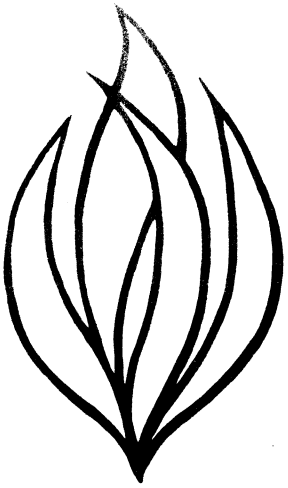
A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME I

James W. Boyd

NUMBER I

HEAVEN

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write, for these words are true and faithful." (Rev. 21:1-5).

We shall have occasion to refer to this text in the course of our lesson on the subject of heaven. The highest, greatest, fondest hope of anyone who realizes what he is must be to reach heaven. There is nothing in this life that could possibly compensate for the failure to reach heaven. This sermon is intended to make us see heaven as best we can with our limitations and to make us want to go there more than ever. We would like to motivate us to make our calling and election sure and lead us in paths of greater faithfulness and service so that heaven will be the home of the soul.

Insufficient Understanding

How often have we asked, "What will heaven be like?" Is there really any sufficient way for us to describe heaven? What in this earth is really comparable to heaven? We have various descriptions, but we can be sure that they fall short of adequacy. This is because of our inability to comprehend such majesty and grandeur, and also because there are not words in our language that can do justice to the glory of heaven. But enough is revealed to us to make us confident that we want to go there.

A Place

Heaven is a place. "I go to prepare a place for you," Jesus said (John 14:1-4). It is a place where God is (Matt. 6:9). It is the place where Jesus ascended (Acts 1:11). What kind of place is it?

Permanent Security

Heaven is a place of security and permanance. What real security does this life and this world offer us? There is nothing here upon which we can depend. Our health, wealth, happiness, even life itself, can be gone in a moment. We know not what a day may bring forth. Everything on which we look can be taken from us in a matter of moments. Someday the entire universe will be no more. The very best that worldly and earthly things can offer is temporary and false security. Nothing here is permanent. It is as a king reviewing his troops who were young, strong, stalwart men. But they would not long remain that way. With nothing more than the passing of time, they would be gone.

Prov. 27:1

2 Pet. 3:10

But heaven offers us real and permanent security. Luke 16 shows that there is a great gulf fixed between the redeemed and the lost, and no passing from one to the other. While this is frightening if we are among the lost, it is comforting to know that once in heaven there will be no departing. The things gained in heaven shall never be taken away. Heaven will not be for a limited time, but forever and ever without end. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through amd steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal." (Matt. 6:19-20). Heaven is a place of eternal life (Matt. 25:46). "Earth holds no treasures but perish with using, however precious they be; yet, there's a country to which I am going; heaven holds all to me."

Better Country

Heaven is a better country. We who are Americans are blessed to live in the greatest, most powerful, wealthiest, most productive nation that men have known. The standard of living in our land is considered wealthy by the standards in most of the world. Our system of government that gives us freedom has proven to be a blessing to mankind. Surely this land has been blessed by the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the One from whom all blessings flow. But even here, there are many things that cause distress and discomfort. Everywhere around us we are witnessing an increase in moral degeneracy, lewdness, the raging of sin that concerns the godly. Sensuality and debachery abound, even in high places. All manner of evil is being considered respectable and acceptable. With the increase of disrespect for authority, a contempt for earning one's livlihood by working, on and on one can name the problems of the land. While this is the best of lands, there is so much ungodliness. And it is growing more rapidly than godly influences holding it back. We are very much in danger of losing our blessings by turning further and further from God. Gal. 6:7,8

But heaven is a far better country. It is not only better, it is the best. Hebrews 11:15,16, " And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city." While this may have had some reference to the land of Canaan toward which Abraham was going, the phrase denoting it to be a heavenly city makes it all the more sure that the beautiful place called heaven was in mind. Some have denied that the patriarch ever had any thought of life beyond this one. But this passage shows he not only thought about it, he looked for it. Hebrews 11: 10 teaches, "For he looked for a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God." That is heaven.

Gain

Life on earth is precious, but heaven is more so. "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain. But if

I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor; yet what I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait betwixt the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." (Phil. 1:21-23). This world is not our home. We are just passing as sojouners going to a better place. It is much like a bridge that we cross in order to enter the eternal promised land.

Rest

Heaven is a place of rest. When Christ invited people to come unto Him, He promised to give them rest (Matt. 11:28-30). There is coming a time when we will rest from our labors. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." (Rev. 14:13). We should not be weary in well-doing (1 Cor. 15:58). Heaven is a place of reward. "For great is your reward in heaven." (Matt. 5:12). It is a place where the saved will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matt.25:23). Life is our time for work and service. The toil may at times be difficult, wearisome and discouraging. But we are laborers in the vineyard of the Lord. The night is coming when none shall work. In the midst of our labor we can lift up our heads and hearts in the knowledge that there awaits us a place of eternal rest. The hardships of this life will be over, and the peace, calm, serenity and contentment for which we long will be a reality. We sing of that place that is called heaven. "O land of rest for thee I sigh, when will the moment come, when I shall lay my armor by, and dwell in peace at home." Life may seem to be a forest, but it is surrounded by light. As we keep going we come ever closer to the light of an eternal day of reward and rest.

Great City

Our opening text speaks of the new Jerusalem. Many differ over what this means, but I would persuade you that is has reference to the Lord's church. The church will someday be taken to heaven (1 Cor. 15:24). We

should consider the ultimate destination of the church that is presented here. Surely every description of new Jerusalem here is not a picture of the church here in earth. Often there are tears, sorrows, pains. But faithfulness in the Lord's church, the new Jerusalem, will eventually take us to that place of no grief.

The great city described in Revelation 21 has reference to the ultimate destiny of the church. It is a symbolic presentation, heaven being a spiritual place inadequately described in material terminology. The great dimensions, the precious materials, the unsurpassed grandeur, lighted by the glory of God, where no unclean thing enters, no sin, nothing to mar our blessed state, surely this is heaven. It is the place where the names of the redeemed are written. It behooves us to ask, "Is my name written there?"

"O Zion, lovely Zion, I long thy gates to see ... when shall I dwell in thee?" It is beyond our mental capacity to conceive of heaven in its fulness of glory. But God presents it to us in the richest, most beautiful, majestic terms our minds can grasp.

Gift

Heaven is a gift, received as an inheritance. 1 Peter 3:4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." No man can merit heaven. If we enter therein, it will be by the grace of God and because God gives us this inheritance as children. God's grace is manifested through Christ who gave His life and the plan of salvation. If we follow His plan we will be given heaven. Given/Received

Christians are the children of God and God is the Father. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the Spirit of God again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth withness with our spirit, that

we are the children of God, and if children, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. 8:14-17). Heaven is the ultimate inheritance of God's people.

In heaven are beautiful mansions. "In my Father's house are many mansions." (John 14:1-4). We are taught in that same passage that Christ is there and we shall be with Him in heaven. We shall be like Him (1 John 3:2), that is, in heaven with God as a child of God. Yes, there is that land that is fairer than day. How we thrill to sing the songs of praise that speak of it.

Who will be allowed to enter therein? Jesus implies that most will not go the way that leads to life (Matt. 7:13,14). Relatively few will. Who will make up that few? Those that are in His church will be the ones who are saved (Eph. 5:23). Those in that kingdom will be delivered to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Heaven has been called a prepared place for a prepared people. We prepare for heaven in this life by coming to Christ for salvation by obeying the gospel. We are invited to come. The Spirit and bride say, "Come." (Rev. 22:17). Christ stands at the door of our hearts knocking and asking to be allowed entrance so that we can someday enter into the joy of the Lord (Rev. 3:20; Matt. 25:23).

Regardless of whatever else we might gain or lose in this life, the goal of the Christian is firmly set on heaven. May we so live that we shall be privileged to live there together, with all the saints, and with Deity.

* * * *

SINNING AGAINST BRETHREN

"But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." (1 Cor. 8:12). This was written by Paul in the context of his teaching about eating meats. The church in Corinth obviously had some problems about what they could and could not eat. The eighth chapter begins by introducing the subject of meats and especially meats of animals that had been offered to idols. He told them that it was of no real concern whether they ate such or not. There is but one God (verse 4). But the problem stemmed from the fact that not everyone had the knowledge that eating meat from animals offered to idols was of no significance. Some considered that to be paying some kind of homage to the idols. In this they were mistaken but they still held to that misconception. It violated their consciences to eat that meat, and it offended them to see their brethren eat it. Others knew that it mattered not one way or the other whether they ate and they had no conscience about it. But for them to go ahead and eat without respect to the feeling of their weak and unlearned brethren would constitute an offense that ought to be avoided. Eating meat did not commend them to God nor separate them from God. But if a brother thought it did, those who knew better were to be considerate of him while he learned. They should not offend the weak brother regarding meats without consideration to the weakness of another lest it cause him to fall away and be lost. To exercise what was one's "rights" without consideration for the weak was to sin against brethren. Sinning against brethren was defined as sinning against Christ, just like doing good to brethren is doing good to Christ (Matt.25:40,45).

Other Ways To Sin

This was but one way a Christian could sin against his brother. There are others, and we want to consider some of them. We need not belabor the point that rendering physical harm against a brother would be sinful because this is so obvious. To steal from him, physically injure him, destroy his properties, kill him,certainly this is to sin against him. To treat him in

the fashion that the brothers of Joseph treated him as they sold him into Egypt would be sinning against our brethren. But this is not the kind of thing that most are likely to do today. We sin against brethren many times by neglecting to do for them the things that are needful. Neglect is as much a sin, the sin of omission, as the sins when we commit something wrong(Jas. 4:17).

We sin against brethren when we forsake them in times of trouble. "And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment and wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come, I will repay thee. Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus, Go, anddothou likewise." (Luke 10:30-37). While the priest and Levite did no harm to the man who fell among thieves, they sinned against him by refusing to help him in his hour of distress.

Jesus Was Sinned Against

This is what happened to Jesus when the time of His arrest and mock trials were immediately before him. In the hour when He needed the encouragement and support of His disciples more than ever before, they forsook Him. "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled." (Matt. 26:56). Demas forsook Paul when Paul was suffering in prison because of his preaching of the gospel. "Give diligence to come unto me shortly, for Demas forsook me, having loved this present world." (1 Tim. 4:10).

Are we not taught to "bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ?" (Gal. 6:2). Paul told brethren to "weep with those who weep," (Rom. 12:15) as well as rejoice with those that rejoice. People in trouble need sympathy, understanding, help, somebody to support them and help them get through it. Therefore we should comfort the fainthearted, discouraged, unfortunate. In Acts 20:35, Paul told the elders of Ephesus, "In all things I gave you an example that so laboring ye ought to help the weak." One of the reasons we are to work is in order to give to him that needeth (Eph. 4:28). "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27). "But whoso hath the world's goods and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17).

Bad Examples

We sin against our brethren by setting a bad example before them. To have the attitude that what we do is nobody's business but our own is to fail to recognize the power of influence. We do not live in a vacuum, separated from others. Others influence us and we influence others. Romans 14:7, "For none of us liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself." What I do is in a sense your business to the extent that it influences you. The same principle works the other way. What I allow my children to do might have an influence on your children that would be harmful and that becomes your business. While we all are accountable to God for everything, we are also responsibile to each other.

When a person drinks alcoholic beverages, he not only sins against himself and God, he sins against those around him because of the influence he manifests. He hurts his children as well as his neighbors. We see a demonstration of this before our eyes in the lives of people all the time. When we forsake the worship services of the church we are telling others that it is unimportant to attend in spite of the command of God to

attend. That has an influence that encourages people to defy the teaching of God. There are numerous evils by which one can influence another to do wrong. "Let us not therefore judge one another any more, but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock in his brother's way, or an occasion of falling." (Rom. 14:13).

Many of us are likely not as good stewards of our influence as God wants us to be. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matt. 18:6). "Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1 Tim. 4:12). An example we cannot escape from being. But what kind of an example are we? "Even so let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16). It is Christlike to set a good example for others. "Hereby we know that we are in him, he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked." (1 John 2:5,6). Christ is our example to follow (1 Pet. 2:21). Would he lead someone astray? Did He care how He lived before the others? Neither should we be negligent regarding the kind of example we set. We can sin against others by being a bad example.

Failure To Recover

We can sin against the fallen Christian by not trying to recover him. "Brethren, if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1). "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sin." (James 5:19,20). That we do have a responsibility toward brethren who stumble and fall is very evident. We might be inclined to think they ought to get right without our help. They ought to know what to do. They know they have sinned.

Let them attend to the matter. This is true to some extent but it does not take into consideration how we need to do what we can to recover them. So many have fallen by the wayside and nobody ever said anything to them in trying to win them back again. They fact that they have drifted and fallen is proof that they need help. If they did not need help they would have never forsaken the truth in the first place. They may know what is right but they may need the assistance of someone else to get them to do what is right. We cannot "pass by on the other side" when someone falls away.

One of the duties of elders is to exercise the watchcare for the souls of those in their flock. Yet, sometimes we see people neglect their duties for weeks and weeks and no elder ever says or does anything to reach them. But elders are not the only ones who have responsibilities to reach the fallen. Every Christian must have this same concern for his brethren.

Sins Of The Tongue

Obviously we sin against our brother if we hate him, find fault, gossip, backbite, lie against him, undermine his good name, damage their reputations when there is no cause. But we may also sin by failing to preach the gospel to them. Yes, brethren need to hear the gospel as well as those who have never come to the Lord. Christ gave the great commission when He said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:16). Paul said he wanted to go to Rome to his brethren that he might preach the gospel to them. Brethren need reminding. Part of the gospel is edifying and building up brethren in the holy faith. We must see to it that the gospel is preached lest we become guilty of indifference toward those who cannot be saved without it. The fact that brethren need the gospel disspells this silly notion that the gospel is for those outside of Christ and doctrine for those in Him.

In the opening chapters of God's book we read about Cain who murdered his brother Abel. God came to Cain and asked him where Abel was. It was not that God did not know what had happened. But He came to Cain to

impress the enormity of his crime and that he did have a responsibility toward his brother. But Cain pretends innocent. To commit a deed that is sinful is reprehensible, but what is almost as reprehensible is to pretend innocent about it. Cain asked the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In this way he hoped to relieve himself of any responsibility toward Abel or what he had done against him. Do we not learn from this, from God's reaction, from the teaching that begins at this point in human history and continues through the rest of the Bible that the answer to such a question is an obvious and unmistakeable, "Yes, we are our brother's keeper?" We dare not pretend that we have no duty regarding those around us. Especially are we to be concerned for our brethren in the Lord for they belong to God. What a painful thing it must be to the Father above when His children have not love one for another. We should guard against sinning against everyone, but especially those who are of the household of faith.

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PURPOSES FOR THE EXISTENCE OF THE CHURCH

Anything that exists ought have some good reason for existence. When God designed the church, He had certain purposes in mind for the church and has revealed those purposes in his word. As we speak of the church, let us always remember we are talking about the church of the Bible, the one of which we read in the New Testament. We have no interest in churches of men, that have been originated by men and have come from the minds of men, regardles of how honest, sincere or well-intentioned those men may have been. The one church is that of Christ, of which He is the head and Savior, the only body, that which has no connection or fellowship with the confused denominational world. We emphasize this because much of the misunderstanding as to the purpose of the church stems from the denominational concept many have regarding the church.

Not The Purpose

Sometimes we learn what we need to know by seeing

some things that are not true in order to contrast the truth with error. Let us first consider some areas that are not included in the purpose for the existence of the church. The church is not to direct the affairs of the state. The church is not a political pressure group or a political party. To be sure, there are matters of a moral nature that are sometimes decided for society by political means. Even when the church does become involved in the moral issues, it does so because of the moral and religious nature, not the political aspect of it. Romanism has had the doctrine of the combination of church and state, but the New Testament keeps the two God-ordained functions separate. This does not mean that civil affairs should have the right to do anything whatsoever regardless of the religious and moral implications, but it means that the state does not govern the church and the church does not govern the state. Christians must abide by the laws of the land (Rom. 13:1-7), so long as these laws require nothing that would make one violate the law of God, the highest authority. In such a case, we must obey God rather than men. But civil government is not the role of the church.

Nor is it the purpose of the church to engage in and promote recreational activities, secular education, entertainment, business operations, manufacturing, merchandising, or displacing the operations of the home. God ordained the home and government just like He did the church. While the Christians lives his life under the umbrella of Christianity, not everything in which an individual Christian can and must be involved is a proper area of operation for the church. We must have God's authority for what the church does(Col. 3:17). Without it, we can bring upon ourselves God's wrath as did Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) when they did that which the Lord commanded not.

The church must not ever just soothe the people into a slumber,pretending that obstacles of life really do not exist, hiding one's eyes from realities and the need for solutions to problems. Voltaire once said, "Religion is the opium of people." Unfortunately, some people "get religion" and act as if the affairs of life have no significance whatever. God does not want us to

become hermits and monks and withdraw from the world. The church is to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth. Pulling back into a religious sleep while the world around goes from bad to worse is to miss the mark. We need to help people awake to the reality of sin, the prevention of sin, and how one can have life and have it more abundantly, here and hereafter. "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee life." (Eph. 5:14). The church must not lull into withdrawal or complacency, but be active, militant, vigorous, never allowing people to think all is well when it is not well.

It is not the purpose of the church to swell its numbers at the expense of the truth of God. Numbers seem to be the goal of so many religionists. Christians ought be concerned for numbers because every number is a soul. But to increase numbers and win the praise and acceptance of men by compromising God's truth is to default on a sacred responsibility.

If we attempt to please men rather than God we are doomed for failure to please either one. Certainly we cannot please God and man at the same time (Gal. 1:10). We cannot even please men for very long. There is the illustrative story of a man, a boy, and a donkey making a journey. They started with the man riding the donkey and boy walking. Someone saw them and criticized the man for making the boy walk. So they switched places. Soon another rebuked the boy for not having respect for the older man, making the man walk. So they both rode the donkey. But someone complained that such was so hard on the donkey. So they both walked. And someone commented how foolish it was for not using the beast of burden. So how can you please men? At best you can please some of the people some of the time. But what is important is pleasing God whether it pleases men or not.

Preach The Word

The purpose of the church is to "preach the word." Paul told Timothy to "preach the word." Again, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall

be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. 2:2). "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). These were among the last words that Jesus spoke to His apostles. They could not do that work physically by themselves. But they and those they taught had this charge from God. The church is the "pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Tim. 3:15). The gospel is the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16) and people cannot be saved without hearing it (Rom. 10:13-17). It is the primary purpose for the existence of the church to make known to the world the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Strengthen The Saved

The saved must grow and be strengthened. After establishing congregations on his missionary journeys, Paul would go back and visit the converted in order to establish them firmly in the faith, confirming them in their hope, and teach them that they might continue in the faith (Acts 14:22; 15:35,36; Rom. 1:11). The church cannot grow without the proper food. It must grow spiritually as well as numerically (2 Pet. 3:18). The food must be fed and that food is the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2). It is wrong for brethren not to grow in knowledge (Heb. 5: 12-14). How some in the church ever allow themselves to think they have learned all they need to learn is almost beyond comprehension. Yet, it appears from the absenteeism among brethren from the periods of study and worship that large numbers have just become deluded and self-deceived. But the church is to feed on the word and make the food available.

Help The Needy

The church should work to create and manifest a Christian atmosphere in the world that would bring true blessedness, which is more than just an environmentally produced happiness. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith. In spite of problems such as are common to man, even problems because we have chosen to follow Christ, we should busy ourselves in making things

around us recognize the glory that belongs to those in Christ. There is so much sorrow in the world. We should avoid creating more of it needlessly. We have such blessings like forgiveness, fellowship with Deity, the avenue of prayer, God's providence, the hope in this life for an eternal life with God. Christians are optimistic about the future in spite of what seems to overshadow the good and the right. Part of our purpose is to bring relief to those around us from the miseries that so often beset the human family. We should do good as we have opportunity to all men, but especially to them that are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). The widows, orphans, hungry, ill-clothed, aged, they are all in need of care and attention. It is the Christian's privilege to serve God by serving other people. It is beyond reason to think that the people of God would not be concerned and active in manifesting a compassion to those in need when our Lord showed such compassion while in this world. The work that we undertake is not simply to be a social program and social reform, but always within the bounds of the authorized work of the church. Helping the less fortunate is a part of that benevolent attitude.

Be Good; Do Good

Someone once abbreviated the purpose for the existence of the church as being good and doing good. In this way we glorify God, which is the overall purpose for the church's existence. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Eph. 3:21).

The church is the saved. We have been saved to save by taking the gospel and the character of Christ to the world. We may not take the world to Christ, but our purpose is to take the Christ to the world. We are servants of God, of our brethren, and the world. We have the duty and privilege to be stewards of that which has been committed to our trust. We have a goal, a mission, a purpose for existing. These things make us the most blessed people in earth.

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THE TRAGEDY OF DEMAS

We turn to God's book and study about a man and discover something about him that could be, if not already. characteristic of life for many of us. The man is named Demas, a New Testament character. If I were to choose one word to describe the life of Demas the word I would select is the word "tragedy." His life was a tragic affair indeed.

Life offers mankind many tragedies in many forms. Some suffer disease, financial ruin, injury, accident, loss of health, loss of ability to earn a livlihood, many things short of death, and eventually death also. But compared to the tragedy of Demas, though at first we may not be convinced, his tragedy forces these other things into relative insignificance. His was not a tragedy of physical matters, but a spiritual tragedy of eternal consequence.

Demas is mentioned only three times in the New Testament. But from these three notations we can piece together his tragic life. We will consider each verse, not as it appears in the order of the New Testament books, but in the chronoloigal order of the books in which his name is listed. In this way we can see the tragic life of Demas unfold before us.

Fellowlaborer

The first time we read of him is in Philemon 24. "Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my feollowlaborers ..." Demas is mentioned along with a number of recognized stalwart Christians in this chapter. He shares in the commendable remarks that they were Paul's fellowlaborers. There is no denying that Demas was a Christian. He was working hard as a child of God, and considered among the select company that worked with Paul. As those of the first century had to do, he, in the fellowship of the others, suffered the hardships and trials of taking the saving gospel to lost humanity. In doing this he doubtless was called upon to endure many things. But he had a determination, and a zeal, and devotion. He was a pillar in the church.

The first time we read of Demas we see him like many others we have known in our own lifetime. We can be so thankful for good brethren who always put first things first, who have a keen sense of responsibility to the church, who visit the sick, widows, orphans,and give liberally, always eager to serve in whatever capacity they can. Their very life is a shining example of what people ought to be. Many of us have seen people who make the church as a city set on a hill, the salt of the earth, the light of the world. They are so fine that it is an encouragement and pleasure just to be in their company and enjoy their good spirit and example. Probably most of us would have to make some great improvements in our lives to be as commendable as was Demas the first time Paul mentions him.

Slipping

The second reference of him is in Col. 4:4. This was written some months after Philemon. Again Paul mentions a host of strong Christians, like Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner; Onesimus, faithful and beloved brother; Mark, to be well received when he came to them; Luke, the beloved physician; and Demas. This time all the others received some special mention of commendationexcept Demas. This time Demas is merely mentioned and nothing more. This is distinctive, but even more significant in that with the first mention of him he was ranked alongside the others for special commendation. This time his name is there, but nothing more. Does it not suggest to you that, while the other brethren were still considered worthy of being noted in some special way that Demas was not so deserving? Does it not suggest that his zeal, loyalty, dedication had noticeably slipped somewhat? At least it appears that Paul thought so.

This second reference to Demas reminds us of some brethren we see today. They have not left the church nor renounced their faith. But their attendance at the worship has become irregular. They are not as ready to volunteer to work as they once did. They once grieved over missing the Lord's Supper, but now it has become too commonplace for their conscience to hurt anymore.

They do not pray like they used to do. Even their way of standing for the truth has become stained with compromise, negligence, accepting unclean habits, immodest dress, questionable recreation. They are more defensive of the wrong. Their companions are more among the godless than the brethren. No, they have not completely forsaken everything, but they are showing the dangerous indications that they are assuredly going that direction. As for their name on the church roll, it is still there, but not much more than that. If such as this is found in your life, dear friend, they ought to serve as warnings to us that you are going the wrong way and headed for the same tragedy as Demas.

Fallen

The third time we read of Demas is in 2 Tim. 4:10). Here we learn why we call the life of Demas a tragedy. "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." Demas had forsaken Paul, but not only Paul. He had forsaken that for which he and Paul once had fought together. He and Paul were once fellowlaborers for the Lord. He had turned back to the ways of the world. He turned his back on the faith of Jesus Christ because he loved the things of this world.

Let me insert here how ridiculously this passage is rendered in the so-called Living Bible Paraphrase. That perversion of Scripture has Paul saying of Demas, "He loved the good things of this life." Not so. Demas did not love the good things of this life. He had the good things of this life. He loved the evil things of this life. He loved the world more than Christ. What a wrong and distorted impression some have about what is good and what is evil. For men to have the audacity to take the word of God and try to put it into their own words by making it say what is does not say or even suggest is above and beyond the abominable. But such is the case with nearly all of the modern versions of the Bible.

No, Demas loved the evil and left the good for the evil. He failed to abide by the teaching of 1 John 2:15

where we are urged to not love the world, nor the things in the world. Being a child of God means to set our minds and affections on things above, not on this earth and this life, and its evils. Demas was once a strong Christian, but the world got the best of him. He was not like Paul who fought the good fight, finished the course and kept the faith. Demas quit. He quit before the prize was his and before he won the race. He failed to realize that friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:14).

A False Doctrine

In the religious world we hear people teach that once one is saved he cannot so sin as to be lost. If a Christian sins at all, and some deny he ever does, it will not affect their salvation. The doctrine is known as the doctrine of eternal security or the impossibility of apostasy. But the tragedy of Demas is sufficient within itself, in addition to the multitude of other passages, to disspell that false notion. It is sad that men would mislead other men into such religious error. Demas not only could fall, but did fall. One cannot be saved loving this world. Demas left his first love and turned back.

Let Us Hear Paul

Paul wrote, "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" (Gal. 4:9). "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Gal. 5:4). Why would Paul say some had fallen from grace if the doctrine that says you cannot fall from grace was true? The very fact that he mentions it disproves forever the false doctrine of once saved, always saved. 1 Tim. 5: 15 Paul wrote, "for already some are turned aside after Satan." 1 Tim. 6:10 speaks of those who had erred from the faith. 1 Tim. 1:19 mentions those who had made shipwreck the faith, having thrust it from themselves. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall. " (1 Cor. 10:12). Why did not

someone, even the Holy Spirit, tell Paul that his warning was useless and nobody can fall anyway? "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Cor. 9:27). Even Paul realized he had not yet attained and could be a castaway (Phil. 3:12). In every epistle of Paul he warned against apostasy and exhorted brethren to faithfulness. Why would he do that if one could not fall?

Let Us Hear Peter

Peter wrote, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knolwedge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter. 2:20-22). Now these words were written to those who had "obtained a like precious faith with us." (2 Pet. 1:1). Did Peter get the wrong message from the Holy Spirit?

Consider Three Epistles

The books of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews were written with an emphasis against falling into apostasy, leaving the faith of Christ, returning to the religion of the Jews. Hebrews 2:1-3, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression received a just recompense of reward, How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation..." Again we see the Hebrew writer did not know the doctrine of once saved, always saved. "Take heed, brethren, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ <u>if</u> (Emphasis, JWB) we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." (Hebrews 3:12-14).

Let Us Hear Jesus

Jesus did not know that one could not fall away. He taught, "He that endureth to the end the same shall be saved." (,att. 10:22). He gave the direct warning. "Remember Lot's wife." (Luke 17:32). Lot's wife had already left the city that was to be destroyed with fire and brimstone, but turned back. In Matthew He spoke of how the love of many waxed cold (Matt. 24:12). "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven." (Luke 9:62). How many times must we cite His words to know He never taught once saved, always saved?

Even The Devil Knows Better

But whether you know it or not, the devil does not subscribe to that false doctrine but delights that it is taught. Actually he was the first to teach that lie when he told Eve that she would not die, but that she would be as gods. He persuaded her she would not fall as God had warned. In fact, everything would be even better than before. Even now we are warned, " Be sober, be vigilant, your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8). This is a warning to Christians, "the elect" (1 Pet. 1:2). Why does not somebody tell the devil he is wasting his time? If the doctrine that you cannot fall is true, he cannot recapture anybody. But he does not know that. He wants you and I to think that docrine is true so we will let down.

After Peter listed a number of virtuous qualities the Christian should develop, he added, "For if ye do these things ye shall never fall." (2 Pet. 1:10). But what if you do not do these things? Does it make any difference? Why did Peter urge his brethren to make their calling and election sure?

That which makes the life of Demas such a tragedy is that he could have gone to heaven. He was traveling the right road, going in the right direction with the right people, the people of God. But now he has foreited all of that for the paltry offerings of this

of this present world. Here was a man who had found true life, but turned away from it. He was going toward heaven, and turned back to the way that leads to hell. We do not know how old Demas was, but even if he had been a very young man, it would not have been but a few years and he would be able to keep the faith and inherit the eternal reward of heaven. But now any hope for his soul is dashed by his apostasy. "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest of these, it might have been." It might have been that Demas would have been with God always had he not turned away. Cannot you see why his life was such a tragic matter? It is the same tragedy whenever anyone who has once come to Christ, falls away.

The plea of the gospel is that we not let the tragedy of Demas become our personal tragedy. Having taken up the armor, let us fight the good fight of faith faithfully to the end. Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not (Gal. 6:9). Whatever sacrifice it requires of us, let us be faithful unto death. The crown of life awaits us (Rev. 2:10).

* * * * *

A BURNING FIRE

It is my hope that this first issue of this booklet is the beginning of a long series of similar booklets that I plan for many months and years to come.

Let all who read be well aware that I make no claim of originality for these sermons. It is impossible to remember, let alone give credit, to the multitude of people and sources from which I have gathered the sermons I have preached through the years. I only know I am grateful for every assistance received.

The primary source is the Word of God. I believe the lessons to be Scriptural in content and God knows the motive for wanting to get them out to as many as may read them.

As long as I can, I shall keep them coming and pray it may be of some spiritual benefit to all. JWB

ONCE WILL NOT BE ENOUGH

Every generation must be taught everything about Christianity. Just because one generation learned it does not mean the hard fought battles for truth may not be lost in the next generation.

There are problems facing the church that confronted brethren over a century ago, such as evolution, premillienalism, instrumental music, the sufficiency of the Scriptures, the necessity of the church, the work of the church, worldliness, liberalism of various sorts and a host of other matters. Brethren today need to be strengthened in the basic principles of truth and how to determine what is truth.

It begins with the insistence on the inspiration of the Bible, its infallibility and all-sufficiency. There must be Bible authority for what is said and done or we lose our footing. We have no license to go beyond the things that are written.

We have the two-fold task of destroying what is deserving of destruction and building that which is to be built. To simply destroy and not build will not accomplish what God wants done. To attempt to build without destroying what is false also falls short of the task to which we ought to be committed.

Paul told Timothy to "reprove, rebuke and exhort." (2 Tim. 4:2). God told His prophet Jeremiah to "root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant." (Jer. 1:10). We must speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11) without adding to or taking from it. We must stand on the position that when the seed of the kingdom is sown now as it was in the first century it will produce the same harvest.

We cannot bow before the pressures of evil and the disposition to compromise whether it comes from within or without the church. We will not be "like the nations about us." Truth, over and over, for every generation must be our unwavering goal.

GOOD THINGS ABOUT ZACCHAEUS

We can learn many of the lessons God would have us to learn from a study of the characters of the Bible, and their actions and reactions under the various circumstances they encountered. Most anyone should learn from their own experiences, but a wise person will also learn from the experiences of others. We do not have to experience everything personally before we can know.

Luke 19:10

"And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down, for today I must abide at thy house. And he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he is gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

There are several good things about this man recorded here that we do well to imitate. Most people had rather be known as a good person rather than an evil one. Hearing good things about others is often just the motivation we need to be good ourselves. Doing good and being good is a large part of being a Christian. It is expected of Christians. "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth forth not good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." (Matt. 17-20). The Lord is pleased when people are good. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way." (Ps. 37:23). If we look for the good in others we can usually find some good there. There are a number of good things said of Zacchaeus.

A Leader

Zacchaeus was a chief publican. A publican was a tax collector for the much hated Roman government. As a group of people, they were very hated by the Jews. They were classed with traitors, sinners, the worst of betrayers of their own people. But regardless of how most Jews would have considered Zacchaeus, let us suggest that he was well-received by other publicans. He was a chief among them. They recognized him as one capable of leadership, a quality so often lacking even in the noble affairs of men. He obviously demonstrated the capacity to assume and discharge responsibility.

Good Manager Of Wealth

He was also rich. Being rich did not make him good anymore than being poor would have made him good. Wealth, or the lack of it, does not determine the goodness of a person by itself. Some have such a distorted view of wealth that they have concluded that being rich is good and being poor is bad. But others have just the opposite idea of it. Some have concluded unjustly that if a man is rich he must be dishonest. While wealth does not make one good, it does indicate that he is a man of thrift and knows how to take care of his wealth. Zacchaeus did not squander or waste it. He was a wise user of his talents. True enough, many publicans had gained their wealth by exploiting others but there is no indication that Zacchaeus had gained his fortune that way. In fact, he was more than willing to repay anything that he may have taken wrongfully. He was simply an excellent manager of his affairs.

Compassionate

In addition to these things, he was mindful of those who were less fortunate than he. He gave half of his goods to the poor. This is a remarkable demonstration of charity. This shows a liberality as well as a compassionate spirit and interest in others. He had concern for his fellowman and a willingness to share those things with which he had been blessed. The world is generally overrunning with greed, avarice and selfishness, but such had not stained the character of Zacchaeus. You might say that Zacchaeus was a good man that was a light in the midst of a world of darkness.

But this passage shows other good things about him that are really more important than the matters we have mentioned thus far. There was a spiritual goodness about him as we shall now observe.

Sought To See Jesus

Luke 19:3 says, "He sought to see Jesus." He heard that Jesus was coming his way and he wanted to know more about him. Possibly some of his desire was from curiosity because the fame of Jesus was widespread at this time. Yet, the events which follow indicate another motive for seeking Jesus than just idle curiosity about a famous person. There was an attraction about Jesus that struck a responsive chord in the heart of this man that caused him to want to see Jesus. Was it His miracles of compassion? Was it His message of love and peace, forgiveness and goodness? Was it His concern for the poor and lowly, as Zacchaeus also had to a lesser degree? This we are not told. But he may well have had the same attitude as some Grecians who came to the disciples of Jesus once and asked,"Sir, we would see Jesus." They wanted to know more about Him and that for which He stood.

Should we not imitate Zacchaeus in this respect and have a desire to see and know more about Jesus? In Jesus' day, many made great sacrifices to seek after Him. They would follow Him into deserted areas, lacking even the needs for sustenance, clinging to every word He taught, hungering and thirsting for the righteousness He taught. Are we not also promised that if

we seek Him we shall find Him? The trouble with many is that they never seek after Him. Some who would find Him are seeking for Him where He cannot and will not be found. Jesus will not be found in worldly living, human doctrines, man-made schemes, and religious experiences. Only in the Word of God can we expect to find the Christ. It is there that we must look. If people would only seek Jesus and learn that He is the only begotten Son of God, the only Savior of mankind, that His will offers the more excellent way of life, that heaven can be their eternal home, but only by Christ. It is not true that the way of Christ is irrelevant and out-of-date for our time. His way is untried, rejected without trial. If people would only seek from the right source the solution to the problems of this life and their spiritual welfare, what a better world this would be!

But He Was Handicapped

Zacchaeus had a problem that hindered him seeing Jesus. Jesus did not ride in chariots, nor was he carried aloft on men's shoulders like those who profess to be vicars of Christ today. Although He was the King of kings and Lord of lords, He did not present Himself to the world in a pompous, proud, haughty, ostentatious fashion. Born in a manger, a lowly Nazerene, gentle, humble, He came a benefactor to mankind.

What was the handicap Zacchaeus had? He was a small man. He could not see above the crowd of people as Jesus came by. He could have said, "I want to see Him, I want to know more about Him, and I tried. But I cannot see. It is not my fault that I am small. I will just give up and go home or about my business." But shallow excuses would not satisfy the yearning in the heart of this good man.

It is a tragedy that many today will never come to know the Lord Jesus because there is some minor handicap that confronts them. They are willing to use that as an excuse for not pursuing the matter any further. Prejudices, excuses, laziness, taking the line of the least resistance, bowing to pressure from those about

them, unwilling to resist temptation, all such things are allowed to keep some from seeking Jesus. But has God ever accepted man's excuses for not doing what he ought to do? Did He accept the excuse of Adam and Eve? Did He accept the excuses of Moses, or Elijah, or Peter and anyone else? The Biblical phrase, "And he began to make excuse..." is the life story of many people regarding their duties to the Lord.

His Effort

But Zacchaeus did not make or accept any excuses. He made an effort in spite of his handicap. He did as he could. Someone has said, "When the going gets tough the tough get going." Zacchaeus was like that. He ran ahead, climbed a tree, and from there his desire to see Jesus could be realized. Possibly climbing a tree was a humiliating act for a wealthy man. Whatever of that, he was humble and energetic enough to see Jesus.

Do we not recall the parable of Jesus about three men to whom were given one, two and five talents respectively? The five and two talent men doubled their talents and received the master's approval. But why was the one talent man rejected? It was not because he failed to double his talent. It was because he did nothing. He did not do what he could have done. He did not even try as he ought. He commited the sin of do-nothing. Zacchaeus did not make that mistake.

There are things that God has done for our salvation. There are things that we must do also. God has provided the way to be saved, but we must come that way. That involves faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ, followed by a life of faithful service to God and our fellowman.

The Result

What was the result of the efforts of Zacchaeus? They were far above anything for which he had hoped. He was trying to see the Savior, but when the Savior saw him, He called him down from the tree and went home with him, saying, "This day salvation is come to

this house." By this He had reference to Himself, the source of salvation. What a glorious opportunity had come to Zacchaeus. Were not his efforts richly rewarded? The very author of salvation was to be with him. There is no way for us to miss the great lesson that shows the value of making whatever effort is necessary to see, know, seek, benefit from the Lord. Such bring us favors in more abundance than we could anticipate.

It is thrilling that God has ssen fit to include this account in His inspired record for our benefit. As we see the good things about Zacchaeus, we, in effect, can follow in his steps. We may never be rich in this world's goods as was he, nor chief among our fellows. We may never be able to be as generous and helpful as was he. But we can see Jesus. We can do whatever we must. We can make the effort, overcoming whatever hindrance between us and this goal. We can enjoy a fellowship with Christ in salvation that will extend into eternity.

* * * * *

DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Let me make three introductory points. One, the church is a prominent theme of the Bible. It is found in Old Testament prophecy, in promise, in types and in shadows. It is revealed in the New Testament where we read of people being members of it. It existed in the mind of God before the world (Eph. 1:4). By the church is the manifold wisdom of God made known (Eph. 3:10). No gospel preacher needs to make apology for preaching the church. The charge of "churchanity" is an attempt to intimidate and is a transparent effort to dissuade brethren from declaring the whole counsel of God.

Two, the Bible is God's inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient revelation to man (2 Tim. 3:16,17). The church is described in the Bible, the only reliable source of information that we have concerning it. By searching the Scriptures we can learn about God's church.

Three, it is important that we identify the church because Christ shed His blood for it (Acts 20:28). This shows the value God places upon it. The saved are added to it (Acts 2:47). It is the same as God's kingdom (Col. 1:13) and it is that kingdom that shall be delivered to the Father when Christ comes again (1 Cor. 15:24).

As we discover the marks of the Lord's church we shall become aware of its distinction from denominations. The church is not a denomination, nor composed of denominations, and has no kinship with denominations because there is no authority for the existence of denominations.

Origin

The first mark of the church is its origin. As stated, it began in the mind of God, established on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection (Acts 2). As the prophets had prophecied (Isa. 2; Micah 2), it was established in "the last days." Heb. 1:1,2 identifies these days as the time when God speaks to man through His Son. Christ promised to build it (Matt. 16:16-18) and He kept His promise. After the resurrection, the apostles were told to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of power that was to come (Luke 24:44ff). That power was identified as the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). It was to be established in the lifespan of some of Jesus' hearers (Mark 9:1), and would begin in the very city the prophets predicted, Jerusalem.

Birthday

The events of Pentecost day marked the "birthday" of the church. Peter later declared that occassion as the beginning (Acts 11:15). Churches that have other beginning dates are not the Lord's church.

Government

The church is distinctive because of its governmental structure. The structure is relatively simple compared with the ecclesiastical networks of various

denominations. The fact that the church is called a kingdom serves notice that it has governmental traits. Some have denied that the church is an organization or institution, but is a living organism. Certainly, as the body of Christ, it is a living organism. But inasmuch as it was organized by the Lord and instituted by Christ it is foolishness to deny the church is also an organization and an institution.

Head

Christ is the one head of the church (Col. 1:18). The church does not have an earthly head and a heavenly head as does Romanism. The Scriptures present us no vicar of Christ on earth. If one asks, "Where is the headquarters of the church of Christ?" we answer, "It is where the head is, which is heaven."

Universal And Local

Under Christ the universal church is organized into local and autonomous, self-governing congregations of redeemed people. There is no Biblical authority for a diocese or any such thing. Members of the church are bound together by a common faith, yet the church is composed of local congregations. This is the largest governmental structure of which one reads in the New Testament for the Lord's church.

Each congregation is overseen by men of specified qualifications called elders, bishops, pastors, overseers. These terms refer to the same men in the congregational leadership. This eldership has the authority to oversee the affairs of that local church in the matters of human judgment that must be determined, having the watchcare of the flock, feeding the church, convicting the gainsayer and other duties of rule. Always spoken of as a plurality of men, the eldership has no authority to tamper in any way with the doctrine of Christ.

Each local church is served by men called deacons or servants. These also must have special qualities to serve. Time forbids going into detail in these

matters in this lesson.

The rest of the congregation is made up of preachers, teachers, all the members of the body who work and worship, serving one another, alongside each other, together serving the Lord.

There are no synods, councils, conferences, conventions, cardinals, popes, presidents, reverends, boards, clergy and laity in the Lord's church that one finds in the denominational world.

Authority

The church is under the authority of Christ. To believe the Bible demands that there be no other one to guide than Christ, and those He authorizes to speak His will by inspiration. His will is revealed to mankind through the written word. There is no place for manuals, prayer books, cathechisms, creeds, disciplines, etc. that have been written by uninspired men as authority for the church. The Bible is God's all-sufficient guide (2 Tim. 3:16,17). What the church does and says must be by the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17), the One to whom all authority belongs (Matt. 28: 18). If one wants to know what God wants, let him follow the advice given by Isaiah, "To the law and the testimony, " (Isa. 8:20). Peter said, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." (1 Pet. 4:11).

Worship

The worship in which the church engages is distinctive in that it is prescribed and authorized by God. The very concept of worship entails submission to the will of the One who is worshipped. Man is not left to determine what is pleasing to God. God determines that and has revealed what He wants. Man needs to recognize God's teaching regarding worship.

The church assembles on the first day of every week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1,2) and Christians are not to forsake the assemblying (Heb. 10:25). When assembled, the early church engaged in prayer, through Christ, in His name, recognizing Him as the mediator

and the only approach to God (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

There is music in the worship. The kind of music God has specified in His word is singing. Without exception, every place where the New Testament speaks of music in Christian worship , it is singing. There is no authority for playing mechanical instruments, humming, etc. and to do so is to go beyond the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

The Lord's Supper is eaten each first day of the week (Acts 20:7). The supper was observed in the assembly (1 Cor. 11) which was on the first day (1 Cor. 16:1,2). The supper is a memorial to Christ, with unleavened bread symbolic of the body of Christ and the fruit of the vine symbolic of His shed blood. The Bible does not teach that these physical ingredients become the literal and actual body and blood of Christ.

We are to worship by giving. As Solomon taught to honor God with our substance, so we learn from Paul the grace of giving. It is to be planned or purposed (2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Cor. 16:1,2), from the heart, on the honor system, motivated by love, as we have been prospered, giving liberally and cheerfuly. The word "give" is one of the best single word commentaries on the religion of Christ one can consider. God gave. Christ gave. Christians give.

When the disciples met for worship they studied God's Word (Acts 20:7). So it is when faithful brethren worship today.

Jesus taught that our worship is to be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). This includes a correct attitude, reverence, understanding, from the heart. To worship in truth means as the truth directs. God's word is truth (John 17:17). So to learn how to worship we turn to the law and the testimony.

Christians do not worship with candles, organs, tithing, bingo, carnivals, pie-suppers, incense, beads, etc. etc. Nothing like such things were incorporated into God's teaching on worship in this age when God

speaks to man through Christ.

Name

The church is most often identified in the Bible as simply, the church. The Bible teaches that there is but one. The phrase "church of God" or the plural "churches of Christ" show ownership. The church belongs to God and Christ. A number of terms are used to present the church in its various sides, such as a body, the kingdom, a vineyard, a temple, the house or family of God.

Names matter to God. To dismiss the need to use the correct terms regarding the church with the remark, "There is nothing in a name," is to show contempt and disrespect for the Lord's attitude toward names. Even the members of the church have been given a name. The prophet Isaiah foretold of the time when God would call His people by a new name, indicating that such a time would be when both Jew and Gentile were included in the family of God (Isa. 62:2). It was at the Antioch congregation, a church composed of Jews and Gentiles, that the disciples were first called by the new name, the name "Christian." (Acts 11:26). This glorious and worthy name enjoyed apostolic approval (Acts 26:28), so much so that Peter said that suffering as a Christian was not something for which to be ashamed (1 Pet. 4: 14,16).

Other terms to indicate God's people are saints, brethren, priests, disciples, children of God. Why anyone would want, or would be content, to be called by some name not even found in Scripture is beyond acceptance. The denominational names so prevalent in the world today only contribute to division, confusion and error.

Mission

The mission of the church is threefold as pertains to the work the church is authorized to do. We must preach the word to evangelize (Mark 16:15), and this is the primary task. The church is called the

pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). The church is not to make truth, alter truth, up-date truth, but to support and proclaim the truth. Any church that does not emphasize the proclamation of the word is derelict in its number one responsibility.

The church is to edify and build up itself, helping each other grow, be strengthened as we are commanded to do (2 Pet. 3:18). There is also benevolent work the church is to do (James 1:27; Gal. 6:10).

It is not the work of the church to provide recreation, fun and games, entertainment, secular education, build so-called "family life centers," and such things as that. Some are more concerned over softball teams than they are preaching the gospel. It is because many brethren have decided that getting crowds is the primary mission of the church regardless of how you get them.

Standard Of Life

Christ gave His disciples a standard of purity that is to be followed in life. We are to "walk in the light as He is in the light," (1 John 1:7), keeping our affection on things above (Col. 3:2), following the Master's footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21), being zealous of good works (Tit. 2:14), ever living in faithfulness in work and worship (1 Cor. 15:58). There are those things we are expected to do and those things from which we are to abstain (1 Th. 5:22), learning to abhor that which is evil and to cleave to that which is good (Rom. 12:9). We must separate ourselves from the sins of this world (Rom. 6:1,2), doing deeds of goodness (James 4:17).

Terms Of Entrance

How does one become a member of the Lord's church? The terms of entrance are marks of identification of that church. One does not "join" the church like he might join some club, society or fraternal order. He is not left to decide what he would like to do to become a member of the church. Nor can he adopt whatever human doctrines have decreed. He either comes to God as

God directs or he cannot come at all.

Briefly stated, one becomes a member of the church the same way he is saved because the church is composed of the saved. God adds people to the church (Acts 2:47) when they, having heard the word (Rom. 10:13-17; Acts 18:8), believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3), confess their faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9,10; Acts 8:37), and are buried in water (baptism) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3,4; Gal. 3:27). As on Pentecost, when the gospel is preached, believed and obeyed, God takes care of the matter of membership just as He takes care of fulfilling His promise to save when He adds the obedient to the church (Acts 2:47). This pattern is followed in every example of conversion. Nobody is voted in or out. You cannot become a member of the church the same way one joins a denomination.

Dear friend, the church of the Lord does exist and people can and do belong to it. When people today hear what was heard in the first century, believe and obey as did those back then, they will be what they were, namely, Christians, members of the Lord's church. Nobody has a right to ask more of anyone than what the Bible requires. Nor does anybody have the right to lead people to think they can receive the blessings of God regarding the soul without following God's plan and being a member of His church.

* * * * *

IS IT EVER RIGHT?

Is it ever right to take a social drink? A better way to ask the question and get the answer is this: " Is it ever right to do what you know will lead you in the wrong direction? Is it ever right to do what can lead someone else in the wrong direction?"

Proverbs 20:1, "Wine is a mocker , strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

* * *

THE LOYALTY OF JESUS

"For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (1 Pet. 2:21). This familiar instruction leads us to an area where we should follow the Lord Jesus, namely, in the matter of loyalty. The Lord is our example in everything, love, forgiveness, kindness, service, purity, sacrifice, etc. etc., and this includes the matter of loyalty.

Loyalty is defined as being faithful and true to duty or faith. It means to stand beside something or someone through thick and thin, good times or bad, prosperity or adversity. People can be loyal to country, ideals, other people,marriage partner, etc. Ruth was loyal to Naomi. Jonathan was loyal to David. An example of disloyalty would be Absalom's conduct to David, and Judas toward Christ. There comes to mind a dear lady in the church at Central Pike where I first preached every Sunday. For seven long and arduous years she never left the bedside of her helpless and invalid husband. The services of the church were broadcast into their home by a special line connected for that purpose. How loyal to her commitment to him she was. Wives and husbands are to be loyal to each other in sickness and health, good fortune, hard times, successes and failures. Loyalty often exacts a high price because it is so "other-centered" rather than "self-centered." It calls for self-denial, self-sacrifice. What we want to study in this lesson are the ways that Jesus demonstrated loyalty and learn what it was to which He was loyal. Discovering His loyalty is not near so difficult as it is to follow in His steps.

Loyal To Truth

Christ was always loyal to the truth of His Father. He never turned His back against God's will. He was always faithful to the Scriptures. When He was tempted of Satan, He said, "It is written..." time and time again in order to refute Satan. He relied upon God's word and remained stedfast in His loyalty to it. He called God's word the truth (John 17:17). His loyalty

to the will of God was evident in the fact that He came to do the will of the Father (Heb. 10:7). "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38).

He was loyal to the truth because it was through Him that grace and truth came (John 1:17). "For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Christ." If there had ever been any shadow of disloyalty to truth on the part of Jesus, would God have chosen Him to be the very channel through which truth was given?

We know He was loyal to the truth because He is the very personification of truth. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6). To have been disloyal to truth would have been disloyal to Himself. Rather than that, He suffered for truth, lived for the truth, died for it, revealed the truth, and He is the very embodiment of God's truth.

Are we loyal to the truth of God? Or do we try to dodge it, change it, twist it to fit our ways rather than conform our ways to it? Too many are too timid to stand for the truth. When the pressures come because of the truth they leave the footsteps of Jesus and pursue paths that are easier. They hesitate in proclaiming it if someone objects. They weaken it in the presence of its enemies. Only with reluctance do they let it be known that they are on truth's side.

Loyal To Disciples

Christ is also our example in loyalty to His disciples. His disciples were not always loyal to Him, but that did not alter His loyalty to them. Who are His disciples? His disciples are Christians (Acts 11:26). "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." (John 8:31). "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35). "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." (John 15:8). A word that is almost synonymous with loyalty in the word "friend." Jesus is the

friend of His disciples. We are His friends when we do what He has commanded (John 15:14). We have a friendship with Christ that is established and maintained by our obedience to Him. He is our friend and loyal to His promises to us.

In one sense, Jesus is the friend of "publicans and sinners." His friendship is not one that condones their sinfulness, but is designed to redeem them from their sinfulness through forgiveness of sins if they would follow Him. His association during His earthly life with sinners continued only so long as the direction was toward His righteousness and away from their unrighteousnesss. In a sense, He showed loyalty even to His enemies in that He always sought their highest good, which is real love.

One of the tragic parts of Scripture is the way His disciples were disloyal to Him. Peter denied Him; Judas betrayed Him; all forsook Him and fled. In the hour when He needed their loyalty the most, they were not to be found. Yet, even as He was being seized, He showed His loyalty to them by pleading for their release. "I have told you that I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." (John 18:8).

His loyalty to His disciples is seen in His promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:20). Inasmuch as those to whom He immediately spoke would not live until the end of the world, it is obvious that His promise extends to all of His disciples even yet.

Since Christ was loyal to His disciples, should we not also be loyal to His disciples? After all, His disciples are our brethren. Should we turn away from His faithful disciples and accomodate those who pursue error? Shall we defend the wrongdoer against our brethren? When we show loyalty and friendship toward the faithful brethren, we are imitating Christ.

Loyal To His Church

We must mention the loyalty of Christ to His own

church. This naturally follows in the wake of His loyalty to His disciples because His disciples make up the church. Christ built the church (Matt. 16:18); is the head of it (Eph. 1:22,23); is the Savior of it (Eph. 5:23); loves it and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25); purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28); it is His own body (Eph. 1:23). By and through the Holy Spirit He guides the church as the church adheres to the guidance given the apostles (John 14:26). Through His word He leads, guides and directs the church even today.

When thinking of the Lord's church we must consider it in the sense of the New Testament, both universally and locally. Christians are concerned about the church everywhere. But espcially are we concerned for the church locally because that is where we live. When the church falters, we suffer. When it enjoys success, we rejoice. Regardless of where that is or who is involved, when the kingdom of God make advances against the kingdom of darkness it is the success of us all. The tie that binds our hearts in Christian love makes us loyal to the church everywhere, anywhere, everytime, anytime, especially where we live and at our post of duty. It is a mistake to have loyalty to only one faithful congregation and neglect the welfare of other faithful congregations. For the reason of love and loyalty we pray for each other and are always concerned one for the other.

Loyal To His Mission

Jesus was loyal to His mission to this earth. He came to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). He was not sidetracked nor did He neglect that for which He had come. At awesome price, He accomplished the work God sent Him to do.

It is too easy at times to be sidetracked from our mission in life that means to "fear God and keep His commandments." It is too easy for the church to become overburdened with matters that are not even the work of the church. We can major in minors and minor in majors to the disloyalty of our duty. There is a

difference between doing the Lord's business and just having so much "busy-ness." Christ never wavered or slacked, was never diverted from His goal and mission. Even though it ultimately cost Him His life with an excruciating pain, He was loyal to His mission.

There is a story told during the time when steamboats went up and down the great Mississippi River of a plantation owner who entrusted the care of his two children to a trusted slave to take them on the trip from Memphis to New Orleans. But the trip met with disaster. The boat got off channel, hit rocks, broke apart and began to sink. Lifeboats filled rapidly. There was room left for either one adult or two children. Being loyal to his master and his duty, the noble slave placed the children in the boat and went down with the ship to his death. That is pure and undefiled loyalty at the highest cost. This is what Jesus did for all mankind. "I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do." (John 17:4). Christ is our example in loyalty to work, duty, mission, purpose. Are we being loyal to our mission as Christians?

The Quality Of Loyalty

If we be true Christians, loyalty will characterize us. A young girl was about to marry a man who professed no confidence in Christ, but he knew what was expected of a Christian. He invited her to a party where there would be dancing, drinking, other such things. Trying to please him, she accepted. Time came for the party, but instead, the man broke the engagement. "You profess to be a Christian. But if the vows you make to God can be so easily broken, how much easier to break vows made to man." He knew what loyalty demanded.

Those who love animals will appreciate the illustration of loyalty in the story of a dog of a soldier from Illinois who went to war in the War Between the States. The dog would not remain at home, but went everywhere the soldier went, even into battle. One day

the soldier was killed. But the dog watched over him until his body was buried. Even then he remained at the grave until he was taken home by the soldier's widow. Loyalty, friendship, devotion, commitment, whatever you call it, Jesus gave us an example to follow in all the things that matter.

To be loyal to Christ, we must follow His lead. The song encourages us, "To Christ be loyal and be true." Loyalty to Christ means loyalty to His doctrine and the manner of life for which He calls.

We can be grateful for such a vivid demonstration of loyalty our Lord has given us. May it be that we shall not disappoint Him in our loyalty.

* * * * *

THE COMMON SALVATION

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3). Many sermons on several subjects have their basis in this passage of scripture. We now want to reflect upon the common salvation of which Jude spoke.

What is the common salvation mentioned here? It is the salvation by the Christian faith. It is the salvation that belongs to those who have come to the Christ. It is the salvation the Christian religion provides. God sent His Son unto the world to save man, and that which His Son has offered is the salvation of this passage. This salvation is freedom from sin that we are promised in the gospel. "The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32). This freedom from sin is the salvation. Sin puts man in bondage and slavery. The salvation from that bondage is salvation by Christ.

Why Called Common

Why is it called a common salvation? It belongs

to every Christian equally. It has been offered to every person on the same terms. "God so loved the world... that whosoever believeth in Him..." defines how widespread the offer of salvation goes. Christ tasted of death for every man (Heb. 2:9). Whether Jew or Gentile, we are all saved the same way (Gal. 3:26-28). The faith that saves one is the faith that will save another (Acts 11:18; 15:9,11). It matters not the color of skin, nationality, sex, race, social position, or any of the distinctions between people. The salvation offered by Jesus is offered to all, on the same basis. The promise to Abraham was that "through thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18), and this seed is Christ (Gal. 3:16). It is a salvation common to all who will obey.

Even the apostles did not at first understand the inclusiveness of this salvation. The gospel was first preached to Jews. Only after the Lord came to Peter and convinced him to go to the house of Cornelius did it begin to be understood that the Gentiles were to be called by the gospel also (Acts 10). The salvation is needed by all, available to all, offered to all, and enjoyed by all who come to Christ.

From Past Sins

There are four senses of this salvation. First, there is salvation from past sins. Peter mentioned certain qualities that are to be developed in living the life of a Christian and added, "But he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." (2 Pet. 1:9). Man is born into this world innocent of sin. He is not lost; he is not saved; he is safe. Until he transgresses the will or law of God (and that is what sin is, 1 John 3:4), he remains safe. But he eventually reaches a time of accountability before God as we all must (2 Cor. 5:10). We all sin (Rom. 3:23), and that is what separates us from God (Isa. 59:1,2). Realizing one's lost condition, when one hears the word and believes in Christ, repents of his sins, confesses his faith in Christ, and is baptized unto the remission of sins and into Christ, he is saved (Mark

16:16). From what is he saved? He is not saved from sins which he has never committed. He is not saved from the sins of his foreparents of which he was never guilty. He is not saved from sins which he may later commit. He is saved from his past sins. He enters into a saved relationship with God because he is now in Christ. He enters a newness of life (Rom. 6:3,4), as a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Into A Relationship

He also enters into a relationship with God where he can be forgiven of sins that he commits as a Christian. Yes, Christians sin. John makes that plain in (1John 1:8-10). In Acts 8:13, 20-23, Simon, who had heard the word, believed the word, and obeyed the word, had sinned. When a Christian sins he is not to be baptized again, but he has the privilege of repentance, confession of sins, and prayer for forgiveness of sins (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

Prevention

In this new saved state he entered at baptism he also has access to preventive measures against sin. He grows as a Christian and learns to resist the devil, to avoid temptation, to overcome temptations, to develop strong affections for the good, right and holy ways of Christianity. He flees youthful lusts. He abstains from the appearance of evil. He sidesteps many pitfalls and when he does stumble and fall, he gets up , and keeps on striving toward perfection, asking for forgiveness from God.

Heaven

After rendering initial obedience to the gospel, and then living a faithful Christian life, there is a fourth and final phase of the salvation of which Jude writes. That is salvation in heaven. While one lives, he lives with the assurance and hope of this salvation (Titus 3:7). When he leaves this life there awaits him his crown of righteousness which the Lord gives to the faithful (2 Tim. 4:6-8). He enjoys the fruits of

his labors (Rev. 14:13), and inherits the eternal home of the soul.

This common salvation is the biggest news story of all time. "Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again according to the Scriptures. " (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Jesus' birth was wonderful news and was announced by heavenly hosts. It was wonderful because the Savior was born. But even a more important news is declared in Christ's death, burial and resurrection because in this He was declared to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4). He was made Savior of mankind. The fact that sin need not have dominion anymore, but that we can be saved is the biggest, grandest, best news that the ear can hear, whether we at first realize it or not. Heaven can be our home. Hell need not be the destiny of the soul.

As A Will

This news of salvation and the way we can benefit from it is presented to us in the book of Hebrews as a will. Hebrews 10:9,10 teaches we are saved by the will that He came to establish. A will is made before one dies, but is not in effect until after the death of the testator. So it is with the will of Christ. "For where a testament is there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead, otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. (Heb. 9:16,17). We understand this without difficulty. A man may make a will giving his estate to his nephew. But the nephew cannot lay claim to theestate until after the death of his uncle. If there are conditions in the will that the nephew must meet to inherit the estate, these conditions must be met or the estate will not become his. So it is with the salvation that Christ has offered. Christ made a will, delievered that will, a will that

became effective after his death. We live this side of His death on the cross. We enjoy the benefits of His will only if we meet the conditions set forth in that will. Once we meet them, then the provisions offered in the will, namely, the salvation to which Jude referred, belongs to us.

Salvation Is Conditional

The conditions of salvation in the New Testament are noticeable. Those who shall inherit the crown of eternal bliss must hear the gospel, learn of their lost condition, learn that they cannot save themselves and that they need a Savior, that Christ is the only Savior, that God sent Him to this earth to be our Savoir He then must believe in Christ, placing his confidence, faith and trust in Him for salvation. Then he must repent of his sins, confess His faith in Jesus and be baptized unto the remission of sins. He is to live a faithful life in Christ, having the hope of the eternal reward in heaven. These terms and conditions must be met. To not meet them and still expect to receive the benefits of His will anyway is unreasonable. We cannot expect to be blessed if we disregard the will of the Lord. It makes a difference what one believes, and what one does. Mark it down, we enjoy the common salvation through God's way, or we will not enjoy it at all. We only deceive ourselves to think that it could be or will be otherwise.

Obviously,the climax of this common salvation, as already noted, is heaven. May we illustrate with this little story? A small boy went to a neighbor's farm one day to work. There was a rather large forest between his home and farm where he was to work. He worked hard all day and as night began to fall he started home. He approached the forest with some apprehension, and especially as it grew darker and darker. It was so dark in the forest that he could scarcely see his way another step. "Are you waiting for me, father?" he called. The answer came back with great power of comfort and reassurance, "Yes, my son, I'll meet you at the edge of the forest." He pressed on until the father took his hand and led him home.

Someday we shall leave the fields of labor. Now we are working in the vineyard of the Lord. But it is not going to be long at the longest before we shall all start home. Brethren, between us and home there are many unknowns and uncertainties. Many "forests" may stand between us and our eternal happiness. But God, our heavenly Father, waits for us on the other side of the blackness of death, ready to receive us home at last. Then we shall know the fulness of the meaning of the common salvation of which Jude wrote.

* * * * *

MAJOR SURGERY

When we lived in Jacksonville, Alabama and worked with the church there, it was our good fortune to have Foy E. Wallace, Jr. for a gospel meeting.

As those who remember that gallant soldier of the cross, his sermons were not any longer than anyone else's, he just preached more of them at one time. He explained in his first lesson that he preached longer than some because, "I did not come to remove warts; I came to do major surgery."

Our oldest son, Bill, said to me later that day, "Dad, somebody needs to tell brother Wallace that if you perform major surgery, you put people to sleep."

I related his comment to brother Wallace that afternoon, and I never saw that grand old gentleman laugh more heartily. He got the point, and Bill won a place in his heart. But he preached just as long anyway.



JAMES W. BOYD

WHY WE IMMERSE

Answering an inquiry why we immerse can be quickly answered by saying, "It is out of respect for the teaching of the Bible." That really is the reason. It is because of a determination to do according to the apostolic commandment to "speak as the oracles of God." (1 Pet. 4:11).

But to be more specific, the word "baptize" is derived from the Greek word that the Holy Spirit chose for the Holy Scriptures, and it means to immerse, plunge beneath, bury, submerge. Consultation with any reliable Greek-English lexicon will place that fact beyond dispute. Nobody has ever sprinkled or poured for baptism because of the meaning of the word that the Scripture uses.

The word pictures of baptismal scenes are indicate immersion (Mt. 3:16; Acts 8:38,39). Never does the Scripture indicate sprinkling or pouring of water on a person as baptism. The early church always immersed and the church must continue that practice now.

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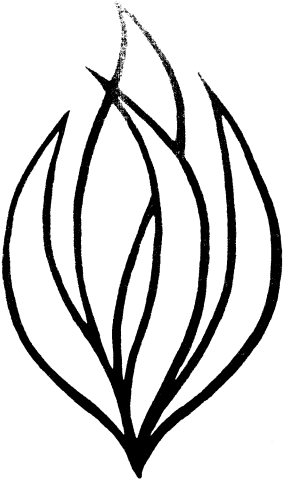

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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PRAYER

When man reads the Bible, God is speaking to him, revealing the thoughts of the infinite mind unto man. When man prays to God, he is speaking to God, revealing the thoughts of a finite mind to God. There are similarities in reading the Bible and praying. Both assert the God-man relationship. Both are means of communication. Both acknowledge the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present God. In both activities God is the benefactor and man is the beneficiary. Both are indespensable in man's journey to heaven.

Involves A Relationship

Prayer does involve the God-man relationship, but it involves something more intimate than that. It is a God-Christian relationship, because prayer is a privilege that belongs only to those who are of God through Christ. Prayer involves the father-child relationship. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:17,18). "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. 8:14-17). God is the spiritual Father and Christians are His spiritual children. As a father hears his child, so God hears the Christian. As a child looks to his father, the Christian looks to God.

Why Pray?

"Men ought to pray and not to faint." (Luke 18:1). Why pray? It is a recognition of our need of divine help. It is a realization of dependence. The strength of man is limited, but the strength of God exceeds that

of man and is limited only as God Himself may limit it. Man stands in constant need of the Father's care and protection. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need." (Heb. 4:16). When a person will not pray, it indicates an attitude of self-sufficiency that is unrealistic. Paul urged brethren in Thessalonica to "pray without ceasing," meaning to always have the attitude of dependency on God and the recognition of the need for God's help. While prayer is an action of adoration and worship of God, it also may be described as a reflection of a constant attitude toward God.

Love

We pray because we love God. Prayer is not a burdensome duty, but rather a blessed privilege. Prayer is asking for the attention of the Almighty God, knowing God loves us and we love God. Those of pagan religions often feared their gods to the extent that they shied away from approaching their gods. It is not so with the Christian.He delights to be in the presense of God because there is the strong tie of love between them.

God Answers

We pray because God answers prayer. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:7-11).

God does not answer prayer with miracles today as He has done at times in other dispensations and earlier days of this one. The days of miracles are

over, having accomplished the purposes for which they were given. But God still answers prayer as we are taught in James 5.

James tells us that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Then he illustrates his teaching with the prayer of Elijah for rain. In 1 Kings 17 and 18, we read of the drought that had beset Israel because of the wickedness of Ahab and northern Israel. For three years it did not rain. Then Elijah was told to pray that the rain would come and it did. The rain came by means of the clouds that arose. This is not a miraculous occurence. This is the natural way for rain to come. As far as anyone could tell, it was the natural means by which Elijah's prayer was answered. So it is with the answering of our prayers. We must readily admit that we have no information one way or the other to what extent God may manipulate the operation of nature to His liking. This is totally in the realm of speculation and outside the realm of revelation. But we have no reason to question the fact that God answers prayer even though the miraculous element is not present.

Prayers are not always answered the way we would ask. God answers prayer according to that which He sees fit. He may respond negatively to our prayer, or positively, or just as we ask, or what He sees is best. We do not always know how to pray in the best way. Often, God allows us to wait for His answer to our prayers. Is this not the same way that an earthly father responds to the requests and wishes of his children?

Prayer Plus Effort

Prayer is not to be a substitute for our efforts. We must cooperate with God in doing for ourselves with what He has already provided for us. Prayer should always be connected with our work. Like the man who prayed for a turkey on the table for his family and said, "Lord, if you will just show me where that turkey is, we will get it on the table." Prayer becomes a mockery when we expect to sit back and allow God to do everything even when there are those things we

already have the capacity to do. For God to answer prayer without any effort on our part would tend to make us lazy, without incentive, lethargic, and otherwise a parasite. Working and praying is the way God's people have always reacted.

Acceptable Prayer

Acceptable prayer must have certain characteristics. It must be offered in faith. "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive them, and ye shall have them." (Mark 11:24). But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." (James 1:6). Why pray if we do not believe God will answer? "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Matt. 21:22). The story is told of some people suffering from a lack of rain who decided to meet and offer special prayer for rain, but only one man even brought an umbrella. To pray and doubt that God hears and answers is mockery.

Attitude

Prayers must be offered with sincerity, fervency, and reverence. All worship is to be "in spirit." (John 4:24). This involves having the correct attitude of heart. "I will pray with the spirit." (1 Cor. 14:15). This passage may well involve inspired prayers, but certainly includes sincerity in prayer. Prayer is to be offered with the utmost reverence toward God. The manner in which we address God should manifest our respect and reverence. To call upon God in trite, flippant, cheap terms is to make God nothing more than another human being. We shall not list the terms some use in calling on God because the very mentioning of them are offensive to those who love the Lord in His majesty, holiness, might and power. God is God, and we must approach His throne of grace with confidence, but with reverence.

Prayer must be offered with humility. Some pray as if they are giving God His work orders for the week.

They "claim" this and "claim" that, and demand that God do this, that or the other as if prayer was the right to present God with a shopping list of things He is obligated to provide. We must realize that we are mere humans and He is Deity. The prayer of the Pharisee in Luke 18:10-14 was not accepted because he was haughty, self-righteous, proud, and sorely lacking in a humble and submissive spirit.

Understanding

Our prayers must reflect an understanding. "I will pray with the understanding." (1 Cor. 14:15). We must understand the limitations of prayer as well as the will of God. It is not God's will for some things to be done the way man might specify. God has spiritual laws and this is His will. He does not violate His own will to satisfy man. For instance, it does no good for one in sin to pray for forgiveness of sin when he refuses to submit to the conditions in God's will to be forgiven. It does no good to pray for a miracle when the days of miracles have been accomplished. Our attitude must be that which Jesus manifested, namely, "Thy will be done." This is the way we are taught to pray (Matt. 6:9). Keep in mind, there are times when we do not know how or for what to pray. God realizes this and has made provision even for that (Rom. 8:26,27). But we should never ask nor expect God to set aside His will to accomodate our wishes.

Through Christ

Prayer is to be offered through Christ and in His name. The avenue of approach to God is Christ. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6). "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name," was the teaching of Jesus (John 14:13). Christ is our great high priest (Heb. 4:14). It is according to the will of God that prayer be made in His name. Even when the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf, it is through Christ, because that is according to His will (Rom.8:27).

Righteous Life

Prayer must be offered in the company of a righteous life. Even a child of God, who has the right to pray,but who persists in going the evil way, will have his prayers hindered. It is a bad thing not to be on speaking terms with God. Proverbs 28:9, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." Peter wrote, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." (1 Pet. 3:12). Failure on the part of husbands to treat their wives properly will hinder their prayers (1 Pet. 3:7). "And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight." (1 John 3:22). We need not think we can offend God and run roughshod against His will and still expect God to hear our prayers.

Repetition

In prayer we are to avoid what Jesus called "vain repetitions." (Matt. 6:5-8). The value of prayer is not measured by its length nor its many words. The prayer Jesus prayed as well as His teaching on prayer was short, precise, to the point, and clear. We shall not be heard because of much speaking. He does not forbid repetition, because men of God often prayed repeatedly for the same thing. Did not Elijah do so in 1 Kings 18? Did not Jesus Himself repeat the same prayer over and over? Repetition is not what is forbidden, but vain repetition, repeating a thing over and over, thinking that the mere repetition will have some efficacy.

Praise and Thanksgiving

Prayer should include praise and adoration. "Hallowed be thy name," was included in the teaching on prayer (Matt. 6:9). Prayer should include thanksgiving. Sometimes our prayers are top-heavy with requests. We need to have gratitude for the blessings already received and express that gratitude. Jesus was pleased with the leper who was healed and returned to offer thanks. Concerning

the others, He asked, "Where are the nine?" (Luke 17: 12-18). 1 Cor. 15:57, "Thanks be to God who giveth us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," was a prayer of thanksgiving. Every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17), and we must thank God for His bountifulness toward us. It is even the polite thing among men to say "thank you." How much more should we be grateful to God.

Confession

Prayer should include confession of sins. We can pray, as children of God, for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). But John teaches, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9). Did not the publican, who went to his house justified, include in his prayer, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner?" (Luke 18:13). All sin is against God. When we sin against another person we should confess our sin to him. When we sin against the church we should make confession to the church. But inasmuch as all sin is against God, we should always confess our sins to God.

Request

Prayer is an opportunity to make requests of God. It is a matter of petition. "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." (Phil. 4:6). While some have mistakenly looked upon prayer as only an avenue for asking and never thanking, we do not want to overlook the fact that prayer is the way we ask of God. We do not make requests of God to inform Him of our needs because He always knows our needs. We make petition in prayer to show that we realize and respect that God is the provider of our needs. We express our dependence on God for the provisions of life and for the soul. As children of God we can pray for the physical and temporal things needful in life. But more importantly, we can pray for the spiritual needs. We can pray on behalf of others. God expects us to ask of Him.

What would you exchange for the privilege of being in communication with God? What would be worth depriving yourself of His word? What is as useful and valuable as the avenue of prayer by which we worship God? The failure to pray is the failure to show faith, love, dependence, gratitude and respect. It is to neglect giving praise and honor. Let us learn the teaching of God about prayer and utilize it as He would have us do.

* * * *

CAN ONE BE SAVED OUTSIDE THE CHURCH?

Our study centers on one of the more controversial religious subjects, namely, that which concerns the relationship of the church with being saved. There is such wide division between people in this matter, and it generally stems from a misunderstanding of the Bible and possibly, a willingness to reject the Bible as the final authority in settling such disputes. The fact that the subject is controversial does not mean that you can take it either way. Some feel if a matter is controversial, no one can be sure about the solution. But that is not so. The reason it is controversial is because there is controversy over it, not because there is not a right and wrong about it. Some contend we cannot see the Bible alike, and thereby lay all blame for religious division on God. After all, God gave us the Bible. If we cannot see it alike, it is His fault we are divided. Even though His Bible tells us to be united, are we to blame God for division? People may misunderstand the Bible differently and be divided, or one may understand it and the other misunderstand it and therefore are divided. But when both understand the Bible, they will see it alike because they will see it like God presented it. God did not teach unity, then give us a Bible that causes division.

This question of the church and salvation is important because there are those out of the church who must know what being in the church means. Those in the church need to be refreshed with the knowledge of the significance of being in the church. Anything purchased by the blood of Christ, as the church is (Acts 20:28), demands

our attention. Christ is the head of it and is called the Savior of the church (Eph. 5:23). He is the founder and foundation (Matt. 16:16-18), and these facts alone make it imperative we understand the significance of the church and salvation. If one can be saved outside of the church, we must find some Biblical answer as to why He established it and what is the purpose of it.

Accountable People

When we ask if one can be saved outside the church we are talking about accountable people. We are not talking about those mentally incapable of obeying God, or children who are not lost because they have not yet sinned. The Bible does not assign responsibility to such as those.

Not A Denomination

Furthermore, when we are talking about the church we are not talking about any denomination, or anything akin to denominationalism. Denominationalism is a subject that is foreign to the Bible except the Biblical condemnations of the division that denominationalism propagates and upon which it feeds and promotes. The church is not a denomination; is not the sum total of all the denominations; has nothing whatever to do with denominations. Denominations are not even found in the Bible, and not one of them exists by the authority of God. They are altogether of human creation while the church was designed in the mind of God and brought into existence by Him. It is unfortunate that many people have been so steeped in denominationalism that they cannot seem to grasp the Biblical presentation of the church except in terms of some man-made denomination. But we must confine ourselves to the Bible, and in doing so, we will not equate the church with anything akin to denominations. Even the strongest advocates of denominations admit that one can be saved outside of a denomination, or all the denominations. Since that is so, we wonder why they exist at all. But must an accountable person be a member of the church which Christ purchased with His blood to be saved? We are

talking about the one church revealed in Scripture.

We can learn the Bible answer to our question when we learn the Bible meaning of the church. What does it mean to be in the church?

In Christ

First, it means to be in Christ, because the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23). We get into Christ and into the church the same way, namely, by being baptized into the one body (1 Cor. 12:13) and being baptized into the Christ (Gal. 3:27). There are not two baptisms because there is one baptism (Eph. 4:4). The same baptism that puts one in Christ puts him in the church.

Reconciled To God

Being in the church means being reconciled to God. Eph. 2:14-18, "For he is our peace, who has made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body (emphasis, JWB) by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby, and came and preached peace unto you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Paul says these Christians were reconciled to God. By whom were they reconciled? It was Christ. Where did this reconciliation take place? It was His death on the cross and is enjoyed in the one body, which is the church. Whereas the Jews and Gentiles were at enmity against each other, they were reconciled, not only to each other, but to God, in the body and by Christ. Reconciliation was accomplished when they took advantage of what Christ did, namely, to die on the cross, and they entered the one body. Outside the body there was no reconciliation. Reconciliation is in the body. Being in the church means one is among the "reconciled to God." They made peace with each other and with God by becoming members of the body, the church.

A New Creature

Being in the church means being a new creature. In John 3:3-5, Jesus taught Nicodemus the necessity of being born again. The commonly heard phrase, " born again Christian," is a redundancy. If one has been born again, he is a Christian. One cannot become a Christian without being born again. When one is born he is a new creature. But one in Christ is a new creature. 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Being a new creature is the same thing as being in Christ. Being in Christ, as we have already learned, is the same thing as being in the church. So being in the church means you are a new creature in Christ.

Taking this immediate comparison a step further, we become a new creature when we are born again by water and the Spirit. The teaching of the Spirit is involved in being born again. Water is involved in being born again. We are raised to walk in newness of life, which is synonymous with being born again, when we are baptized. Born of water means baptism. We are baptized into Christ; we are baptized into the body; we are baptized to be born again or to become a new creature. In Christ, in the body, a new creature, born again, in the church are all synonymous terms.

Sanctified

Being in the church means being sanctified. To be sanctified means to be holy, cleansed, released from sin, set apart from sin into the service of God. The Corinthian brethren were said to be sanctified (1 Cor. 1:1-3). They were said also to be in Christ in the same passage. Therefore, the sanctified are in Christ, which means they are reconciled to God, in the body, and new creatures. Please take note how one is sanctified, or purified from his sins. Paul had his sins washed away when he obeyed the instruction of baptism (Acts 22:16). Baptism is the step that makes one free from his sins, set apart into the service of God.

There are other Biblical comparisons we can cite

that show us the meaning of being in the church, but these are sufficient for us to learn the Biblical answer to the question, "Can one be saved outside the church?" Knowing what being in the church means, let us raise the question in other terms.

Can one be saved out of Christ? The Bible teaches salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Apart from Christ we cannot bear fruit (John 15:1-10). But being in Christ is the same as being in the church.

Can one be saved without being reconciled to God? Those in the church are those who are reconciled by Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20). We cannot be saved while remaining at enmity with God. Nor can we be saved outside the church where the state of reconciliation exists. Those who are reconciled to God are those who compose the church. That is what the church is, namely, people who are reconciled to God.

Can one be saved and not be a new creature? Jesus makes that answer quite clear when He taught, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3). The old man of sin must be discarded and the new man of holiness must take rule and reign (Eph. 4:22,23). No person who believes the Bible would contend one can remain in sin and be saved. He must be a new creature. And that is what the church is, namely, those who have been born again.

The same thing is true regarding sanctification. One cannot be saved unless he is set apart from sin and set into the service of God. But the sanctified are those that make up the church.

The Church Is The Saved

Those on Pentecost who heard the word, believed the word, and obeyed the word by being baptized, were added to the church because they were saved (Acts 2:47). The Biblical answer is clear and unmistakable. One cannot be saved without being a member of the church. The church is the saved. The church is the body of Christ,

the sanctified of God, the reconciled, the new creatures in Christ.

The way one becomes a member of the church is exactly the same way one is sanctified, born again, reconciled to God, and enters into Christ. We do not do one thing to be saved and something additional or different to become a member of the Lord's church. True enough, there is a difference between what one does to be saved and what he must do to join some denomination. But denominations ought not exist anyway. As did those of the first century, we must hear the word, believe in Christ, repent of sins, confess our faith, and be baptized. God adds all the saved to the church at that time, by the same power and process that He saves.

* * * *

TWO VIEWS OF ONE LIFE

We shall consider two passages of scripture as our basic texts in this lesson. Both of them are evaluations that Jacob made of his own life. What strikes us so forcefully is that the two statements are contradictory. The evaluations are completely different. It was the same life, and reviewed by the same man. The statements were made some seventeen years apart. That had something to do with it. But what is of greater significance is that Jacob viewed his life from separate perspectives, one taking recognition of God and the other leaving God out of it.

Few And Evil Days

In the first passage, Gen. 47:9, Jacob emphasizes the disappointments and failures. He stresses how his days have been few and evil. "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."

Fed By God

In the second passage, he placed emphasis on his blessings and reflected upon what God had done for him. He realized how God had fed him and redeemed him. "God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." (Gen. 48: 15,16).

Self-examination

Let us commend the idea of evaluating our lives. Self-examination is a wholesome and beneficial practice. We are urged to examine ourselves. We need to stop long enough in the hurry and scurry of life to take note where we have been, where we are, and where we are going. We need to take stock regarding what we used to be, what we are now, and what we intend to be in the future. Older people can look upon their past and likely see many sorrows, tragedies, distresses, losses, regrets. But they can also likely see blessings, goodness, kindness, providence, successes. We all might ask whether our lives have been good this far? Doubtless there may be seasons of regret and mistake. But has there not also been seasons of bounty and plenty? The young ought take a look at life, even though they may not have yet lived much of it. Even while most of life is before them, they need to consider whether their lives will be fruitful, beneficial lives worth living, and of service to God and man.

We need to evaluate our lives and remember that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesses (Luke 12:15). We need to remember that the soul is worth more than all the world (Matt. 16:26). We must recall the priority of Jesus that those who serve are the greatest in His kingdom (Matt. 23:11). Life is brief at the longest. It is pictured as a vapor that appeareth for a little time and vanishes away (James 4: 14). We ought make the most of it.

Why The Difference

Why did Jacob make such different evaluations of his life? In the first instance, he was before Pharoah having just left his homeland, the land that God promised the descendants of Abraham. He had come to Egypt because of the famine. He had been united with his son, Joseph. He had suffered many hard times during his life. There had been the strife with Esau in his young years. Of course, much of that was his own doing. He had to flee his home for his life. He had difficulties with his father-in-law, Laban. While Jacob had tricked and deceived others, he had also been the victim of deception. His own sons had tortured him by selling His favorite son, Joseph, into Egypt and had allowed him to think Joseph was dead. His sons had brought him into disfavor with the inhabitants of the land of Canaan because of Dinah, his daughter. He now had left his home in his old age and knew he would not see it again.

But he was before Pharoah, an unbeliever. Yet, he was complaining about how he had been "short-changed" in his life. He never once took recognition of the good things God had done for him. He never showed any appreciation for his good furtune at that moment in seeing Joseph again and knowing that his family would survive in the famine. There was no mention of God whatever. Sure enough, when one leaves God out in his evaluation of life, he is not going to see very much that is worthwhile.

On the second occasion, he was in the presence of his family. He had his sons and grandsons around him. He was pronouncing blessings upon each of them. He was recalling how God had preserved and sustained him. He could recall his prosperity, his many children, the reunion with Joseph, the hope that his seed would continue. This time he was giving God credit for the blessings he had enjoyed. It was God who had been the source of such blessings. When he turned his attention to God he could see the fulness of his life.

Attitude Matters

How we look on a situation, to determine whether it is good or evil, depends on the situation, but it also

depends on our own attitude. What we think is important. What we think is what we really are. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Prov. 23:7). It is not that one is what he thinks he is. But one is what he thinks. His thinking is so important. We think in the heart and "out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23). We need to set our affections on things above, think right, evaluate properly, including God and what God has done for us. He is the fount of every blessing. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights." (James 1:17).

The difference in the two attitudes and evaluations of his life was God. When we include God, things will always be different. Temptations can be met and overcome. What we cannot overcome, we can endure. We can enjoy the peace that belongs to those who are right with God. Nothing stresses how God makes a difference more than the passage in Ephesians 2, that describes how the Christian was before he became a Christian, namely, dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, disobedient, having our manner of life in the lusts of the flesh and mind. Then Paul spoke of that which made the difference. In verse four he states, "But God..." Because of God's love, His mercy, we were made alive, raised up, made to sit in heavenly places with Christ. God made the difference.

Jacob could not know the fulness that Christians can enjoy. But Jacob was a prominent part in the unfolding of God's scheme for saving man. He had his hard moments, but he had his blessings. When he concentrated on the difficult, his life seemed dark and dreary. But when he thought of what God had done, God made such a difference, and his life was considered one that was filled with blessings. Like Paul said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

Let us take stock of our lives and let God in. Let us emphasize God, and life will not only seem better, it will be better.

* * * * *

THE CHRISTIAN AND PERSONAL WORK

"Go ye," means "Go me." Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). Did that include me? "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." (Mt. 28:19). Did that include me? The early Christians as they were scattered due to persecution went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). Does that mean I should? "And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. 2:2). Does not that indicate that all should be teachers of the word?

It Is Christlike

A Christian is a follower of Christ, having been baptized into Christ. Personal work is a way of reaching the lost with the message of salvation. There is public proclamation or preaching by means of various media, such as radio, television, literature, classes. But there is also the one-on-one and more personal contact with the gospel. All methods are useful. None make the others unnecessary. Things can be accomplished by this method that may not be accomplished other ways.

Christ was a personal worker. He taught publicly, but He also taught individuals, such as the Samaritan woman (John 4), Nicodemus (John 3), Zacchaeus (Luke 19). One soul is worth more than the world so He sought even one soul. As noted, the early Christians were personal workers, teaching in the temple (Acts 5), as they were scattered (Acts 8), from house to house (Acts 20). As Ezekiel was God's watchman on behalf of others, so we are His watchmen today.

> When in the better land, before the bar we stand,
> How deeply grieved our souls will be, if any lost
> One there should cry in deep despair, 'You never
> Mentioned Him to me. You helped me not the light
> To see. You met me day by day, you knew I was
> Astray, yet, you never mentioned Him to me'.

Too often what we do is to build a building, hire

a preacher, conduct services, teach a few classes, maybe have a gospel meeting each year and a summer Bible school, put out a sign and invite people to come, and that's it. We realize that the lost have a responsibility, but we must feel more keenly the duty of getting the message to the world, and it may be that we will have to go one-to-one-to-one-to-one. We cannot take the attitude that if the lost do not come we will not go to them. Too many in the church engage in nothing more than conscience soothing efforts, not even winning their own family and children as they "play church." The Lord said to go and teach, not let them know we are in town. The gospel must be commited to others who will in turn take it even further. This is a duty of every Christian. It makes you wonder as you see the "go by proxy" attitude so many have whether we sing a lie in our assemblies when we sing, "We'll Work Till Jesus Comes," "I Love Thy Kingdom Lord," "Rescue the Perishing," and such songs. The next time you sing, "I Love To Tell The Story," just ask, "To whom have I told it recently?" Where did we get the idea that we only should get our name on the church roll and lay back and glide into heaven?

Many in the church probably cannot even tell somebody else the basic first principles regarding the way of salvation. It is not due to timidity, because we talk to others about anything else. It is not due to the lack of talent and ability, because we perform every other kind of task. It is not due to the lack of contact with others who need it. It may well be due to a lack of knowledge and willingness. Probably we have for too long thought we might survive with weekly sermonettes that have only produced "Christian-ettes."

It Is Work

Personal work is just that - WORK. It takes time, preparation, study, patience, love. How many really care that much for souls?

Someone has listed twelve steps to personal evangelism.

1. Unplug the television, stereo, and radio.
2. Hide all newspapers, books, and magazines.
3. Place "keep off" signs on easy chairs, davenports and beds.
4. Pick up your Bible and car keys.
5. As you go, pray for God's strength and guidance.
6. Stop at the house of a lost soul whom you love but would not trade places with spiritually.
7. Tell him/her about Jesus Christ, how to live and remain faithful until death.
8. As you make each point, back it up with scriptures, and then appeal to their heart.
9. Tell the truth in love, being tactful and courteous. Heal, don't wound.
10. Don't give up, but don't stay too long. The power is in the gospel (Rom. 1:16)
11. Return home with joy in your heart.
12. Thank the Lord for blessing you in this rewarding work, and showing you how simple it is.

Excuses

Many offer excuses for not doing personal work. The life story of many "Christians" is, "They began to make excuse." "I'm too busy." But the Lord always chose busy people to do His work. "I'm already doing my part." Fine, if this is true. But attending worship is not all that there is to your part. "No one is interested." You find this nearly true. But Paul went to the heathen cities where nobody cared as far as he knew. He did not offer that as an excuse for doing nothing. "I've tried and failed." Not so. If you tried, you have already succeeded to some degree, simply by trying. The only one who completely fails is the one who does not try. "I don't know enough Bible." Well, teach what you know. And get busy studying so you can know what you need to know. "I don't know how." Too many feel they must have some kind of specialization before they can talk to others about the gospel. They have been led to believe you must be some sort of expert. This is not so. Training may be good, but we have spent so much time training, learning

"how to" but never getting around to doing the work, that it makes you think we have emphasized it too much.

If you cannot sing like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus,
You can say He died for all.

If you cannot cross the ocean,
And the heathen land explore,
You can find a heathen closer,
You can find one just next door.

Some complain that we do not have sufficient leadership in personal work. This may have some validity, but what is meant by leadership? Do you mean we must have some sort of set-up, arrangement, some organization, some personal work leader, before you can do your Christian duty? This is not true. What holds us up is not organization. It is simply waiting for somebody else to do it. Each of us has an individual duty and we can go about our Christian duties without somebody heading up some organization. Instead of looking for excuses for not doing the work, would not our energy be better spent getting active in it?

There are visits to be made, sick to be comforted, bereaved to be consoled, needy to be supplied, the wayward to be restored, the young to be encouraged, the lost to be taught. Why wait on somebody to lead in this? What is needed is not leadership but action. There are all kinds of manuals and "how to" books available if you want to spend some time with them. That they have some good in them, we do not doubt. But, you can devour all that and never see a soul. If you want to be a worker for the Lord, then get to work. Go tell somebody, anybody, everybody, "The lost must come to Christ," and tell them how. That is personal work. What do you intend to do about it, now that you have read this sermon?

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LIFTING UP CHRIST

John 3:14, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

Jesus was here teaching Nicodemus regarding the new birth when He emphasized something that "must" be done. He, Christ, must be lifted up. Jesus referred back to an Old Testament event that is recorded for us in Numbers 21. Israel was in the wilderness and began to murmur and complain against God and Moses. "The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died." (Numbers 21:6). The people acknowledged their sin and asked Moses to intercede for them and ask God to remove the serpents. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." (Numbers 21:8). By the lifting up of the serpent, God saved the people from destruction when they looked upon it. In a similar way God saves man spiritually by the lifted up Lord Jesus Christ. Let us consider the ways Jesus was lifted up, and ways we can lift Him up now.

On The Cross

At the urging of the Jewish leaders, the mob called for the crucifixion of Christ. The Roman soldiers took Him and nailed Him to the cross. "And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left." (Luke 23:33).

While we recognize that God gave His only begotten Son, and both Jews and Gentiles were involved in the actual crucifixion, we must never forget that Christ submitted voluntarily. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again." (John 10:17,18). He willingly

"gave himself for our sins." (Gal. 1:4). "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it." (Eph. 5:25). "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give him life a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:28).

Why did He allow Himself to be crucified? He did it because man was in sin and could not redeem himself. It was a manifestation of the love of God (John 3:16). 1 John 4:10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Love has a tremendous drawing power. Love for another causes one to return that love. Proverbs 8:17, "I love them that love me." The greatest proof of love is that which Jesus did. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13). Christ died even for His enemies. "For when we were yet without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man one will die; yet peradventure for a good man some would dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:6-8). Yes, Jesus was lift-up up on the cross and that has been nearly 2,000 years ago.

From The Grave

Although Jesus died, and was buried, on the third day, even as He said, He was raised from the dead. He did not remain in the tomb wherein His body was laid. God did it. Acts 2:24,"...whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pangs of death." There would be no power or hope in a dead Savior. Christianity does not present to the world a dead Savior but a living Lord. Other religions can show the sepulchres of their founders, but the Christian has no tomb of the one he serves. By the resurrection He was declared to be God's Son (Rom. 1:4). If Jesus had remained in the tomb then the Devil and his forces would have triumphed over God. How could Jesus offer anyone eternal life if He remain-in the tomb himself? The resurrection was one of the sure evidences of the Deity of Christ. It is at the very basis of Christianity. Remove that truth and you

essentially destroy the authority of Christ as the Son of God. The evidence of His resurrection is very abundant, but that is another subject into which our present study will not undertake.

Into Heaven

Christ told His apostles that He was going to prepare a place for them. Acts 1:9-11 records His ascension. "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld,he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Lifting up Christ on the cross, from the tomb, and into heaven provides for man God's way of salvation by His Son, Jesus Christ. Without these events, there is no provision for our forgiveness or hope of eternal life. "Even so must the Son of man be lifted up." But there are other ways that Christ must be lifted up.

By Preaching Christ

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Gal. 3:1). Paul lifted up Christ to those people. Similarly did he preach in Corinth. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness." (1 Cor. 1: 23). "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:2). "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory, whom we preach..." (Col. 1:27,28). In Athens Paul preached Jesus (Acts 17:18). This is the message men must hear and heed if they ever know the joy of salvation. "For we preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." (2Cor. 4:5). We lift up Christ by telling the world of Him.

In The Lord's Supper

1 Cor. 11:26, "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye proclaim (show forth, KJV) the Lord's death till he come." When the saints gather together to partake of this memorial feast, the very observance of it is a proclamation of Christ. Christ is lifted up every time we eat the bread and drink the cup in memory of Him. We are announcing to the world that Christ was with God, that He became flesh, that He lived a perfect life, that He was betrayed, tried, crucified, buried, raised from the dead and into heaven, and that He will come again. We are proclaiming Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. This simple, yet solemn ritual is another way of lifting up Christ.

By Living A Christlike Life

Christ left us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). God is pleased with us when we do as well as say His will (Matt. 7:21). We are not to be hearers only, but doers of the word (James 1:22). We are to let our light shine so that others will see our good works and glorify the Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16). We are not to curse, lie, steal, murder, commit adultery, etc. because that would not be Christlike. We are to praise God, serve others, obey commands, respect parents, help the needy etc. because that is Christlike. Jesus "went about doing good..." (Acts 10:38) and so should we. In so doing we are upholding Christ, lifting Him up.

We had nothing to do with lifting Him on the cross (except as pertains to our sins), or lifting Him from the tomb, or into heaven. But we can busy ourselves lifting Him up by preaching Christ, worshipping Him, living for Him. As surely as it was necessary for Christ to be lifted up in the first three ways for us to be saved, it is also true He must be lifted up the last three ways for us to partake of the benefits God offers us through Him. May God help us be busy at the task of lifting up Christ.

* * * * *



JAMES W. BOYD

THE PROVEN WAY

It is disturbing to hear many prominent leaders of our nation speaking with such pessimism regarding the future of our nation. From leading economists, military experts, leaders in almost all areas of concern, we hear the pathetic conditions that exist. Almost to a man there is the foreboding addition that things will get much worse before they get better. We do not doubt their word.

It seems more and more apparent that America stands at a crucial crossroads that has its very survival as a free people at stake. For so long many Americans, not all, have "gone everyone to his own way" with a life of godlessness and greed, that the wages of such conduct are now beginning to be realized as never before.

While we hear much talk about who is right we are concerned whether anyone can or will make the needed "turn around." The moral fibre of the people is what gives us the greatest misgivings. We wonder if the morality of the nation is sufficient to turn things around.

There is one thing of which we are certain. The way of Christ is the way life ought to be lived. Unless we go to Him, we will be gone.

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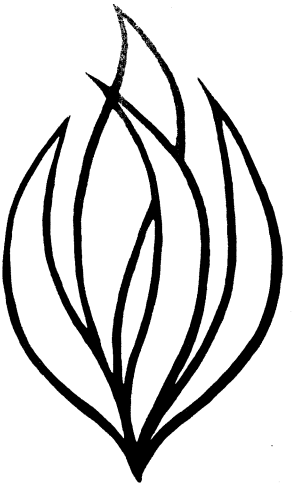

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME I

James W. Boyd

NUMBER 4

WHY WE STUDY THE BIBLE

There are lessons that would be entirely too long at one sitting if everything that could be said on the subject was suggested. This is one of those lessons. So we must abbreviate our remarks and make mention of a few reasons why we study the Bible.

Not everybody cares about studying the Bible and do not study it. Many spend their energies studying cathechisms, philosophies of men, psychology, economics, political science, social revolution, various creeds of human origin. They had just as soon know those things as the word of God. But we have good reasons for expending ourselves in Bible study.

Bible is the Word of God

The Bible is often called "the Book of books." It is a volume of sixty-six books, yet a book characterized by unity and singleness of message. It is one book, with one primary theme, centered around one central theme, centered around one central personality, revealing to man the mind of God in God's scheme for redemption of man. Approximately forty men were used by the Holy Spirit to compose the Bible. They came from different lands, wrote in different languages, from different occupations and backgrounds. Men wrote it, but it was authored by Deity. This last observation gives us the first and all-sufficient reason for our study of it. The Bible is the Word of God.

If we presented no other reason, this ought cause sensible men to want to know what it teaches. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us through His Son..." (Heb. 1:1,2). The Son of God is the authority to whom we look for matters of religion. His way and will is that which the Bible reveals. "All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

This affirms the scriptures to be verbally inspired, a plenary inspiration, authoritative, infallible, inerrant and all-sufficient. This is why we study it.

The Bible not only contains, but is the very word of God. It can be read with confidence. It is not always consoling and comforting, but there is no error in it. It is not a science book, but when it speaks scientifically, it speaks harmoniously with everything science has ever proven to be true. It is not just a history book, but it speaks with historical accuracy. Men have sought to destroy it, but it has shown itself to be indestructible. Which translation should we rely upon for accuracy? Any translation that is an accurate translation can be relied upon. Unfortunately, the modern speech "versions" are too often perverted in crucial areas and cannot be relied upon for accuracy. The King James Version remains the superior version of all those that have been brought to my attention. The versions like the RSV, NIV, and individual translations have been proven to be overrunning with modernism, or denominational dogmas, or personal commentaries to the extent we cannot present any of them as a reliable translation of the word of God.

Endurance of His Word

"But the word of the Lord endureth forever." (1 Pet. 1:25). This means something to us. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (1 Pet.1:21). This means something to us. It is not man's interpretation of what he thinks God said, or should have said, or really wanted to say. It is not a record of some religious "experience" of men. It is the word of God, given through men, as the Holy Spirit selected from their vocabularies the words He wished to use to convey God's message to man. 1 Cor 2:10-13 teaches the verbal and plenary inspiration of the teaching given through men. For a time, the will of God was embodied in inspired men as they were guided by the Holy Spirit in accordance with the promise Jesus gave the apostles (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). Now it is in the inspired

book (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Over 2,000 times in the book no larger than the Bible we have the words, "Thus saith the Lord, "either exactly that way or the equivalent to it. The overwhelming reason for studying the Bible is that it is the word of God.

Spiritual Weapon

Another reason is seen as we consider Jesus after His baptism being led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Over and over Jesus blunted the Satanic thrust by citing the Scriptures. "It is written..." proved to be the death dealing blow to the fiery darts of the evil one. We live in a world where we are constantly tempted to do evil. But the word of God provides us the weaponry we need to resist and withstand. Man shall not and cannot live by the material bread of this life alone. He needs the spiritual food and sustenance that comes from a knowledge of the Bible. So many have deprived themselves of this support and have led lives that are tragic in every respect. Men search for answers from the strangest sources, when the real answers to the problems of life are revealed, specifically and in principle, in the pages of God's revealed word. If you were ill and the doctor told you what medicine to take for your cure, would you ignore him? So many have ignored the Great Physician as He directs them to His word for their spiritual salvation. How foolish people are to neglect the study of it!

Command

It is no small matter to consider that we are commanded to study. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim.2:15). Do you want to be approved of God? Do you want to know how to work for Him? Do you want to handle the word of God aright? It takes study. There is no other way.

We are commanded to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior (2 Pet. 3:18). But how do we grow? We grow by feeding on the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:1,2). When a baby is hungry he does not

care who knows it. In fact, he wants everybody to know it until he gets the food he needs. If he is hungry enough, everybody around him will know it. So should we be just as determined and desirous for the spiritual food that God offers.

The writer of Hebrews condemned, warned and exhorted, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:12-14). Something is wrong when we have no appetite for the word of God. Something is wrong when we are content to ever remain on a milk diet. Something is wrong if time has passed when we should have learned sufficiently to teach others but we are still incapable to do so. We are commanded to study and commanded to grow and if we truly love the Lord we will keep His commandments (John 14:15; 15:14).

Aids To Bible Study

Let me cite to you some good helps that we can use in Bible study. While we do not look to men as authority, but to God's book, we can profit from the labors of good men who have gone before us and have compiled various aids to Bible study. We should secure a good Bible dictionary and concordance. We should have some maps and commentaries by men who have proven themselves faithful to the book. Faithful brethren have written books, tracts, sermons that can provide great assistance to us. But have a good and reliable copy of the Bible by which to measure all things. Having a Bible does no good when left closed and never studied.

To learn, we should attend classes whenever we possible can. Faithful in Bible study is an indication that one is hungering and thristing for righteousness. Private study at home is a "must" in order to get meat.

Benefits

The benefits of Bible study provide reasons for studying it. What are some of these benefits? It shows us how to live. It is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path (Psalms 119:105). It provides understanding (Psalms 130). "The opening of thy words giveth light, it giveth understanding unto the simple." Where else can we learn with confidence of our origin, purpose for existence and destiny? What else provides us the reliable hope after this life? Where else can we learn about God, and know His nature and character? Where else can we learn what He expects of us and how we are to serve Him acceptably? From what other source can we discover what really matters in life, how to establish our priorities in life, how to live before others and get along with others? How else can we learn the way to heaven except from that book that tells us of heaven and the only way there? Where can we turn and find the comfort we need when the woes of this world overtake us? What other message warns of the pitfalls into which we might fall, and guides us around them? Where are the instructions to prepare for death, the judgment? Is it not all too obvious to us all that we shall not remain here for long, even at the longest? The Bible tells us, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." (Rev. 14:13). What makes them blessed? What did they do to be able to leave this life with confidence in the next? By following what other revelation can we become the sons and daughters of God and have fellowship with Deity and the saved of all the ages?

Give me the Bible, star of gladness gleaming,
To cheer the wanderer, lone and tempest tossed,
No storm can hide that radiance peaceful beaming,
Since Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

Give me the Bible, when my heart is broken,
When sin and grief have filled my soul with fear,
Give me the precious words by Jesus spoken,
Hold up faith's lamp to show my Savior near.

Give me the Bible, all my steps enlighten,
Teach me the danger of these realms below,

That map of safety o'er the gloom shall brighten,
That light alone the path of peace can show.

Give me the Bible lamp of life immortal,
Hold up that splendor by the open grave,
Show me the light from heaven's shining portal,
Show me the glory gilding Jordan's wave.

Give me the Bible, Holy message shinning,
Thy light shall guide me in the narrow way,
Precept and promise, law and love combining,
Till night shall vanish in eternal day.

These words express why we study the Bible. And there is yet another that we dare not overlook. We shall be judged by those things that are written in this book. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him, the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." (John 12:48). God will judge the world by Christ (Acts 17:31). At the judgment, books shall be opened and the records revealed (Rev. 20:12). The dead are judged out of the things written in the books. The book of God shall be the standard of measure as we stand before His throne, which we all shall do (2 Cor. 5:10). How we shall then want to have known what the Bible taught! But we can know now, if we will study the Bible, the word of God.

* * * * *

WHERE ART THOU?

Genesis 3:9, " And the Lord called unto Adam and said unto him, Where art thou?" A person needs to know where he is, spiritually speaking. Many have no idea. Many do not even care. Many care, but have not taken time to find out. Many who care are misinformed as to where they really are. It is not God's fault that anyone does not know where he is. It is not the fault of His word for not revealing unto man sufficient information so he can know. The Bible tells whence he came and why he is here, in what state he is while he is here and where he is going. The all-sufficient, inspired,

inerrant, authoritative Scriptures provide all man needs in these matters (2 Tim. 3:16,17). True Bible believers will not accept anything other than the Bible, nothing alongside the Bible, nothing as if it was equal to the Bible.

We all should want to improve ourselves. We ought never become totally satisfied to the extent that we do not wish to do better. But self-improvement demands knowledge of self. We need to know where we are in order to know how to be what we need to be.

Consider the parable of the prodigal son. He took his substance and left home, going into a foreign country and wasting his goods. Soon he found himself feeding the swine and starving. His riotous living had caught up with him. But the Scripture says, "And when he came to himself." (Luke 15:17). Finally, the man realized where he was, considered from whence he had come, realized where he needed to be. It was so important that he be impressed with where he was before he could and would make the needed improvements. How many are in dire spiritual circumstances, not knowing just how tragic their situation really is? We need to ask ourselves, "Where am I?"

Adam

God asked Adam, "Where art thou?" Adam was in hiding. At least he thought he could hide from God. He knew his guilt of sin, having transgressed the command of God. "I heard thy voice in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." (Gen. 3:10).

Adam held to a fundamental error so many people hold. He thought he could hide from the all-seeing eye of God. God once said, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself." (Psalm 50:21). Men can hide things from other men, and they somehow get the idea that it might work with God. But it is impossible to hide from God. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." (Prov. 15:3).

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13). While this thought may strike fear and awe in our hearts, and well it should when we do evil, it is also a blessing that God is watchful and mindful of us because it means He knows when we do good, and are trying to do what is right. But let us be impressed that we shall give an account before God (2 Cor. 5: 10), and we cannot hide from him as Adam thought he could.

Jonah

Jonah, "Where art thou?" At one point in his life we find him trying to flee from the presence of God, trying to run where God would not know. God had commanded Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and cry out against it because of its wickedness, but Jonah was obviously fearful to do that. He boarded a ship taking him the opposite direction. Later, in the midst of a storm, he was cast into the sea and swallowed by a great fish. But if you had asked Jonah where he was during the storm, he could have answered, "Running from God." Especially ought we be aware that when God has given us a duty to perform, we cannot escape the responsibility involved in that duty by running. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Psalm 139:7). The psalmist went on to mention wherever he would be, God would still know. How many today are trying to run from the duty to be righteous, from being a Christian, as if they think they can succeed in that futile effort? The only way to deal with a duty is to face it and discharge it, not try to run from it.

Aaron

At one point in the life of Aaron, we might ask, "Aaron, where art thou?" Moses was on Mt. Sinai, receiving God's law for Israel in writing that had already been given to them verbally. Aaron was still at the foot of the mount, but what was he doing? He was fashioning a golden calf for the people to worship. "These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought

thee up out of the land of Egypt." (Ex. 32:4). Please note that the calf was only a symbol of Deity to them. They made a feast to the Lord (Ex.32:5). They knew the calf was not God, but only an image that they used as they attempted to worship God. Paul called this action idolatry (1 Cor. 10:7). Men sometimes make images to assist them in worship, claiming they do not worship the image but that which the image symbolizes. This is exactly what Israel did, and Paul called it idolatry. There is no place for such images in the religion of Christ. "We walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Cor. 5:7). Jesus condemned idolatry (Matt. 4:10). John wrote, "Keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21). Anything to which we give our allegiance before God is an idol, whether it be pleasure, other people, self, material things, whatever. Covetousness is called idolatry (Col. 3:5). How many today are really in idolatry because their first love and concern is not the things of God?

Ruler

Let us ask the rich, young ruler where he is. And we see him sorrowing. Why is he sorrowing? He had just asked Christ some serious questions about identifying his neighbor, and how we are to treat others. (Matt. 19: 16-22). Jesus had taught him that the two greatest commandments were to love God and love thy neighbor as thyself. The man seemingly wanted to know what to do to have eternal life, but the answer he got was not the answer he wanted. He had kept the commandments from his youth, but he had a love for his wealth that exceeded his love for God and man. He did not wish to separate himself from his material possessions if that is what it took to go to heaven. Not hearing what he had wanted to hear, he found himself in sorrow, but not sorrowful enough to turn again and be saved.

The love of the world, and the love of riches, has caused and is causing many people to lose their own souls. They fail to understand that material gain, at best, is fleeting and temporary. Treasure on earth cannot and will not last. What a mistake we make to put our emphasis on these things and neglect the matters of

the soul. Obedience to God will bring the joy and contentment in life and in the hereafter that we want and need; not the paltry offerings of this world. While this man thought he wanted to know what to do to have eternal life, he really wanted something less. When he learned that his allegiance could no longer be for his goods, he turned away sorrowfully. He went away lost, having had the opportunity to be saved. Discipleship has its costs, and some are not willing to pay them. Is this where some of us are, like the rich, young ruler, in sorrow, because we do not want to pay the cost necessary to be saved?

Laodiceans

Where was the church in Laodicea? It was in a state of lukewarmness. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Rev. 3:15,16). This is the picture of half-hearted efforts to serve the Lord. They were fence-straddlers. They would not commit themselves one way or the other. They would not serve the Lord fervently. No, they would not completely quit all efforts to follow Him, but their heart was not really in it. They were putridly lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, not very decisive about following Christ. In their lives there was a little for the devil,a little for God.

At the root of their trouble was their mistaken idea that they needed nothing, that all was well, and they were satisfied, not wanting to be disturbed by what they really ought to be doing. They thought there was some middle-ground in serving the Lord. They did not believe you could not serve two masters. They did not think they had to make a clean-cut choice. They were religious, but were not righteous. They would not take a stand, but preferred to be flexible, as the situation may demand.

Lukewarmness is one of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of Satan. It ranks close to that of hypocrisy because the two are so alike. By the luke-

warmness of professed Christians the devil can cite to the sinner what a despicable person a Christian is, and many believe it. They see the half-hearted, haphazard, on-again, off-again service. They witness the unfaithfulness, the worldliness in the lives of those who say they follow Christ, and rather than be attracted to the Lord they are repulsed by the misrepresentation of Him by the lukewarm "Christian."

Simon

"Simon, where art thou?" We address Simon the former socerer who heard the preaching of Philip, believed it, and was baptized. According to the teaching of Jesus, these things made him a saved man (Mark 16:16). But now where is he in Acts 8:23? "For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Having once obeyed the first principles of the gospel of Christ, he now had fallen again into sin. Simon is one of the Biblical evidences that prove "once saved,always saved" is a false doctrine. Those who teach that false doctrine say that Simon was never a saved man. But Jesus said he that believes and is baptized shall be saved (Mk. 16:16), and Simon had done exactly that (Acts 8:13). What evidence is there that he was not saved when he did what Jesus said do? He was enjoying fellowship with the saved, including the apostles. His trouble stemmed from his desire to have power that did not belong to him, in fact, did not belong to anybody except the apostles. He sought to buy what he wanted. Peter condemned him and said his heart was all wrong.

Fortunately, there was a way of forgiveness for this fallen Christian. It was repentance and prayer (Acts 8:22). But how many today are like Simon was when Peter condemned him? How many have fallen away and need to be restored? How many are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity even though they once were baptized into Christ? Is this where you are?

We ask our question to just one other person. This time we ask Paul, the apostle of Christ, "Where art thou?" Paul had been baptized (Acts 22:16), and was in

Christ (Gal. 3:27). This meant he was in the one body (1 Cor. 12:13). This meant he was added to the church (Acts 2:47). He was among the saved, the ones Jesus promises to take to heaven (Eph. 5:23; 1 Cor. 15:24). He had counted all the other things that he once possessed as dung, refuse, less than nothing, in order to have Christ (Phil 3:7). He was in that state and spiritual realm where all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3). He was where he could serve God and glorify Him (Eph. 3:21). In Christ, he was free from the bondage and enslavement of sin and now a servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18). Are you in the same state as was Paul?

Where we are is so important as you can see from these few persons we have studied. Also, important is the direction in which we are going. Where we are when death comes will determine where we will exist in eternity. How near are you to the saved state? Which direction are you going, nearer and nearer to the Lord, or drifting further and further away from Him. Are you going toward salvation or toward destruction? You are going one way or ther other. You are either in the saved state or you are lost. Would you be willing to stand before God in judgment having not yet obeyed the gospel, the only way to be saved? Is it not the mark of wisdom that we ask, "Where art thou?" and find out about ourselves?

* * * * *

"OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES..."

The church in Jacksonville, Alabama is one of the best singing congregations with which we have ever had the good fortune to worship and work. Shortly after we moved there, we became acquainted with songs which had heretofore been unfamiliar to our family. One was the song, "When All Of God's Singers Get Home."

One day we heard our youngest, Sam, then age four, singing at the top of his voice, "When All Of God's Sinners Get Home." He missed the words, but he may have had more truth than we realize.

THE CHRISTIAN AND WORLDLINESS

"I beseech ye therefore brethren by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:1,2). Our emphasis is on verse two, and a lesson to brethren.

One of the greatest hindrances to the advance of the cause of Christ is worldliness among brethren. It is one of the more discouraging factors to those who preach. It is a great cause of unfaithfulness to Christ and eventual and total apostasy. It is a great stumbling block to the Christian but also to those we seek to convert to Christ. It blinds the eyes and distorts the person of Christ to the unbeliever. It is the reason that many church members are not going to be in heaven.

Meaning of "World"

What is meant by "the world?" We are not referring to the earth where we all live. In that sense we cannot escape being worldly. We are not referring to simply the people who live on earth because God so loved the world in that sense, that He gave His "only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Romans 12 is talking about the sinfulness that characterizes this world. We are talking about Christians sinning by being given to material things, sinful things, temporal things, worldly things, above those things of God. Worldliness is being absorbed in the affairs of this life. It leaves out proper consideration of the affairs of the spirit and the world beyond. It is being devoted to this world, this life, the enjoyments, advantages, pleasures, sins, profits that this temporal existence offers. As Christians, we must live in the world as a place of habitation, but we are not to be of the world, that is, partakers of the evil in this world. "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world." (John 17:16).

The Christian should not conform to the feelings, manners, conduct and fashions of those people who know not God and are content to go contrary to His will. 1 John 2:15-17, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Those in the world live under the influence of Satan. They live vile and corrupt lives. They freely indulge in the things of the flesh and the works of the flesh, (Gal. 5:19-21). This prevents one from entering the kingdom of God. Their god is the god of pleasure and "doing as they wish" regardless of the will of God.

A Peculiar People

We must not be like such people. We are expected to be different. We are to be a "peculiar people" (Titus 2:14), that is, distinctive because of the kind of life we live. It is a deplorable thing, but sometimes you cannot tell a professed Christian from the sinful of the world. They stand side by side, doing the same evil things, saying the same wicked words, with the same goals and ambitions, going the same sinful places, reading the same immoral literature, attending the same wicked events, engaging in the same manner of life that is like those who openly defy the will of God.

Love for the world is incompatible with a heart that loves God. As the love for God increases, the love for the world will decrease. The love of the world chokes out the word (Matt. 13:22). "Demas forsook me, having loved this present world." (2 Tim. 4:10). "But take heed to yourselves, less haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life." (Luke 21:34). We cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). The Christian must not conform to the ways of the world. This seems to be one of the more difficult truths brethren have to put into practice.

In attempts to excuse ourselves, some cry, "But everybody is doing it." This is the wail of the weak and deliberate sinner. First, everybody is not doing it. Some are living for God, not self and Satan. Again, so what if everybody else is doing it? What does that justify? "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." (Ex. 23:2). Just because others may do a thing does not make it acceptable before God. Paul could have justified himself for persecuting Christians on that basis. The apostles who forsook Jesus at the cross could have said the same thing. The truth is, the godless and rebellious, those steeped in "doing their own thing" are those who are doing the evil things of the world, but not everybody. We are not to be followers of everybody anyway. We are disciples and followers of Christ. It was this "everybody's doing it" attitude led Israel to forsake God in their desire to be like the nations round about. We need to realize Christ teaches that more shall be lost than saved (Matt. 7:13,14). Are you real sure you want to be like the majority?

"Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you," (2 Cor. 6:17,18). We ought never be ashamed to be different for righteousness sake. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one." (1 John 5:19). "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (James 1"27).

Enmity With God

James uses other strong terms in dealing with worldliness. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (James 4:4). God called worldly people "adulterers and adulteresses" because they were guilty of spiritual unfaithfulness. They broke their vows to God. They professed to be Christians, but they were trying to serve two masters. One cannot be a friend of the world without being an enemy of God. "Fence-straddling" Christianity is not Christianity.

The Christian life is a life of restraint instead of indulgence. "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Th. 5:22). We are taught to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12). We are not permitted the uncontrolled satisfaction of every desire and passion. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience, in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." (Col. 3:5-10).

Some folks do not like the negatives of the Bible. But they do not like the positives either if they conflict with their own wishes.

There Is A Cost

Many are simply not willing to pay the cost of being a child of God. Where did we get the idea that Christianity consists of just Sunday worship and the observances connected therewith? Christianity is the faith of Christ that governs the way of living this life. It is a way that has costs that must be paid. Even as we pay these costs we do not earn our blessings but receive them as a gift from God. But still we must pay the price. How it hurts the reputation and name of the Lord and His church when members of the church act and dress and speak in sinful and worldly ways. Then they come to worship as if it made no difference how they lived during the rest of the week. They drink, dance, smoke, gamble, curse, tell dirty stories, act immorally, dishonestly, cheat, lie, steal, just as if they had never heard of Jesus Christ.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find

it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:25,26). We must sacrifice evil, sin, wickedness, worldliness and give our lives to God's service.

Many want the blessings that God offers, but are not willing to do what they must to receive them. They would like God's gifts and the temporal and sinful gains and pleasures at the same time. They do not want the result of living wickedly. They just want that part to be forgotten.

To the world it may seem strange, ridiculous, and foolish to sacrifice sinful pleasures, luxuries, and such like in order to give service to God. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind, for that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our lives may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, banqueting, revelings and abominable idolatries, wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you. (1 Pet. 4:1-4). Some think it a strange thing that we do not spend all of our money in order to give to the work of the church. They think it strange that we allot time for worship; that we sever relationships in order to be consistent with the way of God; that we turn our backs on the social affairs, parties, dances, etc. that are destructive to the spirit and not conducive to righteous living. They think it strange that we would give up harmful and sinful habits that destroy our health and are wasteful. They would think one would do most anything in business to make another dollar regardless of whether it was honest or not. But we are bought with a price and we are not our own. We belong to God and must give up the evil of this world. (1 Cor. 6:20).

The Christian life is not conformed to the world but is a transformed or changed life. "Ye turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God." (1 Th. 1:9). "Repent and be converted (changed)" was the command given to those in sin (Acts 3:19). We were formerly servants of sin, but that is changed. We are now the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18). We now look for the things above and not the things of the world (Col. 3:1,2). "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things." (Phil. 4:8). "Wherefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things are passed away, behold, they are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17). Being in the world, but not of the world, means we must use our Christian efforts and influence against the advance of sin and for the advance of the cause of Christ.

Paul said transformation is accomplished by the renewing of the mind. This involves a change of the views, attitudes and allegiance one may have. It is a regeneration of the heart that results in a reformed life. We turn from evil thoughts to good thoughts; unbelief to belief; love of the world to love for the righteousness of God; from disobedience to obedience.

Overcoming Through Christ

We can overcome the world through Christ. "For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world (1 John 5:4). We can defeat the evil and be saved but only through Christ. We are begotten by the gospel and must obey it (1 Cor. 4:15). "And this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4). "But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:57). It makes a difference how you live, what you do, what you say, what you think, what you accept, whether you are worldly-minded of spiritually minded.

Press toward the heavenly goal; Forsake what destroys the soul.

Give up sin and wordliness; And give your life to godliness.

* * * * *

IN THE POTTERS HANDS

Jesus often used the commonplace, everyday events to convey great spiritual truths. Especially was this true with His use of the parables. But the prophets also used things that people already understood in the daily affairs of life to teach the will of the Lord. One such effort was in the teaching through Jeremiah. "The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there will I cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel which he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter. So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so ye are in mine hand, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah 18:1-6).

Potter's House

Visualize as best you can a small room where there is the large horizonal potter's wheel and the equipment necessary to his work. There would be a water basin, and different kinds of clay. Some would be of very high quality, no sand or dirt that might cause it to crack or dissolve. It may be surprising to know that the finest china dishes as well as the roughest pottery is made from clay, but clay of different quality. Nearby you might see the baking ovens into which the molded vessels, once formed, were placed. In the heat of the oven the vessel would harden, or if not of good quality, possibly crack and break into pieces. The fire is to test the power and quality of the clay, to prove its worth, to perfect it as a vessel.

From this room we might pass into a display room where there are shelves lined with pottery. Some of it would be beautiful and decorative. Others would be both beautiful and useful. Some would not be so attractive but would have usefulness. Other vessels might neither be beautiful nor very useful. In back of the house you might find a pile of broken pottery that has been marred,

no longer of any benefit, waiting to be hauled away.

Having seen the rooms and equipment for the making of pottery, and noting the clay, let us turn our attention to the potter. If he is a master craftsman,he will have some years of experience. He knows how to use the clay, how to make the best vessel possible out of each kind of clay. He is skilled at his work. He selects the best for vessels of beauty and use, and does the best he can with lesser quality clay. If the pottery breaks, it is cast away, not due to any fault of the potter but the fault of the clay. Having this picture before us, let us learn the spiritual lesson that God was teaching through Jeremiah and see how this lesson is also applicable to us today.

Man Is Like Clay

Isaiah used this same circumstance to say, "But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter, and we all are the work of thy hand." (Isa. 54:8). The potter is God. The clay is man. Just as there are different qualities of the clay, so it is with men. Some are useful to the potter and are of great value. Some are of little value. Some are quite useless.

This same manner of distinction is presented in the parable taught by Jesus in Matthew 13, the parable of the sowing of seed. The seed, which is the word of God (Luke 8:11), fell into different kinds of soil. Some fell on the wayside and could not come up. Some fell on thorny ground, came up, and was choked. Some fell into stony ground and came up, but did not take root. Others fell into good ground and produced fruit. Even the seeds that fell into good ground produced differently because the good ground was of verying quality. Some brought forth a hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold.

The parable of the talents is another instance showing the different qualities and talents of people. One man had five talents, another had two, another but one. As to the kind of soil, or how many talents, or

the kind of clay, largely depends on ourselves and how we are to be useful and submissive to the working of the potter. We can be good clay or we can be useless clay. Clay will always be just clay until molded by the potter.

Life's Proving Ground

The baking oven is like the proving ground of life. The pressures, sufferings, hardships, temptations, abuses either refine us into greater characters, or we may crack and fall into pieces. Some become so broken that they are worthy only to be cast out.

The display room shows the finished products of our lives. The finest thing a vessel can do is to bring glory and honor to the potter. The finest thing we can do in life is to bring glory and honor to God. "Even so let your light so shine before men that others seeing your good works may glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16).

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver but also of wood and of earth, and some to honor and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." (2 Tim. 2:20,21). Notice in the last of the passage where Paul speaks of two kinds of vessels, one to honor and one to dishonor. In the Bible we read of those who have brought dishonor on themselves and on God.

Israel

Consider the nation of Israel. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation. By his son Isaac, then Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob, came the nation of Israel. They were tried in the fires of Egyptian bondage and wilderness wanderings. Time and again, the clay revealed defects and mars. Their history was splotched with apostasy until both Israel and Judah were carried into captivity. In these things they proved themselves to be vessels to dishonor.

Samson

Samson was a giant of a man in physical strength. He seemed at first to be good clay. His enemies feared his strength. But as he was physically strong, he also was morally weak. His weakness allowed him to be marred at the potter's wheel.

Saul

Saul, the first king of Israel, is an example of marred clay. He began his reign with such promise. A fine speciman of manhood he was at the start. But his own stubborness, pride, and self-will dissipated his leadership and opportunities until he became a broken vessel and took his own life on Mt. Gilboa.

Solomon

Even King Solomon might be cited as a vessel unto dishonor, though there are honorable things about him also. With his great wisdom, he nonetheless allowed himself to be carried into idolatry. Having inherited a strong and united nation from his father, David, he left a weak and divided nation to his son Rehoboam, and under Rehoboam the nation actually broke into two nations, never to be re-united again.

Joseph

But the Bible also tells us of vessels of honor. Consider the man Joseph, both in boyhood and manhood. At the age of seventeen he was sold as a slave into Egypt by his very own kin. He was falsely accused, imprisoned, persecuted, misunderstood, neglected. Nonetheless he retained his sense of integrity, honesty, moral purity, and remained faithful to God even though tried in the many ovens of life. His life closes with one of success and stands as one of the most Christ-like Old Testament persons of whom we read. Particularly is this true regarding his forgiving spirit. He was good clay, molded by the Potter.

Daniel

We can also see the good quality of Daniel. As a young man he was subjected to great pressures and temptations. In a strange and foreign land as a captive, his loyalty to the Lord and His law stands as a memorial to the high quality of people men are capable of becoming. In the many tests that he endured, the plots against him, the lions' den, from his youth until his last years, he showed himself good clay.

There are so many New Testament characters to which we could point as of good clay molded by the Potter. There was John the Baptist, the apostles, Peter, James, John, Paul. Women of the Bible like Ruth, Esther, Dorcas, Naomi, Lydia, all are examples of good clay at the potter's wheel. All completely yielded themselves to the will of the potter and they are known for their great faithfulness and service before God.

We Are Clay

In a sense, each one of us is a piece of clay. Our quality is determined by our willingness to obey God, to submit to His molding, to allow ourselves to be worked by the fingers of the Great Potter. We shall enter the fires of sorrow, temptation, disappointment, and other matters that try the souls of men. But after a while, our life will be finished and we will either be a vessel of honor or dishonor. Our goal is to be a useful vessel, both here and in the hereafter. The question before each one is, "Shall we bring glory and honor to God, or shall we be such that He will be disposed to cast us out as clay that is useless to His service?"

One of our most beloved hymns is the song "Have Thine Own Way, Lord." The sentiments of that song have special personal meaning to me, being sung at the time of my wedding. It has been the goal and desire of us both throughout our lives together that we will let God have His way with us. How often we doubtless have fallen short, at least on my part. The sentiments and verse include the phrase, "Thou art the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still."

* * * * *

IS HE A RELIABLE TEACHER?

I would not want a man who accepted the "day-age" theory teaching my child about the creation. I would not want a man who believed a book that teaches salvation by "faith only" is a reliable Bible teaching my child the plan of salvation. I would not want a man who believed that the flood at the time of Noah was a local flood teaching my child the book of Genesis. I would not want a man who believed "almah" means only a "young woman" teaching my child the prophecies of Isaiah. I would not want a man who preferred "only" to the Biblical expression "only begotten" teaching my child about the Deity of Christ. I would not want a man who contended we ought to fellowship theistic evolutionists teaching my child the conflicts between the Bible and evolution. I would not want a man who believed in a literal thousand years reign of Jesus on earth teaching my child about the kingdom. I would not want a man who does not believe that we can even know the truth for sure teaching my child anything.

Yet, some will endorse and promote those who teach and believe such false doctrines, if those teachers come from the "right" places. If they come from "our" schools, then somehow it does not seem so bad to some gullible and naive members of the church. The favorite institution means more to some people than what is being taught.

But such teachers are unreliable because they are false teachers. Those who think it really does not matter that much need to take a closer look at what is coming into the body of Christ via these teachers. Paul wrote to the Ephesians and said, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph. 5:11). He did not exclude "scholars."

* * * * *



JAMES W. BOYD

LORD AND CHRIST

In John 19, Pilate ordered Jesus scourged, a most painful beating with whips in which were embedded stones and metal that would often inflict such injury that the victim would die.

Mockery followed with a crown of thorns placed on the Lord's brow. A robe of royal color was wrapped about Him, followed by the jeers of scorn and blows from the mockers.

All this was done to One who was admittedly innocent of the crime of which He was accused. It was done as an attempted compromise by Pilate to the throngs that vented their hatred of Him.

But the compromise only whetted the appetite of the raving mob for the life of Christ. Soon the angry chorus was heard, "Crucify Him!" And so the Son of God was delivered into the hands of His enemies to be treated as they pleased.

Even so, this same One was preached in the same city just a few days later as the One that wicked hands had slain, but God had "made that same Jesus... both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36).

It remains true yet. He remains "Lord and Christ."

* * * * *

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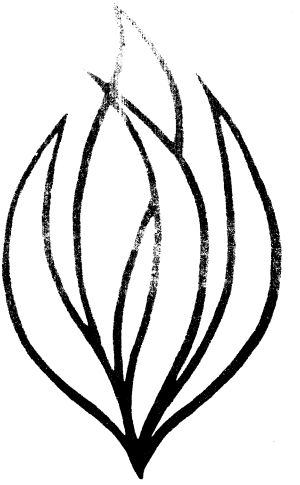

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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FOR WE BE BRETHREN

Our text contains one of the sweetest, warmest, most wonderful phrases found in the Scriptures. "And Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journey from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai, unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first, and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together, for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle, and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." (Gen. 13:1-9).

The statement of Abram, "for we be brethren," is the subject of this lesson. At a time when both Abram and Lot were wealthy with great herds, the land was not able to provide all the water and grass that was necessary. Strife arose between the herdmen of each man. The wise Abram realized that such a strife could eventually reach serious proportions and even come between him and his nephew. It had to be stopped. More than anything else, Abram wanted no strife between himself and his nephew because they were brethren. That was reason enough for him to take whatever measures that had to be taken to preserve their brotherliness. That was more important to him than personal ambitions or desires. Next to being right with God, Abram wanted to be right with his brethren.

Brotherhood In Christ

We want to give recognition to the great spiritual

brotherhood found in Christ. Just as the brotherhood between Abram and Lot was precious and important to Abram, so this brotherhood in Christ is precious and important to true New Testament Christians now. In our study we want to discover the meaning of being brethren in Christ, and see what is involved and expected of us in this relationship. When we speak of Christians, we are not doing so as the world so often does, including so many who have never obeyed the gospel of Christ. Christians are those who have heard the word, believed in Christ, repented of their sins and been baptized into Christ, and are living a faithful life before God according to the will of Christ. Unfortunately, everything today that is called "Christian" is not Christian.

A Family

The closeness of this brotherhood is presented to us when we consider ourselves as the family of God. The thoughts of family generally strike a warm and responsive chord in our hearts. Certainly, this is true of those who have been so blessed to have a loving family. The family belongs to God. He is the Father. We are His children. Physically speaking, all people are children of God, inasmuch as we have come from the same first parents, Adam and Eve. But the family we are considering is the spiritual family of God, that is, those that belong to Him through Christ. God is the Father of the obedient. Peter refers to brethren as a "spiritual house." (1 Peter 2:5). Paul notes, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. 8:14). The church is called the "house of God." (I Tim. 3:15). "And will be a Father unto you and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:18). Abram and Lot were of the same family and were brethren. As family members, they realized the inconsistency of strife between them. It is even so with us. Strife has no place in God's family. We should work so that such will not exist.

It Means Unity

Being brethren means we are united. "For ye are

all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3: 26-28). "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." (1 Cor. 12:26,27). Paul admonished, "Be of the same mind one toward another." (Rom. 12:6). Again, 1 Cor. 1:10, "Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." This demands unity with each other. We have fellowship one with the other as did the early Christians (Acts 2:42). The strong denunciations against division, and the equally strong admonitions to unity all point out that brethren are united with each other. Together we hold up each other's hands in doing the will of the Lord, helping each other get to heaven. Christ prayed that those who believed on Him would be one (John 17:20,21). Even though we are permitted to hold different opinions in matters of human judgment, we are expected to stand as one man in the revealed truth of God. Regarding His will, there is no place for variance. We must be considerate of each other and each should try to be learning all he can, but we are to stand together in matters of "thus saith the Lord." That is the distinctive mark of the brotherhood in Christ.

Division

Division has been and continues to be a serious drain on the energies and opportunities of the church. Paul pronounced "accursed" those who taught false doctrines that divided brethren. To disrupt the peace and harmony of brethren over human opinions is unjustified. The demand to have it "my way" is not the Christlike spirit. We are to mark those who cause divisions contrary to the doctrine (Rom. 16:17). We must always remember that the troublers in the brotherhood are not those who stand against the inroads of innovations, di-

gressions, apostacies, but those who are determined to mold the brotherhood after their unbiblical aspirations and precepts.

As hideous as division is, and as damaging to the church as it has proven to be, there is something worse. To seek peace at the sacrifice of truth is worse than division. When we would seek peace at that price, we totally leave the authority of God and prefer the fellowship of men even if it costs us our fellowship with God. Error in the brotherhood must be combatted and routed. Truth cannot be compromised. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity?" (Psalm 133:1). But we can have unity in error as well as unity in truth. Truth is not ours to compromise or sacrifice even for peace with brethren. It is not brotherly to fail to stand against false brethren. Nor is it brotherly to fail to stand with those who teach and promote the truth.

Christ gives no license to any brother to cause division and strife for selfish gains. But Christ demands that brethren walk according to the truth. The only way to be free from division is for brethren to stand together in that which God has revealed, and not press other matters to the point of rupturing the brotherhood.

A Kinship

Brethren have a kinship that is even closer than physical kinship. Jesus showed this plainly in Matthew 12:46-50. "While he yet talked to the people, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother." Jesus meant no disrespect nor showed unwillingness to acknowledge His kin, but He was stressing that the spiritual kinship

surpasses even that of physical kinship.

Care For Each Other

To be brethren means that we are concerned for both the physical and the spiritual welfare of each other. In the early church, brethren sold possessions in order to provide for those who had need (Acts 4:34,35). This was not a mandatory but a voluntary expression of love toward each other. We are a brotherhood of benevolent activity. "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2). "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:10). "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." (Phil. 2:4). This shows a mutual interest in the welfare of each other, not a nosy, busybody type of meddling, but a caring and concern for brethren. "But whoso hath the world's goods and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17). Because we are brethren we will deny ourselves in order to help brethren. "Wherefore if meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh forevermore, that I cause not my brother to stumble." (1 Cor. 8:13).

Even when brethren fall, we will still be willing and ready to help him be restored. "Brethren, if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thy self lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1). Even when we must withdraw fellowship from a brother, we will not count him as an enemy but as a fallen brother (2 Thess. 3:15). When we help our brothers, we are helping Christ (Matt. 25:40). "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even the least, ye did it unto me."

Tolerant, Patient, Forgiving

Being brethren means that we will be as tolerant and patient toward one another, and forgiving as we can be. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?

Until seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times but, Until seventy times seven." (Matt. 18:21,22). "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph. 4:32). Of course, there can be no forgiveness when there is no desire for forgiveness. The one who sins must repent. But brethren should always have the willingness and desire to forgive when sinned against whenever the offender repents. This would eliminate backbiting, back-stabbing, undermining character, slander, gossip, vengeful actions. It would allow by-gones to be bygones. It would demand kind treatment toward anyone who may have offended in order to point out their sins. Grudge-holders suffer and may well lose their souls. God will forgive as we forgive others. "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." (Matt. 6:14-16). If forgiveness is not Christlike, what would be? He came to forgive us of our sins? Should we not forgive our brethren who wish to be forgiven?

Love

We could summarize the meaning of brotherhood by saying it means to love one another. Paul praised the Christians in Colosse for the "love which ye have to all the saints." (Col. 1:14). He used the word "brethren" repeatedly in his epistles and with such tenderness and affection. "Wherefore my beloved brethren and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved." (Phil. 4:1).

Let us give reverence and respect to the words of inspiration. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another." (Rom. 12:10). "But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." (1 Thess. 4:9). "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:34,35). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar,

for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God loveth his brother also." (1 John 4:20,21). The Hebrew writer said, "Let brotherly love continue." (Heb. 13:1).

It is into this brotherhood that all who are out of Christ are invited to enter. Sinners are forgiven by the blood of Christ upon being baptized into Christ and are added by God to His family, the church.

* * * * *

WHAT MEAN YE BY THIS SERVICE?

"Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you What mean ye be this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped. And the children of Israel went away, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they." (Ex. 12:21-28).

Questions that are asked in the Bible often form the basis for many sobering spiritual thoughts. Such is the case with the question asked in verse 26, "What mean ye by this service?"

The background of this question was that Israel was in Egyptian bondage and about to be delivered. God had given them certain instructions concerning their departure and the eating of the first Passover supper. Among the instructions given was the command to observe that supper annually. God forsaw the time when this question would be raised by their descendants relative to keeping the Passover feast. Each generation would need to know the meaning of that solemn observance.

People today need to know and have a right to know why Christians do the things that they do in worship to God. The young must be taught and impressed with the significance of every thing concerning Christianity. There are acts of worship performed by Christians which we must respect and understand.

The Passover

What did the Passover feast signify? It recalled the time when God would pass through the land of Egypt to smite the wicked Egyptians with the plague of the death of their firstborn and provoke them to let Israel leave the land. But God provided that the Israelites be spared. They were to put the blood of a lamb on the doorposts and lintels, and God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." This Passover supper was to be a memorial to their deliverance. It was to commemorate and keep alive in their minds that which God had done on their behalf. It was a silent, ritualistic reminder of that event. It was to be observed because they did remember, and also for the purpose of keeping it in their memory. It looked backward to the event and looked forward aswell.

This Passover supper was given only to the Jews, not to all people. Gentiles were never taught to observe the Passover. Even the Jews are not commanded to observe it anymore since the law through Moses has been taken out of the way and the perfect law of liberty is now in place. Like the observance of the Sabbath Day, instrumental music, animal sacrifices and other such things characteristic of the Mosaic law, these things are no longer a part of worship unto God. But they

served a purpose for the Jews as long as the law was still binding upon them.

God has provided a memorial in Christian worship that Christians are to observe. It is an outward, ritualistic observance. It is relative to the greatest and most significant sacrifice ever made. It is the Lord's Supper and its connection with Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Supper

What mean ye by this service? What means the eating of the bread and the drinking of the fruit of the vine? It is not to be confused with the Jewish Passover. It is not the "Christian Passover" even though there are similarities between the two. Except for the fact that the Lord's Supper was instituted at the last Passover Supper, and that Christ is called our Passover because He was sacrificed as was the sacrificial lamb, there is the likeness between them only in that they both are memorials.

The Lord's Supper is a memorial to Christ, with emphasis upon His death, burial and resurrection. "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (1 Cor. 11:23-29).

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples,

and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matt. 26:26-29). We show Christ in the Lord's Supper. It is a proclamation of Christ and everything concerning Him. To refuse to observe the Lord's Supper is to refuse to show and proclaim Christ. Many evidently do not realize the serious neglect by their failure to observe this memorial. One preaches Christ, His pre-incarnate state, His birth, life, works, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and His promise to return. As the tomb of the unknown soldier in Washington, D. C. is a memorial to those who have died in the wars of our nation, the Lord's Supper is a memorial to the One who has died for the sins of the whole world.

The Lord's Supper also sets forth the new covenant of Christ. "After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Cor. 11:25). Man today serves God through Christ. We do not live subject to the covenant which God made with Israel through Moses. The prophet Jeremiah prophecied the coming of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31), and the writer of Hebrews identified this new covenant as the covenant through Christ (Heb. 8:8). The first covenant was faulty in that it could not take away sins. (Heb. 10:4). Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 8:6). The Lord's Supper sends forth the message that the new covenant has already been established and Jesus is the One through whom God gave it. People now come to God through Christ (John 14:6). This the Lord's Supper announces.

We eat the Supper because we remember His sacrifice for us. We honor and respect Him for that. He died in our stead. We also eat the Supper to continually keep before our minds what He has done and make it foremost in our thinking.

Our Attitude

The manner and attitude with which we partake of the Lord's Supper is of great significance. We are warned not to partake of it "unworthily." This word is an adverb telling us how we are not to partake of it. It has nothing to do with our own "worth" or worthiness of partaking of the supper. A flippant, thoughtless, irreverent, light approach to the Lord's Supper is most unbecoming to a Christian. Whispering, laughing, appearing to be far removed from thoughts of that event on Calvary is to bring damnation upon ourselves. Reverence and respect, seriousness and soberness must be involved in observing the Lord's Supper.

Should we speak for hours we could not over-emphasize the importance and necessity of meeting around the Lord's Table. To observe the Lord's Supper is as much a command from God as being baptized. Jesus said, "This do." Paul taught the necessity of the Supper because it was received of him from the Lord. Try as hard as we might try, we cannot uncover reasons why those who profess to be Christians and claim to be faithful to Christ will deliberately, wilfully, and habitually absent themselves from that sacred observance. Heb. 10:25 teaches we are not to forsake assemblying ourselves together, yet there are those that pay no more attention to God than if He had never spoken. It is a mark of gross disrespect for God to miss the Lord's Supper.

On the First Day

The Bible teaches the Lord's Supper is to be observed on the first day of the week. "As oft" is the time designated in 1 Cor. 11:26. "How oft?" Acts 2:42 answers, "Stedfastly." That demands some regularity and consistency. How regular? 1 Cor. 11 shows the Corinthians ate the supper when they assembled. They assembled on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1,2). Acts 20:7 is the record of the brethren at Troas meeting on the first day of the week for the purpose of breaking bread, which refers to the Lord's Supper. We are aware that many observe it at different times. Some do it annually, semi-annually, quarterly, monthly. Some

have it at any occasion they see fit. But when we are governed by that which God's word authorizes, we will observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week and on no other day. Every week has a first day. If we seek New Testament Christianity we will allow our observance to be determined by what the early church did, and the word of God to be our guide. The early church was commanded to meet on the first day. They ate the Lord's Supper on the first day. Even though relatively little is said about the time of observance, enough is revealed for us to know. Men who would set one first day above the others are making laws where God has not made them. To observe every first day of the week is making no law, but observing one that God has made.

We ought not call the Lord's Supper what it is not called in Scripture. It is never called the Christian Passover, Eucharist, sacrement, sacrifice of Christ, mass or any such thing. Speaking as the oracles of God we should refer to it as the Lord's Supper, Lord's table, communion, breaking bread.

Physical Ingredients

The physical ingredients used in this observance are unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. Unleavened bread is what was used in observing the Passover feast and Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at the last Passover feast. The fruit of the vine is wine, but this does not mean fermented wine. The word wine can be either fermented or unfermented. Inasmuch as the bread used was to have no spoiling, it is consistent to think that such would be true of the cup used. It is called the fruit of the vine, and this does not indicate fermented wine.

The bread is symbolic of the Lord's body and the fruit of the vine symbolized His blood. There is no change of these physical ingredients to the literal flesh and blood of Christ. After Jesus had blessed these things, He still called them fruit of the vine. They symbolized the literal flesh and blood of Jesus. The flesh and blood of Jesus was very much intact even after He gave these physical ingredients to His disciples. Remember, this is not the Lord, but a memorial

to the Lord.

The Lord's Supper is not a perpetual sacrifice of Christ as the Catholic Mass contends. Jesus was sacrificed "once" (Heb. 7:27; 9:26). The Mass may well be a perpetual sacrifice of Christ by man, crucifying Him again, but it is not the Lord's doing.

The Lord's Supper is to be observed by Christians. It is inconsistent for one who rejects the sacrifice of Christ to be observing a memorial to it. Nor is there such a thing as a closed communion, excluding certain Christians. This is a false denominational practice of some. The table is the Lord's, not ours. Indeed, we must examine ourselves as we partake, but we are not told to examine one another to determine who can and cannot observe the Lord's Supper. We are brothers in the Lord, each as guests, gathered to praise His name.

What mean ye by this service? Just what the Scripture teaches; a proclamation of Christ, a memorial to Him, an act of adoration, and reverent worship

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THINGS WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GOD, NO.1

"Happy is that people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15).

Wherever mankind is found, he is found to be a worshiping creature. Even those who do not believe in God as we do, have something they worship. It may be an image of their own making, nature, rivers, a totem pole, beasts, mountains, other men, self, pleasure, material goods. But from the most uncivilized savages to the most devout Christians, people have that which they worship. Such is the case wherever men are found. Man is a worshiping being.

But truly happy are those whose God is the Lord of whom we read and learn from the Bible. Nature itself, with its magnitude, mysteries, timetables, unexplainable life, precision, accuracy, design, and power, bears tes-

timony that a Supreme Being does exist. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). The trouble with many in the world is discussed by Paul in Romans 1:20-25. "For the invisible things of him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

Bible Is God's Revelation

The Bible is this Supreme Being's revelation of Himself to man. Through His Son and His word and His works, God reveals Himself to us. We worship Him and serve Him, patterning our lives according to His will because we believe that He exists, and we trust Him explicity and completely.

But even the combination of nature and revelation does not tell us all there is about God. The reason is obvious. Men, finite as we are, cannot fully comprehend Deity anyway. To do so we must be on an equality with God. He is limitless while we are limited. He is infinite while we are finite. Because we cannot fully comprehend God, some have chosen to reject the fact of His existence. Such a course is sheer folly. It is an inconsistent reaction. It smacks of gross egotism on the part of man. Men are unwilling to react in this fashion about other matters wherein they have limited comprehension. We do not fully understand the operations of the body, yet none would deny the body or its operation. We do not fully comprehend the seasons, all that is in the atmosphere, and space, yet, we do not dismiss them as

non-existent. Someone might say we can see these things. But men accept many things they cannot see, and can only know through evidence. We do not see the wind but we see the evidence. We do not see oxygen, life, time, radio waves, etc. but we have evidence they exist and we accept that. So it is with the invisible God. Though unseen by the physical eye, we see Him by the "eye of faith" because the faith is founded on evidences that cannot be denied.

But what does the Bible reveal about God? In this first part of a two part lesson, we want to note ten qualities, characteristics of God, that we can and do know regarding Him. Surely, when pondered, our respect and awe of God will be increased and will grow, making us more sincere and genuine in our faith in Him and service before Him.

Eternal

The Bible reveals God is eternal. Man cannot fully grasp this concept. Our lives exist in the realm of time, with starts, stops, beginning and ending. We live within limits. Not so with the incorruptible and ever-living God of heaven. God has always existed. "In the beginning, GOD..."

The Bible has never argued the existence of God. It begins with God. "From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." (Psalm 90:2). Paul calls God eternal (Rom. 16:26). Such a characteristic belongs only to Deity.

Living

God is living. Unlike gods made with hands that fade, change, decay, and die, God lives. At least twenty-nine passages in the Bible ascribe to God the quality of living. Man is a mortal being, that is, with a body that dies. God is Spirit (John 4:24). God is the God of the living, not the dead (Matt. 22:32). While part of man dies, nothing about God dies. God is immortal and the very source, the only source of immortality (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16). Would it not be most unreasonable for a living man to have a dead God? By what reason would man adore

that which is inferior to himself?

True

God is the true God. The Bible reveals over and over that great word "truth." Truth is that which is wholesome, clean, uplifting, right. The world calls many things "god." But all gods are false gods except the eternal and living, true God of heaven. John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they should know the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send." One cannot be a follower of Christ and contend for gods, but only for the true God. Paul reminds Christians in 1 Thess. 1:9, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." That the God of heaven is the true God is borne out in Jesus' words, "Thy word is truth." (John 17:17). If God was anything less than the true God, His word would not be so identified as truth.

Omnipotent

The Bible reveals God is a mighty God. Repeatedly His power is demonstrated in the sacred record. The creation, guiding Abraham, protecting Israel, raising Jesus from the dead, the establishment of the church, these and manifold more, express the power of an Almighty God. Who else but a powerful God could give man every good and perfect gift (James 1:17)? The Psalmist addressed Him, "The Mighty One, God, Jehovah,"(Psalms 50:1). Job 36:5, "Behold, God is mighty." The Bible states emphatically, God is a mighty God.

Omnipresent

God is an ever-present God. This is a sobering and comforting thought. Psalm 139:7-12, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be

light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day, the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." It is sobering to know that we never escape the watchful eye of God. This should make us cautious what we do, where we go, what we say, how we think. We ought never do that which would be embarrassing to us before God. But is it not also comforting to know that God is present and that He does not cease to watch over us day and night? This enables us to meet life and whatever comes. If we would consider His nearness with greater confidence and appreciation, it would help us live a purer life on earth.

Omniscient

God is all wise, omniscient, and all knowing. Man must continually add to his own knowledge and wisdom. Many people, as they come to think of themselves as wise, have seen fit to discard the wisdom of God. The Bible tells us that the Lord's way is as high above our way as the heavens are above the earth (Isa. 55:9). "It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps." (Jer. 10:23). "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Prov. 16:25). Man's greatest wisdom is but foolishness when compared to the wisdom of God. 1 Cor. 3:18-20, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seem to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, He knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain." Romans 11:33,34, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counseller?" Measuring God by the standards of men rather than measuring man by the standards of God is to prove oneself foolish, regardless of worldly wisdom. The wisest of men except Christ, the man Solomon, realized the folly of pitting our limited wisdom in confrontation with the omniscience of God. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Psalm 111:10).

Love

God is love; not love is God. 1 John 4:8, "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love." The greatest display of love was the sending of His only begotten Son to the world (John 3:16). Because God loves, we love in return. By His love we have provision for the physical and temporal matters of life. But more importantly, we have the spiritual blessings. We must be careful not to confuse God's love with God's approval. God will always love everyone. But God does not approve everyone. He approves those who love Him by keeping His commandments.

Merciful

Closely akin to the love of God is the mercy and grace of God. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2:8,9). We are saved by His mercy (Titus 3:3-5). Without the grace and mercy of God, there would be no means of salvation. There would be no Savior to whom man could turn. Man cannot merit heaven. We must lean on the mercy of God. This does not say, as some erroneously teach, that salvation is by grace alone. We are not saved by anything "alone." But we are saved by grace, God's part in His plan for saving man.

God is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4). Wisdom that is from above is full of mercy (James 3:17). "For great is thy mercy toward me." (Psalm 86:13). If God dealt with any of us strictly according to justice, none could be saved, but we would be forever lost. Our prayer is, Psalms 85:7, "Show us thy mercy, O Jehovah, and grant us thy salvation." How unbearable life would be without the graciousness and mercifulness of God.

Comforting

God is the God of comfort. 2 Cor. 1:3, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." In

those times of strain, stress, sadness, disappointment, we turn to God through His Word and find the relief, hope, assurance, sympathy, and understanding of God. Even in death, the Lord is our shepherd. "But I would not have you to be ignorant brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you, by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (preceed) them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Paul, when weary, tired, and discouraged, received comfort from the Father. "Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." (2 Cor. 7:6). Peter said, "He careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7).

Peaceful

The last characteristic of God for this lesson is that God is the God of peace. "For he is our peace." (Eph. 2:14). Paul said of Christ, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." (Eph 2:14).

There are three ways in which man needs peace, and God provides for all three. Man needs peace with his fellowmen. God prescribes the formula that will bring peace among men. We need peace within ourselves. So many are distraught, depressed, despondent and crushed, even by their own guilt and awareness of their own iniquities. God, when obeyed, will bring the peace that passeth understanding. Man needs peace between himself and God. Christ died on the cross to provide the way of reconciliation with God. We can be at peace with God.

God is the very God of peace.

The next lesson we shall speak of other matters revealed in Scriptures concerning God.

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THINGS WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GOD, No. 2

"Happy is that people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15).

In the first part of this two-part study we discovered ten characteristics of God. God is eternal, living, true, mighty, ever-present, all-wise, a God of love, comfort, peace, mercy and grace. All these traits are such that we think about them with rejoicing. They are pleasing and comforting to us. But there is another side to God that the Bible reveals.

Paul wrote in Romans 11:22, "Behold the goodness and severity of God." In this part of the study on things we should know about God, we shall look at the more severe characteristics.

Jealous

God is a jealous God. "Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth; Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." (Deut. 5:8-10). God wants His people completely devoted to Him. He disallows any other god, image or any such thing. He will not share first place in our hearts. He will never accept second place.

We must also note that the sacrifices that God commanded under the old law were to be of the best quality. No lame animals, maimed, blighted in any way could be used, but only the best. Also, in the New Testament, God demands the best. "I beseech you there-

fore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). Repeatedly, the Bible reveals the anger of God against half-hearted, lukewarm, indifferent and sloppy kind of work and service.

The New Testament stresses the jealousy of God when Jesus taught that you cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). We must make a choice; either God is first or we do not serve God acceptably. Matt. 10:37, "He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Matthew 4:10, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." Attempts to give God anything but first and best reveals our lack of wisdom and knowledge about the God we propose to worship.

Impartial

Again, God is no respector of persons, but is exacting and demanding of all. Never was this more forcefully brought out than in New Testament times. We experience evidences of racial hatred and tensions in our own society. Yet, in the first century, racial strife was very much in prominence. For many centuries, the Jews were God's chosen people, a special people because it was through that nation that Christ was to come. But after the cross and the establishment of the church, God has no special people by virtue of race, nationality, or ancestry, but in every nation, them that fear God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him (Acts 10:34,35).

Peter, a Jewish Christian, was sent by God to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, to preach the gospel. Peter remarked, "Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respector of persons."

We can be glad God is this way. Otherwise, it could be that we would be left out. Paul wrote, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). In Christ, Christians have become God's special, holy nation.

Some evidently feel God shows favoritism to men because of who they are, their race, their color, their education, financial situation or their social position. They think they are special. Some think God bestows special favors by sending them direct revelations and enjoying direct operations on them by the Holy Spirit. Some think they are saved in special ways different from that which God has directed. Why they think they should be saved apart from the will of God is not always clear. But the Bible teaches all are saved the same way (Acts 15:9; Mark 16:15,16).

When each one stands before God in judgment, each will be judged by his own works, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12,13).

God of Vengeance

The Bible also tells us that God is a God of vengeance. "For we know Him that said, Vengeance belongeth to me, I will recompense" (Heb. 10:30). Vengeance means the affliction of pain due to injury received. It is payment for evil done. Some would say they would never worship a God who would harm anybody. But they do. They worship money, pleasure, other men, self. Some say God would never punish anybody. They do not know the Bible. They simply do not accept the God of heaven. They would have us worship a God that treats good and evil with the same reaction. Some ask how God could be merciful and gracious and a God of wrath and vengeance at the same time. God is merciful as we have learned last lesson. Now is the time of mercy. He pleads and beckons and offers salvation. But the time is coming when the day of mercy will end and judgment shall take its toll. "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:6-9). God is just, and justice demands that evil be punished just

as it demands goodness be rewarded. Through Christ we can be made good and receive the reward in heaven. To defy Christ is to invite God's wrath and vengeance upon ourselves.

Cannot Be Mocked

God is not a God that can be mocked. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting"(Gal. 6:7,8). To mock means to ridicule, scorn, deride. You may even treat God that way for a time, but it is certain that nobody shall get away with it. Some seem to think they can ignore God and it makes no difference. But such people will someday find out just how wrong they were about God. Some may say, "Sin now and repent later so all will be well." But you shall pay. We reap what we sow, even if we do repent later. Sin leaves its hideous and horrible scars on our lives with the regret that we have offended God. We too often act as if God somehow will forget our evil. We have convinced ourselves He is so loving and good that He will not punish but we forget the Biblical affirmation that God is not mocked. We deceive ourselves to think so.

Consuming Fire

"For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29). Among the many uses of fire, it can save from the cold, prepare our food, and other benefits. There is also the power to destroy and consume. Even as it can purify, by heating water to boiland killing harmful bacteria, by burning trash and other undesirable substances, fire will consume that which is deserving of being consumed. Heaven and earth shall melt with fervent heat and all the unpleasant things before God shall suffer. The fire that can save is the same fire that can consume the wicked and evil. "And fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt. 10:28).

Hates

God is a God that hates. Yes, God is love. But

the same characteristic of God that enables Him to love also enables Him to hate. "These six things doth the Lord hate, yea, seven are an abomination unto him; A proud look, a lying tonue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."(Proverbs 6:16-19). "The fear of Jehovah is to hate evil."(Proverbs 8:13). God hates everything evil and loves the good. He could not be a lover of good and the lover of good men, if he did not hate the evil which can destroy good men. While hating sin, God loves the sinner. He condemns sin, but offers to save the sinner. But make no mistake. There are those things that God hates. Those that love God hate what God hates, just as they love what God loves.

Refuge

Let us mention one final trait of God. God is our refuge. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved, he uttered his voice, and the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah."(Psalm 46:1-7).

The hymn we love speaks the sentiments, "There is a place of refuge, for every troubled soul, where tempests beat no longer, where billows cease to roll, A calm and quiet haven, a harbor safe and blest, There storm tossed bargues may anchor, where weary hearts may rest." God is our rock and refuge.

Seeing these things about God, how could we but worship Him? Is it not true, "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord"?



JAMES W. BOYD

POST-APOSTOLIC FATHERS

People cite a wide variety of things as religious authority. It is common to hear men quote ancient documents, outstanding religious leaders of the present and past, as if that somehow must settle matters for all time. The denominational world is dependent upon what uninspired man since the aposltes have said and thought about religious matters.

We should have respect for the wisdom and learning of the past. But we also must recognize the limitations that are incumbent upon all uninspired men, living and dead. Great men of the past had misunderstandings just as people do today. Jesus warned against following the doctrines of men and human traditions (Mt. 15:9).

Let us learn once and for all that the standard of authority is God's verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all sufficient word (2 Tim. 3:16,17). God's will, given by the Holy Spirit through inspired men, is now embodied in God's inspired book. If what we believe is not revealed therein, then it is not of God. To leave that standard is to leave the truth.

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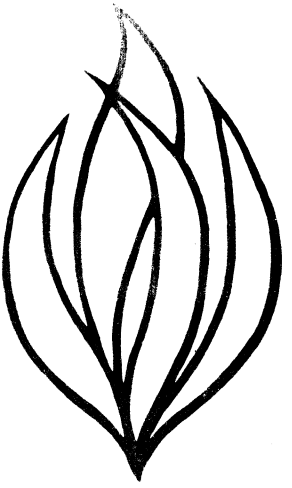

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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WHAT DO YE MORE THAN OTHERS?

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:43-48).

Jesus was teaching that high standard of loving even your enemies. This was in contrast with the law of Moses which was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; love your neighbors, but hate your enemies. But Jesus taught to love even enemies, bless those that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. Jesus not only taught this principle of love, but lived it, giving us an example of that which He taught. Picture Him as He is suspended between heaven and earth on the cross, and hear Him pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Loving Like God

By believing and living this standard, we resemble the Father. God blesses in some ways unconditionally. He sends the sunshine on the good but also on the evil. The evil are blessed thereby as much as the good. He sends the rain on the just and unjust without partiality. In this way He renders good for evil.

Some have thought it impossible to love an enemy. But God has never commanded nor expected the impossible. He would not have taught us to do this if it was impossible. "Recompense no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly

beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him. If he thirst, give him drink. For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:17-21).

Even the publicans lived by a standard of doing good to those who did good unto them. The publicans were tax collectors for the Roman government. During the life of Jesus the Jews were under Roman occupation. Rome exacted taxes. Those who collected these taxes were hated and despised, especially the Jewish collectors who were considered traitors. Usually this work was done by those of ill-repute, who lacked self-respect and were of questionable character. The system of collection was one that lent itself to the encouragement of exploitation, unfairness and fraud. But Jesus said of the publicans, this lowest of the low in the eyes of most, "For if you love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if you do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same." (Luke 6:32,33).

The Christian should have a love that distinguishes him from the sinner. He should be better than that which is expected of the bad, or even the average.

Saluting Brethren

Christ said the publicans salute their own brethren. The salutation was, and is, a token of courtesy, decency, and respect. The Jews generally did not salute Samaritans and vice versa. They would salute only their own. Sometimes one finds even Christians not speaking to each other. They are living on a level lower than that of the publicans and sinners.

Christianity is designed and intended to lift man above the level of sinners. A father said to his son, "My boy, speak to everybody, even those who are rude to

to you; for remember that you show courtesy to others, not because they are worthy and are gentlemen, but because you are." There is no honor or praise due one for rendering good to them which do good to you. Even sinners will do as much. We should not do good in order that someone do good to us in return. Our motive for doing good should be higher than what we might receive in return.

The questions in our text that Jesus asked are self-answering questions that prove that Christians are expected to live better and do more good than others because they are Christians. Our religion is worth little if it does not make us better. A Christian is raised from the waters of baptism to walk in a newness of life. Once we were in the darkness of sin, but now are walking in the light. "Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph. 5:7-11). "Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candle stick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5:14-16). Christians are expected to be different from the world. "And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom.12:2). The difference stems from the fact that the Christian does not live according to the standards of the world, but according to Christ. Far more is expected of them in the way of righteousness.

It is a pity that we do not do more good than we do. It is shameful that we do not give more, attend worship services more, study and pray more, be helpful to others more. Some who teach error sometimes give more of their income to their cause and are nore faithful in attendance to their services, are more attentive,

zealous, active and interested in what they are doing than those of us who profess to follow Christ. This is not as it should be. True New Testament Christians ought do more than others. This is what Jesus is teaching when He asked, "What do ye more than others?"

Being "Average"

Christians are in constant danger and temptation of being dragged down by accepting and following what we might call "average standards." Most people are satisfied if they think they are "average," that is, are convinced they are doing as well as most others around them. But Jesus expects better than the average from Christians. Let me illustrate with the teaching Jesus Himself did.

The old law said not to kill. This means not to murder. Most are satisfied that all is well if they refrain from murdering somebody. But Jesus not only taught not to murder, but not even to hate, from which comes murder, and the doing of harm against others. More than that, we are to love. John wrote, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3:15). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

The average is "eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth," somewhat like the attitude of the law of Moses. Of course, the rendering of justice and proper recompense was to be done by authorities, not personal vengeance even under that law. But some take the law into their own hands. Hard though it may be to follow, Jesus taught that vengeance belongs to God; we are not to "even the score" with those who sin against us and misuse us. "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. 5:39). What is Jesus teaching here? Are we to invite our enemies to continue to do us harm? No, that is not the point. We are to refrain from retaliation. We will suffer loss

before we take over God's prerogative of vengeance. As Christians we are expected to do better and do more than what might be generally expected from others.

"Thou shalt not steal" is a law that most agree ought to be respected. Not all give honor to this teaching, however, for they steal. In our nation, with many, the only thing wrong about stealing is getting caught. They feel if you can get away with it, it is all right. But Jesus said we are not even to defraud one another, that is, not to even take advantage of one another, let alone steal from each other.

While others may commit fornication, the Christian is not to even look on a woman with lust in his heart. While many will allow drunkenness, and social drinking is deemed acceptable, the Christian is to abstain from such things. Selfishness is a norm in the lives of many people, but Paul taught that the way of Christianity is "Look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others." (Phil. 2:4).

The average religious man or woman believes that one church is just as good as another; one faith is as good as another; doctrine is not important; we can choose our own way and whatever we choose the blessings of God will be just as applicable as another choice. But Paul taught one church, one faith, one gospel that is not to be perverted. The Christian knows it makes a difference what he believes, what he says, what he does, that doctrine matters, that men's ways are not just as good as God's ways. We are expected to do more and be more than others.

These contrasts between the "average" and the acceptable to men with the religion of Christ proves that Christians are to exceed that with which others are content.

Christ Is The Standard

Christ, not men, not the average, not the popular, not the socially acceptable, is the standard for the Christian. "For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (1 Peter 2:21). "I am the

way, the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me." (John 14:6).

It is foolishness to compare ourselves with others, even other members of the church. "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves, but they measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." (2 Cor. 10:12). We may be inclined to point to the weaknesses of others to justify or excuse our own weaknesses. This is foolish , because the one to whom we point is not the measure and standard anyway. We can always find shortcomings in others. There will always be those human frailities and sin in the lives of human beings, even Christians. But we shall never find a weakness in the Son of God who is the pattern we are to imitate.

Those in the church think they can point to those outside the church and by comparison give themselves a sense of contentment. Surely, being in Christ is a blessing to be cherished. But even if we did compare most favorably with someone who has not the hope of Christ, we are to excell and do more than others.

The questions Jesus raised ought provoke each one to ask, "What do I more than others?" Am I really a better person? Is my life really a better life? Just who am I following? By whom do I make comparison? Is Christ really my standard? For let us learn, Christ expects us to do more than others.

* * * *

One of the truly foolish arguments being put forth by some, that amounts to nothing but a shield and defense for false doctrine, is that nobody has the right to expose false doctrine today because none are inspired. Have they never read Paul's inspired instructions to gospel preachers? (2 Tim. 4:2). We are taught to reprove and rebuke. To fail in this is to fail in one of our assigned duties. JWB

IF I AM LOST

We are all aware that life is uncertain and death is sure. But the Christian does not look upon death as others. He lives in Christ and he dies in hope because of Christ. He looks for that city whose builder and maker is God. We read, sing, think, and talk of heaven. "O think of the home over there." "There's a beautiful place called heaven." Salvation is not only our goal, but our expectation.

But did you ever think, "What if I am lost?" Admittedly, it is not a pleasant thought. In fact, it is so unpleasant, that most will not seriously consider it. Probably most do not think of being lost in terms of themselves but always in terms of others. Even those who do not believe there is a life after death do not think that they would be lost even if there was a life beyond this.

Every person who becomes a Christian once considered the possibility. This is one of the reasons he became a Christian. Since there are only two eternal destinies, heaven or hell, it is worth our time to consider being lost. It is a sobering and frightening thought. But there are a few things of which we can be sure if we are lost.

Not Be Alone

We will not be alone. This may at first appear to be comforting, but not in this instance. Being alone is something many of us dread. But being in a crowd with the wrong ones is even worse. Jesus taught that more will be lost than saved. "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:13,14).

There is that nagging thought that most likely whether we be lost or saved, we will probably have taken someone else with us. This is because we each have influence. Romans 14: 7, "For none of us liveth to him-

self, and none dieth to himself." Probably those closest to us, the ones nearest and dearest to us will be the ones influenced most. It could be your wife or husband, your child, your father or mother, a dear friend. If we are lost, someone precious to us will likely be lost also, and we will have contributed to it. Murderers, liars, theives, adulterers, ungodly, disobedient, rebellious, vulgar, scoffers, atheists, hypocrites, the lewd and dishonest, Satan and his angels, heathens, idolators. What a company with which to exist throughout eternity!

Lost Forever

If we are lost we will be lost forever. Many are lost now while they are living. But they still have opportunity to be saved. They can change their spiritual state if they would take advantage of the mercy of God presently extended to them. But after death there can be no change. After the judgment there is no second chance. "It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment." (Heb. 9:27). Matt. 25:46, "And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." Rev. 20:10, "... and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." While we glory in an eternal heaven, let us realize that the same description is given regarding hell. Luke 16:26, "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence."

The doctrine of a purgatory where one's sins are burned out of them over many years is not Biblical. It is a doctrine of salvation eventually that by-passes the blood of Christ and one pays for his own sins. How many people have rejected the invitation of Christ and died, thinking that somehow they shall have another opportunity? Let us know that for which we can look. "But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries." (Heb. 10:27). There is coming a day when the last opportunity to go to heaven will have passed.

A Two-fold Loss

If we are lost we will suffer a two-fold loss. We will not only be barred from heaven, and what a loss that would be to miss the company of the saved through the ages, the joy, the peace, the fellowship with the righteous, but we must suffer the torments of hell, with all the misery, despair, hopelessness, darkness, fear, weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Scriptures do not offer us a middle-ground. While there are indications of degrees of punishment and reward, we shall exist in eternity either in heaven or hell. Either we suffer a two-fold loss, or we enjoy a two-fold gain, namely, escaping hell, and enjoying heaven.

Only Ourselves To Blame

If we are lost we will have only ourselves to blame. Yes, others may influence you one way or the other, but ultimately, nobody can make us rebel against God just like nobody can make us obey Him. Each one is personally accountable before God and each one will be individually judged. Many are trying now to persuade the lost to be saved.

Who Wants You Saved ?

God wants you to be saved. He gave His Son so you might be saved (John 3:16). He is not willing that any should perish but that all would come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Nobody has to beg God to save them. Nobody has to weep and wail asking God for salvation. He is more than willing and always ready to save whosoever will do His will.

Jesus wants you to be saved. That is why He died on the cross. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He gave His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). He gave Himself for us and redeemed us(Titus 2:14). He tasted of death for every man (Heb. 2:9). Our salvation was His very mission to this earth (1 Tim.1:15).

The Holy Spirit wants you to be saved. Even now He invites you to come. "The Spirit and the bride say

come." (Rev. 22:17). The word of salvation was given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20,21).

The angels in heaven want you to be saved. Luke 15:10, "Even so, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

The members of the Lord's church, those who are already saved, want you to be saved. They know the blessings of forgiveness. They know the joy in Christ. They know the peace that passeth understanding. They know the hope of heaven. They know the providence that the Lord has promised. They know that all spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). They know that salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). They have taken advantage of the offer made to man by the grace of God. They have the same attitude toward the lost as Paul did toward his Jewish kinsmen who were yet lost. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." (Rom. 10:1). The lost, when they are in an assembly of Christians as they often are, can know that every Christian heart longs for them to be saved. If one is lost, it is because we have self to blame. Others want it otherwise.

Even those who are lost want you to be saved. At least that is the way it was with the rich man of Luke 16:19-31. He failed in his life, but he had brothers still living that he did not want to come where he was. He wanted Abraham to send Lazarus back and warn them. Of course, they had adequate warning from the law of Moses and if they would be spared, they would have to listen to Moses. Seldom do those in sin really want their children to live in sin. It is unusual that those in prison want others to be in prison. "Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8).

Lost Can Be Found

The good news of the gospel is that the lost need not remain lost. We separate ourselves from God by

our sins and iniquities (Isa. 59:1,2). All have sinned (Rom. 3:23). We cannot earn, merit, or deserve salvation because of our own good works of righteousness (Eph. 2:8,9; Titus 3:3-5). Man must therefore look to another to save him, and God has provided that Savior (Rom. 5:6-9). But we must come to the Christ He has provided because only through Him can we be saved (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9). We must believe in Christ, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Christ, and be buried with Him in baptism for the remission of sins. The way of salvation is open to man. If we are lost, what a loss it will be. There is no need for you to be lost. Come to Christ, His way, and be saved.

* * * *

WOMAN'S WORK IN THE CHURCH

No religion or philosophy places womanhood on the pedestal as does the religion of Jesus Christ. This is because the faith of which Christ is the author places woman where God intended when He created her. After God had created everything else, including the man, He made a very special creation to be a help that was meet or suitable unto man. He created her with distinctive abilities and roles that would be peculiar to her and could not be accomplished by any other of all His creations. Her role was designated as distinctive, one of honor, nobility, when it is rightly understood and performed. Her position in life is God-ordained. Whereas paganism, modernism, heathenism, atheism, has reduced woman to be nothing more than property, a slave, an instrument to be used and discarded, only the bearer of children, Christ restored her to the side of man where God had originally placed her.

Women Are Exceptional

The role of women has been exceptional in the religion of Christ. He was born of a virgin. Among His disciples were many women. The last to leave the cross were women. The first to His tomb were women. Women showed respect for Him in His burial.

Inasmuch as the gospel is for all, we would expect and we do find women in the church of the Lord. If it were not for the spirituality of Christian women, the church would not be as strong as it is, nor would even exist in many places. Women, like their brothers in Christ, have a mission, a work, a role in the Lord's church. This lesson proposes to consider what her work is.

There Are Limitations

We begin by observing a teaching that must be remembered throughout the study of the woman's role in the church. Whether people like it or not, whether it suits their thinking or not, God has placed certain limitations on the work of women in the church that those who believe in God, and accept His word and wisdom will not attempt to set aside. In our world we hear much of freedom, emancipation of women, equal rights, and such things. None who is informed would deny that there has been much abuse of women in many areas where there ought to be fairness and equality, such as equal pay for equal work, the right to vote, the right to own property, etc. But the doctrine that says that men and women are to be equal in all matters is as foolish as contending that up is the same as down, and right is as proper as left. Some have taken this idea of across-the-board equality into the realm of religion. But it does not exist in the realm of true New Testament Christianity. Christianity keeps both man and woman in the role for which God created them. We rather think God knows best for that which He designed and brought into being. Some in the church have evidently tired of standing with God in this matter. A few years ago one church bulletin had an article written by a woman in that congregation that contended the role of women in the church is exactly what is the role of men, no more and no less. (Gospel Advocate, 1974, p. 649). The Highland church in Abilene conducts a radio program that includes instrumental music and with women doing much of the preaching. All of this might be acceptable in the denominational world, but not if you respect the word of God.

Not To Assume Authority

What are the limitations that God has placed on women? "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." (1 Tim. 2:11,12). This is simply stated and with apostolic authority. She is not to assume a position of authority or leadership over the man. Whatever she does must be done in consideration of this restriction. She is not to take dominion over man, nor allow herself to be involved in circumstances where she appears to have abandoned the required subjection to man.

God said to the woman that the man would rule over her (Gen. 3:16). "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor. 11:3). The reason for this ranking is given in 1 Tim. 2:13,14. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." This may not suit you. You may think you know better than God as to how things ought to be. But people have a history of showing themselves fools when they challenge the wisdom of God. It is when men and women alike will submit to God's will that things are as they ought to be. Deviation from God"s word is to sin against God.

Worship

Because women are Christians, they are to worship as men are to worship. They are to sing, pray, partake of the Lord's Supper, give, and study God's word. However, there is no authority to set aside God's limitations and allow her to take the lead in these activities. Some folks have the distorted idea that unless you are leading you are not doing anything. A man who does not take the lead in worship still worships. So does the woman. The place and circumstance of that worship does not set aside what God has said. By this I mean that she must respect God's limitation whether it be in the public assembly, a home devotional, at the camp ground, wherever and whenever there be both men and women present, she must not assume authority over him.

We see one application of this principle even in Corinth

and the subject of speaking in tongues. "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." (1 Cor. 14:34,35). We are aware that this refers to a very special kind of service where miraculous gifts were used. We are aware that all women do not have husbands from whom they can seek information. But we are also aware that the limitations and restrictions of which Paul wrote in 1 Timothy, chapter two, were applied even to this situation in 1 Corinthians 14. Such a rule is repugnant to the modern, the liberals, the untaught and misguided innovators, who think they know better than God. But such is given by God for her protection, her dignity, her uniqueness, not for her suppression.

Denominations and some liberal members of the church advocate women preachers, women song leaders, women leading in prayer in the presence of men. But we must recall that not everybody has a love for the truth either. Some contend that the only restriction on women is that they cannot be lady elders (Mission Magazine), but anything else is open to them.

The influence of this false doctrine is being seen in gatherings of young people where girls do the same as boys in worship. The young are often innocently mistaken because they are misled by the digressive adults. But they are in error. Some have contended that a woman can do whatever the elders will allow. They fail to appreciate the fact that even the elders are not permitted to set aside divine law. Advocates of such error cannot produce Biblical authority for what they preach and practice in this matter. It is a potential cause of division, and another step of the church going into denominational apostasy.

Teach

Women are to teach. Titus 2:3-5 tells us they are to teach young women. Obviously, if a parent, they are to teach children as did Eunice and Lois (2 Tim. 1:5).

Teaching children, boys or girls, does not take authority from the man. No men are present. Women teaching in "bus programs" in the presence of men, and with puppets, etc. are violations of this Biblical teaching.

Even under certain conditions, a woman can teach a man, as Priscilla and her husband, Acquila, together taught Apollos the way of the Lord more perfectly. She did this without assuming authority over him. A wife can teach her husband and still be subject unto him. It would be impossible for a woman to conduct a public assembly without usurping authority, however.

But the place of women in teaching is not determined merely by whether it is public or private. A ladies' class may be considered public in that all ladies are invited. A woman is not to privately take authority over a man. The restriction is based on her respect of the man's authority over her and she is not to usurp that under any circumstances. For this reason she cannot lead songs, lead in prayer, preach, etc. in the presence of men. Women did not do so in the New Testament church and it was not simply because of the customs of the times. It was apostolic teaching behind it.

Philip had four daughters who prophecied. Prophesying means teaching. There is no indication of any violation of God's limitations on their part. Many women teach under circumstances harmonious with God's law and are careful to observe God's will while doing so. The Today's English Version of the New Testament reveals another of its many perversions when it says that Philip's daughters preached. That is not what they did. Preaching is a public proclamation of the word. This they did not do unless they violated the apostle's instructions.

Serve

Women are to serve. In Acts 9, we read of Dorcas, a woman full of good works and alms deeds (Acts 9:36). When she died and Peter was called, "When he was come they brought him into the upper chamber, and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and the garments which she had made, while she was with them." (Acts 9:39).

There are many acts of service for which she is especially adept, such as benevolent aid, caring for the sick, visitation in the home, hospitality, showing sympathy. She is to bring up her children (1 Tim. 3:5), a task that has become repulsive to many modern women who prefer the so-called glamour of an out-of-the-home career. The most glorious career a woman can have is to serve her home as wife and mother. This is that for which she was especially made. How people can degrade this labor of love as some do simply shows their contempt for the dignity of homemaking and their contempt for God. Peter's mother-in-law rendered service to others.

Phebe (Romans 16:1) was called a servant of the church. The word "servant" can also be translated "deaconness." But she is not the female deacon or the counterpart of a male deacon. The office of deacon is a permanent position indicating special appointment in an office. Not so with women who are servants of the church. Again, one does not have to hold some sort of official position to serve as God would have them serve.

Examples

Women are to be a Christlike example in living properly. They are to be discreet and modest in their apparel (1 Tim. 2:9). This is a lost art with some women, even in the church. They are so impressed by the fashions of a sinful world that they fall for whatever style and fashion hits the clothing market whether it is modest or not. Christian women are not governed by the sinful things of this world. She can be attractive and stylish without being sinful. Christian women have always managed to do that.

She is to be an example in her behavior. "Likewise ye wives be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they may also without the word be won by the conversation (manner of life) of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let

it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands." (1 Peter 3:1-5). She is to be an example of proper submission to her husband as Sarah was before Abraham, "Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement." (1 Peter 3:6). She is to be an example of faith, as were those holy women of old time (Heb. 11; 1 Peter 3:5).

Help To Husband

If a woman is married, she is to serve God by being a help meet to her husband (Gen. 2:18). For this she was created. When a woman is the proper help to her husband, she is fulfilling her prime purpose. The word "meet" means "suitable." Nothing else of God's creation was suitable for man, so He especially created woman. She does not take dominion over her husband, nor assumes the leadership in the home or church, but is a help to him. We all need to keep the distinction between being the head and being the help that is suited. It is Christ's will that the husband be the head of the wife as He is head of the church (Eph. 5:23).

Having pointed out the limitation God placed upon her, and telling why, we read further in 1 Tim. 2:15, "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." There are various interpretations that people give to this verse. Some say it refers to the birth of the Savior by Mary. Certainly we are saved by the One born unto Mary. But that was an event of the past, and Paul says "is" which is present. It does not mean that physically bearing a child will produce spiritual salvation for the woman. Many women who are very ungodly have borne children. Furthermore, some of the most godly women in the Bible, and in our time, have never borne children.

"Childbearing"

That which makes more sense is to consider the word

"childbearing" as representative of the distinctive role of women, and it stands for the whole of the role of women. Paul is saying, "If the woman is what she is supposed to be, she shall be saved." She was created after Adam, and she sinned first, but salvation can belong to her if she does what she is to do. Peter wrote, "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered." (1 Peter 3:7). She, like her husband, is a soul that is to be saved. She is also an heir of God and the eternal life offered through Christ. She can be saved when and if she does what God wants women to do.

The role of women in the church is not different from that of men in many instances, except in the limitation to which we have referred. She is to worship, teach, serve, live properly, be a good example, a good help for her husband, perform the wifely duties to husband and children and fulfill that special role for which she was created.

No Apostles Were Women

It is significant that none of the apostles were women. We never read of women preachers, elders, deacons,public proclaimers. Men are told to pray everywhere, but not women (1 Tim. 2:8). There are places and circumstances in which she is not to lead in prayer.

Christians, loving God, and respecting women, do not wish to place women in a role for which God never created her. But all want women to be in Christ. When Paul wrote, "...there is neither male nor female...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus," (Gal. 3:28), he was not teaching that men and women are alike in all respects, or that they all have the same role and function, and their roles are interchangeable. He was teaching that the woman and the man are spiritual creatures and they both can be in Christ where there is salvation. Whether one be male or female makes no difference when it comes to benefiting from the sacrifice of the Son of God.

* * * *

THE TOWER OF BABEL

The lesson comes from the Old Testament, Genesis 11:1-9. As Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, these things were written for our learning. So let us learn from this historical record from the ancient past. There is demonstrated to us a characteristic of mankind that has unfortunately plagued him down through the ages, namely, man does not remain long in faithfulness to God. Just why mankind will not learn the lessons from the past is bewildering, but the fact remains that men repeat the same errors generation after generation.

Just exactly how long from the time of creation this event took place we cannot determine. It comes about a century after the flood at the time of Noah. Noah and his descendants were saved from the destruction of the flood because Noah, a righteous man and a preacher of righteousness, obeyed God's instructions, built an ark, and eight souls were spared. Now they were out of the ark, they were instructed to go forth and multiply and replenish the earth, and this they had done to some extent.

Just One Language

Verse one says, "And the whole earth was of one language and one speech." Just how many souls were living on the earth we cannot know. But there was a unity among them. There was a single language that they spoke. The language barrier that is such a barrier for people today was non-existent. This facilitated their relationships with each other and made mankind a powerful and unified force with which to deal.

Verse two, "And it came to pass as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there." It seems that the people were scattering and this enabled them to replenish the earth. There was movement among them as they sought for places to live. One such location was the plain of Shinar. Just precisely where this locality is we cannot be sure. Even the meaning of Shinar is unknown, although

some have speculated that it probably meant the land of two rivers. If that be true, it could mean the geography in and around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This would be in the general area that was later known as Assyria, and Babylon. But all this is uncertain. We can be relatively sure that it was in that general vicinity, since the ark landed on Ararat.

Verse three, "And they said one to another. Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone and slime had they for mortar." This is a very interesting statement because it indicates the skills of the people. They were not "sub-humans" nor what evolutionists like to present as some kind of half-man, half-beast. The primitive man was man, not something in between. They had skills, tools, abilities to provide and build. They were an industrious people with knowledge. They knew the art of brick-making and how to put it to use.

Verse four, "And they said, Go to, let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Now we are beginning to see something of the character of these people. They were going to put their talents to work, but it was for evil purposes. Talents that a person may have does not mean that they shall be used to produce good necessarily. They might be used to produce evil. It depends on how they are used, and the motives behind their use.

Why Build A Tower?

There are two motives stated for building the city and tower. One was that they might not scatter over the face of the earth. There was the desire and intent to keep a centralized place in which mankind would live. They would not replenish the earth in this way, but would remain rather restricted. Another motive was that they would make a name for themselves, that is, a reputation, a power, something for which they could take pride in themselves and gloat in their power and abilities. The flood had destroyed the civilization that had existed, and for good reason. The people had become terribly wicked. Now that the human family was

expanding again, they had no intention of allowing their wisdom and accomplishments to be destroyed another time. How foolish they were to think that men can build anything here upon this earth that will last forever. Look at the many peoples, nations, civilizations, worldly powers that have arisen, made a splash on the pages of history, only to be wiped away and for all practical purposes, forgotten. Only that which is spiritual will last. Only that which is of heaven will continue. Things of this earth cannot be and never will be eternal.

Rebellion

Actually, this whole scheme amounted to another rebellion against God. We see in their conduct that oft-repeated practice of mankind of not remaining faithful to God for very long regardless of how many "fresh starts" he may be granted. This has been seen in the history of Israel, in the history of the Lord's church. Apostasy, digression, departure from God has been a part of man's sorry past down through the ages.

These two motives for building the city and tower reflect not only a rebellious attitude toward God, an ignorance in thinking anything of this earth can last, but the foolishness of man to think he can successfully direct his own steps and somehow get around what God expects and intends.

Verse five, "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded." We are not to think that God was not aware of what the people intended and were doing. The verse simply notes how God took attention to it and would deal with it. God gave recognition of the plans of men and how they were inconsistent with God's plan for man.

Verse six, "And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language, and this they begin to do, and now nothing shall be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do." Here we see the results of their misused talents and their misspent unity. Their unity was a blessing unto them. It granted them power and ability, but they abused what they had

and set out on the evil and rebellious course. Left in this unified condition, there would be no limit to their rebellion. Obviously, God was disappointed that man would misuse what could have been to his benefit. But as we see what those people did then, let us also realize how we can abuse and misuse our blessings now and bring upon ourselves God's displeasure. We may be granted material wealth, and it be our downfall. We may have health, and we spend our lives in wickedness. We may have various talents but use them for evil rather rather than for good. We can speak one with the other and the ability to communicate is a great privilege. But James teaches us how we often send forth from the same mouth blessings and cursings. People can be united in doing wrong just as they can be united in doing right.

Confounding of Their Speech

Verse seven, "Go to, and let us go down and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." God acts to disrupt their unity in evil. He would remove the blessing that they were abusing. The strength, power, success that they enjoyed because of the oneness among them would soon dwindle away with the confusion of their language. And what powerful lessons we learn here.

Why do you suppose that Paul urged brethren to speak the same things? Why would he urge them to be of the same mind and judgment? (1 Cor. 1:10). Why would Peter exhort brethren to speak as the oracles of God? (1 Peter 4:11). The power of being united, the strength in saying the same things, the abilities that abound in standing together with understanding are tremendous. Division is such a drain on the energies of the church. When brethren are separated by talking differently, the forces of good are weakened. We all suffer from the sin of division. God knew that division would curtail their power for evil. And God knows that evil can curtail our power for doing good.

In verse eight and nine we see the result of God's intervention. "So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth, and they left off

to build the city. Therefore, is the name of it called Babel, because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth, and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."

Toil on Tower Terminated

In their state of confusion and division, they were not able to continue with their plans to build. Their rebellious intents were cut short. The original plans for them to scatter were once again expedited. The very name, Babel, means confusion. Their tongue, their language, was confused to the extent that they could no more dwell together but they scattered abroad over the earth. So the wickedness of man to thwart the plans of God was uprooted.

We see in this episode the overruling power of God. While we are not always sure how God does His will, we can be sure that the will of God shall ultimately prevail. How wise we are to submit to His will.

We see in this episode the power and strength of unity and speaking alike. Giving forth with the same message is a great source of strength. Unity can work for good as well as for evil. God wants His people united.

We can admire the industriousness and ambition of people if it is rightly directed. But what evil can abound when men become vain, proud, seeking their own glory rather than the glory of God.

The story of Babel contains many principles we need to learn and practice. May we learn them and rightly use them.

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JAMES W. BOYD

FOUR WHO HAVE MEANT SO MUCH

In every person's life there are those who have had enormous influence upon them. That influence is not always evident right at the time the influence is being exerted, but one becomes aware of it with the passing of time.

There have been many to whom I owe so much; men and women, those younger than I, some older, some of my own generation.

I wish to praise four of those men of an older generation who have meant and still mean so much to me.

When I think of noblemen, my first thought is my own father, Bowling B. Boyd, Sr. Only God knows what a Christian man he was and how much he meant to me. Likewise, my father-in-law, H. Clyde Hale, gospel preacher. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. was a man that I shall ever hold in admiration for manifold reasons. J. Roy Vaughan, gospel preacher, and the man probably the most responsible for me trying to preach, holds a special place with me.

Many others of former generations have influenced me through their writings, but these I knew personally and dearly.

How can one ever honor such as these enough? Thank God for them.

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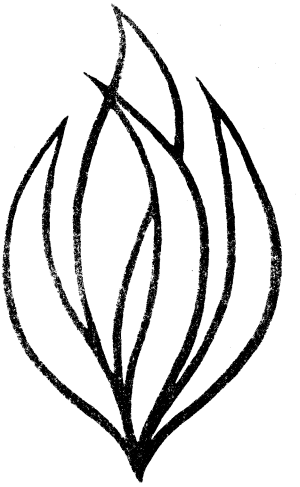

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME I NUMBER 7

I HAVE SINNED

Not everyone who has not obeyed the gospel is mean, rebellious, stubborn, and loves the wickedness of the world. They are untaught and have not yet realized the need of a Savior. Many are not Christians because they have never acknowledged the fact that they are in sin, that they cannot save themselves by themselves, and that Jesus Christ is the only Savior God has provided. To admit these things means one must humble himself, sacrifice his pride, and confess that he is a lost sinner. Whether we ever admit it or not, all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). Some excuse themselves by saying, "To err is human." Friend, that does not excuse. That is coming close to admitting the Biblical truth that all have sinned. Sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). We are not born guilty of sin. We may well suffer many consequences of sin committed by those who have gone before us, and suffer because of sins around us. But we are guilty of sin "...for all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12). Nobody will ever obey what the Lord says they must do to be saved until they admit, "I have sinned."

Reality of Sin

Sin is real. There are records of those in Scripture who sinned and were brought to the realization that they were guilty of sin. Our study shall focus on five characters who said, "I have sinned."

Achan

Let us start with a man named Achan. Achan is an Old Testament character of whom we read in Joshua 7. He was an Israelite who crossed the Jordan with Joshua. As they approached the first obstacle to taking the land of Canaan, the city of Jericho, God told Israel He would give them the city but they were not to take the spoils for themselves because that would belong to the treasury of God. But when Achan saw the wealth around him, he took some things and hid them for himself.

Later, after Israel met temporary defeat at Ai, and Joshua inquired the reason for the defeat, God told him

that there was sin in the camp. Eventually, it was discovered that Achan had partaken of that which was not his to have. Faced with his guilt, he confessed, "I have sinned." He was then taken and put to death because of his transgression. By his sin he had caused the people of God great suffering and loss.

King Saul

The first king of Israel, King Saul, also once admitted his sins. God sent Saul on the mission to utterly destroy the heathen and very wicked nation of Amalek. This was divine retribution for their evil. But Saul did not do what God told him to do. He won a great victory over Amalek all right, but he spared flocks and herds and King Agag. When confronted with this transgression he tried to lay the blame on the people rather than accepting the blame himself. But he was condemned by God's prophet, Samuel. Samuel told him, "To obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams." Samuel accused him of rebellion and stubbornness. God's displeasure was pronounced against the disobedient King Saul, whereupon he said, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice." (1 Sam. 15:24).

David

Another Old Testament person, David, was guilty of a long series of sins. He was the second king of Israel. His series of sins resulted from his futile attempt to cover his sins the wrong way. He tried to cover one sin by committing another. All this did was to accumulate his guilt.

David, who was to be the leader of his army in battle, neglected his duty and stayed behind. He caught view of Bathsheba as she was bathing and lusted for her, sent for her and committed adultery with her. Later, it was known that Bathsheba was with child by David. David plotted to have Uriah, her husband, returned from the battle hoping to enduce him to lie with his wife so the father of the child would be assumed to be Uriah.

But Uriah did not cooperate, refusing to lie with her. David, in conspiracy with Joab, had Uriah placed in the heat of the battle, and left alone so that he might be killed by the enemy. This was done.

Some time later, Nathan, God's prophet, came to David and told him a parable that was designed to convict David of his sinfulness. "There were two men in one city, the one rich,and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had brought and nourished up, and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come unto him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man." (2 Sam. 12:1-7). Nathan proceeded to remind him of all that God had done for him and given him, and yet, David took the wife of one of his loyal soldiers and sinned.

When David heard all this, and was impressed with the impact of the situation, he said, "I have sinned against the Lord." (2 Sam. 12:13).

Prodigal Son

In the New Testament, we read in Luke 15, the story of the prodigal son. This was one of the Lord's parables. This younger son took his inheritance early, and left home, going into a foreign country. There he wasted what he had, living riotously and sinfully. After he had spent all his wealth, a famine struck the land and he hired himself to another to feed swine. He became so hungry that he would have eaten the food that was given to the swine.

But the Scripture says "he came to himself," he recognized his situation, he no longer could tolerate his conditon, and he admitted what he had refused for sometime to admit. He said, "I have sinned."

He resolved to return to his father and seek his forgiveness, asking only to be allowed to be as a hired servant because he had so wasted everything. He did go home, and there he found a loving father awaiting him. He admitted to his father just exactly what he said he would admit, "I have sinned." "I have sinned against heaven and before thee." (Luke 15:18). It was not until he realized how wrong he had been that he decided to do something about it. It was not until he realized how helpless he was and how dependent on the father he was that he determined to humble himself and go to his father.

Judas

There was one other who spoke the same words, "I have sinned." His name is the infamous name of Judas. In Matthew 26, we read about his plotting with the enemies of Jesus to betray the Lord into their hands. He waited until what he considered to be the opportune moment to plant the hypocritical kiss upon the cheek of Jesus to identify Him from among the disciples.

After Jesus was seized, Judas began to be aware of what he had done, he returned the thirty pieces of silver to his co-conspirators and said he had betrayed innocent blood. "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." (Matt. 27:4).

As we look back over these people whose words are recorded in their confession of guilt of sin, we see how some sought forgiveness, and others did not. There is more to being forgiven than simply admitting one's guilt. But the fact remains, none will seek forgiveness until he does admit the need of forgiveness. And none will be forgiven until he does what the Savior commands in order to be forgiven. It begins by the realization that we are guilty of sin and cannot save ourselves by ourselves. It follows by learning that God has sent a Savior into the world, and that is Christ Jesus.

It is really a futile and foolish effort on the part of any of us to attempt to deny that we have sinned. Once we know that, is it not also foolish to refuse to be saved? By faith, repentance, confession of our faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ, we can enjoy the forgiveness of sin which we must have in order to go to heaven.

Whether we ever admit it or not, there is not a person that cannot join the chorus that says, "I have sinned."

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THREE ATTITUDES TOWARD POSSESSIONS

Please read from your Bible our text, Luke 10:24-37. There came this certain lawyer to Jesus posing a question. According to Matthew 22, this was following a series of debates between Jesus on the one hand and the Pharisees and Sadducees on the other. Jesus had been successful in putting to silence those who were questioning Him in order to tempt Him. This lawyer is said to come with the same motive, to tempt Jesus. Later in the account, we learn more of the condition of the heart of this man when it is said he was willing to justify himself. In other words, this lawyer was posing this question to justify himself and find fault with Jesus. No fault can be found with the question itself because it is the most important question one can ask, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus responded by telling the story of the good Samaritan, one of the more familiar parables that Jesus ever taught. There are so many profitable thoughts provoked by this parable, but we wish to concentrate on the various attitudes toward possessions that we see demonstrated by the characters of the parable. Our concept of life and our comprehension of responsibility toward others determines our conduct. Having the true perspective will encourage us to live a righteous life. When we are confused, mixed up, and hold an erroneous view, we cannot expect to have the quality of life that God expects us to have.

The story tells of this man going along the very hazardous roadway between Jerusalem and Jericho. It was dangerous because there were thieves along the way and very little protection. It was the misfortune of this traveller to fall among thieves. Let us consider the attitude of the thieves toward possessions.

Yours Is Mine

Their dispositon was, "What is yours is mine if I can take it." Another way of stating their attitude may be, "Might makes right." Quite obviously, they lacked respect for their fellowman. They did not appreciate the right of ownership. They were not disposed to work to earn that which they received. Rather, they believed that if they had the power to deprive another of whatever they may want they had the right to simply take it.

There are many who hold this view today. Those who would steal from others have this attitude. If the philosophy of "doing your own thing" is a correct and proper one, nobody could object. It was "the thing" of the thieves to act this way. By the possession of power many take advantage of others.

Stealing is so commonplace in our degenerate society. Violent robbery, embezzlement, shoplifting, are all everyday events. The workers who cheat on the job, anyone who takes what is not his, is like the robber on the Jericho Road. It stems from a basic dishonesty. The attitude is that nothing is wrong as long as you do not get caught.

Another form of stealing of which many are guilty is stealing the good name of another, destroying reputations through lying, gossip. It might be because of jealousy and envy. Certainly a heart of covetousness is involved. But some have this attitude, "I want what you possess, and if I have sufficient power to take it from you, then I can make it my own."

Mine Is Mine

The unfortunate traveller was left by the roadside by an uncaring mob of robbers. Whether he lived or died was of no concern to them. They left him. But for a moment there was a flicker of hope for this man upon whom this hardship had fallen because other travellers were coming that way. Among them were people of whom you might expect the best kind of treatment, religious leaders like the priests and Levites. They did not fail to see the man and took note of his serious condition. But then we see their attitude crash to the forefront. They went by the other side. They did not stop to assist. They, like the robbers, left him there. Whether he lived or died was no real concern to them. They could have helped, but their attitude was, "What is mine is mine, and I will keep it."

The heartless, unmerciful selfishness of these people is difficult to imagine. Thinking only of themselves with no interest in anybody else, even those unfortunate, they failed to realize that what was in their possession did not actually belong to them. They were only stewards of things that God had placed in their hands to be used for good. They refused to share with those in need.

The world today is plagued with selfishness. There is the uncharitable, stingy, hold on attitude in the heart of so many. Nothing seems to concern them except their own welfare. They are fearful of losing what they have to the extent they will not help those who lack.

One of the real and almost unsolvable problems facing brethren today is just who to help and how far. Many are in need because they cannot help themselves. Many are destitute and deserve assistance. Unfortunately, there are many who are nothing but professional parasites, who have no concern about bettering themselves, who are quite willing to rely on others and do nothing for themselves. Many are such poor stewards of what comes into their possession that if help were given they would squander it and be in the same deplorable state as before. Many are simply not deserving. But the problem is to always know who is deserving.

At the time of this writing, after preaching for thirty years, there has yet to be that first person that has come by the church building seeking help to get from one place to another that has ever sent any thanks or even let us know if they arrived. They take and go. They never do what they promise. More times than can be counted, they are later discovered to be professional "bums" with nothing more on their mind than another handout. They are not interested in the soul, nor even in improving themselves in this life. They resent being "checked out." They have no use for the church except what they can get for nothing. They tell every kind of imagineable lie to deceive. So many times brethren have fallen for their tale and been touched with compassion for a poor, unfortunate soul, only to later discover that they have been "burned" again. Such has brought us to the point of helping nobody who cannot verify who they are and what they claim. There needs to be some legitimacy to their story, and proof of themselves. Just exactly where the line between charity and proper stewardship falls is not easy to determine in every case.

But we must guard against being selfish and uncaring. It is hard to have things but not share with one who is in need.

Those with wealth who help the poor are going to be blessed for so doing. Those who have the attitude that they should make all they can and "can" all they make for themselves are like the despicable characters of this parable.

The matter of giving also involves what is given directly into the perpetuation of the work of the church. We are but stewards of God's world. Our giving should be liberal and cheerful, as we have prospered, and not "what is mine is mine and I will keep it."

Mine Is Yours

Then we see the attitude of the Samaritan. This parable was especially stinging to the Jewish hearers

of Jesus because they despised the Samaritans. For Jesus to place a Samaritan in a favorable light provoked them all the more. The Jews would have nothing whatsoever to do with such people. But the Samaritan came along the same road the others travelled. He also saw the unfortunate victim of the robbers. But unlike the religious leaders who ignored him and showed no human compassion and mercy, this Samaritan stopped and rendered whatever assistance he could immediately to relieve the suffering. But he was not content to stop there. He placed the man on his own beast, and took him to a place of safety and lodging, served him and nurtured him as long as he could, and even paid for additional services that were needed. He even offered to pay further upon his return if needful. His attitude toward his possessions was, "What is mine is yours if you need it."

Attitude Of The Early Brethren

This is the same attitude the early brethren had toward those who were in need among them (Acts 4:34-37). Provoked by a love and concern for the welfare of each other, they provided what was lacking to those who lacked. This is the attitude Paul taught in Gal. 6:10, "As we have opportunity therefore, let us do good unto all men, especially to them which are of the household of faith."

Attitude Of Jesus

Was not this the attitude of Jesus Himself and did He not demonstrate it? Did He not give up His place in heaven, to take on the fashion as a man, to come to this low world of sin and sorrow, pain and woe, and allow Himself to be humiliated and tortured, even unjustly put to death, because He could provide for mankind what mankind so desparately needed? He gave His all for the benefit of others. John wrote, "Whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in Him?" (1 John 3:17). Jesus showed us the high plane of giving for the good of

others. Nothing selfish about His attitude was evident. His was the highest and noblest of all. He had taught and demonstrated, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35).

Of these three philosophies, it is not difficult to see which will relieve the burdens of the distressed. We can see which will solve the gross inequities of the distribution of wealth. Only one will make friends of enemies, and bring peace and appreciation one toward the other. Only one will actually meet the needs of want and suffering.

What is our personal attitude toward that which God has placed in our power for a while? And it is but for a while. Soon another will assume the stewardship of whatever we have, whether we dispose of it in life or leave it in death. It is not really ours. It all belongs to God and ought to be used in such fashion as belonging to God. Only one of these three attitudes is pleasing to God. Is that the attitude that you have?

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LORD, THAT OUR EYES MAY BE OPENED

"And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the wayside, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace, but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes, and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him." (Matt. 20:29-34).

Our subject comes from the words of the blind men. We have recorded for us one of the many miracles of

our Lord. But in addition to the miracle, we have an excellent example set before us by the blind men when they make their request for assistance from Christ.

Why Miracles?

We need to understand why Christ performed miracles. It was in order to convince people He was the Christ. "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30,31). Miracles were performed for the purpose of confirming, proving, verifying the word that was preached. "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." (Mark 16:20). "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will." (Heb. 2:3,4). These are the reasons miracles were performed. We now have the inspired written record of these things to show us that Jesus is the Christ. There no longer exists the need for miracles. Faith comes by hearing the word (Romans 10:17), and the word tells us of the verified miracles. The word, once confirmed, does not need any further evidence. In addition, Paul told the Corinthians that these miraculous gifts would cease (1Cor. 13). To expect miracles to prove anything today is to cast reflection on the all-sufficiency and confirmation of the inspired written word of God.

Let us turn our attention, however, to five things about these blind men and the event of their receiving sight and learn lessons from it that can be helpful to us if we would imitate them in principle.

Recognition of Need

First, they recognized their need and the power of Christ to provide what they needed. Second, they earnestly desired to see, even in the face of rebuke and

opposition. Third, they kept pleading until Jesus had healed them. They did not quit. Fourth, Jesus opened their eyes because He had compassion on them. Fifth, they followed Him after their eyes were opened. While their blindness was physical, the worst blindness of all is spiritual blindness. What they did to receive their physical sight, we can do to receive spiritual sight. As Paul told the Ephesians, "having the eyes of your heart enlightened." (Eph. 1:18).

Respect Christ's Power

We must recognize our need of spiritual sight and respect the power of Christ to provide the spiritual healing. We, like the blind men, must accept the fact that we stand in need of spiritual healing. No person will come to Christ until he realizes the need to do so. Once we are aware of that need, then we simply have to determine to whom we should appeal. In John 6:68, Peter once asked the question, "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Christ is the author of salvation (Heb. 5:9), and the only way to God (John 14:6). "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). All power or authority belongs to Christ (Matt. 28:18). We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ (Heb. 10:10). There once was a time when men offered animal sacrifices, but they were incapable of removing sins (Heb. 10:4). Such sacrifices had to be offered year by year repeatedly. If they could have been sufficient for sins they would not have been offered continually. But Christ was offered only once (Heb. 9:28). Just as He was able to give the blind men their sight, He and He alone could come to this earth and provide for the forgiveness of sins. We must accept that fact.

An Earnest Desire

As they faced some opposition in their quest for sight, we may well face opposition in our search for salvation. The blindest of all are those who do not want to see. "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy

of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear and shall not perceive, for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart and should be converted, and I should heal them." (Matt. 13:14,15). People with a closed mind do not really want to know the truth. They are so content and satisfied as they are, they will not give a moment to questioning what they say they believe. How can any person be brought from error to truth when they care no more for truth than that? We are exhorted to have a desire for the word of God. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (1 Peter 2:2). The Ethiopian had a desire to know the truth and that is why he invited Philip to teach him. The Jews on Pentecost wanted to know what they must do. The Philipian jailer obviously sought the truth when he asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Jesus taught, "Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." (Matt. 5:6). Again He said, "Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." (Matt. 7:7).

Sometimes people study and listen, not because they want to know the truth, but because they want to defend what they have already decided to believe. They study hoping to find somebody at fault. They want to prove their own opinions to be right. They may just want knowledge for the sake of having knowledge. The way of Christ is not designed to be forced upon people. There must be a desire to learn the truth and do the truth.

Overcoming Opposition

Many people have had to overcome various kinds of rebuke and opposition as they sought the favors of the Lord. There are always those who would discourage a person from crying unto God. It can come from families, friends, associates. It may stem from our own prejudices and indifferences. Would it not have been a tragedy if the blind men had given heed to the discouraging words of those who advised them to be quiet, and discontinue

their efforts to be healed by Jesus?

Stayed With It

But just as the blind kept pleading, we cannot be content until we know that we know. And we can know. This is the reason God has given us His word, that we might know the truth and be free from that which enslaves us (John 8:32). 1 Chronicles 16:11 reads,"Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually." We once heard of a person who had been a member of four different denominations, but as he studied and learned, he abandoned them one by one, knowing that they were not what the New Testament presented as the church. Eventually, he learned, believed and obeyed the truth. He would not quit in his search for what the Bible teaches.

None of us will ever understand the depths of the knowledge of God. It is beyond our capacity. But those things we must know and do to be saved are within our reach. We cannot content ourselves and quit searching. Once we have found the truth, we should hold to it.

If the blind men had ceased their cries, they would have continued in darkness. If we cease trying to find the truth, and having found it, do not obey it, then we will live life in spiritual darkness and be lost forever.

They Could See

We take note that Jesus, out of compassion, healed because of the pleading of men. Did He do this because they were deserving? Did He owe it to them? Was He paying a debt back to them? No, on all counts. Out of compassion He healed them. Friend, it is because Jesus Christ had compassion on sinful man that He came to this earth and fulfilled His mission of dying on the cross that we might be saved. He understands the trials and temptations of man. He is sympathetic. Yet, He demands that we obey His will. He has lovingly, graciously, mercifully provided for mankind. He reaches toward our hearts with the gospel of Christ. By His word, He leads us toward obedience and salvation. He came to seek

and to save, not primarily to destroy and punish. If we will not shut Him out, if we will direct our appeals toward Him according to His will, He will save us just as He healed the blind man.

They Followed Christ

After sight was given these men, they followed Christ. When we are washed clean by His blood in baptism, we are to follow Him also throughout life. The way we show our gratitude toward God and Christ for that which has been done on our behalf is to give our lives as living sacrifices to the service of God through Christ. This is done by following Him in life. To follow the footsteps of Jesus, we will be led into eternal glory.

May our prayer be, "Lord, may our eyes be opened. May we be willing to cry unto thee, recognizing our need and thee as the only provider of salvation. May we continue to seek Thee, and follow thee all the days of our lives, that we may live with thee forever and ever in heaven."

* * * *

TRUE WORSHIP

"But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23,24). These were some of the words spoken by Jesus to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. They should command our attention because few matters are more important to the Christian than worshipping God acceptable.

Definition of Worship

Worship means paying honor to one as a divine being. It is to show reverence with great respect as for Deity. It is to perform acts of adoration to Deity. It is a sacrifice of praise to God. Verse 23 mentions "true

worshippers" who worship the Father. The implication is that there is true worship, worship that God accepts. Also, it implies that there is worship that is not true, and God will not accept. Worship requires certain external actions that are performed as worship. God has required different acts of worship for people in different ages and dispensations. In the patriarchal age, men built altars, offered animal sacrifices, gave gifts, various items of worship. Under the law of Moses, the Jews were led in worship by their special priests, observing feasts, sacrifices, rituals, washings, giving, and a host of things they did in worship to God as the law directed. In the dispensation of Christ, men are to worship also. The acts performed are not the same ones done under previous dispensations, but are peculiar in many respects to this age. We worship the same God as did those of earlier times, but not in the same way because we live under a different system and law.

The Scriptures mention different kinds of worship. Some worship is not true worship because it is directed to the wrong object of worship. Romans 1:2-25, tells how some worshipped the creature rather than the Creator. They worshipped beasts, birds, one another, creeping things. Their worship was misdirected. But even those who attempt to worship God can offer worship that is not acceptable with Him.

Ignorant Worship

In Acts 17:22,23, Paul speaks of ignorant worship. "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitous. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."

Paul was in Athens on what is called his second missionary journey. Athens was a city of idolatry. Historians tell us that there were likely more idols than people in the city. It was a center of human philosophy and many gods. Lest they leave out some god and provoke that god to anger, they erected an altar

to "the unknown god." Paul called this kind of worship "ignorant worship." They did not know whom or what they worshipped. The object of their worship was not understood by them. Paul wanted to make known unto them the true God, then they could worship acceptably.

A pertinent question just here is, "Were they excused in worshipping in ignorance?" So many today seem to think that when somebody does whatever they do sincerely and honestly that even if they are wrong it will be overlooked. But Acts 17:29,30 reads, "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent." Ignorance in worship was not excused then, nor is it excused now. We cannot afford ignorance when God's word reveals His will to us.

Will-Worship

Colossians 2:20-23 mentions "will-worship.""Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (touch not, taste not, handle not, which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body, not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh." These words were written to people who were already Christians. They had died with Christ, that is, separated themselves from the rudiments (elements) of the world. They had been dead in sin but were now dead to sin. Once they were spiritually alive in Christ, separated from the sinfulness of the world. Paul asks, "Why do you subject yourselves to ordinances after the precepts and doctrines of men?" They owed no allegiance to such things. He was telling them in essence, "Hands off such things." They may have an outward appearance of wisdom, humility, and austerity, may even include treating the body with punishment to bring it into subjection, but it is not the kind of worship that God has ordained. It is rather

worship according to the devices of men and according to man's will, not the will of God. It gave the appearance of being something important, but in the sight of God it was not of any value.

Will-worship, worshipping according to the will of man, cannot please God. The very concept of worship includes submission to the will of the one worshipped. Man is not left to determine what will and will not please God. This God has determined Himself. As Jeremiah once wrote, "O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Nor is it in man to decide what worship God will accept. "There is a way that seemeth right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Prov. 14:12).

Cain attempted to worship God according to his own will rather than the way God approved. Nadab and Abihu attempted to do the same thing under the Mosaic law. Ananias and Sapphira attempted to honor God by giving but in such a fashion that brought punishment because their worship was according to their will rather than God's. We must not think that just being sincere, honest, and earnest in our efforts to serve God will suffice. If what we do is not by His authority, it is not acceptable (Col. 3:17).

Vain Worship

Closely akin to will-worship is what Jesus called "vain worship." "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:9). Proverbs 22:9, "He that turneth his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Jesus asked in Luke 6:46, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say." What we are taught is that our worship is vain if we are not following God's commands but rather doing the commands that come from men.

Vain means empty, useless, profitless, of no value. Worship that is vain does not please God. Only that which is according to His will is acceptable to Him. What we do must be done as His will directs (Col.3:17).

The simple, beautiful New Testament pattern of worship has been corrupted by additions, subtractions, introductions of rituals, form, show, display, human traditions, marred by doctrines that men have invented without God's authority. It seems that man is always trying to "improve" on God's way. They want to make it more appealing, more impressive, more meaningful. As a result they do what they like rather than what God says. They make worship elaborate, mysterious, very ceremonious, with a great show of alledged piety.

King Saul of Israel once disobeyed God's command to spare animals that he said were to be used for worship. Samuel told him to obey was better than sacrifice. In other words, worship to God was not beneficial when it was not accompanied with obedience and righteous living. God said through the prophet Hosea, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." (Hosea 6:6). God was not dismissing worship. He was emphasizing the need for righteousness alongside worship. We cannot properly worship God on Lord's Day and live in an evil way during the week. Even those who do not treat their wives properly, their prayers are hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

True Worship

But there is true worship, worship that God directs and approves. Jesus said, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24). True worship includes the right object, doing the right things, with the right attitude.

Right Object

The object of Christian worship is God. Jesus taught, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. 4:10). There is only one God (Eph. 4:4,5). We are not to worship men, idols, angels, or any such thing. Deity is the object of our worship.

Right Attitude

We must do what God's word authorizes us to do in

worship. This includes having the right heart, attitude, disposition, spirit in worship. We are to worship sincerely, earnestly, with reverence, awe, respect, giving attention, sacred homage, with the attitude to praise, with the purpose of giving glory to God, with the intent and motive to exalt Him. This is a matter of the mind or heart. Our manner of worship is as important as what we do.

This idea that worship is to be some kind of entertainment is foreign to the New Testament concept of worship. Some have services that are nothing more than entertainment productions. Some attend services to watch rather than to participate. They have the spectator complex and this is not worship that is acceptable. Every worshipper is to worship. Every act performed is to be done because of a converted heart. Each one must worship for himself. This is something nobody can do for the other or in the stead of another.

Right Act

We are to worship in truth. This has to do with the external acts of worship. They must be according to the truth. Jesus once said in His prayer to the Father, "Thy word is truth." (John 17:17). Worship is to be in truth. Therefore, worship must be as the word instructs. Our Christian "liberty" does not allow us to do whatever we want or think is proper. We are to worship as we learn from His word to worship.

Takes All Three

Therefore, we learn we are to worship the right object - God; with the right attitude of heart - in spirit; and as the word teaches - in truth, for our worship to be true worship and for us to be true worshippers. It takes all three. If one is lacking, our worship is lacking.

We may have the right object and the right spirit, but not worship in truth. We can be honest and sincere, but so are pagans. Saul of Tarsus was attempting to serve God, but he was doing it the wrong way. Apollos was "fervent in spirit" but teaching faulty doctrine.

People can have good intentions and still not measure up to what God commands. One can think he is serving God when he is actually opposing God (John 16:2). "They shall put you out of the synagogues, yea the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

We may have the right object and even perform the right acts and our worship not be true worship because we have the wrong attitude of heart. Our motive may not be what God wants. It may be we are going through some form without sincerity. We may be trying to impress others rather than honor God. We may be flippant, flighty, irreverent during worship which would make our worship vain. Paul spoke of some who would teach the truth but out of a heart of envy and strife, thinking to raise factions opposed to the authority of Paul as an apostle (Phil.1:15-17). What they taught was true but their motive for doing it was wicked. 2 Timothy 3:5 speaks of some having a "form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof." Going through a ritual, a ceremony, making some outward observance is part of worship, but certainly not the total of it. Even partaking of the Lord's Supper can become "eating and drinking damnation to oneself," (1 Cor. 11:29) if he does not discern, understand, appreciate the significance of what he is doing and what he is memorializing.

If our worship is to be true worship it must include the right object, the right acts, the right attitude. These things are determined from the Scriptures.

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THE CONVERSION OF EVE AND THE JEWS

We study two conversions, one of which is seldom considered a conversion, but which includes all the principles involved in conversion. Conversion means "changing from one state or condition to another." It is turning toward one direction and away from another. We need to understand the process of conversion, inasmuch as conversion is essential to salvation. If we are not converted, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3). In both instances under consideration, there was a conversion, a change from one relationship

to another. One conversion was turning away from God while the other was a conversion turning toward God. One was a conversion from serving God to serving the devil. The other was a conversion from serving the devil to serving God.

Process of Eve's Conversion

First, let us consider the process involved in the conversion of Eve, the first woman. We first find her with her husband, Adam; innocent, guiltless of sin, fit company for fellowship and association with Deity also. They were living in the paradise of the Garden of Eden.

But a bit later on we find them both subjected to death, in sin, suffering the consequences of their sin and being cursed because of sin. We find them no longer in the Garden but driven from it. They no longer have access to the tree of life. They are even barred from entering again into the Garden.

What had happened? That which took place was a conversion, a change of state and condition. Eve, by the process of conversion had turned from God.

Message Heard

Notice the steps taken in her conversion. First, there was a preacher. The preacher was the devil, in the form of a serpent. He had a message. "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made, And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die, For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen.3:1-5). Of course, his message was a lie, but sprinkled with truth to make it appear reasonable and possible. The death that they would suffer would be a spiritual death,

not a physical one. So in one sense the devil was telling the truth, but misrepresented the situation to the woman. That they would become as gods appealed to her vanity, but was totally a lie. That their knowledge of good and evil would exist more than before was true because they would become aware of how they had disobeyed God. The devil was preaching a message that some still preach today; once saved, always saved. Once a child of God, you cannot fall so as to be lost. That doctrine originated with Satan in the Garden of Eden. And Eve believed it.

Faith

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat."(Gen. 3:6). She believed the lie the devil preached. It all seemed so right to her. It appealed to her. She felt that it was the thing to do. She was deceived (1 Tim. 2:14). How many times people feel safe, feel secure, think what they are doing is to their advantage, but they are so wrong about it. People can believe a lie. And they can feel real good while believing it. But it is still a lie and they will suffer for believing it.

Obedience

Take note, that the suffering did not begin the moment she believed. She was not disobedient to God until she actually acted. Her faith alone was not what brought about her conversion, but her action based upon her faith, misguided though it was. The Bible says, "She did eat." Her faith, coupled with her obedience brought about her conversion from being in God's good favor to God's displeasure. That accomplished her conversion. Note the specific steps taken in Eve's conversion; she heard a lie, believed a lie, obeyed a lie, and thereby became guilty and disinherited, driven from the Garden. There was the change of state and condition. There was the change of relationship with God. Death entered the world. Sin entered the world.

Not a Direct Operation

Eve was not converted by some kind of direct operation of the devil, even though the devil's agent, the serpent, operated. She had a part in her conversion and the devil had a part. The devil through his messenger, sent the message. She, hearing the message, believed and obeyed it. The two working together converted Eve.

Process of the Jews's Conversion

The Jews on Pentecost were lost when the sun rose that day, but when the day ended, they were in the company of the saved. Peter reminded them that they had cried and consented to the death of Jesus about fifty days before. Though they did not all realize it, they killed the Savior for whom they had looked and of whom the prophets had spoken. His blood was upon them and their children. But later we read of how 3,000 having heard Peter's sermon, were baptized, and added to the saved, the church (Acts 2). What had happened? They had been converted. A change had taken place. What was the process of that change? In principle, it was the same process by which Eve was converted from acceptance to disapproval.

Message Heard

There was a preacher, the inspired apostle, Peter. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he preached a sermon proving that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ. The essentiality of the message is apparent in this conversion, as in all other that are recorded for us. But hearing the message was not sufficient to accomplish the entire process.

Faith and Obedience

The hearers believed what they heard and were "pricked in their hearts." The sword of the Spirit, the word of God, had cut to their conscience and the evidence had convinced them of the truthfulness of the things Peter was saying. They heard, they believed, but they were not yet converted. They obeyed the commands given. Being told to repent and be baptized, those that received the word did exactly that, (Acts 2:38,41). They were added to the saved (Acts 2:47). They heard the truth, believed the truth, obeyed the truth. The difference was the lie Eve heard and the truth the Jews heard. The process was the same in principle.

Conversion : Essential

Let us fully understand the necessity of conversion for salvation. When Paul was describing the condition of people before they became Christians, he wrote, "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. "(Eph. 2:12). It is by our sins that we are separated from God (Isa. 59:1,2). We all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). We cannot be saved in that state. There must be a changed situation that comes through conversion.

The reason for conversion is "that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). Conversion is necessary to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3). Let no man deceive himself by thinking he can go to heaven any other way than by the process of conversion.

All this talk about a mysterious experience, some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, following some man-made plan, however honestly and sincerely it may be followed, will not suffice. Man is saved only by being converted. It matters not how wealthy or poor, healthy or sick, how learned in the ways of the world or lacking in such learning, how great his influence or how small it may be, nor any other differentiations that exist among people. Except we are converted, there is no heaven for us. For this reason the knowledge of the process and principles of conversion are so vital to us.

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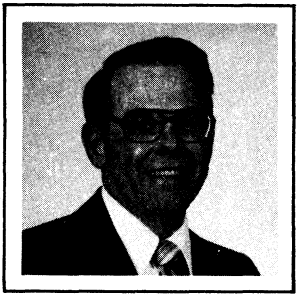

JAMES W. BOYD

YOU NEED TO KNOW

The leading organizations that are promoting "liberation for women" are nothing less than humanistic and pro-communistic organizations. Their leaders are radical in their anti-God, down-with-the-family doctrines. They cry long and loud that all they want is equal rights, but that is as far from the real truth as darkness is from light. That is more of a cover than a conviction.

While they were ridiculing the opponents of the recently defeated Equal Rights Amendment, and denying the havoc that would have upon society, they slyly covered the real truth and put forth strained efforts atop efforts to deceive the naive.

Humanism denies God, while claiming to dignify humans. But it seeks the destruction of Christianity, according to their own statements. While claiming to be for women and seeking civil liberty for all, their underlying goal is to uproot the family, the home, morals as taught by Christ, the church, and all Biblical teaching. Rather than bringing dignity to the human family, humanism turns the human into the animal from which they claim we all have descended.

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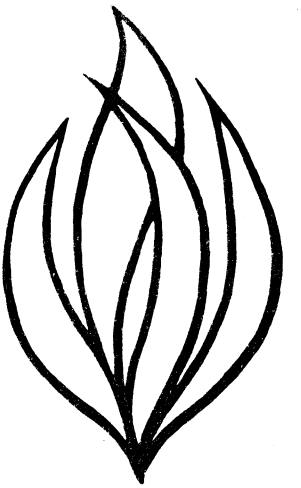

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME I NUMBER 8

MARRIAGE

Evidently the subject of marriage has been too often neglected, judging from the disintergration of so many marriages. So many have experienced tragedy in marriage that the very subject and study of it may be offensive to some. Certainly it is not the aim and purpose to discourage those who have made mistakes regarding their marriage. We usually find that those who have suffered bad marriages would prefer others avoid making the same mistakes they have made. Because there is so much controversy on the subject of marriage, any preacher approaches the study with caution and prayer. Because so many seem determined to do whatever they want to do regardless of what God teaches, it makes the study all the more difficult. We must leave out personal opinions but stick closely to that which is revealed regarding the institution of marriage.

Our text is Genesis 2:18-24. "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof: And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Divine

First, we learn that marriage is a divine institution, just as the church is a divine institution. It has come into being from the mind of God. It was brought into existence by God for the benefit of mankind. It is

regrettable that so many people have taken so lightly the divine origin and divine instruction regarding marriage. This has contributed to the many difficulties and failures that have been experienced.

It is the work of the church to proclaim God's truth regarding marriage. There is much cause for concern, seeing the moral decline in our society, our children growing up into a society where respect for marriage is lessened, where the divorce rate has reached epidemic proportions. Many marriages that do not end in divorce are not happy ones. Thousands of babies are born each year where father and mother are not married to each other. This disregard of moral purity and God's arrangement for the home is a threat to the very continuation of our nation and the liberty that we enjoy. Nations, like people, reap what they sow. Even the church is experiencing more and more divorce. Some have surrendered God's standards to accomodate what is taking place in the world and are condoning marriages that do not have approval according to Scripture. The tendency is to find some way around the strictness of God's law because marriage failures have become so frequent.

But if we will pay any attention to history, we will see that marriage and the home have been, and still are, the primary bulwark of strength to any nation. From the homes come those who run the government, the teachers, the religious leaders, the workers. The home, more than any other institution sets the moral climate for the society. When the home is degenerate, what can be expected for the rest? If we will consider such nations as Israel, Judah, Greece, and Rome, we will see that disrespect for the home has led to the collapse of the system altogether.

What We Can Do

There is not very much any one individual may be able to do to stem the destructive tide of marital failure. But each can make his, or her, own personal contribution by making sure his, or her, own marriage is proper. We all need to learn and abide by God's own will

regarding the laws, duties, privileges, and all other matters pertaining to marriage. The most productive effort is probably in the area of preventing problems by having the right kind of marriage rather than correcting problems already existing. This is because so many people are dead set to do as they see fit. If they are united with one unlawfully and unscripturally, few will terminate that adulterous situation. But if we can teach and persuade the unmarried before they get into an unscriptural marriage to build correctly, the problem can be lessened.

Marriage Is For Life

The rule of God is, as we can see from our text, that God intends for a man and woman who come together as husband and wife to live together in that relationship until they are separated by death. Matt. 19:3-6, "The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." This is God's law under Christ, which is God's law from the beginning. Forsaking all others, mates are to cleave to each other. Once married, stay married. This concept of trying it a while, and if it does not work then divorce, is of the devil. This idea has been glamorized into social acceptability through movies, television, multi-marriages of prominent people and the abandonment of respect for God's word.

There are but two causes for terminating marriage. Let us hasten to add here that gaining some kind of legal termination does not mean that God accepts what the courts decree. As Christians, we can never allow God's will to be set aside by the lesser authority of the laws of the land. Courts will allow divorces for almost any, every, even no, cause. But God does not recognize such perversion of His institution.

Death terminates the marriage. Romans 7:3, "So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." Let us emphasize that death is the only honorable way for a marriage to end. The other way that God allows involves sin.

Grounds for Divorce

God will allow divorce on the grounds of adultery. Matt. 19:7-9, "They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." God does not simply accept divorce. It must be for the reason specified. In the event of fornication, there is always the avenue of forgiveness. But God does not demand nor expect one to continue to live with a mate who is unfaithful to the marriage vows.

A man and his wife may be separated, but if so, there are two alternatives open to them. They may either be reconciled, or remain unmarried (1 Cor. 7:11). The Biblical teaching is, when you marry, stay married.

Privileges and Duties

Marriage brings privileges and duties to those involved. Eph. 5:22-25, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Here are general instructions to both husbands and wives. Wives are to

be subject to husbands. Husbands are to love their wives. When we consider the relationship that is to exist between Christ and the church, then we will see what God wants in marriage.

Mates have physical duties to each other. One of the purposes of marriage is the satisfaction of the sexual desires of the body. 1 Cor. 7:1-5, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me, It is good for a man not to touch a woman; nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence, and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."

Possibly something that needs emphasis is that the sexual union of husband and wife is God-ordained, pure, holy, and honorable. Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." That which is sacred and holy in marriage is base and immoral outside of marriage. There is nothing vulgar, unclean, or immoral in the sexual union of mates in marriage. But all such relations before marriage or outside of marriage is sinful before God. That there is widespread disregard of the sanctity of marriage is so blatant and obvious. Everywhere one turns he sees presented to him situations calling for immorality, sexual union outside of marriage, adultery, fornication, unfaithfulness to partners. This has become the norm in modern entertainment. While it is wrong to teach your children that physical satisfaction of the sex drive is evil and impure, it is also wrong not to teach them that God has provided for that but only in marriage. All of this cheap talk about liberties, new morality, etc., is nothing but sexual bondage in sin and the same old immorality that has damned humanity through the ages.

Cooperation

The husband and wife ought to cooperate in every phase of marriage. This includes financial matters, social affairs, the rearing of children, making decisions that affect one another and the family. They are in a partnership, two working as one. No longer are matters to be considered on the basis of me, my, and mine on the one hand, and you and yours on the other. In marriage it is we, us, ours. There must be that togetherness.

Marry In The Lord

Let us also urge that Christians marry Christians. Sometimes the question is asked, "Is it wrong for a Christian to marry one who is not a Christian?" According to everything that experience shows, one of the major causes of marital strife is the failure to agree religiously. There is absolutely no question but the Christian places great handicaps on his, or her, soul by marrying a non-Christian. Not only do they jepordize their own souls, but those of children that may be born into that marriage. While it is true that God recognizes marriages between people who are not Christians, and between people one of whom is a Christian and the other who is not, this does not mean God is pleased with that relationship. How can there be the supremacy of Christ in a home when one of the mates do not even respect Christ as the Savior, and has not obeyed His gospel? The chances of success, happiness, and spiritual contentment are hindered immeasurably when a Christian acts unwisely by marrying a non-Christian. So many who do this are led into apostasy because of the influence of the non-Christian mate that gradually erodes their faith and confidence in Christ.

Some are heard to contend how things worked out so well for them. And this is true. Many have been converted because they married a Christian even though it was a mixed marriage. If that be the case with anyone, let them be grateful that both are now united in Christ. But what of the encouragement given to others who married outside the church and now have left the church?

We ought never encourage people to marry someone in order to convert them. And how can the Christian really impress their faith on the non-Christian when, as is so often the case, the matter of religion is hardly considered in making the marriage? While it may not be a sin in every case, although in some instances it would surely be, it can be said without any doubt that it is unwise, dangerous, and against what God prefers.

Causes of Failure

As we think of the causes of marital failure, high on the list is the strife over finances, suspicion and jealousy, the refusal to have children, being so selfishly interested in one's own interests to the neglect of the other, immaturity. All these things go to break up the home.

As the person contemplates marriage, one of the first concerns should be, "Can I help this person go to heaven? Can this person help me go to heaven?" Are we on a relatively social, economic, educational level? There must be compatibility. If that is lacking, there will be contention and strife. Broad differences will provoke tensions.

The subject of marriage is so broad and encompassing that it is impossible to do more than just touch the various areas of concern, each of which deserves detailed study. But if we could only get people to give more thought and study with a greater respect to God's design and purpose in marriage, we would all profit and our homes would be more stable.

The happiest, most successful marriage is that between two Christians, who establish a home where Christ reigns supreme, rearing children to be Christians, living and loving as God has intended. God, who made the human fanily , knows better than anyone else what is required to make that human family happy and complete. If we would only listen to God!

* * * *

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR IS HARD

There are many options open to man as to how to live. There are various roads that he can travel through life. Each of us is constantly confronted with the necessity to choose the way we shall go. These ways can be classified under two general categories.

Two Ways

One category consists of "the good way" (Jer. 6:16), "the strait and narrow way" (Matt. 7:13,14), what Peter calls "the right way" (2 Peter. 2:15), "the way of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:21), "the more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31), "the way of holiness" (Isa. 35:8), "the way of death" (James 5:19,20; Prov. 14:14), "the way to hell" (Prov. 7:27), " the false way" (Ps. 119:104), and "the way of the transgressor" (Prov. 13:15). Our lesson will center on this last description, "the way of the transgressor." It is not that this way differs from the other descriptions given that lead to destruction, but it emphasizes the plight of the transgressor.

Who is a transgressor? This refers to the sinner, the one who sins against God by violating God's will. 1 John 3:4, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin in the transgression of the law." Paul contends that all have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

What Is Sin?

How do we sin? How does the Bible define sin? First, all unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17). The failure to do good is sin (James 4:17). To violate one's conscience is sin (Rom. 14:23). Sin is the result of temptation and surrendering thereto (James 1: 13-15). The avenues of temptation are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

Why We Sin

Why do people sin? Some sin because they love the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19). Some sin

because of weakness (Rom. 14:1), while others sin due to ignorance (1 Tim. 1:13). Sin is often nothing but outright rebellion (Heb. 10:26). But whatever may be the motivation causing sin, and whatever be the reasons behind it, when one sins he becomes a transgressor. And Scripture teaches that "the way of the transgressor is hard."

Satan would not have you think so. He would persuade you that the way of the transgressor is the way to get the most out of life. He shows you how sin brings comfort, pleasure, fame, power, and what is mistakenly called "a good time." Always remember that no time is "a good time" when it is not good in the sight of God. But that is one of the devil's deceptive devices. We cannot deny that sin has its rewards (Heb. 11:25). The pleasure of sin is what makes sin so attractive. But the reward of sin that appeals to us is temporary, fleeting, deceiving. Like thin ice on the pond, it seems adequate enough but becomes a trap that leads to death. We must be mindful of the ultimate wages of sin (Rom. 6:23) which Paul calls "death," with reference to spiritual death, or separation from God. However enjoyable and temporarily beneficial sin may appear to be, as Moses once said to his fellow countrymen, "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Num. 32:23). "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal. 6:7,8).

Hardship And Sin

Many hardships come in life because of our sins. Not all hardship that we suffer is due to our own personal sins. Sometimes people suffer because of the sins of others. We are not talking about bearing the guilt of another's sins, but there are other consequences of sin that those other than the sinner sometimes have to endure. Children often bear great hardship because of the sins of their parents. Innocent people suffer because of the wickedness of those around them. Jesus presented such in Luke 13:1-5 when He asked His hearers

if they believed the ones Pilate killed or the ones upon whom the tower of Soloam fell were more wicked than others. Of course, they were not. Tragedy and hardship often befall people and it is not because of their own sin. Jesus taught the same thing in John 9:1-3 when His disciples asked Him who had sinned that a man was blind. Jesus said neither the man nor his parents had sinned that caused his blindness. Sometimes people ask, "Why did God allow this to happen to me?" "What evil have I done to deserve this or that?" What a person suffers may simply be something that "is common to man," and not because of any transgression on his part. Even godliness can produce persecution. Consider the life of Paul (2 Tim. 1:11,12; 2:9,10; 3:12). Jesus taught, Matt. 5:10-12, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Sometimes people lay the blame on God for their difficulties, however, when the problems are simply common to human existence, whether good or evil.

But there are those hardships that we impose upon ourselves because of our wicked lives. It is this self-imposed difficulty and hardship that we want to investigate. There are many Biblical examples of such things.

Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve certainly brought hardship on themselves by their transgressions of God's instructions. Created in purity and sinlessness, placed in the Garden of Eden, given every provision, denied nothing except the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they were tempted and fell beneath it. Did it make a difference? Certainly it did. Genesis 3:16-19, "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said,

Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return." Paul told the Romans that death entered the world through that first sinful pair (Romans 5:12). Their hardship was the result of their own actions.

Cain

Cain, the first murderer, a self-willed man who worshipped God according to his own way rather than God's way, was cursed because of his wickedness. He tried to cover his sins by pretending he knew nothing about them. He was jealous, full of hate, angry and it led to his act of murder. He was bemoaning his fate of being a fugitive and a vagabond, but it was all his own fault. He proved that the way of the transgressor is hard.

Israel

A study of the history of the Israelites is a demonstration before us that this powerful proverb teaches the truth. Delivered from Egypt, they showed their lack of faith in God by listening to the ten faithless spies. Because they followed not God's directions, they suffered the hardship of wandering in the wilderness for forty years until only those twenty years old and below were still living, except Joshua and Caleb. But their hard way was self-imposed. Their transgressions brought it upon them.

Achan

Look at the man named Achan who took of the spoils of the city of Jericho that belonged to God's treasury. He buried his takings in his tent to attempt to hide his misdeed, only later to be discovered and put to

death for sins. But who was at fault? God had given instructions and he decided to disobey them. The way he chose was hard.

David

David is one of the best witnesses to the truth that the way of the transgressor is hard. At the height of his reign, David neglected his duty, lusted, committed adultery, tried to cover his sins even by the murder of a loyal subject. Yes, he was forgiven of his transgression, but the consequences of it ruined the remaining portion of his life. This man, once a man after God's own heart, was cursed with hardship from within his own family throughout his remaining days. First, there was the death of the child conceived by Bathsheba. Then, he suffered the shame of a son raping a daughter, one son murdering another, two sons raising rebellions. He never had a moment of peace thereafter. It took the great prophet of God, Nathan, to make David realize his sin and the enormity of the consequences of it. But who could deny that David proved that the way of the transgressor is hard.

Judas

What of Judas? How wonderful the thirty pieces of silver once looked to him. He was "in" with those who wanted to retain power over the people. All he had to do was to identify the Master from the midst of His disciples. It was not a big thing. It seemed so small and totally profitable. But he lived long enough to see the wickedness of his deeds, to suffer the agony of regret, but not sufficiently to repent and ask forgiveness. He repented only to the extent that he wished it had turned out differently for him. He took his own life. Was his sin worth what he reaped? Indeed, the wages of sin makes the way of the transgressor hard, even while here on earth in many instances.

Drunkard

Who would even question that the drunkard brings his hardship upon himself? He is the one to blame. The only solution to the problems of drinking is total abstainence. But there be so many who think they will never be caught up in the havoc of the alcoholic beverage, but later find themselves in poverty, or disease, or ruined lives, homes destroyed, marriages broken, sins accumulated on top of sins. What a miserable existence! And from whence came their hardship except from their own doings?

The liar, the cheat, the immoral, the thief; they reap what they sow. And their way is mined with hardship upon hardship. Even those who seemingly have the best of life even in their sins, have to face God in the judgment. They will hear the words of eternal doom and suffer the eternal punishment of hell. Who then will question the truth that the way of the transgressor is hard?

On His Behalf

Service to God in a world of evil may often produce hardship. 1 Peter 4:12-16, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering, that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of God and of Christ resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or an an evil doer, or an a busybody in other men's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in his behalf."

It makes all the difference in this world and in the next why one must suffer. What a tragedy that one's wicked life brings his hardships upon his head.

Jesus came to this earth to relieve us of the guilt of sin by providing for us the way of forgiveness. But many other consequences of sin may have to

be suffered in this life. While we are naturally concerned about that, we should be more concerned about being forgiven because if we are forgiven there will be no suffering after this life for our sins. We can bear the hardship imposed on us because of being a Christian. We can even endure the hardship caused in this life due to our sins and the sins of others, even though we ought to be aware of the law of sowing and reaping. But one thing we cannot do, and that is bear the guilt of sin. That burden is more than we can take. But we can come to Christ, exchange that burden for His yoke that is relatively light and easy. The way of the transgressor is often hard in this life and self-imposed. But the self-imposed hardship of eternal damnation can be avoided. If not, we shall know the way of the transgressor is hard.

* * * *

WHAT I CAN DO TO HELP THE GOSPEL MEETING

Most congregations will conduct one or more gospel meetings each year. The success of these efforts depends upon how well the members cooperate and work. What more brethren need to realize is their personal responsibility toward such things. Too many have the "they" attitude rather than the "we" attitude when the church conducts a meeting. For some reason many think that the duty rests only on some and not all, especially not them. That is a very mistaken attitude. A gospel meeting presents a heavy responsibility for each Christian and a great opportunity as well.

This lesson might be considered as a call to work. It is to abandon the attitude of letting the other fellow do it, and "let us have a mind to work." It is the work of everyone.

Experience shows that some will not cooperate regardless of how much they are urged and persuaded. They just do not care that much about themselves or the souls of others. We might save ourselves some time, energy, and expense to realize that the "drones" are not going to help; mark them off, let them go, and get busy with those that will work.

Experience also shows that there are some that will work and really do not need to be encouraged. They realize the work of the Lord is dependent on them and they have a duty and privilege to get involved. It is upon such people that God depends. Thank God for them.

But we are convinced that there is a group of people who really do care, who would cooperate, who want to work, but they just do not know what to do or how to go about it. All they need is a little direction and a few suggestions and they will be as busy as anyone. So it is toward that goal that we make the following expressions.

Keep The Goal In Sight

First, we need to understand what we are trying to do in a gospel meeting. Many good things are overlooked, neglected, left undone, if we lose sight of our goals and purposes. Why are we having a gospel meeting?

To Praise God

We will have this meeting to give praise to God. It will be a special and added season of worship. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24). "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve." (Mt. 4:10). "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiriual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Pet.2:5). Seeing it is our duty and privilege to worship God, this gospel meeting ought strike interest in the hearts of all of us.

To Save The Lost

The gospel meeting will also be intended to teach the gospel to those who are out of Christ. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). A gospel meeting is one effort designed to do just that. Many in the area are not New Testament Christians. Many think they are saved because they have honestly followed some human dogmas but are mistaken and

deceived. They need to hear the truth. Christians have mates, children, friends, relatives, neighbors, that at this moment are lost. The gospel is the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16). The lost must hear of their spiritual state and be made to realize that salvation is in Christ and no other (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 8:1; 2 Tim. 2:10).

To Restore The Fallen

The gospel meeting will also be directed toward those who have fallen away. They need to be revived, restored, strengthened and encouraged. Such efforts are sometimes called "revivals." It is a shame that Christians need to be revived, but we might as well face reality and admit that such is often needful."Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1). "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:19,20).

To Help Us Grow

Every Christian needs to grow. "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. 1:9-12). We must feed upon the sincere milk of the word if we are to grow (1 Pet. 2:2), and grow we are commanded to do (2 Pet. 3:18). "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

In answer to the question, what can I do to help the gospel meeting, we simply need to ask, what can I do to assist in praising and worshipping God? What can I do to help reach the lost with the word of truth? What can I do to reach out to recover the fallen brother? What part can I play in strengthening brethren? Eight suggestions, if put into practice, can prove to be most useful and helpful. In fact, it makes the difference between success and failure.

Pray

We can pray for the meeting, individually, and when we are together. "The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working." (James 5:16). "If ye shall ask anything in my name, that will I do."(John 14:14). The power of prayer is taught in the Bible. Early Christians prayed. Paul urged that we always be in an attitude of prayer. "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thess. 5:17). In a very real sense, we are asking for failure, and certainly limiting whatever success we might produce, when we fail to utilize this avenue and approach to God of prayer for the meeting, for the preacher in it, for everyone that participates in a public way, for the lost, for those who come, and for the whole effort.

Invite

Second, we can and must invite others. More than any other time of the year we have an opportunity to invite others to attend the services with a greater possibility that they just might come than at other times. Brethren, we ought not allow anyone to be lost without having at least invited them to hear the gospel. Just think of the vast multitude of people that the members of any congregation will contact in the course of a week. What if we included in our contacts some kind of invitation to the meeting? We realize that many will never come. If most do not come, and one does, that is that much more than would have been accomplished. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." (Rev. 22:17); and the bride is the church. The church is composed of us. We must invite. We ought never be

embarrassed to encourage someone to hear the gospel. It is the only means of salvation for them as well as for us.

Be Concerned

Third, we can demonstrate a genuine concern and interest in others. It was Andrew who brought Peter to Christ. It was Andrew again who was involved in bringing some Gentiles to see Jesus. It was Andrew who took the lad with his lunch to Jesus with which Jesus was able to feed the multitude. It was Andrew who demonstrated a genuine concern in the welfare of others. Someone has said that people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Not one of us ought find it difficult to express our hope to a lost one that this meeting might be the time they will choose to become a Christian. Let them know you hope for that. They need to know it matters to you whether they are saved or lost. Sometimes just a word from a person can cause one who intends to become a Christian, but has postponed and waited, to make the necessary move.

There are tracts you can give that will show your interest. Offer to study with them and to either answer their questions or find out the answers to them. You can learn what hinders them from being converted, and possibly assist in removing whatever barrier is there. What a joy it is to have a part in converting another. But it is a tragedy how many Christians never speak to another about the soul, even to our mates, friends, and precious young people.

Along this line, we can show our love toward visitors by being friendly when they come, extending to them a warm handshake and a cordial greeting. We know our visitors are welcome. But we need to make sure they know it also. Look around at any service and locate those with whom you are not familiar and introduce yourself and make them welcome.

Attend

Fourth, you can attend every service of the meeting. I still am amazed why it is that professed Christians have to be begged and urged to attend worship services. It ought be so ingrained in their hearts to do this for God that nobody would ever deliberately be absent. We can show our faith by our presence. Be an example to both young and old, members and visitors. What must the young think when the old do not attend even though they could? How discouraging it is to those who have lived faithfully when the young show little interest in matters of the soul. We make up the church. We are to be the pillar and ground of the truth. But we do not support the truth when the truth is being proclaimed and we are not there to hold up the hands of those who are preaching it. We cast our vote to cancel the meeting and close the doors when we deliberately absent ourselves from the services.

I recall how embarrassing it was to me, and to a visitor, when the visitor entered the building and asked for a certain member. It seems the member had invited him to come, but the member did not come himself. What kind of impression do you think that makes? All you have to do is ask one simple question, "Is the gospel of Christ worthy of your support?" If you answer as you ought, then you will do all you can to be present each time.

Be On Time

Fifth, try to be on time. Even though there are emergencies and unexpected things that sometimes hinder our being on time, more than likely a little more thought and planning can eliminate lateness in most cases. Being on time reflects the degree of importance that we place on the service. Furthermore, coming in late can be distracting and contribute to irreverence. Sure, it is better to come late than not at all, but the better course is to come and be on time.

Being habitually late is the result of habit in many cases. I know there are some exceptions with some

people whose responsibilities hinder them from being on time. But we are talking about the vast majority of us. What if the song leader came in late? What if the preacher dragged in after the first or second song service after service? Promptness indicates alertness and importance placed on the event. Being on time is impressive to visitors, and those outside of Christ.

When we are on time we can more easily help by sitting toward the front. We ought not act like we are almost afraid to be associated with what is taking place and holding back. We never judge another's spirituality by where they sit by itself, but too often those who are the least interested seem to just get inside the door and hurry out when the worship period ends. Sitting together, up near the front, is such as assistance to the song leader and the preacher.

Be Reverent

Sixth, when we come, let us be reverent. Reverence is a part of worshipping "in spirit." While we would not encourage a false piety, or stiffness, we would encourage entering the building in the proper attitude toward worship. This does not mean being gloomy and with a long face. Nor does it discourage greeting brethren and visitors as they come. But as the moment to begin approaches, we should come on in, take our place, let our minds focus on that which we are about to do. Just before the service is another splendid moment for a quiet and personal prayer for the services and the effectiveness of the lesson. If we must speak, let it be done softly and with the minimum of distraction. Be considerate of those around you whose minds are being turned toward the hour that approaches.

Sing

Seventh, when the time to sing praises to God begins, sing. That is a very simple matter. When the song leader announces the number of the song, or begins the song, be a participant. It is the individual duty

of the worshipper to worship. It cannot be done unless the worshipper sings. Singing can make a good meeting. Singing is the way that God has authorized us to worship Him in song (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). We are aware of this truth, and yet we may bring criticism on the church and on God's way by not doing it well.

Do not confuse what we are saying. We are not saying that the quality of the voices makes the singing acceptable or not. The quality of the heart is more important. But the participation in what God says do is also very telling. People who have had their tastes developed to contend for instruments of music have heard brethren do such a poor job in singing that they have remarked, "Well, you need something." Now that hurts. But it is because those who would stand up against the instrument will not participate in what God requires.

What a sorry sight to see some brother or sister "just sitting there" during the song service. What an example! At times there may be some physical reason one cannot lift up his voice in song, but those times are the exceptions. With some, not singing is the rule. We should do the best we can even if we are not accomplished singers. That is not what is so important anyway. We can sing out, keep up the the leader, think solemnly and seriously on the sentiments being expressed. We can learn from the songs because our singing is supposed to be a way of teaching and admonishing one another. Good singing inspires, comforts, encourages, provokes noble thoughts, can even move one to obedience. Why should not each one be found doing his or her part as best he or she knows how?

Make Personal Application

One final suggestion as to how we can help make the gospel meeting as successful as it can be; and that is, when the lessons are preached, take them to heart, make a personal application of the lesson. After all, what is being presented is God's truth for each one. What a mistake we would make to think that only "the other fellow" ought to be listening. To get the most

from any sermon, we do well to have our Bibles with us, to read with the preacher, to search for the accuracy of his teaching. We can take notes and that will assist us in taking the lesson into the heart with understanding. It will also provide a way of review after the lesson is over. See what terms, what phrases, what thoughts are presented that possibly you have not considered in just that way prior to the lesson.

If you can truthfully and conscienciously do so, comment to the preacher about the lesson, whether it was helpful or interesting. And remember, if he is in error, you have a duty to him to help him understand the way of the Lord more perfectly. You can courteously point out to him wherein he may need more study on some matter. Or you may encourage him by kind and supportive words for the truth he has preached and the manner he has preached it. But personal application is the way to gain the most from any sermon or lesson.

In summary, we can assist the gospel meeting by prayer, inviting others, showing genuine concern and interest in others, attending, being on time, being reverent, singing, listening and applying the lesson to ourselves.

But how can one really support the gospel if he has refused to obey it? Do we not realize what we are saying to others when we do not respond to the gospel? Each of us say to those around us, "Be and do as I am and as I do." We may not even intend to send a message at all, but we do nonetheless. We are sending a message to our brethren, children, friends, and to the Lord. The gospel meeting is a very serious event during the course of a year. Example and influence can be utilized so beneficially, or can be used to the distraction from the gospel, and contributing to the condemnation, rather than salvation, of people.

The next time the congregation where we worship has a gospel meeting, how much will you help?

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JWBoyd

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ARE YOU REALLY A REASONABLE PERSON?

Would you like to take a brief test of yourself?

Suppose Christianity is false and there is no life after this, no heaven, no reward. What has the believer lost? He is no worse off than the unbeliever. He has lived the best life one can live while on earth.

Suppose Christianity is true and there is life beyond this, a heaven and reward. What does the man in Christ gain? His gain is more than we can estimate.

Suppose Christianity is false, what has the unbeliever gained? Is he better off? He certainly has not lived a life that has proven beneficial to those who have gone their own way and done their own thing.

Suppose Christianity is true, and there is both heaven and hell in eternity. What has the believer lost? What has the unbeliever lost?

Now the conclusion is inescapable. Either way, whether Christianity is true or false, the Christian has the better of it. Unbelief is a one way street to nothingness or destruction.

Are you reasonable? In Christ, you cannot lose, but only gain. Out of Christ, you cannot gain, but only lose. Which is the reasonable way to go? Are you really sure you are a reasonable person?

But in addition to all this, we can KNOW that the way of Christ is true because of the irrefutable evidence. It is not a matter of which is best even if Christianity is not true. It is a matter of truth because Christianity is true and can be proven so.

We do not live in a state of "agnosticism" and "maybe so." Even if we did, the best path is that which we find in the Bible. But we live in a state of realism and fact. Reasonableness is to be a Christian. Are you reasonable?



JAMES W. BOYD

TODAY'S ISRAEL AND PROPHECY

Political and religious leaders have advanced a false notion regarding the present day Israel. They are often heard to refer to Biblical prophecies and apply them to the existent nation. Especially do they claim that the Bible promises the land of Palestine to Israel. Israeli people cite the Bible as the basis for their claim of certain territories. They fail to realize that those prophecies have long ago been fulfilled (Joshua 23:45;23:14). To look to the Bible for any word concerning Israel today is to look for that which does not exist.

That Palestine would be Israel's homeland was a conditional promise, and ancient Israel violated the conditions (Josh. 23:15,16).

It is a serious matter when the destruction of millions may well hang in the balance in a struggle for territory and one side leans erroneously on the Bible for its claim. There is no more reference to present-day Israel in the Bible than there is Guam, Argentina or Dixie. Such notions spring from premillennialism, which is a false doctrine taught by many denominations.

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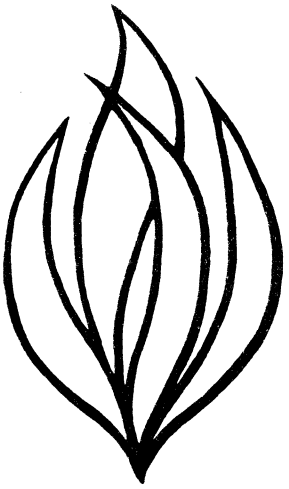

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THE FIVE SPIRITUAL STATES OF MANKIND

Our lessons will eventually call upon each of us to make a very serious self-examination. We shall be given the opportunity to determine in what spiritual state we presently are and what alternatives are before us. The Bible presents to us five spiritual states once we are born into this life. They are the state of innocence in infancy and childhood, the sinful state of the world,the saved state in the church, and the two eternal states of heaven or hell. Every state has entrances and exits except heaven and hell have no exit. For the purpose of our study we shall not include the intermediate state of the dead between death and the judgment because once we leave this life in death, the final and eternal state will already be determined and nothing in the intermediate state will alter that finality. We will reserve a study of that hadean, in-between state, for another lesson.

Innocence

We enter into the state of innocence upon being physically born. We are helpless, dependent on others, but spiritually innocent. We are aware that some teach that a baby is born into the world totally depraved, wicked and damned. But the Scriptures do not so teach, but actually puts emphasis that such is not the case.

The infant is not capable of knowing good from evil. We read in Deut. 1:35, when God placed the pronouncement of death upon those Israelites who disobeyed him on the way to Canaan, He excluded the little ones. "Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers." But then He added, "Moreover, your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it." (Deut. 1:39).

Luke 18:15-17, "And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them, but when his disciples saw it they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto

him and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." Matthew 18:3,4, and 19:14, teach that one must be as a child to be a part of the kingdom. If children were lost, then why would Jesus want anybody to become like children? The fact is, children have not ever been lost, and they do not need to be saved because they are still safe in their innocence. One must become innocent, pure, clean, spiritually undefiled as children are. We can know that children are safe. They are not yet accountable and responsible before God. Should death overtake the infant or young child, we need have no anxiety concerning his soul.

Accountability

But should that child grow to maturity to the age and ability that he can know good and evil, and is responsible and accountable to God, he, like all others who grow to such a level, will sin. He will obey unrighteousness and his sin will condemn him. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23). "We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." (Rom. 3:9). Sin entered the world through Adam, but all are sinners who partake of sin for themselves. And Paul said, "For that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12) Jesus said, "Everyone that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin." (John 8:34). "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). Those once innocent can either obey wickedness or can obey righteousness. The Bible teaches that if we live through the state of innocence, we will obey wickedness, unrighteousness, and sin. This takes us from innocence into the sinful state of the world.

In The World

Those in the world are lost. Before one comes to Christ to be saved, he is described as being without Christ, alien from the people of God, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, surely lost,

and without God "in the world." (Eph. 2:12). "And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." (1 John 4:19). Why would the world need a Savior except that those in the world are lost? Christ came to save the world (John 12:47). The state of the world is undesirable to the extent that those who would follow Christ are not be be fashioned and conformed to the world. (Rom. 12:1,2). "Keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27). Friendship with the world is enmity with God. (James 4: 4). "We know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in wickedness." (1 Johm 5:19).

There are two exits from this sinful state of the world that we enter through the doorway of transgression. One exit is death; the other is obedience to the gospel. Should we leave the world by death, our doom is sealed. Those not converted to Christ and not saved shall be condemned to hell. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3). Jesus said to those who refused to believe on Him. "Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?"(Matt. 23:33). "The wages of sin is death," (Romans 6:23), and that refers to spiritual death which is an eternal separation from God. (2 Thess. 1:6-9).

In Christ

But one does not have to be overtaken in the sinful state of the world by death. He can be converted and be saved, and leave the world through the doorway provided by the grace of God. He can obey the gospel and be saved.When one obeys the gospel, he is added to the church (Acts 2:47). This is the saved state. Believing (John 3:16), repenting (Luke 13:3), confessing Christ (Luke 12:8,9), and being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) is what God commands in order to be saved. By this we are enabled to reach the saving blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9, 6:3,4). Whereas one was out of Christ, obedience to the gospel puts him in Christ. We are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). "But now in Christ Jesus ye that were once far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ." (Eph. 2:13). Salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10).

It is in the church where we have the privilege of serving the Lord as a child of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7). Faithfulness in the church will eventually mean we shall enter the eternal joys that God has for the saved in heaven.

In Apostasy

There are two exits from the church. One is the way that leads back into the world and an entanglement in sin once again. Once saved we can fall. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12, 2 Peter 2:20-22). "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment given unto them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." The doctrine "once saved, always saved" is a false doctrine and we dare not be deceived thereby. Should one return to the sinful state of the world again and die there, his hope of heaven is destroyed.

One who has fallen away can return to the saved state by being restored. He does not do the same as he did before to enter the saved state. But, as we learn from the example of a man named Simon, a former sorcerer who heard the word, believed the word, and was baptized, he later sinned, and was once again in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. He was told by Peter to "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." (Acts 8:22). A fallen brother can be restored. Efforts should be made to restore him (James 5:19,20; Gal. 6:1). Once restored, he can renew his service to God. But if death overtakes him in his fallen state, Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62).

But, there is that other and glorious exit from the church or saved state, and that is to die "in the Lord." "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth, yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them." (Rev. 14:13). "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." (Phil.1: 27). "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him." (1 Thess. 4:14). "For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give unto me in that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

In Eternity

The eternal domain of the spirit of man will be either hell, the place of punishment, or heaven, the place of reward. Once we enter in whichever it may be, there we will ever exist. Luke sixteen teaches there is no crossing over from one realm to another in the hadean world, the state of the dead. The condition in which we die is the determining factor for all eternity.

Man is enabled to trace his existence by coming to a knowledge of the states into which he can enter and exist. Being born, he can live in innocence for a while until he is capable of being accountable to God, if he lives to that age. Should the infant die, heaven will be the place of the soul. Should he live, he will sin and sin separates him from God. He enters the lost state. Should he die in that state he will enter hell and therein remain. But he can escape hell and leave the sinful world by obeying the gospel and becoming a member of the body of Christ which is the church. If he remains faithful in the church and dies in that faithful state, heaven will be his home eternally. He can fall from his saved state back into the world. Then he can either be restored to the saved state or remain in the world and suffer the terrible fate of the lost.

Where Am I?

The pressing matter confronting every thinking person is, where does he now exist? What will be the destiny of my soul if I remain and continue as I am? Having left infancy, am I still in the sinful world? Shall I exit that state by death or by obedience to the gospel? If I am in the saved state, shall I fall away or remain faithful? If I have already fallen, shall I remain back in the world or be restored? There are only two eternal destines presented to us in the Scripture, heaven or hell. Each one is going to one or the other. But each one has the power to choose which it will be.

* * * *

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

In Mark twelve we read of several matters concerning Jesus. We read about His teaching the parable of the vineyard that was let out to the unthankful husbandmen. When time came to receive the fruit of the vineyard the husbandmen caught the servants and beat them, sending them away empty. More servants were sent and they were also rejected. Finally, the son of the owner of the vineyard was sent, but the husbandmen killed the son and took the inheritance for themselves. The theme of the parable was applicable to the way the Jews were treating Jesus. They were rejecting the stone that was to be the cornerstone. They were mistreating the Son of God sent unto them by the Father.

As the chapter continues we read of various questions that were asked of Jesus, mostly to tempt Him and try to find fault with whatever answer He gave. One question was, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (Mark 12:28). While the motive behind the question is not revealed to us, we can suppose that it may not have differed from the evil motives that were behind the other questions. A parallel account of this question is found in Matthew 22. The answer Jesus gave is recorded in Mark 12:29,30. "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God

is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment."

Two Points- Must And Can

Two points spring to the foreground in His answer. One, people must give themselves completely to the service of God. Whatever this demands is what is required. Two, Jesus reveals that we most certainly can give ourselves completely to God's service. He does not require that which we cannot do. As we study it is our intent to provoke us to want to give ourselves completely to God's service, and learn what that means, being aware that such is not only required but expected and possible.

With Thy Mind

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind." The mind refers to the intellect of man. It is that part of man that thinks. We probably do not realize how important what we think really is. Prov. 23:7, "For as he thinketh in his heart so is he." It is not that we are what we think we are, but we are what we think. Our thinking determines what we really are in the sight of God who knows the mind of man.

It should go without having to greatly emphasize it that we need to think on those things harmonious to the will of God. But we can know the will of God only by studying the Scriptures. The noble people of Berea searched the Scriptures daily to see what was so (Acts 17:11). We are directed, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15). We are told to hold fast the faithful word as has been taught that we may exhort and convict the gainsayers by sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). Unless we know what the will of God is, we cannot speak the things which become sound doctrine (Titus 2:1). Our thoughts should be on things true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report (Phil. 4:8). But we do not

stop in our service to God with only an intellectual understanding and meditation on His word, lest our religion be only cold, formal, ritualistic and lacking in the sincerity expected.

With Thy Heart

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Sometimes the Bible uses the word "heart" in the sense of the mind of man. Obviously, inasmuch as both terms are used here, some distinction between them is intended. In this passage, the heart refers to the feelings of man, his emotions. With the heart a man loves. David is an example of a man who loved God with all his heart. As one reads the Psalms, especially Psalm 100, this becomes evident. There was great emotion involved within David as he thought on God.

It is to be regretted that people will go to extremes first one way, then another, in matters of emotion in religion. Some lose control of themselves and act in mannerisms that are unbecoming to a Christian. Others are so fearful of demonstrating any emotion that they appear uncaring, cold, and hard of heart. A religion that over-emphasizes the feelings is sure to lead one astray. Feelings are sometimes considered as evidence of what is true. This is a glaring deception. What one believes is true will affect one's emotions, but one can have emotions and feelings of various kinds, but they are not evidence that what one believes is true. When we obey the commandments of our Lord, we are showing our love for Him in a way He directs (John 14:15). When we do obey and thereby have knowledge of our relationship with the Lord, it is not unusual that this has an effect on our emotions.

The emotional side of man is a most unreliable guide, however. When our feelings become the basis of our service to God, rather than what the word teaches, we will be led to do what makes us feel good more than what God approves. On the other hand, knowing we have done that which God approves does make us feel good. But emotions follow obedience , and are not to be

relied upon as evidence that we have done correctly.

With Thy Soul

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul." The soul of man is not easily defined because it is used in different sense in the Bible. Mostly, it is that part of man that is created in the spiritual image of God. It is the spirit of man. While the Bible sometimes speaks of the soul of animals, there it is used with reference to life, animalistic life, that is characteristic of both humans and animals. But the human has a quality that does not coincide with that of animals. Man is a spirit, in the spiritual image of God, of which God is the Father (Heb. 12:9).

Sometimes the word "psyche," that is translated "soul," is also translated "life." (See Matt. 20:28). "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The word "life" is the same word as "soul" in our text. So the idea of loving the Lord with all thy soul is that we are to love God to the full measure of life, the full capacity of our existence. There should be nothing about life that is not governed by and overwhelmed in a love for God. A full and complete submission to Him is embodied in this teaching.

With Thy Strength

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength." Like the other statements, this is still another expression of complete devotion to God. Our strength refers to our talents, abilities, energies. We must be willing to spend and be spent in His service. This would require that we not be conformed to this world, but be transformed (Rom. 12:1,2). We do not belong to ourselves. We have been bought with a price. We belong to God. The price paid was the blood of God's Son (1 Cor. 6:19,20; Acts 20:28). "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of

men." (1 Cor. 7:23).

The first commandment, when obeyed, will be the determining factor in everything we do in life. Love for God will not be just a part of our existence. It will dominate our existence and control what we do in every phase of life. When we become Christians we should not be merely responding to God's commands, or running from hell and running toward heaven, though this is involved. We should be making a complete surrender of our will to His. It must be a commitment that the way of God for man will be the way of life for us. This is what loving God with all the mind, heart, soul and strength means and includes.

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CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS

In this sermon we propose to examine the sacred record how this man, Cornelius, was converted. Just what was involved? We shall refer to the accounts of the events that took place at his house as given in Acts 10, 11 and 15. While we want to learn what did occur, we shall also give some time to false doctrines that have arisen from a misuse of this record. So it is with the hope that another might be saved that we turn our attention to the conversion of Cornelius.

From Acts 10:1,2, we learn that Cornelius was a Roman soldier, a centurion, which meant he had charge of a hundred men. When we read of his good qualities some might conclude that the man was not lost and not in need of salvation. Surely, if any man could be saved by his own worth, Cornelius would be the man. He was devout, one that feared God, had led his family to fear God, gave alms to those in need, and was a praying man. Verse 22 teaches he was highly thought of among the Jews, even though he was a Gentile and one of the army that kept the Jews in occupation.

Miracles In The Record

As we read, we shall discover that three miracles

were recorded in revealing the story of his conversion. But we must not jump so hastily as to think miracles necessary today in the conversion process. We shall see that the miracles were incidental to the actual conversion process. The first miracle was Cornelius seeing a vision (verse 3). God took notice of his prayers for they came up to God as a memorial before God. Just what was the content of this man's prayer we are not told. There is a difference between God taking notice of one's prayer and God promising to answer the prayers of those who are not His children. God takes notice of everything. But there is the assurance from God that the privilege of prayer belongs to those in Christ.

Cornelius' Vision

Cornelius saw an angel and heard him speak. But please notice that the angel did not tell him the way of salvation. Nor did the angel miraculously move the heart of Cornelius and save him. Rather, Cornelius was told to send to Joppa for Simon Peter, and when Peter would come, "He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." (Acts 10:6). So we see the bringing of the preacher and the one needing conversion together. There was not any by-passing of the word of God; no direct operation of the Holy Spirit to save the man; nothing but the instructions to get the man who knew the plan and the man would tell the plan. This miracle served the same purpose as the angel telling Philip to join himself to the chariot of the Ethiopian in Acts 8. It served the same purpose as the Lord telling Annanias to go to the street called "Straight" and to find Saul of Tarsus. The teaching of the Bible that instructs Christians to "go into all the world and preach the gospel" serves the same function in the process of conversion today. The messenger with the word must be heard.

Cornelius wasted no time in sending for Peter (Acts 10:7,8). Now the scene shifts to Joppa and the apostle Peter and events that transpired while the men of Cornelius made their way toward Joppa.

Peter's Vision

In Joppa, Peter saw a vision (Acts 10:9-16). A sheet was let down that contained all manner of four-footed beasts, wild beasts, creeping things and fowls. Peter, a Jew and one who had been taught under Judaism not to eat certain foods, was commanded to kill and eat. Peter refused on the grounds that he had never done such a thing regarding the "unclean" beasts and fowls. But again the voice said, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." This was done thrice.

The message of the vision is obvious. The Jews had historically looked upon the Gentiles as common and unclean. Even now, the gospel being for all men, it was not being preached to the Gentiles because of Jewish traditions that stood in the way. The Lord was impressing upon Peter the message that Peter himself had preached on Pentecost but failed to comprehend, and that is how the gospel is for all, regardless of race, nationality, ancestry, etc. The commission of Jesus to go and preach to every creature (Mark 16:15) was needful because all are lost and need salvation (Rom. 3:23). The purpose of Peter's vision was to convert Peter to the idea that the gospel is for all. It is very evident that he learned the lesson well (Acts 10:28,34).

When the men from Cornelius arrived, they told Peter their mission, were lodged for the might, and the next morning a company of ten men left for the city of Caesarea, the home of Cornelius. Those in the company were the two servants and one soldier sent by Cornelius, Peter, and six of Peter's Jewish Christian brethren (Acts 11:12). Thus far, both miracles were directed toward the same goal, namely, getting the messenger with the message to the ones who needed to hear it.

While this company made their way, Cornelius was busy gathering his kinsmen and friends together (Acts 10:24). When Peter arrived he found "many come together" (Acts 10:27). Verse 25 tells how Cornelius fell down at Peter's feet and worshipped him. Since the man

was a worshipper of God, he knew that Peter was not God. But Peter showed the impropriety of men bowing before other men in a religious sense whatever be the purpose or motive. Peter said, "Stand up, I myself am a man." Is it not somewhat significant that this man, who the pope claims to succeed, disallowed men paying such homage like that which the pope demands and receives today? Of course, the Bible says nothing of Peter being a pope, or anything about a pope at all. That is altogether Catholic tradition and not God's revelation.

Peter asked for what purpose Cornelius had sent for him, and Cornelius told Peter about the vision he had, the instructions he received to send for Peter. Then he said, "Now therefore we are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." (Acts 10:33). The two miracles had accomplished the desired result. The miracles are not needed to get the preacher and the lost together now. The Scriptures teach for the saved to teach others and the message of salvation that must be delivered. At the time of Cornelius the word was in inspired men. Now in is in the inspired Scriptures.

Peter's Sermon

What did Peter preach? What was it that Cornelius and the others present heard? First, there was the affirmation that the gospel is for all. "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respector of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." (Acts 10:34,35). Having said that, Peter begins to speak of Christ, and "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him." (Acts 10:38). He continued to discuss the facts concerning Christ, including His life, miracles, death, resurrection, and how Christ was to be the judge of the living and dead, how the prophets bore witness that He was the Son of God, and how remission of sins was through faith in Christ. He told Cornelius the same revelation that he had preached on Pentecost; that

Philip had preached to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian; that Annanias had told Saul of Tarsus. He preached the Christ and Him crucified as the Savior of mankind.

Cornelius and his household heard the word of God, the gospel of Christ. This was the purpose for which Peter had come, namely, to tell them what they ought to do. Before any can come to Christ, he must hear the word of the Lord. (Rom. 10:13-17).

Did they believe what they heard? Obviously, they did. Acts 15:9 states specifically that their hearts were cleansed by faith. Furthermore, they obeyed what they were commanded to do. Their salvation was not accomplished apart from hearing the word, believing the word, and obeying the word.

Coming Of The Holy Spirit

The purpose of this miracle was not to save Cornelius and his household. That was done by the things that Peter told them, to which they had properly responded. It was not to prove that they were already saved before being baptized, as some claim. Actually, the Holy Spirit fell upon these Gentiles as Peter began to speak (Acts 11:15). He had not yet told them "what thou oughtest to do." If the Gentiles were saved by this direct operation of the Holy Spirit, they were saved without the word being preached, heard, believed and obeyed. This would mean that it was absolutely unneccessary for Peter to have come there in the first place. The Holy Spirit could have come and saved them without sending for Peter. There would have been no need for preaching the good news of Christ. Faith comes by hearing the word (Rom. 10:17), and that is why Peter came. This miracle was not to produce faith in the hearts of Cornelius and his family. It was not to save them. It was not to prove that they were already saved without baptism in water.

What was the purpose of this miracle? We can determine its purpose by a specific statement that tells us, or by learning how it was used and what it accomplished. There is no specific statement telling us

the purpose of the miracle, such as, "The miracle was for the purpose of..." But we do learn how it was used and how those of the first century understood it.

Keep in mind that six of Peter's brethren, Jews who were now Christians, had come with Peter to this Gentile household. Keep in mind the exclusive attitude the Jews had toward Gentiles. These men did not believe the gospel is for all. They had not seen the vision that Peter saw. But verse 45 tells us that these Jews (they of circumcision) were astonished because of what took place. This miracle removed any doubt from their minds that Cornelius, as well as the Jews, were proper subjects of the gospel. These tongues were for a sign (1 Cor. 14:22) to those who did not believe something but needed to believe it. It was a sign to these Jews, who did not believe that the gospel was for the Gentiles, to show to them that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews. We know that this is the purpose because of the reaction of those who heard Peter rehearse these events later. "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." (Acts 11:18).

We do not have to have a repetition of this now for us to know that the gospel is for all. We can know this from the all-sufficient Scriptures. Again, the miracle was not a part of the conversion process, but was incidental to it, with a specific goal.

Obedience To Baptism

As Peter preached Christ, and the hearers believed what he said, Peter commanded them to be baptized. "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." (Acts 10:48). This is exactly what he had commanded those who heard him on Pentecost to do. He told them to "repent and be baptized," and told them why, "for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38). This was a water baptism that Peter commanded of Cornelius (Acts 10:47). Paul teaches that there is one baptism (Eph. 4:4,5). Peter preached and practiced water baptism. That ought to settle the matter about what

baptism is necessary to obey to be saved.

Note also that this was a command from an inspired apostle. When a command is given, one must do one of two things with it. He either obeys it or disobeys it. Can one disobey what an inspired apostle has commanded and still be pleasing to Christ who sent the apostle to teach in His name and by His authority? Of course, an honest answer to such a question is, "No."

The miracles then were for the purposes of getting the preacher to the lost, convincing Peter that the gospel was for the Gentiles, and convincing other Jews that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews. The way of salvation was by the word that was preached, the word being heard, believed, and obeyed. It is that same pattern in every record of conversion recorded in the New Testament following and beginning with the conversion of Jews on Pentecost.

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THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

"If a man die, shall be live again?" (Job 14:14). We all have asked that question. We ask it as we are by the grave of those we bury. There have been various explanations given by people as to what immortality is. Some say we are immortal only in the sense that the human race continues after we are gone. Others say we continue to live but only in the memory of those that knew us. Still others contend that our immortality is merely a continuation of our influence after our death. But what does the Bible teach about the immortality of a human being?

Solomon wrote," The dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it." (Eccl. 12:7). The death of the body does not mean the cessation of the existence of the spirit of man. Death means there is a separation of the body from the spirit. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26).

Jesus taught, "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:28,29). Certainly this contends for existence after physical death. Both good and evil shall be raised. Both enter into judgment. They are separated there because one enters life and the other enters damnation.

When Lazarus died, Jesus said, "Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the reusrrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:23-26). There is no way to deny the continued existence of man beyond the grave unless you flatly contradict the Son of God. "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matt. 22:23). At the time Jesus spoke those words, these Old Testament patriarchs had been physically dead many years. Yet, Jesus said God was the God of the living; that God was their God; and therefore they must have still existed somewhere and lived in some sense personally.

1 Corinthians 15, Paul taught the reality of the resurrection. In his concluding remarks he said, "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1 Cor. 15:53).

Moses led the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage, wandered with them for forty years in the wilderness, but because of his own transgression was not allowed to enter the promised land. He died and the Lord buried him. Yet, hundreds of years later, after John the Baptist had announced Jesus as the Christ, Christ having been born in Bethlehem, and having reached manhood and coming to the mount where He was transfigured, He had a conversaion with Moses, and not only Moses, but also the great prophet Elijah

who had also physically died long ago. "And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias, talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid." (Matt. 17:1-6). Who can read this and doubt that the Bible teaches life after death, and the immortality of the spirit of man even though the body has died? You may not agree with what the Bible teaches, but no honest man can deny that it teaches the immortality of man's spirit.

What are you worth? We are not concerned with what amount of material wealth you may have accumulated. We are talking about the most valuable of all things of your existence. What material possessions you may have will soon belong to somebody else anyway. Your physical body would bring a very small price. We are more concerned than just with the material body. Man is also a soul. "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). Man's body is but the place where his soul or spirit resides for a while.

Why Is The Soul So Valuable?

It is because it will never cease to be. Man may change cars, houses, clothes, etc. You might even rid yourself of your own body. But you must live with yourself as a spirit for eternity. The soul outlasts the physical body and all the things of this world. We are speaking of that which is the inward man, the part of man that has been created in the spiritual likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). The fact that Jesus placed such a

value on the soul proves to us that it is of great value. The fact that He died that the spirit might be saved shows the value He placed on it.

Someone may say, "I do not believe I have a soul or that I am a soul." Whether one believes it or not is not really the question. Whether the Bible is true or not is the question. The Bible affirms we are souls and spirits. But some object on the ground that the soul cannot be seen and has no measurable weight. But why should we deny something we cannot see in this matter while we accept the reality of so many other things that we cannot see? We accept the reality of their existence on the basis of evidence. So it is with the soul of man. Man's thought-ability, his mind, his reasoning capacity, are evidences that man is not merely an animal, merely physical and nothing more.

The Lost Soul

In Matthew 16:26 Christ mentioned the losing of the soul. James speaks of saving the soul (James 1: 21; 5:20). Peter speaks of the salvation of the soul (1 Pet. 1:9). He also mentions the purifying of the soul (1 Pet. 1:22). Souls can be beguiled and unstable (2 Pet. 2:14). The existence of the soul of man is not a debatable matter when one believes the message of the Bible.

Saving The Soul

What must I do to save my soul in heaven? You must first admit the truthfulness of the inspired record that you have and are a soul. You have to admit that the soul can be lost in hell as well as saved in heaven. You have to admit that the soul shall exist in one of two eternal destinies, heaven or hell. You have to admit that you cannot save yourself by yourself. You must acknowledge that God has provided a Savior and that only Savior is Jesus Christ, His Son. Then in faith, you must obey the commands to repent of your sins, confess your faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the remission

of your sins. Upon your obedience, God adds you to His church which is composed of the saved souls.

Once a saved soul, you are to live faithfully in Christ as His disciple, being the light of the world, the salt of the earth, as a city on a hill to be seen of men that they might glorify the Father in heaven. You must live in the realization that physical death will eventually overtake you as it will all others. You must realize that though you die, you shall be raised, and judged, and sentenced to heaven or hell.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10). "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." (Matt. 25:46).

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A DIFFERENT GOSPEL

Paul had taken the gospel to Galatia. People had heard, believed, obeyed. But when Paul wrote the Galatian epistle, it is clear that some were turning from the gospel Paul preached to a different "gospel." "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel." (Gal. 1:6)

"Gospel" means good news. Here it refers to the gospel of Christ (Mark 1:1), "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God." When Paul spoke of a different gospel, or another gospel, he meant something that varied from what he preached.

What We Believe Makes A Difference

It matters what one believes. Every religious message is not of equal value. Being honest and sincere in one's beliefs does not necessarily mean that what one believes is the truth. Paul described this different gospel, "Which is not another, but there be

some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." The different gospel is not good news at all but is a perversion of the true. It is forgery and counterfeit and fraudulent, having no right to be called "gospel." It a breeder of trouble. A perverted gospel causes trouble in the world and among brethren because it changes the truth, misapplies it, twists and wrests the scriptures to convey a different message than that which the Lord presented and inspired His apostles to teach.

"But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say we now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8,9). Another gospel is not what the apostles taught.

Another or different gospel is not pleasing to God. "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." (Gal. 1:10). A perverted gospel may please some people, but not God. Therefore, it makes a great difference what we teach, preach, practice, and believe.

By what authority did Paul preach what he did? "But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:11,12). The distinction belonging to what Paul preached was that it came from God. THe source made a difference.

That which the apostles taught was that in which the Holy SPirit guided them. "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26). "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall be speak, and will show you things to come.'

(John 16:13). That which was taught by the apostles on Pentecost was that which the Holy Spirit gave them to utter (Acts 2:4). What the apostles taught was given to them by the Lord. "I have given them thy word." (John 17:14). By virtue of the source of the gospel that Paul preached he could claim superiority over all else.

Anathema

What does the Bible say about those who teach a different gospel? Paul says they are to be accursed. The word is "anathema," which means cut off from God. That spells damnation. It is a most serious thing to teach other than what the apostles taught. Peter said of those who would wrest the scriptures that they did so to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16). Christ said that "every plant which my heavenly Father planteth not shall be rooted up." (Matt. 15:13). Paul warned the Corinthians of those who would preach another Jesus whom he had not preached (2 Cor. 11:3-6). Such teachers do not have God (2 John 9). They bring swift destruction upon themselves (2 Pet. 2:1). A person assumes a great responsibility to preach, and if he preaches falsely, he produces his own doom. But not only is the false teacher doomed, but those that may follow him (Matt. 15:14).

When one considers that the gospel is God's power to save, the way of eternal life, the pattern for life, the only message by which we bring glory to God, then a different gospel means none of these things. We are lost, not knowing how to live, cannot be saved by it, do not glorify God, have no hope of heaven.

Perverting The Gospel

How can a person pervert the gospel, change it, turn it into something different? Almost any message may contain elements of truth, enough to make it seem to be what it is not. The greater the likeness of the truth, the more likely it can be passed off as the genuine. Here is the subtle danger of much preaching that is heard. But it can be a different gospel. When

men add to, take from, alter, change, rewrite, teach the doctrines, creeds, traditions of men, rather than "thus saith the Lord," they are guilty of preaching a different gospel. To explain a passage is not the same as explaining it away and changing its meaning. Binding what God has not bound, loosing what He has bound, mixing truth with human philosophies, however honest the intent, is to to preach another gospel.

We are commanded to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27); to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11); using sound words, sound speech that cannot be condemned (Tit. 2:1,8); not going beyond the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9); nor being presumptious as were Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10); nor going our own way as did Cain (Gen. 4). Division and confusion is the result of a different gospel.

Guarding Ourselves Against Another "Gospel"

First, we must realize it makes a difference. So many today do not think it really matters what you say and do in religion so long as you are right on a few basics. Honesty and sincerity has become the only measure for many. But we are to try the spirits whether they be of God because many false teachers are in the world (1 John 4:1). Truth makes us free (John 8:32), but error enslaves. "Prove all things and hold fast to that which is good." (1 Th. 5:21).

When you know what the truth is , you are in a position to detect whatever is contrary to it. One of the reasons people believed false ideas in Jesus' day was because they knew not the scripture nor the power of God (Matt. 22:29). When you do not know what the Lord taught, you do not know whether you are hearing the truth or error. You may be hearing truth, but really do not know. You may be inclined to accept something that sounds reasonable, but actually it is something false. For this reason, we should search the scriptures and study (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15). The best safeguard against error is the knowledge of the truth. Is there really any other way to guard ourselves against error?

There Is One Gospel

Once we are convinced that there is but one gospel of Christ, not four, and therein is the "righteousness of God" revealed, that is, the way that God makes man righteous before Him, then being warned of the ruin of those that would teach and follow another way or a different gospel, surely those who are honest and sincere will want to please God and will be motivated to learn from the Bible what God's gospel really is.

Then, having learned it, they will want to obey it, live by it, die by it, enjoy the blessings of God that are given to those who follow the truth.

* * * * *

THE POWER OF THE WRITTEN WORD

Forty-five years ago sister Villa Duke, now over ninety years old, obeyed the gospel in Tupelo, Mississippi. She moved near the Gloster Street building and visited the services, having been a Baptist for years and some of her brothers were Baptist preachers.

Sister Duke picked up a paper called "Truth In Love" which had an article by J. Roy Vaughan that explained that when one obeys the gospel to be saved he is doing what he must also do to become a member of the church that belongs to Christ. This contradicted what she had been taught as a Baptist. She went home a searched the Scriptures of the article.

A short while later she asked J.W.Dunn, who preached at Gloster Street then,to baptize her and her daughter into Christ and His church. She has remained loyal and faithful ever since.

What a blessing that written article proved to be to her and many others.

It is our hope and prayer that A BURNING FIRE may be a help for someone, somewhere, sometime to obey the truth and remain stedfast therein. JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

DEFEND OR PRETEND?

A duty of the eldership is to protect the flock over which they have oversight from "wolves" that teach and practice a message and manner that is not according to God's revealed truth (Acts 20:28-31). Many are doing a good job in this.

Defending the truth by convicting the gainsayer (Tit. 1:9) is part of the work of elders. Churches that are led by men who are diligently teaching the truth and warning of error, defending the right and exposing the wrong, are churches that are blessed.

But some elderships want "peace at any price." They suppress any exposure of error, resist teaching that condemns error, try to keep those in their "watchcare" from knowing what the devil and his servants are saying and doing, thinking that will keep the wolf out.

But all that does is to keep the flock from recognizing the wolf when he is seen and/or heard. Preventing error from entering in the midst is more profitable than having to drive it out. We must defend truth against all forms of error, but not pretend that error is not real and keep a lid on its exposure. Ignorance is not bliss; only A BLIND BEHIND WHICH WOLVES HIDE TO ENSNARE THEIR VICTIMS. JWB

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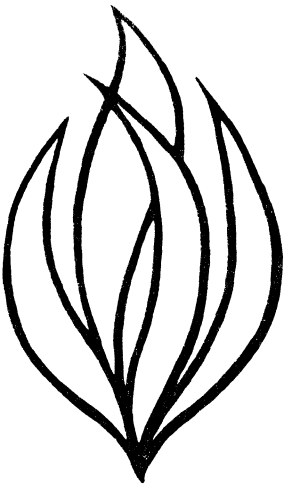

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THE DEVIL

"And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." (Rev. 12:7-12).

The Devil Exists

Regardless of what you believe all this means, there can be no doubt as to the affirmation of the existence of one called the Devil and Satan. Yet, the teaching of the reality of the Devil and a place of eternal punishment called hell has lost much of the significance due it in modern preaching and religion.

That evil exists none can deny. It is universal and manifests itself universally. There is war, bloodshed, strife, vengeance, immorality, corruption, sorrow, suffering, sickness, death and decay. All such things are evidence of the reality of sin and some of the consequences due to the fact that the Devil is in the world. "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." (Job. 14:1).

Origin of Evil

What is the origin of evil? From where did it come, and why? Many philosophers have tried to deny the existence of evil, but few really will swallow such ideas

when they see the real world. The only light that we have about the origin of evil is found in the Bible.

"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." (Genesis 3: 1-6).

The facts are plain enough. Adam and Eve were created sinless. But they fell by disobedience against God, being led into disobedience by the deception and subtilty of the serpent. Just who was this serpent?

Obviously, the serpent was but an agent of a greater power. No ordinary serpent has the power of speech. The serpent was the agent of the Devil. The Devil is the seducer of mankind. He is responsible for sin being in the world. He is the liar and murderer of John 8:44. "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is liar, and the father of it." In our text he is called the Devil and Satan.

From where did the Devil come? Just who is the Devil? First, let us know that he is not something imaginary, nor just the personification of evil. He is not just an influence floating around. Nor is every man his own devil, as some contend. The Scriptures teach he is a distinct personality, referring to him by personal

pronouns, "he, him, his." He is the worst of all wicked spirits, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). He is named the Devil and Satan. He is called man's accuser or slanderer. Peter calls him our adversary (1 Peter 5:8).

Origin of the Devil

From where did the Devil come? Did God create him? We are confident that the Devil is a created being because only God is the eternal One. There is much dispute among students of the Bible about his origin, and we are ready to acknowledge we do not know the answer to that one. Some are rather sure that he was an angel in heaven that fell and was cast out of heaven. Some even say he was Lucifer of the Old Testament. To us, so much of this kind of reasoning is nothing but speculation and we find it too difficult to say Lucifer is the Devil because the king of Babylon is identified as Lucifer. No doubt, the Devil worked through the king of Babylon. We are not too concerned about from where the Devil came as we are the fact that he is. We are confident that we do not have to know from where he came to know that he exists. So we leave the origin of the Devil and the speculations that have come surrounding that matter to others who want to wrestle with it. We have found such a study to not be very profitable, even though academically interesting.

Satan has a kingdom. "And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?" (Matt. 12:26). We know he is at work in the world, being the prince of the world (John 12:31), and is in the world (Eph. 6:12). Just as there are children of God, there are also children of the devil. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil." (1 John 3:10). He has his angels. Jesus taught about the place prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). The Devil will be in the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10).

His purpose is to walk about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). He is the tempter (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5). Through temptation he seduces people by

appealing to their own lusts, causing them to transgress God's law, and bring upon themselves spiritual death. (James 1:13-15).

Not Funny

Some laugh at the idea of the Devil because too many times he has been presented as some kind of comical creature with a red suit, a pitchfork, and a forked tail. Many joke about the deadliest enemy man has. While the Bible does not give us that kind of description of him, he is defined to be "as a roaring lion" in 1 Peter 5:8. He can even present himself as "an angel of light." (2 Cor. 11:13,14). "For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."

When we search the Scriptures, we do not find an abundance of material speaking directly to the person, description, or many of the other matters that our curiosity might provoke to inquire about the Devil. But make no mistake. The reality of the Devil, his purpose, and the final end of him and those that follow him is made clear, even though in few words. "Then shall he say to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 25:41). We know enough about him to know we need the Lord and must shun the evil ways the Devil would have us go. Following the Devil leads to hell, while following Christ leads us to God in heaven.

* * * *

WHO REPRESENTED YOU AT THE CRUCIFIXION?

There is a hymn often sung that asks the question, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" It also asks, "Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?" Nearly 2,000 years ago men killed the Son of God on Calvary. Those involved in that event possessed a variety of attitudes toward Jesus and toward the event that took place. Inasmuch as the basic nature of mankind and his attitudes generally have not changed through the

years, it is worthwhile to ask who might have been as we are now. Who represented us at the crucifixion? Obviously, none of us were there personally, but which person or persons who were there had the same attitude that we have today? Let us consider those who were around the cross and see who represented us.

The Roman Soldiers

First, there were the Roman soldiers. "Then released he Barabbas unto them, and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had plaited a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand, and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him saying, Hail, King of the Jews. And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they mocked him, they took the robe from off him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him." (Matt. 27:26-31).

Crucifying Christ was just another job to the soldiers. Doubtless they had done this thing with others. But this time they went out of their way to show contempt and heap ridicule on the victim. They scourged Him, put a crown of thorns on His head, stripped Him, beat Him, mocked Him, gambled for His seamless garment, spit on Him. This was nothing less than cold-blooded murder by indifferent people who disbelieved His claims of Deity. They really did not care one way or the other about our Lord. They had no regard for things sacred, for human dignity, but were hard, brutal and merciless. It is a serious and frightening thought that there were and still are such people in the world. There are those who are but savages, and some in civilized lands.

Judas

While the reader may not be likened unto such people, could one be compared to Judas? The suggestion might offend you. "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto

them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him." (Matt. 26:14-16). "And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he, hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus and said, Hail, master, and kissed him." (Matt. 26:47-49).

Here was a man that was once a follower of Christ, but now a betrayer. He was guilty of more than simply turning his back on the Lord. He aggressively opposed Him. Why did he do this sordid thing? Luke 22:3 tells us that Satan entered into Judas, Judas fell victim to the temptation set before him. The will of the Devil captured his heart, mind, and thinking. He did what he did, not against his own will, but because he allowed his will to accept the evil will of Satan. He had cultivated a life making his usefulness to the Devil very apparent and made himself available as the Devil's tool. He had demonstrated his greed for money, being guilty of theft and a heart of covetousness. He had demonstrated the truthfulness of 1 Tim. 6:10, "For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." And are we not like Judas when our love for material things surpasses our love and loyalty to the Lord? Nothing is to surpass our love for the Lord. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 10:37-39). "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6:33). "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and

where theives do not break through and steal. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also. (Matt. 6: 19-21).

Peter and The Other Disciples

Possibly, we are like most of the other disciples, especially Peter. When Jesus was seized, we read, "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled. And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end." (Matt. 26:56-58). The disciples fled when the going was difficult for Jesus. When the future grew uncertain and safety was threatened, they forsook Christ. We are not contending that we might have done any better. We may have been like Peter who continued to follow Jesus, but not close enough to be identified with him, not near enough to be a comfort to him, not near enough to draw strength from him, not near enough to derive any benefit to anybody. It was as if Peter was attempting a posture of neutrality.

Pilate

We need to understand that the claim of Jesus Christ makes neutrality an impossibility. He claims to be the Son of God. He either is or is not. And we find no middle ground. People sometimes think they won't make a decision on Jesus. But to decide not to decide is a decision, and it is a deadly one. "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." (Matt. 12:30). "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 10:32,33). Consider Pilate in the light of this teaching. Pilate attempted to remove from himself any responsibility to decide about Jesus. "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person, see ye to it." (Matt. 27:24). You

know how cowardly and contemptible this action was. The name of Pilate and his deed is a by-word to this day. But some today might be like Pilate, or Peter, or the disciples that fled, attempting neutrality toward Him.

His Enemies

Then there were the scribes, Saducees, Pharisees, priests, elder, Levites. These had been constant enemies of Christ, undermining Him, trying to trap Him in His words, accusing Him of blasphemy, of being a disturber and an imposter. They were very religious, but steeped in human traditions above God's revealed will. Our Lord branded them in severe terms as hypocrites.

"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." (Matt. 23:13-15)

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees,

hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. 23:23-33).

The death of Jesus was considered by them a moment of triumph. They had arranged it, urged it, plotted it. But even as they did all this, though they did not realize it, they were providing additional evidence that Jesus is God's Son, because it was prophecied that they would do such a thing to God's Son, and their deeds are evidences that Jesus is the Lord that fulfilled those prophecies. "But all this was done that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." (Matt. 26:56). But are there not those today who are active and aggressive against Jesus, who choose to be chronic enemies of the Christ?

The Mob

But we must consider the mob that was present. Just four days before they had done Him honor. "And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." (Matt. 21:8-11). But now they were crying "Crucify Him, Let Him be crucified." What a change had come over them. Why? "But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what

evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children." (Matt. 27: 20-25). The mob was caught up by evil persuaders. Like blind sheep and thoughtless robots in the hands of another, forsook their human dignity, did whatever someone else told them to do, never really considering their ways nor the consequences of them. Jesus once said, "And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit." (Matt. 15:14).

We must be careful and not be like the mob and blindly follow men, but be sure we are following the Lord. We must be as were the Bereans, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:11). Paul admonished, "Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good." (1 Thess. 5:21). We can hear the voices of many who cry out against the Lord, and many will blindly follow their lead.

The Centurion

But let us take a glance at a single centurion standing nearby. He was a bit different from the other soldiers in that he took greater care to consider all that was being done. At the death of Jesus the veil of the temple was rent, the earth did quake, rocks broke open, graves were opened. This man was literally and spiritually shakened. His reaction was, "Now when the centurion and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God." (Matt. 27:54). Deeply impressed, even moved to belief, he was different. Whether his faith ever led him to become a disciple of Christ we are not informed. Many did just that. It would be tragic if he did not. But it is just as tragic today when people are moved by the gospel, who know that the evidence demands the con-

clusion that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and yet never come to Him. It is not enough to be impressed with the evidence but never come to him. We must humble ourselves before Him and obey His will if we are to be saved.

Simon, of Cyrene

We cannot omit the man from Cyrene, whose name was Simon. Matthew 27:32, records his part in these events. "And as they came out they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, him they compelled to bear his cross." Jesus was weary and weak from the persecution He had endured. He was being forced to carry His own cross to Calvary. But he fell beneath the weight of it. Simon was compelled to bear the cross of Christ. Notice the word "compelled." Simon was forced to do this. No doubt the brutal soldiers escorting Jesus to the cross drew him out of the crowd and made him do it. He did not volunteer to help Jesus.

We may at first be inclined to commend this man for relieving Jesus. But upon closer examination we see that he did not come to the aid of Christ willingly. He did not do what he did because he wanted to do it. He was not driven to it by love, compassion, sympathy and conviction. He was compelled.

Of course, our Lord does not force anyone to serve Him. He did not force Simon. Someone else did that. But Simon was somewhat like some people today who may indeed appear to render service to the Lord, but they do not do so out of love. They are not serving because they want to serve. They feel pressured, coerced, forced by others. They may attend worship, but would rather not. They may give, but it is from necessity rather than cheerfully and liberally. They consider what they do on behalf of the Lord as a burden imposed upon them rather than the blessed privilege to honor God and show love in return for all that God has done for them. They are not willing servants. If it was not for the fear of hell, they would not serve at all. The motives of reward are not that significant with them. The highest motive of love really does not exist. Could it be that some of us are represented by Simon?

Those Who Were Loyal To The Last

But we would leave a distorted story if we did not also consider some others surrounding the crucifixion of Christ. There was Mary, His mother. Also present was Mary Magdelene, other women, the beloved apostle John. Some of these stood with Him to the very last. They were there to the end even in its bitterness and injustice. They are the ones who ought to be our representatives. Have you ever wondered, if you had literally been there at that cross, would you have been standing by the cross?

Just who represented us at the crucifixion? Was it the former follower who had betrayed Him? Would it be the disciples who forsook Him and fled at the most difficult moment for Him? Are we represented by the evil leaders who had opposed Him all along? Or would we be one of the mob who showed their fickleness and allowed themselves to be persuaded to call for the death of the very One we had earlier praised? Possibly some of us are like the centurion whose faith may or may not have led him to be saved. He showed respect for the evidence, but what did he do about it? Are we like Simon, of Cyrene, who served, but not willingly? Or are we represented by those whose loyalty remained true at all personal costs? Our answer is so important. It determines the direction we are going which will determine our eternal destiny. In a sense, we all can answer the question, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" We can answer that someone who was there represented us. Who was it?

* * * *

MOSES' CHOICE

We suppose that every nation has its national heroes and personalities. We cannot imagine studying the history of our own country without thinking about such men as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Robert E. Lee. Our history is interwoven around the lives of these men and many others that we consider the heroes of the land.

The nation of ancient Israel is no exception. There are the national heroes of prominence. There is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon. Certainly, one of the most outstanding was Moses. "There hath not risen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses." (Deut. 34:10).

There are several reasons why Moses deserves the distinction of greatness. He was a deliverer, lawgiver, leader of the people in some of its most trying periods of existence, one that loved God and the people of God. But certainly one of his measures of greatness was in the choice he made as to how he would live his life and for what purpose. And this is the kind of choice every person is compelled to make for himself or herself.

First Forty-Year Period

The life of Moses can be divided into three separate forty year periods. Each period proved to be of great importance in his mission in life. The first forty years were spent in Egypt. He was born under adverse conditions, at a time when Egyptions were killing newborn Israelite baby boys. His mother hid him as an infant. But eventually he was adopted by the daughter of the Pharoah. He spent most of his years at the Egyptian court, being trained in all the wisdom and learning that the Egyptians had. His stay in Egypt went a long way toward preparing him for the most important decision he would make, that was, how he would spend his life.

He learned the nature of poverty from observing the plight of the Israelites, their toil, their persecution, the hardships of their enslavement. He also learned about wealth, being a prince in the Egyptian court. He

gained the most advanced education one could obtain at that time. There he could develop self-confidence, poise, and the qualities of leadership. All of these qualities would prove essential to him later in life. It is true that Moses may have had an "overdose" of self-confidence at this time because he assumed the people of Israel were ready to accept him as their deliverer when actually they were not. He took some premature actions that forced him to leave Egypt. But that is another matter.

In Exodus 2:11-15, we read of two very important days in the life of this man. One day he observed an Egyptian task master mistreat an Israelite and he killed the Egyptian. The next day he found two Israelites in conflict and offered to settle the issue between them when one of them challenged him if he supposed himself to be their leader, and wanted to know if he would kill one of them as he had killed the Egyptian. Moses thought nobody knew what he had done. But he now knew that it would not be long before Pharoah would pursue him and kill him for his deeds. He had to make a choice whether to remain in Egypt or to flee, and he chose the latter. By his defense of the Israelite, we see how Moses had made a choice to cast his lot with the enslaved rather than with the ruling power.

Second Forty-Year Period

Leaving Egypt, he spent his second forty years in the land of Midian. As he had learned much in Egypt, he learned much in Midian, further equipping him to do the primary work God wanted him to do. It is interesting to me to observe how God utilized the first two thirds of the life of Moses getting him ready to do what proved to be his greatest work. While in the land of Midian he was employed as a shepherd, lived in the great open space of nature. There he learned things vital to survival that proved useful in his later work. There he learned quietness, and how to think, how to meditate on the glories of God who created all nature, and to reflect on his own relative insignificance. He learned responsibility, how to risk his life to do his duty, being seasoned and tempered in the things that really matter in life.

A Deliberate Choice

It was in the last stages of this forty year period that he made his great choice to obey the command of God to lead the people out of Egypt. God called him from the burning bush, assigning to him the duty of being Israel's deliverer in the name of the Lord. Yes, Moses began to make excuse why he ought not and should not do it. But as we see time and again, God did not accept excuses, but provided answers for every attempt Moses made to be relieved of this task. Moses had to carefully consider the commission and weigh the matter. This he did. No doubt there was great inner conflict for him. Dare he return to the land from which he had fled? But dare he refuse to do God's bidding? There was much at stake for himself, but also for many others. He had chosen to leave the pleasures of Egypt rather than risk death. Now he must choose to suffer the afflictions of Israel if he assumed the leadership role God called him to perform. The greatness of Moses is seen in his choice to follow the directions of the Lord, whatever the cost to himself.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of reward." His choice was a deliberate one. It was not an impulsive act. He was not forced even though he was persuaded. He carefully weighed the pros and cons of such an undertaking. This showed great wisdom. But he intentionally decided as he did. He chose to do what God wanted, giving his life into the hands of the Lord to be used in whatever manner the Lord so desired.

By all the maxims and standards of this world, Moses made an unspeakably absurd choice. He made a bad choice when he killed the Egyptian in defense of an Israelite, according to things as men of the world would see them. Why risk his wealth, power, pleasure, security, fame to defend a worthless descendant of Abraham? Why be forced to leave the land for such as that? And now, why give up the peace, tranquility, security and worthwhile life as

a shepherd only to join the ranks of an enslaved people being held and tortured by the most powerful nation then on earth? He once had the world at his fingertips but chose to defend the defenseless. He once had the peace for which many long so much, but gave it up to go back to Egypt and fight against the Pharoah. Why did he make such choices? What did he see in doing that?

Moses Was Far-sighted

Moses obviously looked to the future. In the immediate future he saw deprivation and suffering. He saw possible death for himself and others. He saw the absense of the pleasures, luxuries, blessings that he was enjoying. But he looked further down into the future than just into what immediately was before him. He even looked past this present life. He looked toward eternity. He considered the life after this. He looked to the recompense of reward (Heb. 11:26). He weighed the matter and measured the difference between the pleasures of sin on the one hand and service to God on the other. To consider it another way, there was the temporary, deceiving, disillusioning, deceptive, eventually disappointing offering of this world that has never satisfied the yearnings of mankind in contrast with the city whose builder and maker is God, the eternal bliss of heaven, the reward that is beyond all this world can provide, the peace that passeth understanding, the kind of life that produces eternal benefits and goodness, the satisfaction of knowing that one is doing what he ought to do, knowing he is doing what God wants him to do.

In one sense, the choice Moses made was not as difficult to make as it first might seem. But that was because Moses was prepared to make an intelligent choice. Some do not make good choices because they are not equipped to make good choices. Moses had first learned what is and is not truly valuable. He knew what mattered. He had perceived the real meaning of life. He knew that to fear God and keep his commandments was the whole duty of man (Ecc. 12:13). For one who does not know this, he finds himself torn between the paltry and fleeting matters of this world and spiritual consider-

ations. When one really knows the difference between what matters and what does not, he can make good choices. Moses had learned to discern between good and evil. He knew what was deserving of emphasis and that which would ultimately prove to be sheer folly. He had learned to walk by faith and not by sight. His faith led him to make the kind of far-sighted choices that he made rather than to bind himself down with the short-sightedness of choosing his own welfare in this life to choosing God's way and his own welfare for eternity.

We Must Make Choices

But are we really all that different from Moses?. Do not each of us have to make choices? Do not we also stand before our "burning bush" as God calls us to duty and have to decide which it will be? Do we not have to choose between an Egypt and an Israel? God, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, calls every man to make this world a better place. He calls upon us to give rather than just receive. He calls us to serve rather than be served. He calls us to forgiveness of sins and salvation rather than continue to exist in the hopeless state of being in sin. God affords us the opportunity to enter His service and choose the more excellent way. Moses was great because of his choice for the Lord. The Lord blessed him and sustained him. His choice brought him some trying times while on earth, but his choice brought him rewards from the hand of blessing from God.

Moses once charged Israel, "I call heaven and earth witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death; the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, to love Jehovah thy God, to obey his voice, and cleave unto him, for he is thy life, and the length of thy days; that thou mayest dwell in the land which Jehovah sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."(Deut. 30:19). Having chosen life for himself, he urged his brethren to make the same choice.

Today, spiritual life and spiritual death are before each of us. Those that obey the gospel choose life. Those that do not obey choose death. Those that live

faithfully in Christ shall have their reward. Today is a day of choosing. Are we as wise as Moses?

* * * *

WHY MARRIAGES FAIL

When we have a physical disease, we have to apply the medicine. We have a serious social and religious disease in our land, and it reflects the loss of respect for the sanctity of the home. The divorce rate increases with each passing year. It has reached epidemic proportions that it now threatens the whole social structure. It has become respectable to be divorced, to commit adultery, to "have an affair." People of prominence in government, entertainment, sports, every field, have many whose marriages have failed. Even in religion it has lost its stigma. Even in the Lord's church, among some, divorce is no longer considered shameful, but a wise choice of alternatives. We suggest that marriage failures reflect failures somewhere else. To be sure, marriage failure has been the cause of numerous social, psychological, financial, mental, and spiritual problems. But just as it is a cause of many problems, it is also the result of other problems that lie behind the failure. We want to consider some of the major causes of maritial destruction.

Marriage Is Of Divine Origin

One cause, possibly the most prominent, is the failure to recognize the institution of marriage as a divine institution. Marriage is not just the result of social evolution and merely a social structure. It is not just a legal arrangement between people. It is not simply for the satisfaction of the sexual desire. It is more than just a custom among nations. It is not merely for the propagation of the human race. It is a divinely given institution, having come from the mind of God, designed by God, given for specific purposes as God intended. Like the church, it came from the Lord and is to be governed as the Lord has designed it. Specifications and regulations for the home and marriage have been revealed by God. It had its beginning in

God's mind. "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." (Gen. 2:18-25).

Any disposition of marriage that leaves out God, His will, His intent, His design, is a perversion of an institution of divine origin. Marriages between people who do not respect this fact are in a relationship no stronger than the human beings involved. Marriage is more than a covenant between mates. It is a covenant with God.

Marriage Is Monogamous

Failure in marriage often results because man has perverted God's design that marriage be one man for one woman. Monogamy is God's pattern. This is to be a relationship between one man and one woman who become husband and wife for so long as both of them are alive.

"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female. And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.

What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them. Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." (Matt. 19:3-9).

"Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. " (Rom. 7:1-3).

"Till death do you part" is not just a phrase in a ceremony. It is a very accurate description of what marriage involves. The only honorable way for a marriage to terminate is the death of one of the mates. Yes, there is another way that God allows; divorce because of fornication, but that involves sin. Multi-marriages may be popular and accepted by society generally. But God does not approve of it. Those living with new mates whose first marriages were terminated dishonorably, are living in adultery, unless the divorce was for the one cause God allows.

There Must Be Love

Marriages fail because there is the lack of love. Love is the only proper foundation upon which to enter marriage

"Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he

might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." (Eph. 5:24-33).

This passage teaches about Christ and the church. But it also teaches about husbands and wives. How much did Christ love the church? Just that much is the husband to love his wife. How much is the church to be subject to Christ and submit to Him? Just that much is expected of the wife to the husband. Christ died for the church. While some marry for social standing, security, physical attraction, vain and foolish reasons, the Lord intends that marriages be built on love one for the other. When that is missing, the marriage will likely collapse and the people involved will be scarred for life, possibly eternity.

Lack of Preparation

Marriages are failing because those entering marriage are not trained to understand it. There is so little genuine preparation for marriage. We train our children for many things but often omit some of the most important matters. We would not allow them to drive an automobile without training, yet we allow them to get married without giving them what they need for success. They train for sports, for occupations, but not in the art of making a good home. It is harder to get a driver's license than a marriage license.

The responsibility for this training is first the home and the parents. The church must be active in

teaching the truth of God regarding marriage and the home. The home, however, is the most influential training school.

The young must be taught the responsibilities as well as the privileges in marriage. So many are so immature toward duties they must assume in marriage. They must be shown their opportunities, the spiritual significance of this relationship, the holiness and sanctity of marriage. They must be taught the permanency of marriage. The physical relationships and the purity of it must be taught. They need to be warned of the manifold pitfalls. They must be aware of problem areas like finances, the sore trouble when there are mixed religions, potential in-law problems, the necessity of loyalty to each other. "Leave and cleave" is a theme that cannot be over-emphasized. So many problems that cause marriage to fail could be avoided with proper pre-marital training.

Keep Thyself Pure

And how important it is to teach the young to enter marriage undefiled sexually; to be pure, to save oneself for one's lifetime mate. Pre-marital sex, entered into for pleasure, is often the source of great hardship and divorce, as well as shame, disgrace, distrust, and sacrifice of morality. Training before marriage is far better than trying to correct problems after marriage has begun. There will be problems enough even after training. But so many marriages could have been spared divorce if forethought had been given.

Leave and Cleave

Many marriages fail because of interference from outsiders. Often these outsiders are mother-in-law or father-in-law who just will not allow the young to marry and become their own. Either the young are not willing to cut from the parents or the parents are not content to let the young govern their own affairs. Meddling in the affairs of the home of your children when you are not asked is to ask for trouble. Parents should always be willing to help and give advice when it is asked. But unless it is a matter of life and death, parents should

stay out of the family affairs of their children. It brings estrangement and in-law trouble. And the only real solution to in-law trouble is distance.

People ought not marry until they can stand on their own feet. If the training of children has not given them sufficient background and backbone prior to marriage, then after they are married you have two with which to deal and that won't work. "Leave and cleave" is one of the most needed lessons in teaching about marriage.

It is hard for a son or daughter to go against parents, even when it calls for them to side with their mate. Parents ought not put children in that situation. Children need to learn that when they marry their first loyalty is to his or her mate, parents a distant second. Young couples may not do everything and handle everything the wisest, and certainly not always to the liking of parents. But do they have to? Is there anything that says they must follow where the parents went in every case? Both young and old need to learn that there is a difference between helping and interfering, and discover just where one ends and the other begins.

But in-law trouble cannot separate a married couple when they lean on each other and put each other first. No outsider from any source can harm their marriage when they trust each other, stand by each other, and pull for one another.

One In Christ

Marriages fail because those involved did not think soberly about their religious faith. Some get married without even discussing the matter. We have never read of any religious group that encourages mixed religious marriages. Everyone knows the problems that are caused. There just is lacking that common ground upon which to make decisions, settle disputes, establish priorities. That which ought be the dearest to your heart, your service to God, cannot even be properly shared with the one who is supposed to be dearest to you on earth. Most of the problems that arise in the church come from homes where religious division exists. Compromise is so often

the result. Children grow up not knowing what to believe. Many children have no faith at all because they have grown up in a divided home and they have decided that religion is just a source of trouble rather than the peace God intended.

So many who marry one who is not a member of the church eventually abandon their faith, leave the church, and maybe join some human denomination, just to keep peace in the family. They sacrifice their convictions for their mate, and thereby lose their own soul.

It is useless for someone to cry out, "I married a non-Christian and it worked out because he or she became a Christian." Just be thankful that it worked that way with you, but think of the many, many times it goes the other way. Think of the unhappiness and incompleteness that exists in many homes, where there is no divorce, but there is lacking that solid and firm base upon which the family is supposed to be built.

The Prime Goal of Marriage

Marriages have a one primary purpose; helping each other get to heaven. How can one who refuses to obey the gospel help a Christian get to heaven? It is futile to deny the heartache that accompanies mixed marriages. It is equally futile to deny the disastrous spiritual consequences so many times that result from mixed religious marriages. If two people who propose to spend their lives together cannot take time to discuss the most important matter of life, the Lord Jesus Christ, and come to an agreement regarding their service to Him, they have no business getting married.

Wanted: Good Examples

Marriages sometimes fail because those involved have never had a good marriage set before them. They do not know what a good marriage is supposed to be. Their home when they were growing up was not as it ought to have been. There was strife, separations, divorce, and all they know of home is a tug-of-war.

When they get married, they think that this strife is what is expected in the home. They have never seen real consideration for others demonstrated. It ought to be the goal of every father and mother to present before their children a marriage where the children can see what marriage and the home should be. Homes will have problems and problems can be met and overcome when the husband and wife want them to be overcome. They will work at it until they are overcome.

Marriages can be successful. Many are. There are many ways to fail without getting a divorce. But success in marriage does not just happen. Failure does not just happen either. When both mates work hard for success, the likelihood is that there will be joy in the home. We should try to avoid these reasons why marriages fail.

* * * * *



JAMES W. BOYD

WHY DON'T YOU FIND OUT?

That the New International Version of the Bible is unreliable is a demonstrable fact. That it is a favorite of many brethren is a sad commentary on the brotherhood. But why won't those who take versions as reliable translations do study and learn why we cannot be blindly led about by such things?

Listed are a few sources that can help you see why a repudiation of the NIV is in order.

An Evaluation of the NIV, by Foy E. Wallace
NIV- A Brief, Critical Review, by A. G. Hobbs
Challenging Dangers of Modern Versions, by Robert R. Taylor, Jr. (Chapter 9)

There have been many articles written warning brethren about this version so promoted by our schools. But many just will not hear, and will not investigate. Like blind sheep, they just trot along where the "scholars" direct.

* * * * *

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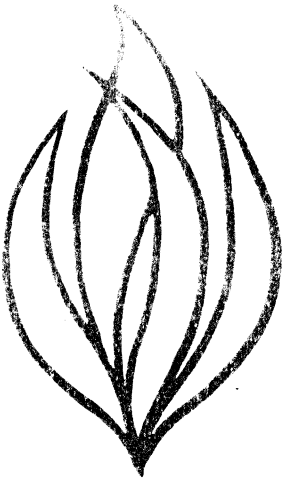

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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WHY HAVE YOU SENT FOR ME?

In Acts, chapter 10, Peter was taught by a vision that he was to go to the house of Cornelius and preach the gospel of Christ. That is the function of gospel preachers. How the gospel is received is the responsibility of the hearer. Jesus taught, "Take heed therefore how ye hear." (Luke 8:18). The parable of the sower depicts the different kinds of soil into which the seed falls.

When Peter reached the house of Cornelius, Cornelius was asked, "Therefore I came unto you without gainsaying; as soon as I was sent for; I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?"

Same Question Now

Preachers come before congregations asking the same question. We know why some want a preacher. It is for the same reason that Cornelius wanted one. But one wonders sometimes why some people want a preacher, any preacher at all. With sincerity we ask, "Why do you want a preacher?" It is a fair question for any congregation to seriously consider. What do you expect of the one who is to preach to you? There are some things you have a right to expect, and some thing you do not have a right to expect. Before you draw conclusions as to what you can expect and have a right to receive, you need to be familiar with what the Bible teaches a gospel preacher is supposed to do.

What Some Want

Some want preachers to be figureheads and ornaments for the local church; someone to do their visiting for them; someone to introduce to friends; someone to attend community functions as a representative of the local church; someone to perform their weddings and preach their funerals; someone to give respectability to their church as the denominational people expect from their clergymen; to act as some kind of master of ceremonies at the formal worship services.

The preacher and his family is expected to be very pleasant regardless of the circumstances, discreet where he goes, what he does, how he dresses, the kind of car he drives, and such as that. Some want him to be the jolly public relations man in the community and a "back slapper," a comedian, an entertainer, an after-dinner speaker at club meetings, and to make the social rounds, to be seen of others as the "church of Christ preacher," not unlike clergymen. Every member has the right to a preacher whose appearance is respectable and whose public conduct and that of his family is acceptable and such that does not bring reproach on the church. But actually, what the membership expects of him along these lines, he and all the other members have a right to expect from every other Christian. Too often some have a double-standard, one for themselves and one for others, with even a special one for preachers and their families. Preachers do not deserve that kind of discriminatory treatment, but most have learned that it comes with the work.

Peter's question, "Why have ye sent for me?" was not dealing with social functions, community appearances, club meetings, promotions, but on the subject of what Peter was to do in their presence regarding his preaching. This is the reason we ask this question in this lesson. We are concerned with what people expect from the preacher when he gets up to preach. The Bible is plain as to what God expects and what he is to preach, but it is all too apparent that many of his hearers do not always want him to preach what God has commanded to be preached.

The Bible is also plain as to what some want to hear. They prefer sweet sounding nothings that do not question or challenge their lives. Some want entertainment and expect the preacher to be a big joker. Others want uncertain sounds, words that flatter, words that tickle their ears, words that soothe them in whatever they are doing, right or wrong. It is all too evident that many church members have a big "Do Not Disturb" sign on their heart and life, and resent anyone that does not respect it.

There are those who will tolerate an occasional exposure of error provided it does not get too specific. Some do not want any kind of negative preaching and want nothing said against anything.

Some members will enjoy lessons dealing with things that they have already obeyed, or about matters where they have no guilt, but they even want these so worded so no friend or relative might think they are lost. Some want baptism preached, provided you don't make the unbaptized feel anything is too wrong if they have not been baptized.

But experience has shown that the preaching that is most often resented is preaching which deals with living a Christian life, the necessity of being a faithful steward before God, the need to conduct daily life in a manner consistent with the gospel, putting first things first. This is what rubs many members of the church the wrong way and they dislike it.

Cornelius' Answer

We want to take a long and sober look at the answer Cornelius gave to Peter when Peter asked why they sent for him. Cornelius said, "Wherefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things commanded thee of God." What did he want to hear? For what was he hungering and thristing? He sent for Peter so Peter would preach what God wants man to know, to do, and to be. He had no idea what all that might involve, but he knew that was what he wanted to learn. He wanted the simple, plain, unvarnished, uncolored, unchanged truth. He wanted God's will taught. Here was a man who was open to conviction and yearning for the truth.

Why do you want a preacher to preach? Do you want to hear God's will? Search your heart and be honest about it. Is that what you expect the preacher to deliver? If he does, is that what you really want? This is what you have a right to expect from him. Too often the preacher will do just exactly that, but some later give evidence that this is not what they expected and, what is more, not what they wanted to hear.

Often the preacher is subjected to attack, battered with irrelevant lies, misquoted, misrepresented, bombarded with half-truths, any and all kinds of criticisms and accusations that are without basis, just because somebody did not want him to do his job as God directed. Many preachers have been made the targets of vile and vicious gossip by sinful brethren who rejected the truth. They could not withstand the truth and have done the only thing they could do except repent, and that is "get the preacher." They seek some face-saving way to hide their sins rather than turn from them.

Attacks Hurt

To say that such attacks do not hurt preachers is unrealistic. It hurts. There is no hurt as severe as when those who should stand for the truth, and who promised to stand for the truth, who have pledged to stand for the truth, change their minds and do not stand for the truth, and turn and rend the preacher who did stand for the truth. It is no easy thing to be the victim of the venomous tirades of "loving brethren" who prefer to destroy the messenger because they did not like the message.

Would you expect a preacher to teach sprinkling as baptism? No, and if he did that, you would want it corrected, and if not corrected, the preacher removed from the pulpit. You would be absolutely right. Then why would you talk down a preacher, criticise him, when he teaches that one must be a member of the church to be saved, that denominations are not of Biblical authority, that one is lost until he is baptized. That is God's truth also.

Would you expect the preacher to teach the observance of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week? Yes, because that is God's truth. Then why cringe and rebel when the preacher teaches on giving cheerfully, liberally, as you have been prospered, etc.? Is that not the truth also?

If we really want to hear the whole counsel of God, why cause disturbances in the church when the preacher preaches God's word that denounces the sins of the flesh,

such as drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing, immodest clothing, smoking, gambling, lying, adultery, etc.? These are wrong.

Once Upon A Time

There was a time, when we began our pulpit work, that we did not know of even one who professed to be a gospel preacher who would not openly condemn such conduct. Now, we have them in pulpits by the scores. It has become so unpopular to transgress the worldly habits of church members that the preacher places his livelihood, place of residence, reputation, and ability to provide for his family on the line every time he preaches God's truth on these subjects. Many behave as if the preacher has done some wrong because he dared to do what God said he must. They would prefer that he ignore sin, dodge it, even deny sin is sin rather than hear some of their practices reviewed in the light of the New Testament. Error from the pulpit is quickly dealt a blow, but error from the pews goes unnoticed and condoned, and the preacher that exposes it leaves himself open to a barage from his "loving brethren."

Faithful gospel preachers in recent years have been pounded if they dared warn of liberalism, modern versions, cultism, and the necessity to have authority from the Scriptures for what is taught and practiced. Brethren do not mind hearing idolatry condemned, just so long as their idol is not included. They applaud condemnation of lying, murder, etc. because they are not quilty. But let the whole counsel be preached and that becomes another story.

Why Have A Preacher?

Why have a preacher if he will not preach both the positive and negative parts of the word of God? Why would one want only those parts that soothe and comfort but omit those parts that disturb and arouse, since it all is the will of God? Do we want men in the pulpits to simply serve "mush" when the souls of people are dying from spiritual malnutrition? Do we only want preachers who pour out eloquent emotion? If your loved one

was sick and you called the doctor, you would expect him to point out the trouble and prescribe the remedy. If we are so concerned about the physical welfare of our loved ones, why are we not equally concerned about the spiritual welfare and want a preacher to point out the trouble and prescribe God's remedy? You want the doctor to tell you what must be done even if it means making sacrifices and changes. Why are we not that way about the truth the preacher preaches?

Is It The Truth?

Are you among those people that would have the preacher be apologetic for the narrowness of truth? Astounding as it may sound, suggestions have been offered that such be done, so as to make the truth not appear so demanding? On what basis dare anyone speak God's word and then justify himself in apologizing for it being so hard? This is nothing short of heresy. There are times when truth hurts, particularly when our lives are running against the truth. But when the preacher preaches, we have the right and ought to have the desire that he tell us the truth. The first and overriding question regarding any sermon is, "IS IT THE TRUTH?" When it is not, then a book, chapter, and verse approach can expose it for the error that it is. But when it is the truth, whether it appeals to us or not, we ought to bend every effort to believe and obey it.

No preacher of our acquaintance expects every person to obey the gospel. We wish they would, but do not expect it. We know that some will treat it with indifference, and others will openly rebel against it. But woe be to that man, woman, boy or girl, who will attack a sermon, but fail to accompany that attack with a "thus saith the Lord" to justify it. Anyone does himself an injustice to wage war against the truth. Our first and overriding question ought to be, "IS IT THE TRUTH?"

When people have the same desire as did Cornelius, they will rejoice and be thankful when someone reveals to them the will of God, regardless of how it applies.

Reactions

People react differently when the truth is preached. Some run from it and vow not to allow themselves to hear it again. Some fight it, some ignore it. Some pout beneath the pressure of it. Some are unwilling to commit themselves one way or the other. But some believe it, and obey it, stand for it, fight for it, defend it, live by it, and are not shamed of it.

We hear and read of the "preacher" shortage, and this is depressing. We see preachers having to uproot their families and ties of friendship and go first here and there because of the "whines" and "whims" of a sinful lot in the congregation who create disturbance because the truth is preached. They inspire antagonism against the preacher, either getting him "fired" or making life so miserable for him and his family that he takes and takes until he does not see any need to take anymore, and he moves. These things happen because some are not in love with the truth and do not want the preacher to "tell it like it is." Their remedy for their problem is the Salome - Herodias treatment. Like they treated John the Baptist, "Get rid of the preacher." Many elderships have bowed beneath the pressure and contention of a sinful and rebellious lot and sacrificed the preacher in order to keep peace, but have sacrificed the truth at the same time. Many preachers have moved from congregations, but the problems remained because the problem was not the preacher, nor his sermons. It was the sinfulness of some of the members that were not of the disposition as was Cornelius. Many congregations have had to learn the hard way that moving the preacher is not always removal of the problem. The problem remains because the problem is the ingrained self-will of sinful brethren.

"Loving" Treatment

Some preachers see the storm clouds gathering and know it is but a matter of time that they must move on. They know from experience that many members have such little consideration of the preacher and his family, and

consider them expendable. Preachers are dismissed or made so discouraged that they leave because elderships will not stand by them, but will "go along" with the disturbing element who really does not want a preacher that tells the "whole counsel of God." Preachers are human beings, also, and can get just so much of this kind of "loving" treatment. But most stand and fight for the truth until such time as it is obvious that truth is not what is desired.

Preachers need the support of elderships and memberships. They cannot function without it very well. They seek not praises from men, if they are truly loyal to their task. But they are not always blessed with the support they deserve. But they have no alternative but to stand by the truth regardless of what costs come their way.

Preachers Beware

Preachers need to be warned that there are going to be times when the brethren will no more want truth than denominational people. Some years ago we determined to preach the gospel and uphold it with "thus saith the Lord." We have not wavered from that. We have encountered opposition through the years from the dancers, drinkers, smokers, liars, hobbyists, liberals, human legalists, adulterers, innovators, pious playboys and the "ever-loving" sweet talkers who will stab a faithful brother in the back as quick as they will breathe. But we shall not abandon the standard of truth to accomodate any person or group of persons. We go into the pulpit knowing what God expects and having the right to expect support from brethren.

Truth Will Prevail

When all of the forces of evil and error have expended the power to suppress the truth that preachers are supposed to preach, the truth will stand, and those that preached it and lived it shall be saved.

When the truth is preached, you ought be pleased. You can know what the truth is from your study of the

word of God. We will rejoice when the truth is preached if we have the same attitude toward it as did Cornelius. "Now we are all here before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." If that is not the reason you want a preacher, you need to alter your thinking and get yourself right, real quickly.

* * * *

WHO IS TO BLAME FOR THE TROUBLE IN LOS ANGELES?

(Note: Some lessons have specific application regarding specific events. In the 1960's, our nation saw such civil turmoil. The following lesson was preached over the radio at that time, and was later requested by the elders where I preached that it be repeated. It followed the rioting that took place in the Watts area in Los Angeles, California. The principles involved were applicable then, and still are.)

This afternoon the subject of my remarks brings our focus on a growing and terribly serious matter facing the people of these United States. In recent days and over the past several months and years, this nation has been shaken to its very foundations by a seige of mob action, violence, crime, and irresponsibility the likes of which has not been suffered in the history of our nation, now nearly 200 years old, with possibly the War Between the States as an exception. There have been horrifying incidents in years gone by. But never has such as we are now seeing existed in such tremendous proportions as now. Never has such attitudes and conduct of rebellion been so widespread and open as now. From one end of this nation to the other, from Massachusetts to California, the entire breadth of this land, the people of this nation have witnessed an outburst of crime and terror and savagery never experienced since the founding fathers set our nation in order.

Riots, Riots, Riots

It has become commonplace for people to expect some new report of rioting with almost any daily newspaper. The nation has heard over and over, has seen

by means of television and other means, pictures of virtual war between the citizens of this country and their very own law enforcement officers. Demonstrations of one sort or another are no longer news, but such conduct has become the mean. Mob action, legal and illegal, it makes no difference, is a threat and a thorn in the side of every community. Civil disobedience is running rampant through the United States, and this is cause for alarm among every thinking group of people regardless of their race, religion, occupation or politics.

There is not one decent minded individual in America that was not shocked and horrified over the holocaust that erupted several days ago in Los Angeles. There is not one person with any respect for what is right that has not deplored what has taken place in Chicago in recent days. For months, right-thinking people cringed and condemned the repulsive actions that disrupted communities of our southland; Selma, Montgomery, Bogalusa , Nashville, one after the other. Thousands upon thousands of people have been placed at the mercy of lawless gangs who have turned the hours of both day and night into opportunities to wreak havoc wherever they can. The college and university campuses have become hotbeds for disturbers and troublemakers in both state and private educational institutions where learning is supposed to be the major product. But these places have been turned into upheaval and turmoil while fumbling, misguided, inexperienced, uninformed, immature hordes of ill-bred pagan youths destroy and disrupt the very purposes for which they were supposed to have come to the campuses. There can be no doubt in the mind of any person that keeps abreast of the course of this nation that the nation is in deep, serious, perilous trouble because of this growing contempt and disrespect of law, order, property, life and the rights of others who do not share their views.

Who Is To Blame?

I ask the question today, who is to blame for such tragedies as that which turned the city of Los Angeles

into a week-long nightmare for hundreds of thousands of people? I ask not only with reference to that city because there can be no doubt that Los Angeles is simply one locality where "the pot boiled over." I ask the question with reference to the entire nation, for the same forces that are at work in Los Angeles are at work from the tip of Florida to the corner of Oregon, from New England states to the fertile valleys of southern California.

I realize the very asking of such a question will cause some to scoff and close their minds immediately, shrugging their shoulders with contempt as if it made no difference why such things happen. Some would even suggest that such a topic has no place in the pulpit. I have heard some display a disinterest in the direction our nation is going with the remark, "Who can tell why it happened?" Others would rather not even seek out either the cause or the cure or even attempt to locate the blame.

Not Me

There has been an approach to the civil and social problems of our nation that has done about as much to pave the way for problems as anything else, and that is the attempt to blame nobody in particular and everybody in general. This is just so much nonsensical rot and there is not one ounce of real truth in such an approach to the problems of mankind. Yes, many are to blame for what is gradually eroding the very usefulness of America, but each one is to blame individually for their personal contribution to the havoc what is being created. We, as a nation, have for too long been willing to swallow that nonsense of psychiatry, the ridiculous explanations of the self-acclaimed expert, and have allowed ourselves to think that such a thing as personal responsibility is no long existent. Since the beginning of time, from Adam until this hour, people in the wrong have tried to push the blame for their own wrong doings to the shoulders of somebody else. The murderer blames his father because his father was a drunkard. The thief

blames his friend because his friend led him to do it. The juvenile blames the police for being too strict. Everybody is busy shirking their own personal responsibility and shifting it to somebody else. Nobody is willing to be accountable even for their own actions. When the nation staggered under the recent assasination of our head of state, there were the horrified "bleeding hearts" that tried to blame the entire nation for what one Communist sympathizer and fanatic had done. Such an approach can never solve anything. Such an approach is simply a deliberate and deceptive cover-up for our unwillingness to assume the responsibility for our own deeds.

People Are Accountable

Let me hasten to tell you, regardless of all the psychoanalyzing and explaining away, the shifting of duty and expert evaluations, God's word has taught, and still teaches, and shall forever teach, that the Lord will hold a man accountable for the deeds done in the body. If the Lord holds a person responsible, then we know he is responsible. Where has all the other smoke-screen cover-ups of personal duty led this nation, except to the brink of complete breakdown of law among the populace? How long must this nation continue to wallow in the muck and mire of proven inept and unacceptable explanations before we will cast it away and come to our sense, and accept the fact that each man and woman is responsible before God and his/her fellowman? There is not one doubt but that each individual that was involved in the looting, arson, shooting, and destruction of Los Angeles is individually responsible for what they did. Each one is responsible for his/her part. It is sheer folly and the epitome of darkness to contend that nobody- or everybody- is to blame. The man that stole the outboard motor is a thief and is responsible. The woman who crashed her car into the barricade is a law violator and is responsible. The sniper that murdered innocent children is a murderer and is personally responsible, and if and when detected and located, ought to be dealt with as a murderer.

Who is to blame for that inexcusable riot? Every single individual that took part in that explosion of lawlessness is to blame. Regardless of whatever else can be said, and much can, that fact cannot be altered by any amount of razzle-dazzle side-stepping of the facts. Each one is personally responsible because each had either rejected or never possessed a true moral or spiritual attitude toward life and others.

Many Contributing Factors

It cannot be denied that there were many circumstances that contributed to getting these violators of law to such a state that they acted as they did. While we must accept the fact that they are personally responsible, we shall not help matters whatever until we investigate the various forces that contributed to their display of spiritual and moral decay.

Heat?

Some tried to lay the blame on the heat. But my friend, it was just as hot in one part of Los Angeles as in another. It was even hotter that day in South Dakota, in fact that entire week, but the population did not tear up their communites. It gets hot every summer. This summer is no exception. But these explosions do not happen every summer. Heat may make people irritable and uncomfortable but that does not tell the story nor is it a legitimate excuse.

Southern Negroes?

Some commentators, continuing to display a definite prejudice and hatred against the southern part of our land, have laid the blame on the southern Negroes who have moved into California. This is a direct insult to the Negro of the south and the area generally. It gets hot down south also. But even though circumstances in the south are not always to the liking of everyone, never in the entire history of the south has there been such an outburst like that which rocked California and Chicago, and I pray God that it will

never happen, or happen anywhere else again.

Poverty?

Others have blamed poverty, lack of jobs, housing. Poverty does exist, and with some it will always exist because some have the attitude that the world owes them a living and they are professional parasites who will not work and do not intend to work. But some of the looters were driving away with their stolen merchandise in late model, high-price automobiles, the kind that the average working American cannot afford. Therefore, it cannot be truthfully said that all involved in this thing were in poverty. Those on the scene have reported nationwide that conditions in the riot area are, or were, better than in so many other places in the United States.

Others have, with a self-righteousness and racial prejudice, declared, "Well, it is just that way with Negroes." This again makes about as little sense as some of the other dodges attempted. There are thousands upon thousands of law-abiding Negroes through this nation. There were thousands in California that did not riot. Even while some Negro leaders have preached and practiced disobedience of whatever law you do not like, many have rejected that teaching. There are prominent and outstanding Negroes who have publicly deplored the civil disobedience that has characterized so many of the demonstrations and the ruthless conduct the nation has suffered. The white man cannot look upon the color of his own skin and contend, "I am more righteous because I am white." Some of the most violent and vicious people on earth are of the white race. Many of the college riots are led by white people. No race, brown, black, white, yellow, whatever has a monopoly on degenerate lawlessness.

Poisoned Bloodstream

But one could go on from one so-called explanation to another, discounting each of them with ease, and still never get to the heart of the matter. There is

no doubt that the bloodstream of America has been poisoned. It flows with hate, bitterness, brother against brother, lawlessness. It stenches with prejudice and passion. Contempt for the law is at a peak as never before witnessed. And who has contributed to making this bloodstream of America so filthy and corrupt? It has not always been this way. There was a time when law enforcement officers were respected. There was a time when law itself was upheld in both the mind and actions by overwhelming majorities of people to such an extent that these things did not and could not happen. What has occured in these past few decades that has turned so many in America into near savages that threaten to engulf the society and nation?

THERE HAS BEEN THE SLIPPING AWAY OF AMERICA FROM SPIRITUAL AND MORAL STRENGTH. There has been the undermining of her foundations of respect for Biblical truth. We have drained away the truth and have filled our veins with philosophies of men that turn men into near animals as far as behavior is concerned.

The real blame belongs to those who would cry they are innocent the longest and loudest. The real blame and the biggest contributors are those least expected to be blamed and the last accused. It is a fact that a man does what he is taught to do. He is what he is within as a product of his learning. He generally acts in accord with what he has been taught to be acceptable and proper. And what has America been taught of late?

Institutions Of Learning

Look at the elite and sophisticated intellectual who heads the classroom of our institutions of learning. The professors have taken great delight in ridiculing the principles of human decency and human conduct standards as they are found in the Bible. They have encouraged the young and immature student to seek their own standards and do what they feel is right in their own mind, whether it conflicts with the rights and proven standards of others or not.

There is no use to deny that our professors have not poisoned the thinking of millions of American minds for I have been in their degenerate classes and heard everything decent degraded as being foolish. We have put millions upon millions of our young, for a generation or two, through the intellectual factories where they have been indoctrinated with the idea that there is no right or wrong, that a thing is right or wrong only as one feels it within himself. Every man therefore becomes his own law, judge and jury, responsible to nobody for anything. Such a person has the idea that he has the right to do whatever he see fit. You are now seeing in America today the fruits of the great contributions of the vast majority of the professors of our places of learning, where you see otherwise reasonable and capable people turned into ravening animals, because they are taught that they are merely animals. For such people as have been fed on the idea that truth is relative, they now live and lead others, even the masses, to behave accordingly.

From our colleges and universities, as well as the high school classrooms, the American public has been taught that man is only a highly developed animal, there is no God, there is no truth, there is no standard. And now we are beginning to reap what that kind of absurdity and stupidity has always brought on the human family. It produces nothing but ruin, shame, disgrace and horror. There is not one good contribution to the betterment of mankind that can be attributed to the teachers of evolution and atheism. They are the pirates and thieves against everything that ever raised mankind above the level of a savage. You want to see why this nation is plunging itself into anarchy and collapse? Then take a look, a long look, at the ridicule of truth that has now been firmly entrenched into the educational systems of this nation. There you will find some of the injectors of poison into the spiritual and moral bloodstream of America.

Religious Leaders

Then let us turn the spotlight of attention upon the religious leaders of our land. This nation was

once considered religious. Some even called it a "Christian" nation, which admittedly is a misnomer and always has been a misnomer. But America has been sabotaged and betrayed by the Judases that have put on their pious, long, black clerical garb and climbed to their pulpits and sown their evil seeds of inconsistency and discord, sending forth as sermons of the gospel the vain and deceitful philosophies of men, bragging and boasting of the theories of first one theologian and then another, telling what this "doctor or reverend" or some other creature, from a movie star to a football player had to say, leaving undone the work of telling the world what the Lord God of heaven has said. They have undermined the Bible rather than having taught it. The only rule by which men can live and get along with God and their fellowman has been buried beneath the rubbish of human dogmas. They have tried to explain why the Bible really does not teach what it teaches. They have shown why their semanary professors believed this or that, or why the Bible is probably not true. They have taken it upon themselves the task of going diametrically opposite to the moral and spiritual declarations that have proven themselves to be uplifting to mankind and have chosen to replace them with their own "learning." The religious teachers of today are not much more than glorified conscience soothers to the sinful, ourwardly respected and the recipients of the praises of their fellows, one who glories in his position but who does not give a care about the word of God. The religious teacher today, in so many instances, would not dare cross his moneyed membership, would not condemn the sins of his congregation, would not speak forthrightly the truth of God's book, but for the shillings that he draws from the collections, sells his soul and the souls of his hearers. When those with religious responsibilities of leadership will water-down and sidestep the truth, and often be involved in the very sins he ought to be condemning, what else can you expect except what we are seeing? How can Satanic wells without water and clouds carried by the tempest ever have a real influence for good in the nation? Rather than doing good, the clergymen and pulpit holders have only pumped the slime of sin,

compromise, evil, immorality, rebellion, etc. into the minds and hearts of the people of this nation, and we are all reaping the sorry crop they have sown.

Government Leaders

Many have raised their voices during the recent crisis, and wondered why the high ranking men of influence within the government do not voice their pleas for calm. Why do not they express their distaste and plead for a return to sanity and obedience to the law? But hard and bitter though the pill may be to swallow, how many men do we have in places of national prominence and government that could raise their voices against such things with consistency? From the high to the low, office holders of this nation have condoned, encouraged, and engaged in lawlessness for their own aims. They are hardly in a position to lead others out of the same wilderness in which they have helped to lead them. We hear them speak, just as we hear the rioters speak, and wide coverage of their words is given by the press and other media. Yet, the impression such words make has not much real impact. Why is that? It is because men have congratulated law violators in one place, and cannot expect people to listen to them if they plead for obedience to the law in another. Every branch of our present national government has tied its own hands to plead for lawfulness among the American people. They cannot plead for respect for the law because respect for the law has not been one of their characteristics.

Other Influences

We live in a time when there be the producers of immoral movies and television stories, and these people pour their slime and corruption into the homes and minds of Americans, young and old. When people feed on that, when men produce and sell sin, when advertisers will promote it, when there be powers that would sell your soul for their dollar, then what else can we expect from the populace but a reenactment of what they are thinking, living, dealing, using, talking?

Hell shall have an eternal supply of fuel in the manufacturers, distributors, and consumers of the alcoholic beverages, narcotics, sensual literature, and other morally destructive influences that has turned our nation into a madness of lustful, self-indulgent, sex-crazed, drunken pleasure seekers.

Yes, there are many contributing factors to such horror as was seen in Los Angeles and elsewhere. But the event is first and foremost a manifestation of just how extensive is the spiritual and moral decay of our nation.

Shall We Repeal It?

Americans are acting as if this nation shall be the first to repeal the law of sowing and reaping. But even though our past shows many great accomplishments, this repeal shall not be one of them. As surely as the sun shines upon the earth, this nation shall suffer its fall from her pride and waste and defiance of God's truth unless the people repent and turn from the path now being followed. There has not been a society or nation that has sown as we have sown and continued to prosper and progress.

The Solution

It is not that the solution to the problem facing mankind is beyond our reach. For nearly two thousand years the solution to the ills of humankind has been at the disposal of humankind. People have simply seen fit to rebel against it, reject it, and turn away with a deaf ear before trying it. The only hope there is for mankind, including America, is JESUS CHRIST, the Son of the true and living God of heaven. Only when and if people recognize this fact and act accordingly shall we see such episodes as we have been witnessing through the nation cease.

Those of us who are Christians know that we have a duty to turn this world upside down so it will be right side up again. They only way is the faith of Christ in word and deed. I plead with the modernists,

the liberals, the atheists to be fair enough and see where your vanity and folly is taking this nation. I plead with the egotistical and gluttonous politicians to have enough honor and integrity to be real servants of the people rather than grabbers of power to feather your own nest. I plead with the hypocritical clergy to cast aside your false doctrines of men and your clerical robes and take up the sword of the Spirit, put on the whole armor of God, and do battle against the forces of evil rather than continue to pave the way for the victory of atheistic secularism and humanism. Far more than clergymen realize, they are leading our people to the slaughter at the altar of communism, atheism, and the vilest forms of moral degeneracy. I plead with those who teach and train our youth. Awaken to your real duty to make men and women of your students, and cease producing the godless, unprincipled, rabble that is so much in evidence with your pseudo-intellectualism, which is nothing but sophisticated barbarism. I plead with the churchgoers to quit being just a satisfied, complacent, two-faced churchgoer and become a true New Testament Christian. I plead with parents to fill their roles in the home and stop thinking they can shirk responsibility for the sake of more material possession.

Either-Or

One more and closing fact which I would call to our attention. We either do make a turn from our present course, or our nation shall perish, our descendants shall suffer, and we shall bear the guilt of bringing upon them the whirlwind that we have created.

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DIMENSIONS OF GOD'S LOVE

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye,

being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph. 4:14-19).

We often speak of the dimensions of things, like the dimensions of a room being twenty feet by forty feet. The dimensions show the expanse of the room and also the limitations of the room. In our text, Paul gives the dimensions of the love that Deity has for man by speaking of the breadth, length, depth and the height. We are not to understand that God limits His love, but we try to understand that there are some things that the love of God does not accomplish if man does not love God in return.

Length

What is the length of God's love? How far does it extend? John 3:16 speaks of God loving. God is the Creator, Designer, Governor, Preserver of all things, and the Giver of life. He is from everlasting to everlasting. God gave His Son. The Son He gave was not one son among many from which He might have chosen, but He gave His only begotten Son. He gave the purest, finest, richest of all gifts. Paul says concerning this gift from God, (2 Cor. 9:15), "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." The gift was and is of such value that words are not capable of adequately expressing the magnitude of the gift.

The motive behind the giving of this gift was the love God has for the people of this world. Love is the greatest of gifts. God has demonstrated to us what love is in the giving of Christ. Love sacrifices self on the behalf of another. Love seeks the other's highest good. Such is the meaning of the love that God has shown, that Christ manifested, that Christians are to imitate. Picture the Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane. Scripture says that Jesus prayed in the stillness of the night, alone and in great agony. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But because of God's wondrous love for man, He spared not His only begotten Son. How can any doubt the

extent of the love of God?

Breadth

What is the breadth of God's love? It is equally as marvelous. It is broad enough to be all-inclusive. It embraces all men everywhere. The giving of God's Son was the giving of the greatest gift to the greatest number. "He tasted of death for every man." (Heb. 2:9). God's love was broad enough to cover all the transgressions of all people.

This does not mean that all will be saved because the love of God must be accepted by those who would be benefited from it. God gives, but man must receive. Should man be so foolish as to reject the One God sent, then man deprives himself of the salvation offered.

But the scope of God's love is seen in such passages as John 3:17, how God "sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." This does not mean that sinners are not condemned. It means God's gift had as the primary goal the salvation, not the destruction, of man. Sin destroys. God saves. John 6:15 teaches that Jesus gave His flesh "for the life of the world." "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." (1 John 4:14). He came to save (John 12:47). The provision of the love of God is as broad as the entire human race.

Depth

What is the depth of God's love? How far down does the love of God reach? We might best understand this part of God's love by asking how far down can one go in sin? God did not just love "nice" people. He is not concerned only for those who come from good homes, who are outstanding in the community, who are considered successful by the standards of the world. The downcast, weary, heavy-laden, burdened by sin, all are the targets of the love of God. Even those in the "gutter of life" are included in God's love. It

reaches as far down as man has allowed himself to plunge. Murderers, adulterers, liars, the covetous, wicked in any and every way can be reached by the love of God. Even as He was dying on the cross His concern through His Son was for those who had committed such a grievous sin as killing the innocent and perfect Son of God. He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." One cannot become so stained with sin that the blood of Christ cannot wash him clean and pure as new-fallen snow. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven when a man meets God's conditions of forgiveness. There is no "unpardonable sin" when man obeys God's will. There is no pardon of any sin when men rebel against God and refuse to obey. No person is too bad, too mean, to save, if they will turn to God. That is how far down the love of God goes. It is as if God is extending His hand downward to sinful man, ready and willing to lift him up, provided man will lay hold on the hand of God and allow God to save him.

Height

What is the height of the love of God? Ultimately, the love of God reaches upward into heaven. Higher and higher in the ways of righteousness and service to others can a person go when he will let himself be led by the love of God. We shall finally be caught up with Him into the eternal realm of glory because the love of God extends that far. We sing the song,"Love Lifted Me." This reminds us of both the depth and height of the love of God. Down in sin, and lifted into glory is the way of man when he obeys God and loves God in return for His love for man.

Love's Limit

The "limitation" of God's love is specified by God Himself. That is, the benefits of His love are limited to those who will appreciate His love. God will not force His love on any, but extends His love to all. "Whosoever will may come." But only in that

sense is the love of God limited.

The boundlessness of God's love for those who come to Him is expressed in the blessed words of Paul's letter to Rome, chapter 8, verses 37-39. "Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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BOY OR GIRL?

Will you be a boy or girl?

A stubborn cowlick, or a pretty curl?

A little priss, or a little brat?

An Easter bonnet, or a cowboy hat?

Little britches, or a little dress?

With make-up or mud will you make a mess?

A little truck, or a little doll?

A pom-pom, or a football?

A little lady, or a little man?

I don't know, but understand-

That whether you are pink or blue?

You're just what we want- And we love you.

--William H. Boyd



JAMES W. BOYD

WHAT DENOMINATION?

Upon being told that I was a preacher, a man asked me, "What denomination?" I told him, " No denomination. I have never read of a denomination anywhere in the Bible. But I do read of the church that belongs to Christ, built by Christ, founded on Him and purchased by His blood. That church He has promised to save. But a denomination cannot be found in God's book."

I understand the problems faced by denominational people. They want to follow Christ, "their own way." Having no authority from God for denominations, still they persist in them. People like what they want and want what they like. But it does seem only fair that the advocates of denominations produce something from Scripture to give authority for their existence.

When and if the time ever comes in the preaching and teaching that is done by the church that fails to distinguish between the church and denominations, then the church will soon be just another group but not the Lord's church. There is a difference and we must never forget it, nor be ashamed to contend for it.

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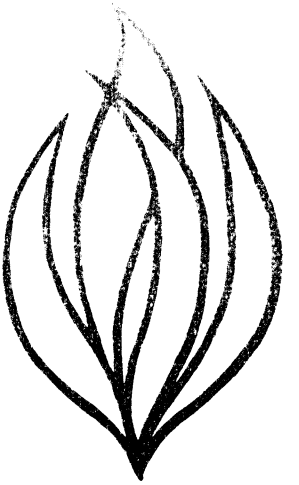

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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BE SURE YOUR SINS WILL FIND YOU OUT

As Israel made the journey toward Canaan and approached the east side of Jordan, the tribes of Reuben and Gad made request of Moses that they be allowed to live in lands on that side of the river. They said they would leave their wives and children and possessions there and cross over the river with the rest of the tribes as armed men and continue in the battle of deliverence until all the tribes had secured their homeland. Moses agreed to this arrangement, but also warned these men, "But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23). The warning was clear. If they did not do as they promised,their misdeed would be as one that searched and sought for them until retribution for their transgression was paid.

Since the beginning of time and the first sin entered the world, people have tried to escape the consequences of their sins, only to eventually have them discovered, and what they have sown comes back to them in the harvest that they are forced to reap. No matter how the sin may be committed, it will ultimately be exposed.

Secret Sin

Sin may be committed in secret as was the sin of Cain. In Genesis four, we read how Cain was jealous of his brother, Abel. Cain semmed to have pretended a friendship with Abel that enabled him to get into a position to do him harm. "And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him." (Gen. 4:8). He thought nobody knew what he had done.

It was not long thereafter that God came to Cain and asked him where Abel was. Cain responded in a way that feigned ignorance of Abel's whereabouts and as if he knew nothing. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Whereupon God let Cain know that his crime against his brother was fully known. Cain was cursed because of His evil deed and would have to till the ground but it

would not produce its strength. He would be a vagabond, a wanderer, never at rest. He would be a fugitive and nobody would like him but would seek to do him harm. If Cain were brought, as it were, to a witness stand and asked, "Is it true that your sin will find you out?" there is no question as to what his answer would be. As Solomon wrote, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." (Eccl. 12:14).

Sinned Long Ago

Sin may have been committed long before it is finally discovered and exposed. But nonetheless, "be sure your sin will find you out." Take the story of Joseph and his brothers. His brethren sold him into slavery because they were jealous of him and hated him. Even though Joseph provoked them to some of this hatred, they were not justified in lying to their father as if Joseph had been slain. They were not justified in selling him as a slave into Egypt.

Many years passed and many events took place in the life of Joseph that none could have supposed would ever occur. Gradually, doubtless through the providence of God, Joseph was raised from slavery, to the head of the house of Potiphar, wrongfully accused and placed in prison only to rise to be the head of the prisoners, and eventually, as the interpreter of dreams of Pharoah, he was lifted to the second rank in all the land. And there he ruled at the time that famine struck the entire area, including Canaan and the homeland of Jacob and Joseph's brothers.

The brothers came to Egypt to buy grain, never thinking they were on their way to meet the brother they had sold into slavery. Before Joseph eventually revealed himself to them, they went through much agony and concern. Strange things seemed to happen to them regarding their money being given back, one of them placed in prison as hostage, witnessing more grief for their father as he mourned over the loss of Joseph, then Simeon, and his concern for the continuation of the famine. When Joseph did let them know who he was, they feared for

their lives. Even after Jacob died, they thought Joseph would take vengeance on them. How many times they paid and paid because of their sin against their brother. Their conscience hurt them down through the years. Ask these brothers, "Is it true that your sin will find out out?"

Sin Thought To Be Covered

Sin may be thought to be well-covered only to rise up again and haunt the sinner. Take the account of Achan and the overthrow of the city of Jericho. He tried to hide his sin. Before taking the city, God through Joshua warned the people not to take the spoils of the city for themselves because it belonged to the treasury of the Lord. But when Achan saw some of the plentiful bounty that was in the captured city his greed and covetousness was more than he could control, and he took certain things burying them in his tent, supposing that his theft was adequately covered, never imagining how his sin would eventually find him out.

When Israel went against the city of Ai, they suffered a temporary defeat. Joshua inquired of God as to the reason for this set-back, and God told him that there was sin in the camp. Upon investigation, the sin of Achan was uncovered. Achan and all his were taken out and destroyed because they had violated God's way and they had thought they had covered their sin. We might ask this man, as if he were providing us with evidence, "Is it true that your sin will find you out?"

Luke writes, "For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known." (Luke 12:2).

And when we think of people trying to cover their sins, think how David tried to cover his sin with Bathsheba by lying, plotting, scheming, eventually conspiring and being a part of murder. But the prophet Nathan came and told him a certain story that exposed David. Those famous words of accusation, "Thou art the man," convinced David that his sin would find him out. From that time until David left the walks of men he suffered

distress, primarily coming from his own family, just as Nathan the prophet had said he would

Each One Is Responsible

It may well be that many people sin because they are prompted and encouraged to sin by other people. We certainly have influence on each other. People can lead others to sin. But each one is accountable before God for his or her sin and must give an account. And even though somebody else may have been a contributing factor in our sin, it will still find us out.

Turning to 1 Kings 2:22, we read of the king of northern Israel and Naboth. Offering to buy Naboth's vineyard, but being refused, Ahab acted as a spoiled child and pouted about being denied. But his evil wife, Jezebel told him that she would take care of the matter. He gave her his ring of authority and she began her evil plotting. She had false witnesses to testify against Naboth that he was guilty of blasphemy and Naboth was executed. Then Jezebel seized the vineyard and gave it to Ahab. But what Ahab and Jezebel had not counted on was the work of Elijah, God's prophet. He came to Ahab and told him that his deeds were known and that dogs would lick his blood and the blood of Jezebel in the very vineyard they had taken from Naboth.

It did not happen immediately, but in time Ahab was wounded in battle and was brought back to the place of his crime, and there he died. And the dogs came and licked up his blood. Jezebel later was thrown down from a high window and the dogs consumed her body. Ask them, "Is it true that your sin will find you out?" Does one really have to eventually pay for his sins?

When Ahab was refused the vineyard, he seemed to have given up the idea of possessing it. But he was led into the grievous transgressions by his wicked wife, and shared the guilt and responsibility in the things that were done, and his sin found him out.

Jeremiah wrote, "For mine eyes are upon all thy ways, they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes." (Jer. 16:17).

Sinning In Ignorance

People sometimes sinned ignorantly, not realizing the enormity of the evil that they are committing. Such was certainly the case with the Jews as they called for the crucifixion of Christ. Through that very nation God had designed that the Savior would come. But when the prophecied and promised Messiah came upon the scene, the Jews rejected Him. Led by their leaders who hated the Christ, they denounced Him, and asked Pilate to have Him killed. All the while they thought they were doing what God would want them to do with one who they perceived to be a pretender and a blasphemer. But what they did they did in ignorance. Peter preached and said to them, "And now brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it." (Acts. 3:17). Even so, they were held responsible. There actually was no excuse for their ignorance anyway. When one does something wrong, even though he may not be aware that it is wrong, he has still done something wrong. He may not do his deeds with evil intent, but wrong can be done even with the intention of having done right. People can sin ignorantly. But they are still guilty of sin.

The crime they committed against Jesus meant they were estranged from God. They were sinners. They were lost. They were made to realize this. The inspired apostles preached forthrightly to the Jews in the condemnation of their sins and warned them of the fearful hell that awaited those who rejected Christ. Has not the Jewish nation even to this day been a "hiss and a by-word?" Are they not the object of persecution in almost every land where they exist? Did not they say that the blood of Christ should be on them and their children? Do we not see how that even yet their sins find them out, even though those living now are not guilty of the sins of their foreparents? Just like many people today suffer because of the slavery of the black people, not being guilty of it, but still, sin finds people out.

Impulsive Sinning

Sin may be commited under the sudden impulse of passion, under the influence of strong drink, or to please the crowd and gratify the public. Samson, Esau, Pilate, all those sinned in such fashions. One can even sin with the approval and participation of those in authority, like Judas, but who can doubt, "Be sure your sin will find you out?"

But thanks be to God we can be forgiven our sin. God provided Christ for that specific purpose. We can belong to that company of the saved, which is the church which belongs to Christ, and can be forgiven of all guilt. We may well suffer hardship and certain temporal consequences because of sin, but we do not have to face God condemned. If sin is not forgiven, and we may even think we have not been found out here on this earth, there is the judgment. None then will doubt the fact, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

* * * *

PREVENTIVE RELIGION

The field of medicine is possibly the greatest field of service to the human being, second only to Christianity, the healing of the spiritual man. A study of the history of medicine and its growth and advancement is a fascinating study. Many of the steps, principles, and developments in the history of medicine parallel some of the principles of New Testament Christainity.

In medicine, we read about some of the early theories and practices that would cause us either laughter or horror today. Ill health was once attributed to angry demons that affected people. Witch doctors in Africa still deal with illnesses in such a light. The medicine men of the American Indians acted on the basis that sickness was a demon-caused condition. They would try to appease these evil spirits by offering various sacrifices and doing certain rituals.

They would not treat the disease nor get to its cause.

Man later began to recognize symptoms of diseases. Various medicines were discovered to ease suffering when someone had a certain disease. My great-grandfather was a doctor. I remember seeing on the fireplace mantel a device called a "bleeder." It was an object with many swiftly cutting blades that would be placed on a person's arm that had high blood pressure and with the push of a switch these blades would cut the arm and cause it to bleed, thinking that would relieve the pressure of blood in the veins and arteries. It is said that excessive "bleeding" is what killed George Washington.

Not Just Symptoms, But Causes

Eventually, doctors began to go behind the symtoms of a disease and were not content to just treat symtoms, but began to seek the causes. Once the cause could be determined, then the removal of the cause would heel the disease.

As progress continued, men began to learn how to prevent diseases by avoiding the causes. When the cause is known, prevention is sometimes possible. Medicines have been discovered, vaccines found, that can kill bacteria that is harmful and prevent the disease from ever occuring. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Anyone had rather avoid having a disease than having to recover from one. In many ways, the most beneficial part of medicine to man has been preventive medicine. This is the reason for so much medical research.

While medicine deals with the body, Christianity deals primarily with the soul or spirit of man. There is this deadly spiritual disease that is called sin. God has dealt with man and the matter of sin under three dispensations. A dispensation is simply a system of rules by which God governs man for a period of time. These dispensations are called the patriarchal, Mosaical, and Christian dispensations. Although these are not so named in Scripture, we can soon see why these labels have been attached to them as we see the characteristics of them.

Patriarchal System

The patriarchal age was a time when the father of the family served as prophet and priest before God. It was a time of father-rule. The father would receive instructions from God on behalf of the family. The father offered petitions and sacrifices for his family. Such men as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived under such a system. Also, men like Adam, Noah, and many others.

During this period sin was very rampant, but there was not given a remedy for sin. There was the correction by the flood at the time of Noah. Also, sacrifices were offered, but mostly as worship rather than offerings for sin.

Mosaical System

Under the Mosaical system there was more concern about sin. There were efforts made to treat the symtoms. Such commands as "Thou shalt not kill" was dealing with murder, but did not get to the cause of murder, which is hate. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" was the outward manifestation of the cause which was lust. The "thou shalts" and the "thou shalt not's" endeavored to remedy sin by instructing man to see the condemnation on him if he sinned. Forgiveness of sin and prevention of sin was not the main thrust under the law of Moses. Many kinds of animal sacrifices and offerings were offered because of sin, but as Hebrews teaches us, the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins. (Hebrews 10:4).

System of Christ

When Christ came and produced His system of salvation, He condemned sin. He provided the way of forgiveness which is the only cure of sin. But even more, by following Christ, we can prevent sin in our lives. For instance, while the Lord condemned murder, He struck at its cause of hate. The same applied to adultery. His teaching was at the heart of man, the inward, to drive out lust, which was the cause of adultery.

Three-fold Glory of the Gospel

The glory of the gospel can be perceived as being three-fold. First, it reveals the Savior, Jesus Christ. "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are wirtten, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30,31). Second, it reveals God's power to cure sin, to save man from sin. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:16,17). Third, the gospel has the power to prevent sin, and to keep us from sin. "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding jou." (Jude 24). The gospel provides us a defense against sin and a shield from the fiery darts of the evil one. Just as preventive medicine is the greatest benefit to man, the gospel of Christ is the greatest spiritual benefit there is for mankind.

Because Christ can and does guard us against sin does not mean that we cannot sin, or cannot fall away. We have our part to play also. There are too many scriptures warning against falling away to ever believe that it is impossible for such a thing to happen. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12). If one could not sin such a warning would have no meaning whatever. "Brethren, if any among you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:19,20). This was written to Christian brethren. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of

God afresh, and put him to an open shame." (Heb. 6:4-6). "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Pet.2:20-22). Prevention does not mean impossibility.

Prevention of Sin

How can we prevent future sins through the gospel? Listen to what the gospel tells us. "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love." (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Peter went on to write, "For if these things abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." (2 Pet. 1:8-10). "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man sowth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal. 6:7,8). To sow to the flesh would be to produce our condemnation. Paul wrote concerning the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21), and concluded by saying, "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." On the other hand, there are the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:21,22), against such there is no law. The way to prevent the works of the flesh and to produce the fruit of the Spirit is to "walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." (Gal. 5:16).

The innoculation against sin is to fill our lives with righteousness. By having God's word in our heart we can prevent sin. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee." (Psalm 119:11). Jesus prevented sin by escaping the temptations of the devil with the proper use of the Word of God. In Matthew four, time after time, when the devil tempted Him, He would respond, "It is written..." and the teaching of the word prevented sin. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15). Study brings knowledge, and knowledge enables one to know the difference between right and wrong. He has the ability to withstand the devil and be approved of God. The more you know and apply the Bible, the less likely you are to sin. Herein is the great preventive power of the gospel.

Limitations of Immunization

But the gospel will immunize us only to the extent that we allow it to work in our lives. Smallpox vaccine can do wonders, but not until it is accepted and applied. The Salk vaccine that has about rid the nation of polio can prevent polio, but not if it is unaccepted and never applied. The gospel tells men of the grace of God and forgiveness of sins, but it cannot and will not save unless accepted and applied. The prevention of future sins will be a reality only if the gospel is accepted and applied. The message of Christ unbelieved and disobeyed will not save one's soul. But heard, believed, obeyed, followed, we can be forgiven of past sins, and many potential sins can and will be avoided. When we do sin we have an avenue of prayer to ask for forgiveness when we are penitent and confess our sins.

* * * *

WE SHOULD DO WHAT WE CAN

"And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious, and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone, why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good, but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could, she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." (Mark 14:3-9).

Our study shall concentrate on the phrase, "She hath done what she could." It is a lesson intended to encourage us individually and collectively to be sure we are utilizing our talents and opportunities as we ought for God.

There are many who would like to do something for the Lord. But they feel that whatever they may do is too small or worthless. "If I could only preach or teach or do personal work, lead singing, lead in prayer, something like that." Others might think, "If I only had the money I could give so abundantly to the cause of Christ. I could do great things, big things." It is unfortunate that many think they must "shake the world" before the work they do is of any significance. Let me suggest at the start that more than likely the greatest work being done on behalf of the Lord today may well be that which escapes the praises of men, the notoriety, the acclaim some give some action or gift. It is rather disgusting to see brethren talk about the "Christian of the Year" or something of that nature. How in the world anyone can possibly be so arrogant

and presemptious to think they can pass such a judgment on anybody. They do not know what is going on in the world that may far exceed what they praise so highly. We ought allow God to determine what is the greatest and most worthy actions. But how people do crave for notoriety and praise from their fellows. The back-scratching political movements that captivate the thought and energies of so many brethren must cause our Lord grief and pain.

Big Is Not Always Best

To think that one must do something "big" in the eyes of men before it matters before God is a mistake. The Lord has given each of us different opportunities, and abilities. Does not the parable of the talents teach us this in Matthew 25? One man got five talents, another two, another one. The five talent man gained five more, the two talent man gained two more. The one talent man was condemned, but not because he did not gain another talent, but because he did not use what he had. He did not try. He was not expected to do as much as the others, but his trouble was that he did nothing. Please notice also that the five talent man and the two talent man both received the same words of commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Each did as they could do.

The "outstanding" efforts, what some like to call the big things, are not necessarily productive of what God wants, nor meet God's approval. Even big things are made of many little ones. While the Lord does not expect us to produce exactly alike, He does expect us to do what we can. But He does expect that. We have several Bible characters that illustrate for us this truth. We will consider only three or four. But keep alert that what might seem insignificant was something that was very important and provided a very essential part and impact.

Value of "Small"

We have already mentioned the woman who anointed

the head of Jesus. We will pass on to some others. But Jesus shows us what our attitude toward "small" things ought to be. Wherever the gospel goes, goes the story of the deed of this woman. Her action provides the Biblical basis for many truths.

Hur

Do you know the man named Hur? Probably few could identify this man without some research. He played a small, but very essential role, in the story of the Israelite nation. In the Old Testament we read how Israel was delivered from Egypt and was in the wilderness. Hur becomes active at a time when Israel is in a great deal of trouble. "Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, Choose us out men and go out, fight with Amalek, tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek, and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses hands were heavy, and they took a stone, and put it under him. and he sat thereon, and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side, and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." (Exodus 17:8-13).

Three of the characters of this event were very prominent in the affairs of Israel. There was Moses, the great deliverer, lawgiver, leader of the entire nation. There was Aaron, the spokesman for Moses and soon to become the first high priest. There was Joshua, who was the leader of the military forces and eventually the notable spy as well as the successor to Moses. But we also have mention of the man named Hur. This event, and one other, is the only reference to Hur. He was likely a man in whom Moses trusted, but was certainly not of the statue in the land as these others.

Hur could have reasoned that he was not very important, and nobody was too dependent upon him. He could have asked, "What can I do?" He was not the commander-in-chief. He was not the brother of Moses. He was not a soldier. He was not asked to assume a prominent role in this time of crisis. But Hur did not have that attitude nor act accordingly. He went to the hill with Moses and Aaron, and did what he could. It was in some respects a lowly task. When Moses grew weary of holding up his hands, he got on one side of Moses to give him the assistance Moses needed so Joshua and his countrymen could drive out the Amalekites who had invaded their camp. Actually, he proved to be a valuable aid in enabling Israel to win the battle. He helped save Israel from potential destruction in the early days of their wandering. How did he help? He held up the hands of those on whom the responsibility rested. He encouraged them and assisted them. He did what he could.

Abraham's Servant

In Genesis 24, we read about a servant of Abraham. His name is not given. Abraham was growing old and he wanted a wife for Isaac. But he did not want his son to take a wife from among the heathen Canaanites, but from his own people who had come some of the way with him from Mesopotamia. He gave the charge to this servant to find a wife for Isaac, and sent this servant back to the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia to find the girl that would become the wife of Isaac. This servant began his mission, praying to God for assistance in locating who the girl should be.

He asked God to give him a sign to identify the one for whom he should ask on behalf of Isaac. The sign would be that he would ask for water at a well and the girl that gave him water would be the girl that would be chosen.

The account reveals how Rebekah was that girl. She was the grand-daughter of Abraham's brother, one of the kindred from which Abraham wanted Isaac to have his wife. After proper negotiations, Rebekah was brought to Isaac.

This servant, being given this rather awesome task, could have said that it was more than he could do. He could have disclaimed any ability to perform such a task. He could have cited the obstacles that stood in the way of success, such as being just a servant. Who would commit his daughter to just a servant on behalf of an unknown master? He could have said that the responsibility was not his at all. But he did not do that. He did what he could. With the help of God, he was most successful.

Rebekah became the mother of the man for whom the nation of Israel took its name. She was a powerful influence in shaping the early history of Israel in her dealing with Esau and Jacob, which were not always what they should have been because she deceived her husband and showed partiality between the sons. She was also an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ through the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But this unnamed servant played a role of significance, even though it was not near so prominent as others. But he did what he could.

A Little Maid

We turn attention to a little Israelite maid who did what she could. She was the servant of Naaman's wife, a Syrian captain who had leprosy. He was a mighty man and quite prominent in Syria. This maid mentioned to his wife that there was a prophet in Samaria that could heal Naaman of his disease. News reached Naaman of this and he was sent to Samaria in search of his recovery from leprosy.

Without going into detail of the mistakes Naaman made by going to the king at first rather than the prophet to whom he should have gone, and how when he received instructions to dip himself in the River Jordan to be healed he became angry and was about to turn away and go back home, we find that he finally did what he was instructed to do and received the benefit for which he sought. Scripture says his flesh became again like unto the flesh of a little

child and he was clean.

This maid could have thought, "I am only a young girl, a slave at that, and this is none of my concern. There is nothing I can or should do. It is simply not up to me. I will probably do better not to become involved."

Naaman's Servant

But she did what she could as did the servant of Naaman that later provoked Naaman to reconsider his rash reactions and obey the voice of the prophet. He could have said, "I better stay out of this. My master is angry and I have no right telling him what he ought to do." But like the maid, he did what he could. The healing of Naaman was the only healing of this kind that took place during that period (Luke 4:27).

Consider what great lessons we learn from this entire account. There is the demonstration of the power of God. There is the necessity of obedience. There is the benefit of changing one's mind when in error. Many, many useful lessons are there even for us today. But none of them would have existed if the little maid, and the unnamed servant, had not done what they were able to do. They were not the prominent people of the story, like Naaman, the king of Israel, Elisha the prophet. But they did what they could. And without them, none of it would have happened. People today have been persuaded to obey the gospel because they have been impressed with the necessity of obedience from the study of the account of Naaman. Surely, we see the value of doing what we are able to do.

A Boy's Warning

In the New Testament, we read about a boy who did what he could. Paul had been taken a prisoner because of accusations against him by the Jews. He had to appeal to Ceasar lest they put him to death. While making preparations for the journey to Rome, the Jews plotted a way to assasinate Paul. We read of their plans in Acts 23:12-16. "And when it was day, certain of the

Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore, ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he will bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him; and we, if ever he come near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul."

Paul sent the boy to the centurion. The centurion went to the captain and arrangements were made for the safe evacuation of Paul by night from the city of Jerusalem to Caesarea.

This young man was Paul's nephew. He learned of the plot, it seems quite by accident. But he could have said, "I am too young to do anything. What can I do? These men are killers. It is the responsibility of the Roman government to protect Paul. They know how to handle such things. After all,Paul is in prison, and nobody will believe me anyway." But he did what he could. He could tell Paul. And that set in motion several events that lad to the escape that prevented Paul's death at this time.

If the boy had not done what he could do, possibly much of the New Testament may never have been written, certainly not by Paul. While in Rome, the Holy Spirit had Paul to write Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Timothy, Philemon, and possibly Hebrews. The great teaching that he did while in Rome would never have been done. Many who were saved might never have heard the word of truth. This boy did the cause of Christ a tremendous service simply by doing what he could at the time he had opportunity to do it.

We might conclude that all these things were manifestations of the providence of God, and we would be correct. But can not se see how God provides through

the actions of people who will do what they can, when they can, to the extent that they can?

Others could be mentioned, such as Miriam, who helped spare Moses; the men who let a lame man down through the roof to be healed by Jesus; the mother and grandmother of Timothy who taught him the scriptures. Over and over we can find examples of people doing what they could. Without great fanfare, praise from others, they went about doing good as they could.

God does not necessarily measure greatness the way men do. It is not always how "big" a thing we do that counts. It is doing what we can in proportion to our abilities and opportunities.

There is the story of a couple who wanted a son so they could train him to be a preacher. But their only child was a daughter. But they brought her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. She married and gave birth to nine sons, all of whom were taught by their mother from infancy to be gospel preachers. What if the original parents had not done what they could?

The song we often sing asks the question, "When to the Lord we restore our talents, will He answer thee, well done?"

* * * *

BAPTISM

Most gospel preachers will preach on the subject of baptism many times because of the significance given to it in God's word. Likely, he will have a number of sermons that approach the subject in different ways, but all of which bring to light the revelation of God concerning baptism. We should never be apologetic for preaching anything that the Bible discusses. Baptism is a prominent Bible subject. Many need to be baptised. Just because many do not understand the subject, many reject baptism as taught in the Bible, many teach error concerning it, and some contend that it is discussed too often. Gospel preachers ought not be intimidated to

withhold the much needed lessons on so vital an issue as baptism.

We shall approach the lesson now by asking four questions and seaching the Scriptures for the answers. We shall ask who, why, how, and when regarding baptism. First, before baptism, one must be taught. We could not expect anyone to want to be baptized who was not taught about it. The faith of Christ is a taught faith. Faith is not received miraculously, but by the hearing of the word of God (Rom. 10:17). This is the reason the apostles spent so much time teaching, privately, house to house, publicly, to multitudes, to individuals. Christ said to go, teach, baptize. Before baptism there was to be teaching (Matt. 28:19). "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, He that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15,16).

Those baptized in New Testament times were those that received the word that was taught (Acts 2:41). Having heard and understood the message, they accepted it as being true. Those who rejected the word were not baptized but only those that received it. Believers are proper subjects for baptism. When the Ethiopian wanted to be baptized Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." Had he not believed he would not have been baptized.

But one was not a proper subject for baptism simply because he believed. There is another condition that preceeds baptism according to Acts 2:38. Peter said to repent and be baptized. Those who repented were the ones baptized, and we would be presumptuous to encourage baptism in anyone who does not repent. To repent means to change one's mind that leads to a change in life.

Furthermore, Acts 8:37, also shows that one confesses his faith in Christ prior to baptism. From all that the Bible teaches as to those who were baptized, we learn that those to whom the word of God has been taught, those who had received that word and believed it, who repented of their sins and confessed their

faith in Christ, they were the ones who were baptized. This would exclude those who are untaught, or incapable of being taught. This would exclude those who reject the word and disbelieve. This would exclude the impenitent as well as those who do not confess Christ. This would have to exclude infants who cannot do the things necessary. Those unwilling to obey would not be proper subjects for baptism. Would you baptize someone who admitted he did not believe in Christ? Would you baptize one who would not confess his faith? Would you baptize one who said he was going to continue in his sins after baptism? Such would not be proper subjects for baptism as taught in the New Testament.

Why?

Why should people be baptized? Again, let us see the reasons given in the Scriptures for baptism. Some are baptized today as a sign that they are already saved. Some say baptism is but a symbol of salvation. Some are baptized simply to join some denomination. Nothing like these reasons is given in the Bible. But reasons are stated nonetheless.

Acts 22:16 teaches that baptism is to wash away sins. We are not to understand that the power of forgiveness is the water. But the power of forgiveness is the blood of Christ. But we reach that blood in baptism (Rom. 6:3,4) when we are baptized into the death of Christ, the place where His blood was shed. It is obvious that prior to Saul's baptism his sins had not been washed away because that is the reason Annanias gave for him to be baptized. Peter told his hearers on Pentecost that baptism was for the same purpose as repentance. Both repentance and baptism were "for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38). The word translated "for" means "unto," which is always pointing forward. Peter told them to be baptized "unto the remission of sins." Baptism was not because they had already been forgiven, as Baptists teach. We can see the meaning of the phrase "for the remission of sins" quite clearly when Jesus used the identical phrase in Matt. 26: 28, when He said He shed His blood "for the remission of sins." Jesus

did not shed His blood because sins were already forgiven. Since the phrase shows the necessity of the shedding of the Lord's blood, it also shows the necessity of repentance and baptism. The purpose of baptism could not be more clearly stated, and is not to be dismissed as optional.

Paul said we get into Christ by baptism. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). Who has the right to say we have put on Christ if we have not put Him on like people did in the New Testament? Who has the right to say we get into Christ another way since Paul says we are baptized into Christ? This is identically what he taught in Romans 6:3,4. When we are baptized we are baptized into His death. The importance of being in Christ is seen in Romans 8:1. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ." Salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). So we must get into Christ, and we are baptized into Christ.

This is the way we enter the church. We are baptized into the one body (1 Cor. 12:13). There is one baptism (Eph. 4:4,5), and the baptism being preached and practiced was water baptism. (Acts 8:36; 10:47). Those who heard Peter on Pentecost, who received the word, were told to repent and be baptized, and three thousand did just that and were added to the church (Acts. 2:47).

We are baptized in order to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3,4). We do not begin that new life before baptism, but upon being raised. When we start a new life it is because we are born again. That is what the new birth involves, the beginning of a newness of life. We are "born of water and the Spirit." (John 3:3-5).

Why Not?

Some say we are to be baptized to obey Christ, but that it has nothing to do with our salvation. A more inconsistent statement could hardly be uttered. Christ

is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9). Baptism was commanded by Peter (Acts 10:48). They either would obey or disobey. If they disobeyed, would it make any difference? Being baptized is to obey. To obey Christ is necessary to be saved.

Some say that baptism is not necessary because the last part of Mark 16:16 does not mention baptism as a condition for condemnation. The first part of the verse includes faith and baptism to be saved. If you want to be saved, then meet the conditions of salvation. If you want to be lost, meet those conditions. All you have to do to be lost is to disbelieve. Those who do not believe do not concern themselves with baptism, or repentance, or faithfulness, or Lord's Supper, or anything else regarding Christ. Unbelief is sufficient for condemnation. There is no need to mention baptism when you are talking about condemnation. But if you are concerned about salvation, you better pay attention to the things connected with it, and baptism is.

Ask Peter

1 Peter 3:21 reads, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth now also save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Baptism is a symbol, but not a symbol of salvation. It is that "form of doctrine" that is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3,4, 16-18). As Noah was saved by water, we are saved by baptism. No amount of denominational twisting can change the meaning of this definitely stated purpose for baptism. People may deny it and refuse it, but can't change it.

How?

How is a person to be baptized? We are asking what is the physical action. People sometimes talk about the "mode" of baptism. Baptism expresses the mode or manner. Baptism is a burial (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:12). The Bible states what baptism involves and all the sprinklers cannot change that. Baptize means to bury, plunge beneath, submerge, immerse. It has always meant

that in Biblical language. When people were baptized in the Bible they were under the water. They went to the water, went into the water, were baptized in the water, came up out of the water, were buried. There could be no resurrection, no raising to walk in newness of life if nothing more than pouring and/or sprinkling was involved. Pouring and sprinkling came into practice centuries after the New Testament church was in existence. They are human substitutions for the divine teaching.

When?

When should one be baptized? Providing he has been taught, has received the word, believed what he heard, has repented of his sins and confessed his faith in Christ, when should he obey the command to be baptized? Should he put if off for weeks, waiting for what is sometimes called by denominationalists "baptism Sunday." In the Bible Annanias asked Saul, "Why tarriest thou?" In other words, "Why are you waiting? Arise, and be baptized." Acts 9:18 says he did it immediately. The Ethiopian stopped the chariot at the first place of sufficient water. The Jews on Pentecost were baptized that day. The jailor in Phillipi was baptized the same hour of the night. Of course, they wanted to be baptized right away because they knew its importance. They had not been taught that it was optional and could wait. They knew how essential it was to obey and they did.

Friend, if people would only set aside their denominational creeds and the doctrines and dogmas of men and hear what the Spirit says through the word, the matter of baptism would no longer be a point of constant conflict and religious confusion. So we would encourage one and all who have been taught, to believe, repent, confess your faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins, and do it now. "Now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2).

* * * *



JAMES W. BOYD

THE FIRST VOLUME

This issue is the final one of the first of over twenty proposed volumes consisting of sermons I have preached over the years.

Because I believe them to teach truth, I hope to commit them to print, Lord willing.

A BURNING FIRE is distributed free upon request. Even though the expense is considerable, and our goal of 500 requests was quickly reached, we will continue to honor each request as long as we can afford it. We are very grateful for the assistance various ones have given this first year and enter the second volume very encouraged.

We plan to improve the appearance of the booklet with the use of printing equipment we are trying to accumulate.

It is our hope and prayer that each reader may enjoy spiritual profit from this effort. If so, we are amply rewarded. JWB

* * * * *

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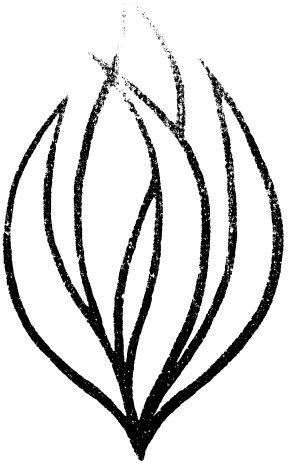

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME II *James W. Boyd* **NUMBER 1**

ELIJAH
AT MOUNT CARMEL

"Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks, and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood and put no fire under; and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." (1 Kings 18:22-24).

TWO NATIONS

The Biblical event under study occured around 900 B.C. It is an account of an event that took place in Northern Israel. Politically, Israel was divided into two nations, Judah and Northern Israel. Northern Israel was ruled by Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel.

SPIRITUAL STATE

The spiritual condition of Israel was far from what God would want it to be. Some worshipped God but in secret because of fear. There was much mixture of the worship of God alongside the worship of idols. There was outright paganism and heathenism and all of the attendant evils. There was even the sacrifice of children, sacred prostitution and other such things. How had Israel, God's chosen people, come to such a sordid state? They had married foreign wives who brought in with them their false religions. The Israelites, desiring to be like the nations around them, went along with the crowd of nations, riding the wave of popularity, following the way of alliance with evil.

There was weakness in Israel with immoral leadership, even spiritual decay among religious leaders. The people had become like their leaders. 1 Kings 16:33 shows how God's anger was provoked against them. *"And Ahab made a grove and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."* The result was that Israel had become a demonstration of

Proverbs 14:34, *"Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."* It produced the same result that any people can expect when the nation rebels against the will of the Lord.

ELIJAH'S PROPHECY

Elijah was the prophet of God in a country where prophets of God were not well received. In fact, they were hated and their lives were in danger. But Elijah appeared before Ahab and sounded a prophecy against Israel in the Lord's name.

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." (1 Kings 17:1).

There was to be a drought and famine in the land because of the evil of the king and the people. This prophecy forced Elijah to flee the country for his life. This is the result many times when one dares to tell God's truth. There are those that seek to destroy God's messenger. Ahab was angered. Jezebel threatened. The people ridiculed, mocked and laughed at him. But let us note that all the heat of anger against Elijah did not make even one word of Elijah's message false.

The laughter and mockery soon faded and the attitude turned to that of despair as the drought claimed the land. Crops burned in the fields. The ground cracked open for want of moisture. Wells went dry. Animals perished. Grazing lands were turned to dust. People were thirsty because water was scarce. Everything was parched in this troubled land.

It is an interesting study to see how God provided for Elijah during these hard days, but that is not the theme we wish to study.

ELIJAH MEETS AHAB

Eventually Elijah was told to go meet Ahab. This was an instruction that was fraught with danger because of the perilous times for the prophets of God. Jezebel had slain all she could find, and especially was Elijah sought. Many prophets had fled and were hiding in caves.

Meanwhile, Obadiah, Ahab's servant, and Ahab himself

searched for water, going in different directions. Elijah met Obadiah, a man who feared God but who must have feared Ahab more. Elijah told him to fetch Ahab for a meeting.

Notice the greeting Ahab gave to Elijah, which was certainly not a pleasant one. *"Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* [1 Kings 18:17). It is so typical of people like Ahab, then and now. Doubtless the land was in trouble. But Ahab tried to place blame on the man who spoke the word of the Lord rather than on himself and the people who sinned.

Ahab was like a thief who had been caught in the act of stealing but laid the blame for his troubles on the one who caught him rather than his theft. People are still that way. When someone points out sin, particularly a sin of which some close by may be guilty, right away there is anger toward the one who pointed it out. How many preachers have been blamed for causing trouble simply because they condemned sin, but those who were guilty accused them of being troublemakers? Such people never look at themselves. Ahab ought to have been glad there was a man like Elijah around him, showing him his error before God and directing him the right way to go. Elijah was concerned for the people, loved Israel enough, to tell them wherein they provoked God. One is a far greater friend who shows us how we offend God than one who will allow us to continue to our destruction and say nothing about it.

But Elijah had a response for the king. *"I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed baal."* (1 Kings 18:18) Direct, and to his face, in distinct terms that none could misunderstand, Elijah told Ahab that Ahab was the real troublemaker, and told him why. Friend, if Elijah was a troubler of Israel, the world, the nation, the church needs more troublers of his kind. We need those who will warn, arouse, expose sin, shake loose the minds of the hardened and indifferent, those who will uproot apathy and drive out self-righteousness and self-satisfaction. Always, without exception, always the troubler in the land, the church, a home, without exception is the one who is in sin, not the one who points out the sin. Whenever we learn that lesson we will be on our way to righting so much evil that is around us.

We now shall turn our attention and see how this important issue before Israel was resolved.

A CONTEST PROPOSED

Elijah proposed a contest between himself and the prophets of Baal. We can say to Ahab's credit that he was willing for the contest to take place. Some today are not as honorable as Ahab and will not allow what they say or think be put to the test. Some will even hear the message of truth, reject it, and will not even consider it or measure it by the word of God to see if it is true. They cast off truth as "preacher talk" or just another human opinion. They really are not honest enough to want to find out what is and is not the truth. There really is not much that can be done with people like that. Actually they are to be pitied because they are afflicted with a spiritual blindness. They are diseased with a hard and caloused heart, proud, fearful that they may be wrong, but simply will not dare to put what they say they believe to the test. They do not want to be disturbed. They do not want truth, but want a lullaby as they sleep in iniquity.

FOR A DECISION

Back to the proposed contest. What was the purpose of it? It was to prove that the God of heaven is the true and living God and that the idols were false gods. But there was another purpose. It was to get the Israelites to make a decision, an intelligent decision based on real evidence. Elijah asked the people, *"How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him. But if Baal, then follow him."* But notice the reaction of the people. *"And the people answered him not a word."* (1 Kings 18:21). They were unwilling to make a decision. They tried to be neutral or were too cowardly to take a stand either way. Possibly they were so indifferent that they did not care one way or the other. Whatever the reasons, they did not love the Lord enough to step out on His side. Maybe they were like some today who are always "studying the issue" but can never come to any conclusion. They may have been like some of whom Paul spoke who were ever learning but never could come to a knowledge of the truth. If only we could see that we must decide for God. All attempts to remain indecisive are deceitful. Jesus said that we are either for Him or against Him (Matt. 12:30). Fence-straddling is not acceptable. The attempt to not decide was a decision to not be for God.

WHAT IF SOME HAD SAID...?

Let us sidetrack our main theme just here and inject an observation. If some people living today had been living then and could have had their way, this contest the inspired prophet of God proposed would never occured. We can hear them now, for we have heard them before. What would have happened if someone had approached Elijah and said, "Now brother Elijah, there is no sense in this. There is no cause for such concern. You are just upset over nothing. After all, just look at how many think things are going pretty well just as they are. Can't you see that the leaders of the land think we are all right? And look around you at all the other prophets. There are four hundred here that belong to Baal, and another 450 prophets of the groves. Surely, you do not think all of these are wrong and you are the only one that is right." Those who preach the gospel have heard just such verbal nonsense at times. Some people measure the rightness and wrongness of things by counting noses. If it pleases a large number it must be all right. They are not so concerned about truth as they are the majority.

Suppose someone came privately to Elijah and said, "Now brother Elijah, I agree with you that there is sin in the land, and I agree that it is wrong. But aren't you afraid you are going to cause disturbance here? You might offend someone if you bring this into the open." There are those who say they uphold what is right, but always choose to support it quietly and privately rather than take any public stand for the truth, even discouraging those that do. They have the attitude of Gamaliel that if error is just left alone it will go away by itself. Nothing could be further from the truth. Following error does not bother some people as much as disturbing somebody.

But we can imagine, if some living today were then present, saying, "After all, brother Elijah, these prophets are leaders, and they are honest and sincere. We must love, and learn to get along with such people. We have to live with them, you know. Are all things either black or white? We all have our faults. We can't know for sure what truth is. There is that gray area. We might do better to go along with some error rather than oppose it and just do what good we can." It makes you wonder when you hear such as this, and we have, how people who talk that way can claim to love God's

truth.

But listen again as one comes to Elijah and says, "We love you, brother Elijah. But we must love these other prophets, too. We don't want to drive them away, do we? We want unity. We want peace. Let's drop this whole thing and exercise patience. Let's not be drawing lines. It will pass in time." Did you know that there are leaders in the church who want peace to the extent that they will sacrifice God's truth in order to have it?

Then there are the compromisers who "butter-up" those of prominence. They come out and say, "Just let the leaders decide. They are our leaders and know what is best." Well, look at the leadership in Israel at this time. What guarantee does anyone have that men who are in leadership will always steer us correctly? Paul warned that apostasy would come from among elders in the church (Acts 20:30). History shows that leaders can go astray. We have seen it personally. Sure we want to have confidence in leadership, and will follow them, when they stay with God's word. But when they, like some who lead, compromise the truth, they must be exposed and opposed like anybody else.

There were not any such voices heard at Mt. Carmel like we hear sometimes today when something is proposed to be tested by the measure of truth. So many today perfer to "go along anyway." In fact, there is growing within the ranks of the church a "Go-Along-Anyway Church of Christ." This is the same attitude that has brought denominationalism to near nothingness.

THE CONTEST

We have already read the terms of the contest. The first try for success was given to the false prophets. We ask you to turn in your Bibles and read 1 Kings 18:25-29. Having done that and seeing their failure, read of Elijah's turn in 1 Kings 18:30-39. Were not the results of the contest conclusive? Was it not proven that the God of heaven is the true God?

FIVE LESSONS

One, there is one true and living God. No idol, mental, physical, real or imaginary can take His place or be allowed alongside of God.

Again, we must make the right decision, offer the right service and worship to God. Attempts at indecision fail because that is a decision to not be for God.

We learn who is the real troubler. It is not the Lord, nor His will, nor those who will proclaim His message. It is the people who will not follow God's will. The real troubler is the one who is bent on rebellion , self-willed, neither wanting the truth nor the exposure of evil. The real troublers are those who are going to do their own thing, who will wallow in complacency and compromise, having the attitude that nobody is going to tell them anything. The troubler sets aside God's standards for his own.

We learn much from Elijah the prophet. We see his great faith under trying circumstances. We see his willingness to stand with God even if nobody else would. He had the courage to raise his voice against sin and proclaim God's message whether it was accepted or rejected, pleasing to the crowd or not. He applied God's truth to the high and lowly alike. He stood unwavering for the truth.

Finally, we learn that Israel had an opportunity to know what was true and right, and they accepted the truth once the evidence was placed before them. This is more than what some are willing to do today.

Is there not much value for us today from this great contest that took place on Mt. Carmel so many years ago?

† † † † †

OFFENSES AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM

Before one considers this lesson, he should read and weigh carefully the teaching of Christ in Matthew 18:15-17.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

It may sound strange but even a sermon on offenses and how to deal with them can be very "offensive" to some people. Especially is this so when there be those in the wrong who do not want to correct the problems, and have no intention of admitting any guilt regardless of the certainty of it. Still it is the duty of those who preach to *"preach the word"* even though some will not endure sound doctrine. The truth must be spoken with all authority (Titus 2:15). Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26) and so should we. If we do not, we shall give an account of our neglect of duty (Ezek. 3:17-21).

WHAT IT MEANS TO OFFEND

To offend means to sin against. It is doing wrong against another. It is to make one angry by committing sin against him. We are not to understand, however, that the offense under consideration is simply something somebody may not like or happen to agree. This kind of "offense" often followed Jesus, but He did no sin. That is not what we are studying. We are talking about trespassing against another, sinning against another, not just something disliked.

Offense will occur from time to time. " *Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come, but woe unto that man by whom the offense cometh."* (Matt. 18:7). Jesus said this in the context of sinning against " *these little ones"* or those in the kingdom. He may have had some reference to Judas who sinned against Him. But He certainly included those who sin against brethren. Christians will suffer antagonism from others, even to the point that others will sin against them. Brethren will sin against brethren. This is not the way God wants it, but people often do wicked things.

PERSONAL OFFENSES

The offenses under consideration are not open and public sins that someone commits. Neither is this referring to teaching false doctrine publicly. It has to do with a personal grievance between brethren.

Sins against one another can arise because one may have a quick temper and loses control of it. He may say or do something impulsively in the heat of disagreement and sin

against his brother. It may be that some are overly sensitive and take offense too easily, but the matter should be corrected. Selfishness is often at the root of problems, as is personal pride. Some "fall out" over property, business dealings, other material matters. Greed is always a matter with which brethren must deal. It can lead one to offend another. The love of money has caused many to sin against others. Surely the misuse of the tongue is one of the more frequent and prominent ways that brethren sin against one another. "*For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body.*" (James 3:2).

We can aggravate offenses by constantly talking about them and thinking on them. We generally make matters worse when we do that. We may be inclined to develope grudges against others. The Christian must be willing to forgive. Of course, when the offender does not think he has sinned, he will not seek forgiveness. But even so, the Christian must not hold a grudge and always be ready and willing to forgive.

Public sin is not just a personal offense nor just against one individual. An individual may be involved, but the public nature of the transgression already places the matter beyond the manner of dealing with personal sins against one another. Public sins need to be corrected publicly. As we see in our text, personal and private sins can become matters of public concern when they are not settled as Jesus teaches.

HINDRANCE TO WORSHIP

Offenses against our brethren prevent us from worshipping God acceptably. "*Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave thy gift before the altar and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*" (Matt. 5:23,24). Of course, this assumes that your brother is willing to settle the matter. Sometimes we find those who are not even willing to discuss those things that they consider to have been offenses against them. They have already severed all relationship with the one they consider the offender and will not even discuss it. To take such a position is a very high-handed manner of dealing with others. When the alledged offender is willing to settle a matter, the offended surely ought cooperate. But sometimes the offender, or the

one accused of offense, is denied what is due him. In such situations, there is not much the offender can do but recognize the haughtiness of the one who has charged him with offense and go on about his business. God will forgive an offender when he does what Jesus teaches whether the offended will forgive him or not.

ATTITUDE IS IMPORTANT

Dealing with personal offenses begins with the attitude of heart. Do you want to solve the problem, or are you determined to win some kind of victory over your brother? Do you want reconcilliation or do you seek the humilation of another? Do you want what is right, or do you want to prove you are right? There is a big difference in attitudes. We are persuaded that when there is offense between brethren and both of them are of good will and seek to stand for the truth and desire to resolve their differences wherever possible, the pattern for solution that Jesus prescribes is the most effective way known to man.

WHO TAKES THE INITIATIVE

Who shall take the initiative in these matters? The one who feels he has been sinned against has that responsibility. It may be that the one he accuses of sin is not even aware of his sin. He may not even know he has offended. He cannot very well initiate a solution to a problem of which he is unaware. People have been known to have hard feelings toward others because they feel sinned against but the person they think has sinned against them is not even aware of his sin or that brother is offended. He must be informed. This is the duty of the offended. Once the offender is informed, he should have a response. He should either admit his fault and ask forgiveness, or offer evidence that the accusation is false. The accused offender does not have the right to ignore the accusation against him. The matter should be met and resolved. The goal should be to save each other and remove any alienation between them.

Usually, when brethren have the right attitude, once they get together, the end of the matter quickly follows. Nobody else needs to get involved. But sometimes the disputants are not able to see the other's point of view. They should solicit

aid from others to help them resolve the matter. That added influence ought to carry weight with both of them. If that does not work, then the pressure of the whole congregation should be added. Sometimes that does not settle the matter and there is no repentance or forgiveness. It could be that one or both are reluctant to face reality. If it is determined that the offender simply refuses to repent, withdrawal of spiritual fellowship is in order. Just have no more to do with them. Break all ties. The person who will sin against another, possibly reject all attempts for a reconciliation, or will not admit his wrongs is not worthy of friendship and fellowship. Let him go. God will avenge.

WHEN THERE IS REPENTANCE

But when the offender repents, he should be forgiven. It is our duty and privilege to forgive those who sin against us. Our very salvation depends upon our willingness to forgive (Matt. 6:14,15). Jesus taught that there is no limit to our forgiveness so long as the one who sins genuinely repents (Matt. 18:21-35).

It is possible that one brother sin against another, and the offended one is not yet aware that he has been violated. But if the offender knows what he has done, he should not wait until he is brought to task over the matter, but, because he has hurt his brother, do quickly whatever he can to correct his wrongs. Brethren ought to seek peace, harmony, unity, love and good relationship with each other. It is a sad situation when brethren will not resolve their offenses against each other. It is tragic that some are so high and mighty that they will try to impose certain personal conditions on others before they will even discuss the problems. It is obvious that such people do not have a good heart and do not want solutions. But God will judge each one. Let us be sure that we are not of that sort. Regardless of what others do, we can be sure that we do what the Lord teaches.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." (Psalm 133:1).

† † † † †

MUSIC IN WORSHIP

We have five motives and goals in presenting this lesson. (1) We want to know the truth about music in worship. (2) There is much disagreement over the subject and it has caused division. We seek unity based on truth. (3) We hear people say that the churches of Christ do not have music in worship. This is not true. (4) This lesson involves some of the basic and fundamental principles in coming to a knowledge of the Word of God. Principles of this study are applicable in most every question. (5) The truth is so often buried beneath misrepresentations and false doctrines taught by denominational clergymen. It is neither belligerent nor hostile to insist that those who differ with our conclusions come forth with Bible in hand and prove otherwise.

We are talking about worship, but not just any worship. We mean the worship unto God that is to characterize those who follow Christ. Worship is homage paid, service rendered, acts performed, with the intent to praise the God of heaven and glorify His name among men. We are talking about worship here on earth that is done by Christians.

We are not talking about what some may do in Buddaism, Mohammedism, Shintoism, Judaism, or any such thing. The age under consideration is the Christian age, not the Patriarchal or Mosaic, or even what may take place in heaven now or later. Nor are we discussing music in weddings, funerals, entertainments in the home, at social events, etc.

OUR CONCERN

We are talking about worship to God by the authority of Christ whether that worship be offered in the assembly of the church, at home, in a rented hall, beside a lake, or wherever. It is not a matter that is affected by when that worship is offered whether morning or evening, Sunday, Thursday or whenever. What is right at one place and at one time is right for every place and time in this matter. Likewise, what ought not be done at one place ought not be done at another. What ought not be done at one time ought not be done another time, except the observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week exclusively as Scripture teaches.

Furthermore, it matters not whether the worship is offered by one or a thousand, one at a time or altogether. We are

talking about music that is acceptable to God in worship according to the authority of Christ regardless of when, where, how many, etc.

John 4:23,24, "*But the hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*"

OBJECT OF WORSHIP

This passage tells us the object of our worship and certain rules governing it. God, the Father, is the object of our worship. "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.*" (Matt. 4:10).

WORSHIP IN SPIRIT

To worship in spirit has to do with the mind, attitude, disposition, intent and motive. Reverence is essential in worship. The motive to serve God and show forth His praise is the goal. The manner of our conduct is to be in keeping with the seriousness and solemnity involved in worshipping God. For this reason worshippers should not be flippant, nor have a flighty attitude manifested when worshipping. This worship involves the heart.

WORSHIP IN TRUTH

To worship in truth means to worship as the truth tells us to worship. Jesus prayed to the Father and said, "*Thy word is truth.*" (John 17:17). To worship in truth means to worship according to the specifications that are taught in God's word.

We are not left to decide what we are to do to perform whatever acts we think are best, or according to what we or others like. We are to do those things that God directs us to do. He has designed worship and the very essence of worship includes submission to the will of Him who is being worshipped. Therefore we must search the Scriptures to learn what God wants us to do, authorizes us to do, in worship to Him.

We see that we are to perform the right acts with the right intent and motive in the heart. It takes both for our worship

to be acceptable. We may have a good motive but perform the wrong acts, or do things not authorized and thereby make our worship displeasing. Or we may do the right acts with the wrong motives, or with an irreverent manner, and nullify the acceptability of our worship.

We do not search some creed book, discipline, manual, cathechism or any such human document to learn what God wants. We do not come together and discuss the matter and then vote on what we like and follow the majority. "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" (1 Pet. 4:11). So we now ask, "What do the Scriptures teach about music in Christian worship?".

There are nine references in the New Testament that mention music in Christian worship. Two of the nine actually refer to a time prior to the beginning of the church and the new covenant, but we include them because they are in the New Testament and relate to that which Christ did.

Matthew 26:30,"And when they had sung a hymn they *went out into the mount of Olives.*" Mark 14:26 reads the same.

Acts 16:25, "*And at midnight Paul and. Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them.*"

Romans 15:9, "*And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy, as it is written, For this cause I will confess thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.*"

1 Corinthians 14:15, "*What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*"

Ephesians 5:19, "*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*"

Colossians 3:16, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*"

Hebrews 2:12, "*Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*"

James 5:13, "*Is any among you afflicted, let him pray. Is any merry, let him sing psalms.*"

These are the verses in the Scriptures that tell us how to offer music in worship unto God by the authority of Jesus Christ and under His covenant. Please note that every time,

without exception, that which is commanded or authorized is singing. There is no doubt as to the kind of music in worship that God approves. Every passage is specific and teaches singing. There are no exceptions.

TWO KINDS OF MUSIC

There are only two kinds of music. Some is produced by mechanical instruments. Some is produced by the human vocal chords. While humming is produced by the vocal chords, God has been more specific and said we are to sing. For those who want to *"speak as the oracles of God,"* this big question of singing and/or playing is settled already. Nothing else needs to be said on the subject. In fact, mechanical instruments of music would never need to be discussed if men would remain with what is revealed in the oracles of God concerning music in Christian worship. It is because some have introduced the instruments that we have to deal with it. These verses show why we do what we do. Those who would do otherwise have the obligation to show why they do otherwise. God did not simply say, "Make music." He said, "Sing." That is what we do. That cannot be wrong provided the heart is right. The act is according to divine authority. That cannot be said when one plays, or plays alongside with singing.

Only singing can accomplish what God says music in worship is to accomplish. Ephesians 5:19 teaches that we speak in song. Speaking has to do with words. Instruments produce no words, but the voice does. Colossians 3:16 teaches that we are to teach and admonish one another. Instruments have no ability to do this. We are to sing with the understanding (1 Cor. 14:15). The instrument has no heart with which to understand. It has no spirit. It takes a mind to praise (Heb. 2:12). The instrument has no intellect. We are to make melody in the heart, that is, the mind. Again the instrument has no heart or mind. Only through singing can we do what God says is to be done in music in worship.

Some criticize this position by saying that we are "straining at a gnat." But we would contend that confining ourselves to what God authorizes is not some minor matter. If we can presumptiously add to what God has taught in this matter, by what authority are we restricted from adding or subtracting

from His word on anything else? Jesus said, "*Howbeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" (Mark 7:7). Vain means useless and not worth anything. God said sing. That is a doctrine of heaven. From what source come instruments of music in Christian worship?

Consulting encyclopedias, church histories, etc. the concensus is that the use of instruments began around 666 A.D. when accepted by Pope Vitalian. Users of instruments of music must go back to Romanism to find it in "Christian" worship because there is no reference to it in the New Testament. It was one of the many things that were added by the apostate church and imitated by Protestantism. It is not a teaching from God but from men.

We did not say it was vain worship. Christ did. The argument is with the Lord, not with those who are willing to abide in the doctrine of Christ. 2 John 9, " *Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God, but he that abideth in the doctrine hath both the Father and the Son.*" The doctrine of Christ refers to the doctrine given by Christ, not just about Christ. It is a possessive phrase showing to whom the doctrine belongs and the source and authority behind it. We must abide, remain within the limits and restrictions of, the doctrine that Christ taught and authorized to be taught in His name by inspired men. Is music a part of that doctrine? Yes. What kind of music is included in that doctrine? Singing. Anything else? No. Is singing safe and sure? Yes. Is playing right? It cannot be because it is not a part of the doctrine of Christ.

DOES NOT SAY "NOT TO"

But someone contends, "The Bible does not say not to play?" Upon investigation, we shall see that the Bible does implicitly, even though not explicity, teach that we are not to play. We must determine what we wish to use as our guide. Shall it be what God has said or shall we presume we can do whatever He has not specifically prohibited? Shall we respect His silence as well as His words? Are we permitted to be presumptious?

To permit whatever is not specifically prohibited opens a Pandora's box. The Bible does not specifically prohibit counting beads, baptizing babies, doing hand-stands, or throwing baby girls to crocidiles. None of these are

specifically prohibited. If because God did not specifically prohibit playing we are permitted to play, we are also permitted to do all these other things in worship.

God does not have to say, "don't," when He has told us what to do. God told us the ingredients to have on the Lord's Table, namely, bread and the fruit of the vine. He did not say, "Do not have sweet potatoes, ice cream and coca-cola." Are these permissible? When He told us what to have, that excluded everything else.

When God told Noah to build an ark, He did not have to tell him, " Do not build a raft, or a canoe, or a woodshed, or a bridge." He told him what to build. He also told him the kind of wood to use, namely, gopher wood. He did not have to say, "Do not use oak, cedar, pine, hickory, etc. etc." When God told him what to do that revealed what God wanted and everything was excluded. Noah would have been presumptious to have used anything else.

When God told the Israelites to offer a lamb as sacrifice, did He also have to say, "Do not use a pig, goat, horse, dog or etc. etc.?" When He specified, that ended the matter. That is exactly what we do when we authorize our children to go to the store to buy certain items. We and they know that they do not have a "blank check" to buy anything and everything they want. They are told what to buy. When they buy that they act by our authority. If they buy something else, they act on their own authority. Just so, anything other than singing is by the authority of men, not God.

WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

The kind of music used is not just a matter of human opinion. It is a matter of "thus saith the Lord." God has spoken. What did He say? "SING".

Do we have something against instruments as if they are morally evil? Certainly not. That has nothing whatever to to with it. We have instruments in the home. We use them for other events quite properly. But there are many things that are morally acceptable that cannot be used in worship. We can eat ice cream, but not on the Lord's Table. We can practice circumcision, but not as a religious rite. We can wash feet, but not as worship. We can play football, but not as an act of worship to God. We can play an instrument, but

not in worship to God. Many things are morally right, but are not included in worshipping God.

TUNING FORK

But do not we use a tuning fork? Some do. But a tuning fork does not produce music, but only a tone. Music is a harmonious succession of tones. A tuning fork provides what is essential in singing, that is, the pitch. It matters not how you get the pitch. Even so, when the worship in singing is done, the tuning fork is silent. Nobody sings with a tuning fork. The fork only aids in securing the pitch. There is no parallel between a tuning fork and the piano, organ, etc.

AID OR ADD?

"But we only use the instrument as an aid to singing," some contend. It is said to be like song books, seats, lights in the building, etc. But an aid is to expedite that which has been commanded. It is not to add to what has been commanded. For an expedient to be permissible it first must be lawful (1 Cor. 6:12). Everything lawful may not be expedient, but every expedient must be lawful. There is the law regarding another kind of music? While song books do aid in singing by providing the words to be sung, it does not add another kind of music to the kind God has specified. While the seats and lights aid in worship by providing a place to sit and ability to see, it does not add another act of worship. There were lights in the place where brethren worshipped in Acts 20:28. The mechanical instrument adds, not aids. It produces that which is coordinate with the commanded act.

When we use slides, charts, maps, etc. in teaching the word, we are doing nothing more than teaching the word. When we use a hat, box, plate, etc. to gather the contribution, we are doing nothing more than giving. When we use one cup, many cups, plates, whatever in serving the Lord's Supper, we are doing nothing more than observing the Lord's Supper. But when mechanical instruments are used, we are adding another kind of music. If you can add to what has been said in worship, where else are we permitted to add to or take from?

But there are other arguments put forth that call for our attention lest deception prevail.

IN OLD TESTAMENT

But some remind us that instruments of music were used by the Jews. But we are talking about Christian worship, not that which was done under the authority of Moses (Matt. 17:5). All authority belongs to Christ (Matt. 28:18). The old law has been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). We fall from grace if we try to be justified by the old law (Gal. 5:4). What we do is to be done "in the name of" or by the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17). Under the Mosaic system there was a special priesthood, animal sacrifices, burning of incense, sprinkling of blood, special garments, holy days, etc. Are these to be observed under Christ? Certainly not. He set the old covenant aside (Heb. 10:9)

IN PSALMS

"Well, what about the Psalms? There are mechanical instruments of music mentioned in them." True, but that is a part of the old law. Christ said so (John 10:34; 15:25). The multitudes recognized the psalms as being a part of the old law (John 12:34). When Paul taught us to sing psalms, he taught that they were to be sung, not played. He did not necessarily demand that the psalms to be sung be the psalms of the Old Testament anyway. But we are willing to permit whatever might be found in the psalms to be in Christian worship? Certainly not. Mentioned there are bullocks, altars, animal sacrifices, etc. A psalm is a pious song and we are taught that they are to be sung.

IN REVELATION

"But are not instruments mentioned in Revelation in worship? Would God allow it in heaven and disallow it here on earth?" Revelation 14:2,3, *"And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps; and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders, and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth."* What was heard? Was it thunder, waters, harps? No, he heard voices as thunder, waters and harpers harping with harps. And

what were these voices doing? They were singing. Who were they? They were those redeemed "*from the earth,*" not those still on earth. Whatever God wants in heaven is fine. But there are bowls of incense in heaven also, but not in Christian worship. The language of Revelation is so often figurative anyway. Can you imagine a literal, physical, mechanical instrument of music in the spiritual realm of heaven? Physical things will decay, but nothing decays there. This was a worship in heaven, not on earth and not applicable to us at this time at all.

Some make the argument that the instrument is included in the word "psallo." Some reject that argument even though they use instruments because they recognize that this would prove more than they want proved. If "psallo" includes the instrument, we all must use an instrument to please God. Trying to have music without an instrument would not be acceptable. Everyone is to "psallo" and everyone would have to have an instrument.

Five times the word "psallo" is found in the New Testament. It is translated four times as sing, one time as make melody. Whatever "psallo" includes, this is commanded of us. There is an instrument involved in Christian worship, but it is not a mechanical one, but the heart. There was a time in ancient Greek language when "psallo" meant to sing and play, but in the New Testament and in Biblical usage it means only to sing (Thayer's Lexicon). If it includes playing, Paul and Silas did not obey God's command regarding music in worship when they only were singing in the prison in Philippi.

LIKE NADAB AND ABIHU

In Leviticus 10, two priests, Nadab and Abihu, offered fire unto God "*which the Lord commanded not.*" They were presumptious in thinking it made no difference. Fire was fire. But God had specified and they did what was outside of God's authority. They were consumed in fire as a result. Is there any excuse for us to offer strange music, as they offered strange fire? Are we not doing that "*which the Lord commanded not?*"

We would like to think that there are those who use mechanical instruments now who would discontinue that practice if they could see the error of it.

COMMENTS OF CHURCHMEN

Some have thought that churches of Christ were odd in refusing to use instruments of music. But let us look at a few comments from others who have agreed. We do not cite these as authority. We have cited the Bible as authority for what we do. We cite these words of these men to show that others have also recognized the impropriety of adding mechanical instrumental music to the worship God has set.

Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran church, "The organ in the worship of God is an ensign to Baal."

John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian church, "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of other shadows of the law."

Adam Clarke, Methodist Bible commentator, "I am an old man and an old minister, and I here declare that I have never known instrumental music to be productive of any good in the worship of God, and have reason to believe it has been productive of much evil. Music as a science I admire and esteem, but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of worship, and I here register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of that Infinite Spirit who requires his followers to worship him in spirit and in truth."

Charles Spurgeon, Baptist preacher of London who preached for twenty years to ten thousand each week, said, "I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery.He never allowed it in his tabernacle.

Alexander Campbell said, "Such aids would be as a cowbell in a concert."

J. W. McGarvey said, "We cannot adopt the practice without abandoing the only ground upon which a restoration of New Testament Christianity can be accomplished."

When we get down to the "bottom line" regarding the instrument, the real reason some insist upon using it is because they like it. It is not because God teaches it. It is not because it is found in His book for Christians. It is not because there is any substantive argument on its behalf. It is because some like it, want it, and are determined to have it. Its use divided the growing resotration efforts back in the nineteenth century and is one of the factors preventing unity today. Those who opted for the instrument have continued

to erect more and more human innovations on the same platform that allows the instrument and have drifted further and further from the truth until they are nothing more than just another denomination among denominations.

When men will "*speak as the oracles of God,*" and be silent where the Bible is silent, the instrument will never be an issue, will never be heard in worship, and will never be defended for worship.

After all is said and done, as for instrumental music in worship of God today, there just is not any divine authority for it. Singing is what pleases God. Let us sing.

† † † † †

THEY FOUND THE HITTITES

Those who have taken it upon themselves to discredit the Bible as being the Word of God often find themselves in embarassing situations. But they seldom admit they have ever been wrong about their blasphemies against the truth.

For many years the deniers of truth ridiculed the Bible because it mentioned the Hittite nation. According to skeptics, nothing that is revealed in Scripture ought ever be accepted as true unless it is confirmed by some extra-Biblical source. Rather than taking God's Word as the standard by which to measure other things, they prefer to discount the Bible until something other than the Bible shows it to be true. In fact, they even deny that which is in the Bible is true unless confirmed otherwise, in spite of the record. The record is that nothing has been found to disprove the Bible while innumerable times those matters that skeptics held in question have been demonstrated to be true from outside sources. Still the skeptic remains skeptical. But the Hittite nation forced them down again.

2 Kings 7:6 says, "*The king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites.*" Skeptics said no such people ever existed. But now their objections have been eliminated.

Egyptian and Assyrian monuments have confirmed the existence of the nation once claimed to be imaginary. Indeed, the Hittites were a real and powerful people with an advanced civilization. A great mass of antiquities of the Hittites have also been found in southern Asia Minor and

Northern Syria. Thus, extra-Biblical evidence hits the critic and drives him from his entrenchment and his claim of "mythical, imaginary, non-existent people" mentioned in the Bible.

We have always believed there was a Hittite nation since the first day we heard about it from the Scriptures. The extra-Biblical findings did not produce or enlarge our faith in the accuracy of the Biblical revelation of their existence. "God said it, that settles it, and I believe it."

But doesn't it seem reasonable that those who scoff so long and loud would temper their claims in light of their many mistakes and in view of the repeated confirmations that the Bible tells the truth?

GET THROUGH THE BEST YOU CAN

Listening to comments being made by several people about life and these times, one remarked, "You just have to get through life the best way you can." That struck me as being one of the most pessimistic statements that I had ever heard.

Nobody denies that life presents us with many problems. Some folks have problems of real magnitude that I sometimes marvel at the way they keep their equilibrium. Everybody has problems of one sort or another.

But sometimes we dwell on the problems, the negative side of life, and magnify them all our of proportion to the rest of life. There are some things we can correct, some we can overcome, others we just have to endure. But is life just something to "get through the best you can?" Is there nothing more uplifting about it than that?

There are innumerable things one can do that enhance the good. Life is not just a time to be dreaded, looking for the worst, something to escape.

Begin by considering the beauties of nature. Have you ever seen a glamorous Fall season? Think of God's provisions for us from the Earth. Think of His wonders in all of nature. Then spend time considering the glory of honest toil and its rewards, goals reached, service rendered. There are so many good things that each one can cultivate and nourish, not the least of which is the Lord's church. Brotherly love, family love, self-esteem, brighten this journey with marvelous experiences and satisfactions. Possibly some of us need a

good dose of the admonition we often sing together, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one."

After doing that, then turn attention to what really matters, the spiritual blessings in Christ, like forgiveness, hope, fellowship, privileges of prayer and worship, opportunities to bring glory to God by our lives. My beloved reader, life is an adventure, not a burden and chore to "get through with the best you can."

The best way to live life is to live it for God. Fixing our view and goal on Him will bring us good, and a life with purpose, meaning, value, rest and reward. Life has its good side, doesn't it?

A CHANGED LOOK

Beginning with this issue of **A BURNING FIRE** we have added the use of our "new" typesetter. The machine is new to us, and we have a lot more to learn about it before we can be very efficient in its use.

We want to make the booklet as readable and as reasonably neat in appearance as we are able to do with the facilities presently available to us. Being able to set the type as it appears this time is a giant step for us in that direction.

There are other pieces of equipment that we need and are trying to obtain, but the cost prohibits securing too much at once. Gradually, we expect to have what we need and plan to keep **A BURNING FIRE** a regular publication.

We hope the new look is pleasing to you. JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

YOUTH'S PROBLEMS

It is not easy to be young. The maturing process is often fraught with hazards that those who have reached adulthood some times forget. One thing older people forget is how that they contribute to problems.

Of all places that ought not be the source of problems for youth is the home. The home ought to be a haven, a place of security and guidance. But often the home makes life almost unbearable for children.

The Bible places responsibility on parents regarding their children. When parents allow themselves the devestating indulgence of selfishness, when they neglect the home, when love is permitted to erode, when the home is allowed to be broken by divorce, when the spiritual as well as physical needs of children are not provided, the home becomes a real threat to the child by misshaping him, misleading him, giving him a distorted outlook on life.

We may wonder why some children behave as they do. A closer look at the home from which they come may reveal the reason.

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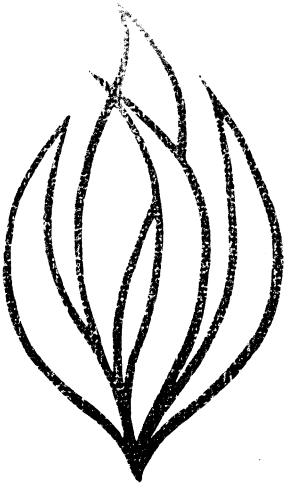
A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME II James W. Boyd NUMBER 2

SOURCE OF POWER

Jesus ascended to Heaven from Mt. Olivet, leaving the gospel in the hands of the apostles. On Pentecost, they were endued with power from on high. Peter preached the first gospel sermon. The church was established that day, and three thousand were baptized into Christ, many being added daily that were saved (Acts 2:47). As the early days of the church continued, five thousand men, not counting women, were added (Acts 4:4). Acts 4:32 tells of multitudes coming. Acts 5:14, multitudes of men and women came. Acts 6:7 reveals that the number of disciples multiplied exceedingly in Jerusalem. It has been estimated that ten thousand or more people were members of the church in Jerusalem shortly after it began.

How do we account for such a beginning, and for such a startling growth? The men involved were not unusually talented men. They were not rich in this world's goods. They were not politically influential or of the higher strata of society. They were humble, lowly, hard working men of Galilee.

The answer is that they used spiritual energy. They had spiritual resources that they put to work. Their task was a spiritual one and they used spiritual power.

NECESSITY OF POWER

It takes power to accomplish any task. Man has developed steam engines, gasoline engines, other types of power, even atomic power, to accomplish certain tasks. Athletic teams drill, practice, and train to develop skills in order to have necessary power to win the games. Power is not achieved overnight, but takes great effort. There is a price to be paid to possess it.

Since power is needed in physical, temporal, human efforts, how much more is power needed in accomplishing the spiritual tasks? And the primary task of the Christian is a spiritual one. He must have spiritual power. Such power comes through training, loyal devotion, self-discipline, sacrificial living. Paul wrote, "*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.*" (1 Cor. 16:13). "*Finally,*

my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." It takes power to be strong.

POWER OF OBEDIENCE

What are some of the sources of spiritual power available to us? There is the power of obedient faith in Christ. "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" (Phil. 4:13). Being a Christian means that power that comes from Christ belongs to you. "*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*" (1 Cor. 3:16). We have the abiding presence of our Lord. This is not an actual, literal, personal indwelling, as some have supposed. But as we partake of the word of the Lord, His Spirit dwells in us. Just before Christ ascended into Heaven He gave the promise, "*Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.*" (Matt. 28:20). We are not alone in the task that we undertake for the Lord. Our power is the result of our linking ourselves with the Christ. By this abiding faith, we can do that which is expected of us.

POWER OF PRAYER

Prayer is a source of great power in the spiritual realm. Matt.21:22, "*And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*" We are not to dismiss certain conditions of an acceptable prayer, nor think that God is obligated to fulfill our every request. We do not always know how to pray nor for what to pray. But God hears our prayers and answers according to that which He sees is best.

We can illustrate the power and need of prayer by thinking of a deep sea diver, provided with the air he must have through a lifeline that reaches to the top. If it was severed, he would perish. We are like that diver. Just as he must have air, we must have spiritual assistance. Our lifeline is prayer. We are strengthened through prayer. We gain confidence and hope because of the avenue of prayer. No wonder Paul admonished, "*Pray without ceasing.*" (1 Thess. 5:17). The idea is caught in the words of Tennyson, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." The inspired James said, "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" We assume our duties with God as our helper. We do not "go it alone."

THE BIBLE PROVIDES POWER

The Bible is a great source of spiritual power, of course. The Scriptures furnish us completely unto every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16,17). The Bible is the message of the Lord. The gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). Meditation on the message of God produces courage from fear, makes weakness turn into strength, sorrow turns to consolation, disturbance to peace, despair to hope, and death to life. Hebrews 4:12, "*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" Standing on the word of God and building our lives thereon, we are standing on the solid rock that cannot and will not be shaken.

POWER OF A RIGHTEOUS LIFE

A righteous life is a source of power in the Lord's work. "*Even so let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" (Matt. 5:16). Consistent Christain living does much in the promotion of the cause of Christ. There is much wisdom in the idea conveyed in the saying, "I cannot hear what you say because what you do speaks so loudly." There must be consistency between what is said and what is done. Just talking a good religion is not sufficient, either. "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.*" (Matt. 7:21). Christ taught, but He also did (Acts 1:1). So must we.

The story is told of a preacher who preached in a gospel meeting in south Kentucky. One man who was not a Christian attended every service. On the last evening, he obeyed the gospel. The preacher asked him what influenced him to obey the gospel. His response was, "The good life of my neighbor. He is a true and faithful Christian." We wonder how many may have been blinded from seeing the Savior by the inconsistencies in our lives. While many are saved because of the influence of good people, doubtless many remain lost because of the lack of that needed influence. Yes, a righteous life is a source of power.

NOT MIRACULOUS POWER

Paul wrote to Timothy, "*Stir up the gift of God which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.*" (1 Tim. 1:6). This indicates that Timothy was granted miraculous powers. We do not have miraculous powers today. But we have powers, abilities, talents, that we need to be using. We have latent energies, hidden resources, that need developing and exercising. There is not one of us who does not have some ability to do some work in the kingdom, however small some may think that work to be. What we must realize is that what some may consider small, the Lord may have quite a different outlook about it.

In our day, some would look down on the lowly task of helping the needy. But this is Christlikeness in action. Some do not think that making a home where Christ is supreme is all that important. With the craze for careers outside the home for women being pushed into the foreground, and shutting our eyes to the havoc to the family, morals, modesty, marriage, etc. that has resulted from women forsaking their primary duties for which they were created, we see and hear the noblest of tasks being classified as "just a housewife." Would to God that we had more godly, Christian women who took seriously the responsibility of guiding the house and rearing their children properly. We may consider only those things that are prominent and noticeable to be of any value. But that is a mistake. Each one has powers untouched that can be used for good. We need to "stir up" the gift or talent that we have, rather than bury it as did the one talent man in the Lord's parable.

POWER OF SACRIFICE

Sacrificial living is a source of power. Romans 12:1, "*I beseech ye, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*" We really have not learned the essence of Christianity until we have learned to sacrifice. One of the basic fundamentals of the faith is denying self, and putting the will of Christ first before all else in life. Those who will give of themselves for the cause of Christ will find resources to accomplish more than they ever dreamed could be done. What they do is of eternal, not just

temporal, value.

Let us turn our thoughts back to Mt. Olivet once again and the ascension of Christ into heaven. He told His apostles to go back to Jerusalem and wait there until they be endued with power from on high. That power was the power of the Holy Spirit that was evidenced when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ.

The promise of this baptism belonged to them, not to us. We do not have and will not receive that kind of miraculous power. Proof of that is another lesson, but proof of it is irrefutable. But we do have power, nonetheless, to do the work that God calls upon us to do if only we would avail ourselves of it.

Usually there is a great gap between what we are doing and what we are capable of doing. The early Christians bridged that gap through the use of spiritual powers available to them. We have spiritual powers available to us, also. Let us take advantage of them by going to their source. We need to realize our weaknesses without them. We are useless until we grow strong through the use of power. Let our prayer be like that of Nehemiah, "*Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.* (Neh. 6:9). Then we can do the work that is ours to do,and do a good job while doing it.

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EXCUSES OF BRETHREN

"Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray they have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray they have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife,and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in

hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you. That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." (Luke 14:16-24).

Those who are often absent from the worship need this lesson more than those who attend. But that is usually true of any sermon. If you have been baptized into Christ, then you are the one who can profit from this lesson. Brethren in the Lord, like alien sinners, often deceive themselves by offering excuses for not doing as they ought. We are very much aware of the excuses people give for not becoming Christians. But are we as aware of some of the excuses we are guilty of making for not being the kind of Christian we are supposed to be?

We recognize that there is a difference between a reason and an excuse. We are quite willing to let God be the judge as to what is the real reason behind something and what may be just another human excuse. The principle we want to consider can be applied to Christian duties, but we shall focus attention on the responsibility to attend the worship services.

WORSHIP IS A DUTY

Let us be fully convinced that worship is a duty. Possibly some do not think it necessary to worship God. The early church attended to matters of worship stedfastly (Acts 2:42). Observance of the memorial to Christ is a command (1 Cor. 11:23ff). Hebrews 10:25 makes it clear that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. If we intend to pattern our religion after the New Testament revelation, we will be present every occasion that it is possible for us to attend. It has never really been considered a serious thought that Christians would want anything less than worshipping God with brethren when the time for worship arrives. We never heard of a faithful Christian wanting to be absent. But absenteeism is one of the dominant traits of some brethren. When those who are haphazard, spasmodic, now-and-then, and irregular in their attendance are approached, they often have some kind of remark similar to the ones we shall mention. If they are not just excuses, they certainly have

every characteristic of one. There are real reasons sometimes why one cannot be present. But they are scarce, like being ill, carrying for the sick, uncontrollable emergencies, or transportation problems that could not be avoided. But when a person is generally able to do most everything else he sets out to do, but misses worship, and then makes comments such as we shall note, we cannot be far wrong to declare that they are not facing the real reason, but are simply making excuses.

DOING MY BEST

"I do the best I can." If this be so, nobody could do more. But we want to be sure this is not just a cover for us. God has never expected anything we cannot do, and when we do our best, our attendance will not be splotchy and at random. Faithfulness is expected and very likely we are not doing the best we can when absenteeism is so frequent.

NO WORSE THAN OTHERS

"I am no worse than other brethren." Some prove themselves unwise by comparing themselves with themselves or with others. Paul says that making this kind of comparison is not wise (2 Cor. 10:12). We are not to be judged according to what others do anyway. So often when people like to compare themselves with others in the church, they will select someone who is weak, possibly a known hypocrite, and alongside them they may not look so bad. But did it ever occur to us that we may compare favorably with somebody else and they not be acceptable, either? We might look good but that might not mean we are acceptable to God. Our standard is Jesus Christ. There is always the possibility that more is expected of us than somebody else with whom we might want to make comparison. Even if we are not worse than other brethren, we still may be far short of what God is expecting from us.

PART-TIME OBEDIENCE

"I keep part of God's law; probably the larger part at that." Since when did we assume the right to declare some of God's will important and the rest to be optional? It is quite presumptious to tell God that there are certain portions of His

will that are not too important nor necessary. There is a principle stated in James 2:10 that we need to have before us. "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*"

This does not mean that if one steals he is also guilty of lying or adultery. It means if one violates the law in any point he is guilty of violating the law. To violate God's law on any point is to challenge His authority and right to command us. While it may be easy to see that the immediate consequences of violating one law are not as serious as violating another, who are we to tell God that we have ranked His laws according to what we consider important? Violating a "minor" point is serious. We cannot pacify ourselves by thinking we are acceptable just because we have done a goodly portion of our duty while neglecting the rest.

IT'S THEIR FAULT

"But I do not like the preacher, or an elder, or a teacher, or somebody else that attends there." That is often the reason behind absenteeism. But we are very charitable in calling it a reason. It is more of an excuse. We do not attend worship because we like other people. We attend to worship God. Of course, if there is no fellowship between you, that is another matter. Personality differences, likes and dislikes give us no justification for taking our feelings out on God, staying away, refusing to obey His command to worship. We all have people we like more than others. This is natural. But keep in mind that any preacher who is doing his duty is not there to please people but to teach people God's word. Worship, including the preaching portion, is not some kind of popularity contest. It is not to entertain. It is to teach the will of God. When a preacher is doing that he deserves your support.

We seriously doubt we would take such an attitude in other matters of life. If your house was on fire, would you deny the fireman the right to put it out for you because you did not like the fireman or some of his fellows? Would you refuse to let a doctor perform an operation that you needed because you did not like his wife? We have no right to expect perfection out of others anymore than they have a right to expect it out of us. But none of us have the right to take the matter out on God by refusing to worship, using other people as an excuse.

TOO TIRED

Probably the most trifling excuse that has so often been heard is, "I just cannot seem to get up in time. I was too tired." It is absolutely true that you are too tired if you are too tired to obey God. Whatever you have been doing that gets you so tired should come to a halt when it begins to interfere with your service to God.

Some just stay up or out too late on Saturday night to be able to give their attention to their soul. It is very doubtful that any brother or sister would be too tired to get up if $1,000 would be given to each one attending. They would not be too tired to get up then. So the claim of being too tired is just an invalid excuse.

The problem is a spiritual one. It is a disease of the heart, not the body. We get up and go to our jobs day after day, on time, whether tired or not, because that means money. We might do better if we just admitted that we lack a love for God, that we are endangering our souls by our indifference, rather than try to soothe our consciences with something that we all know is not really the truth. We know that we are expected to worship come Lord's Day morning and evening. Why do we not make plans for it, and make sure nothing hinders, rather than run ourselves around late into the night and then cry, "Too tired!". It is a lame excuse.

HAVING COMPANY

But how many times have people offered as an excuse for not attending, "We had company, or we were expecting company." This smacks of hypocrisy about as badly as any of the excuses. It is an admission that even though you profess to be a Christian, Christ is not first in your life. Somebody who wants to come and visit you takes first place and Christ is shuttled aside for that week.

Sure, there is work to be done when company comes. But who should wait? Should Christ be set aside for the benefit of company? You say you do not want to be rude? But you are being rude toward Christ. Yes, you may have to cook dinner for them. Let them wait until after worship. What sort of an example are you setting before others when you let company keep you absent from a sacred duty? Either bring your company with you, let them wait on you, but do not show

them that Christ is not that important to you. You could make better arrangements if you really tried.

NOTHING TO WEAR

Some even try to excuse themselves on the basis that their clothes are not good enough. This is seldom the excuse of most brethren, because most have reasonably good clothes. But it is heard at times. Are you telling God that He has not blessed you enough for you to worship Him? The clothes you wear are not as important as the kind of heart you have. Does it not strike you as strange that some who say their clothes are not good enough to attend worship will be seen in public all week long in those clothes and never feel shame about it? It makes you wonder why the "proud" act only comes at the hour of worship.

We would do better to strive for heaven wearing rags than go to hell in a brand new suit. If clothing is truly lacking, brethren will provide it. One cannot justify his disobedience on that excuse.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is sometimes a problem, but not one that cannot be easily remedied when there is the desire to remedy it. The fact that some do not drive is no excuse. Others drive and are happy to come get you.

"But I do not want to bother anyone." First, let me say it is no bother but a privilege to assist another to come to worship. Second, I had rather bother my brother than forsake a duty to God. Most congregations have three or four times the transportation needed. Third, people do not mind "bothering" others for rides to other places.

Zachaeus was a man who had some trouble getting to see the Lord. He had a handicap, but did not let that stop him. We should not let obstacles like transportation hinder us.

MY JOB

"I cannot get there because I have to work." What we shall say here will not set well with some. Work schedules are often in conflict with periods of worship. But we are also aware that few are required to work to such an extent that

they could not attend sometime during the Lord's Day. Some work because they are asked to work and they like that extra pay. They do not even try to make other arrangements. We have seen brethren make such efforts to avoid these conflicts that we are certain that many times it can be done. Furthermore, nobody can make you work so as to miss everything. But some deliberately take jobs when they know it will be a hindrance to worship.

Have you ever really tried to get off from Sunday work? If the ones for whom you work are so inconsiderate of you as a person, and of your faith, it may be that you will have to decide between your job and your faith. Brethren have to take these things into consideration when taking a job. We are reasonably sure that 99 % could make it at one service. By the way, offering the Lord's Supper on Sunday night was never intended to accomodate those who deliberately were absent. That is to abuse the purpose of it.

DULL SERVICES

"Well, to tell the truth, I miss a lot because the services are not very interesting." This is possibly true at times. But we must remember why we have come. It is not to be entertained. We are there to give, not just to receive. We are there to worship and honor God according to the teaching in His word. Some have the idea of getting and never giving. One time a lady said she did not get anything out of the worship to take home with her. One told her quite bluntly that possibly she did not bring very much in which to take it home. The fault may well be with the worshipper rather than the worship.

NOT RUN TO SUIT ME

"I do not come because things are not run to suit me and I do not like it." Things have to be "run" by somebody, and whoever does will not please all. Elders of a congregation have that responsibility. What is it you dislike? I there something Biblically wrong going on? Or is it your opinion versus the opinion of the leadership? We have to submit to our leaders in matters of judgment unless there is a matter of conscience involved.

Possibly those in charge are not even aware of your

dissatisfaction. Even if they are, you go to worship God, not show favor to human opinion. We would not encourage one to worship where error is tolerated and promoted. But just because one may not like the way matters of judgment are run is no reason for disobeying God.

We can draw a conclusion or two from all of this. Just remember that God does not accept excuses when He has given us a task to perform. He does not ask what we cannot do, and will hold us responsible when we shirk our job. Let us not deceive ourselves in thinking we can sidestep God by offering excuses instead of offering sincere worship. The next time you have temptation to miss the worship assembly, just consider how God looks at what you are doing. It will likely urge you to get on your way, and you will be glad that you decided to be present.

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WHAT CAN STOP THIS CHURCH FROM GROWING

There are some subjects on which we must meditate and that must be preached that demand a measure of frankness and firmness more than others. We should always try to speak the truth with a motive of a genuine interest and concern for the church and the individuals that compose it. This lesson includes things which most Christians have heard many times and they are already aware of them because these things are frequently taught by brethren.

We begin with a Biblical emphasis on the necessity of growth by the Christian. *"But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* (2 Pet. 3:18). *"And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge..."* (2 Pet. 1:5). *"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."* (1 Pet. 2:22). *"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith growth exceedingly and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth."* (2 Thess. 1:3). *"For when*

for the time that ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not strong meat. For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:12-14). Growth is not only a command and directed by Scripture, but the failure to grow is disobedience. Every person and every congregation must grow as it has opportunity. If it does not, it makes itself displeasing to God.

WAYS IT MUST GROW

There are many ways a congregation can grow. It can grow in the virtuous characteristics Peter mentions; such as, faith, knowledge, virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. It can grow in good works, influence for good. It may grow in numbers. There is such a thing as spiritual growth, numerical growth, and even material growth. Often these different ways of growing go along together. But there can be numerical growth without spiritual growth, and vice versa. There can be material growth without either of the others. The most important by far is the spiritual growth, and next comes the numerical growth because each number represents another soul worth saving.

In the years ahead, many congregations shall have unparalleled opportunities to grow by the big increase of population, new homes being built in the locality, people moving, and an avalanche of material progress. But this does not necessarily mean the church will grow, or that it will grow in a way that is pleasing to God. In some of our largest cities where growth has been almost beyond measure, the church is both numerically and spiritually weak. In the fastest growing places, the church is not even keeping proportional pace. There are things that can keep a church from growing, and we need to be aware of what they are so we can prevent them to whatever extent we can, and combat them when we cannot prevent them. More than anything else, though not exclusively, that which prevents the congregation from growing is the membership that is already there. How can

this be? Well, let us consider.

UNSEEN OPPORTUNITIES

With many there is a lack of alertness, asleep as to what future opportunities are before us. Many simply lack the realization of what is taking place. I recall when a child and our community was about to explode with new homes, business growth all about, and many visitors coming into the assemblies that had never been there before, making the building so crowded that it became inconvenient, that an elder who objected to erecting a larger facility complained, "Why can't these people find themselves a place to worship?" This kind of short-sightedness can stifle the growth of a congregation. "*Without vision the people perish.*" (Prov. 29:18). "*Awake thou that sleepest*" is what many need to hear. The failure to grasp the urgency of seizing opportunities, and a sense of urgency in saving souls while there is time has escaped too many. A spiritual drowsiness and blindness has clouded our view. We need to lift up our eyes and see the harvest that is there. Many souls will doubtless be lost that could have been saved if the members of the church recognized and realized the opportunities of spreading the gospel that are before us. We are as God's watchmen on the wall to warn the people (Ezek. 33:1-9). We bring about our own doom as well as that of others to not sound the trumpet loud and clear.

LACK OF PLANNING

We can stifle growth if we proceed without intelligent plans. God wants things done "*decently and in order*" rather than haphazardly and with confusion (1 Cor. 14:33,40). When Nehemiah set himself to the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he first got clearly in mind what was needed, and a plain of operation for getting it. A general does not go into battle without a strategy and battle plan. We ought not go into the good fight of faith without knowing what we are trying to do and how we are going to do it. What would you think of a builder who was commissioned to build a skyscraper in a city who started digging the first day but had no plans before him as to how and what he was going to do? Hapazardness hinders. It causes confusion and duplication

and unnecessary action, waste, and expenditure. Things will be overlooked that must be watched. Many congregations need plans for better facilities, better means of contact and teaching, and better programs that accomplish the authorized work of the church. Now is the time to plan before the need for these things is upon us. We will miss much growth if we wait until something is needed before we make any effort to have what is needed.

LEAVING GOD'S SYSTEM

Churches often begin with a small number. Many times they go along without the government that God has designed. There are reasons why this is true sometimes other than just unwillingness to do what God wants. Sometimes there are so few that there are none qualified to serve as elders and deacons. Sometimes brethren get into the habit of operating on a "committe system" and continue to ignore God's plan and keep their own. But we must always remember that the church belongs to God, purchased by Christ's blood, had its beginning with the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. What we are saying is that the church is of divine origin and God has shown how the church is to be governed. *"And when they had ordained them elders in every church..."* (Acts 14:23), was the New Testament way. *"For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee."* (Titus 1:5). The church in Philippi had bishops (or elders) and deacons (Phil.1:1). We teach that we should "*speak as the oracles of God*" (1 Peter 4:11), and correctly so. Well, God has spoken. We should not attempt to operate without the divine government God has ordained. If there are no elders, they should be appointed, if there be qualified men. If no qualified men exist, then efforts should be made to qualify them. We must hasten to add and emphasize that we have no right to appoint unqualified men just to have a form of government. This would be another act of ignoring God's will. There is nothing worse than the wrong man in the right place. But at the same time, we cannot go on and on without giving respect to God's government. To do so will be to place a millstone about the neck of the church and hinder its growth.

The service to be rendered by elders is necessary. They are

to convict gainsayers that may enter and to oppose the false doctrines that might attempt to influence some into error. Without elders a majority rule system may develop which is not Biblical. The weak will fall away without proper attention because elders have the watchcare of their souls. Without the government for which God's word calls, we show to brethren around us and the world generally that we will only comply with what we want rather than with what God says. This cannot but be a problem to growth.

LACK OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

But as much as anything else, the lack of spiritual growth among the members will keep the church from growing numerically as well as spiritually. Without spirituality in the lives of the members, there may be numerical growth only. But what thinks God of such a thing? Many have a distorted view as to what spirituality is. It is not mere attending worship, though this is certainly included. It is not wearing a pious countenance. It is not the mere observance of ritual. It is a way of living. It is love for the cause of Christ to the extent that we give ourselves to it with talents, time, energy, compliance in life day by day. That is spirituality. Doing as the Spirit directs through the word is spirituality. Keeping our hearts free from envy, jealousy, and hate is spirituality. Rendering service to others is spirituality. Obeying parents, obeying the law of the land, doing one's duty to one's family, hungering and thristing for more and more knowledge of the will of God, that is spirituality. You may build a giant auditorium and fill it with people and have a very pious service in it, but if these other things do not abide in the lives of the members, we have most likely deceived ourselves and others and really done nothing of eternal benefit for them or ourselves. A deep and sincere reverence and devotion to God and His ways is what composes spirituality. Without these qualities one will not experience the growth in a congregation that brings praises to God nor enjoys His approval.

UNINVOLVEMENT

But the membership must also have a mind to work. This was the "secret"to the success of the people of Israel under

Nehemiah. With the task clearly in mind and the plans before them, the walls were erected because *"the people had a mind to work."*(Neh. 4:6). Growth can be accomplished with work and sacrifice. We can be sure the devil will be working through many means and influences to keep the church from growing. We must work for the Lord if success is to be achieved. Denominations will work; false teachers will work. Many souls will be swept away by them unless we reach them with the truth of God. Cooperation in the ranks is essential. There is no place for discension. All for Christ and none for self is the watchword. Humility and service is what is needful. Someone has said there is no limit as to what can be done when we do not concern ourselves about who get the credit.

One final word is relevant to these suggestions and teachings. Where there is opportunity also goes responsibility. Sometimes opportunity knocks even when we are not looking for it. It imposes itself upon us. Sometimes we have to make opportunities and look for them. But whenever there is opportunity there comes the responsibility to grasp that opportunity and make the most of it. Should we fail to do this we will not be counted as worthy stewards nor faithful to the task as children of God. The opportunity will soon be snatched away from us, and we shall give an account of our neglect.

The future of any congregation is of such importance because that is all a congregation really has in order to do what God wants. The past is gone and only the future remains. So let us rise up and build and give God the glory.

† † † † †

continued from page 23

church. Being sick is one thing. Visiting other local churches is another. But we need to be encouraged to love the work and worship of the local church assembled.

We have yet to read any Scripture that says anything is an acceptable substitute for the Lord's Day worship of the local church. We know of no authority to fragment the local church into splinters at that time. If we are not careful, we shall soon come to consider the local worship service as only a worship to attend when there is no other place to go. Many already think that. We must look upon that assembly in respect of the teaching to not forsake the assembly. JWB

RIGHT OR WRONG

It has been said that you can prove most anything by polls. Possibly this has some truth in it, but polls are interesting in discovering what people think and believe. Religious polls reveal that most Americans believe that God exists, consider religion important, even attend church, though not with regularity. In one poll it was found that about seven out of ten believe there is a heaven, the place of reward. But the same poll found only six out of ten believe there is a place of punishment. What was very interesting was that only one out of ten believe that they would be punished.

Such polls often reveal how far removed is man's concept of things from what the Lord taught. It is encouraging to know that many believe God does exist and there is a heaven and hell, but the Bible that shows there is a heaven and hell teaches that most shall not go the way of reward.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow the way, which leadeth unto life and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:13,14).

Therefore, we may observe that while man had a very high estimate of himself and an acceptable appraisal of his life, man is often wrong. We need to be concerned about our beliefs and be sure that we are right. " *Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."*(1 Cor. 10:12). It is so easy to be wrong. It is more difficult to be right. Contrary to what many think, it does make a difference what we believe.

ERROR EXISTS

The Bible teaches that religious error is in the world. " *Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (1 John 4:1). Why does religious error thrive? It ought to be apparent to any reasonable mind that the division, confusion, contradiction of religion cannot all be right. God is not the author of this confusion. He does not lead men in opposite directions at the same time. He does

not just turn man loose to go whatever way man pleases.

Truth is the same the world over. The way of Christ does not change with each generation. This doctrine that we must "re-interpret" Christianity every now and then to bring it up to date is totally false. "*The word of the Lord endureth forever.*" It is not subject to man's "improvements." Truth is absolute, not relative. The divergent convictions of men are evidences that many must be wrong because truth is always consistent with truth. With the scores of denominational names, systems, doctrines, no honest evaluation of the religious scene could say that error does not exist.

Some say that error is not really error but that we just interpret differently. To interpret means to gain the meaning, not assign a meaning. If interpret means to give something whatever meaning you wish, then there is no way to misinterpret. God has not given us His word, which calls for unity, and then given different, even contradictory, meanings to it. That would necessitate the very disunity He abhors. It is an accusation against God to say that we cannot see the Bible alike. When I understand what God has taught, and you understand what God has taught, we are going to be alike. Possibly one or both misunderstand and we are divided. But when the Bible is understood, we either will be alike, or God is the author of confusion, the very thing Paul says is not true. (1 Cor. 14:33).

Why is it so hard for people to believe that there is a right and wrong in matters of religion when they readily accept the fact that there is right and wrong in everything else with which has to do in this world.?

NOT AN IMMEDIATE VERDICT

Possibly one reason for people not considering the possibility of religious error is because God's verdict against error is not usually immediate. One can live this life through in rebellion against God and seemingly prosper in this world. This is one of the frustrating realities with which those who strive to live righteously must contend. In this life "*God sendeth his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and the unjust.*" (Matt. 5:45). Not all of the blessings of this life are conditioned upon service to God. Much that is evil goes unpunished in this life. Therefore, some have blindly concluded that God does not punish and

that there is no right or wrong. But the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-40) teaches that the final verdict is not given in this life. That will come at the judgment before God.

There is a story of two western farmers who had farms joining each other. One was a Christian and the other was not. One year the non-Christian prospered better than did the Christian. So he chided his Christian neighbor that God evidently did not care for him after all, and that not serving God was better than serving Him. The Christian responded, "God does not render his accounts final in the Fall of the year." The final count does not come in this life. We may go through life in disobedience and seem to fare quite well. Many do, even without giving God His due. But they will eventually know their error. "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man. but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" (Prov. 14:12).

FAILURE TO STUDY

People are religiously wrong because they do not study God's word. They may consider the Bible with some regard, but do not study it. The Bible is the most bought and least studied book in the world. So many are content to let somebody tell then what they ought to do rather than to know the truth for themselves from God's word. Actually, they are content and satisfied with what they already believe and are unwilling to be disturbed, even afraid of discovering that they may be wrong. God once said, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*" (Hosea 4:6).

Many engage in wishful thinking. They are like the ostrich who sticks his head in sand when danger is near as if that will cause the danger to vanish. They had rather not think about the possibility of being lost. Some have even invented doctrines like purgatory, the doctrine of a second chance, and other such doctrines, limiting punishment. Jesus used the same word to describe punishment as He did heaven. "*These shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*" (Matt. 25:46 ASV). It is not a mark of wisdom to deceive oneself into thinking all is well when it is not.

If only we could persuade people, even brethren, that knowledge of the word of God is so important to the spiritual welfare of the soul. We must study.

PRIDE IS A PROBLEM

Pride is at the root of much religious error. "*Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.*" (Prov. 16:18). Stephen Decatur once said in a toast to his country, "My country, may she always be right. But my country, right or wrong." We might admire his patriotism, but can we admire his reasoning? Certainly not if we want to be right before God. Some have Decatur's attitude toward their religion. "My beliefs, may they always be right. But my beliefs, right or wrong."

To admit being wrong offends the ego, hurts the pride, demands a spirit of humility that many simply dare not adopt. It might hurt their image with others. It might knock them off the pedestal that they have erected for themselves. It might mean they will not remain the "big name" among others. Rather than do what is right, they either cover-up their wrong in some inglorious manner, refuse to investigate it, or as often as not, brush aside anyone or anything that might suggest they are in error and continue in their haughty, pompous, better-than-thou, superior, pride-filled way.

CERTAINTY THROUGH MEASURING

How can we be sure that we are right? First, we need to get off that idea that we must defend what we believe at all costs. It is not so important that **WE** must be right as it is that we **BELIEVE WHAT IS RIGHT.** There may be a close line between these thoughts but it is an essential distinction. If we approach the search for truth with the idea that we must show ourselves right, rather than the desire to learn what is right, we shall not likely learn, and even if we do learn what is right, we shall not likely conform to the truth.

There is the story of a foreman that worked at Oak Ridge, Tennessee in the atomic plant. His method of reasoning with some when he discussed religious matters was to take a small notebook and ask several people what they thought was the length of that notebook. He would write down what they thought. After several offered their guesses, he would ask, "Who is right?" All knew that there was one way to determine, not who was right, but what was right. They got a ruler and measured by the accepted standard. If one was correct, he was right, not because he was a bigot,

narrow-minded or dogmatic. If he was right it was because he stood with what the standard measured.

Dear reader friend, the same thing is true in matters of religion. If we agree that the Bible is the standard, we can discover what is right. We are aware that more and more people do not wish to use the Bible as the standard. But we can prove that the Bible is the Word of God, and therefore is the standard. But if we want to know what is right or wrong, we must use the same standard and abide by what the standard reveals. Let us make one or two applications of this principle of measuring by the standard.

One man says we are saved by faith. Another says we are saved by faith only. Who is right? We can find numerous passages in the Bible that teach that man is saved by faith. But there is not one that teaches we are saved by faith only. In fact, we find that we are not saved by faith only in James 2:24. Is there any real difficulty in knowing what is right?

One says that baptism saves. Another says that baptism has nothing to do with salvation. When we read Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, 1 Pet. 3:21, there is no doubt but baptism and salvation are connected, and salvation always is after obedience to the act of baptism. Is it really all that hard to know what is right? God's standard is right, and so are those who abide by it.

WHEN WE ARE WRONG

What should we do when we learn that we have been wrong? We ought to be as honest and fair in discovering we are wrong religiously as we are in the relatively unimportant matters of this earthly life. After all, the soul is worth more than the whole world. If we find our clocks are wrong, we change them and set them right. If we find we are travelling the wrong highway, we turn around and make whatever adjustments that are necessary to get on the right road. If we dial a telephone number and discover it is incorrect, we find the right one and use it. We ought to do the same thing in principle in matters of the soul.

It has been said that "great men often change their minds; little men never."

When in error, the path of wisdom is to acknowledge it and change. When Nathan accused David of sin, he admitted it and sought forgiveness. When Paul was convicted that Jesus

is the Christ, what did he do?

We can be right. We can be wrong. There is a way to know. When we are right we must hold to it stedfastly. When we are wrong we must turn from our error. It is far better to abandon wrong and be right than to exist in eternity in regret.

† † † † †

A WORD ABOUT SUBSTITUTE ASSEMBLIES

How many times brethren read Hebrews 10:25 that teaches us not to forsake the assemblying of ourselves together, and still many are negligent regarding this gathering. The early church assembled on the first day of the week and they worshipped the Lord together, including the partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 16:1,2; Acts 20:7).

Keeping that in mind, let us also remember the organization of the Lord's church, universal and local. While much of today's world considers organized religion repulsive, the church of Christ is organized into local congregations under Christ, overseen by elders, served by deacons, every Christian a member thereof, according to Scripture. We dare not ignore worship, nor dare we disregard the Lord's pattern of organization.

There is a tendency among some to by-pass the local congregation. While there are certain individual responsibilities we must discharge, the work of the church (evangelism, benevolence, edification) belongs to the local church. The worship is also to be observed as a congregation, as is obvious from the command not to forsake the assemblying of ourselves. Sometimes today we hear of brethren trying to go around the local church instead of respecting that order. While we are members of the church whether assembled or disassembled, there is the occasion we are to be assembled, and the Lord's Day worship period is such an occasion.

Regarding worship, instead of assemblying together, there are programs designed to disassemble rather than assemble the local church. Such is seen in "youth church, college-age church, camper's church," and similar assemblies. While none object to such groups worshipping, there is ground to object to such assemblies displacing the Lord's Day worship and fragmenting the local church regarding that period. We are forced to ask, "By what authority in the New Testament

do we fragment the local church into such parties and groups at the time of the partaking of the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day?"

Some have quoted Matthew 18:20, "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.*" We may not fully comprehend all this passage teaches, but we are sure it does not provide divine authority to disassemble ourselves in worship. If it does, we have a genuine contradiction with Hebrews 10:25.

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus is speaking with His apostles discussing the promise made in verse 19, "*that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*" The meeting of the two or three is to be "in my name" or by the Lord's authority. The verse does teach that it does not take a great number for the Lord to be in our midst. But is it His authority to dismiss His authority to assemble for worship in groups and show disrespect for the organizational character of the local church?

If it is right for one group to have their own "private church," then it would be right for a second, a third, etc. until the matter of assemblying together would not and could not be possible, even though commanded. While families should worship in their homes, what if each family started their own "little worship" on Lord's Day instead of assemblying with the local church? If one can, all can. If they can one Sunday, they can every Sunday. Then what happens to God's appointed local church assembly? Does God authorize against Himself?

When Paul taught the local church in Corinth (1 Cor. 11) about partaking of the Lord's Supper, which is observed in the assembly, he said, "*when ye come together...*" (verse 18(; "*...when ye come together into one place...,*" (verse 20); "*... wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another...,*" (verse 33). While the last phrase cited does not mean we must wait until the last slothful and dilatory brother drags in, it does mean that we do what we do together. This would be impossible, however, if the local church is dispersed into various cells.

One of the problems facing the church is the lack of local loyalty and local responsibility. The world calls for brethren to seek their own interests even at the expense of the local

[*Continued on page 17*]



JAMES W. BOYD

DID HIM NO GOOD

A boy who lived in the city went out almost every day to the athletic field. After he had been going several months, his muscles were still flabby and not any stronger. Most of the other boys who had been going had developed their muscles and were enjoying robust health. What was the matter?

Most had been working, getting the training. He had been lounging on the edge of the field, smoking cigarettes, watching rather than being involved.

Christians who train by growing in grace and knowledge, who work earnestly at the business of serving God, will develop and become strong and efficient in God's service. They will be influential for truth and right as the days go by. As physical growth takes nourishment and exercise, so spiritual growth takes the "*sincere milk of the word*", (1 Pet. 2:1), "*meat,*" (1 Cor. 3:2), and also the exercise of doing "*the will of my Father.*" (Matt. 7:21). Those who merely "go to church" and idle through worship, only to go home to resume the indulgence of the flesh, will not grow.

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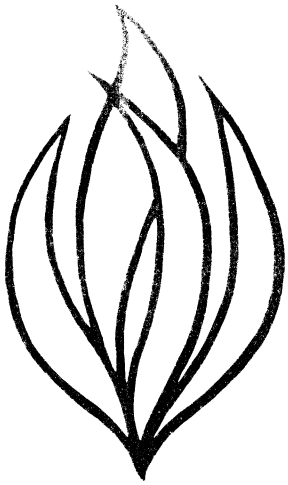

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

WHY DO PEOPLE NOT SEE THE BIBLE ALIKE?

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME II **NUMBER 3**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

AND CREDIT

The sermons written in **A BURNING FIRE** are sermons that I have preached through the years. It is impossible for me to know from what sources I have gleaned and gathered all the material, other than from the Scriptures. I, like many other preachers, have used the suggestions, ideas, sermons and notes prepared by others in preparing my sermons. Very seldom can I make a claim of originality.

But I do know quite well from what source the lessons of this issue have come. The primary thoughts are presented in a book written in 1949 by **J. Ridley Stroop,** of Nashville, Tennessee. My copy was purchased in 1954. I read it and was much impressed by it, and remain impressed today. I consider his analysis of the question under consideration to be exceptionally well discussed.

These sermons are my efforts to reduce the material into three sermons. This demanded that much of his good material be omitted, as you can imagine. I, therefore, commend to you the book for a deeper study of the subject.

Brother Stroop is no longer among the living on earth, but we can continue to profit from the good effort he made in providing the study of "*Why People Do Not See The Bible Alike?*"

J W B

WHY DO PEOPLE NOT SEE THE BIBLE ALIKE?

PART ONE

We begin a three part study on a question that is frequently asked. The question is so important that it cannot be pushed aside. Nor should there be an attempt to answer it with an impromptu answer. It is the kind of question that cannot be easily answered in just a passing conversation because it demands more investigation than that which a short answer can provide. It involves some very complex matters. It cannot be buried beneath wishful thinking that the question is not a real and genuine religious problem. Therefore, it deserves our consideration with seriousness. The religious conditions in America and the world demand a thoughtful answer. There are mountains of trouble and misunderstanding, even strife, because of religious differences. Even among those who profess to believe the Bible is the Word of God there is division. The very question provokes the reminder of church differences, denominationalism and disunity. People spend effort trying to place the blame for the chaotic conditions. We spend effort in trying to restore unity. But it could be that too many of us are simply not willing to get at the real problem and deal with the cause and source of the division.

FUTILE EFFORTS

Some have made attempts to achieve unity by forming church federations where religious people join together to "agree to disagree." That certainly is not the unity for which our Lord prayed in John 17. Some have even decided that division is a wholesome trait and we ought to accept it as such. But this is so foreign to apostolic teaching (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27). When Jesus prayed for unity among those who said they believed in Him, He warned that division would provoke atheism. He prayed that they all may be one, "*that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*"(John 17:21). Division produces the opposite effect of unity. If unity would

cause people to believe that God sent Him, then division would cause people to deny it. Division has caused sincere seekers of truth to become hopelessly confused and often give up in despair of ever knowing right from wrong.

While division is the cause of much religious trouble, it is also the symptom of other problems. One symptom is the explanation that people are "not seeing the Bible alike." To be sure, some are not even looking at it. But many who are trying to see are differing with each other. Why is that?

Many people no longer care what the Bible teaches because they see such disparity between religious teaching and religious practice. So many who claim to be followers of Christ are living lives that are careless, sinful and indifferent. It is not fair to blame Christ of the Bible for those who say one thing and do another. But this is a reality that is causing many to no longer even look at the Bible.

MORAL DECAY IS A SYMTOM

The social and moral disintergration of our society is another symptom of not seeing the Bible alike. Crime and delinquency of both young and old is running rampant and increasing with each passing year. The sacrifice of moral purity, blemishes on the honor of motherhood, defying the sanctity of marriage and the home, a misnamed "freedom" to indulge oneself in whatever lustful action one sees fit, all of this is evident, and stems in part from the failure to see the Bible alike. Someone has said, "If the nation is spared destruction it will be because of religious people." We would insist that is too broad. Religious people are contributing to the problems as much as the cure in many instances. True, the salvation of the nation may rest with religious people, but certainly not all religious people. There is too much division among religious people for them to have the impact on society of which they are capable. Division between churches, division within churches, disparity between doctrine and practice, the relaxation even among the religious of moral values, are all symptoms of a dreaded problem. All these things cause people to feel frustrated. It is because people do not see the Bible alike.

We are asking why this is the case? When we find the answer to that, we will have found one gigantic cause of the religious impotency and troubles.

DON'T BLAME GOD

Some would say that people cannot see the Bible alike. But that is saying far too much. Millions of people do see it alike.

Furthermore, God requires unity. Has God made His requirement impossible by giving us a book that causes the very division He condemns? It is not God's fault that men are divided. We dare not blame God for something man has caused in defiance of God. God is not the kind of Being that demands one thing and then prohibits it from being possible. This kind of "reasoning" is to indict God with gross hypocrisy and inconsistency. We shall see that this is not near the case.

ONE FAITH

We want now to bring to mind four basic and fundamental facts. One, Jesus brought only one teaching. There is one faith (Eph. 4:4,5). When people learn a single truth, and remain with that truth, there can be only unity. Let me illustrate; George Washington is reported to have been our first president. If somebody says that is not true, then obviously somebody is wrong. It may be those who say he was president, or it may be those who say he was not. But one or the other is wrong. Both cannot be right.

When people disagree on some Biblical teaching, somebody is wrong. There is only one teaching. The Bible is not a "take your choice" kind of book. We may not easily know who is right or wrong, but when there is disagreement, we can know that both cannot be right. To say both can be right is to say that God is deliberately ambiguous and provokes division even as He commands oneness.

IS IT INTERPRETATION?

But someone suggests, "We interpret the Bible differently." Let us be clear; the Bible must be interpreted. But what does it mean to interpret the Bible? Does interpret mean to assign a meaning, or does it mean to learn the meaning? God has given His word and it has meaning. It is man's duty to learn the meaning God gave, not assign it some meaning of his own. When you interpret a passage, you get the meaning of it When I interpret that same passage, I get the meaning of it. We will see it alike. You may interpret and I misinterpret,

or vice versa. We both may misinterpret in different ways. In either case we will be divided. But when you interpret (get the meaning), and I interpret (get the meaning), we can but see it alike. If man has the right to assign to a passage a meaning that God did not place there, then there would be no way for anyone to misinterpret the Bible. Everyone could decide whatever he wanted regarding anything in the Bible. Honest and reasonable people would not allow any writing to be treated in such a manner. Certainly we ought not do the inspired Word of God that way.

HIS WORD HAS NOT CHANGED

Secondly, God's Word endures forever. The faith has been *"once delivered to the saints."*(Jude 3). There is no room for latter-day revelation. The Scriptures will furnish us completely unto every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

MAN IS THE SAME

A third basic fact is that man's nature is basically the same generation after generation. He loves and hates; he rejoices and weeps. He approves and rejects; he learns and he forgets. 'he can understand and also misunderstand. He has the same basic organic needs, same drives, same feelings. Basic human nature has remained constant. We are aware that evolutionsts deny this, but evolution is false. This is not the place to show evolution false, but there is accumulating evidence to that end, and nothing has changed about human nature.

CAUSES ARE THE SAME

Our fourth basic fact is the summation of the first three. Since Christ brought one faith, His teaching remains constant, and human nature remains the same, the causes of failure to see the Bible alike are the same now as they have been down through the ages. They are the same as the reasons why people did not see the teachings of Christ and His apostles alike in New Testament times. Some saw it. Some did not. Some accepted it. Others did not and went their own way. We can find our present day difficulties relative to understanding the Bible alike reflected in the lives

and attitudes of people of that period. By turning to the New Testament, we have a safe approach by which to study the question. The New Testament reveals to us the reasons why people did not accept the teaching of Christ and did not see it alike.

Jesus was never explicitly asked why people did not see things alike. Therefore, we shall not find a direct, point-blank answer to our question. We must glean from the Scriptures information that relates to this matter and compile it. Let us pray for wisdom as we proceed.

WHY THE JEWS DID NOT AGREE: IGNORANCE

We ask why the Jewish people did not agree with Christ but rejected His teaching. Romans 10:3, "*For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*"

To put it bluntly, the reason they rejected Jesus was because they wanted their own way. Ignorance of what they were rejecting had a large part in it. God's righteousness refers to God's plan for saving man by making man righteous. The Jews had their own system that they were determined to follow. Peter charged the people, "*And now brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.*" (Acts 3:17). Paul said that Christ was crucified because "*they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath.*" (Acts 13:27). 1 Cor. 2:8, "*For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*" The Jews were too quick and too willing to reject what Christ had said because they did not know just what they were doing. They were guilty, nonetheless. But they were ignorant of the way of truth.

Saul of Tarsus is a classic example of religious ignorance. Before he was known as the apostle Paul, he persecuted Christians and was, by his own admission, a blasphemer and injurious, making havoc of the church (1 Tim. 1:12,13; Acts 8:3; Gal. 1:13,14). Part of his problem was his ignorance of the truth.

When Jesus had an encounter with the Saducees regarding the resurrection, He charged them, "*Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.*" (Matt. 22:29).

Similarly, the cause for the Gentiles failing to accept truth

was "*because of the ignorance that is in them.*" (Eph. 4:17-19). Ignorance was often the cause of problems among the early disciples. One criticized a woman who anointed Jesus with oil. But Jesus commended her good work. The critics were ignorant of the significance of what she did. The mother of James and John asked a favor of special places for her sons in the Lord's kingdom. But Jesus showed she was ignorant of what she was asking.

The Christian warfare is directed against ignorance of God's will by teaching and preaching His truth. One of our greatest enemies is ignorance of what the Scriptures say, let alone what they teach. Ignorance is causing many today to cast off that of which they know very little.

The charge of ignorance is not a reflection on a person's intelligence or ability to know. It does not mean one is mentally incompetent. Paul was a highly educated man before he became a Christian, yet he admitted ignorance of the truth. The Jewish leaders were educated men, but Christ, Peter, Paul, and others said they acted in ignorance. Ignorance means that a person is woefully lacking in knowledge of Biblical teaching. One has simply not read, not studied, does not know the Scriptures. Rather than knowing, one might go about trying to establish his own way instead of God's way.

TWO CLASSES OF THE IGNORANT

All who are ignorant of the Bible can be divided into two general categories. (1) Those who have studied. (2) Those who have not studied. The second classification contains by far the largest number. The majority of people do not study the Bible. When someone asks the simplest things about the Bible, they have no idea whatever.

Those who have studied can be divided into two groups that still misunderstand. Those who do understand are among those who have studied. But among those who have studied and still misunderstand are (1) those who do not understand but realize they do not, and are teachable; (2) those who not only do not understand but have accepted a misunderstanding. This second group is seldom open to being taught. They have latched on to error thinking it is the truth, and are content to believe that and nothing else.

This leads us to consider another point.

A MATTER OF DECEPTION

What are the causes of misunderstanding? Some say that people cannot understand until God works some kind of special direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart. If that be so, it does no good to study until God operates. Furthermore, this makes the misunderstanding God's fault because He has not operated yet. What we have is man accusing God for the problems.

But people misunderstand because they think a thing is true when it is not true. People can be deceived. We are all capable of being deceived. I may be. You may be. We might as well admit the possibility. Deception is a major human weakness. But we are also capable of understanding. Paul wrote the Ephesians and told them they could understand what he understood by reading what he wrote (Eph. 3:4). Through deception, the problem of sin entered the world (1 Tim. 2:14). Satan deceived Eve, leading her to believe the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was good for her when it was not true. Deception has been a weapon of Satan through the ages. Paul said, "*But I fear lest by any means, as the serpant beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ.*"(2 Cor. 11:3).

People are led deeper and deeper into wickedness by deception. "*But evil men shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*"(2 Tim. 3:13).

James 1:13-15, "*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth for sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*"There are three fundamental truths revealed in this passage. One, God is not responsible for man sinning. Two, man is responsible for his sins. Three, man is drawn into sin by being deceived into thinking something is good when it is really evil. He is enticed, deceived when he thinks something is true when it is not true.

Paul said the Galatians were being "*bewitched*"or deceived into believing something as a part of God's gospel, but was a perverted gospel. He warned his brethren, "*Be not deceived...*"(Gal. 6:7).

Why do people, who are equally intelligent, equally well educated, equally sincere, equally respected, teach ideas that are diametrically opposite? Even those who claim to be directly guided by the Holy Spirit do this. It is due to deception. Somebody might say, "Not me." Maybe not, but we ought to be aware of the possibility.

The answer to our primary question stems from this common weakness of the capacity for deception. When one is ignorant, he is easily deceived. Some are deceived for other reasons. Some are not really motivated to learn the truth. Some have swallowed the doctrine that it does not make any difference what you believe just so long as you are honest and sincere. They are not concerned too much about the matter. They are deceived into thinking it makes no difference anyway.

SUMMARY

Let us summarize Part One. People do not see the Bible alike. This is too evident to belabor. The teaching is the same as in the past. Man is basically the same. There is one faith. Therefore, we can learn why people see things differently when we learn why people saw them differently in New Testament times. We have also learned that much of the problem stems from ignorance and the determination to establish one's own way.

Some are ignorant because they have not studied. Some who have studied are ignorant because they have been deceived into thinking something is true that in reality is not true. They have laid hold on error.

In Part Two we shall ask, "Why are so many deceived? Why are people willing to remain deceived?" In this connection we shall mention one of mankind's most dangerous religious practices.

† † † † †

PART TWO

Without review, let us continue in a progression of thoughts, one built upon the other, and discover the answer to our title question. We have reached the question, "Why are so many people deceived?" Let us not entertain doubt about the reality of deception. Almost every New Testament writer devotes some attention to this human weakness.

AWARENESS OF DECEPTION

Jesus was keenly aware of it. He knew that people often think something is true when it is not. He began His ministry by teaching, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I came not to destroy but to fulfill.*" (Matt. 5:17). Again, "*Think not that I came to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*"(Matt. 10:34). Again, "*And in praying, use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking.*"(Matt. 6:7).

Christ authorized others to warn against deception. 1 John 1:8, "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*"1 Cor. 3:18, "*Let no man deceive himself.*"James 1:22,"*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding* (deceiving) *yourselves.*"James 1:26, "*If any man thinketh himself to be religious while he bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain.*" Repeatedly we find the phrase warning against deception. Proverbs 14:12, "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" In other words, what one may think is true may not be true. Surely this array of Scriptures ought to persuade us that we are vulnerable to being deceived.

But why are so many deceived? It is not necessary that we be deceived. While it is possible for anyone to be deceived, deception can be prevented. But it is easier to deceive some people than others. Some make themsleves more subject to deception than others.

We now turn our attention to the matter of deception and how it relates to such things as ignorance, pride, and other problems that complicate unity of understanding.

DECEPTION THRIVES ON IGNORANCE

Everyone knows that an uninformed person is the easiest to deceive. A gem expert who knows his business will not buy glass thinking it is a diamond or some other valuable gem. A wise investor who understands the market will not likely buy worthless stocks and bonds. Give a child a shiny penny and a ragged dollar bill, likely he will prefer the penny because he is uninformed as to the value of money. But most of us keep saying to ourselves, "But that's not me, I know." Maybe not. We can know. But many who think they know actually do not. Let us ask a few more questions.

THE SOURCE OF CONVICTIONS

How did you come into possession of your religious convictions? We have been taught to believe what we believe. We were not born with these convictions. To a great extent, what we believe was learned as a child. We have accepted them originally because we had confidence in our teacher, whether it was a parent, friend, preacher, etc. Too many times, however, such people become our religious authority. But no human is the final authority in matters religious. Too often, instead of learning the answers to religious questions from God's book, we just ask the preacher, or a priest, or someone else and just accept what we are told. This is a practice of most religious people. It is a very dangerous practice; that of quoting and citing man's conclusions. This does not condemn placing confidence in man's knowledge and teaching. It does not forbid seeking help. But we ought to do some study on our own, check and recheck, what we are taught by others by comparing it with what the Scriptures teach. We dare not follow men blindly. "*If the blind guide the blind, then both shall fall into the pit.*" We need to be like the noble Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to see what was so (Acts 17:11). We are deceived many times by accepting and never questioning the teaching we have received rather than proving all things by the Bible. 1 John 4:1, "*Brethren, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*""*Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good.*"(1 Tim. 5:21).

DECEPTION AND PRIDE

But many will not check what they believe by the Bible. They are willing to remain with what they think, even if they are deceived. The reason behind this rather odd manner of inaction is their pride. They are conceited. It is just too much for them to admit that they are or ever have been wrong. We see a vicious chain or cycle of ignorance, deception and pride. From the New Testament, let us notice a few statements which describe conceit, warn against pride, and admonish the dethroning of it. The tie between pride and deception is amply noted in the Scriptures.

"*For if a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.*" (Gal. 6:3). "*For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.*" (Romans 12:3). "*Be not wise in your own conceits.*" (Romans 12:6). "*For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits.*" (Romans 11:25). "*Because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*" (Romans 1:21,22).

Before a conceited man, full of pride, can become truly wise, he must humble himself and become as a fool; recognize his own shortcomings and look to one wiser than is he. He must look to God if he would be wise. His own reasoning is not sufficient. But in his stiff pride and inflexible will, he will remain deceived. "*If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth not yet as he ought to know.*" (1 Cor. 8:2). The first thing that we need to know is that we do not know everything. Too many of us get stuck on ourselves as if nobody knows anything but us. But when we recognize our weakness and insufficiency, and know that we are dependent on and need God's wisdom and power, then we have taken a giant step toward real strength. The converse is also true. When we feel we are sufficient and independent of God, satisfied as we are, content with what we know, then we are strong in our own eyes but are actually weak. People, therefore, remain locked in deception because of conceit and self-sufficient pride. Chained in that bondage, they will remain wrong, lost, unwilling to admit their

limitations and go through life deceived.

Revelation 3:17, "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked.*" The trouble with those in Laodicea was deception. They thought something was true when it was not. They were in bondage to their own pride.

CONCEIT OR CONFIDENCE

It is useful to draw the distinction between conceit and self-confidence. Self-confidence is necessary to man's accomplishments and is not evil in itself. The danger of self-confidence is pushing it to the point that it becomes over-confidence and unjustified confidence. Conceit is unjustified confidence. Conceit is thinking more highly of oneself than is warranted. We have some teaching along this line in the Bible.

A scribe came to Jesus, Matt. 8:19,20, "*And a certain scribe came and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*" This man was confident that he would go with Jesus. But he really was not informed enough what all was included. The requirements, sacrifices, deprivations that would likely be his as a result of following Christ had not been properly considered. His self-confidence bordered on unjustified pride.

Peter is a good example of unjustified self-confidence. Matt. 26:33-35, "*Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet, I will never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, that this night before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise said all the disciples.*" We know that Peter later did just as the Lord said he would do.

A person may have wonderful intentions and many excellent qualities and still be in danger of falling under the blighting influence of conceit. In the qualifications for one who would serve as an elder of the church, we learn he cannot be a novice, "*lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*" (1 Tim. 3:6). No man should consider himself immune from this danger, and think he is

the exception to the possibility of being misled by conceit and pride. Feelings of sufficiency can handicap the Christian to such an extent that he is unable to live a Christian life. It can be a stumblingblock to him. This was the downfall of the publican who went up to pray but considered himself too righteous and immune from being deceived, thinking his prayer was acceptable to the Lord. (Luke 18:9-14).

DENYING SELF

Let us take note of a significant teaching of Christ. "*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" (Matt. 16:24). A requirement of followship is denying self. Just what does this mean?

We sometimes speak of how one has denied himself an education to help the family. Or a person may have denied himself something so that he might have something else. What is denied is the education or that something else. But what is to be denied in following Christ is **self.** This means a person reserves no right of authority in matters of religious faith. The authority must be Christ and His word, not man's feelings, preferences, wishes or any such thing. "*Not my will but thine be done ,*" state the attitude of denying self. We must turn from our own wisdom and follow the wisdom of God. In brief, what Jesus is teaching is "If any man would come after me, let him not be conceited." It is either God on the throne or self, and to follow Christ, it must be God.

A simple illustration may help us see what denying self means. Suppose Mrs. Jones wishes to make a pie. She is an outstanding pie maker and all know what good food she prepares. But Mrs. Jones samples a pie that she considers exceptionally good and asks for the recipe, takes it home, and starts to make the pie. She comes to a place that calls for four tablespoons of butter, but she begins to reason that this sounds like too much, and she cuts the amount in half. She reasons, "I know what is good. Everyone knows I am an excellent cook. I think this sounds too rich and I will cut it down." So she proceeds and does the same thing with another item or two until toward the last she adds a bit of cinnamon for which the recipe does not call, but she likes cinnamon and thinks that will add just a bit of flavor that she considers worthwhile. In other words, she has taken the recipe and added a little here, taken away a little there. She

may like the pie she has made, but it will not be the pie she set out to reproduce. It is not the same pie. Why did she make these changes? She considered herself to be an authority on making pies and felt like she wanted this or that, and added it in spite of the recipe. She did what suited her rather than what the recipe required. She had such confidence in herself that she ignored the recipe when it was not what suited her.

We wonder whether she would have acted so proudly if she had been a new housewife making her first pie. Probably she would have been more humble and dependent on the recipe. But in her confidence and pride, she abandoned the original recipe. In a similar way, many people do the recipe of God the same way.

Why then do people not realize that their conceit is what deceives them? Why do they not realize that their deception is what causes them to misunderstand the Bible and remain ignorant of what it teaches? Why do they not realize that ignorance is the reason people do not see the Bible alike?

TAKING FALSE MEASURE

Here is the reason why and it is probably man's most dangerous religious practice. *"But they themselves measure themselves by themselves, compare themselves with themselves, and are without understanding."* (2 Cor. 10:12). People measure themselves by themselves so often in many matters and think they can do this in religion. When we compare ourselves with ourselves we will produce a biased and distorted picture of what really exists. We may compare ourselves with other people and possibly look fine in comparison and deceive ourselves into thinking we must be all right. We can become so completely deceived that we make no other comparison and it never occurs that we might be deceived.

If these lessons can produce no other good than to cause us to realize the possibility of being deceived, they would be worth our time. This is not to say that we cannot ever know for sure what is the truth. We can know the will of God, and know that we know. But let us also know that there is the possibility that we can be deceived and take the necessary precautions to prevent deception. But when we compare ourselves with ourselves, or with other people, we are

making a faulty comparison. We are using a false standard by which to make determination.

Not until we place God's teaching above everything else, and respect His standard to the neglect of all others, and follow that, shall we ever be able to see through our own conceit.

SUMMARY

Going back in summary and to our original question,"Why do people not see the Bible alike?" we are growing closer to the answer. It is the result of ignorance. Ignorance exists among those who have not studied. Ignorance exists among those who have studied. Those who have studied are sometimes deceived, thinking something is true when it is not true. They are deceived by blindly accepting what somebody has said or taught without making an investigation of the Scriptures. People will continue in their deception because of their pride, conceit, and unwillingness to humble themselves and even admit that they are not sufficient. They remain conceited because they use false standards by which to measure themselves. Not until the Bible and the Bible alone is the respected and honored measure will man ever see the Bible alike. This means the creeds, cathechisms, manuals, prayer books, disciplines, edicts of conferences, councils, feelings, etc. must be left out of it. "What saith the Lord?" This is that by which all things must be determined. We must not add to, or take from what God has declared.

In the final part of this three part lesson we will place more consideration on why people do not study.

† † † † †

PART THREE

We take another step forward in finding the answer to the question before us. We want to center our thoughts on those who have not studied the Word of God and learn why this is so often the case with so many people. Ignorance is at the root of the problem and one of the primary sources of division. But still many do not study. Some study and still miss the truth because they are led to think something is true when it is not. But what of those who seemingly never study?

The vast majority of people in this country do not study the Bible. It is one of the most often purchased books, but one of the least consulted. Even most religious people do not engage in a serious study of the Bible. Why is this?

Part of the problem stems from the fact that churches do not stress Bible study. Others tell their people that only their priests can understand it anyway. Some have accepted the idea that they cannot understand it until there is some kind of direct operation by the Holy Spirit upon them. Therefore, they view Bible study as a fruitless endeavor and do not do it.

When asked why they do not study the Bible, many people, especially people who claim to belong to some church, offer all kinds of defensive answers and excuses. But the real problem with most is that they just do not want to study it. They do not care that much. People generally make a serious effort to do what they really want to do.

WHY SOME DO NOT WANT TO STUDY

There are three contributing factors to this attitude of not wanting to study. One, the nature of study. Two, the failure to recognize the blessings of Bible study and the importance of it. Three, the lack of conviction of the need for it. Let us reflect on these three factors.

STUDY IS WORK

Study is work. It is some of the hardest work one can do. It is tiresome and demands a great amount of self-discipline. It requires time, physical and mental energy. Someone has calculated that seven hours spent in mental concentration is as exhaustive as forty hours in purely physical effort. Most

tasks require some of both. But study demands a tremendous amount of mental effort.

It may be too strong to suggest that some are just to lazy to go to heaven. They are unwilling to try to learn. In most fields of thought, real study is done by the minority of people involved. This is true in economics, law, commerce, medicine and religion. People want ready-made answers to their questions. They want a short-cut solution. They had rather somebody tell them than to dig it out for themselves. This might suffice in the mundane and temporal matters of life. But can we rely that much on frail human beings when it comes to the matters of the soul? Some might because of the inability to learn and know. But most have far greater capacity to learn than is ever utilized.

JUST TOO HARD

The lack of study implies a failure to meet personal responsibility. We often excuse ourselves from Bible study because we have been led to believe, maybe even convinced ourselves, that it is just too hard to understand. Sometimes religious leaders who prefer to have people follow their lead will discourage Bible study because they want the people to be dependent on them. We are sure that there are many portions of Scripture that are hard to understand. It takes a lot of study to come to an understanding. But much of the Scripture can be easily grasped by people of reasonable intelligence and normal amounts of education to read.

It takes study to understand the dispensations, the plan of salvation, the requirements of a Christian life, the overall story of the Bible which is the story of man's redemption. But these things can be understood when the sufficient effort is put forth. But some are unwilling to do it, and never come to a knowledge of the truth. Just a short while each day would help. Knowledge of the Bible does not "just happen" and does not come overnight. Because this is true, many are discouraged from trying.

THERE ARE BLESSINGS IN STUDY

Secondly, people are discouraged from studying because they do not realize the great blessings that await them from such a study. The blessings from God are motivating factors

that should provoke us to study. The relevancy of the Scriptures ought cause us to study them. Read the 119th Psalm and you will be impressed with the usefulness and blessings of the Word of God. Today, many have accepted the claim of skeptics that the Bible is unfit for our modern age. It is not true that the Bible is out-of-date and unfit. It is unstudied, unlearned, untried and unapplied. That is the real problem. But until one does appreciate the potential, he is likely to pass it by.

The blessings that can be derived can be classed into two categories. There are the eternal blessings, and the temporal blessings to be enjoyed in this life. The Bible gives us the guidance to an abundant life here and in the hereafter.

ETERNAL BLESSINGS

James teaches that the word is able to save our souls (James 1:21). The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). This is the primary purpose of Bible study; namely, to learn the way to heaven. This life is not all there is to our existence. We must be concerned about life after physical death. The Bible is the only sure and safe guide. It tells us who we are, from whence we have come, why we are here, what we are to do while here, and where we are going.

But the blessings of the knowledge of truth are also something enjoyed in this life as well. "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.*" (Matt. 6:33). Jesus was speaking of the necessities of this life. God will provide if we seek Him first. This includes growing in grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18). We are taught to study (2 Tim. 2:15). We cannot claim to be seeking God first when we neglect to learn His ways. But when we do seek His ways, He is mindful of us and will provide.

A BLESSED LIFE ON EARTH

The psalmist shows that a man who loves God's word is blessed in this life. "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of*

water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season, his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." (Psalm 1:1-3). A true guide to genuine happiness is found in the Bible. People pursue happiness from so many sources. But God's way is the way that promises success.

Do you want a true guide to blessedness? Turn to the Bible. Do you want to have the burdens of sin lifted? Turn to the Bible and learn what God has done for you and what He calls upon you to do. Do you want to avoid many of the pitfalls and conflicts suffered by so many in this life due to sin? Follow the lead of the Word of God. Do you want to be the right kind of father, mother, son or daughter? The Bible tells you what you must know. Do you want to love others and be loved in return? The answer is in the Bible.

If there was no heaven, much of the blessedness of Bible knowledge would be removed, to be sure. But there are so many wonderful blessings now. We do not have to wait until heaven to benefit from Bible study. People who fail to realize this often rob themselves by not studying.

STUDY IS A NECESSITY

But possibly more than other reasons, people do not study because they lack the conviction that it is necessary. This, of course, reveals a disrespect for the word of the Almighty God. The Bible can be shown to have come from God. It shows how man has shown his disrespect to God by ignoring, rejecting, and failing to obey the word of God. Too many consider God's word as optional, something you can take or leave with equal benefit and no fear of difficulty in leaving it alone. Even religious people talk about loving the Lord. But they do not obey the Lord's word. Jesus said, "If ye love me, *keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). But many are not even aware of what His commandments are because they do not study His word.

A classic example of what we have in mind is the case of Eve in the Garden of Eden. God gave certain instructions, but she did not respect them. She went another way, following the seductions of Satan. She thought it was but a little thing. She considered it to be a wise action on her part. She figured going the way she chose was just as good as what God had said.

Eve was not an atheist. She did not repudiate God's

existence. She did not refuse to worship Him. She did not deny His power. She did not blaspheme His name, nor was she a moral degenerate. She was not guilty of stealing what belonged to another. She murdered nobody. She merely took a piece of fruit, ate it, and gave it to her husband to eat also. What could be less offensive? What could appear to be less degrading than that? Why was this such a terrible thing to do?. It was terrible because she did not respect the necessity of the word of God. For this same reason, many do not study. Eve knew what the word of God was and paid no attention to it because she did not respect it. Many today do not even know what God wants, because they do not respect Him.

It would seem that people would open their eyes and look around them and could see that man left to himself to guide his own steps is a failure. Prov. 14:12 teaches, *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death."* Jeremiah taught, *"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."* (Jer. 10:23). Jesus taught, *"Man shall not live by bread alone. but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* (Matt. 4:4). It is God's truth that will make us free (John 8:32), and that truth is His word (John 17:17). God's word tells us of our lost condition, our inability to save ourselves, how God has provided a Savior and that Savior is Jesus Christ. It tells us how to come to Him. No other source in the world provides us this vital information.

GOD OFFERS WHAT IS NEEDED

It is only reasonable to think that since God loves man He will offer to man what is needful. It is equally reasonable that if a man loves God he will earnestly seek to know God's will. But when there is this lack of conviction, he will not study. This lack of conviction is evident in many who profess to be children of God, depending on Christ to save them. Just look at the opportunities for Bible study offered in every congregation but ignored by so many who are members, let alone those who are not members.

SUMMARY

Now let us summarize these three lessons briefly as we have

sought to answer the question, "Why do people not see the Bible alike?"

God gave one faith. That faith has not changed. Man's basic nature has not changed. Therefore, we can learn why there is division when we learn why people did not see the Lord's will alike when He was here on earth.

At the root of the problem is ignorance of what God has taught. Some are ignorant because they have not studied. Some are ignorant even though they have studied because they have been deceived, thinking something is true when it is not true. They have been led by others and not seriously questioned and searched for themselves what is right and wrong. They not only have not learned and understood, but many have accepted a misunderstanding, being deceived.

People are willing to remain deceived because they are too proud to admit they are in error. Their conceit prevents them from even subjecting what they believe to investigation. By comparing themselves to themselves, or to others around them, they have failed to measure by the only standard that is reliable, and that is the Word of God. They too often are governed by the productions from the minds of men and follow blindly.

Some do not study because it is hard work. They fail to see the blessings available. They have no respect for God and lack conviction of the need for Bible knowledge.

But we can know, and know that we know. God has not made our salvation dependent upon the word of God and then made it so we cannot understand. Whether we be in the church, or still in the world, we must study to show ourselves approved unto God. The only standard is the Scripture. It is inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient and authoritative (2 Tim. 3:16,17).All matters must be measured by it. When people do that, they will see the Bible alike, for God expects that of them.

† † † † †

DOROTHY

ROSALYN

BOYD

My wife, Rosalyn, and I joined the ranks of proud grandparents with the birth of our first grandchild on March 5, 1983.

The parents of the little girl are Bill and Lori Boyd of Rives, Tennessee. She is named Dorothy Rosalyn, after her two grandmothers.

Rose, as she shall be called, weighed seven pounds at birth and doubtless is the prettiest little baby to come into this world since our children were born.

Lori's parents, the other grandparents, are Jeanne and Clifford Reel, of Oneida, Tennessee. Clifford preaches for the Lord's church there.

May God's sweetest blessings ever abide with Rose and her parents.

TAPED SERMONS ON HUMANISM

Three tapes that contain six sermons on Humanism are available. These sermons were preached by me recently over the radio, WTUP, Tupelo, Mississippi.

The tapes can be obtained from the East Main Church of Christ, P. O. Box 1761, Tupelo, MS 38801 for a total of three dollars that covers the cost of the tape and mailing.

COUNTING THE COST

Luke 14:28, "*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?*" The Lord gave this teaching in the context of deciding to follow Him. People are urged not to make such momentous decisions without the consideration they deserve. A quick, irrational, totally emotional response brought on by sensationalism and high-powered mind-stirring but void of convictions based on truth will not result in the commitment the Lord expects. We need to count the cost.

But we need to consider our motive in counting the costs involved in serving God. It is recognized that there are costs. It is granted that we count the cost. But there are two motives possible for counting the cost,

Once we have learned what the truth from God is, we are faced with the necessity of making a decision. It is evident that we should decide to do whatever the Lord teaches. Only in that way can we show our love for Him. *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* [*John 14:15*].

Do we consider the cost of following Christ in order to decide whether we will follow or not? Or do we consider the cost in order to learn what it is that God wants?

In the first instance, we may count the cost to see if we think the cost is too high. If we think it is, we might turn away from Him rather than following Him.

But in the second, we have already decided that we will follow Him no matter what may be the cost to us. We count the cost to determine what it is that we must get busy and do.

What a difference in motives for counting the cost. May we count the cost, but let our motive be the second motive. In no way can anyone say that what God requires is too much. Decide to follow where He leads regardless of what it takes.



JAMES W. BOYD

WHY A DOUBLE STANDARD?

If a lawyer or real estate salesman finds a flaw in the title of your property, one that would affect your ownership, but he does not warn you about it, you would think he had not done his duty toward you. You expect him to let you know.

If a doctor examines you and discovers that you have an illness that needs correction, but does not inform you about it, because it might hurt your feelings, you would think him derelict of his duty. You would expect him to prescribe proper medicine.

If a banker allows your account to become so mixed up and allows you to continue to make error after error to your detriment, is he really being your friend?

But preachers are another story. When one preaches God's Word the right way, even condemns the sins of mankind, why do some resent both the message and the messenger? Do they love sin so?

Many do not resent it. But do you?

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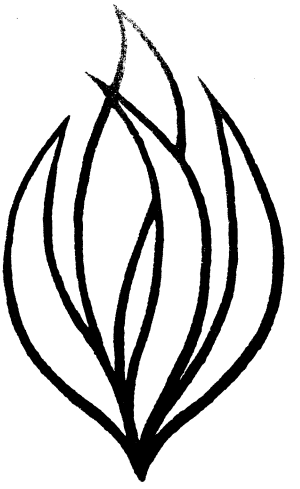

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME II NUMBER 4

THE FIRST PSALM

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish." (Psalm 1).

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that the rule and standard by which our thoughts and actions are guided and governed is of the utmost importance to us, not only for life here on earth, but for the determination of our eternal destiny. The right rule chosen and followed will produce eternal life with God. The wrong rules chosen and followed will spell spiritual death and destruction from the presence of God (2 Thess. 1:9).

The first Psalm addresses this matter of standards and rules that people follow.

MEANING OF "BLESSED"

The state of a godly man is described as being "blessed." This word means happiness, but more than the happiness which can be produced by temporary good fortune, more than what environmental betterments can give. It is not a happiness that is fluctuating according to the "ups and downs" that characterize so much of this life. It is an inward peace and contentment. It is a stability and security that comes from the satisfaction and assurance from the Word of God that one is right with God. It does not mean that one is well-off in this world, prospering and healthy and everything going well. That kind of happiness can be destroyed with adversity, disease and things not going so well. The

blessedness that belongs to the godly man is a spiritual well-being because one is well-off with God.

WALKS NOT

Four qualities of this blessed man are listed, three of which are negative in nature, and the fourth positive. First, this godly man walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly. This means he does not follow the advice and guidance of those who are ungodly. The ungodly person has no fear and respect for God and His will. They have no settled aim, no certain road, no real purpose. He goes wherever his lusts and desires of the moment may take him. Godly people ought not seek the advice and counsel from such people because their instructions will lead a person astray. For instance, why should those who love God seek the guidance of movie stars, divorced people, the "free love" advocates, on how to have a righteous home and marriage. Those who live and strive on degeneracy and sin have nothing to offer the person who puts his trust in God. It is good to seek advice, but we must be careful from whom we seek advice and measure the advice we receive by the will of God. The godly man shuts out those who are ungodly. He will not listen to his directions. Why turn to false teachers and those whose ways lead us deeper and deeper into paths of sinfulness?.

STANDS NOT

Second, the godly man will not stand in the way of sinners. This does not mean he will not oppose the way of sinners because he will. It means he will not travel the sinful path with the sinners. He is careful as to his companions, friends, and associates.

To sin is to transgress the law of God (1 John 3:4). Such a course is the wrong course. The godly man will maintain contact with sinners only to the extent he can influence them away from sin. He will associate with sinners, not to partake of their wicked ways or to enjoy their approval, but to show them the more excellent way if he can. When he is prohibited from doing that, he avoids the evil and the evil companionship.

SITS NOT

Third, he will not sit in the seat of the scornful. The scornful refers to those who mock and ridicule God and His ways. It is wicked enough to be ungodly and a sinner, but the scorner has gone to a disastrous degree of hard-core rebellion against the Almighty. Scorning God is no less damaging in David's day than in our own. Many blatantly and defiantly scorn God's Word, abuse it, misuse it, ignore and scoff at it. There are examples of sin in our society all around us. Some even try to use the teaching of the Bible to destroy the integrity and validity of the Bible. Many wrest the Scriptures to defend practices of sin and promote false doctrines. Some even try to cite Scripture to silence Scripture. Others would reduce every Bible teaching to something other than what it is. Some scorners pretend to have love and allegiance for the Scriptures but show themselves to be scorners when the Scriptures lead a direction other than what they want and prefer or what their denominations hold. On every side there is the glorification and exaltation of the infidel and skeptic. Sin is glamourized; denial of faith is called intellectual. Faith is ridiculed as superstitution. Articles, books, and television programs are pouring forth with vile, vulgar productions designed and intended to pervert the truth, destroy the truth, and lead people away from the truth by holding the truth up for ridicule and scoffing. There are those that openly and unashamedly sneer at things holy, sacred, and eternal. It is obvious that such people have given themselves over to help the devil tighten his damning grip over the hearts of many.

But the blessed and godly man will not be one of these. He will not be found and listed in their number. Because he loves truth and believes truth, he will not allow himself to be identified among such servants of Satan. While he lives in a world that is hostile to his basic convictions regarding God's truth, yet he will not be swerved nor turned from them because they are right and founded upon the rock of God's Word. Scorning and sneering, mocking and ridiculing is the only weapon some have to oppose the will of God because they cannot meet it through reason, truth, logic, investigation or any other avenue of evidence.

DELIGHT IN THE LAW

Fourth, the positive quality of the godly man is that he lets the Word of God be the rule and guide for his life. God's way

is more than just a pleasure for him. It delights his heart and life. God's law regulates and it demands. There is a yoke and burden involved in keeping that law. But even though the path of least resistance might be conformity to the world, the godly man rejoices in the law of God for it is good. From both revelation and experience in life as a follower of God, he knows he is not able to direct his own steps. So he follows divine guidance given through the Word. He makes application of it in his life, keeping himself under constant self-examination, asking what is expected of him, listening to the preventive instructions and bowing to the corrective measure, making all decisions in the lights of God's law. It is a constant matter with him, day and night. He thinks and he acts accordingly.

A TREE

In verse three this blessed and godly man is compared to a planted tree. It is not a wild tree that just happened by chance to be where it was. It was intended, one with a purpose and a role to fill. He is a planted tree. He is something especially admirable. He is stationed near the source of nourishment so that he might gain strength therefrom.

He produces fruit, like the fruit of the Spirit to which Paul refers in Gal. 5. Within his heart there is joy, peace, love, kindness, longsuffering, mercy, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. What he does is in harmony with God's law for prosperity. He grows spiritually. Like a leaf that does not wither, there is constant life within him. He enjoys real and true prosperity.

WHEAT

This blessed and godly man is also compared with the ungodly. The ungodly delude and deceive themselves with a pseudo-happiness and temporal pleasures, turning away from the things that are eternally good. They are concerned only about their "good times" in the here and now.

The ungodly seek and follow the evil counsel. They go the way of sinners. They stand alongside in agreement with the scoffer and scorner who holds the truth of God in contempt. They are like chaff, not wheat. They are only fit for destruction like dust and dirt. Their destiny is that they shall

be "blown away" from the blessings of God. They shall suffer in the judgment; they shall not stand. This does not mean they will not be there, for they will. It means they shall know no success but spiritual failure and doom. They will be separated as chaff is from wheat. The godly wheat shall be preserved, while the evil chaff shall be burned. This dramatic separation is powerfully taught in Matthew 25, when Jesus taught about the separation of sheep and goats.

Yes, there are two ways to follow. The one is the law of God and the other is the way of the devil. At the conclusion of these ways are two distinct destinies. The one is heaven and the other is hell.

THE RIGHT WAY

The Lord knows the way of the righteous. He has provided the way for the righteous to go. He has decided and announced the joyful eternity that will belong to those who follow His word. But the Lord also knows the way of the ungodly; and that those who are ungodly shall perish in eternal punishment with the devil and his angels.

How much our nation and each individual needs to set their path straight. Can there be any doubt which we ought to pursue? When such revelation is given us from God it makes one wonder why anyone would seek the way that is sure to fail. The reason people go the way of Satan is because they have no respect for God and His word. They give no heed to His warnings and reject His precious promises and offers to bless.

But which way will it be for me and for you? It is left to each one to make individual resolve. We plead on behalf of God's way for all.

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SINS IN THE CHURCH

The nature of the lesson is obviously directed toward those who are members of the church. While it is true that members of the church have been saved from their past sins, it is also true that Christians can and do sin. John writes, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* (1 John 1:8-10).

The Christian is in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). There are two sides to the Lord's church, the divine side and the human side. The divine side is perfect in every respect. There can be no improvement. There is no need for any. But the human side will always manifest certain and various weaknesses and shortcomings. The people that compose the church are still subject to temptation, can sin, and some even fall away.

WE CAN FALL

While we are aware of the doctrine that once one is saved he is always saved and cannot be lost, we are also aware that the doctrine is as false as any other deception the devil propagates among men. The book of Galatians was written to persuade some who had fallen to see their error. Brethren are directed how to restore those who have been overtaken. (Gal. 5:4; 6:1). Jesus once said, *"No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62). Peter warned, *"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour."* (1 Pet. 5:8). The certainty of the possibility of apostasy is put beyond all debate by the words of Peter again, *"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them then the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb,*

The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Pet. 2:20-22). Simon the former sorcerer, Demas, Judas, Ananias and Saphirra, are all examples of those who did the very thing some say Christians cannot do; namely, so sin as to be lost.

SIN IS SIN

Sin in the church is the same as sin outside the church. It is the transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4). Just because one is a Christian does not make his evil deeds and thoughts acceptable to God. Sin entered the world through Adam (Romans 5:12), and when we fall under the pressure of temptation, we sin (James 1:13-15). The avenues of temptations are the same for saint and alien sinner; namely, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). Murder is murder regardless of who murders. The same is true for lying, adultery, and any other violation of the will of God.

The sins just named are sins that are commonplace in the sinful world. While they sometimes are found in the lives of those who profess to be disciples of Christ, this is not found often because the follower of Christ has learned that such things are wrong. He has had enough respect for the will of God to not do these "real bad" things. These sins are not the ones that generally characterize those committed by members of the church. Sins found among Christians are usually those we mistakenly call "little sins." Actually there is no such thing as a "little sin." Some sins do have more immediate consequences and worse consequences on others than do some other sins. Murder will likely have more dire results than stealing a wrist watch. But sin is sin regardless of what sin it is. And it is usually the "little sins" that Christians commit.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

There is the sin of self-righteousness. We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Romans 12:3). Having a "better than thou" attitude is like that of the publican in Luke 18. It ought to be true that a Christian lives a better life than others. But at the same time, he is to be humble, not boasting of himself. Because he makes efforts at

serving God, worships, does those things that are done by religious people, abstains from many wrongs others commit, he can fall into the snare of considering himself so much better than others that he becomes smug and conceited. He develops a tendency to judge others in order to make himself look good. But the reality of the matter is that one may be weak in one place but we may be weak in another. In Gal. 6:1, Paul urged the restoration of those who have been overtaken in a fault by those who are spiritual. But as those who are spiritual attempt to recover the sinful brother, they are commanded, *"Looking to thyself lest thou also be tempted."* Self-examination is a part of being a Christian. When we look at ourselves in the mirror of God's Word we will find sins in our lives as well. That ought behoove us to stay away from the attitude of being so much "better than thou."

The world often has a deadly influence on members of the church. One area where this is obvious is in the customs of people. We have customs like other people do, often the same ones. There is nothing wrong in following customs that are not in violation of God's will. We are not to follow religious customs of others because customs and traditions of men are not authorized of God for our observance. But we are followers of dress customs and fashions that are determined by people of the sinful world. Often the fashions are immodest and lust-provoking. Yet, we see many Christian women following such things as if it must be all right.

IMMODESTY

We need not be overly explicit in describing the immodest attire that some wear. But the Christian must learn to not let the fashion designers of the world determine everything they do and wear. These designers have no respect for the teaching of God concerning modesty (1 Tim. 2:9-10). They actually make clothes lustful by intent. Why should a Christian wish to undress as far as they can, be like the world round about, and ignore the modest apparel that God's Word requires? Modest clothing is available. It can be purchased just like the skimpy, short, tight, revealing things often found for sale. If modest clothes are not found in the stores, the Christian still has no right to defy God and go along with the

foolish fashions of a degenerate age. It is profitable that entire lessons be devoted to this theme, but it is sufficient to mention the fact that one of the more obvious, but sometimes considered "little sins" in the lives of members of the church, is that of immodesty.

SINS OF THE TONGUE

But we want to concentrate on sins of the tongue. This is a sin that is as prevalent among men as among women. Just why some think it is so smart to curse, swear, use profanity and filthy language is bewildering. If we need to emphasize our words we can do so without sinning. Christ said, *"Swear not at all,"* (Matt. 5:34). *"By thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."* (Matt. 12:37). The Israelites were taught, *"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."* (Ex. 20:7). The third chapter of James is primarily devoted to the regulation of our speech and the condemnation of wrong speech. *"Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."*

Like some other sins, the sins of the tongue that Christians commit may not be so much the "hard core" sins like we have mentioned, but those that some consider of lesser importance like slander, gossip, tale bearing, being overly critical, unkind, speaking evil of others, and such like. By the tongue so much harm can be done. Homes can be broken, friendships destroyed, strife created and perpetuated, reputations ruined, discord aroused among brethren. Too many are anxious to know what they consider to be the faults of others, and they talk about them to all those around them that will listen. What has happened to what is called the "golden rule?" Would we want others talking about us the way we talk about them?

Let us not misunderstand. We are not rebuking the refutation of wrong. We are not saying, "Do not condemn evil." When there are those things that need correction we have a responsibility to assist in making correction. Sins have to be pointed out. But point them out to those who sin. Do your talking where it will do some good, not just where it will spread the matter far and wide. Some things, even though they are true, really do not merit our continuing to speak of

them. Fires can die out if fuel is left off of them. The tongue can add fuel to the fire when the tongue ought to have been kept secure and quiet. Tongues have caused churches to split. It may take many years, even many deaths, before the harm done by tongues can be overcome. Malicious talk is not cheap. It is expensive to the one who is the subject of conversation, and it is soul damaging to the one who does it. It is a good adage that advises, "If you cannot say anything good about a person, do not say anything at all." To take that to the extreme would be to silence the reproving and rebuking of evildoers for which the Scriptures call. But the general sentiment is that we ought silence the malicious gossip.

AN UGLY CHURCH

Sin in the church presents an ugly picture of the church to the world. Rather than being a light in the world, a city on a hill, the salt of the earth, it becomes known for its hypocrisy. It can bring reproach on the very Lord to whom the church belongs. It can destroy the influence of the church to do the good work the Lord has commissioned it to do. No member has the right to live as he pleases. He has the right to live like God teaches. When Christians sin it makes the church the laughingstock before all. Just about any sin we find in the world can sometimes be found in the church, but with less frequency and intensity. But, as James said, *"...these things ought not so to be."*

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RESPONSIBILITY TO TOMORROW

If you have concern for the future and are interested in the young, if you want to know the solution to the ills of mankind, you will be interested in this lesson. We ask and answer four overriding and all important questions pertaining to the responsibility we have right now to the tomorrows that may yet be. "*He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.*" (Prov. 16:20). Sometimes we emphasize the present to the neglect of the future and are not wise. But how could we overemphasize the importance of the young, the future of the church, the molding of lives and the saving of souls? What is our responsibility to that period of time which we call the future?

THE FUTURE

First, we ask, wherein lies the hope for the future? We suggest it lies in the proper training of the young. "*Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" (Prov. 22:6). One of the themes of the faith of Christ is that of hope. 1 Tim. 1:1 tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ is our hope. Without God there is no hope (Eph. 1:18) but with God there is hope. That longest of all of the Psalms, and a great chapter giving emphasis on the Word of God shows where the inspired Psalmist placed his hope. "*I hope in thy word.*" (Psalm 119:49, 81, 114). What is the hope for the future of mankind? Wherein lies the answer to the problems he faces? It is training the young to follow the Christ of whom we read in the Word of God. Yes, we quickly answer that the hope of all is in the Lord. But how strongly do we really believe it?

Nobody can deny that the world has momentous problems such as war or peace, fear or security, life or death, sin or wickedness, good or evil. These things are manifested in racial, economic, social, political, and moral tensions, nationally and internationally. Can we really look to armies and navies, the ability to manufacture material goods, scientific knowledge and discoveries? Can we even look to churches? So many religious beliefs have brought people to

the morbid state of paganism, superstition, Romanism, communism, modernism, heathenism. These things have been able to overpower the minds and lives of millions even in the land of Bibles. Has there ever been a time when these things have proved adequate? No, never in man's history.

ONLY ONE TO WHOM WE CAN GO

In the long ago, when some were turning away from Christ, He asked His disciples if they would also go away. *"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."* (John 6:68). The hope of the world lies in the Son of God. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6). Paul urged, *"Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel."* (Col. 1:23). Our hope lies in the church, inasmuch as it is the work of the church to proclaim and uphold this truth. *"The church is the pillar and ground of the truth."* (1 Tim. 3:15). Since the church is composed of saved people, those like me and you who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and are members of His body (1 Cor. 12:27), does it not sober you to think that we are the hope for the future? Yes, although this may sound on the surface to be making ourselves more important to the world than we are, it is true. But it is glaringly apparent that we have little impact on the world.

THE CHURCH AND TOMORROW

This leads us to a related question: How is it that the church is the hope for tomorrow? Why do we say the church is the hope? It is growing more and more apparent among all the inhabitants of our earth that people must learn to live together or die and be destroyed together. Man's genius has invented many things and discovered many ways of bringing people "closer" together. We must learn to get along with each other. But, among man's amazing discoveries, are ways and means of wiping out the real progress of ages past by weapons and destructive powers that would destroy civilization if turned loose. This is not an overstatement nor idle words. Not only have men produced weapons but also philosophies and ideologies that would destroy the dignity of mankind and reduce him to nothing more than a highly

evolved and powerfully destructive animal. While we must look as much as we can to the future with confidence, we also must be realistic.

Man has devised all manner of treaties, pacts, agreements, alliances, world federations, balances of power, which have proven to have some usefulness to prevent the takeover of the world by savage elements. But none of these things are successful, being based on the wisdom and merit of humans. Many have not adopted nor lived up to the agreements put forth. Only when the minds and hearts of men are changed can there be what humanity needs. Only Christianity is the perfect peace plan. This is because this is the faith that came from God our Creator that was designed and delivered to the entire race. He knows what is best for His creatures. It is the plan that cleanses man from his sinfulness and makes them brethren on the basis of love one for the other in the same Savior.

THE YOUNG MUST BE TRAINED

When we realize how dependent the future is on the training of the young to follow the Christ that is revealed in the Scriptures and that it is the work of the church to proclaim that very Christ, it behooves us to ask what will be the church of tomorrow?. Of what will it be composed?. The answer is that it will still be composed of a redeemed and peculiar people. It will be composed by the same people that may become the owners of businesses, heads of governments, members of homes. In but a few short years the world will be overtaken by another generation. Those who will be making decisions regarding our world are now mere children, eager to learn, subject to training and impressionable. Those who lead now were children only a short while ago. Each one could have taught Christ as easily as they have been taught greed, power, hate, war, godlessness, etc. History could have been different and far better. But the past is gone never to be changed. But what of tomorrow? Tomorrow's people can still be taught and impressed with good, with Christ, with HIS CHURCH. History can be made better through the proper guidance of the young today. The Lord's church can have an impact on the future generations.

Some have a very pessimistic attitude toward the youth of today. This kind of attitude has probably always existed. We

do not minimize the evil ways so profound among the young of our time. We are told that ninety-five per cent of the college age people of our nation never read the Bible. This is not good. The crimes of the nation are mostly committed by the young. The rampaging immorality is among youth, being promoted and exploited by those who are older. But we must remember that the youth of today is just about what the adults of today have taught them and led them to be. The responsibility lies upon the older generation to teach and discipline and instruct the young as well as the younger generation having the duty to respond to that training. It is to the benefit of the young to give heed to the things they are taught because it is their world that shall be determined by these things as well as our own.

WHAT TRAINING INCLUDES

To train means to lead, not just to drive. It means to direct the growth, not allowing the youth to set the course and determine each step. God gave young people parents for a purpose, but many parents have forsaken their duties, failed to guide the development of their young and we are reaping the hell and havoc that neglect produces. We have the duty before God and man to instruct, discipline, educate, and set the right example before the young. We believe the Scripture when it teaches that a rightly trained young person, when he lives according to his training, will not depart from those righteous ways when he grows older.

We often visit the hospitals to see the newborn. As we look upon that little creature in the nursery bed, we are made to wonder, "What kind of person will that baby grow to be? What kind of life will he or she lead? Are we looking upon a future drunkard, a murderer, an infidel, a dope addict, a parasite on society, a soul that will be lost because of its sins? What kind of influence will that person have on those near him? Could this be a world leader? Are we looking at one whose life will contribute to the improvement and service of mankind? Will this baby be a Christian? Will he, or she, have the respect for morality, property, and others?" All this depends largely upon what kind of training that baby will receive. It depends upon those who have the responsibility to train that child and steer his, or her, upbringing.

Someone wrote, "The lesson of Samuel and his sons is a

clear demonstration of the fact that virtue is not acquired by inheritance. Samuel's sons did not possess the character of the father. Goodness is no more hereditary than evil. Children neither inherit the good or the bad characters of their parents. Principles of character are instilled through teaching only."

TEACHING CHARACTER

Christian principles of character are taught. We emphasize so much secular education, and there is room for this emphasis. Every child is required to go to school. Millions are spent each year in this endeavor of educating. There is constant planning, improving of facilities, expanding buildings, time, thought, money, work, training, an ever, and on going process. But what are they learning? What is being taught? We so often have left out, ruled out, and neglected the most important matters. The spiritual education of the young is far more important than any other education. Moral training is what keeps humans from behaving like wild beasts. Secular education, at best, can only help the young provide a place for himself in this life in the temporal and material world that will be gone after a short while. One can have all that and never be what he ought and can be. Spiritual training is what makes life liveable. Without it we live in a jungle of vile evil. Only by rearing the people of the future in the nurture and admonition of the Lord can there be meaning and purpose for life and for eternity. Without spirituality, life has no reason for existence. Yet, this side of training is what goes wanting.

Our fourth question then naturally follows: Where does the responsibility lie for the spiritual training of young people? *"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord."* (Eph. 6:4]. Parents, the home is where it must begin and continue through the formative years of the child. When the home is not as it ought to be, when this training is neglected and many times left out altogether, when the home is shattered by hate, strife, immorality, godlessness, separation, and divorce, what can be expected except young people who go the way of hell rather than the way of God. There is no way to overemphasize the duty of the home in the proper training of the young. When the home fails, you have only produced

more problem makers and sordid lives.

The church has the duty to teach the young as well as all in the world. These two divine institutions, the home and the church, both coming from the mind of God, must and should work harmoniously and consistently in presenting by word and deed the way that youth should go.

BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

Our young need to learn the Bible stories, to be encouraged to study the Bible, to be shown why there must be respect for God, His Word, His church. Families need to pray together, obey God together, live God's way together. If we would only train our young, so much agony and human misery could be avoided and prevented. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It is much better to build a boy than mend a man. A wise home and church will be very attentive to the training of the youth. It will not be the emphasis of the church to provide the recreation, entertainment, secular education for the young, but the spiritual and moral guidance and teaching. This is God's plan. The affairs of the young must be guided primarily from the home. The duty rests squarely on the shoulders of parents, teachers, preachers, elders, deacons. The church's attitude toward the young is all important. They will not care what you think until they think you care. Our efforts to guide the youth to Christ should occupy the place of primacy in dealing with the oncoming generation.

Shall we allow the stumbling blocks of ignorance of God's will continue to hinder the path of our precious children? Shall we spare what is required of ourselves, our means, our time, energies and thoughts, to give them that which is more needful than all other things combined; namely, a saving faith in God and the divine guidance for their lives?

I can think of nothing more consuming of my thoughts, and entering into my prayers, than that my children walked before God acceptable to Him. If this is accomplished, every failure will pale into insignificance and every other success will be minor. This is what matters. May it be so!

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SUCESSFULLY EVANGELIZING

To evangelize means to convert to Christianity by instructing in the gospel. The instruction must be in **THE** gospel, not just **A** GOSPEL. The instruction is to be given to the people of the world, all people, everywhere, anywhere, everybody, anybody. There are two levels of success in this effort which we shall notice as we proceed.

Evangelism is accomplished by individuals being converted. While we may preach to masses, ultimately conversion must take place one by one. The embracing of the gospel in an individual and personal commitment is successful evangelism. The way of Christ is designed for the individual. When we stand before God in judgment we shall stand as individuals, not as nations, families, churches, but individuals. Therefore, the gospel must be heard and accepted on an individual basis regardless of how broadly the message is proclaimed. The importance of each soul is something God has impressed upon us.

Success in this effort of evangelism depends on the Christian doing as he should and the non-Christian responding as he should. Herein is the basis of the two levels of success. There is a certain level of success enjoyed when the Christian has done his part. A greater and more profitable success is enjoyed when the unconverted are converted. Four steps are involved in gaining evangelistic success.

GOING

There must be a going to the world. *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."* (Matt. 28:18). *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). *"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."* [*Acts* 1:8). This is often called the great commission.

The command to *"go"* is a command given to the child of

God. It is the serious duty of the Christian to go to the world. While there must eventually be a coming on the part of the sinner to Christ, there first must be the going of the Christian to the sinner.

Every Christian can and must do some going. We sometimes say either go yourself or send others. We should say we should go ourselves and send others because both are possible. We can go to our friends, neighbors, relatives, children, people with whom we come in contact daily regarding other things. We actually have but a short distance to go. We can also go in a sense by providing what is necessary for others to go longer distances. We can support them as they go with finances, prayers, genuine interest. Too many of us limit our going to support alone, and are careful not to do too much of that. But evangelism demands going.

PREACH AND TEACH

Second, there must be preaching and teaching. *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things. But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:13-17). It is not needful that we comment very much on this very logical and step-by-step process of producing salvation. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and it saves (1 Cor. 15:1-4), but it first must be believed. It cannot be believed until it is heard, and it cannot be heard until it is preached. There must be the going of those who know the word to preach the word so that people can be saved. *"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."* (1 Cor. 1:21).

After saying *"go"* the Lord said "*preach*" and told what to preach; namely, "*the gospel.*" (Mark 16:15). He set the example before us as a preacher (Matt. 4:17). God had but

one Son and He was a preacher.

The apostles certainly taught the necessity of preaching. *"Preach the word"* was the ringing theme to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2). The early church knew the need of preaching, for as they were scattered abroad due to persecution they went everywhere *"preaching the word."* (Acts 8:4). Philip preached Christ to the Ethiopian. Peter preached to Cornelius. Paul preached to Lydia and the jailor in Philippi. To the rich, poor, men, women, Jew and Gentile, they filled Jerusalem and all around with their doctrine (Acts 5:28).

When they preached they preached *"the whole counsel of God."* (Acts 20:26,27). They spoke *"as the oracles of God."* (1 Pet. 4:11). They preached the *"gospel of God."* (1 Thess. 2:2). They never compromised or gave in to the pressures brought against them. They never withheld what needed to be preached and would not suppress the truth even though they were afflicted for it.

Preaching is a public proclamation of the word. But there are other ways of spreading the word. While only men are permitted to publicly preach, all can teach others privately, women can teach other women, we can conduct classes for various groups, use the printed page, the different media at our availability. Many methods are open to us, but the one message must be proclaimed. Successful evangelism must include this.

ONE LEVEL OF SUCCESS

When a Christian will go and preach, then a primary level of success is already there because the effort to save souls has been made. Not all who have the opportunity to obey will obey. We may often be disappointed at the fruit that may be borne. As of old, many will resist and reject the only means of salvation. We might be tempted to declare our efforts a failure. But when there is going and preaching there is success even though the results may not always be what we would hope for them to be.

SUCCESSFUL CONVERSION

Successful evangelism includes converting. To convert means to change and turn. Going and preaching is the work of the Christian. Converting is what is expected from the lost.

"Repent ye therefore and be converted," was the admonition of Peter (Acts 3:19). Jesus had said, *"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."* (Matt. 18:3). The conversion process, as far as the response God expects from the lost, includes hearing the gospel (Rom. 10:17), believing in Christ (John 8:24), repenting of sins (Luke 13:3), confessing faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9,10; Luke 12:8,9), and being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27). In conversion we change our minds about Christ, sin, the manner of life we shall live, who shall be our guide, to whom we give our allegiance. We turn from darkness to light. We leave the kingdom of Satan and enter the kingdom of God. We forsake the broad way that leads to destruction and begin walking the strait and narrow way that leads to life. This is the goal of evangelism: to convert the hearts and lives of people who otherwise would have not the faintest hope extended them from the Scriptures for heaven, but live under the tyranny of sin and doomed to an eternal punishment for their defiance of their Creator. With each precious soul brought to Christ, there is an enlarged measure of successful evangelism.

CONFIRMATION

The fourth step involved is that of confirming. By this we have no reference to ceremonies originated by men or rituals over children as have been done in the denominational world. Such as that has no Biblical authority. We do not mean the admission to full communion after a form of falsely called baptism. Confirmation is not a ritualistic action. Confirmation simply is a Biblical process of strengthening and upbuilding of those who have become Christians. This is accomplished by teaching also. *"And when they had preached the gospel in that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith..."* (Acts 14:21,22).

"So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle, which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them." (Acts 15:30-32).

The importance of being confirmed is reflected in the many admonitions to Christians to grow spiritually, grow in knowledge, study, be strong, stedfast, increasing in wisdom and doing the truth. There is a grave danger to the Christian because of Satan who walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). We have to be fortified with the armor God provides to be able to resist that which would destroy us (Eph. 6:10;17). There is danger to the church in an unconfirmed membership. Division is more likely; indifference is more probable. There can be less zeal expected, less loyalty, less devotion, and more apostasy. There will be more worldliness in the church, backsliding and hypocrisy. It can lead to the destruction of the church among us in one generation. Souls that were saved can be lost.

A Christian that is not confirmed is presented to us in the parable of the sower as that plant that had no root and withered and died. The seed fell and the plant sprang up but only lasted a while. Lacking the proper nourishment, various influences destroyed it. So it is with the unconfirmed Christian.

Confirmation involves teaching the Christian his Christian duties and privileges. There is the need to worship including observance of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. He is admonished to do good works, care for the less fortunate, make his home as God would have it be, rear his children in the nurture and admonition of God, obey the laws of the land, live a Christlike life in every activity that is honorable, and include in life the matter of evangelism. When these things are accomplished, and whatever else Scripture teaches, then we see the ultimate success of evangelism because now there is the assurance that heaven will be the home of the soul.

† † † † †

FULFILL AND FULFILL AND FULFILL

"Scholars" have attacked the idea that fulfill means to fulfill. The word has been given a meaning that allows things to happen over and over and over again and each time there is "fulfillment."

The arrogant and militant advocates of modern versions, especially those who promote the RSV and NIV, have attempted to defend these books in ways that have astounded faithful brethren. They have challenged the right of elderships to determine what versions shall be publicly presented as reliable Bibles. They have ridiculed and attacked the KJV repeatedly, accusing it of much malicious evil. It is a wonder that such a volume could have ever been the prime weapon in bring about the restoration of the church. They have offered "evidence" to redeem the modern perversions regardless of the fatal doctrinal errors endorsed therein. So it is not really too surprising that some contend that a prophecy is fulfilled, and fulfilled, and fulfilled, and fulfilled, etc. etc.

The RSV has removed the word "virgin" from Isaiah 7:14 and replaced it with two words, "young woman." Just how a young woman bearing a child is supposed to be a miraculous sign has not been explained by anybody. That the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 is stated by the inspired Matthew in 1:21-23. That Jesus is the only One to have been so born is a Biblical fact. No child by any young woman in Isaiah's day fulfilled that prophecy.

One has written, "Every English translation on the market teaches that Isaiah 7:14 predicts the Virgin Birth, and any statement to the contrary is either a misunderstanding on the part of the one making it or is a prejudicial slander." But many modern versions, including RSV, have removed many God-given evidences of the Deity of Christ and His virgin birth and anybody acquainted with these perverted books knows that, and any statement to the contrary is patently false. The RSV, in Isaiah 7:14, does not teach the virgin birth, and any statement to the contrary reflects the inability to read Isaiah 7:14. We know Isaiah 7:14 teaches the virgin birth because Matthew said so. But Isaiah said so, too. What right do "translators" who openly deny the virgin birth have to remove that evidence? They have done it, and it is astounding that believers defend them in it.

There are types, prefigures, shadows in the Old Testament

of things fulfilled in the New. But if the word "fulfill" as defined by modern version "scholars" has validity, then fulfillment of a type, prefigure, a shadow might occur again and again and again, etc. "Dual-fulfillment," some call it. Well, why stop with two? Why not three, four, or a dozen "fulfillments?"

The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled only once and there is no evidence in anything Scripture says to prove otherwise. The attempt to make some natural birth fulfill the prophecy of the virgin birth is foolish.

Consider what that "definition" of fulfill would allow! Will Christ die on the cross again? It was prophecied. Did He fulfill it? Could it happen again? Will another Israel take Canaan under God? It was prophecied and fulfilled. Could it be "fulfilled" again? Will there be another virgin birth or is that fulfilled? And if "fulfilled" according to the "scholarly" definition, what could prevent another such event? Is there any limit to any prophecy when you contend that a prophecy can be fulfilled, and fulfilled, and fulfilled, etc.?

The prefigure of God calling His Son out of Egypt was not fulfilled in Israel leaving Egypt, but in Christ. Scripture says so.

"Rachel weeping for her children..." involves the Babylonian exiles, but was a prophetic statement fulfilled near the birth of Christ when Herod killed children trying to kill Jesus. Scripture says so.

The extremes men will go to defend error, and the modern versions they have embraced so arrogantly and confidently, is sometimes as startling as the error itself. We need to beware of such false doctrines and the false doctors that promote them.

THE DRASTIC SOLUTION

Christian people like to watch television like other people. The difficulty Christians encounter is finding something decent to watch. So much that comes via television today can be best described as filth, muck, moral garbage and other terms of similar nature.

Now and again writing campaigns are encouraged that would appeal to the official of television programming to clean up their programs and get rid of the profanity, adultery, murders, and every kind of vicious sinfulness. We would like to lend our voice in the support of such efforts.

But let us not be naive. Those in charge of television productions do not care about morals. They, like the liquor industry, are only concerned with money and their desire to change society into a totally secular one. They will gladly sell your soul and that of your children, if that will line their pockets and accomplish their anti-God goals. To appeal to the television industry to clean up television is almost like asking a dog to never bark. Ninety-three per cent of those involved in this programming make no effort to attend worship services anytime, anywhere, of any kind. It seems to be their nature developed by habit to dip as far down into the depths of the rubbish of society for their stories as they can.

There is at least one drastic step a Christian can take to keep such things out of his home and from the eyes and ears of his family. He can turn the thing off. Surely, you can find something better to do than fill your mind with the worldly evil that evil people wish to propagate.



JAMES W. BOYD

JUST ONE LETTER

There is one letter difference in the words VINDICTIVEand VINDICATIVE. But the ideas are far apart.

To be VINDICTIVE is to seek revenge, have the desire to hurt and harm another in order to "get even," and retaliate.

To be VINDICATIVE is an honorable and worthy activity. It is to defend and protect that which is justly defensible and deserving of protection. It seeks to clear away suspicion of evil and bring to light that which is true and good. When something worthy is offended there is a proper place for vengeance, that is, proper punishment against the wrongdoer for violating that which is right. There is no intent to hurt and harm.

To be VINDICTIVE is not Christlike. To be VINDICATIVE of what is true is needful and proper. The first is motivated by hate, while the other is motivated by love for the right and good.

Vengeance is a trait of God. Evil for evil is a characteristic of the servants of Satan. (Romans 12:17-21).

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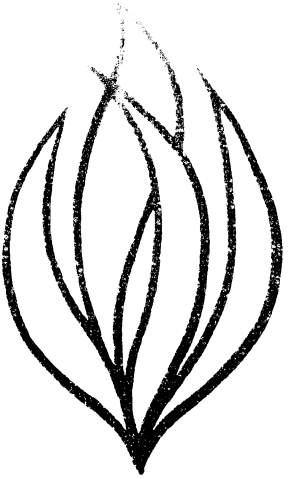

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME II NUMBER 5

CONVERSION

"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3).

"Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19).

In both of these passages the necessity of conversion is emphasized. Conversion is necessary to enter the kingdom. Conversion is necessary to have our sins blotted out.

Therefore, it is imperative that we understand what conversion involves, how it is accomplished, and when and where it takes place. It is the intent of this lesson to study conversion, not any one particular conversion, but the theme of conversion.

TURN AND CHANGE

What does conversion mean? It involves a turning and a changing. To convert means to turn one thing into something else. It means to change something into something else. We speak of converting animal skins to leather. We convert the leather into a wallet or a coat, or a pair of shoes. Biblically speaking, it means being changed from one who was spiritually dead in his sins to one who has been quickened or made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:1-6). It is going from sin to salvation; from being a sinner and being a saint. It is turning from Satan and coming to God through Christ. It is leaving one manner of living for a Christlike manner of living.

Paul wrote in 1 Thess. 1:9 that those brethren had *"turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."* A converted person is one who has turned away from a life of sin to serve sin no longer (Romans 6:1,2, 16-18). He was a servant of sin, but becomes a servant of righteousness. A converted person is one who has undergone whatever process is necessary to change his spiritual state or condition.

GRACE AND MERCY

This conversion is possible because of the grace and mercy of God. If God was not gracious toward undeserving humanity, there would be no conversion of anyone. But the

unconverted person must be active in his own conversion. Salvation is a gift (Eph. 2:8,9; Rom. 6:23), but the gift must be received from the giver. The gift is offered by grace and received by an active and obedient faith. God has created man with the power of choice so that he can either receive or reject the gift of salvation. But if man decides to accept the gift, there are certain conditions he must meet that God has prescribed. Meeting these conditions does not constitute earning or meriting the gift, but it does involve action on the part of the one who wishes to be converted and saved.

GOD AND MAN

Therefore, the process of conversion is accomplished by the combined operation of God and the response of man to what God has done. God is not responsible if anyone is lost because man is fully adequate to come to God through His Son if man decides to do so.

We do not want to be misled about the process of conversion and what it includes and what is not included. The process is not simply having good feelings, not an emotional reaction. One does not "get religion" like he might get a disease. Conversion is not the same as forgiveness, even though one must be converted to be forgiven. Forgiveness is the result of conversion and is the completion of the conversion process. It is God that forgives, and it is man that must be converted.

In addition to God having provided the way of salvation and offering salvation to man, and man having a part in his own salvation, God is also active and exerts an influence on man causing man to be converted. What is that influence? What does God do? Romans 1: 16 teaches the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. We are born again of the incorruptible seed which is the Word of God (1 Peter 1:22). The Word saves (James 1: 21), and we are begotten by the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). There is not one instance in the New Testament where one is converted separate and apart from the Word. The Word must be heard, believed, and obeyed (Rom. 10:13-17). God draws man to Him as man is taught, as he learns, upon hearing the Word (John 6:44,45). Here is the necessity of preaching the gospel. Without the Word of God there is no conversion. In every situation of conversion there is the preaching of the Word of God. God operates on

the heart of man by and through His Word.

TWO CHANGES

Of what does this spiritual conversion consist? For one to be converted, there must be two major changes: (1) a change of heart, and (2) a change of relationship toward God.

CHANGE THE HEART

The heart of man refers to that part of man that enables him to have the ability to reason, think, understand, desire, believe, trust, purpose, determine. It refers to the mind of man, the heart of his spirit. Whereas a person had one set of attitudes toward life, sin, Christ, salvation, church, etc., a change takes place. By hearing the Word of God a change in heart takes place. The evidence of truth is convincing and convicting. He changes what he believes about the Lord, where he puts his confidence, what really matters, his will and purpose in life. This change of heart is what the Bible calls repentance. One could never repent unless he believed the message of truth that he was priviledged to hear. He turns from distrust to trust and faith; from desiring to sin to desiring purity of life. He makes a decision to live apart from sin and live united with Christ. So when one hears the gospel, believes the gospel and repents of his sins and changes his heart in those matters where change is necessary, he has taken the first steps toward being converted. But a change of mind and heart is not all that is involved in conversion. A change of heart is not the same as the needful change in relationship.

CHANGE THE RELATIONSHIP

Let us illustrate; a man meets a woman. By association he gradually has a change of heart toward her, even desiring her to be his wife. She may also have a change in heart toward him and agrees to be his wife. But there still must be accomplished the change in relationship; namely, they must be married before they are husband and wife. So it is with conversion to Christ. A change of heart is essential, but so is a change of relationship. On this point, many stumble. The unconverted person is still a child of the devil just as the

unmarried person is still single. The unconverted person is out of Christ and in sin, doomed to an eternal separation from God. This is his spiritual state or condition. The converted person is one who is a child of God, who is in Christ, who has left his sins because they were blotted out by the blood of Christ. The converted person has the promise of an eternal life with God in heaven. What does one do to accomplish this change of relationship?

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered unto you. Being then made free from sin ye became the servants of righteousness." (Romans 6:16-18). The change of state was accomplished when they obeyed a form. What form? A form of doctrine. What doctrine? The doctrine that saves. What doctrine is that? 1 Cor. 15:1-4 shows the doctrine that saves is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. What is the form, or representation, or picture of that doctrine? It is when one is baptized, buried with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:3,4). Gal. 3:27 teaches, *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ."* It is when one is baptized that he enters into Christ. It is when one is baptized that he becomes a servant of righteousness. It is then that the change of relationship to God is accomplished.

With the change of heart and the change of relationship, the conversion process is complete. This is exactly what Jesus taught (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Luke 12:8,9; Mark 16:16). This is exactly what people did in New Testament times to be converted (on Pentecost, Acts 2; the Samaritans, Acts 8; the Ethiopian, Acts 8; Saul, Acts 9;22,26; Cornelius, Acts 10; Lydia, Acts 16; the Jailor, Acts 16; the Corinthians, Acts 18). The same process of conversion is open unto all mankind today, and when followed, will produce the same results.

WHO NEEDS CONVERTING?

But some may question whether a religious person needs to be converted. Do young people need to be converted? Do good moral people, honest and sincere people need to be converted? What about those who already have faith that

Jesus is the Savior? Do they need to be converted?.

A study of the person converted as listed above will answer the questions. In nearly every case, the people were exceptionally religious, moral, sincere, honest people. With teaching there was accomplished the change of heart. With teaching directions were given how to change the relationship. With obedience the completion of the conversion process became an accomplished fact. They were now *"in Christ"* where is salvation (2 Tim. 2:10), where all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3), where there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

Young people may not have as many sins from which to turn and from which to withdraw. But they need forgiveness of whatever sins they have committed. Their relationship with God is all-important. They will remain outside the fold of safety until they are converted.

We know of no more important matter facing any accountable person than being converted. We would once again remind you of the opening verses cited at the beginning of the lesson to underscore the necessity of conversion for every person.

† † † † †

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CONVERSION

There are many questions that one can ask related to the Holy Spirit for which we have no answer. This is because some things are not revealed. Many make the mistake of speculating, inventing various theories, in the absence of revelation. "*But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.*" (2 Tim. 2:23). This refers to untaught questions. *"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever..."* (Deut. 29:29). We must concern ourselves with what is revealed. *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..."* (1 Pet. 4:11).

There are always those who are dissatisfied with the all-suffi-

cient Word. They want something special. They want more than what God provides. They rely upon their feelings, claim a direct operation of the Holy Spirit in some warm, mystical, emotional, strange kind of something. They claim God talks to them directly like He did Moses at the burning bush. They profess to receive latter-day revelations. They have their "quiet time" when they open their Bibles, not to learn the message, but to see what the Holy Spirit might say to them through thoughts provoked from the passage that may have no relationship to the passage.

JESUS TAUGHT THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

The work of the Holy Spirit is outlined to us by Jesus Himself when He was speaking to His apostles. As we read His words, it is important that we remember that He was speaking to His apostles and the promises made were applicable to them, not to just anyone.

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine; therefore said I, that he shall take of mine and shall show it unto you." (John 16:7-15).

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father shall send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26).

CHRIST TO LEAVE

Please take note that the work of the Holy Spirit is related to and connected with the going away of Christ. Jesus said it was expedient that He go away. We ask why this was

expedient? This passage does not tell us but other passages do give us an insight into that matter.

The disciples were confused about the nature of His kingdom that was soon to come. His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). His people were in the world but not of the world. His kingdom was a spiritual one, and yet, the disciples still looked for an earthly kingdom. His continued presence would possibly keep this confusion alive in their minds and expectation.

Soon Jesus would promise to be with His disciples everywhere, all the time (Matt. 28:20). In the flesh this could not be possible. But the Holy Spirit would come and be with them and He would be with them through the Spirit.

In the flesh He was subject to the persecutions, hindrances and restrictions that men could place against Him. But the Holy Spirit, being spirit, could not be so hindered.

But it was expedient that He go away because of His very mission. He was to be King and Priest. He could not be king on earth because the earth is His footstool while heaven is His throne (Acts 7:49). Also, He was not of the priestly tribe of Levi, but the tribe of Judah, and He could not be a priest here on earth (Heb. 7:14). So for these reasons it was expedient that Christ return to heaven, but it was also necessary that Deity be with the apostles in doing the work assigned to them. This is where the work of the Holy Spirit comes in.

REPROVE THE WORLD

The work of the Holy Spirit was to reprove, convict, prove, persuade. Who was the Spirit to reprove, etc.? The people of the world. Of what was the Spirit to reprove or convict the people of the world? Three areas are listed. One, of sin, because they believe not on Christ, is the first named.

OF SIN

Paul wrote that, *"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* (Rom. 3:23). Christ was sent to this earth to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). He came to show man that man is in sin and doomed. He also showed man that man cannot save himself by himself, and therefore man is in need of a Savior. God has provided that Savior and that Savior is

Christ. Man must believe on Christ for his salvation. Christ is the only Savior there is. Soon the Christ was to return to heaven to rule and reign and the Holy Spirit would continue this work of reproving, convicting, persuading men of the things that Christ had taught, said and done, offering salvation to those who would come to Him.

OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Holy Spirit was to convict the world of righteousness, because Jesus was going to the Father and they would see and be with Him no more. Righteousness is a great word in the redemption story. Psalm 119:172 tells us, "*My tongue shall speak of thy word, for all thy commandments are righteousness.*"Romans 1:16,17, Paul wrote, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*"Righteousness does not refer to an attribute of God or His character. We learn of His character even in the Old Testament and do not have to wait until the gospel account to learn that. But righteousness refers to God's scheme for making man righteous. It is His plan of justification; the plan of salvation. Christ was soon to leave this earth and this message had to be proclaimed. The work of the Holy Spirit was to see that this was done.

OF JUDGMENT

The Spirit was to reprove or convict the world of judgment, because the prince of this world, which is Satan, hath been judged. There is a day of judgment coming. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good of bad.*" (2 Cor. 5:10). Because reward and punishment is not meted out in its fulness in this life, some conclude that there will be no judgment. The Holy Spirit was to persuade accountable people of the reality of the coming judgment. Satan has already been judged and condemned. There is a place prepared for the devil and his angels. Those who follow the ways of the devil will be doomed as is Satan.

TO GLORIFY CHRIST

In doing all of this, the Holy Spirit would glorify Christ. *"He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."* (John 16:14).

THROUGH THE APOSTLES

How did and how does the Holy Spirit do this work? Remember, these things were spoken to the apostles. Obviously, the work of the Holy Spirit was to be done through them. The Spirit would teach, guide, bring to their remembrance what Christ had taught them. This promise was never given to everyone, not even everyone of the first century, not every Christian of the first century, and certainly not to people living nearly twenty centuries removed from the conversation. It is so evident that the Holy Spirit is not guiding and leading all those who claim His special direction because they teach differently, contradict each other, do not teach what the apostles taught and generally are far removed from doing what they did.

That the Spirit worked through men is not surprising. We read of this procedure in the Old Testament. Consider the time of Noah when the thoughts and imaginations of the hearts of men were evil continually (Gen. 6:3). God said, *"My Spirit shall not always strive with men."* How did the Spirit strive with men. In 2 Peter 2:5 we read of Noah and he is identified as a preacher of righteousness. Noah preached God's message of warning and the coming flood. In this way, God, through the Holy Spirit working through Noah, did strive with sinful men.

Again, Nehemiah 9:30, *"Yet many years didst thou forbear them and testifieth against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets, yet would not give ear."* Testimony was given Israel by the Spirit through the preaching of the prophets.

In the New Testament, Acts 7:51, Stephen accused his hearers of *"resisting the Holy Spirit as did your fathers."* How did their fathers resist the Holy Spirit? Acts 7:52 explains, *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?"* The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets. Their fathers persecuted the prophets, gave no heed to the message preached. In doing so, they were resisting the Holy Spirit that worked through the preaching of the prophets.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit operated on the hearts of those who heard the preaching of the apostles. Acts 2:4, "*They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance.*" The message preached was not one that originated with men, not even the apostles. But the Holy Spirit worked through them as they preached the gospel. We know the Spirit did not come upon others than the apostles because Acts 1:26 tells us that Matthias was numbered with the apostles and the "they" of Acts 2:1 refers to those with whom Matthias was numbered. Furthermore, Acts 2:14, Peter stood up with the eleven apostles. It was the apostles that worked wonders and signs (Acts 2:43). The doctrine preached was called the "apostles' doctrine" because they were the ones who did the preaching (Acts 2:42). The Holy Spirit did not come upon the entire multitude directly, nor upon the one hundred twenty that had been gathered together previously. He came, as promised, upon the apostles.

HOLY SPIRIT ON PENTECOST

We can know it was the Holy Spirit that worked that day because it is explicitly stated that they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. Furthermore, at the close of the sermon recorded, the hearers had been convicted of their sins, had heard the terms of righteousness, and obviously believed in a judgment to come and their own accountability because they asked, "*What must we do?*" If they did not believe these things, they would not have asked such a question. To convict people of sin, righteousness and judgment was the very work Christ said the Spirit would do. And it was done through the preaching of the Word. It was not a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the sinner. Neither is there record of such as that anywhere else where salvation is obtained separate and apart from the Word of God. It was not a case of the Holy Spirit and the Word operating in conjunction with each other, but the Holy Spirit operating through the use of the Word.

HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS

How does the Holy Spirit operate on the sinner? He operates by the use of the sword of the Spirit, which is the

Word of God (Eph. 6:17). Salvation is not to be enjoyed apart from the Word. James 1:18, "*Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls.*" Again, "*Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently, being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.*" (1 Peter 1:22,23). "*For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.*" (1 Cor. 4:5).

As the doctor operates on his patient, not directly, but with tools, using means, indirectly, so the Holy Spirit uses the tools, means, to operate on the heart of the sinner. This means the tool used is the Word of God. As the woodman uses the axe with which to fell the tree, so the Holy Spirit uses the Word to convert the lost. The Holy Spirit is not the same as the Word anymore than the woodman is the same as the axe. But by the use of the axe the woodman fells the tree, and by the use of the Word the Holy Spirit converts the sinner.

THROUGH THE GOSPEL

The words the apostles preached are all-sufficient. They were guided into all truth, nothing left out. Paul preached all the counsel of God (Acts 20:26). Addition or subtraction to that Word is prohibited (Gal. 1:6-9). Jude 3 tells us the faith is once delivered. That message of salvation was once in inspired men, earthen vessels, but is now embodied in the inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Sinners learn what to do to be saved from the Scriptures as much as if an apostle was standing by his side telling him the same message. Christians learn how to live the life as a Christian from the Scriptures as much as if they personally walked with the apostles. There is no special leading, guiding, nudging, revelations, etc. that stem from a literal, personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit did His work through the Word of God in the effort of conversion. In times past, the Spirit was sometimes accepted, sometimes rejected, depending on what people did with the Word they heard. We are not to wait for some strange, mysterious, better-felt-than-told experience and subjective feeling, some warm and emotional happening and attribute that as the working of the Holy Spirit. By and

through the Word the Spirit works in converting men to Christ and leading them to heaven.

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IDOLATRY

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (Ex. 20:3). This is a command, given through Moses to Israel, that was plain and easy to be understood. Every commandment that the God of heaven has given to man is based upon the truth that God is the one God and Father of all. There is no other god that is true and therefore, our allegiance belongs to Him.

This commandment is the first of the ten commandments received on Sinai. Prior to this, God had demonstrated His power over false gods in Egypt by the plagues that produced the deliverance of the Israelites. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile River, but God turned it to blood. They worshipped the sun, but God darkened it for three days. They worshipped Pharoah, but God showed His power over him with the death of his firstborn and his defeat at the Red Sea. These signs manifested Jehovah's power over all the deities of Egypt, indeed, of the whole world. These upheld Him as the only God worthy of man's respect and worship.

God is presented to man as all-seeing, ever-present, all-powerful, all-knowing. We use the terms omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient to depict God. We lift our voices in praise as in Revelation 4:8, *"Holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."*

The ten commandments were for the Jews alone, never to Gentiles. Nor do we live under that Mosaic law now. The ten commandments are a part of that law which was fulfilled and taken out of the way at the death of Christ (Col. 2:14). It served as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). Romans, chapter seven, teaches we are dead to that law. But the sense of the commandments abide still in the doctrine of Christ. Ephesians 4:6 reads, *"One God and Father of all..."* Putting the God of heaven before all others is a prime and basic principle of Christianity (Matt. 6:33).

Recognition of Jehovah as the only God forbids idolatry. An

idol is anything that occupies the place due to God. We might think of idols only in terms of some images or hideous monstrosities of the heathen and pagan world, but these are not the only idols. We can have idols in our hearts. This command is a negative one that says, *"Thou shalt not have..."* The New Testament prohibits idolatry as well. *"My little children, keep yourselves from idols."* (1 John 5:21), *"Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry."* (1 Cor. 10:14). Someone has said that whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is properly called your god.

NATURE WORSHIP

By this standard there are many forms of idolatry in the world today. Nature worship is a form of idolatry. People like to be close to nature, the mountains, streams, valleys, trees, flowers, stars, planets. We sense the majesty of God in such things. But it is wrong to worship such things as if they were gods, or to think the worship of nature is to worship the God of heaven. Some have said, "My church is out in the woods, in the hills, etc." This is to displace the worship of God in the assembly of the saints where God has prescribed.

We read in 2 Kings 23:5 that idolatrous priests burned incense unto Baal, the sun, moon, planets, and all the hosts of heaven. Deut. 17:3-5 tells how some had *"gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, or the sun or the moon, or any host of heaven."*

The things of nature show us the handiwork of God and His glory (Psalm 19:1). But we are not to substitute the created for the Creator as the object of worship. Paul mentions how some had done this very thing (Romans 1:25).

CREATURE WORSHIP

Worship of nature is closely related to creature worship. Like the Egyptians who worshipped birds, beasts, etc., people in certain parts of the world are still in that paganism. Such is not found to a great degree in our nation, but surely is in others. This is to change the truth of God for a lie when one worships the creature rather than the Creator.

But one idolatrous practice that is prominent in our society is that of man worship. There are those who bow themselves to men and to the doctrines and commandments of men that

designate men as gods. The payment of religious respect to any man as if he were Deity and Divine is idolatry and is condemned in God's book. The practice of kissing the hands and feet, bowing the head, and addressing some man in terms of religious excellence is nothing but idolatry.

When Peter came to the home of Cornelius, Cornelius bowed before Peter, and Peter told him, *"Stand up, I myself am also a man."* (Acts 10:26). Paul and Barnabas were highly frustrated when men began to look upon them as gods and would have done sacrifice to them (Acts 14:8-18). Look at the displeasure of God toward Herod when he allowed himself to be considered as a god (Acts 12:21-23). These things should serve as a warning to men who allow themselves to be worshipped, as well as a warning to men who worship other men.

PLEASURE WORSHIP

There are some other very prominent gods among us. There is the worship of pleasure. Pleasure becomes a god when we allow our pleasure, our satisfaction, our desires and wishes, our enjoyment and good times to replace God. Paul spoke of those who were *"lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."* (2 Tim. 3:40). Again in Phil. 3:18,19, he mentioned some *"whose god is the belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things."* *"But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."* (1 Tim. 5:6). This type of idolatry is sweeping the nation and is hurting the church. Many put the seeking of "good times" before service to God, even many in the church. It is difficult to understand why a person who professes to put Christ first will put their pleasures and recreation, etc. before God. But it does happen and is idolatry.

IMAGE WORSHIP

The worship of images is not found just in other nations. This is so evident among Roman Catholics that it is sufficient just to mention it. Many are not aware that the Catholic Catechism contradicts the Catholic Bible. In their Bible they record Exodus 20:4, *'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image."* Yet, in their catechism, when they record the ten commandments and cite Exodus as the Scripture

reference, this prohibition is omitted, and the tenth commandment is expanded into two commandments in order to retain the number ten.

It is taught in Acts 17:29, *"Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man."*

The reason behind image making is so man might have a concrete manifestation of Deity. It is claimed that it is too difficult to worship what you cannot see, therefore, there is created a symbol to represent Deity. But what some ignore is that this is precisely what Israel did when Aaron made the golden calf. They cried unto it as the gods that had delivered them out of Egypt. They knew very well that the calf had not led them out. The calf had just been made. Exodus, chapter nineteen, makes it quite plain that they were attempting to worship Jehovah and the calf was but a symbol of that which they worshipped. Paul referred to the event as idolatry in 1 Cor. 10:7. One today who tries to justify images as just symbols of Deity are as guilty of idolatry as were the Israelites.

But man can have his mental images also. An image does not have to be metal or stone. Many have a god that has conformed to man rather than the God to which man must conform. They worship a god they have created in their own mind rather than the One revealed in the Bible. Let me illustrate: Man knows he can deceive other men. He therefore thinks he might deceive God, as if God can be deceived. Man is deceivable, but not the true God. Man can hide treasure of the soul from other men, but not from the true God. Man might accept bribes to distort justice and he thinks he might be able to bribe God also. Too many have looked upon God as not much more than another man. God pointed out this error of thought when the Psalmist said, *"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself."* Some men prefer a god that agrees with them rather than the God to which they must give obedience.

MAMMON WORSHIP

One god we mention to which we all must be careful and not worship is specified. *"No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot*

serve God and mammon." (Matt. 6:24). Listen to Paul, *"For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil."* (1 Tim. 6:10). Colossians 3:5 teaches that *"covetousness is idolatry."* When it comes to deciding between God and money, what comes first with us? Isn t it very obvious that there be many who willingly sacrifice the things of God and violate His will in order to get gain? Money is more important than morals, and material gain is greater to some than godliness.

Do we show love for money when we have opportunity to give toward the cause of God? When it comes time for worship, do we let the gain we can get keep us from our post of duty? Mammon worship will destroy our concern for souls, our own as well as others. This temptation to serve other gods like money is very prominent in a materialistic, gadget getting society and economy like the one in which we live. People living in abundance like our nation too often place too much emphasis on money and the things money buys.

Yes, idolatry can present itself with many faces and different approaches. We can commit the sin of idolatry many ways. Whenever this is the case, it is damning to our spirits.

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THE CHURCH PROMISED

Our text is Matthew 16:13-20: " *When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou are John the Baptists; some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they*

should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ."

Some have taught that Peter is the rock upon which the church is built. But it is evident that this is not true because the word translated "*Peter*"is a masculine word and the word translated "*rock*"is a feminine word. They are not the same thing. Furthermore, the word translated "*Peter*" means a pebble while the word translated "*rock*"refers to a solid ledge of rock. Again, the two are not the same. Peter is pictured as the possessor of the keys of the kingdom in the presentation by the Lord rather than the rock upon which the church is built. The church is of divine origin and that which is of divine origin is not built upon a frail, weak, and human foundation.

THE REAL ROCK

The rock of which Jesus spoke has reference to a specific and important truth; namely, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Everything about the church of Christ ultimately rests upon the validity of that statement. Jesus establishes the fact that He is who Peter confessed Him to be and it is upon that confession that the church is built.

Some have contended that the church was begun during the lifetime of John the Baptist. But it is significant to note that John had already been dead almost six months at the time that Jesus expressed His intentions to build His church. So it could not have had its beginning during the life of John the Baptist.

BUILT BY CHRIST

The church was to be built by Christ. It is not the product of some board nor exists by the authority of men. Again, the church was to belong to Christ because He called it "*my*" church. Acts 20:28 tells us He purchased it with His own blood. Paul says the church is the "*house of God*" which shows it belongs to God (1 Tim. 3:15). It is not a denomination nor a group of denominations. It is God's spiritual family and those in the church are His spiritual children.

The establishment of the church was promised on several other occasions also. "*And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted*

above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Here the prophet writes of the establishment of the Lord's house. It would come in the last days. All nations would flow unto it. The word of God would go forth from Jerusalem. Those who come shall learn peace.

JOEL

In Joel 2:28, we read the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days and deliverance in Jerusalem. Those who would call on the name of the Lord would be saved. Acts 22:16 teaches we call on the name of the Lord by being baptized to wash away our sins. Peter said the promise of Joel was fulfilled in the events that took place on the first day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. It was on that day that people were first added to the church (Acts 2:47).

JOHN

John the Baptist came preaching the coming of the kingdom of heaven, stating that it was *"at hand"* (Matt. 3:2). The kingdom refers to the church (Col. 1:13). John promised the church was soon to come.

JESUS

Jesus also began to preach and to say, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* (Matt. 4:17). There are many instances of men of God giving God's promise and assurance that the church would be established.

DANIEL

Let us now turn our attention to another promise or

prophecy by yet another prophet that the church would come. The prophet is Daniel and the place of the Scripture is Daniel 2.

The historical background of this prophecy is vital to our comprehension of it. Northern Israel had already been taken away into captivity by the Assyrians. Southern Judah was likewise in captivity, being overtaken by the Babylonians. Among those taken captive was Daniel, a man faithful to God even in time of tribulation. The Babylonian king was Nebuchadnezzar. This king had a very disturbing dream and called for the wise men of his kingdom to interpret the meaning of that dream for him. There was a tremendous problem for these wise men because the king had forgotten the content of the dream. He instructed his wise men to tell him the dream as well as its meaning. They argued that was not possible. Nebuchadnezzar informed them that he could be sure they knew the meaning if they could also tell him the dream. But this was impossible for them. If only the king would tell them the dream, they said they would give him its meaning. He knew they would make up some meaning rather than really be informed as to its significance. In his anger the king was about to destroy all the wise men of the kingdom until Daniel entered the picture. Daniel was granted an audience before Nebuchadnezzar and not only told him his dream but also its meaning. It is noteworthy here that Daniel took no personal credit for this ability but attributed it to the God he worshipped.

The king had dreamed of seeing a vast image in the similarity of a man. This man was made of different substances. The head was gold, the breast and arms were silver, the belly and thighs were brass, the legs were iron with the feet and toes a mixture of iron and clay. He also saw a stone that was characterized as a stone not made with hands, that came and smote this image and broke it into pieces. The stone then grew into a large mountain that filled the earth.

THE INTERPRETATION

The interpretation of the dream depicted the future political kingdoms that were to come, and then the kingdom of God. Five kingdoms are represented in this imagery. Daniel said the first referred to Babylonian, with King Nebuchadnezzar being represented by the head of gold. After him would come

a second kingdom somewhat inferior to Nebuchadnezzar, that was represented by the silver; then a third kingdom represented by the brass; followed by a fourth kingdom represented by the legs and feet and toes.

The stone represented the kingdom of God. The stone would come in the days of the fourth kingdom (verse 44), and would be superior to all the kingdoms that had gone before it; this being indicated by the smiting of the image, breaking it into pieces, and growing into a large mountain. That fifth kingdom would be God's spiritual kingdom, a stone not made with hands; that is, not of human origin but from God. This kingdom would last forever. Such then was the recollection of the image and Daniel's interpretation thereof.

This event took place around the year 606 B.C. It was when Nebuchadnezzar was king. The specific identification of this king as being the head of gold gives us the key to the understanding of it in the fulfillment that is unfolded to us through the events of history.

BABYLON AND PERSIA

Following Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, Babylon, came the Medo-Persian kingdom, which later was dominated by the Persians. Babylon was overpowered by Cyrus of Persia and this kingdom lasted until approximately 330 B.C. The Persian empire is represented by the silver of the image.

GREEK

The third kingdom or empire came in 330 B.C. The Macedonian or Grecian empire reached its zenith under Alexander the Great, who at the age of thirty is reported to have wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. This is the kingdom that Daniel said would "*rule over all the earth.*" It is represented by the brass of the image.

After the death of Alexander, his empire was divided among four of his generals. None of them became another world power as the Babylonians, Persians, or Grecians. But as to the area of Palestine, two nations became very important: Syria and Egypt. For a time, rulers from Egypt dominated Palestine, but eventually the Egyptian rule was broken by the Syrians. During these years the Jews suffered vicious, cruel, and bloody persecution, especially under

Syrian rule. Efforts were made to exterminate this entire body of people, but to no avail. There was constant conflict in the area.

In time, the Jews were about to throw off the yoke of Syria under the leadership of the Macabees. For nearly a century the Jews were relatively independent, but the period was fraught with wars and rumors of wars.

Eventually Rome became interested and concerned about that territory. It was the oncoming power of the world. Represented by both iron and clay, it was a power of unheard of strength, but also, due to the permission of local rule over territories conquered, there was innate weakness, characterized by the clay. The fourth empire of the image was the Roman empire.

Daniel had said it would be in the days of this fourth empire that God would establish His kingdom, the time of the coming of the stone not made with hands.

ROMAN

Romans marched over the land some six decades before the birth of Christ. John the Baptist was born and did his preaching of the kingdom to soon come during the days of Roman rule. Christ's ministry was when Rome was the power in Palestine. His death and resurrection was under Roman time. The events of Pentecost were when Rome dominated the land. It was in that day that the church was established, "*in the days of these kings.*"

Let us understand that the church is the Lord's kingdom over which Christ rules and reigns as king. The world is its domain and those who are Christians are the citizens of this kingdom. Set up from heaven as promised, the church shall never be destroyed and will endure forever. It is superior to all other kingdoms of which this earth has known. It surpasses them in glory, honor, peace, righteousness, love, splendor, and authority, as well as duration. Men of every nation flow into it. Citizenship in that kingdom provides what no other kingdom can provide; namely, life eternal with God in heaven.

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CHURCH ENTRANCE

One of the marks of identification of the church of Christ of which we read in the New Testament is the way one becomes a member of that church. When we speak of the "terms of entrance" we have reference to the conditions that God has established to which people must conform before they are a member of Christ's church.

One is not a member of His church by virtue of his physical birth or ancestry. One must be "*born of water and the Spirit*" (John 3:3-5) to belong to the church, the house of God, which is the kingdom of God. (1 Tim. 3:15; Mt. 16:16-18).

Neither does one become a member of His church by making application to some committee of men, or by being elected by a vote of the existing membership, nor any other of the various ways that men become members of denominations. We can be sure that when requirements for belonging to some church varies from those requirements in the New Testament, that church is not the New Testament church. Man's ways are not God's ways (Prov. 14:12; Isaiah 55:8,9).

Salvation is "*in Christ.*"(2 Tim. 2:10). All spiritual blessings are "*in Christ.*"(Eph. 1:3). One cannot be "*in Christ*"without being in the body which is the church (Eph. 1:22,23). Christ is the head of the church (Col. 1:18); the church is His body (Eph. 1:22,23); the members of the church make up His body (1 Cor. 12:27). One cannot be in fellowship with the head without being a member of the body, which is the church.

It is the church that the Lord will save (Eph. 5:23). The saved were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47). Some complain that the church does not save you, as if it makes no difference to which church you belong. They miss the point. The church is the saved. Unless one is in the church that belongs to Christ he is not saved.

Contrary to much denominational doctrine, you do not do one thing to be saved and something else to "join" some church. Man is not called upon to "join" anything. He is taught to obey the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8) because Christ is the author of salvation unto all them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9). When one obeys the gospel. God adds him to the body of

the saved, the church (Acts 2:41,47). Every person can be a member of the Lord's church without asking the permission of any other human being. What one must do to be saved is exactly the selfsame thing that he must do to be added by the Lord to the Lord's church.

Men may hear the plea, "Be saved and join the church of your choice." Such a plea is as foreign to the teaching of the Bible as sin is from righteousness. Such a cry is a false doctrine of man. Our choice is to obey God or disobey God. When we obey, God attends to the matter of church membership.

Men may "join" denominations. But the church which Christ established is neither a denomination nor is composed of the total of denominations. Scripture reveals no authority for the existence of any denomination that has, does or shall ever exist. But it does reveal the church which He purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28).

It is not a question, "Does Christ save?" He does. But what is the relationship between salvation and His church? The answer is simply that salvation in Christ is in His church.

When we turn our sincere attention to the Scripture, we can learn what people were taught and what they did in New Testament times to be saved, to be added to His church. This is exactly what people must do now to be saved, added to that same church. What was taught and what did they do?

In the book of Acts we read of several instances of conversion. The messengers of God went forward preaching the gospel in obedience to His charge to preach (Mark 16:15). People heard the gospel of salvation, believed, obeyed and God added them to His church (Acts 2). Romans 10:13-17 outlines the way man is saved. Hearing the gospel produces faith, a faith that demands "*calling on the name of the Lord.*" This is more than simply saying, "*Lord, Lord.*" (Matt. 7:21). There must be the doing of His will.

As one studies the conversions of those on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian, Saul of Tarsus, Cornelius, Lydia, the Jailor, the Corinthians (Acts 2,8,9,10,16,18), he sees God's terms unfold before him. Those people heard the gospel, believed it, obeyed it in repentance, confessing their faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ. In every instance the conversion began with preaching of the Word and was completed with obedience in baptism.

Those on Pentecost did this and "*the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*" (Acts 2:47). Today, when people will do as they did, people will be as they were; namely, members of the church, the body of Christ, the saved, the family of God. God's way is the right way and no other can supplant it.

There is probably nothing that we could do that would be as beneficial for those around us than to see to it that they hear such a message that tells them about being a member of the Lord's church. There is probably not one who reads these words but has the ability to so learn the message that they could go and tell somebody this very saving truth before the day has ended. Every Christian knows any number of people who are lost, and will die lost, unless they are members of His church, the saved. Is there any greater duty that we have, any more wonderful privilege that is ours, to already be a member of the church and convey to others these simple, plain, irrefutable truths of salvation.

But will we do as we ought regarding those around us? That remains to be seen. But words of encouragement to do this, and do it now, is the way we close the article.

† † † † †



JAMES W. BOYD

DESPERATE ATHEISTS

Atheism has never contributed one benefit for humanity. The entire concept where people prove themselves to be fools by denying the reality of God stems from the rebellious determination by some to establish a "down-with-God, up-with-self" philosophy because they want to "do their own thing" regardless of the consequences.

The big gun of atheists is the self-acclaimed superiority over everyone else. If you listen to them very long, you are impressed with how impressed they are with themselves. You would be convinced that they have a monopoly on wisdom, scholarship, and everybody that does not "curse God and die" are simply ignorant and superstitous hangovers from yesteryear.

Yet, when pressed, they flee like rats from water when challenged. They hide behind bombastical tirades rather than risk exposure.

* * * * *

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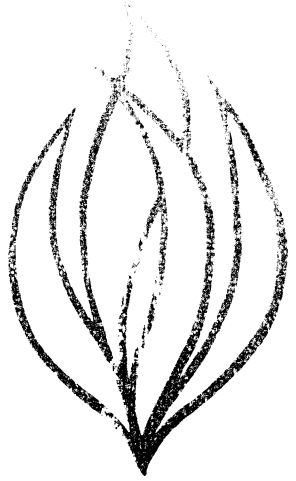

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME II NUMBER 6

LESSONS FROM HEZEKIAH

In keeping with Romans 15:4, where we learn the things written aforetime are for our learning, we turn to a study of an Old Testament character, and find valuable lessons from his life that we need to learn and apply into our own. The person is Hezekiah, king of Southern Judah. Hezekiah was of the Davidic lineage serving as king long after the nation of Israel had divided into the two nations of Northern Israel and Southern Judah. Of the twenty kings listed for Judah, Hezekiah is number thirteen, if you include the woman, Athaliah, as a monarch, which most listings do.

The father of Hezekiah was Ahaz, a very wicked and disobedient king who led Judah further and further away from God. Hezekiah became king at the age of twenty-five, and reigned for twenty-nine years. It was a time when Northern Israel was on the brink of their self-imposed destruction because of their rebellion against God. Naturally, this put great pressure on the southern kingdom over which Hezekiah ruled. Judah was following the same digressive path as Israel, and Hezekiah was determined to do something about it. Of the twenty kings of Judah, only six received very favorable marks as far as their service to God was concerned. Hezekiah was one of the six. Our lesson is centered on efforts he made to bring about a revival of obedience and a return to the ways of righteousness in Judah. Let us take note of seven things he did, and observe the result.

OPENED THE TEMPLE

"He...opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them." (2 Chronicles 29:3). His father had shut the temple, mutilated the vessels and sacred furniture, and allowed the physical condition of the temple to deteriorate. Ahaz had also driven the priests from their duties, preventing them from functioning as the law of Moses instructed, and in many instances terminated their work altogether. Now Hezekiah comes upon the scene and reopens the temple, making it ready for the priests and people to worship again as God had directed. "*So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order.*" (2 Chronicles 29:35b).

In principle, we must do the same thing today. The *"house of God"* is not now a physical temple, but is the church (1 Tim. 3:15). The doors of the kingdom were opened by the apostles on Pentecost, Christ having given the *"keys of the kingdom"* to them for that purpose. What the inspired men of God bound and loosed is what God had bound and loosed. By the preaching of the gospel, the doors were flung wide and invitations extended for *"whosoever will"* to enter therein.

In a sense, we open the doors of the house of God every time the gospel is preached and people are urged to obey and come to Christ. We tell the lost of the grace of God, the sacrifice of Christ, the terms of pardon. While denominational efforts have mutilated the doctrine the church is to uphold, we must repair that which has been desecrated by a renewed vigor in preaching the Word.

PRIESTS REINSTATED

Hezekiah encouraged the priests in their work. *"My sons, be not now negligent, for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense."* (2 Chronicles 29:11). They needed encouragement, after what Ahaz had done unto them. Now, under Hezekiah's influence, they were reinstated to their duties. Some had drifted into sinfulness and needed to cleanse and sanctify themselves, renewing their allegiance to the Father.

We need to encourage each other, for we are all priests of God, *"...and He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father."* (Rev. 1:6). We encourage each other by bearing each other's burdens, praying for one another, ministering to the needs of each other, offering comfort, kindness, helpfulness, lifting the fallen and strengthening the weak. Fellowship in the Lord's family is one God-given source of benefit that we ought never neglect to give or to partake as we sojourn together.

PERSONAL WORSHIP

Third, Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord and worshipped, "... *the king and all that were with him bowed themselves and worshipped."* (2 Chron. 29:29). It was not

enough just to encourage others to do their duty. It was needful for Hezekiah to attend to personal duty as well. He worshipped as well as others. He sang praises to God, offered the sacrifices through the priests, humbled himself before God. He "preached" the sermon that all needed to hear by his example. He realized, "You cannot lead where you will not go." So he showed the right way as well as telling the people the right way.

And should we not do as much? Are we not commanded against forsaking the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25)? Is it not inconsistent that those who profess to be Christians have to be urged to be respectful of the opportunities to worship God?

Why is it when preachers preach the needed sermons on attending the worship services that some "Christians" ask, "Does this mean Sunday night, too?" Devoted Christians do not ask such things. They look upon the worship periods as privileges, not just cold duty. They engage in the avenues of worship that the New Testament authorizes with joy and happiness. It is not drudgery for them to express their love and praise of God.

We once heard a person say, "I can go to heaven and never go to church." Well, one does not just "go to church." We go to worship. And you cannot go to heaven and not worship as God has directed. And He has directed that one assemble with the saints for worship. Just how one expects to negate God's instructions and still be pleasing to God is bewildering to say the least. Failure to obey God in worship is to show disrespect and disobedience whereas worship is designed to give honor, glory, praise, and love toward God.

Christians are to set the example as did Hezekiah and show others just what it is God wants. Our friends, children, the lost, everyone needs to know that we think seriously of the privilege to worship God.

BRING THEM IN

The fourth thing Hezekiah did was to invite others to worship. *"And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Mannasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel."* (2 Chron. 30:1). Everyone was invited. The division of the land did not

prevent him from urging all to do what God wanted. Invitations were sent "*throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan.*" (2 Chron. 30:5). As could be expected, some scorned his invitation (2 Chron. 30:10-12), but not everybody. So Hezekiah did what he could by pleading and warning and inviting others to return to the ways of the Lord.

It might seem a little thing to some to extend invitation to others to serve God, but it is no little thing. The Spirit and the bride say come; Christ invited. We are urged to go into the highways and by-ways and bring them in. Shall we allow the millions of lost people to live around us and die and not mention to them about their souls or duty to God through Christ? Surely, some will laugh and mock and scorn, but what of that? We will have done what God wants. And in addition to that, some will heed the invitation and come into good favor with God because we showed enough love for them to invite them.

GIVE TO GOD

The fifth action of Hezekiah was to give support to the work of God. *"For Hezekiah king of Judah did give to the congregation a thousand bullocks, and seven thousand sheep, and the princes gave unto the congregation a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep, and a great number of the priests sanctified themselves."* (2 Chron. 30:24). Notice that these things are things that he did, he acted. Worship required certain things; doing the work had its demands. It called not only for Hezekiah's time, thought, energy, but also his good, and he gave. "*He appointed also the king's portion of his substance for the burnt offerings...*" [*2 Chron. 31:3a*].

The Lord's work still requires gifts. God looks to the saved to do the work the church is authorized to do. He does not look to those outside the church to support the work of the church. This demands money from the purses of Christians. Christian giving is not through merchandizing, sales, pie-suppers, gimmicks, etc. The funds needed are to be raised through free-will offering (Cor. 8:1-3; 9:6,7). We lay up treasures in heaven when we give for the work of God.

HIS NEGATIVE DEEDS

Hezekiah's sixth action was a negative one. Not only did he do the positive things that were necessary to see that things were right before God, but he also opposed evil and attacked error. The entire thirty-first chapter is given over primarily to the deeds Hezekiah made in fighting evil. He hewed down the idols, broke down the altars where false worship was offered, destroyed evidences of disobedience. He knew it was not enough just to be good and do what was right. He knew the obligation to wage war against the forces of wickedness.

It is tragic that some in the church today have the idea that we must be only positive in our spiritual life. They fail to realize we are in spiritual combat, with weapons provided for us by the Lord for offensive and defensive action. We are to preach and act positively. But we are also to be negative toward all that is wrong before God. Ephesians 5:11 not only tells us to refrain from fellowshiping darkness, but we must also rebuke that wickedness. *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* Some have such a distorted concept of love that they do not even wish to offend the devil. They think that love means not to oppose anything, even wickedness and false ways. God hates sin and hates every evil way. Shall we do less? Do we show love for God when we coddle the very thing He hates, the very thing that destroys the souls of people that we say we love? Love will demand of us a negative approach toward wrong just as it demands a positive approach toward right. Anything less is only half-way and will not suffice. It is sad and a sure sign of digression when brethren are heard to call for a cessation of negative preaching.

WITH ALL HIS HEART

To the credit of Hezekiah, he did what he did with all his heart. *"And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered."* (2 Chron. 31:21). Hezekiah was devoted, consecrated, put the Lord first, did what he did with vigor, diligence, with all his might and conviction. He did not do his task in a half-hearted, lukewarm, timid sort of way. He really meant what he undertook to do. He gave it one hundred percent effort. This certainly contributed to the measure of success his

efforts produced.

We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, strength (Matt. 22:37). We are to be a people zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). We have no right to go about the Lord's business in a trifling and sloppy manner. Our attitude must be that what we do is worth doing and worth our very best energies and efforts and devotion. This characteristic was that of Saul of Tarsus before he was converted because he was sincere, honest, and dedicated, even though he was wrong. But once in Christ, he kept this same marvelous and commendable characteristic and used it in doing what was right.

The results of Hezekiah's work was that there was *"great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem."* (2 Chron. 30:26). Hezekiah wrought that which was good and right and true before the Lord and he prospered (2 Chron. 31:20,21).

With the same kind of effort, we can enjoy the same kind of result. We may be inclined to desire the result but somehow not make the effort. This will not be productive and we will be disappointed. But when we put forth as did Hezekiah, we shall reap as we have sown. God's name will be glorified and we shall be saved.

† † † † †

RECONCILIATION

"And all things are of God who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5:18,19).

In a very real and true sense, the message of the Bible centers on the subject of reconciliation. Reconciliation means the renewing of friendship, the act of making peace and reconciling that which was estranged. To illustrate, let us suppose there are two friends, who have some misunderstanding between them and they break their friendship and

are at odds with each other. Later, they forgive and forget their differences and make peace. This is reconciliation; a renewal of their friendship.

The passage above tells of God and man being reconciled. The Bible is one long and beautiful account that tells how God and man become separated, and the provision made for reconciliation. To enjoy salvation in heaven one must be reconciled to God. "*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...*" (Rom. 5:10). "*And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.*" (Ephesians 2:16). "*And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself.*" (Colossians 1:20). Instead of counting our trespasses against us, God has offered us an opportunity to be forgiven and be reconciled unto Him.

NEED OF RECONCILIATION

The very need of reconciliation implies a previous separation, an alienation, and an enmity. Unless this was so there would be no need to renew friendship. It is evident from the Bible that we alienate ourselves from God because of our own iniquities and sins (Isaiah 59:1,2).

Certain cases of estrangement require a mediator. Such is the case in the reconciliation of God and man. Let us illustrate the role of mediator. Two friends fall out and are at variance. They both may share in the blame for their trouble, although it may well be a case where one is entirely innocent of wrongdoing and the fault lies totally on just one party. In such cases, it may well be impossible for the two to be reconciled without assistance. When labor and management have their disagreements, they might try to find a solution but cannot come by one. So they turn the matter over to a mediator to assist in the solution. The further apart the parties involved are, the more likely a mediator is needed for reconciliation.

In the case of the alienation between God and man, God is entirely innocent and man, because of sin, is at fault. Because of this, man is not likely to come to God without a mediator between them. God recognizes this and has made provision.

THE MEDIATOR

In a dispute, not just anybody can properly serve as mediator. A mediator must have certain qualifications. He must not be a party to the cause of alienation. He must have equal relationship between the two parties. He must have complete knowledge of all the facts of the case. You would not likely be an acceptable mediator in a dispute between someone of your family and the family next door. If you were in dispute with a neighbor, neither of you could serve as the mediator. A person who knows one side of a problem and that alone is not qualified to mediate.

THE PARTIES TO BE RECONCILED

In spiritual reconcilation between God and man, the parties involved are God on the one hand, and sinful man on the other. God is superior and innocent, while man is inferior and guilty of sin. A person is not at enmity with God until he sins. But when he sins, that draws the barrier into place. Ephesians 4:18 speaks of the Gentiles being alienated from God. We have referred to Isaiah 59:1,2, and would also include Romans 8:7, *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."* Paul is not saying the carnal minded person is not accountable and answerable to God, but one with such a mind is not submissive to God and cannot and will not be submissive so long as he retains a rebellious and impenitent attitude toward God. James tells us that friendship with the world (the evil of the world) is enmity with God, (James 4:4). And this is that which involves every person who reaches an age and state of accountability because we are all guilty of sin (Romans 3:23).

Can man and God be reconciled? Indeed, the answer is in the affirmative. Paul said he was to preach that very message of reconciliation. If man is to ever enter heaven, he must be reconciled to God. God has provided the way of reconciliation.

Are they reconciled without a mediator? In the wisdom of God He has decided that there is to be a mediator. No other human being could be the mediator because that person would also be guilty of sin and could not qualify. A sinful man is the servant of the devil and cannot represent God.

CHRIST, THE MEDIATOR

Who is the mediator? God has decreed that the mediator is Christ. *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."* (1 Timothy 2:5). It is not that God could not have provided for reconciliation any other way. But the fact is that God has provided reconciliation this way through Christ. After all, God is God; He is the offended One, and He has the right to ascertain the means and terms of reconciliation. Christ is qualified because He is both God and also became man. He sustained a relationship with both that no other of the Godhead ever sustained. He was sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; Heb. 7:26) and without any stain of that which caused the alienation. He certainly knows all the facts of the case, since He was present with God in the beginning and as Deity, has all knowledge.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." (Phil. 2:5-9). This is an account of the Second Person of the Godhead taking on the form of man and thereby meeting every qualification for a proper and adequate mediator. He is the only mediator. There is no other. While there may be others that intercede one for another, there is only one mediator.

What is the mediator to do in bringing about reconciliation? In cases that involve people versus people, he may suggest solutions, compose compromises that would be acceptable to both. He would reason and persuade the parties that their alienation was destructive and seek peace between them. In the role of mediator between God and man, the role of Jesus is not precisely as that stated above in reconciling man to man. There is no compromise offered. And God does not have to be persuaded to be reconciled because it is God who has made provision for the reconciliation from the start. The role of mediator of Christ is to remove that which stands between man and God. We must turn our attention to that which must be removed and that which has caused the

alienation.

Ephesians, chapter two, shows that the Gentiles were alienated from God because they were not God's chosen people as were the Jews. They did not live under the law God gave to Moses. The wall distinguished the Jew from the Gentile and thereby was a wall of separation between them. Jesus removed that barrier when He died on the cross, taking away the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, and abolished the law, nailing it to the cross (Eph. 2:14,15; Col. 2:14).

THE BARRIER

The barrier between man and God is sin that man has committed. God sent Christ to taste of death for every man (Heb. 2:9), pay the debt of sin in our stead, redeeming us by His blood (Eph. 1:7), making possible the remission of sins in His name (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; Matt. 26:28). It was in the death of Christ that justice toward sin and mercy toward man was accomplished (Romans 3:26). By the sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary, Jesus made atonement for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2)

This mediator took away the stronghold that Satan had on the soul of man. He became conqueror over death and the grave, breaking forth from the tomb as a demonstration of the power of God and Himself as the giver of life. We die physically because of the sin of Adam. We die spiritually because of our sins. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and this has reference to separation from God. If we die in our sins we shall suffer eternal death, eternal separation from God, which is banishment into hell. But we need not die in the guilty stain of our sins. They can be forgiven us because of that which the Mediator has done on our behalf. Christ has broken Satan's dominion over us and has brought life and immortality to light. (2 Tim. 1:10).

BY THE CROSS

Let us see clearly the significance of the cross in all this. By His death He took the old law away. He became the propitiation for our sins, His resurrection shows His power over that which would destroy us. All the obstacles and barriers between man and God are removed through the

merit of the blood of Christ.

But man must partake of these benefits by complying to the will of God in coming to Him through Christ. This includes faith in Christ as God's Son, repentance of sins, confession of our faith, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. Paul said he was sent forth as an ambassador, as the bearer of the glad tidings of reconciliation. God has offered to save man from the disastrous fate he has brought upon himself.

In 2 Cor. 5:20, Paul urges, *"We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God."*

† † † † †

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

The Bible is the Word of God. *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."* (2 Tim. 3:16,17). This message did not come from the mind of man, but from God. *"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."* (1 Thess. 2:13). Peter wrote, *"Knowing this first that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (2 Peter 1:20,21). *"But I certify you brethren that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it: but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."* (Gal. 1:11,12).

This being true, the Bible is deserving of our very sober and reverent study, meditation, and consideration. The knowledge of the Bible is vital to the welfare of man. *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway."* (Psalms 119:105). We cannot be saved without a knowledge of God's Word. *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the*

Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:13-17).

We must come to a knowledge of truth. *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). Paul said that it was the will of God that men *"come to the knowledge of the truth."* (1 Tim. 2:4). We are permitted to *"escape the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the truth."* (2 Peter 2:20). Therefore, we must take seriously the commandment *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* (2 Tim. 2:15). The church in Colossae was admonished to *"be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding that ye might walk worthy* (worthily, ASV) *of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God ."* (Col. 1:9,10). The early hearers of the Word were said to be *"noble"* because they *"searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."* (Acts 17:11). How else can we come to a knowledge of God's truth except through study? No person can be considered well educated who does not have a knowledge of the Word of God, regardless of how much schooling he may have received.

RIGHTLY DIVIDE

To *"rightly divide the word of truth"* means to handle it aright. There are several ways in which this word can and must be properly divided. We are familiar with such divisions as the Old and New Testaments, possibly even the major divisions of each testament into such categories as law, history, poetry, prophecy in the Old, and biography, history, epistles, and prophecy in the New. Each portion of the scripture has certain objectives and all the parts fit harmoniously together to present the unified whole of the will of God for man.

But once we are impressed that the Bible is God's Word, that knowledge of it is important to us. As we recognize these major divisions, there are some basic and fundamental rules of study we must apply.

WHO SPEAKS

When studying the Bible and we read a passage, we must ask, "Who is speaking?" It makes a great deal of difference who is speaking. For example, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). It is vital to know that this was stated by Jesus. Again we read, "*Curse God and die.*"(Job. 2:9). Who said such a thing? It was Job's wife. What a difference if these two statements were made by the opposite speakers. "*Ye shall not surely die. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*"(Gen. 3:4,5). We must know that this was the temptation of Satan. 1 John 1:20 includes the phrase, "*I am not the Christ.*"If Jesus of Nazareth had said that, what a difference it would make. But this was said by John the Baptist. We can see how important it is to know who is speaking.

TO WHOM SPOKEN

We also must observe to whom the words are spoken or written. For instance, "*And now why tarriest thou, arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins calling on the name of the Lord.*"(Acts 22:16). Was this a saved man who received these words? Was he an unbeliever? Was this said to someone who just wanted to join some church? No, this was instructed of the believing and penitent Saul of Tarsus, teaching him what he must do to be saved from his sins.

Exodus 20:8 gives the command, "*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.*"We must know that this was directed to the Jewish nation and to them alone. It was never instructed of Gentile people. This was a part of the Mosaic law that was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way by being fulfilled by Christ. Nobody is amenable to this Sabbath law today.

Acts 8:22, "*Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*"Not just anyone can turn to these words to

learn what they must do to be saved. The one who has never come to Christ is not the target of these words. But this was said to a Christian who had fallen away and was being taught how he may be restored. Not every phrase in the Scripture applies to every situation. We must understand what is said, to whom, and by whom.

WHICH DISPENSATION?

We must also respect the dispensation in which the words were spoken. A dispensation is simply a system by which God governs men for a certain period of time. There have been three dispensations according to the Scripture: the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and now the Christian. It is in this area of dividing the word of truth that so many have fallen short of the knowledge of truth and so much religious error has been propagated.

The Patriarchal age began with Adam and continued until the giving of the Mosaic law to the Israelites. It is thought that this manner of God governing man continued with others than the Jews until Christ. This was a system of "father-rule" with God speaking to the fathers, the heads of the families, giving His will directly to the family through the father. There was no written law in this family system of religion.

The Mosaic law was given to Israel on Mt. Sinai and governed Israel until Christ. It was a written law, limited in its purpose, having a very special service as a type or shadow of things to come in Christ.

We today live under God through Christ (Heb. 1:1,2). The Mosaic law being fulfilled and taken out of the way, the religion given through Christ is the new covenant God makes with all mankind. We shall be judged according to the will of Christ revealed in the New Testament.

As we study the Bible, we must be alert and attentive to which dispensation is under consideration. We cannot take the instructions given to Noah and build an ark and expect to be saved. We are not to offer animal sacrifices as did those under the previous two dispensations. Nor are we to be surprised that those of former ages were not commanded to be baptized. We live subject to a different system. So as we study we must learn about the dispensations so we shall know just what and how the information we read applies to us.

THE CONTEXT

It is also absolutely necessary to study a text in its context lest it become a pretext. If you take the Scriptures out of context, you can make them say almost anything. We read how Judas went out and hanged himself. Shall we follow that with the words, "*Go thy way and do likewise?*" Possibly we can add, "*And what thou doest, do quickly.*' Some have wrested the words of Paul in their effort to dismiss baptism in 1 Cor. 1:14 by quoting only part of his words, "*I thank God that I baptized none of you.*" The passage is actually condemning division and Paul goes on to state that he had baptized some and names them. But since some were dividing themselves according to men, he was glad there were no more baptized by him than there were lest they call themselves after Paul rather than Christ. The false doctrine of the necessity of celibacy is based upon misapplication of Paul's words regarding marriage in 1 Corinthians, chapter 7. Paul was not forbidding marriage to any but advising, under the present distress, that it was best not to marry. He expressly states that one does no wrong to marry or to not marry (1 Cor. 7:36).

GOD IS CONSISTENT

As we study we must not conclude that God contradicts Himself. There is perfect harmony in the Scriptures and we do err to interpret (get the meaning of) in such a fashion as to make God stand against God. This is God's Word. To claim contradiction is an indictment of God and clearly refutes His own teaching that He is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). When passages seemingly contradict, it is because we have not learned the real meaning of it, and when we do we shall see there is no contradiction. Often people will take obscure passages, passages that are hard to understand and give them a meaning that contradicts other clear and easily comprehended passages. For instance, many take the book of Revelation and conclude it teaches things that would certainly contradict other parts of Scripture. Revelation is a highly figurative and symbolic book and we err to draw from it to the contradiction of the rest. Some have taught a literal reign of Jesus on earth to begin at His next coming when He establishes His kingdom. The fact is, He established His

kingdom on Pentecost, is reigning now, and when He comes will announce the judgment.

THE WHOLE TRUTH

We cannot learn the truth if we do not take all that God has said on a given subject. To isolate a passage from all other teaching on the theme under consideration is to omit God's full truth. Many make this mistake when it comes to learning how to be saved. We hear people talk about salvation by faith alone, or grace alone, or other such things. But Scripture teaches we are saved by faith (Rom. 3:28), by grace (Eph. 2:9,9), by blood (Rom. 5:9), by works (James 2:24), by hope (Rom. 8:24), by preaching (1 Cor. 1:18), by baptism (1 Pet. 3:21), by ourselves (Acts. 2:40), by repentance (Luke 13:3), and on and on, many matters making up the components of God's plan for saving man. It is a gross error and a mishandling of truth to take part and ignore part. It is unreasonable to say that one part is the whole thing.

RIGHT ATTITUDE

To learn the message of God, we must have the right attitude of heart. We must want the truth, love the truth, seek the truth. If we study out of curiousity and nothing more, if it is but an intellectual exercise and it means no more to us than reading a novel, if we search the Scriptures just to prove ourselves right and somebody else wrong, we are going to be subject to being led astray. We should approach the Bible with a desire to know what is the will of God, observing these proper rules of study, then making application of the message learned to our individual lives.

We may well become experts in the knowledge of many things that this world offers. But not until we know God's Word and conform ourselves to it can we possibly accomplish what life means.

† † † † †

OBLIGATIONS TOWARD OTHERS

We read from two passages for our text and basis of our study

"And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this if the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:

And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question." (Mark 12:28-34).

"But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matt. 22:34-40).

In these two records of the same event and conversation, Christ gives us one of our obligations we have toward other people. Christ had just completed a series of debates. One was with the Herodians on the issue of tribute unto Caesar. Then He discussed with the Sadducees the subject of the resurrection. Next came a scribe with a question. The scribes were looked upon as being leaders of the people because of their occupation, that of repeatedly copying the Law. This enabled them to be more knowledgeable than most regarding the Law. We have to ask, "Was the question sincerely asked or was it to try to catch Christ in some inconsistency and fault?" Regardless of the motive behind the question, and we do not dismiss it as totally unimportant, the answer given by our Lord still taught the truth.

TWO REALMS OF DUTY

His answer dealt with two great realms of man's duty; namely, duty to God and duty to other people. *"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."* The individual who truly loves the Lord will want to do what God wants him to do. The individual who loves his neighbor will treat his neighbor the way God would have him treat him. Paul stated it in Romans 13:10b, *"Love is the fulfilling of the law."*

LOVE

In giving us our obligations toward others, none deserves first mention more than that of love.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

The scribe implies in Mark 12:33 that the Jews considered

sacrifice, burnt-offerings, and outward observances more important among the commands of God. But Jesus did not agree. This does not detract from the importance of sacrifices and these other things. They have their place. Christ does not teach that outward observances have no significance. The Jews were not to think that they were at liberty to discontinue such things. But there was something more fundamental. There was the motive behind the doing of such things. Love is to be the motive behind every sacrifice and observance. This is true in observing the outward matters of Christianity. Love is the motive behind baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, etc. To say that love is the motive is not to mean the outward obedience is nothing. The outward service is love being expressed. Jesus said that love is shown by obedience (John 14:15). Neither love nor outward observance is acceptable without the other. They complement one another.

Love then is an obligation that manifests itself in the ways that Paul describes in more detail in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8,13.

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil,

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

HELPFULNESS

A second obligation we have toward others is to be helpful. James 2:14-17 reads:

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those

things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?
Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

Christ emphasized the necessity of doing good unto others in Matthew 25:31-46. By the parable of the Good Samaritan He extolled and approved helpfulness to those in need. James 1:27 tells us, *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,..."* Galatians 6:2, *"Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ."* Galatians 6:10, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."*

Something is lacking when we do not help those less fortunate than we. As sure as we have the obligation to worship, we have the obligation to others to be helpful.

CONSIDERATION

A third obligation we study is that of counting others better than ourselves. Admittedly, for all of us, being often too self-centered, this becomes a difficult task. Philippians 2:1-8 reads:

"If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,
Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.
Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.
Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.
Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:
But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

We are to be concerned for others. There is Christlikeness in

discounting self and exalting others. This requires denial of self, humility, and unselfishness.

"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.
Wherefore if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church." (3 John 9,10).

There was trouble among those to whom John was writing. Diotrophes had not learned to humble himself. He considered himself above others. He wanted to be preeminent among them. He plotted against others and spoke disparagingly of them. What a contrast to the life of Christ that was characterized by consideration of others, the importance of others, and service to others.

Our Lord counted the souls of people, even though sinful, spotted, stained with evil, full of wickedness, of greater value than His own life. Did He not die to save just such as those?

If we are not alert, we can think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think and fail in an obligation we have toward others.

FORGIVING

The fourth obligation we mention is to have a forgiving spirit toward others.

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?
Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." (Matthew 18:22).

The chapter continued with Jesus relating how a servant who owed much asked for forgiveness of a debt he could not pay, but when one who owed him asked for forgiveness from him, the servant denied it. The point is obvious. How can we expect to be forgiven if we are unforgiving? When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He said, "*For if ye will forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will*

your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 9:14,15). Paul urged brethren in Colossae to forbear one another, forgive one another, as Christ forgave. (Col. 3:13).

ENCOURAGING

We also have the obligation to encourage each other. Colossians 3:16 teaches us to admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Admonition is a means of encouragement. Hebrews 10:25 teaches us to exhort one another. This is but to encourage one another in doing what we ought. *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."* (Eph. 6:10,11). These were words of encouragement to Christian duty. Again we read the inspired words from 1 Corinthians 15:58, *"Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* What is that but encouragement to faithfulness? And again in 1 Corinthians 16:13,14, *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity."*

How long has it been since we went out of our way to speak words of exhortation, admonition, and encouragement to others?

GOLDEN RULE

We might be able to summarize our obligations to others in the words of our Lord recorded in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31, *"As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also to them likewise."* This if often called the "Golden Rule" because of the great value of this principle is obvious in human behavior one toward the other.

Notice that this teaching is positive. It is not just something not to be done, but something to be done. Negatives are included in the doctrine of Christ and must be preached. But this teaching is positive. We are not obliged just to not do harm. To refrain from evil is good as far as it goes, but this enjoins upon us the doing of good as well as refraining from evil.

This rule determines how we are to treat others; namely, as

we want to be treated. The rule is so useable and practical. There is nothing about it that is hard to understand. The hard part is living accordingly. It teaches us to think of our fellowman. Such a principle ought be the governing force in all our activities in life, whether in the home, the church, the community, our occupation, whatever, and wherever.

Let us close this study of a few of our obligations to others by asking, "Just how does one learn to live by these things?" Is not the answer, "Learn by doing," about the best we can give? If we will concentrate on loving God, and we realize the doing of such things toward others is the will of God, will we not want to do them, and learn to do them better and better by actually putting these principles into activity in life?

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TRACT ON HUMANISM

Every Christian should be concerned with one of the most insidious and deceitful philosophies that this world has ever known. It is called HUMANISM. Once you have learned what it is, how it operates, become aware of the advances it has made in the thinking of so many people, and understand the real nature of its message, you can see why it is so detrimental, especially antagonistic to Christ and His doctrine.

So many people do not recognize HUMANISM when it is presented before them because they are unfamiliar with its precepts, affirmations, background and catch words. Therefore HUMANISM has marched through our society almost undetected and unchallenged. It has made a penetration into almost every realm of our national life, including religion. It is not overstating the case to say that certain phrases and tenets of HUMANISM are even heard and read in teaching coming from some members of the church.

Robert Taylor, Jr. is no stranger to brethren who read. His writings are published far and wide, as they should be. Those who are acquainted with his work know how thoroughly he does his research before putting anything into print. Some time ago brother Taylor prepared a manuscript for the book of the Sixth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectures. His subject was HUMANISM.

We contacted the National Christian Press, who published the book, and also brother Tom Warren, co-editor of the book, and secured permission to put brother Taylor's article into tract form. They readily gave permission because they want his message spread abroad.

The East Main congregation in Tupelo, Mississippi has underwritten the expense of producing this tract, doing most of the work ourselves in order to reduce costs. This twelve page and cover tract is available, mailed to you, for only ten dollars per hundred copies. This should cover production cost and mailing expense as well as provide funds for reprinting if it becomes necessary.

Every congregation ought to have enough copies for every member, young, old, friend, visitor, school teachers, denominational preachers, anyone, everyone. We printed a limited supply at first and can produce more if the demand warrants it.

YOU CAN DO SOMETHING FOR YOUR BRETHREN BY SECURING SUFFICIENT COPIES FOR THEM. Write the East Main church for copies of this tract on HUMANISM and help acquaint all of our people, and every other God-fearing person, with this "down-with-God; up-with-self" heresy.

As has been announced previously, we also have available three tapes with six lessons on HUMANISM that were preached over the local radio station in Tupelo. These can be obtained for only one dollar per tape mailed to you.

Unless and until those of us who believe in God begin to wake up and become aware of what the forces of evil are accomplishing right before our eyes, and begin to take the offensive and blunt the thrust of error, the future for our young, our nation, and the church of the Lord looks bleak. We urge you to take advantage of the materials available at so little cost.

All checks should be made payable to the East Main Church of Christ, P. O. Box 1761, Tupelo, MS 38802-1761. JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

JERRY CORLEW, RIPLEY, TENN.

Saturday, July 16, brother Jerry Corlew died in a Memphis, Tenn. hospital of a heart attack. We enjoyed a special relationship with Jerry and Martha because their daughter, Carol, is married to our son, Steve. More than that, Jerry was such a fine and genuinely Christian man. His death is an enormous loss to so many people. As brothers Alan Highers and Robert Taylor said with justification as they mentioned a few of the distinguished qualities of this man, like Barnabas, "For he was a good man." (Acts 11:24).

Jerry was an outstanding public servant, father, husband and gospel preacher. He leaves a trail of good deeds of spiritual nobility that shall extend through eternity. We count ourselves blessed to have known him. To Martha, the two Corlew sons, and especially Carol, we express our sympathy, admiration, continued love and concern.

"He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." (John 11:25). We are comforted in the promise of Jesus Christ.

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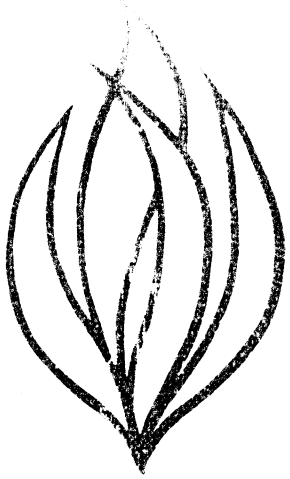

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME II **NUMBER 7**

THIEF ON THE CROSS

The account of the thief on the cross is familiar to Bible students. It is a record of significant events. Sometimes you hear people say, "I will be saved like the thief on the cross." By this they mean they can be saved by faith only, and without being baptized. But the account of the thief is often abused and misused to teach something that simply is not the saving truth.

Christ and the two thieves were on the respective crosses. The irony of the event is that what appeared to be the death of Jesus Christ and a victory for evil was actually a necessry step in God's plan for offering salvation to all mankind, and the overthrow of the power of the devil. What seemed to put down God's plan was in reality the setting up of God's plan and bringing it toward completion.

The record (Luke 23:39-44) presents one thief as railing against Jesus while the other, railing at first, sought His favor. The response that Jesus gave him has given rise to at least three false doctrines. One, that people today can be saved like the thief on the cross was saved, that is, in the same manner. Two, that the thief is an example of "death-bed conversion." Three, that it is not necessary to be baptized in order to be saved. But an honest investigation of the record and the context of what was said and done will not show such doctrines as the truth.

THE THIEF'S REQUEST

For what does the thief ask? "*Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*" Just what did the thief expect? Did he understand the nature of the Lord's kingdom, that it was to be a spiritual kingdom rather than a physical one? Is it likely that he did inasmuch as even the apostles retained a misunderstanding right up to the time that Jesus ascended into heaven? Did he realize that being in the kingdom meant the salvation of the soul? Again, we must give the thief a lot more credit than seems deserving, because most looked upon the kingdom of which Jesus had taught to be a deliverance of the Jews from Roman occupation. Did he expect Jesus to perform a miracle and come down off the

cross and allow the thief to be kept alive also? This is possibly what he had in mind. He might have been able to see the sign that said Jesus was King of the Jews and may have known of the mighty works the Lord had done on earth. The indication is that he was aware of the innocence of Jesus. The fact is, we cannot determine with a dogmatic positiveness just what it was the thief expected to receive from Jesus. The best we can determine is by what Jesus, the all-knowing Lord, answered and what He understood the thief to be asking. Surely, His answer would have accomodated the question, whatever was meant by it.

HELL AND HADES

But let us suppose for a moment that the thief had clearly in mind salvation in heaven for his spirit. Does this mean that we can be saved the way he was? Jesus answered him, "*Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.*" It is certain that wherever Jesus went that day the thief went also. Where did Jesus go that day? Acts 2:31 tells us He went to hell, or more definitely, hades, the intermediate and unseen state of the dead. The word "hell" as is used in the KJV has two meanings. It could refer to the place of eternal torment, as the Greek word "gehenna" is translated. But "hell" was also used to translate the Greek word "hades." Neither is incorrect, but admittedly the distinction found in the ASV between the two renditions makes matters easier to grasp at first. The word that tells us where Jesus went is the word "hades." Jesus went to the state of the dead, not into eternal hell and punishment. He did not go to heaven where the Father is (John 20:17). He went to the place that corresponds to "*Abraham's bosom*" (Luke 16) where Lazarus went. A study of "hades" reveals it to be a place of two parts, one of torment and the other of peace called Paradise. Jesus went to Paradise, and the thief was promised that he would go there also.

We have no doubt but that the thief will enjoy the glories of God in eternity. But does that prove we can get to the same place the same way? The answer is, "NO." We are saved by the gospel (Rom. 1:16). The gospel includes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The thief could not have been saved by the gospel because it was not yet presented or even fully developed and revealed. The thief, a

Jew, lived and died before the gospel age and he was subject to the law of Moses which was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way by the death of Christ (Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:13-16). We no longer live under that law that has been removed (Gal. 3:23-25; Heb. 9:15-17). The first to be saved by the gospel were those on Pentecost. The events about the thief were prior to that time. So he died before the gospel and its conditions were in effect. So what he did, or did not do, is not a pattern for us to follow today.

ACCORDING TO HIS WILL

While Christ lived He could and did dispense with His blessings to others any way He saw fit. But upon His death, then His blessings are granted according to His will. Before a will goes into effect there must be the death of the testator (Heb. 9:16). Unlike the thief, we live subject to the will of Christ.

Let us illustrate. Prior to 1913 nobody paid income tax. It was not a law. Since that time, most have to pay it. Can one be relased from the tax obligation on the basis that those prior to 1913 paid no such tax? Certainly not. We live under different requirements. So the claim that anyone can be saved like the thief today is false and disastrously misleading.

DEATH-BED CONVERSION

It is unfortunate that some place such confidence in what they call "death-bed conversion." What is meant is that a dying person, who may have rejected the Lord all his life, can call out to God for salvation and be saved without meeting any other condition. The thief is cited as an example of that kind of salvation.

We certainly have no doubt about the sincerity of a dying man who has lived wickedly and now realizes he must face God. His desire for salvation is not questioned. Sincerity has nothing to do with the matter, however. It takes more than sincerity to be saved. Jesus said, "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 7:21). Are we to think that the sincerity of one dying sets aside the will of Christ? Are we not aware that there is no such thing as being almost saved but not altogether? (Acts 26). We know that in life men can wait too long to seize

opportunities given them until they are past. Why is it so unthinkable that men can rebel against God so long that they have passed the opportunity for salvation?

Let us illustrate again. Consider a man going downstream holding to a log, being swept toward a falls and toward death. One by one those on the bank call to him, throw him a rope, urge him to grab it and be pulled to safety. But he refuses and passes one after the other, until he passes the last one. He may now realize he wants to be rescued but also realizes he has passed his last hope for safety. He has waited too long and now there is no way open to him. People can reject God until they find themselves in conditions where they cannot obey. Do they have the right to expect God to save them contrary to His revealed will?

No, reader friend, the thief is not an example of "death-bed conversion" under the will of Christ. He was not saved by the will that went into effect on Pentecost. But dear friend, you must consider this. While we do not for a moment grant the validity of "death-bed conversion" apart from obedience to the will of Christ, even if God would save you that way, that really does not apply to you at all. You are not likely on your death-bed. You could do His will if only you would. Even if God saved the thief by faith only, and "death-bed conversion," there is not one word of comfort to you who have the opportunity to conform to that revealed will of Christ and obey the conditions of salvation included in that will.

SAVED WITHOUT BAPTISM?

The record of the thief is misused to attempt to show that one is saved today without being baptized. First, in response to such a claim, nobody can prove the thief was never baptized. Nor can we prove that he was. Efforts to prove that he was are fallacious as efforts to prove that he was not. But there is more evidence that possibly he was than there is that he was not. Matthew 3:5 reads, "*Then went out to him* (John the Baptist, JWB) *Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region round about Jordan.*" Is it possible that the thief could have been among them? Possible, yes. But nobody can prove he was. But, since nobody can prove that he was not, nobody can say with any sort of confidence that the thief was never baptized, can they? Either way is to argue from silence.

But that is not the real issue.

The thief was never commanded to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins as people were beginning with Pentecost (Acts 2:38). But since that time, every record of conversion found in the New Testament includes baptism. There is not an exception. There were the Jews (Acts 2), Samaritans (Acts 8), the Ethiopian (Acts 8), Saul (Acts 9, 22, 26), Cornelius (Acts 10), Lydia (Acts 16), the jailor (Acts 16), Corinthians (Acts 18). All of these lived this side of the cross, since Pentecost, like we do. All of them were baptized. They were not saved without it. By what reasoning does one think people today can be saved without obeying the Lord's conditions as stated in Mark 16:16?

Have you ever thought yourself saved "like the thief?" Dear friend, for the sake of your soul, abandon such false doctrines and obey the truth. Baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21). It is embodied in the will of Christ that baptism saves. Who has the right, or should have the desire, to remove it and set it aside as if what He taught makes no difference?

† † † † †

THE CURSE OF NEGLIGENCE

While many have not considered it so, negligence is one of the more prominently committed sins of our time. It is a sin that is literally sapping the life out of the church. "*Cursed be he that doeth the word of the Lord deceitfully* (negligently, ASV), *and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.*"(Jer. 48:10). The Hebrew writer asks, "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*"(Heb. 2:3). Timothy was admonished by Paul, "*Neglect not the gift that is in thee.*"(1 Tim. 4:14).

To be guilty of negligence is to be guilty of carelessness of the worst kind. It means to omit what ought to be done, showing disregard for what is needful, slighting and leaving undone that which God expects. This matter under consideration is precisely what James was writing when he said, "*To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to*

him it is sin." (James 4:17).

We must first be aroused to accept the possibility that we can neglect our duty. We must appreciate the seriousness of it. When a soldier neglects his duty he is severely punished. We are in the army of the Lord and have serious duties of eternal consequence. While we pray for the Lord to forgive us of sins of commission and omission, we may pray in vain if we deliberately repeat the sin of neglect, making no effort to do what we have left undone. The Scriptures warn Christians to be doers, not merely hearers, of the word. (James 1:22).

DANGER OF NEGLECT

We need to be impressed with the danger of neglect. We likely do consider neglect dangerous in some matters, but have not realized the danger of negelct in spiritual matters. We know we ought not neglect our health. We are constantly being encouraged to have check-ups, and many are faithful in that. When we get sick, we do not neglect treatment lest the illness get out of hand. A forest ranger would be punished and lose his job if he saw a small fire in the woods but neglected to report it.

If duty is neglected, there will come a time when it is too late to be constructive. To postpone repair of the brakes on your car for too long will cause an accident you cannot undo. How many parents have seen their sons sentenced before the judge to imprisonment or worse who cry, "What did I do wrong?" Very likely the problem is what the parent did not do that ought to have been done.

A preacher friend once told me of some parents who were distressed that their children had no concern for the church. They never cursed before their children, nor lied to them. The parents minded their own business and were not in trouble with civil authorities. But further investigation also showed they seldom knew where their children were, or who were their friends. They did not pray at home. They did not worship faithfully together. They neglected teaching their children God's Word. What they did not do was fine as far as it went, but they neglected doing what was needed.

NEGLECT IN THE HOME

One of the greatest neglects in our nation is parental neglect

and the absence of spiritual guidance in the home. Parental neglect is one of the prime causes of juvenile deliquency. Mothers are away from home attending to everything else except the home and family. Children are left without parental love and guidance. The generation of children reared by baby-sitters and day-care nurseries while parents "do their own thing" has just about wrecked the moral level of society.

Baby-sitting is not wrong in itself. But it has been overused and therefore abused. The evil rises out of the willingness of parents to turn their God-given duty over to someone else.

A juvenile judge once reported that out of eight to ten thousand cases that had appeared before him, less than twenty regularly attended Bible study classes with their parents. In fact, only three were in trouble from homes where both parents and the entire family regularly attended Bible study and worship. In an age so provoked and seduced to sin, why cannot parents get their stubborn eyes open to what they are doing to their own children by neglect?

Which do you consider the worst? Is it the farmer who takes a hammer and destroys a piece of machinery, or the one who allows it to rust in the elements and does not take care of it? Do not both accomplish the same destruction? Is a parent less guilty who would murder a child or one who through neglect allowed a child to starve to death? Do not we see how damaging neglect can be?

GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD NEGLECT

God's attitude toward neglect is quite evident from the passages we read at the start of the lesson. When Israel neglected their worship, their sacrifices, feasts and tithes, God allowed enemy nations to overpower them. The parable of the talents is an outstanding teaching against neglect (Matt. 14:14-30). The servant that was so sorely rebuked had commited no transgression as far as doing what he ought not do. He was guilty of not doing what he should have done. Therefore, he was called wicked and slothful and had what talent that was given him taken away.

Consider the foolish virgins of the same twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. They did not curse the bridegroom. No sin of commission was laid to their charge. They simply neglected to make adequate preparation and in their haste to try to

catch up, were excluded from the feast.

One of the most striking accounts is the judgment scene of Matthew 25. Those that heard the words of welcome were those who had done what they should have done. Those told to, "*Depart,*" were not accused of theft, adultery, lying, etc. etc. They had neglected to do what they ought to have done. Is this not impressive evidence of God's attitude toward spiritual neglect?

There is likely not one of us who cannot relate to this lesson and make application of it. Have we pursued our Bible study as we ought, or even as we have intended, but neglected? Are we faithful in worship or has this been a point of negligence also? Have we neglected the righteous management of our homes and the training of our young? Are there those good deeds that we have planned on doing that we have shoved into the background so long that we are guilty of neglect? What of the sorrowing neighbor we plan to comfort? What of the encouragement we ought to offer somebody? When do we make the visit to the sick, elderly, unfaithful brother or sister? Is it not true that we really have more opportunities to do good and bring glory to the name of God, the Father, than we ever use? For some excuse or another, we persist in neglecting to do what we can and ought to do. This can be disastrous for us.

Let us be persuaded so we will not neglect salvation. We cannot earn salvation, nor work our way to heaven apart from the grace of God and the blood of Christ. We are expected to do certain things. How can we expect to see God in all His glory if we content ourselves to simply disobey through neglect?

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ARE WE READY TO DIE?

Does the thought of death strike you with fear? Does the very consideration of dying seem morbid and gruesome to you? Possibly it does, and maybe for good reason. Possibly you are not ready to die, even though you know it is inevitable. You are not ready because you are not spiritually prepared for death.

Prepared or not, "*...it is apointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*" (Heb. 9:27). Death is as much a part of our existence as life. It is usually true that if we think of death at all we think of it in terms of someone else. But let me insist that consideration of our own death is neither morbid nor gruesome, but realistic and wise. Far more important than how, when, or where we die is whether we are ready to die. Actually, being prepared to die is a matter of life because preparation for death involves living a certain manner of life. It can well be contended that you are not really prepared to live unless you are spiritually prepared to die.

To help us determine whether we think ourselves prepared or not, let us consider the question, "What would you do today, if you knew that you would die tomorrow?" Are you willing to die and face God in judgment as you are at this moment?

TWO WHO SAID THEY WERE READY

There were at least two men, both apostles of Christ, who said they were willing and ready to die, indicating that they considered themselves ready for death. One was Paul. The other was Peter.

Acts 21:10-13: "*And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break*

mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

2 Timothy 4:6-8: " *For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."*

Matthew 26:31-35:" *Then said Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you unto Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise said all the disciples."*

There is a similarity about these statements, but there is also a difference. Both men felt willing and ready to die. The difference was that one had been put to the test at the time he said he was ready, but the other had not yet been tested. Paul had been tested, beaten, stoned, left for dead, plotted against, sick, having laid his life on the line many times in many ways because of his faith in Christ. While the statement made by Peter was obviously made with good intentions and great sincerity, at the time he made it he had not yet been pushed as had Paul. His comment was uttered from zeal and love, but untested. He thought he was ready to die, just as many of us may think so. But is it not true that later, when his faith was tried and he felt his life endangered, he denied the Lord, not once, not twice, but thrice?

Let us not leave this point without recalling that Peter later did meet the test many times over with valiant success.

What qualified Paul to say he was ready to die? May I suggest that there are three reasons. We need to know these reasons so we can truly be ready to die also.

RIGHT RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

First, he was in the proper spiritual relationship with God. There are two spiritual kingdoms. One is of Satan and the other is the kingdom of God, which is the church. John

made the distinction plain in 1 John 5:19, "*We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one.*" Paul noted the two relationships in Col. 1:13 where he spoke of brethren having been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son. In Satan's kingdom Satan is master and we are his servants. Satan is father and we are his children. Satan sets the rules and we follow them.

But Paul was "in Christ." 2 Cor. 5:17 reads, "*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*" When one is "in Christ," Christ is Master and we are His servants. He is the Redeemer and we are the redeemed. He is the Savior and we are the saved. God is our Father and we are His children. This is the relationship Paul had. This is the relationship of every faithful Christian. When Paul addressed Christians in Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, etc. he called them saints "in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1, "*There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus...*" Salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10) and those who die "*in the Lord*" (Rev. 14:13) are blessed.

Before we mention the other two reasons Paul was ready to die, we need to ask, "How did Paul get into Christ?" It was not by physical birth, blood ancestry, or because he was one of the chosen race of the Jews. He was not "in Christ" simply due to his sincerity and zeal, though he had both. He was not "in Christ" because of his own godliness and works of merit of which he could boast. He had not been forced there against his will. He had not entered Christ through some scheme concocted by religious men. He was "in Christ" because he had obeyed the gospel (Acts 26:19). On the Damascus road he believed, and being led into the city, he was instructed what he had to do by Annanias (Acts 9:22,26). He did as he was taught and was baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). What did baptism have to do with entering Christ? Let Paul tell us. "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" (Gal. 3:27). Paul had entered Christ through baptism. See also Romans 6:3,4).

No one can miss this significance. May we illustrate. Should one be outside a room and wish to enter the room, there are several steps he is required to take to accomplish this. But there eventually comes that one final step that takes one from

outside to inside. The other steps are necessary before the final step reaches the goal. So it is in obeying the gospel of Christ to enter Christ. One must hear the Word, believe it, repent of sins, confess his faith in Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ.

Baptism is that step that changes one's relationship from that of a servant of Satan to a servant of Christ (Romans 6:16-18). Baptism is that form of doctrine that saves. The doctrine that saves is the death, burial and reusrrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). We die to sin, are buried in water, and are raised to walk in newness of life. Paul was ready to die because of his relationship to God. He was in Christ.

SEPARATED FROM THE WORLD

Second, he was prepared for death because he had divorced himself from the evil of the world. John wrote, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."* (1 John 2:15,16). Paul said, "*And be not conformed according to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*" (Romans 12:2). James told us to keep ourselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27). It was the love of the world that turned Demas away from salvation back into condemnation (2 Tim. 4:10). In Luke 16:13 Jesus makes it plain we cannot serve two masters successfully. "*No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*"

Paul had given up all worldly gains that were hindrances to his loyalty to Christ (Phil. 3:4;8). Position, honor, power, respect from men were all counted as trash compared with being in Christ.

Not only had Paul given up such things, he had learned to abhor whatever might cause him to be unfaithful to Christ. He urged, "*Abhor that which is evil.*" (Rom. 12:9). Some may refrain from doing evil things themselves, but never really develop the hatred toward sinful things as they ought. While we must love sinners, we must hate sin. David said,

"*Ye that love God, hate evil.*" (Psalm 97:10). The way some live, you might get the idea that they would not enjoy heaven if they were allowed entrance. They would ask, "Where are the dirty shows? When do we dance? Why cannot I tell vulgar stories? Where are my cigarettes and liquor? Who has a pornography magazine? Which was to the gambling tables? Etc. etc."

As Christians grow in the faith of Christ, such things become so offensive to them they learn to hate them as well as refrain from their use. Paul was ready to die because he had severed himself from the wickedness of this world and had come to love what God loves.

A LIFE OF SERVICE

The third reason he was ready for death is because he had spent his life in service to others. The judgment scene in Matthew 25 impresses us with the need of doing good. The Christian life is a life of serving. If we walk in the steps of Christ, we must recall that He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister (Matt. 20:28). *"He that is greatest among you shall be your servant."* (Matt. 23:11).

We are stewards and servants, using what God has allowed us to use and that for only a relatively short while. "*It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.*" (1 Cor. 4:2). Paul realized this and was devoted to serving on the behalf and betterment of others. This sentiment rings clear in Phil. 1:21-26.

"*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor; yet what I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait betwixt the two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, with is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith, that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.*"

Paul said he was willing to die, and ready to die, and for good reason. Having divorced himself from the evil of this world, having lived his life in service to others, being "in Christ," in the right relationship with God, he could look with hope and confidence to that day that awaited him.

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JABEZ

"And Jabez was more honorable than his brethren, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him in sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it might not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested." (1 Chron. 4:9,10).

Second Timothy informs us, "*All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable...*"But we are sometimes prone to pass over certain portions of it as if there was not really very much to be learned from it. We might even to go the extreme of considering some verses dry, meaningless, unchallenging, and not really valuable. To be sure, there are passages filled with more substance than others. Some verses deal with more criticial and significant matters than others. For instance, how do you look upon the genealogy lists found from place to place? They seem to contain long, hard-to-pronounce names that do not impress us. But when we realize each one was a real person in God's plan, a connecting link in the unfolding of the scheme of redemption, even the genealogies that might appear boring take on a profitable meaning. Just remember, each one of us will soon be nothing more than a name of someone who existed but has gone the way of all the earth. In fact, most of us will be totally forgotten in just a few years. Are we to conclude that this means our life is of no profit or significance? We certainly are not so persuaded. Just to prove to you how swiftly even the prominent people are forgotten, how many can name the president of the United States at the turn of the century? How many know the names of your great-grandparents? But their lives were important.

James asks the question, "*What is your life? It is even a vapor than appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away.*"(James 4:14).

IN THE GENEALOGIES

In the midst of the genealogies, we read these two verses of

our text concerning a man named Jabez. He is somewhat of a flower in the midst of the desert, maybe like a single star in the darkness of the night. He stands out with a quality that is deserving of imitation.

Jabez was an Israelite according to verse one. The names of his parents are not known. Being a son of David, that is, a descendant of David, we can conclude that he was of the tribe of Judah. We cannot be absolutely sure of the historical period in which he lived, but it would seem from the other names listed and the length of the genealogy by the time his name appears that he lived after the return from Babylonian captivity.

His name means "sorrowful." His mother said at the time he was named, "because I bare him with sorrow." We can only speculate as to the nature of the sorrow she had in mind. Was it with reference to childbirth, as was told Eve, "*in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children...*" Genesis 3:16? Or was it some sorrow that his mother may have suffered because of the death of his father, or anxiety over providing for the child? It may be that the family had fallen on hard times and was experiencing some peril. Possibly the nation was in peril. Her life may have been unusually endangered in childbirth. Rachel called her child, "Benoni," son of sorrow, and she died at his birth. Jacob later called him Benjamin. Regardless of the reasons behind his name, it can be determined that the joy so often celebrated at the birth of a child was tempered, possibly excluded, at the birth of Jabez. But whatever sorrow marked that event, it was eventually replaced by the joy of a son who grew to a man who walked uprightly.

HIS CHARACTER

The scripture notes the eminency of his character. By comparison with others, he was "*more honorable than his brethren.*" The adversity that was connected with his birth could well have been a blessing in disguise. Adversity often produces more stalwart characters than the softness of luxury and ease. Poverty is no disgrace in and of itself. Neither is it an excuse for doing evil. Hard times often are the motivating forces that develope manliness, discipline, self-control and determination to rise. Some of the greatest figures of history were people who came from lowly birth and poverty

circumstances.

Just what it was that gave Jabez this quality we are not told. Nor do we know in what realm he was so honorable. But whatever it was, the Holy Spirit took note of it and mentioned it to his glory. We are inclined to think that he was deserving of this characterization because of the mind he had concerning things that matter, as is evidenced by further comments concerning him. He may have been a man of learning, inasmuch as the city that had his name was a city of scribes (1 Chron. 2:55). He was a pious man, a praying man, and a man that feared God. Whatever other areas were deserving of commendation, he certainly was commendable in these things.

He was not an idolater as were so many of his countrymen. He was a worshipper of the true and living God. The history of Israel is stained with rebellions against God, but Jabez had respect for God. He realized what James later wrote, how God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). So he directed his petition toward God.

HIS PRAYER

In his prayer he asked God's favor. He asked for blessings that be substantial and lasting. There are many things that one may want that are of no real and eternal benefit, such as wealth, power, worldly honor and fame, earthly success, etc. Such things as that can actually become curses in our lives rather than blessings. But Jabez asked for what is real and genuine. "*Bless me indeed.*" He wanted to live under the care of God. He wanted what God considered best for him. His prayer was akin to the sentiment, "*Thy will be done.*"

"*And enlarge my coast.*" He prays for things necessary to the physical provision as well as spiritual provision. Like Proverb 30:8, "*Give me neither poverty nor riches.*" He wanted enough prosperity to be able to discharge his duties. There is nothing sinful about riches per se. When rightly obtained, properly used, they can be blessings. We do no wrong to seek what we can use to the furtherance of that which is good. We do well to pray that our capacity for doing good be enlarged, not for our glory, but to the glory of God (Matt. 5:16). We should work and pray that our usefulness be multiplied. Surely this is the kind of increase that this man wanted.

His prayer indicated his willingness to combine his requests with his own labors. He did not pray that God do everything for him. He did not pray that God would fight his battles, meet his problems, defeat his enemies, while he sat idly by doing as little as he could and only watching. His prayer was, "*Lord that thine hand might be WITH* (emphasis, JWB) *me.*" He was saying he would do all he could but he leaned on God as his strength. We need to pray for God to do what we cannot do, but use every ability God has already given us as we make our prayer.

HUMILITY

We are inclined to consider Jabez a humble man, who recognized his own limitations, but also recognized his dependence on the limitlessness of God. He accepted what Jeremiah once wrote, "*It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.*" Jabez coupled prayer and work.

Jabez prayed that evil would not grieve him. That is, as the Lord taught His disciples, and as Paul wrote, "*Be not overcome with evil.*" Let us face reality. Evil is very damaging and destructive. It can be a burden in life to the point that it crushes us. We are to pray that we will not be overcome by temptation, but delivered from evil (Matt. 6:13). While facing and overcoming evil can be turned into something strengthening, we ought not seek out confrontations with anything so deadly as sin. The prayer of Jabez was that he might be equipped to face whatever evil that confronted him and that he would manage it successfully. "*Keep me from evil.*" Help me not to sin. Bring not the grief of a transgressor upon me.

The noble prayer of Jabez was answered and "*God granted him that which he requested.*" Is it not comforting and reassuring to know that God hears the prayers of His people and responds in the way that is best?

Jabez prayed a prayer that was in harmony with God's will. His prayer had the right aim, prayed in the right way, to the right One, by one who was "on speaking terms" with God. James 5 tells us that the prayer of a righteous man avails much. The same God that heard and answered the prayer of this rather insignificant Old Testament man, whose entire life is presented in just two verses, is the God we worship and Who has promised to be a Father to us as much as He was to

Jabez.

Yes, Jabez was a man worthy of imitating. The study of his life, as much as is revealed, is a light to us, a guide in life, a word "*for our learning.*" (Romans 15:4).

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EXPECTATION OF THE LORD'S RETURN

Man is religious.Wherever humans are found, they are religious. It may be among the "civilized" nations or among the tribes of the South Seas or darkest Africa , man is religious. Christianity is a religion. But it is a religion that differs from all others because it is the religion that has come from the one true and living God. Such is the message of the Bible. Those who are Christians believe and follow things differently from those of other religions. One of these differences is concerned with the expectations of the Christian. One of these expectations has to do with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The epistle of Second Peter was written in part dealing with the problem of unbelievers and scoffers regarding the Lord's coming again. The contrast of belief by followers of Christ and unbelief is graphically presented in 2 Peter 3:1-13:

" This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

HE WILL COME

Our text reflects the expectation of the coming of the Lord. This is a basic and fundamental element of the Christian faith. Unbelievers cry, "Where is He? He promised to come. Things are going on as before. What about this promise to return?" Peter says that these unbelievers willfully forget something they ought to know and recall. Time is not important to God as to the validity of His promises and the fulfilment of them. A thousand years is as a day and a day as a thousand years. It makes not one bit of difference to God how long it may be before He does what He has promised, but we can be sure He will do as He said. His promises are sure and certain. Everything the Lord has assured will eventually be fulfiled as He stated.

Time is a human concept. We measure according to time, but God does not. God is timeless. We cannot judge the fulfilment of God's promises by our clocks and calendars.

When God has not specified any particular time for something to occur, we dare not think He has gone back on His word because we have set a time limit for Him. There have been those things that God has promised and He set the time for it to occur. When He has done that He always keeps His word. But in this matter of the return of Christ, there is no revealed time that God has told us as when it will occur. But this does not mean, as scoffers imply, that God will not do as He promised.

High anticipation of the Lord's return is still at the heart of His faith or religion. The reason for this is obvious. The eternal salvation of the believer for which the Lord first came to accomplish will be fully accomplished. Remove this expectation and hope from Christianity and man has nothing for which to look forward except perishing from the earth. The Christian faith becomes nothing more than another philosophy and religion. The hope of the Christian would have no limit beyond this fleeting life. It would cease to be timeless, but become bound in time. Faith would be of no eternal benefit, but would be only temporal, and actually of no value with respect to the primary salvation in Christ.

WHEN?

The question is asked, "When will the Lord come again?" We have no way of knowing because God has not told us. Some have proven themselves to be false prophets by assigning dates, talking about the "signs of the times," and other such imaginative speculations that come from the minds of men. Concerning the moment of His return, we know neither the day nor the hour. Christ said He did not even know while He was hear on earth (Matt. 24:36). Do we dare think we know more than He? Peter tells us the Lord will come "*as a thief in the night.*"This means He will come without announcement, unexpectedly. Actually, it is unimportant to know when the Lord will come. "*At what time when ye think not, the Son of man shall come.*"What Jesus stressed was the importance of being ready to meet Him whenever He came.

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT

What did Jesus teach about His eventual return? John

14:1-3: "*Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.*" He said His coming was certain. He did not teach His coming would be soon after He gave this assurance that He would come. He did not teach that there would be "signs" by which men could know His coming was "soon." Men have taken the signs of which Jesus spoke concerning the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem and the signs that forewarned of it have already taken place in the year A.D. 70. But there are not signs indicating His return. The point we want to make, without going too far astray from the main theme of the lesson, is that Jesus promised to return. The matter before us is simply, "Do we believe Him?"

WHAT THE APOSTLES TAUGHT

What did the apostles teach about His return? They also taught it would come to pass. Remember, they were guided into all the truth (John 14:26). We can have confidence in what they taught. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: "*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent* (precede) *them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall be ever be with the Lord.*"

First Thessalonians 5:1-6 warns of the return of Christ. Even though some to whom Paul wrote may have expected the Lord's return in their lifetime, Paul wrote no such thing, but corrected their error (2 Thess. 2:1-7), citing a "*falling away first*" that would come.

The apostles did not teach that the return of Christ was "at hand." The falling away would come. The man of sin would

be revealed. Other things would take place, things that had already begun. Paul indicates he would be taken out of the way first.

Notice Paul's comments in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The dead in Christ shall rise before those living shall rise. The living Christians shall be changed. Together shall they be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Whenever Jesus comes, this is what is going to occur. Jesus will not come until God's appointed time.

CERTAINTY

So we see how Christ and the apostles taught the certainty of the Lord's return. This is the reason for the expectation by the Christian for that event, even though the time is not revealed.

PERSONAL COMING

Scripture shows that the Lord's coming will be personal. The same Lord that ascended is the Lord that will descend. "*This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*"(Acts 1:11). Our expectation will be fulfiled because Jesus said, "*I will come again.*" Someone other than Christ will not be sent in His place.

What will His return be like? It will be like nothing we have or could ever experience. The elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth and the works therein shall be burned up; the heavens shall pass away with a great noise. There is nothing to which we can compare these events.

DEAD RAISED FOR JUDGMENT

There will be the resurrection from the dead. All men shall come forth from the tomb regardless of the kind of life they have lived on earth (John 5:28,29). This resurrection will take place on the last day (John 11:24). Christ will have conquered the last enemy, which is death (1 Cor. 15:26). The judgment that God has appointed (Acts 17:31) will occur. All shall stand before the Lord (2 Cor. 5:10). The kingdom shall be delivered to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). The good and evil shall be forever separated (Matthew 25). What

a day that will be! It will be a day of rejoicing for some! But it will be a day of weeping and gnashing of teeth for others!

Christians now, like Christians of yesteryear, expect Jesus to return and all these things shall come to pass. Peter reasoned, "*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness...*" (2 Peter 3:11). In other words, since all this is promised, does it not make it plain what kind of lives we ought to live? In view of the return of Jesus Christ, can there be any doubt as to the manner of life God expects and that which will be profitable for us? Realizing the certainty, and knowing not when, is there any other way to conclude except that we live righteously? Our expectation makes this imperative. Only a life as a faithful Christian can one be prepared for this inevitable and inescapable event, the Lord's return.

† † † † †

KNOCKING SOUNDNESS

Those who love the Word, their brethren and the spiritually lost, are not blinded to the reality of the drift away from the New Testament that characterizes some brethren betimes. There are those who like to minimize this departure and ridicule anyone who dares to call attention to the digressive trends adopted and the denominational imitations being advocated.

Brethren, when you hear some brother scoff at the reality of liberalism making inroads in the church, you can be fairly certain that he would prefer nothing ever be said about such liberalism. When one begins to criticize criticism, it is most likely that he wants to reserve the right to criticize for himself alone, and much prefers to criticize those who persist in calling brethren to examine all things by the Word. Such a one often becomes aggressive in criticizing brethren for criticizing digression. When you hear brethren berating others who are determined to be sound in the faith, and contend for it, suggesting that those who are trying to be sound must be some kind of Pharisee, legalist, self-righteous, pontifical, sectarian, etc. you can mark it down that he has changed his measuring rod and lost his moorings. Soundness is not something to be ridiculed. (Titus 1:2,9; 2:1,8).

In over thirty years of preaching, I have never heard anybody using the word "liberal" to keep anybody from reading the Bible, as some have charged. But I have heard many faithful brethren urge reading the Bible to keep from becoming liberal.

Broad and general accusations against the church of Christ are often leveled against anyone who is not swept away with the innovations of all kinds and who do not feel compelled to jump on every bandwagon that comes through town regardless of who is driving and the direction it is going. Some have made it a hobby to denounce everyone as a hobbyist if they dare point out doctrinal errors among brethren

Various departures from the faith have hurt the church through the binding of human traditions and opinions. While such has tragically divided congregations within, and congregations from sister congregations, liberalism destroys any reason for having a congregation at all.

Beginning with the Lord and His apostles, every faithful one of which we can read and currently know who has tried to be aware of issues and problems that confront the church is concerned about liberalism. Anyone, be he a self-appointed "scholar" of the schools, a flamboyant crowd-pleasing preacher, or whoever, that would ridicule this threat and danger does not serve the Lord well in doing so.

Those who are alert to such inroads of error do not invent issues, but recognize them in order to deal with them. We can be grateful for such people. Let nobody be intimidated from opposing error by the criticisms of those who feel you should be ashamed to be sound, or are unsound unless you adopt whatever program, project, doctrine or position that they at the moment happen to be propagating.

And let those who seem to think they have some kind of monopoly on love, joy, fellowship, scholarship, wisdom and "know-how" be careful lest they get so "righteous" that they cannot see, being blinded by their own brillance.

Being sound in the faith begins with a desire to be sound and is accomplished by following the Word. Without the desire, the knowledge of the Word, and the resolution to walk thereby regardless of anything and everything, one cannot be sound as he can and ought to be. JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

POST-APOSTOLIC FATHERS

People cite a wide variety of things and other people as religious authority. It is not uncommon to hear men quote ancient documents, outstanding religious leaders of the present and past, as if that must somehow settle matters for all time. The denominational world is heavily dependent upon what uninspired men since the apostles have said and thought.

We should have respect for the wisdom and learning of the past. But we must also recognize the limitations that are incumbent upon all uninspired men, living and dead. Great men of the past had misunderstandings just as people do today. In fact, the Lord warned against following the doctrines of men and human traditions (Matt. 15:9). So much of the denominational world owes its positions to what uninspired men thought.

But let us learn once and for all the standard of authority. God's inspired word is the standard (2 Tim. 3:16,17). God's will, given by the Holy Spirit through inspired men, is now embodied in God's inspired book. If it is not found there, it is not of God.

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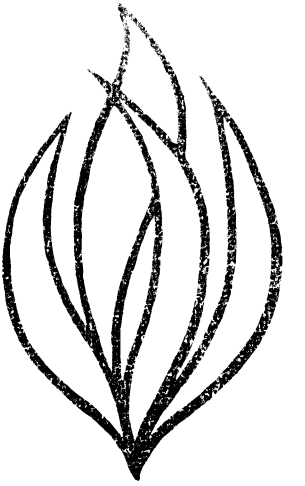

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME II James W. Boyd **NUMBER 8**

DOES IT PAY IN THIS LIFE TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

There are those that say that Christianity is not for this age. Even some who claim to be Christians have said they would not want to be a Christian if there was no heaven. They consider the time and energy expended in being a Christian to be something that simply does not pay. It is not uncommon to hear the phrase, "You cannot get ahead in this world and be a Christian."

Because this attitude is expressed, we need to ask, "Does it pay in this life to serve Christ?" We insist that the answer is an emphatic, "Yes."

In this study we are not concerned with the reward after this life. We most assuredly do not dismiss it. But we are confining our investigation to our existence here and now. There are those that would have us believe that this life is all there is anyway. So our inquiry is, "If this earthly life was all there is to our existence, would it be worthwhile to be a Christian?" Please do not misunderstand. The greatest benefit and reward of Christianity has to do with the next life, not this one. Paul wrote, "*For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give unto me in that day; but not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.*" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

THERE ARE COSTS

Sometimes people do not consider the costs involved in being a Christian. Christ said, "*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?*" (Luke 14:28). There is a cost to being a faithful Christian. Some have started on life's journey with Christ but decided it was more than they bargained and have forsaken Him, thinking it did not pay.

SELF-CONTROL

Let us consider some of the costs involved. There is the

need of self-control, one of the characteristics of Christians listed in 2 Pet. 1:5,6. Self-control, or temperance, was a characteristic of Jesus. The value of this trait is immeasurable in the affairs of this life. Consider for a moment the danger of an airplane out of control, or an automobile out of control. But far worse situations exist when men lose control of themselves. Sometimes the whole world can be adversely affected, such as the madness of Hitler, Stalin, and other barbaric leaders of this world. The Christian must control his lusts, appetites, passions, desires for power, wealth, even control those things necessary to the sustenance of life. How much harm is done all around because of the loss of control over mind, temper, and body?

One who possesses self-control bears no malice toward others, seeks no revenge, but tries to be a blessing to others. It is obvious that life can be miserable for a person, and those around him, when the Christian quality of self-control is lacking. Proverbs 16:32, "*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*"

SELF-DENIAL

Closely akin to self-control is self-denial. Jesus said, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.*"(Matt. 16:24). That which is to be denied is not pleasure, money, etc. It is self. That is, no longer is one most concerned with self and his own will, but the will of the Lord. He makes himself secondary for the benefit of others. His own ambitions and goals can be sacrificed if that is what is the best for the spiritual welfare of others. He must love Christ more than anything or anyone, including self.

Matthew 10:37, "*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*"Loyalty, allegiance is first to Christ before all others, again, including self. We need to self-examine ourselves to know where our primary loyalties lie.

OBEDIENCE

Obedience is a cost to be paid for being a Christian. John

14:15, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" The "well done" to be heard from the Lord will be heard by those who were "*good and faithful servants.*" (Matt. 25:31). Faithfulness demands obedience. Possibly one of the mistaken concepts some have about being a Christian is that somehow they can have a "hit and miss" kind of service and this will suffice as well as faithful service. When we obey a command, just because we think it is reasonable to do so, just when it is convenient, then we have not really given the submissive obedience the Lord expects. We should do what the Lord wants because the Lord wants it. That is the cost of being a faithful child of God. Do we serve God out of convenience or conviction?

Let us briefly sum up the costs involved in being a Christian by saying we must give our lives (Romans 12:1,2). A living sacrifice is what Paul said was the role of service. Is not this what Paul did? (Gal. 2:20). While Paul lived, he served Him. He was willing to die to be faithful. He was willing to live to serve more if God wanted that.

Let us not overlook the fact that choosing to serve Christ means that all hell will be arrayed against you. But to refuse to serve Christ means that you array yourself against the King of kings and Lord of lords. We need not be surprised that the world hates us (1 John 3:13). Jesus said,"*...ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*" (John 15:18).

We have touched on the costs of being a Christian, but have not exhausted them. But this adequately lays the groundwork for asking the question, "Does it pay in this life to be a Christian?" Are there benefits other than the primary one of heaven? Let us consider the following.

BENEFIT OF FELLOWSHIP

There is fellowship to enjoy with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are fellow-laborers in the Lord's vineyard. The help, comfort, encouragement, concern that we extend to each other is one of the most wonderful blessings of life. We are privileged to travel the road of life with those who care for us and we for them. Our brethren, because they have respect for the teaching of Christ, are the best people on earth. Christian friends understand, sympathize, assist, stand with you in truth. What sweet sentiments are expressed in that song, "Blest Be The Tie That Binds." One has written, "If but

two things I could keep, and could retain no other; I want the friendship of my Lord, and then my Christian brother."

BENEFIT OF PROTECTION

As Christians we can know that we are safe from any real harm. We will have trials, persecutions, dangers, disappointments, even betrayals. Temptation shall stalk our steps and we remain subject to physical harm and hardship such as is common among men. But we have a promise that others outside of Christ do not yet have, nor shall have until they are in Christ. 1 Cor. 10:13, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*" It is easier to say than to live, but to get the meaning of this blessed promise, Paul is telling us that we, as Christians, can say, "There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle." That is worthwhile.

Peter asked, "*And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?*" (1 Pet. 3:13). Peter does not promise escape from every pain and threat, grief and woe. But no REAL harm can overcome us if we remain followers of our Lord. If only we could grow and develop sufficient faith in these assurances, even in those matters where we lack understanding, we can be assured that God knows, cares, and will overrule.

Paul said, "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*" (Rom. 8:31). Is not that something of benefit in this life? The Hebrew writer stated in Hebrews 13:6, "*The Lord is my helper and I shall not fear what man shall do unto me.*"What would you exchange for that blessing?

BENEFIT OF PROVIDENCE

We even have the promise of the things God sees we need in life. In that matchless sermon of Jesus (Matt. 6:25-34), we have the conditional promise that if we seek first things first, which means the kingdom of God and His righteousness, His church and His commandments, we shall have God's provision. We believe in the providence of God. We do not contend that we understand it, but He has assured us of it.

We are not promised all we want, or all we may think we need. But in the infinite wisdom of God, He shall see to it that we have provision of the needs of this life. Again, is this not something that makes being a Christian worthwhile here and now? David wrote, "*I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*" (Psalm 37:25).

BENEFIT OF SERVICE

Serving Christ also provides an outlet for one of man's greatest earthly needs and that is rendering service to someone or something else other than himself. We have the joy of service in Christ. We receive blessings by being a blessing. Doing a good deed makes the heart glad. Acts 20:35, "*...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Did not Christ live a life of service? He came to minister (Matt. 20:28). The greatest before God are those that serve. The happiest in life are those whose concern is more on others than on self. We receive such joy, consolation, and benefit in this life by doing the labor of a child of God. Such provides for the human spirit that for which the world longs; namely, contentment, peace, accomplishment, absence of fear and purpose in life.

BENEFIT OF CONTENTMENT

We do not want to leave the impression that we are to become so self-satisfied that we cease to grow and move forward spiritually in this life. But we are urged to be content with what we have (1 Tim. 6:8). "*Let your conversation be without covetouesness; and be content with such things as 'ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" (Heb. 13:5). Paul wrote, "*And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*" (Phil. 4:7). These are benefits enjoyed in this life in service as a Christian.

Christianity is not designed to bring us material wealth, power, social standing in a sin-wrecked world, popularity, etc. It is a sin against God and man to hold out to others such things as the material rewards in this life for serving Christ. Such things are not promised in abundance and supply. In

fact, the loss of such things is a very real possibility if you serve Christ. Many faithful servants have had to abandon all of that in order to be faithful servants. But following Christ pays richly in those things that really matter and that cannot be removed or taken away even if the world ceases to exist.

Does it pay in this life to be a Christian? Obviously, the answer is in the affirmative. We have only noted a few matters that prove this is true. We might add to what we have said, "All this, and heaven, too!"

There is coming an hour when we shall walk the earth no more. We shall face, without dread but with hope, that very definite and personal event. But shall we not have the Lord to walk the valley of the shadow of death with us? (Psalm 23). Jesus said, "*I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.*" (John 10:10). This has primary application to the eternal life in heaven with God. It also has application to life for the obedient child of God even here on earth. Such things cannot be dismissed. It goes to the very heart of our existence both now and forever.

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DENOMINATIONALISM

LESSON ONE

Two lessons have been prepared on this subject. Any "ism" is a danger and a threat to true New Testament Christianity, whether it is Communism, Facism, Catholicism, Atheism, Materialism, or Denominationalism. Christians need to be informed about these various "isms."

There are several hundred religious organizations in our country alone that are called denominations. They exist separately with certain distinctions about each one that sets them apart from the others. Usually, they have different names, characterized by different doctrines and religious practices, governed under varying governmental systems. But each claims to be faithfully following Christ. This confusion is complicated all the more because too many are not even willing to objectively investigate the matter of denominationalism. They are content with what exists.

But we must ask how this religious division compares with what is set forth in the New Testament. Does the will of our Lord condone or condemn denominationalism? Does it make any difference to you?

ATTITUDE TOWARD DENOMINATIONALISM

The attitude of people toward denominationalism varies. Most people who compose the various denominations are unconcerned with the divided state of so-called "Christendom." They accept the status quo. They are content as they are. They really do not want to compare denominationalism with Scripture.

There are some who are concerned about the tragic division and wish it was not so. They consider it scandalous and inconsistent. In fact, many efforts and suggestions have been made to bring about unity.

Some honest and sincere people believe it is absolutely sinful. Since the Scripture presents no divine authority for such division, confusion and frustration, they look upon denominationalism as one of the greatest hindrances to the real cause of Jesus Christ.

But what does the Word teach? Christ prayed for unity. John 17:20,21, "*Neither pray I for these alone, but for them*

also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." We cannot doubt as to what Christ prefers. Jesus also said, John 10:30, "*I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do... and all things that are mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them."* Again, John 10:30,"*I and the Father are one."* Again, John 14:24, "*And the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me."* In John 14:11, "*Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me..."* also compounds the emphasis for the oneness of the Father and Son. From these Biblical citations, the relationship of the Father and Son shows it to be complete unity, perfect oneness. They agree as to teaching or doctrine, practice, plan, intent, purpose, and procedure. There is no indication or insinuation of any contradiction or variance between them. This is presented by Jesus Christ as the standard of unity that He enjoins upon those that would be His disciples.

UNITY VERSUS DENOMINATIONALISM

Is this unity just mentioned characteristic of the system of denominationalism? To ask is to answer as far as the informed are concerned. Certainly it is not. While the denominations exist separate and apart, even contradicting each other, with great disparity as to teaching or doctrine, practice, plan, purpose, etc., there is contradiction against God's will. Denominations exist in direct opposition to the prayer and teaching of Christ regarding unity.

No one can truly respect the Lord's prayer for unity and at the same time be sympathetic toward denominationalism. One or the other must be rejected. It is impossible to accept both.

This is enough already for us to establish what our attitude toward denominationalism ought to be. But note just a word or two from inspired apostles on the same theme. 1 Cor. 1:10, "*Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* Romans 15:5,6, "*Now the God of patience and consolation*

grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Jesus Christ, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Passages could be multiplied with similar sentiments but this is sufficient for the moment.

Note the contrast between the requirement of these inspired statements and the condition of denominationalism. Denominationalism presents several hundred divisions, speaking different things, with different standards and judgments, attempting to glorify God by many ways. But the Scripture teaches one body, with the same message, the same standard, glorifying God God's way and that alone. We could make a lengthy list of the contrasts that result from these basic differences. But such is adequate to prove that denominationalism and Scripture are diametrically opposed.

THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Notice the use of the word "church" in the New Testament. It is used to refer to all who are disciples of Christ, or in a universal sense, such as in Matt. 16:18; Eph. 5:23 . It is used to refer to local congregations as in 2 Cor. 1:1; Romans 16:16 . It is used to refer to brethren in assembly (1 Cor. 11:18). It is never used to refer to a denomination, and no denomination can qualify for the ways that the Bible uses the term. No denomination claims to be all of the disciples of Christ, but the church consists of all of them. No denomination is simply a local congregation or brethren in assembly. The word "church" cannot be used with reference to a denomination in any sense of Biblical usage. Consequently, no denomination can Scripturally be called the church of the Bible.

WALLS OF DIVISION

Actually, denominations represent walls of division among religious people. The only wall of partition that God ever authorized was the Mosaic Law that was between Jew and Gentile, and that was for a limited time and a specific purpose. It is now broken down in Christ (Eph. 2:14;16). Is it not presumptuous for men to erect and maintain other walls when God has broken down the only one that He ever ordained? Certainly, those responsible for acting so contrary

to His will shall be held accountable in the day of judgment.

We cannot avoid undenominational, non-denominational, anti-denominational attitudes and teachings of inspiration. Were the apostles classified according to denominational identifications? Was Paul a member of one religious body and Peter another? Was John yet a member of a third? Does not the asking of such questions point out the absurdity of denominational divisions?

The early Christians, members of the church that belonged to Christ, were one body. Paul urged, "*There is one body...*" and defined that body as the church (Eph. 1:22,23). There is no more than the one approved of God. Those in that church in Bible times taught, believed, practiced the same religion. No denomination can claim that those Christians belonged to their sectarian group. They were neither Catholic nor Protestant, but Christian. They wore no human names and followed no human creeds. The apostles were distinctively different from and contrary to the very fundamental foundation of denominationalism

SEED PRODUCES ITS KIND

Is it not evident to all that seed produces after its kind? If you sow corn, you reap corn. If you sow wheat, you reap wheat. You cannot sow beans and reap potatoes. The Word of God is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11) and that seed cannot and will not produce anything other than the church, the kingdom of God. When people today sow the same seed that was sown in the hearts of people of the first century, it will produce the same result; namely, Christians, no more and no less. To produce denominations one must sow other kind of seed, indeed, the tares of sectarianism. Sowing just the Word of God will never produce a denomination, and sowing the seed of denominationalism cannot and does not produce the New Testament church.

Denominationalism does have its defenders, and we need to turn our attention to the efforts made to defend it. We shall continue to consider these defenses in the next lesson also.

ONE BODY

It is admitted that denominationalism represents a multiplicity of religious bodies, but since they all recognize

Jesus Christ as the one head, it is argued that they exist with divine approval. It must be agreed that the Bible teaches there is but one head of the church (Eph. 5:23). But it also teaches there is but one body (Eph. 4:5). To affirm that Christ is the head of more than one body has the absurd connotation of Christ having more than one bride, inasmuch as the church is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23). Those who support denominationalism need Scripture to prove that recognition of Christ as the head of the church dispels the anti-Biblical contention for many brides and many bodies. The fact is that there is no Biblical authorization for the existence of any denominational body. There is nothing that teaches that the Lord's church is composed of many differing bodies.

It is said that Jesus authorized the existence of denominations in John 15 on the subject of the vine and the branches. But such a contention is easily refuted when one reads the passage and sees that the branches are individuals, not denominations. No denomination even existed until several hundred years after the church was already in existence. How could the church have been composed of something that was not in existence? The "*ye*" of the passage refers to a "*man*" and not some religious organization that was to appear on the religious scene many years later.

DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES: DO THEY MATTER?

It is said that the matters over which denominations differ are of no consequence but are merely non-essential factors. Concerning what is essential, it is said they are united; namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Bible is God's Word.

This is an admission of division, and the matter now is focused on the nature of the division. The argument is based on the false premise that all that is necessary to be a Christian is to believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and the Bible is God's Word. Even on that basis, denominationalism runs aground because the avalanche of liberalism into denominations has placed even those basics in suspect among them. But the denominations do not even preach the same plan of salvation. Their worship is different. The moral principles they uphold vary. Are these things of no

consequence to unity? Can each one say they follow Christ and at the same time be going off in different directions in the matters on which Jesus and His apostles have spoken and written? Who has the right to present themselves as sufficient authority to declare the things taught by the authority of Jesus to be unimportant and subject to being set aside? We possibly need to ask, "Just who is going to be God?"

2 Timothy 3:16,17, teaches that the Scripture is verbally inspired, God-breathed, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient. Just who has the power and right to dismiss any portion of the Scripture as not important in the purposes for which God gave it? Christ taught His apostles to go and teach what He had commanded. Did they do this or did they teach as they pleased? Were they not guided by the Holy Spirit in their revelation? Did not Jesus promise the apostles that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance what He had taught? (John 14,15,16). How does one set aside the words of Christ when He said, "*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things whatsoever I have commanded you?*" This proves that simply conceding that Jesus is Christ is not all that is necessary to be pleasing before Him.

ARE THEY JUST DIFFERENT ROADS?

Some members of denominations contend that we are all going to the same place, heaven, but just are traveling different roads, or different denominations. It is granted that there are some places one may reach by going a number of ways. But the burden of proof rests upon those who contend you can go to heaven any number of different ways. Christ is the way (John 14:6) and He has not given man a road map with any number of roads, all leading to the same glory in heaven, leaving it up to man to choose whatever may please man. Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1:10). The way that leadeth unto life is strait and narrow (Matt. 7:14). One problem that defenders of denominationalism will find insurmountable is to find Biblical support for the idea that there are many ways to heaven and we can take our choice. To state that and to prove that are two very different things.

Does it matter what one believes and practices? Some say it does not, just so long as you are honest and sincere in what you believe and practice. But when put to the test, even the most ardent denominationalists will shy away from that view.

Can one be honest and sincere and be an infidel? Surely he can. Are Buddists, Mohammedans, etc. honest and sincere in persecuting the Lord by persecuting His church? Does it matter that they repudiate Christ altogether? Was not Saul of Tarsus honest and sincere in making havoc of the church? Did that matter? Sincerity and honesty alone does not account for sufficiency in any realm of life. People have been honest and sincere and mistaken about the condition of their automobile and been killed. They have been honest and sincere in thinking themselves healthy only to find unexpectedly that they would soon die. Would poison harm a person who took it sincerely thinking it was vitamins? Neither honesty nor sincerity are sufficient in matters religious. While it is necessary to be honest and sincere, we must also be right before God. What you believe and practice does make a difference.

CAN WE SEE IT ALIKE?

We hear the wail that people are following the same Bible but we just cannot see it alike, hence the denominational divisions. Keep in mind that the Bible is God-breathed. In that Bible is the demand for unity and condemnation of division. Does God give us a Bible that calls for unity but also a Bible that cannot be understood so that we must divide? We must see that such a contention and defense for denominationalism is to place the blame on God for the confusion and division. It is not that people cannot see the Bible alike, anyway. The problem is that many are looking at it through denominational creeds, catechisms, prayer books, manuals, confessionals, conventions, councils, clergymen, etc. etc. and getting distorted views of it. Of course, many are not looking at it at all because they go by their feelings and subjective notions. Too many are like those of whom Paul wrote in Romans ten, who were more concerned about establishing their own righteousness rather than God's righteousness. Therefore, they have refused to submit themselves to God's righteousness. People can become so wedded to their denominational ties that even the Word of God is rejected when in conflict with the denominational teaching.

† † † † †

DENOMINATIONALISM

LESSON TWO

All sin carries with it a curse. Denominationalism is a transgression of the will of God and that is precisely how John defines sin in 1 John 3:4. There are few blights on the religious scene that have produced such devestation as the concept of denominationalism. Instead of preaching to the world the purity and simplicity of the gospel, the world has been subject to division by messages of perversion and contradiction. Instead of exalting before the world the New Testament church as revealed in Scripture, and the unity for which the Scripture calls, denominationalism has produced such a chaotic set of circumstances that it is truly doubtful that things shall ever be unraveled and corrected.

ADVANCED ATHEISM

Denominationalism has encouraged infidelity and atheism. In the prayer of Jesus for unity that we studied from John 17:20,21, one reason that Christ prayed that His followers would be one was so the world would believe that He was the One sent by the Father. Unity would provide such a powerful force on the side of truth and encourage people to believe. Whereas the division that results from denominationalism has the very opposite effect, the prayer of Christ is being ignored. There is no doubt but infidelity has grown and some have considered atheism the fastest growing religious idea in the world today. Whether that be true or not, denominationalism has cultivated the ground that is very receptive to the seeds of unbelief. Division repels rather than attracts. Intelligent people ought to be able to see that Christ is either divided, hopelessly confused, or He has nothing to do with denominationalism. It is the latter. How people can contend that the contradictory and divergent ideas put forth are of Jesus the Christ is beyond reason. It is demeaning of Christ to suggest it. Young people are exposed to all sorts of destructive skepticism of modernism and materialism, especially in the higher educational institutions. The inconsistent and irrational pleas of denominationalists are easily overturned by the learned skeptics. As a result, the young come away just as skeptical and knowing nothing of

the true church. Their meager faith is destroyed.

WASTEFUL

Denominationalism is also the producer of such waste and unnecessary duplication. Consider how many millions of dollars are spent on just building and maintaining meeting-houses. In some cities you find a church building in nearly every block. None of them are full and the expenditure to keep them operating is beyond calculation. But everybody has to have their own church that suits them. So we have all of this duplication and waste. With millions dying without ever having heard the name of the only Savior, religionists are spending millions upon millions keeping up the individual denominational machinery. Would it not be more profitable that the money be spent spreading the gospel rather than keeping up something of which the Bible never speaks, but condemns? The waste of time and talent in addition to the monetary waste only makes denominationalism all the more abominable. Each church with its own literature, preachers, programs, promoting their distinctive denomination; of a truth, those who promote and condone such a thing shall have much for which to answer before God.

DIVIDED HOMES

The religious division created and nurtured by denominationalism contributes to division of homes and families. Keep in mind that the home is a divine institution brought into being by God. But no denomination has that distinction. Yet, these human organizations have done their part in causing strife and division in the divinely given home. Seeing how the strength of any nation ultimately rests in the strength of the home, the basic unit of society, cannot you see how denominationalism is an enemy to the welfare of every citizen? Many marriages fail because there is no agreement on the matter of religion, with each determined to go his or her own way, according to the dictates of some denomination. The harm done to children and the frustration and confusion planted in their minds is seldom overcome. With father going one direction and mother another, what is the child to think? It is not uncommon that he thinks the whole affair of religion is worthless and harmful and he gives up on God altogether.

Denominationalism contributes to such thinking.

CAUSE SOULS TO STAY LOST

We can now say with confidence that the greatest tragedy of denominationalism is the loss of precious souls. Regardless of how moral, honest and sincere those involved in denominationalism are, they are giving their time, money, energy and thought to that which cannot save but will cause millions to be lost in hell. "*Every plant which my heavenly Father planteth not shall be rooted up.*" (Matt.15:13). Nothing is surer than the fact that the Father never planted denominations.

What has caused denominationalism? What keeps it alive? The cause can be traced back to the apostasy from the true church and the divisions that have resulted from men trying to either reform or bring into being a new and improved church. Every denomination that has, does, or will exist will do so without Biblical authority. It is caused by a departure from the word as the all-sufficient guide, and the unwillingness of people to bow and submit to the authority of God, creating what they want and like rather than following what God teaches. It is the exaltation of men, human creeds and such like, above Christ.

TRADITIONS OF MEN

People are so prone to hold to traditions that they will not abandon them even when it is shown to be contrary to revealed truth. They hold tenatiously to what ancestors may or may not have done and believed. They blindly follow religious leaders in whom they have placed their confidence. Rather than searching the Scriptures to learn what is so, they ask men or turn to the writings of men. They formulate their beliefs accordingly.

Jesus said, "*But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.*" (Matt. 15:9). Any doctrine that is more or less than what God through Christ has taught is either too little or too much. Man's malcontent with God's Word lies at the root of the problem.

There can be no compromise with religious error. When Paul met error he withstood it and would not give place to it for an hour (Gal 2:5). Compromise always produces

something other than the truth. Truth is not man's to negotiate, but to propagate. We are not to obtain unity at the sacrifice of truth, nor maintain unity on the plain of compromise. Unity is to be sustained in standing for the truth. The plea, "I like it and I see no harm in it, others are doing it, what is wrong with it, etc.," are nothing but mouthings of those whose heart is not wedded to the Lord's will but who seek their own way. We cannot have what some call "unity in diversity" in those matters where God has spoken. We cannot have unity without having Biblical authority for what we say, do and believe. When we step outside of His authority and begin to add to and take from His will we shall inevitably have division.

THE ONLY CURE

The only cure for this religious malady that has wrought so much havoc is to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (1 Pet. 4:11). The goal is not merely to have union. You can have union in a sack with dogs and cats, but where is the unity? Union is not necessarily the unity for which the Lord prayed. The idea of agreeing to disagree is not the oneness of the Lord's mind. "*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*" (Amos 3:3). The pious but misguided "tolerance" that some advocate does not cure the disease. While every man has a right to his own beliefs, it does not follow that his beliefs are right. Christian toleration does not grant error the right to be accepted as being just as beneficial as accepting the truth. God will allow all people to "do their own things" if they wish. But God does not promise to approve and accept just anybody and anything except on His conditions and according to His will.

Charles Spurgeon once wrote, in his commentary on Psalm 18:49, "Too much politeness to traitors may be treason to our King." We agree with that sentiment.

The only solution is the divinely given one. Romans 15:5 suggests the correction as well as the prevention of division; namely, "*according to Christ.*" Everything must be according to Christ. Col. 3:17 commands, "*Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of* (that means by the authority of, JWB) *the Lord Jesus.*" There must be Scripture for what we say, do, practice and uphold in religious matters. As one old and poorly educated man once said when

answering why he did not accept mechanical instruments of music in worship, "Thar ain't no Scripture fer it." He was not learned in the language, but he sure had a grasp on the Biblical principle of truth.

NO FELLOWSHIP WITH DENOMINATIONS

When and if people will discard all authorities except, "*Hear ye him,*" then the chaos and division of denominationalism will fade into the history of man's rebellion against God. People can march under the same banner and be united in the cause of Christ. But not until each one is willing to get in step with the Master and hear and heed His directions can that be possible.

Meanwhile, we cannot fellowship denominations since they are not of God. The unfruitful works of darkness are off limits to those who would submit to Christ and be faithful to Him (Eph. 5:11). We cannot and will not bid Godspeed to those who teach other than the doctrine that belongs to Christ (2 John 9-11). We will continue to expose, oppose and dispose of the fallacies of men in attempting to uphold denominationalism. We must be persistent, consistent, and proclaim "*the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.*" (Acts 8:12).

† † † † †

LOST AND FOUND

" Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentence."
(Luke 15:1-7).

When something or someone is lost it captures the interest and attention of everyone who knows it. If some person is lost in a forest or in the mountains, some airplane that has strayed from its course, a ship at sea, the nation and sometimes the entire world becomes aroused. People get very concerned over the loss of certain treasures, a ring, their purse, even little things that are possibly not so valuable but useful. The concern and attention remains "until the lost is found."

We need to be reminded of the significance of the two words *lost* and *found*. These two words hold the place of center attraction in the passage under consideration.

Luke, chapter fifteen, contains three parables taught by Jesus emphasizing the tragedy of loss and the joy of finding. We read of lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. That which prompted these parables was a criticism and murmur against Jesus because He was demonstrating concern for the lost. The groups with which He was concerned were publicans, sinners, and the Pharisees and scribes. The first were considered infamous by their countrymen because they collected taxes for the Roman Government. Sinners referred to the notorious transgressors of God's Holy Law. The last group was composed of the complainers, the self-righteous,

who feared they might be polluted and defiled if they gave consideration for the lost. They considered the interest Jesus showed in them to be disgraceful.

The purpose of the parables is not just a single thought. They brought to light a shameful attitude of the murmurers, and they deserved rebuke. They set forth man's likeness to the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. They emphasized the seeking love of God. They underscored the great need of man to respond to that love and to rejoice when there is the salvation of one that was lost.

The parable of the lost sheep begins by showing the inconsistency of the murmurers. If they had lost something, would they not seek to find it? Would not they rejoice upon its recovery? This is precisely what Christ was doing; namely, seeking the lost souls. Yet, they condemned Him for doing what they themselves would do in lesser matters. These Pharisees and scribes were religious leaders of the people. They might be considered as shepherds of the flock. They, more than anyone else, were supposed to have love and compassion for others. Yet, there was no manifestation of love nor intent to recover the loss, nor utilize means to effect that recovery.

THE SHEEP

This parable also pictures people like sheep. *"All we like sheep have gone astray."* (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus is the good shepherd (John 10:14). Lost men and Jesus are the principal characters of this parable. In the behavior of the sheep, we see a likeness found in people who become separated and apart from God. Through careless wandering, the sheep was lost. Those that care for sheep tell us that sheep will go about, seldom raising their head to note where they are, or the direction they are going. Gradually, one becomes removed from the flock and is lost. How much like sheep are people! Through weakness, ignorance of truth, negligence, evil influence of others, and failing to exercise self-examination, men find themselves estranged from God. As Paul quoted, " *There is none that doeth righteousness, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23). The lost sheep are like every person at some point in life, not escaping the ravages of sin.

THE LOST SHEEP

Let us stress the point that the sheep was *lost.* Possibly, you have experienced the panic, fear, and frustration of being physically lost. Children often feel lost when they are not able to immediately see their parents. But such loss is minor compared to being spiritually separated from God. While it might be conceivable that a sheep that has strayed might wander back on his own, this is not so with men. Men cannot find their way back to God alone and by themselves. They cannot even accidentally find their way back. *"Oh, Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23). The force of sin is to take man further and further away from God. Man is dependent upon the Shepherd to find the way back.

THE SHEPHERD

Not just any shepherd will make the effort to find the lost sheep. Hirelings will not put forth such effort, especially in the face of danger. The good shepherd is watchful for his sheep. Though he had ninety and nine sheep that were safe, he was keenly aware of the one that was lost. He had sorrow over its loss, and had compassion. This kind of concern was reflected in the attitude of Jesus as He looked over the city of Jerusalem and said, *"Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."* (Matt. 23:37) How Jesus sought the salvation of the people there, but they would not come to Him. His mission was to save, but, in the language of Jeremiah 8:20, *"The harvest is past, the summer ended, and we are not saved."*

Is it not obvious that the shepherd of the parable was persistent and untiring in his search? He stayed with it "*until he find it.*"He never gave up as long as there was hope; he kept looking.

Just how long should we strive to win a soul? We know there comes a time when attempts to save might become as "*casting pearls before swine.*"We know that there comes the time when it is proper to "*shake off the dust of your feet.*" But we need to be careful lest we discontinue our efforts to

save prematurely. One more attempt may be just the one that will turn the situation around. Jesus has not ceased to plead with people, nor should we. He will plead until He comes again. Shall we do anything less?

THE FOUND SHEEP

There was rejoicing when the lost sheep was found. And there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. If men rejoice over finding an animal, how much more shall Christians rejoice with the angels in heaven in the salvation of a soul? It is worth mentioning, that there have been evidences that some do not really care that much that souls are saved. They find no real joy over salvation for another. It has been seen upon the response of someone to the invitation of Christ to be baptized into Christ or to be restored, for some to leave the assembly rather than remain for what is to follow because they must go somewhere for their pleasure, or get to the cafeteria line first, or they have just become tired and wanted to go home. What a sordid display of unconcern for the lost!

Why all the joy? Because the one that was lost is found. Ninety-nine were safe in the fold, but now all are safe. If that one soul was your own, or that of some loved one, we might better comprehend the joy at repentance.

Are we not impressed with the tenderness of the shepherd? The shepherd searched and found the sheep, laid it on his shoulders, and brought it back. He did not harshly drive it back. He bore the burden himself. This is the way Jesus has recovered us. He bore our sins in His own body on Calvary (1 Peter 2:24,25).

The hero of the parable was the shepherd. While there are many lessons we can learn from the implications of these parables of the lost being found, we must place heavy emphasis on the shepherd who loved, cared, used his energies, tenderly and lovingly, sacrifically, to recover the lost. While some were criticizing our precious Lord for His concern over the lost, He shows us the right way. He will receive sinners upon repentence. For this glorious favor extended to sinful man, we cannot be too grateful. What if it were otherwise? Wherein could we be saved?

† † † † †

COMMENTS RECEIVED ABOUT *A BURNING FIRE*

"I was able to obtain a copy from my son and was very impressed. Please put me on your mailing list." Texas

"Thank you for including me on your mailing list." Ohio

"I have read your paper... and believe it is an excellent publication." Kentucky

"Your sermons are true to The Book." California

"My limited vocabulary hinders me from fully describing the benefits of your publication. Most of us need a burning fire to keep our lights aglow." Tennessee

"It would be a blessing to me and the church ... if you could send your publication over here." Malaysia. It is sent. JB

"I thank you very much. I appreciate the great work you are doing for the Lord's kingdom." Tennessee

"I have been receiving your publication since the beginning and thoroughly enjoy it. Do you have back issues?" Illinois. Many have asked for back issues, but I do not have them. I print just enough to cover the current mailing list to try to stay within the finances available. JB

"My life has been richly blessed from each article that I have received. Let me thank you for this excellent work." Arkansas

Thus far, only one person has asked to be removed from the mailing list, and did not tell us why even then. JB

One missionary said he has translated some of the lessons into the language of the people with whom he is working. JB

"I have found the articles to be enjoyable and have gained valuable insights which I have used in some of my sermons. Having only a few years experience as a preacher, I find it very helpful to see how others have dealt with and applied various passages of the Bible." Alabama

"I have just finished reading 'Who Represented You At The Crucifixion.' I just wanted to let you know how much of an impression it left on me." Tennessee

"May God bless you in sending these edifying sermons..." Georgia

"We have received it from the first issue and appreciate the lessons very much." Arkansas

"May God bless you with a long and fruitful life." Mississippi

"I am very much impressed by this publication and am receiving much help from it."Tennessee

"You will never know how much encouragement this

booklet has been to me in remaining faithful." Washington

"I have been reading your issue. The lessons are so encouraging." Georgia

"We appreciate the good work you are doing." Tennessee

"We have heard you on radio many times although we have never met you. But we hear your voice with every line in this fine sermon paper." Tennessee

"Thanks from a young preacher of only eight months." Mississippi

"We are enjoying them very much as we are shut-ins. We do much reading." Tennessee

"I enjoy reading it. I am interested in learning as much as possible and your lessons are so plain." Missouri

"These are the best lessons I have ever read out side of the Bible." Georgia. Some are extravagant, but their words are appreciated. JB

"I am a student at ... A fellow student let me borrow a couple of his issues...After reading a couple of your articles, I would like to commend you for the plain way that you present the truth. Please add me to your list." Florida

"I have had opportunity to examine copies.. I was impressed by the soundness of this material and would like to receive it." Oklahoma

"Thank you so much for sending it to me." Texas

"I was in the home of brother ... and he brought to my attention your periodical. Would you please put me on your mailing list?" Idaho

Such comments have meant so much to me in this effort. Thus far we have been blessed in being able to produce it without charge. I have every intention on keeping it that way.

A few days ago a brother who served as an elder in a congregation where I preached some years called me and asked if he could help me with this booklet. What a help he was and is! Because of him, I was able to secure an electric stapler, and that really has been a wonderful piece of equipment for me. Several others have contributed toward the mailing expense. Others have sent notes of encouragment and contributions. A few congregations have helped. I just hope and pray that the Lord lets me live to produce this booklet for the next fifteen or twenty years. I have that much material already.

May God bless each reader, and my thanks to all. JB



JAMES W. BOYD

TWINS

There is a concept in education that is called "academic freedom." The bottom line is that a teacher can teach whatever he sees fit, unlimited, free to go whatever direction he chooses, without being obligated to contend for any particular view.

In religious circles there is a concept called "unity in diversity." It is the twin of "academic freedom" in that it allows one to believe and practice whatever one wishes without restrictions. Right and wrong fade away under the glare of "agreeing to disagree" and still calling it unity.

Academic freedom is part of the thinking of most college professors whatever their field. This is true of Bible professors also. Having received training in denominational seminaries, and holding to "academic freedom," it is not difficult to see how the church is being poisoned and the source of it.

Digressive and liberal teachers in Bible departments have ruined any usefulness they once had toward Biblical soundness. The deadly twins have captured this arena.

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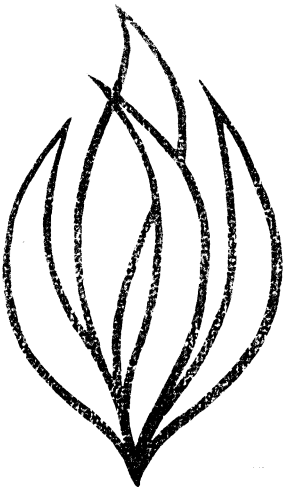

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME II James W. Boyd **NUMBER 9**



AM I YOUR ENEMY?

"Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:13-17).

This epistle was authored by the Holy Spirit and written by Paul to the churches of Galatia. One of the primary purposes was to root out false doctrines and Judaizing teachers that were leading brethren to return to Judaism. They taught that men could be justified by the law of Moses and that the Jewish ordinances were binding upon the Gentiles. They either did not understand or would not accept the fact that the old law had been taken away at the cross of Christ.

Paul describes the Galatian brethren as being removed from the truth to a perverted gospel (Gal. 1:6,7). They were bewitched, that is, deceived and misled (Gal. 3:1). They were turning again to the weak and beggarly elements from which they had been delivered and were entering again into bondage (Gal. 4:9). He asks who had hindered them from obedience to the truth (Gal. 5:7), warning that to follow such teaching would be to fall from grace (Gal. 5:4).

WAS IT IN VAIN?

Even though they had once commended Paul and would have done most anything for him, Paul was now afriad he had bestowed labor upon them in vain (Gal. 4:11). Were they turning against Paul and the message of truth he had preached to them? Were they going to be offended because he now warns them of the encroachments of apostasy? In short, he asked, *"Am I become therefore your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"*

THE NEED FOR REBUKE

There are at least four things Paul's question suggests. One, there are times when God's children need rebuking as

well as those who live in the lost world. Do we not read about Simon (Acts 8), and did not Paul have to rebuke Peter (Gal. 2:11,14)? We read where John spoke sharply regarding Diotrophes (1 John 3). Paul wrote to Timothy, "*Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others may also fear.*" (1 Tim. 5:20). There can be no doubt that Christians in error need rebuking as much as anybody. Failure to rebuke sin and false doctrines in the church is to invite and allow apostasy (1 Cor. 5:6).

POSSIBILITY OF MAKING ENEMIES

Paul's question also suggests the possibility that preaching the truth to brethren may make enemies, even of former friends. Such a reaction is not to be considered unlikely, especially from those who have never been friends. Moses stood before Pharoah and warned of the plagues that would befall Egypt. Pharoah's response was one of intense anger and threat. Elijah condemned the sins of Jezebel and Ahab and his reward was that he was pursued and had to flee for his very life. Did not John the Baptist lose his life by being beheaded because he made enemies by telling the truth? Ahab once said, about the prophet Micaiah, "*I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.*" (1 Kings 22 .8). Isaiah 30:10 reveals to us the attitude of Israel when rebuked. "*Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits.*"

No, we are not to be surprised that there are some that consider us enemies when, motivated by love, we expose the error they preach and practice. John wrote, "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" (1 John 3:13). Jesus had said, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*" (John 15:18). "*And ye shall be hated of all* men *for my name's sake.*" (Matt. 10:22). We doubt that Paul even asked the question out of an idea that resentment toward him could not result from his teaching. It was asked to show his readers the inconsistency and sinfulness of rejecting him because they did not accept the truth.

SOME OPPOSE THE TRUTH

Third, there are those who will oppose the truth. Why would anyone want to oppose God's truth? Some do so out

of ignorance. Peter told the Jews, "*And now brethren, I wot* (know, JWB) *that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.*" (Acts 3:17). Paul explained that he once did things contrary to Christ out of ignorance (1 Tim. 1:3). The Gentiles were alienated through ignorance (Eph. 4:18). We are not to suppose that ignorance justified or excused wrongdoing. There is difference between explaining why a thing takes place and giving justification or excuse for it. Acts 17:30 reads, "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*"

But some oppose the truth knowingly. They do not want the truth, nor love the truth. "*And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*" (2 Thess. 2:10). Jesus explained, John 3:19, "*Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*" Yes, some are even said to be willfully ignorant (2 Pet. 3:5). It is because they want their own way rather than the way of God. (Romans 10:2,3). You could not expect people of that frame of mind to consider anyone who spoke the truth to be considered as a friend.

TRUTH MUST BE PREACHED

The fourth implication of Paul's question is that the truth must be preached, even if it does make enemies for the messenger. To fail to preach the truth because of the fear of making enemies is to offend God and be guilty of hideous compromise and disloyalty to truth. Many quit following Jesus because of the hard sayings He taught (John 6:59-61,66-69). In Matthew 15:7-9,12,13, we learn the Lord's attitude toward those who would be your enemies because you stand for the truth. On that occasion Jesus had spoken words of rebuke to some of His hearers to such an extent that it even disturbed some of His followers. He was reminded that the Pharisees were offended at the things He said. Did Jesus run after them to apologize? Did He indicate He might have been too hard? Did He wish He could have recalled the time and done differently? Indeed, not. He stated, "*Every plant which my heavely Father planteth not shall be rooted up.*" (Matt. 15:13). He admonished, "*Let them alone.*" He did not infer disinterest in those who recoiled under His teaching. But He did not suggest in the

slightest way to retract truth in order to win those who would not accept it. He only emphasized the seriousness of not conforming to the truth.

In 2 Timothy 4:3,4, Paul outlines the steps into apostasy. "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables.*" First, sound doctrine was no longer what was wanted, nor would it be tolerated. Next came the securing of teachers who would teach and preach whatever the hearers wanted, with little to no regard to what was needed. They would turn away from the truth and follow the error of fables and false doctrines. Their teachers would "scratch their itching ears" with pleasant words to please them rather than sound words to save them.

My beloved reader, I have seen individuals and even leaders in congregations behave just exactly like Paul said those who are heading toward digression and leading others into apostasy would act. They may have once stood for the truth, but they relaxed and gave in to a spirit of compromise and digression and proceeded to go more and more out of the way. They chose preachers and teachers that conformed to what liberal and digressive members wanted and rebuked the sound teaching they needed. It is no strange and unheard circumstance today for someone to become your enemy, indeed, a vicious and vindictive enemy of faithful brethren because faithful brethren would dare tell them the truth.

CAN WE LEAVE OTHERS ALONE?

Some have contended we should "preach the Bible and leave other people along." This sounds so pleasing that some have acted stupidly and even given such a contention credence. But let's put that kind of advice to the test. Try preaching, "*In the beginning God...*" and you will make enemies of atheists, evolutionsts, humanists, etc. Teach "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*" and you will offend every idolater on the earth. Preach "*Without faith it is impossible to please him*" and you will offend the moralist who thinks "being good" is sufficient. Try preaching, "*Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins,*" and you will reap the wrath of nearly every denominationalist around you.

" *God created..*"just aggitates the evolutionsts. Preach giving as prospered and forsake not the assembly and you will arouse the aire of many brethren. To contend that Jesus is the Son of God will anger the skeptic. If you say man is more than a material being but is also an immortal soul, you will lose the friendship of the materialist. Can you imagine how offended are the Buddists, Jews, Mohammedans when you say, as Jesus did, " *I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). On and on we can go. There is no point of truth from God's book that presently comes to mind that we would not have to shelve if we followed the ill-conceived idea to simply preach the Bible and leave others alone. If you preach the Bible you cannot leave anybody alone.

Are we to adopt a position like one foolish command given to one army, "Men, shoot to win, but do not dare hit anybody." Maybe we are too much like the preacher who said he refused to preach on the subject of hell because he had too many friends there. It is a tragedy of my preaching years thus far to note that many brethren will defend and follow error and those who promote it, but get angry if any effort is made to tell them the truth. Especially is this true if the error comes from colleges, professors, and prominent brethren who are big crowd-pleasers.

But we must have the attitude expressed by Paul. " *For do I now persuade men or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*" (Gal. 1:10).

DUTY TO PREACHING

All Christians have at least two serious duties toward all preaching that cannot be set aside. One is the duty of the preacher to teach the truth. He ought not at anytime be deliberately offensive, abusive or unkind. But he must be firm, send forth a certain sound, realizing he shall receive the heavier judgment (James 3:1). He must say with Paul, " *Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.*" (1 Cor. 9:16). He must preach, and he must preach the gospel.

There is the duty of the hearer. Jesus warned, " *Take heed therefore how ye hear.*" (Luke 8:18). We are expected to search the Scriptures to see whether or not the preaching we are hearing is the truth (Acts 17:11). Energy is better put to

use in refraining from anger when the truth strikes home, but should be spent in study and prayer with determination to obey what the Lord teaches. Let each one examine his own heart to see the extent he is willing to learn and follow the truth.

If you hear what is not the truth, discharge your duty to let it be known that it is not the truth. Let the one who has proclaimed the error have the advantage of having that called to his attention. No man is infallible and beyond making mistakes and reaching wrong conclusions. On the other hand, when we hear what we have not properly considered heretofore in the light of the Bible, and if it offends, let us make it inoffensive, not by railing against the messenger of truth or becoming the enemy of the one who has loved us enough to tell us the truth. Make the truth inoffensive by conforming to it and adopting it for your own way of thinking and behaving.

Some in Galatia were about to make a serious blunder, possibly some had already done so, by counting Paul as an enemy because he cared for their spiritual welfare enough to tell them the truth they needed, even when it might not have been the most pleasant and popular thing to do.

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MODERN EVILS

A man about to be executed for crimes said, "Take part in Sunday school and church activities. Forsake drinking, smoking, narcotics, road houses, etc." He said those were the things that led him to where he was.

Some people do things only to learn too late of the tragic results of doing them. Some measure everything, "What's wrong with it?" rather than, "What's right about it?" Everyone knows it is better to prevent problems than even to cure them. Paul urged those who follow Christ to deny "*...ungodliness and worldly lusts... live soberly righteously and godly in this present world.*" (Titus 2:12). It is a good rule to follow, "When in doubt, don't." Know what you are doing and be aware before you ruin your life, and the life of others who will be affected and influenced.

As we consider what are called "modern evils" we are not really considering anything new, but the old vices presented in different ways. We intend to show why some things commonly practiced are wrong before God.

SELFISHNESS

You may think the first evil we mention is not all that bad, but there is the terrible vice of selfishness that is so common among so many so often. You may say that everybody knows that, but everybody does not act like they know that. One has commented, "He who lives only to benefit himself confers on the world a benefit when he dies." The selfish person is miserable and unhappy, but is disliked by others, makes no worthwhile contribution to life, allows others no place in his life unless he can use them, because he seeks his own and with himself only is he concerned.

Christ and selfishness cannot live in the same heart at the same time. One or the other takes control. We must surrender self to be a Christian (Matt. 16:24). Are we not to follow Christ? Was not His life one of selflessness rather than selfishness? What do you ever do that is totally for the benefit of somebody else?

The only known cure to selfishness is love. "*Love seeketh not its own.*" (1 Cor. 13:5). Love is seeking the other's highest good. We cannot fulfil the law of Christ if we are selfish. Selfishness is a major contributing factor to spiritual disaster.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Without a lengthy and exhaustive commentary, let us see what is wrong with drinking alcoholic beverages. We might be surprised how many "Christian" people have compromised with the devil in this matter. "*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*" (Prov. 20:1). "*Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babblings? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpant, and stingeth like an adder.*" (Prov. 23:29-32).

Drinking alcoholic beverages has taken such an enormous

toll. Fathers are without jobs, health has been lost, respect destroyed, finances ruined. Mothers with broken hearts, in death's grip, are shameful before her children. Children are fearful, insecure, lack provisions, emotionally disturbed. Homes have been wrecked and lives lost. Bodies are broken, property destroyed, jails filled, crimes committed, innocent suffering. The nation is drained of resources. There is not one good thing that can be attributed to the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Even the stretching of the imagination cannot produce any good. But the hell and havoc it creates is beyond measure. What fools people are who touch it!

One sad story tells of a young man who committed a crime while under the influence of alcohol. His parents were distraught and wished to see him. But he would not consent to see them and explained, "My parents would drink. My first drink came from my own home. I thought I could handle it but I got into a fight and killed a man. I blame myself, but I also blame my parents for having it around. I never want to see them again."

This young man is not altogether correct to lay blame only on his foolish parents. They certainly share the blame. He too was to blame, but not just he and his parents. What of the people who produce it, distribute it, deliver it, sell it, make their living from it? What of those of government who allow it and tax it? What of the so-called Christian who will not fight against it?

Alcoholic beverages when consumed takes away a person's understanding and good judgment. It destroys his physical and mental capacities to the extent that even the first drink makes him a danger to himself and those around him. That which harms our bodies is a sin. We cannot glorify God with alcoholic beverages within the body. Just be reasonable an apply the "fruit test" to drinking alcoholic beverages. There is no moral, financial, recreational, physical, emotional, or any other kind of defense for it. But in its path it leaves death, disease, divorce, destruction, degeneracy and damnation. It is inconceivable that anyone who loves Christ would have that first word or attitude of acceptance toward it.

As for the social drink, we had just as soon contend for moderation in lying, adultery, stealing and murder. There is no such thing as being moderate in doing what is evil. Evil is itself immoderate.

A little girl was properly taught by her parents that grown

people ought to have more sense than to drink. Being in the company of an adult who was drinking, the little girl asked, "When will you be old enough to have enough sense not to drink?"

PETTING AND DANCING

Our young people especially need to know what is wrong with petting and dancing. There are standards of conduct toward other people that Christians must respect. Petting is defined as physical contact for pleasure, arising from sexual desire, arousing sexual emotions and sensitivity, but less than intercourse. It is true that the relationship between the sexes, privately and publicly, married and unmarried, is freer, less restrained, more openly practiced and expressed than in any time in our history.

Again we know a tree by its fruits. Petting places an unnatural strain on the boy and girl because their passions are aroused and it is sinful for them to satisfy them outside of marriage. The tensions are not released and thereby become an impairment to physical and emotional health, as well as spiritual welfare.

There is the loss of self-respect that is difficult to recapture. One begins to consider himself or herself as cheap and used. Reputations are established and the character of the petter is compromised. Passion is often confused for love. Petting breaks down moral restraints and there is the inclination to "go further" with each petting experience. Too often petting has been the prelude to illicit intercourse, unwanted pregnancies, disgrace and unbearable burdens. The human resistance can be torn away until anything goes.

Unfortunately, many young people have been deceived into thinking that everybody does it, that it is the only way to be accepted, that it is the thing to do. "How else can you know if you are compatible?" is the deceptive seduction to petting and more. Petting is exciting and the destruction involved is too often overlooked until things get beyond what was ever intended.

Christian young people should avoid situations and company of those who use each other for selfish gratifications. Christians should work at being pure and untarnished upon entrance into marriage. When one truly loves another he will not push for such things that will cause

sin. The scars of regret have been carved into many young lives that will remain throughout life because they were not forewarned of the evils of petting or paid no attention to the warnings they received. But there is forgiveness.

LASCIVIOUSNESS

Regarding petting as well as dancing we must concern ourselves with lasciviousness. This has long been a problem and has become so widely practiced that even many Christians now are repulsed by the condemnation of the modern dance which is lascivious. Those who engage, invent, design and promote the modern dance have no qualms about the purpose and intent of such dancing. They readily admit its sexual connotation and intent. It is usually the worldly-minded "Christian," the ambitious parent who wants their child to be popular, that is heard to defend it as innocent. But they do not deceive those who really know and who objectively consider the matter.

Lasciviousness is the exciting to lust. Reveling is defined as dancing. That which is intended to arouse and partially satisfy the sex drive outside of marriage is lasciviousness. This defines dancing exactly. People may claim it is their love for music, recreation, etc. But take away the partner of the opposite sex and what happens to the dance? The suggestive movements, the flirtatious holding of another's body, the embrace of the partner, such would readily be recognized as evil without the accompaniment of music. Putting such things to music does not make evil righteous. Dancing is designed to arouse sexual sensitivity and assist in the upswing of passion. It is petting set to a tune.

We have never known in over three decades of preaching the gospel of anyone in the church who was a defender and practioner of dancing that demonstrated any real spirituality in their lives. They are too worldly-minded to be considered a Christ-like example. Those who have been the dancers of our acquaintance have been those who sought worldly praise, community acceptance, popularity, and are the compromisers of truth time and again. Their fruit reflects the level of their thinking. But cannot we dance at home under proper supervision and a chaperone? Supervising and chaperoning sin does not make it right. We are to keep ourselves "*unspotted from the world.*" (James 1:27), which no dancer

can claim for himself or herself. We are not to be fashioned according to this world as Paul has taught in Romans 12:1,2. The fact that Scripture makes little impression on some does not negate the Scripture.

Scripture teaches that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19). That may not deter some from these sinful practices, but it does inform any and all who do so that they cannot please God in that thing. For one who truly wishes to follow Christ, these things will not be allowed in life. The continual encouragement of the cheap familiarity between the sexes is one of the most common and openly committed sins of our day. But it remains off-limits to the child of God.

GAMBLING

For this lesson we will consider only one other modern evil, and that is gambling. What is wrong with gambling? It is popularized today and winners of gambling adventures become instant wealthy people sometimes and celebrities in the nation.

But we must realize that it is still against the law in most places. It is not justified by the thrill of chance, win and lose, the cleverness nor wit of gamblers, etc. Gambling is not the way God teaches us to acquire our wealth.

We are to work. Children can inherit from their parents. But the principle, "No work; no eat," is the Biblical way. In gambling one does not give value received, nor is there the equitable exchange that is true is fair deals with others.

The influence of the gambling world, the neglect of priorities it causes, the excesses it produces, the surrounding evil associated with it, all condemn the practice. Born of idleness, seeking something for nothing, this habit-forming vice has brought nothing but ruin countless of times. Yes, many racketeers have exploited the gullible and naive gambler to his personal and material gain. But he has done so through trickery and deception. Gambling is more at home with the underworld than in God's kingdom. A gambler is productive of nothing but is a parasite living off of others. We are stewards of that which God has commited to our care and we have no right to deliberately expose it to needless waste and loss.

There is a difference between handling your material trust

and meeting misfortune, and taking a risk with it that is strictly for unearned gain and thrill and possibly lose it. The work ethic has become distasteful to many and they seek a fortune without it. But that is not God's way nor is it an honorable way of discharging the trust as a steward. With some, it is but an escape mechanism from reality that they are too cowardly or spiritually impoverished to face and overcome. Gambling has been, is, and will ever be, a corrupting influence in every community that allows it and such will it ever be upon humanity.

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THE CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN

Verse by verse study is a valuable approach to the Scriptures, especially when you are trying to learn the sequence of events and steps involved in the process of conversion. Considering each verse we can learn what was done, when it was done, and why it was done. In our text, which is Acts 8:26-40, we shall take note of a man who, when we first meet him, is out of Christ. We shall see how he became a Christian. Actually, what we are considering is the old, old story that is forever new.

"And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert." (verse 26). Two characters and one instruction are recorded in this verse. The angel of the Lord, a messenger from God, and the man named Philip are mentioned. Philip was directed to a certain locality, a deserted area. This instruction reminds us of the divine instruction given to Annanias to go to Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9. It is also like the voice of God directing Peter to Cornelius in Acts 10. The purpose of this instruction is rather obvious. It was to get the preacher and the one needing the message together.

"And he arose and went..." (verse 27). The readiness of Philip to obey the directions given is something to behold. It is not revealed that he was informed why he was to go, but

only to go, and he went. Such is always the way of those who are submissive to the will of God.

THE MAN FROM ETHIOPIA

The rest of verse 27 and 28 reads, *"And, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet."*

Another person is introduced to us, the man in the center of the story. He was a man of authority. It is not presumptious to assign him the trait of wisdom, understanding and responsibility. He was obviously trustworthy because to him the charge of the treasury had been delegated.

The man was a long way from home. Why was he on this road? He had been to Jerusalem to worship, and he was on his way home again to Ethiopia. As he rode, he read Scriptures. From these comments there is much that we can know about this man.

He was either a Jew or one who had been proselyted to the Jewish faith because Jerusalem was the place of Jewish worship. Being from Ethiopia, it is possible, though not certain, that he was a man with black skin. But more important than his skin color is the fact that he attended to his religious duties. Neither distance, danger, hazards or hindrances kept him from doing as he ought to do. He may well have been alone in holding the religious convictions that he held. But no matter about that, he was faithful to them.

It is also obvious that he was a believer in God who worshipped God. The God he worshipped was the true and living God of heaven. Furthermore, he was a student of God's Word. He had so many good qualities that many today would say he was already a saved man at the time that we first meet him. There is no question but he was a good man in many respects, but he was in a state of spiritual disaster because he was not yet in Christ where salvation is (2 Timothy 2:10). The very fact that Philip was sent to him to preach the gospel is irrefutable evidence that this good man was yet lost because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). He needed to hear it. It made a difference what he believed and what he did.

PHILIP JOINS HIM

"The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." (verse 29). Was the Holy Spirit involved in the conversion of this man? Yes. What did the Spirit do? He did not go directly to the lost man to save him, nor even to reveal unto him how to be saved. The Spirit sent the preacher of God's Word to this lost man. Of course, the message the preacher would preach would be the message the Holy Spirit revealed. Philip, upon receiving this second direction, could now know that his presence on the scene had to do with the man in the chariot.

"And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?" (verse 30). Again, with willingness to obey, Philip approached the chariot and overheard this man reading from the Old Testament prophet, Esaias, or Isaiah. He asked the Ethiopian a question. Why this question? He asked in order to learn how much of what he was reading he comprehended.Did he know what the passages involved were teaching? For Philip to teach this man what he needed to know, Philip needed to know how much this man already knew. Philip needed to know to what extent the man had already progressed toward obeying the gospel.

The answer of the Ethiopian is most interesting. *"And he said, How can I except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him."* (verse 31). This tells us that the Ethiopian wanted to know the truth of the Scriptures. He wanted help. He had a teachable mind. It was open to being convinced and convicted of the truth.

If the Ethiopian had before him the book of Acts as we do, he would have been able to discover the meaning of the passage without Philip. But all that was available to him at that time was the word of Isaiah without sufficient information that he needed for complete understanding. In the early days of Christianity people were taught by men who were inspired of God. The message they taught is the message of the Old and New Testaments. We do not need inspired men today because we have the revealed and recorded inspired Word. But the Ethiopian did not have all of that and so he needed this inspired man to guide him.

PHILIP'S SERMON

"*The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth; in his humiliation his judgment was taken away; and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.*" (verses 32,33). That which the Ethiopian was reading is what we identify as Isaiah 53. From this passage the Ethiopian could know that someone was to suffer, but would not complain. Someone was to endure humiliation and receive no fair trial. There was none who would attempt to vindicate him or proclaim his worthiness. In fact, he would be forsaken and his life taken from him. He could learn all this. But he could not yet know of whom the prophet was speaking or why all this was done.

Philip used that as his opening. "*And the eunuch answered and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this, of himself, or some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*" (verses 34,35). Philip knew the prophet was not speaking of himself, but of Christ. Please notice the subject of Philip's sermon. He preached "Jesus." Everything that was taught the Ethiopian was a part of preaching "Jesus." He did not teach some theory, philosophy, doctrine of man or some opinion of the theologians and scholars of the day. He preached "Jesus." He did as Paul said, "*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.*" (2 Cor. 4:5). This was the same sermon preached by Philip to the Samaritans. "*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.*" (Acts 8:5). Concerning the preaching of Paul again, Acts 9:20, "*And straitway he preached Christ in the synagogue, that he is the Son of God.*" Although there be some who would deny this truth regarding Jesus Christ, this is the truth that the inspired men of the first century preached when the opportunity was afforded them to preach.

PREACHING CHRIST

What could Philip say when he preached Christ? He could teach that Jesus was Deity, with God in the beginning, in His pre-incarnate state. He could cite the many Old Testament prophecies concerning His coming, then His birth by a virgin.

Somewhere, he would want to include in the preaching the confessions and identifications of Christ as was done by John the Baptist, then the life of Christ, including His miracles, signs, wonders, doctrine, forgiveness of sins. There would be remarks about His baptism, being tempted in the wilderness, His transfiguration. Eventually, there would be His rejection by the Jews, being betrayed by Judas, the mock trials, beatings and agony, and the death on the cross, and after that, his burial. But that would not end what could and should be taught. One cannot preach Jesus without preaching His resurrection, appearances after His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, and that He now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. There would be included the establishment of His kingdom, the church, the plan of salvation, and the promised coming of Christ again at some time, and with it the judgment of the world and the sentencing by God of all people into their eternal abode of heaven or hell. All these things are a part of preaching Christ. When one preaches the Bible as the Bible is given, rightly dividing the Word of truth, he is preaching Christ, because the Bible is centered around Christ, the Savior of man from man's sins. While we do not know what all might have been declared on this occasion, from the study of the Scriptures we know what all must be included to preach the "whole counsel of God" and to preach Christ.

REQUEST FOR BAPTISM

"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water, and the eunuch said, See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (verse 36). We ask, "Where did the Ethiopian learn about baptism? What had been taught that would have provoked him to want to be baptized? Where did he learn about water baptism?"

He did not get this from the prophet Isaiah. An angel had not come to him to reveal it to him. He had not received this from his Jewish faith. He had learned about it from Philip as Philip preached Jesus. Therefore, we can be confident that preaching Jesus includes preaching baptism in a way that makes the hearers who believe the message want to be baptized, and to be baptized right away. While some leave out baptism, others deny it is important. Still others baptize sometimes many weeks after the decision to be baptized is

made. When God's man preaches Jesus, people who believe it want to be baptized in water, and do not want to wait. You can listen to some preachers today and never hear a word about water baptism. But this man heard about it, and desired to respond to it.

The Ethiopian's question, "*What doth hinder me...?*" implies that there was possibly something that would have made it improper for him to be baptized. There was the possibility that he was not yet a proper candidate for baptism. Something has to precede baptism to make it as it ought to be. What was it? Did he believe? To be baptized without faith is to only get wet. Obedience to the divine command to be baptized must come only after one believes. Furthermore, it follows the making of the confession that one does believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Philip answered the question this way, *"And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*(verse 37). See the harmony that exists between this event and the teaching of Paul in Romans 10:9,10. *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* Why confess that God raised Him from the dead? Because that is the evidence God gave that Jesus was His Son (Rom. 1:4). That is one of the many evidences, the climatic evidence, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

A BAPTISMAL SCENE

We have a word picture of a New Testament baptism. *"And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip that the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing."* (verses 38,39). Sometimes people talk about the "mode of baptism." Friend, baptism expresses the mode. To baptize means to immerse, plunge beneath, submerge, bury. Sprinkling and pouring are not baptism. Why will not people be willing to accept the meaning of the word? But even if one did not know the meaning of the Greek word *"baptizo"* or

baptize, just look at what happened and you can tell what baptism involves. BOTH went into the water. BOTH came up out of the water. While BOTH were in the water Philip baptized him. This procedure is unnecessary in sprinkling water on a person or pouring water on his or her head. Men will have to ignore what Scripture presents to them to escape the truth that baptism is a burial. In fact, Romans 6:3,4 and Colossians 2:12 explicitly tells us that we are buried in baptism. What further evidence in the matter does one who trusts God's Word needs to know to realize he must be immersed?

Two final questions are in order. When did the Ethiopian rejoice, before or after his baptism? It was after his baptism. He did not rejoice before baptism because he was not saved until he had obeyed baptism. But once he had obeyed, little wonder that he would rejoice. Now he was in Christ (Gal. 3:27). He had been baptized into the death of Christ where His blood was shed (Rom. 6:3,4). He had been baptized into the body, which is the church (1 Cor. 12:27). He was raised to walk in a newness of life, having been born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5).

WHAT DENOMINATION?

Our last question is "What denomination did he join?" We are not trying to be facetious, but to learn the truth. He joined no denomination. There were not any to join. He was added, however, to the church like those who had done as he did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:47). He was not saved by faith, then rejoiced, then baptized to join some denomination. What he did to be saved was precisely and simultaneously what he did to become a member of the Lord's church.

This is that which gospel preachers have preached down through the ages. This is that which people have done when converted to Christ since Pentecost. It can hardly be made plainer than the account of the Ethiopian of what one must do to be saved.

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CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptism and of laying on of hands, and resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permit." (Hebrews 6:1-3).

There is not agreement among Biblical students as to the meaning of the *"principles of the doctrine of Christ."* Some have considered them to refer to the primary steps of obedience to the gospel, the elementary principles of the gospel. Others have considered it a reference to the Jewish system that was the prelude to Christianity, typical of the faith of Christ. There is certainly an element of truth in what is said but it seems to me that the specification that the principles are of Christ's doctrine would lead us to believe the first rather than the second position.

Regardless of which position one takes, and this does not suggest that both are right (both cannot be right), the theme under consideration is not changed. The admonition is to leave the former things, the first things, the things already passed, in the sense that you press on to something more, something of greater maturity in Christ. There is the call to *"go on unto perfection,"* that is, to completion, wholeness, fulness, maturity. The writer is urging Christian progress and growth. In the context of the book of Hebrews where some were being threatened by apostasy to go back again into Judaism, the remedy for apostasy and the need they had was progress and growth in Christ.

Chapter five had contained a rebuke that the time had already come when they ought to have been teachers but were still babes and not capable of receiving the meat of maturity that ought be expected of them (Heb. 5:12-14). We cannot escape being impressed with the admonition to progress.

We live in an age that not only is characterized by progress in a variety of ways, but very rapid and startling progress. In the lifetime of one generation men have gone from horse and buggy transportation to riding to and from the moon in a rocket ship. Who can measure the marvelous advances and

progress in medicine, science, electronics, and agriculture? There is a never ceasing and persistent push for improvement and progress. To be sure, some things men might have labeled progress are in reality regression and digression. We have heard the phrase, "You've come a long way, baby," with reference to the accepted conduct of women and much of it is nothing more than the adoption of the sinful ways of the world. That is not progress. One might debate whether covering the farmlands with cement and asphalt is always progress.

But the purpose of this lesson is to recognize the need for Christian progress and ways of determining if we are making any.

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN PROGRESS?

Just how would you define Christian progress? Sometimes we can get a hold on things by discovering what it is not. Christian progress is not to be confused with social progress in society. Climbing the "social ladder" may be the ruin of people, not progress. Improvement in social conditions might reflect Christian progress, but again it might mean the pushing aside of the way of Christ to accomodate what men want more than what they need. Some consider the advanced freedom in drinking, dancing, adultery and such like as social progress. They consider God's restrictions on conduct as oppressive. They confuse liberty for license.

FINANCES?

Financial progress is not necessarily Christian progress. It is a travesty against truth when men preach that coming to Christ will solve your money problems, will get you a better house, better job, better car. Such a materialistic "come on" is offensive. Christ did not die on the cross for men to have more and more of that which perishes.

Many make financial progress in sinful ways. Riches and the coveting of them can damn the soul (1 Tim. 6:9-11; 17-19). Riches were certainly a hindrance to the rich young ruler of Matthew 19. Jesus told him to go and sell his possessions, but loving them as he did, he went away sorrowful. In his case, financial reverses would have been progress.

The rich fool of Luke 12 allowed his riches to blind him to the needs of his soul. Financial gain was not progress for him.

It is not wise for individuals, nor congregations, to necessarily conclude that they are making progress that God wants just because their financial condition may have improved from a material point of view.

EDUCATION?

In our day when there is such emphasis on secular education, one might mistakenly conclude that intellectual progress is Christian progress. True enough, Jesus grew in wisdom, and we consider that intellectual progress. But who would deny that there are highly educated "fools" who even deny the existence of God? One of the marks of the higher educational institutions of our time is the atheism that it propagates on campuses. Earthly wisdom often makes people think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, even think more highly of themselves than they do of God. Unless the will of God satisfies their own reasonings from earthly knowledge, they reject God in favor of what they have learned in school. That is surely not Christian progress. Just here we would warn brethren, that the trend toward the idea that one is unfit to preach unless he has a college education will be the ruin of the church. So many "wise-guys" do not know the Bible and come back from their schooling, often from semanaries and schools of denominationalists and skeptics, spewing out their new-found wisdom that offsets the truth of God. A man might well be sound and faithful even though he has attended such schools, but the possibility that he is tinged and stained with the liberalism and skepticism poured out in such places is deadly and great. Arbitrarily determined degrees do not make one fit for the pulpit. We better not go that path or we shall digress rather than progress.

FAME AND POPULARITY?

Worldly fame and popularity may be considered progress to some. We once had an elder to advise us to abandon certain positions of truth that were offensive to some brethren of the more liberal stripe, and he suggested if we would that we could preach for the largest congregations in the

brotherhood. That was his distorted and twisted idea of progress. Who would want to sacrifice his soul by compromising the truth just to preach in some lucrative and famous pulpit? God have pity on such people.

NUMBERS?

But the rage of the age is numbers. If we can increase in numbers some are sure that is Christian progress. But not necessarily so. We see some brethren doing such strange and unscriptural things to get numbers. The gadgets and gimmicks that characterize denominations have invaded the brotherhood. Numbers seem to be the name of the game. If it gets numbers, it must be all right. Where do people get such concepts? We don't always know, but we do know such does not come from the Scripture. Increase in numbers may indicate progress, but not always.

Well, what is Christian progress? First, let us make some general statements, then be more specific.

FAITH

Christian progress is growing in faith. The apostles petitioned, *"Lord, increase our faith."* (Luke 17:5). The Bible speaks of weak faith (Rom. 14:1), little faith (Matt. 6:30), great faith (Matt. 8:10), obedient faith (James 2:20-26). Surely, the greater the faith, the greater our progress. Faith comes by hearing and heeding the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

LOVE

Christian progress means growing in love. We show love by obedience (John 14:15). Love is seeking the other's highest good. It reflects a denial of self and doing what is best, even for our enemies.

KNOWLEDGE

Christian progress includes growing in knowledge. 2 Peter, chapter 1, lists many qualities in which we are told to grow, adding them to our characters. 2 Peter 3:18 teaches us to grow in grace and knowledge. Knowledge of the things of

God does not just happen. It takes study (2 Tim. 2:15). Christ urged men to *"learn of me."* This is growth in knowledge. Knowledge is even more desirable than zeal, because zeal without knowledge can be deadly (Rom. 10:2).

There are other ways we should grow but now let us turn our attention to some very usable measures that will help us determine whether we are making progress. First, consider the congregation. Are we teaching more people the Word of God? After all, this is the primary work of the church. Are our efforts effective? Do we relieve the needy for which we have responsibility? Are we assisting more in the spread of the gospel in other areas? Are the members spiritually stronger, living better lives, homes more stable, young people more Christlike? What is the influence in the community of this congregation? How do we react to the congregational privileges of worship, service to others, Christian labors?

INDIVIDUAL PROGRESS

What of each one individually? As the individuals go so goes the congregation because the congregation is composed of individuals. While an individual is not the congregation, the congregation is dependent upon the individuals involved. What kind of literature do we read? What comes into our homes via television? How much Bible knowledge do I have and what am I doing to expand that knowledge? Am I dependable and faithful to the worship services? Am I known for being one of good works like Dorcas? If people around me only knew of Christ from observing my life, what sort of picture would they have of Him? If you were prosecuted for being a Christian, would there be sufficient evidence to convict you? Is my word reliable? Is my speech pure? Are my habits such that Christ would approve? Am I forgiving? Do I look for opportunities to reflect the spirit of Christ? Who will be in heaven because of me that otherwise would not be there? Many such questions are appropriate and relevant in determining Christian progress, or the lack of it.

We all may be prone at times to compare ourselves with others. We might pick out somebody that we know is falling short and feel pretty good in the comparison. Why not compare yourself with the most active, knowledgeable Christian you know? Better yet, compare with the One who is the standard, Jesus Christ.

There are some who have been members of the church for years who have never pressed forward from the initial things regarding Christ. Some have not even outgrown their sinful ways. Some have made great progress and it is evident in their lives. Some have had further to come than others and have had a harder fight to grow than others. The devil had a stronger grip on their lives from the start. Their sins, which were many, have been forgiven and they are growing and making real Christian progress. But we all must make progress.

We are mindful here of the comparison between the publican and Pharisee of which we read in Luke 18. The Pharisee had every opportunity for real spiritual growth. He was surrounded by those who professed godliness, even though they did not possess it. He thought himself acceptable and prided himself in his goodness, not realizing his wickedness. But the publican knew he had a long way to go. He was humble, submissive, dependent on God rather than on any righteousness he could claim. But he was the one that made real progress.

There is such validity in the statement, "It is not altogether where you are that counts, but also in the direction you are going." Sure, it matters where you are. But which of the two had you rather be; one who was strong but growing weaker, or one who was weak and growing stronger? Progress then is made when we are drawing nearer and nearer in Christlikeness. Our target is heaven and our example is God's Son. As we draw toward Him we can be confident that real Christian progress is our blessing.

† † † † †



JAMES W. BOYD

MISQUOTATION

It is a serious matter to misquote others. But to misquote Scripture and make it appear to teach what it does not is a most serious violation. Some misquote God as if nobody will ever know better. If we would "*search the scriptures*" we would not be misled by anyone who would misquote it.

We read an article citing Romans 1:17, using quotation marks, saying it read, "justification is by faith alone." This is false. That teaching is not found anywhere in the Bible. That salvation depends on man's faith is repeatedly taught and no Bible student would question that assertion. But to say that Scripture teaches salvation by faith alone, and have the audacity to put such a remark in quotation marks as if that was what the Word of God said is downright dishonest. Salvation is not by anything "alone" because God has included many components in His plan to save man.

Most people would resent being misquoted. We wonder what God must think when men assume the right to publicly or privately misrepresent the Word of God. A basic requirement to being a Christian is to be honest. Let us take "*all the counsel of God.*"

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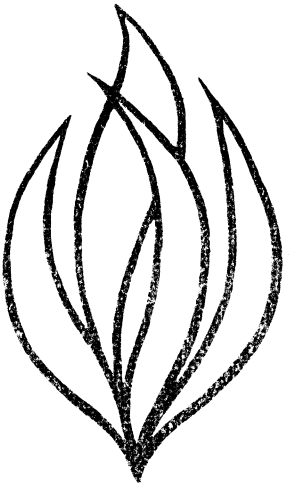

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME II James W. Boyd **NUMBER 10**

Why Agrippa Was Not Converted

Let us first consider Acts 25:13-26:32. The text is too lengthy to include in this writing, but one should read this passage before proceeding in the lesson. It is the complete record of the appearance of the apostle Paul before Festus and Agrippa, and the sermon preached to Agrippa as he made his defense against Jewish charges against him. In this record we have Agrippa saying, *"Almost thou persuadeth me to be a Christian."* He said this after he had the rare privilege of hearing the gospel preached by Paul. He is admitting that it would not take very much more to convince him that he, too, needed to be a Christian. This is very likely the same situation of many people today; that is, almost but not altogether, persuaded to be a Christian.

OPPORTUNITY LOST

It is a sad thing when a person has the opportunity to become a child of God and for whatever reason or excuse refuses to do so. Those who live and die outside of Christ suffer a three-fold loss: (1) They suffer the loss of the best life one can live while on earth. (2) They suffer the loss of heaven, being prohibited from entrance therein. (3) They suffer the torment of an eternal hell because of their rebellion against God. In view of this, we are made to wonder why Agrippa, in fact anyone, would not become a Christian.

Who was Agrippa? According to Acts 25:13, he was a king. His territory of rule was east and northeast of the Sea of Galilee. He was of Idumean origin, a member of the Herod family, a very important family in New Testament events. This family, though not Jews, had adopted the Jewish religion, or at least appeared so. There was a political party called the Herodians that was strongly nationalistic that supported the Herod family. These supporters hoped for independence from Rome through this family. Actually, the Herod family ruled by the appointments from Rome.

This Herod family had been very antagonistic against Christianity. Agrippa's aunt, named Herodias, was the adulteress that was condemned by John the Baptist. His

uncle, Herod Antipas, had ordered the beheading of John and was the one before whom Jesus once stood and suffered humiliation. His father Herod Agrippa I, killed James to please the Jews, and had Peter imprisoned for the same reason. This Herod died suddenly while allowing himself to be praised as a god. It was his great-grandfather, Herod the Great, who was extremely ruthless and bloodthirsty that caused the slaughter of infants in the Bethlehem area at the time of the birth of Christ. He had two sisters that hardly were commendable. One of them, Drucilla, was married to Felix who sought to get Paul to bribe him to obtain a release. The other sister, Bernice, was oft-married and was strongly suspected of living in an incestous relationship with Agrippa even when Paul preached to him. She was present at the time Paul was before Agrippa. So their record in upholding righteousness was not good at all. Nominally, they upheld Jewish laws, but they were wicked, immoral, and bloody people. They upheld the Jews' religion in name only, more for political reasons than any other. Therefore, they were bitterly opposed to the way of Christ.

WHAT AGRIPPA KNEW

What did Agrippa know about Christ? Before one can be a Christian he must hear. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Hearing precedes faith and obedience. Agrippa could have known much about Christ from three sources. One, he knew of him through the Old Testament prophets. *"King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest."* (Acts 26:27). This meant he could know that a Messiah was promised, would be born of a virgin, would be of the house of David, would be born in Bethlehem, would suffer, die, be entombed, but raised from the dead. He could know He would ascend into heaven, would be made King of kings, and that He would come again. All these things are mentioned in Old Testament prophecy regarding the Savior from Abraham's seed. Not only could Agrippa know these things, Paul said he believed them.

He could know of Christ because of Christ's own ministry and fame. Acts 26:26, *"For the king knoweth of these things, before whom I also speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was*

not done in a corner." The life, works, teachings of Jesus were widely heralded throughout Palestine and surrounding areas. His fame had spread rapidly. Multitudes knew of Him and followed Him. This was not a secret mission of Jesus. Agrippa knew all about it. He could know that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of which the prophets had spoken.

He could also know of Christ from Paul's teaching. Paul preached Jesus to this man. This was why Paul was compelled to stand before him. Paul was a prisoner, brought to Caesarea from Jerusalem because of Jewish accusations related to his preaching. He had not been sentenced, only accused. He had violated no Roman law, only Jewish custom. Felix had tried him and found him guiltless. Festus held him because Paul refused to be tried before the Jews. To escape certain death at the hand of the Jews, Paul had appealed unto Caesar as a Roman citizen. Agrippa was visiting Festus and they discussed Paul's case. Agrippa asked to hear Paul. There was the need to find some reasonable accusation to level against Paul. Paul's defense before Agrippa was mostly a proclamation of Jesus as the Christ. As Jesus had warned, the apostles would stand before royalty and the poor. Paul did both.

When Paul had opportunity to speak he related how he once opposed the faith of Christ, like Agrippa. He told of his conversion and turning from persecutor to preacher. It was for his preaching he had been seized. Acts 26:21, *"For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple and went about to kill me."* But he cited that he only preached what Moses had said would come. Acts 26:22,23, *"Having therefore obtained help from God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer and that he would be the first that should rise from the dead and show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."* Paul preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

FESTUS' REACTION

When Festus heard this sermon he accused Paul of going mad because of his much learning. No doubt some do get so much so-called education that they lose their sense, but such was not Paul's case. Paul knew that Agrippa understood just

exactly what was being taught, and knew it was true. Agrippa knew what he needed to know, and more, in order for him to believe in Christ. He knew from the prophets, from the ministry of Christ, and from Paul's teaching.

But Paul never told this man to be baptized. Why not? In every conversion example in the New Testament the people were told to be baptized, but not here. This is because Agrippa never reached that point. He left the room unwilling to inquire further. Others, who heard the word and believed it, had asked what to do to be saved. This man did not show that much concern. He knew the truth and believed it, but would go no further. Paul even tried to persuade him, *"I would to God that not only thou but all that hear me this day were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds."* (Acts 26:29). Agrippa later admitted that Paul had taught him correctly (Acts 26:32).

HE WENT ASIDE

Why did Agrippa turn away? Why did he not believe enough to act? Was it because it would demand too much of a change in his life? Some refuse to obey for that reason. Was it his pride? After all, he was a king. Should he obey what was taught by a prisoner? Pride keeps many people from obeying the gospel. Was he too steeped in sin and liked it too much to repent? This could be. Possibly, it was the pressure of his family, some of whom were present, that kept him from obeying. There is no indication that he was too shy. We might speculate for hours as to the specific reason or reasons he walked out and turned his back on the only way of salvation any person has. He said he was almost persuaded. But what a difference between almost and altogether. Since he did refuse, he will face God in judgment out of Christ. There is no salvation out of Christ. He had the opportunity, but let it pass. He was responsible before God, and heard the word. He will be weighed in the balance and found wanting. It really does not matter anymore why he did not obey and be saved. Whatever might have been the reasons or excuses, the fact remains that he died lost and must face God's wrath. What a shame! He could have been saved. He almost was, but was not altogether.

But was Agrippa any different from many today? There be those who have heard, but continue to reject Christ.

Somehow, in spite of all the truth they know about God's love and mercy and the sacrifice of Christ, they manage to say "no" to the Savior. Some are almost convinced, and are responsible before God, like Agrippa. Some have had many opportunities, like Agrippa. Many have let their opportunities pass them by, like Agrippa. What can be justly said of Agrippa may well be justly said of some others who live now; almost, but lost.

Do you ever wonder what a lost man would give to have one more hour such as many have right now; that is, an opportunity to obey Christ? Do you suppose they would take advantage of it? How much would Agrippa give now for a repeat of the scene when Paul stood before him? The lost would give ten thousand worlds for one more invitation song. Do you suppose Agrippa still thinks his reasons for not becoming a Christian are valid? Do you really think he has made a good bargain, to hold on to his excuses and suffer an eternal hell for doing so?

We can see the folly of Agrippa. Why can we not see the folly of those today who have the door open before them and are urged to enter?

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Remedy For Sin

The subject, "*Remedy For Sin,*" presumes that we understand the reality of sin and that it is a desirable thing to find the remedy for it. We are confident that once a person is impressed with what sin is and what sin does that he will want the remedy for it.

Possibly a commonplace illustration can help us see the lesson we want to present. Once I was quite sick with some kind of respiratory illness. I was suffering from chills, fever, and aches that were characteristic of my ailment. Something was wrong and I realized that I was sick. What I wanted more than anything at the moment was to be well again. But what was I to do? Having once accepted the fact that I was sick and in need of some remedy, I had to ask, "Who can provide what I need?" In this instance, I needed a doctor who understood how to deal with my problem. Going to the

doctor, he told me what I should do, what medicine would relieve me. At this point I was still sick but at least I knew how to get the remedy. Once having secured the remedy, it had to be applied. I took the medicine prescribed and soon I was well again.

This illustrates our spiritual situation. We have the spiritual disease of sin. "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23). There is no use denying this reality. "*Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*" (Romans 5:12). "*What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise, for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin.*" (Romans 3:9). The consequences of our spiritual malady are far worse than anything any physical diseases can do to us. Sin brings death (Romans 6:23), and the death involved here is spiritual death, separation from God, no entrance into heaven and an eternal banishment into hell. But thanks be to God there is a remedy for this disease of sin. Before we will look for a remedy we must be convinced we are in need of a remedy. The people on Pentecost had to first realize they were in sin, but once they did, they asked, "*What must we do?*" The jailer in Philippi had to be convinced that he was lost, but once he was convinced, he asked, "*What must I do to be saved?*" Nobody will be concerned over finding the remedy for sin until he is convinced he needs it.

THE REMEDY FOR SIN

Once convinced of sin, we then seek one who can provide the remedy. What is the opposite of spiritual death except spiritual life? And who can provide spiritual life? "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16). The message of Scripture is that spiritual life is provided by the Lord through His Son Jesus Christ. Our redemption has been set forth by God through Christ (Romans 3:25). Rather than asking what is the remedy for sin, we are in reality asking who is the remedy for sin. The answer is Jesus Christ. He is the author of our salvation (Hebrews 5:9). He came to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). This was His mission and purpose (John 12:47). He was called the Savior from His birth (Luke 2:11). He is the

way, the truth and the life, and no man can come to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). There is no other (Acts 4:12). The gift of grace is by one man, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:15,17). Christ redeemed us and we are justified through the redemption that is in Christ (Galations 3:13; Romans 3:24,25). There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ (Romans 8:1). As Peter responded, *"Thou hast the words of eternal life."* (John 6:68). Christ is the physican to whom we go. *"They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Mark 2:17). So we have repeatedly established the major emphasis of this sermon. Christ is the remedy for sin, and the only remedy. For this reason we preach Christ, urging the sinful in this world to go to Christ for the remedy they need.

HIS BLOOD

What is it about Christ that makes Him the remedy for sin? Let us again turn to the Scriptures. *"For if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* (Hebrews 9:13,14). To Christians John wrote, *"If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."* (1 John 1:7). Revelation 5:9, *"...for thou wast slain and didst purchase unto God with thy blood of every tribe, and tongue and people and nations."* *"But now in Christ Jesus, ye that once were afar off are made nigh in the blood of Christ."* (Ephesians 2:13). What are we learning? The remedy for sin is in the blood of Jesus Christ. *"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."* (Ephesians 1:7). We have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20), and the price was the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). We are loosed from our sins by His blood (Revelation 1:5).

We often sing the hymn that asks the question, "What Can wash away my sins?" The answer comes ringing back, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus." The conclusion reached thus far is that Christ is the remedy for our sins by the

shedding of His blood.

Let us go one step further. Where did Christ shed His blood? *"Then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs, but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith there came out blood and water."* (John 19:32-34). Then His blood was shed in His death, was it not? Again we see how this harmonizes with such affirmations found in Colossians 1:22 and Romans 5:10 that teach that we are reconciled to God through the death of Jesus Christ. The blood of Christ that was shed in His death is the remedy for sins.

APPLYING THE REMEDY

Recalling our original illustration, I was not free of my physical ailment until the prescribed remedy had been applied. So it is with the remedy for our spiritual disease. The blood must be applied. How is the blood of Christ applied to our sin-stained souls and we are made free from sin? Follow closely each step as the Scripture explains. *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."* (Romans 6:3,4). By reaching the death of Christ we come in contact with the sin-remedying blood of Christ. We get into the death of Christ when we are baptized into Christ. The application of the blood of Christ becomes a reality when we obey the command to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Little wonder then that Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark 16:16). He recognized that His blood is the remedy for sin and that in baptism we reach His blood. Little wonder that Peter affirms that baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21). He knew the blood of Christ is the remedy for sin and that in baptism the blood washes away our sins. Ananias told Saul of Tarsus to be baptized and "*wash away thy sins.*" (Acts 22:16). What was the cleansing agent? What washed away his sins? It was not the power of the water into which he was taught to be immersed, but the power of the blood. *"Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from*

wrath through him." (Romans 5:9).

Now we have the answer to the most important matter the human mind can consider. What is the remedy for sin? The remedy for sin is the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross of Calvary which is applied to the needy sinner when he obeys the divine command to be baptized into Christ. Our earnest and sincere plea is that all will respect the blood of Christ and hasten without delay to obey and be saved.

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The Shadow Of The Tabernacle

After Israel left Egypt and entered the Sinai area, God called Moses into that mountain for forty days where he received instructions from God. The Ten Commandments, the law of Moses, and directions for building a sanctuary were given Moses. *"And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them, according to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it."* (Exodus 25:8,9). *"And look that thou make them after their pattern which was showed thee in the mount."* (Exodus 25:40). Chapters twenty-five through twenty-seven reveal the description of the tabernacle, furniture, and things related to this structure. These things were made of wood, precious stones, fabrics, skins, gold, silver, and brass. It was to be portable, moveable, so it could be taken with them as they journeyed toward Canaan.

THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TABERNACLE

Hebrews 9:1-12 reveals the real significance of this structure. *"Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary; for there was a tabernacle made, the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the*

Holiest of all, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat, of which we cannot now speak particularly. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone, one every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people, the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing, which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

Hebrews 9:24, *"For Christ is not entered into the holy place made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."*

These verses show that the first covenant, the first tabernacle, the things that Moses received on Sinai, were figures or types of that which was to come. They did signify and point forward as a simile, for the purpose of comparison. They formed a pattern, a prefiguration, of something in the system of which Christ is high priest. The Christian system answers to the pattern of the old. The first tabernacle was a type of something to come.

Hebrews 8:5 teaches that the Law was a shadow of things to come. In like manner the tabernacle sacrifices and service of the old was a shadow of things to come. (Hebrews 10:1). These things prefigured New Testament Christianity. Now let us observe the Biblical comparison.

OUTER COURT

Consider the outer court where all the nation was allowed to enter and gather. In this court was the brazen altar, made of wood and covered with brass. It was called the altar of burnt offering because this is where the sacrifices for the sins of the people were offered. Also, in the court was the laver, made of brass. It was the place where the priests would engage in the ceremonial washing by which they were consecrated to their duties and qualified them to perform their daily ministrations. As one would pass the altar, then the laver, he would then approach the entrance into the Holy Place.

HOLY PLACE

The Holy Place was entered by priests only. There was only the single entrance. Before entering and serving as priest, the sin offering would be made, the priest would wash in the laver, then putting on his priestly robes, he would enter into the Holy Place for the service to be rendered.

In the Holy Place was the table of showbread, made of wood, overlaid with gold, upon which would be the twelve loaves that were to be eaten by the priests each week. There was also the candlestick on the other side of the Holy Place, made of solid gold, with a central stem and three branches on each side. The candlestick was the only source of light in the Holy Place. Also, near where one would go from the Holy Place into the Most Holy Place was the altar of incense, made of wood, overlaid with gold, where priests burned sweet smelling incense daily, the smell of which would pass through the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

HOLY OF HOLIES

The Most Holy Place, also called the Holy of Holies, was entered only by the high priest, and that once each year with the blood of the sacrifical lamb, to be offered for the sins of the people and himself. In the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant, made of wood, overlaid with gold, in which was a pot of manna, the tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments, and Aaron's rod that had

budded when the authority of God through Moses had been confirmed. Atop this ark was the mercy seat of God with two cherubims, all of which was made of gold.

These implements were center in the Jewish system of worship. They were in service under the dispensation of Moses. But they were types of things to come, the Christian system through Christ. Let us now consider the anti-type, the Christian system, that answers to the types of the Jewish system.

THE WORLD

The outer court is like the world. The Holy Place compares to the church which is entered into only by priests. Those in the church are God's priests under Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Christians are the "royal priesthood." John called the Christians kings and priests in Revelation 1:16.

THE CHURCH

Before reaching the Holy Place, the priests had to be sanctified, set apart, cleansed for the work they were to do. A sacrifice was offered on the altar of burnt offering, then the priests were washed at the laver. In like fashion, before one is granted the privilege of rendering service as a priest under Christ in His church, one must pass the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and be washed in the waters of baptism. Christ is called our sin offering (Romans 8:3), the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world (I John 1:29). Again, he "*put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*" (Hebrews 9:26). We read in Hebrews 10:22, "*...having our body washed with pure water let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.*" This is the *"washing of regeneration"* of Titus 3:5. *"That he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the word."* (Ephesians 5:26). One can no more enter the church without the sacrifice of Christ and baptism than one could enter the Holy Place without the sacrifice and washing at the laver.

The table of showbread is like the Lord's Supper, eaten weekly, and only by priests, which in the Christian system, are the Christians.

The candlestick represents the Word of God, the only source of light. *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light*

unto my path." (Psalm 119:105). *"The entrance of thy words giveth light."* (Psalm 119:130). Paul spoke of "*the glorious light of the gospel."* (2 Corinthians 4:4). Christ, the Word, is the light of the world.

The altar of incense was a prefiguration of the prayers offered. *"Let my prayer be set before Thee as incense."* (Psalm 141:2). Prayer is again pictured to us as incense in Revelation 5:8; 8:4. Incense is like the prayers of the saints going up before God.

HEAVEN

The Most Holy Place represents heaven where God abides. This was where the high priest offered the blood of the sacrifice for the people. Hebrews 9:11 teaches that Christ is our high priest, and He entered into heaven to offer His own blood for us (Hebrews 9:12,24). The Most Holy Place is where the incense went before God, just as the prayers of the saints go into heaven before God.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

There are numerous lessons and impressions to be learned from this type and antitype relationship of the Old Testament tabernacle and the New Testament church and Christian system. We see that there is definitely a relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Modernists deny that there is this continuing connection, but this makes it certain and plain. As the tabernacle was erected according to a God-given design and pattern, so must it be with the church.

This comparison answers the question whether one can enter heaven without the church. The only entrance into the Most Holy Place was to first come through the Holy Place. The only entrance into heaven is through the church.

As one entered the Holy Place to serve as priest by the way of the sacrifice and washing, so one now enters the church as a New Testament priest by the way of the cross and baptism.

In the Holy Place the priests served by the observance of eating the showbread, burning of incense, guided by the light of the candlestick. In the church the Christian serves by observance of the Lord's Supper, offering of prayer, and being guided by the light of the Word.

The place where prayer is to be made is in the church, as a member of the church, just as the incense was to be offered in the Holy Place as a priest in the Holy Place. The incense was not offered in the outer court nor is prayer to be offered while one remains in the world.

This type - antitype relationship emphasizes also that the Old Testament system was not God's plan for saving man but the type of the true that was to come in Christ, His faith, and His church (Hebrews 9:8). Some today are still borrowing certain things from the old system, but they do not belong in the plan of God for man today under the authority of Christ.

The book of Hebrews was written to prevent brethren in the church from turning from the way of Christ back to the former system of Judaism from which they had been delivered. It was written to prevent apostasy. Why should one leave the true and turn back to merely the shadow of the true? The tabernacle and that which pertained to it was but a shadow of things to come. They were but types that have now served their function and have been set aside.

This comparison of the two systems is also intended to enhance our respect for the church and to see how essential it is for us to belong to the church and be included therein. Herein is our salvation, service, and priesthood. Even though the tabernacle and the church were separated by some fifteen hundred years from the time God instructed the building of the tabernacle and the time that Christ built His church, we can see God's hand in it all and see how God overruled and designed both.

† † † † †

STABILITY

Stability in all areas of life must be developed. Spiritually, there must be doctrinal stability through the study of the Bible. Mentally, we must learn how to combat Satan's great tool of depression. Emotionally, we need to strike a happy balance between becoming too calloused or too sympathetic.

The Eldership

Any subject that is taught in the Bible is deserving of our consideration and knowledge. Especially is this true regarding the leadership of the church. We want to study this lesson for the benefit of those who serve, for the congregation that it may know what to expect from the eldership and their duties, and for the benefit of those who will someday become elders in the Lord's church. Preparation for leadership has been sorely neglected and is often reflected in inadequate and incompetent leadership. The younger men need to know how to qualify themselves for the work.

TO BE MEN

The eldership is composed of men who serve as the elders over a local congregation. Christ is the head of the church. But other than He, there is no universal organization or governmental structure before one reaches the level of the local church revealed in the Bible. There are to be elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Each elder is on an equality with every other elder. There is to be no "chief" elder over the others. Each time the Scriptures refer to the elders it is always in terms of the plurality (more than one) of elders over the single congregation. Even when there were apostles who were members of the local church in Jerusalem, the church had elders. Those who serve were to be men of certain qualifications, which we shall investigate in this study. These few general statements about the elders and their position in the government of the church introduces us to the more detailed matters we wish to consider.

BIBLICAL TERMS

The Scriptures refer to the leaders of the local congregation by several terms. We have already used the term "*elder.*" They are called this in Acts 20:17. They are also identified as bishops (Titus 1:7), overseers (Acts 20:28), pastors (Eph. 4:11), shepherds, having the oversight over the flock (1 Peter 5:5). The eldership is called the presbytery (1 Tim. 4:14). These terms can be scripturally used interchangeably.

Their difference lies in the way each term emphasizes certain portions of the responsibility to that work.

As we briefly noted earlier in the lesson, there must be a plurality of elders over one congregation. Christ did not ordain a "one-man rule" for His local churches. They act as a team, not individually. While some religious groups have one bishop over several congregations, the Lord's government calls for several bishops over one congregation.

DUTY/AUTHORITY

The duties and authority of elders must be discussed together; they cannot be separated. Where there is authority there is power. Where there is power there is duty and responsibility. The greater the authority; the greater the responsibility. To understand the duties of elders one must understand the relationship between the eldership and the congregation they serve. Congregations sometimes experience disasters because the eldership either does not know, will not do, or is not allowed to do the work that God has given the eldership to conduct.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28). *"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the suffering of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock."* (1 Pet. 5:1-3). *"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."* (Heb. 13:7). *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that is unprofitable unto you."* (Heb. 13:17).

There are both positive and negative instructions given to the elders. They are to serve *"not of constraint."* This means they are not to assume this task reluctantly, or just because nobody else will undertake it. They must do so willingly because of the opportunity to serve and not because of how

they might be profited materially.

"Not for filthy lucre." The elders were often supported by the congregation they served. But the motive for elders to serve was not to be the financial support they might receive.

"Neither as being lords over God's heritage." An elder is not to assume that he has powers which he does not have. He is not to be a dictator, some kind of tyrant over his brethren. He is not a boss with the church his servants. He is not a feudal lord. To have the arrogant, bossy, you-obey-me attitude is unbecoming an elder of the Lord's church.

Elders, along with their fellow-elders, are to take heed unto themselves. He who would save a drowning man must first have good footing himself. To pluck the mote from thy brother's eye certainly means you must remove the beam from your own eye. Individually, and as a group, they must continually monitor their activities, attitudes, and words. Their lives must be kept in order. They must examine one another and assure each other and the flock that they are doing what God expects elders to do. Sometimes elders get way out-of-line and have to be dealt with for the good of the flock.

Not only must they take heed of themselves, but take heed for the flock. This requires giving the members of the congregation where they serve their attention and watchcare. To tend the flock means there must be concern over each sheep. A good shepherd knows his sheep. He leads his sheep to food and drink. He protects them from outside harm. This requires convicting the gainsayer (Titus 1:9). Ravening wolves, false teachers, may come among the flock and it is the duty of elders to see to it that their mouths are stopped and they are marked as false teachers. He cannot shift his responsibility to somebody else, even though he may seek and secure the assistance of others in carrying out his duties. As a shepherd over the sheep, in similar fashion the elder is over the local church to do for the church what the shepherd does for his sheep.

"Feed the church." Nothing is more important than the sheep be fed. That which must be provided is the Word of God. The elders are responsible to see to it that the Word of God is taught in its fullness, simplicity, positive and negative qualities. Too often elders would try to suppress portions of the gospel in order to pacify some of the sheep. But elders must see that a proper and balanced diet is provided. They

are not only to be teachers and able to teach, it is their responsibility what is taught. They do not have to do all the teaching personally, but the job is theirs to see that the Word of God is preached and taught among the flock.

ELDERS TO HAVE THE OVERSIGHT

They are to take the oversight of the affairs of the local church. All the activities of the church are under their observation and supervision. Like the matter of teaching, they are not expected to do all the work. This they cannot do because each one has his or her work to do. But the elders are to determine the needs, see that the needs are met, exercise the superintendence over all the affairs of the congregation. Whatever is done must be the work of the church and must be done in as efficient and effective manner as humanly possible. The power of making decisions for the local congregation's activities is their power and duty and they shall be answerable to God and brethren.

Elders have the power to rule. Some would like to deny this power to elderships. They would prefer the preacher rule everything, or confine the rule of the eldership to nothing more than ruling by example. But the duty of exercising oversight demands the power to rule and the congregation having the need to obey that rule. His rule is in the area of taking care of the church (1 Timothy 3:5). There are limitations over the rule of elderships. They have no power to make, alter, tamper with or otherwise change the doctrine of Christ which the church is to uphold and proclaim. That has already been decided by the Lord. It is their duty to see that it is preached in its purity. They are not lawmakers concerning the doctrine of Christ. But they are to exercise their collective judgment in handling the affairs of the local church, making the necessary decisions that must be made to conduct a congregation. Their power falls in the realm of preferences, expediences, and which way is the better way of doing things wherein they have the right to make such decisions. Their decisions will seldom be pleasing to everyone, but everyone is to abide by their decisions. This is not to be confused with lording it over the flock, but it is to recognize that their work requires the power to carry it out. This power they have. It is in this realm that many elders falter because they develope an attitude that they must have their own whimsical way in

everything to the disregard of other elders and the congregation. But this would be an abuse of power; not the proper use of power.

AN ELDER IS AN EXAMPLE

An elder is to be an example in his personal life that is worthy of imitation. Their words, attitudes, dress, general manner of conduct, faithfulness, knowledge, interests are all to be something for the congregation to behold and see the spiritual values of living for Christ. But he must at all times remember that he is a member of the congregation of brethren like the others. While the elders must have certain specific qualifications to assume this task, and have specific duties, they are also Christians like others.

QUALIFICATIONS

We now turn our attention to the qualifications that Scripture has noted for those who serve in the eldership. Not just anybody can be an elder and be pleasing in the sight of God. These qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3, and Titus 1. Whether the church progresses the way the Lord wants depends largely on the leadership offered to it by the eldership. Nothing is worse than having the wrong man in the right place. A man who is in the position with the authority of an elder who does not grasp his work, will not do his work, or does it poorly, is a real hindrance to the church. But when qualified men are in those positions, and they retain the qualities necessary to do the task, then the members of that congregation are among the most fortunate people on earth. It is better to have no elders at all than to have men serving as elders who are not qualified. This is not to dismiss the necessity of elders. It is to stress the importance of developing men who do have the qualities so the church can be as it ought to be.

In a general statement, let us emphasize that the qualifications for elders are high, but they can be met. God would not have required them if they were impossible to attain. Their qualities are such that have to be developed over a long period of time. This is why efforts should be made early in the lives of young men to start the process that produces a good elder.

"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

[For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall be take care of the church of God?]

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without;lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

"If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." (Titus 1:6-9).

We can discuss the qualifications given in these two passages together for there is much overlapping. Blameless means to be without reproach. It does not require perfection which is beyond human ability anyway. But he must be a person known for his integrity, honesty, purity of life.

He is to be the husband of one wife. He must respect God's marriage laws for himself. He cannot be a bachelor or a bigamist, but a married man. He is not to have more than one wife at a time. One whose wife has died and he has remarried has still met the requirement in this matter. One who is an elder and his wife dies, has gleaned the qualification needed to serve as an elder, but the wisdom of continuing in that capacity might provoke some problems for the church.

He is to be temperate, a man who exercises self-control, able to restrain his appetites, temper, passions, not soon angered, but longsuffering.

He is to have proven his ability to rear his children to be Christians. If he cannot rule his own house, how can he be expected to take care of the church? The term "*children*" is a generic term and a man with one child who is a Christian is qualified in this particular matter. However, none would question that a man with more than one child, all of whom are accountable before God being Christians, does have an added ability to serve.

To be sober-minded means a person of mature judgment. He is one of dignity and discretion. He does not outwardly display piousness as if he was holier than others, but at the same time he is not a flighty person, flippant and boistrous, but well-behaved and considerate, someone to be admired.

He is to be orderly, well-mannered, not rude, have some system as to how he goes about doing things. The haphazard, hit-or-miss approach to matters is not beneficial to the conduct of the affairs of the church. One who conducts affairs in this manner will likely produce a real problem for the congregation rather than real leadership.

He must be given to hospitality. This will determine to a great extent the quality of his home, his wife, his attitude toward others, his willingness to reach others.

Being apt to teach means to have the knowledge and ability to teach the word of God to others, publicly and privately. He must be able, willing, and ready to this work.

He cannot be a brawler, striker, argumentative, harsh, overly stern, bitter, a wrangler about matters, but one who is easily approached, gentle, sound, and certain. He is not out looking for a fight over something, but seeking spiritual peace with God and with his brethren.

He is not to be contentious; that is, insistent that everything must go his own way. He cannot be self-willed, but willing to cooperate with the other elders and the congregation. Keep in mind that matters which he must oversee are matters of human opinion and judgment wherein there is room for compromise.

He is to be no lover of money. Sometimes elders, who have the oversight of the finances of the church like every other affair of the church, have an attitude toward the treasury as if the money was their own. Some prefer to save money more than souls. They are not to be covertous about their own money nor the money over which they serve as stewards for the entire church.

A novice should not be made an elder. One who is young in the faith, young in years, inexperienced, unseasoned is not yet ready for the awesome work as an elder. A babe in Christ must be given time to grow and learn and know what it is all about before given the responsibility of leadership in the church. He must prove himself.

He is to be just, holy, sound in the faith, a man of relative age that has reared a family correctly. He is not to be a drinker of strong drink, nor a double-tongued and slanderous, gossiping type of person. An elder whose tongue is not under control will destroy an otherwise good congregation.

As it can be expected, these qualifications are high. A man, and he must be male as there is no allowance for women in the leadership of the church, can reach these qualifications. Many of them are qualifications of degree; that is, he must have them to such an extent that it is recognizable that he does possess these qualities of character. Some, like being married and having Christian children, are more readily observable and more easily determined. Because the qualities of character are qualities of degree, great caution must be used in making an unknown an elder. Whereas one may come to a congregation having served as an elder in another congregation, the new congregation must allow time and opportunity to determine whether a man really is qualified before he is placed in that capacity. Experience has shown the folly of appointing men whose characters appeared to be as they ought to be, but as one gets to know him better, it is easy to see he is not fit for the eldership, even though he may be a faithful brother in Christ.

HOW TO SELECT ELDERS

A matter of concern to congregations is how to select elders; that is, the process by which a man becomes an elder. Assuming that one has the qualifications and they are recognizable, what is to be done to place him in that work? Let us emphasize and repeat for emphasis sake; he *must* be qualified; he must be appointed. He cannot function unless it is known he is in that capacity. There is no specific way of appointing one as an elder revealed to us in the Scripture. It would therefore seem to require the exercise of judgment and a consideration of all those involved that tends to produce

peace. The congregation should be given the opportunity to consider the man because they are the ones over whom he will have oversight, and they will be expected to obey him as one in the eldership. They should have the opportunity to make suggestions and offer objections. If a congregation already has elders, they should take the lead in the selection of additional men. But if no elders already are in place, brethren should behave as brethren and keep the cause of the church before them. This is not a popularity contest nor a political office. It is a work. A time of appointment and assumption of duties should be specified and, there being no scriptural objections, the qualified man should simply be designated in some reasonable and brotherly fashion that he is an elder. As stated, there is no step-by-step procedure in Scripture for this appointment. But he does not become an elder simply by becoming old, or simply because he has the proper qualifications. To be respected as an elder and to be obeyed as it is required of the congregation, there must be an appointment of some nature.

It is easier to get elders appointed than it is to get them removed. Sometimes it becomes necessary to remove a man from that position. "Once an elder, always an elder" is no more true than "once saved, always saved." A man who is an elder can fall. Paul showed in Acts 20 how elders can go astray. When that tragedy strikes, he ought to either remove himself or be assisted out as oftimes happens. The same ones who selected him and appointed him can UN-select him and UN-appoint him. When a man becomes self-willed, contentious, doctrinally unsound, disorderly,intemperate, lacking a cooperative spirit, slanderous and many other such things, he is no longer fit for the eldership. If he becomes lord and master over others, he needs to be removed.

DUTIES TO ELDERS

The congregation has serious and profound duties to those who serve as elders. They are to be treated as brethren, with the love and consideration of the "Golden Rule" as much an anybody else. They are to be duly regarded in their authority, esteemed highly, their faith imitated, their decisions obeyed. They are to be counted worthy of honor because of the work they must do. They are to be treated with respect, nor be rebuked and criticized unnecessarily, and accusations against

them rejected until proven. Whereas elders ought remain open to constructive criticism, and elders who sin must be rebuked lest sin go unchecked, they must be considered as men of dignity and approached with respect. Sometimes the difficulty members of the church have toward elders stems from the fact that elders are not respectable. This puts an added burden on the member of the church who wishes to consult with elders about the misdeeds of elders.

The work of the eldership is a great work, a heavy task, a powerful opportunity to serve God and brethren. But it is a work that must be desired, not because of the power that it brings, but because of the good that can be done. No elder functions perfectly anymore than any Christian lives perfectly. Probably few function at their very best. Even the strongest sometimes show signs of weakness. An elder fails no more miserably than when he compromises the truth, bends and bows to pressures of those in error, has the attitude that he is "boss" and does not guide the ship of faith aright.

We should pray for those who serve in this capacity. They shall answer to God, for how they labored, for every soul under their charge. Good elders can make our journey easier and be a great assistance to us in going to heaven. Elders who fall sorely short of the mark can be the undoing of the church.

† † † † †



JAMES W. BOYD

TOUCHDOWN ANYWAY

To score a touchdown in the game of football, the ball must be taken across the opponent's goal line. This is the rule. But suppose some wanted a touchdown so much they decided just pitching the ball into the air would given them a score. Would loyal football fans approve?

The Bible teaches that baptism is *"for the remission of sins."* (Acts 2:38). Peter said, *"Baptism doth also now save us."* (1 Pet. 3:21). Paul wrote that we are *"baptized into Christ."* (Gal. 3:27). Annanias instructed Saul to "*Arise, and be baptized and wash away your sins.*" (Acts 22:16). Christ made baptism a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16). Baptism is an apostolic command (Acts 10:48).

But suppose somebody wanted to be saved so much that they decided that faith only, or praying through, or having some experience, etc. will be sufficient. Will they be saved anyway?

Who has the right to add six points for a touchdown to the scoreboard against the rules? Who has the right to change God's Word regarding baptism?

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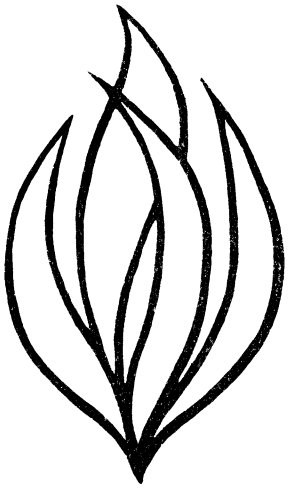

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME II James W. Boyd **NUMBER 11**

Salvation By Grace

"For by grace are ye saved through faith..." (Ephesians 2:8). This phrase was written by the apostle Paul to his brethren in Ephesus who were saved people. How had they been saved? Paul says they were saved by grace. We want to be saved also. If we are saved, we will be saved the same way they were; that is, by grace. There is no new way to be saved, no short-cut way, but the only way of salvation is the way people were saved in New Testament times. Therefore, it is imperative that we understand that we are saved by grace and what it means to be saved by grace.

MEANING OF GRACE

The word *"grace"* means unmerited favor. In the case of the grace of God toward man, it refers to unmerited favor and benefits extended to man from the heavenly Father. God has bestowed favors upon man that man neither has earned nor deserves. The word grace is used in several different senses in the New Testament.

GRACE OF OPPORTUNITY

One way is found in Romans 15:15, gifts from God enabling man to do the work of God on earth. *"Grace was given me of God that I should be a minister of Christ Jesus unto the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God."* God gave Paul the charge, duty, opportunity, and ability to take the gospel to the Gentile world. Again Paul wrote, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."* (1 Corinthians 15:10). This carries the same sense as Philippians 2:13, *"For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to work, for his good pleasure."* It is the same as the sense of Acts 26:22, *"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great."*

GOSPEL OF GRACE

Grace sometimes refers to the gospel itself in contrast to the law of Moses. Romans 6:14, "*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.*" John wrote, "*For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*" (John 1:17).

GRACE AT THE JUDGMENT

Grace is the word that refers to the benefits of God's unmerited favor to man that shall be fully realized at the judgment. "*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" (1 Peter 1:13). When Christ comes again, the judgment will take place. Those who have taken advantage of the salvation that God offers will receive the unmerited favor of God in the form of entrance into heaven. We are not to understand that God will offer grace at that time to those who have rejected His offer in life, but those who have accepted His offer of grace will receive the salvation that can be ours through the grace of God. The Christian, having made provision for that hour, and having taken advantage of his opportunity, will receive the culmination of his hope.

GRACE OF MAN

Grace can also refer to a quality of man that reflects a Christlikeness toward those who are in need. "*Moreover brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia, how that in great trial of affliction the abundance of thier joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.*" (2 Cor. 8:1-7). Giving to the necessities of others in called grace. The

Macedonian Christians graciously shared their resources even when they did not have an abundance for themselves. The grace of giving is Christlike.

SAVED BY GRACE

In our text we are taught that we are saved by grace. This has reference to the forgiveness of our sins and establishment of a saved relationship with God through Christ. Consider more closely the concept of being saved by grace.

Romans 5:10, "*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*" To be saved means to be reconciled to God. We are alienated from God by our sins, but when we are forgiven of our sins, reconciliation is the result.

Romans 6:23 teaches that the wages of sin is death, a spiritual death, the separation from God. When we are saved, it means we have escaped the necessity of suffering the wages of sin.

Romans 6:14, "*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*" Being saved means we are not the servants of Satan and no longer in servitude to evil. Sin has lost its dominion over us

This reconciliation, this escape from the wages of sin, this relief from the dominion of sin, is possible because of the grace or unmerited favor of God. This is the theme of Ephesians 2:8. Salvation is a gift from God that no man could deserve or earn. This saving grace is manifested in God giving to man the opportunity to come to the Savior that God has provided. Romans 5:6-8, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some will dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" Here is the way God demonstrated His grace toward man. Without this grace, there would be no provision for salvation. Therefore, we are saved by the grace of God.

SALVATION IS A GIFT

Even though salvation is a gift that we cannot merit, it is a gift that is given upon condition. The condition is an obedient

faith. This is the way we appropriate unto ourselves the benefits of the grace of God. *"And being made perfect, he became the author of salvation to them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9). *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). There is something that man must do. There are conditions that must be met. Even when man meets these conditions he is not earning his salvation. No matter what he does he cannot earn salvation. But until he does what the will of God requires, he cannot enjoy the blessings extended him by the grace of God.

After Peter had convinced his hearers on Pentecost that Jesus was both Lord and Christ, and his hearers had asked what they must do to be saved, Peter told them to repent and be baptized. He continued to urge them. "*Save yourselves from this untoward generation.*" He did not tell them to save themselves by themselves, for that was impossible. But he was urging them to do the will of God as he had instructed. He was pleading that they might obey. He pressed them to meet the conditions necessary to obtain the benefits of the grace of God.

WORKS OF GRACE

What is it that people must do to be saved by the grace of God? Second Thessalonians 1:8,9 teaches that we must obey the gospel. This refers to the commands of the gospel. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). We are saved by the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The gospel includes facts to be believed, promises to be enjoyed, and commands to be obeyed. We must meet these conditions to be saved by God's grace.

The objection is sometimes raised on a false use of Romans 4:4,5 and Romans 11:6. *"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt, but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."* The argument is made that meeting conditions and obeying commands is working for salvation. *"And if by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work."* Again the argument is made that these verses deny

any need for man to obey, but we are saved by grace.

The fallacy is in the failure to understand that the Bible speaks of different kinds of works. There are works of merit, by which we cannot be saved. But there are also works of obedience, which are not meritorious, but without which we cannot be saved. We are not saved by works of righteousness which we have done (Titus 3:3-5), nor by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:9), nor by works of the Mosaic law (Romans 3:28). But we are saved by works that make faith perfect, whole, complete (James 2:24). While we are saved by grace, we are never taught that we are saved by grace alone, no more than we are saved by works of any kind alone. To be saved by works alone would deny the need of grace. To be saved by grace alone would mean universal salvation and the removal of the accountability of man. The truth is, salvation involves both that which God has done and that which man must do.

GRACE AND OBEDIENCE

Saved by grace and saved by obedience are not contradictory concepts but totally compatible with the entire plan of salvation God has designed. Galatians 1:15 teaches we are called by the grace of God. Second Thessalonians 2:14 teaches we are called by the gospel. When we hear the gospel, including the commands of the gospel, we are called to be saved by God's grace. Acts 20:24 says, *"...and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."* Part of the gospel is the unmerited favor God has extended to undeserving man.

In Acts 15, when Peter was rehearsing the conversion of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, he said the Gentiles were to hear the word of the gospel (verse 7). Yet, they were cleansed by faith (verse 9). Then he concludes how they were saved by grace (verse 11). When a person is saved by obeying the gospel, he is saved by grace through the means of faith. We have access into this grace by faith (Romans 5:1,2).

Yes, saved by grace is New Testament doctrine. But now we know more fully just what this means, and just what it includes.

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Why Not Be A Christian

How would you define a Christian? One definition is found in Acts 11:26 where a Christian is identified as a disciple. "*And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*" A disciple is a learner, a follower, in this case a learner and follower of Christ. More than that, in another sense, a disciple is one who believes in Christ and has been baptized into Christ. "*Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*" (Matt. 28:19). The word "teach" can also be rendered "make disciples." A disciple is one who hears, believes and obeys Christ.

In yet a fuller sense than that, a disciple is one that continues in the word of Christ. "*Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed on him, If ye abide in my word, then ye are truly my disciples.*" (John 8:31). To "abide" means to dwell or live. We are to learn of Christ, follow Christ, believe and obey Christ, and continue to live in the will of Christ, if we are rightly identified as a disciple of Christ. This is what a Christian is. We must abide in Him to bear fruit that He expects. "*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can ye, except ye abide in me.*" (John 15:4). We ask, "Why not be a Christian?"

A WORTHY NAME

The name "Christian" is that worthy name that the followers of Christ are called (James 2:7). First Peter 4:16 reads, "*If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name.*" We would not ask anyone to be a sectarian, or a member of some denomination. Denominations have no divine authority to even exist. We would not urge anyone to be anything religiously of which you could not read in God's Word. We only want people to be what God wants them to be. We ought to be ashamed to ever ask any person to become anything other than just a Christian. Even though God wants all to be Christians, when the invitation is extended, many say "no" by their refusal to obey. But let us consider the advantages of being a Christian.

SALVATION

In Christ we enjoy salvation. "*Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12). We each are a soul that will either be saved or lost in eternity. We are the ones who will determine that destiny. Christ said the soul is worth more than all the world. (Matt. 16:26). Only in Christ is there the salvation we must have. (2 Tim. 2:10). "*Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*"

Christ is the author of salvation. (Heb. 5:9). "*And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*" (John 4:14). Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). Those out of Christ are spiritually dead, and those in Christ are spiritually alive. (Eph. 2:1,5). In Christ we enjoy salvation.

FELLOWSHIP

By being a Christian we can have fellowship with other Christians, the saved and redeemed. Acts 2:42, "*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.*" Fellowship includes the communion, cooperating together, joint participation with one another in the affairs of the Lord. It denotes a relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ. Words are not adequate to describe the sweetness of this fellowship when it is as it ought to be. There are no relationships of such a nature that are more beautiful than that of Christians with Christians. They share their joys, sorrows, successes, failure, hopes, goals. All of this is contained in that hymn entitled, "Blest Be The Tie That Binds." If one is not a Christian, he cannot benefit from this fellowship. He lacks that which God has provided in life. First John 1:3, "... *that ye may also have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*" Christians walk together in this life helping each other get to heaven. This is why everyone should be a Christian.

CHILD OF GOD

A Christian is a child of God and God is his spiritual Father. In one sense, all people are children of God inasmuch as He is our Creator and we have all come from the first parents, Adam and Eve. But all physical children of God are not spiritual children of God. Some have the devil as their spiritual father. "*Ye are of your father the devil...*" Jesus said this to some as is recorded in John 8:44. But to Christians, John wrote, "*Beloved, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*" (1 John 3:1,2). Galatians 3:26, "*For ye are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*" Second Corinthians 6:18, "*And I will be to you a Father and ye shall be to me sons and daughters.*" Over and over the Bible identifies the Christian as a child of God.

PRIVILEGE

As our Father, He can be approached by us at any time for the help that we need in life. "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you whom if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to him that ask him?*" (Matthew 7:7-11). "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*" (Hebrews 4:16). First Timothy 3:14,15, "*These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou ought to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" The "house of God" refers to the family of God. The church is composed of the children of God. Paul wrote confidently to Christians in Rome, "*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be*

that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Romans 8:16,17). Yes, Christians are God's children.

HOPE

We ought to be Christians so that we may benefit and enjoy the hope that God has provided. Hope is called the anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast. (Hebrews 6:19). The purpose of an anchor is to make secure and stabilize. A person of no faith is "*like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*" (James 1:6). He has no anchor to hold him. The hope of eternal life holds the Christian firm amidst the threatening events in life. In this way we are saved by hope. (Romans 8:24). We come to Christ to be forgiven of our sins, to enter into the realm of salvation, to partake of the spiritual blessings found in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3). We may be battered time and again with temptation and trial that is designed to cause us to abandon the faith, but there is that which provokes us to keep on keeping on and that something is the hope of an eternal home in heaven. Without that hope, we would lose our way and possibly give up before the prize is ours. Paul wrote, "*For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give unto me at that day, and not to me only but unto all them that love his appearing.*"(Second Timothy 4:6-8). This was his expression of hope that he possessed because he was faithful in Christ. "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor, yet what I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait betwixt the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*" (Philippians 1:21-24). Paul had the hope of the Christian in his heart. When you and I are Christians, we can have that same hope.

FACING DEATH AND ETERNITY

We ought to be Christians because we must someday die. "*And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the*

judgment." (Hebrews 9:27). There is much about death that strikes fear in our hearts because there is so much that is hidden and remains a mystery as yet. Many are afraid to die because they are not ready to die. Those who obey the gospel and walk therein also have concern about death as stated. But the fear is replaced with a comfort. Like the Psalmist, "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" (Psalm 23:4). Robert Ingersoll, renowned atheist, said at the graveside of his brother, "Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word; but in the night of death hope sees a star and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing. He who sleeps here, when dying, mistaking the approach of death for the return of health, whispered with his latest breath, 'I am better now.' Let us believe, in spite of doubts and dogmas and tears and fears that these dear words are true of all the countless dead." Even this man who denied God wanted more than anything to have hope. But in denying God, one denies all hope, for hope resides with God. "*Hope thou in God.*" (Psalm 42:5).

THE DISCIPLE'S DEATH

The Christian can face death as a disciple of Christ with hope rather than fear. He can enjoy confidence and trust and expectancy beyond this life in the land of fadeless day. "*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth; yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.*" (Revelation 14:13). No man can live with the devil and die with the Lord. No man lives with the Lord and dies with the devil.

In the face of death and eternity, the Christian can rely on such words as, "*So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (First

Corinthians 15:54-57). Even death cannot separate us from the love of God. (Romans 8:38). Death for the Christian becomes but a necessary doorway through which he passes into that greater and more wonderful realm with an eternity with God in heaven.

These are a few of the advantages of being a Christian, though not all. But even these are sufficient to show that we ought to respond favorably to the call of God to come to Christ.

It would be a good exercise for each one who is having some difficulty in making the right decision to take the time, with pencil and pad, to write down the advantages of remaining alienated from God, in your sins, doomed and damned, and compare them to the advantages of being redeemed and reconciled to God through Christ. We are confident that an honest comparison will provoke you to obey the gospel and walk therein the remainder of your days.

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EMPHASIZING CHRIST

Emphasizing Christ is an activity with which no Christian can quarrel. But I wonder why some seem to think it necessary to de-emphasize the church in order to emphasize Christ. We have read statements such as, "We do not read in the New Testament Scriptures of Christians urging men to 'become members of the church' nor do we read of anyone ever doing that." Again, we have read, "When a great persecution arose in Jerusalem, Christians went everywhere 'preaching the Word,' not 'establishing churches '."

While we all know such exact wording is not found in Scripture as "becoming members of the church" or "establishing churches," the idea is indisputably there just as much as the statement, "The Christian's job today is, in a word, to communicate Christ to the world." Who can dispute it? But why do some brethren feel they must cast off at the church and call it emphasis on Christ?

We are told that most passages that speak of the church speak of people as individuals, not as groups. The truth is,

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Greater Than John

It is said of John the Baptist, *"For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord..."* (Luke 1:15a). Greatness is determined in different ways, depending upon the standard and measure one uses. Certainly John was great in the way that matters because he was great in the sight of God.

Why was John great? When we study his life and the things said of him we are made to stand in awe and respect for this man of God. We want to consider him in these comments, not only to appreciate the man and the righteousness he exemplifies, but also to take note of another statement of Jesus concerning John that makes us realize the greatness of being a member of the church.

FULFILLED PROPHECY

John was great because he fulfilled inspired prophecy. *"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."* (Isa. 40:3). Mark 1:1,2 makes it evident that this was accomplished in the work of John the Baptist. Malachi 4:5,6, *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."* When the angel appeared to Zacharias regarding the forthcoming birth of John, the angel designated John's mission as doing these very things and being that very *"Elijah "* (Luke 1:17). Jesus identified John as the *"Elijah"* that was to precede Him (Matt. 17:12,13).

A MIRACULOUS BIRTH

John was great because of his miraculous birth. His father was called an *"old man," "well stricken in years,"* past the age when one might expect to produce children. It was also so of his mother, who had been barren during the normal years of childbearing. Nevertheless, the angel identified the child by name, by work, even by the special laws under which he was to be reared, giving Zacharias the sign of his inability to speak until it was accomplished in the birth of his

son. Obviously, this birth was the result of a direct intervention on the part of God.

HIS GREAT MISSION

John was great because his mission was great. He was God's messenger, a prophet, a bearer of a great proclamation. "*But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*" (Matt. 11:9,10). It was his mission to prepare the way for Christ. He preached so that people might believe in the coming of Christ. (Acts 19:4). He taught people to repent (Matthew 3:2) and confess their sins (Matthew 3:6). He taught baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). He preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2). He testified that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:6-8,29). He was the vessel used to "*fulfill all righteousness*" at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:15). He turned many in Israel to the Lord (Luke 1:16). It was his noble purpose to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the remission of their sins (Luke 1:77). It was his goal to give light to those in darkness, in the shadow of death, to guide their feet in the way of peace (Luke 1:79). He was to teach men to fast and pray (Luke 5:33; 11:1). As one scans the Biblical information regarding the mission of John, he cannot escape being impressed with the work of God that he did. His mission was fulfilled (Acts 13:5) even though it was not attested by miracles, because "*John did no miracle,*" (John 10:41).

HIS LIFE OF SACRIFICE

John was great because he lived a sacrificial life. He forsook the sinful pleasures of this world which would not have been compatible with his task anyway. He was characteristic of the kind of person God can use. He lived in the wilderness (Matthew 3:1), in the country away from the luxuries and excesses that characterises city life. His food was locusts and wild honey; his clothing that of camel's hair and a leathern girdle. His existence may have been considered crude even by the standards of his own day. But he willingly

gave up what some might have considered an easier life in order to do what God wanted him to do. Making sacrifices to serve God contributes to the greatness of anyone who does it.

HIS HUMILITY

John was great because he was humble. Greatness and humility are two qualities that sometimes find it difficult to co-exist in the same person. Too often those who are considered great lose this vital trait of humility. When asked of John to baptize Jesus, John responded, *"I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?"* (Matthew 3:14). John said of Christ, *"There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose."* (Mark 1:7). His attitude toward himself was seen in his statement, *"Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."* (John 3:28-30).

HIS COURAGE

John was great because of his courage. He was fearless in the proclamation of the new and coming King, the kingdom to come, and the new religious law of Christ, even in the face of Jewish and Roman opposition. He was courageous in the condemnation of evil. He called the Pharisees and Sadducees a generation of vipers. He condemned the immorality of Herod and Herodias to their face. This boldness led to his death by being beheaded. It is not likely that John considered himself particularly bold. He was simple doing his duty and knew not to do otherwise. Surely, among the record of courageous men that the past has produced, John the Baptist must be listed near the top of any such list.

HIS INFLUENCE

John was great because of his influence on others. Multitudes left the cities and came to the wilderness to hear

him (Matthew 3:5,6). He taught many to obey the command to be baptized. Among those he reached was Andrew, a convert of John (John 1:35-40). But all who heard him did not believe (Matthew 21:32). Nonetheless, the people counted him as a prophet (Matthew 14:5). He was so great and influential that some confused him for the Christ (Luke 3:15). When Jesus asked His disciples who people thought Jesus was, some reported there were those who thought Jesus was John the Baptist alive again (Matthew 16:14). What a tribute to this man to be confused for the Christ!

CHRIST IS GREATER

For these reasons we can understand the designation regarding John that he was great in the sight of the Lord. His greatness is beyond question. Yet, the Bible testifies that Christ was greater. The *"mightier one"* of whom John had spoken was Christ. Christ fulfilled more prophecies than John and prophecies of greater significance. His birth was a miraculous act by Deity in that He was born of the virgin. He offered a greater sacrifice than John could have done, because He offered Himself as the Son of God for the sins of all (Hebrews 2:9). He left heaven to come to lowly earth to endure all the wickedness that evil men could heap upon him and die the death as a criminal even though He is the Savior.

This mission of Jesus was to seek and save the lost, to be the very way to God, to show man how to live, how to die, for what to live, to grant unto those that would come to Him the forgiveness of that man-erected barrier of sin that separates man from God. His ministry was testified by miracles (John 20:30,31). His humility exceeded that of John for He was Deity serving humanity, the Master serving the servant, the Creator benefiting the created, the just dying for the unjust (Philippians 2:5-8). No one ever exemplified greater courage than our Lord. John could have prevented his death by withholding the words of condemnation. But Jesus deliberately allowed men to seize Him and crucify Him. He could have called down twelve legions of angels for His protection, but if He had, God's plan for saving man would have had to be set aside. *"As a sheep before his shearer is dumb, so He opened not His mouth."* He courageously endured false witnesses, humiliation, pain, disgrace, and an excruciating death.

And who can compare with Jesus Christ as to influence? Jesus, more than any other who walked among men, has influenced the history of man. His influence will affect the eternal destiny of all. From the lowliness of despised Nazareth, Jesus Christ surpasses all men of all time in all that is noble, good, pure, and true. His influence is that of the Son of God.

Though John the Baptist was undoubtedly great and deserving of that description, a mighty man of God and one faithful to God, Jesus Christ, is far above him in every realm wherein John is denoted as great.

ANOTHER WHO IS GREATER

Surprisingly, there is another that is called greater than John. Jesus said, *"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."* (Matthew 11:11). How can we understand this to be true, seeing the unquestioned greatness of John? The answer lies in the greatness of Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of heaven refers to the church. It is the church that shall be delivered to the Father in heaven when Jesus comes again (1 Corinthians 15:24).The church originated in the mind of the Heavenly Father. John the Baptist was dead before the church began. He was never a member of it. It was not established during his lifetime. He was beheaded in Matthew 14, but in Matthew 16, Jesus was still speaking of the kingdom in the future tense. John preached the coming of the kingdom but never lived as a citizen in it.

The least in the kingdom, the Christian, is a citizen of the kingdom of which Christ is the King. One in the kingdom is one of the saved by the blood of the Son of God. He is in the church. It is because of the greatness of Christ that one can belong to this saved company.

The statement that the least in the kingdom is greater than John shows the greatness of the kingdom, the greatness of the church. Being a Christian is a blessing of such proportions that Jesus considers one in the kingdom greater than John.

Surely, John shall have his eternity in heaven. How much more shall the faithful Christian have his eternity there also. He can be with John because he has partaken of the benefits

offered to mankind on the merit of the greatness of Christ. For this reason, everyone should be a Christian in the kingdom, in the church.

Entrance into the kingdom or church is the same as entrance into the company of the saved. Upon hearing the word, one must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. God then adds him to the church, the kingdom, and he is counted greater than John the Baptist.

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the term "church" most often refers to a group of people. Check the references in any complete concordance.

Since when is it "selling yourself," as some charge, to promote God's church? Why do some feel it necessary to brand preaching about the church as a failure to preach Christ? To proclaim to the world that body for which our Lord died and to contend there is but one, and to uphold the conditions of entrance into it, and the conditions for faithfulness in it, is neither partyism nor sectarianism.

It has been asked, "Is the church an organism or an organization?" To ask this is like asking if Jesus is God's Son or is He the Savior of mankind, as if the two were in conflict. He is both. Why run from one while trying to emphasize the other? It does not make good sense.

We have read, "And since the church is neither an organization,not in itself a body, it is not really accurate to speak of it having 'members' in any sense." The church is organized and is, therefore, an organization. To claim the church does not have members is not only foolishness, but a direct contradiction of Paul in First Corinthians 12:12. A member of anything is a part of the whole, according to Webster. If one belongs to the body, he is a member of it. Since the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), those who make up the body are members of that body. When one is saved by Christ, he is a member of the body, which is the church (Acts 2:47). Why should we not strive to get people

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The Christian Worker

In this lesson, when we speak of the Christian worker, we are not referring primarily to work that is done by a person that is peculiar to a Christian, such as soul-winning, relieving the needy, and other good works, but to a Christian as he works in his occupation by means of which he earns his livelihood. Whether he is self-employed, employed by another, a businessman, a factory worker, or whatever, we are talking about a person who works and how he should conduct himself in his work because he is a Christian.

The lesson concerns matters that are very daily, practical, applicable in living the Christian life. We are to be Christlike at all times whether we are at home, at worship, at work, at leisure, at play, etc. We are stressing being a Christian on the day-to-day job of earning a living.

WORK IS A BLESSING

Contrary to the thinking of some, work is a blessing. After God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, God gave him work to do. He was to dress and keep the garden. (Genesis 2:15). Even in the state of sinlessness, even before sin and temptation are recorded, man had work to do. Work was not a part of the curse that God placed upon humanity because of sin. Work preceded sin. It is true that after man sinned, the curse of God made his work somewhat more difficult. "*And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee saying, Thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*" (Genesis 3:17-19). But work was given as a blessing, not a curse because of sin.

There is an adage that says, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." Those who have lived very long can readily acknowledge the truthfulness of this sentiment, seeing it in their own lives as well as the lives of others. People are

happiest when they are busy doing somehing worthwhile. Work is the means of providing the physical needs for ourselves and those who are our responsibility, as well as for those less fortunate. God provides all we need, but He does this by providing us the ability and opportunity to work and earn our daily bread. One blessing of work that is difficult to describe but is well known by every good worker, and that is the blessing of satisfaction over a job well done.

Paul instructed people to work. *"For we hear that there are some which walk disorderly among you, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."* (Second Thessalonians 4:11,12). He prefaced that instruction with the words, "*For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*" (Second Thessalonians 4:10).

God is displeased with those who will not work. "*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*" (First Timothy 5:8). *"And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, to work with your own hands as we commanded you."* (First Thessalonians 4:11). Proverbs 14:23 says, *"In all labor there is profit..."* We can conclude no other way but to look upon work as one of the benefits toward man as determined by the wisdom of God.

EXAMPLES OF WORKERS

In the Bible we have examples of good men who worked. *"For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you, neither did we eat any man's bread for nought, but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be charitable to any of you, not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us."* (Second Thessalonians 3:7-9). Paul worked as a tentmaker, that he might be an example for them to follow.

DEITY WORKS

God and His Son Jesus Christ are examples of work. *"My Father worketh even until now, and I work."* (John 5:17).

As we scan the pages of history and note those men who have so greatly benefited their fellowmen, we see they were workers, like Dr. Jonas Salk, Alexander Graham Bell, Madame Curie, Henry Ford, Louis Pasteur. Men who are idle dreamers and never do anything, never tackle a task, never put themselves into the harness of honest labor, will not accomplish much for themselves, for others, and certainly not for God.

THE ANT WORKS

Solomon cited the ant as an example to follow regarding work. Proverbs 6:6-11, "*Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise, which having no guide, overseer or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man..*" Let us take Solomon's advice and consider the ant.

In spite of the smallness of the ant, the ant works. Many jobs it cannot do, but it does what it can. While it cannot carry a pile of grain, it can move that pile one grain at a time.

The ant is an example in perseverance. Did you ever sweep your foot over an anthill? Immediately the ant begins to build anew and does not stop until the job is done. They are seemingly tireless.

The ants teach us cooperation. They work harmoniously together. This seems to be more than men can do, even brethren. When a load is too heavy for one ant, others come and assist. Often you will see ants fighting, but not each other. They only fight intruders into their midst.

The ant takes advantage of its opportunities and provides for the future. We are taught not to be anxious for the morrow. God has provided us a way to escape that anxiety; namely, make provision with what He has given. God provides for the future much like He provides for the present; namely, through our labors and proper stewardship. While there is a danger in making material security our goal in life to the neglect of other matters, we ought not squander what God provides on the present to the neglect of the future. We shall either die or live. In either case, we must make ready.

Yes, the ant is a guide for us in many ways regarding work.

CHRISTIANS WORK

As Christians we have special duties in the realm of work. God gave a law to the Israelites, *"Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates. At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it, for he is poor and setteth his heart upon it, lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be a sin unto thee."* (Deuteronomy 24:14,15). Those who worked deserved their pay. They were not to be oppressed. To do so would be to provoke God's displeasure. God has given a similar teaching to those who are Christians. Ephesians 6:5-9, *"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice , as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And ye masters, do the same thing unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master is also in heaven, neither is there respect of person with him."*

Those who serve others, in the employ of others, are subservient to the authority of others, are to follow the instructions given them, cooperate with their superiors on the job and do a good job. Some growl, complain, and grumble every time they are told to do anything. But the Christian will go about his task with cheerfulness, giving heed to what those in charge tell him to do. He does not do this because of fear, but because he respects their authority. One who has respect for God will respect whatever authority God teaches him to respect.

MOTIVE BEHIND WORK

The motive in the heart of the Christian for being a good worker is not simply to please his manager or receive congratulations of men. He has a nobler calling with which he complies. He is a follower of Christ. He works because he is

serving Christ, not men. He does what he does from the heart with all his might because that is what Christ wants from him. This is why the Christian worker is, or at least ought to be, the best worker on any job. He is working for the Lord.

These thoughts ought to provoke each of us to ask if we are being obedient to Christ in our work. You may be a lawyer, doctor, mechanic, teacher, engineer, nurse, or whatever. Are you diligent? Do you realize a job well done is a job well done for God? After all, the reputation you build or destroy affects the body of Christ. Is Christ pleased with the way I do my job? Am I slothful and negligent? Is my attitude wholesome? We must realize we are not just earning a living. We are serving the Lord as we earn a living. We ought be known as an honest worker, responsible, dependable, always doing our best at the moment, whether under the watchful eye of an overseer or not, like the ant. There are rewards for those who work like that. We not only earn our pay, but we have that satisfaction within that we have done as we ought. And the Lord will reward those who live after that fashion.

Paul had words to the masters, those who have authority, those who are "the bosses." They are not only to do their job with the same highclass operation as the instructions given the workers, but they have an added responsibility because they have more responsibility. The greater the authority, the greater the opportunity to display Christ in your life. The master is to treat his employees, or those who work under his authority, with Christian respect. He is not to threaten them because he has a Master also who sees how he does. A good manager does not intimidate and take advantage of others. He will render them their just due. The Lord will repay the workers and he will repay the masters. Each shall give an account before God for how he performed his particular duties. And *"There is no respect of persons with Him."* That means God will judge each one by the standard that he has ordained. God expects everyone to live and work in a Christlike fashion.

Finally, God wants all men to labor in His vineyard. *"I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh when no man can work."* (John 9:4). Jesus did the work God gave Him to do. *"I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."* (John 17:4). We are to follow in the steps of Christ as laborers in His vineyard. We often sing the hymn that says, "I

will work, I will pray, in the vineyard, in the vineyard of the Lord." Let us be true laborers, and as another hymn exhorts, "To The Work."

† † † † †

(continued from page 17)
to "become members?" If we want them to be saved we will want them to be members because the membership of the Lord's church is the saved. If the gospel is preached where none were in Christ, and some hear it, believe it and obey it, you have established the church there.

While I do not know why some brethren like to speak and write in such a fashion that degrades and minimizes the church, I do know why the denominational clergy says such things. They never have taught the truth about the Lord's church. They have been telling people all along that it does not make any difference to which church they belong. They teach that one is as good as another. Some even teach that you can be saved and not have anything to do with the church whatever. Knowing what they teach and hearing some brethren, it makes me wonder whether these brethren prefer to imitate the denominational line of false doctrines or proclaim the Scriptural concept and truth about the church. We have no cause to be ashamed of talking about the church, the necessity of being a member of it, how to become a member and the necessity of remaining faithful therein. Peter talked about it. Paul talked about it. Christ talked about it. Are some among us becoming so "up-to-date" that they are afraid of the truth? Is this supposed to be our contribution to the "ecumenical spirit?" Are we to get others to like us by taking up their false ideas about the church and abandon the distinctive teaching of the Bible to accomodate them? We had just as soon quit teaching about the Lord's Supper, the need for worship, godly daily living and call it emphasizing Christ as to downplay the church and say it is emphasizing Christ.

Denominational people have tried for a long time to separate Christ from His church. It is not a new thing for faithful brethren to emphasize Christ. Such was being done when most of these "down-with-the-church; up-with-Christ" digressives were not yet on the scene of life. But it is a rather

new thing to hear men who were once considered to be faithful, and who claim to be gospel preachers, de-emphasizing the church under the guise of emphasizing Christ. Their message does not make good sense and it certainly is not true to the revelation of God. JWB

WORTH THE EFFORT

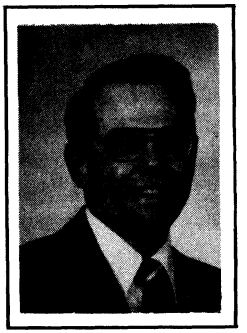
Peace is worth the effort it takes to have it. We hear and read much of peace among nations, within nations, between races, individuals, brethren etc. This is well and good, but we must work diligently to have peace. The greatest peace is peace between us and God, a peace made possible by reconciliation through Christ, God's Son.

Let me focus attention on another peace that is a taste of heaven itself. This is peace among brethren within a local church. We know God hates division and that which causes it. He is displeased that children of His family are torn apart. Those who have experienced tensions and strains within a local church know the agony it causes and the unhappiness it produces. How wonderful is a local church that is active, vigorous, progressive (not digressive), attentive to the work God has authorized. This joy is crowned and made full when the members of the local church have love, consideration, esteem for one another that is manifested by their cooperative spirit and desire to work together.

This condition does not "just happen." Nor does it continue unless nurtured and strengthened. Fortunately, the same thing that produces peace is that which perpetuates it; namely, putting God's truth above all else. With a determined subscription to God's will by each one, brethren are drawn closer to each other as they draw near to God. Peace at any price is not true peace. Truth must prevail.

The responsibility for creating and maintaining this peace rests on elders, deacons, preachers, teachers and all members. By words and deeds they mold hearts and lives into a family "*knit together in love*" (Colossians 2:2); a "*building fitly framed together*" (Ephesians 2:21) that brings glory to God.

It is God's will that it be so, and the benefits for each member of the church are immeasurable. JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

WITNESSING

"Witnessing for Christ" is an expression heard in the religious world in an erroneous way. Nobody can "witness for Christ" today in the Biblical sense of the phrase. Witnessing requires giving testimony of that which has been seen. In Scripture the terms refer to eye-witness accounts or revelation by inspired men. It means more than simply telling what one knows. The apostles and some others were witnesses, but we are not, nor can we be. We should learn to use the phrase so that we will "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11).

What difference does it make? First, it may reflect that you do not understand what the Bible teaches about who is and who is not a witness. Second, inasmuch as some who say they are "witnessing for Christ" believe they are directly guided by the Holy Spirit, do not become offended if someone thinks you believe that way also.

This phrase is heard among brethren who mean nothing more than preaching and teaching the Word, but their terminology is faulty and sounds more like a denominational imitation than a Biblical presentation. *"Sound words"* (Second Timothy 1:13) are in order.

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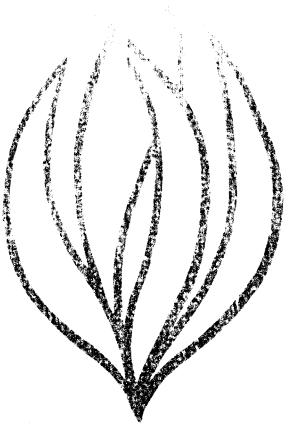

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME II **NUMBER 12**

Theistic Evolution

One of the prominent ideas being taught and widely held in the world today is that which is identified as "theistic evolution." Our lesson will deal with the subject of evolution generally, but specifically concentrate on one branch of evolutionary thought that is called "theistic evolution." Before one can intelligently consider theistic evolution, he must first have a reasonable understanding of evolution, for without evolution, theistic evolution makes no sense at all.

Evolution Defined

Let us first define evolution as it is used in this lesson. The word itself means an unrolling or change. "Under this definition there are a great many things which can be labeled evolution; a child growing into an adult; a seed developing into a tree; weather changing from summer to autumn; or day turning into night." (1). This however does **not** define that with which we are concerned.

Nor are we concerned with the changes that occur within different kinds of life as is so evident when we observe there are many varieties of dogs or variations among humans. One can simply look about him and see that there are variations and changes between human beings; one generation being larger than another; the black man differing from the yellow. But the point is, dogs are still dogs. They are not descendants from serpents or fish, nor do they share a common ancestry with the corn stalk or giraffe. Men are still men. They are not cousins to elephants, mockingbirds, or rodents.

What we mean when we speak of evolution is organic evolution, which is defined as follows: "The hypothesis that millions of years ago, lifeless matter, acted upon by natural forces, gave origin to minute living organisms, which have since produced all living and extinct plants and animals, including man." (2) To put it more simply, it is the idea that all living things have developed by natural processes from a single living cell. The origin of that cell differs depending upon which brand of evolution under consideration. We shall mention origins again. The evolution under consideration is the idea that all living things came from a single cell. This is the central assertion of evolutionary thought.

Is It A Fact?

Some have asserted that evolution is a scientific fact. "But it does seem to be increasingly clear that evolution is no science. Evidence continues to accumulate that it is rather an anti-Christian, anti-theistic way of thought, a system rather than a science, a philosophy instead of a history." (3) "It is a fiction, a product of the imagnination. It has no basis in fact." (4) "The most remarkable paradox of modern scientism is that the system of evolution could ever have obtained such nearly universal acceptance while being so utterly devoid of any genuine scientific basis." (5) The fact about evolution is this: To claim evolution to be a scientific fact is to assert one of the biggest lies ever asserted by man. If one will take the time to investigate, he will learn that evolution contradicts many known scientific facts. It runs counter to information that has been learned, proven, and demonstrated repeatedly.

We shall not have time in this single discourse to bring you the many facts of science that make organic evolution unreasonable and impossible. There are many studies available regarding this and we trust each reader will be sufficiently concerned to study the manifold evidences that show such to be the case. We are primarily concerned in this lesson with the relationship of evolution to the message of the Bible.

Why Be Concerned?

"Why should a Christian be concerned with evolution? Assuming that God is really the One who began it all, what difference does it make whether He created the world instantaneously or allowed everything to develop gradually over long ages?" (6)

It Denies God And The Bible

Our first reason for concern is that the major branch of evolutionary thought does not allow room for the existence of God at all. Most evolutionists are not willing to assume that God, or any god, had anything to do with living things whatsoever. The fact is, if evolution is true, the book that tells us of God, the Bible, is false. We would have no source from which to learn of God and our relationship to Him that is reliable.

Taught In Schools

Another reason for concern is the fact that this doctrine is being taught throughout our educational systems, by word and text. "A good example of the far-reaching influence of this idea in America is the fact that practically the entire structure of modern public school education is centered around this theme." (7). "The evolutionary origin of the universe, of life and of man is taught as scientific fact even to elementary school children in probably most public schools, at least by implication. The Christian and Biblical record of origins is usually ignored, sometimes allegorized or even ridiculed." (8) Most liberal and modernistic thought is either centered around or holds to ideas that make room for evolutionary concepts.

Anti- Biblical; Anti-Christ

As we shall soon see, this doctrine strikes at the very heart of the integrity and inspiration of the Bible. It challenges the Deity of Jesus Christ. Any idea or philosophy that will destroy the very foundation upon which the religion of Christ is built is of vital concern to every Christian. It is a conflict between the Biblical account of the creation and the anti-Biblical assertions of evolutionists.

Influences

Christians are very concerned about the influence evolution is having in the world. What is that influence? It has been primarily to drive from the hearts of men and women that there is a God, that we are but accidents, that there is no divine purpose for our existence, that we came from a blob and we are going nowhere but to oblivion. Several trends have been attributed to evolutionary thought, such as the trend toward materialism with less and less concern for spiritual matters; the trend away from moral principles taught in the Bible; the trend toward more and more crime; the trend away from respect for all forms of authority; the trend toward less self-discipline; the trend toward atheism. (9) Viewing the fact that evolutionary thought has contributed significantly to these trends, and considering how it is neither scientific nor Biblical but stands opposed to everything sacred and divine, including the dignity of humanity, it is beyond explanation why any "Bible believer," any "faithful Christian"

could allow room for evolutionary thought, atheistic or theistic. If ever there was a doctrine that qualified for condemnation as a work of darkness, with which the Christian must have no fellowship, (Ephesians 5:11), evolution qualifies.

Kinds Of Evolution

It is important to note the different kinds of evolutionary thought. One branch is called atheistic evolution, which contends that all living things came from a single cell, and that single cell accidently, in some unexplained manner, was produced from pre-existing, non-living matter, The position completely rules out God altogether.

Another related branch of evolution is called agnostic evolution, which contends essentially the same thing as atheistic evolution except little attention is given as to the origin of the single cell. To the agnostic evolutionists, the origin of the original cell is unimportant.

The third evolutionary view is called theistic evolution. This view also contends all living things originated from a single original living cell, but says God created that first cell. The idea is that God used the method of evolution to bring life into existence, even man. The only real difference between theistic evolution and other forms of evolution is the origin of the original cell. From that point all branches of evolutionary thought are alike. All three rely upon organic evolution being true. "If evolution has not occured, it then becomes unnecessary to deal with the question of theistic evolution." (10) "In the deepest sense the theory of evolution is not true." (11) It is significant that evolution contradicts science, but it is far more significant to the Christian that it contradicts the Bible. We now point to several instances where organic evolution, whether atheistic, agnostic, or theistic, contradicts God's Word. For brevity, we must confine ourselves to only a few, but even a few ought to be sufficient to persuade the open-minded that the idea of evolution and the Biblical record are contradictory.

Contradictions To The Bible

The Bible teaches God created a fully grown and developed man and woman within one day. (Genesis 1:27,31). Evolution declares it took millions or billions of years for man to evolve from a blob, into lower forms of life, through the various ages,

and finally became developed as he is today.

The Bible teaches that from the beginning there was male and female, (Matthew 19:4), with the capability of reproduction. (Genesis 1:28). Evolution declares that at the beginning the blob was neither male nor female, but slowly evolved into sexes simultaneously, eventually becoming capable of reproduction.

The Bible teaches that one man and one woman were made in one given locality. (Genesis 2:8). Evolution declares that human beings slowly evolved from lower forms of life simultaneously in many and widely scattered areas.

The Bible teaches that the first man and woman were able to think, understand, talk, choose. (Genesis 2:16,17; 3:10). Evolution declares man gradually evolved the ability to do these things.

The Bible teaches that the first man, Adam, was made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26,27). God is Spirit. (John 4:24), and man is spirit. Atheisitc evolution denies God altogether. Theistic evolution affirms that man gradually acquired God's characteristics. In fact, the theistic evolutionist cannot say when the first man, during his process of evolution, became a spirit in God's image.

The Bible teaches that the first man could have lived forever if he had not sinned. (Genesis 3:22). Evolution teaches that the earliest and even the latest forms of man always were destined to die.

The Bible teaches that the first pair were innocent, knowing neither good nor evil. (Genesis 3:22). Evolution teaches that man has always had varying concepts of good and evil. It insists that man, physically and spiritually, follows the idea of the survival of the fittest.

The Bible teaches the first man and woman were perfect, but fell by the sin of disobedience. (Genesis 3:6,7). Evolution says man has never been perfect but is getting better and better by the process of evolution.

The Bible teaches that man was given dominion over all creatures and the earth and was told to subdue them. (Genesis 1:28). Evolution teaches that man was controlled by earthly elements and could not have dominion over the beast because he was merely a beast himself.

The Bible teaches woman was made from the side of man. (Genesis 2:21,22). Evolution teaches she somehow evolved into existence. The Biblical account of the creation of woman is something one either believes or disbelieves. One cannot

possibly accept evolution and the Biblical record at the same time.

The Bible teaches all things were made to reproduce "*after their kind.*" (Genesis 1:12,24). Evolution teaches all things evolved from the same cell. These contradictions can be multiplied, but these should be sufficient.

Theistic Evolution

We now must explore more fully the Christian's attitude toward theistic evolution and the attempt to harmonize by compromise the doctrine of evolution and the Bible. Why one feels compelled to make the attempt to harmonize the Word of God with a hypothesis that has no scientific proof and is openly contradictory to the Bible is puzzling in itself. There is not one proven scientific truth that must be discarded or disbelieved in order to accept the literal Genesis account of creation. The truth is, the literal Genesis creation explanation of how life came to exist is far more logical, scientifically provable, and consistent with known data than any other explanation ever offered the mind of man. It is foolishness to accept what denies both science and the Bible. To believe the literal Genesis record is far easier for the rational mind than an accomodation of evolution either atheistic or theisitc.

There is no way, we repeat, no way to harmonize the Bible record with evolution unless you dismiss the Genesis record as being merely a myth, only symbols, make-believe, fairy tales, etc. But, there is no rational explanation for dismissing the Genesis record in such fashion. To treat the Genesis record this way would necessarily give license to treat any other portion of the Bible, historical or otherwise, in a similar way, whether it be miracles, the cross, the resurrection, even the record of the life of Christ. Of course, many do this very thing. But such an approach destroys the veracity, integrity, factualness and reliability of the Bible. Men would not treat even the writings of other men with such contempt.

Denies Biblical Texts

Both the Old and New Testaments obviously regard Genesis and its events as historical in the strictest sense. The Psalms, the book of Job, and other Old Testament books make many references to the creation and the flood that, even when

couched in poetic language, are consider actual. Christ and the New Testament authors considered the first chapters of the Bible as historical fact.

New Testament Endorsements Of The Literal, Historical Genesis Chapters

Matthew 19:4,5, "*Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh.*"

Mark 10:6, "*But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.*"

Luke 3:38, "*Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.*" This refers to the historical record.

Romans 5:2-19, the Holy Spirit through Paul shows sin having entered the world through Adam, an obvious endorsement of the Genesis record being literal, actual and historical.

First Corinthians 11:8,9, "*For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.*"

First Corinthians 15:21,22,45-47, "*For since by man came death... For as in Adam all die... The first man Adam was made a living soul... the first man is of the earth.*" This is an obvious acceptance of the Genesis record as historical.

First Corinthians 11:3, "*But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*" The temptation was considered historical.

First Timothy 2:13,14, "*For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.*"

Second Peter 3:5, "*For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water.*" This contends for the historicity of Genesis.

"If part of the Bible mistakenly believes other sections are factual when they are myth, no one could honestly regard the Bible as inspired. A document that contradicts itself is unreliable, probably worthless. No one could seriously accept its principles as guidelines for a life philosophy. Christ, who claimed to be the Son of God and His representative (see such references as

Matthew 11:27; John 13:3; 14:9; 5:18), could hardly have been divine if He could not tell the difference between historical fact and symbolic or allegorical poetry. All His teachings immediately become suspect. And what relevance have the writings of the apostles if they were naive enough to associate their teachings with untrue legends and myths? The Bible itself implies that it must stand or fall as a whole. (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The acceptance of theistic evolution forces the Bible to contradict itself and undermines the foundation of the Christian religion." (13)

One major point we must consider with emphasis in the quotation above is that Christ endorsed the Genesis record as literal and historical. For us to accept it in a different light we must contradict Christ, and take it upon ourselves to declare Him wrong. If He was wrong, how can we trust Him as Christ, King, and Savior of man? Now do you see what the issue is?

Who And How

In his book, *The Bible and Science,* Henry Morris writes how some say, "Genesis 1 is deigned to tell WHO is the Creator, and not necessarily HOW the full process of creation was accomplished." Mr. Morris comments, "This is a very popular rhetorical device of theistic evolutionists. But if the only purpose of the Creation account is to tell us that God is the Creator, then what is the value of the rest of the account? Why does not the record simply stop at the end of Genesis 1:1, which gives us this information quite adequately." (14)

While it is true every detail of creation is not revealed, enough is revealed for us to know that the record is to inform us not only of the WHO but something of the HOW, and even some of the details of creation, at least enough to know that theistic evolution cannot possibly be harmonized with what is written.

Mr. Morris commented, "That the theory of evolution, as commonly taught by secular scientists, cannot be harmonized with an acceptance of the Bible, interpreted literally, should be obvious from even a superficial examination." (14) Following these statements, he gave a list of several facts demonstrating the total incompatility of theistic evolution and the Bible.

Theistic Evolution Most Dangerous

S. H. Hall, gospel preacher of years gone by, and many may

remember his name, wrote in a book entitled, *The Bible Versus Theories of Evolution,* published in 1925, "The theistic evolutionists are those who claim to be Christians. They are 'wolves in sheep's clothing'; hence, the hide should be cut from head to heel by the sword of the Spirit and this sheepskin pulled from them and the wolf flesh exposed to a thinking public. They are the most dangerous of the three (kinds of evolution, JWB). They are filling many of the pulpits all over the land. But they betray our Lord, put Him to an open shame, by espousing the evolutionist theory of the 'beginning', which is wholly out of harmony with the Mosaic account." (15)

It is interesting to note that gospel preachers of just a generation ago were strong, unequivocal, and uncompromising regarding such false doctrines. It is only in recent years that some of our own "scholarly" brethren have shown a willingness to soften the opposition to error and compromise and fellowship works that are clearly Satanic in origin, design, and result.

Otis Gatewood wrote in his book, *There Is A God In Heaven,* "This (referring to theistic evolution, JWB) is the most dangerous and subtle form of evolution for its proponents affirm allegiance to God and the Genesis account of creation while at the same time denying the latter." (16).

Ultimate Effect On The Bible

Unlike some errors men may hold religiously, this error of evolution destroys the very heart of that upon which Christianity must look for guidance; namely, the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God.

Albert Hill said after describing atheistic evolution that denies God altogether, "The theistic evolutionist holds to similar ideas, except he believes in a god of some sort, who created the original matter, and used the evolutionary process to form the earth and all things therein. Theistic evolution among brethren is a position of compromise in an attempt to satisfy the demands of modernistic thinkers. Theistic evolution is no better than organic evolution, for both deny the Biblical account of creation." (17)

It is well to remind ourselves of the statement, "The spirit of compromise is always the prelude to apostasy." (18)

Jon Gary Williams, in his book entitled, *The Other Side Of Evolution,* says, "Evolution cannot be reconciled with the Bible. They are complete opposites, altogether different at every point. The Christian has no reason to try to bring the two together. He

can stand on his faith in the inspired record and let the shaky foundation of evolution run its course." (19)

The same man, after giving nine contradictions between the Bible and evolution, and showing why a faithful Christian cannot be a theisitic evolutionist, said, "Probably the greatest danger to the church of our Lord is the fact that men have and are slipping into our midst who hold to a watered-down form of evolution. These are men who have fallen victim to the pressures of modernism and, as I have observed first hand, are in fear of being labeled uneducated or antiquated by their counterparts in the world.

"Out of this attempt to burn the candle at both ends, some brethren have taken to the position sometimes called 'theistic evolution.' This is the person who feels he can believe both the Bible and evolution. Consequently, he looks upon himself as an intellectual because he believes in evolution. Then, he sees himself as flexible because he also professes to follow the Bible. But, then, after looking more closely at the issue, and seeing the strain which exists between the Bible and Darwinism, he realizes he must make several modifications in pure evolution (such as attributing the initial origin of things to God- which position is totally unacceptable to all leading evolutionists). And then the real danger comes- he is forced to make drastic modifications in the Bible in order to align it with evolutionary views.

"It is truly amazing that men will go so far out of their way to adjust the Scriptures to a theory which is beyond proof. Invariably, this position will cause a spiritual decline and a general doubting of the inspired record. As men of this persuasion begin to fill our pulpits, teach our Bible classes, and eventually work their way into the eldership, what damage will the church of our Lord experience." (20)

Warnings Ignored

In spite of such sober and irrefutable warnings, there have been prominent voices telling God's people that it would be improper to withhold fellowship from the theistic evolutionists so long as these evolutionists are honest and sincere. (21) My beloved reader, honesty and sincerity on the part of an evolutionist does not dismiss the God-denying error of his doctrine, nor will it cause any less havoc to the church. Indeed, his honesty and sincerity might well be the catalyst by which this blasphemous heresy acquires acceptance among brethren. Error cannot be

offered the hand of fellowship on the basis of the honesty and sincerity of those who believe error. We are taught not to fellowship works of darkness, (Ephesians 5:11; Second Corinthians 6:14ff). There is no way man can set this aside without challenging the Bible itself.

"Theistic evolution is non-Christian because it contradicts the Source Book of all true Christian teachings. The only way to combine evolution and Christinaity is to submerge one into the other. One denies the validity of the other. To hold the theory of evolution as the explanation of how life originated, the Christian must discard the sources of all his beliefs, the Bible. He then becomes a Christian in name only, claiming to belong to one school of thought while thinking in the guidelines of an opposing philosophy. Theistic evolution may fit into a non-Christian framework, but it cannot be combined with the Christian concept of God." (22)

We Cannot Fellowship This Error

In view of all these things, we must be mindful of Second John 9-11. "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; For he that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds.*" The doctrine of Christ does not merely refer to the doctrine about Christ. This is a possessive phrase meaning the doctrine that belongs to Christ and has been taught by Him and authorized to be taught in His name. Among the things our Lord taught was an endorsement of the literal, actual, historical account of creation as given in Genesis. There is no way a faithful Christian can lend support to those who would promote, condone, or accomodate the doctrine of organic evolution whether atheistic or theistic. To do so makes one an accomplice in this evil.

We Must Stand

Men and women of God must realize the deadly venom of this doctrine, and, like men of God of ages past, rise up and refute it, denounce it, warn against it, and have no part or parcel in it. Certainly, there is no room for fellowship for those who hold it. We could never show ourselves more foolish than to array

ourselves with the so-called and ever-changing "wisdom of men" in opposition to the wisdom of God. In the words of C. R. Nichol, "I am ready to deny that one can be a theistic evolutionist and at the same time believe the Bible." (23)

Footnotes

(1) *The Other Side Of Evolution*, Jon Gary Williams, page 1
(2) Ibid., page 1
(3) *The Twilight Of Evolution*, Henry Morris, page 13
(4) *The Bible Versus Theories Of Evolution*, page 218
(5) *The Twilight Of Evolution*, page 14
(6) *Evolution And The Modern Christian*, Henry Morris, page 11
(7) *The Twilight Of Evolution*, page 19
(8) Ibid., page 19
(9) *I Believe Because...*, B. B. Baxter, page 165
(10) Ibid., page 161
(11) Ibid., page 167
(12) *There Is A God In Heaven*, Otis Gatewood, page 237ff; *The Bible And Science*, page 90ff; *The Other Side Of Evolution*, page 54,55; *Evolution or Creation*, Basil Overton; "Evolution," *The Spiritual Sword*, April, 1971, Vol. 2, No. 3

(13) "Is God An Absentee Landlord?," *These Times*, January, 1971, Gerald Wheeler, page 28
(14) *The Bible And Science*, page 90
(15) *The Bible Versus Evolution*, page 279
(16) *There Is A God In Heaven*, page 236
(17) *The Bible Versus Liberalism*, 1972 Freed-Hardeman Lectures, page 83
(18) *The Bible And Science*, page 100
(19) *The Other Side Of Evolution*, page 55
(20) *The Bible Versus Liberalism, page 293, 294*
(21) *I Believe Because...* page 165
(22) *These Times*, January 1971, page 30
(23) *The Bible Versus Theories Of Evolution*, page 255

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His Humiliation

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, of things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5-11).

His Original Glory

The passage states several significant facts concerning Jesus Christ. One pertains to His pre-incarnate state. His original glory before He came to earth. He was in a glorified state before coming. "*And now Father, glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*" (John 17:5). "*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us [and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father] full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:14). He was on equality with God the Father. He was the agent of creation. "*All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*" (John 1:3). "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*" (Hebrews 1:1,2). Christ is the very source of light and life. "*In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*"(John 1:4).

He Became Poor

In Second Corinthians 8:9, Paul adds, "*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich.*" This introduces us to other significant facts of our original passage. We learn He took on the form of a servant. He

became such as we are, and lived among men. He became as man. As man is lower than the angels, He took on manhood (Hebrews 2:7). He became poor. He was not forced nor driven to become poor. He did what He did willingly and voluntarily. He humbled himself; he gave himself. (Ephesians 5:25)

Added to these great truths about His pre-incarnate state and His self-humiliation is the emphasis of His exaltation, which is not, however, our prime theme.

Steps To Humilation

Let us now notice the steps taken by Jesus in His humilation. He left the glories of heaven and became flesh. *"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us..."* (John 1:14). It began with the humble and lowly circumstances surrounding His birth. He was born in a stable and laid in a manger because there was no room for Him in the usual accomodations in Bethlehem. This is not what one might expect in the birth of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Son of God. But it marked the general nature of His humiliation even from His birth.

As a human, He was subjected to certain limitations such as fatigue, passions, disease, injury, temptation, thirst, hunger, disappointment. He was tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15). He would not escape the thrust of Satan as Satan tempted Him in the wilderness, and throughout His ministry.

He was reared among the poor. His earthly parents were poor, as determined by the kind of sacrifices they offered. They offered two turtledoves and two pigeons, while those more wealthy offered lambs. He was reared in the modest home of a carpenter in a city that was despised, the city of Nazareth. So despised was Nazareth that many thought nothing good could come from that place. His acquaintances and associates were seldom from the ranks of the well-to-do. He was very concerned for the rich and taught many things to them to help them resist the temptations that the rich have that the poor never know. Generally, His closest companions were of the lower social strata. One of the marks of His Messiahship was that *"the poor had the gospel preached to them."* As far as we can determine, He never owned any property except the garment on His back. He once said, *"The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head."* (Matthew 8:20). Even His garment was eventually taken from

Him.

In His humiliation He suffered disappointment. He was opposed by the religious leaders of the Jews. Those to whom He came to offer help, hindered Him more than any others. *"He came unto His own and His own received Him not."* (John 1:11). Often His own fellow countrymen set traps for Him, plotted against Him, tried to ensnare Him in His words, sought to find fault with anything and everything He did. His own people aroused enemies against Him. Vicious campaigns of prejudice and hatred were waged toward Him. He was falsely accused as being against Moses, against Caesar, against the Jewish law and customs. Not being able to find fault in Him, men were hired to make false charges against Him. His words were distorted and wrested to mean things He never indicated. His enemies could not deny the mighty works which He did but they tried to destroy people's confidence in Him nonetheless. His existence on earth was one that was wearisome, trying, provoking, disappointing. It was because men loved the darkness rather than the light. (John 3:19).

Gradually, the jealousy and hatred toward Him accumulated during His three and one half years of earthly ministry. As the prophet had foretold, He was *"despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief..."* (Isiah 53:3).

The Worst Humiliation

But it was during the final week of His life that He underwent the worst of the humiliating experiences. Consider Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. *"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with me."* (Matthew 26:36-38). He was troubled. He was in heavy sorrow. He prayed for the cup of suffering to pass. *"He sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."* (Luke 22:44). It is great comfort when in sorrow to know that others understand. But none understood that which Jesus suffered. Even His closest disciples went to sleep as He prayed in great agony. They simply did not grasp the occasion. Later, He was betrayed by one of His own, one He had taught, one to whom He had given powers, one in whom He had placed confidence.

The greatest hurt of heart is when one who you considered as being with you turns against you. Judas had struck a deal with the priests who hated Jesus to betray Him into their hands for a mere thirty pieces of silver. He added to the disgrace by identifying Jesus with a symbol of affection, a kiss of greeting like a friend.

His Arrest

The manner of His arrest by the mob was designed to humiliate Him. They came with swords and staves as if to capture a common and vicious criminal. *"Then Jesus said unto the chief priests and the captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hand against me, but this is your hour and the power of darkness."* (Luke 22:52,53). After he was seized, He was forsaken by all His friends. *"And they all left Him and fled."* (Mark 14:50).

His Trials

The so-called trial of Jesus was a mockery of justice from start to finish. The illegalities, even by the standards of law that were in operation, were ignored. Without charges, they took Him and then began to search for some offense, even hiring false witnesses to testify against Him. Then they turned their attention to minor details to try to legalize the conviction of an innocent man by going through the motions of a trial, making sure it was done in daylight as the law required. The fact that what they were doing defied all justice and truth did not concern them. *"The men that held Jesus mocked him and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?"* (Luke 22:63-64). They spit in His face. He was denied three times by Peter. He was declared guilty before several authorities even though it was admitted that no fault was found in Him. Yet, He was condemned to die. People cried for the release of a murderer who was guilty of insurrection rather than to allow the release of the innocent Son of God. As the prophet said, *"In his humiliation, His judgment was taken away."* (Acts 8:33).

We want to be impressed with the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made on our behalf. We never want to become insensitive to the humiliation that He willingly endured.

His Death

The climax of His humiliation was His death on the cross of Calvary. Though weakened by the scourgings, He was forced to carry His own cross while those who stood by laughed and mocked. He was mercilessly nailed to it with spikes through His hands and feet, and the cross lifted between two convicted thieves. The soldiers mocked him and said, *"If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself."* (Luke 23:37). They ridiculed His claim of being the Son of God. The soldiers gambled for His garment. He was given a bitter drink in His agony. He was allowed to hang until He died. His side was riped open by a soldier's spear. His followers turned away to return to their former work and life.

Three days later, His humiliation came to an end. By the power of God, He proved once again that He was the Son of God by coming forth from the tomb, later to be raised into heaven and exalted to the right hand of God, to sit on His throne, as King of His kingdom.

Why?

Why did He allow Himself to be humiliated in these many ways? The answer is often sung when we sing the hymn that says, "because He loved me so." *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10). That is why He suffered what He did. *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..."* (First Timothy 1:15). This was God's provision for us, that we might be forgiven of sins, allowing Him to taste of death in our stead (Hebrews 2:9), and provide the way of our salvation. This was God's plan by which He showed His grace, mercy, love, and favor toward us.

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THIS ISSUE COMPLETES OUR SECOND VOLUME. WE LOOK FORWARD TO VOLUME THREE.

The Work Of The Church

The church was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. It is composed of people who are the saved. Therefore, the work of the church is the work these people are called upon to do as the body of Christ. To the extent each member does his duty, to that extent will the work of the church be done. To the extent one does not do his or her duty, to that same extent the work of the church will not be done. We should probably speak less of the work of the church as what **it** does, and more as what **we** do.

Christ did give His church work to do. What is that work? How is the church to get the work done? Is the church sufficient to accomplish that work? What if the church fails in doing that work?

We are correct to consider the church as a body that works. The Lord taught several parables about the kingdom of heaven in which He likened the kingdom to a vineyard of workers, doing the will of the owner. The master of the vineyard gave the laborers work to do. *"Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing."* (Luke 12:42). We, who are Christians are workers in the vineyard of the Lord.

Works Are Necessary

While some say that we are not saved by works, there are some works that we must do. There are works of obedience which makes faith perfect. (James 2:22). We are not saved by works of which we can boast, but we are *"created in Christ Jesus unto good works."* (Ephesians 2:10). There are things to do. *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17). We are to be *"always abounding in the work of the Lord."* (First Corinthians 15:58). We are to *"do works meet for repentance."* (Acts 26:20).

What is the work the church is to do? Paul told Titus, *"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready unto every good work."* (Titus 3:1). *"Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."* (Second Thessalonians 2:17).

By what standard are we to determine what is good? While admonitions may seem very inclusive, almost without limit, there is a limitation on what the church can, ought, and must do. *"Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."* (Colossians 3:17). This demands that there be the Lord's authority for what is done. In other words, the church is to do whatever good work the Lord has authorized the church to do. This limits the boundaries of activity.

What The Work Is Not

It is not the work of the church to provide entertainment for people, or to provide recreation, secular education, social programs, or business operations for profit. It is not the work of the church to displace the civil government, the home, or any such thing. The church is not to be a political party. The reason this is so is because there is no authority for it. Certainly, the church should not support and promote anything or anybody that is inconsistent with the divinely revealed truth. Many intrusions into the affairs of the church have been made by zealous people who would have the church to be engaged in activities for which there is no direction from God. The doctrine that the church can do whatever the individual Christian can do is to confuse any number of activities an individual may do as a citizen, a parent, or a business man in his work and recreation, etc., that does not fall under the work of the church. There are duties that overlap. It is also true that the individual is a member of the church wherever he is and whatever he does. It is also true that many things are authorized and commanded of individuals that are not commanded of the body functioning together.

As a parent one can discipline his child, supply games, enjoy entertainment and earn money, but the church has no business in such things. The individual may operate a gas station, grocery store, or insurance office, but this is not the work of the church. Whatever the individual does he does as a Christian, but his work is not always peculiar to the work of the church.

In a broad overview of the work of the church, we can say that the church is to glorify God. *"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."* (Ephesians 3:21). The work that Christ did was to the glory of the Father. *"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do."* (John

17:4). So it is with the church at work. Being the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15), brings glory to God.

The Primary Work

The primary work of the church is to spread the gospel. The great commission, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,"* was a charge given to the apostles and through them to all who would believe by their word. The early church knew this mission, and even under persecution "*went everywhere preaching the word.*" (Acts 8:4). Paul taught Timothy that he in turn might teach others who would go out to teach even more. (Second Timothy 2:2). *"Preach the word"* is the outstanding and ever present duty of the church. How shall they preach except they be sent, was Paul's question. The church must send laborers into the world to gather a harvest for the Lord. Christianity is a taught religion. Christians are to see to it that teaching and preaching is done. This is the number one and dominant work we are charged with doing. We are the support, promoter, and propagator of the gospel. "*Go ye therefore and teach all nations*" is the watchword. (Matthew 28:19).

There are any number of methods that we may utilize in spreading the worrd. We have the public proclamation of the truth. Preaching is authorized of God to bear the burden of making known the word of truth. We can use the printed page, teaching from house to house, or whatever media is available to us that is honorable and consistent with the truth itself, to make the message known and to fill the world with the gospel. Many use various visual aids. There is a danger that the visual aid not teach, but become a means of entertainment. Classes, home study courses, and private conversations are all useful in carrying out the work of the church. We must not erect organizations that displace the church in doing this work. God's governmental arrangement for the church must be respected. The church is fully adequate in its structure to take the gospel to all the world.

What To Teach

What is the church to teach? Preach the word; preach the gospel. The word of God is the subject matter. Preach Christ and His kingdom as the apostles and early evangelists did. We

can neither go beyond what was preached, nor add to what was preached in New Testament times.(Galatians 1:6-9). We bring God's anathema upon ourselves to vary from the gospel message.

Once I went to conduct a gospel meeting and was asked if I was going to bring anything new to the people. My answer was that I would not. Whatever men preach ought to be that which has been preached for nearly two thousand years already. Politics, reviews of novels, the so-called "social gospel," and such like, have no place in the pulpits and teaching work of the church. What God says, what to obey, how to live before God, the majesty of Christ, His death and resurrection, are the doctrines that are to be taught. Men of every nation are to hear the word of truth. The lost must be led to be saved. The saved must be led to grow. Even though the home has the duty to bring up children in the admonition of the Lord, the church has the duty to let all men everywhere have opportunity to know the word. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and it is the work of the church to see to it that the gospel goes to the ears of all.

Aiding The Needy

There is also another area of work the church is authorized to do, and that is to do good toward those who suffer misfortune in this life. It is sometimes called benevolent work; deeds of relief for the suffering; helping those in need; acts of kindness and works of charity. While social betterment is not the primary work of the church, it is a part of that work. The conversion and preservation of souls is the prime work; but doing good toward the unfortunate is a fruit of Christianity. *"Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."* (Ephesians 4:28). To the churches of Galatia Paul wrote, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all man, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* (Galatians 6:10). *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world."* (James 1:27). Here we have a definition of pure religion. Would any be so brazen to suggest that the church cannot practice pure religion? We would insist that this is what the church must practice. The churches of the New Testament were busy in

relieving the needs that arose during times of crisis and famine. The first responsibility for giving relief rests with the family. But there are circumstances and situations where the family either cannot, or has become so estranged from each other that they will not help those who need help. To those the church has a duty and must supply that which is lacking to sustain life. (First Timothy 5:16). Can we profess love and do otherwise? *"But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"* (First John 3:17).

Do Good To All, Especially...

Some have contended that the church can only help its own members. If this be true, many orphans are immediately eliminated because they are not old enough to yet be Christians. But we are taught that pure religion includes helping orphans. We are taught to especially help our brethren, but also others as well (Galatians 6:10). Nobody should suggest that the church is to undertake the relief of all the physical distress that the world might suffer. This is beyond the capacity and opportunity for the church. But, as we have opportunity we are not to turn away the needy who are deserving of help. Paul took thought for things honorable in the sight of God and men. (Second Corthians 8:21). Is it not honorable to help those in need, whoever they are? Did not Jesus help those who were God's children as well as those who were not when He assisted Jew and Gentile alike? Are we not to walk in His steps?

When one is hungry, food should be supplied. When one is thirsty, he should be given drink. The naked should be clothed; the distressed relieved; and the homeless provided a home. The church cannot be the home, but can provide a home. And God has not legislated the way to provide that home. This calls for the exercise of human judgment, and to discover, many times through trial and error, what is the best way to provide homes for the homeless. The church cannot be the relief, but can provide the relief.

Great benefit to the church is seen in its benevolent program. What better way to display to those whose hearts are hardened against the truth that truth makes a difference in the way one lives? Mighty works were done in New Testament times that opened doors of opportunity to preach the gospel. Benevolent work is a means that can be used to propagate the gospel. One

must secure a receptive heart before the seed can be sown. Relief of the needy goes a long way on accomplishing this.

The Sufficient Church

The church is fully capable and sufficiently organized to do the work that God has authorized the church to do. Within the governmental arrangement of Christ as the head, with local congregations, each one autonomous and independent under its own elders, whatever needs to be done can be done. The Bible authorizes no superstructure to do the work of the church. There is no allowance for institutions of men that would displace the work of the church. Again, we repeat, that individual work and cooperate work often overlaps, but neither makes the other unimportant. The church is its own missionary society without any other structures. The church cannot be the home, and must provide a home for the homeless, to do this work. Churches can cooperate without violating the self-government of one another. If one church sends funds to another church, the funds leave the oversight of one and becomes the money of the other. There is no violation of autonomy in that. A great danger in cooperating is for bigger churches to dominate and attempt to dictate to other churches. This has proven to be a sore spot in the work of the church, but it need not be.

The Alternative

If the church fails to do the work God has authorized it to do, it will result in the loss of souls, even the souls of those in the church. We are to be faithful stewards, servants of the Lord, doing His work in our lives. We shall be judged according to what we do in this life. (Second Corinthians 5:10). When one realizes the emphasis God has placed on saving the lost, keeping the saved saved, bringing relief to the needy that are under the charge of the church, one realizes the tragedy of failure in accomplishing these things. We dare not attempt what God has not authorized. We dare not neglect that which He has authorized to be done. While every detail of operation is not specified in doing the work of the church, the area of work is outlined for us and we must exercise the good sense and judgment we have to do what God directs. Whatever God has specified must be done the way He specifies. When God has commanded something to be done but has not detailed how it is

to be accomplished, it still must be done, and we must find ways consistent with all other truth to get it done.

There is no work that surpasses the work of the church in greatness and importance. Let us be up and about in doing this work.

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GOSPEL PREACHING

"*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" (Mark 16:15,16). It is God's plan for people to come to a knowledge of the truth by hearing the gospel preached. (First Corinthians 1:21). One of the thrilling records of Scripture is how the gospel was preached to people of every nation and race. (Colossians 1:23).

Not everyone that heard the Word had respect for it. Some were like foolish men who built their houses on the sand. (Matthew 7:24-27). But there were others who heard the Word, believed the Word, and obeyed the commandments of the gospel and were added to the saved, the Lord's church. (Acts)

Each one shall give an account of their response to gospel preaching. (Romans 14:12). Blessed will be those who have shown the proper love for the truth of God and been baptized into Christ. (Galatians 3:27). But those who obey not the gospel have no consolation, but a certain and fearful punishment awaiting them. (Second Thessalonians 1:8,9).

A NOTE TO OUR READERS

If you move and we do not receive your change of address, we cannot continue to send you our booklet.

We hope your profit from ***A BURNING FIRE***, but at any time you wish to discontinue receiving it, or are not interested in reading it, it would be a help to us for you to simply advise us of your desire.

Meanwhile, our prayers for your spiritual welfare come your way with every lesson. JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

RELY ON THE WORD

The Holy Spirit tells us all that God wants us to know through the all-sufficient, written Word. (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We rightly reject those who come claiming that God has given them some special revelation, or spoken directly to them, or given them guidance other than the Word.

Paul warned of those who preached a different gospel. (Galatians 1:6-9). John warned of false prophets. (First John 4:1).

Does it not strike you as strange that there are so many who claim some special revelation, and yet, they do not even speak the same things, nor agree regarding truth? They teach different doctrines, and are at variance with the inspired Word. Are we to believe the Holy Spirit is the source of such confusion and contradiction?

Inspired men of the New Testament were guided into all truth, and proved their message by miracles. None in our day do as they did.

Many want more than God's Word, not content to walk by faith, but prefer sight. Do not let false teachers exploit you. Do not allow yourself to be caught up in the frenzies of religious promoters who claim special and direct revelation.

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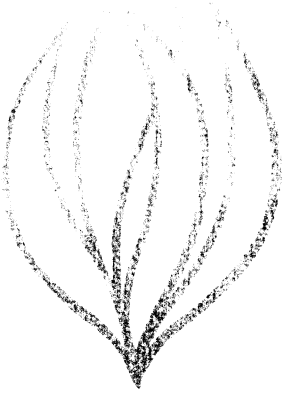

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III James W. Boyd **NUMBER 1**

We Can Improve

As we live the Christian life, it is evident that there are areas wherein we need to grow and improve. There are two ways to provoke people to improve. One way is by encouraging them to do better through commending what efforts they are already making. Another way is to point out shortcomings and criticize these so there can be improvement in those areas where it is needed. Possibly, the method of encouragement is that which most of us prefer, and it may be in the long run, the most effective way. But the Lord taught and led people in the paths of righteousness by using both methods, and so should we. We need a proper mixture of the positive and the negative. All of one to the neglect of the other will not accomplish the task.

There are various ways to bring criticism and various motives for doing so. We want to criticize constructively if we criticize at all. We want to seek the right kind of growth and improvement; the good response that is needed. To criticize just to find fault is beneficial to no one and does not reflect a proper attitude. We need not make fun of anyone, nor be inconsiderate of anybody's feelings. We should be anxious to help, hoping and working for that which is better.

But we still want to be frank and plain, with kindness. There is no need for tongue lashing and belittling of others. But we should be able to assume that Christian people really want to know where they can improve in their Christian activities, whatever they are. We seldom see ourselves as others see us. For this reason, whenever we receive criticism, regardless of the motive behind it, we ought listen to it and pay attention to it long enough to find out if there is any substance to it. Even those who would intend to harm us might just reveal something to us about ourselves that could help us improve. Through constructive criticism we are given an excellent opportunity to improve.

Improve Our Singing

We need to improve in the singing in our worship services. Singing is one of God's ways for man to worship Him. "*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord.*" Singing is the kind of music that God has authorized for His

people to offer to Him, and there is no authority for the use of mechanical instruments with which to make music. To use such innovations is to add to what God has directed, and this is forbidden (Second John 9; Galatians 1:6-9). Sometimes our singing seems so wonderful, at least as far as humans can determine. This we determine by the quality of the singing, the number who participate, how interested brethren seem to be in that portion of the worship. Of course, we would not presume to judge the hearts of those who are singing, or determine how acceptable to God the singing may be on any given occasion. But is there any reason our singing ought to appear half-heartedly done, with little interest, with many not singing? Good congregational singing takes good leadership. And it also takes congregational participation. We have at times brought criticism of His way for music in worship by the poor way which we have executed it. There have been times when visitors have told me, after a rather dismal song service, that we may not approve of the instruments, but we need something. That kind of comment really hurts the truth. Surely, a poor song service is unintentional on our part. Often, it is through carelessness and may be due to indifference. But more seriously, it might reflect a lack of faith, love and interest in spiritual matters. Many consider the way the song service goes as a spiritual thermometer for the congregation. It does seem that when the singing in a congregation is good the interest in the church is good. It suggests a real support of what the church is to do and is doing. It is distressing that some never sing. This is not because they cannot sing, but they prefer to listen, or just sit until it is finished. Regardless of the quality of our voice and our ability to "carry a tune," we ought be found trying and joining with our brethren when time comes to sing praises unto God. Singing to honor God is a privilege like other items of worship, and we ought do our best, and make improvement.

Improve In Reverence

Another matter where it becomes obvious we can improve is the spirit of reverence we have during the worship period. We readily recognize that the "noise level" is not the only measure of the reverence of a service. We know that the environment makes a great difference in maintaining a reverential atmosphere. But we ought to keep to a minimum the distractions, noise, interruptions and distractions that break the attention of

others from worshiping. We realize that children at times cause distractions. We would not encourage putting the children out of the worship service, but would encourage parents to bring them each time. They learn by observing. There is a great lesson they can gather when they see father and mother worshiping God. This great and righteous activity becomes a good habit with them. But at times the very little ones will cry or otherwise disturb. This is as normal as living, and we can appreciate that fact. But those whose children do begin to distract have a responsibility to remove them as quickly and quietly as possible from the assembly, with no more disturbance than is necessary in doing so. How inconsiderate is that parent who spanks his child while in the worship assembly, with the slaps going on to the audition of all. It is a reflection on the parent. Little doubt the child may need what he is getting, but there is a time and place for that sort of correction and the worship assembly is neither one. Take them out; that is a part of their training to be attentive and reverent in the worship services.

The confusion of getting up, milling around, running in and out to the water fountain or bathroom is something that can and ought be controlled. Talking, snickering, and passing written notes have no place in the worship hour. Some young people do this in imitation of some older ones.

When brethren are called upon to lead the congregation in prayer, they ought make sure they can be heard. It may not be anything but shyness on their part, but it is distracting to others to come to worship and not be able to hear what is said.

An imaginative story is told about a certain worship assembly where suddenly a man in dazzling white apparel appeared at the entrance, came down the aisle and took a seat on the front pew. Everyone suspected it must be the Christ. Can you imagine the quietness and reverence that captured the scene? The songs were never sung with greater earnestness. The prayers were never uttered with greater thought and sincerity. The preacher never preached with such meaning and intensity. Everyone gave more than they usually did. The observance of the Lord's Supper never was so meaningful and reverently observed. Why? It was because it was thought the Lord was present. Do we not realize that our Lord is present in every worship service? Just because we do not see a figure in dazzling clothes sitting in our midst does not mean he is not there. He has promised to be there. Shall we not respect His spiritual presence and exercise as great a reverence as we are capable?

Improve In Attendance

We preach often on the need of improvement in attendance at the services. Some do not need to be encouraged in this because they are always there when physically able. They do not need words of rebuke because they are faithful in that matter. We know at times there are unavoidable problems that may arise that can prevent our attendance, such as car trouble at the last minute, illness, bad weather that prevents us from making the journey to the place of meeting. These things occasionally happen. We are confident that God knows when we can and cannot attend. But too many are just not devoted to worshiping God at the times appointed. The variation in worship attendance figures indicates this. Too many attend as a matter of convenience rather than conviction. Possibly some come just enough to soothe their consciences but not enough to impress God of their love for Him. When one is so sick they cannot attend, or cannot do so with health safety for others, or are involved in the necessary care of the sick, or because of unavoidable emergencies, this is understandable. But do we not realize that to deliberately absent oneself from the worship services is to sin and neglect a sacred privilege and obligation? (Hebrews 10:25). The now and then, on again, off again manner of attendance at worship makes us sure there is room for improvement in the worship attendance of many professed Christians.

Improve In Willingness To Work

We mention but one other area where there is room to improve, and that is in our willingness to be involved and to do the work with the rest of the church when there is work to be done. Some always have to be begged to do anything. Some are always ready, willing, and able to do anything that demands attention. Why cannot we all be like the latter group? Why should we have to be begged to do the Lord's work? Isn't He our Lord, too? Do we not look to Him for our blessings like the next Christian? Those in charge of getting the work done so often have to announce, and call, and urge, and plead, over and over, for brethren to help in carrying out the work. This is not a good reflection on the interest, love and concern for souls and the church. When we have opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ toward others, why are we so backward in

being involved? Some have the "they" attitude toward the church rather than the "we" attitude that we ought to have. "They" are doing this; "they" are doing that. Why is it not "we" are doing this and "we" are doing that? Is it because we do not realize that we are members of the church with duties as much as the next? Or is it because we want to do as little as we think we can and still "get by?" We will let God be the judge, of course, but it is a fair question and intended to provoke within us some serious self-examination.

We do not want to sound overly critical of brethren. Some brethren are in the work, worshiping fervently, giving liberally, living righteously, and they deserve every commendation, even though they are not accountable but to God. But I feel confident that every Christian wants the affairs of the church to be such that would attract the lost to Christ rather than repel, or discourage those who are already in Christ. Therefore, we need to recognize the need to improve; learn where we can improve, and then, improve. Improvement begins with me. It begins with you. Each individual must improve for the body to improve.

The greatest improvement some can make is to come to Christ. They have never done this. They remain lost and they need the improvement that forgiveness of sins provides. Christ offers this forgiveness when you come to Him in obedient faith. The wayward Christian who has wandered needs to improve by being restored. Those who are presently faithful need to analyze and examine themselves, and make improvement in whatever area there is need, whether we have touched upon that area in this lesson or not. We all can grow. This is a part of being a Christian.

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(contined from page 24)
to belong to that which admits it is unnecessary to salvation? That admission tells you that it is not the church of Christ. We are reconciled to God in the one body. (Ephesians 2:16). The saved are added to the church. (Acts 2:47).

There are other reasons why we belong to the church of Christ but these are sufficient to show why everyone needs to belong to that same church.

† † † † †

The Form Of Doctrine

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." (Romans 6:16-18).

In the inspired epistles we have much that teaches us how to live as Christians. Among the things taught in these epistles are reminders of what the Christian has done to be in a saved relationship with God. We read of what was done to become a Christian, as in this passage that now commands our attention.

In this chapter Paul had reminded brethren how they had died to sin (verse 2), been baptized into Christ and into His death, (verse 3), had been buried in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life, (verse 4), and had become united with Christ, (verse 5), the old man of sin having been crucified and now they were no longer under bondage to sin, (verse 6). In verse seventeen he mentions what they once were, servants of sin, but that was not true of them any longer because they had obeyed the form of doctrine delivered them. By that obedience they changed their service from service of sin to being servants of righteousness, (verse 18).

We take note here of a matter that we shall discuss in more detail later, that the passage of Romans 6:3,4 speaks of a death, burial and resurrection, and in that logical order. When there is a death there is to be a burial. The burial must come before the resurrection.

Obeyed A Form

Paul said they had been obedient to something. What had they obeyed? They had obeyed a form of doctrine. They had not merely obeyed a doctrine, but a form. The form was a form of a doctrine. It was a picture, a representation, a likeness of a doctrine. The doctrine is one matter and the form of the doctrine is another. They had the doctrine delivered them, that is, preached to them, and they had obeyed that which is in the likeness of that doctrine.

What is the doctrine to which Paul refers? Whatever it is, the

obedience to the form of that doctrine was necessary for them to change from being servants of sin to being servants of righteousness. The doctrine must be that doctrine by which we can obtain salvation from sin.

The Doctrine

Paul wrote, First Corinthians 15:1-4, "*Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.*"

Here is the saving doctrine that Paul preached. He preached the same thing wherever he preached. The doctrine is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. There is no salvation apart from the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. His blood was shed in His death. There is no salvation without the shedding of blood. (Hebrews 10:4). What can wash away sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is the doctrine, the form of which the Romans had obeyed. The form was a likeness, a picture, a representation of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

We have to keep before us that in God's plan for saving man, God has a part and man has a part. The divine part is that which God provided; that which Deity has done. The human part is what man must do in order to take advantage of the benefits of God's part. God's part provided the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Man's part is to obey the form of that doctrine.

The Form

What is the form of this saving doctrine that men must obey? After Jesus came from the tomb and just prior to His ascension, He said, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned.*" (Mark 16:15,16). We are concerned about being saved, so we center our thought on the terms of salvation rather than on the way of damnation. Faith and baptism were both listed by Christ. No man has the right to tamper with what Christ specified. Jesus also taught, "*Except ye*

repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3). Again, "*Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the son of man also confess before the angels of God."* (Luke 12:8). The Savior requires faith, repentance, confession and baptism in order to be saved. The apostles taught the same things. People in the New Testament did those very same things in order to be saved. These are matters of divine command. Paul says obedience to the form of doctrine is necessary for salvation. So we must find the form to be obeyed in these commands.

Death

In the doctrine, the first item is the doctrine of death. Christ died. Where is the likeness of death in these instructions? Paul says we become dead to sin, (Romans 6:2), and the old man of sin is crucified, (Romans 6:6). We separate our lives from the ways of sinful living. There must be a change from the love and practice of sin to a love and practice of righteousness. Affections are called away from evil and wickedness to the pure ways of God. We must change our minds, turn our lives, so sin will no longer rule and reign. This is called repentance. When one repents he is making the resolve to separate himself from the ways of sin. Believing the message that we all do sin, believing that Christ is the Savior from sin, repenting of sin and determining to go that way no more pictures the spiritual death to sin. We are not yet forgiven of past sins, but have made the determination of the direction we shall go. As Christ died, so sin must be mortified.

Burial

The second item of the doctrine by which we are saved is burial. Christ was buried. We are also buried with him in baptism. "*Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him."* (Colossians 2:12). In passing, we must insist that this should be sufficient to forever close the contention that baptism can be a mere sprinkling, pouring or any other of the human innovations and substitutions to Biblical immersion. But we are not so optimistic that men will abandon their traditions in favor of God's truth, but God's truth is clear and plain anyway.

Resurrection

Furthermore, as Christ was raised from the dead, His

resurrection, we are raised from that watery grave to walk in newness of life. In faith, repentance and baptism, we have the likeness of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. In faith, repentance and baptism, we have the form of the doctrine by which we are saved.

Notice just when a person becomes a servant of righteousness. Notice when he ceased his servitude to sin. It is not before he obeys the form, but upon his obedience to the form of doctrine that saves. Salvation is not granted when only part of the form is obeyed. The Romans had obeyed from the heart the entire form, and were then, and by that obedience, made servants of righteousness. Faith, repentance, confession and baptism is that which men must obey in order to be blessed, as were the Christians in Rome.

† † † † †

Deacons

An understanding of the Lord's church is not complete without understanding the organizational structure or government of it. We must understand the leadership roles and duties.

Christ is the head of the church. Other than this there is no universal government of the church. Christians in a given locality are organized into local congregations. Each congregation is autonomous, overseen by elders, served by deacons, and the rest of the members, including the preachers and teachers, make up the body under the oversight of the eldership.

Unfortunately, not every Christian sees fit to be a part of a local church as they ought. They not only deprive themselves of one of God's safeguards against apostasy, but they fail in their individual duty, obstruct the progress of the church, and generally float from place to place never assuming responsibility anywhere for anything. This is a grave error because one's soul is endangered by such irresponsible conduct.

The purpose of our lesson is to learn what the Scriptures teach about the deacons. God has ordained that a congregation have deacons as did the early congregations. "*Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.*"

(Philippians 1:1). Again, First Timothy 3:8, alongside the qualifications for those who serve as bishops, Paul said, "*Likewise must the deacons...*" and gave certain qualifications for those who would be deacons. It is certain that the office and work of a deacon was already established by the time these two epistles were written. We cannot be absolutely certain when the first deacons were selected.

Some have considered the selection of men to care for the neglected Grecian widows, (Acts 6:1;6), were the first deacons. Others have considered the young men who buried Annanias and Saphirra to have been deacons. (Acts 5:1-10). In neither instance were those men called deacons. That they were servants of the church is true, and in one sense anyone who serves might be called a deacon, as we shall discuss. They were attending to a given work assigned them. But whether they occupied the more or less permanent office called deacon, (First Timothy 3:13), is questionable. But when the office was established is of no real consequence. The important thing to know is that God has ordained that a congregation have deacons.

A Servant

We need to consider the work, authority and responsibility of deacons. The word "deacon" means a servant. Translated from the word "diakonos" that appears thirty times in the New Testament, sometimes it is translated servant, minister, referring to one who attends to certain matters. In only four instances does it seem to designate an office. So we see two senses in which the word "deacon" is used in Scripture. In general use, it refers to anyone who serves. More specifically, it refers to certain ones of certain qualifications who are appointed to the office of deacon.

There is a certain authority that belongs to deacons, but it is very limited. They, like the rest of the congregation, serve under the oversight of the eldership. They are not junior elders, not rulers or policymakers for the congregation. That belongs to the eldership. The deacons can exert their influence in matters to be decided like any other member, but they have no power of decision, except as is delegated to them by the eldership in the performance of tasks assigned them to accomplish. While they are responsible for the work they do, the eldership ultimately is responsible for what they do.

A Misconception Of Deacons

There is a misconception entertained by some that the deacons have charge over the physical and material matters of the church while the eldership has charge over the spiritual matters. The truth is that the eldership has the oversight of all things of a local congregation and the deacons are to assist them in any phase of work they are called upon to assist. It is easy to see the need for close unity, harmony, cooperation, respect and communication between the men who serve as elders and the men who serve as deacons.

There is very little revealed by which we can know exactly how a deacon is selected. If, and the "if" is a big one, the men of Acts 6 were deacons we have one example of making the selection. Certain men were to be chosen from among the brethren, by the brethren, who were of certain quality, and later appointed to the task. But an example does not bind in and of itself without some command undergirding it. The fact is that we have no step-by-step, point-by-point procedure specified. Therefore there must be the exercise of human judgment. When God requires a thing and does not specify how that thing must be done, then human judgment must be called. Inasmuch as the selection of deacons is a congregational matter, it would fall under the purview of the eldership as to how to get it done.

Qualifications

Not just anyone can be a deacon. Selection should not be made on the basis of friendship, kinship, a popularity poll, or any such thing. The work is far too serious and dignified for such political maneuvering. There are Biblical qualifications given in First TImothy 3:8-10 that a man must possess before he can rightfully assume the role of a deacon.

Grave. He must be serious-minded, capable of sober thinking, realizing the gravity of handling matters pertaining to the church. He ought not be hasty and presumptious. He should not be flighty, empty-headed, but one who weighs his words and actions, being capable of good judgment.

Not double-tongued. No "two-faced" person ought be a deacon. He must be a person who says what he means and means what he says. He has to be able to make decisions with an open mind, having convictions that are not tossed to and fro. He must be a man of his word with a discreet tongue.

Not given to much wine. This does not grant him the right to drink strong drink a little bit. No Christian has that right. God's leaders in both the Old and New Testaments have been men who abstained from strong drink if they were faithful to God. The word "wine" can refer to both fermented or unfermented produce of the grap. What the deacon is allowed is a moderate and temperate consumption of the unfermented juice of the grape. What kind of an example would a leader in the church be who drank strong drink?

Not greedy of filthy lucre. A deacon ought not be one who places such emphasis on material things and the having of money. Too often those who are concerned about money are less concerned about spiritual matters. Too often men have been made deacons even though their prime motivations are monetary in life. Being considered a financial success is all some consider for a man to be a deacon. But a deacon cannot be grasping, greedy, covetous. He must realize that money is but a tool with which work for God can be done.

Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. This is a qualification often overlooked. We expect those who preach and those who serve as elders to know the faith thoroughly. But somehow we feel a deacon does not have to be very schooled in the knowledge of the truth. Before one is appointed a deacon he must have a knowledge of the truth that is recognizable, holding fast to that truth, and stefast in the performance of that truth. Too often, influential deacons, who lack knowledge, have created grave problems in the very congregations they have been asked to serve. A deacon must be well-informed, well-studied, and faithul in what he knows.

First proved, then let them serve. It is a mistake to put a person in some responsibility hoping that he might gradually qualify for it sometime. Those who are appointed as deacons are to have demonstrated certain qualifications before being appointed. He must have proven his ability, willingness to work, sense of duty, attitude of cooperativeness. He cannot be a novice or a newcomer whose talents, disposition and outlook is unknown and untried.

Blameless. This means he is to be without reproach, a man of good character and reputation both in and out of the church. He should be known and respected for his honesty and purity of life. Otherwise he will bring reproach on the church.

Husband of one wife. The man who is a deacon must respect God's law on marriage. He cannot be an adulterer,

bigamist, or any such thing. He must be a married man and one who knows the dignity of marriage and the home.

Ruling their own children and their houses well. Does the man have the respect and confidence of his own family? Is he the head of his house? While the children of elders are to already be members of the church (faithful children), the deacon's children need not yet be Christians if not of age. Nonetheless, he cannot be a deacon with unruly, disobedient children.

These qualifications are not easily attained because they are high. But they are within the reach of brethren or God would not have required them.

One additional consideration must be given in selection of men to serve as deacons concerns the wives of deacons. As much as any one source, wives of leaders in the church can be sources of problems or contributors to solutions by being good helps for their husbands. But when the wife of a leader is not as she ought to be, nothing but harm to the church will result. She must be the kind of woman that is careful about her words, her dress, the manner of home, her relationship to her husband, lest she be the object of problems. While there ought not be a double standard of behavior, it is certain that those with greater opportunity have greater responsibility. This applies to those who would serve as deacons, their wives, and their children.

Opportunity

Being a deacon offers a marvelous opportunity for service, development and training. "*For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*" (First TImothy 3:13). Many men who later become elders have proven themselves by being good deacons first.

† † † † †

Hell, And Who Is Going There

From the title of this lesson it might appear to some that we are going into an area that we have no right. Judging the souls of people is the work of God, not man. But we are making no judgments based on our own standards. We would violate the Word of God to do that. But we are obligated to learn and respect the judgments that God has revealed in His word. This is what we propose to do in this lesson.

The very nature of the subject makes it unpopular. None like to dwell on the subject of hell. It is not pleasurable. But it evidently must be important or God would not have told us about it. Being a Bible topic, it is a message that must be preached. In fact, we probably need to hear such sermons more often than we do.

Cannot Ignore It

Some would immediately dismiss this lesson in disbelief of hell. They deny there is such a place or that there will be punishment after death. They do not think anybody will ever go there even if there is such a place. Universalists think everybody will be saved. But the Bible speaks of both the saved and the lost. Liberals and modernists deny the existence of hell and heaven. But the Bible teaches both of them. They simply do not believe the Bible is God's word at all. Some religionists believe in reward and accept the reality of heaven but inconsistently deny punishment and deny the reality of hell. The Bible teaches of both. Why accept one and deny the other? Few are willing to accept the severity of the teaching found in the Bible on the subject. Being anxious to please, many preachers omit the topic from their sermons altogether. Others may mention it in passing. Some will water it down and smooth it over as best they can. But we are inclined to think that people would not be so quick to joke about hell if they knew what God's word has to say about it and who is going there. Like heaven, words do not adequately describe the horrors of hell any more than words can adequately describe the glories of heaven. But enough is said and in such a way that we have no problem knowing we do not want to go there.

Is There Punishment?

Is there punishment after death for anyone? "*And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man also died, and was buried. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*" (Luke 16:22-25). Was the rich man in punishment or not? Surely he was. It was after his life on earth. He was in hell or hades, not the final place of punishment as yet, but in torment nonetheless.

Jesus warned, "*And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*" (Luke 12:4,5). "*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*" (Matthew 25:46). Those are the words of Christ Himself.

Listen to the inspired apostle Paul. "*He that despised Moses law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace.*" (Hebrews 10:28,29). Again, Second Thessalonians 1:9, "*Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.*" Hear another apostle. "*For if God spared not the angels that sinned but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment, and spared not the old world, but saved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly, and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly, and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds. The Lord knoweth*

how to deliver the ungodly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." (Second Peter 2:4-9).

Can there be any doubt in the mind of an honest person that the Bible teaches the reality of punishment after death for those who are ungodly? And where is that place? What is it called? It is called hell. The word "gehenna" appears only twelve times in the New Testament and is translated "hell." It refers to that final place of punishment for the wicked. "*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."* (Matthew 10:28). "*Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"* (Matthew 23:33).

Hell Described

How is hell described? We might answer, "Inadequately." It is not that God has not told us enough, but that it is beyond our ability to comprehend how horrible hell is. "*And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."* (Revelation 20:10). "*And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.* (Revelation 20:14,15). Revelation 21:8 describes hell as "*the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."* Matthew 25:30 , "*And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "And shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 13:42). *"And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."* (Revelation 14:11). Notice the terms used: outer darkness, gnashing of teeth, torment, pain, anguish, lake of fire and brimstone. It is beyond our worst imaginations.

How Long?

How long must hell be endured? When we become sick, one of the first questions we ask is, "How long before I can be well again?" If we break a bone, we ask, "How long before I can take

off this cast?" We have expectation that at some point in time we shall be relieved from the problem. Some have invented a doctrine of purgatory where one goes and burns until he has paid for his sins. The Bible teaches nothing like purgatory. It teaches that man cannot pay for his own sins. This would be salvation apart from the blood of Christ. We would be paying our own debt, and eventually delivered. But it is false from the start. Others teach that the wicked at death will simply be annihilated, cease to exist, and their punishment will be that they simply shall be no more. Their punishment is not one that includes torment because they will cease to be. But this is not what the Bible teaches.

What does the Bible say as to how long hell will be endured? Revelation 14:10,11, "*...for ever and ever.*" Revelation 20:10, "*...for ever and ever.*" Mark 9:44, "*...unquenchable fire, where the worm dieth not.*" Matthew 25:46 speaks of life eternal and punishment everlasting. The word translated "eternal" and "everlasting" is the exact same word. Heaven and hell exist together; one just as long as the other.

Is ther really any doubt regarding what the Bible teaches, that there is a place called hell that shall never end? There will be no hope, no end. Those who go there are locked in forever. Once there; forever there.

Who Is Going There?

Who is going there? Again, we have no right to make our own judgments, but we have the obligation to respect what God has warned. God is the judge and He has told us who is going there. Even though some may say nobody is going there, we would better listen to God rather than men. Even though some say that nobody can say who is going there, we can say what God has said and say it with confidence.

Some follow the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination that contends that some are predestined to heaven and others are predestined to hell even before they are born, and they can do nothing about it one way or the other. Of course, that would mean the entire mission of Christ to save was a farce. That means the invitation to be saved is extended insincerely. That means that man is not responsible for his spiritual condition or destiny because he has no choice in the matter. He may as well give in and give up because it was settled before he was born. It makes a mockery of the entire Biblical record.

But again we ask, what does the Bible teach as to who is going to hell? "*For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*" (Ephesians 5:5). "*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and socerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*" (Revelation 21:8). "*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*" (Galatians 5:19-21).

More Lost Than Saved

Scripture teaches that more will be lost than saved. "*Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*" (Matthew 7:13,14).

Hell is the place of the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41). This includes Satan's messengers and fellow-workers. John teaches, "*And we know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*" (First John 5:19). James wrote, "*Friendship with the world is enmity with God.*" (James 4:14). Those that follow the sinful ways of the world cannot be saved while in that spiritual state. Furthermore, Jesus taught that those who have neglected doing good works shall hear the words, "*Depart from me.*" (Matthew 25).

Romans 2:8,9, "*But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentiles.*" "*And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.*" (First Thessalonians 1:7-9). Those that do not obey the truth are included among those that shall

go to hell. Cannot you see why Christians urge people to obey the truth of the gospel? It is so they can escape hell. The reason the gospel is such good news is because, when obeyed, it enables one to escape hell. The gospel, which includes facts and promises, also includes commands that must be obeyed. Man must believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, be baptized for the remission of sins into Christ, and live according to the gospel. This must be obeyed; to not obey is to seal our spiritual condemnation in hell.

Also, those who become unfaithful as Christians will go to hell. Second Peter 2:20-22, *"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."* The first state of a person is that he is lost in sin. The latter state, the state of the one who becomes a Christian and is unfaithful and turns back, is even worse. Certainly, since it is said to be worse, the unfaithful Christian is lost. Probably, the reason he is in a worse state is because, having heard the only message of truth and now turning from it, there is nothing else to which he can turn. Jesus said, *"No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62). This shows the one who draws back will be lost.

Revelation 2:10 admonishes that the faithful will receive a crown of life. Are we to suppose that the unfaithful will receive the crown anyway? It is to the faithful servant that the Lord says, *"Well done."* (Matthew 25). That lukewarm Christian shall be *"spewed out."* (Revelation 3:16).

Motives For Serving God

There are three primary motives for serving God: One is the hope of reward, another is the fear of punishment, and the third is love for God. God uses all three to motivate man to come to him for salvation. All three make a contribution toward conversion. Paul said, *"For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things*

done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..." (Second Corinthians 5:10,11). Will you be persuaded?

Hebrews 10:31, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*" Hebrews 12:25, "*See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.*"

† † † † †

Why I Am A Member Of The Church Of Christ

"*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*" (First Peter 3:15). We should have scriptural reasons for what we are religiously. People ought not just accept blindly what somebody may teach them and tell them to believe. This is not to cast reflection on preachers and teachers, parents or friends, but to focus attention on the ultimate authority for what we believe and practice. We all believe many things at first because we have confidence in the one who may have taught us. But the time comes when we must believe what we believe because we have a Bible reason for knowing it is the truth. Every faithful gospel preacher will urge his hearers to do as did the noble Bereans of old; that is, search the Scriptures to see what is so. (Acts 17:11).

Why are you what you are religiously? Some are members of certain churches for no better reason than the fact that their ancestors were members. Some married a mate who was a member and they went along. Others are what they are for business, political and social benefits. There are those who tell you they belong to their church because it was the closest building to where they live. Such reasons fall short of the Scriptural demands.

The Church Is Not A Denomination

We must understand that there is a difference between the

church of Christ of which you read in the Bible and a denomination. There is no kinship between them. No denomination has Biblical authority for its existence. They all exist by the authority of men whereas the church is of God. The church is not composed of the sum total of the denominational world because the Bible never presents the church in such fashion. We should be members of the church of which the Bible speaks.

Let us first insist that we are members of the church of Christ because we want to be governed by what the Bible does teach. We cannot conceive of belonging to something religiously of which we read not one word in God's revelation. Life, eternity, salvation, hope, forgiveness and all such things are too important to commit to something that is not from the Bible. All who know anything about the Bible readily admit that the church that belongs to Christ is revealed therein, and it is the one to which we ought to belong. Until those who have been taught concerning the church in denominational terms release from their minds this preconceived misinformation, it will be impossible for them to grasp what the Bible teaches about the church.

The Bible does not teach people just to join some church, or join the church of your choice. While this is what denominational clergymen preach, it is not what the Scriptures teach. No person can "join" the church of Christ. Rather, when one obeys the gospel, God adds him to the church. (Acts 2:47). What one does to be saved is the same thing he does for God to add him to the church. The church is the house or family of God, (First Timothy 3:15), and one is born into that family when he is born of water and the Spirit. (John 3:3-5). The new birth enables one to enter the kingdom, and the church is the kingdom.

The Church Is Of Christ

We are members of the church of Christ because it is of Christ. It is His. He built it. (Matthew 16:16-18). The fact that He is the Son of God is the foundation upon which the church is built. Christ promised to build His church, and He promised to build only one. "*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" (First Corinthians 3:11). Christ is the head of the church. (Colossians 1:18). It is His by virtue of the fact that He purchased it with His own blood. (Acts 20:28). He is the tried and tested foundation of which Isaiah wrote,

"*Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.*" (Isaiah 28:16). Christ identified Himself as that stone.

People sometimes will ask, "Are you a Christian?" When you respond, "Yes," they likely will ask, "To what church do you belong?" There is no such thing as being a Christian without belonging to His church, not some denomination. Biblically speaking, the question reveals great misinformation as to be nature of the church. One had just as soon ask, "Which Christ do you follow?" as to ask, "To which church do you belong?" There is but one church just as there is but one Christ. You will never find anything about the hyphenated church member ; that is, a Methodist-Christian, a Baptist-Christian, or a Presbyterian-Christian. You just find that the disciples were called "Christians". (Acts 11:26). All the denominational appendages came from men.

In Jerusalem - On Pentecost

The Lord's church was established at the place and time that the prophets said. It was in the city of Jerusalem, on the first Pentecost day after the resurrection of Christ. (Acts 2). Isaiah, Micah, Daniel, Zechariah, all the prophets had foretold of those things. (Acts 3:24). If a church had its beginning other than in Jerusalem, and on a day other than Pentecost around A.D.30 or 33 (depending on the calendar count), then it is not the church that Christ built. Why should anyone want to be a member of a church that Christ did not build when he can belong to the one that He did build?

The Creed Of The Church

We are members of the church of Christ because of its creed. The word creed simply refers to what is believed. Nearly every denomination has a human creed that has been compiled for that denomination and makes that denomination distinctive from all the others. The church of Christ also has a creed that makes it distinctive. That creed is simply the Bible, no more and no less. Nothing has authority behind it that is not of the Bible. One could take a copy of the Bible and have stamped in gold on the cover, "The Creed of the Church of Christ." The Bible is the discipline, the manual, the catechism, the rule book. It is the

inspired Word of God, all-sufficient and authoritative; there being no need or allowance for anything more or less. (Second Timothy 3:16,17). This is what members of the church of Christ who are faithful to God believe. There is no other authority that one must accept but God's Word. The will of Jesus Christ is what the Bible is. If people would set aside their human creeds and unite on the Bible as the authority, this would be a major step toward unity for which Jesus prayed. It would remove from the religious scene everything not taught in the Bible, and this would remove from existence any and all churches except His.

The Support Of The Truth

We are members of the church of Christ because it is the pillar and ground (the support, defender, proclaimer) of the truth. (First Timothy 3:15). Therefore, it teaches what the Bible teaches as to how to be saved, what God has done, and what man must do. It teaches the grace, love, and mercy of God in sending His Son; how people must hear the Word, believe it, repent, confess, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Churches generally will not teach this. Rather they teach what their manual, discipline, or creed book instructs. They teach one must "pray through," salvation by faith only, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, just be honest and sincere, and on and on with many ways of salvation of which nothing is stated in Scripture.

Government

The church of Christ is organized and governmentally structured the way the Bible reveals with Christ as the head, the universal church organized into local congregations, and there being no ecclesiastical heirarchy or organization larger than the local church. The local church is overseen by men of certain qualifications called elders, or bishops, or pastors, who are shepherds of the flock. There are deacons who serve. The rest of the church is composed of the rest of the members, including preachers and teachers. Each congregation is self-governing or autonomous, being tied together by a common salvation and conviction.

The Work Of The Church

We are members of the church of Christ because it does the

work the church is supposed to do; namely, preach the gospel to save souls, edify the saved that they may grow and not fall away, and render benevolent assistance to those in need as opportunity presents itself.

The church of Christ worships as Scripture authorizes with singing, praying, giving, the Lord's Supper, and proclamation of the Word. This is that of which we read in the New Testament.

When churches begin to "branch out" into the fields of secular education, recreation, entertainment, and such things, going beyond what is written and leaving the need for authority for what is done, that church has turned away from the pattern the Lord established and has embarked on the paths of digression and apostasy.

Names

We are members of the church of Christ because we subscribe to the Biblical identifications for the church and its members. The church is called the church of God, the church of Christ, and more often than not, simply the church. After all, it belongs to God and Christ, and there is only one. No names that honor men, or doctrines, or governmental systems, or any such thing have any Biblical support. The disciples are called saints, disciples, Christians, members of the body of Christ. Why should anybody want to wear names that God has not authorized? Why would one want to promote and encourage religious division by wearing names that divide and separate? Why does one dismiss the importance of the worthy name by which we are called when everyone knows names are very important. God thinks names are important and gave names as He saw fit. He gave the name "*Christian*" to the followers of Christ. (Isaiah 62:1,2). The name He gave is the name the apostles approved. It is the name "*Christian.*" Members of the church of Christ wear that name that honors the Savior.

Christ Saves The Church

We are members of the church of Christ because that church is what Christ promised to save, (Ephesians 5:23), and which He shall deliver to the Father when He comes again. (First Corinthians 15:24). He offers to save everyone, but only those in His body, the church, will be saved. Why should anyone want

(continued on page 5)



JAMES W. BOYD

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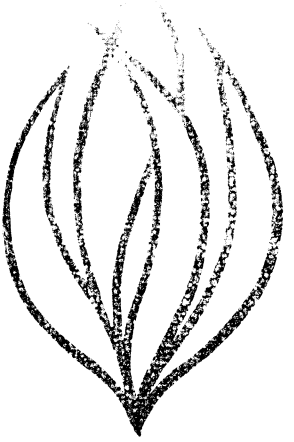

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME III James W. Boyd **NUMBER 2**

Brevity: An Evidence Of Inspiration

The study of Christian evidences is an investigation of those things that tend to show that the Bible is not just another ordinary book, but that it is what it claims to be; namely, the Word of God. Those who believe this claim ought to have good reasons for their faith. We are not expected by the Lord to just blindly accept whatever someone might tell us. There is evidence to show that the Scripture is inspired and we should be acquainted with it. Such knowledge is reassuring and comforting to us. In our society, there is an evergrowing number of people who wish to discredit the Bible and who do not believe the truths of it. We must be prepared for the battle of the Bible with every weaponry at our disposal.

What we are proposing in this lesson is that one of the evidences that the Bible came from God and not from the minds of men is the brevity of it, the style, and conciseness of the Bible. The lesson will not have a multitude of Scripture references because of the nature of the lesson is talking about the Bible, not as much as learning the lessons taught. Obviously, as we consider the brevity of it, we shall cite Biblical texts to prove the points made.

In Genesis

The thoughtful student of the Bible is soon impressed with the briefness of the various books that make up the Bible. For example, consider the book of Genesis. In only fifty chapters, covering about forty-six pages in my Bible, it covers the origin of the world and all that is in it, human history for approximately 2500 years, several centuries longer than Christ's day until now. All of this is reported in less space than is used each month in an issue of *The Reader's Digest.* Obviously, the writers were restricted in what they said and how much. It is not like man to cover such great spans of time so rapidly.

The first thirty-four verses tell us the entire creation story, not only of man's world, but all the universe. The vegetable and animal kingdoms are included, as well as the creation of humanity. Only four verses are used to tell us of God's creation

of man, how man is in the image of God, how he is a living soul, and man's relationship to all the material and animal world.

The very opening verse of the Bible is a very compacted verse. *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* (Genesis 1:1). These are but ten words, the length of an abbreviated telegram. It includes all the major elements of our world: *"In the beginning"*--time; *"God"*--suggests the origin of energy and power; *"Created"*--the actual expenditure of energy; *"Heaven"*--the air, space, heavenly bodies and all therein of a material substance; *"Earth"*--our material world on this planet, matter of our globe. Time, space, matter, energy, all are included in this opening verse. When you compare the amount of space given in the Bible to this momentous event with a daily newspaper, you are impressed with the brevity of the report. The writer of Genesis used less than one column of news print to tell the entire story of creation. This is not like a report of total human origin for such an event. In fact, men have turned out volumes discussing the few verses of the Bible that give us this information.

In The New Testament

Brevity is a characteristic of the New Testament as well as the old. Matthew has but twenty-eight chapters, using thirty-four pages. Mark has sixteen chapters, using twenty-two pages. Luke has twenty-four chapters, using thirty-six pages. John has twenty-one chapters, using twenty-seven pages. All together in only one hundred nineteen pages, and much of it is repetitous, each was telling the world's most remarkable story, the Messiah who came to redeem mankind. If uninspired men had been reporting, surely volumes would have been written. Have not men continued to add books upon books even dealing with the brief accounts of these four writers?

The history of the early church is told in only twenty-eight chapters and thirty-five pages in the book of Acts. Over thirty years of this remarkable institution are covered. It was written with restraint and brevity, unique in the writings available for man to read. It was not characteristic of man alone, but was that which reflects a guidance and inspiration.

Incidents

Not only are the books brief, but the records of many

incidents are so abbreviated, yet so profound and overflowing with richness that none can fathom their depth. The fall of man was recorded in only twenty-four verses. What a profound affect this has had on mankind. In these few verses we read of the origin of sin in the world and the results that followed. Here we find the basis for man's need of a Savior.

Matthew used only seventeen lines, and Mark and Luke used only nine lines each to record the baptism of Jesus, the appearance of the dove, and the all-important testimony from the mouth of God concerning the authority and identity of Jesus. *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."*

In about twenty-five lines and eight verses, the record of the transfiguration of Jesus is given in Matthew, chapter seventeen. Here we are taught, as were the apostles who were present, the superiority of Christ and His law over all else, including the law given through Moses and under which the great prophet Elijah served. The appearance of these two Old Testament characters provides evidence that there is life after this. For the second time the voice of God is recorded to acknowledge Jesus as His Son. The authority of Christ is emphasized when God said, *"Hear ye Him."* Actually, these lines are only half-lines, covering but one-half of the page, in only one of two columns. Yet, there is no revelation that is more significant than this, unless it be the resurrection of Christ.

Matthew mentioned but two appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. Mark mentions three, as does Luke, and John mentions four. To get the entire list of the appearances of Jesus after He arose, we must read from all four of the writers, as well as from the epistles. Surely, this shows the power of restraint exercised upon those whose pens wrote down the accounts.

In Characters

One of the great studies of humanity is seen in the man, Saul of Tarsus. Once an archenemy of Christ, yet this was told in only two verses of Acts. Only two verses are used to describe the dramatic moment when he first preached the very Christ that he once persecuted.

A matter of extreme importance to the early church was the martyrdom of James at the hand of Herod. He was the first martyr among Christians as far as the inspired record gives us. We wonder how he died, what charges were placed against him, what was the effect on the church. Yet, all this that human

curiosity would report, is omitted. The inspired writers used only eleven words to tell about it.

Omissions

Yes, the things not said in Scripture point to a divine inspiration of it. Read the book of John. John was a very close associate of Jesus. He doubtless knew as much about Him as any other. Yet, He omitted some matters that most would have considered so significant; such as, the birth of His forerunner, John the Baptist. He did not even record the birth of Jesus. He omitted the genealogy, Jesus' youth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, and ascension. Contrast that to a famous work of the second century called *Protevanelium* which devoted twenty-five chapters to the time of the appearance of the angel to Mary until the slaughter of the children around Bethlehem upon the command of Herod. Man's tendency, left to himself, is to be voluminous, lengthy in writing, while God's book is characteristically brief.

An important omission is seen in the small number of days of Jesus' life that are actually mentioned. Jesus lived approximately twelve thousand days upon the earth. Only one hundred twenty of them, or thereabouts, were in what we call His active and earthly ministry. But John mentions events in only twenty of those days. In all four of the first books of the New Testament, only thirty-four days are included. Yet, who can fathom the wealth of information related therein? Almost one-third of John's book is concerned with one day. No wonder John wrote, *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name."* (John 20:30,31). *"And there are also many other things which Jesus did of which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."* (John 21:25). The brevity of the report of the most remarkable being is yet sufficient to produce the faith we must have in order to be saved.

Acts gives such a partial report of the work of such notables as Peter and Paul. In reality, the book called Acts of the Apostles is but a record of some of the acts of some of the apostles. Yet, sufficiency abounds for us to know the church, the plan of salvation, the use of miracles, the spread of the kingdom, and

many other matters. We know nothing of facts that men would consider so important if only men had composed the book, such as the birth, death, and more personal information regarding appearance of these apostles.

The Scriptures do not even give us a personal appearance report of the Lord, as far as His physical nature is concerned. What color was His hair, His eyes? How tall was He? Was He large or small? The absence of such details are not characteristic of men when they write of a man. But such was of no concern in revealing the story of salvation and the Savior. It all adds up to additional evidence that the book called the Bible is unique and different from writings that come from the minds of men.

Conclusion

Yes, the conclusion is inescapable; namely, that men do not write like this when left to themselves. The explanation we offer for this quality of the Bible is that God was the author, and men were the writers as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. Truly, the Bible is God's Book.

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Misrepresentations of The Church

It is wrong to misrepresent anyone or anything. Sometimes it is done ignorantly; sometimes it is deliberate. To deliberately misrepresent is dishonest. Regardless of the motives behind the misrepresentations of the church, they do the church harm. The misrepresentations need to be refuted and corrected. The truth deserves defense against those who would misrepresent it.

We should not be alarmed that the church is sometimes misrepresented. Nor should we assume that what we have to say in its defense will forever silence the voices of those who have no love for the church but seeks its detriment. It is no new thing for those who love the Lord to suffer various kinds of persecution. "*Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is*

your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." (Matthew 5:11,12). *"All that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (Second Timothy 3:12).

We are not to hastily conclude that we suffer misrepresentation just because of our godliness. Sometimes we may be living in such a fashion as to misrepresent that for which we profess to stand. We may give a distorted picture of what we believe and therefore people misunderstand and misrepresent. Hypocrisy does provoke ugly things against the church.

When some Jews approached Paul in Rome, they said, "*But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest, for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against."* (Acts 28:22). The "sect" of which they spoke was the Lord's church, mistakenly thought to be a sect of the Jews at that time.

Our lesson is to help us be as was Paul when he said, "*...knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:17). We not only need to be ready to give answer to every man that *"asketh a reason for the hope that is in us,"* but also to defend the Lord's church against misrepresentation.

This Is Serious

We cannot minimize the seriousness of the church being misrepresented. The inevitable consequence is that truth is hindered. False ideas will be believed. People will be misled and develope misconceptions. The result of this is the creation of prejudice, spiritual blindness to the truth that saves. It will discourage brethren as well as turn away the lost without even a fair investigation of the truth. It leads to the condemnation of souls that Christ came to save.

Misrepresentation is based on "half-truths" and a lack of complete information. Distorted versions of what the Lord's church really upholds will cause the church to be erroneously presented to others. It is sinful to circulate a false report. Lying and bearing false witness is transgression. Even if one is sincere and honestly believes what he presents, if it is false, he is guilty of misrepresenting. Certainly, everyone that may do this does not do so out of maliciousness as much as out of ignorance and prejudice. But no honest person will continue to believe and circulate a false report once the truth has been presented to him. Therefore, in making a defense of the church, we can only appeal to those who are honorable enough to be open-minded.

We really do not expect to make headway with those who are intent on being injurious.

Campbell's Church

It is said that the church of Christ was founded by Alexander Campbell, and was a break-off from the Baptist Church. There are those who proudly point to Campbell as the founder of their church, such as the Christian Church, the Disciples of Christ. But those of the church of Christ are not among them nor admit to Campbell or any other man being the founder of that to which they belong.

Is it wrong to plead for the Lord's church? We are concerned about the church of which you read in the Bible. Cannot people be concerned about that? Take your Bible and learn that the church of Christ was founded by Christ on the foundation that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 16:16-18). It began on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2). This was nearly two thousand years ago. It was founded in the city of Jerusalem, with the Word of God being the guide as was delivered by the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

To assign the name of Campbell to that institution, or to call those who are members of it "Campbellites," is to cast derision on those who are concerned only with the church of the Bible. There is nothing taught or practiced by members of the church of Christ by the authority of Campbell or any other uninspired man. Should we hold convictions which Campbell and others also held, it is because we have derived these convictions from the same source, the Bible. I was a member of the Lord's church for over three years before I recall even hearing the name of Alexander Campbell, though it may have been mentioned. We are not what we are because he designed or authorized anything. We seek to uphold no denomination whatever, but only the Lord's church. To accuse us of something other than that is to misrepresent.

The Protestant and Catholic world has smarted under the plea and the effort to return to the Bible as the sole authority in religion. They have balked at disposing of human creeds. They have done many things individually and collectively to undermine the growing conviction that God's Word is sufficient and exclusively permitted in determining truth. Campbell was only one, and not even the first of his generation, to contend that people should "*Speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter

4:11). Is one who obeys what Peter taught a Campbellite? Is he not rather acting like a Christian?

We do not deny Campbell's scholarship in the Bible, nor his astute mind. His accomplishments are outstanding in the annals of religious history. But by no adherence to the truth can he be called the founder of the church. Nor did he pretend to found one. Our hope is in Christ, not Campbell. We are what we are because of what the Bible teaches. The challenge is continually put forth to the scoffer to show wherein we follow Campbell because of Campbell. When one points out the error of our way he is not our enemy, but our friend. Unlike so much in this world, we seek the truth without the additions and subtractions imposed by theologians, scholars, councils, conferences, etc. etc. We are Christians, not Campbellites.

The Only Christians

We are accused of trying to monopolize the name "Christian." But the truth is that we are calling for people everywhere to abandon names that have no Biblical authority and for everyone to wear just the name that the Bible gives, which is "Christian." We never read of the members of the Lord's church being called Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Catholics, etc. Those who contend exclusively for the name "Christian" do so with Biblical auithority.Thosethat want to wear other names, or names in addition to the identifications of Scripture, are going beyond what is written. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Peter said, *"Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."* (First Peter 4:16). Paul almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian (Acts 26:28).

Names have significance and meaning. They bestow honor and identification. We want to be identified with Christ as the Bible teaches. Denominational names divide, not unite. The Lord opposes such division. We would that all religious people who professed to follow Christ would adhere to the Biblical terminology rather than perpetuating the divisive errors of human institutions. Surely, this is a far cry from trying to monopolize the name.

Too Narrow

The members of the church are often accused of being

narrow-minded. This may be true in some instances. But some think that if you believe there is a right and a wrong about anything that you are narrow-minded. Believe it or not, to be accused of being narrow-minded may be a compliment even though it is not intended to be. There is nothing wrong with being as narrow-minded as is the revealed truth in God's book.

People do not object to narrow-mindedness in the chemical laboratories. They insist upon it in mathmatics, athletics, mechanics, or medicine. It is only in the realm of religion where people are wedded to traditions and customs and unbiblical doctrines and practices that they do not want to accept the line God has drawn between truth and error. They want anything to be all right.

But Jesus said that the way of life was strait and narrow, not broad and wide (Matthew 7:13,14). Many are on such a broad-minded craze that they will embrace those things that are prohibited or those things not authorized of God. That is too broad for acceptance before God.

Let us illustrate. Why do people use an organ in worship? It is not because the Bible teaches it. Those who do not use it are not just trying to be different and narrow for narrowness sake. There is that earnest desire to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. We have no right to add to what God has spoken. And when he has spoken we have only the privilege of conforming to his will. Only singing is authorized in the Scripture for Christian worship in the realm of music. Some may call it being narrow, but it is only as narrow as is God's revelation.

Some think that making any distinction between right and wrong is narrow. They are so inconsistent as to deny there is such a thing as absolute truth, and they are absolutely sure in making that assertion.

Water Salvation

But the church is misrepresented by saying that we believe and practice water salvation. That water is involved in salvation is true because the Bible teaches it. *"Baptism doth now also save us"* is what Peter said in First Peter 3:21. We are not going to deny that. There is one baptism (Ephesians 4:4,5), and we deny it not. Every example of conversion to Christ was concluded with baptism (Acts 2,8,9,10,18). We believe it. We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized

into the body (First Corinthians 12:13). Paul was baptized to *"Wash away sins."* (Acts 22:26). All the words of denominational clergymen shall never alter that fact.

But we are also aware that the water is not the saving element, but the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). It is not a question "if" the blood saves but "when" does the blood save. When we are baptized into his death we reach that saving blood. That is why we are raised to a new life (Romans 6:3,4). The water is only the element into which we are commanded to be baptized (Acts 10:48).

This is not the same as "baptismal regeneration" as some practice: that is, believing that the efficacy is in the water. The power is in the blood of Christ. But the blood is applied when we have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine that pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Baptism is a symbol of those facts, but not a symbol that we are saved before being baptized.

Why should it surprise us that God involves water in our salvation? Has not he involved water in other "salvations"? Did not Jesus involve water in granting ability to see to the blind man of Siloam (John 9)? Were not those who were saved with Noah *"saved by water"*? (First Peter 3:20,21). Was not water involved in delivering Israel from the Red Sea (Exodus 14), and Paul called that a baptism in First Corinthians 10:1,2 ? Was not water used in the healing of Naaman from leprosy in Second Kings, chapter five? Why should we think it such a strange thing that God has declared baptism in water to be essential? To ridicule any appointment that God has assigned it is to misrepresent his truth.

There are other misrepresentations, and they are as equally false as those which we have mentioned in this brief span. But we all ought be very careful about making a thing appear to be something when it really is not true. What the honest person will do is to hear the explanation and measure it by what the Scripture teaches rather than blindly, prejudicially, continue to misrepresent the truth as many are inclined to do.

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Church Membership

While many are interested in church membership, there exists a mass of unwarranted and unnecessary confusion on the subject. This, like most other religious matters, is because people consult just about any and every source for information except the Bible. People use the words "members of the church" so flippantly and unscripturally, with little understanding of what the Bible teaches about it.

Are you impressed with the importance of being a member of the church? Many are not. It is second to none in matters of importance, and when we learn what Scripture teaches about it, we cannot escape that conclusion. But so many take it so lightly. They consider it as something comparable to being a member of some club, a friendly association, fraternal order, professional group, or something no more important than that. They do not consider it to be very useful or necessary in serving God if you choose not to belong. As a result, they do not make good church members.

On the other hand, some appear to think that having your name on some roll that designates who are the members of the church is all that matters. As some do not give the matter sufficient importance, others place too much confidence in simply being considered a member of the church.

Our motive for being a church member must not be simply to please other people, or for material gain and good business. What we do in matters of religion must be done with the motive of pleasing God regardless of what others say, do, or think. We must be church members from conviction, not just because it may be convenient, or the accepted thing in some circles of society.

Not Just A Church

Church membership, according to the Bible, does not mean being a member of just some church, any church, or a church. It means being a member of THE church. This point is where many stumble. They have comforted themselves in the fact that they belong to something called a church and have concluded that is what matters. But this is false. Christ built only one church *"Upon this rock I will build my church."* (Matthew 16:18). Please note the word *church* is singular. He is the head

of the body, which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), and as is true of all normal bodies, the church has one head and the head is over one body. *"There is one body,"* (Ephesians 4:4), made up of many members. *"We are members of his body."* (Ephesians 5:30). *"But now are they many members, yet but one body."* (First Corinthians 12:20). Who are these members? They are not denominations. You read nothing in the Bible presenting the Lord's church in terms of denominations. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth and identified the members, *"now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."* (First Corinthians 12:27). *"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."* (Romans 12:5).The church is composed of people, but a very distinct people.

Bride of Christ

The church is called the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:23). Christ is the bridegroom (John 3:29). As there is one husband and one bride, so there is the one Christ and His one church. There are many churches in existence, but not by the authority of the Lord. Christ is no spiritual bigamist with many brides. His church began on the first Pentecost after His resurrection (Acts 2), and is revealed to us in the Bible. There is only one body for which He died (Ephesians 5:25), and only one that He will save (Ephesians 5:23). Therefore, we are interested in membership in the Lord's church. This truth that there is only one church is a barrier that many have not been able to overcome. Having been reared in a denominational context all their lives, they find it difficult to accept what the Bible teaches about the singularity of the church. But acceptance or rejection of the truth does not alter it.

Children of God

Let us consider now the significance of church membership. As members of the church we are the spiritual children of God's family. First Timothy 1:15 defines the church as the *"house of God."* This means the family of God. God is the Father and we are His children (Second Corinthians 6:18). Christ is our elder brother in this analogy, and we are joint-heirs with Him. (Romans 8:16,17). How important is it to be in God's family? Can we be saved and not be God's child? Certainly not. So the

significance of church membership is obvious.

In Christ

To be a member of the church means we are in Christ. Salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). Salvation is by no other than Christ (Acts 4:12). *"Neither is their salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."* There is no way to be in Christ and outside His body. But to be in His body is to be in His church because the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). So being in Christ is to be in the church.

In the Body

How does one get into Christ or into His body? Galatians 3:27 teaches, *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ."* We are baptized into Christ. Again, First Corinthians 12:12,13, *"For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."* By the instructions given through the Spirit, we are baptized into the one body, the church. Baptism puts us in Christ. The same one baptism puts us in the church. Again, it is obvious why church membership is important. We cannot be saved out of Christ and to be in Christ is to be in His body, the church.

The Called Out

The word "church" comes from the word meaning "the called out." The Lord's church is composed of people who first have been called. We are called by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). We have been called out of a life of sin into a life of righteousness. We are called to be saints (First Corinthians 1:2); called to liberty (Galatians 5:13); called to hope (Ephesians 4:4); called into the one body (Colossians 3:15). *"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness."* (First Thessalonians 4:7). *"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."* (First Thessalonians 5:9). *"Wherefore come ye out from among*

them," is the call of the gospel (Second Corinthians 6:17). We are called out of the world and into the realm of the saved. The church is composed of such people.

The Saved

We must keep before us the fact that to be in the church means to be one of the saved because the saved is the church. The Lord adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). The church is that body that Christ has promised to save (Ephesians 5:23). He offers to save everyone, but only those in the church will be saved.

A New Creature

To be in Christ means to be in the church, but to be in Christ also means to be a new creature. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new."* (Second Corinthians 5:17). We are born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (John 3:3-5). When one is born he is a new creature. From these verses we see that being in the church, being in Christ, being in the kingdom, being a new creature are all the same state or condition. Could one expect to be saved as the old man of sin, or as a new creature in Christ? The answer is plain, *"We must be born again."* Therefore, I see the significance of being in the church, just as I see the significance of being in Christ, being in the kingdom of heaven, being a new creature.

In the Kingdom

Being in the church is being in the kingdom. In Colossians 1:13, Paul told those Christians that God *"hath delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."* Those delivered from darkness are those in the kingdom. They were the ones who were in the church, or who were in Christ (Colossians 1:1). The necessity of being in the kingdom is stressed in First Corinthians 15:24, where we learn that when Christ comes again He will deliver up the kingdom to the Father. Unless we are in the kingdom, we will not be among those delivered to the Father. That ought be easily understood. But being in the kingdom, in Christ, new

creatures, one of the saved, in the church, are simply varying ways of expressing the same thing. How can one miss the obvious significance and importance of being a member of the church?

How To Become A Member

We now turn our attention to how one becomes a member of the church. In the book of Acts, a book wherein are recorded several instances of conversion to Christ, we see that the process of conversion consisted of hearing the gospel, believing in Christ, repenting of sins and confessing faith in Christ, followed by being baptized into Christ. *"Faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17). *"Except ye believe that I am he ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). *"Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3). *"With the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* (Romans 10:10). *"Repent and be baptized...for the remission of sins."* (Acts 2:38). Those who did the things mentioned above were added to the church (Acts 2:47). They were not put forward and others voted whether they would be in the church. They were not made members by something their parents had done in the days of their infancy. They were not made members of the church by some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit. They did not do one thing to be saved and something extra or different to become members of the church. What they did to be saved is precisely and exactly, as well as simultaneously, what was done for them to become members of the church.

Become, Then Be

Once one has become a member of the church he assumes the responsibilities that belong to living a Christlike life. This includes work, worship, righteous living, being a light in the world, a city set on a hill, the salt of the earth. He is to busy himself to continually do those things that are needful to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior (Second Peter 3:18).

Actually, the matter of church membership is not confusing nor difficult to grasp when one confines his study to the Bible and allows his conception of it to be molded by *"thus saith the Lord."*

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The First Commandment With Promise

"Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." (Exodus 20:12). *"Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise , that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."* (Ephesians 6:1-3).

It is a privilege to be a parent. There are heavy responsibilities attached to being a parent, but the privileges and blessings are glorious. But not all are parents. But all have parents, either natural or otherwise. There is a God-given responsibility that every child has to his or her parents. It is a lifelong duty, not just one that applies to the child when the child is young. God teaches that the child is to love, honor, respect, and obey his parents, holding them in special esteem and regard.

To honor is to express a deep inward feeling of love and respect. This expression may take many forms. But certainly one form of honor is to render obedience to parents. This teaching is basic to both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We must realize that the good order of the home where there are children is dependent upon children obeying God in the duty to honor parents.

Jesus

A child cannot successfully imitate Jesus unless he is obedient and respectful to parental authority. As Jesus approached the teen-age years, we read, "*And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart."* (Luke 2:51). Notice it is expressed that Jesus was subject to Joseph and Mary, his earthly parents.

All we know concerning Jesus between the years of twelve and thirty is written in Luke 2:52, *"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."*

When Jesus was on the cross he demonstrated his respect for his mother by his concern for her welfare. *"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore*

saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." (John 19:25-27). If Jesus could not dispense with being obedient, concerned, and respectful toward his earthly parents, then we cannot dispense with it either and still walk in his footsteps.

Paul said, "*Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.*" (Ephesians 6:l). If it is right to obey your parents, then it follows that it is wrong to disobey them. By God's design, parents have the care and authority over their children. Children cannot be respectful of God and ignore this design. The disregard of parental authority is the beginning of disregard for all authority. Those who learn to respect the authority of their parents learn to respect authority, whether it be in the school, civil authority, or God's authority. To disobey one's parent is tantamount to disobedience to God because God commands obedience to parents.

Parents have not only the right but the duty to guide their children, direct them in the way they should go, train and discipline them, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Since God gave this assignment to parents, it ought come as no surprise that God expects children to cooperate with this arrangement by being subject to and obedient to parents. It is wrong for the parent to misdirect the child. It is just as wrong for the child to ignore the direction of the parents. The only circumstances under which a child can disregard his parents and still please God is when his parents direct him to go against the revealed will of God.

Permissiveness

Too often in our permissive society the parents obey the children. They allow their children to grow up as tyrants, demanding this and that as if the world was to bow at their feet. Too many parents have not learned to say "no" to their children, even when a "no" is required. So many parents today have fallen for the psyshologist's doctrine that saying "no" only frustrates the child. Therefore, parents refrain from stifling the child's initiative by allowing the child to do as the child pleases, making up his own mind what he will and will not do. The result is that the child never learns the difference between right and wrong. He never knows the limits beyond which he should not

go. What parents thought was allowing the child to "express himself" was actually depriving the child of what the child needs and wants; namely, guidance and direction. Children left to make their own decisions without having been provided criteria by which to make intelligent decisions are the most frustrated children in the country. They not only do not know what is right and wrong, they cannot determine what is best, and they are led to believe that it really does not make any difference, and nobody cares what they do anyway. Parents sin against their children to not provide the guidance and direction that God expects parents to give their children. And children are being defiant of God to ignore and rebel against parental supervision.

A Frenchman once came to this country and at the conclusion of his visit expressed that he was amazed at how the parents obey their children in America. Such misconduct brings heartache, regret, sorrow for everyone involved, and alienation. The disobedience of children, their sassing their parents, their disregard and disrespect for their authority, are marks of sinfulness.

Elderly Parents

But when children reach adulthood they still owe their parents honor, love, respect, care, and whatever may be needed. Honoring thy father and mother does not end when you leave home. True, the relationship is somewhat altered because the child now assumes responsibilities he did not formerly have. But it is tragic how some leave home and ignore parents.

It is sad when a child leaves home because he disrespects his parents. He or she might do this to spite the parents, hurt them, show contempt for the authority God has given the parents. Some rebel against parental authority as if this is a sign of their own maturity. But nothing is a more glaring sign of immaturity than to disrespect and dishonor parents.

We have heard of children who leave home and seldom, if ever, even write their parents, 'phone them, visit them, have much of anything to do with them. Many elderly parents long for some attention from the children for whom they sacrificed so much to help when they were small. But some children are so entrenched with the devil's ways that they have no time for their parents.

We have seen children who disrespected their parents while the parents were living make a great show of grief when the

parents die. Funerals sometimes are more than the burying of the dead; they are displays of deep regret for having been dishonorable toward one's father or mother.

Those of us who may have living parents need to remember that there is coming a day, and it may be sooner than we think, when we won't have to make excuses for neglecting our parents. We can just go right along with our pressing commitments and ignore them, because they will no longer be among us. They will have come to the close of their lives and died, and missed receiving the love, respect, attention, and concern due them from their children.

The evening years of life are often very lonely at best. But to be pushed into the background, to be ignored, to be considered a burden, by one's own children must be very painful. And all that need never be. It is so easy to brighten the day of one's parents. To do so is right. It is Christlike. It is God's will.

Provision

Honoring parents may include provision of the aid and care when they need it. It does not occur to some people how their parents sacrificed for them when they were young. When the parents were not able to lay aside for their last years because they were caring for their children does not concern some. Who took care of you when you could do nothing for yourself? Who stayed by your side when you were sick? Who helped you when you had problems? Who loved you when actually you behaved so unlovingly? Who did what they did for you, not because you deserved it, and not only out of duty, but from love? Parents are not perfect. But where do we learn that we are to respect only the perfect parents? Loving children respect their parents because they are parents.

Certainly, it is easier for children to respect their parents when the parents will be respectable. But children have a duty whether the parents do their duty or not.

In Jesus' day the Pharisees tried to dodge this divine duty of caring for parents. Mark 7:9-13, *"And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother, and Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to*

do ought for his father or his mother, making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered, and many such like things do ye."

To pronounce something "Corban" meant to state that it was commited to the treasury of the Lord. The Pharisees were teaching that one could take what he might and ought to use for the care of his parents and pronounce it "Corban" and thereby be relieved from responsibility to provide for his needy parents. To do this was to make God's word that taught honor toward parents, to be null and void. It was to make the word of God of none effect. By this we can know that honoring parents can include making necessary provision for them in their need. To refuse to provide for those of one's own house, Paul says is worse than an infidel (First Timothy 5:8). We are to first show piety at home and requite (pay benefit) to our parents (First Timothy 5:4).

The conclusion is inescapable and unmistakable. Obedience and honor belong to parents when we are young. Honor and respect must be our attitude and action toward our parents all the days of our lives. Even after they have left this life, we should honor their memory and the good they did.

It is too common today for children to pay more attention to the counsel of their peers than the advice and direction of their parents, and this is wrong. Sometimes a child will cast off the wishes of his parents regardless of what those wishes are to show his distaste and contempt for his parents. This is itself beneath contempt.

While we have pity toward that child who will not obey God in this matter, we are compelled to warn that child that they shall reap as they sow. The blessings of God were promised to the Israelites who obeyed and honored their parents. The Israelite nation was promised a long life in the promised land that God gave them if they would honor their parents. So even now God's blessings rest upon those who honor their parents with a life upon this earth that may well be extended because of following the advice and wisdom given them from parents. Those children in the Lord will not be found disobedient to this divine stipulation.

The best way to honor one's parents is to honor God by being a Christian. If you honor God, and are in the Lord Jesus, then you will be motivated to show God's will in your life which will include honoring thy father and mother.

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We Need Christ

"And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner." (Luke 7:36-39).

Our text tells us something about the woman of the text that ought to be true of all of us. People have a tendency at times to become very self-sufficient. Especially is this true when they are prosperous materially. They get to feeling they have the "world on a string." They may realize they have some needs, but they are confident that whatever they need they can provide for themselves. This self-sufficiency grows to the point where one is so independent that he thinks he needs nobody for anything. But regardless of how self-sufficient a person can become in many matters, none will ever outgrow the need that this woman of our text realized. She knew she needed Christ. There is not one of us who does not need Him. It is somewhat bewildering that this primary theme of the Bible is denied by so many.

Our need for Christ surpasses our need for anything and everything else in life. Even though many do not believe this, it is nonetheless true. We can include man's need for food, shelter, clothing, medicine, whatever. These are important needs in the physical realm without which we could not survive. But there are needs more important than physical needs. We have spiritual needs. Because these needs are not tangible and, therefore, are not as readily recognized as the physical ones, some have mistakenly relegated them to a secondary and unimportant position. May I send you the warning from God that we not make that mistake. If we do, the time will come when we will see that God did not warn us needlessly. But then it may be too late for us to do anything about it.

Why is our need for Christ so great? It is because Christ supplies us our spiritual needs. "*Blessed be the God and Father*

of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3). Man's greatest need is forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the soul.

In Sin

Man's spiritual condition is that he is in sin with only doom and damnation awaiting him. "*All have sinned."* (Romans 3:23; 5:12). *"Ye were the servants of sin."* (Romans 6:17). All can say along with Achan, David, the Israelites and others that we have sinned. Even Christians can say we have sinned (First John 1:8,10). Man is spiritually diseased. His greatest need is a cure from that malady. Without Christ man remains lost. He cannot find his way back to God by himself. Man cannot direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23). Paul spoke of the Christian's plight before he became a Christian by describing him as being "*alienated from God, separate from Christ, strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."* (Ephesians 2:12). This is the condition of all who have not yet come to the Savior. We need Christ.

Recognition Of Our Need

The woman who came to the Pharisee's house and anointed the feet of Jesus realized her need of Him. She did not allow her pride to prevent her from showing honor to Him. She had no self-righteousness to blind her to her spiritual condition. It may make you angry to be informed that you are lost outside of Christ and that you stand condemned. But is it not better to know it while there is something you can do about it than be allowed to finish life and then face God unprepared? This woman was honest with herself and she knew she needed Christ. How many of us will admit the same thing?

You may be inclined to defend yourself against the charge of sin, but keep in mind who made it. You may dislike the preacher for bringing this to your attention, but keep in mind that he is only preaching God's message. Would a preacher be honest to his commitment if he did not encourage people to be honest with themselves and their need of Christ?

You need Christ because you are lost and Christ is the only Savior. "*For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10). "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world*

to save sinner, of whom I am chief." (First Timothy 1:15). It is by and through Christ that we are brought to God. "*But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are brought nigh by the blood of Christ."* (Ephesians 2:13). Because we separate ourselves from God by our sins, (Isaiah 59:1,2), and we cannot save ourselves by ourselves, (Ephesians 2:8,9), we need Christ. He is not only man's Savior but the only Savior man has (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Paul wrote, "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."* (Romans 5:8,9).

You need Christ because He does for you what no one else can do. He does for you what you cannot possibly do for yourself. He gives salvation. Regardless of how righteous you may be from this moment forward, all your goodness will not erase one sin you have committed. This does not mean doing good and being good are without value. Those who follow Christ are expected to be a people who are zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). But it is to emphasize the insufficiency of our goodness to save us. There have been those who have concluded that they are morally good, not doing many of the evils that some practice, and they have decided they need no Savior. But this is a mistaken notion of a deceived people. Cornelius, Lydia, the Ethiopian and others were such people. But they were also lost until they came to Christ to be saved.

Lost Without Christ

If you believe what the Scriptures teach, you must believe you are lost without Christ. Surely you want to be saved and have heaven as your eternal home. But heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Not all will inhabit heaven. No sin is going to be allowed in heaven. The very presence of God demands that our sins be removed through forgiveness if we see God in His glory. Therefore, we must come to Christ and be forgiven according to the terms of the gospel.

There are many who have been like the woman. They have seen their sinfulness. They have desired salvation. They have realized their inability to save themselves. They have come to Christ. They are now among the redeemed. But have you seen that same need as it applies to you?

How does one come to the Savior? Christ is the author of salvation. But He saves those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).

We must learn what He commands and then conform to whatever He directs.

A study of the conversions as found in Acts is most profitable. When we read what the apostles taught and what people did to be saved, we learn that it is exactly what Jesus said was to be proclaimed. We must believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24). We are commanded to repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). We must confess our faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9,10; Luke 12:8,9). We are to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), into Christ (Galatians 3:27), to be saved (Mark 16:16). Those in New Testament times who did this were added to His church (Acts 2:47). And so shall it be with all those who will do as He commanded, as people did back then.

Dear reader friend, only by coming to Christ will you ever fill the greatest need you have. Will you come to Him?

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BOUND VOLUMES AVAILABLE

We mentioned on the back cover of our last issue that brother C. S. Gatlin, Jr. has a project to provide copies of back issues of this publication in a spiral bound volume. Volumes one and two should be available shortly at a price of nine dollars each. This includes twelve issues in each volume and mailing it to you.

This is his personal project, but we want to assist him in advertising it. Send your orders to:

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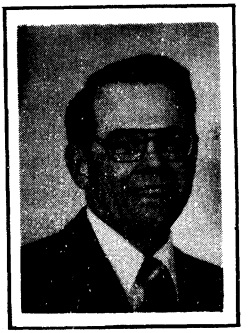

JAMES W. BOYD

Paul's Sermon In Athens

Acts seventeen records Pauls visit to the city of Athens and his opportunity to preach before the intellectuals of his day. Invited to Mars Hill, he seized what was afforded him. As we read what he preached we have to conclude that Paul was answering questions that nobody was asking. But he was answering questions that everybody ought to be asking.

There were many matters he could have discussed, but what did he preach to them?

There were three primary themes in his notable sermon. (1) He preached the existence of God, His nature, and that He created the world, even giving life to all mankind. (2) He preached Christ and His resurrection. This was the theme that seemed to have aroused the curiosity of the philosophers of Athens so that they wanted to hear more. (3) He warned of the inescapable judgment for all, and that God's judgment would be through Christ.

Today many people would think his sermon irrelevant. Certainly the elite sophisticates and so-called "scholars" of our time would so think. But we rather believe Paul knew what was necessary and was not ashamed to declare it forcefully before everyone.

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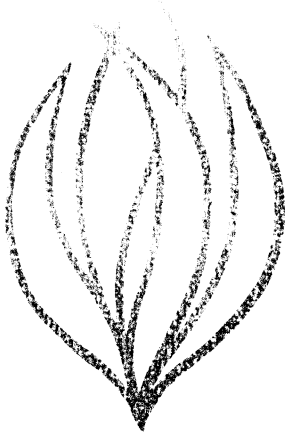

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III James W. Boyd **NUMBER 3**

Faith and Expediency

The subject under discussion has been at the root of much religious division both in the church and between the church and the denominational world. It is an important subject because it does affect unity and truth. Unity is not acheived by dodging issues, but facing them and resolving them in harmony with the teaching of the Bible. *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."* (Psalm 133:1).

The early church had one accord, spoke the same things, were of one mind and enjoyed the unity the Lord desired. They worked for it, taught for it, prayed for it, and sustained it on the right basis. Our subject can be a very dangerous one if we misunderstand because it can prevent the very unity we want to have among brethren.

Know The Terms

We must understand our terms. What is a matter of faith and a matter of expediency? A matter of faith is what God has said, where God has spoken, what is revealed in God's word. Faith comes by the word of God (Romans 10:17). God has given us His authority, explicity and implicity, and the boundaries, limits, and what is included in His will is in the Bible. For example, the conditions of salvation are matters where God has spoken. The manner of worship is another matter. We are prohibited from adding to or taking from what God has spoken. *"Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God; but he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son."* (Second John 9). Matters of faith are specifically regulated by God's word. What God has said is always right. We should stand united where God has spoken. *"Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..."* (Colossians 3:17). *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..."* (First Peter 4:11).

A matter of expediency will involve human judgment and opinion. It is a matter of deciding what is the best expedient way to do what God has authorized us to do. We want to stress that an expediency is to expedite what is authorized. There is no expedient way to do what God has not authorized to be done. Nothing is a matter of expediency where God has spoken. That is a matter of faith. But when God has taught that something is

to be done, or may be done and has not spelled out the way and manner of getting it done, this calls for the exercise of human judgment, and involves human opinion, as to the expedient way or ways of getting done what God directs. God has made some things necessary and has authorized certain matters without giving specific details regarding them, leaving it to human judgment to determine the expedient way to accomplish what He has taught.

Examples

God has said we are to go and preach. He has been specific what we are to preach; namely, the gospel. He has said we are to go, but has not specified a particular way of travel. We may walk, ride, fly, whatever may be the most expedient way. We have to use our own judgment there. We are to get the word to the world. There are many avenues open to us to preach and teach the gospel, such as pulpits, newspapers, books, television and radio programs, classes, personal conversations. Just what may be the most expedient in a given situation must be determined by human judgment. This is a matter of human opinion. We do not always agree in such matters, nor do we have to agree as we do in matters of faith. Human judgment is not infallbile while the faith that God has revealed certainly is. We have differing talents, abilities, and opportunities which prohibit any one expedient from being the one and only way of doing a thing. There may be ways of doing some things that are "better" than others, but each one has a right to think differently on that. Such decisions have to be made when the church is working together, of course. The eldership has the oversight in such matters for the church and are responsible for determining what is the most expedient in their judgment.

One basic requirement of anything that is used to expedite the commands of God is that it be lawful. *"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient..."* (First Corinthians 6:12). Paul teaches that from among things lawful must we choose what expediency we will utilize. We are not permitted to do something in violation of God's law in order to carry out His law. The end will not justify the means. We cannot call something unauthorized and unlawful a legitimate expediency. For instance, we cannot use gambling in order to raise funds for the work of the church because gambling itself violates God's law.

Avoid Confusion

It is important not to confuse matters of faith and matters of expediency. We dare not assign matters of faith to the realm of opinion. Nor can we place human judgment on the level of God's revelation. We have the right and duty to enjoin matters of faith upon each other, but we do not have the same right to bind matters of human judgment as if they were equivalent to matters of faith. Much trouble arises in the church when either variation is practiced. When brethren become too "set" in a matter of opinion, or become too "loose" in a matter of faith, the devil enjoys the strife and tension that arises. Hard words are often exchanged over such things. So it is important that we understand the difference. There may have to be withdrawal of fellowship when matters of faith are violated. But the matters of expediency are not justifiable matters of withdrawal, provided one does not become contentious and divisive by insisting on his own way. Then that contention and divisiveness becomes a matter of faith because the Lord condemns that. We must learn to stand together where God has spoken and be tolerant and cooperative in matters of opinion.

More Examples

Possibly we can understand this matter with a few specific examples. In the matter of giving, giving itself is a matter of faith. *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."* (First Corinthians 16:1,2). *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver."* (Second Corinthians 9:6,7). This authorizes giving, free-will offering, as planned and intended, willingly, cheerfully given. There is no authority for raising funds by selling, pie suppers, rummage sales, bingo, or any other such gimmicks some use to get money.

How those funds that are given are to be collected is a matter of judgment. We might decide to use a basket and pass it around before the congregation. We might place a box by the door where givers can give as they enter or leave. So long as it

is given with the Scriptural instructions being obeyed the Lord is pleased. He is unconcerned about the manner of gathering.

Take the matter of music in worship. Has God spoken? Every Bible student knows that He has. What has He said? He said *"Sing."* Therefore, when we sing we do what we do by faith because that is what the word has revealed. When we play instruments, hum, whistle, or some substitution for what God has said, we have violated a law of faith. We act by our own authority, not God's. If God has said, *"Make music,"* we would be left to decide whatever way we wished to make music. But He did not leave it that broad. He said sing.

Whether or not we sing two songs or five is a matter of judgment. Whether we use a song book or sing from memory is also a matter of judgment. There are no divinely given specifications regarding such things. But we have to have some number of songs in order to sing. We have to follow some words and tune in order to sing. How that is done is a matter of expediency.

Consider the Lord's Supper. The physical ingredients to be used in the supper are specified in the Bible as the bread and the fruit of the vine. This prohibits hamburgers and orange juice. Nor can we omit one. This is a matter where God has spoken and is a matter of faith.

But whether we use one cup or many, whether it is passed to the people or the people come around a table, at what place in the worship it is done, is all a matter of human judgment.

Caring for the needy is a matter of faith. *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself upspotted from the world."* (James 1:27). The necessity of providing is a a matter of faith. *"As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* (Galatians 1:10).

Just where the provision must be offered is not assigned. The needy may be brought into an existing home, a private home, an institutional orphan home, or whatever may be considered expedient. A home is what is needed by the child. That home must have supervision and parental guidance, whether provided by many or by few. Where God has not specified the means to be used in accomplishing what he has said to be done, we must use our best judgment in determing the exepdiency.

God commands us to assemble for worship (Hebrews 10:25). This is not, as many seem to think and act, an optional matter.

This is a matter of faith.

But where we meet, the kind of facility, at what specific hour on the first day, all such things must be left to human opinion to decide what is best. In such matters, as stated, the eldership must determine.

Unfortunately, some get very aroused if their opinion does not carry the day. Some are willing to compromise matters of faith in order to get along with other people. Others are not even willing to compromise matters of opinion. Both attitudes produce hardship for the cause of Christ. The only course open to us is to follow the word in matters of faith, and be charitable and cooperative in matters of expediency and opinion where human judgment must be exercised.

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On Which Question Will You Stumble At Judgment?

"And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27). *"Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."* (Acts 17:31). *"I charge thee, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and kingdom."* (Second Timothy 4:1). *"Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give unto me in that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."* (Second Timothy 4:8). *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10). *"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works."* (Matthew 16:27). *"Who will render to every man according to his deeds."* (Romans 2:6). *"In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."* (Romans 2:16). *"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the*

righteous into life eternal." (Matthew 25:46).

These, and many other Scriptures, can be arrayed before us to emphasize the certainty of the judgment to come. We shall die and there is no escape. We must face the judgment and give account. God, through Christ, will judge all people. Judgment will be just. Justice will be administered, not mercy. Now is the day of mercy and the offer of it. If we reject his mercy we shall receive his justice. He will render the verdict from which there will be no appeal. What we do, say, and think in this life will be laid open before Him and compared with the teaching of the gospel of Christ. This is an awesome matter to consider.

We might picture the judgment as being conducted in the Lord's courtroom. We stand before Him being asked to account for our lives. Before God will be the complete record and there is no possibility of falsification. Certain matters will be questioned and we shall give answer. How could you respond to certain questions if you were called to give account this day?

Did You Hear?

How would you answer the question, "Did you hear the gospel?" We must hear the gospel before we can believe (Romans 10:17). Those who have a Bible have no excuse for not knowing what the will of God is. We may ask, "What of those who have never heard? Are they lost?" Regardless of the answer for such people, that would not be applicable to most who will read these words. But Paul says that those who know not God and obey not the gospel shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord (Second Thessalonians 2:7-9). If failure to hear the word means safety then let us reject the marching orders of Christ to preach the word. The very fact He says to preach it to all nations ought show us that without hearing there can be no salvation. But have you heard? Think not of others just now. Have you heard?

Yes, we have had opportunity to come to a knowledge of the truth. This is not a matter upon which we can rest our case.

Did You Believe?

"Did you believe the gospel? Did you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Many will stumble at this question. Jesus said, *"I said therefore unto you that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24).

The many passages calling for faith in Christ can be listed by most any serious Bible student. The necessity of faith is well emphasized in the New Testament.

If one does not believe, then this seals his doom. Jesus said in the last portion of Mark 16:16, *"He that believeth not shall be damned."* Will this be the question that will cause you difficulty in the judgment?

Did You Repent?

Consider again, Did you repent of your sins?" Peter preached, "*Repent...*" (Acts 2:38). Peter said, *"Repent and be converted..."* (Acts 3:19). Paul said, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."* (Acts 17:30). Second Peter 3:9, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* It was Jesus who said, *"Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3,5). In light of these commands, how shall we escape if we neglect to repent? Will this be the question on which you stumble at the judgment?

Did You Confess?

Another question concerns our confession of Christ. Paul wrote, *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* (Romans 10:9,10). Jesus said, *"Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man confess before the angels of God."* (Luke 12:8). To fail to confess Christ is to deny Him. We cannot be neutral regarding Christ. We are either for Him or we are against Him (Matthew 12:30). We cannot successfully serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). If you have not confessed Christ, just how do you think you will fare at the judgment concerning this matter? Did God mean what He said when He taught the necessity of confessing Christ?

Were You Baptized?

Let us ask another question upon which one might stumble at the judgment. "Were you baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins?" Christ said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned."* (Mark 16:16). To be lost, as already noted, just refuse to believe. Some will stumble over unbelief. But the conditions of salvation must be met and here Jesus specifies two of them in one verse; namely, belief and baptism. Peter commanded, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* (Acts 2:38). Have you done this?

Paul wrote, *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ."* (Galatians 3:27). Have you put on Christ? Baptism is the way one gets into Christ, as is also taught in Romans 6:3,4. *"Baptism doth now also save us,"* wrote Peter in First Peter 3:21. Is this a question upon which you might stumble at the judgment? What excuse can you offer to God for disobeying His command to be baptized when the command is so clearly and plainly put before us?

At this point you may be breathing a sigh of relief because you have heard the word, believed it, repented, confessed your faith and been baptized. Thus far, all seems well with your soul. Thus far, the answer to all questions on these matters must be that we have done as the Lord has directed. But we are not in heaven yet. There is still more to serving the Lord than becoming a Christian. We are to live as faithful Christians after we have become Christians

Were You Faithful?

So we return to the stand once again and ask another question for which we shall give answer at the judgment. "Were you faithful to me as a Christian?"

We might break this down somewhat by asking, "Were you faithful in worship of me?" That we are to worship God is the teaching of Christ (John 4:24) and His apostles (Acts 18:13). That we are to partake of the Lord's Supper is a privilege and duty of Christians (First Corthians 11:23ff). Were you faithful in that duty last year? Are you faithful now? Do you answer, "Yes, I observed the Lord's Supper," but have to qualify it with such expressions, "when I did not have company, when I did not have to work, when I was not vacationing, when I did not go visiting friends and relatives, except when I did this, and when I

did that."

"Did you sing songs of praise to my name?" Some have the idea, evidently that listening is an act of worship. The truth is that we must sing. True, the quality of voice is not important, but the singing is. Some might answer, "I both sang and played instruments in praise of God." But where do you find the authority for the instruments? It is not in God's new covenant under Christ.

What about your contribution? Is it possible that we shall fall on this question? Shall we stumble regarding prayer, Bible study, how we talked, where we went, our business dealing, our responsibilities in marriage and the home, the way we treated our fellowman, and on and on with the same respect of all the duties of living a Christlike life? Will these questions give us grief when our time comes to give account before God in the judgment?

We might stand before God and tell him how we did not steal, lie, cheat, commit adultery, murder, smoke, dance, course, etc. All of that is good as far as it goes. There are those matters where we might be questioned where God has commanded, *"Thou shalt not."* But will not the Lord be concerned with what we have done, as well as with what we have not done?

Did we visit the sick, teach the lost, care for the needy, provide for the sorrowful? What good did we do? To be sure, we shall not be saved on the merit of our works, but the lack of good works can spell our doom. When we read of the judgment scene as given in Matthew 25, it is significant that those who heard the words, *"Come ye blessed of my Father,"* were those who have rendered service to Christ by serving others. It is likewise significant that those to whom the words were addressed, *"Depart from me,"* were not those who were accused of doing so many bad things. In fact they had done some things thinking they were good. But they had neglected to do service to others in the name of Christ.

Possibly we should concern ourselves with our mind, our spirit, our attitude. *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ..."* (Philippians 2:5), was Paul's admonition. Are we slow to speak and quick to anger? Are our words kind and gentle? Do we speak good of our neighbor? Do we count others better than ourselves? Are our minds thinking on things true, honest, just, pure,lovely,and of good report? (Philippians 4:8). These things reflect our determination to practice the faith of Christ as well speak it. We must do both.

Think About It - Now

We do ourselves a favor to think of the time when we shall be questioned in judgment. Will some of these questions cause you to stumble at that event? Friend, there is nothing we can do about the report we must make at that time once we are there. But now is the time that we can make things right with God so that when we stand before Him, we shall not stumble, because we will have been forgiven, we will have striven to obey Him, and remained faithful in His service through Christ.

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The Kind Of Person God Wants

God created man, giving him life, making him a spirit, placing him in the perfectness and sinlessness of the Garden of Eden. But man departed from the Lord by a violation of God's instructions concerning the fruit in the garden. By that transgression sin came into the world (Romans 5:12), and *"All have sinned."* (Romans 3:23; 5:12). In sin we are not the kind of person God wants us to be. But we can be what God wants us to be. Before that will be the case, we must have an earnest desire to be what God wants us to be. It begins with the heart of man wanting to please God, and continues with man learning just what kind of person God wants us to be. Our lesson now is centered on some of the characteristics that God wants of us.

Self-Examiner

God wants a person to be a self-examiner, paying close attention to self, lest we go astray. The warning to the elders of Ephesus, "*Take heed unto thyselves...*" (Acts 20:28), is useful for us all. We are sometimes so busy watching the other fellow to note his mistakes that we are not mindful enough of our own lives. We hear a sermon and make application to somebody else rather than ourselves. It is like the story of the time a preacher began his lesson by saying, "Some member of this church has been heard cursing last week." Then he preached against the sin

of the tongue. He knew one man was guilty because he had heard him curse. But when the people were leaving, several members told him that they were guilty, except the one who he knew to be guilty, and that person said, "You sure did set them straight this morning, preacher." He did not apply it to himself.

In eating the Lord's supper, Paul said, "*But let a man examine himself...*" (First Corinthians 11:28). Self-examination is emphasized in Romans 2:1-3. *"But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."*

In restoring those who have fallen, Paul taught, *"Brethren, if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."* (Galatians 6:1). Christ said, "*And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye but considereth not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."* (Matthew 7:3-5).

Busy

God wants a busy person. When you want something to be done you usually ask the busy man to do it. Why? Because the busy man works. God wants people busy doing the work that must be done. We might ask, "How can we be busy in the work of the Lord?" This little poem is a good thought along this line.

"Father, where shall I work today?" And
my love flowed warm and free.
Then He pointed me out a humble spot,
and said, "Tend that for me."
I answered quickly, "Oh, no, not that!
Why, no one would ever see.
No matter how well my work was done;
Not that little place for me!"
The word He spoke, it was not stern; He

answered me tenderly:
"Ah, little one, search thine heart; Art thou
working for them or me?
Nazereth was a little place, And so was
Galilee."

We may be guilty of only wanting to work when some prominence will come our way as a result. Prayer for the sick, family, church, or nation may never be heard from you by others, but God hears. Talking one-on-one to a neighbor about the soul may not bring you acclaim, but it may save a soul. Being faithful in worship, inviting others, visiting the needy, reading the Scriptures, may not bring you brotherhood noteriety, but what of that? You are busy doing what God wants done. Your day-to-day work, whether it be in the home, on the job, or wherever, may seem insignificant to those around you, but you will be doing what God wants done. You are being busy in what is right. Too many of us might be like the man who prayed for the Lord to use him, but only in an advisory capacity. Many are willing to work when it is noted. Many are willing to complain, criticize, or advise others. Too few are willing to be busy workers.

Cooperative

God wants a person who will cooperate, After all, the church is to be *"fitly joined together,"* (Ephesians 4:16), and this implies cooperation by brethren. Unity, harmony, being *"fitly joined together"* is a mark of Christianity

Nobody even likes that person who always has to have his own way or will not cooperate with others. Have you ever watched children at play and noticed what happens to the child that insists everything must be as he calls it? Soon the others will leave him alone. The same thing is true on the adult level. God is not pleased with the uncooperative person who is unwilling to sacrifice himself for the benefit and good of others.

In the New Testament we find Christian fellowship, joint participation, brethren working hand-in-hand and heart-in-heart together. This demands cooperation. It is only because there is a cooperative spirit that we can have our Bible study periods, our gospel meetings, our worship services, our efforts to preach the gospel near and far. It is a sad spectacle when someone exhibits the attitude that he does not have a responsibility to others to be

working alongside others for the common good of the whole church. We all ought to look upon all matters of the church as "my work" and not "their work." We must support it, do our part, cooperate with others under the leadership. A lack of this attitude hinders the progress of the cause of Christ.

One Who Loves

God wants a person who both loves and hates. The same ability that enables one to love will also equip him to hate. There are those things that God hates just as those things that God loves. *"For God so loved the world..."* (John 3:16). But Solomon writes, *"These six things doth the Lord hate..."* (Proverbs 6:16). Those who love God love what God loves and hate what God hates.

God wants us to love His truth and to demonstrate that love. To love God means that we will love His truth enough to obey it. *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."* (First John 5:3). We show our love for the truth by believing it, obeying it, living according to it, defending it against attack, teaching it to all who will hear. By doing this we are able to obey the two greatest commandments of Matthew 22:37-39, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."*

God wants us to love one another. *"For ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another."* (First Thessalonians 4:9). *"And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity."* (First Corinthians 13:13). The word most often used in the original language of the Bible to depict the love we are to have is the word *"agape."* The real meaning of the word is a sacrificial love, a love that seeks the other person's highest good.

We show our love by being longsuffering, not quick to condemn, but not hesitant to condemn when the soul is at stake. Love is kind, pleasant, friendly, without envy. When we love someone we are not interested in showing ourselves better than they are to make us puffed up with self-righteousness. We are not primarily interested in seeking our own interest to the neglect of others. We will grieve over their errors just as we do over our own. We will have a forgiving attitude toward them,

supporting them, encouraging them. Love will help us prevent hard feelings, suspicion, verbal abuse, false accusations and insinuations to discredit and destroy. There are many ways to display the love God wants us to have in the heart. *"Follow after love."* (First Corinthians 14:1). It is that more excellent way of which Paul speaks in First Corinthians 12:31.

One Who Hates

God wants us to hate every false way. God hates sin because sin destroys the sinner and God loves even the sinner. He sent His Son to die on behalf of the sinner. We must hate sin and love the sinner. We must learn to despise and abhor evil (Romans 12:9). Those who look lightly upon such things as that which keep one separated from God have not yet learned to hate as God hates. Sin ought to be so repulsive to us that we would abstain from the appearance of evil (First Thessalonians 5:22). We have noted how people laugh at the antics of one who is drunk. But may we impress, there is nothing funny about sin, whether it be drunkenness, or any other transgression.

Obedient

God wants us to be persons who are obedient. When God speaks, man is to hear and heed. At the time of the disobedience of Saul, the first king of Israel, Samuel taught, *"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."* (First Samuel 15:22). Christ is the author of salvation, and in this truth we rejoice. But Hebrews 5:9 teaches that He is the author of salvation to them that obey him.

Is it possible that when we read the will of God that we do not weigh it and measure it as we ought, failing to see what is required of us, and considering the evidence to decide to obey? Obedience is to do what God says because God has said it. We do not even have to understand why God has said something before we recognize we must submit to it. We are to try to understand His will. But when we have faith in God as God wants, when we love the truth as He wants us to love it, we will be found trying to learn it, and determined to be obedient because this is what He wants.

† † † † †

Solomon's Recipe To Happiness

This should be a popular subject inasmuch as people generally strive to be happy. Nobody in their right mind likes to be unhappy. But many do not know what happiness is nor do they know the recipe for finding happiness.

When we speak of happiness, we are talking about being contented. This is not the same as being lazy and unwilling to make improvements. It is not satisfaction with mediocrity. Happy people are busy people, working people, seeking betterment, but with patience, coping with circumstances as they come and go without frustration and dishevelment.

A happy person has a peace of mind, because of a clear conscience, having done no wrong for which he expects retaliation, doing his best in each situation. He is free from anxiety, worry, dread. This makes him cheerful and optimistic. This is not to say he is boisterous, but friendly and agreeable. The happy person seldom is gruff, snapping at others, walking about with a cloud over him.

Basis For Happiness

His basis for his happiness stems from his right relationship with God. He is more as Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount; namely, *"Blessed."* Blessedness is not determined by environment and conditions without, but conditions within that are good because one is a child of God. Such a person looks forward to each day and lives his life fully.

People have sought happiness from so many sources. They have made idols out of things hoping that the pursuit of them will produce happiness. Some seek power over others and over things; they want wealth and possessions, great and small. Some pursue pleasure and the satisfaction of every lust, with riotous living, licentious behavior, having the so-called "good time," involved with drugs, alcohol, and immorality. They think such will eventually bring them happiness because it grants them temporary pleasure. Others may rely upon worldly accomplishments for their source of happiness. But those who have lived very long can see and have known people who do such things and they still are lacking happiness. This is because those recipes

do not produce the happiness for which people long.

Solomon

The Bible tells us of a man who had all these things and who tried many ways for happiness. His name was Solomon. Solomon had power as the king of Israel, reigning in a time of peace and prosperity, having inherited a strong and united kingdom from his father, David. He had large armies, navies, thousands of horses and chariots, servants, swords, spears. Other nations paid tribute into his treasury, and the neighboring nations feared him and respected his power.

"I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchads, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits; I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees; I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me; I gathered me silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of the kings and of the provinces; I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the songs of men, as musical instruments and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever for my eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my portion of all my labor." (Ecclesiastes 2:4-10).

It would seem with all that, if such things would produce happiness, he would have exceeded everyone else in happiness. But did this power satisfy him? *"Then I looked on all the works my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do, and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."* (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Vexation means annoying, harassing, disturbing. His power did not bring happiness even though he had power immeasurable.

As noted, he also had great wealth. This would be very appealing to many in our materialistic and greedy day. *"So Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom."* (First Kings 10:23). Notice an array of passages that depict his wealth. *"Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold...and all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold, none were of silver; it was*

nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon... For the king had at sea a navy of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks... And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the vale, for abundance." (First Kings 10:18,21,22,27).

The Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's wealth and desired to see it. Her reaction was, *"And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came and mine eyes had seen it; and behold, the half was not told me; thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard."* (First Kings 10:6,7).

Failure To Produce

But the question is, did all of this make him happy? Listen to what he says. *"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase; this is also vanity... The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep... As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go; and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?"* (Ecclesiastes 5: 10,11,12,15,16). This is a warning to those that will to be rich. As Paul wrote, *"For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."* (First Timothy 6:10). Jesus said, *"For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul."* (Mark 8:36). Again, *"For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* (Luke 12:15).

Solomon had pleasure. *"...And the delights of the sons of men... I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life... enjoy pleasure, and behold, this also is vanity."* (Ecclesiastes 2: 8,3,1). Paul spoke of those who were *"lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."* (First Timothy 3:4).

People have parties, banquets, musical entertainments, with

wine, drunkennes, satisfying the fleshly lusts, as Solomon did before them. He proved that was not the way to happiness. Yet, people still go that way. They engage in the lascivious dancing, adultery, drinking their liquors, attending gawdy and suggestive movies, following acts of entertainment that are lewd. Some pollute their bodies with things that make them "high" and hold a false promise of happiness. Some even overdo innocent activities seeking pleasure until these activities become a hindrance to them, such as hunting, fishing, games of various sorts. God is even neglected at times in order to be a participator or a spectator of such pleasurable events.

Solomon's Conclusion

But Solomon's conclusion about such things should ring loudly in our ears. "*And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly; I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.*" (Ecclesiastes 1:17).

We often read of Solomon's wisdom and knowledge. First Kings 10:24, "*And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.*" Jesus spoke of Solomon as a man of glory (Matthew 6:29).

One very interesting example of Solomon's wisdom was when he made a decision as to whom a child, over which there was some dispute, would be given (First Kings 3:16-28). The text, too lengthy to present here, is impressive concerning Solomon's wisdom.

But was this a correct source of happiness? "*I communed with mine own heart saying, lo, I come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that were before me in Jerusalem; yes, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom... I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.*" (Ecclesiastes 1:16,17).

Who has not observed the same conclusions that Solomon drew as we look about us in life, and so often see that the most miserable people on earth have power, wealth, glory, pleasure, whatever their heart desires, except happiness. We are not being taught that these things are evil in themselves. Some of the greatest servants of God had many of these things. But the point of Solomon's notation is that these things are not the sources of happiness. Happiness must come from somewhere else.

His Recipe

What is Solomon's recipe for happiness? Having seen how all these other things fail, and they all add up to vanity, where do we go to find what we want? Solomon has the answer. *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). There it is in concise form. Solomon goes on to explain why this is true. *"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."* (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Because this life is not all there is to our existence, because there is a life after this, because there will be a judgment, and we are accountable for how we live, the way to have inward peace, comfort, joy, happiness, blessedness, that people need and want, is to be right with God by keeping God's commandments.

This being true, we should be motivated to know just what the commandments are, what is expected of us, and be busy about the task of following where He leads us by His Word.

It is my prayer that we find happiness. May we seek it from the true source, and give God the glory and praise. *"Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he."* (Proverbs 16:20). *"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is the Lord his God."* (Psalm 146:5).

† † † † †

1984 Meeting and Lecture Schedule

Plans call for me to be at the following locations during 1984.

Lafayette, Georgia	April 8-13
Dyersburg Lectures, Philip St.	April 19-21
Pensacola, Florida, Bellview Lectures	May 13-17
Hayti, Missouri	June 3-8
Killeen, Texas	June 24-28
Nettleton, Mississippi	July 22-27
Gum Church near Fulton, Miss.	August 5-10
West Plans, Missouri	October 7-12

Short-Cut Religion

We live in an age of short-cuts. People want to reach their goals quickly and go the easy way. We are not saying this is all wrong, but simply noting that this is the case. We seek short-cuts to financial success. We want short-cuts when we travel. We have all kinds of short-cuts in preparing our meals. Short-cuts abound in almost every field of endeavor.

But there are some things which cannot be reached and achieved by shortcuts. Some goals, such as a formal education, good health, learning to master the piano, and many other things that must have the time, energy and effort put forth, and there just are not short-cuts. Nor is there a short-cut to heaven. There is a way we must go. There are no alternative routes. We are not permitted to skirt around any of the matters that God has decreed.

Israel's Short-Cut

We turn our attention to the Old Testament and the people of Israel as they make their way from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. They had been in the wilderness nearly forty years and once again were approaching the borders of the land they wished to enter. Moses sent messengers to Edom asking permission to "cut through" their land. It was a much shorter distance for Israel if they could go that way. But the king of Edom denied them passage (Numbers 20:14-21). Moses persuaded that they would not harm the land, would take nothing from it, would remain on the roadway turning neither to the left nor right, but still the king refused permission.

We might wonder why Edom would not allow Israel to pass. But we must remember, that even though it seemed a reasonable request, all the inhabitants of the land were very suspicious of Israel. But doubtless there was another and more profound reason behind the denied permission. God was leading Israel and God was taking them from captivity to the promised land. The accomplishment was to belong to God and not in part to the heathen nations then occupying the country. Even though Israel preferred the short-cut route, God was not going to allow it. They were to go the way he directed them.

Desire For Short-cuts

People today propose short-cuts to the spiritual promised land of heaven. The world is filled with "short-cut" religions and doctrines. Men proclaim roads other than, and sometimes contrary to, the one road that God has taught. From pulpits, classrooms, in books, every means of communication, people are exposed to short-cuts.

Some would call this condemnation the preaching of "hate" toward other religions. But this is not preaching hate. To some, anything that exposes error and does not compromise for the sake of peace is called hate. But we must have more love for God's truth, and for the souls of people, than to side up to doctrines that are not harmonious with the way of God. Such alternatives that men propose will not take people to heaven. We are being deceptive to think that one way is just as good as another when God has given the one way to heaven. As God led Israel the way they were to go, and they had to follow if they reached the promised land, so God directs us through His Word the way we are to go, and we must follow if we reach heaven.

What are some of the short-cuts that men have proposed? Let us first be impressed that any way except God's way is false. Those who teach and promote ways different from God's way are false teachers. Paul wrote, *"But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say we now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."* (Galatians 1:8,9). *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."* (Second John 9).

The various "isms" in the world either add to or take from what God's book reveals. If we can believe what the Scripture says, they have not God. This teaching does not originate with me, or my brethren, but from the Bible. If we criticize it, let us know we are criticizing the author of the Bible.

The "Only" Short-Cut

One short-cut that is often taught might be called the "only" short-cut. Men teach that we are saved by "faith only" or "grace only." While the Bible teaches repeatedly we are saved by faith (Romans 5:1; Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16; John 8:24), never does it teach we are saved by "faith only." In fact, James says

quite the opposite in James 2:20,24, *"But wilt thou know,O vain man, that faith without works is dead?. . .Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."* Some wish to by-pass baptism and therefore teach this "only" short-cut. They are inconsistent because this short-cut also cuts short repentance and confession of our faith. These pleas for people to raise their hand if they want to be saved, death-bed conversion, ask God to come into your heart, and similar admonitions are "faith only" short-cuts that men attempt but will not prevail.

We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8,9). None who teach the truth teach otherwise. But none who teach the truth would teach that we are saved by "grace only." This is deceptive and misleading. It attempts to by-pass the necessity of man obeying the commands of the gospel. This short-cut will not take us to the desired destination. When we read of the many passages that teach the necessity of baptism (Mark 16:16;Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4; First Peter 3:21), we realize the futility of the "only" short-cut.

Communion Short-Cuts

Some would run a short-cut around the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. Once per month, once per quarter, or other such intervals are common among religious people. But in New Testament times the saints observed the breaking of bread upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). And every week has that first day.

Some make a short-cut regarding the supper by allowing only those they call priests to drink of the fruit of the vine, while the laity may eat the bread. But this is not what Paul taught in First Corinthians 11:23-26. Christ commanded that they all do both in memory of Him. Men can take the short-cut but cannot please God at the same time.

Living Short-Cuts

Do we attempt to short-cut around Christian living? Do we think we can live six days according to our own will, and then worship on one day, Sunday, and that makes everything acceptable? I suppose many still consider Christianity a once-per-week affair. Men cannot sin during the week and think it matters not. We cannot drink alcoholic beverages, smoke,

gamble, lie, cheat, gossip, etc., and then come to worship as if we are clean before God, or that our coming makes us clean. Christian living has its costs. We must give up the sinfulness of the world or be lost. Paul said, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* (Romans 12:1,2). John wrote, "*Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.*" (Revelation 2:10).

Short-Cut To Growth

There is no short-cut to the spiritual growth God expects. Second Peter 3:18, *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* God is not pleased with the one who has been born again, who becomes a new creature, who is raised to walk in newness of life, who remains a babe in Christ and does not grow. But there is no quick-fix in growing spiritually just as one does not grow suddenly physically. Growth is a process that demands certain things of us. It requires study, devotion, meditation, working in righteousness, faithfulness to duties in worship. Others cannot do our growing for us. We can no more grow "by proxy" than we can be born "by proxy."

The Other Fellow Short-Cut

In our Christian labor we hear and see so much of the action and attitude to "let the other fellow do it." There are things that the other fellow must do, but he can only do them for himself, not for you and me. We can help one another do as we ought, but it ultimately comes down to each one doing his own part. There is no short-cut to discharging our personal responsibility.

Encouraging Short-Cuts

Possibly, those of us who preach contribute to encouraging the acceptance of short-cuts by failing to make the way God has prepared clear and plain. Possibly, we are too shy in condemning the ways men have devised and by which people are misled. Could it be that we are so afraid of offending that we commit the greatest offence; namely, failure to declare the

whole counsel of God? Is it not better to speak the truth in love and speak plainly as the oracles of God, running the risk of even hurting people's feelings than to allow them to go on down the path that leads to destruction, thinking all is well?

We cannot apologize for the truth, nor "pull punches" against error. We can become so soft-spoken that nobody hears what we are saying. Those who want truth above all else are not offended when they learn they have been in error. They are grateful for the opportunity to leave the error and be right before God.

Possibly we contribute to short-cut religion by leaving the impression that the church of the Lord is but a denomination among other denominations. If we do not make the distinction clear, certainly those who look upon the church in denominational terms, will never know the truth.

We should never deliberately offend anyone. That is not Christ-like. But we can be so diplomatic and display a pseudo-kindness and love that will allow people to remain comfortable in their sins. Admittedly, it is not always easy to know just how "hard" to preach on a given occasion. But the increase of numbers of people who reflect a distorted view of the church and live a half-hearted manner of life indicates we might have overdone the soft approach and left off what is needful.

Short-Cut Failure

Short-cut religion never succeeds. Error never saves. Compromise only contaminates. We either preach the *"whole counsel"* as is revealed, or we do God and those that hear a disservice even as we pose an angels of light.

Faith, repentance, confession of faith, and baptism is the way God commands. Faithful living must follow. There is no short-cut to that.

† † † † †

A Burning Bush?

Now and again someone will refer to the booklet you are reading as ***A Burning Bush*** rather than ***A Burning Fire.*** We do not mind. The bush kept burning, and we hope the booklet can continue also. We like producing it. It teaches truth.



JAMES W. BOYD

Modern Version Danger

Brethren who preach and love the True more than the New have often warned of the dangers of the modern versions of the Bible. Equally dangerous are some methods being used to promote them. Not understanding the real issue, some invent "straw-men" and assign positions to opponents nobody ever held. Others have resorted to slander, misrepresentation, ridicule, attacking reliable versions, and even denying the authority of elderships to decide what versions can be presented publicly as reliable. Some, evidently feeling the weight of evidence against them, have taken the "low-road" to promote modern versions rather than be content with truth. When you have truth, you do not have to take such steps.

Division may result over this issue, not over translations, or up-dating the language, but over acceptance of books that teach false doctrines, the advocacy of commentary and paraphrase as inspired Scripture, and the tolerance of the theory of "thought inspiration" rather than the Bible doctrine of "verbal inspiration."

There seems to be no limit to the ways of evil being used to promote the acceptance of perverted "versions." We must stand fast for truth.

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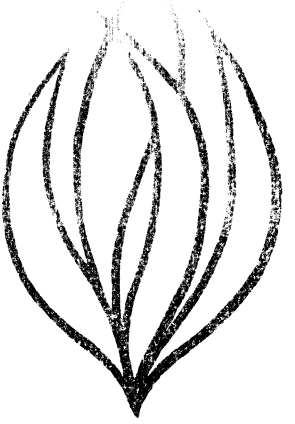

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III James W. Boyd **NUMBER 4**

One Thousand Year Reign

Almost every denominational radio and television program is packed with premillennialism because it is prominently believed among denominationalists. It is a doctrine that has to do with the future, the second coming of Christ, and related matters. There are many books, articles, and sermons presented on its behalf. But we contend the doctrine is false and propose to expose its error in the light of the Bible lest any be overtaken by it and its consequences, which are deadly.

Leave It Alone?

We cannot leave false doctrines alone and obey God. Passages as Second Timothy 4:2, First John 4:1, First Thessalonians 5:21, Ephesians 5:11 demand that anything contradictory to God's will is not harmless. Some may ask, "What difference does it make as to what will happen in the future and at the Lord's return? Whatever will be, will be." But if some doctrine is taught that creates disrespect of Bible truth, dishonors the church, shows God to have gone back on His word, and provokes disobedience to God, it will cause souls to be lost.

Premillennialism misrepresents truth, denies several basic points, divides the church, and still has the power to subvert brethren and mislead religious people. We will show the doctrine is not only unbiblical, but anti-biblical.

Whenever you discuss religion with some people, you find they are absorbed in fantasy, speculation, and sensationalism about the return of Christ, an alleged one thousand years reign on earth, a rapture, an earthly kingdom, utopia, and only want to talk about Revelation. This causes many of them to by-pass plain truth they must believe and obey to be saved.

Not all proponents of premillennialism are agreed, but there are several major points generally held that serve as a foundation of the doctrine. These are what we shall discuss.

The Theory

The theory basically contends that Christ came to establish His kingdom just as God had prophecied through the prophets, but upon being rejected by the Jews He postponed it and established the church as a temporary measure, intending to

establish the kingdom the next time He comes. The church is really an after-thought with many premillennialists, though not all. It is the result of an upset in plans, sometimes referred to as a different kingdom. (Some teach the church is a kingdom, but not the Messianic Kingdom that they say is yet to be established.)

Before Jesus returns, some contend that Rome will be re-established because Daniel's prophecy showed it would come in the days of that empire (Daniel 2). These people expected the rise of Italy during World War II to begin the return of Rome.

All the Jews will be converted and miraculously and instantaneously transported back to Palestine where the temple will be rebuilt, Judaism reinstated, and Christ will occupy a literal, earthly, physical throne in Jerusalem for one thousand years. When He comes the righteous shall be raised into a rapture for seven years, during which time there will be the Tribulation on earth. After seven years and the establishment of Christ on the throne, and completing His one thousand year reign on earth, there will be a literal and carnal warfare in which all the wicked dead shall be raised and all forces of evil destroyed in a carnal war called the Battle of Armageddon. Then the saved will be ushered into heaven.

Furthermore, all this is imminent, meaning that it is likely to happen at any moment. Some even have signs on their cars stating that the car will suddenly be without a driver when Jesus comes. They even say there are signs by which everyone can know it is about to happen.

Like many false religious doctrines, there are scatterings of truth mixed with loads of error, imagination, speculation, and contradiction. The major springboard of this theory is a phrase in Revelation 20, the only part of the Bible that refers to a one thousand year reign of any kind or nature. We need to understand as best we can what we can about that chapter. Here is where we focus our attention.

Revelation Misunderstood

The book of Revelation was written at a time when the early church was facing immediate persecution and trial. In fact, it had already begun. The things portrayed in that book were for the encouragement, comfort, and reassurance of the early church specifically, and what is included were things that were to "*shortly come to pass.*" (Revelation 1:1). For the most part, the

things of Revelation have been fulfilled, with the closing chapters presenting a discussion of the church, the glory and triumph of the church, scenes of judgment, and possibly descriptions of heaven. Revelation should be studied more as fulfilled prophecy, as history, not something yet to come, not tomorrow's newspaper. It was written to forewarn churches concerning events vitally connected with the immediate experiences of those churches. "*For the time is at hand...*" (Revelation 1:3). Revelation 22:6, "*...the things which must shortly be done.*" The events during the days of Nero and other periods of persecution related to that time period furnish complete counterparts to the symbols of Revelation. We are not given "signs" to determine the remainder of time. Misunderstanding of these points contributes to premillennialism.

The book was written in symbolic language. Had the writer, John, been instructed to write with plain and literal language, it could have provided the enemies of the church information intended for the welfare of the church. It was written in code to prevent the enemies from knowing how Christians could and would prepare for their survival. The persecutors are described as dragons and beasts, persecutions are called wars, pestilences, and catastrophes. Actual names and plain language would have increased the hazards of brethren and they could have been charged with treason by their own books if it fell into enemy hands.

The Theme Of Victory

Rightly understood, the book of Revelation is a symbolic account of hardship of God's people, but the people of God ought not falter, but endure because eventual victory belonged to the faithful.

It is commonly heard that the Bible plainly says Christ will reign on earth one thousand years beginning at His return. Revelation 20:1-10 is cited as the text. The assertion is false. The Bible neither says nor teaches any such thing, plainly or vaguely. It says something about one thousand years, but the reign is not of Christ, but martyred souls. The text, which the reader should have at hand for consultation, says, "*...they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*" Revelation 20 does not mention anyone living today, nor Jerusalem, the alleged capital of the kingdom supposed to come. How does one get from that passage that Jesus shall reign on earth one thousand years?

The trend of the book presents the rise from apparent defeat to the place of victory of the cause of Christ and those who died for it.. (Please trace the progress of 6:10; 16:7; 18:20; 20:4). Premillennialism adds to God's word, a fatal mistake (Revelation 22:18), and makes an impossible situation.

Notice that both the living and reigning are limited by one thousand years. Does this mean life ends when the reign ends? It would demand it. One cannot have life eternal, then limit it to an actual thousand years. The one thousand years is a figurative and symbolic expression, as are many other expressions of Revelation. We read of a white horse, a rider, beasts, dragons, keys, a bottomless pit, chains, seals, even a dragon with a tail that plucks stars out of heaven, and not only fills the earth but is put in a pit in the earth. All this is figurative. Why insist that only the one thousand years is literal, actual, and non-symbolic? It is not good exegesis but faulty eisegesis.

One Thousand Years

When asked, "What about the millennium?" we answer there is nothing about it. Where will it be? Nowhere. When will it be? Never. What was it? It never was something on earth. "IT AIN'T," as Foy E. Wallace, Jr. commented.

What does Revelation 20 teach? It has to do with the overthrow of Satan. Dogmatism as to the exact meaning of every symbol is unbecoming because we are not informed. Investigating eleven different commentaries on this chapter, almost eleven different "interpretations" were given. But there are some things we can determine with confidence.

An angel or messenger from heaven with authority and power comes to bind, restrict, curtail the power of Satan for a span. We do know that Christ came, resisted temptation, and bound and limited Satan to the extent that He casted out demons, and provided man a way of salvation and deliverance from the hold of the devil. What can bind Satan except the Word of God?

Satan is loosed, which we shall consider in verse seven. Verse four mentions something John saw; namely, martyrs now on thrones, judging, living, reigning. This is symbolic of their victory rather than defeat. The cause for which they died lives. Once under the altar crying, "*How long?*" they are now pictured as the ultimate victors.

The first resurrection is a raising and vindication of the cause of Christ for which they gave their lives. It goes from seeming

defeat to apparent victory. The rest of the dead, good and bad, are not included in what John saw here. The first resurrection shows victory of the Christian faith. The second resurrection will be the resurrection of the bodies of all just prior to the judgment.

How definite can one be as to the meaning of the loosing of Satan? We know there be some who are in "concrete" in everything about all of this figurative language. Forgive us for not assuming to be able to help you here, but we are not among them. It does no violence to the truth we can know, nor to the faith of Christ, to admit there are things in Revelation we do not know with the same confidence we can know other things, such as the nature of the kingdom, the plan of salvation, the manner of worship, and many other matters.

But this we do know. There is nothing "plainly said" about some Rapture, Tribulation, Christ's reign on earth in Jerusalem, or a carnal warfare of Armageddon. The important message is that Satan and his hosts shall not be victorious regardless of the seeming victories scored in the persecution of brethren. Eventually, and eternally, Christians will prevail because of Christ.

More related material is presented in additional lessons concerning the church as the kingdom, Christ as King on David's throne now, and the alledged "signs of the times," that will appear soon.

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CORRECTION: Volume III, Number 2, page 3, contained an error that needs to be corrected. We said, speaking of James, the apostle, "He was the first martyr among Christians. " Not so. Stephen was the first martyr of whom we have record (Acts 7). James was the first martyr among the apostles (Acts 12). We are sure we miss mistakes in spelin, but we want very much to keep Bible fax correct.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: Lacking space in this issue, we have another lesson on the same general theme entitled, ***Christ, The King***, that we hope to include next time. Look for it.

The Church Is The Kingdom

Many people do not understand the church, its nature, what it is, and how it differs and excels all other organizations, bodies, associations, orders, and such like to which people can belong. Naturally, not understanding, nor realizing its importance, they are inclined to never become members of it, or postpone entering into it, or, if already a member, not as devoted to it as they ought to be. Much of the misunderstanding is due to the confused, contradictory, unscriptural way the church has been presented by the religious teachers of the world. It is our intention to learn how the Bible presents the church.

When we speak of the church we have no reference whatever to any denomination that has, does, or ever shall exist. There is no Biblical authority for the existence of any denomination. The church is not a denomination, has no kinship with denominations, is not composed of denominations, and is never presented in terms of denominationalism. But the church is presented to us as God's kingdom.

We learn by making comparisons, observing similarities and likenesses of things. We learn about new things in terms of things we already know. When Christ came to establish the church and reveal its nature, He knew it would differ from anything men had known, yet it would bear similarities to things they understood. He defined the church in terms common to man's understanding. This was characteristic of His teaching in parables. He presented the church as a kingdom, telling of the parts of the kingdom and the way people become citizens of it.

A Monarchy

The church is a monarchy with Christ as King. That the church and the kingdom are one and the same is evident from certain Scriptures. Some contend that Christ came to establish His kingdom, but when the Jews rejected Him, He postponed its establishment and provided the church, something of a temporary substitute, intending to establish the kingdom the next time He comes. This doctrine makes the church and the kingdom different from each other. But the Bible teaches they are the same thing.

Daniel 2 tells of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in which he saw an image with a head of gold, a breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron with feet a mixture of iron and clay. These parts of the image represented kingdoms of the earth. There came a stone *"not made with hands,"* that is, from God, that smote the image and ground it into pieces, with the stone growing throughout the world. The meaning was that the stone from God was superior to the kingdoms represented by the image.

The head of gold was Babylon that would be followed by inferior kingdoms. In the days of the fourth kingdom, God would establish His kingdom that would surpass all others. Following Babylon came the Persian, Grecian, and Roman Empires. It was in the days of the Roman kingdom that Jesus came and established the church, God's kingdom.

"At Hand"

John the Baptist preceded Jesus preaching that people must repent, *"for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* He, Jesus, the apostles, and the seventy Jesus sent out to preach, eighty-four inspired preachers in all, preached the kingdom was *"at hand,"* nearby, soon to be, nigh upon them. If the kingdom was postponed, as some claim, these eighty-four preachers were false teachers.

Jesus said the kingdom was going to be established in the lifetime of some who heard Him preach (Mark 9:1). If He postponed it, He preached falsely. He said it would come with power, and told the power was the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

On Pentecost (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles; they preached as the Spirit gave them utterance; people heard the Word, believed the Word, obeyed the Word, and were added to the church (Acts 2:47). With the coming of the things Jesus said would mark the coming of the kingdom, the church came into existence. Hence, the church and the kingdom are the same.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper He said He would not commune with His disciples until in the kingdom. Paul gave instructions to the church in Corinth concerning the partaking of the Lord's Supper. Those in Troas (Acts 20:7) observed the Lord's Supper. They were in the church. Therefore, we know the church and the kingdom are one and the same.

Paul said the members of the church in Colosse had been

delivered out of the power of darkness and *"translated... into the kingdom of his dear Son."* (Colossians 1:13). How could they be in the kingdom if Jesus has not established it yet? Those in the church were in the kingdom.

The same is true concerning words written by John (Revelation 1:9) to members of the churches of Asia. Those in the church were in the kingdom as John was in the kingdom.

Jesus used the words "church" and "kingdom" interchangeably in Matthew 16:16-18. An honest consideration of the Scriptures will insist that the church is the kingdom and vice versa.

Four Essentials

The kingdom consists of at least four essentials: a king, subjects, a territory, and a law. Jesus Christ is the King of the kingdom of God. It was said He was to be a king even before His birth (Luke 1:31-33). It was to this end that He was born (John 18:37). He is called *"the King of kings, and Lord of lords."* (First Timothy 6:15). He is the monarch of the kingdom.

His subjects are those who are members of the church. All people are subject to Christ in the sense that they are accountable to God through Him. But only those who are members of the church have submitted themselves to His kingship. He is the head of the body, which is the church (Colossians 1:18). As head of the church, He is also King of the kingdom. Those in the church are subject to Him (Ephesians 5:24), and those in the kingdom are His subjects. We are *"fellow citizens with the saints"* when in the church (Ephesians 2:19).

At present the kingdom is IN the world but not OF the world. The territory of the kingdom is not a geographical location but exists in the hearts of men (Luke 17:21). The boundaries of the kingdom cross the boundaries of earthly nations (Acts 10:34). The gospel is for everyone of the whole world (Mark 16:15). Daniel 2:35 speaks of God's kingdom becoming a great mountain and filling the earth. All nations were to flow unto it (Isaiah 2:2).

Someday, at God's pleasure, when Jesus returns, the kingdom shall be delivered to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). Notice, when Jesus comes, it is not to SET UP the kingdom, but to DELIVER UP the kingdom to God. Those who are citizens of that kingdom shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (First Thessalonians 4:13ff). Then shall be the *"new*

heaven and new earth," a new habitation, for those of the kingdom (Second Peter 3:13).

The law of the kingdom is the "*perfect law of liberty.*" (James 1:25). Israel lived subject to the law of God as given through Moses. But we live subject to the truth that came through Christ (John 1:17). The former law did not take away sins nor make one whole before God. Jesus took away the first law that He might establish the second (Hebrews 10:9). "*Lo, I come to do thy will. He taketh away the first that he may establish the second.*" He abolished the first in His death (Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:15). The will by which we are saved is the second will, the will of Christ (Hebrews 10). It is that law by which we shall be judged (John 12:48).

Delivered to God

Realizing that the kingdom shall be delivered to God, that Christ is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23), we should be members of it. But how does one become a citizen in the kingdom of God? He is "*translated*" into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). This means he is changed, removed from one relationship to another. He is delivered out of the darkness of the kingdom of Satan into the glorious light and life of the kingdom of God. There is a change of relationship. Let us illustrate.

Suppose a person wishes to change citizenship from England to the United States. What must he do? He cannot just "claim it." He first hears of the United States and decides he wants to become a citizen. He then applies for citizenship according to the laws of the U.S. Learning the terms of entrance, then meeting them, he is granted citizenship. It is no different, in principle, in becoming a citizen of God's kingdom, the church.

One must first hear of this kingdom wherein is salvation. He decides he wants to be a citizen therein. He learns the terms of entrance. When he has done what the law of the kingdom says he must do, he is given, granted, citizenship.

Terms Of Entrance

What are the terms? We know the blessings make entrance into the kingdom so important. What must we do? Upon hearing the gospel of Christ that He is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind, realizing that we are lost in sin and without hope,

unable to save ourselves by ourselves, we must put our faith, trust, confidence in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. We must obey His commands to repent (Luke 13:3), confess our faith in Him (Luke 12:8,9), and be baptized to be saved, for the remission of sin, into Christ (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). Having done this, God adds one to His church (Acts 2:47), which is the kingdom, as we have learned.

Nobody can set their own terms of entrance. We become citizens of God's kingdom God's way or we do not become citizens at all. All of us are in one of two existing spiritual kingdoms, God's or Satan's. If in Satan's kingdom, there is nothing but eternal death and punishment awaiting us. In God's kingdom there are all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3), salvation and heaven. Each one must, and can, decide for himself or herself in which kingdom he wishes to live and die. But only those who are faithful, loyal citizens in the kingdom of God have the promise of eternal salvation in heaven.

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Scripture Contradictions Of Premillennialism

The basic points of the premillennial theory are that it was prophecied that the Lord would establish His kingdom, that Jesus came to earth to establish it, but upon being rejected by the Jews it was decided to postpone it until He comes again. At that time the righteous shall be lifted into a seven year Rapture which will run concurrently with the Tribulation on earth among the wicked. Then Jesus comes again, and this time will establish His kingdom with headquarters in Jerusalem. All the Jews will be miraculously converted and taken to Palestine, the Judaistic system revived, and Jesus shall reign on earth for one thousand years. Then there will be a carnal warfare called the Battle of Armageddon, which will result in victory for the forces of the Lord, defeat of the wicked, and the righteous taken to heaven.

There are several variations of this theory and it is not surprising to find premillennialists with great differences. The above points, and even their order, do not fit every millennial system, but these are generally the fundamentals of it.

Why Be Concerned?

Why should we be concerned about this doctrine? Since whatever is going to happen will happen, what difference does it make whether we know in advance or not? Anything that contradicts the Bible creates great problems by throwing the entire word of God into disrepute. The preoccupation with speculative and fanciful theories have caused many people to close their eyes to their duty to God. The theory dishonors the Lord and His church, divides people who profess to be Christians, makes God's prophets false prophets, and brings reproach on the very Christ to whom we look for salvation.

In a previous lesson we discussed the figurative words of Revelation 20 regarding the one thousand year reign. The system of premillennialism rests on a misunderstanding and misappropriation of that passage. The theory separates the church from the kingdom as if they were two institutions, making the church a kind of "after-thought." It removes Christ from His throne now, saying He will become king but is not now a king. There are other contradictions of the Bible we consider.

Earthly Kingdom

Premillennialsim makes the same mistake some made during Jesus' day; namely, that His kingdom would be an earthly kingdom, rivaling Rome, having a capital in Jerusalem. Some wanted a kingdom like that of ancient Israel with David and Solomon. But Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). It would not be like other kingdoms on this earth. Some even wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him an earthly king (John 6:15). They misunderstood the nature, scope, purpose, activity, and organization of His spiritual kingdom. Jesus separated Himself from such people. It is no less an error to think of His kingdom in such terms now.

God Defaults

The theory makes God default on His prophecies and promises. Daniel 2 and the dream of Nebuchadnezzar was a prophecy that showed the Lord's kingdom would be established in the days of the fourth or Roman Empire. It either was established then or God did not keep His word.

Daniel 7 teaches the Son of man would receive His kingdom

when He returned to the Ancient of Days, having reference to the ascension of Christ into heaven and back to the Father. The kingdom was either given Him then, or God did not keep His word and Daniel was a false prophet.

Isaiah 2:2,3 says the Lord's house would be established in the last days. Joel prophecied the coming of the Holy Spirit in the last days. Peter, Acts 2, said the events of Pentecost fulfilled Joel's prophecy. The kingdom either came that day or God did not keep His word.

David prophecied that Christ would be raised to sit on the throne. Peter declared that prophecy was fulfilled when Christ took His place on the right hand of God. Do we reject Peter and accept the doctrine of premillennialism?

John the Baptist said the kingdom was *"at hand."* Was it a false prediction? Was he not a messenger sent by God? Did he err? You must contend that John was wrong if premillennialism is true. Not only John, but Jesus, the apostles, and the seventy sent forth all preached the same message. Were all eighty-four inspired teachers mistaken?

Jesus said the kingdom would come with power in the lifetime of some to whom He was speaking (Mark 9:1). He identified the power as the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). If the kingdom did not come when the Holy Spirit came, and did not come in the lifetime of those people, there are some mighty old people somewhere waiting for the promise Jesus gave. Who believes they are living? Did Jesus pronounce a false forecast, or did the kingdom come as He said it would?

God's Word Is Made Suspect

The theory throws suspicion of the reliability of God's word. Will God keep His own word or not? If He did not keep His word about establishing the kingdom after so many promises, predictions, and prophecies, how can we be sure He will not change His mind again? If the rejection of Jesus by the Jews could cause postponement, who else might provoke Him to postpone? The whole theory is an attack on the integrity of the word of God.

An Eternal Earth?

While the theory says Jesus will set up a throne in Jerusalem and reign a thousand years, Peter says there is not going to be

any earth on which to set up anything when Christ returns (Second Peter 3:7-13). This place of habitation, the heaven and earth, as we now have it, will be burned up. The elements will melt. There will be a new place of habitation, but it will be new, not the old rennovated. There is no word in the Bible that says Jesus will even set foot on earth again. It teaches He will not (First Thessalonians 4:17).

Comings and Resurrections

Premillennialism claims two more comings of Christ and two more resurrections. One coming and resurrection is at the time of the Rapture, and another at the time of setting up the kingdom. The wicked will be raised just before the Battle of Armageddon. The first resurrection is supposed to be of the righteous who are taken into the Rapture, and another resurrection before the wicked are destroyed.

But John 5:28,29 teaches that the good and wicked shall be raised the same hour. John 6:39,40,44,54 teach that the righteous shall be raised the last day. This allows no future day for a Rapture, a thousand years, Armageddon, and the resurrection of the wicked later. John 12:48 teaches the wicked will be judged the last day, the same day all shall be raised. Matthew 25 teaches, in the parable of the ten virgins, there is one more coming of Christ. There simply is no way to fit the comings and resurrections of premillennialism into Scripture.

Carnal Warfare

The idea of a literal, actual, carnal warfare violates the Bible regarding the nature of the warfare to be conducted by the kingdom of God. We are at war to "*fight the good fight of faith,*" (First Timothy 6:12), as did Paul (Second Timothy 4:6-8). We are to be soldiers of Christ (Second Timothy 2:3). Christ is our captain (Hebrews 2:10). We are to war a good warfare (First Timothy 1:18). But this is not a actual, bloody battle of the flesh in physical conflict. John 18:36 shows such warfare is not the legitimate way for the kingdom of God to protect itself and spread its borders. Peter was told to put the sword in its place (and it does have a place, and can be used by the civil power in administering its God-given duties, Romans 13). But Second Corinthians 10:3-5 makes it plain that the premillennial idea of a literal, physical warfare in incompatible with the advance of His

kingdom.

Church Versus Kingdom

We have already noted that the theory makes the church and the kingdom separate while the Scripture shows they are the same. An entire lesson on this theme is included in this series. That which makes the church an after-thought rather than a planned ingredient in God's plan, as is taught in Ephesians 3:10,11, is a false doctrine.

Different Plans

Finally, the theory nullifies the plan of salvation for Jews by having them miraculously converted and transported into Palestine for the revival of Judaism. But the Judaistic system has been taken out of the way, its purpose having been accomplished. This alleged inheritance of Palestine by the Jews is based on a misunderstanding of the land promise God gave Abraham. That was also fulfilled a long time ago (Joshua 21:43-45).

The Bible teaches that Jews and Gentiles will be saved the same way, and that by the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16; 3:9,22). There will not be a "special" and miraculous conversion of anybody. The great commission Jesus gave before ascending into heaven was that the gospel was to be preached to every creature (Mark 16:15). Everyone is accountable to God under Christ. Any doctrine that attempts to by-pass the necessity of a person obeying the gospel, including faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins, is a false doctrine and one that denies what God has affirmed.

Imminent

We are told that this sequence of events that the premillennialists say will occur is imminent, liable to happen at any moment, and that there are signs that tell us that it is about to occur. Other lessons have been composed regarding the alleged "signs of the times ." But are these things imminent? Is even the coming of Christ imminent?

Imminent means that these things are to surely come to pass at any moment. We do not think they will come to pass at all because they contradict so much Scripture. But the certainty of

the Lord's return is definitely affirmed in Scripture. But we know not when the Lord may come. It is not a question of the possibility that He could come at any moment. But there is nothing to tell us that He will come soon or whether He will come late. He will come when Almighty God determines for Him to come.

We do not know every detail about what shall occur when the Lord returns, and the resurrection, the judgment, etc. All is not revealed. But there is much we can know because it is revealed. But when any doctrine runs contrary to that which can be known, that doctrine must be repudiated, even though it may contain strains of truth running through it. Most false philosophies do contain some elements of truth. But the error they contain demands they be rejected. So it is with the doctrine of premillennialism.

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What Signs?

Matthew 16:1-4, *"The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them and departed."*

Let us concentrate on the phrase, *"signs of the times."* We should speak as the oracles of God and use Bible terms to express Bible concepts and ideas. This is "sound speech" rather than the uncertain Ashdodic language that too many use in religion. When Jesus used the phrase He was talking about the signs and wonders and miracles that He had done to prove that He was the Christ. John wrote, *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing ye might have life in his name."* (John 20:30,31). The things that Jesus did had

been convincing to Nicodemus who remarked, *"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles which thou doest except God be with him."* (John 3:2).

Some Want More Signs

Even with all the evidence that had already been provided, these who came tempting Jesus requested more signs. It was not that they could not understand but they would not understand. As Jesus described them in Matthew 13:15, *"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."* They were a wicked, unfaithful, hardened, and rebellious people.

Jesus did say that they would have another sign which He called the sign of the prophet Jonas. What is that sign? Matthew 12:40 tells us, *"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* It is obvious that Jesus believed the account of Jonah as an event in history. As Jonah was in the whale's belly for a certain time, so shall He be in the heart of the earth, then come forth. The sign of Jonas referred to His death, burial, and resurrection.

Today we hear so many talking about the *"signs of the times"* and using the phrase with reference to what they claim are signs of the coming of Christ. They claim His return is imminent, nigh upon us, soon to be, even designating when it shall be, and drawing these conclusions from what they call the *"signs of the times."*

Keep in mind, Jesus used the phrase to refer to the evidence that He was the promised Messiah and Son of God. Some teachers today use the phrase to talk about His return. But the Biblical phrase, *"signs of the times,"* has no reference whatever to His return.

Imminent

We read and hear the phrase, "Jesus is coming soon." We are told that His return is imminent; that is, soon to come to pass, nigh upon us, expected at any moment, threatening to occur immediately. The "signs" are cited as evidence.

There is no question that Jesus shall come. There is no doubt that Jesus could come at any moment. But there is no evidence of "signs" that He is about to come.

The seriousness of this kind of teaching is that it is a part of that false philosophy and speculative theory that is called premillennialism that contradicts so much that Scripture teaches about the return of Christ, the kingdom, the judgment, the resurrection, and other matters. There is no way to harmonize premillennialism and the Bible without wresting the Scriptures into a fanciful and imaginative distortion.

We are even told by some that the Bible teaches the imminent return of Christ and that the apostles taught and believed that Jesus would return in their lifetime. This is a serious claim because it means that the apostles were wrong in what they taught. Jesus did not return in their lifetime as He promised. Either Christ went back on His promise, or has decided not to come, or the apostles taught falsely. Any of these conclusions are devestating to the integrity of the Bible. All we know as to what the apostles taught is in the Bible. What the Scriptures teach now is what they taught then.

"As A Thief"

If the apostles were wrong about when Jesus would return, what else may they have mistakenly reported? Were they wrong about the Deity of Christ, the atoning power of His blood, the reality of sin, the certainty of the judgment? Doctrines that emphasize the speculations and imaginations of men's minds can create grave skepticism as to the reliability of the word of God, especially if such doctrines are believed.

Alleged Signs

Some, however, point to certain chapters of the Bible and contend that these chapters teach that there will be "signs" whereby we can know when the Lord is going to return. For the remainder of this lesson we shall look at two passages that allegedly teach such a thing.

Second Timothy 3:1-7. Would the reader please assist by turning to this passage in his Bible and reading it. Please notice the several abominable manners that are listed there as being characteristic of "*perilous times*" in the last days.

What many fail to realize is that people have been living in the

"last days" for nearly two thousand years. The last days is that age when God speaks to man by and through His Son (Hebrews 2:1,2). It refers to the last dispensation. The church began at the beginning of the last days as was prophecied by Joel and fulfilled on Pentecost (Joel 2; Acts 2). Some contend that we are "in the last of the last days." They might be correct about that, but there is nothing in Scripture that denotes that this is true.

Pointing to these reprehensible traits of behavior recorded in this chapter, some say, "We have all of these things now." It is unfortunate that some seem to think that nothing ever happened in this world until their own time. These things have characterized sinful people down through the ages. This generation is not the first to experience such people. If time continues, these kind of people will be existing as they follow the ways of Satan rather than God. To suggest that this passage gives us certain "signs" by which we can know that the return of Christ is nigh is to make two glaring errors: (1) misunderstanding the period of the last days, and (2) attributing these signs as being distinctive of the time just before He returns.

Matthew 24

Probably the chapter most often mentioned by those who believe the end is nearby is Matthew 24. Radio and television evangelists of the denominational and premillennial world are often heard to refer to what is recorded in this chapter as "signs of the times" before His return. So it behooves us to look closely at the chapter and learn what is taught.

Again, for the sake of space, we urge the reader to open his Bible and observe the setting. Christ and His disciples were viewing the temple and its surroundings. Jesus made an awesome prediction that all of that would be destroyed (Verses 1,2). Later, when He and His disciples were alone, they asked Him to tell them two things: (1) when would this destruction of the temple and its surroundings would come, and (2) what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the world. Christ then answers their questions in the order they were asked.

He warns them against being deceived (verse 4). We need to take heed to this warning in view of the many contradictory voices that are being heard regarding the return of Christ. There would be those who would profess to be "saviors" who were deceivers. Beginning with verse 5, Christ presents numerous

signs by which they could detect the coming destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Verses 5 through 33 mention a host of events that would give warning of this impending desolation of the temple and the city.

That Generation

We must state with emphasis, even if we are not able to know exactly what every sign the Lord named might mean, that whatever they meant, they took place in that generation. They are now history, not something yet to occur in the future. Verse 33, Jesus said, *"So likewise when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors."* Then in verse 34 He remarked, *"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."* Whatever things that were named in verses 5 through 33, we know they took place in the lifetime of those who were priviledged to hear the Lord make this explanation. Verse 34 is a key verse in the understanding of the chapter. The failure to recognize its significance has caused many to attribute the signs to which Jesus referred to things that will occur just before His return. What did He say in these twenty-nine verses?

There would be pretenders and deceivers to come (5). There would be wars and rumors of wars (6). Nation would be against nation, kingdoms against kingdoms, famines, earthquakes, pestilences (7). But this was only the beginning of the signs (8). Disciples would be persecuted (9) and some would fall away (10-12). Those that remained faithful would be saved (13). The gospel would be preached throughout the world (14), which Paul said was done (Colossians 1:23). Then the end would come. What end is in mind here? It is not the end of the world that shall occur at the return of the Lord, but the end of the temple, the end of the city of Jerusalem, the physical end and destruction of the Judaistic system. God made it physically impossible for the resurrection of the old system that came through Moses and preceded Christ with the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in 70 A.D.

He depicts the end as "*the abomination of desolation,*" the same terminology used by Daniel 9:27 to show the desecration of that which was counted holy by the Jews. This was indicative of the pagan and heathen symbols that adorned the holy places. It would occur at the time when Jerusalem would be surrounded by enemy armies (Luke 21:20).

To Flee- And Why

Those in Judea were to flee to the mountains (16). Obviously, if *"the end"* being discussed was the end of the world, fleeing to the mountains would be a useless gesture. Their escape should be hasty and without delay, even to making preparation any further (17,18). It would be a time of great hardship on those with small children. It would be harder if it came in winter. If it came on the Sabbath day the gates of the city would be closed and their escape routes blocked. So they should pray that it would not come on those times (19-21).

There would be a temporary lifting of the seige of Jerusalem that would allow the elect (Christians) to escape (22). It is a fact of history that there was such a temporary hesitation by the Romans in their attacks on Jerusalem, during which time Christians fled to the mountains of Pella and escaped the destruction that befell the city.

There would be those who would cry that Christ was here, there, and elsewhere, and about to physically deliver them. Many misunderstood the nature of the work and kingdom of the Christ and anticipated deliverance by Him. But Christ warned not to be misled by such cries (23). The event would be so broadly known that it would be as noticeable as lightning that crossed the entire heavens (27). The eagle (vulture) would descend as upon a carcass (28). The terms of verse 29 are figurative expressions that denote the fall of a great power and system, as they were also used to depict such scenes in the Old Testament and the destruction of Babylon and Judah. These things are not literal and actual but figurative. We need not think these things will happen, but are symbolic expressions showing the impending fall of Judaism and Jerusalem.

The Coming Of The Lord

The entire procedure was called the appearance and coming of the Son of man (27,30), inasmuch as the destruction was the coming of the wrath of Deity against a rebellious and wicked nation that had rejected the very Christ that had come from among themselves.

All these things are not signs of His final and ultimate return but a prophectic record of the fall of Jerusalem. As one can tell from the fig tree and its leaves that summer is nigh, so by these events one could tell when this catastrophe against Jerusalem

was nigh (32). And they all took place in that generation (34).

Some have taken the time to parallel each of these pictures with the facts of history surrounding the fall of Jerusalem. Doubtless, there may be some speculation and guesswork in attempting to make a parallel in every instance, but regardless of that, they have already occured long ago. These are not *"signs of the times"* telling us when to expect the return of Christ.

End Of The World

With verse 35, Jesus begins to answer the second question asked Him; namely, signs telling when He would come and the end of the world. We can see the break in His discussion when He shifts from things that would occur in that generation to a discussion of the time when heaven and earth shall pass away (35). To understand, we must note this change of subject.

Peter wrote that His day would come, the elements would melt with fervent heat, the earth and the works therein would be burned up (Second Peter 3:7-13). As to when that would be, Peter said it would come as *"a thief in the night,"* unannounced, unexpectedly, with no signs and fanfare to forewarn. Jesus also remarked, *"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."* (36).

No Signs

There would be no signs the likes of which we are being told will occur. Life will be going along as usual, just as it was in the time of Noah and the destruction of the flood overtook them. (37-39). There would be a separation, which is further discussed in Matthew 25:40,41. And the really important matter was to watch and be ready, *"for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."* (42). This emphasis on preparation, rather than speculation, is a great difference between the teaching of Christ and false teachers of today with their speculative and sensational theories of contradiction. Notice from verse 42 through the rest of the chapter the Lord's emphasis on being ready regardless of when He does come. Keep in mind, He can come at any time. He may come befcre you finish reading this lesson. He could. But that there are signs that tell us when is a false notion. Men have proven themselves false prophets by even setting dates and making great commotions over their expectancy of His imminent

return. Instead of being so concerned as to when, we need to be concerned with the certainty of His return and our own readiness, whether it be soon, late, noon or night, at the end, or as far as our time for preparation is concerned, at death.

Must Be Ready

Only those in Christ shall be ready. Only those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel, and lived faithfully therein, shall be ready for that day to come.

Fret not thyself about the assertions of men regarding *"signs"* that they see in everything that transpires. But center your mind on what the Lord says we must do so we can meet Him in the air and ever be with Him. (Second Thessalonians 4:13-18).

† † † † †

Our "Loving" Brethren

We have always striven in writing, preaching, classwork, to be plain and present a certain sound rather than ambiguity as if what we are saying really did not matter too much. The Lord knows we try to be kind while being forthright. We readily admit the possibility, even the probability, we do not reach our goal. But we try and shall keep trying.

Often what we have said or written irritates some who chastise us for "lack of love." We think many would be shocked at some of the remarks, charges, criticisms that are directed toward us from those who say they advocate "love." Often these gems come anonymously. It makes us wonder just who really understands Christian love.

Truth always offends compromisers who are bitter. Their only response is to lash out personally at anyone who does not agree with them. If "love" is what produces what is sent to us at times, we prefer to be "unloving." With folks like that against us, we conclude we cannot be all bad.
JWB

Possibly we should be more careful and not so bold as to actually invite the devil and his influences into our homes. But the probability is that many who profess to be Christians are doing just that, even though they may not fully be aware of it. They may be just deceiving themselves into thinking that what they are doing is not so evil and then content themselves in their self-imposed blindness.

Have you ever really listened to the lyrics of the songs being heard over the radio? Usually, we are only aware of the "background noise" and pay little attention to the lyrics. From the country music to the corrupt and sensuous beat of "rock" just listen to the filth and sinful parade of slime that is being presented and heard. Fornication, drunkenness, cheating, lying, stealing, you name the sin and the songs of America, especially those high on the popularity charts, sound it out loud and clear.

The young of this land, as well as the older, are hearing and absorbing it, singing the lyrics from memory. Parents either do not care or are so fearful of offending even the devil that they will allow such things to continue to flow into the very sanctuary of the home without restriction or rebuke. Seldom a word of caution or reproof is heard.

Cannot you almost hear the "wise" and sophisticated parents of today considering it an innocent youthful activity, like some parents whose children became unwed parents passed off the warnings of lascivious dancing. What fools parents often are! There is nothing innocent about sin, nor parading it as if it is the "in" thing. Be aware that such moral garbage set to music is designed to make money for those who had just as soon peddle electronic pornography as they would printed "porn."

Some of these songs and the wild "singing" (if it can be legitimately called singing, sounding

more like a savage turned loose under freezing water) is sometimes defended as "art." Such "art!" If that is "art," then any degenerate heathen is capable of being an "artist." Even if the stretching of the meaning of the word "art" could cover the "music" so often heard, do not Christians have some obligation to choose their "art" to be in harmony with purity and righteousness?

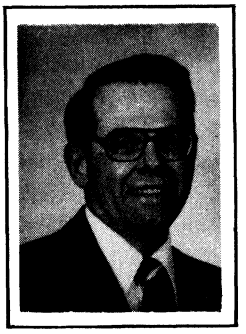
There are songs that even encourage the illicit use of drugs, sexual perversion, infidelity to one's marriage partner, profanity, ridiculing Christ and His church. This is becoming the "norm," not just an occasional unwarranted intrusion.

Have you really listened to the "gospel music?" From the sound and gyrating coming from the performers, the only difference is that the loud, sensuous "beat" of "rock" music has been combined with words about religion. Why anyone thinks they can please God with the lewd and licentious actions of the savage and sinful world escapes me. And what has happened to "Christian" people who look upon such things lightly? Have we lost our way entirely? Or are we so caught up in worldliness that we actually think we can serve God and the devil at the same time?

Do you ever wonder how much money "Christians" spend buying the records and tapes of such performances? Do you suppose many even give an equal amount into the Lord's treasury?

Start listening to the "music" and measure it with God's standards of righteous conduct. Your young people are listening, quoting, singing, and often imitating what is being taught. Hopefully, all consciences have not become seared and dulled to the point it no longer matters.

James W. Boyd



JAMES W. BOYD

Who Shall Govern?

Elihu, with three "friends" of Job, spoke with Job during the trying period of Job's life. They condemned him, accused him, and misunderstood the nature of Job's problem, thinking he was being punished because of his sins.

But Elihu raised an important question. Job 34:17, *"Shall even he that hateth right govern?"* This applies to those who rule and exercise their authority. How can one who does not respect right and wrong, has even shown contempt for what is right, be the kind of ruler he should be?

Americans are called upon to select their rulers, and we should be grateful we have that opportunity. If those who profess righteousness refuse to be involved, it must be left entirely to those who subscribe to evil. What a ridiculous neglect and nonsense this would be!

We do not expect the rulers to be perfect, or any political party to be as the church should be. But we can choose those who have more in harmony with the will of God instead of those who *"hateth right."* How can a Christian encourage those who promote abortion, deny God's existence, profess Humanism, and defend moral liberalism? Convictions should determine how we vote, not men or allegiance to party.

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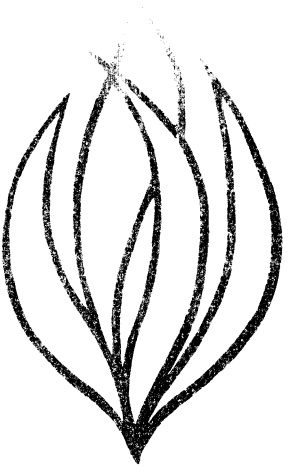

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III **NUMBER 5**

Christ, The King

A king is a ruler over a kingdom. His authority is supreme, sovereign, and unsurpassed. He occupies his throne, which indicates his power, dignity, and rank.

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is King, ruling over His spiritual kingdom, having all power, authority, pre-eminence, reigning from His throne which is in heaven. He is King NOW. His kingship is a basic and vital matter concerning the central personality of the Bible. It refers to a specific role that He, the Son of God, performs.

In Prophecy

His kingdom and kingship had been prophecied many times in the Old Testament. Genesis 49:10, *"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."* The sceptre is a staff of authority belonging to a king. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah. The word "*Shiloh*" means peace. Jesus was the Prince of Peace, bringing spiritual peace between God and mankind.

By David

To David it was said, *"And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."* (Second Samuel 7:12,13). This did not speak of Solomon, but Christ, inasmuch as the throne given to the descendant of David would be forever. Jesus was a descendant of David and sits on David's throne. David was a type of Christ and David's kingdom was an earthly kingdom that was a type of the Lord's spiritual kingdom (Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24; Hosea 3:5).

By Jeremiah

Jeremiah 23:5, *"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the*

earth." Jeremiah 30:9, *"But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them."* The One to serve would reign after David's death; would be a seed of David, and called the Branch. Zechariah 6:12,13, provides us very significant information on this matter. *"And speak unto him saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."* Notice this One called The BRANCH would be king and priest at the same time; sit on the throne and build the Lord's temple. Please notice that The BRANCH is the same name earlier mentioned that would be the seed of David and who would sit on David's throne.

By Isaiah

The kingdom was again prophecied in Isaiah 2:2, *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it."* The term *"mountain"* is a figurative term for government. Here is a forecast of the establishment of the government of God. Verse three reads, *"And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."* The government of the Lord is the church that was established in the city of Jerusalem, Christ being the founder of the church.

Isaiah 11:1, *"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots."* Jesse was the father of David. Jesus Christ was of the seed of David. Therefore, He is of the stem of Jesse, again called the Branch. Paul specifically referred to this prophecy in Isaiah 11:1 in Romans 15:12, *"And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust."* Paul applies it to Christ, showing that Christ was of the stem of Jesse and seed of David, the Branch who would reign over the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

We noted that the one who would be the king would also

build God's temple. The church is the temple (First Corinthians 3:9,16; Ephesians 2:20-22), and Christ is the head and founder of the church, having preeminence over it (Colossians 1:18).

Isaiah 9:6,7, "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.*"

These are a few of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingship of Christ and the kingdom of Christ, the one of Judah and the seed of David, whose kingdom would begin at Jerusalem, having reign over Jew and Gentile, the Branch, the Prince of Peace, the One who served as King and Priest at the same time, the same One who was founder and head of the church, the government of God. With all such prophecies pointing to a coming king and kingdom, we can understand the expectation and anticipation of the Jews for such as this. It is true that they misunderstood the nature of the kingdom and the king to come. But both had been foretold by the prophets of God.

The Throne Of David

We must note the references connecting Christ to the throne of David. The concept of David's throne was first introduced in Second Samuel 3: 9,10, when the earthly kingdom of Saul was to be taken from him and given to David. David was promised that his seed would reign forever. This was not reference to Solomon because his reign ended when he turned his kingdom to his son, Rehoboam. It referred to Christ.

The one to reign would reign while David was in the tomb (Second Samuel 7:12-16). Therefore, His reign would be prior to the resurrection at Christ's return when David, and all others, will be raised. Inasmuch as the resurrection will occur at His return, we know that the reign prophecied would be BEFORE the Lord's return, while David was in the tomb, and not AFTER His return. This alone sinks the ship of premillennial fantasy.

The throne of David is called the throne of Israel (First Kings 2:11,12), and the throne of the Lord (First Chronicles 29:23). The throne of God is called the throne of Christ (Acts 2:30;

Matthew 16:18). If the kingdom is His, obviously the throne is His. The kingdom of heaven is the same as the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:24; 19:23,24).

It was announced at the birth of Jesus that He would sit on David's throne (Luke 1:32,33). When Peter gave the meaning of David's prophecy in Acts 2:29,30, he showed it had reference to Christ who assumed the throne after his resurrection.

"At Hand"

The kingdom was not in existence when John the Baptist was preaching that it was *"at hand."* Jesus taught the same thing during His personal ministry (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:5). In fact, in addition to Jesus and John, the twelve apostles and the seventy the Lord sent forth to preach, all preached the kingdom was yet to come, but *"at hand,"* nearby, soon to be. But it was not established during His life on earth. Some, who misunderstood the nature of His kingdom, its purpose, and the time of its coming, would have taken Jesus and forced Him to become an earthly king (John 6:15). Jesus did teach that the kingdom would come with power,and He identified that power as the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit came on Pentecost and the kingdom was established, in Jerusalem, that day.

The Old Testament prophets had foretold when the kingdom was to come. Daniel 2, Daniel interpretted Nebuchanezzar's dream as representing four earthly kingdoms. In the days of the fourth kingdom (verse 44), God would establish His kingdom. The four kingdoms, beginning with Babylon, were Persia, Greece, and Rome. It was in the days of Rome that the church began.

In Daniel 7:13,14 and Acts 2:34, we learn that the kingdom would be given after the Son of man went to the Ancient of Days, referring to Jesus ascending into heaven to the Father (Acts 1:9; Mark 16:9).

In the Lord's parable of the pounds in Luke 19:12, the nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. He did not return before receiving the kingdom, but after receiving it. Again, Jesus will not return to receive the kingdom, having received it when He went into heaven. This is another death blow to premillennialism.

On Pentecost, Peter announced, *"For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my*

Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:34-36)."Lord" means a potentate who is sovereign. This is the King.

Right Hand Of God

What does the phrase, "Sit on the right hand of God" mean? It was prophecied in Psalm 110:1, and Hebrews 1:13 plus Acts 2:34 teach that it referred to Christ. Jesus also prophecied, *"And Jesus said, I am, and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."* (Mark 14:62). He is NOW on God's right hand (Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1). On the right hand means He has been given supreme rule, rank, power, authority, preeminence, and dominion (First Peter 3:22). Notice that He was raised to sit on the throne (Acts 2:30). He was raised to sit on God's right hand (Acts 2:34). To sit on the right hand of God means to sit on the throne of His kingdom.

We also learned that He would be priest and king at the same time (Zechariah 6:13). He would be after the order ot Melchizedek, of whom we read in Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 6:20; 7:1; who was a priest of God and king of Salem at the same time. Christ is priest now (Hebrews 3:1 ; 4:15), the high priest of our profession. Therefore, He is King now, at the right hand of God now, *"Received into heaven and sat on the right hand of God."* (Mark 16:19). Romans 8:34 affirms His priesthood and kingship in effect concurrently, and it is NOW.

Revelation 3:7 tells us He has the *"key"* of David now, which denotes possession of authority. He is on the throne of heaven (Acts 7:49).

The kingship of Christ is repeatedly acknowledged. For the sake of brevity, we simply list some of these acknowledgments. By Jesus, Matthew 2:1,2; Luke 1:33. By Nathanel, John 1:49. By Pilate, John 18:39. By the mother of James and John, Matthew 20:21. By the multitudes at His entry into Jerusalem, Matthew 21:5. By the thief on the cross, Luke 23:42. By the superscription over the cross, Matthew 27:37; Luke 23:37,38; John 19:19-21. By Paul, Acts 17:7.

Was It postponed?

Some contend that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews caused the Lord to postpone the establishment of His kingdom, but He established the church as a temporary measure, a substitute, until He comes again, at which time He will then make good the prophecies to establish the kingdom. There are so many approaches one can make with Biblical basis to refute that false teaching, but that is not our prime theme. Other lessons have shown the church and the kingdom to be one and the same.

But we must consider Romans 3:3 as refutation of that doctrine. *"For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?"* Man's rejection of God's Son and His plan does not and did not cause God to change anything regarding the coming of the kingdom. To contend for such a postponement demands the voiding of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and eighty-four inspired preachers in the New Testament, including Christ. Matthew 21:33-46 and the parable of the householder and wicked servants shows that the misdeed of the servants did not alter the plans of the householder.

Some then, as now, misunderstood the nature of His kingdom and thought He would establish an earthly power rivaling Rome. But His kingdom is spiritual, not earthly, not of this world (John 18:36). His kingdom is composed of people who are in the church (Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 2:19,20). The spiritual kingdom, (Luke 17:20,21), is within us, in the heart and mind. It is a spiritual house (First Peter 2:2-5), and offers spiritual sacrifices (Romans 12:1).

How long will Christ reign? As for the number of years, we cannot know. In one sense, His kingdom shall never end (Daniel 2:44; Hebrews 1:8; Psalm 45:6). In another sense, as far as existing as it does now, He will reign until He returns, when He shall deliver the kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24-26). He will reign until death is destroyed, which will occur with His coming and the resurrection. There is an earthly phase of the kingdom, the first dominion, (Micah 4:8), and a heavenly phase, (Second Peter 1:10,11).

Citizenship

How does one become a citizen of His kingdom? One must be *"born again"* to enter the kingdom (John 3:3-5). This demands obedience to the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21). God's plan includes faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of Christ,

and baptism into Christ.

There can be no doubt, if one relies on the testimony of the inspired record, that Christ came with the intention of becoming King over a spiritual kingdom. The kingdom had been predicted through the ages. It did have its beginning on the first Pentecost after His death, burial, and resurrection. He reigns now, as KING OF KINGS, THE ONLY POTENTATE, LORD OF LORDS (First Timothy 6:15; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 17:14). Yes, Christ is King, and to this end was He born, and for this purpose He came into the world (John 18:37).

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What Is That In Thine Hand?

"*And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee. The Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.*" (Exodus 4:1-5).

At this time Israel was in bondage in Egypt. Moses had fled Egypt into the land of Midian. God saw Israel in bondage and remembered His promise unto them. It is not that God had forgotten, but that God recalled the promise. God appeared unto Moses in the burning bush, calling Moses to the leadership of Israel and the task of delivering them out of the hand of the Pharoah.

Excuses

Moses did not readily accept this assignment but offered all kinds of excuses why he should do what God wanted him to do. "Who shall I say sent me? They won't believe me. I am not an eloquent man. I can't speak to the people." One excuse after

another was offered by Moses.

God's reaction to these excuses tells us something about God. He did not accept them. When God wants man to do something, God will not accept man's excuses for not doing it. We need to remember this. As God called Moses from the bush so God calls us now by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). From Luke 14, Jesus teaches us that excuses offered for not coming to that which He has prepared will not suffice.

It was in the midst of these excuses being offered by Moses that God asked, "*What is that in thine hand?*" Moses answered that he had a rod. It was a shepherd's staff, a tool useful in guiding sheep, retrieving them from places where they might fall. It was something he used while keeping the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro. It was nothing uncommon. All shepherds had them. But it was more than just another rod when it was used as God directed. When Moses cast it down it became a serpent. When he picked up the serpent, it became a rod again. It became an instrument through which the power of God was manifested. God made something great out of something very ordinary. That is what God does every time He takes a sinner and cleanses him of sin, making him a servant of righteousness. In fact, there is not a possession, a talent, an ability that we have that cannot be great if used as God would have it used. There are things in the hands of us all that God has given us that are useful for good if only we would consider such things as potential tools with which the will of God can be accomplished.

Using The Rod

Let us look at some of the instances in which this same rod was later used to reveal the power of God. "*And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand wherewith thou shalt do signs.*" (Exodus 4:17). "*And Aaron spake all the word which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.*" (Exodus 4:30,31). One problem Moses faced was convincing the Israelites that he was coming in the name of the Lord to deliver them. Before he could deal with the Egyptians, he had to convince his own people. With this rod he did signs that brought hope to the people and persuaded them that he was from God. God's name was praised.

When Moses went before Pharoah and into his court, he used this rod to perform miracles to convince Pharoah to let Israel go. *"Get thee unto Pharoah in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river's brink against he come; and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thine hand. And thou shalt say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness; and behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear. Thus saith the Lord, In this thou shalt know that I am the Lord; behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood."* (Exodus 7:15-17).

Moses also stretched this same rod over the Red Sea to divide the waters and allow Israel to pass over on dry land into safety. *"And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the mist of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians and they shall follow them: and I will get me honor upon Pharoah, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen."* (Exodus 41:15-17).

Prior to that momentous event, Moses used the rod also in bringing the ten plagues against Egypt to compel Pharoah to allow Israel to leave. It was that same rod that was used to strike the rock in Rephidim to provide water for the thirsty nation in the wilderness (Exodus 17:5,6). The same rod was held out by the hands of Moses over the field of battle against the Amalekites and Joshua led Israel to victory (Exodus 17:9). This was the occasion when Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses when he became too weary to hold up the rod.

What did Moses have in his hand? Just a plain, ordinary rod, a shepherd's staff, until it was used as the Lord God of heaven had directed. Then it became a tool for performing great deeds. It became the avenue through which divine power was demonstrated. But it was just a rod until placed at the disposal of God and His purposes.

What Is That In Thy Hand?

Yes, Moses saw the rod he held, But could not
see the ways

That God would use that very rod through all
his future days.
And though you see your talent plain, God keeps
your future sealed
In His good time -- from year to year-- the plan
will be revealed.
So hold it high or cast it down, or strike, as
God will choose
A rod in hands which He directs is one that He will use.
(Ruth Johnson)

There are others we could ask the same question, "What is that in thine hand?" We could ask David as he took his sling into battle against Goliath. With it God used David to take away the reproach from Israel and produce a great victory over the Philistines who had defied the army of the Lord and hence the Lord Himself.

We might ask the little lad whose name is not even given in John 6. But he had just five loaves and two fishes which Jesus used to feed over five thousand with twelve basketfuls left over. His great work enabled Him to continue His work of preaching to the multitudes.

Ask the widow of Luke 21, who had only two mites -- all that she had. Yet, when they were rightly used, given to God, Jesus cites her as an example of the sacrificial attitude and action that God approves by declaring that she had given more than all the others.

It will do us good to take inventory and think a while on the things God has given us. We are a blessed people. Do we count our many blessings? Among our blessings are blessings of opportunity. What kind of stewards are we with what God has placed in our hand? What do you have in your hand today that can be used for the good of mankind and to the glory of God?

In Our Hands

I want to mention only one thing, even though there are many. If we were assembled in a congregation, I would likely ask you to stand when I asked the following questions in order to impress upon you the personal application that this lesson deserves. I would ask all who are fathers, grandfathers, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, uncles, or teachers to stand. All of these have a vital influence on the lives of the young. These are those

who love children and seek their welfare. "What do we have in our hands?" That's right! We have our children. They are given to us by the Lord, placed in our care. They are blessings, and they are opportunities. They are living souls waiting to be molded, shaped into desirable vessels much as a potter might mold and shape soft clay. We are stewards of this sacred trust. Each child is a potential power for good or for evil. They are a life that shall never end. Each is a soul that will exist somewhere throughout eternity.

To such a great extent, whether our children will be blessings or curses, useful or harmful vessels, good or evil influences, servants of God or of Satan, exist in heaven or in hell, depends upon us in whose hands they are entrusted. So precious and pure is the little child. Jesus said, "*Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 18:3). Jesus used children to illustrate what the kingdom is. Who is more teachable, impressionable, more easily molded than the child? One has written, "Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined." Who manifests greater trust and at the same time is more dependent than a little child?

But what we must realize is that what my child grows up to be, for the most part depends on me. William Ross Wallace wrote a century ago, "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world." This is because by and through our children we exert a tremendous and lasting influence on the world. What will we do with this gift that has been placed in our hands?

What Is Happening?

It is dreadful to see what some do and have done. They have neglected the child, ignored him, failed to consider his worth and turned the care and training into the hands of another. Sometimes for no greater reason than getting more money, parents leave the molding of their children to somebody else. Many parents can say, "I gave him money but what he needed was me. I provided gold and gain, when he longed for guidance, and for God."

One of the tragedies becoming so rampant in our society is child abuse. This takes form both physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Many neglected children have warm houses in which to live, money to spend, good clothes to wear,

and plenty of food. But they do not have the love, security, and guidance they desparately need. They do not have that Christian home.

We have lost and are losing so many of our children to the ways of the sinful world. They have not been taught nor had demonstrated before them morality, the do's and don't's of God, and the glory of the church.

But let us not just here concern ourselves with what others do or have done with their children. What will we do with our own? We are not discussing the HOW so much just now as we are trying to emphasize the NEED of using this gift to God's glory. For many children there is nothing much that can be done more than has been done. They have reached a level of growth where the parental influence is minimal. But many have their children who are yet very young and still subject unto them.

God wants us to love them, provide for them, teach their tender hearts His truth, provide for them goals and ambitions of righteousness. He wants us to train up that child in the way that he should go. He wants us to bring them up in His nuture and admonition (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). He wants us to do more than teach them how to make a living, but how to live, not just in this world, but in the world to come. We can provide them all this world has to offer, and yet, we fail miserably if we have not taught and showed them how to love God and respect His Holy Word. So tremendous is our task and so great is our opportunity.

But we also have assistance available to us in this awesome task. We have the privilege of prayer. We have His word of instruction, the Bible. We have the encouragement of those who have gone before us who have done well in the guidance of their children. We have the encouragement of others who are busy at the same task we are trying to perform.

Both by teaching and by providing a wholesome example we rear our children in the way of the Lord, giving them a rich religious heritage which shall be a bulwark for them throughout life. But we must ask ourselves, "What will my children hear and see from me?"

Yes, we have much in our hands. We can succeed. But we cannot lead where we will not go. We want to lead them to God through Christ. But we must go that way ourselves.

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Three Prayers For Forgiveness

It is recognized that some lessons are more applicable to some than others. This is because we are in different circumstances and in different stages of spiritual growth. But the following lesson is applicable to every Christian regardless of circumstances, who they may be, where they live, or any other of the variations noticeable between people. The lesson will not only present an insight into the character of Christ, but also shows us the Lord's infallible standard regarding a certain attitude that we are to possess. It brings into focus a duty of faithful Christians.

We shall consider three passages as texts. *"And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots."* (Luke 23:32-34). *"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."* (Acts 7:59-60). *"Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he that greatly withstood our words. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."* (Second Timothy 4:14-16). Each of these prayers was a prayer asking for forgiveness for others. Each was an intercessory prayer.

Let us ask the purpose of the Lord for coming to earth? Was it not that he might save sinners? (First Timothy 1:15). The prime purpose was to provide atonement for the sins of people, satisfy justice and extend mercy. This is why the Word became flesh. A secondary reason that is actually inseparable from the first, was to give man a guide in life, to show man how to live so he would be prepared to die. *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."* (First Peter 2:21). Peter continued to explain how Christ was sinless. Like the writer of Hebrews 4:15, *For*

we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmites, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Therefore, Christ was fully qualified to instruct man how to live. Jesus not only taught correctly but he demonstrated his teaching. Luke began the book of Acts speaking "*of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.*" (Acts 1:1).

What Jesus Taught

On one occasion Jesus taught, "*But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.*" (Luke 6:27,28). Paul wrote, "*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*" (Romans 12:19-21). These passages teach certain attitudes we are to have toward those who offend us and do us harm.

When Differences Come

This lesson is inescapably applicable to every faithful Christian. Why? It is because inevitably there will be differences that occur among people. There are many causes for this, but the fact of it is reality. Christ warned His disciples,"*Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come! But woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!*" (Matthew 18:7). Second Timothy 3:12, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" If you live for and stand up for God's revealed will, there will be those who will not like you for it. "*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*" (Romans 12:18). One implication of such an admonition is that we might not always be able to live peaceably with all men regardless of how hard we try. Christ said, "*Woe unto you when all men speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*" (Luke 6:26). Peter said we can suffer for evil doing or we can suffer for righteousness and for the name of Christ (First Peter 4:12-16). But the question at hand is, "What must be the attitude of the Christian toward the offender?

By word Jesus taught love, not hate; blessing, not cursing; forgiveness, not revenge. Matthew 6:14,15, "*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, you heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye will not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.*" Matthew 18:21,22, "*Then Peter came to him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times, but, Until seventy times seven.*" Someone has suggested that he who would not forgive another destroys the very bridge over which he must pass in order to enter heaven.

We cannot dismiss the words of Christ by saying that this principle is easy to say and more difficult to do. This is true. But Christ both said and did. As we consider the last moments of the Lord on the cross before death overtook Him, we see Him writhing in physical and mental anguish and pain. He had undergone such rebuke, ridicule, sarcasm, and lies. He had suffered blasphemy. He had heard sacred things profaned. He was deserted by His closest friends. He was hated by His enemies and turned over to them. He had been beaten, spat upon, mocked, and had suffered every indignity. Even as He is breathing His last He can hear the sneers and cheers of the mob. Now, under such conditions, did our Lord do as He had taught? Did He show as well as speak His will?

His Attitude Expressed

Listen as He speaks. "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" What was the Lord's attitude? Who can fail to acknowledge it? There was no hatred or vengeful spirit. There was no cursing or anger. But there was a prayer falling from His lips on behalf of the very ones who chose to be His enemies and persecutors. They sinned in murdering the Son of God, a sin far more terrible than they imagined because of its significance. They were guilty and condemned in their sin. Yet, Christ longed for their forgiveness and their freedom from that guilt.

His prayer was not that they would be forgiven unconditionally. We are not to suppose Christ means for the Father to forgive them even if they did not want forgiveness. He was not asking for forgiveness even while they were in rebellion and determined to pursue their wicked ways. Has there ever been a time when God forgave sinners unconditionally? We cannot recall one such occasion. God forgives those who seek His forgiveness. He is

not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9). He ever remains willing to forgive, but He does not force this blessing upon anyone. When the sinner will humble himself, seek God's forgiveness by meeting God's conditions, the sinner will always find God willing to forgive. Forgiveness is conditioned upon a recognition of sin and the need of forgiveness, the knowledge of the conditions, and the compliance to the conditions. Forgiveness is never outside or beyond God's will. Therefore, Christ was praying that His offenders would turn from their sins, leave their wicked ways, seize the opportunity to do the Lord's will, and be forgiven. His attitude toward them was one of readiness, willingness, and desire for a full and complete pardon to take place.

In Acts 2, some of these very same persecutors of Christ heard Peter say, "*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazereth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made this same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" (Acts 2:22,23,36). Then the opportunity was opened unto them for forgiveness when Peter answered their question, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:37b,38). For three thousand, the prayer of Jesus was fulfilled and answered positively because they heard and obeyed the conditions given (Acts 2:41).

Prayer Of Stephen

The prayer of Stephen for his enemies was like that of Christ. Stephen, a man full of faith, a preacher of the truth, by his message had aroused the enmity of his Jewish hearers. He was falsely accused and brought before the Jewish council. His only defense was the continued proclamation of the indisputable truth. He compromised not one matter even when facing danger. Their reaction was *"then they cried with a loud voice and stopped their ears and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city and stoned him, and the witnesses laid*

down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." (Acts 7:57,58). This was most unbecoming for the august body of leaders. Who could deny the impropriety and injustice of this event?

But Stephen's reaction to their conduct was to pray that the Lord lay not this sin to their charge. Did he not follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Was not his attitude toward his enemies a willingness to forgive?

Stephen was not asking God to do something against His will. He was not asking that they be forgiven if they wanted no forgiveness. He was obviously praying as did Christ; namely, that his persecutors might have opportunity to be delivered from their sins, that their pride might be removed, and they be granted redemption by coming to the source of forgiveness. But the stress we make here is that Stephen had and demonstrated the Christlike attitude toward those who hated him.

Among those consenting to Stephen's death was Saul, later known as Paul, the apostle of Christ. He was holding the garments of those who did the actual stoning. He was in agreement with the action. He encouraged it.

But as we follow the life of this man, we see in him a literal fulfillment and positive answer to Stephen's prayer. Paul became an outspoken advocate for the truth God revealed concerning Christ. This resulted in grave hardship and persecution for him. By championing the faith he once sought to destroy, he brought the wrath of his former companions upon himself.

Paul's Prayer

Second Timothy 4:16, "*At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.*"

Late in Paul's life when he was imprisoned because of the faith, he wrote this to Timothy. He expressed his great hope, recounting his faithful fight within and without the church. He had given up all for the cause of Christ. What had it brought him? He suffered injury, heartache, and prison. But it also enabled him to develop a Christlikeness. As we consider his prayer for those who had forsaken him, it is reminiscent of the prayer of Stephen, a prayer which he likely had actually heard. It was a prayer like the prayer of Christ on the cross. There was no rancor, bitterness, or desire for revenge. It was a prayer showing his willingness to forgive those who had trespassed

against him. Is it possible for one who had been offended to have had a more glorious, honorable, noble attitude than that?

Two conclusions we draw from these prayers. (1) Let us see the nature of Christ and how the disposition to forgive is according to God's plan for us. (2) The one who sins must meet the conditions of forgiveness before he can receive it, but the offended one must at all times have the attitude of heart to willingly forgive. It is to his benefit to be forgiving.

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Authority In Religion

What constitutes the proper authority in religion? This is that which we shall consider in this lesson. *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever shall hear these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."* (Matthew 7:21-29).

Christ And The Scribes

Christ is presented in contrast with the scribes. The scribes were supposed to know quite a bit about the law of Moses by virtue of the fact that they were constantly copying it. They were often consulted in legal and religious matters. Christ often taught

differently from the law of Moses, however. For instance, Moses' law condemned murder, but Christ commanded we are not even to hate. Moses condemned adultery but Christ even condemned lust. Moses taught an *"eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,"* but Christ taught to love even our enemies, pray for them, and do them good. He taught as one who had authority. The scribes taught what the authority, Moses, had commanded. Jesus, before He ascended into heaven, said, *"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth."* (Matthew 28:18).

Our world is in a political, social and religious restlessness. Much of this is due to the lack of recognition of proper standards and authority that governs us. Men differ, have disputes, conflicts, and the result is confusion. Were it not for the courts with authority, confusion would be the constant state of things. Without law there could be no order to society. There must be standards to which all are accountable and responsible.

We have measuring standards such as sixteen ounces in a pound or thirty-six inches in a yard. Our government has a bureau of weights and measures, scales and standards. And this is true in every department of life, whether it be in the home, in school, on the highways, in civil affairs, etc. But it is more important to have the correct standard in religion than in any other area because in that area we are concerned about the soul of man that shall not cease to exist with physical death.

Two Dominant Standards

To simplify our lesson, let us suggest that there are two dominant standards to which all religious authority might be reduced. And these two standards are opposite each other, very incompatible with each other. Broadly speaking, these two standards are concepts called modernism and fundamentalism.

Modernism

What do these terms mean? Modernism is a term first applied to some European teachers who had departed from the original teaching of the Scriptures. It now includes a great force of many of the "best" minds of the world. It is representative of the attitude of heart and trend of mind which rejects the Bible as authority, substituting human reasoning as the guide and criteria for religion. Briefly stated, it exalts reason above revelation,

feelings above faith which is created by the Word of God. Modernism relegates the Bible as nothing more than literature, uninspired, and nothing more than a human product. Man, and man's reasoning capacity, is the sole standard by which to measure.

When we speak of modernism, we are not speaking of a straw man. Modernism is taught in the schools, textbooks, over every media and in every area, including the teaching of many religions. Certainly, men do not always agree, but modernism promotes the everlasting confusion because each individual becomes a law and a standard of his own. Each is governed by his own feelings and thinking. None are accountable to anyone if modernism were taken to its ultimate. Nobody ever does anything wrong as long as they do not violate their own personal law.

Modernism begins with a rejection of the miraculous recorded in the Bible. Anything that cannot be understood and explained naturally and by human reasoning is summarily rejected. To accept anything you cannot rationalize is looked upon as a reflection on your mentality.

If one will stop and think for a moment, he would realize that there are so many things that we accept to be true that cannot be determined by testing in a test tube, or seeing with the eye, or being able to explain by human reasoning. For example, we believe life exists. But what is that quality we call life? The chemist can take a grain of corn and make something like it as far as its physical and material substance is concerned. But he can plant it and it will never produce. But the natural seed will bring forth another plant. Neither you, nor I, nor the chemist can explain that but we accept it.

Things We Accept

Why do you eat some foods and it will make nerves, blood, muscles, and bones? We know this happens. But the explanation is not available to us. Why will the same food produce white skin on some, black on others, yellow or red on others? We know it does. But human reasoning will not explain it. Yet, we have no problem accepting it. Someone has asked how a black cow can eat green grass and give white milk from which we can make yellow butter? Do you have the rational answer to such things? No, but we accept it.

The idea of rejecting whatever one does not comprehend is

not something we apply so broadly and absolutely as is done by the modernist in religion. Really he is simply seeking a way to escape being accountable to God for his life and behavior. Someway he must remove God, and his way of attempting to do that is to contend that he will never accept anything he cannot physically measure or raionally understand.

Because of this attitude, the modernist rejects the virgin birth of Christ. He knows that every person has a male and female parent. But one being born of a virgin is not natural but miraculous. Having begun with the rejection of the miraculous, he has no explanation for the virgin birth, therefore, he just dismisses it as being false. The same thing is true regarding the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the power of salvation by His blood, the promised return of Christ. Just because their finite and limited minds do not understand how this can be according to natural law, they reject it.

But the Christian accepts these things by faith. His faith is not a blind faith, but a faith based on reliable evidence. This evidence is revealed in the Word of God. It is verifiable, and the testimony reliable. As with so many other things in life, these things are believed because the evidence proves it.

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is the exact opposite of modernism. Let us hasten to note that when we speak of fundamentalism, we are not talking about the term as is used by some to designate those who accept a totally literal meaning of every passage of the Bible. To do that is to fail to rightly divide the Word of truth. Some language of the Scripture is literal and some is figurative. It takes study to determine which. We use the term "fundamentalist" to mean the opposite of modernist. We mean by it the acceptance of the Bible as God's Word.

Notice the opposite positions taken by modernism and fundamentalism. Regarding the Bible being a divinely-given book, Christ being born of a virgin, Jesus as the Son of God, the resurrection from the dead, and other miracles, the modernist says "no" to all this while the fundamentalist says "yes." The points of view are as far apart as east from west can be.

It is greviously evident that those who claim to believe the Bible are hopelessly divided. The Catholics are divided from Protestants, Protestants divided from Protestants, and those who are determined to follow the Bible as the sole authority in

religion divided from all of them. Catholics, many Protestants (though not all), and true Christians believe the Bible to be inspired of God (though not in the same way). Most of them believe in the miracles recorded, and some believe miracles are still happening now. Much of Catholicism and Protestantism has been overrun by modernism. So the division is deep and for all practical purposes, irrevocable.

In addition to the modernists among these groups, Catholics turn to creeds, councils, papal edicts, canon law, tradition, superstition, and even many other things that openly contradict the Scriptures.

Protestantism is a mass of confusion with the disciplines, prayer books, manuals, conferences, catechisms, confessions of faith, etc. More and more we see and hear of the authority of "feeling" that is called a "direct operation of the Holy Spirit." All manner of innovations, departures, and transgressions have resulted, and such provokes the world toward atheism.

The Only Authority

Christians believe the Bible to be the sole authority in matters of religion because the Bible claims that for itself. One cannot seriously claim to believe the Bible and deny its claim. *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."* (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Place this assertion alongside Paul's warning against preaching another gospel other than what was preached (Galatians 1:6-9), the teaching of John not to go beyond or transgress the doctrine of Christ (First John 9-11), and you can see why the Scriptures are the sole authority to be followed. One must deny Scripture to allow anything else other than the Bible as religious authority.

Christians of the New Testament order recognize no human document as God's law. They are determined to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent, bind what it binds and loose what it looses, doing what is authorized and doing nothing that is outside Biblical authority, taking God at His Word, and taking all of that Word, the "*whole counsel.*" Christians believe that what one believes, says, does, or thinks, must be from the Book of Books.

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ARTICLE: Most Likely To Deceive

Did you ever play the money game called MONOPOLY? If you have you will recall that there are many kinds of bills of various value to be used in playing the game. Even though it is called money, we realize that it is not of any real value. It is play money. In fact, the very appearance of it is so different from real money that nobody would confuse the real with the play money. But have you even seen a counterfeit bill?

Several years ago a friend of mine who worked in a bank showed me a counterfeit bill. It was difficult to tell the difference between it and the real thing. He had to point out to me the variances because my untrained eye could not make the distinction. Nobody could have fooled me with the game money as being real. But you sure could fool me with what my friend showed me. It was so near the real thing. But it was worthless.

This is the way it is with doctrines of men. Some of them are so far out and contrary to the truth of God that you would not expect anybody with even a passing knowledge of the truth to be deceived. Such doctrines are not the real threat to the church. Of course, they contaminate the souls of those who do not know the truth because they are so obviously wrong.

But there are other doctrines, equally wrong and equally counterfeit, that are close to the truth. They can be stated in terms used to convey truth so that one might be deceived into thinking they must be the truth. Most false doctrines come all dressed up in Biblical language and are presented as Biblical teaching. Take the many false ideas regarding the Holy Spirit, the second coming of Christ, the plan of salvation, just about everything. Being containers of some truth, mixed with human error, the power of deception is greatly enhanced.

Those who profess a love for the Bible are often victimized by such things because, like the counterfeit money my banker friend showed me, it is hard to tell the difference. But it is counterfeit nonetheless.

This kind of "close to the truth" doctrine is the kind that leads lovers of truth into apostasy. This is the pathway of digression.

There is only one way to know the difference between truth and error and that is to be thoroughly acquainted with the truth so that anything that runs ajar that truth will be immediately spotted for what it is. For this reason faithful brethren continue to insist on speaking as the oracles of God, demanding Biblical authority for everything. JWB

ARTICLE: About The Jerusalem Conference

False ideas have been propagated that stem from a misunderstanding of the "conference" that took place in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 15.

Error was being taught in Antioch among the brethren by teachers from Judea that one had to be circumcised according to the law of Moses to be saved. They did not accept the fact that the law of Moses had been nailed to the cross and taken out of the way, having been fulfilled. Therefore, circumcision availed nothing in Christ. Yet, these doctrines persisted.

Paul, Barnabas, and others from Antioch went to Jerusalem to settle the disturbances caused by such teachers. The matter was set before all the brethren and certain ones spoke. Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and finally James all made contribution to the discussion.

It was established that the gospel is for all on the same terms (verses 9,11). It was shown how Paul and Barnabas had been preaching the same message of salvation to Gentiles as had been taught to Jews and with the Lord's approval. But James nailed it down so none could legitimately question the matter again. He quoted from the Old Testament the words of the prophets (Amos 9:11,12), that predicted the inclusion of Gentiles as well as Jews, and James applied the passage to that time.

Those at Jerusalem did not decide that the law of Moses was no longer binding on Jews, nor binding on Gentiles. That had already been decided by the Lord before they ever met (verses 7,28). What they decided was to abide by the Lord's decision. They taught one another regarding the subject, reaching for Scripture, relating the evidences of the Lord's decision, and urged each other to submit to His way. They did not legislate for the church. They made no law, altered no law, but learned the law of Christ and commended submission to it by everyone.

The "Jerusalem conference" is no example of men legislating for the church as to what was and was not the truth of God. God alone determines that. He has revealed that. It is the duty of men to learn what the truth is and abide by it. This is what was accomplished at Jerusalem in Acts 15. JWB

There is no charge for our booklet, *A Burning Fire*. We do appreciate the contributions some have made to assist us. Thank you! JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

Don't Believe Satan

In Genesis we read where God had instructed Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He accompanied that instruction with the warning, "*For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*" (Genesis 2:17). The death they suffered was a spiritual death, separation from God.

Satan entered the scene with a false doctrine that they would not fall even if they disobeyed God. "*Ye shall not surely die,*" Satan said to these children of God. Some have preached Satan's doctrine from that day until this, that once you are a child of God you cannot fall.

First Corinthians 10:1-12, Paul recounts events of Israel's history, God's people, and how they were destroyed because of their sins. He further states that the record of those things serves as an example and admonition to Christians today. He concluded with the sober warning that forever destroys the false doctrine that a child of God cannot fall when he said, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.*"

Let us not listen to the lies of Satan when we have the privilege to heed the warning of truth that God has given us.

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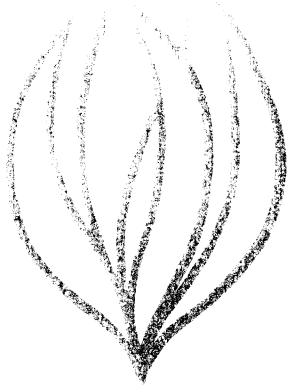

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III **NUMBER 6**

Making Men Over

Some lessons include many passages of Scripture while others might be a concentrated study upon just one or two passages. Both ways of study are profitable. The lesson in mind just now centers on one verse, Second Corinthians 3:18. *"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

Of the thousands of tasks open to man, possibly one of the most difficult is the task of making men over. The one who coined the phrase that is is better to build boys than to mend men must have realized this difficulty. It is not easy to take a person who has become contaminated by the evil of this world, whose wicked habits have become second nature to him, whose attitude of heart is calloused with sin, one who has partaken of every sin, and then make him into the kind of person God wants him to be. In fact, the task is beyond the ability of man to do alone, even though man has a part in bringing this re-making into reality. But as difficult as it is, it must be done.

Man Is Distinctive

Man is not like a piece of machinery, an automobile, an electrical appliance that can be used for a while and when through with it can be abandoned to the junk heap. Man is a living soul in the spiritual image of God. Man is more than body but is also spirit; a spirit that shall exist in eternity somewhere, either heaven or hell. His soul is worth more than the whole world. He cannot simply be scrapped like some material object for which there is no concern.

Nothing should move us more than to realize that a soul that could have been a saint, could have been a soldier of the cross, could have been a servant of God and a benefactor to his fellowman, but who by wrong associations, following wrong ideas, measuring by false standards, and developing the wrong habits, has become a disgrace before God and a blight on humanity.

A man came by the church building one day, his clothing ragged and dirty, and he was asking for some kind of material help, whether money, transportation, food, clothing, or most anything someone might hand-out to him. I invited him in to

talk and learned he was from a broken home, had lived a degenerate life, broke up his own marriage, had become a heavy drinker, wandered from one place to another and from job to job, staying a while and then drifting. He is one of so many like that. The man needed more than food, and other physical assistance. He was a derelict. He needed a will to live, something for which to live, a guide in life. He reminded us of the words of Jesus, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:4). This man needed to be reshaped, remolded, given a fresh start, and made over. He needed to be born again. Sadly, he was not too interested in such a thing, but this is what was needed.

Think of the contrast between that man and the little baby, innocent, pure, knowing no evil words or thoughts, beginning with a clean slate, so to speak. What a tragedy a few years can bring when such a one as a little babe can learn profanity, hate, lust, greed, and have life marred, broken by sin. And how difficult it is to take that life once shattered, and make the person over into the kind God wants us to be.

Accomplishing The Task

But it can be done. It is being done. This was the reason Christ came to this earth that it might be done. He is the one who does it as people will come to Him and follow His lead. Our text contains the general formula for accomplishing this remaking of man, as far as man's part is concerned.

Let us consider the passage in its context. Israel, the prophets, those who lived under the old Mosaic law, viewed God's plans and purposes as though they looked through a veil. They could not see God's scheme of redemption clearly. God used them to gradually unfold His plan. They were often an important part of this unfolding without even realizing it. They did not fully grasp the significance of much of what they did. It was a mystery to them that was not revealed until Christ and through his apostles.

It is different with people living this side of the cross. We have the full and complete revelation of God as to his way of saving man. We can see the relationship of what has gone in the past with what God has done by and through His Son, Jesus Christ. We look with "open face" or with an unveiled face. We can see clearly and distinctly not only God's way of redemption, but the guidance and leadership that he offers us through life.

Paul writes, *"...beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord."* Think about the last time you looked into a mirror. There you saw yourself clearly and distinctly, as you really were. So we must consider the glory of the Lord as it really is.

The Basis Of Remaking

The formula for making men over has as its basis the glory of the Lord and man seeing clearly the Lord as He actually is. We see the Lord as we see Christ. *"Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. How sayest thou then, Show us the Father."* (John 14:8,9). As we behold Christ, we behold the glory of the Lord.

As a result of beholding Him clearly, Paul says, we *"are changed into the same image from glory to glory."* We are changed from one level of likeness of Christ to another. We grow to be as the song suggests, "more and more like Jesus." When one lives close to the ways of the Lord, thinks about Him, measures himself by His standards, seeks to imitate Him in the decisions of life, follows in His footsteps, he is gradually changed, transformed, made over into a similarity of the Son of God as far as life and character are concerned. From the little glory we have as human beings we grow to a greater glory in the likeness of Christ, never reaching His perfection, but striving toward His perfection.

The story by Nathaniel Hawthorne entitled "The Great Stone Face" is a reasonable illustration of the lesson we believe Paul is teaching here. The story is about a small New England village set in a valley with mountains towering above it. On one ledge there was a natural phenomenon of stone that resembled a face. The tradition or legend of the village was that one would come to the village one day and lead the people into wealth and prosperity. The one who would do this would resemble the face of stone.

Various men came to the village, wealthy men, statesmen, and generals. But none were like the great stone face. Eventually one did come that led them into the abundance they anticipated and he did resemble the great stone face. It was one of the lads who had grown up in the village. Day after day as the boy grew, he looked at that face of stone, he thought about it, he meditated upon it, and he gradually came to resemble it.

The application is that when one looks upon the ideal of Christ and continues to do so, he begins to take on the characteristics of the Christ. He begins to act, speak, go about life, and evaluate matters of life the way that Christ would do. This is the formula by which men can be made over. People can be changed from what they are to what they ought to be. People can be changed from what they are to what they are capable of becoming. It is done by proper consideration and devotion to Christ.

Examples In Scripture

We can sight Biblical examples of just such things. Consider Peter, Andrew, or James and John who were fishers when they first met Jesus. They were changed to be fishers of men. Look at Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of Christ, who was later Paul, the apostle, the preacher of Christ. Consider the jailor of Philippi who commissioned the beating of Paul and Silas but who later washed their stripes and fed them, having heard, believed and obeyed the gospel of Christ.

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (First Corinthians 6:9-11). See what they were but later became.

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." (Ephesians 2:1-3). Paul describes the Ephesian Christians before they came to Christ, reminding them of their past wickedness. He continued, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, [by grace ye are saved;] And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to*

come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:4-7). Another before and after picture is completed. From what they were is contrasted to what they had become. Because of what God did on their behalf, and the fact that they had taken advantage of the grace extended them, they were not as they once were, but had been made over.

It Is Still Being Done

It is wonderful to read of these instances where people have been made over in the past. But what is more glorious is that Christ is still transforming men's lives. The transformation is not a change in one's physical appearance, but a change in the way one lives his life, the fruit of the Spirit.

There is the story of a man who had visited the worship services riding along with the preacher the next week. The man expressed some concern over a certain person who had served the Lord's Supper the past Sunday. "Do you know what kind of man that person was? Do you know how evil he was? Do you know that there was not anything he would not do? It disturbs me to see people like that serving in the worship services."

The preacher turned to the man and said, "You are telling me what kind of man this person used to be and what he once did and was. But do you know the kind of person he is now? There has been a tremendous change in that man. He is not what he used to be. He has been made over by coming to Christ."

Christianity may be defined as the process of making men over. It is the work of transforming people from what they were when in the service of Satan to what they can become in the service of the Lord.

This process of becoming more and more like Christ is a lifetime matter. It is a matter of spiritual growth. It begins when one becomes a Christian and continues as one lives more and more in the imitation of the Master. Inasmuch as all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, can anyone escape the realization that people, indeed all people, are in need of being made over in the image of the Lord?

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Am I In The Place Of God?

If I was preaching this lesson before a congregation I would begin by reading the first twenty-one verses of Genesis 50. With limited space, I must call upon the reader to take his Bible and read those verses before continuing the lesson. A few comments on the context is in order.

Jacob had just died in Egypt. Joseph and his brothers secured permission from Pharoah to bury Jacob back in Canaan in the cave of Machpelah where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, and Leah had been buried. At the death of their father the brothers of Joseph grew fearful of Joseph lest he now retaliate against them for what they had done to him many years earlier when they sold him to the Midianites as a slave. They sent word to Joseph begging his forgiveness. It was upon their request that Joseph said to them, *"Fear not: for am I in the place of God? "But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."* (Genesis 50:19-21).

Joseph's brothers had allowed their hatred, jealousy, and envy to permit them to treat Joseph unjustly, stripping him of his coat of many colors, casting him into a pit, and selling him into slavery. But now the tables had turned. Joseph was second only to Pharoah in Egypt. Until now Joseph had sought no revenge against his brothers. But now that Jacob, their father, was dead, they feared he might avenge his mistreatment. Probably they were judging Joseph according to what they might have done if the situation was reversed. Many do judge other people according to what they would do under similar conditions. The brothers were suffering for their sins and the consequences of them. They had a guilty conscience and knew they deserved punishment. They were tormented with the fear of what Joseph might do. They came asking forgiveness.

Joseph's Meaning

What did Joseph mean by his reply, *"Am I in the place of God?"* Joseph realized that all the past had taken place by the providence of God. The brothers had meant harm, but God used it to preserve Jacob's seed, the seed of Abraham and

Isaac.

Our problems and difficulties are often blessings in disguise. At the moment they seem harsh and severe. But upon reflection we are able to see the good things brought about in spite of hardship. Paul saw blessings in trouble. "*But I would that ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.*" (Philippians 1:12). One poet expressed the idea in his hymn, "God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform, His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower." What begins as something dreadful can often result eventually into somthing wonderful.

Joseph held no grudge nor sought revenge against his brothers. But he promised to do them good in spite of the intended evil done against him. This man lived many years before Jesus Christ, yet, he was practicing that perfect law of returning good for evil. Only a person who is truly a big person can do a thing like that. The little, malajusted, distorted person seeks to get even. To render to no man evil for evil is not always the easiest path to trod. But it is the right one. "*Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you*" was a theme of the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5:44). We need not concern ourselves with "getting even" because God will settle all accounts in the last day. Vengeance is His (Romans 12:19-21). Joseph knew it was not his place to exact revenge. For him to have attempted that would have been to put himself in the place of God. He would have overstepped his bounds. So he asks, "*Am I in the place of God?*" With this rhetorical question, a question the answer to which is obvious, he sought to dismiss the fears of his brothers. It took more spiritual strength to refrain from exacting revenge than for him to have tried to get even.

Needed In Religious Matters

Joseph's attitude and desire to not try to "play God" is one that is needful in so many religious matters. Men often displace God and place themselves or some other in God's place. Man has a place, but it is not on an equality with God.

In no area is this misstep of man more glaring than in the writing of creeds, manuals, disciplines, catechisms, rule, regulations, and other documents that are to be bound on others as if they were the law of God. God has provided us the

all-sufficient Scriptures that will furnish us unto all good works (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Man has no right to tamper with God's Word, take from it, nor add to it, or even substitute for it. We are commanded to preach the gospel and not some human creed. We are forbidden to go beyond the doctrine of Christ (Second John 9). Our loyalty is to be to Christ and His will, not some denominational church document created from the minds of men, however well-intentioned they might have been. Does the church to which you belong have a human creed, manual, disciple, catechism, prayer book, confessional, or something to which you look for guidance in church affairs? The Lord's church has only the Lord's Word. Men are trying to take God's place when they insert their authorities over or alongside the authority of God.

No Voting

Men attempt to replace God and take over His throne when they attempt to vote people in and out of the church. First, you never read of such a thing as that in Scripture. We should speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). Some religious groups will have people "testify" about their religious experience and then the congregation will vote on whether they should be accepted as a member or not. One's application for church membership is determined by man. But the Scriptures teach that when one hears, believes, and obeys the gospel, God adds him/her to His church (Acts 2:47). No men have the right to make one a member when God has not. No men have the right to prohibit one from being a member when God has added him.

No Joining

Man does not "join the church" like he might join some club, business society, fraternal order, or social group, being first approved by previous members. One becomes a member of the Lord's church upon hearing, believing in Christ, repenting of sins, confessing his faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. When anybody does that he is a member of the Lord's church, the saved. It is not man's place to say otherwise.

This does not prohibit the exercise of disciplinary measures when the situation warrants. Having no fellowship with one may well be just what the Lord commands. He does command

withdrawal from the impenitent and sinful brother or sister who walks disorderly and not according to apostolic tradition. Rather than displacing God by withdrawing from such wayward members, we displace God to refuse to withdraw from them since God taught this is to be done.

The point is that the matter of church membership is in the hands of God. Men must respect what God has said about adding as well as withdrawing. If we do not respect that we are putting ourselves in the place of God.

Sinful Judging

We displace God and place ourselves on His throne when we try to judge the hearts and motives of others. Man is limited to observing the fruit that is borne in peoples lives. We are not like God. As God told Samuel, "*For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*" (First Samuel 16:7). God can and does know the heart of man. Our motives and intents, as well as our words and deeds, are open unto him. But such is not the case with man's ability. We can only observe what one says and does. We violate the law against judging when we attempt to assign motives to the actions of others when those motives have not been revealed or become evident (Matthew 7:1-5).

We could be guilty of taking the place of God by deciding the destiny of the dead. The Lord will be the final judge. He "*will render to every man according to his deeds.*" (Romans 2:6). He shall "*judge the quick and the dead*" rather than leave that matter to men (Second Timothy 4:1). It is often that a preacher will assure everyone that a certain person has gone to heaven when he preaches a funeral. This is beyond his power. To be sure, we may have hope, and as far as we know the departed was righteous and faithful before God and we express that hope and the reason for it. But this is a far cry from what one often hears, such as, "I know that this person is now with God in heaven." Sometimes that is even said over the body of the people who have lived outwardly the worst kind of lives.

We must preach and teach what is necessary to be saved, and we are not judging when we say one is lost if he does not obey. We are merely preaching the judgments God has already revealed. It would be judging God to preach anything other than what He promised or what He warned regarding eternity and the destiny of the soul. To declare one saved who has not done

what God says one must do is to attempt to nullify God's commands and remove Him from authority, displacing Him with ourselves or the ideas others may have written and declared that are contrary to His will. We dare not put ourselves in God's place.

Cause Of Tensions

Many of the religious tensions in the world are caused by those who wish to put themselves in the place of God. To be sure, some are accused of doing that when they speak frankly, dogmatically, or directly concerning some matter. When one speaks as the Bible teaches he is not displacing God. He is exalting God on His throne and declaring God's law. When men attempt to dictate religious laws to the church for which there is no divine direction, when they try to legislate for the church, binding or lossing as if what they are declaring is God's will when there is no Scripture to sustain it, when they place matters of judgment and opinion on the same level as divine authority and the revealed Word, then men are taking the place of God. Joseph knew that was out of line and we must learn it too.

Where is man's place? Man is a created being and is to worship and serve the Creator. He is not to be God but to follow God. He is to bring honor and glory to God by keeping God's commandments. He is to show love and respect for God by living according to God's Word. That is man's place. It is a full-time occupation doing that and we fall so short of His glory (Romans 3:23). We do ourselves a favor to ask, "Have I been replacing God? Have I been ignoring God? Or have I been following God?"

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> While some tolerate false teachers out of "love" for them in hope of restoring them, what love is shown for the church they divide and the souls they mislead as long as they are tolerated? Is it really love for the false teacher to "go along" with him? Could it be that what is disguised as "love" is really an unwillingness and fear to stand for the truth?

Concerning The Tongue

Is there ever a time when a lesson on the tongue is untimely? Some may think so. I am reminded of the time when some brethren were highly criticial of me for preaching on the subject of the sinfulness of modern dancing one Sunday morning. They said that they agreed with the truth I presented, but it was so untimely because the high school prom was to be the very next week. Some may think a sermon on the tongue is untimely because that is what is really the most needful. There are so many Scriptures relating to this matter that we shall have the opportunity to occupy much of the lesson with quotations.

James 3:2-9 gives us some characteristics of the tongue. "*For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, withersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind; but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men which are made after the similitude of God.*"

Little But Loud

The tongue is a little member of the body, but it is ever so loud and powerful. It is compared to a horse's bit, a ship's rudder, little but able to control the entire body or ship. It is a fire. Fire can be helpful or harmful, depending on the way it is used. It cannot ever be completely tamed but must always be kept under control and guard. As is a serpent, it is full of deadly poison. It is a powerful force with which we must deal and learn to handle properly. It is a part of being a Christian to learn this.

Let us consider some of the fruit borne by the tongue. Let us

see some of the things, harmful and beneficial, that come from the tongue. Consider some harmful works first. Again, we turn to Scripture.

"A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." (Proverbs 16:28). *"Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth."* (Proverbs 26:28). *"Their throat is an open sepulchre, with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."* (Romans 3:13,14). Discord, destruction of friendships, strife, cursing, deception, are all listed as harmful fruits of the misused tongue.

"For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision; whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake." (Titus 1:10,11). James said the tongue can defile the whole body. The list could be extended almost without limit as to the harmful effects that can and are often perpetrated by the tongue.

It Need Not Harm

The blessing of the ability to speak and communicate need not be used harmfully. Great good can come from the use of the tongue. Again, let us read from the Bible. *"The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment."* (Psalm 15:1). *"The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord; but the words of the pure are pleasant words."* (Proverbs 15:26). *"Pleasant words are as a honey comb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones."* (Proverbs 16:24). *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."* (Ephesians 4:29). *"Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."* (Colossians 4:6). *"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* (Romans 10:10). The fruit of a good tongue promotes wisdom, knowledge, justice, turns away wrath, brings pleasantness, edifies, gives answer for one's faith, and confesses Christ. All of these very beneficial results can come from the same tongue that can produce the evil things we earlier noted.

It Can Be Hypocritical

The tongue can often be hypocritical. This is especially a danger that confronts the Christian. Evil people can be expected to abuse and misuse the tongue. But Christian people must guard against that. But they do not always succeed. "*Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers! how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*" (Matthew 12:33-35). Can we not see the inconsistency to have both good and evil springing from the same mouth? James wrote, "*Therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.*" (James 3:9-12). Can you think of anything more two-faced than singing praise to God with the tongue and soon using that same tongue to curse others? How can we use the same tongue to pray that is used for vulgarity and lying? We can get the lesson without belaboring it.

We have a responsibility regarding the use of the tongue. "*But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*" (Matthew 12:35,36). The eternal consequences of the use of the tongue is taught in Proverbs 13:3. "*He that keepth his mouth keepeth his life; but the soul of the transgressor shall have destruction.*"

How To Use The Tongue

How shall we speak? What saith the Scriptures? "*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*" (Ephesians 4:29). "*Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought*

to answer every man." (Colossians 4:6). "*Wherefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."* (James 1:19). "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."* (First Peter 3:15). "*Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law and judgeth the law; but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge."* (James 4:11). "*Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking..."* (First Peter 2:1). "*For he that would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile."* (First Peter 3:9). "*Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile."* (Psalm 34:13). "*If any man among you seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."* (James 1:26).

Do we really want our speech to be acceptable before God? Surely, we do. We all do if we care for the soul. We cannot be perfect, but we can learn to guard the tongue. It is not an easy task, but is a lifetime work. As James said, "*For in many things we all stumble,"* but we can learn to speak as God would have us speak if we will get our hearts right and make it our goal in life to keep them right. When we fill our minds with purity, forgiveness, goodness, righteousness, and genuine love, then we will be better equipped to speak correctly because we shall speak as we think.

† † † † †

If a person can be saved as a member of a denomination of which not one word is found in the New Testament, and if we are truly in earnest about being united religiously with other people, just how does one justify our existence being separate and apart from denominations? It would seem reasonable that we disband and "join" one of the denominations and lessen the religious division by one.

Jesus Is The Son Of God

Those who are Christians are subject to taking things for granted just like other people do. Because we believe the truth about Jesus we might fail to realize that many people do not. We have heard the evidence, possibly many times, and to us the matter is beyond question. But most of the world does not hold to the faith concerning Christ. Unless they are taught and the evidence is presented to them they will not believe and accept the most notable and significant fact that shall ever come to mind.

In a sense, everyone is a son of God. Since God created Adam and we are all descendants of Adam, physically speaking we might be called the sons of God. But all are not the sons of God spiritually. Only those who have come to God through Christ are His spiritual sons and daughters today. When we speak of Jesus being the Son of God we are considering something far more than what we can be. We are thinking of Him as being born of a virgin, Deity in the flesh, the Savior and Messiah, one of the three persons of the Godhead.

What Some Close To Him Thought

We begin our study by looking at what those who walked with Him on earth thought of Him. Christ had been preaching and had sent His disciples back across the sea. While going back a storm arose. "*But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straitway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boistrous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus strectched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.*"

(Matthew 14:24-33).

"*When Jesus came into the coasts of Ceasarea Philippi he asked his disciples saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some, Elias, and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (Matthew 16:13-16).

God confessed Jesus to be His Son on the mount of transfiguration and just prior to the baptism of Jesus by John. "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 3:16,17; 17:5).

Christ's Claim

Christ claimed to be God's Son and accepted the acknowledgements of others that He was. Nicodemus said, "*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*" (John 3:2). God was with Christ which He would not have been if Jesus was merely an imposter and making false claims of His Sonship. "*The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ; when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.*" (John 4:25,26). When Jesus was before Pilate, and earlier before the high priest, He acknowledged His identity as the Son of God. Those closest to Him, God Himself, Christ Himself, as well as others who recognized the things that He did to be what the Messiah would do, they all looked upon Him as the Son of God.

Some Denied Him

There were those at that time that denied His claim. They brought in false witnesses to testify against Him, to wrest His words and deeds, to accuse Him of blasphemy because He made the claim. But we must decide whose testimony to believe. Shall we believe people who were hired to perjure themselves, or those who walked with Him and saw the things He did and heard the things He said?

There is one underlying matter that must be settled in our minds in order to make our decision. Everything is suspended upon it. Did Jesus rise from the dead? We know He was killed,

buried, and we know on the third day His tomb was empty. Did He rise from the dead, or is there another explanation for the empty tomb? If He did not come forth from the tomb as the prophets had said the Messiah would, and as He himself claimed He would, then we can know He was not who He claimed to be. God would not raise an imposter from the dead.

It is not here our intent to investigate all the various "explanations" people through the ages have offered in objection to His resurrection. We want to consider the one explanation that was offered in and around the time of the death, burial, and empty tomb of Jesus. We would think that the explanations of people at that time would carry far more credibility than inventions of men hundreds of years removed from the event. We are confident that all the anti-resurrection explanations can be put to flight with the evidence available. But we intend to limit this particular study to the explanation of the empty tomb as given by the guards.

A Disputed Point

The resurrection is now and has been a point of controversy. Many believed then and believe now that He lived again. But some challenged that contention then as some do now. They may admit He was a good man, but why would a good man lie about His identity? They admit He was a great teacher and even a prophet, but nothing more than any other prophet that had gone before Him. They deny He worked miracles or rose from the dead. They admit He died, was buried, and that the tomb was empty the third day. But what became of the body they dispute and subscribe to the guard's story. The guards said one thing and the angels of God said another. Let us first hear the testimony given by the guards as to what happened.

"*Now when they were going, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught; and this is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.*" (Matthew 28:11-15).

The Folly Of Error

Consider, please. First, they told the Jewish leaders the truth about the events. But the truth was not what the Jews wanted told. Take note that sleeping on guard duty was punishable by death. Would men admit to sleeping on guard duty as these guards were asked to do? But they were told that if trouble came to them over it, they would be secured and no harm come to them. They took the bribe. Are men who can be bribed to tell a lie be considered competent witnesses?

Second, consider the risk the disciples would have taken to do as the guards reported. To break the Roman seal that had been placed on the tomb was also punishable by death. If Jesus was dead they could certainly know He was not the Messiah but an imposter. Would they risk their lives to steal the body of an imposter that had proven Himself to be different from what He claimed and from what they accepted Him to be? What advantage would it be to them to try to perpetuate a lie? How would their faith be supported by covering for Him?

Third, how could the guards offer reliable testimony to something that was supposed to have happened while they admitted they were asleep? Yet, this was noised abroad. Are men capable of testifying to something that they never saw?

Fourth, is it likely that all the guards would fall asleep at the same time, and not only at the same time but at the exact moment the disciples were supposed to have opened the tomb and take the body? This is unreasonable to believe.

Fifth, would the thieves who were stealing the body under risk of their lives have taken the time to neatly fold the garments and cloths and lay them aside rolled as they were found (John 20:7)?

Sixth, would men risk their lives and suffer persecution for preaching a risen Savior when they knew it was a lie? When they could have been accepted and declared heroes by renouncing a dead imposter, would they still hold to that which brought them only grief and pain from their fellows? Will men hold to lies that produce hurt when telling the truth would bring them reward?

Seventh, neither the guards, who broke the law, nor the disciples, who were open and public in their work, were ever arrested for the crimes they were said to have committed that night. Why was that? Surely, the guards had been told they would be covered, but who covered the disciples?

The Truth

The other explanation for the empty tomb is that of the angels of God. "*In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And behold there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did quake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay, and go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead, and behold, he goeth before you unto Galilee; there shall ye see him; lo, I have told you.*" (Matthew 28:1-7).

Jesus was seen many times after His resurrection. Some twelve separate instances are recorded in Scripture where Jesus appeared before others. Were they all wrong? Why else would men risk their lives to preach Him as the risen Son of God except they knew they were saying what was a confirmed truth? There were many evidences during the life of Jesus on earth for us to know He is the Son of God. In addition to all of them is this climatic evidence of His resurrection from the dead. "*And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*" (Romans 1:4).

No truth has firmer historical evidence of truthful and reliable people than the contention that Jesus rose from the dead and that He was and is God's Son, the Savior of mankind. The implications of this reality are far-reaching. It demands of us a decision concerning Him and His will. I know what my decision is. I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. I hope you believe as well.

† † † † †

Having unity with other people is very desirable. But having unity with them at the cost of separating oneself from God and adopting the doctrines of men is a price too high to pay for unity.

The Ten Virgins

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." (Matthew 25:1-13).

In Matthew 24:3, the disciples had asked Jesus, *"Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"* In chapters 24 and 25, Jesus explains the coming destruction of Jerusalem and answers questions concerning the end of the world at His final coming. In answering these things. He teaches a lesson on the need to be watchful, which is an oft-repeated New Testament admonition. *"Watch therefore, for ye know not the hour your Lord doth come."* (Matthew 24:42). *"Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day not the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."* (Matthew 25:13). Paul advised, *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong."* (First Corinthians 16:13). The parable of the ten virgins is just such a teaching, stressing watchfulness and preparedness.

An Ancient Custom

It helps in understanding this teaching to observe some of the marriage customs of that time. The bridegroom, with his friends, would go to the house of the bride to take her to her new home. She is accompanied by her friends and they all return together

to the wedding feast. All others waited near the groom's home to welcome the bride and groom and join the marriage procession and enter into the feast. In this parable were ten virgins who were among those who were waiting for the procession near the home of the bridegroom and expecting to enter the door into the feast. The feast was usually after darkness had settled, hence the lamps, torches, and the need for oil for the lamps.

Let us analyze the parable. *"Then"* refers to the coming of the Lord. The *"Kingdom of heaven"* is the church. Jesus used the terms *"church"* and *"kingdom"* interchangeably in Matthew 16:16-18. Colossians 1:13 depicts those who leave the darkness of sin as entering into the kingdom, into the company of the saved. The *"bridegroom"* is Christ. John pictured Jesus as the bridegroom and himself as the friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29). Ephesians 5:23 pictures Christ as the husband of His bride, the church. The coming of the bridegroom is the final coming of the Lord. The ten virgins are different kinds of church members. In Second Corinthians 11:2, Paul pictures the church as a pure virgin. This denotes the purity of the Christian doctrine and character of the church. The virgins are those who had received and accepted the invitation to the wedding feast. They were awaiting the coming of the bridegroom. The *"oil"* represents the necessary preparation to enter into the procession that enters the prepared feast.

The bridegroom is Christ. Christ came to this earth, but ascended, having fulfilled His mission. Before He left He gave the reassuring words, *"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also."* (John 14:1-3). Let us note the emphasis that He will come again. Acts 1:11, *"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."* The uncertainty of when is as reliable as the certainty that He will come. *"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is."* (Mark 13:32,33). Peter wrote, *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night..."* (Second Peter 3:10). He will come unannounced. But

He will come. Hence the necessity of being ready for Him whenever He does come.

He Tarried...

In the parable, the bridegroom tarried. He did not come when many thought He would. This contributed to the negligence of some in being watchful and ready when He did appear. Peter writes about some who would scoff at the promise of His coming because He did not come when they thought He ought. Peter persuaded that God does not count time as do men, and that God is not slack concerning His promise. And he emphasized the certainty that Christ will return (Second Peter 3:1-3). The tarrying of the Lord caused some problems among the brethren in Thessalonica regarding the coming of Christ and aroused their concern for those faithful who had already died. Paul wrote to them to ease their concern regarding the faithful dead (First Thessalonians 4:13ff), and to stress the certainty of His coming at an unspecified time (First Thessalonians 5:1-6). How long the Lord shall tarry we are not privileged to know.

The virgins are those who had been invited to the wedding feast and had accepted the invitation, waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. These are like members of the church, those that compose the kingdom of heaven. There was a difference respecting these virgins because some were wise and others were foolish. The difference was in their preparation and readiness. Some had provided sufficient preparation and were watchful. Others had not provided as they ought, having only what they thought might get them by. They are much like the foolish as are the wise that Jesus mentions in the close of the Sermon on the Mount. *"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."* (Matthew 7:24-27). These virgins are not unconverted people but church members. They had received the invitation, accepted it, made some preparation and thought they had done enough. They are like those today who

hear the gospel, convinced they are lost, believe in Christ, publicly confess Christ, having repented of their sins, and are baptized. But that is about as far as they go. They grow very little if at all. They do not make further preparation that is commanded. They carry as little oil with them as they can. They do as little as they think will suffice. They are satisfied with soothing their conscience but not really serving. These are the kind of folks who worship only one hour a week, and not always regular and faithful in that. They are seldom among the workers. They give but a token amount and that reluctantly. They never assume responsibilities and would be the last people in the congregation upon whom anyone could depend to get something done for the Lord. They are careless, indifferent, do not study at home or in the classes, unwilling to cooperate, and even arrogant and defiant if called upon. Really, they are not making much effort toward spiritual growth and development. Like the foolish virgins, they have made some preparation, but surely not as they ought. They evidently have the idea that going to heaven is sealed with baptism. They, like Peter, follow Christ but "*afar off.*" They don't want to be too identified with Him, but just enough to make them feel good. They will neglect the sick, the needy, the lost, and just don't have much "*oil.*"

But He Came

The bridegroom came at midnight, later than expected. When Christ comes or when death overtakes us, whichever is first, the time for preparation will be over. He will come at a time which is compared to the time of Noah. "*But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*" (Matthew 24:37-39).

The virgins rose to trim their lamps, get them to burning brightly to meet the bridegroom, join the joyful procession to the prepared feast. The time was too late to prepare. The time was upon them. The foolish virgins realized their lack of preparation. They asked for assistance but the time had passed. Help could not be given. There are some things one must do for himself and nobody can do it for him, and making preparation for the coming of Christ is one of those things. The day of mercy is

now. When the Lord comes, the opportunity to receive His mercy will have passed.

The door was shut. This stresses the finality of the end. The foolish virgins were not prepared and were not allowed entrance. How they did plead but, it was too late. They had good intentions but just neglected to make preparations.

Friend, the day is coming when the door that now stands ajar will be shut, never to be reopened. Those who have entered into the feast of the Lord shall never have to depart from it. But, those who have not entered shall never enter.

The foolish, careless, hypocritical, unfaithful, lukewarm, indifferent, half-hearted, haphazard, unprepared member of the church, and this is who is being considered in this parable, will be banned.

From this it is easy to see the love of Christ for us, to warn us of that coming day and hour. We must redeem the time (Ephesians 5:16), taking advantage of life, mind, and opportunity. All of these things can be taken away at a moment. They will eventually and certainly be taken away at some time.

These foolish virgins were much like what was said to Belshazzar. *"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin."* (Daniel 5:25). *"Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting."* Dear reader, let such not be the case with us.

† † † † †

Recently a digressive "scholar" with a divinity school credentials said a person could be properly baptized and not even know that baptism was for the remission of sins, but he could be baptized on the basis of Mark 16:16.

Mark 16:16 reads, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*"

One can know from this verse that baptism is essential to salvation and should recognize his duty to be baptized. But as for not even knowing it was for the remission of sins, we ask, "Can one be baptized to be saved and not even know from what he is saved?"



JAMES W. BOYD

The Only Hope

We wonder what God's prophets of the Bible would say about our land today should they walk among us. Those who disbelieve the Bible would probably not care what they would say. Many professed believers are so wrapped up in their personal interests that they would not listen to them anyway.

But those who care would soon be made aware of the similarities in America with the immoralities of the pagan, heathen, idolatrous, and sin-possessed societies of the ancient world just before the patience of a just and righteous God was exhausted and they received the fruits of the seeds they had sown.

The reality of America's present moral condition in almost every area underscores the urgency of the gospel of Christ. The message of God's truth is the only hope for the people of this nation, indeed, the people of the whole world. Our problems are basically spiritual and moral.

It is the glorious and frustrating task of Christians to proclaim to the world the gospel of Christ and how it must be heard, believed, and obeyed. In spite of sinful darkness all around, the "light of the world" can bring mankind the peace, joy, hope, and salvation that is needed.

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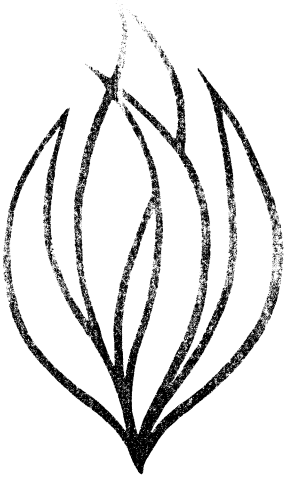

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III James W. Boyd ***NUMBER 7***

The New Birth

The subject of the new birth, being born again, is a much mentioned religious matter. There are so many doctrines floating about concerning the new birth. Some check out every source of information concerning it except the Bible that teaches the truth about it. People consider it some "experience" that they have had that they cannot explain. Others look upon it as simply a change in their lives. People talk about "born again Christians" and the very phrase is redundant when you understand the Scriptural teaching. In this lesson, we shall consider what is revealed in the Scriptures and only in passing might we touch upon some of the fallacious concepts being suggested.

The subject was raised and taught by Jesus Christ and is recorded in John 3:1-20, when He was teaching a single individual, Nicodemus. Let us proceed with a "precept upon precept, line upon line" investigation with an occasional reference to related passages.

"There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him." (John 3:1-2).

An Unusual Pharisee

Usually, there was strong confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. Matthew twenty-three reveals some of the most condemning language of the Bible when Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and other transgressions, making God's law of none effect. The Pharisees were a very strict, religious party of the Jews and the New Testament concept of them is that they were very religious, ritualistic, but not righteous. We are not sure that Nicodemus would fit that characterization, however, because he does show more concern regarding Jesus than usual. He was a ruler, therefore one who was supposed to be very knowledgeable and a leader.

Much speculation has been given as to why Nicodemus came by night. We are not told, and we shall not add to that speculation. Suffice it to say that he came by night.

Nicodemus had a great deal of respect for Jesus because of the miracles that Jesus did. By these miracles, Nicodemus was

convinced Jesus had come from God. He addressed Him as *"Rabbi,"* which means an exalted teacher. Whether he considered Him to be the Son of God at this point, we cannot be sure. Doubtless, because of the teaching Jesus had done, this was a matter he had considered in view of the fact Jesus had been declared as God's Son. The fact that Nicodemus had respect for Him as coming from God would lead us to think that there was a real probability that He was a believer, or near to being one, even as he came to Jesus.

Jesus' Interest In One Person

The fact that Jesus took the time to discuss so vital a theme with even an audience of one also shows the great concern our Lord demonstrated for even the one person. We see, also, one of the purposes of miracles; namely, evidence that Jesus was the Son of God. John said the same thing in John 20:30,31, *"...these are written that ye might believe..."*

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3). Whatever is involved in the new birth or being *"born again,"* Jesus declares it to be absolutely essential for going to heaven. Salvation is dependent on being born again. The kingdom of God is the church. The church is that which the Lord Jesus shall deliver to the Father when He comes again (First Corinthians 15:24). So, at the very start, even with the words, *"verily, verily,"* that conveys the certainty and the necessity of His statement, Jesus impresses on Nicodemus and on us the necessity of being born again.

"Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4). Nicodemus misunderstood the teaching of Jesus. Jesus was using the matter of being born as a figure of speech to illustrate the spiritual new life that must take place. Nicodemus was thinking in terms of a physical birth while Jesus was teaching in terms of a spiritual one. It was obvious to Nicodemus that a second physical birth was impossible, yet, he knew not what Jesus meant. Therefore, Jesus expresses the matter of being born again in additional terms that draws the sharp distinction between a physical and a spiritual birth.

"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and

that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:5,6). First, Jesus said, *"Except a man be born again."* Then He expanded on that and said, *"Except a man be born of water and the Spirit."* Being born again, and being born of water and the Spirit, are simply expressions denoting precisely the same thing. The new birth involves being born of *"water and the Spirit."* Jesus makes it clear He is not talking about a physical birth or one of the flesh, but a spiritual one. The spiritual new birth He is teaching involves being born of water and the Spirit. Being born of water has no reference to the physical birth of man. To suggest that is to suggest nonsense in the words of Jesus. Obviously, one could not be born again if he had not been physically born. But the birth of which He was speaking included being born of water and the Spirit. Both are parts of the new birth process.

A Parallel Passage

Consider a parallel passage in Titus 3:3-5: *"For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit."*

Regeneration

Note the word *"regeneration."* It means a new life. There is a washing involved in this regeneration or coming to this new life. This is parallel to Jesus' statement about being *"born of water."* Romans 6:3,4 reads, *"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* When we are baptized we enter into a *"newness of life."* What is that except being born again? When we are baptized, we enter into Christ. Paul writes in Second Corinthians 5:17, *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."* A new creature is one that has been born again; He has entered upon the newness of life. This

occurred when he obeyed the command to be baptized. This is what it means to be born (a product of) of water. We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27), and become new creatures.

Note now the "*renewing of the Holy Spirit.*" It is not that the Holy Spirit, one of the persons of the Godhead, needs to be renewed. It is man that is to be renewed. This renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit. Every person that has ever been born again according to the Bible has been born again as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. But how does the Holy Spirit do that work? Is it due to some predetermined destiny of everybody? Is it by some experience, something "better felt than told," some ecstatic mystery? If so, why does the Holy Spirit choose some and dismiss others? Is God a respector of persons after all, even though Paul and Peter have denied that He is? (Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:11).

By The Word

Peter wrote, *"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."* (First Peter 1:23). Peter says we are born again by the Word of God. James 1:18 reads, *"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."* We are begotten by the Word. Paul told the church in Corinth that they had been begotten by the gospel (First Corinthians 4:15). The Holy Spirit makes a person a new creature through the influence of the Word of God. This is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). Being born of the Spirit is to go according to the directions of the Spirit as given in the Word, the Word itself being given by the Holy Spirit. It is not some direct, miraculous operation upon man. The Holy Spirit operates, but through the Word, in the conversion of man. This is what it means to be born of the Spirit. The new birth involves following the teaching of the Spirit, even to being baptized in water. One cannot escape the singularity of meaning in such words as *"born again," "renewing," "regeneration," "newness of life," "new creature."* All of this is talking about the new birth.

"The wind bloweth..."

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou heareth the sound

thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:7,8). Possibly no text has been more abused by those who teach the direct operation of the Holy Spirit than this one. Nicodemus was still laboring under misunderstanding, and Jesus continues to explain. He uses the wind to illustrate the effect of the new birth on a person.

He is not teaching that the Holy Spirit is out here somewhere floating around ready to "zap" somebody, as one teacher put it, and we cannot tell just who and when he is going to "zap" the next one. The wind is not compared to the Holy Spirit but to the one who is born again. *"So,"* or thus it is, with the one who is born of the Spirit. One does not physically see the wind. He sees the evidence of the wind. Neither does one see a spiritual rebirth because it is spiritual. We can, however, see the evidence of it. We see it in the lives of those who are reborn. They bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:21ff). They are not the same as before because they are new creatures. Their physical stature is the same; they look the same; they weigh the same; there is no physical alteration, but there is the result in their lives of having been born again. Jesus is once again emphasizing the spiritual nature of that which He is discussing.

Nicodemus is still bewildered. *"Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"* (John 3:9,10). Nicodemus was a teacher of spiritual matters. It seems there may be a slight rebuke by Jesus here, but it is slight, that this teacher of spiritual matters could not grasp the spiritual concept. At this point, Jesus then turns to give a background to the new birth, that which preceeds it, and then the understanding for Nicodemus, and for us as well, ought be complete.

The Teaching Is Sure

First, Jesus presents both the certainty and the source of His teaching. *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."* (John 3:11-13). The source, and therefore the authority behind His

teaching, is that it came from heaven. This is not an earthly or humanly originated doctrine. Nobody even went into heaven to get it, but Jesus brought it down with Him. He, the Son of man, as He often referred to Himself, with emphasis upon His humanity as well as His Deity, is the source of this teaching. *"We do know...we have seen...our witness."* There is no mistake concerning the authority of this matter. The certainty of its truthfulness is also stressed in this paragraph.

There is the idea that these words were not spoken by Jesus but were words that were recorded by John later. Whether the words are quotations of Jesus' conversation or the inspired record through John is of no consequence as far as their meaning is concerned. But the context seems to necessitate that Jesus is still talking to Nicodemus. Verse twenty-two starts a new thought about things Jesus did. There is nothing to indicate that Jesus had ceased to speak at verse ten. Just because He uses the third person at times in the verses eleven through twenty-one, does not demand that they are not the words of Jesus. He used the third person to refer to Himself on other occasions.

What Deity Has Done

Whatever be the accuracy on that minor matter, consider the next step. *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."* (John 3:14). Jesus calls to mind an Old Testament event, recorded in Numbers twenty-one. When Israel was complaining against God, fiery serpents came into their midst and many died. The Israelites eventually cried to Moses to intercede before God that they might be spared. God instructed Moses to make a brass serpent and lift it up on a pole and those that looked thereupon would be spared. Even so, there must be a lifting up of Christ. Christ was lifted up in three ways: He was lifted up on the cross, which is probably the primary meaning here, and he was lifted up from the grave, and later He was lifted up into heaven. By these things Christ became the author of our salvation. Before there can be an "*new birth*" there must be the recognition of that which Deity has done on man's behalf. Without the death of Christ, His burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, there would be no such thing as being "*born again.*" Before the new birth, was the sacrifice of Christ.

What Man Must Do

"That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:15-18).

At least five times in that passage Jesus stressed the necessity of faith in Him. He never taught salvation by "faith only," but He did teach salvation by faith. He did not come into this world to condemn, but to save. Of course, those who chose to reject His salvation bring upon themselves their condemnation. They are condemned in spite of what Deity has done to save them. Christ died on the cross, was raised and ascended into heaven, and that is what Deity has done. Believing in Christ is that which man must do. This preceeds the new birth.

His Deity

Notice the emphasis upon the Deity of Christ in the identification of Him as the *"only begotten Son of God."* Five times in Scripture He is so identified. It is tragic that the modern perversions of Scripture so often have rendered the Greek word *"monogenes"* which means *"only begotten,"* as simply *"only."* Jesus is not the *"only"* son of God. Adam was called the son of God. The Israelites were God's sons and daughters. People who come to God through Christ today are sons and daughters of God, but Jesus is the only one to ever be identified as God's *"only begotten Son."* This was a designation of Him first made in the revelation of His incarnation (John 1:14). It is one of the many evidences of His Deity. Faithful brethren are not about to surrender this evidence to anybody simply to defend some book that is called the Bible that has been produced by men who do not even believe the Bible is the Word of God and who deny the Deity of Christ. Such perversions as the *Revised Standard, New International,* and nearly all the individually produced versions, make this glaring affront toward Christ. Some of our own brethren have rushed to the defense of this perversion. They should be ashamed. They claim the word simply means

"unique." Friend, there is not a living soul that cannot be called unique. That is no distinction concerning Christ. He was not just another living person. He was, and is, the only begotten Son of God, Deity in the flesh, so identified by the Holy Spirit, and that is exactly where faithful brethren are going to leave it.

Repentance

Before the new birth, there must have been the provision for it by the deeds of Deity. There must be the faith of man. But there also must be repentance, a turning from darkness to light. *"And this is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."* (John 3:19-21). Leaving the darkness of sin and coming to the light of Christ involves a change of mind. This is turning from one to the other. This is repentance, which is essential to being born again. It preceeds the new birth and without it there can be no new birth. Those who have come to Christ have been delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). They have been called out of darkness into his marvellous light (First Peter 2:9).

Now we have before us the entire process of being born again. It begins by the virtue and merit of Christ and His sacrifice. It is appropriated by man through faith, repentance, and baptism into Christ. It is all accomplished by conformity to the teaching given through the Holy Spirit in the Word of God. It is not something mysterious, confusing, bewildering, and beyond our understanding. It is the same as conversion to Christ. It is the same as obeying the gospel and becoming a Christian. Those born again are born into the household or family of God, which is His church (First Timothy 3:15). Those who are born again are Christians and members of His church.

The Necessity of the New Birth

If I should search for ages for words that would make the necessity of the new birth emphatically impressive, I could never find words more pronounced than those uttered by the Lord Himself when He originally taught the new birth. Our Lord said,

"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Indeed, ye must be born again.

† † † † †

The Providence Of God

The Bible teaches the providence of God. "*I laid me down and slept, I awaked, for the Lord sustained me.*" (Psalm 3:5). "*Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.*" (Psalm 55:22).

Matthew 6:24-34, "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you. O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewith shall we be clothed? [For after all these things to the Gentiles seek:] for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*"

The Psalmist did not explain his life in terms of chance, coincidence, or good luck. He associated it all with the power of God. An accompanying passage to the one in Matthew is Luke 12:22-31. Another very familiar one is First Corinthians 10:13, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted*

above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

All of these Scriptures teach the providential care of God over His people. This is one of the most precious and reassuring promises that a Christian has, especially in times that are difficult. Such assurance enables the child of God to face each day with confidence and hope. God cares; God provides. Everything that is necessary to be acceptable before Him is offered. Peter echoed the sentiments of the Psalmist in First Peter 5:7, "*Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.*"

God Oversees

Some find it impossible to believe that God oversees our lives. Perhaps due to the teaching that miracles have ceased because they were confined to the times of confirmation that some have doubts about God's providence. Some confuse the miraculous with the providential. Others doubt because they see so much desolation in the rampages of nature. They see floods, droughts, and storms that wreak immeasurable havoc in life and property. They see famines, wars, and a wide variety of tragedies, and ask, "If God oversees, why all this?" The subject of why God allows suffering is not the prime topic of this lesson. But we mention it because it does provoke some, who misunderstand the providence of God and confuse it with the miraculous, to doubt that God oversees. But the Scriptures assert that truth.

Providence Defined

We need a good definition of providence in order to understand what the Bible teaches regarding it. It is not easily defined in brevity. The foreseeing care and guardianship of God over His creatures is about as good a definition as any. In one sense, everyone is His creature. God sends some of His blessings upon mankind unconditionally, such as the sun and rain on the good and evil, the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). But His promise of providence is not given to all but to *"them that love God... to them that are called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28). Providence, like spiritual salvation, is conditional. Providence is God's control and supervision of all events of our world so as to bring the highest good to His saved people and the upholding of His will. Providence is to be

considered in the context of His spiritual children.

This is not to say that God is unconcerned about those who do not love Him. Nothing has been demonstrated more forcefully than God's concern for the lost. Just think how He sent His only begotten Son into the world (John 3:16). God has made provision for everyone to become one of His children through Christ.

God Does Not Make Everything Happen

Nor is this to contend that everything that happens is because He makes it happen. He does not make everything happen. Many evil things happen and God has no part in it whatsoever. Men commit sin, not because God makes them sin, but in spite of God's desire for them. We are creatures of choice. We have the power of decision. We have a will that is not forced by God to do anything. God allows things to happen that He does not make happen. If He did not do that we would be mere robots, deprived of being free moral beings. Being creatures of God, we, and others, make things happen. The laws of nature make things happen. God does not force everything to conform to His will every step of the way.

He Can Use What Happens

But the providence of God is that whatever happens, God can, with the cooperation of man, use that event or circumstance, in spite of how tragic it may seem to be, to accomplish His holy purposes to the benefit of those who love Him and remain faithful to Him.

Nor are we to think that everything that happens is good or will be good. Providence means that in spite of it, it can be turned around to the point we can either overcome it or endure it, even when we may not be able to make something useful from it.

Causes

Maybe we can get a hold on the providence of God if we consider the difference between what we might call the first and second cause of things. Let me explain. Men generally have a purely naturalistic concept of life and deny the working of God altogether. To some everything is the result of luck, good or

bad, coincidence, fate, nature, or something else. For instance, you ask the "man on the street" what is the key to success and he will likely tell you it takes money, education, health, work, luck, power, opportunity, and other things. But none of these things by themselves are the real primary cause. They are secondary causes. They play a vital part, but they are not the ultimate source of success. There is something behind these.

An illustration may help. We enter a room that is dark and flip on the light switch with our finger. What caused the lights to come on? Did your finger cause the light to come on? It was a secondary cause, but not the first or primary cause. Actually what caused the light to come one was way down the line, all the way back to the dynamo many miles from the light switch. Possibly you can trace it back even further to that which runs the dynamo, even on back to the energy source, eventually back to the origin and source of all things, who is God, the Creator.

The First Cause

To understand the providence of God men must respect the ultimate first cause, the Uncaused Cause, which is God. In other words, we must believe that God is (Hebrews 11:6), and there are manifold evidences of His existence.

James presents two views of life in James 4:13-15, "*Go to now, ye that say, To day or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year and buy and sell and get gain; Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. For ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.*" Here are two views of life. One is purely naturalistic. One considers himself a skilled trader, his market good, his judgment good, his continuation of life due to his own strength and all this will enable him to do what he wants to do. The second view is one that recognizes dependence on the Lord. If the Lord will, I will do this, that, or the other. We need to ask ourselves where is the place of our faith? Is it in self or in God? Do we rely on the changeable secondary causes or the unchangeable First Cause? The Bible teaches that God is involved, especially regarding His own people.

He Is Able

Let us take even a closer look at the Biblical view of divine

providence. We want to make five points. First, our God is able to overrule our lives. He is omnipotent, all powerful. Our emphasis now is on His ability. When Sarah questioned the possibility that she would bear a son in old age, God said, "*Is anything too hard for Jehovah?*" Jesus said, "*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*" (Luke 18:27). God is able to do what He says He will do. But that does not mean He would violate His own laws or His own will to accomplish His purposes. He says He will provide. He is able to do what He promises. This is the first point in considering His providence.

Not Coincidence

Second, providence presupposes that God has a special purpose in mind for those whose lives He oversees. This gives life meaning for the Christian. It was certainly true in the life of Joseph, Esther, and Moses. Mordecai said as much when he told Esther, "*Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" (Esther 4:14). God's providential working is seen in the life of the Ethiopian, Lydia, and the Philippian jailor. Were the events regarding these people mere coincidences? Who can believe it? There was a divine purpose in the things that took place with them.

We need to inject a word of caution here. Man has his limitations in knowing fully the operation of the providence of God. We are in no position to definitely ascertain just what goal God may have in mind when certain things take place. There are general and overall goals in the life of every Christian, and there are specific things that God wants done and gets done through individuals. Our ability to know just what God may have in mind because of a certain happening is limited, even totally screened out. But this does not nullify the fact that God knows and that God works to some end. The right attitude we must have concerning God's providence necessitates our submission to His will by faith, not sight. We do not have to understand why something takes place, or even see the significance of something that takes place at a given moment to be assured that God oversees.

Distinction From The Miraculous

Third, providence does not infer a miraculous working. A

miracle is an event or effect in the physical world that passes, deviates, even appears to contradict known laws of nature. It is a noticeable, direct intervention by God into the affairs of men. The key word to understanding a miracle is the word "supernatural." But God's providence accomplishes His purpose through the use of natural laws, not setting them aside through the miraculous. God manipulates the natural. Just how He does that, I do not even propose to know, nor do I think anyone else does. This is something God has not revealed. The way God used the life of Joseph to preserve the seed of Jacob did not involved the miraculous. The way God used Esther was not a miraculous operation. The relief for which Elijah prayed at the time of famine and drought did not come through the miraculous, but through the natural operations. It was in answer to prayer, but prayer is answered by the providential today, not by miracles. To conclude that God does not work unless He performs some miracle is to admit ignorance of the operation of God.

Cooperation

Fourth, divine providence accomplishes God's purposes with man's cooperation and submission. God often uses man to help himself. God gives the ways and means of getting things done and man must act in compliance with God's ways regarding their use. If man rebels or ignores God's way of provision, then God cannot be accused of failure to provide. This is illustrated in the way God provides our food. God gives the ways and means and we must till the earth, plant the seed, harvest the crop, etc. God provides healing. I believe in divine healing. I do not believe in miraculous divine healing today because the Scriptures teach miracles have ceased. But I believe in the divine providential healing. God provides the ways and means through the substances from which medicines can be made. Man takes the medicine and enjoys his health through the providence of God. But he has cooperated with God and submitted to God's ways in order to receive the benefit to himself. God's providence offers man the opportunity to do what man is capable of doing with what God has already given him. God assures the godly that what is lacking, if according to His will, He will provide.

Conditional

The fifth point in considering God's providence is that providence is conditional. Providence does not mean we cannot make mistakes. It does not mean that every human success has God's approval. Man often succeeds in his evil, temporarily. It does not mean that we know every purpose which God is achieving in every particular situation. But it is not a question, "Will God provide?" The real question is, "Will I give myself to God and enjoy His providence?"

The operation of the providence of God might be illustrated this way. Suppose an artist begins a new canvass. As we observe, the first strokes appear meaningless to our untrained eyes. But they are meaningful to the artist. As he proceeds, gradually, the new painting energes into something of beauty that we can appreciate and understand. Even the untrained eye can see what the artist had in mind even with the original, apparently meaningless, first strokes as well as the finishing ones. So it is with the working of God as He overrules the affairs of the lives of His children. We walk by faith. We trust that He knows what He is doing. We might not see very clearly the reasons behind what occurs. We may never know in this life. But someday all matters will be plainer and we shall understand.

Admittedly, the grasp of the subject of the providence of God is difficult and incomplete. But the fact of it is that which has been assured us in His inspired Word.

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The Invitation: Accepted And Rejected

"And behold, one came unto him and said, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good, but one, that is God; but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother, and Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet? Jesus saith unto him, If thou wilt

be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions." (Matthew 19:16-22).

"And Jesus walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straitway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee, their father, mending their nets, and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him." (Matthew 4:18-22).

Different Invitations

These two passages have something in common. Both of them relate an invitation from Christ to follow Him. One was rejected and the other accepted. People usually appreciate invitations whether they can always accept them or not. There is constantly the invitation to sin, and people often accept the wrong invitations and reject the right ones. One thing on which we can rely about the invitation of Christ is that it is absolutely right to accept it. It should be joyfully and thankfully accepted.

The sentiment of Christ's invitation is expressed so completely in Matthew 11:28-30. *"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Action Is Required

The one who is invited must act. To ignore the invitation is to reject it. We are compelled to make a decision regarding Christ. The same thing is true with any invitation. Man is invited but not driven to accept it. God does not force us to come to Christ. If we come in an acceptable manner we must come willingly. But the invitation does force us to either accept it or reject it. There is no middle ground.

Possibly, you have seen or heard of a painting that represents the twentieth verse of Revelation, chapter three: *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and*

open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." The figure outside the door represents Christ knocking on the door, the door of man's heart. One who saw the picture noted that there was no knob on the door. The artist explained that it was intentionally left off because this was a door that can only be opened from the inside. So it is with the invitation Christ has extended.

Universal

The invitation of Christ is a universal one. It is not confined to one nation, to just male or female or to one race. All need to accept this invitation because all have sinned (Romans 3:23). The Lord wants none to be lost (Second Peter 3:9). Even though it is extended to all nations, and preached to every creature (Matthew 28:11,20; Mark 16:15,16), many reject it. But none are excluded from the opportunity to come.

Acceptance of the invitation offers relief. *"I will give you rest...Ye shall find rest unto your souls."* Man is burdened and heavy ladened with the burden of sin that he cannot successfully carry. By the blood of Christ, man's sins can be washed away. We have peace with God through Christ (Romans 5:1). *"And the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4:7). Still, some reject it.

Responsibility

Acceptance brings responsibilities, as is true with all invitations. For example, if you are invited to a dinner at someone's home, you have the responsibility to be on time, be courteous, cheerful, appreciative, and respectful. Acceptance is an easy burden. The yoke is light, certainly light compared to carrying the burden of sin. Acceptance of the Master's call means we assume duties as a Christian in living, working, and worshiping; indeed, the best we can offer. Some reject the invitation because they do not want the duties that go with it.

Rejection

We have read of the rich, young ruler who chose not to follow Christ. He was in many ways already a relatively good man. He was very sensitive to morality, for he did not kill, steal, commit

adultery. He honored his parents and loved other people, but he lacked something yet. Being told to separate himself from his physical possessions and give to the poor, was more than he was willing to do. He had to remove the obstacles between himself and Christ. This was too much, and he rejected the invitation. *"He went away sorrowful."* He wanted to follow, but he loved his material possessions more than he loved the Lord. We can picture Christ standing alone as the two of them went their separate ways. Doubtless the heart of the Lord was pained, but He loved his soul. But the man would not accept the invitation.

Rejection

There have been many others since that time who have done a similar thing. Many of the Jews rejected the Lord's invitation. Even though they professed loyalty to Moses' law, when Christ read to them from that law and applied the passages to Himself, they rejected Him. *"Jesus saith unto them,Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes ."* (Matthew 21:42). Jesus was that rejected stone. "*Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner."* (Acts 4:10,11). Even though He had taught them, loved them, performed miracles in their presence that they might believe, done nothing but good, showing kindness and mercy, still they rejected Him.

Christ so much wanted Jerusalem to receive Him. "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"* (Matthew 23:37). But instead of accepting Him, they were heard to cry, *"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"*

King Agrippa was one of the most pitiable of all who rejected the invitation. Paul had been arrested, tried before the Jewish courts, had to escape Jerusalem under guard to keep from being assassinated, and was in the Roman courts of Felix and Festus. Eventually, his case was heard by King Agrippa. Instead of a

personal defense, Paul told of his conversion to Christ, and preached Christ to all of those in the court. Festus accused Paul of being mad. Paul denied the charge, and asserted that Agrippa believed what he was preaching because of what the prophets had said. Agrippa knew that Jesus had done the very things the prophets had prophecied that the Messiah would do. Agrippa even admitted that he was almost persuaded to be a Christian. But he rose from his seat and left the room as lost as when he had entered. He rejected the persuasion of Paul. As far as the Bible record is concerned, he died out of Christ.

There are others, such as Felix, who wanted to wait for a more convenient season, like some who may read these words, and like many, who have lived their lives and finished them, never coming to Christ. Many have heard the invitation, but rejected it to their eternal condemnation.

Acceptance

But there have also been those who accepted the invitation. We read of Peter and Andrew who were busy in their occupation as fishermen, who left all and followed Christ when He invited them. There was James and John who were busy mending their nets, but left that to follow Christ when invited.

We read of Saul of Tarsus, who is better known as Paul the apostle. When Annanias told him, *"Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* (Acts 22:16). Paul said he was not disobedient.

There is the man from Ethiopia who was taught by Philip. When the opportunity came for him to obey the gospel, he accepted the invitation and was baptized, going on his way rejoicing.

Down through the years, there have been many who have heard the Word, believed it, heard the invitation to obey and did obey. Even now Jesus invites all who have not come to Him to come and be made whole, and clean, and be justified before God, to live faithfully with the hope and assurance of heaven as the eternal home. When one considers all that God has done, all that Christ has done, and the simple obedience that one must do, and hears the tender call of Christ, *"Come unto me,"* why does he not accept His invitation? Acceptance means heaven; rejection means being lost in hell eternally.

† † † † †

Blessed Are The Pure In Heart

In Matthew 5, 6, and 7, read what is called the Sermon on the Mount. The preacher was Christ, the Son of God. He was the Prince of all preachers. He was intelligent, effective, and lived a life that was perfectly consistent with what He taught. When He preached, it reached to the heart of man. What was once said of Martin Luther is more properly applied to Christ, "He spake as if he had been within a man."

His pulpit was some unidentified mountain near the Sea of Galilee. His sermon was the gospel of the kingdom, the basic principles of the doctrine of Christ. Within it we find the germ of every moral and spiritual truth that He taught. It was a contrast with the Law of Moses. As the law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai, accompanied with thundering and lightning, the gentle voice of Jesus depicts some of the differences between these two systems.

His hearers were His disciples. He spoke to them because He loved them. Their hearts were open and receptive to His teaching.

Blessedness

The sermon begins with what are called the "beatitudes" (Matthew 5:1-12). The word "*blessed*" is found repeatedly. It appears nine times in the text. Blessedness means happiness, but much more. It has a broader, deeper meaning than happiness which comes from without and depends upon happenings, environment and material circumstances. Blessedness is an inward condition that reflects the right relationship with God. It is that which cannot be touched from the outside. It is not found in what a man HAS but what a man IS.

Blessedness is not a state enjoyed by every person, but those who are in the kingdom and are of a certain quality because they follow Christ. Who are they? What kind of people are they? We shall study only one of these beatitudes, possibly the one that is quoted as frequently as any, and one of the most loved of the. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*"

The Heart

Let us first understand what is meant by the heart. The heart includes the intellect. It is with the heart that man thinks (Proverbs 23:7), understands (Matthew 13:11), and believes (Romans 10:10).

The heart includes the emotions. It is with the heart than man desires (Romans 10:1), loves (Matthew 22:37), and trusts (Provebrs 3:5).

The heart includes man's will. It is with the heart that man purposes (Second Corinthians 9:7), determines (Second Corinthians 7:37), obeys (Romans 6:17), and intends (Hebrews 4:12).

The heart includes the spirit, the mind, the inner man. It is not that muscular pump in the chest cavity of the body. It is the real person. Purity of heart refers to the purity of the soul of man.

Purity

That which is pure is free from pollution and all impurities. Pure gold is free from all dross. Pure water contains nothing harmful. We are not fearful of drinking pure water because it is clean and wholesome. The pure heart is free from evil. There is cleanliness of thought, singleness of purpose, and sincerity of motive. To be pure in heart one must think on pure things. "*Finally brethren, whatsoever things are... pure... think on these things.*" (Philippians 4:8). To be pure in heart means to love the right things. "*If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.*" (Colossians 3:1,2). The Bible says that Daniel "*purposed in his heart he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank.*" (Daniel 1:8). That is what it means to have a pure heart.

The Jews in the time of Christ stressed ceremonial purity. They were very strict about rituals and prided themselves in doing various actions in just a certain way. Possibly some today put great emphasis only in the outward rituals and the outward show or piety. Certainly, the observance that Christ has given us to observe must be done with reverence and sincerity and we are not saying that the rituals ordained by Christ are unimportant. But there is so much more than an outward display of a alledged purity. When Christ taught, He took note of doing the right things in the right way. But that all began with emphasis on the heart, the inner man. He condemned having

just an outward purity. "*Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*" (Matthew 23:25-28).

If the heart is kept pure, then the life will be pure. Proverbs 4:23, "*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.*" "*O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*" (Matthew 12:34,35). "*But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.*" (Matthew 15:18-20).

"They shall see God"

The blessedness that comes to the pure in heart is that "*they shall see God.*" The key word in the phrase is "*see.*" There is a clearness of vision. This has no reference to the natural, physical vision. After all, God is a Spirit (John 4:24). But it is with reference to the heart that understands the things of God. He has an appreciation and gratitude for God. He properly evaluates the greatness, importance, and goodness of all things of God that pertain to life and godliness. A diseased eye, one with defects, gives an unclear vision and distortion of that which is seen. Only the clear and single eye, without double-vision, possesses the clear view. A sinful and impure heart gives a false view of things holy. Only the pure in heart see God as He really is as revealed in His Word.

The object of the vision is God. Not only shall the pure in heart see God in heaven in all of His glory, but in a sense the pure in heart see God even now. We see God in His works. Psalm 19:1, "*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the*

firmament showeth his handiwork." Who can gaze upon the wonders of our universe and not be amazed at the glory, power, beauty, and magnificence of the creation, and be impressed with the Creator? We can see God in His people. Jesus said, "*Let your light so shine before man that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16). Paul wrote, "*...no longer I that live but Christ liveth in me."* (Colossians 3:3). When we see one who is obedient to God, we see the reflection of the Son of God. When we see someone doing good, we see Christ in their lives. When we see people doing the Lord's will, following His Word, living His way, we see the guidance, influence, and direction of God. When we see a Bible, we see the result of the miraculous inspiration of men as they were guided by the Holy Spirit to write the revelation of God to man. But the most glorious of all vision will be when the pure in heart see God in heaven.

The words of the familiar hymn seem to express the idea quite adequately. It speaks of that which lies before us when we shall see God in all His glory.

Only faintly now I see him,
With a darkling veil between,
But a blessed day is coming
When his glory shall be seen.

Face to face shall I behold him,
Far beyond the starry sky,
Face to face in all his glory,
I shall see him by and by.

It is noticeable that in the beatitudes Jesus did not say, "Blessed are philosophers, the intellectual giants, the scholars, those who do many might works for the eyes of men, the successful according to the world's standards." Rather, those who are truly blessed are those whose treasure is in that which is eternal in nature. The blessed are those who are faithful, stedfast, and unwavering in the truth. True success is being right with God. The true inward peace and happiness comes to those whose hearts are in tune with Jesus Christ.

A pure heart is free from malice, lust, envy, pride, jealousy, hate, greed, ill-will toward others, selfishness, or holding a grudge. The pure heart seeks the very best for all others at all

times. This is a heart of love. It is a heart that loves peace, truth, righteousness, God, Christ, the church, neighbors, and doing good.

How Is The Heart Made Pure?

With this array of importance of the pure heart before us, we are now concerned with the thought of how one's heart can be made pure. The answer is, "By the blood of Christ." Acts 15:9, "*...cleansing their hearts by faith.*" This is faith in Christ. Belief and trust in Christ is part of the cleansing process. First Peter 1:22, "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth.*" Faith, plus obedience, is the way the heart becomes pure. That which must be obeyed are the commands of the gospel; namely, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. It is then that the blood of Christ, which was shed in His death, is applied to our hearts and we are made pure (Romans 6:3,4).

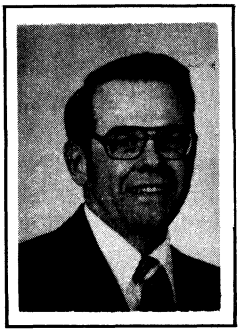
Our hearts are kept pure so long as we "*walk in the light as he is in the light.*" (First John 1:7). His blood not only cleanses the heart at baptism, but His blood is the power that keeps us clean as we live faithfully before Him.

"Purer in heart, O God, help me to be," is the prayer of every Christian. The question before those yet out of Christ is, "Is thy heart right with God?"

† † † † †

Appreciation

Nothing makes us happier than when we receive words of encouragement from those who read the sermons in this booklet. We are not so gullible as to think that they are always deserving of the kind remarks we have read. But it does the heart good to know that the efforts we are making are getting the truth of God into the hands of other people, and people who love the truth. Thank you. JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

A Faulty Measure

Let us not be too hasty in judging the value or the soundness of a sermon. All sermons must be according to "this saith the Lord." If they are, and if a preacher will preach the whole counsel of God both positively and negatively, his sermon will be useful and true to the book.

But some may be inclined to measure a sermon almost entirely on the number of Scriptures a preacher may quote or cite during his sermon. But is that always a fair measure? Sermons must include the Word of God and passages pertaining to the subject should be cited. But some subjects, although solidly based on Scripture, need not have a long array of passages. Many good sermons have been preached from just one verse. When the subject is treated according to the Scriptures, the sermon is proper. It is a mistake to measure a sermon by the mere number of passages used. The soundness of a sermon depends on whether the preacher has handled aright the Word of truth, properly applied the passages, and delivered his thoughts in a way that his hearers come to an understanding of the will of God.

The next sermon you hear or read, ask, "Is it the truth?" If it is, obey.

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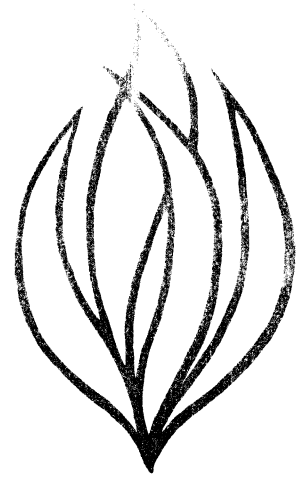

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III James W. Boyd **NUMBER 8**

The Restoration Plea

It is healthy for people to ask questions regarding themselves. Often questions are raised, "Who are we? What is our place in the religious world? Why do we exist? What are we for? What are we against? What is our purpose and our goal? What makes us distinctive?" All such questions are important.

Both young and old are asking such questions about the church of Christ. It is apparent that many do not know about the church because they consider us just another denomination among denominations. Even some who are members of the church seem to have some confusion about this. They consider us no better, no worse, and not really different from other churches. This misunderstanding among members could possibly stem from a "hand-me-down" faith with little study and even less knowledge acquired for one's own research. Just because something is handed down does not make it wrong. If truth is handed down it is still the truth. But should we not know, understand, believe and obey the truth because we do it ourselves and not simply because those before us did so? We should not be concerned about traditions just because they are traditions. If something is right we ought to hold to it. If it is not right, we ought to abandon it for what is right. We should be concerned for the truth, but we must accept it for ourselves, be converted in our own hearts, be convinced by the evidence.

We want to give some answers to such questions about the church and who we are, why we are distinctive, the plea we make, the basis upon which we stand. The story will be told in four parts. It begins before the foundation of the world.

Came From God

The church came from the mind of God. Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:9-11, that "*by the church the manifold wisdom of God*" is known. The existence of the church is evidence of God's wisdom in saving man. The church was in God's eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus the Lord.

From the Old Testament we have God's promises and prophecies that foretold the establishment of His kingdom, which is the church. God gave certain promises to Abraham (Genesis 12,18,22) which included the greatest of these promises, "*And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be*

blessed..." (Genesis 22:18). Paul said that "*seed*" was Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). Peter said that all the prophets foretold of those days (Acts 3:24). Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, all had words that pointed to the coming of God's kingdom, the Messiah, the scheme of redemption, and the salvation of man. Through types, antitypes, prophecies, promises, shadows, arrows pointing to the church, God, through Israel, brought to pass that which was in His mind before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

John the Baptist came preaching repentance, that the kingdom was "*at hand,*" that is, nearby, or soon to be. He was preparing the way for the coming of the Lord. (Mark 1:1-4,15).

Christ was born of a virgin in Bethlehem, lived life perfectly, fulfilled the prophecies spoken of the Messiah, was betrayed, crucified, and buried. On the third day He arose from the grave and later ascended into heaven. Those things foretold had come to pass (Luke 24:44; Acts 3:18; Matthew 5:17). Upon His ascension He took His place of authority at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34), as the prophet Daniel had described in some detail in Daniel, chapter seven. He became King of kings and Lord of lords (First Timothy 6:15).

The Spirit Promised

Christ had promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles (John 14,15,16). He had instructed them to wait for this promise in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49). At that city the Holy Spirit would come with power (Luke 24:49). Promised power would be in the person of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit did come upon the apostles as promised, the gospel was preached in its fulness for the first time, people heard it, believed, were instructed what to do to be saved, and they obeyed those instructions, and were added to the church (Acts 2). That is what the church is -- the saved. The church is composed of those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel. In this way God made it possible for people to be washed clean in the blood of the Christ and be saved. As Jesus had said in Luke 24:47, repentance and remission of sins began to be preached from that day. The Lord's church, which had for a long period been promised and predicted, had actually become a reality. The kingdom had come.

That church that Christ promised to build and that began on Pentecost is revealed in the New Testament. This leads us into

the second part of our story. Those who were members of the Lord's church believed certain things, practiced certain things. Those beliefs and practices are taught in the New Testament. They worshiped a certain way, were organized according to a certain pattern, enjoyed certain promises and blessings, had a certain hope, preached a certain doctrine, and gave heed to certain warnings. All of this is found in the New Testament. The characteristics of His church are all laid before us in Scripture.

That church grew numerically and spiritually. The gospel was preached to all the world. Before the apostolic days ended, ominous warnings were given by inspiration. Prophecies of apostasy were written. Suffice it here to list the location of several of these passages that contain these warnings and prophecies: Acts 20:28-31; Second Thessalonians 2:1-12; First Timothy 4:1-3; Second Timothy 4:3; Second Peter 2:1-2 . There would be a falling away. False teachers would come in *"not sparing the flock."* False doctrines would be taught. Apostasy was in the future for the church.

Apostasy Realized

History reveals to us the fulfillment of those dire predictions. It did not occur rapidly. It was not an "overnight" event. It was gradual, sometimes so gradual that those involved were not even able to detect the drift from the truth. Such is the case with apostasy many times. But gradually that which was known as Christianity became distorted, altered, twisted, defiled, polluted, changed, and revised. The teaching suffered from additions and subtractions. Practice began to take on different forms as innovations and doctrines of men were expedited. Further and further from the truth did men go. Still, they were erroneously called Christians. Eventually, that which Christ gave His life to establish was hardly a resemblance to what had become known as Christianity. What was called Christianity had become a scourge, a plague, a physical and spiritual pestilence among men. Men had changed the government of the church, the doctrine it upheld, introduced creeds, changed the worship, side-tracked its mission. What most historians now call the "dark ages" is called the "golden age of the church" by Roman Catholicism because the Roman church was the result of the apostasy from the truth.

Efforts To Reform

From here we go into the third part of the story as to who we are. With all this departure from the truth, we are provoked to ask, "Why didn't somebody say and do something about it?" Many did make efforts. Through the years various ones opposed the apostasy and attempted to adhere to New Testament Christianity. Very likely there were faithful Christians even during those dark ages. But certainly the record shows little of them. Those who tried to oppose the trend away from truth found it a hard way, often a bloody way. They were persecuted, and many were exterminated. They were threatened and deprived of the necessities of life. They suffered much.

Eventually, their sentiments against the harsh and cruel oppression of Romanism grew and became so strong that in some quarters men could speak out and live. There was Luther, Zwingli, Knox, Calvin, and Wesley. Their plea was that Romanism was wrong and what men needed to do was to go back to the Bible as the authority in religion. They urged people to cast off the papal tyranny and reform the Roman Church. The Bible was translated for the common man to read. This was facilitated by the invention of the printing press. There was a great awakening for spiritual reform, hence, the Reformation Period. It is called a Protestant Reformation because it protested against Romanism.

The overall results of this reformation are a mixed sort. There was good but there also arose a hideous evil. Rome's hold over the body and soul of man was broken. The Bible was delivered to the people. People began to search the Scriptures for the truth. But this reformation also brought in the maze of religious confusion that produced denominationalism. There were produced more and more creeds, doctrines of men, churches of men. The pope had been dethroned, but other men had been enthroned. Groups banded together founding many churches rather than returning to the church of the Bible. This chaos has grown until it is dominant in what is mistakenly called "Christianity" today. It is important that we know how all the religious confusion came to be, but more important is to know how this confusion could be disspelled. We need to return to the church of the Bible.

Efforts To Restore

Consider the fourth part of the story. In the midst of all these varying, contradictory doctrines, churches, creeds, faiths,

practices, authorities, and names, voices began to be heard once again that we should give heed to the Scriptures.

Did not our Lord pray for unity in John 17:20,21? Did not Paul condemn division in First Corinthians 1:10? Are not the Scriptures all-sufficient according to Second Timothy 3:16,17? Should we not speak "*as the oracles of God*"? (First Peter 4:11). Is it not condemned to add to or take from God's Word? (Galatians 1:6-9; Second John 9-11). Why cannot we take the same seed of the kingdom which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11), and sow that in good and honest hearts and expect the same result as that when the gospel was first preached on the earth? It produced Christians then (Acts 11:26), and it will produce Christians now. We can turn to the Scriptures and learn how to organize the church, how to worship with God's approval, what to preach, believe, and practice. We can abandon human traditions and follow the truth. We can bind what God has bound and loose what He has loosed. Why cannot people be added to the same church the same way that was done when the church had its beginning and early growth? "Return to the Bible" was the watchword. Follow the New Testament faith and nothing more.

The effort is called the Restoration Movement for want of a better term. It is so called because it attempts to restore Christianity before there was the confused Protestant denominationalism, before there was the domination of the Roman Church, before there was the deadly apostasy. Various men with such names as Stone, Smith, Jones, Scott, Campbell, and others, arose and preached "thus saith the Lord" with the Bible as their guide and standard. They called not for another denomination, but the restoration of the Lord's church.

Our Goal

Friend, this is the cause we perpetuate today. This is what we are trying to do and who we are determined to be. Nothing less and nothing more than Christians as taught in the New Testament. We are members of the church of which you can read in the Bible. We are *"set for the defense of the gospel,"* ready to *"contend earnestly for the faith once delivered."* We stand upon God's Word as the sole authority in religion. We are a distinctive people, not because of any merit of our own, but because we are God's people, having come to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

We have no inordinate commitment to some human movement, not even what is called a Restoration Movement, but it so happens that such a movement is the attempt to follow just what the Scriptures teach. We are commited to what the Bible teaches. This is who we are, why we are, what we are, and it is here that we take our stand and stake our lives, both here and in the hereafter. Our stand is Christ and all things revealed pertaining to Him.

This cause is the noblest of all because it is the Lord's cause. It is the way of salvation for mankind. Herein is the answer to the dilemmas of life and solutions to problems. It is the way of peace, hope, and assurance of heaven. Herein is the saved relationship with God.

Our plea is for men to come with us as we march according to the steps of the Christ. What of you personally and your relationship to such a cause?

† † † † †

Dead Or Alive?

The thoughts of this lesson are probably appropriate regarding any congregation, especially where there are evidences of activity. The lesson serves as a warning and provocation to self-examination, an encouragement and commendation, as well as an exhortation to every member of the church to better ways and better things in the future.

Revelation 2 and 3 contain letters written by Christ to the seven churches of Asia, recorded by John as he was directed to write. Possibly these churches were established directly or indirectly by the efforts of Paul. We know this is true of some of them. We are not to suppose that these were the only churches in Asia, but these are the ones to whom these letters were originally and specifically addressed. The content of these letters is properly applied to any congregation, even today. Have you ever wondered what kind of letter the congregation to which you belong would receive? Very likely it would contain essentially what these letters contain.

The Lord Knows

Each letter is either introduced or includes the words, "*I know...*" Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodecia had the words, "*I know thy works.*" Smyrna was told, "*I know thy tribulation.*" Pergamum read, "*I know where thou dwellest.*" The point is, Christ knows what there is to know about every church and every member of that church. He can know not only their actions individually but also collectively. He can know the hearts of people and therefore know their motives. He can speak with authority inasmuch as He is the Son of God. "*For he knew what was in man.*" (John 2:25).

Jesus knows the good things about churches and individuals. He knows their toil, patience, refusal to endure false teachers, doctrines, ways, stedfastness, tribulations, poverty, willingness to suffer and sacrifice, their love, faith, and service. In nearly every letter Christ mentions some good concerning each church. This is not true of all, but of most of these churches. He commends those things that are worthy of commendation.

He also knows what is lacking. Often we read the expression, "*But I have this against thee.*" There were many good things in Ephesus, but, "*Thou didst leave thy first love.*" He told Smyrna, which mostly was a letter of good words of commendation, that they were in danger of weakening and falling under the pressure of suffering and prison. Whereas Ephesus would not tolerate false teachers, the church at Pergamum had some that held to false and erroneous doctrines, even idolatry and immorality. Thyatira also had false teachers in its midst. They had a constant, disturbing, divisive irritation from a faction that was characterized was being like Jezebel. Some have thought this faction was led by a woman. Whatever of that, it was causing many to sin, eat things offered to idols, and have their hope of salvation taken from them.

Singularly, there was nothing said against the church in Philadelphia and nothing commendable said about the church in Laodecia. The latter was lukewarm, half-hearted, indifferent, and deceived into thinking they were acceptable when they were not. They thought physical prosperity was an indication of spiritual prosperity. It is not.

To Sardis

We wish to concentrate this lesson on the letter to Sardis in Revelation 3:1-6. Before we read the text let us be aware that Christ is keenly aware of all congregations. He knows about

them all. He knows the strong points and the weak points, even to what is in the heart of each member. We cannot deceive Christ even though we may deceive ourselves. He knows us as we really are.

"*And unto the angel of the church in Sardis, write, These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*"

The church at Sardis had a reputation of being active, alive, mission-minded, benevolent, quick to respond when the need arose. It was known for that kind of conduct. But the real truth was that they were spiritually dead. We wonder how they could get such a reputation for being alive if they were spiritually dead. They doubtless had many activities in progress, a lot going on, promoting many things, and entering many efforts. To others it seemed they were "on fire for the Lord." But in God's sight they were dead.

Death means separation, vanity, uselessness. When one dies physically there is the separation of body and spirit, separation from all that this world offers. Spiritual speaking, being dead means separated from God and His favor. Sardis appeared alive because of great physical activity, but spiritually they were not so prosperous.

Business Or Busy-ness

Brethren are sometimes heard to say, "Let's get something going." If we be a faithful church we must do that. If a church is alive there will be something going on, and a lot of beneficial activity that God has taught us to do we will do. But there can be much activity and still the church not be acceptable to God.

We have need for more than just activity. We need to be careful what the activity is and whether it is authorized of God or not. The church ought not be busy doing just anything. But Sardis seemed to be alive, but was actually dead.

Furthermore, Jesus said, "*For I have not found thy works perfect before God.*" The word "*perfect*" means complete. Work was started but not finished. It was not being carried out to its fullest. They were capable of far more than they were doing. While they were doing many things, they were falling far short of their potential and their ability. There were many avenues to promote the cause of Christ that they had not touched, and many they had touched they quit before completion. It must have been a church where there was great zeal for getting things started but the zeal faded in gettings things completed.

Not everyone in that church was that way. There were those who had not defiled their garment. They were promised that they would walk with Him in white. There were the "faithful few" among them. Most congregations have them, and it is a good thing they do. Many congregations might not exist except for the "faithful few." It may well be that the good reputation was more because of the efforts put forth by this few than the efforts of the entire church. The implication is that most of the members of the church were not doing their duty and sitting around letting a few others carry the load. Some may have been hoping to "ride on the coattails" of others into heaven. They may have been like the elephant and the flea who crossed a bridge with the flea on the elephant's back. The bridge shook and quivered, but they reached the other side. The flea then said to the elephants, "We sure shook that bridge this time." One thing every Christian needs to learn and that is we all have our duties and cannot go to heaven riding on somebody else's back and their good works.

This problem can be the problem with most any congregation that seems to be the example of activity. "We have gospel meetings regularly," one might say, but who really supports them? "Our contribution is growing," but who is giving as he ought? "We have this youth activity, that program of interest, first this, then that." In many churches known for numerical growth they have much activity, but it is not activity that is truly befitting the Lord's church. Some have branched away into entertainment, more of a food-fun-frolic fellowship, athletics, even building gymnasiums, fellowship halls, and spending more time, money and energy taking people to playlands than getting

people to know the gospel truth. This is taking its toll against the real progress of the Lord's church because it is reducing the church in the minds of the world and many members that the church is just another social-minded, poor man's "country club," more akin to a denomination than the body of Christ.

Some congregations pride themselves in thinking all is well because they are not worse than others. But others are not the standard. No member ought to feel content because another member is active. We all should ask, "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?"

Individual Judgment

The truth is, we shall not stand before God in that final day of judgment as a congregation to be judged as a group. The judgment shall be on an individual basis. Yes, the Lord is concerned about the congregation now because they are His. But when the final summons comes and "*each one of us shall give account of himself to God,*" (Romans 14:12), it will be on an individual basis.

That day will be a bad day for brother Do-nothing and sister Holdback. It will be the doom of those who sat back to "let the other fellow do it." It will be the day of undoing for those who were active but active outside the authority of Christ. It will be the crushing day of disappointment to those who thought all was well just because they belonged to an "active" congregation when they were not among the active, or the activity was not by divine authority.

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The final words of a person are significant and often emphasize the truthfulness of certain passages of Scripture. Henry Cabot Lodge's last words were, "The doctors promise prompt recovery. I shall be back in Washington well and strong, and I trust that I shall be able to be of some service to you when I get there." But he died.

Read James 4:13-15 and note the certainty of death, the uncertainty of life, and man's dependence on God.

How Do You Hear?

"And when it was day he departed and went into a desert place, and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee. And it came to pass as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake Gennesaret and saw two ships standing by the lake, but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he should thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people out of the ship." (Luke 4:42-5:3).

The people were anxious to hear the Word of God. Many people even yet are hungry for good, solid, sound gospel preaching. Bibles are being sold by the millions, even though we must sadly acknowledge that many of them are the perverted modern versions rather than reliable translations. But when we read, study, and hear preachers and teachers proclaim truth from the Bible we are hearing God's Word.

Factors Involved

Several factors are involved in hearing the message. There is the great message itself, the gospel. There is the preacher whose ability to preach has much to do with getting the message across. His manner and attitude displayed can affect the reception of the message. But there is also the hearer to be considered. The way the Word is received is important. Hearing and understanding the Word of God is vital to us. When we know we cannot be saved without faith, (Hebrews 11:6), and faith comes by hearing the Word, (Romans 10:17), we can appreciate the importance of the way we hear.

Our Lord spoke of those who had ears but did not hear (Mark 8:18). He had no reference to physical deafness. The sounds around them were very audible and that they heard. But because of the way they heard the Word, the motive for listening, their reaction, they could not and would not understand. Therefore, they could not believe and could not be spiritually healed.

At the end of teaching the parable of the sower, Jesus warned, "*Take heed how ye hear.*" (Luke 8:18). Our motive for hearing the Word will determine how we react to it. The Lord says we must beware, take heed, be careful to rightly hear the Word. This lesson shall investigate five motives which people had in New Testament days for hearing the Word. These same motives will likely motivate some to hear today.

Curiosity

Some listened to Paul preach out of idle curiosity. This was true in Athens (Acts 17:16-21). "*Now while Paul waited for them in Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? Other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears. We would know therefore what these things mean. [For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new things].*"

Paul was waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him in Athens. He observed the idolatry of the city and had to begin preaching the truth. It has been said that in Athens at this time there were more idols than people. So Paul preached openly, in the marketplaces, synagogues, whereever he had an opportunity. But those who came to listen in Athens were of a peculiar sort. Athens was overrunning with people who wanted knowledge for knowledge's sake. They would gather to listen and speak just so they would be aware what was going on. They seldom acted upon their knowledge even though they knew much. Their reason for wanting to hear Paul further was curiosity about the message he was proclaiming. They really did not care about its truthfulness one way or the other.

Could it be that many today study the Bible for no greater motive than this even now? Possibly some attend a worship period of the church for the sake of knowing what goes on, not out of a desire to know God's truth. We cannot de-emphasize

the importance of knowledge, but we dare not conclude that merely knowing the content of the Word will produce the blessings we need.

Personal Gain

Some listen to preaching with the desire for personal advancement and material gain. When I was a child a druggist came into our community and attended worship and expressed, "It is good business to go to church." There was a politician in our community who always went around visiting all the churches in the area just before an election. Some make sure they have their church membership in the largest and most prosperous church. This motive is not a new one, even though it is an evil one. "*And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him, wherefore he sent for him the oftener and communed with him. But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix' room, and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.*" (Acts 24:24-27).

Felix heard the Word and heard it often. He hoped he might get something from Paul, a bribe, if he listened. His motive was not to learn the truth to be saved and please God. He sought personal gain for himself.

Some followed Jesus and heard Him preach for no better reason. "*Ye seek me... because ye did eat of the loaves.*" (John 6:26). To hear the Word in order to get gain, have social status, be acceptable to man, to see and be seen, is a deplorable reason for hearing the Word of God.

Try To Trap

Some will listen to the preaching of the gospel with the expectation and desire to ensnare and entrap the preacher. They are trying to find fault in what he is saying. Possibly they listen attentively hoping to hear something wherein they can fault a neighbor or brother. Preachers are aware that sinister motives may exist for hearing. This is the reason a gospel

preacher will rely heavily on "thus saith the Lord" for what he preaches. If fault is found, the charge must be laid against God. Preachers are cautious and careful about the facts presented. They spend hours making sure the truth is taught and stand ready to prove, or attempt to prove, whatever they teach.

There were those who came to hear Jesus with this evil motive. "*And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.*" (Mark 12:13). What a wonderful opportunity they had! But they wasted it because they listened with the wrong motive. Still his words were twisted and distorted in order to find fault and make accusation against him. Those who hear the Word with this motive only harm themselves the most.

Trying to prove somebody else wrong is not likely going to bring one to the truth unless he approaches the Word with an open mind. It is not a hard thing to find fault in human beings, preachers especially. But while one listens to preaching with this motive, he will miss that by which he could have been profited. We should not hear the Word just waiting to take issue with something one may say and then use it against him.

There is a story about a person who approached the preacher after a sermon and told him nothing was gained from the lesson. Criticism was given for using the expression "ain't" in one phrase. He did not recall using it, but knew it was possible, so he asked, "What did I say just before I said it?" The critic did not recall. "Well, what did I say after it?" Again, the critic did not recall. He then remarked, "Well, I am glad I said it because if I had not you would not have heard anything else I said all morning." Surely, the Lord is not pleased with those who hear for the purpose of trapping the preacher.

Attitude Toward The Preacher

You have heard of people who rejected the gospel message because they did not like the preacher. Others sometimes receive the message only because they like the preacher. Obviously, some speakers appeal to some that may not attract others. This is not alarming. Everyone has likes and dislikes along this line. But to consent to hear and receive the gospel only when certain ones are doing the preaching is placing the messenger above the message. Some people stay away from services because their favorite preacher may not be preaching. Some will not support efforts to save souls, like gospel meetings,

if they do not like the preacher. Others will come only if they like him. Their interest in the truth is secondary to the one teaching it. Their love for truth rises no higher than men. They will show love for God only if they like the preacher.

This was part of the trouble in the church in Corinth. "*For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*" (First Corinthians 1:11-13). These brethren had a problem of "preacher-following." Paul wrote, "*For while one saith I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.*" (First Corinthians 3:4-7).

While preachers appreciate encouragement and like to have their efforts appreciated, we cannot tie our soul's welfare to any man. Men often disappoint you, anyway. We ought to support the gospel whoever and whenever and wherever one is preaching the truth so long as he preaches the truth.

Love For The Truth

There were those then, and now, who hear the Word because they want to know God's truth. This was certainly the motive of the Ethiopian as he read his copy of the Scriptures. It was his motive for asking Philip to join him and teach him. He sought no personal gain materially. It was not mere curiosity on his part. He did not seek to trap Philip, nor was he looking for the opportunity to praise Philip. He yearned to know what the prophet meant. He wanted to know the truth. This is the highest motive and the one that will open the heart of man to receive and obey truth.

When a person approaches God's Word with this good motive, there will be several other virtues he will possess. He will hear it with respect and reverence that he is hearing God's Word and it is worthy of reception. Paul told the Thessalonians, "*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it*

not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (First Thessalonians 2:13).

When we approach the Word with the desire for the truth we will have an open mind, subject to being taught, like Cornelius. "*Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."* (Acts 10:33). We can put aside previous prejudices and religious ideas once held sacred and take the truth to heart.

When we approach the Word desiring truth we will be more likely to apply what God says to ourselves, not just to others. "*Take heed to thyself,"* was a warning Paul gave. "*Let a man examine himself,"* he told the Corinthians. "*Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth,"* is the attitude we should have. Before trying to see how the truth applies to some other, one who comes to the truth wanting the truth will apply it to himself, measuring himself by the divine standard.

When one wants the truth he will measure what he hears by the written Word. Peter taught us, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11). If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the pit. "*Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good."* (First Thessalonians 5:21). Be like the noble Bereans who searched the Scriptures to be sure what they heard was true (Acts 17:11). John wrote, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (First John 4:1). This is why gospel preachers urge their hearers to study the Bible.

Those who are hungry for truth will not be satisfied with a minimum diet of the bread of life. They will take advantage of opportunities to hear it. Great blessings await those who will hear God's Word with a good motive. In New Testament days such people were converted and "*went on their way rejoicing."* Jesus compares those who hear and do to a wise man who built his house on rock rather than sand (Matthew 7:24-27). But the question comes to each one, "How do you hear?"

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What Jesus Means

Sometimes we see sermons entitled, "What Jesus Means To Me." The thought struck me that this is not what we need to be preaching. What Jesus means to me is important to me, but not to anyone else. What He means to one person may be different from what He means to another. Is there a different Jesus for each person? What needs to be preached is what Jesus means. It is God's intention that He mean the same to everyone. What Jesus means is revealed to us in Scripture. What He may mean to me, or someone else, will not necessarily be what the Bible reveals concerning Him. While each one's relationship to Jesus is important, our task in preaching Christ is to preach what the Bible teaches us and not giving some personal testimony about our subjective attitudes and concepts.

Savior

Jesus is Savior. We all sin (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Since it is not possible for me to deliver myself, by myself, I need a Savior (Titus 3:3-5; Ephesians 2:8,9). None of my friends can save me, nor any in my family. There is no animal sacrifice that is sufficient (Hebrews 10:4). But Christ has provided for my salvation by His death on the cross. "*But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*" (Romans 5:8,9). "*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*" (Hebrews 9:12). What does Christ mean? He means there is a Savior for all of us. Without Him there is no Savior (Acts 4:12).

Hope

Christ is the hope for that which is better. Paul identified Jesus as "*our hope.*" (First Timothy 1:1). We have hope in this life and for the life to come. "*I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*" (John 10:10). Through God's providence we are assured the necessities of life as He sees we need them (Matthew 6:33). We benefit from all the joys, blessings, and comforts of Christian service. We have

friends, Christian associates, and fellowship with Deity and the redeemed. While life is not always rosy and downhill, even plagued with sickness, poverty, pain, and heartache, we have the teaching of the Lord that enables us to overcome evil, or accept what we cannot change, and endure rather than be defeated. Because of Christ the burdens of life are more tolerable and easier to bear. Life is better.

But our great hope lies beyond this life. "*And this is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life.*" (First John 2:25). "*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*" (First John 5:11). After all, this life on earth is but a vapor (James 4:14). Even though we must die (Hebrews 9:27), we shall be raised (First Thessalonians 4:17). Life with God in heaven shall have no end (Revelation 22:5). "*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" (Philippians 1:21). The writer of Hebrews reminded brethren, "*...knowing that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.*" (Hebrews 10:34). What we may sacrifice here in this life shall be replaced a hundred fold (Matthew 19:29). Indeed, heaven is a better place (Hebrews 11:16), and this is our hope.

Example

Christ is also the example and leader. The road of life may have many treacherous pitfalls, stumblingblocks, snares, and traps set by the devil. Jeremiah warned, "*It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.*" (Jeremiah 10:23). We need a leader and guide through life. The way is dark and we have no light of our own. We look to another, and that is Christ.

"*Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*" (First Peter 2:21). Jesus extends to all the invitation to come and follow Him. "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). We are not led out into the wilderness of life and left alone and stranded. We have the light of Christ. Simeon, when he saw the Christ as a child, said, "*Light to Gentiles, glory to Israel.*" Proverbs 3:6 teaches, "*In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*"

Christ not only tells of the way but shows us the way, set the example for us to follow. "*He did no sin, neither was there guile in his mouth.*" (First Peter 2:22).

We need not fear as we travel with Christ. There is a true story of a boy who was walking home with his father late one

evening. As they approached the railroad and the dark station house nearby, about which "ghost stories" had been circulated among the children, the boy asked his father, "Daddy, are you afraid?" The father replied, "No, son, I am not afraid. Are you?" Upon hearing the reassurances of his father, now with a stronger and more confident voice, the boy responded, "I'm not afraid either." We need have no fear with Christ near.

Strength

We need strength day by day, and who is the source of that strength? Christ is our strength! "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" (Philippians 4:13). Human strength can accomplish just so much. It is limited and very insufficient for so many things. While the Lord does not provide some kind of miraculous energy for us, we are motivated, provoked, encouraged, and helped through the teaching of His Word to do better than we otherwise could or would. With His help, given through His providence, we can accomplish the good that He expects from us. "*Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart.*" (Psalm 27:14).

Our Lord is ever with us in our Christian tasks. Through His Word we receive the help we need. In answer to our prayers, we are recipients of His blessings. In ways that we may not be able to notice and even comprehend, the Lord is as a shield from evil, a protector from real harm, a source of cheer, and consolation. "*The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*" (Hebrews 13:6).

There are times that come in life that we feel so useless and inadequate. We think we are failures and despair is in our heart. But as we read the Word of God we are motivated to "*press on toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*" (Philippians 3:4).

Has not the Word of God raised our ideals and goals in life? Has it not shown us the better way to live than we could have discovered for ourselves? Is it not true that in the Bible we learn of life's purposes and intentions? Because of Christ, life has meaning and we will not fail through Him.

Intercessor

Christ is man's advocate and intercessor, that is, to those who come to Him to benefit from His salvation offer. He "*ever liveth*

to make intercession" for me and for others (Hebrews 7:25). He is the One through whom we make our approach to the Father (John 14:6). It is as if He is pleading our case and our cause before the Father on our behalf. The Father will hear His Son, and His Son is interceding for each Christian.

There is no other that could so effectively intercede inasmuch as He understands us, having been tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15). He took on the fashion of man and lived on this earth. Nobody can ever say to Christ, "You just do not understand because you have not lived here." Many of our fellow human beings cannot fully understand and sympathize, but Christ can and does. He knows the hearts of all people, their weaknesses, their motives, their strengths, and their shortcomings. Who is in a better position to be the advocate that man needs than Jesus Christ?

What a joy it will be when we stand before God in judgment, having confessed the name of Christ while we lived here on earth, and have Him confess us before the angels of God (Luke 12:8,9). We have His promise He will be there with us.

There is a song we sing in our worship that has this phrase: "Jesus is all the world to me, my life, my joy, my all. He is my strength from day to day. Without Him I would fall." The song concludes, "He's my Friend." He is not like any other friends we may have in this life. None can exceed Him. He watches over us day and night, knowing the times of our failings, but also the times when we succeed in resisting temptation and when we have done good, striving nobly in His name.

There is no way for me to know what Jesus means to you or some other. But I know what He means to me. But more importantly, I know what God would have Him mean to each of us. The beautiful part is that He will be all these things to *"whosoever will"* come to Him.

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Many well-meaning people mistakenly take the passages that affirm the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and assume that they also affirm a literal, personal, actual, bodily, and direct indwelling. But the Holy Spirit dwells in us as does the Father and the Son, and that by and through the Word of God.

Be Prepared

When I was a boy I was a member of the Boy Scouts of America. The motto of that organization was, "Be prepared." Is it any less true in being a Christian? There are many things for which the Christian must be prepared.

Many golden opportunities are lost because of the lack of adequate and proper preparation. Business advantages are lost; battles are lost; lives are lost. Recently I read of an airman who lost his life because he failed to properly prepare his parachute. He was unprepared for the emergency. The very emphasis of education is preparedness. The young need to be encouraged to prepare themselves for life, marraige, jobs, and service. The Jew taught his child a trade. Jesus was a carpenter. How many social and financial problems could be avoided if people would prepare themselves for what they have to do?

The Greatest Need For Preparedness

Man's greatest need is for the soul to be prepared to meet God. Without this we will be lost eternally in hell. There are certain inevitable events before everyone. Hebrews 9:27, "*And it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.*" Not only are there certain inevitables before us, we cannot render the service to God that we must without effective and efficient preparation.

Heaven has been called a prepared place for a prepared people. Jesus said, "*Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.*" (John 14:1-3). We desire heaven, but we must prepare ourselves for it if we are to get there. It is doubtful that some would enjoy heaven if they were permitted to go. Their lives, aims, ambitions, goals, habits, etc. are not in tune with heaven. Their joys, pleasures, actions show they are not ready for heaven. Some would be bored and dissatisfied and disappointed.

The goal of life is to prepare oneself to be a fit inhabitant of heaven. Even with all we can do, we still must rely on the grace of God to enter. Life is but a vapor and a short period of

existence. We should not live it as if it will never end here on earth, or that this life on earth is all there is to be lived. It is useless to spend our time grasping, possessing, seeking the vain, empty, and eternally useless, and miss heaven. Matthew 25:34, "*Then shall the King say unto them on the right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*"

Heaven is a prepared place, but so is hell. Matthew 25:41, "*Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me ye cursed into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.*" The probing question that concerns us is, "For which destiny are we preparing?"

Scripture Teaches Preparation

Preparation is an oft-repeated Biblical concept. It was so important for Noah to prepare for the coming of the flood. Hebrews 11:7, "*By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house...*" What if Noah had waited until the rains started to get ready?

God prepared Moses for his great task of leading Israel out of bondage. Earlier in his life Moses presumptuously took matters into his own hands and rushed the situation somewhat. But he was not prepared to deliver Israel then. It was forty years later before God called him from the burning bush to assume the guidance of Israel. Two thirds of the life of Moses was spent in preparing him for the major task of his life. During those eighty years he learned leadership, patience, loneliness, stedfastness, courage, endurance, and faith in God. He could never have made it without preparation.

Israel had to make preparations for leaving Egypt. Detailed instructions were given them regarding the passover lanb, how to eat the food, and other matters. What if some had been so foolish as to ignore the need to prepare?

Did not Joseph prepare Egypt for the seven years of famine that was to follow the seven years of plenty? Warehouses were built and grain was stored. What if that had been neglected?

There were preparations made for the initial coming of Christ. John the Baptist had the mission "*to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*" The prophecy of Isaiah had reference to the work of John and was quoted in Matthew 3:3, "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord,*

make his paths straight."

Paul wrote to Titus and said, "*Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.*" (Titus 3:1). If repetition has the power to emphasize, then we can see how Scripture emphasizes the virtue of being prepared.

God Uses The Prepared

Only those who are prepared can do the work God has for man to do. Paul could do his task because he was ready. "*So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also.*" (Romans 1:15). Peter taught readiness. "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*" (First Peter 3:15). The five virgins were called foolish (Matthew 25), because they did not make adequate preparation for the coming of the bridegroom.

We can deceive ourselves into thinking we are prepared when actually we are not. Such was the experience of Peter just prior to the death of Jesus. He had confessed, "*Lord, with thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death.*" (Luke 22:33). Yet, he denied Christ three times in a matter of a few hours from his confession. He was not as prepared for what he encountered as he thought he was. Paul warned, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.*" (First Corinthians 10:12).

Ready To Meet God?

Are you ready to meet your Lord in judgment just as you are right now? We may be called to do that very thing. Life is not promised beyond this moment, and that is soon gone. Have you made all the necessary preparations for death, the resurrection, and the judgment? Paul said he was ready. "*For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my couse, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give unto me in that day; and not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing.*" (Second Timothy 4:6-8). He was ready because he was "in Christ." He had served faithfully and put his

confidence in the Lord.

What To Do

What must be done to get ready to meet God? In Ephesians 6:15 Paul speaks of the preparation of the gospel of peace. The preparation we must make has to do with the gospel. We must hear it, believe it, obey it, and live it faithfully.

Faith in Christ (John 8:24), repentance of sins (Luke 13:3), confession of our faith (Romans 10:9,10). and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38), is the way we begin our preparation. We continue preparing all the days of our lives as we live and labor in God's vineyard as He directs us through His all-sufficient and inspired Word, the Bible (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We must never cease to "*walk in the light as he is in the light.*" (First John 1:7).

A Great Day

"There's a great day coming, when the saints and the sinners shall be parted right and left."

"There's a bright day coming, but its brightness shall only come to them that love the Lord."

"There's a sad day coming, when the sinner shall hear his doom, Depart I know you not."

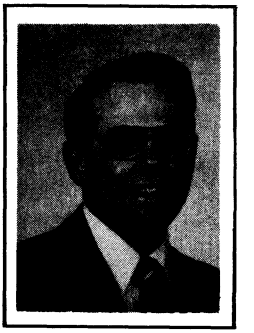
"Are you ready for that day to come?"

† † † † †

Now and again we hear of those who question, even object, to the phrase used by gospel preachers concerning receiving the Spirit "by measure." What is the Scriptural basis for this terminology?

John 3:34, "*For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.*" Jesus, few" among them. Most congregations have being Deity, received the Spirit without limit, without measure. The implication is that others who receive the Spirit receive it by measure, not to the fullest as did the Son. The terminology is proper, therefore.

Facing Goliath



JAMES W. BOYD

When young David volunteered to face Goliath, Saul viewed David as unprepared and incapable of handling such a conflict. First Samuel 17:33, "*Thou art not able to go against the Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.*"

There are things young people cannot do because they lack the skill, training, judgment, and experience. This is not to criticize, but to recognize a reality. Time and learning will remedy such as that. But many are far more capable than we might think. Particularly is this true when they, like David, place their faith in God, rely on Him for their strength and guidance, and are prepared as he was. David had already met danger fearlessly, and he gave God the credit for his victories. He was prepared to meet Goliath because he had proved himself, and he conquered the foe of God's people.

David has taught both young and old by his battle with Goliath that we can meet our modern-day "Goliaths" with confidence if we will have the same heart in us as he had in him. Our enemy can be overcome just as Goliath was overcome. The "secret" lies in where your faith is.

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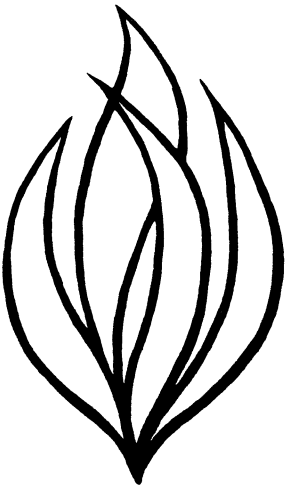

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III **NUMBER 9**

James W. Boyd

Two Fundamental Problems

"O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so-called." (First Timothy 6:20). *"But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strife."* (Second Timothy 2:23). Both of these verses encourage us to avoid some things, prevent things from happening. There is somewhat the sentiment expressed that is in the adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Someone has said it this way, "It is better to build boys than to mend men."

All will agree that it is better to avoid and prevent distress and trouble than to have to overcome it. It is with this attitude that we should approach the lesson presented here.

Being brethren in the family of God, being members of a congregation that is united, at peace within itself, moving forward with great opportunities, we want to do everything we can to preserve and enlarge these qualities and conditions. Not every congregation enjoys these things. Many are torn apart by doctrinal issues, personality problems, etc.

To maintain the unity and strength we have we must always submit to the truth. The best defense against the intrusion of error is a well informed, well taught membership regarding those things that could disrupt.

Liberalism and Legalism

Since Pentecost, the Lord's church has had two fundamental problems, liberalism and human legalism. Liberalism is disrespect for the authority of God, the willingness to go beyond the limits of God's authority, to assume liberties that God has not given and to loose what God has bound. Human legalism is the other extreme. Sometimes called "anti-ism," (but this is not a good term because every Christian must be against some things) and called human legalism to contrast it with the law God has instructed, human legalism is making laws and binding human judgment and opinion as if it were the law of God. Through the years there have been those who have done one or the other, sometimes we find those who have done both.

The Bible is the Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). All

we do, teach and practice must be according to His will (Colossians 3:17; Second John 9-11). To teach otherwise is to bring upon oneself God's wrath (Galatians 1:6-9; First Timothy 6:3; Revelation 22:18,19). We are not given the liberty to do as we please, nor are we given the power to assume the throne of God to make laws as if God was the maker of them. We must operate within that which God has authorized, commanded, permitted, instructed, and allowed.

How God Authorizes

God authorizes by direct commands, by approved examples and by implication or necessary inferences. Let us explain. When God commands something, obviously He authorizes it to be done. When we read of actions people have taken that had God's approval, obviously this authorizes the actions for us. And when God has authorized something, that which is necessary to the accomplishment of that is implied. For instance, since God has commanded baptism, it is implied that He has authorized we provide sufficient water for baptizing. When God said to assemble, it is implied and necessarily inferred that He has authorized there be a place to assemble.

When God has told us what is to be done and has told us how that thing is to be done, both the "what" and the "how" are divine instructions. Both are binding. There is no room for human opinion wherever God has spoken. But when God has told us what to do but has not directed the specifics as to how it is to be done, man must use his judgment, exercise opinion, proceed in an expedient way to do what God says do.

There is no room for variance where God has spoken. There must be liberty anbd charity toward each other in matters of human judgment. Again we illustrate. God has said to "Go..." but man must decide which is the best means for going. God has commanded to baptize, but man must decide what kind of facility is expedient to provide sufficient water. God has said to assemble, but man must determine the best place.

We have no right to loose what God binds, nor bind where God has left it open. For local congregations, God's government is for elders to oversee the affairs of the local church. They have not only the right but the duty to decide in matters of opinion regarding the congregation over which they serve as bishops.

The Danger of Liberalism

The greatest danger in the church at the time of this writing is the growth of liberalism. This is true even while human legalists are still to be found. Human legalism has, does, and will tear the church asunder. But liberalism undermines the authority of God altogether and will remove the church completely from existence if followed.

Even though liberalism is the greatest danger we currently face, we wish now to discuss certain human legalisms that have caused problems in the church in recent decades, notably the matter of church cooperation and the provision for orphans via orphan homes. Before we get into the details, which shall come in a second and third lesson, let us be warned of the general approach human legalists often make in binding opinions where God has not bound them.

They make the attempt to parallel what they consider to be wrong with something that we definitely know to be wrong. For instance, those who oppose churches supporting orphan homes from the church treasury will attempt to make the orphan home parallel and identical with missionary societies. A missionary society is wrong because it displaces the church, usurps the work of the church, comes between the church and its work, is a human organization that makes the church secondary. Is the orphan home identical to the missionary society? If it is, it bears the same marks of error upon it as does the society.

Similarity Is Not Identity

There are some things about an orphan home that are similar to the missionary society, but that does not prove they are identical. Two people may have similarities, but are not identical. One gross inconsistency of many who oppose supporting orphan homes from the church treasury is that they are willing to support them individually. But it is wrong to support the missionary society either way, because it has no right or authority to exist. They therefore admit they are not identical.

Likewise, there are certain elements of similarity between the missionary society system and churches cooperating. But they are far from being identical, as we shall note later.

The church is not a home, nor a home the church. It is not the work of the church to be a home, but to provide a home. The home does not take away the work of the church from the church because the home does a work which the church has

never beeen authorized to do and be.

The orphan home in no way infringes on the local autonomy and independence of the local church, as do missionary societies with their delegations and voting assemblies of delegates from local churches.

Is There a Pattern?

Human legalists contend everything must be according to some pattern that is found in the Bible. Let us underscore the truth that where God has given a pattern, men must respect and follow that pattern just as far as the pattern exists. We have no quarrel with that. But where there is no such pattern, men do not have the right to make one for God and demand everyone follow just that. In matters of faith where God has spoken we must adhere to the word. But in matters of opinion where there is room and necessity for human judgment, we must be charitable toward others and not attempt to bind a personal view as if that was divine law.

"But you have no example for it," it is often said. But having an example is only one way of authorization. We have no example for church buildings owned by the congregation. But buildings are authorized because God has commanded us to assemble and there must be a place. What kind of place? God has not spoken. We must exercise human judgment.

There is no example for an invitation song. But we are authorized to preach the word and encourage people to obey it. What all must we do and can we do to encourage obedience? An invitation song is one way that has proven very expedient. The same principle applies in a number of other things, such as the manner of collecting the contribution, using chalkboards, microphones, radio or television in preaching. These are authorized under the command to teach, and the specifics to the last detail have simply not been provided in Scripture.

As for the church building, we make a mistake to consider it something sacred, as if it was a sanctuary akin to the tabernacle or temple of the Old Testament. Some make laws as if God has made them regarding what can and cannot be done in a church building. This is human legalism. So long as an activity is within the limits of Christian conduct, there is no law that governs the use of expediences when they are not being used for their primary purposes. It is not wrong to pitch ball in the parking lot, to eat a meal together in the church building, to use the

telephone to make a personal call, or use a screwdriver that has been purchased by the church to help operate a mimeograph machine to adjust something on a delivery truck that stalls at the doorway of the building.

How To Meet These Extremes

What must we do in the face of these extremes, which we intend to explore more and more in further lessons. First, let us suggest several things not to do.

Do not let one extreme drive you into the other. Fearing liberalism, do not back into human legalism. Fearing human legalism, do not become a liberal concerning the necessity for God's authority.

Do not let the abusive treatment you may receive from either a liberal or a human legalist drive you from Christ and His church. Some of the meanest people on earth are religious people who are liberals and legalists. They will lie, misrepresent, distort, accuse, etc. But rise above that kind of sinful behavior.

Do not go around with a chip on your shoulder looking for a fight with everyone who comes along. Stand your ground and teach the truth, but to be hostile and seek conflict is unproductive.

Do not pretend the matters are unimportant. Do not attempt to shrug off liberalism or human legalism as if it will just go away. Evil and error will make headway when good men do nothing. It cannot be ignored.

What should we do? Study the issues involved. Know your own ground and why. Be sure you are standing on Biblical sustained positions. Have strong convictions. Do not wobble with every wave that comes along. Having strong convictions is not the same as being close-minded. You can hold strong convictions and still be open-minded. But be sure there is evidence for what you believe. Do not just jump on whatever bandwagon somebody may be pulling through town. *"Buy the truth and sell it not."* (Proverbs 23:23).

When Every Part Is Correct...

When we prove that every part of an operation is correct, then we have proved the whole operation is correct. This we intend to do with both the matter of churches cooperating and churches supporting orphan homes. We approach many matters

in this same way. There is no one place where the system of salvation is spelled out--one, two, three. Nor is there such simplicity in the way we are to worship. We *"search the Scriptures"* and take the whole counsel of God to learn the truth.

But in such matters and problems that arise before the church, be kind, be considerate, practice the "golden rule," be strong and stedfast, but do not get ugly, biting, vindictive, seeking personal glory or personal fame. Even the good you may do will then be overshadowed by the dark shadows of sin and the truth will be unclear.

† † † † †

In Support Of Church Cooperation

What we are saying in this lesson is that it is authorized of God in the Scriptures for local congregations to cooperate with each other in the performance of some authorized given task. Furthermore, we are saying that it is permissible for one church to assist a second church in a work over which the second church has oversight. Church "A" can help church "B" do something church "B" has undertaken to do.

We assume the work church "B" is undertaking is authorized as the work of the church. Nobody ought to help anybody do something that is not to be done. There is no way church "A" could help church "B" do some work that the church is not authorized to do.

What We Are Not Saying

We are not saying that one church can surrender its autonomy to another church, or one church can take charge of another. To illustrate, we are saying that church "A" can help church "B" conduct a gospel meeting, conduct a television program, print and distribute tracts, assist in building a meetinghouse, pay a preacher, etc.

We are not saying that church "A" must do this. We are

speaking of something that is permissible, not mandatory. If a church chooses not to support some program of work that others undertake, that church has that right and privilege and ought not be chastised for choosing to do something else. This insistence that one "prove" loyalty by supporting this or that has caused about as many problems in the church as making laws that demand churches refrain from helping each other.

An Illustration

Let us illustrate with a television question and answer program. What is the program anyway? It is a means of teaching the gospel. Nobody objects to churches teaching the gospel.

Who oversees the program? Church "B" has the oversight under the direction of its elders.

Is the use of television an acceptable means of teaching? This is a matter of judgment, but most answer affirmatively. It is only one way, not the only way. But nobody questions this to our knowledge.

How is the program financed? It is paid for from the treasury of the church that oversees it, church "B."

How does church "B" get money into its treasury? It comes from the contributions of its members, and contributions from assisting churches?

That is the entire matter, briefly stated. The only point of contention is whether other churches have a right to contribute funds into the treasury of church "B."

New Testament Cooperation

Did churches in the New Testament contribute to the work of other churches? Read Second Corinthians 8:1-5 and the answer is "Yes." Macedonian churches sent help for the *"poor saints in Jerusalem."* Who took the money over there? Paul and company. We learn elsewhere to whom they gave the money.

Acts 11:27-30 shows how the church in Antioch also helped to relieve Jerusalem. Brethren there sent relief funds by Barnabas and Paul who gave them to the elders in Jerusalem (Acts 12:25). What do we have? We have many churches giving funds into the hands of the elders of Jerusalem for the work of relieving the physical needs among those in that city.

Some who are against this kind of cooperation will agree that it is all right to do this in benevolent work, but not in evangelistic

work. That is plain silly and nonsensical. Who would contend churches can send money for physical bread, but are prohibited from sending money to teach the bread of life? That is an absurdity, and legalism gone to seed.

Cooperation In Benevolence And Evangelism

But let us accomodate such foolishness for a moment and remove even that objection. Acts 15:22-32 shows how the Jerusalem church, under its elders, sent men and letters of teaching to assist the church in Antioch in teaching. Here is one church helping another church in a matter of evangelism. Surely, nobody would be so absurb as to contend one church could send men and materials, but could not send money to secure men and materials. Whether men, money, or materials, one church is helping another church in evangelistic matters.

Neither church usurps the autonomy of the other. Both remain independent local churches. Autonomy did not prohibit their fellowship in these matters. But still they cooperated.

Other Objections Answered

Some have contended that it was wrong for a church to assume any work that was larger than it could do by itself. Tell it to Paul, the inspired apostle. He took money to Jerusalem for a work that was bigger than Jerusalem could handle alone. To preach to the whole world is bigger than any one church can do. Shall none try?

Some say it is wrong for a smaller and poorer church to help a larger and richer church. Where does the Bible teach that? The Macedonian churches were in deep poverty when they gave. Did Paul run a financial audit on both congregations and all its members before he took funds to Jerusalem? Not everybody in Jerusalem was in poverty, even though some were.

Some say it is wrong for one church to spend the money of another church. We have not contended that such be done. Church "B" that oversees the program and pays the bills spends only its own money. When church "A" gives church "B" certain funds, they no longer belong to church "A" but to church "B." Nobody is spending anybody else's money.

"You ought to give it up for unity's sake." Friend, the truth of the matter is that those who have made laws ought give them up for the sake of unity. If the church never acted or operated until

there was nobody to raise any objection, the church would likely never do anything. Churches would not ever conduct Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services. Some folks never support them and even object to being asked to do so. Shall we reduce our work to only that which the biggest objector approves?

But church "B" becomes a brotherhood missionary society. No, church "B" is a scripturally organized governmental unit, a single local church just as the Bible teaches. There is no human governmental system created when churches cooperate in this fashion.

Again we stress, this is something churches are permitted to do. It is not mandatory that they cooperate this way. But they have the right.

† † † † †

Church Support Of Orphan Homes

We intend to show that a church may, this is, has the authority and is permitted, if it chooses, to make financial contributions from its treasury to care for orphans in an orphan's home.

We are not contending that the church is insufficient to do the work God has given it to do. Nor are we contending that the church can shift its work to another organization. We deny a church has the right to give away its autonomy and independence, or that it is authorized for man to set up an organization parallel to the missionary society to usurp the work of the church. We are not contending that needy children must be cared for this way to the exclusion of other ways.

We do intend to prove that every part that is involved in the work of the church in providing homes for the homeless by contributing to an orphan home is within the authority of God's Scripture.

A God-Given Duty

The church does have a duty to the needy. Acts 6:1-4, this is

the very nature of the work being done. There was complaint as to how that work was being executed, and another and different system was devised. That within itself proves that there is no unalterable pattern as to how provisions for the needy are to be discharged.

As foreign to the Bible as it may appear, there are those that deny that the church can help anyone who is not a Christian. If that were so, then that would eliminate the vast majority of orphans immediately, because most are mere children, not yet accountable before God. Some have said the church has a duty to children of members, but there is no Scripture that designates such a distinction. How could one profess to be like Christ and refuse to give assistance to needy children?

Galatians 6:10 proves that the church is to help both brethren and those who are not brethren as we have opportunity. The book of Galatians was written to the churches of Galatia. That same chapter six is authority for paying the preacher by the church, but somehow, those who oppose taking money from the treasury to help children allow the preacher to be paid but deny helping others outside the church. While they contend that the duty to help outsiders is only an individual duty, not the church, they do not so "reason" when it comes to the preacher's pay.

That the church does have a duty to needy people is also seen in First Timothy 5:16, where those who are not cared for by their own families are to be cared for by the church.

James 1:27 gives us a definition of pure religion, which includes *"visiting the fatherless and widows"* and that means providing care for them. The church can help needy widows (First Timothy 5:16). It can also help needy children (James 1:27). What kind of church is it that cannot practice pure religion? Surely that is not the Lord's church that is so prohibited.

To provide for the homeless simply means there must be a home provided. The church is not a home; does not do the work of a home; is not designed or organized to be a home. God ordained the church and He also ordained the home. The two are separate. When there is no home, the church does not become the home, but must provide a home. That is all it can do. This includes provision of food, shelter, clothing, medicine, guidance, care, love, recreation, education, etc. all the duties that belong to the home.

A Separate Institution

The orphan home is a separate institution from the church. Every home is the same way. If a church cannot help provide a home for the homeless, it would also be prohibited from giving assistance to any home if one is going to withhold aid on the basis that it is a separate institution. It is, and so it must be. It is not the church, nor vice versa.

But some say they oppose having a board of directors and/or trustees over the home, contending that is an institution between the church and the home. They say the board provides the home, not the church. But that reflects a lack of knowledge about the home.

Every home must have supervision, both domestic and legal. Your home has it; and so does mine. Even if the board is incorporated, it is still a part of the necessary supervision of the home, doing what parents have to do as far as legal responsibility is concerned.

Orphan homes have houseparents which provide the domestic supervison that is necessary in any home. The combination of the board and the houseparents provides for the orphans what parents provide in regular homes. Parents can incorporate if they choose, but that does not change the home into something other than a home. Churches are often incorporated for legal purposes, but that does not change the nature of the church. Some states require this kind of legal provision. Does that make the church something other than the church, or is that responsible stewardship and obedience to the laws of the land?

Every home has a charter, whether written or unwritten. The government does not allow people to just take in children without showing some quality of responsibility. There must be charters, license, regulations met, etc. The home is still nothing more than a home. There is no "in-between" human institution between the church and the work the church is to do.

Financing A Home

The orphan home is financed the same way as other homes, namely, from its treasury, just like your home and mine. How does money get into that treasury? It gets there by contributions and sometimes supplemented by work, farming, other activities by the members of the home. The church can take funds and

donate them to a needy private home. Does the church take charge of the home when it does? Does the home usurp the authority of the church by receiving them? Do the elders of the giving church take over the rule of the home? The answer to all of these is "NO." Nor is it "YES" regarding an orphan home, either.

When a church gives aid to a private home, to whom does it give the funds? They are given into the care of the parents. With the orphan home, the funds are given into the care of those who have assumed parental duties, such as the board and houseparents. Where is the difference in structure and arrangement? There is none.

The Scriptures do not designate how needy children are to receive the provisions they need. So human judgment must come into action. An institutionalized orphan home is one way of providing this. This is not the only way, but it has proven to be one expedient way.

To summarize thus far: The church does have a duty toward needy children whose parents either cannot, will not, and do not provide for them. The church does have a duty to provide a home for the homeless; that is their need. The church cannot be the home, take over the home, but can provide means whereby the home can maintain itself with aid. Those in charge of the home receive the support and use it to the conduct of the home. It is neither complicated nor anti-scriptural.

Objections Answered

But some contend the elders ought to be over the home. Elders are not overseers of the home, except their own home, by virtue of being elders. We never read of elders over a home, or parents over the church. Elders are over the church and parents are over the home. Elders may serve in both capacities, but not because they serve in the other work.

We have already shown that there is no organization between the home and the church. The board, houseparents, trustees, etc. are a necessary part of the supervision of the home, generally done by parents.

Some contend the natural parent-child relationship is not there. That is true. If it could be there, the home would be unnecessary. But where does the Bible necessitate such a relationship before a home can exist? One parent with children is not the natural relationship either. A grandparent rearing

children is different, or an aunt and uncle rearing them. Even the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus was not a natural parent-child relationship. Was that not a home? Even the home of Jesus was not the natural parent-child relationship since Jesus was born of a virgin. This kind of objection is a senseless quibble.

But some say children ought to be placed in private homes, adopted. Such is a fine way to provide for homeless children. But all children cannot be adopted. And the Bible does not demand that adoption be the way. As we have said before, there is no one set way in the Bible.

Some would have the church to cease from contributing to orphan homes because not everyone agrees it is acceptable. But that does not make it wrong. We have shown the church's duty and nobody can show how that duty is to be discharged. Human opinion must be exercised in the matter. It is wrong to make a law where God has not made one.

There have even been cases where preachers have so objected to children being provided a home in orphan homes and churches supporting them, that they have been the reason some children have been accepted into Catholic orphanages rather than one supported by the church. It makes you wonder if such people have any kinship to the spirit of Christ whatever. But God be their judge. *"By their fruits"* we know they are way out of line.

Any home receiving aid from the church ought to give detailed and complete accounting of what is received and disbursed. This has not always been done with efficiency and has raised questions regarding work that is being done. Handling funds is a grave responsibility. Homes that ask and receive also ought to give detailed reports. That would erase criticisms, or at least put the operation open before all. Too often that part has been neglected or omitted by those operating the homes.

Not a Misssionary Society

One final note. There is gross inconsistency on the part of those who say the orphan home is parallel to the missionary society, when they say an individual can support the home, but not the church. Even an individual does not have the right to support an institution that usurps the church like the missionary society does. They simply are not parallel, even though there may be certain similarities. There are even similarities between

the church and denominations, but they are not the same.

It is authorized for the church to do its work, such as, providing a home for those who do not have one, even an orphan child. When a church makes contributions from its treasury to such a home, it is doing its work in that respect.

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Note Of Explanation

The reader will notice that three of the articles in this issue have to do with problems that have bothered the church over the past few years. Actually, the problems of liberalism and human legalism have existed in one form or another since the establishment of the church on Pentecost. These matters take on new forms from one generation to the next, but the basic issues are about the same each time.

As our readers are aware, this booklet contains the substance, almost the exact words, of the sermons I have preached through the years. Obviously, during those years I have brought lessons dealing with the various issues and confrontations that disturb the peace and progress of the church. Three sermons included in this issue have been preached several times at different congregations with considerable success. Problems have been prevented, and problems have been corrected, both the problem of liberalism and the problem of human legalism.

Several have asked and others have sent written requests for lessons dealing with these matters. This issue is in response to those requests. Like all the other lessons we have sent, we send these with the hope and prayer that it will provoke serious study and lead to conformity in word and practice to that which the Bible teaches.

We realize all will not be in agreement, possibly, with what is written. But all are not in agreement with what the Lord wrote, so why should we think everybody will be pleased with us. If you differ, let me say to you in kindness, that it is probably not the first time you have been wrong, and may not be the last.

But we want to send you all of our lessons in the right spirit, and believe that we do this even with these. JWB

Holy Spirit Baptism

Mark 1:1-8, *"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare the way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; and preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost."*

One Area of Study

There are several areas of study involving the Holy Spirit, but we shall confine this study to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There are many things revealed, and there are things unrevealed. We intend to confine our study to what is revealed.

The confusion regarding this subject is evident in that some claim to be baptized of the Holy Spirit today while others deny that is true. Some claim to be baptized several times in the Holy Spirit while others deny it. Some say it is necessary to salvation while others deny it. On goes the discussions about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not a liquid into which we are baptized as baptism in water. John 7:37-39, *"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified."* The Holy Spirit is not literal water, but this statement explains the saving and life-giving quality that flows from the Holy Spirit.

Baptism conveys the idea of being overwhelmed, completely

overcome, overpowered, and submerged beneath the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. Unless this is the meaning of *"baptism of the Holy Spirit,"* we fail to find any meaning at all to the phrase.

What It Is Not

We need to understand what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not. It is not emotionalism, or spontaneous excitement. Nor is it something that has been commanded of anybody. It was promised, not commanded. Joel 2:28-32 was a prophetic promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. John promised it, as our opening text relates. Jesus also promised it, Acts 1:5, *"For John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence."* Nobody could then or can now "obey" Holy Spirit baptism. One obeys commands. But the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a promise, not a command. We are commanded to be baptized in water (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-40; 10:48). Nobody could then or can now receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit simply by choosing to receive it. This contradicts many false doctrines being circulated about Holy Spirit baptism today as people are urged to receive it upon request.

Holy Spirit baptism was not administered by men, but by Christ (Mark 1 :8). John 1:33, *"Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit."*

Holy Spirit Promised

Jesus promised to send the Spirit, the Comforter, after His departure (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:4,5). Even the apostles were never given the power to baptize anybody in the Holy Spirit. This was an action of Deity, not man. The apostles, having been baptized in the Holy Spirit, could lay their hands on others whereby they were enabled to work spiritual or miraculous gifts by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; 19:6). This was a power unique to the apostles (Acts 8:21). Even Philip, (Acts 8), who had preached the gospel and himself worked miracles, could not even grant miraculous powers to others. It took the apostles for that.

Paul taught *"there is one baptism."* (Ephesians 4:4,5). This blunts the claims of those today who contend for Holy Spirit

baptism now. When Paul taught that truth the baptism that was being preached and practiced was water baptism for the remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. That is the *"one baptism."* While some contend for both water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism, such a contention contradicts Paul's affirmation that there is "one."

If anyone today has been baptized of the Holy Spirit, it would have to be because the Lord Jesus administered it, and this would contradict Paul's statement again. To those who claim Holy Spirit baptism for themselves, we ask, "Why is God a respector of persons, baptizing you in the Holy Spirit, but not everybody?"

Effects of This Baptism

What were the effects of being baptized of the Holy Spirit? It was not God's way of saving anybody. The plan of salvation is through the gospel by hearing the Word, believing the Word, and obeying the Word, including repentance, confession of Christ, and water baptism for the remission of sins. If God saves people by baptizing them in the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as only Deity can administer Holy Spirit baptism, why does God choose to save some and not others, seeing how nobody can obey it, and it is entirely the work of Deity?

When those who were baptized of the Holy Spirit received that baptism they were able to perform miracles, speaking in tongues (languages which were not normal, native, and naturally learned), could heal the sick, raise the dead, and speak infallibly as the Spirit gave them utterance. They were endued with power from on high. They were guided into all truth, everything Jesus had taught them being brought to their remembrance. If there be those today who have been baptized of the Holy Spirit, they should be able to demonstrate it as did those in the Bible. WHERE GOES THE CLAIM MUST ALSO GO THE DEMONSTRATION.

They ought to be able to do the same kinds of healings, raise the dead, do all the miraculous works they did from speaking in unlearned languages to drinking poison. They would not need a Bible. They ought to be able to write it as did those who were inspired.

Holy Spirit baptism, and the accompanying miraculous results that sprang therefrom, was evidence from heaven for the confirmation of the Word that was preached. (Mark 16:20;

Hebrews 2:3,4). What truth can anybody preach today that has not already been confirmed? Has not the faith been once and for all delivered? (Jude 3).

Promised To The Apostles

To whom was Holy Spirit baptism promised? It was not promised to everybody, even in Bible times? It was not for every Christian? It was promised to the apostles, (John 14,15,16), and received by them (Acts 1:26; 2:4; 7,13,14,42,43; 4:33). The promise to *"all flesh"* did not include every person. Surely, it did not include animals. The benefits of the action of Deity, that Peter said was fulfilled on Pentecost, (Acts 2:16), extended to Jew and Gentile, indeed all families of the earth, as the saving message through Christ that was delivered that Pentecost day was spread throughout the world, even to this day. Without discrimination, salvation is offered to all who believe and obey (Galatians 3:28; Romans 3:22). The apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit. They were the ones to whom the promise was given, and they were the ones who received the fulfillment of that promise. It is gross error to think that the promise extends to people today, or the need of it, or the demonstration of it. Again, we repeat, WHERE GOES THE CLAIM MUST GO THE DEMONSTRATION.

Christians are to be full of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). The parallel passage of Colossians 3:16 explains that this means to *"let the word of God dwell in you richly."* The Holy Spirit and the Word are not the same, even though the Word was given through the Holy Spirit. It means that the influence of the Holy Spirit abides with us as we follow the Word. We read of people being *"full of the Spirit"* even before the baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised (Elizabeth, Luke 1:41; Zacharias, Luke 1:67).This is significant because some preach and ask their hearers, "Have you been filled with the Holy Spiriit?" and lead them to expect the same outpouring upon themselves as God granted to the apostles on Pentecost. It is misleading people due to misunderstanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to whom it was promised, why it was promised, and the results produced when it was administered.

Water Baptism

The baptism with which we are personally concerned is the

baptism taught by those who were baptized of the Holy Spirit. *"Repent and be baptized..."* (Acts 2:38). This is baptism for the remission of sins. As this same preacher commanded in Acts 10, it was a water baptism.

Some have suggested that Cornelius and his house was baptized of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was given them in a direct manner, but not to the same measure, lest we be forced to conclude that Cornelius and his family were equally inspired as were the apostles. In such a case, it would not be necessary for Peter to preach anything to them. They would know as much truth as he. That which occurred in Ceasarea was evidence that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as Jews, providing proof for the six Jewish brethren who accompanied Peter there. Those of the first century also understood that to be the purpose of the miraculous manifestation at the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:18).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles ushered in the age of salvation by and through the gospel of Christ. That gospel, delivered by the Spirit and preached by inspired men, is still the saving message for all mankind today. We have God's inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient, and authoritative Word in the Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We need not expect something more, nor is there any need for it.

† † † † †

(continued from page 24)
the United States. While we realize the designation of America as a "Christian nation" is not altogether accurate, it is true that our history has generally been guided by the hands of men who believed in God and respected the Bible. The more secular our society becomes the less likely such leaders will be found.

Christians have an influence in the world where they are. We are in the world but not of the world. In America, we, like others, have the privilege of having a part in selecting the leaders of our land. While there be some who would have us shy away from exercising our rights as citizens in the selection process, we would encourage moral-minded, God-fearing folk to express themselves, even at the ballot box. Why should we allow the forces of evil to chart the course of the nation of our children and grandchildren and we sit idle?

JWB

Brighteners Of The Pathway Of Life

There may be times when we are inclined to think of the whole world much like Nathanael considered Nazareth; nothing good could come out of it. Much of the world does cause us to feel the bad is getting the best of the good with all the wars, disease, riots, blasphemies, and moral erosion. We may be tempted to be like Peter after he requested to walk on the water, but began to look at the turbulent seas about him and began to sink. If we center our thoughts only on what is deplorable we may well fail to see many things that actually brighten life's path even in the midst of so much that is regrettable.

After Israel requested and was allowed to have a king, Samuel came before the nation to remind them of all that God had done for them in the past with provisions, protection, abundant blessings both physical and spiritual. There was good reason for that reminder lest they forget their blessings and the source of them. For a few moments think with me of some very real and significant things that ought to cause us to lift our heads and raise our voices in praise and thanksgiving that they exist.

Luke 15:7,10, *"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance...Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."* If this can cause joy in heaven, should it not cause joy here on earth among those whose goal is heaven? Is it not wonderful to see people with conviction, knowledge, understanding, and courage make a commitment for matters that are right and eternal? This restores our faith in the power of righteousness even in a wicked world. It restores our confidence that there remains many people of honest and sincere hearts who, when taught, will put the Lord first in their lives. Such as this brightens the path of the Christian.

Christian Lives Brighten Life

Life is brightened when you have occasion to see people truly living daily lives in fulfilling their Christian duties. Many people are doing many good things for the cause of Christ without fanfare, notoriety and attracting attention. There are those who

have a genuine concern for the lost and they are busy demonstrating that concern by trying to win souls to salvation. They perform acts of kindness, benevolence, they express sympathy, give assistance, and actually look for opportunities to do good.

It bothers me to have some school, paper, or even a church have a big day of honoring and celebrating what they call "The Christian of the Year." How do they know who is the Christian of the year? They have the right to recognize brethren for their works' sake, but such a distinction smacks of egotism and haughtiness. As far as we or they know, the one God considers the Christian of the year may not even be noticed by brethren. It may be some humble, hard-working, sacrificial servant of God that goes about living godly without all the "hip-hip-hoorah" that many stir around them. To know and see such people as these humble servants is refreshing, especially in the midst of evil, and in the midst of "honors" bestowed on those with "big-names" and big purses.

Godly Parents Brighten Life

Life is brightened when we are privileged to learn of some parent being attentive to the physical and spiritual welfare of their children. They bring them to worship, study the Bible with them, make sure the children know how to choose their companions, concerned about the development of their mind and talents, giving them the "*nurture and admonition of the Lord*" by word and example.

So many fathers and mothers have abandoned their children and some do not even recognize they have done it. They turned their upbringing over to the child-care center, to grandparents, baby-sitters, while they pursue their careers of money and glamour. They naively think all is well simply because they supply adequate funds for the fashions, fads, and material things. Parents often sacrifice considerably for the welfare of their children, but it is a real blessing to the child and a real "lift" to observe parents making that special effort to provide for their spiritual guidance and instruction. It is not too hard to detect that child whose parents are on the job from those children too often left to themselves, or turned over to somebody else. When you see Ephesians 6:4 being obeyed, it does make life a little brighter.

Help In Hardship Brightens Life

It is strengthening and encouraging to take note of how many react in time of crisis, hardship, and disruption that comes in life. Sickness, death, financial stress, and various burdens often break upon families and individuals as they sail the stormy seas of life. But there be those who seem to continue their course. They are like a mighty vessel that encounters rough seas but persist on the way, possibly rocking and tossing somewhat on the stormy waves, but not being knocked from the goal. They refuse to allow themselves to be submerged beneath the slashing upheavals that can characterize periods of life.

Knowing how we ought to react to problems, and reacting that way are sometimes very different. It is easier to say what we should do than it is to do it. Sometimes when beset with adversities we do not always do our best thinking anyway. We are subject to weakness and have our frailities. But our own problems are made lighter and seem to be less, and our courage is raised when we are privileged to see others taking their "lumps" and handling them successfully. We see how valuable a strong faith is. We are better equipped to bear up and press on. Many never take their eye off of the Lord even in the blinding events of difficulties. These things brighten our own path of life.

Good Examples Brighten Life

While many are indifferent, rebellious, and seem to go out of their way to do what they ought not, it is most refreshing to know that there are many who go out of their way to do as they ought according to God's Word. Many young people have brought disgrace upon themselves, their families, the church and shamed their generation. But how fine it is to see some clean-cut, ambitious boy or girl who believes in respecting their parents, respecting things holy and sacred, have high moral standards, and who take seriously the admonition of Paul to Timothy to *"Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."* (First Timothy 4:12. We do not doubt that the tragedy of many youths is that they have "gone to the dogs." While we bemoan this and make efforts to prevent it, and recover those who have fallen, we are made to realize that there are many Christian young people who are not going into such ways of life. They rely on God because they have had good teaching and had the

wisdom to apply that teaching. Many young people have been called upon to sacrifice school honors, position, acceptance, and other things that they deserve because they would not compromise righteousness and His kingdom before all else. They care for the aged, neglected, anxious, less fortunate and bereaved. They stand for the truth even when the odds are stacked against them. Even when some other brethren will take the position of the wrong, they will stand, and they are not ashamed for the world to know that they serve the Lord and follow His will. Is not this something for which every child of God can give thanks?

Gratitude Brightens Life

Our nation has a day that is called Thanksgiving Day. It is a good celebration because it calls to mind how God has blessed this land in ages past. We do ourselves and our nation a favor to consider the good things that happen and exist in this world so often dimmed with gloom and doom. What is good deserves commendation.

We know it is necessary to condemn evil and we do not hesitate to do it. But we also believe it is necessary to commend the right and speak words of appreciation for those who will do the right. This is giving honor to whom honor is due. There is still much good in our sinsick world. We stand in awe at the wonders and beauty of nature. We are amazed at the providence of God, the sweetness of fellowship of faithful brethren. We enjoy the spiritual blessings in Christ, such as the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with Deity, the assurance of heaven to the faithful. We ought to be ready to strew flowers along life's path and give thanks for all others who do the same.

The "Seven Thousands"

Once Elisha was so discouraged that he thought he was the only one in Israel wanting to do God's will. He had some reason to think that way because of the behavior of his people. But God told him that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed their knee to Baal. Surely, there are "seven thousand" yet who want to follow God. We must put forth effort to locate one another, be helpful to one another, strengthen each other, and brighten the path of each other.

We are constantly reminded that the conflict between good

and evil rages. But we can be motivated and be a more effective servant of God by looking at the good that remains as well as attacking the evil. We make a mistake to do one without the other. God's power is His Word and we must learn it, follow it, teach it, and uphold it, giving others an example of what it is to believe it.

That which brightens the path of life more than anything else is the spiritual salvation God offers through Christ. It can belong to all who hear the Word, believe it, repent of sins, confess faith in Christ, and are baptized into Christ, living faithfully as a child of God who has the justified hope of eternal glory with God.

† † † † †

NO, NOT ONE

Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.*"

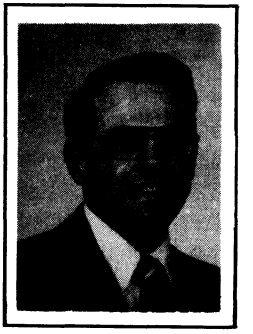
Have you ever considered what a prediction of doom this truth was to the nation of Northern Israel? That was the nation that broke away from the house of David shortly after Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, came to the throne of a united Israel.

Jeroboam successfully led a rebellion against Rehoboam and became the first of twenty men who rose to the trhone of Northern Israel. Their first king was so evil that when the Scriptures wished to convey how evil a man was, it was said that "*he followed the sins of Jeroboam.*"

Not even one of those twenty kings were acceptable before God. They all lived wicked, immoral, idolatrous lives in rebellion against the true and living God. While Southern Judah had only six or seven who were ever commended for righteousness, Northern Israel never had one single ruler that deserved that description.What an influence they were to all the people! Little wonder that God eventually allowed Assyria to overrun them and take them into a captivity from which they, as a nation, never returned. They must have been gradually absorbed into the heathen societies of their captors, except for those who fled to Judah when their doom was near.

There is a lesson for us, those of us of this great nation called (continued on page 19)

Into Thy Hand



JAMES W. BOYD

Psalm 31:5, "*Into thy hand I commend my spirit...*" These words were written by the inspired Psalmist and were also the same words uttered by our Lord as the final moments of His life gradually ground away as He was dying on the cross.There is hope in this phrase.

This life is not all there is to our existence. The spirit will continue to live even after this tabernacle of clay has died. The materialistic doctrineconcerning the human being is false. Mankind is created in the spiritual image of God and the soul of man never dies.

Furthermore, when the spirit leaves this body it is in the safe and just keeping of the God of heaven. His disposition of the soul will be as it ought to be. *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it."* (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

It is a marvelous thought that Christ, even as His death approached Him, spoke words that are comforting to every faithful child of God even yet. As His spirit was in God's hand, so shall it be with my spirit if I am among those who shall come to Christ and live faithfully in Christ.

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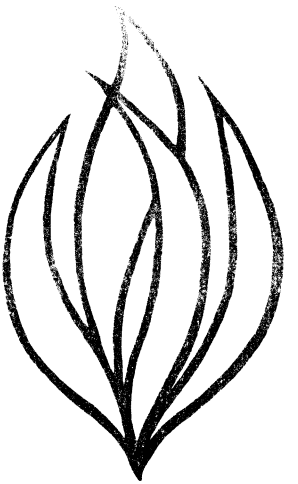

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME III James W. Boyd **NUMBER 10**

Temptation

When Jesus was teaching His disciples how to pray, He said, *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."* (Matthew 6:13). It is easy to see why we need to pray such a prayer when we are aware of the danger of temptation. Temptation is that bridge over which we cross to sin. Inasmuch as the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), temptation cannot be taken lightly. *"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* (First Corinthians 10:12).

Source Of Temptation

From whence comes temptation? James wrote, *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is full grown bringeth forth death."* (James 1:13-15). Satan is the one who tempts (First Corinthians 7:5). By appealing to the baser nature of man and his weaknesses, Satan leads man to sin and ruin.

Three Avenues Of Temptation

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world." (First John 2:16). Satan used these three avenues to tempt Eve. He called her attention to the fruit and suggested it was good to eat. This appealed to the flesh. He pointed out how good it looked. This was an appeal to the lust of the eye. He told her how it would make her as gods. This was an appeal to her pride.

Basically, these are the avenues Satan used in his attempt to get Jesus to sin. He appealed to the flesh by suggesting He turn the stones to bread. He used the appeal of the eye by taking Him to see the whole world and offering it to Him. He appealed to pride by taking Him to the top of the temple and telling Him He could cast Himself down and the angels would not allow His foot to be dashed against a stone.

Friend, these are the ways Satan attempts to get me and you

to sin. If you will take the time to consider each temptation you face you will see that each of them can be placed in one of these three categories.

Curse Or Blessing?

Temptation can be a curse or a blessing. It is intended to be a curse upon us. If we yield to temptation and sin it is a curse. But if we take advantage of the deliverance from temptation, we can grow stronger in spite of temptation because we resisted temptation. James 1:12, *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."*

Ways to Escape Temptation's Power

God will provide a way of escape. "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear, but will with the temptation make also the way of escape that ye may be able to endure it.*" (First Corinthians 10:13). Many times our trouble stems from our unwillingness to go the way of escape that God has provided, seeking rather some other way. We now want to take a brief look at some of the ways God has provided that we, like many who have gone before us, have successfully battled temptation.

By The Word Of God

Psalm 119:11, *"Thy word have I laid up in my heart that I might not sin against thee."* A knowledge of God's Word is a great preventive to sin as well as information regarding its cure. When Christ was tempted of Satan He quoted from the Scriptures repeatedly to put Satan to flight. When one knows what is right, he can more easily detect the wrong and avoid it. For this reason, we must become thoroughly informed in the Word.

Watch And Pray

"Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." (Matthew 26:41). When we are alert and aware of the Devil's ways we will not be so likely to fall victim. It is significant to me

that men of God in ages past when tempted, resorted to prayer. When Nehemiah was tried while building the walls of Jerusalem, and pressures came from various quarters to get him to quit, he went to God in prayer (Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:1-5,8,9; 6:9). When Daniel was commanded to discontinue his prayer as had been his custom, the very thing that he did was to be to his window facing Jerusalem and pray (Daniel 6:10). Paul and Silas in prison for preaching the gospel, lifted up their voices in singing and prayer (Acts 16:25). So it was in many instances through the centuries. Taking advantage of the avenue that God has provided, we are able to withstand the temptations of Satan.

Purpose In Heart

Many times temptation can be drained of its power because we have already made up our minds that we will not sin against God and our fellowman. James wrote, *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."* (James 4:7). When Daniel was confronted with the decision to either eat that which had been set before him that would have defiled him or stand firm and be obedient to God, Daniel 1:8 tells us, *"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank."* We can fight the onslaughts of the devil if we have control over our own determination.

There Is A Time To Run

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, flee from idolatry." (First Corinthians 10:14). After Paul had listed a number of ungodly matters, he told Timothy, *"But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."* (First Timothy 6:11). Again he told Timothy, "*Flee youthful lusts...*" (Second Timothy 2:22). Often the best way to deal with temptation is to put distance between yourself and the opportunity to sin. Let us remember what Joseph did when he was enticed by the wife of Potiphar to commit adultery. He fled from the house. While we may be able to withstand temptation in other ways the first few times it is presented to us, with continued bombardment against us, we could be overcome. Therefore, do not remain where you are tempted.

How foolish it is for a man with weakness for alcohol to

always be hanging around where it is served. Situations that constantly provoke us to lose control of our temper should be avoided.

Put On The Whole Armour

"Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (Ephesians 6:11). This was given as one of the reasons for putting on the armour of God, that weaponry in our spiritual warfare that God has provided for us that enables us to successfully fight the good fight of faith. Possibly one of the reasons we are so vulnerable to temptation is because we have not applied ourselves sufficiently to acquire those good qualities that teach us to develop, not taking advantage as we ought of the provisions He has already offered as a way of escape from temptations.

Avoid Evil Company

You cannot clean out a coal bin and expect to remain spotless. Nor can we expect to place ourselves among the enemies of the cross, those who care not for the moral standards of God, those who reject His mercy, and still live the kind of life that God approves. We influence others and they influence us. So long as our influence for the right is predominant, then we should exercise it. But when the influence to do evil is running against us, we do well to seek other friends and associates. Get out of the wrong crowd. Many people sin under the pressure of their peers. If they had not been in their company they would have been better able to say "no" to evil and "yes" to right. "*Evil companions corrupt good morals.*" (First Corinthians 15:33). As the song suggests, "Make friends of God's people." How much we need to emphasize to the young Christian to seek their partner in marriage from among those who are in the Lord. Did not Paul show the inconsistency of trying to harmonize with evil in Second Corinthians 6:14ff? Did not the Psalmist write, *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful?"* (Psalm 1:1).

Overcome Evil With Good

Romans 12:21, *"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil*

with good." We will be much stronger in opposing the enticements to do evil if we are busy trying to fill our lives with what is good. We will not live in a vacuum and our minds shall not stay in neutral. We will either be doing as we ought or doing what we ought not, even idling around is a wasteful exercise. The old adage says, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." But if we have our lives geared for good things, busy about the Father's business, so pressed in doing the will of God, then we will not have either the time nor the energy and resources to be expended in falling before the temptations that Satan will place before us.

Where do these thoughts lead us? Facing a few realities, we see that we are beset with temptation that we cannot avoid. While we pray that we be led not into temptation, sometimes we meet it head-on in spite of all we can do. But there are ways to defeat it. God has provided the way, yes, several ways, of escape that we may be able to be the victor rather than the victim of temptation.

† † † † †

A Woman Becomes A Christian

Religious teachers do not give the same answer to the most important question one can ask. But the Bible teaches but one way to be saved. Both by direct commands and precepts and by examples, the Scriptures leave us without wondering how to come to Christ. The book of Acts has been called the book of conversions because therein we read of the conversion to Christ of several people. Of the eight examples (Jews on Pentecost, Samaritans, Ethiopian, Saul of Tarsus, Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailor and the Corinthians) we shall study the conversion of Lydia, what was involved in her conversion, just what she did and what others did.

"Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis. And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony; and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer

was wont to be made, and we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us." (Acts 16:11-15).

Paul, The Holy Spirit, And A Prayer Meeting

First, we see Paul and company, which included Timothy, Silas, Luke, and possibly others, obeying the great commission of Christ to go and preach the gospel to the whole world. Why preach? The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). We are begotten by the Word of truth (James 1:18). The Word is able to save us (James 1:21). The Word is the incorruptible seed by which we are born again (First Peter 22-23). The Holy Spirit had directed Paul to this city in a vision in Troas. Here, as in the cases of the Ethiopian and Saul himself, we see the Holy Spirit getting the preacher and the prospective Christian together so the preacher might preach the word of salvation to the lost. It is important to note that the Holy Spirit did not come with a still, small voice to Lydia. Nor was there any other kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon her to her salvation. Those who claim we are saved by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit have a different plan than that of which we read in the New Testament. There is no conversion apart from the hearing of the Word because faith comes by hearing the Word (Romans 10:17).

Paul went down by a river where he supposed there would be gathered some for prayer. Paul usually would go into the synagogues of the Jews and find opportunity to preach. But there was no synagogue in Phillipi. Paul, himself a Jew, knew that Jews would seek out a relatively quiet place to worship on the Sabbath Day, so he went looking for someone to whom he could preach the truth.

We want to note also that the Holy Spirit is again involved in the conversion of this woman as the Word of God was preached because the Word was given by and through the Holy Spirit. When the Word is proclaimed, this is the way and the manner the Holy Spirit operates on the hearts of those who hear it.

Among those present at this prayer meeting was a woman named Lydia. In passing, we might note the importance of attending every worship service. What if Lydia had been absent from this gathering? Would she have ever had the opportunity to hear the gospel and be saved? How do you know but that the very service you choose to miss may be the one wherein something is said or done that may be just exactly what you needed most at that time to see you faithfully through some temptation or trial? Something may be taught then that you would desparately need later in life that could mean the difference between heaven and hell. We run a needless risk and waste to deliberately be absent from any period of worship or study of the Word of God. Can we afford to ignore such things?

Lydia

Let us look more closely at the person under consideration. Lydia was already a believer in God. She was obviously a devout person. It was not convenient to be in a strange city where there was no place of worship but nonetheless she arranged to be faithful to her duty. She was a long way from home, her home being in Thyatira some 300 miles distance. She was a Jewish business woman in a Gentile city. The Sabbath was a regular business day for the Gentiles. It would be costly for her to lose the trade that she might have otherwise gained that day. But making money was not more important to her than worship. She did more than what some who profess to be Christians today will do when it comes to money-making, vacations, visiting friends, etc. She even brought others with her to this prayer meeting. She would not allow anything to come between her and what she considered her religious responsibility. Certainly before she ever met Paul, she was a woman of faith, humility, devotion, and prayer, with a keen sense of duty to God.

Yet, she was not saved because she was not in Christ. *"Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12). Jesus had taught, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6). Lydia was still lost because she had not obeyed the gospel of Christ. This is the reason Paul wanted to preach the gospel to her and others. It is highly significant that in every example of conversion in the book of Acts (with the possible

exception of the jailor, yet he was a religious man under the Roman system), the one converted was called upon to change religions. Some balk at the idea of changing religions today, yet this is precisely what all those who came to Christ had to do.

Lydia Heard The Word

Hearing the gospel is the first step toward coming to Christ. Her heart was opened to the things she heard. "*The Lord opened her heart.*" The Lord opens the heart of all who eventually come to Christ. But how does the Lord open people's hearts? He opens hearts by the preaching of the gospel and the persuasive story of His love; those who hear open their hearts to the truths they must obey. Only an open heart will receive the message of truth. Those who have closed their minds, hardened their hearts, and refused to listen cannot give heed to the things they hear. This was no act of respect of persons. The soil was cultivated to receive the seed of the kingdom and when she heard it, she responded to it. The gospel is the way Deity appeals to man to be saved.

She Gave Heed

This means she did what she was instructed to do. People who hear must also heed. They must act in obedience to the commands of the gospel. Paul had preached and Lydia had come to know what she must do to be saved. Now it was up to her to either obey or reject what she had heard. She attended to the things she heard, even through baptism.

What was it that Paul could have preached? We do not have the record of his sermon, nor where he started in the story of Christ. He could have begun with God's plan for the Jewish people that through them would come the Messiah for all mankind. He would then have preached the pre-existence of Christ, His virgin birth, His perfect life, His death, burial, resurrection, ascension into heaven, the establishment of his kingdom on Pentecost, the judgment to come, and the plan of salvation requiring man's obedience. All this, and more, is included in preaching the gospel of Christ. Surely he included the promises of forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven after this life.

She Was Baptized

In every example of conversion in the book of Acts, people were baptized. As one reads the Scriptures on baptism, he is not surprised to learn this was true. Baptism saved (First Peter 3:21), not by any power of the water, but because in this way one gets into Christ (Galatians 3:27), reaching His shed blood that was shed in His death (Romans 6:3,4).

She Lived Her Faith

Having been baptized into Christ, she immediately began to practice the manner of life that characterizes one in Christ. She offered hospitality to Paul and his preaching company. Later, after Paul had undergone persecutions for having preached the gospel in Philippi, her house was open to them where he was comforted by this newly formed congregation.

What Did She Do?

What Lydia did is exactly what people now must do to be saved. She heard the Word, believed the Word, obeyed the Word, lived the Word. And what church did she join? Friend, she joined no church. This is not because being a member of the church is unimportant and optional. It is because when she obeyed the gospel, like others before her, she was added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47). One does not do one thing to be saved and something additional and different to join some church. I know she was not a member of any denomination because none existed. But she was a member of the body of Christ, the church, the saved.

The way of salvation is before us in terms that are clear, plain, simple, easily understood. And the way is open even yet to all those who will do as she has done.

† † † † †

Did you know that the New International Version which some brethren defend omits "*And whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery*" from Matthew 19:9? The NIV sounds like what a lot of multi-married people have been wanting! Just another NIV perversion, however!

How Do I Know I Love God?

Lessons that provoke self-examination are very profitable for us. Most people who believe in God will say they love God because they should love Him. We are commanded to love God. *"Then one of them which was a lawyer asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."* (Matthew 22:35-40). Even though we say we love God, how can we be sure we love Him as we ought? Let us run seven tests that will help us answer this question.

Presence

One, we love to be in the presence of those we love. This is true concerning our family and friends. Strange indeed would be the man who would say, "I love my wife, but do not want to be with her." Do we desire to be where God is?

We are aware that in a sense, God is everywhere. But in this sense He is as much with those who love Him as those who do not. There are some additional ways in which God and man are together. God said, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them."* (Matthew 18:20). Do we share the sentiments of David when he said, *"I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord."* (Psalm 122:1). He knew God would be there. If we love God and want to be where He is, then we will not neglect assembling with the saints for worship (Hebrews 10:25). Many members of the church would be offended if it was suggested they do not love God, but they demonstrate their lack of love by not being where God said He would be.

Furthermore, if we love God we will not be where we know God does not want us to be, such as places of ill-repute, gambling dens, drinking bars, dance floors, etc. By this test, do we really love God?

Eat And Drink

Two, we love to eat and drink with those we love. Eating

together has always been a mark of hospitality, friendship, and love. We like to have those we love come and eat with us and we cherish the opportunity to go to the homes of those we love and enjoy this fellowship. Great warehouses of treasure are shared together while sharing a meal.

There is a memorial feast where we can commune with God also. It is called a communion. We commune with Deity and our brethren. Christians have the opportunity to partake of the Lord's Supper. "*And as they were eating Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it, For this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom.*" (Matthew 26:26-29). Paul gave a lengthy teaching concerning the Lord's Supper in First Corinthians 11:23-30. When we love God, we will be very attentive to this privilege and duty regarding the Lord's Supper.

Hear Them Talk

Third, we love for the ones we love to talk with us. God has spoken His Word unto man. *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us through His Son..."* (Hebrews 1:1,2). If we receive Christ, we must receive His word. *"He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me."* (Matthew 10:40). The apostles and early inspired evangelists went out bearing witness of Christ and preaching His Word, later writing down the Scriptures which is the Word of God. To receive those who were sent out by Christ was to receive their word about Christ. His Word is His voice. If we love God we will love His Word.

We must show reverence for His Word. Those of the Old Testament showed this reverence. When Ezra gathered the people together to read to them God's law, everyone that could understand was assembled, and the people were attentive to that reading. When Ezra opened up the book, everyone showed their respect by standing. The Psalmist said, *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway."* (Psalm 119:105). Jesus is called the *"Word"* in John 1:1. He was the very personification of God's Word. That Word will make us free

(John 8:32). We are commanded to study it (Second Timothy 2:15). Those who are blessed are those who meditate upon His Word (Psalm 1:1,2). Does it not strike you as strange that one would claim to love God but just could not bear to hear from God over fifteen minutes a week? They cannot bear to hear His voice on Sunday evening, Wednesday evening, during gospel meetings, or at home. Does it cause us to wonder whether we shall be comfortable in heaven when we dislike hearing His voice so much?

Talk To Them

Fourth, we love not only to hear from those we love but we love to talk to those we love. It would be most peculiar if we never talked to the ones we loved. We talk to God through prayer. "*Men ought always to pray and not to faint.*" (Luke 18:1). "*I will therefore that men pray everywhere.*" (First Timothy 2:8). *"Pray without ceasing."* (First Thessalonians 5:17). One has written that more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. James says, *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* (James 5:16). We need to pray for the church, our families, ourselves, the sick, our nation, all nations of the earth. We need to offer praise and thanksgiving to God. This can be done through prayer. We will talk to God often and fervently when we love Him. We will not reserve our prayers for only those times when we encounter difficulties, or just at the formal worship services. Prayer will be a faithful practice because we love God.

Loving Others

Fifth, if we love God we shall love those He loves. *"These things I command you, that ye love one another."* (John 15:17). *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."* (First John 3:14-16). *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."* (First John 4:11). *"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God*

whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." (First John 4:20,21). *"Let brotherly love continue."* (Hebrews 13:1). If we love God, we shall never have hate in our hearts against any person, especially our Christian brothers and sisters. God loves them, and He loves the world. We should love the world and love our brethren, to be like God.

Gifts

Sixth, we love to give gifts to those we love. God loved us and gave His only begotten Son. Parents and grandparents give gifts to children because they love them. God has given us life. Every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17). Paul said, *"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy."* (First Timothy 6:17). He offers to give us eternal life if we will come to Christ and live faithfully before Him.

In return, we should give gifts unto God. Those of the Old Testament gave to Him of their first-fruits, not the blemished left-overs. We do not treat those we love with what is left-over, but try to provide for them our best. Some treat God about like they do their pets, handing out scraps on which they are to survive, and be grateful to get that.

More than that, we will give Him gifts that we know He wants. *"I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, unto God, which is your reasonable service."* (Romans 12:1). *"Therefore as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also."* (Second Corinthians 8:7). *"Every man according as he hath purposed in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, nor of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver."* (Second Corinthians 9:7). The work of the Lord is dependent to a great extent on our gifts to God. We show our love by the way we give. God has not specified some percentage in giving, but has placed the Christian on the honor and love system of giving. When we love God we will find it easy to give to Him. This principle of truth is another one of those matters in the God-man relationship with which nobody cane take exception. We know it is true even in the relationships that exist between people. It is also true in our service to God.

Try To Please

Seventh, if we love God as we should we shall try to please Him because we try to please those we love. We should seek to please God in every phase of our lives. Pleasing God is not a now and then affair, but a life. "*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this; To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*" (James 1:27). Worldliness is one of the greatest dangers threatening the Christian. It has, is, and can ruin the church. "*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.*" (Titus 2:11,12). "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" (First John 2:15). "*Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.*" (John 15:14). "*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous.*" (First John 5:3). "*Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words,f and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings, and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.*" (John 14:23,24). "*If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love.*" (John 15:10). There is no legitimate way to justify the claim that we love God unless we obey the voice of God as revealed in His Word.

Now we each one can examine ourselves before God with these seven measures to determine the extent of our love for God. We can see wherein we may be lacking and should hasten to be about improving wherein we fall short.

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But you need to know that the NIV also omits, "*Bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you,*" from Matthew 5:44. That ought to go over big with some folks, especially those that never did want to treat other people the way God says!

The Terror Of The Lord

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..." (Second Corinthians 5:11).

Some years ago I read of a tragic train wreck. The cause of the accident was that somebody had given incomplete instructions. The result was many lives lost and much property damage. This is serious in earthly matters, but how much more in spiritual matters. Is it not obvious that many have an incorrect and incomplete conception of the solemn and sacred things? People who are intelligent in many other matters are so ill-informed and indifferent toward Christianity. So many are not sufficiently impressed with the seriousness of passing into the presence and judgment of the Lord. *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Hebrews 10:31). Even many who are religious misunderstand the nature of God and consider only one side of His character to the neglect of the other. In our age people emphasize the love, mercy, grace, kindness and goodness of God to the neglect of other characteristics.

We have no desire to limit the love and mercy of God toward mankind. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). *"God is love."* (First John 4:8). While there is a difference between love and acceptance, we recognize and appreciate the fact that God loves everybody, even though He does not approve of everybody. But are we to think that because God loves us He will simply overlook our indifference toward Him? Can we disrespect His will and be disobedient thereto and still stand in His favor? Are we to think that regardless of our unconcern for truth and right that God is so magnanimous that He will extend His spiritual blessings to us anyway? It does seem that many people must believe that He will. They act so unconcerned about doing the will of the Lord. *"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant and to those that remember his commandments to do them."* (Psalm 103:17,18). Mercy is extended to all, but not all will profit from it because they will not obey the conditions God has given for receiving His mercy. Does this include you, dear reader?

God Loves And Hates

That quality of God that enables Him to love also enables Him to hate. Whoever is capable of mercy is also capable of vengeance, wrath, and anger. There are those things that God hates (Proverbs 6:16-19). God's wrath has been and can be provoked to hot anger (Judges 2:14). Vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19). Paul says, *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord..."* Yes, we want to know His love, but we also need to be aware of His terror. We want His mercy, but be not blinded to His wrath. We bask in His goodness, but we are not immune from His anger. In the Bible, even in nature that God created, we see demonstrated before us these qualities of God.

Consider Nature

God created the natural world. Where is the man that cannot see evidence of the goodness of God in the natural world? Consider the provisions for man from the good earth. Look at the beauties and grandeur of the heavens. Listen to the songs of the birds. Smell the fragrance of the flowers. Gaze upon the carpets of the gree grass and warm in the rays of the benevolent sun. All this exists by the creation of God. It brightens and cheers humanity in his sojourn through life. The minerals beneath the earth's surface, the trees on the surface, the animal kingdom, all given for man's use and over which God has given man dominion bespeak of the goodness of God. These things provoke us to think of the softer, gentler, more compassionate side of God.

But the same God created the same nature that has another side. Why the storm cellars? They give protection and refuge from the ravages of cyclones, tornadoes, hurricanes, etc. Have we not read of entire cities buried beneath volcanic ash? Are not earthquakes constantly shaking mankind? Floods baptize entire provinces sweeping everything in their paths to destruction. The lightning splinters the giants of the forest. All of these actions of nature provoke within us this other side of God we usually prefer to pretend does not really exist. These things show a sterner and harder side to God.

Consider The Word

No honest man can read the Scriptures without being impressed with God's goodness that leads man to repentance. He is the source of comfort. His is a message of victory for those

that come to Him. His Son is the spring of hope. His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway. That which Christ has done is the manifestation of that immeasurable goodness of God. Christ's resurrection is the assurance of life eternal for the righteous with God. Of all men that would never minimize the goodness of God would be the Apostle Paul for he recognized that he had been a recipient of that goodness. *"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to everlasting life."* (First Timothy 1:16). Yet, Paul is the same man that reminds us of the terror of the Lord.

We see that terror demonstrated in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. We see it in the cleansing of the world in the flood in Noah's time. It is unmistakable in the way Joshua was commanded to deal with Achan after Jericho. What of Uzzah who touched the ark of the covenant in violation of God's laws concerning it? Are we not impressed with what happened to Sodom and Gomarrah because of their vile and wicked ways? All of this stands as testimony that transgression will receive its recompense. *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation..."* (Hebrews 2:1-3). How shall we escape? The plain and unvarnished truth is that we shall not escape.

Why Warn Of The Terror Of The Lord?

The reason behind the warning is in verse ten of Second Corinthians, chapter five. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."*

Daniel Webster once said, "The most serious proposition that ever challenged my attention is the thought that I must appear before the God of my being and give an account for the deeds that I do while in the body, whether they be good or bad."

By writing these words about the terror of the Lord, Paul was revealing a portion of God's message to man. Paul had taken glad tidings of salvation wherever he went. At great personal sacrifice he had traveled to preach the gospel. He had withstood

trials, suffered physical distress and persecution all for the same cause of saving souls from the wages of sin. He sought to tell his fellowman of the salvation that God extends through His Son, Jesus Christ. He wanted them to know how much they needed that salvation. For the same reasons he wanted them to know of the terror of the Lord. *"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God...Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."* (Acts 20:26,27,31). Paul knew that God would recompense. *"So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure, which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power."* (Second Thessalonians 1:4-9).

With such warnings Paul persuaded men, and to what end? It was that they may be saved. *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved."* (Romans 10:1). Agrippa once said to Paul, *"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."* Paul answered, *"I would to God, that not only thou, but all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am except these bonds."* (Acts 20:26,27,31).

Judgment is rushing toward us all as an unstoppable flood. We must concern ourselves when the judgment winds blow and beat upon our house whether it shall stand. Not every house will stand. Only those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the commands of the Lord and served him faithfully have the assurance that all will be well with their souls in the judgment before God. Knowing therefore of the testimony in God's book of His wrath, we persuade men to come to Christ by obeying the gospel in faith, repentance, confessions, and baptism into Christ that is to be followed by a life of faithfulness.

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I Know Not The Man

"And he went out and wept bitterly." (Matthew 26:75b). Obviously, we have a scene of a man in deep agony, heart broken, and the depth of indescribable grief. The word translated *"bitterly"* means a grief so intense that it actually inflicts literal physical pain. It is a state of uncontrollable emotional and spiritual distress. The man in such a state was the Apostle Peter.

Why was Peter in this state of suffering? What had brought it about? *"Now Peter sat without in the palace, and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly."* (Matthew 26:69-75).

Luke records an additional and significant point of the story. *"And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter."* (Luke 22:61a). Just before Peter went out and wept bitterly, Peter had been the object of a look from Christ. What was it about this look that moved Peter so? Had not the Lord looked upon Peter before? Yes, certainly, but this look recalled to Peter's mind the words of Christ how that Peter would deny Him thrice before the cock crew. Sure enough, following his third denial of Jesus, the cock crew. The look from Jesus pierced him to the heart with the conviction of his transgression.

Steps Toward Denial

Let us briefly consider the circumstances leading to Peter's denials of Christ. Christ and the apostles had observed the last Passover Supper. At this gathering the Lord had instituted the Lord's Supper that would be observed in His kingdom. They had sung a hymn together in the sweet fellowship and companionship they all had known together. Once in the garden

on the Mount of Olives Jesus remarked, *"All ye shall be offended of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad."* (Matthew 26:31). No doubt these words were shocking to the apostles. The implication was obvious. The Lord would be smitten which was bad enough in itself. But they would be ashamed of Him, offended at Him, and would forsake Him. Such a thought must have been intolerable for them to seriously consider at that time. And it was Peter who responded, *"Though all men shall be offended because of thee. yet I will never be offended. Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples."* (Matthew 26:33-35). Take note that all emphatically said they would remain loyal.

Peter's Agression

After a time in the garden of Gethsemane, those who sought Jesus, led by Judas, came to take Him away. Then a significant thing happened. *"And behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear."* (Matthew 26:51). John 18:10 tells us the servant's name was Malthus, and the man with the sword was Peter. It has been said that Peter was really swinging for his head and missed, but this is speculation, though not altogether an unreasonalbe thought.

There are two reasons why this event was significant. One, it proves the good intentions of Peter that were behind his earlier words of loyalty at all costs. Though he die, he would not deny His Lord. He would fight before he would allow Jesus to be taken away. Second, it proves the sincerity of Peter. He had a great zeal, but it was not properly guided. But his sincerity was unmistakable.

Jesus was led away to a series of six trials, three before the Jews and three before the Romans. In these trials, as Isaiah had foretold, *"his judgment was taken away"* by the desecration of justice. Unfairness, illegalities and false witnesses ruled the day.

Peter Followed

Later Peter was identified as one of those who followed

Christ, as we have read. He followed Christ afar off, that is, not close enough to be identified with Jesus, but not near enough to do Jesus or Himself any benefit. Under the circumstances, he denied Him. Why did Peter do such a turnaround? Why did he go against his own strong expressions of loyalty? Why did he deny what he knew to be true? Why did he try to emphasize his denial with cursing and swearing? Why did he go against his own intentions that were sincerely expressed?

As we seek the answer to these questions, let us be aware that we are not seeking merely to uncover the faults of Peter, but to discover why people even yet are offended in Christ, deny Christ, and say in word and deed, "I know not the man."

Pride

The trouble began with Peter himself. He was proud, sinfully proud. *"Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet I will never be offended."* He was too sure of himself. He was not intentionally that way, but had been blinded to the power of temptation. He minimized it in this event. But he warned later, "*Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour."* (First Peter 5:8). When he wrote that he knew whereof he spoke as well as writing by inspiration. Peter demonstrated the appropriateness of Paul's warning, *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall."* (First Corinthians 10:12).

Wrong Place And People

Peter also put himself in the wrong place and with the wrong company. He followed "*afar off"* (Matthew 26:28). He did not declare himself to be with Jesus nor close enough to comfort Jesus. He was only close enough to show a fence straddling mentality under the pressures of the moment. He went into the high priest's place, the den of the enemies of Christ. *"But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace and went in, and sat with the servants to see the end."* (Matthew 26:58). Putting himself in this location, it appeared to an onlooker that he was one of the company that opposed Jesus. *"And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them."* (Luke 22:55). Peter warmed himself by the enemies' fire. Those that loved not

the Lord had assembled for evil and "*Peter sat down among them.*" He had separated himself from the minority that loved Jesus and had joined the majority that rejected Him. In this unfavorable environment and the pressure of the hostile crowd around him, his loyalty was not strong enough for him to stand and provoked him to sin in denying His Lord. Once he was asked point blank of Jesus, being forced to take a stand, and stand by his word to Christ or stay in the good favor of those around him, he wrongfully chose the latter, seeking to please the wrong people. Social pressure, peer pressure, pressure of the crowd, whatever it may be labeled, caused this good man to crumble under the strain. He could not be loyal to Christ and say by his actions to the enemies of Christ, "I am one of you."

It was mentioned earlier that Peter's action in the garden was very significant for the reasons that it proved his good intentions and sincerity. But those intentions were uttered when he was in the midst of his brethren. When he was with them he found strength and boldness. Certainly great strength can be found in the fellowship of loyal brethren. But when he was among the enemy and separated from his brethren, he folded. What more encouragement do we need to always seek fellowship from loyal and faithful Christians?

Peter had not yet learned what God through Moses taught in Exodus 23:2, *"Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil."* He had not yet learned to sufficiently respect Psalm 1:1, "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*" God's people are taught, *"Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come ye out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."* (Second Corinthians 14:18).

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *"Lead us not into temptation,"* (Matthew 6:13), but Peter had placed himself where sin had every opportunity. We must learn from this

serious blunder of Peter that regardless of what is popular, whatever most may say or do or think, and whichever way the majority may go, we must remember right is right and wrong is wrong, and we must do right. God expects His people to do right. We will do right when we adhere to the Word of God. Following the trends, the crowds, the multitudes, the glamorous and new for the sake of "going along" will bring us into spiritual disaster.

Apostasy Can Strike

Christians today are afflicted with a similar problem that Peter faced. We can be so proud that we think, "It can't happen to me. I'm above that. I'll never forsake my Lord." We sing good songs with those sentiments, but as we sing we must increase our alertness and determination. There are many others who, with just a few backturns of the clock, were thinking such things, but who now have done just what they said they would never do. We dare not trifle with temptation and sin. Some are saying, believing, and doing what neither we nor they would have thought was possible a few years back. Apostasy is like that.

Christians are daring the devil by placing themselves in wrong places. The night spots, taverns, bars (even in the houses where Christians live), serving social drinks, the dance floors (even if it is called a gymnasium), such places are off-limits to the Christian. When you are in such company and engaged in such practices there is temptation to sin. Consider the evil that springs from mixed swimming, indecent body exposure, immodest dress. How many lives have been marred because Christians ignored the warnings against such temptations. Following the foolish fashions of a degenerate age is no manner of life for the child of God.

Many Christians flirt with sin while seeking to please the crowd. They keep company with the sinful, the digressive, the liberal. They cultivate their friendships among the immoral, those with harmful habits, who are disrespectful of sacred things. Even churches today are seeking to be accepted by the community at large by sacrificing sound doctrine and compromising. Many brethren want to "go along" with almost any and every promotional stunt somebody concocts, abandoning principles of truth to "go along." We must remember that being in the "in" crowd may well mean being "out" with God. *"Evil companions corrupt good morals,"* Paul wrote (First Corinthians

15:33). It is still true now. It is bewildering that Christians somehow feel compelled to "go along" with just about whatever "comes along."

If we place ourselves in compromised positions we may well retreat in fear and cowardice when called upon to take our stand. Peter did. Are we as strong as was Peter even then? And as for Peter, once he received that look from Jesus, now realizing his sin and recalling the words of the Master, *"he went out and wept bitterly."*

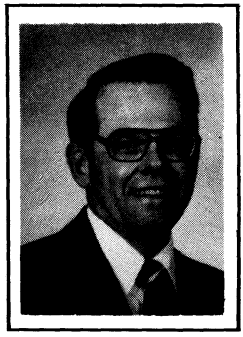
He Was Restored

Since Peter stumbled as he did, we can be glad that he reacted the way he did once it was laid before him. He could have hardened his heart, and in cold indifference excused himself, or just gone off his own way. Many have done exactly that once their sin was brought to their attention. He could have reacted like Judas, grief stricken but not with a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. But a more penitent man cannot be found in Scripture than Peter in this pathetic scene of weeping bitterly. Remembering the words of his Master and crushed with guilt of sin, he obviously repented, because the rest of his life reflects that repentance. He recovered. He rejoined the disciples. We later see him running to and into the empty tomb of Christ to see for himself. We see and hear this same man boldly standing before those who called for the crucifixion of Christ and proclaiming, *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made this same Jesus whom ye crucified, buth Lord and Christ."* (Acts 2:36). No longer did he whimper, *"I know not the man."* But with a fervent and determined faith, he preached the Christ.

† † † † †

Sidney White, gospel preacher and good friend, preached recently at a nearby congregation and he reminded us that when Jude said we should "*earnestly contend for the faith,*" Jude 3 we could know four things for certain. (1) The faith does exist or we could not contend for it. (2) We can know the faith or we would not know for what to contend. (3) The faith will always be under attack and this is why we contend for it. (4) We have the duty to contend for it. So let us be at it!

Murder By Abortion



JAMES W. BOYD

An abortionist is a murderer. In both Old and New Testaments we are commanded, "*Thou shalt not kill,*" which means not to murder. God hates "*hands that shed innocent blood.*" (Proverbs 6:16,17). That which is in the mother's womb is living, distinct from, even though dependent on, the mother. It is human, having life from the moment of conception, and possessing everything that a person shall physically be. It is innocent, yet, is deliberately, wilfully, with premeditation and planning killed when aborted. What a confused society that demands protection of animals but can declare legal butchery, savagery, inhumanity, and cruelty that is involved in destroying the unborn child.

The Holy Spirit used the same word, "brephos," to identify both an unborn and a newborn child (Luke 1:41; 2:12). People show themselves arrogant and rebellious children of the devil to defy God and make void His Word.

Three to four thousand unborn children are murdered everyday in the abortion clinics of America.This is one of our most hideous moral evils. Our land should denounce this sin and return to civilized thinking.

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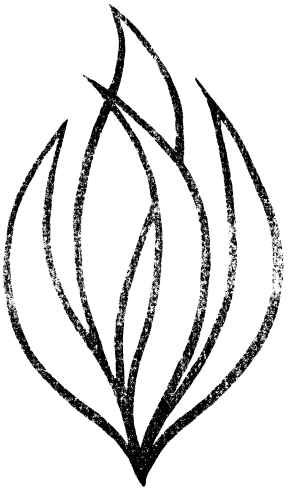

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III James W. Boyd **NUMBER 11**

Why Seek The Living Among The Dead?

"Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments; and as they were afraid and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here but is risen; remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words." (Luke 24:1-8).

Background

Only a few days before the events here recorded, Jesus had been betrayed by Judas, had undergone the arrest and series of trials before both Jews and Romans, was found innocent but nonetheless crucified and buried in a borrowed tomb, a watch of guards set over it to prevent the disciples from stealing His body. On the first day of the week, women came to anoint the body as was the custom of Jewish burial. But what they saw was the stone rolled away, the body gone, and two men in white apparel. What they heard was, "*Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.*" (Luke 24:5). *"Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen, as he said."* (Matthew 28:5,6). In other words, they said He had foretold of His resurrection and that He would live again, so why do you look for Him here? The tomb is the place of the dead, but He is not dead. In this lesson we want to consider the question, *"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"*

An Imposter

What if Christ had remained in the tomb? It would have proven Him to have been an imposter and a fraud. He claimed

to be the Son of God and the Messiah, accepting that designation often. It was prophecied that the Messiah would rise from the dead. *"But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me."* (Psalm 49:15). If He was the Christ, He would have to fulfill this prophecy. The resurrection is the most powerful evidence in proving Jesus is the Son of God. Romans 1:4 *"...who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, even Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Powerless

We would never have power over death. Satan would be recognized as stronger than God. First Corinthians 15:12, *"Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?"* Because Christ was raised, we have proof of God's power and ability to raise the dead and His power over death for mankind. *"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (First Corinthians 15:54b-57). We are victorious, but if there was no resurrection, then death would be the victor and we the victim. We can have victory over death because of His resurrection. *"For thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."* (Psalm 16:10).

Lost

We would have to look elsewhere for salvation. Christ could not fulfill His promises if His bones were still in Palestine. Our hope is in Christ. But how could we have hope in a dead Savior? *"For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. "* (First Corinthians 15:16-19). Our salvation is based on the resurrection of Christ (First Peter 3:21). There is not another Savior to whom we can turn (Acts 4:12).

Meaningless Message

If Christ were among the dead, the teachings of the apostles are meaningless. They preached the resurrection of Christ. Acts 17:18, *"...he preached Jesus and the resurrection."* Acts 4:2, *"...proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."* First Corinthians 15:14,15, *"And if Christ be not risen, then our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom He raised not up if so be that the dead rise not."*

Down Goes The Church

The church would be nothing, salvation a false hoax, the commands to be saved meaningless, the laws governing Christian living useless. All Christianity amounts to nought and the Bible is a false book rather than the Word of God, if Christ were among the dead rather than the living.

But when one considers what had taken place and the things that Jesus had said Himself, it is unreasonable to expect Him to be among the dead. He had shown Himself to be the Son of God by His miracles. Even Nicodemus recognized that (John 3:2). He said He would rise again. If He would do as He said you would expect the tomb to be empty. So why should we seek the living among the dead? Christ is risen. He was raised up. There is no sacred shrine denoting the place of His burial, for He is not there. For this reason, we, even now, continue to preach Christ as the resurrected Messiah.

Two Classes Of People

But let us consider in another sense the question, *"Why seek the living among the dead?"* There are two classes of people mentioned in the Scriptures, the living and the dead. This often refers to physical life and physical death, as already noted. Sometimes the terms are used in a figurative sense, denoting those who are spiritually alive and those who are spiritually dead. Those who are the "living" are the children of God; while the "dead" are children of the Devil. When Paul was describing the condition of Christians before they became Christians, he said, *"And you hath he quickened* [made alive, JWB), *who were dead in trespasses and sins."* (Ephesians 2:1). *"But she that giveth herself to pleasure is dead while she liveth."* (First Timothy 5:6). She was physically alive, but spiritually dead

because she was in sin. Matthew 8:22, Jesus said, *"Let the dead bury the dead."* A man had asked to leave Jesus to bury his father, but Jesus taught the Lord must be first with His disciples. Those who are spiritually dead are those who are so concerned about the earthly and personal matters of this life that they lost their concern for the things of God. Jesus was not teaching disrespect for parents nor was He saying burying the physically dead is wrong. He was showing where one's emphasis must be in life. The point here is that there are those who are spiritually alive and spiritually dead, as well as those who are physically alive and physically dead. First John 3:14, *"We know that we have passed out of death unto life."* John 8:51, *"Verily, verily I say unto you, If a man keep my word, he shall never see death."* Keeping His word means spiritual life. Peter spoke of those who *"being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness."* (First Peter 2:24).

We Live When In Christ

Christians are the living; those in sin are the dead. We do not expect the living to be counted among the dead. We do not expect to find Christians living in the sinful pathways they have left. Psalm 1:1,2, *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law doth he meditate day and night."* Paul taught, *"Come ye out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing."* (Second Corinthians 6:14ff). The Christian is to be a good example. *"Be ye an example to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity."* (First Timothy 4:12). We are to have a good influence to the glory of God. *"Let your light so shine before men that others may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16). The Christian is expected to forsake worldliness. *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."* (First John 2:15). *"Be not fashioned according to this present world but be ye transformed..."* (Romans 12:2). We wonder why so many of us so often ignore this divine command.

Live As The Living

The Bible teaches that it is unreasonable to expect to find the

Christian doing those things like those who are dead in sin. Do we live so that others could even suspect we are Christians? As one asked, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" There is no consistency in a Christian dancing, drinking alcoholic beverages, lying, cheating, committing adultery, gambling, wearing immodest clothing, reading filthy literature, engaging in hurtful and harmful habits, and such like. These are characteristic of the "dead." They are out-of-place and off-limits to the "living." We should no more expect to find Christians doing such things as to expect to find Jesus in the tomb. Romans 6:1,2, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*" When the Lord returns, He will expect to find His people walking in paths of righteousness. Those who shall live forever with Him will not come from among the spiritually dead. *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth."* (Colossians 3:1,2).

† † † † †

Not Everyone

"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21).

This is an oft-quoted text and from it many spiritual truths are learned. But none can escape the awesome, sobering, soul-shaking statement that says everyone will not be saved. It will not be because God wants anyone to be lost. He "*is not willing that any should perish,*" (Second Peter 3:9), but it will be because people can be mistaken, dwell in false security, be deceived, be misled. At the judgment, there will be a very great difference in the outcome. Some shall enter the joys of God. Others shall be commanded to depart from Him.

Not everyone will be saved. Everyone will be at the judgment (Second Corinthians 5:10), but all shall not be eternally saved. Think of the words of Jesus concerning Jerusalem. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest*

them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." (Matthew 23:37). When Paul and Barnabas were preaching the gospel in Antioch of Syria, Acts 13:46 records, *"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."* Some judge themselves by refusing the saving message of the gospel of Christ.

More Lost Than Saved

Matthew 7:13,14, *"Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."* Among the disturbing revelations of this passage is that using relative terms Jesus is saying that more shall be lost than shall be saved.

Do You Love The Truth?

One reason everyone will not be saved is because everyone does not have a love for the truth. Jesus encountered this attitude early in His preaching. In the Bible, righteousness and sinfulness are contrasted many times by picturing one as light and the other as darkness. *"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."* (John 3:19-21). There are those, and we should be very careful not to allow ourselves to become such a one, that believe what they think, what they believe, what they want, what they like, becomes far more important to them than what God has revealed. When people have this attitude their mind is closed and the seed of truth cannot penetrate.

Closed Mind -- Closed Door

While knocking on doors in South Bend, Indiana, years ago

where I lived and preached, I met one "lady" at her door, but upon learning the purpose for the visit, said, "I am a Baptist. I have always been one, I will die one, and you nor anybody else can make me anything else. I will not listen to anything you have to say." You have to admire her stick-to-itiveness, but what an attitude! Faithfulness does not demand a closed mind. She slammed the door upon us. But in contrast to that, it was less than three days that I baptized her daughter-in-law. But never could the first lady be reached because she did not love the truth enough to investigate. She was wedded to what she already believed, not wanting to even put that to the test. Paul wrote in Second Thessalonians 2:10, of those who *"received not the love of the truth."* Again, *"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."* (Second Corinthians 4:4).

In the Bible we read about people who cried aloud against Stephen when he preached to them. They stopped their ears and even resorted to violence rather than hear the truth. Brethren down through the ages have been subjected to treatment at the hands of such people.

Who Really Loves The Lord?

The sad fact of the matter is that not everyone really loves the Lord. Even many who would loudly contend that they do, show by their deeds that they do not. Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). Are we to think that we love the Lord even if we do not keep His commandments? Are His words meaningless? John wrote, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."* (First John 5:3). We can "talk" love from now until the Lord returns, but we show love by our obedience. Disobedience is a demonstration of the lack of love. The Lord wants us to be *"living sacrifices."* (Romans 12:1). Some refuse to give themselves to Him.

"But I Am Religious!"

Not everyone that is religious will be saved. This is because many religious people have simply not done the will of the Lord. Notice that the ones mentioned in our text were religious. They

were believers in God. They realized they were dependent on Him. They even *"called"* on His name. But they did not do His will. Every example of conversion found in the book of Acts is that of a religious person. Check it for yourself and see whether that be true. In Acts 2, the Jews were religious. In Acts 8, both the Samaritans and the Ethiopian were religious. In Acts 9, 22, 26, Saul of Tarsus was very religious. In Acts, chapter 10, we read of Cornelius who was religious. In Acts, chapter 16, Lydia was religious, and the jailor, though not religious as were the Jews, was doubtless one that worshipped the emperor, which was characteristic of those in the employ of Roman authorities; he was religious. The few who were converted in Athens were religious, as were the Corinthians in Acts, chapter 18. However, just being religious does not mean one is right.

Buddists, Mohammedans, etc. are all religious people. But they cannot be saved outside of Christ (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). Christians are religious but are religiously right. Hebrews 5:9 teaches that Christ is the author of salvation *"to them that obey Him."* Unless one obeys, wherein can we read of his or her salvation? (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

What Of Church Members?

There is another group that should cause those of us in the church to take stock and do some serious self-examination. Not everyone who is a church member will be saved. Those in churches that do not belong to Christ are not in the body that He will save (Ephesians 5:23). Denominations are not the Lord's body. They are church members, but that is not sufficient. In fact, membership in a denomination is a hindrance to learning and obeying the truth because most people in denominations are content that all is well. But even all of those in the Lord's church are not in heaven yet. There is always the possibility of apostasy. We have examples of those who fell away. We probably know of some among our own acquaintances who have done just that. There is this ever-present danger, and that is why we are urged to remain stedfast, and why we are admonished to be faithful unto death (Revelations 2:10). True, all the saved are in the church. But to say all in the church are going to be in heaven is to deny the emphatic teaching that we can fall. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them in a

furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. In the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25), they all were people who had accepted the invitation, but had not made adequate preparation. There was more to being prepared than accepting the invitation at the start.

No Escape

There are some things we all will do. *"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."* (Romans 14:12). All shall one day confess the truth regarding Christ (Romans 14:11); all shall be judged by the Bible (Revelation 20:10). All shall be judged (Second Corinthians 5:10), but not everyone will be saved. It is left up to us, by our manner of living, as to which it shall be. God wants us to come to Him through Christ.

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Weakness Of The Church

There are many ways to look at the Lord's church because there are many aspects to it. It is composed of both the divine and human elements. In this respect, it is not altogether unlike the Bible, because the Bible is divine. It is of God and God is the originator of it. The church is divine and has come from God. But there is a human element about the Bible inasmuch as men were used by the Lord to write down His revealed will. There can be detected in the Scriptures the various human styles of writing, which is evidence that God used their various talents and vocabularies to convey what He wanted to say.

It is the purpose of this lesson to examine the two sides of the church, both human and divine, taking note of the weakness of the church which will be apparent in the human element that composes the church.

The Divine Side

It is because of the divine side of the church that the church is the most important organization to which men and women, boys

and girls can belong. Clubs, fraternal organizations, political parties, schools, etc., are totally human. There is nothing divine about them. While there is a human element of the church, as we shall study, it is also divine. It is unfortunate that even some members of the church, as well as many people of the world, will place the church beneath other organizations in importance and give preference to human institutions above God's church. It is not uncommon for some to place attendance to human groups more important than attendance at worship to God.

Divine Origin

The church came from God. It is not the result of some social development, but something that was purposed by the Lord from the foundation of the world. *"To the intent that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Ephesians 3:11). *"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."* (Ephesians 1:4). Peter said, *"Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days."* (Acts 3:24). The days to which he referred were the days of the kingdom of God, the church. God had told prophets down through the ages to predict the coming of that which eventually was begun on Pentecost.

Divine Government

The way the church is organized and governed is not left to man to determine. God has revealed the system by which the church is to be ruled. Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). The universal church is organized into local congregations, overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, all the members making up the body. It is no accident that there is no ecclesiastical hierarchy with one church overruling another, or elders or bishops presiding over more than one congregation. The autonomous nature of the local church is characteristic of what the New Testament reveals (First Peter 5:1).

Divine Mission

God has assigned the church its function and duty to perform. The church is the *"pillar and ground of the truth."* (First Timothy 3:15). It's prime mission is to take the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). As opportunity presents itself, it is to do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

There are those that would pervert the work of the church and give it responsibility to provide entertainment, recreation, secular education, sanitation, medication, political activity, etc. God did not intend the church to serve as all things to all people. Its work is more specific than that. It is not an accident that loyal churches do not have gymnasiums, health spas, weight-lifting rooms, golf courses, business activities in the field of commerce, political arms, etc. These things, while they have a place, do not fall under the work of the church.

Blood Bought

Nothing gives emphasis to the divine side of the church more than the fact that the church was purchased by the blood of Deity, the Son of God, Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). Because man sinned and God loved him yet, God provided for man's salvation through the manifestation of His grace toward man by sending Christ to this earth to suffer and die on the cross for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). He gave His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). He was the atonement or *"propitiation"* for our sins (First John 2:2; 4:10). Those in the church belong to Christ because He purchased them by His own blood (First Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). For this reason it is proper to refer to the church as the church of Christ (Romans 16:16), meaning that it is His. He gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25).

Divine Terms Of Entrance

One does not "join" the church as one might a human organization. God adds those who obey the gospel to the church (Acts 2:47). The same thing one does to be saved from his past sins, to come to Christ, is the identical thing he does to become a member of the church. This is easily understood when you realize the church is composed of the saved. What one does to be saved makes him a member of the saved, the church.

It has not been left to men to determine what to do to be saved. God has taught in His Word that we must hear the

gospel (Romans 10:17), believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of our sins (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38), confess our faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). We either enter the church the road that God has provided, or we will not enter. We only deceive ourselves if we follow the dogmas, creeds, and doctrines that men have devised.

Divine Duties

Those in the church have duties as Christians that God expects to be done as His children. Without going into detail here, suffice it to say that these duties included work and worship, actions and attitudes, deeds and words, involving human relationships as well as fellowship with Deity.

Divine Law

It is a tragedy that some are misdirected concerning the grace of God that they have concluded that the system of salvation is totally one of grace apart from anything else. We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8,9). But we are not saved by grace alone. There is law involved in God's system under Christ. We are saved when we obey Christ (Hebrews 5:9). Christ's law is the *"perfect law of liberty."* (James 1:25). The law that governs the church is from God just as the existence of the church itself. This law has been *"once delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 3), and the saints are to abide therein (Second John 9). The assumption that somehow men in their councils and conferences can improve or update God's law is the epitome of arrogance and presumption. There is the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). That great book of Romans that teaches the distinction between the law of Moses and the grace of Christ mentions the "*law of faith.*" (Romans 3:27).

No Weakness In The Divine Side

We have mentioned the weakness of the church. There is no weakness in the church or concerning the church when we are talking about God's side of the church. That which God has done, and still does, is and ever will be perfect in every respect. Nothing can be done to improve anything about the church that God has designed, developed, and delivered.

Human Element

There is also the human element of the church. The church is composed of human beings. We are not heavenly hosts, not angels, not perfect creatures. We are frail, weak, stumbling, faulty human beings, who are subject to temptation and sin, who have recognized our own inadequacy and inability to save ourselves, and we have come to Christ. We are human beings who operate in the church and we often make mistakes. But we should not condemn a machine nor the designer of it because of some unskilled operator of it. Just so with the Lord's church. Many refuse to obey the Lord because they see faults in those of us who are already members of it. Shall we deny the Lord because some who profess Him do not live as they should? Where did we ever get the idea that we can be saved by the sins of others? Does God anywhere suggest that our way of escape is the way of hypocrisy of others?

This great treasure of the unsearchable riches of Christ has been committed into our hands to preach to the world. It has come from God. But it is still man that must preach it, many must obey and follow it. Nevertheless, man will not do to perfection all that he should. Herein lies the weakness of the church of Christ.

The mission of the church is perfect, but imperfect men are assigned the task of performing that mission. The organization and government of the church is perfect, but imperfect men fill those places of labor and responsibility in the structure of the church. The duties of Christian living are set forth by the Lord, but men are the Christians who often fall short. Because people do not measure up is no reflection on the church as God intended it. Rather we must recognize this distinction and do all we can to improve the human element of the church.

Members That Hurt The Church

May we list just four kinds of church members that really bring reproach and hardship on the church, producing criticism against this divine institution. There is the non-worshipping member, who can always find some excuse for not doing what they should. There are the members who are uninformed, lacking in knowledge, but who are content to remain that way. There is the member who feels that it is always somebody else's job to support the church with time, talent, money, energy, etc.

There is the member who is unfaithful in his daily life, who brings reproach on the church by pretending to be a follower of Christ but goes the way of the world. This is the weakness of the church.

May we ever pay respect to the divine side of the church and busy ourselves in improving the human side, which is you and me, dear brother!

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The Way Back To God

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (Second Chronicles 7:14).

Is it not obvious that Gods people were once with God, but had left God, and needed to know the way back to God? The background of this passage is the building and consecretion of the great temple that Solomon had built; it was called the house of God. Everything was ready for worship, except the people. The reason they were not ready is because they were not near to God as they ought to have been.

It is rather surprising that they were estranged from God inasmuch as this was what might be called the "golden age" of the Israelite monarchy. David had left a strong and united nation. Solomon had added wealth, wisdom, and power among nations, with great prosperity. The borders of the kingdom covered great territory. They had every reason to be grateful to God. They should have been giving God the glory for their welfare. Instead, they were not near to God, and needed to come back to Him. God gives them the plan by which they could be restored to Him. It seems that Israel made the same mistake that nations and individuals often make and that is confusing material well-being with spiritual acceptance and approval. They were religious but not righteous; they were wealthy, but also wicked.

False Security

We sometimes feel secure when actually we are not. We may

be speeding along on the highway unaware of some defect in the steering mechanism, or some problem with a tire. We may think we are healthy and actually some disease is already sapping away our life's strength. The rich man in Luke, chapter 12, considered all was well because of his material gain. He said, *"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."* (Luke 12:20). God called him a fool because he relied on his material prosperity rather than really caring for his soul.

We are no different. We can be lulled into complacency, false security, self-satisfaction and indifference. This is one of the ways the devil gets us to "let down our guard." *"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* (First Corinthians 10:12). This should ever be heeded. Surely, one of the most deceiving conditions in our nation is that all is well simply because we are a nation with material abundance. We need to be more concerned about the spiritual and moral conditions that can bring on us our ruin.

We need to profit from what history teaches. Nations have risen, only to fall because they neglected the things that really matter. Individuals have been overtaken and crushed because they lost concern for the soul. Does it not concern you that there is so much gambling in our nation, that immorality is running rampant, that moral standards have dipped year after year, that divorce is tearing up the home, that children are neglected, abused, untrained, that atheism is the fastest growing religious faith, that modernism, liberalism, and skepticism is taking the day, and even invading the ranks of the church. Many in the church go about their lives as if this made no real difference to them. Have they no concern for themselves and their children and children's children? Do we no longer believe that unrepealable law of sowing and reaping?

We Need To Know

Every person, every nation, needs to know the way back to God. We sin (Romans 3:23) and this separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). Apart from God there is no hope of salvation (Ephesians 2:12). We must find our way back. God has provided the way back and that way is Christ (John 14:6). Because of Christ and that which He has accomplished on our behalf, we can come back to God, be forgiven, be healed of the spiritual malady that threatens to engulf us.

Humility

The first thing God prescribed for those wanting to come back to Him was for them to humble themselves. *"Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."* (Proverbs 16:18). Our land overflows with pride. *"God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble."* (James 4:6). Christ, who is the way back to God, humbled Himself (Philippians 2:8). Shall we do less? We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Romans 12:3). *"For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."* (Luke 14:11). *"The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low."* (Isaiah 2:11,12). This effort of trying to save face is more important to many than saving the soul. One who does not "give in" and submit himself to the Lord can never find the way back to God. He will remain separated.

Prayer

No task should be undertaken without prayer. Prayer is an action of worship of God that manifests an attitude of dependence on God and the recognition of Him. If we cannot pray over it, we ought not do it. *"Pray without ceasing"* is an expression of a constant attitude (First Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer is the realization of One higher and greater than self. We cannot return to God until we accept His greatness, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, and majesty. I have in my study a painting made for me many years ago by a good sister in the church that shows "Uncle Sam" on his knees in prayer. She painted it for me at my request because I believe this is an essential position for the welfare of America. Unwillingness to recognize God will spell our national doom. And so will it be with each person who fails to recognize God.

There are some things that cannot be accomplished by prayer. When God has given commands to be obeyed, if we do not obey, we deprive ourselves of the privilege of prayer. Prayer is no substitute for obedience. Neither can we dispence with prayer and be blessed with the healing we need.

Seek God

There is a great difference between people who seek the Lord and those who do not. *"Seek and ye shall find"* was a promise by Jesus. Earnestly wanting to know the way of the Lord, yearning to serve Him and please Him, will cause a person to *"search the Scriptures"* to learn what he must do to serve God. One will not be content until he knows the way and until he can read of his salvation from the Word of God, knowing that he has done that which the Lord has commanded of him.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," Jesus said. (Matthew 6:33). God spoke to Jeremiah and told him to instruct Israel, *"Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."* (Jeremiah 29:12,13). The captivity of Israel and Judah could have been prevented if the people had sought the Lord. The welfare of the nation for the benefit of our descendants depends largely upon us and whether we seek God or go our own way to our ruin and the destruction of hope for those that follow us. Many will be lost in the day of judgment, not because they could not be saved, but because they would not be saved. They pursue their own ways in this life to the neglect of that which is to come. Will such be said of me? Will it be true of you?. While many seek fame, fortune, pleasure, and power in this life, if we are to be saved, if we are to come back to God, our only hope, we must seek His face.

Repentance

Turning from wickedness means repentance. It means leaving that which is wrong and coming to the light of truth. It is hard to persuade people to repent. They may be sorry about mistakes made, but too often it is not a godly sorrow, but a worldly sorrow that does not lead to repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance. Jesus preached repentance. The prophets of old preached repentance. We must preach repentance. Without repentance we shall perish (Lluke 13:3). *"God commandeth all men everywhere to repent,"* (Acts 17:30). To come to God we must turn around. We must leave the paths of sin and follow the ways of truth. When one has truly repented of his sins, and changed his heart as he should he will find no difficulty nor will there be hesitation to render obedience to whatever God has commanded. We do not turn from evil into a state of neutrality. We show we are leaving the ways of sin by

obeying the commands of the gospel and then living in such a manner that produces the fruit of the Spirit.

Blessings Received

God is true to His Word. He keeps His promises just as He keeps His threats. If we will humble ourselves, give God the recognition due Him, seek His face, turn from evil, all of which requires submission and obedience to His will and commands, then God will hear us and will forgive us, grant us the spiritual healing without which we cannot survive.

The nation as a whole, and each person individually must make a decision about God, Christ, and their relationship with Deity. Under the new covenant of Christ, we are taught that those who have never come to Christ must hear the Word, believe in Christ, repent of their sins, confess their faith in Christ, and be baptized *"for the remission of sins."* (Acts 2:38). Those who have once come to Him but fallen away must be restored. God's plan of restoration is repentance, confession of sins, and prayer. Dear reader, if you fall into either category, what decision will you make? Whatever it is, it is one with which you must exist for eternity.

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On page 24 is a piece written by Chris Young, young member of the church in Killeen, Texas, where I preached in a meeting last June. I preached on abortion, and he gave me a copy of this he had written earlier. Be sure to read it!

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"God never closes one door without opening another. He didn't deliver you this far to desert you now."

"If you lie down with dogs, you'll get up with fleas."

"He who gave you teeth will surely give you something to use them on."

The Two Laws Of Pardon

Why is the matter of pardon so important? It is because we stand in need of being pardoned. *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23). Our iniquities separate us from God and our sins hide His face from us (Isaiah 59:1,2). *"For the wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23). There is no sin allowed in heaven (Revelation 21:27). That is where God is (Matthew 6:9), and there is no fellowship between God and things evil (Second Corinthians 6:14ff). To enter heaven we must be rid of our guilt of sin. *"Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity..."* (Habakkuk 1:13). We must be freed from sin.

When we sin we enlist in the army of the devil and become servants of sin (Romans 6:16). To sin is to commit lawlessness against God (First John 3:4). We make ourselves enemies of God. *"Friendship with the world is enmity with God."* (James 4:4).

The only way we can be delivered from sin is that God would forgive us. *"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."* (Romans 4:7,8). Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God. Forgiveness is not accomplished by simply claiming we have been forgiven. God must pardon us.

Pardon Is Conditional

There are some blessings all receive without condition, such as rain, sunshine, life, the laws of nature, etc. (Matthew 6:45), but spiritual blessings are conditional. All spiritual blessings are *"in Christ."* (Ephesians 1:3). If one is not in Christ, the spiritual blessings are not his. Surely there can be no doubt in anyone's mind that forgiveness of sins is a spiritual blessing. It is conditional. *"Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). *"And being made perfect, he became the author of salvation unto all them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9). We are not to think that refusing to do God's will or failing to obey Christ will bring us the spiritual blessings anyway.

Pardon Makes Us Better

One of the purposes of pardon is to cleanse us from the stains of sin. This makes us better than we were before being pardoned. It makes us acceptable before God whereas prior to pardon we were not acceptable. Furthermore, being made free from sin we are encouraged to live better lives. Everything that God has ever required of man makes man better when obeyed.

To be pardoned there are some changes that have to be made. One must change his mind about sin, about Christ, change his convictions about truth and error, change his manner of life. This is repentance and the fruit of repentance. The changes required in being pardoned helps us to obtain, sustain, and remain in the Christian principles of purity. If pardon was unconditional, none of these beneficial changes would take place. If there were no costs involved there would not be the appreciation for salvation. Unconditional pardon would leave us clean but without much impression of the debt of love we owe. Pardon therefore is conditional.

Pardon Is In The Mind Of God

One of the reasons we can know that our feelings do not tell us whether we are pardoned or not is because pardon does not take place in our mind, but in the mind of God. Regardless of how we feel, that does not determine our salvation. As Joseph realized (Genesis 39:9) that all sin is against God, so must we realize it. Peter told Ananias and Sapphira that they had not lied unto men but unto the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Others may be involved in our sins, but all sin is an offense toward God. He is the one who forgives. *"Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"* (Luke 5:21). First John 1:9 teaches that God is the one who forgives sins. God forgives when man meets God's conditions of forgiveness. Therefore, we must look to the mind of God to know what the conditions are and God has revealed that in His Word.

Two Laws Of Pardon

We do not imply there are different ways to heaven. There is only the one way and that way is Jesus Christ (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). But the doctrine of Christ reveals two laws of pardon because there are two kinds of people who need to be forgiven. There are those who are not and never have been children of God, and there are those who sin even though they are children

of God. One class might be called "aliens" and the other called "wayward children." We shall see that regardless of the class into which one falls, the way of pardon is by the blood of Christ in both instances.

The Alien

The alien sinner is one who has never come to God through Christ. He is lost in sin because he is out of Christ. One cannot be saved outside of the relationship established between man and God through Christ. This is highly offensive to those of other religions to have this preached, but regardless of what others think of it, this is fundamental to the religions of which Christ is the author.

Under the Old Testament system, the Israelites were God's children and all others were aliens. Like today, some of us are citizens of this nation and those who are not are called aliens. Those who have never obeyed the gospel are aliens from the Lord and their greatest need is to come to Christ for the pardon of their sins and establishment of the Father-child relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Wayward Children

God's children are not perfect. *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."* (First John 1:8). But the Christian has a different relationship with God than does the alien. He has once come to the Father through Christ. He heard, believed and obeyed the gospel and was added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47), which is God's family or household (First Timothy 3:15). Children can become wayward and leave the home of their father here on earth. Jesus taught the parable of the prodigal or wasteful son (Luke 15), the younger son who went away from home. God's children can also leave their spiritual home and leave the Father. The fact that there is a way of pardon for the fallen children is evidence that one can fall away. But the alien and the wayward child are not taught to do the same things in being pardoned and brought into the good favor of God.

Conditions For The Alien

What were aliens told to do in the New Testament to be forgiven of their sins. Whatever they did is what aliens must do now. First of all they had to hear the gospel of Christ. *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?...So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:13,14,17). The need for the gospel to be heard is why there must be preaching (Mark 16:15). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). We are saved by the Word (James 1:21). So the first step in the pardoning of an alien is that he hears what God has done, what Christ has done, be impressed with his need of forgiveness, and then learn what he is expected to do.

He must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. When the jailer asked Paul what to do to be saved, the first thing Paul told him was to believe on Jesus Christ (Acts. 16:31). Just here it is noteworthy that Paul did not say that this was all that was necessary. He was just beginning to teach this man what to do to be saved. Had he stopped the teaching there, then so much else revealed in Scripture would have been declared null and void. Jesus taught, *"I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins, for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). Hebrews 11:6, "*But without faith it is impossible to please him...*" That man is saved by faith is one of the cardinal teachings of the New Testament. But the New Testament never teaches salvation by faith alone. Paul *"spake unto him the word of the Lord,"* (Acts 16:32), and later the man was baptized (Acts 16:33).

Those on Pentecost who heard Peter preach the gospel asked what they had to do to be saved and Peter told them, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:38). They were not told to believe because they already believed. They would not have been pricked in their hearts if they disbelieved what Peter preached. They would never have asked nor would they have cared what to do if they had not already believed. They were told to repent and be baptized.

Jesus taught repentance essential to salvation in Luke 13:3, *"I tell you nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."* Second Peter 3:9, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise*

as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30).

There must be the confession of Christ. *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* (Romans 10:9,10). Before the Ethiopian was baptized he confessed his faith in Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:37).

The necessity of baptism is repeatedly taught in the New Testament. *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be condemned."* (Mark 16:16). We have already noted Peter's remarks in Acts 2:38, *"And now why tarriest thou, Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* (Acts 22:16). Peter taught that baptism saved (First Peter 3:21). It is by baptism that we get into Christ (Galatians 3:27). It is by baptism that we enter His death (Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized into the one body (First Corinthians 12:13), and the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). How many times must God say something for us to accept it?

The Wayward Child Restored

Once one has done what has just been studied, he is added to the church (Acts 2:47), and is a child of God, having been born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5). But he can fall away. There is the necessity of remaining faithful to Christ once one has come to Christ. Those who sin, those who drift away, those who quit or turn back into the paths of sin must be pardoned if they are ever going to enter heaven. What are they to do?

Just as a physical child is not born into the family again and again, regardless of how loyal or disloyal they are to the father, so the spiritual child of God is always a child of God once he has come to God through Christ. But he may well become a child out of favor with the Father and lose his inheritance.

The fallen child is on a different relationship with God than one who is an alien. He has the advantage of already being a child, but one that needs to be restored. *"Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, looking to thyself, lest thou also be*

tempted." (Galatians 6:1). *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins."* (James 5:19,20). How is the fallen brother restored? Acts 8:22, *"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."* The man to whom this was instructed was one who had heard, believed, and been baptized (Acts 8:13). But he fell away into the *"gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity."* To be pardoned he had to repent and pray. He was not baptized again, but was told to *"Repent...and pray..."*

Furthermore, John tells us, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (First John 1:9). In addition to repentance and prayer, there is confession of sins. This is the law of pardon for the fallen brother in Christ.

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What's that? Get rid of me, you say?
Why would you want to do that?
I haven't even been give my chances yet.
I haven't spoken my first words, tied my own shoes,
Or even brought home my first report card.
Aren't you going to give me a chance?
I haven't brought tears of laughter to your eyes yet,
I haven't learned about life yet, had my first girlfriend,
Or told you how much I love you.
I haven't hit my first homerun, scored my first touchdown.
I haven't made any friends to have over for the night
And eat popcorn and watch the late movie.
I haven't felt the pride of being the top of my class.
I haven't gotten to cheer up a friend who is
down in the dumps.
I haven't felt the joy of success; or the pain of defeat!
Aren't you going to let me try?
Please, Mom, tell the doctor to go away.
I don't like the way he's looking at me.
What's he doing, anyway?
Ow! That hurts! Doesn't it hurt you, Mom?
Please, Mom, make him stop!
Aren't you going to give me a chance?

Our Homeland



JAMES W. BOYD

Most Americans get a thrill when they hear such songs as "God Bless America," "America, the Beautiful," or the "Star Spangled Banner." And well we might be moved because we live in a land that has been so blessed. While there are nations that must build walls around their borders to keep their citizens from escaping, America has problems with the tremendous outpouring of people from every land who wish to make their home here.

Nothing said here diminishes the serious problems we face in America, nor the disastrous moral decline that this nation has suffered in recent decades, which is at the root of so many of our problems. We dare not decrease our alertness to the encroachments of evil that are pounding at our foundations.

But we shall not be unmindful how God has bountifully blessed us with freedom, and the many joys and happinesses we have in America. The most patriotic thing we can do, and at the same time show our genuine gratitude, is to be faithful in service to God through Christ. *"Righteousness exalteth a nation,"* and that is the first order of business for every Christian.

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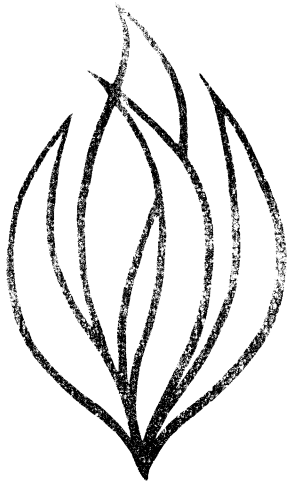

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III James W. Boyd **NUMBER 12**

Authority In Religion

"And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" (Matthew 21:12).

Jesus was teaching in the temple and the authority by which He was teaching and for the things He had done was challenged. He had cast out the money changers from the temple, overturning their tables and driving out their animals, calling them robbers. His teaching was different from anything they had heard. He said, *"Ye have heard that it was said...but I say unto you."* Christ was not of the priestly tribe of Levi. He was not one of the Rabbinical leaders. He had no authority from the Roman government for what He was doing. Therefore, they questioned His authority.

Of course, being the Son of God, He had the highest authority. His was the authority of Deity, but His hearers did not accept that. Jesus taught before He ascended into heaven, *"All power [or authority] hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth."* (Matthew 28:18). *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, by whom He also made the worlds."* (Hebrews 1:1,2).

Need For Authority

The question posed to Jesus implies the recognition of the need for authority in matters of religion. There can be no harmony, unity, order or system in anything in life without some authority, some standard, something by which to measure. In business, trade would be paralyzed if there were no standards and no authority. How could men be merchants if there were no standard and accepted weights and measures? There must be authority in the home, the school, and the church. There must be authority regulating the conduct on highways, in sporting events, etc. Lack of authority brings confusion, chaos, and disorder.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that there must be authority in religion as well. The chaos, division, confusion,

contradictions, and general bewilderment of religion that exists today stems from the fact that there is no agreement as to what shall be the authority in religion. This condition does not exist because there is a lack of authority, but because mankind has failed to recognize and respect the authority of God. Before the rubbish of division shall ever be cleared away, there must be an agreement on the authority by which to be governed. What ought be that authority? Let us look at some of the authorities people are using today in religion.

False Authorities

The modernist may look to human reason. It is true that the truth of God is reasonable and logical, and can be upheld through intelligent reasoning processes of that which has been revealed. But for people to discard whatever they do not understand, or is not consistent with what they have previously thought, is to close the door on learning. Because the modernist does not accept the miraculous and rejects anything miraculous because it does not fit his natural understanding of things, he will reject the creation, all miracles including the virgin birth, the resurrection, everything concerning the Deity of Christ. In fact, they deny even the existence of God. Unless they can understand it, measure it in some naturalistic manner, see it tested in the test tube, they refuse to accept it. Their authority is what they think. What they fail to understand from the start is, *"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."* (First Corinthians 3:9). The world knew not God because of its foolishness that it called wisdom (First Corinthians 1:21). *"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world, nor the princes of this world, that come to nought; But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."* (First Corinthians 2:6-8). *"There is a way that seemeth right unto man but the end thereof are the ways of death."* (Proverbs 14:12). Jeremiah taught, *"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23).

If human reasoning was to be set as the authority, there would be as many authorities as there are individuals. In essense, there would be no authority at all. People never show themselves

more foolish than when they pit their wisdom against the wisdom of God.

Not Human Traditions

Some cite religious traditions as their religious authority. The church of Rome has decreed "that the oral traditions of the Catholic Church are to be received with equal piety and reverence as the books of the Old and New Testaments." (Council of Trent, 4th Session.) Catholics also claim for the pope equal authority with Christ, contending he is the vicar or earthly representative of Christ or God.

Catholicism does not have a monopoly on this error, however. The denominational world, children of the apostate church, also hold ecclesiastical organizations and documents and decrees as religious authority. Some denominations among Protestants have changed their divorce laws to accomodate the dreadful upsurge of divorce in the country. They have changed their laws regarding women preaching. They have altered, revised, manipulated and rearranged whatever they have seen fit, whenever they have seen fit. Their sin is not in changing man made laws; man made them, man can change them. Their sin is in making religious laws and setting aside the laws of God. The creeds, disciplines, manuals, cathechisms, etc., are of human origin, have no validity, are not by the authority of God, not inspired of God, but are human innovations that are forbidden by the Word of God.

Not Majority Rule

Others use the system of majority rule as their authority. With a desire to be open, fair, and democratic, everybody has a "say." They do not understand that the kingdom of God is a monarchy, not a democracy. But if one is going to use the majority as the standard, we are forced to ask, "Which majority?" In many nations the majority would be Buddhist, Moslem, or Catholic. In some places, Mormonism is the majority. The majority changes with localities.

God forbade Israel from following a multitude to do evil (Exodus 23:2). But if they were to follow the majority, why would that be wrong? What if Noah had operated on the majority rule doctrine? Do we not realize that Jesus shows the majority will be lost (Matthew 7:13,14)? If we followed the

majority, there would be no church services in America next week. Most people do not attend worship regularly. On any given Lord's Day, most of the population misses any kind of worship service. Did not Israel get themselves into trouble trying to be like the majority of the nations around them? We are not to be followers of men, but of God.

Not Feelings

Many use themselves as the authority in religion. They determine what is right and wrong, what can and cannot be done, on the basis of how it feels to them. Their feelings are the rule of measure. They will let their conscience be their guide as if the conscience was infallible, which of course it is not. Cannot we see, that if we allow each man to be his own authority, once again you have as many authorities as you have people, and actually you have no authority at all?

What I think may be right, but it is not right just because I think it is. What you believe to be wrong may be wrong, but not because you think it is. We can be deceived, misled, sincerely believe a lie, and honestly be mistaken. No man, or group of men, can be the authority.

Christ Is The Authority

The only authority in religion is Christ. *"And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority."* (Matthew 7:28,29). *"And Jesus came to them and spake unto them saying, All authority hath been given to me in heaven and on earth."* (Matthew 28:18). *"He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."* (John 12:48). Concerning Christ, Peter said, *"...who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him."* (First Peter 3:22). *"When he raised him from the dead and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but in that which is to come, and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."* (Ephesians 1:20-23). Speaking of

Christ, Paul wrote, *"...and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power."* (Colossians 2:10). There is no doubt that God has made it so that Christ has *"the preeminence."* (Colossians 1:18).

Delegated Authority

He has delegated the inspired apostles to speak by His authority. To them gave He the power to bind and loose as God bound and loosed (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). As they were guided and taught by the Holy Spirit they would teach what they had been taught. They were the ambassadors of Christ (Second Corinthians 5:20). For a time the will of Christ was embodied in inspired men, but now it is found in the inspired book, the Bible (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The one source of light is the Word of God (Psalm 119:105). For this reason, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11). As has been paraphrased, "Speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent." We are not to add to nor take from the Word of God (Galatians 1:6-9), but contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), because that is the measure and standard and authority.

In summary, if it is authorized by the Bible, it is right. Otherwise, it is wrong before God. We must respect the authority of the Lord by respecting the authority of His inspired Word.

† † † † †

Three Volumes Completed- Many More To Come

This issue completes three volumes of ***A Burning Fire*** with twelve issues each. Lord, willing, with adequate health, mind, and money, I have material to continue this effort for probably another seventeen years without very much duplication. I am grateful to all who have encouraged me in any way, and though the circulation must be limited, I am assured that much benefit is being derived from the publication of these sermons. ***JWB***

A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on.

Are your troubles causing you to lose your religion or use your religion?

The Lost Child

"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a days journey, and they sought him among their kinfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days, they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed, and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them, but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." (Luke 2:40-52).

Biblical writers said so much in few words. Brevity, and the inclusiveness of what is said, is one of the evidences of the divine origin of the Bible. As one reads this account, he may see only the record of a mere incident in the early life of Christ. But there are much deeper and more significant matters being discussed that are of benefit to the soul of man.

Someone Was Lost

The story tells of something lost. In this instance it was the Christ. He was lost from his earthly parents. The announcement that something is lost produces some anxiety with people whether it is an article or an individual. We expend great energies to recover things that are lost, if we place any value on those things. In Luke 15, we read about one lost sheep and how the shepherd searched diligently until he found it. We read of

the lost coin, and how the woman energetically sought for it until it was found. More importantly, we read of a lost son and the great joy at his recovery. That which is lost creates concern. At times, the entire nation, even the world, is aroused over the report that someone is lost somewhere. Nations pool their resources to find that which is missing. But this record tells us that Christ was lost from Mary and Joseph.

It is not to be expected that parents will lose a child, but it sometimes happens. Such panic runs through the heart of the parents until the child is found. Jesus was not lost because his parents did not love him, or deliberately neglected him. They were not bad, irresponsible people. He was not lost because his parents could not know his whereabouts. They were just a bit careless, and presumed all was well when it was not. Oversight on their part, carelessness, assuming He was among company returning home was their mistake. They went all day without really knowing where He was. That was a long time to not take a check on the location of your child. We are not to think that Mary and Joseph were without blame in this instance. In a real sense, Jesus was not truly lost, being fully aware of Himself. But He was lost to them.

Make It Sure

But we wonder how many of us are supposing Jesus is with us, presuming Christ is with us, thinking He is among us, but really He is not. There is a way to know whether He is or not, and we dare not make the same mistake they made by just "supposing" He is with us. We can know, and we should know.

We are not inclined to make such a mistake of just "supposing" when it comes to many other matters of life. Business men that have financial success at stake are very careful to investigate and make sure that they know the facts. When one goes to buy a piece of property, he is not content with "just supposing" that he knows where the property line is. People do not buy stocks, bonds, other securities, "just supposing" their value. Yet, many today have supposed that Jesus is with them but have never really investigated the matter. Is not the soul worth more than money, property, etc.?

Many parents have supposed too much regarding their children without really knowing about them. They suppose they know where they are, with whom they form friendships, what they do. Sometimes parents are shocked by the conduct of their

children because they have "supposed" everything was all right. It is part of the duty of being a father and mother to "know," not just suppose about such matters. We have been too guilty in the church for too long taking for granted that the young are forming convictions concerning the truth only to be harshly awakened later on and learn they really care little for the Lord and His church. The point is simply this, "Don't just suppose, but know."

Once discovering His absense, Mary and Joseph became wonderfully concerned and were busy trying to find Him. Where was He? Was He among family, friends, or acquaintances? No, they did not locate Him there. They eventually forsook the homeward caravan and returned to Jerusalem. There they found Him.

His Father's Business

They did not find this youth in a pool hall, night club, dance room, around a card table, or at the local bar. Jesus was in the temple of His Father, attending to the affairs of His Father, discussing the way of the Father with all of those who were present, including the learned men of His day. He was busy about His Father's business. Should we not be?

They asked, "Son, why have you done us this way?" They made a big mistake in thinking Jesus had forsaken them. It had been the other way around. They left Him. This was but the first time in many times that people would leave the Lord. In John, chapter six, we read of many disciples who considered His sayings "*too hard*" for them, and they walked with Him no more. But where was Jesus? He was right where they had left Him.

There are several beneficial lessons for us to learn from this brief account of the event in the early days of the life of our Lord on earth. One, we can leave the Lord and thereby cut ourselves off from Him by our sins. Christ has not forsaken the people of the world, but the people of the world have not sought Him. He is standing right where He has always stood. So much of the religious world has completely forsaken the teachings of Christ. Even many in the church have turned their back and walked with Him no more. But if ever anybody wants to find Him, look for Him in the temple of God, which is His church.

Are We Searching?

A question that we need to ask ourselves is whether we are as concerned over finding Him as were Mary and Joseph. They diligently searched, seeking Him, sorrowing. They were bereaved over the loss of Him. Having once "supposed" He was with them, they learned He was not and they made haste to remedy the bad situation.

He Can Be Found

They found Him and we can find Him. Actually, Christ is not the one who is lost, but we are the lost ones when we are apart from Him. They did not find Jesus among their religious neighbors. He is not found today among the doctrines and opinions of men. He will not be found following Martin Luther, John Calvin, the pope of Rome, or some Protestant denominational creed book. To find Jesus, people must return to Jerusalem. We are not suggesting a literal return to the literal city. But this is the "restoration plea," back to the Bible, back to that which is revealed therein. We must go back to the events that occurred in Jerusalem concerning Christ; namely, His death, burial, and resurrection. Back to the church that had its beginning on Pentecost in that city. Jerusalem is where He shed His blood, and we are saved by His blood. Without His blood we cannot be saved. It was there that He proved Himself in the most powerful fashion possible that He was the Son of God by coming forth from the tomb, showing Himself alive among witnesses. In this way He gives assurance to all that He is capable of fulfilling His promise of life to all that would come to Him.

There are so many churches in the world. They have started in first one place, then another, by first this person, then another church by another person. But the Lord built His church and it is that church that shall be delivered to the Father when Christ comes again (Matthew 16:16-18; First Corinthians 15:24). Let us go back to the church of Christ that began in Jerusalem.

There are many endeavors of varying value in which people can occupy themselves. But there is nothing that compares with finding the Christ. By sin we are separated from God. In Christ there is salvation (Second Timothy 2:10). Who will cease his "supposing" and learn and know?

† † † † †

Personal Responsibility

Galatians 6:2,5, *"Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ...For every man shall bear his own burden."* What appears on the surface to be a contradiction is part of two statements giving emphasis to two points of truth. The apostle is teaching that there are those things in which we can be of assistance and help to one another. We can bear each other's burdens. But, on the other hand, there are certain matters that each one must bear for himself and nobody else can relieve him of his personal responsibility. He must bear his own burden. In other words, there are some things that no one can do for you. You and you alone are responsible.

Few experiences of life have a more sobering effect than to be faced with responsibilities. We grow up in homes where others make all the provisions for the food, shelter, clothing, etc. Even when we are sick somebody else takes care of us. This is as it ought to be. Eventually, however, we enter adulthood and must assume these physical responsibilities for ourselves. We have to make decisions and bear the consequences of those decisions. We have to locate a place to live, find a job, pay the bills, and take the "heat" from the world around us. We are faced with meeting responsibilities all through life. But such material responsibilities fade into relative insignificance compared to the spiritual responsibilities we have to God and our fellowman.

An Awesome Thought

Daniel Webster once said that the most awesome matter he ever contemplated was his personal responsibility to God and standing before God in judgment. Webster was not the only one with such responsibilities. Each of us have the same matter before us.

Some have asked, "Why did God make man so he could sin?" God created man and placed him in the beautiful Garden of Eden, but also placed the tree of knowledge of good and evil there. Why? Did He do it with the idea, "Now, I dare you to eat of it. If you do, I'll get you for it." Certainly that was not the case. The answer to this question is not very difficult when we recall the nature and purpose of man's existence.

God made man for His own glory. God made man to honor Him. The whole duty of man is to "*Fear God and keep His*

commandments." (Ecclesiastes 12:13). God did not make us like robots and machines. He made man with a power of choice, the ability to decide and determine for himself what he shall do with his own existence. If we were but robots, wound up and left to run according to the way we were "programmed" we would have no responsibility for the way we operated. But that is not the nature of man. Having the power of volition, we are responsible. God blessed us with an intellect, the power to think and to choose, and left us free to make whatever choices we wanted. Of course, we shall either enjoy or suffer the consequences of our choices, but we have the right and power to choose. How we choose makes a great difference, but the point here is that God made man so man would be a free moral agent and responsible for his own actions. If we choose to serve God, then we fulfill our purpose and God is glorified. If we choose not to serve God, then God is dishonored and the Devil is glorified, and we shall be punished. If God had made us so we could not sin, we would be something other than a human being. This is the very nature of human beings. There is no glory in a Creator making something that could not do anything except the will of the Creator. The glory comes because the created does the will of the Creator by choice, deliberate intent and purpose. But this power of choice also includes personal responsibility.

We Must Choose

Today, if you are a Christian, it is because you want to be a Christian and have chosen to be one. If you are not a Christian, it is because you have chosen to not be one. God has not forced anyone to be a Christian and He does not force anyone to keep from being a Christian. He has made it possible for all men to come to Him through Christ, but He forces nobody to do so. Those who come, come by choice. Just as the father is not held responsible for sins committed by the son, and the son is not responsible for the sins of the father, God is not responsible for the sins of man who was created by Him. Every soul must give answer for himself or herself. (Here is where the sexes have equality.)

Paul said, "*You were dead through* ***your*** *trespasses and sins."* (Emphasis, JWB, Ephesians 2:1). We are not spiritually *"dead"* because of the sins of any other. We are not *"dead"* because of the sins of Adam, our parents, or forefathers. We

may well suffer some of the consequences of the sins of those who have gone before us, just as we enjoy many blessings because of those who preceded us, but we are not guilty of their trespasses. We do not have to give account of what they did or did not do. Jesus rebuked the Jews, *"Ye shall die in **your** sins..."* (Luke 13:3). Again the emphasis we note is that it was their own sins that would condemn them. Paul said, *"God will render to every man according to **his** works."* (Emphasis, JWB, Romans 2:6). And each one must obey the gospel for himself or herself. Individually we shall stand before God and give answer. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10). Nobody can believe for you. Nobody can repent for you. Nobody can confess for you or be baptized for you. Nobody can live a faithful life for you. Others might wish that they could, seeing how some have postponed and put off and completely failed to do as they ought. Parents, husbands, wives, children, might wish they could obey for those they love, but each one must bear his own burden and responsibility.

No Escape

While we may not like being called into the courts of the land, and may not even receive justice in those courts, we shall not escape being called before God, and we can be sure the judgment shall be as it ought to be. No favoritism will be exercised before God because one is rich, or poor, white or black, popular or unpopular, small or great in the eyes of other people. Only those who have come through Christ shall be the beneficiaries of the mercy of God.

God will not ask to which congregation we belonged. When brethren pool their efforts in a congregation, it might make us all look fairly good because of those who really did work. The story of the flea and the elephant is appropriate here. When the flea, riding on the back of the elephant, crossed the bridge and the bridge shook somewhat, the flea said, "We sure made it shake that time, didn't we?" But when we are before God in judgment, what we have done, good or bad, as a group is not going to be the criteria. It is what we have done as individuals. What did I do? How did I serve? Was I faithful? Did I obey? Indeed, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Hebrews 10:31).

In the Lord's parable of the ten virgins, they all waited for the coming of the bridegroom. When he came some were insufficiently prepared. They cried, *"Give us of your oil for our lamps are gone out."* But such was not possible. While they were gone to buy more, the bridegroom came and when they returned the door was already shut and they were left out. Friend, we cannot borrow from the preparation of others. Sons and daughters cannot turn to parents. Husbands and wives cannot turn to one another. Members cannot turn to elders. Preachers cannot turn to deacons. Each shall bear his own burden and personal responsibility.

In the parable of the talents, where Jesus gave one man five talents, and another two talents, and another only one talent, when time came to give account, it was not said, "I gave all of you a total of eight talents and together you have gained seven more. That is pretty good. All of you enter into the joy of the Lord." But each one was taken as an individual and gave account for his talents and the use of them.

Actually, we ought to be glad it is that way. While there are certainly those whose righteousness exceeds our own, are there not many brethren upon whom we could never depend and who might cause us all to lose the inheritance? Some are so good and loyal and true. But there are others who call themselves members of the church and servants of the Lord, who expect to go to heaven, who are living rather carelessly as far as their personal Christian responsibility is concerned.

One of the privileges of being a Christian is the opportunity to help our brethren. Indeed, as we have opportunity, this must be a primary function of our lives (Galatians 6:10). We have the duty to help each other get to Heaven. One of the safeguards against apostasy is fellowship with faithful brethren. But at the same time, ultimately, we have our own life to live and our own accountability to face. Let us do what we can to bear each other's burdens, but let us never lose sight of the fact that *"every man shall bear his own burden."*

The story is told of "Racoon" John Smith, a pioneer gospel preacher in the days of the early efforts of restoring New Testament Christianity, and how he left the faith that he had learned from his mother. His mother asked him, "John, why did you do this?" He answered, "Mother, if you can guarantee me an entrance through the pearly gates into eternal glory by that

faith, I will go back and live and preach my former faith." She answered, "John, I cannot do that. You must answer for yourself." And so must each of us.

† † † † †

Withdrawing Fellowship

We need so much to understand the subject of fellowship, and in this lesson we want to investigate the matter of withdrawing fellowship. Why is it to be done? What is the purpose of it? What must be our attitude of heart? What is the significance of it? How is it to be done? What are the responsibilities involved?

Because fellowship is so seldom withdrawn in our day and age many have not the remotest concept of the Biblical teaching concerning it. It is one of those matters that the church in our time has pushed into the background. Some feel disciplinary actions are unfair and unjust because they do not know the will of the Lord regarding it. They have thought that obeying God in these matters is making an unrighteous judgment when God has commanded certain things to be done when discipline is needed.

A Matter of Relationship

Withdrawal of fellowship involves the relationship of Christian with Christian. Those who are not Christians are not involved. Those who are not yet in Christ are not in fellowship with Christians anyway. This is a family matter, the family of God. More specifically, it involves the relationship between faithful Christians and unfaithful Christians. It is a matter of the duties brethren have to walk uprightly, faithfully, upholding the truth, living properly, honoring Christ in obeying divine laws governing the life of a Christian.

Salvation is conditional. Not only are we to believe in Christ, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Christ and be baptized into Christ, but we are to live a faithful Christian life. The words, "Well done," shall be spoken to the "faithful."

We Can Fall

Christians can fall from the truth and away from the Lord. Among the many passages that teach this, and this is not our main theme, is Second Peter 2:20-22. The passages can be multiplied that show the danger of falling away and the error of the "once saved, always saved" doctrine. Christians do not always live up to their duty and some even have renounced the faith entirely. Some hold to duty in some areas only to make a public display of unfaithfulness and unsoundness in other areas. Without developing this further, let us be reminded that this results in the loss of the soul, a victory for Satan, an injury to the church, and the discrediting of the cause of Christ before the world.

When one falls, that which is most needful is that they be restored. *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."* (Galatians 6:1). James 5:19,20, makes the same emphasis. Efforts at restoration are numerous and the exercise of discipline is but one of them, but a very significant one, because it is the ultimate that the church can do in trying to recover the fallen. Let us learn, here and now, once and for all, never to be forgotten, that disciplinary measures are for the purpose of recovering those who have fallen. The withdrawal of fellowship is the most severe and the last to be used. It is used only after all other efforts have failed. Other attempts should be exhausted first, as we shall see in the continuation of this study.

Matthew 18:15-17, *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church, but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."*

The Goal

The goal of all of this procedure is to correct what is wrong. Usually these personal measures will suffice. This procedure outlined has to do with personal offenses one against another and teaches what ought to be done before the matter becomes a

matter for the church to consider. It is an error to apply this passage that demands personal contact to situations that begin openly and publicly. It is not the prescribed resolution of false doctrines that have been publicly proclaimed. Some would like to declare their false doctrines publicly and demand that all correction of them be made privately and only privately. That is a misapplication and perversion of this passage that begins with personal offenses.

Sometimes the initial efforts to resolve differences do not succeed. Then help from others, as outlined, is required. But after help has been sought and still there is no repentance from sin, the only alternative is to have no further dealings with that person, or withdraw fellowship from him.

It Is A Command

Let us understand that the church has no choice but to obey God's directions that discipline be applied. If the church obeys God, it will discipline those who do not conform to the truth. It is not a question, "Should we withdraw from such people?" but "Will we obey God and withdraw from such people?"

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us." (Second Thessalonians 3:6). *"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."* (Second Thessalonians 3:14,15). *"A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."* (Titus 3:10,11). *"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little*

leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." [*First Corinthians 5:1-7*]. *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."* (Romans 16:17,18).

These passages not only demand that those in certain categories be withdrawn from and fellowship taken away, but it gives us the reasons for it and shows the divine authority behind it.

What It Is Not

Withdrawing fellowship is not to throw somebody out of the church. It is not "playing God." It is not sinfully judging another. It does not change the sinful Christian's relationship with God. His sin has already done that. It is not a way to take vengeance nor to vent animosity toward a person. It is not a self-righteous action on the part of those who exercise discipline. It is a recognition of *"sin in the camp,"* the necessity of recovering the fallen, the need to keep the church pure, and is the most serious effort that can be taken to save a soul that has departed from the faith and from Christian conduct. If such action is not taken, then the way of truth will be evil spoken of. Hopefully, the action will cause the sinful brother to be ashamed of his sins and turn from them. That is the goal; that is the prayer; that is the purpose. To fail to exercise discipline is not a manifestation of love. To take action where the Scriptures call for it is to demonstrate love.

The Procedure

There is not a set detailed procedure by which this withdrawal is to be accomplished. Some public notation is evident in that it is to be done when brethren are gathered together. Surely, the eldership that has the oversight of the church must take the lead,

as in all other matters of the church. When the eldership refuses to act and stands in disobedience to God in the matter, we have no alternative but to withdraw fellowship and obey God anyway. The failures of men ought not prevent us from obeying God. Some procedure that utilizes consideration and respect for all concerned is to be exercised.

The entire church is to withhold fellowship. To not expect this is to nullify the effect of the disciplinary effort. It is wrong to console the rebellious sinner in his sin and take a stand against the church on the side of the one in sin. If one feels disciplinary measures are unjust and improper, let him come forward with Scripture and show such to be the case. Otherwise, let him obey God and withdraw from those who deserve it.

Meeting Objections

Some would object by saying this is making a judgment. Certainly, it is making a judgment. All judgments are not condemned (John 7:24). The same God that forbade some judgments has commanded withdrawal. To recognize the judgments God has made and revealed, and then obey His instructions regarding them, is not to make a sinful judgment. To fail to obey God is to judge God and His way to be wrong.

Some say that we all sin and therefore none should be withdrawn from. We all sin, but we all are not unfaithful. We all stumble and fall, but some get up and keep going. It is God that commanded faithfulness, and God who cited the need to withdraw. The disorderly are those who refuse to denounce that which has caused them to be disfellowshipped. While all sin, all are not persistent, deliberate, determined to remain in that sin. To refuse to obey God in the matter because it involves some others is to put man before God.

"Well, you do not withdraw from people who are guilty of envy, hate, jealousy, lust, etc., so we cannot withdraw from others either." But man is not a judge of another's heart. Such sins as named above are sins of the heart, which man does not know, but only God. But if and when those sins manifest themselves in behavior and conduct, then we have a responsibility to recognize the sinful fruit being borne and let it be known that such will destroy the soul of the guilty. There are sins that people can commit that only God would know. There is no way to take disciplinary action of the kind under discussion in those matters. But when sin is open, flagrant, deliberate,

continual, persistent, rebellious, defiant, etc. faithful brethren have no choice but to show their love for the sinful brother, their love for the truth, their love for the will of God, and exercise the procedures demanded to either restore or remove that brother.

The Way Back

Thankfully, there is a way back for the fallen Christian. We should encourage those who have fallen to take that way. Repentance, confession of sins, and prayer is the plan of God for restoring the fallen brother (Acts 8:22; First John 1:7). Until the brother from whom the church has had to withdraw repents, faithful brethren cannot associate with him, eat with him, include him in their circle of associates, continue in relationship with him as before in the service of God. If these measures do not turn the sinner from the error of his way, then he will go on his sinful way to eternal condemnation. Faithful brethren must try to recover that which turned back. Failure to carry out God's plan to recover the lost is to commit sin and neglect duty.

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visitation groups, but found few willing to be involved or who would stick with it. His discouragement was becoming evident. He was really knocked down when one of the leaders, being asked to lead a group in contact work, told him, "Isn't that what you get paid for doing?"

The attitude of the eldership was, "It has always been this way with this church." One of them even defended the absenteeism by saying, "Week-ends are the only times some have to go places and do things." But the young preacher knew this attitude was all wrong.

Not knowing what to do next, and remembering how Christ and the apostles often spoke strong and determined words, he delivered his strongest lesson yet from the pulpit. What do you suppose happened? The good brother who had advised him at the first came to him rather indignantly and said, "I told you that you cannot drive people. You have probably outlived your usefulness here."

† † † † †

Believing A Lie

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming, even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause shall God send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (Second Thessalonians 2:7-12).

Honesty And Sincerity

There is a very popular idea among many religionists that if one believes a thing is right and he is honest and sincere in that belief, that what he believes is not so important. He will reach glory because he is honest and sincere in his conviction. This is a principle, however, that few will apply in any other field of thought except religion. Men do not think a bank is sound just because they think so. They want evidence that it is reliable. Many battles in warfare have been lost because what someone thought was true proved to be inaccurate. The great ocean vessel, Titanic, was thought to be unsinkable, but went down on its first voyage when it struck an iceberg. Believing a thing to be true does not make it true. If it is false, regardless of how sincerely it may be believed, it will spell disaster for the one who believes.

Jesus warned, *"These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."* (John 16:1,2). Paul told Agrippa, *"I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."* (Acts 26:9). Do we doubt that people can believe a lie? Does not Paul expressly state that some should believe a lie in our text? Some believe a lie because they are deceived and misled. But others will believe a lie because they love unrighteousness rather than

the truth.

Lies Produce Damnation

There is something sinister that is unavoidably connected with believing a lie, and that is damnation. God will send a strong delusion to those that love unrighteousness and they will honestly and sincerely believe a lie. God does not deceive man with some direct operation on man's mind anymore than God enlightens man with some kind of direct operation upon him. God will allow that person who does not love the truth nor want the truth and will not seek the truth to be influenced and worked upon by error and deceptions until that person becomes satisfied in his sin, lulled into a spiritual slumber, unconcerned and indifferent. Then, drifting on the waters of human opinions and personal preferences, he rests upon the sand bar of destruction, because he believed a lie. Unless shaken from that position, he will perish thereon and be eternally damned.

An Old Testament Example

In the Old Testament we have a classic example of one who believed a lie even though he was, for the most part, a rather good man. In First Kings, chapter one, we find our inspired record. The background is important in understanding this event. Jereboam was king over the ten tribes of Northern Israel that had rebelled against the house of David and his son, Rehoboam. But Jereboam was not as secure in his power as he desired. He feared the people returning to Jerusalem to worship because Jerusalem was in Southern Judah over which Rehoboam reigned. He feared lest the people return there and be influenced against him. So he devised what he considered a remedy for this potential threat. He made two calves of gold and set up two altars, one in Dan, in the north part of his territory, and the other in Bethel, in the southern part of his territory. These places were to be substitues for Jerusalem. The people did not need to leave the area over which he had control. He urged, *"It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem."* Under the disguise of doing his people a favor, he set up what he considered his protection against mutiny. He even assumed the role of a priest, planning to burn offerings on the altar he had erected.

Meanwhile, over in Judah, God had spoken to a young

prophet, whose name is not given, to go to Bethel and cry against that altar. In obedience to God's voice, he went and forewarned of the coming destruction of that which Jeroboam had raised. Jereboam was outraged and commanded that the prophet be seized. But his hand withered and his arm became paralyzed, causing him to ask the prophet to intercede before God on his behalf that his arm might be restored. The thing was done.

Jereboam now invited the young prophet to return with him to his palace and refresh himself before returning to Judah. Dear reader, what would you have done if some dignitary had invited you to go home with him and dine? The young prophet had done a good job, might have been able to use this acquaintance to influence the king to lead all Israel back to God. He could have seen a great opportunity all around. But he had been instructed by the Lord not to tarry and not to eat while he was in Israel, but to return back to Judah immediately. The prestige, honor, fame, glory, and power he might have had from Jereboam was cast aside in order to be obedient to God. He went to Judah, refusing the invitation of the king. We cannot help but admire this nobleman. He was at this time a man of determination, faithfulness, devotion to duty, and given to obedience.

He Was Misled

While he was making his way home, an old prophet heard what had taken place from his sons. He wanted the brave prophet to visit him. He arose and went to the young prophet and told him that God had spoken to him and to come get him, bring him back home with him, and eat with him. God had done no such thing. The old prophet told a lie. (He claimed to have received a latter-day revelation. Like those who make such claims today, it was a lie.(At first the young prophet objected on the same grounds that he had refused the king. But he was persuaded that the old prophet was telling the truth, and returned back with him. Flattery, riches, fame, refreshment, all had failed to overcome his great obedience and determination. But now he believed a lie. It seemed so reasonable, possible, and plausible. Without checking it out with God, he believed a lie. While eating at the old prophet's table, the Lord did come with a message and warned the young prophet that he would not return to his home in Judah, but would die on the way. He

left for Judah, but was met in the way by a lion that slew him, and strangely, did not devour him nor attack the ass upon which he rode. It was the punishment of God.

Who Was To Blame?

Did the old prophet bear any blame for that which had taken place? Certainly he did. He lied; He misled another. God shall reward him properly for his evil deed. But was the young prophet to blame? Yes, he knew what was right, but believed a lie rather than the truth. It led to his destruction. He was honest and sincere in what he thought was acceptable, but he believed a lie. Do you suppose it is possible that we might also believe things that really are not true?

Many today are believing religious lies rather than truth. They think one church is as good as another, not realizing that Christ built only one church. They believe one can be saved by faith alone, that baptism has nothing whatever to do with salvation. Some believe they are baptized in the Holy Spirit and are directly guided by the Lord. Some believe the religious name one wears makes no difference, even though the disciples were called Christians (Acts 11:26). Some think sprinkling is as good as immersion, even though Scripture always shows baptism to be a burial. People follow creeds, theologians, philosophers, clergymen, traditions, etc. They are honest; they are sincere. They are religious, but they are wrong. On and on we could name the false ideas being tossed about on the religious scene that many accept in good faith.

How can we know what is a religious lie and what is the truth? Jesus said, *"Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17). Everything must be measured by the Word of God to determine its validity. When you know the Word of God you know the truth. When something jars against that truth you can know that it is a lie, and reject it. For this reason we must study and learn, searching the Scriptures like the noble Bereans of old, to learn what the truth is.

If what we are told by somebody either adds to, takes from, or varies in any way from *"thus saith the Lord,"* we can know it only deserves being cast aside. We are to *"prove all things; hold fast to that which is good."* (First Thessalonians 5:12). *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (First John 4:1).

A Lie Many Believe

We close with reference to one lie too many believe. Many have believed it too long and went to the next world unprepared. That lie is that they have plenty of time, yet, to obey the gospel. There are those who intend to obey "someday," and plan to come to Christ, but who put it off, believing the lie that there is no urgency in obeying the truth. Friend, we have no promise of one additional hour, let alone unlimited opportunities to obey the gospel. Many have been at that same point and failed to ever change in time. Young people are misled to think there is plenty of time.

Believing a lie, from whatever source, means the blind leads the blind, and they both fall into the pit. Learn the truth, believe the truth, obey the truth. Be on guard against believing a lie.

† † † † †

"You Cannot Drive Them!"

The young preacher enthusiastically began his work with the first church with which he had worked. Desiring to build up the church numerically, because he knew that each number represented a precious soul, he set out to discover the best advice he could find as to how this could be accomplished He approached one of the elders for his thoughts.

"You cannot drive them!" was the advice given with emphasis. Even though this advice really did not tell him what he should do, but what he ought not do, it was taken to heart.

He preached the Word on worship, loyalty, "first things first," and other themes appealing to everyone to love the Lord enough to obey. He added lessons on the necessity of faithful attendance and participation.

Soon he included approved activities of visitation, cards, phone calls, personal contacts, everything he knew to do. Yet, there was no improvement in attendance. So he approached personally as many people as he possibly could who seemed negligent in their responsibility and tried to encourage them. He focused on those who seemed to consider the week-end the time to go everywhere but to worship. You can guess the reaction he received from those folks.

He decided he must include others in this work. He urged

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Godly Parents



JAMES W. BOYD

Whether your parents are living or have died, there is not a day that passes that their memory and presence do not serve to benefit and bless those children who know godly parents. My parents made it so easy to obey the commandment, "Honor father and mother."

They tried to live what they taught, showing by example what they said in word. They, like all others, lacked perfection. But if I should fail in those eternal matters that really count, it will not be because my parents failed to provide me the light to show the way that ought to be followed.

God said of Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." They were teachers, advisors, and pals, but more than anything else, they were parents who showed the way before their children. I praise them for that.

Many of life's hard places are more easily overcome because I can hear their words, see their faces, recall their example. The world would be a far better place if everyone could have parents like the ones my brother and sister and I were privileged to have.

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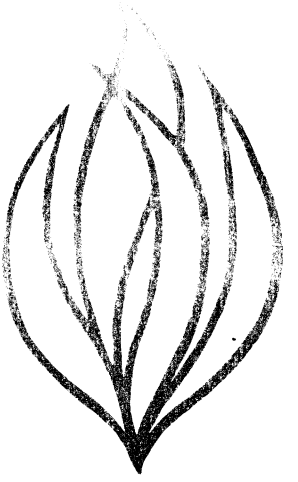

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME IV **NUMBER 1**

The Healing Of Naaman

It is not easy to tell just what might motivate one to obey the gospel. Some teaching, some illustration, some Biblical account comes at a crucial moment in a person's life and leads him to Christ. I baptized a man after preaching this lesson and as we were coming out of the water of baptism he told me that the story of Naaman and his healing did more to help him understand the relationship between salvation and obedience than any one lesson he had heard. He advised, "You ought to preach that lesson more often." Possibly, what influenced him could influence another. This Old Testament account certainly does shed the light of truth on some basic and fundamental matters in being saved.

Please turn in your Bible to Second Kings 5:1-14, and read this passage which is the text for this study.

Naaman, a Gentile, was a captian of the Syrian army. He was an important man in Syria, considered great in the eyes of his king and the nation, *"but he was a leper."* There was *"a little maid,"* an Israelite who had been taken captive by the Syrians who waited on Naaman's wife. This unnamed person told Naaman's wife that there was a prophet of God in Samaria that could heal her master. The healing of Naaman was eventually accomplished, but not near so easily as it could have been if Naaman had not made things more complicated and committed several blunders. His mistakes are much the same kind of mistakes people make today as they seek their spiritual healing from sin. Remember that Paul said *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..."* (Romans 15:4).

Mistake Number One

Naaman's first mistake was that he went to the wrong person. Naaman was told to go to the prophet of God in Samaria, but he went to the king of Israel. This upset the king of Israel, who cried, "*Am I God...*"In other words, he was saying, "What can I do about leprosy?" There was nothing the king could do. He had no such power to heal. In fact, Israel's king considered the entire episode as an excuse for Syria to make an attack against Israel.

Elisha, God's prophet, heard how the king was upset, and he sent word for Naaman to come to him. We are made to wonder why Naaman did not seek out the prophet in the first place. Possibly it was his pride. After all, Naaman was considered a great man. Should he go and search for a lowly prophet? He was one of position and fame. Certainly, pride keeps many people from coming to the right source for their salvation. They refuse to humble themselves before the lowly Nazarene. They want forgiveness but without repentance, confession, without giving up their sins. They wish to follow doctrines, creeds, traditions, opinions of man's making rather than submit to the will of the Lord. Their attitude is one of "what I want, rather than what God wants."

Let us learn early, that there is only one to whom we can go for salvation. *"Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12). *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6). Jesus was humble and lowly from His birth through His death. We must bow our will unto Him or we reject salvation. As Peter declared, *"Thou hast the words of eternal life."* Before there can be spiritual victory there must be surrender to Christ, without reservation. Rebellion and refusal to accept His instruction, failure to follow His directions, means condemnation. Such it was with Naaman, and so it is with us.

Mistake Number Two

Naaman left the king's palace and went to the door of the humble home of Elisha, God's prophet. But there he made his second blunder. Scripture says he *"stood at the door"* expecting to be healed right there. Just as the king was the wrong person, the door of Elisha's house was the wrong place.

Elisha sent his servant to Naaman with instructions. He was to go and dip in the Jordan River seven times and he would be healed. He had to go to the right place which was the Jordan River. This upset Naaman greatly. It was a strange direction, but who was he to decide what ought to be done?

Naaman complained, *"Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?"* Naaman was making the mistake in thinking that the power of healing was the water itself. But the quality of the water was not what made the difference. The river

was that into which he had to dip, but the power of healing was in God, not the river. Naaman failed to realize that the power of healing would be applied to him when he obeyed what he was commanded to do. It may well have been true that the rivers of Syria were superior to Jordan, but that is not where God said for Naaman to go.

Let me tell you where we must go to receive healing from sin. As the song states, "I must needs go home by the way of the cross." Redemption for man is through the blood of Christ. *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."* (Colossians 1:14). *"Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."* (Romans 5:9). Christ died on the cross and His blood is the power that cleanses. Jesus bore our sins on the cross. We must behold Christ on the cross. We must come to that cross, His death, reach His blood, or we cannot be saved. We must make our appeal for salvation through the provision made at Calvary. This is God's way of redeeming man.

Though some may be offended at the cross, reject the idea of the Savior having to die, even be repulsed at the use of blood, nonetheless the penalty for my sins and yours was paid there, in His death. Later we shall see just how we come to His blood and enter into His death.

Mistake Number Three

The third blunder of Naaman was that he expected to pay the wrong price. He had taken many riches with him from Syria and he offered money, gifts, clothes, riches, etc. Some people seem to think that they can buy anything if they have enough money. But some things cannot be purchased with money. Simon, the former sorcerer, in Acts, chapter eight, thought he could buy the apostolic power with money. Naaman did not yet realize that the only price involved was humble obedience to the command of God. Nothing less would suffice, and nothing more could purchase the gift he needed. There is a danger that some may think they can buy their way into heaven by generous and liberal giving. Giving is a sacred and precious privilege and duty, but first we must give ourselves. People cannot by-pass God's way and be complete. We might remember how Saul and Israel saved animals of the Amalekites for sacrifices, but God was not pleased with sacrifices in the face of disobedience. All Naaman had to do was to dip seven times in the River Jordan. That is all.

It was so simple that he balked. He was like many today. He had not yet learned what God required. He had to obey if he was going to be blessed.

Mistake Number Four

Naaman also wanted to follow a different plan than what the Lord said. Notice his comment upon hearing the Lord's requirements. He said, *"I thought..."* Like so many today, Naaman already had it worked out in his own mind how he ought be healed. He had figured out how God ought to do it. But the plan for healing was not left to Naaman to present. It was his task to follow God's plan. The only thinking he needed to do is to think what God wanted and then do it. Too many now have it figured out how they are going to be saved and what they have figured is not what God has said at all. True enough, we are to work out our own salvation (Philippians 1:12), but we are not told to work out our own plan of salvation. That belongs to God.

Mistake Number Five

When Naaman learned his plan was not the way, he grew angry. *"But Naaman was wroth, and went away..."* Today when some learn that God's plan of salvation is not what they "thought" they get angry also, even at those who have taught them the truth. Some have thought they shall be saved by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, by faith only, praying through, just ask God to come into their hearts, grace alone, etc. Sadly, so many turn away defiantly and return to their spiritual doom when the truth is presented to them and it is not what "they thought."

Naaman would have gone back to Syria a leper as he had come, but one of Naaman's servants, another unnamed hero of this account, persuaded him to lay aside his pride, his preconceived notions, and simply do as God's prophet instructed. *"If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"* So Naaman turned back again, humbled his own will, sacrificed his pride, went to Jordan, dipped seven times, and came out clean with flesh as that of a child.

God Gets The Credit

Let us consider to whom the credit for this healing was given. None would give credit to the waters of the Jordan. Naaman did not. We all know that the power of healing resided with God. Naaman returned to the prophet, Elisha, and standing before him, praised Jehovah saying, *"Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel."*

We all know that Naaman did not earn nor merit his healing. We know it was a gift from God. But we also know that the gift was not given until Naaman met the prescribed conditions of dipping in Jordan. He had to obey.

We noted earlier that we, too, must humble ourselves, come to the right place, the cross, and enter the Lord's death to be saved. How does one enter the death of Christ? *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* (Romans 6:3,4). It is in baptism that we reach the saving blood of Christ. But someone cried, "That is water salvation." It is no more and no less "water salvation" than was the healing of Naaman "water healing." The power of salvation is not in the water, but in the Lord. But the power is not applied to our sin stained souls until we are obedient in baptism and the power to heal Naaman was not applied until he obeyed by dipping in the Jordan.

Even when we are baptized we have not earned nor merited salvation. Baptism is not a work of merit but a work of obedience, as was Naaman's dipping. God gave Naaman his health and God gives us our spiritual health. Just as there was no way for Naaman to be healed except God's way, so there is no way for us to be saved except God's way. Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). While denouncing God's plan as "water salvation," let us recall that Peter said, *"...even baptism doth also now save us..."* First Peter 3:21).

Will we let this record open our hearts to God's way to save us? Come to the right person, the right place, with the right price, following the right plan and receiving the right power.

† † † † †

Religious Indecision

"And Elijah came unto all the people and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word." (First Kings 18:21).

"Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth, and put away the gods which your father served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the floods, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:14,15).

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life; that both thou and thy seed may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19).

In each of these passages, Elijah, Joshua, and Moses were urging the people of Israel to make a religious decision and leave the state of indecision. Christ also makes demands of mankind to make a decision. In fact, the very nature of Christ and the faith of which He is the founder requires and makes necessary the making of a decision. *"No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* (Matthew 6:24). *"He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."* (Matthew 12:30).

The Reason To Decide

Paul wrote in Second Corinthians 5:11, *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."* Why persuade men? Because there is the necessity to make a decision regarding Christ in view of God's wrath against evil. It is necessary to make the right decision based on evidence supplied in God's Word. The very question that Jesus once asked, *"Who do men say that I am?"* makes a decision inescapable. *"What think ye of Christ?"* is a question we all must eventually answer.

Most people like to think of themselves as reasonable,

rational, intelligent people. God has given man the ability to think, reason, weigh evidence and make decisions. We are free moral beings with the power of choice. Some may think they can dwell in the realm of indecision regarding Christ, but by attempting to be neutral they have made a decision not to be for Him, which Jesus says is to be against Him. There is no realm where we make no decision when we consider the necessity of deciding for Christ. But some would like to leave things hanging without making a commitment one way or the other. In this sense they are in the state of indecision. We would persuade people that any attempt to remain undecided is irrational and unreasonable, out of character for anyone who would claim to be able to consider evidence and decide thereon. Let us consider some reasons why attempts at indecision are unreasonable.

God Before Man

We realize the creature is not greater than the Creator. The created has a duty to the Creator. We are the creature, having been created by God, the Creator. Is it not reasonable, therefore, for the creature to give respect to the One who has created him? We are in God's image, that is, He is Spirit and we are spirit. We have no right to ignore Him, but are obligated to honor and worship Him. It is "*in him we live, move and have our being.*" The servant is not greater than his lord. Service to God is reasonable service (Romans 12:1). It is reasonable to decide for Christ because until we come to Christ we cannot give honor to God, the Creator. "*That all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him.*" (John 5:23). "*Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father, but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*" (First John 2:23). Staying from Christ is to stay from God which is not a reasonable position seeing who God is and who we are, His created.

The Future Awaits

Is it not reasonable to prepare for the inevitable and inescapable? We prepare for what may be in our future. How much more ought we prepare for what will certainly be in our future? Life is uncertain, but death is sure (James 4:14). After

death there will be the resurrection, judgment, and eternity. *"And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment."* (Hebrews 9:27). *"Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29). *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10). *"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him, the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."* (John 12:48). *"Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."* (Acts 17:31). *"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."* (Matthew 25:41,46). These things are before us all. They are inevitable and inescapable. Is it not reasonable to make preparation for them? But so long as one remains apart from Christ, he has not made the proper preparation. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6).

The Soul Endangered

To attempt a state of religious indecision is unreasonable because of the danger involved to the soul. When one is out of Christ, he is lost in sin. If one dies out of Christ he is lost eternally. There is no second chance. Reasonable people do not subject that which is valuable to unnecessary danger. People do not play with high voltage wires, poison, dynamite, etc. We do not act carelessly with life, but even when risks are necessary, we are cautious. But the soul is worth more than all the world (Matthew 16:26). Even though God is longsuffering and not willing that any should perish (Second Peter 3:9), there is coming an end of our opportunity to be saved. We need to realize that each refusal of Christ makes it easier to refuse Him again and again. We can become so hardened that even the precious gospel of love will make no imprint upon us. Is it not

reasonable to take special precaution with the immortal spirit? Can we not see how unreasonable it is to remain apart from Christ?

Religious indecision is unreasonable because too much is involved for one to stay away from the Savior. There is more involved than what many every consider. They may think they are dealing with only this life, but they are also concerned with the life after this. They may think they are concerned with only events in time, but they are concerned with eternity. What one does in this life determines where one will be in the next. Man is not all that is involved, but also Deity. Just the person in indecision is not all that is involved, but also his or her loved ones, neighbors, children. If you are lost, you will not go to hell without influencing others to go also. If you are saved, you will not go to heaven without influencing others to go. When one remains out of Christ his influence is against his own salvation and that of those around him. Are you satisfied with the direction of your influence? Therefore, what you think of Jesus and how you react to His commands are very significant and far-reaching. It is unreasonable for a person to have a duty in life to others, to God, to himself, and then ignore that duty. Yet, only in Christ can we fulfill our purpose in life and discharge our duty. The reasonable course is to come to Christ.

Choose Christ

I would plead with every person, young and old, that is accountable before God, and persuade from the Scriptures as well as from a rational, reasonable, sensible, logical, intelligent point of view, to decide for Christ and then become a Christian. On the basis of one's own sense of responsibility to others and the reasonableness to respond to such a manifestation of love such as God has shown toward man, come to Christ. God love you. Christ died for you. Provision for your salvation has been made. Salvation is offered to you. Blessings are yours for the taking. What more can you expect to have manifested before you that God loves you?

A knowledge of the way of salvation is essential. But having knowledge will not save standing alone. The recognition of the need of salvation, and compliance with the conditions of salvation are before you. You must believe and obey in repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Him.

If I passed around a sheet of paper and handed each a

pencil, asking for the names of those who want to go to heaven, and would then read aloud the names written on the paper, would your name be written there? More than likely each one who reads this would include his name. The Scripture says, *"And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."* (Revelation 21:27). *God has a book upon which are written the names of* the redeemed. As the song asks, "Is your name written there?" Only those whose garments are made white in the blood of the Lamb, which is Christ, have their names in the book of Life. What of your name, friend?

Once Alexander the Great was asked how it was he was able to conquer the known world. He responded, "By not delaying." Today is the day of salvation. Today can be the day of your salvation, if you will believe and obey the gospel. To attempt to remain in indecision means you have decided to reject Christ. There is no way for you to be mistaken about the destiny of those who persist in their rejection of the Son of God.

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(continued from page 24)

the conditions He prescribed, He added me to the company of the saved, which is the church. Man need not concern himself about joining anything. He must obey the gospel, and God takes care of church membership, because God takes care of the saving. When one is saved, he is a member of the church, because that is what the church is, the saved through Christ. Those who have obeyed the gospel are members of the church. Nothing in Scripture teaches you to do one thing to be saved and then something different to "join" some church. That is human false doctrine.

What church to join? Join none, obey God, be added to His church. Faith, repentance, confession, and baptism is the way. Have you obeyed?

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An admission of error is a sign of strength rather than a weakness.

The Will And Adoption

In this lesson we will examine the subject of adoption into the family of God under the figure of a will or testament. *"And for this cause he is the mediator of the testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth."* (Hebrews 9:15-17). *"Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* (Hebrews 10:9,10).

What do the words "will, testament, covenant" mean? When we use the words, "Old Testament" what comes to mind? We think of the 39 books that include the writings of Moses and the prophets. This is correct, but not an exhaustive meaning. Again, what does "New Testament" mean? While it means the 27 books of the writings beginning with Matthew through Revelation, is that the whole meaning? When we say one has prepared his last will and testament, what comes to mind? It is an instrument of writing containing the desires of that man concerning the distribution and division of his estate among his heirs after his death. With this definition, we have the true meaning of the words. There must always be kept in mind the death of the testator and the will he makes before death. Wills are not executed until after the death of its maker.

Second Over First

A man may make more than one will, but the second always replaces and takes precedence over the first. Only the last will is to be executed after his death, and any inheritance is determined according to that last will and testament. Two wills do not have force at the same time.

God has dealt with fallen man in a similar fashion, that is, by a will. The book of Hebrews mentions more than one will of God. Over the period of time, God has established more than one order of worship for men. But never has there been more than

one in force at a time for any given people. One ceased to be in force after the coming of the second.

The first will of God was for the patriarchs from Adam to Moses. The heads of the families served as the spiritual leaders for God. Next, for the Israelite nation, God gave a will through Moses, called the law of Moses. It was nationalistic in nature, taking the place of the patriarchal will for Israel. It continued until it was replaced by the will of God through Christ. The testament through Christ is universal in nature, extending to all men, and it replaced all that had preceded it. This is the will of God under which people living today receive inheritance from the heavenly Father. To be blessed we must comply with the terms of this new covenant. No blessings from God can be received under a will that has already been set aside and taken away.

The failure by some to understand these matters has led to many false doctrines and practices. Many have confused the stipulations of various wills. The result has been confusion regarding how man is saved, how he is to worship, what is expected of the heirs of God, etc. Some point to the prayer of the publican as the way of salvation, or the thief on the cross, not realizing that both of those people lived subject to a different will than that under which we live. The will of God through Moses did not extend past the death of Christ on the cross where it was taken away (Colossians 2:14). No person can turn to what was done prior to the will through Christ to learn what God wants of man now.

Before And After Death

While a person lives, he or she can distribute to his children, or any other, his benefits in whatever manner he sees fit, when he sees fit. But once that person dies, his benefits are distributed only according to his will. This was true concerning Christ. While on earth, Jesus could and did bless whomsoever He chose in whatever manner He chose. He had the power to forgive sins and did so in a variety of ways. (Matthew 9:2; Luke 7:47). He conferred many special gifts on people, conditionally and unconditionally, while he was living. But that has no bearing on how one receives blessings through Christ now. Since then has been the death of Christ, we now must consider His will. Only by complying to the terms of that will can His benefits be ours. We cannot be saved except by the stipulations of His will.

Hebrews 10:9,10, teaches we are sanctified by that will.

No one living has the right to change even one single feature of the will of Christ. In human relations, wills are sometimes broken and changed. But who is so presumptious as to think they can change the will of the Lord? It was a will that took force only after His death. The apostles served in the fashion of executors of His will, declaring it through preaching as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, forbidding any alterations concerning it (Galatians 1:6-9). An attempt to change the Lord's will brings upon that person the wrath of God. His will is unchangeable and does not vary. All who will be saved must honor that will and do whatever it teaches.

Nobody can inherit another's estate if they are not included among the heirs. You cannot inherit properties that belonged to your neighbor unless you are included among his heirs. Who is embraced in the will of Christ? They are the heirs of God. The universal nature of this will is that all people are granted the opportunity to be an heir of God. Christ died for every man (Hebrews 2:9). The gospel of salvation is to be preached to every creature (Mark 16:15). Unfortunately, all do not come to God through Christ and are thereby depriving themselves from being heirs of God. There can be no salvation except through Christ (Acts 4:12).

Who Are The Heirs

Children born into a family are considered the legal heirs. Children that are adopted into a family are also legal heirs. In order for one to be a beneficiary of the blessings of God through the will of Christ, we must become an heir of God, a child of God, a member of the family of God, which is the church (First Timothy 3:15). The Scriptures present only one way to become an heir of God, but illustrates that one way in terms of being "born again" and also in terms of "adoption." These are not the only illustrations, but these are the two that are pertinent to our present investigation. Taking citizenship in the kingdom, enlisting in His army, being grafted as a branch, being a plant growing from the seed, etc. are other presentations of becoming a child of God.

We now focus our attention on the terms of adoption. There are laws in the will of the Lord that allows adoption and the inclusion of those not physically born into the family of God. Actually, none are now children of God by virtue of physical

birth as was true under the Mosaic system when one who was born of Jewish parents was automatically considered a child of God. That system of inclusion has been terminated. We all can become "children of Abraham" if we belong to Christ (Galatians 3:28,29). If adoption takes place, it must be according to law, to the will. "*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*" (Romans 8:14,15). Paul continued, "*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God,if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified together.*" (Romans 8:16,17).

"*But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*" (Galatians 4:4-7). Our question is, what must one do to be adopted in the family of God?

Only Two Families

Keep in mind that there are but two spiritual families. God is the Father of one; the devil is the father of the other. In the parable of Matthew eight, the tares are the children of the wicked one. Jesus once cited to some of His hearers, "*Ye are the children of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.*" (John 8:44). Children of the devil reject Christ and His will. Of their own choice they refuse to leave the family of Satan, even though God offers the opportunity to do so. But God does not force His will upon any to become an heir of God.

Children of the Lord are those who have allowed themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads through the revealed word, which teaches us what to do to be saved. The law of adoption is another manner of presenting the plan of salvation. As for mankind, each must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of sins, confess faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ, into the body (First Corinthians 12:13), which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). As long as one loves and enjoys the society of Satan, he makes himself unfit for

adoption into the family of God. But those who hear the word of the Holy Spirit, which is in the Bible, and conforms thereto, he becomes an heir of God. He becomes an heir "*to an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you.*" (First Peter 1:4). This inheritance is available to the rich, poor, king, beggar, bond, free, male, female, Jew Gentile, all men everywhere, in every nation, that will fear God and work His righteousness (Acts 10:34,35). It is open to you as it is to me. There is no reason we should deprive ourselves of this inheritance. Let us be disposed to honor God and respect the will of God through Christ.

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Give Us Something Practical

There has been a swelling cry against the pulpits and those who occupy them to become more attune to what some have designated to be the real issues of our day, the real needs of our time. The charge is leveled that churches generally have neglected their duty to keep abreast with the times and are too busy answering questions nobody is asking, talking about matters that are irrelevant and of no real concern. In papers, magazines, religious and secular, on television and radio, we hear the plea, "Give us something practical." People want something that will solve their problems of the here and now.

There is no question that mankind has many problems. Many face unemployment, inadequate housing, the threat and actuality of war, prejudice, drugs, social injustices, racial discrimination, hypocrisy, riots, ignorance, diseases, pollution of every sort, etc. The magnitude of these problems has overwhelmed many into turning to the proclamation of a "social gospel" as if the mission of Jesus Christ to this earth was to provide a remedy for the mundane and materialistic matters. The burdens of life have provoked many to turn away from the spiritual message of salvation from sin, forgiveness, redemption, the right relationship with God, the church, concern of heaven and hell, the next life, etc. These things are called impractical and irrelevant.

Irrelevant Messages

We would have to agree that the messages coming from many pulpits today do not relate to the real needs of mankind today, but not in the way that many critics have thought. Most people do not seem to be aware of the real need of mankind, the cause of so many of his problems, and are totally ignorant of the solution of his real need, as well as those temporal and earthly needs with which some have become totally concerned. Some have embarked upon a crusade of social reform and material relief without changing the heart of the people. Some preach a "health and wealth" gospel, as if Christ died to make everybody healthy and wealthy. You would be led to believe that Jesus went to the cross for environmental improvement and physical provisions. Those who so think have become doctors of symptoms rather than dealing with the real cause and cure of the needs of man, here and in the hereafter.

Even some in the Lord's church have been overtaken by this approach to where they have abandoned the mission and the message of Christ and are busy emphasizing the beneficial by-products of Christianity to the neglect of the heart of the religion of Christ. Even brethren are active in taking the church into recreational provisions, entertainments, food, fun and frolic kind of emphasis. Some have even gone so far as to involve the church in political matters to the extent that the church becomes not much more than a pressure group on politicians, leaders in social revolutions, and similar movements.

A Major Concern

True Christians will be concerned with the general state of things here on earth. It is practical and relevant to be concerned about the ills that beset the human family. But is it not more practical to be concerned with the cause of problems and the real issues of life? And these issues are not jobs, houses, money, clean air, etc. Nothing is more practical than an understanding of when, how and where the solutions to the ills of mankind really are. The problems of mankind, their cause and cure, are primarily spiritual in nature, not physical. These problems often manifest themselves in physical distress, but they are issues of the heart. So much that wreaks havoc in our world stems from the spiritual degeneracy of people and comes from the decay of the moral principles that Christ taught. We may patch and

bandage the physical forever, but no solution will be found apart from spiritual regeneration.

For a long time now, many people, even leading religionists, have scoffed at doctrine. They have decreed that doctrine does not really matter. They would have us all believe that what you believe is not that important. Isn't that strange? They are very concerned that you believe that what you believe doesn't really matter that much? Any philosophy that contradicts itself is not worthy of being accepted. Rather than doctrine, they urge that we preach something practical. After all, according to these social gospel advocates, one doctrine is as good as another, but they are very insistent that you accept their doctrine that doctrine does not matter. Standing upon the Word of God as our authority, we must contend and insist that Christianity is practical, the most practical doctrine that men have ever heard. Christianity deals with every phase of life, including problems. But it is doctrinal in nature, governing man's existence from the cradle to the grave, and into the world beyond this.

We Must Be Practical

To be practical means that which is usable, capable of being profitable. Inasmuch as **sin** is at the root of man's problems, what could be more practical than dealing with sin? Sin is a violation of God's law (First John 3:4). Sin has always buried man beneath havoc, confusion, frustration, hopelessness, fear, distress, and ruin. Some prefer to dismiss this fundamental truth about the existence of man, but they can neither prove it incorrect nor have an alternative explanation of validity. They just do not like the doctrine that says man is accountable to God. They want to do whatever they wish without the consequences of their actions and thoughts and deeds. Everything is acceptable, yet, so much of what people do brings them shame, disgrace and problems on top of problems. We must ask, "What is more practical than forgiveness of sins? What is more practical than providing hope for the hopeless? What is more practical than giving meaning to life? What is more practical than for the lost to be found? What can one suggest that would benefit mankind more than solutions to the threats against the home, the young, the old? Since spiritual contamination and spiritual death is the worst enemy man has, what is more practical than victory over such as that? Is there anything more useful than the escape from hell and entrance

into **heaven**? What is nobler than fulfilling life's duties? What can be more beneficial than avoiding pitfalls and preventing problems? Without submission to the will of **the authority** that is higher than man, people will never do better, be better or make real improvement.

The Primacy of Doctrine

But all these blessings are the result of conformity to doctrine, God's doctrine, God's laws. By conformity to these laws the heart of a person is converted and changed, and this results in a better way of living. Man cannot live by the material bread of this life. He must have the spiritual food that comes from God. History has shown that man is not capable of directing his own steps. Man's worst disease is sin and the blood of Christ is its cure. We cannot meet and overcome the problems of this life, let alone the next, without the right relationship with God, and that relationship is attained by doctrinal considerations. Nothing is more practical than that which accomplishes that relationship. People do not improve until their mind is improved. Our lot in life will not improve until we improve our life. The matters of the here and now with which some are totally concerned become better when people provide for the hereafter. Until they consider the hereafter, nothing in this life has any real meaning and significance. Until there is a recognition of God and His way, our existence is nothing and ends only in the grave and for no purpose. Nobody that pays attention to the world in which he lives doubts that it needs healing. The principle of Second Chronicles 7:14 still abides, *"If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."* *"Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people."* (Proverbs 14:34). If someone really wants to do something about the havoc in the world, if he is truly serious about making things better on earth, let him devote himself and encourage those around him to conform to the ways of God. *"The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them, but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness."* (Proverbs 11:6).

When people cry out today, "Give us something practical and relevant to our times, our needs, our problems," there is nothing better to offer than the words of Christ, *"Ye must be born*

again." To have a better world, we must have better people. It begins in the heart. That is what the doctrine of Christ provides. The conversion that mankind needs is produced by the Word of God (Psalms 19:7).

The Practical Message

The most practical message men can hear is the gospel, its facts, its commands, its promises. Nothing is more beneficial than to learn how to apply the blood of Christ to the sin-stained heart. The beginning of a better world is a saved person that respects God. When one respects God he will respect morality, his neighbor, his duties. While the humanists, athesists, materialists, social gospelites are running about denouncing the Lord's prescription and remedy, they offer nothing better than "a band-aid on a cancer." They scoff at the only solution and practical answer that exists.

Following Christ, respecting His authority and doctrine in one's life will produce good. People will have self-respect, learn to work, and not be willing to be parasites upon their neighbors. Those in need will find provision from others who follow Christ because caring for those who cannot care for themselves is a part of Christianity. Taking drugs that destroy the body and mind will be eliminated when all people conform to the doctrine of Christ that the body is the temple of God. Prejudices will melt when people practice the Lord's "golden rule." War will not exist if more and more would insist upon loving their enemies rather than killing them. Ignorance, poverty, hypocrisy find their cures in pure hearts, love without dissimulation and pretense, seeking the others' highest good. Hate can only be driven out with love. Is not that the doctrine of Christ? Sin can be replaced with righteousness. Despair can be disspelled with hope. Doubt can be replaced with confidence. What else can produce such as this except conversion to Christ?

Down through the ages men have followed first one theme then another. All the various philosophies of men have crashed against the rocks of failure because they are human and therefore limited and fallible. But the will of God for man has in the past, and does now when applied, produced that which man needs most, spiritual regeneration, and an abundant life here and the assurance and hope of an eternal happiness and blessedness with God for eternity. What could possibly be more practical than the doctrine that produces this for human kind?

Adhering to doctrine will cause one to obey the gospel in faith, repentance, confession of faith and baptism. Adhering to doctrine will cause one to live righteously toward others and toward God. It will prevent apostasy and falling away. It will avoid the innovations, substitutions and counterfeits that men often put forward. Every spiritual blessing is in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). What mankind needs is spiritual regeneration. Out of the heart comes the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). When the heart is right, the person will be right. When the person is right, the world will be right.

A father once gave his son a puzzle. When completed it would be a map of the world. In an unexpected short time the son had the puzzle completed and everything in proper place. The father was amazed and asked him how he was able to work things out so fast. The son replied, "There is a picture of a man on the other side. When you get the man straight, the world automatically becomes straight." As we call for something practical, we might do well to give that more thought, and give respect to that which gets man straight, which is doctrine, the doctrine of Christ.

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What Church To "Join"?

The subject under consideration is one about which the world has many varied attitudes. We approach the study very conscious of the fact that the things we present shall be contrary to what many people have believed heretofore. But, as always, we only ask a careful and Biblical consideration for the things that are taught. We never encourage anyone to accept anything except what the Bible does teach. The study has to do with the church and is in the form of a question, "What church ought a person join?"

Almost everybody, except the atheist, infidel, agnostic, and those who are anti-Christian, expect to join some kind of religious organization before they die. We must take note that the number seems to be growing among those who do not have any specific religious affiliation. There is a real campaign against

"organized religion." We share some of the complaints against "organized religion" because most of it comes from man, not God. But we must also keep in mind the church that Christ built is also organized. As we discard the "organized religions" of men, let us not cast out the religion that Christ organized. There are more and more people who have joined the "no church" movement. In a sense, they belong to the "no church" church.

Among those that believe the Bible to be the Word of God, there is not this same rebellion against organized religion. But even many of them have not yet decided which church to join. With several hundred different churches beckoning them to "join us" they have many opportunities to join something, but thus far, have decided upon no church. They visit around quite a lot, looking at this one, then that one. We suggest that this kind of "church shopping" would take a man wiser than Solomon to ever decide with all the confused, chaotic, contradictory situation that exists in religion. Many who take the course of action do become hopelessly confused.

Should We Join Them All?

It may sound strange to make such a suggestion, but how would you react to the idea of joining all the churches within reach? If there is good in all churches, and one is as good as another, and you can be saved in any of them, why not take advantage of as many as time will allow? Why cut yourself out from the benefits of any of them? Why not join them all? You You buy insurance from different companies, not just one exclusively. You buy groceries at more than one store. You might even drive more than just one brand of car. Where did you get the idea that you can belong to only one church? If each one has something worthwhile to offer, why not get in with them all?

Now we must admit that many churches would not let you do this. But you ought to ask them, "Why not?" Why should they object to you belonging to a Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Pentecostal church all at the same time? Are they all good, according to their doctrines? Why should you limit the number? I never have had anybody to give me an intelligent answer to that question.

But I would never advise anybody to join many churches. In fact, I would never advise anybody to join any church. No, this is not because I am anti-organized religion. It is just because I

have never read anywhere in the Scripture of God telling anybody to "join" any church. Yes, I am a member of the church, but I did not become so because I "joined" it. This statement takes us to First Peter 4:11, where we are taught to *"speak as the oracles of God."* The Bible does not speak of "joining some church, any church." You will have to take my word for that until you have had the time to study the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, and prove that is true for yourself.

We best define what the church is; that is, the church revealed in Scripture. We are not talking about some physical building, more properly called a meetinghouse. There are many splendid edifices, representative of hugh expenditures, but they are not churches. They are just buildings. All the building material in the nation cannot erect the church of the Lord.

A Building

The church is described as a building. *"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; In whom ye are also builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."* (Ephesians 2:20-21). *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."* The material of this spiritual building is people who have been born again, having passed from darkness to light. Paul, when preaching on Mars' Hill said, *"The God that made the worlds and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands."* (Acts 17:24). The Athenians had their marvelous temples to their gods. But the true God has no such temple. Those who belong to Him are His temple (First Corinthians 6:19).

A Kingdom

What is the church? The church of the Bible is that spiritual kingdom over which Jesus Christ reigns as head and king, and in which the Holy Spirit dwells by and through the Word of God. It is the body of Christ, composed of people who have come to Him by obeying the gospel, being washed in the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. *"And hath put all*

things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Ephesians 1:22,23). *"And he is the head of the body the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence."* (Colossians 1:18). *"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."* (First Corinthians 12:27).

The Saved

In the New Testament the word "church" is never used in the sense of a denomination. A denomination and the church of the Bible are not the same thing. A denomination is a religious organization that claims to be larger than a local congregation but denies being all the saved of the world. Compare that definition with the usage of the word *"church"* in Scripture. In the Bible a church is either the saved of all the world, or the saved in a given locality. A denomination is different from the New Testament church in both respects. In fact, we never read of a denomination in the Bible. But someone says, "The church is composed of all the denominations." To make such a claim is to convict God of the most reckless kind of division and confusion one can imagine. Is God the author of the chaos that exists in the religious world? Is this what Jesus meant when He prayed that His followers be one, and when Paul taught that we all speak the same thing? Nobody can possibly conclude that God is the author of denominationalism. That is entirely the invention of man.

No Denominations

No denomination existed on earth until several hundred years after the Lord's church had come into existence on the first day of Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 2). We advise no man anywhere to become a member of a denomination. There is no divine authority to support the existence of even one denomination. You could memorize the Bible and be no wiser about denominations. The only thing close to a denomination you can find in the Bible is where Paul condemned the division that existed in Corinth. Denominationalism strives on, propagates, and promotes the divisive factors that characterize the religious world.

Can one be saved outside of a denomination? Even

denominationalists admit the answer is "Yes." Can one be saved outside the body of Christ, which is His church? No person honest with the Scripture would say, "Yes." Salvation is "*in Christ*" (Second Timothy 2:10), not outside of Christ (Acts 4:12). The church is God's household, His family (First Timothy 3:15). Those in His family are His spiritual children. They are the saved (Acts 2:47).

Can one be a member of God's church without being a member of a denomination? Not only can he be, this is what he ought to be. The people in the New Testament were never members of a denomination, but they were members of the church of Christ. I am a member of the church of the Bible and I have never belonged to a denomination. Many who are members of the church came out of denominations in order to be members of the Lord's church. I do not see why some brethren have taken up the banner of soft-peddling the fact that denominationalism is religious error. Are they ashamed of the church? Do they fear the displeasure of men more than they seek to please the Lord? Why is there not a strong, definite, sound and certain cry against this human intervention in religion anymore? Do we think that maybe, somehow, in spite of God's Word, denominationalism is acceptable after all?

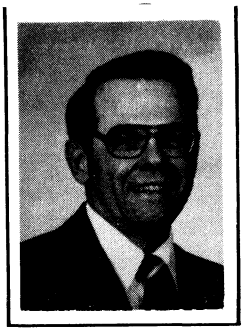
Entering The Church

How did I become a member of the church? I became a member of the Boyd family when I was born into that family. I became a member of the family of God when I was born into it "*by water and the Spirit.*" (John 3:3-5). I did not enter the world and then shop around, looking for a family I might like and one that pleased me. I did not decide to "join the church" like somebody decides to join some club or association. Nobody voted on me when I became a member of the Boyd family. I became the child of my parents by virtue of being born of them.

Being begotten of the Word and born into the family of God, I thereby and at the same instant, became a member of the church, God's family, because God added me to the church like He added those on Pentecost when they obeyed the gospel commands delivered to them (Acts 2:38-47). They did not become members because of their own merit, but by the merit of the blood of Christ. By virtue of something God did, when I met

(continued on page 10)

Seek The Lord



JAMES W. BOYD

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

When people are in such conditions as was Israel, it is to their advantage to search until they find the solutions to their problems. The only real solution to the plagues of society and individual lives is a commitment to the true and living God. Our text impresses us with the necessity of seizing the opportunity to call on the Lord while opportunity exists.

This is an invitation very much like the call of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30. "*Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"

The tragedy of many is that they neglect this great business of serving God while they reach for other things that pale into relative insignificance. "*Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not?*" (Isaiah 55:2). We do far better to seek the Lord in this life and be mindful of Him.

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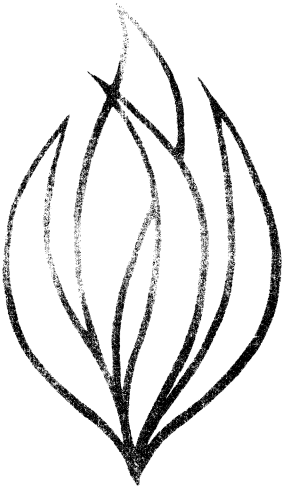

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IV James W. Boyd **NUMBER 2**

What Is The Christian Life

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16). This verse, alongside many others, asserts among other things, that salvation is conditional. *"For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast."* (Ephesians 2:8,9). *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 6:23). We learn that salvation is a gift. It is a gift, given by God, when man meets certain conditions. Those conditions need only be stated here for our lesson. One must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Thereafter, he is to live a faithful life as a Christian. But what is the Christian life? How can one know if he is living a Christian life if he does not know what that life involves? Obviously, we must not only know what to do to become a Christian, but we also must learn what being a Christian demands.

A Way Of Life

When we rightly understand the religion of Christ and the Christian way, we will understand it to be a way of living. We live according to a certain pattern and standard. It is not only the way that leads to heaven, which is the greatest of its benefits, but it governs the manner of everyday living, one's outlook on life, including his attitudes, actions, words, thoughts, deeds, and goals. The Christian life involves every phase of life, every relationship, and occupies the entire person his entire time. There is never a moment when the Christian can forget that he is a Christian and should act accordingly.

We want to make a few general observations regarding the Christian life at the beginning, then concentrate on a few specifics. Although many have chosen to reject the Christian life, it is the best way of life one can live. This is not only so proclaimed by the Lord and exemplified in the life of Christ, but it is also attested by the thousands who strive to live it. It is *"the more excellent way."* (First Corinthians 12:31).

Different

It is also a different way of life. It is different from the way most people live; different from what man would live if left to himself. It is different from the way of life one lived before he became a Christian. Those who are Christian have separated themselves from the wickedness of this world (Second Corinthians 6:14ff), and are a *"peculiar"* people (Titus 2:14). While most would live in sin for self and Satan, not so with the Christian. The Christian life is not worthy simply because it is different, but it is different because it is worthy.

Costly

The Christian life is a costly life. *"So likewise, whosoever he be among you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."* (Luke 14:33). *"Then Jesus said unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."* (Matthew 16:24). All things of value have great costs. Walking with Christ is not always the smooth, easy path. It is often quite difficult and demanding. But in the long run, and after all is taken into account, the costs involved in living the Christian life cannot compare with the rewards received. *"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."* (Philippians 3:7,8). *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18). With these general observations before us, let us turn our attention to more specific characteristics of the Christian life.

Faith

The Christian life is a life of faith. We believe in God because the evidence is too convincing to think otherwise. We are not blind and naive. We investigate the evidence and draw the only conclusion the evidence allows. Therefore, we trust Him and have confidence in His word. We are assured of His power and we are given hope by His promises. We live with a trust that what He says He will do and His will is eternally true. We may at

times be beset with trials and problems, even dangers, but we are confident of ultimate victory over all that which would destroy us because of Him.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28). This means that God has worked certain things that will be for the good of those who heed His call that comes by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it."* (First Corinthians 10:13). This means that there is nothing that can happen this day that God and I together cannot handle. What a glorious promise even for the here and now! We can face each day with confidence, optimism, hope and vigor. Hardship need not lessen our faith, but only emphasize our need of God, our dependence on God, and serve as an opportunity to endure and be blessed (James 1:12).

We walk by faith and not by sight, confident that He careth for us and is mindful of us. He will overrule all things for what He sees is best for us, both now and forever. Christian living is a life of faith in God.

Worship

It is also a life of worship. *"God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24). No person can be a faithful Christian who does not worship God. Worship is a rich, blessed privilege as well as a Christian duty. Christians never shun the opportunity to worship their Father, but seek the occasions to worship. They never look upon worship as something they "have to do" as much as something they "get to do."

God has authorized how His children are to worship Him and revealed His way in His word. Man cannot honor God without honoring His word and confining himself to *"thus saith the Lord"* when it comes to worshiping God. Christians worship God through prayer, giving, singing, the Lord's Supper, and teaching His Word. So vital is the worship of God that God has designated a day in which the saints are to assemble for such purposes. And these assemblies are not to be forsaken (Hebrews 10:25). To deliberately absent oneself from a period of worship

is to deliberately ignore a sacred Christian action.

The Christian life is one of self-denial, service, and sacrifice for God and for others. Someone has suggested that Christian service is J-O-Y, meaning service to Jesus, to Others, then Yourself. It is doing to others as you would they do to you. It is being useful and helpful to those less fortunate. It requires one to be a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), putting others first, their welfare, their happiness, their salvation, their good (Philippians 2:3-4). Actually, this is what love is; namely, seeking the other's highest good. Behind every willing sacrifice is love.

Selflessness

The selflessness of the Christian life is rooted in love. Selfishness is the source of so much of the world's problems among human relationships. This is true between nations, in homes, even between brethren. Instead of asking, "How does this or that affect **me**?" the Christian asks, "How does this or that affect others?" Even more, what does God think about it? Christian living puts to death pride, self-righteousness, and self-exaltation. Rather it is giving of oneself to something and someone higher and nobler. To deny self is to set our affections on spiritual and heavenly matters, seeking first things first, giving the way of Christ priority in life before everything else. The prayer of Christian living is, "Not my will, but thine be done."

Self-Control

Along this same line, Christian living is bringing self under control and being disciplined. It is refraining from evil and doing what is good. *"Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good, abstain from all appearance of evil."* (First Thessalonians 5:21,22). *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17).

It is a paradox, but the one who gives of himself the most is the one who receives most for himself. Jesus taught, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35). The one who becomes a servant, will be the greatest of all (Luke 22:26). The one who humbles himself, shall be exalted (Luke 14:11). The one who remembers the Lord is never forgotten.

Purity

Christian living is living a life of purity. The Christian is to live a *"pure religion"* (James 1:27). *"Keep thyself pure."* (First Timothy 5:22). *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. Teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."* (Titus 2:11,12). We are not to love the world (First John 2:15), because *"friendship with the world is enmity with God."* (James 4:4). In a world that makes mockery of a pure life, the Christian dares to be pure in morals, in tongue, in thought, in conduct, where he goes, what he does, what he condones, what he allows himself to support, that which he is a part, even his influence. Christianity never requires leaving off anything that is clean and wholesome and pure. Some of the most powerful negative instructions in the Bible have to do with the purity of one's life.

Purity demands abstinence from all unlawful satisfactions of fleshly appetites. The works of the flesh are not to be part of his life (Galatians 5:19ff). Purity forbids lying, dishonesty, stealing, adultery, drinking alcoholic beverages, immodest dress, filthy habits, dancing, *"and such like."* Purity requires producing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22ff). It calls for truthfulness, honesty, godly living, and being a good example.

Growth

But the Christian life is also a life of growth. If we do not grow we shall become spiritually emaciated. We are born into the family of God as babes in Christ. As a new-born babe is expected to grow physically, so must the spiritual babe grow. It is not shame to be immature unless one has had time and opportunity to grow. It is shameful to not be growing (Hebrews 5:12).

Growth comes by adding the Christ-like virtues to our lives and character as Peter described in Second Peter 1:5-7, *"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience, godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity."* We grow by feeding on spiritual food. *"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrises and envies, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."* (First Peter 2:1,2). We grow by spiritual exercise, *"...and exercise thyself rather unto godliness,*

for bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable **unto** *all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of* **that** *which is to come."* (First Timothy 4:7,8).

Christians are expected to grow strong. "*Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."* (Ephesians 6:10). "*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong."* (First Corinthians 16:13). We stand in line for rebuke if we do not grow. "*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."* (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Faithfulness

While the Christian life is not a life of perfection, it must be a life of faithfulness. We must "keep on keeping on."

The Christian life is characterized by a spiritual warfare. It is a fight against evil and for the good. It becomes a struggle. But eventually there is peace, contentment, happiness, consolation for eternity. We are to fight the good fight of faith, war a good warfare, suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ. Satan and sin is the enemy. Truth and right is the cause.

The Christian life is much like an oasis in the midst of the desert. It is a haven from a stormy sea, a light in a world of darkness, a calm surrounded by a tempest, certainty and security in the midst of doubt and confusion.

Faithfulness as a Christian brings the eternal rewards. *"Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9). *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (First Corinthians 15:58).

† † † † †

In every trouble there is a blessing.

The trouble with trouble is that it starts out as fun.

A Great Announcement

We like to hear announcements and anticipate them with excitement. An announcement imparts knowledge and information. Sometimes it thrills us and sometimes it saddens us, depending upon the nature of the announcement. In the Bible, we find many great announcements, particularly with reference to Jesus Christ. *"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."* (Luke 2:11). This was a wonderful announcement of the coming of the Savior into the world, being born of the virgin Mary. *"He is not here. He is risen even as he said."* (Matthew 28:6). What a joyful announcement of the resurrection of Christ.

But there was an announcement made that surpasses the marvelous announcement of the birth of Jesus and the resurrection. It is recorded in the second chapter of Acts, made by the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost, at the climax of his sermon preached on that day. *"Therefore to all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ."* (Acts 2:36).

What does this announcement tell us about Jesus of Nazareth? First, it tells us that Jesus is Lord, that is, Master of all. He is approved of God. He is Deity. He is authority. He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Savior of mankind, the deliverer from sin. As such, He is the hope of the world, the light of nations, the Son of God. This is the greatest declaration of truth that has ever been made. Nothing exists that is of equal significance. So much else that we consider important rests upon the validity of this announcement. It states the identity of the One to whom we look for salvation.

Evidence

But what right and by what evidence did Peter make such an announcement? What proof could he offer? How could he expect people to accept what he was saying as the truth? To put things in perspective, let us understand that all that took place before Pentecost pointed toward Pentecost. All that follows after that notable day looks back at Pentecost. This was the day that the gospel was first preached in its fulness. On this day were the doors of God's kingdom opened to mankind. It was then that

the first of the saved through Christ were added to the church. From that day until this the message of salvation has been heard to the saving of those who believe and obey.

The evidence that Peter cited was conclusive and convincing. The hearts of the hearers were pricked with the truthfulness proclaimed. They were convicted of their sins and cried out, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37). Peter had proven beyond question the validity of his announcement concerning the Christ. He had used four irrefutable facts concerning Jesus to support his declaration. It is our purpose to consider these four facts, as presented in that matchless sermon preached on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ.

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." (Acts 2:22).

Miracles

The miracles that Jesus did was evidence that He was who Peter claimed Him to be. Toward the end of His personal ministry, Jesus said, *"Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake."* (John 14:11). If any had doubts as to who He was, they should consider what He was doing and had done. Nicodemus recognized this weight of evidence early in the ministry of Christ and said, *"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him."* (John 3:2). When John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus from his prison cell to learn more fully of the identity of Jesus, He told them to *"Go and show John again those things which ye do see and hear. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."* (Matthew 1:4,5). Here was the evidence that Jesus was the One that should come and it was useless to look for another.

In John, chapter nine, we read where Jesus healed a blind man. Later that man was asked, *"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"* He said, *"Lord, I believe."* What convinced him? *"One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."* In submitting proof that Jesus was Lord and Christ, Peter was submitting the miracles of Jesus, miracles of which his hearers

were well aware. He said, *"As ye yourselves also know."* If ever there was a time for someone to deny that Jesus worked miracles, that was the time, rather than now, some two thousand years removed from their occurrence. But none denied. John wrote, *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and believing have life in his name."* (John 20:30,31).

Prophecy

A second irrefutable evidence Peter presented was the fulfillment of inspired prophecy. Speaking of David, *"Men and brethren, let me speak freely unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ, to sit on his throne."* (Acts 2:29,30). The prophets had foretold of the birth of Christ by the virgin, the place of his birth, his name, some things of his life, his death, burial and resurrection, his mighty works, and his kingdom. In fact, as Peter declared in Acts 3:22-24, "*For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days."* One who was knowledgeable of the message of the prophets could recognize in Jesus their fulfillment concerning the Messiah and Savior of mankind.

Scriptures

Jesus said of the things in the early Scriptures, *"Search the scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me."* (John 5:39). Stephen disputed with those who rejected Christ and preached, *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now betrayers and murderers."* (Acts

7:52). At the household of Cornelius Peter said, "*To him give all the prophets witness...*" (Acts 10:43). Christ did not come to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17,18). When Paul preached before Agrippa, he preached what the prophets said should be, and Paul said he knew that Agrippa believed the teaching of the prophets, the things that Moses and the others said should come (Acts 26:22).

In every instance, in minute detail, Jesus fulfilled prophecies concerning the Messiah. It was not coincidental nor accidental, but miraculous and providential. Peter used this evidence to sustain his announcement.

Resurrection

Peter then turned to the resurrection as evidence he was declaring the truth regarding Jesus. After saying of Jesus, *"Him delivered up by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay."* Peter added, *"Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, for it was not possible that he be holden of it."* (Acts 2:23,24).

As with the miracles, if ever there was a time for someone to deny the resurrection of Christ, that was the time. They were in the same city where Jesus had lived, where He had been seized, where He was tried, where He was humiliated and taken and slain and buried, and that only a few days previous to Peter's announcement. If ever there could have been presented evidence that Peter's statement was untrue, then was the opportune time. Certainly the objections raised then ought carry more weight than those raised thousands of years removed from the event and from the witnesses of the events. But none denied, nor could produce any evidence to the contrary. The tomb was empty; Jesus had been seen by many witnesses. At least twelve different appearances are recorded in Scripture. Once as many as 500 people at once saw Him. Peter said, *"We are eyewitnesses of His majesty."* (Second Peter 1:16). John writes, *"That...which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled...declare we unto you..."* (First John 1:1-3). In Acts 4:20, Peter stated forthrightly before the enemies of Christ, *"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."* Paul declared that by the resurrection Jesus was declared to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). By the resurrection Peter proved

his announcement to be true.

But those who heard Peter did not have to rely on the words of the apostles and that which had been seen of them alone. Peter pointed out other evidence that his announcement was true that none could deny. *"He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."* (Acts 2:33). To paraphrase, "We have beentelling you what we have seen and heard and know is true. But now the Lord has given you evidence for you to see and hear and you can know that which we are saying is from God and be convinced yourself." What was it the people were hearing and seeing?

Holy Spirit

They had heard about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles that came with a sound as a rushing mighty wind and as tongues of fire upon them. They heard these Galileans speaking in languages (tongues) that were not normal, native, and natural to them. These were languages the apostles had not learned, but were nonetheless able to speak and those from every nation were able to hear in their own language. Every man was hearing the truth in his own language. This manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit, this miraculous evidence that the apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit in what they were preaching, stood as evidence that the entire procedure was of God. True, some accused them of being drunk, but Peter convincingly refuted such a false charge. The accusation only goes to prove that even the scoffers recognized that something unusual was taking place.

What was the result of this inspired testimony and presentation of the evidence that Jesus was both Lord and Christ? Paul once wrote, *"Faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17). The preaching of the word produced faith in the hearts of the hearers. They accepted the validity of Peter's announcement. The evidence was too weighty to refute. They were convinced and convicted. When they asked what to do, they were told, *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* (Acts 2:38). Some 3,000 heard, believed, and obeyed as they were instructed, and the Lord added them to the church (Acts 2:47).

This is the way people became members of the Lord's church

on the day that the church came into existence. It is still the same way people enter the church, the body of Christ, the company of the saved, today. The church exists on the foundation that Peter's announcement is true; namely, that Jesus is both Lord and Christ.

Are You Convinced?

What think ye of the announcement made by Peter? Do you believe it? What think ye of the evidence Peter presented to substantiate his announcement? Is it convincing to you? Can you refute it? Do you dare disbelieve what is so evidently set forth, realizing that to do so is to bring ruination to your soul?

If you are convinced that Jesus is the Christ, then obey Him unto salvation. Repent of your sins and confess your faith in Him, then obeying His command to be baptized, being added to the saved, the church of Christ. Live your life in faithfulness in work and worship as a child of God. Those that do have the hope and assurance of an eternal life with God, because God *"hath made this same Jesus...both Lord and Christ."*

† † † † †

Good Homes Good Churches

A former Bible teacher of mine told of visits he made into different homes, both homes of elders of the church. One had two married sons, active in the church. He said he came away from that visit thinking how good homes help make good churches. During the other visit he asked the elder where he had met his wife. It was at a worship service. They attended the same Bible classes, married at the church building by a faithful gospel preacher. They discussed how the church had been such a help to them through the years in times of trials, problems, and grief, providing strength, encouragement, comfort, and power to face difficulties. He said he came away from that visit thinking how good churches help make good homes.

It is certainly true that good churches contribute in the establishment and maintenance of good homes. It is also true

that good homes contribute to building and maintaining good churches. Like the two rails of a railroad track, they complement each other. Each is vital and necessary to the other. While in a sense independent, they are also dependent one upon the other. After all, both came from God and are divinely planned. One began at Eden and the other on Pentecost. Side by side they contribute to the welfare of each other.

Benefits The Home

Consider for a moment the benefit rendered by the church to the home. We might start by considering actual physical assistance that is sometimes offered. First Timothy 5:16 authorizes the church to offer relief where needed. Money, food, clothes, and physical care are all within the nature of the help the church can offer to those in physical distress. But more often there is the spiritual assistance, instruction, training, guidance, counsel, direction, encouragement, sympathy, fellowship, opportunity for worship and service and study that the church provides for every member of the home. The eldership has the watchcare for the souls of all who are members. This is a part of God's plan for keeping brethren from falling away.

Consider the benefit the church renders to the children in the home. They are involved in classes where they are taught from an early age. They learn to love, share, have respect for authority, seek higher levels of morality than what the sinful world would have them accept. They learn the value of honesty, purity, and self-respect. The church assists parents in the training of children in the nuture and admonition of the Lord.

One juvenile judge once reported that he had tried nearly 14,500 cases of young people under seventeen years of age. In only two instances did both parents attend Sunday school classes with their children. In only 93 cases were the young people attending classes at the time they got into trouble. Don't you see the good influence of such periods that are offered by the church? Don't you see why the church urges parents to bring and accompany their children in such activities? The home and church working together is of eternal as well as temporal benefit to young people.

But the benefit is not just to the young. *"The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their*

husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." (Titus 2:3-5). There is to be the coupling of Biblical instruction with practical experience of older Christians, taking advantage of the wisdom of godly people.

Opportunity To Worship

Then consider the value of the opportunity for worship that the church affords the family. Families worshipping together have a great bond. It is a true saying, "Families that pray together, stay together." Children are impressed by example as they see their parents active in worship to God. They learn where true value lies. They learn to respect God and His will. No greater heritage can parents give to their children than a strong parental example of faith in God. Such worship opportunities are instances of the church taking an interest in families. This is one reason we should be repulsed at the idea of "children's church" where children are removed from their parents and shuttled off somewhere else, deprived of the opportunity to not only learn as they can by word and by demonstration, but to witness their parents in devotion to God in worship.

Association

The church affords association with the finest people on earth. Yes, evil companionships corrupt good morals (First Corinthians 15:33), people of the church being together provide the fellowship for each other and make being a Christian a joy and privilege in this life. Good companions encourage good morals. The preventive side of Christianity is realized in Christian association. Many Christians have benefited immeasurably from fellowship with their brethren. In good times and bad times, Christians help each other get to heaven. They enjoy the wisdom and counsel, as well as the example, of godly people around them. There is no other conclusion that can be drawn except that good churches that are fulfilling the role God assigned to churches, help make good homes.

But let us now consider how good homes help make good churches. Have you read the recipe for a good home?

"You will need one husband, one wife, children to suit yourselves. Next, cream one cup of love until it is fluffy and

mellow. Add one-half cup of tears and hardships and stir gently. Whip in a cup of joy; when smooth, add one teaspoon each of thoughtfulness, heartfelt tenderness and sympathy. Add one cup of ambition with two cups of Christianity generally. Bake in a moderate oven, top with kindness and serve repeatedly."

There is no passage in the Bible that begins, "The home should be..." The Bible does give specific and general principles however. This teaching includes instructions to husbands, wives, children concerning responsibilities, blessings, and privileges. Homes that listen to the teaching of the Bible will be of inestimable value to the church.

To Husbands

To husbands we read, "*Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.*" (Colossians 3:19). *"Likewise, ye husbands dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.*" (First Peter 3:7). *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it.*" (Ephesians 5:25). "*So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.*" (Ephesians 5:28,29).

To Wives

To wives we read, "*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.*" (Colossians 3:18). "*That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.*" (Titus 3:4,5). "*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*" (Ephesians 5:22-24). How this runs against the grain to those women who think they are smarter than God and are running around promoting what they mistakenly call equal rights and the feminist movement. One thing for sure, they are not very feminine, and are certainly

Jezebels as far as the teaching of God's book is concerned. How can things that are innately different, with different roles and purposes in life, ever be declared equal to one another in all matters? It is sheer, ungodly, definat and rebellious nonsense. No Christian, man or woman, would lend support to such a concept. In our twentieth century some have considered the wisdom of God to be outmoded and outdated regarding the role of husband and wife. But they only show their own folly. When God's will is obeyed, homes will be better and the result will be that even churches will be better as well as the rest of the world.

David Lipscomb wrote, "The submission of the wife to the husband is that of love, respect and reverence which is befitting the relation she holds to her husband. In her sphere she is spiritually on an equality with man, but as a husband, he is the natural scripturally recognized head and leader of the family. Her submission must be in accordance with the principles of righteousness, and nothing is required of her inconsistent with Christian character. This submission of the wife, when rightly understood and practiced, accords with her inner nature, is in harmony with her relation to God and others, and is productive of the fullest development of her character, her mighest happiness and good."

The husband is not to be a tyrant. Wives are to be subject to their own husbands. It is not all that hard for a wife to obey God by being submissive to her husband when her husband also obeys God in his attitude and action toward his wife.

To Children

To children we read, "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.*" (Ephesians 6:1-3). "*Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.*" (Colossians 3:20). It was said of Jesus when He was a child, "*And he went down with them, and came to Nazereth, and was subject unto them, but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.*" (Luke 2:51,52). Parents are to be honored and obeyed. They are also to so conduct themselves that it is easy for children to obey God in this matter.

Parents are to encourage, lead, guide, instruct their young to

follow the Lord Jesus Christ. *"And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nuture and admonition of the Lord."* (Ephesians 6:4). In so doing, parents will be helping the church as well as the home. Good homes provide proper example for children to follow. Good homes uphold, rather than tear down, the church. Good homes put Christ and His kingdom first in all things. Then the home is as it ought to be as the church is greatly assisted.

Influence On The Church

The influence of the home regarding the church is tremendous. When both parents are united in Christ and active in the church, ninety-three percent of their children are faithful to the church of the Lord. When one parent is active, there is quite a drop to only seventy-three per cent remaining faithful. When parents are inactive, members in name only, only fifty-three per cent remain loyal to Christ. When parents worship irregularly, only six per cent remain faithful. This ought to give parents something to consider when they think of the spiritual welfare of their children and the spiritual climate in the home, and how one affects the other. The conclusion is again beyond escape. Good homes help make good churches.

But what of your home, your family, and the church of the Lord? You are a member of the home and possibly the church also. Is it not our duty before God to make both of these divine institutions as God would have them and to the greatest degree we are capable? When the church and home work together, good comes from it. When there is conflict and division between the home and the church, there is eternal harm. The place to begin to make both more as God wants is with each individual. My part begins with me, and your part begins with you. When members of the family and members of the church work together with one another and with God, all shall be blessed. It begins with becoming a Christian and continues with being what you have become.

† † † † †

The man who believes he can
do something is probably right, and
so is the man who believes he can't.

Having Put His Hand To The Plow

Possibly all have known people who seemed to be people of great promise and potential to the church of the Lord, but who later quit the church altogether. I can think of several. They are people with many good qualities. Some were even teachers of Bible classes. But they became involved in other matters: seeking an education, having social goals, business interests, etc. It would be interesting, and possibly depressing, to know how many people have been baptized into Christ who now are going about their lives without any real concern for the soul whatever. What has become of those people? How many remain faithful to God? What is the present spiritual condition of those who once began but turned away? Surely, many have fallen by the wayside. You may even be one of them.

Jesus said, *"No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62). Having once begun, and turning back, makes one unfit before God, unacceptable as a child of God, unfit for heaven after this life. It means spiritual damnation.

A Conspiracy

There is an ancient conspiracy of which we must be aware. It is led by the devil and his angels against all mankind. *"Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."* (First Peter 5:8). The devil has a twofold purpose: (1) Keep men from becoming Christians and (2) Cause those who have become Christians to be unfaithful and fall away. His efforts are far too successful. His techniques are cleaver and effective. Many are persuaded never to come to Christ. They reject, and even denounce, the very Christ that came to save them. Too often Satan is also victorious in misguiding the Christian and provoking him to abandon that to which he once committed himself. The end result is the same in both instances. Both shall be eternally condemned. You cannot put your hand to the plow and turn back and go to heaven.

This is a very real danger, not an imaginary one. It is a

tragedy that can befall any child of God that is not alert. It overtakes some in their teen years. Even young people who have been reared in Christian homes, who have been active in Bible classes, can become indifferent, inactive religiously, disrespectful of the sacred truths to which they have been exposed. They begin to drift with worldly companions and grow away from the faith. The number of young people in the Bible classes in the pre-school age compared to the number of young people in the high school and college age levels confirms this loss. But the problem is not confined to any one age group. The devil can and does snare victims at any and all ages of life.

This is not just a problem unique to our time. Second Timothy 4:10 tells us of the man named Demas. Paul wrote, "*Demas forsook me, having loved this present world.*" When Jesus dictated to John the writings of Revelation and the letters to the churches of Asia, He said, *"But this I have against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent."* (Revelation 2:4,5). That once great and strong church in Ephesus had drifted to the point of being disowned. This is ancient evidence of the success of Satan.

Many Warnings

We have many warnings from the Bible regarding this danger. Even so great a Christian as Paul realized this danger. First Corinthians 9:27, *"But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage, lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected."* He wrote to the brethren in Philippi, "*I count not myself yet to have laid hold.*" (Philippians 3:13). Some passages in Hebrews center directly on the danger of falling away having once become Christians. (Hebrews 6:4-12; 10:26-31). These passages were written about those who once were close to the Lord, but left Him. No passage more strongly emphasizes the danger of falling away than that which was written by Peter in Second Peter 2:20-22. *"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto*

them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." There is not the slightest chance that these inspired writers ever believed or taught the false doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy, once saved always saved, the doctrine of eternal security, that once you come to Christ you will be saved regardless of what you do thereafter.

Causes

What are the causes for people turning back into the ways of sin they once rejected? Why do people reject the church of the Lord? Let us first learn that Satan's opportunities to ensnare us are enlarged when we are distracted. Complacency and self-satisfaction opens the door for digression. It seems as if those who were once made aware of their sins and lost condition would never become indifferent regarding it. But it is sometimes difficult to keep things vigorous and alive, fresh and active for an extended time. Like clocks, we sometimes need "winding up." There is a need for revival lest we drift. Have you ever wondered what happened to the tremendous church in Jerusalem, Rome, or Phillipi? Somewhere down the line they faded out. They were once great powers for he cause of Christ. But they must have become complacent, indifferent, cold, stale, inattentive to duty. Could that happen to the congregation to which you belong?

What is true of congregations can also become true of individuals. Too many have their names on church rolls that really are not impressed, nor display very much care and concern even for regular worship. In every congregation there are those who are sluggish and haphazard to duty. Why must people in the church constantly have to be prodded to serve God? Rather, they should be urging others to come to the Savior, not having to be coddled and pushed along by others. Complacency is one of the reasons.

Paul encouraged brethren, *"Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9). *"Wherefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (First Corinthians 15:58).

Changes

Another cause of apostasy is lack of alertness during improtant changes that come in our lives. Environment plays a great role in influencing us. The change of job sometimes places us in circumstances incompatible with living the Christian life. To keep the job, one might gradually lose his interest and concern for the church. Even the hours that we work can become an infringement on Christian duty. The change of residence is always an opportunity for the devil to inject some discordant influence into one's life. Marriage is one of the more profound and far reaching influences upon a person. Marrying one with whom you do not share a common faith in Christ can be devestating to one's faith. Every Christian should seek his or her companion from among children of God. Parents need to teach their children to marry *"in the Lord."* Even when babies are born into the home, the increased responsibilities, the extra time and work that is required, can be allowed to grow to a hindrance in serving God. We must realize that properly guiding our children, keeping the home, tending to such sacred duty is a part of being a Christian. Too often, and especially is this true with very young parents, we can allow the mundane matters that have their rightful place dominate and take over first place, even to the neglect to the worship of God. Change in life can create threats to faithfulness. With many it is like the little boy who was moving to another town, and upon leaving his former home, said, "Good-bye God, we are moving." This becomes very true in the lives of too many people.

Education

Seeking a secular education can be the provocation to apostasy. Some compromise their convictions once they are on the godless campus. When the immature and ungrounded youth are thrown into the den of modernists and evolutionists, the immoral activities that characterize nearly every campus in our nation, especially among state operated schools, the pressure often becomes more powerful than one's ability to resist. It is not easy to be a Christian when nearly everything and everyone around is yelling, "There is nothing to it but superstitution. It is irrelevant. It is archaic. It is not the 'in' thing to be." On one campus a poll was taken among 200 students that enrolled who were members of the church. At their fourth year, only five were faithful to the Lord and His church.

Not all of the blame lies on the shoulders of the godless

schools and the "wiser than God" professors and anti-Christian students. While much of the blame rests there, some who are members of the church do not really lose their faith at college. The truth is, the college situation took advantage of the fact that they did not take very much faith with them. They went untrained, undisciplines, ill-taught, with a borrowed faith, never really coming to know the difference between right and wrong for themselves. They, and their parents, Bible class teachers, and others, wasted time during the formative years to instill in their hearts a personal, deep, sincere, conviction for truth. Once away from the environment that is favorable to being faithful, they meet opposition that overturns what little faith they may have developed. How important it is to see to it that the young know the truth for themselves.

Schools operated for the purpose of securing a secular education, operated by brethren, have historically been a great assistance to the home in preserving the values and standards upheld in the home. The goal is to provide a learning environment compatible with Christianity. This ambition is worthy and honorable. Too often in recent years, the Bible departments in "our" schools have become the primary funnel through which digression, apostasy from the truth, false doctrines, modernism, etc. have poured into the church. Too many "Bible professors" have drunk so deeply of the modernism where they attained their theological degrees, that they pour forth that same Satanic pollution upon unsuspecting and undiscerning youth, who in turn grow in the church with the distorted and twisted concepts. As a result, the Bible departments have become one of the worst enemies for the faithfulness of the church that presently exists. I know this is "blasphemy" to those whose love for school is more than for truth, but let us not be naive and blind to realities among us. We pray to God that those of the schools would return to their function and teach faith in Biblical truth, not the theories, philosophies, liberal apostacies that have characterized them so much in recent years. But we are not too optimistic that there will be a turn-around. "Scholarship" acceptable to the world seems to have become the campus god, rather than *"thus saith the Lord."*

Too Busy

A prominent cause of digression and falling away among

many families and again it is especially true of young families that are "coming along" in building their homes, business, families, etc. is to become "too busy" with the affairs of this life to the extent that the Word is choked. They are so busy making money, pushing this and promoting that, that the church is crowded out of their lives. Social acceptance becomes paramount. Places of recognition in the community is of great desire to them. Bible study, prayer, converting the lost, worship, work of evangelism, all become second place, if included at all. First, they must make their mark in the world.

Sin

All ages are affected by the unwillingness to give up the old man of sin. We just won't cut loose from former ways of error. We have habits, attitudes, practices that are simply and downright unchristian. Yet, we hold on to them and try to live in the world and in the church at the same time, as if God will tolerate us anyway. But the man that steals must give up his stealing. The liar must quit lying. The one in adultery must leave the adulterous relationship. The drinker must stop drinking. The smoker must stop smoking. And on and on we could name many sins that we are prone to try to carry into the saved relationship with us as if it will be all right just the same.

When teaching is presented that shows that "*we that are dead to sin*" should not "*live any longer therein,*" (Romans 6:2), rather than give up sin, some give up the Lord that demands giving up sin. Some love sin so much that they are determined to persist in it. They are sometimes encouraged to have this attitude toward sin because other brethren disobey God in refusing to exercise the discipline toward such people that God has instructed. We must learn that being a Christian has its costs just like becoming a Christian does. *"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind."* (Ephesians 4:22,23). If we do not overcome sin, sin will overcome us.

Overconfidence

Finally, overconfidence has spelled disaster for many. Self-righteousness and the attitude that "it cannot happen to me" has been all the opportunity that the devil needs or wants.

"Look what I have done over the years. Surely, God is pleased with me." "Nothing is going to cause me to leave the Lord." In both cases, it may be true that one has been faithful. This is the way it should be. But, *"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall."* (First Corinthians 10:12). Did not Paul urge us to restore those who have fallen, but along with that teaching warn *"lest thou also be tempted?"* (Galatians 6:1).

We cannot ever rest on our laurels. The good deeds of yesteryear are fine to remember, but are nothing upon which to rely and relax. Each day has its opportunities and duties and we must meet them with the same confidence and vigor as those of yesterday were met. Some get the idea that because they did a good work in the past that they can now "take it easy" and coast the rest of the way. That gives the devil an opportunity to place something of his choosing into the thinking and practice of a person to fill the void and idleness.

Having the attitude that one is probably better than most other members of the church will be one's undoing. We are not to measure ourselves by ourselves, nor compare ourselves with ourselves, because that is not wise (Second Corinthians 10:12). Other people are not the standard. Christ is the standard. More may be expected of us than others because we have more abilities and opportunities. You may be able to do more than someone else and it is therefore expected of us. To become satisfied with past accomplishments will inevitably mean a sliding back from what you ought to be.

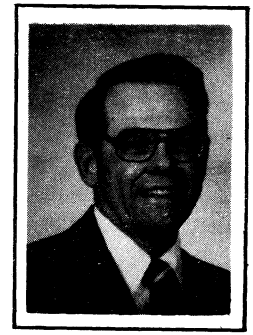
Two Tragedies

It is tragic when one does not become a Christian. It is another tragedy when one has come to Christ, but later turns away again. Having once tasted of the good things of God, be stedfast and loyal. Faithfulness will bring us to the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

If you have fallen away, repentance, confession of sins, and prayer is the way of restoration. Heaven will be inhabited by those "in Christ," but more specifically, those who are faithful in Christ. Those who put their hand to the plow and look back make entrance into heaven impossible, lest they repent.

† † † † †

Alpha And Omega



JAMES W. BOYD

Revelation 21:6, "*I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.*" This was an identification Jesus gave of Himself when guiding John in writing Revelation. It was a duplication of His words at the outset of the book (Revelation 1:11).

"Alpha" is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and "Omega" is the last. By these terms, Jesus summarizes His teaching and declares His Deity. The nature of Christ, the all-sufficiency of Christ, the total of God's provision for mankind's redemption through Christ is embodied in this description. Nothing needful is lacking concerning Christ.

There is nothing before Christ or after Him, the first and last, the beginning and end. The record of Scripture is enclosed between two utterances of God's Word, "*In the beginning...*" and "*It is done. I am the Alpha and Omega.*"

Do not these words emphasize His authority, unsurpassed by all the genius of mankind? Who else but the Son of God could make such a complete claim, the one of *"all fulness."* (Colossians 1:19).

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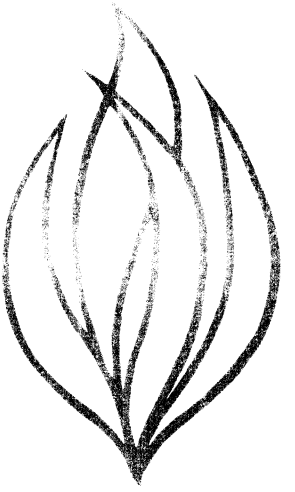

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IV James W. Boyd **NUMBER 3**

The False Front

Seldom did Jesus condemn anything more severly than he condemned hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a word from which all turn away with disgust. We would not want to be considered a hypocrite, nor can we speak more harshly of anyone than to refer to him or her as a hypocrite. Hypocrisy means playing a part or a role on a stage, to put on an act or practice, feigning and pretending to be what one is not, or to feel what one does not really feel. It is assumption of an appearance of virtue or of religion; the simulation of goodness when there is not the reality of goodness.

Hypocrisy is dishonesty; integrity replaced by deceit. It is akin to lying because it is living a lie. There is no better way to express the idea of hypocrisy than to refer to it as something counterfeit, a false front.

When I was young, our family made a trip to visit relatives in California. They lived not far from the movie studios which we also visited. We saw a beautiful little village the studio carpenters had constructed, with cabins, stores, a church building, even a jail. But actually there were no buildings at all. They were only the fronts that appeared to be buildings. Unfortunately people are sometimes like that, false fronts and appearing to be what they are not. Herod, the king of Judea when Jesus was born, asked where the child was, explaining that he wanted to know *"so he could worship also."* But he had no intent of worshipping the Christ. He actually sought the life of Jesus. Annanias and Saphirra are examples of two who wanted to appear to have been liberal in their giving when actually they lied about it (Acts 5).

A Bible Topic

The word "hypocrisy" appears only twenty-eight times in the New Testament in one or the other of its forms. It is found some additional times in the Old Testament where sharp condemnation of it is characteristic. Of the twenty-eight times in the New Testament, twenty-three times it was used by the Lord or in direct connection with His conversation. Let us read a few passages recording His words on the subject.

In Matthew six, *"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the*

synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men." (Verse 2). *"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men."* (Verse 5). *"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast."* (Verse 16). The hypocrite is not generous, prayerful nor pious, but he wishes to appear that way before others.

In Matthew seven, *"Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye."* (Verse 5). Jesus condemns the fault-finder who does not take note of his own life and shortcomings.

In Matthew fifteen, '*"Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth night unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* (Verse 7-9). Lip-service is a mark of hypocrisy. Saying, but not doing is hypocrisy. An example of this is found in Matthew 22:15-18. *"Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?"* Those that asked cared nothing for what Jesus taught, nor were they sincere in their compliments. They were seeking ways to trap him in what He said. Their "sweet talk" came with captious questions, but Jesus knew their hypocrisy. The strongest condemnation of hypocrisy by Jesus is found in Matthew twenty-three and denunciations of the Pharisees. Jesus taught people to do what the Pharisees said, but not what they did, because *"they say and do not."* Again, *"But woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites."* The same is found in verses 13,14,15,23,25. Over and over Jesus condemned them because they were fastidiously correct outwardly and made a grand display of being religious, but inwardly they were fools, blind guides, like whited sepulchers, full of dead men's bones, outwardly appearing righteous but inwardly full of hypocrisy and iniquity. The most scathing

language recorded to have come from the lips of our Lord are found in this chapter where He denounced hypocrisy. The reader would do well to pause long enough to read the entire chapter and thereby get the Lord's attitude clearly in mind regarding this sin. Once His words are read, we are impressed with how hideous hypocrisy is in the sight of God.

Other References

Only five times do the words "hypocrisy" and "hypocrites" appear outside of the speaking of Jesus. In Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 12, verse 9, *"Let love be without hypocrisy."* Nothing is more wicked than a hypocritical love, a feigned and pretended love, whether it be between married partners, for the brethren, for children, for the Lord's will. It is as evil as anything one can imagine. As reprehensible is the performance of outward acts persumably for the purpose of worship and adoration of God, yet not really designed to praise Him nor reflect a genuine love for Him. Until we come to the place that we can love sincerely, we have yet to reach the heart of the faith of Christ.

Galatians, chapter two, reveals a moment of hypocrisy on the part of Peter and some other brethren when they withdrew themselves from association and fellowship with other brethren because the other brethren were Gentiles. It would seem that of all people who would know that Gentiles were acceptable to God as well as Jews it would have been Peter. He first took the gospel to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. But he allowed the prejudice of those around him to sway his actions and he sought to please the Jewish brethren. Paul rebuked him to his face for his *"dissimulation."* (Galatians 2:13).

First Timothy 4:2, Paul warned of those who would be guilty of *"speaking lies in hypocrisy."* James 3:17 tells us that wisdom from above is *"without hypocrisy."* First Peter 2:1, *"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrises, and envies, and all evil speakings..."* Hypocrisy was not to be characteristic of those who had come to Christ.

Areas Of Hypocrisy

The hypocritical false front is widespread and the temptation to be a hypocrite is ever before us. In school it used to be called "apple polishing." The student appears to be more worthy of the

teacher's consideration than he deserved. Sometimes hypocrisy raises its ugly head in courtship. The boy or girl wanting to impress others that he or she is more than he or she really is becomes an actor or actress. If there were not other reasons for an extended period of courtship, the opportunity to discover hypocrisy is enough. People who hurry into marriage too often find that the person they have married is far from the person they had been led to believe. Promises are often made which are not genuine and sincere. It is hypocrisy and pretense. The veneer wears through after a while and it is best to let it wear through before getting married.

Hypocrisy is quite prevalent in the business world. Most advertising is an exaggeration, if not entirely false. Every headache relief cannot be the most powerful. Every car cannot ride the smoothest. The temptation to deceive and claim more for a product than is actually true stems from covetousness and the love of money. Such gross overstatements are examples of false fronts.

The temptation to be a hypocrite is very powerful in religion. For instance, let us ask, "Why did you attend the services of the church?" The reason that God wants you to be there is because you love Him and seek to obey Him by showing that love and appreciation by doing those things He has authorized whereby His name is glorified and honored in worship. But do we come because we have the idea that being religious cloaks us with a mantle of respectability before others? Do we come merely for visiting others, conversation, seeing and being seen? Are we there because others have pressured us to be there rather than from a heart that desires to serve God? A person can appear to be very religious, pious, reverent, even well versed in Scripture, but if he fails to have a heart toward God, and fails in living in his life a style that is consistent with Christlikeness, is he not a hypocrite?

The Devil's Tool

More than any other weapon in the devil's arsenal against the church is the weapon of hypocrisy among members. It does more to damage the cause of Christ than all the forces outside can muster. For one to outwardly appear to be a Christian at the hours of worship, and then live like the world, slandering and cursing, lying and cheating, drinking and dancing, smoking and commiting sins right and left, gives the name of "Christian" a

dirty connotation. It is a misrepresentation of Christ, and it is hypocrisy. For one to sing, "I love Thy kingdom, Lord," and then refuse to be involved in the work of the church, attendance at worship, righteous living at home, school, on the job, etc. is to mark oneself as a hypocrite. To display an outward piety but at the same time hold hate, envy, covetousness, greed, jealousy, vengeance, etc. in the heart is to be a *"whited sepulcher."* Has not the Lord and His inspired penmen condemned hypocrisy?

The Better Way

There is a better way to live than being a pretender. Hypocrisy never pays benefits and eventually pays destruction. How much better to be real, genuine, true and honest. Hypocrisy grows out of a desire to gain favor with other people. But we should seek the favor of the Lord. Hypocrisy erects a false front over the real person, but in time, it will all be exposed. If you would have the love and respect of people who love the Lord, build a character where there is nothing to hide, and if you want people of good will and worth knowing to be in your fellowship, win their respect by being inwardly as well as outwardly righteous. Let it be said of you as was said of Daniel, *"We shall find no occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God."* (Daniel 6:5). Let not our good be evil spoken of because of hypocrisy. Let there be no gap between what we claim to be and what we are. That may demand some changes in our thinking and actions. But let it be so. Too many are like chameleons, the little lizard that has the ability to change color according to its environment. That may be all right for lizards, but not right for anyone who professes to be a child of the Lord.

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"Friendships are precious and should be preserved and cultivated. So often we keep ourselves so involved in our various activities that we forget those who have been our dearest associates on earth. Having lived in several places over the years while preaching the gospel, we have been privileged to know many fine Christians who are close friends. Surely, this is one of heavens blessings on earth."

Attitudes And Reactions To The Gospel

Studying the attitudes of people is a most interesting subject. The attitudes that people have toward someone or something determines their actions and reactions concerning it. The acceptance or rejection of the gospel plea reflects one's attitude toward the gospel, toward Christ, toward God, and toward things sacred and eternal in nature. It is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to get very far with someone in teaching them the truth, if their attitude is one of indifference, unconcern, or hostility toward it. This is true regarding any subject, whether it be mathmatics, geography, social science, history, or the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Acts, chapter seventeen, we have reported to us numerous attitudes people of the first century had toward the gospel, and the resulting variance in action concerning it. We can expect people to have different attitudes toward different things. But in Acts, chapter seventeen, there were so many things that were exactly the same in each instance. There was the same preacher, the same message, the same approach, the same need. Yet, there were very different attitudes and reactions. What existed and is so easily noted then still exists today.

Now when they had passed through Amphilpolis, and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and rise again from the dead, and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ." (Acts 17:1-3).

Preacher And Approach

Paul *"reasoned"* with his hearers. This implies a calm, deliberate, rational, intelligent discussion of the Scriptures. It was a discussion designed to create understanding and faith. There was nothing sensational, dramatic, entertaining or flighty about his approach. He did not try to win his hearers with words of wisdom or excellency of speech, appealing to the vanity of worldly acclaim. He simply took the Scriptures and taught them

the truth concerning the prophets, their message, what they said of the Messiah, and applied it to Christ, showing how Jesus is the Christ.

Two Reactions

There were two very distinct reactions to his teaching. *"And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few."* (Acts 17:4). There was great acceptance on the part of many.

On the other hand, *"But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also, whom Jason hath received, and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go."* (Acts 17:5-9). Here was violent rejection, hostility, aggressive opposition against the gospel. The unbelievers created a near riot with the lewd and base elements of people, making charges for which there was no basis except ignorance, making no effort to investigate or prove what they were saying. It was an emotional, irrational, defensive reaction of rejection. They shut their minds to the truth, not even fully aware of what they were opposing. It was prompted by sheer and transparent prejudice. Yes, Paul did preach another king, King Jesus. But what kind of king did he preach Him to be? Jesus was not a competitor to Caesar. His kingdom is not an earthly one, but a heavenly and spiritual kingdom. But what a different attitude and reaction was seen in Thessalonica to the preaching of the gospel.

The Bereans

Then Paul went to Berea. *"And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea, who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with*

all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:10,11).

In Berea there was the same message preached as before. Paul used the same approach, going into the synagogue. Of course, he was the same preacher. But there was something very different here. The difference was in the hearers. These were open-minded. They had a readiness of mind, a willingness to investigate and a desire to learn. They would inquire rather than be content to remain in their prejudicial ignorance. With this kind of attitude, as one might expect, there was a very different reaction to the gospel.

"Therefore many of them believed, also of honorable women, which were Greeks, and of men, not a few." (Acts 17:21).

The truth is not offensive nor threatening to those who want the truth and love the truth. Even though truth is demanding, those who want to be right before God are grateful to learn what God wants. Truth often arouses resentment from those whose minds are so set against it that they will not fairly give it a hearing and look into the matter.

Trouble Created

Not everyone in Berea reacted with favor toward the gospel. The hostility that existed in Thessalonica was brought to Berea. *"But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither and stirred up the people."* (Acts 17:13). The situation became so bad even there that it was necessary for Paul and company to move on. *"And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul and company to the sea, but Silas and Timothy abode there still."* (Acts 17:14). There were those who so hated the truth that they not only did not want it for themselves, but they did not want any others to learn of it either. They were much like those of whom Jesus spoke in Matthew 23:13, *"But woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."* There are those that would hear the gospel and accept it if it were not for others who sow seeds of prejudice and opposition in their hearts. The opposition against the gospel, and the proclaimer of it, was so intense that Paul had to leave and take the gospel elsewhere.

Athenian Responses

Paul then went to Athens. *"And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens; and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed."* (Acts 17:15).

Paul was now alone, as far as Christians were concerned, in the city of Athens, a very unique city. It was the intellectual capital of the world; one that was renowned for its architecture, literature, philosophy and worldly wise men of the age. It was a city of much learning. But it was also a city of heathenism, idolatry, superstitution, uncertainty, and populated by those who sought knowledge for knowledge's sake.

As Paul waited for his companions, the Scriptures tell us his *"spirit was stirred within him."* In Athens we have the same preacher, and he makes the similar approach in the synagogue and market places, proclaiming the same message. His message seemed strange to certain philosophers because he taught the resurrection of Christ. Paul had aroused their curiosity sufficiently that they invited him to tell them more, taking him to Mars Hill and the Areopagus, the assemblying place for the honorable men, thinkers, philosophers, and leaders of the city.

We will not here discuss the full sermon Paul preached there, but suffice it for our study now to say that he preached the true God as opposed to idols. He preached the judgment to come, the necessity of repentance, the resurrection of Christ. It was the resurrection that provoked such reactions as became so evident.

This whole thing may seem to have been a glorious opportunity for Paul to make Christ known to Athens, and the leaders of the area. But his hearers were not concerned with truth versus error. They were merely curious, only wanting to know what Paul was teaching in order that they might hear something they had not heard previously. They were intrigued by what was new, more than what was true. Those kind of people have not vanished from the earth. Their "broad-mindedness" was so extensive that nothing really mattered one way or the other. They were indifferent to any personal responsibility. They had no intention to make a decision about what they heard, even though their failure to make a decision was a decision not to decide for Christ.

The attitudes and subsequent reactions to the preaching of the gospel in Athens were varied. Some mocked. Others said they were interested, at least enough to want to hear more at a later time. Some clave to Paul and believed, but they were few. Doubtless, there were those that went away as indifferently as

they had come, having satisfied themselves in hearing some new thing.

A Variance In Attitudes

In these three cities, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, we see the same man, with the same message, and the same approach. But what a variance in attitudes of the hearers and their reactions. There was rejection, hostility, opposition. And that age was not the last to react to the truth in such a sinful fashion. But that is always the case with those that love darkness rather than light. There was indifference, curiosity, and unwillingness to listen in order to be persuaded. When there is unconcern, no real care about right and wrong, this is what can be expected. Many today, who are wise in their own eyes, who have drunk deeply from the wells of so-called intellectualism and learning, consider it beneath their "scholarship" to make a serious and fair-minded inquiry into the gospel of Christ. They already have such a superior attitude regarding themselves because they have spent much time in studying the philosophies of men, that they really cannot submit themselves to seriously consider the lowly Nazarene. Unless they have invented it, they feel it must be something less than deserving of their time and study.

But there was also acceptance by some. There was belief because there was a desire to learn the truth, a willingness to weigh the evidence, and a sense of responsibility to truth. Those that believed were not gullible, blind, naive nor easily led about. But they were open, investigative, inquiring, willing to discuss the issue. They learned, not for the sake of just learning, but for the sake of making application of what they learned.

The Saving Reaction

Of the three attitudes, only the last will save. The first two means condemnation. To reject, or ignore, the gospel means damnation. Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). What is your attitude? To which group in Acts seventeen do you belong?

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Born Of God

We find the phrase *"born of God"* several times in the New Testament. Most of these times it was written by the apostle John. It conveys an important Christian concept and we need to be aware of the spiritual meaning and significance of it. Our study shall center on the phrase as is found in the books written by John.

First, let us understand the term *"born."* When we speak of one being born it refers to that which has been begotten, generated, produced, given life and existence. To be "born of God" means to have been given life by God. When one is born of woman he is the product of the woman with the woman as the parent. The woman gives life to that which is born of her.

A Symbolic Phrase

We sometimes use the phrase in a symbolic sense but with the same basic meaning. We speak of something being born of poverty. For instance, some person may be very successful financially because of the persistent effort put forth to reach such success. When searching for the motivation behind the hard work, we may find that the quest for riches was born of poverty in one's earlier life. Courage is sometimes born of fear and necessity. Patience is born of adversity; that is, it is a product of adversity. Weakness is born of indulgence. Strength and trust is often born of experience and age. In the same general sense, a person is the product of God; God being the source and parent.

In one sense, all men can be said to be born of God. Physically we have all come from the first parents, Adam and Eve, that God created. Through God's laws of procreation have we all come. But the phrase in John's writings does not refer to physical descendancy, but refers to a spiritual relationship we can have with God.

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:11-13).

Christ came to the Jews first, but they refused to accept Him as the Messiah that had been prophecied by their own prophets. Under the influence of their leaders, even the people of

Nazareth where He grew to manhood refused to acknowledge Him as the Son of God as He claimed.

But some did receive Him and recognized Him to be the Savior. This was true among both Jews and Gentiles. Those that accepted Him as the Savior were given the power, the right, the privilege, to become what they were not; namely, sons of God. Their mere belief did not make them sons of God, but their belief was the first step toward becoming children of God. Once they believed and obeyed what the Lord commanded, they were sons of God. Their faith gave them access into the grace of God (Romans 5:2).

We Are Born

Children of God are those that are born of God. One is not a child of God due to any fleshly parentage or heritage. While the Jews emphasized the physical ancestry as being the avenue of being a child of God, the will of Christ makes it plain that one's parents are not what brings one into the relationship of God as Father and child. Children of God are not born of the flesh, nor by following the will of men. Children of God become so by virtue of following God's will. By faith, an obedient faith, we become sons and daughters of God and are said to be *"born of God."*

"Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." (First John 3:7-10).

Christians Can Sin

Some have suggested that this passage teaches that the children of God cannot sin; that is, it is impossible for them to sin. But this would contradict so much else that the Scripture teaches regarding Christians who do sin, that it must be an erroneous interpretation of the passage. In fact, in this same epistle John speaks of Christians who sin and how they can be

forgiven (First John 1:8-10). So we know it is not teaching the impossibility of sinning. The words, *"cannot sin," "sinneth not," "committeth sin,"* have reference to continually, habitually, willfully continuing in ways that are sinful. The present tense of verbs in the Greek language, the original language chosen by the Holy Spirit, has the idea of "keeping on" in the action mentioned. The passage teaches that those who are born of God will not "keep on sinning" as they had before they were born of God. Being born of God, they are now new creatures in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17), and will not continue in the ways of unrighteousness. As Paul stated, *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"* (Romans 6:1,2). It is not expressing the doctrine of impossibility of sin, but the incompatability and inconsistency of sin in the lives of those who are born of God. The person who is *"born of God"* is no longer a servant of sin, but a servant of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18).

Love

Verse ten concludes by mentioning the characteristic of love in those who are born of God. And this introduces us to the next use of the phrase *"born of God,"* that we shall consider. *"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and every one that loveth is of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another."* (First John 4:7-11).

In these five verses, love is mentioned eleven times. There is an inseparable tie between love and being one who is born of God. A child of God is a person who loves. Love is an important stone in the foundation of Christianity. Our very religion came into being because of the love God has for mankind. It is perpetuated by love. It will prove to be of eternal benefit as well as temporal because of love. God loved us (John 3:16) and we love Him in return. Christ demonstrated His love by giving His life for us (John 15:13). Christians are to love.

"O how love I thy law," wrote David. (Psalm 119:97). The first and greatest commandment is to love God. And the second

is like to it, to love thy neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). Peter admonished, *"Love the brotherhood."* (First Peter 1:22,23).

One who is lacking in love reveals something amiss in his life. The lack of love is not like the Father. God is love. His children should be as He is. Those that are born of God will love that which God loves. We are told that we do not really know God if we do not have love.

"And now little children, abide in him; that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." (First John 2:28,29).

Righteousness

There is a trait of character and life of those born of God that is called doing righteousness. There is an emphasis on the fact that there is something that the person born of God must do. Being born of God means that one lives a life of action, work, service, doing the Father's will. *"To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17). We cannot be passive, inactive, lethargic, and indifferent if we are to be the children of God. Those born of God are not of that persuasion or disposition. Their lives are lives of activity to the glory of God. We do what God calls righteousness.

Obedience

What is the "righteousness of God?" Psalms 199:172 says, *"All thy commandments are righteousness."* Paul said the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16,17). It is the way God makes man righteous. It refers to the commandments of God to man by which man does the will of the Father. If we are to be born of God and live as one who is born of God we are expected to do these commandments. Some of the Lord's commandments are positive. There are those thing that we are to do. Some of the commandments are negative. There are those things which are forbidden and from which we must totally abstain. Honoring parents, doing good to all men, especially those of the household of faith, remembering the Lord in the memorial feast of the Lord's Supper are examples of positive commands. Not to lie, steal, commit adultery, etc. are negative commands. All of these are included

in the righteousness of God.

Because of the righteousness of God we can be acceptable to God. Acts 10:34,35, *"Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respector of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."*

Thus far, we have seen that "*born of God*" means belief in Christ by which we have power to become the sons of God. It means loving what God loves. It means living and doing in everyday behavior and conduct the way and manner of Christ as the will of God reveals. Possibly we can summarize with a generalized statement. *"Born of God"* means faith, a faith that requires obedience. It means a love that will obey. It means a determination to live a life apart from sin by obeying his commmands. It means doing what God declares is righteous. Ultimately, "*born of God*" means being a submissive servant of God, not only in obeying the first principles in coming to Him through Christ, but living a life after the example of that Christ.

"Born Again"

One is *"born of God"* when he is *"born again."* We are born into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5). The kingdom is the church and the church is the family of God (Matthew 16:16-18; First Timothy 3:15). Those in God's family are His sons and daughters.

First John 5:1-5 presents to us a rather complete definition of the phrase directly from Scripture. *"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."*

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Sources Of Youth's Problems

To say that the youth of our land face many problems is not to reveal anything new. Every generation of youth has faced problems. But this particular era of our nation's history seems to offer the young problems that were not always that pressing on some other ages. Their problems seem to be more dominant, if not of different kinds than some before them have had to face. Everywhere we see the young confused, frustrated, involved in riots, rebellion against authority, steeped in crime, and the age is characterized by suicide. Certainly this is not true of all the youth, but it is true of a distressingly large number of them. Juvenile deliquency was a problem when I was growing up, but the proportions of misconduct have reached epidemic levels. Just yesterday on the news reports (April 7, 1982), one explanation for a slight decrease in the crime rate was that there are proportionately fewer young people. This is a sad commentary on the youth of the land. But we are inclined not to place the full blame for this deplorable state of affairs on the young.

In Genesis 42:22, *"And Reuben answered them saying, Spake not I unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? Therefore, behold, also his blood is required."* Reuben had urged his brothers not to mistreat their younger brother, Joseph, but they paid him no attention. It is possible for those who are older to sin against the younger. Those who have the responsibility of caring for the young are often guilty of sinning against the very ones for whom they have the watchcare. A child is not born into the world wicked, evil, delinquent. He learns to be that way. He is taught to become that way. It does not come from within himself. In this lesson we want to locate some of the present day sources of problems for the young.

Many Fine Youth

We first need to emphasize that all young people have not gone and are not "going to the dogs." Not all are long-haired, beer drinking, dope taking, immoral and degenerate rabble.

Experience with young people over the past thirty years convinces me that many are fine, stalwart, strong, serious, well-intentioned Christians. True, even some of these are misled by others into ways that are not for the the child of God. But there are those who shall stand for the faith as much as any adult.

But many have serious problems and guidance is sorely needed, if they will give it a fair chance. We who are older need to consider more closely the problems of the young and work for them and with them to overcome them rather than simply hope that everything will work out all right. Too many of the older generation have played Pilate and washed their hands of the youth as if nothing can be done. For the sake of the good young people, we need to do something to correct the trends of godlessness that have come so heavily upon the youth of the land. We need to treat the sources and causes of these problems rather than simply wail over the symptoms. While the problems are sometimes complex and not easily resolved, the major causes of the problems are not really that far beneath the surface.

The Home

The number one source of youth's problems is the home. Where there ought to be security, love, provision, guidance, standards, discipline, hope, example, there is often just the opposite. Home has become not much more than a temporary filling station for many families. Respect for this divine institution has been underminded by many. The proverb, *"Train up a child in the way that he should go...,"* is primarily directed to parents. *"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,"* is the medicine needed. (Ephesians 6;4). Children are learning to disrespect their parents and many times it is because the parents have been beyond respecting. Parents are too busy making money, reliving their own youth, having a "good" time to be parents. The modern idea of motherhood is to have a career outside the home and leave the rearing of the children with somebody else. In most cases where there is trouble with children, you will find mother was outside the home, being the "liberated and modern" woman, but one who has sacrificed her primary role for the paltry offering of a sinful world. Let all the society holller and cry that it does not make any difference, but the fruit produced shows otherwise.

Children learn disrespect for authority in the home. It carries into the school, against civil government, against God. Keeping the home is the noblest work of women and because that has been smeared in the minds of so many, the children suffer.

Parents

It is rather difficult for a child to grow up with stability when the two people the child loves most hate and despise each other, and show it. Divorce has created problems for youth that can never, ever, be erased. The selfishness of parents, seeking their own, has placed the welfare of the child on the "back burner." In homes where father and mother and child learn to love God and each other and are regular in worship, there are few cases of juvenile delinquency, very few and rare. Children that come from divided homes suffer all kinds of maladjustments, unhappiness, confusion, insecurity, and build resentment and frustration. J. Edgar Hoover said, "Almost invariably parents are to blame for the development of young criminals." We can add that almost invariably parents are to blame for their children not becoming Christians. They have not taught them, set the right example before them, consider their inconsistencies of no consequence, and as a result, son and daughter either never become Christians or leave the church shortly after leaving home

We read about neglected children and it touches the hearts. But any child that is not taught the way of the Lord, and does not have parents that try to live the way of Christ before them, is a neglected child. We can all be grateful for the homes where God reigns supreme.

Schools

Problems are caused for the young by the schools. While we have a great appreciation for school teachers generally, there are those who are servants of the devil. This is not because they are unfair, or poor teachers, but because of what they teach and promote. While many can credit their teachers with a large measure of their personal success, many others can credit their teachers with their problems also. I have long considered the public education system to be one of the greatest enemies of the truth of God and His church because of some of the things done to the young in these schools. I once thought "Christian schools"

were the answer, but more and more, because of the false doctrines and false doctors in these schools we have to consider them as one of the primary sources through which digression is pouring into the church. Just what is the remedy for such things, I am not quite sure. But the problem is obvious.

Many teachers on nearly every level make fun of religion. They have often been trained in humanism, atheism, skepticism, and they teach this in their classrooms. Many teachers consider religion just a haven for the weak and timid of the world. Some textbooks even state such. False theories are taught as truth, theories that contradict Biblical teaching. Great effort is made by some teachers to destroy any confidence the young may have in the Bible. Evolution and humanism are the primary guiding principles governing education in most schools. This is why there has been a veritable rash of private schools arising. It has not been so much the hatred of racial intergration, as some would have us believe, as it is the disgust of God-fearing parents with God-hating teachers.

You teach a child that he comes from an animal, and he will likely act like one. Teach him he comes from God and he will aspire to be like God. Morality is scorned, drug use is prominent, peer pressure is detrimental and so often the social events are designed to promote the worldliness that the Scripture condemns, such as drinking, dancing, lasciviousness, etc. Even the emphasis for getting an education is to get more money rather than be able to be of more service.

Administrators and teachers have become so sensitive to the demands of the "experts" and the so-called "scholars" that God and His ways have just about "flunked out" in so many schools. This has a damning influence on the young who are exposed to this environment.

The Media

None who are informed doubt the harmful effects of radio, television on the youth. Freedom of the press has been so abused as to include every kind of glamorization of sin. The youth are exposed to the lurid, lewd and obscene as if it should be socially acceptable. Pornography has become a present-day rage. Have you ever checked the magazine racks near campuses? For the love of money, merchants will sell anything, and the undisciplined, immoral, anti-Christian youth will buy it, absorb it, practice it. The movies appeal to the young with all

manner of vile and corrupt pictures. The level of vulgarity that once was reserved for the backroom and houses of ill-repute are now blatantly and openly placed on the screen publicly.

The writers wallow in the mire of murder, rape, brutality, sexual immorality, theft, etc. Their minds must be "garbage pits" considering what comes out of them. The criminal is exalted, the divorced are the heroes, fornication is the norm, drunkenness is everywhere, and you cannot hear a program almost anywhere without profanity and obscenity. Do you really think this has no effect on the young impressionable mind as he hears this day in and day out? The addiction to television has about destroyed the thinking capacity of many people already, and replaced it with them becoming mere buckets into which the money-makers pour their filth for the dollar's sake. Let the television industry disclaim responsibility all they wish, they have lied so often, acted irresponsibly too many times, refused to face the facts and really just don't care if they get their money. What we think comes more from what we see than any other one source. *"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."* From what we are seeing in movies, on television, in magazines, etc., we can understand why the thinking of so many is so sordid.

Know The Difference

It is the responsibility of Christian parents to make sure that their young people know the difference between these sinful ways of the world and the way of Christ. Permissiveness and tolerance toward such things is going to cause many young people to degrade themselves and so stain their hearts and lives that only hell can burn away their evil. Is it not a shame that these marvelous means of communication cannot rise to a higher level than what is generally characteristic?

The Government

The government must assume some blame for the problems of the youth. The ambitious and unscrupulous politicians have so fouled up much of the business of the nation that the young are "turned off" from being responsible citizens. The greed, graft, and personal gain of the nation's leaders have set a terrible example before the young. Power, popularity, and profit have dominated the careers of governmental leaders. Wars are even provoked for he sake of gain, and the lives of the young are

disrupted, if not totally sacrificed.

Someone has said that three parties govern our lad, the Republican, Democratic, and cocktail. How much of the nation's business is conducted by people under the influence of the alcoholic beverage. Sometimes you would think that everything has come from the mind of a drunk. Statesmen are few and far between, and their voices often drowned out by the lying, immoral, double-dealing, insincere power hungry politicians. Our young see these things, and it does them harm.

Government has too long set the example of living beyond its means. It has for too long rewarded the immoral with support, the trifling and lazy with food and shelter. It has interfered with the homes by trying to influence and dictate concerning matters that belong to the home, not the government. All such things complicate the lives of the young. What a tragic shame that the government has so often thrown its weight behind such movements as the feminists that would defame God and His ways. Now the legitimacy of killing unborn children is sanctioned by the government. It ought not be, but the forces of righteousness are often in a to-the-death battle with the power and influences of government.

Churches A Problem?

But where you would expect to find solutions to the problems facing the young, you often find another source of problems, and that is religion, even the church. Can it be that the churches of our land are causing the problems many are facing? Yes, with the confusion, compromises, division, inconsistency, the charlatans, modernism, social gospel advocates, have so polluted what is called "Christianity" until those who have any sense of decency and consistency are repulsed by it all.

Atheism is growing rampantly in this land. One of the causes is the division of denominationalism. Men have loved their churches, creeds, doctrines, power, money, etc. more than the revealed will of God. With all the varied voices shouting this and that, what are the young to think? What is anybody to think? If God is behind all this, He is more confused than most of us. Why turn to Him? But God is not behind it, but is opposed to it. What exists is not what God has commanded. Men are going their own way, not the way of the Lord.

Churches have so changed their doctrines to accomodate sin, like divorce, drinking, morality, etc. that the churches are more

governed by the world than having an influence in the world for good. It is commonplace for churches to sponsor gambling and dancing. Some churches are involved in politics and business ventures, even business of producing whiskey, wine, beer, cigaretes, etc. Civil disobedience against laws that have no moral persuasion whatever has been instigated and actively pursued by religious leaders. Rebellion against authority has been the watchwood in recent times by the very ones who have forsaken the authority of God for their own authorities.

Worldliness

Immodest dress, smoking, drinking, cursing, multi-marriages, empty pews, have even invaded the Lord's church in large measure. Whereas churches of Christ were once known for their oppostion to sin, in so many places there is such a compromise with it, you had just as soon not have anything to do with such congregations. They have become nothing more than a poor man's country club and the gospel is hard to come by.

Problems, problems, problems. Distressing to consider them, isn't it? But the solution is still God's truth. We cannot answer for every home, school, media, government, and church. But we will answer for what we do, and don't do. Why we keep placing these stumbling blocks before our young is hard to figure. But we have the task of paving the way as much as we can, removing the stumbling blocks when we can, and teaching and showing the young how to avoid and overcome such things that cannot be totally removed from the scene.

They Are Not Adults

Young people are not just little adults. They are young people that need the love, guidance, training, discipline, love and security that those who are older are obligated to provide. Once given those things, it is up to them to walk accordingly. God has given the young parents for some reason. It is past time for many of us to find what those reasons are and get on with the divine task of rearing the young in God's way. It is not enough to simply tell the young, "Don't, don't, don't." There must be the provision for the good that they can and should do. The problems are too big for the inexperienced and untrained youth to handle alone. Possibly we need to "get off his back" and "walk by his side." Every child deserves the teaching of Christ

and a Christlike example. That is the only solution to youth's problems. Be a "solution," not a "source" of them.

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Religion In Politics

Politics is not the business of the church, but religion is; namely, the faith and religion of Christ. Only those more defensive of their politics than the faith of Christ would deny it.

"Morality in politics" has been advised, but some object. Do the objectors prefer immorality, or no morality in politics? Is there any realm of life where morality ought be outlawed?

Church and state are separate institutions (Matthew 22:21). Does this grant the state the right to suppress religion? There are many who would destroy religion, especially the faith of Christ, such as communists, humanists, atheists. While we advocate no state religion, we must protect freedom of religion from those who would destroy religion.

Many are confused regarding tolerance. To be tolerant means to allow to exist. It does not mean to agree, nor does it prohibit opposition to doctrines and beliefs. Christians are tolerant of others, but do not accept as true whatever others might believe when it contradicts the Lord's Word. We contend, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Is It A Worthy Issue?

Does one's religious faith have any bearing on what he should support? What one believes determines what one is likely to do. When a man asks for my support for him to rule over me, should I consider his acceptance of Humanism? Should his belief that one should have the right to kill unborn children affect me? When he thinks we are all just highly evolved animals, is this important? If he wishes to place homosexuality as an admissible life style, should I consider it? If his allegiance is to the Pope of Rome before the Constitution, is this fair for me to consider?

Sometimes politicians, lacking legitimate issues, conjure up something they believe may appeal to the prejudices of others. Some have ridden into high office on the appeal of their running mate and a display of religion, but then denounce opponents for

suggesting that religion and morality have an important place in national life and in candidate selection. "**Righteousness exalteth a nation...**" is a Biblical declaration and we should applaud the efforts to exalt righteousness, morality, ethics, and the dignity of the human being.

If anybody should demand that we make a specific religious faith the state religion we would oppose them with all of our power. This is one reason we stand opposed to the forces of atheistic communism and Humanism. The purge of religion is one of the ambitions of those philosophies and to stamp out belief in God is a major goal. Humanists have worked to capture the educational system, media, and governmental power to demand that one keep his religion to himself and keep quiet while they proceed to outlaw all remnants of morality and religion from national life.

We are accustomed to the "silly season" before elections. But we are not amused at the blatant threats made against religious freedom and the protective cover some politicians would grant the anti-religion forces as they seek the erosion and destruction of religious liberty and practices.

We are not so naive as to think the national politicians are going to be New Testament Christians as all people ought to be. Choices are seldom, if ever, between a non-Christian and a true New Testament Christian. Neither are we going to be blind to that which more closely reflects the basic principles of the faith of Christ. We choose between imperfects. But sometimes the choice is clear and distinct.

Think what you will, but it is true, ***"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."*** We take this admonition seriously in every realm of human activity in which we are involved, whether it be business, recreation, politics, home, church, whatever! If we should not, why not?

Our nation will be better if more people who hold to the moral values and standards as taught in the Bible under Christ would exercise their influence in the selection of those who govern. For too long good people have stood back, doing nothing, hoping everything would be all right, but refused to get involved and act according to what they profess is the standard of their life, the doctrine of Christ. We encourage morality in politics and encourage Christians to utilize their influence on election day to support candidates who more nearly share those same values.

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Shortage Of Doers



JAMES W. BOYD

Jesus criticized the Pharisees and warned His hearers, "*But do not ye after their works: for they say and do not.*" It is quite evident that all those of a similar position are not dead. So many people talk a strong religion, but when it comes to doing as the talking, then the story becomes different.

James 1:22, "*But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*" The theme is the same as Jesus taught. Is there not a shortage of people who will do the work that is needed?

It is easy to find people who cry, "*Lord, Lord,*" but those who will do His will are harder to find (Matthew 7:21). It is easy to find people who want the church to prosper but who do not work for its prosperity. It is easy to find people who complain about the evil in the world, the rampant immorality on television, the raging alcohol and other drug problems, the crimes. But all they do is complain. When it comes time to do something, they crawl into the shell of "do nothing."

Edmund Burke said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." This may explain evil's gains.

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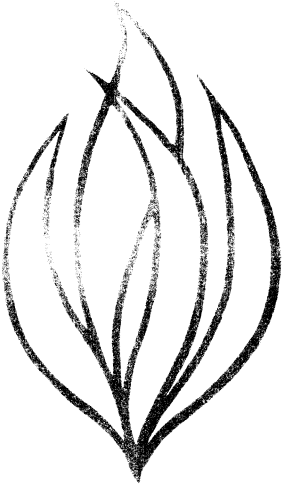

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Is The Bible From Heaven Or From Rome?
Number One

When we speak of the Bible we have in mind that book that contains sixty-six books, beginning with Genesis and continuing through Revelation. We reverently refer to it as the Word of God. It claims to be inspired of God and all-sufficient for us. Our study is concerned with the origin of the Bible as to whether it has been preserved for us by God or are we indebted to the Roman Catholic Church for the Bible. Has God given men this book or are we to give thanks for the Roman Church and its hierarchy?

Romanism claims to have given the world the Bible. Repeatedly they claim that the Bible is a Catholic book. They claim to have compiled it, preserved it, and given it to the world. There is a tract printed by the Roman Church entitled, *The Bible An Authority Only In Catholic Hands,* which shows they believe they have the exclusive right to interpret the Bible because they gave it. The booklet is actually an imaginary debate between a Roman Catholic and a Protestant, and both sides of the argument offer an abundance of error and misunderstanding of both Scripture and history. But be that as it may regarding the tract, did the Bible come to us through Rome?

As Christians, we should be vitally concerned about this subject. The Bible condemns those who preach and teach and practice error, just as it commends those who proclaim and follow the truth. We are fortunate that we do not have to make this investigative inquiry as either a Catholic or a Protestant. Men can be Christians, no more and no less, without Protestantism or Catholicism. True Christianity knows nothing of either one.

Not A Catholic Book

For many reasons, we deny that the Bible is a Catholic book. Catholics claim they gave the Bible to the world at the Council of Hippo in 390 A.D. This is obviously not true, inasmuch as the Bible was in existence as early as the second century. The most complete manuscripts of the Bible have never been in Catholic

hands. Even older versions of the Bible are in existence that Roman Catholics never possessed. These older versions do not contain the Apocrypha (doubtful) books that the Roman Catholic Bible contains.

Catholicism has not been a defender or preserver of the Scriptures but destroyed as many copies of the Bible as they could find. They have suppressed the reading of it, teaching people that only their priesthood could understand it anyway. People have been persecuted for reading the Bible, and hatred beyond description has been manifested by official Rome for translations of the Bible that gave the Bible into the hands of the common man. Catholics admit they do not study it because they are never encouraged to study it. They study the Romanist catechism instead.

We do not have to rely upon Catholicism, or anyone else, to know that the Bible is the Word of God. The proof of what the Bible is can be determined by the book itself. If the Bible were a Catholic book, you would think they would have a greater respect for its teaching than is obvious in their doctrine. We want to proceed by showing how Romanism disrespects the Scriptures, ignores them, contradicts them, and attempts to discredit the Bible. Surely, if it was their book, such things would not be.

Are They "Fathers"?

Catholics call their priests "Father." They say this is based on the fact that Paul called Timothy his *"beloved son in the faith."* They also city Paul's statement to the Corinthians, *"...for in Christ Jesus by the gospel, I have begotten you."* Of course, Paul was never a Roman Catholic priest.

Calling a priest or anyone else with a religious title such as Father is a direct violation of the teaching of Jesus. *"And call no man your father upon the earth, for one is your Father, which is in heaven."* (Matthew 23:9). Jesus and Paul did not contradict each other.

Romanists admit this is not a prohibition to calling one's fleshly male parent by the term "father." The Holy Spirit has done that often in Scripture. So it must mean it is wrong to use the term in some other sense than with reference to one's physical parent. Jesus was speaking of honorary, spiritual, religious titles and He forbade it. Alongside His strong denunciations of pride and special distrinctions, which characterize the Pharisees as well as

Roman Catholic clerics, Jesus rebukes the ecclesiastical, self-exalting, special titles that men heap to themselves to show distinction in religion.

You never read of Reverend Peter, or Your Highness Paul, or Your Excellency James, etc. Paul spoke of Timothy as his *"son in the faith"* because Paul was instrumental in Timothy's conversion. There is no Biblical authority for Timothy or anyone else to call Paul "Father Paul." The Corinthians were begotten by Paul only in the sense that he preached the gospel to them. They were actually begotten by the Word (First Peter 1:23). Why not call Paul, Farmer Paul rather than Father Paul since he said, *"I planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase."* (First Corinthians 4:6). Rather than using titles, which so many preachers seen to think is vital to their recognition as a "man of God," Romanists and Protestants alike should cease this sinful practice. No person who respects the Bible will allow such titles to be assigned him. Not even the terms "doctor," or "brother," or anything else, ought be used as some kind of ecclesiastical, religious title. One might be called an elder, preacher, deacon, etc. because he serves in that work. But these are not titles to be worn among brethren. How can Romanism claim to have given the world the Bible when they are such violators of this simple teaching?

Idolatry

Catholicism includes the worship of images, which the Bible forbids. We are aware that they deny that they worship images. They only admit to worshipping Deity by the use of images.

When Christians worship, they are to worship *"in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:24). When Jesus promised His apostles that they would be guided into all the truth (John 16:13), is it not significant that He never guided them into the use of images in worship? The early church did not use them and such practice is but another innovation of man.

Even the Israelites were forbidden to make graven images. God does not condemn artistry, sculpturing, painting, etc. He forbade using these things in worship. He condemns the adoration of them, bowing before them, praying to them, serving them. Even though Romanists may deny that they show such affection for images, the toe of the stature of Peter in Rome has been worn away because of the kisses Roman Catholics have placed upon it.

Those that bow before images, making "the sign of the cross," will say that they worship what the image represents, not the image itself. This may sound as if they have escaped the commandment against idols and images. But please take note that this is precisely what the Israelites did at the foot of Mt. Sinai when Moses did not return when they thought he should. Aaron fashioned for them the golden calf. He said, *"These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."* Aaron and the people knew that the physical golden calf did not lead them out of bondage. What they were doing was making a *"feast to the Lord."* (Exodus 32:1-5). These actions are defined by Paul (First Corinthians 10:7) as Idolatry and he condemned it.

Their "Ten Commandments"

It is more than significant, it is very telling, that in Catholic catechisms where the "ten commandments" are listed, the second commandment which condemns making graven images is omitted. To make ten commandments, they make the tenth, which forbids coveting, into two commandments. A very telling blow can be leveled at Romanists when one compares their own Bible and their own catechisms with respect to the "ten commandments." They do not agree. Their Bible includes the condemnation of graven images, but their catechisms which they study leave it out. If the Bible was their book, why would they do that?

"Pope Peter"?

Catholicism teaches that Peter was the first pope. Yet a pope cannot be married, and Peter was a married man because he had a mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14). Romanism claims Peter left his wife after he assumed his papal duties. Now is not that strange that the "vicar of Christ" would violate the teaching of Christ regarding the life-long relationship of marriage and desert his wife to serve as the representative of Christ on earth? Do we have Pope Peter violating God's law from the start? Many "popes" since then have not had much respect for the sacredness of marriage and sexual relationships.

Catholics cite the fact that Peter said they had left *"all things"* to follow Christ. They say this includes his family. But if it included his family why did he not leave Andrew, his brother?

Furthermore, Paul claimed he had a right to lead about a wife as much as Cephas, who is Peter (First Corinthians 9:5). Peter did not leave his wife.

Again, Peter said he was an elder or bishop (First Peter 5:1). According to the pen of Paul, an elder must be a married man (First Timothy 3:2-5). We do not want to forget that Paul warned that one of the marks of the apostasy would be those who would forbid to marry. The doctrine of the *"celibacy of the priesthood"* is error from top to bottom. There is no special clergy and priesthood class in the Bible among Christians, inasmuch as every Christian is a priest, let alone the prohibition of priests to marry. But this doctrine has changed in many parts of the world among some Catholics, and with papal approval, although, papal objection still lingers among much of Roman Catholicism, Gregory VII, said celibacy was voluntary, but also decreed excommunication for anyone receiving the sacrements from a married priest. So how do Catholics claim the Bible as their book? Celibacy is never binding on Christians when they have the Scriptural right to marry. Peter was never a pope, nor has anyone else ever been a pope with God's approval.

Purgatory

Catholic doctrine teaches that there is a place called "purgatory," a place of cleansing after death, with fire and punishment. One dies and goes to purgatory to get the evil burned out of him for various periods of time. The doctrine has supplied millions for the coffers of the Roman treasury because for various fees, prayers can be made for the departed to hasten their exodus from purgatory.

The doctrine is a doctrine of salvation by works. One can stay in purgatory long enough to get to heaven without the blood of Christ. It is a doctrine of second chance, which the Bible does not teach. Nothing about purgatory is found in the Bible. It comes from some of the apocrypha books, and has been enlarged and expanded into a basic Catholic doctrine.

The Bible teaches that the dead shall be raised (John 5:28,29), both good and evil and be judged. The Lord will separate the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25), and nobody will be given a second chance to get right with God. Rome admits that the early church did not subscribe to this doctrine and was not fully developed until 590 A.D. If the Bible is a Catholic book, why does it add doctrines that Paul prohibited?

Mariolatry

Catholicism teaches things regarding Mary, the mother of Christ, that is hard for one acquainted with the Bible to imagine. They worship her on an equality with God and Christ. She is the "Mother of God." She can even mediate for our salvation, they say, in spite of Paul's teaching that there is one mediator, and that is Christ (First Timothy 2:5).they say that the Bible says there is only one mediator, but that does not mean there cannot be another. How do you reason with people who talk such double talk?

Not only do they pray to Mary, saying she will make God do things that the Son could never get done, but they pray through their "saints, angels, etc." The same book that says there is one God says there is one mediator. While we may pray on behalf of one another, there is only one approach to the Father and that is Christ (John 14:6; First Timothy 2:5). Catholics have written, "We shall sometimes be sooner heard and saved by invoking the holy name than that of Jesus our Savior." In the *Glories of Mary*, page 149, we read, "We sooner find salvation recurring to the mother than the Son." This is blasphemy. They not only deny the Biblical teaching, but deny Christ, His mission, claim we are saved through others. Are not these points sufficient to prove to any honest mind that the Bible is not a Catholic book?

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Is The Bible From Heaven Or From Rome? Number Two

In this lesson we shall continue to look at the inconsistencies that exist between Catholic doctrines and the Biblical teaching. While Catholics like to have others believe that they have given the world the Bible, the fact is that there are few religious organizations that has as little respect for the authority of the Bible as does the Roman Church. If the Bible was a Catholic book, as they claim, surely there would be more consideration of it than what characterizes the Roman religion.

Inherited Sin

Without reviewing the previous lesson, we examine their doctrine of inherited sin. Keep in mind that many Protestant groups have adopted this false teaching unto themselves as well as Catholics. But the doctrine teaches that a child is born guilty of sin, doomed, damned, guilty because of the original sin. Children who die without something having been done to cleanse their souls will suffer eternal punishment. The doctrine goes under a variety of names; such as, the doctrine of inherited sin, born in sin, guilty of the original sin, total depravity because of being born in sin, etc.

Realizing the dire condition that this doctrine places upon children, men have invented additional doctrines and practices to alleviate the problem for children. Among them is the practice of "infant baptism," which seldom is a baptism at all, but a sprinkling of a few drops of water upon the head of a child, who as often as not expresses his great disapproval by incessant crying, but who has no control over the matter, let alone having any understanding about the procedure to which he is being subjected. There have been those who have considered God a most cruel God because the doctrine teaches that the innocent, helpless child is damned through no fault of its own. The child has no control whatever over his or her destiny.

But the Bible teaches, *"The son shall not bear the iniquities of the father."* (Ezekiel 18:20). To be a sinner one must transgress

the law of God because that is what sin is, a transgression of the law (First John 3:4). *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* (Ezekiel 18:20). In the case of the child and the Romanist doctrine, the soul that has not sinned shall also die because of the sin of somebody else. Infants do not sin, are not capable of understanding, are not accountable and responsible before God, do not have the capacity to do those things that Scripture teaches one must do to be saved (hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized). We shall all be judged (Second Corinthians 5:10), but according to the things we do (Revelation 21:12,13), not according to what somebody else has done. We influence each other, but we are not to give answer for each other. That is something each must do individually. Even the Douay Catholic Version of the Bible reads, *"Who will render to every man according to his deeds."* (Romans 2:6). It is not according to the deeds of Adam or his ancestors. Salvation and condemnation is determined by what we do in life, and not by what somebody else does. There is no such thing as inherited guilt of sin.

There is no doubt that descendents suffer many consequences for the sins of those who have gone before them, but guilt of sins is not one of those consequences. All of society suffers because of the drunkard, but all of society is not guilty of drunkenness. A man's sins may bring reproach upon his entire family, but his family is not guilty of his sins. The sin of Adam brought sin into the world, but we are guilty of sin only because *"for that all have sinned."* (Romans 5:12). If the Bible is a Catholic book, then we wonder why Catholic doctrine is so much at variance with what the Bible teaches. There are other reasons showing the innocence of children, such as the statements of Jesus comparing children with those in His kingdom. Why would Jesus want people to become as children if children were lost? What advantage is there to be in the kingdom if those in the kingdom are as children?

"Infant Baptism"

Just an additional word about "infant baptism." Without the doctrine of inherited sin, there would be no cause for such a practice. But the Bible teaches that there is *"one baptism."* When that passage was written, the baptism being practiced was baptism in water by the authority of Christ for the remission of sins of those who had heard the Word, believed it, repented of

their sins, and confessed their faith in Christ. Who can teach the infant the plan of salvation? This "infant baptism" practice was not prominent even in the apostate church until the fourth or fifth century, hundreds of years after the Scriptures were completed. Is it not significant that the Bible teaches nothing akin to infant baptism? Did not Christ come to save the lost, but yet, everyone born is lost and not a word is said what to do about the infants?

Romanism teaches that sprinkling is baptism, as do many Protestant denominations who have borrowed from Rome rather than followed the Bible. Romanists historians admit that for over twelve centuries baptism was by immersion. The practice of sprinkling for baptism was "legalized" by the Council at Ravenna in 1311. It began because some were considered too sick to be immersed and at first had much water "poured" over them. Gradually the amount of water used was lessened, until sprinkling was in vogue. Sprinkling and pouring are substitutes for what the very word *baptize* means. It means to dip, plunge beneath, submerge, bury, immerse.

As one studies the record of baptisms where the action is under discussion there is no room for doubt that baptism is immersion. When Philip baptized the Ethiopian (Acts 8:36-39), they both went down into the water. While this possibly could happen and sprinkling follow, is this what is practiced when one is sprinkled? Colossians 2:12 and Romans 6:3,4, both call baptism a burial. The Roman brethren obeyed a form of doctrine delivered them in order to be saved. The doctrine was the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The form of that doctrine is to die to sin, be buried in water, and be raised to walk in newness of life. Only immersion, not sprinkling or pouring, can qualify as the "form" of that doctrine. Romanists have been able to embarrass many Protestant groups who claim the Bible is their sole authority but who will also practice sprinkling. Sprinkling came from Rome, not the Bible. To practice sprinkling ought to embarrass anyone who respects the Bible.

You Cannot Understand

The Roman Catholic clergy teaches that the "laity" cannot understand the Bible anyway. In this they are like Pentecostals and others who claim one must have a direct operation from the Holy Spirit before he can even understand what the Scriptures teach. In so many religious groups there is this superior attitude

manifested that only a select few can possibly know what anyone ought to do, and everybody else ought just sit back and keep quiet and accept whatever they dictate others to do. We even have some of this attitude among members of the church who have bowed at the altar of so-called "scholarship" of brethren who have drunk deeply from the wells of modernism, and liberalism.

The Scriptures make no such distinction between "clergy" and "laity." There are no special priests (all Christians are priests), or popes, cardinals, etc., such as characterizes the Catholic hierarchy. The priests are called the "official interpreters" of the Bible, in fact, of everything. We wonder why Romanists, Pentecostals, and others who believe they have the monopoly on understanding the Scriptures, ever quote the Bible to us when trying to prove something. Have not they already told us we cannot understand it, but only they have that ability? Why waste the Scripture on those that cannot grasp it even if they wanted to do so?

It is evident that the Scriptures are given so that we might know the truth. Why else are we taught to study? Why else did Paul write his epistles? He said they could be understood (Ephesians 3:4). Why would God give us a book and then prevent us from understanding it and condemn us for not obeying? When the prophets of the Old Testament read the law, they taught it and the people could grasp it. Is not the question asked, *"What saith the law?"* What difference would it make what the law said if nobody but the "special interpreters" could grasp it? Paul said the things written aforetime were for our learning (Romans 15:4). But if we cannot understand it, what did he mean? The things of the past are for our admonition (First Corinthians 10:11). This shows they can be understood. Colossians 4:16 teaches that the letters were to be read in the churches. Why do that if only the "official interpreters" could understand it? Friend, such a doctrine is nothing more than to keep hold on people by persuading them they cannot know until some self-appointed, self-acclaimed, expert tells them what to do. What use is it to warn against following men and then concoct a doctrine that makes following men essential? The reason the priesthood has been able to exercise the domineering power over many peoples and lands thus far is because they have kept people ignorant of the Bible, and one of the ways they have done that is to tell people they are the only ones who can really know.

Catholics cite Second Peter 1:20 as a "proof text" against others interpreting the Bible. But the text speaks of the origin of the Scriptures. It did not come from the minds of men, nor is it any man's interpretation of God's will. It has nothing whatever to do with getting the meaning of what is written, which is all an interpretation is. For a people who claim the Bible to be their book, they sure go to great lengths to keep people from coming to a knowledge of it.

If God could not give us His will without going through some human and his interpretation, why give us the book at all? If we cannot understand what God caused to be written, are we sure we can understand what God's "official interpreters" have to say about it? Maybe we need an official interpreter to interpret what the official interpreters have interpreted.

Confessions

Then consider the Catholic practice of the auricular confession; this periodic necessity of bearing your soul and confessing your sins to some Roman priest. (The "Crossroads" philosophy has a similar perversion to it.) The teaching, *"Confess your sins one to another,"* (James 5:16), not demanding going before those not involved as "telling all." It certainly does not say tell your sins to your "prayer partner" or some Roman priest. If "lay" members are to confess to the "clergy," then why should not the "clergy" confess to the "lay" members? This is *"one to another."* The whole idea is a control mechanism over the lives and minds of others.

What right does some bachelor priest have to say to anybody, "I absolve thee"? Does he think he is God? Claiming to be the successors of the apostles, and the power to forgive sins, they do not even understand that the way of forgiveness of sins by the apostles is through the word of reconciliation that they preached. It was not to them to personally decide what is to be forgiven and what is not. The priests even claim more than the apostles.

This auricular confession practice is a product of the Council of Trent, 1545, far removed from New Testament Christianity. Catholics have claimed that their religion does not change. Nothing has evolved more nor changed more, contradicting itself more, than historical Romanism. But the *"word of the Lord endureth forever."* (First Peter 1:25).

Pope Worship

Lastly, there is the worship of the pope. However, this does not complete the end of false doctrines and practices of Rome. "We do not worship the pope," some are heard to say, but they do. They think him infallible. They bow before him. They call him "Holy Father, His Holiness, etc." They kiss his ring. They carry him about on a throne on their shoulders. They do more for the pope than was ever done for Christ.

Poor Peter! He did not realize he was a pope, but had Cornelius stand up when Cornelius bowed before him, saying he was also a man. The papal infallibility was not recognized until 1870, and then declared retroactive. The problem with that is that they had an infallible pope contradicting other infallible popes. But when you do not respect the Bible anyway, what difference does that make? Once in history there were three men, all laying claim to the papacy at the same time. Romanists contend some were imposters but the line of succession of popes stems from some they claim were imposters.

Is the Bible a Catholic book? The Bible is a Catholic book about as much as the United States Constitution is *Mein Kamp* of Hitler or Karl Marz's *Das Kapital*. The Roman church is an outgrowth of apostasy from the truth, the mother of many denominations of apostasy, powerful, grasping, greedy, deceptive, vicious, and soul-destroying. The Bible is God's book, not from the Roman Catholic Church.

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Gospel Meetings

What is a gospel meeting? It is the opportunity for the gospel and mankind to meet. This is essential for one to be saved inasmuch as the gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16).

We have four goals in such a series of meetings. (1) To preach the saving gospel to the lost who are out of Christ. (2) To recover those who have fallen and need to be restored. (3) To strengthen and build up the saved so they will stay saved. (4) To worship God in spirit and truth.

Incalcuable and eternal good can be accomplished in a gospel meeting when everyone involved does his or her part in attaining these goals. Every soul saved, restored, and strengthened is a glorious bonus of gospel meetings.

Solomon's Request

Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."* So we turn to the Old Testament and study an event in the life of Solomon recorded in First Kings 3:5-15. Because of the length of the passage, may we suggest that the reader turn to his own Bible and read before continuing the lesson. Having read the text, we are now ready to learn the lessons that are open to us and observe some principles that govern God's guidance of man. We shall be able to discover what is and is not of real value in life.

Solomon was born into luxury, the son of a king. He lived the life of a prince, surrounded with all the glory, grandeur, riches, power, and influence that anyone could ever want in life. If ever such things were to be conducive to the building of a good character, they had opportunity in the unbringing of Solomon. So often those very circumstances provoke the development of a character that is "spoiled," given to laziness and indulgence. It does not necessarily have to be that way, but often is. Those who are born into the luxurious way of life seldom ever have to face the struggles of existence that are so commonplace for the common man. They do not have to submit to self-denial nor learn the hardships of poverty. This environment invites pride and self-gratification and extravagance. When President Carter asked a citizen what he could do as president to keep in touch with the common man, the man replied, "Push a cart in the super market, drive in a traffic jam, and eat at McDonald's." Those who live so far above the rest of us with respect to the material affairs of life either never know, or soon forget, what most have to encounter in the normal routine of life. Solomon's childhood would not have allowed him to come to a knowledge of the life most had to live.

Solomon Takes Control

Solomon's assumption of David's throne was not an easy task. His brother, Adonijah, had attempted to take the throne before him when David was still on his death bed, but not yet dead. Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, with the assistance of the

prophet Nathan, urged David to have Solomon crowned king as David's successor. In speedy action, this was done and the attempt of Adonijah was thwarted.

Even so, there was other opposition to him becoming king. Solomon found an excuse to have Adonijah put to death, also the long-time captian of David's army, Joab, who with Abiathar turned against David after a life of friendship. Abiathar, a priest, was deposed. Shemei, who had been an ally with Absalom when Absalom tried to overturn David, was put to death. One by one, by the use of violence and removal from power, Solomon was able to rid his courts of all those who were not supporters or who were potential enemies. In time, the responsibility to rule the nation rested firmly and entirely with Solomon.

Our text tells of a request Solomon made for wisdom so he would know how to rule Israel. It is generally ascribed to Solomon great credit for making the kind of request that he made. But actually, upon examination of the text more closely, we see how God taught Solomon through the dream that for which Solomon must ask. To the credit of Solomon, he obeyed that which God taught him in the matter.

It Was A Dream

Notice that the text is the record of a dream. *"And in Gibeon the Lord appeared unto Solomon in a dream by night...And Solomon awoke and behold, it was a dream."* (Verses 5, 15). God communicated with him by this dream. This was a means of instruction that God used many times in former days. He taught Moses, Daniel, Joseph, Nebuchadnezzar, Jacob, many others in this fashion. *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son..."* (Hebrews 1:1,2). This dream was revelation to Solomon of what he ought to seek as king and what he should strive to be.

What did God teach him? Solomon was assuming great responsibilities and powers. He should show honor and respect for his illustrious father, David. While many today think it is wisdom to discard the past, God taught Solomon he should walk as his father had done. Solomon was fortunate to have had, for the most part, the great example of a good and great leader before him.

Notice also that Solomon was taught humility. God taught

him to say, *"I am but a little child."* (verse 7). A child is in need of guidance. He is not self-sufficient, but dependent upon that which is greater than he. This teaching was prefaced with Solomon in the dream calling himself a *"servant."* For a man of high estate to call himself a servant is a mark of humility. Power, when coupled with pride, is a very dangerous weapon against the people over which such a one holds the power. God taught him to have respect for his own position and for those he led.

In the dream the people of Israel were called *"a great people."* When a leader does not consider those he leads to be worthy, he will mistreat them. This often happens in the home and the church, as well as in civil matters of earthly governments. But when a leader does respect those he leads he will exercise great caution and be as responsible as possible in handling all matters that concern his subjects.

Give God The Credit

Credit was given to God for having made Solomon king. *"Thou hast made thy servant king."* (verse 7). How many times, after one has come to power, even though he might have called upon God while seeking power, after receiving it, he forgets God and considers he has attained his power by himself. Some have little or no consideration for those who placed them in power and made it possible for them to achieve. Those who assist along the way are so soon forgotten. God, as much as anyone else, is left out once the goal is reached.

Solomon was also taught to ask for understanding of heart. He wanted wisdom to be able to rule correctly and discreetly. He needed to be able to discern between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error. This request, as Solomon was taught to make, was as much for Solomon's personal benefit as those whom he ruled. The pressures of governing, making decisions, handling aright national duties and complex situations, would be taxing on any man who assumes such duty. Should he not execute his judgment well, the problems for himself and the people would be multiplied.

Solomon learned the lesson that God taught him in that dream. He was to be blessed with not only that for which he asked, but with many other blessings for which he could have asked, but did not. He was given wisdom and understanding that excelled that of all others. He could have requested wealth, long life, power over his enemies, honor, on and on, the things

of this world for which people have even sold their souls to obtain. But Solomon was taught and learned well, and obeyed what he was taught, respecting the instruction of God. He sought the more important things in this life. And in addition, because he made the request the way he did, he was given so many of the lesser benefits as well.

Wisdom Demonstrated

The wisdom of Solomon is seen in that dramatic episode before his throne recorded in First Kings 3:16-28. Again, because of the length of the passage, we ask that the reader take his Bible and read that account just now. Each time it is read, we come away amazed at the wisdom demonstrated by Solomon.

Solomon's fame as a wise man spread throughout the world. *"And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Dardo, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five."* (First Kings 4:29-32). *"And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom."* (First Kings 4:34).

The Queen of Sheba visited Solomon and her reaction must have been typical to that of most visitors. *"And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and behold, the half was not told me. Thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom."* (First Kings 10:6-8).

We are also expected to be wise. *"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord Is."* (Ephesians 5:15-17). The wisdom we seek is to be true wisdom. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."* (Proverbs 9:20). There is no such thing as true wisdom without respect for God. This is why I

wonder so often why anybody would point to someone who denied the very existence of God as being some kind of "scholar" in the realm of religious matters. His knowledge does not include respect for God. He is unwise.

"Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain." (First Corinthians 3:18-20). Worldly wisdom has deceived some men into thinking they are wise by discarding God. They show themselves to be fools in so doing. To be wise, one might well have to be considered a fool in the eyes of the worldly-wise.

The Source of Wisdom

God is the source of true wisdom. *"For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."* (Proverbs 2:6). *"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."* (James 1:5). The *"asking"* is not expressing the manner by which we seek wisdom, but rather the idea is that wisdom is that for which we ought to seek, and God is the source of it. We need wisdom that is from above. *"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."* (James 3:17). This wisdom comes by and through the revealed Word of God. *"All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God..."* (Second Timothy 3:15). *"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."* (First Corinthians 2:6-8).

Inseparable

Take note that Solomon's wisdom was conditioned upon his obedience to the Word of God. First Kings 3:14, *"If thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statures and my commandments..."* Obedience and wisdom are inseparable.

In our day, there is a great premium placed upon formal education, and justly so. People are made wise in many useful areas through educational efforts. Many are made wise in areas that are eternally useless. But without education, we would be less advantaged to be sure, but "The only really educated person is the one who has been educated first as a Christian." A knowledge and proper use of everything else without the knowledge and wisdom derived from the Word of God prevents one from being truly wise.

Jesus taught that the wise man builds his house on the rock while the foolish man builds on sand. Only by following the Christ of heaven can one be wise. Being a Christian will mean that your wisdom is of eternal value, even exceeding the wisdom that characterized that great king of Israel so many years ago.

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How Do I Know When I Am Right?

In the first half of the 1800's, there was an American statesman named Henry Clay who desired very much to be president of the nation. But Clay was a man of strong convictions and somewhat of an uncompromising nature in many areas. It is credited to him to have once said that he would rather be right than president.

Solomon once wrote, *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death."* (Proverbs 14:12). Being right is valuable and desirable. In many areas of activity, being wrong is fatal. Being wrong simply means to be in error and to fail to have the truth. Being right is essential to succeed in business, to reach correct destinations in travel, in construction of buildings, and certainly in the field of medicine. Being wrong can mean bankruptcy, wrong destinations, and life or death situations. Surely, we should strive to be right, and this takes effort. In fact, if the whole truth was known, the fact that it takes effort to be right is a major contributing factor as to why so many are so wrong so much of the time when they could be right.

We Must Be Right

But there is no area of human involvement where being right is more important than in the realm of religion. If we are wrong in secular matters, even the most serious consequences are temporary in nature. But being wrong in matters of the spirit are of eternal significance. In spite of the fact that much of our present age seems to place a stigma on being right and wanting to be right, branding being right to be equivalent to bigotry, self-righteousness, and other uncomplimentary descriptions, it does make a difference what one believes and what one does in the matter of religion. This mania that "I'm O.K., you're O.K." has just about made people think that nothing matters. "Everything is beautiful in its own way" has been the distorted thinking of too many for too long until many actually believe that whatever one believes and whatever one does, it must be acceptable to everybody, including God. Is it not true that any philosophical thought that contradicts itself is unworthy of being accepted? Well, is it not true that it is foolishness to contend that there is no right, there is no wrong, that everything is relative and nothing is absolute? How can those who claim everything is relative be so absolutely sure about their contention? How can those who insist nobody can really know what is right and wrong be so confident that they are right when they make their assertion? They meet themselves coming back and contradict their own stance. In every matter of life people know that it makes a difference what you think and what you do. But somehow, some mixed-up people wish to exclude religion from that reality. The Scriptures teach that there is a right and a wrong, and that people can know which is which.

Motives Matter

Seeing the benefit in being right, we must guard ourselves from having an evil motive for wanting to be right. We should want to be right because we love the truth, want the truth, and despise error. We should not want to be right just to prove somebody else wrong, or to present some show of personal superiority, or to put someone down. We can study the Bible to learn but we can have a bad motive for even studying the Scriptures. We should be more concerned with **what** is right and less concerned with **who** is right. Remember, before God, the heart must be right in order to be right.

Let us also realize that death is certain (Hebrews 9:27), the judgment is inevitable (Second Corinthians 5:10), our duty in life is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13), and we shall not be prepared for what is coming nor fulfill our purpose in life unless we are right. It is not just as useful to be wrong as it is to be right.

People encounter hindrances that prevent them from being right in matters of religion. Often they are just downright prejudice against the truth. Very often they are ignorant of the truth, some even preferring the darkness rather than the light. There is the handicap of being self-willed, closed minded, actually loving sinful ways. At the root of nearly all of it is the application of false standards of measure by which to determine right from wrong. And how pride steps in so very often. Some, it seems, had rather die than ever admit they were wrong. But it takes a better person to admit being wrong when he is wrong than to persist in holding on to error in order to "save face."

The Standard

For one to be able to determine what is right and wrong, there must be that perfect standard of measure, and one must have knowledge of that standard in order to properly apply it. In matters of religion so many have heaped to themselves their human traditions, their creeds, manuals, prayer books, catechisms, disciplines, confessions, etc. Others follow their feelings as well as doctrines of men. But all these things are constantly changing, being altered, up-dated, and discarded. They are as fickle as can be. They are not reliable. What they say today may not be what they say tomorrow. They are made by men and are changed by men. They are of human authority, not divine authority.

The only standard by which to measure what is right and wrong in matters of the spirit, matters of religion, matters of the relationship between God and man, is God's Word, the Bible. *"But the word of God endureth forever."* (First Peter 1:25). *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (Second Peter 1:20,21). Paul contended that his message came not from man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12). *"But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth*

all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so, the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (First Corinthians 2:10-13). *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."* (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

The Bible is adequate, so much so that nothing is needed or allowed. Nothing about it is to be omitted, altered, or added to it. Let me insist right here that here is the doctrinal danger of the so-called "modern versions" of the Bible, produced by unbelievers, who are bent on promoting modernism and denominationalism, and are guilty of rewriting the Scriptures, adding to and taking from, changing and distorting what God has said, offering their commentaries as if that was the Word of God. It is my conviction, and for good reason, that the most serious danger facing the Lord's people today in maintaining faithfulness to the Word of God is the general acceptance of the modern versions. This is true not only because of the fatal doctrinal error within them, but also because it reveals a careless and unconcerned attitude on the part of so-called Christians regarding the veracity and verbal inspiration of the Bible. The acceptance of modern versions is another symptom of the willingness to compromise God's truth in order to accept the doctrines of men. The only reliable standard is the Word of God, reliably translated. The Bible is the inerrant, inspired, infallible, verbally and plenary inspired, authoritative and all-sufficient Word of God. That is the measure that must be used to determine what is right and to distinguish it from what is wrong. *There is no other.*

Matter of Understanding

"But everybody understands the Bible differently," cried someone who really does not seem to be aware of the seriousness of his comment, and who is trying to find some justification for believing whatever you want and doing whatever

you like. Remember, God gave us the Bible. In that Bible He calls for unity. Is God guilty of demanding unity but also guilty of giving us a guide that makes unity impossible? What a charge to make against God! God gave the Bible to be understood and mankind can either understand it or God demands something and makes it impossible at the same time. When two people differ over something in the Bible, it is not God's fault. One or both misunderstand what God has taught. When they both understand it, they will see it alike. It is not that people cannot see the Bible alike. The trouble is, too many prefer to look at it through glasses colored with their denominational prejudices and human creeds. Just why would God command us to study His Word (Second Timothy 2:15) if we cannot understand it anyway?

Too many people decide what they are going to believe on the basis of WHO BELIEVES IT rather than WHAT SCRIPTURE TEACHES. They follow theologians, philosophers, clergymen, "scholars," ancestors, you name it, they follow it.

How can I know when I stand in truth? First, guard your heart and pursue the truth with an honest and sincere motive. Second, compare your convictions with that which the Bible teaches. Do not ever be caught up in that nonsense so prevalent in today's world, "This can't be wrong because it feels so right." That is an absolutely stupid measure.

Put It To The Test

Let us run a few tests by considering a few issues. What about the origin of the world. Did all things just happen into existence? Is evolution true? Was the world created? Is it all an ancient accident by chance? Is there any plan to it? Read Genesis 1:1 and learn that God created the heaven and the earth, and as we continue to read we learn the origin of all things.

What about the identity of Jesus? Was He merely a teacher, or a martyr for a cause that faltered? What He a zealot, a fraud, or the Son of God? Can the reading of Scripture leave any doubt as to the teaching that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?

Ask about the reality of heaven and hell, and read Matthew 25:46 that speaks of eternal life and everlasting or eternal punishment. What name should the followers of Christ wear? Let Acts 11:26 inform you that the disciples were called Christians. Does not that settle the matter?

How many churches did Christ build? Ephesians 4:4 says there is one body and Ephesians 1:22,23 tells us the body is the church. Does not that answer the question? Did Christ say, "Upon this rock I will build my churches?" Or did He say "church" in the singular number? The Bible teaches us about one church, His church, and no other church.

What kind of music is to be used in worship under the authority given by Christ? Every time the Scripture speaks of the subject it says, "Sing." Shall we abide by what the Word teaches, or do we presumptiously take the liberty to our damnation and add to His Word and do whatever we want?

What about denominationalism? Well, what about it? Nothing in the Bible authorizes its existence. It is the result of human error. Why cannot we simply recognize that reality and abide by it? Division is condemned, not condoned (First Corinthians 1:10).

On it goes with subject after subject. What is the way to raise money, the way to be saved, the organization of the church, the work of the church, the manner of life acceptable to God, attitudes and actions toward others, marriage, divorce, remarriage, worship, miracles, the role of women, duty to civil government, morality, ethics, the Lord's Supper, adultery, whatever. The Scripture provides us God's teaching. The truth shall make us free (John 8:32). We can know the truth, follow the truth, and be right.

It Really Matters

It matters what you believe and what you do. Just being honest and sincere in your convictions is not sufficient. This you must be, but you also must be right. As we feed on the Word of God we can know what God has declared to be right. Whatever is at variance from that is wrong. This is either true, or the Bible is of no value whatever.

Buy the truth and sell it not," was Solomon's advice. (Proverbs 23:23). *"Cease from thine own wisdom,"* is found in Proverbs 23:4. When you follow God's Word you will be right and can know you are right.

† † † † †

It's Over For A While

The big presidential election is past, and I am pleased with the way it went. Let me tell you why.

While I am sure many voted because of economics, foreign policy, and other mundane issues, there were others issues that far ourweighed these things, such as morality, human dignity, and faith in God.

I do not think I could ever bring myself to cast any influence in favor of one who admittedly endorsed Humanism, or was in favor of granting people the right to kill unborn children through abortion. Furthermore, the shrill, defiant demand to consider homosexuality as an acceptable and alternative life style is more than anyone who believes the Bible can tolerate. There was such a distinct choice on these issues that, to my mind, should have been of paramount concern to every person who believes in God, and certainly to those who profess to be New Testament Christians.

Neither candidate nor party could claim perfection this time as in other times. In these elections, we, as citizens of God's kingdom first and citizens of our nation second, must consider the trend of influence as well as specifics regarding morality and righteousness in the land. Such qualities are the backbone of any nation that wishes to remain free and blessed. Those considerations are far more important than party, money, or anything else.

I can explain the way I voted because of my moral and religious convictions. It does disturb me that so many Americans evidently did not care about these weightier matters and gave their support to that which is so antagonistic to the truths of the Bible. I even noticed a few who say they belong to the Lord's church giving their endorsement to political figures who are openly rebellious to the basic fundamental principles of human dignity and morality. It makes me wonder how much the teaching of the Bible really matters to them.

I know the government is not the way we must promote the kingdom of God. But I also know that I had rather have those who regulate the government be sympathetic to my convictions rather than have those who are openly destructive of them to decide the affairs of our government. JWB

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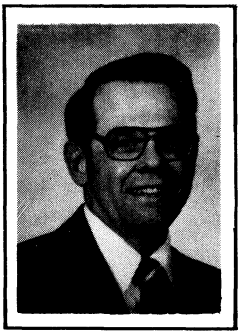
Do You Know Why?



JAMES W. BOYD

When an old and faithful dog grows old, blind, and crippled, we might take him to the "vet" and have him "put to sleep." But we would not that to our elderly people who may be in similar conditions. Do you know why?

When a horse breaks a leg it has been the usual procedure to shoot him. But we do not shoot people who might break a leg. Do you know why there is a difference?

Thousands of cattle are slaughtered each day for food for other creatures. Such a thought as doing this to humans is so repulsive we do not entertain it for a moment. Do you know why?

Some claim we are only evolved animals. If they are right, where is the logical and consistent reason for treating humans differently from other animals? Even evolutionists do not like the logical conclusions of their theory. It is but a theory; an anti-God and anti-human theory.

"**Let us make man in our image...**" is the reason humans are different. If you remove God, as atheists, evolutionists, and humanists contend, man becomes nothing more than a totally materialistic animal. I contend we had better watch out for such people before they kill us all.

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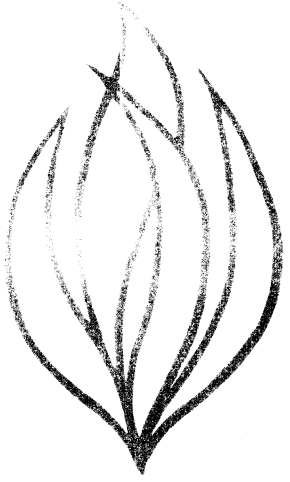

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If You Wish To Continue...

(See enclosure)

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VOLUME IV James W. Boyd **NUMBER 5**

What About Modern "Faith" Healing?

There is as much concern about the matter of "faith" healing as there is about almost any religious question being considered today. There are many people who sincerely believe that Christ heals miraculously today through men as was done in the first century. There was a time when only the very emotional and ignorant would be deceived regarding this, but today there is an unbelievable number of otherwise intelligent people who think this miraculous healing takes place now. There are many religious sects that preach such an event, such as the Holiness people, Spiritualists, Roman Catholics, Christian Scientists, Pentecostals, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc. Some Methodists and Baptists are heard to claim miracles now and then.

When one begins to examine the claims and doctrines he is soon impressed with the lack of uniformity in the teaching and reported events. Strangely, even though they all claim their work is of God and that the Holy Spirit is operating in this direct manner through miraculous healing, they disown each other and claim the others are false religionists regarding doctrines. In fact, they each claim the other to be fakes as often as not.

Those who believe in "faith" healing contend that it was the mission of Jesus to redeem the body as well as the soul. The idea is, "Through the fall of Adam we lost everything. Jesus recovered all through His atonement." There is the attempt to show spiritual salvation and physical healing to be inseparable. Where one goes, go both. Healing is physical salvation; forgiveness is spiritual salvation. Every Christian is supposed to be redeemed both physically and spiritually.

No Exemption

Somehow they forget that the Christian is not promised exemption from physical affliction. The presence of death ought be sufficient to show that the child of God is not exempt from physical woes. Even the faith healers get sick and die. Grief, toil, pain, deprivation, tears, fear, all these things common to man are often suffered by the Christian as well. Even one of Paul's

fellow workers was sick (Second Timothy 4:20). While we are promised grace to endure, we are not promised freedom from hardship and suffering. Just consider how much physical distress the apostles suffered. Peter once wrote, *"If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed..."* and this proves that even Christians suffer. They are spiritually redeemed but they suffer the pains of the body like other men.

We also need to observe how the healing ministry of Christ differs from that conducted by the modern miracle claimants. Never did Christ do what he did for notoriety. He had a higher and holier mission. He healed all manner of diseases, even extreme cases. Nor was there ever any indication that He came to deliver every follower from disease. Not all were healed even when He healed some. Salvation from sin and healing of the body were not set up as inseparable. There were no partial recoveries, no failures to heal, no continuation of symptoms and pain, and He never told anyone to wait a while and eventually their "healing" would be evident. His healings were instantaneous, and a "go home, pray, wait, it will come" type of deception. His mission was to *"seek and save the lost."* He came into the world to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). His gospel was not a "health and wealth salvation."

Sin and Sickness

Modern faith healers sometimes preach that physical illness is due to sin. Yes, through Adam many hardships came into the world. But one can be sick, and even die, but not because of some sin he has committed. Thinking that physical distress is due to some spiritual transgression, they claim that to be physically healed the spiritual condition must first be corrected. This gives the "healer" an alibi when the "healing" does not occur. It is the fault of the one who is sick, not the "healer." The sick lacked "faith," he is told.

Personal sins can cause illness, but such is not always the case. In John 9:1-3, there was a man who was blind, but Jesus said it was not because of his sins nor the sins of his parents. Job suffered through no fault of his own. Ahaziah was sick (First Kings 1), but it was because he fell through a lattice from his upper chamber. Falling down is no sin against God.

Role of Faith

With the "modern faith healers," personal faith is essential to physical healing. Without faith, no one can be healed. As noted earlier, this provides the escape of responsibility from the "fake" healer when healing does not occur. Furthermore, the subject is groomed, prepared, programmed, and told what to say and do and to contend he is healed regardless of what happens because to doubt it would mean his faith was lacking and he could not be healed. This is the reason many "testify" that they have been healed when they have not. Some have later died, having ceased to take necessary medicine. Some continue with every symptom but insist they are healed.

Of the thirty-one recorded healings by Christ, faith on the part of the one healed was required in only one. Faith was present in seven others, but not a condition for healing. Five were healed on the basis of the faith of others. In nine cases, there is no evidence of faith. In four, faith is most unlikely. In four others, faith was impossible. Yet, our 20th century "miracle man" demands personal faith in the sick.

Some faith healers are opposed to all medical care altogether. This is true of all of them. It is interesting to note that during the Oral Roberts Crusade of Healing, on one occasion the tent fell, many were hurt, and they were sent to the hospital. Many wondered why Oral did not take care of the matter. Strange, also, that in his later years, he now builds a hospital to utilize medical science. If he could heal, why build a hospital?

Two Kinds of Healing

There are two kinds of healing. One is natural; the other was miraculous. Some faith healers tell us, "When a Christian does not trust God for the healing of his body, but runs to drugs and medicines, he is resorting to the same experiments as does the drunkard, harlot, and thief." That is an extreme position, but some contend that way. To them, the use of medicine is a repudiation of God. They will even allow their own children to die before they would given them medicine, or allow an operation by a doctor.

Progress in medical science is undeniable. Its benefits are beyond refutation. Godly men use medicines. In the Bible, godly men used medicines. Even Christ commended the sick to physicians. Luke was a physician. The Good Samariatan was commended for using means to help the wounds of the troubled man he assisted. Paul told Timothy to take *"a little wine for the*

stomach's sake." Opposition to medicine is a refusal to use what God has already given and placed here on earth. Some had rather God did something miraculous than to use what God has already provided.

Evidence Is Lacking

Stories innumerable have been told of "wonderful healings," but when these things are checked out, they are far from being what they are claimed to be. It has been my experience that those who claim such events always know of someone somewhere, way off from nowhere, that had heard of something that happened. I have confronted many who have claimed healing by miracles and have yet to find one that can prove his claim. They expect you to simply accept it on the basis of their "testimony."

The truth is, the days of miracles are past. First Corinthians 13 is Paul's discussion of spiritual and miraculous gifts and he made it clear that they would fail, cease, vanish away, be done away. He told when that would be; *"when that which is perfect is come."* This refers to the *"perfect law of liberty."* (James 1:25). This refers to that which for a time was partially revealed but is now fully revealed. These gifts were to remain *"Till we all attain to the unity of the faith."* (Ephesians 4:13). This is not until we all believe alike, as modern perversions of the Bible state, but until "the faith" is fully revealed. For a time God's will was embodied in inspired men who could and would confirm their teaching by working the miraculous. But now His will is embodied in the inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It has been confirmed (Hebrews 2:3,4), and needs no additional confirmation. To claim the need for repeated confirmation is to doubt the record itself. Miracles were for confirming the Word (Mark 16:20). We have that perfect law of liberty and there is neither the need nor the use of the miraculous anymore.

Decline of Miraculous Gifts

It is interesting to note the decline of the mentioning of spiritual gifts as the New Testament was being written and came more and more toward completion.

The problem with "faith healers" and those who believe there are miracles today is their problem of simply not believing the revealed will of God. They do not wish to walk by faith, but by

sight. Unless God keeps on doing something special for them, they cannot accept what He has said. They demand God work a miracle. One set of parents said that they prayed to God that their child might be healed, and "God was honor bound to keep His word." The child eventually got better because the medicine worked.

What Really Happens?

Well, how does one explain the apparent recoveries at the healing campaigns? Healings do occur, but they are not miracles. Keep in mind that all healing is divine healing in that God is involved. But God heals through natural means and not miraculous means today. Many illnesses are psychosomatic and can be healed through the proper utilization of psychological means. Faith healers never have accomplished anything that medical science has not done. We must realize that there are three kinds of illness. One kind is organic. Some organ or structural part of the body has been diseased or afflicted such as a broken bone or a ruptured blood vessel. Then there are functional diseases of mental or nervous disorders as hysteria or anxiety which can cause physical symptoms. There are also combinations of the two as when one suffers a fall and injures his spine. Organically he recovers but there is a functional or mental block that prevents him from walking. Paralysis is set aside when that mental problem is corrected. The paralysis was caused purely from the mind even though the physical injury had recovered.

Faith healers never cure the organic problems of broken bones or diseased organs. They can assist in these functional disorders through the combination of the power of suggestion and emotional tensions and stresses, which often borders on near hypnotism. It is psychotherapy. Doctors, psychologists, and even parents do the same thing over and over. There is no miracle involved. A miracle is a direct intervention on the part of God, setting aside the natural means and using the supernatural. These corrections are not supernatural, but according to natural physical and psychological laws that men have studied and learned.

Doctors tell us that probably two-thirds of all illnesses are of mental origin. This is the reason some doctors on occasion prescribe pseudo pills such as sugar pills. They simply recognize the mental or emotional factors involved in healing when there is

no organic difficulty causing the symptoms.

The mind has a great influence over the body. Under certain emotional conditions, ills can be cured by the process of suggestion by planting the idea of healing in the mind. But this is a natural process not miraculous.

Deception and Fraud

So much can be said about modern faith healers that space prohibits saying much more. But the popular and renowned "faith healers" are frauds and deceivers getting rich over the naive and gullible people who grasp at anything in the hope that they can recover. Illnesses remain, symptoms continue, money is collected. People are told they are healed when they are not. I recall talking to a woman who Oral Roberts was supposed to have healed from affliction of stuttering. She said he told her it would take a few days. Such fraudulent practice is a sin against God and man. The candidates are screened and their alleged illnesses are fake or misdiagnosed. They always have some problem impossible to verify at the healing campaign like heart problems, nervousness, kidney stones.

The dangers of this malicious rake-off are at least two-fold. Some have neglected proper treatment suffer the results because they believe they are healed. Just recently a faith-healed person "cured" of tuberculosis was confined because she had carried the disease to many others while she believed she had been "healed" by the Lord miraculously. The other danger is seen in how people will give heed to the lying doctrines these "fakes" perpetrate. Thereby they are immunized against the truth and go on to perdition, feeling quite secure. Why do people believe them? Many reasons can be offered, but primarily it is because they know not the truth of the Bible regarding the miraculous.

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(continued from page 17)

Modernism, Romanism, radicalism, worldliness are but a few of the discernible trends and drifts that are evident in the church today. They have become battlegrounds within and without the church because those that love truth and are determined to stand for it will not let such pass as if it was nothing.

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The Sin Of Grumbling

Many have a tendency to classify sins as big sins or little sins. Sometimes this classification is determined by what I do that is wrong in contrast to what you do that is wrong. Your sins are big and mine are usually little. But we also think that one who steals five dollars has committed a little sin while a person that steals a million has sinned a big sin. We classify lying in terms of white lies and black lies. We all seem to recognize adultery, idolatry, murder, and such as that to be sinful, yes, very sinful. Such sins contributed to the downfall of Israel and Judah. But we also must notice that murmuring, complaining and grumbling were listed along with these other sins. The sin of grumbling was one of the reasons so many Israelites fell in the wilderness. This being true, why should we conclude that murmuring and complaining are less displeasing to God?

"Moreover brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpants. Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." (First Corinthians 10:1-10).

Commonly Committed

"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). All men have sinned, but not all have sinned the same way. Some are guilty of murder, others of drunkenness or lying, or something else. But very likely many, if not most, have been guilty of murmuring, complaining, and

grumbling. So we have under consideration that which is not foreign to us.

Actually, grumbling is one of the most useless activities in which we could engage. It is about as beneficial as the man in the story about building the great Hoover Dam (once named Boulder Dam) in Arizona. It was my privilege to see that huge structure some years ago and it is massive. It blocks the very swift and powerful Colorado River that cuts its way through the Grand Canyon. The benefits of that dam are immeasurable regarding flood control, irrigation, energy and other benefits. But what would you think of a man who, at the very beginning of the building of that dam, came forward and said he would build it, and simply began tossing stones over the canyon wall into the river? We need not go on with the uselessness of such an effort. We would suggest, however, that the exercise of grumbling is about as beneficial, and even harmful.

It Is Useless

Just what can be accomplished by grumbling? We evidently must think there is some usefulness in it because so many of us do so much of it. But does it really ease any pain? Has it ever changed the weather? How many church problems has it solved? It has caused quite a few. Does it produce a better person? Has it caused food to taste any better? How many have been made healthier, wealthier or wiser? Did it ever produce a friend? It has alienated many friends from each other. It never improves the disposition. In fact, it really does not bring satisfaction and contentment even to the grumbler. It probably has never produced any good without creating worse side effects. It just is not one of the recommended manners of conduct. is it?

One of the finest characteristics one can develop in life is that of contentment. Please do not confuse contentment with self-satisfaction, indifference or laziness. Paul wrote, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*" (First Timothy 6:6). "*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" (Hebrews 13:5).

It Is Revealing

Grumbling reveals something ugly about the grumbler. It

reveals an attitude of heart that is not becoming to a child of God. "*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*" (Matthew 12:34). When we grumble and complain we show what is in our hearts. "When something is always wrong, from the end back to the start, and you complain, in sunshine or rain, the something wrong is the heart."

The Christian has less reason to complain than anyone on earth. This is not to say that being a Christian is like living in a "bed of roses." That is not the case at all. But the mature Christian has learned to live with contentment. He enjoys the spiritual and physical blessings from God. He knows where he came from, why he is here, how to live while here, and where he is going. He is secure so long as he remains faithful in Christ. He does not fear what man can do to him. He has been cleansed from that which can destroy body and soul. He considers his life as an existence of preparation for the grand and glorious eternity with God. He does not give such emphasis to the affairs of this life and this world that he allows them to destroy and disrupt his peace with God.

It Is Injurious

Actually, we do injury to the cause of Christ to be a grumbler and complainer. We set such a bad example before others, even our children, that they conclude, even if not expressed out loud, "We want none of that way of life. It that is what being a Christian does to you, who needs it?" This sin hurts the church, the grumbler, everyone around the grumbler.

If there is something that is out-of-line, deal with it. Do something about it constructively. But to just keep up a barage of complaints is not the Christlike way to behave.

The Israelites were known for their much complaining. When they left Egypt, bound in by the Red Sea, mountains, and Pharoah's army, they began to complain, "Why did you bring us out here to die?" But God delivered them, did He not?

Once they were in safety on the other side of the sea they began to complain about the lack of food and water, as if God was not aware of their needs or did not concern Himself with them. They murmured, "We could have stayed back in Egypt and done better than this. We had rather died there than come over here and be killed by giants. We don't like this and we object to that."

On and on it went, year after year. I do not see how Moses

fared as well as he did with that mouthing, griping, vexing horde of wanderers. Each time God did something on their behalf and they would calm down, but would soon forget God's goodness and mercy and soon were heard complaining and murmuring and grumbling about something else.

It Brings Sorrow

Grumbling only brought sorrow to the Israelites. Has it ever produced much else? Has it produced happiness? Once fiery serpants were sent into their midst and those that were bitten died. Their complaining against God's instructions to enter Canaan, their failure to listen to the words of faith and courage from Joshua and Caleb and Moses caused them to wander in the wilderness those forty years. Their complaints never relieved them of any difficult, but only brought them into displeasure with God because of their gross ingratitude. Paul noted that it was a contributing factor to the downfall of many of them. Are we somehow immune from the dire consequences of similar activities?

It Is Offensive

When we grumble and complain it is offensive to God because we are complaining against His provisions for us. Moses told Israel, *"This shall be, when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for the Lord that heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him, and what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord."* (Exodus 16:8). God guides our lives and has promised us His providence if we seek Him, His kingdom, and His righteousness first in our lives (Matthew 6:34). Has he not promised us His protection and care? Is it because we doubt the Word of God that we lift our voices in complaint? Is it our lack of faith that we murmur when anything gets somewhat off balance? Has He not promised that we will not be tempted above what we can bear, what we can overcome, what He provides in the way of escape (First Corinthians 10:13)? *"Do all things without murmuring and disputing."* (Philippians 2:14). To murmur is closely akin to rebellion against God and a questioning of His wisdom. How unhappy are those who find fault with everything, everybody, anytime, everytime, regardless of who, what, when, where, or why! They are miserable and seem to be discontent

unless they can make everyone around them the same way.

There is another side of life if we would but open our eyes to see it. Alongside the bitter there is the sweet. There is the bad, but it is offset by the good that abounds. Only in heaven will everything be perfectly good. This is one additional reason that heaven is so appealing to mankind.

We have so many blessings for which to be thankful. Israel forgot their blessings, and we often are found walking in their ungrateful footsteps.

There Is A Remedy

The best and sure cure for grumbling is to heed the admonition of the song that says, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one. Count your many blessings, see what God has done." Someone said that he complained he had no shoes until he met the man who had no feet.

"The grumbler's life is ever so sad,
It is filled with sorrows and woes,
He hasn't thought how content he could be,
By counting the blessings God bestows."

We make our lot in life heavier and our lives harder by grumbling about matters over which we have no control. If there is something we can do about a matter, we do better to busy ourselves in doing it rather than simply complaining about it. If there is nothing we can do about it, is grumbling going to help?

The great blessing that we who are God's children have is the forgiveness of sins. We do not have to live life in fear of death, in dread of the judgment. We belong to Christ and those faithful in Christ have every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). We are recipients of the benefits of God's grace because we have come to the One who brought grace and truth into the world (John 1:17). Believing God to be faithful to His Word, what reason do we have to spend our lives and mar our happiness with grumbling, murmuring, and complaining? Seeing what God has done for us, we ought be ashamed of ourselves to the extent that we will lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving rather than with grumbles and murmurs.

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Trends And Battlegrounds

A religious movement broke out in America around the turn of the nineteenth century that is often called the Restoration Movement. It consisted of many people, encouraged by religious leaders, preachers, teachers, from various parts of the country, that noted the division that existed in the denominational world and realized that it was not the unity for which the New Testament called. They sent forth the plea for unity based upon the Word of God as the measuring standard. They urged people to abandon their human creeds and traditions and "speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent." They wanted no additional denominations, but only the restoration of the church of which we read in Scripture.

As the influence of these people expanded, it was inevitable that they would soon encounter each other, see some differences still existing, and continue to *search the scriptures* to learn what was true. Like in the days of the first century after Pentecost, the church came into reality where it not been known, and it grew and multiplied.

What Were The Goals?

The aims of those who were a part of this effort differed somewhat from that which was attempted by Martin Luther and other great leaders of the Protestant Reformation Movement. Those efforts were attempts to "reform" the existing conditions of the Roman Catholic Church. What resulted was the maze and confusion of Protestant denominationalism, with the establishment of many rival religious bodies, each teaching things distinctive to itself that separated it from others. The people of the Restoration Movement sought the abolition of sectarianism, human creeds, human doctrines and practices. They sought for all people to return to the Bible for the authority for what was believed and practiced. They said we should call Bible things by Bible names, do Bible things Bible ways, uphold only what the Bible taught, restore the faith as authored and revealed in the all-sufficient Bible. Whereas the leaders of the Reformation Movement sought reformation, those of the Restoration Movement sought to restore New Testament Christianity, nothing more or less.

Being a part of some "movement" is not our goal even today, but to restore the New Testament church remains the goal. We respect those who have gone before us with these noble and Biblical motives, but even the early restorers are not to be cited as our authority for anything. We are to follow no man as if he was the authority. A matter is true because God teaches it in His book, not because some nobleman of the past also believed and practiced such things.

Many found then and many find now that it is difficult to leave the shackles of denominationalism. They had become accustomed to human doctrines and creeds and fearfully contemplated leaving such things to follow just the Bible. But as they learned, they adopted certain things formerly ignored, and dropped certain unscriptural ideas they formerly held. Their attitude toward the Bible was right and remains right. We must retain that attitude, adhering to the Bible, never leaving it as our guide (First Peter 4:11; Second Timothy 3:16,17).

The Battle Was Fought

Those of the past warred a militant warfare. They had to fight, debate, struggle, endure hardship, win each inch of ground with difficulty and often suffered personal abuse. There are some novices today who glibly declare that nobody can win and nothing is accomplished by debates and militant presentations of the truth. But they have either never known or have wilfully forgotten the history of the early restoration efforts. Contrasting truth with error has always been an appropriate method for teaching the truth. It was in Bible times, it was in the early days of the work of restoration, and it is now. To be sure, some ill-advised and improperly conducted debates have done harm. But the abuse of a thing does not negate the proper use of it. As Jack Meyer said, "They laid it on the line. They let people see the difference. They were not afraid to contrast the gospel with human creeds, and to let men see that they were preaching the one and only way to heaven." They left no one guessing and wondering what they meant as some do today when they speak with double-tongues and uncertain sounds. We have no reason to think that such militancy is out of date. We need to absorb their noble spirit and vigorously do battle, pressing for the truth, sacrificing ourselves with boldness, "*having done all to stand,*" as was done in days gone by. Without it, the movement lags and drifts and souls are endangered.

Drift From Distinctiveness

There is a treacherous drift away from both the principle and spirit of the earlier restoration efforts which were in many ways like the days of the early church. There is a growing reluctance on the part of some to make it clear that the church of Christ is the church of Christ, and that we are to be different for the sake of truth. You can listen to some "preach" and never come to a knowledge of the basic elements of the faith, never see any real difference between truth and error, never be shown the difference between the Lord's church and denominations, even seldom treated to what one must to do be saved. The sweet nothings that pour from the sugar-coated orators only sounds out what people want to hear rather than what they need to hear, the gospel of Christ. It is evident that some preachers must determine successful preaching by how many laughs they get per minute. Even among some in the church there is a growing antagonism against exposing error and contrasting it with truth.

Because of this reluctance and fear the brotherhood is losing its distinctiveness. We are not unmindful of the intention of some to reduce the church into just another denomination. With the attitude of leaving everybody else alone, being complacent and indifferent, fearful of offending, becoming smug with increases in numbers and monetary resources, many have put out the "Do Not Disturb" sign, expecting everybody to heed it. With fine meetinghouses and community acceptance (which is the emphasis of many) some have judged themselves religiously successful. But the truth goes wanting for proclaimers and many are deceived into thinking all is well when it is not.

The Discipline Gap

Discipline in the church, as the Bible commands, has become a "no-no" with many "loving" brethren. They love others so much they will disobey God to let the sinner continue in his sinful way rather than do what God says regarding him. It is not popular to stand for the truth. Timidly, almost with apologies, if at all, the distinctive qualities of the faith are being heard. As you hear some who call themselves preachers of the gospel, you would come to the conclusion that doing what God says, even commands, is optional rather than mandatory. There is a deadly trend away from militancy, coupled with ambiguity. We are certainly not advocating brethren should go out looking for a

fight. But some fights are necessary and when you are doing God's will in this world some fights are inevitable if we are faithful. Progress, real progress, has always been made that way. Pseudo-growth is what we see so much of today with the "namby-pamby" compromises many promote and condone.

We have too long been "at ease" and have closed our eyes to the drifts and trends that now threaten the church as never before in our lifetime. This desire to relax, be at peace at whatever price, and be approved by others has about sunk the ship of faith and crashed it upon the rocks of digression and apostasy once again.

Covering Up The Message

There was a time, even when I was a young preacher, when members of the churches of Christ were known for their knowledge of the Bible. But we have become overburdened with the barage of "how-to-ism" that many have lost the "what" we are to teach. Too many depend on the preacher and do not study for themselves. What is proven to be worse, many have relied upon the college expert and "scholar" who often has acquired his status from studying at the feet of false teachers in the denominational seminaries. Some read but probably anemic literature, something "edited" by one of our brethren but saturated with denominational doctrines and ideas. Others have become enamoured with the "easy-to-read" modern versions without being too concerned what they teach. Bible study classes are ignored by nearly half of the members of the church. It is not likely that those who habitually and repeatedly absent themselves from Bible study are serious students of the Word at home. The result of all of this is telling and becoming more and more pronounced. Ignorance of the Word is producing a digressive body, more akin to that against which the restorers waged war, than like the church for which Christ shed His blood as revealed in the New Testament.

Modernism And Company

Let me briefly mention four areas of battle upon the church even as I write these lines. Probably the most threatening is modernism, liberalism, humanism, atheism. There is a militant denial of God, the Bible as His Word, the Deity of Christ, the need of His faith at all, the miracles of the Bible, the very

integrity and authority of the Scriptures. Problems facing the church in days gone by have caused great division in the church, but these doctrines are designed to totally and completely destroy and remove the church from the world, terminating its existence. What is so astounding is that modernism is pouring into the ranks of the church through the schools and professors who have gained their academic standings in the study of modernism and at the feet of modernists, and have come to the campuses operated by brethren, coming with the air of superiority and scholarly sophistication that nobody knows anything but them, and injecting what they have learned into the minds of inexperienced youth, to the chagrin of unsuspecting parents once it is known, sowing their evil work for generations because among those they teach are young men who plan to preach. When will the Lord's people become aware of the change that has come over the schools and the damage so many in the Bible departments are doing to the church? There is not one, not to my knowledge, and I have investigated, where there cannot be found false teachers, sounds of compromise, uncertain sounds, and often overt liberalism, modernism and agnosticism. It is taking a deadly toll in the church.

Romanism

In America the Roman Catholic Church is making its play for renewed dominance and influence by means of compromising many of its "infallible" positions that the public does not admire. What Romanism has lost in Europe it intends to recapture in America. Through deception and duplicity, it may call for religious tolerance and liberty, but does not officially change its doctrines along those lines, nor repent of its past expressed intentions. Romanism is a chameleon, being whatever it has to be at the moment, to gain power. In this respect it is not unlike atheistic communism. These two anti-Christ systems drink from the same kind of approaches of force, fear, persecution, subtlety and ignorance, especially of the Bible. Many, in their desire to show how "loving" they are have shied away from any exposure of Romanism, being blinded by certain "good works" that they do, even wishing Catholic leaders well in their pursuits. We ought to be ashamed to have any hesitancy to oppose and expose one of the most anti-Biblical religious systems on earth.

Radicalism

The church must battle radicalism, human legalism, the attempt of some to declare themselves as God's special spokesmen by claiming special revelations to them from God. They, as all false teachers, take some portions of the body of truth, mingle it with their own doctrines and "revelations," and deceive many who are gullible, misinformed, naive, and Biblically untaught.

There are even those in the church who would go beyond what is written by assigning certain laws, rules, regulations for which there is no Biblical authority, dividing churches over issues of cooperation and the support of needy people. Making laws where God has not made them, whether legalistic or liberalistic, is wrong. Man does not have the right to make laws where God has not given them, nor does man have the right to presumptiously take it upon himself to act without Biblical authority in matters religious. Both are contrary to truth.

Christians must be "anti" everything unauthorized of God. But we must not stand opposed to what is acceptable and Biblically substantiated. As hideous and sinful as such is, liberalism is far worse of the two problems of legalism and liberalism, because liberalism removes all basis for determing truth and error.

Worldliness

A massive problem of the church in our time is the compromise and fellowship of the sins of the world by so many who profess to be Christians. Members of the church are found doing just about anything and everything, going along even without sound and solid Biblical rebuke and discipline. Dancing, drinking alcohol, adultery, gambling, lying, cheating, smoking, and such like are all found openly practiced by far too many members of the church for it to be accidental.

Let a sound preacher raise his voice and declare God's denunciation of such things and it will likely not be long before he is forced to move his place of residence because the members will not tolerate denunciation of what they like to do. Elderships often do not want the truth taught on worldliness and members raise trouble if it is done. More and more preachers, knowing who "butters their bread" (and they want their bread buttered) are showing their cowardice by omitting these subjects from their sermons and skirting the matters altogether. They love their hire and fear their "fire."

(continued on page 6)

False Doctrines Of Jehovah's Witnesses

"Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way." (Psalm 199:104). We must love what God loves and hate what God hates. While we love people who hold to error, we hate the error to which they hold. Such is applicable to the religious group known as Jehovah's Witnesses.

This religious group was founded by Charles Taze Russell and for a time was known as "Russellites." This man founded *Zion's Watchtower* in 1879. It is not unfair to say that he was a scoundrel and a fraud. He was taken into court many times because of his misdeeds, proven to be a liar, making false claims, guilty of forgery and fraudulent promotions. Jehovah's Witnesses do not like to refer to him because of the kind of man that he was. Although he was their founder, it is to their credit that they would rather disclaim him.

Russell was succeeded by one named "Judge" J. F. Rutherford, who was a tireless and brilliant man in many ways. He did serve a term in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary because of a violation of the Espionage Act in 1918. He has since died.

Since 1931

They adopted the name of "Jehovah's Witnesses" at Columbus, Ohio in 1931, leaving the name of Russell. The head of their body is the man who serves as the president of the *Watchtower*.

There is no question but the Jehovah's Witnesses are a very zealous, hard-working people in promoting their faith. They print literature in massive amounts. Their magazine is produced in 100 languages from their printing plant and school in Brooklyn, N. Y. They are very mission minded, preaching their message in at least 160 nations, going from house to house with their literature, constantly seeking converts. They have also gained notoriety through oppostion to the laws of the United States regarding service in the armed forces, refusing to salute the flag, etc. They have been the object of much persecution throughout the world by the Roman Catholic Church. Huge mass meetings at the New York Yankee stadium has brought

them much publicity.

The primary source of their beliefs are the writings of Russell in seven volumes called *Studies in the Scriptures.* The importance they place on these writings is seen in their own comments regarding them. "They are not mere comments on the Bible, but they are practically the Bible itself. Furthermore, not only do we find that people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself, but we see also, that if anyone lays the 'Scripture Studies' aside, even after he has used them, after he has become familier with them, after he has read them for ten years, if he then lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness. On the other hand, if he had merely read the 'Scripture Studies' with their references and had not read a page of the Bible as such, he would be in the light at the end of two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures." [*Watchtower,* September 15, 1910, p. 298).

From God or Man?

Is the religion of the Jehovah's Witnesses from God or from man? They claim they teach the Bible and claim to be Christians through their latter-day revelation. Since they make this claim, they are of concern to those who claim to teach the Bible and be Christians but differ with them. Their doctrines can be proven false by an examination of the Scriptures and comparing the Scriptures with their doctrines. If a doctrine is like the Bible, it is true. But when there is variance, that which is not of the Bible is false.

Wrong About Deity

They deny the Bible doctrine that Deity includes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They claim the doctrine of the "Trinity" originated with the devil. "There is one solitary being from all eternity, Jehovah God, the Creator and Preserver of the Universe and of all things visible and invisible." (Jehovah of the Watchtower, p. 30). They deny the eternal nature of Christ, contending that Christ is a created being. They deny He was God and man while on earth but only a "lesser god." They deny the personality of the Holy Spirit, claiming He is an "invisible active force of Almighty God."

But there is abundant evidence in Scriptures to support the teaching of three persons in the Godhead, all of the same substance, co-equal, co-existent, co-eternal, immutable forever. At the creation we read, *"Let us make man after our likeness."* (Genesis 1:1). The word translated as *"God"* is the Hebrew word *"elohim,"* which is a plural word, more than one.

There is nothing in the Bible that teaches Jesus was a "lesser god." There is one God, not greater and lesser gods. The Bible teaches monotheism, not polytheism. If Christ is any kind of god, He must be eternal and one with Deity in every respect. Jehovah's Witnesses ask, "Who ran the universe while Jesus was in the grave?" But Christians do not teach that the entire Godhead became flesh and was buried in the tomb. Only the one called the Son did that.

When Christ said, *"All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth,"* (Matthew 28:18), this showed equality with the Father. John 5:23 reads, *"That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him."* Jesus claimed to be one with the Father (John 17:22).

Wrong About Christ

A denial of the three persons in the Godhead denies the Deity of Christ. That fact is the cornerstone and basic fundamental truth of all of New Testament Christianity. In Hebrews 1:8, He is called God. Christ revealed God in human form. Philippians 2:5-11, *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

Hebrews 1:1-4, *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the*

worlds, who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself perged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

Colossians 2:9, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."* How could this be except His eternal nature? So would it be with Hebrews 13:8, *"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."*

Jesus prayed, *"And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."* (John 17:5). This demands an eternal nature, possessed only by Deity. John 1:13,14 expresses, *"and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."*

Wrong About The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not just a glorified "it". He is a person, not an abstract, invisible force and influence. John 14:26, 16:3, and many other passages use the personal pronoun in reference to Him. He possesses the characteristics of a person. He teaches, speaks, makes intercession, has a mind, etc.

When we are baptized, we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). All three are mentioned in Second Corinthians 13:14. Space prohibits continued citings of Scriptures that prove beyond any question that the Godhead (Deity) is composed of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Deny Bodily Resurrection

It is but a short step from denying the Deity of Christ to deny His bodily resurrection. "The man Christ Jesus was resurrected a divine spirit creature after offering the ransom for obedient man." (Jehovah of the Watchtower, p. 30). They claim He did not appear in the same body as before His crucifixion. He was resurrected only as a spirit. The writings of Russell teach that He was "dissolved in gases or is preserved somewhere as a memorial to God's love."

The Bible tells a different story. *"But Thomas, one of the*

twelve called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them, then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord, and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John 20:24-29). It would be difficult to persuade those disciples that Jesus arose from the tomb only a spirit being. No reasonable person would dare say the body of Jesus was not manifest at that time. Christ said specifically that He was not just spirit, but flesh. *"And as he thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them and saith unto them. Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and afrighted and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them. Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold, my hands and my feet, that it is I myself, handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish and of an honeycomb. And he took it and did eat before them."* (Luke 24:36-43).

Furthermore, there were many appearances of Jesus before people in addition to these (First Corinthians 15:3-8). To deny His bodily resurrection is to deny the truth.

Wrong About His Return

JW's teach that Christ returned to this earth in 1914, and is now here in spirit. We do not deny that Christ is here in spirit, inasmuch as He promised He would be (Matthew 28:20). But not in the sense that the JW's teach. Jesus Christ has returned to earth in A.D. 1914, they say, and has expelled Satan from Heaven and is proceeding to overthrow Satan's organization and will establish the Theocratic Millennial Kingdom and vindicate the name of Jehovah God. He did not return in a

physical form and is invisible as the Logos. Nobody saw Him come, but He came secretly and quietly, they teach. There is no explanation as to how they propose to prove this claim. Russell first claimed He came in 1874, but JW's are silent about that claim.

Again, Scripture tells a different story. His return will not be invisible and secret, but visible and audible (First Thessalonians 4:16,17). At His ascension it was promised, "*And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heave, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*" (Acts 1:9-11). Second Peter 3:10, "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*" To deny His physical coming and claim a secret invisible coming that is already past is to deny Scripture.

Wrong About Immortality

JW's deny the immoratality of the soul of man. They are rank materialists. Man, to them, is wholly mortal, like animals, and cease to exist once they die. "The soul of man is not eternal but mortal, and it can die. Animals likewise have souls, though man has the preeminence by special creation." (Jehovah of the Watchtower, p. 30).

But the Bible teaches man is a soul, a spirit, in the likeness of God. Consider the teaching of the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:17-31). Both men lived and both men died, but both men existed after death. Both were in a state of consciousness. The body that was buried was something different from that which went into the unseen world.

Ecclesiastes 12:7, "*And the dust returneth to the earth as it was and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it.*" Jesus taught, "*Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of*

damnation." (John 5:28,29). That is not the teaching that harmonizes with the cessation of man's existence at death.

When Jesus was confronted with those who denied life after death in much the same fashion as do the JW's, He said, "*Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."* (Matthew 22:29-32). These patriarchs had long ago physically died, but Jesus said they were living. Does this sound like the JW doctrine that the spirit of man dies and ceases to be?

Wrong About Punishment

One final observation. JW's deny a continous and eternal punishment for anybody. "Hell, meaning a place of 'fiery torment' where sinners remain after death until the resurrection, does not exist. This is a doctrine of 'Organized Religion,' not the Bible. Hell is the common grave of mankind, literally, *SHEOL* (Hebrew), 'a place of rest in hope' where the departed sleep until the resurrection by Jehovah God."

They also teach, "Eternal punishment is a punishment or penalty of which there is no end. It does not mean 'eternal torment' of living souls. Annihilation, the second death, is the lot of all those who reject Jehovah God, and it is eternal." (Both statements from Jehovah of the Watchtower, p. 30,31).

When you compare that doctrine with Second Thessalonians 1:7-9, you see how false the JW doctrine is. Matthew 25:46 refutes it altogether. Revelation 20:10 teaches contrary to it. Their doctrine is consoling, there being no punishment. The worst that could happen to us it that we cease to exist. But it is just not true.

There are other JW precepts that are false, but this has already been extended sufficiently to prove beyond doubt that Jehovah never taught what these who claim to be His witnesses teach. They are false teachers with false doctrines, producing a false religion, and deserving of exposure, opposition, rejection and refutation. They also deserve to hear the truth that they might believe the truth, obey it, and be saved.

† † † † †

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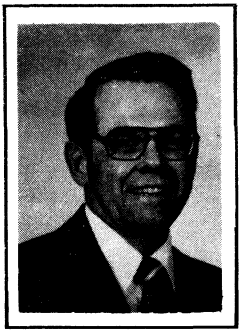

JAMES W. BOYD

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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Almost And Altogether

Acts 26:28, 29. "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*" There is a vast difference between "almost" and "altogether." For instance, I can recall many years ago when I was in high school when our little country school football team played against a team that was year after year a contender for the championship. To even score against that opponent would have been a major accomplishment for a team like our team. We played so hard and moved the ball within seven yards of the goal with four downs to get it across. When the fourth down had been run we were about as close as one could get but still not over the line. We "almost" made it, but not "altogether."

When living in South Bend, Indiana I recall a fire in the neighboring Chicago at a school building. One small boy was at a window on the second floor. His father was calling for him to jump and he would catch him and he would be saved. But the small boy was too frightened to move and was later identified among the dead, having been overcome with smoke. He was "almost" rescued, but not "altogether."

Across the road from where I was reared was a family of children whose father had drowned some years earlier. He was fishing and allowed his boat to drift too close to the perilous waters around a lock in the river. The boat overturned and he attempted to swim to the bank. He was reportedly within ten yards of the bank when his weary body cramped and he went under. He "almost" reached safety, but not "altogether." Surely, we can see the vast difference. As the song teaches, "Almost is but to fail, almost, but lost."

Then And Now

Some people of whom we read in the Bible were almost Christians. Some were altogether Christians. It is the same today. Felix said, "*Go thy way for this time, and when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.*" But that season never came and he was banished from his position. As far as we can know, he died out of Christ. Agrippa was the one who said, "*With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian.*" But he left the courtroom where he had heard Paul preach, just as lost as he was when he entered. In Athens, Paul

preached, "*Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, We will hear thee concerning this yet again.*" (Acts 17:32). But if Paul was successful in planting the cause of Christ in that city of self-sufficient sophisticates, as he had been successful elsewhere, we do not read of it.

In contrast, we read of the people on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian, Cornelius, Saul of Tarsus, Lydia, the jailor of Philippi, the Corinthians. They were not just "almost," but "altogether" converted to Christ.

What is it to be "almost" a Christian? It means that one is close to becoming a child of God, but is not yet born into His family. One may have the knowledge of what to do to be a Christian, but has not acted on that knowledge. We must know the truth to be freed by the truth (John 8:32). But one can know what is right and still not do what is right. "*To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" (James 4:17). On Pentecost, many others besides the 3,000 who obeyed heard the same message and the same instructions, but they did not obey as did the 3,000. Some today, possibly even some who read these words, may know what to do to be saved, but until it is done they remain nothing better than "almost" a Christian, but not "altogether." Recently a young man expressed to me, with tones of regret, that he knew as well as anyone what was required to be a Christian, but he was not yet willing to give up certain habits in his life that a Christian cannot practice. He is "almost," but not "altogether" saved. "*Many are called, but few are chosen.*" (Matthew 22:14).

To Desire Is Only Almost

Having a desire to become a Christian is just "almost," but not "altogether." Agrippa believed the preaching of Paul. Before the Jews became Christian on Pentecost they expressed their desire to be followers of Christ by their question, "*What must we do?*" They cared that much to want to be a Christian. The Ethiopian had the desire to be baptized before he was baptized. Many see the advantages of coming to Christ, but until they actually do that which is commanded, they are merely "almost," but not "altogether" saved.

Some, although they do not become Christians, will even make drastic changes in their way of living, and for the better. But just reforming our behavior is not sufficient. Reformation of

life must follow becoming a Christian. This change of lifestyle will result from a change of heart and relationship to God. Repentance is absolutely necessary in becoming a Christian. "*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*" (Luke 13:3). This is the change of mind or change of heart. Ephesians 4:22-24 shows the change of life that results. "*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*" Those who repent, but nothing more, can never become a true child of God. Those who genuinely repent will not continue to live in sin (Romans 6:1,2). But good moral living, as vital as it is to faithfulness in Christ, is not sufficient to make one a Christian. Nobody can ever be good enough to be counted among the saved on the basis of their goodness. Salvation includes doing the will of God (Matthew 7:21), but salvation is not by works of merit of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), nor works of our own righteousness, but by the mercy of God (Titus 3:3-5). We must be "good" as a Christian, but we can be "good" in many respects and remain separated from the only Savior there is. Certainly, being "good" makes for a better life, and is surely beneficial for those around you. But such is not God's plan for saving man. Many good moral people are not Christians. Cornelius (Acts 10) was a good moral man before he was even taught the way of salvation through Christ. But he was lost because he was not yet in Christ where all spiritual blessings are provided (Ephesians 1:3).

Stopping Short

Almost becoming a Christian is like making steps toward a door, putting your hand on the knob, turning the knob, flinging the door open, but never going through the doorway. The "almost saved" are just as lost as ever. "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus...*" (Romans 8:1). This is not true of those who remain out of Christ, even those "almost" in Christ.

Let me tell you of the way to be "altogether" a Christian, and it really does not take very long when we confine ourselves to the Scriptures. A person must hear the gospel because, "*Faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God.*" (Romans 10:17). Having heard, and this is the reason for preaching, one

must believe in Christ as the Son of God. "*Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*" (John 8:24). "*Without faith it is impossible to be pleasing unto him.*" (Hebrews 11:6). One must repent of sins, as already noted. The very first command the apostle Peter gave to those who had heard the word and indicated their faith by their question, was to "*repent...*" (Acts 2:38). Paul taught those in Athens, "*God commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*" (Acts 17:30). One is to confess his faith in Christ as the Son of God. "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" (Romans 10:9,10). One must be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). "*Repent and be baptized,*" was the divinely guided command by Peter in Acts 2:38. The reason was clearly expressed as being "*for the remission of sins.*" Jesus said, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*" (Mark 16:16). "*Baptism doth now also save us...*" (First Peter 3:21). This is the action man takes to reach the blood of Christ that was shed in His death (Romans 6:3,4). This is how one gets "*into Christ*" where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10).

Must Go The Distance

Not until we have completed the process that God has specified can we properly make the claim that we are saved. No man has the right to set aside any teaching of the Lord and still claim he has the blessing anyway. When we do as the Bible teaches we are "altogether" saved. Until we do that we are at best, only "almost." Jesus said, "*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46).

Once in Christ, we are to live in a manner befitting a Christian. It is one thing to BECOME a Christian, and a lifetime of service, work, and worship to BE a Christian.

Tragic things happen in this world. An automobile "almost" got across the railroad track, but not "altogether" and the occupants died. The child "almost" got out of the street before the car arrived, but not"altogether." The miners "almost" got out of the mine before it collapsed. The airplane "almost" made it to the runway but crashed a few hundred yards short.

When Russia crushed the freedom-hungry people of Hungary, many people fled their homeland into Austria. One

woman told the story how she, her husband, and their two children crossed a snowy field toward the border of deliverance. As they approached the last barbed-wire fence that was designed to prevent escape, her husband helped her and the children over it and into safety. As the husband started over a rifle shot rang through the night. The husband yelled to his family to run as fast as they could toward the border. More shots, and the husband fell. Wounded, he struggled and crawled, but not very far until he fell dead. The wife and children were "altogether" delivered. The husband was "almost." What a sad and tragic event!

A Tragic "Almost"

Jesus once told a man, "*One thing thou lackest.*" (Matthew 10:21). To another He said, "*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*" (Mark 12:34). It may be that way with you, dear reader. Please! Will you not make it "altogether," rather than just "almost?"

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The Love Of God

Occasionally we are blessed with special foods and "goodies" that are pleasing to our appetites, such as a Thanksgiving meal, or some special dinner where a veritable feast is laid before us. We thoroughly enjoy those delicious things. But after a season of that we get weary of it and long for the plain and simple foods of everyday that nourish and benefit our bodies. After a stay somewhere as "company" for a week or so, even like being away from home in a gospel meeting, how fine it is to get back to "home cooking." We also get hungry for certain themes of the Bible. They are not new and sensational. They are familiar to us and really quite "everyday" in many respects. But they nourish the soul and satisfy the longings in our hearts. One such Biblical theme is the love of God. So let us attune our thinking with Biblical thinking on this subject.

Two Directions

We first need to consider how the phrase, "the love of God," might have two meanings. It could refer to the love we have for God, or it might refer to the love God has for us. The phrase could point in opposite directions until you understand the context in which it is used.

"*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grevious.*" (First John 5:3). This refers to the love that man has for God and how love is demonstrated by obedience.

"*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.*" (First John 4:9). Here the phrase refers to the love God has for man and how He has demonstrated it by sending His Son, Jesus Christ. This same idea is embodied in Romans 8:38,39. "*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Man can quit loving God. But God, though He hates our sins, so long as we remain faithful in Christ, He shall never cease to love us. What a wonderful blessing and source of comfort! It is the love that God has for man that we shall emphasize in this lesson.

Divine Traits

We can develop a distorted idea about the love God has for us if we listen to the doctrines of men. We could get the idea that God is like some overindulgent grandparent, some all-powerful Santa Claus, that only gives and gives, never punishes, omits discipline, and really does not require much of us. We may get the idea that He loves us so much that nothing we can do will really displease Him. But what a mistaken concept of God and His love that would be! There are other aspects to the nature of God that must be respected as well as this kindly side to the love of God.

Yes, God is omnipotent, which means all-powerful. Man has discovered nuclear power, but God created it. Man studies the universe, but God spoke it into existence. The grandeur, power, and severity of God is evident in the world God made. We know this because the Scripture teaches us that the heavens

declare His glory and handiwork.

We know that God is omniscient, which means all-knowing. He knows even the thoughts and intents of the hearts of men.

We know God is omnipresent, which means ever-present, everywhere. There is no place to escape God's awareness (Psalm 139:7-12).

We must also respect the justice of God and His fairness in dealing with mankind. God is the judge of all through Christ (Acts 17:31). He does not look upon righteousness and unrighteousness just the same. That we shall be judged is inevitable (Second Corinthians 5:10), and following this assurance we are told of both the goodness and severity of God. God rewards, but God also punishes. The love of God would be superficial and hypocritical if God made no distinction between right and wrong in His dealings with mankind.

As we ponder the immeasurable love of God, let us not allow ourselves to think of His love in some distorted and unwarranted way.

Men have written many poems, songs, prose, trying to define their concept of the magnificence of love. Even human love is beyond adequate description. How far short we fall in trying to compare the love of God with anything that we can fairly compare. Recognizing my inability to picture such a trait in words that would do justice, let me only suggest that when you think of the very summitry of everything good and wonderful, you are approaching the thoughts of the love of God.

God's Love For Man

God has always loved man and manifested His love. God created the beautiful world in which man lives. Placing man in the Garden of Eden was a token of His love. Even when man disobeyed Him and God forced man from the garden lest man live in rebellion eternally, God gave hint of His plan to redeem man. "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" (Genesis 3:15).

This was what God said to Satan who had lied and deceived mankind to sin. The seed of woman was to provide the way for mankind to overcome the destruction Satan desires for him. That seed referred to Christ, born of the virgin, the seed of woman, not man and woman.

God loved Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, giving them great

blessings and promises. He has sent the rain, sunshine, seasons, life, the productivity of the soil, the minerals of the earth from which man has been able to accomplish so much for his welfare.

God has provided divine guidance and instruction regarding the way man should live, not only to be pleasing to God, but also to find the real happiness, blessedness, and contentment in life that God would have all to know. There is not anyone who has ever lived but he or she could sing, "*God is love.*"

So Great A Love

The greatest evidence of God's love is the gift of Jesus. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). This passage speaks of the love of God. No passage says that God is power, even though He is. No passage says that God is justice, even though He is just. But First John 4:8 says, "*God is love.*" Notice it does not say that love is God, as some have evidently determined. The way some speak of love, you would get the idea that nothing else really matters except love. They make His commandments optional. Morality is not too important. Nothing is significant to them if there is love, as they conceive of love. Of course, genuine and true love cannot exist without man's conformity to the will of God. But love is not God. God is love. This is a special and wonderful characteristic of God toward mankind.

The passage speaks of this marvelous exhibition of His love, the sacrifice of His Son for man's benefit. It speaks of that benefit which is salvation for man, the gift of eternal life.

Love Demonstrated

The love of God is manifested through Christ. Jesus, His Son, born in a manger, having no earthly home, living a perfect life, having given up the treasures of existence with God and equality with Him (Philippians 2:5-8), suffering all the deprivations, humiliations and injustices that people of His day (and our day, too) could heap against Him, Jesus is the way that God has shown His love. Even His death on the cross was a continued demonstration of the love of God toward man.

Jesus once said, "*Greater love hath no man that this; that he lay down his life for his friends.*" (John 15:13). But Jesus even went beyond that greatest love that man can show. He died

even for His enemies. Paul wrote, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5:6-8). In sin we are at enmity with God (James 4:4). Yet, even while we were enemies, the love of God was manifested toward us.

We know that it is man's prime purpose in life to do the will of God (Ecclesiastes 12:13). But cannot we also understand that the love that God has for man is for man's own good? The least that man could do is return that love with as much sincerity and fervor that he can. How grieved God must be when any person for whom He has shown such love defies Him and rebels against Him! The love of God mandates that we love Him in return. It is our ruin to fail to do so.

How To Love God

Man shows his love for God by doing the will of God. There is no such thing as loving God apart from obeying God. But do we really love God? Are we showing God we love Him the way He says we must show our love? Have we obeyed the gospel? This means believing that Jesus is the Son of God and putting our confidence and faith in Him, repenting of our sins, confessing our faith in Him, and being baptized for the remission of sins? Are we walking in the light as He is in the light? This is the way we return "the love of God."

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WITHOUT A DOUBT one of the comforting satisfactions in standing for the truth against those who either resist it, ignore it, or deny it, is the knowledge that you have done what is right when you stand. From both within and without the church there are those who are guided more by friendship and personal accomodation than by loyalty to the revealed Word. Many disappoint you by their compromises. But standing for the right is what God expects.

Launch Out Into The Deep

"And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake, but the fishermen were gone out of them and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into thedeep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing, nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had done this, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their nets brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken, and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him." (Luke 5:1-11).

This event in the life of Christ is familiar to Bible students. It shows the greatness of the Lord, His miraculous power, and that He was a master at teaching and illustrating His teaching. We shall primarily concern ourselves with one statement of Jesus, *"Launch out into the deep."* Of course, His instruction was that Peter take the boat into deeper water and there would be a great catch of fish. Such was the result. There are great meanings to us even in the Lord's use of this illustration and demonstration.

Two Extremes to Avoid

Many people are inclined to follow one of two extremes regarding religious activity. Some are often so careful and cautious, afraid of making a mistake, that they do nothing or almost nothing. They hold back from doing the good that they

can and should do. On the other hand, some are so reckless, careless, and ungoverned by the Word of God that they do almost anything, whether it is authorized of God or not. To them, being active is not just an essential part of serving God. It is just about the whole thing. God's people are not given to such extremes either way. They try to be careful but not careless. They want to do right and be right, and be busy in the Lord's business. Doing what is right, in the right way, for the right purpose is the mission of the child of God.

We need to be impressed that Christ expects His people to be doers, not just hearers (James 1:22; Matthew 7:21). These fishermen that Jesus approached were people of action. In fact, they had been working all night with little success. They were discouraged. But the Lord persuaded them to get involved in doing some more. They needed to "*launch out*" and be active once again.

We must remember that there is a difference between "busy-ness" and really doing the Lord's business. May we present at least three things we must keep in mind.

Awake Or Asleep

The Christian is alert. He is not dead, asleep, lazy, and indigent. He is attentive and keenly aware. Paul admonished the brethren at Ephesus, "*Awake thou that sleepest.*" (Ephesians 5:14). Nobody can do what God wants done if they are not alert and active.

What are some of the characteristics of a congregation that is awake? You will find most, if not all, of the members active in Bible study. Families include their children and bring, not just send, they children. They will be on time to worship, participate in the studies, singing ferently and with enthusiasm. Their contributions are sincerely given and possibly growing in amount week by week. There is good attendance on Sunday evening. They have a busy mission program, watchful for every opportunity to spread the Word of God by every means available and within their capacity to utilize. Each member is striving to be more and more like Jesus in every affair of life. When there is a congregation of people like that, you have an alert congregation.

As we keep busy, we must be progressive. Every organization either progresses or grows stale and stagnant, whether it is a business, a club, or a congregation. That which does not grow

becomes stymied in its strength. There is a vast difference between being progressive and digressive. We dare not confuse the two. We can "progress" beyond the doctrine of Christ and lose our souls (Second John 9-11). That is not real progression but digression. Seeking a new message, a new gospel, is not making progress. Leaving the "old paths" for new ground of the wisdom of men is digression, not progression. Some get carried away with something new and are not sufficiently concerned about whether it is authorized and true to God's will. Jesus said, "*If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples.*" (John 8:31). But to leave His word is to digress. Many digressive steps have been taken through the years under the guise of progressing. There has been an alteration of the message to accomodate for the innovation of methods. We are to "press on" and go forward, but we have to be sure we are going the right direction.

Fervent, Not Fearful

As we are active, we must also be militant and aggressive. It is our duty to press the attack against all evil and for all righteousness. We are soldiers of Christ, our captian. We are to put on the armor of spiritual warfare and fight the good fight of faith with fervor and determination. The adversary is the enemy; the battleground is the heart of man; the victory is man's conversion to and faithfulness in Christ. We are not to be fearful (Hebrews 13:6), but give the warfare our full and complete effort. We must be ready to go on the offensive as well as be set for the defense of the gospel. Alert, progressive, and aggressive are characteristics of those who follow Christ.

Christ told Peter to *"Launch out into the deep."* They had been in shallow water and there had been no catch. Many times we stay to close to shore to "catch" the souls that can be won for Christ. Every congregation had its beginning at some time. There were obstacles and problems in getting started. There was much work involved. Seed was sown. With great faith and hope and love, the congregation launched out on its mission of service to God and man. Sometimes it is more difficult to keep something going than it is to get something started. But once a work is started, opportunity and labor awaits those involved. The gospel is to be preached. The lost must hear and be persuaded to be saved. The saved must be grounded and strengthened and firmly rooted. All need to be taught and

instructed. The physical needs for which the church is obligated must be met. The sick and bereaved need comforting. The hungry need food. Those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness need to learn of the bread of life and the water of life, which is Christ. With millions of this world living and dying, lost and doomed, there is the work of taking Christ to the world. That is the work of the church. This is that which God demands and expects.

God is looking to each congregation, with its elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, and every member of the body to be *"fishers of men."* This can seldom, if ever, be accomplished by hovering in safety close to the shore.

Guarded Excitement

Launching out into the deep carries with it a spirit of adventure and challenge. Hearts pound with anticipation when the needy are relieved, souls are taught and brought to Christ, brethren are fortified and restored. Davy Crockett was a pioneer with a spirit of adventure, doing exciting things. The Christian life is an exciting life because of that which one does for Christ. Let us not be confused, however, to think that just because what we are doing is exciting that we are necessarily doing what the Lord wants done. I recall a teacher of young people telling the young that they ought to get as excited at church as they do at a ball game. He missed the point badly. Worship is not a time to arouse emotions and "turn people on" and provoke excitement. People can get excited and still be far amiss from doing what they ought for God. But when one is doing what God has taught to be done, this is an exciting adventure.

Pray tell me what should stir the heart of a child of God anymore than seeing a precious soul, that shall exist in all eternity, converted to Christ, renouncing sin and Satan, and giving himself to that which is holy and right? And what greater thrill is there than to have had a part in that person's salvation? Jesus sent forth the challenge, *"Come ye after me and I will make you fishers of men."* We need to launch out into this effort just as Peter did when he was told to take his boat into deeper water.

Peter was not told to be content to just push out a few feet. This he did to provide the Lord a pulpit from which to speak. But to catch fish, he had to launch out into the deep. This took some risk, some effort, and a lot of determination, plus

obedience.

Launch Out Or Dry Up

Many churches have launched out into the deep. But some become satisfied and content with past accomplishments and withdraw their nets. No congregation can rest on its laurels, dream of the past, reflect on the old battles won, gaze on the trophies of former victories, and keep growing and doing. We have opportunity today we did not have yesterday, and shall have opportunities tomorrow that we do not yet have today. We must lay hold on every one, and proceed with caution, through every open door.

To successfully accept the challenge to *"launch out into the deep"* we must have faith: faith in God, faith in our mission, faith in ourselves. We must stand as did Paul, *"ready to preach the gospel..."* We find no place for the foot dragger, those who want to hold back for fear, those who refuse to cooperate, those who wish to obstruct. Making sure first of all that we stand on the solid ground of revealed truth, we must get busier as we have opportunity. Working together, with God's help, there can be souls in heaven that otherwise would never be. The name of God can be glorified that otherwise would never have occurred.

But who will accept the challenge? Who will *"launch out"* in confidence and obedience to follow the instructions of the Lord? Will it be me, or your, or do we wait for another? Peter, though tired, was ready to do what Jesus said simply because Jesus said to do it. When we have that same submissive attitude, and the same respect for Christ, we will *"launch out into the deep"* in the search for the lost, knowing, talking, thinking, and doing the will of the Lord.

† † † † †

If You Wish To Continue...

...receiving ***A Burning Fire***, please notify me of your interest

by **February 23,1985**.

No Room In The Inn

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Ceasar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. [And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.] And all went to be taxed every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, [because he was of the house and lineage of David,] to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:1-7).

Even though the life of Christ that is recorded for us is relatively limited, there are many significant events recorded and some of the statements surrounding these events escape our attention. From them we can extract many helpful lessons for our present and eternal benefit. Such is the phrase, *"because there was no room for them in the inn."*

The event was the birth of Jesus the Christ. It was the highest kind of world-shaking event, even though the world knew it not at the time. The circumstances surrounding His birth were very humble indeed. Yet, the effect of it remains and ever shall remain.

"Christmas" Celebration

During what is called by many as the "Christmas Season" some people celebrate the birth of Christ. Those who are guided by the authority of God do not celebrate such a day as the birth of Christ because there is no authority to do so. We cannot just act without due regard for the teaching that we do what we do by His authority (Colossians 3:17). As historians and astronomers have determined, about the only thing that we can be certain as to the time of year of His birth is that December 25, was not it. So we do not wish to attach religious significance to what can otherwise be a very joyful social and family custom.

We also need to remove the accumulated fiction from around the record of his birth. Many fanciful stories have been told

connected with it that simply have no basis whatever in Scripture. The time of enrollment was a time of taxation. Every man was to go to the home of his ancestry to be taxed. Joseph, being of the house of David, went to Bethlehem, the city of David, taking Mary, his wife, with him. Mary was soon to give birth to the child that had been conceived in her by the miraculous power of God, she being a virgin and remaining a virgin until after His birth.

Accomodations were hard to come by. In fact, there were none available for Joseph and Mary when they arrived. They took shelter in a barn or a stable. In this environment, the child Jesus was born, and was laid in a manger, the feeding trough for animals. We cannot help but wonder if the innkeeper had only known that Mary carried within her the long looked-for Messiah, that he would have provided better facilities. But there simply was not any room anywhere for Jesus.

Still No Room

The sad truth of the matter, there was not only no room for Him at His birth, but so many, many times men have no room for Him in their lives even yet. The world really did not want Jesus, even though the world needed Jesus. Look at the conduct of Herod, King of Judea, who sought the life of the child once he learned of him. The way this special family escaped from his wickedness was through the warning to the wise men who had inquired of him to return home another way. (Matthew 2:13). Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fled into Egypt.

After Jesus began His personal ministry, His own people had no room for Him. *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."* (John 1:11). He grew up in Nazareth and was not received by the Nazarenes. When He came there to read the Scriptures and to teach, the teaching was so displeasing to them that their reaction was actually violent. *"And they all in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong, but He passing through the midst of them went his way."* (Luke 4:28-30). They had no room for Him.

Certainly the ruler of the Jews had no room for Christ. Even though they were the religious leaders, who should have understood the prophets concerning Him, they rejected Him.

Even though they taught that a Messiah was to come, they entertained preconceived notions regarding the Messiah and when He did come, they did not recognize Him. They fought against Him with all their power and influence. *"But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him."* (Luke 19:47).

Most of the Samaritans had no room for Him either. When He came into their borders, going from Galilee to Jerusalem to the feast of tabernacles, He passed through their villages and they even refused Him permission to stay overnight. The hatred the Jews and Samaritans had one for the other extended with emphasis against Jesus. *"And it came to pass when the time was come for him to be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. And sent messengers before his face, and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem."* (Luke 9:51-53).

From these and similar records, we see that Jesus was not wanted by the people of His time. There was no room for Him, from birth to death. He was constantly being rejected by most people.

Worse Than Unwanted

The world even treated Christ worse than they usually treated men they did not like or did not know. The world takes compassion on the refugee, the wanderer, the man who is "down on his luck." People offer a helping hand, organize to assist those upon whom misfortune falls. But it was not so for Christ. Although He was a wanderer without a home, having no possessions [*"Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay hid head,"* (Luke 9:58)], even though He was hated and despised, tortured and persecuted unjustly, [*"He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,"* (Isaiah 53:3)], men did not have compassion and pity toward Him. They had no room for Him.

Finally the world felt it had ridded itself of Him when He was killed on the cross of Calvary. But the story of Jesus does not end with His death. Nor did man's rejection of Him dispose of Him. But does the world even today have room for Him? We speak not of His person in the flesh, but for His gospel message of salvation, the blessings of God that are provided only through

Him. Does the world care for Him in life, word, deed, and attitude?

Where Is Room For Him?

Is there any room for Christ in the business world? Do those who operate the shops, stores, offices, markets, consider Him? How can they while shortchanging others, taking advantage, stealing, being dishonest and gaining unfair gain, cheating on the job? Someone has said that business is business and religion is something else. That is partly true, but not altogether. Christ and His ways belong in your manner of earning a living and conducting your business affairs. If that is not the case with us, then we are not faithful to Christ. Business and religion do mix and must mix as far as business activities being governed by principles of truth and honesty and concern for others.

Education?

Is there any room for Christ in the educational institutions? More and more the public educational systems of America have seen Christ and His Word driven out by the increased influence of those who hate God. Even the moral and ethical truths have been taken away. And schools are more and more becoming the breeding ground for humanism and every vile and evil practice. Teachers, textbooks, and curricula are designed to deny the teaching of Christ, ridiculing it, and filling the minds of youth with the Satanic influence of atheism, immorality, violence and sin. Whether by design or through negligence, the American public school system has become one of the worst enemies New Testament Christianity has in the entire nation. It is undoing the very things God wants done.

Society?

Is there room for Christ in society generally? Consider the gross immorality, drunkenness, lasciviousness, reveling, cursing, pride, envy, hate, murder, etc., ever on the increase year after year. That is contrary to the will of the Lord. He could not feel "at home" in the midst of such depravity. Society thinks so little of the Lord, and many who think of Him at all either hate Him or totally ignore Him.

Government?

Is there any room for Christ in the governing of this world among nations? Would there be the war, hatred, greed, scandal, dishonesty, lying, theft, etc. if Christ had a place in the hearts of the rulers of the world? Let some man have an attitude of respect for God assume a place of power and he is either soon corrupted or is banished from power. Political leaders seldom refer to the God of heaven and call upon Him for guidance. They ignore the principles in His Word. They themselves are participants in every vile and worldly activity, determined to satisfy their own greed and passion regardless of the welfare of the nations. The depth of political decay, regardless of how long the blighted history of it can be traced, is a cancer on the scene of the world. Integrity in government is so seldom found that most do not even expect it anymore. There is no room for the Lord in the international organizations because so many worship false gods and care not for the true and living God.

Homes?

But we must ask, does Jesus have any room in our homes? What of that home where worship never occurs, where prayers are never heard, where Scripture is disrecpected rather than taught? Is He in homes where there is a lack of love, kindness, and consideration one for the other? Is He in homes wrecked by divorce and unfaithfulness to duty and each other? Is He included in the family finances, time, activities? If someone came to your door and asked, "Does Christ live here?" how would you answer? He ought be the head of the home.

Churches?

As fantastic as it may sound, Christ does not even find room in many churches. He has to take a back seat and His will is set aside in favor of what the church members, or its clergy, or governing board, or creed book determines ought to be. When the truth of Christ is not respected and His authority is not supreme in a religious group, there is no way to conclude that Christ has room in that church. It is certainly not the church of Christ. It may even wear the name, "Church of Christ," but unless His will prevails, it is misnamed. Many are following what their disciplines teach, the catechisms, manuals, prayer books,

prominent clergy, or monied members might declare, but not the will of Christ.

The Heart?

But while it is evident that Christ has no room in so many places today, does He have room in your heart and life? Paul prayed, *"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God."* (Ephesians 3:17-19).

Those who have never become Christians have not made room for Him. Those who walk unfaithfully have no room for Him. So we plead, in the words of the hymn, "Have you any room for Jesus? Knocking at your heart is He! Hear Him, open, open, bid Him enter! He has much in store for thee."

† † † † †

Attendance At Worship

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together; whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good." (Psalm 122).

Most lessons are privileges and opportunities to present; some are not as enjoyable to deliver as others, but they are necessary just the same. I am convinced it is never right to deliberately make somebody mad. But sometimes you cannot help it. There are lessons where you have to run that risk. It is of some comfort to know that Christ often ran that risk and did sometimes make

some mad. Paul ran that risk and made some people mad. Preachers have a duty to preach plainly. If he is true to God, the truth, his brethren, and himself, he must speak plainly. It is not uncommon for some to call that "hard preaching." But why would anybody want a preacher that would not teach what needs to be taught? Those that are honest regarding their service to God want no other kind. If a preacher thought he saw the need for a lesson on a certain subject from God's Word and shied away from it, avoided it, just because he would run the risk of making somebody mad at him, he is not worth his salt.

Straight Talk

This lesson includes some straight talk. It may make some who read it very angry. But you can be assured that such is not the intent. It is presented to help. You might feel I am picking on somebody, but I am not picking on anybody specifically, but on everybody to whom these words will apply. I trust that you have enough justice and fairness to accept what I present in the same helpful spirit I shall try to present it. I trust you will reflect upon what is taught and search the Scriptures concerning it. The origin of the thoughts and the basis of the lesson is the Word of God that concerns a fundamental Christian and primary responsibility. The motive behind the presentation is the salvation of souls, mine and yours.

Some of us will likely go to hell unless we make some changes. No, this is not being guilty of judging you. It is being guilty of observing. It is being guilty of listening. The relationship of some of us to the church and to the worship of God is far from what the Bible requires. It would be a shame for anyone in the church to be lost, but it is a possibility. Since God's Word is true, some of us may hear the terrible words, "*Depart from me,*" unless we make some changes in our conduct and behavior regarding worship.

Few people who have lived on earth have as great an opportunity to know and do the will of God as those of us who live in this country (USA) right now. We have been abundantly blessed with every conceivable blessing and many luxuries in addition to that. There is no excuse, no justifiable reason, why any of us should be lost in that last day, except for the fact that we might not change what needs changing.

What About Duty?

Why may some of us be lost? What change must we make? Many give every appearance of trying to slip into heaven, sneak in, creep in, with a "get-by" attitude. There are duties enjoined on every that becomes a Christian. We must meet those duties if we expect to enter heaven. We must not think we can dismiss these duties and all be well with the soul. If we think so, we are in for a rude awakening and disappointment. We may be able to "get-by" in this life with half-way doing as we ought on our jobs, in our schoolwork, and other things. We may be content to judge ourselves by others and consider ourselves acceptable because we have determined we are at least "average." But do we actually think we can slip by the all-seeing eye of God? If so, how deceived we are!

Some evidently think they are going to heaven by trying to do as little for God as they think they can. While we know we cannot earn heaven and must rely on God's grace, let us not think this dismisses our duty to obey. Many lessons can be drawn from Matthew 25:41, but one of them is that we must not be content with doing as little as possible, but must strive to do as much as possible. "*And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.*" The sentiment is doing more than is expected. This attitude of doing just enough to "get by" is an attitude that will cause us to fall short. We sing "Have Thine Own Way, Lord" and "Take My Life And Let It Be Consecrated Lord To Thee," but how sincere are we? We sing "All To Jesus I Surrender," but when it comes to worship periods we frequently allow many things to interfere, or we attend only so much as will allow us to soothe our consciences. Do we really go that second mile? Many give the appearance that they have to be pushed the first mile. Some may go the first mile but not a step more.

Do I Have To?

For example, during the years I have been trying to preach so many have asked, "Do I have to attend church every Sunday?" Some have actually asked that, while others have asked it without verbalizing it. They ask it, and answer it, by their actions and example. We need to understand, first of all, that we do not just "attend church." We assemble to worship God. Does not that put the matter in a different light? Some are so lax that they do not attend even the worship service when the Lord's Supper is prepared, at least, not regularly. If something else comes

along that they see fit to do, the worship of God is neglected. If you have a problem with Hebrews 10:25, "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is...*" (and still is), your problem is not with any person, preacher, elder, or brother. You have a problem with inspired Scripture.

Some just dismiss God from their minds, if actions reveal anything, and do whatever they wish when they have company visiting. They show more respect for their visitors than for God. They will excuse themselves from their sacred duty if they want to work. Many work and miss services all day long on the Lord's Day, even when they do not have to work. Think what God must think about that! Why should God excuse that? Rather than letting work interfere with worship, have you ever considered letting worship interfere with work? Has not the Lord promised He will provide if we seek Him and His kingdom first? (Matthew 6:33).In over thirty years of preaching I have never known of a Christian who could not arrange things to attend at least one worship period on Lord's Day if he tried hard enough to do it. Many simply place their jobs before God. Do you have more respect for your company, your boss, your income, than God? Dislike me for saying it if you wish, but first things first is not something I invented or only applicable when convenient.

It has always been strange to me that some can so often "feel bad" on Sunday, get better Sunday afternoon, and go about Monday through Saturday doing whatever they want. I know that sickness is a problem at times. But possibly the sickness may be more spiritual than physical.

Even Sunday Might?

"Do I have to come Sunday night, too?" I have never heard those that show they love the Lord more than anything else ever ask that. That very attitude shows something is lacking. "What? Worship again? Twice in one day? Do I have to worship Him who blesses me? Do I have to worship the One who gave me body and soul? Do I have to praise the One who died for me? I already did that. Why do I have to honor my Judge, again?" No, we would not likely put it in those words out loud, but this is what we are asking.

Why is it so unreasonable to worship God for two periods on His day? But in most congregations, anywhere from one third to one half never attend more than one worship period a week. In some churches it is less that twenty-five per cent. When you take

the visitors out of the count, and children not old enough to have obeyed the gospel, you see that a large portion of most congregations fit the very matter of which I speak. You may be one of them. If you are, you are the very one that needs to take a closer look at your relationship with God. The Sunday and Wednesday evening assemblies probably reflect more properly the love for God in a congregation than Sunday morning.

Why do you not attend on mid-week periods? If I told you outright, you would probably get mad. So I will not tell you right now, but ask you. Is it because you already know enough to not study with brethren anymore? Is it because being a good influence and example is not expected of you? Is it because it is hard to get out at night? That may be, for a few. But often that same few can make it out at night to the grocery, a ball game, go visiting, eat supper at a restaurant, go shopping, work at night, or whatever suits. We go and do other things. Why is it too hard to worship God and study His Word?

Let me be very direct and suggest that some of us quit lying to ourselves and to God. The sooner we just admit we lack enough love for God that we ought to have, the sooner we may get busy and do something about our neglect. Absenteeism that could have been attendance is a vote to close the doors of the church and cancel the hours of worship. Is that what you want to contribute to the cause of Christ?

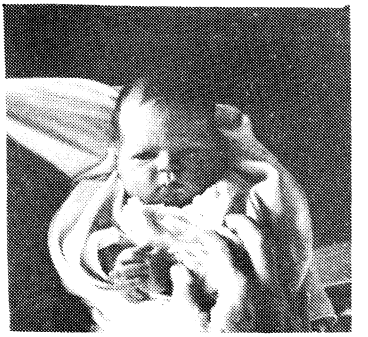
How many times do we place the blame of our irresponsibility on the weather, transportation, headache, etc., but in the worst weather we make it to the store. If lacking transportation we will call someone to assist us. Some find the weather too severe to attend worship on Sunday, but Monday can be worse and they will be at work on time. Does that not strike you are transparent? Let us do ourselves a favor and admit we do not love God.

Do You Mean Me?

Yes, I mean you, and me, and everyone else. Let us not be upset. But let us not go to hell, either. Why should we place our salvation in danger with this "do-as-little-as-I-can" attitude? The person not a Christian cannot make it like he is. Neither shall we make it if we, as Christians, are derelict to our sacred duties as diligently as we can be.

† † † † †

Rebecca Allison Boyd



was born in Nashville, Tennessee, December 22, 1984 to Stephen and Carol Boyd. Stephen is our son and his wife is the former Carol Corlew. Needless to announce, Allison is our granddaughter, and a precious little baby she is. This is our second grandchild, both little girls, and our thankfulness for them and their parents is beyond expression.

Seeing your family grow toward maturity, and the number of us being more and more, one cannot escaped being impressed with duty and optimism regarding the future. Our prayer for Allison, and all of our children, is that they always be faithful to God as they are this day.

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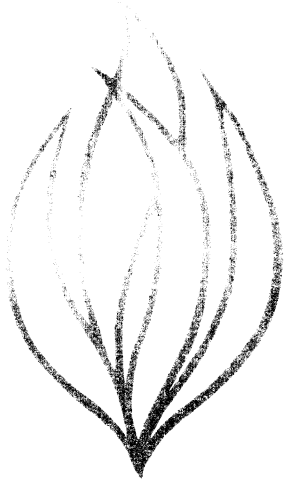

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IV James W. Boyd **NUMBER 7**

Eternal Principles In God's Dealing With Man

Our God is the same God all all the ages. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the One who created the world, who sustains the world, and who shall bring it to an end in His own good time.

Our God also created mankind and has dealt with man throughout all of man's existence. We read of God's dealings with man in the Bible, the inspired Word of God. We want to make very clear that this same God of heaven has dealt with man by the same principles in every age, although not according to the same specific laws.

There have been three dispensations, or systems, by which God has governed man since the creation. Each of these three systems or dispensations have certain peculiarities and distinctions that distinguishes it from the other two. There are certain similarities, even in various specifics. But generally speaking, the variances overshadow the specific similarities. But there have been certain overriding principles that have characterized each dispensation and all three dispensations.

The first dispensation is called the Patriarchal Dispensation, for want of a better term. This term does identify adequately that period and that system we have in mind. It was a system and an age when God spoke through the patriarchs, or heads, of families like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. There was no written law, but God conveyed His will to men through these heads. The fathers served as the priests between man and God. This system covered that indefinite number of years from the creation until God gave the Israelites a different and distinctive system through Moses.

Mosaical

This system is called the Mosaic Dispensation because God gave this law of governing to Moses on Sinai and through him to the singular nation of Israel. It was not a system for all mankind, but exclusively for Israel. There was a written law, and it governed Israel until the time of the system of Christ, approximately 1,500 years.

Christian

Since the cross of Christ, at which time the Mosaic system ceased to be operative for anyone, including the Jews, all men have lived subject to God through the doctrine of Christ. This system began on Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection and ascension and shall continue until time shall be no more and the earth no longer stands. This "Christian Age" corresponds to the "last days" of which we read so much in the New Testament. It is that time and system when God speaks to man through His Son, Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 1:1,2). It is that time and system when Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18).

To demonstrate that there were different laws distinctive to each system, let us be reminded that Cain and Abel were to offer animal sacrifices. This we do not do under Christ. Animal sacrifices also characterized the Mosaic system. God told Noah to build an ark, but nobody in the Mosaic or Christian age is commanded to do such a thing in order to escape God's wrath now. Israel was to observe the Passover feast each year, but neither Christians nor the pre-Mosaic patriarchs observed it. We all serve the same God, but depending on the age and system, there were certain specifics peculiar to each. Neither the patriarchs nor Moses had to observe the Lord's Supper, because this is distinctively Christian. The failure to recognize and distinguish between these systems, the failure to rightly divide the Word of God, the failure to note the different dispensations, has produced much misunderstanding and error in the religious world.

Common Principles

Nonetheless, there are certain principles that characterize God's dealings with man regardless of which age or system under consideration. For instance, there is God's grace. Yes, there was grace in former systems before Christ. We hasten to add that the manifestation of the grace of God under Christ far exceeds anything demonstrated prior to Christ. It is untrue to suggest that there is as much grace in the Old Testament as in the New Testament. *"For the law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."* (John 1:17). Obviously, there is a distinction to be made about God's grace in the Old and New Testaments. But God did deal with man through grace in former ages. We shall note this later.

God has also dealt with man according to faith. Faith is an eternal principle in the God-man relationship. Trust, confidence, and belief are evident in every age.

God's dealings with man has also included obedience, the doing of His will, carrying out God's commands and instructions. Every age has been noted by obedience.

Not "Alone"

Neither grace, nor faith, nor obedience have stood alone. One without the other has never availed anything of benefit for man standing alone. All three have been necessary and all three have been evident.

Under The Patriarchs

Consider the grace of God, faith, and obedience in the patriarchal age. Was it not a gracious and unmerited favor of God to even give mankind life? Was not placing mankind in the beautiful garden of Eden an unearned favor? Just here we must take note that in the midst of God's grace, God gave man and woman a law by which to live (Genesis 2:16,17). Grace included law. There was and is no conflict between God's grace and God's law.

Faith in God is evident with Adam and Eve when they feared and respected God. Eve even expressed her confidence in God in Genesis 3:2,3. It is true that Satan shook that confidence, but until Satan came on the scene, she believed and trusted God.

Obedience was required of Adam and Eve, but they failed, opening the floodgates of sin upon the world. Now all are tempted and all sin (Romans 3:23).

Noah lived under the patriarchal system. Genesis 6:8 reads, *"But Noah found favor in the eyes of Jehovah."* Others were wicked and deserved destruction, but God extended grace unto Noah. God was not forced to do this nor obligated to do it. It was an unearned favor from God. But merely offering salvation to Noah did not accomplish it without his faith and obedience. Genesis 6:22, *"This did Noah according to all that God commanded him."* His salvation was "*by faith.*" (Hebrews 11:7).

Abraham received grace from God. God extended great promises to this man, such as making him the father of a great nation, giving his descendants a land of their own, blessing those

that blessed him and cursing those that cursed him, making his descendants as numerous as the sands of the sea, and most of all, through his seed would all the families of the earth be blessed, and Paul identified that seed as Christ (Galatians 3:16).

The Scriptures teach that Abraham believed God and his *"faith wrought with his works,"* (James 2:22). Faith in God and obedience to God was the way that Abraham benefited from the grace of God extended him. Can there be any question that grace, faith, and obedience all existed under the Patriarchal system?

Under Moses

The same is true under the Mosaic system. Deliverance from Egyptian bondage was the result of an unmerited favor from God on Israel. He was not forced to grant them this deliverance. God graciously sent Moses to be the one through whom this deliverance would be accomplished. But Moses, and the Israelites, had to believe and obey God. If they had not crossed the Red Sea when commanded to do so, they would have perished. Grace, faith, and obedience were all present at that time.

And what shall we say of the healing of Naaman? Did Naaman deserve restoration of health, or was it all by the unearned blessing God gave him? (First Kings 5). But grace alone did not accomplish the return to health. It also required Naaman's faith and obedience. Not until he believed in the cure the prophet commanded, and did what the prophet said, was his flesh restored as that of a little child. Again, we see grace, faith, and obedience working side by side to the benefit of man and the glory of God.

Under Christ

Friend, these same principles are evident in the new covenant of Jesus Christ. Those of Pentecost had been those who called for the murder of the Son of God. They were rightfully accused of His death. If they had received what they deserved, they all would have perished. But God extended grace unto them. He offered them, through the preaching of forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ, salvation. They heard the Word, and coupled that hearing about God's gracious provisions by believing the message of the gospel and obeying the commands given. Grace,

plus faith, plus obedience, brought them to salvation.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was the same process. Paul said he was what he was *"by the grace of God."* (First Corinthians 15:10). He taught his brethren that they were saved *"by grace."* (Ephesians 2:8). But not by grace alone was he or any other ever saved. We have access into this grace *"by faith."* (Romans 5:2). And what kind of faith brought them into the grace of God? It was a faith that obeyed. Paul repeatedly spoke of the *"obedience of faith"* (Romans 1:5; 16:25). Paul obeyed what he was commanded to do. *"Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins calling on the name of the Lord."* Acts 22:16). Unless he had believed what he heard and obeyed what he was taught, the grace of God would not have saved him.

They Still Abide

So it is with us today. God does not ask the same specifics of you and me that He did of the Patriarchs and Jews. But He deals with us through grace, faith, and obedience.

By the grace of God, God sent His Son into this world to live perfectly, and die on the cross, to be raised from the dead to provide the plan of salvation by His blood. The grace of God offers the sin-cleansing blood of Christ. Man comes into contact with this saving blood by a faith that obeys God's commands that are found in the *"law of faith."* (Romans 3:27). That law calls for repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ.

The very fact that God has dealt with man through these same basic principles in every age is evidence that we serve the same God of Abraham, Moses, and the early church.

† † † † †

WITH THE ACQUISITION of a small computer, I now have a much better method of addressing the booklet. It should look better also. The marvels of a computer amaze me. I do not try to understand it; I just enjoy it tremendously. **JWB**

Condemned By The Wicked

On the surface the sermon title seems to express somewhat of a contradiction. It seems most inappropriate for those who are wicked to be condemning anything or anybody. Instead, they should be repenting of their sins rather than correcting or condemning someone else. The error of those who are sinful passing judgment on others is set forth quite clearly in Romans 2:1-3. *"Therefore thou are inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"* In this passage Paul had reference to the Jews who condemned the Gentiles but were guilty of the same transgressions themselves. The principle is very applicable to all.

Begin At Self

Christ encourages us to get ourselves right first before we try to help others overcome their faults. *"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again. Any why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then thou shall see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."* (Matthew 7:1-5). Christ is not demanding absolute perfection from anyone before he can assist in correcting another. Some have taken His words to mean that. If that were true, then all of the Lord's teaching of correction would be meaningless because absolute perfection is not attainable in this life. The emphasis is upon self-examination and consideration of our own sins as well as the sins of others. We are to remove our own faults as well as be helpful to others. We also must remember, wherever we study Matthew 7:1-5, that there is a difference between making judgments by our own standards and

respecting and abiding by the judgments of God's standards. The former is forbidden while the second is an obligation.

Even so, Christ warned against the possibility that those who were evil could and would justly condemn others for their sins and evil behavior. Luke 11:29-32, *"And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation, they seek a sign, and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them. For she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."*

Know The Context

Let us understand the background of these words of our Lord. The multitudes had gathered to hear Jesus preach. But He did not speak so as to tickle their ears with conscience soothing phrases. It was characteristic of the preaching of Jesus that His words were often condemning, convicting, and very much to the point. Many considered Him a "hard" preacher. He was not rude nor abusive, but He did not avoid arousing His hearers so they would come out of their sin. By this time, Jesus, His messengers, and their message, had been heard, but rejected by many, probably by most. He and His had been abused, scorned, ridiculed, mocked, criticized. But He warns His hearers of their eventual disaster and doom by comparing them unfavorably with some Old Testament characters and situations wherein there was wickedness and evil. In the comparison, His hearers did not look so good.

The Queen

He mentioned the queen of the south. This referred to the Queen of Sheba, of whom we read in First Kings, chapter ten, and her visit to Solomon. She was a worshipper of idols, one whose reputation is that of laxity in morals, certainly not an admirable person according to God's standards. She had heard of Solomon's wealth and wisdom. She came to see and hear for

herself. The evidence convinced her of his greatness. She said, *"The half was not told me."* Things were greater than she had even been led to imagine.

But should she be the judge of those who were listening to Jesus, she could justly condemn them because of their stubborness and unwillingness to accept the truth and the evidence that Christ was God's Son. The line of reasoning was, "If the queen of Sheba accepted the greatness of Solomon on the evidence presented, how much more should Jesus Christ have been accepted on the evidence presented." There was more reason to accept Christ than there was for the queen to be impressed with Solomon. With all the signs, wonders, miracles, fulfillment of prophecy and His words, they should not have rejected Him.

The Ninevites

Jesus mentions another, the Ninevites. Nineveh was one of the great Old Testament cities. It was a Gentile city, not populated by God's "*chosen people.*" The city would naturally be looked down upon by the Jews. Its population was one of idol worshippers. They were a sinful people. God sent Jonah to cry out against the wickedness of that city and foretell of its impending destruction because of its wickedness.

But though they were exceedingly wicked, they were not as bad as were the ones to whom Jesus was speaking. Should the Ninevites be the judges of the hearers of Jesus, the hearers would be condemned and justly so. A greater than Jonah was in their midst. There was a greater message. Jonah preached destruction but Christ preached the opportunity to repent and be saved. There was more reason to obey the preaching of Jesus than there had been for the Ninevites to repent at the preaching of Jonah. Yet, they repented while the hearers of Jesus would not.

Cities In Jesus' Day

Similar warnings are recorded in Matthew 11:20-24. *"Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I*

say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell. For if the mighty works, which had been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

Chorazin and Bethsaida were cities where Jesus had performed mighty works. He had fed the 5,000, healed many, and His fame was spread abroad. The people of these cities had every proof that Jesus was who He claimed to be, the Son of God. He contrasted His hearers with the cities of Tyre and Sidon, ancient Gentile cities which His hearers hated. Once these cities were very friendly with the Israelites, but later there was great animosity and unfriendliness between them. The people of Tyre and Sidon celebrated the captivity of Israel and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, the humiliation of God's people. This caused the Lord through Isaiah and Ezekiel to forecast their eventual doom and destruction.

Even so, as dreadfully wicked as those people had been and deserving of God's wrath, the hearers of Jesus in Chorazin and Bethsaida were more deserving of it because they rejected God's Savior of man.

What opportunities the city of Capernaum had! If there was anything that might be called the "headquarters" of Jesus during His personal ministry, Capernaum would come closer to qualifying than most any other place. He stayed there often. He healed one of palsy, healed the nobleman's son, taken money for tribute from the mouth of a fish there, had taught in the synagogue, and many other public and private acts. In contrast the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plains in Abraham's time, had been so wicked that God destroyed them from off the face of the earth to such an extent the exact location of those places has not yet been determined. Sodom was the home of Lot and his family. Sins are named after this city. In spite of the efforts of Abraham to mediate on their behalf, there was not found ten righteous souls in those areas that justified the salvation of them. They were destroyed with fire and brimstone.

Jesus was saying to the people something like this, "If people of Sodom and Gomorrah had the same chance you now have to do right, even as wicked as they were, they would have been spared destruction because they would have believed and changed." This is a very sharp indictment of His hearers. You

will have to search a long while to find anything as stern and condemning as this evaluation that Jesus made of those who were rejecting His words. Indeed, they could be condemned by the wicked.

What Of Us?

But, could those also condemn us? I speak not only of the queen of Sheba, the people of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Morrah, and Nineveh. Could even the hearers of Jesus in Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, also stand in judgment of us and condemn us?

As for those who reject the message of Christ, regardless of who they are, Jesus said, *"And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city."*

No people who have ever lived have had more favorable opportunities to serve God than we have. We have the ability to read, know, understand, and living in a land of freedom to practice our convictions without interference. We have such easy access to God's revelation, church buildings, teachers. Furthermore, we have the entire story of salvation before us that even those in earlier days did not have. We have the inspired record of the prophecies and their fulfillment. We have more light than did they. We have the full, complete, all-sufficient Word of God. We have many encouraging us to follow the way of truth.

Will it be, could it be, that those vile characters of old will be counted better than we because we have rejected the truth? Could they say to us, "We would have been Christians if we had opportunies like you presently have." Could they cry out, "Our hearts were black and hard, but not as much as yours. We would not have to have been begged and pushed and urged had we the chance you have. We were not acceptable before God, but you are even beneath us."

Heed God's Warning

Paul wrote, "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*" (Hebrews 2:3). The answer is, "We won't escape. We shall be forever lost." I say to you, from wherever or

whenever one leaves the walks of this life, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But these United States are a most fearful place from which to go and face the Judge of our souls. Where goes the opportunity goes the responsibility. The opportunity is real and cannot be denied. The responsibility to come to Christ is no less evident. To turn away is to seal our condemnation and to place ourselves in the unenviable position of even being condemned by the wicked.

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From Saul To Paul

When we refer to Saul, or Paul, we are referring in this lesson to the same person. The man was known by both names. In his early life, he was Saul of Tarsus, a tentmaker and a very zealous and devout Jew. Later in life he is known as Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ. Physically he was the same man, but spiritually and inwardly there was a difference.

Meet The Man

The first mention of this man is in Acts 7:57,58. *"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city and stoned him, and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."* This was at the time when Stephen was being stoned by those who hated him and the gospel he had preached to them. Saul was in agreement with what was taking place and watched over the garments of those who did the actual stoning of this Christian. *"And Saul was consenting unto his death."* (Acts 8:1).

It surely takes a man that is capable of cruelty, hate, violence and bitterness to be so void of compassion as to consent to such illegal and immoral conduct as was manifested that day toward a helpless and outnumbered servant of God. Yes, the first mention of Saul was a time when he was an enemy of God, even though he considered himself God's friend. He was a Satanic influence and power against the very cause for which the Son of God had given His all. *"As for Saul, he made havoc*

of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, commited them to prison." (Acts 8:3). *"My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among nime own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee...I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."* (Acts 26:4,5; 9-11). Paul admitted, *"I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious."* (First Timothy 1:13). *"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past on the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it, and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers."* (Galatians 1:13,14). Words almost fail to adequately describe the wickedness, viciousness, corruptness of a person like Saul of Tarsus regarding the faith of Christ. He also said of himself that he was the chiefest of sinners (First Timothy 1:15).

Meet A Changed Man

But the man Paul was very different. Listen to him in Acts 26:22,23. *"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to great and small, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."* This man Paul suffered much for the cause of Christ. *"Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? [I speak as a fool] I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep, in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by*

the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." (Second Corinthians 11:22-28).

Paul was almost alone in his final years. He wrote, *"This thou knowest that all that are in Asia turned away from me..."* (Second Timothy 1:15). But still he faced death with assurance and comfort. *"For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing."* (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

At the close of Paul's life, his attitude toward those who forsook him was much like that which Stephen had. Stephen prayed, *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."* (Acts 7:60). Paul wrote, *"May it not be laid to their account."* (First Timothy 4:16). His attitude toward the hardships he was called upon to suffer was, *"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:12). This man who had once consented unto the death of the saints with violence and hatred later was used by the Holy Spirit to pen some of the most brotherly and compassionate words to his brethren one can read. Once he cried for the superiority of the Jews. But later he wrote, *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:27-29). He wrote that God is no respector of persons (Romans 2:11). We cannot avoid being stricken with the immense change that took place in this man, once called Saul, and later Paul.

What Did It?

What caused that change? How did it come about? The Bible tells us. Saul was on his way to Damascus with the mission of expanding his persecution of Christians. Because of the length

of the passage, let me urge the reader to let Paul tell you in his own inspired words what happened, and then return to reading this sermon. Get your Bible and read Acts 22:6-16. This is one of three accounts of the conversion of Saul.

Now having read Paul's words, let us be aware that Saul had known about the Christ for a long time. He had been opposing Christians. Now he hears the voice of the Lord. It was the words from the Lord that convinced him that Jesus was who He claimed to be. On this road, further instructions were given to him to go into Damascus. There a man named Ananias told him what he was to do. He was to arise and be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). This penitent man, unable to eat and drink for three days, obeyed what he was commanded to do.

The Gospel Power

Let us hear Paul again tell us about the power that causes the kind of change that took place in his life. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."* (Romans 1:16). *"For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12). Just as a surgeon's knife separates diseased tissue from the good and healthy, so the word of God separates sin from the soul. What is that power? It is the gospel, the word of God. Jesus said, *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). He further said, *"Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17). It is the word of God that sets man free from his sins and grants him salvation. It is the word of God that causes one to cease the life of sin and become as God would have him to be.

The change from Saul to Paul, from persecutor to preacher, is but one example of conversion of which we read in Acts and other places. Consider Matthew, the tax-collector who became an inspired writer of Scripture. Or consider Peter who went from a fisherman to a fisher of men. What of the Jews that were so hate-ridden that they called for the death of the Son of God, but later came by the thousands to obey the gospel commands and be added to His church. All heard the word, believed the word, and obeyed the word.

When I was very young and attended college, I remember meeting an older student who once had been a part of Hitler's armed forces of Germany. After the war, he returned to his home in Frankfort with no job, no food, no family, nothing but the disgrace of defeat. He was found by Otis Gatewood, one of our brethren who had entered Germmany as a missionary. Brother Gatewood was the first American to enter the nation as a missionary after the war. He took this once proud German who was sick and in poverty, nurtured him physically and taught him spiritually and converted him to Christ. The man came to this country to learn how to preach the gospel, has since returned to Germany, and the last I ever heard of him, was preaching the gospel in Germany. What caused that change in that man? It was the word of God, taught and practiced.

Changes Are Still Being Made

The good news to you and me, indeed, to all mankind, is that the word of God still accomplishes the same beneficient things for anyone who will come to Christ according to its teaching. The *"word liveth and abideth forever,"* Peter said. (First Peter 1:25). It is still God's power unto salvation. It can change the present from what we are into what we ought to be. That being true, is it not strange how many will resist to the death the influence of the gospel in their lives? Some are satisfied to remain in their sins. Some are deceived into thinking that physical welfare means spiritual welfare and do not wish to consider Christ at all.

What spiritual change do you really need? Many have been touched by the influence of the gospel before you. Do you wish to be more faithful as a servant of the Lord? Are there unbecoming habits that you need to abandon? Would you have more love in your heart for others? Do you desire to be a better example of Christlikeness to those around you? Have you ever brought your life into harmony with God at all? How else can you lay hold on the promise of eternal life as long as you keep yourself separate from the only source of life, which is Jesus Christ?

Through The Sufficient Word

Friend, the way to accomplish what is needed is by and through the revealed Word of God. The same gospel that

changed Saul of Tarsus will change you, if only you will do as he did; namely, believe and obey. Think of what Saul was and what he became. Think of what you are and what God wants you to become. The Word of God is the anwser to your most urgent spiritual welfare. Believe in Christ as the Son of God, repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him, and obey His command to be baptized in water for the remission of sins. Then spend your life adding to your knowledge of the word, practicing what you learn in daily life. Let your prayer be as the song suggest: "Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee."

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TO THE READERS

Over the past few weeks we have been updating the mailing list for our booklet, ***A BURNING FIRE.*** You responded upon request to return the cards and notices that you desired to receive it as you have been doing. The response was very gratifying to me, especially to know that so many are benefiting from it, and passing it to others that they might profit to whatever degree they can from it.

Not only am I thankful for the splendid cooperation from those who have receiving the booklet, but many sent words of encouragement . This warmed my heart and spurs me forward. I do plan to produce this booklet as long as health, finances, and a reasonable degree of intellect abides with me. I am constantly producing more and more manuscripts from my outlines. Altogether, I should have enough material to carry me for another fifteen or more years. I will be as old as some of my friends by that time. So many have been so gracious in your comments and I want you to know I realize your exaggeration but appreciate it abundantly.

And "THANKS" to those who even sent contributions to assist in the costs of producing it. You are very thoughtful and considerate. I never want to cahrge for the booklet, and the way some of you have seen fit to help me, I feel sure I will be able to manage it in the future as I have in the past. "Nip and tuck" has been the procedure, and so far, it works.

May God's tenderest blessings continue with us all. **JWB**

CHURCH FINANCES

This subject may be considered among some of the more neglected subjects on which there is adequate teaching in the Scriptures. Many preachers fail to preach on it as often as it is needed because some impugn their motives everytime there is a sermon on giving. They accuse the preacher of seeking personal gain, interested only in money, etc. Since the financial affairs of the church are overseen and handled by others, there is no cause to assume such motives when this subject is discussed.

It is not a popular subject with many because they are covetous and stingy. They resist the truth because it cuts into their use of money for their own selfish aims and ambitions. But if one really wants to know how to please God in the matter of giving, then he will welcome every opportunity to give this subject a thorough study. Preaching on giving is not merely a "plea for money." It is an effort to influence the heart and provoke people to learn what God wants.

A Study In Sacrifice

Church finances are inseparable from the study of sacrifices. Christianity is built and maintained by sacrifices. God gave, Christ gave, we give. *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor. that ye through his poverty might be rich."* (Second Corinthians 8:9). *"If any man will come after be, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* (Luke 9:23). It is never asking "too much" to ask a Christian to sacrifice for the cause of Christ. So much of the finances of the church are provided from "leftovers." We ought not sacrifice our giving to the Lord so we can have other things. If anything, it must be the other way around.

Follow God's Way

Men have devised many ways to "raise money" for their religious activities. They conduct bazaars, suppers, raffles, shows, operate businesses and any number of other ways of gaining funds for "church" work. In such things, people become merely spenders, not givers. God's plan for finances of the

church is given in First Corinthians 16:2. *"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, that there be no gatherings when I come."* This tells when, who, how, and how much, along with Second Corinthians 9:6,7. *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver."* Did not Christ teach, *"It is more blessed to give than receive?"* (Acts 20:15).

We have had it asked of us, "How can you plan the expenditures for the church when you do not have any control over your members about giving?" Some have inquired, "Don't you have some system of assessment? Don't you send regular statements? Don't you have special fund-raising programs?" The answer to such questions reflects a lack of confidence in the Lord's plan. It is true that some may take advantage of the Lord's plan and not give as they ought. But God controls through the conversion of the heart, and not through statements, harassments, schemes, and such like.

We Give Regularly

We are to give upon the first day of the week. This is so logical, inasmuch as Christians meet for worship on that day to observe the Lord's Supper as well. Unlike the Lord's Supper, we are not prohibited from giving at other times because we have the teaching, *"Let us do good unto all men,"* which is prefaced by the phrase, *"as we have therefore opportunity."* (Galatians 6:10). But there is strength in regularity of giving just as there is strength in regularity of assembling and engaging in the other items of worship to God. There is actually nothing wrong with taking a contribution every time we meet, if it be necessary. It might leave the impression that money is the main thing. And if one had given as he should have given earlier he will not be giving later. But this falls under the heading of using good judgment and still giving opportunity to give as giving ought to be done. Contributions are often taken other than at the first day of the week assemblies when the need demands it. There is no wrong in that, but it is not always expedient.

All Are Involved

Who is to give? The Scripture says *"every one of you..."* Every Christian is expected to be involved in giving. Now this does not demand that each one must necessarily, actually, and literally place something in the collection basket as it is circulated among the worshippers. A man and hiw wife may both be giving even though only one of them writes the check and places it in the basket. But both are giving. Both are involved. Both should know and be included in determining the matter. We recognize that when a man pays the utility bill, the whole family is paying the utility bill. So it is when just one member of the family does the actual placing of the money into the collection.

When both a man and his wife are earning money, their entire income should be considered when determining their giving. It is not unknown that the income earned by many wives is totally ignored when it comes to the amount to be given.

One has asked, "What if you cannot give?" We have never known when such was the case. Consider the widow's mite of Luke 21. She never came to the place where she felt she could not give. It has been known of people borrowing to give. They borrow for just about anything else that they want.

The Sinner's Gift

Shall we accept gifts from non-Christians? I know of no specific teaching on that subject. One has suggested that we need to accept it and let the Lord get use of it for a while since the devil had used it long enough. We might needlessly offend someone if it was refused. Furthermore, is it not right to use whatever you have opportunity to use for the cause of Christ unless some divine law is violated? I know of no reason not to accept money from non-Christians if they want to give. We ought not solicit money from them because the Lord's plan calls for His people to finance His work through their giving. But money is just money and it will spend regardless of the person giving it. I would not doubt that money given by some members may be as "stained" as money received from some other source sometimes.

"How" And "How Much"

People often concern themselves with "how much to give." It has been my experience that if we would concentrate more on "how to give the "how much" will naturally follow and be as it

ought to be. Paul commended the brethren of Macedonia in their giving because they *"first gave their own selves to the Lord."* (Second Corinthians 8:5). When a person has given himself to God, he will not withhold his money from the financing of the work of the church. The Christian faith is a very personal matter and nobody can do your part in giving for you anymore than one can partake of the Lord's Supper for you. Giving is a personal matter. God does not leave it to others to determine "how much" anyone gives. Even God has not set any specified percentage, as was the case in the Old Testament. The Jews tithed, and some have calculated that throughout the year they gave as much as one third of their prosperity into the treasury of the Lord. We are to give liberally, cheerfully, bountifully, and through love. Giving is a test of love. It is a matter where each one much examine himself. It may be worthwhile in comparing what we give for the church with what we do in other activities. We may see why we have suggested that many times the church is financed with "left-overs."

Questions

Let us consider some of the questions raised about church finances, some of which involve human judgment. Who is to oversee the distribution of the funds of the church? The eldership has the oversight of the congregation (First Peter 5:2), and this includes the finances.

Shall We Pledge

Is it right to "pledge"? If we purpose in our giving as we are commanded to do, we are pledging. Now, whether we tell someone else, like the elders, what we have purposed or not is another matter. It is my judgment that giving should be kept private. There is a way of accomplishing the advantages and benefits of "pledging" without invading privacy if desired. It is an advantage to the eldership to have some real concept of how much to anticipate as they plan the expenditures. Pledging helps them along that line. But this can be done with anonymous revelation of intentions. This is what I recommend, if such an approach is to be used at all. Asking people to sit down and write out what they intend to do will usually provoke some serious study by some who otherwise would never do it. We make promises and pledges to others for everything we buy on

credit and sign our names. Surely, there ought not be any objection to revealing our intentions if we are not required to make known just who intends what. Purposing is a command whether you call it pledging or whatever.

Considering Some Expediences

Can a church have a treasurer? Some have considered the treasurer to be an addition to the "officers" of the church. But a treasurer is simply one who has the care of the funds. He is not like an elder or deacon. In fact, he may or may not be either one. But he is simply one who is assigned the work of caring for the money records just as another may be assigned to care for the baptismal garments. He does not oversee the distribution of those funds. The eldership does that. He merely keeps good records of what is done and does the necessary physical labor involved in attending to such things.

Budget

Should a church have a budget? It is a matter of judgment, and I certainly think good business practices apply in handling the funds of the church. A budget is nothing more than financial goals and plans. It is not set in concrete. Some brethren have turned down opportunities to help in worthy efforts because "it is not in the budget." The budget is not the law of the Medes and Persians. It can be changed if necessary. One congregation with which I labored changed its budget three times during the year because opportunities arose for which some accommodations were made. Budgets are good ways of planning a year's work, but they are not to be considered inflexible.

"Special"

Should there ever be "special" contributions? If everyone gave as they ought each week, would there ever be a need for it? Yes, even if everyone gave as they ought, there might arise needs that would justify a "special" contribution. Opportunities and emergencies arise that could not be anticipated. Sacrifice has not floor level in it. Whether to have a "special" contribution ought be over, above, and beyond the regular one or all you are doing is gathering what ought to have been given already. But some situations may call for greater sacrifice and a "special"

contribution may be permitted. *"As we have opportunity..."* seems to govern this.

Matter of Oversight

Should there be more than one treasury? Some places have treasuries in Bible classes. The eldership is to have the oversight of the affairs of the congregation and there ought not be situations where others are governing the distribution of contributions. If some wish to make up a fund in a class, let it be given into the regular treasury under the oversight of the eldership, and not have separate accounts under the oversight

Reports

Should there be a financial report to all members? This is nothing but good sense and good judgment. It is for the protection of those who handle the money for the church as well as a source of information and encouragement for the membership.

Is it anybody's business what I give? Yes, it is the Lord's business. We have an obligation to other brethren to carry our share of the load when we are in fellowship in such things. We may not have to report to other men what we do, but God knows. We have to live with ourselves and our own conscience as well.

A Matter Of The Heart

When we have the right attitude toward money, the church, other brethren, God's work, our personal stewardship, and respect for His Word, giving will not be near the problem that it has become to many. First, give yourself to God, then the rest will come.

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"The best way to break a bad habit is to drop it."

NOT WITH OBSERVATION

"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." (Luke 17:20). The Pharisees had demanded of Jesus when the kingdom of God should come. This is the answer Jesus gave. Just what is meant by what He said?

Already John the Baptist, Jesus, the twelve and the seventy had been preaching among the people that the kingdom was *"at hand"* (Mark 1:15). Jesus had said it would come in the lifetime of some of those to whom He spoke (Mark 9:1). Before these had been the prophets who foretold its coming (Isaiah 2:1,2; Micah 4:1,2; Daniel 2:14; 7:13,14; and other passages). The Pharisees were right in expecting the coming of the kingdom.

Do the words of Jesus indicate that there would be no way for men to know when the kingdom had come? Does He mean that there would be nothing observable that would designate its existence? Indeed not! Many signs had been related through the ages with specificity regarding events that would denote the coming of the kingdom, including the outpouring of power, specified as the coming of the Holy Spirit (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8). By seeing the occurence of the matters prophesied we can know exactly when the Lord's kingdom was established.

Linquistic scholars inform us that the terms translated *"not with observation"* have not only to do with that which can be seen by the eye, but related to some visible manifestation like the falling of stars or something similar. It is an astronomical expression. Such was not the nature of the kingdom or its coming.

Jesus proceeded to teach the spiritual nature of the kingdom by saying, *"The kingdom of God is within you."* (Verse 21).

Some have suggested the term *"observation"* might be a medical term being used by the physician (Luke) that conveys the idea of taking note of symptoms. This means the kingdom would be"observable" only as the manifestations of the righteous inward man might be seen in the lives of those that made up its citizenry.

God did not promise to set off an array of heavenly fireworks with the coming of the kingdom. Such would not announce its beginning. Its presence would be most noticeable, however, as people lived in the imitation of Christ and could be observed in their manner of life. **JWB**

THE BEATITUDES AND THE KINGDOM

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5,6,7), including the Beatitudes (5:12), must be understood in the context of its presentation. Matthew 4:23 speaks of Jesus going about "*preaching the gospel of the kingdom.*" At the conclusion of the sermon we have the specific designation that the sermon was "*his doctrine.*" The sermon is as a preamble to the new covenant or testament of Christ. The old was soon to be displaced by being fulfilled and the new would become effective. The entire sermon is prospective in nature, contemplating the new kingdom that would begin on Pentecost.

While there are unquestionably certain ethical values in the Beatitudes, each one is correctly recognized as a gospel principle; a preview of the kingdom that was soon to come.

The poor in spirit refers to what a man is; one who recognizes his dependence on God; destitute of pride and self-sufficiency.

Those that mourn do so because of their grief over sin; their own sin as well as that of others. In the kingdom would be comfort. The meek are not to be confused with being passive, timid or inferior. The basic element of meekness is inner-mastery, self-control, possession of one's faculties and temper. To inherit the earth is but a forecast of the spread of the gospel of the kingdom throughout the world.

The righteousness for which we are to hunger and thirst refers to the system, laws, commandments of God (Psalm 119:172; Romans 1:16, 17; 10:3). The satisfaction of that spiritual appetite will be in the kingdom.

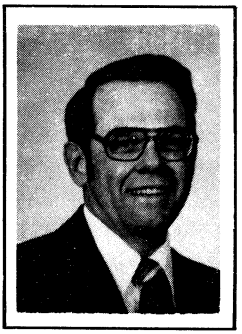
The merciful are the forgiving, even as God is merciful and forgiving. Pure in heart is purity of understanding. They shall see, rather than be double-minded (James 4:8).

The peacemakers are not merely those who settle disputes among men, but those who lead others to make peace with God by being reconciled through Christ.

The persecuted are those who encounter opposition, being buffeted by hostile forces for the kingdom's sake. Even in the midst of railings against them their reward is assured.

We will come to a more perfect knowledge of this matchless sermon when we view it in the light of the characteristics of the kingdom , which is the church. The Beatitudes are forecasts of the nature of the new kingdom of Christ and the quality of those who compose it. **JWB**

Did They Know Of The Soul?



JAMES W. BOYD

Matthew 16:26, "*For what is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*"

The New American Bible translates it, "What profit would a man show if he were to gain the whole world and destroy himself in the process?" Justification for this paraphrase is argued on the basis that the ancient Israelites did not know we have a soul. Is this accurate?

Moses spoke of man as a soul (Genesis 2:7). Solomon spoke of the "*spirit*" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Hebrews eleven implies the awareness of immorality of man was even understood by Abraham (verse 10). David knew of the continuation of a person's existence after this life (Second Samuel 12:23).

True enough, the Sadducees denied this element of the nature of man (Matthew 22:28; Acts 23:8). But they were reprimanded for their position (Matthew 22:29).

The ancient Hebrews knew of the nature of man that included the soul or spirit. But perverters seek excuses for making changes.

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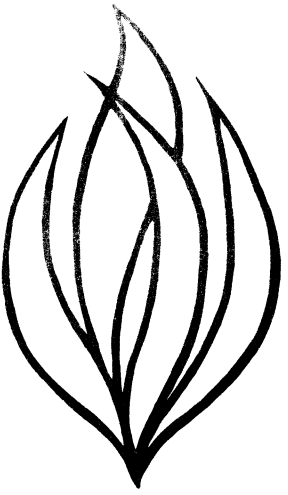

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IV James W. Boyd NUMBER 8

Sanctification

The word "sanctification" is a Biblical word that conveys to us a doctrine found in the Old and New Testament. Because it occupies a prominent place in the teaching of the Bible, we need to have a good understanding of it. While we shall not exhaust the subject in this one lesson, we do believe we can consider a sufficient amount so that we can have the proper understanding of the term as well as be able to see the falsity of much that is being taught about sanctification. Because of the error being taught, the term conjures confusion and there is much mysticism surrounding it.

In this lesson we want to present some illustrations of sanctification, note how sanctification takes place, and learn its true meaning.

What It Is Not

It is quite popular to consider sanctification as something very sensational that appeals to high emotions. It is widely held by some religious groups that sanctification means some kind of instantaneous and personal holiness that makes one sinlessly perfect. It is supposed to be some direct operational gift that comes from the Holy Spirit. It is even supposed to cause a person to lose the capacity to sin. He no longer has any desire to sin and is beyond the reach of temptation because he is now sanctified. This kind of doctrine regarding sanctification gives a person a great sense of security, removes all fear of the devil, and one enjoys a state of bliss that nothing can cause him to be lost ever again. It all comes about, according to this teaching, as a second measure of grace that is miraculously and mysteriously provided.

But the Bible does not show sanctification to include such things as mentioned above. Sanctification is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit, even though those who were baptized of the Holy Spirit were sanctified. It is true that they were sanctified in one sense by virtue of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but sanctification occurs without the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We shall have occasion to refer to this again.

There is only one record of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and that was on the first Pentecost after the resurrection and

ascension of Christ. I realize that many contend that the household of Cornelius was baptized of the Holy Spirit, and there is no question but there was a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon them, enabling them to speak in languages they had not learned, whereby it was proven to the visiting Jewish brethren that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. But we would contend that the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was only given to the apostles, only came upon the apostles, and only the apostles were endued with the power of inspired men in such fashion. Even those who believe the household of Cornelius was baptized of the Holy Spirit agree that the purpose for the operation of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost differed from that at Caesarea. But John, chapters 14, 15 , 16, explains the purposes for the coming of the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised, and that applied to the apostles. But this is another subject. Suffice it here to say that sanctification is not something necessarily attached to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There were people, places, and things of the Old Testament that were sanctified long before anyone was baptized of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere is there evidence that sanctification demands some miraculous, mysterious event.

False Doctrines

The false doctrines surrounding sanctification appeal to feelings. So many rely upon how they feel to determine whether they are saved or lost, right with God or not, right or wrong about a matter. But surely, informed people realize that feelings are not a source of reliable evidence. One feels good when he thinks all is well, but feeling good does not prove all is well.

Nor is there any evidence that being sanctified means that one no longer has the capacity to sin and is beyond temptation. If there is any emphasis in the New Testament to the Christian it is the emphasis of the danger of sinning and falling away. Every New Testament book contains that warning in some form or another. Sanctified people are not immune from the deceits and wiles of the devil.

What It Means

To "sanctify" something, or someone, simple means to set it apart. One is sanctified when he is set apart from the rest. It is the same idea as being made "holy." That which is holy is

sanctified, set apart. The person who becomes a Christian is a sanctified person because he has been set apart from his sins, set apart from the world, set apart into the right relationship with God by being washed clean of his sins by the blood of Jesus Christ when he obeyed the gospel. A saint is a person who is sanctified. For this reason, Paul called the Christians in Corinth *"saints."* (First Corinthians 1:2). To further understand this meaning of being "set apart" as the meaning of sanctification, let us look at some things said to be sanctified in the Old Testament.

God sanctified the seventh day. *"And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it."* (Genesis 2:3). That day was set apart from the other days, for special use and observance that became evident when God gave the Israelites the law of Moses on Sinai. (Exodus 8-11). There were other days that were sanctified under that old and former law, such as the various feast days: Passover, Pentecost, etc.

The firstborn of both man and beast was to be sanctified. *"And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast; it is mine."* (Exodus 13:1). Sanctification does not mean without sin. Animals have no sin. A newborn child has no sin. To be sanctified means "set apart" and in this case, set apart unto God.

Even a mountain was said to be sanctified. *"And Moses said unto the Lord, the people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it."* (Exodus 19:23). This was the mount where Moses was to meet God and receive the law. None were to go near it, man nor animal, lest they die. It was set apart from the rest.

The tabernacle and the priesthood were sanctified (Exodus 29:44). For this reason the temple as well was called a *"sanctuary."* It was a place of worship, where sacrifices were offered, where daily services were rendered, made holy by the special presence of the Lord, set apart for this sacred work. The building itself was a holy place. Those who served therein were also set apart with special duties and ceremonies for that work. They were sanctified.

Also, there were vessels, altars, and many other things that were said to be sanctified. Surely these inanimate objects were not in sin, were not subject to sin, were not tempted, were not relieved of any capacity to sin. Sanctification implies no such thing.

Jesus Was Sanctified

Even the sinless and perfect Jesus was said to be sanctified. John 10:36, *"...Father sanctified him and sent him into the world."* Jesus was subject to temptation (Matthew 4), yet He was sanctified. He never sinned but had the capacity to sin. Sanctification did not provide Him with that perfection. He was set apart for a certain work and purpose; providing salvation for all mankind.

The apostles were sanctified. Jesus prayed that the Father would sanctify them (John 17:17). They were set apart for the work that was peculiar to an apostle. They were baptized of the Holy Spirit which was part of their qualification and equipment for doing their apostolic work. They were left in charge of spreading the gospel to the world.

Every Christian is sanctified. There is no such thing as some Christians being sanctified and others not. Christians are to be different. They are a peculiar people (Titus 2:14). They are distinctive from the rest of the world. They are in the world but not of the world. They are the *"called out,"* set apart by having come to Christ.

Certainly the Corinthian letters, addressed to *"Saints,"* shows that being sanctified does not mean sinlessness, because the church at Corinth was beset with all manner of sins among them, even fornication, division, contentions, going to law against each other, carnality, misuse of the Lord's Supper, etc. John once wrote to Christians and said, *"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."* (First John 1:8). How presumptous one is when he declares himself to be sinlessly perfect and immune from temptation!

Again, Christ is said to be sanctified in First Peter 3:15. Now get

Again, Christ is said to be sanctified in First Peter 3:15. We are told to *"sanctify the Lord God in your hearts..."* We are to sanctify God. What does this mean? It means we set God apart in our love, loyalty, devotion, above all else. He assumes a place of special importance to us as we acknowledge Him.

By The Word

People are said to be sanctified by the Word of God. Jesus prayed to the Father regarding the apostles, *"Sanctify them by*

thy word." (John 17:17). Christians are sanctified by the sacrifice of Christ, the death of His body on the cross. *"By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* (Hebrews 10:10). We are sanctified by being washed clean of our sins. *"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."* (Ephesians 5:26). Our sanctification comes according to Romans 15:16, by the Holy Spirit. *"That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit."* Again, *"But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."* (Second Thessalonians 2:13).

As we hear, believe, and obey the truth of God's Word that has been provided through the Holy Spirit, we are washed clean by the blood of Christ from our sins and set apart into the service of God as His children. In this way we are sanctified people. We do not cease to be human. We do not become sinlessly perfect without even the capacity any longer to sin. We have not been the recipient of some miraculous operation upon us directly by the Holy Spirit. But as we follow His Word, we are sanctified

Because a Christian is sanctified, a saint, he ought to live in a manner consistent with his sanctified state; namely, *"Soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."* (Titus 2:12).

Sanctified And Saved

Those who are the sanctified are those who are the saved in Christ. They are the Christians. We do not wish to fall victim to false doctrines that would make us think we are something we are not. Nor do we wish to be led astray into thinking a saint is some peculiar person of the long ago that has been elevated to "sainthood" by Romanism. People are sometimes heard to say, in excusing their faults, "Well, after all, I'm no saint." Well, we had better be, if we want to go to heaven. We do not have to be perfect to go to heaven. We strive toward perfection, but we must rely on the saving and cleansing blood of Christ to remove our sins in order to enter heaven.

Friend, is your life "set apart" into the service of God? Are you a Christian? Have you been washed in the blood of the

lamb? Are you a saint? Let the Word of God persuade you to become one.

† † † † †

Friends With God's Enemies

We read in First Corinthians 15:33, *"Evil companions corrupt good morals."* This was written by the apostle Paul as he was directed by the Holy Spirit to Christians. They are words that govern the day-to-day manner of life of the Christian with respect to those with whom we associate and those whom we choose to be our friends.

The Lord associated with wicked people while He was here on the earth. He ate with publicans and sinners. He allowed a woman of ill-repute and an evil reputation to wash His feet with tears and dry them with the hair of her head. He discussed the great subject of the water of life with a Samaritan woman who had obviously led a rather loose life. He forgave the woman that was taken in adultery.

His Association With Sinners

Our Lord never associated with the evil people around Him for the purpose of partaking of their evil, but only to use the opportunity He had to condemn their sins, teach them a better way, and encourage them to live more righteously than before. Never did He leave the impression that He condoned sin, but was always seeking to bring people out of sin. He said, *"They that be whole need not a physician but they that are sick."* He was often among the *"sick."* He came to seek and save the lost, so He was often found among the lost. He came to the world to save sinners, so it is not surprising that there were times and conditions when He associated with sinners. Even so, we are to follow His example, but at the same time be mindful of Paul's warning, *"Evil companions corrupt good morals."*

The passage is a warning. We are urged to be cautious in the

choosing of our friends. Everyone has a certain amount of influence. That influence can be good or bad. A Christian can influence others for good, but he can also be influenced by evil. Bad company can ruin more than just one's reputation. It can be the opening for the ruin of one's character. Choosing the wrong kind of friends and associates can produce the wrong kind of life, lead us into temptation and sin, and draw one away from God.

It is not uncommon for one who has become a Christian to not only change many of the habits and activities of his life, but also his circle of friends and associations. He has to leave those with whom he formerly associated and make friends of God's children who share the same goals, the same faith, the same purposes in life. Former friends, continuing to live in sin, can only become a hindrance and drag against him as he strives to be faithful to Christ.

"But I associate with former friends, people out of the Lord, in order to convert them to Christ," some might say. That is certainly a noble purpose and a righteous goal. Indeed, it is a part of the Christian's duty to try to win others to the Lord. But still we must be careful, lest we be converted back to the ways of evil rather than converting them to Christ. We must always be very careful and very sure which way the influence is flowing.

A Different People

People of God have always been a distinct, set-apart, exclusive, peculiar people. This was true in the Old Testament as well as the New. God has shown His displeasure with His own people when His people aligned themselves with those who did not belong to Him. Nine hundred years before Christ, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was invited by Ahab, wicked king of Northern Israel, to go and fight against Syria. Ahab, the worshipper of idols and one who led various efforts against God's prophets, wanted Jehoshaphat for his ally. Jehoshaphat foolishly agreed.

Before the battle with Syria, Jehoshaphat asked that a prophet be consulted. Ahab balked at that, calling only for his false prophets that always said what they knew would please him. But Jehoshaphat wanted a true prophet of God. Reluctantly, Ahab consented and sent for Micaiah, whom Ahab hated, because he did not say things simply to please Ahab. Jehoshaphat should have realized what kind of company he was

keeping and had nothing to do with this anti-Jehovah person.

When they went into battle, Ahab disguised himself so he would not be identified as the king. This caused the Syrians to attack Jehoshaphat, who barely escaped with his life. The armies of Ahab and Jehoshaphat were soundly defeated, Ahab killed, and Jehoshaphat returned home humiliated. He was met by the prophet Jehu who told him, *"Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."* (Second Chronicles 19:2).

A Cause Of Downfall

It was association with the heathen nations around them that contributed substantially to the downfall of both Israel and Judah. In spite of the Lord's repeated warnings that they not inter-marry with them, and not make treaties with them, they became more and more entwined with them until their unfaithfulness to God caused their destruction and captivity.

Living in the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah brought great heaviness upon Lot and his family, and also Abraham. Abraham got into serious trouble when he went to Egypt without the Lord's direction and lied about his wife, Sarah, claiming she was only his sister, in order to escape what he thought would be his death if others wanted Sarah.

Solomon married foreign wives from idolatrous nations. *"But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharoah, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites, of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clave to these in love...And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father."* (First Kings 11:1-6). It has ever been true that marriages with those who do not belong to God have been a source of weakness and detrimental influence to those who do belong to God. But it is so hard to get people to admit this and realize it until it is too late.

The New Testament bears out the same teaching with the same conclusions regarding Christians and their choice of associates. *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what*

part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (Second Corinthians 6:14-18). While the passage does not forbid all association with the world, for then we must needs go out of the world, it does forbid entrance into any tie, relationship, or association that would cause the Christian to be unfaithful to the Lord whether it be social, recreational, occupational, marital, or whatever. *"Come ye out from among them, saith the Lord."* The Lord has said it. Too many in the church want to be in the church for the spiritual blessings but are unwilling to leave out the world, sinful activities and associations. They become a reproach against the holy and worthy name of Christ. Historically, this has been one of the ways the devil has sapped the church of its effectiveness and spiritual vitality and influence for good.

A Restricted Fellowship

Christians are not to have religious fellowship with all people. *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is a partaker of his evil deeds."* (Second John 9-11). Gospel preachers are not members of ministerial associations that include all kind of denominational pastors and clergymen, false teachers of false religions. Such people do not teach the whole counsel of God but are wedded to their creeds and denominations. The Lord's church is not a part of such things as the National Council of Churches. In addition to being an unscriptural body, that council is a promoter of modernism and error. One must sacrifice the Biblical truths and ignore the doctrine of Christ to fellowship false teachers and false doctrine.

Faithful brethren and faithful churches do not join with sectarians of the denominational world to celebrate such days as Easter, Christmas, etc.

I was once asked to preach on salvation at a rescue mission but was told not to mention baptism. Furthermore, the service was to include instrumental music and testimonials about the direct operation of the Holy Spirit by some of those present. I had to refuse rather than agree to compromise the truth and sacrifice it in order to preach there as was requested.

When living in South Bend, Indiana, I was invited to conduct the daily program of the local council of churches for one week. I accepted on the condition that I could state I was not a part of that council and tell why. It was agreed and I did what I said I was going to do. Needless to say, I was not asked for another time.

Preach, But Not Compromise

Gospel preachers will preach anywhere and anytime, conduct services as they ought to be done anywhere so long as truth can be taught, nothing must be compromised, and no impression left that appears to condone error. But if one cannot preach the truth or oppose the error that needs to be exposed and opposed, he would do better to shake the dust and go elsewhere.

So important is the right choice of associates, Christians cannot even fellowship unfaithful brethren. *"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators, yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat."* (First Corinthians 5:9-11). Why this instruction? *"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened."* (First Corinthians 5:6,7). The influence of the unfaithful brother is harmful to the church. There is to be no agreement between those who walk contrary to the truth and the faithful in Christ. A man, woman, boy, girl or church is known by the company it keeps and condones, and what they appear to approve by the behavior it endorses. Even though the need to abstain from the appearance of evil does not fit into the plans of some who are members of the church, and even though the distinctiveness required of a Christian regarding his

manner of life is not what some want, sinful conduct in the church destroys the church. The church is often slandered, criticized, charged with narrow-mindedness and self-righteousness when it is determined to uphold God's truth. It is better to win the ill-favor of evil men than to offend Almighty God and "go along" anyway. James said, *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."* (James 4:4).

Who Are Enemies?

Are such people as we have mentioned really God's enemies? It is not for me and you to judge. But it is up to me and you to accept the judgments of God, recognize what He has declared, and live by His standards. We are expected to discern between good and evil, and keep apart from that which has the appearance of evil. We are to abhor evil. (First Thessalonians 5:22; Romans 12:9). Proof of friendship with the Lord is the doing of His will. *"Ye are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you."* (John 15:14). Proof of love is obedience to His commands. *"For this is the love of God; that we keep His commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."* (First John 5:4). Those that shall inherit the eternal kingdom of God in heaven will be those who not only say, but also do, the will of the Lord (Matthew 7:21). Since this is the teaching of the Lord, we shall not be ashamed of it, nor give place to anyone or anything else if we be faithful to Him. We must be like Joshua who said, *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* (Joshua 24:15).

Christians live in a world that is mostly controlled by servants of the devil. Evil, degeneracy, perversion abounds all around us. Because of this situation, the inspired apostle warns, *"Evil companions corrupt good morals."* While we busy ourselves in seeking the lost souls for the salvation Christ offers, we dare not for a moment forget that there is a difference between the Christian and a non-Christian, nor involve ourselves in any associations, relationships, companionships, activities that lead us away from the Lord and cause us to compromise the faith.

For our own protection and preservation in Christ, for our own spiritual welfare, God, through Paul, warns us about the ties with others that we make.

† † † † †

The Fall of Jericho

The time of the events under discussion was about forty years after the people of Israel had been delivered from Egyptian bondage. They had been given the law on Mt. Sinai after crossing the Red Sea, and had wandered in the wilderness for these four decades. Now they had experienced the change in leadership from Moses to Joshua, and at his direction crossed the Jordan River on dry land much the same as they did the Red Sea. They now approach their first major obstacle in taking the land of Canaan; namely, the armed, walled, and well fortified city of Jericho.

All Canaan knew the Israelites were coming, *"And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was their spirit in them anymore, because of the children of Israel."* (Joshua 5:1).

Jericho closed its gates and prepared for the seige. *"Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in."* (Joshua 6:1).

Please Read The Text

At this point, let us persuade the reader to take his Bible and read the lengthy passage of 'Joshua 6:1-20, which presents to us the complete account of the fall of Jericho. Space prohibits its inclusion here, but to gain the most from the lesson, please read the Scriptures.

The plan for taking Jericho was certainly unorthodox and unusual as far as military conquests were concerned. No man would have devised such a plan because it would have seemed unreasonable, lacking appeal, illogical, and humilitating to think that anything of this nature would accomplish the desired result. It defied all human reasoning and experience.

The plan obviously came from God and was delivered to Joshua who instructed the people. It was simple even though different. The people were to march around the walls of Jericho one time each day for six days and seven times more on the

seventh day, blow their trumpets, and shout. There is nothing complicated or difficult about this procedure, an unheard of and an unlikely military effort.

No Questions Asked

Joshua and Israel are to be commended for not questioning the wisdom of God nor His plan. No one said, "I don't see how that will do any good." Nobody cried, "What will the people of Canaan think of us when they see us doing this thing?" N obody questioned, "How can marching, blowing and shouting get these great walls down?" They simply accepted God's plan because they believed God. When people believe God, they will accept what God directs. The fact that they question God, as if God's way will not work, shows that they place too much importance on their own thinking and really do not have confidence in God.

Many today would have questioned God and rejected His plan altogether. They never would have obeyed it. It was not glamourous enough. It did not appeal to vanity enough. It did not fit man's intellectual understanding. They would laugh it away and make mockery of it. For these and similar reasons, many today reject God's simple plan for saving man. They just don't see how doing what God says will do any good. They are not satisfied with God's plan and prefer their own. They really just do not have the faith in God that they must have to be saved.

Especially do people reject water baptism like this. Recently on television, in one of the popular programs, *The Waltons,* the father of the clan said, "I don't see how getting yourself all wet is going to do anything for my soul." His trouble, and that in real life as well is the presumption of questioning God's wisdom and plans.

Attempts To "Improve"

God's ways have often proved peculiar and strange, even useless, to some. Men are ever trying to "improve" on God's ways. This is at the base of the existing denominational system. We are taught that His ways are above ours and His wisdom is not limited to our finite wisdom. Man never shows himself more foolish than when he clashes with God and pits his own wisdom against God's. It takes greater faith to do what God says

simply because God said it than it does to do what God says when you think you see some good reason for it. We do not have to agree with "why" God directs anything. But we have to agree to do whatever He teaches us.

The story is told of two sons who were instructed by their father to go to the fields and plant one field with wheat, another with oats, and the third with corn. They went, and when they came to the first field, they agreed it was a good field for wheat and so sowed it. The next field they also considered good for oats and planted oats. But the third field was not good for corn, according to their thinking, so they sowed something other than corn. Now, how many times did they obey the father? The answer is none. Each time they did their own will, not the father's. And when the father's will differed from their own, they went their own way. So it is with many today. Even what they appear to be doing in obedience to God is really being done because they happen to think God was right about it that time. When they don't approve, they forsake His way.

But Joshua and Israel had faith in God, did not doubt, did not question, but obeyed precisely what God told them to do. This was a manifestation of genuine confidence in God.

By Faith

Hebrews 10:30 reads, *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days."* The walls fell *"by faith."* Faith was the power that made the walls fall. Whose faith? Man's faith, Israel's faith, Joshua's faith. Faith in whom? Faith in God and His Word and promises He had given them. What kind of faith? There are different kinds of faith. We read of weak faith, strong faith, dead faith, little faith. But the faith that caused the walls of Jericho to fall was an obedient faith, a faith that works, that is active, submissive, unreserved, unquestioning, one that is made perfect or complete by obedience.

Notice the marching, blowing, and shouting were acts of obedience. Their obedience was faith at work; faith being manifested.

Let us cover the ground again. Did the walls fall by faith? Yes. Was it faith without works? No. Was it faith only? No. What if they had not done what God instructed? Would the walls have fallen? Certainly not. When did the faith cause the walls to fall? When the people did what God told them to do, *"after they were compassed about seven days."*

Paul teaches we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1). No Bible believer doubts this. Salvation by faith is a paramount and cardinal point in the doctrine of Christ. But are we saved by faith without works? No, not without works of obedience. When are we saved by faith? When faith leads us to obey the commands given that pertain to salvation. What are these commands? Believe (John 8:24); repent (Luke 13:13); confess our faith that Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10); be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).

A Gift From God

Notice again that Scripture says that God gave Jericho to Israel. (Joshua 6:2,16). *"Shout, for the Lord hath given you the city."* They did not earn it apart from God. Their works alone were useless. Marching, blowing, shouting, even the mightiest military array would have failed except God had said that was what they were to do. But when God told them what was to be done, even these otherwise illogical acts took on tremendous importance.

Jericho was a gift from God. But when did God give them the city? He gave it to them in promise and on condition. But the actual gift was not their's until they had obeyed. By the grace of God, He gave them the city when their faith lead them to obey His commands.

In the same fashion and according to the same principle, God gives us our spiritual salvation by His grace when our faith leads us to obey what He has commanded. Not by works of merit, or works of the Mosaic Law, but by works of obedience we are saved (James 2:17).

Two False Doctrines

This record of the fall of Jericho refutes two very prominent false doctrines. The first false doctrine is the teaching of salvation by faith alone. Just believe and that is the whole thing according to some. Many will teach the need to be baptized, but not to be saved, but only to "join the church." This shows they neither understand the need of obedience nor the church. Some are baptized thinking they are already saved before obeying. Such teaching would be like the Lord telling Joshua that he already had the city even though they had not marched, etc. We can

easily see the necessity of the marching, blowing, and shouting, without which their faith would have been a dead faith and nothing of benefit would have been accomplished.

In like manner, baptism is necessary in order to receive the blessings of salvation. **In every instance in the Bible where baptism and salvation (or its equivalent) is mentioned together, baptism always, yes, *always*, comes before the blessing.** One may dismiss this, but only at their spiritual detriment.

The second false doctrine this record refutes also has to do with obedience. Salvation is a gift. Therefore, some say that being baptized is trying to work our way to heaven. Well, friend, Jericho was a gift also. Their deeds of obedience did not merit them the city. But their deeds of obedience were necessary to receive the gift. While Jesus has said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,"* some denominationalists teach, "He that believeth shall be saved, and will be baptized to prove it." One may feel comfortable following such perversions of the teaching of Christ, but I would urge otherwise. God gives when his conditions are met. No one is saved before baptism any more than the walls of the city fell before the marching, blowing, and shouting.

A Valuable Lesson

This Old Testament record of the fall of Jericho is so valuable to man today. Like other writings, it is written *"for our learning."* (Romans 15:4). It shows God's power and wisdom. It shows the requirement of faith and obedience. It is an important event in the history of Israel as they received the land God had promised Abraham's descendants until Christ came. It reveals the process by which God gives His conditional gifts such as our salvation. It shows clearly the relationship between God's grace, man's faith, and man's obedience. The same principles that governed the fall of Jericho also govern our spiritual salvation. The walls fell *"by faith,"* and we are justified *"by faith."* As Joshua heard the Word, believed it and obeyed it, let us also hear the Word, believe it and obey it. As Joshua received God's gift in so doing, so shall we.

† † † † †

Man

Like many others, I have watched as grave workers plunged their shovels into "mother earth," spreading it gently and systematically over a vault that contained the physical remains of someone who had died. As one watches, his thoughts and questions are manifold. What if death and the grave were really the end of man's existence? We are persuaded that a righteous life in Christ is still the best life to live even if it was all to terminate with the grave. But how much greater would our sorrow be if that were true. Surely, the dismal hopelessness and uselessness of life would be underscored. But death is not the end. In a real sense, it is a new beginning into another phase of existence. For the Christian, death is the doorway into happiness and glory that nothing in this life could ever afford him.

Paul wrote, *"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."* (First Thessalonians 4:13). The reason behind our hope is because of the nature God has given to man. It is because man is man, different and distinctive from everything else that God has created.

Important Questions

What about man? Where did he come from? Why is he here? Where is he going? What is he to do while he is here? These things are all answered for mankind in the inspired Word of God. *"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands. Thou hast put all things under his feet. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth."* (Psalms 8:4-9).

Plato once defined man as simply a featherless, two-footed animal. Many today think humans are merely highly evolved animals. Because some think of themselves and others in this way they behave like animals toward each other. They have no

real reason to offer as to why people ought not treat one another in the savage fashion that animals often treat each other. But man must be more than a mere beast because man is a thinking being, capable of making choices, with sense of right and wrong and morality, who appreciates "oughtness," and has capacities that are not known among other forms of life.

Man's Origin

The only reasonable explanation of the origin of man is that God created man, just as the book of Genesis reports. Many blasphemers deny this truth and would inject into the hearts, and lives, of their fellowman theories that would destroy the dignity of the human race. But no explanation is so simple, logical, complete, and harmonious with what man can know as the contention that man has been created by God and in the image of God. *"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them."* (Genesis 1:26,27). *"For in him we live and move and have our being...For we are also his offspring."* (Acts 17:28).

God created man distinctively. Man has a body and man is a soul or spirit. The body, which is tangible and material, dies and decays. But the spirit, which cannot be seen, lives. *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."* (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

When God created man, He made him a perfect creature in every respect. Man was a fit associate with God. Being in the spiritual image of God as already described in Psalm 8, and also Hebrews 2:7, he was put a little lower than the angels. He was given dominion over all else that God created. Nothing else was provided a soul or spirit in God's likeness as was mankind. His home, The Garden of Eden, was a place of beauty and purity as was the soul of man. There was no sin but goodness. The garden was indeed a Paradise.

The Entrance of Sin

But man did not live up to the test of loyalty to God. Satan tempted Eve and Adam to disobey God, and that they did. This was the fall of man, the introduction of sin into the world with all of its havoc, death, sorrow and woe. Driven from his beautiful home of Eden, man's home became a land of thorns, thistles,

sweat, pain, and separation. Life became a continual struggle, ending in a physical death, as far as this world is concerned. Man gave himself over into the bondage and servitude of Satan. (Romans 6:16).

All are guilty of sin. We are not guilty of Adam's sin but we suffer some of the consequences of Adam's sin. We are all guilty of sin because *"all have sinned."* (Romans 3:23; 5:23). Man in sin by his own choices has become like those described in Romans 3:10ff that quotes from the Old Testament. *"There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre, with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

By sin, the glory of man was dimmed from its former luster. He became distasteful before God, unpleasant to His eyes, and unfit for God's association and fellowship. Such is the case with every person when they transgress the will of God. Each is responsible before God for alienating himself from God. In sin, one is no longer pure and erect as is his spirit when he enters this life. He becomes bent and stained with the hideousness of sin against his Creator. The body of man dies and becomes a corpse. There is the separation of the body and spirit (James 2:26; Ecclesiastes 12:7). The body returns to decay into the material substance from which the physical body has been formed. But the soul or spirit returns to the disposition of the *"Father of spirits."* (Hebrews 12:9; Ecclesiastes 12:7).

But man shall be resurrected from the dead. *"Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice. and shall come forth. They that have done good unto the resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29). The glory of the resurrected body will differ from the earthly body. (The reader is asked to carefully and soberly read the lengthy passage of First Corinthians 15:35-44 for the Biblical documentation of the variance between the physical and spiritual bodies.)

Following this great resurrection, *"Both of the just and the unjust,"* (Acts 24:15), there shall be the judgment. *"And as it is*

appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment," (Hebrews 9:27). *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Man's Destiny

Man's eternal destiny will be one of two eternal spiritual domains. *"And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from his goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."* He further stated, *"And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."* (Matthew 25:46).

What shall be the determining factor that shall decide the eternity of man? It is man himself. Even though he had no part in bringing about his own birth, has no power to defeat eventual physical death, has nothing to say about the coming resurrection and judgment, he can determine his destiny because God allows him to do so. God has made the human being with the power of choice, the ability to make decisions, a free-will. His volition is a part of his character. Whereas Adam decided to disobey God, as have all others, mankind, any individual, can also decide to seek forgiveness of his sins by deciding to obey what the Lord has specified in order to be saved. Of course, man can decide to reject God's offer of redemption if he wishes. Whatever man decides, man must bear the consequences of his choice.

Man's Salvation

God's plan for man's salvation involves Christ and His shed blood. By this God manifested His grace and mercy toward an undeserving sinful race. To partake of the benefits of God's offer, one must believe in Jesus as God's Son (John 8:24), repent of his sins (Luke 13:3), confess his faith in Christ as the Son of God (Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). Thereafter,

having become a child of God, being washed clean of his transgressions by the blood of the Savior, one is expected to live a life compatible with the example set before him by the Lord and Savior.

† † † † †

A Day Of Work

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: The night cometh, when no man can work." (John 9:4).

Jesus Christ is our example in all things (First Peter 2:21). This includes being our example in work. There was no laziness in Him. He was industrious, energetic, and active. Even as a youth He realized the need to be busy. He said to Him mother, *"Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"* (Luke 2:49). In John 5:17, it is recorded, *"My Father worketh even until now, and I work."* Peter preached to the household of Cornelius concerning His activity and said, *"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree."* (Acts 10:38,39). In this Peter pictures our Lord as one that worked.

Our "Day"

He said we must work while it is day. The day refers to our period of life here on earth. As we live, we are in the midst of our *"day."* Night is the night of death. We are to work while we can and while we have the opportunity, ability, energy, and life. We are now living and we can work for the Lord now. In fact, now is the only time that we have to work. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow may never be. Someone has said that life does not get finished, it just stops. There is always more and more to be done as long as we live. We have no time after physical death to work for the Lord. Therefore, we cannot postpone doing what we ought to do.

As we consider the reasons for working now, it is emphasized that the night comes when no man can work. Our opportunity is short even at the longest. We are here but for a few brief years at best. *"For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away."* (James 4:14). Since life is so uncertain and death is sure, since this is the only time in which we have to prepare for eternity, should we fail in this life we shall lose the glories of eternal salvation.

We are to work, if for no other reason, because the Lord has instructed us to work. *"But in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."* (Acts 10:35). *"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* (Philippians 2:12). James 2:14-26 shows the necessity of working. We show our faith by our works. Without our works, our faith is a dead faith. Nobody is going to be saved by a dead faith. As Abraham worked, so must we. As Rahab worked, so must we. We do not merit salvation by our works, but neither shall we enjoy salvation without our works. *"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."* (James 2:24).

What is the work that we have to do? One primary concern of the Christian is the developing of a Christlike character. Christian character does not just happen. It must be intended. It comes through growth and takes effort. It is gradually developed. One gains godly strength step by step, not by leaps and bounds. It takes work, prayer, spiritual nourishment and godly exercise.

Developing Character

Character might be likened unto a tree. The roots are the Beautitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:2-10). The branches are the virtues of which we read in Second Peter 1:5-9); such as, faith, diligence, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. The fruit of the tree is the fruit of the Spirit. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law."* (Galatians 5:22,23)

Saving The Lost

Our work is also the salvation of others. Someone has said, "We have been saved to save others." This expressed the soul-winning disposition that the Christian is to have. The church, which is composed of the saved, is as a lighthouse for those who are on the dark sea of sin. As the familiar song suggests, "Let the lower lights be burning, Send a gleam across the wave." That is the work of the church. We are to be as lights in the world, the salt of the earth, as a city set on a hill (Matthew 5:14-16). Our light is to so shine that others may see our good works and glorify God, the Father of Heaven.

The gospel is the light that men must have. Second Corinthians 4:4 speaks of the *"light of the gospel."* We are *"begotten of the gospel."* (First Corinthians 4:15). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). It must be preached and taught so that it can be heard, believed, and obeyed. Paul wrote, *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:13-17).

Jesus said, *"No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."* (John 6:44,45).

Let The World Hear

It is my work, and the work of every brother and sister in Christ to see to it that the world hears the gospel. When one is telling the gospel story, there is no more essential work that could be done. There is no nobler work. There is nothing of greater importance to mankind than the gospel. *"And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."* (Daniel 12:3). *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and*

shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:19,20).

So we see we are to work while we can. We must know what our work is. We must know why we must work now.

Rest Awaits Us

Some day we shall be blessed by resting from our labors. *"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."* (Revelation 14:13). We must work before we rest. But we shall eventually lay down our tools and cease from our labors. *"Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season, we shall reap if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9).

Let us resolve to be a worker for the Lord. Let us sing with sincerity, "I want to be a worker for the Lord."

Before we can work for God, we must be in Christ. We are to work in His vineyard, not the vineyard of the devil. We enter that vineyard by faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. We are to labor faithfully in that vineyard, knowing that at the end of the *"day"* we shall be rewarded by the Father above.

† † † † †

A Mark Of Wisdom

A wise person will solicit and listen to advice that comes from the lips of those who are studious, experienced, and have proven themselves to not only be reliable but have demonstrated wisdom in their own lives.

Too many people seek the advice and counsel from faulty sources and proceed to follow in the steps of those whose steps have led from one disaster to another. None of us should be so egotistical that we cannot learn from others, especially those as described above.

The real source of wisdom, guidance, direction and counsel is the infallible Word of God, the Bible. *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God..."* (James 1:5). We deprive ourselves of the fountain of undefiled consultation and instruction if we do not come to a knowledge of the Word of God.

God said the reason His people were destroyed, Hosea 4:6, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."* Proverbs 2:6, *"For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."* JWB

Honesty About Abortion



JAMES W. BOYD

Do you suppose those endorsing abortion will ever honestly face the realities? Does it matter to them that innocent human life is being deliberately destroyed? Is it of any concern that the overwhelming majority of abortions are because of immorality and is but a means to "cover" the consequences of irresponsible moral conduct?

People talk about the woman having power over her body. She does when she engages in sexual intercourse. But when another life is conceived that life also must be taken into consideration.

The brutality, cruelty and savage barbarism that characterizes abortion says something dreadful about those who condone it. Who is honest enough to face it? Even the illogical tri-level periods of three month intervals admit there is more in the womb that just "a blob of tissue."

Those who promote and condone abortion are not known to sanction standards of morality, or that humans are anything but animals. Their cry is a twisted and perverted "freedom" which has degenerated into license to accumulate evil atop evil. Honesty will admit this. But shall we expect honesty from those who would slaughter the unborn?

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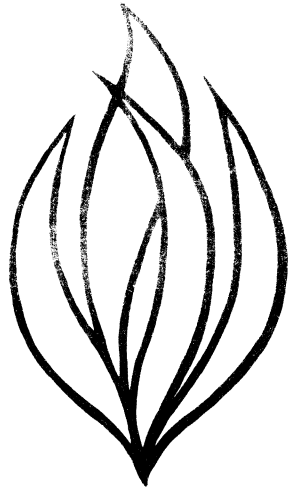

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IV James W. Boyd **NUMBER 9**

Why The Law Of Moses Had To Cease

If there was more understanding about the place of the law of Moses in God's scheme of things, much of the error in the religious world would cease to exist. Because of misunderstanding and misapplication of the law of Moses there has been created a mixture of Judaism and Christianity that can only dishonor God's Son. Even many in this day and time look to the teaching that God gave through Moses as their authority for what they do religiously. Some will point to the Mosaic law as the authority for a special priesthood, instrumental music, burning incense, and many other matters. Some continue to make a pretense of observing the Sabbath Day that was done under Moses. The denial of the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins stems to a great extent from a misplacement of the law of Moses and the way God formerly has dealt with mankind.

Not In Effect Now

The law of Moses is no longer in effect or applicable as to the ways and laws by which God governs man today. Those living now, neither Jew nor Gentile, will stand before God in judgment and be judged according to the law of Moses. Even though it came from God, its term of service has long ago been reached and terminated.

Our subject is asking the question, "Why did the law have to cease?" If we believe and accept the inspired record of the New Testament, we will have no doubts in our mind that the old law, the law of Moses, had to cease. If the law of Moses had not ceased, the law of Christ could never have come into effect. To understand that this is so, we must know something more about that old and former system.

Only To Israel

The law was only given to the Israelites, the Jews. Deuteronomy 5:1-3, *"The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers,*

but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day." It was a law that was not in force prior to the time of Moses. It was never a law which governed Gentiles. Inasmuch as salvation is offered to all, there was of necessity the establishment of a law that not only would include Jews, but also Gentiles as well. The law of Moses never could do that.

We might wonder why the law was ever given. Paul asked, and answered that question. *"Wherefore then serveth the law?"* (Galatians 3:19). He responded, *"It was added because of transgression."* The law of Moses served as a guide, God's rule and schoolmaster to govern the Jews and bring them unto the time of the long-promised Messiah. Through the types, shadows, symbols, representations, pictures, of the law of Moses God gave somewhat of a preview of the basic principles of the universal law that He would give through Christ. This law was to serve as the divine standard for Israel in the development of a religious heritage and a holy nation through which the Savior would come.

Intended To Be Temporary

The law was never intended to be a law to last until the end of time. Just as it was limited as to those to whom it applied, so it was limited as to the time it would be in effect. It would last *"...till the seed should come to whom the promise was made."* (Galatians 3:19). In Galatians 3:16, Paul asserted that the *"seed"* of the promise to Abraham referred to Christ. Christ is Abraham's seed that fulfilled the promises that God gave to Abraham. The law of Moses was not the fulfillment of that promise. It was a temporary measure for the Jews until Christ came. It was designed to be taken out of the way once *"the faith"* had come. Paul even reasoned how the Old Testament teaching taught that (Galatians 4:21-31) in the account of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael.

More specifically, Paul wrote in Colossians 2:14, *"Blotting out the handwriting contained in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross."* Christ did not come to *"destroy"* the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17,18). The law had served as a *"middle wall of partition"* between Jew and Gentile, but by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, that middle wall was broken down and ceased to be (Ephesians 2:13-18).

It is not too uncommon to hear religious teachers still saying

that people should live by the law of Moses, and can be saved by the law of Moses, and that the law of Moses is still in effect. But such teaching is contradictory to the strong and repeated statements of inspired men.

The law that was removed included the Ten Commandments. They have been set aside as far as God's will today through the Mosaic authority. There are some who say that only the "ceremonial law" has been set aside, and not the "moral law." The Scriptures make no such distinction as that regarding the law and breaking it into two parts. Surely, the ordinances of the law can be categorized into these two categories, but the Scriptures make no kind of assertion or insinuation that only one part of the law is removed.

All Of It Is Removed

It is plain and easy to see that Paul taught that even the moral commandments have been removed, as far as coming through Moses. Romans 7:1-7 teaches that we are no longer under the old law, and Paul uses the moral commandment, *"Thou shalt not covet,"* as an example of the law to which he had reference. Just as a wife is no longer bound to her husband once he has died, so none are bound anymore to the law for it is dead. And the law to which he referred included the tenth of the Ten Commandments. There is no part of the law of Moses to which we are accountable today. To be sure, there are many inclusions in the law of Christ that resemble ordinances found in the Mosaic law , some even identical to the Mosaic law, and others expanded upon. But we live under the authority of Christ. It is wrong to steal, not because Moses said so, but because it is a part of the doctrine of Christ to not steal.

The very nature of the Ten Commandments made it necessary for them to cease. Much of them dealt only with the outward and overt acts of sin. There was only minor consideration of the intents and purposes of the heart. The law of Christ gave emphasis to both the heart and the deeds of men. Regretfully, I recently heard a teacher, one of the brethren, make a glaring doctrinal error in suggesting that Christ was only concerned with the heart and not with deeds. That is not so; He is concerned with both. The law of Moses was more concerned with the deed. For instance, the law said, *"Thou shalt not kill."* This means not to murder. But the law of Christ goes beyond that and condemns even the hatred of others, which is the

heart-seed from which murder grows. *"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,"* wrote John in First John 3:15. The law said, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery."* The way of Christ goes into the heart and forbids lust that precedes the overt act of adultery. To have a governing system that reached the inward man. a new and different law was necessary. The old law had to cease. And please note how often we have reference to the fact that we are still living under law, even though it is not the law of Moses. We still live under law, and that law is the law of Christ.

Hebrews 7:11-12, *"If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood...what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek and not after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed there is made a necessity a change also of the law."* The priesthood was changed. The law that governed that priesthood could not continue. The Bible teaches that Christ is a priest forever, and that every Christian is a priest, not just those of the Jewish tribe of Levi. The law that considered only the lineage of Aaron as high priest would have clashed with the priesthood of Christ because Christ was of the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7 :14). Yet, He is our high priest (Hebrews 3:1). The law had to be changed for this reason. It had to cease.

Confusion Erased

What confusion would reign if two laws were to coexist that differed one from the other. That even creates problems among human laws. Man could not expect to serve God *"decently and in order"* if there were two differing laws binding upon him. In fact, we are touching on the heart of the major problem in the religious world today; namely, the futile attempts of some to follow man's laws and God's law at the same time. Such confusion does not exist and God would not be the author of it.

There was no promise to come by the law of Moses. To be sure Moses spoke of the Messiah that was to come. The promise that God gave to Abraham was accomplished in Christ (Galatians 3:16). If one wants the blessing that God offers because of the promise to Abraham, then he must come to Christ. *"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:29). We cannot attain such favors through the law of Moses. The inheritance is not of the law. *"For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise, but God granted it to Abraham by promise."*

(Galatians 3:18). There had to be a new and better system, and the old law had to cease its function.

It Was Not The Cure

Moses' law could not and did not bring perfection, even in the sense of completeness and wholeness, let alone sinlessness and forgiveness. Suppose for a moment you were very sick, nigh unto death, and medical science found a drug that would postpone death only one year at a time but no longer. It would never provide a cure. Then suddenly an announcement was made that there was a medicine that once taken, it would cure you forever and no other medicine would ever be needed. How would you react to such an announcement? This is an ample illustration of how the old law of Moses compares with the new law and system through Christ. *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect."* (Hebrews 10:1). Christ was offered once for all and there is no longer the need for the repeated sacrifices of animals, by which sins could not be removed anyway (Hebrews 10:4). By His one sacrifice, *"He taketh away the first that He might establish the second,"* and that which He established provides for the forgiveness of sins. The old law had to make way for the new.

Again, the Mosaic Law had to cease because of the existence of another law from which one could not be freed by the Mosaic law. This other law is what Paul called *"the law of sin and death."* (Romans 8:2). Exekiel 18:20 reads, *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* This refers to a spiritual death, a separation from God. Romans 6:23, *"The wages of sin is death."* This is the penalty for unforgiven sin. This law of sin and death ever exists. But, even though the law of Moses was weak and could not deliver us from the law of sin and death, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made us free from the law of sin and death. It was not possible that the blood of animals could accomplish this (Hebrews 10:4). But it is accomplished by the once-offered blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:12;28; 10:10).

It Was Not Evil

The law of Moses was not something sinister and evil. It was not against the promises that God gave through Abraham (Galatians 3:21). By the law and the study of it we all can come to an understanding of the nature and ruin that accompanies sin. We can see how desparately those in sin need salvation. And by that law we have presentations of the system of Christ that shows to us fully that God's plan is the system through Christ. But we now live under that *"perfect law of liberty"* of which James speaks in James 1:25. We live under law. The system of grace through Christ involves a system of law and works of obedience. If we ever enjoy the spiritual blessedness that we must have to live successfully in this life and enter heaven when this life is over, we must follow the law of Christ. The old law has served its turn and is now set aside. It was God's plan to give it, and God's plan that it cease. Let us respect God's plan.

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He Knew The Reason

What happened to him is very similar to what happens to many people who profess to have become Christians. Could this be something applicable to one of us?

The small boy went to bed as usual and soon fell asleep. But before very long his parents heard a noisy THUMP in the boy's room and rushed in to see what was the matter.

The boy had fallen out of his bed and when he hit the floor he was suddenly awakened and realized he was not where he was supposed to be.

His parents were relieved that he had not hurt himself, but they asked, "How did you happen to fall out of your bed?"

As quick as a wink, and almost as if he had given his answer some real thought, he responded, "I guess I went to sleep to close to where I got in."

That may be the reason some who have been baptized find themselves "floored" by Satan and his devices. *"Awake thou that sleepest"* may be the very admonition more of us need to heed. Getting too comfortable too quickly can prove to be spiritually detrimental, don't you think? JWB

What Baptism Will Not Do

There are those religious people who say that we talk too much about baptism. More than likely this is said because they do not talk about it at all. Recently, one was heard to say that you could tell if a "Campbellite" preacher was preaching because they will eventually talk about baptism. Well, why not? Paul preached it. Was he a Campbellite? Peter preached it. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all preached it. Jesus preached it. Were they Campbellites? I am no Campbellite and I preach baptism and preach it just like the aforenamed men preached it. The trouble with many religious people is that they reject what the Word of God teaches regarding it and resent those who accept it and proclaim it. We give place to such as that, not for a moment. They are like the man who was caught stealing and was brought to trial. One witness after another testified of his guilt. Finally, the judge asked him if he wanted to say anything, and he responded, "I think too much as been said already." Little wonder that those who dislike the Bible message think we preach on baptism too often.

Can We Overemphasize?

Is it possible to overemphasize anything that God has taught? We think not. It is very possible to underemphasize what He has taught. Many pulpits will stress faith, love, hope, morality, etc. and nobody complains that it is overstressed. We do contend for balanced preaching, but not preaching one thing to the neglect of another. Paul preached the whole counsel of God and so should we. I am persuaded if more of our religious objectors preached on the subject more and taught the truth about it, our task of preaching it as often as we do would not be as demanding. Baptism is one of God's commands and men must obey, and obey for the reason it is commanded.

But even then, we must realize that there are some things that baptism will not accomplish because God has not commanded baptism for just any and every purpose. Its purposes are limited. So now we study the subject "What Baptism Will Not Do."

Three Changes

Conversion to Christ involves three distinct changes: (1) The sinner's heart, convictions, and allegiance must be changed. (2) His manner of life must be changed. (3) His relationship to God must be changed. The person who changes in all three of these ways is converted to Christ. A person may love sin, but now loves righteousness. He once practiced sin, but now practices righteousness. He was in Satan's kingdom, but now is a citizen in the church, the Lord's kingdom.

There are three divine appointments or commands to be obeyed for the purpose of accomplishing these three changes. God uses faith to accomplish the needed change in man's allegiance and convictions. In order for man to do the "*will of God from the heart,*" (Ephesians 6:6), his heart must be right. His faith must reside in Christ, the only way to God (John 14:6). *"Except ye believe that I am He, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). True obedience stems from the heart (Romans 6:17,18). Those people to whom Paul wrote are said to have obeyed from the heart.

Even though baptism has an important place in God's scheme of redemption, baptism does not change the heart of man. Faith changes man's loyalties, convictions, and service. And faith is produced by the Word of God. (Romans 10:17). As one hears the evidence presented in God's Word and considers it, he comes to believe.

The change in one's manner of life is the result of genuine repentance. Jesus taught, *"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3). Repentance is a change of mind toward sin, a change of mind toward Christ, brought about by godly sorrow, and results in a reformation of life. A change in conviction is useless unless it takes action in a change of mind that will lead to a change of life. One cannot continue living in sin and be pleasing to God. (Romans 6:1,2).

As important as the Bible teaches baptism is, that change of mind is not accomplished by baptism. That is repentance, a repentance motivated by a faith and confidence in Christ.

The third change, the change of relationship with God, follows faith and repentance. Whereas we were servants of sin, we become servants of righteousness by our obedience (Romans 6:17,18). When Paul was convinced that Jesus was the Son of God, he gave evidence of repentance and was baptised (Acts 22:16). The Jews on Pentecost, showing evidence that they believed the gospel message as preached by Peter and asking what they must do, were told to repent and be baptized (Acts

2:38). Those who are baptized are those who are made sons and daughters of God and by baptism enter into Christ (Galatians 3:27). Salvation is *"in Christ"* (Second Timothy 2:10), so it is important that we get into Christ, and that is done by baptism (Romans 6:3,4).

Friend, conversion is not complete until these three changes have occurred.

"For The Remission of Sins"

Baptism is *"for the remission of sins."* (Acts 2:38). Baptism is in water (Acts 8:38,39; 10:47,48). Even so, the water of baptism will not remove our sins. There are those who falsely accuse gospel preachers of preaching "water salvation" because they preach baptism in water to be saved. But nobody that has ever taught the truth has ever considered the power to save being the element of water. It is simply the element into which one must be baptized. We do not preach what is commonly called "baptismal generation." We place no efficacy with the water itself, but rely wholly and totally on God and the blood of His Son to be saved.

Salvation is an operation of God (Colossians 2:12), an operation that God performs when we obey His command to be baptized. Since it pleases God to save man in such fashion, why should any man object?

Naaman was healed of his leprosy (Second Kings 5) when he dipped himself seven times in Jordan. But neither he, nor anyone else, credits the waters of Jordan with healing power. God healed him. But when did God heal him? It was when he obeyed what God told him to do and not a second before. Naaman glorified God, not the water. But neither did he deny the need of going into the water, as some anti-baptism people do today. Peter said that baptism saves (First Peter 3:21), but not in the sense that there is power in the water. The power is in the blood and it is in baptism that we reach His blood. When we are baptized we are baptized into His death where His blood was shed. (Romans 6:3,4).

Does Not Immunize

Nor can we expect baptism to remove and immunize us from temptation. After baptism, we are in Christ and one of the saved. But we are still human beings, not gods who are perfect

and not subject to temptation. Repeatedly, the Scriptures warn the Christian against falling to temptation. *"Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* (First Corinthians 10:12). Why would Paul comfort his brethren that they could endure trial and temptation if they, once baptized, were immune to its havoc? (First Corinthians 10:13). Even Paul realized he could be tempted and become a castaway (First Corinthians 9:27). It is no sin to be tempted. Sin is yielding to temptation. Jesus was tempted, but sinned not (Hebrews 4:15; First Peter 2:22). John teaches us that we make ourselves liars to say we do not sin (First John 1:8-10).

Forgives Past Sins

Baptism does not forgive future sins that we may commit after baptism. We are purged from our old sins (Second Peter 1:9). But in baptism we are not forgiven of sins that we have not yet committed. Baptism does not give us a license to live as we see fit thereafter. Having come to Christ, we are not to live in sin (Romans 6:1,2). We often do sin (First John 1:8-10). Baptism places us in a relationship with God where we have access to the avenue of prayer for forgiveness, but baptism does not forgive future sins. When we sin, there is no need to be baptized again because by baptism we are no longer children of the devil but children of God. Once baptized, we are in Christ and can pray for forgiveness, after we have repented of our sins (Acts 8:22). Baptism washes away past sins, changing our status before God, but we are not given a lifelong "indulgence" that says all sins we commit hereafter are forgiven.

No Guarantee

This leads us to the important point that baptism does not assure and guarantee we shall go to heaven. While baptism is essential to reach heaven, for God has made it a condition to meet, the child of God must live faithfully in order to receive the crown of life (Revelation 2 :10; Second Timothy 4:6-8). *"Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9). We are not to think that if we faint along the way that the benefits will be the same as if we remained stedfast.

Too many times we have heard it said by members of the church, those added to the church by baptism (Acts 2:47), "Oh,

I have been baptized," and even though they are living a sinful and unfaithful life, they are relying totally on the fact that their baptism has assured them that they shall see God in all of His glory. This is not so. We read of baptized people falling away, forsaking the truth, apostatizing. Baptism is the beginning of being a Christian, not the end. One who is baptized but is not loyal to His Lord will lose his relationship with God and be lost in hell, lest he repent and pray.

Baptism does not change your allegiance. It will not produce the change in your life. It does not forgive sins by virtue of the water itself. Nor will it remove temptation, the ability to sin, and will not forgive sins not yet committed. It is not a guarantee of heaven.

Baptism is the way that God has provided for us to be washed clean by the blood of Christ. It changes our relationship with God and, by obedience to His divinely given direction to be baptized, He adds us to the saved, which is the church, composed of His sons and daughters in Christ.

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Same Things Are Different

You would think a twenty dollar bill was a twenty dollar bill wherever you saw one. But evidently some folks do not see it that way. If it takes a twenty, or several of them, to go to a ball game, have a dinner, or take in some entertainment, that seems reasonable. But that same bill grows to gigantic proportions when its destiny becomes the contribution plate.

Sixty minutes is an hour, or is it? With some people you can link several of them together as they sit on a backless bench, in the rain, or turn their mind to neutral and stay before the TV. But sixty minutes is all they can stand in worship to God. And if they are urged to do that twice in a week they think you are fanatical and unreasonable. Why?

Why are children allowed to "make their own decision" about attending Bible study, but never allowed the same opportunity about attending their secular school? Figure it out and let me know if you discover the difference. JWB

A Walk Pleasing To God

"Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus." (First Thessalonians 4:1,2).

Living the life as a Christian as God has prescribed is presented to us in many different figures and illustrations. Sometimes it is shown as a race, an athletic event, a game to be played and a prize to be won. It is also presented as a warfare, like working in a vineyard or constructing a building. In the above passage it is pictured as a walk or a journey. It is not unlike Hebrews 11:8-10, *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God."* Again, First Peter 1:17, *"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."*

Walk To Please God

Paul wrote that he had shown his brethren how they ought to walk and how to please God. Let us understand the importance of pleasing God, rather than men. *"For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."* (Galatians 1:10). *"Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men."* (Ephesians 6:6,7). *"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."* (Acts 5:29). We must therefore conclude that we are required to walk pleasing to God. He is to have the priority of our allegiance, first, last, and always.

The expression of *walking* is used differently in revealing possible relationship to God. We are to walk ***with*** God; we are

to walk ***before*** God; and we are to walk ***after*** God. Each has a singular meaning and when all three are rightly considered, they have a collective meaning.

With God

First, let us consider the walk ***with*** God. In Genesis 5:22, we read, *"Enoch walked with God."* Here is a picture of a human being having companionship with Deity. There is a nearness to God and communion with Him that Enoch enjoyed because he chose to walk with God. Side by side, Enoch kept in step with God. It is that way with us as we live a faithful Christian life. We go hand in hand with Him, He in us and we in Him, and we benefit from our fellowship with Deity. *"Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,"* (First John 1:3).

It is a tragic event when men so conduct themselves that they get ahead of God and lose that fellowship. Moses, in his early life, got ahead of God. He supposed that his brethren would recognize him to be their deliverer and he determined to deliver Israel his own way and at a time that he determined. But he got ahead of God and God's plans and ways. Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1,2), got ahead of God by doing what God had not authorized in worship to Him. They offered that which the Lord commanded not. People can still get ahead of God and cause themselves distress. *"Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God."* (Second John 9).

Sometimes people get too far behind God. Are we ever like Peter, who followed the Lord, but followed Him *"afar off"?* Too far behind our Lord is tantamount to refusing Him.

We must be in agreement with God in order to walk with God. Amos asked *"Can two walk together except they be agreed?"* (Amos 3:3). The power of the apostles rested in their willingness to walk with Jesus and live in agreement with Him.

As best as we can calculate, Enoch walked with God for about 300 years. Genesis 5:22, that tells us that Enoch walked with God, records his pattern of life after the birth of his son, Methusalah. He probably walked with God even before that. It has some significance to me that Enoch recognized a deep and serious duty of a father, that Methusalah, his son, never knew a day but that his father walked with God. Can your children and mine say as much?

We sing a hymn that is designed to express the thought we are laboring to present. I do not consider the song as some kind of suggestion of a mystic and direct communication with Deity, but one that denotes the fellowship we have with Christ when we are in Christ. "I come to the garden alone...and He walks with me and He talks with me." Should not our prayer ever be, "All along my pilgrim journey, let me safely walk with Thee...Close to Thee"?

Walk Before God

Second, we also walk ***before*** God. Genesis 17:1, *"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."* Abram was to ever be in the presence of God, being under the constant inspection of the Almighty. We are no different. We are as soldiers marching before the inspection of God, not in large numbers and great companies, but single file. At the close of his illustrious and righteous life, Samuel said, *"I have walked before you from childhood."* (First Samuel 12:2). The idea was that his life had been an open book for all the people to read and inspect. It is that way as we live before God.

When we go to the store and buy clothes, we will walk before the mirror in order to see how they look on us, how they fit, and determine if they pass our inspection. On most assembly lines in the factories there are those who inspect the work being produced to see to it that the standards are being maintained and flaws removed.

"For he that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good. Let him seek peace and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." (First Peter 3:10-12). *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."* (Proverbs 15:3).

Isaac said to his servant that he walked before God. Hezekiah is said to have walked before God (Isaiah 38:3). These statements should sober our thinking in the realization that God sees, knows, observes, and is aware of our every deed, thought, and motive. It is all manifest before Him.

This thought ought also console and comfort us in the knowledge that as we walk before God He can and does protect

us and provide for us as He sees is best for us. He knows when we do wrong, but He also knows when we do right and are sincerely trying to do His will.

B. C. Goodpasture once used the illustration that in the afternoon, when the sun was still up, he would go to the barn with his father and allow his father to go ahead of him and he would come along. During the daylight, he was not the least bit afraid of anything in the way or anything coming up behind him. But coming back, after the sun had set and darkness prevailed, he said he walked right in front of his father, and not too far ahead. He then knew that if anything came at him from the darkness His father was there to care for him.

Walk After God

Third, we walk ***after*** God. Deuteronomy 13:4, *"Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him."* This projects the thought of following God. God is our leader and we are His followers. There is always the danger of following the wrong leader. Jesus warned, *"And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."* (Matthew 15:14). The story is told of how a man was driving in a snowstorm and lost his way. Suddenly, he saw some red lights glowing in front of him and he realized it was a truck going the same direction he was, so he determined to follow the truck. Further down the way the truck's lights disappeared. The truck had left the road and plunged off a cliff. The man following after in his car almost did the same thing. *"Follow not the multitude to do evil,"* was the instruction given Israel in Exodus 23:2. The downfall of Solomon was following the lead of his foreign wives into idolatry and away from the living and true God of heaven. Israel's downfall is largely attributable to their desire to be like the nations round about them. They fell victim to following the wrong leader.

Many are going the way of sin and destruction because they are inclining themselves to the satisfaction of their own lusts and ambitions. Others are following man-made doctrines and systems. Still others are allowing themselves to follow their consciences wheresoever it may lead them.

To please God we must follow Christ. *"For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."* (First Peter 2:21).

John teaches us to *"walk in the light as he is in the light."* (First John 1:7). *"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."* (First John 2:6). Paul wrote, *"Be ye imitators of me, even as I am of Christ."* (First Corinthians 11:1). Our walk after God would be made easier if we were able to see more of the imitation of Christ in each other. We ought to be content to follow after God.

Each expression of walking has its own meaning. We have fellowship and companionship to walk ***with*** God. We realize God is our Judge and protector as we walk ***before*** God. We are to go the way that God leads and walk ***after*** God.

When we put the expressions together we get another very important conclusion. To walk ***before*** God in an acceptable manner and receive His care, we must first walk ***with*** God and be in agreement with Him. To be agreed with God means that we must walk ***after*** God, following Him and His way as He has revealed it in His Word.

Christ, The Way

What is God's way for man? We could summarize by saying the way is Christ. As for man's duty, we could summarize by saying it is to trust and obey, become a Christian and then live as a Christian in faithfulness. To hear the Word, believe it, repent of sins, confess our faith that Jesus is God's Son, and be baptized is the way we begin our walk. Should we fall away, we renew our walk by being restored through repentance of sins, confession of our sinfulness, and going to God in prayer asking His forgiveness. This is the walk that is pleasing to God.

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(continued from page 24)

capable younger brethren seek other lines of primary work as they see the lack of respect being given to faithful gospel preachers. No, they don't preach for money. They preach because of love for God, His truth, His Son, His church, the lost and the saved. But they are deserving far better than what many brethren are willing to do on their behalf. When do those in charge come to realize preaching brethren are vital factors in the congregation and begin to render to them the financial consideration due them? In many, many instances, it is long overdue. JWB

Christian Education

We preach many sermons regarding the Christian and his conduct in all of the various sectors of one's life. We talk about the Christian and his occupation, or the Christian and his recreation. We preach concerning the Christian and his association with others, and his relationship to the government. It seems only reasonable that we would talk about the Christian and his education. Even though many have a very limited concept of "Christian education," we hope this lesson will broaden our thinking and make it more in harmony with the Biblical concept of education of a Christian.

"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:6). *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."* (Proverbs 22:6). Both of these verses have to do with Christian education.

The Treasure of Children

We would insist that our richest treasure is our children. Our greatest loss, other than the loss of the soul, is the loss of our children and this involves the loss of the soul. Yet, one of the most serious neglects of the human family is the proper spiritual development of its children. When we guide and train our children aright, the influence of that good work will be felt for generations to come. When we do a bad job regarding our children, that influence will also have repercussions for generations to come.

The founding fathers of our nations wrote into our law the concept of freedom of religion. The first amendment states that Congress shall make no laws respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. It is terribly unfortunate that many have taken this noble concept of freedom **of** religion to mean freedom **from** religion. There is a great difference. Freedom of religion is threatened by Catholicism, communism, atheism, humanism, etc. But freedom from religion will destroy all of our freedoms.

Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:4). This irrefutable truth was spoken by the Son of God nearly two

thousand years ago. Some today evidently consider themselves wiser than Deity and they plan and live their lives as if the Word of God should have no place. Jesus also taught, *"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"* (Mark 8:36). So many misguided people have concentrated upon the "here and now" to the extent that they ignore the realities of that which is to come. This has been evidenced in the securing of one's education as well as in other realms of activity.

No Religious Training

We are informed that over one-half of the children of America are receiving no religious training with any sort of system. We tremble over what the inevitable consequences for the nation will be in a few years with this neglect. Already atheism is running unchecked and promoted in many lands, and humanism is fast becoming the national religion in America. The results are turning the nation into a giant Sodom and Gomorrah. Children are learning secular knowledge and secular skills, but are unguided and unrestricted because they are growing up in a religious vacuum, not learning morality, values of dignity, or any such thing. They are growing up to be educated animals and highly skilled fools.

As Christians, we should desire the best education we can provide for our young. We live in an era of man's existence when preparation and learning is so important. The unprepared will have a difficult time in the future, probably more than ever. Only the prepared have the doors of opportunity opened to them. Only the prepared are able to seize the opportunities when they are opened. To a great extent, the measure of preparation is determined by one's education. So many young people, who "drop out" of the educating process are so short-sighted and fail to visualize this reality.

Life is for those who prepare for it. The development of both mental and physical talents is imperative. It is God's will that we grow in favor with God and man, wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). To deliberately neglect this is sinful.

The Best Education

An education that is void of the spiritual and moral qualities and values as has been decreed by the God of heaven through

His Son is not the best education, regardless of how many years, degrees, or academic standings one can accumulate. No matter how well "educated" a person may be, he or she is little more than a powerful machine out of control if his or her education is not guided by the teaching of Christ. Knowledge without wisdom is dangerous to everyone. Wisdom is a quality that comes from God (James 1:15). Some educational procedures provide knowledge but "Christian education" provides knowledge and wisdom.

Many of the most vicious and clever criminals the world has known have been highly educated people according to the world's standards. Tyrants, dictators, mad-men that have wrought immeasurable havoc on the entire world have been people of high educational levels. Every effort must be made to remove the obstacles in the paths of the young so that they might attain spiritual wisdom as they attain secular knowledge. Unfortunately, the educational institutions of our nations have become institutions that produce more and more obstacles and hindrances rather than removing such things. As one brilliant scholar of an instructor said on the opening day of his class, "If any of you students have any old fogy ideas about religion, park them on the outside of this class." This is about the level of "thinking" in educational circles throughout the land, for the greater part. As the young attempt to secure their education, they have every energy that godless people can produce thrown at them. Christ is ignored, ridiculed, suppressed. What is needed is "Christian education."

Not Just Schools

Some seem to think that "Christian education" refers to what is done in schools operated by Christian people. To whatever extent this is true, (often these schools are hindrances rather than helps) "Christian education" in schools is but a small part of it. In fact, more and more we are seeing that the work of the schools is undoing that sound Christian education being done by the home and the church.

Christian education begins in infancy, in the home, and never ends so long as one lives. Christianity in the home, or the lack of it, will reflect itself in the lives of children when they reach adulthood. *"Train up a child"* is the parental duty first and foremost before any and everyone else.

It Never Ends

One should never consider that his Christian education has ceased. It is a cradle-to-the-grave affair. Emphasis upon what some call "Christian education" centering only during the school years and periods of formal education is a narrow and unwarranted consideration of the subject.

For emphasis sake, let us repeat where the responsibility for educating children resides, both spiritual and secular; it is the home, father and mother. Public schools came into being as a communal effort to assist the home in educating children. Let us not close our eyes to reality because of prejudice; the public educational systems of America today are probably the worst enemy to the cause of Christ that exists in our borders. This is because humanism, evolution, atheism, immorality, no values, "do-your-own-thing" philosophies have dominated the scene until "down with God" is almost the rallying cry of the public educational systems. We are aware of exceptions, and are aware of individual exceptions, but the controlling influences on every level of the public and state educational institutions, and many privately operated systems, are in step with the devil rather than God. Many might deny it, remembering the time when such was not so just a few years ago. To deny it, ignore it, and dismiss it, is just exactly why it is predominately true today. Parents of faith have a tremendous task providing for the secular training of their children through public schools because of the anti-God sentiments that so often are in evidence. The documentation of this reality is too awesome and widespread for honest people to deny, and too deadly for Christian people to ignore. But even if there were no public schools, the responsibility of the education of your child rests on you.

A Parental Responsibility

Christian education or the spiritual training of your child rests on parents. The "Christian schools" can be an assistant to the home but never a replacement. The "Christian schools" that are worthy are deserving of the support of the home. It is not the work of the church to provide secular education, even for the children of Christians.

When a "Christian school" is as it ought to be there are certain very useful and valuable qualities that pertain to it. Before we consider these, we regretfully must recognize that not all

"Christian schools," even those operated by our brethren, are really what is needful. In fact, on the college, university, and graduate school levels, they are becoming more and more a detriment to the maintenance of the purity of the faith because of the false teachers that exist on the faculties and are allowed to remain there year after year. The uncertain and unsound teaching that is being implanted in the minds of so many of the young is already having a devestating effect on the church; but it does not have to be that way. Unfortunately, in more cases than we would like to think, it has become so.

Nonetheless, "Christian schools" can help the home in providing a secular education in a spiritual and Christian setting. When their teachers are faithful and sound Christian people, what a benefit this is to the student. When the teaching done is harmonious with the sound Christian education given by the home and the church, the schools are valuable.

The Bible classes teach the Christian values and virtues, when the truth is taught. We would that the teachers would be more concerned about the truth than some seem to be about their degrees and theological garbage so many have absorbed during their quest for their degrees. However, sound Biblical instruction cannot be measured for its worth. This is also true regarding the daily worship services.

Campus Benefits

The Christian environment, atmosphere, activities, social functions and attitudes that resound over the campus is of spiritual help to the educating of young people. Probably a tightening of standards has become very much in order, but when the Christian standard is upheld, what a difference for the youth. Having attended schools of both kinds, I can speak with some degree of authority concerning such things.

Alongside these other benefits is that of association with those of common faith and conviction. Young people can make friends of God's children, find marriage partners that will be a help for both to get to heaven. Yes, there are tragic exceptions. Whereas the tragedies are almost the rule on other campuses, they are still the exceptions from the campuses of "Christian schools."

There is no real excuse for the secular education of Christian youth on Christian school campuses to be inferior. We urge superiority. And there is no excuse for relaxing the Christian

values and standards in order to attain what the unbelieving world has arbitrarily determined to be the superior secular education. One of the real mis-directions of our Christian schools today is the feeling that they must accomodate all the anti-God nonsense that runs characteristic of the academic community. They feel they have to belong to the scholastic associations. They feel they must have the proper number of high degree people before they can provide what is needed. Nobody ought think the unbelieving world needs to set the standards for the secular instruction in schools operated by brethren. But most certainly, the unbelieving world ought not set the standards of qualification for the religious teaching that is done. Too many of those who teach in the Bible departments, while securing their degrees that the associations say they must have and which administrators seem to think is mandatory, have inhaled the liberal and modernistic philosophies taught them, more than most will admit.

As often as not, young people who have been trained in the home and the church to respect the Word of God as they ought are heard to state that the weakest departments regarding "the faith" on the campus is the Bible department, just where one ought to expect it to be the best. Teachers whose majors are in other fields than religion, but who are sound and faithful men and women, are more likely to adhere to the word than those who have "qualified" themselves in "religion" at the seminaries and schools where everything except truth is presented. We are very suspect of the Bible departments and the Bible professors because experience has taught us that over and over again false theories and doctrines are coming into the ranks of the church through just such sources. Again, there are exceptions. Unfortunately, we are convinced that the sound ones are the exceptions rather than the rule. This may sound harsh and very negative toward the Christian schools, but we might as well take our heads out of the sands of prejudice and stupidity and recognize the major source through which digression and apostasy has, does, and will come into the church.

Be Ever Alert

Even when parents send their children to the "Christian schools," they need to be watchful and alert. Only God probably really knows what all will be taught as "truth" in the classes.

Is Christian education absolutely necessary to salvation? Yes;

Christian education is being educated in the knowledge and wisdom provided by the Lord through His Word. It is essential to salvation. Whether one attends a special school operated by brethren called a "Christian school" is certainly optional. It can be very helpful. It is too often very detrimental. For the most part, they are far superior in the things that matter than the secular schools operated by the state and the private unbelieving community, but they are not "heaven on earth."

The home and the church must provide Christian education. Hopefully, the schools will help and not hinder. Knowledge of the will of the Lord cannot be dismissed if any person wants to live right and go to heaven.

† † † † †

The Preacher And His Pay

As sure as the night follows the day somebody will accuse preachers who talk about money for themselves as being a hireling, preaching for money, and all the other degrading judgments of his heart and motives when he says anything about it. Through the years many preachers have said very little to elderships with which we have worked on the subject of our salaries in order to avoid being accused of just such things. We have been intimidated by the tightwads and skinflints in the congregations to the point that we have allowed ourselves to be exploited and underpaid.

It is unfortunate that many brethren, including elderships, have so little regard for the ability, energy, sacrifice, training, insecurity, endurance and stress that goes with the work of being a regular preacher for a congregation. They consider him not much more than the light bill, gas bill, and other operating expenses and think they are being good stewards of their charge if they keep all money that goes to the preacher and his family at the minimum they can manage. While many in the congregation prosper, and preachers we have known have not been jealous of others' prosperity, brethren want the preacher to always get just "what you have to have to get by." If it ever appears that the preacher may be getting ahead, you can be sure that somebody thinks he is overpaid. They would not dare apply such a standard to themselves.

So few consider how churches treat preachers financially. While many members have all kinds of extra benefits of insurance, retirements, furnished tools, clothing, and other equipment, who do they think supplies all of that for the preacher? Some have all of their business transportation provided them, but who buys the car, runs it, repairs it, wears it out in his work, and what it costs is seldom considered in the work of a preacher? While the church owns the house in which he lives, he is forced into a situation where he is doing nothing more than paying rent to brethren, and when he leaves, which could occur at the whim of just a handful of disgruntled sinners who whine to a fearful leadership, he never accumulates any property equity. Some of us have already purchased a house or two in our time, but the title still belongs to the brethren.

Some brethren must never consider the cost of a college education for a preacher's child. They labor under some misconception that he gets discounts, free this and that, and that is not true. He pays like everybody else. But with the support he receives he can barely make it even with his children working.

And when "old brother preacher" reaches the point where brethren prefer something young, dynamic, "on fire," they wish him well, and out he goes, probably with very little materially to use for his provision because he never had enough to make provision.

Yes, we are all aware of highly paid preachers, those who would gouge brethren for all they can get, who will "go along" with most anything if the pay is good, and they seek to please the suppliers of their salary rather than God. But what of that element of brethren, and they must be legion, who use these overpaid hirelings to castigate every hardworking and struggling faithful preacher?

There needs to be more consideration of preachers financially. When a boy out of high school with no special training at all can get a job driving a truck and make as much or more money in the course of a year delivering packages than a man can who had faithfully preached the gospel and accumulated decades of invaluable experience can receive for his support, something is dreadfully wrong, and too many times this is just the trouble-something is dreadfully wrong. Many brethren would not want to see their sons treated the way they are content to treat their preacher along these lines.

It is really not all that difficult to understand why many (continued on page 16)

Between The Words Of Jesus



JAMES W. BOYD

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business," (Luke 9:49). These are the first recorded words of Jesus in the Scriptures, spoken when He was but twelve years of age.

"It is finished." (John 19:30). These were the last recorded words of Jesus just before death on the cross of Calvary brought to an end His suffering.

Have you ever stopped to think what a marvelous mission was accomplished by Jesus Christ between the utterance of these two phrases? Between them lies the work of Deity in the flesh in providing for the forgiveness of sin for an undeserving humanity. The will of His Father was the work He came to accomplish, and this He did. After three days and nights in the heart of the earth as He had prophecied, He came forth victorious over all that would destroy mankind. With that victory He offers to one and all salvation through Him.

How acquainted are we with what He taught between these two statements? Seeing what He did on our behalf, do you not believe you should become better acquainted with the rest of His words?

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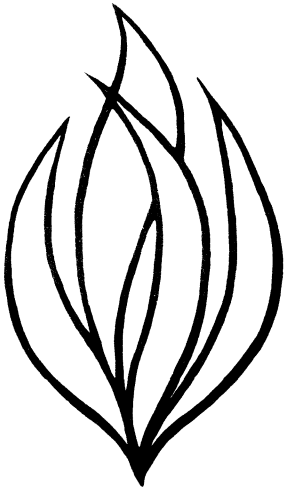

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IV James W. Boyd **NUMBER 10**

The One Baptism

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:1-6.

Among other things, this passage emphasizes oneness. There are several things mentioned of which there is but one. Among those named is *"one baptism."*

Seven Baptisms

At first, this may sound strange, inasmuch as the Bible mentions seven baptisms. Men, of course, have devised and invented many other baptisms in addition to the ones mentioned in the Scriptures. But even the Bible talks about seven baptisms. Yet, Paul says there is one. Our study is to search the Scriptures and learn what is the *"one baptism"* of which Paul speaks in Ephesians four.

We want to make this major point at the outset. Paul says there is *"one baptism."* If Paul says there is one, then there cannot be two, or a half-dozen. He did not say there *was* one, but there *is* one. What *was,* and even what may yet be is not the object of our search but what *is*. Furthermore, when he says *one*, do any of us have difficulty in knowing just exactly how many he had in mind? If we accept, as we must, that there is one God, one Father, and one of everything else, we must accept there is but *one* baptism.

Unto Moses

In the Old Testament we read of the baptism unto Moses. It is not called a baptism in the Old Testament, but we read about it in the Old Testament and it is called a baptism in the New Testament. *"Moreover, brethren, I would not have you to be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."* (First Corinthians 10:1,2). This refers to

the deliverance of the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage as they crossed the Red Sea with water on either side and the cloud above them. They were immersed in the dual element of the cloud and the sea. This immersion is called baptism by the inspired Paul.

It is obvious that the baptism unto Moses was not the baptism to which Paul referred. The baptism unto Moses was in the past tense and occurred only once, pertaining exclusively to Israel.

Matthew 3:11,12, mentions three baptisms. *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire, whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

Fire

There is the baptism of fire. It is a baptism that is administered by Christ, not man. It will occur when the Lord gathers into His garner His wheat, and the beginning of unquenchable fire. This will occur when there is the separation of the wheat from the chaff. It is similar to the judgment scene presented in Matthew 25, where there is mentioned everlasting fire. The baptism of fire is the description of the punishment of the lost. This is yet future. This is not the one baptism to which Paul pointed in Ephesians four.

John's Baptism

This passage also mentions the baptizing that was done in water by John the Baptist. The baptism preached and practiced by John was a part of the preparatory work he was ordained of God to do in making ready the coming of Christ. It was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:1-4). It pointed forward to the coming of Christ (Acts 19:1-5). It is obvious that after Christ had come and the plan of salvation in His name was in operation, that John's baptism ceased to be effective, and after Pentecost anyone baptized by John's baptism had to be baptized again in the name of Christ. Paul taught and practiced that very thing. (Acts 19:1-5). Since the baptism of John is no longer valid, it cannot be argued that John's baptism is the one baptism that Paul says *"is"* the one baptism.

There is another baptism mentioned in this passage that we shall consider later in the lesson.

Jesus Was Baptized

There are two baptisms that relate directly to Christ. Matthew 3:13-17, *"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me. And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straitway out of the water, and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him. And lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

This baptism, even though at the hands of John, was not for the remission of sins. Jesus had no sins (First Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15). This baptism was *"to fulfill all righteousness."*

The term *"righteousness"* here is like that in other places of the New Testament (Romans 1:16,17), and refers to God's commandments. Psalm 119:172, *"All thy commandments are righteousness."* We do not have the specific record when God commanded that this be done, but inasmuch as the baptism is said to be a fulfillment of that righteousness or commandment, we can know that somewhere, sometime, the Father had directed this to be accomplished, and Jesus was obedient to His Father in heaven. It provided the open and public forum for the Father's announcement of the identity of Jesus. *"This is my beloved Son."* It also marked the beginning of what is generally called the public ministry of Christ.

Suffering

Luke 12:50 presents to us a figurative use of the term baptism. *"But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"* The explanation of this terminology is found in reading Matthew 20:20-23, *"Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said,*

Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand, and on my left is not mine to give, but it shall be for them for whom it is prepared of my Father."

The cup that Jesus was to drink was the cup of suffering. Matthew 26:39, *"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."* Jesus was facing the suffering of the cross. He called it a cup to drink. He prayed that it might be spared him, but the Father's will must be done. The cup was the cup of suffering, and the baptism of which he spoke to James and John, sons of Zebedee, also referred to that suffering beneath which he would be plunged and submerged.

Both of these baptisms related to Christ personally. He was the only one to die on the cross for the sins of men. Only He is the divine Son of God. Neither of these two are the one baptism. There remain but two others, one of which must, if even by elimination, be the one baptism of Ephesians four.

Holy Spirit

Let us now consider the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The subject is a very extensive one, but a few words can lead us to know whether or not this is the one baptism of Paul.

We read from Matthew, chapter three, where John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Not only did John foretell this but also the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28). Jesus had promised His apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). It is also recorded that Jesus said, *"...but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence."* (Acts 1:5). He told His apostles to tarry in Jerusalem and wait for the power to come, and identified that power as the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

This event took place on the first Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus. The Spirit overpowered and immersed the apostles, covering them with divine power. They began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance. They were inspired of God in what they said. This was not a baptism that was commanded of them, but one that was promised to them. It was not that for which they were to

pray, but was given in fulfillment of the Lord's promise. It was promised only to the apostles, administered by Christ, not men. They were guided in presenting and revealing the truth of God infallibly. It enabled them, as the recipients of this baptism, to perform miracles and to lay hands on others that imparted this power to others to perform miracles. (Acts 8:17; 19:6). Such was a work that was exclusively theirs and belonged to no other (Acts 8:19-21). It was for the purpose of confirming the word that they preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4).

If there be those who are baptized of the Holy Spirit today as some claim, there ought to be the demonstration of such power as was given to the apostles, both in their miracles, their revelation of the Word, and the impartation of such power to others. But all three matters are significantly lacking among those today.

The truth is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was upon the ones to whom it was promised, the apostles, and no other. Even the events at the household of Cornelius were not identical with that of Pentecost, and to call that event a second baptism of the Holy Spirit is to assign it a significance that is not to be proven by Scripture. The purpose of the Holy Spirit baptism, the people of the Holy Spirit baptism, the action of the Holy Spirit baptism is not among men today as then. The revealed and confirmed Word, of course, still abides.

Men have added many other baptisms, so called, since the Bible was completed. They have substitutions for what the Scripture demands, and have meanings for these things for which the Scripture gives no authority. Sprinkling and pouring are not scriptural baptism. *Triune* baptism is no scriptural baptism. Baptism to join a denomination is unheard of and baptism to show you have already been saved is false to the core. Infant baptism has no Biblical authority. All such things are digressions from the truth. *Lordship* baptism is another misnomer. To be baptized confessing that Jesus is your Lord is nowhere found in Scripture. Some today who have been baptized for the remission of sins are now undergoing what is called *Lordship* baptism. Such is another digression.

The One Baptism

The command to be baptized still stands today. It is significant that the baptism that was being preached and practiced at the time when Paul said there is one baptism was baptism in water,

in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, as the entrance into Christ, whereupon God adds one to His church. (Acts 8:36; 10:47,48; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:47). This was in conformity with the condition that was given by Jesus (Mark 16:16). That command has not changed and still abides today. This is the baptism that is taught and obeyed even now. Those that love the Lord will obey His will (John 14:15).

By this baptism one becomes a member of the body of Christ (First Corinthians 12:13). It is administered by men as Jesus directed (Matthew 28:19). It is not in connection with a second baptism, the Holy Spirit baptism, for then there would be two baptisms, whereby Paul has said there *is* one.

Every example of conversion revealed in the New Testament under the authority of Christ, beginning at Pentecost has concluded with baptism because that is the point of leaving the sinful world and entering Christ (Romans 6:3,4). We urge all men to obey this baptism.

† † † † †

Partakers Of The Divine Nature

Second Peter 1:5-8, reads, *"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to your virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."* This familiar list of characteristics is often called the Christian virtues. They are some of the qualities that Christians are expected to develop in their own lives and character. The American Standard version begins this passage, *"Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part..."* the various qualities. For what cause? This is an important point in our lesson. There is good reason and cause for adding these qualities to our lives. Look at the verses immediately before this passage and we find the reason for adding these qualities. *"Whereby are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises; that by these ye*

might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (Verse 4).

Faith

Peter was addressing those who had obtained a *"like precious faith"* with him. Peter was in close fellowship with Christ. Peter had the privilege of having seen the Christ while He was here on earth. Those to whom Peter was writing had not been so blessed, but they believed on the basis of the evidence revealed unto them. They had *"the knowledge of God and of Jesus the Lord."* They both knew the Father and Son.

Furthermore, Peter states that the Father had given unto *"us."* This refers to the apostles and to others who received these things through their preaching, *"all things that pertain to life and godliness."* Everything that related to eternal life with God had been taught them. By having the knowledge that they had of Christ, they had everything that was needed to get right, stay right and be right with God.

Promises

They were also the recipients of *"great and precious promises"* that had come through Christ. By developing these qualities, these Christian virtues, they would become more and more in the character likeness of Deity. Through Christ they had escaped the corruption of the sinful world, and by becoming more and more like Him they would be partakers of *"the divine nature."* This does not mean they would become Deity. It means, as we sometimes sing, they would become "more and more like Jesus."

"Yea, and for this very cause..." because of their precious faith, because of the blessings through Christ, because they had received what they needed to be right with God, because of the precious promises extended to them through Christ, because they had escaped sin's defilements, because they could become more and more like God in character, they were to add these character qualities to their lives, heart, mind, and actions. This is the reason and the motivation for adding these virtues.

These qualities do not just happen to become ours. There is something we must do to possess them. They are available to us for the developing.

We do not add just one quality at a time. All these qualities

are added simultaneously. It is a process of growth. Just as one does not first grow a leg to mature size, and then grow the arm to full size, then grow a foot, etc. but all parts grow simultaneously and together, so these qualities are added to our characters as we grow spiritually. Actually what we are considering in this passage is the matter of growth as a child of God. Having been born into the family, we are to grow. These are the ways where growth is expected.

Diligence

Consider the quality of diligence. This is the very opposite of slothfulness and careless indifference. "Hit or miss" Christianity is really not the Lord's faith at all. We are to give close attentiveness to Christian living. We are to be watchful and alert, wide awake, lest the devil overtake us. We know the value of diligence in business, driving a car, in walking across a wide chasm. Brethren, we are as someone who is walking over a narrow bridge over the open jaws of hell. Therefore, we must be diligent.

Courage

In our faith we are to supply or add virtue. This term means manliness and courage. It reflects a disposition to stand for what is right against all opposition. It means holding firm to faithful and true convictions. David said to Solomon, *"Be strong and show thyself a man."* What good advice every child should receive.

The lack of courage has contributed to the fall of many. Demas fell in the weakness of love for this world. When members of the church, whether young or old, compromise and surrender their faith and convictions in order to be accepted by people of the world, they reveal a lack of the very quality Peter admonishes here. Joshua showed virtue when he withstood the ten faithless spies and said Israel could take the land of Canaan. He demonstrated it again when he said, *"As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah."* Paul expressed virtue when he commented, *"I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."*

Cowards cannot fight the good fight successfully. Truth cannot be upheld by the hands of the timid and afraid. God needs strong and courageous children to do His bidding on this earth. Be one of them.

Knowledge

Add knowledge. Some knowledge is necessary in order to become a Christian. More knowledge is needed in order to be a Christian day after day. Christ urged, *"Take my yoke upon you and learn of me..."* (Matthew 11:29). Hosea mourned the agonies of God, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee."* In spite of this, we see so-called, nominal "Christians" ignore the opportunities to know more perfectly the will of the Lord. We see them neglect adding knowledge of truth to their lives. *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). But we need not expect the freedom when we refuse to glean the knowledge.

Just as a babe must physically have nourishment to survive and grow, so must the one born into the kingdom have spiritual supplies. As the children of God we are to feed upon the *"sincere milk of the word."* We are expected to press on so that we can take meat and be strong. It is a command to grow. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* (Second Peter 3:18). So many members of the church are disobedient to this command and float through life as if it really did not matter that much. Did not the Lord in Hebrews 5:12 rebuke the Christians who did not grow in knowledge as they should?

Self-control

Then there is the quality of temperance or self-control. It is unfortunate that some think of temperance only in terms of the use of alcoholic beverages and usually miss the point there. Some think it means they can drink a little bit. Temperance means self-control. The Christian will have such control of himself and will abstain from evil, even the appearance thereof. It is not self-control to indulge in something wrong even a little bit. Moderation, self-control, or temperance means refraining from evil altogether, and doing what is acceptable in moderation.

It is intemperate to swear at all, lie at all, drink alcoholic beverages at all, overeat at all, smoke at all, commit adultery at all, etc. It is sinful to curse and use profanity at all. You cannot do such things moderately and temperately. Such things are themselves intemperate. Self-control is what is needed to

abstain. One cannot lose his temper a little bit and be as he ought. Control is the order.

Patience

We must add patience to our lives. The term patience is often misunderstood for self-control. It is obvious that many of us display a lack of self-control in pressing situations and we say that we lack patience. But the term used here means stedfastness and faithfulness. It is not a symptom of passive non-resistance, complacency or serenity. Nor is it the same as indifference. Sometimes what some call patience is nothing other than lethargy and a "don't care" attitude.

James reminded us of the patience of Job (James 5:11). As one surveys the book of Job he notes that there were times when Job got very aroused and lashed out. He might have displayed a small amount of lack of self-control, but he is an example of patience. He said, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him."* (Job 13:15). He would not curse God and die. He would cease to be faithful to God regardless what hardships came upon him. He knew that giving up on God was never the way to follow. He was stedfast in his faith, unwavering in his confidence in God. This is the real meaning of patience. It might be best defined as "keeping on keeping on." Patience is certainly put to the test when times are difficult and the discouragements frequent under adverse circumstances. God is easy to serve when all goes well. But the patient Christian will serve God at all times, every time, and regardless of the times.

Godliness

The Christian is to add godliness to his character. Again, this word like the word *patience* is often misunderstood because of its similarity to the word *godlikeness*. But it means reverence, respect, piety toward God.

How the world lacks respect for the Almighty! But the child of God has reverence for things sacred and holy. He is not like a swine who will trample underfoot that which is precious. He will not abuse the things of God. He does not profane what God has made holy. Rather, he has respect and stands in awe of the power and majesty of God, honoring His name, His laws, loving what God loves and hating what God hates.

Godliness must be taught to the young. They will not hold

things in reverence unless they are taught that which is to be so held. When the young see those who are older speak and act disparagingly toward things that deserve honor and reverence, what can you expect from them except the same kind of godless behavior? The Christian is a pious man, giving reverence to God and all things that pertain unto Him.

Kindness

Brotherly kindness is to characterize the Christian also. This is the special love he is to have toward his brothers and sisters in Christ. Genuine love will manifest itself in word and deed, in consideration and concern. Love will not produce injury and harm, as is often done through gossip, slander, and false accusation. But it will produce help in time of need, bearing one another's burdens, quick to forgive, ready to protect.

Brotherly love is displayed and enjoyed in the good fellowship that brethren have as they journey through life, working together in the cause of the Lord. When one is sick, his brethren are attentive. Whether in times of good fortune or trouble, the Christian should be able to count on his brethren to rejoice with him or weep with him. The greetings one to another are warm, sincere, heartfelt. This is because the tie that binds in Christian love is a tie that is stronger even than fleshly ties. It should be an ongoing project of every child of the Lord to build a disposition toward brethren that is the kind of love that the Lord wants among those of His family, the church.

Love

The last quality Peter names is love. Certainly love is embodied in brotherly kindness, but love even extends beyond the limits of the brotherhood. God loves all people, and so should we. God does not approve of all people, and neither are we expected to do so. But "seeking the other's highest good" is the quality of love, and this is what God wants of us.

So much is said about love today, and too often nothing more is meant than an emotional, almost gooey nothingness and wordy mush. Deeds reflect real love, not mere talk. Paul writes that if we have not love, then whatever else we may have suffers and is in vain (First Corinthians 13).

R. L. Whiteside wrote in *Sound Doctrine,* page 164, volume 2, "It is possible for us to become selfish in our love for the

church and to develop a sort of family pride. Such a one does not think of leading men to Christ for their own sakes and because they need salvation, but he thinks of the world as a quarry out of which he may extract material to help build up the church and make it greater and more glorious. But the Christian must outgrow that trait; he must cultivate love for men and seek to reclaim them from sin and ruin because he loves them. Hence, to brotherly love add universal love."

By adding these things to our own hearts and lives, we become more as the Lord above would have us be. We become more like Him. We become partakers of the nature that is characteristic of Deity.

It might be a good way to bring this discussion to a close by simply asking, and let each ask of himself, "How are we doing in growing along these matters?"

† † † † †

Father, Forgive Them

The only way for sins to be covered is that they are forgiven by the Lord (Romans 4:7,8). Jesus came to this low life of sin and sorrow for the specific purpose of bringing salvation and forgiveness of sins (Matthew 1:21). His life was a giant emphasis on forgiveness, as is evidenced by His words of forgiveness and His teaching concerning it. His death on the cross provided the sin-removing blood by which the sins of men are forgiven.

As our Lord was on the cross, His attitude toward those that chose to sin against Him was that of a willingness to forgive (Luke 23:34). So must be our attitude (Matthew 6:15). To withhold forgiveness from anyone who seeks it is to seal our own spiritual doom (Matthew 18:35).

When we understand the wages of sin means an eternal separation from God, a hell to be suffered without end, our hearts and voices cry out for forgiveness. We want our sins forgiven. We cannot successfully cover them ourselves. We need the Savior God has provided.

It should be our prayer that all who sin will conform to the conditions of forgiveness, one of which is to possess a forgiving spirit. JWB

Jesus Washes His Disciples Feet

The text for this lesson is John 13:1-17. It is the record of an event during the week just prior to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It tells of happenings during a very trying period of the Lord's earthly sojourn.

The assembly in the upper room was the last assembly the Lord had with His chosen apostles before His death. After this followed the Garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal by Judas, the series of unjust and vicious "trials," and eventually the cross. Christ was aware of what was before Him, *"knowing that his hour was come that He should depart."*

We must keep in mind how difficult this assembly must have been for Jesus. He deeply loved His apostles and counted heavily on them. He had been in such close association with them for the past three to three and a half years. They had been together under many and varying conditions. Any final gathering with loved ones is emotional; goodbyes come hard. These men were the closest to Jesus on earth. Later He would pray fervently for them. He knew what mockery, scourging, blasphemy, ridicule, physical pain and shame awaited Him. His apostles did not, and could not at this time, grasp the awesomeness of the entire proceedings. Surely, all these things were in His heart as He rose to perform the service of washing the feet of His disciples, teaching them a lesson that they, as well as we, needed.

Jesus, The Servant

Instead of being comforted by others in this agonizing period of His life, He took the towel and basin and rendered the humble task that was usually performed only by servants.

Among the heavy burdens within the heart of our Lord was the problem among His disciples. There was evidence of greed, covetousness, and other evil in the heart of Judas. The Lord loved Judas, but the heart of Judas was evil. It proved to be fertile soil into which Satan sowed the seeds of disloyalty and betrayal that turned Judas into one of the most reprehensible people of whom we read in the Bible.

Who Is Greatest?

Another problem, and is some ways even a bigger one, was the distracting concern among the rest of the disciples as to whom would be the greatest among them. While Jesus walked with them, He was their leader but now that He was going away they became concerned about who would be chief, and each seemed to have desire for position. Jealousy was working its way into their hearts, and all this at a time when they should have had no concern for themselves but very much interest and compassion for Jesus.

This was not the first time that this problem had arisen among them. Matthew 20:20-28 reads, *"Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you, but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."* The problem of rank was raised by the mother of James and John. The result of this ambition was *"strife among them."* (Luke 22:24).

Strife and jealousy can work its ugly head into the body of Christ today if we are careless and indifferent about keeping a check on it. This was doubtless part of the problem with Diotrephes of whom we read in Third John 9, *"who loveth to have the preeminence among them."* Such an attitude can only create division. Pride surely grieves the Lord as much now as then. The manners of much of the religious world caters to and

fosters such strife by giving ecclesiastical titles like Reverend, Father, Excellency, etc. The same is true with the wearing of robes and parading before others in a public fashion. Such is more like the Pharisees than Christians. (Matthew 23 :5-12).

Custom

It was the custom in that land that before the meal was served, as an act of hospitality, the host or one of his servants, would wash the feet of his guests. They wore sandals and the dust upon their feet made this needful, as well as a refreshing action. But Jesus and His disciples were in the room that belonged to another who was not present. None of the disciples assumed the role. None rendered the work of a servant. All considered themselves as guests. To have done otherwise would have admitted a role of inferior rank, which was incompatible with their ambitions to be counted the greatest.

Christ had taught His disciples who would be the greatest. *"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 18:4). We have already read Matthew 20:26-28. Luke records, *"But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth."* (Luke 22:26,27). Even though He was Master of all, He bows before each one and performs the humble and menial task of a servant.

At first Peter objected. He evidently had grasped the point that the disciples had erred and refused to let the Lord wash his feet. But Jesus said, *"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me."* It was plain that Jesus wished to teach this lesson to all who were present and it would be wrong to refuse to allow Him to do so. Peter then quickly submitted (John 13:9).

What Was It?

When Jesus had completed the literal washing, He asked, *"Know ye what I have done to you?"* (John 13:12-15). it was obvious to all that He had washed their feet. It is obvious to us that Jesus had something else in mind other than the literal washing of the feet of His disciples. He was not teaching the act of "foot washing" as some kind of religious ceremony. Rather

He was teaching them the lesson they all so desparately needed, particularly in view of their contentions about who would be the greatest. He was teaching them humility, service, the unacceptability of arrogant pride and the desire for position among brethren. He was condemning self-exaltation and commending service. There is nothing in the text to indicate that He was establishing some kind of religious rite and ordinance that was to be a part of worshipping God, as some claim. Foot washing, then and now, is an act of service and hospitality. Whenever we read of it in Scripture it was such an act. It was not this actual practice that Jesus taught, but He was teaching something designed to correct a blight and blemish in the character of His disciples, and something that can mar our characters also if we fail to learn.

Sin Of Pride

Proverbs 16:18,19, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud."* Proverbs six tells us of six things, yea seven that the Lord hates. The very first one mentioned is *"a proud look." "A man's pride shall bring him low; but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit."* (Proverbs 29:23). *"And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms, saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him, and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place, and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."* (Luke 14:7-11).

James said, *"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."* Paul admonished, *"Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits."* (Romans 12:16). Earlier he had written, *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..."* (Romans 12:3). *"Let*

nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." (Philippians 2:3,4).

Such then is the teaching of Jesus Christ by this event. The qualities of humility and service are qualities that are admitted by the Lord, taught of God, and are to become a part of the Christian's manner of life. It all begins by humbling our will to Him.

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(continued from page 23)

The Bible student will remember that with the passing of years, the coming of famines, Joseph and his brothers met once again. When the identity of the powerful distributor of grain in Egypt was realized by the brothers to actually be their brother Joseph, a thrilling and emotional story is told.

"God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance." Gen. 45:7.

Preservation of the family of Jacob could not be accomplished in Canaan due to the famine that extended over many years. So Joseph looked upon his ordeals, and they were difficult, as God using him to accomplish God's purposes in preserving Israel. He considered himself but a tool in God's hand.

Another great example of the character of Joseph that we will do well to imitate is what happened after the death of Jacob. The brothers feared retaliation from Joseph. But Joseph said, *"Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."* (Genesis 50:19,20). Joseph consented to the providence of God, forgave his brothers, and rejoiced in his opportunities to accomplish good in spite of what others had done against him.

Shall we do less when the hardships of being faithful to God overtake us? We know not all the workings of God's providence but we are assured of His providence nonetheless. If we keep a Joseph-like attitude toward all things that come our way, we shall do good for ourselves and those around us, possibly even for those who have acted toward us like Joseph's brothers acted toward him. JWB

The Antediluvian World

The word "antediluvian" means before the great flood in the days of Noah. It has reference to that period of time between the creation and that flood recorded in Genesis. Just exactly how long a period that was we are not in a position to be certain and dogmatic. The Bible does not give us a date of the creation or the age and antiquity of man. It does not tell us how long the earth has existed. We place ourselves in an unnecessary and complicated situation to try to assign a certain number of years for this period.

Let us hasten to add, however, that this admission is not an allowance for the millions and millions of years that evolutionists like to say that the earth, the universe, etc. has existed. Scientific evidence contradicts such extended periods of time. The theory of uniformitarianism is not a valid one, because it denies such events as the flood itself, even creation, or any other miraculous intervention on the part of God. It is a concoction of unbelievers that is designed to prop up the unproven and unprovable hypothesis of evolution as the explanation for the origin of man and denial of God and man's accountability to Him. The existence of the earth is more likely in the neighborhood of ten thousand years, but we have no obligation to specify such things.

Usshur's calendar has given a period of approximately 1,700 years to this antediluvian period, but we are not Biblically obligated to defend this figure. The calculation is based on the genealogies listed in the Scriptures, but failed to take into account the skips in genealogies that often takes place because the genealogies were not designed to necessarily denote each generation, but only the lineage involved; but this is an irrelevant matter in our discussion.

Like most any other period of history, we find good things and evil things. But we need to note some of the characteristics of mankind in that age as the Bible reveals them.

Contrary to the assertions of evolutionists, early man was not more animal than human, not a savage, not a wild man. So often we are provided the hypothetical pictures and drawings from the imaginations of unbelievers regarding the early appearance of man, and man is made to appear little more than an animal, not quite human. But the Bible says man was created

an intelligent, sane, complete creature. Atheistic or theistic evolution either one denies the Scriptures and there is absolutely no harmony between them. To accept the Darwinian theory of evolution, that man was beast and is now highly developed, is to deny the Word of God. Such a hypothesis is neither Biblically or scientifically compatible with what mankind can and does know. True enough, some of the descendants of early man seem to act more like savages than humans, but that is because of sin. And you do not have to go back into history to find examples of such degenerate conduct. Just look around the society of which we all are members and you will see examples of this sorry condition with many.

Human Skills

When God created man, He made man superior to everything of His creation and gave him superiority over all things. Man was created in the spiritual image of God, full-grown, with talents, abilities, intelligence, capacities and knowledge. Even before the flood, man had attained considerable skills and a high degree of civilization.

Men were herdsmen like Jabal, father of tent dwellers and those that had cattle. There were musicians, like Jubal, the father of all who handle the harp and pipe. There were metallurgists, workers of metal, like Tubal-Cain, and instructor of every artificer in brass and iron. There were builders like Cain, who built a city and named it Enoch, after his son. Farmers existed and even Adam knew how to till the earth and make his livelihood thereform. There are manifold evidences showing early man before the flood to be highly skilled, civilized, with knowledge and ability. Even Noah had great abilities, sufficient to build the ark. Certainly mankind was not as mechanized as now. Many things have been learned and discovered through the centuries of man's existence, but to think that our ancestors were mere animals, savages, beasts of the field, without any refinement, culture, or such things, is to degrade the race with nonsense. Our earliest foreparents could speak, communicate, not just grunt and act silly to convey their intents and messages as we are sometimes led to believe by those who prefer to think of their fathers as brute beasts.

Long Life

Characteristic of this antediluvian period was the longevity of life. Adam lived 930 years; Seth lived 912 years. Methusaleh lived 969 years, the longest life that is recorded. Some have contended that such was not possible. Why was it not possible? Is it just because it does not occur now? All things are possible with God. There is no reason to consider these long periods of life to be anything except literal designations of the time these people lived. God's Word, having been verified, confirmed, proven, tells us how long they lived and we prove ourselves fools whenever we try to show that God is ignorant and did not know whereof He spoke.

We do not profess to know why God allowed those people to live so long. That does not matter. He may have wanted them to live long so as to populate the earth. The world then may not have been as infected with disease. It may have been to expand civilization. Whatever, we do not attempt to second guess God. We believe His Word.

There are those who are always so anxious to appease and compromise with the skeptic and contend that the "years" really only meant "months." This would make Methusaleh only about 80 years old, which is more to their human reasoning. But if that be true, then Jared was only five months old when he fathered a child, for he fathered a son at 65. This reduces the attempted compromise to the absurdity. When there is no reason to relegate Biblical statements to the symbolic and figurative, we do the Word injustice to attempt it. As usual, man's rationalizations of what he does not understand produces far more complications than acceptance of God's Word ever produced. True enough, people do not live as long as before the flood. What changes in the world's environment were produced by the flood, or what changes God may have instigated then, remains unknown.

Sin

The antediluvian period is very well known for its sinfulness. The first sin was in the Garden of Eden by Adam and Eve in disobedience to God. We read of Cain's murder of Abel, resulting from his jealousy and envy. We read of presumptious worship by Cain. We read of the ever-growing rebellion by mankind against God, with lies, neglect of personal responsibilities, polygamy, immorality of various forms, evil marriages, until the Scripture records, *"that every imagination of the*

thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5). Once the floodgate of sin was opened, the devestation of sin and the weakness of man to resist temptation plunged man into spiritual and physical ruin.

Now and again we read of noblemen during that period like Enoch, who *"walked with God."* There was also Noah who *"found grace in the eyes of the Lord."* But these are the exceptions.

Lamech is the first man to be recorded to violate God's intent concerning marriage, having two wives (Genesis 4:19). The result of all these transgressions was, *"And it repented God that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart...And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth."* (Genesis 6:6,12). Genesis 6:11 tells us that *"the earth was filled with violence."* This certainly contributed to the necessity of destruction of such a magnitude of wickedness by the flood. Man's misuse of power and the exploitation of his blessings, made violence commonplace.

The extent of this evil is described in Genesis 6:5, as we have read. It is beyond ability to adequately picture the corrupt society, not in part but the whole, with minor exceptions.

What should be sobering to us today, but which is dismissed by most is that these same sins are running rampant in the world even yet.

Warnings

When God saw the situation, God warned the antediluvian world. Although they were wicked, undeserving, and sinful, God was concerned for them as He has always been for the souls of people. Sacred history records their punishment, but not without having had opportunity to repent. Noah is called a *"preacher of righteousness."* (Second Peter 2:5). He was described as a *"perfect man,"* not without any fault, but blameless, without reproach, whole, complete and mature before God. Through Noah the Spirit of God did strive with man (Genesis 6:3). Hebrews 11:7 says Noah *"condemned the world,"* warning of the destruction impending due to sin. Indications are that this man of faith (Hebrews 11:7) spent 120 years warning his fellow beings of God's wrath, but to no avail except his own family. God was longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but there came a time when the longsuffering

of God expired and He ceased His persuasion through Noah. He executed His justice and wrath against the wicked generations in the form of the flood.

Worship

During this antediluvian period, there was worship of God through sacrifices, using altars, other activities that were done *"by faith,"* which indicates that God's Word was given to them (Romans 10:17). Worship has characterized every period of human history. At no time has God left man without instructions of how to worship Him. Unfortunately, history shows and the present reaffirms, that so many pay so little attention to what God wants, preferring to do things they like, their own way.

From a survey of this span of human history as given from the Bible, we can observe several significant matters: (1) In the creation, God's power and provision for man is evident. The rank that God gave to man was to be his blessings, but man dissipated it through sin. (2) We see God's displeasure with sin, and His wrath against the sinner. (3) We see the longsuffering of God, His kindness, His grace and favor toward Noah, His concern for all mankind. But we see that such has its limits. (4) We observe the results of man's continued rebellion against God and His refusal to repent and live God's way. (5) We can be encouraged that a righteous life can be lived even in a perverse generation. Noah was even able to save his own family under the worst kind of circumstances. (6) We can note, that even though we live in a different age and dispensation, we serve the same God. They worshipped, and we are to worship, even though not the same way. They had to believe and obey to be spared, and we must believe and obey to be spiritually spared. They, for the most part, failed and were punished. We, if we also fail, shall be punished.

Salvation

First Peter 3:20 teaches that Noah was saved *"by water."* Having heard God's warning, being given God's instructions concerning the ark, obeying what God said because he believed God, the water, rather than being the means of his destruction as was the case with the wicked, was the means of his salvation, lifting up the ark, Noah and his family, to safety.

First Peter 3:21 reads, *"The like figure whereunto even*

baptism doth now also save us [not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God] by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Baptism involves water. Obviously, water baptism was under consideration here, else where would have been no need to explain that it was not a mere washing of the body. In spite of all of the denials by the denominationalists and the "dry cleaners" of the religious world, the Bible teaches that we are saved by water, even by baptism. So it reads and so shall it remain, and so shall we preach and so ought men obey.

The earth, and all that is therein shall again be destroyed, but not by water. God promised there would not be another flood like that which ended the antediluvian age. If the flood had been a local flood as some have contended, then God has violated His own promise because there have been many local floods since the days of Noah. The flood was a universal, earth-covering flood. Next time God will destroy the earth by fire (Second Peter 3). It is inevitable and predestined.

Are we ready for that day to come? Without warning (Matthew 24:37-39) and at a time we cannot know in advance, the end shall come and the judgment shall be. Will we have given God's Word any more respect than those of the antediluvian period? Or shall we be destroyed as well?

† † † † †

The Difference Was Attitude

A study of accepted Bible characters is one of the richest sources of material for character improvement one can find. Few surpass that great Old Testament character named Joseph. He provides us with a multitude of commendable examples. For instance, focus attention on how he viewed the sins committed against him by his brothers.

In the book of Genesis we read how the brothers of Joseph took him and sold him as a slave into Egypt. They were envious and jealous of him and realized they could not cope with him unless they did some underhanded deed against him. So they seized him and sent him away.

(continued on page 17)

One Glory Of The Church

Ephesians 3:10, "*To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.*" Our emphasis is on the phrase, "*by the church.*"

The Old Testament contains many prophecies concerning the kingdom of God, which is the church (Colossians 1:13; Matthew 16:16-19). While those who subscribe to the false theory of pre-millennialism contend that Christ failed to establish the kingdom and provided a hastily conceived substitute with the church until He returns the next time to set up His kingdom, the Bible teaches the church was God's intent "*before the foundation of the world.*" (Ephesians 1:4). It exists according to His eternal purpose (Ephesians 1:11).

The glory of the church we now emphasize is that the very existence of the church makes known, demonstrates, the manifold wisdom of God. It is true that the church is to make the gospel message known to the world and is the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15). But our text teaches how the existence of the church tells us something of God and His wisdom.

Keep in mind, God promised Abraham that of His seed would come One who would be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:3; 18:18). That seed is Christ (Galatians 3:16). The saved belong to Christ and are those that make up the church (Acts 2:47). The intent and wise plan of God to save mankind is observable and demonstrated by the existence of saved people, the ones who compose the church that Christ saves (Ephesians 5:23).

This teaching refutes forever the idea that one can be saved outside of the church, that church membership is optional, that it does not matter to which church one belongs. All such teaching has come from the minds of men as they strive to justify what cannot be harmonized with Scripture. If people would make as much effort to learn the will of God as they do to "discover" ways that God already accepts whatever is among men, then there would be respect for the church, and denominationalism would die overnight.

One glory of the church is that God has declared its composition to be saved people and it stands as undeniable evidence of His wisdom. Indeed, the church is a glorious church. JWB

It Is Better Hidden



JAMES W. BOYD

There is no justification for hypocrisy. If there was anything our Lord considered contemptible it was the pretended and feigned righteousness some outwardly displayed, but were "*whited sepulchres, full of deed men's bones.*"

But there is no offense to good morals to contend that society is better served when the evil of the wicked are concealed rather than paraded openly and shamelessly.

The flaunting of wickedness, as if there is some kind of virtue in being a servant of the devil openly instead of secretly, is to ignore the corrupting influence of evil upon others, especially those in their young and formative years.

If someone is determined to consume alcoholic beverages, commit fornication, lie, steal, or some other of the many forms of sinful behavior, he does eternal spiritual damge to his own soul. But if he commits his transgressions in hiding, even though his damnation is certain, at least he will not be influencing others to the same spiritual devastation. There are some things better left unsaid openly and undone publicly even if disrespect for God is under deceptive concealment.

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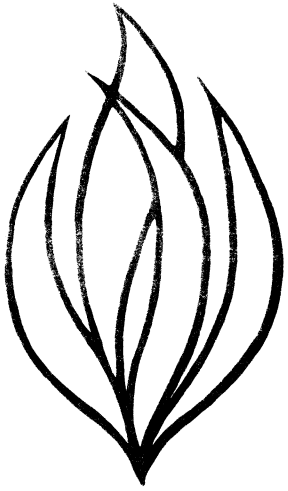
A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Way Home

There is something thrilling and wonderful in the thoughts of home. "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." We may go away from home for a while, even on a most pleasurable experience, visiting friends and loved ones, enjoying a vacation or a trip, but we are glad to get home again. We like to think of home, and the many wonderful memories concerning home and those who inhabit it.

Our lesson now centers on the thoughts of home, but not our earthly homes, but the most wonderful home of all, the heavenly home. For the Christian, this earth is not our home, at least not our permanent home. It is but a temporary one for a short while at the longest. Life is but a vapor that will soon be finished, and if not finished, it will come to a stop nonetheless. We are just passing through this domain on our way to another land, on our way home. *"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims..."* (First Peter 2:11). We are but sojourners, as the *"man goeth to his long home."* (Ecclesiastes 12:5). Paul wrote, *"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven."* (Second Corinthians 5:1,2). We are striving for that better destination and as Abraham, looking for that city whose builder and maker is God.

We sing the song that says, "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land." Heaven is that home for which we long. But certain things are required of us to go home to heaven.

The Desire

To go home to heaven one must earnestly desire to go there. The way that some seem to live their lives indicate that they would not want to live in heaven even if they could. Their desires and ambitions are not on heavenly matters. They will have to change their likes and dislikes before they would enjoy heavenly fellowship.

Abraham desired a better country (Hebrews 11:9,10). At the

death of his infant son, David expressed the desire to go and be with him (Second Samuel 12:23). Few words express the desire for heaven more adequately than those of Paul in Philippians 1:23,24, *"But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ for it is very far better."*

When I was a young child I wondered at the statements I sometimes heard from older people as they talked about the time of their death. They did not look upon it with a dread and fear, but almost with a sense of anticipation and a pleasure to come. Some actually looked forward to it because they had such a hard time in this life. As I grow older, I have not even yet been fully able to grasp that sense and attitude toward departing from this world, but I can see more clearly why some would desire to leave the toils of the road, the cares, the pain and suffering, the difficulties, and depart to be with the saved eternally, which included many loved ones who had gone on before them. But there must be a desire to go to heaven. Possibly some do not have a sufficient desire and therefore will not succeed.

I heard a rather humorous story about having sufficient motivation and desire to accomplish something. In England the graves are dug ten feet deep, and not only are graves found in cemetaries, but other places. An educator died and his grave was dug on the campus where he had taught. The evening before the funeral, one lad was crossing the campus in the dark and fell into the grave. The depth of it made it impossible for him to be able to get out however hard he tried. So he resigned himself to sit in a corner and wait for the dawn to bring help. By chance another lad was walking the same area and also fell into the same open grave, unaware of the first occupant in one dark corner. The second lad jumped and jumped and tried to get out, but was making no headway. Finally, the first boy said, "It's no use trying, because you can't get out." Hearing those words from a source unknown he suspected the worst and he leaped from the grave with a single bound. You might say that he had been sufficiently motivated and had a strong desire to get out. Maybe that is what more of us need; namely, a stronger desire for heaven to be our home.

The Decision

To go to heaven, one must decide to go there. He will not just accidentally come upon it. And actually, it is amazing that man is given the opportunity to make such a decision. Life is filled

with the making of decisions, some of which are rather insignificant, but many are so important, life-forming, even determining our eternal destiny. Some of the more momentous decisions we make in life are where we shall live, our means of livelihood, who we shall marry, etc. But the most important decision of all of one's existence is, "What shall I do concerning Christ?" To refuse to decide to live in Christ and for Christ is to decide not to go to heaven. This we shall emphasize later in the lesson. But the necessity of making decisions are a part of living.

God pleads with us to decide for Christ. He urged the people before the flood of Noah to turn from their wickedness by the preaching of Noah (Genesis 6:3; Second Peter 2:5). Even now, we are invited to come to Christ (Revelation 22:17). The Lord does not want any to perish (Second Peter 3:7). If anyone is lost it will be because they have decided to be lost rather than saved.

The making of this decision is a very personal matter and a personal responsibility. None can decide for me. Others may encourage and instruct me, but each one must act in obedience to God for himself. We can help one another prepare for heaven, but each must make his own preparation. We have to choose whom we shall serve (Joshua 24:15).

There is an old song that asks the question, "What will Christ do with me?" That depends on what I do with Christ.

One Way

There is but one way to go to make heaven our home and that way is Christ. There is no other. "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). "*Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12). There is only one Lord (Ephesians 4:4,5). We all must walk by the same one rule (Philippians 3:16). The gate is strait, the way is narrow (Matthew 7:13,14). We either go that way or we do not go.

Some have mistakenly accepted the idea that there are many ways to reach heaven and we can choose whatever way we prefer. We must choose to go the way that God has prescribed. "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" (Proverbs 14:12). As another great and grand song of worship states, "I must needs go home by the way of the cross, there's no other way but this." Such is the teaching of Ephesians 2:16. It is the way of the cross that

leads home.

What is another amazing and wonderful thought is that the way home is simple and understandable. It is not complicated, mystical, or beyond our reach. This is not to suggest that the way is always easy to travel. Actually, the opposite is often the case. But it is a way that we have the capacity to go if we determine to go. The way may be thought of in three simple steps: One, we are lost and out of Christ. Two, we believe in Christ, repent of our sins, confess our faith and are baptized into Christ where salvation is. Three, by remaining faithful to Christ in life, we have God's own word that heaven will be our home. All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1). If we abide in Christ, He will abide in us (John 15:6). And the living of life in the followship of the steps of Christ our example (First Peter 2:21) will lead us right to the gates of glory. There we shall be privileged to hear Christ's own words, *"Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* (Matthew 25:34). It is then that the toils of the road will seem nothing. We will have reached the end of the way. We will be home at last. What a comforting and wonderful thought to think of the home over there.

God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the angels of heaven, the redeemed of the ages, will be there waiting to greet us. And we shall be forever blessed in the presence of all that is holy and righteous in our home.

Heaven: Our Home

There is a story of two men who were returning to this country on board the same vessel. One was a very famous and prominent person, whose return had received a great deal of publicity. Ther other was an old man, with his beloved wife, who was coming back after many years of service as a preacher in a foreign land. As the boat neared the dock one could see the banners and hear the bands playing a song of welcome. But the fanfare was only for the famous individual, not for the preacher and his wife. Everyone was welcoming the famous one home. There was not even a person on the dock to meet the old preacher who had given his life in service to God and others. He felt a little hurt, not that there was not a great display, but that not anyone was there at all. His hurt was observed by his wife

and she asked what was bothering him. He told her, "I did hope that somebody would be here to welcome us home." And she, wisely and Scripturally remarked, "My dear husband, we are not yet home." She understood what this lesson is trying to convey. Heaven is our home. And we long for it when our journey on earth comes to a close.

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God Is Not Mocked

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Galatians 6:7,8).

There are some things people attempt to do that are absolutely futile and useless. Some things simply cannot be done and it is senseless to think that they can be done. One such thing is to be successful in an attempt to mock God. To succeed in that effort means certain disaster anyway. It is an impossibility. Yet, it is hard for many of us to learn this. Some of us have to learn things the hard way. Tragically, some of us may not learn this truth until it is too late to make any correction or do anything about our foolishness in the attempt to mock God.

Through the ages people have tried to mock God. To mock God means to ridicule Him, treat Him with scorn, deride Him and His will. It is the picture of one tossing his head and turning up his nose with disregard, contempt, sneers and defiance of God. Some might think that nobody would ever attempt nor dare do such a thing. But just look around you at the masses of people who care nothing for God, who detest His church, who ridicule His word, who violate His commands, who ignore anything and everything that He has revealed. It is not an overstatement to say that most of the world attempts to mock God. Our text teaches that God will not permit one to be successful in such a thing. Our limited study will focus attention on three ways that people have and do attempt to mock God. Let us be sure that we do not try it.

Mocking Authority

Men mock God by mocking His authority over them. How people do detest having it said that they have a duty to God! They prefer to "do their own thing and go their own way" without divine rebuke.

In Numbers 16 we read of a rebellion led by Korah. Some 250 others joined with him in this rebellion. Israel was wandering in the wilderness and Korah and company decided they had suffered enough under the God-appointed leadership of Moses and decided to rebel and take over. *"And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them. Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?"* (Numbers 16:3). This was a direct challenge to the authority of Moses.

But did they succeed? No, inasmuch as Moses was God's leader. A challenge against Moses was tantamount to a challenge against the authority of God. God commanded that all the people separate themselves from Korah and company and He caused the earth to open and swallow all of them, thus ending the rebellion. Nobody can defy God's authority and expect to succeed in it. Eventually his failure will come.

To mock authority is rebellion. First Samuel 15:23, *"For rebellion is as the sin of withcraft..."* Withcraft was a sin punishable by death under the law of Moses. It was to claim magical powers. It was to claim the ability to work the supernatural when God had given no such power. It was deceitful trickery based upon superstition. Rebellion is classified alongside witchcraft as abominable before God.

It is to rebel against God's authority to not only teach that which differs from His will but also to accept what is contrary to it. We have a responsibility regarding what we teach, what we endorse, what we accept, what we bid *"God speed."* (Second John 9). We are warned against false teachers (Second Peter 2:1). We are warned against following men (Mark 7:7-9). When people follow creeds, disciplines, manuals, catechisms, councils, conferences, schools, papers, where men have devised their own doctrines, we are guilty of rebelling against the authority of God. Christ is our authority (Matthew 28:18). To have any other, or place some other alongside Him, such as the Book of Mormon, is to mock God. Whether one sets himself or someone else as his authority, whether he follows some philosophy or theology of men, unless it is taught in God's Word as God's

Word he is guilty of mocking God by rebelling against God's duly identified and appointed authority.

Mocking Warnings

Men mock God by mocking His warnings. God does not make idle threats. As surely as God will keep His promises, just as surely can we be confident He will keep His warnings and threats. God's warnings are not attempted intimidations, but are manifestations of His love and grace toward us, designed to warn us and prevent us from living the role of a fool and going the way to an everlasting hell.

Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ignored His warning that in the day they ate of the forbidden tree they would die. They died spiritually, separated themselves from God, when they ignored His warning. Did they succeed in their attempted mockery by setting aside His warning? No, but rather by them sin entered the world, they were driven from the garden, and certain curses were placed against the, some of which hover over mankind to this day. God would not be mocked.

The people who lived before the flood of Noah were warned by the preaching of Noah, but they gave no heed. They failed in their attempt to ignore and sneer at the warning of God. What of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah? Were they not warned? Was not Lot and his family warned? They paid little to no attention, but were failures in their effort to set God's warnings aside as if they were nothing.

What of us today? People are warned of the coming judgment. *"For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the things done in the body, whether they be good of bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10). *"And as it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment,"* but who pays attention to Hebrews 9:27?

We are warned of the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8). We are told that "*the way of the ungodly shall perish.*" (Psalm 1:6). But still many run the pathway of wickedness. Peter said, "*But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.*" (Second Peter 3:7). But does this stop men from their sins? Only a few give much credence to God's warnings as if they matter. They think, act, as if such will never be. They laugh and joke about such things as sin, the judgment, the devil, hell, etc. But the Word of

God being true, mockery of this sort shall not be allowed to reign. "*For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation...*" (Hebrews 2:2,3(. Of course, we shall not escape.

Mocking Commands

Men also attempt to mock God by mocking His commands. But this was the same mistake King Saul made when God told him to go and utterly destroy the wicked Amalekite nation. Saul could have obeyed but decided it was better to listen to his people, save Agag, the best animals, and he obviously allowed many people to escape because we read of the Amalakite nation again. Saul said he did what the people wanted. (Sounds like some preachers today.) In spite of his disobedience, he arrogantly contended he was obedient.

Did he succeed? No, his kingdom was taken from him and he lost the cherished fellowship with God, Samuel, and became the object of God's righteous wrath. Samuel told him, "*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams.*"

But many of us today persist in going our own way to please ourselves or some other rather than following the prescribed revelation of God. People will worship whatever way they want. They do whatever makes them feel good whether it is authorized or not. They practice what they deem to be popular and crowd-getting without due regard for Scripture.

Paul wrote, "*For do I now persude men or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ.*" (Galatians 1:10). Jesus said, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" (John 14:15). When we do what we want and like but ignore God and what He has taught in the Bible, we are trying to mock God. Shall we be more successful than those who have failed before us?

We might cry loudly that we love God. But such is just insincere lip-service and hypocrisy if we do not have as our prime intent to obey His commands (Matthew 15:8). Even baptized people ignore so much that God has said, such as faithfulness for worship, the doing of good, forsaking the evils of this world. Shall we somehow be the first to overcome God and succeed in mocking Him? We think not and would advise us all that the effort is senseless and damning to the soul.

We Cannot Succeed

God is not mocked. It may seem so for the moment. But at best, any appearance of mockery of God is temporary. In a sense, nobody ever breaks God's law, but rather they break themselves against it. To mock God is like throwing glasses against a wall of solid granite and expecting the wall to collapse. Only the dish shall be shattered and the wall unmoved.

Why should anybody want to mock God, seeing the bountiful blessings He offers us when we honor Him? By obedience to the gospel, in faith, repentance, confession and baptism, we come to Him through Christ. If we serve Him faithfully throughout life, heaven will be our home. We have God's own Word for it. Why attempt to run against Him?

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The Return Of Our Lord

The return of Christ is a much discussed subject, usually heavily sprinkled with speculations, false theories, confusion, and many misleading doctrines. Possibly some of this is attributable to the fact that there are many unknown factors surrounding it. But in this matter, as in all others, we do well to confine ourselves to what Deity has determined to reveal and leave the speculations, guess work, sensational theories, and doctrines of men to those who feel they have a need for such as that.

We want to ask four questions in this lesson pertaining to the Lord's return: One, does the Bible teach that He is coming again? Two, when is He to come? Three, what shall take place when He comes? Four, what shall we do to be ready for His coming?

Will He Come?

The Bible does teach that Jesus will come again. We wish now to follow a principle of Matthew 18:15,16, concerning dealing with an erring brother where we are admonished, "*...At the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be*

established." This is a principle stemming from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 17:6. We shall call for some witnesses to testify concerning our questions and establish the truth by them.

Our first witness is First Thessalonians 4:16. *"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God."*

The second witness is Hebrews 9:27,28, *"And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die and after this cometh judgment, so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for Him, unto salvation."*

Our third witness is Colossians 3:1-4. *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above and not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."*

For good measure, let us call upon other witnesses. *"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:9-11). Jesus said, *"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also."* (John 14:1-3). Peter testified in Second Peter 3:1-14, that even though there be scoffers who question His coming, the *"day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night..."* He further revealed that time is of no essence or consequence to God in the fulfillment of His promises. But the end of all things will come and Christ will come to announce it.

Surely, seeing this vast array of testimony from the inspired Word of God, no honest mind that believes the Bible doubts that Christ will come again.

When?

When shall He come? We can know something about when He shall come. For instance, Christ said it would be as in the days of Noah, as people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Life will be proceeding as usual (Matthew 24:38). But we cannot know when that will be.

Mark 13:32-37, *"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning. Lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."*

Second Peter 3:10 tells us, *"But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night."* This means it will be unannounced. There will be no sudden warning. There will not be signs and indications whereby we can know when His return is imminent.

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven but my Father only...Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh...Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come...Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh..." (Matthew 24:36,42,44; 25:13).

One prominent and irrefutable conclusion from these passages is that all this talk about the *"imminent coming of Christ."* "Christ is coming soon," "the signs of the times," that are supposed to pre-announce His arrival, are just so much speculative false teaching. There is none who knows and there are none who can tell when it will be.

But let us be sure that our lack of knowledge of "when" in no way diminishes the certainty that He will return.

What Will Happen?

What is going to take place when the Lord returns? There will be many things, no doubt, that are not revealed to us in the Bible. The awesomeness of the event will overwhelm us all. But there are some things that we can know will occur at the coming of Christ.

It will be an occasion of glory for both Christ and the Christians. *"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."* (Colossians 3:4). John writes "... *we know that if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* (First John 3:2).

There will be the resurrection of both the good and evil. *"Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29). The resurrection will be the last day. *"Martha said unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* (John 11:24). All this will take place when Jesus returns. *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* (First Thessalonians 4:16,17). This last passage refers to the two classes of the redeemed that shall be with the Lord, those who had died before He came and those who were alive when He comes. The resurrection of both the good and the evil will be the same time.

First Corinthians 15 is the inspired argument for the reality of the resurrection, and in this chapter we learn some of the things that will transpire when the Lord comes. *"And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doeth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery, We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immorality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in*

vain in the Lord." (First Corinthians 15 :49-58).

Paul wrote, *"For our conversation is in heaven from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."* (Philippians 3:20,21). While we do not profess to comprehend all that is involved in a spiritual and changed body, we know that this change shall become a reality when the Lord returns.

More Happenings

The return of Christ will mark the time of the judgment. *"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats...,"* and the chapter continues with a picture of the events of the judgment to come. Notice that the initiation of the judgment is when Christ returns.

Of course, with the judgment there shall begin the vengeance upon the wicked (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). And the reward shall be given to the redeemed.

The return of the Lord Jesus marks the end of the world. The world shall be destroyed. *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent hear?"* (Second Peter 3:10-12). For the righteous, there will be a new habitation, a new heaven and earth, a new place of residence. It will not be this old one made over and renewed, but a new dwelling place.

And what of the church, the kingdom of God? First Corinthians 15:24, *"Then cometh the end, when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when He shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He hath put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death."* Death is destroyed by the resurrection of the dead, which occurs at the return of the

Lord, as we have already noted.

Are You Ready?

There is a great day coming. It is inevitable and we shall not escape it, nor the events of it. We shall each one be present to see these things. Therefore it behooves us to be ready for that day to come. What shall we do to be ready? Those who have never obeyed the gospel must do so if they be saved. Those who are not faithful in Christ must be faithful if they expect to go to heaven for eternity. There is no other way to be ready, but when one is right with God, being faithful in Christ, he is ready for the return of Christ. Are you ready for that day to come?

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Parable Of The Sower

"The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat, and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow, and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them. Some fell upon stony places where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth, and when the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But other fell into good ground and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold." (Matthew 13:1-8).

This was probably the first of the seven parables of Jesus that are recorded in this chapter. A parable is often defined as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is the presentation of a spiritual truth by illustration from the natural and physical world. It could be a record of an actual event, or a fictitious one that could happen.

Jesus taught in parables for several reasons. It was an effective way of teaching, leading people from the known to the unknown. In this way Jesus could draw upon the knowledge

and understanding that people already had, taking them into knowledge and understanding of the spiritual message He was delivering. It attracted attention to His message. It was a way of veiling the truth from those who did not want it while unveiling truth to those who sought it. It served as the key to the door of understanding, opening that door for truth seekers, locking that door to those who would commit the truth to scorn. One would be unable to find fault with the natural circumstances presented and therefore would be unable to find fault with the spiritual truth that it represented.

The Earthly Sory

In this parable Jesus calls upon His hearers to picture a farmer sowing seed as it falls into various kinds of places. Some fell by the wayside, a hard pathway. The result was that birds came and picked it up and took it away. Some fell into shallow, stony ground with only a thin layer of soil. It sprang up but could find no nourishment and could take no root. Under the heat of the sun it withered and died. Some fell among thorns, like into a fence row and amidst weeds. It sprang up, only to be choked to death by the weeds and died failing to bear fruit. But some fell into various kinds of good soil, that was cultivated and made ready for the seed, having fertility. The seed penetrated the soil, brought forth its plant and bore fruit in varying amounts, depending upon the quality of the soil.

The simplicity of the story is matched by the profoundness of the spiritual truths taught by it. The explanation and application of the parable begins with Matthew 13:18, also Luke 8:11.

Luke 8:11 identifies the seed as the Word of God. The soils are varying hearts into which the seed of the kingdom is sown. The sowing of the seed is the teaching of the word, and the hearing of the word is like the seed falling into the soil. Anyone who teaches the word would be a sower, and anyone who heard it would be one of the places into which the seed fell. The parable illustrates the varying reactions people have to the message of salvation. As we read and study, we have the opportunity to search our own heart and see how we react to the truth of Christ.

"When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side." (Matthew 13:19).

Wayside

Some that hear the gospel have hearts and consciences so seared and hardened that the gospel cannot penetrate. Their minds are closed, their hearts are prejudiced, and they will not see and understand. The truth never makes any real impression upon them. It is never given the opportunity to germinate and grow.

But the seed does not remain there. Satan finds a way to take it away, side tracking one's thinking away from the truth, bringing other interests into one's life, anything and everything to prevent the word from touching the heart favorably. And herein is a tragedy. The gospel, God's power to salvation, is taken away. The opportunity for heaven is ignored and removed. The rejection of the word means no hope for salvation.

Stony Ground

"But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word and anon with joy receiveth it. Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while, for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." (Matthew 13:21,22).

Happy is that person who hears the truth and gladly receives it. His sins are forgiven and he is heaven-bound. There is cause to rejoice. But he has not taken proper account of the costs, hardships, hazards, sacrifices that are necessary to being a Christian after becoming one. Lacking in depth of earnestness, determination, resolution, devotion, he takes no root by which to gain the needed strength and be stablized. It is not long before that which was saved is destroyed. This is a forceful refutation of the false doctrine that one cannot be lost after being saved.

Being rooted in truth is as essential as coming to it. Paul prayed *"that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love."* (Ephesians 3:17). *"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard..."* (Colossians 1:23). *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."* (Colossians 2:6,7).

Christian living is a process of growth. *"But grow in the grace*

and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Colossians 2:6,7).

Christian living is a process of growth. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..."* (Second Peter 3:18). Christian living is a matter of adding certain Christlike qualities to our own lives and character (Second Peter 1:5,7). It is often the fault of baptized people to fail to grow (Hebrews 5:12-14). Sometimes when one begins to realize that it takes work, self-denial, sacrifice, restraint, and often includes suffering persecution, he finds it easier to slide back into the ways of sin. The heat of the tribulations come, and because of the lack of growth and failure to be rooted, the person withers as does the plant under the sun. The only prevention for such a fate is to get the proper spiritual nourishment through study, prayer, worship, service, and godly living. There is no short-cut to becoming strong in the Lord.

Among Thorns

"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22).

We have the same seed, the same sower, the word is received, but it is choked out by weeds and thorns. The nourishment and energy that is needful for growth is channeled elsewhere. The person becomes overly concerned and anxious about this life, materialism invades his heart. Luke says the thorns are worldly care, riches, and the pleasures of this life.

All such things are not necessarily evil of themselves. Some are, but some worldly attention is necessary in the conduct of life. Such things must be kept in their place and not be allowed to become primary.

Paul was sorrowful over the defection of Demas from the cause of Christ because he loved this present world. (Second Timothy 4:10). *"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which shile some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."* (First Timothy 6:9,10).

John wrote, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is*

not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lusts thereof. But he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." (First John 2:15-17).

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses. Know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoso therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (James 4:4).

For one to fall in love with the world, he must fall out of love with God. One chokes out the other. How foolish for a general to give his all to win a battle at the cost of losing the war. How foolish to exchange that which is temporary at the loss of that which is eternal. How foolish to gain the whole world, but lose the soul. We can allow even our jobs, homes, health, wealth, education, social affairs, sports, clubs, pleasures, etc., all things of the present life to crowd out time, energy, thought, devotion for the things of God and the welfare of our spirits.

Good Ground

"But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Luke says the good ground is that person with an honest and good heart (Luke 8:16). His heart is open to conviction. He wants to know the truth. He loves truth. He longs for salvation. He hears the Word and understands its application. He believes it and obeys it. He lives in such a manner as to bring forth good fruit as a Christian according to his ability and as he has opportunity.

God does not expect everyone to produce exactly alike. Each one differs from the other. We all have our individual traits and talents. What God does expect is that we do what we are able to do. This kind of person is the kind that builds churches, saves souls, puts the Lord first in life, rears his family God's way, brings glory to the Father because of the good life that he lives.

This parable should provoke within each of us serious self-examination to determine the quality of heart that we have. What is our reaction to truth? Are we producing the fruit of the Spirit that the Christian is expected to produce?

† † † † †

Things In Hades That Ought To Be In The Church

Our Scripture text is Luke 16:19-31. Please read the text. Verse 23 informs us that the rich man lifted up his eyes being in a place called *"hell"* in the King James Version. There are two Greek words that are translated by the one English word *"hell"* in that majestic version of the Bible. One word is "gehenna," the place of eternal punishment. The other is "hades," the disembodied and unseen state of the dead. This is not a translation mistake, because the word hell has both meanings, as is noted in most modern dictionaries. But we need to realize that there are two different words involved. This distinction is noted in the American Standard Version of the Bible.

As for "hades," the word itself does not denote whether one is in a state of torment or blessedness. There are two parts of "hades." The rich man was in "hades" and in torment. Jesus went to "hades" which He also called paradise. (Acts 2:27; Luke 23:43). The part of "hades" that we are considering is the place of torment.

There be those who say this is only a parabolic account. They do this hoping somehow this will prop up their contention that there is no real punishment for anyone after physical death. To deny that there is punishment is to deny that Jesus taught the truth, whether a parable or not. It is also to deny Matthew 25:46, which teaches an everlasting punishment, as do many other passages. Proper names are not usually found in parables whereas this contains the name of Abraham. As for the truth taught, it matters not.

A Child Can Be Lost

Before we approach the major theme of this study, let us consider four other important truths taught here. One, it shows that a child of God can be lost. Both the rich man and Lazarus were children of God by virtue of the fact that they were of the chosen nation, Israel. The rich man called Abraham *"father"* and Abraham called him *"son."* The message that the rich man wanted his brothers to hear was the message of Moses, God's law for Israel. Under that law, one was a child of God by virtue

of his fleshly descendancy from Abraham.

John the Baptist warned against relying on that ancestry as if it was sufficient. He taught that the time was soon to come when ancestry would not make one a child of God, but one's personal obedience to Christ. Obviously, the rich man, a child of God, had fallen and was lost. This contradicts the doctrine that once one is a child of God he cannot be lost. He is one that definitely was lost.

Circumstances Different

We also learn that circumstances in this life may be quite different from those in the life to come. Lazarus knew few friends and had even fewer comforts. The rich man had everything this world could afford. He was considered successful and Lazarus a failure. We learn that real success is not to be measured by what one has in this life. In the life after this one, Lazarus was the blessed one and the rich man was in torment. Lazarus achieved genuine and lasting success that was eternal.

Consciousness

There is also the teaching of consciousness after death. The rich man lifted up his eyes and could see. He was able to suffer. He was aware of his torment. He could cry and beg. He was able to recall or remember his life on earth and suffer regret. He could recall his brothers. He was not aware of all that was taking place on earth at that moment but he could remember the time he was on earth. Solomon wrote, *"For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten, also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished, neither have they any more portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun."* (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6). The key to understanding that passage is *"under the sun."* They have no more to do with this life. They would soon be forgotten, even though they could remember their life. What was taking place on earth is beyond the knowledge of the dead.

Matthew 7:22 also shows there is consciousness after death and the ability to recall events of this life. *"Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, have we not prophecied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?"*

Destiny Set

We also learn that our eternal destiny is decided in this life. Now is the time of opportunity to be saved. There is no second chance. There is a *"great gulf fixed"* and there is no crossing over from one place to the other. All the preparation for the next life must be made in this one.

But now let us turn our attention to things that are revealed to exist in the hadean world that ought to exist in the church now. We are not considering things that are sometimes in the church that will wind up in torment, but things that ought to be in the church.

Authority

There ought to be the recognition of the power and authority of the Word of God. Whereas the rich man thought he could disobey and all still be well with him, in hades he learned better. God's Word was for him and for others to respect. At the time of the life of the rich man, Moses' law was God's authority (verse 29). Today we look to the teaching of Christ for it is through Him that God now speaks (Hebrews 1:1,2). The gospel is the power to save (Romans 1:16). To disobey the gospel is to be lost (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). There must be this recognition of God's Word.

Prayer

Next, there ought to be fervent prayer and petition. The petition of the rich man was earnest, sincere, heartfelt. All he wanted was just a drop of water for some relief. He then requested earnestly some special assistance for his brothers.

Prayer is a God-given privilege, the avenue of communication between man and God that God has ordained. God promises to hear and answer the prayers of His own. The power of Christianity in the world would be enhanced if there was more fervent prayer by those in the church.

Concern

There was also real concern for the lost in hades. The rich man did not want his brothers to come to where he was. He sought their salvation. He wanted Lazarus to go back and warn

them. Just here he was thinking of others and not just himself. Is not this an attitude that ought to abide in the heart of every Christian?

The rich man should have thought more of his brothers and himself while he was living on earth. At least he was thinking of them now.

The mission of the church is to carry the saving gospel to the world, to be the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 1:15). No church fulfills its reason for existence that only concentrates on itself to the neglect of the lost. The church must be mission minded. The first word of the great commission is *"Go." "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things."* (Romans 10:14,15).

Right And Wrong

In hades, there was distinct and recognizable distinction between righteousness and wickedness. This distinction ought exist among those who make up the church. When it is not so, the church has a responsibility to exercise discipline to keep the church pure. As a rule, the twentieth century church has been lax in this matter. The result is that sinfulness is tolerated in the church to its disgrace and discredit before the world. The church is in the world but the world does not belong in the church. Too often those of the world cannot detect any real and significant difference in the lives of those of the church and those who care nothing for it. They see the same actions, motives, words, ambitions, dress, conduct, etc. And they so often fail to see the devotion and priority to Christ that a Christian is supposed to manifest if he is faithful to Christ.

There was a clear-cut distinction in hades, wasn't there? And there ought to be just as clear-cut distincition in the church.

Urgency

The church must stress the urgency of seizing its opportunities to be saved in this life while there is time. The rich man, concerned for his brothers, knew that something needed to be done and right away. He wanted something special, in

addition to the Word of God. This is the fault with many today. They are not satisfied with the provision God has made and seek and want something special, some direct operation of the Spirit, some miracle, some feeling, some experience, something better felt than told. The brothers would not receive anything more than what God provided. Neither shall people today have anything more than His Word.

Those of us in the church must press the urgency of salvation upon others. They, like ourselves, do not have unlimited time and opportunity to get right with God. Life is uncertain, death is sure, the judgment awaits, and there is no escape from eternity. The rich man knew it too late. Can we learn it now while there is time?

We would insist that if these qualities that are observable in hades in this teaching of Jesus was in the church in as notable fashion and demonstration, many more would go to heaven than otherwise will be there. It is your task and mine to make it so.

† † † † †

MUD IN THE EYE OF THE EVOLUTIONIST

Did you ever get your wheel of your car stuck in the mud? After finally getting out and you began to ride along, mud would sling from your wheel. Did you ever think that this was another evidence that the theory of evolution, and one of the explanations offered for the origin of things, cannot possibly be true? They contend all things exist as a result of the natural events. But the mud from the wheel and one of their explanations contradict each other.

Notice the mud as it flies from the wheel. It seems to be going in every direction. But the fact is that the mud flies from the wheel according to the direction of the rotating wheel from which the mud comes.

Look at the God-deniers explanation of the origin of the universe. They contend that the earth and all the other planets were once part of a rapidly rotating substance. Of course, they do not tell us what this substance was nor what really happened to it. They do not even tell us where that substance came from so they really are not explaining origins at all. But someway,

somehow, at some time, somewhere, the earth, and the other planets were thrown off. Do you suppose that mystical substance just blew to pieces and nothing remains of it? I do not know, but we can "blow to pieces" this imgainative theory that by which some seek to replace God as Creator.

Science proves that objects thrown from rapidly rotating bodies will rotate in the direction they are thrown. (Mud from the wheel). But there are variations in the rotations and orbits of the planets and satellites that are supposed to have come from this mysterious and unidentified "father" substance.

C. H. Woodruff, in ***BIBLICAL ANALYSIS,*** reminds us that Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Urinus rotate from west to east. The eightht satellite of Jupiter, the tenth of Saturn, Neptune and its one satellite, four satellites of Urinus, rotate from east to west. If they all got their start from being "thrown off" there is a contradiction. It is the theory that ought be "thrown off."

We should not be too surprised that such theories come and go, often being discredited by the very people who formulated them. But men will not be content to accept what has always harmonized with scientific discovery; namely, the creation account in the first book of the Bible.

While some claim they continue their investigations in the interest of knowledge and science, seeking explanations for what they do not yet know, it is tragic that when the evidence runs against their theories, they begin looking for something else rather than accept what is consistent with their findings. It is well known in our day of expanding scientific information that much that is done in the name of research and science is anything but research and science. It is a blatant and persistent attempt to find something, somewhere, some time, from some source, that they think they can use to discredit the Bible. Sinful men will never be content until they try and try again to remove their obligation to God. To accomplish this they must remove the Bible and they must destroy the Biblical teaching concerning God. How desparately they seek that destruction!

But the Word of God has not been moved nor shall it be. It stands and shall forever endure. Those who respect it, study it, learn it, follow it, live by it, render obedience to it, shall stand also. JWB

When To Dust Your Feet



JAMES W. BOYD

The Bible student knows that our Lord told His apostles that there might be certain times when they should just shake the dust off their feet against a city and its people. He meant there are times when it does not good to continue to deal with some folks. Nothing worthwhile can be accomplished by continued association . You just have to let them go their own way and refuse to be bothered with them anymore. Just when it is proper to do this is not always easily determined however. Many people, even probably most, communication with such a person who reflects dishonesty, impugns people. But there can come such a time and that is evident.

Do you suppose one is justified in refusing further association and communication with a person who persistly reflects dishonesty, impugns motives, misrepresents others, becomes a talebearer and sower of discord? After trying to deal with them and present truth to them, what benefit is there to cast the truth before them that they simply trod underfoot? We have known but few people like that in life, but we have known some and know some now.

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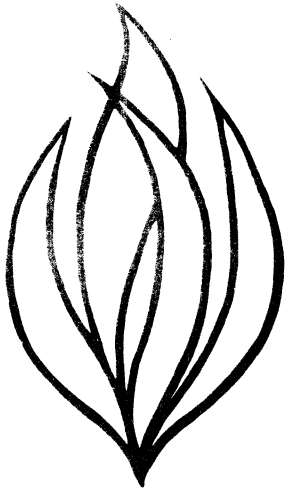

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IV James W. Boyd **NUMBER 12**

What It Means to Grow up

We begin with two scriptures as our test: *"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man I put away childish things."* (First Corinthians 10:13). *"He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."* (Ephesians 4:10-15).

Both passages have to do with the matter of "growing up." We are to grow up physically and spiritually. Life is a process of growth from one level to another. And none can deny that the years of the young, and often of the older, that are the "growing up years," can be very difficult years. As one young person put it, "One minute it seemed like everybody took for granted that I knew what to do when I really did not; and the next minute everybody was telling me what to do as if I knew nothing."

Growth Involves Everyone

The more adult years have their problems of growth also. Sometime people think that the younger years were easier. The young years have their difficulties to the young just as the older years have their difficulties to the older. Because we are all in the process of "growing up" it seems appropriate to understand just what this means.

In the physical world, we expect growth. It seems that the passing of the calendar takes care of that, if all is normal and well. Just a few months, a few years, then one matures physically. What many do not seem to understand is that the outward, visible, physical growth is not the whole story. In fact, it is not even the most important part of growth. The big part is

the inner growth, the spiritual growth, the maturing of the mind, judgment, thinking and self-control. This has always proven to be more difficult.

It is unfortunate that many young people place a ceiling on their lives while they are young. Instead of building foundations, they are erecting ceilings through which they shall never penetrate. They fritter away their time and opportunities for growth. I suppose we all have done this to some extent, and we live to regret it. Youth has time, ability, opportunity to lay the groundwork for a fine and useful life. But the failure to seize these swiftly passing qualities will restrict one's usefulness and happiness in life. Once the young years are spent and the record made, it cannot be changed. One of man's strongest desires is to be able to start all over and do differently. The very best we can do is to start from where we are. The past cannot be undone. What a tragedy that some build their ceilings through neglect of education, failure to take care of the body, wasting the development of the mind, forming attitudes and habits that harm his character and potential. While the young often resent being told, it is still true, that youth is the time for gathering information, building habits and attitudes, properly laying good foundations upon which to build life.

Measuring Maturity

We measure maturity in various ways. Birthdays are chronological measures, but not always a very accurate measure of maturity. Some live decades and never grow up in the things that matter.

Physical size is sometimes used to measure, but that is also a very fallible standard by which to measure real maturity. Boys of fifteen are often larger than many two and three times their age, but nobody would contend that a fifteen year old has reached maturity. Years ago my grandmother would have considered a boy to be a man once he began to wear long pants. But that is a fallacious idea. Girls thought that once they wore high heels they were grown. It seems laughable, doesn't it? People may look grown and be far from it.

Isn't it pitiable that somehow we have "educated" our society to think that the use of profanity, cigarettes, disrespect of authority, wild driving, strange dress, late hours, are marks of maturity? So much that is mistakenly called "adult" today is more "adultery" than adulthood.

What are the real elements that determine whether one is grown up? One, the way a person spends his time. Here is a real clue. Some have a distorted idea of bigness. Those who waste their time in constant play, watching television, have hardly begun to grow. Having access to a car, seeing all the movies, being an athletic hero are life's goals for the immature. "When I get like that, I have arrived," is their idea.

But as one really grows up, he sees things in a better and different light, the light of experience and reality. He realizes just how foolish and childish such things are. These are not evidences of being grown. They are evidences that there is much growing to be done.

We are taught to redeem the time, take advantage of it and use it wisely and constructively. Life is composed of time and we ought make every minute count. Those who realize that show signs of maturity. While we do not expect the young to fully grasp this, the fact that they do not is evidence of their immaturity. But it is something you should expect from those who claim to be mature.

Values And Maturity

What do you consider to be the real values of life? This helps to determine your level of maturity. Many go through life and never learn what matters. When we want to know the value of things we often turn to a catalog and check the prices. God's book is a catalog of what is valuable in life and we need to be better qcquainted with it. If you want to know whether something is worthwhile or not, see what the Lord thinks about it. How does it fit into His standard of things?

What a person thinks of others and how he treats them is a mark of maturity or the lack of it. How does he consider the authorities over him, parental, civil, religious, educational, occupational. The immature person resents authority over him. He feels depressed and that somehow others are taking advantage of him. He refuses to abide by the law; reneges on his agreements; is irresponsible in his work; cannot be depended upon; even rebels against the authority of God. No person is mature until he realizes that he is accountable to God for all of his life and everything pertaining to it. That individual who has the idea that the world orbits around him and for him and to satisfy him is sorely off beat. He will have little to no regard for others and consider everybody out of step but himself. He

simply has not grown up. His reactions to whatever gets in his way reflects his maturity. The immature will pout, cry, kick, scoff, lash out. The mature person realizes that such is a part of life, take it in stride, and keep on his own path without hesitation or distraction.

Making Choices

One of the biggest factors in growing up is the ability to make decisions. We all have to make so many of them. True enough, many of the decisions we make are relatively insignificant. But some are life forming and are determinators of our eternity.

Some never learn to make decisions. They were never allowed to make them when they were growing up. They were never taught standards by which to make an intelligent decision. Therefore, when they reach a point in life that they are called upon to make decisions, they know not which way to turn. Learning how to make decisions is such an important part of maturation.

Someone has said, "In each boy or girl there are a number of different salves. There is an honest self and a dishonest self. There is a truthful self and an untruthful self. There is a kind and generous self and an unkind self. There is a selfish self and an unselfish self. There is an obedient self and a disobedient self." In this matter of growing up, each one must determine which of these selves will be the real you. As one decides to be honest, truthful, kind, selfless, and obedient, he is making great strides toward real maturity.

The Inspired Window

Think for a moment about Moses. The Bible is a magnificient window through which we can see this man as he grows up. *"By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."* (Hebrew 11:24-26). The American Standard Version translates *"come to years"* with the words *"grown up."* When Moses was *"grown up,"* when he was truly mature, he decided against the ways of sin and decided to be God's person. He might have had everything else that this world

could offer, but he was wise enough, mature enough, to make the right decision. He chose God's way.

All of the big decisions are not made in the capitals of the world's nations. Bigger events are taking place in the lives of people everyday, everywhere. While some may consider the conquests of Caesar to be the outstanding events of the first century, that which was far more important was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the faith of Christ. Even today, as the leaders of the world ponder the gigantic ills and tensions, there may well be a decision made in the mind of some boy or girl that will have a greater effect in years to come on the world, or even have a bearing on things eternal. The decision to be a Christian is the most significant decision that a human being can make.

In God's Image

Every young person ought to believe in himself or herself. Each must remember that he or she is created in God's image and each counts before God. There are things of eternal value that can be accomplished when one goes God's way. Anyone choosing a goal and purpose in life that fits God's purposes has the assurance that God will be with him.

The greatest need of our world is for truly devout Christian men and women. Our needs are not for faster aircraft, or rockets to take men to the moon. We need lives that will take people to heaven. Our need is not more missiles, but morals. We need not have creeds, but Christ. Physical food, as essential to life as it is, is not as needful as the spiritual milk that nourishes the soul. We need Christians to counterbalance the increasing wickedness and degeneracy of the world. We need those who will use what God has given them, prepare themselves, and be exhausted in His service of doing good. To have that takes mature people.

The Day Of Maturity

Every life has what we call "red-letter days," that is, days that mark the more important events, such as the day of our birth, our marriage, our first job, etc. The greatest day in anyone's life is the day that they declare, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," and then render obedience in baptism into Christ. All other days take a second place to that one. On that day, you begin to do the things for which you were created; namely, to

bring glory to God by your life. That is a mark of real growth. And the rest of life continues to be a process of growth until that notable day of death when we pass from this world to the next. Unless we reach sufficient maturity to be ready for that day, our lives, our existence, will have been for nought. Our regret will be eternal. Our immaturity will have overtaken us to our destruction.

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The Bible Heart

We hear so much about "heartfelt religion." Preachers ask their hearers to give their hearts to Jesus or to let God live in the heart. There is much talk about the "heart." But do we understand what the Bible teaches with respect to the heart of man? There is much misunderstanding in the world concerning it that forms the basis for much false teaching, false hopes, false expectations, false security, resulting from dependence on emotional feelings as evidence of salvation. It also causes people to close the heart to the truth. You can hear people say, "I know that I am saved because I feel it right here in my heart," and pound their chest. Others have been heard to say, "I can tell you the very moment that Christ came into my heart" and begin recounting some "experience", again pounding their chest which contains the blood pump of the body.

Two Hearts

There is a physical heart and there is a spiritual heart. The physical pumps the blood through the arteries and veins of the body. It is the center of the circulatory system and operates involuntarily. The operation of the physical heart is often affected by emotions. We speak of the heart "skipping a beat" at certain stressful times. Emotions affect so much of the operation of the body, including the digestive system, respiratory system, nervous system and the circulatory system. Because this is true, some religious exercises are designed to arouse the emotions, stir up people, get them excited, produce a physical reaction due to emotions, make people feel good, produce some kind of emotional response, and call it the operation of the Holy Spiirt

on the "heart." Often it is called "getting religion" or "enjoying the Spirit."

While emotions affect the body, emotions are simply the result of what we believe to be true. If we believe something good, we will feel good. If we are convinced of something bad, it makes us feel badly. How we feel does not prove what we believe is true or false. Therefore, emotional reactions are not reliable as a source of evidence of salvation or the operation of the Holy Spirit, or much of anything else. Such reactions are never cited in the Bible as a means to know when we are saved. Emotions can be the same when the truth is told or when a lie is told but believed to be the truth. We may well be emotional when we are saved, but we do not know we are saved just because we have become emotional. Our feelings only reflect what we think is true, not necessarily what is true.

Unreliable

Let us consider some examples where the unreliability of emotions and feelings is evident. Do you remember the time when the brothers of Joseph sold him into slavery and told their father, Jacob, that they found Joseph's coat stained with blood? They led Jacob to believe that Joseph was dead. He could not have felt worse about it even if it had been true. He would not be comforted. But Joseph was not dead. Jacob's emotional reaction was due to what he believed to be true, but what he believed was not actually true.

Paul, formerly known as Saul, was a persecutor of the cause of Christ before he was converted. But he did what he did in all good conscience, thinking he was serving the Lord by surpressing what he believed as "heresy." (Acts 26:9). He admitted that he had been a blasphemer and persecutor, even consenting to the death of Stephen, but all the while he felt confident he was doing right. But we know he was wrong. His feelings were not reliable to determine what was true or false.

Have you heard of pagan mothers who have actually thrown their children into the river for food for crocodiles, thinking these creatures were gods and they were worshipping them? They felt they were doing right. How horrible was their activity! Just consider your own experiences. You hear bad news and feel badly. Then it turns out not to be as you first thought. Were your feelings reliable to tell you what was right and wrong, true and false? Or did your feelings simply reflect what you thought

was accurate?

We can best understand the Biblical teaching on the heart by studying what the Scripture reveals that the heart does.

Intellect

The Bible heart is capable of intellectual activity. By the heart a person thinks. "*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*" (Proverbs 23:7). Before the flood of Noah, Genesis 6:5 reads, "*...the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*" Jesus said to the scribes in Matthew 9:4, "*Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts.*"

By the heart a person reasons. Luke 3:15, "*...all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John.*" Mark 2:6, "*But there were certain of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts.*"

It is with the heart that man understands. "*For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*" (Matthew 13:15). Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 32:4, "*The heart of the rash shall understand knowledge.*"

When we consider the heart of man as the Bible speaks of it, we are talking about that part of man that thinks, reasons, understands.

The heart of man is also that which possesses the power of determination, volition, the power of making decisions and choices. The heart contains the motivating activity, turning a person in a certain direction, toward various activities and conduct. We call it the will of man.

It is with the heart that man purposes. Barnabas went to Antioch to preach and we read in Acts 11:23, "*He exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*" Second Corinthians 9:7, "*Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.*" The Bible heart is the will of man and has the power to determine his actions, motivating his conduct. Daniel 1:8 reads, "*But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself...*"

For a person to serve God, his heart must be converted so that his heart will make the right decisions and lead him in the right directions.

Emotions

The heart of man is also the seat of his emotions. Being the seat or center of the emotions is not the same as a physical reaction to the emotions or some emotional experience. This becomes clearer as we observe the emotions of the heart in contrast to the reactions of the physical heart to emotions.

The heart fears. Jeremiah 32:40, Jehovah said, *"I will put fear in their hearts."* Fear is in the heart. It manifests itself with various reactions. Fear is the emotion. The heart is the center or seat of fear.

The heart despises. Second Samuel 6:16, *"And as the ark of God came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart."*

It is with the heart that man loves. First Timothy 1:5, *"But the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart."* Matthew 22:37, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart..."*

The heart sorrows. Nehemiah 2:2, *"Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart."* When one has suffered a great sorrow or loss, we speak of them as being heartbroken. The opposite of a broken heart is a heart of gladness where there is joy.

The heart desires. Romans 10:1, *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."* The heart can desire what is good and also what is evil. All these things are emotions. These emotions will manifest themselves in conduct and responses.

The Bible talks about purifying the heart, the heart being discouraged, being merry, wise, despiteful, deceitful, heavy, proud, froward and righteous. We now can see that the heart of man as presented in the Bible refers to the inward man, his spirit, that part of man that does not die when the body dies, that which is in the image of God. It is the heart of man that must be redeemed. *"Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"* (Psalm 51:10). *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."*

The Heart Believes

It is with the heart that man believes. *"With the heart man*

believeth unto righteousness." We must have faith to be saved. Faith must be in the heart. This means the intellect of man is affected. He must have proper knowledge and understanding, making the proper decisions on the basis of evidence, and exercising the will to follow the Lord, having love and desire for the truth, hating and despising the evil. Mark 11:23 shows the heart can disbelieve and doubt. *"For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith."* We cannot be saved with an unbelieving heart.

This faith that must be in one's heart comes by the Word of God. *"So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17). The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). By the word our hearts are purified (First Peter 1:22). Acts 15:9 teaches, *"And put no difference between us, purifying their hearts by faith."* Their faith was in that message which had been preached to them (Acts 11:14). The gospel appeals to the heart by informing the intellect, provoking the right decisions, planting, arousing the rightous motives that lead to obedience to the gospel. We obey from the heart. *"Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin ye became the servants of righteousness."* (Romans 6:16-18).

Truly "Heartfelt"

When one has heard the gospel, believed it, decided to obey it and live according to it, then he has what can rightly be called "heartfelt religion" as far as the Bible is concerned. Knowledge of having done God's will may well produce observable reactions of an emotional nature. There was rejoicing at the conversion of the Ethiopian and also the jailor (Acts 8:38; 16:34). To realize that you were lost and bound for hell, and then become aware of God's love and provision of your salvation, taking advantage of your new spiritual state and relationship with God will cause one to have an emotional

reaction. It is an emotional experience. But the emotions come as a result of what you know to be true. It is not a case that you think something is true because of some emotional experience.

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The Right Way To Cover Sins

Romans 4:7,8, *"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sins."*

Sometimes the simplest lessons prove to be among the most important. Such is the case with this lesson. It is applicable to everyone inasmuch as *"all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23).

Generally speaking, while admitting some exceptions, people do not want what they have done that they consider wrong to be exposed. People do not like having their errors brought to the light of the truth. This is a common characteristic of mankind that Jesus recognized when He said, *"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."* (John 3:19-21). While there are some who do not care whether they do right or wrong, most people would prefer covering up what they have done that is wrong. They have some sense of responsibility about it and do not want the disapproval of others, even if they are not concerned about God's judgment.

Two Ways

We might say there are two ways that people try to cover their sins: (1) the wrong way, and (2) the right way. Our text speaks of those who have sinned but are blessed because their sins are covered. Obviously they are those whose sins have been covered the right way. Solomon wrote, *"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper."* Proverbs 28:13. Such a one has

obviously tried to cover his sins the wrong way and could not succeed. God no longer counts sins when covered the right way, but sins still mar the soul when we attempt to cover them the wrong way. We want to consider both ways so that we may avoid the one and follow the other.

Adam, Eve, Aaron, Saul

From the study of Adam and Eve we see people do not want God's disapproval. As a child wants to hide his wrongdoing from his parents, people seek to hide their sins from God. Genesis 3:8-10, *"And they heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."* Adam knew he had violated God's will and he wanted to escape God's disapproval. He tried to hide.

But the first sinners were not able to conceal their sin from God. Nor can we. If only we all would be persuaded of this reality! Jesus said, *"For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known."* Luke 12:2. *"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."* Hebrews 4:13. When we know the law of God, we know we can violate it. *"I had not known sin except through the law, for I had not known coveting except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."* Romans 7:7. We can sin ignorantly, and we are still accountable for our sin. But knowing God's law we can know when we sin and know that we cannot hide our sins from the eyes of God. As surely as the voice of the Lord caused Adam to come out from his hiding and face his sin, so the voice of God, through the written Word, causes us to recognize the folly of hiding from God, leading us to face the reality of our need to cover our sins the right way.

Is It Knowledge

It is probably true that the majority of people who want their sins covered try to cover them the wrong way. Maybe they just do not know the right way. Possibly they are looking for an easier and less humiliating , face-saving way. Others may prefer

to cover sins their own way. Whatever way people choose, Solomon says they shall not prosper in it.

Another way that Adam tried to cover sins was to shift the blame to Eve. Then Eve tried to shift the blame to the devil. Aaron tried to blame the people for the golden calf at Sinai. Saul blamed the people for saving the best of the flocks and herds of the Amalekites. Down through the pages of history people have attempted to escape the responsibility for what they have done by pointing the finger at someone else. While others may tempt us, provoke us, even encourage us to sin, we still are the ones who sin and we still are the ones who must face them and cover them. We must find the right way.

Cain, Achan, Ananias, Saphirra

Cain tried to pretend innocence. When God asked him about Abel, he answered, in essence, "I don't know what you have in mind." But it did not work. Anything that might be more reprehensible than our sin is our pretended innocence when we know all along that we are guilty. God sees through that pretense.

Achan tried to hide the stolen goods he took from the spoils of Jericho in his tent. Those spoils belonged to the treasury of the Lord. But he was later discovered, and he and all of his were destroyed. He tried to cover his sins the wrong way.

Ananias and Saphirra lied about their gifts in order to cover their greed. Peter said they lied to the Holy Spirit. They did not escape the punishment that befell them immediately.

Over and over the Bible tells of those who have tried to cover sins by committing additional sins. The classic example of this is David, who tried to hide his guilt of adultery with Bathsheba through a whole series of additional sins, including deception, conspiracy, even to murder. But Nathan finally confronted him and told him, *"Thou art the man,"* who was guilty of transgressions.

Does Time Cover?

One of the more subtle ways that people try to cover sins is by the passing of time. "What I did was so long ago. Surely God has forgotten it by now." But time will not cover sins. Sins remain against us until they are covered properly. Even if what one has done was a long time ago, if it was not rightly covered,

it stand yet today. "But I do not do that anymore." That is fine. But just ceasing from sin is not the right way to cover sins already committed, even though the cessation of sin is a part of repentance.

"But I am a religious people and even belong to a church." Being religious is usually commendable. But that alone does not cover sins. Many are religious, even members of churches. Just belonging to a church is not so great inasmuch as there are so many churches in the world, but God has only one. Many churched people have never done what the Bible teaches must be done to cover sins. They have followed false doctrines and entertain false hopes. They have accepted such things as "salvation by faith alone," or that one can "pray through" to God and be forgiven. Some claim they have experience the direct operation of the Holy Spirit and they feel good and think they are saved. They are honest and sincere in what they believe, but what they believe is not God's way of covering sins. Neither is the "deathbed conversion" system the way to separate oneself from sins.

We repeat, unless sins are covered the right way, as Moses said long ago to his brethren, *"Be sure your sin will find you out."* Numbers 32:23. We shall be confronted with the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Only By Forgiveness

No sin is covered until it is forgiven. *"Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin."* Psalm 85:2. When you talk of forgiveness of sins you must include Christ. His blood was shed *"for the forgiveness of sins."* Matthew 26:28. He came to seek and save the lost; to save sinners (Luke 19:10; First Timothy 1:15). He is the only way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Only by His blood can sins be forgiven. *"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission."* Hebrews 9:22. But animal blood will not forgive sins (Hebrews 10:4;. It was by His own blood that Christ purchased our redemption (Hebrews 9:12). *"In whom we have redemption through his blood..."* Ephesians 1:7. Sin cannot and will not be forgiven until there is the application of the blood of Christ. We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9). The song asks, "What can wash away our sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

Terms Must Be met

Christ is the author of salvation, but He is only *"to them that obey him."* Hebrews 5:9. The vengeance and wrath of God awaits those who *"know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* Second Thessalonian 1:8.

What are the terms of pardon? First, remember that salvation is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). We can never earn it or merit it. We cannot work our way by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), nor by our works of righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). Nonetheless, there is that which God has commanded as necessary for us to receive the gift He gives. He gives us the gift when we do as directed.

We must believe in Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24). We must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). We must confess our faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10). We must be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). When we are baptized we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was shed (John 19:31). It is then and there that we reach the saving blood of the Savior. That is when we receive the benefits of His blood. As far as the Scripture teaches, this is the right way to cover sins, and there is no other for those who have never come to Christ. We either conform to the way that God has revealed, or we shall live and die in sin, face them at the judgment with condemnation. Thank God He has given us the way that will prosper and will cover our sins.

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Religion Without Tears

Our lesson should assist us to see a side of Christianity that many overlook. This side of it even causes some to reject it. Thoughtful observers are aware that many people want a religion that is not exacting or demanding of them. The faith of Christ as revealed in the New Testament demands more than many will give. Even some professed Christians reveal an unwillingness to be inconvenienced to meet the demands of Christianity. So many want an easy religion. They want it so much that they have altered the way of Christ and tried to make it easier. Is it unfair to suggest that many religious people today

are busier than ever trying to convert God to accept them as they are rather than being converted to God's way?

But we are persuaded and would persuade you that the New Testament faith was never intended to be an easy religion to follow. It is not a new thing in the world to discover people who despise a religion that really demands something of them.

Jeroboam Tried It

Years ago a man attempted to make God's religion easier for himself and his people. After the tragic failure of the reign of Solomon and the arrogant display of folly by Rehoboam, his son, the nation of Israel divided into two nations. Judah was of the south and Israel was of the north. Jeroboam became king of the north nation. In spite of the circumstances that brought Jeroboam to power, God promised to establish his house on the throne of Israel upon certain conditions. Those conditions included faithfulness to God and obedience to His will. But Jeroboam had other ideas and decided to alter God's way of doing things because he felt that God's way was too demanding.

The Israelites were to assemble in Jerusalem for certain feast days, holy days, special seasons, and the like. Jerusalem was the location of the temple. But Jerusalem was also in Southern Judah which was under the rule and influence of Rehoboam. Jeroboam feared for his people to go there lest he lose his control over them and they be persuaded to return to Rehoboam.

"And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David. If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam, king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam, king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel and the other put he in Dan." First Kings 12:26-29.

Jeroboam pretended a concern for the people but all the while he was only concerned for his own power. But he persuaded the people that what God expected, the return to Jerusalem, was just too much, too demanding, unnecessary, too much of a hardship upon them. He relieved that problem by setting up gods in the northern and southern extremities of

Northern Israel for the people to worship. The sacred historian records, *"This thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan."* First Kings 12:30. It violated God's instructions. The king and the people wanted an easier religion and decided to follow the altered course provided by Jeroboam.

Israel "Went Along"

It is a wonder that Jeroboam's evil plan was so readily accepted by the people. They knew better than to "go along" with his circumvention of God's plan. But obviously there was in the people a streak of softness and compromise to which this kind of thing had appeal. Nearly everybody likes to be comfortable and have things easy. There is no wrong in having things easy provided you do not have to violate God's will to have it. But few are really willing to be inconvenienced for the cause of Christ. They want what they want. Their wishes and ambitions are really first with them. They do not like having to make sacrifices to serve the Lord, and if they sacrifice they do it grudgingly. Some people never seem to realize that many things that are worthwhile demand toil, sacrifice, self-denial and even tears. They find themselves torn between doing God's will and doing what they prefer because they wish to avoid any such thing. They want a religion that demands very little of them, makes them feel comfortable, allows them to go their own way, regardless of what is best for the cause of Christ. They want a religion without tears. While they accept the idea that religion is essential to a good life, and even accept the idea that they must be Christians, they really do not like the faith of Christ if it interferes with their own way. As a result, so many are half-hearted, lukewarm, indifferent, dead, draggy, reluctant "servants." They feel so martyred to have to serve Christ. If they could, they would change the faith and make it easier. Of course, changing the doctrine of Christ means damnation to the soul. *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God."* Second John 9. Any alteration is condemned (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18,19).

Let us make personal applications of the lesson we learn from this Old Testament action by Jeroboam. After all, *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..."* Romans 15:4.

Now Is Work Time

There is coming a time when the faithful shall rest from their labors (Revelation 14:13). But that time is not now. Now is the time of work (John 9:4). When we come to Christ we are relieved from burdens that we cannot carry successfully, but we assume His yoke which He describes as light and easy (Matthew 11:28-30). In comparison with the burden of sin, His yoke is easy. But it is still something that is demanding of us and requires something from us. Too many want the deliverance from sin that Christ gives, but they do not want to have to carry the responsibility and work of being a Christian. If they cannot have an easy life and everything they want, they feel they have been the victims of imposition.

History teaches us that the majority of people have never approved of the Christian way of life. While they love the sentimentality of Christianity, and often think on the joy and peace it offers, finding cause for rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins and the hope of the resurrection, they never want to think in terms of the work, toil, sacrifice and service that is as much a part of being a Christian as anything else. Possibly they have been so immunized against it by the teaching that salvation is by grace that they have forgotten or possibly never accepted the fact that there is work involved also. Many would consider the way of Christ only in terms of the blessings to be received but dismiss the teaching of Romans 12:1 altogether. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual service."* This service and sacrifice part often turns some people away.

Blessings

We dare not minimize these wonderful benefits of being a Christian. There are such comforting words in the teaching of Jesus. At times when death has struck near us, in periods of sickness, trial, disappointment, we lean heavily on the consoling words of the Lord to comfort our grief and mend our broken spirits. But there are also comfortable words that are demanding, exacting and requiring. *"What do ye more than others?"* Matthew 5:47. **"***If ye love me, keep my commandments."* John 14:15. *"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* Luke

9:23. *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* Mark 16:15. *"Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you."* Luke 6:27,28. *"Forgive, that your Father also may forgive you."* Mark 11:25. It is entirely possible for us to block our forgiveness by refusing to be forgiving.

The uncomfortable teachings of Jesus caused people to turn away from Him when He walked among men in Palestine. *"Many therefore of His disciples when they heard this said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it"* Later it is recorded, *"From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked with him no more."* John 6:60,66.

Living for God is never without its costs and sacrifices. When much has been given us, much is expected from us. To complain and find fault with working and serving for the Lord's cause is to betray an unwillingness to pay the cost. It is to have the Jeroboam attitude, *"It is too much."*

Jeroboam Versus Jesus

Notice the contrast between Jeroboam and Jesus. While Jeroboam contended that it was too much to go to Jerusalem, years later Jesus said, *"Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man."* Luke 18:1. The *"things"* that were to be *"accomplished"* referred to the betrayal of Jesus, His own disciples forsaking Him, His humiliation and suffering before the mockers against His claim of being God's Son. It also included the beatings, scourgings, injustices, being spat upon, the cries of mockery and contempt, and eventually the death on the cross. Did He consider it too much to go to Jerusalem? There was no other way for man to be saved, for me and you to be saved, except He do the will of the Father who had sent Him. Thankfully, He did not complain and say, *"It is too much."*

Many people want to be religious, but their own way. They are not very different from the priest and Levite in the story of the good Samaritan. They wanted to be religious without self-sacrifice, without service, without caring, without inconvenience, without work and concern. So many have invented ingenious and fatal ways to make the faith of Christ easier than what God requires. Crossbearing is an essential ingredient for discipleship. The words, burden, cares, duties, obligations,

thorns, trials, hardship, cross, persecution, are all a part of the Christian language. A religion without tears is without a cross to bear, but it is also without salvation. If a religion without tears is what you want, then Christianity will not supply that for you.

Two Songs

There are two songs we sing in worship that express the teaching we need to understand and which is the burden of this lesson. One stanza reads, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me."

Another reads, "Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?"

Christianity is not without its tears. But Paul wrote in Romans 8:18, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."*

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The Lord Looketh

"But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance but the Lord looketh on the heart." First Samuel 16:7.

These majestic words were spoken by the Lord God of heaven and reveal to us one of the basic and fundamental teachings regarding the way God considers mankind. The situation that called forth these words is most interesting. Saul had been rejected by the Lord as the king of Israel because of his disobedience, arrogant pride, stubbornness and deliberate attempts to circumvent God's way. It brought Saul's ruin. Samuel grieved over Saul until God told him to go and select another king for Israel.

Samuel's Mission

Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse, a man

who had eight sons. It was from these sons that a new king would be chosen. The first that came before Samuel was Eliab, a person of strong countenance, tall and upright, a fine specimen of manhood from all outward appearances. He certainly made a good impression. But then the Lord spoke to Samuel and told him not to consider Eliab even though he seemed to be just what most would have thought would fill the need. Nonetheless, the Lord was able to see and know what men could not see and know and refused him.

These words remind us that the Lord does look with interest on each of us. That points out His concern with us. But what is the primary concern about mankind as the Lord sees things? On what does the Lord look with the greatest interest?

Appearance?

The Lord does not consider a person's physical appearance first. To be sure, we are expected to be modestly dressed, have an appearance that denotes the distinction between male and female. But in the sight of God a person is not of value or lacking in value simply because he or she may not be considered attractive physically. Some of the world's greatest characters have been people whose outstanding characteristics most certainly were not their physical attractions. In fact, many of the people of renown have been people with serious physical defects. Helen Keller was without sight, hearing, but one of the world's most remarkable people as well as very accomplished. Abraham Lincoln was known for his physical appearance, but that was because many considered him so unattractive. The impression is left that Paul may have had some kind of physical defect although we cannot ascertain just what it might have been. Some have thought it was a weakness of the eyes, lameness, or various other things. It seems that some turned away from Paul because they considered him unworthy because of his outward appearance (Second Corinthians 10:7).

Even Christ was not one to attract by physical attributes. The prophet Isaiah said of Him, *"When we see him there is no beauty that we should desire him."* Actually, other than this phrase, there is nothing we can know about the physical appearance of Jesus. That within itself ought tell us that God does not place a great emphasis on outward beauty as people are so inclined to do.

There is an old proverb that we heard when we were young

that mother would often say to our sister, "Pretty is as pretty does." Another was, "Beauty is only skin deep."

Peter, Paul, James

Peter did teach the women to be concerned about the *"hidden man of the heart"* more than their outward adorning (First Peter 3:3-5). Paul taught the necessity of modesty (First Timothy 2:9,10). But their urging was more on the inward godliness than outward appearance.

This does not mean that slovenness, an unkempt and "don't care" appearance is all right because that reflects an attitude of the heart that is uncomplimentary. But whereas Samuel might have thought Eliab would be the one to replace Saul because he looked good, God taught him, and us, that there is something far more important than that.

Did not James rebuke brethren that gave the chief places to those with the gold finery and looked down on those of more modest situations? This kind of discrimination due to appearance is not acceptable to God.

Social Standing

There are many people in the world who are impressed with a persons social position. There is a mad craze among some elements of society to be among those who are in certain social circles with social status as if that really counted for something. While we all should desire to be as socially acceptable as we can among Christian people, many have a distorted view as to what is and is not the right kind of society. How young people are obsessed with the idea of being accepted socially! They will sometimes even compromise principles of right and wrong if it will get them "in" with certain social groups. Some have such a passion to be socially prominent, or at least socially regonized as acceptable among the prominent people of the world.

The family of David was not among the socially prominent of their time, yet David was the one chosen to be the next king. Not a single one of the apostles were among those considered high in society of that day. They were humble, hard working, unlearned people. Hardly is there a wider span than that between a free man and a slave. Yet, Paul said, *"There is neither bond nor free... in Christ."* Galatians 3:28.

Social prominence, social activities are often nothing but

vanity and foolishness which many flit here and there trying to capture and enjoy, and once they have it, they have a bag of wind, and even the bag has holes in it. So what? Social standing may occupy the minds of those whose thinking is dwarfed regarding what really matters, but it is of no major concern to the Almighty. Strange that so many of those who claim to be His children would place such emphasis on it.

Race

Nor does God consider one's racial background like people seem to consider it. One of the world's great tensions throughout history has been racial hatred and prejudice. That differences exist cannot be denied. That it is expedient to mix and mingle the races is a matter that cannot be set aside with the wave of the hand one way or the other. But as far as one's worth and spiritual value in the sight of God, race has no place.

There exists a false aristocracy and a "better-than-thou" attitude among so many simply because of their ancestry. Some of the most shoddy kind of people think themselves special and better than others just because of their skin tone. But such is not so with God.

"Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respector of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." Acts 10:34,35. After all, Paul said we are all of one blood (Acts 17:26). There is no "super race." Each race does have traits that mark them from others. But that has no spiritual significance, at least, not to God.

The gospel is for all. The great commission teaches, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* Mark 16:15. The same message is for everyone. There is no difference (Acts 15:9). *"There is neither Jew nor Greek."* Galatians 3:28. *"Whosoever will"* means just exactly that. God does not look at one's race as do men.

Wealth

God is not impressed, as people are, with how many riches a person may have. A person is not acceptable or unacceptable before God based on his bank account or his stock holdings, or lack of them. Some have developed the idea that being poor necessarily makes a person better in some way, while other have the idea that being rich means you are more pleasing to God

than others. Actually, having more of this world's goods really means you have more over which to exercise stewardship and for which you shall give an account as to how you used it. Neither wealth nor povery declares a person's real worth.

Some feel so secure if they have money. They think themselves more important, even in the church. It has been known for people to be placed in positions of leadership based more on what they have than what they are. Riches, improperly received and improperly used, can be and will be a curse to the one who has them. The love of money has caused some to even turn away from the faith (First Timothy 6:10).

Compared to most people in our world, nearly all of us in America might be considered wealthy. This only means we have a greater responsibility than others.

When Jesus was watching the giving of some, He observed how the rich gave of their abundance, but how the widow gave of her very living with great sacrifice. He said she had given more than all of them (Mark 12:44).

We may be able to impress those around us with our possessions, but God is not impressed. We may think ourselves somewhat because of what we have, but that is not what measures with God. Material success does not even imply spiritual success. Consider the "rich fool" of Luke 12, who though all was well simply because he had abundance.

What God Sees

What does God see? On what does He look? Back to our text and we learn that God looks on the inner man most of all. He sees the heart, that realm into which men cannot see. But God can and does see. He see the real "you" and the real "me." While God is concerned with man's deeds and words, He is also concerned with man's motives and intents. He considers his thoughts. On these things He is capable of rendering judgments that are prohibited to us. Attempts to make "heart judgments" are forbidden to us (Matthew 7:1-4).

The heart is the secret spring of our lives. *"As a man thinketh in his heart so is he."* Proverbs 23:7. It is not that we are what we think we are. But we are what we think. For this reason let us heed Proverbs 4:23, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."* Christ said, *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."* Matthew 12:34.

Again, it is needful to remind us that this does not mean God

is unconcerned about out actions and outward deeds. It only means that He considers our attitudes as well as our actions. Our motives and intentions must be right as well as our deeds and words.

Man's Limitation

Man looks only on the outward appearance because that is all that he is capable of doing. Outward appearance can be deceiving, misleading and does not always reveal the true person. A person may have good intentions and do something wrong. Or he may appear to do something worthy but all the while he has an evil motive behind it. Man can only see the outward. But God does not look as does man. God sees the outward and the inward. God knows whether or not our hearts are pure as they should be.

Certainly, when our hearts are pure, our lives will reflect it. But what is reflected may not always be just exactly what really is. It is sobering as well as comforting to be reminded that our Judge at the last day will see things as He does, and not as other people may see them. That thought should sober us to "clean up the heart" as well as rejoice in the knowledge that God knows.

Things that seem so large in life to people are not that large before God. Physical appearance, social position, racial ancestry, financial status, all such things loom so big before people. But not so with our God. God looks on the heart. So our prayer should be, and our efforts directed toward, "Purer in heart, O God, help me to be." Our hearts are purified in obedience to the truth, the word of God (First Peter 1:22). As I ask myself, so may you ask yourself, "Is thy heart right with God?"

† † † † †

A Big Change Coming



JAMES W. BOYD

During the month of July of this year the Boyd family expects to move into Tennessee, near the city of McMinnville. A variety of personal and family circumstances has caused us to think this is the expedient thing to do at this time. We are going to buy a home and use that are as our base of operations.

This will also change the form of the preaching work I am now doing. I hope to preach in that area, hold meetings, especially in places that cannot afford gospel meetings but need them nonetheless. I will be looking for support for those meetings. I intend to continue producing this booklet as well as other writings I have in mind.

Our four year stay with the East Main church has been pleasant throughout the time. The association with the leadership has never been anything but harmonious and cooperative on the part of everyone. The church defends the faith and stands strong for the truth. But sometimes conditions arise in the life of a family that necessitate some major changes in what you do and where you do it. Such is the case with us. I'll tell you more about it next time.

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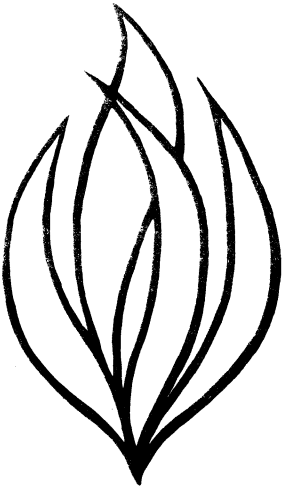

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME V James W. Boyd **NUMBER 1**

Jesus as Savior: Tidings Of Joy

The mission of Jesus Christ to this earth is presented to us in a number of different ways, all consistent and harmonious one to the other. The fact is that Jesus fills many roles and offices in the relationship between humanity and Deity. We could mention how He is prophet, priest, king, intercessor, mediator, etc. Each expression provides a different view of why He came to this earth. But our lesson just now is to underscore in our minds the prominent, and in some ways dominant, mission as Savior. Jesus Christ came to save.

The Scriptures

Even before He was born of the virgin Mary, it was announced, *"Fear not Mary, for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus."* (Luke 1:30,31). The name Jesus means Savior. This name was indicative of His mission to the earth.

Matthew 1:19-21, *"Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."* His mission was proclaimed even with the prediction of His birth.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore affraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:8-11). Jesus was to be Savior. This was news of joy.

When the days of purification were accomplished as specified

in the law of Moses, Jesus was taken to Jerusalem and to the temple to be presented to the Lord. There He was seen by a man named Simeon, of which it is said, "*...that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.*" (Luke 2:26). When he saw Jesus, "*Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*" (Luke 2:28-30). By this Simeon testified that Jesus was Savior.

John wrote, "*And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*" (First John 4:14).

He Is Savior

There were various times during His personal ministry that Jesus was identified as Savior. When He went to the home of Zacchaeus, He said, "*For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.*" (Luke 19:10). When speaking with Nicodemus, "*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*" (John 3:17). To the Jews He said, "*And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.*" (John 12:47). The world was already condemned because of sin. His hearers were already lost. They needed a Savior and He was the Savior upon whom they could rely.

His mission of salvation was a mission of love and mercy to mankind. After teaching the parable of the lost sheep and stating, "*For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost,*" He added, "*Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*" (Matthew 18:11,14). Paul expressed it this way in First Timothy 1:15, "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...*"

The gracious, loving, and merciful attitude of God toward sinners is written in First Timothy 2:3,4, "*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*" "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16). Peter wrote, "*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but*

that all should come to repentance." (Second Peter 3:9). It is through Christ that God gives repentance and forgiveness (Acts 5:31).

These and other passages declare unmistakenly that the goal of Jesus and His earthly mission was to save those who are lost in sin. Everything that He did, said, and upheld pointed in that direction. Inasmuch as this is true, and we are to follow in His steps, should it not be a primary purpose in our lives to seek those who are in sin and lead them to the only One who can save them? It is just possible that if every Christian would really be concerned for the lost that the church would expand in numbers, influence, and spirituality the likes of which has not been seen in our lifetime. As Christians, we ought to ask ourselves, "In all the activities of life, am I faithfully following Christ by showing Him to be the Savior of the world?"

Great Joy

Consider further the announcement that was made to the shepherds at His birth. He was not only proclaimed as Savior, but this proclamation was declared to be *"tidings of great joy."* The fact that Jesus has come to save is the best news, the best tidings, the greatest information that could fall upon the ears of mankind, whether he realizes it or not. And do we show the gladness and joy of this reality? Do our lives reflect the joy Christ and salvation produces? Or do we have the same fears, anxieties, concerns, ambitions, goals, misgivings in life as those who know Him not? Are we still as uncertain, wandering, glum, helpless, insecure, sour on life as before? Has the knowledge of salvation brightened your life and that of those around you? It should. Are you better able to cope with the stresses and strains that human existence inevitably produces? A lady lost her husband by death, leaving her with small children to rear alone said, "Ten years ago I could not have faced life like this. I was not a Christian then. But now I am. I can overcome and see it through, knowing the Lord is my shepherd." That is the joy the tidings of Jesus as Savior brings.

Joy In Work And Worship

One field where we should find happiness and joy is in work and worship of God. The Christian is happiest when he is doing what the Lord would have him to do. He looks forward to his

tasks and does them heartily. He anticipates the periods of assembly with gladness. His interest and enthusiasm for worship is reflected in his manners, his faithfulness and regularity, his punctuality, his participation, and involvement. Can one who is cold and indifferent to Bible study, evening worship periods, who does not join in the singing, habitually late, who considers it all a burden and a yoke, can such a one really reflect the joy that is provided in the knowledge that Jesus is Savior?

Another way we can show the message that Jesus is Savior is a message of joy is in telling the story of Jesus to those who have never heard. Think about it. We might go shopping and discover a wonderful bargain that we know would interest our friends. Do we keep that to ourselves, or do we hasten with gladness to tell them of it? Coming to know Christ as Savior is the most marvelous "find" of human experience. The early Christians showed their joy in that joyous report by preaching and teaching Christ everywhere they went. Should not we do as much?

Another statement relative to the mission of Jesus that is worthy of our consideration here is Matthew 20:25-28. *"But Jesus called them unto him and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."* Consider for a moment how small a percentage of the people of this world have any respect for conditions of salvation and obey them. Then consider again what percentage there might be even among that small percentage that really and truly follows the way of the Lord in life with devotion and dedicated faithfulness. Yet, this is what one must do to be saved. Come to Christ and follow Him. Become a Christian and then be one.

His Service

What type of service did Jesus render? He said, *"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."* (John 4:34). Again, *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day."* (John 9:4). God's will was His work. It must be our work as well.

The greatest service that Jesus did was to see man lost in sin,

having defiled himself by his own transgressions and left the way of God. Knowing that God wanted man to be redeemed, He became the Redeemer. He provided the way home. In fact, He is the way home. Christ and His cross is the way of salvation. Jesus served God by serving man, giving man the opportunity for an eternal life with the Father in heaven.

In principle, we serve God in the same way when we serve those around us. There is no nobler, higher calling than making the effort to turn people from the way of sin and leading them to the way of the Savior. That is serving mankind. That is serving God. That is the Father's will. This is that which Jesus did. This is that which we must do.

When Jesus Christ came forth from the tomb, the joy that the message of Him as Savior was complete. As conqueror over death, He became the offerer of life. Friend, we suggest to you that the proclamation of Jesus as Savior is good news, the gospel, tidings of gladness and joy. *"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel peace and bring glad tidings of good things!"* (Romans 10:15).

As our Lord assumed and discharged His mission of joy, let us resolve to never fail Him in the unselfish task of doing our best in the interest of the salvation of the souls of people around us.

† † † † †

On The Mountain And In The Valley

A prerequisite to reading this lesson is to first read Mark 9:2-29. It contains one of the three accounts of these events in the life of Christ, the other two being in Matthew and Luke.

The passage contains two contrasting scenes. One is on the mountain where there is peace, glory, communion with Deity, inspiration and quietude. The other is in the valley where there is disease, misery, confusion, and unbelief. As we study, we

shall come to have greater respect for the glory and power of our Lord, as well as help us see more clearly our present-day duties to God and man.

When Christ went into this unnamed mountain He took with Him Peter, James, and John. They were there to be witnesses of the events that were to take place. These would fortify them with stronger faith and understanding. We can only suppose why He took these three without the others, but we know there were other times when these three were privileged to go with Him at momentous occasions, such as the raising of the daughter of Jairus, and when they went with Him deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane than the others.

The Transfiguration

While on the moujntain, the transfiguration took place. This meant there was an outward change in His appearance. His raiment became shining, white as snow. His face was as the sun, glistening and brilliantly sparkling. Luke says this occurred *"as He prayed."* His face was turned toward God. He was talking with the Father. There was communion with the holy and divine; between two of the three persons of the Godhead.

There appeared two others. They appeared in a glorious fashion. Elias (Elijah) and Moses, characters of the Old Testament, who had lived many years before, appeared on the scene. These two represented all that had gone before Christ. They represented the law and the prophets which had pointed to the coming of Christ. Christ fulfilled both the law and the prophets. *"Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."* (John 5:39). *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill."* (Matthew 5:17). Elijah and Moses, and others like them, had been God's spokesmen previous to Christ.

It is somewhat amazing that Peter, James, and John seem to have been sleeping, certainly at the first. Luke records, *"When they were awake, they saw His glory."* They obviously did not grasp the greatness of the occasion at the start of it.

Peter's Proposal

When aroused, Peter's reaction seemed to be a startled one, although rather natural. In the presence of such illustrious

company, surely something extraordinary was appropriate to honor Christ, Moses, and Elijah. Peter gave expression to one "understatement," but he also made one glaring error. He said, *"It is good for us to be here."* That was certainly true. It was good to witness such an event, and to have fellowship with God and His messengers. His error was that he wanted to honor each of the three alike. He wished to make three tabernacles for them, but they were not to be honored and respected equally. God showed this when He overshadowed them, took away Moses and Elijah, and said, *"This is my beloved Son, hear ye him."* The law and the prophets were not on an equality with Christ. Christ fulfilled them and took them away by fulfilling them. He was God's authority. All men should hear Him rather than anyone who had come before Him. This statement of God is one of the most significant statements of Christianity. It is the Father's own confession of the identity of Jesus plus His own announcement by whose will men are to serve Him. The authority and superiority of Christ are etched forever.

Verse nine reads, *"They came down from the mountain."* Now they were in the valley. Here we shall see quite a contrast to the glory that was witnessed in the mountain.

Christ charged them to tell no man about what they had seen. What they had seen would be very useful to them in their later work. *"But we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty, for he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."* (Second Peter 1:16-18).

Jesus also answered the questions about the prophecied coming of Elijah. He explained that John the Baptist fulfilled that prophecy. John was the Elijah that was to come. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

Into The Valley

When they came to the valley they saw a multitude. The scribes began questioning Jesus' disciples and Jesus entered into the discussion. The point in question was a failure of the disciples to cast out a demon from a certain man's son. The father explained the nature of the boy's difficulties to Jesus. He

was very severly stricken and he had brought the boy to the disciples for help, but had not received any benefit. Here we see the scene of an agonized father, an afflicted son, a bewildered multitude, critical scribes, and the weak faith of followers. All stood in need of someone to help them in their different ways of needing help.

The father pleaded, *"Master, I beseech thee, for he is mine only son."* What father cannot feel the longing within the heart of this father of long ago?

Then we see the great power of the Christ manifested. Christ commanded the spirit to depart from the boy. From that moment the boy was cured. Only the words from the Lord Jesus were needed to provide an answer to all the problems that stood before those who were in the valley. They cured the son; soothed the father; answered the critics; strengthened the followers of Christ. It caused the multitude to believe in Him. Those that needed help were helped. Those desiring service were served. Whatever it was that was in want, Christ was able to provide it for them by the service He rendered.

The purposes of the transfiguration were two-fold. It further equipped Jesus for the death that He was soon to suffer. It also equipped the apostle for life as they would carry out the great commission which would later be given to them. We might add, it lets us all know for a surety regarding the divine authority of Jesus the Christ.

The purposes of the miracle might also be considered two-fold. Not only was their relief and service given to mankind, but it was the confirmation of His claim as God's Son. It caused the unbeliever to believe. *"And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God."* (Luke 9:43).

Into The Mountain

We also go to the mountain and into the valley. In the mountain was fellowship with Christ, communion with the Father, peace, tranquility, talking with God's people. There was adoration, praise, glorification of Christ above all else. There was the radiance of His being. The heights of the mountain did not surpass the heights of the spiritual blessings which were received in the mountain.

Can we not have this same experience in worship? We speak not of some emotional reaction, but the reality of this closeness with Deity. When we worship, we approach the throne of God

in a unique manner. We are in the mountain of praise and thanksgiving. In worship we commune with Deity. The blessed spiritual strength and knowledge that is ours as we glorify and honor the name of God is awaiting us. We can draw near His throne, pour out our heart unto Him in the quietness and reverence of the occasion. There is joy in bestowing honor on Him. It is likened unto being with Him in the mountain.

We cannot, however, remain in the mountain. We also must go into the valley where there is service to be rendered. Worship, in one sense, is an end in itself. When viewed in perspective to all that there is in Christianity, it is also a means to an end. In the valley, where there are those who are sin-possessed, in agony, grief, sorrow, suffering from the many ills that beset the human family, we have the privilege and opportunity to bring the Christ to them. In the valley are those who have been overcome with evil, just as the son was overcome with affliction. As the father was bewildered, longing for that in which he could hope and place confidence, so there are the masses of people in the same spiritual distress.

In the valley we shall encounter many critics of the Lord and of ourselves. At times each of us may display a weakness that is unbecoming to a follower of Christ. The valley is a place of turmoil and hardship, distress and pain. Only by leaving the great and wonderful mountain of worship and entering into the valley where there are needs to be met and service to be rendered can we seek and save the lost as the Lord would have us do.

A Good Sign

In some church buildings we have noted a small sign over the door that leads out of the building, out of the place where we assemble for worship. The signs read, "Enter to worship; leave to serve."

We hesitate to speak the word "experience" because so many have misused that word to refer to something they call a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or something of an emotional reaction that they assume is a message or sign from God. But the word "experience" refers to an actual event. In this sense we have all experienced worship and we have experienced service. We have experienced being in the mountain of glory and we have experienced being active in the service of God by serving others. In this we are following the Christ and come to

appreciate His glory, His purpose, His function all the more.

† † † † †

Escape For Thy Life

"And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." (Genesis 19';17).

This passage is found in the midst of that familiar Old Testament record that tells of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the efforts put forth for the preservation of Lot and his family. The very names of Sodom and Gomorrah are synonyms of evil and indicative of sin. They are like the names of Judas and its association with betrayal, Pharisee and hypocrisy, Laodicea and lukewarmness. In the city of Sodom lived Lot, the nephew of Abraham.

It was the ambition, selfishness and greed of Lot that had brought him to make that evil city his home. When Abraham and Lot divided the land between them, Lot took first choice and chose the choicest of the land and the well-watered plains that led to these cities. Although Lot, for the most part, was a righteous man, he made a bad decision for himself and his family. It was not very long until he had drifted into the midst of the corruption that characterized these places. Even though he was vexed because of the sinfulness, it was there that he chose to rear his family and live daily. His daughters married people from that environment and were drawn away from the true and living God. His wife and two daughters still lived in his house.

God's Wrath Justified

God announced His intentions to destroy these cities of wickedness that might be considered a moral cancer among mankind. Such intent was an act of wrath against evil but also an act of mercy for those around these cities. They deserved destruction. God told Abraham of His plan and Abraham made a plea for the cities. God said He would not destroy them if Abraham could find even ten righteous men in them. So

abominable were these cities that such could not be found.

Angels of God, in the form of men, came to Lot's house. It was their mission to deliver Lot. Their message was, *"Jehovah sent us to destroy this place."* They had come to warn Lot and urged him, *"Escape for thy life."* Because Lot was basically a good man, and because of his relationship to Abraham, Lot was given the opportunity to flee. Yes, he would lose all his earthly possessions about which he thought so highly and which he had such ambition to retain, but he did have the opportunity to spare his life and that of his family still at home.

Lest for a moment we think God was proposing something too harsh, remember that God is a just God, a righteous God, a God that hates evil, and God that loves man and hates what destroys man. God is God and has the right to act according to His own will. Wickedness has no right to exist before God. Such is in violation of the will of God. Definance of men against God defies the very purpose for which God created man. The people of Sodom had forfeited their right to live. After all, *"the earth is the Lord's,"* and He may do as He sees fit and no man, certainly no wicked men have a right to question Him or His actions.

But God did not desire to destroy the good with the bad if the good would only give heed to the warning. This is why the angels came to Lot and warned him, *"Escape for thy life."* Their mission was two-fold: (1) Warn Lot and (2) destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. In a sense, their mission was like that of Jesus Christ: (1) save man and (2) destroy sin.

Both May Suffer

There are those times when the good suffer with the evil and because of the evil. There are times when the evil enjoy blessings alongside the good. But God does not want the good to suffer. Eventually there will be the eternal separation of the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the chaff, the good from the bad. For this reason Paul wrote, *"Wherefore come ye out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almight."* (Second Corinthians 6:17,18). This is a lesson that seems hard for some of us to learn; namely, the incompatibility between good and evil and the inconsistency to attempt to mix the two together.

God wanted Lot spared. God wants those who love Him to escape the ravages of sin. He does not want anyone to perish. *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* (Second Peter 3:9). Unfortunately, many will refuse and reject His offer of deliverance. This very account serves as one of God's warnings to us. *"And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly."* (Second Peter 2:6).

It Was Urgent

Please note the urgency of the message of warning the angels gave to Lot. In verse fifteen of that chapter, *"Then the angels hastened Lot."* He was reluctant to respond to their warning. They laid hold on him and led him out when he hesitated. *"Escape unto the mountain, lest thou be consumed."* They were saying in essence, "Up, get you out of this place. There is no time to hesitate. There is no time to lose. God means what He says. You cannot survive here as you are." Immediate and urgent action was demanded if he was to be spared.

How people today need to be impressed with the urgency of salvation from sin. One of the devil's lies is, "You have plenty of time yet." Friend, in but a brief moment, life can be terminated and opportunity for salvation be forever taken from you. In the twinkling of an eye we can be ushered into eternity. Paul pleads, *"Behold, now is the day of salvation."* (Second Corinthians 6:2).

Does it not strike you as highly significant that in the accounts of New Testament conversions the urgency they recognized to respond immediately? Those on Pentecost were baptized that same day. The jailor was baptized immediately, the same hour of the night. The Ethiopian stopped the chariot at the first opportunity to obey. They knew, as we must know, salvation from sin is urgent. We know not the day or hour when life may end, or when the Son of man might return from heaven.

When Lot heard the warning, he had concern for others. He went to his married children and their husbands, but they gave him no heed. *"He seemed unto his sons-in-law as one was mocked."* The love of sin, deceived by a wicked life, the lack of respect for Lot, their dulled sensitivity to the Word of God

caused them to pay no attention. There might have been some inclination by his daughters to heed, but they went the way of their husbands. This is what living in the midst of sin does to a person's mind. It hardens his heart and he does not care. No amount of persuasion and warning moves him anymore.

Many have scoffed at those who send forth the word of warning and pleading of the Lord to be saved. The hearers of Jesus said, *"He is beside himself."* (Mark 3:21). Felix thought Paul had gone mad (Acts 26:24,25). Hearts are so hard, ears are so dull of hearing, eyes are so closed. This is the result of loving this present world and the sins abounding in it.

Leave It All

Lot was warned to not only leave the city but the surrounding plains. It was unsafe to remain in Sodom. It was unsafe to stay near Sodom. He was to flee from the entire situation. His wife was unwilling to do that. She looked back and became a pillar of salt. A halting flight from evil caused one to perish. Jesus warned us, *"Remember Lot's wife."* (Luke 17:32). She had left the immediate borders of Sodom, but looked back and perished. We must leave sin and never look back.

Friend, it is spiritually unsafe to remain ***in*** sin or even stay ***near*** sin. Often the mark of wisdom is to flee, as did Joseph from the opportunities to sin. It is not cowardly to run from sin. *"Flee youthful lusts."* (Second Timothy 2:22). We must completely cut from our lives those sins that characterized us. While we strive to save the sinner from the error of his way, we also must shy away from sin. You cannot save the sinner by partaking of sin with him.

One who truly hates sin as God hates it will not want to remain under its influence and will avoid it. Lot's two daughters were saved from destruction because they moved completely away from the cities. As Christians, once having obeyed the plan of salvation whereby we are washed clean by the blood of Christ, we must keep putting distance between us and sin. This is accomplished only through growth and spiritual progress. Again Christ warned, *"No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven."* (Luke 9:62).

Destruction fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Fire and brimstone devoured the city, its inhabitants, and everything concerning it to the extent that no trace is yet found of either of

these places for certain. A blight on humanity, a malignity of transgression perished from off the face of the earth. And as surely as Sodom perished, so shall the ungodly.

Jesus Spoke Of It

Jesus said, *"But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all."* (Luke 17:29). None of the wicked escaped the wrath of God. Hebrews 12:29 teaches that *"our God is a consuming fire."* He will not punish unjustly. He is merciful and loving. This He demonstrates even through the warnings are given. He provides salvation through the supreme sacrifice of His only begotten Son. We can be made clean, pure, and righteous by Him.

Judgment came to Sodom. Only those who gave heed to the warning were spared. Those that refused the way of safety failed. It is the same, in principle, with me and with you concerning our spiritual salvation.

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We can escape for our life if we but will. Christ saves, but not until we go His way.

† † † † †

Why Attend Every Service Of The Church

We realize that many in the world dismiss a lesson of this subject without any further investigation. We hope you are not of that disposition. There are members of the church that question their responsibility to being present whenever the saints assemble for worship and study. Others are simple "Sunday morning" attendants, and nothing more. Sunday Bible study, other opportunities such as Wednesday evening, a gospel meeting, Sunday evening, etc. are never attended, or seldom at most. We want to appeal to those who say they love the Lord more than anyone or anything else in the world and make that appeal with reasonable evidence. If each of us will consider these things, we will never be among those who ask, "Do I have

to attend? Must I?" We will not be found searching for excuses for not being present.

Love

We should attend to prove our gratitude and love for the Lord. We are so indebted to Him. So boundless was the love of Christ, He gave His life for us that make up the church. We read in secular history of a man named Estulus that was brought before an Athenian court accused and convicted of a crime, but released because his brother had lost both hands in the defense of the city of Athens. On the basis of the merit of the action of the brother, Estulus was set free. Friend, in similar fashion, on the merit of the sacrifice of Christ, we who are Christians have been delivered from the power of darkness. Does this not impress us with the love the Lord has demonstrated? And if I be a true disciple of Christ, I will want to show my love also.

To show my appreciation, I should want to do everything I can to stand by His truth and His church. I will want to praise His name and bring honor and glory to Him. By my attendance at the periods of worship, I can show my gratitude. And if we show our gratitude by our presence, what do we show by our absence?

Strength

We should attend because we are made stronger spiritually when we do so. There is power to be gained through public worship. The fellowship with brethren is a source of encouragement and strength. We have fellowship not only with brethren, but more importantly with Deity. By the studies, prayers, expressions in the songs, we are taught and led by the truth to be closer to the Lord. Heaven has been described as a prepared place for a prepared people. Attendance at the services helps to prepare us and make us fit for dwelling in heaven.

At the services, the spiritual bread of life is broken, the very bread by which we grow spiritually strong. Through the Word of God, God speaks to us; through our prayers we speak to God. Realizing the value of the soul, and seeing the necessity for growth, cannot we be impressed with the reasons why we should be present at every period of assembly?

His Presence

We should go to worship because Jesus said He would be there. Matthew 18:20, *"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* It should sober us to realize Christ is in our midst. People often travel many miles and make special efforts to be in the presence of earthly dignitaries and famous people. But the greatest of all is present when the saints gather together for worship. It is a wonder that anyone who professes to love the Lord would be absent.

Once an irreligious man asked a Christian why he attended the services of the church with such regularity and faithfulness, even at those times when it seemed so few attended. The Christian answered, *"The Lord will be there, and that is enough for me to want to be there."* Do we have this same attitude as did this noble saint? Even though we do not see Him literally and physically, by faith in His confirmed word we know He keeps His word. This should cause us to keep our appointment every time we have the opportunity.

For The Church

We should attend because God wants the church to grow, numerically and spiritually. Experience has proven time and again that congregations grow where the members put their loyalty to the church before everything else. Other activities are planned around the church services.

Nothing should be placed in conflict with attendance at worship. We must understand that even sickness that prevents attendance, though it is a reason for being absent, is hurtful. Every absence from worship contributes harm even when it can be excused. We are interested in numbers because every number represents a precious soul. The larger the number the more souls that are worshipping God. If members of the church think attendance is a matter of indifference, what must those who are not Christians think of it? How can we impress upon them the necessity of worship if we are negligent toward it? Some want their children to be present, even in Bible classes, but they fail to see how they are tearing down everything the Bible teacher is doing faster than the Bible teachers can build because they "send" their children rather than go with their children. Some expect the leaders of the church, the preacher, or somebody else, to make the church grow, but they are

building hindrances to growth by their own absence. There is no question but that the power of public preaching is lessened when the membership does not support it by their presence. Too few realize that just by their attendance they have a real and significant part in the upbuilding of the church. If one was going to "quit the church," what could he do more effectively than quit attending deliberately?

Good Example

We should be present because we want to be a good example to others. Many observe each of us and imitate our influence. Our neighbors, children, relatives, and brethren are all influenced by what we do. At the hour of assembly, what kind of influence do you exert on others? What do your neighbors see in you? What are you teaching your children if you are present? What are you teaching if you are absent? How can you expect to influence your relatives if you allow other matters to crowd out worship to God? We need to let the world know whose side we are on, and we can do this, in part, by faithful attendance. The devil rejoices over the way some church members operate in attendance.

To Obey

We should attend in order to obey God. Actually, this is reason enough without mentioning all these other things. Hebrews 10:25 admonishes us, *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching."*

Almost invariably, when this passage is cited, somebody asks, "Does this mean I have to attend Sunday night?" Those whose love and loyalty to Christ is primary in life never ask if they "have to" praise God. They rejoice in the opportunity. The very question reflects an attitude that is condemning. We believe this includes all the worship assemblies, but even if it does not specifically include Wednesday night, Sunday night, etc., what kind of attitude is it that looks upon worshipping God as some kind of obligation only, that is to be avoided whenever possible? Worship is a privilege that will never permit asking such a question as, "Do I have to attend?" Since we obey God by attending, what do we do when we deliberately fail to attend?

Safest

While the next reason is certainly not one of the more powerful reasons, it is worth considering. We should attend because it is the safest thing to do. Let's be frank with each other. We have no desire to run risks with the salvation of our soul. We don't want to dare the devil and flirt with evil. Why give the devil any opportunity that we can avoid? We need to make our calling and election sure. We do not take needless chances with our physical lives, so why should we gamble with our spiritual welfare?

You need to consider this: the very service you choose to miss may have included just the teaching and encouragement, the very spiritual fortification you will need most in later years to resist the devil. By your absence you deprive yourself of that which is most needful and leaves yourself open to Satan's barrage without defense, that your attendance could have provided. Opportunities that are ignored are opportunities lost. We ought to take advantage of every opportunity to be made more and more like Jesus. Why deliberately endanger the soul? Certainly, it is the wisest, safest, and most beneficial thing to be present whenever physically possible.

Service

We should attend because we want to be abounding in the work of the Lord. Yes, there is a distinction between worship and the works that we are to do as Christians. But worship is a part of the service we are to render to God. First Corinthians 15:58, *"Wherefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* To worship is not all the work that is expected. But worship is an essential ingredient in serving God. Doing those things that God wants done is profitable for us.

We may invest money, go into business, plant a garden, and nothing come of any such things in spite of our diligent efforts. But you never fail to prosper when you are doing what God wants you to do. I am not suggesting material prosperity, but spiritual prosperity.

Do we think we can work our way to heaven? Not by our works alone can we go to heaven. But there are works we are to do, and worship is one of them. *"God is a Spirit, and they that*

worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24). Notice, we *"must"* worship. *"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve."* (Matthew 4:10). Worship is not an optional matter.

The conclusion of the matter is that a real, true, faithful child of God will do all he can, not as little as he can, to be what God wants him to be. We are simply not doing what we can and what we ought when we deliberately are absent from the worship assembly.

† † † † †

A Christian Is A New Creature

The New Testament writers used a variety of comparisons, illustrations, and expressions to depict the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. Some of these were the distinction between a servant of sin and a servant of righteousness, a saint and a sinner, one separated from Christ and one made nigh and united with Christ, an enemy and one who has been reconciled. They compared the lost with the saved, the condemned with the redeemed, those dead in sins and those alive in Christ. All of these terms have the mark of the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as the word is inspired by the Holy Spirit. All of these present to us the vast change that has taken place when one comes from the dark valley of sin into the glorious light of truth through Christ.

One vivid expression is found in Second Corinthians 5:17. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are past away, behold, all things are become new."*

Making It New

We delight in things new. We even delight in seeing old things being restored to look and operate as if they were as good as new. Some of us enjoy refinishing furniture. I have done much of it. It is a pleasure to see some old piece that somebody

thought was "junk" changed into something that everyone admired and considered both useful and beautiful. Some have the ability to restore old automobiles. What they produce is the envy of car-lovers everywhere. Just about everyone admires the work that goes into the restoration and "making new again" of some old house that had become run-down and in bad repair.

Many father's have brightened the eyes of their youngsters when they took a broken toy and fixed it "good as new." And what a blessing when some skilled surgeon is able to successfully operate on someone whose life was endangered by disease and assist them by removing the diseased tissue and they begin to function as if it never happened. Salesmen are often seen and heard to use the "pitch" of contrasting the "before" with the "after" use of their product. Yes, we like things new, refreshed, restored, made right again.

A person can be made new. Regardless of how broken and useless he has allowed himself to become, if he will do what is necessary, he can be made new again. It remains for God to make a sinful man a new creature. We are born into this world spotless, sinless, pure, innocent and undefiled. But we corrupt ourselves when we partake of sin. Sin ruins us. It makes us unfit for fellowship with God. It separates us from God and we are as enemies and aliens. But God can take that blighted life, even your life and mine, and make it over so that He will cherish our fellowship. So great is the change that is wrought that the Holy Spirit has used the term "a new creature" to describe it. As the song says, "Bring Christ your broken heart, so marred by sin; He will create anew, make whole again." David prayed, *"Create in me a new heart, O God."* (Psalms 51:10).

It Takes Power

The tremendous power that effects such a change and renewal begins with the love of God for us in spite of our sinfulness. The Gospel message is that message of God's love for man and what God has done for man that man could not do for himself. It is the story of an unmerited, unearned, undeserved, freely offered grace and favor to mankind. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8).

His love is what motivates and prompts our love in return. *"We love, because He first loved us."* (First John 4:19). By what Paul calls *"the foolishness of preaching,"* (and that is what some considered it to be in the first century and still so consider it) we hear of this love. This is the way God initiates the operation of our salvation. Upon our belief in that message, the demonstration of God's love in the sending of His Son, we are given the right to become sons of God. Upon our obedience to the commands of the gospel, we are enabled to be new creatures.

To become a new creature demands wholehearted and unreserved commitment of self to God through His Son. This commitment is made by obedience from the heart to that form of doctrine which is delivered (Romans 6:17,18). The doctrine that saves is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4). We obey a "form" or picture of that doctrine. By repentance we die to sin, and in baptism we are buried, only to be raised to walk in *"newness of life."* (Romans 6:3,4). Those who embark on this *"newness of life"* are those who are *"born again,"* (John 3:3-5), or are made "new *creatures."*

Other Passages

Notice some other illusions to becoming a new creature that we find in the New Testament. Colossians 3:9,10, *"Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in the knowledge after the image of him that created him."* We are new people. The old man is put away.

First Corinthians 6:9-11, *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effiminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor theives, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."* What a sad and sorry spiritual state such people are living. But Paul continues, *"And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."* Those to whom Paul wrote were once the worst sort of people. Their lives were wretched as far as God's will was concerned. But they were not that way when Paul wrote. What happened? They had changed. They were once reprehensible, but they

were washed, sanctified (set apart), justified (made righteous before God). They were now new creatures.

God has designed the avenue of an active, obedient faith as the way to bring about this newness of life. Beginning on Pentecost, many have favorably responded to the call of the Lord to obey. The Samaritans, the Ethiopian, Saul, Cornelius, Lydia, the jailor, Corinthians, others. All are examples of people becoming new creatures by being born again, as Christ taught Nicodemus one must do (John 3:3-5). This is essential to salvation. One is born of water and the Spirit when he is led by the Spirit's message to be baptized in water for the remission of sins. Again, Paul noted, Colossians 2:12,13, *"Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye also are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead, and you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses."* From death to life is the process of becoming a new creature. It is an operation of God, produced by our faith in the operation of God.

Things Are Different

As a new creature, the Christian takes a new mind and attitude toward all things. He has a different outlook. He once looked on things as would one who was doomed and damned. Now he considers things in the light of truth as once redeemed and saved. He develops the *"mind of Christ"* (Philippians 2:5-8). He is obedient to God, submissive to all His will, respectful of God's authority, and joyfully follows wherever the Master's path takes him.

He adopts the mind of service (Romans 12:1,2). The *"mind of the flesh"* is forsaken for the *"mind of the Spirit."* (Romans 8:5-10). The flesh and Spirit, being contrasted as the way of sin and the way of righteousness, are not compatible with each other. The new creature goes with the Spirit. He is provoked to think on things true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report (Philippians 4:8). He accepts Paul's challenge of Colossians 3:1-3, *"If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."*

As much as anything else, upon becoming a new creature, one has a new goal and aim, a new purpose and direction in

life. As Paul stated, *"It is no longer I that live but Christ liveth in me."* (Galatians 2:20). Our goal is, *"Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him."* (Second Corinthians 5:9).

As is true with any new creature, there must be growth. With the Christian there is the necessity of adding Christlike qualities to our lives. Peter writes, *"Besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* (Second Peter 1:5-11

Our Hope

Man's hope in this world is that he can be a new creature. Not only can he become a new creature, he must, lest he live in sin, die in sin, and suffer in hell in eternity. Jesus said, *"Except ye be born again..."* and that is just another way of saying, except you become a new creature. What a wonder that we can be made whole again, new, start over, be clean, purified, sanctified, every spot and stain removed.

It is the blood of Christ that does that. With the application of His blood upon our obedience to the commands to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized into Him, we are raised a new creature in Christ, where salvation abounds (Second Timothy 2:10).

† † † † †

A Necessary Change

After four of the most peaceful and tranquil years any gospel preacher could want, we have made the decision to leave the work at East Main. This may sound strange, and it was a difficult decision to make. But personal responsibilities to one of our parents as well as new opportunities recently opened to us make this decision imperative.

We count it a blessing that we have been associated with this congregation, so many brethren in the area, and many faithful gospel preachers.

From the first until now the eldership and I have worked with exceptional harmony and oneness. It is not this way everywhere. The membership has been supportive of the messages I have brought these years. While few ever accomplish everything they would like, and there are those we wish we could have reached but have not, we are confident that lasting good has been accomplished, the truth preached, and the church stands firm and solid in the doctrine of Christ, facing an expectant future and aware of various potential hindrances.

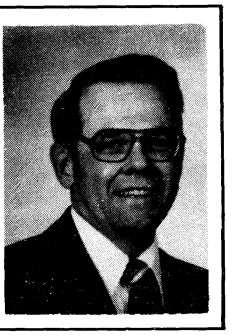
Near the middle of July we shall move our residence to McMinnville, Tennessee. I expect to find a place to preach, make myself available for more meetings, especially in areas that cannot financially afford meetings, spend more time on this booklet, ***A Burning Fire,*** and other writings I have been compiling for several years.

We have purchased a house and plan to make that area the place where we "drive down a peg" and operate from there.

This will likely be the last issue of this booklet to be sent from Tupelo. Thanks is sent to the East Main church for every consideration in this effort. The next issue will be mailed from our new location.

If I can be of service to brethren in gospel meetings, or if brethren will assist me financially as I go to small and struggling congregations to conduct gospel meetings, I would appreciate your consideration. As of July 15 our home address will be: Route 11, Box 90, McMinnville, TN, 37110.

It Is Still Sin



JAMES W. BOYD

In a recent report over national television of a poll among American clergymen, it was found that sixty percent no longer consider premarital sexual intercourse sinful.

With many people that will be good news because they, nor the clergymen, care for what God teaches on the subject anyway. But what a disgraceful situation among those who profess to be leading people in the way of God.

Regardless of what the liberal, unbelieving and modernistic clerics think, God's Word condemns fornication and warns of the wrath of God and His just punishment of those who commit it. All the seminary training in the world is not going to change God's mind. It has only once again corrupted the minds of the clergy.

America has no more sinister enemy in its ranks than liberal clergymen who teach the lies of Satan and cause people to defy the revelation of God. But what is worse, think of the souls they lead to damnation with their error.

All the "reverends" in the world cannot change immorality into something God will approve. But how they try!

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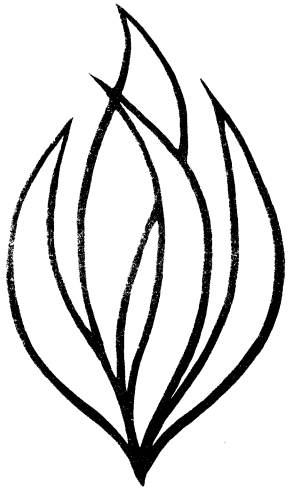

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME V **NUMBER 2**

The Invitation Of An In-Law

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:10). Doing good is Christlike (Acts 10:38). Peter told the household of Cornelius how *"Jesus went about doing good...for God was with him."* To do good is the highest level of human behavior. Doing good not only benefits others, but offers to man the richest rewards, the truest joy that can fill his heart, and makes him useful and meaningful.

The sphere of doing good is so broad and inclusive. The opportunities are almost unlimited. There are many objects upon which we can expend our time and talents in doing good. There are the widows, orphans, homeless, those in various kinds of physical need, the aged, sick, bereaved, afflicted, discouraged, down-trodden, weary, etc. The failure to do good is one way that we sin (James 4:17).

We can also do much good in the moral and spiritual realm as well as the physical. In fact, of the two realms, the spiritual good is more important and more lasting. Let us consider something good that Moses did long ago. He extended an invitation to his brother-in-law.

"And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come thou with us and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." (Numbers 10:29).

Our lesson is that we can do good in a similar fashion by extending to those around us a similar invitation. Let us analyze the nature of this invitation and learn how we can, and ought, extend a similar one.

The Journey

Moses said, *"We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you."* Moses was talking to Hobab, his brother-in-law. The Israelites were on their way from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. They were strangers in the land; nothing more than wandering pilgrims. They were passing through the territory of Midian. They were going to a place that would not be earned, but given to them by the grace of God.

Peter refers to Christian people in a similar fashion; that is, being strangers, sojourners, pilgrims, just passing through. *"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims..."* (First Peter 2:11). This world is not our home. We are in the world but not of the world. We are passing through this way on our way to our heavenly home that God will give us. Eternal life with God is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). Like Abraham, *"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."* (Hebrews 11:10).

The journey of the Christian is much like that of Israel. Israel's journey began by leaving the bondage and slavery of Egypt. By the blood of the Passover lamb this was made possible. The Christian's journey to heaven begins by leaving the bondage and slavery of sin, made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ, who is called our Passover (First Corinthians 5:7).

Exodus

Israel was freed from their bondage when they crossed the Red Sea, which Paul described as being baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea (First Corinthians 10:1,2). The Christian's exodus from the servitude of Satan is a reality when he is baptized into Christ to become a Christian (Galatians 3:27). In baptism his sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). It is then that he leaves the service of sin and becomes a servant of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). And after Israel was *"baptized unto Moses"* they rejoiced for their deliverance. Even so, when one is baptized into Christ, like the jailor and the Ethiopian, he has reason to rejoice for he has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13).

Wandering

Israel's journey continued through the years of sacrifice, service, denial, hardship, phases of weakness and strength, being chastized, praised, worshiping, and working. For forty years they wandered toward Canaan.

Is not the Christian's life often filled with trials, threats, hardship, praise, and persecution, weakness and strength, regret and reward?

Israel was guided by God with the cloud and pillar of fire. The guide for the Christian is that same God, through His Word. As

the Psalmist wrote, *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway."* (Psalms 119:104).

Canaan

Israel's journey ended when they successfully crossed the Jordan River and entered the promised land. In like fashion, our journey shall end when we cross the river of death. We shall also reach our goal. And there waiting to help us across will be our Savior and Lord.

Moses told Hobab, *"We are on our journey."* Christians today tell the world, "We are on our journey also. We are going somewhere and we know where. We have a purpose in life and a goal to reach. We have a mission to fulfill and accomplish. We count with God and we are on the way. He will reward us at last."

Invitation

Moses extended a most cordial invitation to Hobab. *"Come thou with us."* From this we know that Hobab had not yet begun such a journey. Just like many people today who have not yet started toward heaven, Hobab was standing nearby, but had not started. First John 5:19 reads, *"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness."* Many are in the state of wickedness, and not going toward heaven. In fact, most are actively pursuing a journey away from heaven by the wide and broad way that leadeth to destruction (Matthew 7:13,14). Is it not obvious that there was no way Hobab could ever enter the promised land if he never started toward it? Is it not equally obvious that none shall see the glories of God in heaven if they never begin their journey toward it? We cannot complete what we never start. Some may have fears that they "can't hold out," but the greatest concern is that there is no way to suceed without beginning.

Moses' invitation also implies that Moses wanted Hobab to come along. Moses was in God's service and happy to be there. He had faith in the promises of God for the nation of Israel. He knew that the people would reach the land. He wanted Hobab to be among the blessed ones. His invitation was a most unselfish one.

It is no different in the attitude of faithful brethren toward the lost of the world. As Paul stated it, *"Brethren, my heart's desire*

and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." (Romans 10:1). Paul wrote, *"And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you..."* (Second Corinthians 12:15). *"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law [being not without law to God, but under the law of Christ], that I might gain them that are without law; to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am become all things to all men that I might by all means save some."* (First Corinthians 9:19-22).

Paul was saying that he would go to any legitimate length and effort to put himself in the place of others that he might understand them, love them, teach them, lead them to salvation. Nothing was too much to save others. How Paul wanted the lost to go with him on the journey to heaven!

We should invite people today because we have a Savior that they need. We have a love for them, a concern for their spiritual welfare. To lack that love would be to miss so much of the way of Christ. Christ came to the world to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He wanted them to go the strait and narrow way to life (Matthew 7:13,14). As His followers, how could we want anything less for anyone than that which He wanted for them, and died to provide? Christ invited people to come to Him (Matthew 11:28-30). We invite people to come with us as we follow that same Christ. Therefore we say to the world around us, *"Come thou with us."*

Promises

Then Moses offered a two-fold promise, *"We will do thee good, For the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."* The first promise has a certain limitation because it includes humans. But the second is divine.

Those traveling the same road can be of assistance to each other. We can bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2). We need the help of each other on our way to heaven. At every turn, the devil stalks his prey. We are all prone to weakness and subject to temptation. But part of being a Christian is having fellowship with the redeemed and helping one another serve God in a pleasing manner. One primary goal in marriage is

helping each other get to heaven. Brethren ought have deep concern for the welfare of each other along life's way. Life has its pitfalls and difficult moments and we can lift one another over them, providing help to endure.

We pray for each other; strengthen and encourage each other; offer kind words to each other; express sympathy; weep with those that weep and rejoice with those that rejoice. We cooperate, congratulate, and rebuke each other when needed. The tie that binds is precious to us and we gladly, willingly, quickly, lend a helping hand to help a brother.

Christians need one another, not only in times of disappointment and set-backs, but also in times of success and progress, lest one become puffed-up and proud and his heart be turned from the Lord. The fellowship of faithful Christian brethren is so pure and tender, even with all of the faults that abide among us.

The Best Part

The divine part of the promise was that the Lord would do Israel good. He had spoken good concerning that people. The Israelites were God's chosen people. He protected them and provided for them. He was their God and they were His people.

The same things can be said of Christians. Christians are the children of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). We are God's people. For us He provides and we are under His protection. One becomes a member of spiritual Israel, the church, by being born into God's family, just as the Israelites were born into that nation. God had spoken good concerning that people, and God has spoken good, yea, even much more good, concerning His church that is composed of Christians. Great and precious are the promises (Second Peter 1:4).

Let us notice a few of the things God has spoken concerning the church. We enjoy remission of sin (Acts 2:38). This is important to us because our sin is what separates us from God. Now, in Christ, they are forgiven and we are most blessed in that (Romans 7,8).

We enjoy His abiding presence. To His own He said, *"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."* (Matthew 28:20). Even to us, we have the assurance, *"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have; for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may bodly say, The Lord is my helper,*

and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." (Hebrews 13:5,6).

Christ is our intercessor (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). God hears and answers our prayers offered through Christ. He pleads our case for us.

We have power to live this life successfully, even in face of trying circumstances. *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear; But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation make also a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it."* This simply teaches us something that is far easier to say than to live, but the promise is true, "There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle."

We have hope because we are heirs of God (Romans 8:17). We are citizens in that kingdom that shall be delivered up to the Father when He comes (First Corinthians 15:24). We have the promise of the resurrection from the dead, but more than that, a resurrection unto life, a crown of glory (First Peter 1:3,4; Second Timothy 4:6-8). *"And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life."* (First John 2:25). Our crown of glory and righteousness shall never fade away (First Peter 5:4).

In fact, Paul tells us that every spiritual blessing is *"in Christ,"* and that is where we are and that is the good that God has spoken concerning us. God has spoken good concerning spiritual Israel.

Therefore...

All this being true, we have the privilege and the duty to turn to the world and invite them in a similar manner as Moses invited Hobab. We can say with confidence, *"We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come thou with us and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."* May it not be true that any miss heaven because we failed to inform them of the Master's invitation to be saved.

† † † † †

Appreciation is expressed to the ***ARLINGTON CHURCH OF CHRIST, McMINNVILLE, TN*** for allowing the use of its mailing permit for the future mailing of ***A Burning Fire.***

A Real Man

"Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged his son Solomon saying, I go the way of all the earth; be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself; that the Lord may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee [said he] *a man on the throne of Israel."* (First Kings 2:1-4).

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." (First Corinthians 16:13).

In the first passage David is giving his death-bed charge to his son Solomon who was to succeed him as the next king of Israel. He told him to show himself a man and told him what that involved. It meant doing God's will, being obedient to God's word, living as God would have him live. That was real manhood.

In the second passage, Paul was instructing Christians in Corinth how to be a faithful disciple. Among the instructions he gave was *"quit you like men."* The word *"quit"* meant to "behave or conduct themselves" as a real man would, not as an immature child, but a man. Every age has its desparate need for real man. And we use the term "man" to mean both men and women of certain kind and quality, but mostly males who are real men. We make a distinction between just being a male and being a real man. Jeremiah 5:1 reveals God's charge to the prophet, *"Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem and see now and know and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh truth, and I will pardon it."* Jeremiah could find any number of males. But the instructions implies he would have difficulty finding a real man, the kind and quality described.

Who Is A Real Man?

Just what is a real man? Real manhood is not measured in physical power or prowness. It means more than being

physically strong, with big biceps, tall, broad shoulders, etc. The strongest man of the Bible was Samson, but he was a moral degenerate, weak in self-discipline, void of godly character. Goliath, the giant of the Philistines, was a physical giant, but one of the idolaters that fell before the young boy's sling. It takes more than physical bravery, athletic achievement, muscles, etc. to be classified as a real man in the sight of God.

It is more than mental power, quickness of mind and wit. Solomon was the wisest to have ever lived except the Christ. Yet he failed to heed the very directions his father David gave him. He lived an indulgent life of luxury, gradually turning to idolatry. He lived his life through in much wantonness, only to come to the ultimate conclusion that all that kind of life was vanity and vexation of spirit. There are many "wise men" of our time, scholars, geniuses in some respects, that show themselves to be fools because they even deny the reality of God. They are not real men.

Maturity

Paul shows that real manhood is manifested by maturity in those things that matter. Behave like a man should behave before you call yourself a man. Do not continue to be as a child in conduct and think you are a man. Being a man, you should put away childish things and accept the duties, work, obligations of manhood before you classify yourself as a man. The real man is one who accepts his duty to God and his fellowman, whatever that duty is, and discharges it faithfully and to the best of his ability. Just being a male does not mean you are or shall necessarily ever be a real man in the evaluation of God.

There are many poor excuses for men filling the roles of husbands and fathers today because they either do not know or will not accept their duty to God and man, wife, children, home, church, etc.

Head

What is the duty of a real man? He is to be the head of the home as Christ is head of the church. This is not an arbitrarily assigned duty, but one that has been designated by the Creator of the home, Almighty God. This rules out the "hen-pecked husband." This outlaws a domineering wife and the weak husband figure. There is no more reason for a woman-governed

home than there is for a woman-run church. God decreed that man is to be head of the home. God made Christ the head of the church and God gave man to be head over the family. Variation from this is a variation from God's design.

Attempts on the part of women to take over the home, assuming that they have husbands, is to show disrespect for the law of God. The failure to assume the duty over the home by the husband is another show of disrespect for the law of God. Regardless of what the fanatical "women's rights" perversity would have us believe, this is God's will. Departure from this is already showing its deadly results in our society and all the rabble-rousing rubbish from whatever source cannot and will not prove otherwise. People are fools to listen to and give heed to those who show such little concern for God.

Decisive

There are decisions in the home that the husband ought be man enough to make, not leaving them to the wife to have to make when many times she prefers not to have to make. Many wives have to make decisions they ought never be called upon to make because their husbands shirk the duty that is theirs. A wife has a right to a husband that will lead the family aright. Everyone in the family ought to be able to lean on him for support and direction. Some families are like the story where the wife makes all the little decisions and the husband makes the big ones. He decides whether America should declare war on an enemy, when to send up the next space flight, what to do about the nation's economy, all the big decisions; she decides where they will live, what will be his occupation, where to go to church, how to spend the money, what to do about the children, etc.

Lead

Notice, we said the husband ought to lead. We did not say and would not contend that the husband is to drive his wife and family. Attempting to be a dictator and tyrant is not manly. A leader is always considerate of those he leads, sensitive to their needs and what is in their best interest before himself. What would you think of a man's head that was indifferent to the welfare of the rest of his body? You would rightly consider him "nuts." That is a good description of a man who runs his family

without proper love, compassion, consideration and interest for those he leads. There is nothing manly about an abusive brute who throws around his authority, running roughshod over others. Only when he is a real leader is he a real man.

Provide

He has the duty to provide for the family as best he can. God gave man this duty, to earn bread by the sweat of his brow. Unless there are reasons why he cannot provide for his family, it is unmanly for him to allow others to provide for him and his. The wife is to be the *"keeper of the home,"* the *"help"* that is suitable to him. She is not to ordinarily be expected to be the provider, unless there be extenuating circumstances that would demand her assistance. Too many men have allowed their wives to go to work outside the home and the home and the children have been neglected for the sake of more and more money and the things money can buy. You may not have as much, but what you can have will be worth far more than to have all that this world offers, and lose the precious souls of your children through your neglect, lack of attention, failure to supervise and guide. This idea that a woman ought work outside the home has harassed the home, marriage, society, etc. until America is suffering beyond measure, young and old. Young people need to think about that.

Some men are just lazy and willing to let the wife work herself to an early grave while he loafs, plays, does as little as possible. Yes, in emergencies, she should help if she can, provided the better things are not sacrificed. But we see too many "planned" emergencies that are nothing but manifestations of covetousness and greed. If a man does not provide for his own, he is worse than an infidel. (First Timothy 5:8). Such spineless males can hardly be called men.

Advice to young men and young women is in order. Boys, do not marry until you are willing and can carry the load. Girls, do not marry if you are unwilling to be a homemaker which is your primary work. You have no right to violate God's will by bringing children into a home that is turned upside down through love of money. Learn to do your duty, both the husband and wife. That is God's way.

Example

A real man is a good example to follow. Some think a real man is the kind that drinks beer, whiskey, etc. We see it advertised all the time. Some big "hero" guzzling down his "booze" as if he was a real man, getting his "gusto." What a distorted picture! He is a glutton and a wine-bibber, not a real man. His evil appetite is showing his sons and daughters just what a person is not supposed to be, and he is deceived in thinking that is manhood. How many children grow up literally afraid of the presence of their father because he is a servant to the devil's brew.

A real man is an example of honesty, clean living, clean speech, obedience to the laws, respect for authority,truthfulness. Real men do not brag how they outwitted the policeman, or cheated on a business deal. Fathers with sons in jail wonder why they ever turned out that way. Many of them can just look at the example they gave them and know why. When their mouth is stuffed with tobacco, chewing and smoking, cursing and swearing, what can you expect from that son or daughter who loves father, but he has taught them to be servants of Satan like he is.

Real men will be concerned for the home and everyone in it. They will make time to be with their children and see to it that they are growing in the right direction. So many parents really do not know their children because they spend so few hours with them during the time of their upbringing. They are strangers to their children.

Real men are examples of morality, responsibility, work, purity. Real men do not commit adultery. Real men do not forsake their families. Real men show the dignity and honor of labor to their family. Whether one is single or married, a father or not, a real man holds these things high on his list of that which is deserving of esteem.

Spiritual Guide

Please get the next point. No man is a real man who is not responsible for the spiritual welfare of those of his family, including his wife and every child. The admonition to train the child, and bring the child up in the ways of God are assigned to fathers (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). This is a duty that cannot be shifted to another. Others may help, and others may have to do it because the father fails to do it, but fathers are not real men who think all they have to do is provide food, shelter,

clothing, money, etc., and forsakes the duty of spiritual guidance and instruction. Some may think it manly to be crude, gruff, coarse, worldly, irreligious, indifferent to the Lord. They may think that "church and Sunday school" are for women and children and not "real men." But they have it backward regarding what is a real man. A real man is Christlike, walking daily in the ways of the Lord, living obediently to His every command. This takes courage, honor, conviction, loyalty, sacrifice. But to be a real man demands it. Being the family's religious leader is a sign of strength, not weakness. The failure in this realm is weakness, not strength. The big beer-drinking, cursing, muscular, godless brute is a dwarf and a pigmy in comparison to that person who lives nobly, honestly, truthfully, with dignity and love for God and man, doing his daily duty in fearing God and keeping His commandments. He may be small, physically inferior, financially less blessed, and all else that the world considers so important. But when one does what God wants him to do, he is a real man.

There is a story about a man who took his hog to the state fair and won first prize. But beside the pen was a boy, smoking, stunted in growth, given to profanity, a poor specimen of what a lad ought to b e. It was the son of the hog's owner. He had given more attention to the hog than his son.

Dear friend, nobody has the right to claim to be a real man until the souls of his wife and children are first and foremost in his concern. Until you do your duty before God, regardless of whatever measure you may use to test your manhood, you are not there until God approves of you.

We all do well to hear and heed David's words to Solomon, *"Show thyself a man."* Listen to Paul, *"Quit ye like men."* Be a faithful Christian, leading the home, providing as best you can, being a good example, showing those in your charge the way to heaven.

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This Is That

Our lesson text is Acts 2:16, *"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel."* The place was Jerusalem, where were gathered devout men of every nation for the observance of Pentecost. This was a very significant day because it was the first Pentecost after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It would be a day that would influence all time and eternity. On that day was the promised and miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:1-4).

This event was soon noised abroad and multitudes gathered. People were astonished at what was taking place. *"And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"* (Acts 2:7,8). Some accused the apostles of being drunk with wine.

Peter dismissed the absurd charge of drunkenness and began a rather lengthy discourse which was the first gospel sermon. The theme was to bear the conclusion *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made this same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."* (Acts 2:36). The sermon continued with the inclusion of the terms of salvation for the forgiveness of sins. But a great portion of the sermon was an explanation of the events that were taking place.

Peter referred to the prophecy made by Joel (Acts 2:17-21). Before repeating the prophecy, he explained, *"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel."* This was the great moment of which Joel had foretold. This was the great time for which Israel had longed. This was the fulfillment of many prophecies and promises. Please focus attention on the pronoun ***this*** and the pronoun ***that.***

This

What is the meaning of ***this? This*** was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to His apostles before He ascended into heaven. (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).

This was the coming of the power from on high. *"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."* (Acts 1:8).

This was the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. *"For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."* (Acts 1:5).

This was the signal for the apostles to begin carrying out the great commission given them. *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations..."* (Matthew 28:19). *"And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send you the promise of my Father upon you, but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."* (Luke 24:46-49). *"And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."* (Acts 1:8).

This was the beginning of a new age, a new dispensation, a new and perfect covenant. ***This*** was the beginning of the *"last days."* The Patriarchal age had come and gone. The Mosaic age had come and gone. ***This*** began the Christian age, that age when God speaks to man through His Son, Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 1:1,2).

Finally, after many years, the new and better covenant came into force. The old law had been taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross, having accomplished its purposes. The perfect law of liberty through Christ was being ushered to the front. It brought what the imperfect and faulty law of the past could not provide; namely, the forgiveness of sins. It was not a law that embraced a single family alone, or a single nation alone, as had previous ages. It was a law and a system that was for *"whosoever"* would come to Christ. As Peter preached that day, guided by the Holy Spirit, he opened the doors of the long looked for kingdom of God, the church, and salvation through Christ.

Yes, ***This*** was the start of the last days. Some preach with

near hysteria that we are living in the last days. But such has been the case for all those who have lived since Pentecost day. And after this age, there shall be no more. This is the last.

Significantly, ***This*** was the birthday of the church of Christ. Peter preached salvation in the name of Christ for the first time. The terms of repentance and baptism were proclaimed. Those that believed what Peter preached, repented and were baptized were added to the church (Acts 2:47). Prior to ***This***, the church was spoken of as that which was to come. After ***This*** the church is spoken of as being in existence. Christ had said He would build His church, and He gave Peter and the other apostles the *"keys"* to the kingdom, which is the church. On ***This*** day, those keys were used to open the door of salvation to all. Any church that began before ***This*** is not the Lord's church. Any church that has begun or shall since ***This*** is not the Lord's church. ***This*** is the start of the church for which Jesus died and shed His blood.

That

What is the meaning of ***That***? Obviously, as Peter stated, it refers to the prophecy of Joel. Joel had foretold of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28ff). He foretold of people calling on the name of the Lord.

That referred to the announcement of God made through His foreknowledge even since man fell in sin that He would provide a way for man to be reconciled to Him. ***That*** meant the hopes and purposes for which Israel had been selected as God's people.

We find many prophecies and their fulfillments in the Bible. This reality is one of the irrefutable evidences of inspiration. The connection of the prophecy and its fulfillment is often easily seen. Sometimes we would not know that a prophecy was fulfilled if it was not for the notation by Scripture that something taking place was a prophetic fulfillment. But when we come to such an outright statement as made by Peter, ***"This is that..."*** there is no problem in knowing the prophecy or its accomplishment. When God reveals that a prophecy is fulfilled, there is no room for doubt.

The Church

Let us turn away from Peter's application of "*This is that...*"

for a moment into another realm of thought where the phrase is often used. Let us think about the Lord's church that was established on the day of Pentecost and the church today. Many accept the value of the great events of Pentecost and see the value of the church today. They want a replica of that church that was begun on Pentecost. They want to be members of the Lord's church. Yet, there are so many churches in existence, and each is saying, "This is that church of which you read in the Bible." Each contends that it is that which the Lord built, that the Lord approves, that has its foundation on the truth.

We share the desire of others to want to be members of that church that began that day in Jerusalem. That is the church to which the saved belong. But with so many churches being so different one from another, and so different from what you read in the New Testament we wonder, "How can the claim be made that this is that church?"

So many people have mistakenly divided what they call "Christendom" into two major camps, Roman Catholicism and Protestant denominationalism. If such is a valid division before God, we want to accept it. But where does Scripture teach any such thing?

Not This

Romanism claims to be the church belonging to Christ. If so, we want to be a part of it. If not, let us shun it and oppose it as a false religion. How can the church of Rome be the church of Christ when the church of Christ of the New Testament is so different from the Church of Rome of history and our time? Romanism has its special priesthood. But under Christ all Christians are priests. Romanism makes the priest a mediator between God and man while the Bible teaches that Christ is the only mediator. Romanism has one bishop over many congregations while the New Testament teaches more than one bishop over a single congregation. Romanism teaches purgatory, Mary worship, guilt of original sin, infant baptism, transubstanuation, auricular confession to the priest, catechism authority, a pope and other hierarchy relics, superstitution, etc. of which the Bible provides no such instruction or revelation. How can the church of Rome claim "This is the church of the Bible"? The two are world's apart. If anything Romanism has the marks of apostasy all over it, in practice, doctrine, authority, organization, purpose, and just about everything else.

Nor That

Protestant denominationalism is no better. "This is the church that Christ established," cry the denominationalists. But which one of the literally hundreds of churches do they mean? The church of Christ was united. Protestantism propagates and survives on division. The early church members wore the same name; not so among denominations. Early Christians taught the same things. What a confusion of additions and substractions to the Word of God we find in denominationalism. With all the creeds, disciplines, manuals, prayer books, conferences, councils, catechisms, confessionals, etc. the chaotic and contradictory confusion is overwhelming in Protestantism. In many instances they have borrowed from Romanism, and added their own way as well. How can anyone have confidence in the claims of denominationalists who tell us, "This is that church" of which you read when the similarity between Protestant denominationalism and the Lord's revealed church is so far removed one from the other?

Matter of Authority

Reason with me for a moment. If one preaches what the Bible teaches, practices what the Bible reveals, upholds the same things the early church upheld, believe what they believed, do what they did, follows the same way they walked, uses the same authority and measure, why would not that one be the same as they were? Indeed, such a one would be a member of the church that began on Pentecost.

People today who call for the restoration of New Testament Christianity are calling for what is right. The perpetuation of human churches is wrong. By taking God's Word, and taking God at His word, and putting into practice what He has taught us, we can be Christians, and belong to His church, and say to others, "This is that church" of which you read in the Bible.

Such is our plea in the religious world and before all mankind. Such is our intent. As we follow His revealed pattern, we shall be what He wants. We can say, "This is that" which was spoken of God.

† † † † †

The Last Three Points I Would Want To Make

The story is told of a preacher who was called to preach at a prison, and just before he preached he was told that there were two men who would be in his audience that were going to be executed the next week. His sermon would be the last that they would ever hear. So he thought, "What kind of sermon must I preach seeing it will be their last?"

Let me ask you, "If you had the entire world to hear you for just one lesson, what would you preach?" There is always the possibility that the sermon I preach will be my last one. There is the possibility that someone may be hearing their last sermon, also. There is possibility that you are reading your last sermon. I might add that I hope none of these things shall be true. But does not that possibility exists? Certainly it does. And since it does, what needs to be preached?

I think you would agree that it is a difficult task to try to reduce all that you would want to proclaim into one sermon. This calls for the establishment of some priorities. Assuming that your hearers will include Christians and non-Christians, what points should be made? One preacher facetiously said he probably would preach and preach and maybe never get through in order to keep alive.

I have decided on three major points I would want to make. Possibly you would choose something different.

The Way

I would want to teach men the way of salvation. I would start by telling my hearers that anyone outside of Christ is lost. All men sin (Romans 3:23), and this is what separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). The whole world lieth in wickedness (First John 5:19). Sin is the transgression of God's law (First John 3:4). *"The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and his ears are open unto their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil."* (First Peter 3:12).

Furthermore, *"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23). *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a*

man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Proverbs 14:12). Man, left to himself, is hopeless and helpless, doomed and damned, unable to redeem himself or save himself by himself. He is in desperate need of one to save him from the wages of sin (Romans 6:23).

God's Part

Then I would proceed to send out the glad tidings that God has provided a Savior and a way of salvation whereby our sins will be forgiven and our fellowship with God a happy relationship. Even though God's justice demands that sin be punished, His mercy and grace also demands that opportunity for salvation be offered to an undeserving humanity. We are saved by His grace (Ephesians 2:8,9), and not by our own works of righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). God sent His Son to be man's Savior (First Timothy 1:15). The plan of salvation that God devised included the perfect life of Jesus the Christ, His death on the cross where He shed His blood, the event where the Just died for the unjust. In this way God was both just as well as the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Romans 3:26). Christ is our propitiation (First John 2:2). He tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). He died for our sins and they were nailed to the cross. *"Much more then being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."* (Romans 5:9). We are redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7).

Through Christ

Jesus Christ is the only access to the Father (John 14:6) and there is no other through whom salvation can be enjoyed (Acts 4:12). God acted on man's behalf through His Son and His sacrifice. The way of salvation provided, the way was opened to man and man is invited to come that way.

But along this line, we must recognize that His invitation to *"come unto me,"* can be accepted or rejected. He is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). While His plea is that *"whosoever will may come,"* only those who do come will be saved. Salvation is conditioned on man's response to God's invitation and terms.

Man's Part

Scripture warns that God will *"render vengeance on them that*

know not God and obey not the gospel." (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). Man must believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of his sins (Luke 13:3), confess his faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38;Mark 16:16). When one is baptized he is baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27) where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10). It is then that one reaches His shed blood (Romans 6:3,4) and is raised to walk in a newness of life, the result and product of the new birth (John 3:3-5). He is added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47) which is composed of the saved.

Yes, it seems that no final sermon could possibly be complete without the teaching of the way of salvation. What is more important to mankind than such a message?

Do Good Work

But to my brethren, I would want to stress that we must be ready unto every good work, as Paul exhorts in Titus 3:1. That which we do must be according to God's authority. This embraces the whole of one's life. This necessitates spiritual growth and all that is necessary to attain spiritual growth, such as study, work, and exercising ourselves unto godliness.

While we cannot be saved on our own goodness, nor on the goodness of other people, there is still that noble Christian labor that we are expected of God to perform. We cannot be content to be merely professed Christians but actually working Christians. We shall not be saved as a body, in a mass of , but individually. Regardless of what others may or may not do, each has his duty before God. We all need to realize this and discontinue any excuses for not being busy about the Father's business of right living.

To be ready unto every good work demands making ourselves fit and prepared in advance. We must develop the self-discipline, self control, Christ-like qualities to be ready, able, and willing servants.

Possibly more of us need to learn that we cannot serve God by proxy. It is an individual duty that cannot be shifted.

His Authority

As we labor together as the Lord's church we must give great emphasis to the Lord's authority. The church fell away into apostasy because of departure from the need of Biblical

authority for what we say, do, teach, and practice. Unless it is God's will, we have no business involving the church in it. While there are individual duties and privileges that we have as children of God, we must always ascertain what is the authority of God and not confuse the individual and the church as if the church can do whatever the individual can do.

Nothing would be more relevant and important to brethren than a rehearsal of the many Biblical warnings against falling away. *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* (First Corinthians 10:12). *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men..."* (First Corinthians 16:13). There is not an epistle from the inspired pen that does not include warnings against falling and admonitions to faithfulness.

We who are children of God should be reminded that the salvation of others depends upon our obedience to the Lord's command to take the gospel to all the world. We may not take the world for Christ, but we can take Christ to the world. By life, daily practice, teaching, preaching, word and deed, we are to be as a city set on a hill, a light to the world, the salt of the earth. We are to be that peculiar people, different because we are following Christ rather than the evil ways of the world (Titus 2:14). *"In his law"* we are to *"meditate day and night."* (Psalm 1:2).

Someone has suggested, "We are the only Bible the careless world will read; we are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed. We are the Lord's last message, given in deed and word; what if the type be crooked; what if the print be blurred." O my beloved brethren, would that we all gave heed, *"Be thou faithful unto death."* (Revelation 2:10).

Love

The third and last major point I would want to make, and this includes so much with one giant swipe, *"Let all that ye do be done in love."* (First Corinthians 16:14). This has to do with the heart, the motive behind the deed and word. It has to do with the inward man, the soul, the spirit, the attitude, the disposition. Proverbs 4:23 has urged, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life."* Let love be our motive for everything we do and say. Has not Paul taught us that it really makes no difference how many *"great"* things we might do, such cannot be pleasing unless we have love? (First Corinthians 13). We must have love for God, Christ, Holy Spirit, the Word

of truth, His church, His people, the sinful people of the world that they might be saved, and love for brethren in the Lord. Love means seeking the other's highest good. It is a deliberate choice of conduct as frame of mind. Love requires the doing of what is needful, whether easy or hard, pleasant or unpleasant. It means doing right, being right, acting right toward all. What a large order and heavy demand!

Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."* (First John 5:3). Again, *"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."* (First John 4:20,21).

Jesus summarized it all by saying, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."* (Matthew 22:37-39).

His Invitation

But if this were to be my last sermon to preach, or some hearer's last sermon to hear, or even to read, I would include the reminder of the call of the Lord, His sweet invitation. Let Revelation 3:20 be heard, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me."*

Now that I have reviewed what I might preach if I was aware that the sermon would be my last, or your last, or someone's last, I am sobered by the reality that someday that last sermon will be presented by word or letter. That last opportunity will come to you also.

If you knew that tomorrow you must face your Creator and Judge, are you willing to meet Him as you are right now? Faithfulness in Christ is the only acceptable way to go before the judgment. May it be that we all hear what the Spirit saith.

† † † † †

Not An Uncommon Error

Some have succumbed to the doctrine that if you tell a thing often enough and loud enough that many will eventually come to believe it is true regardless of how false it is. This is certainly true regarding who established the church of Christ.

We recently read where someone cited Alexander Campbell as the founder of the "Disciples of Christ." Another added and complained that such was incorrect and that Campbell was the founder of the "Church of Christ," at least he admitted to thinking that for over sixty years.

"Disciples of Christ" denomination does point to Campbell as their founder, even though we are quite certain that Campbell would disclaim any such "distinction" in view of his efforts to restore New Testament Christianity, the condemnation of denominationalism, and the division upon which it breeds.

The founder of the church of Christ is Jesus Christ. He is the One who built it (Matthew 16:16-18). He is the "rock" upon which it is built. It had its beginning on the first Pentecost following the ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 2). No man, Campbell or any other, founded the church of Christ, the one in which I claim membership.

It is historically interesting to note that congregations existed even in this country before Alexander Campbell, or even his father Thomas Campbell, ever left the shores of Ireland to come here. It is quite impossible that the Campbells founded the church of Christ.

Many have been bombarded with this idea that the church is made up of denominations for so long that they seemingly cannot grasp the teaching of the New Testament about the church being separate and apart from the human institutions of varying names and different doctrines. Not only that, they would deny everyone the right to be a member of the church of which you read in the New Testament without being labeled and branded as just another denomination alongside others. But the misinformation held by many does not alter the truth.

The church of our Lord is not related to denominations whatever. It has no fellowship with denominations. Those who obey the gospel are members of the Lord's church, being added to it by the Lord Himself upon obedience in baptism for the remission of sins, which enables one to reach the saving blood of Christ. Once in the church, one must remain faithful.

† † † † †

Regarding Proverbs 22:6

We have read several excellent pieces on rearing children. Nearly all eventually refer to Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*"

Some cite this passage as a certain preventive against waywardness of the child in the future. But this is a misinterpretation of the passage because it contradicts the accountability of the child as he grows into maturity. The passage emphasizes parental duty in obtaining the desired result, but there are other implied truths in the passage that cannot be overlooked.

Some children who are reared by godly parents in a godly way have gone astray. These parents often blame themselves for failure. There was a failure, but not always on the part of the parents. Parental training does not negate choices the child may make as a free moral agent later. Parental training does not incorporate predestination. Parental training is a parental duty, and without it the probabilities of the child walking uprightly are unlikely. But parental training is not the entire matter. Other influences may intrude into the life of the child that he will accept and be led astray, being accountable himself.

Two periods of life are explictly stated in the passage and one is implicit. The stated one are childhood and old age. The implied one consists of the years between the two. The passage teaches the need to teach the child. It assumes the desired result only on the basis that the child will not abandon his training, living the way he has been trained during his middle years. Parents are to train. The child is to walk accordingly. When that is the case, when the child reaches old age, having walked faithfully those many years, he will not be moved from them.

Children going astray must surely be one of the darkest tragedies parents who love the Lord can suffer. Parents are often to blame; possibly more often than not. We have no real measure regarding this. But parents are not always the total fault. The child has a responsibility to learn what he is taught as much as the parents have the responsibility to teach. It takes both doing all they can to assure the desired result, does it not? And what a blessedness to one's life when he knows his children are walking in truth, faithful to God and His church. Nothing this world offers can come close to equality of that blessing.

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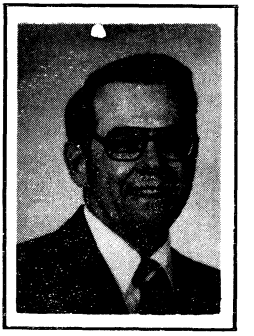
Defiling The Temple



JAMES W. BOYD

First Corinthians 6:19, "*What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*" First Corinthians 3:16, "*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*"

When we know what is harmful to the body, but ignore that knowledge and cause the body to become sickly, why does this not violate the teaching of these verses?

With overwhelming evidence we know smoking is harmful to the body. Certainly many other things are also. But there is no question about smoking, is there? When you see cigarette leftovers, someone smoking, or smoke yourself, you see evidence of man's defiance of the teaching of God. If not, why not? Smoking is more than a bad habit destructive to your health. It is a sin. Whether anybody cares enough about pleasing God to stop smoking is one matter. That it can be justified as approved by the Lord is impossible.

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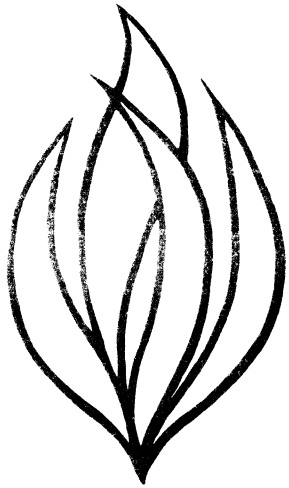

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME V **NUMBER 3**

The Comeback Of A Delinquent

Delinquency is not something that belongs exclusively to any one age of life. Even though we hear much of juvenile delinquency, this is but one area of delinquency. The young, old, males, females, all are subject to this spiritual malady. But in nearly every instance, it follows a pattern that is similar, if not identical in each case.

Apostasy, falling away, becoming delinquent does not occur in just a quick and unexpected moment except in rare cases. It is rather a gradual and slow process that culminates in delinquency. Fortunately, not all who go astray are content to remain in such a sinful state, and they find their way back to their first love.

The way back, like the process of turning away, does not usually occur in a moment, although it can. But it also follows an observable process and pattern. There is a series of steps one takes that leads him from God, and there is a series of steps he takes to come home.

Our lesson shall focus on the familiar Biblical account that reveals to us, and should warn us, of the process toward delinquency, but also shows us God's way back home.

"And he said, A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living." (Luke 15:11,12).

The story begins with one son wanting to escape from parental authority and go where he could live as he wanted. He was like so many people today who think that happiness is found in "doing your own thing." No longer would he permit anyone to offer him direction. Mistakenly thinking himself capable of directing his own steps, he wanted to launch out on his own before he was mature enough to handle it.

It is obvious that this son suffered from the disease of self-will. His demand was to "give me." He wanted what he thought was coming to him and he wanted it now. He manifested an attitude that was possessive, grasping, having little concern for others, wanting prematurely what would eventually be his. His responsibility to the father, or his older brother, seemed to

escape him completely. He had his own plans, sought his own ambition, concentrated entirely on himself, and wanted leave of home.

Departure

"And not many days after the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country..." (verse 31). Here was the separation from his father. It was altogether his own decision and action. He did not wish to remain even in the same country as his kin. He went into a strange land some distance from home, cutting his ties, going among people that were strangers to him, leaving those that loved him, abandoning the stabilizing influence of his heritage. Staying nearby would not satisfy his desire to exercise himself as he wished. It would not be compatible with his selfishness and self-will. His desire for his "personal freedom" took him into environments for which he was not qualified to handle.

"...And there wasted his substance with riotous living." (Verse 13). The word translated "riotous" means profligate, without any sense of principles, lack of moral standards or religious restraints, shameless. wicked. As a self-willed young man who was intent on his own satisfaction, removing himself from potential restraints on his behavior that would come from people who knew him and loved him, with a pocket full of money, but a head empty of good judgment and principle, he entered into a riotous lifestyle. How many times we see this replayed in our own day!

Poverty

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his field to feed swine." (Verses 14,15). He soon ran through all his money. He really "lived it up." Without thinking of the need to resupply himself, he soon found himself totally without, and the need for income hit him with full force. His lack of ability and preparation for this circumstance is seen in the kind of work he was required to take. For a Jew to feed swine was about as degrading as could occur. Swine were "unclean" animals to the Jews anyway. He was not even able to earn enough to feed himself. He ate what the swine ate. He lost his "fair-weather"

friends he had made during his fling at riotous living. He entered into a personal financial depression brought on by his own mistakes and low living. He was a living example of Galatians 6:7,8, *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."* This person brought himself to a low level and took himself into degradation.

"And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him." (Verse 16). Even though he was making some effort now in the swine field, he could not earn enough to supply himself. He would ever desire to eat the food that the swine ate. He had descended the latter about as far down as he could go.

What a tragedy if the story ended there! With many people this is where the story ends. They follow the pathway of apostasy, sink to the lowest point, and never rise again. There they meet death and from that point they go to face God in judgment. Their guilt, shame, disgraceful behavior accompanies them into eternity, and all because they preferred to satisfy their appetites of the flesh and a worldly mind rather than give heed to that which was far better for them.

But the story does not end here for this man. Even though he foolishly followed the way of delinquency, he made a comeback. He returned to the high road and recovered. He learned the high price of low living, and he humbled himself and was ultimately exalted. Notice what he did. Please see the reaction of his father.

Change Of Heart

His recovery began in the heart. He realized his state. *"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger."* He was not jealous of his father's servants. He simply realized how foolish he had been to leave that which had adequate supply and seek that which brought his ruin. Before anyone makes improvements he has to see the need of improving. We must recognize certain realities and open our eyes to things as they are. In his deplorable state he knew he had become a misfit and was misplaced. He evaluated himself fairly and was grieved at what he discovered. So it is with people in sin. Nobody ever turns to the Lord who considers everything

well with them. Until and unless each one of us comes to the state of realization of our lost condition, we will never make the effort needed to be saved from it.

Repentance

The next step he takes is another matter of the heart, and that is genuine repentance. *"I will arise and go to my father and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants."* (Verses 18,19). Repentance is not sorrow. Repentance is provoked by godly sorrow (Second Corinthians 7:10). He was sorry for his showing and conduct. This motivated him to "change his mind" and decide to return home. His repentance later produces the fruit of repentance in a reformed life. If this lad had just been sorry, and stayed sorry, and not allowed his sorrow to lead him to change his mind, his sorrow would have been for naught. But he realized his state, and repented, being ready to admit, "I have sinned; I have been wrong; I have done evil."

Action

Following his realization and repentance, he follows his resolve. He had the sentiment like the song expresses, "I am resolved no longer to linger charmed by the world's delights." His repentance and resolution led him to his next step; that of actually returning.

"*And he arose and came to his father.*" (Verse 20). Good resolutions are sometimes made but not carried out. But this person carried out his resolution. It must have been a hard road for him to travel. It was a humiliating experience to come back in such a poor condition, and all due to his own folly and sin. With regret in his heart, shamed by his own conduct, battered by the certain wages of sin, but wiser and with a faint glimmer of hope that things would be better back home, he starts toward his father. Things had not gone as he expected and as he had planned. Now he knew first hand what it meant to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. Nobody could tell him before he left. Nobody had to tell him now. But with bravery, courage, humility, and genuine penitent spirit, he comes back along the same road he had taken to leave, only this time, he is going in the right direction.

Reconciliation

That which awaited him was reconciliation. There was more awaiting him than he could have dared to expect. He knew what he deserved. He was willing to be just a hired servant. He recognized his own unworthiness. He did not expect such a restoration into the good favor of his loving father. *"But when he was a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him."* (Verse 20). The real hero of this story is the forgiving father. The impression we get is that the father must have been longing and looking for the time when his son would *"come to himself,"* and allow his training to come to the foreground. He saw him coming even when he was afar. Cannot we conclude that the father was wanting him to come home?

A wonderful point in the story is the action of the son when they met. He had not only resolved to admit his wrong, but he said just exactly what he had intended to tell his father. "*And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*"

The Loving and Forgiving Father

But the father would hear no more. The request to be just a servant was never heard because the father interrupted. The son was reclothed. "*But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.*" (Verse 22). The son was restored to his place in the family. He was made as he had been. Tattered, dirty and disgraceful garments were replaced with shoes and a robe and a ring of distinction. He was accepted, not as a hired servant, but as a son come home. He was back in his former state, even though he did not deserve it. The son had become the object of the unearned and unmerited love and grace of his merciful father. How like this are we when we come to the Father of heaven and enjoy His forgiveness of sins.

Following the son's realization of his evil condition, his repentance and resolve, his actual return, the reconciliation, reclothed again, there was rejoicing. There was a great celebration and for good reason. The father commanded, *"And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry."* (Verses 23,24).

The fact that all did not rejoice, is another story and another study. Our lesson will conclude with this passage. But are we not able to see these two paths that lead in opposite directions? Cannot we see how our self-will, selfishness, desire to go our own way, disregard for others, lack of gratitude for our blessings, appetites of a worldly and sinful sort take us away from the Father above? Cannot we see what a low level we bring upon ourselves by this kind of living? Are we not able to see the steps that lead us home again? More than this, cannot we see the kind of Father we have?

Let each ask himself, "On which road am I traveling? Which direction am I going?" It makes a difference, does it not? If you have been with the Father, and have left, please consider these heavenly and spiritual thoughts, and come back. God want you with him. He beckons, "Come home!"

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Things Spoken Against The Church

Being a Christian is not always easy. Not everyone has been or is now sympathetic with New Testament Christianity. Acts 28:16-22, "*And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together; and when they were come together he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customes of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I have ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came*

showed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against."

The "sect" to which they referred was the church of Christ. It was considered by many to be a splinter group, a throw-off of some of the Jews. Many failed to see Christianity for what it is.

Against Christ

From the day Jesus was born there have been those against Him. There was Herod who sought His life, making it necessary for Joseph to take Him and Mary to Egypt until Herod's death. Throughout the ministry of Christ the Herod family was antagonistic to the work of Christ.

He was spoken against with prejudiced words at His trial. He was spoken against even when He was on the cross. During His ministry many listened to Him, not to learn, but to ensnare Him in His speech and find fault.

On the day His church was established some accused His apostles of being drunk. Persecutions arose, first from among the Jews, then the Romans. While at the very first the church found many friends, it was not long before it was very unpopular to be a Christian. Some churches thrive on being popular. The Lord's church has never been popular because of its call for righteous living and its opposition to sin.

The things spoken against the church ought not be ignored. The human beings that make up the church are not perfect and there may be room for criticism. Furthermore, to ignore the opposition to the church is to fail to defend the truth. Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel, and so should we be.

Jesus warned, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."* (John 15:18). *"Marvel not, brethren, if the world hate you."* (First John 3:13). We can expect to be spoken against and we need to know what is said and either correct our faults or defend the faith.

Narrow

The church is accused of being narrow-minded. In a Biblical sense this is true and may it ever be. The way to heaven is strait and narrow (Matthew 7:13,14). Some think being broadminded is always a virtue. This is not so. We must be as narrow and as broad as the truth and not at variance with it.

People really do not mind narrowness, except in religion that runs contrary to what they want. We go to the doctor and he prescribes a medicine. We take it to the druggist to have it filled, and we want it just like the doctor ordered, without addition or subtraction. We do not call either the doctor or the druggist narrow when they do what is required, no more and no less. We dare our business documents with a specific and certain date. Is that narrow? We dial a series of numbers on the telephone and if we miss one number and get a wrong number we do not accuse the telephone company of being narrow.

Some of the principles and specifics of Christianity are too narrow for some. That Christ is the only Savior is too narrow for many (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). That there is one church bothers many (Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:4,5). That there are things we must do and things from which we are to abstain seems too narrow to those who want their own sinful way rather than God's way. Some think it strange (Acts 17:18) that we live a *"peculiar"* life (Titus 2:14). Truth is always too narrow to those who want something else. But it is the truth that shall make us free (John 8:32). Error is not as good as truth. What many do not realize is that when the church follows the way God has revealed in His Word, calling that way narrow in a derogatory sense is calling God too narrow.

Too Much On Baptism

The church is criticized for "overemphasizing baptism." We wonder if it is really possible to overemphasize anything God has taught. We might underemphasize what He has revealed, but can we really overemphasize His Word or any part of it? Let us suggest that what some call "overemphasizing" is really their reaction to their underemphasizing. When talking to a Baptist who was criticial in this way, I responded, "At least we do not name ourselves after it."

Baptism is a command of God. Please look up the passages for yourself if you have any doubt of this (Acts Acts 10:47,48; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38). Baptism puts one into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3); there is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1); salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). How can you overemphasize what God has made necessary to have these blessings?

Regardless of the doctrines of men, baptism saves (First Peter

3:21). We reach His blood being baptized into His death where His blood was shed (Romans 6:3,4). How does one make too much of all of that?

The real reason for the criticism against the teaching what the Bible teaches on baptism is because most denominations will not teach what the Bible teaches. Baptism "*for the remission of sins*" is unpopular because it clashes with the human creeds and disciplines. To teach what the Scripture teaches is mandatory, not optional.

Intolerant

Some charge that the church is intolerant of others. To some, if you even believe there is such a thing as right and wrong, you are considered intolerant. Many confuse tolerance with compromise and indulgence. Truth is not ours to compromise. Sin is not ours to ignore. Some think others are intolerant if they do not accept whatever someone else thinks. Strange, how those who charge the church with being intolerant because we do not accept whatever they believe but do not consider themselves intolerant when they reject what we believe.

Tolerance means to permit to exist. God, in this sense, is tolerant of sin in that He allows it to exist. But He does not approve of it. People can sin all they want, but not without eventually giving an account for what they say and do. We grant all people the right to believe and practice whatever they want, so long as it does not prevent others from doing so. But we must insist that Jesus said we are either for Him or against Him, and there is no middle ground of neutrality. We are not permitted to do whatever we want with equal blessing and benefit. With some the only way to be wrong is to contend that there is a way that is right.

The church has the obligation to be the "*pillar and ground of the truth*" and "*preach the word*" without addition or subtracion. If that is intolerance, then God is the One to blame because such is His command.

No Heart

Some charge that the church denies what they call "heart-felt religion." So what? The church does not teach "experience, emotions, something better felt than told, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, still small voices, etc." The Bible does not teach that

is the way God leads and guids us today. The church teaches the truth about the heart and how it purposes, believe, despises, loves, obeys, and can even be hardened. The heart thinks, determines, and many other things which are not expedient to state now. But the Bible does not teach feelings above revealed faith that is created by the Word. The church teaches conversion, not convulsion. One who knows what the Bible teaches about the heart would never denounce the church about "heart-felt" religion.

Out Of Date

How many times have we heard that the church of Christ is old-fashioned. This is actually a compliment even though it is meant as a criticism. Far better to be old-fashioned and right before God than new-fashioned and be wrong. The church is not in the business of trying to keep up with the times anyway. Its mission is to change the sinfulness of the times and bring mankind into harmony with his Creator. The trouble is that the times are not keeping up with God. We do not need to abandon first century faith but we need to put it into practice. It is relevant for every age if only people knew more about it and understood it.

The true church is not modernist, denying the miraculous as recorded in Scripture, denying the Deity of Christ, His virgin birth, resurrection, etc. If that is what it takes to not be old-fashioned, then we can pray we always remain old-fashioned.It is a shame that there are those who claim to follow Jesus who are constantly finding fault with the "old paths" and trying to inject their "new wisdom" into the religion of Christ. The church is not to be conformed to this world (Romans 12:1). If it takes being old-fashioned to keep in step with the Son of God, then that is what the world needs. We sure cannot say much by way of congratulations to those who have left Him and followed their own way or the way that may be new, but not true. What good can such people ever do? They only make matters worse.

Hypocritical

"But there are hypocrites in the church," some complain. That is right. There are. Even the Lord has His Judas. But what has that got to do with the perfect will of God? There is a divine side to the church which cannot be improved. There is the

human side that has its weaknesses and faults. Hypocrites have no hope of heaven. They only deceive themselves. But that is no criticism against the way of the Lord everyone must follow. Can we blame God because somebody who claims to follow Him really does not?

All error is not hyppocrisy. Sometimes it is weakness, lack of growth, misunderstanding and confusion. But there is pretense, sham, show, hypocrisy. None who knows what is going on would dare deny it. But who thinks they are going to heaven because somebody who claims to be a Christian fails in his duty? We are not followers of men anyway, but of Christ. "*Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.*" (First Corinthians 11:1). Christ is our example (First Peter 1:21), not some hypocrite.

The church can justly be criticized when it allows hypocrisy to go uncorrected. This is a fault of the church in our day; namely the failure to discipline those who bring reproach on the church and its Founder.

"Nobody But You"

One of the most mentioned things spoken against the church of Christ is, "You do not think anybody is going to heaven but you." If the Bble tells the truth, only those who do God's will are going to heaven, and being faithful servants of His in His one church is what He teaches. If I did not believe being a member of the church of Christ was essential to salvation, I would work for its cessation and line up with somebody else for the sake of togetherness. Why exist if it is unnecessary to please God? The church is the body of Christ, and only those in the body are going to be saved. Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23). The church is God's kingdom and only those in that kingdom will be delievered to the Father (First COrinthians 15:24). The church is God's family (First Timothy 3:15) and is composed of the sons and daughters of God. Are we to think that children of the devil are going to be saved as they are?

Many fail to understand what the church is. They have been so schooled in denominationalism they find if difficult to grasp the New Testament revelation about the church. There is no hope outside of Christ. Being in the church is being in Christ because the church is His body. The criticism designed to make others prejudiced against the church is the fruit of ignorance and possibly an attempt to make the critic seem more loving and

gracious than those in the Lord's church. The truth is, the critic does not understand the church and does harm against the will of Christ. He wants what he wants and if the way of Jesus is not that he will try to find fault with those who agree with Jesus.

We have only briefly mentioned a few of many things people in and out of religion say against the church Jesus founded.

So What?

But what of that? Men have seldom really been enthusiastic about the way of God. Most have, do now, and probably will continue to be rebellious against what He teaches in His Word. But that does not change anything about the truth. The thief hates the teaching against stealing. The adulterer does not like teaching that condemns adultery. The denominationalist despises the teaching of the Bible on baptism and the one church. Sprinklers detest immersion. The church organist will not hear to just singing. The homosexual cannot abide by moral teaching. The murderer scoffs against the prohibition of that crime. The atheist rebels against the existence of God. So what else is new? Criticism against those who make up the church may often be justified because we fail to live up to the standard of Jesus Christ. But when anybody upholds the truth of God's Word, all the criticism in the world amounts to naught as far as altering that truth. It is the truth by which each one shall be judged. We ought to respect it.

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Moving And Adjustments

Those who have ever moved, and preachers do this probably more often than most people, except possibly the military, know of the many matters that have to be done when first arriving. As we have mentioned, we have moved to McMinnville, and we intend this to be our "permanent" home. We have bought us a place to live and are getting settled. As I responded to one inquirer who asked if we were settled, "We are in enough so that if it rains most things will stay dry."

We look forward to living in this area and continuing to work for the Lord in a slightly different capacity than previously. JWB

The Ark And The Church

We believe all the Scripture to be inspired of God, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God..."* (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We are to learn to *"rightly divide the word of truth."* (Second Timothy 2:15). When we do this we learn that we are not bound by all that is found in the Scriptures because we do not live under the former covenents like that given to Israel through Moses. We live under Jesus Christ. But that in no way affects our confidence that all the Bible is from God.

The Old Testament is of great value to us even though it is not therein that we find the specifics of our service to God under Christ. *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..."* (Romans 15:4). *"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples and they are written for our admonition..."* (First Corinthians 10:11). From a study of the Old Testament we learn many great and everlasting principles of right and wrong in God's dealings with mankind.

Our present lesson turns back to the passages of the *"things written aforetime"* and we shall concentrate our attention on the ark of Noah and note many similarities between it and the way God used it and the church and its importance today in God's scheme of things.

Our Text

"And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them, and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shall pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion that thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit thou shalt finish it above, and the door thereof thou shalt set in side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it. And behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die. But with thee shall I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the

ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep alive. And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee, and it shall be for food for thee, and for them. This did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he." (Genesis 6:13-22).

Here is presented just about everything that we know about the ark. Generations of men had become so evil that God decided to cleanse the earth of this wickedness. But He was going to preserve Noah and his family by means of the ark.

Noah built the ark as God had designed it. Noah was the builder. God was the architect. Noah was a servant of God, and a preacher of righteousness, who walked with God and found favor in the eyes of God.

God designed the ark just as God wanted it to be. Noah had to follow the plan as God had specified. It was not left to Noah to decide how the ark was to be constructed. God determinded how large, how long, how wide, how high, how many stories, what materials, all measurements, everything. The construction of the ark was a joint operation of God and Noah.

The Ark

The ark had but one kind of material; namely, gopher wood. Any other kind of wood would have been to change God's plan. Noah did not have the right to add to nor take from any direction God gave. God specified the kind of wood, and Noah obeyed. Would that all men were as content with God's directions today.

The ark had but one source of light, the single window. We are not informed as to the exact size of the window. That is immaterial. The point that does matter is that there was but this one source of light.

Those that were spared from the destruction of wickedness were on the inside of the ark. Those that were on the outside were destroyed. *"And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; they were destroyed from the earth; and Noah only remained alive, and*

they that were with him in the ark." (Genesis 7:23).

Probably many laughed at Noah while he was building the ark. Doubtless they considered him some kind of fanatic. They may have ridiculed him right up to the time that the rains began and the fountains of the deep were opened and the earth began to be overflowed. But those on the outside of the ark were drowned and those inside were spared.

Salvation Inside

If Noah had done everything God told him to do, building the ark exactly as specified, gathering the animals as directed, thinking that God was surely going to keep His word and destroy wickedness, but then had never entered the ark, do you really think he would have survived? The point is, salvation was on the inside of the ark and no where else.

Furthermore, the ark had but one door. The only way to enter was through that door. The opportunity for entrance was determined by the Lord and when time came, *"Jehovah shut him in."* God shut the door. He determined when the last one could enter and just who it would be.

We want to note the similarities of the ark to the church of Christ. When we speak of the church, no denomination or anything akin thereto is remotely suggested. There simply is nothing Biblical about denominations.

Christ's Church

Christ is the builder of the church (Matthew 16:16-18), and God is the architect (Ephesians 3:10). The church belongs to Christ. He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He died for it and is the Savior of it (Ephesians 5:23,25). This is why the church is properly identified as the church of Christ. Such designates the One to whom it belongs. Paul wrote, *"The churches of Christ salute you."* (Romans 16:16).

Since God designed the church, it ought come as no surprise that the church is also identified as the *"church of God,"* (First Corinthians 1:2). After all, He determined the government of it, the worship, the terms of entrance, the duties of members, etc. All such things have been delivered from heaven. Men have unfortunately taken upon themselves to alter and revise the Lord's church, perverting it into apostasy, and producing the human denominations that blight the earth today. We wonder

why men, regardless of how sincere, have ever thought themselves empowered to vary the teaching of God in His inspired word and create for themselves their own churches.

The material of the church is people. The church is not made of literal stones and wood, but is composed of people. They are a very special people. They are people who have obeyed the gospel, having been cleansed of their sins by the blood of Christ, set apart (sanctified) by the blood of the Lord (First Corinthians 1:2). Peter said, *"Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house."* (First Peter 2:5). The church is a temple not made with hands. Rather it is the *"house of God,"* (First Timothy 3:15). Those in the church have been added thereto by the Lord upon the completion of their obedience to the gospel (Acts 2:47).

The church has but one source of light, and that is the Word of God. As David said, *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway."* (Psalm 119:105). *"The entrance of thy word giveth light."* (Psalm 119:130). Paul wrote of the *"light of the gospel."* (Second Corinthians 4:4). Proverbs 6:23, *"For the commandment is a lamp and the law is light."* Christians are guided by the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (Second Corinthians 4:6).

Salvation Inside

Similar to the ark, the saved are on the inside of the church. Those who are outside the church stand in danger of their eternal peril. There is no more salvation outside the church than there was outside the ark. Salvation is *"in Christ."* (Second Timothy 2:10). *"All spiritual blessings in heavenly places are in Christ."* (Ephesians 1:3). There is no condemnation to those *"in Christ."* (Romans 8:1). And what does that have to do with the church? The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). There is no such thing as being *"in Christ"* but outside His body. To be *"in Christ"* is to be in His church, the saved.

Those in the church are the saved. The false doctrine that one can be saved outside the church has no foundation in Scripture. One can surely be saved outside of denominations. He cannot be saved in these human institutions. There is no salvation therein. Christ is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23).

Proof Texts

"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." (First Corinthians 12:27). Our triumph is *"in Christ."* (Second Corinthians 2:14). To be in Christ is to be in the church and is to enjoy victory.

"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." (Ephesians 5:30). This is said in the chapter where it is designed that Christ saves the body and the body is the church.

"So we, being many, are one body, and all members have not the same office." (Romans 12:5). Those who are Christians are those who are in the church. Christians are not outside the church but in the church. If there be Christians outside the church then they are out from under the head, since Christ is the head of the body (Colossians 1:18). How absurd to contend one is subject to Christ and be outside of Him, His body, the church.

The saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47). If the world would study and learn about the church from the New Testament, they would discontinue all teaching that offers salvation on the outside. They would realize that the church is the saved and the saved make up the church. We can no more offer hope to those outside the church for their spiritual salvation than Noah could extend hope to those outside the ark for preservation from the destruction of the flood.

Like the ark, the church has but one door and that is Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We go through that door by doing whatever we are taught to do to enter Christ. Only two passages of Scripture teach us the final step that takes us from outside of Christ into Christ. Faith, repentance, confession all precede the final step and each of these takes one toward Christ. But one is *"baptized into Christ."* (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). Every example of conversion includes this final step. Nothing is finally accomplished and salvation is not realized until this step is taken. Baptism is *"for the remission of sins."* (Acts 2:38). Jesus specified it as a condition for salvation (Mark 16:16). Some people labor so diligently to avoid and dodge the Lord's simple teaching. If they spent that much time and effort in trying to obey as they do in trying to dodge, they would be a far better people, and everything around them would benefit.

On The Outside

Death and sorrow awaited those outside the ark. There was no hope for them. Nothing Noah could do would change their

destiny. He preached to them, but they gave no heed (Second Peter 2:5). *"And they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away."* (Matthew 24:39). And such is the only expectation of which we can read in God's Word concerning those who choose to remain aloof and outside the church of Christ. Someday, God will close the door. It may come by death or the Lord's return. But once the door was shut, Noah was in safety, the rest were in ruin. And what shall it be with us?

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Behold The Man

"Then Jesus came forth wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man." (John 19:5).

Paul said he preached Christ. When Philip went to Samaria he preached Christ and His kingdom. Should not we also preach the same person?

These momentous words of our text were spoken by Pontius Pilate to the angry, hate-filled mob of Jews whose hearts were set against the Lord Jesus Christ. The *"man"* of whom Pilate spoke was Jesus the Christ. He is the subject of this lesson.

Pilate had made at least four attempts to bring about the release of Jesus, the prisoner, because he knew that Jesus was not guilty of anything worthy of the punishment for which the Jews craved. He was not guilty of the charges placed against him. Pilate knew that and ought to have let Jesus go free if justice had prevailed.

He had urged the Jews to try Him in their own courts. *"Take ye Him and judge Him according to your law."* (John 18:31). That offer was refused because they wanted to see Jesus put to death and under the existing system of Roman rule only the Romans could carry out an execution.

Pilate had sent Jesus to Herod, having heard that Herod was visiting in Jerusalem, and knowing that Jesus was a Galilean, the province over which Herod ruled. In this way Pilate had hoped to escape the responsibility of deciding what to do with this innocent One.

He even gave the Jews a choice between Jesus and Barabbas

(Matthew 27), since it was the custom to release some prisoner on days of high celebration, such as the Passover. Barabbas was a robber and a murderer, as well as guilty of insurrection. Nonetheless, the Jews so hated the Christ that they preferred the release of Barabbas to Jesus.

Pilate had Him mocked, scourged, humiliated publicly in the hope that such treatment might appease the anger pent up in the heart of the mob, but that only whetted their appetite for His blood.

Pilate's Weakness

All attempts at release having failed, the weak character of Pilate becomes evident and justice is denied our Lord when Pilate brings Him out to them and says, *"Behold, the man."* And they cried out for His crucifixion. In essence, Pilate is saying, *"Here He is. He is helpless before you. Do as you wish."* And he delivered Jesus into the hands of the wild and vicious mob that clamored for His death.

Pilate said, *"Behold, the man."* Will you behold Him also? Will you, in your mind's eye, fasten your attention upon Him and gaze at Him? I want us to become spectators for a while and also look upon this One that stood beside Pilate and before the mob. See the mocking robe, and the crown of thorns cutting His brow. Observe the bruises and scars from the inhumane scourging He had endured. Watch as the blood trickles down from the gashes inflicted as was usually the case when one was beaten with rods. Let us also, *"Behold, the man."*

He Was Man

We are looking at a man, not an angel, not a vision, not something imaginary. Here was One who was born about thirty-three and one half years before. His mother was the virgin Mary. He was humanity and Deity in One person. He was the Son of man and the Son of God.

This man had grown to maturity much as other boys. He knew what it was to be tried and tempted. He felt pain as well as joy. He had His moments of happiness and His periods of grief and sorrow. He had experienced life, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). And this hour we now observe was a bitter one for Him to endure. It was difficult because He had become flesh, and knew the agony that was already His, and knew there was

worse awaiting Him. He was a man.

Forsaken

Pilate could have said, *"Behold the forsaken man."* Jesus Christ was facing this ordeal all alone. Loneliness is one of mankind's most difficult burdens of life. The disciples of Jesus had forsaken Him and fled when He had been seized. Judas, full of envy and greed, had betrayed Him. Peter, out of fear and weakness, had denied Him. All of those who had been closest to Him had left Him to His enemies. None came to His defense. He was entirely alone and none was even near to comfort or encourage Him. Only the whip, the lash, the mockery and laughter of His enemies were His companions. Behold the forsaken man.

Innocent

Look again, and you will see the innocent man. Nothing for which He had been accused was true of Him. He was not guilty of any of the vicious charges leveled against Him. During His stay here on earth He had done nothing but good toward others. He never sinned. Not one transgression could be laid to His account. He had only been doing the will of the heavenly Father who had sent Him. Even His accusers had to be bribed to say what they did against Him. Judas, who betrayed Him, admitted that he had betrayed innocent blood. Pilate, using every means to extract a confession from Him, found no fault in Him. Pilate's wife called Him a righteous man. Even the Jewish leaders, when asked what evil had He done, only shouted down the others in calling for His death. Truly as the prophet had foretold, *"In His humiliation His judgment was taken away."* A fair trial was denied Him. He was altogether innocent. *"Behold, the innocent man."*

Ridiculed

But again, *"Behold the ridiculed man."* The vilest and meanest method of fighting an enemy is by the use of ridicule. In this way one shows his scorn and contempt for another. To laugh at what you cannot answer is the only way some can combat an opponent. Scoffing is the prime tool of many. Attempts to make others appear absurd in unkind and wicked.

Before His birth Jesus was proclaimed as successor to David. His kingdom would never end. Now His enemies made fun of Him being a king. They gave Him a robe to wear, a crown of thorns, a reed as a sceptre. All this was to ridicule His heavenly royalty. They even shouted, *"Hail, King of the Jews."* Then they spat upon Him, asking Him tp prophesy who it was that hit Him or cursed Him.

Dressed in this humiliating manner, they brought Him before His enemies for additional laughter and ridicule. Few, if any, have ever undergone such severe mockery as did Jesus of Nazareth prior to His death.

Silent

As we continue to gaze at Him, *"Behold the silent man."* Isaiah had prophecied that Jesus would be as a *"lamb before his shearer"* and would not open His mouth to refute the charges against Him. He made no defense whatever. This is so strange that it causes one to marvel. He could have defended Himself with twelve legions of angels to His rescue. He could have asserted the perfection of His life. He could have explained every misrepresentation of His words. He could have called for many to testify on His behalf of the good works He had done. But would it have done any good? Obviously not. His enemies sought His death, which they supposed would mean His termination, and truth would not have had any impression upon such hearts.

Furthermore, it was God's will and plan that He die for the sin of all mankind. He bore the mission He was sent to accomplish in silence.

Self-Sacrificing

Once again. *"Behold, the self-sacrificing man."* *"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:45). When Paul was showing the relationship between Christ and His church He said Christ *"gave himself up for it."* (Ephesians 5:25). More fully expressed is the sacrifice of Jesus in Philippians 2:6-8 *"...who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and*

became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

His suffering and death was a suffering and death of the just for the unjust, the pure for the impure, the perfect for the imperfect. As the song suggests, *"I gave My life for thee."* He was not forced, nor driven. He willingly, lovingly, sacrificially gave Himself. Jesus once said, *"Greater love hath no man than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13). Jesus went even a step beyond. He died for His enemies as well as for His friends. Self-sacrifice is an accurate description of what Jesus did for mankind, even for you and me. He was the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep.

After Pilate spoke concerning Jesus, Jesus was stripped of the garments of mockery, His own seamless robe placed back upon Him, and He was led toward the hill of death, to the cross of Calvary. He was by now so weakened physically that He fell beneath the weight of the cross and a man named Simon was compelled to carry it the rest of the way. Nails were driven into His hands and feet into the wooden cross and He was suspended between heaven and earth, hanging in agony, and would suffer until life drained from Him and His relief would be in death.

Victorious

There are so many things one might say about this man. But let us take one more look at Jesus. We have been spectators as Jesus the human one was forsaken, found innocent, ridiculed, remained silent, self-scrificing. But the story of Jesus does not end with the cross. For a moment let us, *"Behold the victorious man."*

When Jesus was standing beside Pilate He appeared as anything except a victor. See Him on the cross and victory would be one of the last words that might come to mind. But consider Him just three short days later.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came forth from the grave as conqueror over death. He arose from the tomb by the glory of the Father. He burst forth from a tomb sealed and secure. Having once died for the sins of men, now He was alive to give hope of a resurrection and life to those that would follow Him. The Romans, the Jews, none could keep Christ in the grave. Not even all Hell itself could prevail against Him.

He fulfilled prophecies of old as well as those of His own. He was declared to be God's Son by His resurrection (Romans 1:4).

He had overcome the world and the worst that mankind could do unto Him. He was soon to ascend back into the glory of heaven from whence He came, to take His place on His throne as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He would reign until time would be no more. Yes, *"Behold, the victorious man."*

One final and additional thought. Let us also behold Him as our example and pattern for life. Look to Him and see God. Behold, not just an ordinary man, but the greatest of men, yea, even the Christ, the Savior, the only begotten Son of the true and living God. And think of the glory that shall be His and can be ours when we behold Him coming again to receive His own unto Himself. Behold Him, friend, with admiration, devotion, thanksgiving, reverence, and submission. He is what He is, He did what He did, that we might be saved.

† † † † †

Just A Word Of Clarification

When we announced we would move to McMinnville, Tennessee, somebody got it started that Jim Boyd had retired. At this point in life that does not even have an appeal. Furthermore, the necessities of daily provision, and another offspring to send through college make it impossible. Retirement is nowhere in sight or mind.

It is true that we have "shifted gears" in our lives. I will be involved in some work that I have not had time to do heretofore. It is a strange move to leave a good church, buy a place, move, and not even know where you might be preaching. But we hope in time that this will be settled. Meanwhile, I am rather busy with gospel meetings. In the first two weeks living here I have been away from home two of those. We have four more meetings this year arranged and that is about all that time will allow just now.

It is amazing to hear from first one source and another what some have said that I am going to do. How they invented these stories is difficult to know. But the imaginations of people sometimes run in every direction but right.

If things go as planned, I shall probably preach more sermons next year than this. But retirement? Certainly not now! JWB

Written For Our Sake

Romans 4:23-25, "*Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*"

Paul had been giving information about the justification of Abraham. He emphasized that what was written was not merely for the purpose of glorifying that great patriarch. It was not merely to provide a historical record of his life that was lived thousands of years ago, regardless of how good or bad his life may have been. The record of Abraham's life was primarily given for the sake of us who live this side of the cross of Christ. It is for the benefit of all who are saved by the faith of Jesus Christ. We are saved by a system of faith. Abraham was saved by a system of faith. If we understand the way Abraham was justified before God we will understand, in principle, the way we are saved.

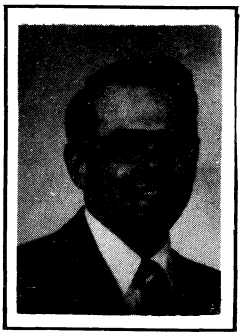
The grace of God provided certain blessings unto Abraham. He partook of those blessings by exercising obedient faith.God offers us certain blessings also. These blessings become a reality to us by and through an obedient faith.

This revelation is similar to what Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, "*Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*" First Corinthians 10:11 teaches that the Old Testament events were recorded for our example and admonition. These records benefit those who live in this final dispensation, the age when God's will is revealed in Christ.

The Christ in whom we are to believe "*was delivered for our offences.*" That is, He died the death of the cross on our behalf. He "*was raised again for our justification.*" With these words Paul repeats the fundamental facts of the gospel; namely, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. These truths compose that upon which our salvation ultimately depends. The credit for our salvation belongs to Deity, not to ourselves. The merit is in the blood of the Savior.

The remarks of Paul are a portion of the revelation of the system of salvation that God has provided. It is a system of God's grace that embodies the necessity of man's faith. Grace provided the cleansing blood. Faith that obeys His commands brings us into contact with that blood. What we obey is His "*perfect law of liberty.*" JWB

Making Judgments Of Others



JAMES W. BOYD

Not only is it a Biblical prohibition of judging other people, there is a very practical reason for not doing so. It is because we seldom know enough about a person to make a very reliable judgment, except where the fruit produced is evident and cannot be ignored.

Some people have the ability to keep their lives much to themselves. Unless you are exceptionally close to them, you may not be aware of the particular problems, burdens, stresses that they handle every day. You may know only a few of their problems and if you were more aware you may be more understanding.

There are those who have the ability to cover up their real character. They make a fine outward appearance to many and people may speak of them in glowing terms. But again it may be because they do not really know that person as well as they think they do.

Proper judgment is needful in many instances, but we must not be too hasty in making them. Things are not as they always seem on the surface. People are not always what you have first thought them to be.

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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME V James W. Boyd **NUMBER 4**

Belief In Man

One's soundness in the gospel system is tied hardfast to his belief in God, The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is not questioned by those who know the Biblical message. None can truthfully say that he is a faithful Christian that wavers in any way about this conviction. It is a misnomer to call anyone a Christian who doubts the existence of Deity. Of course, there are other marks of identification that are essential also.

We bring to our attention the contention that one cannot be spiritually sound in the faith that does not have a "belief in man," by which we mean one must have certain confidences concerning man. No matter how pious and powerful may be a person's verbal professions of belief in Deity, we must realize that men are made in the spiritual image of God. Man is spirit as well as body. He who fails to believe in man denies man's worth even though Jesus said he is worth more than the world. To deny the worth of man is to deny the mission of Christ, His goodness, His majesty, and the immortality of man's spirit which he received from the Creator of all.

Christ Believed

One of the fundamentals of the gospel is not only man's belief in Christ, but also Christ's belief in man. In what sense did Christ have belief in man? We need to know if we are going to reproduce as best we can in our own lives a Christlikeness. We are to be Christlike. We cannot be as we ought to be unless we express by word and deed the same belief in man as did He. Regardless of race, nationality, social standing, financial condition, and any other barricades men have erected between them, Jesus obviously thought there was justification for believing in man.

His mission to this earth was predicated on His belief in man. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came to "*taste of death for every man.*" (Hebrews 2:9). He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). He accepted as truth that humans live, that they are souls, that even though they are sinful and deserve to be punished with everlasting destruction, Jesus believed that man could be changed so as to bring glory and honor to God. He saw man,

not just as man was and is, but in terms of what man could become.

The confidence that Jesus had in man was that once offered the way of salvation, many, though not all, would come to Him and receive that which was needful. His confidence in man was such that He loved man and believed that some, not all, would love Him in return. "*We love, because he first loved us.*" (First John 4:19).

We have but two major points to make in this lesson. The first is that Jesus Christ believed in mankind. Consider the evidence.

The Adulterous Woman

"*And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery, and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted himself up, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.*" (John 8:3-11).

Adultery was and is a grievous sin against God and man. The Ten Commandments forbade it. The law of Christ forbids it. Some of the strongest teaching of Christ is condemnation of that sin. Revelation 21 says those who are adulterers shall be in the lake of fire and brimstone.

But Jesus had compassion on this sinful woman. He could know her heart. He in no way condoned her sin, but He knew not only what she had done, what she was, but what she could be. He effectively expressed His belief in her when He charged her to go and sin no more. He evidently thought the way to reach this sin-stained soul was to show His confidence in what she could become.

His Apostles

Another striking example of the Lord's belief in man is His selection of His apostles. They were human beings, subject to temptation with frailties common to all. But Jesus saw these men, not as they were when He called them, but what they could be with proper teaching and guidance. Consider the selection of Peter, James and John in Luke 5:1-10. Jesus entered their boat, told them to cast out their nets. They were faithless, doubting and questioning. They had been fishing all night without success. But *"they obeyed."* They caught so many fish that their boat began to sink and their nets began to tear. Peter said, *"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man."* He was right about that. He was not fit company for the Lord. He was a sinful man. Jesus did not deny such was the case with him. They both accepted that confession as a reality. But Jesus believed in Him, not while he was in his sins, but as one whose life could be transformed and changed to the glory of God. He expressed this confidence when He said, *"Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."*

The apostles of Christ were *"earthen vessels"* to whom was committed the task of preaching the gospel to the world. Suppose Jesus had assumed a pessimistic, doubtful attitude toward them and "marked them off His list?" Suppose He had said, "Seeing the kind of men you are, it makes my task impossible and hopeless." Would Peter, James, John and the others been encouraged to leave the security of their jobs and homes, and followed Jesus through all the hardships and persecutions they endured? Would not the result have been different with them except Jesus had confidence in them? He believed in man.

A fictitious story is told how angels questioned Jesus upon His return to heaven after His mission to earth. "Did you do your job? Did you provide for the salvation of man? Did you provide a way for that salvation to be offered and made known to mankind?" To all these questions the Lord answered, "Yes." "What provision did you make?" they inquired. "I left it in the hands of men." The men would be inspired men, to be sure, but men nonetheless. "And what if they should fail?" the angels asked. "I have made no other provision," said Jesus. While the story is fictitious, the principle is accurate. It expressed the Savior's belief in man. So our first point is that Jesus believed in men in terms of their worth, that they mattered, everyone

counted, and considered them in terms of what they were capable of being.

Glorifying God

The second point is likened to the first. A primary and basic responsibility of every Christian is to so live that they will exalt Christ and lead others to Him, and through Him to heaven. *"Even so let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16). We are to be examples and to exert the Christlike influence. To a great degree our success in this venture depends upon our confidence in men and our attitude toward them.

We may be too willing to "shake off the dust of our feet against them" and go our way. Seeing how some behave, and react, we do find it difficult at times to maintain the best attitude toward some people, do we not? Even though there does come a time when we must leave them to their own folly and self-imposed destruction, we ought not be too hasty about that.

We stress, and rightly so, the necessity of love for, loyalty to, and conviction in the doctrine of Christ. Our love and loyalty is expressedd by our conviction in our obedience. But there is more to "soundness" than doctrine, realizing that in one sense doctrine included the doctrine of loving others and believing that they are worth saving. Is it not near the impossible to convince men of the gospel when we show little interest in their welfare? The gospel really has no meaning except as it relates to the needs of mankind, especially his spiritual need of forgiveness of sins and being in the right relationship with God, *"in Christ."* As was true regarding the Sabbath when Jesus said, *"Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,"* so the gospel was made for man. Man needs the gospel. If we should fail to realize the worth of a soul, have we the mind of Christ?

Those that love truth and right are often grieved and even disgusted at the evil ways of the world. But does our concerning stop there? As we see the masses plunging toward hell, are we ever aware of what could be the joyful eternal destiny of those people? Do we not realize that the Christ died to save them? Does that not prove their worth? Cannot we also see them in terms of what they can become?

There is always a great danger of Christians becoming like the Pharisees who fastidiously kept their rituals and observances but

left undone the *"weightier matters of the law,"* such as mercy, justice and faith. Jesus said, *"These ye ought to have done and not left the other undone."* (Matthew 23:23).

Importance Of Attitude

We are engaged in the effort to plant seed, the Word of God, throughout the world. We are attempting to restore New Testament faith in the hearts and minds of people everywhere. It is one thing to restore the outward form, which cannot be neglected nor dismissed as some are inclined to do, but it requires something more of us to have the spirit of Christ, the attitude of the Lord, toward others. Without proper doctrine we go the wrong way. Without the proper attitude toward mankind we hinder the cause of Christ. We must always have in our hearts that "milk of human kindness" if we are going to reach the lost. Years ago, when my father was yet alive, and I, as a young preacher was encountering hindrances and obstacles due to obstinate people, he advised, "Never lose the milk of human kindness." Whether I have always lived up to that may be questioned. But there cannot be found fault with such advice. Such is that which our Lord demonstrated in His belief in man.

So significant is this quality, we cannot worship God acceptably without it (Matthew 5:23,24). Husbands' prayers are hindered without it (First Peter 3:7). The Jews took pride in their orthodoxy. They thought they could reach God's throne through offerings and sacrifices alones. But Micah asks the question, *"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offering, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"* While these observances were necessary, for the most part, Micah hastens to add that such is not enough nor sufficient. *"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"* Does not this include an attitude toward our fellowman that reflects our love for his soul? It is not enough to be religious, but we must be righteous. Being righteous, as was the Savior, includes confidence in the worth of man, belief in what man is capable of being, and the recognition of the duty to provide a good example and influence before all those around us.

Jesus did those very things. Why should we not strive in the same direction? Though people often disappoint us, did they not also disappoint Christ? But did He allow their failure and His disappointment to destroy the confidence in their worth, their capacity, and their need of salvation and a good example?

Are we not thankful Christ did not "mark us off" but had confidence in us, enough to die for us, and offer us that hope that comes only through Him?

† † † † †

Know With Whom We Are Dealing

Hebrews 13:2, "*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*"

This lesson is intended to drive home one major point and make one primary application. We assume that a person who calls himself a Christian is serious about following Christ and will approach the study with this mind.

Every bank warns its tellers to be sure they know with whom they are dealing. They go to great lengths to be positive about identification. This same practice is followed in most businesses, especially when extending credit is involved. This is not only a good business practice, but it is essential in religion. Serious financial mistakes are often made when dealing with one about whom you know too little. It can be fatal in religion.

Others have made this mistake in the past. Our text tells us of those who entertained angels not knowing they were messengers from God. This doubtless refers to the time when three men came to Abraham to inform him of the coming birth of Isaac. Sarah laughed at the very idea, not knowing that the visitors were not ordinary men, but messengers from God.

Pharoah and Moses

Pharoah made this mistake when he was dealing with Moses. Moses came to him demanding that he allow the people of Israel to leave Egypt. But Pharoah said, "*Who is Jehovah that I*

should obey him?" Pharoah did not know Jehovah and thought he was dealing with Moses, some representative of his slaves and nothing more. This wind-roughened man, with garb of the wilderness, came before this man of riches, power and display of royalty. What a contrast between the two men! But their appearance was not the most notable distinction between them. Pharoah, arrogantly and in no uncertain terms, refused the demand of Moses. He thought that would end the matter because he did not realize that he was actually dealing with the Almighty God of heaven.

Goliath and Moses

Did not Goliath make the same mistake? This Philistine champion challenged the armies of Israel, mocking them, taunting them, daring them to fight him. Eventually this young lad named David came forward. He was but a shepherd boy, without armor and unskilled in battle. What a difference between these opponents! But Goliath did not really know with whom he was dealing or whom he faced. He thought he confronted a small boy from Israel that had come from tending sheep. He was not aware that God was with David and when he faced David he was actually having to deal with God and God's man.

About Jesus

The error of not knowing with whom they were dealing was committed by many people when they dealt with Jesus. Nicodemus knew He was not an ordinary man because *"no man can do the miracles that thou doest except God be with him."* But others confused themselves thinking that He was Isaiah, Elijah, Jeremiah or some other prophet. They did not realize that they were dealing with the Son of God.

Some even considered Jesus a blasphemer and troublemaker. They considered Him and His followers to be a schism and heretical group. Still others treated Him as a common criminal or worse. Criminals usually received some semblance of a fair trial, and often enjoyed mercy. But Jesus suffered illegalities and abuses before a prejudiced and perjured assembly. He was mocked, ridiculed, had a crown of thorns placed on His head, a robe of mockery, a reed as a sceptre, beaten, spat upon, lied against, humiliated beyond all human reasoning. Those who did this thought He was simply a very bad Galilean, not realizing

they were dealing with the Messiah from God. He was not just a carpenter's son, but God's only begotten Son.

The Church and Christ

After the church was established people continued to make a similar mistake. Saul of Tarsus thought he served God when he persecuted Christ by persecuting His church. When he bound Christians, cast them into prison, subjecting them to all sorts of abuse, he thought he was protecting the religion of the Jews and doing God's will. He figured he was dealing with an evil company of heretics. He did not know with whom he was dealing. He did not conceive that these were actually the saved, God's children, followers of the long-anticipated Christ.

None of these people- Abraham, Sarah, Pharoah, Goliath, Saul, the enemies of Christ- none knew with whom they were dealing. It is very possible, very probable, that many today are just as ill-informed, misinformed, uninformed about whom they are dealing in matters religious.

The Gospel and God

When the gospel is preached and you hear the Word of God, you are not just dealing with the preacher who preaches it. The gospel is not of men, nor from men, but from God. *"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."* (Galatians 1:11,12). The demands, commands, requirements, restrictions, obligation, duties, privileges are all of divine origin. How you react and respond to it is how you react toward God. You are not dealing with some human being who informed you of it. It seems all to obvious that many who hear the Word somehow get the idea that they are getting mere "*preacher talk*" and fail to understand that they are confronted with truth that is divine.

Your opposition to what is right, your participation in what is wrong, does not hurt the preacher. He wants you to follow God, not him. When you mistreat your wife, husband, children neighbors, they are affected. But more than that. You are dealing with God because God has taught you how to treat others. When you refuse to accept the invitation to come to Christ, you are not defying some human being. You are turning your back on the only Savior there is. When you misbehave and

act in manners unbecoming a Christian, you are not just "showing them," the elders, parents, preacher. You are showing God you have no respect for His will. Let us know with whom we are dealing. It is eventually before God that we shall all stand and give account (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Over the years we have observed some peculiar attitudes among some brethren who obviously fail to grasp with whom they are dealing in life. When called upon to perform some service, render some task, they act as if some man has asked them to do a personal favor, when actually they have only been asked to do something for the cause of Christ. Let me illustrate. Let us run a brief self-examination here. When asked to make a visit, work in Vacation Bible School, volunteer for some effort for the cause of Christ, do you have to be begged, prodded, urged along? Do you not realize that what you are asked to do is something for Christ, not the person who has done the asking? Do you really realize with whom you are dealing?

You and Your Work

When you accept some responsibility and say, "Yes, I'll do this or that as requested," do you feel you are doing the elders or someone like that a personal favor? Or when you said, "No, I won't do it," do you think you have only refused some man? Cannot we see this point? How many times through the years have I had to ask, beg, plead, with professed Christians to do some simple duty and they make you feel like they are doing it all for you rather than the Lord!

When the preacher urges you to be more faithful in attendance, do you consider him just a promoter, even while he is urging you to obey God? When asked to support some special effort, give, invite, attend, act in some godly fashion, do we not hurt ourselves unless we realize that we are really dealing with God? We do not just discourage, even destroy, brethren when we drag our feet, kick against the works done to promote Christ, be a hindrance to what is good and authorized of God. Yes, brethren who want to do the Lord's will are affected, and affected adversely. But you are dealing with more than brethren.

† † † † †

When you move, please send us your address if you wish to receive *A Burning Fire.*

Our Warfare And Weapons

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; [for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of stronghold;] casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Second Corinthians 10:3-5.

Various figures of speech are used in Scripture to depict to us the nature of living a Christlike life. Here the language employed shows the power of the gospel as it works to overcome sin and the forces of unrighteousness. The picture is that of a military conflict; a war. This is a war for which there are certain weapons with which to fight. As in any war there is the effort for victory.

Let us consider the warfare itself. Surely none who profess to be followers of Christ would deny that it is a life of struggle and conflict trying to be a Christian in a non-Christian world. But the nature of this conflict is spiritual and moral, not a carnal, literally physical warfare. *"We do not war after the flesh." "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."* Ephesians 6:12. Our warfare is not a bloody engagement that characterizes the actions of nation against nation, people against people. The Christian conflict is truth against error; knowledge against ignorance; righteousness against unrighteousness; Christ against Satan.

It is Unavoidable

This is an inescapable conflict regardless of which side you choose. It is not an optional matter to fight only if we are so inclined. It is a warfare in which every Christian must engage and cannot be excused for any cause. There is no neutrality in this war. Each person takes sides. The often quoted passages of Matthew 6:24 and 12:30 are appropriate here. *"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth*

abroad." This is a warfare where the issue is to conquer or be conquered. It is a struggle of spiritual life versus spiritual death. We either fight and win, or we die and perish.

The fight is not an easy one, but rather very arduous. The way is pictured as being strait and narrow, restricted and hemmed in, precise and exacting. By referring to the Christian life as a battle it is implied that there must be vigorous exertion, enduring harships and dangers. If we approach this warfare lazily and lacking alertness, we shall be overcome by the enemy of the soul.

The difficulties of the warfare only go to emphasize the truth that we cannot relent or become tolerant toward the enemy, never compromising or negotiating some kind of truce with evil. Our foe takes no holiday and neither can we. There will not be a stalemate but a victory for good or for evil is inevitable.

This warfare is the most momentous and far-reaching struggle in which we can engage. Every physical warfare has certain interests at stake. All of these interests are relatively insignificant and unimportant when compared to what is at stake in the warfare the Christian must fight. This spiritual warfare involves interests beyond description and that defy estimates of value. The results extend beyond this life, but also into eternity. The matter is one of heaven or hell for each precious soul that is worth more than all the world.

Seeing this is the case, the Christian cannot afford to be lukewarm and haphazard in his fighting on the side of right.

The Weapons

The nature of our warfare dictates the nature of our weaponry. Every Christian is a soldier, armed with offensive and defensive weapons. *"Finally brethren be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your lions girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quence the fiery darts of*

the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all perserverance and supplication for all saints." Ephesians 6:10-18. Notice the weapons we have: truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God, prayer, perserverance. Note again that these weapons are not carnal in nature, but spiritual. We are in a battle for the minds and hearts of men and women, boys and girls, and the Lord never ordained that we use physical force, intimidation, physical power of weapons of physical war to defend or promote the cause of Christ. Some attempt to spread the cause of Christ through social action, terrorism, street demonstrations, violence, holy wars, etc. This has marred the history of many religions, including Protestantism, Catholicism, Mohammedanism, Humanism, atheism, denominationalism, etc. But never has it been God's way for the warfare of Christianity. Jesus said, *"My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."* John 18:36.

But our weapons are mighty through God. He is the giver of them. He is the power behind them. They are capable of accomplishing His will when they are used properly by the solider of the cross.

Our Victories

Our text mentions the victories of warfare. In three notations these victories are outlined for us. First, there is the *"pulling down of strongholds."* A stronghold is a fortress, a powerful fortification. This shows the strength of our enemy and a description of our obstacles. The devil is no pushover, and his servants are not amatuers. We are in a warfare to the death with the worst sort of enemy. Every heart that is not brought to Christ is under the destructive power of the devil. He controls those whose lives remain out of Christ and in sin.

But the right and proper use of the weapons God has provided can bring deliverance for that soul that will hear and heed the message of truth. The lost can be found and the captive can be set free. There is liberation for those that will leave the devil's service and come to Christ.

Second, there is the *"casting down imagination, and every high things that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God."* There are many ideas, doctrines, practices, philosophies, that

only bewilder mankind, confuse him, lead him away from his salvation and away from God into deeper and deeper hopelessness and nothingness of despair in this life and hell thereafter. Such things hide the truth of God from the hearts of men. These things have to be met and overcome lest they continue to dominate souls.

When we think of the so-called "new morality," humanism, atheism, agnosticism that says we cannot know the truth, evolution of man from lower forms of life, the various religious "isms" that are all around, the "do-your-own-thing" attitude, then we get some concept of the imaginations and high-sounding things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.

But there is no doctrine, idea, philosophy, theory or theology that cannot be met and defeated by the proper use of the weapons God has provided. There may be many high things that men crave and advise, but they can and must be cast down and brought to defeat.

Third, there is "*the bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*" Those in the service of the devil are captives. They must and can be made free by the knowledge of the truth. Once the truth is heard and obeyed, one is freed from sin and the ways of Satan, but he has become a captive of Christ. We are always servants of one or the other. We are either servants of unrighteousness or of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). It is when we obey that form of doctrine that was delivered that we cease to be servants of sin and become servants of righteousness. In this way, victory over the enemy is accomplished through Christ.

Conclusions

Let us draw a few conclusions from what has been said. Christianity is not pious idleness, quietness, pacifism and retreat from the world. Rather, to be a Christian is to enter into a system of intense and determined combat for the rest of one's life. It is to fight for the truth and against error in every respect. It is to stand for the right and oppose the wrong. God's Word, the Bible, reveals God's determination of what is right and wrong.

We face a real danger in this warfare of being undermined from within. In our world there is a great emphasis on togetherness and merging. The call for unity, a noble call, is distorted into an acceptance of union made possible by compromise with error. There are forces that would tell us we

cannot be sure about anything; that we can only search for truth but never attain it. Some are very certain that nobody can be certain. They are sure nobody can be sure. In this way they weaken the forces of truth and hovel into a timid corner of agnosticism and "maybe-so" religion rather than engaging in an agressive affirmation of truth. But in a world that is so hostile to the ways of God, if we the people of God, we must fight an aggressive war. We must be as Paul, *"set for the defense and confirmation of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:17).

We cannot content ourselves with just a defensive war, but must take the offensive in capturing precious souls for their salvation. We must ever be alert and attentive and prepared for battle. When the enemy rises, from whatever quarter, whether from inside or outside the ranks of the church, we must confront that error lest it take hold and spread to the condemnation of all who follow. We dare not seek anything short of total victory for ourselves and those we can reach. Keeping our eye on Jesus Christ, the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10), let us *"endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."* (Second Timothy 2:3). May we, again like Paul, fight a good fight and finish the course (Second Timothy 4:6-8). If we do, we shall receive the same crown of righteousness of which he spoke.

We Must Enlist

Have you enlisted in the Lord's army? Enlistment calls for faith in Christ as the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of Christ, and baptism in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins.

Have you once gone into battle, but forsaken your post of duty? You need to return again and lift up the royal banner of truth and return to the fight. You can do this by repentance, confession of sins, and prayer to God for forgiveness.

"There's a royal banner, given for display, to the soldiers of the King." Best we be among those that hold it high and fight on its behalf and enjoy the eternal victory.

† † † † †

"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in Jehovah, lovingkindness shall compass him about." (Psalm 32:10).

The Test Of Obedience

" *And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*" First Samuel 15:22.

God command King Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites. That very wicked nation had attacked Israel when Israel was in the wilderness. They had a long history of evil, heathenish, degenerate people and were deserving of being wiped from the face of the earth.

Saul went against Amalek and won a great victory, but failed to carry out God's instructions. He allowed Agag, their king, to survive, and evidently allowed many others to escape because we read of the Amalekites after this event. He also preserved what was considered to be the best of their flocks and herds.

When Saul met Samuel coming home from victory, Samuel inquired as to the meaning of the preservation of these animals. Saul laid the blame on his people, saying they wished to keep them for offering sacrifices unto God. It was then that Samuel spoke this great principle of obedience. While God called for worship, more important it was for them to respect Him and obey what He commanded. Worship, apart from obedience, was useless and vain.

Isaiah tells us that we are separated from God by our sins and iniquities (Isaiah 59:1,2). The way back to God involves obedience. It began with the obedience of Christ, even to His death on the cross. "*And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.*" Philippians 2:8. The way back to God continues with man's obedience to God's commands. "*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*" Hebrews 5:8,9. "*Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*" Matthew 7:21. Obedience on the part of man is essential for man's salvation. This is the primary point and burden of this lesson. The Scriptures impress it upon us.

It is strange that some men preach that even though Jesus has

commanded certain things, that somehow, someway, man has a right to ignore them, do away with them, obey then if he likes and disobey if he does not see fit, and still be able to know the salvation of which Jesus is the author. There is only one of two things one can do when given a command. He either obeys or disobeys. Is it not clearly taught that we must obey the Lord's command if we expect to go to heaven? What right does any man have to set aside any command of Deity and say that one can be saved even though he wishes to set that command aside? It does not matter what that command is, we either obey, or we shall wish we had.

What Is Involved?

Obedience is not as simple as some may think. It involves more than what many understand. Obedience does involve the performance of a commanded act. It involves more than that. Obedience involves attitude and action; thought and deed, mind and matter. It is compliance with the directed command, but done so with the heart submissive to the authority of Jesus.

Let us consider two fundamental facts. One fact, God's law can be divided into two kinds, moral laws and positive laws. The same authority is behind each kind. But moral laws are right within themselves. It is easy to see why we are to obey moral laws. We can see the good reason for such a law. It is right within itself. We understand the nature of it. We are not to defraud our neighbor, kill, steal, lie, and we can easily recognize the rightness of obedience to such laws.

But positive laws are somewhat different. God has given positive commandments and the reason for obeying them is not so easily understood. In fact, at times, they seem to be arbitrary and without reason. Such positive commands exist simply upon the discretion of Almighty God. While we comprehend the reason for moral laws, positive laws seem to have no particular reason behind them. They are to be obeyed simply because God commanded them. That is reason enough to be willing to do whatever it is we are commanded.

Faith Is Tested

Fact number two, God has always tested the faith and loyalty of man and has used positive commands to do it. From the Garden of Eden to this present day God has provided certain

tests of a person's faith. If one truly believe in God and trusts His Word he will obey what God has commanded regardless of what it is. He does not have to understand why if it is not revealed, nor does he have to be satisfied in his own mind it makes sense. He does what God says because God said it. He may not see any real reason for the command like he can with moral laws. But on the basis of his faith in God he obeys, even if there is no apparent connection between what God has commanded and the result that is promised. As Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* John 14:15. He did not say we must keep those commandments we understand and think makes good sense. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not grievous."* First John 5:3.

When a person is confronted with a positive command from God, this calls into play his faith and confidence, love and trust, of God. He will offer no excuse, plan no hesitation, make no effort to rationalize or explain away the necessity of it. He does not try to determine whether it is important because he already knows whatever God commands is important and salvation depends upon our proper attitude toward what God says and doing what God says. He will never reduce any command of God to the realm of something optional.

Examples To Consider

Let us present some illustrations of what we have in mind. God told Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. There was nothing immoral in itself in eating fruit because they were a lowed to eat fruit from every other tree except this one. While God warned them against it, He gave them no reason for such a command. He simply told them his instruction. It was a test of their faith and confidence in God and His Word. They failed the test.

By their disobedience they brought sin into the world. Being cast from the garden, the consequences of their trespass has plagued mankind from that day until this. It was because they disobeyed God and failed in the test of their faith through the use of a divine and positive command.

When God told Joshua and Israel to march around the walls of the city of Jericho one time each day for six days and seven times on the seventh day, blow their trumpets and shout, this seemed a rather odd operation. God told them He would give

them the city and the walls would fall if they obeyed. There was absolutely no reasonable and rational connection between what they were told to do and the walls falling. In fact, it was a rather absurd way to overcome the obstacles they faced.

But every Bible student knows that the walls did not fall until that which was commanded had been done. The entire matter was a matter of faith. Would Israel follow God's way or balk because they did not understand it? Did they doubt God? Would they complain? Would they offer excuses? Would they try to devise something "just as good?" Would anybody say, "I don't see how that will do any good?" Or would they receive the desired gift by simply doing what God commanded?

Study Numbers 21 and the time when Israel sinned against God by complaining against Him. God sent fiery serpants into their midst and many of them were bitten and died. Penitently, they asked Moses to ask God to relieve them and Moses asked for a remedy. God told them to erect a brazen serpant on a pole, behold the serpant, and live.

What a strange instruction! How could a brass serpant on a pole prevent their death from the bite of serpants? There was no logical and reasonable connection between the command and the desired result. What did God expect them to follow, "brass-pole salvation?"

But nobody objected. Nobody considered the power to be in the brass serpant. Everyone knew that the power was God. But they also knew that they had to behold that serpant on that pole or they would die when bitten. They knew this condition well and met it.

In Second Kings 5 we read about Naaman, the Syrian leper. who was told to go to the Jordan River and dip himself seven times in the river if he wanted to be healed of his leprosy. Just what connection there was between the water of the Jordan and being healed from leprosy neither Naaman nor anyone else could figure. In fact, Naaman was so upset at the command that he refused at first to obey. Later he was persuaded.

But was God teaching "water healing" here? Was the power in the water? After he obeyed even Naaman knew there was nothing special about the water. But he also knew that he was not healed until he entered that water and did as commanded. He knew he had to obey to be healed.

The command given Naaman was a test of faith. He was healed *"by faith."* But when was he healed by faith? It was when he obeyed. Until he obeyed his faith was not worthy

anything to him as far as being healed was concerned. Just like the walls stood until faith acted, and people died from serpants until faith acted, Naaman remained a leper until faith acted. Obedience was necessary.

It Is Still True

In principle, there is no difference between these Old Testament examples of obedience and our need to obey the command to be baptized for the remission of sins. We know not why God devised this plan, nor do we have to know. There is no reasonable and logical connection between baptism and salvation except the fact that Jesus gave a positive command to the accomplishment of this result. To declare His command non-essential is defiance. Those who believe God, believe in His Son, accept His Word, have confidence in His promise, never quibble about obeying what He has commanded. They are never heard to degrade any command by saying, "You can be saved even though you do not obey it."

Some today preach baptism, not to be saved as Jesus taught, but to join some denomination. You never read anything akin to that as a reason for baptism anywhere in the Bible. Some say it is not necessary to salvation but is a sign that you are already saved. No person ever found anything remotely related to such a doctrine regarding baptism in the Scriptures. Some say they are baptized, not even knowing its relationship to salvation, but just to "obey God." We should be willing to do whatever God says simply because He said it, but we also cannot obey from the heart, the seat of understanding, if we do not know it is essential to salvation. Does anyone really think they can be saved without obeying Jesus? How does anybody talk about doing something to obey Jesus but not to be saved? Jesus made baptism a condition of salvation just as surely as God made marching around the walls a condition for their falling; just as surely as beholding the brass serpant was necessary to keep from dying; just as surely as dipping in Jordan was essential to being healed from leprosy. These things were and are tests of faith. Many who claim long and loud to believe in Christ fail the test because they do not see any sense in it. We do not have to see any sense in it to do it. We are taught to obey. Upon our conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, having repented of our sins, confessing our faith in Christ, we are to be baptized for the remission of sins because God said that was

necessary. That is reason enough.

There is no power in the waters of baptism. The power is in God. Until one is submissive of heart and mind, obedience in action, doing what God says, for the reasons God says do it, the way God says do it, there is not a word in the covenant of Christ that offers anyone anything.

† † † † †

The Ascension

New Testament preachers preached Christ. He was their theme and focal point of all they taught. When Philip went down to Samaria he preached Christ and His kingdom (Acts 8:5,12). To the Ethiopian he preached Jesus (Acts 8:35). Paul said he preached Christ and Him crucified (First Corinthians 1:23). Would that all those who claim to be gospel preachers today would *"preach Christ"* and leave off their death-bed emotionalism, their personal testimonies, their book reviews, social reforms, politics, creeds, human philosophies and entertainments.

Preaching Christ includes all that is revealed concerning Him. From His pre-existence as Deity before the beginning, His time on earth, all that transpired, His present rule and reign in heaven, His return and judgment, all thise is embodied in preaching Christ. One could not include everything that must be preached in one session lest it extend longer than the mind could comprehend.

Preaching Christ includes preaching about His ascension into heaven at the conclusion of His earthly ministry. *"And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen."* (Luke 24:50)53). *"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of there sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand*

ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11).

We shall ask and answer four questions regarding the ascension of Christ. These four are: when? whence? to where? and why?

When?

In terms of years it was over 1,900 years ago, now nearing 2,000 years. More specifically, it was forty days after His resurrection after He had showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs (Acts 1:3). He had appeared to many as evidence of His resurrection (First Corinthians 15:5-9). There are at least twelve different and specific appearances of Jesus after His resurrection recorded in the Bible. During these forty days He was teaching His apostles concerning the kingdom (Acts 1:3). Even as He was soon to leave them, until the last, He kept instructing them.

His ascension was at the close of His earthly sojourn. He had been born of the virgin Mary nearly thirty-three years earlier, the last three and one half years having been spent in accomplishing His mission. He had come to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). His mission was to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). He provided the way of salvation for mankind. Now that His work was completed, having *"finished the work which thou gavest me to do."* (John 17:4), He returned to the state of glory from which He had come.

He ascended while witnesses beheld Him. Human eyes had never seen such as that. Their eyes followed Him upward until He was no longer in sight but was received into the clouds. The value of this witness was immeasurable in the labor that these men were soon to undertake. Now they could preach in full confidence the truth concerning the whereabouts of Jesus. With great emphasis they could declare what they had seen and heard (First John 1:1-3).

Whence?

Whence? From where did He ascend? He left a world that had received Him not. The world was unworthy of Him or the blessings that He brought. He left a world abounding in sin, unrighteousness, where people were undeserving and without

merit. The irony of the life of Christ on earth is that He came for man's good, but the world hated Him. *"Light is come into the world"* but men loved the darkness of their sins (John 3:19,20). They subjected the Just and Holy One to abuse and maltreatment that was even too terrible for the worst sort of criminal.

Geographically, the location of the ascension was near Bethany. Only once did Jesus ever go beyond the borders of Palestine. His life was spent in a very small area. We marvel at the influence of one who traveled no more than did Jesus. The actual spot from which He ascended was the Mount of Olives, not far from the home of His friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Acts 1:12). It was but a Sabbath Day's journey from Jerusalem.

He ascended from a place where He has often gone for prayer and solitude from the multitudes and stress imposed upon Him. He had been there often to rest and to teach His disciples.

Those who have visited this area even in our own day comment on how the entire surroundings present a garden-like environment, a peaceful atmosphere.

Where?

Where did He go? He went to a place that is invisible to the human eye. He went *"out of their sight."* But He went to a place of rank and power. He is now *"seated on the right hand of God."* (Colossians 3:1). When He ascended He *"sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."* (Hebrews 1:3). This designates a place of rank, honor, authority and unexcelled power.

Luke 24:51 tells us He *"...was carried up into heaven."* This means that He went to that great spiritual realm of joy, peace, goodness and purity. He went to the same place that is promised to those who come to Him and live faithfully in Him.

What a marvelous thought to know that where Jesus went is not out of reach of human beings. He went to an unseen world, but yet He is near enough to see us, sympathize with us, watch over us, provide for us, intercede on our behalf. What is even more wonderful is that we can go where He is (John 14:1-4). The mission of Jesus here on earth was to make it possible for us to go and dwell with Him forever in the land of eternal life and heavenly reward with Deity.

Why?

But why did He ascend into heaven? It seems to me that of our four questions this one is by far the most important of them. There are a number of reasons we can consider; some explicily stated and others implied.

He went to receive His kingdom. In Luke 19:12, in the parable that Jesus taught where He pictures His going away and coming again, Christ shows that He went away "*to receive for himself a kingdom.*"

Daniel 7:13,14 prophecied of the event when the Son of man would go to the Ancient of Days, God the Father, and being given a kingdom. It was announced before His birth that He would be a king on the throne of David. His was a spiritual kingdom, not an earthly one (Luke 1:32,33; John 18:36). While on earth He foretold of the coming of the kingdom. He said some standing there before Him and listening to Him would not taste of death until they saw the kingdom come with power (Mark 9:1). He identified that power as the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) which came on Pentecost. He had even foretold the signs where it was able to be known the moment of the coming of the kingdom.

Holy Spirit Promised

Furthermore, He had promised His apostles that He would send them a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, when He left them. He said it was expedient that He go away (John 16:7). The misunderstanding of the nature of His kingdom, even among His apostles, made it needful that He remain on this earth no longer. He would also be hindered while in the flesh, even subject to certain limitations, persecutions as was evident while He was here. He could not be King and Priest on earth because He was of the tribe of Judah, not the priestly tribe of Levi, and the earth is God's footstool, not His throne (Acts 7:49) which is heaven. Having made all the necessary preparations for His return, having fulfilled the work He was sent to accomplish, He ascended back into heaven to fulfill the prophecies that had been foretold concerning Him and this event.

But in addition to all these reasons, we have that explicitly stated reason by Christ Himself in John 14:1-4. *"I go to prepare a place for you."* We have His very own words as to why He returned. We have His very own assurance that *"I will come*

again and receive unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

Objection may be raised that this promise was given only to the apostles. The words were spoken to them. The promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit applied only to them. But Paul added, when speaking of the crown of righteousness that he would receive, "*and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing.*" (Second Timothy 4:8). When He comes again from heaven we shall be raised to meet Him in the air, and *"so shall we ever be with the Lord."* (First THessalonians 4:16,17).

Yes, our Lord returned to be King, Priest, Mediator, Rewarder and Spiritual Companion with all those that follow Him.

God's Word teaches us that Jesus is our Savior now, and reigns in heaven. We can be thankful He was lifted up in this fashion. He was lifted up on the cross, but lifted up from the tomb, and eventually lifted up into heaven. In these ways He became our Savior and provided God's plan for saving man, providing the basis for our hope of eternal life.

As we conclude our brief thoughts about the ascension of Christ, have you seriously considered the time when you can be lifted up to the glories of heaven? We shall be raised from the dead, but to what existence in eternity? Shall we meet Him in the air and return to heaven with Him? The answer is, "Yes," provided we have taken advantage of the way that He provided, part of which was His ascension from Mount Olivet.

† † † † †

The "Missionary Spirit"

Does the church today really possess an interest in getting the gospel of Christ to the lost of the world? Doubtless there are thousands of brethren who are interested, concerned and active in doing this very thing.

But there are so many evidences that some churches want a preacher to "hold services" for them each week and seldom if ever leave home to even preach in a gospel meeting. Actually, they prefer the "located preacher" to stay located. Mission work is far down on their list of priorities, even to sending their preacher to domestic scenes where people have not heard. This is not an encouraging commentary on such churches, is it?

Anything Goes



JAMES W. BOYD

Many harsh and vicious words are being directed against religion. There are many who look upon all religion, especially that which makes up the confused denominational world, as a farce and money-making fraud. They see the lack of conviction, consistency and creditability. They see religions changing and swaying with the trends rather than standing firm in the revelations of the Lord.

Some people think religions ought to change with the times. They have never appreciated the Biblical truth that the times must be brought into conformity with the will of God. Pure religion does not attempt to change God and His will to fit man regardless of what man says, does or thinks. Men must change according to God's Word.

In many denominations today, Catholic and Protestant, the "do your own thing" philosophy is the norm. What is accepted is accepted because it suits the people. Anything goes whether it is with Biblical authority or not. But majorities do not determine truth. God does.

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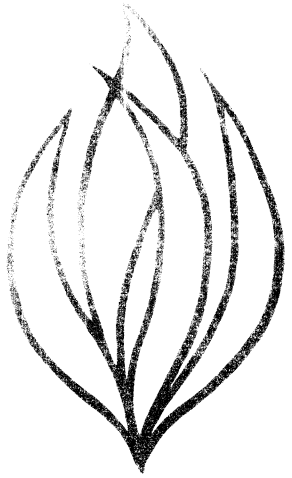

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME V James W. Boyd **NUMBER 5**

Remember Thy Creator

"Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Older people have a love for those who are younger. God loves the young. This passage is primarily directed toward those who are young. It is a challenge to every youth. It is a plea for all young people to turn to the Lord early in life. Let us absorb each thought.

Youth is a very precious and beautiful time of life. Someone has said that youth is so precious that it is a shame it is wasted on young people. We are not of that persuasion because we know that many young people are taking advantage of their youth in the way that God is pleased. But such a comment does reflect the appreciation we all have for youth. It has a purity, spirit, enthusiasm and honesty about it that does not always characterize every period of life. It is priceless and once spent it is forever gone.

Youth Has Problems

We are not to think that being young means being free of problems. The young face many dangers, threats, the need of making decisions, and other frustrations that those of us who are no longer young may have forgotten. Older people sometimes talk about what they would give to be young again. But likely they do not remember the hard parts of being young, trying to determine the direction of life, making commitments that must be made.

We sing songs of the gradeur of youth when we sing of the land where we'll never grow old. But even though young people may tire of hearing it said, youth is a time for preparation. In one sense all of life is a time for preparation for the life that is to come. But youth is a time to prepare for a life on earth that is a life of preparation for eternity. This being true it must be used wisely and as God would have it used.

The primary appeal of the gospel is very relevant to youth. Even though people of older years may turn to the Lord and find forgiveness for misspent years, it is to the youth of every generation to which we turn with hope, with deep emotions and

goals. We seek for them salvation.

One reason the gospel has such an applicable appeal to youth is because young people have a lifetime to give in service to God. There need not be one day spent in the devil's service after we learn how to come to God. Young people have the opportunity to so live that they can look back on life with great consolation that they served God all the days of life. They need not suffer the agony of conscience of ill-spent years. The evil scars of sin, regret, neglect need not mar their life. They need not sow the "wild oats" of the flesh only to reap a painful harvest later.

Our text suggests three important questions. One, when remember the Creator? Two, why remember the Creator? Three, what does it mean to remember the Creator?

When?

With this question we are talking about the age of accountability or that point in the time of one's life when he stands responsible before God for his duty to God. At what age should a young person realize they are answerable to God for themselves?

The Scriptures do not designate a certain "birthday" to answer this question. Some have mistakenly assumed that because Jesus was twelve years of age when He went to the temple that twelve is the moment of personal accountability to God. But this is not taught. But we are driven to the conclusion that such a time does come, and it come "*in the days of thy youth.*" We are taught that we all shal stand before God in judgment and "*shall give an account.*" (Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12). The fact that we do become accountable shows that there is a time, at some age, when we are responsible.

We are not accountable in infancy. A little child is not sinful nor guilty of the sins of others. Christ used a little child to picture the nature of those who are in His kingdom, the church, the saved (Matthew 18:2-4; 19:14). If children were condemned and depraved, why would Jesus want anybody to become as children?

Sin is a transgression of the law (First John 3:4). Children have not violated any law of God. We are to be like children by being humble, pure, teachable, obedient and submissive. There is nothing in Scripture to substantiate the total depravity doctrine, people born in sin, being guilty of the sin of Adam or

any other foreparent. This is an invention of Augustine, pursued in the heretical creeds of men, promoted by denominations, and serves as the basis for another false practice called "infant baptism." It is a doctrine that is blasphemous of God and contradictory to His revealed will.

Nonetheless, there does come a time when that sweet innocence of youth gives way to accountability before God. It is in youth. But as we must consider how one answers to his accountability, it becomes clear that one must be able to understand his duty and respond to it. To not be able to understand, and not be able to respond, would be to assign accountability to one who could neither know it nor do anything about it. Accountability, therefore, is determined by whether one has the capacity to know and respond to duty. It is not determined by whether he does know or not, but whether he is capable of knowing and responding.

Some may live an entire lifetime and never become accountable due to some mental deficiency. Some may become accountable at a very early age, developing rapidly, even as early as eight or nine years of age. Usually this period of serious contemplation occurs around the age of twelve or the early teen years. It varies with the individuals and no man can set a universal age standard. But it is in the days of youth.

Young people who have reached such an age, with normal capacity for learning and knowing, but have not yet responded to the invitation of Christ stand in great spiritual danger.

Why?

Why should the young remember their Creator? It is possible that the young never grow older. The young die, too. Opportunity may be taken from them quickly. Death is no stranger to the beautiful bloom of youth. The first funeral I ever tried to conduct was that of a ten year old boy. It impressed me so heavily that death comes to youth. Disease, accident, many things terminate life and opportunity is gone forever. One of the devil's most subtle and vicious lies is, "You have plenty of time yet to obey the gospel."

Delay makes obedience harder. The text tells of evil days that follow the days of youth. Evil has the power to harden the heart. Those that were once tender and modable become set and resistant even to the gospel. Waiting can cause indifference. Many things can occur in the course of a person's life that can

turn attention away from the soul. Satan is constantly begging the youth to postpone obedience for he knows that delay gives him additional opportunities to deceive and mislead.

Illustration

Charles Spurgoen was a Baptist preacher who preached to thousands every Sunday in London, England. What a pity he preached Baptist doctrine rather than the doctrine of Christ! But, as all denominational preachers, he also taught much truth. (The truth they teach oftens blinds people to the error they teach.) He illustrated the value of remembering the Creator in youth like this. Without a word he took two candles, one short and one longer. He lighted them both and watched them burn down. Both gave off the same light as they burned. But it was not long before the shorter candle burned out. But the longer one continued to give light on and on. He explained that it was that way with youth coming to God. Both old and young can radiate light, but youth can do so much longer, if for no other reason than by the reason of years that they will noramlly live.

Remembering God in youth gives young people the opportunity to offer talents to the Lord that they will not possess in years to come. They have their enthusiasm, their honesty, their teachableness, and they can set a good example for other young people. Is it right to withhold from God your life, living as you please until you grow old, and then give Him only the "leftovers?" If "leftovers" is all one has he best hasten to offer them to God. But what of that person who would deliberately shortchange God in that fashion? The glorious treasure of zeal and vigor belong to God. Nobody ever loses anything valuable in serving God. You only come to appreciate them more, use them to the fullest, and thereby enjoy the richest, happiest and most useful life one can live on earth.

We must ever keep before us the reality of the promise of the Lord's return. We know not when. He may come before a young person grows to maturity. Even the young ought to want to meet Him prepared.

What Does It Mean?

What does it mean to remember thy Creator? Generally speaking it means to be mindful of God and His ways. More specifically it means to realize that we all live before God under

the authority of Christ. Christ is the approach to the Father (John 14:6). There is no other (Acts 4:12). To honor God means to honor the Father (First John 2:23). To deny the Son is not to have the Father (First John 2:23). To remember God means

means to honor the Son (John 5:23). To deny the Son is to not have the Father (First John 2:23). To remember God means to be a Christian.

It means that one must believe in Christ as God's Son (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3), confess faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38). It means to belong to His body, the church (Acts 2:47). Being in Christ is the same as being in His body which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23).

It means living a faithful life as a Christian, imitating the Lord Jesus, asking, "What would Christ have me do?" This demands a life of service, worship, unselfishness, humility, truthfulness, purity, submission to His will, thankfulness, patience, kindness, goodness and all the other Christlike qualities that Christians are to add to their life.

Too Young?

An oft asked question regarding these matters is, "Is there not a danger of encouraging young people to respond to the invitation of Christ while they are too young?" The answer is obviously, "yes." That danger does exist. But we must also remember the danger of discouraging them too long. It is not an easy matter to face either way, but if we err, let us err on the side of safety.

Actually, one cannot obey if "too young." They might go through outward motions, but obedience must be from the heart (Romans 6:16-18) and that demands understanding. If one has gone through outward motions, being baptized, but without knowledge and understanding of that which was done, he or she has simply been made wet. This can be distracting and deceitful. Therein is the danger. It may lead some youth to postpone genuine obedience because they think all is well simply because they went through some ritual years ago even though they did not comprehend it. We must do our best to make sure that the young are taught and that they know and understand what they are doing.

Whenever this question is raised I think of a friend with whom

I was reared. He and I wanted to obey the gospel at the same time. We agreed to talk with our parents first since we both respected our parents. We valued their guidance. My parents encouraged me while his discouraged him. He was crushed, but would not go against their decision. While I went ahead and obeyed, to this day, over forty years later, he has never obeyed the gospel and likely never shall. This shows the danger on the other side.

Parental Duty

When one who is very young responds to be baptized, it places a great obligation on parents and the church to see that this young babe in Christ is properly nurtured, fed, strengthened and led aright. But accountability is a matter of understanding and the capacity to understand. If a mistake is made and response is made before proper understanding is achieved, likely, with the right kind of guidance from older ones, correction of that mistake will take place later. But what happens if one is turned away forever?

To delay can well mean eternal condemnation. Better to heed the inspired teaching of Solomon and remember the Creator in youth, leaving room for growth and making sure that growth follows. Souls are too precious to deal with them otherwise.

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The Lost Parables

Those who are familiar with the teaching of Jesus know that He often taught by the use of parables. A parable is a story concerning material matters that has a spiritual meaning. It is a short, fictitious narrative from which a religious and moral truth is drawn and explained. It has been called an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

The publicans and sinners had come to hear Jesus teach. The Pharisees and scribes ridiculed Jesus for associating with the publicans and sinners. It was then that Jesus taught what we shall call the lost parables; lost because they are about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost boy.

To more fully understand the message of Jesus these parables should be studied together rather than separately. This is not to say that much cannot be gained by individual study of them, but to suggest that there is a continuing theme carried throughout all three telling how people are lost.

We ask that the reader assist us in getting this lesson presented by taking his Bible and keeping it close at hand to read the verses as we reach them in the study. Space makes it impractical in this lesson to write out each passage in its fulness. So get your Bible and study Luke 15 with us.

Lost Sheep

Versus 3 through 7 tell us about the lost sheep. In this parable Jesus likens the sheep to mankind. As the sheep was lost, so man is lost in sin, and is in need of a Savior.

Every sheep was considered valuable by the shepherd, just as every soul is considered precious by the Lord. A good shepherd would lay down his life in order to protect his sheep. When one of the sheep was lost, the shepherd would not be content in saying, "I have most of them, so that will be enough." As long as one is lost, he is concerned. We certainly would not think of our children in such fashion that we would relax if one was lost even though we had most of them. Nor is the Lord content to allow one lost soul to go into condemnation.

Christ is our Shepherd. He laid down His life for us. He is not indifferent toward even one that is lost. He is rather concerned about the salvation of every accountable person. The Lord is concerned about me and you whether we are concerned about ourselves or not.

Why was this sheep lost? It was not because others got it lost. Sheep get lost through their own carelessness and lack of attentivensss.They keep their heads to the ground while eating and gradually wander away. They get too busy feeding on the things immediately before them until they find themselves separated from the flock and the shepherd. Even an occasional glance upward would give them their bearings and keep them together. But not so with the sheep. The shepherd tried hard to keep them together.

Many people shall seal their own doom in the judgment because of their own carelessness and indifference, their over-involvement in the affairs of this life to the neglect of the soul. Many shall find themselves astray from the fold because

they refused to glance upward and locate themselves and the direction they were going. They will impose on themselves their own destruction because of their own negligence and misguided priorities. The carelessness of man is a common trait. In this parable of the lost sheep our Lord attempts to impress on us the necessity of alertness lest we stray and be lost.

Lost Coin

Verses 8 through 10 constitute the second parable. You should read them now before continuing.

Here the coin is representative of man as the sheep was in the first. Just as the coin is lost, so man is lost. And notice the diligent effort the woman of the house put forth to find the coin. Obviously she valued it very much. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house in every corner, seeks diligently and does not stop until she finds it.

Friend, Jesus seeks the souls of men just as earnestly. And we who profess to follow in His steps ought be just as concerned for the souls of people as was He.

Why was this coin lost? There is a different reason for the coin being lost and the sheep being lost. The sheep was lost through its own fault. But the coin was lost through the carelessness and fault of another. The sheep acted in its own lost condition, but the coin had been acted upon and the influence of another had brought about its lost condition. The lost coin was right where somebody had left it or allowed it to fall.

Will there not be those in that last great judgment day who will be condemned because they were misguided and misdirected by some other? Do we not have influence on those around us? And what direction does that influence point them? Yes, each shall be held accountable, because people are not exactly like coins, unable to decide for themselves. But people can be lead in the wrong way that will cause them to be lost. We cannot over estimate the power of influence that each person does have. We do not live to ourselves or die to ourselves.

As we look at the lives of others, and consider our own as well, do we not see how misspent many lives are and what an evil and harmful influence they are having on others? How many youth are lead the wrong way by their parents, by the entertainers of our day, by the notables around them? And most of all, how many are falling beneath the waywardness of the peer pressure upon them?

Failures At Home

In many homes there is no adult that is leading in the moral and spiritual training of the young. They are left to themselves so often. Maybe mother is trying and Dad is dragging his heels. Why do parents not show more concern for the spiritual nature of their children? Why do they do those things that can only harden the hearts of the young against the truth of God and bring about their damnation?

Leading others astray is an abominable thing. Jesus said it would be better that a millstone be placed around one's neck and he be cast into the sea than to lead others astray. Sometimes even church leaders act as if they have no responsibility regarding their influence on others.

You and I need to consider how our carelessness may be a major reason for others being cast into outer darkness, and they could have been saved if we had only been different before them.

Lost Boy

Verses 11 through 24 is the familiar story often called the parable of the prodigal, or wasteful, son. Turn now and read it.

This son was lost, was he not? But he was lost for a different reason than either the sheep or the coin. The sheep was lost through its own carelessness. The coin was lost through the carelessness of another. But the boy was lost because of his own stubborn will, his determination to "do his own thing and go his own way." Nobody could tell this upstart anything.

He did not wander aimlessly into the foreign country. He went there deliberately. He did not lose his funds through theft or monetary failures. He wasted it in sensuous and riotous kind of living. His own indulgence, his own sins, that is what brought him into the swine pit.

It seems that there are some people today who are not unlike this son. Their minds are closed; their hearts are hard; their eyes are fixed on what they want; their ears will not hear. They act as if what they do not know has not even been thought of yet. Many times, they go on their own rebellious way, knowing all the while that they are defying God and in some way have convinced themselves it will not make any difference.

But the fact is that they shall be damned eternally. And they will be in hell because that is what they defiantly chose -- the

path that leads only there.

There is a certain similarity in these three parables. But there is also a distinctiveness to each one, isn't there? The sheep -- lost by its own carelessness; the coin -- lost through another's carelessness; the son -- lost because he was determined to go his own way rather than the right way.

Happy Ending

Thankfully, the story of the lost boy does not end with him in the low state of feeding swine. He returned home to a loving father.

Dear friend and reader, are we not blessed in the knowledge that we do not have to end our lives in the hovels of sin either. How dreary and helpless life would be if life could not end in a better fashion. But we can be forgiven of our trespasses and be redeemed and restored to our Father which art in heaven.

Did you notice as you read each parable, that when that which was lost was found, there was rejoicing and celebration. The shepherd called his friends together to share his joy. The woman did the same thing. The father prepared a banquet because his son which was lost had come back to him.

Being saved is a cause for rejoicing also. We read of the Ethiopian who went on his way rejoicing. The jailor of Acts 16 rejoiced with all of his house after he had heard the word, believed it and obeyed it. Indeed, there is every cause for rejoicing when one who is lost is sin is forgiven and is saved.

Have you come to Christ for salvation? Life is a failure if it is lived apart from the Lord. We do not have to live away from Him, nor die apart from Him. We can live and die *"in the Lord"* and be among those that shall be blessed eternally.

Do you realize that even while you live on earth you are living the best, happiest, most useful and meaningful life a person can live? Let us persuade every reader to obey the gospel, and create great joy in the hearts of those saved around you, and even joy before the throne of God.

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continued from page 24

"God's man, in God's place, doing God's will, God's way, to God's glory." This about covers it. When you have a body of such members, then you have the church of Christ.

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Christ And Your Vocation

Shall we be very practical for a moment? God expects mankind to work for a living. *"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground."* (Genesis 3:19). *"For even when we were with you this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat."* (Second Thessalonians 3:10). Work is not a curse because man sinned. Work was given to man before sin entered the world. *"And the Lord God took the man, and put him in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it."* (Genesis 2:15). There are blessings in work. There are rewards from work. Work is a necessity of life. It is good for members of the human family to work.

Youth is a period of life beset with making decisions. They have to decide where to attend school, especially if they attend college. They will decide whom to marry, where to live. Their biggest and most important decision is what to do about Jesus Christ. They choose friends. They also select an occupation whereby they work and earn their livlihood. It is not easy for a young person to make all these decisions, but they are thrust upon them nonetheless. Some of their decisions may prove not to be the right ones. Some are of such a nature they can be changed without too much damage. Others they cannot change because they have eternal consequences connected with them. These are the decisions with which they have to live.

Our lesson deals with choosing an occupation, a vocation, the machinery for making a living. It is not possible for anyone else to tell another just exactly what they ought or ought not do in this matter. Each has different talents and should develop them and learn to use them. But there are a few basic principles that ought to be considered when one selects his occupation because a person's occupation vitally affects his life, attitude, associates, and ultimately can have an effect on one's eternal destiny.

Preaching

We would like to encourage young men to honestly consider being a preacher of the gospel. Through the years one's ideas may change regarding what he has done in his own life. But I am sure that I would never have been content to never have tried to preach the gospel. I do not contend that everybody

ought be what we sometimes call a "full-time" preacher. Even though there are advantages in that, there are also handicaps. This is something all must work our for themselves, and consider their own talents and circumstances. Nonetheless I would persuade that young men ought to so train themselves to some extent to be able to publicly preach the Word, even if he earns the bulk of his livlihood another way.

The world is lost and needs to know of the Savior. We do not look with favor on the growing concept of a "clergy" among brethren. Too often what seems to be produced in our colleges today is a clergy-class, so perceived by both preacher and congregation. This is not as Scripture authorizes. What has been called the "pastor system" has overtaken many congregations, meaning that the preacher just about dominates everything and either does run or has to run everything and everybody looks to him for whatever goes on or does not go on. Such a thing is not God's government for the church. But young men, early in life, ought resolve that they will learn how to deliver discourses in truth before others. He never knows what opportunities and duties may open before him in life when he will be sorely needed for such a work.

Rewards

The harvest is great and laborers are few. Preaching is not a lucrative work with financial gain, except in rare instances. Those who approach the work of preaching because of finances are likely in for a big disappointment. God will provide, but you cannot always count on the brethren. Experience has shown me as I observe these "high-salary preachers," that they become little more than program promoters, "yes" men to others, seeking popularity above truth, and compromise it to maintain their gain. There may be some exceptions. It has not been my experience to know them. But preaching offers other opportunities. It is true that often you are either praised or damned, sometimes both at the same time.

But there are rewards that money cannot buy. What is it worth to influence a soul to be saved? How many dollars can you be given to match the joy of seeing fallen brethren restored because of the efforts you put forth? True, no amount of money can compensate for the bruises and tears that come your way. The constant insecurity and badgering will be something with which you will live daily. But what a satisfaction to know that

you are involved in the greatest work on earth! You can do this without depending upon brethren for your support if you can provide another way. But young men ought to be encouraged to train themselves with ability and knowledge to preach. They may well earn their living other ways, but they ought to be able to preach and teach the Word.

For Women

As for our young ladies, we feel sorry for them in this last half of the twentieth century when there is such a mad thrust in the world against the most honorable and noble task a woman can fill, and I refer to being a homemaker, rearing children, taking care of her husband, keeping the home. All the glamour girls and career types seem to "have it made," some seem to think. But no honest person can deny that women leaving their number one God-given task and going into the marketplaces and competing in this materialistic rush has caused a deadly rise inthe destruction of home, marriage, stability and security of children, and all of this is now a plague in the nation. Leaving the home for lesser pursuits has been at the root of many frustrated, ill-kept, neglected children that turn delinquent. It has caused havoc in the homes of our nation. It has hurt the economy and availability of jobs for men to support their families. I know that many will think this old-fashioned and terribly chauvinistic, but the hell and havoc that has been caused by the push of women from their homemaking careers has proven beyond question that God's way is best and society is composed of too many fools that think women are nothing but female men.

The old saying says, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" is still true. That many hands have forsaken the cradle is one major cause for the sad plight of the world. There are no two occupations available to the human family that can surpass the glory of preaching the gospel and making a home where Christ reigns supreme.

Whatever You do...

There are many other occupations one can have in which he can bring glory to God and fulfill his obligations in life. Whatever honorable task for which one trains, he ought to try to do his best to succeed by being as good at that work as he can be.

"*Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might...*" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

It is unfortunate that many measure success only in terms of financial gain. That may be one measure, especially in some fields. But one can have great financial success and be a failure at things that are more important. You can be as poor as "Job's turkey" and be a success. You can be the "man of the year" and be a failure. You can be a ditch digger or a garbage man or a surgeon and big financier and be a success or a failure.

When you are pondering your occupation there are serious matters to be considered. One measure you dare not omit is the influence on eternity. Real success must be measured in terms of the effect your vocation will have on your soul. Whatever secular task you undertake will eventually pass from the scene. That which lasts beyond this life is what really counts.

You may have an "excellent job" with big money and much prestige and glamor, but if you fail to serve God you have missed it. Others may respect you and stand in awe of what you have accomplished, even after your life is over, but if you have not lived for God in Christ you have messed it up. You can live for Christ and enjoy financial success in many occupations. On the other hand, you may work hard, gain little, have no notoriety and pass from this life almost unnoticed. But if you have lived a life for the Lord you are the most successful of persons. You will have eternal life in heaven. Of the two kinds of lives open to you, which do you really believe is best? What I am saying is that whatever occupation you choose, be first and always first a Christian.

The Right View

There was an elder with whom I once worked that I greatly respected because of the kind of man he seemed to be. His name was Charles Hoggatt. I heard brother Hoggat say to a man once when he had been asked what he did for an occupation, "I work for God. I am an accountant at the U.S.Rubber Company to pay my bills." He was not boasting, but simply expressing his view toward his job. I suggest he had the right view and we would do well to have the same attitude.

I have found it neither best nor practical to simply uphold various occupations before young people before they learn some basic lessons. Anyone can name over a host of jobs that are attractive, pay well, offer rewards in many ways. Specific job

descriptions ultimately come into play, but not in this lesson. Some fundamental "do's and don't's" are in order.

Points To Consider

Choose a work that renders some service and benefit to mankind. Jesus taught service as the way to greatness. Service is characteristic of a Christian. Do not let your ambitions be purely selfish in nature. Think what you can do for others. Let not fame and fortune be your motive, but service.

As stated earlier, make up your mind to go at your job with your very best. "*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.*" (Colossians 3:23).

You may never be the best in your field, but you can be the best that you can be. Do not worry if somebody can do better. Be glad for their success and ability. Just do what you can do as well as you can do it. That is what the Lord expects. Does not the parable of the talents teach us this? (Matthew 25).

Do not take a job that interferes with being a faithful Christian. Do not take a job that runs against your conscience for this also is sinful (Romans 13:23). Keep the worship services in mind. There are some fields of endeavor that Christians cannot pursue and should not promote. He cannot encourage sin nor should he advance the influence of sinful things. Better to be paid less and work harder than to assist the cause of the devil in any way.

Keep your occupation in perspective. Never let it become first with you in life. It does not belong before your family, the church, your health. It is a necessity, but put your trust in the Lord's providence when He has promised, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.*" (Matthew 6:33). Neglect of the most important, even for things that are somewhat important, is getting things mixed up.

Remember, you are privileged to earn. It is a blessing from God. Your earnings compose a part of your stewardship. Remember God with whatever comes under your possession and control. Actually, everything belongs to God and you dare not withhold from Him what is His.

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Satan's Most Powerful Weapon

Christianity is pictured to us as a warfare, the Christian as a soldier, Christ as the captain, and our faith as a fight. The Christian has been given armor with which to wage the good fight of faith. These things are asserted in Scripture and we begin our study accepting this as true.

Peter tells us that our adversary is the devil (First Peter 5:8). *"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* And the devil also has weapons with which to fight his side of the war. We want to concentrate upon just one of them, possibly the most powerful one other than sin itself, and this weapon involves sin.

We need to be aware of the devil's objective. His goal is to capture every soul. He has the same goal as the army of the Lord in this respect. Every soul is important to Satan, whether rich, poor, male, female, bond, free, black, white, Jew, Gentile, or whatever. He will go to whatever distance is necessary to accomplish his goal of enslaving mankind to sin. He is active, aggressive, vigorous, energetic and wastes not a single opportunity. Especially is he anxious to recapture those souls that have repudiated him and come to the Lord.

Different Missions

But the mission of Satan and of Christ is quite different. Christ seeks to save; the devil seeks to destroy. Satan hates God, hates good, loves evil. He is the father of evil and wickedness. And he uses certain weapons in attempting to enlarge the borders of his kingdom at the expense of the kingdom of God. Any person that desires to go to heaven has an opposite desire for himself than what Satan desires for him.

Our enemy is no fool. We dare not underestimate him and his wiles. Many battles are lost because those who are superior have underestimated the enemy. Satan knows what he wants and he knows how to get it. Even as we make this study, Satan seeks your soul and mine.

Furthermore, he is skilled in the use of his weapons. Even the most powerful enemy and his weapons need not be feared if the enemy did not know how to use his weapons. But the devil knows how. God's word is more powerful than anything Satan has in his arsenal. But too often much of the force and persuasion of the Word is lost and drained because it is not properly used. Satan has had sixty centuries, maybe more, in which to perfect his attack. He is no amateur, but a skilled professional.

Satan's Tools

Some of Satan's tools are easily recognized. Deception is one that he used in the Garden of Eden. We are warned against his subtle ways. Half-truths, which are nothing less than half-lies, can mislead. Many accept error that is taught from teachers who also include in their teaching much truth. Lust of the eyes, of the flesh, the vain glory of life are weapons of Satan (First John 2:16). He used all these against Christ when he tempted Christ in the wilderness. (Matthew 4).

Satan will even use our blessings against us. He can use our wealth, success, even our own enjoyments that of themselves are not evil. He can even use our children, our mates, our jobs, other interests. How many have turned a deaf ear to the Lord rather than to offend some loved one? How many have been negligent to God because of their work, sports, hobbies, past times, leisure activities, etc. Some have even been known to forsake their duty to God and laid the blame on the fact that they have small children.

The devil will use sorrow, failure, grief, and disappointments in life to cause a person to curse God and die. He tried that tactic on Job, but Job withstood the test and the devil failed with him.

Satan uses the various "isms" in the world to lead man astray from the truth. There is the divided, chaotic, contradictory denominationalism. Friend, to look lightly on denominationalism is to look lightly on one of Satan's weapons for destroying confidence in the uniqueness of Christianity.

Then there is atheism, promoted through pseudo-science, false theories, the sophisticated educational circles. Humanism is just another form of atheism. The acceptance of untried, unproven, and unprovable ideas of theorists have deluded many into a denial of the Bible, even a denial of the reality of God.

There is materialism, that denies man is spirit, that contends we are but material that came into existence by accident. It teaches there is no eternity, no soul, no accountability; we came from nowhere, here for nothing, no reason for being here, and on our way to nothingness. The whole thing centers itself only on the here and now.

Modernism, liberalism, all such "isms" are the devil's weapons to capture and contain the souls of men. And there is no doubt but that he has been very effective in the use of these things.

But we are persuaded that all these forces of evil can be met and overcome in the hearts and minds of honest people who will consider the evidence of God and His Word. There is no weapon the devil has such as we have named that cannot be repelled and destroyed when battle is pitched.

From Within

One of the more powerful weapons in all of the devil's arsenal is one that is provided for him by those who claim to be Christians. This may sound ridiculous and impossible, but bear with me a while. Yes, one of the most powerful and effective weapons the devil has comes from right within the church rather than from the outside.

During World War II those of us who were at home heard a great deal about what was called a "fifth column." It referred to traitors, spies, those who worked from within to do damage and hinder the cause. Some of the most telling and expensive damage done to the Allies was done by this inside operation.

All nations realize this danger and stand on guard against subversion. Doctors know that diseases that work from within and cannot be so easily detected are often more deadly than those that are without and can be more easily treated. Satan realizes this principle and works hard in the church, using church members who will allow him to do so. You may ask, "How can this be?" Is not the church his prime enemy? Yes, the church is his prime enemy, but sometimes there are those in the church who fail to realize how the devil will use them as his tool if permitted. There are those in the church who have been deceived by the devil and are not even aware of it. They are so blind and hardened, so confident in their false security, that they do not realize they are doing a great deal of harm to the cause of Christ and actually advancing the influence of Satan.

What is this weapon that the devil uses that members

sometimes provide him? It is hypocrisy. We may as well admit it rather than try to deny it, and get on with the task of doing something about it.

Have we not heard many times people say, "I'm just as good as so-and-so who is a member of the church?" On that grounds they refuse to consider becoming a Christian. Of course, that is no justification. Nobody is going to heaven on the basis of the hypocrisy of somebody else. But the trouble is, there are those outside the church whose lives put to shame the lives of some who claim to be Christians.

The sad fact of the matter is that both shall be condemned to hell. But one will go there as an alien, and the other as a hypocrite. If there was anything that came under a fierce barage of attack by Jesus Christ while He was here on earth, it is the sin of hypocrisy (Matthew 23). Eight times in less than twelve verses He scathingly denounced it.

Hypocrisy Defined

Hypocrisy is professing to be one thing when you are not. It is saying and never doing. It is to sing, "I love Thy kingdom Lord," but forsake the assembly, withhold liberal giving, have the "let the other fell do it" attitude. It is to let social, secular, sporting events, etc., interfere with work to be done as a Christian.

Sometimes we find those who profess to be Christians who are just as unkind, uncouth in their speech, ill-mannered and ill-tempered as anybody else. They have the same goals, read the same filthy books, watch the same dirty television shows, laugh at the same suggestive jokes. They even drink the same brand of liquor and dance to the same tunes, often in the same degenerate places. They marry and divorce with the impunity, mistreat their families the same way, neglect their children just like others. Their tongues are as full of gossip, slander, lies, and backbiting as anyone else. They sow just as much discord and unhappiness as those who make no effort in following Christ.

The Christian is to respect God's order above all other people on earth. To disregard His doctrine, His government, a godly life, being indulgent, permissive, and stained with transgression is unbecoming to a child of God. Don't we realize that the devil takes note of those things among us and points to them saying, "See there! There's a Christian for you. Do you want to be like that?" Nobody with good sense would want to be. Yes, too

often one cannot tell the difference between a member of the church and one who is not unless he has a role book. You cannot tell by the "peculiar, distinctive, godly life that he lives." What a shame and disgrace!

The damage done by that materialistic, self-seeking, worldly minded member of the church is beyond measure. He tears down faster than godly souls can build up. All the devil needs is a few such so-called Christians to louse up years of work in saving souls. And to think that this powerful weapon is handed to him by his enemies.

Why Hypocrisy Is Powerful

There are two reasons why this weapon is so powerful. One reason is because a precious soul, that of the hypocrite, is lost. He was once saved, but has turned back again into the ways of condemnation. Faith, repentance, confession, and baptism are essential to going to heaven. But so is living a faithful Christian way of life.

The second reason is that those who are yet lost and have never come to the only Savior there is will be "turned off" before He is even given a fair showing and hearing. They will laugh and scoff at the inconsistency and sin of the Christian and go on their way thinking that all is well with them. Yes, the weapon of hypocrisy is so powerful that it will keep the lost lost and make the saved lost again.

What can be done about it? Some way we must get that weapon out of Satan's hands. How? The answer is a really converted membership. Away with this "hit'em quick, trick'em in, shallow conversion." We must convince and convict people of their sins, not make them feel good regardless of the life they are living. People must be sincere and honest about serving the Lord. We all must realize there is no command of the Lord that we can push aside as if it does not matter.

When Christians will live godly lives, be good examples, pay their debts, do honest work, keep their speech clean, guide their homes and children in God's way, keep themselves unspotted from the world, practice love, cheerfulness, dismiss envy, jealousy, hatred, grumbling, be grateful for their blessings and put the Lord and His kingdom first, then we will snatch away from Satan that weapon of hypocrisy that has been placed there by wayward members of the church.

Then there must be the attempts to recover the fallen. And if those efforts fail, rather than allow Satan to continue to batter the church with the weapon of hypocrisy, use the procedures of discipline God has taught in His Word and cut off the evil doer from among us. This has been a neglected matter in the 20th century, and we are paying an awesome price because of the toleration and permissiveness of sin in the church. We continue to let the devil have his weapon of our hypocrisy and he uses it well.

What a tragedy for anyone to be used by Satan. What a tragedy that anyone would allow himself to be used. We each need to check up and analyze ourselves in the light of truth and make sure we are not among those who are giving the devil one of his most powerful weapons.

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What Is The Church Of Christ?

It is time to get back to basics and fundamentals, stirring up our minds by way of remembrance. The knowledge of and respect for the basic foundational teaching is what keeps us on track.

When we talk about the church of Christ we are not talking about a denomination. If a church is a denomination it is not the church of Christ, and if it is a church of Christ it is not a denomination. The reason we can be so sure of this is because the Bible tells us about the church of Christ, but there is not a word of authorization anywhere in the Scripture for any denomination of the past, present or future.

We regret very much to have to recognize another fact of life. If we want to know what is the church of Christ we will have to look elsewhere than at some of the churches that call themselves churches of Christ. You can find just about anything and everything among so-called "Churches of Christ" today, and that is not a compliment but a criticism.

The word "church" appears one hundred and ten times in the New Testament, translated from a words that means "the called out." This immediately gives us some concept of the church. It refers to people who have been called out of the darkness of sin by the gospel, and into a saved relationship with God in Christ.

A Correct Name

The church is quite properly called the church of Christ because of its relationship to Christ. We urge the reader to pause a moment and take the Bible and read the brief passage of Ephesians 5:23-32.

Having read it, we observe that Christ is the head of the church, the Savior of it, the church is subject to Him. He loves it. He gave Himself up for it. He sanctified it. He cleansed it. He nourishes and cherishes it. Little wonder it is referred to as the church of Christ.

Furthermore, He is the founder and builder of it (Matthew 16:16-18), and the foundation of it (First Corinthians 3:11). He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He called it *"my church"* (Matthew 16:18). Those who are members of it are people purified by Him, a peculiar people (Titus 2:14).

There are other Scriptural terms that are used to identify the church of which you read in the Bible, such as church of God (Acts 20:28; First Corinthians 1:2). It is the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33; Revelation 1:9; Matthew 16:16-18; Colossians 1:13). It is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). It is the house of God, or the family of God (First Timothy 3:15).

Seeing that these are the designations of inspired writ, we ask, "By what right and authorization do men attach names not found in Scripture for the church to what they call the church?" This is one of the reasons those who are true to the Bible can have no attachments to denominations. To *"speak as the oracles of God"* (First Peter 4:11) applies.

In Prophecy

The church is that institution that was prophecied to come by the prophets of old. Yes, the church is an institution, and we give no place for a moment to those who like to ridicule the idea that the church is an institution. Some say it is not an organization, but an organism. That is like saying a man is not a

human, but a person. He is both. And the church is organized, has been instituted, and is an organism because it is the body of Christ. Why get away from correct descriptions, just in order to pacify an element of society that disdains "organized religion." The religion of Christ is organized, whether anybody accepts it or not.

In the Old Testament the *"house of the Lord,"* the *"kingdom"* was foretold. Daniel 2:44, *"And in the days of those kings the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom..."* Isaiah 2:2, *"...that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains..."* Many signs were prophecied that would announce the coming of the kingdom, such as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles (Acts 1:5-8; Luke 24:47-49). Acts 2 tells us of the fulfillment of such things.

Peter preached that all the prophets had foretold of those days (Acts 3:24). John the Baptizer announced its coming as did Jesus, His apostles, and the seventy that were sent forth.

Marks Of Identification

The church of Christ is that church that had its beginning on the first Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ (Acts 2). Peter said that was the time of the beginning (Acts 11:15). On that day, for the first time, people were added to the church (Acts 2:47). The church of Christ is not of recent origin, but is now approaching its two thousand year anniversary.

The church had a mission, a government, a manner of worship, terms of entrance, and a pattern of life to be lived by its members. All these things are governed and regulated by Scripture. There was no human creed, discipline, catechism, manual, confessional, prayer book, conference, council, etc., to govern the church of Christ. It was not Protestant, although it protested all evil. It was not Catholic, although it is and was universal in nature. It was not Jewish, although many Jews were members of it and it composed spiritual Israel (Galatians 3:29). It was unique and distinctive as the church of Christ.

The church of Christ was not some invisible or vague sort of thing, as we are sometimes taught by denominationalists. It is made up of individual members that form the whole body. *"Ye are the body of Christ and members in particular."* (First Corinthians 12:27). Paul was talking about people, but a very distinct people. He was talking about people who had heard the

gospel, believed it, and obeyed it in repentance, confession of their faith, and baptism into Christ. The church is composed of people who have been baptized as the Holy Spirit directed (First Corinthians 12:13). One person is not the church, but a member of the church.

The church is a *"spiritual house, an holy priesthood."* (First Peter 2:5). This house is made up of living or lively stones (First Peter 2:5). It is a *"royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people."* (First Peter 2:9).

The church is the saved (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23). While Christ came to this earth to offer salvation to all, not all will benefit from His sacrifice because not all will come to Him. But those that come to Him will be saved, and He is the Savior of those who do come to Him, not those who refuse to come to Him. Someday, those in the church, which is His kingdom, shall be delivered up to the Father when Christ comes again (First Corinthians 15:24). Those not in that kingdom, the church, will not be so delivered.

From The Mind Of God

The church of Christ is not a creation and invention of the minds of men, but from God (Ephesians 3:10). Its very existence is a demonstration of the wisdom of God in saving man. It is not an "afterthought" and a substitute measure erected by Christ after He decided not to establish His kingdom as the false premillennial theory teaches. It is rather the temple of the Lord (Ephesians 2:21).

The church is what the Bible shows it to be. The church is not what men have done with it and to it. One may call himself the president of the United States, but calling himself that does not mean that he is. If he is, he is rightly called the president of the United States. And a church is not the church of Christ just because it might call itself the church of Christ. It is the church of Christ if it is like the Bible defines and describes it, and will call itself by that identification, as well as the others the Scripture allows.

Any church not founded in Jerusalem, on Pentecost, by Christ, is not the church of Christ. A church that digresses from the work, worship, mission and message has no right to be called a church of Christ. It is no longer of Him when it varies from His way. It is a church fallen into apostasy.

Someone has defined a member of the church this way.

continued on page 10

Do Your Young Know?



JAMES W. BOYD

A Gallup poll reported that only ten percent of America's youths knew that worshipping idols violated the Ten Commandments. Many youths are tragically ignorant of the Bible on most subjects.

Some religions teach catechisms that omit the command against idols. Our Surpeme Court takes an antagonistic position against religion and moral training in schools, even though upholding atheistic, humanistic, down-with-God doctrines. Many churches soft-pedal the Biblical moral standards, daring not to offend the violators in their church pews.

America's youth sees violations of decency and morality constantly on television and even witness it among many adults they know. How could they take the commands of God seriously in this environment?

Nine of the ten commandments are included in the doctrine of Christ, the Sabbath observance being the exception. But while bemoaning how many youths know so little about the Bible, do our children know it? Have we taken for granted they know right from wrong? Or are we seeing to it that they learn God's will? It is a serious matter.

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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME V James W. Boyd **NUMBER 6**

A Man After Mine Own Heart

"And afterward they desired a king, and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will." (Acts 13:21,22).

Paul was preaching in Antioch of Pisidia, reviewing the history of Israel, especially noting the time that God selected David to be king of Israel. God called David *"a man after mine own heart."* That is a mighty fine compliment for anyone at anytime in his life for God to so consider him. Many men find favor among their fellowmen. Many even receive glory from others. But David was highly regarded by the Highest of the High.

David was the second king over Israel, and if not the greatest of them all, he was certainly one of the greatest. He ruled at a time of the greatest spiritual and physical attainments of that nation. It was unique in that it was a time of building up. Solomon's reign was a time when many things were built, but Solomon's reign had about as many flaws as good points. And the building that Solomon was able to do was because of the great foundations that were laid by his father, David.

David was the writer of most of the Psalms in the Bible. He was a prophet of God, prophesying concerning the Christ. He was the ancestor of the Lord that had such distinction that people considered the Messiah to be a son of David.

Young David

The early life of David may be considered relatively unimportant, although it provided for him the preparation he needed. When Samuel came to the home of Jesse at the direction of the Lord to anoint a successor to Saul, David was not even considered sufficiently important for his father to have called him in from the fields to be considered. But when Paul writes about him centuries later, he assigns him true greatness, *"a man after God's own heart."*

What made David so great? There were several contributing

factors. Men that are outstanding in character, great in stature before God and man, are not developed overnight. There is no one thing that makes them great, but rather a well-rounded development. All of us should want to have the right kind of character. There is no better source of wisdom for character building than the Word of God. We want now to consider some of the things the Bible records that molded David. Then we can do our best to pattern ourselves accordingly, having an earnest desire to also be one after God's own heart.

David was reared in a good home. This is credit to his parents. Jesse, his father, was a worshipper of God. He was obedient to God's messenger, Samuel. Obviously, he was loyal to the law of Moses under which he lived. Jesse had instructed his son in ways of toil, usefulness, responsibility. David did not have idle time to learn to squander and misuse. This is the basis of ruin for many young people. "An idle mind is the devil's workshop" is an adage of wisdom.

There have been people to rise to commendable greatness of character that did not have good homes in their youth. They rose to those heights in spite of their home life, rather than because of it. Certainly any young person has a head start when he has godly parents, a home with a moral and spiritual influence, that provides him the solid foundation of honesty, integrity, responsibility, the appreciation for right and wrong, a strong heritage, and basis by which he or she can make decisions.

Remembered God

David remembered God in the days of his youth. Solomon wrote it in Ecclesiastes 12:1, but David had already lived it earlier. Even as a youth, David had learned to depend on God. He cited how God had delivered him when he met a lion and a bear while tending his sheep (First Samuel 17:37). Early in life he had learned to believe in God and trust Him.

God approved the heart of David while he was a young man. When Samuel was looking at Eliab, David's eldest brother, and considering him as a possible king, God said to Samuel, *"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart."* Obviously, God approved the heart of David because David was selected. He had not *"sown his wild oats."* It is a mistake to think that the young must *"sow their wild oats."* If they are so foolish as to do that, they will reap the harvest of

regret and ruin. Youth can control themselves and attend to the urgent task of building character rather than dissipating those precious years in recklessness and sin. When David was out watching for the sheep entrusted to his care, he learned to respect the Creator of this world and be mindful of God's protection and provision.

Faith

David was great because he had a great and strong faith. He is listed among those of great faith in Hebrews, chapter eleven. His entire career was one that manifested faith. From his early days when he witnessed God's protection over him from the lion and the bear, and in his fight with the giant Goliath, and in his sacred and inspired writings and prophecies, David manifested faith in God.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" "The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" "I have been young, and now an old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Few men ever walked in such faith as did David. When one of Israel's kings was to be noted as a faithful man, it was said that he walked in the ways of David.

Respect

David was great because he had respect for things holy and sacred. We know how he was pursued during his early years with Saul seeking his life. David had several opportunities to slay Saul and be rid of that threat and danger. Yet, he respected Saul as the anointed of the Lord, and said, *"I will not put forth mine hand against my Lord, for he is the Lord's anointed."* He sought not to destroy what God had set apart.

There is a drift, yea, more than that, a veritable run in the world today to show disrespect for the holy things of God. There is disrespect for the church, the Bible, morality, the commands of God. Even among brethren there seems to be a growing disrespect for the use of the Lord's Day. God's authority is turned aside. The principles governing the home, marriage, parental authority, worship, etc. If anyone is to ever achieve greatness in the eyes of God, he or she must develop a keen sense of respect for holy things.

Sacrifices

David was willing to sacrifice to God. Loyal service to God has had its costs in every age. Many will live their lives through, and die, and be lost in hell, because they would not surrender their own will to the will of their Creator and Judge. Christianity is unpopular in the world today because it demands much of the Christian. It calls for inconveniences and sacrifices. It means putting God first. Christians are to be *"living sacrifices"* before God. (Romans 12:1). Some are simply unwilling to give up their sins, their evil pleasures, their dirty habits, their evil companionships, even a few hours for worship. Many are too worldly to ever go to heaven. They want what this world offers more than heaven, and when this world is over for them, they won't ever have heaven.

David was once offered, free of charge, everything that he would need to offer a sacrifice to God. But he refused it. He said, *"I will surely buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which cost me nothing."* (Second Samuel 24:24). True spiritual greatness cannot be attained without a willingness to pay the cost, whatever is required.

Penitent

David was a man of penitent heart. He was capable of humbling himself and admitting, *"I have sinned."* Few men have sinned any more grievously than did David in his adultery with Bathsheba, and his multitude of crimes that he committed and instigated in trying to cover his sin with her the wrong way. There were so many things amiss in David's life in connection with that transgression.

Yet, when Nathan the prophet confronted him with his guilt, he no longer tried to hide it. He admitted it. He obviously repented of it. He said, *"I have sinned against the Lord."* (Second Samuel 12:13). If only all of us would be as honest, and as humble as was David at that moment of penitence. Not until one will recognize guilt of sin will he ever seek forgiveness of his guilt. Not until one will acknowledge to himself and to God that he needs a Savior will he ever be great in the sight of God.

We are much aware that the statement made by Paul about David was made concerning him in David's early life. One might

suppose that by the time that David sinned with Bathsheba that David could no longer be called a man after God's own heart. There may be some merit in that evaluation. But there is also something to be said of David after that sin, in the way he responded once he was convicted of it. Surely, his reaction was the kind that would make God proud of him.

Honored God

Finally, David was great before God because he sought to build the house of God in order to honor God. While his actions in that proposal did not meet with God's approval, his intentions did. The Lord refused him permission to build the temple because he was a man of war. But he allowed his son Solomon to build it. And He allowed David to gather materials for its construction. The Lord said ot it, *"Thou didst well that it was in thine heart."* (First Kings 8:18).

God's house today is His church (First Timothy 3:15). The man usefully active and unselfishly interested in the upbuilding of the house of God is one that wants the church to prosper, and grow, numerically and spiritually, abounding in the ways of truth. Such a man is a man after God's own heart.

It was these kinds of qualities that made David so acceptable before God. These things are worthy of our imitation. Surely, they can bring to us the same glorification.

† † † † †

NO COMPROMISE

There are voices being raised, and from some who once could be counted among the strongest and soundest brethren, that would have us compromise truth in order to form some kind of "merger" with various elements of the Christian Church. They are telling people far and wide that such things as the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship is not all that important one way or the other and it is just a matter of human opinion. These turncoats, and that is precisely what they make themselves, are undermining the church by their false doctrine. They evidently do not any longer have appreciation for the necessity of having authority for what is done. JWB

Why We Believe The Bible To Be God's Word

With advances being made by atheism, humanism, evolution and other anti-God and anti-Bible philosophies, it is needful that we study again the reasons why we believe the Bible is the Word of God. Many believe that the Bible is a very unusual and remarkable book, but do not accept it as the Word of God. We agree that the Bible is unusual and remarkable, but that it is far more than that. We believe the Bible to be the verbally inspired Word of God. It is either that or it is unworthy of being trusted in any sense because it claims to be the verbally inspired Word of God. "*All scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*" (Second Timothy 3:16,17). This asserts the scriptures to not only be inspired (God-breathed), but infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient. If the scriptures mislead us in this all-important teaching, can we trust it on anything? While men wrote the Bible, they did so as they were guided by the Holy Spirit.

If the Bible is not the Word of God how could we obey First Peter 4:11 that commands that we speak as the oracles of God? How could we use sound words and sound speech that cannot be condemned? (Titus 2:1,8). Thousands of times the Bible uses the words "*thus saith the Lord*" or their equivalent. We have good reason to believe the scriptures are God's words. It is not blind faith or a leap in the dark to so believe, nor is it just a matter of hoping it is true, but there is evidence that proves so we can know. Let us consider some of this evidence.

The Claim

The Bible claims to be God's Word, as noted earlier. It is reasonable that God would communicate with His creatures. It is unreasonable to think that God would not give a revelation that claimed to be from Him. We could not sensibly accept a book as God's Word that did not claim to be just that.

Paul said he wrote what was revealed unto him (Ephesians 3:1-5). His revelation was from God (Galatians 1:12). He spoke

words which the Holy Spirit teacheth (First Corinthians 2:12,13). That which the people in Thessalonica received was received as the Word of God (First Thessalonians 2:13). The writers acknowledged they wrote and spoke not of themselves but from Deity. *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (Second Peter 1:20,21). While this may not prove the Bible is the Word of God, the claim that it is should be expected, and the claim is there.

Unity Of The Bible

We believe the Bible is God's Word because of the very existence of the Bible and the unity of it that shows it could not have come into being without a power greater than men overseeing its production. From the time the first part was written by Moses until the final chapters were penned by John over sixteen hundred years passed. Over forty different men were used to write the Bible. They not only lived in different periods of time, different countries, they were of different occupations. Some were kings, others farmers, fishermen, soldiers and shepherds. Some wrote in Hebrew and some in Greek. From many backgrounds and positions came the writers of the Bible. They even wrote of different events. But when their work is brought together it blends into a unified revelation of God's love for man, man's need for God, God's plan to redeem man, and the central personality of the Bible is Jesus Christ the Son of God. There are no contradictions and discords in the Bible. There is no need for rewriting and updating it. It is relevant to every people, everywhere, in every generation. All this exists without anyone "comparing notes."

There is no writing for which we have more ancient manuscripts than the Bible. No writing has such credentials for such unity. It is like a group of unrelated artists painting a portion of a portrait, each unknown to the other, yet, when their work is put together it forms a perfect picture. Anyone with reasoning ability must admit there has been an Overseer throughout the entire production of such a document. That Overseer is God. It is His book.

Prophecy And Fulfillment

Prophecy and the fulfillment of it is irrefutable evidence that

the Bible is the Word of God. Prophecy sometimes means preaching and sometimes refers to predicting. True prophecy must extend beyond one's experiences, beyond his power to manipulate and control events, beyond ability to foresee through natural means. True prophecy is not just a lucky guess or a coincidence. Prophecy is written before the event and is definitely applicable to a given event. The fulfillment must be plain and identifiable. The Bible is overruning with such things.

None of the prophecies are more assuring and intersting than those dealing with Christ and His kingdom. The Old Testament prophets foretold the birth of Christ, where it would take place, that His mother would be a virgin, that His home would be a despised place, events of His life, miracles, words, parabolic teaching, His betrayal and the price to be paid, His death, burial in a borrowed tomb, His resurrection, His kingdom and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Over and over in the New Testament we read of the fulfillment of what the Old Testament prophets said. There is but one explanation how men who lived hundreds of years before an event could predict it and with minute accuracy even in matters over which they had no control whatsoever and no personal experience. The prophecy-fulfillment element of the Bible proves that it came from the Divine Mind.

Science And The Bible

There is harmony between science and the Bible. Let it be known first and foremost that wisdom demands we expect the Bible and science to harmonize. We accept the revelation of the Bible above the unproven theories of science that are ever-changing and being updated. What is discovered today often overturns what scientists said was true yesterday. But the Bible is stable and stedfast. Inasmuch as God created the world that science studies, and the Bible is His Word, we expect harmony rather than contradiction.

There are no facts of science that one must abandon in order to believe the Biblical message. While the Bible is not intended to be a science textbook, when scripture refers to scientific matters it speaks accurately, just as it does in matters of history, geography, and other fields of study. Science has actually proven to be a friend of the Bible, especially in the area of archaeology. We realize that some theories of science that are neither proven nor compatible with what can be proven have

often contradicted the Bible, such as the theory of oraganic evolution. Also there have been religious interpretations of the Bible that are false that have contradicted proven scientific fact. But the errors of science and religion cannot be used to sustain a claim for contradiction between science and the Bible.

Archaeology has been a great friend of the Bible, uncovering many findings that either prove or corroborate the probability of what the Bible records. Names once found only in scripture and denied to have ever existed by skeptics have been found on scrolls and tablets, such as Hittites and Belshazzar. Life styles as Biblical records depict have been found in archaeological research.

Particularly interesting is the specific accuracy when the Bible speaks of geographical and topographical matters. One does go down from Jerusalem to Jericho, even though one moves upward when looking at a map.

Not until the fifteenth century did men prove the earth was round. But Isaiah wrote of the *"circles of the earth."* (Isaiah 40:22). This was hundreds of years before Christ, without scientific instruments or experience and discovery to know for himself. How could he have known this except the Creator informed him?

Long before Matthew Fountaine Murray discovered the currents of the oceans, David had written of the *"paths of the sea."* (Psalms 8:8). It would be impossible for David, who lived in Palestine and never a sailor, to have known this.

Long before telescopes proved the empty spaces of the north, the book of Job records, *"He stretcheth out the north over empty space."* (Job 26:7).

Of course, we would not expect contradiction between God's world and God's Word. And, as we should expect, we find none, but only harmony when subjected to the close scrutiny of investigation.

Impartiality

Another evidence many overlook that the Bible is from God is the impartial way the Word of God deals even with its heroes. It reveals the greatness of Peter but also his denial of Christ. It tells of Abraham, the father of the faithful, but also his faithlessness in lying concerning his wife. The glories of Moses are amply related, but also his rebellion and failure to enter the promised land. When men write solely on their own they either "play up"

the bias they have or "play down" their bias whether they like or dislike the individual concerned. If the Bible were written by men, would they have written such strong denunciations against men who would presume to be as God? Can we think that men would perpetrate a lie in which the damnation of liars is so dramatically depicted as burning in the lake of fire and brimstone? Many things have been said regarding the writers of the Bible, but can it be shown they were dishonest and self-contradictory men? The mind that could have forged such a document would never have been capable of revealing such righteousness as is found in the Bible.

Brevity

Consider the brevity of the Scriptures. The whole account of creation is in 34 verses. Every major element of the universe is in ten words, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* (Genesis 1:1). The fall of man occupies only 24 verses. Libraries overflow with men's comments on what the Bible says because of its depth, comprehension, and scope in few words.

Men would have included information that the Holy Spirit left out, such as where Moses was buried, how Jesus appeared in the flesh, the age of the apostles. The only way to explain the richness, and spiritual value of the freshness and wisdom of the Scriptures is to attribute it to the mind of God.

Influence

One cannot omit consideration of the effect that the Bible has had on the world and on human behavior. This has been true not for just a generation or so, but down through the ages. The message makes saints out of sinners. Can atheism claim that? It lifts man to higher and nobler levels of conduct and consideration for each other when followed. Can atheism claim that? Where the Bible goes and is respected, ignorance, poverty, fear, spiritual darkness are driven away. The impact of the Bible on education, government, morality, architecture, literature, music, law, freedom, is immeasurable. Nothing is more relevant and useful than knowledge of the Bible. Regardless of how much education one may have, he can never be considered educated unless he has a knowledge of the Bible. A study of Psalm 119 will show to any honest reader the value of Scripture

to man in this life and the next.

Indestructibility

One final evidence we must observe is the indestructibility of the Bible. Evil men have historically opposed the Bible and sought to drive it from the minds of men. Only when people ignore the Bible can evil have its success. Because the Bible runs contrary to greed, hate, pride, neglect, sin after sin, men have wanted to destroy it. In Jeremiah's day the king Jehoiakim literally slashed it with a pen-knife and burned it. It has been attacked by pseudo-scientists, by human philosophers who enlarged themselves as if their wisdom surpassed God's. Mohammedan wars have been waged against it. The Papacy has burned it, condemned it, kept it from their people, ridiculed it, and when all else has failed, either discredited it with modernism or explained away those things that were against its system. Liberalism and pseudo-intellectualism wages war against the Bible. Voltaire once said, "In less than 100 years the Bible will be discarded and Christianity swept from the earth." A few years later his very printing house was used as a distribution center for the Bible. We believe the sacred writing of Peter which declares, *"The word of the Lord abideth forever."*

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
When looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.
How many anvils have you had, said I,
To wear and batter all these hammers so?
Just one, said he, then said with twinkling eye,
The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.
And so, I thought, the anvil of God's word
For ages skeptics' blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed -- the hammers gone!

† † † † †

Please send us a change of address when you move if you wish to continue receiving this booklet. Correct addresses are of vital importance to us.

Origin Of Life

One of the gigantic battles of the twentieth century is the battle over the existence of God and the Bible as the Word of God. Millions do not accept either, and the number seems to be increasing. Furthermore, the faith of many who have been taught in their early years the truth about God and the Bible are having their faith undermined by the philosophies and pseudo-scientific theories being widely propagated. With the swift accumulation of scientific knowledge in our lifetime, many have been led to think that science is the answer to everything and provides the explanation for everything.

Our age is not the only age of science, but it is an age when science has become the god of many. Scientism has become a popular religion. We do not ridicule nor speak disparagingly of the wonderful scientific advances and benefits that have occurred. Everyone is better because of the scientific advances in various fields of human activity and endeavor. Scientific words are becoming household words in the land. But we are not blind to the fact that science is being used to destroy man's faith in God, destroy the dignity of the human being, and used as a weapon for the destruction of confidence in the teaching of the Bible.

On just about every level of formal education today the teachers, professors, textbooks and various activities and promotions are designed to destroy faith in God and the Bible. Atheism is a religion that is being taught in the public schools. Humanism is being promoted by public funds through the schools as well as the media and just about every other source of information. Much of it is being done under the false assertion that science has proven what they are saying to be the truth.

There Is Harmony

True science, proven scientific fact, has always been in harmony with the Bible. Some theories jar with Scripture. Some false ideas about Scripture jar against factual science. But science (knowledge) that can be demonstrated as being true and the revelation of the Bible do not contradict each other.

The Bible is not a scientific book, nor was it written after the many findings of modern scientific discovery. Yet, there never

has been a proven scientific fact that differed from Biblical revelation. There never has been any scientific information in the Bible that has been proven to be in error. The unproven, untried, untested, unsubstantiated and ever-changing theories and speculations of men are often contradictory to the Bible. But such is nothing other than "*science falsely so called.*" (First Timothy 6:20).

The various fields of science, archaeology, anthropology, geology, palenontology, biology, psychology, astronomy, etc. all show the Bible in agreement with factual information that can be verified.

There are many scientists that have assumed the hypothesis of evolution to be true. One of the biggest lies of our day is that evolution has been proven as a scientific fact. Anyone who would make that contention is a liar, either ignorantly or deliberately. Scientific and provable, demonstrable facts of science show evolution to be false. But it is not sophisticated today to question what a few skeptic experts who deny God have decreed.

Evolution

Organic evolution, by which we mean man having come as a descendant from lower forms of life that began accidentally and gradually developed into his present form, is simply unscientific, unbiblical and untrue. This doctrine, that nothing decided one day to become something and from that one-celled something everything else that lives gradually developed, is absurd as it is degrading. That this process all occurred as a natural process is a part of that assertion and cannot and has not been proven true, but has been contradicted by scientific and Biblical findings time and time and time again.

What is interesting is how scientists are ever changing their views regarding evolution because they find errors in their previous beliefs. But one thing remains constant with them and that is that evolution must be true because the only alternative is that there is God. This they refuse to accept even though what they offer as the alternative is repeatedly shown to be error.

Fossils

For a number of years, and still with some who are behind times, the fossils were said to prove evolution. The problem for

evolutionists, however, is that fossils prove the sudden appearance of fully developed forms of life rather than the gradual change from one form to another. This has been embrassing to the evolutionists, but to no avail in changing his mind. They have the great "missing links" in the evolutionary chain. Little wonder that there be links that are missing since the entire chain is so false. Even fraudulent attempts have been put forth to present to the world these "missing links." But even after being proved as frauds, the faith of the evolutionists remains stedfast. He is determined against the revelation of the Bible even if he has to contradict himself.

Once men were supposed to have come from monkeys, but that only made "monkeys" out of those that believed it. Now men and monkeys are supposed to have come from the same ancestors. Just where and how this came about remains a mystery, but we are assured that it is scientific fact. Woe be to those who doubt or question the sketical "scholars" of atheism.

After Its Kind

The Bible, as well as science, and everyday experience of everybody and everything proves that each produces after its own kind. Dogs do not produce cats. Cats do not produce chickens. Lower forms of life have not produced man. Nor does man produce anything other than man. But you are supposed to accept the contradiction to this fact because the "wise men of evolution" have told us to do so.

The evolutionists is spreading his doctrine with great pomp to the extent that any doubter is pictured as a fool. The real problem with that is the failure to recognize who is the real fool. Many "go along" with evolution simply because they fear being labeled a fool by those who deny God's existence.

A most telling weakness in science in its attempts to repudiate the Bible and deny the existence of God is its complete incompetence to explain the origin of life. Some once held to the doctrine of "spontaneous generation." "According to this doctrine... many species of animals were supposed to arise spontaneously from non-living matter. For example, insects were believed to originate from dew, frogs and toads from the muddy bottom of ponds under the influence of the sun, skippers from cheese, and fly maggots from flesh." In other words, something just happened and "here's Johnny." What could be more unscientific than such an assertion? Something from

non-living matter producing life is nonsense. Where is there proof anything like that ever occurred?

Furthermore, where did this marvelous matter come from? Even if this matter is so marvelous as to be able to produce life, you have not eliminated the existence of God.

Some scientists are honest enough to admit that this explanation of life is unscientific. "We do not know when or how life originated," is a refreshing admission. "The actual beginning of life remains an unsolved problem. The gap between earth materials and living matter has not been bridged." (Lord Kelvin). The origin of life is a problem only for those who deny God. The bridge to earthly material and living matter is explained in Genesis.

Some "brilliant scientists" have suggested that life "flew off" from another planet and imbedded itself here on earth and somehow, someway, sometime, sprang up again. What great evidence! Scientists that deny God must remain very vague regarding origins. They have nothing to support their theories, but will not accept the only explanation that harmonizes with what can be known.

Garbage

One doctrine that received widespread circulation for a while back in the late fifties and early sixties was that our planet was visited by outer world creatures who found the environment not to their liking and they left. But they left some of their garbage behind, and from that garbage came all forms of living creatures now on earth. This was presented over national television, not as a joke, but in serious discussion about origins. I saw it and heard it. (This may explain why so many people are so "trashy"! We all have come from garbage!). And people who say such things contend that faith in the Bible is foolish!

Down through the ages there have been those who "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." (Romans 1:20). Our day has a bountiful crop of such people.

We have not the space in this lesson to show the fallacies of evolution, the contradictions of atheism and humanism, and the foolishness of all the proposed "explanations" of the origin of life put forward by those who deny God and scoff at the Bible. But consider one or two additional matters.

Every science book ever written is soon out-of-date because of new findings. But not a line of God's Word has to be altered.

(Modern versions are busy destroying the Bible by changing the Word of God.) But the Word of God endureth forever just as Peter taught in First Peter 1:25. Not a word has been proven false. Not a doctrine needs to be changed to satisfy what can be demonstrated by science. Why follow the altering and declare it to be right, but discard the unalterable that has never been shown to be wrong?

Nobody living was present at the beginning. We must rely on revelation. That revelation must have been shown to be reliable and trustworthy. This the Bible has been demonstrated to be time and time again, generation after generation, with evidence atop evidence.

God

The origin of life is God. The idea that blind forces, without plan, accidentally, touched off something unknown, and all that produced a single cell from which every form of life has gradually and naturally developed is about as stupid and unscientific as a person can get. Such a doctrine fits nothing accept the deep longing of the rebellioius heart that wishes to "do his own thing," being accountable to nobody, and therefore, must come up with something to show that God does not exist and the Bible cannot be true. So the efforts continue, and always with the same futility.

We must recognize, however, that more and more atheists are now contending that the explanation of origins is "irrelevant." They do not see the need for that anymore. We wonder why they reached that conclusion after they made such strenuous efforts to show the origins! Could it be that it overpowers their atheism when the evidence is presented? We are inclined to say so, and forthrightly insist that the Biblical explanation of origins, Almighty God as Creator, fits every fact, is reasonable, conflicts with no truth, and is the reason there is dignity to the human being and purpose in life.

† † † † †

"He who is not liberal with what he has deceives himself when he thinks he would be liberal if he had more."

"Trying times are times for trying."

What Hinders You From Being A Christian

"Then he said unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many; and sent his servant at suppertime to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." (Luke 14:16-24).

The problem with those that were invited to the supper was that they permitted other things to hinder them. Jesus was teaching people who were allowing other things to keep them from following Him. They were offering all kinds of excuses, however absurd and ridiculous they might have been. Yet, even in their rejection of Christ they felt secure.

There may be those who have hindrances before them that they need to overcome in order to become a Christian. We want to consider some of the excuses that are most often given by people who have heard the Word, but still reject it and do not obey. We want to see how flimsy excuses are when it means the damnation of the soul. We hope to remove any excuse any reader may have who has not yet obeyed the gospel.

No Need

Excuse number one. "I do not see the need. I am a good moral person. I take care of my family's needs. I am a good citizen, obey the law, pay my debts. My life's work is going well.

What else can I need?"

Is it not ironic that some will let the blessings they have received from God keep them from God? Yet, some do this. Certainly morality is necessary and meeting duties and responsibilities is honorable. Many people could list many evil things that they do not commit. But they have a distorted picture of themselves. One cannot be good enough to save his own soul by his own goodness. (Titus 3:3-5). He must come to Christ because He is the only way provided for salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

When Peter preached to the Gentiles in Acts 10:1,2, he talked about what they ought to do (verses 6,33). Cornelius was one of the best moral people of whom you read in Scripture. But he was lost because he was out of Christ. Material things were well with him, but spiritually he was separated from God. He, like all others, had sinned (Romans 3:23).

It would be a tragedy if you did as did the "rich fool" of Luke 12 who mistook his physical abundance to be spiritual adequacy (Luke 12:19). You really are not seeing your true situation if you think you can live your life successfully outside of Christ. Salvation is "*in Christ.*" (Second Timothy 2:10).

Not Good Enough

Excuse number two. "I am not good enough to be a Christian. There are some changes I must make first." There may be an element of truth in that. You, nor anyone else, is good enough to be a Christian. Nobody can ever deserve salvation. You must make a change of mind, which is repentance, before you can be a Christian.

But if you think you are going to overcome all your faults before you come to Christ, rest assured that you will never be a Christian. A Christian is not a perfect person anyway, but one that is *"in Christ"* and keeps on trying in faithfulness. We will never be sinless. We shall always be in a constant struggle against our adversary the devil (First Peter 5:8). Just what makes you think you can defeat the devil by yourself? He is more powerful than any of us. This is why we need Christ. It is a no win- sure loss situation to stay away from the Lord until you think you have overcome everything.

Lack Knowledge

Excuse number three. "I do not know enough yet." Again, that may be true. There are certain things one must not only know, but believe and be willing to obey, in order to be a Christian. But to think you have to know everything is to leave no room for growth.

While talking with a person one day about becoming a Christian she expressed her intent to understand Revelation before she took the step. Well, the devil will surely get her if she sticks to that.

Those who came to Christ in New Testament times had some religious instruction and background. None of them were "cold turkey" conversions. The nearest thing to such as that would be the jailor at Philippi, and even he had things explained to him real well before he acted. Most responded favorably after one lesson. But that lesson included a great deal. It is a mistake for anyone to misguide another into thinking they are converted by just telling them a few things, getting them into the baptistry, and leaving them in their religious and denominational error. This has happened so many times.

The one who thinks he does not know enough is to be commended for realizing that there is something he must know. There is a remedy to that, however. A through study session will remove that problem. Every reader will know enough after reading this lesson to become a Christian.

Pleasure

Excuse number four. "I want to enjoy my pleasure first. There is no hurry, and there is time enough yet. I intend to be a Christian but I want my freedom a little longer." This person just loves the world more than the Lord. He is deep in his sinfulness. Many young people have been led to believe that they have plenty of time. They have been taught that being a Christian is a boring, dull, joyless life. What a mistaken concept!

Yes, the pleasures of sin must be forsaken. But sin is what damns us. If one prefers sin to salvation, not much else can be done for him. He will just have to reap what he is sowing. But it is a surety, that being a Christian does not mean leaving anything good or worthwhile. Folks just must get their values and priorities in harmony with God rather than the devil. Until they do they will remain lost. If death overtakes them in that state, there is not one word of hope in the Bible for their souls!

Hypocrites

Excuse number five. "There are too many hypocrites in the church." Faithful brethren will resound with a hearty "Amen" to that. This is another point of truth. If there is even one, that is one too many. But think for a moment. Shall you allow one who fails in his duty keep you out of heaven? How have you benefited that way? Are you sure those you consider hypocrites are not just weak, struggling Christians who are sorely tempted, but keep trying? Do you not realize that in hell you shall associate with hypocrites throughout eternity?

Name one activity in life where there are not hypocrites! Name one. Yet, we do not run away from everything in life just because some are not what they ought to be. Some doctors are "quacks." But shall you refuse all doctors on that basis? Some cars are "lemons." Will you walk instead of ride? Some growers are scoundrels. Will you quit eating food? Come, now. Be fair and reasonable. Is it not that you are hiding behind hypocrities.

It is noble and commendable that you do not want to be a hypocrite and realize their damaging influence. It is good that you realize how you must live a faithful life once coming to Christ. Some have evidently not learned what you already know. But to hide behind someone else's failure will not save your soul. To hide behind the hypocrite might indicate he is bigger than you are or else you could not hide behind him. Christ died for you. Shall you refuse Him because somebody else refused to live up to their obligation?

Which Church?

Excuse number six. "I do not know what church to join." Well, hold it right there! Don't join any. Are you surprised at this advice? You need not be. Nobody "joined" any church in the New Testament and nobody "joins" the church of Christ. When people obeyed the gospel in the Biblical record, God added them to the church (Acts 2:47). They did not go out here and join anything. You can join denominations, but not with God's approval. You have never read in the Bible about any denomination. Why fool around with such as that?

Christ built only one church (Matthew 16:16-18). He is the head of the body (Colossians 1:18), and the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), and there is only one head to the one body (Ephesians 4:4,5). Nobody ought ask anybody to be a

member of anything of which you do not read from the Bible. Hear the Word, believe the Word, obey the Word, and God will add you to His church.

Waiting

"I am waiting for God to call me." Well, you must have been taught the false doctrine that God is going to save you by some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit. God has already called you. He calls us through the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:13,14). The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). We are saved by the Word (James 1:18,21).Your problem is not that God has not called you. You have not understood how He calls.

Jesus said those that come to God are drawn to Him. Then He tells us how we are drawn. "*And they all shall be taught of God. Every man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*" (John 6:45). When you read your Bible, hear the gospel preached, that is the means and method God uses to call men to Him. You have been called. You just have not yet answered that call.

When our youngest child, Sam, was but a very small boy, he was playing in the next room and I called him. He got quiet but did not answer. I called again. Still quietness reigned and no answer. I called rather firmly the third time and he ran to where I was and said, "I'm sorry, Daddy. I did not hear you the first two times." Many people are like that. They have heard God's call time and time again, but they just have not yet come.

Can't Hold Out

Excuse number eight. "I'm afraid I cannot hold out." Congratulations! You realize the necessity of remaining faithful. That is a big step forward. Sincerity of purpose is essential and you have attained that already. This attitude will be a assist to you in remaining faithful after you obey. But whereas you are afraid you cannot be faithful, you must remember that God has never asked anything of us that we cannot do, with His help. He says, "*Be thou faithful...*" (Revelation 2:10). Therefore, we both know that we can. It may not always be easy, but it is always possible. Just listen to God and trust His Word.

Opposition

Excuse number nine. "But there will be those who oppose me doing this. My parents object. My friends will not understand. Furthermore, I will be condemning others who did not obey."

Your problem is easily detected. You have to decide who is going to have first place in your life, God or somebody else. Jesus knew that problem would arise and taught that allegiance to Him must always be first (Matthew 10:37).

You can be assured that everyone may not approve. Again, you have to decide who you intend to please, God or man. Being a faithful servant of Christ may mean you will not please many other people(Galatians 1:10). But is hell worth it? You have to decide.

Your true friend, those that know the truth and love your soul, will heartily approve. Others either do not care for the truth or may prefer that you remain in sin with them, not understanding the important matters of life. But you have to realize that to *"fear God and keep His commandments"* is man's whole duty (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

As for you condemning anybody, where did you get the idea that you can condemn anybody? God attends to that, just as He attends to the salvation of those that come to Him. Your obedience to the Lord is not the way anybody is condemned. That is the way you are saved. If others refuse to obey, that is between them and God. But whatever you do, or refuse to do, is not going to affect the souls of those who have lived and died out of Christ. The only ones you will affect are those around you now. What will your influence be? Will you say to them by your deeds, "Serve the Lord," or will you say, "Keep serving the devil?"

You are probably right in thinking that being a Christian will not be popular. You can be religious and be popular, but your popularity may dwindle considerably when you are a faithful Christian. This world is hostile to the way of Christ. So you have to decide. Will you go to heave pleasing God, or go to hell pleasing the devil and some others?

Intentions

Excuse number ten. "I intend to be a Christian someday." Today ought to be that day. Do you have assurance you will have tomorrow? Are you aware of the consequences of facing God unprepared? What do you have to gain to remain apart

from Christ even one more day? You can be sure that you have everything to lose by doing that.

Someone has said that the way to hell is paved with good intentions. Picture yourself before God and listen as you try to explain why you refused to be washed in the blood of His Son that died on your behalf. What will be His reaction when you say, "I intended to obey you someday." A little sober thinking will drive you away from that excuse in a hurry.

After all the excuses that can be mentioned and discussed, these and all others, we must ask, "So what?" Whatever be the excuse, the fact remains that you are lost until you come to Christ. You can excuse, excuse and excuse from now to judgment day and the fact remains you are lost and are on your way to hell until you obey the gospel. That can only be changed by your obedience. So whatever be the excuse, it will not do you any good whatsoever. It will destroy you.

But faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of your faith in Christ, and baptism in water into Christ for the remission of sins, you can be added to the Lord's church, become a child of God, have the hope of heaven in your heart upon living a faithful life *"in Christ."*

Unfortunately, the life's story of some people can be told in the words, "And he began to make excuse." Will that be the case with you? Or will you obey the Lord now?

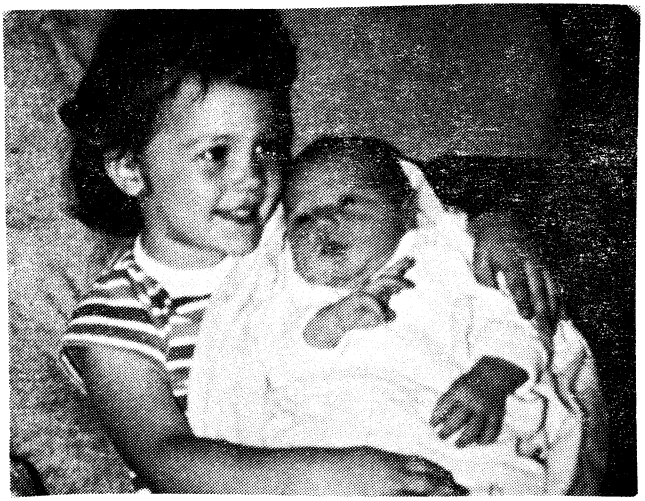
† † † † †

Words Should Equate Deeds

Many brethren are aroused at the sweeping digression being propagated among churches of Christ. They wish there was something they could do to stem the tide of apostasy among us. We share with them this same ambition. But we have misgivings about some of the means and procedures being suggested.

To have a big gathering of brethren to discuss the problems may have some benefit. But that benefit is severly limited when there is such compromise among those invited to participate. We have contended for a long while that too many brethren determine fellowship on the basis of friends, family, finances, fame and favoritism rather than the faith. Until there is an abiding willingness to practice what is preached, and unsound people no longer used in prominent places, the tide will roll on.

James Clifford Boyd

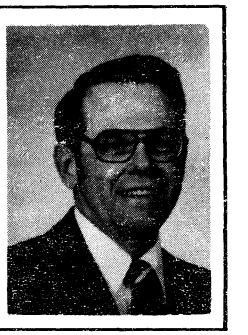


Pictured above with his sister is the latest addition to the Boyd family and our third grandchild. After two precious granddaughters, we are proud to have a grandson. Cliff was born October 14, 1985 to Bill and Lori, who are also the parents of Rose, who is holding her little brother. They live in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The other set of grandparents are Clifford and Jean Reel, who live in Oneida, Tennessee where he is the preacher for the church there. When I saw Clifford he said, "Did you hear the name they put on that child?" The baby is named after his two grandfathers.

Cliff weighed nine pounds and eight ounces, just one half ounce more than did his daddy when he was born. So we have a big, fine boy along with two wonderful girls, and there are two more grandchildren also on the way. You can see why it sometimes is hard to get my vest buttoned. What a wonderful crew we have!

Friends Of Our Foes



JAMES W. BOYD

Recent portrayals of the horrors of nuclear war produced a barage of propaganda from liberal clergymen for the U.S. to unilaterally disarm before the atheistic, communistic, inhuman and anti-freedom forces in the world. If clergymen knew as much Bible as they profess to know about foreign policy they might not give aid and comfort to those who would rob us and our children of liberty, truth and dignity.

How can some denounce our free land, yet seldom decry the murders, slaughters, plunder, poverty, wars, enslavement, atheism and destruction by renegades that weapons keep off of us? Let them take their cries to the Kremlin where these horrors originate. See if they even can protest. Something is wrong with people who use freedom to undermine the defense of it.

No sensible person wants war. But we have no confidence in those who deny God and believe mankind is nothing but an evolved animal. The permissive and libertine churches and churchmen serve neither God nor man when they echo barbarians who would crush everything we hold sacred. They dishonor those who won the freedom they abuse.

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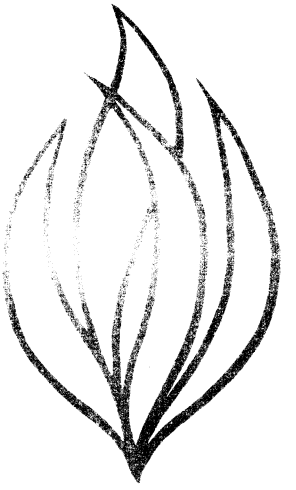
A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME V James W. Boyd **NUMBER 7**

A Consideration In Selecting Elders

It goes without belaboring that the seriousness of selecting men to serve as elders is greater than most realize. The future of the congregation is very much at stake. The salvation of souls hangs in the balance.

When selecting elders there must be a thorough knowledge of what the Lord has required in His Word regarding the eldership, and the qualities a man must already possess before he is made an elder by the congregation. We will not go into the matter of the seriousness any further, nor the many reasons why this selection must be made now and again. We want to focus attention on something too often overlooked in the selection.

The right selection will prove to be a blessing to the congregation. It is vital that only qualified men even be considered. Good leadership makes for a good church. The opposite is also true. A wrong selection can be a hindrance to the cause of Christ in a given area for a generation or more. It can disrupt an otherwise growing church. It can cause division, strife, decay, retardation of the efforts made to save souls. The history of the church in ancient times as well as our own day gives us ample evidence that this is so. Elder selection is a crucial moment in the history of any congregation.

Know The Qualifications

Inasmuch as every member is called upon to assist in this selection, every member ought to know what to look for and how to recognize a brother who would be qualified. We should never approach the attempt of selection without fervent, earnest prayer. We need God's guidance through His providence.

We need to be acquainted with the Biblical qualifications and what they mean. It has been my experience, and that of many others, that there has never been an elder to fail in his responsibility when that man was in possession of the qualifications that the Scriptures demand. It becomes evident too many times, and too late, that certain qualifications were lacking.

Attitude Toward Authority

But I want us to consider a matter that is not specifically listed in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1. But it has to do with something so closely connected with his work that none would dare deny that this qualification ought be given great consideration. What is the man's attitude toward authority? One with the wrong attitude here will cause trouble every time, sooner or later. We need to exercise caution, because it is a lot easier to put a man into the eldership than it is to get him out, especially when he has the wrong attitude toward authority.

Temptations beset elders just like other brethren. Many men give over to the base instinct of domination. Diotrophes was such a man (Third John 9.) Power can be used for good, but power also has the ability to corrupt. The love of exercising power is so universal that it takes an exceptional man to be proof against the misuse and abuse of the power and responsibilities he undertakes as an elder in the church.

Not Bosses

There is no caste system in Christ. There is no clergy and laity. There is no ecclesiastical hierarchy. There ought not be any "bosses" in the Lord's church. An elder is properly regarded as "first among equals." He is not a lord and master (First Peter 5:13). He should not have that "super-spiritual" attitude over others. When he gets the idea that the other members of the church are his "underlings" and to be bossed about as if they were his employees, then he has become diseased with egotism.

Elderships have authority. All authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 28:18). He is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). The apostles have authority as the Holy Spirit directed them. They were the Lord's ambassadors, with the power to speak in His name, on His behalf, and backed up with credentials. Their authority was delegated and limited to that which they were guided to do and speak. But they received all things that pertain to life and godliness (Second Peter 1;3).

Elders have authority also, as they function as an eldership. They are to rule (Hebrews 13:17; 5:17). Nobody can rule without authority. The authority of the eldership is not our subject but we only mention it.

Limited

But their authority is limited, prescribed. They are not given to arbitrary rule. We all need to know this. Elders need to remember that. Every man considered for the eldership must have distinguished himself in the recognition of just what his job will be and what is the nature of his work and authority. Too many act like they have been crowned king.

While a congregation is to submit to the rule of the eldership, nobody is required to submit to anyone who has overstepped his power. No church, nor any individual in it, is obligated before God to bow down to the personal whims of a self-willed, dictatorial, know-it-all tyrant. The man who is to be an elder must be Christ-governed, which requires he be humble, knowing his limitations of rule. He is to be a "team" man with the other elders, and a leader and example before the members. He is not someone given a position to "boss" other brethren. Believe me, there are those who obviously never knew that.

A Work To Be Done

The eldership is a work, not an office for exercising personal power. Too many elders act like they have been appointed to a lifetime job of sitting on the board of directors to hand out orders. People with such an attitude toward authority ought never be given authority in the church. He is to fulfill his duty, not go beyond his authority.

An elder is to be an example to the flock. He should say to others like Gideon said to his men, *"Look on me and do likewise."* He should be one on whom brethren could depend, could speak to in confidence without fear that the elder will stand as some kind of judge and master, and what is said will soon be noised abroad for all the gossipers in the church to pass along.

It is obvious that many "little" men have been made elders and they feel that they must someway "throw their weight around" and let everybody know that they are elders. It is clear that some elders are so unsure of themselves and uncertain about their work that they are jealous of their authority and had rather "show who is boss" than do their work.

Leadership

There are two ways to be a leader of a congregation, either guide or drive. A slave driver may govern his slaves with a whip,

but not so with godly elders. An elder is the custodiam of the faith and is not to attempt to direct and govern the entire mental, financial, and social affairs of the lives of others. He is not a confessor-priest.

Paul tells us that the selfish man is not to be chosen for duty as an elder, bishop, or overseer. *"Not self-willed"* is one of the negative qualifications of an elder. Self-willed means the man who delights in himself, has a self-loving spirit, centered on himself. Personal vanity, egotism, pride, bigotry, intolerance, are elements that are found in the man that thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think. He places his opinions on an elevated level above anything and everything else that anybody and everybody else may think. It has to be his way or not at all. He will not ever admit to possibly being at fault. He has a single dimension and that is whatever he wants. Such attitudes arouse disgust from other people and will bring a congregation to hardship when such a man is in the eldership. He just has no respect for authority because he abuses it, misuses it, and never learns to properly use it.

Cooperative

When selecting elders, seek out men who have shown themselves cooperative. Select men who have shown the ability to listen to the other person. This knowledge of another does not come quickly. It has been the case that men have been placed in the work of an elder without the congregation really having had ample opportunity to know how a man feels, thinks, and acts toward others and toward authority. Is he considerate of others? Some will play "politics" and almost campaign to be made an elder with sweetness, a most humble countenance, etc, until they are in, but then may the brethren beware. His dictatorial ways soon surface, and what agony and offense to brethren and the cause of Christ. We have seen it happen. Know the man well before entrusting to him the welfare of the congregation.

History will be me out. Older brethren who have had the unfortunate experience of dealing with such men will echo the warning. So much of the trouble that arises in the church is because of self-willed, dominant, dictatorial, boss-like, jealous, little men who have been unfortunately placed in the eldership.

You let someone like that get an off-balanced view on something, it is soon chaos. You let him be of a compromising

nature with worldliness, and nothing but trouble will occur for anybody in that congregation that loves the truth. You let him get a "bug in his bonnet" to rule or ruin a preacher, and he will do anything to accomplish just that. He just never did develop the right attitude toward authority. Once he gets the authority, the devil makes the most of it through him.

Keep these thoughts in mind whenever the matter of selecting elders arises in the congregation where you attend. Let the truth be known. Prevent problems by preventing self-willed tyrants from ever becoming elders.

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Extremism

We want to discuss extremism because we are convinced that extremism has, does, and will likely exist in matters of religion. Many times there are those who cry "extremism" in order to scare people. Other times extreme positions are allowed to go unchecked because extremism is not recognized for what it is. Standing for the truth is called extremism by those who do not want to stand for it. Anything other than allowing anything and everything is called extremism by some. There is no way to parallel extremism with upholding the truth. Extremism is a departure from the truth, either to the left or to the right. Can one uphold what is right too much? He may well fail to uphold many things that are right and neglect having a good balance. But when something is true and right and in harmony with God's Word, to attach a label of extremism, is to show contempt for the truth.

Not A New Thing

Every dispensation has been plagued with extremism. It soils the pages of religious history from the time of Cain until now. Jesus warned against extremism and extremists. He urged people to take heed and beware of the Pharisees and Saducees. Beward of the leaven of these groups. Beware of the leaven of Herod. Those were people who were extremists in their own day.

Isarel's history was marred with extremism. It went to one extreme that it apostatized from the way of the Lord. This extreme brought about their captivity into Assyria and Babylon.

Upon their return and under the leadership of Ezra, Nehemiah and others they returned to the ways of truth, only to see extremism go the other direction from the digressive apostasy and permissive sinfulness to an over-strict, man-made system of strangling traditionalism. Neither extreme was what God wanted for His people.

The history of the Lord's church, and that which has been called "Christianity" (although the term has been used to include many things that are so foreign to the faith of Christ), has witnessed extremism.

Leaving the doctrine of Christ, men banned together to teach the doctrines and innovations and inventions of men until after a few centuries that which developed is the Roman Catholic church with all of its hierarchy, centralized control, political power and even military power. This tyranny over mankind reached such a degree of human depravity that men broke the hold of Rome with the Protestantism Revolution and Reformation.

But what grew out of that except the multiplied churches and chaos and confusion of differing parties, names, creeds, etc. From the papacy to the paucity of Protestantism and denominationalism is the swing of the pendulum from one extreme to another. It went from "do what the pope says" to "do whatever you want to do."

These same ideas are reverberating through the religious scene today in the form of liberalism and legalism. Neither position is the New Testament position.

Jewish Extremes

In the days of Jesus upon this earth there were the extremes among the Jews. There were the Pharisees who went to the extreme of equating the traditions of men with the law of God. They were extreme in having little concern for the inward man and having total concern for the outward appearance, form, ritual and spectaculars that characterized the hypocrisy for which the word "Pharisee" has become synonymous.

There were the Saducess who were religious but were so extreme that they allowed most any kind of conduct. Quite a contrast to the strictness of the Pharisees. They even denied the

spirit of man, angels, the resurrection of the dead and life after this life. Thier philosophy was to eat, drink, be merry in the here and now because to them "today" was all that mattered. They were the self-indulgent rich and aristocratic element of Jewish society. God to them was far removed from any real interest in the affairs of man on earth.

A Jewish sect of which we read nothing in the Bible but which existed among some remote Jewish communities was the Essenes. This was more a monastic order that went to the extreme of removing themselves altogether from life, from society, from affairs of this world, going off into the wilderness and mountains to escape whatever they called bad. Whereas the Saducees disparaged human feelings and the Pharisees made religion a hard, dry form of ritualism, the Essenes relied almost entirely on their feelings, being mystical, unrealistic, cut off from the realities of the world in which they lived. Extremes everywhere abounded in Jesus' day.

Today's Extremes

There are modern counterparts of these things. There is the liberal idea that allows most anything. There are those who have more laws and rituals than one could even count, let along observe. There is traditionalism right alongside hyper-emotionalism and religious hysteria. There are those who rely almost entirely on how they "feel" about something, and then there are others that seem to think how you live is not so important so long as you follow some rituals and rules now and then. All such things are forms of extremism. None of them is totally void of certain elements of truth, yet none of them present the truth as it really exists.

It is a distrubing thought to be reminded that there are at least two wrongs for every right. Extremes to the left or to the right of truth are wrong. Right is generally between the two. Truth is always supposed to be the norm and the standard. Whenever anyone goes one way or the other away from truth he has adopted a sinful extreme. Standing for the truth, vigorously, aggressively, stedfastly, persistently, militantly, unwavering and determined is not extremism. It is expected by the Lord.

(We recently heard of one young college promoter who labeled a faithful gospel preacher as the most radical and extreme preacher in the brotherhood. It would surpise us if this young man even knew all the preachers, let alone who is the

most radical. But the reason this young man labeled this preacher in such fashion is because that preacher does not support the school which the young man promotes. There are those who determine soundness and faithfulness on the basis, "Does he support what I am doing?" If one does, he is a great fellow. If one does not, he is the most radical preacher in the brotherhood. Would this attitude of his fit the description of extremism? We think it would.)

Why do people go off into extremes? There are at least two reasons, probably many more. One, they almost deify themselves. Two, they misuse the word of God if they attempt to use it at all.

Some violate Paul's warning, *"...not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think."* (Romans 12:3). The proud, self-righteous, know-it-all individual will likely find his way into extremism. He cannot be taught because he is too smart already. Nobody knows what he does and nobody is likely to ever be as intelligent and informed as he is, to hear him tell you. Humility, modesty, a willing mind to learn are not parts of his character. What he does not know just is not worth knowing. Being deceived in self-deception that he is something that other people could never attain, assuming a god-like posture toward himself and others, he swerves from the left to the right as his whims direct. Let us face this certain reality. There are some people who just will not hear. Jesus met them. They existed then. Why should we think they are all dead and none shall

Many try to justify their extremism with the use of Scripture, or should we more correctly say, their misuse of Scripture. Scripture can be misused just like the devil misused it when he tempted Christ in Matthew, chapter four. Jesus put this misuse to flight by the proper application and correct use of Scripture. flight by the proper application and correct use of Scripture. Satan just gave part of the teaching, just that part that suited him, just enough to appear to substantiate his extremism, but not enough of it to show the real truth.

Rightly Divide

When Scripture is used it must be rightly divided and handled aright (Second Timothy 2:15). To change God's truth is to make it a lie (Romans 1:25). We must apply the test of Scripture, but we must keep Scripture in its context and use it in its fullness. It is the misuse of Scripture that supports the doctrine of "salvation

by faith alone." Yes, salvation is by faith, but to quote only passages that teach salvation by faith and leave the other passages that teach additional matters is to misuse the Scriptures to support an extreme and false position. A fixation on stray passages, lifted from their setting, produces the same dire results. Extremism is supported by the fallacy of fragments, taking only a part but not the whole teaching of God and not making proper application.

The Scriptures must either be blended together into oneness and unity or God has given us a book of confusion and He is the blame for religious confusion. The choice is not hard to make as to what God has produced. When Scriptures appear to jar against each other, you can rest assured some man has misused certain portions.

The only way we know to prevent extremism is to first, let God be God, and not try to displace Him. This is an interesting thought because whenever somebody condemns something this is one of the first things those in error will cry. "Let God be God. Don't try to play God." I insist that whenever anybody binds what God does not bind he is overstepping his limits. Let me also insist that when one looses what God has bound he is as guilty of trying to play God as the first one we mentioned.

If mankind would step out of making the standards and follow the standards God has revealed, this extremism produced by this self-inflated egotism that abounds at times would melt away. There is no room for tampering where God has spoken. This is one reason why the modern "versions" of the Bible are so hideously sinister. People are trying to play God by rewriting and editing in and out what they want regardless of what God has revealed.

There is a realm that demands the exercise of human judgment and this allows for varying opinions. We err if we attempt to bind a human opinion and tradition as if it was the same as the Word of God. Human wisdom and human opinion are not allowed, however, where God has spoken. A knowledge of the Word of God can be helpful to determine where God has already spoken. Man's reaction to God's directions should be that of submission and obedience.

The Only Solution

Following the New Testament is the only preventive and cure to the various forms of extremism that arise from time to time. It

is not within the purview of this lesson to deal specifically with the forms of extremism existing but to consider the concept of extremism whenever it exists in any form. Let us take the Lord at His Word and adhere to that and that alone. He neither went backward nor forward from the truth. He did not waver to the left nor to the right of the truth. He walked the line without fault.

Those who go into extremism do not have the blessing of taking God with them. We cannot overemphasize any truth. We can underemphasize much truth. We should preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26) and when we do extremism will not be one of the plagues that will follow us.

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Sin In The Early Church

Once again we solicit the help of our readers and ask that they read Acts 5:1-11. This is the basis of our study.

Sin is born of lust. *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:13-15).

God cannot sin. God cannot be tempted to sin because God is void of sinful lust. God does not encourage, seduce, entice, tempt men to sin. God does try the faithfulness of men (Genesis 22:1), but He does not lead men into the ways of sin.

Matter Of The Heart

The more a man's heart is rid of evil, the less he will be tempted to sin. For this reason we all need to constantly work on keeping the heart pure. As one grows in his love for what is right, the less attractive to him will be those things that are evil. He is able to put to death the sinful desires that find lodging in the heart. To put it another way, when we mature to the point that we *"abhor that which is evil,"* (Romans 12:9), the easier it is to *"abstain from all appearance of evil."* (First Thessalonians 5:22). When we love good and hate evil, we have gone a long

way toward spiritual victory in this life.

It is the heart that is the home and source of our desires. Whether good or evil, holy or unholy, all proceeds from the heart. *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, and evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."*(Mark 7:21-23). *"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he."* (Proverbs 23:7). It is not that a man is what he thinks he is, but a man is what he thinks. It is a matter of the heart.

All sin is against God. Did you notice that Peter told Annanias and Saphirra, *"Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."* (Acts 5:4). In one sense they had lied unto men. They had sold their land for a certain price and left the impression that they had sold it for another. They also left the impression that they gave the entire proceeds for the cause of Christ when they had determined not to do so. But more than other human beings were involved in their transgression. While they had attempted to deceive man, they had lied unto God; lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). We might add here in passing that this is a proof passage that the Holy Spirit is God or Deity. But the prime point at the moment is that all sin is against God. We find the same teaching with respect to the sins of David, but he said he had sinned against God (Second Samuel 12:13).

Jesus also showed us that doing good unto men is to do good unto God (Matthew 25:40). *"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."*

When Did It Start?

Just when was the design and intent to lie formed in the heart of Annanias and Saphirra? We are not specifically told. But it had to be at one of two times. It might have been conceived in their mind after the sale. Possibly they had originally intended to do what others were doing; namely, giving all. But once the money was in their hands, it looked bigger to them than they had expected. Their greed was kindled into a blaze. The love of money came to the foreground. This is not an uncommon occurrence among men; that is, to have good intentions but later withdraw from those intentions and do evil instead of good.

On the other hand, it is entirely possible that they designed from the beginning to attempt this deception to sell the land, with the idea that they would appear to give it all, when they

never really intended to give it all. But regardless of when they decided to lie, they determined evil in their hearts and failed to look for and find the avenue of escape that the Lord always has before us (First Corinthians 10:13).

While studying sin in the early church, we might spend some time *"classifying sins,"* and this is really a misnamed effort. By "classifying" we do not mean to categorize them as "venial and mortal" sins as does Romanism. There is no Biblical basis for such as that. Nor do we mean to convey that there are "big sins and little sins, white sins and black sins." Sin is sin, and sin condemns (Romans 6:23). It is obvious that all sins do not produce the same immediate consequences, nor do all sins spring from the same motive and circumstance. Our "classification" is simply according to the type of sin, as shall become evident.

Ignorance

There are sins of ignorance. The Jews crucified Christ in ignorance (Acts 3:17). Saul persecuted the church ignorantly (First Timothy 1:13). Paul preached, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."* (Acts 17:30). A violation or transgression of God's law is sin (First John 3:4) whether we are aware of it or not. Being ignorant does not excuse even though it may explain. But sins are committed because people do not know the will of God and violate it. But they can know and ought to know.

Weakness

There are sins of weakness. Not everyone in the church that sins does so because they are hypocrites. Sometimes it is because of a spiritual weakness. Living the Christlike life is a battle against evil. There are times when we bow to the provocations and temptations to sin. We sometimes let ourselves be influenced too heavily by others and we sin. Regardless of what leads us to sin, we are accountable before God and responsible for our transgressions. Our fear of saying "no" and being left out by the crowd is a manifestation of weakness. Striving to be like the nations round about is weakness. It leads to sins of weakness. Sin is sometimes committed because of a rebellious heart. Saul, first king of Israel, sinned in this fashion

(First Samuel 15:22). Arrogance, pride, defiance, deliberate rebellion, a stubborn refusal to submit to the will of the Lord, the determination not to sacrifice self, this is the reason many sins are committed. It is a love of the darkness of sin.

It is difficult to know just which classification the sin of Annanias and Saphirra belongs. God knows the heart. We can be sure that it was not a sin of ignorance, because it was easy for them to know that their actions were not right. They may have been weak, desiring the praise of others for being generous, but also desiring to hold on to their money. It could have been a sin of rebellion, wanting their own way rather than doing things God's way. But it really matters very little in the final analysis, seeing the outcome of their transgression.

Whatever was behind their sin, it was a terrible deed, and both were held accountable for it. Regardless of who first suggested the idea, they both "went along with it." Rather than helping one another get to heaven, which is one of the fundamental purposes in marriage, they helped one another go to hell. They failed in exercising the proper restraining influence on one another. It could have been a different story if either of them had been pure of heart.

Followed Satan

"Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie?" was Peter's question. As for Satan's design, it is evident he sought their condemnation. What Peter was really asking is, *"Why did you* allow Satan to have his way with you?" We may not always be able to keep Satan from planting ideas in our minds, seeing all the provocation to think evil that surrounds us. But we can keep that idea from being cultivated and nurtured until we follow through with evil. As someone has suggested, we may not always be able to keep a bird from lighting on our heads, but we can keep him from making a nest there.

Notice the record once again. Peter did not accuse Annanias of making a false statement about their giving. He did not ask him, "Did you sell the land for so much?" He asked Saphirra that, but not Annanias. But as for Annanias, he was guilty of attempting to slyly, quietly, pull off a deception. While Saphirra stated a lie, Annanias acted one, and both were guilty of lying.

The entire sordid event demanded the exercise of discipline. God exercised discipline against them. When they were accused and their guilt was evident, they fell down dead. They had

conspired to do evil, and were condemned individually for it. As far as we can tell, they had no opportunity to repent. God has not promised us opportunity to repent when we sin. What a risk we take when we sin!

The severity of their punishment should alarm us, as it did the early church (Acts 5:11). While punishment for sin is not meted out in such fashion now, let us not allow ourselves to drift into indifference about sin thinking that somehow God just might forget all about it with the passing of time. It all shall be uncovered (Matthew 10:26; Numbers 32:23).

Reaction To Discipline

"Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." (Acts 5:11). Because God showed His wrath against sin in the church, all had greater respect for the truth and for God. The strict and strong disciplinary measures did not "run people away," as is often the excuse some give today for not obeying God's command to discipline those who are wayward in the church today. Discipline, when handled the way that God has decreed, always strengthens the church, not the other way. It has been the experience of most brethren to know that the lost public does not fault the church as much for an occasional rise of hypocrisy in its ranks as it does the willingness to tolerate it and let it go unchecked. That really "turns people away." The lack of discipline against sin in the church brings reproach on the church as much as the sin does. When discipline is exercised, it brings glory to the Lord's church.

While liberality and generousity is commendable, honesty is also necessary. Having respect for the truth is mandatory. Deception is unbecoming a child of God. Having a good reputation is fine, but having a good character is more important. Striving for a pure heart always lessens the devil's opportunity to cause us to sin. Sin arises in the church because members of the church are still just poeple. But sin ought not be condoned. These things were learned from the event of Acts 5:1-11.

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Life's Unfulfilled Purposes And Unreached Goals

Deuteronomy 34:4, *"And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither."*

The Bible student will recognize this as a statement by the Lord to Moses as Moses was on Mount Nebo, soon to depart the walks of this life. For one hundred and twenty years he had lived, the last forty of which was spent leading Israel from Egyptian bondage toward the promised land. Now the land was before him, but he would not enter therein.

There are some Biblical scenes that are tremendously striking. Can you imagine the scene of Noah stepping into the ark prior the great flood, facing a destruction of the world? See Abraham as he is climbing the mount to sacrifice Isaac. Think about Joseph, sitting in prison for a deed he had not committed, a victim of lies and sins of others. What of David's lamentations over the death of his friend, Jonathan. Or his agony of heart as he wails at the death of his son, Absalom.

Sometimes we think of Job, as he sits among ashes, in sackcloth, suffering from the sores covering his body, but who would not deny God. It is a sorrowful scene to see the disciples turning away from Jesus as He was being led to His trials. Prior to that, the hideous deed of Judas as he planted a kiss of betrayal on Jesus. What can catch our respect more than the Christ hanging on the cross, and the earthquaking and darkness prevailing. Have you ever thought about Saul, in prison, only Luke with him, waiting to be killed?

Similarity Of These Scenes

Scenes like these are found so often in the Scriptures and all of them have something in common. They are the experiences of people who moved toward some great goal and objective, with noble motives and purposes, but there were interruptions and setbacks that deterred them. Such is the scene on Mount Nebo. Forty years he had led that complaining nation toward their homeland to be. When he reached it, he is denied

entrance. Tempted by the frustrations and complexities of his task, he had acted sinfully when he struck the rock rather than speaking to it for water; when he had credited himself, alongside God, for the blessings the people were receiving. (Numbers 20:10,11).

The point we wish to make is that the high and noble goals and purposes of life are often not attained, certainly not in this life. Moses was not the first nor the last man who has failed to reach his goal. Abraham did not live to see the fulfillment of the divine promise of the land. Nor did he live to see the "seed" through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16). David planned to build the temple to God, but was not allowed to do so, but only to gather some of the materials that would be used. King Josiah had fond hopes for a forlorn nation, but was killed in battle before he could accomplish his goals. Did Paul live to see the real fruits of his labors?

Even men of secular history in their worldly pursuits, men whose work was the springboard to many great things, did not live to see what they had been able to establish. Christopher Columbus died without knowing he had found a "new world." Schubert was composing an immortal symphony when his work was interrupted by the hand of death.

About Life

For each of us life is an interrupted story. It will be an unfinished symphony. Someone has said that life is not finished, it just stops. Our tasks are never fully completed. Many good resolutions and plans are never fulfilled. We die before we reach that for which we have set our hearts on doing. Eventually, a halt is called, and the goal goes unreached. It is sad, but it is reality. I even think about that as I set my plans to write out the sermons I have preached over my lifetime, with the intentions of putting them into booklets such as you are reading. Maybe I will get the job done, but someday, in the middle of some job, life will end. It is the same with us all. Let's face the reality.

We might see ourselves better if we would consider life as a link in the chain of God's eternal purposes. Getting Israel from Egypt to Canaan, God used not only Moses, but Aaron, Joshua, Caleb, Miriam, many more. A survey of history shows that God uses not just one person, but multiplied thousands in executing His determinations. I am not suggesting that God has

"programmed" us all like computers and we only "act out" what God has foreordained. That would be a concept contrary to the Biblical teaching of the free moral agency of man, his power of choice, his responsibility for his actions. What is being asserted is that we each play a relatively minor role, even though each part is vital and necessary. Like a link in a chain, one life by itself is not all that much standing alone. But when linked with the efforts of those who have gone before him, and those who will follow after him, his existence takes on a greatness and importance that otherwise we might overlook. One person steps into the vacancy created by the passing of the one before him, only to see that person later on step aside for his replacement. We are not workers standing alone, but *"workers together with God."*

We Come; We Go

As we play our part, do our job, take our turn, and then step aside, others will enter into our labors even as we have entered into the labors of those who went before us. We are therefore somewhat like the horses of the "Pony Express." A rider would take a horse and ride him for some distance, then the time would come for him to change horses and he would take another one further down the trail, and on and on it would go until the desired point was reached. Many horses were used in the process.

Again, we are somewhat like runners in a relay team. The first runner does his bit, then the second, then the third, and so on. Together they run the race and complete the course.

Elisha picked up the mantle of Elijah and continued as God's prophet after the great and fiery prophet, Elijah, was taken up from the earth.

After Moses died, Joshua entered into the picture, assuming the leadership left vacant by the matchless Moses.

It is like Paul stated, *"I have planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase."* (First Corinthians 3:6).

We are all heirs of great things that others have done before we came on the scene. We continue the good works they began. We hope that there will be others that will follow after us who will continue in the work that we have considered so important. If we attained heights that those before us never reached, it is because we are "standing on their shoulders." This should not only humble us in whatever good things we are able

to achieve, but also make us grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the "team" that keeps alive those things thats are worthy of living.

Weighed In The Balance

When God weighs us in the balance, He will not only consider what we may have accomplished, but also our motives in doing what we did. This is comforting and consoling, inasmuch as many times there be those who impugn motives of those who do good. In one sense, as one considers the life of Moses, he might be considered a failure. He gave up so much of this world to do what he did. He had to leave his home in Egypt for forty years. He struggled with Israel for another forty. And then he died, short of entrance into the promised land.

But when we observe him from the point of view of motives, he is among the greatest to have ever lived, and is a success in all that matters.

Consider the life of our Lord Jesus. Was His earthly existence a failure? When He left there were only a few score disciples. He had been put to death on the cross as a criminal. We can list a number of things that might make Him appear as a "failure," until we realize what He really accomplished; namely, the will of God in providing salvation for mankind.

What Matters

Our fidelity to principle, not what visible and material success we may have, is what is important in life. That is what matters. The door of Canaan was closed to Moses and he never reached that goal in his lifetime. But he entered into the safe keeping of God, into that eternal spiritual realm, into that state of blessedness and acceptance by the Lord. What could be better?

When brave Stephen died the martyr's death because of his preaching of the truth, his life came to an abrupt end, and all his ambitions he had for himself and his work were dashed forever. But he entered into a better country where *"the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."* (Job 3:17).

Paul once wanted to preach in Asia and Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit closed that door and sent him into Macedonia. There was a more fertile field and there he gathered a glorious harvest of souls.

When one door is shut in the face of God's faithful servants,

that servant will find another door standing ajar that will lead him to other things, more wonderful than he could have ever imagined. For you see, dear reader, there is no real defeat for those of noble and honorable purpose and motive, regardless of what attainments they succeed in making, or what goals and ambitions are cut short in the making. Even in the dark moments, they are but phases of an eventual victory. *"For I reckon that the suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18).

Reaching The Goal

Our greatest goal shall be reached, by the grace of God. There is no way to reach that goal in this life anyway. We must pass through the valley of death to reach it. *"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"* in its eternal state. It is only after we have served our time and our turn faithfully that we shall rejoice with the redeemed in heaven forever and ever.

So let us take heart concerning life, our goals, our motives. We may not climb to the heights that we envision for ourselves. We may not see the day that our efforts are rewarded here on earth. But let us *"fear God and keep His commandments"* in this life, and everything that really counts will be ours for eternity. *"Believest thou this?"* (John 11:26).

† † † † †

The Importance Of Bible Study

Another lesson on Bible study? Does not everybody already know that Bible study is important? The answer is, "No." Most people do not know it is important. Most people never, or at best seldom, study the Bible. Many who say they believe the Bible never do much more than read a bit from it. Many members of the church do not believe Bible study is important. How would I know that? Because when opportunities are offered to study the Bible they cannot be found taking

advantage of it. So, this deplorable situation existing like it does, why should there not be another lesson on Bible study?

Regardless of what field of endeavor you are considering, knowledge is power. But to know reguires diligent study. Knowledge is not gained in a single bound, but by persistent, insistent study.

With the amount of things that can be known in the world, it is certain that no man can know everything. (Some may like to have you think they do, but they do not.) Each one therefore must pursue knowledge in the field of his interest. But every person needs to have knowledge of that which pertains to the soul and eternity.

Man is both spiritual and physical. Paul speaks of the outward and inward man (Second Corinthians 4:16). Matthew 10:28 speaks of the body and soul. Mark 8:36. *"For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"* Is is not apparent from these verses that man is body and soul, and the soul is more valuable and important than the body? The reason the Bible is so important is because it deals primarily with that part of man which is the most important.

It Is Commanded

God has commanded that His word be studied. That ought be sufficient reason in itself for us to study if we never learned any other. Isaiah 34:16, *"Seek ye out the book of Jehovah and read."* First Timothy 4:13, *"Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."* Ephesians 5:17, *"Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is."* And how were those Ephesians to find out what God's will was? *"Whereby when ye read ye shall understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ."* (Ephesians 3:4). *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."* (Colossians 3:16). *"Study to show thyself approved unto God..."* (Second Timothy 2:15). It is said of the blessed man in Psalm 1:2, *"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night."* In light of such teaching from the Word of God, cannot we see neglect of Bible study is to disobey God?

Fruits Of Ignorance

Next, let us take note of the consequences of ignorance, and follow that with what knowledge through study does for us. Paul

was speaking of Gentiles at the time that they were alienated from God, Ephesians 4:17-18, *"This I say therefore and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."* Lack of knowledge produced vanity, alienation, void of understanding, possessing no ability to distinguish between right and wrong.

Hosea 4:6, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me, seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."* Ignorance means to perish. The consequences of ignorance does not just affect one generation, but generations that follow. Parents ought take note of that. When parents do not know the will of the Lord, they will not teach it to their children. Somewhere that vicious cycle of generation after generation living in ignorance and dying in sin must be broken by the gaining of knowledge of God's will.

Ignorance will cause us to neglect what we ought to do, and do what we ought never do. We can offend the Lord while we are thinking we are serving Him. Jesus said to His disciples, *"These things have I spoken unto you that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me."*

Saul, the persecutor of the church, and later the apostle Paul, said, *"I thought verily within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."* (Acts 26:9). Peter told the Jews, *"And now brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it* (crucified Christ, JWB), *as also did your rulers."* (Acts 3:17). Can't you see what ignorance will lead people to do?

Fruits Of Knowledge

On the other hand, consider the immeasurable benefits that knowledge of His Word produces for us, keeping in mind that this knowledge is available but only through Bible study.

Psalm 19:7, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul."* Man in sin must change. He must be converted (Matthew 18:3). Where is the power to convict and convince men of sin and that Jesus is the Savior? The gospel is that power (Romans

1:16). It is the law of God that saves.

Sometime take your Bible and read the longest chapter in the Bible. I cannot say that it is the longest because of the emphasis of it, but there is nothing more important than what the 119th Psalm teaches. Verse after verse has reference to the Word of God in some form or another. Only a couple of verses do not refer to the Word of God. And verse after verse shows us the relevancy and benefit of the Word of God.

Peter teaches that we are purified by the Word of God. "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth...*" (First Peter 1:22). Man in sin is defiled and impure. He cannot enter heaven like that (Revelation 20:27). Where is the power that will make him clean? The power is the blood of Christ. And where do we read about that blood? In the Bible. Where do we learn how to apply that soul-cleansing blood? Only from the Bible. Can't you see the importance of Bible study and Bible knowledge?

Being spiritual beings, we must have spiritual nourishment. "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Father.*" (Matthew 4:4). First Peter 2:2, "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*" "*But grow in the grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" (Second Peter 3:18). Spiritual growth is in direct proportion to one's knowledge, and then the application of that knowledge in life. The reason so many members of the church who are weak remain weak is because they do not take on the food God has provided to make them strong. What can you expect from a person except sickly, lukewarm, haphazard service when they refuse to feed on God's Word? They are spiritual pygmies and will remain so to their ruin. We cannot enjoy the Lord's approval and we deny ourselves so many of the Lord's blessings by our persistent lack of knowledge and understanding that could be ours if we would study the Bible.

Our Lamp Of Life

When we study the Bible we have a guide in life. Jeremiah 10:23, "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.*" If the Bible did not say it, history is there to prove it. "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" (Proverbs 14:12). People are so easily deceived, and

that includes both me and you. We need a guide in life.

"*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway.*" (Psalm 119:105). We live in a world of sinful darkness, but Jesus Christ is the light of life (First John 1:6,7). We have a roadmap to heaven if we would only study and follow it. That "map" is the Bible.

The message of God in the Bible gives us hope to an otherwise hopeless and useless existence. How important is hope?. "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*" Romans 8:24. "*For we are saved by hope.*" That is how important hope is. We are saved by hope. The hope that we have through Christ, that is revealed in His Word, is what keeps us pressing on the good fight of faith and not quitting. Take away that hope, found in the Bible, and what do we have left? This life would be all there was to our existence, and there would be no purpose, no meaning, no reason to it, we would have come from nowhere, here for nothing, and going nowhere. What a miserable thought!

Our hope provides us the motivation to do the good that we do, to refrain from doing evil, to remain faithful in service to God. Our hope is both sure and stedfast (Hebrews 6:19). And how does this relate to knowledge of the Bible? The Bible tells us of our hope, gives us the evidence of the surety and certainty of that upon which we have based our hope, and tells us how to lay hold of that hope. If informs us of the assurance of the things hoped for.

No Knowledge--No Salvation

Knowledge of the Bible is indispensable to salvation. "*Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*" (John 8:32). From this statement of our Lord I know that we can know the truth, and I know that to be free from what would destroy us we must know the truth.

James 1:21, "*...receive with meekness the implanted word that is able to save your souls.*"

Second Timothy 2:15, "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" How can we rightly divide that of which we know so little? How can we show ourselves approved without rightly dividing it? Can't you see how knowledge of the Bible is so important, and that this knowledge comes only

through study?

Second Timothy 3:15 teaches that the Holy Scriptures make us wise unto salvation. Jesus admonished, "*Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life.*" (John 5:39). So this means that whether we study and learn is not a minor matter. Knowledge cannot be trifled with, and is it not amazing that there are people even in the church who have to be begged to study the Bible?

Finally, even though we neglect the study of the Word, we will meet it again someday at the Judgment. Ignorance is no excuse (Acts 17:30). Jesus said, *"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day."* (John 12:48). "*The word of God endureth forever.*" (First Peter 1:25).

In the Judgment books shall be opened, and out of these books shall the judgment be made. One of the books will be God's book, the Bible (Revelation 20:12). How wise we are to gain knowledge of that by which we might be ready for that day for that day to come. It is coming and we shall not avoid it.

We applaud efforts that encourage Bible study. Our very relationship with God depends upon it. So we present you these thoughts with the prayer that this lesson on the importance of Bible study will provoke each of us to study in a more diligent fashion than ever before.

† † † † †

"Treat Me Special"



JAMES W. BOYD

"Treat me special," is the cry of some. Especially when I have been wrong. Even more so when I have been wrong openly and publicly. "Treat me special" even if you have to ignore your duty to do so. This is the way some who say and do erroneous things before all would evidently prefer to be handled, if anybody dared to correct the errors they are propagating. Sin openly, but correct it in a corner is what some seem to think is due them.

When Peter sinned in Antioch regarding his disassociation from Gentile brethren, Paul corrected him "*before them all.*" Was Paul just trying to create trouble? No! Peter had already created the trouble by doing things openly and publicly which were wrong. Paul knew such things must be corrected just as openly and publicly. This was not a private spat between Peter and Paul. It was a matter of false doctrine and false practice. The teaching of Matthew 18 dealing with personal disputes did not apply.

Faithful brethren will not be intimidated by public wrongdoers who demand all correction be handled "quietly."

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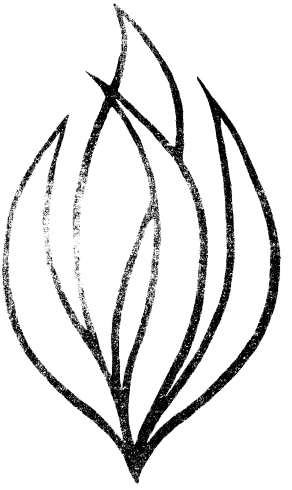

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME V James W. Boyd **NUMBER 8**

Dwelling With God

One of the values of the study of the Old Testament is to learn the unfolding of God's eternal purposes. We can also observe principles of God's dealing with man that transgress dispensational lines. Seeing the record of the Old Testament we can better appreciate the truth of the New Testament. But in addition to all of this, there is the benefit of feeding on the rich spiritual messages found therein.

"For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shiled; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Psalm 84:10,11).

The book of Psalms is a book of spiritual revelation and beauty. The words are majestically religious with a treasure of soul-stirring passages. Little wonder it is the favorite book of many people with favorite verses therein. It provides a wealthy reserve of divine strength and is deserving of our serious meditation.

Most of the Psalms were written by David, but not all. We are not able to determine exactly who is the author of each one, but that is of no real consequence since, "*all scripture is given by the inspiration of God.*" (Second Timothy 3:16).

An Absentee

This eighty-fourth Psalm seems to have been written by one who had been deprived entrance into the house of the Lord, at least temporarily. The psalmist leaves the impression that he had been absent from public worship and was longing for communion with the Lord. He shows his love for the house of God in the first three verses. " *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God.*"

He shows the happiness of those who continue in the assembly for worship in verses four through seven. *"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee.*

Selah. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well, the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."

The valley of Baca was a valley through which travellers passed as they came toward Jerusalem to worship. They were made happy and blessed by the refreshing waters there in anticipation of the worship of God.

Verses eight and nine are almost an outburst of joy from a longing soul. *"O Lord of host, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah. Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed."* There is quite a disposition difference in people. Some are much freer to express outwardly their emotions than others. But should we not all strive to cultivate our emotions to respond to that which is high and holy and good whether we do so outwardly or inwardly?

Emotions

Everyone possesses an emotional nature. Some emotions are common to all. Some should be cultivated while others need to be culled from character. There are the emotions of hate, envy, jealousy, conditions of the heart that are not to be cultivated but uprooted as weeds from a bed of lovely flowers, and be cast out and burned. On the other had, there is love, sympathy, joy that should be cultivated for they are as the flowers and the emotions of goodness. The psalmist knew what is meant to be in God's service and consequently was capable of knowing the joy and radiance to be found when in His service. He had grown to appreciate the privilege of worship.

"A day in thy courts is better than a thousand." Better than a thousand what? Better than a thousand days elsewhere? This is the outcry of one who loved to worship God. One day in that special presence of God was considered better than all other days spent anywhere else doing anything else. Such devotion and loyalty to the praise of God is seldom found in the hearts of mankind. What a contrast to some today who evidently consider even one hour too much to be involved in worship of God. Who among us looks with admiration and appreciation for the time of worship as did this psalmist? Was he unreasonable and fanatical, or was he one who loved the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind and strength?

What is it in your life that is dearer to you than serving God in periods of worship? Would the psalmist ever be such a person that would ask, "Do I have to attend on Sunday night?"

"I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." He had not worldly ambitions for wealth, power, fame and fortune. He would not go the ways of sin to get the gain that this world offers. He preferred the company of God than all the gaiety, pleasures, feast, frolics and foolishness that this life can give. He did not seek to be "brother Big" and prominence. He was humbly grateful to serve even in the lowliest ways, as a doorkeeper. Some folks just will not cooperate and do anything unless they have "the chief seats" and the most recognized.

Worship

When the psalmist came for worship, he came to adore the Lord, not seek himself and the admiration from his fellows. He came for the spiritual stimulation and uplifting that follows true and sincere worship. He did not come to "feel good about himself." He wanted to be in God's house because God was there.

His attitude toward God is what made him have this devotion to God. *"For the Lord is a sun..."* that is, his source of light, guidance and warmth. Some do not really want to worship God because God is not their guide. At best God is allowed to be a part-time guide, and only then when it is convenient with other plans and ambitions. God was the course of spiritual light to this inspired writer. As the moon and stars derive their radiance from the sun, so that which is good derives its beauty and goodness from God, the Sun.

The psalmist calls God *"a shield."* The Lord was his protector and defense. It was evident to him that the Lord cares for His own. *"The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me."* (Hebrews 13:6). *"If the Lord is for us, who can stand against us?"* (Romans 8:31). Our God is greater than all of our enemies.

Furthermore, the *"Lord will give grace and glory."* God extends to His people unmerited favor, and when that favor is seized by obedience to the gospel , God purifies the soul from sin and pardons iniquities. In a redeemed state we are glorified and shall be glorified when the Lord comes again.

James said that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). In Psalm 84 it is stated, *"No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."* We must take note of the conditional nature of this assurance of receiving good things. It is given to those who walk uprightly, which means an active obedience on the part of man. There is that which man must do. All these benefits are extended to "*whosoever will,*" but they are to be enjoyed only by those who live the kind of life that God wants mankind to live. To walk uprightly means to walk according to the truth with sincerity. Paul wrote, *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."* (Ephesians 4:1). Again he wrote, *"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."* (Colossians 1:10). In these passages he has reference to one's manner of life and behavior.

Each of us will dwell or live in some fashion whether with the Lord or separated from him. The writings of this psalm encourage us to dwell with God and be a worshipping servant of God, living a life that is pleasing to God, and receiving the blessings given by God.

† † † † †

Concerning The Eldership

The qualifications that men must have in order to serve as elders are revealed in First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Without quoting the entire passage here, it is our intent to discuss each of these qualifications one by one.

Let us preface our remarks by emphasizing the importance of the selection of qualified men to serve in this capacity. They are watchmen for the souls of others. They are to oversee the affairs of the entire congregation. If they fail, souls will be lost. When they succeed, it will likely mean the salvation of many that would otherwise be lost. Men seldom, if ever, assume a greater responsibility than when they undertake the work of an elder. None will stand before God with the necessity of presenting a worthy record more than an elder because God expects so

much from them.

Asking a man to be an elder is no way to bestow some honor or power to an individual. We do not do a man a favor to ask him to serve when he is unqualified to serve. We place his soul in danger to do that. He must weigh carefully his acceptance. When unqualified, he does best to refuse it. While you offer a man great opportunity for service by asking him to be an elder, you also do him an injustice to suggest he serve when he is not prepared and qualified. The magnitude of the matters we are considering cannot be overemphasized.

A man is to possess all of the qualifications Paul has written and possess them to a recognizable degree. Certainly some of the qualifications are matters of degree, but they must abide prominently in a man's life. There must be consideration of his family and his relationship to his family. While there is no reason to omit any qualifications, in those areas where degree is obvious, we must consider room for growth. God does not ask for the impossible, but the qualifications He specifies are high and strict.

He must be blameless (First Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). God does not demand perfection for this would eliminate all men. But one must be known for his integrity, purity and honesty in life. There should be no justified reproach that could be brought against him. His record in life must be such that no blame can be placed to him for wrongdoing.

He is to be vigilant or temperate. This means he must be attentive, self-controlled, one who is not given to extremes in habits, behavior, attitudes or actions. An elder should have a constant and even disposition. He ought not have too wide a range of feeling lest his judgment be adversely affected. He must have control over himself, his appetites, his temper and be about the same kind of man at all times, not too easily influenced by the heat or the cool of the moment.

He is to be a man that is not soon angry, no brawler, no striker, no wine. He is not a pugnacious person, looking for a fight. He does not "fly off the handle." People who are easily offended, who immediately take a hostile attitude toward others that may differ with him, will bring reproach on the church. He does not involve himself in brawls and physical violence. He does not cloud his thinking with strong drink. He is to be gentlemanly, suited for spiritual guidance, able to offer counsel and advice.

Motives

An elder must guard his motives for being an elder. It must not be for filthy lucre or money. In New Testament times it seems that those who served were often supported in their physical needs by the church. Their time was given over to work which was assigned them and it prevented them from having time and opportunity to earn their livelihood as others. But none should seek the work of an elder for the purpose of a "meal ticket." Neither should anyone preach for that motive. Coveteousness is a common sin among men. The world seems to be in a mad frenzy to get, have, gain and prosper materially. One of that disposition is not good elder material. "*Where thy treasure is there will thy heart be also.*" (Matthew 6:21). Too often those who have made a financial success are considered qualified on the basis of that kind of success. Financial success ought not be a mark against a man, necessarily, but it is not a mark that proves him qualified for an elder. Many have too much love for money. People have been known to acquire their wealth in questionable ways, disposed of their wealth in questionable ways, and hold on to their wealth in questionable ways. Such men are not what is needed in the eldership. They are often greedy with their own money and if made an elder will act greedily for the funds of the church to the retardation of the work. Too much emphasis on worldly success is a handicap for any Christian, and certainly is for one who is supposed to be the shepherd of the flock.

An elder is to be given to hospitality. This presents an attitude toward other people. To translate this thought into other terms, it means he is a friendly man, genuine in his interest and concern for his people. It is not hard to be hospitable when there is love in the heart. He radiates his joy of giving for Christ and others can see it in his life. No "grump and grouch" ought be made an elder. Neither is his cheerfulness to be a veneer and an outward show. It must be sincere.Watching a man over the years will display whether his joy in Christ, his attitude toward others, is real or counterfeit and pretended.

In And Out Of The Church

An elder, or one who is considered for the work, should have a good testimony from those who are without the church. He will be a symbol of what the church is. Place a man at the helm and those who know him will evaluate the entire church accordingly. It does matter what other people think of him.

Some may hate him because he does good. But others may dislike him because he has given them legitimate reason to look upon him unfavorably. If the latter case be so, exclude him from being an elder of the congregation.

He ought not be a novice, a new convert, inexperienced in the affairs of the church. Age and experience are so vital to being a good elder. Serious mistakes have been made in congregations who have appointed men too young in years, or too unacquainted with the local church over which they are to serve. Let a man prove himself before those he shall guide before giving him the task of leading. Mistakes here will cost the congregations untold misery in time to come.

An elder must be sober-minded. This means he must be a person who has demonstrated the ability and good practice of using mature judgment. Hasty, flippant, flighty, quick, spur-of-the-moment decision are not characteristic of a sober-minded man. He thinks through matters cautiously and wisely, then draws conclusions based on the best evidence before him. He deals with others in a sober manner. There are many problems that come before an eldership involving the lives of those in the flock, and they must be the kind of men who will give each situation intelligent and serious consideration. While he must remain open-minded in securing all facts, he must be stedfast and consistent in his manner and methods. He cannot do his work if he is otherwise. He must be one capable of doing his own thinking and not be a "yes man" to others, or too easily influenced by others.

He Is A Teacher

An elder is to be "*apt to teach.*" This demands a knowledge of the Word, plus the ability to convey that message to others. One of the basic tasks of elders is to feed the flock. How can he effectively do this if he is not knowledgeable of what and how that ought be done? He is not required to do all the feeding for there are preachers and teachers given to this work constantly. But he ought be able to go before his people and publicly teach them the truth. The members of the church have a right to be able to look to him for guidance. He ought to be a person who will take a stand for the right, defend that stand, and openly proclaim it. Ignorance of the Word in the eldership is to invite digression. You let some smooth-tongued orator or a preacher come into the midst and there be nobody to resist him when he

takes off on a tangent, it will not be long before the entire congregation goes the way of error. God's safeguard against that happening is an eldership composed of men who can stand before brethren and expound the truth and put error to flight.

An elder is to be a man who is of good behavior. The American Standard Version says, "*orderly.*" Is the man composed, well-mannered toward all? A rude, coarse, disorganized and unsettled person will add no good feature to an eldership. He should do things according to some system of operation. He must know what he wants to accomplish and have means and ideas as to how to accomplish it. He is a man of action along orderly lines of work. His general behavior is to be good before all.

Not Self-Willed

An elder is not to be self-willed. To my mind this is one of the most important considerations in selecting elders. In our last issue we spent an entire lesson dealing with this matter because it is so deserving of attention. This may well be the source of trouble with elders as much or more than any other one problem as far as the person himself is concerned. What is his attitude toward authority and how well does he cooperate with others? Some men, once they get a little authority, just act like they have been crowned king of the jungle and they assume a dictator complex toward those around them, demanding that everything and everybody jump their way. They become tyrannical in their oversight. They consider everybody else as some kind of hireling or their employee and he lords it over them. Many elders feel the need to dominate, intimidate, harass and dictate to preachers in order to "show who is boss," as if they have been appointed to "bosshood." Especially is this evident when a preacher was on the scene before the man was appointed an elder. To show "I am the elder," he has to demonstrate authority in some way and often takes it out on the preacher.

This self-willed man also must contol the other elders or he will create tensions and strife. He must have his way on everything that comes along. He really does not know what his work is, and he has no concept as to his authority, its extent or limitations. He is so self-willed that what he does not know and think really is underserving of thought.

Lives of members, other elders, preachers and congregations

have been disrupted in ungraceful manners by men who were mistakenly placed in the eldership who showed themselves self-willed, egotistical, with only self-interest, even above the interest of truth. They become diseased with their quest for power and they ruin the whole church.

Elders must realize that they have authority, but only to see that the truth is upheld, error rooted out, the lost saved, the saved preserved faithful, and the fallen restored. Their decision are in matters of human judgment, not doctrine. They have the obligation of treating others in the spirit of the "golden rule" rather than in the spirit of "obey me because I am boss around here." Brethren need to know a man long enough to be able to know whether he is a team man or a self-willed individual.

Elders are to be lovers of good, just and holy. These terms do not need great elaboration for us to understand the nature of the character that is required.

His Family

The family of a man must be considered when thinking of him as a potential elder. He must have ruled his own house properly. He must have demonstrated the capacity to rule his children and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. His wife must be submissive to him. He must be the elder, not just the voice for his wife and family to "throw their weight around" in the congregation.

He must be a man who respects God's marriage laws. His children must be Christians. Possibly a man with children old enough to be Christians and some children not yet old enough may be qualified. But that is running a risk because it is likely that he is not experienced enough to undertake this work as yet. Give him time to develop and prove himself. His children yet under his roof may prove to be an embarassment to the church. What his children do after they leave his control is not altogether his responsibility. But even if they are unruly then, this is a handicap to him in being the kind of elder he needs to be. One child who is unfaithful can disqualify him. The term "children" is generic and a man with one faithful child meets the terms required. But all of his accountable children should be faithful. A wife-ruled, "henpecked" man is not elder material. *"If a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God."*

Where Fault Lies

The fault of unqualified men in the eldership lies with members who either do not know, or do not care, about the qualifications that God requires. It may also lie at the feet of men who are already elders who oversee the selection of additional elders but who set aside God's requirements for whatever reason. Ambitious and self-seeking men often "run for office" and when they get in, woe be unto the church! Better leadership begins with better respect for the Word of God on the subject. The spiritual qualities of a man are so vital in the role of spiritual leadership. They are more important that all his earthly attainments and notoreity.

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Summer Is Ended And We Are Not Saved

"The harvest is past, and summer is ended, and we are not saved." (Jeremiah 8:20).

Northern Israel had already fallen before Assyria but Judah remained. But Judah gave little heed to the fate of her northern cousins, ignoring the warnings of the prophets, persisting in her sinful ways with a brief exception during the reign of Josiah.

Jeremiah was one of God's great prophets, often called "the weeping prophet," because he mourned and grieved over the sins of the people, their rebellious hearts and stubborn ways that eventually and inevitably led to their doom and captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah faced the social and religious conditions of the land that were abominable in the sight of God. It was his task to condemn, warn, plead for repentance. *"See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."* (Jeremiah 1:10). *"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set a watchman over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the*

trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken." (Jeremiah 6:16,17). It would do well for us to read these words and compare the actions and attitudes of that time with those of our own nation today.

Judah's Condition

In chapter eight, verses five through seven and ten through twelve, we learn that Judah had degenerated below the level of fowls who knew the times of their migration, but Judah knew not the judgments of the Lord. Their false prophets and priests had deluded them with the cries of, *"Peace, peace, when there is no peace."* The enemy of destruction was already nigh upon them and there was no escape. The words of verse twenty are pathetic, forlorn, mournful, having a ring of hopelessness, doom and finality. Harvest time had come and gone. Summer had ended. They were not saved. What might have been and could have been a time of rejoicing and thanksgiving was a time of sadness, regret and despair. The salvation spoken of is a salvation from destruction by their enemies.

Originally, the words were used as a figure of speech to describe the spiritual state of Judah, using the harvesting of crops to illustrate. In Bible lands there was the spring harvest of grain. But should the spring harvest be lacking and lean, there was still hope for success with the summer planting and bountiful ingathering of summer crops. But in this picture the first harvest had passed with little success; the summer planting and growing season had also come and gone; the final harvest was lean; and there was not enough. The nation would face disaster, famine and even starvation.

The spiritual meaning of this illustration was that there has been a time and opportunity for Judah to repent and come to God for their deliverance. But they had not seized that opportunity. The opportunity to be preserved was not to be extended because the time had now passed for them to be spared. Harvest was past; summer was ended; and they were not saved from impending doom. They had waited too long.

Matters Of Concern

What would you suggest is the fondest hope of the heart in those who know the Scriptures and have some appreciation for the fact they are from God? We pursue many things in this

life, such as wealth, health, fame, fortune, pleasure, contentment, etc. We have many desires for ourselves, our children, our neighbors, the church, the world. But to those who view life as God has revealed it in His Word, there is one matter that exceeds all things in importance. We want that eternal home with God. "Earth holds no treasure but perish with using, however precious they be; Yet, there's a country to which I am going; Heaven holds all to me."

If this life stood alone and there was nothing else hereafter, the sum total of man's existence would be cruel and for naught. Consider the heartaches, pain, grief, disease, anxiety, war, disappointments of life, and then think that it all would end in the grave and nothing more. What a hopeless and useless episode! Death and the grave is the leveler of all, whether high, mighty, low, weak, poor, rich, strong, whatever. "*It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment.*" (Hebrews 9:27).

But those who serve God through Christ have a promise from God that gives meaning and purpose to life. "*Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*" (John 14:1-3). "*For great is your reward in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:12). First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is one of the great comforting and hope-giving passages of Scripture also. Without such assurances life would be void, waste and vain.

That one in sin is lost is a divinely revealed fact (Romans 3:23; 6:23). One cannot enter heaven in a sinful state (Revelation 21:27). Therefore, we must be freed from the bondage and enslavement of sin if we ever are to realize our greatest longing, a home in heaven.

Knowing that we need to be saved, but also knowing we cannot save ourselves by ourselves, because salvation is not by our own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5), it is wonderful to know there is a Savior, who is Jesus Christ. The gospel is that good news that Christ came to save us and we are saved by this gospel (Romans 1:16).

How Are We Saved?

Does the question arouse concern in your heart? Peter convinced and convicted his hearers on Pentecost (Acts 2) that

Jesus is Lord and Christ, that they were lost in sin. They cried out, "*What must we do?*" Whatever they did to be saved is exactly what we must do now.

God initiates our salvation. Salvation is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). Because of His love, mercy and grace we have the opportunity to be saved. "*For by grace are ye saved...*" (Ephesians 2:8,9). He commended His love toward us while we were sinners (Romans 5:8,9), allowing Christ to die for us. We are redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7). We are saved by the mercy of God (Titus 3:3-5). But how do we appropriate to ourselves the benfits of God's love, mercy, grace and the blood of Jesus Christ?

By faith we have access into this grace (Romans 5:2). By faith we have power to become sons of God (John 1:12). Salvation is grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8,9).

What does it mean to be saved by faith? In Acts we have a number of detailed accounts of people and how they were saved. In each instance the story is the same. Hearing the Word, they believe it and obeyed it. One must hear (Romans 10(17; Mark 16:15); believe (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6); repent (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; Second Peter 3:9); confess faith in Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9,10); and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; First Peter 3:21). Other references in addition to these could be cited, but this is sufficient.

Obedience

Upon man's obedience his sins are washed away (Acts 22:16); they are forgiven (Acts 2:38); he is added to the church (Acts 2:47); he is then in Christ (Galatians 3:27) where all spiritual blessings are (Ephesians 1:3). He rises to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3,4).

God afforded Judah opportunity to hear, believe and obey the way of salvation for them. They failed to pay attention to God and went their own way to their destruction. Eventually the time came when opportunity to be saved was forever gone. There was nothing left but doom for them.

Today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow may never be. "*Now is the accepted time.*" (Second Corinthians 6:2). Shall we take advantage of the opportunity we have, or shall we refuse to lay hold on what is offered us until at last it can be said concerning our souls, "*Harvest is past; summer is ended; and we are not*

saved."

While we have life, control of our mental faculties, having knowledge of what God has done and what God requires of us, let us not refuse Him any longer. Life is uncertain and death is sure. We need not be lost any longer.

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Talking Our Way To Hell

When I decided to preach the gospel an older gospel preacher advised, "To keep the church at peace, preach at least once a year on the sins of the tongue." He went on to explain, "Many will talk themselves into hell."

"A good man out of the treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of an evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. For I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matthew 12:35-37).

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." (Ephesians 4:29).

The reader is asked to read at this point in the lesson the entire passage of James 3:1-14 which also provides the Scriptural basis for our study.

Comparisons

In this last passage we find five comparisons made in defining the qualities and power of the tongue. It is like a horse's bit that is small, but used to guide the entire animal. It is like a ship's rudder, also relatively small to the rest of the ship, but by it the whole vessel can be directed. It is like fire. Fire can be helpful and can be harmful, depending on the way that it is used. The tongue is like a deadly poison that comes from the fangs of a poisonous snake. It is also like a wild and untamed beast that must ever be kept under control.

If we were near a rattlesnake or some wild beast we would use a great deal of caution regarding it. James is telling us that God expects us to use a great deal of caution regarding the tongue.

Proverbs 6:16 teaches that there are things God hates. Among them is *"a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."* (Proverbs 6:19). Earlier in the passage was listed *"a lying tongue and hands that shed innocent blood."* (Proverbs 6:17). This emphasizes the destructive power of the tongue. With it we can sow discord, tell lies, give false reports, create tensions and strife, and destroy harmony among brethren that shatters the unity that ought to exist. Treasured qualities can be blasted to the extent that they can seldom if ever be recovered when the tongue is misused.

Proverbs 16:28, *"A whisperer separateth chief friends."* Strong and good friends compose one of the strongest ties in human relationships. But this tie that binds can be torn asunder by the misuse of the tongue. Good friends can be set one against the other.

Proverbs 26:20, *"Where no wood is, the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer the strife ceaseth."* When you keep putting wood on the fire you provide the fuel necessary to keep it burning. We can also keep trouble brewing and perpetuate strife by putting fuel on it with talk. While some have said, "Talk is cheap," actually the results of talking can often be very, very expensive to many, many people.

It Can Defile

Notice James 3:6 that the tongue can defile the whole body. When a person talks first to one, then another, when he or she ought not be talking at all, he defiles himself or herself. We might find ourselves talking about something and about somebody except the only ones to whom we ought to talk if we talk at all.

James 1:26, *"If any man come among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."* This verse gives us a compelling reason for a study like this. Most of us, if not all who read these words or attend worship services, consider ourselves religious and are considered to be religious by others. Our very presence at worship indicates that this is true. This verse is directed toward those who are religious people. So what is said is a very applicable and relevant passage. Not every person that is religious is a Christian, but every Christian is religious. Now are we ready to receive the instruction James gives?

A religious person can have a big problem. We can be

deceived. The most serious kind of deception is mentioned in this verse; namely, self-deception. *"But deceiveth his own heart..."*

The result of this deception is that our religion can be counted vain. The word vain means useless, empty, valueless, of no real benefit or profit whatever. This ought to sober our thinking. Let us realize that there exists the real possibility that our whole religion may amount to nothing, be without any value to us, can be vain before God.

Vain Religion

What can make our religion vain? There might be mentioned a number of things that could make our religion empty, but here we are told that the failure to bridle and control the tongue can do it. Think of it! We can attend services of worship, eat the Lord's Supper, do good deeds for others, pray, and all the other things that compose following the way of the Lord, and make it all for naught by talking ourselves into hell.

Can we see how this ties perfectly with the words of Jesus, *"By thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned?"* Now we can understand how what we say and how we say it is of such importance.

All talk is not evil. All talk will not render our religion vain. What kind of talking will talk us into hell and make our religion useless? Some speech is obviously evil, such as cursing, lying, swearing, profanity, filth and vulgarity. Most people agree that this is improper. But we must hasten to add that many do not consider even this kind of corrupt communication to be of any bad consequence. We are forced to notice that many of our world use this kind of speech without restraint and with impunity. It is heard in private conversation, on television programs, seen written in books, magazines and newspapers. It is a shameful thing that our society present such "language" to the youth of the land as if this was a mark of being an adult. It is rather a mark of a sin-diseased society and individual.

One young boy was heard to say when he was asked if he cursed, "No. I know too many other words that I don't need to do that."

Another way men condemn themselves and others with their speech is through preaching and teaching false doctrines. We must realize that error can accomplish only one thing and that is our condemnation. The truth makes us free (John 8:32), but

following the ways of error cannot and will not save but can only condemn. Woe be to those who use the power of speech to communicate false doctrines that make worship to God vain (Matthew 15:9)!

Ways Less Obvious

But there are less obvious ways we make our religion vain by speech. One way is gossip. People do not think too seriously about gossip, but this is an abuse of speech. We are fortunate that usually gossip comes our way with warning. There are warning flags that proceed gossip that usually tells us it is gossip. Notice some of the flags. "Have you heard about...; Don't tell anyone else and don't say I told you...; They tell me this and they tell me that...; I am not real sure about this, but..." And on it goes. Such introductions are so often followed by nothing but gossip that destroys reputations, undermines character with unjust and untrue criticisms, creating false impressions and doing eternal damage. Some possibly do this deliberately while others do it without giving what they are doing proper thought. One person can seriously hurt another by the tongue. It is a deadly weapon when used irresponsibly in gossip.

The tongue can be used to misrepresent others and impugn motives. Motives are matters of the heart that only God can know. We do err to speak of that of which we cannot have knowledge until it is revealed to us. Speaking disparagingly of others can be a vicious sin.

Circulating harmful and destructive information is evil. The information may be absolutely accurate, but we ought to ask if passing it along will really accomplish any good or just perpetuate and expand evil.

Criticism is often justified. Criticism of others is sometimes necessary. Criticism of ourselves may become necessary also. None of us likes to be criticized even though it often does us good if received in the right spirit. But unfair, untrue, unjust criticism that is toned to do damage is hard to take. We ought not be guilty of doing this toward others.

The trouble with many of us is that we often talk about somebody but never talk to the one with whom we ought to talk. We will talk about the preacher but not to him. We will talk about the elders but not to them. We will talk about our brethren but refuse to talk to them. We talk about our neighbors but not to them. How can this be righteous?

By the tongue we can reopen old wounds uselessly. We can revive ill-feelings and revive ugly situations that ought to have been forgiven and forgotten long ago, but are kept alive by talking about them over and over again.

Angry Words

But we sometimes say things that are deadly without intending to do so. We experience a "slip of the tongue" because the tongue was not under sufficient control. Often words are spoken hastily, harshly, angrily under the pressure of emotional tensions or heated discussions. Later, we regret what we have said and wish we could take it back. Of course, once spoken, words cannot be taken back, even though we can say, "I'm sorry, please forgive me." One elder told me that the reason we have the "slip of the tongue" is because it is in a slick place. This is not really the reason. We just do not guard our speech properly.

One of the more deadly uses of the tongue is to hurt the church by criticizing the leaders, downgrading the members, bad-mouthing the work. Some are masters at this because they practice it so much. They never seem to realize the harm that they are doing to the cause of Christ. Legitimate warnings of error and false ways are always in order when done with the motive and spirit of love. But fault-finding and parading every fault you find before others both in and out of the church cannot possibly be for good. You can be almost certain that those who busy themselves in talking against the church, but will not address themselves to those about whom they are talking, are not seeking solutions, but give every indication they love to stir up trouble and problems. We must realize that attacks on the members of the church are attacks on the body of Christ. At times the body is diseased and we must make the attack to attack sin. But often the attacks are made against sound brethren, motivated by vengeance, criticism, damaging and productive of no good thing. When the church gets off track this is a time to talk about it. But to attack the church that is doing the will of the Lord the Lord's way simply because we do not like somebody or something is a serious transgression.

On Guard

We must not only learn to guard our own speech but

encourage others to guard theirs. We ought not lend a sympathetic ear to those who stir up strife and gossip. We ought turn a deaf ear to those who will talk about others but are unwilling to talk to others to find solutions. It is a good rule that says, "Don't be a good listener to bad talk."

To use the tongue to devise mischief, sow discord, undermine others, give encouragement to rebellion against the will of God are spiritually damaging activities and can make our religion vain.

We would fall short if we did not mention the good that can be accomplished by the tongue, even though our extended remarks along this line must wait for another lesson. It is a blessing to be able to communicate ideas and thoughts from one mind to another. We can use the tongue to teach the saving truth of God. With it we can offer comfort to the bereaved, encouragement to the downtrodden, express kindness, give wise and good advice and counsel. The tongue is an instrument whereby needed rebuke can be provided. We can speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Good works can be supported and promoted. God's name can be glorified. Songs of praise can be sung. The name of Christ can be confessed unto salvation. Sins can be confessed so they can be forgiven. Apologies can be made. Edification is a product of the right use of the tongue. Is there anyone who cannot profit from the admonition to seriously examine themselves and the way they use the tongue?

None should want to be guilty of doing harm by their speech. We do not want our religion to be in vain. If we are so inclined to be guilty of committing sin with the tongue, "if the shoe fits," then let us be honest enough and love truth enough to wear it and apply the lesson here presented. Not one is likely immune to the temptation of misuse of the tongue. The tongue is something that must ever be kept under surveillance and control.

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Words are not adequate to express the appreciation I have toward those who have been of financial assitance to me now and again in producing this booklet. I do not minimize the help of the money, but the kind and supportive words coming from brethren you know who love the Lord is a source of strength which cannot be measured because of its enormity. "Thanks" to you who have remembered and appreciated my efforts. JWB.

An Allegory On The Covenants

One of the chief causes of religious division is the failure to *"rightly divide the word of truth."* (Second Timothy 2:15). People do not handle the Word of God aright. The Scriptures can be handled wrongfully, and they can be handled correctly.

The Bible presents three distinct dispensations. A dispensation is a system by which God governs man. God is the same but the systems by which He has governed mankind has not always been the same. There has been the Patriarchal Age, the Mosaic Age, and the Christian Age. While not taking the time in this particular lesson to denote the distinctive characteristics of each one, we simply take note of this reality and move forward.

Many have fallen into the error of combining these dispensations, failing to make the distinctions between them. They will take part of one, part of another, mix and mingle them, and the result is confusion, inconsistency, religious error and misunderstanding. Many false doctrines have their origins from this effort to combine the dispensations. False practices also come from that source of error.

Under Moses

For example, under the Mosaic system the Jews were to observe the Sabbath Day which corresponds to our Saturday. Some today have taken from the Mosaic Age and attempted to bring that into the Christian Age. The Jews were taught to tithe. Some teach tithing as a part of the Christian faith. Some have special holydays, a special priesthood, instrumental music, and other relics of an age no longer binding upon man. They have taken these things and employed them into the faith of Christ for which there is absolutely no authority for so doing.

Many find themselves in the dilema of taking part of the Mosaic Age but quite unwilling to to take it all, very willing to leave portions of it behind. They will leave off the laws that demand animal sacrifices, pilgrimages to Jerusalem, observance of the Passover, the restrictions of travel on the Sabbath, death to an adulterer by stoning and other such things. In reality, they have a "super market approach" to the Bible, picking and

choosing what they prefer, taking what they happen to like and leaving out what they do not want. They fail to note the differences between the convenants and the time of their validity and authority. Some have even invented classifications of laws from the Mosaic law of ceremonial laws and moral laws. Actually the Scripture does not make such a delineation nor speaks of different times of their termination as some contend. Some laws are moral in nature and others are ceremonial. But the Scriptures do not teach to set some aside and hold to others. The only laws to be held under Christ that were held under Moses are laws that Christ authorized, and they are to be obeyed because of Him and not because they were given through Moses. Too many fail to separate these two systems. Christianity is not a Jewish religion. It is a new faith that has been founded on Christ as all authority.

Under Christ

We live and are accountable to God under the Christian dispensation. The old law has been abolished (Ephesians 2:15) and taken out of the way being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). It never was binding upon the Gentile people, and it is no longer binding even upon the Jewish people. Christ fulfilled that law (Matthew 5:17). *"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."* (Galatians 3:23-25). We are dead to the law (Romans 7:4), even that law that says, *"Thou shalt not covet,"* the tenth of the Ten Commandments given to Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai (Romans 7:6,7). We are not to covet because Christ forbade it (Romans 13:9).

Some who make the unwarranted distinction between the ceremonial and moral laws would bind the ceremonial law (Sabbath observance). This kind of inconsistency shows the fallacy of such doctrine.

The authority of God is now through Christ (Hebrews 1:1,2). All authority belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). He is the One we are to hear rather than Moses or the prophets (Matthew 17:5). *"For the law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ."* (John 1:17). It is not the law of Moses by which we are made free, but truth (John 8:32).

We are not to murder, lie, steal commit adultery, etc. because of the authority of Christ, not because the law of Moses forbade it. Some of the teaching of Moses and Christ are identical and other times very similar. Still other teaching is quite different. *"Ye have heard that it hath been said... but I say unto you..."* (Matthew 5:21,22).

The Relationship

Paul, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and according to the authority of Christ, pictures the relationship between the law of Moses and the law of Christ in Galatians 4:21-31. The length of the passage leads us to urge you to take your Bible and read that passage before continuing this study. This is very important so you will have the Biblical basis for the points we wish to observe.

In verse 21 Paul urges those that would still bind the old law to really listen to the law itself. It explains its own relationship to the new covenant under Christ.

Verse 24 calls the relationship of Sarah and Isaac on the one hand, and Hagar and Ishmael on the other, an allegory, a figurative representation, a comparison, a means of conveying a truth symbolically.

Abrahan had two sons, one by Hagar (Sarah's handmaid), born of the natural law of procreation, whose name was Ishmael. The other son was Isaac, born by Sarah, a child of promise, born unto his parents after they were beyond the years of childbearing, and the result of an intervention by the Lord.

Two Women-Two Children

Verses 25 and 26 tell us that these two women and children represent the two covenants. Hagar and Ishmael represent the law of Moses while Saran and Isaac represent the law of Christ. Paul says, *"Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise."* Hagar is that which was given at Sinai, but Sarah is that which is from Jerusalem.

Ishmael was older than Isaac and persecuted him (Genesis 21:9). This was more than Sarah would permit and demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be cast out. *"Cast out the bondwoman and her son..."* (Verse 30). Ishmael was not to share in the inheritance with Isaac. So it is with the two covenants. Those of the old covenant of Moses, the Jews, were persecuting the

church as they followed the old law. But the old law would not share in the inheritance with those of the new law. The old law was to be cast out as was Hagar and Ishmael. The old covenant was no longer God's will for any man, Jew or Gentile. The life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and the events on Pentecost has brought the old law to an end and had instituted the covenant through Christ, the perfect law of liberty, forgiveness of sins through Him.

The conclusion of this allegory is, *"So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."* The way to serve God, the way to glory, the road to heaven is Christ, not Moses. "The way of the cross leads home."

The Law's Significance

This is not to say that the old law has no significance for us today. We are taught that it provides examples from which lessons are to be learned (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11). We learn much of the nature of God and His dealings with mankind from the events and laws of former ages. Those things that were given through Moses served their purpose and accomplished what God intended to accomplish by them.

Even so, having served its turn in the gradual unfolding of God's scheme of salvation through Christ, it is no more the law under which children of God are to live and serve. While various principles of truth found in the old law remain, the specific ordinances of God are now given by the authority of His Son. Unless mankind recognizes this distinction we will continue to have the admixture of the two covenants and the confusion in religion that dominates so much religious thought.

The old law could not accomplish salvation because the blood of animals cannot take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). But the blood of Christ can and does (Hebrews 9:12). It was the law that defined sin and condemned sin but did not make provision for the removal of sin, demanding sacrifices year by year, day by day, to "roll sins forward" to the cross of Christ. But the sacrifice of Christ *"once"* was sufficient to provide for the forgiveness of sins.

The allegory of the covenants is really an inspired revelation through Paul on the subject of religious authority. What we do is to be done in the name of Christ (Colossians 3:17) to whom God has given the preeminence in all things (Colossians 1:18). We cannot "borrow" from other dispensations and be loyal to

the authority of Christ any more than we can borrow from other religions. Salvation is not through any other than Christ (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). *"Hear ye Him."*

† † † † †

A Few Brief Comments On Various Things

It is noticeable how some prominent magazines try so desparately to establish the theory of evolution as a fact. Especially is this evident in the *National Geographic*. They present pictures as if that is the way it was. But their comments are guarded with such words as "possibly, maybe, perhaps, it could have been," but all the while the impact is there that evolution actually took place, man is a descendant of animals, and there is no God who created. It is a wonder above wonders that men of great minds are so blatantly dishonest with facts. Facts disprove evolution as the theory contends.

When friends suffer the lost of loved ones and you see their faces pained with grief, it strikes a blow into the heart. You wish there was something you could say or do that would grant them comfort. But when they can know the comfort that their loved one has gone to their reward with God, while you sympathize with them in their loss, you also rejoice with them in their victory. How glorious is the death of a Christian!

It was an encouraging time when I heard my youngest son speak of the many troubles facing the church, but added something like this, "But I believe there will be better times in the future for the church." This optimism and determination is what will take the church through this period of digression and apostasy that is evident all around us. Adherence to truth by the younger generation is the hope for the future. May their numbers be legion!

JWB

Tax Time Nears



JAMES W. BOYD

The entire nation focuses attention on the payment of taxes of various kinds. The first part of a new year demands more attention to this matter because Income Tax is due soon. The Christian is also concerned about his obligations to the civil government. More than just meeting his duty to his nation he is concerned about wise obedience to God regarding his nation as in everything else.

"Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21).

"For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." (Romans 13:6,7)

We are blessed to live in our land, enjoying best of all, protection as we worship. For freedom and privileges we obey God and do our duty.

* * * * *

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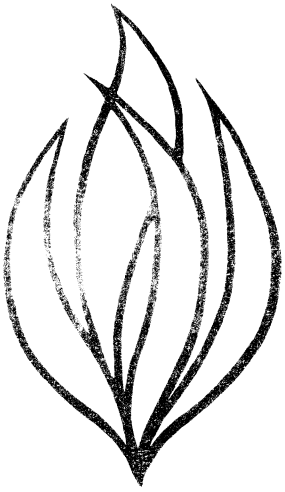

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

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VOLUME V James W. Boyd **NUMBER 9**

Letters To The Seven Churches Of Asia

Ephesus

The book of Revelation was written in the first century, just a few years after the church was established, probably before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. We realize that there is dispute over the date of writing but we have considered the evidence and would contend that the evidence is heavily in favor of a date before 70 A.D. While that has a great bearing on one's interpretation of Revelation, it will not have a heavy influence in understanding the letters written to the seven churches of Asia recorded at the beginning of the book.

John was on the Isle of Patmos, some suggesting that he had been banished there because of his faith in Christ. Whatever be the reason, while he was there he saw a great vision. A revelation from God was given to him, as visions had appeared to men of God in times past, like Moses at the burning bush, Jacob at Bethel and his ladder to heaven, Daniel while in Babylon, Ezekiel, Elijah, and many others. He was *"in the spirit,"* which I understand to mean he was in spiritual thought and became the recipient of divine revelation. It was on the Lord's Day. (Revelation 1:10).

A voice, like a trumpet, majestic and attention-demanding, said, *"what thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches, unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea."* (Revelation 1:11). These churches were in what we today call Turkey. The number seven is so often a number of significance, meaning completeness and entirety. It may be nothing but speculation to suggest that *"seven"* means the message is for the entire church everywhere as well as for these particular congregations. Whether we can draw this conclusion from the *"seven"* or not, we are certain that the principles taught in these letters are applicable to all of us. And as we read them, we wonder what might the Lord write

to us, if he wrote a specific letter regarding our local congregation.

The first letter was to Ephesus. This church was established by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 19), around 58 A.D. It was the capital of the province, a city of prime importance, the principal emporium of trade between East and West. It was called "one of the eyes of Asia."

The crowning glory of Ephesus was the temple of Diana, guardian goddess, the idol of which was believed to have fallen from heaven. That idol was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Paul's preaching caused a riot in Ephesus when he preached against gods made with hands, idols, etc. Demetrius and other manufacturers of the images of Diana raised a tumult against Paul and company and would have killed him. But he remained there about three years.

On his third journey, Paul visited with the elders of Ephesus in the city of Miletus, around 60 A.D. (Acts 20). Timothy had labored in Ephesus and was probably there when Paul wrote him in First and Second Timothy.

Later Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, 64 A.D., when he was in chains in Rome. Now through John, the Lord was about to send them another message. The letter is seven verses long.

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus, write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." (Revelation 2:1).

"Angel" means messenger, one who speaks by the authority of another. The angel might have been a man who was preaching there regularly. Although the letter is addressed to him, it was intended for the consumption of the whole church, because these letters were to be read to the churches (Revelation 1:4).

Even though John did the writing, the words are those of Christ and John wrote as he was directed. The writer is designated as the one that holds the seven stars in his right hand and walketh in the midst of the seven candlesticks. Chapter one, verse 20, identifies the stars as the angels of the churches and the candlesticks as the churches themselves. Christ possesses and upholds the messengers of His will and He is in the midst of His churches. So Christ is the one dictating these letters.

"I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how

thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted." (Verses 2,3).

Christ knew all about every church. There are no secrets from God. He knew what was commendable, and He begins by pointing out these good things about Ephesian brethren. In our efforts to make ourselves better, we too often only bear down on our faults. This we must do. We must know our shortcomings in order to correct them. But sometimes a word of commendation will motivate and is more appropriate.

The church was known for its works. Their toil was acceptable to Him. Their stedfastness, patience, even in the face of stubborn opposition and persecution was noteworthy. There is need for those who will endure inconveniences of being a Christian. Too many evidently consider it "too much effort and trouble."

But these brethren were not easily knocked off track by their hardship. Some are ready to give up and quit at the first sign of oppostion to their efforts. Not so here.

All they did was for the name of Christ. They had one goal in mind, that of serving Christ. And they were commended for their discipline. They had set themselves against "evil men." In Acts 20, Paul had warned the elders of intrusions by those who would be wolves in the midst of sheep. While they had learned that it is right to bear with a weak brother (Romans 15:1,2), they also knew it was error to bear with false brethren (2 John 9-11; Romans 16:17). The Ephesian brethren were demonstrating that they knew the value of keeping the church pure.

Before considering verses four and five, look at verse six. *"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."* Nicolaitans were those who worshipped idols and gave themselves to fornication. One of the problems of the early church was the great influx of people who had not totally forsaken their sinful and heathenish ways. It took a strong church, with a strong leadership and teaching to withstand the pressures of heathen converts to compromise and continue in sinful ways. No doubt, this influence contributed to the eventual apostasy that overtook the Ephesian church. Whereas the doctrine of the Nicolaitans gave license to sin, teachers of truth warned against sin, and of such people (Jude 4). Paul said that the grace of Christ was sufficient to cover all sins, but that did not mean that one could continue in sin (Romans 6:1,2).

But Christ also had some words of condemnation for Ephesus. *"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."* (Verses 4,5).

Their trouble was they had left their first love. Once they were very much in love with the Lord, but that love had waned. They had grown indifferent and lost their early zeal. Just what had caused them to drift and become cool we are not told. But for some reasons, they had not remained aggressive and active as they once had been. Possibly, they were resting on past achievements, or had become too concerned about this world. James warned that friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4). Maybe they were content to say, but not willing to do. They had not turned away altogether, but they were not as they ought to be.

The Lord called for action in three parts. They were to revive their memory of past good works, back in their days of zeal, enthusiasm and good intentions. *"Remember therefore whence thou art fallen."* The way of memory was to be the lever to recovery.

Secondly, they were to put their will back into action and repent. This involves the will, the mind, the heart. A change was needed and they needed to change their minds, their attitudes and turn from their error.

Thirdly, they were to get busy at their labors as before. *"Do the first works."* In the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul had commended many things concerning them (Ephesians 1:15,16), and now they are being urged to get back to those things. They were to continue to be active in the good they were doing, and restore the good that they were neglecting.

And the Lord warned them that if they did not, He would remove their candlestick; that is, they would no longer be a light in the world. They would be overtaken with darkness. They would no longer be considered a faithful church.

Following this exhortation and warning, they were given words of encouragement. *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."* (Verse 7).

To hear the Spirit means to pay attention to what has been instructed. The promise to the tree of life is to eternal life, and is

offered to those that overcome. This illustration seems to have been drawn from the Genesis account of the Garden of Eden.

From this letter we learn of the omnipresence of Christ; the omniscience of Christ; that He is interested in the good we do and also concerned about our evil and our shortcomings. When one loses love for Christ, he soon falls away. Such a one will be lost unless he repents and returns to his former state and condition of service. If we will, he will be saved.

† † † † †

Smyrna

Introductions to these seven letters are unnecessary with each lesson, so we are permitted to go right on with the study. Having considered the letter to Ephesus, we now turn attention to the letter to the church in Smyrna. Located about forty miles north of Ephesus, as one would travel counter clockwise, the next logical place to go from Ephesus was Smyrna. Being a letter of only four verses, it is the shortest of the seven. At the same time, it is one of the richest in spiritual value. It is remarkable how each letter is distinctive in quality and purpose.

Very little is known of the early history of the church in Smyrna. We do not know who first took the gospel there. It was likely during the time of Paul's third missionary journey and during that period when he taught in Ephesus in the school of Tyrannus over a two year span (Acts 19:9-10). The Scriptures say that he disputed daily concerning the gospel of Christ and *"all that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord."* (Verse 10). If not started personally by Paul, it could well have had its beginning out of the labors of some of those whom Paul converted in Ephesus. Whoever did that good work is not as important as the fact that it was done. As someone has suggested, "It really is amazing how much people can get done when they do not care who gets the credit for it."

The Smyrna church was a good church to which to belong. *"And unto the angel of the chuyrch in Smyrna, write: These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive."* (Revelation 2:8).

There is more in this salutation than may at first seem to us.

The very opening words set the theme and tone of this epistle. Keep in mind that the brethren in Asia were under persecution. Words from Christ were calculated, among other things, to console, reassure brethren in their distress. Truth is always a tower of strength to the Christian. So Christ identifies Himself as *"the first and the last."* Earlier in Revelation 1:8, He called Himself the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Christ is the beginning and the ending, the all-inclusive one; everything surrounded by Him. There is nothing before Him or after Him. Does not this phrase emphasize His rank and authority?

And would not the word comfort the brethren to be reminded that their Lord is Lord over all, indestructible and eternal? They did not serve a dead martyr, but a living Lord. Even though He had died on Calvary's Cross, He was alive. He identified Himself as the one *"which was dead and is alive."* Christ is the resurrected One. He has conquered death. His resurrection is the basis for our hope of life after physical death. First Thessalonians, chapter four, is a chapter where Paul pointed out how the teaching of the resurrection is designed to give comfort to brethren. Inasmuch as their Savior had conquered the grave and the Hadean realm, He could grant them life also, as well as give reason and purpose for life on earth.

In a real sense, this brief salutation is a capsule of the gospel of Christ. The length, depth, height, and breadth of New Testament Christianity is implied in this one opening sentence. Christ; first, last, always, dead but alive, victorious and powerful. The sentence is a phrase of victory and hope.

"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, [but thou art rich] and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." (Revelation 2:9).

In each letter, the Lord states that He knew the works of each church. And we are made aware of the omniscience of Christ. He is aware of all of us, individually and collectively. Nothing escapes His observation. And He was aware of what the church in Smyrna faced. He commended them because they were an active congregation. Sometimes churches are lukewarm, passive, inactive, dead or dying, but not so with the church in Smyrna.

But their existence was not an easy one. They were enduring hardship, tribulation, poverty, suffering from the reviling and blasphemous Jews. They were the people who claimed to be

God's people (and had been for many centuries), but no longer were they special. And these in Smyrna were so wicked that Christ called them the synagogue of Satan. In face of this, these brethren were being heroically patient. Paul teaches that *"all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (Second Timothy 3:12). Some churches are too much like the world for the devil to want to disturb them, and so they do not suffer very much. Peter wrote, *"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this behalf."* (First Peter 4:14-16). Peter also wrote, *"For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing."* (First Peter 3:17).

The impression that I get is that these brethren may well have suffered material losses because of their faith. They were in poverty. Even so, in the things that really mattered, Christ said, *"Thou art rich."* As other Christians, they took joyfully the *"spoiling of your goods."* (Hebrews 10:34). Smyrna was just the opposite of the church to whom the seventh letter is addressed, that of Laodicea. Laodicea considered themselves rich and in need of nothing because of material prosperity, but Christ told them they were poor, blind, naked, wretched and miserable. Far better it is to have spiritual wealth than material wealth.

Christ warned men of placing their trust in riches. *"Man shall not live by bread alone."* (Matthew 4:4). *"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things that he possesseth."* (Luke 12:15). We should seek to lay up treasures in heaven, not on this earth (Matthew 6:19,20). The world needs to learn the lesson that the church in Smyrna had learned quite well. So many sell their souls to Satan for the paltry, temporary pleasures, wealth and fame of this world, and neglect that which is eternal and lasting.

Significantly, there is no word of condemnation and rebuke to the church in Smyrna. Could it be that their persecutions had refined them rather than disheartened them? (James 1:3,4). They had weathered the storms and had become stronger as a result. They, like the apostles early in the church, counted it joy to suffer for the truth (Acts 5:41).

There are two ways to face adversity; it can be considered a defeat or as a challenge and opportunity. What may be intended

to bury you may be turned into your preservation. There is the story of a mule that fell into a deep hole. The farmer could not get him out, and instructed his sons to simply bury the mule where he was. But as the sons threw in dirt to cover the mule, the mule packed down the dirt and gradually rose toward the top, and finally jumped out of the hole. An obstacle can be either a stumbling block or a stepping stone. It depends on how we consider it. The poverty, tribulation and persecution of Christians in Smyrna had presented them the opportunity and temptation to fall away. But rather than doing that, they turned it into an opportunity to grow stronger. Like Paul said of his persecution, *"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."* (Phillipians 1:12). They were thinking like Peter taught, *"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."* (First Peter 1:6,7).

The letter contains a prophecy concerning them. *"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days."* (Revelation 2:10). In other words, their hardships were not over yet. There was more to come. The devil wouild work through men and use them as his agents against the church. Now, this information might discourage them, but it was designed to prepare them. How would they face this new and additional threat? They were not to face it in fear, but calmly, courageously, remaining faithful throughout. The Lord is encouraging them to look beyond the time of their hardships, because better things eventually awaited them.

The final portion of the tenth verse reads, *"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life."* They were on their way to eternal life. There was victory, royalty, that God would give to those who just "keep on keeping on." This blessing from God was conditional. It depended upon their faithfulness. But Christ urges them to be faithful, not only until they died, but even if faithfulness cost them their lives. There was great gain ahead of them.

Furthermore, there was escape provided. *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."* (Verse 11).

While we all must die physically (Hebrews 9:27), all need not suffer the torments of hell, described as the second death, the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:14,15,;21:8).

This immunity from the second death will be granted to those that overcome. To begin as a Christian is fine, but that is not enough. Faithfulness as a Christian is as much a condition of salvation as any other condition the Lord has specified.

The letter to Smyrna ought to encourage us to faithfulness. It ought to help us see more clearly the hope, power, victory that is in Christ. It points out to us what is of real value, as well as how to face hardship. It stresses the essentiality of faithfulness, and the way of immunity from the second death.

† † † † †

Pergamos

The third letter is found in Revelation 2:12-17. Keep in mind as we read and study that the Bible is inspired of God and is our sole rule and standard by which all things are to be measured in service before God. From the study of these letters we can learn what pleases and displeases the Lord Jesus, who is the One who sent these letters to these churches through John. We can detect the Lord's attitudes toward the church and just what His expectations are. Having such knowledge, we will be better equipped to be faithful servants of His.

Like the church at Smyrna just studied, there is not much background knowledge that we can have about the church in Pergamos. Again like the church in Smyrna, it was likely established during that period when Paul was staying in Ephesus and teaching at the school of Tyrannus and all Asia heard the word.

Pergamos is sixty miles north of Smyrna, a city which had a great library, and its citizenry emphasized education and literary works. But it was also a stronghold of anti-Christian idolatry, which helps to explain the tone of this epistle.

The letter contains salutation, approval, reproof, admonition, and promise. We shall follow that outline.

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos, write: These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges." (Revelation 2:12).

It is interesting to note the various ways that Christ identifies Himself in these letters. To Ephesus He said He was holding the seven stars in His hand, walking amidst the seven golden candlesticks. To Smyrna He was the first and last, the One once dead and now living. To Pergamos, He had a sharp two-edged sword. Hebrews 4:12 calls the Word of God just such an instrument. Ephesians 6:17 also calls the Word of God the sword of the Spirit. Revelation 1:16 says, *"...out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword..."* This means that Christ weilds the word of truth and that word is a powerful weapon against error and evil.

"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth."

True to the pattern and outline, the letters thus far have contained things which the Lord complimented and commended. He did not rebuke them first, but approved what He could.

It is evident that the church was in a wicked city and evil environment. Christ knew about them, what they were doing, what they were facing, and was sympathetic toward the difficulties they faced to be Christians. He calls Pergamos the place *"where Satan's seat is... where Satan dwelleth."* This city was a center of the devil's operations, steeped in idolatry and blasphemy against the true God, having temples to Zeus, Jupiter, the people involved in emperor worship and many other gods and goddesses. An evil environment makes it more difficult for Christians to remain faithful because of the influence upon them. *"Evil companions corrupt good morals."* (First Corinthians 15:33).

But even in such an environment the brethren in Pergamos held fast the name of Christ and would not deny the faith. Persecution, even unto death, pillage, confiscation of property, was not uncommon for Christians in pagan and heathen lands. Such maltreatment is designed to cause Christians to abandon the faith. But the brethren had not wavered under this stress and duress. One named Antipas was named as having been martyred for Christ. We must admit those of such courage and bravery that would remain faithful in spite of such things. We wonder what we of the twentieth century might do if we were subjected to the same treatment. Some, even in the most

favorable circumstances, won't even inconvenience themselves to be faithful to worship, let alone being faithful in daily life. But if one is not willing to stand for his convictions, even in the face of hardship, does his faith really avail him anything?

Even though they were worthy in one way, they were deserving of reproof in another. *"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."* (Revelation 2:14-15).

The very fact that they were deserving of rebuke ought cause us to be cautious in our own lives. We may excell and appear favorable in some ways and be a reproach to the cause of Christ in others. Does not God want us to be attentive to all our ways? The good that we do does not offset the evil of which we are guilty.

The reproof given to the church at Pergamos was because of doctrinal errors that were being taught and held in their midst. The problem was false doctrines. The Lord shows His displeasure at a church that will tolerate false doctrines.

The doctrine of Balaam (Numbers 22,23), was one of compromise and error. Balaam had been asked by Balac to curse Israel, but he would not. But Balaam brought about the same results by leading Israel to sin in various ways. Balaam's teaching was a stumbling block to the people of God. Some in Pergamos were teaching doctrines that were causing stumbling blocks to brethren. They were like those spoken of in Jude 11 who *"ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward."* Understanding the moral law of Christ as we do, we might find it strange that brethren could be led astray into such sins, but we must remember that they lived in a very licentious city, full of idol worship and where immorality was the acceptable thing. Brethren could be enticed.

The Nicolaitans were also present. We read that there were some in Ephesus of this persuasion. Such people also gave themselves to idolatry and fornication. But with Ephesus, Christ wrote, *"how thou canst not bear them which are evil."* (Rev. 2:2). But in Pergamos, they were being tolerated. Even though some did not accept their false teachings, they shared in the guilt of allowing false teaching to go unchecked. They were guilty of what so many in the church today are willing to do. They are

possessed with the doctrine of "go-along-ism." But no greater injustice can be committed against brethren, the faithful as well as the sinful, than to allow error and evil go unchecked without rebuke and discipline. It is not a manifestation of love to refuse to cross those who are teaching false doctrines. It is a manifestation of a lack of love for God and brethren and a manifestation of devilish cowardice. When sin is present, it is God's will that it be fought.

Following this rebuke, Christ tells them what they must do. *"Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."* The congregation had two courses open to them. Repent, or else; or allow those in error to continue, fail to oppose and expose them and let them be subjected to the wrath of God. The first course would be the salvation of the church and possibly the sinners, but the second would be a disgrace to the "faithful" and damning to the sinners.

Christ knows that it is better to discipline false brethren than to allow them to go on in the evil ways without opposition. Unless a sinner is converted from the error of his way, death awaits him. Real love for the false brother is to stop him, not "go along" anyway. *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Hebrews 10:31). But please get the force of His words, "Repent, or else."

Christ closes this letter, as He did the first two with a renewal of great and precious promises. *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."*

To those that overcome, time and again promises are made. Here there are three promises. One, they will eat the hidden manna. Manna was the food that God provided for Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. It was nourishment from heaven, the means of sustenance to the weary pilgrim and traveller. Spiritual nourishment will be given to those who overcome.

Two, he will be given a white stone. The meaning is a bit uncertain, but probably refers to the manner of selection of those who would be counted acceptable to a group. A white stone meant acceptance, while a black stone meant rejection. Even today we talk about people being "blackballed," which means they are rejected by a certain group that might be considering

them for admission into their association. But those that overcome, will be counted acceptable to God.

Three, they will be given a new name. When one becomes a Christian he has a new name. But that is not the meaning here because the new name here will be given to those who have already become Christians and have remained faithful as Christians. The significance of a new name seems to lie in the new distinction, an elevation of status, an advancement for those that overcome. Abram was given a new name of Abraham and it denoted his elevation. The same with Sarai being called Sarah; Jacob being named Israel. Those that overcome will be advanced into heaven.

Cannot we learn from this epistle that we can live a faithful life before God even in an adverse environment? They did. It is more difficult, but it can be done. Joseph, Daniel, Christians in Caesar's household, they all did it. And surely Noah lived loyal to God in an evil environment.

It is always right to love sinners, but it is never right to tolerate sin. To tolerate sin is not loving sinners. Anything other than a firm stand for truth and against error is neglect of duty.

God's promises belong to those who remain faithful and overcome. Victory belongs to the faithful. The wayward Christian does not have these promises.

† † † †

Thyatira

These letters present to us good things and bad things about these churches. The Lord commends the good and condemns the bad. From this we can see what the Lord likes and dislikes. We can learn the admonitions, corrections, warnings, remedies to bad situations that the Lord directs. Such letters are fountains from which we must drink in order to know the will of the Lord more perfectly and how to serve Him more effectively.

Thyatira was not a very noteworthy city according to historians. It is best known as a center where purple dyeing was the major skill. The Bible student will recall that Lydia (Acts 16) was a seller of purple and her home had been Thyatira.

How the gospel first was taken there we do not know. Some have speculated, without much foundation, that through Lydia

the news of Christ first reached the city. We have no way of knowing this.

Although all of the letters are short, this one is the longest, found in Revelation 2:18-29. The outline of the book is similar to those that we have already studied. There is the salutation, commendation, condemnation, words of admonition and encouragement, and the urging to pay attention to what had been written.

"And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass." (Revelation 2:18).

Burnished brass is highly polished brass. The language is easily recognized as being figurative and symbolic, possibly indicating the penetrating sight of the Lord, piercing even to the most hidden portions. He is all-inspecting with nothing escaping His view. He is One of strength and durability like brass, as well as One of beauty and brillance like burnished brass. The Son of God, with strong feet, is able to crush under foot all evil that His all-seeing eye would discover. Whatever are the implications specifically, the words are designed to picture Christ as powerful and able to accomplish what He wills.

"I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first." (Revelation 2:19).

This verse mentions several activities of the church. There was charity, which is an active demonstration of love. No congregation is pleasing in the sight of the Lord where love does not exist.

Thyatira was noted for their faith. Christians walk by faith and not by sight (Second Corinthians 5:7). Though they had not seen Christ personally, even as we have not, they knew the evidence concerning Him. Actual sight was not necessary for them to know by faith. In fact, we can be more sure of the testimony of God's Word than the things we might personally see and experience. We are capable of being deceived. But the testimony of the Lord is true and reliable.

This was a church of service and ministry. The way to greatness, according to Christ, is the way of ministering and serving. Their love and charity was noted by the things they actually did in serving. They were not involved in just "busy-ness," but were active in doing the Lord's business.

They had patience, which is stedfastness and faithfulness. They like the brethren of the other churches, were subjected to

persecutions. But they remained loyal to their convictions and to Christ. I used to have a picture in my office of a sailing ship, being blown by the winds and slashing its way through the waves toward its destination without being driven off course. This seems to picture what the life of a Christian is supposed to be. This was the case withs the church in Thyatira.

And the church had obviously made progress from the beginning. Its present works were greater than their first works. They had grown. They were doing more. This is what the Lord expects of His people. Only when each member will do more will the church do more. We need to be reminded now and again that we shall not be judged at the last day as a congregation, but as individuals. Even though the church was doing more, that does not necessarily mean each member was doing more. Obviously many were. But it is vital for each one to examine himself or herself to see if we are contributing to the expansion of the church or not. Whereas Ephesus had left their first love and were urged to return to their first works, the brethren in Thyatira had not been content with the amount of their first works and were doing more.

"Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not." (Revelation 2:20,21).

Jezebel was the name of the infamous wife of Ahab, king of Israel. The name Jezebel is synonymous with evil, as is the name Judas. By the use of this name Christ is either referring to some individual or a group of individuals in the church that were wicked and influencing others to be wicked. The teaching was licentious and idolatrous. It should have been obvious to all that the teaching was false and damning, but it was going unchecked. Like in the church at Pergamos, false ways were being allowed to go without rebuke. The lack of discipline where there is the need for discipline is always detrimental to any church.

This evil woman, or this group, had been served fair warning and given opportunity to turn from their evil. But there had been no repentance. There is a time needed to allow those doing wrong to stop it and correct it. But there also comes a time when the line must be recognized and action taken. In Thyatira, the time to act had come.

"Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts, and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." (Revelation 2:22,23).

Not only would the leader of this false teaching and wicked ways be punished, but also those that followed after her. Whether this was a case of literal or spiritual adultery, we can only speculate. In any case, it was abominable before God and would be dealt with in harsh fashion as all evil deserves. Time had been given to turn, but when there was no turning, then there would be the burning.

The purpose of strong action against this evil by the Lord was for the benefit of all the churches. Everyone needed to know that evil is not acceptable before God, and everyone is held accountable and will receive according to their works. The Lord knows the hearts of each one. Nobody can get away with their evil. The Lord is not tolerant of sinfulness among His people.

"But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak, I will put none other burden upon you. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. [*Revelation 2:24-29*].

Those who were not involved in this evil would not be punished and they would not have additional burdens placed upon them. The only way to escape God's wrath is to do His will. You serve God and there will be blessings abundant. But if you defy Him, you can expect to receive what you sow.

To those who had not fallen victim to this sinister teaching among them were admonished to *"hold fast."* Faithfulness is one of the key themes of these letters, indeed, the entire book of Revelation. Christ is saying to them, in essence, "The trials will soon be over; don't give up; the victory will be yours." Keep on keeping on is faithfulness.

As with the other churches, He promises certain things to those that overcome. For some reason, too many baptized people think they have a guarantee of heaven regardless of what

they do after being baptized. This false doctrine of "once saved, always saved," is denied by brethren and rightly so, but it seems that some must think it is so by the indifference they manifest toward living a faithful Christian life.

Those that overcome shall be given power over nations, will rule with a rod of iron, will break the enemy as a potter does a vessel, and receive a morning star. We do not profess to be able to get the full meaning from each of these categorizations. These are highly symbolic and figurative expressions. But of this we have good certainty; namely, that the implication is how the faithful Christian will have power over the enemies of his soul, that he would be victorious in spite of those that opposed him, that there was the rising star of hope, like a morning star. This power and hope belonged to the faithful. Just as the first light of day was ushuring in a new day, our hope will usher us into glory.

The distinctiveness of this letter might be summarized by saying that error is not as good as truth; toleration of error is not as good as discipline of error; growth and expansion is better than sliding backward; and victory will be better than defeat.

† † † † †

Sardis

The city of Sardis had at one time been a very principal city but at the time of the writing of Revelation it was not quite so prominent. It was located on an almost inaccessible mountain called Mount Tmolus. For many years the city was considered impregnable but was finally captured by Cyrus, and from that time forward it seemed to deteriorate in prestige. The citizenry of Sardis was one with a glorious past that had been tarnished by defeat.

In the letter that the Lord sent to Smyrna, He had nothing but good things to say of them, having no rebuke. The letter to Sardis is quite the opposite, there being little of significance to commend and much to condemn. This very fact leads us to believe that the church at Sardis had already drifted way out of line in the Lord's eyes. Yet, there was still a spark that might be fanned into a flame because there were still some commendable individuals there. At any rate, the Lord was still very much

concerned about them.

"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis, write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars." (Revelation 3:1).

This is a similar salutation of the letter to Ephesus. We must remember that *"seven"* did not always necessarily mean just that number, but was a term which signified completeness and fulness. That Jesus possessed the *"seven Spirits of God"* might well indicate a thought of His nature similar to Colossians 2:9, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* It could be a word emphasizing His Deity. The *"seven stars"* can be considered as the seven messengers of the seven churches at noted in Revelation 1:20. The messengers belong to Christ.

"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." (Revelation 3:1).

How did the Lord look upon the church at Sardis? How did others look upon that church? All that really matters is what the Lord thinks. We have two evaluations that are far apart. One, their reputation among men, and the real character as evaluated by the Lord. It was a difference between what things seemed to be and what things really were.

As for their reputation, *"Thou hast a name that thou livest."* Praise came upon Sardis from the lips of many. They had a fine reputation. We are not told why they enjoyed this good reputation, but just that they did. We know why churches today have good reputations. Sometimes it is because they have a large membership or contribution. It may be because of their fine building where they meet. It may be because *"brother Big"* is their preacher, or possibly many of the brethren are prominent in the world, with wealth and prestige.

A church can also enjoy a good reputation because of the soundness of doctrine that is preached and upheld. Fornication and idolatry are not mentioned against Sardis as with other churches. Ephesus had the Nicolaitans; Pergamos had Balaamites; Thyatira had Jezebel, but nothing is said about false doctrine at Sardis. We are not to suppose that there was not any, but it was not noteworthy in view of their real problem. The point is that in the eyes of men, they were something commendable.

But how did the Lord see things? He could see through the varnish and veneer of reputation and know the hearts of men. They were dead. They were obviously not physically dead, but spiritually dead. While we hear read of no false doctrine, we do

not read of persecution either. Paul wrote, *"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (Second Timothy 3:12). This may be a clue to their problem. Why should the devil persecute a corpse? They were not giving the devil any problems. There was some godly activity still twitching and about to die, but not enough for even the devil to try to persecute. We can be sure that a church that stands firm and strong in the truth and is active in that work will receive all manner of persecution.

Reputation and character are not always the same. One may be good and the other bad. God really knows what people are. *"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart."* (First Samuel 16:7). We might be able to deceive ourselves and our fellowman, but not God.

And just because we proclaim long and loud, as we should, the plan of salvation of faith, repentance, confession and baptism, and are sound in doctrine, does not mean the Lord is fully pleased. We could fall into self-righteousness, preaching the truth, but not living, acting, serving, spreading the Word, properly applying that truth in daily life. 'Is there not severe condemnation to that Christian who professes to be a Christian but whose life does not indicate it?

"Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard and hold fast, and repent." (Revelation 3:2,3).

The solution to their problems was to become alert, watchful, attentive to duty and awaken from their slumber and sluggishness, and strengthen their efforts. While much of their work had not been carried through to completion, some works remained that had not yet died. They were to renew their efforts in those things before they also died away. Too many good works die, left hanging on the vine, because of a lax, sloppy, ill-planned, poorly executed program of work. Too many things are neglected and left undone. Some things are begun with enthusiasm, but the enthusiasm proved to be only an explosion that soon passed away and the works are not carried to completion. Neglect, indifference, leaving to the other fellow to do, is the spike of death to many of the works undertaken by the church.

As in other letters, when there was the need to turn around, the Lord taught them to repent. They had to make up their minds first that they would do better, and out of a heart filled

with their shame and guilt, with godly sorrow provoking them, rather than defend their wrongs, they would repent and start the other direction. This is the Lord's remedy for churches that are dead. *"Remember...and return."* That is the cure.

We must be impressed that when the Lord says, *"Repent,"* He means it. In verse three, the last portion, He passes to them a frightening and stern warning. *"I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."*

Unless His admonition was heeded, He would bring swift destruction upon them. For the Lord to come as a thief meant that He would come unexpectedly, and they would be called into account, and they would not be ready. Their state was one of an emergency because the hour in which they might be called to answer could be any hour. They could not afford any delay in making the necessary corrections.

"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels." (Revelation 3:4,5).

Sardis had their "faithful few." Nearly every congregation does, and that is what keeps things going. Some were not going along in the indifferent state with the majority. They were still trying even though they were in the minority. For them, the Lord holds out better things. *"They shall walk with me in white."* They will be clothed with white raiment, signifying their purity and acceptance by the Lord. Whereas the evil will have their name blotted out of the book of life, not so with the "faithful few." They will be confessed before God and His angels as Jesus promised in Luke 12:8,9. And what a comfort to know that if and when you give the Lord your best, even if others do not, He is mindful of you and you shall receive His blessings even if others do not.

Can we not rather believe that what works were still going on in Sardis was really due to the work of the "faithful few?" While most had the "let the other fellow do it" attitude, they were active. Someone has suggested that the church is filled with willing people; ten per cent willing to work, and ninety per cent willing to let them. This sounds like the problem at Sardis, and possibly at many congregations now. Is it that way where you regularly attend? And in which group are you? We shall not stand before God in judgment as a congregation, but as

individuals, so regardless of others, let us be about our Father's business.

It is distressing to hear brethren sometimes talking about what "they" are doing at church. "They" are going to have a gospel meeting. "They" are going to do this or that. And you know, that is the trouble with many. It is "they" who are doing it, not "we." It ought to be "we" are going to do this or that. Everyone ought be active and involved to their fullest capacity. Otherwise, we are more like Sardis than is comfortable to consider.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." (Revelation 3:6). In other words, we had better pay attention to the teaching of the Lord and shut our eyes and close our ears to His will. By doing my part, and you doing your part, we encourage one another and others to do their part. Let me close this lesson on the letter to Sardis with the plea that we all examine our own personal participation in the cause of Christ, and learn to cooperate where we can scripturally do so in the good work that God has authorized the church to do. For we see that the church at Sardis was not condemned so much because of what they were doing that was wrong, but for what they were not doing that was right that they ought to have been doing. There are sins of commission and omission, and omission was their problem. Is it mine? Is it yours?

† † † † †

Philadelphia

These seven letters include identifications of Christ, praise for the good, reproof for the evil, exhortations to righteousness, admonitions and encouragements, solutions to problems, warning against evil and precious promises to the faithful.

The letter to the church in Philadelphia is one of the most beautiful of the seven and in some ways more sublime. In this letter, as the others, we gain an insight into the mind of Christ. We can know what He wants, and what He does not want. We are equipped to be better servants of the Lord.

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." (Revelation 3:7).

This is the most lengthy of the descriptions that Christ has given concerning Himself, so we must spend some time considering them. They are expressive of several attributes of Christ.

He is holy. This announces Him as One who is sanctified, set apart, distinctive. In the Bible we read of holy things, people, places. That which is sanctified is set apart from the rest because of certain distinctive qualities and appointments. So it is with Christ. He is the chosen One, selected to become flesh and be the Savior of mankind. He is the anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ.

He is true. In fact, He is the very personification of truth. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life."* (John 14:6). There is a radiance about truth that nothing else possesses. Christ is free from all error and falsehood. And in a day, like ours, when there be those who contend that truth is only relative, that truth cannot really be found, that truth is not absolute, the affirmation of Jesus about Him being true refutes all of that.

He hath a key. The possession of a key means that one has certain authority. When one has the keys to a car, he has the power to operate that vehicle. The keys to a house, or a safe, indicates the authority to use those things. Peter, and the other apostles, were given the *"keys of the kingdom,"* and they used them authoritatively to open the doors of the kingdom by preaching the gospel of Christ. Christ has unlimited authority (Matthew 28:18-20). He has the preimmence over all things to the church (Colossians 1:18). He has the authority of a king, even the kingdom of David. The kingdom of David on earth was a type of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, and in that sense Jesus reigns over the kingdom of David, exercising authority over it as did David over his earthly throne. His authority is such that what He opens, none can shut; and what He shuts, none can open. In this way Christ reveals His supremacy over all. When one realizes this significance of Christ, little wonder that he stands in awe and respect of Him as the Son of God.

There were four things Christ said that church had. *"I know thy works, behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."* (Revelation 3:8). An open door meant an opportunity of some kind. There was before them an entrance through which they could pass. It is not stated just what that opportunity was. But rather than focus our thoughts in speculation as to what might have been their *"open door"* let us think about what doors of opportunity are open to us.

We have the door of evangelism before us, to take the gospel to the world. Paul spoke of this opportunity as an open door in First Corinthians 16:9. *"For a great door and effectual is opened unto me..."* He was saying that he had great and wide opportunities there in Ephesus. Again, Second Corinthians 2:12, *"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord."* (Colossians 4:2,3, *"Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving, withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds."* This door of taking the gospel to all the world is ever before us.

There is also what might be called the door of refuge, the entrance into eternal safety. Revelation 3:10 implies an impending trial of the faith of the brethren in Philadelphia. But the Savior stood ready to admit them into the fold of security. There is a place of refuge for every troubled soul, and that place is *"in Christ"* that leads to heaven.

Do we not also have the open door of service to others? And to all who are separated from the Lord, there is the door of salvation. Any and all opportunities that are open to man might be called *"open doors."* They are open to us. Where there is opportunity, is not there also responsibility? Failure to cease opportunities will mean the removal of those opportunities and the door will be closed. Nobody could shut the door that the Lord had opened, except themselves; they could shut it by refusing to pass through it.

Revelation 3:8 also reads, *"...for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."*

It is very difficult to know just what strength was in mind here. Was it numerical strength, spiritual strength, material strength, lacking in abilities in some way? We cannot tell. It is interesting, however, to note that the Lord did not rebuke them for having little strength, but He only takes note of it. It may suggest that the Lord was more concerned with the quality of their strength than the quantity of it. Perhaps they had but a few soldiers of the cross and were limited, but as with Gideon in the long ago, a few that were truly dedicated to God were of more value than many who might have been fearful and half-hearted. It seems to have been a reminder by the Lord that they did have something and that they ought to be busy using it.

They were a stable church and received commendation for it. Under the pressure of persecution they had not wavered and

denied Christ. They had attempted to assume a neutral position regarding Him. They had kept His word. Persecutions are designed to intimidate and provoke apostasy. This had not been their reaction; they stood firm.

Philadelphia did not receive any strong words of condemnation. We do not suggest that they were perfect. Possibly the reference to a little strength may be interpreted as a minor rebuke, but there may have been something else meant there. Doubtless much of the reason that we do not find rebuke against them is because they had kept the Word.

The church in Philadelphia can be looked upon as a church with a glorious future. *"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."* (Revelation 3:9).

As in the letter to Smyrna, the Lord mentioned those who said they were Jews but were not. There were those who claimed to be children of God, but actually they were in the service of Satan. As for those people, the faithful brethren have no fear because the Lord would see to it that they would be victorious over such enemies. In Christ there would be their victory.

"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." (Revelation 3:10).

There was preservation in the future of this church. Hardships of some kind and of some undesignated quantity and source would come against them, but the Lord would keep them and protect them. This would be a very comforting and consoling message to beleaguered brethren.

There would be divine visitation. *"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."* (Revelation 3:11).

These are words of encouragement to faithfulness. They had what mattered and they ought hold to it. Christ is asking them to just hold on a bit longer; deliverance would come. Nobody can take your crown from you if you will just remain faithful to what you have.

In addition to the triumph over their foes, preservation from the persecution, divine visitation and deliverance, they would be exalted. *"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of thy God; and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God,*

(continued from page 24)
which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name." (Revelation 3:12).



JAMES W. BOYD

Remaining loyal and faithful would mean the faithful would be a part of God's temple, a pillar, an essential part of God's house.

Once in that temple, nobody would force him out. This is not teaching "once saved, always saved," because we can remove ourselves from God's temple if we choose, but nobody can force us out. Once in heaven we would never have to leave.

The faithful would receive a three-fold inscription: one, the name of God; two, the name of the city of God as a citizen of that city; three, the Savior's own name as one redeemed by Him. How glorious!

The evaluation by Jesus of the church in Philadephia makes one want to be a part of a church like that. What is there that prevents each of us from working to make the congregation where we are more like the church in Philadephia that received such good marks from Christ?

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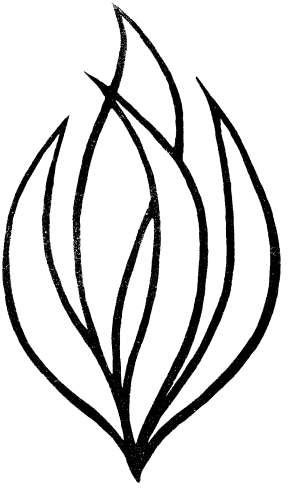

'But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.'' (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME V James W. Boyd NUMBER 10

Letter To Laodicea

The first six letters to the churches of Asia were in the previous issue of ***A Burning Fire***. The general pattern of this letter is similar to the others. The design and outline is very much like the preceding ones because we first have identifications of Christ as given by Him, observations concerning the condition of the congregation, admonitions, warnings and promises. In most of the letters we find commendations and condemnations. The letter to Laodicea is somewhat different in that we find no good thing mentioned.

Of all these letters it just may be that this one is more fitting to a vast number of twentieth century congregations than the others. They are all applicable and valuable, but it is not difficult to find congregations where the terms used to describe Laodicea would fit many today.

Revelation 3:14, *"And unto the angel of the church of Laodicea, write, These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."*

By way of brief review, Jesus has identified Himself as holding the seven stars, walking amidst the seven candlesticks, the first, the last, the One once dead but living, having a sharp two-edged sword, eyes like a flame, feet like powerful burnished brass, holy, true, the possessor of authority, perceptive and powerful.

He adds three more descriptions. He is *"the Amen."* "Amen" means "so be it," or "let it be so." It is an expression of agreement, confirmation and endorsement. We use it to conclude our prayers and show the hearty acceptance of the sentiments expressed. By calling Himself *"the Amen"* He reveals His power of permitting things to be so, one whose agreement and endorsement is to be sought and cherished. He is the One who places the stamp of approval. Had we not rather have the Lord's "Amen" than any other? This identification also is more or less a guarantee that His words are eternally true.

He is *"the faithful and true witness."* He is altogether competent to testify. Whatever He says ought to be heeded. He is worthy of complete confidence and trust. There is no falsehood about Him. We can depend upon whatever He reveals to be the fulness of Almighty God. Again, it is an emphasis of the need to give full attention to Him and His

testimony.

He is *"the beginning of the creation of God."* It is not that Christ was the first that was created. Christ is not a created being. He is eternal inasmuch as He is Deity. This points to Christ as the originating cause of all creation. *"All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that hath been made."* (John 1:3). *"Through whom also He made the worlds..."* (Hebrews 1:2). This gives emphasis to His eternal nature, underscoring His Deity by reference to His creative power.

In several respects, of all the descriptions Jesus gave of Himself in these seven letters, these reveal more of His majesty and greatness than many of the earlier ones. Why are such identifications so important? Words have varying degrees of importance depending upon the One who speaks them. The words of these letters are from Christ.

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot. I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

The church in Laodicea was in a sad plight. They were afflicted with the spiritual disease of lukewarmness. There is no word of praise given to this church as with most of the others. Doubtless, this was because none was considered worthy. Laodicea has the "tag" as being the lukewarm church.

Christ implied that it is worse to be lukewarm than cold. In other words, He preferred that they stand for something, somewhere. They had enough Christianity to have a form of godliness, but not enough to be real Christians and be saved. They "played church." They "kept house for the Lord." There was no real zeal, little courage, no sacrifice, too much of a "ho-hum" attitude toward the things of God.

The lukewarm Christian is really one of the greatest hindrances and enemies the church has. He poses to the world to be a follower of Christ, but gives a false and distorted picture of what Christians are supposed to be. It is a serious matter to misrepresent anything, certainly the Lord. Probably more than the drunkard, adulterer, murderer and such like outside the church, the lukewarm member does the church more harm than they.

The lukewarm member is so deceived. They deceive

themselves. Like the Laodiceans, who considered themselves rich and in need of nothing, they were quite the opposite. The church was probably a relatively wealthy church as far as this world's goods were concerned. They, like the fool of Luke 12, evidently thought because they were well fixed physically that all was well spiritually. It is so difficult to show those who are rich the need of spiritual devotion. They think, "Everything is so fine with me. I have prosperity, health, wealth, and in need of nothing that I cannot afford to get if I want it. What could possibly be lacking that is too important?" So many who have wealth do not ever seriously consider the welfare of the soul.

But while they considered themselves rich, Christ considered them as *"wretched"* (worthless, sunk in deep woe), *"poor"* (poverty stricken in treasures that matter; near spiritual bankruptcy), *"blind"* (unable to perceive and see things as they really were), *"miserable"* (in danger and distress; insecure even while feeling secure), *"naked"* (without the cover and protection they needed, exposed to evil and the enemy of the soul). This church was almost the exact opposite of the one in Smyrna that was materially poor but spiritually rich.

The Lord sent them the message, "You are not as you have led yourselves to think you are." They were not what the Lord desired. They were so distasteful to Him that He would rid Himself of them. He would *"spue thee out of my mouth."* Such a church makes the Lord sick.

But even as bad as they really were, there was yet something they could do about it. *"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent."* (Revelation 3:18,19).

The Lord still loved them. He was displeased with them. They could not enter heaven as they were. He disapproved, but loved. He was chastening them, pointing out their faluts because He loved them, hoping they would take heed to His warnings and what He told them to do.

They needed to come to Christ to secure real wealth. They claimed to be rich but they needed the spiritual gold that was free of dross. Only Christ can provide that which is of eternal value. They needed riches that were pure and refined.

They could have garments of white. Their shame of their trespasses could only be hid with the garments the Lord gave.

As the song suggests, "When the bridegroom cometh will your robes be white, pure and white in the blood of the Lamb?" It goes on to say, "Lay aside the garments that are stained with sin and be washed in the blood of the Lamb." No apparel is so valuable or needed as the spiritual garment of white that denotes forgiveness of sins and purity of heart.

Whereas the Lord said they were blind, they could use the eyesalve that the Lord could provide and really see. Those whose eyes are closed can never see the Lord, not their own deplorable condition. We cannot see the truth through glasses that are colored with worldly gain, sin, greed, and doctrines of men. The salve of God's truth, when properly received and applied, will give spiritual sight, even as Christ was able to restore the physical sight of so many while He was here on this earth.

How could they acquire this gold, apparel and salve? The message was, *"Repent."* They had to change their minds and change their ways. To continue as they were meant certain doom. But they could turn around and make things right again.

The tenderness of Jesus toward sinners is nowhere demonstrated or stated more kindly than in Revelation 3:20,21. *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame, and am set down with the Father in his throne."*

He stands, patiently knocking on the door of our heart. He is not harsh nor gruff, but tender and kind. He is willing to enter into communion and fellowship with any and all who will welcome Him. But whether the door is opened or left closed depends upon the keeper of the house.

Embodied in the beautiful plea is the summit of all promises. We can be with Christ in glory even as He is with the Father. This is a manner of expressing the eternal life that is promised to those who come to Him and live and die faithful to Him.

As with the other letters, He closes urging the readers to give heed and attentiveness to His words. *"He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."* (Revelation 3:22).

We can drift into the same spiritual lukewarmness as did Laodicea. Only by partaking of the virtues of the Lord can we hope to stay alive, on fire, in tune, and harmonious with Him. What shall it be with the congregation where you worship? How

will it be with you personally?

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Secret Discipleship

"And the Jews Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting. And when he had made a scrouge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables, and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence, make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." (John 2:13-17). This is a record of one of the two times that Jesus cleansed the temple. (See Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15; Luke 19:45).

The action of Jesus was bold and open, vigorous and decisive. He feared no man and courageously took the initiative. It was for just such actions that the Jewish leaders became concerned about Him and sought His undoing. Everyone was talking about Jesus and the rulers were losing their grip on the people.

John 2:23 tells us *"many believed in his name."* His words and deeds caused people to have confidence in Him. Doubtless the religious hierarchy that so often came under His barrage against evil looked on Him with an evil eye, jealous of their position and power, anxious to instigate something that would undermine Him. For the moment they had to remain silent and seethe in their contempt for Him.

Not All Hated Him

All of the rulers among the Jews were not so bent with hatred of Jesus. Some were even disposed to have a high regard for Him as one who was endowed with divine wisdom and power. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews said to Jesus. *"We know that thou are a teacher come from God."* (John 3:2). There were others who actually believed on Him, but were afraid to openly

confess it. *"Nevertheless among the chief rulers many believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."* (John 12:42,43).

Joseph

We also read of Joseph of Arimathea, who is called *"an honorable counsellor, who also waited for the kingdom of God,"* (Mark 15:43); *"A good man and a just,"* (Luke 23:50); *"a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself was Jesus' disciple,"* (Matthew 27:57), *"but secretly for fear of the Jews."* (John 19:38). The point is, there were prominent people who recognized Jesus to be exceptional and even believed what He said, but they were afraid to commit themselves openly. They wanted to be the servants of Christ, but they were what we might call, "secret service men." By that we mean they looked for the Messiah, looked for the kingdom, even identified with Him. They would not stand up for Jesus nor speak out on His behalf. They kept their "faith" in Christ a secret from others.

Nicodemus

In John, chapter three, we read of the visit Nicodemus had with Christ when he came to Jesus by night. Much speculation has been offered as to why he came by night. Whatever be the real reason, his action did avoid any open impression that he actually sought out the Lord. Nicodemus was probably the best specimen of faith in Christ that we find among the Jewish leaders. He had some courage and interest, being knowledgeable of the law and knew what the prophets had said concerning the Messiah. He was a respected teacher or a master among Israel. Yet, he dared not be offensive to the enemies of Christ. An open and public visit would certainly tarnish his image as a Jewish leader with most other Jewish leaders. It would cut into his power and prestige. At this point in the life of Nicodemus we fail to find exhibited the stuff from which nobility is made. He would not stand up and speak out and be counted for Christ. He remained in secret.

The character of Nicodemus at this point is a mixture which can neither be greatly admired nor altogether despised. He had faith, but it was weak and feeble. His timidity toward Christ robbed him of true dignity and personal greatness. Even though

he was head and shoulders above his peers, yet there lacked the manliness and courage he needed.

We read about Nicodemus later in John 7. Verses 31 and 32 say, *"And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done? The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him."* Again in verse 40, *"Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet."* There was considerable dispute among the people about Him. Even those who were sent to take Him came away saying, *"Never man spake like this man."* (Verse 46). This infuriated the Jewish leaders and made them all the more anxious to seize Him, judge Him, condemn Him and dispose of Him. They were losing control of the people. So they met to plan their manipulations against Him.

In a council meeting, Nicodemus arose to speak. For a moment it seemed that he would venture into the realm of boldness of his convictions. He uttered but one sentence. *"Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?"* Is this a Jewish ruler? Does he even dare to come to the aid of Jesus? Has the fear he once felt been replaced by such conviction that he will willing to shed his secret discipleship and stand up for Christ?

He Backed Away

We see his budding courage pale and wither, shrinking away beneath the attack from the others. *"They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."* (Verse 52). With these intimidating words, Nicodemus, along with the rest, *"went unto his own house."* (Verse 53). He did not gather any additional courage to speak but remained silent as the Jesus he loved was the object of plots and snares. He even remained a secret disciple through His trials and crucifixion, timidly pulling back under the pressure of others, not willing to be unacceptable to those around him.

It was not until after Jesus had died at Calvary did Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus raise sufficient courage to openly ask for the body of Jesus in order to give it proper burial. With this action, it finally became evident that they were His disciples. They had been "secret disciples" for some time. Someone has

written, "How often we come creeping along with tardy devotions when it is too late; our offerings poisoned by procrastination, and the decay of lost opportunity." It is almost like withholding all the "flowers" from another until after they have died and are to be buried.

Keep in mind these were in many ways good men, honest and sincere. They, like too many of us even now, were pitifully lacking in the constitutional strength and courageous character to stand up for Christ when they should have stood. They were "secret disciples" and acted so nobody would really know they were.

We Are To Be Lights

Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16). Just how do we go about the task of showing we are on the Lord's side? We do not wish to be a show-off with pretense. We do not seek personal praise from others for what we do. How do we show our fellowmen and our God that we are disciples of Christ?

We read an account about a man who claimed to be a member of the Lord's church who worked alongside some others, and he almost bragged that they never knew he was a Christian. Can one really be a true Christian and live in such a way that those around never suspect it?

A Christian should be known by the life he lives, his clean and godly habits, his pure motives and desires. He ought to be recognized by the way he walks, dresses, what he thinks is humorous, his recreation. People ought to be able to know he is a Christian because he is known to be a faithful worshipper. At assembly time, they know where he and his family will be. He ought to be known by his charity, and the things he supports and opposes.

A true disciple is known by the fact that he loves his brethren and demonstrates it, not just expressing it with flippant, pious, and often gimmick-type exercises that call for him to say, "I love you." Love is shown by deed, not by trite words.

A true disciple is not fearful nor ashamed of the truth, nor of being identified with it. He will not bow before the social pressures nor have any inclination to just "go along with the crowd." If need be, he will stand for what is right all by himself. He will do what is right. He will take his stand where the Lord's

will demands and let people think of him whatever they will for doing so. His godly manner and righteous life is the only advertisement he offers that he is a disciple of Christ.

The Lord Knows

John 2:24,25, *"But Jesus did not commit himself unto them because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man."* There were those that Jesus could not and did not trust. There were those who seemed to be His followers but the Lord knew the inward man and knew their commitment to Him was insufficient. The Lord's favorites were the "*sons of thunder.*" the men of rock, those who would live and if need be die for the truth. Those who would pretend to serve the Lord but with reservations, or those who secretly admire Him from a distance, are not those on whom the Lord can and does depend. He wants and needs the uncompromising person who will endure the heat or the cold, hunger, thrist, humiliation, ridicule, scourings, and tortures of body and mind but will remain strong and bold. He wants us to be as was Paul when he said, *"I am not ashamed..."* (Romans 1:16). We should be ashamed to ever be ashamed of Him and His will.

The following poem embraces the admonition of our lesson:

Why shrink in fear and shame of Him?
  Why Him in secret love?
Why come at night
  To see the light
Of Him who reigns above?

Why walk amid His enemies
  And trembling fail to stand
To own His name
  And praise His fame
Throughout a sin-sick land?

Why cringe beneath the scorn of men?
  Why timidly confess?
He gave His life
  Endured the strife
For our own worthlessness.

Shout loud, and rise and march in faith
For all to hear, let us say,
"I'll stand, my Lord,
My King, my God
My hope, my strength, my stay."

James W. Boyd

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A Great Woman

Second Kings, chapter four, tells us of a woman who is called *"great." "And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman."* (Second Kings 4:8). The name of this woman is unknown, being only identified by the area where she lived, the Shunamite woman. Just what all might be included in the term great we cannot precisely know. It may well refer to her prominence in that area. As we read about her, there are at least four qualities revealed that would qualify her to be called great that are not always considered qualities of greatness by much of the world. As we consider them, we need to compare ourselves to her and probably we shall discover areas where we could make real improvement.

A Servant

This woman lived to do good for others. One who lives to serve others is obviously an unselfish person who really cares for the welfare of others. In this case, we see Elisha, God's prophet, as he passed through the city as he often did. He would be dependent on the people of the area where he was for his livlihood, food, shelter, and other necessities. At this particular time in Israel's history, the prophets of God were not among the most wanted and popular people. The nation was demoralized by worship of Baal and wicked living. God's prophets, expressing God's rebuke for such things, meant that few people really cared for them or even wanted them around. Fewer still would risk showing kindness and consideration.

This woman recognized Elisha as a *"holy man of God."*

(Verse 9). As he came through the village, she *"constrained him to eat bread,"* offering hospitality and provisions and rest for the weary servant of God. She used her material goods for another, bestowing kindness on one who was deserving. She showed her love and respect for God by "holding up the hands" of the prophet of God by assisting him.

It was her suggestion that she and her husband, who obviously shared her concerns, build a special room and furnish it so that it could be used by the prophet whenever he was passing by. This is thoughtfulness and consideration being manifested. She was like an Old Testament Dorcas who was busy doing good things for other people. Surely such people are "great" in the eyes of the Lord, because Jesus said that those who served would be the greatest (Matthew 20:26). Doing unto those that love God is like doing unto God (Matthew 25:40).

Contented

She could be considered great because she was contented with her lot in life. As might be expected, Elisha, upon receiving this support, wanted to show favors in return. He sent a message by his servant Gehazi, *"Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?"* Elisha was in a position to return the favor and inquired what it was that he might do for her?

Her response tells something of her character. *"I dwell among mine own people."* In other words, she was content as she was. She had not done these things for Elisha in order to receive some benefit for herself. Like the psalmist, she felt that her *"cup runneth over."* She had no ambitions and sought no glory, fame, reward for her service. How different she was from so many today who are never content with the good that they can do, but always seek something more, better, grander, for themselves. They never really consider that they have a duty and an obligation to give themselves on behalf of others but only seek what they want.

We do not suggest that she was in a state of stagnation, with no desires whatever. She earnestly wanted a child, but she had her husband's love, her home, her chance to do good. She did not complain and murmur about sacrificing.

The prophet made her heart glad when he informed her that God would be gracious to her and her husband and bless that

home with a son. In time a son was born, and through that son we are able to see some other sterling qualities in the life and character of the Shunnamite.

Strength And Control

This woman knew how to stand strong in the storm. She exercised self-control and faith in God, virtues that go hand-in-hand. This son grew to some size and was in the field with the father but became sick. He was taken to his mother where her love and skill did all that could be done for him. Nonetheless, the son died; tragedy had invaded that home.

This great lady demonstrated control and faith in her hour of grief. She laid the son's body aside, and without any indication of self-pity, resentment, bitterness or rashness, she displayed sober and mature action. She sent for her husband and requested transportation quickly to Mt. Carmel, the home of the prophet Elisha. Her husband thought it strange, seeing it was not a regular time of worship, such as the new moon or the sabbath day. This brief remark indicates that it was the custom of this woman to be a worshipper of God and a faithful attendant to worship duties. Her response to her husband was, *"It shall be well."* There was need for haste and not delay. She assured her husband that everything was going to be all right. She had that kind of faith, and evidently she had so conducted herself before him that he had full faith and confidence in her, because he asked no further questions, respecting her proven judgment and knowing her to be worthy of trust.

This "great" woman had attained two goals that every man and woman ought seek. She wanted to be acceptable before God, and she had the love, confidence and respect of her mate. She had learned through living to strive for things that really matter, rather than the frivilous, trite, paltry decorations of a secular and materialistic world.

Action And Submission

Another quality seen in her was that she was a person of energetic action, as well as submission to God. As she approached Mt. Carmel, she met Gehazi, Elisha's servant, who asked, *"Is it well with thee, thy husband and thy child?"* Her answer was *"It is well."* Even though she was in sorrow, grief and on a mission of concern for her child, she was submissive to

what she could not change, but active in changing whatever could be changed. She offered no complaints, no whining, no distrust, no grumbling of her misfortune, no wringing of the hands in panic, but a calm and serene dignity in the face of the worst storm of her life.

We might focus attention in passing on Gehazi's question, *"Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?"* (Second Kings 4:26). This is a question every wife and mother ought to consider. Many women are so concerned about being "liberated" and "becoming a free and independent person" that they have either neglected or altogether abandoned their sacred responsibilities to their husband, child, and home. Our society has become so "career-conscious" for women that the primary purpose for woman's existence has been shoved into the background if not out of the picture completely. Women have become more sinful, secular, self-seeking, and misguided and it is evident that many will continue in this perverted pathway because they have been fed the garbage of Satan that "You've come a long way, baby." They sure have. For many, they have taken no notice of the way they have gone. Respect for women is often less because more women are less respectable. They have acted like barbarians rather than women as God would have them. This great woman from Shunem was one who was concerned for her family first.

Elisha's Help

When she met Elisha, she told him what had taken place and urged him to come and do whatever he could. Possibly she sought nothing more than the presence of a friend and man of God at the time of distress. She also knew him to be a man of miracles. Nothing would suffice except Elisha return home with her.

Elisha arose, went to the house, found the child, and called upon God to raise the child, and the child's life was restored and then given to his mother. This woman, seeing the child alive again, bowed herself to the ground with submissive thanksgiving for what had been done. (verse 37).

This great woman was a person of strong faith, a steady disposition, fervent piety, one that worshipped God, who was a keeper of the home, self-reliant, trustworthy, grateful, wise, kind and considerate. What else could describe her but *"great"*?

Her grave is unmarked and her name is unknown, but her life

still shines in brilliance down through the ages, and benefits even us.

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Parental Government

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou riseth up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

"And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies and the statues and the judgments which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharoah's bondmen in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharoah, and upon all his household, before your eyes, and he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statues, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us." (Deuteronomy 6:20-25).

"If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them, then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place, and they shall say unto the elders of the city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice, he is a glutton and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die; so shalt thou put evil away from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear." (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

These verses from the Mosaic Law introduce our theme. They were firm and hard, insisting upon obedience from children and the exercise of parental government in the home. Is there not a need for people today to think on the matter of parental government, seeing the veritable rash of wayward children, disturbed homes, divorces, void of spiritual guidance, and breakdown of respect for authority?

Two Kinds Of Parents

In the first chapters of First Samuel we see two kinds of parental government and the results of each kind. One is that of Eli and the other of Hannah. One proved to be a failure and the other produced blessed results.

It was the obligation of Jewish parents to train their children in the knowledge and respect of God. Failure in this effort was one of the most serious crimes and the punishment for failure was of the greatest magnitude. Now, as then, the family is the fountain of all national life. The hope of the nation is in the families where the young are trained to a pure, holy, pious and righteous way of life. It was incumbent on all parents to be attentive to this duty, especially those of leadership.

This obligation rests upon every father and mother today, to see that their children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Failure does not always mean the death of the child, as under Moses' Law, but it always means sorrow, grief, worry, punishment, either here or in the hereafter. The family is still the fountain of national life. It is still a sin against society, the child, and God, to not train up the child in the way that he should go (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:1-4).

Eli's Failure

While we are taught this duty, not all obey God in doing it. Look at Eli. Generally, he was a good man and faithful in his official priestly duties. But he was radically defective in the government of his family. His children grew up unrestrained, self-willed, indulgent, and even irreverent for things holy and divine. They were never guided in the proper values.

Eli's sons were priests, having inherited the duty. They did not care for the people and had little religious interests. They used their position for personal gain, to satisfy their passions, commit adultery, and take unfair portions of food for themselves. They

brought disgrace and public contempt on their office and their father.

We are not left to wonder what contributed to their misconduct. Eli was responsible. Children sometimes resist the influence of the best of homes, but this is not the rule. Trained properly, they will likely be proper. When children are lawless, corrupt, irreligious and reject Christ, we can be fairly certain that there was a sinful neglect in their spiritual training. There are exceptions, but that is the rule.

Training of children consists of more than sending them to Bible study once a week. It demands living before them day by day an exemplary life. Children learn by words, but mostly by deeds. During the formative years many parents have been "too busy" with lesser matters to attend to the spiritual training necessary for their family. Somehow, some seem to think that they can neglect the Word of God, ignore the church, put the world first in their life, and still the children will grow up loving God and desiring to live a life that will take them to heaven.

Eli was at fault for not checking the wickedness of his sons. He had the authority to act, but did not. *"For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."* (First Samuel 3:13). Too many parents ignore the misdeeds of their small children and the children do not learn to abide by parental directions of restraint later. Too many parents run to the defense of their children regardless of what the child does, right or wrong. While we must stand by them when they are wrong, we must stand so that they will know they are wrong and make correction. Too many parents condone the misbehavior of their offsprings.

The result was a total failure for Eli, his sons, and even suffering upon the priesthood and Israel. God showed His displeasure with Eli by the judgments placed against him and his family.

Hannah's Success

Look at Hannah, the mother of Samuel. When she was childless, she prayed that God would give her a child for God's own sake. *"If thou wilt give thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life..."* (First Samuel 2:11). Her ambition for her son was that he would be a servant of God. Is not this the ambition that every parent should

have for every child? Do we receive our children, and train them so that will be the case with them? Hannah kept her promise, and the noble life of Samuel is a reflection of the kind of parents he had. While we are not required to give our children to God in the same fashion as was Hannah's promise, we are to rear our children to the glory of God and that cannot be done short of exercising parental responsibility and power. Samuel was a tower of righteousness in his life. He was a godly man and a leader of Israel for many, many years. The name of Samuel is revered as one of God's most devoted messengers. What a tribute to Hannah!

The Home

The home is where the child is trained. From the home come the business leaders, political people, teachers, labor leaders, religious leaders, etc. The stream will rise no higher than the spring and source. There is always that great need for homes where God, truth, honor, respect, love, work, and discipline is very much in evidence. Restraints on ill-behavior that is spasmodic and irregular, brutal and intemperate, will produce more of a savage than a respectable human being. Parents ought never abandon their children to the vice and immoralities of society. The drug problems and juvenile delinguency so rampant among the youth today is directly attributable to parental failure in most instances. Parents have not cultivated in their young the noble aspirations, but urge them on to worldly success and personal satisfaction. Such only leads to ruined lives and hopeless graves. People without training that God directs are frustrated, confused, searching for something, and finding no meaning to their existence. They do not know how to cope with life, let alone the soul.

Possibly the sternness of the Puritan home was too much, but whem one compares the results with so much in evidence today, we are inclined to think that, if they erred, they did so on the safest side.

There must be a cultivation and development in the young heart for morality, responsibility, truth and honesty. One of the bitter failures of our present day is basic, fundamental honesty. Until one is taught to love God, he will find no reason to live right, and probably will seek out whatever means at his disposal to do whatever he wishes.

Real Education

We spend so much time, money, and energy on "educating" our children regarding the affairs of life, secular matters, worldly matters, and neglect that which far supercedes these things in importance. Children need to learn to make their own decisions, but parents must provide for them the will of God so that they can learn to make intelligent and righteous decisions. Parents have the duty to lead, mold, form that child so he can "stand on his own feet" before God and be acceptable. Parents who do not give their all to this task are failures, regardless of whatever else they might accomplish in life. Parents must rear their children so that when the child walks in the ways of his training, he will be walking on the road to heaven with God. Anything less is too little.

Judge Sam Davis Tatum, juvenile judge for many years, listed what he considered the six basic causes of teenage delinquency:

(1) Lack of religious training in the home.

(2) Petted and pampered children; too much freedom too early.

(3) Broken homes; one parent families; and all the attendant insecurity.

(4) Consuming intoxicants, often in imitation of parents as well as peers. The easy access to alcohol and drugs.

(5) A discordant home, where there is nagging, fussing, strife, immorality, profanity, etc.

(6) Dictatorial and overly rigid parents, who consider themselves as dictators rather than parents, "laying down the law," but seldom showing how life is to be lived.

Parents have a lot to consider, do we not? God help us do our job well.

† † † † †

It Is Not Geography

No area of the nation or the world has a monopoly on good motives regarding learning the truth. One liberal of "Joplin Summit" fame once wrote that those in his section of the country were more concerned with searching the Word for truth while those in another region simply wanted to preserve traditions. Such conceit and snobbery is reprehensible.

Spiritual Gifts

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant...Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same God who worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will... And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away... And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." (First Corinthians 12:1,4-11,28-30; 13:8-10,13).

From The Old Testament

The Old Testament prophets pictured the Christian age as one in which the Holy Spirit would be very prominent. Joel said God would pour out His Spirit on mankind and they would prophesy. (Joel 2:28ff). Peter said the events of Pentecost were the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:16). Beginning that day, the Holy Spirit worked in an extraordinary way in the early church. Christians were able to do things that they could not have been able to do without the *"spiritual gifts"* granted them through the power of the Holy Spirit.

How did people come into possession of these gifts? The apostles had been promised the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14,15,16), and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit on

Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4). From the eighth chapter of Acts we learn that through the laying on of the apostles' hands, others could perform these wonderful deeds. Philip, who could perform miracles, was not able to impart this power on others (Acts 8:17). The same was true in Acts 19:6 regarding Paul and brethren at Ephesus. The apostles not only had the power of the spiritual gifts, but they, exclusively, had the power to impart this ability to others (Acts 8: 18-21). From this fact we know that nobody today has these gifts because nobody today has come into personal contact with an apostle. This is one of the reasons we know that the day of the miraculous has passed.

A Distinction

We need to distinguish between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the power of spiritual gifts. The Lord was the administrator of the baptism of the Holy Spirit on those to whom it was promised; namely, the apostles. Others, upon whom the apostles laid their hands to impart the power of spiritual gifts, were not baptized of the Holy Spirit. They were enabled to perform the wondrous deeds listed in First Corinthians 12.

Paul wrote to the brethren so they would not be ignorant nor confused as to the use, purpose, and duration of these gifts and their significance. Gifts were granted for the purpose of doing something. They were not granted to change one's character. Even Balaam, an evil man, had the gift of prophecy. Judas had the power to perform miracles as one that was a part of that ministry. Spiritual gifts did not denote character although most to whom such power was given were God's people. We read how that Caiphas prophesied, and he was not commendable before God.

Now to the primary thrust of this particular lesson, and that is what these gifts were and what were those who had them able to do. All the gifts came from the same source, the Holy Spirit, but each gift was distinctive. The word *"administrations,"* or *"ministrations"* in First Corinthians 12:5 indicate that their purpose was to minister. They were not to be used for personal glory, financial gain, pleasure, a demonstration of power or for a show. They were given so that those who possessed them might render a service. How different from so many who *"claim"* to have these gifts today.

The Gifts

There were the gifts of wisdom and knowledge. This was the ability to know and reveal divine truth. The early church had no New Testament Scriptures. The gospel was not fully written and recorded. Those with these gifts enabled them to know what the will of God is.

The gift of faith was not the kind of faith that comes from the Word of God, but a miraculous faith, to impower them to do the impossible, except God was with them. We shall see, without a more detailed distinction given in Scripture, that some of these gifts seem to overlap. We may as well recognize that we do not fully know what all some of these gifts may have included. The gift of faith is one of these.

There were the gifts of healings and miracles. Some could heal the sick, and it was a miraculous act that they did. They could make the blind see, the lame walk, and the dead rise again. None would doubt that such is miraculous. Just exactly what is the difference between the gift of healing and miracles is hard to determine, unless the gift of miracles went beyond the ability to heal, even to the power to strike one blind, shake off a poisonous viper or walk on water.

The gift of prophecy included both foretelling the future and preaching the gospel. A prophet is one that speaks for another. They were teachers of the will of God, guided by the Holy Spirit in what they taught.

The discerners of spirits were those who could distinguish between true and false teachers. Again, we note there was no written word by which one could compare what was heard from some teacher, but the early church was not left helpless to be able to detect false teaching and false teachers because of those with the gift of discerning spirits. Such a gift was for the protection of the church.

There were divers kinds of tongues. First Corinthians 14:22 teaches that tongues are for a sign to the unbeliever. Therefore they had to be something spoken that was understood. Tongues were not unintelligible jabber, incoherent babblings, and emotionally induced utterances of vowel sounds. They were languages that people could understand. They were not some kind of "special prayer language" that some claim today. Those with this gift could speak in languages that were neither normal, natural, nor native to them. They had not learned them, but were able to speak in various languages because of the power of the Holy Spirit. The usefulness of this gift is obvious in a world of many tongues. Those contending for the ability to speak in

tongues today do not do what those in the first century did when they spoke in tongues. The early church tongue-speaking was genuine, but that which is done today is counterfeit and false.

The gift of interpretation of tongues was the power to explain what the speaker of tongues was saying to those who were not learned in the tongue he was then using. He gave the meaning of the speaking. First Corthians, chapter fourteen, shows that interpreters were not always active, but only when needed.

Their Purpose

These gifts were used in the early church for the purpose of confirming the word, verifying the truth, ratifying it (Mark 16:20). All these gifts being used together in the aggregate enabled the early church to prove that the doctrine it supported was God's Word. Since the New Testament was not yet written, men could not "*search the scriptures*" of the new covenant to know what was true and false. Nonetheless, the church was provided a means to document and substantiate its teaching.

Their Duration

It is not in the purview of this lesson to deal extensively with the design and duration of these powers, but it is necessary to note that the very chapters that mention these gifts also teach that they would cease, fail, and vanish away. Tongues would have served their purpose. Miraculous wisdom and knowledge would no longer be needed. These gifts were to last *"until that which is perfect is come."* Not until we reach heaven; not until Jesus comes again; not until we all believe alike. They would continue until the full revelation, that was being given in parts, was fully delivered. They continued until there was the perfect, whole, complete, unified, total will of God through Christ committed to the all-sufficient, inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative Scripture was given.

That *"perfect law of liberty"* is now before us in the Bible (James 1:25). The *"unity of the faith"* is existent in the Bible (Ephesians 4:13). These gifts were intended to last until the will of God was revealed and written, recorded and confirmed.

It is an interesting side note to see how the record of the use of miraculous gifts lessens as one continues to read the book of Acts. Love is the *"more excellent way"* and is superior to spiritual gifts.

Miraculous

Do we believe in the miraculous? Yes, we believe the record of the miraculous given in the Bible. Do we believe in the miraculous being done today? No, because the purpose of the miraculous has been accomplished long ago. Nor are there those who have been with the apostles. Nor do these present day "miracle workers" do what was done in the New Testament record.

We are all endowed with talents and abilities that are not miraculous in nature that need to be put to use in spreading the confirmed word. Such talents are God's blessings and our opportunities. Let us not seek that which was not promised us, but rather use what has been given us.

† † † † †

What Does It Take?

While the purchase of cigarettes is slowing somewhat we are told, we still see multitudes of people burning incense to the devil. Over and over the media has presented the irrefutable evidence of the destructive power of tobacco and its disease causing and aggravating effects. But why does not the smoker pay any attention? What does it take?

One of the most pathetic demonstrations of the weakness of people and their lack of self-control was seen on television recently. Following a rather lengthy presentation of the harm cigarette smoking by the mother does to the unborn child, one pregnant woman said she knew she should stop but just could not. It would seem that she would quit, if not for her own welfare, for the welfare of her child. She was also a nurse and knew the effects of smoking. What does it take?

We know that nicotine is a habit-forming drug. It may be difficult for some to throw off the expensive and filthy habit. But the real problem is a spiritual one. Those who smoke evidently do not care that is harms them, is offensive to others, harmful to others, and is a sin because it is harmful to the body. Self-control is a virtue they have not developed.

But likely there will be some who will read these things and turn again to their cigarette as if they had never been taught or forewarned. What does it take to get them to do right?

Meeting Schedule For 1986

Listed below are the dates and places for gospel meetings and lectureships where I am to preach this year. These are listed with the hope that any reader within reasonable distance to these events might come.

Lafayette, Georgia March 23-28

Gilt Edge, TN April 6-10

Mid-Tennessee Lectures, Lebanon, TN, Adams Avenue Church Building April 11-13 (I preach the 11th)

Dunlap, TN April 13-18

Phillips Street Curch Lectureship, Dyersburg, TN April 23-26 (I preach the 23rd)

Crossett, AR April 27-30

Algood, TN May 11-14

Arlington Church, McMinnville, TN June 8-13

Bell Buckle, TN July 13-18

Ohatchee, AL July 27-August 1

Spring Creek, near Jackson,TN August 10-14

Greenfield, TN August 24-28

Plainview Church, near Fulton and Tupelo, MS September 7-10

Savannah, TN October 5-10

This fills the time available for meetings this year. JWB

A Dead Giveaway



JAMES W. BOYD

Those who are stained with a liberal stain have various ways of exposing themselves. Listen to them closely and they will betray their bias and digressive attitudes and doctrine.

They are very judgmental toward those they accuse of judging. They are viciously negative against negative preaching. They are certain and postive that nobody can be sure of truth. They are often heard to speak of love but demonstrate their capacity to verbally tear asunder any who questions what they teach. Liberals have learned the art of ridicule for those who contend for the faith and sound doctrine. Disdaining labels, they label others as Pharisees and legalists those who are not given to liberalism. They present themselves as "super-saints," having considerably more "spirituality" than others. Restoration is displaced by a "unity in diversity" reformation. Anything that was taught before this new wave of digression is called traditionalism. Defending the faith is, to them, something unnecessary. Pseudo-love is their god.

Hating the KJV, they condemn condemnation. As was said of Peter when he denied Christ, "*Thy speech bewrayeth thee.*"

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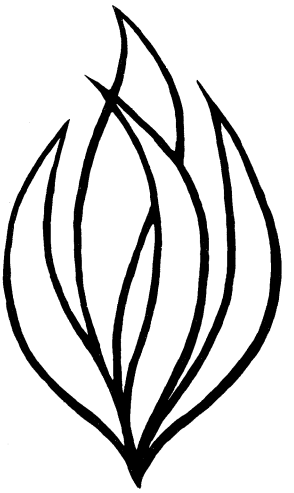

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME V James W. Boyd NUMBER 11

Serving The Master With Vision

Only one matter in life is of eternal significance, and that is whether we serve God or not. Our subject implies that we can, do, and must serve Him. It also implies that there is action on our part. God has a role in the salvation of man, but man also has his part. It is man's part that we are considering.

To serve the Master with vision is to go behind our actions and get to the heart. Vision must precede intelligent action. We are discussing a matter of the inward man and his service from within.

What do we mean by "vision"? The word "vision" has at least two senses, and we can serve God with vision in both senses. A vision is defined as a revelation; an act or sense of seeing; involving sight; perception; in a vision something is revealed that before the vision was unrevealed. There have been "visions" in the sense of divine revelation. There are also "visions" in the sense of man's perception and concept, foresight, looking forward and planning. Divine "vision" is revelation from God, God's message to man, showing man how God sees things and what God wants.

In Acts 10, Peter saw a vision of a great sheet let down by its corners that contained all manner of unclean animals. This was a vision from God revealing to him how the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, were subject to the saving gospel of Christ. In Second Corinthians 12:2, Paul saw a vision of a man carried into the third heaven. Philip was instructed by the Spirit to go to the Gaza Road and meet the Ethiopian. This was divine revelation. *"Then thou speakest in vision to thy saints..."* (Psalm 89:19).

God no longer speaks to man through vision inasmuch as He has provided His inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient word (Second Timothy 3:16,17). God speaks through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2), and the Scriptures tell us what the Son has authorized to be taught.

The Word

Proverbs 29:18, *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* The American Standard Version reads, *"Where there is*

no vision, the people cast off restraint." The application is, where there is no word from God there is no hope of heaven. We need God's revelation. We must have His divine guidance. *"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23). *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* (Proverbs 14:12). Hence, the necessity of revelation or "vision" from the Father.

Our service to God must be according to His revelation. We must never lose sight of His Word. It is spiritual blindness to do otherwise. It is unfortunate that so much of the religious world is not impressed with the phrase, *"thus saith the Lord."* But we are unable to serve Him without His revelation to us as to what he commands, expects, desires, what is pleasing and displeasing to Him.

As we think of "vision" in the second sense, we are talking about the exercise of human perception and foresight. It involves the application of God's will in our lives, individually, collectively. In much of our service to God, God expects us to use the good sense He has given us. Man is often called upon to exercise his judgment and do what his opinion deems is best.

Human And Divine Vision

We want to emphasize the difference between human vision and divine vision. It might be called matters of opinion and matters of faith. For instance, divine vision has told us to give. Human vision determines how it is to be collected. Divine vision teaches us to go into all the world. Human vision determines the best way to go. Divine vision specifies what is to be taught. Human vision decides which method of teaching is the most effective. Divine vision says to care for the needy. Human vision must come to some conclusion how it can best be done. There is no room for variance in matters of divine vision. There are differences among men about human vision, and this can be expected and tolerated. Human vision demands we use our best judgment in carrying out what divine vision has revealed is to be done, in those cases where divine wisdom has not specified the how like it has specified the what.

We suggest that the "great commission" is an example of great vision. *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."* (Mark 16:15,16).

There are at least four characteristics of this great vision that we need to imitate.

Universal Vision

One, it was a broad and worldwide vision. Why should not our vision be as extensive as possible? Shall we become self-centered and concentrate only upon ourselves? This is what has retarded "mission work" in foreign places. We have built buildings of excessive design and trivia for ourselves while others have never even heard the gospel once. Some are even pushing the church into areas of activity for which there is no authority, such as building expensive gymnasiums for their own play, while souls are dying for the lack of the truth.

Congregations that turn attention inward, not for self-examination but for self-satisfaction, soon become spiritually lukewarm and compromising of the truth and mission of the Lord's church. *"Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest."* (John 4:35). Good vision is going to see the real needs of the world and teach the lost, strengthen the saved, recover the fallen, with the Word of God. How foolish we show ourselves to branch out using gimmicks, playgrounds, gyms, shows, entertainments, "big bang frivolities," to try to harvest souls for Christ. We cannot show good vision when we are too busy centering our sight on what we want for ourselves rather than what the Lord wants for the world. We would hate to have to stand before God in judgment and give account of hundreds and thousands of dollars spent on such "denominational imitations" of worldly grandeur, when there be places without churches less than a day's drive away, because preachers cannot find adequate support to preach. Surely, hell will be fueled by such as that.

Our Home

Our broad and worldwide vision must put this life in proper perspective. This world is not our home. Too many of us are concentrating so heavily on the here and now, the materialistic aspirations of this life, that the spiritual welfare of our own families is often neglected. Parents are more concerned about the popularity of their children than their soul. More time and energy is spent on a secular education than instruction in the way of the Lord. This is vision? When we know this life is brief

and uncertain and death is sure, the judgment awaits, hell or heaven will be the destiny, and we trifle with mundane matters to such an extent that we are not even aware of our relationship with God. This is vision?

Families will borrow hundreds of dollars for pleasure and luxuries, but find it "wise" to cut short their contributions to the cause of Christ. Brethren will spend hugh sums in a few minutes to do some material work on a church building or parking lot, but hassle for weeks over a small sum needed for spreading the truth. This is vision?

Surely one of the matters that trouble us and bogged down the expansion of the kingdom is the lack of vision. We just do not have a very broad or worldwide look at things. We do not get the full view of the importance of an eternal existence.

Far Reaching

The vision of the "great commission" was far-reaching. It included everybody. Sometimes one generation seems to forget that the oncoming generation must be taught everything from the beginning. We take too much for granted. Lack of vision retards training efforts. We look at only today, and ignore what must be tomorrow. One area where lack of vision is evident is placing the right training and emphasis on qualified men to serve as elders of the church, preachers, and teachers of the gospel. So much of the work one does for Christ may never be realized in one's own life. He must have vision enough to look beyond his own time. Yes, we need immediate actions that consider long-range vision.

The "great commission" was optimistic. What a gigantic task? The gospel was for all the world and was committed into the hands of only twelve inspired men. Today, the task seems overwhelming, and we are inclined to think it cannot be done. Some never want to do anything because they are defeated before they start. We want "big things" but fail to understand that "big things" are generally made up of many "little things." Too many want only a "big splash" and are pessimistic when something small is suggested. So many leaders are blind to the opportunities before the congregations they lead. They do not have enough vision, and often they do not appear to even be looking. Truly, without vision the people perish. "I can't" has about captivated many brethren, and there is no optimism.

We recall years ago when a store called Harvey's had a lease

taken from them by a competitor called Cain-Sloan. The portion of Harvey's store that would be lost included his escalators, and was right in the middle of the store. Harvey's sued for possession. The trial was aggressive.

On one examination, Mr. Harvey was asked what he would do if he lost the suit and lost the premises. He replied that he never had considered it, because he did not undertake any task with the idea of being unsuccessful. That is optimism. That is vision. We need more of it in the church.

Trusting

The vision of the "great commission" was based on confidence in God and His providence. Man is short-sighted when he does not lean on God. Planning to do only what we can "see our way clear to do" indicated that we are not leaving much room for God. We cannot do what needs to be done by ourselves. We must depend on God. Maybe this is the reason we do not have the vision we need. Could it be that we are not as dependent on God as we ought to be? Could it be that we are not walking by faith at all, but like Thomas, must insist that we see before we act? At least, it is something about which to think, is it not?

Serving God with vision, then, means serving Him with His word as our guide and law. It also means using our good senses to do what God has commissioned us to do. It means having foresight that is far-reaching, broad, world-wide, long range, optimistic, full of faith. Are we to think that God is pleased with anything less?

† † † † †

The Spirit Of Christ

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Romans 8:9).

It is so important that we know what the Spirit of Christ is because if we do not have the Spirit of Christ we cannot belong to Christ. To be *"none of his"* is to be separated from Deity.

The Spirit of Christ, Spirit of God, Holy Spirit, must refer to the same because of what seems to be their interchangeable usage, even in this passage. Also, to have the Spirit of Christ, or the Holy Spirit, means to have the mind, the attitude, the characteristics of Christ. We sing a song that pleads, "More and more like Jesus, I would ever be." To be more like Jesus we must partake more and more of His Spirit.

Paul urged, *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus..."* (Philipians 2:5). Is he not teaching that we are to be more and more like Christ? And how can we become more like Christ except by partaking more and more of the teaching of he Holy Spirit and conforming thereto?

There was what might be called a gentle and soft side to Christ. There was also a sterner, more aggressive, plain spoken side of Christ. On the gentler side we think of His love, devotion, loyalty, innocence, kindness, and similar characteristics. On the sterner side was His rebuke against sin, His condemnation of hypocrisy, His commands, His wrath against those that blasphemed holy and sacred things.

In this lesson, we shall confine ourselves to only four manifestations of the Spirit of Christ as seen in the life of Christ. These are qualities of Deity that man would do well to strive to imitate, and reach in his own character to the best of his limited capacity.

Humility

Consider the humility of Christ. There is the temptation of power, prestige, fame, wealth, rank that draws one away from humility. There is much that urges people to set themselves up higher than they ought.

As we study the life of Christ, we see His life was humble from start to finish. He was born into a humble earthly home, that of Joseph and Mary. Joseph was a lowly carpenter. His birthplace was in a stable and His first bed a manger. He lived in the humblest of cities, Nazareth, a city that was looked down upon by most of Israel's citizenry. He lived most of His life among those who were lowly folk by this world's standards. The rich and powerful had little use for Him, with a few exceptions. Those who loved the pleasures and power of this world did not seek His association.

His every word was indicative of humility, even though firm and forceful at times. There was no haughtiness or vain pride

ever displayed by Christ. Satan attempted to tempt Him through vain glory, but Satan was turned away because Christ did not have vanity about Him.

He died a most humiliating death, as a criminal on a cross, even though His life was spent doing only good. From His glorious place in heaven, He humbled Himself and took on the form and fashion of a human being and came to this earth of sin and sorrow. If that is not humbling oneself, what better example could be given?

Jesus taught, *"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 18:3,4).

When He washed His disciples feet (John 13:1-10), He demonstrated a humble spirit that He wanted His disciples to imitate. He taught that those who would humble themselves shall be exalted, but those that exalt themselves shall be abased (Matthew 23:12).

Surely many of this world's ills are attributable to pride, haughtiness, thinking of oneself more highly than one ought to think (Romans 12:3)

Forgiveness

Christ had a forgiving spirit. He taught forgiveness (Matthew 6:14,15). *"For if ye will forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* Whereas people had been taught to love their friends and hate their enemies, Christ taught to love even enemies (Matthew 5:43,44). Carrying a grudge and harboring ill-will toward another is more damaging to the one who holds the grudge than it is to the one who is despised.

The very mission of Christ to this earth was that of forgiveness. Peter once asked Christ how often one ought to forgive another. Christ answered, *"Until seventy times seven,"* meaning, there is no limit to be placed on forgiveness to those who truly repent and seek forgiveness (Matthew 18:211,22). The desire for revenge and keeping offenses alive is the work of the devil. We ought not assist Satan in this sinister work.

Christ not only taught forgiveness but we read of the many times when He spoke men's sins forgiven. Even as He was

hanging on the cross and those who hated Him were scoffing at Him, He cried to the Father, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* His attitude toward those who offended was that He sought their forgiveness. We are not to understand that forgiveness was given to those people unconditionally. We do understand the spirit of Christ in the matter.

Failure to forgive means failure to be saved. Someone has correctly said that if we will not forgive, we burn the very bridge over which we must cross to enter heaven. Oh, that we had the Lord's forgiving spirit.

Sacrificial

Our Lord was also One who was willing to sacrifice Himself for the benefit of others. In fact, this is precisely what He did in coming to the earth and dying on the cross. He laid aside His heavenly station to wear a seamless garment among sinful people. He was with God, but allowed Himself to be tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15). He owned no property, had no place to call "home," was even buried in a borrowed tomb, and it was all for others, none for Himself.

Behold this Christ as He prays and the sweat was as drops of blood because of what He had to endure, His anticipation of the cruel cross. See Him as He stands alone before the raving and angry mob that called for His death; the very ones He loved and came to save. Follow Him through the trials of mockery and scorn, injustice and inhumanity of treatment. See the innocent Christ nailed to Calvary's cross, and ask if there can be any doubt but Christ had the spirit of self-sacrifice.

When we consider His words and deeds, it is not as hard to see why God would banish to hell those who would reject Him and refuse to worship Him. How dreadful is that person who would consider his time and energy too precious to be given to such a One as Christ.

Do you know the best way to show our appreciation for the sacrifice that Jesus made that we might escape hell and enter heaven? Do you know how to do that? It is not by mere words, but by a life of good deeds and discipleship. Sacrificing ourselves for Him is the way we show our esteem for this self-sacrificing Christ.

Obedient

Christ had an obedient spirit. He was always subject to His Father's will. His first recorded utterance was, *"I must be about my Father's business."* (Luke 2:49). He had John the Baptist baptize Him because it was to *"fulfill all righteousness."* (Matthew 3:15). Inasmuch as *"all thy commandments are righteousness,"* (Psalm 119:172), the baptism of Christ was an action in obedience to the Father's will.

"Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." (Hebrews 5:8). *"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."* (Philipians 2:8). Romans 5:19, *"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."*

Christ not only taught obedience, He obeyed, *"leaving you an example, that ye should follow in his steps."* (First Peter 2:21).

Our individual lives would be greatly improved if we would only develop our spirits in the likeness of Him.

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The Differences Between The Christian Church And Churches Of Christ

It is sometimes thought that the only difference between the Christian Church and churches of Christ is the instrument of music in worship. We hope to make clear that this does not reveal the entire picture.

We do not take any pleasure in noting religious differences inasmuch as we know the Lord is pleased when there is unity. There is a difference between truth and error, and to teach the full truth the error must be exposed and opposed. While there are similarities between these two churches, there are significant differences that cannot be overlooked.

In the last part of the eighteenth century there arose men who

recognized the sinfulness of denominationalism and religious division. They proposed religious unity based on the Word of God. In the early nineteenth century there were men like Barton W. Stone in Kentucky who led a movement of people who called themselves the Christian Church and Christians. A while later there came Alexander Campbell in Pennsylvania and Virginia who had a similar plea to Stone but who called themselves "Disciples." When there was the eventual contact between the two groups in 1832, it was determined that they believed many things alike and began discussing their differences, which were gradually resolved as they contended that unity must be based on the authority of the Scriptures.

The two groups merged into one and remained in unity from 1832 until 1849. Their goal was to *"speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent."* They promoted unity in matters of faith and charity in matters of human opinion. They called themselves by the Biblical name of "Christians." They sought not to erect another denomination, but to restore the New Testament church by following the New Testament pattern. There was not only unity but tremendous growth in what is now looked upon historically as the Restoration Movement.

Rise Of Division

There arose divisions among those who sought the restoration of the faith of Christ. Out of these differences have come the distinction between the Christian Church and churches of Christ.

There are a number of wide gaps between the two groups, but fundamentally the real division is over the attitude toward the Bible. The difference between the churches of Christ and the Christian Church is much the same as that between churches of Christ and all other denominational bodies. It is the attitude toward the Scriptures.

Members of the church of Christ would contend as Peter taught, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..."* (First Peter 4:11). There should be no additions, subtractions, substitutions, or alterations from the Bible. There must be Biblical authority for what is done and taught. In other words, the motto of speaking where the Bible speaks has remained the watchword.

On the other hand, those of the Christian Church adopted the attitude that man is permitted to do whatever God does not

specifically prohibit. If Scripture does not expressly forbid something, we are at liberty to do it if we see fit.

Two Attitudes

To summarize briefly the two attitudes: churches of Christ contend that we should go by what the Bible teaches while the Christian Church contends we are permitted to go by what the Bible does not prohibit. The result has been an ever-widening gap in practice, doctrine, faith, and position. It is not unfair to say that the Christian Church in my lifetime has drifted more and more away from the Bible as authority and they have patterned themselves after the denominations around them. They now even admit to being just another denomination among denominations.

While there are some Christian Churches that like to be known as the conservative Christian Church, some even wear the name Churches of Christ, the basic position regarding the Bible is still there, and it is just a matter of time until the differences between those and the churches of Christ become more pronounced.

Missionary Societies

The first major division came over the introduction of the missionary societies. Until 1849 the Restoration movement was not troubled by these things. A man named David S. Burnett, formerly a Baptist, promoted the idea and promised on his sick bed in 1845 to start a missionary society. He got it going in 1849 to the disruption of the peace among brethren.

While the missionary society advocates claimed it was but a simple method for doing mission work, it was more than that. There is nothing wrong in legitimate methods, or doing things decently and orderly. Certainly spreading the gospel is the work of the church. Nor is there anything wrong with churches cooperating in doing such work because New Testament churches worked together in accomplishing the mission of the church, sharing, giving, receiving one from another to spread the cause of Christ.

The missionary society was a structure that displaced the church and was without Biblical authority. It even had delegates from the various local congregations to meet and make decisions with which churches who were members of the society were

obligated to conform. The society became a legislative body, usurping the authority of local elderships, violating the local church autonomy which the New Testament teaches.

God set up a system of elders over the local church and each church was meant to be independently governed. However, under the missionary society, delegates of many churches made the decisions what the local churches were to do. They began to "hire and fire" preachers, telling them when, where, and what to preach. Some even advocated assigning the amounts of contribution to the society that each church was expected to contribute. The missionary society became a wedge that split the restoration movement.

Instrumental Music

About ten years later, another innovation of denominational imitation was forced upon churches. This was the mechanical instrument of music in the worship of God. While the Scriptures authorized singing, the instrument produced another kind of music that God did not authorize. Those who were determined to stay with the Scriptures rejected the instrument. Those who had the philosophy that they could do whatever was not expressly forbidden moved it in. This human innovation completed the division between the two groups. It was the result of abandoning the necessity for Biblical authority. Through the years since the early part of the twentieth century, other divisions have come forth as could be expected. Once you leave the necessity for Biblical authority, there is no limit to which people can and will go.

Government

There has been a change in the government of local congregations among Christian Churches away from elderships to governing boards that include both men and women. Women cannot be elders, nor can they take authority over men. Yet, the Christian Church does it anyway.

Some years ago when I lived in South Bend, Indiana, a woman from the local Christian Church called me by telephone. She was disturbed because the Board of their church proposed to place a woman as chairman of the Board. She was already on the Board. She thought that would be wrong because she would have authority over men, which Paul specifically forbids. I

told her not to object; they had already left the Bible by having a Board and by having a woman on it. They would not aggravate the sins among them anymore by letting her be "top man." She got the point, but went along with them anyway.

The Christian Church has established another "office" in the church in addition to elder and deacon with a "deaconess." Such is not authorized in the Scripture. Women serve, but not as some kind of female counterpart to a male deacon.

Decisions in many Christian Churches are made on the basis of majority rule, voting, and sometimes preacher rule. Majority rule was the way the instrument got into many places. The Lord's plan is that elderships have the oversight, but some wanted a democracy and changed things.

Tithing

Some Christian Churches teach tithing as God's law for today, borrowing a portion of the Mosaic Law even though that law was nailed to the cross.

There is fellowship and cooperation with Christian Churches of the false teachers of denominationalism. Their ministers are members of the local ministerial associations alongside all the other clergyment. They often exchange pulpits. They promote religious meetings together even though some participants have not even obeyed the gospel and are not Christians as the New Testament uses the term. There have been instances where Christian Church preachers have exchanged pulpits with a Jewish Rabbi, one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Other Sources of Divison

Modernism and liberalism run rampant among Christian Churches to such an extent that the inspiration of the Bible, the Deity of Christ, His virgin birth, and the historicity of miracles is denied.

Their preachers have copied the denominational clergy in the wearing of titles and robes, calling themselves Pastor and Reverend.

Christian Churches most often observe special religious "holy days" for which there is no Biblical authority. They recognize Easter, Christmas, Lent, and on and on. It is not uncommon for them to celebrate these unscriptural celebrations in fellowship

with all other denominations. All they are doing is nibbling at Roman Catholic traditions. They have left the Bible and are following men.

Open membership is acceptable to many Christian Churches today. Open membership means one only must say he believes in Christ and baptism is no longer necessary for one to be accepted into the fellowship of many Christian Churches. Some of my own kin were accepted into the Christian Church on the basis of having been sprinkled as a child.

The Christian Church long ago went in big for entertainments, social events, playground and gymnasium promotions, sponsoring the Boy Scouts, Little League ball teams, etc. Following their philosophy of doing whatever is not specifically forbidden, there is no limit to which they can involve themselves in anything regardless of what the Scripture denotes as the work of the church.

These differences are also noticeable in the inclusion of women preachers and song leaders. There are many things that now divide the churches of Christ from the Christian Church.

Let me go back just a little bit and say that there are many things that divide faithful churches of Christ from the Christian Church denomination. It is one of the tragedies of my life to have to observe so many who were once faithful brethren adopt the plan and pattern, practice and preaching of the digressions and apostasies of the Christian Church. Some have taken in the mechanical instrument. Many are building their own gymnasiums and have their church league ball teams. There is what is called Youth Worship or Children's Church separate from the assembly. Women are teaching in the presence of men. Churches are getting a larger and larger "staff" with titles galore for each official. Acceptance of triune baptism is advocated. Acceptance of baptism as taught and practiced by Baptists is advocated. Celebration of the "holy days" in fellowship with denominational clergymen has become the "in" thing with some of the more "with it" brethren. They have become as removed from the truth as Christian Churches ever thought about doing. They have left the need for authority and are "doing their own thing." Some of the biggest names among us have appeared on programs of the Christian Church designed to promote the growth of the Christian Church. Yet, these same apostates are on the college lectureships, in the brotherhood papers, invited for gospel meetings as if they were sound in the faith. The "go-alongism" that has stained the churches of Christ in recent

years has blurred the differences between the Christian Church and what some still prefer to be called churches of Christ.

No Compromise

There is no compromise between truth and error if we be faithful to God. As long as time lasts, the difference between the Christian Church and that which our Lord purchased with His blood will be distinct in the minds of those who still love the Word of God.

We have not been able to discuss the pros and cons of each issue in this one lesson, but only have noted the differences. But the arguments are discussed in various other lessons from time to time.

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Where Are The Dead?

Most people have some concern about death and what follows. The subject of the abode of those who have died intrigues us not only because of our interest in those who have gone before us, but because we too shall pass that way. We must guard ourselves against airy speculations and confine ourselves to what we can know, leaving the unknown to God.

The Bible does teach us that there is existence after death. Where do the dead exist? What are the conditions?

Let us consider man: *"What is man, that thou art mindful of him...?"* (Psalm 8:4; Hebrews 2:6). Genesis 2:7 reads, *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."* Ecclesiastes 12:7, *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."* Man's body is made of dust and shall return to dust. That part of man is mortal and subject to death, but there is more to man than his mortal, physical body. Job 32:8, *"There is a spirit in man."* Genesis 1:26,*"and God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."* Daniel 7:15, *"I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body."* Zechariah 12:1, *"God formeth the spirit of man within him."*

So man is body and spirit. When the two are together there is life. When the two are separated there is death. *"The body without the spirit is dead..."* (James 2:26).

We know what happens to the body after death. It decays and returns to the earthly substance from which God made it, but what happens to the spirit? Where does it go?

Where The Spirit Does Not Go

It does not go into the grave with the body because they are separated. This is a tremendous comfort as we are called upon to bury the bodies of our loved ones. The body is called a tabernacle (Second Corinthians 5:1), literally a tent or temporary dwelling place. Longfellow wrote, "Life is real! Life is earnest! And the grave is not its goal; Dust thou art, to dust returneth, was not spoken of the soul."

The spirit does not go to purgatory. We want to stay with the Bible and the Bible says nothing of purgatory. This is a Roman Catholic superstitution born during the dark ages of apostasy.

It does not go directly to heaven, regardless of how good; nor directly to hell, regardless of how wicked. When you listen to many funeral sermons you might get that idea, but that is not the case. The eternal heaven or eternal hell follows the judgment, which follows the resurrection, which will occur at the coming of Christ, which has not happened yet. There is an intermediate state to which the spirit goes after death.

When Christ was hanging on the cross, we read, *"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnmation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."* (Luke 23:39-43). Wherever Jesus went, that is where the thief went at death.

Jesus did not go directly to heaven. Three days later, when one godly woman approached Him, He said, *"Touch me not. I am not yet ascended to my Father."* (John 20:17). Three days before He went to paradise, but He still had not returned to the Father in heaven. So they did not go directly to heaven at death. Paradise is not heaven. Where then is paradise and what

about it?

Jesus Into Hades

Acts 2:27,29-31, Peter was preaching on Pentecost and was telling about Jesus and certain prophecies that related to Him. *"Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption... Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption."*

David's prophecy was concerning Christ, not himself. The body of Christ was not left in the tomb to decay as is normally the case with a dead body. He was raised from the dead. His soul was not left in hell. We need to study this word *"hell."*

There are two Greek words that were translated by the one English word in the King James Version. *"Gehenna"* refers to the place of eternal punishment and is translated *"hell." "Hades"* refers to the intermediate state of the dead and is also translated *"hell."* Dictionaries still give both meanings of the word *"hell."* Some have assigned this as a mistake on the part of the KJV translators, but that is incorrect. *"Hell"* had and still has both meanings. However, the American Standard Version makes a distinction between *"gehanna"* and *"hades,"* translating the first by the word *"hell,"* and transliterating the second with *"hades."*

Christ said He was going to paradise, and Peter said He went to *"hell."* The word in Acts 2:27 and 31 is the word *"hades,"* which means when Christ died, and when the thief died, they went to the intermediate state of the dead. They did not go into eternal punishment, *"gehenna,"* but *"hades."*

Some have equated paradise with heaven and hades with the eternal place of punishment, but one can see the distinctions. Gehenna hell is the eternal place of punishment. Hades hell is the intermediate state of the dead. Paradise is therefore a part of hades because that is where Christ and the thief went.

More About Hades

In Luke 16, we read of the rich man and Lazarus. Some say you cannot prove anything much from this because they claim it is but a parable. There is no evidence that it is a parable, but the evidence is that it is an account of a historical event. In either case, what Jesus taught is the truth and it has no bearing on the matter whether it is a parable or history. The length of Luke 16:19-31 forbids its inclusion here, but this text must be read to grasp the points to be made.

We have learned that at death the body returns to dust. The spirit goes into the hadean realm. Righteous spirits go to that part of hades that is called "Abraham's bosom" or paradise. The wicked spirits go to a place of torment (verse 23) which is another part of hades. This place is *"tartarus."* There is a great gulf fixed between the two and an impassable barrier exists. The place of torment is not the eternal punishment because, as we have noted, eternal punishment is not until after the judgment (Matthew 25:46).

To summarize thus far, when one dies his body decays, but his spirit enters into the hadean realm, the intermediate state of the dead, which is composed of two parts, (1) Abraham's bosom or paradise, or (2) tartarus, a place of torment. There the spirits await the judgment.

Why The Judgment?

What then is the purpose of the judgment if it seems it is already decided just what the destiny of the soul will be? The judgment is not so much to decide who will go to heaven or hell, but to sentence the soul to heaven or hell. The decision is made in this life, and depends upon what one does with the will of God in his life. The judgment scene of Matthew 25 is not a time of deciding, but separating wheat from chaff, sheep from goats, saved from lost. At the judgment, those in the hadean paradise will enter heaven and those in torment will enter hell.

Another often asked question about the dead is "Are they conscious?" The scripture shows they are. The rich man was conscious. The martyred souls in Revelation 6 were conscious and crying out, *"How long, oh Lord, how long?"* Ecclesiastes 9:5,6 shows that the dead are not aware of anything that is transpiring *"under the sun,"* that is, back in this life, but they can remember and are conscious of their state, as we shall be. When one is in another city he is still conscious, even though he may not be aware of what is taking place back home. So it is in

death and in the hadean realm.

Shall we know one another in heaven? We cannot answer with as much certainty as some of the other questions, but the indication is that after death there is some recognition of the dead. Elijah, Moses, Samuel, Lazarus, the rich man, were all recognizable. David must have expected to see his child again (Second Samuel 12:23). Just how we shall be able to know one another we do not hazard an answer because we do not know. We do know that this mortal shall put on immortality (First Corinthians 15:42-44,50-54), and it is this body that shall be raised. We have the assurance that we shall know the Lord Jesus (First John 3:2), which means we shall know him and discern His presence and person. So the indication is that recognition will exist in heaven.

Power To Remember

Those in that joyous glory of God's heaven shall have nothing to mar nor blemish their eternal bliss regardless of the circumstances. Of this we can be sure. There is another class that will also be conscious and existing in eternity. For them there is no joy and happiness, but outer darkness, punishment, the second death. Abraham said to the rich man, *"Son, remember..."* Memory is a wonderful thing when one recalls moments of gladness and relives the delights of this life. But memory can also be most painful, especially when one is doomed and damned in Gehanna. The rich man could still recall the words of Moses to which he was accountable and could remember how he had neglected his soul.

Possibly some who read these words will remember the sermons, the invitation songs, the pleas from loved ones, urging them to obey the gospel, and they might remember how they kept pushing it aside, until time and opportunity existed no more. The supreme folly of man is to reject the Master's call to salvation. Death is coming to each of us, and we shall exist. The question is, "Where?"

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Why Be Baptized

"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:19,20).

Our text mentions the subject under consideration, that of baptism. Baptism is one of the prominent topics of the New Testament. While everything that is called "Christian" is certainly not Christian in the Biblical use of the term, ninety-five per cent of those who call themselves Christians practice something or another that they call baptism. This of itself speaks of the prominence of the topic.

Differences

Unfortunately, there are fewer subjects over which there has been such controversy and division. For instance, people talk about the "mode" of baptism, and by that they mean sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. The Bible makes it plain that baptism is a burial (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4). The Greek word *baptizo* means to submerge or plunge beneath. Only immersion is baptism.

There is division over whether there is to be one or three baptisms. Some practice what is called "triune" baptism, meaning once in the name of the Father, another in the name of the Son, and a third in the name of the Holy Ghost. Ephesians 4:5 says there is one baptism and that settles that for those who respect the Bible. "Triune" baptism is not Bible baptism.

There is division over whether baptism is in water or is it a Holy Ghost baptism. Some claim both. The Bible teaches the baptism of the Holy Ghost was for the apostles. Ephesians 4:5 says there is one baptism. The baptism being preached and practiced at the time Paul said *"one baptism"* was water baptism. Furthermore, Holy Ghost baptism was never commanded, but was administered by Christ. The baptism Jesus mentioned in Matthew 28:19 is commanded and administered by men.

Some have even created controversy over who is to do the baptizing. Denominations have made laws that only their own

"ordained" can baptize. What matters is the person being baptized, not the immerser.

There is division over who is to be baptized. Some baptize infants without any Biblical authority whatsoever. The Bible teaches that the proper subject for baptism is one who understands the gospel plan of salvation, is able to believe, having heard the Word, is able to repent and confess his faith in Christ.

Some even quibble over where a baptism must take place, whether in a river, a pool, or somewhere else. It matters not at all. Nor does it matter when one is baptized as far as the day or hour.

All this confusion, controversy and division is unnecessary. It would not exist except that men have substituted, added to, and taken from what God's book reveals and have demanded that others conform to their denominational laws and rituals and traditions. God has spoken and that settles it with those who love God. It is not that we cannot see the Bible alike, but we are not hearing it alike. Too many are not even looking at it at all, but only following their "clergymen, parents, etc."

Why must one be baptized? That is our study. We wish to present only five Biblical reasons why everyone must be baptized. We must know what we are doing when we are baptized. We are to obey from the heart (Romans 6:16-18), and that requires understanding of why. Going through the right forms but without comprehension, or for the wrong reasons, is not obedience to the command of God.

Commanded

We should be baptized because Christ commanded it. This may sound over simplified, but this is reason enough to be willing to be baptized. Now there is more to know, but we are dealing here with our submissiveness to Christ. He commanded and we should obey. *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."* (Mark 16:16). He made it a condition of salvation.

When Peter went to the house of Cornelius, he commanded those people to be baptized (Acts 10:48). You do one or two things with a command. You either obey or you disobey. Christ said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). It is unreasonable to contend that you love the Lord but will not obey His command. Hebrews 5:9 teaches that Christ *"became the author of salvation to them that obey him."* It is

unreasonable to contend you are saved if you have not obeyed him. Jesus said, *"Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you."* (John 15:14). It is unreasonable to claim friendship with Christ but refuse to obey His command.

One may ask, "Why did He command it?" That is a reasonable question. Suppose we never learned anything more than what we have already learned. This is enough for us to be willing to be baptized. If not, then something is terribly faulty with our submissiveness to Christ. There is more to be learned and we shall discover much more before we are through. But John wrote, *"For this is the love of God that ye keep his commandments."* (First John 5:3). Each one needs to ask and answer before going further, "Is the fact that Jesus commanded baptism enough for me to be willing to be baptized?" If it is not, then you may as well not read more. If you are convinced that you must obey the Lord, then let us study more what the Scripture says concerning baptism and the reason for it.

Remission Of Sin

Baptism is *"for the remission of sin."* (Acts 2:38). Man is lost because of his sins (Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin brings death (James 1:15). Baptism is to wash away sins (Acts 22:16). It is to be saved (Mark 16:16; First Peter 3:21).

The word *"for"* is from the Greek word *"eis."* It does not mean because of, but in order to. Not once does *"eis"* mean because of. It is a word that points forward, not backward. The thing for which one repents is the same thing for which he is baptized. One does not repent because his sins are already forgiven, but in order to their forgiveness. The same is true of baptism.

Just read Matthew 26:28 and you will have no difficulty with what the word *"eis"* means in an identical phrase as found in Acts 2:38. *"For this is the blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins."* Did Christ shed His blood because sins were already forgiven? Certainly Not! He pointed forward to the forgiveness of sins. It was necessary to accomplish the result. The same is true concerning repentance and baptism in Acts 2:38. Matthew 26:28 tells us what Deity did that we might be forgiven. Acts 2:38 tells us what we must do to be forgiven. *"Eis"* means unto, never because of. We do not want anyone to deceive us in this definition.

Just here it is well to state that just being baptized, that is buried in water, is not enough. Some have been immersed but for the wrong reason and with faulty understanding. Some have been immersed thinking they were already saved and were baptized as a sign of their salvation. The Bible never presents baptism in such a fashion. Some have been immersed to join some denomination. Never was anybody in the Bible baptized to join any denomination. Denominations did not even exist. In Acts 19, we learn that some had been immersed under John's baptism, looking forward to the coming of Christ, but they had been baptized by an invalid baptism because Christ had already come. Paul took them and baptized them again, this time for the right reason. This is exactly what those who have been baptized for the wrong reasons must do.

Get Into Christ

Baptism is to get into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). Salvation is *"in Christ."* (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation to those who are *"in Christ."* (Romans 8:1). All spiritual blessings are *"in Christ."* (Ephesians 1:3). How does one get into Christ? Both of the passages of Scripture that anwser that question tell us that we are baptized into Christ.

Enter The Church

One is baptized to become a member of the Lord's church. One is not baptized to "join" some denomination. The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). There is one body (Ephesians 4:4). Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23). If we are saved, we must be in the body of Christ which He saves. No where do we read of many churches or taking the church of your choice.

In Acts 2, after Peter preached the word, and the people heard it, believed it, and obeyed it in baptism, *"the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* (Acts 2:47). God adds the saved to His church. First Corinthians 12:13 teaches we are *"baptized into one body."* The baptism under consideration is the baptism that was being preached and practiced when people were added to the church in Acts 2; namely, water baptism, for the remission of sin, in the name of Christ, of penitent believers who had confessed their faith in Christ.

Reach The Blood

Baptism is the way we reach the saving blood of Christ. This thought shows us more clearly the connection between baptism and salvation. We sing the song, "What can wash away my sins?" The answer comes back, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Permit the listing of a few passages that emphasize salvation by His blood: Revelation 1:5; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 13:12; First John 1:7; Romans 5:9; Hebrews 9:22; and others. There is no question but we are saved by the soul cleansing blood of Christ. But when are we saved by His blood? How does one reach that cleansing blood?

While some have complained that baptism by-passes the blood of Christ, the truth is, baptism acknowledges the blood of Christ. Baptism is not what some have disparaging called "water salvation." It is "blood salvation." Baptism is no more "water salvation" than the healing of Naaman from leprosy (Second Kings 5) is "water healing." The power is not the water but the blood. But where has God provided that the blood be applied.

Romans 6:3,4, *"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* Where did the Lord shed His blood? It was shed in His death (John 19:33-34). By baptism we enter into that death and its benefits. This is where and when the blood is applied and washes away our sins. Water did not wash away Saul's sins (Acts 22:16) but the blood did when he was baptized. Baptism saves (First Peter 3:21) because of the blood of Christ being applied. We die to sin, being buried in water, and are raised from the spiritual death to spiritual life. This is the likeness of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

There are five reasons (and enough to convince anyone who respects the Word of God to obey the Lord's command) why one should be baptized. We have learned what the Lord says about it. Now, what do you say?

† † † † †

About Marriage



JAMES W. BOYD

There are three classes of people that Scripture teaches are permitted to marry. Those who have never married (First Corinthians 7:36); those who have married but whose mate died (Romans 7:3); those who have married and are divorced because their mate was guilty of fornication (Matthew 19:9). Unless one fits one of these classes he or she does not marry with God's blessings and approval.

Too many look for guidance and counsel regarding marriage from sources that do not and will not uphold God's teaching. But if you want a marriage that can reach the level of joy and happiness that God intends, then you must consider His ways and be wise, being governed by His Word.

It is more than merely unfortunate that there are religious people, denominational clergymen and even some who profess to be gospel preachers and elders of the church, who will compromise and sacrifice the truth regarding marriage in order to accomodate others from a professed compassion. If one has true love for another he will do everything in his power to persuade them to follow the truth.

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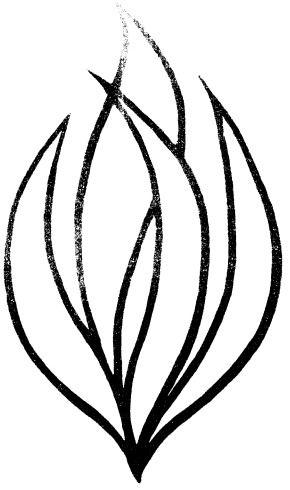

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME V James W. Boyd **NUMBER 12**

Brief Analysis Of The New Testament

One reason some people do not derive more benefit from the Bible is because they do not understand its character and structure. To be saved we must have faith (Hebrews 11:6). *"Faith cometh of hearing, hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17). It follows then that we must know the book in order to have faith and be pleasing to God.

Look at what the book claims for itself. *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."* (Second Timothy 3:16,17). To be inspired of God literally means "God-breathed." The book claims to be God's word, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient. Peter said, *"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (Second Peter 1:21). *"Moved"* means "directed, borne along, impelled, guided by the Spirit's power."

Galatians 1:11, *"But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."* The gospel is not of human origin. Paul's teachers were not human beings. It did not come from man but Christ. The Scriptures claim divine origin.

Nature Of Inspiration

What is the kind of inspiration that characterizes the Bible? Some claim it is inspired like the works of great writers, such as Milton, Shakespear, etc. By inspiration they simply mean something of superior quality and has endured because of that quality. That would remove the Bible as a book originating with God. It makes it nothing more than some other book that is highly exalted. This kind of "inspiration" contradicts what the Bible claims for itself.

Others say that only the thoughts are inspired, not the words. Of course the thoughts are inspired. How are thoughts conveyed except by words? Paul contends that the very words that were preached were inspired. *"For what man knoweth the*

things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (First Corinthians 2:11-14). Man cannot know the mind of God until God reveals His mind to man. Paul said the Holy Ghost revealed God's mind to them and chose the words of that revelation. This demands verbal inspiration. This means the words are God-chosen.

Some reject the New Testament because of its supernatural character. They deny anything supernatural, including the Bible. Everything to them must have a naturalistic explanation. Is it not evident that those who reject the Bible because of its supernatural quality know not what they are rejecting? Ask such modernists even the simple question, "Which came first, the hen or the egg?" and they are without any ability to answer. There is no answer without a Creator and the creation, which they deny. *"The fool saith in his heart there is no God."* (Psalm 14:1). Our very existence necessitates that there is a supreme overseer in this universe. To deny the supernatural is to deny reality that is proven from evidence.

Thomas Paine once boasted that the Bible would be a discredited book in a museum as a display of former superstitions. Tonight, the Bible is still the world's best seller. By the way, Thomas Paine's office has since been used as a distribution point for Bibles. To totally reject something which you cannot reason with limited knowledge is falacious. It would demand that we reject so much that we take for granted outside of matters religious. Supernaturalism is the only logical explanation for much that man can know. How absurd to reject the Bible because it denotes the supernatural!

Major Divisions

The New Testament can be divided into four parts: (1)Biographical -- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. (2) Historical -- Acts. (3) The Epistles -- Romans through Jude. (4) Prophetical -- Revelation.

The first four books are not the "four gospels." There is but one gospel. There are four brief records of a portion of the life of Christ sufficient to prove Him to be the Son of God. It is

generally thought that Matthew wrote to appeal to the Jewish mind, Mark to the non-Jewish mind, Luke to the Greek speaking people, and John filled a need of details on the life, birth, death, and certain events in His life. Personally, I do not put too much emphasis on this kind of analysis. All of it is inspired of God and we should study it all. Whether this distinction is valid or not is of no concern to those who read the Bible to learn God's truth.

The purpose of these books is simple set forth as John came to the close of his book. *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing have life through his name."* (John 20:30,31).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke close with Christ giving what is often called "The Great Commission." (Mark 16:15). Other similar words are found in Matthew 28:18-20 and Luke 24:47ff).

The book of Acts is a record of some of the acts of some of the apostles. It is a history of the beginning and the early history of the church. It is an account of the carrying out of the charge Christ gave to the apostles. What we have in Acts is the story of conversion after conversion, the spread of the truth of Christ among men of every nation, people rendering obedience to the commands of the gospel and enjoying the benefits of salvation as they are added to the church upon their obedience.

Christian Living

As the first four books help create faith, and Acts shows the start of the faith, the epistles (letters) are overrunning with admonitions to the Christian how to live as a Christian. It is one thing to become a Christian and something else to really be fone. These letters teach brethren how to keep saved. We are not to suppose that these are totally void of any information regarding the church, or the plan of salvation. Nor should we think that the first five books contain no information regarding Christian living. The truth is that all parts contain something about everything. But the emphasis is very discernible in each of the parts, the biographical, historical, epistles, and finally the single prophetic book, Revelation.

As we study the book of Revelation, we should consider as a prophecy that was given in the first century, but from our

vantage point, it is history, because the prophecies of Revelation deal primarily with matters that were to "*shortly come to pass*" and events that were *"at hand."* (Revelation 1:1,3; 22:10).. Some people read Revelation as if they should expect to find tomorrow's headlines somewhere in there. That is a misconception of the nature of the book. Many false doctrines have arisen because there have been those who have assigned the events of Revelation out of place.

As Bible students are much aware, the last book is highly symbolic and overrunning with figurative language. Therefore, the specific records of fulfillment not being available to us, we find the book a difficult one. Some have said, and we think with some degree of boastfulness, that Revelation is the easiest book in the Bible. We are not among those who so think. It certainly is not the place to start in trying to learn the will of God. It is amazing to me, after three decades of trying to preach the word, how many people who don't know Peter, Paul, and Mary from a singing group want you to explain to them in four short sentences the book of Revelation.

To study and understand, let me suggest an approach you might try. It is far more important that you understand, believe and obey *"He that believeth and is baptized..."* than it is for you to know what is the *"mark of the beast."* That which is of the greatest importance to you, how to be saved, is not a complicated subject. Whether God intended so or not, I cannot say, but those portions of the Scriptures that are more obscure and less easily grasped seem to be in areas that do not vitally affect our salvation, but are useful in our more effectively serving God.

A Word On Versions

Which translation do you recommend? There was a time when one could conscientiously say that he could learn the truth from most any translation. That is not so today. With the influx of modern versions, like the Revised Standard Version, New International Version, Good News For Modern Man, The New English Version, many individual translations, and on and on they go, we now have such perverted books represented as the Bible that one can take the whole of them and discover almost anything he wants. They contradict themselves within themselves, and certainly stand in contradiction with those proven and reliable versions, the King James Version exceeding them

all in our judgment. We denounce the upholding of these modern things as if they were reliable Bibles. We are compelled to say that those who do so do not serve the cause of Christ well, because they are putting books that teach false doctrines into the hands of people and leading them to believe that they have something deserving of confidence. We are amazed by the lack of respect for the inspired word that these modern "translators" have, and further broken-hearted to see brethren who say they love the truth, heaping to themselves these error filled books and polluting the ranks of the brotherhood with such things. God will hold those who do so guilty of contributing to apostasy and promoting fatal and false doctrines. Get yourself a King James Version and a modern dictionary, and God bless you as you *"search the Scriptures."*

† † † † †

First Things First

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6:33).

This was a statement of Jesus spoken in the midst of His discussion on the providence of God and how God cares for His creatures, especially mankind. He cares for the sparrows and even the grass which today is and tomorrow is not. *"Consider the lilies..."* and how He cares for such things. Jesus concluded, if God cares for those things, how much more does He care for the human being made after His own spiritual image? (Matthew 6:30).

There are four major points we want to consider as we analyze this statement of our Lord. It contains an obligation of man (what to do); an object (what to seek); an order of priorities; and a conditional offer.

Seek

We have the obligation to seek. The word *"seek"* carries the idea of a diligent search, and a patient inquiry. The New Testament abounds with instructions and admonitions along this

line. Take our concordance and run the references dealing with the Christian life and we discover the frequency of such passages, and the emphasis given to activity. For instance, *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* (Philippians 2:12). *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (First Corinthians 15:58). *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."* (Galatians 5:6). *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work."* (John 9:4).

Work

Look at this last passage and see how Jesus taught we must work. It is not that it would just be better if we did, but we ought to, we must, we have an obligation. Furthermore, we must work the works of the Father, not that of the devil, or of our own will. We must work while there is time and opportunity, because both shall eventually be taken away. Today is the only time that we have. The night cometh when none can work anymore.

In Luke 13:24, *"Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."* The word that is translated "strive" is the Greek word *"agnidzo,"* which is much like our word agonize. It speaks of effort, even wearisome and painful toil. How much agnozing are we doing to gain heaven? Sometimes we even complain when we are inconvenienced. So let us be impressed that Matthew 6:33 carries in it a definite obligation on man's part.

Object

It also specifies the object of our seeking. God's kingdom and His righteousness is the object. The world is overflowing with those that are following philosophies of life which are not satisfying to them. They have not found that for which the soul longs and the heart sighs. They try first one thing then another, trying to get something into and out of life. Here is the answer and the object of our seeking.

To seek the kingdom and God's righteousness means to seek

the benefits and blessings that are found only that way. The kingdom of God is His church, and His righteousness is His commandments. *"All thy commandments are righteousness."* (Psalm 119:172). Righteousness means "right doing" as God's Word has defined the right. We enter His kingdom by being "born again" (John 3:3-5). What Christ is teaching is that we must seek the church and the will of God. We are to strive to learn, know, follow what He has directed.

So many times people are misled to believe that the church does not really matter. God's commandments are relegated to a state of something optional, rather than required. However, salvation is in the church and can only be attained through what the word reveals.

First

Our priority is to seek the kingdom and righteousness **first.** The word *"first"* is not difficult to understand. We know what that means. Nothing else comes before it. We have more difficulty in obeying this teaching than we do in understanding it. It means all else is secondary to this object.

To put it down in very practical terms, it means when I have two places to go, and one of them involves some secular and personal interest and the other is concerning the specific work of the Lord, I am to attend to the Father's business **first.** It means when I have a limited amount of money and wish to do certain things with it but also have my responsibility to give as prospered, I give to the Lord's cause **first.** It means when there are two courses open to me, and one of them harmonizes with God's will and the other does not, I go God's way. The other, however worthy it might appear, cannot take the place of what must be **first.** We need not belabor this matter. We can all understand where our priorities should be. This is a hard problem for many who have not yet learned the will of God and have temptations to set aside what they have learned. **First** means **first,** and nothing can stand alongside of it or before it.

The next time you are tempted to be absent from worship in order to go visiting, watch television, rest, take some recreation, make money, etc., try to remember what the Lord taught.

We make so many excuses as to why we do not put His cause first; but excuses will not excuse. Our excuses merely reflect our unwillingness to do what God has said. We are often like the man who was asked by his neighbor to loan him his ax. He

refused on the basis that he had to eat soup with it. "But nobody eats soup with an ax," complained the neighbor. "That's right," said the man. "When you do not want to do something, one excuse is just about as good an another."

Result

Finally, we see the result of seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness **first.** *"All these things"* refers to the physical provisions of which Jesus had just been discussing. God cares for animals, birds, flowers, and He will care for people. The material necessities of life are provided. God knows we have material and physical needs. Some folks worry over them and strive for them as if they think God must not know that we have need of such things, but He does. And here is the way to be sure that we shall have what we need. People will absent themselves from work and worship in order to care for the things of this life and act like God has forgotten all about such needs of humankind, but He knows. He has promised us what we need, provided we meet the condition of putting first things first.

He has not promised us material wealth and abundance. Some cheapen the pleas of Christ to mean that you can have a better job, a bigger house, and a nicer care, etc., if only you serve the Lord. God never promised such things. He has promised we shall have what we need, not everything we want. It is often the case that people want what is not best for them. God not only knows what we need, that we have needs, but what is best for us to have. He promises if we keep things in proper order of importance, He shall provide what His infinite wisdom determines that we need.

This should lead us away from "majoring in minors and minoring in majors." It should lead us to put first things first as God has determined.

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BIBLES FOR SALE

In order to assist in meeting the expenses involved in producing ***A Burning Fire*** we are offering for sale the DICKSON NEW ANALYTICAL STUDY BIBLE. Many are already familiar with this Bible and brethren have recommended it widely. If you have an interest in owning one, giving one to someone, and thereby helping yourself and producing ***ABF***, please contact us.

Jesus, The Prophet

Matthew 21:1-11, *"And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straitway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them: and straitway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples sent, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; other cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that sent before, and that followed after cried, Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee."*

This is a record of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Many were praising Him and shouting, *"Hosanna,"* which means "Save, we pray." They attributed to Him the distinction of the long-anticipated Messiah, the One that was prophecied to come through David. Spreading the garments and branches were indications of bestowing honor. While others in the city asked, *"who is this?"* the answer was readily given, *"This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee."* We want to study Jesus as a prophet.

Work Of A Prophet

A prophet is one who speaks for another. In one sense a prophet foretells the future. If a prophet foretells the future and it comes to pass, he is a true prophet. Otherwise, he is a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Jeremiah 28:9). So many have proven themselves false prophets by predicting what they

could not know and being proven false when it did not occur.

A prophet is also a forthteller, a preacher, a teacher. It was foretold by Moses that God would raise up a Prophet who would command the word of the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:18). Peter cited that prophecy in Acts 3:22,23, *"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people."* The prophet taught the people the will of God. Peter showed that Moses' foretelling prophecy had reference to Jesus as a forthtelling prophet. Jesus was a prophet in both senses, predicting the future and preaching the Word.

His Predictions

Notice some of His predictions. He predicted His going away (John 8:21,22; John 16:7,28). He predicted the betrayal. *"Verily I say unto you that one of you shall betray me."* (Matthew 26:21). He predicted Peter's denial. *"Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice."* (Matthew 26:34). He predicted His own suffering (Matthew 17:22,23; 20:17-19) and His resurrection (Matthew 26:32). *"But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee."* This was fulfilled when He met His disciples in the mountains of Galilee (Matthew 28:16).

He predicted the fall of the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-34), and many of the things that would take place prior to and during its fall. The minute fulfillment of His words are marvelous and worthy of consideration. As we listen to His words of prediction and observe how the things He said came to pass, we can say with the Samaritan woman, *"Sir, I perceive that thou are a prophet."*

Jesus did more prophesying than simple predicting future happenings. He was first and foremost a preacher and a teacher. His first coming into the world was at a time when there was such a need for a teacher from God. Men needed to know the way of salvation that God had developed, prepared, and had been gradually revealing through the years. John the Baptist had pointed to Christ as the Savior of man, the Lamb of God. The Old Testament had given many types, shadows, promises, prophetic words concerning him. The Gentiles were

steeped in the darkness of sins, alienated from God. The Jews had lost their mooring, bogged down with traditions and customs which they had come to consider sacred like God's truth. They had "*strained at the gnat and swallowed the camel.*" They were paying *"tithes of mint and anise and cummin, but omitting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith."* In the midst of all of this came Jesus, preaching and teaching, and opening a new chapter in the history of the human family and in God's dealings with man.

How Jesus Taught

Jesus taught both by declaration and illustration. Many of the truths He taught were both declared and illustrated. He taught the power of the word and illustrated it by parables. Consider the parable of the sower. Listen as He warns people to *"Watch."* He illustrated His warning with the parable of the ten virgins. He declared the necessity of a life of faithfulness and service and taught it with the parable of the talents. He told Nicodemus to be *"born again"* and showed what that was when He said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."*

Jesus not only taught by declaration and illustration, but also by demonstration. He practiced what He preached. He did what He said. Too many of us are good at saying and short on doing. Jesus was perfect in what He said and in what He did. This is the reason we should imitate Him (First Corinthians 11:1). We should follow in His steps. (First Peter 2:21).

What He Taught

Jesus taught forgiveness, and He forgave, providing forgiveness for all. He taught love and He loved. He taught kindness and was kind. He taught devotion and was faithful. He taught prayer and prayed.

When people heard Him teach, even those who were sent to take Him, came away saying, *"Never man spake like this man."* (John 7:46). Because He did as He taught, Pilate was able to say, *"I find no fault in this man."* (Luke 23:4). Pilate's wife called Him a *"just man."* (Matthew 27:19). The centurion recognized Him as a righteous man (Luke 23:47). Even though He was tempted in all points as we are, He was without sin (Hebrew 4:15; First Peter 2:22). At His mock trials, it was asked, *"Why what evil hath he done?"* The fact remained He

was only guilty of having gone about doing good (Acts 10:38). Judas had betrayed innocent blood (Matthew 27:4). The reason He was innocent was because He had done as He had taught.

Seeing Jesus as a prophet in both senses should cause us to have greater respect for Him and confidence in Him. He was the *"Prophet"* that God said would come. People recognized Him as a prophet. The Scriptures state that He was a prophet. The men on the road to Emmaus said of Him, *"Jesus of Nazareth which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people."* (Luke 24:19). One of the many roles that our Lord filled while on earth was that of Prophet of God.

† † † † †

The Unpardonable Sin

The theme under consideration is of great interest to every Bible student. We have pondered at length the passage of Matthew 12:31,32. *"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."* It appears from this passage that there is a sin for which there is no pardon.

Let us consider the marvelous scope of God's plan to save man. *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."* (Matthew 28:19). *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). *"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden..."* (Matthew 11:28). *"And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."* (Romans 5:20). Notice the inclusiveness of the opportunity for salvation to everyone. Notice the sufficiency of the grace of Christ to forgive.

Disturbing Verses

So it is somewhat disturbing to read of passages that seem to indicate that it is possible to be beyond the reach of the grace of

God's offer of salvation.

Hebrews 6:4-6, *"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."* We understand this to prove the possibility of apostasy and the certainty of condemnation to those who fall away. We also understand the impossibility of renewal unless the condition of renewal is met. While at first it may seem that those who fall away cannot be restored, other passages show us that the apostate can be recovered provided the conditions of restoration are obeyed.

"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:26,27). Some have thought this mentions an unforgivable sin, but it is stressing that there is only one to whom we can look for forgiveness and salvation from sin, Jesus Christ, the one sacrifice. If we reject Him, there is no forgiveness, but coming to Christ still provides us the avenue of forgiveness.

Our text appears to say that one may sin against God and can still be forgiven; one can sin against Christ and still be forgiven; but if one sins against the Holy Ghost, he *"cannot be forgiven neither in this world, neither in the world to come."* Some have therefore labeled this sin an "unpardonable sin," which is not a Biblical phrase.

We realize that the explanation we shall suggest will not satisfy everyone. We know there are many views regarding this matter. All cannot be right when they differ so widely, but we shall present what seems to us to be in harmony with all that we can know.

Some Explanations

We shall now consider some explanations others have offered and try to briefly explain why we reject them. Some say it is impossible to commit this sin today because this was a denial of the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost and inasmuch as we no longer live in the day of miracles, nobody can commit it.

God and Christ are also said to have performed miracles.

Would it mean we cannot sin against them because the day of miracles is passed? Furthermore, one can still deny the power of the Holy Ghost to perform miracles even though miracles are not being performed. One can deny the inspired record of the miracles performed through the Holy Ghost today as well as they could then. And many, who once denied the miraculous, later believed in the miraculous, both then and in our own age.

Some have thought the sin against the Holy Ghost was the neglect to obey the gospel until death overtook them. We are inclined to think this comes very close to the meaning, but without the fulness we believe needs to be included. True enough, to live and die not having obeyed the gospel, there is no forgiveness. This is a sin one does, not something one neglects to do. It is a sin that one commits and still lives, not a sin that one commits upon dying. If this was the proper explanation of the sin under consideration, it could never be committed until death. That does not fit the circumstances of Matthew 12:31,32.

Other Explanations

Some have thought it meant attributing to Christ the power of Beelzebub, the devil. It is attributing divine power to Satan. However, we see in the Scriptures how many did that very thing and Jesus kept preaching to them, indicating that they could still be converted. Many who were among the first to obey the gospel had once considered Jesus a child of the devil and the works that He did to be done by the power of the devil. Certainly to attribute the power of Christ, or the Holy Ghost to Satan is a sin, but not the sin under consideration.

Others have simple stated it is speaking against the Holy Ghost. Many have done this in ignorance but later were taught and were converted. While blasphemy means to speak against, surely there is more involved here than such speaking.

Others have considered the "unpardonable sin" to be suicide. It is true that suicides deprive themselves of the opportunity to seek forgiveness. Whether one is accountable when they take their own life is a matter that only God can determine in every case. Some have done so with awareness and deliberate action. Others have done so because they are deranged. Just what the case may be with any one case, we gladly leave to God, but the sin of Matthew 12:31,32 is a sin that one commits and still lives. So suicide would not be the sin mentioned here.

There is a sin mentioned in First John 5:16 that some have thought is the same sin as the one of our text. *"If a man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it."* There is a sin unto death. It obviously follows there is a sin not unto death. For the later, one should pray, but for the first there is no need to pray.

To help us understand which is which we call attention to the context of the book and First John 1:9. There, writing to Christians, John gives the condition of confession of our sins in order to be forgiven. If one will not confess his sins, he will not be forgiven of them. If he will confess them, he can be forgiven. Does it not follow that a sin which is not unto death is a sin confessed and for which we ought to pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22)? There is no need to ask God to forgive a sin which one will not confess. That is a sin unto death. The other would not be a sin unto death provided the conditions are met. Any sin can be an unpardonable sin if the guilty one refuses to confess it. Any sin can be pardoned if the conditions of pardon are met. What is this sin of Matthew 12:31,32? We have given what we believe it is not. Now let us turn our attention to what we believe it is.

What "World"?

May we consider the world *"world."* Some understand the world to be synonymous with life. In other words, the sin cannot be forgiven in this life nor the next. This seems odd inasmuch as no sin will be forgiven in the next life. The word *"world"* often means *"age."* The statement Jesus made was when the Mosaic Age was still operative. What He is saying is that the sin under consideration would not be forgiven in the Mosaic or the Christian Age. So it is a sin that could be committed then, while the Mosaic Age was still operative, and can be committed now while we live in the Christian age, but it would not be forgiven in either age.

Let us now explain what we consider this sin to be and then offer an illustration, which we know does not prove but does illustrate what we are trying to convey.

We believe the "unpardonable sin" is to be beyond the point of no return. Man sinned in Eden. Justice called for death, but mercy called for opportunity to be saved. For many years,

through the patriarchal age, notably through promises given to Abraham, God indicated His scheme for saving man. Through the Mosaic age, additional types were given, prophecies and promises. Christ was born in the closing stages of this Mosaic age and His ministry was during that time.

In God's due time, Christ died for the ungodly on Calvary. He was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. On Pentecost it was proclaimed for the first time that salvation was offered by and through this same Jesus. This is God's plan and only offer to redeem mankind. There will never be another plan, another system, another scheme. This is that which God has provided.

During the former ages, when men sinned, they were to conform to whatever God told them to do under that age. Those to whom Christ spoke lived in the closing days of the age of Moses. They might well reject Jesus in those closing days, but still have another opportunity in the Christian age that would soon come. If they rejected this plan through Christ, that plan that was delivered unto man by and through inspired men as the Holy Ghost gave them utterance and guidance, there was no other to which they could ever look for salvation. Inasmuch as this plan was delivered in the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to reject that message was to reject the Holy Ghost, just as rejecting the word of Christ was tantamount to rejecting Him.

Rejecting The Gospel

We need to understand that one can reject the gospel, as given by the Holy Ghost so often and to the extent that even the gospel plea makes no impression on his hardened heart. Such a person reaches a point that there is nothing that moves him. He has heard the only message of salvation, the message of the Holy Spirit, but has closed his mind to it, and inasmuch as there is nothing else by which he can be saved, he has gone to the limits where nothing can reach him for God.

May we illustrate. Picture a man caught in a swift stream that is moving rapidly toward a high waterfall and certain death. A man on the bank throws him a rope and urges him to seize it and be saved. He rejects it and continues to float downstream. A second man sees him and offers to throw him a rope and does, only to have it ignored. Then a third, and the last man before the falls, throws him a rope, but he does not take it either. Having passed his last hope, he still floats for a while, but

has passed the point of return. He has rejected the last offer. Rescue is impossible.

When one hardens his heart against the message of the Holy Ghost, by continuing to reject it and refusing to obey it, he can soon reach a place where he is no longer impressed, and he plunges to his spiritual and eternal doom. When this occurs, it is our conviction that he has committed the unpardonable sin because there is no more offer of pardon for him. He has rejected the Holy Ghost by refusing His Word.

Just when one might pass that point of no return, we cannot say. That one can do so is not to be disputed. If one can say he appreciates what Christ has done, and believes that He is God's Son, but can continue to refuse to obey, he may well have passed the point of no return and there is nothing that can be done. What a horrible and terrible lot!

Let us plead with everyone to stir the good impulses that call upon you to obey the Lord, lest there come a time when your sin will not be forgivable, because you have denied the only hope there is.

† † † † †

God Hath Spoken

There are many ways to logically prove that the Bible is inspired. There is no major problem to those of open mind who will investigate the evidence. One of the convincing arguments is the compact manner that the Bible presents such all inclusive concepts. For instance, *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he made heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."* (Hebrews 1:1,2). There are no useless words or meaningless phrases. In two short verses God has revealed the profound truth of His dealing with man throughout all time. In view of the existence of God and the fact that He created man, it is not surprising to learn that *"God...hath...spoken."*

In The Past

It says God *"spake in times past by the prophets."* At

different times God has spoken in various ways. In the garden of Eden He spoke directly to Adam and Eve. *"The Lord God called unto Adam and said..."* (Genesis 3:9). God spoke to Abraham first one way then another. Once He informed him through angels that visited him (Genesis 14). Another time He used a vision (Genesis 15). Sometimes it seems He spoke directly (Genesis 12). Always it was the voice of God; God's message.

God sent angels to warn Lot to flee Sodom and the impending doom (Genesis 19). An "angel" is a messenger. They delivered God's message. God addressed Jacob through dreams, visions. Before Moses assumed the leadership of the Israelites, God spoke to him through the burning bush. *"And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see it, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereupon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover, said he, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God."* (Exodus 3:4-6).

Notice again that the passage says in times past God spoke these ways. There was a time when it was common for God to so speak. Seventeen prophetic books are in the Old Testament, written by sixteen prophets. Even before the writing prophets we read of Elijah and Elisha. These prophets foretold the future and preached God's message as God's messengers to man. God spoke through them in various ways, in times past. Instead of a direct voice, dreams, and visions, God now speaks to man another way. Our text tells us how He does not speak to man today and how he does speak.

There are those who claim to be modern-day prophets with a latter-day revelation from God. Christ predicted that there would be people who would make such claims and warned against them. *"For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect."* (Mark 13:22). It is a sad commentary that people are so easily led, are so naive, so gullible, to be willing to follow whatever some people put forth, regardless of their claims or the validity of them. Many are honest and sincere in what they say and do, but making a claim and substantiating a claim are two very different matters.

Let me illustrate. If I told you Woodrow Wilson was president

of the United States in times past, but now another man was president, you would understand that Wilson is no longer the occupant of the presidency. Here in our text we are told that in times past God spoke in certain ways, but now He speaks through His Son, it would mean that God no longer speaks in the ways that He formerly did.

How God Speaks

How does God speak through Christ? What does it mean that God speaks through Christ? Obviously, Christ is not speaking to us in the flesh as He once did when He lived here on earth. He has ascended into heaven and is no longer among men in fashion as a man. Nobody living today has ever heard the literal voice of Christ, even though some say they have.

We are not without the message of God that was given through Christ. In the first four books of the New Testament we have many words that Jesus spoke. When we read them we are hearing Him. At the mount of transfiguration, it is said, *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear he him."* (Matthew 17:5). Before Christ ascended into heaven, He said, *"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth."* (Matthew 28:18). Christ is the one that has the preeminence (Colosians 1:18). To hear Christ is to hear the message of God (John 17:18). *"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God."* (John 3:34). *"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak."* (John 12:48,49).

The Lord Jesus also authorized the inspired apostles to speak in His name. *"These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."* (John 14:25,26). *"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."* (John 16:13,14). Jesus told His apostles, *"He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth*

me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." (Luke 10:16).

God has spoken through Christ, and Christ has spoken (His words being recorded in the written word) through the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit.

We have the teaching of the apostles recorded in Scripture. When we read them, we hear them speak. When we hear them, we are hearing Christ. When we hear Christ, we are hearing God. This is the way that God speaks today through Christ.

Christ's Authority

To further emphasize the authority of Christ, consider Galatians 1:6-8. *"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; which is not another, but there by some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."* He stressed the issue by repetition in verse nine. *"As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."* A false gospel, a perverted gospel, a changed gospel, one that has been added to or taken from what God has spoken through Christ and His apostles, is a gospel that will not save, but will condemn, not only those who would follow after.

Just because one teaches that Jesus is the Son of God does not mean that he is a sound teacher. There are many points in the doctrine of Christ and men are to respect each of them. When one departs from the truth, he is not to be fellowshipped or followed. *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed. For he that biddeth him Godspeed is a partaker of his evil deeds."* (Second John 9).

Do Not Tamper

God has made it clear in every age how men are not to tamper with what God has spoken. *"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."* (Deuteronomy 4:2). *"What thing*

soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it." (Deuteronomy 12:32). *"Every word of God is pure. He is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."* (Proverbs 30:5,6). *"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."* (Revelation 22:18,19).

We Have His Word

The sufficiency and completeness of His recorded Word is before us. *"All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Today, if we want to know God's Word, we must turn to this inspired book, the Bible. Nothing more is needed; nothing more is allowed; nothing less will suffice.

† † † † †

Loving In Deed And Truth

"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts

before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." (First John 3:13-24).

No subject needs teaching any more than the subject of love. John teaches us to love in word and truth. Just what does this mean and what does it include? So much is called "love" today that really bears little resemblance to Biblical and Christian love. Some of the meanest and most hateful people on earth are some who cry long and loud, "love, love, love." To them, love is some emotional outburst of superficial explosion toward others. Because some have it all mixed up, we need all the more to know and teach what the Bible teaches on love.

To Brethren

This instruction is written to brethren. Brethren can expect to be hated. Jesus once said, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."* (John 15:18-20). Christians are often hated. It is because some hate Christ. Being His followers, we are subject to the persecutions that befell Him.

In verse fourteen, the "*we*" refers to Christians. Sin is death and forgiveness is life. Christians, by forgivensss, have passed from spiritual death into spiritual life. This makes a difference in our lives. Because of this life, we love the brethren.

Love for brethren did not cause us to pass from death to life, but is the result of having passed from death to life. John 13:34,35, *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have*

love one to another." Loving is an identifying mark of the child of God. Without love for each other we lose our identification. *"Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth"* (Verse 19). *"He that loveth not abideth in death."* (Verse 14). *"He that loveth not knoweth not God."* (First John 4:8). Without love for the brethren, we cannot be saved.

Love Versus Hate

The opposite of love is hate. God considers one who hates his brother to be as guilty of sin as a murderer. While the immediate consequences of hatred may not be as bad as a murder, the spiritual consequences for the hater are disastrous. While there are degrees of love and degrees of hate, the two are incompatible. We may think we love our brethren, but we want to be sure. We want to know that our love for the brethren is pleasing to God. We need to emphasize First John 4:20,21, and see the seriousness of the matter before us. *"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God shom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."*

How can we be sure of the genuiness and correctness of our love? God is the origin of true love. *"We love, because He first loved us."* (First John 4:19). *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God."* (First John 4:7). Love is an emotion that produces action. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."* (John 3:16). Deity has displayed love by what Deity did. We conclude, then, when love is as God wants it, it will manifest itself. It is not just a matter of words, but also of deeds.

Loving Means Doing

Verse 17 of the text may well be the main point of the lesson. We see others in need, spiritually and physically, and we attempt to provide that need. Many are willing to "love" so long as nothing is expected of them. But love must express itself, not merely through pious words, but through actions that actually benefit. Like faith (James 2:18-20), show me your love without deeds. You cannot do it any more than you can show your faith without works. Giving assistance where assistance is needful is an act of love. The King James Version often translates the

Greek word *"agape"* with the word *"charity."* This is entirely accurate. The thought behind charity is doing something because of an attitude. It is seeking the other's highest good. It is not merely an emotion, but an emotion that calls for and produces deeds.

We heard about these churches that like to arouse emotions and call upon brethren at worship services to turn around to each other and say, "I love you." Such nonsensical display of showmanship! If brethren wish to say, "I love you," say it in a way that amounts to something, not some spontaneous outburst of foolishness like that. Do something! Brethren have been known to say "I love you," and before nightfall stab each other's character in the back. We have had experiences of being the target of some of these "loving" people. We know whereof we speak. Love is known by what it does.

There are blessings to the Christian as he obeys the commandment to love his brethren. These blessings are conditional upon obedience. That God will hear us is conditioned upon our obedience. John urges our obedience and singularly cites the commandment to love each other. The commandment has two parts: (1) Believe in Jesus Christ and (2) Love one another. The two are inseparable. Love for brethren is the acceptable expression and demonstration of our belief in Christ.

Love As Evidence

Brother love is evidence that we have passed from spiritual death to spiritual life. Caring for those in need, providing what is lacking, doing what is necessary, acting rather than merely talking, this is love. We have seen the bumper sticker that says, "Honk, if you love Jesus." Our reaction is that any ole goose can "honk." One has said, "We do not show love for Christ the same way we get a dog out of the road." We show love by what we do, not merely a verbal outpouring.

† † † † †

With this issue we have completed five volumes consisting of twelve issues each. We look forward, Lord willing, to producing many, many more. We pray that this booklet will be of spiritual benefit to all who read what is contained in it each time.

Liberals And False Issues



JAMES W. BOYD

I have been preaching many years but have yet to have any brother or sister in Christ suggest we can dismiss the necessity of observing the Lord's Supper every first day of the week because some may not observe it with the proper attitude and understanding. Just how somebody's failure to observe the Supper properly makes room for a Thursday evening observance has yet to be explained. But we have heard the argument made by liberals.

Some ridicule our opposition to instrumental music because the early church did not use them on the basis that the early church did not sing in four-part harmony either. Cannot those who advocate the instrument see the difference between playing instruments and singing? When brethren sing in four-part harmony or off key, what are they doing? They are singing, which is precisely what Scripture teaches us to do.

Really, because some mistakenly hum songs, does this allow playing them? Both are in error because neither is what Scripture authorizes. When digressives want to "do their thing" they produce every pseudo-argument in the world. They should be ashamed.

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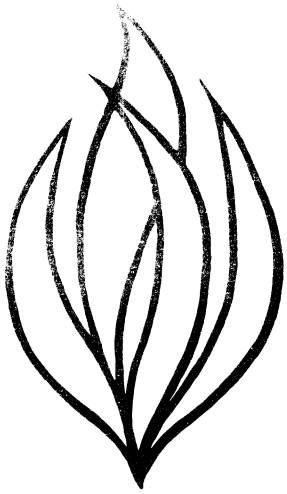

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 1**

It Is Too Much

Our lesson is taken from the Old Testament at the time in Israel's history when the nation had recently divided and Jeroboam was king in northern Israel. We center our attention on the first action that Jeroboam took upon becoming king. It was an effort to keep the people from returning to Jerusalem, which was under the rule of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, and to prevent the influence of Rehoboam from winning back the loyalty of the people away from Jeroboam. Jerusalem was located in the southern kingdom and that was where the people were supposed to go to worship.

"And Jereboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David; if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold, thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin; for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan." (First Kings 12:26-31).

Why He Appealed

On the special feast days and other days of religious observance, the people were expected to be at the temple in Jerusalem. Fearing the effect that might be produced by having his people go there, Jeroboam provided places of worship for the people of northern Israel within the borders of his own rule. Dan was in the northern part of northern Israel and Bethel in the southern part of northern Israel. He appealed to the people on the basis that it was too much to expect them to make the journey to Jerusalem and they could worship God at these other places. This appeal found attentive ears among the people, but God was greatly displeased with this attitude and action.

We are able to see clearly how Jeroboam was acting sinfully. He acted rebelliously and we have no problem detecting it. Regardless of what might have been more convenient for the

people, it was God's will that they present themselves at the temple. His will should have been first with them. While their motives for not going to Jerusalem was not the sly and sinister motive of Jeroboam, they were not found blameless for their indifference toward their duty.

We often have difficulty in seeing the same kind of attitude in ourselves that those people exhibited. *"Therefore, thou art inexcusable O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doeth the same things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"* (Romans 2:1-3). The attitude that what God requires is too much is found among many who profess to be Christians today. It makes itself known by the words and actions, and lack of actions, on the part of too many people. Jeroboam was wrong in his heart and deed. We rightly condemn him for it. Why do we sometimes do the same things in principle?

Evidence Of An Attitude

This "it is too much attitude" manifests itself so clearly in the wide difference between attendance figures on Sunday morning and the other hours of assembly, such as Sunday night and Wednesday night services. Why do so many dismiss Sunday evening worship opportunities? Do they think they have already done enough by being present Sunday morning? Are we content to do just as little as we feel will "get us by"? Those who have the "have to" attitude toward worship rather than the "get to" attitude are missing something very important.

A man asked me once if I thought Hebrews 10:25, which teaches not for forsake the assembly, applied to Wednesday night as forcefully as the worship service where the Lord's Supper was observed. Having already been warned about this man and how he constantly argued against attending on Wednesday night, I answered him in a way that he obviously did not expect. I said, "No, I think there is a distinction to be made. You might not be lost for violating Hebrews 10:25 because you missed Wednesday night. But the possibility is that one could be lost because of the attitude to do as little as possible and still please God. One would be lacking the basic quality for going to heaven, and that is putting the kingdom of God first." Needless to say our conversation was abbreviated by those remarks, but

the point was made. When we consider worship nothing but duty, which it does involve, but never a privilege to show honor and praise to God, we have the wrong attitude toward it from the start.

Why should it be thought too much to worship God with the brethren more than once per week? If we genuinely love God and one another, is not the time of worship a period of delight? Since His Word is taught and studied, would not our love for the Word draw us to the assembly? If heaven meant more than anything else, why would we try to get there by some "short cut" religion that may cause us to miss our goal? Truly, if we are converted as we must be, and have given our lives to Christ, we will not ever ask, "Do I have to attend?" We never heard of anybody thinking being in the presence of those they love as being undesirable.

Knowledge Is Necessary

Is it too much to come to a knowledge of God's Word for man? Do we not realize that we shall be judged by that which Jesus taught? *"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."* (John 12:48). This being true, it is unreasonable that we would not want to know what that Word teaches. Yet, it is apparent that many think it too much to regularly, consistently, habitually study God's Word. In most congregations, over half of the membership do not attend Bible study Sunday morning. Even a lower percentage attends Wednesday evening. In which half of the congregation do you stand?

Nothing shows the attitude of "it is too much" more than the failure to observe the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. There are doctrines of men that teach this observance once per month, or once per quarter, or other periods. But the New Testament shows us when the early church observed the Lord's Supper and that was every first day of the week (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 11:23ff; First Corinthians 16:1,2). The Supper was observed in the assembly which occurred every first day. Every week has a first day. What right does any man have to specify one first day to the exclusion of any other? Nobody can worship in this way for you. Each must worship for himself. Nobody can sing for you, pray for you as if you need never pray, give for you, study for you, nor partake of the Lord's Supper for you.

This is a personal duty before God for each Christian.

There are those that can miss this observance and memorial to Christ without any pain of conscience whatever. The slightest and most minute matter can detract their attention and they will ignore their sacred duty to proclaim Christ by the Lord's Supper. When they first started missing they were somewhat concerned. Now they have so flippantly disobeyed the Lord's will that they are not even moved by the fact that they are sinning against the very Son of God by whom they shall be judged. Some want the benefits of His death, burial, and resurrection, but do not want to take the time and show the respect to Him that is in the Lord's Supper.

When we observe the Lord's Supper only on those occasions when it is convenient to us, it is doubtful that we are even obeying the Lord then. We are doing more according to our will than His even then. That is not obedience.

Deliberate absenteeism is a symtom of the attitude that Jeroboam tried to get all the people of Israel to adopt. *"It is too much."*

Who Will Care?

Do I really think these thoughts will provoke people to be more attentive to their duty in worship and study? Yes, but only those who are honest and who really care about what the Lord's Word teaches. I know it will not be very impressive on the rest.

We might stop and consider it just may be too much to get to heaven. It just may require a greater love and sacrifice than some of us are willing to give. We just may be in hell because we considered, *"It is too much."*

If we could, we would persuade each one that it is never too much to go the way of the Lord. How glad we are that Jesus did not complain and refuse to die for our sins and say, *"It is too much."* When we consider what Deity has done on our behalf, how can we ever say too much is asked of us to serve Him?

† † † † †

Testing Kings

In Second Kings, chapter three, we find a discussion of a historical event involving Israel, Judah, Edom, and Moab. At the time of the event, the Israelite people were divided into two nations, Israel of the north and Judah of the south. So long as Ahab, the king of northern Israel lived, the Moabites paid tribute to him with animals and other gifts. When Ahab died and his son, Jehoram became king, the Moabites refused to continue their tribute. Jehoram decided to make war against the Moabites and asked Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to be his ally. In addition, they sought the aid of the king of Edom. So these three kings set out to do battle against the Moabites.

On their way they ran out of water for themselves, their men and their animals. The kings became fearful, almost in panic, lest they become the victims of the Moabites rather than victors as they planned. Jehoshaphat called for a prophet of God and Elisha came. Elisha said he would have nothing whatever to do with the king of Israel and Edom if it were not for Jehoshaphat. Israel had been led deeper into idolatry by Jehoram, and Edom was a heathen nation. Nonetheless, for the sake of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, which held to some semblance of respect for God, Elisha consented to inquire of God for them.

God's Instructions

Through Elisha, God spoke, giving instructions to the kings. They were promised water without rain and victory over the Moabites. It was a conditional promise. Their blessings were dependent upon them doing what God commanded of them. Actually, commands were tests of the kings. God tested them. The command was rather simple in nature. *"Make this valley full of ditches."* The Lord would then fill them with water.

God has always tested man and does so now. The tests may vary from time to time and age to age, but the purposes of the tests are usually about the same. By this test, God tested four important attitudes of these kings who had come to Him for help.

His command was a test of their faith in God. They had asked for God's help. Now would they follow what He directed? If they really had confidence in God, they would obey. If they lacked

that confidence, they would cast His command aside.

It was a good test because there was no way that they saw how God could do what He promised. He told them there would be water, but also said there would be no rain. So how would God do it? There was no logical connection between what was commanded and what was the promised result. To have obeyed God because they understood it all and could see the reasons behind it would have been more accepting of God's wisdom which agreed with what they concluded. To do as God commanded when they could not see any reason for it would mean wholesome obedience.

Doing what God says because "it makes sense" to us is not showing the right kind of faith. Doing what God says because God said it even if we do not see why, that is obeying and demonstrating faith.

A Test

This command was a test of their willingness to obey. The line of their duty was clearly drawn. "Make a ditch." They were kings and usually gave commands, not take them. Would they obey? Would they humble themselves to submit to a higher authority? Would their pride provoke them to resist? Would they offer excuses or try to rationalize around doing what God commanded? Possibly they might suggest a substitute way.

They did none of those things. God commanded; they obeyed. There were no excuses, no delays. They were willing to do what God directed.

We need to ask ourselves if we are so willing as were they? Is it not unreasonable to expect God's blessings when we question His way? If we hold out on God, what reason is there to think He will bless us anyway? *"Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* said Jesus (Luke 6:46).

This matter was a test of their willingness to cooperate one with the other. Here were men from different nations working together before God. They had a common goal and single purpose. When people will cooperate and work together, rather than against one another, much can be done that otherwise would go undone. Actually, there is no room in the church, the home, or in a Christian's life that will not work harmoniously with others. Sometimes there are members of the church who want to go their own way and only their own way, standing aloof from everyone else, just because they did not get their

way. This is not the same as remaining separated from those who do not follow God's way. We are talking about people who have to have their own way in doing what God says do but has not specified how it is to be done.

If these kings could not work together in digging ditches, they would not likely work together in warfare either. By working together, they were actually working together with God. They were not just working with one another. If they had refused to cooperate, their lack of cooperation would have been toward God as much as toward each other.

Is it not true that a cooperative attitude is needful in getting the work of the church done and done properly? When God gives the word, we should help each other do what God says every way we can.

Would They Work?

This was a test of their willingness to work. Too many people have the attitude, "Here am I, Lord, use him." Getting these ditches dug would require work, patience, stedfastness, strength. They wanted to be spared from the Moabites and win over them. Were they willing to do their part, or did they want it all handed to them, as is said, "on a silver platter without effort on their part?"

Many people today really want to go to heaven. But they are not willing to do their part. They rely totally on God to do what they want done even if they do not follow God's plan. Man working alone will not avail, but man working God's plan will get the job done. Who is willing to work as God has commanded?

Work is honorable and there is no substitute for it. Christ worked, the Father works, we must work. Work for the night is coming when man works no more! These kings, and their soldiers, were obviously willing to put forth the effort required to obey God's plan of victory.

They passed every test. They did show confidence in God, were willing to obey, cooperated together, and worked what had to be done.

The Result

First, they had ample water. Second, as the chapter reveals, when the Moabites saw the sun reflecting off the water they mistakingly took it for blood, assumed the kings had fought each

other, rushed in for the spoils, and were handed a solid and ruinous defeat.

The principles are plain and easily understood. We must have faith in Christ and do what He says, even if you do not comprehend why He may have commanded as He did. Many stumble at baptism saying, "I don't see how getting down in the water will do anything for my soul?" Well, if one will just study this account just a bit he will see that obedience is doing what God says because God said it.

Are you willing to cooperate with God and others in doing His will? Are you a ready worker for the Lord? You have your test just as the kings had their test.

As they gained victory, God will give each one who will pass the test a spiritual victory over sin. Victory belongs to those who love the Lord enough to do what He commands and with the right attitude toward it. What of you?

† † † † †

The Power Of God

Some passages of the Bible stand out more than others. It is not because they are more inspired because all of the Scripture is inspired. It is not because they are more important because all are important in their context. It is because in them are found key thoughts, all inclusive and comprehensive concepts.

John 3:16 is one such passage. The same might be said of Revelation 2:10, Micah 6:8, and others. Surely Romans 1:16 is such a passage. It provides us the "key" to the book of Romans, a great doctrinal book that presents to us as full a picture of the system of salvation as is to be found in one New Testament writing. As we consider a few thoughts in Romans 1:16 we exalt the gospel of Christ, that one message above all others that deserves man's complete attention.

What is the gospel of Christ? It is good news that has come from Christ, that is about Christ, that belongs to Christ, that embraces the scheme or system that Deity devised and delivered for the salvation of man from his sins. It is "good news" because man, lost in his transgressions, can be saved. It is the "glad tidings" of redemption for the soul.

A Revelation

The New Testament is more than a record of historical events and doctrines. It is an account of something that happened in this world that God designed for the benefit of mankind. It is a revelation from God, of God, to man, and for man. Therein is the philosophy of life that has been revealed by the Creator of life. Therein is the religion, the moral and spiritual principles and teachings that have come from the mind of Deity. *"Therein is revealed the righteousness of God..."* (verse 17).

The founder and author of the New Testament faith, the only begotten Son of the true and living God; is revealed to us as God's noblest creation.

Paul said he was not ashamed of the gospel. It is accurate to say that Paul was proud of the gospel. He was proud to have the privilege to preach the gospel. He was thankful for what the gospel did, from whence it came, the dignity and benefit it produced. He proclaimed it with boldness, clarity, without hesitation, fear nor favor, and to its fullest extent. *"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."* (Acts 20:27). Whether he was before friends or foes, Paul demonstrated that he was never ashamed of the gospel. He was not ashamed of it in Athens, the center of culture and education. He was not ashamed of it in Corinth, a focal point of immorality, lasciviousness, all manner of moral degeneracy. He was not ashamed of it in Ephesus, even in the presence of idolatry and Diana, the goddess of the Ephesians. Nor was he ashamed to proclaim the gospel in Jerusalem, the city of the Jews, steeped in traditionalism, ritualism, religious and racial prejudice. Before kings and peasants alike, in freedom or in bondage, to male and female, Paul was proud of the gospel of Christ. So should we be proud of it. We ought never be ashamed at the shop, in school, in the office, at play, at work, at home, at the assembly, never, anywhere, anytime dare we reflect against the gospel by being ashamed of it. It came from God.

Romans 1:15 reads, *"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."* Rome was the capital of one of the most ruthless, bloody, merciless governments that has existed. Yet, Paul looked forward to preaching the gospel of peace with God in that environment. When he was taken there as a prisoner, he did spend his time teaching and preaching whenever and wherever permitted.

Power

Paul tells us four basic and fundamental reasons why he was so proud of the gospel. The gospel is power. People respect power. There are many kinds of power, such as economic, military, muscular, mental, and the power of the natural world. The gospel is a spiritual power that influences the heart and conscience of the human being. In this way it governs, guides, and controls one's life, deeds, thoughts. The gospel is designed to convert the heart of man and thereby lead him to live a life that is good, beneficial, pleasing to God, without the defilements of sin.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7). *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."* (Matthew 12:34). *"A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."* (Matthew 12:35). *"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."* (Matthew 15:18,19). We see from these passages the necessity to have the heart under control. The gospel is the power by which this is accomplished.

Divine Power

Again, the gospel is divine power. It is the power of God. The power of Rome was in the sword. The power of Greece was her culture and intellectual attainments and art. The power of Jerusalem was her religious traditions. The power of Satan rests in his ability to tempt, seduce, deceive, mislead mankind through temptation. The power of God resides in the gospel of Christ to accomplish what is needful for mankind. God works through His Son, Jesus Christ, and the gospel of Christ.

God seeks to control and regulate the life of every person and their eventual destiny. He does not desire this simply for His own glory, but for the good and salvation of man whom He loves. The gospel of Christ is not simple "a" gospel, but it is "the gospel." The word "*power*" comes from a word that conveys the idea of a dynamo, dynamite. The gospel is God's dynamo, His strong right arm, the grand display of the grandest power ever known to man.

Of the gospel that he preached, Paul wrote, *"But I certify you,*

brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:11,12).

Unto Salvation

Furthermore, the gospel is a power that is for the benefit of mankind. It is God's power unto salvation. Some powers are destructive and harmful. Such is the power of storms, diseases; certainly the power of Satan is detrimental and intended for hurt. The gospel, however, is constructive, leading man upward, blessing him with regard to both body and spirit. The gospel is God's pattern and plan for liberating man from the bondage of sin. The gospel encourages what is the potential best in a person. It provides that great drawing power that takes man from his deeds of corruption and sinfulness into a life of nobility and purpose with purity, compassion, and goodness. The gospel is a power that makes a saint out of a sinner. It is the way of conversion that changes man from within and results in the change without.

The gospel of Christ raises man morally and mentally, enabling him to walk in a newness of life, able to bear good fruit in his life that is of both temporal and eternal profit to himself and others. The gospel provides man the standard by which he is to measure all things and know the difference between right and wrong. When one walks in the path of the gospel he becomes more and more like God would have him be. It is that power that delivers man from darkness into light, from condemnation into Christ where there is salvation.

It is the message of the gospel that causes people to obey the law even if they do not like the law. It urges people to develop their talents to the glory of God, treat their neighbors with dignity and respect, have compassion for the sick, down-trodden, homeless, elderly, all those in need. If one will compare those areas where the gospel has been preached and applied with the pagan and heathen areas of our world, he will see what the gospel does that is beneficial to mankind. What else raises mankind to the level where God created him, with purity, hope, and happiness?

Universal Power

Finally, the gospel is a universal power. It is needful for both

the Jew and the Gentile, and is without distinction as to race, color, social standing, or educational background. Men have many standards of measure by which they divide themselves one from the other. While there are many differences and some cannot be ignored, all have the opprotunity to be blessed by the gospel of Christ with equal blessing. *"All have sinned..."* and all need to be saved. The wages of sin is the same for all; namely, spiritual death (Romans 6:23). *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus, and if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:28,29).

Conditional

It is important that we know that the benefits of this divine, universal beneficient power are conditional. One part of the gospel consists of commands to be obeyed. Yes, there are the facts to be believed, and the promises and hopes to be enjoyed. Before we are the recipients of those blessings we must meet the condition of obeying the commands that change our relationship to God and make us His child *"in Christ." "Whosoever will may come,"* but they must come. God is no respector of persons, but he is a respector of character and obedience. The person who believes and obeys the command of repentance, confession, and baptism is the one who partakes of the gospel blessings of forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God. As he sojourns through life and allows the gospel to be his guide, he benefits from this great power.

It is sad but true, that even though this great power is before us and its blessings offered to us that many reject it in disobedience. Like the best of medicines, it will accomplish nothing for us until it is applied. If not believed and obeyed, this greatest power will lie dormant as far as we personally are concerned. God will, *"take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel."* (Second Thessolonians 1:8).

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Jesus As High Priest

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Jesus Christ serves in many roles. He is the Redeemer and Savior of man, the Preacher of salvation, the Prophet of truth, our example and guide. We want now to consider Him as our High Priest, as He is identified so frequently in the book of Hebrews.

The New Testament shows that every Christian is a priest. Christians are to be *"a holy priesthood."* (First Peter 2:5). They are called *"an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."* (First Peter 2:9). John said in Revelation 1:6, *"He made us kings and priests unto God and His Father."* There is no special priesthood class as that which characterized the Jewish system whose priests came from the tribe of Levi.

Jesus is more than just a priest. He is our High Priest. *"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostles and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus."* (Hebrews 3:1).

Theme Of Hebrews

One of the prime purposes of the book of Hebrews was to prevent Jewish brethren from leaving the faith and returning to the Mosaic system that had been nailed to the cross. Those who read it would understand the nature of the Mosaic priesthood composed of the Levites. The Holy Spirit used that ancient priesthood to describe, compare, and contrast the High Priest, Jesus, with what had been formerly, showing in this way the superiority of the priesthood of Christ.

A logical question in the Jewish mind would be, "Why change the priesthood?" The priesthood was the basis for the old law inasmuch as the priests taught it, practiced it, led people in it, performed their duties accordingly. When there was a change of law, there was of necessity a change in the priesthood (Hebrews

7:11,12). The old law could not accomplish what the new covenant could accomplish. It was but a shadow of things to come (Hebrews 10:1). Jesus Christ is the mediator (Hebrews 9:15) of the new covenant. *"But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second."* (Hebrews 8:6,7).

Not just anyone would qualify for a priest under the Mosaic system. Certain qualifications were necessary before one could be made a high priest. Every high priest was taken from among men (Hebrews 5:1). The reason for choosing a man as high priest is because the priest must be one *"who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity."* (Hebrews 5:2). He needed to be one who could be sympathetic and understanding of the trials and difficulties of those he served.

These men were also to be the descendants of Aaron (Exodus 28:1-4). Aaron, like Moses, was of the tribe of Levi.

He Understands

Jesus Christ is a High Priest now that fills the role as One who is sympathetic and understanding of mankind. (Hebrews 5:5). He has been tried and tempted and lived as a human being here upon this earth in the midst of all the difficulties that mankind faces. This is one of the reasons He became flesh and assumed the form of man. The devil tempted Jesus, not only in the wilderness after His baptism (Matthew 4) but throughout His life on earth. Even though He was tempted, He sinned not (Hebrews 4:15; First Peter 2:21). Jesus knew success and He knew failure. He knew suffering, betrayal, poverty, slander, hunger, sorrow. *"Jesus wept."* (John 11:35). By His mission to this world of sin and sorrow He could know the plight of the one He came to serve and save.

The Levitical priests were to be called of God. None could take that service upon himself as his own will. Aaron was callled to be the first high priest and that priesthood was to remain among his descendants. Imposters, ambitious ones, would rise up at times to assume that place, but one could not seize that office except it be God's will.

Christ was also appointed by the Father to be our High Priest.

Even the Son of God did not presumptiously assume this place. *"So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest, but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee."* (Hebrews 5:5). God, the Father, designated Jesus to this Priesthood. And Christ was faithful to him that appointed Him. (Hebrews 3:2).

As noted, the Israelite priests came from the tribe of Levi, but Jesus was not of that tribe. He was of the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). This is another reason there was a change in the priesthood. Christ is not a priest after the order of the Levites, but He is a priest after the order of one named Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:15,17). Now who was this man, Melchizedek, and in what way was Christ a priest after his order?

Like Melchizedek

We first read of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, when Abraham was returning from the rescue of Lot from the hands of certain invading kings. On his way from victory, Abraham met Melchizedek, called king of Salem and priest of the most high God. Notice he was king and priest, and he was king and priest at the same time.

Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham gave tithes unto him. This event depicts the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham, just as the priesthood of Jesus is superior to that of the descendants of Abraham; namely, the Levites. If the priesthood of Melchizedek was superior to the father of the priestly tribe, how much more is Jesus superior since He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

It is also said of Melchizedek that he was *"without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually."* (Hebrews 7:3). This man was a type of the Christ that was to come. These words denote the eternal nature of Christ and His Deity.

Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek and through Abraham his descendants paid tithes. The Levite Priests through Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:9,10). This shows the superiority of the one over the other.

The high priest under Moses' system had certain duties to perform. They offered sacrifices and gifts (Hebrews 8:3), and so should Christ have something to offer. What He offered was

Himself (Hebrews 7:27).

The tabernacle was divided into two parts, the Holy Place where all the priests did their labors, and the Most Holy Place, where only the high priest would go before God once a year to offer blood for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 9:6,7). These sacrifices would not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4), but had to be offered continually (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:ll). But Christ offered the one sacrifice of Himself and this was sufficient (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12,26; 10:12,14). What the offerings under the old law did might be illustrated as rolling a snowball (year by year) toward the fire (the cross) and there (at the cross) the sins were melted away.

The Sacrifice

There is a distinctive difference in what the Levitical priest offered and what Christ offered in that the Levitical priest also offered for his own sins as well as the sins of the people (Hebrews 7:27). Christ, having no sin, offered no sacrifice for Himself.

Please take notice what Jesus has done. *"But Christ, being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* Hebrews 9:11-14 . Again, *"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us, not yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with the blood of others. For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world. But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."* (Hebrews 9:24-26). As High Priest, Jesus served as both the Priest and the Sacrifice. And His sacrifice was sufficient for all time, there being no need for a repetition of it. This is further explained in Hebrews 10:11-14,18.

Our High Priest is now on the right hand of God where He lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). He is our Advocate, pleading our case before the Father (First John 2:21). He is the One mediator between God and man (First Timothy 2:5) and there is no access to the Father except through Him (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We are not called upon to go through any human being as priest. We cannot go through any human being. We approach God through Christ. This practice of Romanism of praying through Mary or certain "saints" is born of apostasy and departure from the truth regarding the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Through Him we can come with boldness (meaning confidence) to God's throne of mercy and grace. We can obtain the help we need. (Hebrews 4:16).

Jesus, however, is High Priest only to those who come to Him. Have you believed in Christ, repented of your sins, confessed your faith in Him and been baptized into Christ? Until one does that, he has no priest nor an avenue of approach to God. Christ is the way; He is High Priest.

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Acquaintance With Jehovah

"Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee." (Job 22:21).

The words of the text were spoken by the chief spokesman for the three *"friends"* who visited Job in the midst of his adversities. They contended that Job's distress was because of his sins. Job denied this, and we know that the friends were wrong in their conclusion because the book of Job opens with the declaration that Job was to be tested and tried. Furthermore, sin does not always produce personal and immediate suffering, nor is all suffering due to one's personal sins. However, the declaration by Eliphaz is true.

Acquaintance with God is essential to peace and salvation. To

enjoy the spiritual blessings that God offers, to have peace between oneself and His creator and Judge, to have the hope of heaven in one's heart, he must have an acquaintance with God. This acquaintance is more than just knowing something about God, and more than just a passing reference to knowing that God exists. It means more than being religious. Being religious is not always profitable because the religion may be that which has been designed by man rather than the heavenly Father. The only religion that is profitable unto man is that which comes from God. We would stress that the great need of mankind in every generation is to have the right kind of acquaintance with God.

Must Be Personal

The statement also shows that one must have an acquaintance with God for himself. Nobody can know God for you or by proxy. There is good reason to suspect that some think all will be well with them in the day of judgment because their wife, husband, children, parents, or friends knew the Lord. We are speaking of a personal acquaintance.

This acquaintance involves a personal transformation of character and a change of relationship spiritually with God. Being acquainted with God requires entrance into a new and blessed life here that leads to the joys hereafter. Again we stress that it is a personal and individual matter.

It is possible to have this acquaintance with God, as undeserving of it as we are. We can get to know God in such a way to know that we are His children and that we are saved. We can never know God to the extent that we completely understand all there is concerning Him, for then we would have to be Deity as is He. Jesus confidently affirmed that man can know God. *"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."* (John 17:3). The writer of Hebrews said, *"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth to me."* (Hebrews 10:30). John wrote, *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."* (First John 2:3). While there are those who are planting doubt rather than faith and confidence in the minds of their fellowman, the Lord's Word teaches that we can know, and can know that we know. There is no need nor room for agnosticism in God's book.

Down through the ages good and righteous people have known God. They have known how desirable it is to be in

fellowship with God. Even as we can appreciate the value of being in association, fellowship, and acquaintance with the good and righteous people around us, how much better it is to enjoy this kind of relationship with Deity. There was a time, Paul said, when the Galatians did not know God, but later they did (Galatians 4:8). The world, in its sinful state, does not know God (First John 1:3).

How We Can Know God

We come to know God only through His Son, Jesus Christ. *"No man cometh unto the Father but by me,"* said Jesus (John 14:6). *"He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him."* (John 5:23). Jesus said, *"If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also, and from henceforth ye shall know him, and have seen him."* (John 14:7). To deny the Son is to deny the Father (First John 2:23). One must acknowledge the Son of God (First John 2:23). In Jesus Christ, *"God was manifest in the flesh."* (First Timothy 3:16).

Job 22:22 gives indication of how one comes to know God. *"Receive I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thy heart."*

The acquaintance with God of which Eliphaz speaks reminds us of Romans 5:1 because both Paul and Eliphaz speak of peace. *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* One result of acquaintance with God is peace with God. Man in his sins is alienated from God, without God, without hope (Ephesians 2:12). He needs to be reconciled to God, cease his warfare against the will of God and surrender his own will to the One who loves him. This reconciliation, making peace, is provided through the death of Christ on the cross (Ephesians 2:15,16).

Paul spoke of how Gentiles, in their paths of sin, *"know not God."* (First Thessalonians 4:5). He again warns that vengeance shall befall those who know not God and obey not the gospel (Second Thessalonians 1:8). Those who do not know God do not know the peace with God that we must have to enter into heaven. To live in the world of sin is to live at enmity with God (James 4:4).

Being at peace with God is not just a "cease fire" or a temporary truce. The more we come to know God, and this we can do as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord

through the partaking of His word, the more harmonious our lives will become to His direction and guidance. Two spirits become united. Our spirit becomes united with God. God loves us and we grow in love for God. Just as our acquaintance with people here on earth will lead us from one level to another in mutual love and esteem, so our continued association with God, fellowship of God, brings us into a lasting oneness with God until the way of God becomes the norm of life.

Blessings

Eliphaz said that acquaintance with God brings us good. Doubtless this was stated to Job in the context of deliverance from the ills that then did beset him. It was said in the mistaken belief that Job's troubles were due to Job's sin. Eliphaz was trying to point out to Job the avenue that was open to him to receive blessings rather than sufferings. Even though knowing God is no guarantee that hardship will end, that there will be no persecution and inconveniences, the statement is true with respect to the avenue of blessings, true blessings that matter.

What man sometimes classifies as good is not always good because it is damaging to our souls. Men may measure financial success as something good, but not necessarily so. Some lose their souls while seeking this gain (First Timothy 6:10). Generally, men think of ill health as all bad, but again we can be mistaken. Paul had his "*thorn in the flesh,*" which was likely some physical malady and affliction. It was a blessing to him in keeping him humble. So it is with misfortune. It can be a blessing in disguise when it provokes us to consider what really matters in life. Worldly fame and fortune, pleasure and power, are fleeting at best. The wisdom of this world is not true wisdom. Only those treasures that are laid up in heaven are lasting.

Acquaintance with God brings us what is truly good, as God measures the good. Nothing is good that damages the soul and the possibility of going to heaven. That which is of true profit is that which helps us onward in the journey that eventually ends in the glories of God. This is the good that acquaintance with God produces.

Source Of Hope

Our text is one of the many reservoirs of hope and confidence that we find in the Scriptures. What surpasses in value having

peace with God? How can one place a price tag on being assured the truly good things, the things that benefit the spirit of man, now and forever? Both of these benefits come from acquaintance with God.

This verse is also an admonition to us. There is something to be done by each of us. The implication of the teaching is that acquaintance with God must come before the reception of the blessings and benefits. How do we come to know God? John wrote, *"And hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."* (First John 3:2). Only by hearing God's Word, believing it and obeying it can one establish the acquaintance with God that he must have to be blessed. Here is the test by which we can know whether we are acquainted with God or not. Do we obey Him?

† † † † †

Forecast Of The Future

We have no intention of trying to be a foreteller of things about which we cannot know. Many have proven themselves false prophets by attempting to predict concerning the future. There are some things, however, that we can know because God has revealed them.

Man has a yearning to know what awaits him, but the old adage, "We never know what a day will bring forth," is certainly true. Christ taught us not to be anxious concerning the morrow, but that does not rule out making plans for the future. Christianity looks to the future. God expects us to consider the future and live today the best we can.

God evidently did not intend for us to know everything about the future. There are five events that will necessarily be in the future of everyone of us. The details of these events are lacking because they are not revealed, but we can be confident these five things are going to happen. There is no guesswork involved in it. It is certain.

Life

From this moment forward, we shall live a portion of life. For how long we cannot say, but whether it be in terms of moments, hours, days, years, or decades, we shall live life.

Why is that so important to remember? This life is our time to prepare for the life that is to come hereafter. Someone has coined the phrase, "Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people," taking a note from John 14:1-6. There is no second chance after this life. We either prepare now, while we live, or we will face God unprepared. Because life is before us, we should use it in the best fashion. It is not to be spent in indulgence, on self, wasted, or seeking the temporal and fleeting nothingness of this life to the neglect of the soul and the welfare of the soul in eternity.

Our lives should be lived for Christ. *"And that he died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."* (Second Corinthians 5:15).

Our lives are to be characterized by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly and righteously and godly (Titus 2:12). We are to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1,2). For life to be lived for Christ it must be lived in Christ.

I cannot tell whether your life will be spent as a Christian or not. I can tell you that is a decision you must make, and your decision vitally affects the other four inescapable events awaiting you.

Death

Someday you will physically die. The body and the spirit shall be separated (James 2:26). Nobody escapes this separation (Hebrews 9:27). There is a time to be born and a time to die (Ecclessiastes 12:7). Even if we are alive when the Lord returns, we shall be changed and leave this body (First Corinthians 15:51).

Every person thinks at some time about when they will die, and how they will die, where they willl be at that moment, who might be near them. Is the when, where, who, and how the most important matter to be considered when considering death? This awesome occasion will occur when Christ comes again (Second Peter 3:10). *"The day of the Lord will come."*

Resurrection

As we all shall die, we all shall experience the resurrection. Here we part from the materialist who thinks man is totally material and has no spirit. But the Bible clearly teaches that

there is more to man than just the body. And it teaches that death is not the end of our existence (First Thessalonians 4:16,17). Death is a doorway through which we pass from this life into another. All will be raised, both good and bad (John 5: 28,29). First Corinthians 15 is that great resurrection chapter. While there are many questions man can raise about death and the resurrection for which answers are not revealed, the resurrection from the dead is a matter that is clearly taught. We all have the need to prepare for it. It is in our future. We know not when, but the uncertainty of when in no way affects the certainty that it will be.

Judgment

Following life, death, the resurrection, there will be the judgment. *"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."* (Hebrews 9:27). *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10). Does this reality in your future concern you?

Our salvation or condemnation will have already been determined before the judgment. That determination is made by the life we live and what we have done regarding Christ. The judgment is not a time of decision but a time of sentencing and separation for eternity (Matthew 25). At the judgment, the sheep and the goats shall forever be parted. The wheat and the chaff shall be separated. The faithful shall hear the sentence, *"Well done... Enter thou..."* The lost shall hear the sentence, *"Depart..."*

The judgment scene will be so awesome and serious. It will be a time of great rejoicing, but also a time of great sorrow and panic. Nothing else will have mattered if you are condemned and lost.

Eternity

Then there is eternity. Unlike time, eternity will have no end. It is limitless. This is beyond the ability of the mind to fully comprehend, since we live in an existence of "stops and starts." Eternity, like God, is forever and ever.

We really will not "spend" eternity. When you spend something the implication is that the supply can be exhausted. There will be no exhaustion of eternity. We all will exist in eternity.

The Bible presents only two places of eternity, heaven and hell. And while the descriptions of the two are lacking in detail, we have enough information to easily determine which we prefer.

Heaven is pictured as a place of joy, peace, rest, the residence of God and all the blessed, no sorrow, no death, no decay, no yesterday, no morrow, but one eternal day. Nothing but what is good, pure, righteous, holy, and cleansed shall enter therein.

Hell is pictured as a place of outer darkness, weeping, the gnashing of teeth, crying, torment, punishment, second death, the lake of fire and brimstone. The same Bible that tells us about the glories of heaven also tells us of the horrors of hell. How foolish to be willing to believe the reality of one but not the other.

This is our future. These five events await us. From them there is no escape. Nothing in the Bible talks about "the rapture, The Great Tribulation, a thousand years reign of Christ on earth," and all that imaginative and speculative false theory of premillennialism. These five are coming.

What We Cannot Predict

We cannot predict whether you will go to heaven or hell. That is a decision you must make. We can be sure each will be in eternity at one place or the other. We decide the place ourselves.

We cannot predict whether you shall be saved or lost, but we know that you shall be judged, as will everyone else.

We cannot predict whether the tone of your sentence will be happy or sad, but we know it will be made.

We cannot predict whether you shall be raised to life or punishment, but we know all of us shall be raised.

We cannot predict when, where, or how you shall die. We know we all shall experience the separation of body and spirit.

We cannot predict whether you will live life as God wants it lived or not. That is a decision each one must make for himself or herself. The only way to live life pleasing to God is faithfulness in Christ. And the way you live will determine the happiness or the lack of it in the other inevitable events of the future before all people.

The future is ours to make of it what we will. What will it be with you?

† † † † †

Strange Reasoning



JAMES W. BOYD

Many and varied have been the efforts of those who wish to use mechanical instruments of music in worship. Each of them have met with defeat because they are based on sand, removed from divine authority and reflect the feeble efforts of men to try to so change the revelation from God to somehow accomodate what they are determined to have.

But a position taken by some in recent days seems to confirm the determination to use them regardless of evidence Did you ever think some would start contending that there is nc authority for congregational singing? Space prevents refutation of thi: foolishness just here, but there is a point that needs to be made Suppose for a moment one could prove there is no authority fo congregational singing which cannot be done . Has that proven use o mechanical instruments right? All you would have is two unauthorizec pratices rather than one. What ridiculous "reasoning" some produce!

What is as tragic as the foolisness of this is that some who profess tc have respect for the Bible as the Word of God will fall in line anc swallow such as that as proving instruments are allowed.

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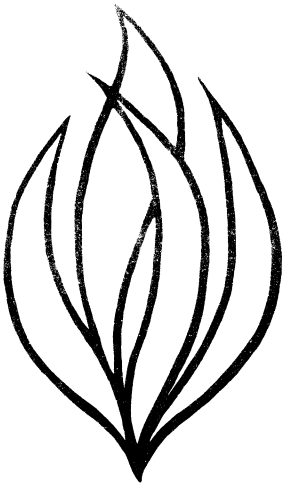

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 2**

A Plea Not To Dance

The matter under discussion is so pressing that it deserves attention before the rising of another sun. Conscience, responsibility to God, to you, and to myself demands that the lesson be brought. It comes upon the heals of much prayer, serious thought and preparation. I bring it with a heavy heart because some of you are to be rebuked for what you have been doing. I seek only your spiritual good, your salvation, and the welfare of the church of the Lord at this place. We are stewards of God (First Corinthians 4:2), and this includes stewardship of the gospel. We must be loyal to it, dependable, standing with true allegiance in the truth, and firm in adherence to the teaching of the Bible. None of us would profess perfection, even though that is that for which we strive. Many of us fall and stumble, but we get up and press on. I am speaking to you about open, public, deliberate, repeated transgression that ought not be found in the life of one who professes to be faithful to God's truth.

Shall We Sin?

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (First John 3:9). This does not mean it is impossible for us to sin. It means it is inconsistent and incompatiable for one who is born of God to continue in sinful ways. *"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins."* (Hebrews 10:26). When we deliberately disobey God's teaching, to what else or to whom else can we turn and expect to be saved? We will have defied the only hope we have. Some sin in ignorance. Others sin because they are untaught. While this explains why some sin, it does not justify. But others sin knowingly, having been taught. They deliberately pursue sinful ways in spite of all. This is what is taking place among us, by young people, and condoned and even encouraged by some parents.

You may seek my removal from the pulpit after this lesson. I hope the truth is not that offensive to you. If that be the outcome, so be it. I cannot and will not shirk my God-given task as a preacher of the gospel and look away when my brethren

makeour own way without God. *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* (Proverbs 14:12). Mankind, without the divine direction that God has provided, is like a flock of sheep, being scattered about, without a shepherd, subject to whatever might fall upon it as prey. In life people are often buffeted, not knowing how to go or which way, unable to make the decisions that must be made, with values twisted and distorted. Man is not able to set his own standards and be happy. He cannot even know by himself what is and is not of value. Without God's standards and values he cannot make intelligent and proper decisions. History is lined with the remains of those who have sought to live life without God and their story is failure upon failure in things that matter.

We have the need to know God and do good. Without God's revelation, and without Christ, His Son, we can neither know God or even know the difference between good and evil. Christ came to reveal God unto mankind. *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."* (John 14:9). Christ not only came to teach us the way we shoujld go, He is the way (John 14:6). Living a perfect life, He is the qualified One to direct mankind in the way that he sould live. *"He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."* (First Peter 2:22). We live properly only as we walk in the footsteps of the Son of God.

The Way Revealed

The way that the Lord walked, and the way we are to pursue, is revealed to us in God's Holy Word, the Bible. *"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."* (Isaiah 42:16). *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...He leadeth me beside the still waters...He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."* (Psalm 23). *"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord...Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway...Order my steps in thy word..."* (Psalm 119:1,105,133). It is not that man cannot know the way he ought to go. God has given the instruction that we need. How tragic that so few have the hunger and thirst for His will and will learn and perform in life as God has intended. Can we expect the joys God has offered if we do not walk the way He has directed?

kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21). Let us understand with whom we are dealing. It is not man, but God. *"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."* (Galatians 1:11,12).

To the Young And Those Older

I want to say to the young people that I have nothing but love in my heart for your souls. I have worked with you, taught you, been with you, are sympathetic toward you, know you and would go to any honorable length to save you. To the parents, I want to say that I respect your position as a parent, have admired you, been in your homes, enjoyed your hospitality, count you as friends and brethren. But when either you or your young defy the teaching of God, I must show my love for you by telling you of your transgressions so that you may make things right. When you disobey God, you are not being a loyal Christian.

I want to say to our elders, deacons, and Bible class teachers, more than others in the church, you set the standards and have the duty to uphold the truth of God. You cannot be unmindful or shirking in your responsibility. If you are, you become guilty of sin.

Many young people here, their parents, even families of elders and deacons, have sinned and have disobeyed God time and again by attending, partaking of, supporting, encouraging, condoning, allowing the modern dance. In doing this, you are like the world, not like Christ. The congregation is not untaught. We cannot plead we are not accountable. You have been begged and persuaded. The matter has been repeatedly explained. Yet, some wilfully, deliberately, defiantly stand against the teaching of God. You are revealing your worldliness and rebellion against the truth. The Word of God teaches that you have sinned in so doing. *"Thou art the man."*

Whether one dances, plays in the dance band, decorates for the dance, promotes, sells tickets to it, or whatever, you are contributing to the encouragement of a sinful practice. Parents who encourage and condone it and do not restrain their children from it are likewise guilty of sin. A sizeable number of the members of this church have thereby defied the teaching of the Bible and have brought reproach on the cause of Christ, openly and publicly. Deep in your heart, you know what I am saying is

the truth.

Some Try To Justify It

We often seek defenses and excuses for doing what is wrong. Parents seek to justify their permissiveness toward their children. Some say, "It is no worse than other things, and far less evil than other things." Or, "I'm not the only one. Others are doing it." And so goes the efforts of those in sin to justify sinning. But, there is not one present or absent that can defend the practice. If you could, you would have tried long ago. There is no defense for going what the Bible condemns.

It is not my intention to give an extensive proof just now as to why dancing is wrong. That has been done over and over, publicly and privately, in classes, through tracts. I am pleading with you to obey God. When you dance, you do not reflect Christ, but reflect the devil. The question before us is this, "Are we convinced that God's way is best? Do we believe God's way is true and right? Are we willing to abide by His infallible word?" That is the sum and total of the entire matter!

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." (Second Thessalonians 3:6).

If You Dance

Those who dance, and permit it, are not following the tradition or teaching given by the apostles. Here is your sin in a word - Disorderly. Paul said we are to withdraw from such if they will not turn from it. It matters not whether one be prominent, popular, powerful or whatever. God is no respector of persons. Some congregations love the Lord's word enough to actually obey this apostolic direction. Does this church? The matter has been dodged, neglected, by-passed, covered up long enough. The way of sin is becoming the norm. We must decide whether God rules in this church or whether the social aspirations of a few who sin shall dominate.

Again we say, those of you who dance, support it, promote condone it, you show disrespect to God and your brethren; you disgrace the church; you exhibit a bad example; your influence is detrimental; and you are undermining serious injunctions of God's word. Young people whose parents have disapproved of

the dance but who dance anyway can add to that their dishonor and disobedience to parents. We cannot overcome evil by partaking of it, ignoring it, compromising with it, but only by doing good (Romans 12:21). Paul tells us to be lights in the world (Philippians 2:15). How can one do that when he walks in the darkness of the world?

Who is at fault in this matter of wilfull and continued sinning by participating in the modern dances? The young people who attend are at fault. They know better. Parents who allow it are at fault. There are parents who stand against the truth, undermine what is taught at the assemblies when they get home. And then they wonder why their children do not have respect for the church or the Bible. Preachers in nearby churches who lie to you that it is all right and innocent are at fault. They are false teachers and deceivers, playing to the worldly minded that they might be popular. Elders are at fault who do not stand with truth, even if it is a matter that involves their own families. Certainly the pressure of the schools, the teachers, society, clubs, the social set who really are not too concerned with God's wishes anyway, all bear responsibility.

It is not difficult to assign and locate the blame. Correction must come from those who have violated God's teaching. *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."* (Galatians 6:1). *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."* (James 5:19,20).

Give It Up

I come to admonish you as your brother in Christ. I entreat you with love for the truth and for your soul, give up this practice and persist in it no longer. Stand with God and those who are faithful to His Word. Repent of your sin and confess it, ask God to forgive you. Resist the temptations to ever be involved in it again. Do not wait until you see what others may or may not do. Do not let pride stand in your way. To one and all who have been in error in this matter, we make the fervent plea that you will turn today and sin no more in such fashion.

If you have a defense for dancing, bring it forward. We have asked for it openly and publicly repeadedly and no one even

tries to defend it, standing on the Word of God. Lacking Biblical defense, be honest with yourself, and with God and your brethren, and recognize it for the sin that it is, leave it off, and do not allow it to continue to be a part of your life.

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A Religious Error

Our lesson will teach a very unpopular religious truth. The religious world and the Bible are often at odds with each other. The Bible calls for much that the religious world rejects. The religious world condones, promotes, and supports much that the Bible opposes. Calling for a strict following of the Bible is often ridiculed. Many have such a strong desire for what they call "unity" and for what they say is "brotherliness" that they have allowed themselves to be forced into compromise of the truth of God in order to "get along" with other people. While there can be no objection to wanting to be "brotherly" we must consider the teaching of God more seriously than to set it aside to accomodate men. True and genuine unity cannot be founded on compromise with the truth. While we are all brothers physically (Acts 17:26), we are not all brothers spiritually. Not everyone is a spiritual child of God. Not even all who say they are God's children are really in His spiritual family which is His church. (First Timothy 3:15).

There is tremendous pressure against adhering to the Bible. "Toleration" is the watchword. While we must be tolerant, does that mean that we must agree that everything is all right regardless of what the Word of God teaches? Is it evil and wicked judging to stand by the Bible and oppose what differs with it? Would we not be guilty of judging God if we dismissed His Word and decided "Everything is beautiful in its own way"?

What Freedom?

Freedom of religion does not mean freedom from religion, nor does it mean it makes no difference what one believes and does in religion. Religious freedom, probably the most wonderful freedom we enjoy in America, does not mean God

approves whatever anyone does religiously. Unity is not agreeing to disagree. Nor is it hate, bigotry, prejudice, etc., to hold to convictions that are founded on inspired revelation.

Christians should never be afraid to stand for the truth. We should rather be afraid to ever be ashamed of it, regardless of the consequences. It may cost us our friends, families, jobs, consideration of our fellowman, money, acceptance, etc. As Paul admonished, we must *"...stand fast in the faith..."* (First Corinthians 16:13). This leads us now to consider a very unpopular truth.

There are many who contend that all the religions serve a good cause and are all right before God. They place Mohammedism, Buddism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, etc., all on the same plane. One is just as good as another in their view. These are simply different ways of approaching the Supreme Being, we are told.

Closely akin to that attitude is that which is held by most religious denominations; namely, that Christianity is the superior faith, possibly the only true faith, but one church is just as good as another. One faith, called Christian, is as beneficial as another, they contend. The Lord's church, according to this false belief, is supposed to be made of all the denominations combined.

There Is One

In sharp contrast to these views is the view that there is one faith that is acceptable before God, there is one church, and denominations have no place in this world by the authority of God but are man made religions that are not the church that was founded by Christ. It is not uncommon that those who hold this view are considered second class people, full of self-righteousness, hatred for others, narrow-minded, and all kinds of similarly ugly designations.

Who has the courage and integrity to inquire from the Scriptures and see what is taught therein? Are we honest enough to ask, "What does the Bible teach?" Are we honest enough to accept what the Bible teaches? Can we contend that we believe and follow the Bible if we defend what the Bible opposes, or attack what the Bible teaches? *"All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good*

works." (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Bible is inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all sufficient. Who will accept it?

The Bible teaches that there is only one church that belongs to God. While some scoff at this and say, "One church is as good as another and one faith is as good as another, and we have the right to choose the church of our choice," the truth is that Christ established His church, is the head of one body which is the church, promises to save the church, has given teaching as to how to belong to His church, and never gives authority for man "choosing the church of his choice."

Some will say that there is so much good in every church. We do not doubt that. This being true, we wonder why people do not join them all and get the good out of all of them. Remember, 98% of rat poison is good food, but who wants to swallow it?

When people talk about "Christians in all the denominations" we are compelled to ask, "Where does the Bible teach anything whatever about denominations and God being pleased with their existence?" It does seem that those who condone and promise denominationalism and also say they believe the Bible is God's Word ought to produce something from the Bible that is favorable to denominationalism, at least show where God has authorized such a system as denominationalism. The trouble with denominationalists is that they want to serve God their own way.

Honestly Wrong

To differ with people about denominationalism is not to challenge their honesty and integrity or sincerity. The Scriptures show how people can be honest and sincere and as wrong as can be. Consider Saul of Tarsus before he was converted. As for the church, what does the Bible teach? Are there many churches? Is one as good as another? Does God give man a choice of churches?

The word *"church"* means "the called out." It has reference to people who have been called by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14), out of darkness into light (Colossians 1:13; First Peter 2:9).

We read of the church universally, when in assembly and locally.When the Bible speaks of Christ as the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), the term refers to the church

everywhere. We also read about local congregations, the church in Corinth, the church in Ephesus, etc., meaning local churches. In First Corinthians 11:18 we read of the church when assembled, such at the time for partaking of the Lord's Supper. The church is composed of the saved (Acts 2:47), and when the members of the church are scattered, the Scripture speaks of the church being scattered (Acts 8:4). A single member is not the church but is a member of the body, which is the church.

Christ promised to build His church (Matthew 16:16-18), and said He would build His church (singular number). There is one body (Ephesians 4:4) and the body is the church (Colossians 1:18). As husbands have but one wife so Christ has but one church, which is His bride (Ephesians 5:23ff).

The local churches were not denominations, but all believed the same doctrine, became members the same way, were to worship the same way, follow the same rule, be guided by the same instructions. Before going further, please consider such passages as First Corinthians 1:10-13; Philippians 3:15,16; First Timothy 1:3; 6:3; Galatians 1:8,9; John 17:20-23. After reading such passages, how could anyone contend for "unity in diversity" and that it matters little what one does, believes, teaches, and practices in religion? The idea that God is pleased regardless of what we think and do is diametrically opposite of Romans 12:16, *"Be of the same mind one toward another."* It contradicts the admonition, *"Be comforted, be of the same mind..."* second Corinthians 13:11). Philippians 4:2 reads, *"I exhort...Be of the same mind in the Lord."*

Division Is Wrong

The idea of division, varying doctrines and practices being acceptable in New Testament Christianity is absurd. Our Lord bought the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28) , and it makes a difference whether you are in or out of His church. The difference is between salvation and condemnation. The teaching that one can be saved in all churches is blasphemous against Christ and His blood on the very face of it. The church is His kingdom (Matthew 16:16-18; Colossians 1:13), and it is His kingdom that shall be delivered to the Father when He comes again (First Corinthians 15:24). Those outside of His kingdom, the church, are not promised salvation, but are warned of condemnation.

The True Church

Someone comes forward to inquire, "Do you believe the church of Christ is the true church of the New Testament?" Well, if I did not, knowing what the Bible teaches about being in His church, I would not be a member of anythging else. And if I did not believe I was in the church revealed in the Bible, I would be busy finding it. When I can read of the church in the Bible, and believe what those Christians believed, practice what they practiced, worship like they worshipped, then I am what they were, Christians, no more or less, in the kingdom and a member of the body, the church that belongs to Christ.

All people must do is to take the Bible and follow it and leave off the theologies, disciplines, manuals, catechisms, human traditions, innovations, additions, subtractions of which men have been guilty of doing with God's revelation about the church, and the church of the Bible is reproduced. It would not be possible to produce a denomination when you sow only the *"seed of the kingdom, which is the word of God."* (Luke 8:11). One must sow the tares of human doctrines to produce a denomination.

Christ is the only way to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). This means other religions are vain and false. Christ has but one church. If a church is a denomination, it is not the church of Christ. If it is the church of Christ, it is not a denomination. Nowhere are we taught one church is as good as another, choose your own church, you can be saved in any or all of them, or even one of them if you see fit. That is Satanic and deceptive false doctrine.

The truth is, Christ has one church, and we must be members of it.

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I Hope It Continues

My first meetings this year have been encouraging. As much as anything else there has seemed to exist among faithful brethren an air of optimism. For several years the onslaught of liberalism left a numbing effect. The problem is still very much with us and serious. But more and more brethren are recognizing it and dealing with it. For this we are encouraged. JB

The Children Of Abraham

"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith that should afterward be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized unto Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:23-29).

In the Bible you read of many people who are called the children of Abraham, Abraham's seed, Abraham as their father. You hear messages where Christians are called Abraham's children, and this is true. This is what our passage teaches. We need to understand in what sense Christians are the children of Abraham. What does being a child of Abraham really mean? What does this say about our relationship to God? Why are Christians called children of Abraham?

The Patriarch

Abraham, one of the better known Biblical characters of the Old Testament, is first mentioned in Genesis when he was called to leave his home in Ur of Chaldee to go into a place where God directed him. God made great promises of this man; such as, he would be the father of a great nation, his descendants would be as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars of the heavens, God would bless those that blessed him and curse those that cursed him, his people would have a land for their own so long as they were faithful to God, and the greatest promise of all, *"and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed..."* (Genesis 22:18). Paul identified that *"seed"* as Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16).

Abraham is often called the father of the faithful, and James identified him as a friend of God (James 2:23).

Abraham has children both physically and spiritually. Physically, Isaac was his descendant, the promised son born unto Sarah in their old age. Before him was Ishmael, born unto

Sarah's handmaid, Hagar. After the death of Sarah, Abraham had more children by Keturah. The Israelite nation, later known as the Jewish nation, are all physical descenants of Abraham. Likewise, through Ishmael, and Esau, the Arab world looks to Abraham as their physical ancestor. It is said of Abraham. *"I have made thee a father of many nations."* (Romans 4:17).

Spiritually, the children of Abraham are those who make up the family of God. For a number of centuries, the Israelite people were God's chosen nation by virtue of their descendency from Abraham, the nation through which the Messiah of all mankind was to come. The Jews placed such tremendous importance on being a descendent of Abraham as the mark of their spiritual acceptance. The fact that Jesus preached salvation to all men, not just to the Jews exclusively, was what created such antagonism against him by the Jewish leaders.

John's Message

John the Baptist, while preparing the way for the coming of the Lord had taught, *"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit meet for repentance, and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto abraham."* (Matthew 3:7-10). He taught the coming end of the special status of the Jews and their special privileges and relationship with God because Christ, the promised Savior of all mankind, had come. Spiritual acceptance would no longer be based on one's ancestry but one's response to this Savior. "...*For they are not all Israel which are of Israel, neither because they are the children of Abraham, are they all children: but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for seed."* (Romans 9:6-8). Just because one could point to Abraham as his fleshly foreparent would not suffice to identify him as one of God's family anymore.

The blessings of God would rest upon those of any nation, tribe, color, tongue, background, ancestry, if they would come to God through Christ. *"Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respector of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."* (Acts

10:34,35). Therefore, the children of Abraham, those who are the beneficiaries of God's promises, are those who belong to Christ. Our text plainly states that child of God is a child of Abraham, and we are children of Abraham if we belong to Christ. Therefore, if one is out of Christ, he is not a child of Abraham, spiritually speaking, and not a child of God, spiritually speaking. That relationship does not exist except for those who belong to Christ.

Birth / Adoption

How do people become members of their families? One, it is by birth. This is obvious and needs no further comment. Another way is by adoption, a legal process whereby a child becomes the child of adoptive parents. The New Testament pictures people becoming spiritually the children of God by using both illustrations. It is not that people become children of God two ways, but that the one way is illustrated both ways.

Jesus taught the new birth (John 3). We must be born again. We enter into a newness of life, new creatures in Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Second Corinthians 5:17), We are born into the family of God by this spiritual new birth.

Paul speaks of people being adopted, receiving the adoption of sons, becoming children of God through Christ (Galatians 4:5; Romans 8:15ff). Once belonging to Satan because of sin, Christians are adopted by the Lord. *"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."* (Galatians 3:7). By the faith of Christ, and faith in Christ, a faith that renders obedience to Christ, we become children of Abraham, hence, children of God, spiritually. As Israel was once the children of God because they were of the descendants of Abraham, so we are the children of God, called children of Abraham, through the faith of Christ.

It is not surprising that faith is involved in becoming children of Abraham, seeing he was a man of faith, an example of faith, one who acted on his faith, and whose life emphasized faith. It can be expected that the child will be like the parent. Jesus said of some in His day on earth, *"I know that ye are Abraham's seed, but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father, and ye so that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of*

Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God, this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then saith they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:37-44).

Devil's Children

As children of the devil will behave like the devil, children of God will behave as God directs. The children of Abraham will be people of faith as was Abraham. Abraham was justified by faith (Galatians 3:6; Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6). Nothing in the Bible teaches he was justified by faith alone, but he was justified by faith.

When was Abraham justified by faith? James 2:21-24 makes it plain. Paul and James refer to the same Old Testament passage. One teaches that Abraham was justified by faith and the other teaches that Abraham was justified by works of obedience. There is no conflict whatever. Works of obedience made the faith of Abraham perfect, whole, mature, complete. Without his works of obedience his faith would have been a dead and useless faith. His faith acted. Hebrews 11:8 says Abraham by faith obeyed. Hebrews 11:17 says by faith he offered. His faith justified him when it led him to do what God commanded to be done. Faith plus works saved Abraham.

Romans 5:1 teaches that we are justified *"by faith,"* as was Abraham. When does our faith justify us? When do we become the children of Abraham? Our text told us that we are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Then it explains just when that faith made us a child of God. *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."* Notice that it was when we acted on our faith like Abramas. Paul says that those who *"have been"* baptized into Christ *"are"* the children of God. It stands therefore that those who have not been are not. We are because we have been. We are not if we have not been. Not until our faith has led us to obey the Lord's command

to be baptized has our faith made us a child of God.

Circumcision

The children of Abraham in a fleshly sense were circumcised. This was a token of the covenant between God and Abram (Genesis 17:10). Circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth anything in Christ as far as our spiritual welfare is concerned (Galatians 5:5,6). What is important is the circumsicion of the heart; that is, the heart brought into covenant relationship with God. What is the circumcision of the heart? This is a figurative expression denoting that we also are in covenant relationship as was Abram. *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."* (Romans 2:28,29). Paul told his Christian brethren in Philippians 3:3, *"For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."* Again, *"In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."* (Colossians 2:11,12). The *"circumcision"* of the heart is an operation of God. It is not fleshly, but spiritual. It is not of the body, but the heart. It occurs when we are buried in baptism into Christ.

As Abraham's children, we should walk in steps of faithfulness all the days of our lives as did he. He is called *"faithful Abraham."* (Galatians 3:9). Abraham was not perfect, but he did "keep on keeping on." That is what God expects of those who are children of Abraham.

"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made." (Galatians 3:16). The promises were through his seed, which is Christ. Through Christ, we are also of the seed of Abraham. We can be partakers of God's promises in Christ.

Abraham was called from Chaldee (Genesis 12). He obeyed; He built an altar of worship in Hebron (Genesis 13). He paid tithes to Melchizedek (Genesis 14). Genesis 15 tells us he believed in the Lord and it was counted unto him for righteousness. It was *"because that Abraham obeyed my voice and kept by charge, my commandments, my statues, and my*

laws," (Genesis 26:5) that God saved Abraham by faith. His obedience to God in offering Isaac was an act of obedient faith. By such he obtained God's promises, and so with us. If we would be children of Abraham, God's people, among the saved and those of promise, we must belong to Christ (Galatians 3:29).

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To Believe And Do

Revelation 21:1-7 gives us a picture of the church and a forecast of heaven. Most of us have that great desire to enter heaven. We expect to be saved eternally, but not all who want to go to heaven will go. Added to this, there are many who know not the truth who will miss heaven also.

Regarding those who want to go to heaven but have not obeyed the gospel, or regarding those who have never heard the way of salvation, people are heard to say, "Maybe God will provide a way for them to be saved anyway." There is no other way than Christ (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). This is the reason it is urgent that the gospel be spread throughout the world.

Let us illustrate this way. There are many "wonder medicines" in existence that can cure diseases that would otherwise prove fatal. If those who are sick do not know of the medicine, or refuse to take it, they cannot expect to receive the benefits from it. So it is with the gospel of Christ prescribed by the Great Physician to heal our souls from sin.

Wrong Belief

People may be lost because they believe the wrong things. *"Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). One may be honest and sincere in what he believes, but he may not believe what he must believe in order to be saved. If one is taught wrong, he will believe what is wrong. It matters what a person believes.

Because what we believe is important, we urge us all to *"search the Scriptures daily"* and learn what the will of God is.

This is why we are to study the Word of God. (Second Timothy 2:15).

Do Wrong

Many may be lost because they are doing the wrong things. Revelation 21:8 condemns a variety of sins, as other passages do, and concludes how those who are guilty of such things *"shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."*

It matters what you do. When people are sinning, they cannot expect salvation. Following the ways and doctrines of men rather than the more excellent way that God has designed and delivered will cause one to be excluded from the glories of heaven. Cain sacrificed in error. Nadab and Abihu worshipped God but not according to the way God authorized (Leviticus 10:1,2). Annanias and Saphirra did not follow God's plan (Acts 5). When we do those things that are wrong, we have no promise of heaven, but only the stern and awesome warning of hell.

People must learn not to go beyond what the doctrine of Christ teaches (Second John 9-11). Paul wrote, *"Learn not to go beyond the things which are written..."* (First Corinthians 4:6). Galatians 5:19-21 warns against doing certain things and those that do them *"shall not inherit the kingdom of God."*

People can also be lost eternally because they fail to believe and do the right things. Believing wrong, doing wrong, will seal our doom. Salvation is more than simply refraining from the evil. It also involves believing and doing what is right. In other words, we can "back into hell" by doing nothing, being passive when we ought to be active, and being idle when we ought to be working.

The doctrine of salvation by "faith only" is false to the core. There is that which must be done in order to be saved. We would remind you of the teaching in Matthew 25 and the parable of the ten virgins, five of whom made adequate preparations, but five who did not do what they ought to have done.

Judgment

We would read further and note the judgment scene and those who were received and those who were rejected. The

virgins, as well as those later received in the chapter, were not accused of doing evil. There was no charge of sin. They were excluded because of their failure to do what they ought to have done. Jesus teaches there is a right to do as well as a wrong not to do in service to God.

"To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James 4:17). *"Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding your own sleves."* (James 1:22). Matthew 7:19-27 gives great emphasis to not only hearing the will of the Lord, but also doing it. Those that hear and refuse to do are branded as foolish as the man that builds his house on sand. It is those who hear and do that are like the man who built his house on the rock and it was able to stand against the elements.

Our lesson is that there are those things that we must believe and do in order to get to heaven. We realize that even when we do what we are commanded to do we are not earning salvation. To merit a home in heaven is beyond our ability. Only through forgiveness of our sins by the blood of Christ can we enter therein. The merit of man's salvation is Christ, not man. Nonetheless, there are conditions we must meet or we shall remain lost. Salvation is a gift but a gift given on certain terms.

What To Do

The message that the world must hear and know is what one must do to be saved. Having learned of God's grace and mercy, and the demonstration of His graciousness and merciful kindness by the sending of His only begotten Son to live, die, and be raised again, taking note that we are saved by the blood of Christ, we must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. *"Without faith it is impossible to be pleasing unto him..."* (Hebrews 11:6). *"Saved by faith"* is a paramount theme of the New Testament. Unless we place our trust, confidence and faith in Christ, we have closed the only door that God has provided through whom we can be saved. *"He that believeth not shall be damned."* (Mark 16:16).

We are to also submit our own will to Him, turn from the wickedness in our heart and behavior, turning to the Lord, in repentance. *"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3,5). Paul said that God *"now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."* (Acts 17:30).

Repentance is a change of heart, provoked by godly sorrow and the righteousness of God, that results in a change of

direction and manner of living. Repentance is not merely sorrow, nor is the reformation of the pattern of life to be confused with repentance. Reformation is the result of repentance. When one has genuinely repented, changed His mind about sin, about Christ, about the truth, he will then do whatever the Lord directs him to do to be saved.

One must confess his faith in Christ with his mouth (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10). Like the Ethiopian in Acts 8, we ought never be ashamed to acknowledge, *"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."* (Acts 8:37).

One must be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), into Christ (Galatians 3:27), for Jesus made this a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16). Annanias told Saul, *"And now why tarriest thou, Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* (Acts 22:16).

In Matthew 22, Jesus told the parable of a king who had prepared a great feast and invited many. Some rejected the invitation, some attended. There came one who was not properly prepared. He was not wearing the wedding garment. He had not made adequate preparation. His wrong was that he failed to do what was right, and he was cast out into darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Desire Is Not Enough

The lesson is too plain to miss. Just wanting to be saved is not enough. Just doing some things is not sufficient. We must believe and do what the Lord of all has instructed.

The question before us is simply this: "When we stand before God in judgment, will we have our garment of obedience to His commands or will we, like the unprepared man, be cast away because we failed to believe and do what God has taught is necessary?" Better we answer that question now, in this life, while there is time and opportunity to get right, than to wait until we face God and hear our doom because we neglected such an important matter?

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Our Mailing Address

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Man's Changeless Needs

We are very much aware that we live in a rapidly changing world. This has always been the case, but our age has seen changes of greater impact and speed than any age of human history. We also must be aware that there are some things that do not change. Among those things are the basic needs of mankind.

We deem it profitable as well as interesting to consider what man's basic and fundamental need are. Let us imagine a world blown apart by a super explosion that left but a few people to survive. No longer did they have their houses, their cars, their televisions, their wrist watch or jewelry. All the many material possessions that we see around us ceased to exist. Yet, the human family could survive if we had his basic needs.

Even though our world has become tremendously complicated because of the many things around us, the ultimate requirements of life remain relatively simple. The real necessities have not changed since Adam. Many refinements have been added and we have multiplied our wants until the list is extensive. It takes so much of our time, energy, thought to continue to supply the comforts, luxuries, and the many other things upon which we have allowed ourselves to become dependent. It is good to strip away all these surface matters and think about the basic needs.

Physical Needs

Man has certain physical needs for the sustenance of life. He must have food, shelter, clothing, and not much more. We are not suggesting that we do away with everything else that makes life enjoyable, but we are trying to focus on what is demanded. Our lives do not depend on all the added things that we have accumulated. Many problems of life arise from our excessive wants for many things. People even fight, hate, gouge, push, exploit, take advantage, cheat, kill, whatever they feel is needful in order to possess material things. By this we show we do not understand that keeping our wants few and simple would be more in accord with our needs. People like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc. had much the same needs that we do today. Basically there is no difference. We may have

different modes of transportation, wear different types of garments, sleep in a different design of house, etc., but we still have the same needs that they had.

There are a number of Biblical passages that teach us the futility of seeking happiness and satisfaction by having things. *"Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."* (Job 1:21). *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content."* (First Timothy 6:6-8). *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."* (Philippians 4:11,12). *"Take heed and beware of covetousness: for man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* (Luke 12:15). All of these passages plead that we not overemphasize the material and physical things of life.

The beauty and wonder of it all is that God knows we have need of certain physical things and has promised us if we will put His kingdom and His righteousness first in life we shall be provided what we really need (Matthew 6:33). Man has lungs and God provides air. Man has hunger and God provides plants and animals from which clothing can be made. Man needs warmth and God provides the sun, the fuels, with which to build shelter and produce heat. Before man was created, God had already created a world that would provide for he needs of mankind. These things have not changed from the beginning of time. Man is learning more and more how to use what God has given and enhances his state in life by their use.

Not By Bread Alone

Man shall not live by bread alone. Man is more than a physical being. He is also a spiritual creature. He is created in the spiritual image of God. Man is soul and spirit as well as body. Many fail to realize this about themselves and others and therefore fail to provide for this part of man and this failure leaves them so incomplete.

Being a spiritual creature, mankind needs fellowship with God, His Creator. Having sinned, mankind needs to be

redeemed from the onslaughts of sin. *"All have sinned..."* (Romans 3:23), and are subject to the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Our sins separate us from our Creator and deprive us of the needed fellowship with God (Isaiah 59:1,2). If only all mankind could realize his lost and condemned condition, then the task of persuading people to come to God would be greatly simplified. So many either deny or ignore the fact that we are spirits and shall continue to exist after physical death.

God Provides

God has provided for our spiritual needs. *"She shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for it is he that shall save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21). *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). Jesus Christ is God's provision for the spiritual blessings that man must have. All such blessings are found in the relationship with God that is called *"in Christ."* (Ephesians 1:3).

When Jesus taught the woman at Jacob's well (John 4), it was obvious that she was concentrating on the physical need of water. She was unsaved, unbelieving, unblessed, in spiritual need. Christ told her about another water, the water of eternal life. While the woman was like so many today that put their emphasis only on the physical, Jesus pointed out her spiritual need and that He was the One through whom that need could and would be supplied. He is the water of life.

One basic reason why so many people are groping about in life with such frustration, hopelessness, aimlessness, seeking to get something out of life but missing the mark is because they have not acceopted the fact that man is spirit, man has spiritual needs, God has supplied those needs and His supply is Jesus Christ. Only Christ can give unto man what he must have to be complete and fulfilled. One can heap to himself a wealth and abundance of the material and be miserable and lacking. The one who has partaken of the spiritual bread of Christ, regardless of physical circumstances, he has learned contentment, peace, value, and has the hope of an eternal life with God.

Mankind needs guidance in life. *"It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23). Here is where many of us make a colossal blunder. We get the idea that we can

Something wrong here

are sinning and bringing reproach on the cause of Christ that we all are supposed to uphold together.

Relevant Scriptures

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:1,2). *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."* (First John 2:15-17). The sinful things of the world are off-limits to the child of God. *"Come ye out from among them..."* is the Biblical admonition (Second Corinthians 6:17). Too many of this church have been repeatedly and deliberately following the ways of the world, bringing reproach on the church, making mockery of the teaching of God. If Christian people do not wish to live by the Bible, how do you expect anybody to persuade others to go that way? There are those who do not worship on Sunday, as we do, who know better than to do what some of you are doing. They see the inconsistency and the influence of gospel preaching to save their souls has no effect. We must realize that there is more to Christianity than going to services, eating the Lord's Supper, giving a few dollars and bowing in prayer. Now, as always, God requires obedient living in order for worship to be acceptable. *"For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."* (Hosea 6:6). *"Behold to obey is better than sacrifice."* (First Samuel 15:22). We make our worship vain when we defy God Monday thhrough Saturday and think coming to worship on Sunday is going to make everything all right with God.

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like, of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the

We have our physical and spiritual needs. It has been essentially the same for all people in every generation. In a world where changes are so fast, when what was new yesterday is obsolete today, when what was new today is antiquated by tomorrow, we need to know that some things remain constant and do not change. We also need to know that the supply of our basic needs has not changed. *"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever. '* (Hebrews 13:8). When we hold fast to Christ, we can either ride out the turbulent changes or take advantage of them for good. Without the Lord, we are sailing on a stormy sea, without compass or hope of reaching a happy destination

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Why Cannot People Be Honest?

We have mentioned several times what we perceive to be a major flaw in the characters of so many people, and that is basic, fundamental honesty and the will to tell the truth. This manifestation of the work of the devil is evident in quarters one would never expect. It may be expected among the people of the world who admit they care nothing for the Lord. It might even be expected among religious people who have adopted the idea that they are at liberty to do what they like rather than what the Lord commands.

But it is distressing to see, time after time, brethren who will lie. Some will lie about what somebody said. Some will lie in their business dealings. Some lie to cover their sins rather than clean up their sins. This is not the conduct expected of children of God. Yet, among those who profess to be members of the Lord's church this is seen all too often.

This dishonesty and lying is not only among the membership generally, but among elderships and preachers. Having encountered liberals lately in matters pertaining to doctrine and false accusations, the way they will dodge and squirm rather than tell the truth is pathetic. Do they not realize the fate of liars? (Revelation 21:8). How long do they think they can follow that path of wickedness and still be considered faithful children of God? They talk love, but are the most viciously dishonest people with whom it has been our misfortune to deal. In the words of James, "*My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*"

James Campbell Hagewood



James was born March 15, 1986 to Amy and Lowell Hagewood. Amy is our daughter and this makes the young James another grandchild for Rosalyn and I. He is also the first grandchild for Jean Hagewood, Lowell's mother.

Weighing in at eight pounds and one ounce, he has had the constant attention of his grandmothers from the day he came home. First one then the other was with him under the guise of assisting Amy.

We now have two sweet granddaughters and two fine grandsons. This sure makes us proud and thankful, not only for each of them, but for the wonderful Christian parents our grandchildren have.

James was named after his maternal grandfather and his paternal great grandfather, Campbell Jenkins. With such a fine boy to love and rear, we are most happy for Amy and Lowell.

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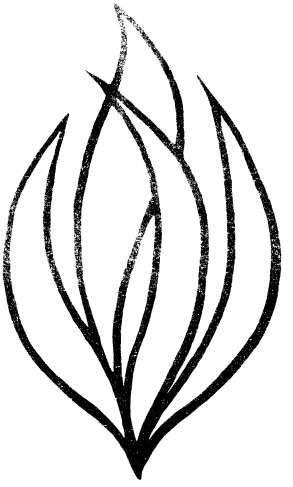

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 3**

Christian Optimism

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5). This is a description of the world just prior to the destruction of the world by the flood at the time of Noah. The extent of wickedness is beyond imagination. We may feel that the world is almost like that now, and doubtless such is true of some quarters of it, but every age considers its problems and woes worse than any other. There are many good and moral people in the world, plus many true New Testament Christians as well. But we do not minimize the evil, the injustices, the degeneracy that abounds in the world.

Sin In The World

It is true that evil dominates our world, and this is depressive. Crime grows faster than the population. There are more and more robberies, murders, rapes, seditions, riots, abuses from year to year. We are witnessing the deterioration of the God-given plan for the home. We suffer the highest divorce rate in the world. Our papers, television, and magazines overflow with violence, moral decay, wars, and corruption. They report it, promote it, and glamorize it.

The holy things of God are disrespected, such as the church, the gospel, authority, morality, even the dignity and sacredness of human life. The nation is almost submerged beneath materialism, spiritual poverty, evolution, and atheism, with its three accompanying "a's" of alcohol, adultery, and abortion.

Wickedness in high places is commonplace. The influence of powerful people only contributes to a worsening situation. And the forces that are trying to hold back the tide of error seem so weak and inadequate, confused, divided, and ineffective. On the surface, there seems to be little about which to be optimistic. Someone has suggested that those who are optimistic are just not really paying attention.

Yet, the Scriptures teach the Christian to fear not, be not anxious, be of good cheer, and that godliness with contentment is great gain. The Christian does not look on this world as do others. He knows this world is not his home, but only a temporary dwelling place. One may ask, "Why be cheerful?

Why be optimistic? What reason is there to be contented and happy?" Even as the question is asked, it is apparent that many have found refuge, peace, and contentment in the midst of the storms of life. Many are smiling amidst the gloom. Some are not overwhelmed. Why is that?

The Christian Is Different

The Christian remains cheerful and optimistic, not because he lives a life of indifferent hilarity or because he is on some kind of psychological high that ignores reality. He does not content being a Christian "fun" when he and others suffer because of what they believe and do. He knows he has a mission in life, a reason for living, a goal to reach, a hope in his heart, and a cause for which to stand.

So many have never learned what life is nor the reason for it. They grope about seeking power, pleasure, popularity, doing all sorts of weird and bazaar things trying to add some meaning to their existence in ways that have never brought man the satisfaction of his needs and desires. In contrast to those poor and deluded souls, the Christian is fortunate to have heard, learned, and accepted the more excellent way that God has provided, and therefore has hope, a basic element in Christian character. Hope is a part of the armor of God (First Thessalonians 5:8), the *"anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and stedfast,"* (Hebrews 6:19). We are saved by hope (Romans 8:24), because our hope keeps us on the right path, renews our determination, and prevents us from being overturned even though tossed about by waves of distresses in life. The Psalmist said, *"Hope thou in God."* (Psalm 42:5). Our hope is stayed on God through His Son, Jesus Christ, who is the giver of hope. The Christians hope is not founded on fantasy and escapism, nor wishful thinking and lack of realism, but is solidly grounded and undergirded by the revelation from God, the Bible.

Our Hope

Our hope springs from the assurance and conviction that good will ultimately triumph over evil. There is reason for this conviction. We do not ignore, belittle, or minimize the world's disorders. While we are not blinded to the present and terrible realities, neither are we blinded by them and unable to see the eternal realities that have been assured us by the Creator of all

things.

Our Victory

We are aware that the victory over evil has its costs. We are aware that Christ has made it possible for us to be victorious. *"But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (First Corinthians 15:57). We are aware that there is a high cost for us to pay, but we are willing and ready to pay that cost. We concede that things are not as they ought to be. In fact, when we see what God says man should be, we are more aware than most that things are not as they ought to be. We are determined to be as we ought to be regardless of the rest of the world. We are fully conscious that this life is not all there is to our existence.

Paul wrote great words of faith and hope when he said, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28). This does not teach that everything that happens is good for us. Neither does it teach that God makes everything happen. The "*things*" that God has provided refers to the system of salvation through Christ, and those things work for man's good. We benefit from these things if we love God and respond to His call, a call that comes through the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). God has worked out certain things that are for man's good. He has provided His Son and the way of forgiveness of sins that leads to heaven. These things are for our good. The Christian serves God in the spirit of the words of Isaiah 26:3, *"The Lord will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth Thee."* Therefore, our hope is not just wishful thinking or refusing to face reality. Rather we face reality with confidence even in the evil world knowing that God's will shall prevail.

The book of Revelation sends us the message of victory to those who are faithful "*in the Lord.*" Being faithful means we can and will overcome.

Faithfulness

There are four legs to our table of optimism. One, the faithfulness of God. *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the*

temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it." (First Corinthians 10:13). This tells us that there is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle." God is faithful, reliable, dependable. We can count on God. He is our strength, our shield, the same yesterday, today, and forever. *"But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you and keep you from evil."* (Second Thessalonians 3:3). *"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised."* (Hebrews 10:23). This does not mean we shall not face hardships, but it means we shall be victorious over them if we remain faithful to the Faithful One.

Optimism

Two, Jesus Christ is the perfect example of optimism. Consider how optimistic He was when He came into an evil world to save the world. He demonstrated love, truth, and honor in the midst of hate, error, and every form of dishonorable conduct and thought. By His obedience to the Father's will, He showed man light and life. He lived perfectly before God, a sinless life even though sin and temptation was all around Him.

Becoming our Savior by His death on the cross, He showed His optimism in giving the great commission, in offering salvation, even in rising from the dead, giving man a guide for life.

Prayer

A third leg of the optimism of the Christian is the avenue of prayer. *"Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."* (Philippians 4:6). *"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* (Hebrews 4:15,16). *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us, and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."* (First John 5:14,15).

Some would reduce prayer to a mere form and ritual. Others

attribute the power of prayer to nothing more than a psychological exercise. But James tells us, *"the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* (James 5:16). As Tennyson wrote, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

This avenue of approach is open to the children of God. God will hear us and answer our prayers according to His will, according to His infinite wisdom as to what is best for us. Knowing this, we can be optimistic.

Sowing/Reaping

Then, four, there is the unrepealable law of sowing and reaping in Galatians 6:7,8. We usually consider this law as a warning to us, and it is. *"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."*

This law is a promise of good things. *"But he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."* In other words, God promises us, that if we live according to His direction, we shall be blessed, not only in this life, but in the next as well. For this reason we can place confidence in Paul's very next statement. *"And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9). Paul wrote, and stressed the value of serving God in First Corinthians 15:58, right after he noted that our victory is in Christ. *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

There is a story told about a small lad who was on a sailing ship many years ago that was overtaken in a terrible storm at sea. All the passengers were very afraid and feared for their lives, except this lad. He was calm and serene. It was not because he was unaware of the storm, nor unconcerned about the danger. When he was asked why he was calm even under such trying circumstances, he replied, "My father is the captain of the ship." His serenity was due to his confidence in his father who controlled the ship. And our heavenly Father controls things, too.

A small boy and his father were walking home and the night was very dark. The small boy asked his father," Daddy, are you afraid?" And the father answered, "No, son, not at all." Then the boy sopke with greater confidence, "I'm not afraid either." So it is with us, if we be faithful Christians. This is our Father's

world. So long as we walk with Him we need not be anxious. He is mindful of us and cares for us (First Peter 5:7).

It is in the light of these truths that we have every reason to go about our lives, discharging our duties with vigor and enthusiasm, with resolution and a keen sense of responsibility and optimism.

Every generation has its challenges and we have ours. We may wish we had lived in calmer times and more tranquil circumstances, but, as Mordecai told Esther, *"Who but knows but thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

Our nation, our home, and the church needs the influence, standards, teaching, and discipline of Jesus Christ. Let us not fail ourselves, our children, our friends, and neighbors, and the Lord in this great hour of need. May we develop and possess Christian purpose, hope, optimism, and confidence, and allow our zeal and fervor to surge from us in doing the Master's will to His glory and our salvation.

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"Easter" And The Resurrection

There is a day that to many people is the most important "holy day" of the year. They call it "Easter." The prominence of its observance and the claim of its connection with the religion of Christ requires that we examine the subject from a Biblical viewpoint.

This celebration is observed annually by most Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox churches as well as many independent denominations in recognition of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The name "Easter" comes from the name of a Teutonic pagan goddess of Spring, according to encyclopedias. It is also a term that has been used to denote a certain time of the year, such as "baseball season," "harvest time," "Thanksgiving," etc. The term nor any observance of such a special "holy day" was common

among anything called "Christian" for many years after the close of God's revelation of His will to man. As "Christianity" spread, often the spread and expanse was due to compromise with error and the adoption of pagan customs and religious rites in combination with certain Christian teaching. This attitude has caused the growth of numbers, but always contributes to the departure from the paths of truth.

Passover

The word "Easter" is found once in the King James Version of the Bible (Acts 12:4). This is a mistranslation and the word should be "Passover." It does not authorize the celebration of Easter for the Christian any more than it authorizes the celebration of the Passover. It was used to denote the time of the year because the observance of the Passover and the resurrection of Christ took place in very close proximity of each other. The use of the term in the KJV has caused many to attempt to brand the KJV as unreliable as the perverted modern versions that reek with fatal doctrinal error. Such an attack is unwarranted and it is a rather transparent effort to justify false doctrines in modern speech versions. It demonstrates the extremes to which advocates of perverted books called Bibles will go to accomodate what they want.

Churches of Christ that are patterned after the New Testament do not observe Easter as a holyday. There is no authority for it any more than observing Palm Sunday, Ash Wednesday, Holy Thursday or Good Friday, Christmas or any other man-made "holy days." What one does in matters of religion (and many brethren need to learn this) must be by God's authority (Colossians 3:17; Matthew 28:18). We must speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). Easter is of human, not divine, origin. New Testament Christians did not take note of the resurrection by an "Easter" but by partaking of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week "*till he come.*" (First Corinthians 11:26). His resurrection is also noted in baptism (Romans 6:3,4).

Paul chided the Galatians for observing days, months, times and years for which there was no authority under Christ (Galatians 4:10,11). Endeavoring to be true to the Bible, resisting temptation to either add to or take from it, Christians refrain from Easter as a celebration of the resurrection of Christ, in spite of what the majority of "Christendom" may do.

Christians will note His resurrection the way Scripture authorizes rather than some man-invented ritual and celebration.

To Be Believed

The resurrection of Christ is something to be believed. The gospel of Christ is composed of facts to be believed, promises to be enjoyed, and commands to be obeyed. The resurrection is a fact of the gospel.

Jesus spent slightly over thirty-three years on earth, the final three concentrating on preparations for the establishment of His kingdom. Up and down Palestine He went, teaching, preaching, performing miracles, doing good, giving hope and converting people to Himself.

He had entered Jerusalem amidst the shouts of praise of the multitude, even though they obviously misunderstood the nature of Christ and His kingdom. They saw Him as an earthly king, even as some still mistakenly view Him today.

For a week, spending nights at Bethany and days in Jerusalem, He gave special attention to teaching His apostles. He was later betrayed by Judas, taken before various Jewish and Roman court proceedings, enduring the false charges leveled against Him, and being turned over to an angry, jealous, hate-ridden mob which was urged on by their religious leaders, and crucified. His was the death of the Just for the unjust.

His body was removed from the cross on what we would call Friday, and there it remained until the early moments of the first day of the week. It is here that our study centers.

He Arose

"Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain other with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments, and as they were afraid, and bowed their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen; remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galiless, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise

again. And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest." (Luke 24:1-9).

This is a simple and beautiful account (one of four) of the most significant event that has ever taken place. This was more important than His birth, His life, even His death. The resurrection of Christ was God's way of declaring Him to be who He claimed to be, God's Son (Romans 1:4).

Notice what is revealed. Friends came to anoint the body as was the custom. They found it not and were distressed at its absence, fearing it may have been removed by enemies and mutilated and disgraced.

They were met by two men in dazzling apparel and heard the words, "*He is not here, but is risen.*" This is as Jesus had foretold it.

Today, we either believe that announcment or we do not. It is obvious that God expects us to believe it. But He does not ask for a blind and naive acceptance. He has provided evidence that we might believe as well as be able to convict the gainsayer.

Where Was The Body?

Something happened to the body of Jesus. If the body was still in the tomb, obviously, He did not rise from the dead. But the tomb was empty. Both friend and foe alike admit this. The empty tomb is not sufficient evidence alone to prove the resurrection, but the empty tomb is one essential in the evidence.

The guards that were placed to guard the tomb claimed the body was stolen. They said it happened while they slept (Matthew 28:13). But is the testimony of one who was asleep when an event occured reliable evidence? Furthermore, the guards proved themselves dishonest by entering an agreement with the enemies of Jesus to make this claim when they could not possibly witnessed anything while they were asleep. But that testimony would please the Lord's foes.

Jesus was seen at least twelve recorded times by people who would have easily recognized Him. He was not only seen, even by five hundred at once, but was touched, handled, He walked and talked with witnesses. He ate with them, as no phantom or spirit could do. His body was flesh as before His death.

Furthermore, His resurrection was preached boldly in the very city where He was condemned, and only a few days after

His death and resurrection. If there was ever a time for those who would deny it to be able to prove it false, then was the time, not some two thousand years removed by those who can know only what is recorded concerning those who were actually on the scene.

One of the strong evidences of His resurrection is the manner of life of the apostles. While Jesus was dead they doubted and misunderstood. But later they preached the risen Christ, even in face of threat, torture and death. All but one is said to have died a martyr's death. What could cause men to preach and die for something they knew to be untrue when denying their message would have made them fre from such hardship and likely made them heroes among the multitudes? Is it reasonable to think men would knowingly uphold a lie when the truth would serve them better? The only explanation for such a manner of life was the simple fact that they knew they were proclaiming the truth.

It's Meaning

But what does the resurrection of Christ mean to mankind? It means there is One who has conquered death and demonstrated power over Satan. We are also subjected to death, but in Christ we can conquer death, escape Hell, rise from the grave to live in heaven with God eternally. Life is in Christ. He has overcome death and the grave and offers life to all mankind. He is man's hope and salvation, God's Son.

By coming forth from the tomb Jesus made it possible for us to live with God. All shall not live with God, but all who will do the will of the Father shall live with Him. The way is prepared and salvation from sin is extended to us. This salvation is conditioned on our obedient faith.

The entire faith of Christ is founded on the fact of His identity as the Son of God (Matthew 16:16-18). The resurrection proves that identification to be true. To the penitent believer who will confess his faith in Christ and obey Him in baptism, his sins, that would destroy him, are washed away by the blood of the risen Christ who now lives and reigns on His throne in heaven. Thanks be to God for the glorious resurrection of His Son, and that which awaits us because of Him.

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Hardening The Heart

One of the major causes for the rejection of the truth of God is a hardened heart, a closed mind, a complete unwillingness to submit regardless of the evidence. Many times truth is rejected, not because it has not been presented, not because opportunity was denied to hear it, but because the heart is so tightly closed that one will not be convinced. It is not until the one who possesses such a heart will open it to the truth, pay attention to the testimony and evidence of the truth, that good fruit can be produced in his life.

Our Texts

We often read in the Bible of people who have hardened their hearts. *"For they considered not the miracle of the loaves; for their heart was hardened."* (Mark 6:52). Some would not even be impressed by the reality of the miracles Jesus did. It was not because the miracle was fradulent or unreal, nor because they had not witnessed it, but because they were determined not to believe.

"And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?" (Mark 8:17). Here we find a rebuke by Jesus. Provisions had not been brought and they concluded none could be obtained. Even though they had witnessed the feeding of the five thousand and four thousand with loaves and fishes, their comprehension, trust and confidence in Christ was still confused. It was because of a hardened heart, Jesus said.

"Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen." (Mark 16:14). Even as late as after His resurrection, the apostles were suffering from a hardness of heart that caused them to have doubts and unbelief.

"He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (John 12:40). This is yet another instance of people who allowed their hearts to be hardened. We read of warnings against hardening

the heart in the New Testament. *"But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."* (Hebrews 3:13). A similar thought is presented in First Timothy 4:2 of those who "*speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.*" It is a fearful matter to consider that one can become so hardened against the truth of God that the saving gospel of Christ will make no impression. One can become like the hard ground in the parable of the sower. Even though the seed is planted there, it cannot germinate and cannot take root because of the hardness.

"Happy is that man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief." (Proverbs 28:14). By the study of the Scriptures we learn the ultimate condemnation of those that harden their hearts. *"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of righteous judgment of God, who will render unto every man according to his deeds."* (Romans 2:5,6). Those that harden the heart will be the recipients of the wrath of God and His judgment of condemnation.

The Hardening Process

How does the human heart become hardened? Does it happen suddenly? Is it a gradual process? Is it accomplished by oneself alone? Or are there additional factors involved in hardening the heart?

Romans 15:4 teaches that we learn from the things written aforetime, that is, from the record of those who lived before us and recorded in the Old Testament. There is a person in the Old Testament whose heart was hardened. We can learn from a study of him the answer to our questions.

The man was Pharoah, king of Egypt, the most powerful nation in the world at that time. He had many people under his dominion, including the Israelites who were in bondage. God called Moses from the burning bush to return to Egypt and lead Israel to freedom. The events that are involved include the hardening of the heart of Pharoah.

Exodus seven and eight tells how Pharoah's heart was hardened. There were three factors involved. God hardened the heart of Pharoah. *"And I will harden Pharoah's heart and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt."* (Exodus 7:3). Second, the magicians of Pharoah's court

contributed to hardening Pharoah's heart. *"And the magicians did so with their enchantments and Pharoah's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them, as the Lord had said."* (Exodus 7:22). Third, Pharoah was involved in hardening his own heart. *"But when Pharoah saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had said."* (Exodus 8:15). Let us discover the role of each, God, the magicians, and Pharoah in hardening Pharoah's heart.

God's Part

God's part consisted of making a demand on the king. "*Thus saith Jehovah the God of Israel, Let my people go...*" (Exodus 5:1). Of course, this was against the political and financial interests of Pharoah and Egypt. It offended his pride, power, prestige of so great a king and he refused to obey. He said, *"Who is Jehovah that I should hearken unto him?"* But God's part was to make a demand on him.

God later sent plagues on the people and the land of Egypt to bring about their recognition of His power and compel them to comply. Under pressure and inconvenience of the plagues, Pharoah would temporarily relent. But once the plague was lifted, he would change His mind and disallow the Israelites permission to leave.

God did not force Pharoah to harden his heart. He did not remove from Pharoah the power of choice. He did not make it impossible for him to obey. God made a demand of him and necessitated the making of a decision, the making of a choice to obey or disobey. This was God's role in hardening Pharoah's heart

The Magicians' Part

The magicians played a different role. When Moses would perform some noteworthy deed, such as turning his rod into a serpent, or turning water into blood, or bringing frogs upon the land, the magicians would seemingly duplicate the deed. Just how and by what power this was done, or allowed, we would only be able to speculate. Either through some trickery, sorcery, or possibly God allowed evil powers to perform these works, we are not in a position to determine. But they did something that caused Pharoah to have no special concern about Moses and his

God. The result of their work was to convince Pharoah to believe a lie; namely, the lie that God was nothing more than were his magicians and did not deserve to be obeyed. These magicians led Pharoah into being confident in his error, believe what was untrue, and stand firm in the wrong.

Pharoah's Part

Pharoah also hardened his own heart, and this need not be belabored. He viewed the situation and made up his own mind not to do what God directed. To submit was too damaging to his power, prestige, pride, prominence and vanity, and he determined in his own heart not to yield.

The day of hardened hearts is yet with us, even as existed in New Testament days. The warnings against it are as applicable now as ever.

God Still Has A Part

God still plays a role in hardening the heart. He has given certain commands that He expects man to obey. There are commands to be obeyed in order to enter the kingdom, and there are commands to obey after one has become a citizen in His kingdom. His commands necessitate the making of a choice on the part of mankind.

As in the case with Pharoah, often His commands run contrary to the evil desires, behavior, ambitions and determinations of sinful people. Before one can live for the Lord he must surrender his own will to God. Submission means the sacrificing of self to God to do His will. Many people do not wish to submit to God because they prefer to "do their own thing." Some go so far as to even deny God exists in order to escape the obligation they have to respect the authority and Word of God. This attitude lies at the root of atheism today.

The gospel preached acts much like fire. Jeremiah 20:9 presents the word of God as a burning fire. Fire can melt wax, but it can also harden clay. What is does depends on the quality of the material which is brought before it. The gospel can soften the heart of those who seek truth, but it can harden the heart of those who want to follow their own way. The gospel can be, and is designed to be, God's means of saving man, but it can also become the means of our condemnation if we reject it. Just as Jesus came into the world to save sinners, refusing Him is to

bring upon ourselves the wrath of God. *"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."* (John 3:17).

Each time the gospel is heard it either softens of hardens. When it is heard, believed and obeyed, it means spiritual life. But when it is heard and rejected it will bring spiritual death.

So God still plays a role in hardening human hearts by requiring man to make a choice as to who will be his master.

The hearts of men are often hardened against the truth by those who teach them error and cause them to repudiate the truth. If the heart is filled with error there will be no room for truth. Indeed, the more error one believes the less open is his heart to the truth. He becomes prejudiced against it, closed to it, unwilling to even examine and investigate the evidence of truth.

False Teachers

Just as the magicians caused Pharoah to believe a lie, false teachers with their false doctrines cause people to believe a lie today. They labor under a *"strong delusion"* (Second Thessalonians 2:11) and their consciences are seared (First Timothy 4:2). For this reason we must never ever allow ourselves to be led by the doctrines of men. *"And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."* (Matthew 15:14). We must ascertain that what we believe and practice is of God and founded on *"thus saith the Lord"*.

Our Part

People today still contribute to hardening their own hearts, placing more importance on what they think, how they feel, what they want, their pleasure, material ambitions, desires and pride than on what God has directed through the gospel of Christ. Man makes his own choice to harden his heart. He is not forced to do that, but chooses that way, and can eventually make himself beyond being molded and fashioned in the way of the Lord.

Seeing how the hardness of the heart is developed, and noting the warning against it, we must ask ourselves, "What of my own heart?" Is your heart pliable, moldable, soft, and receptive to the truth of God?

Consider two final words: hearken and harden. They sould much alike, but are so different. To hearken means to hear and

heed. To hearken means life here and with God in the hereafter. To harden means to hear but reject. The result is to banish oneself into the eternal fire of hell.

"Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts..." (Hebrews 3:15). But as Jesus said, *"Hearken unto me everyone of you and understand..."* (Mark 7:14).

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A Plea For Christ

It is the desire and duty of every gospel preacher to uphold Christ and make a plea on His behalf. This is the prime work of gospel preaching. The plea is made to mankind that they might take advantage of what God has provided for mankind through His Son, Jesus Christ.

We begin our plea at the tomb of Jesus, which is significantly empty. It once contained the body of Christ. But He arose from the dead and was thereby proved to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). Because of this empty tomb we are justified in making Him known to the world. He was God in the flesh, Emmanuel, the One sent from heaven.

The apostles first raised their voices on behalf of Christ and the fullness of His mission and message on the first Pentecost following His resurrection. They declared Him to be both Lord and Christ. Some three thousand heard the Word that day, believed it, and were baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2). Since then many others have preached the message and millions of others have heard the message. An untold number have believed and obeyed the message concerning Christ.

His Authority

We would first plead for the acceptance of the authority of Christ. All authority is His (Matthew 28:18). He taught as One having authority (Matthew 7:29). He demonstrated His authority over the elements, demons, disease and sin. Whatsoever we do is to be done by His authority (Colossians 3:17). Man's salvation is in His name (Acts 2:38). God speaks through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2). He is the One to be heard

(Matthew 17:5). It is by Him that forgiveness of sins is to be preached (Acts 13:38). Saying "yes" to Christ means saying "yes" to His authority before all else, including parents, friends, preachers, human creeds and everything else.

To make a plea for Christ also involves letting the gospel of Christ be the only basis of your religious faith and salvation. The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). It must be believed and obeyed (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). There is no room for anything else (Galatians 1:6-9) because it came from Deity (Galatians 1:11,12).

It is so important that we follow no other doctrine (Second John 9-11). If one says that one church is as good as another, we must demand there be Biblical evidence for such teaching. If one says that we are saved by faith alone, we must demand Scripture that so teaches. If one contends he can go to heaven by being a member of the Masonic Lodge, we must demand that he produce Bible teaching to prove it. So must it be with every doctrine and practice.

A man walked into a jewelry store to set his watch to the correct time. He saw many watches and was about to leave very confused. But the owner said, "Check your watch by that one," pointing out a certain one. "That one is correct and that is the one by which we measure." So it is with the Bible. With many standards offered in the world, we must "check our spiritual clocks" by God's clock, the Bible, the gospel, the redemption story through Jesus Christ.

His Name

We plead for Christ by pleading that people wear no other religious name than what we find in Scripture which is Christian (Acts 11:26; 26;28; First Peter 4:16). That is the worthy name by which we are called (James 2:7). Is it not reasonable that followers of Christ be so identified? Where is there anything in the Bible that justifies denominations or the many denominational names people wear? We read of a man who said he was a Presbyterian and a Christian. We read about Christians, but where do we read about Presbyterians? So it is with every denominational name. When we call ourselves by what the Bible teaches we are speaking as the oracles of God, which we are taught to do (First Peter 4:11).

His church

We plead for Christ by pleading for His church. It is a grievous doctrine that says, "Preach the man, not the plan, not the church." Preaching about the church is ridiculed as "churchanity" rather than Christianity. But those who say this betray an ignorance of the truth.

The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). He is the head of it (Colossians 1:18). He purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28). It is His kingdom (Colossians 1:13) and His bride (Ephesians 5:23ff). He is glorified in the church (Ephesians 3:21). It is called the "*house of God*" (First Timothy 3:15). He built it (Matthew 16:16-18). He is the Savior of it (Ephesians 5:23). It is the church that He shall deliver to the Father when He comes again (First Corinthians 15:24). We are baptized into Christ with the same one baptism (Ephesians 4:4) by which we are baptized into the body (Galatians 3:27; First Corinthians 12:13). There is no other foundation than Christ (First Corinthians 13:11). How could one make a plea for Christ and not preach the church?

Christ has no fellowship with human denominations of which we do not read one word in all His revelation. The church is not a denomination, has no kinship with denominationalism. To plead for Christ we must plead for His church above every other organization, association or religious affiliation on the earth.

His Blood

We plead for Christ by pleading for people to respect the blood of Christ. We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9). "*Without shedding of blood there is no remission.*" (Hebrews 9:22). But animal blood will not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). But the blood of Christ will (Hebrews 9:12). It took the blood of Christ to bring the church into existence (Acts 20:28) and we who are members of the church have been bought with that price (First Corinthians 6:20). We are redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7), having made peace with God through His blood (Colossians 1:20). Our sins are forgiven after we become Christians when we confess our sins , but they are forgiven by the blood of Christ (First John 1:7). We are clean and white as snow when washed in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). There is no way to overemphasize the blood of Christ in God's scheme of man's redemption.

When does one reach that cleansing blood? It is when one is baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was

shed (John 19:34). It is then that we are no longer servants of sin but become servants of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). It is then that we are raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). That is the form of doctrine we must obey. The song asks, "What can wash away my sins?" The answer is, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

His Life

We finally plead for Christ by pleading with mankind to imitate Christ in their lives. "*Be ye imitators of me even as I am of Christ,*" said Paul (First Corinthians 11:1). He is our example and we are to walk in His steps (First Peter 1:21). "*Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.*" (Ephesians 5:1). The word "followers" means imitators. We should have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), setting our affections on things above (Colossians 3:1). The guiding principle of our day-to-day manner of living should be, "What would Jesus Christ have me to do?" This we can only learn from a study of the Bible.

If the plea for Christ is meaningful to you, you will hasten to come to Him. Believing that He is the Son of God, you will repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him, and obey Him by being baptized for the remission of sins. When one does that God adds the obedient one to the church and he is counted among the saved (Acts 2:47). So we plead for Christ by pleading for His authority, His gospel, His name, His church which is His body, His blood and His example.

† † † † †

Outsiders?

It has become the custom of some who teach error to bitterly resent anybody even suggesting they are in error. What is seldom characteristic of them is a Biblical investigation of what they teach and the corrections offered by those who resist their error. They prefer to use another method to dismiss what they have determined to reject.

If error in a congregation is taught and someone other than a member of that congregation questions it, the objection is dismissed on the grounds that the objection came from an "outsider." So what? Error is error and truth is truth regardless of who brings it to another's attention.

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Kinship With Christ

"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50).

We all place a great deal of importance on kinship. Usually we are proud of our ancestors, children, kinpeople. Of course, as much as we love our kin, even they are not to come before our loyalty to the Lord.

In this event in the life of Christ He shows that spiritual kinship is more important than physical kinship. He was not in any way being disrespectul to Mary, His mother, or His brothers, but He was giving emphasis to the spiritual kinship with Himself.

One of the religious problems the Jews had was their heavy dependence on their physical relationship with Abraham. John the Baptist preached to them and said, *"O generation of vipers, who warned you to flee the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance, and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."* (Matthew 3:7-9).

An older preacher once commented that he did not like to boast too much of his family tree lest he went too far and found a rotten limb.

Kin To Christ

It is a great blessing and opportunity for mankind that we can be kin to Jesus Christ. In this we can rejoice. We can not only be kin to Christ, but kin to all those who are in Christ as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Just how can we be kin to Christ? Our kinship is not physical, but spiritual. It is a relationship that is superior to any fleshly relationship one could have.

There are certain similarities between physical and spiritual

kinships that we wish to observe. How are people related today? When do they count one another as kinfolk? How did they enter that relationship?

Born Into The Family

First, people are born into the same family. We are kin to our parents, brothers, sisters, etc. as a result of birth into the family. The same thing is true of the spiritual family of God, which is His church (First Timothy 3:15). *"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3,5). The kingdom is the same as the church (Colossians 1:13), and the church is God's family. We cannot be related to Christ outside of God's family.

The "new birth" is not difficult to understand nor is it something weird and mysterious. Before one is born, he is begotten. Paul teaches that we are begotten by the Word of God (First Corinthians 4:15). One of the reasons the commission of Christ to *"go into all the world and preach the gospel,"* is so vital is because the Word of God, the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11) must be planted in the hearts and minds of people. From that Word, faith is produced (Romans 10:17). From faith comes obedience to the commands of God whereby we are born again into His family, thereby coming spiritually related to God the Father and Christ, His Son. People cannot be saved through the message of psychology, philosophies of men, social reforms, denominational dogmas, etc. The gospel is the power of God to save (Romans 1:16). Jesus said that those who are His relatives are those who *"shall do the will of my Father."* That will is the gospel that teaches us to believe in Christ, repent of sins, confess our faith in Christ and be baptized for the remission of sins. It is by and through the gospel that it is possible for us to enjoy spiritual kinship with Christ and the saved.

Blood Kin

Second, families are obviously related through blood relationship. We come from our parents and are thereby related. This blood link ties us together with parents and brothers and sisters.

So it is that the blood of Christ links us to Him spiritually inasmuch as we are saved by His shed blood (Romans 5:9;

Ephesians 1:7). By His blood He purchased the church (Acts 20:28), and we have been bought with that great and precious price (First Corinthians 6:20). As Christians we are still cleansed by the blood of Christ (First John 1:6,7).

Too many members of the church speak of the church as something distinct and separate from themselves. The truth is, we are members of His body which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), and His blood is of benefit to those in the body, as is true physically as well as spiritually.We are to realize that we are in that body and related to all others in that body because of the blood relationship.

Same Name

Third, people are known to belong to their family not only because of birth and blood ties, but also because of the name they wear. We are proud of our name and wear it with distinction and significance. We are known by that name, called by that name, and are identified as belonging to a certain family because of our name.

The family of God also wears a name that was given by the Father. *"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Acts 11:26). This name enjoyed apostolic approval and reference (Acts 26:28; First Peter 4:16). The name we wear is a worthy name (James 2:7) and was prophecied in the Old Testament when both Jew and Gentile would be included in God's spiritual family (Isaiah 62:2).

The name "Christian" is a sacred name and gives honor to Christ. There is no reason nor justification for those in God's family to take upon themselves names that have originated elsewhere than from God. The name shows our relationship.

This family is not only kin to Christ and to each other, but it possesses a family characteristic of brotherly love. We sing the song with meaning, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." We have love for our Father in heaven, our elder brother, Jesus Christ, and for the whole brotherhood. *"Let love of the brethren continue,"* (Hebrews 13:1). *"Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."* (First Peter 2:17).

Nothing is any more essential to a successful congregation than brotherly love. Where genuine love abounds for each other, all difficulties and problems that will arise can be resolved. We seek the other's highest good, which is the true meaning of

love. *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* (John 13:34,35). *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."* (John 15:12). This is the way it is supposed to be in God's family.

One Family

The last family characteristic we mention that shows kinship with Christ is by communion. fellowship, oneness. Something is wrong in a family when members of the family deliberately absent themselves from gatherings of the family. Something is amiss when the family circle is deliberately broken. Something is lacking when members of the family fail to appear around the family table, or be involved in family acitivities.

Many members of the church contribute to the breaking of family ties because they deliberately absent themselves from the Father's Table on Lord's Day. They have little to nothing to do with family acitivities, the worship and work of the church. They exclude from their lives the fellowship of brethren that is designed to be helpful to everyone.

God has appointed a time for His children to assemble for communion with Him. Each Lord's Day the early Christians assembled to partake of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:1,2; First Corinthians 11:18,20). When we partake of the Lord's Supper we are eating and drinking with Christ in the kingdom as He promised (Matthew 26:29). When members of the family will ignore or set aside this gathering and communion, something is very wrong with their family relationship. This communion shows our kinship with God, Christ and the brethren (First Corinthians 10:16).

Someday there will be a glad reunion of all of God's spiritual children around His majestic throne where we shall live with Him forever (First Thessalonians 4:13ff). God will gather the *"wheat"* into His barn. Those who are related to the Lord by being *"in Christ"* will rejoice for the kinship that we have with the Lord.

Some will choose to remain children of the devil, as did some in the days when Jesus was upon the earth (John 8:44). How much better that we become and remain loyal and faithful sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:14-17).

† † † † †

(continued from page 19)

Truth versus error is the business of every Christian whenever, whereever, or from whomsoever it comes. False doctrines cannot be "covered up" by complaining about "outsiders." Christians are "insiders" in these matters all the time.

Error does not deserve being "covered up," but "cleaned up."

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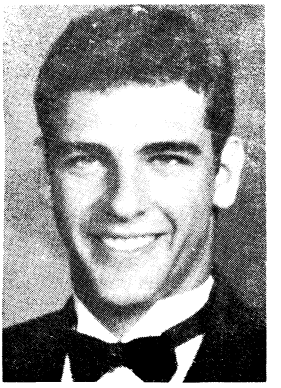

Sam is our youngest. He reached a milestone in his life when he graduated from Warren County High School in May. Sam has made several adjustments during his school years because of our moving, but he has done so well. He played football, receiving letters from both the Tupelo High School as well as Warren County. He also holds a part time job with one of the local banks in McMinnville. His senior year has been especially busy for him.

His plans call for college this fall. He is also learning how to be "Uncl Sam" to more and more nieces and nephews. His mother and I hav been especially proud of Sam and the way that he has handled th numerous situations in the schools that are not compatible with being Christian. His experiences have shown him that one need not simpl follow the crowd but can be his own man and chart his own course.

We have to admit that we may be a bit impartial when we conside our children, as most parents tend to be. But we have many goo reasons to be proud of Sam, as well as our other children. We just d not know what we would have done without him. God bless him.

* * * * *

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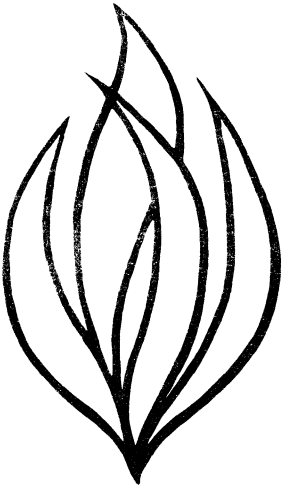

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 4**

Fit For The Kingdom

Lesson One

What It Means To Be A Christian

Every person has some big events in life and we acknowledge them. We celebrate the day of our birth, take note of when we begin school and graduate, when we marry, signficant changes such as change of residence or occupation. But there is one event that stands out that is far greater than any other because it involves not only the here and now, but also eternity. That is the time when one becomes a Christian.

But what does it mean to be a Christian? Such information is profitable to those who may be considering becoming Christians. It should be of benefit to a young Christian who takes note of the stand he has taken for the Lord. It should benefit the older soldier of the cross as he reflects upon the commitment he has made and the years of faithful service he has rendered.

To be a Christian means to be saved from sin. God forgives when one obeys the gospel and becomes, thereby, a Christian. The idea is adequately expressed in Ezekiel 18:21,22, *"But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgression that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him; in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live."* Romans 6:17,18, *"But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you, being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."*

Since your past sins have been forgiven God will look upon you as if you have never sinned. They are forgotten and forgiven and remembered against you no more. *"And their sins and their iniquities will I remember against you no more."* Hebrews 10:17. *"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."* Romans 4:7,8.

New Relationship

To be a Christian means that you have a new relationship with God. *"The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."* Romans 8:16,17. *"Wherefore come ye out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord."* Second Corinthians 6:17,18. In this new relationship there are spiritual blessings. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."* Ephesians 1:3. It means you have fellowship with God and are one of His companions. *"I will in no wise fail thee; neither will I in any wise forsake thee."* Hebrews 13:5. It means you have the privilege of prayer to the Father as a son. *"Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you."* James 4:8. You are now under His watchful care. "*Casting all you care upon him for he careth for you."* First Peter 5:7.

Not Your Own

Being a Christian means you no longer belong to yourself, if ever you did. Christians belong to God. We are to be *"living sacrifices"* Romans 12:1. We have been purchased by the awesome price of the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). *"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, are ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's."* First Corinthians 6:19,20. *"For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman, likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant."* First Corinthians 7:22. We belong to Deity. *"And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."* Second Corinthians 5:15. God provided a ransom for us and that was Christ (Matthew 20:28). Peter says we were redeemed, *"but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."* First Peter 1:19.

This means that we cannot do just as we please, but that

which pleases the One to whom we belong. While He lifts from us the burden of sin that we cannot carry, we do assume His yoke (Matthew 11:28-30). Everything we do in life, in work, play, worship, at home, away from home, whatever and whenever, His will must be the governing factor of our existence because we do not belong to self or Satan but to God.

New Life

To be a Christian means you have a new life. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature..."* Second Corinthians 5:17. Again, *"That ye put off concerning the former conversation, the old man which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."* Ephesians 4:22-24. Romans 6:1-6 teaches that we are raised to walk *"in newness of life... our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."* This is the new birth of which Jesus spoke in John 3.

The extent that this new life is different from the former one depends in part upon how wicked the previous, pre-Christian life was. For some there is a very noticeable difference. For others, who may have been living a moral life, there may not be as noticeable differemce. For a man like Cornelius there would not be as much change in his manner of living as that of a man like Saul who was making havoc of the church. It is obvious that the Corinthians who became Christians had to make a tremendous change (First Corinthians 6:9-11). It is not always easy to leave the old sinful habits and practices. It is not uncommon for the one who comes to Christ to become the target of ridicule and temptation by former associates in sin. But because God has forgiven past sins, having become a new creature, he must have the resolve to no longer walk as he formerly walked. Paul exhorts putting away the old man of sin and striving for the more excellent way.

We Can Overcome

One of the blessings the Christian now enjoys is the assurance that God will not allow temptations to come that cannot be overcome (First Corinthians 10:13). For this reason we can say with Paul, *"I can do all things through Christ which*

strengtheneth me." Philippians 4:13.

Joy and Happiness

To be a Christian means you have entered into a happy life. Becoming a child of God is a time of great joy. Even so, being a Christian may mean persecution and hardship. How can one say being a Christian means happiness? The kind and quality of happiness to which we refer may better be classified as inward joy. Happiness is often dependent upon happenings. But the joy that belongs to those who are Christians is not disrupted by what happens. There is an inner peace with oneself, and he has the knowledge that he is at peace with God. This is the peace that passeth understanding (Philippians 4:7). The fact that we are children of God and know there is an inheritance awaiting that will not fade but is reserved (First Peter 1:3,4) gives us this great hope and joy that did not and could not exist before one is a Christian.

We do not wish to convey the idea that everything in life will forever be lovely and easy. Such is not the nature of service to God through Christ. But we shall know the benefits of doing good for others. We come to understand that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Little wonder that it is more profitable in Christ and that we are admonished, *"Rejoice in the Lord always."* Philippians 4:4.

Hardships

The Christian's attitude toward persecution and hardship is at great variance from that of the non-Christian. *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven;for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."* Matthew 5:10-12. *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of*

you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other man's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf." First Peter 4:12-16.

Many other points could be listed, but this will suffice for this lesson. In brief summary, what does it mean to be a Christian? It means you have been saved from your past sins. It means you are not your own because you have been bought with the price of the blood of Christ and belong to God. It means you have been ushured into a new way of living, a life that is designed and destined to bring you genuine and inward spiritual happiness and blessings, even in face of hardship.

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Lesson Two

Worship: Public; Private

In every dispensation the Lord has expected and directed man to worship Him. As with all of the commands that God has given, worship to God is for man's benefit and man's good. God is worthy of all adoration and worship, but man needs that which is greater and higher than he is for which to strive, imitate, meditate, and center his concentration, lest he degenerate to nothing much more than the animal level.

When a person becomes a Christian, he enters into a new relationship with God, with new duties, privileges, and accountabilities. One of these new matters of his life is that of worship. It is both a duty and a privilege.

As in all ages, God directs worship through His word. He told Cain and Abel how to worship. He directed Abraham and the Israelities after him how to worship. He has shown His displeasure with those who refused to worship Him and worship the way He directed. Nadab and Abihu worshipped, but not according to the way God instructed (Leviticus 10). Cain and Abel also worshipped, but Abel did as directed while Cain did as he saw fit. Israel was always worshipping, but not always worshipping the Lord according to the Lord's way.

Acceptable Worship

Acceptable worship involves the proper object of worship, who is God, and it also involves the proper attitude and actions. John 4:24, *"God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* To worship in spirit has to do with the disposition, intent, motive, and frame of mind. To worship acceptably in spirit one must worship submissively, reverently, in a worthy manner, humbly and respectfully. To worship acceptably in truth means to worship as truth directs, which means as the Word of God instructs. *"Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17).

When the object, act, or attitude is improper, the worship is made unacceptable. We may do the right acts with the wrong attitude, or the wrong acts with the right attitude, or misdirect our worship toward the wrong object. In any such instance, our worship is in vain. The reader is encouraged at this point to turn and read Psalm 100 and there consider the disposition toward worship that the inspired writer possessed.

What is the activity that acceptable worship requires? We live under the authority of Jesus Christ today. We do not do what was done in former ages but according to what the will of God is through Christ. So we turn our attention to what is found in the new covenant to learn what we do to worship God acceptably. (Hebrews 1:1,2; Colossians 3:17).

Prayer

In Acts 2, we read of the beginning of the church. In verse 42, among those things being done by the early church was the stedfastness and faithfulness in prayer. In Acts 4, we read of the brethren in prayer. In Acts 12, we read, *"...many were gathered together and were praying."* Prayer was an important part of the life of the Christian as recorded in the Bible.

By prayer we show our dependence on God, our respect for Him, our reverence for His name, and acknowledge His goodness and greatness, praising His glory and giving recognition to Him as the source of our blessings. Prayer is to be made according to God's will. Prayer is not a mere form and ritual, but the sincere outpouring of one's heart before God. Our prayer is to be made with the spirit and understanding (First Corinthians 14:15). Prayer is a privilege that is given to the child of God, and we have the assurance that God will hear and

answer our prayers as He deems is best for us.

Singing

Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19, along with other passages, teach us to worship God with music. It is significant that every one of the nine references to music in worship in the Christian age of which we read in the New Testament refers to a specific kind of music; namely, singing. There is no authority in the doctrine of Christ for the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship under the Christian age. Some violate God's will by playing instruments, while others violate God's will by allowing somebody else to do their singing for them, either through choirs, choruses, or just remaining silent when worship in song is to be made.

Giving

Giving is at the very heart of New Testament Christianity. God gave; Christ gave; The Holy Spirit gave. The early Christians gave. The faith of Christ is one of giving. It is unfortunate that some consider the subject of giving something commercial and offensive to them. But giving is not offensive to the genuine Christian. Only those who are greedy, selfish, who would shirk their duty and fail to see their privilege would raise objection to the emphasis on giving of our means into the service of God.

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (First Corinthians 16:1,2). *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."* (Second Corinthians 9:6,7).

God expects the Christian to plan his giving and then give as he has planned and intended. He does not expect man to give Him his "leftovers" after everything else is met. The work of the church is to be supported by the members of the church through voluntary, free-will, sacrificial offerings designed to give honor and praise to God. By giving we show our respect for His

command to give. We show our concern for His cause in the world of saving the lost. We show our recognition that we are but temporary stewards of that which He has committed to our trust and that all things belong to Him and are to be used in harmony with His will. We show our confidence in His promise and providence that He will provide if we put His kingdom and His righteousness first in life (Matthew 6:33).

Lord's Supper

A significant item or avenue of worship is the Lord's Supper. This observance is a memorial to Christ (First Corinthians 11:23-29), and we are commanded to observe it. By the supper we proclaim Christ and that which He is, what He has done, that He will come again. By the Lord's Supper we announce to the world that we rely on Christ for our salvation.

The bread and the fruit of the vine symbolize and represent the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper is a notation of the grace and love that Deity has manifested toward sinful humanity. It is a period calling for self-examination before God as well as an adoration and praise for the Savior.

We are not to forsake assembling ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25). In the assembly the Lord's Supper is observed (First Corinthians 11). The early church assembled on the first day of the week (First Corinthians 16). Acts 20:7 is a recorded instance where the disciples met to partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Sacred and secular history show that the Lord's Supper was observed every first day of the week. To be true to the Biblical teaching, we must observe the Lord's Supper every first day. To designate some other time, some additional time, or fail to observe the Lord's Supper every first day is to abandon the Lord's authority and is to be as guilty of violating God's directions as was Cain, Nadab, Abihu, or anyone else who proposes to worship God, but worships Him his own way rather than the way God has specified.

Preaching The Word

We also offer praise and worship to God by teaching His Word. We need spiritual food by which to grow. The food is the Word (First Peter 2:2). To preach and teach His word honors Him and His authority above all else. For this reason, when brethren assemble for worship, the will of the Lord as is revealed

in Scripture occupies a prominent emphasis in the worship period, as it should.

Christians are to assemble for worship together. But they also have the privilege, in addition to public periods of worship, to worship in their own privacy. The teaching concerning worship is constant whether one is with brethren or is alone. The items of worship cannot be vaired just because someone is off by himself. If one cannot assemble with his brethren he should worship alone. There ought to be private prayer, like Daniel. There ought to be family prayer. There ought to be public prayer. There ought to be faithfulness, stedfastness, regularity, sincerity in worship to God the Father through Christ.

Worship to God is one of the surest safeguards against apostasy when worship is offered as God has directed. Going through the motions is not what God commands. But when the heart of man is truly committed to the Lord, and the avenues of worship as God has specified are observed and respected, the Christian is strengthened and benefited even as God is adored. To be fit for the Master's use, worship must be included in the life of the child of God.

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Lesson Three

Bible Study

Because of the changed relationship that exists between God and man when man becomes a Christian, there are expected alterations of responsibilities and privileges. Now we are to consider the duty of studying the Bible, the Word of God. It is unfortunate that many who have been baptized into Christ have not taken as seriously as they ought the necessity of growing in knowledge of God's message to man.

It is sometimes true that the new Christian finds it difficult to embark on a consistent study of the Bible. They have a desire to know, even a zeal and interest, but they do not know how to study. It is not unknown for those who have been members of the church for years and who have spent many hours studying the Bible in the past to discontinue their study for one reason, or

excuse, or another. It is hard to tell whether they think they know everything, or if they have just lost their love for the truth.

But knowledge of the Scriptures is a duty and there is no way around it. *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* Second Timothy 2:15. The Bereans were commended as being noble because they *"searched the scriptures daily."* Acts 17:11. *"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."* First Peter 2:2. *"But grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."* Second Peter 3:18. There really is no justification for a Christian not learning what the Bible teaches.

Important

Why is Bible study so important? The all-inclusive answer is because the Bible is God's authority revealed unto man. It is the only authority. But we can be more specific. Ignorance of the Bible encourages sin and allows man to sin without a guilty conscience. Sin condemns man and when sin goes unforgiven it will mean hell to the sinner. Society is burdened with the results of sin. But a knowledge and respect for the Word of God is a deterrent to sin. *"Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee."* Psalm 119:11.

Ignorance of truth is the breeding place for error. Many religious systems would collapse overnight if the honest and sincere people who make up those systems knew and respected the Word of God. But they do not know what the Bible teaches. They are content to remain uninformed and are willing to be led about by their clergymen who do not teach them the Word of God.

The world is laboring under a cloud of sinful darkness that is growing blacker and blacker as it enshrouds humanity. The light of God's truth would disspell that darkness if only more people knew the truth.

Ignorance of the Bible among church people retards the work of the church in its divinely assigned mission to preach the gospel to the world. One reason the early church grew was because the membership knew the truth and everywhere they went they proclaimed it by word and deed.

Without knowledge we cannot escape perishing. *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."* Hosea 4:6. Knowledge of

the way we are to live before God is essential to a faithful Christian life. Yet, many remain without this knowledge. Paul gave the full sequence of being saved and the connection of knowledge with salvation in Romans 10:11-17.

Benefits

As we consider so many temporal and eternal benefits connected with knowledge of the Bible we wonder why so many are content to never really learn very much about it. Part of the reason is because the widely publicized philosophers of the Bible have taught people not to trust its teaching. The authority of the Bible is ridiculed in our educational institutions and the doctrines and ideas of men have been run in as a replacement. Religiously, men have taught their catechisms, disciplines, prayer books, manuals, feelings and "visions" and other such things and have provoked people to cast the Bible aside. But to throw the Bible away, in ignorance, is foolishness. There can be nothing placed alongside the Scriptures as authority. When generation after generation is being taught that the Bible is not the Word of God, more and more people will discard it without investigation, not realizing what they are casting aside. It is significant, that even though the "wise" men of our time would relegate the Bible out of the hearts, minds and thinking of people, they have yet to produce anything that even comes close to being as useful and valuable as the Word of God. But for the pride of human wisdom, they persist in denouncing it. Many will just tag along in ignorance.

Some will just accept whatever some preacher, priest, rabbi or clergyman has said and never question or measure it. While most religious teachers and leaders may well be men with higher than usual morality, it is not the rule that they know very much about the Bible.

Some are discouraged from Bible study because the Bible is a large book and seems insurmountable to them. They make the mistake of reading the Bible like they would read other books, just starting at the beginning and reading it through, expecting one chapter to add to the former one as if they were reading a novel. The Scriptures do not read that way. There is a unity and central theme and personality of the Bible, but one must study before he can rightly divide it, handle it aright. But God has not given us a book that cannot be understood. He does not command understanding and then make it impossible.

It Takes Time

Probably the most serious reason for the lack of Bible study is the pathetic and heart-breaking reason that people just will not take the time it requires. They become so involved with the affairs of this life that they starve the soul to spiritual death. They allow the here and now to crowd out the possible life in heaven with God. They fail to put first things first. What a mistake if we gain the whole world and lose the soul.

Some suggestions for Bible study are in order. First, be serious about it. Make some time for study. Set in motion with regularity a period when you will consult the Word of God. We all have the same amount of time even though we all do not have the same duties. But there is a duty that we have to come to a greater knowledge of God's Word. Shall we set our duty to God aside for something else?

Take advantage of class opportunities. Regular attendance at Bible study adds so much to our knowledge and understanding. The growth you realize may seem slow and small at the start, but like all growth, it is real and with persistance and concentration, growth is inevitable. Do not become discouraged as you investigate the will of the Almighty. Week by week, class by class, year by year, the accumulation of knowledge and its relationship to the rest of the Word will gradually unfold. You can study for many hours and seemingly learn very little, but suddenly things will come open and the light of understanding becomes evident.

Have some good Bible helps as you study to facilitate your study. Have a concordance, a good Bible dictionary, a good English dictionary also. If you have access to commentaries by faithful brethren, they are worth consulting, remembering they are not the authority. Articles from good religious journals by faithful brethren as well as a tract library will assist you in learning.

Methods

Whatever method of study you use, whether it be the study of topics or a textual study, be systematic, take notes, do not just skip about here and there, but center your study with goals in mind. You might want to study one book at a time. You may wish to investigate some subject, and here a good concordance and topical study guide can be so useful. You can find good

lessons for study in Sunday school quarterlies, sermon books, other prepared courses and tracts.

Engage in conversation with others about the Bible. Sometimes it may be little more than "sharing ignorance" but it is probing to your mind and helps you see what areas on which you need to focus study.

Whenever you study, realize that this is God's Word. Keep your heart and mind open to conviction. Do not study just to prove somebody else wrong about something. Do not study just out of idle curiousity. Study to learn what God wants of you. This way the study will have relevance on your life.

My final suggestion is that you remember one very significant point. It is not enough to just know, intellectually, what the Bible contains. We must do the will of the Lord. There be those who have studied the Bible and as far as facts and figures are concerned, seem to be very conversant about the Scriptures. They are acquainted with its characters, events and general message. But they make no application of their knowledge. Do not allow yourself to become one of those persons who are ever learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth. Nor be one who may know many things, but makes little or no use of what he knows. *"He that doeth the will of my Father"* is the one that is pleasing to God.

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Lesson Four

Good Works

Before a person can enjoy the promise of eternal life he must become a Christian. He must believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. God has promised forgiveness of sins to those who will obey. This does not guarantee heaven. There is a life to be lived as a Christian and that life must include an active, faithful service to God. This is an essential part of New Testament Christianity.

Many who have been baptized are not serving as they should. Before we can serve we must be fit to serve. Before we can be used we must be usable. Having changed our relationship with

God by becoming a Christian, assuming new responsibilities and benefiting from blessings, we are to worship, study, and also do good works. Christianity is a life of doing good as God has defined that good.

Let us not misunderstand the purpose of going good. This does not mean that we can please God by good works alone. Nobody can earn their way to heaven. We cannot buy eternal life. We can never deserve nor merit salvation. Good works are essential to going to heaven once we have become Christians, just as faith, repentance, confession, and baptism are essential in coming to Christ. James teaches that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. There is the work of obedience in becoming a Christian that is essential, and there is the work of a Christian that follows. The reason our works of obedience and good works thereafter are of value is because of the grace and mercy of God, and the merit of the blood of Christ.

We Show Faith

We show our faith by our works. (James 2:14-20). We glorify God by good works. *"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."* (First Peter 2:11,12). *"Even so let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify the Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16). We are to follow the example of Christ (First Peter 2:21), and He *"went about doing good."* (Acts 10:38). We are to be a people zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."* (Ephesians 2:10). We are to be careful to maintain good works (Titus 3:8,14). James wrote, *"To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17). This should be evidence sufficient for us to understand the necessity of good works, the purpose of them, and God's expectation of them.

Spiritual Works

We can classify good works into two groups. There are good works of a spiritual nature, and good works of a material nature.

The spiritual good works are those that primarily apply to one's soul rather than to one's physical welfare. When Jesus was teaching the will of God, condemning sin, upholding righteousness, showing man how to be saved from sin, this was primarily for the benefit of the soul of man. When we teach people the plan of salvation, their responsibilities as Christian, when we are *"fishers of men"* for the Lord, this is spiritual good work. Providing spiritual nourishment for the soul, giving encouragement, offering the divine spiritual guidance for life, planting the seed of the kingdom, which is the Word of God, we are involved in spiritual good works. To lead another to see the value of his soul and to conform to the will of God to save his soul is the greatest work one can do for another. *"Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine,"* is doing spiritual good works (Second Timothy 4:2). *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."* (Galatians 6:10). That is spiritual good works. Likewise, *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins."* (James 5:19,20). The great commission, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,"* (Mark 16:15) is spiritual good works.

We do not want to overlook the good spiritual work of encouraging one another to be faithful and strong. We are our brother's keeper and have responsibility toward each other to help each other get to heaven. We cannot be indifferent to the problems, temptations, weaknesses and dangers that we face or that are faced by our brethren. God does not want the Christian to "go it alone," but has provided for fellowship with Deity and with the saved. We should provoke one another, not to anger and to sin, but *"unto love and good works."* (Hebrews 10:24).

In times of loss, bereavement, discouragements, we need to be able to rely on one another. God knows the toils of life can bend the spirit. *"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."* (Second Corinthians 1:3,4). Part of our Christian duty is to be a source of relief and comfort to others in need.

God has given spiritual assurances and hope to the Christian for his comfort. Paul wrote concerning the end of time and the resurrection of the redeemed, and concluded his remarks by saying, *"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."* (First Thessalonians 4:18).

Material Works

There is another kind of good works in the material realm. Although the soul is more important than the body, we cannot overlook the physical needs of those to whom we have opportunity and responsibility.

Christ considered the physical needs of the five thousand and the four thousand as He fed them with fishes and loaves. Many of His miracles were miracles of healing that brought relief from physical distress, pain, agony, and suffering. The report sent to John the Baptist concerning Christ was *"Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor he gospel is preached."* (Luke 7:22). Jesus did good in a physical way for those who were God's children and also those who were not. Does not His parable of the good Samaritan show His endorsement of doing good to others in need in a physical way? Today, too many are like the priest and the Levite, willing to pass by on the other side.

James 1:27 provides us an inspired definition of *"Pure religion."* *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."* Something is tragically missing about that person who claims to be a child of God who would prevent help being offered to those in need, such as the orphans and widows.

At The Judgment

In the teaching of Jesus on the judgment scene in Matthew 25, it is evident that those who were saved were those who had done good works toward the needy, and those who were banished were those who refused to help. Christ taught that *"it is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35). Paul recalled the apostolic message sent to Gentiles, *"Only they would that we should remember the poor, which very thing I was also zealous to do."* (Galatians 2:10). *"As we have*

opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:10). *"But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"* (First John 3:17). Our first duty is to our brethren, but as we can, we should help those others who suffer in this world. Never forget that the prime work of the Lord's church is the spiritual work of saving souls. This does not terminate the effort that should be made to relieve the needy.

Good works, both spiritual and material, are essential in serving the Lord as Christians. While they cannot save by themselves, neither shall we be saved without them. Christ did good works of both kinds. So should we.

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Lesson Five

Daily Living

Someone once said, "I don't believe in mixing religion and business." Some others say, "I don't believe in mixing religion and politics." Still others suggest, "I don't believe mixing religion and recreation." So on it goes. There are those areas of life that some do not think ought to be mixed with religion. It is true that we have to keep clear the distinction between religion and other matters, but the religion of which Jesus Christ is the author is one that is to be mixed with every phase of life. Christianity is not a one time, now and then, sometime faith. It is a way of life that involves everything a person say, does or thinks.

The faith of Christ is primarily a postive way of life. While there are those things that are forbidden to the Christian, there are the "don'ts" in the doctrine of Christ, the main force of Christianity is constructive, upbuilding and positive. "*Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not bear false witness...*" are all a part of New Testament Christianity. But living a life in the imitation of Christ is its main thrust (First Peter 1:21). *"Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus..."* Philippians 2:5. *"Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ."* First Corinthians 11:1. *"...Christ shall be magnified in*

my body whether by life, or by death." Philippians 1:20. Our aim as Christians is to bring Christ closer to people by our daily conduct in life. We have heard the old adage that says, "I had rather see a sermon than hear one." This is the idea behind daily living as a Christian. Some have been converted, others have been repulsed, by the lives of those who profess to be Christians. *"Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world."* Philippians 2:14,15. This is what the faith of Christ necessitates.

Application

Christian living must be applied in various relationships of life. When one becomes a Christian there is a change in his relationship with God. But there is also a change in his relationship with the devil and with his fellowmen. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things become new."* Second Corinthians 5:17. We now turn our attention to some of these relationships.

Being a Christian affects one's relationship with his parents. *"Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Honor thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."* Ephesians 6:1-3. *"Children obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord."* Colossians 3:20. It was written of Jesus, *"And he went down with them, and came to Nazereth, and was subject unto them."* Luke 2:51. Children who are still under the care and provision of their parents are to accept gracefully and willingly the rule of the home by father and mother. Even after leaving home, honor to parents is commanded. Even though it is true that some parents are not very honorable, children are to honor them because they are their parents. This includes providing for parents when parents are not able to provide for themselves. Paul wrote, *"If any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel."* First Timothy 5:8. We recall a man whose father was cruel to him when he was young, partial against him when he was older, and cursed him when he was on his death bed. Nonetheless, the son found comfort in the fact that he did all that he could for his father simply because he was his father.

Being a Christian affects one's relationship to the government under which he lives. The Bible does not command one particular kind of civil government. Surely God is more pleased when civil authority respects the standards of Christianity and defends Christians as they serve God. But the faith of Christ teaches the Christian to pay his taxes, obey the laws so long as they do not demand that he disobey God in doing so, show respect for civil authority and government leaders because of their position and pray for rulers. To disobey the laws of the land is more than merely disobeying man's laws. It is disobeying God because God teaches us to obey those that have the rule over us (Romans 13:1-7; First Peter 2:17; First Timothy 2:1-3; First Peter 2:13-15). Only in the event that a law of man requires violation of a law of God is there an exception. Then we must obey God rather than man (Acts 4:19; 5:29). We are not permitted to disobey a law simply because we do not like it.

Even On The Job

Being a Christian affects the Christian when on his job earning his livelihood. Even though most people will not accept it, the way of Christ is the solution to what is known as labor-management problems. Such problems generally exist because of greed, envy, jealousy and the desire to take advantage of others, unwilling to treat one another fairly and considerately. If a man can work, he ought to work, or not eat (Second Thessalonians 3:10-12). God is not pleased with a loafer. If one works for another, Paul teaches, *"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ, not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."* Ephesians 6:5,6. *"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God, and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ."* Colossians 3:22-24. If one has other men working under him, Paul addresses him also. *"Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."* Colossians 4:1. *"And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master also is on heaven, neither is there respect of*

persons with him." Ephesians 6:9.

Christianity affects the home and marriage. Sometimes the faith of Christ causes hardship in a home because some wish to follow Christ and others wish to continue serving themselves and Satan. Christ warned that following Him might well cause estrangement from relatives (Matthew 10:21,34-39). But when everyone of the family is obedient to the Lord the home will be what God wants it to be and what it is intended to be.

Following the will of Christ assists people in selecting their marriage partner. Christians marrying Christians should be the goal. We need the good influence of one another in the family to be faithful to the Lord. Being married to one who is disinterested in Christ, antagonistic to that which is supposed to be the nearest to the heart of the Christian, having to be loyal to one who is sinful and rebellious, places such a strain on the home and its success is almost impossible. It is far better to remain unmarried than to be yoked with one who is going to cause you to lose your soul.

The doctrine of Christ governs the husband's attitude and action toward his wife, and vice versa. Together in Christ they live under a common standard and have a divine basis upon which to make decisions and solve problems. The doctrine of Christ prohibits divorce, *"except for the cause of fornication."* Matthew 19:9. Therefore, setting the standard of life together until death separates them is of supreme importance. Many problems in marriage are directly traceable to the religious division and tensions that accompany that division. When husband, wife, father, mother and children submit to the will of the Lord the home will be the nearest thing to heaven that this world afford.

Christianity will affect the parents' duty toward their children. We have already noticed how it affects the children's attitude toward parents. But it works the other way also. Fathers will bring up their children in the nuture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). They will train their children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6). The birth of a child into the home imposes an awesome responsibility upon the parents to make sure that the child is molded and taught in such a way that they know God's will and are encouraged to obey it. Physical, mental and social and economic assistance to the child is secondary to the spiritual upbringing that the parent owes the child. With godly parents the soul of the child is of primary concern.

In The World / Not Of The World

Christians live in the world but are not to be of the world. We are not to partake of the sinful things of the world. We must guard ourselves from behavior that brings reproach on that for which we stand and which we profess. We are to be a peculiar people (Titus 2:14), a people who are different because of the kind of daily life that is lived. The worldly standards are not the standards by which we measure. We are to convert the world, not conform to it (Romans 12:1,2). *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."* First John 2:15-17.

Christianity even governs our attitude and action toward enemies if such we have. Jesus, who was perfect in every respect, had enemies. How much more might frail followers expect to have enemies. Paul urges us to live peaceably with all men as far as is possible (Romans 12:18). But even that teaching implies that there may be times when it is not possible.

We are not to be overly disturbed if we are hated. *"Marvel not my brethren if the world hate you."* First John 3:13. *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."* John 15:18. But when we are hated, we are taught to render good for evil (Romans 12:20,21; Matthew 5:43,44). Instead of eye for an eye, it is love for hatred. Instead of seeking revenage, it is rendering good for evil. The "golden rule" of Matthew 7:12 is the standard for the Christian toward all, even enemies. When Christ was reviled, He reviled not again (First Peter 2:23).

This is a very difficult test of our faith to follow Christ when dealing with those who seek harm and destruction. Especially is it difficult when you have the truth and the means to score a great victory over your opponent. But we must guard our motives in what we do. The better way to deal with enemies than to seek their destruction is to pray for them, and try to befriend them. If he rejects you, he will eventually destroy himself. In the judgment, God will settle the matter. We must have the attitude of Christ when He was on the cross, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

In Speech

There are other areas where the teaching of Christ and being a Christian determines our daily life. We shall mention just one other briefly. The way of the Lord governs the way we speak, our conversation, and the use of our tongue. Our speech can contribute to our salvation or to our condemnation, depending on the way we use this blessing of communication (Matthew 12:37). We can talk ourselves into hell. James writes an abundance of instruction governing the use of the tongue. But Christianity makes a difference. Those who are faithful to Christ will be known for clean and pure speech.

Being a Christian is a full-time occupation and profession. It regulates everything we do, where we go, what we say, who we select as friends, our acitivities, what we can support, what we oppose, where we stand, how we work, play or whatever is a part of life. Certainly it governs our worship and work, but being a Christian means letting Christ have His way in your daily life.

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Matthew 16:13-19

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Ceasarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered, and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

It was in this fashion that the Holy Spirit through Matthew records the intentions of Jesus to establish His church. Our lesson proposes to learn in some detail the truth that is here revealed. We are persuaded that much misunderstanding of the Lord's church can be cleared away by understanding this passage.

Jesus and His disciples were in a period of retirement that we might call a vacation, but more of a relief from the multitudes that constantly pressured them. The disciples had been throughout the land preaching the coming of the kingdom of heaven. This close association with the people enabled them to glean firsthand knowledge of what the people thought of Jesus. Jesus asked them who the people thought He was.

As might be expected when something is left to the opinions of men there was little unanimity of thought. Some thought He was John the Baptist, who was already dead, or one of the prophets, even some great one like Elijah or Jeremiah returned from the dead. It is interesting to note that at least there was no report of identifying Him as someone decadent and degenerate like some are inclined to do in our anti-Christian society.

Jesus had been with His disciples for nearly three years. They had seen His miracles, heard His teaching, and were in a position to know the truth about His identity. Peter responded, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

Jesus acknowledged this statement by noting that the source of such information was a revelation from God. It was not a mere human opinion. Then He uttered what has unnecessarily become a highly controversial statement. *"I say unto thee that thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

Not Peter

Some have erroneously determined that Peter is the rock upon which the church of Christ is built. There are two words involved here. One is the word "petros" which is masculine gender and means a fragment of stone and translated Peter. The other is "petra which is feminine gender and means a solid ledge of massive foundation of rock. This difference certainly shows that the rock and Peter were not one and the same. In essence, Jesus is saying to Peter, "You are but a pebble, but that upon which I will build my church is an unmovable, mountainous ledge of rock."

Nothing here indicates what Romanists like to call "the primacy of Peter." That the foundation is Christ and His identity as the Son of God is further confirmed by Paul's statement in First Corinthians 3:11, *"For other foundation can no man lay*

than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The truth concerning Jesus that Peter confessed is the rock upon which the church is built. Indeed, it is the foundation of all of Christianity.

His Promise

The statement also notes that Christ would build the church sometime in the future from that moment. *"I will build.. "* is future tense. This is significant in view of the false teaching of some denominationalists that the church existed before the cross, established even in the lifetime of John the Baptist. But when Jesus uttered these words the church had not yet been established, was yet future, but John was already dead (Matthew 14).

The contention that the church was built during the days of John is a part of the false doctrinal concept that salvation is obtainable today on the same terms some received it prior to the cross, like the thief, or by faith only without baptism. But the words of Jesus puncture that doctrine because the church had not yet been built.

The statement also shows the One to whom the church belongs. It is the church of Christ. *"I will build MY*)emphasis, JWB) *church."* He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He is the head of it (Colossians 1:18). It is His body (Ephesians 1:22,23). It is His kingdom (John 18:36; Colossians 1:13). It is called after Him (Romans 16:16). In view of this array of Biblical evidence as to whom the church belongs, why should men have the audacity to name it other than the way the Bible does?

Notice also the singular number - church- He would build. He would build His one church. He is not the founder of a vast variety of religious organizations that differ one from the other in doctrine, practice, name, and often even contradictory matters between them. There is one body (Ephesians 4:4), and the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). He is the head and there is only one head and one body.

The religious division that characterizes denominationalism is as foreign to the teaching of the New Testament as light from darkness. Those who contend "one church is as good as another" should do some serious concentration on the fact that Jesus only promised to build one.

Church's Foundation

Peter was blessed for his confession. That truth is the foundation of the church. The church did not exist prior to this time. It came into being on the first Pentecost after the Lord's ascension (Acts 2).

The church belongs to Christ and there is but one of which He is the founder, builder, foundation and Savior (Ephesians 5:23).

Jesus also said the *"gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* The word "hell is translated from the word "hades," which means the unseen state of the dead. It is not the *"gehenna"* hell that is mentioned many other times and refers to the state of eternal torment. What Jesus taught is that even though He would die and be buried, He would come forth. Death would not prevent the establishment of the church. In view of His forthcoming resurrection, even death shall not prevail over those who are faithful members of the Lord's church for *"in Christ"* is our victory over death (First Corinthians 15:57). Death could not prevent its establishment nor shall death have victory over it.

Today, we can rejoice that the Lord built His church and even more that we can be members of it. The saved make up the church (Acts 2:47). Christ will save the church (Ephesians 5:23). The church, which is the same as the kingdom, will be delivered unto the Father when Jesus comes again (First Corinthians 15:29).

Still The Same Terms

The terms of entrance into His church are the same now as in the days of the New Testament. Faith in Christ (John 8:24), repentance of sins (Luke 13:3), confession of our faith (Luke 12:8,9), and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38), is the process of salvation and entrance into the body which is the church (First Corinthians 12:13).

You never read of "getting saved" of going out and "joining the church of your choice." You never read of "joining any church." You do read of hearing the gospel, believing it, obeying it, whereupon God adds you to His church.

† † † † †

Fit For The Kingdom



James W. Boyd

Luke 9:62, "*And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*"

This passage has been properly cited as Biblical evidence that it is possible for one who has once started toward heaven by serving God in Christ to turn back and thereby render himself unsuitable to be considered as one pleasing before Almighty God. He has apostatized.

It is also evident that there is such a thing as being "fit" for the kingdom and therefore there is sucn a thing as being "unfit." It should be the goal in life of every person to be acceptable before God. Nothing else really matters if this is not true of us. But what does it take to be "*fit for the kingdom?*"

This issue presents the first five lessons of a ten lesson series on that specific theme. We plan to have the final five in the following issue. These lessons have proven useful for ladies' classes, a series for Wednesday evening Bible study, almost a quarter's work for a Sunday morning class. We hope they will prove beneficial to all who read whatever further use they may make of them.

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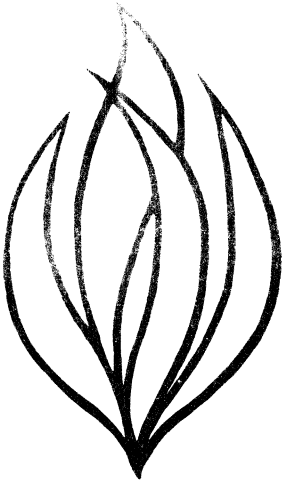

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Fit For The Kingdom

Lesson Six

The Divine Nature

When we studied Christianity in daily living, we learned that we must imitate Christ. How can we, being human, weak, sinful, have the ability to imitate Jesus who was sinless, perfect, and the divine Son of God? The nature of Christ differs from the nature of man. He, being Deity in the flesh, possessed to perfection qualities that man can possess only in a limited way. In order for us to imitate Christ, we must develop a Christlike nature, striving toward His perfection.

God has encouraged us and motivated us to become partakers of the divine nature through great and precious promises. He not only offers us guidance, comfort, protection, and providence in this life, but heaven after this life is over. What greater incentives could be provided us? He has not left us alone without aid in becoming partakers of a nature like Christ.

We often hear it said that human nature never changes. We believe this is true. We also believe that human beings can change. They can grow and become what they had not been previously. We can become more and more like Christ until *"we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* (First John 3:2). While we may not fully comprehend all that is implied in that statement, it is certain that mankind can become partaker of the divine nature.

Can People Change?

We have heard it said regarding some people, "A leopard cannot change its spots." We do not know much about leopards, but evidently the Lord thought mankind can change because Christ came to this world to bring about the change that is needed to make sinful man fit for His service and His fellowship.

Becoming like Christ is not something that happens automatically or suddenly. A person is not steeped in defiant and rebellious sin one moment and possess the character and

disposition likened unto the Son of God the next. Becoming like Christ and partaking of the divine nature is a matter of spiritual growth. It is a process that never knows completion as long as we live on earth.

First Peter, chapter one, points out how God has provided the way whereby we can become like Christ. Having offered great and precious promises to those who will strive to be like him, Peter, by inspiration, tells us of the qualities we must develop. The development of these Christlike qualities requires a constant and persistent effort on our part.

The starting point is faith. *"Without faith it is impossible to be pleasing to him..."* (Hebrews 11:6). Christ said, *"Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Before we can begin to build a character like Christ we must have this obedient faith which the gospel teaches. Then these various traits are built, simultaneously, not one at a time. They are so interwoven one with another that they cannot be separated except for study.

To faith we must add virtue, which means courage, boldness, manliness. In the life of Peter we see demonstrated virtue and the lack of it. He lacked virtue when he denied the Lord three times. He displayed virtue when he stood before the Jewish leaders, risking his life, defying their commands to cease preaching the gospel. He continued to preach Christ even under the threat of persecution and death. Virtuous people are not afraid nor ashamed to stand up for the truth of God whenever, wherever, and before whomsoever they have the privilege to stand.

Other Additions

To virtue we are to add knowledge. Some knowledge is essential before one can become a Christian. He must know the truth concerning Christ, the plan of salvation, etc. Having obeyed the gospel plan, he must add to his knowledge lest he fail to grow and be strengthened. He needs to be grounded in the truth, able to withstand false doctrines so he will not be tossed to and fro by them, able to teach the truth and convict the gainsayer. This knowledge comes through the study of the Bible. Bible study is an essential activity in becoming more like Christ. Therein the Christ is revealed. How else and where else can we even know what we are to imitate?

To knowledge add self-control, sometimes called temperance. Self-control has two meanings. Some have limited the meaning of temperance to moderation and this almost exclusively to drinking alcoholic beverages. Such a concept fails to understand the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Self-control or temperance means abstinence from that which is sinful. One cannot claim to have self-control unless he refrains from what is evil. And it also means to use and partake in moderation even that which is acceptable and good.

There is nothing sinful about eating food, unless it is done without self-control. There is nothing but evil in consuming alcoholic beverages. There is no way to lie moderately, steal moderately, commit adultery with moderation. These things are sinful in themselves. Such things as eating, recreation, work, etc.are right in themselves but must be utilized with moderation. The Christian knows how to regulate his life and control himself, keeping himself in circumspect boundaries of behavior. The lack of self-control is at the root of many of the problems mankind brings upon itself. Happy is that person who has learned to manage his life and keep himself under bondage. This idea of "letting yourself go" is contrary to the teaching of the Lord. Christians won't do that. They possess temperance.

More Additions

We are to add the quality of patience to our character. Patience refers to faithfulness, endurance, stedfastness. Job is presented to us in the Bible as an example of patience (James 5:11). In the face of all his suffering and disappointments, he never gave up, he kept on going, he stayed faithful to God, and refused to accept his wife's advice to *"curse God and die."*

Being patient means that we serve God in good times and bad, in easy times and difficult ones. In adversity as well as prosperity, the Lord is our God. Our faith is one of conviction, not merely convenience.

We are to add to our characters the quality of godliness. Godliness is not the same thing as "godlikeness." Godliness refers to reverence, respect for things holy and sacred. It is genuine piety toward God.

A godly person would never take God's name in vain. He will not speak disparagingly of the Lord's church, His commands, or anything related to Him. He respects God's authority and cherishes God's promises. Reverent esteem is what he shows

toward Deity. While a godly man may at times stumble, he will also rise from such things and press on because he knows and loves all things that are of God. Even when so much of the world is showing contempt and offering ridicule for the standards and doctrine of Christ, the godly man will bend his every effort to conform himself to that teaching. He holds God in awe and reverence.

Finally, we are to add brotherly kindness and love. These two qualities can be considered together for they are much alike. We are to have brotherly kindness toward our brethren. We are also to seek the highest good of all those around us. This is the meaning of love. Love is unselfish, seeketh not her own. Love is concerned about the welfare of others and what is best for others. Our first priority is toward brethren in the Lord. The love that the Christian must develop extends beyond his brethren. If we only love those that love us, in what way are we distinctive or different? Christ reasoned in Matthew 5:43ff that we are to do more than that.

Many problems and much strife would cease to exist in the church and in the world if more of us could learn to possess and practice genuine love, a trait of character that is a part of the divine nature.

Jesus Demonstrated Love

Jesus showed us what love is. *"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:15).Have you ever considered how Jesus even went beyond this, and gave His life for those who were alienated from God, yet sinners, and died for such? (Romans 5:6-9).

Peter closes these remarks with great assurance that developing such a character will produce only our spiritual good. *"For if these things be in you and abound..."* then certain blessings will be enjoyed. We will not be unfruitful in the service of God. We will not be blind but be able to see what is of real value and truth, not groping about in darkness, but seeing in the light of truth. We can make our calling and election sure. This provides us with security and confidence. If we possess these qualities we shall not fall. The Lord does not guarantee us sinless perfection, and those who either claim such or expect such have no basis for their thinking in Scripture. In the adding of these qualities we can build a preventive power against falling away. There is an entrance into heaven awaiting us.

Is there any wonder, then, seeing the end result of having a Christlike nature, that it is called a divine nature? There is abundant life with Deity in fellowship while we live here on earth, plus the assurance of eternal joy in heaven with the redeemed of all the ages.

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Lesson Seven

The Church And You

We begin this lesson with some questions. What is the church? What is your relationship to the church?

The church is composed of people who have been saved from their past sins by the blood of Jesus Christ, having rendered obedience to the commands of the gospel of Christ. God alone forgives sins, and God alone makes one a member of His church. God adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). People do not and cannot "join" the church like they would some club or fraternal organization. When they believe, repent of their sins, confess their faith in Christ, and are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, their sins are forgiven them and God adds them to the church, the company of the saved.

The church is identified as the family of God (First Timothy 3:15). It is called the "*house of God*" which is His family. The church is also called the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). The church is that organization and institution of people who have been purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), and are therefore the possession of God (First Corinthians 6:19,20). There is no such thing as being saved apart from the church because the church is the saved. The same process of obedience whereby one's sins are remitted is the process by which one becomes a member of the church. This denominational teaching that we do one thing to be saved and something else and different to "join" some church is a false teaching and has no root in Scripture whatsoever.

The church is also called the kingdom of God (Matthew 16:16-18). Those that make up the church are those who are in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Christ is the King of the kingdom and Christians are the citizens of it. It has no earthly

headquarters because the throne of the King is in heaven (Acts 7:49). It is a spiritual kingdom, not one of this world (John 18:36).

The church of Christ is not a denomination. One never reads about denominations in the Bible. Denominationalism is entirely a creation of man and is the result of apostasy from the truth of God. There is no divine authority for the existence of any denomination on the face of the earth. If a church is a denomination, it is not the church of Christ. If it is the church of Christ, it is not a denomination.

You Are Or You Are Not

What is your relationship to the church? At this moment you are either a member of the Lord's church or you are not. If you are a member, then you are a Christian, one whose past sins were forgiven when you were baptized. If you are not a member of the church, you are yet lost and doomed in your sins, and there is not a word of hope for your soul anywhere in the Bible so long as you remain as you are. All spiritual blessings are found "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3) and if you are not in Christ, you are not the recipient of His spiritual blessing. Nor shall you be until you are a member of His church

Let us turn our attention to certain responsibilities that you have in the church toward others who are members of the church and learn more of the relationship one should have toward the church.

Government

You should be identified with a local congregation. The universal church has no organizational or governmental structure other than Jesus Christ as the King. Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). Christians in a given locality make up a local congregation. They assemble for worship, have fellowship together in the doing of the work of God.

The local church is ruled and overseen by men designated as elders or bishops. There is to be a plurality of bishops in each congregation, men who meet certain specified qualifications as given in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The local church is served by those called deacons. There are preachers and teachers, and the membership makes up the body. There is no ecclesiastical structure larger than the local church in the church which Christ

built. One of the major avenues of digressions has been the departure from the governmental structure of the church. Once that is set aside or altered, then liberties of every sort are brought in and apostasy is sure to follow.

A Christian is to cooperate with those who have the leadership of the local church. He is under their watchcare and oversight. They have the authority in matters of judgment and opinion over the local church. The church is not a demoncracy, nor is to be ruled by tyranical means. The universal church is a monarchy with Christ as king and each local church governed as we have noted. Each member has an obligation to those who are called upon to serve as elders. Elders are to be *"esteemed highly for their work's sake."* (First Thessalonians 5:13). Members are to obey them (Hebrews 13:7). One violates God's law to raise rebellion against the duly ordained eldership when that eldership is acting according to Scripture and within the boundaries of their authority. Careless and reckless accusations against elders are not to be received. Good elders do not have to ask for respect and consideration because they so conduct themselves that they win the confidence of those over whom they have oversight.

Its Work

When plans are made for the carrying out of the work of the church, our relationship to the church is to be one of cooperation and harmony.

Each member is obligated to contribute of his means to the local church. Financially, the church is dependent upon members who give willingly, cheerfully, bountifully, sacrificially, The church is not authorized to go into business ventures to make money. Saving souls, not money, is the work of the church. To withhold your support to the local church is to withhold that which belongs to God. We would not contend that every contribution you make must be given to one local church, but we would contend that every Christian has the duty to the church to give. It is surely not a matter of great debate that the support of the local church should not only fall on a few while others feel no responsibility whatever. We are brethren and should have joint participation with each in this matter.

As a Christian, your relationship to the church should be one that tends to making and keeping the church united, as Jesus prayed for the church to be. The influence and power of the

church is often drained away because of division. In matters where God has spoken, there is no room for division. We are to speak the same things and be of the same mind (Philippians 1:27; First Corinthians 1:10). In matters of human wisdom and the exercise of opinion, we should be charitable toward each other, remembering that the eldership has the duty and power of making such decisions for the local church. Seldom will everybody be pleased with every decision. It is our task to work for unity, not division. We might note that elderships that are attune to the disposition of the congregation will take into consideration what others think before making decisions that affect the entire body. As for matters of faith where God has spoken, their duty is clear. They are to uphold the Word of God regardless of what others may think. Good leaders are considerate, attentive, openminded and try to create the unity among brethren that is easy to sustain by the members. A sower of discord is abominable to the Lord (Proverbs 6:16ff) and one places his soul in danger to foment division and strife just to have his own way.

Love The Brotherhood

Where there is genuine love for God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, where there is love among brethren, where the truth and its power is utmost in the minds of the brethren, unity, peace, harmony, cooperation is much easier maintained. Each Christian should always try to be a part of the solution to every problem, never the source of it.

As a Christian, you owe it to every other member of the church to live a righteous life. We do not have the right to live anyway we want. We must take into consideration the influence and effect that it has on the rest of the brethren, as well as the image our behavior places before the world about the church of Christ. One of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of the devil is hypocrisy among members of the church. The devil delights in being able to point to the professed Christian and take note of his inconsistencies and sins. Teachers of the truth are often placed in embarrassing situations when trying to proclaim and defend the truth because there are those of their own brethren who are so involved in sin that his words of instruction have little effect on his hearers. You have no right to ruin the influence of the church, to retard the efforts made to save souls, to bring reproach on the name of Christ by living a hypocritical

life. This attitude that it is nobody's business but my own what I do is false. What we do involves God, His church, as well as our own spiritual welfare.

To help the church remain pleasing to God, every member should check everything by the Bible. We all should insist that what is preached and practiced be authorized by the Scriptures. Only in this way can we prevent the congregation where we attend from drifting away from the straight and narrow path. Almost from the time of the beginning of the church there have been those who have wanted to go beyond the doctrine of Christ. Likewise, there have been those who have been "watchdogs" that often confused their watching with their insistence that everything be done their way. We all do need to watch and be alert to the slightest deviation from the truth. Digression does not occur suddenly but gradually, little by little, step by step. Only a persistent and consistent measuring by the Scriptures will keep the church on course. Everyone has a duty in helping to do this. We have the duty to uphold the truth as it is taught, and to oppose and expose error whenever and wherever it raises its Satanic head.

If you are a Christian, you and the church are inseparable because you are one of the members of it. You have to sustain a relationship to all the rest of the redeemed. We not only need to know what that relationship is, but we must determine that we will be one who will be found performing as the Lord has commanded.

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Lesson Eight

Overcoming Sin And Its Consequences

On order to reach heaven, we must not only be forgiven of our past sins but we must keep our lives free from sin. Our past sins are forgiven when we obey the gospel in faith, repentance, confession and baptism. But this does not guarantee heaven. What is too often overlooked is another condition of salvation; namely, that of being faithful. *"Be thou faithful unto death and I*

will give thee the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10). Even though we cannot be sinlessly perfect, we can be faithful. The doctrine of once saved, always saved, that one cannot fall so as to be lost, is false.

Once we become Christians the devil does not cease to try to recapture our souls *"Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil walketh about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour."* (First Peter 5:8). Just as God did not forget man in sin, the devil does not forget man in Christ. The possibility of falling is not our theme in this lesson, but we take note of that possibility nonetheless.

The thrust of our lesson is that God does not leave us helpless in our battle against Satan and sin. He has promised us the ability to resist temptation and overcome and/or endure whatever comes our way (First Corinthians 10:13). *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* We have His Word as a *"lamp unto our feet"* to lead us in the way that we should go. With the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit, we can wage warfare against Satan and put temptation to flight even as did He.

Every baptized believer must be concerned with facing sin and overcoming its intent, design and destruction so as to escape the ultimate wages of sin which is spiritual death (Romans 6:23).

How Sin Develops

We need to learn how sin develops. In finding a way to overcome a disease the medical scientists try to learn how that disease is produced. This is why there is continued research. Once this knowledge is known they are better able to locate a place to attack it, even cure it. A similar procedure is necessary in dealing with the spiritual disease of sin.

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man, but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death." (James 1:13-15). Sin does its work in three stages.

Temptation

The first stage is that of temptation. There are two elements to temptation: (1) desire or lust, and (2) opportunity or enticement. People are not tempted when there is only desire. Nor are they tempted only when there is opportunity to sin. But when the two are found together, there is temptation. Let us illustrate. A man may desire an alcoholic beverage. But there is none available. He is not yet tempted. Beverages may be available but the man may have no desire for them. Again, there is no temptation. But if he desires it and it is available, then he is tempted to sin by drinking it.

It is not a sin to be tempted. Our Lord was tempted (Matthew 4) and tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15), but He did no sin (First Peter 2:22). Temptation equals desire plus opportunity.

Yielding

The second stage in the development of sin is yielding to the temptation. This involves the action, whether physical or mental. One can sin through mental action as well as physical action. Sin equals temptation plus yielding. Sin involves transgression or violation of God's law (First John 3:4). Desire plus opportunity plus yielding equals sin.

Death

The third stage is spiritual death. Death means separation. When one sins he separates himself from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). In Revelation 21:8, after listing a number of sins, it is stated that *"their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."* The ultimate result and wages of sin is an eternal separation from God in hell.

The glorious hope that can be ours in Christ Jesus is that sin need not bring spiritual death eternally to us because we can be forgiven in Him. This was the mission of Christ to this earth to forgive man of sin (First Timothy 1:15). He shed His blood *"for the remission of sins."* (Matthew 26:28). We might compose another equation that reads, sin plus no forgiveness equals spiritual death. Sin plus forgiveness equals spiritual life. Our full equation can be read as follows: Desire plus opportunity plus yielding plus no forgiveness equals eternal spiritual death.

How To Overcome

How can sin and its consequences be overcome? We can first attack it at the point of desire. As Christians we are to learn to control our appetites and desires. We must crucify evil desires (Galatians 5:24). This is accomplished by controlling our thoughts. Read Colossians 3:2 and Philippians 4:8 in this connection. Much of our evil desire springs from an over-emphasis on the pleasures and goals of this life. We must learn to guard our hearts. A greater concentration on heavenly things makes us have a stronger appetite for that which is good and right and a greater distaste for sinful things. We come to the place when we do as Paul instructed, *"Abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good."* (Romans 12:9). Solomon wrote, *"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."* (Proverbs 23:7). It is not saying that a man is what he thinks he is, but rather he is what he thinks. The heart is the fountain from which evil desires spring (Matthew 15:18,19).

Sin can also be attacked at the point of opportunity. We should shun situations that offer opportunity to sin. We may not be able to avoid all of them, but we can seek good companions, refrain from the appearance of evil, not allow ourselves to be constantly bombarded with opportunity to do wrong. Too many people, possibly thinking themselves stronger than they are, will go places, say things, do things that will only lead them into temptation. Why pray for God to deliver us from evil and then flirt with opportunity to sin? There are some jobs a Christian cannot hold. There are some people with whom Christians ought not have close association as friends and companions. There are places where no Christian ought to go. It is easier to fall before temptation under some circumstances than others. The best way to combat sin with respect to opportunity to sin is to put distance between yourself and the opportunity, as did Joseph when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife.

Then we must ever be developing control over ourselves so that we will not yield even when tempted. There are desires of the human being that are not sinful in themselves, but can be satisfied sinfully, such as the sexual desire. These desires are to be satisfied in the holy estate of marriage. Therefore, even though the desire resides, and opportunity may arise to sin, we must have control over ourselves and resist the devil. James says, *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."* (James 4:7). Too many flirt with the devil and then wonder what happened. We can develop this self-control by studying carefully how to

possess the characteristics of the divine nature of which Peter wrote in Second Peter one.

All Have Sinned

But we must recognize that we are all too often not as strong as we ought to be and in spite of ourselves there are times when the desire is so strong, the opportunity so enticing, our self-control so weak, that we yield and sin. We bring abomination upon ourselves. To enjoy an eternal life with God we must be forgiven of our sins. John wrote, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* (First John 1:8-10).

A Christian is not baptized again as when he was born into the family of God and when his past sins were forgiven that way. But God's plan for forgiving His children of sin requires repentance, confession of sin and prayer. Peter told Simon to *"Repent... and pray..."* (Acts 8:22). John added that we must confess our sins (First John 1:9). Repentance, confession and prayer is not the plan of God for one who is not a Christian to be forgiven. It is the plan for the Christian who has sinned to be forgiven. The Christian is in the body of Christ where he is in contact with the cleansing blood of Christ. As John wrote, *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."*(First John 1:7).

We are not commanded to be sinlessly perfect. God has never commanded that of which we are incapable. While perfection is the goal and the standard, we realize we sin. But because of our relationship with God through Christ forgiveness is easily available to the faithful who meet His terms. This is what God expects. Faithfulness means to keep on keeping on, not giving up. *"Be not weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9). It is not to the perfect, but to the faithful, that the crown of life will be given (Revelation 2:10.

† † † † †

Lesson Nine

Discerning Good And Evil

"For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Hebrews 5:13,14).

This passages takes notice of two stages of Christian growth. There are "babes" and there are those called "fullgrown or of full age."

How do we identify and describe a "*babe*" in Christ? It has nothing to do with one's actual chronological age. Rather it is a matter of mental and spiritual attainment rather than a physical state. One may be elderly as far as years are concerned and still be a babe in Christ. On the other hand, one may be relatively young in years, but be strong and exhibit great spiritual maturity, although not many who are very young are spiritually mature because of the lack of opportunity to grow and develop. One can even be an intellectual giant and a mental whiz but be yet a babe in Christ.

A babe in Christ is a new Christian who may not know much more about Christianity than the plan of salvation which he has obeyed to enter into Christ. Just as we enter our fleshly family by being born into them, we enter God's spiritual family by being *"born again."* (John 3:3,5). We then embark on a journey of maturing and growing in the imitation of the Son of God. A babe in Christ has just begun to walk with the Lord.

A fullgrown man in Christ is one who has reached a level of maturity that demonstrates spiritual wisdom, knowledge and is manifested in his words and deeds. Obviously, those who have had more years in which to partake of the things of Christ are expected to be more mature than those who are younger. Unfortunately, there are some who have had years of opportunity to grow and mature but are still very immature, almost retarded in their growth.

Not Sinlessly Perfect

We would not want to leave an impression that we shall ever

reach such a state of maturity in this life that we are sinless or that we can attain such a degree and level of growth that we could be perfect as was the Son of God. We never reach the place when we cannot grow. We shall always be in a state of growth as long as we live. Mature people grow as well as immature ones.

Going from the state of being a babe to that of a fullgrown or mature Christian requires study, knowledge, devotion, faith, humility and characteristics that are like Christ, words and deeds that reflect what was once said of the apostles that *"they had been with Jesus."* (Acts 4:13).

But our present study is not intended to dwell upon the stages of growth as much as to speak of these stages to set the background for the ability and necessity of discerning good and evil. As Christians, and to be fit for the kingdom, we must learn to determine what is right and wrong, how to decide about good and evil, how to distinguish between the two. It is not always a simple matter. Being mature and fullgrown provides a great advantage, however. It is not an ability that we just automatically possess. Rather it is a quality and talent that we must devlop and nurture before we can use.

Know The Difference

The only sure and certain source of knowledge about the difference between good and evil is God. We must ask of God and inquire of His Word to know what is correct from incorrect. The more we grow toward Him, the more like Jesus we become by developing the traits of character He had, the better able we are to discern. This fact should encourage us to diligently expend ourselves in Christian growth. It is essential in being acceptable to God.

Some things can easily be noted as right or wrong because the Scripture plainly and explicity speak of them one way or the other. There are a number of veritable catalogs of sins given in the New Testament as well as lists of things that are right and good. For the sake of space we shall only note the reference here without giving the full quotations. Ephesians 5:3-6; 4:31; Colossians 3:5-9; Galatians 5:19-23; Philippians 4:8, and many others. Even those who have a very limited knowledge of the Bible are able to know that such things are either good or evil without much difficulty. We must acknowledge, however, that there seems to be such a vast number of people who do not

seem to care whether they do good or evil. But knowledge of right and wrong in these matters is not that difficult to determine.

Our Consciences

What many have not yet learned is that anything that violates the conscience is wrong. Let us be sure what the Scripture teaches. It does not teach that anything which does not violate your conscience is right. Many seem to think that so long as their conscience is not violated that whatever they do is acceptable. That is a bad mistake. While our consciences are to be our guide, they are not infallible guides. Consciences have to be taught and trained and they are no more reliable than the training received. One can be trained to believe truth is error and wrong is right and have no hurt of conscience whatever even though they do wrong. Many have sinned sincerely and honestly while thinking what they were doing was right.

But honesty demands that we live in harmony with our convictions. One who will do that which he believes to be wrong cannot please God. This is the meaning of the passage of Romans 14:23, *"For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." "Faith"* here refers to what one believes. He may believe truth or he may believe error, but whatever he believes ought to be his guide. He should bend every effort to determine whether his beliefs are according to God's Word. Fortunate is that person who has acquainted himself or herself with God's law. How deceived is that person who, lacking knowledge of God's Word, can violate God's Word and his conscience cause him no problem.

In Romans 14, Paul discussed a problem among early Christians concerning eating some meat. Some thought it was wrong to eat meat from animals that had been offered to idols, thinking they would in some way be paying homage to the idol. Paul taught them that there was nothing wrong with eating such meat unless they believed it to be wrong. If they believed it was wrong they ought refrain from eating it. To eat thinking it was evil would mean to violate their convictions and offend their consciences. What they really needed was to have their consciences instructed more clearly concerning the truth about eating meat. This Paul was attempting to do in that chapter.

Such Like

We are also taught that those things that are like what is specifically named as evil are to be shunned. When listing the works of the flesh Paul gave a sweeping and inclusive statement, *"and such like."* (Galatians 5:21). When we may be temporarily uncertain about the rightness or wrongness of something we are to leave it alone. Similarity to sin is to be avoided. *"Abstain from the appearance of evil."* (First Thessalonians 5:22). While this is not always easy to determine, it can be determined with a close and persistent application of certain principles and guidelines that shall be discussed later. Just here we want to establish that it is wrong to be involved in that which has the likeness and kinship of sinful things.

We need to summarize at this point before moving into the area where the discernment of good and evil is more difficult. Things specifically named to be right and wrong can be discerned relatively simply by a knowledge of the catalogs of sin in Scripture. Things that violate the conscience are wrong for the reasons mentioned. Things related to and "*like*" sinful things are also to be noted as off limits to those who would be fit for the kingdom. But we now turn our attention to determining those doubtful and difficult matters where the "black and white" is not so clearly defined. There are matters that are right in themselves that can become wrong if given a place in life that is contrary to the Christian priorities. But there are also measures available to the Christian that can assist him to discern even in those areas where there appears to be much "gray" area. It is here that we begin to see the value of being mature and fullgrown in Christ.

Value Of Fellowship

We do not want to ignore one of the real benefits of Christian fellowship is the association with more mature Christians. Those who have been in the service of the King have had experience and gained knowledge that can be used to help us know what and how to do. We should seek the advice and counsel of those who are rich in faith. Experience is a great teacher. Those with experience can see dangers as well as opportunities that others without experience cannot see. We need to take advantage of the blessing of mature brethren. Ask them and profit from what they know. They are able to discern good and evil with great precision because they know where things can lead. They have been along the way.

This is the reason God has mature men to serve as elders of

the church. For the same reason parents are to govern and guide the children. This is why older women are to teach the younger women. Those of maturity who love their less experienced brethren will be considerate, even sympathetic, with their decisions and discernments that have to be made and will lend a hand with their background of Biblical information and personal experience in living the Christian life.

Influence

We must consider the effect some action may have on others as well as on us. Influence must be considered. *"For none liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself."* (Romans 14:7). We must think how what we say and do will affect non-Christians as well as brethren, and certainly our families. We do not want to become a hindrance to someone's conversion nor a stumbling-block for a brother or sister. While we think about the affect on our own spirit and attitude toward heavenly things, we must leave off activities that will tend to dull our sensitivity regarding sin. We do not want to do things that will gradually sear our consciences and hearts and make us less interested in the things of God.

The best test might well be to simply ask, "What would Jesus do?" He is our example. The more we know of Christ the easier it will be for us to know what He would decide, what He would do, where He would go, what He would say. Cannot we see the value of studying the Bible because that is where we learn of Christ? Just think about the time when Peter had denied the Lord, and Jesus then simply looked upon him, not saying a word. Peter knew and realized so intently what Jesus would have had him to have done. When we are trying to discern good and evil and find it difficult to know just which way to turn, think about Jesus looking at you. Do you really believe He would smile on you in what you are considering, or would He be disappointed in you?.

He Watches

We are fortunate that Jesus is watching us. He is not watching just waiting for us to commit some transgression and ready to pounce upon us. He is not looking as if some warden or guard might observe his prisoners. But He watches over us in love, as a mother watches over her child as he goes about his activities.

He has the awareness and interest because He wants to guide us, protect us, assist us, and even comfort us as we journey through life. When Jesus told the brethren in the seven churches of Asia, *"I know thy works,"* He wanted them to know that He was aware of their misdeeds, but also He was aware when they faced temptation, when they overcame, when they were victorious and faithful.

The stronger we get and the more mature we devlop ourselves we will be able to discern good and evil with less problems. In addition, the maturity that we can enjoy for our own benefit can be a great help to others. There are such blessings to be found in becoming *"fullgrown."*

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Lesson Ten

Continuing To Grow

This is the tenth of ten lessons on the theme of being fit for the kingdom. We have studied what it means to be a Christian, our duty in public and private worship, Bible study, the necessity of good works, applying Christianity in daily living, partaking of the divine nature, our relationship with the rest of the church, how to overcome sin and its consequences and learning to discern between good and evil. This final lesson is to encourage us to continue to grow. While it might appear so obvious that this is what we ought to do, the seriousness of it requires additional concentration.

We begin by the reminder that the plan of salvation is hearing the word, believing in Christ, repenting of sins, confessing faith in Christ, being baptized for the remission of sins into Christ, and (the part we now stress), remaining faithful to Christ. Remaining faithful requires spiritual growth. We must continue to grow.

In every realm of life growth is essential to its prosperity. It is true in business, science, industry, whatever. Things cannot be allowed to become stagnant or lie in a state of motionlessness. Things will either grow or die.

It would be of benefit if we leave the lesson for a moment and

pick up our Bibles and read the following passages and then return to these comments. Ephesians 4:10-16; First Peter 2:2; Second Peter 3:17,17; Second Thessalonians 1:3. These are a few of the passages that teach the necessity of continued growth.

Balanced Growth

Saying we must grow is not all that we need to learn. Our growth must be well balanced. In physical growth we recognize that something is wrong if only a person's legs grow but not the rest of the body. Or if only the head increased in size but the arms and legs remained as an infant growth would not be balanced or healthy. We studied the characteristics of the divine nature and saw many areas in which we are to grow. But we are to grow in such things simultaneously, not one exclusive of another.

We have tried to be realistic in this series and realize that there are hindrances to spiritual growth. This is true in mental and physical growth and we need not be surprised that such is true in spiritual growth. Some hindrances we cannot avoid but we must learn to overcome. Other hindrances can be avoided if we are alert.

One hindrance to growth is the lack of effort. Being glad over being born into God's family, we are not to expect growth to be automatic. It is not. The course of least resistance will allow you to be taken downstream. We are to work out our own salvation (Philippians 2:12). This does not mean we are to work out our own system of salvation, but we must work our part in God's system. Nor does it mean that by our works alone we shall merit salvation. We cannot earn it. But there must be obedience and this requires effort. Would it not be tragic that one failed to enter heaven simply because he was too lazy to do the work that is necessary?

A Real Hindrance

Discouragements are often hindrances to growth. Some make a fine start, but they encounter personal troubles, opposition from former friends and family, trouble arises in the church itself and frustrates them. Jobs, finances, health, school, many things can become problems to remaing faithful if we permit it to be so. But we are not justified to abandon the faith of Christ simply

because everything does not go the way we would like it. The cure to discouragement is, *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (First Corinthians 15:58). Paul urges, *"And be not weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9).

But many "wither on the vine" due to disuse. Machinery that is not used does not retain its usefulness. It will rust, become stiff and unworkable. Even a knife, left to itself, grows dull. It stays sharp through use. If you tie your strong right arm to your side and do not use it, it will not be long before it is of no value to you. People who take to the bed even though they are well will soon become sick. Disuse is harmful. "Use, or lose" is a watchword that leaders of the church need to heed regarding their flock. Knowledge unapplied soon slips away. Talents not used will soon cease to exist. Paul told Timothy, *"Exercise thyself unto godliness."* (First Timothy 4:7). Just as having a proper diet is necessary for growth, proper exercise is also essential. This hindrance to growth can be overcome by getting busy and staying busy. Nor should we think there must always be some organized congregation-wide plan of action before we can be busy about the Fathers business. Individually we can be active, aggressive in teaching, helping the needy, relieving the distressed, encouraging the discouraged, sympathizing with the bereaved, and on and on.

Interference is often a hindrance to growth. The crops in the fields do best when they are not bothered. If things are allowed to crowd them too much their growth is stunted. Plants become malformed if somebody is constantly "fooling around with them." The Christian cannot allow interference to prevent his growth. What is likely to interfere?

Priorities

We have many interest in life. Some of these interests are necessary in the daily conduct of life. All such things are not evil in themselves. It is just possible, however, that we allow such things to interfere with our faithfulness to God. It could be a job, recreation, material ambitions, associations, pleasure, vacations, even family concerns. While attending to some of these things is a part of being a faithful Christian, we can get our priorities mixed and soon find that we are "letting the tail wag the dog,"

or as one has said, "majoring in minors and minoring in majors." We must keep a clear head and our eye single focused on the ultimate goal lest we become cloudy as to what really matters in this life. Interference from anything is a hindrance if it creates a problem for continuing to grow as a Christian. We know of a man who seemed to be prospering and who bought a nice boat. There is nothing wrong is owning and using a boat. But that boat soon came between him and faithfulness to worship and Bible study. It gradually took him "downstream" as far as his relationship to God was concerned.

Regardless of what level of maturity we might reach, there is always room for growth. We should never think we ever reach the point when there is no further progress to be made. Let us offer some suggestions for continued growth. Our prayer is these might be personally helpful to you.

Let Us Work

Be active in the work of your local congregation. There is room in the kingdom for every brother and sister in Christ. There is no unimportant person before God. There is work for each to do. We do not all have the same abilities and are not expected to do the exact same things in serving God as Christian servants. But offer yourself to the leaders and ask them for assignments. Listen for announcements that call for volunteer help. Regardless of how small or insignificant it may appear to you, get involved in what is going on. By this we mean more than attending the worship services, which is important. Be in the visitation program, teaching work, door knocking, building and yard work, fixing the Lord's Supper, whatever and whenever you can be of assistance.

Set for yourself the goal of trying to convert someone to Christ. This will demand study of you and you may well benefit more than anyone else. But think of the possibility of leading someone to Christ! Be in discussions, ask questions, bring someone to the services and ask them their reactions to what was said and done. If they allow, tell them why things were said and done as they were. Prepare answers for subjects about which you will likely be asked. Learn what the Scriptures teach and tell somebody among your acquaintances about it. This will be one of the most productive activities of your life. Christ wanted His apostles to be "*fishers of men.*" There is some soul you can "catch" for Christ, just waiting until you start to act.

Personal Effort

Start your own personal Bible research. Study one of the books, or take some topic and search the Scriptues regarding it. A good series of studies can be made from gospel tracts, Bible study helps, correspondence courses. We encourage attendance in Bible classes, paying attention to sermons that are preached from the pulpit. But you will learn and grow faster if you have a personal program of private study alongside these things.

Sometimes people start to study and become discouraged because they think they are not really getting anywhere. But like all growth, it is gradual and great strides should not be expected. Children do not jump fro the high chair and begin walking, nor suddenly stand six feet tall. While progress may appear almost imperceptible, progress is being made nonetheless.

But always keep yourself under constant self-examination. Do not allow yourself to slip off course. Like a sailor on the sea, check your compass regularly. Make application of your increasing knowledge in your personal and daily Christian life. Do what you have learned.

Businesses take inventory now and then to see where they are and where they are going. Schools gives examinations. We need to take stock of our lives, where we are, the direction we are traveling. If we fail to do this we can drift either to the left or the right from truth. Self-examination helps us keep our eye on the goal. It is also one the the essential elements in continuing to grow. Someday we shall be judged and we do not want to be *"weighed in the balance and found wanting."*

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ONE OF OUR LIMITATIONS

We cannot supply back issues with few exceptions. We appreciate the fact that some may be wanted, but we print only what is currently demanded because of financial pressures. Now and then we may have a specific number someone wants, but please understand that it cannot always be provided. **JWB**

IN THIS GRACE

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth concerning a number of matters wherein they needed to make corrections and improvements. There was such sin in that church that it took strong words from the apostle to motivate them to clean up their spiritual house. Doubtless, some today would have rebuked Paul for making corrections. They have the idea that nobody ought to "judge" anybody else. Others have concluded that even though there was rampant sin and error in that church that Paul still considered them brethren, therefore, we should always looked favorably on all churches regardless of their sins. They fail to observe that Paul was warning and correcting them, not condoning them in their error nor did he expect them to continue as they were. Discipline is a prime theme of the book.

Among the admonitions Paul gave in the Second Corinthian letter concerned giving. He cited other churches as examples of the kind and quality of giving that God expected. By the time he wrote Second Corinthians many necessary corrections had been made in Corinth, yet that did not mean they could forget anything else wherein they had duties. Even though they abounded in some of the rich and cherished traits of Christianity, like faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence and love, they were to abound in giving also.

Nobody that understands Scripture believes or teaches that anyone can buy their way to heaven with money. But at the same time those who understand Scripture realize the need to lay up treasures in heaven, and accept the fact that we are but temporary stewards of certain material possessions and shall give an account to the Master how we acquired and disposed of them. Whether we abound in giving or not will largely depend on our attitude toward material things and our obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ regarding them.

We are persuaded that insufficient funds is not the real reason many churches are not doing more work than they are. It is very likely that insufficient giving is the real problem. Too much for self and not enough for the work the Lord wants done continues to hamper and hinder the saving of souls. Does not God want us to abound in giving as He did the early churches?

JWB

Tyler Nathan Boyd



The picture you see is of Tyler who was born May 8, 1986 to Carol and Steve Boyd. They have one precious daughter, Allison, and obviously are so proud of their son. Carol is the daughter of Martha and the late Jerry Nathan Corlew, for whom Tyler was partly named. Steve is one of our sons and we are justly proud of him and his family.

Young Tyler weighed in at eight pounds and eight ounces, thus becoming our third grandson and the fifth grandchild.

As all who have grandchildren well know, there is joy and thanksgiving galore when such events occur. We anticipate a good future for this boy because he has such wonderful parents. We bid a fond entrance into our family to him and pray God's richest blessings to ever abide with him. Like the others, we love him beyond measure.

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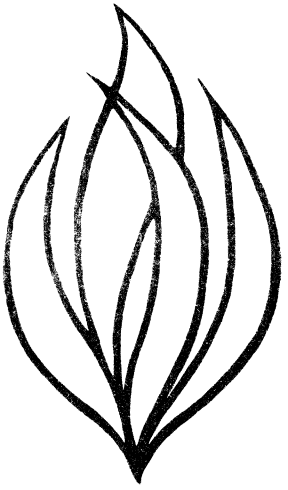

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 6**

The Foundation Of Society

It has been said that the nearest thing to heaven on earth is to be a member of a Christian home. Those who have been blessed with such a home will agree. Christ has given principles for the home which, when followed, will make the home what it ought to be. With a prayer that after studying this lesson you may turn again to your home and put forth the effort necessary to make sure it is a Christian home, we offer this lesson.

The home is older than the Lord's church. Like the church it originated in the mind of God and is a divine institution. No home will ever be what it ought to be if there is disregard of the Founder of it.

The home, again like the church, is composed of human beings. The first home consisted of Adam and Eve, created by God, given a residence in the Garden of Eden, and from that day to this the home has been the basic and foundational unit of society. As goes the home, so goes almost everything else. The collapse of the home means the collapse of society.

God gave mankind the home for the benefit of mankind from infancy to the grave. Let us suggest three reasons why God planned the home arrangement as He did.

Honorable Birth

First, it provides an honorable birth for children. *"Be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth"* was the command given to the first man and woman. Children born out of wedlock do not enter this world in a manner pleasing to God. This is no fault of the child, but is because of the sins of its parents. It is God's will that through the home and through holy marriage that children are born. Without this there is the spread of degeneracy and immorality that eventually destroys all who are involved, including the level of society.

Protection

Second, the home gives protection, help and physical provision to its members. Parents provide for the children. The physical necessities for each one comes through the cooperation

and work of the members of the home. We are expected to provide for our own. In sickness, health, good times, hard times, all times, we have a duty to each other to provide the things necessary in the physical realm for the sustenance of life.

Training

Third, the home is the primary training ground of the soul. Too many have wanted to shift this responsibility to the church, or even to the schools. But it belongs to the home. A child comes into the world as a piece of clay that is moldable and dependent. Children can be taught and trained to know the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. That duty belongs to fathers and mothers.

Some parents are more concerned about their child's development in sports, mental growth, physical and social advancement than they are the welfare of their soul and their relationship before God before whom they shall someday stand in judgment. At the root of the problems of many young people is the neglect of parents to assure their children of spiritual training and information from the Word of God (Ephesians 6:1-4; Proverbs 22:6).

We need more fathers like the young father who stood before the glass partition in the hospital gazing with admiration at his newborn child, and prayed, "God, help me to realize that this is more than just another mouth to feed, but a living soul to train for Thee."

Provision

The home is also the basic unit to provide for the elderly. There comes a time when the young must provide for the old, just as the old once provided for the young.

The Christian home is built upon God's plan for marriage (Matthew 19:1-12). No longer is life a matter of "I, me, mine" and "you, yours." In marriage there is to be that oneness that recognizes from "this day forward" the relationship is "we, us and ours." There is to be this oneness in the home. This oneness must extend to include both mates united in Christ.

Death ends marriage in the sight of God (Romans 7:2,3). But God does not require one to continue with a mate who is sexually unfaithful to them (Matthew 19:9). This and only this cause permits a marriage partner to divorce the mate. God's

foundation for the home is that the husband and wife enter marriage with respect for the life long existence of marriage. No court, no judge, no circumstance other than fornication has the power to dissolve marriage. Remarriages that are entered without the earlier marriage being dissolved by death or divorce because of fornication are adulterous in nature and can never be acceptable before God as an honorable home. Only the innocent party has the right to remarry.

Companionship

The home is a place of companionship. *"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him."* This was God's concern for mankind. God made for the male a suitable companion in the female. Many things can destroy this companionship, such as drunkenness, selfishness, failure to accept the duties of marriage. Sexual infidelity can even be the breaking of the tie.

Married people should enjoy the companionship of each other. They do not have each other forever. Ask those who have been called upon to bury their mate about companionship. Husbands and wives should live life together. Each should live in such a way that the other can admire them, desire them, seek their company. When this is done, and the inevitable time comes for parting through death, it can be said, "We had a wonderful Christian companionship together."

The Christian home is where the husband is the leader of the home. The spiritual leadership is also on his shoulders. Sad it is that so many men have neglected this most serious duty. Often it is the wife and mother who must give direction in service to God. This is not as it ought to be. A man ought to be ashamed to be so weak as to fail in what is his number one responsibility toward his family. It is far more important than physical provisions, and this does not minimize that duty. Each husband and father ought to commit himself to lead his wife and children to God through God's church. Regardless of whatever else he may achieve in life, when he does this he is a success before the Almighty. He is a failure if he does not do this with all his power and ability.

Often one parent or the other will keep the home divided religiously. This is so disturbing to children as well as each other. It brings a strain on the ties of love, respect and oneness. It destroys opportunities in training children aright. It creates

confusion and frsutration and often is the means of the destruction of faith in the hearts of members of the family.

Two fathers were talking and one said, "I give my son the very best education." The other commended him for this, but added, "Do not rob him of the greatest gift you can give." "And what is that," asked the first father. The second responded, "Do not fail to give him the memory of having a Christian father, a Christian example, a Christian upbringing. No other man can give him that.

Memory

When children are deprived of having a memory of a devoted Christian father and mother they have been cheated from the greatest security, comfort, pattern, faith and confidence that they ever receive. Happy is that home where the family is led by a Christian man and woman.

In the Christian home the mother is queen. Behind every good man there is usually the encouragement, support and advice of a good woman. The influence upon children, either for good or bad, that is in the power of the mother cannot be measured because of its enormity. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

So often men who have accomplished great things have had the benefit of a mother who sacrificed themselves in the training of their children. This was their duty, and they considered it their privilege. Nor were they inattentive and negligent in performing their godly task. It is a shame when women who have borne children will not put their primary duty first and attend to the home, but seek other careers of a social, political, financial emphasis and their children denied the guidance and comfort that God intended to be provided by the mother.

The "worthy woman" of Proverbs 31 was such that her husband praised her and her children called her blessed. This could not be said if she had failed in her God-given role of wife and mother.

Let us present a few straightforward words to the young. Especially those who have reached their teen years should give heed because they are accountable before God. They ought to be Christians. The home is not what it ought to be when there are young people of accountable age who have yet refused to obey the gospel.

Be A Christian

Being a Christian means to live a life of purity in Christ. In Galatians 5 we read a catalog of sins that includes the sin of "*lasciviousness.*" Not only are the young to abstain from fornication and adultery, but also reveling, riotous conduct, lasciviousness and such like. Some have the idea that because one is young he has the license to "go wild." This is not so. It is a mistake to encourage and allow the young to cultivate habits and appetites for that which is worldly and sinful. Rather, they should be taugnt self-control.

As for the sexual desire, it is clean, pure, wholesome and honorable. But God requires self-control and respect for this appetite. The satisfaction of the sexual desire outside of marriage is sinful. One of the purposes of marriage is to provide for this need (First Corinthians 7:2). But outside of holy wedlock that which is given by God for man's pleasure, companionship and reproduction of the race becomes an abomination. Lasciviousness and promiscuous conduct arouses the passions that cannot be satisfied outside of marriage. From such behavior the young must abstain. The deliberate creation of unlawful desire is to flirt with hell and sin against God.

Christian boys and girls ought assist each other in controlling these appetites rather than encouraging each other with temptation. It should be the goal of every boy and girl to present their bodies to their marriage partners unsoiled by sin, but pure, chaste, and void of the cheap conduct that is so rampant in society today.

Giving one's body to another outside of marriage is not a sign of love but a sign of degeneracy. Nor would one who truly loves another ever encourage the other to commit sin and damn the soul. We would urge the young to find the greatest happiness in life by following the way of Jesus Christ and *"keep thyself pure."*

Love

Home is where there is love. The source of love is God (First John 4:8). The fullest measure of love cannot exist apart from Christ. Love ties the family together. When there is love for God and His Word, love for His Son and His church, there will be love for each other. This love will make the home as near heaven as one can find on earth.

We close with this story. Imagine a young man who marries

his chosen young lady. After their honeymoon they return to their small and modest quarters and begin life together. After a while a child is given them; possibly more. The mother reads the child the Bible stories. The father leads them in spiritual upbringing. They are loyal to God in work and worship. Their hearts are thrilled as one by one their precious children are baptized into Christ. These children mature physically and spiritually, and before it seems that much time has elasped, the children are planning marriages. Being taught to seek a mate from among the people of God, they have the determination in their heart to rear their children as they have been reared, in the nuture and admonition of the Lord. It is then that one can realize even here on this earth and in this life the fondest and most precious blessings of having made the home a Christian home.

From this moment forward, let us all resolve that we shall do our best to assure each member of the family the benefit and treasure of living and growing in a truly Christian home.

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The Most Important Thing In The World For Man

We are privileged to spend but a few short years on this earth at the longest. It is necessary that we get our priorities in line and learn what really matters and what is important.

Ecclesiastes 12:13,14, *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."*

By these words Solomon makes it clear what is the most important thing to man. Respect for God and obedience to Him takes first place if we have things in proper order.

Samuel once said, *"Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."*

Jesus said, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). Closely aligned with that thought is Hebrews 5:9, *"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."*

From these statements it is impossible to miss the conclusion. Obedience to God is the most important thing in the world for man.

Life

In Ecclesiastes, before Solomon announced the conclusion, he had presented a man's life. Verse one gave the first part of life, youth, the time one ought to remember God. In verse three he speaks of the time after youth and growing old, when the house, the physical body, shall tremble. The keepers of the house, the hands, shall tremble. The grinders, the teeth, will be lost. The eyes, those that look out of windows, are darkened and vision is less efficient. Sleep is not deep and burdens are heavier. A person begins life, passes youth, his mid-years come and go into the older days, and then, according to the natural schedule, he dies. The dust returns to the earth as it was. Mourners are heard in the streets. The cord of life is broken. The spirit no longer remains in the body.

Man might be able to do many marvelous things. He might even be able to prolong life to some degree. But death he cannot escape, even if he lives to be an old, old man. In view of that reality, Solomon concludes what is really the most important to man. Respect and obedience to God is it.

Love

Why is obedience so important? First, it is a way of showing love for God. Jesus taught, *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment."* (Mark 12:30). *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). *"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."* (John 15:14). *"For this is the love of God; that we keep his commandments."* (First John 5:3). We have seen car bumper signs that declare, "Honk if you love Jesus." Well, any ole goose can honk. You can even get a dog out of the road

with a honk. How popular would a bumper sign be that read, "Obey if you love Jesus."

Faith

Obedience is the way we show we believe Him. *"But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* (Hebrews 11:6). The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is a chapter of great men and women of faith. But in each report concerning them their faith manifested itself in the doing what God instructed them to do. Noah built an ark. Abraham offered Isaac. Moses chose suffering with God's people over the pleasures of sin in Egypt. Such was evident with each one mentioned in the chapter.

Wisdom

Obedience is the way we show ourselves wise in God's sight. *"Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock... And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand..."* (Matthew 7:24,26). Both the wise and foolish heard the word. Both knew the will of the Lord. But the wise obeyed while the foolish ignored.

Other Matters

Since obeying God is the most important, let us consider some matters that evidently some people consider minor. It matters what kind of music one uses in worship to God. Those who follow the New Testament pattern do not use mechanical instruments of music in worship, but are content to *"speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11). We do not have the liberty to add another kind of music to that which God has authorized. We cannot have mechanically produced music by His authority. It is just not to be found in His will for the Christian in worship. When we sing we are obeying God. By singing we show our love, demonstrate our faith, and follow the path of wisdom. It is incorrect to attempt to worship God our own way without due respect to what He has authorized.

We partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week

as was done by the first Christians (Acts 20:7). This memorial is given in honor of Christ. *"This do in remembrance of me."* We show our love for Christ, respect for His will, our faith in Him when we do as He and His apostles taught the Christians in New Testament times to do.

Our buildings usually have a baptistry. There people are *"buried with him in baptism"* (Colossians 2:12); buried in baptism, into Christ, into His death (Romans 6:3,4). In Acts 8:38,39, both men went into the water and both came up out of the water, the baptism taking place in between. We bury people in water because baptism is a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16). Peter commanded it of the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:48) and on Pentecost (Acts 2:38). By doing as inspired teachers taught we show our love, faith and respect for Deity.

Whose Will?

There is a difference between obeying God's will and doing our own will, even though at times that may appear to be the same. Let me illustrate. A father died and in his will he instructed his son to plant field A in wheat, field B in corn, and field C in cotton. The son considered the matter and agreed that field A was a good wheat field and so planted. He agreed that field B was good for corn. But when he came to field C he thought soy beans would be a better crop than cotton and planted soy beans. How many times did the son obey the father's will? He did not obey even once. Each time he did his own will. It just so happened that the father commanded what he wanted twice.

Many are this way in matters of religion. When they like what God declares, they will strive to go along. But when they want something else, whether the Father has authorized it or not, they "do their own thing." But our attitude should be, *"Not my will, but thine be done." "Not as I will but as thou wilt."* Obedience means doing the will of God even if others disagree, and even when you do not see the wisdom of His command. Obedience is doing what God says, the way God said do it, for the reason He said do it, because He said do it.

Rewards

There are rewards that result from obeying God's will. James 5:16 teaches, *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man*

availeth much." Those who are God's children have the privilege of prayer. Have you ever tried to picture one separated from God, rebellious in his sins, disobedient to His commands, trying to even address God in prayer? He cannot say, "My Father who art in heaven," because he is still a child of the devil. He has never obeyed the commands whereby one is born into God's family. Can he say, *"Lord, save me. I come to you in praye*

Can he say, "Lord, save me; I come to you in prayer"? But Jesus has already taught what one must do to be saved, and it is not "praying though," but obedience to the commands of the gospel, faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. There is no way he can address Deity in his disobedience.

By obedience one enters Christ. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."* (Romans 8:1). Salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Only by obedience, even to the command to be baptized, can one enter Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27). We are baptized into Christ.

Obedience results in spiritual hope for the soul in eternity. Those who die in the Lord die in hope (Revelation 14:13). Those who mourn the passing of loved ones in Christ do not grieve as those who have no hope (First Thessalonians 4:13ff).

To obey is the most important thing in the world for a human being. Because man is born, only to someday die, that which provides for eternity ranks above all else. Only by obedience to God's will can such provision be made. All things pertaining to Christ are important when we realize the importance of being obedience to His will.

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ARTICLE: NEEDS HIS OWN MEDICINE

I recently publicly exposed and opposed false doctrine being taught at a certain congregation. One "loving brother" criticized me in his bulletin for not having gone to the preacher privately before opposing his teaching publicly. Of course, the Bible does not teach to oppose public error privately first. I did as did Christ

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Truth Shall Make You Free

"Then Jesus said to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31,32).

Three points are implied by this statement. One, man is in a condition of bondage due to his sin. Isaiah 59:1,2, *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."* Man is in sin, an unsaved state of spiritual slavery to Satan. Paul (Romans 6:16-18) spoke of how brethren had been servants of sin and were later servants of righteousness by virtue of their obedience to the form of doctrine delivered them. Man in sin is not free, but enslaved.

Two, there is a means provided whereby man can be delivered from this servitude. This is a statement of hope of deliverance.

Three, the truth is the key that unlocks the shackles of sin and bondage. Think of one bound hand and foot with chains and locks. The lock can be opened and the bonds removed but only with a proper key. Spiritually speaking, the truth of God is the key that unlocks man's soul from the grip of Satan.

It Matters

In spite of the fact that truth is the only means of deliverance, it makes little difference to some if that truth is unheard, unbelieved and unfollowed. With many, truth is not that important because they are willing to follow whatever they want, thinking that error and truth will produce the same desired results. Many have been deceived into believing a lie and still think all is well with their souls. There actually are religious leaders who contend that what you believe is not as important and being sincere and honest in whatever belief you hold. It is not too much to charge against the religious world that most denominational bodies either preach or practice just such an attitude toward the revealed truth of God. Honesty and sincerity, though essential, will not save unless that which is believed and obeyed is truth.

Just think about this attitude in other realms of life and we can see how radically absurd it is. Suppose one goes to the medicine chest and takes some pills from it, thinking they are one thing, but are mistaken about it. Will he receive the same result regardless of what he honestly takes? Or suppose a man driving headlong and sincerely down a road with the idea that he is going a certain direction and toward a certain destination, honestly and sincerely thinking he is on the right road, will he still arrive at the desired destination even if he is on the wrong road?

Knowable

Another very important fact is evidenced in these words of Jesus. Truth can be known. With so many declaring today that we really cannot be sure about anything anymore, Jesus said we can know the truth. Furthermore, unless we know it we cannot be free from the bondage that ensnares us. This idea that we all make mistakes and therefore nobody can ever really determine what is right and wrong contradicts our Lord. It is a tragedy that even some leaders in the church have adopted such stupid foolishness. To some, the truth is like looking for a black cat in a dark room that is not really in the room anyway. But that is not what the Lord taught.

But We Can!

Some people cry, "We just cannot see the Bible alike." Agreed, we do not see it alike, but that does not mean we cannot see it alike. This is the cry of religious people who try to justify the religious division in the world. Why anybody would want to justify it in view of the Lord's prayer for unity, and Paul's condemnation of division, is hard to understand. We can see it alike. One trouble is that people are not hearing it alike. So much "preaching" is so colored with denominational dogma and creeds that misapply that the truth is covered over by the doctrines of men.

There is only one way to understand a thing anyway. Everything else is to misunderstand it, unless God has given us a book that calls for unity but also makes it impossible. Some, possibly unknowingly, are blaming God and His book for the confusion that exists religiously. I may misunderstand and you understand and we are divided. I may understand and you

misunderstand and we are divided. We both may misunderstand in different ways and are divided. But when we both understand what God's book teaches we will stand united. That is either true or the very division God condemns is His own creation.

Interpretation

"But we interpret differently." This is a similar plea of those who do not really wish to be united as God teaches. To interpret means to get the meaning. Unless God has given more than one meaning, when we both interpret we will be alike. When either or both misinterpret, then we have the division and confusion. We ought be more careful than to shift the blame of man's rebellion, ignorance and division on God and His Word.

Take the matter of baptism. It is a subject that is neither difficult nor complicated. You cannot misunderstand without denominational help. When those in the New Testament heard gospel preaching they were baptized. Today so many never hear the sermons the early Christians preached and heard. So they do almost anything and everything except what New Testament people obeyed. Peter said one is to *"Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sin."* That is as clear as can be. The word translated "*for*" always points forward to the result, never backward. Nobody was ever baptized in the Bible record because they were already saved. The word means "in order to." Here was a command that must be obeyed for sins to be remitted. No amount of "interpretation" is going to rewrite what Peter taught. People simply need to submit to the teaching and quit trying to justify some denominational code that omits it.

Again, as to the "form" of baptism, that is no heavy problem. The word "baptize" means to immerse, plunge beneath, submerge. Why should men argue for sprinkling and pouring as baptism? In these two instances the subject is not submerged or baptized. Paul taught that we are buried in baptism (Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12). Why is his testimony doubted and disbelieved? This is not a matter of difficult interpretation. Just obey the teaching.

"But great scholars and preachers preach it otherwise." So what? Men often follow their own way rather than God's way. What some "scholar" may declare does not alter the Word of God one bit. Scholars have upheld just about everything and anything at one time or another. Nothing is more fleeting and temporary than the pronouncments by the "scholars." You must

remember, a few years ago (it is worse at the time of this writing) most of your great religious scholars do not have much use for the Bible anyway. They deny the inspiration of it, the Deity of Christ, the virgin birth, miracles of the Bible, creation, the resurrection, the second coming of Christ, etc. Fifty-four per cent have denied the existence of the devil twenty years ago. Even more deny him now. Heaven and hell are disbelieved by the majority of the "reverends" and clergymen. These are the same great scholars that tell you that baptism is sprinkling and pouring. Follow men to your damnation. But follow Christ to heaven. Paul warned how the wise of this world would have little use for truth (First Corinthians 3:18,19).

Why The Differences

Why are all these contradictory doctrines being preached? If people really want to know what to do to be saved, let them consult the Giver of salvation, Jesus Christ. Do not go to your lawyer, banker, real estate agent or theological doctor. Turn to your Bible and read for yourself.

Let us ask "preachers" this all important question, "What must I do to be saved?" One might answer, "Nothing. Salvation is by grace alone. Just wait and let God." He might even teach you that you were foreordained to heaven or hell even before you were born and there is nothing you can do about your destiny either way. Some do teach that.

But Jesus did not teach there was nothing for you to do. *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). Over and over and over again, the Bible teaches both God's part and man's part in God's plan for saving man from sin.

Preacher number two might tell you, "Only believe." Gospel preachers will also tell you to believe, but they will not add that denominational heresy by saying "only." James wrote, "*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified and not by faith only.*" (James 2:24). Yet, men will still preach that false doctrine. Salvation involves faith, but much, much more than faith. There is obedience, without which none can claim Christ as the author of their salvation (Hebrews 5:9).

Preacher number three might tell you to repent of sins and then believe. This is an impossible twisting and wresting of Scriptures. John the Baptist told people to repent toward God

and believe in Christ. But upon believing in Christ there are other acts of obedience awaiting to be met. The preacher might tell you to "turn to the Lord" and lead you to expect some kind of direct operation from God that will give you emotional chill bumps. But the Bible never teaches any such thing as that.

A fourth preacher, taking the Bible in hand and quoting book, chapter and verse will tell you to believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Luke 13:3), confess your faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9), and be baptized for the remission of sin (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38), and be added to the saved, which is the church (Acts 2:47). While others were spouting the dogmas and doctrines of men, this last preacher is telling you what the Bible teaches and telling you where it teaches it.

Why do not these preachers get together and teach the same thing? The reason is because they are not all following the same standard, the same guide, the same rule. If they were, they would teach the same thing. They would teach the truth and their hearers that believed and obeyed the truth would be made free from the bondage of sin.

Illustration

Suppose you go to the Post Office to mail a package. Regardless of the clerk that helps you, you will learn exactly what postage is necessary because each clerk looks up the rate in the same book and instructs accordingly. When men follow the Bible, omitting their creeds, manuals, feelings, catechisms, conferences, councils, prayer books, traditions, ancestral hand-me-downs, and so-called latter day revelations, they will give you the same answer. It will be the truth. That truth will deliver a person from sin. Jesus said so. Do you believe Him?

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(continued from page 10)

and His apostles.

But if it were not so serious it would be humorous because this man was condemning open criticisms before private inquiries, but he openly was criticial of me and never contacted me before he did it. Does he believe what he teaches, or does he, like many sympathizers of error, operate on two standards, one for himself and another for what he dislikes? JWB

The Disciples Of Christ

"Then Jesus said to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31,32).

By the phrase disciples of Christ, we have no reference whatever to the denominational body that wears that name. This will become very apparent as the lesson proceeds. We intend to speak of the disciples which are defined for us in the New Testament.

We need a good definition of a disciple. The term is used in three ways. Sometimes it has reference to the twelve apostles, such as the time when Jesus washed the disciples' feet (John 13:5). The only ones present with Jesus on that occasion were the apostles. All of the apostles were disciples, but not all disciples are apostles.

Sometimes the word is used with reference to a learner, a pupil, one who is receiving teaching and instruction from another. In this sense it does not necessarily mean that the disciple is a Christian, but one who is being taught. Such is the use in John 6:66, when His hard sayings caused some who had been listening to His teaching to turn away from Him.

Sometimes it refers to one who has been obedient to the gospel of Christ and has thereby become a Christian. *"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Acts 11:26).

Continues

In our text we find the Lord's own definition of discipleship. *"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."* It is significant that the Lord did not say, "If you are honest and sincere to your convictions." Nor did He say, "If you follow the dictates of your conscience and feelings." Nor did He say, "If you follow diligently the religion or faith of your choice." But only when one continues in the Word of Christ are they defined as disciples.

Continuing in the Word implies there was a coming to that Word and a beginning of service. But not only was there a beginning, but a faithful continuation of walking in the light of Christ.

It matters not how willing people are to set aside the Lord's Word in order to accomodate their own sentiments, thoughts, feelings and traditions. The Lord does not accept honesty and sincerity in the place of abiding in the Word, submissively and obedicently. It is *"then"* that one is rightly called a disciple of Christ.

Abide

What does it mean to continue in or abide in His Word? Let the Bible speak. *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son."* (Second John 9). To abide means to reside, dwell, stay within the confines, limits and boundaries. One cannot go beyond, add to, take from, transgress, violate the doctrine of Christ and continue to abide in His Word.

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (First John 2:4). These are strong words and they come from the inspired pen of the "apostle of love." Please note the severity of them. If a person does not obey the Lord's commands, he cannot lay claim to knowing Him nor being His child. Rather, he makes himself a liar. To make the claim of being a disciple of Christ while refusing to abide by the authority and doctrine of Christ is self-condemning. Revelation 21:8 teaches the condemnation of all liars in the lake of fire and brimstone.

We are not pleasing to the Lord by just crying verbally to Him (Matthew 7:21). There must be the doing of His will. *"Blessed are they that do his commandments that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter into the gates of the city."* (Revelation 22:14). We need to ask, "Upon whom are these blessings pronounced?" It is those who do His commandments.

Abiding in His Word and continuing therein necessitates the knowledge of His Word, believing and obeying His Word. Abiding in His Word is essential to our eternal salvation.

If I may set aside this teaching, ignore and fail to respect it, on what grounds do I have the right to accept anything the Bible teaches? If I can reject this positive injunction, I can reject anything I want to reject without bad consequences. If I can claim discipleship while refusing to be obedient, then how can I have any confidence in anything the Holy Scriptures proclaim? Christ says the true followers of Him must continue in, abide in,

come to and stay with His will, knowing it, believing it, obeying it in my life.

Conditional

Notice another mark of discipleship in the Lord's definition. He is speaking to Jews who already believed on Him. Yet, He uses the term *"if." "If ye abide..."* If those who teach salvation by faith only and then couple with that the doctrine that one cannot fall, and the people who teach the one doctrine usually teach both (like Baptists), then why would the Lord use the term *"if"*? If the doctrine once saved always saved is true, and salvation is ours by faith alone, those to whom Jesus spoke were already saved and could not fall anyway. He should not have questioned the possibility that they might ever discontinue in His Word. If such doctrines are true, then it is a foregone conclusion that they not only would continue in His Word, but could not do otherwise. But evidently Jesus thought they could cease from continuing in His Word and no longer be classified as His disciple. The truth is, one is not saved by faith alone, nor is one who is saved necessarily always saved.

The hearers of Jesus were not in heaven, yet. Before they would ever see heaven they must meet the lifelong condition of *"continue in"* His Word. They knew His will and had heard it. They were learning it more and more; believed on Him. But they were not in the glories of heaven, yet. They could cease to walk as He walked if they chose to do so. Jesus warns them against doing the very thing that some teach they could not possibly do anyway. Do not accept such false doctrines calculated and concocted by men.

When one considers James 2:20-24, it is evident that we are saved by faith, but when are we saved by faith? By what kind of faith are we saved? It is faith that works in obedience. A faith that does not work is a dead faith and will save nobody. Only that faith that is made *"perfect,"* that is, whole, complete, mature, is saving faith. It is faith **with** works that justifies.

We must also consider Ephesians 2:8,9 in this connection. *"'For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast."* We have the situation where Paul teaches we are not saved by works but James says that we are. Is it not obvious that these two inspired writers are speaking of different kinds of works? Since the Holy Spirit directed them both, it is

necessary that we learn the kind of which each speaks.

Paul says we cannot be saved by works of which we can boast. We cannot earn, merit nor deserve salvation. We cannot save ourselves by ourselves. James speaks of works of obedience that makes one's faith perfect or complete. Discipleship demands the doing of works. Indeed, the very next verse (Ephesians 2:10) teaches *"we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."* There are commands to obey to become a Christian, and commands to obey to be a Christian faithfully. There is no contradiction nor conflict whatever between the two writers. Discipleship demands works of obedience.

Essential

We can never get to heaven without being a disciple of Christ. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6). It is not enough to know who He is, what He taught, or even to believe it and give it mental assent. This is a necessary start. But one must obey and continue in His Word. Failure here means condemnation (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

"But is God so cruel as to threaten me with hell if I do not obey Him?" To answer let us imagine a moment a commander of a ship whose small son is on board. Suppose the son climbs the highest mast on the vessel and could not get down. One false step would mean sudden death. The father took a rifle and shouted the command to jump into the water or he would shoot. The boy jumped and was rescued immediately. What appeared to be the father's "cruelty" was actually a motivation for the son to do what he had to do to be saved. Here is where our trust in God comes into focus.

We must trust God completely. Our trust must be as was that of a soldier of Tiberius Caesar who was asked, "If the emperor commanded you to burn the capitol city, would you do it?" His answer was, "Yes. If the emperor commanded it, he would know that it was for the best." While we have our doubts about such submission to any man, we have none that such is the way it should be toward God. God's warning and threats are manifestations of His love toward us as much as His promises.

There are other definitions and characteristics of genuine discipleship found in Scripture. But this passage emphasizes these things that we have mentioned and we commend the

Word of Christ to every honest heart.

† † † † †

Fruits Of Excuses

Let us get a few fundamental and irrevocable Biblical facts before us. There is one way to heaven and that way is Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The way to hell is the way of sin (Romans 6:23; James 1:15).

One can sin either by doing what he ought not (First John 3:4), or by failing to do what he ought (James 4:17). All who are accountable before God stand guilty of sin (Romans 6:9,23). This means that all stand in need of forgiveness of sins.

The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:15). In the gospel is revealed the plan whereby God makes man righteous. Man's part in God's plan includes faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins.

Scripture warns that most shall never enter heaven (Matthew 7:13,14). It is not that opportunity is not afforded. It is because they will not face and accept the reality of their own guilt of sin. Rather, they make excuses for their transgressions and neglect, attempting to justify their evil one way or another. Some have even said, "I know what I did was wrong, but..." and then proceed to excuse themselves as if they were not really guilty and therefore undeserving of condemnation for their sins.

It is not always difficult to establish the reason behind our sins. We might even be able to explain why we have done as we have. But there is no way to make wrong as right. There is no way to make sin as righteousness. There is nothing that justifies sin and allows it to stand as if it were not sin. All manner of excuses will have no effect whatsoever on the mind of God.

Why Make Excuses?

So what good does it do to make excuses for our sinfulness? Indeed, do we not really add to the harm and injury that sin has already caused? Let us take a look at what excuses will actually produce. We can see the value, or lack of value, of excuses

when we study the excuses people gave in Biblical records for their failures.

Consider Adam and Eve. God gave them a command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They violated that command. When they were confronted with their sin, one by one they each attempted to justify their action by shifting the responsibility to someone else. Adam tried to place the blame on Eve, and Eve tried to blame the devil. In a measure, they were correct as far as others having an influence on them to do evil. But the responsibility rested with each one individually to do the will of the Lord and not violate His command. Nobody makes anybody else do what is sinful. They may encourage another to sin, tempting, even helping to sin. But nobody can make anybody else sin against their will. We can say "no" to sin if we are determined to do so. We cannot hide behind some lame excuse and blame it on others.

The result for Adam and Eve was that their punishment was suffered anyway because they stood condemned. Being cast out of the Garden of Eden it is evident that God did not show Himself a "mushy" God and say in essence, "Well, all right. If others led you astray, I won't hold you responsible." But God did hold them responsible. Excuses failed.

Other Failures

When Aaron formed the golden calf while Moses was on Mt. Sinai, his attempt to remove responsibility from himself when his part in this idolatry was evident proved a failure. He cried how Moses had been gone for so long a time and the people grew restless. He even lied outright about how the calf came into being, saying he simply threw in the precious elements and out came this calf. Did Moses, or God, buy that kind of excuse? Certainly they did not.

The people were made to drink foul water with the ground up calf in it. The impenitent were slain. Excuses they could multiply. But no justified reason existed. God does not accept excuses.

Moses learned that first hand when God called him into duty at the burning bush. When instructed to lead Israel out of Egypt Moses gave one excuse after another why he should not do the job. But God gave that no heed. He expected Moses to do what Moses was commanded to do.

God told Saul to go down to the wicked and idolatrous

Amalekites and utterly destroy them. He went down and won a tremendous victory over that perverse nation, but spared the king and the best of their flocks and herds, and evidently allowed many of them to escape because they reappear on the scene thereafter.

When he returned Samuel asked him the meaning of his failure to do what God instructed. He contended that he had obeyed in spite of the glaring evidence that he had not. He tried to blame the people, even suggesting that he saved their animals in order to sacrifice to God.

Samuel told him, *"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams."* (First Samuel 15:22). All of the excuses and attempts of Saul to escape his responsibility in bringing about this vast disobedience to divine command produced nothing benficial for him or his people. Excuses just do not produce good fruit.

When we turn into the New Testament we read of those who heard the invitation to the great supper that was prepared for them. But, as the Scripture reveals, *"And they all with one consent began to make excuse."* (Luke 14:18).

Does Not Matter

It really did not matter what the excuses were that were offered by those who were invited but refused to come. The fact is, they did not come and they made excuse as to why they did not come. These excuses may have seemed good enough to them, but they were not sufficient for the host.

The lesson Jesus taught is clear and plain. He has prepared the great spiritual feast for those who will accept His invitation. Those that come shall be bountifully blessed. But those who make excuse, regardless of the nature of the excuse, shall be excluded from the blessings that are offered from God through Christ. Excuses simply do not produce good fruit.

Those who preach and teach and show concern for the souls of others do what they can to urge people to come to Christ and be saved. They often are blessed in seeing someone respond favorably to the call of God. But there are those other times, heartbreaking times, when they must listen to the excuses of people as to why they should remain in sin and not be saved. It is heartbreaking, not only because it is discouraging to the soul winner, but because a precious soul, that could live with God in this life and in eternity hereafter, remains in a lost state, without

any hope, nothing in anticipation but the despair and agony of an eternal fire of hell.

Often there are those who say they agree with every vital point of the doctrine of Christ that they must obey, and even express an intention to someday, somewhere, sometime, render obedience and be saved. But for the present, they offer excuse.

These excuses ofttimes run the remaining course of one's life, and prove to be insurmountable and the spirit leave the body, unprepared to meet God. It is beyond understanding why anybody would allow any excuse to keep them away from God. Regardless of how heavy that excuse may seem, or how reasonable it may appear at first, should one leave this life to face judgment, not having rendered obedience to the gospel and lived faithfully thereafter, the nature or enormity of the excuse on which one leaned will not relase him from his doom.

The Other Way

There is a better way to go. Forget excuses and simply show love for God by doing what He commands. Ridding oneself of excuses is not that difficult. If one would concentrate on the blessings and spiritual needs as much as searching for excuses why he should continue in a damned condition, he would soon see the folly of excuses and hasten to come to Christ.

Let us close this lesson by showing the unreasonableness of excuses. We can see that excuses do not produce the desired result. Suppose you wished to reach a certain destination. You knew one way had always proved to be the right way to reach your goal. Others before you had gone that way and were successful. Then there was another way offered to you, but you knew that those who traveled that road never reached the destination. Does it take superior intelligence to decide which one you ought to take?

Obedience is the only way to heaven. But who has even shown himself acceptable to God through offering excuses for disobedience?

Excuses are more likely transparent cover-up attempts of the lack of love and lack of faith in the Word of God. Admitting this lack might seem too strong to acknowledge, so instead of facing that reality, up comes some excuse to make refusal appear rational. But it never has worked for anybody, nor shall it ever. This includes me and you both.

Heaven is too wonderful and hell is too terrible for any kind of excuse to cause us to miss heaven and suffer hell.

† † † † †

ARTICLE: BEWARE OF THE "HOLIER-THAN-THOU"

As the readers of ***A Burning Fire*** are aware, this booklet consists of written sermons that I have preached through the years. It will contain presentations of the truth as well as exposure and opposition to error. This is the kind of preaching recorded in the Scriptures.

Because of the nature of this effort we seldom make specific reference to preachers, churches, elders, editors, or college people by name who propagate various false teachings. There are a number of similar publications among brethren that operate on about the same position. Such publications have a place among us and serve much good.

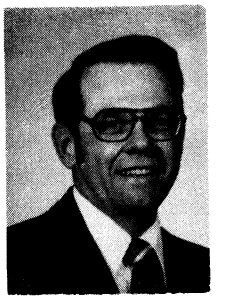
But there are some who severely criticize papers and people who do name names and identify false teachers for all to recognize. We contend that such is both Biblical and useful. There are many brethren who do not want to become entangled with false teachers and movements that arise from time to time and the specific identification of such things is quite helpful.

But there be some who publish materials that thrash with venom anything that specifies the sources of error. They assume a "holier-than-thou" air about them, proclaiming that they do not "stoop" to dealing with brotherhood problems. They fail to realize that a goodly portion of the New Testament would never have been written if the inspired men refused to deal with brotherhood problems, naming names as well as false doctrines.

It is a shame that some seem to think that opposing error is unbecoming. Some of the timid sympathizers of error like to say that critics of error do not know "the whole story." How do they know that? Have they done their homework and checked whether they are correct in condemning those who condemn error? Just because they do not know whereof they speak, why should they think everybody is like that?

To fight the good fight of faith requires both positive and negative work. For those who are "too pure" to soil their hands to battle error, we only have pity on you. May you soon mature.

Very Revealing



JAMES W. BOYD

The Bible contains many severe criticisms of doctrines, people, attitudes and every false way. As faithful servants of Christ we must learn to be criticial of the same things, yet with the proper attitude and motive. But we are mistaken to think we are less than loving when we expose and oppose those people and positions that run ɔntrary to Scripture.

That there has arisen a liberal tidal wave among brethren cannoᵗ be denied by anyone who keeps up with what goes on. One problem among brethren is tha they do not keep themselves informed and are swallowed up in erro before they even realize it. Especially should we know the inroads anc innovations of digression invading the brotherhood.

But some are viciously critical. This is characteristic of many liberal: who only have criticism for those who are criticial of error. Never doe: one read or hear criticisms from them about the departures from truth being taught and practiced among brethren, but they are only opposec to those who oppose the apostasy so evident among many brethren. Is i not revealing concerning them that they do this? To defend error is sin.

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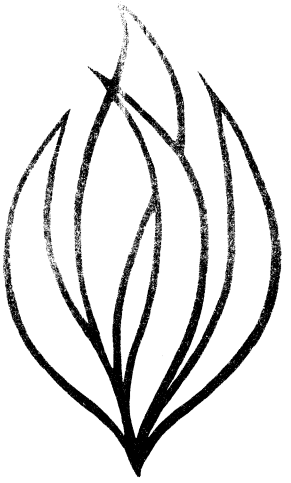

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 7**

Five Facts We Must Face

Most people pride themselves on being reasonable, whether they really are or not. Most would be offended if charged with a void of intelligence. Most prefer to consider themselves as willing to accept the truth when presented. None would think it unfair, unreasonable, nothing but right, if asked to face reality. Well, on the assumption that we are all that way, rather than just thinking we are, our lesson calls upon us to face a few facts of reality. Hopefully, none of us will withdraw and hide from the truth, but rather will react and perform according to the truth.

We stand on the foundation that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and all-sufficient Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). If one does not share this conviction concerning the Bible, then he needs to examine the evidence for this claim. The lesson will have meaning only when one does agree with the teaching of the Bible.

Nature Of Man

The first fact we must face is the dual nature of the human being. Man (mankind) is body and spirit (Genesis 1:26; Second Corinthians 4:16; First Thessalonians 5:23; Matthew 10:28). Those who believe in God do not find this difficult to accept. Jesus taught God is Spirit (John 4:24), and we are in His spiritual image (Genesis 1:26). Man was created by God, his body formed from the dust of the earth, and God made him a living soul. He is soul, in the sense of having life. He is soul, in the sense of having a spirit.

The doctrine of materialism denies the soul and spirit of man. Humanism denies that man is anything more than the beasts of the field with only physical body and nothing more. But the Bible teaches the multi-facet nature of mankind. We are asked to accept this first fact.

Death

The second fact to face is that the body dies. We need never have heard of the Bible to know this is true. In every nation, tribe, and society, this is common experience. There are columns in our papers everyday that remind us of this reality.

The Bible reads, *"Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return."* (Genesis 3:19). There is a time to die (Ecclesiastes 3:2). It is appointed unto man once to die (Hebrews 9:27). We need not belabor such an obvious reality.

We must say that the Bible teaches the resurrection of the body (First Corinthians 15), and it shall be a *"spiritual body."* But we are not in a position to tell you that we understand what all that involves. It will be an incorruptible, glorious, spiritual body. Whatever else, we only can engage in speculation. But this does not affect the reality that the body dies. This occurs when the spirit separates from the body (James 2:26).

Spirit Survives

A third fact is that the spirit of man survives the death of the body. While atheists, humanists, etc, deny this, there is no doubt that the Bible teaches it. You can decide which to believe. That which offers mankind a hope for the future, a reason for existence, a divine origin of his spirit, or that which tells us we came from nowhere and that by an accident, here for no reason except to satisfy ourselves, and going nowhere anyway, and therefore, nothing really matters. Is it a hard choice?

The body dies but the spirit returns to the disposition of God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The spirit of man does not die when the body dies. Man's physical death is not the termination of his existence. Such accounts as the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16) is sufficient to document this truth.

In a true sense, death is but one event (a major one, to be sure) in the path of man's existence. God is the God of the living. This was affirmed by Jesus concerning people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, long after their physical deaths. Jesus approved of Martha's belief that there will be the resurrection from the dead (John 11:20-25). I cannot accept Jesus to be God's Son and deny what He taught.

So we should face the reality of our dual nature, the death of the body, and the continued existence of the soul.

Things Change

Do we find it difficult to realize the fourth fact; namely, that death changes many things? We speak of physical death. Possibly more than any other one event, many things, all things, are affected with a single event. Death marks the end of the job.

This being true, we wonder why some go at their jobs as if they were going to be there forever, even to the neglect of matters that will involve eternity. Every honorable labor and duty will cease. Your association with your family will end. You will be no longer among your earthly friends.

But death also marks the end of the opportunity to sin. Never again will one be tempted to violate God's law. At the same time, never again will one be able to tell the sinner how to be saved. Death makes the song, "Work For The Night Is Coming" more meaningful.

But death also terminates the opportunity to be saved. If one has not taken advantage of the time of mercy now extended and goes into the great beyond unprepared, he will have no opportunity again to escape hell, nor prepare himself for heaven. Of all of man's needs, his greatest need is salvation from the wages of sin, which is spiritual death (Romans 6:23), separation for eternity from God (First Thessalonians 1:7-9). God has provided a Savior, and Jesus Christ, His Son is that Savior. Unless one comes to Christ, the only way of salvation (Acts 4:12; John 14:6) while he lives in this life, death will change his time of opportunity. It will be no more. There is no second chance. There is a *"great gult fixed"* and there will be no crossing over. If man is saved when he physically dies, all will be well with him. If he is lost, he will remain lost eternally because there is nothing he can do about it anymore.

While physical death marks the door of entrance into the spiritual and eternal realm, it makes a difference regarding the possibility of salvation.

No Escape

The fifth and final fact we must face is the fact that death will come to each one. There is no escape from it. How, when, where, and other such questions we cannot answer. But the reality of it cannot be denied. We are "here today and gone tomorrow." Tomorrow's newspaper could report your death. We write these words of warning, and before you read them death may have overtaken the writer. It is doubtful that anyone really and seriously questions that he will eventually be overcome by death, but many just will not face that reality now while they are living and do what they must do while they can do it.

In view of these five faces, what do you intend to do

regarding your eternity? Whether we want to face them or not, these facts are there. We will face them eventually. We make an appeal to your good sense and wisdom. We make an appeal to your reasonableness. Since these things are before us, should we now make preparation for them? Is not that the only reasonable, intelligent, sensible, rational, logical way? For you see, it is not a matter, "Will we face them now or later?" It is a matter, "Will we be ready to face them?"

We need not fear the future nor dread these realities. That they give us misgivings and concern is natural. But we can be glad that this life is not all there is to us. We can be glad we are not mere beasts. We can be thankfully proud that we are spirit as will as body. While we enjoy life and cherish it, we know it cannot last here on earth, but we can be glad that we have the opportunity to live forever in heaven with God and all the redeemed. We need not live life in fear and dread of the tomb, but with purpose, expectancy, assurance, comfort. We can live confidently and abundantly. And we are the ones that not only can decide, but must decide. Each one must decide for himself or herself. Nobody can decide for anybody else.

Will you face these facts now, and come to Christ?

† † † † †

God's Infallible Rule

"Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good." (First Thessalonians 5:21). This is a specific and direct command and it should be obeyed. *"Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (First John 4:1). God will hold every person responsible for what he believes and practices in service and worship to God as well as for the manner of life he lives. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10).

God has blessed man with an intellect, the power to reason, the ability to know, understand, and with the power of choice. If we allow others to lead us astray, both we and the one who

misleads us shall be lost. *"And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."* (Matthew 15:14). Therefore, the need to measure, and to measure by the proper rule, is of utmost concern to those who want to be saved.

The very command to prove, put to the test, try the spirits, not allow yourself to be misled, all necessarily implies there is some rule by which to measure. God has given us His infallible rule. It is unfortunate that there be many who have set aside God's rule for one of their own making. Let us look at some of the substitute rules men have used.

A Faulty Group Of Rules

"I see no harm in this or that. It seems all right to me." With many, if they do not see any harm in it, whether it is authorized of God or not, they consider it harmless and right. But that does not prove anything to be right. That makes man's thinking the standard rather than God's rule.

"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Proverbs 14:12). Jeremiah warned, *"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23). *"Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes."* (Deuteronomy 12:8).

So many rely almost totally on their feelings, adopting the fallacious standard, "If it feels good, do it." Poison may be made to taste like sugar, but it is still poison. Things are not always what they seem. Man is not the one to determine what should and should not be. That is an attempt to take God off His throne and replace Him with man.

"If I think something is right, it is right for me." This rule is closely akin to the first. It is what causes people to make themselves their own god. With this kind of "rule," if it can be called a rule, there would not be anything that is prohibited if it was pleasing to the one doing it. While it is sinful to go against what you think is true (Romans 14:23), it is not true that whatever you think is true is necessarily true just because you think so.

His Authority

Many of us have experienced occasions in teaching people

when passages of Scripture are cited and what the Bible says is noted, yet they will remark something like this, "I know that is what it says, but I really think this or that." This is simply a repudiation of the authority of God in favor of self.

Jesus said, *"They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."* (John 16:2). This prediction actually came to pass. The apostles and early Christians were persecuted and murdered even by some who thought they were serving God by doing it. Paul, before he became a Christian, was just such a person. He consented unto the death and imprisonment of children of God, but later said, *"I verily thought within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."* (Acts 26:9).

Naaman is a classic example of one who *"thought"* one thing, but the right way was quite the opposite. Going into Israel as a leper, receiving instructions from the prophet Elisha to go to Jordan and dip seven times, he commented, *"Behold, I thought..."* He already had his own mind settled what he ought to do, and when God's way was not his way he acted in anger until another persuaded him to simply obey God and be healed. Many today are afflicted with the same "I thought" complex that Naaman had. We have minds with which to think, but we are not endowed with the authority to determine what ought and ought not be. That is the prerogative of God. All this simply proves that what one might think does not prove his thoughts are the proper rule.

Follow Conscience?

"Let your conscience be your guide," is the cry many make. Probably more people than we could imagine use this as the sole standard for measuring whatever they do. It is true that the Bible teaches us not to go against the conscience and against our convictions (Romans 14:23). Honest people will not violate their consciences. But what is the conscience? "Conscience is that something in every person that approves, when he does what he has been taught is right, and disapproves, when he does that which he has been taught is wrong. But conscience does not teach a person right and wrong. If he has been taught that error is truth, he may practice that error with a clear conscience."

The conscience is no more reliable than the teaching one has received. History shows many dastardly deeds that people have

committed against other people with all good conscience; deeds that no Christian would condone for a moment because we know they are violations of God's law. Even Paul stated, *"Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day."* (Acts 23:1). He said this even after an earlier career of making havoc of the church of Christ. How could he have done such a thing with good conscience? It was because his conscience was mistaught at the time. Conscience is not an infallible rule by which to measure standing alone.

Other False Standards

Others will follow traditions and customs that have been handed them without ever investigating whether such things are from God or men. Romanism puts great emphasis on human traditions, as does Protestantism. But how long a thing may have been taught and practiced, or by how many, or who, does not always mean that it was correct before God.

One of the problems Jesus encountered with the Jews was their insistence on following human traditions as if they were God's law. People today are still wrestling with that same problem in principle. Our Lord condemned following the doctrines and ways of men. *"Howbeit, in vain to they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* (Mark 7:9). Again He once asked, "*Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?*" (Matthew 15:13). It is tragic when people are so wedded to whatever was done by some who lived before them that they will ignore the revelation from God's book as to what is really God's law. Following tradition can be well and good, unless we consider human tradition to be of divine origin and consider it of God. Just to observe some tradition may be innocent enough if it does no violence to the authority and limitations of truth. The tradition we should follow is the tradition taught by the inspired apostles (Second Thessalonians 3:6).

The fallacy of following tradition can be illustrated with the following story. In a rural merchantile store the owner had used for years a stick for measuring that he honestly thought was one yard long. His father and gradfather before him had used it with the same understanding. But it was once called to his attention that it was less than a yard. Nobody ever questioned his honesty before. But his honesty was not being questioned. He honestly thought the stick measured one yard. But when compared to a

metal ruler that was surely a yard long, it was found that the stick fell short by nearly an inch.

Now the storekeeper could do one of two things. He could continue to use the short stick of his foreparents and call it an acceptable yard, or he could replace it with a stick that was truly a yard long. Since he had been honest in believing his first stick was a yard, likely he set aside the short stick he had fondly used because his foreparents had used it, and used a true yard. His honesty demanded that he do just that.

It does not impugn a man's honesty to call to his attention an error that he holds. Once it is proven to him that it is error, however, his honesty will not allow him to hold to error anymore.

The Only Measure

What then is the infallible rule that God has given? *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God man be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."* (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Peter said. *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11). John said, *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son."* (Second John 9). Paul wrote, *"But speak thou the things that become sound doctrine."* (Titus 2:1). We are not to go beyond what is written (First Corinthians 4:6). *"The word of the Lord endureth forever."* (First Peter 1:25). The Bible is God's infallible rule and there is no allowance for anything else.

If we are not going to take God's Word, if we think we can pick and choose what we like and omit what we dislike, if we believe we can go through the Bible like we go through a cafeteria line, taking what we want and leaving what we do not want, we are sorely mistaken. We had just as soon cast it all away because we are not showing respect for God nor His infallible rule by such actions and attitudes. We do not have the right nor the power to measure God according to our own standards.

God's Word

The Bible is God's Word. It is His revelation to man. Even

though some might say we cannot see it alike, one of two things is true: either God could not reveal His will so we could obey Him and be united, or He would not reveal His will so we could be united, even though He commands us to be one. In either case, to contend that the Bible is not God's will or that we cannot see it alike, is a gross reflection on God. We ought not blame God on man's unwillingness to obey His Word. We should hear and heed God's infallible rule.

† † † † †

God Answers With The Gospel

Mankind is beset with many problems. Among them are three great plagues that trouble the human family. They are ignorance, sin, and physical distresses. In other words, man has mental, spiritual, and physical ailments.

Jesus Christ has provided the basis for the answer to all three. As for ignorance He said, *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). Knowledge displaces ignorance.

Again, Paul wrote, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..."* (First Timothy 1:15). God provided salvation for man through Jesus Christ.

Our ultimate physical distress is that we physically die. But Jesus taught, *"Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29). Paul wrote, *"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body."* (First Corinthians 15:42-44).

The Bible is the only authoritative book by which man can consider the eternal future. It begins with the creation by the

power of the Eternal God. This God lives. He is the same God that loves us and makes provision for us. The all-knowing God has revealed certain matters to us in His Word, which is the inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient, authoritative Bible.

We Are Souls

We are faced with the great proposition that we are living souls. *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."* (Genesis 2:7). Again, *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."* (Genesis 1:27). God is Spirit (John 4:24), and we are created in the spiritual image of God. We are spirits as well as bodies. We have life. We are souls in the sense of life and spirit. This spirit does not die when the body dies, but is separated from the body and returns to God (Eccelsiastes 12:7; James 2:26). We are faced with the matter of an eternal existence. This means that we shall live with ourselves always, never being rid of oneself. We have cars and we can trade them or sell them and be rid of them. We have clothing that we either wear out or discard should we tire of it. All material things shall cease to exist and we shall not be associated with them. But we shall never escape our own presence because we are souls that shall never cease to be.

Since we must live and will live, even in eternity, what can one do to assure his existence will be a pleasant one? God gives the answer through Christ. *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days, spoken unto us through his son..."* (Hebrews 1:1,2). God answers with the gospel. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The word power carries the same idea as our word "dynamite." The gospel is God's dynamite, great power, to accomplish for man what man needs.

We wish to present the gospel in three separate pictures, hoping this approach will magnify our responsibility before God with respect to the gospel of Christ.

A News Story

First, let us think of the gospel as the world's biggest news story. The next time you see or hear a news program, you may

be in store for some big news. Tomorrow's headlines may contain something tremendous. But the biggest news story of all ages occured nearly 2,000 years ago. That story is the gospel, the story of the Christ who died for the sins of man, was buried in a borrowed tomb, but was raised from the dead the third day. No report to man has ever been as great as this account.

Can you imagine the impact of such an event if it was reported to have happened in our own time? What a day for newsmen, photographers, the curious as well as the serious. Everyone would crowd around every television or radio available to learn every detail. But it did not happen just recently. Nor shall it happen again. But it did happen in Jerusalem many years ago.

Unlike many news stories, this one requires something of all of us who hear it. What will you do with it? Will you lay it aside in unbelief or skepticism? Do you realize that your eternal destiny, as well as the manner of your life here on earth, depends on your reaction? Without the knowledge, belief, and obedience to the commands that this news account imposes on us, there is no way to heaven.

A Will

Second, we can consider the gospel as the will of Jesus Christ. This book, the last 27 books, is called the New Testament. A testament is a will. Christ died and he left a will concerning man. Let me tell you something about that will that affects each of us.

Sometimes people point to the thief on the cross as the way we can be saved today. They are trying to prove that salvation can be ours without obedience to baptism. It may well be true that the thief was never baptized, although there is no evidence one way or the other about that. But the thief lived and died before this will of Christ was ever in effect. Abel, Abraham, David, on and on were not baptized. But what of that? How does that concern those of us who must give an account before God according to the will of Jesus Christ that does require it?

Before a will becomes effective, the will maker must die. (Hebrews 9:16). Christ spoke words of comfort and hope to the thief while both were yet alive and the will was not yet in effect. While one lives he can dispense of his blessings any way he sees fit. But once he dies, all things are according to His will. Christ, being alive, often spoke men's sins forgiven and as far as we

know, those were not baptized. But that has no effect on the plan of salvation for me and you.

An illustration may make it clearer. Suppose a man dies leaving $100,000 for his daughter that she can receive upon her twenty-first birthday, provided she has completed her college education and is married. At the time of his death she is sixteen. Can she demand the money immediately? She is yet in high school. She is unmarried. Is the money her money yet?

Suppose she finishes college at the age of twenty, gets married, but still lacks a few months before reaching twenty-one. Has she met the provisions of the will? She has met some of them, but not all. Not until all three conditions are met is the fortune hers.

The same principle operates regarding us, salvation, and the will of Christ. There are the conditions of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ before salvation is ours to enjoy.

We Must Believe

Third, think about a very distinguishing and distinctive mark about the gospel of Christ. Unfortunately, there are no many varying voices being heard in religion. There are so many different churches that contribute to the divided and chaotic religious scene that only confuses people. But there is a mark of difference about the gospel that makes it stand out above all other messages. Jesus said it in the last portion of Mark 16:16. *"He that believeth not shall be damned."* Friend, we must believe the gospel.

Men may tell you that one faith is as good as another. They may persuade many that the church does not matter, that one is as acceptable before God as the next, that honesty and sincerity is all that really matters, that you can be saved in the denomination of your choice, and on and on. But the Bible truth is that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There is one body, which is the church. There is one way to heaven which is the way of Christ. You can be saved and never accept what men teach about their churches, doctrines, morals, etc. But you cannot be saved if you reject what the Lord has taught and authorized to be taught in His name. You must believe His Word if you ever see God in His glory. The absolute necessity of conformity to the teaching of Christ cannot be demanded by any other message. But nothing compares to the God-given

gospel.

Christ has and is the answer to the problems of humanity. The Bible is God's revelation of that answer. There is no other source of teaching to which we can turn and know the assurance of what is revealed therein as we can the Bible. This great news account, this will of Christ, this that cannot be disbelieved and the unbeliever be saved, stands before each of us to decide how we will react and respond to its message and commands.

† † † † †

One Of Life's Greatest Challenges

After the leadership of Joshua, the Judges, the period of the United Kingdom, then the divided Kingdom era in which Judah and Northern Israel existed side by side for around two and one half centuries, Assyria took Northern Israel away into captivity from which they, as a nation, never returned. About a century and a half later, Babylon conquered Judah and took them into a seventy-year period of captivity.

In Ezekiel 22:23-31, we read of God's description of the nation of Judah just before He allowed them to be overcome. This passage is the text of our lesson. A study of this passage and the results of the condition described therein will help us understand something of the evil and wickedness of our own day, and the consequences that must be faced if there is not repentance.

You are urged to take your Bible and read the extended passage before going further in the reading of this discussion of it.

The Man

Ezekiel, the prophet of God, lived about six hundred years before Christ. He prophecied the future of Judah, the coming captivity, and was himself among those who were taken captive into Babylon, where he continued his prophecies concerning the return. The first portions of the book of Ezekiel were written

before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. It consists of warnings, corrections, denunciations of sin, reproofs against Judah, and the urging of repentance lest they fall.

The Land

In the text, note the condition of the land and the people. A clear concept of the conditions makes it easier for us to understand why God allowed them to be overcome.

The land was not cleansed or cultivated. Its resources were being allowed to waste through neglect, extravagance and waste. People sought rewards without labor. False teachers were in their midst, who sought not the welfare of the people but their own profit, gain, and material wealth. They were like a lion seeking his prey. Some would even cause wars to build up their own personal treasuries. The wars brought sadness over the land, grief, famine, and there were many widows of the warring dead. These teachers taught error rather than God's truth.

The civil leaders were reproachable because of their dishonest gain. They exercised robbery through their governing positions, willing to shed blood for wealth and power. They used oppresssion to reach their own goals, just as would a wolf in the midst of his victims. They took advantage of the poor, exploited the weak, the poor were made poorer and the rich were made richer.

What could be said of the spiritual leadership, the ones to whom one might think the nation could turn for beneficial guidance in times of such stress and strain? They profaned holy things with no respect for the sacred. They led people away from discerning between good and evil, contending that good was evil and evil was good. No longer did they proclaim God's law and God was reverenced among them. They spoke religious lies, saying, *"Thus saith the Lord Jehovah,"* when Jehovah had not spoken to them at all.

As one reads the passage he is impressed with the sorry state of affairs physically, spiritually, morally in that land just before God allowed their enemies to grind them into defeat. The priests (verse 26), princes (verse 27), prophets (verse 28), and the people (verse 29), all contributed to the conditions. Whereas God had provided a protective wall against sin, they ignored the wall and there were gaps in the wall, breaches all around through which destruction was pouring over the land.

Punishment

God did allow them to be punished and we can see why. He poured out His indignation against them. People cannot live just any way and expect God to continue to bless them. He consumed them with the fire of His wrath, permitting them to reap what they had sown. How foolish they were to think they could repeal the law of sowing and reaping. Their ruin was self-imposed and they could only blame themselves.

God would have spared them if they had tried. It was not only God is a God of justice and their wickedness demanded there be punishment. The people rejected the way of safety by turning from Him. God sought from among the people those that would *"stand in the gap"* and fill up the vacancy of godly leadership, righteous living, and make up the shortage of God-fearing people. He looked for those who would *"build up the walls"* and called for people to repent. The breaches were large and growing larger. Who would accept the challenge to close these openings? God warned, urged, invited, and there could have been preservation from the destruction that later came upon them. But His plea is followed with the sad and ominous note, *"But I found none."* None would accept the challenge.

Application

Let us turn the pages of history forward to our own day and time. Are not the words of Ezekiel applicable in principle to us today? Let us not be unduly pessimistic but let us be realistic. Only a fool would declare that all is well in our land and the direction it has been going. We should learn lessons from history, especially sacred history, but so often all we learn is that most of us are unwilling to learn.

Consider the gods of our time: possessions, pleasure, leisure, sports, self. We seek reward without labor. We eat the bread of greed and drink the wine of lust. A truly honest and truthful man is hard to come by. A man's word has ceased to be his bond. We swim in the blood of wars and walk in the paths of fear and threat of more war daily. Homes are shattered on the rocks of divorce more than in any other civilized nation on the earth today. Both the young, old, male, female defile and defame the sacred and divine system and the God-given relationships the Creator established. The ravages of strong drink are taking such a monstrous and destructive toll among the population, and few

do more about it than just idle and hypocritical talk. Lascivious, perverted sex, murders of unborn children, the denial of the spirit of man, and such is even being taught in the educational system of the nation, private and public. People will sell their souls and the souls of their neighbors for monetary gain. Even the religious leaders are likely to be over their heads in the corruption and greediness that has become a mark of much called religion. There be those who claim to speak for God, and what they are saying does not even come close to that which God has revealed. They would not dare declare what God has said in His Word lest they reprove themselves and their wicked schemes be exposed for what they are.

It is not uncommon for pious religious leaders to defend and even promote the uncleanness of the world, and in the name of religion, for motives of profit and popularity. Some of these things have slopped over into the church as well and those who ought to stand in the gap are joining the ranks of those who are tearing down God's wall. Friend, if we be objective and realistic, this is the land where you live, the world of your age, the likely home of your children. And the majorities are complacent, indifferent, unaware and uncaring as if it does not really matter.

Then And Now

How much of Ezekiel's description (God's description) of Judah fit that which we can see around us? *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..."* (Romans 15:4). By what reasoning do we think that we of this land of blessings shall be the first people to repeal the law of sowing and reaping? How shall we escape, as a world, a nation, a community, a family, an individual, when we sow to the flesh? Shall we not, as Hosea wrote (8:7), *"For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind...?"*

God does not want us to suffer destruction any more than He wanted Judah to be destroyed. He is not willing that any should perish. (Second Peter 3:9). He has provided so that we need not suffer from our evil and be spiritually lost, as well as physically devestated. Even now, as in the time of Ezekiel, He seeks people, urges, warns, pleads, challenges men and women, boys and girls to *"stand in the gap"* and fill the vacancy of goodness and supply the virtue that is sorely lacking among us. This is one of the greatest challenges of one's life. It requires every physical, mental, and spiritual muscle and fiber within us

to meet this challenge. But the consequences are of an eternal nature. How many have the strength and determination to answer God's call? Cowards will not ever try.

Our Task

The Lord's people are very much in the minority.While we might not bring the world to righteousness, we do have the gigantic task of taking righteousness to the world. It is an uphill fight every step of the way, and we realize we may witness only reverses during our lifetime. The battle is often bewildering, discouraging, beset with hardships and sacrifices, even persecution, *"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake..."* It takes more character to be a Christian than to refuse to be one. But this is God's challenge to us. When accepted, it will produce the best that is within us, enabling us to bring into reality our potential for righteousness.

In this evil day, will you dare to be righteous? In a world of sin, will you speak and act against it? Will you strike a blow for the generations to come by building foundations and providing the teaching that will preserve a remnant, from which God's truth can be proclaimed after you are gone? When all about you gives way for self and Satan in sin, will you commit yourself to live for the Savior?

This is the great challenge before each of us. Our young, as well as those older, need to have this challenge presented to them. When you accept it, and *"stand in the gap,"* doing your best to supply goodness, virtue, honor, truth, and godliness in a world that has lost its way, you can be forgiven of your sins, and can live and serve with the assurance that an eternal heaven awaits you when this life is over. Furthermore, as you live, you will know that the name of God is being exalted for those who follow to honor and reverence also.

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APPRECIATION

We are obliged to express thanks to those who have offered us kind words of encouragment, even monetary donations, toward the continued publication of this booklet.

While I do not say something about it every time, you can be confident that such means more to me than I know how to express. Thank you most sincerely. JWB

If Not God, What?

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse; because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever." (Romans 1:18-25).

God Is

In this passage Paul speaks of God, a Supreme Being, who does exist, who can be known, who should be reverenced. There is severe condemnation against those who refuse to believe in and worship God.

The existence of a Supreme Being is a most profound matter. The truth on that subject lies at the foundation of all of man's beliefs, his purpose for existing, his duty toward others as well as God, his salvation, his origin and destiny. The answer determines not only man's temporal and eternal happiness, but sets the standards for the welfare of the human race, now and forever.

Regardless of what one might think of the Bible, man is incurably religious. There exists no people who are not religious in nature. Everywhere the human family has been found they are worshipping creatures. Constantly the human looks toward a Supreme Being. Mankind strives to be as that which is worshipped and like that which the worshipped one wants him to be. What one thinks of his God, even if he has gods of his

own making, is going to be a basic determining factor in what he will be, wants to be, thinks he ought to be. Even those who deny there is a Supreme Being have erected, in their own minds, that which is their governing measure.

Christians believe in the God of heaven as is revealed in the Bible. The evidence sustains the claim that Jehovah God is the only true and living God.

Can Be Proved

Sometimes we are asked, "Can you prove the existence of God?" The answer is assuredly, "Yes." His existence is proved by the same process that many other things are proved; namely, by the evidence.

We may not be able to convince everyone that God exists. We will not likely convince those who are determined to disbelieve regardless of the evidence. But we learned long ago that there is a difference between proving a thing to be true and convincing some people to accept what is true. Yes, there is evidence to prove that God exists that cannot be refuted, even though many efforts to refute Him have been attempted.

But our lesson wants to focus on this matter in a way that is somewhat different from the usual approaches to proving the existence of God. We want to consider the question, "If God does not exist, what are the alternatives open to man to accept?" One either believes in God or he does not. What options does an unbeliever have?

The atheist flatly denies that God exists. He asserts with great confidence, "There is no God." But can we with confidence blindly accept his assertion? What does the atheist have to offer mankind?

Denials Prove Nothing

To believe there is no God does not demonstrate that there is no God. Until one can prove there is no God there is always the possibility the unbeliever is mistaken. In order to provide proof, one would have to be everywhere at the same time, know everything, have all power, indeed, he would have to be the very Being he denies exists, lest he might have overlooked something somewhere.

To simply not see God with the physical eye does not disprove His existence. We all readily accept the reality of many

things that we cannot and do not see. We do not see radio beams, germs in the air, even distant places we have never visited. The blind man does not see the sun, but does that mean there is no sun? The deaf hear no sounds, but is sound non-existent? We all know the answers to such questions.

But someone complains that there is evidence that such things as those do exist. That is exactly the same reason we can know that God exists. We see the evidence. *"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork."* (Psalm 19:1).

Consider the immense size of our universe, the precision of it, the design, the seasons, the rotations, the inter-working of many systems that are interdependent on one another for existence. Consider the reality of the existence of mind that cannot be produced from matter. All these things indicate a designer, a mind, an intelligence, a power, that surpasses anything man can fully contemplate. There is no foundation for the doctrine of atheism, but the abundance of evidence for the existence of God is all around us.

There Is Evidence

If one saw footprints of a man across the sand he has evidence that a man was once there. There are "God's footprints" everywhere. Atheism can offer man no reason for existence, no purpose, no origin, no destiny, only the grave, no hope, but utter and ultimate nothingness. Who can consider our world for very long and believe it amounts to naught?

The atheist may turn a bit from his outright denial of the existence of God to another position called agnosticism, a position of doubt, where one admits he really does not know one way or the other. But in reality there is little difference between an agnostic and an atheist. Neither acknowledges the reality of the existence of God. Both must turn away from the evidence in our world as we have mentioned. They must assume that because they do not know something that nobody else can know either. While admitting they do not know, everyone must admit that there is much concerning God that we, limited and finite creatures, do not know of Him. But one does not have to know everything to know something and that for sure. I may not know all the matters involved in the operation of an automobile, but there are somethingsI can know and can take advantage of the benefits even of that of which I

know nothing.

Men have not yet learned all there is know of electricity, the atoms, any number of things. But there are some things they can know and know them for certain.

Is There No "Oughtness?"

Like the atheist, whose position would mean there is no authority, no standard, no ought and ought not, the agnostic position would make civilization impossible if actually applied. There would be no laws, no rules, no obligations, nothing. Surely, we can see that any believe that destroys everything and builds nothing is not much of an advancement and offers no promise to the human family.

The atheist and agnostic might turn slightly and become what is called a materialist. The materialist believes that even spiritual matters are the result of material circumstances. Matter is eternal to them and the spirit world, which they do not totally deny exists, someway, somehow, sometime was produced from spiritless, mindless, dead matter. Who can believe it?

Origin Of Life

The philosophy that life springs from non-life has never and can never be demonstrated. Such has never occured. Science has proven that matter is not eternal in nature. It had a beginning. From whence came matter? Mind cannot come from matter. Matter has not always existed. It is easy to see that matter was produced by mind, not mindlessness. There is explanation for the existence of the intellect or thought in materialistic philosophy. The entire theory stands or falls on the origin of life, and materialists have no observable, proveable, demonstratable answer. Their "explanation" is fantastic and rings somewhat after this order. Matter existed (which science has disproved and materilists cannot explain from whence it came), but this matter exploded, and out of that explosion all things have gradually developed and evolved, even life itself and all forms of life, even though we cannot show and do not know how it could come to be.

People usually recognize a fantastic and absurd tale when they hear one, and nothing is more of that description than the "explanation" of the materialist and evolutionist regarding the origin and development of all things, including life.

If No God

What if they are right? What does that do to man except reduce him to nothing more than an animal like other beasts of the field? Even if the materialist is right that mind sprang from matter, he has no evidence concerning the origin of matter, which is not of eternal nature itself. In spite of all the claims and assertions concerning the "fact" of evolution, there is no evidence to prove it and, the truth is, what evidence we do have "for" evolution as often as not contradicts the evolutionary hypothesis. Believers in God and the Bible need have no fear not submit to the attempted intimidations by the alleged "scholars" who would deny the reality of God and the Biblical account of origins.

Materialists have enlisted the "bandwagon syndrome" to sustain their cause. They would create the impression that anybody that knows anything accepts what they affirm. According to their line of "reasoning," if you do not agree with them then you are terribly inferior and are contending against the "majority" thought of the day. To which was respond, "So what?" Where is there evidence that the majority is right? Why should we follow some blind path simply because a lot of self-acclaimed experts, who have neither proof nor sufficient evidence to uphold their claim, say that we must go that way?

Scripture teaches, *"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."* (Psalm 14:1). Follow a fool if you want, but at least be fair enough to yourself to admit that is who you are following and what you are doing. When you reap the fool's reward, do not blame anybody but yourself.

The bottom line of the doctrines that would eliminate the existence of God is simply a system of every man for himself, no law, no authority, "do your own thing," no right, no wrong, no ought, no ought not, everything is beautiful in its own way. We are here for no reason, having come into existence by chance and random, going nowhere, and life and all the world around us amounts to nothing, is for nothing, and the best we can say of ourselves is that we are highly developed animals. Just how this is supposed to provide a foundation for "human rights," the dignity of man, respect for human life, and uplift mankind and make a better world has yet to be explained.

Truth Is Better

But the faith and contention of the Christian offers a better way, a more excellent way. In philosophy there is the consideration of things and the effect of things. There must be evidence to prove cause and effect. The Bible and nature both provide evidence that God is the ultimate Cause.

Science is classified knowledge, gained and verified by observation and demonstration. The only verified knowledge we have, that which has been observed and demonstrated, agrees with the contention of the existence of God. There is not one scientific fact that anyone must deny in order to believe in the reality of God and what the Bible says and teaches. Evolutionists cannot make that claim for their doctrine.

Faith

Faith is not just a "leap in the dark" and a pious wish for things to be as we want them to be. Faith is based on evidence. God has provided evidence for our convictions, including the existence of God. This evidence is seen in our world, the very world He made, and in His Word, the very Word of which He is the author.

Without God nothing can be explained. With Him all things not only have an explanation, but a meaning. We are creatures of choice. We can be atheists, agnostics, materialists if we choose. But we can show ourselves wise rather than foolish and choose to be a Christian.

When a man will be objective and fair, honest with the evidence and sincere, will consider the evidence before him that is available, he will believe in God, the God of heaven and earth, our Lord, Creator, Sustainer and Judge.

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A Mark Of A Sympathizer Of Error

When error is taught there arise those who love truth and are set for its defense who will oppose it. This is as it should be.

But those who defend truth against error are often the targets of attack by those who really never get disturbed about false doctrines, but can get terribly aroused over their misperceived and opinionated judgments about the methods and manners of those who oppose error.

If brethren would get that concerned about error they would show themselves more loyal to truth.

What Kind?

The Bible student knows we are not saved by works. But at the same time there are works by which we are justified or saved (James 2:24). Even faith is a work (John 6:29). There are different kinds of works. We cannot be saved by works of our own righteousness, or works of which we can boast, or works of the Mosaic Law.

But there are works of obedience, conditions we must meet before we can receive the gift that God gives us. Works of obedience are not a way to earn salvation, but to receive salvation.

We are saved by faith and the Bible student reads this over and over again. But as with works, there are different kinds of faith. Weak faith, dead faith, mere mental assent or belief does not save. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. We learn what *"by faith"* means when we study Hebrews 11. In each instance, without exception, the blessing and benefit given to those noble characters was by faith, but without exception they did what they were commanded to do.

There probably is no doctrine more deceptive and misleading, but at the same time more universally taught among denominations than salvation by faith alone. It is the devil's lie.

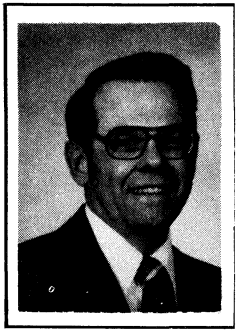
How we yearn for and glory in having peace. Jesus came to bring peace. But what kind of peace did He bring? There are different kinds of peace just as there are different kinds of works and faith.

Some have mistakenly thought the mission of Christ was so everybody will get along with each other. At best this is but a by-product of the peace that Christ brought. Rather than assuring us that everybody will get along with each other, Christ brought a sword, not peace. The reason is because there are those who will follow Him and those who will not. There is the inescapable controversy between those two groups of people.

Many have sold their souls by compromising the truth in order to have peace with other people. But the peace Christ brings is peace with God. The barrier of sin is removed by man being forgiven and those once alienated are reconciled to God through Christ. This is the peace He brought and the peace for which we must strive.

When we read of something in Scripture, let us be careful and understand what kind of something God has in mind.

Justified Four Ways



JAMES W. BOYD

A person may be accused and charged with violating a law and be justified (set free, without penalty) four ways. (1) He may be found innocent. Being not guilty he goes free. (2) There may be considered a sufficient reason, such as speeding due to a health emergency. He goes free. (3) He is found guilty but not retained because he pays his own fine and is allowed to go. (4) He is found guilty, cannot pay his fine, but another steps forward and pays the penalty for him. He personally deserved punishment, but because another has paid in his stead he is delivered and goes free.

Regarding man and being set free, justified, from sin, there is only one way. He certainly cannot be declared innocent for we all sin. Who would think there is any sufficient reason for man to violate the law o God? We cannot pay our own penalty because we do not have the power to save ourselves by ourselves. But we can be free from sin because Jesus Christ paid the penalty for us at Calvary.

We can partake of this benefit offered us when we obey the gospel of Christ. Until we do we stand condemned to suffer our own ruin.

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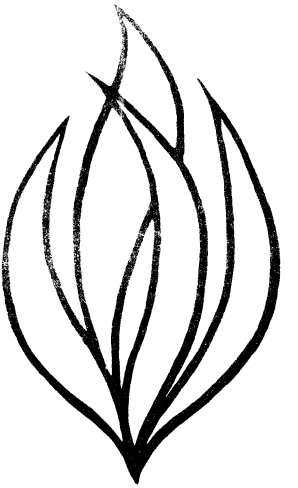
A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 8**

The Beheading Of John The Baptist

A reading of the text, Matthew 14:1-12, is necessary at the start of this lesson. We trust that the reader will turn to his Bible and consider that text before continuing. It is not expedient to copy that lengthy passage here since one can readily read it from his own Bible.

Now that you have read the text, we suggest that there are some basic truths and principles in the actions surrounding the death of John the Baptist that we should study, learn and apply.

This Herod was Herod Antipas who became king of Galilee after the death of his father, Herod the Great. On a journey to Rome this Herod met a woman named Herodias who was the wife of his brother Philip. He persuaded her to leave Philip and marry him, and to this she agreed.

John the Baptist had been preaching concerning the coming of the kingdom and the necessity of repentance, how men must forsake their evil actions and relationships and prepare for the coming of the kingdom. His preaching of moral purity had been offensive to Herodias and Herod because he told them they did not have the right to have one another. *"It is not lawful for thee to have her."* In their anger Herod had John put in prison.

It is noteworthy that if some today had been preaching to them, they would have been told to repent but that it would be all right to continue in their adulterous relationship anyway. It is astounding that such false doctrines are even being taught among brethren.

Some have suggested that the sin of Herod and Herodias was the kinship between them, she being his neice, and that is what made the relationship evil, not their adulterous marriage. But the problem remains. Could they contine in that evil relationship after "repentance?" This is what some are teaching. It is false. Herod and Herodias may have been unlawful for any number of reasons, but their marriage was adulterous and they did not have the right to continue therein.

Fearless

John the Baptist was a fearless preacher. He had proven his

courage by his strong rebuke of the Jewish leaders (Matthew 3:7-9). He had warned the Jewish nation that they must repent. He even condemned the evil of the king. In doing so, he was not only preparing the way for the coming of the Lord, but was also upholding God's marriage law which had existed since the creation of marriage. There was no justification for the dissolution of the marriage of Herodias and Philip. Herod and Herodias were in sin.

John demonstrated both a fearlessness and a love when he preached to Herod and Herodias the message they needed to hear. It was not what they wanted to hear, however. John could have preached to them many things that might not have been offensive to them. He did not deliberately offend, but he taught them the truth and the truth was offensive to them. He showed a genuine concern for their spiritual welfare. If he had not loved the souls of these two sinners he could have dodged what they needed to hear for more acceptable topics.

Go Away - Lost

It is a sad commentary on much that is called preaching today that those who are lost can listen to the preacher time after time and still go away time after time in comfort and consolation as if all was well with them and God. They do not hear lessons they need to hear. They are often entertained. Possible they will hear lessons on love, grace, kindness, the beauty of nature, heaven, etc., and these must be preached. But when that is the steady diet, and sin is not condemned, and the sinner is not discomforted in his sins, and the way of salvation is not explained, then the preaching is lacking a basic ingredient that God expects and that hearers deserve. Many "preachers" will shy away from sermons on worldliness, slothfulness, hell, lasciviousness, modesty, even the specifics of the terms of salvation lest they might "rub somebody the wrong way."

Notice John's method of approach in his preaching. It is not too hard to condemn those who are considered "minor" characters. Some are quick to condemn the errors and sins of "lesser" people. But let somebody of rank, power, influence, position, whether in or out of the church, be the guilty ones, then the voices of some become mute.

Some will stand before a large congregation and condemn sin generally, but when it comes to confronting one personally and individually with specific violations of God's law, then they stop

short. Some will not ever preach publicly against specific sins in any way. We need more preachers and teachers who will be as was Nathan, who told David, *"Thou art the man."* It may not always set well, and it may not be the way to financial increases and long terms of service at a specific congregation, but how can one think he has done his duty if he will not do this? John's rebuke of sin was specific, personally applicable, and given to the most prominent of the land.

Not Ashamed

Neither was John apologetic for his preaching. He knew what he to do and did it. It is told about Sgt. Alvin York, hero of World War I from the mountains of Tennessee, when asked why he risked his life so often in battle, he responded, "I seen my duty, and I done it." The cause of Jesus Christ would be greatly strengthened if more were of that frame of mind.

How do you measure the result of John's preaching to Herod and Herodias? As far as we can tell, none were baptized. No hearer was converted. All that heard the message, especially the ones to whom it was so applicable, were outraged at the preacher. He was thrown in prison. If such was the result of a gospel meeting today, would brethren consider it any success?

But it was not a loss or failure. Upholding the truth is never loss or failure regardless of reactions. When a person does his godly duty there is victory and success whether it pleases or displeases others. We still have before us an example of the kind of preaching and the kind of preacher that God wants. How can that be marked off as failure? As Paul said, *"Therefore, my beloved, be ye stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (First Corinthians 15:58). John's work was not in vain because he did what he was supposed to do.

Truth Remained

Take note that the imprisonment of the preacher did not change the truthfulness of his message. Men thought by destroying Jesus that it would crush the truth He brought. But rather, that was but another giant step in the plan of God's system for saving man. Men have persecuted the church and expected that to dispense with its message. But truth rises again and again. Even in our own time many have thought that

"moving the preacher" will in some mystical way remove the truthfulness of the sermons he preached, that were disliked. Inventive schemes have been concocted to discredit messengers because of hatred toward the message. But do what you will with the messenger, when the message of truth is truly the truth it remains the truth. Putting John in prison, even killing him, did not change the fact that Herod and Herodias were in adultery and they had no right to each other.

We do not know how long John was in prison before his death. What brought it to reality was Herod's birthday celebration at which time, Salome, a daughter of Herodias by a former marriage, danced before the sensuous, drunken, revelling king and his princes. He was so pleased that he intemperately, extravagantly, offered her even half of his kingdom. But her request was as her mother had ordered; namely, the head of John.

Herod was sorry about her request, not because he had any real concern for John, because he would have had him killed before this except he feared the reaction of the multitudes that considered John a prophet. But now, before his princes, and facing his pride, he could not change his offer to Salome and he had John beheaded. Herod is not the last to have bowed to do evil because of the pressures around him.

Scripture does not reveal it, but tradition says that when Herodias saw John's head she shouted, "You will never tell me that I am unlawful again." If she did say this she was right about John never saying anything more about her sin. But she was more in sin now that ever before John died.

Progress Of Sin

In this entire procedure we see sin as it progresses and becomes worse and worse. It began with lust between Herod and Herodias. It continued in their adulterous marriage. It grew through the revelling of evil people, sensual dancing, drunkenness, all such things being companions in vice. It produced revenge, hatred, eventually the murder of this man of God.

The beheading of John closed his earthly life, but his reward shall be an eternal one. Jesus said, *"For whosoever shall save his life shall lost it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what*

shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:35-37). Though it be difficult to consider, there are many things far worse than being put to death for righteousness' sake. Surrender of the truth is a far greater calamity.

Greater Than John

Consider two final thoughts. There is one greater than John. Even John preached, *"But he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear..."* John was great, but even his greatness pales in the brilliance of Christ. John preached, *"He must increase and I must decrease.*

But Jesus also spoke of John. He made an amazing statement. *"What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee."* John was not only a prophet, but the forerunner of Jesus Christ, and one through whom divinely given prophecies were fulfilled.

But Jesus continued with an astounding observation. *"For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."* (Luke 7:24-28).

How can it be that those in the kingdom are even greater than John? It is because John was never in the kingdom. He was beheaded before the kingdom he foretold actually came. The kingdom is the church. Jesus was still predicting and promising the establishment of the church or kingdom in chapter 16, after John was already dead. Those in the church are greater than John. This is not because of our personal greatness, but because of the greatness of the church and the greatness of Christ, the head of His body, the church.

To be ranked far beneath John is our expectation. To even be considered great as John is unthinkable. But what do we make of the statement of Jesus of even being greater than John when in the kingdom? Can there be any doubt about the value our Lord places on being a member of His church? In view of that utterance, how can any refuse to become a member of the body of Christ by obedience to the gospel?

Great truths are presented in this account of John's death. Great hope and promises are offered by Christ through the church. Let us learn these lessons well and conform our lives accordingly.

† † † † †

Christ, A Rock Of Offense

"As it is written, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and a rock of offense: and whosoever shall believe on him shall not be ashamed." (Romans 9:33).

In this passage we have expressed how Jesus would be considered by unbelievers as well as what He would mean to believers. Paul is quoting from Psalms and Isaiah. He had been expressing vindication of the right of God to cast off the favored position of the Jews as a nation and to offer the gospel and its blessings to the Gentile world as well. God now extends His favors of fellowship, once exclusively enjoyed by the Jews, to the whole world. These favors are extended through the gospel message.

Christ came to save both Jew and Gentile, both those that were near and those that were afar off. A characteristic of the gospel is that the gospel is for all. *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). It is most unfortunate that the Jews, as a nation, refused to accept Jesus as the Christ.

Rather than believing on Jesus, He was a hindrance to them. They looked upon Him as a stumblingstone, something offensive. Everything He did and said was an offense to them. It is not that God deliberately made Jesus offensive to the Jews, but they made Jesus offensive to themselves because they would not obey God's teaching regarding salvation.

An Offense

Paul says that Jesus was a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Why was Jesus so offensive to the Jewish people? One reason was because of the lowly circumstances surrounding His

birth and His early appearance in the world. He did not meet their pre-determined standards that they set for their king. His parents were from the despised city of Nazareth. He was born in the humblest of environments, in a stable, and a manger for His bed. He did not possess great properties and was not one of earthly glory and worldly power.

They were offended because of the nature of His kingdom. They wanted an earthly potentate that would challenge the rule of Rome and bring them into the former glories as that which characterized the reign of David and Solomon. Jesus offered no such kingdom, although they first thought that He might. He headed no army, but He preached submission to the powers that ruled the world as long as they were not forced to disobey God. He solemnly declared that His kingdom was not of this world. His kingdom was not an earthly form of government. It is regrettable that there still be many who, like the mistaken Jews of old, still think Jesus is going to be an earthly king, ruling from Jerusalem. They fail to understand and appreciate the spiritual nature of His kingdom.

The Jews were offended because of the frankness and plainness of His reproofs of their wickedness. They were a self-righteous lot, thinking themselves to be in a special class by virtue of being the descendants of faithful Abraham. They refused to accept the teaching that others, as well as they, could be children of God.

Love Sin -- Hate Christ

Their religion was often mere lip-service, but void of genuiness and sincerity. When Christ firmly exposed their hypocrisies and rebuked their deceits, they retaliated. When He spoke concerning sin He did not do so with sugar-coated words that would soften the displeasure of God toward evil. Rather, He expressed and demonstrated an intense hatred against evil. Therefore, those who loved sin and practiced it learned to despise the Lord rather than profit from what He taught.

They were also offended at His mercy toward those upon whom they looked with contempt and inferiority to themselves. Jesus ate with publicans and sinners. He showed God's love by His actions to all people of any race and nationality that would reverence God. He forgave the harlots, spoke tenderly of even the most noxious of people when they were penitent. The Jews were unforgiving and brittle in their legalistic religion. They

would hold grudges against those they disliked. It was quite a contrast between them and the merciful and forgiving Son of God. As a result of this difference, Jesus was offensive to them. They stumbled over Him. Christ did not satisfy their expectations and demands.

But notice what Paul says of the meaning of Christ for believers. They "*shall not be ashamed.*" Possibly there have been times in your life when you were embarassed either by your own conduct or that of someone around you. Parents have sometimes been shamed by the behavior of their children. Children have often been given reason to be ashamed of their parents. Brethren are sometimes ashamed of one another because of the anti-Christian behavior that corrodes the life of some brother or sister in the Lord. But those who believe in Christ will never have justified cause to be ashamed of Him or shamed by Him while they are faithful. Never is there need to be ashamed of the faith of Christ.

Precious Stone

Peter wrote, "*To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious... unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner. And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient whereunto they were not appointed.*" (First Peter 2:4,7,8). The very stone that God placed as the cornerstone and the standard by which all else is to be erected was cast aside by the Jews.

Peter encouraged brethren, "*But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*" (First Peter 4:15,16). Rather than suffering shame because of Christ, we can experience happiness, humble pride, success and joy to the fullest possible, in Christ.

Paul was proud to be a Christian and a messenger of the Lord's will. He wrote, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*" (Romans 1:16). Those who are ashamed of Christ will be ashamed of His doctrine and vice versa. Some are embarrassed before the world

because of it and ashamed to be known as one who professes to be His disciple. They are intimidated by those who look upon Christ contemptuously.

But the true follower of our Lord will gladly uphold every point of doctrine Jesus taught and authorized to be taught in His name. He will strive to abide by every direction and labor to live in accordance with every word as well as the spirit of His message. We need to let all men know that we are Christians, not for our glory before men, but that Christ may be glorified and His will be exalted. In face of all odds and whatever the consequences, we must fear not to be identified with Jesus, nor dare we withdraw from taking a firm and determined stand for the truth He delivered.

Be Not Ashamed

We will not be ashamed to tell others of Christ and His scheme of redemption. We will profess and confess Christ and His way even though it may cost us fame, fortune, power, prestige, popularity or whatever. We will never compromise the truth for the pleasure of any. Jesus said, *"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."* (Mark 8:38).

To be proud of Christ extends to being proud of those who follow Him. We will not draw back from our faithful brethren because of race, education, background, social status or economic condition. It is unfortunate that all of us do not live in such a way that all the rest of us can be proud to call each other brethren in the Lord. There are times when there is reason to be ashamed of sinful conduct and attitude exhibited by one another. But we should never be ashamed of any fellow citizen because of certain worldly and arbitrary standards. Some have shown themselves ashamed to be Christians if the building is not outstanding on the right side of town, attended by the worldly prominent and the financially well-to-do. So often such churches have brought the cause of Christ into worldly compromise anyway.

Being proud of Christ may bring us into many circumstances that are designed to humiliate us. But eventually, those that are poor shall be rich in true riches. Those that are humbled and downtrodden shall be exalted and glorified. We ought to want to

be their number. "*Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.*" Can you possibly consider how important that is when we are present at the judgment? This is the Lord's message of hope and consolation to His disciples.

Rejectors of the Lord shall be cast away to perish eternally. Woe unto that person that cannot humble himself to take into his heart the only Savior that is provided. The eternal bliss and peace for the believer is certain and sure. He stands on the Rock of Ages rather than on a rock of offense. Christ, the stumbling stone to those that disbelieve, is the stepping stone into glory for those that believe.

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When God Repents

Do you believe in the reality of heaven and hell? The Bible makes it clear that such exists. Both are real. We need to consider a matter that will help determine our eternity in heaven or hell. Few subjects are more important than the one now under consideration.

Please turn to your Bible and read Jonah 3, then we shall proceed with the lesson. The account rendered there must be clearly in mind before we can grasp the lesson we intend to learn. Does God repent? When does He repent?

When we think of repentance we usually think of a sinner turning from his sins. But a sinner is not the only one that can and does repent. Even God repents. In Genesis 6 we read how He repented of having made man. But when does God repent?

Repentance, as it relates to man, means to turn, to have a change of purpose, a change of mind, a change in direction and intention, a resolve to be or do differently. Actually a person can repent from good to evil just as we usually think of it, repenting from evil toward good. We generally think of repentance in this latter fashion, changing our minds from sin to righteousness or from the devil to God.

Motives

Three things motivate man to repent of sins. "*The goodness*

of God leadeth thee to repentance." (Romans 2:4). God's love for man and man's response to God in appreciation for that love causes a person to turn from the ways of the devil to the way of the Lord.

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation." (Second Corinthians 7:10). Repentance is not sorrow, but is motivated by sorrow. Repentance is prompted when a person realizes he or she is grieving God because of his or her sins. He becomes sorry for this and decides to turn from his sins.

A man's faith in the Almighty will urge him to change his mind also. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. We must obey the commands of God. *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."* (Acts 17:30).

Repentance leads one into paths of rightouesness, a better way of living, a purer, more Christ-like life, the life of obedience. A reformed life is the result of genuine change of heart. It is the fruit of repentance.

Repentance is vital to a person's spiritual salvation. It is one of the conditions for forgiveness of sins. *"I tell you, Nay, but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3). The rule is that man shall perish. But that rule has an exception. Repentance is the exception.

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38). *"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."* (ALuke 24:47). *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but us longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* (Second Peter 3:9). Can anyone misunderstand the necessity of repentance?

"Except Ye Repent..."

To fail to repent means a person remains lost. One will not hesitate to be baptized when he has genuinely repented because baptism is a command of God, and when we believe God we will obey God. One who has genuinely repented will not forsake worship, deliberately sin, disdain opportunity for doing good. He will not continue his sin, nor be content to remain in a sinful state and relationship. When one repents, as God expects, he surrenders his will to God's will, and will go God's way.

Unfortunately, the need of repentance is a stumblingblock which will keep many out of the glories of heaven because they will not turn nor change their minds to do God's will.

The Bible also speaks of God repenting. Of course, God does not turn from sin because God does not sin (James 1:3). While Jesus was on the earth and in the form of man He was tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Deity does not have to turn from sin. It is not a sin to be tempted, but it is sin when one yields to temptation.

God has changed His mind concerning certain things. In First Samuel 15:11 we read where God changed His mind about Saul as king of Israel. God made Saul king, but Saul was wicked. When Saul showed his wickedness God changed His mind about Saul and his family remaining on the throne.

In Exodus 32:14, Israel was in the wilderness and worshipped the golden calf. God decided to destroy them. Moses pled for them and God changed His mind and did not destroy them.

While God does change His mind, He does not do so without cause. Saul's wickedness caused Him to change His mind. The plea of Moses caused Him to change His mind. God is not fickle nor unstable, jumping back and forth. But on certain conditions He has and will change His mind.

God has shown us in His Word, *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* (Ezekiel 18:20). *"The wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23). If we obey not the gospel we shall be punished with eternal punishment from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). The workers of iniquity shall not inherit the kingdom of God, but shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (First Corinthians 6:9,10; Revelation 21:8). Everyone who is accountable before God has sinned and shall stand before God in judgment (Romans 3:23; Second Corinthians 5:10). Unless God changes His mind toward the sinner the sinner is doomed.

When

God can change His mind when certain conditions are met. When does God change His mind about the eternal condemnation of the sinner? The story in Jonah 3 illustrates the answer for us in clear terms.

God sent Jonah to warn the city of Nineveh that in forty days the city would be destroyed because of its wickedness. Jonah was fearful of going and fled. He was swallowed by a great fish

and called a second time. On the second call he went and preached the warning God has commissioned. Notice that God did not change the message that Nineveh needed to hear.

The message of warning was believed by the people, even the king. They put on sackcloth and ashes, which indicated their deep sorrow for their sins and their fear of impending doom. They cried mightily unto God for salvation, turning from their evil ways. They repented. They changed their minds about their evil lives. They turned from their transgressions.

God saw their works of faith. He saw the results of their repentance. He saw that they determined to do differently. It was then that God repented, changed His mind, about their destruction. They were spared. But when did He change His mind? It was when man changed his mind about his transgressions against the will of God.

What Changes?

God has decreed the eternal death of the wicked. But God will change His mind, not about His decree, but about those individuals who will turn from their wickedness. To make the application very personal, God changes His mind about our being in heaven or hell, depending upon what we do. We have a choice. We have the power to change God's mind toward us. We can leave the service of Satan and enter the service of God. Unless we do that very thing there is no hope for our souls in eternity.

God alone knows the genuineness of one's repentance. Repentance is a matter of the heart, and God knows the hearts of everyone. We can see the fruit of repentance in people's lives, but that follows genuine repentance. Repentance is a matter between a person and God; one that involves the spiritual and inward man, the soul of man.

Down through the years God's messengers have called on people to turn from their evil. How the prophets of old sounded forth the message of God for the Israelites to return to God and leave their idols and sins. John the Baptist urged the people to repent. During His personal ministry Jesus preached repentance. Faithful gospel preachers have always included in their message God's command for everyone to repent.

We urge one and all to let our faith lead us to repent and let repentance lead us to further obedience in confessing Christ and obeying Him in baptism, and in life following faithfully the Lord,

walking in the light as He is in the light.

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Why Did Christ Die On The Cross?

Nearly two thousand years ago Jesus was born of the virgin Mary in a stable in Bethlehem. As an infant He was taken into Egypt to escape being killed by Herod. Later, after that immediate danger had passed due to Herod's death, He was taken by Mary and Joseph to live in Nazareth where He grew to manhood. At the age of twelve they took Him to Jerusalem. The events that transpired there made it evident that Jesus was fully aware of His identity and His mission in this world. *"Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"* was His reply when questioned by Mary and Joseph as to why He went not with them when they left Jerusalem to return to Nazareth (Luke 2:49).

About the age of thirty Jesus embarked upon what proved to be approximately three and one half years of His personal ministry on earth. He began by preaching the message that was preached by John the Baptists, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel.*" (Mark 1:15). During these years He busied Himself teaching, preaching, selecting His apostles, performing miracles of compassion and confirmation of His words, doing good, showing Himself to be the One of whom the prophets had spoken, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of mankind from sin and the giver of life.

In spite of the holiness of His life, He was betrayed by one of His own, seized by His enemies, subjected to a series of mock trials both civil and religious, persecuted, humiliated, tormented and eventally crucified on the cross at Calvary.

Not The End

The story of Christ does not end, however, with His body in

the tomb. After three days, by the power of Deity, He came forth in His resurrection, the ultimate proof of His Deity (Romans 1:4), soon to ascend back into heaven where He was coronated as King of kings and Lord of lords, to await that time when, according to God's infinite wisdom, He shall return to take His own into heaven where they will live with God in righteousness and eternal glory without end.

Our study centers on the death of Christ on the cross and asks, "Why did Jesus die on the cross?" It is evident that Jesus is the focal point on God's plan for redeeming man. He is the centermost figure of all history. Everything before Him pointed to His coming and everything that follows points back to Him. Even those who do not accept Him to be who He is must recognize the importance of Him because even the dating of our time considers His birth. Our years are dated according to A.D. (the year of our Lord). Of course, Christ is also the center of our worship and it is through Him that we have approach to the Father in heaven.

We know more about the death of Jesus Christ than any other one person of ancient history. The inspired Scriptures provide us the answer to our question regarding the reason for His death.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures; and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as one born out of due time." (First Corinthians 15:1-8).

Fundamentals

Listed in the above passage are the basic and fundamental facts of the gospel of Christ. The gospel consists of facts to be believed, commands to be obeyed, and promises and blessings to be enjoyed. The first fact mentioned to be believed of the gospel is that Jesus Christ died.

The death of Christ is noted by both baptism and the Lord's Supper. We are buried with the Lord in baptism, dying to sin, to be raised to walk in a newness of life as He was raised from the dead (Romans 6:3,4). In baptism we obey the form of this doctrine (Romans 6:16-18). Baptism, along with other purposes, is a picture, an emblem, a presentation of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The observance of the Lord's Supper is a memorial to Christ that gives emphasis to His body and blood that were sacrificed on the cross (First Corinthians 11:26).

There are those who would discount the death of Christ by declaring that He was but a mere martyr for a lost cause, or only an example of suffering, or the victim of a self-imposed and self-designed plot that backfired, or even the recipient of justice as a rebel, blasphemer and criminal who was executed for His crimes. None of these things are true and none of them harmonize with the facts as they are revealed to us in the only reliable records of events known to mankind.

But was the death of Christ absolutely necessary? If His death was to save man, could not God have saved mankind some other way without having Jesus to die on the cross? There is no doubt that God could have provided for man's salvation any number of ways if He had chosen to do so. But the fact remains that He chose the way of Christ on the cross. Whatever other way God might have devised and delivered, men could have asked the same question, "Could not He have done it differently?" It is not ours to question God's wisdom. We are not always able to probe the depths of the mind of God except to the limit He has revealed it.

Demonstrates Love

As we consider the way He has offered salvation, by the sacrifice of Jesus, could God have demonstrated more conclusively and decisively His love toward mankind than the way He has done? Jesus once said, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13). But Jesus, being Deity, even went a step beyond that. He gave His life for those who were His enemies, those who were yet in their sins (Romans 5:6-9).

Divine Wisdom

The first reason we offer as to why Jesus died on the cross is that is was according to His love and then add it was according to God's infinite and all-knowing wisdom. *"For the Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."* (First Corinthians 1:22-25). While many consider God's wisdom as foolishness, so are we impressed with what Isaiah has written in Isaiah 55:9, *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."* We are not capable of grasping fully the mind of God and must accept on the basis of the authority of His word that what He considered necessary is the way it ought to be. We show ourselves arrogant to challenge the wisdom of God. Our own finiteness ought to cause us to hesitate to dispute the wisdom of the Infitnite One.

Complete The Plan

There is another reason Jesus died on the cross that we can readily understand. Christ died on the cross to fulfill the program and scheme designed, developed and gradually unfolded through the years and dispensations prior to Christ. Even in Genesis, shortly after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden because of sin, God hinted of the defeat of Satan by One who would be of the seed of woman (Genesis 3:15. God later promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that through them One would come through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18). In Galatians 3:16 Paul identifies that *"seed"* as Christ.

Moses said, *"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."* (Deuteronomy 18:15). In Acts 3:22, Peter said that Prophet was Christ. In the Old Testament we find many types, shadows, pre-pictures, events and objects that represented the coming Christ, such as the Passover lamb, the fiery serpent. the various sacrifices under the law of Moses. If Christ had not died on the cross as promised, predicted, prophecied, all the great revelations of God prior to Christ would have been for naught, would have proved to be

meaningless, indeed, even a misrepresentation of things. But by His death, He proved and demonstrated that God is not slack concerning His promises and His word (Second Peter 3:9). He fulfilled the law by accomplishing its purposes (Matthew 5:17,18). The things which happened to Jesus are summarized in Matthew 26:56, *"But all this is come to pass that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."*

Prove His Identity

Another reason Jesus had to die on the cross was to confirm the truthfulness of His Messiahship and His identity as the Son of God. It is said of Jesus, *"From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."* (Matthew 16:21). Again, *"Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into this world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice."* (John 18:37). In John 2:19-21 Jesus foretold His death and resurrection. *"Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body."*

Had not Jesus died He would have proved Himself a fraud. The Messiah was to die and arise again. Christ had to confirm His claim as Messiah, and He could not have done so unless He did die on the cross as He and others before Him foretold. If He had not done as He said, for what reason could we have any confidence in anything He taught?

He Died For Us

First Corinthians 15:3 teaches the last reason of our lesson. He died for our sins. He died on our behalf, the just for the unjust, the righteous for the wicked, the innocent for the guilty. His death was a vicarious suffering. He had done no wrong, yet He accomplished for us what we could never accomplish for ourselves. *"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."* (Ephesians 2:13). *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that*

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..." (First Timothy 1:15). *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have a Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."* (First John 2:1,2). The word "propitiation" means atonement, the way God has provided for there to be established peace and reconciliation between man and God. Someone has suggested that "atonement" can be broken into parts and the meaning is better understood. It is "at-one-ment." He brought about the means of man being in a state of oneness with God by providing for the forgiveness of that which alienates man from God; namely, man's sins.

Our Peace

By His death on the cross we can have peace with God (Ephesians 2:16). Paul pleads for men to be reconciled to God (Second Corinthians 5:20), and the means of reconciliation has been provided by Deity, and that means is Christ and His death. We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9).

The death of Christ was not just another case of martyrdom, nor merely an example of suffering. He surely was not a criminal dying for His own misdeeds. Nor was there any sinister plot to make Himself appear to be what He was not. His death was the sacrifice of the life of the Son of God as satisfaction to God for the sins of mankind. He paid the debt that man could not himself pay. As Jesus said, when facing the hour of His death, *"But for this cause came I unto this hour."* (John 12:27). That we might be saved from sin is why Jesus died on the cross.

† † † † †

It is planned that the next two issues of this booklet, ***A Burning Fire,*** will consist largely of six or seven lessons on a series entitled **WHAT IS LIBERALISM?** I am confident everyone will find the studies challenging and certainly many will be in complete agreement and others may be openly hostile to what they read.

At The Feet Of A Traitor

A traitor is one who is guilty of betrayal, a deceiver, one who breaks and violates a trust and confidence. The very word "traitor" carries a connotation of something evil, sinister and despicable, that which should be shunned because a traitor is shameful but often shameless.

From whom do we learn the lessons we need to learn in order to follow the Lord as He would have us do? Of course, we look to Christ, the inspired apostles, the other godly characters of both the Old and New Testaments. From these we learn what we ought to be. But we can also learn from others what we ought to avoid and never be. We can profit by their mistakes (First Corinthians 10:11). Let us sit at the feet of a traitor and learn something that will enlighten us. May we attentively listen and observe. Judas the famous, more properly called infamous, of all traitors, can be the source of many lessons. He betrayed Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We now read the account of his evil deed.

Three Texts

"*Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.*" (Matthew 26:14-16).

"*And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus and said, Hail, Master, and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.*" (Matthew 26:47-50).

"*When the morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And when they had bound him, they led him away, and led him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests*

and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself." (Matthew 27:1-5).

Worse Than He Thought

First, we learn that sin is worse than people think it is. Too many take sin lightly. Sin can and does condemn the soul to torment. Sin is what separates a person from God. It is called spiritual death. It is a terrible thing for one to be stamped, CONDEMNED. Every sin is hideous and destructive.

When David sinned the magnitude of it was far greater than he realized. The same is true of the sin of Adam, Cain, Moses, the prodigal son, and our own sin as well. We may not experience immediate and external consequences of sin and therefore may be inclined to consider it lightly. Because God does not punish sin as rapidly toward us as He did with Ananias and Saphirra we ought not think sin is a minor matter. Sin is not just against our fellowman, ourselves, but against God.

Probably Judas did not realize how far-reaching his betrayal of Jesus would be. He may have surmised that Jesus might be persecuted and even beaten, but eventually released. Here was a way to get some "easy money," so he followed through with his plot against the Lord. We do not know this was his thinking, however. He seems to have been shocked that Jesus was treated so cruelly and condemned to death. His dreadful deed was worse than he thought it would be or he would not have taken such actions as he did.

Wages

From Judas we learn that the results of sin cannot be escaped. In the Old Testament when some of the tribes of Israel promised to help in the deliverance of the land of Canaan until all was taken if Moses would allow them to settle on the eastern side of Jordan, Moses warned them that they had to be sure to keep their word and not forsake their brethren, and he added that if they did go back on their word, *"Be sure your sins will find you out."* (Numbers 32:23). Judas learned this lesson the hard way.

It is evident that after a while Judas was smitten with remorse because of his evil deed against Christ. But why? Nobody pointed an accusing finger at him. Those who had conspired

with him did not rebuke him. He did not hear Jesus or the other apostles raise charges against him. What caused him such deep sorrow for his deed? He was driven to despair and finally to suicide over it. We can discover the reason.

Four Courts

There are four courts, so to speak, before which each one must stand regarding his actions in life. There are the civil courts before which the person who violates the law of the land must stand. There is the court of public opinion that places great pressure on a person from the society around him to conform. There is the court of one's own conscience that reminds him of his evil deeds even when nobody else condemns him. There is the court of God before Whom we all shall stand and be judged according to divine law.

It was Judas' knowledge of his own evil in comparison with his knowledge of God's divine law that would not let him go free. When nothing else condemned him he still condemned himself. He could not live with the knowledge of his own guilt. It plagued him. He could not escape.

There is a story of a man who graduated from law school, opened his office and began his practice. But after a few years he closed his office and tore up his diploma because he could not live with the knowledge that he had received it under false pretenses because he had cheated to pass the examination. Even though nobody else knew what he had done, he knew it, and could not escape the results of his sin.

Wrong Cover

Judas also made the mistake of attempting to cover his sins the wrong way. He brought back the money, admitted his error, but that did not make matters right. Deeds once done are done forever. Words once spoken cannot be retrieved. How many times we all might wish we could live moments and situations over again so we could do better than we did the first time. But one cannot cover his sins by trying to make up for them. To be sure, one should try to correct his misdeeds. But there is only one way to cover sins, and that is to receive forgiveness of them. That can only come from God. One must ask God, God's way, for forgiveness. Judas returned the money, even hanged himself, but this could not pay for what he had done. Doing

good, or imposing self-punishment is not a "spot remover." Doing good is something we all should be doing. But we can never do enough good to cover even one sin. Only by forgiveness from our heavenly Father can we ever really be free from the guilt of sin. Once He has forgiven, we are free.

Eternal Effects

Let us learn something about hope and relief. There are earthly and immediate consequences that sin sometimes brings. But there are eternal consequences also if sin is not forgiven. There may be sins we commit and we cannot and shall not escape the physical, temporal and earthly consequences of our wrongdoing, but we can still escape the eternal consequences of them. Let this illustration help us.

Suppose a man gets drunk, which is sin, and drives his car, has a wreck, injures himself or some other. He can be forgiven his drunkennes if he comes to God, God's way. But he will still suffer the physical results of his sin, possibly the remainder of his life. The blood of Christ can wash away his guilt, but his battered and brusied body may never heal as a result of his transgression.

Sometimes people go their own way to their own detriment and bring upon themselves all manner of hardship, then turn to God for their forgiveness, as they should, but expect all the havoc and misery they have created to suddenly vanish away regardless of the nature of their sins. This is unrealistic and not what the Lord promised.

Judas could have been forgiven of his betrayal of Christ if he had returned to the Lord in penitence. But he did not. He suffered not only his guilt to his death, and shall stand before God as the betrayer of God's Son, but consider the mental agony and torment he suffered as well because of his sins.

We may never be able to fully overcome the results of our sins here on earth. But there is hope for us if we truly repent and obey God's commands by which we can be forgiven of our guilt.

As we sit as the feet of Judas and learn about sin from him as one who committed such gross travesty against Deity, we see that sin is worse than we might at first consider it to be. Unless forgiven, it will bring an eternal doom.

You really will not escape all of the results of sin. We have no power to cover our sins by ourselves. No amount of good that we might do thereafter provides for the forgiveness we need.

While we may live the rest of our days in regret and suffering because of our sins, we do not have to remain covered with guilt because the Lord has provided us deliverance from the spiritual death sin imposes.

Sin Removed

How can the guilt of sin be removed? We do not look to Judas to teach us anything here because he did not seek removal of his sins the right way. We must look to Christ because He came to forgive sinners and save them from sin (First TImothy 1:15).

We must realize our guilt and say, as did David, *"I have sinned."* We must put our faith, trust and confidence in the One God sent into the world, Jesus Christ (John 8:24). We must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). We must confess our faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10). Then we must be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27), and then the Lord will add us to the church (Acts 2:47), which is composed of the saved (Ephesians 5:23).

The result will be that our soul will be washed clean by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9) which we have reached in baptism (Romans 6:3,4), and our sin removed. In the knowledge that sin is removed, even with the earthly consequences that may well remain, we can take heart and courage and live righteous lives to the glory of God.

Let us not make similar blunders as did Judas. Learn from him and avoid his mistakes. There is a better path to follow than the one he tragically decided to trod.

† † † † †

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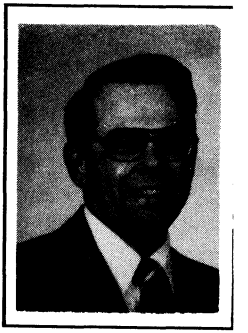

JAMES W. BOYD

The Holy Spirit has placed tremendous emphasis on knowing the Word of God and translating that knowledge into obedience to God. The high cost of ignorance is really more than anyone can afford, if they would only consider it. Isaiah 1:1, *"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his masters crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."*

The ox and ass are among the least intelligent animals. Yet, the ox knew who owned him and ass knew from whence his sustenance came. Isaiah rebuked Israe because they were not only ignorant of God and failed to recognize a the source of their blessings and provisions, but what made matter worse, they were unwilling to be otherwise. They thought ignorance wa something they could afford. Were they different from many among us

"Doth not consider" means they were not concerned enough to eve inquire. They were just too busy with anything and everything else t take the time and put forth the effort to come to a knowledge of wha they desparately needed to know. Were the Israelites the last people t take this same attitude toward gaining knowledge of God's will?

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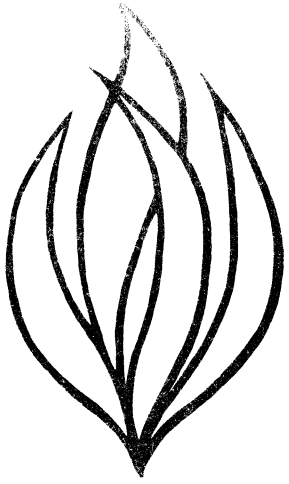

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 9**

What Is Liberalism?

Lesson One

There is a system of thought in our world called Liberalism. It is not something new in the world but has existed in varying degrees since the beginning of man. But it is being promoted with increasing fervor today and with considerable success, being adopted by many, even many who are not aware of what they are accepting. Liberalism is being felt in almost every area of life, economically, politcally, socially, morally, educationaly, in child-rearing, as well as in religion.

We are concerned about liberalism in these studies as applied to the moral and spiritual realm. Such is our business as children of God. We would insist, however, that there is an inseparable tie with liberalism religiously and liberalism in other realms because they exhibit common goals, stand on a common premise. But we are concerned with liberalism in other realms than religion only indirectly. But so often being liberal in one area indicates a liberal spirit in other areas.

Why should we be so concerned about it? First, it affects our lives. It affects the church. Any ideology that dominates so much of what is happening in the world deserves study. The sheer magnitude of its influence demands we acquaint ourselves with it. To follow blindly anything without proper consideration of evidence and facts is folly. One has written, "To say the Lord's people are facing liberalism and that it will soon be our next battle is false. It is not merely facing us. It is upon us. We are now in the midst of a great conflict. It is now time for men of God to rise up against this modern nonsense."

Great Danger

This writer is convinced that the attitude and action of liberalism poses the greatest immediate danger facing the church, though not the only danger. The church has faced problems since Pentecost. There seems to be no escape from them. In our time the church has faced the threats of apostasy

by human legalism, known as antism, where some contend to bind what the Lord has not bound, making laws God has not made. But such a problem pales into relative insignificance when compared to liberalism. Human legalism has divided, confused retarded and muzzled much of the work of the church. But liberalism, if pursued and tolerated, will destroy the church from among us and our children. The church has not always fared well in the battle against it.

Our plan of study is to define our term of liberalism so we can recognize it. We are confident some brethren would not recognize a liberal or liberalism if it had a sign painted across its forehead. We want to note the basic tenets of liberalism in its world-wide quest for dominance in the religious world generally and contrast it with the Bible. We shall consider the many evidences and drifts of liberalism in the church today. Finally, we want to learn what can and must be done to fight against it and not be overcome by it.

Definition

What do we mean by liberalism? A definition of terms is essential. Liberalism is a system of thought, a philosophy, an attitude that manifests itself in actions, doctrines and words that affect the lives and spiritual welfare of all. Regarding the Bible it is primarily negative because it denies the Bible to be God's authority. It denies there is an outside authority over man and contends that man is his own authority, his own last court of appeal, his own judge, jury and lawmaker. "Man is the most. It contends there is no supreme and infallible authority such as God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible. "To each his own as he sees best" is its rule. "Do your own thing" is its motto. Liberalism religiously is the freedom of the mind to satisfy its own spiritual needs its own way, as defined by the World Book Dictionary. Liberalism is the overturn and repudiation as well as the disregard of authority. This is at its tap root.

Liberalism contends that truth is relative, not absolute, and liberals are absolutely sure about that. There is no final right or wrong, no requirements to which one must conform because "we are free." Truth is either non-existent or so evasive that one cannot really know what truth is. It may be the object of constant search but one never really finds it. Looking for truth is like seeking a black cat in a dark room that is not in the room anyway. They contend that since honest and intellectual people

have differed, none can claim to be right. Just how they find a standard by which to determine who is honest and intellectual, seeing they deny all standards, is not explained.

Liberalism says one can know only what they personally experience. Knowledge is existential and truth to you is only what you have experienced. This is one reason liberals do so many strange things because they are seeking to broaden their experiences regardless of the way or the area where they have an experience. It serves as the basis for the emotional craze in our world, with people taking dope to "get high" and experience something new. Since experiences vary, truth must vary and cannot be solid. They say, "If you haven't tried it, don't knock it. You can know only what you experience."

Its Opposite

Liberalism can be understood by considering its opposite which is Conservatism. Conservatism is the disposition to preserve. It generally opposes change. Liberalism contends nothing remains stable and everything must change, even truth.

As liberalism relates to the church, if pursued, it will cause the church to lose its identity, its distinction, abandon its allegiance to the Bible as authority, and drift with the customs, tides and currents of the day. There are those who seek to change the church and restructure it because they are convinced everything must change. They work to break down authority, remove limitations and boundaries, repeal laws, dismiss commands and directives from the Word of God, and alienate the oncoming generation from the older one in order to establish their new ways without the opposition that the older generation would offer. The existence of rules, laws, regulations and oughtness is contrary to a liberty they profess.

Liberalism is "this world" centered. It is sometimes identified as Humanism. It is the parent of the "social gospel" which has concern only for the here and now, the matters of this world, the environment and physical body, exclusive of God and the spiritual realm. It is unconcerned about life after this one, eternity, sin, heaven, hell, man's spirit or his relationship to God. They plead, "If it feels good, do it. I'm OK, you're OK, everything is beautiful in its own way. Do your own thing." Such a philosophy, when believed and followed, has a tremendous impact on a person's manner of life. We shall consider the ramifications of it in practical matters later in this series.

You may note that until now, while defining liberalism, there have been no Scripture citations. This is because you do not turn to Scripture to define liberalism. Scripture presents the very opposite of a liberalistic spirit. We contend that liberalism is the most destructive philosophy that now exists among human beings, especially with respect to his relationship to God.

Conflict

It takes no great effort to see how liberalism conflicts with the Bible. The Bible teaches there is a divine authority over man. Space prohibits quoting and commenting on the many verses found in the Bible on this matter. But the student may wish to consult some of the following passages. Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; Matthew 4:4; Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 28:18; Second Timothy 3:16,17; John 12:48; Acts 17:31; First Corinthians 11:3; Second John 9; Second Corinthians 5:10, and many others could be listed.

The Bible teaches that truth is absolute and can be known. See John 14:6; 8:32; First Timothy 2:4; John 16:13; First John 2:21; Proverbs 23:23; Ephesians 1:18; 3:4; 5:17; First Peter 1:22, and others. There is one Savior, one church. There is evil and good, right and wrong, sin and righteousness.

The observant person will realize that on this point the philosophy of liberalism contradicts itself. If there is no absolute truth, how can liberals be so absolutely sure that is true? If we cannot really know truth, how can they claim to know that truth cannot be known? Any system that "shoots itself in the foot" as does liberalism does not deserve being accepted.

The Bible teaches that truth does not change. Hebrews 13:8, First Peter 1:25; Jude 3; Galatians 1:6-9; John 12:48; First Corinthians 11:26. Therefore, the liberalistic idea that religious truth varies violates the Word of God. Customs, habits, human institutions, traditions, etc. may change, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. But truth does not change. Is it not strange that some "Christians" hasten to adopt the customs in style, dress and manners that reflect an imitation of a godless world more than that which imitates the godly! Does it not make one suspect that his allegiance is in the wrong things? Truth must override customs and similar matters.

The Bible places emphasis on both this world and the next. This life is a preparatory period for that which is to come (Matthew 24:44). There is another life, a resurrection from the

dead, an eternity either in heaven or hell, the destiny being determined by how this life is spent before God (Second Corinthians 5:10; John 5:28,29). God's people look for a better country (Hebrews 11:16). Our affections are centered elsewhere (Colossians 3:2; First John 2:15; Luke 12:15,20; First TImothy 6:7; Matthew 6:19). The prime concern of Jesus is salvation of man from sin (First Timothy 1:15).

Liberalism and the Bible are miles apart on nearly every score. The Bible is God's authority. Liberalism is anti-authority.

† † † † †

Lesson Two

We now turn our attention to that part of liberalism that is called modernism. We must understand our terms, even if we do not always use the same terms. I am using these terms to mean that all modernism is liberalism, but not all liberalism is modernism. Modernism is a prominent religious concept held by many theologians, clergymen, denominations, Romanists, Protestants and Jews. It is not modern, but is as old as the disobedience of Adam. It stems from man's desire and determination to be "free" to do as he chooses without being held responsible for his deeds before any authority, such as God. Such a concept obviously cuts the heart out of Christianity.

Modernism denies that the Bible is the Word of God, but is only a human product, produced naturally, through the use of documents that none have ever found, but modernists contend must have existed. Second Timothy 3:16,17 and Second Peter 1:20,21 both affirm the divine inspiration of Scripture, but modernism denies it.

Anti-Bible

In denying the Bible it naturally denies what the Bible teaches regarding such things as the account of creation. Modernism subscribes to evolution, atheistic and/or theistic, neither of which is compatible with Scripture. Not all evolutionists are

atheists, nor are all modernists atheists. But they all deny the Biblical account of creation.

Modernism denies the reality of the miracles as recorded in Scripture. They attempt to explain every record by some naturalistic process, and when they cannot do that they outright deny it happened, such as the flood at the time of Noah, the story of Jonah and the fish, the miraculous healings, the virgin birth of Christ, etc.

Modernism denies the Deity of Christ, contending He was just a man and nothing more than an exceptional one. Prophecy and its fulfillment is likewise denied. This denial, however, makes both the writers of the Old and New Testaments deliberately liars for one spoke prophecy and another spoke of its fulfillment. Modernists have to deny prophecy and its fulfillment because this involves the miraculous which they deny even as they approach the Bible before they investigate it.

The return of Christ and the judgment, life after this, both are denied. Their conclusions makes this life without purpose or meaning for man's existence, born only to die and nothing more.

The necessity of salvation and the church being composed of the saved is denied because they deny the reality of sin or the need of spiritual salvation. To modernists the church is a decadent social order that deserves extermination or a complete restructuring to make it "relevant" to the times. The only salvation modernists ever mention is salvation from earthly ills.

Radical Liberalism

All in all, modernism denies all such things that would make for a final and supreme authority, totally discarding the Bible and all that is revealed therein. Modernism is a very radical form of liberalism. Some deplore the use of labels and identifications as liberal, conservative, modernist, etc., but without such labels there would be no way to mark those who teach so contrary to Scripture. Labels are needed in order to expose and oppose such error and assist us in learning to avoid such things and preventing being overcome. Christians ought not cringe from the use of labels since Paul told us to "*mark*" certain ones (Romans 16:17). If we are intent on preserving the faith of the Bible we will not shy away from being called conservative in that matter. We are not ashamed to be called fundamentalists, a term often

reserved for extreme positions but a term that can also be applied to those who contend for the fundamentals of the faith. Nor shall we be shy to label a liberal a liberal and a liberal doctrine as a liberal doctrine. Most clergymen and the ruling powers in most religious bodies today are liberals; many being outright modernists. The rank modernist is very prominent in most denominations, but thus far is not often the case in the church. But there have been cases of rank modernism among brethren from time to time. To be a modernist means one cannot be a faithful Christian and a church that is modernistic in its positions cannot be the church of Christ. It may still retain the identification as a church of Christ, but there be a number of churches that call themselves a church of Christ which is not a church of Christ.

Another Liberalism

The problem in the church is liberalism of another sort rather than the blatant, arrogant, denials of modernism. It is a mistake to refrain from branding as liberal those who are liberal just because they might not be modernists. Liberalism, even though not modernism, is a disregard for the authority, and the necessity for authority, of God's Word. There be those who do not deny the denials of modernism who are liberals just the same. Their liberalism cultivates the ground for the planting and growth of modernism. Liberals usually do not look with great disdain toward modernism, but are inclined to be "tolerant." It is liberalism of this insipid nature that can cause the church to lose its distinctiveness as quickly as any other way. To follow liberalism means to soon be undeserving of the identification of being the church of Christ. We now turn our attention to various forms of liberalism as is evidenced among many among us.

We need to be aware of liberalism and that it is being taught and promoted, being accepted and adopted. We can only know of it by being informed. As a gospel preacher, it is my duty to point out the manners of liberalism among us lest others be subverted. We must see the distinction clearly between liberalism and God's truth. We cannot afford to entertain liberalism in any congregation or look upon it lightly in any congregation that calls itself the church of Christ.

Some Examples

I am sure there are many examples of liberalism that I shall not mention. Those that I do mention are those with which I have had personal contact, having heard, read, personally or from tapes, seen in articles, heard in conversations, encountered in correspondence or exposed to it in some way personally. I am not guessing or supposing that the things I shall mention exist. I know they do and know it first hand.

It is liberalism to contend that the church of Christ is a denomination among denominations. It is liberalism to say one church is as good as another. One said, "We may as well admit we are a denomination." I forcefully deny the Lord's church is a denomination. If a church is a denomination it is not the Lord's church, and if it is the Lord's church it is not a denomination. The New Testament knows nothing about denominations existing by the authority of God. Rather we read of condemnation of the division it propagates and upon which it feeds. The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23); composed of the saved (Acts 2:47); and there is but one (Ephesians 4:4); built by Christ (Matthew 16:18); purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28); is His possession (Romans 16:16); He is the head of it (Colossians 1:18); and He will deliver it as God's kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24); because He is its Savior (Ephesians 5:23). The church does not teach or practice denominationalsim, nor even claims but rather denies any fellowship or kinship with denominationalism. Only liberals lie about the church to call it a denomination among others.

Akin to the above, it is liberalism to say "Christ saves, but not the church," because it leaves a false impression that the church is not essential to salvation. This is denominational language, not as the oracles of God. Some are heard to advise, "Preach Christ and not the church." Certainly Christ saves, but those who are saved compose the church. One cannot preach the Savior without the saved; the King without His kingdom; or the head apart from the body. The attempts to separate Christ from the church, or the church from salvation, is to preach false doctrine of liberalism. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15). One must be a member of the church to be saved because salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10), and to be in Christ is to be in His body and His body is the church. Why should anyone who professes to love the Word of God wish to make statements that detract from His church which He bought with His own blood? Attempts to discount the church, make the church of little to no importance

in salvation is to remove oneself from under the authority of God, and this is what liberalism does.

A Liberal's Phrase

Along this same line, liberals talk about "church of Christ doctrine." There is no such thing. The doctrine is the doctrine of Christ, not of the church. The church is to uphold His doctrine, not make, alter, rearrange or tamper with it. Denominations have their doctrines in their creeds, manuals, prayer books, catechisms, etc., but the Lord's church has the responsibility to preach the doctrine of Christ. The church is not to make doctrine but preach and practice His doctrine. To speak of "church of Christ doctrine" is to reveal Biblical ignorance. Some do not wish to accept the doctrine of Christ so they cast off His doctrine by calling it "church of Christ doctrine."

Liberalism extols the denominations while speaking disparagingly of the church. I have heard liberals say, "We are fifty years behind the denominations." So what? That is even too close to that which the Lord planted not and shall be rooted up. Some think the denominations do everything better than faithful brethren. But they fail to realize we are not doing the same work. The church does God's work, God's way. Denominations do not even teach people correctly how to be saved.

Very Negative

Liberals like to point out what they consider to be wrong with the church in its work and the way it stands for the truth. Why should God's people want to be like those who are merely religious but not God's people as denominations? We do not want to be behind the denominations. We do not even want to be on the same road. We canot afford to go the same direction. We must ever be as far "behind" them as necessary to continue to be the Lord's church. We ought to love the body of Christ more than to place it beneath the human religions and cast reflections against it and its sacred design and marks of identification. We might remember that the methods used by denominations to promote their error are not necessarily the methods God's people ought to use to promote the truth.

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Lesson Three

It is liberalism to promote, endorse, and enforce the use and acceptance of the modern versions of the Bible as if they were reliable translations. This included such versions as the Revised Standard Version, New International Version, Today's English Version, New English Bible, and many of the private translations like Moffatt's, Goodspeed's, and similar publications. One of the worst is called The Living Bible.

We are aware that no translators were inspired of God. Nor are we unmindful that there be weaknesses and faults in any of them because translations involve the work of human beings. However, the weaknesses and faults are not of the same type and seriousness.

Anti-KJV

Some have jumped on the modern speech version bandwagon to the extent that they now make all manner of charges and criticisms against the King James Version, thinking if they can find fault with it that this in some way gives credibility to the new things. We have no objections to new versions per se. We have no objections to translations that use synonymous terms and teach alike. But we are disgusted with so-called translations that are nothing better than paraphrases and human commentaries, mistranslations, and rewritten passages that do not teach what God revealed but rather incorporate into the text the doctrines of men. We have never understood why those who say they love the truth are so insistent that brethren adopt one of these new perversions that teach fatal doctrinal error. Their passion for the new has led them from what is true.

Some have gone so far in their advocacy of the new versions to declare that elders have no right to determine which version or versions may be taught publicly from pulpits and classes. They would rob the eldership of their God-given authority and supervision in order to force new versions upon those who attend. Such is the manner of liberals. Many churches now have such things as the New International Version in their auditoriums, distribute them to people, especially the young, and evidently do not know, or what is more likely, do not care

what these books teach.

The schools operated by brethren have done more to promote the modern versions than probably any other one source, even some of them doing it while they were denying doing it at the same time. Such books are tools of the devil that cannot but lead to digression because they teach things foreign to the Word of God. New books mean new authority. New authority will produce a different people. The adoption of them shows a gross disrespect for the Word of God and reflects a contemptible attitude toward the inspired Word.

Most of the new versions have been produced for monetary gain and the promotion of denominational dogma. But some of my "let's be with it" brethren and the "scholars" keep cadence with the liberals and modernists that have produced them.

Liberalism denies that a translation can be inspired. No one after whom I have heard and read contends the translators were inspired like the original penmen. The scribes of the Old Testament were not inspired but what they copied was. Jesus quoted from the Septuagint translation and contended it was inspired, a translation of seventy Hebrew scholars. Do you suppose Jesus knew what He was doing? To the extent a translation is just that, a translation, it is as true as the original text. This is true or we cannot have and do not have the Word of God in our tongue.

First Peter 1:25 would insist that God has given His protection over the preservation of His Word. To deny any translation can be inspired is to contend that the Bible may only contain inspired thoughts, which is the contention of many who say the Bible is only man's commentary on the Word of God. One of the most ridiculous statements we have ever read and heard about modern versions was that when one reads the RSV, NIV, KJV, and ASV, he is reading the very words of God. How can this be when these books do not say the same thing. I mean they not only use different words, they teach different doctrines and where some add, others take away. But the legs of the liberal are never the same length. Scripture contends for a total, verbal, plenary inspiration of an inerrant, infallible, all-sufficient and authoritative Bible. The King James Version is the nearest and best that is available to the English reader, even with its sometimes found archaic words, obsolete formations, and syntax and translational weaknesses. We commend it, preach from it, and people can understand it and know the truth they must know to be saved. This is not what can be said of such

versions as the NIV, RSV, etc.

Regarding The Holy Spirit

It is a mark of liberalism to teach the personal, literal indwelling of the Holy Spirit, giving direct influence, guidance, direction and divine help. Some say the Holy Spirit actually, literally, takes up residence in the body that houses our spirit.

While Scripture teaches that the Spirit dwells in us and we in Him, it also teaches that God the Father dwells in us as does the Son (Romans 8:11; First Corinthians 3:16; First John 4:12; Ephesians 3:17). To teach that we are led by the Spirit by some nudges, notions, feelings, and special guidances is to negate the all-sufficiency of the Word of God. The Word dwells in us also (Colossians 3:16). The truth is that to the extent man abides in the teaching of the Word, to that extent he has fellowship with Deity. The "indwelling" is but a Biblical way of speaking of our fellowship with Deity. We do not become "little gods" with Deity inhabiiting our bodies.

This literal, personal indwelling idea is sometimes cited from Acts 2:38 and the "*gift of the Holy Spirit.*" There are several views on what that means, but the most consistent one is taught right in the text itself. While some contend it is a personal indwelling, others teach it is the possession of miraculous powers.

Peter was answering the question, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* He told them to repent and be baptized, all of them, in the name of or by the authority of Christ, and told them why. It was for the remission of sins. What would be the additional result of their obedience. They would receive something. What? A gift! What gift? A gift of the Holy Spirit, meaning from Him, given by Him, His gift. This is a possessive phrase, like the doctrine of Christ shows to whom the doctrine belongs, the gift of the Holy Spirit shows the One who gives the gift. It is the Holy Spirit's gift, not the Holy Spirit Himself. We also read of the gift of God. That is not God Himself (Acts 8:20; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 8:15). The gift of Christ (Ephesians 4:7) is not the literal indwelling of Christ Himself. Verse 39 of Acts 2 tells us what the gift of the Holy Spirit is.

Gift Of The Holy Spirit

It is the giving of that which was promised. It was a promise

that was extended to *"you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."* The verse begins with the word *"for,"* translated from the Greek word "gar," which means there is to follow an explanation of what has just been stated. Peter explains the gift of the Holy Spirit as a promise given as extensively as even to us. That is not the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, nor the promise of miraculous powers, nor the promise of personal inhabitancy. I know of only one promise in the Bible that is as inclusive as what Peter stated and that is the promise to Abraham that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. That referred to Christ (Galatians 3';16). Salvation would be offered to man through Christ. Those who believed and obeyed Christ would be given that great salvation. The gift of the Holy Spirit is reception of the promise of salvation that God offered to the entire human family through Christ, the seed of Abraham. It is not a literal, personal indwelling. That idea has given rise to much of the Pentecostal doctrines of direct leading, direct operation, direct guidance. It gives rise to religion by "feelings" and claims of tongue speaking, miracles today, and some even claim that this "indwelling serves as a protection against sinning in a supernatural fashion." It brings on this "being more spiritual" attitude because Deity lives inside. We have heard it claimed that prayer is answered because of the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Some confuse God's providential answers to prayer as being a result of a personal indwelling. This is a part of the vast array of false doctrines and positions that find their origin in the contention of a personal, literal, actual indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It just is false as can be.

Holy Spirit And Scripture

There is not one influence upon man that Scripture attributes to the Holy Spirit that is not also said of the Word of God. Just what all Deity may do for us, we are not in a position to tell. But what Deity does TO us, in leading, guiding, directing, comes by and through the all-sufficient Word. The Holy Spirit operates on the hearts of people, but the instrument He uses is the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). The Spirit and the Word are not the same, but the Spirit uses the Word. To contend for a direct operation by the Holy Spirit, separate and apart from the Word, is to jump off into the disregard of Biblical authority, which is liberalism.

Some contend for a personal indwelling of the Spirit but do not contend that the Spirit does anything special as a result. They say they could not even know the Spirit dwells in them except the Word says so. This may be a relatively harmless view as far as distorting the work of the Spirit and man's relationship to God. It does not detract from the Word as the other views mentioned. But it has no Biblical support and is a misinterpretation of what the dwelling of Deity in man, and man in Deity, really means. It means we are among the saved and we have fellowship with Deity because of that relationship.

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Lesson Four

Those who promote liberalism like to say that man cannot say who will be lost. "Leave the destiny of people to God," they say. To say who shall be lost is to "judge" and we cannot "play God" like that. This is so deceptive and misleading. If the liberal is consistent with his words he cannot say what is sinful, wrong or a violation of God's law. Sin is a transgression of law, God's law (First John 3:4). All sin (Romans 3:23). Sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Why am I wrong to say that those who do such things that violate God's law are in sin and are lost? Has not God already decreed it so? Are we in error to teach people what God has said?

Judges Judge

If we cannot "judge" anybody, who does the liberal judge those with whom he differs, even on this point? Does he not violate his own rule, even as mistaken as his rule is? What reason is there to reprove and rebuke, as Paul commanded, unless it is to condemn that which is wrong and warn that those who do wrong sin and are lost? We do not violate the teaching regarding judging to teach what God has already judged and condemned. To fail to do this would be to judge God, saying that God is wrong and has no right to say what is wrong. We are not in the "line drawing business" but we are in the business of

pointing out the lines God has already drawn. When God says certain things are sinful, and those who do them are lost, God is the One who has judged, not man. Man is simply teaching God's will. If ever a person is guilty of "playing God" is when he says we cannot teach what God says.

It is not a manifestation of hatred of others to condemn evil. It is a manifestation of hatred of error. But this is what we are supposed to do. *"Abhor that which is evil."* God hates the false way. Why should not those of us who love and follow His will?

Some have become so tolerant of sin and so "loving" that they outlove God. While it is true that we are forbidden to judge another's heart and motives, for we have not that ability. We can test fruit that is borne. We are to warn of sin. We are to condemn sin. We are to tell our fellowman that sin will mean hell unless it is forgiven. To do otherwise would be to discount, disregard and dismiss the authority of God, which is liberalism. *"Judge righteous judgment"* is a direction of Christ (John 7:24). How inconsistent is that liberal who tells you that you are condemned when you condemn! Some are so afraid of hurting the feelings of others they run roughshod over the will of Christ. We tell you that those who are not Christians, faithfully serving Him, cannot be saved in that state. Will the liberal challenge that? If so, by what authority?

Sacrifices Truth

It is liberalism to offer to give up truth for the sake of unity. I once read a question a "preacher" asked. He said, "What are you willing to sacrifice for unity's sake?" He added that truth should not be given up but only matters of opinion. With this we all can agree. But then he proceeded to name a few things he would give up, such as calling the church the church of Christ, opposition to the use of instruments of music in worship, matters of faith and revelation, and not mere matters of human opinion as he suggested.

When asked why give up calling the church the church of Christ, he told me that everybody claims to be the church of Christ. So what? Everybody may claim to be George Washington but that does not mean they are. Everybody may claim to be millionaires but it takes more than the claim. When asked if it is Scriptural to refer to the church as the church of Christ he said it was, but still he would give it up if it would bring unity with others. With whom could it bring unity? It would only

accomodate those who wear names not found in Scripture and who show no respect for speaking as the oracles of God. Shall **we** seek unity with such as those at the price of revealed **truth**? There obviously exists an element in the church that **must** think unity is the ultimate goal in everything. That is not **so**. We can be united and be far removed from being pleasing to God. Unity in error characterizes many religious people. Only unity based on truth is the unity the Lord wants. To compromise and give up truth just to "get along" with somebody is to sacrifice God's will for human fellowship. We are not at liberty to do that. The "dialogues" into which some have involved themselves are not really unity efforts but efforts to have fellowship with each other in spite of divisions. Those that want unity can have it when they all follow the truth. To seek unity but disregard authority is liberalism.

Answering Prayer

The liberal often confuses the question of whether God answers a sinner's prayer by confusing the difference between an alien sinner and a Christian who sins. When asked, "Does God answer a sinner's prayer?" one "scholar" said, "I hope so for we all sin." This is an example of the duplicity of teaching characteristic of liberals.

We doubt not that Christians sin (First John 1:8,10). But children of God have the privilege of prayer and the promise of being heard and the assurance of God's answer that those who are not in Christ do not have. God is not the spiritual Father of those not in Christ. The alien is not His spiritual child. He does not sustain the same relationship with God as the Christian, even the one who sins.

That God is aware of all things, even all prayers, we do not doubt. He took note of the prayer of Cornelius (Acts 10). If that is what is meant by "hearing and answering prayers" we could agree. But the one out of Christ has no line of communication with God as yet. He is an alien and lost, severed from God by sin. To give an answer to the question such as the liberal cited above one would think there was no difference between the Christian and the alien. It is simply to thrust a false idea that God answers the prayers of sinners. Those that contend otherwise need to show it so by Biblical authority and not be evasive and use deceitful cliches.

Liberals teach it is acceptable to have choruses, solos, as well as congregational singing. Recently we read where some even now contend there is no authority for congregational singing. They say this to try to make way for the use of the instrument, admitting there is no authority for it. Even if they are right, and they are not, they would have only proved we do two things unauthorized rather than proving instruments or choirs right. But the New Testament teaching does authorize congregation singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) but not so with solos and choirs. All are commanded to sing and in the singing we teach and admonish one another. When the choir or soloists sings, who is being taught and admonished by the hearers? How can it be said they are doing what singing is to accomplish?

Never think that liberals will not reach out for some kind of "reason" to justify what they want to do, regardless of how foolish their "reasoning" is. One contended for choirs on the basis that when the congregation sings not everyone sings anyway. He also said that having a choir is no different from singing songs where one part sings for a moment, possibly a line or phrase, and other parts remain momentarily quiet awaiting the part applicable to them. This man teaches in one of the colleges operated by our brethren. Can you imagine what the young who sit in his classes must get from him?

Anybody who cannot see the difference between some singing and others never singing, as in choir presentations, and songs where each one sings his or her part just does not want to see. Nobody is forbidden to sing when different parts are sung. That is not true when only the choir is to perform. The fact that some do not sing, which is error on their part, does not justify incorporating that error into common and acceptable practice. Liberals will say most anything to find excuse to do what they have already decided they want and will do the authority of God notwithstanding.

One of our "scholars" in a Bible department, and at a lectureship, said people from the Christian Church should be accepted in full fellowship without rejecting the instrument of music, without acknowledging it is wrong to use it, if they promise not to cause any trouble over it. He said, "Try to teach them, but if they just cannot see it, it is better to accept them anyway." Can you believe this?

Can you see Paul teaching in Ephesus to accept brethren who

still served Diana if they promised not to cause trouble over it? Do you really think sin can be overlooked "if you just can't see it?" How many other things of the will of God can we push aside if people "just can't see it?" This is liberalism that has blossomed and gone to seed.

Supposed To Come Out

Those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel are added to the Lord's church. But you never read of anybody doing these things to become a member of a denomination. When those in the church preach and practice error they are to come out from it, repent of it, cease to practice it, not just promise not to make trouble over it. They cannot hold to false views just because "they can't see it." Do we take the same attitude toward other sins as lying, stealing, adultery, ignoring the Lord's Supper, etc.? I suppose many do, but it is the wrong approach toward correcting false ways. When you realize that many young people and congregations are hearing this sort of thing and going along with it, is it any wonder that those who know and love the truth contend that liberalism is a hideous danger to the church?

In the next lesson we shall discuss dancing, social drinking, immodest dress, profanity, and other forms of worldliness. We shall discuss the flippant and irreverent terms used by some in prayer with reference to God, also theistic evolution, the contention that there is no specific and exclusive day to partake of the Lord's Supper. Many are the inroads of liberalism among brethren. Some care. Tragically, most do not seem to know the difference between right and wrong and many of those have no intention of learning because they don't care.

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Local Autonomy was never intended to serve as a shield and protection for false doctrine. We respect God's government that calls for each congregation to govern itself, but truth versus error is not confined within congregational boundaries. There is something missing in the minds of brethren who think they can teach and preach openly and publicly whatever they want and then claim immunity to exposure on the grounds of local autonomy. JB

Confession

One of the principal points in the doctrine of Christ is that of confession. This lesson is designed to teach what the New Testament teaches on this subject.

What is a confession? It is an act of confessing. It is to admit, acknowledge, avow, grant something to be true. It may be a confession of a condition, a fact, a crime, or some reality. But it is to settle the matter to say, "This is true and this is what I believe."

The New Testament teaches confession in at least two senses as it pertains to the faith authored by Christ. One is a confession or acknowledgement concerning Christ. The other is the confession or admission of sin.

Confessing Christ is essential to our salvation. "*Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God.*" (Luke 12:8,9). "*Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.*" (Matthew 10:32).

Who is to be confessed? It is Christ. What is it about Christ that we are to confess? We must confess that He is the Son of God. The whole system of Christ stands or falls on that point. When Jesus asked His disciples who they thought Him to be, Peter answered, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus explained that it was upon that rock, that confession, that truth, that He would build His church. Paul added, "*For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" (First Corinthians 3:11).

Consequences

Take note of the consequences of confessing and the refusal to confess. One means being acknowledged by the Son of God before the Father. The other will result in being denied as belonging to the saved when we stand before the Father. Have you properly considered the value of making the confession concerning Christ? Paul wrote, "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the*

mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:9,10).

We have an example of one confessing his faith in Christ in Acts 8:35-38. Philip had preached Jesus unto the Ethiopian. The Ethiopian asked, *"See, here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."* Upon that confession Philip baptized him. Like faith and repentance, confession of Christ must proceed baptism.

While confession is essential to salvation, the Bible does not give us any specific manner in which this confession must be worded. There is no formal procedure to be followed. But the acknowledgement of Christ and the admission of one's conviction that He is the Son of God is a part of God's plan for saving man from sin.

Some Who Confessed

We read of others who confessed Christ. God confessed Him at His baptism and transfiguration (Matthew 3:7; 17:5). John the Baptist said of Him, *"Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29). Again, John 1:34, *"And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."*

We have already noted the confession by Peter in Matthew 16:16. Martha confessed her faith in John 11:27, *"I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."* John wrote, *"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."* (First John 4:15). There are several instances of the confession of Christ.

Even though this confession is essential, it is not all-sufficient. People can give "lip-service" to Christ (Matthew 15:8). Confession without obedience is like saying, "Lord, Lord," but failing to do the will of the Father as required in Matthew 7:21 . To say we have fellowship with Him, but walk in the darkness of sin is to make ourselves liars (First John 1:6; 2:4). The way of salvation is not "confession only" any more than faith only or grace only or anything else only.

When we confess Christ we are admitting many things. We acknowledge Him as God's Son, His Deity, that He is Savior, He is authority and His gospel is truth. We admit that we are sinners and in need of His salvation. We concur with what the Scriptures reveal concerning Him, His miracles, His words, His life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, return and judgment.

When one truly believes that Jesus is the Son of God he will readily accept all that the Bible teaches concerning Him.

Not Only Once

In one sense our confession is not just a one time matter prior to baptism. In the manner of life that we live thereafter we acknowledge Christ and that He is our Lord and Savior. When we are tempted and resist temptation we are confessing Christ. When we are tried and hold fast to what is right we acknowledge Him. When pressured to do evil but remain loyal, again we show our faith in Him. When opportunity to do good is afforded us and we seize it and do what is good we are saying to all, I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Observing the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of Christ, an admission of our faith concerning Him and what He did on our behalf.

All would not confess Christ while He was on earth, even some who believed on Him (John 12:42). All will not confess Him now. John wrote, *"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is anti-Christ, that denieth the Father and the Son."* (First John 2:2). *"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is some in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an anti-Christ."* (Second John 7).

People often meet opposition to their confession. The blind man did (John 9). Parents, family, many others may well oppose your statement and life of allegiance to Christ. But, like the blind man who was healed, we must let nothing keep us from confessing Him.

There is a second confession of the religion of Christ that is a confession of one who has already become a Christian, but who sins again. That a Christian can sin, does sin, may even so sin as to be disinherited is plainly taught in Scripture. John wrote, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* (First John 1:8,10). Christians are taught to confess their sins (James 5:16). This is one of the conditions of forgiveness. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (First John 1:9). Christians, like the prodigal son of Luke 15, can say, *"I have sinned."* We need to confess to our heavenly Father our sins as the prodigal did to his father.

Error About Confessing

The teaching of confessing sins by Christians is not a doctrine of "bearing all to all". There is nothing that authorizes the doctrine that we are to reveal to anyone, whosoever, wheresoever, whenever, every thought, deed, word, etc. of our lives. Rather than this action being the confession taught in the New Testament, it is rather a mind-controlling, intimidating, power-grabbing manipulation of those who would place themselves above others. Neither is there a "confessor father" to whom we make our confessions.

When we sin we must confess them to God because all sin is against God. When our sin involves others, to the extent it does involve others, to that extent that our sin is known and brings harm on the Lord's body and His truth, to that extent it should be acknowledged. We need for others to forgive us of our sins when we have sinned against them. How can they forgive us of our sins if they are never aware of our penitent spirit concerning our sins? However, when one is neither knowledgeable nor involved regarding our sin, he is not privileged to receive confession of it. Too many times throughout religious history there have been those who have exercised a cultish control over others through the demands of confession. But Christ is our high priest and it is through Him that we approach God, not some man, or prayer partner, who sets himself up to pass judgment on our confession and exploit our souls.

It is well to add, however, that one cannot openly, publicly sin and then expect to "cover it all up" in a corner. This is unreasonable as sinning "in a corner" and trying to "cover it up" openly before all when all are not even aware or involved. If your sin involves others, include those it involves. If it is a matter between you and God, then settle it between you and God.

What Confession Is Not

This confession of Christians is not simply saying, "IF I have sinned." That does not admit anything except possibly a willingness to repent. That attitude is good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. We are not merely commanded to confess as willingness to repent. We are taught to confess our sins. Nor is it a confession that simply says, "I want to do better." If that was what confession of sins is, then everybody ought to be making a public confession all the time, everytime, because who among us should not want to do better? Again, the confession the Bible teaches is a confession, admission of sins.

Upon that confession, we, as Christians, have the privilege of prayer to ask God's forgivenss. This is what Peter taught Simon in Acts 8:22.

If you are not in Christ you must confess Christ as a step in your response to the call of the gospel, prior to being baptized for the remission of sins. If you are a Christian and have so sinned as to call for a public confession, then do not delay to confess your sins before all. If you have sinned before God and He alone is aware of it, confess it to Him, and ask Him to forgive. This is a necessary step for the Christian to be forgiven.

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ARTICLE: Hard Preaching

Everyone probably has their definition of what "hard preaching" is. Preachers who are serious about the truth are finding the very task of preaching to be harder and harder because so many have lost real love for it.

It is not uncommon to hear somebody say about a visiting preacher, or someone of whom they have received report, "He sure does preach hard." Possibly you are acquainted with statements heard about a preacher conducting a gospel meeting, "Do you preach that hard at home?" as if there should be a conscious effort by the preacher to preach "hard" away from home but "softer" at home.

What is this thing called "hard preaching?" It might depend upon how applicable the sermon is to the life of the one doing the measuring. If the sermon called for something the hearer has already done, that is not too hard. If it condemned something of which the hearer is not guilty, that is not too hard. But if the lesson presented God's requirements in a matter that the hearer has not obeyed, or condemned some sin of which he is guilty, then that sermon might be labeled by him a "hard sermon" and the preacher a "hard preacher."

In our day there seems to be a lessening desire for certain sounds, sound speech, sound doctrine and clear distinction between truth and error. Some are repulsed by anything that shows the line God has drawn. They often insinuate that the preacher has drawn the line of his own authority rather than what he has actually done; namely, brought attention to the line

God has drawn. But such preaching is called "hard."

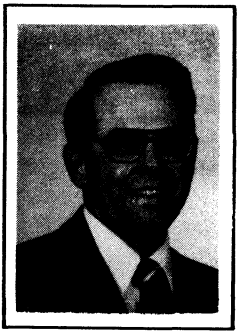
With some only the mushy, ambiguous, "yo" type of sermons (those kind where you can take it either way, yes or no, whatever you like) is judged to be preaching "in the Christian spirit." Even among many brethren this attitude of choosing what you like and discarding what you do not wish to accept, (the same attitude that has dominated the denominational world throughout history), is very much in evidence. A growing number just would prefer nothing that is demanding or that possibly could offend anyone. As one elder once told me of a sermon(?) he heard from a preacher(?), "It was wonderful. Nobody was upset and nobody felt guilty. Nobody was aroused and all left feeling good."

I challenge anybody, if they really *"preach the word,"* to offend nobody. What can you preach? You will not preach Jesus Christ as the Son of God because that will be too hard for the unbeliever. You cannot teach that salvation is only in the church because non-members may become offended. You certainly cannot teach the moral standard of Christ because that would offend liars, the dishonest, the adulterers in multi-married relationshps, drinkers, swearers, on and on. To them moral purity is hard preaching. Just sit down and try to figure it out and see if there is much of anything in the Bible that you can preach that somebody does not call "hard preaching." You will find you have no material left.

You really cannot even preach the truth on the lovely theme of love because so many have the distorted impression that love means acceptance regardless of what you do, that it is only an emotion that prevents objecting to any doctrine whether false or not, crossing anybody despite their conduct. Few subjects have been as maligned in our time as the subject of love. That love demands obedience is "hard preaching" to many people even though Jesus said we show our love by our obedience.

While there is no excuse or justification for deliberately abusive speech from the pulpit or anywhere else, we need to "get our heads on straight" before we cast stones at what some have called "hard preaching." It just could be that the truth is being preached just as the Word of God has revealed it and what is "hard" is the heart of the one who is hearing it, who does not really want it, and therefore will simply reject it, hoping to someway cast some discredit against it by calling it "hard preaching." **JWB**

What Is Liberalism?



JAMES W. BOYD

It is significant that there is considerable discussion among faithful brethren about the philosophy called Liberalism. It is unfortunate that everyone who professes to be a Christian is not better informed about this sinister and deadly series of doctrines that are not only evident in the religious world generally but also are quite evident among many brethren, those who profess to be members of the church of Christ. Too few keep up with what goes on and are woefully uninformed and misinformed. But this can be changed.

In this issue there are four lessons on the subject and these will be followed by three more on the same theme in the next issue. Also included will be other lessons on other subjects.

It is not intended that these lessons be an exhaustive study of liberalism in its many faces and forms, but hopefully will strengthen the faithful in their stand for truth and might arouse and awaken some who are content to sleep while the ways of error erode the very foundations upon which we stand.

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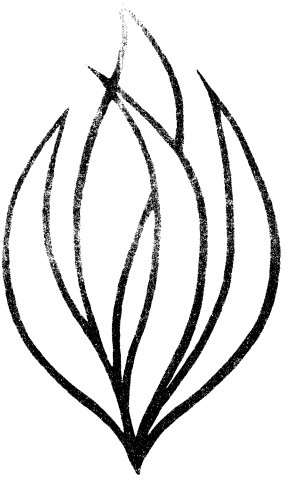

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 10**

What Is Liberalism?

Lesson Five

Liberalism gives acceptance and approval, either by openly advocating or silently condoning, the worldly evils as the modern dance, smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, including what is called social drinking, immodest attire, profanity and other such things. Modern dancing is one form of lasciviousness, a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:19). *"They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."* I know that the liberal, worldly church member does not accept this. But that changes nothing except his likelihood of going to heaven. Even the originators of these dances and the godless who participate in them admit they are for the sexual enjoyment of them. Only now and again some irresponsible parent, or some person who seeks popularity, will try to argue to the contrary. I have seen church bulletins that commend young people for some social recognition they were awarded at the school prom. The preacher and elders of that liberal outfit did not represent the Lord's church but a distorted picture of what being a Christian involves. They are of the world but claim to be of Christ. If they had respect for the authority of God they would have disciplined the young person rather than praising him. But this permissiveness has infected many of the modern and liberal churches that still call themselves churches of Christ.

Social Drinking

First Peter 4:3 condemns what is called in the KJV, "*banqueting.*" This literally means taking strong drink in small amounts. When I began preaching you could hardly find one who claimed to be a gospel preacher who would not oppose such a practice, or even silently condoned it. But now the insipid college-trained and liberal clerics will go along with their sinful church brethren and social drinking is no longer by many considered a sin. They have surrendered the will of God for the praise and pleasure of this world. Elderships that tolerate such as that are servants of the devil, leading their flocks to hell rather than heaven, and do not deserve being called Christians, let

alone elders.

In spite of First TImothy 2:9, *"...that women adorn themselves in modest apparel,"* there is seldom a gathering of "Christians" where scanty clothing is not worn. Some churches even sponsor mixed swimming parties. Preachers even joke about it. Preachers, whose daughters have paraded themselves before the eyes of the world in skimpy clothing in beauty contests, are invited to speak at youth rallies. Honors are given to those who have won such events. Then we wonder why the church has no impact on the evil of the world! It is because so many in the church are no different from the world. There was once some brethren who refused to serve the Lord's Supper until the "ladies" of the church quit wearing their revealing mini-skirts to worship. What sacrilege! If gospel preachers preached the truth and opposed such things they were accused by liberals of being "dirty-minded." Such people may not know it but they make themselves fuel for hell. Women who have no more respect for themselves than to expose themselves as many do are not faithful followers of the will of God. Such exposure provokes lust and leads to overt immoralities. But what care the liberals? They have discarded serious regard for the Word anyway! They are keeping up with the fashions regardless of how offensive to God and faithful brethren.

Liberals like to create doubt about the day on which the Lord's Supper is to be served. We have heard some preachers participating in wedding ceremonies where the Lord's Supper was supposed to have been served. Others have said they see more reason to partake of it on Thursday, the day the Lord instituted it, than to do what a few disciples in Troas did. Such teaching shows contempt for the authority of the Bible, which is the characteristic of liberalism.

We have authority to partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week (Acts 20:7), in the assembly (First Corinthians 11), which we are not to forsake (Hebrews 10:25). Where is the authority for partaking of it any other day? Let the liberals produce it! They cannot and will not but this will probably not matter to them. They do what they want because they are liberal, having no regard for divine authority when it runs counter to what they want. Evidence proves nothing to them unless it suits what they want.

Evolution

The teaching of theistic evolution runs rampant among members of the churches of Christ in many places. It has been growing through the years. Beginning with Bible department heads of the schools who said it would be a mistake to withhold fellowship from those who adopt theistic evolution, to teachers in science and Bible departments that openly endorse the Satanic doctrine that contradicts "thus saith the Lord," it has spread into the churches. There are men in the church who go about conducting lectures to prove the existence of God who hold evolutionist views and positions, who make the arguments of theistic evolutionists, making the same false charges of theistic evolutionists, attacking the same Biblical revelation as do theistic evolutionists, and yet, deny they are theistic evolutionists. But when you deal very long with liberals you soon learn that lying is a common characteristic among them.

There is no compatibility between the organic theories and hypothesis of atheistic, agnostic or theistic evolution and the Word of God. Neither science nor the Bible sustains such a doctrine. But what care those who want to be considered "somewhat" among the "wise" of the world? They have no qualms about calling the Biblical account of creation a myth. They will embrace in fellowship those who deny its historicity. It has become the "in" thing among the unbelieving "scholars" to accept evolution. Liberals do not dare risk their acceptance in the world by standing for the truth of God!

Disrespect

With the upsurge of disrespect for the Word of God it was to be expected that this disrespect would soon be directed toward God Himself. Liberals have been heard to address the Almighty God as "Dad." "The man upstairs" is a phrase tossed about by them. They consider God about like most consider a good buddy. They have such contempt for the reverent terms of Thee, Thou and Thine, preferring You, and Yours, because the modern "versions" use such terms, and because they hold the KJV with such hatred. They have leaped beyond reason to where even one referred to God as "The Big One." We use these phrases with caution as we discuss them, only to express our total rejection of them, and cite them only to show what liberals have done and are doing.

God is not like the neighbor next door. He is the Eternal and

Almighty One, the Creator and Judge. He is our Heavenly Father. Deity is not to be considered with flippancy and cheap familiarity. There are those who even condone using You and Yours in their so-called Bibles regarding Jesus Christ even when such usage has been deliberately denoted to refer to mere man and thereby cast a shadow on the claim of Deity by Jesus Christ. Is there no limit of sacrilege and profanity of Deity to which the twisted, conceited and rebellious liberal mind will not go?

Coming Through Schools

While many in the church howl at the next point, there has not risen one to my knowledge that can refute it. The most prominent source of liberalism coming into the church is coming through the schools of "higher learning," graduate schools and colleges. It is not necessarily liberalism to seek and acquire high scholastic degrees. But it has become THE criteria for some to even consider somebody competent to preach the gospel. There is probably no more self-exalted people on earth than the religiously degreed professor. What he does not know is unimportant, and if you do not believe these people are that way just deal with them. There have been some who have reached high levels of academic learning who have remained loyal, faithful and strong. Some are the most outspoken against liberalism and stand for the truth. But many have bowed the knee to liberal Baal, have returned to fill chairs at colleges as professors, and infected the youth, elderships and church with the heresy they learned at the seminaries while attaining their academic degrees. Is it not evident that something has gone awry in schools where even their founders, and the most stalwart preachers of the gospel who taught there, are no longer considered deserving of consideration, no longer considered qualified to teach the young about the Bible, even aspiring young preachers? Has not something gone amiss when the works of faithful brethren are pushed aside and/or totally discarded if not ridiculed in favor of the outpouring from non-Christian, liberal, modernists and unbelieving "scholars"? But this has contaminated college after college.

Just consider the lists of men who are invited for lectureships. Does anybody making the selections care whether the persons are sound in the faith anymore? Are these people deserving of being placed on such programs simply because they preach for large, rich churches, so often churches that have led in one way

or another from the truth? Why do adminstrators of colleges feel disposed to furnish pulpits for those who have torn the church asunder by their false doctrines and practices? Does the gathering of influence, power and money to operate mean more to them than standing for truth? We are confident the answer has repeatedly proven to be, "Yes." Some of the most experienced, sound, faithful teachers of truth are not considered qualified to teach in these institutions, but let some young, inexperienced, fresh-from-the-denominational-seminary with a doctors degree step forward and he is considered the man of the hour. Such is the disposition of school after school and this is why I have been forced to the conclusion I cannot have confidence in the Bible departments of these colleges operated by members of the church. Administrators give every indication that the school must be that for which Christ died and the church is instituted to supply and provide funds but keep quiet about the false doctrines and practices among them.

One head of a Bible department told me personally, when the drift and change in his department was noted, that young people will not listen anymore to anyone except the doctors. I told him that was no so and it was a vicious put-down of many faithful young people and gospel preachers. I asked him if the average gospel preacher can only teach the young possibly through high school but after that the only ones qualified are the seminary trained professors, he said, "That's the way it is." I deny that forcefully and brand it as collegiate contempt for faithful preachers of the gospel and evidence of the snobbery too often found among professors in these schools!

Liberalism has become so imbedded in the schools, being taught by liberal teachers, that it has done eternal damage to this generation of members of the church. Unless and until the church cuts itself from being influenced by these schools, the church cannot and will not retain its distinctiveness as the church revealed in the New Testament. The possibility that the schools will ever return to the teaching of soundness is so remote.

An Alernative

Many brethren, seeing this tragedy in education, have begun operating training schools for preachers under the oversight of faithful elderships. Not all such schools have stayed loyal to the faith. But the hope for properly and Biblical trained preachers comes not from the four year colleges, but from sound churches

who train sound men.

I can hear some twisted and prejudiced soul now declaring, "Boyd is anti-school." That is foolish. Boyd is anti-error that pours from these schools. Why should you not also be concerned? Do the schools have some kind of special dispensation from God to exercise "academic freedom" to the contradiction of the Word? Just who these professors and administrators think themselves to be? Why do they not educate the young and quit trying to dominate, regulate, manipulate and intimidate churches and fill them with the heresy so often found among the professors and in their classrooms?

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Lesson Six

It is no more right to pervert the work of the church than it is to pervert the Word of God or worship. Liberalism has carried the church into areas of activity for which there is no authority nor connection with what the church is supposed to do. The work of the church can be placed into one of three categories: (1) evangelism, (2) benevolence, and (3) edification. There is no truth whatever to the statement that whatever the individual can do the church can also do in all matters. There are many areas where individual and corporate work might overlap, but there are also many areas that are exclusive. Can the church vote in political campaigns? Can the church run a hardware store? Can the church join the civic clubs? Can the individual do the work the corporate body together is to do? There are many secular, social, economic and other matters open to the individual Christian that does not pertain to the work of the church.

Just which category do you fit building gymnasiums, tracks for jogging, weight lifting rooms and exercise classes? Just which category goes the entertainment and recreational efforts? Where do you place the secular education, chemistry laboratories, basketball courts and dormitory rooms even for students who pay tuition? Did it ever occur to elderships and preachers that Colossians 3:17 is still in the Bible? There is no Biblical authority for these things being a part of the program of work and

financially undertaken by the church? Why are some so arrogant to defy the necessity for authority? Is it because they are determined to have their way regardless?

Ancient Headline

Cannot you see the headlines in an ancient publication where the Christians in Ephesus nipped the disciples of Diana 8 to 7 in the latest races at the amphitheater? Would not Paul be proud of them and send them commendations? Who really thinks this is that for which Christ died?

The "this world" approach to things that characterizes the "social gospel" which is modernistic heresy has an offspring budding in the things some churches have assumed they have the right to do. What a glorious way to attract the young! Play ball! Feed them hamburgers and "pop" and take them to Christ! It probably will not be long before there will be a group traveling about the country playing basketball for the church. Let me submit a good name for them now. Let's call them "Dribblers For Jesus." We already have gymnastics for Christ by people who even perform on programs that teach false Pentecostal doctrines. Just why do such people have place among us? What use do such people have for the guidelines of Scripture? They show no regard whatever for divine authority. That is liberalism.

But just look at the churches, growing in number, that have male and female ball teams enrolled in the church leagues, playing members of denominational groups, as if such groups were acceptable churches, and leaving the impression the Lord's church is one among them. Why do some brethren have no more regard for the body of Christ than to think they can represent it by a ball team, and give the impression it is no more or less than another denomination among denominations? While all have good clean fun, and there is nothing wrong with having good, clean fun, that is not the work of the church and the church ought not be identified with such tripe and trivia. If you think otheriwse, where is your authority? Without it, why are you not upholding liberalism?

Too Much Doctrine

Liberals wail that the church teaches too much "doctrine." "Doctrines divide," the denominations have told us. Now some of our own brethren are singing the same song, along with their

instruments. "It is the spirit that counts," some say. It is true that doctrine often divides. It divides those who obey from those who do not. The spirit does count. But attitude and spirit do not constitute the sum of Christianity. Who can contend that the right spirit dismisses the doctrine of teaching of Christ? Liberals!

Paul stressed sound doctrine (First Timothy 4:13; Second Timothy 4:2,3; Titus 2:1,8). John did also (Second John 9-11). Some only want those parts of the gospel that pleases them. They do not seem too concerned about what pleases God. They want love, brotherhood, everything "positive," avoiding all conflict with anybody at all costs. All of that is well and good up to a point and faithful brethren work for these things short of compromising truth. But that is not all of the religion of Christ. Doctrine, which is teaching, is not to be minimized nor belittled. How can anybody stress too much what the Lord taught and/or authorized to be taught in His name, or by His authority?

Without taking space to discuss the doctrine of premillennialism, let us simply observe that many battles over this heresy have been fought. That false doctrine challenges the prophecies of God in the Old and New Testaments, denies the work of Christ, degrades the church, contradicts the gospel, abuses the truth and does not belong among the faithful. Today there has arisen a new generation that has fed on the fallacies of false teachers and again it is an issue in the church in places where once it was recognized to be false. One "scholar" told me that it was a mute matter in the church. I asked him where he had been. Had he not been told of books written by brethren holding to such foolishness? Had he discussed religion lately with denominationalists? It is not mute in the church nor in the world. There are many who espouse it and teach it, especially in the television religious programs. Even though it is a doctrine that denies the Word, Christ, the apostles and the kingdom, its nature and goals being human speculation, it continues. Why? It is because those who proclaim it do not have respect for Biblical teaching.

Thus Saith Men

Listen to some of "our preachers" today and if it were not for the theologians whom they quote they would not have much to say at all. I have heard tapes, read articles, seen films, listened to nationwide programs where the speakers made point after point, but never documenting what they taught from Scripture

but always from some "doctor" or what some philosopher said, did or thought. Many times the big programs do not even dwell on Biblical themes except remotely. They are often more of a psychology discussion with the emptiness of human ideas. Some of the so-called preachers in the church evidently spend more time reading the works of men than they do Scripture. They cite men more than Scripture to sustain what they contend is true.

I suppose to be able to quote Barth, Tillich, Schaffer, Lewis, James and others shows a man to be well read. But in what is he well read? One preacher of great fame, and once a college department head, could hardly preach a lesson without numerous quotes from William James or some other of his favorite religionists. Are brethren ashamed of Scripture? Do they even study Scripture? Is it really true that false teachers provide better sermon material than faithful brethren, even better than the inspired men of God who wrote the Scriptures?

Do not misunderstand. The learning of other might at times prove very helpful in coming to a better understanding of things. How many of us have profited immeasurably from the learning of men like Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Alexander Campbell, H. Leo Boles, and space prohibits listing many, many others. But they were, after all, men. If there is truth to be preached, cite its source. That source should be some book, chapter and verse, not some man, regardless of how learned, sincere, studious, influential or whatever.

Who is not aware of the strenuous efforts being made among brethren today to uphold teaching regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage that accomodates the multi-married, multi-divorced society of today? One book I read even contends that God's marriage laws are determined by the current customs of the people. He even said we are under the same laws and permissions that existed in the time of Abraham, Jacob, Moses and others. When I got through reading his writings I wondered why Jesus said anything about marriage at all. When asked why Moses commanded a writing of divorcement, and if it was lawful to put away one's wife for every cause, Jesus should have just said, "I have nothing to add. Everything that has been going on is fine with me. You may continue that way if you please."

The subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage is too lengthy for this lesson. But liberalism is having a hey-day among brethren on this matter. The authority of God has been subverted by the permissivenss and the attitude that anything

goes, Jesus' teaching is a covenant passage, if the teaching is too strong for anyone they can ignore it. How defiant many have become toward God's will on this subject!

There remains no question that the Bible teaches that God's will is one man, one woman, for one lifetime, and only one cause for divorce, with the guilty part not having the right of remarriage. After all the attempts to provide for those who have disregarded God's will in marriage, and all who have relatives and friends who have suffered divorces, God's will remains as it has been from the creation and only liberal thought will challenge it. Heretical teaching does not repeal it.

Fellowship Of Error

Liberals wish to have fellowship with all believers. There are some who are more restrictive and contend they only wish to have fellowship with all baptized believers. They talk about something never suggested in Scripture called "Big F" and "little f" fellowship. They propagate the false doctrine of "unity in diversity," when they really do not want unity but fellowship in spite of differences. They generally confuse fellowship and brotherhood. They have the idea that if one is my brother, having obeyed the gospel, that we shall always be in fellowship. That is not so. Brethren can, and at times must, withhold fellowship from certain ones.

Listen to liberals and watch their lectures and services. They will "brother" this false teacher and "brother" that false teacher. They make little if any distinction between brothers, unless of course you happen to believe you should not fellowship false teachers. Then you are an abomination before them.

Preachers are exchanging and/or willing to exchange pulpits with false teachers of the denominations as if all is well. One college trained "preacher" told me he would happily exchange pulpits with denominational clergymen because he did not consider them to be false teachers. He thought it would be a good gesture. He would even have to study on the matter whether he would consider Billy Graham a false teacher. Brethren are already having false teachers through films. They evidently do not care who they have if it will get a crowd. One church, knowingly, presented to their young people a "preacher" who advocates unity in diversity, believes the instrument of music in worship is not a sin, endorses members of the church belonging to lodges like the Masonic Lodge,

contended denominational preachers were not false teachers, and admitted he had never preached a sermon to the congregation against dancing. What a person to present before anybody, let alone the young! Who could ever accuse those elders of caring for souls according to truth? They could never be charged with standing for the right! Square that behavior, if you can, with Second John 9-11 and Ephesians 5:11?

With some, so long as one says he believes Jesus is the Son of God the doors of fellowship are extended and opened to him. Even devils will confess this. We must remember that there are those who are bending every effort and expense to turn the church into just another denomination. They think they will get along with people far better that way.

Ashdodic

Listen to liberals preach and their speech will betray them. They mouth the "language of Ashdod" (Nehemiah 13:23,24). They have cultivated a vocabulary that is overrun with digressive and denominational phrases. They obviously have not much use for Peter's admonition to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" Sound doctrine and sound speech (Titus 2:1,8) is something with which they are either not familiar or hold in contempt. They know how to do it better.

They will call preachers pastors. The Lord's Supper has been named as a sacrement. Auditoriums are called sanctuaries. They urge people to "witness for Christ." When the Bible talks about witnessing it speaks of those who were eye witnesses or who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Who among them fits either category? But denominations speak that way. So do they.

They urge "rededications" rather than restoration (Galatians 6:1). They get responses by the score when they invite everyone who wants to do better to come forward. Who should not want to do better? They have confused spirituality with the stains of spiritualism. They teach people to "go and tell others what Christ means to you." That is not what we are supposed to do. What Christ means to you may not be what He means to another. We are told to go and tell what Christ means as presented in Scripture. Then, to those who believe and obey, He will mean the same thing.

The list of digressive and liberal departures could be extended but these will be sufficient. Our next lesson will be devoted to what can, should and must be done in face of this barage of

liberal heresy that has captivated most of the religious world, and even subverted many, many churches and individuals who once could be considered faithful brethren in the Lord.

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Lesson Seven

Having shown in previous lessons the philosophy of liberalism, its claims and denials, and having discussed a number of matters that have arisen in the church pertaining to disrespect for the authority of the Bible, we now turn our attention to what can, should and must be done about liberalism in the church. Those matters we used to illustrate the liberalistic spirit among many are not all that could be listed, but were chosen because they are matters with which I have been personally involved in combating through the years I have been preaching the gospel.

It Is Here

First, we must realize that liberalism does exist. I am persuaded that too many brethren have their "heads in the sand," either pretending all is well, or content to remain ignorant of the realities about them hoping it all will somehow just go away. There is no profit in denying what is so obvious. We have not reached the state of total despair or believe liberalism has become dominant among many. But liberals have done well in their wicked cause and liberalism is eroding the gains that have been made on behalf of the truth over the years, subverting souls, taking the church more and more into digression and apostasy. Even though bitter attacks are often leveled against those who warn of liberalism, even vicious attacks by some who cry for "love," (deliver us from the kind of love liberals demonstrate), let us be honest with reality and admit we have the problem and we have it now.

Know What It Is

Second, let us realize what liberalism is for what it is. It is heresy. If you do not like labels, such as liberal, conservative,

anti, modernist, which do define and describe positions, then use the Biblical word heresy. That is what liberalism is. Heresy simply means standing opposed to authority. That defines liberalism and is at its core.

Its Sources

Third, let us recognize the sources from which it flows. This includes papers, publishing houses that sell anything and everything if it will make a profit, the colleges and especially the Bible departments, some science departments, modern versions, and the sophisticated, self-exalting, egotistical clergymen among us who are not deserving of being called gospel preachers. The sideshow artists and promotionalists who create attractions for great crowds, who attack everything, trying to remove whatever has been, who denounce even the people and their works on whose shoulders they have stood and in churches built by sound teaching, these are the major sources through which this heresy pours. We need to know who these are.

Show The Difference

Fourth, let us not only be negative and defensive regarding liberalism. Let us go on the attack by teaching the truth on all points in the doctrine of Christ. Brethren who are taught truth will be able to recognize liberalism. This series of lessons is one attempt to accomplish that very thing. We must show the difference between right and wrong, truth and error, so everyone will be able to discern good from evil.

We should not continue to use those men whose influence is toward liberalism. We should remove all literature that smacks of it. We should give warning to churches, preachers, elderships and whosoever that flirts with liberalism. False teachers do not deserve to be permitted in the pulpits and classes of faithful churches. We can keep the perverted Bibles out of the worship services and teaching sessions and never leave an impression in any way that would imply we accept them as reliable Bibles. We must discipline those who persist in holding and propagating liberal positions. We cannot obey God if we do otherwise. Some years ago I wrote an article entitled, "Why Should They Be Among Us?" It was an article dealing with how to handle false liberal teachers that arise in our ranks. Why should they still be in our ranks? Why should brethren allow them to continue as if

they were faithful preachers and teachers? God has provided a manner by which to dispose of those who are determined to teach error. Why do we not follow God's way? This attitude of "go along to get along" is the attitude with which Satan is pleased because it only produces apostasy. If we wish to get along with God we cannot expect to get along with those who defy and disobey God by defying His authority as do liberals.

Know The Book

Fifth, know your Bible. The surest preventive against subversion from either the left or right is a thorough knowledge of the truth. No smooth tongued orator, no personable preacher, no backslapping promoter, no college president, no professor of digression can take the church into error when and if the membership is Biblically informed. The taught will recognize error at the first sound of it and will not tolerate its continued proclamation nor support any effort where it is tolerated and promoted. But when brethren do not know what the Bible teaches, and do not keep up with what is happening around them, they can and will be tossed to and fro and taken any direction by the false teachers who are schooled and trained in moving the masses into liberalism.

This same knowledge will prevent you from going to the other extreme of human legalism where some bind what God has not bound. It will demand of everyone the necessity for authority for whatever is said, done, preached or practiced.

Prayer

Sixth, let us pray fervently, regularly and sincerely that in God's providence His Word and the church will prevail against those who would set it aside for whatever be their reasons so the oncoming generations will hear and be able to know and obey God's truth. Others fought valiantly that we might have the church and we should never be content to do anything less for those that follow us. God can overrule the false teachers and their false doctrines. We can allow Him to use us in doing that very thing. We are in a struggle for the continued existence of faithful churches. Liberalism will destroy us if we do not wage our righteous warfare against it. We need God's providential assistance and we have the avenue of prayer open to us.

Stand Up And Speak Out

Seventh, stand by the preaching of truth and the exposure of error. There be more than a few brethren who will not openly teach what is false. What they teach is the truth as far as they teach. But they will not teach the whole counsel of God and will not attack the devil's deceits, keeping their mouths closed rather than risking themselves. Not only will such people refrain from saying what needs to be said, even from pulpits, they often have disparaging words and belittling attitudes toward those who love the truth and the souls of people enough to stand up and speak out on the side of the Lord. Such people will, of course, be held accountable for their cowardice and neglect because they actually give aid and comfort to the enemies of truth. Do not allow yourself to be numbered among those who fear to be counted on the Lord's side even if it is unpopular with others.

Insist that the leadership and the church where you attend do what the Bible authorizes without addition or subtraction in its work and worship. Be a supporter of those things that are right and let it be known you are antagonistic toward that which is not according to what is revealed. When we love the brotherhood as we ought we shall not be content to be a silent observer during this crucial battle for the church, the truth, the souls of our children. The attitude of "staying above it all" is disgusting. If we cannot be a Moses, or Aaron, or Joshua, we can at least be a Hur, holding up the hands of those who are in the front lines fighting the battle for truth. Let it never be said of us that those who defend the faith have to fight a rearguard action because of us and our unwillingness to be involved.

On The Offensive

Eighth, always realize that the best defense is an effective offense. We can carry the battle into the holds of the enemy. We can challenge his heresies and expose them. We can so operate a Biblically authorized church in a positive and agressively productive fashion that those who would speak evil of the truth we proclaim will be ashamed because that which we are doing is right and is being done effectively and Biblically. When a local church will do what the Bible authorizes with zeal and fervor there cannot be much the liberal forces can say or do that will retard it. We can, as Paul admonished, overcome evil with good. We have a good work to do, and let's do it!

Liberalism is the doctrine of Satan. It serves the cause of Satan. It captures souls for Satan. Shall we sit passively and allow Satan to use this vicious philosophical weapon against precious souls and say and do nothing? The faithful in Christ will rise up as good soldiers of Christ, as many are already doing and the number needs to grow, and will enter the fray wholeheartedly, being assured that ultimate victory belongs to those who belong to the Lord and faithfully serve Him until death takes them from this life.

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Matthew's Call To Service

Matthew 9:9, "*And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of customs: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.*" This is the record of Matthew's call to service. He is also named Levi (Luke 5:27).

Immediately prior to this call Jesus had healed a man who had palsy. He also had forgiven the man of his sins. The Pharisees criticized Jesus for what He had done, but the multitude feared God and gave Him glory.

Matthew was a publican, which means he was a tax collector for the Roman government. He was a Jew in the service of the despised occupational forces. Publicans were classified alongside sinners. Any association with a publican was considered disgraceful. Publicans were considered traitors. When Jesus had any communication with them. He was immediately declared unfit. Yet, He called into His service just such a person. Matthew arose and followed Him.

Even though it is not explicity stated, very likely there had been some previous acquaintance or knowledge of Jesus by Matthew. It would seem very odd that anyone would abandon his pursuits in life and follow a total stranger without having any knowledge whatever about him. The success of Jesus was according to the willing acceptance of people of Him. Therefore,

it is fair to assume that there had been a contact between them prior to this call.

A Man

Verse nine says, "*He saw a man.*" Matthew probably looked like other men in his appearance. His dress would not necessarily be distinctive. He could be lost in a crowd like anyone else. When Jesus saw him, however, He saw something more than just another man on the street going about his work.

Our Lord, being Deity, had powers of insight that surpass others. Being God, He could know even the hearts of people. He could see the real person as well as the outward appearance. Jesus obviously detected something about him, something in him, that others might never have suspected. Jesus could see not only what was before His physical eyes, but the possibilities in Matthew. He could see the potential. There was power for good if it could be channeled and directed. We would insist that there is much potential for good in each of us and we need to recognize that. We need to allow the power that we have be directed and guided by the Word of God. With every person there is more than meets the eye.

Dissatisfied

Jesus saw a man that evidently was not completely satisfied with what he was doing and with what he was getting out of life. How can we know this? The fact that Matthew readily left all that he was doing and followed Jesus shows us that he was not secure in his task. He did not find the collection of taxes for Rome to be the ultimate purpose and goal in life. He was not fulfilling the noble and spiritual needs that each person has. He may have been making much money. He might have had friends and looked upon by them with esteem. But if all that had been satisfying to him he would not have forsaken them. As we have already suspected, his previous knowledge of what Jesus offered loomed high above his present activity.

There are so many people today who are living their lives with a great measure of malcontentment because what they are doing in their lives and with their lives is not the kind of thing that satisfies the souls of people. Many are searching for something and often following after anything in the hope of discovering what is meaningful and truly beneficial in life. They would give

so much to find what is needed.

Jesus knows what we need. Jesus knew He could provide for Matthew what Matthew desired and needed. He could bring to him the contentment and usefulness in life for which he was created. Jesus can do that for all of us, if we would but follow Him. So many times our problems in life result from the fact that we have yet to establish and determine the proper priorities in life and therefore seek after many things that fail to satisfy and produce what really is needful.

Better

Jesus saw a man, but also a man who was really better than that which his surroundings would indicate. We cannot always be absolutely certain about a person just because of where we find him, or even the company that he keeps. It is true that evil companions corrupt good morals, and a man is known (to a great extent) by the company he keeps. We remember the old adage that says, "Birds of a feather will gather together." We would not void the validity of that notion. But at the same time we must realize that people have found themselves, even placed themselves, in situations and circumstances that to not reflect their genuine worth and character. They are out of place.

To emphasize this more, what if we had seen Jesus only when He was in the company of the publicans and sinners! Would we have rightly concluded concerning Him? He was in their midst, not for the purpose of participating in their evil nor appearing to condone their sins, but to save them. But who can deny that Jesus was far better than His immediate environment indicated at those times? The same thing was true regarding Matthew and Jesus saw that.

As a publican Matthew had a reputation that most of his fellowmen would have despised. But one's reputation is not always the same as one's true character.

It is true that our environment has a tremendous effect on our lives. We are not given to the doctrine that we are not accountable for our actions because things around us are unfavorable. That is a false doctrine. But we are aware that what goes on around us does have influence on us. This is the reason we should be careful where we go, with whom we associate, and the nature of the situations where we place ourselves. There are people and places that we do best not to be among them. It is not always easy for a person to overcome the forces of his

environment.

But there have been times when small things have triggered responses in people who were better than their conditions indicated and things which have motivated them to come out of those conditions. Some years ago there was a story circulating about a young lad in Cleveland, Ohio who had broken into a house to steal. But on the wall was a motto that read, *"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths."* This is a quotation from Proverbs 3:6. This lad had heard his mother read him that phrase when he was younger. He turned from his evil intent and fled the house, never again to involve himself in such a thing as he was doing. Who could doubt that the lad was actually a better person than his immediate situation indicated?

We would like to think that this is the case with many of us. What we need is what Jesus offered to Matthew; namely, an opportunity to show he was more worthy than the way he appeared.

Needed Encouragement

Jesus, seeing a man, also saw a man in need of encouragement to be better. Because of his occupation many shunned Matthew, even despised him. This was a customary reaction toward publicans. We wonder if any ever spoke a kind word to him. Did any ever express concern for his welfare? Did any even offer a constructive word of rebuke? Matthew was not a hard-hearted person who would not listen. He should, could and would be responsive to the proper approach. It took Jesus to show the proper interest in him to bring him out from where he was into the service he could perform.

Matthew did not seek out Jesus as some others had done. The initiative was entirely with the Lord in this case. He sought Matthew because He was interested in Matthew. We must have this attitude toward others. People are not knocking at the doors of church buildings seeking salvation. They may be there wanting some material handout for the moment, but not much more. Few ever call the preacher and ask to be taught concerning Christ. They may call hoping he can "work a miracle" and solve some problem they have neglected and allowed to reach an almost unsolvable state. But seldom do they call because they are wanting to be saved. We must, like Christ, show an interest in them and seek them out. Possibly the reason so few are being saved reflects the unconcern of Christians for

the salvation of others.

He Would Act

Jesus also saw a man who would let his light shine when given the opportunity. Luke tells us how Matthew, named Levi, prepared a great supper for Jesus and invited his former associates to that supper. He wanted them to know what he had come to know. Christ was criticized for attending this feast, but Matthew was not ashamed of Jesus, nor was Jesus ashamed of Matthew.

There was a man who was converted to Christ who had lived a very wicked life prior to his conversion. He wondered how he might fortify himself against the criticisms and derisions that would likely come from his former acquaintances. This is an obstacle many have to face, even from families. The best weapon is to simply fortify yourself, declare yourself, firmly, confidently, kindly, and even while they may differ or denounce you, they will have respect for the fact you have made the decision. The only way to take a stand is to take a stand and let whatever consequences come be as they may. There is no easy way to live for Christ in a sinful world. Matthew was willing to take such a stand and proved his willingness to follow Christ. Jesus chose him to be one of His apostles.

Would Pay

Jesus also saw a man who was willing to pay the cost. Luke 14:33, *"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."* This requires placing Jesus Christ and His will above everything and everyone else. Until one is willing to do that he cannot be the disciple of Christ that he must be. Matthew was one who was willing to do that. He was willing to pay the cost.

Could it be that many of us want the blessings and benefits of being a Christian but are unwilling to assume the duties? Do we expect to receive the blessings but are not ready to put Him first in all things? Do we have the right to expect to *"sow the wind"* and then escape the whirlwind of consequences of our conduct? We can be forgiven of the guilt of sin, but many times we must reap the harvest of misspent hours, days and years. Are we willing to do as did Matthew who forsook all and followed Jesus? This is what He calls us to do!

What did Jesus offer Matthew? Matthew probably turned from a life that gave him luxury, wealth, the pleasures of sin and turned to a life of poverty and suffering. But he also turned to a life of sacrifice and service to God and his fellowman. Christ gave Matthew the real reason for living. He gave Matthew the real purpose for existence. In addition, He gave Matthew that hope and expectation of living with God eternally. What more could one give another?

There is a song that says, "It is no secret what God can do. What He's done for others, He'll do for you." The Lord is calling each of us by His gospel to follow Him even as He called Matthew. Will we hear His voice and obey Him in faith, repentance, confession of Him, and baptism into Him for the remission of sins and be added to the company of the saved, which is the church? Then having been raised to walk in newness of life, live before Him faithfully. That is what is required to answer our call.

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The Undenominational Church

Psalm 1:1,2, "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and might.*" Psalm 127:1, "*Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.*" Matthew 15:13, "*But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.*" Proverbs 14:12, "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" Jeremiah 10:23, "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.*"

The leading thrust of these passages is that there is a way for man that pleases God, and there are ways that displease Him. It makes a difference what a person believes, does and thinks.

Unless that which a person follows it the way of God it is in vain. Destruction awaits that which is not of God.

This is true with respect to the church. The popular idea is that one church is as good as another. But since the Bible is true, we contend this doctrine is false. Churches make a difference. While some contend it makes no difference, we urge and demand that Biblical authority for such an idea be presented, and we have never had that request met by anyone.

What do we mean by "the undenominational church?" Without the existence of denominations we would not have to use such a phrase. But denominations are abundant in number. Many have been so ingrained in denominationalism that they find it difficult to conceive of the church without a denominational concept of it.

What Is Not Meant

Let us first discover some things we do not mean by the phrase. We do not mean a church that includes all denominations. Such a mass of confusion would certainly not be a credit to God. Nor do we mean a church that is a single denomination. There is no authority in the New Testament for any denomination.

We are not talking about something that is generally known as Catholic, Protestant or any such thing. These are denominations. The undenominational church would not fit in any such category. We are glad we are not called upon to defend these denominations and their doctrines. We are equally glad we are not required to defend the history of either one.

We do not profess to be a denomination or a member of one. Denominationalism has been a plague on the religious scene. It breeds doubt, division, confusion and unbelief. It misrepresents God, the faith of Christ, His church as revealed in the Bible, and paves the way for atheism. The amalgumation of doctrines, creeds, disciples, catechisms, prayer books, manuals, confessions of faith and other such things, many of which are openly contradictory to the Bible and each other, makes it embarassing for any person who will stay with Scripture to defend them. *"Thus saith the Lord"* is the plea of Scripture and not the doctrines of men. We do not mean any church founded by any man anywhere at any time, regardless of how honest, sincere and well-meaning and pious he may have been.

What We Do Mean

What we do mean is that that church which is separate and apart from all denominations, a church that is not a denomination, a church that has nothing to do with denominations. Let us be more specific.

We speak of that church that is a sacred institution, divine in origin, founded by Jesus Christ, purchased by His blood. God planned and prophesied the coming of the church (Ephesians 3:10,11). Jesus said He would build it (Matthew 16:16-18). It began on Pentecost (Acts 2). We speak of that one body (Ephesians 4:4,5) which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). This is the church over which Christ is head (Colossians 1:18). That church, rather than any denomination, is the one that existed before any denomination, and exists apart from them. That is the undenominational church.

Its Head

The undenominational church recognizes no human head. Any church that has a human as its head, man or woman, is not the undenominational church. Christ is the head of His church, the King of His kingdom, the elder brother in God's family, the chief Shepherd of God's flock. Nothing in Scripture denotes a visible, earthly head of the church. All authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 28:18). Everything is to be done according to His authority (Colossians 3:17).

Its Creed

The undenominational church does not subscribe or follow any human creed. The word "creed" means "I believe." The undenominational church has as its creed the Son of God and His revealed testament. Take a Bible and write on its cover, "The Creed Of The Undenominational Church." By that alone are we guided and bound. Any other message is prohibited (Galatians 1:6-9). Traditions of men are not to be equated with God's Word (Matthew 15:9). By His Word we shall be judged (John 12:48), not some creed of man. Second Peter 1:3, *"God hath given us all things that pertain to life and godliness."* Second Timothy 3:16,17 teaches the Scriptures to be inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative and all-sufficient. It is all we need and all we are allowed. That Word of God is the final court

of appeal. The reason we believe what we believe is because the Scripture teaches it. The reason we do not believe what others may believe is because the Scriptures to not so teach. That is the characteristic of the undenominational church.

Its Name

The undenominational church is identified by terms found in Scripture, like churches of Christ, church of God, more often than any other, simply, the church. Members are Christians. No denominational and divisive names are supplied or warranted. Denominations pride themselves in their distinct names, doctrines, practices that separate them from others. But it also separates them from the undenominational church of the Bible.

Its Practice

The undenominational church follows the distinct New Testament plan and pattern of worship, work, entrance into the church, life in the church. While the world suffers beneath the yoke of denominationalism, those who will take what the Bible teaches quickly learn the difference between what the Bible teaches and what is prominent and dominant in the religious world.

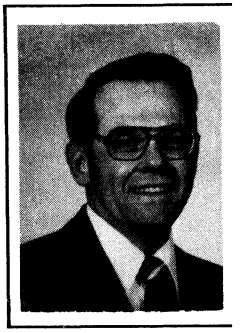
We would put forth this proposition for all to consider. If men would throw away their creeds, human heads of their churches, divisive names, distinctive doctrines, man-made traditions and practices, and take God at His Word, and take only God's Word, the plague of denominationalism and all its attendant havoc would vanish from the face of the earth. Then atheism, communism, humanism, heathenism and all other forms of anti-God ideologies could be confronted with a tremendous wealth of resources, manpower and truth. Salvation for the teeming billions of the world could become a reality.

Realistically speaking, this is not likely to occur, not because it is not right, but because too many people are wedded and welded to their denominations. Their pride and desire to "do their own thing" will prevent it. But regardless of what most may do, this is the cause and the plea of faithful Christians.

Where Is It?

(continued on Back Cover)

(continued from page 24)



JAMES W. BOYD

Is there an undenominational church in the world today? We are sure there is. But even if at this moment there was not one congregation anywhere, taking the Word of God, the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11), we can go forth and sow the seed into good and honest hearts, and the harvest that will be reaped will be the undenominational church. To produce denominations somebody will have to sow the tares of men. The gospel will produce only His church.

Those who believe and obey the gospel of Christ compose th church, and, remaining faithful therein, are the undenominationa church. It is the same church of which we all can read in Scripture. It i the church that Christ promises to save (Ephesians 5:23).

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The end of the year approaches and the mails will b overflowing. Therefore, this will likely be the last mailing o our booklet until after the mailing rush is over. Be lookin for our next issue shortly after the first of the coming year

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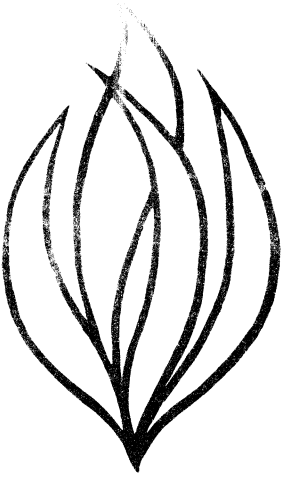

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 11**

A Great Hypocrisy

We would not attempt to define what is the greatest hypocrisy that might be practiced by those who are members of the church. None of us could really know for sure. But this lesson will focus attention on what must surely be one of the most serious inconsistencies and duplicities presently evident in the ranks of the body of Christ. We shall begin by being reminded of two truths which may at first seem unrelated. But we intend to tie them together shortly.

Let us be reminded of the evil and danger of hypocrisy of any kind. All one must do is read Matthew 23 and he cannot avoid knowing the Lord's displeasure with hypocrisy. A hypocrite is a pretender, a deceiver, not what one claims to be, but one who feigns to be what he actually is not. A hypocrite is one who says he believes something but practices and acts quite differently from his alleged conviction.

Religion is just one area where hypocrisy is evident. The business world, sports arenas, politics, in society generally, hypocrisy is a dominant stain. But nowhere is it more repugnant than in religion which deals with man's soul and eternity as well as his relationship with God and his fellowman.

An Inward Disease

Hypocrisy is a spiritual disease that gnaws and destroys from within rather than from without. Doctors know that internal diseases are more difficult to detect and treat than those that are visible and on the surface. Decay within the church weakens the power of the church to fulfill its divine obligations. It is embarassed before those who are not Christians. A solid ledge of rock can withstand constant and heavy bombardment, but a hollow shell will crumble beneath the least pressure. This is what hypocrisy does to the church, making it hollow and weak before the world. While we need not belabor the evils of hypocrisy, because most will agree, probably few of us are really aware of just how deadly it really is.

Concern For Souls

The second truth is that Christians should have a keen and

aggressive interest in those souls still lost in sin. We cannot see the soul as we can a material object, therefore, it may be difficult for us to grasp how horrible it is for the soul to be damned. It is not easy to comprehend a soul banished into eternal hell. We might bring the seriousness of it closer, however, if we should think of ourselves as being among the lost. Or consider your loved ones being destined for hell. We usually disassociate the unpleasantness of such things from ourselves and think entirely of others in this context. But we make a serious mistake to be so confining in our thinking. Not only is the pagan, heathen, murderer, thief, etc. lost, but there are others that are lost also.

What does it mean to be lost? Picture if you can being separated from Deity for eternity, separated from Christian friends and loved ones forever. In heaven is where all will be good and in hell evil dominates everything. Furthermore, there is no hope for anything better or any relief from torment. To know that others are enjoying bliss, a bliss that could have also been ours to enjoy, will only add to the grief and despair.

Why He Came

Why did Christ come to this sinful world? Was it not to seek and save the lost? Was it not because of His interest in saving those who are lost? Why did Andrew go and find Peter? Why did Peter preach to Cornelius? Why did Philip preach to the Ethiopian? Why did Christ talk with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman? Why did Paul make his journeys taking the gospel? Was it not because they loved the souls of the lost and wanted to obey the Lord in taking the saving gospel to them?

We sing in a song, "A charge to keep I have." What is the charge? Mark 16:15 expresses it adequately. "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" This is it in a few words. Christ sent His apostles first to the lost sheep of Israel. He sent out the seventy. He commissioned His apostles to take the message of truth everywhere. They went; they taught; and it was because they had love, pity, compassion, sympathy and concern for the souls of lost people.

That same Master is calling for His people today to do the same thing and preach the same message He commissioned His apostles to reveal to the world. As someone suggested, "We have been saved to save." We save others by making sure they have opportunity to be saved by hearing the saving truth. Peter admonishes us to follow in the Master's footsteps. Can we claim

to be doing that if we are not attentive to the lost?

Are We Serious?

Let me tie these two truths together for an obvious application. Are we too bold to suggest that one of the greatest hypocricies in the church today is the feigned and pretended interest in winning souls that are lost to the Savior? Before dismissing this accusation too hastily, consider a few things. We hasten to add that this plague is not with every Christian, thankfully. But it does exist with many of us.

How can church members be content to let the preacher be the sole soul saver? They seldom talk to anyone about salvation. They feel they have done their duty if they attend worship services, and possibly give a name to the elders or preacher to go visit. Is this really caring for the lost? Some seem to think that the burden of soul saving belongs only to a select few and they are excluded. What a mistaken concept! Where did anyone get the idea? When the church of the Lord was the fastest growing religious body in America there were untold numbers conducting classes in homes where the lost were being taught. Possibly the general public is not very interested in spiritual things, but how many of us are hiding behind that excuse rather than seeing how it emphasizes the magnitude of our task?

How can elderships and the flock they lead busy themselves in building playgrounds, gymnasiums, elaborate and ornate meetinghouses, employing large "staffs" of clerics to conduct the church when there are areas within a day's drive of their splendid edifices that have never heard the truth? How can members show more concern for a "church league ball game" than a program of cottage work? Why can we have twice the number present to a "fellowship dinner" than we can ever get to attend a visitation effort? At the same time we sing loudly and regularly about sending the light, going empty handed, and let funds pile up in the treasury while willing missionaries have to scurry about begging for support as they go to preach the gospel. It smacks of gross hypocrisy, honoring Christ only with our lips. Is the heart really there? Do not our actions betray where our heart really is? These food, fun and frolic promoters who erect their game rooms have much for which to answer before God and the lost of the world.

Smaller religious groups, who do not preach the truth, are often doing more to take their false message to the world than

we who say we are the New Testament Christians, who profess to preach the saving truth. Why is that unless there is a blatant and arrogant pride and indifference? It reflects that too many of us must not really consider those religiously wrong are even lost. Can one be saved apart from hearing, believing and obeying the gospel? Some must evidently think so because taking the gospel to the lost world ranks far below having their plush officies, air conditioning, basketball courts, kindergartens, "Mother's night out," and other trivia and frivolities that dominate the activities and programs of many so-called churhes of Christ.

It has been my misfortune to have been in the vestibule of a glamorous building where there are more trophies for bowling tournaments and softball playoffs than the number of people they have baptized into Christ an entire year. You can explain it, if you can, apart from gross hypocrisy, but how do you do it?

Shortage of Soundness

There is a growing shortage of sound gospel preachers throughout the brotherhood. We have applauded the "after dinner speaker" types and the entertainers until sound doctrine is no longer appealing. We seek to win numbers through deception, trickery, giving prizes, etc. "Rescue the Perishing" is a song that will damn the souls of many church members because they never offer one ounce of energy to accomplish what they sing. They only sing about it and hope the preacher or somebody else does it.

Elderships can get more excited about buying a stove for the kitchen, paving the parking lot, cushioning the seats than spreading the gospel through literature, radio, television, gospel meetings, cottage programs or other means. Why should people who say they love the Lord have to constantly be begged to love the lost the Lord died to save?

Let us suggest two reasons, and these are not all, why so many of us suffer from this plague of unconcern and hypocrisy. (1) We are not impressed with the value of the soul, what it means to be lost, and that there is no salvation without the gospel. If child was in the lake, or a man in a burning building, or an accident victim bleeding profusely, if some acted as many brethren do regarding saving souls, the child would drown, the man burn to death, and the victim bleed to death while we stood by arguing over the best way to make plans to maybe begin to get started to think about possibly doing something sometime when the time gets right.

Takes Both

Yes, proper and scriptural methods are important. But the message must be heard. We have fumbled about methods until we have have ignored getting out the message. Some can talk at great length about methods but are not adequately familiar with the message. We need to remember that the methods for proclaiming the truth are not necessarily the same that often proves effective in proclaiming error.

The church is plagued today with what is called "Crossroad-ism." That system is wrong because it promotes false doctrine and is cultish in its nature. It is contrary to New Testament structure and divisive everywhere it goes. But the fields are ripe unto harvest for this and other false philosophies because of the inactivity and deadness of many so-called "conservatives" who have disgusted many people because of doing nothing. In their disgust many have been provoked to accept anything that shows life. Indifference and lethargy breeds error and cultivates the ground for false ideas.

Death and the devil will not wait while we put money on certificates of deposit and draw interest on money, making sure we have enough in case there is ever another depression like the one over a half century ago. So many brethren are still living in the dark and distant past without regard for the lost souls of the present. Such blindness hampers the cause of Christ!

(2) A second reason this plague exists among us is due to the lack of a sense of personal responsibility. Poor George! Everybody says and thinks, "Let George do it!" George is probably the preacher. Unless the preacher leads the way, organizes everything, conducts most of the classes, as well as preparing to deliver his heavy schedule of public proclamations, writings, visits, etc., nothing is done. It is talked about, but nothing done. Why? Who really care about the lost of which we glidly speak and say we love?

Of the few baptized where you attend, how many are due to your direct influence? Of those restored, who came back because you showed an interest? Did you confine your interest to simply telling somebody else about them and hoping somebody else would see about them? That is often the way.

Then And Now

Acts 15:35 tells about Paul and Barnabas preaching and

teaching "with many others." Does this sound like the congregations of today? Is there no justice in calling our behavior hypocrisy?

When brethren return to an understanding of the work of the church, that it is not schools, camps for fun, ball games, socials, pep rallies, entertainment, etc., possibly more souls, presently doomed and damned, can be saved. Do you suppose we will be a factor in returning to that time?

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Why God Gave The Bible

All of the efforts put forth in a faithful local church are based on the Bible. The teaching, the benevolent work, the everyday life of those who make up the membership, the worship, everything is governed by the foundation on which we stand, the revelation in the Bible. The Bible is upheld above every book and relied upon because we believe it is the Word of God as is affirmed in Second Timothy 3:16,17.

Evil men would not and could not have written the Bible. It condemns so much of which they are guilty that they would not have written it and condemned themselves. Nor would uninspired good moral men have written the Bible. Moral men would not lie, claiming their work was God's Word when they knew it was not. Even though the Bible was written by the pen of men, they were men that were chosen, guided and directed by God. God chose from their individual vocabularies the very words of the Bible to convey His will and mind to mankind. Because of this, they had supernatural knowledge of things no man could possibly have known or revealed from his own findings, discoveries or experiences, *"...but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (Second Peter 1:21). The Scriptures are inspired of God.

Therefore, the Bible is the standard by which we ought to live because it is the standard by which all shall be judged. But why did God give mankind the Bible? Let us suggest some general answers to this question, and then turn our attention to some things more specific as it concerns our relationship with God.

We Need It

Mankind cannot and could not get along without the Bible. God made man, knows man, is aware of man, his needs, weaknesses and strengths. Without the message from our Creator we could never expect to be complete. We need to know about ourselves. We learn from the Bible that we are not only body but also spirit. We are living souls. We are creatures of choice and have the power of volition. We can determine many things concerning ourselves. There is more to us than the physical. We have mind and are spirit.

We need to know about our Creator. The Bible reveals to us the nature of Deity. Jesus Christ on earth revealed God unto man in a measure never known prior to His coming. We must know His standards by which He expects us to live (John 12:48). We need to understand the central personality of the entire system of salvation who is Jesus Christ. All of this is in the Bible. But let us consider four very simple, yet profound, reasons why God gave us the Bible. All four of these reasons have to do with our relationship to God.

We Are Lost

God gave us the Bible so we could know that we are lost when separated from Him. Without the divine revelation, how could we know of our spiritual condition? Isaiah wrote, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way."* (Isaiah 53:6). Some may ask why it is so bad to go your own way. The answer is simply expressed in Jeremiah 10:23. *"It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps."* Whether people are willing to admit it or not, man, left to himself, always degrades himself. He does not have the capacity, standing alone, to lift himself. Not only does the Bible teach this, giving examples of this, but the history of man proves this.

Man is guilty of sin (Romans 3:23), which is a violation of God's law (First John 3:4). Because of sin man is spiritually lost, separated from his Creator (Isaiah 59:1,2). He must be brought to a keen awareness of this reality. This very fact is a powerful motivating factor and incentive for man to return to God.

The Bible tells us what it means to be lost and what awaits those who live this life and leave it, still lost. We all have sinned and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). From what other

source can mankind learn of his spiritual condition?

God's Desire To Save

Again, God gave man the Bible to inform man that God does not want any of His creatures to be lost. God created man with the power of choice, but God wants man to choose the right way. Peter stressed that the Lord *"is not willing that any should perish."* (Second Peter 3:9). *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). If man is lost it will not be because God wants him to be lost. Anyone who is lost and remains lost does so because they have chosen that path in spite of God's wishes for him.

Nothing proves that God wants man saved more than the invitation extended to man to *"come unto me"* and be forgiven and saved from sin. It is from the Bible that we learn of this compassion, grace, mercy and love that God has for sinful man. Where could we learn such majestic truth as this except from God's own revelation of His own mind?

What God Has Done

Again, God gave us the Bible to teach us what He has done in order that we might be saved. Step by step, the Scriptures unfold the great design of God for saving man. From the time of the curse against the serpent (Genesis 3:15), the call of Abraham and the many promises that God gave to and through him, including the one that teaches *"...and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."* (Genesis 12:3). God told Abraham that through his seed would come the One who would fulfill that promise (Genesis 22:16). Paul makes it clear that this *"seed"* had reference to Christ (Galatians 3:16). As we read the Bible we understand that the remainder of it from the time of God's promises to Abraham is actually a divinely given record of how God kept His promises to Abraham. There came the nation of Israel and the law given to that nation through Moses on Mt. Sinai. We read the prophectic messages of the prophets as they foretold the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom. Eventually we reach the time of the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist, and his preparatory work before Him. Finally, the Savior comes upon the scene, lives a perfect life, performs the confirming miracles, only to be betrayed, crucified and buried.

But on the third day He was raised from the dead as victor over death, hell and the grave. Now, through Him, mankind could be offered eternal life and forgiveness of sins. He established His church on the first Pentecost after His resurrection, and through inspired men the terms of salvation were announced. From that time forward, those who hear the Word, believe the Word, and obey the Word have been added to the church as saved people.

It is not too much to reduce the plan of salvation to simply saying, "The way to heaven is Christ and His church." God provided the Redeemer and His blood by which we are washed clean from sin.

From where could man ever know all that God has done to demonstrate His love and grace through His Son except there be God's revelation concerning it? This is one of the reasons why we have the Bible and can know of the mighty works of God to extend to us the glories of heaven and the way of escape from the eternal fires of hell.

What Man Must Do

But another reason God has given us the Bible is to inform man of man's part in God's plan to save man. From the Scriptures we learn our duty. We not only can know we are lost, that God wants us to be saved, what God has done to save us, but what we must do to be saved. It is recorded for us in the Bible, the sacred and inspired writing from God.

Man cannot be saved without obedience to Christ. *"And being made perfect, he became the author of salvation to all them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9). There is something man must do to be saved. *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21).

Only God can prescribe the terms of pardon. Man must be saved on God's terms or he will not be saved. God has provided the way, but man must go that way. This is not difficult to comprehend. It is a matter of eternal life or death, separation from God, that we are considering. To reject His terms means to be *"punished with everlasting punishment from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power."* (Second Thessalonians 1:9). Surely, nobody should want this for eternity!

To be saved we must believe. *"Without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is,*

and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6).

Coupled with that faith must be our obedient response to the divine commands to repent (Luke 13:3), confess our faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:27).

Once again we ask, how could any of us ever know what God wants us to do except He has given us His mind in the Bible? There is no other source of information other than His Word.

But let us be sobered by the fact that we must either abide by what the Lord God has decreed or there is no word of comfort or hope for us anywhere in His Word. Rather, there is the warning of the wrath and justice of God against the evildoer, and those who obey not the gospel (Second Thessalonians 1:9).

How To Live

From the Bible we learn how to live after coming to Christ. We learn how to treat other people, truth about the institution of marriage and the home, everything that has any real substance and importance in living acceptably before God. It is all governed and determined by the message from God. His inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Word, the Scriptures, the Bible, will furnish us all we need to live properly and be able to stand prepared in the judgment.

One final and very serious word of caution. Seeing how God has given us His Word, and that which is revealed therein, to disobey Him is tantamount to telling God that He wasted His time, at least as far as we are concerned. We are telling Him that He need not have bothered. We are saying that His revelation is useless, meaningless and unimportant to us. And we must wonder if that is the way we really want things to be when we stand before God in judgment to receive our eternal sentence of reward of punishment.

On the other hand, to obey is to proclaim to God our thanksgiving for His merciful kindness and blessings. It is to declare His will as the vital and essential declaration to man that it truly is. It is to say that it is our intention and purpose to walk according to His way so long as life remains in the body. Then we can depart for the next world as one redeemed by the Son of God, and know the joy of heaven eternally.

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Flee, Follow, Fight

First Timothy 6:3-12, *"If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud and knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envying, strifes, railings and surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness, from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. But they that will be rich fall into a temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."*

Our Guide

We should appreciate such instruction and instructors that provide for us the right direction, good advice and godly counsel. Such is the nature of this inspired passage that we have presented by Paul. It is teaching that should govern the manner of our lives here on earth.

The two books that were written to Timothy primarily consist of two elements. One, they serve as guidelines for those who preach the gospel. Timothy was an evangelist. Obviously, some of the book is to him personally. Most of it is instruction that is applicable to all who would attempt to preach the Word. Two, the Word that preachers are to preach to others, especially to their brethren, are found in these books. Therefore, great portions of the text were written for the admonition and edification of any who would go to heaven through Christ. Paul told Timothy, Second Timothy 2:2, "*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou*

to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." So it is obvious that the words to Timothy were also words to which we all must give attention.

The text consists of three divisions. One, there are warnings against teaching false doctrines or following after such things. Two, there are exhortations to be content with such as we have materially. We came into this life with nothing and we shall leave the same way. We are stewards of certain things which God has given us for which we are to care and use responsibly for our limited time in this life. We are not to strive for material gain and lose the soul. Three, there is the three-fold instruction to flee, follow and fight. These three directives are designed as guidelines to direct and govern our lives as Christians. Upon these three we shall focus our attention in this lesson.

Flee

Paul tells is, verse 11, "*Flee these things.*" The inescapable inference is that it is not always cowardly to run from some things. To flee is the action of wisdom and prudence. To flee can reflect common sense, good judgment and respect for what is right and good. We are to flee from those things that can destroy the spiritual welfare of the soul. In living the kind of life the Lord would have us to live there are times when running is the proper and wise course and is in keeping with the will of God for us. There are those things from which we are to separate ourselves, including people as well as situations.

Flee What Things?

From what things are we to flee? This text concerns itself with money and the covetous grasp many have for it. The love of money is described as a snare or a trap. It is the devil's device to capture the souls of people who are not cautious. Like when one drowns in deep and dark waters, being overcome and losing one's life in the depths of the sea, so the love of money can overwhelm one into eternal perdition. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. It feeds evil. People will commit almost any and every kind of transgression if they think it will pay them well in money. The love of money, both by the rich and the poor, has caused even those who had come to Christ to turn away and follow Him no more.

There are other things from which we are to flee. Second

Timothy 2:22 teaches us to *"flee youthful lusts."* We should run from those opportunities to satisfy passions that are so strong and powerful in the days of youth. We must learn to control them and not remain with those people and in those circumstances where we are tempted to sin. The physical body was planned and designed by Almighty God and ought not be used for the dissipation of it and exploitation for sinful pleasure. Too many do not flee from such things but actually seek them out, daring the devil to ensnare them in transgression.

Paul taught in First Corinthians 6:18 that we are to *"flee fornication."* This is such a prominent and promoted sin in our society, if we can believe the reports that we read and hear. There are so many evidences that more and more people have no respect for purity and chastity as God teaches people to have. The moral standards of American society have been lowered to alarming levels of base degeneracy and publicly paraded as the acceptable behavior and lifestyle today. But we read from the Bible that fornicators shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelations 21:8). Like Joseph of old, when he was tempted but fled from the scene rather than sin against God, so should be our behavior.

We are told to "*flee idolatry.*" (First Corinthians 10:14). We are not to think that idolatry only consists of bowing before the images of pagan and heathen worship, or the statues of Romanism, even though this is included. Surely that is idolatry. But we can make most anything an idol. Whatever comes between us and God, and our dutiful service to God, becomes an idol to us. Not only can such things be evil, but they can even be things that are not evil in and of themselves, but because we put them first in our priorities and goals of life, many things that could be a blessing to us can become our undoing and become idols that will bring our condemnation eternally.

Why flee these things? The answer is found in verse ten of the text when Paul speaks of some being led astray from the faith and being pierced through with many sorrows. These words were written to Christian people and serve as warnings to flee lest it cost us our salvation in heaven. What an awesome price to pay for the paltry offerings of this sinful world!

We will have trials and tribulations in life without seeking them. But we sure do not want to flirt with them. We should pray that we not be led into temptation, and when we are tempted, that we will not yield. Flee such things for there is nothing to be gained in them, but everything to be lost.

Follow

The second instruction is to follow certain things. What are we to follow? Verse 11, *"Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."* These are traits of Christ, characteristics of the divine nature. To be righteous means to be harmonious with the Lord's will in the way we live. Godliness is reverence and respect for that which is holy and sacred. Faith, love, patience, meekness are qualities of character of Jesus that we are to add to our own characters and lives. Peter teaches us to add these things in Second Peter 1:5-11.

In living the Christian way of life there is a time to flee from wickedness, which is a defense mechanism to help us avoid sin. But there is also the positive side of being a Christian because there are things to follow and pursue. We must go where the Master wants us to go. This is the nourishing, constructive, needful and positive side of Christianity. We cannot live in a vacuum and total void. Our lives will be filled with something. They are to be emptied of evil but filled with these righteous traits Paul and others have listed in Scripture.

Fight

The third instruction is to "*fight.*" That which we are to fight is the good fight of faith. See it clearly as we can. There is a time to flee, and a time to follow, and a time to fight. There exists that call to do battle against the devil and for the cause of Christ, standing our ground no matter what comes or what the cost and consequences may be. All fighting is not evil. There are those situations in life when a person must take a stand and fight for his convictions of truth, contending with all his moral fibre for what he knows to be right and just, not flinching in the process.

The reason Paul was prepared to die was because he had been a fighter in his lifetime. Second Timothy 4:6-8, *"For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give unto me in that day, and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing."*

Paul taught Timothy, First Timothy 1:18, "*This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before thee, that thou by them mightest war a good*

warfare." Paul knew that being a Christian in a sinful world would necessitate a fight to survive.

The Nature Of Our Fight

Our fight is the fight of the faith. We do not wage carnal warfare to promote or protect the kingdom of God (Second Corinthians 10:4). Such is not the nature of the Lord's kingdom (John 8:36). We are to equip ourselves with the armor of God so we can fight as we ought. Ephesians 6:11-13, *"Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand."* Then he lists that armor as the armor of truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and prayer. With these as our weaponry we are to fight for the way of the Lord among those of a sinful generation. We are never to be ashamed of the truth nor afraid to do battle for the cause of the right. We are in the Lord's army and Christ is the captain of our faith (Hebrews 2:10). Second TImothy 2:3, *"Thou therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."* Jude 3, *"Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints."* Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel (Phi lippians 1:17).

To "A Man Of God"

With these three instructions to flee, follow and fight, words that are addressed to one who was a *"man of God,"* let us give heed to them as we rise and go forward toward the remainder of our lives to live for the way the Lord has died. Flee evil, follow good, fight the fight of faith. To do less is to sacrifice our salvation for this world that offers nothing but sin and death when all is said and done. For each of us there will come that time when all will be said and done.

It goes without saying that we want to go to heaven. The Lord's words serve as a *"lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway."* He pleads with all people everywhere that they be Christians. Having once heard, believed, repented, confessed Christ and been baptized into Him, we must continue to abide in

Him. This we do as we walk in the light as He is in the light (First John 1:7). May we soberly, seriously, reverently, intelligently and prayerfully consider and heed these three instructions to flee, follow and fight.

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Jesus As Lord

Second Corinthians 4:5, *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."* The epistle of Second Corinthians was written by Paul, partially as a defense of his apostleship which some false teachers had denied. As evidence he was an apostle he made reference to what he had preached; the subject matter. The theme and focal point of it was Christ Jesus the Lord.

This should be the theme of preaching today. Too often people hear a "super market gospel" that takes what they want and leave what they prefer not to have. Preaching should be Christ-centered, everything based on the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Lord of all.

"What think ye of Christ?" is an ancient but also modern question. When we think of Jesus we likely think of Him in a variety of ways. This lesson calls attention to Him as Lord and what this implies. Romans 10:9, *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."* Peter affirmed, Acts 2:36, *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."* Often the Bible presents the phrase, *"Lord Jesus Christ."*

Meaning Of "Lord"

The word "lord" comes from the feudal system of centuries past. It means a ruler or governor, a master, one possessed with great authority and supreme power. Under the feudal system the lord owned the property and all those who lived on the property. He directed their lives, having absolute rule, with everyone in complete subjection and entirely dependent upon

the lord of the land.

The term "lord" is applied to Jesus. Christians are a people of His own possession (Titus 2:14). We have been bought with a price (Acts 20:28) and are not our own (First Corinthians 6:20). All authority belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). When we consider the designations and identifications of Jesus we learn that the term "lord" properly applies to Him.

Other Terms

Jesus is the Christ. Peter said God made Him both Lord and Christ. These are two different words, but Jesus was both. The term "Christ" identifies Him as the Messiah, the anointed One, the One especially selected by the Father and chosen for a special purpose and mission. He fulfilled the prophecies of old concerning such a One. He came to reign over His spiritual kingdom. Andrew said to Peter, John 1:40,41, *"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ."*

Jesus is specifically called the Word. John 1:1-3, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."* Verse 14 says, *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, [and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father], full of grace and truth."* Being Deity in the flesh while here on earth teaches us concerning the nature of the Word. He has always existed just as the Father and the Holy Spirit. He possessed pre-existence before taking on the form of man. Colossians 1:16,17, *"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."* Hebrews 1:1,2, *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."*

The word "Word" is translated from the word "logos" which carries the idea of not only the message but also the messenger

or the one through whom the message comes. Jesus is "logos," both God's message and messenger.

Jesus is called *"Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."* (Matthew 1:23). Isaiah had prophecied nearly seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus that this would be one of His designations (Isaiah 7:14). The statement to Mary by the angel had reference to Jesus as the One who fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. As Christ points to Jesus as the Anointed One, the Word reveals Him as the eternal one, God's message and messenger, Emmanuel shows Him to be God among men. Philippians 2:5-8 presents additional revelation of Jesus as Deity taking on the form and fashion of mankind.

Colossians 1:15, *"...who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature."* The term *"firstborn"* notes His rank above everything and everyone else. He was not a created being because He is eternal. But He ranks above all else. Second John 7, *"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an anti-Christ."* John was determined that his hearers and readers understand the incarnation, Deity assuming the fleshly form of humanity.

To summarize to this point, Jesus is Lord, Christ, the Word, and Emmanuel. Each designation elevates Him to an exalted and unsurpassed position.

The Example

Jesus is also named as our example, a pattern, the standard, rule and guide by which all are to be measured. First Peter 2:21, *"For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving is an example, that ye should follow his steps."* Often the statement is made, "Actions speak louder than words." None would deny the power of example. God provided the Word but He also provided someone to imitate.

The words of Christ are powerful. His deeds gave His words greater significance. He did even as He said. Words without deeds are but noise. Deeds, even without words, can ring loud and clear. First Peter 3 teaches those whose mates are not Christians that being the right example may be the way to win their mate. In essence a good example is "preaching the word" by the power of a loyal, devoted, faithful example and demonstration of what a Christian is to be. Jesus is the example for all of us to follow.

Savior

We often consider Jesus as our Savior. The name "Jesus" is like the name "Joshua" which means Savior. Likely we prefer to consider Him in this way more than any other because without Him there is no hope for our salvation (Acts 4:12). Being our Savior (Ephesians 5:23), we receive from Him our hope, comfort and the fulfillment of the goal of this life.

From what does Jesus save us? First Timothy 1:15, *"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."* Romans 6:23 warns, *"The wages of sin is death."* We are delivered from spiritual death by Christ.

Because of His sacrifice on the cross, He is our Savior. Hebrews 2:9, *"...that he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man."* He paid the price which was His own blood (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 9:12). We receive the forgiveness of our sins and redemption by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). The Samaritans said it correctly, John 4:42, *"We believe... and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."* First John 2:2, *"And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."*

King

Much is said in Scripture about Jesus as King. We shall present another lesson dealing with this identification of Jesus. Here we only wish to say that He is not altogether like other kings because He has all power, all authority in heaven and earth. None is His superior, or even His equal among kings. All of His enemies shall be overthrown. His kingdom is the spiritual kingdom, the church (Colossians 1:13). It is in the world although not of the world. Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). Christians are the citizens of His kingdom; the gospel is the law of His kingdom; the world is the territory of His kingdom; and He is the King of His kingdom.

As King, Jesus is worthy of honor because He is the divine King and man must obey Him. It is true that some mocked Him while He was being humilated, crying out, *"Hail, King of the Jews."* They laughed and objected at the sign Pilate had placed in three languages over His cross designating Him as King of the Jews. But it is true, nonetheless. Jesus is King of kings.

Is He not also called our High Priest, our Advocate, mediator and intercessor? (Hebrews 2:17,18; 4:14,15; 7:26-28; First John 2:1). When we stand before the judgment bar of God we shall see Jesus as Judge, the administrator of justice. Paul teaches and Peter tells us that when He comes He will judge the world. God had Paul to preach that God would judge the world by the One whom He raised from the dead (Acts 17:31). Jesus said we shall be judged by the *"word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."* (John 12:48).

We can rightly consider Jesus in all of these designations and roles. Each designation gives emphasis to the fact that Jesus is the Lord. He is Master of all, Ruler of all, Owner of all. Paul so emphasized these things when the Holy Spirit caused him to write, *"Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:9-11).

† † † † †

Who Can Be Saved?

Matthew 19:23-26, *"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."*

Some of the most mind-penetrating thoughts are provoked by questions. Jesus had been teaching concerning a variety of sins and duties. He taught God's law for marriage, which is one man, one woman, for one lifetime, and divorce permissible for only one cause and that cause is fornication. He taught man's need for a childlike faith, innocence, purity and said of such is the kingdom of heaven. He defined what to do to have eternal

life by answering the question of the rich ruler and how one must put anything and everything aside that is between him and his service to God which must come first.

When the rich man heard Jesus' answer, he went away sorrowful. Then Jesus spoke how hard it is for a rich man to enter heaven. His teaching gives emphasis to the difficulty involved. He illustrated this difficulty with a proverb of that day, that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. This is to be understood figuratively. Jesus is not teaching it was an impossibility because we read of some rich men who were pleasing to God. Riches alone will not condemn a person. But riches make it difficult because of the temptation to trust in riches rather than God. While riches can help us to serve God, if our attitude toward them is not correct, and our acquisition and distribution of them are not proper, riches can be a hindrance to us. Just being rich is no indication that God approves or disapproves of us. It just means being rich in this world's goods.

Not Without God

Jesus goes on to show that it is impossible for a rich man, or any other man, to be saved without God. *"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* The salvation of the rich is possible, but not apart from God. But with God it is possible. Heaven cannot be reached by "pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps." We can neither earn nor merit heaven. While we must do the part that God commands of us, we can go to heaven because God has offered to save us and provided by His grace a mercy a Savior that we need. We can be thankful for the scheme of redemption, without which there could be no salvation for anyone.

Many then, and many now, confuse prosperity in the material realm as a sign of spiritual acceptance. Even the disciples seemed to have this concept when they asked, *"Who then can be saved?"* If the rich, who were considered somewhat, could not be saved without God, who could be saved at all? Let us look into the New Testament and learn who can be saved.

Sins Forgiven

Those that were saved in the New Testament record were those whose sins were forgiven. Romans 4:7,8, *"Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Sin is what condemns us. When sins are forgiven, blotted out, remembered against us no more, then Satan's grip is broken and we are redeemed. During the personal ministry of Jesus He often spoke men's sins forgiven. Since Pentecost sins are forgiven according to His will that requires faith and obedience. We are saved when our sins have been taken away by the blood of Christ. There is no other way to be forgiven.

Matthew 9:2, *"And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."* Does not Jesus show that spiritual sickness is worse than physical sickness by attending to the man's greatest need first? Some are physically strong who are spiritually weak. Such was the case with Samson. Paul was just the opposite, having some physical infirmity (we know not what it was), but he was a spiritual giant. Nobody is denied the blessing of salvation because of a physical malady. The sick need saving. We have taken people from their hospital beds and baptized them into Christ. The sick and the healthy need saving and can be saved. Often when one is sick he is more receptive to the reality of his need and the certainty of death and will obey when he might otherwise refuse to obey. Who can be saved? The sick can be saved.

Not Nationality

In Acts 8 we read of the Samaritans and the Ethiopian being saved. Paul preached the message of salvation to Jew and Gentile alike when he traveled about the world. Nationality saves no one and does not prevent anyone from being saved. Peter said, *"Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respector of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."* (Acts 10:34,35). Neither race, ancestry, parentage, color of skin nor any such thing keeps one from the need of salvation or the possibility of salvation. While people sometimes get caught up in their prejudices and preferences, we must remember that God loves every human being and Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). National, sectional, racial, economic, social nor educational barriers ought never be considered a factor in reaching for lost souls. The gospel is for all nations.

Not Social Status

That social standing makes no difference in salvation is prominently emphasized in Philemon, a freeman, and Onesimus, a salve. Paul recognized what was a social difference but these two Christians were to treat one another as Christian brothers because they were brothers in the Lord. Galatians 3:28, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."* Such things do not matter with God.

Peter was once called *"unlearned,"* while Paul was accused of being mad because of his much learning. But learned or unlearned, they both were among the saved. Joseph of Arimathaea was rich, and many of the disciples of Jesus were poor, even beggars. But both classes of people are listed as people of God. Christ and His apostles preached to kings, lawyers, tentmakers, merchants, publicans, fishermen, whoever and whatever. What do we learn from this? Regardless of occupation, education, wealth, social status, all need to be saved and all could be saved. All who obey Him are comfortable, happy, and at ease together in the church of the Lord. Since the Lord makes no distinction along these lines, who are we, His disciples, to legislate to do otherwise?

Notice some others were saved back then. Some had been guilty of adultery (John 3:3-11). Jesus did not condone that sin, but showed that even this hideous sin can be forgiven and the sinner saved.

What They Were

Consider the kind of people the members of the church in Corinth had been. First Corinthians 6:9-11, *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God."* They once were such people who were lost, but they did not remain that way. Being forgiven, they were clean. Even such wicked people can be saved if they come to Christ.

The Jews were guilty of murdering the innocent Son of God.

Peter accused them of this very thing (Acts 2:36). But he gave them heaven's instructions and when they complied with them they were added to the saved. Paul wrote, First Timothy 1:15, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."* He had been guilty of many crimes against the Lord as he made havoc of the church, but he had taken advantage of God's mercy and now was among the saved.

Even a backslider can be saved if he will return. Acts 8 tells us of a man named Simon who heard the Word, believed, and was baptized. Later Peter described him as being *"in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."* His heart was not right. But he could be restored if he would repent and pray to God for forgiveness which is the privilege of a child of God. The wayward, negligent, and unfaithful can all be saved if they follow the Lord's way back to Him.

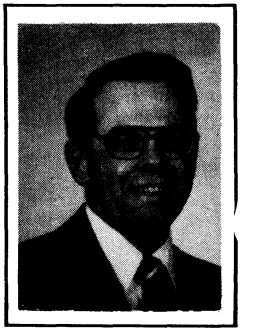
We understand, therefore, that no matter how wicked a person may become, all sinners can be saved. This was the purpose of the mission of Christ to earth. He made it possible. There is not one that is forbidden if the way of salvation is followed. The great commission extends the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Revelation 22:17, *"And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."* This sounds the death of the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination and the necessity of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit before one can be saved.

While all can be saved, all will not be saved. We change the question from, *"Who can be saved?"* to "Who will be saved?" Those who do the will of God will be saved (Matthew 7:21). One must hear the gospel, believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized in water by the authority of Christ for the remission of sins and into Christ, rising to walk in newness of life, living faithfully according to the gospel of Christ. We have God's own Word that those who follow this way, His way, will be saved from past sins and in heaven at last. Those who do not obey His plan have no word of hope extended to them in all the pages of the Bible. No man can change God's way. It is either obey God, or remain lost.

There is one final question each of us should ask. We know who can be saved. We know who will be saved. But are we among those who will be saved? That depends on what we do. What shall it be with you?

† † † † †

Part Of The Gospel



JAMES W. BOYD

"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15,16).

Some teach that baptism is not a part of the gospel, will not preach that it has anything to do with salvation, and contend that one can be saved without ever obeying it. Inconsistently, they also teach one must be baptized to "obey Jesus." Can one be saved and not obey Jesus?

People were to be baptized. Where would they learn that except from what was preached to them? Where would they learn what to believe except from what was preached to them? How would they know believing and being baptized was to be saved except from what was preached to them? How could they know disbelief would damn them except from what was preached to them? What was to be preached to every creature? Christ said the gospel was to be preached.

When one hears the gospel preached he will know to believe, what to believe, to be baptized, and why to be baptized. If he does not believe he will not be concerned about baptism but will be damned for unbelief.

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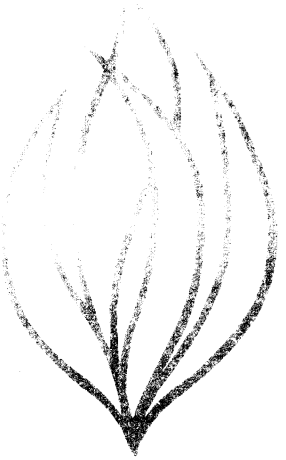

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 12**

Illegitimate Children

Our lesson concerns a very serious moral problem that has devestating repercussions upon society, the economy, and the spiritual welfare of many people. It is a problem that threatens to erode civilization and respect for the Word of God. We are told that one of six children born in our nation are illegitimate. In some ethic groups the rate is over fifty per cent.

An illegitimate child is a child born of a woman, the father of which is not the husband of the woman, therefore, the child does not bear the father's name. It is a child born out of wedlock. The child is born as the result of sinful sexual conduct.

The extent of this problem has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years due to the so-called "new morality," which has given license to any and every kind of sexual relationship without limit. Thousands upon thousands of children are being born to unwed parents. Homes are operated for unwed mothers, government expenditure increasing for both the care of the mother as well as the children. Many of these mothers are teenagers, if not most of them. This does not take into account the thousands upon thousands of unborn children who are murdered each year by some form of abortion, legal and illegal. The figures are staggering because of their enormity, and grow upward year by year.

Nor does this take into account the lowered morals of those who conceive the child out of wedlock but who are married before the child is born. Marriage does not place a robe of sanctity around illicit sexual relationships that occurs before marriage. The child born of pre-marital sex is not counted, however, as an illegitimate child even though the child was illegitimately conceived.

There is no way to be accurate regarding the extent of the fornication and adultery that evidently runs rampant in society. The shame and disgrace of conceiving a child out of wedlock, bearing a child out of wedlock, being sexually immoral has been removed to a great extent because of the acceptance by society of sin, the definance of the will of God, the lack of consistency among religious people between word and deed, the general decay of morality across the board. The sin regarding illegitimate children is not a sin of the children. It is actually a misnomer to declare the child illegitimate as if the child was in some way evil.

The child is as innocent of sin as any other child. The man and woman who produce the child are the ones who are illegitimate and immoral. The extent and influence of their sin resounds far beyond the birth of the sinless child.

No Double Standard

Sin is no more chargeable to the woman than to the man, or vice versa. Even though the world has often had a double standard in such matters, there never was a double standard with God. The shame of the double standard has been largely removed in recent years because now more and more people do not consider it shameful to violate God's laws of morality anymore. While women may bear more of the problems caused by a child born out of wedlock, this due to the physical production of the child, giving birth, caring for the child, and finding ways to support the child, the guilt of sin is as damnable to one as the other. Many men have been led to believe that if the woman with whom they commit fornication should conceive that the problem is altogether her problem. But both have contributed to the damnation of the soul of each other.

We hear a lot of talk today on the subject of abortion that the woman should be given the right over her own body. Nobody disputes that. What some deranged minds cannot understand is that she has exercised the control over her body when she gave herself to illicit relationships. Once a child has been conceived, there is more than just her body that must be considered. She had contol over her body and she ignored the sin and responsibility that inescapably accompanies this conduct.

The problem of illegitimacy, illicit sex, is not confined to any one social or economic level of people. It is a moral infection that has invaded the rich, poor, educated, uneducated, black, white, and every group, including church-going people. Many are aroused over the social problem and the health problems, but not so much because of the offenses against morality. They are aroused because of the increasing tax burden this wilfull defínance of God has produced. The costs are rising and the burden is appalling. But the Christian is concerned because of his hatred of sin and love for souls. It is this moral and spiritual failure and breakdown that grieves the heart of the child of God far more than any other related consequence.

Teach Morality

It is true, however, that this scar of sin occurs far less among those who have been taught morality, who know they are not merely animals that have evolved, who realize they are responsible before God and man for their behavior, and who retain some self-respect and personal dignity. Anyone who does not have respect for the value of Bible study, religious training, moral teaching, Christian principles and human dignity simply does not understand the only remedy and solution to this increasing blight among humankind.

Once it is known that a child has been conceived out of wedlock there are great problems to those involved. The first impulse is to chastise and rebuke those who sin. But it is really too late for preaching. If preaching is to be done it must be the condemnation of sin and the plea for repentance that seeks forgiveness. But what has been done cannot be undone. There is no way that minimizes the enormity of the sin, however.

Parents weep many tears wondering, "Were did we go wrong?" regarding their children who get so involved. Very likely it is not what was done wrong, but what was not done at all. It is frightening to know that over half of those under twenty years of age are receiving no kind of moral training from anybody anywhere. The neglect of proper guidance and teaching is a tragedy. Providing biological information and "birth control" devices does not resolve the problem. The problem is morals and respect for God. When this is either neglected by parents, or ignored by youths, what else can be expected except the results of sin and the just recompense of reward? It is a spiritual tragedy of the worst sort.

Disobedience

What all must come to realize is that illicit sexual relationships are demonstrations of disregard for God. It is a gross disrespect for His authority. It is sin. Many who know the truth ignore the truth. Mere knowledge of God's will is not enough, even though essential. There must be the determination to comply with His will. With this "do-your-own-thing" attitude that is so prevalent today, and being promoted on every hand, illegitimate children are inevitably some of the consequences.

Illicit sexual activity is sometimes provoked by the lack of security in the home. With the enormous divorce rate, single parent homes, mothers working outside the home and children cared for by others, the security level for many children is at rock

bottom. They seek companionship and acceptance. When parents are so busy they cannot take care of their children, seeking acceptance themselves from almost any quarter, their children act similarly and find themselves in sin.

Boys have deceived girls into suggesting that sex is a proof of "love." It is the very opposite when the sex proposed is between two who are not married. Nobody who really loves another will ask that they damn the soul to prove anything. You do not prove love through sin. You prove love by refusing to sin.

Weak fathers, dominant mothers, children even with plenty of money but a scarcity of morals, creates insecurity and feelings of not being wanted. To feel wanted, many have dissipated their bodies in fornication. Empty houses, loose supervision, worldly ambitions, peer pressure and the neglect of God in the home is at the root of the whole sordid and hideous scene. The craving for pleasure, material things, attractiveness and getting ahead have ruined the lives and eternities of millions.

Can We Blame These?

Some have blamed society, finances, education and other factors that likely have contributed somewhat to illicit conduct. But there are many who are poor, who live in deprived areas, who have not have every educational opportunity, but who have been taught truth, who are not among the immoral.

There will ever be the natural curiosity among the young about the opposite sex. Parents have failed to teach children regarding the body. As a result, many today are clamoring for the schools to do the job, often by teachers who are so stupid as to think that sex can be properly presented in a vacuum of moral teaching. True, too many children get their "facts of life" from the back alley, restrooms, locker rooms, dirty jokes and filthy conversation. But this only aggravates the problems.

The disrespect for God's laws regarding marriages, the sacredness of marriage, the permanency of marriage, faithfulness in marriage, the laws of God as to who is and is not marriageable, all have paved the way for the moral breakdown that brings children into the world with father and mother not married to each other. Some are led to think that all sexual activity is evil rather than a beautiful, God-given expression reserved for those who are married to each other.

Even in the church there are those who have left God's law about marriage and divorce, granting divorces for any cause,

granting the right to marry to almost anybody, no discipline in the church toward those who defy God's teaching. They have surrendered to the ways of the world and are trying to accommodate sin and convert God to fit sinful mankind. We should not think that God will hold such false brethren guiltless of their false doctrines and wicked practices which they promote.

The Solution

The only real solution to the problem is to prevent illicit sexual conduct. Once one has sinned we must strive for the conversion of the heart, repentance and restoration through forgiveness. But why should so many have to suffer the agony of sin, the disgrace of bearing a child out of marriage, the regret and pain that shall forever follow? Why must there be the flow of grief that sin brings? God has given us the way to go. Why should we not walk His way?

There must be a recognition that fornication is sin. Galatians 5:19-21 is a list of "*works of the flesh*" which if practiced prevents entrance into the kingdom of God. The first two sins are adultery and fornication. Ephesians 5:3 teaches that fornication is not even to be named among saints. Colossians 3:5 mentions fornications that are to be mortified or put to death. *"Abstain from fornication"* is the instruction of First Thessalonians 4:3. First Corinthians 6:18, *"Flee fornication."*

Among the works of the flesh is also lasciviousness. This is that which inclines toward lewd and immoral thoughts and actions. Therefore, there should be teaching against the modern dances, pornorgraphic literature, running with the "fast crowd," late hours, and other such things that provoke the loss of control of passions. The skimpy attire and immodest clothes many wear in order to be fashionable have tempted the very sinfulness that results in children being born out of wedlock. Petting, beach parties, filling the mind with the sex-oriented movies and television programs all contribute to the breakdown of moral restraint and obedience to God.

Forgiveness

Sin can be forgiven. But the scars of sin plague the one who commits sin throughout the rest of life. This is surely so evident with the sin of illicit sex that results in conception of a new life. Regret is a difficult matter to overcome. *"Be not deceived, God*

is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7). Efforts to cover the fornication and birth of children conceived out of wedlock do not succeed. Giving the child for adoption seldom really solves the problem. At best, it only shifts it elsewhere. Marriage can partially cover conception out of wedlock as far as giving the child a name. But only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse the souls stained in fornication.

We must provide for the oncoming generations a sense of purity, decency, morality, responsibility, security, proper companionship, care and genuine Christian love. We cannot rely upon the unwanted conceptions, the possibility of disease, and other such factors to motivate people to morality. We must teach them the love of God and respect for His ways. Only then can there be a significant dent made in the distress and shame of what is called the problem of illegitimate children.

† † † † †

I Never Have Understood It

There are many things that I do not quite understand, especially about the behavior of people. I have worked closely with people for thirty-five years as a gospel preacher, talking with them about their souls, dealing with what they considered to be their problems, trying as best I knew how to be of assistance to those who sought my help. It has been my good fortune to be with people in some of the happiest moments that life can afford. But I have been by the side of many who were suffering some of the darkness hours of life. All in all it has been, and I trust will continue to be, my lot in life to continue to have association with people of all ages and situations. What I have had opportunity to do is not different from what probably has been the case with every faithful gospel preacher.

But there is something about people, and I especially I have my brethren in mind, that has always been a major concern and has troubled

(continued on page 24)

Some Things For Which To Be Thankful

One of mankind's contemptible faults is his ingratitude. It reveals his greed, envy, egotism, selfishness, and how self-centered he is, because it indicates that he thinks the world and all around him exists just for him. He receives benefits and blessings from God and man, yet is not courteous and Christian enough to even express gratitude, by word or deed.

Thankfulness is one of mankind's noblest characteristics. Being grateful is as wonderful as ingratitude is contemptible. Nobody really likes the egocentric ingrate, but nearly everybody appreciates those who appreciate their blessings.

Too many are like the nine lepers who received healing from Christ, and not enough of us are like the one who was healed and returned to give thanks to Christ (Luke 17:11-20). Everybody ought to have the capacity to say, "Thank you," and mean it. Being thankful is to glorify God and displays respect for others who have done good on our behalf.

The reason gratitude is so admirable is because it is of divine origin. The Lord taught us to be grateful, in every age, to give praise and thanksgiving. Being grateful is a part of pleasing God.

We can be glad that our nation has a day called Thanksgiving Day. While it is not a religious holy day, as some would attempt to make it, the purpose behind it is good and the attitude it expresses is honorable. We have so much for which to be thankful. As we sing "Count your many blessings, name them one by one," we should realize that every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17).

In the epistles penned by the apostle Paul we find many references dealing with giving thanks. Our lesson shall look at three things for which Paul said he was thankful, and for which he expressed gratitude.

For Faith

To the brethren in Colossee, "*We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus...*" (Colossians 1:3,4). The term *"faith"* is used in different senses in the New

Testament. It can denote the entire religion of Christ -- *"The faith."* (Jude 3). It is used in that sense when Paul urged that we *"stand fast in the faith."* (First Corinthians 16:13).

It can also refer to belief, trust and confidence given. We have faith in Christ. We believe in Him, place our trust and confidence in Him and all that pertains to Him. Such *"faith"* is an obedient faith, the faith that saves. We are saved by faith (Romans 5:1). It can be said that we are saved by faith (belief) in the faith (the religion of Christ) because of our faith (confidence and obedience) in Christ.

Our text uses the word *"faith"* in the sense of the belief the brethren in Colosse had. They believed in Christ Jesus. Paul was thankful for that because Christ had taught this to be necessary to be saved (John 8:24; Mark 16:16; John 3:16,18). Without faith we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). Paul loved these people and recognized them to be precious undying souls. He labored for their salvation. Knowing the absolute necessity that they believe, it is understandable why he would be thankful that they did.

It is no different now among Christian brethren. We are thankful for the faith of every person who does believe. How dark and difficult it would be for us if we stood alone. Many times, in many circumstances, we derive strength from the strong faith of others. It helps us to remain loyal to the truth. We sing. "We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear, and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear." How is it that we can do this? It is because we believe the same things. We are united in the faith. We along with Paul can be greatful for the faith others have in Christ Jesus our Lord. Are you not thankful today that others believe in Christ as do you?

For Love

Paul continued to say, verse 4, *"...and of the love which ye have to all the saints..."* Who is a saint? The world has come to consider the term to mean sinless, including perfection, or someone of the distant past who has been appointed to such a status by some ecclesiastical hierarchy. These are misconceptions of sainthood, according to Biblical teaching. A saint is simply a Christian; one who has been sanctified, set apart from the world and into Christ. He has been made holy by the forgiveness of his sins. A saint is a Christian. Paul called the Christian brethren in Corinth and Philippi *"saints."* Love for

saints means love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. The word *"saint"* is used to refer to faithful brethren.

Being brethren means a difference with people, their feelings, attitudes and action one toward the other. Abraham would not allow differences to develop with Lot that might destroy their relationship and love for each other, and his reason was *"...for we be brethren."* (Genesis 13:8). The arguments over the watering holes that existed between their respective servants posed a potential strife between them. Because of their love, Abraham would not allow it to continue. With one of the greatest manifestations of unselfishness recorded in the Bible, Abraham gave Lot his choice of land rather than break close ties.

Genuine love is the most powerful remedy for strife. More than anything else, it can prevent strife. When we love God and His truth, we will love one another. First Timothy 6:2, *"And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren..."* The relationship of master-slave left open potential strife, but being brethren made a difference. First Peter 1:22 urged the *"unfeigned love of the brethren."* Our love is not to be hypocritical, feigned, pretended, but genuine, honest, and sincere. *"See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."* First Peter 3:8, *"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous."* Sincere love will manifest itself in deeds that show kindness, consideration, courtesy, helpfulness, going the extra mile, cooperation, each counting the other better than himself.

John 13:35, *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* We can be thankful that brethren love each other. It is sad when brethren miss the spirit of Christ, and condemn themselves, bringing reproach on the cause of Christ, by their bitterness toward each other, harboring hate and grudges, envy and jealousy. Holding on to false doctrines and dividing the people of God because of them places unfair and undue strain on the brotherhood.

Again we sing, "Blest be the tie than binds our hearts in Christian love." For this trait Paul gave thanks. And so do we.

For Hope

Colossians 1:5, Paul adds the third thing for which he was thankful regarding his brethren in Colosse, *"For the hope which*

is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." What is the hope of the Christian? Can we hope for external peace, contentment, satisfaction in this life, where there is no grief, pain, sorrow, disappointment? This is not what the child of God is taught to expect in following Christ. In fact, he should not consider it strange to be tried (First Timothy 3:12; First Peter 4:12-16). But we have hope. What a dreary, dreadful existence if there was no hope beyond this life! First Corinthians 15:19, *"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."*

Our hope is an eternal one. Paul called this hope the *"one hope,"* (Ephesians 4:4); a "*good hope,"* (Second Thessalonians 2:16); a *"better hope,"* (Hebrews 7:19). It is the *"anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast,"* (Hebrews 6:19). Our hope is Christ (First Timothy 1:1). Paul wrote, *"in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."* (Titus 1:2). Of brethren he said, "*That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

Romans 8:24, *"For we are saved by hope..."* Why is this? Not only must we hear the gospel, believe it, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins, we must live a faithful life before God (Revelation 2:10). Even though we are tried and tempted, we shall continue to run the race with patience because we are aware of the prize before us. It is our hope for the glory and joy of heaven that makes us "keep on keeping on." In this way our hope becomes a motivating factor in keeping us loyal to God, which is essential to salvation. If we do not remain faithful, we become like a dog turning to his vomit and a sow that was washed to the mire (Second Peter 2:20-22). Hope keeps us going onward and upward.

This hope is offered through Christ. Even though He lived and died, He arose from the dead, demonstrating Deity's power over all that would destroy and defeat us. Because of His victory, we can have victory through Him (First Corinthians 15:57). Paul was grateful that this hope did abide with his brethren. We are also thankful that this hope abides among brethren, and that it is offered to all.

All Our Blessings

How many things there are for which we can give thanks!

Consider our families, homes, friends, raiment, food, freedom, medicine, opportunity, forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, providence, prayer, life here and in the hereafter. Can we really count our blessings since they are so numerous? Both temporal and spiritual blessings are ours. We have discussed only three that Paul specifically mentioned in the opening phrases of the book of Colossians: (1) faith, (2) love, (3) hope. There is not a Christian who is faithful in Christ who does not possess good reason to be grateful for the same things.

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His Parting Words

Acts 1:6-8, *"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

Our lesson centers on some of the final words Jesus spoke to His apostles before ascending to heaven. Our text is the last quoted conversation He had with them, even though He spoke with them after this. Parting words are always sincere and important.

It may be a coincidence, but these last words are not unlike the tone and nature of His first recorded words, when at the age of twelve He said, *"Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"* (Luke 2:49). His first utterance of His personal ministry was, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:4). In similar words He presents at the last the duty of being His witness, and shows the power by which this duty was to be accomplished.

The apostles had asked a parting question. The question reflects confidence in Jesus but also misunderstanding of the nature of His kingdom. There was a great change in these men from the time they asked this question until they started boldly

preaching the gospel. Here they inquire about the kingdom but later they proclaim its glory everywhere.

Not Yet Ready

At this time even the apostles were not yet equipped for the service they would render. Their spiritual condition was not strong. The question reflects more of a curiosity than that which is typical of one who walks by faith. They were delving into mysteries that belonged only to God. They were attempting to walk by sight rather than by faith.

Their question is temporal, dealing with time. *"Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* Mankind often forgets eternity and thinks only in terms of time. Possibly this is because we cannot fully comprehend eternity. It is evident that the apostles had great concern for temporal affairs at this moment.

Their thinking was centered on this earth. They were talking about restoring the earthly kingdom of Israel akin to the reigns of David and Solomon. They failed to realize the kingdom was to be a spiritual one.

In one sense, it seems they revealed a personal selfishness. Were they just concerned with fleshly Israel? What of the rest of mankind? This shows they did not grasp the scope and intent of God's promise to Abraham because the blessings to spring from the *"seed"* of Abraham were to be for all nations.

Their question revealed misinformation and misunderstanding. They knew God wants man to come to Him, but they were not informed how God planned to bring man to Him. They seemed to be speculating how God might act rather than relying on God through faith to act as He saw fit. This question they laid before Jesus tells us more of the inadequacy of the apostles at this time than first meets the eye. In their present state they would not be able to carry out the task that would soon be given them. But the message Jesus gives them is designed to make them fit and prepared.

Correction

Christ does three things of importance. First, He corrects a false idea. As for their curiosity, He says, *"It is not for you to know."* There are some things mankind will not and cannot know, but God knows. As for their temporal thinking, He added, *"...not for you to know the times and seasons..."* of the

things God knows. If we all knew all things we could know the times of tragedy before it occured, the date of death and the gloom that would be cast over the joys of life by such knowledge. When a doctor tells a person he has but three months to live, regardless of the joys he may experience from that time forward, they are dimmed by the knowledge of his approaching death in a relatively short and certain time.

As for their earthly thinking concerning the kingdom, Jesus promised the Holy Ghost would come upon them. As He has promised earlier, this would enable them to speak the complete truth, and recall what Jesus had taught them (John 14,15,16). The Lord's kingdom is spiritual, not earthly, in nature (John 18:36). It is not just another political power. When they were more attune to the spiritual nature of the kingdom they would have better understanding.

As for their selfishness, Jesus advised, *"Ye shall be my witnesses."* They would not only preach to their own fellow countrymen, but to people of the whole world. At this time the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans and Gentiles. But soon they would be brethren in the Lord. By these corrections, Jesus brought them into a purer understanding of their mission as well as His. He expelled their error and confusion.

Completion

The second thing He does is to complete them. *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."* He promises them power. This they would need especially seeing their weak condition. Even though they had been with Jesus for nearly three and one half years, they were still in need. With this power Jesus promised they would be equipped to tackle and expedite their work.

Commission

Having corrected them and completed them with promise, He commissions them. *"Ye shall be my witnesses..."* The great commission is also stated in Mark 16:15,16, and Matthew 28:18-20. It is similar to Paul's parting message to Timothy, *"Preach the word."* (Second Timothy 4:2). What Jesus was saying to His apostles was that they must go and tell people of Him and His will.

By correcting, completing and commissioning His apostles,

the basic needs for carrying out their duty were provided. In a similar thought, all Christians have these needs in being faithful Christians and doing their Christian duties. We need purity, power and purpose. We now turn our attention to these needs, in reverse order.

It should be evident to all that those in the kingdom of God have a mission. The question is, "Are we practicing it and doing it?" We are not "*witnesses*" as were the apostles. But we do have the duty to preach and teach the testimony of these inspired men who were witnesses. To witness is to tell what we have seen and heard. We have not seen and heard as did they. Nor are we directly guided by the Holy Spirit as were they as inspired men. But we have learned the truth of Christ from the Word of Scripture, and we are to preach the Word to all the world because only the gospel can save (Romans 1:16). No Christian is doing his full duty who is not busy informing others of the truth. There are many avenues and methods open to us all to teach the will of Christ to others.

What We Need

To do our task we need power. The work of the church demands human energy, resourcefulness and intelligence. But we do not suggest that we shall succeed without the help from God. We have the Lord's promise of His presence and He is mindful of our efforts. We, like Paul, must sow the seed, and like Apollos, water the plant, and depend on God for the increase. We should not expect the baptism of the Holy Spirit since the Lord only promised that to the apostles. It was never promised nor intended for every Christian. But we have the power of the gospel and the power of prayer, plus mental and physical power to be about the Father's business.

We must also have purity. We must remove sin from our lives. We must know the truth and live accordingly. Hebrews 12:1 admonishes us to *"lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us"* and run the race as a Christian with determination and faithfulness.

We have been purified by obedience to the truth (First Peter 1:22), and as we *"walk in the light as he is in the light,"* (First John 1:7), His blood will keep on keeping us clean.

In a very real sense the parting words of Jesus to His apostles were parting words to all of His disciples in principle. As Christians we have the opportunity to rise to the highest level of

spiritual attainment by being a proclaimer of Christ. Christ purifies by correcting our faults. He completes us, having furnished the power of God unto salvation, the gospel. He commissions us, having given us the mission and purpose to tell the world of the Savior God sent into this world.

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The Seven Sayings Of The Cross

Shakespeare wrote, "The tongues of dying men enforce attention like deep harmony. Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain. They breathe truth that breathe their words in pain."

This experience in the history of mankind has often been demonstrated to be true. Few words are dearer to a person than the final utterances that fall from the lips of those whom they love. The words of Jesus Christ as He was dying on the cross are precious to those that put their faith in Him as God's Son and man's Savior.

Jesus spoke seven times as He was hanging on the cross. Each of them are priceless revelations as to what was in His mind during those torturous hours. Each tells us more of His character. We cannot be certain as to the order in which these things were stated because all seven are not found in any one account of His life on earth and His death on the cross. But knowing the order is of no major consequence except for one or two of them.

Forgive

Few phrases are more familiar than, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."* (Luke 23:34). He speaks as a great High Priest on behalf of sinful mankind, specifically for those who were carrying out His execution and those who caused it. He was making intercession for His enemies that pursued Him until He died. The actions and ravings of hatred had been committed against Him by the Pharisees, priests, scribes, the rabble of Jerusalem and even one of His own

chosen number. Their prejudices, born of ignorance and conceit, had taken Him to Calvary. Their mockery resounded to the heavens. These poor, deluded mockers, unknowing of the significance of their merciless actions, were actually fulfilling prophecies that provided additional evidence to the truthfulness of His claim that He was the Son of God, the very truth that His enemies sought to deny. That His enemies helped to prove His identity is one of the several ironies of the cross.

But we marvel at the compassion of Jesus in this trying hour, that of being mindful of the sins of others and the desire that they might be forgiven. Can there be any doubt in the mind of anyone that forgiveness, the willingness to forgive even the worst of enemies, is Christlike? He was too noble and pure to hold grudges and hatred in His heart. He had taught His disciples to pray, *"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."* (Matthew 6:12). Now He was demonstrating His teaching in perfection. The very essence of the Christian faith is embodied in His words. Forgiveness was the theme of His mission to this earth. We can only be saved by being forgiven of our iniquities and sins.

The expression reflects the attitude of Jesus. We are not to think that Jesus was seeking their forgiveness without them meeting the conditions of forgiveness. He was not praying that they be forgiven IN their sins, but FROM their sins. Prayer for forgiveness, when the offender is impenitent, will not accomplish anything except an expression of willingness by the offended to forgive. Jesus' prayer was that they might repent of their sins and know forgiveness. He wanted them to do the things necessary for forgiveness. Even though one may want to forgive another, and is willing to forgive, even as was Christ willing to forgive, forgiveness will not become a reality until the one needing forgiveness meets the divinely-given conditions for forgiveness.

Paradise

"Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43). This was said to the penitent thief who was also dying on another nearby cross. The thief had asked to be remembered by the Lord when He came into His kingdom. While the other thief continued to rail against Jesus, words of hope were extended to the penitent one.

These words of Jesus have been unmercifully distorted by

religionists to attempt to prove the very opposite of what the Bible teaches about the soul of man. They have been wrested into a weapon against God's plan of salvation.

Some have taken these words to teach that one does not have to be baptized to be saved. The truth is that baptism for the remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ had not been commanded of anybody at the time these words were spoken. That was first taught on the first Pentecost after His ascension into heaven.

During His personal ministry on earth Jesus often spoke people's sins forgiven. But we live subject to His will, which did not take effect until after His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on Pentecost. What Jesus said to the thief has no bearing on what people must do now, under His will, to be saved. The thief lived and died before the will of Christ was operative. What fallacy to cite the thief as an example of the way to be saved today!

Nonetheless, the thief could be comforted and rejoice because Christ granted to him an assurance that all would be well with him after death. Paradise is a part of Hades, the unseen state of the dead. Jesus went to Paradise, according to His words to the thief. Peter said He went to Hades (Acts 2:27,31). In the King James Versions the words "hades" is translated by the English word "hell," which is not an incorrect translation, but does not distinguish "hades," the unseen state of the dead, from "gehenna." which is also translated "hell" and means the eternal place of punishment. Jesus went to the Paradise part of the unseen state of the dead, and assured the thief he would be there also. It is interesting to note that most moden dictionaries define hell both ways, as the state of the dead and also the place of eternal punishment. Context determines which is which. The American Standard Version makes the distinction clearer on this word.

Son And Mother

"Woman, behold thy son. Behold, thy mother." (John 19:26). Most likely these words were spoken to Mary, His mother, and John at the same utterance. We conclude it was John because it was a custom for a writer to identify himself in an anonymous manner, which in this case was John. It reflected the Lord's love, care and concern for His mother after His

departure.

What a great lesson on respect for parents! Mary was certainly undergoing great suffering when she saw her Son so cruelly mistreated. She sees His suffering brow, and blood dropping from His body. She could see and hear the soldiers casting lots for His garments. What mother would not be pained under such circumstances!

Yet, she is comforted by the words of her thoughtful Son that show His concern for her. This must have been a rewarding time for Mary in the Lord's display of His love. These were additional words that she could store in her heart as she had done with so many of the words and deeds of Jesus since His youth.

The love of this mother and Son was great. What parent would not desire such love from their children! Who would not cherish their thoughts for parental welfare! When children show concern for parents they are in the imitation of Christ. It is a lesson sorely needed among us today. So many are content to display contempt, disrespect, ingratitude and dishonor for the very ones God says are to be honored.

Thirst

Jesus also said, *"I thirst,"* the shortest of His comments and one that revealed His physical agony and feelings of distress. We are told that the agony of thirst is often the most painful. It is true that when one is injured, or is suffering, that water is greatly desired to relieve the agony.

While we remember that Christ was Deity, let us not forget that He was Deity in the flesh because He took on the form of man. This cry was the human side of the Lord wailing in discomfort. He had undergone so much abuse already. He only is asking for a bit of relief for His weary flesh. But even this was denied Him by His tormentors. Instead of water He was offered a sponge dipped in vinegar, bitter and repulsive, though it mattered little at this stage of His torture. He was soon to depart this life.

His Cry!

But His bodily grief cannot be compared with the grief of His spirit. As a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, the suffering Son and Savior cried out, *"Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani."* This meant, *"My God! My God! Why hast thou*

forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Were these the words of a triumphant King? Was this the voice of a victorious Messiah? How the infidel has gloated in his misappropriation of this phrase! They claim this is proof that even Jesus now recognized that His claim of being the Messiah was fraudulent, and even if He had sincerely believed it earlier, He now becomes aware that He was not who He claimed to be. Is this the meaning of what Jesus said? We deny there is any such suggestion in these words.

It is unthinkable that God the Father would be displeased with His Son in His hour of complete submission and accomplishment of His mission. The events of the resurrection and ascension disprove any notion that He was alienated from His Father. If Calvary raises any doubts about that, the resurrection morn melts them into oblivion.

The most feasible explanation of the passage to my mind is that Jesus had reference to Psalm 22:1, a prophetic psalm about the suffering of the Lord's anointed. Verses 7,8,16-18, *"All they that see men laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him... For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."* The words that Jesus spoke were quotations of the opening words of this Messianic psalm. Rather than being words that suggest the Father rejected Him, they are words affirming again that He was the One of whom the psalmist wrote in prophecy. He fulfilled the psalm. He was the One He claimed to be.

The Accomplishment

As the end drew near Jesus said, *"It is finished."* (John 19:30). What was finished? Several things were finished at this event on Calvary. His life, His work of redemption, the hopelessness of mankind, payment for sins, and the law of God through Moses that was nailed to the cross, (Colossians 2:14), were all finished. Just what Jesus had in mind we cannot specifically tell, but all of these things could have been included.

To The Father

Finally, He said, *"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."* (Luke 23:46). This should remove any question about the relationship of Jesus and the Father when Jesus was on the cross.

It was a reaffirmation that even though the body dies, the spirit lives. There is existence after physical death. The spirit returns to the Father who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

As this ordeal comes to a close, as He takes His last breath, and the last drop of life departs, He commends Himself into the care of the Almighty. While the thieves continued to hang longer, and their bones were eventually broken to hasten their death, He gave up the ghost. It was noonday.

At that moment the sun was darkened, the earth did quake, tombs were later opened, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom, another indication of the end of the law of Moses and the Judaistic system. The Savior of mankind, the Son of God, was dead. A centurion summarized it properly, *"Truly, this was the Son of God."* (Matthew 27:54).

To meditate upon these final phrases of Jesus enhances our love, respect and awe of Him as the Christ, God's Son. But as important as were these last seven sayings on the cross, they were not the last He spoke on earth. After three days He came from the tomb, and for forty days instructed His apostles concerning the kingdom, the church. He made many appearances before those who could identify Him as the One, who though once dead, was now alive.

The Charge

Before ascending into heaven He gave words of hope, promise, obligation and duty. *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."* (Matthew 28:19,20). *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* (Mark 16:15,16). These were among His last words and they teach us how to be saved, even those of us living today. Those who hear and obey shall be saved. Those who don't, won't.

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Cleansing The Temple

Would you read from your Bible John 2:13-22. This is the record of one of two occasions when Jesus cleansed the temple. (See also Matthew 21). Our text refers to the earlier event while Matthew records a similar action toward the end of His ministry.

The temple was the center of Jewish worship, the house of God and a sacred place. The first temple was built by Solomon, the second by Zerubbabel, and the third by Herod. It was Herod's temple that stood during the time of Jesus. When Jesus cleansed the temple the second time, He said, *"My house shall be called a house of prayer."* (Matthew 21:13, a quotation from Isaiah 56:7). Here He accused the people of making it a house of merchandise. Later He said they turned it into a den of robbers, which not only indicated using it for business practices, but unfair practices at that. Misusing the place was serious enough, but to exploit and take advantage of others was error atop error. The cleansing of the temple was a protest against the desecration of that which was holy.

The temple was a material building. The temple of God today is composed of people, Christians, living stones, the church (Ephesians 2:21,22; First Peter 2:5). If the material house was not to be misused, how much more ought the spiritual house not be misused. We ought to put forth every effort to prevent the desecration of the bodies and hearts of Christians because they belong to God (First Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).

His Example

Jesus went to the temple at Passover time. He lived under the law of Moses and kept the Passover faithfully. It was His custom to worship, often taking part in Scripture study when visiting various synagogues. This is a valuable example that we ought to appreciate and emulate. We are not to forsake assembling ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25), and when we do this we are doing far worse than just "missing church." We miss blessings; we fail to worship; we disobey God. What could be more serious? What could be a worse example?

When Christ arrived, verse 14 tells us what He found. People were selling animals and birds that would be used for sacrifice. This availability of animals was convenient for worshippers, and

no fault is found in the mere selling of them. They were obviously demanding too much for them, and they were called robbers. Others were doubtless exchanging foreign money into Jewish shekels at an unfair rate. The Jewish shekel was what was needed to pay tribute in the temple. What they were doing was not evil in itself, except for the dishonesty and the wrong use of the temple area. Outside in the temple grounds would have been a more acceptable place for this assistance that was being offered to the worshippers.

When Jesus saw what was being done He set about to correct it. It is always right to correct what is wrong. Some are so hesitant to oppose error that they leave the impression the error is permissible and acceptable. While we must oppose wrong the right way, we must oppose wrong. When some are prone to criticize those who oppose the manner some use to oppose error, we are inclined to appreciate the phrase that says, "I like the way I am doing it better than the way you are not doing it."

His Action

Jesus made a scourge out of cords and drove the animals out of the temple area. He overturned the tables of the money changers. He told them all to get out of the temple. Our Lord acted very aggressively. Some say that this is an example and permission to use physical force in religion. Some claim that right today. Some religions physically persecute others who do not agree with them. History reveals devestating horrors that have occured in the name of religion, even called a defense of Christianity. Some religions, like Mohammedanism, Roman Catholicism, and some pagan religions of the Far East have never renounced this right but insist they can do as they wish in the use of physical violence to promote and defend their faith. But the actions taken here of a physical nature were not taken against the persons and their bodies, but the animals and tables. One can never prove that Jesus laid a stripe on any person. That is not the nature of the Christian faith (Second Corinthians 10:4). Christ would not have done something contradictory to what He inspired His apostles to teach regarding the defense of the truth.

Why did Jesus use this method? The temple was His because He was God in the flesh. It was His right to do as He wanted with what was His. He acted as Deity. No man can assume such a position unless Deity has granted that authority. His house, the

church, is not ours. It belongs to Him. We have no authority to advance the church in such a physically violent fashion. Furthermore, He lived under the Mosaic law where on certain occasions God allowed and used physical force to carry out His will. We do not live under that law. Christ, as God, was well within His rights and priorities. He could even speak sins forgiven as well. The way we can bring people into conformity to the truth is by teaching, persuasion, example and creating convictions in their hearts. *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."* (Second Corinthians 5:11). It is significant that the temple of God no longer is a material temple that enemies can desecrate, but the temple is a spiritual house.

The action of Jesus was one of great zeal. His disciples recalled a prophecy from Psalm 69:9, *"Zeal for thy house shall eat me up."* Christ was much "eaten up" with determination, and was exercising enthusiasm for the truth, an intense ardor to uphold what was right. Christians today could stand a good dose of similar zeal. Paul says we are to be a zealous people of good works (Titus 2:14). What Jesus did sprang from a zeal for that which was right before the Father.

His Sign

Jesus, appearing in the temple as a reformer, meant He claimed to be divine, the Messiah. He assumed authority that only belonged to Deity. Therefore, they asked of Him a sign to justify His actions. *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* (John 2:19).

His hearers misunderstood Him, thinking that He spoke of the physical temple that stood before them that He had just purged. That temple was forty-six years under construction. What He proposed sounded impossible to them. To destroy the temple was tantamount to blasphemy anyway. Later, at His trial, His enemies used this misappropriated statement as evidence of His blasphemy against the temple. Strange how people who abused the temple were so ready to accuse another of blaspheming it.

Jesus was referring to the temple of His body. The sign was that He would be slain, but raised again the third day. That would confirm His authority. He was foretelling His death, burial and resurrection. His opponents made the error of taking what He said without regard to the intent and meaning of it. This is often done even yet to the teaching of Christ. It is deplorable for people to be guilty of ignoring the meaning a speaker places on

what he says. By twisting and wresting words men can appear to make people say what they never have said nor meant. That Jesus was done this way is to the discredit of His hearers. If people did the Lord that way, it is probable that people today will not be immune from such treatment.

But His disciples heard these words, also, and after His resurrection they recalled them. The truth was dormant for a while until it became evident. Truth sometimes lies unattended for long periods before it penetrates. People have heard gospel sermons and the seed is sown, but they refuse to obey until much, much later. It is tragic that time is wasted and the soul is endangered by such postponement, but the wonderful thing about the truth, it will save whenever people will hear and heed. Truth will accomplish its purposes, either to save or to separate.

He Cleanses Yet

Just as Jesus cleansed the temple, more importantly, He can and will cleanse the heart of all who are washed in His blood. Paul's sins were washed away when he was baptized (Acts 22:16). In baptism we reach the saving blood of Christ (Romans 6:3,4). The water is not the agent that cleans, but the blood of the Lord. But it is when we are baptized in water that God applies the blood. Have you been cleansed by Christ?

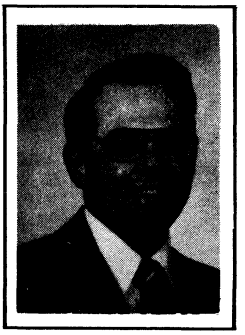
† † † † †

(continued from page 6)

my mind through the years. How can people say they believe something to be true and turn right around and give their support to various forces, religiously, educationally, politically, economically and socially, that work in the opposite direction of what they contend are their convictions!

None would likely contend they have always acted consistently in every matter. But it should be expected that we try. Every action ought be finally decided on what is consistent with Biblical truth. Evidently, with many, convictions must not be very deep. I just do not understand it. JB

Witchhunters



JAMES W. BOYD

It is not the characteristic of false teachers to always be the loving, kindly and gentle folk that they like to present themselves to be. Some of the rudest, most vicious and venemous words uttered by anyone come from the mouths and pens of those who would have others believe they are so charitable and nice. They are usually very judgmental, especially against those they condemn for making judgments. Name-calling has become one of their trademarks. One that we sometimes hear is the label of "witchhunter" applied to anyone who would speak out against false doctrines and warn of false teachers.

Of course, the term is not meant to be complimentary but derogatory. It impugns the motives of those who love sound doctrine and depicts him as one who only seeks to find fault in others. It assumes that those who love truth consider everyone else to be witches. Nobody likes witches, do they? Who would approve of witches? Should not witches be identified and warnings be given concerning them?

It seems to me that the only ones who need be afraid of a "witch-hunter" is a witch. Sound teachers need have no concern, nor do they.

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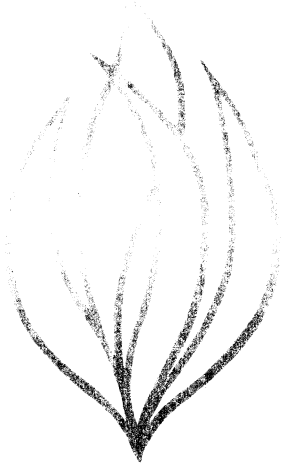

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 1**

Unrequited Love

Unrequited love is love given to another but is not returned. It is a heartbreaking experience to love someone dearly and not be loved by that person. Yet, unrequited love is a tragedy and sadness that runs throughout the history of mankind. It is often mentioned in songs, plays, stories, poems and other means of expression. But the cases of unrequited love are real and frequent. We cite a few examples.

We are told that after Napoleon reached the threshold of glory and power that he forsook the woman who had helped him, entered a marriage that he thought was politically expedient for his continued expansion and growth of power, and abandoned his former love.

Tom Mooney, who was sent to prison in 1916 after being convicted of a dynamiting incident, was eventually released because of the efforts of his wife that spanned over thirty years of persistence, persuasion, seeing all the influential people she could, working, and spending all she could get to bring about his release. Yet, within a year after he went free he left her and married another woman.

There is the story of the widowed mother who sent her son through college by sacrificing, scrubbing floors, taking in washing, working long and late hours to finance his education. At his graduation the son was ashamed of her shabby dress, which did not measure up to that worn by the parents of his classmates, and after receiving his diploma he did not seek her out, but slipped away with the others for a celebration, leaving her to go back home alone, and without even a word of gratitude.

Possibly similar incidents have occured over and over in human relationships. Unrequited love is one of the sorriest chapters of human conduct, and one of life's greatest disappointments. Possibly each reader has suffered something like this from those you respected, loved, wanted to help, had helped, but were treated with contempt thereafter.

Biblical Theme

This theme is found repeatedly in the Word of God. One of the more impressive stories of this nature is found in the book of

Hosea. Hosea was a prophet of God, writer of the book by that name, which is listed among the Minor Prophets. He was not a "minor" prophet because his message was less important, however.

Hosea lived around seven hundred fifty years before Christ. His life unfolds as a story that has the power to grip the heart of any person who has the capacity of compassion, sympathy and sensitivity.

Hosea married a woman named Gomer. Gomer became unfaithful to her righteous husband. Going into a life of adultery, she left her husband and three children and went after her illicit relationships. She became so degraded that eventually no one wanted her and none had any respect for her. After a time she was placed on the slave market to be sold as a slave. The moving part of the record is that her husband was the one who bought her. Hosea 3:2,3, *"So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: and I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so I will also be for thee."*

The reason this story of Hosea is so outstanding is because he was not just telling his own story and how his love for Gomer was not returned. He was telling God's story and the relationship between God and Israel. Israel had behaved much like Gomer. God uses this account to say, "This is the way my people have been toward me."

The first three of the fourteen chapters of Hosea tell the story of Hosea's life. The last eleven chapters present the parallel of that life's story in the God-Israel relationship.

Unfaithful Israel

Israel had been unfaithful to God just as Gomer had been unfaithful to Hosea. Here is how God describes Israel. Hosea 4:1,2, "*Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, no mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.*" Verse six, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.*" Hosea 8:7, "*For they have sown*

the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind..." From Hosea 7:8-11, "*Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, ye he knoweth not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this. Ephraim is also like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.*" As Gomer had gone from one to another rather than the one who loved her, so Israel had turned to the neighboring nations rather than to God. Verse 14, "*And they have not cried unto me with their heart...*"

God Still Loved

But as in the case of Hosea and Gomer, God still loved Israel, even though Israel was not worthy of that love. Hosea 11:4,7, "*When Israel was a child then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them... And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.*" When Gomer reached such a degraded state, there was none who provided for her. But Hosea made provision for her, even when she was not aware of it. So it had been between God and Israel. But the sad part of all this is the fact that God's love went unreturned.

Are we like Gomer and Israel? Here is the real significance of this historical account of human tragedy and spiritual application. It seems that even in our age that there is a great amount of unrequited love. It is not only a matter between married partners that we speak, although that is the case so often in our divorce-ridden society. But it is the lack of love for God from a nation and individuals who have been so bountifully blessed by the God of heaven. Far too often the history of God's dealings with mankind has been a one-way street. God pours out His love on mankind, but mankind has not returned that love.

In the Garden of Eden this was the same story. Did not Adam and Eve fail to respond properly to the many manifestations of God's love?

Down through the accounts of the Old Testament the same story is repeated, as the Bible student well knows. Not only was it the case with Israel but with many individuals as well.

When we come to the New Testament, do we not find more of the same thing? Do we not see the brutal rejection of God's Son? Did not people rise in anger against those who preached to them the message of salvation they needed to hear?

In Our Time

That story continues to our day. It is often written by people such as we are, who will not live as God requires but are content and determined to "do their own thing" and follow their own will. Even among some who profess to be followers of Christ we see that when decisions have to be made between this world and the way of the Lord that this world is often loved far more than God. How often have each of us been guilty of receiving the benefits and mercies and love poured upon us from the Almighty but have withheld our devotion and service unto Him? Let each one examine his own life!

The appeal of this lesson for each of us is that we make our religion deeper, more sincere, more practical and more meaningful. Our relationship to God is something that should concern us, not just during periods of formal worship when we assemble with the saints, but in the day-to-day manner of life. It is not uncommon for many to not even give the Lord service in worship more than once per week, and not even with regularity then. Vacant chairs during Bible study, Sunday evening worship hours, mid-week services, gospel meetings, and other times indicate that we are willing for God to love us, but He should not expect very much from us to show love in return.

We wonder how we manage to sing, "I gave my life for thee, what hast thou given to me?" and then continue in the same negligent, half-hearted way that we sometimes go about being a Christian in word and deed!

The Prodigal

The record of Luke fifteen fits this theme perfectly and completely. The son left home in his determined and self-willed fashion. We call him "prodigal" because he wasted his substance in riotous living. While we see the shame of the son, let us not fail to see the love of the generous and forgiving father. The

reason this story has a happy ending is because of the father, not just because the son *"came to himself."* Thankfully, the son returned home. But what did he find upon reaching home? There was his father, looking, waiting, longing, loving, rejoicing that his son, once lost, was home again.

Has not God shown His love toward us sufficiently? Did He not send Jesus Christ to provide for our salvation, even when we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8,9)? Did not Christ die the cruel death of Calvary for each of us (First John 2:2)? What more could be done to manifest love toward us than what God has already done?

But have we returned that love? Can we live at peace with ourselves knowing that we are withholding from God what He deserves? Should it not be my prayers and your prayer that since God first love us, we should love Him (First John 4:10,19)? *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love him, because he first loved us."*

The way we return God's love is by obedience to His will. First John 5:3, "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."*

† † † † †

Worshipping Worthily

John 4:24, "*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

First Corinthians 11:26-30, "*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."*

These passages introduce our study. Notice several points made in them. (1) Man is to worship God. (2) His worship is to be in truth, which means according to God's Word. *"Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17). (3) He is to worship in spirit. This has reference to his attitude, understanding, disposition motive and

intent in worship. (4) Observing the Lord's Supper is one way to worship, pay homage and respect to the divine God of heaven. (5) The Supper is not to be observed *"unworthily,"* which means in an unworthy manner. This has to do with our attitude and heart in worship. It has nothing whatever to do with our worthiness of that which the Supper signifies, or even the Supper itself. (6) Obviously, if one can worship *"unworthily,"* he can also worship worthily. Acceptable worship must be offered worthily. Hebrews 13:15, "*By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.*" Peter teaches we are "*to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*"

Why Assemble?

Hebrews 10:25 is the often cited passage that commands us to assemble. But why are we to assemble? If the heart of every one was made known we might discover a wide variety of motives some have for assembling. Let us not judge the heart of another, however. But there are many possible, even probable, reasons people have for assembling which we can determine over years of experience, expressions, comments and admissions of people.

"Attending church" has been used as a showcase to display new clothes, a new car, or something somebody wants everybody to see and notice. Especially does this seem to become evident at "Easter" when new outfits are in abundance. There is nothing wrong per se with new clothes, a new car, or other things we obtain. We suppose it is better to be present even with these misfit motives than not to be present at all. Possibly by being present some truth may be learned that would change the wrong motive to a correct one. But attendance at the assembly with such intent is to badly miss the mark.

Some may come just to please someone else, such as the wife or husband, parents, children or friends. It is commendable to want to please others. Again, it is probably better to come for that reason than to be absent. But there must be a higher motive than this before God is pleased.

Could it be that some are present because they feel obligated and bound by duty? It is true that worship is a "must." Doing one's duty is commendable as far as it goes. But is there nothing nobler in worshipping God than simply doing a duty, one that we might wish we could avoid but feel too obligated to attempt

to abandon going through the motions as if discharging the duty? To worship with this kind of heart stems more from fear of hell than love for God.

"Get To" Verses "Got To"

Worship, rightly considered, is one of life's rare and precious moments. We should **want** to be present for worship. We should have the "get to" attitude rather than a "have to" attitude. The difference in the number present on Sunday morning contrasted with Sunday evening could well indicate who has which attitude. Attendance just to soothe our consciences is not really giving God the praise that worship is designed to offer.

Some may come out of curiousity, just to see what goes on, what is said, and who is there. Visitors may have this as an original intent and we would not be surprised at that. It is good to be present, but growth and more information should change that into something better and nobler.

It is possible that some people use the worship periods as an opportunity to just see friends, socialize, converse, see and be seen. In our hurry-scurry world the paths of people who know each other too seldom cross. Fellowship and Christian association should be encouraged. It is encouraging to see and hear brethren greeting and talking to each other and showing a personal concern for each other. But this is not the best reason for not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. This is at best a good by-product.

Those who are not Christians may be present in order to observe, investigate, inquire, and seek opportunity for further study. We would encourage non-Christians to do this with regularity because they can learn much by seeing and hearing what transpires. With an open mind and an open Bible their investigative attitude can bring them tc conversion to Christ.

Possibly you can think of other similar motives why people are present at the worship hours. But for the true and faithful Christian who follows the New Testament the primary reason, first and foremost, is to worship God. Nothing surpasses this motive and nothing can be allowed to challenge it. Unless this is the intent of the heart our worship cannot be offered worthily.

Do we really worship once we are gathered together? Assuming we have the proper attitude, is our worship what God expects and directs? What do we see and do when we proceed

through the actions of the worship period?

Acts Of Worship

We sing songs of praise. There is no instrumental music involved because God has specified the kind of music to be offered and has not authorized the use of mechanical instruments of music. This is reason enough to confine the music to singing. In every instance in the New Testament where God's Word speaks of music in worship it is always singing. There is no Biblical authority to do otherwise. With the determination to *"speak as the oracles of God,"* (First Peter 4:11), we sing.

We pray to God, recognizing our dependence on Him, honoring Him as the giver of every perfect and good gift, the source of blessings, thanking Him and making our petitions known. We do not pray because God needs to be informed what we need, but because we can show we lean on Him for our needs. In this way, praying through Christ, we worship Deity.

We study God's Word, magnifying it as the sole authority in matters of religion and service before God. We teach His precepts that are to be followed in daily living. We honor His laws and proclaim His truths. We are builded up in the most holy faith and the weak are made strong, the strong are made stronger, the sinful are called to repentance, the lost are called by the gospel to be saved.

We contribute of our material means to the special use for the advancement of the cause of Christ. We honor Him with our substance (Proverbs 3:9). Realizing that we are but temporary stewards and all that is in our charge belongs to our Master, we offer its use to the furtherance of His purpose. By our giving we have a measure of our love for the Lord. If those who worship God will not support the work of God, who will?

We partake of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Christ each first day of the week as Scripture authorizes. In this way we proclaim the Lord's sacrifice until He returns. We partake of the emblems of His body and blood as a memorial to Him. These actions are those which are taught in Scripture in New Testament worship. They are simple, yet profound. We do these things according to His Word, which is to worship *"in truth,"* which is what John 4:24 instructs.

Worthily

But do we worship worthily? Let each examine his own heart as Paul has admonished. What of the worship in song? Can it be done worthily if done listlessly, half-heartedly, as if it pains us? Do you even sing at all? Some do not. Nobody can perform this act of worship for you. Every individual is expected to participate to the fullest of his or her capacity. Singing should ring with fervor, enthisiasm, confidence and from the heart overflowing with love and praise for Deity. There is no excuse for a congregation to be content with singing that degrades and lacks the spiritual luster it ought to have.

What of the worship in prayer? You may not lead the prayer, and women should not. But do you pray as you are led in prayer? Prayer is our channel to God, and what a privilege and favor God has afforded us to provide this channel of approach before His throne. It is not just an exercise of mechanical phrases and meaningless expressions. Even though similar wording may occur with each prayer, the prayer should be from the heart. Our very soul should be involved.

When God's Word is presented, do you hear in view of eternity? We must realize that we shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48). It is to our advantage to give respect to the presentation of it. Where is your attention during the lessons? Are you thinking of irrelevant, mundane, and even contradictory matters? Or is your center of attention on the spiritual truth being offered? As much as is physically and mentally possible, we should concentrate on the Word simply because it is God's Word that is being taught. We should do this regardless of the ability, or lack of it, of the one who is presenting it.

Brethren, how do you give? The question is not how much do you give? That is between you and God. But how do you give. This is also between you and God. Do you give liberally, cheerfully, as you have been prospered and as you have planned or purposed? Is it something you do grudgingly, because you feel it is necessary, but wish you could avoid it? Do we give of our firstfruits or does God's cause get the "leftovers" after we have done everything else we prefer to do? When we give worthily we are laying up treasures in heaven.

How do you observe the Lord's Supper? There is a severe warning in First Corinthians 11:29 if the Supper is partaken *"unworthily."* During the observance is no time for idle conversation, flighty thoughts, any sort of distracting and irreverent conduct. It is a very thoughtful moment and a solemn event. Thinking where you are going to eat dinner, where you

plan to go or have been, what you plan to do, is to wander from the intent of the Lord's Supper. In Corinth some were *"sickly"* because they did not partake of the Lord's Supper worthily.

These matters are of the utmost seriousness to the spiritual welfare of our souls. We speak of things of supreme importance. God takes note of our worship. Let us strive to please Him and we shall be blessed eternally.

† † † † †

Better, Yet Lower, Than Angels

Hebrews 1:1-8, "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when be bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers as flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.*"

Hebrews 2:6-10, "*But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visiteth him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownest him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death,*

crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering."

Not Contradictions

In these two passages are statements that at first glance may seem to be contradictory. Christ is said to be *"better than the angels,"* but then it is stated that He was made *"lower than the angels."* What does this mean and why is this revelation so important to us and to the world?

We must understand the general purpose of the book of Hebrews. It was written to Jewish people who had been converted to Christ but were in danger of falling away. The epistle was written to prevent apostasy. This in itself is sufficient to show the fallacy of the false doctrine that once one has been saved he cannot fall away. But the book primarily is written to show why Christians should not fall away. The reason is because of the superiority of Christ over all before or after Him. To show this superiority the writer shows Jesus superior to several things that were sacred to Jewish people, such as the law given through Moses, animal sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood and angels.

The book opens with the reminder how God speaks to us. In former times God spoke through prophets, dreams, visions and a variety of ways. The Jews respected and cherished the divine messages given. But now God has another authority that supplants them all and is superior to them all. Now God speaks through His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of the confession made by the Father in Matthew 17:5, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.*" This confession and instruction was given in the presence of Moses, the great lawgiver for Israel, and ELijah, one of God's outstanding prophets during the age of the Mosaic Law.

The Authority

The importance of a message depends to a great extent on the authority of the messenger. If an ordinary citizen of our land should say that the nation would be at war within the week, this would not cause much concern. But if the President of the

United States made such a statement it would alarm the entire world. The authority behind the message of the Word of God is Jesus Christ. The message is important because of Him. What is it about Jesus Christ that makes Him so important?

Hebrews chapter one teachers He is *"heir of all things."* He is the Son of God. Through Him the worlds have been made, therefore, He is Creator. This necessitates His eternal nature and Deity. He is the *"brightness of the glory of God,"* even being called God. Not only is He the Creator but the Sustainer because by His power all things are sustained. He possesses the highest rank, being on the right hand of God, which means He has assumed the position on the throne (Acts 2:30,34). He is higher, greater and better than angels.

Of what significance would this be to the Jewish Christians? They believed in the reality of angels and God's use of them, except for the Saducees. An angel is a messenger, and in this chapter the angels under consideration are God's angels. Both the Old and New Testaments reveal that God has used angels in various ways to accomplish His purposes. Let us consider some of these incidents.

Angels came to tell Abraham of the forthcoming birth of Isaac. Angels were used to warn Lot of the coming destruction of Sodom. Daniel showed angels presiding over the courts of princes. An angel smote Herod as he claimed deity for himself. God's prophets were often cared for by angels, and once were used for the release of Peter from prison. Angels could have been used to protect Christ at the time He was seized by His enemies if that had been the will of the Lord. Angels were used to frustrate the devil's aims regarding the body of Moses. They announced the birth of Christ, as well as the birth of John the Baptist before Him. They have been used to help God's people against their enemies. We are told that over two hundred references mention God's use of angels. The Lord will return in the company of angels. These are but a few of the Biblical references to angels that would cause any person who respects the Bible to believe in their existence. The Jews did believe in them. Therefore, one who was better, higher, greater than all angels would have to be one of high authority and deserving of reverence and glory.

He Is Better...

In what way is Christ greater and better than angels? Verse

four says He has inherited a more excellent name. No angels were ever called the Son of God. Angels worshipped Him, and the lesser worships the greater, not the other way around. Angels ministered to Christ following His temptation by Satan (Matthew 4). We even read where angels have been cast down and await punishment (Second Peter 2:4), but never so with Christ. The enemies of Christ are the ones that shall be cast down. All of these things give evidence to Christ being greater and better than angels.

...Yet Lower

In what sense is Christ lower than angels? Psalm 8:4,5, "*What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.*" This is the Scripture mentioned by the Hebrew writer in Hebrews 2. God created man, but obviously created him lower than the angels. Since Christ left heaven, became a man, taking on the form and fashion as a man (Philippians 2:5-8), He, being greater, higher and better than angels, nonetheless, in human form, could be said to be lower than angels. He is not lower than angels in any sense at this present time since He has returned to the Father and rules and reigns over His spiritual kingdom from His throne in heaven (Acts 7:49). Having accomplished His mission He left the walks of humanity. But while He was God in the flesh, Emmanuel, God with us, the Word in form of man, He was lower than angels by virtue of being a human being as well as Deity.

What is the significance and importance for us to know that Jesus Christ was both better, yet lower, than angels? To know He is better and superior is to know of His Deity, authority and the gospel delivered by His authority is of utmost concern and is the authority for all mankind. He is the way and there is no other (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Seeing who He is, we can place our complete and unreserved faith and confidence in Him, giving Him our total allegiance. Being the Son of God, He is able to break the hold of sin and Satan that brings our doom and redeems us unto salvation. This is salvation from which we dare not turn back because to do so would be to leave the superior for the inferior. This the Jews needed to understand as they were being taught to return to the system under Moses by which they could not be saved. This we also need to understand as we

might be tempted to follow the ways of men rather than the way of Jesus Christ.

Since the Word spoken by angels proved stedfast, and those that disobeyed received just recompense, how much more ought we be obedient to what the Lord Jesus has delivered and directed, seeing how He is great, higher, superior and better than angels? To know Him as being better than angels is to know that this same Jesus is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

Our Salvation

To know that He was made lower than angels is to know how God has provided for our salvation. God sent His Son to die in our stead, *"taste of death for every man,"* (Hebrews 2:9), and be our Savior by His blood. Although He suffered on the cross of Calvary and died, He was raised from the dead, and is empowered to give eternal life to those that come to Him. Being lower than angels, He brings "*many sons to glory.*" (Hebrews 2:10). In short, being lower than angels means He died that we might live.

With Jesus being better than angels, yet lower than angels, God has shown in a manner incapable of duplication how much He loves us and desires our salvation. We should recognize and accept the authority and greatness of Christ and partake of the spiritual salvation offered us by virtue of His greatness. Better, yet lower, shows what Christ has done for us. It is a rather simplistic expression that actually embraces the essentials of God's plan to save man by His Son.

† † † † †

Conversion

In almost any service when the church members assemble we have people present who are not Christians. They have not yet been converted to Christ. While the worship period is for worship it is also an opportunity to teach the lost the way to be saved. We want to investigate what it means to be converted, the importance of it, and how it is accomplished. It may be an understatement to say that there is much misunderstanding in the religious world over this crucial subject. Our text will be Acts

3:19, "*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*" These words were spoken by the inspired apostle Peter. He had just healed the lame man that attracted considerable attention and gave him opportunity to preach the gospel. He delivered a discourse concerning Christ, emphasizing the basic facts of the gospel. Then he issues this direction of our text.

If there was no other passage in Scripture on this subject this would be sufficient emphasis on the necessity of conversion. We learn why we are to repent and be converted. It is so *"that your sins may be blotted out."* This implies that people do sin and stand condemned because of sin. With conversion this damned condition is overcome.

Another passage that deserves consideration is Matthew 18:3, "*Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" Entrance into the kingdom is essential for salvation. It would be difficult to present language more forcefully than this regarding the necessity of conversion. If God says you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven without conversion then nobody can devise some way to by-pass this teaching. Do not be deceived. We must either be converted or we shall not see the glorious home in heaven into which the kingdom shall be delivered (First Corinthians 15:24).

Two False Theories

There are two very popular theories regarding conversion, both of which are in error. First, some consider conversion to be wholly an act of Deity, purely a transaction that is entirely left to God. This theory reduces man to a mere machine, being acted upon by no other influence than a direct action of God, man having nothing whatever to do concerning the matter. If this be true, as the Calvinistic doctrine would have people believe, then God would be under obligation to save everyone if He saves anyone lest He be partial and become a respector of persons, the very thing Peter and Paul deny is true of Him. If this doctrine were true then anyone who is lost could blame God because it would be His failure to act. Are we to think that the God of justice, mercy, kindness, grace and truth is of such a nature as that? We should fear to take such a position that would accuse God in such fashion.

The second false theory is that the matter is altogether in

man's hands, conversion being wholly a work of man, salvation being a reward that belongs to man as if he has earned or merited it. This is just as foreign to the truth as the first false doctrine. It would be a dishonor to God to assume He does not have the power to cleanse people from sin. It would be an outright denial of many passages that teach that God saves and that He saves through Christ. This would make the grace of God nonessential and the worth of man the basic ingredient of salvation. How could anyone who knows the teaching of the Bible assume that anybody can merit salvation because of their own righteousness?

The Truth

As is often the case when extreme false doctrines float about, the truth is betwixt the two. God has a hand in conversion, but man is also involved. One without the other will accomplish nothing. Paul said in First Corinthians 3:9, *"For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."* God and man work together. This is true once one has become a Christian and it is true in people becoming Christians.

This position is very evident in John 3:16 that shows both Deity and humanity involved in the saving of humanity. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* God's part is that He loved man and graciously provided the Savior who is Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. Christ is involved because He is the One through whom salvation is offered. Man has a part in that man must do the believing, and this belief is always an obedient faith when the New Testament speaks of faith in connection with salvation.

It is impossible for one to miss the message of our text. Repentance and being converted is man's part. The blotting out of sins is what God does. Blotting out sins is equivalent to forgiveness of sins. God and man working together bring the salvation of man into reality. This is the way God designed the way of salvation.

Refusal

In Jesus' day, as now, there were those who refused to be converted. Matthew 13:15, *"For this people's heart is waxed*

gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." They refused the blessings God offered. It was not that God or Christ desired their condemnation. Matthew 23:37, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"* Notice the point made that *"ye would not."* The people would not change their minds, change their lives, change their directions, turn to God. Again, Jesus said, John 5:40, *"And ye will not come to me that ye might have life."* They could come, but they would not come. God had done His part and Christ had done His part, but the people under consideration would not do their part. They refused heaven's call. Therefore, they remained in a condemned state. There was no other way for them to be saved except to be converted and they rejected.

Illustration

The following will illustrate conversion. It is familiar illustration to many who have heard the gospel preached. Suppose a citizen of a foreign country hears of America, learns of its beauty and freedom. The testimony convinces him that being an American is desirable and he determines to become a citizen. His resolve to change citizenship must take place. He must make the decision to leave his old country, his former paths, and do whatever is necessary to become an American. He will never leave the old country until he makes up his mind to forsake the old and embrace the new. Once that decision is made he still lacks some things before he is a citizen, however. Just determining he wants to be an American does not make him an American.

He must engage in and complete the naturalization process that the laws of America prescribe. Not until he has completed these demands is he sworn in as a citizen. Should he die during the process or even the moment before being sworn into citizenship he would die an alien. But once he has finished the process he is then granted (given) his citizenship. His goal and hearts desire is accomplished.

Now the laws of America must be met and he must conform

to them. He cannot write his own ticket, his own way, but must meet the laws of the nation into which he wishes to enter.

Principles In Conversion

The same principles are true in entering the kingdom of heaven. To enter, you sins must be blotted out. You hear of heaven, learn of the joys that await those who are citizens of heaven's kingdom, the testimony is convincing and you firmly believe it is true. You have the strong desire to enter. But just having the desire does not accomplish the goal.

You must decide to become a citizen of God's kingdom. God has provided the way for you be a citizen, but you must make the decision to go God's way or not. You must renounce your allegiance to the old kingdom of sin and Satan. This is called repentance because you change your mind. But there is more ahead of you.

You must submit to God's laws of naturalization. Not until you complete the process are you among the redeemed in the kingdom. After having done what God says you must do, then God gives you the salvation He promised.

What Is Required

His law requires that upon hearing the gospel you must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Luke 13:3), confess your faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission (forgiveness or blotting out) of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). Then your conversion is complete and you begin your service unto God and your growth as a child of God, a new citizen in the kingdom of God.

† † † † †

Overcoming Racial Prejudice

Acts 10:9-15, "*On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. And he became very hungry and would have eaten: but while they made ready he fell*

into a trance, and saw heaven opened and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth, wherein were all manner of four footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord: for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake again unto him the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."

Our subject is very controversial and it is unlikely all will agree with what is presented here. Even though I have tried to avoid personal opinions and concentrate on facts, Scripture, and the spirit of Christ, the nature of the subject makes it difficult to disassociate oneself from the emotion of it and be totally objective. The day in which we live contributes to this.

We assume from the start that racial prejudice is something undersirable, and where it exists it should be overcome. A sense of fairness, the opposite of prejudice, and Biblical teaching lead us to this conclusion. Prejudice is a judgment-in-advance without examination. It prejudges. It is not prejudice to approve or disapprove of something or someone after adequate examination has been made and the evidence speaks. Prejudice can be understood as one defined it, "Prejudice is being down on something that you are not up on." Racial prejudice is one of the more volatile and explosive kinds of prejudice, surpassed possibly by religious prejudice. Racial prejudice is an attitude and action that is injurious and negative toward a person because of his race or color of skin.

Realism

Shall we be realistic? We have racial prejudice all around us in this world, and probably within us. This is true internationally, nationally, and even among those of us in the church. What is the Christlike way to handle this problem? What does God expect of His people? Regardless of what the rest of the world says or does, or how any one of us may think or act, what must we do to please God?

Christianity was born in the midst of intense racial prejudice. It is not a product of it, but it began where it was thick and violent. No people have been more guilty of racial prejudice than the Jews and Gentiles of the first century in the land of Palestine. Some exalted themselves for no other reason than they were of a certain race, and considered others as outcasts, dogs, or

worse, and on racial grounds. This was taught, expressed, reflected in behavior, laws and in every other way.

Generalizations

One prominent mark of prejudice is the willingness to generalize concerning other people. Let me illustrate. Even though every person is an individual, unlike any other, yet, in describing each other and forming attitudes toward each other we will generalize. Southerners are this way; northerners are that way. Who could dare say that all southerners are alike in everything, or all northerners are alike? College people are snobbish. The rich are money hungry and think they are better than others. The poor are lazy. Elders are holding back the church. Preachers try to run things. Women are overly emotional. Blacks are not responsible.

Right here let us consider a thought that is worth the entire study if we can learn it. What may be characteristic of even a majority of a certain group is not necessaily characteristic of every individual in that group. Whether we realize it or not, we are guilty of too many generalizations that only announces our personal prejudices.

Causes

What has caused our present day racial prejudice? Certainly the past has contributed to it. Prejudice is taught, handed down by word and example from generation to generation. Run your own experiment. Children of different races can and do play peacefully with each other. The difference in color of skin does not affect their conduct toward each other. But after a few years of traditions, customs and adult examples they learn to distinguish on the basis of race. Whatever may be their race they are usually taught that those of their race are "right" and all others are either "wrong" or certainly "less right."

Behind much prejudice is the attempt to build up oneself at the expense of running the other follow down. This occurs not only in race relations but in many areas of life. It reveals jealousy, envy, inferiority and a lack of maturity and self-esteem. When we are inclined to consider ourselves "somewhat" and better than others, we would do well to realize that there are many others, probably in any race, who can excel and exceed us in whatever we attempt. We really have no justification to consider ourselves special simply because of our race.

Christ's Will

How does the will of Christ deal with this problem? Romans 10:12, *"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."* Acts 10:34,35, "*Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respector of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."*

These passages teach that God considers every person a soul worth saving and the plan of salvation is open to all on the same terms. Jesus used the Samaritan as an example of a man who showed love toward his neighbor. John the Baptist warned that the day of dependence on fleshly ancestry to be acceptable to God would soon end. The long standing social traditions that alienated one from another would come crashing down. But they would have to fall through teaching, not through violence and revolution that usually set prejudice in cement for generations to come. The "crash programs" designed to remove prejudice usually make the removal of prejudice far more difficult. They may temporarily remove some of the effects of prejudice. But people must be converted in heart to the doctrine that God loves every soul, and it is the will of Christ that all be treated as each would want the other to treat him. This is the "golden rule." (Matthew 7:12).

Something that ought help us become less prejudice is to remember the brotherhood of the human family. Acts 17:26, *"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth..."* The fact that God created Adam and Eve, from whom we have come, verifies this relationship. Not only is there Biblical evidence to this brotherhood of man physically, but scientific evidence as well. We do not propose to explain where the different races originated because we are not informed. *"But foolish and unlearned* (untaught, JWB) *questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strife."* (Second Timothy 2:23). If we never know why there are such varieties among the human family, our ignorance of that does not discount the fact that we are of one blood and ultimate origin.

Problems Atop Problems

We often create problems trying to remove problems. This is true in dealing with racial prejudice. Impatience is a problem, and there is good reason why impatience exists. Hypocrisy and

self-righteousness always has aggravated the problem. Some years ago a president of a northern university denounced the race riots at the University of Georgia, and they were reprehensible. But unfair discriminations existed on his own campus that had been surpressed through intimidation and there were no riots. Racial prejudice will not likely be dissolved, even eased, until each one consider himself. No one section, no one race, no one element of society has a monopoly on racial prejudice. Some, while denouncing it, exploit it for their own advancements as far as they can. Everything from the raised fist and the shouts of "Black Power" to the Ku Klux Klan has been in evidence. We would again insist, though it demands patience, education in the way of God is the only way to remove racial prejudice. We may be able to remove some injustices and unfair treatment through laws, demonstrations, threats and such like, and this has been prominent in race relationships in our time, we shall never remove the taproot of one of humanities evils, racial prejudice, until there is greater conformity to the will of Christ.

Necessary Mixing?

Should we advocate an across-the-board mixing of all races? Is this what God requires? We think not, nor can we find the Bible calls for that. We have good reason to be poud of the race to which we belong and so do others of other races. All men have this right. But can we justify some being advanced over others just because of race? Can we exonerate a system of justice that is unequal? Can we "hate" one color but "love" another? It is not really a question of mixing the races. The races have been intermingled through the ages of history. The question is, "To what extent are they to be intermingled in keeping with God's will? What does His law teach us?"

Some cry against intergration in the schools, but would deny fairness toward those who are not of their race. Some would have certain people ride in the back of the bus for no reason other than color of skin. While it has proven expedient in many instances for there to be congregations predominantly one color or the other, to contend that this is a "must" is wrong. If we are to have segregated congregations, let it be because it may be easier to reach the lost with this arrangement, not because of racial antagomism or because we think God requires it. Let us be honest about!

Intermarriage

Inevitably comes the question, "Do you favor intermarriage of the races?" Both the answer and the reason for the answer is important. It is not favored. We do not doubt that with more racial intermingling there will be more such marriages. Wisdom, experience, good judgment and the vast host of problems that would accompany such marriages in our society place unwarranted strains on such marriages that they would be more likely to fall, dissolve, or provide unhappiness possibly for generations. We would also not encourage a rich girl to marry a poor boy, or an educated man to marry an illiterate woman, or even people with extremely different customs. We do not favor such things on the grounds of wisdom and expedience. But have we the Scripture at hand that teaches such marriages are necessarily sinful, even interracial marriages? If so, where is the passage? Produce it! While it may be unwise to enter into a marriage with so many strikes against it from the start, where does the Bible teach it is a sin?

We should teach our children to seek those with whom they have an extensive compatibility, especially to marry a Christian. Some are so warped about race that they would never allow a marriage outside of their own race, but seem to care little about marriages to those who will take their souls to hell.

Spiritually Brethren

Galatians 3:28, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*" Spiritually, we become united in Christ. When a Jew is baptized he does not cease to be of Jewish ancestry and lineage. When a male is baptized be does not cease to be male. When a black, white, someone big or little, rich or poor obeys the gospel, these things do not change. But our spiritual relationship with each other changes. Our attitude toward each other changes. We can recognize these differences because they still exist, but these differences will not separate us spiritually, but will make us brothers who are considerate of our differences and treat one another kindly.

I once baptized a black man, and he went down black and came up black, just like I went down white and came up white when I was baptized. But if we have the right spirit, we are brothers in Christ, and are determined that such differences that we both recognize exist shall not separate our fellowship in the Lord. We will treat each other fairly, considerately, helping each other get to heaven. Is not that the way it should be?

The Right Of Choice

Christians have the right and privilege of choosing their companions, closest friends, daily associations, without being racially prejudiced, and we should grant that right to everyone without branding it prejudice. We make discriminations among those of our own race in many matters. Certainly it is not wrong to make certain distinctions elsewhere. All discrimination is not evil. But unfair, unjust, unkind, injurious discrimination is evil. The latter is motivated by racial prejudice and even hatred.

Many of us stand guilty as charged in this matter. Who is guiltless? Because the guilt is so widespread the problem is hard to solve. Many good people in other areas of life have stumbled here. Peter and Barnabas did, and Paul rebuked them for it (Galatians 2:11,12). It has hindered our work among many elements of human beings. It has soured our attitude toward many good people. It has caused the church and individual Christians great embarassment because of our inconsistency and guilt.

Matthew 7:12

Cannot you almost hear the wail that the solution offered is to simplistic? But the matter goes back to the teaching of Christ and our attitude toward others. The "golden rule" is still a good place to start. When God considers every soul worth the price of His Son's blood, who am I or you to declare that all people of a certain class, element or group regarding race are this way, that way, some other way, without taking the individual into consideration. We might ask ourselves if Jesus sought to save those who were not His fleshly race? Should we do as He did? Did He persecute and mistreat anyone? Why should we? Are all blacks just alike? Are all Jews just alike? Are all whites just alike? Are we not individual souls before God, and deserve to be looked upon that way?

If you disagree with these sentiments do not become too upset. Others have also disagreed. But be calm and considerate. If you really are disturbed over it, write me. We both should study the matter in fairness and in the light of truth. But what is said here would go a long way toward making the world a better place if we would apply these things. As I write this, I think the best place for me to start is with me. Will you start with you?

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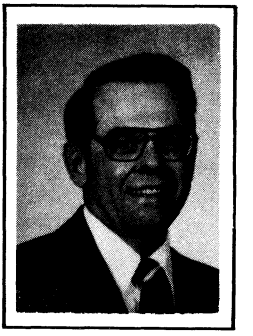
A False Criticism



JAMES W. BOYD

The members of the Lord's church have so often been subjected to all kinds of criticisms. Sometimes the criticism is just. But often it borders on the ridiculous. In recent years we have observed some of these "pendulum preachers," those who once berated the church while they propagated their human legalism, but now find it more to their liking to spout the liberal line of unity in diversity, errors regarding marriage and divorce, just about the whole batch of ugly things one can invent to say against members of the church. But very often they stub their toe badly, however.

Not long ago I read from one of these pendulum people critical of brethren trying to encourage people to become members of the church. He said you never read of such a thing, but that Christians were members of the body.

Does he not know that the body is the church and the church is the body? (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). Sure he does. But when you are a revolutionary, with a passion for attacking, without much regard for what you attack, you are capable of saying most anything.

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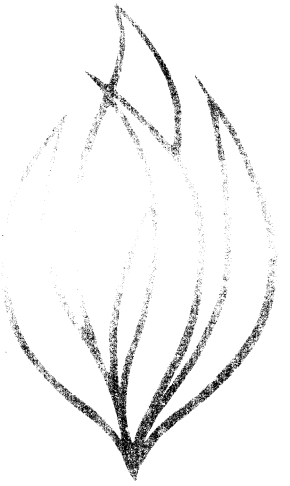

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 2**

What Of Your Tomb?

First Corinthians 1:23, *"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness."* First Corinthians 2:2, *"For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified."*

The Jews gloried in signs, usually of their own selection and naming. Unless they approved the sign they would disapprove Jesus whose identity was confirmed before them. The Gentiles refused Christ because He did not meet their predetermined standards of worldly wisdom and reason, things in which they gloried. Paul said, *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."* (Galatians 6:14). Christians are not offended by the cross but accept it as *"the power of God and wisdom of God."* (First Corinthians 1:24).

A Scottish preacher of years past who was very concerned about the declining moral standards in his own time once said, "When I turned away from preaching mere morality, and began to preach more on redemption through the death of Jesus, then I noted significant changes for good in the lives of my hearers." With the foregoing thoughts in mind, the cross of Christ, the need for morality, let us consider the theme, "What About Your Tomb?"

His Tomb

All will surely grant that somewhere, sometime, at some place, there will be your tomb. What kind of place will it be? The thought may be unpleasant but not intended to be morbid nor sensational. We rather think it is realistic to consider such things because we can be motivated to live properly if we think on the tomb. Let us consider first the tomb of Jesus with which we shall make comparisons with our own tombs.

Matthew 28:1-6, *"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keeper did*

shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was cricified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." With reverence, awe and respect let us join the women and see the place where the Lord lay. As we look into it we see that it is empty. Our hope is refreshed concerning His resurrection and ours. He said He would come forth. The empty tomb is evidence of His resurrection. If He had remained dead His tomb would not be empty. But what else can we say of the tomb of Jesus?

It was a place of sorrow. The place where we lay the bodies of loved ones is always a place of mixed emotions, among them the emotion of sorrow. As we visit such places, fond memories are revived, but sad ones rush upon us. The disciples of Jesus loved Him and this place was a place of grief and mourning. Just as the day of resurrection turned the sorrow into gladness, the day Jesus died and was buried was one of crushing sadness for those who loved Him.

More About His Tomb

Do we not hope that those who might visit our tombs would be touched with sorrow because we have left their company? Where you and I shall be placed after death will be a place of tears that will flow from the eyes of those with whom we had the lovely privilege of sojourning a few years in this life.

The tomb of Jesus was a place of humiliation. Death is the great humbling experience called death. It marks man's powerful and famous will come to the tomb. Death brings the end of plans and earthly purposes. The tomb is the climax of this great humbling experience called death. It makrs man's inevitable submission to death in his struggle to perpetuate his earthly life.

None have been more humiliated than our Lord. In spite of all of His noble works and words, they seemed to have come to a momentary halt and amounted to nothing in the silence of the tomb. His followers were also humiliated because they had trusted Him. Here was the King of kings lying dead in the stone of a borrowed tomb. The Savior of all was mocked because He did not save Himself.

Regardless of the heights any of us may reach in this life, just as was true of the tomb of Jesus, our tombs will be monuments to our inability to sustain earthly life. It will mark our ultimate

humiliation along with all others who have gone before us. Superior in life, or inferior, what will it all matter when we are leveled in death!

The tomb of Jesus was a place of some splendor. Even though it was a borrowed tomb it was originally intended for a rich man. Jospeh of Arimathea had taken the body from the cross with Nicodemus, took it into the burial garden, a place of peace, tranquility and doubtless among the serenity that certain portions of nature can provide.

From the time Jesus left heaven we note a gradual but certain descending, step by step, until His death on the cross and burial in the tomb. From there the glorious ascent began. Though crucified among thieves as if he was a criminal, He was buried in rich splendor.

My Tomb - Your Tomb

We will not likely know to what extent there may be splendor of our tombs. Some have been placed in huge and elaborate buildings amidst the most extravagant surroundings. Others may not even have their grave marked. Our tombs may be humble places with unpretentious markings. Some might have a giant monument, even a memorial of vast wealth. Often those who remain will expend huge sums to honor the dead who neglected to give even a flower or a word of kindness to the same person when they lived. We would do well to heed the admonition, "Do not withhold all the flowers until the grave."

The tomb of Jesus was a place of rest for the body that had suffered so much. Revelation 14:13 offers comfort. *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."* If those who follow Christ enjoy rest at death, surely He did. It came as a relief from the agony He had endured during His perfect life, but even more that He suffered in His death. There comes a time when the toils of life are over. Those who have fought faithfully the good fight of faith look with anticipation to the rest and deliverance that comes with death. The storms on the sea of our earthly existence are finally calmed as the tabernacle of clay is placed into its place.

Our tombs will be places of rest for the weary body. This body that is so prone to weakness, fatigue, stress, strain, injury and weariness will lay quietly in the tomb at last and return to the dust from whence it was made.

Thus far, my tomb, your tomb, and the tomb of Jesus are very much alike. They are places of sadness, humiliation, possibly some measure of splendor and rest. But there is something more about the tomb of Jesus that may be true of our tombs, but then again may not be true.

Shall It Be?

The tomb of Jesus was a place of triumph. In a place probably not much larger than a very small room there was waged the greatest struggle of all ages. The most powerful of forces were engaged in mortal combat. Here was waged the real battle of life and death; a struggle of all time and eternity.

On one side was the evil power of Satan and his forces of wickedness. He was the ruler over death, his last and greatest unconquered weapon which he uses to subvert and enslave mankind, seeking to deprive everyone from the salvation God desires to give. On the other side was the power of God and the forces of righteousness, the Creator of life, the Preserver of life, the Maker of the way whereby men may live eternally in glory. The battle that was fought and the victory that was won was decisive. Jesus came forth from the dead, coming from that tomb triumphantly. Death was no longer unconquered. It was a personal victory for the lowly Nazarene, but more than His personal victory it was. It was a victory for all humankind. His victory proves His power to give life to all who come to Him. Because He was raised we can join with Paul in declaring, *"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Due To Him

Because of the victory of Jesus we can be in that company of which Paul wrote in First Thessalonians 4:16,17, *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in*

the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Because of the tomb of Jesus is a tomb of victory and He lives we also can change our tombs into places of victory at our resurrection. Jesus said in John 5:28, *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice."* The next verse show the resurrection and direction of every soul. *"And shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* Which it will be for me and you depends on what we do concerning Christ in this life. He offers to give us the benefits of His victory. We can make our tombs places of victory, but only if we come to and abide in Christ.

The question facing each of us, "What of our tomb?" In some ways they will be like the tomb of Jesus. But will they be like His tomb in the way that matters most? We can make it whatever we will.

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Weakness To Strength

There was a very tense moment at the seizure of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Mark 14:48-53, *"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not; but the scriptures must be fulfilled. And they all forsook him, and fled. And there followed a certain young man, having a linen cloth about his naked body; and the young man laid hold of him; and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked. And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes."*

Weakness

In this account we have a dramatic moment when an unidentified young man, who was obviously following Jesus, but who also was frightened at the events taking place, ran away. It is usually thought that this panic-stricken young man was none

other than the writer, John Mark. The reluctance to name oneself was characteristic of those who wrote at that time. This was a frantic, embarassing, threatening experience for him, when he, like all the others who had followed Jesus, ran away and forsook Christ. It shows his fear of being aligned with Jesus, revealing his immaturity, spiritual weakness and lack of conviction, being void of courage and fearful at that moment in his life.

We may be inclined to excuse him by saying that he was not the only one who fled. This is true. Did not Peter stoutly declare he would die for Him rather than forsake Him? Was not this the stand of all of the disciples? Yet, they did just what they said they would not do. Mark was not alone in abandoning Jesus.

Some might take comfort in their weakness by reminding themselves of the weaknesses of others. But the failure in others does not excuse nor lessen our own failures. The actions of all the friends of Jesus were regrettable. But we must recognize the weakness of John Mark at this moment even though he may have been adversely influenced.

Strength

But the life of John Mark cannot be properly told only by using the word weakness. That would leave a false impression of him. It would distort the real person. We must also include the word strength. Both words, weakness and strength, are significant and revealing in this man's character, as well as that of most of us.

But let it be stressed how important the relationship of these two words really is. What we contend is that it makes a great difference whether one is weak or strong, but it also makes a great difference whether one is going from weakness toward strength or going from strength toward weakness. Where we are in living the Christian way of life is important. But the direction was are going is also vital. Some lives have begun with great strength only to be dissipated into weakness, such as King Saul, the first king of Israel. Even Solomon might qualify as one who went from strength to weakness. Demas, who fell away and forsook Paul, went from strength to weakness. Judas is a classic example of it also.

But others may begin in weakness and proceed to strength. Such was the life of John Mark. We all begin our service to Christ in weakness but must go forward toward spiritual

strength.

The life of Mark can be assembled by the bits and pieces that we have revealed to us concerning him. We need to study this man because it is a source of encouragement to us, an inspiration to press on and keep trying. Every Christian can look back in his life and find some humiliating, weak, frail even sinful disappointment in himself and the way he failed in doing something he needed to do. Every Christian is involved in a life of growing from where he is toward where he needs to be. We are all moving, hopefully, from weakness toward strength. We do not live perfectly. We suffer setbacks along the way.

A Battle - The War

But we must remember that failure in one battle does not necessarily mean defeat in the entire war. Are you aware that the South won more battles than did the North in the War Between the States in America? Yet, the war was won by the North. The devil knocks us down at times. But that does not have to spell our defeat and surrender to him.

John Mark was a man whose first name, John, was Jewish, and his other name, Mark, was Roman. This indicates the possibility that he, like Paul, was a Roman citizen, although this is not certain, nor very important.

He was a kinsman of Barnabas. Knowing a person's family sometimes explains why people are like they are, although that is not always an infallible standard by which to determine a person's character. Barnabas was a man of great influence for good in the early days of the church. In Acts four we read of his liberality in laying gifts at the feet of the apostles for use in the cause of Christ. He was known as the son of exhortation and consolation. He had lived a life of encouraging others. He had been a companion to Paul later in his life. He was unwilling to cast John Mark aside when John Mark blundered another time, as we shall consider. Doubtless this great man had a tremendously good influence over John Mark.

More On Mark

Mark had an excellent background and upbringing for laboring in the Masters vineyard. His home was a gathering place of the early Christians for prayer when Peter and others were imprisoned. When Peter and John were released from prison

they went to the home of the mother of Mark, which indicates that they knew this was a frequent place for good brethren to gather. Having Christian brethren in the home is always a good influence on children.

Mark very likely was converted by Peter because Peter referred to him as his *"son"* in the same sense as Paul referred to Timothy (First Peter 5:13). With his background it is little wonder that he was asked to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. His duties were to minister to these men, helping them in whatever way he could. He was considered prepared for that labor, although he proved otherwise.

On this first journey Mark experienced a second failure of his life, at least in the eyes of Paul. Mark turned away from the work at a crucial time and went back home.

There has been much speculation why Mark went back. He had seen the success of the work in Cyprus and Paul's encounter with the sorcerer, Eymas, when Paul struck him blind because he hindered Serguis Paulus from hearing the truth. The tour seemed destined for great results. But as they went inland from the sea, Mark decided to go no further.

Some have supposed he got homesick. Others have thought he preferred to work with Peter rather than Paul and Barnabas. Some have been very charitable and suggested he went home to care for his mother. Other have said he might have been too prejudiced to have accepted taking the gospel to the Gentiles. The fact remains that we do not know why he went home, but only that he did. Whatever the real reason, it was sufficiently injurious to Paul's mind to cause Paul to refuse to allow him to accompany them on a second journey when time came for them to leave. He *"had not gone with them to the work"* as Paul thought he should have done. The difference that arose between Barnabas and Paul over John Mark was so deep that Barnabas was willing to take Mark, but Paul was not. This contention grew until the two leaders separated and went their separate ways into the work, Barnabas taking Mark and Paul taking Silas. Whatever was behind this great contention, it cannot be denied that Mark's failure to stay with the work was a disappointment because he had not met the measure as He should have done.

Both Were Right

Someone has suggested that Paul was right about the truth that Mark gave in too easily on that first journey. But Barnabas was right about Mark just as he had been right about Paul. He saw Mark's potential and what Mark was capable of becoming for the Lord and His work.

Later, even Paul recognized the value of Mark and mentioned him as a faithful co-worker (Philemon 24). Mark did become a respected and respectable leader of Christians. In Rome he was one of the faithful who stood by Paul. In Colosse the church was urged to receive him. In Babylon he was with Peter in the work. In Ephesus and Asia Minor Paul said, *"Bring Mark with you."* (Second Timothy 4:11). Once Paul considered Mark a hindrance but later he considered him a source of joy. The Holy Spirit chose this man Mark to be one of the four to write an inspired account of the life of Christ while He was on earth.

Such failures as Mark experienced at the onset might have caused some of lesser character to have fallen into disarray and defeat. Many have failed to grow strong because of smaller reasons. But there were several factors that caused Mark to grow from his weakness into his strength.

Credit Belongs To Several

Mark deserves much credit himself. It took stamina, conviction, determination, resolve, knowledge and devotion to make the gains he made. It also took the severe rebukes from Paul which doubtless aroused him to self-examination and challenged him to improve. It helped him to see his own failures and where he needed to improve. Those rebukes assisted him in seeing his latent talents.

But it also took the patient, kind and persistent understanding of Barnabas who did not give up on him in his hour of failure. What might have happened to Mark without the encouragement from Barnabas can only be a speculative matter. But those who grow from weakness to strength usually have somebody, somewhere, who stands by them, not condoning their weaknesses but encouraging them to come out of them. Barnabas did this for John Mark.

Surely, credit belongs to the Lord from whom all strength is derived. All these sources combined led Mark to become a blessing to the cause of Christ and even yet a blessing to all mankind today thousands of years after his life and death.

We are fortunate to have this record about Mark. It helps us to

take heart in our own failures. It leads us to not allow our setbacks knock us out. His life proves that the past failures need not prevent us from being what we can and ought to be. Failures will make us humble. They will enable us to be aware of our dependence and weakness. Many have profited immeasurably from past errors. They have turned them from being stumblingblocks into stepping stones and grown stronger in spite of them.

We can overcome our sins and faults and be pleasing to God. God knows we are often weak and He is not pleased with our weakness. But when He sees we are striving to go forward from weakness toward strength, this is pleasing in His sight. Christian growth must be the goal of our life. Moving toward spiritual maturity, becoming more and more like Jesus, this is our aim and purpose. We can outgrow our weaknesses.

Why The "T"?

The story is told of a man who was caught stealing and was branded across his forehead with the letter "T" that stood for thief. As the years passed this man learned to read and spell. Living in a distant western town where few could read and write, he soon became the man who would read letters that would come to others, and write their answers for them. As the people began to value reading and writing they asked him to teach them and their children how to read and write. Year after year he taught them. Finally, as an old man, he died. As his body laid in his coffin, one father walked by with his son. The son, not knowing the man's past, noticed the branded "T" on his forehead and asked his father what it meant. The father either had never known or had forgotten, but he said to his son, "It must mean Teacher."

From defeat to victory is the story. Is not this what God offers us through Christ? In Him we can be what we are capable of being. We can live this life acceptably and leave it with the assurance of heaven. We can grow from our weaknesses and become strong. May God help each of us to make this a major ambition in life.

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Prophecy Fulfilled At His Birth

One task before every Christian is to show every generation that the religion of Christ is of divine origin. This demands that there be evidence that the Bible is God's Word. While men wrote the words, the words were chosen by Deity. Among several evidences that this is true it the prophecy-fulfillment element of the Scriptures.

A prophet was one who spoke for God. He did this both by preaching and by predicting, by forthtelling and foretelling. The preaching that the prophets did was by the direction and authority of God. The predictions they made concerned the future and were beyond the normal ability of men to know regarding what was to transpire by their own experiences or immediate conditions. Their kind of prophecy is common to Scripture, but not done today since the complete will of God has been revealed to man through the Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17), which affirms the verbal inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, authoritativeness and all-sufficiency of the Scriptures.

To foretell the future accurately is quite noteworthy. Moses wrote, *"But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptously; thou shalt not be afraid of him."* (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). *"The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him."* (Jeremiah 28:9). No man has the power to look into the future except God grant him that ability. Only God can know the future. Men can know concerning the future what God reveals to them. When events are prophecied centuries before they occur and even foretold in detail, none can doubt that such is evidence of supernatural and divine guidance. This is the kind of prophecy and fulfillment that is repeatedly found in the Scriptures.

Concerning Christ

The first two chapters of Matthew reveal several matters of importance such as the genealogy of Jesus and the events relating to His birth. In these two chapters we have the record of the fulfillment of many prophecies. They are too numerous to discuss them all in one lesson. We shall confine our consideration to four that are specifically mentioned by Matthew. In this way we can teach information vital to the understanding of Christ, His nature and mission plus strengthen ourselves in the evidence that the Bible is the Word of God.

An angel came to Mary to inform her she would bear a son and that He was to be named Jesus, which means Savior, because *"he shall save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21). Mary asked, *"How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"* (Luke 1:34). Mary was a virgin, but betrothed to Joseph. Even so, the angel said she would bear a son according to a prophecy uttered nearly seven hundred fifty years earlier. He quoted Isaiah 7:14, which reads, *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."*

It is tragic that the Revised Standard Version, produced by those who deny the birth of a son by a virgin, and deny the Deity of Jesus Christ, has perverted this passage by changing *"virgin"* to merely "young woman." But one can be a young woman and not be a virgin. This alteration and altercation against the Word allows for the denial of the virgin birth, the very thing these "translators" wanted to deny. A second tragedy regarding the virgin birth and the RSV is that some, for reasons unexplainable, wish to throw their lot with the modernists and deniers and uphold the RSV as a reliable version. God will not hold them guiltless regardless of their "scholarship."

Almah

Mary was more than just a young woman. She was a virgin. The word "almah" means more than just young woman. It means a young, marriageable, unmarried, chaste woman. That is a virgin. But this prophecy was given seven and one half centuries before it was fulfilled, and Jesus was the only one to meet the demands of prophecy. This is not a coincidence but irrefutable evidence of divine guidance both regarding the prophecy and the birth. If anyone doubts that the term "almah"

should be translated as "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14, let him allow himself the wisdom to agree with the way Matthew, writing by inspiration, interpreted and translated it.

Mary and Joseph were of Nazareth, yet Jesus was born in Bethelehem. Augustus Ceasar ordered an enrollment and taxation that was to be conducted according to one's ancestral home. Since both Mary and Joseph were descendants of David and Bethelehem was the city of David, they made the journey southward for this purpose. It was while they were in Bethelehem that Jesus was born.

His birth was unusual, not only because Mary conceived while she was still a virgin, but because it occured in a manger, there being no room in the inn for them. It occured in the city of Bethelehem as had been prophecied in Micah 5:2, *"But thou, Bethelehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."* Reference to this prophecy is recorded in Matthew 2:5,6. How could Micah have known such an unlikely event except God revealed it to him? Even the scribes and priests recognized this prophecy as being of divine origin. It was not "luck" that it all occured there.

Visits

After visits from shepherds and the wise men, Joseph was warned to take Jesus to Egypt to flee the intent of Herod to kill the child. Herod had learned of His birth from the wise men and the Scriptures noted by the scribes. He feared any other king than himself and Ceasar.

Joseph obeyed the direction given him and fled as instructed. This is a normal reaction. But the place to which he fled was designated for him. He was to take the Child and His mother to Egypt. This is important when we realize this event was foretold seven and one half centuries before it happened. Hosea 11:1, *"Out of Egypt did I call my Son."* (See Matthew 2:14,15). God had called the nation of Israel out of Egypt as a type of the coming of Jesus Christ from Egypt. Upon leaving Egypt Joseph took the child to Nazereth, and this also was in fulfillment of prophecy that He would be called a Nazarene. But we omit discussing this prophecy here (Matthew 2:23).

Herod's Evil Deed

There is another prophecy we shall consider that was in connection with the escape from Herod. Herod was unable to locate the Child when the wise men, being warned of God, returned home another way rather than to reveal to Herod His whereabouts. This allowed Joseph time to make the escape. Seeing his failure, Herod ordered the slaughter of all male children in the area of Bethelehem that had been born about the time of the birth of Christ. We can properly consider the slaughter to have occured around two years after His birth since children up to that age were among the victims. Such inhumanity to man has seldom been executed in history. Even though there were probably few children involved, we can appreciate the agony of it if we can imagine one of our own being among those murdered.

Jeremiah had foretold this vicious deed and the agony of it in Jeremiah 31:15. *"Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not."* Matthew 2:18 cites this prophecy that was made nearly six hundred years earlier in connection with the event. How could Jeremiah have known? The only reasonable, logical and sensible explanation is the true one; namely, by divine inspiration and revelation from God. Jeremiah was a true prophet of the true God, and God is all-knowing, all-seeing, and ever-present as well as all-powerful.

The story of the birth of Jesus is a beautiful story that is told over and over but never loses its brillance. We can be thankful for the manifestation of God's love and grace that Deity took on the form of flesh. We are thankful for what He did while in the flesh, including His death, burial and resurrection which gives the hope through Him and the forgiveness of sins made possible by His blood. It is because of these later events that the birth of Jesus takes on greater importance.

But we can also rejoice that God has seen fit to reveal these events to us and shown us that He provided His prophets this information long before it took place. In this way we can be sure of the integrity of the Scriptures and the certainty that God's hand was in it all. It is as if God has placed His signature at the end of the Book.

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To Be Orthodox

The word "orthodox" is not found in our English translations of the Bible but the meaning of the word is prominent. "Orthodox" means to be sound in doctrine and practice. To be "sound" means to be free from flaws, unimpaired by error, approved by the standard. Regarding the faith of Christ it means to *"speak... the things which become sound doctrine,... sound speech that cannot be condemned."* (Titus 2:1,8). It means to uphold the New Testament without perversion, distortion, alteration, addition or subtraction (Revelation 22:18,19). It means to *"stand fast in the faith."* (First Corinthians 16:13). As expressed in the Old Testament, *"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls..."* (Jeremiah 6:16). Paul wrote, *"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."* (Second Timothy 4:1,2). The similar sentiments of Galatians 1:6-10 give us definitions of "orthodoxy."

Being orthodox in word is not always popular because some are willing to turn away from the faith, refusing to endure sound doctrine (Second Timothy 4:3,4). In a day of denial that there are absolutes and standards, orthodoxy is equated with bigotry, prejudice, irrelevance, Pharisaism and other derogatory terms. But the plea of the Lord's church is to go back to the Bible, *"speaking as the oracles of God,"* speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where the Bible is silent. We seek to restore New Testament Christianity as the Scriptures reveal by planting the "*seed of the kingdom,*" which is the Word of God, in honest and good hearts (Luke 8:11). Only the gospel will save (Romans 1:16; First Corinthians 15:1-4; James 1:21).

Do We Stop?

But are we truly being orthodox when we preach the gospel but stop there? Do we "talk" the faith, but not "walk" the faith? Are we doers of the Word, or hearers only? Does not being orthodox require both word and deed?

The Bible was translated into the language of the Navajo Indians, not by one of our brethren, but a Roman Catholic. Was not that a great service?

The village of Dunkirk, New York decided to assist the city in France of the same name, raising funds to show compassion and benevolence. This was not the action of the church. The church is unknown there we are told.

On one shipload of missionaries while at sea several years ago, over one hundred families being included, only one was of the church of Christ.

When one becomes sick, who provides? Who cares for the sick, orphans, those needing nursing homes, the elderly, victims of poverty, humger, drunkenness, drugs, lack of clothing and other such needs?

Who takes the biggest part of visiting jails, county homes, providing opportunities for spiritual growth for college students, sending physical and spiritual provisions to people around the world?

We can hear some say, "This is not the work of the church. We do not subscribe to a social gospel. This is not our mission." But that comment is only partly right, and therefore, partly wrong. It is true that much of the work mentioned above is not the work of the church as a cooperate body because there is no authority for the church to be involved in doing such things. But there is work that individual Christians ought to be doing that so often too many of us are willing to let somebody else do it while we do almost nothing. We accept the fact that the needs are there, but are we so involved (and most are not overly involved even in the work of the church) that we cannot appreciate that such work must be done in our world?

Being Sound

God's people claim to be proclaiming sound doctrine, although too many so-called "churches of Christ" today are not even sound in what they are teaching. But God's people are not lights in the world, the salt of the earth, or even interested in the destitute, diseased, hungry, discouraged, lonely, weary, bereaved and despressed. This is certainly not true of all, but it is too true of too many. Does not the doing of good have a place somewhere in being orthodox? Was not our Lord concerned about such things, even though they were not primary? The point we wish to make is simply that there is more to being

orthodox than just words of orthodoxy. Who can dispute that? Could it be that many think these things are not ours because the local congregation is not to be involved in them? Do we have to wait until there is some "church structure" before we can be orthodox in deeds?

Pertinent Passages

James 1:22-25, *"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."*

First Thessalonians 1:5, *"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."* Was there not action with Paul as well as inspired teaching?

Acts 1:1 tells that Luke had written of the things that *"Jesus began both to do and to teach."*

There are two parts to First Peter 4:11. *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* But the verse continues. *"If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth."* Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light so shine that others may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

Jeremiah 6:16 urges that one not simply "talk" the old paths, but *"walk therein."* How can we miss the point?

In Matthew 25 the five foolish virgins were left out because they did not do what they should have done. The one talent man was condemned because he failed to act. Those cast out as goats were not condemned because of what they did but because of what they did not do that they should have done. Omission was the sin laid to their charge.

Luke 10 tells of the Samritan. The priest and Levite were considered orthodox in word and worship although they had their failings even there if they were as most were. But they were

so "orthodox" that they could allow a suffering man remain in a state of desparation awaiting death to relieve him, or some "unorthodox" Samaritan to do something for him. They were so "orthodox" that they could pass by on the other side. James 4:17, *"Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it* ***not****, to him it is sin."*

The Lord's Rebuke

Christ scathingly rebuked the Pharisees in Matthew 23. They contended for a verbal orthodoxy, which they ought to have done, even though they did not follow their own rule. But they criticized every good deed toward suffering humanity that Jesus performed. Matthew 23:3,4, *"All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do ye not after their works; for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."*

They were not condemned so much because of what they said as much as for what they did not do. If we are of the same mentality and manner of life, do we stand in line for the same condemnation? Christian orthodoxy means preaching the Word with soundness. But it also means service. Matthew 23:11, *"But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant."* Galatians 6:10, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us to good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."*

Never let it be minsunderstood. The primary work of the church is to save souls and glorify God. This is accomplished by preaching the saving gospel to a sin-contaminated world. But let it also be understood that, according to the authority of the Word, individuals and the church collectively, must be active, aggressive and constant in doing good works as much as abstaining from evil.

Are we content to **say** and **do not**? Matthew 7:21, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* Lack of love for those less fortunate is to lack the compassion Jesus demonstrated. Selfishness and self-concern, stinginess, greed, covetousness and disinterest about others are sins that condemn the soul. The failure to develope Christian maturity in both mission-mindedness and charity-mindedness are both unworthy of the definition of orthodoxy.

The Promise

Only the orthodox have the promise of heaven. False teachers, liars, adulterers, thieves, those of profane tongue and greedy heart shall be excluded. Those who depend on their works alone and obey not the gospel shall be excluded. But those who obey the form of doctrine but do not practice daily Christlike living shall also be excluded.

We have seen signs over doorways into assembly rooms that read, "Enter To Worship; Leave To Serve." This captures the thrust of this lesson. Titus 2:14, the very chapter where sound doctrine is stressed, speaks how we are to be *"a peculiar people, zealous of good works."* Titus 3:14, *"And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful."*

Whether in congregational efforts that are authorized that demonstrate the benevolent work of the church, or in individual actions we can and should take to help others, let us be as determined to be orthodox here as we are in matters of doctrine and faithful word. How can we argue against such a position? How can we be content to follow any other course?

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Enemies of the Cross

Philippians 3:18,19,"*For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*"

Here was a realism that caused Paul grief. How could anyone be an enemy to that which God has used to offer salvation to mankind? Yet, there were such people. Are there not such people even yet, in and out of the church whose characteristics are like those Paul lists?

We would be blind and naive to think there are none who would advance themselves, their gain, regardless how shamefully, that would oppose Christ and his truth for their own sake? (continued page 24)

Paul To The Colossians

There ought to be a good reason for studying any particular lesson and we have the very best reason. Paul was an inspired apostle of Jesus Christ and spoke authoritatively, being guided by the Holy Spirit. What he preached was from God, not man. God's Word always deserves a hearing.

In Colosse there were Christians who needed further teaching. As in most places certain doctrines and philosophies plagued the growth of the church and the purity of understanding. Inasmuch as God's Word does not change, what Christians needed to know then is what Christians need to know now. Our lesson is somewhat of a summary of the major points that Paul presented to those Christians by the epistle to the Colossians. We want to present an outline of this valuable, interesting and informative book that stresses many matters, including how the Christian is supposed to live.

Chapter one includes Paul's word of thanks for the faith, hope and love of the Colossian brethren. Such is the fruit of the gospel. These three tremendous spiritual qualities had become theirs through the *"word of the truth of the gospel."* (1:5). Would it not be a mark of goodness if every congregation was the kind that could receive apostolic commendation because they possessed these qualities in a noticeable degree?

Paul prayed that they *"be filled with knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."* (1:9). Paul always coupled his prayers with his own efforts. This epistle was an effort by him, as the Holy Spirit directed, to expand the knowledge, wisdom and understanding of these people.

Knowledge Of Deity

What did he want them to know? They needed to know something more about God. God made it possible for them to partake of the inheritance of the saints, had delivered them out of darkness, had translated them into the kingdom of Christ, His Son (1:12,13). It is still true now. Such blessings can and will belong to anyone who comes to God through Christ. This is possible because God has made it possible.

They also needed to be reminded of something about Christ.

Christ was always with them and their redemption was provided through Him. He is the very image of Deity, the Creator and Sustainer of all things. Power and authority over all things in heaven and earth belongs to Him (1:14-17). The church is His body and He is the head of it. *"That in all things he might have the preeminence."* (1:18). It is a serious matter to claim headship of the Lord's church. It is blasphemy and an attempted usurpation and arrogant presumption for any man to assume such a title or present himself or anyone else as head of the Lord's church other than Jesus Christ.

God through Christ reconciles mankind to Himself. The reconciliation is not bringing God to man, but man to God. This is accomplished by the blood of Jesus Christ (1:20-22).

Knowledge Of Themselves

They needed to know something about themselves. In times past they were alienated from God *"in your evil works."* (1:21). They had been reconciled by Christ's death. Now, holy and without blemish, unreprovable before Him, they could stay in this cherished state *"if so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and stedfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard."* (1:23). What is said of Christians then remains true for Christians now. Every person who is a Christian was once in the same lost spiritual condition, in sin, on the way to spiritual destruction eternally. But now having been washed clean and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, God would continue to keep them clean if they remained faithful.

Knowledge Of Him

Paul wanted them to know something of himself. He was a minister of the glad tidings of Christ. He and others proclaimed that which was once a *"mystery,"* but now that which is revealed. A mystery is not something that cannot be known. It can be known, but only when revealed. The gospel, the scheme of redemption, was not fully known until apostolic revelation. Paul's labor and suffering of affliction was part of his work to let men know how God makes man complete in Christ (1:25-29).

Chapter two opens with how Paul was striving in order that this mystery, a hidden tresure of knowledge, wisdom and salvation, might belong to them all the more. He desired that they be rooted, builded up and established in the faith (2:7).

Today's Christians need the same development and strength. The epistles, including this one, are designed to provide the spiritual nourishment that is essential to this establishment. All of the information Paul suggests in these opening verses are needed by me and you. They are not out-of-date nor irrelevant even though written centuries ago. They are as fresh, alive, timely and practical for our age as when first given. People do not need a new gospel. They need to hear and heed the gospel that was once delivered to the saints through the apostles.

A Warning

Paul gave a solemn warning. *"Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."* (2:8). In Colosse, as elsewhere, some were teaching and binding doctrines and ideas contrary to truth. Every age has its self-made legislators for the church. In nearly all of the early churches, both Gentile and Jewish teachers would attempt to impose upon brethren either the philosophies of the world of the tenets of the heathen or the Mosaic Law that had been nailed to the cross. Paul especially noted circumcision that once marked God's people, Israel. But under Christ circumcision was nothing of significance. The *"circumcision"* under Christ is of the heart, not the flesh. Now one is a child of God through the forgiveness of his sins through Christ, not the old law. The ordinances of former laws were *"against us,"* and were taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross (2:14). Therefore, Paul wrote, *"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."* (2:16,17). Such things characterized the old law which served as types of the new that came through Jesus Christ. Nobody is to allow anybody to take them from the head of the body, Christ, by causing them to submit to that which is no longer God's will for man.

Chapter two, verses twenty through twenty-two, were to prevent apostasy and following religious error. *"Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, [touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using]; after the commandment and doctrines of men?"*

Daily Living

Chapter three puts emphasis on the lives of the Christians. It is very practical and personal. Since they were raised with Christ they were to do two things. (1) Seek the things which are above; (2) Set your mind on things above. Earthly concerns have always been a problem to brethren. Worldliness overtakes many now as it did Demas. Materialism becomes the goal and god of some who once came to Christ. It has caused Christians to be led astray from the faith. It has been historically a failing in the generations of men. It is because Christians sometimes fail to emphasize the spiritual man and overemphasize the outward man and the things of the here and now to the neglect of the soul. Seeking, thinking, planning, desiring and pursuing temporal things which are seen and forgetting the things concerning eternity which are not seen has been the downfall of many through the years. It seems mankind never learns. This world and all that is in it shall pass away. It is the Word of the Lord that endures.

"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (3:3). What does this involve? It means puttings on some things and putting away others. It demands abstaining from some things, which is the negative side of the faith of Christ, and partaking of other things, the positive side. Beginning with verse five through verse ten we have a catalog of things from which we must turn away. But only refraining from evil, as good as that is, is not sufficient. We cannot live in a spiritual vacuum. Verses twelve through seventeen gives us the positive side, what to do and be.

Special Words

The last portion of chapter three contains some specific instructions to wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants and any others who would be a faithful disciple of Christ. Wives are to be subject to their husbands and husbands are to love their wives. Children are to obey parents and servants are to obey masters. Masters are to render to servants their due. All are to pray to God, giving thanks, doing what is done heartily. The directions continue into chapter four, *"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."* (4:5,6).

Such admonitions provide cures for marital strife, domestic and home problems, juvenile deliquencies, difficulties even between enemies, solutions to problems with our fellowmen, and the solution for proper relationships with God. What could be more desirable, practical, useful, relevant, comprehensive and workable than the formula given by the inspired penman of this epistle? Is there anything available to mankind with such power and ability as the message fromn God?

Personal

The last part of chapter four is personal in nature, yet, informative and worthy of imitation. Paul salutes his brethren cordially, commending his fellow workers. He urges them to receive faithful men that come their way. To Archippus, who may have been the primary teacher among them, he gave a special word, charging him to fulfill his ministry. This called for him to carry out his work earnestly and vigorously.

Notice something very significant in his closing remarks. He instructs that the letter not only be read there but elsewhere as well. What Paul taught one church was needful for all churches. What he taught Christians long ago is what Christians need to know and follow today.

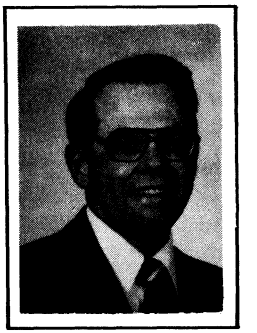
Let me encourage you to use this brief summary as a springboard from which you will launch into a deeper study of this epistle and come away with a greater, fuller and more complete knowledge of God's will. Such a study could be a turning point for the better in your life. May we be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

† † † † †

(from page 19)

When there is drinking, adultery, profanity, compromise, unity in diversity and other false doctrines apparent within the congregation, even the eldership, and the self-serving "pulpit minister" finds it expedient to omit teaching on these matters from his sermons, who could doubt but he is just another of the kind of "*enemies of the cross of Christ*" that Paul was describing. Why are such people allowed and retained in our pulpits? JWB

Constant Vigilance



JAMES W. BOYD

We are so often treated to the assertion that our generation is the smartest, wisest, most astute generation to have ever come upon the scene of human history. But we wonder! If we are all so smart, why are things in such a chaotic mess? Possibly it is because we are not giving due credit to those of the past, or possibly we just are not truly wise enough to learn from the past.Even the simplest matters seem to escape us. For instance, take the matter of drifting into apostasy. Cannot we learn from history that this tragic but real human experience does not just happen quickly, as if it comes overnight?

Ecclesiastical history, and more importantly, Biblical history shows that departure from the ways of God creeps upon the human family, step by step, so often coming so slowly that nobody really grasps what is happening until we find ourselves far adrift and off course. This is the reason we must be constantly vigilant, ever alert, persistent in measuring, turning neither to the left nor right, but pressing forward toward the eternal goal, always keeping heaven before us. If we deceive ourselves by not keeping vigilance, we are the eternal losers.

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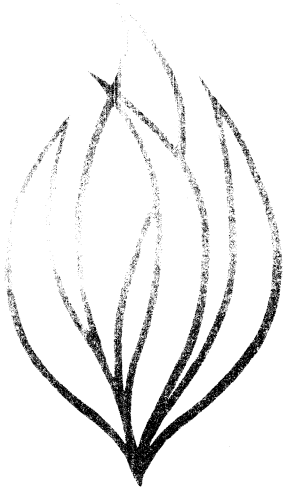

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 3**

The Salt Of The Earth

Jesus began His sermon on an unnamed mount with the Beatitudes which express characteristics of those who would compose His kingdom, and the blessings that would be theirs to enjoy. He added, *"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under the foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:13-16).

Jesus pictured His people in different ways, such as children, sheep, servants, branches and here like salt and light. Obviously, He is speaking figuratively or by way of comparison. But what does He mean when He says His followers are like the salt of the earth? On this question we now center our thoughts.

To understand His comparison of His disciples to salt we must understand the use and qualities of salt, especially in Jesus' day. Salt was not altogether like the purified salt to which we have become accustomed, even though there are many similarities. Salt was not mined or extracted from the sea as it often is today. Once obtained it is boiled clean. But salt was obtained in Jesus' day from marshes along the seaside, from beds of dried salt lakes. What was gathered was mixed with impurities, dust and other earth substances intermingled with the salt. The whole mixture, however, was usually identified as salt.

A Savour

Salt possesses a savour, which refers to flavor, taste and such qualities. Salt was used them, as now, to improve the flavor of foods. One little boy, when asked to define salt, answered, "It is that stuff when left off 'taters, ruins them."

How is the Christian like salt? We know that food for the soul is the Word of God (First Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12,14). Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:4). Mankind often hungers for the soul-reviving nourishment that only the

Word of God can supply. Too many seek to satisfy their spiritual appetites from the wrong source, such as the false ways of men, self-indulgence, riotous living, permissive and unrestrained conduct. But many are seeking and grasping for some food for the soul. The Christian, by living a beautiful, noble, dedicated life can make the Word of God attractive for the hungry soul. The Christian life often provides the attraction for the sinner to come to righteousness. The Christian is observed, admired and his righteousness that he has partaken from Christ soon becomes known as the "secret" of his success. Certainly, no person can so live as to improve on the Word of God, but one can so live that others will see the value of following the Word of God. This is the mission of a disciple.

Christians know the more excellent way. We sometimes wonder why more people do not feed upon the spiritual food that Christ offers. There is always the possibility that the lives of those who profess to follow God's Word have made the truth flavorless and unpalatable to the sinner. We can make the truth unattractive by living evil, inconsistent lives and displaying bad dispositions. When a "Christian" acts like that he is as salt that has lost its savour, its flavor giving properties.

Thirst

Salt also has the capacity to make one thirsty. Men who are lost at sea know not to drink sea water because the salt therein only makes one more thirsty than ever. What is true in the physical realm has some comparison in the spiritual. In the Beatitudes Jesus said, *"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."* (Matthew 5:10). As the physical body cannot survive without water, neither can the soul survive without the spiritual water of life.

Jesus Christ is the water of life for man's spirit. While passing through Samaria Jesus came to a well that had been dug by Jacob. A woman came to draw water from the well and Jesus asked for a drink. John 4:6-14, *"Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. [For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.] Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealing with the Samaritans.*

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."

The Christian is like salt in that he can create thirst, make people thirsty for the blessings of being in Christ, such as inward peace, forgiveness of sins, hope of an eternal home with God, purity of conscience and fellowship with Deity and the redeemed. He can create that thirst by living a righteous example in the imitation of Jesus Christ.

Too many seem to get all they want of Christ very quickly. Again we wonder why, but we must realize they are not really thirsty for what He offers. Is it possible that those who profess Christianity have not made them thirsty?

Preservative

Salt may be best known for its power to preserve. It is used in curing meat againt putrefaction and corruption. It can prevent decomposition. It was so used in Jesus' day and in many instances even in our own time.

The Christian, just as he can present a pleasant taste for truth and create thirst for the water of life, can also contribute to the preservation of his fellowman. His heart and life should be an overflowing reservoir of goodness. He should stand for morality, purity, human dignity, living in such fashion that will lift others and point them to higher and nobler plains of life. The way of the rabble is not the path he trods. Rather, he preserves respect for the things of God by teaching them to his children, friends, neighbors and brethren. He preserves the sanctity of marriage and the home by making them as Christ has taught they should be. It is by his good influence that the power of Christianity is released. As long as there be those who will follow Christ, and the more who follow the more potent is their power, the world will not be completely overtaken by sin, idolatry, vice, crime,

hate, hopelessness and despair.

The forces of unrighteousness only contribute to defiling nation after nation. The Christian, by his influence and example, stands between the devil and his universal victory. Christianity is what prevents the tide of paganism from engulfing every corner of the globe. As Christians you and I are a part of the preservation of that which deserves preservation. This task makes our lives meaningful, useful and essential.

Bad Salt

We must note what happens to salt when it loses its good qualities. It is branded as "*good for nothing.*" It is rendered valueless, becomes as waster matter, and is to be cast out as nothing desirable. It has ceased to function and produce as intended and expected. It is like the branch that is cut off in John 15:6, *"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered: and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."*

It is *"trodden under the foot of men."* Such salt is placed in the streets and pathways, not in garden plots. No man would allow his field to be sown with salt. Even though it has lost its good qualities, it still possesses the ability to destroy the life and fertility of the soil into which it is cast. It is, therefore, thrown where people walk.

So it is with the Christian when he ceases to be what the Lord expects of him. If the Christian loses his savour, *"wherewith shall it* (the world, JWB) *be salted?"* To what else and to whom else can the world turn for hope, preservation and satisfaction for its needs and desires except Christ and those who walk as He walked? There is an urgency in this statement. It shows the worth of the individual Christian in the midst of a world sick with sin. Here is his most important mission. Someone, somewhere, sometime must stand for God and His truth or the race of humankind has nothing but hopelessness.

That Christian who loses his Christlikeness is branded as *"good for nothing"* as far as truth, righteousness and goodness is concerned. He will be cast from God's good favor and presence. He will be trodden down to defeat and despair. No longer is he valuable for God, but actually becomes a power of death and evil.

Melt

We might also be reminded that salt can be used to melt ice. The Christian, by his work and influence, may be able to melt the cold and hardened heart of the lost. What a noble accomplishment that is within the grasp of every child of God!

Let us pray fervently that we will learn the import of this simple comparison Jesus made between His people and salt. But, as we mentioned in the course of the lesson concerning Jesus as the water of life, let us learn to drink of Him, being continually refreshed by Him, by feeding upon His Word that saves the soul (James 1:21).

† † † † †

Redemption In Christ

Titus 2:11-15, *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee."*

This lesson will involve reading a number of Scriptures on the theme of redemption. We often sing of redemption in Christ. "I know that my Redeemer lives." "Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb." "Christ the Redeemer died on the cross." These are phrases familiar to most brethren. Redemption is a frequent Biblical term that conveys what man needs, what God offers, and the benefits and blessings of a spiritual nature that can be ours through Christ.

A redeemer is one who is a kinsman, a defender, a protector, one who rescues, recovers, ransoms or buys back. Property can be redeemed, as well as slaves, or something else that may have been placed as collateral. In the Old Testament God redeemed Israel, bringing them out of Egyptian bondage, rescuing them and defending them.

Under the new covenant Christ is our Redeemer and the One

that God has provided as the means of our much needed spiritual redemption. Let us consider matters related to this redemption that we have in Christ.

Who Needs Redeeming?

Those who are in need of redemption are those who are lost in sin. First Corinthians 15:1-4, *"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again according to the scriptures."* We are not born guilty of sins as the false doctrine of Calvinism teaches. Isaiah 53:6, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."* We did not come into the world already astray, but by going our own way we have gone astray. First John 3:4 teaches, *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."* An infant has transgressed no law of God and is not guilty of sin.

Luke 19:10, *"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."* Romans 3:23, *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* We sell our souls to Satan by sinning, but Christ came to buy us back. The "before and after" coming to Christ is presented in Ephesians 2:12,13, *"That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the common wealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."* This explains how God used Christ to save us and redeemed us from condemnation.

The Redeemer

Christ is the Redeemer. The angel said to Joseph shortly before the birth of the Lord, Matthew 1:21, *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."* Titus 2:14 underscores the truth that He *"gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity."* Anna recognized Him as the Redeemer when she saw

the Child, as recorded in Luke 2:38, *"And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."* Romans 3:24, *"Being justified freely by his grace through redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*

Why was Jesus provided as the Redeemer of mankind from sin? *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). Romans 5:8,9, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."* But let us turn our attention more closely on how God provided this redemption through Christ.

The Price

The price that was paid to buy us back was the blood of Jesus. As noted in Isaiah 53:6, God laid our iniquity on Him. First Peter 1:18,19, *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot."* As the Jews offered a special animal in their sacrifices for sin, Jesus is presented as the *"Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29).

Matthew 20:28, *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."* Revelation 5:9, *"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by the blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation."* Hebrews 9:11-15, *"But Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."* First Corinthians 6:20, *"For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."* First Corinthians 7:23, *"Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men."* Ephesians 1:7, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."* Acts 20:28, *"...to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."* This array

of Scriptures proclaims for all to know that God redeems man by and through the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son.

His blood was shed at Calvary. Galatians 3:13, *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."* John 19:28-37, *"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar; and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon a hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day [for that sabbath day was a high day,] besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs, but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knowth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him who they pierced."*

Redemption Offered

To whom is this redemption available and offered? It is not a limited atonement to a select and predestined few, as Calvinism would teach. God has predestined certain people and things in the deliverance of His scheme of redemption of mankind. God has also predestined certain classes of people that will be redeemed or lost. But, however, God has left it to each person to make his own decision into which class he will be. The redemption provided through the grace of God, by His Son, with His shed blood, is available to all who make that choice and who will be redeemed. First John 2:2, *"And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."* Revelation 22:14, *"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."* (Revelation

22:17). Christ *"became the author of salvation unto all them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9). The opportunity to be redeemed by the blood of Christ is open to all who hear the Word, believe it, and obey it. Those who do not do this cannot read one word of hope for their souls in all the Word of God.

This being true, we are taught to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Him, and be baptized into Christ, baptized into His death, baptized for the remission of sins and to be saved. There is *"one baptism"* that is the act of obedience that separates us from the state of being lost and places us into the company of the redeemed. Water baptism, in the name of Christ, enables us to reach His blood and be raised to walk in newness of life, a new creature in Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Second Corinthians 5:17). What a privilege and blessing to be among the redeemed!

† † † † †

Things That Help Us To Understand God's Word

Often in prayer we ask God to help us understand, and this is proper for us to ask (James 1:5). We believe God will help people in everything that is right. Understanding His Word is essential before we can do as He directs. Who can measure the error and confusion caused by a lack of understanding?

As in everything else for which we pray, we must also cooperate with God and put forth our effort. God does not miraculously grant us the knowledge, wisdom and understanding we need. We do not even profess to know what all are the ways God answers prayer. But we know we must do our part and not be content to expect God to do everything while we do nothing. There are things we can put to use that help us do our part. We shall consider a few of these.

Expectation

One requisite to understanding is the expectation to understand. Paul wrote, *"Whereby, when ye read, ye may*

understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." (Ephesians 3:4). *"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."* (Ephesians 5:17). We should expect to understand. Many regard the Bible as a sealed book with an insolvable mystery, beyond the ability of mortals to ever know without a special and direct intervention from God. Others think understanding belongs exclusively to the "clergy." Neither thought is true. Paul told the Ephesians they could understand. Timothy had knowledge of the Scriptures since childhood. The epistles were to be read before the whole church for all to hear. Why should this be done if understanding was beyond them? Is God so unjust as to give us a message on which our salvation depends and then make it beyond our ability to understand it? We must rid ourselves of this nonsense that has caused millions to remain in darkness when they could have had the light of the glorious gospel open to them.

Desire

We also need to have the desire to understand the truth. *"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."* (First Peter 2:2). How genuine is your ambition to know truth? Some study the Bible just to prove their point against others. Some study so they can show somebody else wrong. Others study trying to find justification for some view they already hold, or to protect their prejudices, or some other less than honorable reason. We must study with open minds, willing to accept the evidence and be convinced, ready to sacrifice whatever is necessary in order to holdfast the truth. If we are not careful, we will be guilty of "reading into" the Bible what is not there rather than "reading out of the Bible" what God has placed there. Honesty and sincerity in our study should be coupled with the desire to know God's will.

Common Sense

Some confusion may arise from this next suggestion, but consider the entire point. Good common sense is necessary to understanding the Scriptures. Someone has said, "If one lacks secular knowledge, let him ask his fellowman. If he lacks religion, let him ask God. If he lacks common sense, he is out of it." Without common sense we shall not be able to understand much of anything on any subject.

What is common sense? One said, "Common sense is the kind of sense without which all else is nonsense." But we use the term with reference to the ability to consider and weigh evidence and draw a consistent and intelligent conclusion. It includes the ability to discern between truth and error on the basis of Biblical revelation (Hebrews 5:14). It enables one to be able to see harmony between ideas, and disharmony where it exists. Without common sense one could not see the difference between Christianity and the Mohammedan religion. We may learn facts and figures, quotations and names, but without the ability to assimilate and apply our knowledge in a reasonable sequence, we will not be able to understand. Many people know a lot about the facts and figures, quotes and names of the Bible but lack understanding because they lack reasoning ability.

Accept The Bible

To have understanding of the Biblical message we must recognize it as the inspired Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Unless we believe this we will never have reason to believe it is true. If you receive a letter from the President of the country, but believe it came from somebody else, it is not going to mean very much to you. Without the confidence that the Bible is the Word of God there will be little motive to investigate it, apply it, believe it, or even respect it. Nobody will respect personal responsibility to its demands if they have doubts about its origin and whether it really came from God.

To read from idle curiosity, to find fault, to search for alleged flaws, rather than respect it for what it claims to be will cloud the mind and understanding will escape us. That the Scriptures are inspired of God can be demonstrated with a study of the evidences. We do not here present those evidences, but only take note of the need to respect the Word for what it claims.

Effort

Mental industry is essential to proper understanding. So many want something easily poured in rather than anything that takes effort to dig out. Mental exertion seems to be too much for some people. They had rather die and go to hell than exert effort. Gaining understanding of the Bible, like other subjects, requires study. *"Study to show thyself approved unto God..."* is Paul's admonition in Second Timothy 2:15. An occasional,

haphazard, irregular, brief scanning of the Bible will profit little. It does take intense study and meditation, regularly done, continuously, over long spans of time. Too many are too mentally lazy to go to heaven. They will not use their minds and study the Bible. Others are mentally alert and active but rather study other things to the neglect of the Bible and then sometimes wonder why they seem to have such a flimsy grasp of the Bible. Mental exertion is more difficult, taxing, tiring and exhausting than physical exertion when compared on a time basis. The unwillingness to apply oneself mentally will deprive us of needed understanding.

We urge that each one try to set a time, however brief, for regular, sincere, daily, respectful study, even if only a passage or two. Take advantage of classes, sermons, books and investigate. The effort is more than rewarded as the light of truth dawns around you. Your knowledge and understanding will expand.

Sincerity

There should be purity of mind by which we mean a sincerity. Luke 8:15, *"But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."* A mind given over to sin, that attaches a "double meaning" to everything they read, that seeks the unchaste, sensual and evil of this world will not likely explore the revelation of God honestly. Rather, they, if they consider it at all, will project their own evil to everything they read, giving a slanted and distorted picture to what God tells us. The carnal corruption in the mind of many prevents a grasp of the purity of truth. It is possible for one to become to hardened in sin that even the truth of God cannot make an impression.

Helps

There are invaluable aids and helps in Bible study, such as Bible dictionaries, concordances, commentaries by faithful brethren, and sermon books that help us cultivate a hunger and thirst for righteousness. A good education helps. Knowledge of language, grammar, meaning of words, an enlarged vocabulary, will all assist us. Knowledge of history, logic, geography, customs and similar things give us better opportunity to come to an understanding of the Biblical message. Many parables simply could not be understood without such information about the

times, practices, and customs of the period under consideration.

Young people as well as older ought to be encouraged to go forward with their educational processes so they can be better teachers, preachers, parents, elders, deacons, people of service to those around them. They will not only produce more materially that can be used to further the cause of Christ, but they will make more productive citizens, be brighter lights in the world of darkness, know how to make intelligent decisions, and be better able to assist other people in problems that arise in life. We would not wish to leave the impression that secular education is the answer to man's ills. This we do not believe, and forthrightly would deny. We are simply suggesting that a good education along the lines mentioned will help us to investigate the Bible more intelligently. We are also aware of the danger and destruction a skeptical education is in understanding God's truth. Nor does one have to be a professor of degrees to be able to know and understand what God wants.

We wish to emphasize that by no means would we indicate that one without a formal secular education, or who has not been advanced in schools, cannot learn the truth and be a Christian and go to heaven when he dies. It simply means that an educated person is better equipped to do the mental exercise that is required to come to an understanding of Scripture, generally speaking. There will be exceptions. Some with many degrees are far from understanding. One who cannot even read and write can understand when taught. But without the basic skills to investigate and comprehend one is handicapped. Education of the right sort is a blessing. Education that makes a man think he has graduated to be a god will damn his soul.

Do we really want understanding? Are we sincere in that desire? Do we pray that God help us? Are we doing our part? Let us put ourselves wholly to the task. Paul prayed, *"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."* (Ephesians 1:18).

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Hate

We begin this lesson with the definition of hate as is found in the dictionary and as people generally think of it. Hate, as a verb, is to dislike intensely, abhor, detest, entertain a continued hostility toward someone or something. Hate is an attitude of heart that seeks to hurt and harm. Most people think of hatred as something altogether evil. They will say, "It is wrong to hate." But to hate does not always classify one as evil, and hating is not always evil. There are certain things we are supposed to hate.

Hatred is wrong when it is directed against that which is supposed to be loved. Whether hate is right of wrong depends, then, on the object of that hate. In this respect it is much like its opposite which is love. It is not right to love everything. A person can hate situations, circumstances, ideas, truth, people God, sin, and what he hates determines whether his hatred is detrimental or beneficial. Anything that can be loved can also be hated. Anyone capable of loving is also capable of hating.

Hate, again like its opposite, love, is in the heart of a person. You do not see hate just as you do not see love. You can see the manifestations of both, the evidences of the existence of them. Hate and love either one can actually exist before it manifests itself. But it usually "comes out." Just a love will demand a demonstration of itself to please God, by our obedience (John 14:15; 15:14; First John 5:3), hate will show itself in the way we act toward various objects and people.

Not To Hate Others

We should never hate our fellowman whether he is a Christian or not. This kind of hatred is what we often consider first when discussing this subject. But God loved the world (John 3:16), and so should we. Jesus loved all mankind and so should we. We are not justified in hating souls. Rather, we have an obligation to all men to preach the truth to them about the love of Christ so hatred can be dissolved from the hearts of all. Jesus hated sin but He always loved the sinner and even died that sinners might be saved.

Hatred of others has a way of backfiring and destroying the one who hates. In the book of Esther we read of Haman who hated Mordecai and plotted ways to kill him. But the man who

died on the gallows Haman prepared for Mordecai was Haman himself. Hate is like a spiritual cancer that gnaws at the spirit of man until he is spiritually impoverished.

Hating other people is one of the fundamental problems of our world. Paul described the condition of sinful man in Titus 3:3 as *"hating, and hating one another."* Those who hate others are in darkness (First John 2:9-11). To hate another is as sinful as murder (First John 3:15). One cannot hate his brother and claim to love God (First John 4:20,21). Hatred toward another will cause us to say and do things that will damn us (Matthew 5:21,22).

Not To Hate God

We should never hate God. In Romans 1 Paul wrote that those who hate God are given unto a reprobate, depraved mind, given to sin. When people, in defiance and arrogance, refuse to live a righteous life they are likely to display their hatred toward God. The greatest commandment is, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."* (Matthew 22:37). Jesus added, *"The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."* (Matthew 22:39).

What should be the Christian's attitude toward those who may hate them? This is not an uncommon situation. People can become your enemy if you tell them the truth (Galatians 4:16). Jesus said in John 15:18, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."* Matthew 10:22, *"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake, but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."* Luke 6:22,23, *"Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets."* How we are to treat those who would hate us is expressed in Matthew 5:43-48, *"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and on the unjust.*

For if you love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Romans 12:20,21, *"Therefore if thine enemy humger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."* We can deal with those who sin against us as Haman did toward one he considered an enemy, even though Mordecai never did him harm, or we can treat them as Joseph did his brothers and forgave them.

A Good Hatred

All hatred is not evil. There are certain things that God hates. Proverbs 6:16-19, *"These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."* What God hates we should also hate.

We learn that God hates every false way (Psalm 119:104). Understanding the precepts of God will lead us to hate every false way. We must, however, distinguish between hatred for the false ways and hatred for the doers of false ways. The first we are to hate. The second we must love. Even as we hate the evil ways some follow we can be compassionate and loving toward them in seeking their salvation. Did not Jesus do this very thing? Even when the church must discipline someone it is not motivated by hate of the person but love for the truth, love for the sinful one, love for those who remain faithful that could be misled if discipline is not carried forward. The Lord chastens those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6).

Mankind has enough burdens in life without being bent with false ways. A way may seem right and be wrong (Proverbs 14:12). Doctrines and precepts of men make vain the worship toward God (Matthew 15:9). We must war against every false way and have no part in it (Ephesians 5:11), lest souls be overtaken in trespasses. We can make the Word of God of none effect by human traditions which people hold as opposed to God's will (Matthew 7:13).

The early Christians learned to hate sin in every form. Jude

20-23, *"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."* Romans 12:9, *"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good."*

To Love Less

The word "hate" is sometimes used in the Bible to mean to "love less." Luke 14:26, *"If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."* In Ephesians 6:2 Paul taught that we are to honor our parents, but in Luke we are taught to "hate" them. There is no contradiction because the word "hate" in Luke means to love less. It speaks of priority and first place in our devotion. Our loyalty must be to Christ before all else, even those nearest and dearest on earth. Even our own lives are not to be placed before the service to God. Matthew 10:37 uses the word "hate" in the same way.

This is a hard sying. Yet, it forms the only acceptable basis upon which we can serve God. Matthew 6:24 is another example of loving less as the meaning of hate. *"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* We all have any number of authorities over us in life, in the home, business, school and society. The meaning is that we shall not place any auhtority superior to the authority of the Lord. That would be to serve the wrong master, and we cannot serve two at once with equal loyalty.

Anything we hate, and any time we hate, there ought to be love as the motivation for it. To hate for the sake of hating will profit nothing good. It will actually be harmful to everything and everyone. We must hate with the right motive and that motive must be love. We must love God, mankind, righteousness and the truth to the extent that we automatically learn to abhor that which is contrary to such things. It would seem that every Christian would desire to have it justly said of his life and attitude that he hated what God hates and he loved what God loves. It has been said about one person that he loved God so much that he hated whatever was offensive to God. This should be said of

all of us. Love for God is the motive for hating evil.

Our Savior has shown to us, by word and deed, how to hate and how to love, what to hate and what to love. May we learn of Him and partake of His ways, walking in His footsteps that will lead us into eternal glory in heaven.

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God's Power Through Strange Victories

Habakkuk 3:19, "*The Lord God is my strength...*" These words were written over twenty-seven centuries ago. It was not the first time such a confession had been made. David, Jeremiah, Isaiah and many other holy men of God since the creation recognized that truth. We need to recognize it also. Every nation would do well to realize that it is strong to the extent that the nation looks to and leans on God.

One need of mankind is someone strong on whom they can depend. Children lean on the strength of their parents. We are the children of God and we lean on our heavenly Father. Almighty God has supplied mankind what is needed. In and of himself man is incapable to live successfully. Even though some have tried, and some have even thought they have succeeded in living life without God, people fail to realize that life itself is from God. Whether one succeeds in life or not is not determined by how he fares in this life temporally, physically and materially, but how he will fare in the judgment and eternity. Jeremiah said, *"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps."* But man can and should trust in the strength and power of the Almighty Guide.

God expects many things of His creatures, but He never expects or requires that which is beyond man, with God's help, nor does He expect what is unreasonable. God has seen fit to provide mankind with evidences that sustain man's trust. He has shown His strength in many ways. We read of the creation and many other miraculous deeds, the power of His Word to convert people from what they were into what they should be. There are the laws of nature in operation which God set in motion that

demonstrate His power. He shows His ability through His providence. We want to consider the manifestation of the power of God as has been shown through various victories enjoyed by Israel over their enemies. These events show God's strength and man's weakness and dependence. Hopefully, this knowledge will motivate us to be more confident as we place our trust in Him as we live our lives before Him.

Deliverance From Egypt

Consider the account of Israel leaving Pharoah's slavery. At the completion of the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn throughout Egypt. Israel marched toward the Red Sea. Soon Pharoah and Egypt recovered from the immediate impact of that plague and pursued Israel to either recapture them or destroy them. Either way, Israel was in danger.

Israel, fresh from captivity, was not equipped for war and were helpless before their enemies. There were mountains on either side of them and the sea in front of them, with Pharoah coming behind them. How could they escape? They could not by their own power.

By the power of God in opening the sea they were spared. Walls of water stood on either side as they passed over on dry land. A wall of fire stood between them and their foes until they were safely on the other side. The victory provoked a gigantic celebration. But such could never have taken place except for the power of God. Alone, they would have been annihilated. Not only was that nation, but all nations, are indebted to the strength of God because of that event. Israel was spared and through Israel came the Christ.

Taking Jericho

Forty years after crossing the Red Sea there was another crossing of water. This time it was the Jordan River even at flood stage. Once across there was another victory awaiting Israel because of the power of God. This was the taking of the city of Jericho. That city was walled and fortified. Israel's strength was not with her armies, but in faith in God.

A strange battle plan was delivered to Joshua. Israel was to march around the walls of the city one time each day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day. Then they were to blow their trumpets and shout. When they obeyed what God

instructed the walls fell and the city was exposed. It became easy prey for Israel. Obviously, Israel could not have captured the city without God's power. Even though what they did was essential, their obedience was not the power but only gave them benefit of God's power. This was another manifestation of the strength and power of God, the same God to whom we belong.

In the process of conquering Canaan there were many times when God's power was the difference between victory and defeat for Israel. One occasion was when Joshua defeated five kings while defending the city of Gibeon. Even though the Gibeonites had deceived Joshua into making a covenant with them which he should not have done, the covenant called for Joshua to protect the city and provide it with safety. The other Canaanite cities became aroused toward Gibeon because of their alliance with Israel and threatened it. When Gibeon sent word to Joshua for help, Joshua and his army quickly came to their aid.

In the battle that followed two expressions of God's power are evident. (1) The enemies fled in panic, and (2) more of the enemy were killed by hailstones than from the swords of Israel. Another display of God's power was when God slowed down the sun, which is spoken of as the sun standing still, giving Joshua almost a full day longer in which to carry the fight. Because of God, not because of Joshua and the army alone, the victory was won.

Amorites and Midianites

Again, when Israel fought with two Amorite kings the victory belonged to Israel but it was because of God's strength. Joshua 24:12, "*And I have sent the hornet before you, which drave them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites; but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow.*" God sent hornets into the midst of the Amorites. Being occupied with fighting the hornets, the Amorites were no match for Israel and they fled in defeat. This is another manifestation of God's power in the strange way victories were accomplished.

Nearly two hundred years after entering Canaan Israel was in servitude to the Midianites right in their own homeland. This was because of their failure to be faithful to God. But in their oppression they cried unto the Lord penitently and God sent a deliverer whose name was Gideon.

Gideon sent forth a call to arms and thirty-two thousand volunteered. Judges 7:2, "*And the Lord said unto Gideon, The*

people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." God instructed Gideon to allow all who wished to return home and twenty-two thousand returned, leaving ten thousand. But God told Gideon that there were still too many and gave directions for a test to be made to determine who would return and who would stay. The test involved how the people would drink water from the stream. All but three hundred men were sent home.

What could three hundred men do against the Midianites whose number was like that of locusts, having camels without number, more like the sands of the seashore? But the whole matter was arranged by the Lord rather than man. Israel was more than equal to the task before them, but only because of the strength and power of God.

The Midianites were encircled at night by the three hundred men. At a given signal the men broke pitchers containing lighted torches, blew their trumpets and shouted. The Midianites were thrown into disarray, thinking they were surrounded by a powerful host of men, and they began striking out against each other in their confusion, killing, wounding and destroying themselves. Those who could fled. Once again the power of God had vanquished the enemies of His people. There is no question as to whom the credit for the victory belonged.

Two Prime Lessons

What lessons do we learn? There are several we need to learn, but we shall emphasize just two. We realize these victories were due to the power of God. But we also cannot fail to see how people had to cooperate with God's directions. God expects man to follow where He leads. The benefits of God's strength were enjoyed when man realized he needed God and obeyed God. Israel had to march into the Red Sea. Joshua had to circle Jericho and enter the fray just as did Gideon. We learn that our God is a God of strength and power but let us not think that God supplies His power to us regardless of our attitude and response to His will. God's power and man's duty were both present in all these events we mentioned.

In the New Testament we have a statement by Paul regarding strength. *"I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me."* (Philippians 4:13). Paul would have been inaccurate to have written he could do all things and stopped there. That would

have revealed reliance totally on himself. He would have ignored the real source of power. But he added, *"...in him that strengtheneth me,"* with reference fo Christ. He revealed a true understanding of strength. God has been and still is the source of power in every age. Christians today can say with the Israelites of old, *"The Lord God is my strength."*

Illustration

This illustration might assist us to see the thrust of the lesson and what our attitude should be. Some botanists were combing a mountainous area in Scotland and spotted a rare species of flower. But it was far down the side of a steep precipice. There was a small lad with them and they asked him to allow them to lower him down the side of the mountain by a rope to pluck the flower that they might study it. The boy refused in spite of rewards offered him. But then he suggested, "If my father holds the rope, I'll do it." The father was brought to the place, given the rope, and the boy went down the side unafraid and secured the flower as requested.

What is the moral here? The boy trusted his father and his father's strength and knew how his father cared for him. He was not afraid as long as his father held the rope because he trusted his power.

The application is clear, is it not? We can have complete confidence in our heavenly Father. He "holds the rope," so to speak, to our lives and spiritual security. But we must trust Him. When we do we shall be able to do what is expected of us without fear but with assurance and confidence.

Do we trust the power and strength of God? Each must ask and answer for himself. We have every reason to look to and lean on Almighty God.

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ARTICLE: Strong Leadership Needed

We begin this discussion with words of commendation for elderships who stand forthrightly for the doctrine of Christ regarding the relationship of the Christian to the world. Not all elders bow to pressures to compromise. Those that do bow are disgraceful, but those who uphold the truth are worthy of honor and respect. Thank God for those who love the truth and retreat

not from it.

While the world "*world*" has several meanings in Scripture, we have reference to the sins of the world, partaking of that which is forbidden by the will of Christ, the fleshly lusts and sensual thoughts and deeds that characterize the unholy and ungodly, the evil order and the pursuit thereof, the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), the *"lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."* (First John 2:16).

"*Friendship of the world is enmity with God."* (James 4:4). Christians are in the world (in God's creation and on earth), but not of the world (partakers of the sins of the world). We are a *"peculiar people,"* a distinctive people because of our *"denying ungodliness and worldly lusts."* (Titus 2:12). Who could find a more specific directive than Romans 12:2? *"And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."*

Unfortunately, not all members of the church in New Testament times lived accordingly, such as some in Corinth, Demas, and others. Not all who profess to be Christians today do any better. Within nearly every congregation can be found some who seem determined to keep one foot in the world as they try to maintain fellowship in the church. How they will swell with anger and venom should godly efforts be made to encourage them to conform to the way of Christ!

Some of the meanest and poison-tongued people on earth are the worldly members of the church. They have no limit to which they will not go to discredit those who uphold Christian teaching regarding worldliness. Their attacks on elders, preachers and brethren generally who contend for the faith in this realm are vicious. Attempts to intimidate elderships with rebellion, forced resignations, withholding contributions until all accept their worldly ways are but a few of their tactics. Dividing churches and alienating brethren has marked their trail. Cheerleading and beauty pageants are more important to them than God's Word.

Before going to the extreme measures, however, they usually try to rationalize their worldly positions. They will defend social drinking with absurd arguments (Jesus made wine). They condone smoking (no worse than overeating). Parading in their slit shirts, shorts, bathing suits in mixed swimming (how short is short, as if short has no meaning), allowing their young men to wear long hair (how long is long, as if long means nothing),

attending proms, rock concerts, etc. (better than necking in the park); one ridiculous and foolish "mouthing" is raised after another. By this they reveal a worldly attitude and a contempt for the Christian standard of conduct. If elders allow the preacher to preach otherwise, they will pout, murmur, create disturbance and act hurt. Weak elders, wanting peace more than truth, sometimes cater to them and suggest the preacher "go easy." When a solid and firm endorsement of sound words is in order, weak elders crawl away or express words of regret that the subject is preached, almost apologizing to the world that sin has been condemned. How such men consider themselves to be shepherds protecting the flock is beyond comprehension!

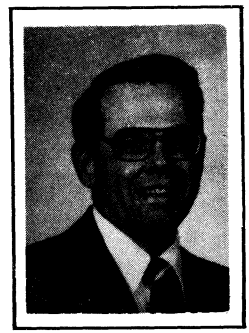
Elders could slow this rebllion down if they would. If they would cease to use the worldly members in public worship and teaching, if they would stand behind sound teaching and *"convict the gainsayer,"* (Titus 1:9), and lead the church, as they have oversight, in disciplinary action the Bible demands (Second Thessalonians 3:6), the lost would be better able to distinguish between a Bible people and "just another church of hypocrites."

Elders feel the pressure of numbers, money, acceptance by the community. Because their children and grandchildren are involved in the sins of the world they often do a backflip on behalf of the devil. Some are so compromising and fearful that in some communities you could not tell a Christian from any other without a rollbook. Members use the same foul language, go to the same places, do the same things, have the same greedy ambitions, belong to the same drinking set at the club, gamble at the same table, laugh at the same dirty "jokes" as others. For all practical purposes, they show their disregard for Paul's questions, *"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?."* (Romans 6:1,2).

Patience ought to be extended toward the babe in Christ as he learns how to *"walk in the light"* (First John 1:7). But as often as not the real problems for elderships come from members who have been members a long time and who just defy the truth. Elderships need to realize what harm such people do to faithful Christians and to the cause of Christ when they tolerate such sinners to remain in fellowship as if it really does not matter.

"Sound words... sound speech... sound doctrine" (Second Timothy 1:13; Titus 1:9; 2:8), supported by faithful men is the only cure. May it be so with brethren everywhere. JWB

Say What You Mean



JAMES W. BOYD

There comes a time when a person who believes he has something worth believing and needs expression to learn how to say what he means without the ambiguity and confusion that characterizes the speech of far too many. Even some of the more educated among the brethren seem to have a great capacity of leaving it quite unclear just what it is they are teaching. It is not because they lack the mental capacity of the adequate vocabulary, but they lack the integrity to say what they really mean and what they really believe. They are too cowardly to be forthright in admitting where they stand on this issue or that, they still want the applause and company of those who take exception to what they believe, so they cloak their sentiments in language that leaves room for "interpretation." This usually means they leave themselves loopholes that allows them to deny what they really want to say but are afraid to say it out loud. If questioned they readily run to the favorite expression of unsound men, "You misunderstood me." Many brethren are no longer considered sound and distinctive in their speech because they simply do not say clearly what they mean.

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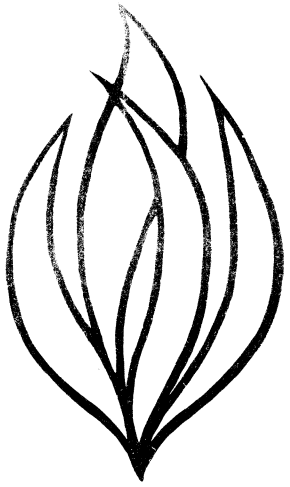

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 4**

Religious Unity

John 17:20-23, *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they all may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."*

This is one of several fundamental passages stressing the Lord's intent that those who professed to be Christian would be united. Unity is the theme of what is called the Restoration Movement. There can be only one way to have religious unity, and that is for all men to subscribe to the revealed will of God and that alone, as that will is revealed in the New Testament without addition or subtraction.

It is rather popular to talk about unity, but more often than not what is really intended is merely union. There never has been a time when unity is more needed than now. In every subtle and overt way the faith of Jesus Christ is being undermined and skepticism spread through the schools, government, social organizations, and even by many religious groups. It is the fondest hope and holiest desire of a true Christian for there to be unity, but at the same time the very basis of Christianity is under vicious attack. There is the desparate need for the defense of the gospel. The outcome of the "battle for the Bible" is very much in doubt for modern man, including the very next generation which includes our children. It is past time that true Christians be aroused, see the digressive direction we are drifting, learn our weakness, and rally our forces and recognize the value, the necessity, of unity.

Division Admitted

The call for unity takes note that there is division. There is division between religions, division among those who profess to follow Christ, and even division among those who have obeyed the gospel. We hear today voices echoing the same compromising themes of yesteryear saying, "We claim to be

Christian only, but not the only Christians." This is said, not with adequate explanation, but to introduce the idea that one can be acceptable to God with something short of following Christ as the Bible teaches. Statements similar to the following are being made, "We should not assume that those with whom we regularly commune are the only Christians in the world." Certainly, there are other Christians in congregations other than the one to which we belong. There may even be some who have become Christians and have left the faith and gone into various paths of religious and anti-religious error. But to leave the idea in the minds of people that there are "knowledgeable and faithful Christians" in most any of the various religious groups that claim to be Christian is as false as a three dollar bill. Unless one hears the word, believes it, repents of his sins, confesses Christ, and is buried in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins, thereby reaching the saving blood of Christ, he is not a Christian. Unless one who has obeyed continues in faithfulness as a Christian he is not among the saved, but has renounced his salvation and returned to the sin that will destroy him. This we must preach without fear or favor because that is what the Bible teaches.

Promoters Of Unity And Division

True Christians should work toward getting God's people everywhere to stand together in faithfulness, and stand together in opposing all forces that are destroying the unity of the church, either from within or without. Only genuine unity will grant the church the strength it needs to preach the gospel to the world. The hopelessly divided religious condition of our society drains the influence of true New Testament Christianity, depletes it of money, energy, and work that needs to be directed toward saving the lost.

Those who have promoted denominationalism through the years have the unenviable future of facing God, having promoted division, while the Son of God prayed for unity. Those in the church who have promoted their opinions as the law of God, or loosed the law of God to accomodate the worldly and wicked in the church, also face a day of retribution. The only justified cause to promote is true New Testament Christianity. Error and sin divide. It is not sinful to fight the error, even if that provokes division, because it is the error that is the real cause, not the truth.

Many religious people have even been led to believe that religious division has some redeeming features. One prominent denominational evangelist was heard to say that religious division and the many denominations give people a choice of ways they wish to serve God. What man might want is not our goal. What God directs is all that matters. God has not given us a choice how to serve Him. We either serve Him His way or we are in error. It matters not what we like or dislike. What matters is, "What does God teach and expect of us?" Until this disposition abides there will continue to be division. There is no Scriptural justification for what the world now sees; denominationalism, and the tearing asunder of the true body of Christ with the borrowings from theologians, creeds, manuals, catechisms, disciplines, prayer books, "scholars," confessionals, and the like.

Wrested Passage

Some have recklessly applied John 15:1-6, the parable of the vine and the branches, as Biblical support for different denominations. But the branches are not denominations, but people. *"If a man abide not in me..."* Nothing in Scripture even resembles the acceptance of denominationalism. How could the Lord address what did not exist? Why should the Lord pray for unity and then condone division?

The evidence of the destruction of religious division is abundant. Division creates confusion, divides home to the point that Jesus cannot even be discussed. The religion of Christ may cause division with some accepting Him and others rejecting Him. But the harm is in the rejection.

Division is a waste of manpower, money, influence, and talents. It opens the door for human doctrines, pride, jealousies, strife, and bitter religious battles. Sons and daughters do not follow with mother because of father, nor will they follow father because of mother, not will they follow Christ because of them both, but they will follow the devil to hell. We could exhaust our space with the destructive elements of division simple being recounted, let alone analyzed.

"Unity In Diversity"

There is a difference between unity and union. Union contends that we should simple "agree to disagree." Is that what existed between the Father and the Son? Unity blends together

things of the same kind. Union places things of different kinds in the same company. The Father and the Son were united, but you can put dogs and cats in a sack and have union, but a far cry from unity. The United Nations is union, but not unity. That for which Christ prayed, and the apostles taught, was not an amalgamation of different types, kinds, and mixtures. They worked for likeness. Union can be achieved without agreement on truth, but unity demands being of the same mind, same doctrine, same judgment, same practice, which demands using the same standard.

Note the Lord's prayer. He prayed that the Father might glorify Him. Then He prayed for His disciples. He even prayed for unity among His followers down through the ages, *"that they all may be one."* The oneness is to be like the oneness of Him and the Father, one in sentiment, purpose, spirit, action, conviction, and goal. He prayed that He, the Father, and His disciples, would be united.

Why Unity

The reason He prayed for unity was, *"That the world may believe that thou didst send me."* Whether we want to admit it or not, the division that exists among those professing to be Christians does more to cultivate the ground for the rejection of Christ than most anything else we can perpetuate. Jesus knew that and prayed for unity. One of the most powerful weapons in the devil's arsenal against Christ is the disunity among professed followers of Christ. The only way to deprive Satan of this vicious tool is for men to set aside the ways of men that divide and conform to the way of God that unites.

John 10:16, *"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."* Few quarrel that we have the One Shepherd, Jesus Christ. We wonder why there is any doubt that there should be one fold. Jesus was speaking of both Jews and Gentiles, heretofore religiously divided, being united in the fold of which He is Shepherd. Contrast this statement of the Lord with the attitude that allows for division, and the situation that permits there to be hundreds of folds. How can anyone claim to have respect for Christ and endorse the very opposite of His teaching and prayers?

First Corinthians 10:16,17, *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread*

which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

Romans 12:4,5, *"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."*

Ephesians 4:4-6, *"There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

The body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). There is only one body, one church, one faith, one baptism, just as surely as there is one Lord, one hope, and one Father. In view of such teaching, how does anyone take comfort in the existence of religious division?

First Corinthians 1:10, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."*

No Right To Divide

There was no right for those who professed to be Christians to be identifying themselves by Peter, Paul, or Apollos. Nor is there any reason for those who profess to follow Christ today to be identifying themselves by names of men, doctrines, governmental systems, or any other such thing. Why cannot people be content with the name God called His people under Christ, and that is the name Christian (Acts 11:26; 26:28; First Peter 4:16)?

The Bible claims to be the inspired, infallible, inerrant, all sufficient, and authoritative Word of God (Second Timnothy 3:16,17). The Bible student is aware how the Bible forbids adding to and taking from the Word of God. Therefore, the Bible is the sole authority in matters religious, and until men accept that, there is no possibility of unity.

Unity is possible, even though unlikely, because Christ prayed that we be united. He would not have prayed for what He did not want, nor what could not be achieved if men would cooperate with His will.

Attitude Involved

What is your attitude toward unity? Does anything go with you? Are you willing to conclude that "unity in diversity" is really the unity the Lord prayed would exist? Does it matter to you the waste and destruction of religious division? If anyone thinks those with whom he communes are not true New Testament Christians, and that others need not be like them, then, if he is honest, he will work to dissolve his communion and dismiss his group, and align himself with others who are "just as well off." What right would any group have to exist that did not believe they were right? Does being right matter with you? Does being wrong concern you? Can it be that Jesus lived, died, came from the tomb, ascended into heaven, having prayed for unity, and then it not really matter after all?

We can be united. But our unity with Christ is far more important than unity with men. Faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins will unite us spiritually with Deity. It will unite us with all others who have done the same thing, and as we *"walk in the light as He is in the light,"* we will maintain that unity. Should any forsake the path of truth and depart into other paths, the unity is shattered, and can only be restored by those who broke it returning to the truth which they left, repenting, confessing their sins, and praying to God for their restoration with Him and those they forsook.

† † † † †

OBEDIENCE IS A "MUST"

Jesus closed the Sermon on the Mount by saying, "*Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man...*" He followed that with, *"And every one that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man..."*

The eventual consequences to the wise and foolish man when the rains came and the winds blew makes it obvious which the Lord desires us to be. Do not these words of our Lord show to us just how absolutely necessary it is for us to be governed by what He has taught? Are we not expected to reduce what He has instructed into practice? Is it reasonable to expect His salvation if we do not obey His voice?

Evolution Or The Dignity of Man

The subject is intended to offer a choice between two positions that cannot be reconciled. We can either accept or reject the doctrine of evolution or accept or reject the doctrine that man has a distinct dignity by virtue of being created after the image of God. We shall contend that it is impossible to accept both doctrines. To accept evolution one must reject the idea that man is essentially different from animals. If that be true, there is no reason to elevate man above the level of beasts but only consider him a more highly evolved beast than others. However, if one rejects evolution, he allows that there is a difference between mankind and the animal kingdom that provides man a distinct dignity above them.

Evolution, being widely taught as a proven scientific fact, is being disputed legally, scientifically, ethically, socially, and religiously. Evolution is offered as an explanation for man's existence. But that it is a proven fact is a vicious and intellectually dishonest lie. Regardless of how sincere an evolutionist may be, he believes a lie.

What Scripture Teaches

One may not believe the Bible, but it cannot be denied that the Bible teaches that man has been created in God's image. Genesis 1:26,27, "*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*" Genesis 2:7, "*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*"

Psalm 8:3-8, "*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou*

madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas."

All through the Bible the emphasis is that man is different from any and every other creature, superior because there is a dignity about a human being. He has that spark from Deity the Bible calls the soul or spirit. It is spiritually that man is like God for God is a Spirit (John 4:24). Acts 17:28, *"For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."* The essential nature of man demands uniqueness not shared by any other of God's creatures. Whether one believes the Bible or not, one is forced to admit that the Bible teaches the dignity of man and evolution reduces him to animal level.

Basis Of Our Way Of Life

This Biblical view of man is the basis for much of our way of life, a way that many wish to destroy. Evolution is a tool for destroying this basic concept of man and pave the way to introduce an entirely new social order that is secular and God-denying. Our nation's Constitution was based on the doctrine that man has certain "inalienable rights" by virtue of being human. Animals have no such rights. Thousands of animals are fatted and killed for food every day, but there is no protest. But one murder of a human being can arouse the entire nation to righteous anger. If evolution is true, there is no reason to think human life is any more sacred than that of any animal. Why do we consider human life sacred, except from the influence of the Bible?

There was a time in our own land when people were bred, sold, bought, and treated as if they were mere animals. Then came that moment in our history when good men could tolerate this abuse no longer. People were freed from slavery because it was realized that regardless of race, creed, color, or other such distinctions, people have rights simply because they are of the human race. While in many instances practice has not caught up with doctrine, the principle of man being distinctive from the beast is well established. But it exists in spite of evolution, not because of it.

Various systems from Rome to Communism consist of man being nothing but an animal, with human life expendable. It is

characteristic of godless communism to slaughter people, casting out the unwanted, exterminating the aged and handicapped. It was nothing to barbaric Naziism to murder several million Jews. Communism has innocent blood pouring from its hands today. Evolution prepares the mind for such as that because it contends man is just a highly developed animal. Nations influenced sufficiently by the way of God believe in the supreme value of human life because man is in God's image. Destroy that concept and the floodgates of terror are wide open.

A Destroyer

Evolutionists are among the worst traitors to civilization. It is subscribed by atheists who deny God, which the Bible calls fools. Denying the work of God, they deny the dignity of man. This is not a new idea, but one that presently receives tremendous propagation in the world today by the so-called scholars and educators of the world. But the Encyclopedia Brittanica calls the doctrine a "theory," not a proven fact. That life has come from non-life is neither scientific, logical, nor rational. But without going into the areas of disproving evolution, we are concerned here with the destruction of the theory to the dignity of mankind.

Crime, vice, war, and all such things are outgrowths of the idea that people are expendable, whether done by religious or irreligious people. Can evolution make people more considerate or moral, kind, law-abiding, or just the opposite? Can there be named one beneficial contribution to the uplifting of mankind that this theory has contributed? How can one train a person aright when people are equated to mere animals? What motive is there to be better? Animals have no morals, ethics, respect for right and wrong, nor do they have any reason to have them. If man is but an animal, anything that suits oneself must be considered acceptable. Nothing but rampant anarchy would exist if every man could "do his own thing" without moral restraint and guidance. Without God, and evolution demands there is no God, there is no authoritative principle against murder, theft, lying, or any other action civilized people define as crime. While evolutionists contend there is no God, few, if any, are willing to have society adopt the consequences of their doctrine.

The cold and bitter truth is, if evolution is true, there is no reason not to be utilitarian and dispose of anyone considered

objectionable, killing the handicapped, aged, malformed, or sick. We shoot animals when they are diseased or injured. Why not a human being? If evolution was true, there would be nothing noble or honorable that could be sustained. Who would and could say what was noble or honorable? To believe evolution you must deny everything holy and right.

Absolutely No Compromise

There are those who try to compromise evolution and belief in God. Their position is called "theistic evolution." They claim that God exists and that He used the evolutionary process to bring mankind into being. They deny the Biblical record of spontaneous creation, instantaneous creation.

There is no need or justification to reconcile to doctrines that are so opposite to each other. Science does not demand it, nor does the Bible allow it. We do not have to deny one proven scientific fact to accept the Bible record that God created man, fullgrown, instantaneously, implanting within him a spirit in the image of the Creator. To contend for "theistic evolution" is to reduce the Genesis record to a myth rather than the historical record it claims to be. It makes the entire Bible suspect.

But we ask the theistic evolutionists: (1) If God used evolution to make man, at what point in man's development did he become a man and acquire a soul? (2) If evolution has occurred, what is to prevent man from developing into something else later? (3) What happens to the soul of man? (4) If man has a soul, which you admit, was it not given by a miracle by the Lord? (5) If God can perform such miracles, why could He not have created man as the Bible teaches? (6) If God allowed man to evolve from a "blob" and from a one-celled creature, why could not God, who had to have made the "blob," have created man full grown? (7) How do you account for the fact that evolution contradicts scientific findings and evidence? The truth is, it is foolish to speak of "theistic evolution" when there is no proof that evolution of the kind evolutionists teach has ever occurred anyway.

Evolution or God

The theistic evolutionist is a most inconsistent and compromising fellow. One admits the existence of God. But once that admission is made, he tries to deny what God has said that He

did. Once you admit the existence of God, you surrender your argument against creation. To deny the miraculous power of God is to deny God. To deny His record is to deny His truthfulness. The theistic evolutionist tried to ride two horses going in opposite directions at the same time.

Some cry, "But many theologians accept theistic evolution!" Theologians through the ages have accepted most anything. Especially will they accept whatever they wish when they wish to be "scholarly" and please the world. The Bible is the authority, not some seminary trained, anti-Bible, conceited, compromising theologian.

Theistic evolution is an attempt to harmonise theories arising from science, such as geology, biology, etc., when no reconciliation is really needed. Proven science is not at odds with the creation account. Evolution is that which contradicts science.

To assert that evolution is a theory, a hypothesis, is one thing. To assert that it is a proven fact is to distort the truth unmercifully.

True Evolution

There is a sense in which evolution is true and we have no hesitancy in admitting it. There are various divisions of creature life. There are changes that occur within these divisions. For instance, man is born and evolves or changes from infancy to childhood, to youth to adulthood. But this is not the "evolution" being propagated and to which we object. There is no evidence that there are changes from one division to another. As the Bible has taught that each produces after its own kind, in both the animal and vegetable world, so science has verified. Dr. A. H. Clark, a scholar of the Smithsonian Institute said, "No matter how far back we go in the trace of any animal forms which are intermediate between the various major groups or phyla...The greatest groups of animal life do not merge into one another. They are and have been fixed from the beginning. No animals are known even from the earliest rocks which cannot at once be assigned to their proper phylum or major group...There can be only one interpretation of this entire lack of any intermediate between the major groups of animals. If we are willing to accept the facts at their face value we must believe that there were no such intermediates, in other words, that these major groups from the very first bore the same relation to each other that they

do at the present day." (Geology and the Bible, *Modern Science and Christian Faith*, page 35).

The "fairy tale" that evolutionists like to tell is that all modern scientists accept evolution is a deliberate lie. More and more who have believed it are having second thoughts about it because the evidence runs against it.

Cannot Have Both

The evolutionists and the believer of the Bible both begin with presuppositions. Evolution denies the possibility of the supernatural because God is denied. The Christian admits the possibility of the supernatural. The evidence shows the Christian view to be logical, reasonable, beneficial, and harmonious with what can be tested and proven. We need not retreat one inch before the bombardments of the evolutionists that God created the world in six days and created man in His own image, thereby granting man dominion and dignity that pertains to nothing else He created.

Furthermore, the Biblical concept of mankind upgrades human kind, giving basis and reason for proper conduct toward each other. Evolution threatens to destroy all grounds for civilized human conduct. The two doctrines cannot be harmonized and there is no justifiable reason to attempt reconciling them. We can believe the Bible with confidence. We can know of the dignity of humanity because there is a God in heaven.

† † † † †

The Episcopal Church does not respect the Scriptures as is evident by their religious forms, doctrines and practices. But there is an element within that church that now calls for accepting homosexuality as permissible, pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationships are also said to be acceptable. The reason for this position is because "times have changed." We are as aware as the next person that times have changed. But God's law has not changed. The Bible still teaches such is sin.

One advocate of the liberalization of these matters says that since the church blesses dogs in a fox hunt they ought to look with favor upon "meaningful" human relationships. The truth is, the Episcopal church has gone to the dogs in many matters.

Present Day Illumination Of The Spirit

What does it mean to illuminate? It means to enlighten, inform, bring light where there is darkness, reveal what has not been revealed, give information that permits understanding. We contend that there is illumination by the Holy Spirit today, but not as some think.

Before Jesus was crucified He outlined the work of the Holy Spirit in John 14,15,16 when speaking to the apostles. He promised to send them the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit involved them and their preaching. The Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, guiding the apostles in all the truth, bringing to their remembrance what He had taught them, all in order to glorify Christ. This was a promise, not to all, but to the apostles. It was a promise that the Lord kept beginning at Pentecost. That day the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and they spoke as the Spirit guided. If this promise was not fulfilled to them then Christ broke His Word. But the Scripture affirms that total truth, once a mystery, has been revealed and we have the full revelation of God's will to man during the lifetime of the apostles.

The Bible

The Biblical evidence of this truth is in Acts 20:27 where Paul said he preached the whole counsel of God. Jude 3 teaches Christians to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. Galatians 1:6-9 pronounces God curse on those who teach differently from what the apostles taught. Second Peter 1:3 affirms they received all things that pertain to life and godliness. Second Timothy 3:16,17 says the Scripture furnishes us all things. First Corinthians 13:10 says miracles were to last until that which is perfect is come, meaning the full revelation of truth. Ephesians 3:3-5, Paul had the *"mystery"* revealed to him, he wrote it down by the Spirit, and one can read and understand what is now revealed although once unrevealed. Psalm 119:105 says *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway."*

Mankind is illuminated by the Holy Spirit today by and

through the revealed, verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Word of God, the Bible.

Men Say

But there is much dissatisfaction among men with the Bible. They resent being confined to the Word of God in the Bible. They want more from God; something additional and different. Therefore, some claim revelations, illuminations since the *"perfect law of liberty"* was revealed. Some religions are based almost entirely on the claims of latter-day revelations and continuous unfolding of additional and different truths since the Bible. Some claim to hold the Scriptures alongside their claimed new revelations. But this is impossible as the Bible itself teaches. Various individuals and churches claim visions, dreams, revelations special from what anyone else ever receives from God.

Many on the "electronic church" and the television personalities make such claims. For instance, Pat Robinson of the 700 Club constantly claims God is telling him something nobody else ever hears. He says God is healing somebody somewhere, here and there, he feels it, he knows it. He preaches a health and wealth message.

Jim Baker of the PTL Club once claimed to heal everybody on the top floor of an Atlanta hospital. Funny thing, however, nobody at the hospital ever knew anything about it. When that healing took place Baker shouted that the Holy Spirit had outdone Himself. Baker also once claimed to have received a special message from God right during his program (I was watching), and following a commercial he revealed what God had said. God told him that this was a special good time to ask for donations.

Oral Roberts once claimed to have seen a 900 foot Jesus rising above his hospital. (Wonder why there is a need of a hospital since Roberts claims to be a miracle worker and can heal everything from gout to cancer.) At this writing he recently claimed God would take his life if he did not raise four and one half million dollars for his projects. He has millions from naive, gullible, Biblically ignorant people. I have visited his crusades and know first hand of his vicious deception. I have talked with those he "healed." He is a colossal fraud.

Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, claimed special revelation and founded that religious movement on such

things.

Other Claims

The Mormon Church stands on the claimed special latter-day revelation of Joseph Smith. The president of the Mormon Church still claims to receive messages from God. If that be true, one can never really know if the message of the Mormons who come to your house is true or not because their message is subject to change as God speaks to their president. It is not surprising that Smith wrote disparagingly of the Bible and that Mormons use the Bible only as an entrance to get into homes to propagate their religious lies.

Ellen G. White, founder of Seventh-Day Adventism, claimed special revelations about the Sabbath. They believe in continuous revelation, as do Jehovah's Witnesses. The Catholic Church is built on special claims of special revelations. The doctrine of Calvinism demands that there be special operations of the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word of God. Baptists are strong Calvinists. One Primitive Baptist preacher told me when they assemble they have not studied but wait unto the Spirit moves them. Once during a campaign against alcoholic beverages he claimed God told him to have a big rally in the city auditorium, but from some experience I warned against such a rally lest it flop because of rain, and the facility being too large, the liquor people would gain rather than lose from such an event. He later agreed. I just had to ask him why he took my word over that of his special revelation. Baptists claim that what they happen to think of has been placed there by the Holy Spirit. They are honest and sincere, but have no understanding of the illumination of the Spirit.

Lynn Anderson, preacher at the Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, openly prayed that God would enlighten the Word as if the Bible was a dead letter on its pages and needed a push from the Spirit. Pat Boone said one cannot understand the Bible until you have the Spirit's experience. He said once it happens to you you will know it. There are some teaching in colleges operated by members of the church of Christ who hold to the same or similar false views.

There was a woman evangelist in Jackson, Tennessee who told me she talked with God nearly everyday like Moses and God talked at the burning bush. She was unable to give me even one single direct quotation from the Lord's mouth,

however. In Memphis, over television, a Baptist preacher claimed to be as inspired by the Holy Spirit and to the same degree as the apostles. Don Finto, of the once Belmont Church of Christ, said over television that what he was saying was no longer Don Finto but "I was God in Don Finto." A visitor to my office once came asking for help to restore his marriage. His problem arose because his wife claimed God told her to move to California. She did, leaving her husband and family.

Feelings, nudges, special instructions on what to preach, where to preach, where to park the car, what to say, seeking signs from God, this is what one hears repeatedly today. People who study these matters could add instance after instance to what I have said.

Answer The Question

The unanswered and unanswerable question is, "If God is speaking to all these people as they claim, why do they not speak alike, speak the same things, teach the same messages? Why are they still divided? Is the Holy Spirit sending contradictory messages? Is He inconsistent with the very Scripture He gave? Or are the claimants deceived or just flat out lying?" Jimmy Swygart denies Oral Roberts heard God tell him he would die unless monies were raised. But why should we believe Jimmy any more than Oral? Both claim the Holy Spirit guides them! Ephesians 4:4,5 teaches there is *"one faith."* Men of faith who subscribe to *"the faith"* are willing to take God's Word and take God at His Word without demanding, claiming, or advocating something more, less, special and different.

In Luke 16, we read where the rich man in torment wanted Abraham to arrange for his brothers to receive God's warning in some special manner. Abraham's answer was that they had Moses and the prophets. Let them hear what God has already revealed. But many want something more and their desire for something more leads them to claim something more.

Deity illuminates through the gospel (First Corinthians 2:13). We are told to speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). We shall be judged by the Word of Christ (John 12:48) and His Word is in the inspired Scriptures.

What Is Lacking?

I am motivated to ask, What if God did actually give

somebody a special revelation? What would it accomplish? What would be the purpose of it?" Would it change His Word someway? If so, this denies First Peter 1:25 that says His Word will endure forever. Will it add to it or take from it? If so, it violates all the many passages that condemn doing that very thing. Will it reveal truth thus far withheld from man? If so, Jesus did not keep His promise to the apostles. Will it give us inspired interpretation of the Scriptures? If so, having given us the Bible which we could not understand without inspired interpretation, would He have to give us another inspired interpretation to help us understand His inspired interpretation? Could not God provide adequate revelation from the first? He said He would and did. I believe Him. If He could not, can we be sure He can now? If He did not, why does He hold man responsible?

Finally, what evidence is presented by these who claim their special revelations to verify that they have received what they claim? The apostles performed miraculous works to prove they were speaking from God. They confirmed the Word in that manner (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). Their miracles were real, verified, even not denied by their enemies because their enemies were confounded by them. They made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the dead to rise. They struck people blind, were unharmed by vipers who bit them. Their healings were instantaneous and complete. They were not involved in some psychosomatically caused problem that can be corrected under the influence of hyperemotionalism. Those who claim such powers today do not do what was done by those of the first century as recorded in Scripture.

Where goes the claim must go the demonstration. The demonstration is lacking. Such claimants are false teachers and false prophets teaching false doctrine. They are people who are malcontent with the Word of God and deceive millions, raking in millions of dollars into their coffers. We are not left in darkness regarding the will of God. The Word lights, illuminates, leads, guides, directs, converts and sustains. By and through the Word the Holy Spirit operates, not apart from it. Thank God for His grace and mercy in His inspired revelation, the Scriptures!

† † † † †

It is heresy to act contrary to the example of Christ. To infringe on His law is a crime of extreme magnitude. Why do frail men presume to do it?

The Work Of An Evangelist

Many preachers, possibly most, are reluctant to preach lessons that concern him so personally as this one. It is not because they have not studied the subject because they probably have spent as much time with it as any other. But his motives can be so easily impugned that he does so for his personal benefit. But it is a Bible subject that needs to be preached. How else can members of the church understand unless they are taught?

A preacher who preaches on the work of an evangelist is probably more qualified to preach on it than any listerner he will ever have. He should be because it directly concerns his work. Few realize the seriousness of preaching as much as those who have given their lives to it. It does involve your entire existence.

Not Just Another Job

Being a preacher is not like other tasks men assume. Preachers do not punch time clocks, "go to work, come home from work." Their work is ever with them and they are thinking about it all the time. They never really leave it behind them, even for a little while. One cannot really grasp this factor until he tries to maintain a regular schedule of study and presentation of lessons. Furthermore, there is very little the preacher does that he can dismiss the fact that he is a preacher. Where he goes, what he says, what he does, what he buys, how he looks; anything that in anyway could affect his work as a preacher must be taken into consideration.

There are misconceptions about the work of a preacher and preachers have to share some of the blame for this because of their reluctance to teach on it. Let us begin by considering some things that are not the work of a preacher, even though many seem to think so.

What He Is Not

It is not his place to rule the church. Attempts by the preacher to rule the church causes trouble. This is the duty of duly appointed, recognized, qualified men called elders or bishops.

The preacher has no authority by virtue of the fact he is a preacher. He, like the rest of the members, works under the oversight of the eldership. While his advice and counsel may be sought, and he can express himself as do others, he is neither a ruler of the church, nor a "policeman" to make the members do right. Even when there may not yet be elders, he is just another member, but one who happens to serve in a very special capacity.

The preacher is not a substitute for a working membership. Some seem to have the idea that when they secure a preacher that the work of the congregation is his to do and they no longer have work to do. His visits do not make other visits unnecessary. His work as a Christian does not replace anybody's work. He is to do his work, but every member still have his/her work. He is not a "glorified errand boy" for the congregation, although he is often pushed into this role. He should not even try to cover all the work by himself. It does concern him that much is left undone that needs to be done, but he cannot, and should not try, to do everything. He cannot be the instigator, promoter, pusher, planner, and coordinator of every program and effort of the church. He should cooperate as well as others, but too often he is expected to take the lead in everything from youth work, Bible classes, visitation, personal work, training, to caring for the lawn, keeping up with baptismal clothes, answering all correspondence, being a part-time janitor, or whatever else nobody else will do.

Once I was in the church building running a vacuum cleaner and a visitor walked in and asked what I was doing. I told him I was doing the work of an evangelist, which being interpreted is, whatever you cannot get anybody else to do. This is not as it should be.

Advising

Part of his work may include what is called counseling. Problems that people encounter are often brought to him for solution. This may be because some consider his a "pastor" or because he has studied such things possibly more than many others. This is a work he does with mixed emotions. He is glad to be of help to anybody. But so often problems are brought to him that Solomon could probably not solve and he is supposed to "wave a wand" and suddenly everything will be all right. It does not work that way. He cannot accomplish anything without

cooperation. But many want easy solutions to problems they rebelliously and defiantly created over a period of years. So often, even after advice is given and Biblical instruction offered, his words go unheeded, and still he is criticized because he did not solve some problem.

As valuable as advising with others can be, this is not his primary work. Experience has taught me that unsolicited advice is seldom, if ever, heeded. Often, even solicited advice is cast aside. So many come with problems, not for solutions, but to find somebody to agree with the decisions they have already made and the conclusions they have drawn. It is unreasonable to expect the preacher, or even the eldership, to have all the answers to every question every time. We are talking about mere men, not angels or Deity. Many expect church leaders to be perfect in every respect. This is why preachers have to be so careful about everything they say and do. While we should try to demonstrate what is preached, realistically every human being must say, "Do as I say and not as I do," because nobody is perfect except Christ. This double standard that many have regarding preachers and their families has driven many good men from the work of preaching because people expect more from them than they have a right to expect. This in no may minimizes the necessity of the preacher to live as consistently with the truth he preaches as he can. But does not every Christian have that same duty?

Who To Please

The preacher must strive to please God, not men (Galatians 1:10). This introduces us to the work of a preacher from the positive side.

An evangelist is a "bringer or bearer of good tidings." He is to preach the gospel, the good news concerning Jesus Christ. Publicly, privately, as he has opportunity, this is his work. He may stay at a given locality for an indefinite time as a "located preacher," or he may go from place to place, but this is what he does. There are only two kinds of preachers: located or dislocated. Who wants to be a dislocated preacher?

God appreciates the work of preaching. First Corinthians 1:18,21, "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God...For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to*

save them that believe." Preaching the gospel is considered by some to be foolishness. But this is the way God has chosen to make His plan of salvation known to mankind.

Romans 10:13-15, "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*"

God Wants Preaching

If God is pleased with the work of preaching, that is all that really matters. Preachers must not attempt to please men, but God. This often brings him into conflict with those who would attempt to manipulate him to their satisfaction when his first loyalty is to the Lord.

Second Timothy 4:1,2,5, "*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine...But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.*" There it is in a nutshell. This work demands of the preacher great study, investigation, Biblical research, and nothing must be allowed to interfere with this number one priority. He is to use every responsible, Scriptural means he can to plant the seed of truth into the hearts of others.

He must be very careful of his message. Paul said, "*We preach Christ...*" Christ is the center of every sermon and lesson. If it were not for Him there would be no need for preaching. Even though Christ is offensive to many, preachers must preach Him. Truth often offends. It is not because Christ set out to be offensive, but because people love sin more than righteousness. Preachers know that many sermons may anger many people. But still he is derelict in his duty if he does not preach the "whole counsel of God."

The Seed And Soil

What is frustrating is to realize that a lesson, the same lesson, will convert some, but make others angry and drive them away.

This is because of the "soil" into which he attempts to plant the "seed." Even so, he must preach it as it is revealed in the Bible. Fortunate is the man that pleases men and God. But can such a one be found? It is not unlikely that those of whom nothing but good is said is one who soothes his hearers rather than teaching them all they should hear.

Whole Counsel

To please God he must preach both the positive and the negative side of the gospel. While some smart under the pressure of the truth, and grow angry at the preacher for delivering that truth to their ears, still this is his work. Preachers are often criticized when he is doing his God-given duty by the very ones who ought to be "holding up his hands" and encouraging him in his faithfulness. Preachers like friends, respect kind words and encouragement as much as anyone. But he does not seek that at the high cost of compromising truth or soft pedaling the gospel to please men rather than God.

Is it not true that some sing the praises of a preacher when he proclaims truth they already accept? But what about those times he preaches the truth that "rubs them wrong"? Many in the church love to hear about faith, repentance, confession, and baptism, and well they should for this is God's plan for saving man. But they will attempt to destroy the work and reputation of the preacher if he teaches against worldliness, commends the necessity of attendance at worship, or says and does anything that contradicts their prejudices, offends their business, or exposes their sins. Nothing is more slimy, repulsive, and unchristian than the attempt to undermine a preacher by picking him to death, belittling his work, and raising opposition to him because the truth he preaches runs counter to that person's conduct and thought. Believe me, this is not an unusual response to truth that many preachers have suffered. He is often attacked in the most sneaky, underhanded, crude, rude, and back-biting fashion. If he is unwilling to "go along" with error or hold back some truth. God will not hold such servants of the devil guiltless.

A Shortage

There is a shortage of preachers. There are far more who profess to be preachers than there are faithful gospel preachers.

But much of the shortage is due to the misunderstanding of the work of preachers. Young men are discouraged from preaching because they see the unfair double standards, impositions, and abuse heaped upon preachers who will not surrender to the whims of faithless men. Preachers have become second class citizens in the kingdom, unless they have some academic degree from some "clergy training system." There is not enough respect and support for those who know the book and will preach it faithfully. Many preachers are doing just exactly what God says preachers are to do, but many are so unfamiliar with Biblical teaching regarding preachers that they do not recognize his work as being what God wants. They want him to become everything for everybody. A wise preacher will not try to do that. It is commonplace for congregations to "fire the preacher, but keep their problems."

Duties To The Preacher

Just as preachers have duties to God and their brethren, the brethren have duties to the preacher. This ought not be overlooked. Most preachers will exhange hours with most members and would gain them more leisure. Most will exchange pay with most members for preparation required, effort expended, insecurity endured, and abuse received. Most preachers persist in preaching because they love the truth, the souls of men, and in spite of obvious disadvantages in many ways, he appreciates the advantages and opportunities to serve God and his fellowman.

I am proud to be a preacher. God had but one Son and He was a preacher. There is no honest labor in which a human being can engage that is any more honorable or necessary than preaching the gospel. He should put his mind to the task, and brethren should support him in it.

Whosoever

Whoever preaches to you, whenver or wherever, you better hope and pray that he is of the sort that will not compromise the truth or bow before pressures to alter it, water it down, or ignore it. You better pray he will teach you the *"whole counsel"* regardless of the cost to himself. You better hope he has the courage and conviction to stand for the right against whatever odds. Anything less than that could well blind your eyes to truth

you need and lead you into paths that will damn your soul. You better pray that the preacher sticks with *"thus saith the Lord"* and wavers not from it. You better expect him to withstand the inroads of error from whatever direction and/or source.

The preacher lives under the awesome warning of God to Ezekiel regarding the watchman (Ezekiel 33:1-9). He must be a watchman that will sound the trumpet clearly, distinctly, faithfully, and without compromise. Which kind of watchman do you really prefer? If you ever reach the point that you no longer want the full truth, then you have become like those Paul mentioned in Second Timothy 4:3,4, who want not sound doctrine but teachers who will tickle their ears.

There is no much more that can and ought to be said regarding this great work of preaching, both from the preacher's position and from the hearer's. But if these few words will accomplish some degree of respect for the Word, and those who proclaim it faithfully, then good will have been done.

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A Practice To Be Avoided

"Give the devil his due!" is sometime heard. The idea is that even the devil can at times seemingly produce something worthwhile. But we really wonder about that. He is the prince of darkness and there is no light in him.

Every false teacher we have ever heard or after whom we have read produces something now and then that sounds and looks pretty good. Some of the denominationalists will occasionally preach a rather decent sermon on some subjects, such as morality. But because they now and then say what is right are we without responsibility to present them as someone reliable and trustworthy? Cannot we teach truth without giving the credit to some false teacher who on some point taught the truth? Just why some wish to exalt those who teach error, even when they may be teaching the truth, only enhances the influence of the false teacher.

We often read articles that faithful brethren publish but are written by liberals and digressives. Whether intended or not, copying articles of those who lead the way into apostasy can only expand their influence. Brethren, preach the truth and do not leave the impression that a false teacher can be trusted.

Much Ado About Nothing



JAMES W. BOYD

Advocates of modern versions try to justify the new books by attacking the King James Version. One point of attack is First John 5:17. *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one."*

While there is evidence that this verse does not belong in the text, there is also evidence that it does. I believe it belongs where it is. But consider what the verse teaches.

Man is not at liberty to add nor subtract from God's Word. If it does not belong, it teaches nothing that is not taught elsewhere; namely, Deity testifies of Christ and while three persons there is but one Godhead. If it does belong, it teaches nothing additional to what is taught elsewhere. So nothing is added or subtracted by it regardless of what disposition one makes of it. We should admit this.

Defenders of modern versions seemingly have never come to grips with the real issue regarding the modern versions. The issue is doctrine, true or false. To attack reliable versions trying to establish those proven to be unreliable is beneath honorable argumentation.

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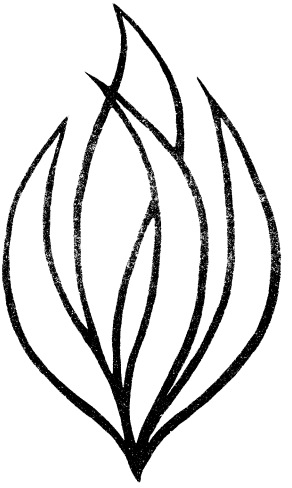

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 5**

Loose Him, And Let Him Go

The Bible student will recognize the title of this lesson as the words of Jesus that were spoken at the climax of one of the more momentous events during His earthly ministry. That was the time of the raising of Lazarus from the dead as recorded in John 11:1-45.

That account is an inspired history that tells of one who was once physically dead but returned to life. Unlike many who claim to have returned from the dead today, we do not read of Lazarus reviewing his "experiences" that occurred during his death and thereafter. The importance of the event actually lies in what it reveals concerning Christ and God, the Father. John 1:18, *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."* Hebrews 1:3 identifies Jesus as the *"brightness of his glory and the express image of his person."* John 14:8,9,11, *"Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?...Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me..."* As Jesus is revealed, so the Father is also revealed. In this event of raising Lazarus, we take note of several characteristics of Jesus.

Lazarus Is Sick

The record begins with Jesus beyond Jordan where John first baptized. Word came that Lazarus was sick in Bethany. He was the brother of Mary and Martha. *"Lord, behold, he who thou lovest is sick."* But Jesus did not react as we probably would, going immediately to his side. Jesus knew this was an opportunity to glorify God and identify Himself as the Son of God. He remained where He was for two more days, then left for Judea.

It was dangerous for Him to go because *"the Jews of late sought to stone"* Him. After Jesus explained to His disciples that Lazarus had died, even they were determined to follow Him into

the area of danger. *"Let us go that we may die with him."*

Do not we see the great love Jesus had for His friends? Are we not impressed with His sense of duty toward God and His mission on earth? We are shown His matchless courage in face of anger and danger. But even more to the benefit of others, He was able to provoke courage and confidence in the minds of His disciples to the extent they were willing to risk themselves in order to follow Him. He was such a positive example of leadership.

Arrives At Bethany

When Jesus first arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. He was first met by Martha. *"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee."* The confidence she had in Jesus and the knowledge of His relationship to the Father is quite evident. She was sure Jesus could have prevented the death of Lazarus. But even though He had been absent at the time when she would have had Him present, her confidence in Him was not shaken in the least. That she expected Jesus to raise her brother from the dead is not evident, however, from what transpires. She was simply saying, in terms we often use, "If only you could have come sooner."

Their conversation continued. *"Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus saith unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."* (John 11:23-27).

There is much revealed concerning Christ in that passage. The words spoken between them were "deep water" for Martha and for us. She had hope in the eventual resurrection, as Jesus had taught. *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29). This truth is a great comfort to all who are faithful followers of Christ when they are called to lay to rest the bodies of their faithful brethren and loved ones taken by

physical death.

The Power

But Jesus means far more than the immeasurable and eventual resurrection. He proclaims Himself as the power behind the resurrection. He is the conqueror over death as much as He was conqueror over disease. He is the source of life. He leads mankind to victory over the last enemy, which is death. Furthermore, the life that He offers is an eternal life. This life can belong to one and all by believing in Him. This faith, which in the Scriptures is always an active, obedient faith, is underscored in verse twenty-six. The life of which He spoke here is spiritual life. As evidence of His power to give spiritual life, He would show His power over physical death. He did this at the tomb of Lazarus, at His own tomb, and will show it again with His coming and the resurrection of all in the graves.

To what extent Martha grasped His teaching we can only wonder. But one thing she did know and was certain, Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Messiah that was prophecied to come. She confessed that truth regarding Him. While she might not have fully understood the extent of the blessings received in Christ (and who would dare say that he does?), she did lay hold on the basic, fundamental, and essential truth about Jesus. This truth is that which He wants all people to recognize and from which to receive benefit. This truth is the foundation upon which everything else regarding Christianity is founded (Matthew 16:16-18).

Later Events

The events that followed tell us more about our Lord. He was later met by the other sister, Mary, who came quickly to the tomb and to Jesus. The scriptures say that some thought she was going to the tomb to mourn. When she saw Jesus she said, *"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."* She, too, believed in the power of Jesus to spare her brother, if only He had been present. When Jesus saw her weeping, He was obviously moved with compassion and sympathy, and the shortest verse of Scripture in the Bible records, *"Jesus wept."* Bear in mind that His friend had died and His friends were in grief. While He was Deity, He was also humanity, fashioned as a man (Philippians 2:8), and tempted in all points as are we

(Hebrews 4:15). None can deny the compassion of our Lord toward those who suffer. Some standing by commented, *"Behold, how he loved him!"*

Then Jesus commanded the unusual and unexpected. *"Take ye away the stone."* One sister objected because the body had been dead four days and doubtless, lacking the embalming measures commonly practiced today for all, decay had already begun its process. But Jesus insisted that it be done. *"Said I not unto the, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"* (verse 40).

Then Jesus prayed, *"Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me."* Here we learn the real reason for this entire episode. It was to provide evidence so the observers would believe in Him. People now, having this testimony from the Word of God also have evidence of His Deity. John wrote, *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."* (John 20:30,31). In all of this we see the intense concern Jesus had for the spiritual welfare of all mankind.

He Arose

Then came the climatic moment. *"And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them. Loose him, and let him go."* (verses 43-44).

Let us now raise the question, and it is not the first time it has been raised. In light of these things, as Jesus once asked the Phraisees, *"What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?"* (Matthew 22:42). He once asked His disciples, *"But whom say ye that I am?"* John 11:45 shows that many believed on Him because of this, but not all. Some went away to report the incident, but only to criticize and find fault with Him.

Sometimes people are heard to say that if they could see a miracle as those people did that they would believe. But why would they so reason? Are they really that different from people living then? Some saw the miracle and did not believe. Why would one necessarily conclude he might do differently? Do we

not realize that the same power behind the miracle is the power behind the inspired testimony of that miracle? To fail to believe on the basis of the divine testimony is to deny the power behind it. If one really believes that God is real and has all power, he will believe what God says as readily as he believes what God has done.

If you will properly consider what the inspired record has to say regarding the Christ, will you not believe and obey? What do you think of Christ? Is He the Son of God? Realizing that the evidence demands that you conclude that He is, why do you not come to Him now? The eternal life that He brings will be yours.

† † † † †

Blood In Salvation

Hebrews 9:22, *"And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."*

There were several means of *"purification"* under the Old Law, depending on what was being purified and the procedure to be followed. Sometimes it was with water, fire, or a combination of elements. These were the exception to the general rule that there was the use of blood.

There is no remission of sins apart from the shedding of blood. To this law there was, and is, no exception. Every sin required a payment, some kind of atonement, a cleansing. Blood was required.

This statement we accept inasmuch as it comes from God's book. Out of respect for what God has said we do not question the truthfulness of it. To try to explain why this is true may be beyond our ability. The fact remains it is according to the wisdom of God that such be the case. It is a cardinal point in the doctrine of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. While modernists seek to dismiss the efficacy of blood, the Scriptures continue to teach that there is no remission or redemption for man from his sins without blood. Such is God's revelation and will.

Blood Used

There was much animal blood shed during the former dispensations prior to the system of Christ. But animal blood did not forgive sins. At best sins were rolled forward, so to speak, and the sacrifices were offered repeatedly. Hebrews 10:4, *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."* Earlier in the chapter the explanation is given. *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because the worshippers once purged should have no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year."* (Hebrews 10:1-3).

Hebrews 9:11-14, *"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"*

His sacrifice was once, and for all, and paid the price justice demanded because of sin. Hebrews 10:19, *"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* We can declare with confidence that principle of God that without the shedding of blood there is no remission.

Eat No Blood

In every dispensation man has been forbidden to eat blood. From Adam to the flood, man was a vegetarian (Genesis 1:29). After the flood, man was permitted to eat animal flesh (Genesis 9:3,4). Even so, man could not eat the blood as he ate the flesh. Animal sacrifices had been offered all along, but the blood was not to be eaten. Man was prohibited from shedding the blood of his fellowman (Genesis 9:6).

In the Mosaic Age, *"Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings. Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even*

that soul shall be cut off from his people." (Leviticus 7:26,27). *"And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul...For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off."* (Leviticus 17:10-12,14).

In the Christian age many things were different from former ages. But regarding the eating of blood, the law changed not. Acts 15:20,29 *"But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood...That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well."* Acts 21:25, *"As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication."* The reason given throughout is because the life was in the blood.

Jehovah Witnesses have concluded that this also prohibits taking blood transfusions. But taking blood through the digestive system and taking a transfusion are not the same. Being plunged under water while swimming is not the same as baptism, although there are similarities. Having a hand cut off by accident, and having it amputated are similar but not the same. There is no passage in Scripture that prohibits man from taking advantage of blood transfusions. By such reasoning, taking any medication that was from outside one's body would be condemned. This is not God's will, but a doctrine that began around 1942.

Blood Is Special

Blood has always been considered special by the Lord. God has used blood many times for many purposes. Blood protected the Israelites from harm just prior to their leaving Egypt. The blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels and

when God passed through the land He promised, *"When I see the blood I will pass over you."* Though the firstborn of Egypt died, not so with the Israelites. In similar principle now, when the blood of Christ, *"the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,"* (John 1:29), is applied, God will spare us from spiritual death in hell.

Under the Mosaic System, on the tenth day of the seventh month the high priest, being alone in the tabernalce, would enter the Most Holy Place, but *"not without blood."* (Hebrews 9:6,7). He would sprinkle blood upon and before the mercy seat. The mercy seat denoted the special presence of God and His mercy toward Israel. God's mercy was available because of the blood of the sacrifice. All of this was a type of things to come concerning the blood of Jesus Christ.

Mercy By Blood

We, too, have access to the mercy of God and His presence through the shedding of the Lord's blood at Calvary. This is why we read that we are *"justified by his blood,"* (Romans 5:9), *"having made peace through the blood of his cross,"* (Colossians 1:20), the church purchased by His blood, (Acts 20:28), and how God set Christ forth *"to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,"* (Romans 3:24).

Both the Old and New Covenants were dedicated with blood, (Hebrews 9:18; 10:29). Just as those things under the old were dedicated by blood, so what we do under the new has also been sanctified by His blood.

Realizing that our salvation is dependent on the blood of Christ, that we are purified by His blood, sanctified (set apart) by His blood, we must understand how to reach His blood and apply His blood for our benefit. The application cannot be ignored if we are to be saved. Let us illustrate: A man may have dirty hands, desiring that they be clean, knowing that soap and water are available that will clean them. But before the cleansing agent will accomplish the desired and needed purpose that agent must be applied. Many has a dirty sin-stained soul, with a desire to be clean, knowing that the cleansing agent for his soul is the blood of Christ. But the blood will not clean until applied.

Reaching The Blood

The blood of Christ was shed in His death on Calvary (John

19:31-34). We are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4), where His blood was shed. We reach the benefit of His blood then and there because in baptism is where God applies to our soul the agent that cleanses us from sin. It is not water by which we are made spiritually clean, even though water is the element into which we are baptized (immersed). We are saved by His blood. As Paul told the Romans (Romans 6:16-18), when they obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, the doctrine being the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and baptism the form of it, then they were no longer servants of sin but became servants of righteousness.

We can stay clean by the blood of Christ (First John 1:6,7), *"If we walk in the light as he is in the light,"* which means faithfulness to our Christian responsibilities. As long as we are faithful, we remain in contact with His blood, that is in His body, (as our blood is in our body), and His body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23).

Christ said that His blood was *"poured out for many."* He died for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). By dying, He made possible man's salvation. God, through blood, saves man from the wages of sin. Just as our physical blood gives life, so the blood of Jesus Christ gives eternal spiritual life. Furthermore, *"without the shedding of blood there is no remission,"* (Hebrews 9:22).

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(from page 16)
ourselves in thinking we are something when we are nothing, or at best, very little benefit to the church. Is it not time we all abandon the "they" attitude about the church and nurture a "we" attitude toward it?

Brethren, be faithful and demonstrate loyalty to what you say you love. Guard your tongue, have an attitude to do right, and let that attitude be evident in your deeds. Attend regularly and faithfully. Give liberally and cheerfully. Assume your rightful share of the responsibility to assure the success of the collective efforts of brethren in your community. Know your Bible. Hold up the hands of faithful brethren who preach it. You can be an asset to the cause of Christ rather than a liability. Learn to carry, not have to be carried. Learn to pull, and not always have to be pushed. Learn to assist and not demand assistance. Keep up, rather than having to be kept after.

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New International Version

Second Timothy 3:16,17, *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."* This passage affirms the verbal inspiration of Scripture, its infallibility, inerrancy, authoritativeness and authority. The Scriptures were originally penned in Hebrew, Greek, and small portions in Aramaic, as the writers were guided by the Holy Spirit. Our language is English. Therefore, we read a translation of what the Holy Spirit provided. This discussion shall not deal with translations generally, but with one particularly.

The New International Version is among many "modern speech" versions published today. It is very popular and upheld generally by the religious world. It is accepted as reliable by many brethren. But is it a reliable version? It makes a difference! Being accepted by some, even most, is not the criteria to use to determine its acceptability. Does it truly reveal all God has said or what God has said?

Opinion Or Faith

Some contend that which version one uses is merely a matter of opinion. We agree it is a matter of opinion which reliable version one might use. But is not the faith involved when we assume a version to be reliable when it is not? We are confident that many have been sold to accept the NIV by those who are more concerned to have something new rather than what is true.

The NIV first came on the scene in the 1970's, produced by the New York Bible Society, claiming to be a new version. But in many instances it is a new book, as we shall prove. It was compiled by people from various denominations, using what they called an "electic" text (no standard text, but an undisciplined random text determined by conscience). This admits the version is the result of negotiation. It admits having "fidelity to the thought of the New Testament writers," but not necessarily what the writers actually wrote. It is therefore a commentary produced by denominationalists as they were guided by their consciences and the results of their negotiations.

But we should want the words of the New Testament writers accurately translated, not what some denominationalists thought they may have meant. Already the NIV has undergone many changes which challenge the integrity of its producers. We wish to offer several reasons for saying the NIV is an unreliable Bible.

Omissions

There are many omissions, and many portions that are included are footnoted so they might be held suspect as being true Scripture. Many have objected to the Reader's Digest Bible which has omitted sixty per cent of Scripture. Thomas Jefferson once produced a New Testament that omitted so much of the New Testament. The NIV has done the same thing on a lesser scale. This is a valid criticism also of the American Standard Version which is very literal in what it translates, but there are even portions of Scripture left from it, and without just cause.

The NIV implies the last twelve verses of Mark 16 do not belong in the Bible. What does that text teach? It speaks of appearances of Jesus after His resurrection, His ascension, the Great Commission, conditions of salvation, the purpose of miracles, and Christ taking His place by the right hand of God. Are these minor matters? But someone complains that these things are taught elsewhere, and this is true. But what right does man have to omit the truth here? If men can take the liberty to omit truth here, what is to prevent them from taking out truth anywhere else at any other time they might choose?

The story of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11) is another example. It is stated that "the most reliable early MSS omit..." this passage. The truth is that ninety-eight per cent of textual evidence demands its inclusion and only two highly suspect manuscripts omit it. These same two manuscripts omit Hebrews from 9:14 onward, and most of Revelation. The oldest evidence includes the passage.

Then there is the omission of the confession of the Ethiopian prior to his baptism (Acts 8:37). Numerous references to Christ and His name are omitted, calling Him simply Jesus, sometimes calling Him Christ but then omitting His name of Jesus, separating Jesus from the Christ. Entire verses are omitted. Portions of scores of passages are omitted. A. G. Hobbs has compiled five booklets discussing this "version," in which he lists passage after passage that the "translators" have left out. I contend this matters. We do not have in the NIV the whole

counsel of God as given by the Holy Spirit even in our own tongue.

Contradictions

There are fundamental contradictions in the NIV. One that is characteristic of so many of these "new versions" is the contradiction between Matthew 5:17 and Ephesians 2:15 that teaches Jesus did not destroy but did fulfill the Old Law. They have Paul saying Jesus did destroy it. It is said that Christ said He did not come to abolish the law, but Paul says He did. When you bring that before the advocates of the NIV they often will respond, "Oh, I have heard that one before." Sure they have, and they will keep on hearing it. Do they think because this gross contradiction has been cited before that it is no longer a valid criticism?

False Doctrines

There are false doctrines taught in the NIV. We do not charge that it contains no truth. Most all the "versions" do. But we charge that it teaches error, error that if believed and followed, will condemn the soul. It teaches the doctrine of inherited sin, original sin, that one is born depraved (Psalm 51:5). You may believe that doctrine but the Bible does not teach it, but the NIV does. Ezekiel 18:2, Romans 14:12, Matthew 18:3; 19:14 all disprove such a doctrine. One scholar on the faculty at Harding Graduate School even said on television that there was no difference between the teaching of the NIV and the KJV in this passage. His comment is ridiculous and absurd, prejudicial, and dishonest, because he wants people to swallow the NIV.

It changes Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 to read that the cause God accepts for divorce to be "marital infidelity." But the cause is fornication. There are many kinds of infidelities, but the Scripture specifies which one. One can beat his wife, not support her, not cohabit, but never commit fornication. This passage plays into the hands of a world that condones divorce for whatever reason one may want it.

In Ephesians 5:19 it uses the term "make music" when the text says God said "sing." You can make music many ways, but singing is specific.

Romans 7,8, contain nine instances, Galatians 5 has four instances, and Ephesians 2:3 one instance where the NIV

speaks of the "sinful nature" of man. Such is not even in the text. This is blatant Calvinistic terminology that contends man is born with a sinful nature. But man acquires a sinful nature by sinning. There is no justification for translating the word "flesh" to mean "sinful nature."

Romans 1:17 in the NIV teaches salvation by faith only "from first to last." This is simple a false doctrine.

Only Begotten

Regarding "only begotten," monogenes, the NIV says it means the redundant "one and only." The truth is that Christ is not the one and only child or son of God. This is a similar error of the Revised Standard Version. Monogenes demands it be translated "only begotten," which expresses His Deity. One of our liberal and digressive self-proclaimed "scholars" says it merely means "unique." Another says it means "especially precious." Christ is unique, but so is each man unique. But monogenes informs us what that uniqueness is. Talk about changing words! Especially precious! This is nothing but commentary that robs the passage of its affirmation of the Deity of Christ. The "unique" scholar once taught just as I am teaching but somewhere along the line he got "smart."

Acts 2:27,31 translated "hades" as merely the grave. This is materialism akin to Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines. It has Second Peter 3:10 saying when Christ returns the world will simply be "laid bare," not burned up. I once told a church in Texas from the looks of things in the territory I had to come through to get the them that Christ must have already come there. It was sure laid bare.

They footnote Matthew 24:34 that "generation" can mean "race." This is changing the word to fit premillennialism. The Jewish race still exists. The prophecies of Christ concerning the destruction of Jerusalem were to happen in that generation, not after the Jewish race ceased to exist. Acts 10:35 removes the word "righteousness" for "right doing." There is more to righteousness than simply "right doing." (Psalm 119:105). How much more evidence does one need to hold the NIV as unreliable? These instances can be, and have been, multiplied in extensive works that review the NIV. Does it matter to those who read?

We can justifiably be critical of the looseness of the translators where they may make a fairly decent commentary on a verse,

but their commentary is not a translation. Matthew 26:41 changes "enter not into temptation" to read "not fall" into temptation. One might accidentally fall into temptation, but one can also deliberately enter into temptation. Why not leave the passage as God said it? To call the "mote" a "speck of sawdust" (Matthew 7:3) may illustrate the term but it does not translate it. The "translators" were just too "free" to inject what they thought more than what God said.

Commentary

We need to note the difference between a commentary or a paraphrase and a translation of the Word of God. Preachers comment. They even paraphrase. But only the text can be cited as authority. Yet, the NIV is an admitted commentary and paraphrase, but presented as the text. This is simply not trustworthy.

Those who promote the NIV do so in some of the most unscrupulous ways. They have charged people with not wanting others to have the Bible. The truth is we want people to have the Bible, not a perversion of it. They claim opponents of the NIV do not want to update language. This is a lie. We oppose error, not truth. That words change meaning is acknowledged. That words become archaic and obsolete is true. But archaic and obsolete words are not "errors," and should not be "corrected" with words that do not even mean the same things under the guise of updating language. This is dishonest manuevers by modern speech advocates.

Attacks Against KJV

But some, while piously professing "love" for the King James Version, have attacked it, can hardly ever find anything decent to say about it, and produce the most ridiculous objections to it. They think if they can discredit the KJV, which they used to never do, that somehow this will make the NIV more reliable. Rubel Shelly, well known at this writing for his numerous false positions, once said, "When you read the King James Version, the American Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, and the New International Version, you are reading the very words of God." How can this be when they do not say the same things, do not present the same truths even in synonymous terms, do not teach the same doctrine in many

instances?

Some, like Jack Lewis, have openly declared that elderships do not have the authority to make congregational policy that omits the modern versions from public use and endorsement. To push the perversions into the brotherhood they even deny fundamental truth about the role and duty of elderships. They want everybody to use and promote, endorse and teach from whatever they want to, and elderships just sit back and shut up about it. So is the manner of modern version proponents.

To gain an insight into the reliability of Shelly, he is the same man that has taught there are Christians in all denominations, that we cannot tell who is saved or lost, that God's grace will cover the impenitent, sinning Christian, that one does not have to know he was baptized for the remission of sins for baptism to be valid. Shall we listen to such false teachers and their doctrines, even when they try to cram false versions down the throats of brethren?

These things mean something to those who want truth. Seldom, if ever, do advocates of modern versions deal with such things. To oppose them is to be a Pharisee and traditionalist, according to them. They have been more successful in "shouting down" the opposition to modern versions than meeting the issue. They really have never grasped the issue. The issue is not translation, but mistranslation. It is not versions but perversions. The issue is false doctrines versus the truth. There be many who would not tolerate the preacher teaching from the pulpit what the NIV teaches, but turn around and promote the NIV as reliable. Can you imagine a more ignorant inconsistency?

Easy To Read

But some contend that it is so easy to read. But are we not concerned about what we are reading. It is far easier to define what is sometimes called an archaic term than to have to try to explain why such obvious false doctrines are included in modern passages. The average length of words in the KJV is five letters. Is it too hard for these liberal "scholars," the ones who are promoting them loudly? Such versions as the KJV have been read and understood for years on end by millions. Why is it that suddenly it is beyond everybody? Is it not because some want these new things to break from the past so they can inject their new ways? We contend so. Nobody has objection to updating

words, but that does not justify rewriting the Bible and calling it God's Word.

Unreliable

I cannot and will not endorse such books as the NIV so long as truth means anything to me. The NIV, like most modern versions, are dangerous to the stability and welfare of the church because it not only contains fatal error but because it reflects the willingness of brethren to just go along with it.

The colleges have been in the foreground promoting the modern versions. Some were doing it even as they denied doing it. They were lying through their liberal teeth, and when their hand was called you never heard nor saw any more vicious conduct than they exhibited. Why do people who say they love truth want to endorse and promote as reliable any book that removes evidences of the Deity of Christ that God has provided? Why uphold a book that leaves out precious statements of truth? Why a "Bible" that teaches denominational dogmas that are false? Why lean and uphold a volume that contradicts itself, but more significantly, contradicts what God has given?

Warning

I warn you against the NIV and the low road taken by many of those who are promoting it. I urge no use of those who show themselves to care no more for truth, regardless of their pious words, than to endorse it, defend it, and encourage its adoption. Those who do so do not serve well the cause of Christ, I care not who they are or how faithful they once appeared to be. God's warnings against tampering with His Word are too plain for any true disciple of Christ to want to lend any kind of support to it. Let us be a people of The Book, not men or just some book.

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(from page 24)
there be an evening worship, or a mid-week Bible study? Would the aged be visited, the sick comforted, the weary encouraged, the bereaved consoled, the orphan clothed? Would there be gospel meetings? Would the newcomers be greeted and welcomed? Would the Bible be studied at home? Would many prayers ascend except in times of distress?

Let us be fair and honest with ourselves, not deceiving

(to page 9)

The Jailor's Conversion

On Paul's second missionary journey he came to Troas and saw a vision of a man from Macedonia saying to him, *"Come over into Macedonia and help us."* Paul said he was obedient to this vision (Acts 16:10-12). Several events follow this last passage that are also recorded in Acts 16, such as the conversion of Lydia, and the time when Paul and Silas cast out the evil spirit from a soothsaying maiden. This action prompted considerable opposition against Paul because those who were using her special abilities became angry. *"And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks."* (Acts 16:19-24).

While they were in prison there began a series of events, nine in number, that resulted in the conversion of the jailor. In this study we can see the process involved in the conversion of a person to Christ.

Unaware

One, we must be mindful that at the time he put Paul and Silas in stocks he was not aware that he was a spiritually lost soul. He was busy in his occupation as a soldier of Rome, a keeper of the prison, with the prestige, power, and recognition such a profession brought him. Religiously, he was a pagan, and of the race of the Gentiles.

Paul and Silas had been preaching in the city and their preaching, unlike that which some call preaching today that disturbs nobody, stirred the city and provoked a controversy. If one should ask him at this point, "What do you think of the preaching of these men?" he would likely have no real opinion one way or the other. He did not consider it to be of any

concern to him. He was lost, completely without hope, but did not know it and was not concerned about it. The reason for mentioning this first fact and his indifference to the gospel is because there are so many people in the world today in exactly the same situation. They are pre-occupied with many other things, but lost because they are not in Christ where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10).

Shaken

Two, God sent an earthquake and the jailor was physically and spiritually shaken before the series of events came to an end. *"And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awakening out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled."* (Verses 26,27). It was his responsibility to keep the prisoners secure and the penalty for allowing any to escape was disgrace and death. Rather than face the disgrace, he was going to kill himself.

Sometimes people have to be shaken in some manner before they realize the spiritual danger they are suffering. Tragedy strikes before some ever open their eyes. They have to have a personal "earthquake" like financial ruin, disease, near death for themselves, or the death of a loved one. Something has to break their confidence and trust in the worldly things and cause them to face the reality of eternity. Such an "earthquake" often opens the mind sufficiently to allow the sowing of the seed of truth into what was heretofore hardened ground. They have to be disturbed. Nobody ever comes to Christ unless they are first disturbed and loosed from their complacency and false security.

Concern

Three, he sprang into the place where his prisoners were, trembling for fear. Think of what had happened to this man. He went to bed perfectly satisfied, but at midnight things began to bring changes. He was made afraid. It is good sometimes to be made afraid, just plain scared, terrified. We can become so self-satisfied, self-sufficient, self-confident, that nothing but fright can cause us to realize our dependence on something other than

ourselves. This fear and trembling brought about fact number four.

Humility

Four, the jailor was humbled. The once proud and glorious officer was brought low, so low that he, a Roman, even ran to the prisoners, even the lowly and despised Jews, seeking aid from them. He fell down before them, asking a serious question.

The point we want to make here is that before we can be exalted, we must be humbled. Before we can be pleasing in the eyes of God we must be lowly in our own eyes. We do not need just a humble countenance and an outward show of piety, but to be the possessor of a genuine, sincere, submissive heart before God. Not until we accept our inability to save ourselves will we place our confidence in the only One that can save us. Jeremiah taught many years ago that we cannot direct our own paths (Jeremiah 10:23). In a humble frame of mind one is teachable.

What To Do

Five, the jailor asked a question of Paul and Silas. *"What must I do to be saved?"* The very question reflects some understanding on the part of the jailor at this point about salvation. It also reflected his knowledge that there was something he must do in obtaining salvation. It was no longer a matter that he could ignore.

Some have conjectured that the man was merely asking what he could do to spare his life from punishment. But this is not true for at least three reasons. (1) Prisoners would have no influence or power to deal with such as that. (2) There was no reason for him to fear punishment since all the prisoners were secure, even though their bands were loosed. (3) The answer Paul gives shows what "salvation" was under discussion, and it had to do with salvation through Christ. He was seeking the salvation that had been preached and had brought these men into the prison. He realized that there was something he had to do to be saved and he wanted to know what it was.

Answer

Six, Paul gave him the answer that anyone would give to another who knew as little about being saved as this jailor did.

He told him the very first thing to do was, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."* (Verse 31). To be saved, one must have faith (Hebrews 11:6). Paul did not say this was all he had to do, but this was the first thing anyone has to do once he has heard the Word and knows he is lost. Nothing here or anywhere else in the New Testament teaches that salvation is by faith alone. The very next fact proves that believing is just the beginning.

One additional comment is needed. If faith alone was all that Paul taught to be necessary for salvation, then Paul was also teaching that one person could believe for another in order to another to be saved. If Paul taught salvation by faith alone, he also taught that some could be saved on the basis of the faith of somebody else. Nobody who has any respect for Scripture at all would dare claim we can be saved because somebody else believes. Faith was the beginning step for this jailor and for his family if they were to ever be saved.

Gospel

Seven, Paul preached the gospel to this man so he would know what to believe. *"And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house."* (Verse 32). How could this man believe until he knew what to believe? *"Faith cometh of hearing..."* (Romans 10:17). How long this teaching required we have no information. It would include anything and everything concerning Christ, prophecies, His birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, kingdom, commands, promises, warnings, and many other areas of vital instruction. Certainly, whatever the man did thereafter to be saved was included in Paul's preaching the Word of the Lord.

Obeyed

Eight, *"And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his straitway."* (Verse 33). The jailor, and others of his family, obeyed what they were taught to do. Washing the stripes and wounds of the men he had previously caused to be beaten and sanctioned their imprisonment is evidence of genuine repentance. Obviously, Paul taught him to be baptized, and he obeyed. When the apostle taught the Word of God people wanted to be baptized. When many preach today they never even hear about it.

Becoming a Christian may well have been very costly for this man, but once he knew he was lost, knew what to do to be saved, he did not hesitate to act.

Rejoicing

Nine, *"And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house."* (Verse 34). Notice the rejoicing did not occur until the acts of obedience were accomplished. Again, notice the inclusion of the faith that he had. It included active, obedient faith, not just mental assent. Only a few hours earlier the man was spiritually lost. Now there was a family of Christians living in Philippi. And entire new life was opened to them. They were new creatures in Christ. They could look forward to a new future, a new relationship with God, a new hope and assurance that all was well with their souls. Heaven was before him and he had started his journey.

From this inspired record of this man's conversion we can learn what anyone, even today, must do to be saved. The question should be asked by everyone, and the answer is the same for everyone. Have you asked what you must do? Have you done as he did?

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What Am I Worth To The Church

There are many passages of Scripture that discuss the quality of character that is supposed to be possessed by those who follow Christ. Most of the epistles of the New Testament are directed to that end. While there is a desire among brethren to enlarge the numbers of people who profess to be members of the church (and this is proper because each number represents a soul), has there been the sufficient emphasis on the quality of character the Lord expects of the church member? Quantity without quality avails nothing. It is easier to measure quantity

than quality but much of Scripture is devoted to quality.

There are serious considerations each Christian must ponder as he lives his life before God and man while professing to be the Lord's disciple. Being a name on a church roll does not necessarily mean one has his name *"written in the book of life."* (Revelation 20:15; 21:27). Our lesson does not center on the value to the member of being in the church, but on what worth the member may be to the rest of the church. It should not have to be argued that each member has a duty to every other member. Nor should it be argued the possibility that many church members are deceiving themselves into thinking all is well with their souls. The churches of New Testament records had people who thought they were spiritually alive, but were spiritually dead (Revelation 3:1). Every congregation likely has its "dead weight" of inactive members who evidently think they shall ride into heaven on the good lives of other members and they are worth very little to the church. Some have obviously not put away the old man with his sinning ways but continue in sin even though they are church members. They want to take the blessings that are offered, but are unwilling to give the life that is required of them. Will you ask yourself, "What am I worth to the church?" It could be a spiritual eye-opener to seriously investigate and self-examine.

Self-Examination

Paul urged in First Corinthians 11:28, *"But let a man examine himself..."* Second Corinthians 13:5, *"Prove your own selves, whether ye be in the faith."* Galatians 6:3-5, *"For if a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden."*

Are you an asset or a liability to the church? Are your brethren sometimes ashamed of you, and for good reason, due to your conduct, your attitude, your manner of speech, the things in which you get involved, your habits? Do others have to constantly struggle to explain you because they are ashamed of your actions? Can they be at ease in your company, not fearing that you will burst forth with something profane, vulgar, uncouth, or degrading? There are people who evidently have more fear of a preacher than they do God, because they will be on guard about their conduct in his presence but fail to realize

how God is aware of them all the time.

Evil conduct by a church member gives a "black eye" to the church and hurts every member. God's people are like an epistle being read by other people (Second Corinthians 3:2). What do they read about the church of Christ as they "read" you? We have heard people comment regarding some brother that if every member was like him the church must be a wonderful church. But we have also heard people say regarding some member that if they represent the kind of church we are, they would never want to be a member of it.

Help Or Hindrance

Are you a help or a hindrance to the work the church undertakes? Some are always ready to do whatever they can to assist, and they are loyal and faithful to their duties. Others, who may be personally prevented from doing something, are strong moral supporters and encouragers in the work. But some drag their feet, do not help, will not help, cannot be counted on, often criticizing those who are busy. Which are you? Do you help or hinder? There were both kinds in yesteryear as the Bible reveals. Why should we think that both kinds do not exist today? One of the most revealing commentaries about a congregation is how the membership supports the Bible study periods and gospel meetings. It shows their attitude toward the truth, their interest in souls, their willingness to cooperate, and whether they will help or hinder the work.

Does the fact you are a member of some local church add strength and character to that church? Do people think better of the church because of you? Or do they get a distorted picture of Christ and those who are His disciples? How it hurts to have non-members say, "You people may preach godly living, but the members are tearing down what you preach faster than you can build up because of the manner of life they live." When those not yet in Christ observe you, are they inclined to want to be a Christian, or had they just as soon remain as they are?

If Like You

What kind of knowledge of the Bible would the church have if every member studied the Bible like you do? What if all had the same zeal, love, determination to know, and interest as you demonstrate? How many do we see sitting in the pews who

never come to Bible study, never read their Bible daily during a week, give Bible study no more than a few minutes in-and-out consideration during one sermon each week, and that not every week? Is not there something odd about that person who claims to love God and His will, but will show so little concern for he Bible? You simply are not an asset to the church when you say you love truth but neglect growth therein.

The same questions could be asked about visiting the needy, caring for the sick, reaching the lost, recovering the fallen, attending the aged, lifting the discouraged, and every other work that Christians can and ought to be doing. Such questions could be multiplied, but surely enough has been mentioned for you to get the idea. Whether you are just a "conscience soother" and a "dead weight" or a real "worker for the Lord" matters. We are not accusing, but asking questions that demand answers for which we must have the right answers before we meet God in judgment.

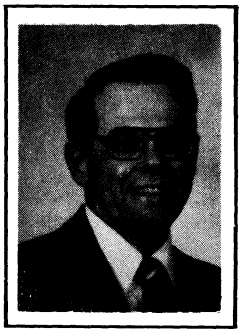
Let us make just a few other practical measurements of ourselves. A person who works for a business firm should present himself with a large degree of reliability, dependableness, faithfulness, loyalty, and enthusiasm toward his responsibilities. Should not we have at least these same qualities toward the body of Christ if we profess to be a part of it? As absence from your job ought be felt because you are not there, should not your absence from the activities of the church be felt? If one can be absent and not be missed very much it is likely he is not doing very much so that he is missed. Once a man and his wife went away for a vacation that extended over a month, and upon their return walked back into the church building announcing, "We're back." One asked them where they had been and had not known they were gone. They were offended, but should not have been. They only attended now and then, and seldom were involved in anything the church attempted. They really were worth very little to the welfare of the church. They were riders. If most of the membership had been as they were there probably would not even be a congregation nearby for anybody to attend.

Kind Of Church

The inevitable question must be raised: "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?" Would the contribution be sufficient to meet the obligations? Would

(to page 16)

God Overruled



JAMES W. BOYD

It is evident from the Scriptures that God intended to provide for mankind a system of salvation and that through His Son Jesus Christ. It is deserving of our attention how so many things were in readiness for Christ and His gospel at the time He came into this world.

The Bible reveals how God used the Jews to bring the plan of redemption to light. What may not be so evident from Scripture is the contribution made by both the Greeks and the Romans.

The language of the Greeks had become known throughout the world. This was the language God later employed in producing the inspired Scriptures. It was a tongue that would facilitate the spread of the gospel because people everywhere were familiar with it. Alexander's conquests had paved the way for the advance of the gospel.

The social and governmental unity provided by Rome was a tremendous advantage. Also, the roads they built made travel easier. Their system of "rights" and protections, although lacking, played a major role in the early growth of the church. Was is just a coincidence that such things were in readiness?

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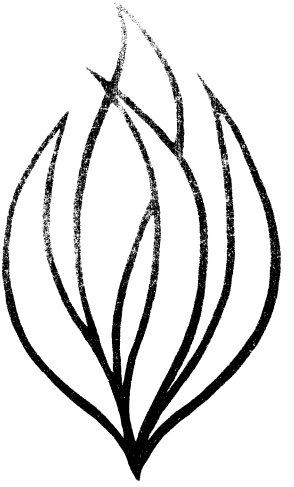

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 6**

Where Was, And Is, The Church

The period of history when the Roman Catholic Church ruled so much of Western society is called the Dark Ages, around 400 to 1400 A.D. Where was the true church of Christ during that span of years? Why is this question such an important one?

Members of the church of Christ reject being identified as a denomination. They are dedicated to the removal of denominationalism that has caused such widespread religious division and paved the way for the advance of atheism. They are intent on being just the church of which we read in the New Testament. They take seriously the prayer of Jesus in John 17 for unity among those who profess to follow Christ. With the desire that all people simply follow the Scriptures, they reject the creeds, disciplines, catechisms, manuals, prayer books, confessionals and other such "authorities" that are used by many in religion. The name "Christian" is the name disciples of Christ were called in Scripture and this is the name they seek for all to wear without other names that divide. To refer to those of the church of Christ as members of a denomination is to show contempt for their convictions, goals and practices. It is done either ignorantly or maliciously, either being reprehensible. Whatever be the motive of those who would call the church a denomination, it is a false charge, even though some who call themselves a "Church of Christ" may have adopted denominationalism and not remained a faithful church of the Lord.

The Pattern

Things religious should be done according to the New Testament pattern. The New Testament is the blueprint to follow in reproducing Christianity in our own century. When Moses was given directions for building the tabernacle (Exodus 25:40), he was instructed to build according to the pattern God gave him. This was repeated in Hebrews 8:5. Following other "gospels" was condemned (Galatians 1:6-9; Second John 9-11). We are to neither add nor take from God's Word (Revelation 22:18,19). This is that which faithful members of the churches of Christ are committed to do. We seek to do and

be what was done in the New Testament regarding what to believe, how to become a Christian, worship, work, organization, manner of life and all other matters of Christianity. Peter's teaching is taken seriously when he wrote, *"If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11). There should be a *"thus saith the Lord"* for religious authority and men should neither fall short of it nor presume to go beyond it. This purpose and mission cannot be wrong because it is what the Bible teaches is supposed to be.

Dark Ages

Daniel prophesied the establishment of the kingdom of God (Daniel 2) when he interpretted Nebuchadnezzar's dream in which he saw an image of four parts that Daniel said represented four empires. During the days of the fourth, Babylon being the first, God would establish His kingdom. The Roman Empire was the fourth empire and during that period the Lord's kingdom came, which is His church. But please notice that Daniel's prophecy said the kingdom would stand forever. So again we ask, where was the church during the days of the Dark Ages? It certainly was not the Roman Catholic Church, that apostate body that was foreign to New Testament revelation. Rather, it was the result of the apostasy which Paul predicted would come.

In Matthew 13, Jesus taught seven parables regarding the kingdom. Beginning with verse three He taught the parable of the sower sowing seed. The seed fell on various kinds of soil, soil which represents the hearts of people. Luke 8:11 identifies the seed as the Word of God. We note the varied reactions and responses by people to the teaching of the Word.

The Seed

The point of the parable is that the gospel. the seed, must be sown in the hearts of people. Whenever, wherever the gospel is preached, people hear it, believe it, and obey it, the Lord's church, His kingdom, will be produced. Even if one cannot trace congregations of faithful Christians down through the ages, and none can, so long as the seed remains the church has not been banished nor destroyed from the earth. Life is in the seed.

Let us illustrate. One may take kernels of corn, plant them, and reap a harvest of corn just like the harvest that formerly existed even if there had not been any harvest for many years

previously. The corn existed in seed form even if not as a stalk, ear or grain.

The seed of truth was sown on Pentecost and what was produced was the church belonging to Christ. If people will take that same seed and sow it today, can any other harvest come forth? Does not seed reproduce after its kind? New Testament Christians lived nearly two thousand years ago. Their religion was founded on the truth of God. Why should not people today take that same truth and be what they were?

No Line Necessary

Some place great emphasis on tracing a continual line of succession from Pentecost until now. This is neither possible nor necessary to have the Lord's church today. For any church to make an attempted tracing of its history, it must of necessity pass through the years of apostate bodies, various Protestant digressions, Romanism, and other tangents from the truth. Should we be descendants of such things? Those were churches that came into existence as a result of tares of false doctrines rather than the seed of the kingdom.

We actually know only fragments of the work of the apostles, the early history of the church, and what happened in succeeding years. Peter and Paul dominate the New Testament historical record and what other apostles did we have no inspired recaord to any large extent. It is entirely possible that faithful Christians have existed in various places down through the many years since Pentecost. We are not affirming it because we cannot prove it, even though now and then there are hints and traces of evidence in that direction. But what of that anyway? That is not what is important as far as our own need to be Christians and having the knowledge how to become and remain faithful Christians! Regardless of where members of the church may or may not have been during the Dark Ages or any other time since Pentecost, the seed, the Word of God, is with us in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). From it was can learn whatever we need and nothing is lacking therein.

Romanism is not the New Testament church. Its doctrines and practices vary too widely from God's revelation to deserve such an identification. The same is true regarding the Protestant denominational bodies. But there is a way to have the church, be the church, and know the truth.

Take God's pattern, the Bible. Follow it intently and faithfully. Either find the church that fits the pattern, or take the pattern and sow the seed and produce the church among people again. Therein one can learn everything that is necessary to being a member of the church revealed in the Bible.

The Right Church

This matter of identifying the Lord's church has too often been complicated by irrevelevant demands, assumptions, presumptions and misconceptions. Inasmuch as our salvation is at stake, it is time for plain words and unvarnished truth. Where was the church? If not in visible existence among men, it existed in seed form because the seed remained. Where is the church? Wherever people have heard, believed, obeyed and remain faithful in the doctrine of Christ the Lord's church exists. Churches that began at the wrong place, the wrong time, wearing the wrong name, practicing the wrong practices, teaching the wrong doctrine, organized the wrong way, worshipping the wrong way, cannot fit the inspired pattern. Our plea is for the church revealed in God's Word. This is right and cannot be wrong unless the Word itself is in error.

† † † † †

Follow The Blind Man

Read John 9:1-34 and become familiar with the account and the characters involved. Blind people often figure in Biblical events, especially in the New Testament and the miracles of Jesus and others. Opening the eyes of the blind, like one born blind, was considered impossible. But it had been prophesied that such would be a distinguishing mark of identification of the Messiah (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5).

Even in the Old Testament special consideration was given to the blind. Leviticus 19:14, *"Thou shalt not curse the deaf not put a stumblingblock before the blind..."* Deuteronomy 27:18, *"Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way..."*

The subject suggesting that we follow the blind man may

appear to contradict a warning of Jesus in Matthew 15:14, "*Let them alone; they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*" Jesus was not speaking of physical sight but warning against false teachers. We should not follow false teachers lest we be destroyed as well as they. But the sense in which we admonish to follow the blind man is to encourage us to imitate him in his attitudes and actions that will prove beneficial to us. We shall mention four qualities deserving of imitation. But first let us understand the blind man himself.

His Blindness Healed

The man had been born blind and his parents testified to that. His blindness was not due to any particular personal sin of which he or his parents were guilty. All afflictions are not directly tied to some personal transgression even though such things have resulted from sin coming into the world. Sometimes people have bad things to happen to them and they ask, "What did I do that God is punishing me?" True enough, we can bring calamity upon ourselves by sin, but hardships are common in life and not always due to the consequences of our guilt of sin. Jesus made this plain when he denied this man's blindness was because of his sins, but *"that the works of God should be made manifest."* The manner of healing was neither heard nor seen previously. Christ made clay from spittle, placed it on the man's eyes, told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam, and the man obeyed and came away seeing. This was a miracle by the power of the Son of God. The power was not in the spittle, clay, water or the man, but Christ. But please notice, the beneficent power of the Lord was not realized by the man until he did what the Lord told him to do. It is the same principle of grace and obedience. We are saved by the grace of God, but not until we obey his voice.

The feat was so remarkable that everyone did not believe it was even the same man they had known being blind. Some said he was the same one, while others said they did not think so. His parents identified him and confessed he was born blind, but they refused to say how he received his sight because the people had already been warned not to acknowledge Christ lest they should be put out of the synagogue. They were afraid to answer, but told the inquirers to ask the man himself.

Did you notice in your reading that he was asked, repeatedly, how he was healed, and he responded over and over the same

thing? (Verses 13-15; 17; 24,27). His answer was rejected as often as it was given. The enemies of Christ had such a mind set against Him that they refused to conform to what the evidence demanded. The man was berated and ridiculed and under this pressure we see the exceptionally remarkable qualities of the blind man come forth. These are the qualities we hold before us that are worthy of imitation.

Courage

First, we see his courage in confessing Christ as the One who healed him. Nearly everyone else was afraid to admit what they knew to be true. The penalty, exclusion from the synagogue, was more severe than just a denial of worship privileges. It would reflect on their character, their ability to earn a living among the people, their association with friends and family. They would be treated worse than lepers, being unwanted and despised. The enemies of Jesus had already decided to reject Christ and refused to give an credibility to evidence that would sustain His claim as the Son of God. Even the man's parents would not stand with him. But this man was willing to endure whatever consequences his confession brought him because he knew what was true.

It was outstanding then, and it is still so now, to find people with determination to be stedfast and loyal for what they know is true regardless of what others may or may not do or say. Most do not find it difficult to remain faithful when conditions are favorable. It is when the going gets tough that the tough get going. Too many have a religion of convenience rather than conviction. We commend the blind man and urge that we be courageous in standing for the truth as he did.

Faith

Second, his disposition was one of faith over prejudice. Inasmuch as it was considered impossible for one born blind to see, yet, when he came seeing, he believed Jesus was from God. This reminds us of the words of Nicodemus, John 3:2, *"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him."* The former blind man said, *"If this man were not of God he could do nothing."* (Verse 33). His attitude of faith overshadowed the attitude of others who defiantly stood in their

prejudices and refused to be swayed by the evidence.

The Pharisees said they knew about Moses, but as for Christ, *"we know not from whence he is."* The blind man caught the inconsistency they displayed and so should we. If they admitted they did not know about Christ, why were they so sure about their position against Him? Their trouble was they had already agreed not to believe regardless of what they heard or saw. They were in the unenviable position of those who seized Peter and John after raising a lame man in Acts 4, for they knew a notable miracle had been done, could not deny it, did not deny it, but refused to admit it just the same. Eyewitnesses were there, even the man himself, yet they denied it.

But the former blind man would not allow prejudice, or the pressure of other prejudiced people, to steer him away from the truth that he knew confidently.

Gratitude

In addition to his courage and faith, he was a man of gratitude. Our Lord taught people to be thankful for their blessings and to realize that God is the source of our blessings. It is common courtesy to say "thank you" to those who favor you. In our giving, give thanks. This man showed his gratitude in what he said and did.

When he met Jesus again, scripture says, *"He worshipped him."* (Verse 38). He acknowledge, *"A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash, and I went and washed, and I received sight."* He gave credit to the One who deserved it. All the glory and praise was for Christ. Why should we not also recognize our blessings, the source of them, and be demonstrative in offering thanks to God for what we receive, just as was true of this man?

Loyalty

Last, we must mention his loyalty to Christ even when few others were showing such loyalty. This is inseparable from his courage and faith. He was not loyal to the Pharisees, or even to his parents before he was loyal to the Lord. Even when prodded and harassed, he maintained his loyalty to Jesus. Possibly, this was because he had an open mind and was subject to being convinced of truth. We do not do well to allow anything to

distract us from looking to Christ and being loyal to Him.

Is it not worth our while to develop such characteristics as courage, faith, gratitude and loyalty? But the story is not quite over. There is something else to learn.

In verses 35-38, when Jesus and the man met again, Jesus asked him, *"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"* The man responded, *"Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?"* His response might be paraphrased, "Just show me where He is. I am ready to believe because I know what I know." When Jesus identified Himself to the man as God's Son, the man immediately answered, *"Lord, I believe."*

That day proved to be a day of great physical and spiritual gain for this man born blind. Those who will be of the same disposition as he can make today a day of great gain also.

† † † † †

Brethren, Lie Not

There once was a program called "To Tell The Truth." Surely, we recognize this is a noble and righteous deed suggested by the name of this program. The Scripture teaches, *"Thou shalt not bear false witness"* (Matthew 19:18). You may think it strange that church people need such a lesson as this because they ought to know better than to lie. But do we always act according to what we know? Lying is often excused and considered sophisticated. The government claims the right to lie; religions have the doctrine of mental reservation; and how many consider it all right to lie, if for a good cause? The end justifies the means with some people. Such a lesson is not needed just among the rough and uncouth people of the world, but few of that element will listen. Obviously, Christians need the lesson also because the inspired New Testament writers had much to say about it. Even those who are not liars need to be strengthened in speaking the truth.

Classify Sin?

Some classify sin as bad and not so bad. This is without Biblical authority, but it is commonplace. Sin by others is bad

while sin by ourselves is not so bad. Regarding lying, some talk about "white lies" and "black lies." But a lie is a lie. The average member of the church will look with contempt on fornication, murder, armed robbery, drunkenness and such like sins. But how many are disturbed over envy, jealousy, vengeance, gossip, greed, covetousness, and even lying? Is truth respected as is ought to be?

It is true that the immediate effects of some sins are worse than others. But sin in any form is a transgression of God's law (First John 3:4). We have not the right to look with liberality on lying and liars. Liars are listed alongside the worst kind of people in First Timothy 1:10.

Lessons against lying are needed because of the harm that a lie does. Good people may believe lies to their own destruction (First Kings 13). Congregations have been divided due to lies. Many church problems are aggravated because of lies. Homes are broken, friendships destroyed, suspicion, doubt, pain, hate and unhappiness are all created by lies. Reputations are ruined beyond total recovery because of lies. (Character cannot be destroyed by lies unless the one who is the victim of lies allows it). Church leaders and their families are branded viciously by lies. Some lie in order to defame and damage others while others lie through carelessness and indifference. But the tongue that lies defiles the liar. It can cause the soul to be lost.

There are at least three ways to promote lies. (1) Make a lie. (2) Believe a lie. (3) Repeat a lie. Let us consider each of these.

Creating Lies

To create or invent an untruth, being the origin of something false, a misleading half-truth in order to deceive and mislead is to give birth to a lie. One could say, "I have not seen that man drunk in a long time." One would think that the man may have been seen drunk at some time. But the truth may be that the man has never been drunk, but the way something is reported gives rise to a deception that is destructive to the man. Never start a lie in any manner. Speak the truth.

Receiving Lies

To be a willing recipient of a lie is to give the appearance of condoning it and agreeing with it. We may not always know when we have been told a lie, but it is always our right, even our

duty, to question what we hear. The Lord said, *"At the mouth of two or three withnesses let every word be established."* (Matthew 18:16). Especially is this necessary when you hear something degrading about another. Talebearers, scandalmongers are too numerous to ignore the need of verification. Do not be too quick to swallow all you hear lest you become an accomplice in propagating a lie.

Repeating Lies

Certainly, you are a liar when you repeat a lie. It is sinful to make, receive or repeat a lie. We can condemn ourselves if not careful in such matters.

May we suggest some practical rules about repeating tales. (1) As already suggested, make sure the report is true. (2) If it is not true, do not believe it or repeat it. You might be called to confirm what you have said. It would be embarassing for others to prove you are lying. (3) Even if some report is bad and confirmed, is it of real benefit for it to be repeated? Especially if the report can hurt the church or some brother or sister, why do we feel obligated to spread it abroad? Sometimes we have to distinguish between a person and the cause of Christ. Some person may not be what he ought to be, but shall we expose that person if it is going to do harm to the cause of Christ, maybe uprooting much good that the person in fault has done, even discrediting good efforts he has previously made? Once you let some report go forward, it is impossible to stop.

How much of this world's ills would die,
If all that entered ear or eye,
Would not escape from below the nose,
And we could learn our mouths to close?

Divine Teaching

Turn your attention to the following passages. *"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."* (Exodus 20:16). *"Thou shalt not take up a false report; put not thy hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness... Keep far from a false matter."* (Exodus 23:1,7). *"Ye shall not steal; neither shall ye deal falsely, nor lie one to another."* (Leviticus 19:11). *"Thou shalt not bear false witness."* (Matthew 19:18). *"Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth one with another; for we*

are members one of another." (Ephesians 4:25). *"Lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with its doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him."* (Colossians 3:9,10). *"Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maket a lie."* (Revelation 22:14,15). Such sentiments can be multiplied from the Word of God.

Falsehoods are works of darkness. Paul wrote, *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* (Ephesians 5:11). Lying is much like the whisperer, slanderer, gossiper. They are all cut from the same cloth and from a similar pattern.

Child Of Satan

To be a liar is to show yourself to be a child of the devil. John 8:44, *"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it."* Listen to Revelation 21:8, *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."*

Lying ruined Ananias and Saphirra. *"But Peter said, Ananias, Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?... And Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things."* His wife came later and showed her complicity in the lie with her husband and she also was taken up dead (Acts 5:3-10).

Denying Christ

The lie that will surely damn is the denial that Jesus is the Christ. *"I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is*

anti-Christ, that denieth the Father and the Son." (First John 2:21,21).

"Truth" is such a noble word, a divine concept, a righteous pattern for life. *"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). Since truth makes one free, lies place one in bondage. Would anyone contest the idea that God expects His children to tell the truth and all who hear can be assured that what they hear is true? Brethren, lie not.

† † † † †

Three Great Gifts

The theme of giving is as broad and beautiful as the religion of Christ because so much of the faith is based on giving. Too often we think of giving only in terms of monetary gifts, but there is far more involved in Christian giving than that.

Giving is as old as humanity. We read of Cain and Abel giving sacrificial gifts to God. Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek. The wise men brought gifts to the Christ as an infant. Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with costly ointment. Barnabas sold land and gave the money to the apostles.

A preacher once requested of a rich man a financial donation. The rich man responded that all the church ever thought was asking for money. He said, "You make Christianity just giving, giving, giving." The preacher ressponded, "Thank you for such an excellent commentary and definition of Christianity. If it were not for the practice of giving there would be no Christianity."

The very existence of the faith is dependent on the great gifts that have been offered. But did you ever consider that the continuation of Christianity is also dependent on giving? It came into being with gifts and it is sustained with gifts. The ultimate rewards are also gifts.

God's Gift

Notice the gift that brought Christianity into reality. It was God who gave. *"He spared not his own Son."* (Romans 8:32). This gift of God was made because of God's love for sinful humanity. It was not given in return for our love because he first love us.

(John 4:19). *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16).

Christ's Gift

Christ's gift was His own precious life. The power of salvation is the blood of the Son of God. He left His home in glory to become a human in order to be the sacrifice for man's sins. *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, thou he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."* (Second Corinthians 8:9). He gave His life, His blood, that we could be ransomed and made spiritually alive from the death of sin.

His death was a shameful one on the cross, at least, shameful in the eyes of His enemies. Yet, it was glorious in the eyes of God and those who trust Him. *"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."* (First Corinthians 1:23,24). There is no more painful manner of dying than that which the Lord endured. While some despise the gift, those who are redeemed are grateful.

His death was entirely for man's benefit, not His own. He died in our stead (First Corinthians 15:3). It was the just dying for the unjust (First Peter 3:18). He tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). Justice demanded the penalty to be paid even as mercy called for opportunity for man to be saved. Justice and mercy met at the cross (Romans 3:24).

Jesus was sent by the Father and did that for which He was sent, willingly, and of His own accord. He humbled Himself; He emptied Himself; He gave Himself. If it had not been for giving, God's giving, Christ's giving, there would be no way of salvation offered to mankind.

Man's Gift

In addition to the two gifts of Deity there is also the gift man must give, and that is himself to God. Whereas the first two gifts made Christianity possible, it avails nothing for a person until that person makes his gift. Though we can be reconciled to God because of Deity's gifts, we will not be reconciled without our gift of obedience to God (Second Thessalonians 1:8,9). To stress

man's part in God's plan for saving man in no way diminishes or dims the glory of God or His saving power. Actually, it emphasizes it and glorifies the name of Christ. Christ requires obedience and without it He is not our Savior (Hebrews 5:9). Obedience is a demonstration of love (John 14:15). When we obey we are giving Him the credit for salvation rather than attempting to earn salvation by our own merit.

Our gift is to be ourselves. So strong and devoted are we to be that service to Christ dominates and regulates our life. We deny self (Luke 9:23), and seek to please God, giving as did those reported in Second Corinthians 8:5, *"...but first gave their own selves to the Lord."*

The Christian does not belong to himself but has been purchased by the blood of Christ (First Corinthians 6:19,20; Acts 20:28). No one ever belonged to another more than the Christian is to belong to the Christ.

What This Means

What does it mean to give yourself? How can one tell whether the expected gift has really been given? This is determined by what one seeks in life. Does he seek purity, kindness and peace? Is he longsuffering, doing good works, attending to matters of a spiritual nature even before matters of the physical and material? Does he live above the sinful level of this world, having his heart set on things above? What are his ideals in life, his aims, and goals? What does one put first in line of his priorities? Matthew 6:33, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

If one cannot answer such questions harmoniously with the will of God then he stands in desparate need of adjusting his life, attitude, manners and ambitions to align himself with God. One cannot come to the Lord acceptably if he comes with reservations. We are to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), that which is totally given to another.

As we think of these great gifts, God's gift, Christ's gift, man's gift, it is obvious that Christianity involves much more than gifts of money, does it not? Monetary considerations are included as a part of Christianity, but that giving is to reflect the first three. Once these three gifts are recognized and appreciated as occupying center stage, the monetary giving expected of Christians is a natural consequence.

There is something common about each of these three gifts. Have you noted what it is? Each of them are prompted and motivated by love. God loved; Christ loved; man is to love. Love is that spiritual quality that is divine in nature, finding its manifestation in giving. That which is like God can properly be exalted in the most magnanimous terms.

To summarize breifly, these three gifts, each one brought forth from the same spiritual trait of love, are tremendous factors in the religion of which the Son of God is Founder and Foundation. But our concern is the impression these truths have on us. We had nothing to do with the giving done by the Father and Son. It was entirely an act of Deity. But we do have to make the decision regarding the giving of ourselves. Will we take advantage of the gifts of Deity or shall we reject what is offered, which means rejection of eternal life in heaven?

We accept what God gives by rendering obedience to the commands of the gospel, that requires faith in Christ, repentance from sins, confession of that faith, and baptism in water for the remission of sins in the name of, or by the authority of, Jesus Christ.

When the invitation of Christ is extended, when an opportunity to come to Him is offered, people stand at a crossroads, and they must make a decision. The attempt to not make a decision is to make the decision not to come to Christ and a decision not to be saved. Only a decision to render obedience will suffice. If you have not taken advantage of these gifts of Deity, and lack giving of yourself, why should you deprive yourself any longer of that which God offers?

† † † † †

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accordingly when called to do so. God has promised we can overcome what trouble may envelope us. What we cannot overcome we can successfully endure.

Having trouble is commonplace, but having comfort is God's grace. WIll you come to Christ and face life by His side? Render obedience to the gospel and know the comfort Deity offers to all.

† † † † †

Spiritual Ignorance

First Corinthians 2:6-9, "*Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought; but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*"

It may seem strange that lessons are presented to Christian people about spiritual ignorance. It would seem more appropriate that such thoughts be directed toward those who are irreligious. The truth is that both need such lessons. Unfortunately, the irreligious seldom will allow thought of this nature to fall upon their ears. They studiously avoid them. Those who are Christians have shown an interest in such matters and are more inclined to listen. The lesson is designed to answer the question, "Why learn the message of the Bible?"

As the text points out, the gospel, formerly a mystery and known only to God, was being preached. Some were accepting it, but many others were rejecting it. But the matter under consideration concerns those who remain ignorant about it. Spiritual ignorance refers to the ignorance people have about God, man's need for God, God's provisions for man, and God's revelation of this information. Such ignorance is deep and widespread. To even a casual observer it should be glaringly obvious that more and more people know less and less about the Bible and what it teaches.

Not An Easy Answer

Any attempt to present a quick and easy answer as to why we should learn the message of the Bible will not be forthcoming because it will fall short. But to make a summary statement, a concise one, that might encompass the many things that can be said and must be expanded, we would say that spiritual ignorance will cause people to live sinful, godless, irresponsible, degenerate and unsuccessful lives while spiritual knowledge will lead them in paths of righteousness, decency, morality, responsibility and eventually heaven rather than hell.

It is to be doubted that we can adequately measure the

immense evil that reigns due to spiritual ignorance. When we look at the homes we see divorce, separation, stress, strain, unhappiness, unfaithfulness, disturbances that adversely affect young and old. Consider the cities as well as the rural areas infected with crime, gangs, drugs, rape, murder and every form of immorality. Can we begin to measure the havoc caused by the consumption of alcoholic beverages that degrade every nook and corner of society where it flows, and even brings terror and destruction on many who do not traffic in this drug, this poison, this defilement of humankind?

The marketing of sin is big business in every community in the form of pornography, prostitution, gambling being legalized in more and more places, graft, political corruption, and all the other notable marks of a people who have lost their way, forsaken their standards, and adopted the manners of the servants of the devil. One cannot even go into a resturant to buy a meal without being served huge doses of profanity, vulgarity, indecency in dress and conversation. Everything from sodomy to murder of unborn children (called abortion) characterizes and gives evidence of spiritual ignorance. The sad truth is that the avalanche of evil is growing even as it already floods society.

The Gospel

How would the gospel affect all of this? The gospel is the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of Christ provides a guide for the home, including each member of the family. It will develop love, consideration, morality, alongside *"doing unto others..."*, teaching respect, honor, truthfulness, modesty, cleanliness and personal responsibility to do right. The gospel would rid the world of the consumption of alcoholic beverages, the no good hypocritical so called "Christians" notwithstanding. The greatest friend any nation has is the faithful Christian. He promotes good citizenship, and is an influence for good in everything he does. *"Righteousness exalts a nation..."* and righteousness is the Christian's business and purpose for living. The vice that plagues the streets, terrorizes communities, degrades all would find scarce ground for cultivation if spiritual knowledge replaced spiritual ignorance.

Because the Jews knew not God's law and respected not the teaching He had given them, they crucified Christ. There has not been a greater crime committed by people than the brutal and unjust death of the Son of God at man's hands. It was a

most defiant and satanic display of impiety. If ignorance can, and did, produce that, it can and will produce all kinds of evil of which the mind can imagine.

Honest, Sincere, Naive, Blind

Many honest and sincere people are going about life naively and blindly as to the reality of the spiritual destruction around them. They are gullible while travelling the path to their own destruction because of spiritual ignorance. The lack of knowledge of the Bible causes men and women, boys and girls, to follow after false ways, even though they may be seeking salvation, even expecting it, but attempting to obtain it from sources that never have and never will produce it. They listen to men, follow after the human doctrines they have been taught, never searching the Scriptures to see if their faith is the Biblical faith. They have presumed and assumed that what they think is true and never even will allow the possibility that ignorance, rather than knowledge, is their plight. This naive and undisturbed attitude contributes to the perpetuation of spiritual ignorance and all the attending havoc it causes.

What Ignorance Does

Spiritual ignorance has even caused churches that once were strong and active in the cause of Christ to be dashed to pieces on the rocks of internal strife, apostasy and digression either to the left or to the right. While members would "go along" wheresoever they may have been led, they did not check with God's Word as they moved. Doctrines were adopted, practices followed, that never had root in God's Word. Failure to put into practice the truth that they had learned opened the door for the invasion of error that eventually carried them away into apostasy. Spiritual ignorance on the part of a church's membership can and will prevent salvation while spiritual knowledge means salvation.

Prevent And Correct

Spiritual knowledge is essential to know how to enter into fellowship with Deity, how to be forgiven of sins, how to work and worship God's way, how to treat other people, and how to avoid pitfalls, and how to make corrections when they are

needed. The gospel has both a preventive and corrective element. There is the positive side of God's will that must be followed and a negative side that must be heeded. Knowledge of truth could have prevented many sins from ever being thought or committed. How many times have you heard people say, maybe you have said it yourself, "If I had know then what I know now I would not have done as I did." Does not this tell you the value of spiritual knowledge?

The old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is a good one, and should be heeded. Spiritual ignorance abandons you to the wiles of the devil while spiritual knowledge equips you for the battles of life. Action without intelligence is merely action, not intelligent action. To act intelligently we must have knowledge. We should cram our minds until overrunning with spiritual information of God's revelation.

Many lives have been scarred and ruined, that will ever remain that way, that could have been productive of good except for spiritual ignorance. Lacking proper training, receiving improper information, never coming to know what really matters, unable to establish godly priorities, has been the sad experience of untold thousands. Spiritual ignorance or spiritual knowledge determines spiritual destruction or spiritual life.

The Word

God's Word is our lamp and light, a guide to joy, peace, usefulness, purpose, accomplishment and success in this life. But it leads the spirit of man beyond the time when the spirit leaves the body in physical death. The message of the Bible takes man into the realm beyond, even through death, the resurrection, the judgment and eternity. Too few are following this guide and their lives, as well as the lives they influence, are miserable, unhappy, distraught, sinful and wicked. They will not only be failures in those things that really matter while on earth, but they shall suffer entrance into hell forever.

To fail to learn the message of the Bible is criminal. Ignorance of the message of God contributes to every evil you can imagine. Your influence is to encourage others to also remain ignorant, to scorn, scoff, ridicule and otherwise set aside the only message upon which people can confidently rely to raise mankind to the level God wants. Today, even as you read these words, you are lending youself to spiritual knowledge if you will give heed to what we are saying. It is our prayer that by reading

these words your interest in spiritual knowledge will be even further aroused and your appetite for the will of the Lord will be whetted and enlarged.

† † † † †

The Troubled Heart

None of us are exempt from trouble in this life. Job 14:1, *"Man that is born of woman is of few days and is full of trouble."* This is commonplace to the human family. Often trouble breaks the heart because of its intensity and magnitude. There are no doors, no bars, no bolts, no locks that can forever keep out trouble in life. It comes to the rich, poor, high, low, young, old, anyone, everyone, sooner or later. Like death, it is no respecter of persons. We have our own troubles, and we see others as they wrestle with their troubles.

We do not want to leave the impression that life is only trouble because that is far from the truth. But it is trouble that causes grief to the heart that we are studying in this lesson. Much sorrow and trouble goes unseen by men because it is known only to God and the one with the troubled heart. Most of us are blessed in so many ways that we are not always aware of the serious problems in life that others have to face and bear. We are often shocked to learn the burdens that others have that we probably have never experienced and did not even know they were experiencing. It is not uncommon that people cover their troubles under a facade of pretending that all is well when such is really not the case. An uncomplaining disposition and a cheerful countenance often hides a multitude of grief. Who knows what pain is attempting to break forth but is surpressed with a patient and godly attitude of endurance? But we are aware that this world is a place of trouble.

Causes

What are some of the major causes of a troubled heart? Is it not such things as the death of a loved one? Is that not a crucial obstacle in life? Even the disciples of Jesus were made sorry when they learned that Jesus would die. Recall the sorrow of the Lord Himself when Lazarus died, and He saw the mourning

of others He loved. Most have experienced this kind of trouble in the passing from life of someone who was near and dear to them. How the heart aches because of this tragic occurrence.

It is real trouble to be misunderstood by others or to have your motives and actions misread and impugned. Often trouble arises because we misunderstand others. Both we and they are hurt. It is valuable when we can secure a good understanding and meeting of the minds with others. Many problems have been created, feelings hurt, friendships harmed or destroyed over such things.

What is more shattering than to learn of the lack of trustworthiness in something or someone in whom you have placed your trust? Some have suffered the unfaithfulness of a mate, or a friend, or some associate on whom they had looked with confidence. Judas, one of the twelve, betrayed the trust Jesus had in him. Having your faith broken after you have depended so confidently is disturbing to the mind and distressing to the heart. It even extends beyond that which has proven itself untrustworthy. It can even cause you to be suspicious of other things and people wherein you have placed trust. A dark and dismal cloud overshadows all of life when this tragedy becomes a reality.

Many go through life burdened with insecurity. Insecurity causes personal pain, but more than that, can often provoke worse things as one seeks to rid himself of insecurity. Many who have been materially insecure have turned to robbery. Others being personally insecure about themselves have resorted to immorality, drunkenness, drugs and other sinful conduct. The dread and fear of the future, when nothing seems anchored, when all around you seem to be uprooted and overturned, can cause unhappiness and trouble the weary heart.

We could continue to mention such things as sickness, losses of various kinds, but surely the point is sufficiently made that trouble exists and it strikes all around us, even upon us at times.

Guilt

But nothing causes more trouble to the sincere heart than the guilt of sin. We grieve over our sins and the sins of others because sin is that which alienates us from God. Think of the grief of Peter after he had denied Christ and the Lord had looked upon him. Think of the sorrow in the heart of the prodigal son when he was still in the foreign country and swine

pits. Can one adequately describe the torture of a guilty conscience?

Have you ever known the trial of seeing your own flesh and blood renounce God's truth and pursue error? Do we not read of violators of the civil law who rejoice once they are finally caught, having borne the burden of guilt and the pain of conscience for so long? Sin brings trouble, especially to those who are aware of right and wrong. But at least such people show a spark of sensitivity toward sin while many can sin with impunity and go their way as if nothing has been done. They will live deceived and die damned.

Source Of Comfort

Is there no comfort for the troubled heart? Yes, there is. God is the God of comfort (Second Corinthians 1:3). The Holy Spirit was identified as the Comforter (John 14:26). Jesus taught, *"Let not your heart, be troubled."* (John 14:1). Deity offers the troubled heart of man the relief and consolation that is needed and for which man yearns.

Our Savior, having been tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15), speaks words of comfort founded on His Deity as well as His experience as a human being. He is fully understanding of us. He can sympathize to the utmost with mankind as he struggles with those things that would bend and even break him in life. Is it not comforting in itself to hear words from others in times of our distress, "I know how you feel?" Especially are we comforted when we know that the one who speaks has also endured similar trials that we are undergoing. Herein is the perfection of our High Priest and Advocate, Jesus Christ. While we seek to comfort one another the best we know how, Christ can comfort with knowledge and completeness that none other can offer.

Let us consider John 14 for some instruction in this area of thought. *"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."* (Verse 1). A life built on faith in Christ is one that can find serenity and tranquility in the midst of the storms of life. He recognizes the temporary nature of life, even the passing of trouble eventually. It all gives way to the power of that which is higher and better.

Hope

"In my Fathers house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." (Verse 2). Because of such words we have hope which is an anchor to the soul (Hebrews 6:19). We can be assured that Deity will keep His Word to us. There is that day before us when the Lord Jesus shall come for us. Meanwhile, we bask in the warmth of His promise that sustains us when under fire from trouble. *"Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted."* (Matthew 5:4). While this blessedness speaks more directly to those who mourn over sin, the fact of comfort to the mourning is stated.

"And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way. Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (Verses 4-6). We can be comforted with the wisdom and knowledge of Christ, the way. The doubt of Thomas concerning the future and the way to go was dissolved with the certainty of Jesus and His instruction. When one will heed the statements of the Lord and follow thereafter, this knowledge brings confidence and contentment. It is a salve to the weary and a source of relief to the chaffing so common in life.

Passing to verses 13,14, *"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."* This was spoken to His apostles and dealt directly with their apostolic office. But the promise Deity gives is that attention will be given to the expressions of humanity. This in itself is amazing! Do we not have a similar assurance that God will hear and answer our prayers if we be faithful children of His? Will not God keep His Word and do what is best for us? Does not the knowledge that we can capture the attention of God and focus it upon ourselves, even on our problems, provide us strength to encounter whatever we are called to meet?

"There is grace to help in our time of need
For our Friend above is a Friend indeed.
We may cast on Him every grief and care,
There is always a blessing, a blessing in prayer.

When our songs are glad with the joys of life,
When our hearts are sad with its ills and strife,

When the powers of sin would the world ensnare,
There is always a blessing, a blessing in prayer."

We have experienced the relief received when we talk to someone who cares and wants to help. It is that way, even more, when we approach the throne on high and seek comfort from Him. God hears; God cares; God answers.

Our Comfort

Verse 18, *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."* Again, this was to His apostles regarding His promise of the Holy Spirit upon them. But we are also promised that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will dwell with us. We make a serious mistake to conclude that we have the presence of Deity in the same measure as did the apostles.

We would be neglectful not to mention the comfort in trouble from the knowledge that we are loved. It means so much to any person to know that others love him or her. How much more does it calm the troubled spirit to know that God loves us. *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."* (Verse 21). Notice the condition of being the beneficiary of that love. We must keep His commandments. To refuse to obey is to declare a lack of love (Verse 24). Earlier Christ said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15).

Endurance

We could extend the list of sources of comfort to include God's providence, protection, guidance through His Word and other blessings. But one other we will include that is found in First Corinthians 10:13. It may well be one of the most comforting assurances given to the Christian in God's revelation. *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."*

What this is telling us is, "There is nothing that shall happen this say that God and I together cannot handle." This is far easier to say than to practice. But we are confident it is true whether we live accordingly or not. God help us to live

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Getting Fired



June 1987 marks the completion of thirty-five years that I have attempted to preach the gospel. There have not been but five churches during all those years where I did what is often called "full time" work, which means I have been privileged to stay rather reasonable periods where we worked. Not once was I fired. It is not because some did not want to fire me. That subject was the topic of discussion several times. One time I resigned probably just a few weeks before I might have been fired. But when I resigned it enraged that eldership so much that I became the victim of some of the most vicious treatment experienced in my life. Looking back on it, however, and seeing the direction that eldership was determined to go, I should not have been ashamed at all to have been fired by such as they.

But many good and sound preacher brethren are fired. When I consider the long list of those who have suffered such things, and realize why many of them were fired, knowing of their soundness and high moral character, and seeing the digression that has swept the church in recent years, I conclude being fired is often a compliment.

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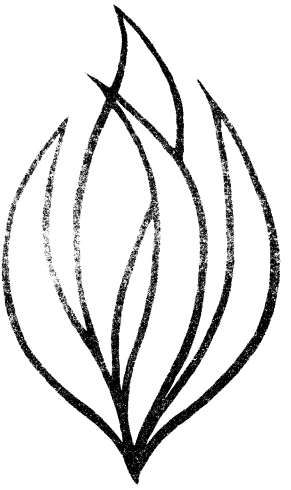

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd [redacted]

The Rich Fool

Luke 12:16-21, "*And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*"

The word "fool" has two meanings, according to Webster's Dictionary. It means a person devoid of reason and intelligence. It also means one who acts in a foolish or unwise manner. Obviously, the last "fool" is not lacking in intelligence, but is unwise. Such is the man of the parable.

We must be careful how we use the word "fool." Christ warned in the Sermon on the Mount, "*...and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*" (Matthew 5:22). This is to speak of someone with hatred and contempt, even with a desire that their soul be damned. Obviously, the Lord is not using the term in this fashion in the parable, but has reference to what He presented as a foolish and unwise action that manifested a distressingly mistaken attitude.

Bible Fools

The Bible describes a fool in many passages. "*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.*" (Psalm 14:1). The book of Proverbs gives many references to fools as those who despise instruction and wisdom. Proverbs 10:8 speaks of a prating fool while Eccelsiastes 5:3 reads, "*A fool's voice is known by multitude of words.*" Proverbs 12:15, "*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.*" Proverbs 14:16, "*The fool rageth and is confident.*" Other proverbs mention meddling fools and how fools utter all their mind. There is a great array of teaching in the poetic books of the Old Testament regarding fools, foolishness and their manners.

Possessions

Why is the man in the parable called a fool? Let us not falsely accuse him. We should consider some of the reasons why he was not called a fool. It was not because he had possessions. Men of God have sometimes been men with wealth, such as Abraham, Job, David, Solomon and even Joseph of Arimathea. There is no inherent virtue in poverty any more than there is inherent evil in riches. There is no shame or virtue in either per se. The love of money is certainly sinful (First Timothy 6:10).

The parables of the talents teaches people they should use their talents and abilities to the best advantage. If one has a talent for making money, why should he not do it, assuming he acts honestly, and uses what he earns in a righteous way? There is nothing to indicate that the man prospered due to dishonesty. The Scripture says the ground brought forth plentifully. He had a good year in his work as a farmer. Doubtless, as is usually the case, other farmers had also prospered along with him, although part of his prosperity might be attributed to good management and diligent effort. While there are those who gain wealth in a dishonest way, it is unfair to think everyone who is rich has been dishonest. That was not the case with the man of our study. There are dishonest poor people, too.

Conservative

He was not a fool because he was conservative of what he had gained. There is no virtue in wastefulness and extravagance. His barns were inadequate and he wisely acted to erect some larger ones. It would have been foolish for him to allow the elements to destroy his harvest because he would not house it properly.

The story of the prodigal son condemns wastefulness. Joseph made preparation for the lean years in Egypt by storing grain in bins during the years of plenty. This showed wisdom, not foolishness. Even Christ cause the food left over from feeding the multitudes to be gather. John 6:12, *"Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost."* We could compliment the man for preserving his bountiful harvest.

Provision

He was not foolish because he made provision for the future.

Some have a mistaken idea that it is wrong to prepare for the future as if this is to doubt the providence of God. "God will take care of you," they say. What they misunderstand is that God has already taken care of us many times, but we have squandered what He provided and failed to prepare for the future with what He gave us. Somehow we expect Him to provide for us again even after we have wasted His provision. We should not "live up" everything when we could lay some aside for the future. In our labor from day to day we earn the necessary provisions for each day so we can give to those who need, but also that they might care for ourselves when that time comes when we can no longer labor and make provision. Some years ago some people even thought having life insurance was sinful. That is foolish. We shall either live or die with the passing of time. With one of these eventualities before us, we act wisely to make ready for the inescapable. This is not doubting God's providence but using God's providence.

Self

This man was a fool because he was egotistical. Thirteen times in the account he referred to himself, what he had, what he had done, what he would do. He failed to realize that it was not merely by his own hand that he had prospered, but every good gift had come from God (James 1:17). He just had a high opinion of himself, more than was warranted. He failed to give credit where credit was due. Actually, none of us do much of anything except that we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us and made our accomplishments possible. How self-centered we are to praise ourselves and not realize God, and others, have contributed to whatever success we enjoy.

The religion of Christ is a religion that requires the denial of self. Luke 9:23, "*And he said unto all, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.*" To deny self means that we no longer follow our own will and way, but that of Christ. No longer do we heap praise on self, but give glory to God. Paul's instruction to the Philippians was this, "*...doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind, each counting other better than himself.*" (Philippians 2:3). This man thought too highly of himself, contrary to the teaching of Paul, "*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among*

you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..." (Romans 12:2).

It Was Not His

This man considered these possessions as his. He spoke of "*my fruits... my barns... my goods...*" Do we not yet know that we came into the world with nothing and that we shall leave the same way? (First Timothy 6:7). Nothing here is really our own except the use of things for a while. We are stewards of that which has been placed in our care. What we have is a loan and we shall be held accountable for its use. We should consider what wealth of any measure that we control to be tools in our hands to do the Lord's will. If we so consider material things there might be many things we now buy that we would never buy, and direct more of them directly to the cause of Christ. First Corinthians 4:2, "*Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*" This man of the parable forgot, or possibly never learned, the true relationship between a man and "his" money. Psalm 24:1, "*The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.*"

Confusion

Again, this man confused his physical need with his spiritual need. He said, "*Soul, take thine ease.*" He made the same mistake many today seem inclined to make and that is to assume that things being well with us personally and materially means things are well spiritually. This is not necessarily so.

This man expected his soul's welfare to be proportionate to his material welfare. He placed his confidence in his wealth. This is the very sin Paul warns Christians to avoid. First Timothy 6:17, "*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.*" Food for the soul is not the same as food for the body. The emphasis of many is the physical side of life to the crowding out of concern for the things of the spirit.

His attitude, "*Take thine ease...*" indicates that he was going to quit doing, but bask lazily in the abundance of what he had accumulated. He was going to use it on his own desires and whims without regard for anything else, even the need to keep producing as he had opportunity. We should not confuse rest

from our labors after life is over with rest from labor while it is still day and the night has not yet come. This man was ready to quit. Can a Christian ever quit in his labor for the Lord? Is there a retirement age for the child of God? If so, when is it? Where do you read about it? This man had the attitude that he had what he wanted, all he wanted, and the devil could just take the rest and leave him alone.

Christ once told the rich young ruler, *"Go and sell what you have and give to the poor."* (Mark 10:21). But the man went away sorrowful because he had much riches, and evidently placed too much trust in them to separate himself from them even to be a disciple of Christ. He had to decide between Christ having first place or his wealth, and he made a foolish choice. This man of the parable of our study also had a misplaced trust, misunderstood what is really important, misconceived his mission in life, and failed to recognize his own accountability.

Folly

It is plain to see from this account that laying up treasures upon this earth rather than treasures in heaven proves disastrous (Matthew 6:19,20). We should profit from his mistakes and not fall into the same snare. Think less of self and more of Christ. Recognize who owns everything and the seriousness of our responsibility in using what is given into our care. Prepare for the life hereafter and not center ourselves exclusively on the here and now. Remember that eternal life is not to be ours on the basis of what we have, but what we are. Food for the soul is more important that even food for the body. As Jesus had taught just prior to this parable, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* (Luke 12:15).

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brotherhood when they need not be surprised at all. The indications are usually very pronounced in advance of someone's departure from truth. It seems that so many of us, possibly preferring it was not true, just shut our eyes and hope it goes away. But that doesn't work. Surprises happen, but many times are unwarranted, if only we would be honest with the evidences. **JWB**

What Does The Resurrection Mean To You?

There are many interesting facts in the world to know. Do you know that Sir John Lubbock was an English scientist? Or were you aware that the Nile River is 4,000 miles long? Maybe you are informed that the square root of 49 is 7. Most are very aware that April 15th is the final day for filing income tax forms. What do you know about America's preparedness for war? Do these questions sound strange coming from the pulpit?

All of these are facts. Some mean something to you while others are relatively meaningless and you really do not care one way or the other. What do you care about Sir John Lubbock, the length of the Nile River, or the square root of any number? But the deadline for tax forms has more meaning, and the state of readiness of our nation for emergencies is of vital concern to every citizen. What makes the difference? It is the effect they have on you and to what extent they have a bearing on your life.

There are other facts revealed to us in the Bible, such as information regarding One named Jesus of Nazareth who came to this earth from heaven, lived a perfect life, died on the cross, was raised from the dead after three days, ascended into heaven, and now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. But what does the fact of the resurrection mean to you?

Disbelief

Many people think it means nothing to them because they do not believe it happened. To them such reports are fairy tales and superstition. To others it means an annual celebration called Easter. It is a time when they go to church, probably one of the few times during the year. For others the Easter period is one of buying clothes, dressing up, doing a large merchantile business, having parties, dances, and making the society columns in the newspapers. For many others, the Easter period is just another holiday season, a time for a brief vacation trip, a visit with kinfolks, or something of that order. That which is called Easter,

which is supposed to mark the resurrection of Christ, is just about that and not much more for many people.

To some very sincere people the Easter season is a reminder of the resurrection of Christ and they make special efforts to observe various religious activities to exalt that event. There are musical programs, plays, prayer meetings, the termination of Lent observance, special religious ceremonies, and it is a very solemn time for them. More than any other time of the year they focus their attention on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Bible does not teach an annual observance of Christ coming from the tomb, but a weekly memorial to Him that necessarily includes the proclamation that Jesus died, was buried, but was raised from the dead because this memorial is to be observed until He returns. The promise of His return indicates that He did not remain in the tomb but came forth as the Bible teaches. Scripture knows nothing of such religious days as Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Ash Wednesday, Easter Sunday, Lent, or similar observances. When people ask me why we do not take notice of all of these days like many other religious people, the answer is simple and easily understood. We are committed to the Word of God as our authority, respect His Word, and must do what we do *"in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,"* (Colossians 3:17), which means by His authority, and His authority is revealed to us in Scripture and Scripture knows nothing of any of it. It is that plain and simple. There is no divine authority for it. Strange it is that many who make quite a fuss over man-made observances pay little attention to the weekly memorial that God has ordained commemorating Jesus Christ, which is the Lord's Supper.

While all of these religious *"holy days"* are intended to honor the Lord, they are activities that spring from zeal without knowledge. When Christians eat the unleavened bread and drink the fruit of the vine each first day of the week as the early Christians did, they *"shew the Lord's death till he come."* (First Corinthians 11:26). Praise for the sacrifice of Christ and those other events surrounding it, including the resurrection, are noted in this manner, not with humanly devised days, programs, ceremonies, and the like.

Intending no arrogance whatsoever, true New Testament Christians can readily affirm that the day called Easter has no special significance whatsoever. It has no meaning. It does not affect the Christian nor his relationship with God. This does not

mean the resurrection has no meaning. More than anyone else on earth, the Christian respects the glorious fact of the resurrection of Christ. As already emphasized, the Christian respects that fifty-two times a year, not just on some exclusive designated Sunday called Easter.

All To Be Raised

The meaning of the resurrection is far greater than most realize. It means that all shall someday be raised from the dead. *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29). Upon being raised, all shall stand before Deity for judgment (Second Corinthians 5:10). Those who have thought the resurrection of Christ had no meaning for them, or simply looked upon it in the trite and secular ways we have already mentioned, will then be impressed with the significance of Christ coming forth from the tomb. But their resurrection will be to damnation rather than to life for they have failed to follow the Lord Jesus in this life.

Jesus Is Christ

But what does it mean to you? It should mean what the New Testament teaches that it means. It means that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God (Romans 1:4). By the resurrection we have additional and irrefutable evidence of that reality. The identification of Jesus means that all that He said is true, all He taught must be obeyed, all that He warned had best be heeded, and all He did must be believed. It means that Jesus is the only Savior of mankind, the guide of man in this life, and the One through whom the Father will judge the world in the last day.

All Die

Because of the resurrection of Christ, the meaning takes on more importance when we realize that we all must die (Hebrews 9:27), but that is not the termination of our existence. Death is not our conqueror because we can enjoy victory through Christ, even over death (First Corintians 15:57).

The significance of the resurrection obviously places the

church in a more exalted light, because the church is built on the very fact that His resurrection confirmed; namely, that He is the Son of God. The significance of the resurrection lies in the basis of our hope for heaven, the assurance of salvation, the fellowship in eternity with Deity.

Hereafter

The resurrection means that there is life after physical death, and now, while we are physically alive, is the time we have to prepare for it. Preparation can only be made by rendering submissive obedience to the gospel of the resurrected Christ. Without proper preparedness there is not that first syllable of hope for one for eternity.

Yes, righteous or unrighteous, all shall be raised, and none shall escape the influence and impact of the resurrection of Christ. What His resurrection ultimately means to anyone depends on their response to Christ.

Jesus once said, *"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"* (John 11:25,26).

Decide while you have the opportunity, to make the resurrection of Christ mean your home in heaven.

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Getting More From Prayer

Our subject makes several assumptions that can be readily proved, but with which we shall not be primarily concerned. It assumes God exists; that God hears and answers prayer; that the prayer of the righteous avails much (James 5:16); that prayer must have power sufficiently to move God if offered according to His will and in harmony with His revelation concerning prayer. It is not our goal to discuss the content of an acceptable prayer nor what should be included in prayers. We are concerned with the power of prayer, how that power can be dissipated, and how that power can be used to its fullest.

Prayer is for man's advantage, giving him the opportunity to

converse with God. It enables the faithful child of God to tap a resevoir of blessings that God offers. Prayer is not to inform God, but gives recognition of God as the giver of every good gift (James 1:17). Often we are not as blessed as we could be because we do not pray as we ought and do not get the most from the privilege of prayer. We simply want to make a few suggestions to brethren along this line.

Sometimes people get so discouraged in life they feel and are heard to say, "I guess there is no power on earth to help me." Let me persuade my brethren that there is a power in heaven and a way of reaching that power through prayer. While the efficacy of prayer is not our message here, this we want to underscore because it is a forceful Biblical teaching.

Daily Prayer

May we suggest that you set aside a few moments each day for prayer so you can think and consider the prayer. Thoughtfulness before prayer will bring to mind that for which you should pray and how to pray. A calm and quiet moment of reflection can produce a prayerful attitude. Most of us are just not capable of switching our minds off and on like light switches from one attitude to another. Thinking before praying will assist us to pray with greater sincerity and understanding.

This does not exclude spontaneous prayer, if you can call it that, because the occasions of the day may well call for such prayers. But if we rely only on prayers "at the spur of the moment," is it not likely that there will be much for which we should have prayed that will escape us? If possible, have a time of day near which you determine to offer prayer. The "sweet hour of prayer" will be joyfully anticipated.

Keep It Simple

Whether your prayer is spoken aloud or only in your mind is not really important when we speak of private prayers. But often a spoken prayer has advantages to provoke deeper thought even when we may be alone. Simple and natural words are best. Even in public prayers there should not be a conscious attempt to be "flowery" or oratorical in speech. We may likely use phrases that are often used, and there is no inherent fault in that. But we should be careful to know and mean what is said lest such words become mere repetitious sounds without spiritual

substance. While we do not advocate a flippant conversational language that borders on disrespect, we would advise against a stiff formality that is as burdensome as unwarranted familiarity is obnoxious. Let us pray with sincerity. God knows the heart. He needs not to be impressed with our grammar or abilities to express magnificient phrases. Nor should He be addressed as if we are simply speaking to a fellow human being.

Prayers must reflect respect and reverence in our own language and thoughts. It is a precious moment and one of closeness with God. This can be marred by artificiality. He is our Friend, but He is God. Respect His warmth and His holiness just as we realize our own unworthiness.

Constant

Paul taught, *"Pray without ceasing."* (First Thessalonians 5:17). Obviously, this does not mean to constantly be in the literal activity of uttering prayers, but has reference to a frame of mind. Prayer denotes a dependence on God and we should know that dependence at all times. We should so live as to "be on speaking terms" with God at all times. This enables us to pray anytime, anywhere, about anything.

Prayers need not be long to be effective. Many short prayers during the day lift us along. But we should try not to confine ourselves to just a few brief expressions without giving longer prayer opportunity.

Thanks

Since prayer is an activity motivated by an attitude and expressive frame of mind, we should be careful not to only make petition in prayer, that is, always just asking. Prayer affords us special opportunity to thank God. Our blessings are so numerous that it will tax the mind to "count your many blessings," but we should attempt to say, "Thank Thee, Heavenly Father," for He is the source of our blessings. It is a mistake to only approach God's throne wanting more and more but having neglected to be grateful for what has already been provided. When we do make petition our requests should not be merely for self without proper regard for others, such as friends, brethren, the lost, sick, bereaved, discourage, any and all who need the prayers of the saints.

In Faith

Prayer must be offered in faith. Tennyson said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." The Bible teaches, as we have already noted, the efficacy of prayer (James 5:16). But prayer is not some magical set of words. Faith undergirds the power of prayer. Faith changed things in the lives of many of God's faithful recorded in Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments. To pray without faith is to reduce prayer to nothing but a mental exercise, a psychological experience, indeed, a mockery. We are assured, though we are not always aware just how, that God hears and responds. We do not have to know how He does what He does since our faith is in God and we have confidence in whatever He has told us. He has told us He hears and answers prayer. We must learn to accept the way He answers because He knows more than do we what is His will and what is best for us. We rely on Him without reservation.

Obedience

To get the most from prayer we must be submissive to His will. The attitude expressed by Jesus is that which must occupy our hearts. *"Thy will be done."* We can sever our line of communication with God if we are indifferent and disobedience to His will (Proverbs 28:9; First Peter 3:7). We need not think that God will respond, especially as we demand, when we show contempt for His will. As we must be submissive to His will in our manner of life, having prayed that His will be done rather than our own, we must submit to whatever His answer is. He may grant our prayers as we have requested them, or refuse our petition. He may, in essence, answer with a "Wait," or even answer in ways we never considered. Again, we must rely on the providence of God and may never know precisely the way He works all things. We do not have to know all the mind of God to have confidence in Him.

Appropriate

When we offer our personal or private prayers we may well include matters that would be less fitting if leading a prayer publicly. We have those areas of life that are personal and possibly problems with which we are wrestling that do not

concern others but are vital to us. There are people of our acquaintance for whom we may wish to specifically pray in private prayers that are not known to others. We may wish to include their names in our personal prayers that may not be appropriate in a public prayer. There are personal sins of which others are not aware but known only to God for which we may seek forgiveness. We deprive ourselves of great spiritual values if we neglect private prayers where we can be so open to our Father, the One who knows and understands. There might even be various ones who have chosen to be our enemies for whom we wish to pray that would not be appropriate to mention in public prayer. What an opportunity to develop a forgiving spirit when we pray in private for those who have sinned against us, praying that we will forgive even as God forgives us (Matthew 6:12,14,15). We should make our prayers appropriate to the nature of the prayer.

Brief Prayers

We meet many people in the course of a days events. Do you ever consider praying for some of them, even though you may not know their names or circumstances? One has called such prayers "shot prayers," that is, a brief prayer regarding someone in particular. Whether you like that identification or not, prayers for others, especially for their spiritual welfare, are much in order. The more you pray for others the greater will be the spiritual benefit to yourself. It might even lead you to make an effort to seek their spiritual welfare. Is not this one way of getting more from the opportunity of prayer?

Because these remarks are concerned with means and methods respecting prayer, and merely suggestions to consider, we have not had the occasion to include many Scriptures. The things we have assumed to be accepted are Biblically founded, however. Each of us might offer any number of proper suggestions for getting more from prayer. The better we know what the Word teaches regarding prayer the better all we will be to benefit from prayer.

In Christ

But we must remind everyone that the privilege of prayer implies the right relationship with God. How can one who is not a child of God even properly address the Father? Until one is a

Christian, God is not his spiritual Father. Prayer belongs to the Christian. God might take note of the prayers of others, but whose prayers has He promised to hear and answer? To get the most from prayer we must first accept the need to become a child of God by obeying the gospel. Then we can go individually and alongside our brethren into that beautiful garden of prayer and meet our God through His Son in prayer.

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Traditionalism Or Truth

Read John 5:1-18 before studying this lesson. Biblical information is essential. Until this time in the ministry of Jesus He had presented Himself in a way that called forth faith from the people and even some of the rulers. His teaching was like nothing they had ever heard because of its content and the authority behind it. There had been miracles of healing and mercy. Most of His work had been done in the provinces of Galilee and Samaria.

Now Jesus came to Jerusalem and ran into conflict with those who were growing jealous of the reception He was receiving. He encountered those who were steeped in their own ways and traditions and would not make allowance for anything He said or did.

From the suggested text we learn several worthwhile lessons, including an expanded knowledge of the compassion, grace and goodness of Jesus. We see the manifestation of His power and willingness to help the sick, wretched and distressed. He gave hope and comfort. But because some of the things which He did had been done on the Sabbath Day He aroused the animosity of others. So we see His exposure of their unfounded traditionalism.

A Miracle

A miracle had been done for an apparently helpless human being who had lived in that sad state for thirty-eight years. He was healed, cured, immediately. The man sat by the pool in

Jerusalem called Bethesda. Some thought there was something special about its waters, thinking that an angel would come and trouble the waters, then the first diseased person into the water would be healed of whatever affliction he had. Whether this was true or whether the people just thought it was true we cannot tell, nor is it material to the truths we learn. The man who was healed evidently believed it to be true or he would not have been there. His problem was his inability to get into the water, helpless as he was.

When Jesus saw the situation and the man's desire to be cured, He had mercy on him and simply spoke him well. *"Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."* The man, being made whole, did as Jesus commanded.

This should have brought forth praise and thanksgiving from everyone. It still thrills our hearts today as we read of it. But rejoicing was not the reaction of some. Some found fault with what had been accomplished. Why? It was because it took place on the Sabbath Day and in their misinformed traditions even the doing of good would not be allowed on the Sabbath. Certainly, this man would have been prohibited from carrying his bed if their traditions had been the law. So Jesus had His critics.

These traditionalists thought they had Scripture on their side. They could read from Jeremiah where no burden was to be borne on the Sabbath. In the Old Testament a man had been stoned for gathering sticks for firewood. To them the man had sinned and Jesus had commanded him to sin. So intent were they in their hostility toward Jesus that they persecuted Christ and even sought to slay Him (verse 16).

Two Charges

They made two charges against Jesus, neither of which was true. They claimed He broke the Sabbath, and that He did wrong in claiming to be the Son of God. He did make the claim, but His claim was correct. He was the Son of God, and as such, if He chose, could do whatever He would regarding any law that Deity had made.

But He was not guilty of violating the Sabbath Law. The Sabbath was a day of rest from ordinary tasks, as we learn from Nehemiah and Isaiah. But that did not forbid acts of mercy and goodness. Even opponents recognized that when an ox fell into a pit it could be retrieved on the Sabbath. Labor necessary for mercy to animals was permissible. Certainly that which was

mercy for human beings was permissible. Their erroneous conclusions that caused them to denounce Jesus was because of the human traditions they had erected, not from a proper understanding of the law of God regarding the Sabbath. They showed no concern for their fellowman, were inconsistent in the application of the law of God, and were more concerned about their traditions than man or God's law.

When people get bogged down in their human traditions, misunderstandings and inconsistencies, errors will inevitably follow. Such people find fault with good. They seek such rigidity in following what they consider to be the letter of the law that they miss and dismiss the law itself. Of course, the only way to determine the spirit of the law is what the law says. But to make a law so rigid that compliance with it causes disobedience to some other law of God is to misuse the law. When men devise creeds, manuals, disciples, written or unwritten, that are founded on human traditionalism rather than revealed truth, nothing but nullification of truth can result.

Regarding Traditions

What is the kind of traditionalism that Jesus rebukes? A tradition is something handed down. All traditions are not evil. In fact, we read of the tradition which the apostles taught (Second Thessalonians 3:6). The gospel of Christ being taught from one generation to another is a tradition in the sense that it is handed down. But there are also traditions of men (Colossians 2:8) and traditions which can make the commandments of God of none effect (Matthew 15:6). Jesus did not forbid all traditions, even all traditions handed down from our foreparents of their own making. But whatever conflicted with the law of God or either loosed what God had bound or bound what God had loosed was condemned because it violated God's will.

While we should consider the past and respect the people, ways and manners of the past, we should discern between that which is of man and that which is of God. Believing and doing what ancestors did simply because ancestors believed and did it that way is to bind what ought not be bound. When our ancestors obeyed truth and we obey truth we will believe what they believed and act as they acted. In some matters that allow for human judgments regarding means and methods that may mean we will depart from their traditional ways but not be guilty of violating God's law. Something handed down may be from

God or it may be from human tradition. If some human tradition violates the teaching of the Lord we ought to reject it.

Binding The Loosed

We note the determined way some operate today in binding as law that which God has not bound. We also see others charting new courses trying to "restructure the church." Some have chosen to make laws regarding the care for the needy that have no foundation in Scripture. Others have declared a set "pattern" for churches cooperating while the Scriptures show that churches cooperated several ways and not in one set pattern. The cry, "This is the way we used to do it," has retarded many efforts, not because the older was was wrong, nor was the newer way wrong, but because some were bound to what had been done and wanted nothing else and others were determined not to do anything like it had been previously done. Having preached in many states I have heard people wail, "We did not do it this way back in Tennessee, or Arkansas, or Alabama, etc." In matters of human judgment, we should be considerate and charitable in such matters and not try to bind brethren by our human traditions.

Please do not misunderstand. Truth is truth everywhere and it must be upheld. Divinely given tradition must be rigidly observed. But human customs, methods and means are not so binding. The results of unenlightened human traditionalism has been the cause of division among brethren. Ignorance coupled with prejudice combined to take the Jews against Christ. This is a malady that no Christian ought ever produce in the church.

The reasons we need to consider these thoughts are three in number. (1) It is the truth. (2) We must learn to prevent problems if we can. Many pitfalls could have been avoided among brethren in the past if there had existed better knowledge, less prejudice and ignorance. We do not want to stand critical of something good as did those who criticized Jesus. Neither do we want to allow ourselves to become too steeped in human traditions anymore than we want to jump too quickly for something new before we know what is true.

Is It Truth?

Of course, what some call human tradition is often a matter of truth. For example, some today scoff at the refusal to endorse

the modern versions of the Bible and the continued use of the King James Version. The issue regarding the versions, as few of the advocates of modern versions have ever learned, is not merely new versions versus old versions. The issue at stake is truth versus false doctrines contained in the modern versions. Truth and error are at stake, not merely a new or old version. We are amazed at how many "scholars" just cannot seem to get the real issue in mind. They constantly berate the KJV and archaic words, claiming we oppose updating language. This is false as a three dollar bill. We believe they know their charge is false, but they make it repeatedly because they cannot defend the false doctrine found in the volumes they promote.

(3) But we need to fortify ourselves, strengthen ourselves, for the future and learn and respect God's guidelines from Scripture. As congregations properly undertake work which is authorized in the Bible to be done, disputes should be kept at a minimum lest the work be retarded. Certainly there ought not be disruptions because of the insistence of human traditions.

Jesus knew the law and lived under it perfectly. He would not bow before the pressures of human traditionalism, nor should we. We must learn to distinguish between human traditions and truth, learn the truth, hold fast to the truth, promote the truth, and not allow the truth to be tied by human traditions. We should not allow the good that we can do to be shoved aside because of the failings of others to discern the distinction between truth and human traditionalism. We must teach them the distinction and press forward in the work of the Lord.

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Noah's flood may have been just a local flood and doctrines that give accomodation to evolution?

I, like so many others, have been fooled by people many times. But one of the sources of my conflicts and problems among brethren has been my perception of a digressive drift in various preachers and churches that others did not see, or would not see, until it had become so obvious that only the dishonest could doubt it.

We have no yearning to be proven right or others proven wrong. But, if it were not so serious, it would be humorous how some folks act so surprised at times at what is happening in the

continued on page 5

Who Is Jesus?

Living such a busy life as many people do, it is possible to overlook some of the more important matters as they are crowded out by lesser ones. We tend to take many things for granted when we would do well to keep certain basic and fundamental truths constantly before us. This lesson is designed to do just that, not by bringing anything new or that is unknown to Bible students, but, as Paul, Peter, Jude and others, bring to our remembrance things already understood. We shall identify Jesus.

To identify someone we tell who he is, something of his ancestry, his birthplace, nationality, things he did, especially his outstanding achievements. For example, how would you identify George Washington or Abraham Lincoln? We all would tell of their presidency, their prominent accomplishments, backgrounds, and the things that distinguish them and set them apart from all others. This is what we shall do regrding Jesus of Nazareth.

King Of The Jews

Jesus was a Jew. Though He existed from the beginning (John 1:1), He was born in the flesh in a small town named Bethlehem (Matthew 21). His mother was a virgin (Luke 1:26-31). This meant He was a fleshly descendant of Abraham and David, but no earthly father. Matthew 1:1, *"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."* He was of the tribe of Judah. Hebrews 7:14, *"For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah."*

He was designated to be King of the Jews. Luke 1:32,33, *"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."* At His death, John 19:19,20, *"And Pilate wrote a title also, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin."* Earlier at His birth, Matthew 2:2, *"Where is he that is born king of the Jews?"* Pilate also asked

Him when He stood before him, John 18:37, *"Art thou king of the Jews?"* Jesus answered affirmatively.

His kingdom was not a physical and earthly kingdom such as the nations and empires of men, but a spiritual one. The misunderstanding of many then, and now, regarding the nature of His kingdom, has caused no little confusion. Jesus was and is King of spiritual Israel, God's chosen people, for by that nation the Messiah was to come and Christians, those in the Lord's church, are the children and people of God today. The kingdom is the church and those in the church are the citizens of His kingdom over which He rules as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Preacher And Teacher

Jesus was also a preacher and teacher. Nicodemus realized this by addressing Him with the term, *"Rabbi."* This means an exalted teacher (John 3:1,2). Matthew 7:28,29 records the reaction of His hearers after listening to the Sermon on the Mount. *"And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."* Luke 5:3, when He asked Simon to push his boat from the land, *"And he sat down and taught the multitudes out of the boat."* He taught in the Jewish synagogues. Luke 4:15, *"And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all."* Matthew 26:18, Christ was known among the people as *"the Teacher."* (ASV). Following His temptation by the devil in the wilderness, Matthew 4:17, *"From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Someone has coined the phrase, "God had but one Son, and He was a preacher."

Son Of God

Jesus is identified as the Son of God. It was so announced at His birth (Luke 1:32,35). Mark 1:1, "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."* Peter confessed Him to be the Son of God (Matthew 16:16). Romans 1:4 teaches that by His resurrection He was *"declared to be the Son of God."* On two separate occasions the Father in heaven confessed Jesus to be His Son. These were at His baptism (Matthew 3:17) and again on the mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). These are but a few of the multitude of

witnesses and the massive Biblical evidence that Jesus Christ is the Son of the true and living God of heaven. Once this basic and fundamental fact is accepted the religion of which He is author is readily accepted. This truth undergirds the validity of His faith. It is the very foundation upon which the faith of Christ stands or falls (First Corinthians 3:11).

Savior

But we would be amiss to fail to identify Jesus as the Savior of mankind from sin. He is the Redeemer for those of us who have sold ourselves to Satan by sinning. Matthew 1:21, *"And she shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins."* The name "Jesus" means savior. First John 4:14, *"And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Savior of the world."* Luke 2:10,11, in the announcement to the shepherds, *"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."*

When Jesus was teaching the woman at Jacob's well and told her that He was the One that was to come, she ran to the city to tell others, who quickly came where Jesus was, and saw, and heard for themselves. Their conclusion was, John 4:42, *"Now we believe, not because of thy speaking* (the speaking of the woman, JWB), *for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."* Titus 1:4 identifies Him as *"Christ Jesus our Savior."* Ephesians 5:23, *"For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the Savior of the body."* This means He is my Savior and yours, and for all who will come to Him.

Regarding The Church

We have mentioned that He is the foundation of the church, but He is also the builder of it, the head of it. First Corinthians 3:11, *"For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* Matthew 16:18, *"...upon this rock I will build my church."* The rock to which He referred was the truth that Peter had just confessed regarding Him as the Son of God. As already quoted from Ephesians 5:23, He is the head of the church.

The Lord's church has no earthly head, but only the one head who is Christ. When people ask, "Where is the headquarters of the church of Christ?" which is a sensible question, especially since many denominations have earthly headquarters, our response should be, "The headquarters is where the head is, which is in heaven."

Seeing these things concerning the relationship of Christ to the church, it should behoove everyone to inquire whether the church to which they belong is founded on Christ, built by Him, with Christ and only Christ as head, following His will. As head He possesses *"all authority."* His people are not to look to creeds, manuals, disciplines, conferences, conventions, catechisms, synods, theologians, clergymen, human traditions or whatever else men have chosen to follow. He has *"all authority"* and His will is revealed to mankind in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Scriptures, the Bible (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

Mediator

Not only is He our Savior, but He is also our mediator between us and God, the Father. Even as we pray we recognize that we approach God through Christ (John 14:6). It is shameful that some would propose to pray through Mary, or someone the Vatican has designed as a "saint." The Bible teaches there is one mediator. First Timothy 2:5, *"For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus."* Such is also the emphasis in the teaching concerning Jesus as our High Priest, the mediator of a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Hebrews 7:25,28, *"Wherefore he is also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them... For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity: but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore."*

He Is Judge

Jesus will be our Judge. Romans 2:16 teaches that God shall judge but by and through Christ Jesus. The same is taught by Paul on Mars Hill, recorded in Acts 17:31. Second Timothy 4:1, *"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his*

kingdom..." Jesus, and His Word, is the standard by which all men shall be judged (John 12:48).

There are other ways to identify Jesus, such as, the Lamb of God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Prince of peace, the Word of God, the way, the truth, the life, the bread of life, the water of life, the Messiah, Immanuel, the Holy One. But time and space being limited what we have mentioned will presently suffice.

Divine Brother

But one more identification is in order. Romans 8:16,17, *"The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."* Jesus can be looked upon as the elder brother in the family of God, the Lord's church, Christ's body, the saved of the earth, faithful Christians. This brings forcefully to our attention the warm and close relationship we have with Jesus Christ.

How does one come into this relationship? Jesus tells us. Matthew 12:50, *"For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother."* Our relationship with Christ depends upon how we respond to Deity's will.

This demands that we believe in Christ as the Son of God, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Him, and be baptized by His authority for the remission of sins, into Christ, reaching His saving blood and being washed clean of sins, whereupon God adds us to His family, the saved, the church.

† † † † †

UNSURPRISING SURPRISES

There are many things that are truly surprising in life. As for people, they are the most unpredictable folks on earth. We could even say that the evidence of the fickleness and changeableness in the ways and manners of some people is glaringly apparent down through the periods of human history. There seldom passes a day that something unexpected takes place.

There are those things which surprise some that really ought not surprise them at all. In fact, it is really surprising that they are surprised, caught off guard and seem so unprepared for the unexpected. Particularly is this true regarding the accumulations of false doctrines and digressive tendencies among some. When you keep abreast of what takes place, listen hard and look closely, when someone once considered sound and reliable goes off some deep end, you are not that surprised because it is evident they have been heading that way for some time.

I once knew a preacher who everyone considered sound, but in private writings and conversations he began to "just raise questions for discussion" that were offensive to truth, but before long he was defending the departures he was "simply questioning." What became apparent was they he had secretly and privately held some false views pertaining to worship that he was testing cautiously before going public with them. Once he became bold enough to really speak what he had long believed it was obvious he had gone astray. The particular issue in this case was the instrument in worship. When he left the church for the Christian church many were surprised. I was not.

Some have been surprised at some of the advocates of "unity in diversity." I have not been surprised. When a man will advocate modern versions that are stained with many fatal doctrinal errors, how far is it until he openly advocates other false doctrines? Again, why should we be surprised when prominent brethren embark on inter-denominational ties when they have openly and boastfully embarked already on positions that lead the church into the recreation business with gymnasiums and all the things connected with it? How far is it for one to go who contends divorce for reasons other than fornication are permissible just so long as one does not remarry before he comes out with something else just as unsound?

Just why some are amazed at the direction some of the schools have taken in the past decades is beyond explanation, except they have not been aware of some of the personnel of these schools, their own schooling, and false ideas held. When administrations will tolerate on their faculties men who teach the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, are you surprised that they endorse other errors? When schools continue to uphold those who teach Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage is merely a "covenant passage" for Christians, why are you surprised when other false views are forthcoming from the same schools? Is there really a very big jump from contending that

continued on page 18

Errors, Errors, Errors



JAMES W. BOYD

Anyone who has labored in producing publications know what I mean. They fully understand that of which I speak. Try as hard as we may, we have yet to see an issue of our paper leave through the mails where we have not included errors. These errors are not doctrinal in nature but typographical. How we can look, read and cover as with a fine-toothed comb looking for things we need to correct and still miss them is difficult to explain.

So often we discover them just as we about to put the paper in the mail, or after so much other work, such as folding, gathering, stitching, trimming, etc. has already been done and it is simply infeasible to discard everything and start over.

Someone once said about his bulletin that he put some errors in it because some folks are always looking for faults and he did that to make them happy. Believe me, no error is included deliberately. But they are there and often in abundance.

We beg the indulgence of our readers. When you find an error, just pride yourself in knowing better, hope we know better, but erred.

* * * * *

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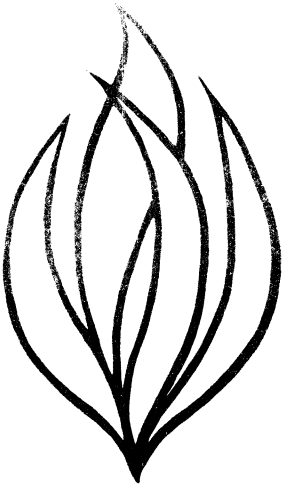

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 8**

Concerning Marriage

Ignorance was never approved by the Savior, therefore, He came teaching to disspell darkness with the light of truth. We must concern ourselves with truth as Jesus taught recorded in the text of Mark 10:1-12.

"And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts Judea by the further side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and he, as he was wont, he taught them again. And the Pharisees came to him and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery."

Trap Questions

Jesus was constantly being asked questions, and as often as not, the questions were designed to trap Him in His words. The question asked Him on this occasion was a good question, but the motive was impure. People often ask questions today, not to learn or gain information, but for various sinister reasons. But let us study the question and the Lord's answer with a heart depleted of prejudice and try to learn what is the will of God in this matter of marriage.

To get a clearer picture of the question, consult Matthew 19:3. The answer Jesus gives whether one could divorce or not was obviously a negative one, and He showed it was not God's

will that such take place. While today divorces are granted for almost any reason, even for no reason, this is contrary to the will, intent and design of marriage as given by the Lord.

Jesus refers to the Mosaic Law under which His questioners lived. What the law taught was what they should obey. God's Word ought be allowed to be the final chapter on any subject. The Pharisees responded that Moses allowed divorce. Actually what Moses insisted was that there be a writing of divorcement if a divorce occur. Moses did not command divorce, but he *"suffered"* or allowed it, and Jesus said it was because the people were so hardened of heart that Moses did it. But it was not true that Moses allowed divorce for just any cause. The morality of the people was so low and rebellious that it was permitted, but never approved. There are things that God has permitted but not approved. This is one instance of that. God will even allow sin, but who would dare say that God approves of sin in any form?

Regardless of what Moses allowed, Jesus referred to God's original plan for marriage as the standard to follow. *"From the beginning it hath not been so."* God never intended that married people divorce. *"What God hath joined together let not man put asunder."* The will of God for marriage is that one leave father and mother and cleave to his or her mate until death separate them. How can there be any question in anyone's mind as to the permanancy intended by God in the establishment of marriage? This idea that one is allowed to divorce just so long as they never remarry and God is not offended is as foreign to the truth on the subject as right is foreign to what is wrong.

Marriage Is More

Marriage is more than just a social contract designed to propagate the earth and perpetuate the race. It is more than a civil contract entered according to the laws of the state, although these laws must be obeyed. It is not just a convenient economic arrangement. It is a sacred and divine contract, a relationship planned in heaven for mankind. It is ordained of God and should be entered, conducted and terminated only according to the will of Him who gave it. Herein is the fault of many who marry; namely, they fail to include God in their marriage. Marriage involves more than a man and a woman. It must include God who gave it.

The nature and purpose of marriage is for the happiness and welfare of mankind. It is not good for man to be alone. The marriage vow is a vow of perpetual and indissoluble friendship which no fortune or alteration of external circumstances should be allowed to interrupt or weaken. In marriage there is no longer just separate interests, but two become united as one. Often the cause of unhappiness in marriage is due to the dissimilarity of those involved in such as education, finances, religion, race, social status and other factors. These differences often place unbearable and unnecessary strains on the marriage bonds and they ought to be avoided before marriage occurs. Religious division is a burden far heavier than many marriages can bear. Nearly every religious advisor I have ever known or of whom I have heard plead with people to be sure the religion of the man and the woman is the same. Why does this have to be constantly brought to the attention of Christians who ought to recognize this from the start?

You And I Become We

Marriage permits no separate possession but what was once I, my and mine, you and yours, becomes that which belongs to both of us. *"The two become one flesh."* The couple are together in all things. Deviations from this God-given intent invites stress, strain and tensions that ought not be given the right to exist. Such things are avoidable.

Marriage does not always bring perfect happiness to everyone. There are manifold reasons why this is true. Even so, this does not allow the dissolution of marriage. Only the death of one of those involved is the way that a marriage can honorably be terminated. If the record given in Mark was the only inspired information we had concerning this matter, we would have to conclude that death, and only death, ended a marriage in the sight of God. But Matthew 19:9 gives additional teaching that must be respected as we study the will of God in marriage.

One Cause

God allows divorce for one reason and one reason only. That reason is the cause of fornication. It is not mandatory for marriage to be broken even then because there is the possibility of genuine repentance and forgiveness. But God does not demand that a person live as husband or wife with a mate that is

not faithful to their sexual vow to keep themselves only to their mate. The vow of marriage is violated by fornication. This teaching is so clear that there ought not be any dispute regarding it. Death is the only honorable way for marriage to end. Fornication will allow a divorce, but that means sin has entered the picture. How far removed from God's will our society has drifted! We are paying a terrible price for man's rebellion.

Have you ever considered the horror of divorce? We read of divorced people more and more, even in the church, and some try so hard to picture it as something beneficial and strain to remove the stigma attached to it. While the shame before mankind of the breakdown of a marriage has been reduced, unfortunately for the guilty and those who suffer divorce, there is no way to ever erase the tragic consequences of it. Divorce has been characterized as tearing a body limb from limb. It is like taking a human body and placing it upon the rack and gradually, painfully, disjointing it until it rips asunder and leaves the victim destroyed. Just think how Jesus teaches in marriage two become one flesh, but in divorce this one flesh is torn apart.

In Jesus' day, like our own, marriage was not respected as it ought to have been. There was great laxity in meeting marital responsibilities. But the teaching of Jesus restores the standard of marriage as God fixed it from the creation of the world. It reaffirms the permanancy of it and the sinfulness of tearing it apart. Woe to the one who is the cause for this tearing! If we love God, we will strive to make our marriage what God intended it to be when He gave it in Eden.

Evil Results

If the institution of marriage, and its sacredness, is not respected in a society, we learn from history the inevitable collapse of that society. National greatness cannot continue when the home, the basic unit of society, goes awry. Without respect for God's marriage law, the level of morality of the people of the land plummets downward until the degeneracy of the race is overwhelming. Souls are cast into misery, homes fall, despair and hopelessness reign over the hearts and lives of people, children are neglected and the security, training and righteous upbringing are absent. The attendant evils resulting from all of this are apparent to one and all who will honestly consider the havoc and ruin caused by the ever increasing breakdown of the home and the disregard of marriage vows.

The future success of the nation depends upon a nation where righteousness prevails. With the divorce rate climbing year by year, and the population being flooded with those who have shown little to no respect for God's moral teaching and the divine edicts regarding marriage, the very foundation of civilization is threatened and nothing is left to sustain.

One Faith

Homes where there is religious division are very subject to this kind of dissolution. This is not to say that divorce does not occur even in homes where the partners were united religiously. But somewhere along the line one or both abandon the authority of God whenever there is divorce. Religiously divided homes have not the ultimate common ground. They have no final standard by which to measure all matters. There is no common respect for the divine teaching of God. In the very area where people need the support and encouragement of each other the most, it is lacking. The children reared in such divided homes become confused, intimidated, frustrated, not knowing what to believe, and often they strike out into areas where their own destruction, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, is the ultimate result. No home, regardless of how much happiness may exist therein, is as God wants it to be until all who are accountable to God in that home belong to God through Christ. The greatest contribution anyone can make toward the stability of the home and marriage is to be a faithful Christian. When that is the situation the blessings of God will be in evidence and the home will be what God wants for it.



Godly Sorrow

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." (Second Corinthians 7:10).

Those who love the Lord ought not find it difficult to be sorry for offending Him. We are not to be simply sorry we got caught in some evil, but sorry because we have done injury toward God. This kind of sorrow will lead a person to repent of his sins and his repentance will lead him to a reformed life.

The Sinful Woman

John 7:53-8:11, "*And every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*"

This was an event in the life of Christ when a serious problem was placed before Him. First Peter 1:21 teaches that Christ is our example and we are to follow in His steps. We see some of His steps in this record.

The Accusation

The accusation against the woman was adultery. Even though often glamorized and glorified in our society, certainly not considered very bad by many, and many writings sensationalize and even advise it, commonplace in movies, magazines, television and other places, the Biblical teaching against adultery still stands. The social stigma of being guilty of adultery has been dulled but the sinfulness of it has not changed. There is no way to glamorize it into something right before God and God's people. Those who do such things are headed straight for hell unless they are forgiven (Galatians 5:19ff; Revelation 21:8).

There was no question as to her guilt, considering she was taken in the very act. She violated God's law. An appeal to the Scriptures was made to show the law demanded her punishment because she sinned against God and marital purity. The accusers seemed to have a ironclad and fool-proof case against her. There was not defense offered and the accusation was not denied.

The Accusers

Most of us probably center our attention at this point on the accused woman. But we should take note of the accusers as well. They were the scribes and Pharisees, the lawyers who knew the law, copied the law, and were among those who were the strictest in enforcing the law. Christ was not dealing with lightweights as opponents, but with the skilled and scholarly.

Were they wrong to bring the woman to Jesus? They were not wrong to condemn adultery, but Jesus was not the one to judge in this matter. That was for the Jewish authorities. They were wrong for tempting Christ and they were wrong for being self-righteous. The very words, "scribes and Pharisees" ring with hypocrisy. *"Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites,"* Jesus said repeatedly in Matthew 23. Their religion was form and lip-service, topped with ritual.

There are many warnings in Scripture against self-righteousness. First Corinthians 10:12, *"Wherefore let him that thinkest he standeth take heed lest he fall."* Second Corinthians 10:17,18, *"But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth."* Galatians 6:3, *"For if a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."* Romans 12:3, *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not yo think of himself more highly than he ought to think."* The instruction regarding the *"mote"* and the *"beam"* of Matthew 7:1-5 is applicable to the sin of self-righteousness.

Let me take a swipe also at the ridiculous idea now much in vogue that if you sin openly and are honest in admitting it that somehow this is more honorable than trying to hide it. Sin is dishonorable in every case. Those of yesteryear may have sinned and hypocritically tried to hide it, but at least they had enough sensitivity about sin to know it ought to be hidden and not paraded openly in a boastful fashion as if openness meant

goodness. People talk about certain sinful deeds coming out of the closet. Some things, if they do exist, ought always be kept in a closet. Opening them up before all as if this somehow makes them less vicious is a delusion of the sinful mind.

The Motive

What was the object of accusing this woman? Why did they bring her to Jesus? They had no desire that the law of God and Moses be kept. They refused to carry out the law once confronted. They just slipped away. The law demanded both parties be punished alike but only one party was seized. Did they have a double-standard as many still erroneously do today regarding immoralities?

As noted, Jesus was not the one appointed to declare her guilty or innocent nor was He to expedite the punishment. The truth is these accusers had not a desire for justice nor respect for the law. The sin did not really bother them that much. They were trying to get Jesus, not the woman. They wanted Him to either condemn or condone her behavior. If He condemned they could have accused Him of usurping the authority of the Jewish court. To condone would mean an accusation of approving of adultery. Jesus must have felt as many preachers have felt many times, "You are going to be wronged either way you go."

But Jesus led a perfect life and they could not find fault with Him unless they invented situations wherein they could find fault. Jesus at first seemed to ignore them and wrote on the ground. What He wrote we do not know. But He knew their evil hearts and sinister motives. While He strongly disapproved the sin of adultery and had so taught, even teaching against lust, He also condemned self-righteousness. He dealt with both sins.

His Response

With their persistent inquiry, He responded in a way that convicted the accusers of their sins, exposing their self-righteousness, and laying bare their evil hearts, and at the same time dealt with the woman who sinned with compassion and forgiveness. He did not condone either sin, but as for the woman, He forgave the sinner. In one brief comment He shifted the responsibility and burden of condemnation from Himself to the accusers. Jesus returned to writing on the ground and one

by one the exposed accusers slipped away, stunned, embarrassed, caught in one of their own traps. Their attempt to ensnare Jesus backfired. They were the ones who were also shown to be sinful and they were made aware of it.

The attitude of Jesus toward one who sins is clearly seen. Our Lord wants none to be lost and wants all to be forgiven. He pleads with everyone to meet conditions of salvation today that are revealed in His will so all can be forgiven and united with God. We should be as anxious to forgive others and studiously want to forgive others as Jesus. We also need forgiveness. Recovering brethren who sin is a glorious accomplishment (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19,20).

The Results

After the scribes and Pharisees left, Jesus told the woman she was forgiven. She was not told to be baptized because baptism for the remission of sins in His name had not yet been preached. That was first announced on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). As He had the power to forgive even while here on earth before His will went into effect, He will still forgive but now according to His will which commands baptism. She was admonished to "*sin no more.*"

This was a great victory for Christ. While condemning sin, He saved the sinner. He was not defending the woman "in sin," but saving the woman "from sin." He did this by forgiving her of sin and teaching her to abstain from sin. He was fulfilling His mission to earth; namely, to bring salvation to the lost.

Had He left any appearance of condoning or ignoring her sin He would have contradicted His own teaching in Matthew 19:1-9, as well as the Sermon on the Mount. The way He handled this situation imposed upon Him only provokes us to glorify Him all the more.

We *"all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23). We, too, need forgiveness. Christ will forgive, if we will respond to His call of the gospel to believe, repent, confess our faith in Him, and be baptized *"for the remission of sins"* in the name of, or by the authority of Christ.

† † † † †

Why We Worship On The First Day Of The Week

Often the question is asked, "Where does the New Testament command us not to keep the Sabbath Day?" A similar question is, "Where are we commanded to worship in the first day of the week rather than the Sabbath?" The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, or our Saturday. In the Old Testament we learn that God's people observed that day for religious reasons. Even though there are around 500 million people who profess to be Christians, and this is not using the term "Christian" as the New Testament defines it, there are but a few hundred thousand who profess to be followers of Christ who contend we are to worship on the seventh day rather than the first day of the week. It is fair to say that the majority of religious people really do not think it makes much difference one way or the other because they have the idea that whatever a person wants to do, and does with sincerity, that God will accept it anyway.

The immediate answer to the question is, "There is no place in the New Testament where we are specifically commanded not to worship on the Sabbath Day." In fact, there is no commandment anywhere that forbids us from worshipping God any day of the week. But neither are we commanded to observe the seventh day above other days.

Matter Of Authority

The real question should be, "Where is the authority for worshipping on the first day of the week rather than keeping the Sabbath as was done in Old Testament times?" What we do should be done by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17), and without that authority we are acting on the authority of men rather than God.

Sabbath keepers offer certain contentions that are designed to persuade us to keep the Sabbath. We feel obligated to consider such things before we dismiss them. Let us see if their contentions have Biblical and historical merit.

We are told that Sunday, the first day of the week, is a day of ancient pagan worship of the sun and this is where the day got its name, Sunday. They conclude, therefore, the day is unfit for

Christian worship and is the result of the mixing of paganism and Christianity.

But Saturday is no better in this regard, taking its name from the worship of the planet Saturn. The point is, neither of the names have any religious significance to Christianity any more than a man's name like Brown, Black, Green or White determines his skin color. All of the days of the week take their names from mythological sources and worship of various man-made gods.

Not Constantine...

It is claimed that Constantine, Roman emperor, by imperial edict changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday about the year 321 A.D. This is historically inaccurate. It is true that he gave the day an official Roman sanction and declared it a holiday, but the day of worship on the first day of the week had been practiced long before his decree. In fact, giving it legal recognition was one thing, but there is no evidence that Christians worshipped in observance of the Sabbath prior to his imperial edict.

Nor Rome...

Others claim the Roman Catholic Church changed the day from the seventh to the first. It is true that Catholics changed many things that varied from the New Testament. They like to lay claim for many of these changes. But they even deny having changed the day of worship. They take no credit for it whatever and this is significant since they like to claim authority for almost everything. Catholicism was historically unknown for nearly 600 years after the Lord's church was established in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection.

Nor Moses...

It is contended that the seventh day observance is in the Mosaic Law. This is true. Sabbatarians will admit this law has been removed, but only in part. They arbitrarily divide Moses' law into moral and ceremonial parts, claiming only the latter has been removed and that Sabbath keeping falls under the moral law category. We must look at this closely.

Of the more than 660 laws of the Mosaic Law, there is no

verse that makes a division as moral and ceremonial, one part removed and the other remaining. This is simply man's imagination and invention.

To remember the Sabbath Day is the fourth of the Ten Commandments and no passage designates them as being wholly moral. In fact, the fourth commandment is obviously ceremonial in nature. Even if the moral laws of Moses were retained, the Sabbath would be excluded. The Sabbath had to do with ceremony keeping, not morality.

Not The Old Law...

Furthermore, all of the law of Moses has been taken away, including the Ten Commandments. Romans 7:1, *"Know ye not, brethren, [for I speak to them that know the law,] how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as his liveth?"* Then Paul said, verse 6, "*But now are we delivered from the law...*" From what law did Paul say we are delivered? Paul identifies it as the law that said, *"Thou shalt not covet,"* which is the tenth of the Ten Commandments, a moral law. While it is true that nine of the Ten Commandments have been embodied into the law of Christ, and some of these expanded to include not only actions but attitudes, the new will of Jesus did not include the fourth that calls for the remembrance of the Sabbath.

The truth is that the Sabbath law is a part of that law from which we are delivered. To hold to that law is to deny the faith and authority of Christ to be above that of Moses. Galatians 3:23-25, *"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."* Few things are taught clearer in the New Testament than the fact that the law God gave Israel through Moses is binding upon no person today, Jew or Gentile.

But again, Colossians 2:14, *"Christ, having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us... nailing it to his cross."* Then Colossians 2:16,17 says of those things of the old law, *"Let not man judge you"* according to such things. They are not to be followed inasmuch as they were shadows of things to come. Notice, among those things that were not to be used as a standard for judgment included sabbath days.

In Galatians 4 and the allegory of Sarah and Hagar as they

represented the new and old laws, it is evident that the old law has been taken away. To attempt to be justified by the old law is to fall from grace (Galatians 5:4).

Nor The First Week...

Much is made of Genesis 2:2,3, so let us read these words. *"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made, and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made."* The contention is that God, from the beginning, required the observance of the Sabbath and that He hallowed it at the end of creation.

There is no question that God *"sanctified"* the Sabbath. But "when" He did it is something else. For whom did He hallow it? For how long did He hallow it? When did man begin to observe it? For these questions to be answered we turn to Scripture.

Nehemiah 9:13,14, *"Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true law, good statutes, and commandments: and madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandest them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant."* There is not one line of evidence that the patriarchs prior to Moses observed the Sabbath, and they were people of God. The law was given at Sinai and to the Israelite nation (Deuteronomy 5:2,3). It was never a law given to Gentiles nor a law given before Sinai.

As for its duration, it was to last throughout the generation of the Jews (Exodus 31:16ff). That has long since past and the law is not even binding on that race and nation to which it was given. It certainly does not apply to us today.

Nor His Ministry...

Some contend we should observe the Sabbath because Jesus did. But keep in mind that Jesus was a Jew and lived under the law and lived perfectly under the law. It was still in effect for the Jew during His lifetime on earth. But the question is, "Did He enjoin the observance of the Sabbath on those who would come to God through Him? If so, where is the passage?"

Every argument put forth by Sabbath keepers fails to prove

the Sabbath is still God's law for all the world today. But to show their contentions wrong does not prove the first day of the week to be the correct day of worship. We now turn attention to this matter. Whereas Christ did not bind the Sabbath on Christians, where is the Scripture that shows the Christians worshipped on the first day of the week which is our Sunday?

But The New Covenant

The first day of the week was a significant day in Christianity because so many important things happened on that day. Christ arose on the first day (John 1). The Holy Spirit came on the apostles on the first day, Pentecost (Acts 2). The church was established that same day (Acts 2). Christ appeared to His disciples on the first day (John 20:19). In the absense of emphasis on the seventh day, we find examples of assembly for worship, study, giving and the Lord's Supper on the first day (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:1,2). The command to not forsake the assembly in Hebrews 10:25 must be noted. We are commanded to assemble, not forsake it, and in these assemblies we worship God through Christ.

"But did not Paul go to the synagogue on the Sabbath?" He did, but not for the purpose of Jewish worship, but to take advantage of the opportunity of teaching concerning Christ. When he spoke to his Christian brethren it was on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

History's Testimony

Secular history, which is not our religious authority, is a corroborating evidence of the day the early Christians assembled for worship. Every Christian literature,letters, commentaries, histories of the church, as well as non-Christian accounts indicate the same thing. Christians met for worship on the first day of the week, the same day Justin Martyr called "the Lord's Day," taken from the phrase in Revelation 1:10. These secular writings date back within forty to fifty years of the life of John the apostle of Christ.

If we be honest with the evidence, we can draw some conclusions with certainty and assurance. The Sabbath was enjoined on Israel during the period when Moses' law was operative for that nation. But once the law of Christ was revealed and set in effect, that entire law was removed. We live

by and under the authority of Christ and His authority says nothing of the observance of the Sabbath, but shows His disciples worshipping on the first day of the week. This is why we do the same thing. We "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). By command, example and historical evidence, we can make such a conclusion.

Rather than our practice being questionable, we would ask those who contend for the continuation of Sabbath keeping where is the passage that the patriarchs observed that day? Where is the teaching that any except Israel was so commanded? Where is the division of Moses' law into ceremonial and moral division with some being set aside and others retained? Why take some of the moral law of Moses but omit part of it, like taking one's brother's widow and raising seed in his name? Why do they not restrict their labor and travel with attending punishments for violators as the Mosaic Law requires. These questions must be considered in the light of truth and will assist to show that worshipping on the first day of the week is not really the major question, but observing the Sabbath is questioned. The will of Christ makes it plain what we must do, and this is why we worship on the first day of the week.

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(continuation from page 24)

Let us learn these four lessons from this chapter. (1) The tragic and dire consequences of sin and disobedience. (2) The need to train each generation to follow the truth. (3) Regardless of the cause of sin or who is to blame, we cannot escape reaping what we sow. Someone has said, "Those who eat must pay the cook; Those who ride must provide the fare; So it is with us, my friend; Those who sin the grief must bear." (4) Let us pursue the mercy and grace of God that we might be forgiven of sin that will destroy us. We do this by obeying the gospel. This means to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, to repent of sins, to confess our faith in Christ, and to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, to be raised to walk in newness of life and living faithfully as a Christian until such time when the life for us on earth comes to an end.

† † † † †

Why The Early Church Grew

As you read the book of Acts, you soon come to Acts 6:7 which states, *"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly: and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."* What a wonderful statement of success and progress! Does this not reflect the hopes and desires of Christians now for the church? This is what we want for the faithful church of Christ anywhere and everywhere it exists.

What made such a growth possible? As we think on this we are struck with the thought that the present is due to a great extent to what has happened in the past. What made the success and progress of the early church so evident was the result of what had been done previously.

The history of the church at this time was very short. But whatever had taken place is what we need to make happen again, at least in principle, so the church today will grow as God would have it grow.

Looking into the earlier chapters of Acts we are impressed with the thorough preparation that had been made for the coming of the church before it was established. Even before the foundation of the world God had designed His plan for saving man, which involves the church because the church is composed of the saved. But especially in the years immediately prior to the establishment of the church there had been concerted efforts made to get things ready. The ministry of John the Baptist had been to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord, converting people to a righteous way of living, repenting of their sins and being baptized for the remission of sin.

The personal ministry of Christ and His apostles had been to preach, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."* (Mark 1:15). The hearts and minds of people were cultivated to be receptive to the great scheme of salvation and the successful establishment of the Lord's church in Jerusalem.

Plan And Prepare

In most every noble undertaking there must first be adequate planning and preparation. Often that is the most important part

of the task. So many good things have fallen in defeat because people go off "half-cocked" and ill-prepared. But even with good plans, that is no assurance of success. It might sould strange at first, but it is true that plans do not work. People must work. Good plans are needful, but that alone will accomplish little to nothing.

Planting

There was a grand planting of the truth on Pentecost. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ was proclaimed, as well as His ascension into glory. The apostles had been told by Jesus to wait in Jerusalem for power from on high, which was the Holy Spirit. On that Jewish feast day of Pentecost, as revealed in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came on the apostles and they began preaching remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. With manifold proofs and evidences of the truthfulness of their message that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, the performance of miracles to confirm their words, the Scripture tells us that three thousand obeyed the gospel that first day and were added to the church. For the first time we read of people being in the church. The enthusiasm, rejoicing and gladness ran high among the redeemed. The new faith of Jesus Christ was now a reality. Christianity had taken its place in this sin-sick world. Many were converted at the beginning. In but a few days thousands were added. But the point we make and stress is that nobody would have been saved if there had not been the preaching of the truth, the planting of truth in hearts. The Lord's church cannot and will not grow without truth. This is the *"seed of the kingdom"* (Luke 8:11). We may bring in crowds and influence many people, but the church is dependent on the grand planting of truth in order for it to grow.

Stedfastness

Beginning with vigor is essential, but continuing the work with vigor and stedfastness is also essential. Those who were baptized had to be taught more and more, as the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 teaches. The early Christians grew because they busied themselves in becoming spiritually strong. The apostles continued preaching forthrightly and powerfully. They condemned evil; called for repentance and baptism. They were constantly on the job, daily, proclaiming the truth without

compromise. Truth was precious to them.

They did not just teach the "first principles" of entrance into the kingdom, but also what is expected of the citizens in the kingdom. No church will amount to much real value unless this constant preaching to sinner and saint is aggressively pursued. A vigorous teaching effort must exist because the faith of Christ must be taught (John 6:44,45). *"And daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."* (Acts 5:42).

Persecution

Even that which was intended to be harmful to the church was turned into an advantage and opportunity for the church to grow. Then, as now, the Lord's church has enemies. Christians suffer persecution which is intended to discourage brethren to give up the faith and quit. But because the early church considered persecution in a way the enemies of truth did not expect, even persecution was helpful.

Persecution and criticism can be very destructive, but only if we let it be. It depends on the way we react to it and what our attitude toward it really is. Some are never persecuted and the reason may be because they are so lax in serving God that they are not giving the devil much concern. But when Peter and John were imprisoned and commanded not to preach and teach anymore, they took it as a challenge rather than a hindrance. They gave thanks to God they were considered worthy to suffer for the cause of Jesus Christ.

When you do what is right, there will be those who will want to hinder you any way they can. But hardship can be used to gain strength. *"Knowing this that the trying of your faith worketh patience."* (James 1:3). Instead of allowing opposition to cause them to draw back and give up, it motivated them to be stronger and more determined than ever before, and the church grew.

Liberality

Another characteristic of the early church that helped it grow was the individual liberality in giving. Unselfishness abounded throughout their midst. This was a manifestation of their love for God and one another. They had all things common, which meant if any lacked the others provided. This was not a communistic, compelled, forced pooling of resources, but a

voluntary, brotherly assistance to whoever needed anything. They, like the Good Samaritan, had the attitude, "What is mine is yours if you need it." What a wonderful fellowship!

Some even sold their possessions and gave the proceeds into the direction and care of the apostles (Acts 4:34,35). This they did willingly.

Why were they so liberal in this matter? The answer is the same reason people are liberal in giving today. They loved the church, the truth, the Lord, one another, and the lost. They had compassion toward those less fortunate than were they. There was a brotherly unity and mutual consideration for each other. They had disspelled covetousness, greed, envy and selfishness. By their giving they had the privilege and opportunity to let their love produce fruit.

God loves a cheerful giver (Second Corinthians 9:7). Those that sow sparingly will reap sparingly. But those that sow bountifully can expect to reap bountifully (Second Corinthians 9:6). This is a good lesson for us now. But what are we going to do with it?

Words And Deeds

The early church grew because they coupled their words with their deeds. Some have a good "talk" religion but are short on a "walk" religion. *"Even so let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16). People learn by seeing good done as well as hearing about it. Preaching good works but never performing good works will retard growth.

"Pure religion and undefiled before God the Father is this; To visit the fatherless and widows and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27). These early Christians lived apart from the sinful ways of the world. John wrote, *"Love not the world; neither the things that are in the world; If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him."* (First John 2:15). What a needed lesson for our time!

As they had opportunity they did good to all, especially their brethren (Galatians 6:10). Acts 6 teaches how they took care of needy widows among themselves.

When those outside of Christ see Christians practicing what they preach it will provoke some to want to be Christians also. Possibly this is one reason growth is retarded. Many Christians only "talk" about being a Christian, and if they were arrested for

being a Christian it is possible that there would not be enough evidence to convict them.

Purity

Finally, the preceding chapters before the statement of great growth showed how the early church did not ignore sin in its ranks. It is not God's will to allow sin to remain among members of the church and allow it to go unrebuked and undisciplined. Many members of the church today simply do not believe this truth. They think sin in the church is quite acceptable. Even though brethren of our time are often reluctant to obey God, we wonder why they think God did not know what He was talking about when He taught discipline, even to the point of withdrawing fellowship from those intent on walking disorderly and not according to apostolic tradition and teaching.

Annanias and Saphirra lied about what they were giving and God struck them dead. Does not this show God's will regarding sin in the church? Once a preacher cited that event and commented that he was glad God did not treat people that way now or he probably would not have many to hear him preach. One older and wiser brother remarked that the hearers would probably not have a preacher, either.

One of the hindrances to growth in our time is the failure to insist on one another being what God's book demands us to be. There are brethren in various stages of growth and process of maturing and they must be taught and encouraged. But there are brethren who are rebellious and disobedient to God's truth, and when that is tolerated without dealing with it God's way how do we expect those who are lost to be favorably impressed that we even believe what we say to ourselves? Those who drag their feet regarding the exercise of discipline as God teaches it do the church a disservice and bring reproach on the cause of Christ because they are willing to show the church is not going to be and not going to do what God requires. Regardless of the excuses offered, what excuse can men offer that is legitimate for disobeying God, even in this matter?

Discipline

Some complain that discipline will harm the church. God did not think so. After the severe disciplinary measure God took against that evil couple in Acts 5 the church grew as never

before. *"And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women."* (Acts 5:14). The failure to let people know that the members of the church intend to follow truth destroys the appeal to become members of it.

Why did the early church grow? There was a thorough preparation and planning, a vigorous beginning, a constant and strong preaching and teaching effort, facing and overcoming persecution, liberality and unselfishness, words coupled with deeds and the maintenance of the high standard of purity. None of this gimmicktry and trickery, entertainments, booster programs and such like were in evidence. When are we going to learn what God shows us does the job?

Times change, but truth does not. These principles, properly applied in our time and circumstance, will cause the church to grow. Whatever may be lacking where we attend, we ought begin now to develop and carry forward these very characteristics. It will save souls and that, after all, is the business of the Lord's church. Would that we all would even learn that.

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Lessons From Judges

Joshua had led the Israelites across the Jordan River into Canaan and they began settling the land as it was conquered. Judges, chapter two, gives us an insight into the Israelite people's thinking and their relationship with God in the last days of Joshua and the years immediately following. A review of this chapter presents us some practical principles that were applied then and are just as useful for us today.

The account goes like this (and you are encouraged to read the entire chapter). The nation, even though it controlled almost all of the land, had not been obedient to one of the Lord's commandments to completely drive out the enemy and the heathen nations that had occupied the land previously. Neither were they to make treaties and leagues with those people. The reason this was prohibited was very simple. God did not want His people to become attached to those who did not serve Him because He knew that such association could only result in temptation for Israel to be led astray from Him to their own

spiritual and physical destruction.

The result of their disobedience in this matter was that those nations remained among them and proved to be as a thorn in their side throughout Israel's entire occupation of the land of Canaan. Israel could not disobey God and expect to escape the consequences of their disobedience.

After Joshua

During the days of Joshua and the elders of the people who served with him, Israel remained, for the most part, loyal and faithful to God. This teaches us the inestimable value of truly righteous leadership for any nation. But then as the older and faithful men were dying, a new generation was rising who did not appreciate what Joshua had done and that for which Joshua had stood during his life. They did evil in the sight of the Lord, forsook God, "doing their own thing and going their own way." They sought out the heathen gods of the people they failed to destroy, serving Baal, Ashteroth, and other gods rather than Jehovah of heaven; the very thing that God wanted them to avoid. But they did not heed His warning.

The anger of Jehovah was kindled against them and they were delivered into the hands of their enemies. Their enemies made slaves of them and the nation was greatly distressed, unable to enjoy the fruits of their own labors. But once in this deplorable state, the people would realize what they had done and would repent of their evil deeds and raise their voices to God in petitions for deliverance from their foes. God, hearing their cry, would raise up a judge who would become the leader of the people and who would lead in a revolt against their enemies and bring them their freedom once again. When they faithfully followed the leadership of the judge they would experience their recovery and be blessed. But time after time they would cease their service to God and return to the ways of evil. When they did, they would suffer the same punishments as had been suffered previously. Israel proved so unstable so many times that God determined to leave their enemies in the land rather than drive them out altogether in order to use them as a means of chastisement of Israel when they digressed from Him.

This fairly and briefly paraphrases the information of Judges 2. But there are several lessons we can learn from all of this in addition to the historical value of the chapter.

Obedience

First, we might consider the original cause of the troubles that Israel suffered down through the years. In a word, their problem was disobedience. The people disobeyed the commandments of the Lord that allowed the heathen inhabitants to remain among them. Disobedience always brings sorrow and regret to the disobedience. *"Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."* (Proverbs 14:34). The book of Judges is a history of a nation that proves this truth.

People often suffer greatly in this life because of their sins. Violation of God's will brings disgrace and hardship on any people. Immorality, riotous living, licentiousness will produce heartbreak, disease, and shame.

In addition to the suffering in this life, there is much more dreadful punishment awaiting the disobedience unless they are forgiven of their sins. Sin and disobedience was at the heart of Israel's distresses.

Leadership

Second, we observe the disastrous results when there is failure to maintain a good leadership for each generation. During Joshua's life and that of those who served with him, the people were led properly as they cooperated with their godly leaders. But when a new generation came upon the scene, Israel went astray. They did not go astray simply because a new generation took over, but because the new generation did not have respect for the things of the past and the necessity to be loyal to God. It was not because they were not teachable, but because they were rebellious and unwilling to submit to God.

Some are always speaking against the youth. But they must realize the awesome responsibility of the older generation to properly train the next one if matters are to be as they should be. It just takes one untaught generation to introduce a wholesale digression from God. The young will not likely rise higher than the levels they are taught by the older folks. The young should be taught to be right with God, and we should expect them to follow God. They usually become just about what we expect of them. For this reason we must always hold aloft the high, noble, pure, righteous and admirable standards of the Lord before our oncoming youth.

As we see the disaster of a younger generation assuming

control, a generation that was evil, let us not forget the failure of the older generation to teach, instruct, guide, mold and train the young. Each generation must fight its own battles. But the generation that has received good training is already ahead. This is why the home and the church must not fail in its duty to see that the young are indoctrinared in truth, well grounded and established in *"thus saith the Lord."* Otherwise, the cause of Christ is severely crippled.

Wages Of Sin

Third, regardless of the cause of sin or where we wish to place the blame for Israel's failures, God does not forever tolerate rebelllion. There comes a time of retribution and recompense. Even if many things seem to go right in this world, all sin is not paid for in this life.

God is longsuffering and merciful, but we cannot take unfair advantage of this benevolence of God and expect to defy Him without Him taking notice of it. *"Be sure your sins will find you out,"* is a principle of truth that not people can dismiss.

Nor does it do much good to say, "My ancestors brought my trouble upon me." Regardless of what our ancestors did or did not do, we do not have to follow evil. We have a personal responsibility also. There comes the time in the life of every person of accountability when he must consider his own duty to God and he cannot shift the blame for his sins to another.

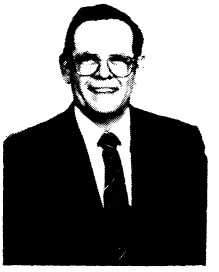
Mercy Of God

Fourth, even in this chapter which is not a pretty one regarding Israel, we see the operation of the mercy and love of God. When an evildoer is penitent, God tries to help him. Israel would sin, but when they would repent, God was forgiving. He was not deaf to their pleas and petitions of those whose heart was turned again His direction.

God could have reacted by saying, "You have brought your disgrace upon yourself. Now wrestle with it the best you can." Indeed, they were not worthy of God's goodness toward them any more than we are worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we might be forgiven of our sins. But we learn that if we will turn to God and seek His way He will look upon us with mercy and forgiveness. How dreadful life would be without this benefit!

(continued on page 15)

Do It For My Sake



JAMES W. BOYD

Paul wrote to his friend Philemon, *"If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself."* Onesimus was a slave that had fled from Philemon. As providence worked, this slave came in contact with Paul and was converted to Christ. This meant that Paul, Philemon and Onesimus were now brothers in the Lord. Paul knew that the right thing for Onesimus was to return to Philemon. He also knew that the right thing for Philemon to do was to receive Onesimus, not as a runaway slave, but as a brother in Christ. Their spiritual relationship should make a difference in the way they looked upon one another.

To encourage Philemon to have the proper attitude and exhibit the proper conduct toward Onesimus, Paul sent Philemon this short epistle and urged Philemon to look upon his slave as he would look upon Paul. Even though their social status was different, they were partners in the cause of Christ.

Being Christians makes a tremendous difference in the way we consider people when we are both in the Lord and partners in Christ.

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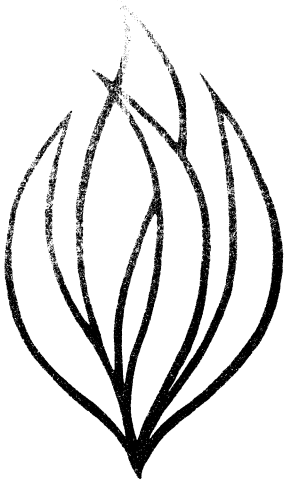

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 9**

Questions Regarding Marriage, Divorce, And Remarriage

This is a controversial subject, but let us understand something about controversial subjects. It does not mean there is no right and wrong regarding them. It does not mean we cannot know what the truth is. It simply means there is controversy over it, usually because there are those who do not want, will not accept, and refuse to admit the truth.

We shall approach the subject by asking questions and allowing the Word of God to provide the answers. When some of us were growing up, gospel preachers frequently had lessons on this theme. Possibly the lack of sermons teaching God's truth on the subject is one big reason why many marriages have suffered divorce, and many have remarried when they had no right to do so.

When, Where, By Whom?

Where did marriage originate? A reading of Genesis 2:18-25 makes it unmistakeable that God is the author of marriage. Marriage is not merely a social arrangement, an economic situation, a legal contract, but a divine institution. It is the oldest of three institutions ordained of God; the three being the home, civil government, and the church. Any and all disposition of marriage must include God. It is not a matter merely between a man and a woman, a husband and a wife. God is involved. The failure to accept this truth is the reason there is so much error being taught and practiced regarding marriage today.

Why?

What are the purposes of marriage? If we were to choose one word above all others to convey the intent of marriage we must choose the word *"companionship."* The woman is a help meet, or suitable, to man. Marriage partners are to leave all others and cleave to each other. Genesis 2:18 teaches the basic purpose of

marriage is companionship.

Procreation, the perpetuation of the human race, is another purpose of marriage (Genesis 1:28). Children are to be born of parents who are married to each other. The home is the basic unit of society. The word "*replenish*" means to stock with persons.

Marriage is to avoid fornication (First Corinthians 7:2,3). God gave us our bodies and the sexual desire for each other. There is nothing evil, sinful, or shameful regarding the sexual relationship of husband and wife. However, sexual activity outside of marriage, either pre-marital, extra-marital, whatever, is to defile that which God has made sacred and holy. Fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, lesbians, etc, are violators of the holy intent of God and they turn what God purposed to be a beautiful and pure relationship into something reprehensible and filthy.

How Long?

What is to be the duration of marriage? First Corinthians 7:39, *"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will, only in the Lord."* The last phrase refers to another Christian. Marriage is *"till death do you part."*

Romans 7:1-4 teaches the duration of marriage the same extent, and those who would marry another mate while their first mate lives commits adultery. These passages do not take into consideration the one exception which Jesus taught in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, which we shall consider further in the lesson. But the rule is marriage is for life. Nobody ought to enter marriage with any other design or plan.

Divorce

Does God allow divorce? The answer is a qualified "Yes." Since much of the remaining part of the lesson centers on Matthew 19:3-9, let us focus attention on it.

"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

And he answered and said unto them. Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female,

And said, For This cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh?

Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

They say unto him, Why then did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."

Malachi 2:16 reads, *"For the Lord God of Israel saith that he hateth putting away."* God will allow divorce, but He does not approve of it. Man ought not put asunder what God has joined.

The Exception

God has allowed one exception to the lifetime duration of a marriage. To deny this exception is as erroneous as to ignore it and divorce for any cause. It is an exceptive clause, which conveys the idea that it presents the only allowance God grants for divorce. This is not a contradiction to Romans 7:1-4 or First Corinthians 7:39, because it takes all that the Lord has taught on a subject to have His full truth.

Fornication, which is illicit sexual conduct with one other than one's mate, such as adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, beastiality, incest, is the cause for which God will allow the one who is innocent of that sin to divorce the one who is guilty of it.

We note here, and shall explore further, the fact that there are two phrases in Matthew 19:9 and they concern two different people.

What if a person divorces for reasons other than fornication, and marries another? They are living in adultery. That is what the passage teaches. Can one live in adultery? Paul said they could (Colossians 3:5-7; First Corinthians 6:11). Some object that adultery is an act and one cannot live in an act. But sin is also an act, and one can live in sin (Romans 6:1,2). Sin is not only an act but also a state, a spiritual condition.

Furthermore, the verb phrase *"Committeth adultery"* is in the present tense, and in the original language of the New Testament the present tense carries the idea of a continuing

action, not just a one time intercourse. The Bible is clear. Those who divorce have but one justified cause and that is fornication. To remarry when that is not the cause is to live in adultery. Those who teach otherwise teach people to be comforted in their sin.

The Guilty

Can the person who is guilty of fornication also remarry? It is evident that the one who is not guilty of fornication can remarry. But what of the one whose sin caused the broken marriage? Can they also remarry?

Here is where we must recognize the two phrases of Matthew 19:9. The first phrase concerns the one who puts away a fornicating mate. That person does not commit sin by remarrying. The second phrase concerns the one who is put away because they are guilty of fornication. There is no exception given to that person. There is no right granted to them to remarry. Rather it is stated that they, and the one who marries them, commit adultery. Nothing is clearer than this.

But someone asks, "How can one be loosed from the other and have the right to remarry and the other not be loosed from the one? It seems if one is loosed, both are loosed." It is true that they are loosed from each other, but neither is loosed from the teaching of God. God allows the one not guilty of fornication to remarry, but He does not so allow the one who has commited the fornication that caused the divorce. They are still tied to God's will even though not to each other.

Forgiveness

If one is divorced for reasons other than fornication, and has remarried, cannot they be forgiven? Yes, they can be forgiven when the terms and conditions of forgiveness are met. Some think that because one has remarried that the marriage must be acceptable to God. Just because the Bible speaks of one as married does not mean that the marriage is approved of God. The Bible speaks of prophets, but not all prophets are approved of God. The Bible speaks of the gospel, but there is a perverted gospel. The Bible speaks of marriages, but not all marriages are what God will accept. One must not assume that a remarriage is acceptable just because it is called a marriage.

One of the conditions of forgiveness of sins is repentance.

This demands a change of mind that results in a change of life. One cannot continue in sin and claim to have repented. A liar cannot keep on lying. A thief cannot continue to steal. Nor can one in adultery continue living in adultery. The relationship is sinful and must be abandoned.

But what if one has been baptized since he was divorced and remarried? When one is baptized, past sins are forgiven, but not future sins. Baptism does not change an adulterous relationship into a holy and sacred one. Baptism does not change one's marriageability. Baptism does not make lying into something honorable. It does not make stealing acceptable. It does not make adultery an acceptable marriage.

"Whosoever"

The teaching of Christ regarding marriage applies to all mankind. Some refer to the teaching of Jesus as a "covenant passage," meaning that the teaching only applies to Christians. But Jesus said His will was as God had decreed it *"from the beginning."* If the teaching of Jesus only applies to the Christian, then nobody who is not a Christian has to conform to anything the Lord has taught. This is ridiculous. If the Lord's will regarding the sanctity of marriage only applies to the Christian, then nobody who is not a Christian could commit fornication, adultery, or any other sin. But we know such a position is absurd. In baptism, the blood of Christ washes away sins, but one cannot return to his sins and be thought delivered from them (Romans 6:1,2).

But what if children are involved in the second marriage? This is a circumstance that makes matters more difficult, but it does not change the teaching of God. In any divorce, or even the death of a mate, when there are children it makes matters more difficult. We are not insensitive to the hardships involved. But we are not blinded by the emotions that are involved to dismiss the teaching either. Nor does anyone have the right to dismiss the teaching of Christ because children are involved.

We can see this more readily if we consider bigamy, pologamy, homosexuality, or some other sinful relationship. We would not entertain the doctrine that one who is guilty of such sins can be baptized and then return to those same sinful relationships acceptably. Then why should anyone think a person could return to adultery? Baptism does not make adultery into a marriage acceptable to God. Those who teach

otherwise teach a false doctrine that will cause many who believe and follow it to be lost. Too often religious teachers attempt to accomodate sinful circumstances rather than teach people how to be saved.

Desertion

Is not desertion scriptural grounds for divorce? To be sure, desertion is a sin (First Timothy 5:8). But it is not grounds for divorce. But one asks about First Corinthians 7:15. Let us read the passage. *"But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace."*

What is the "*bondage*" of this verse? It is a bondage of slavery. It refers to a bondage under which the Christian has not lived to his or her mate. Marriage is not a master-slave relationship. The word translated "bondage" is found 134 times in the New Testament and in the 133 other times it never refers to the marriage bond. But in this chapter the marriage bond is mentioned twice, but with a different word altogether. The marriage bond is from *"deo"* while the bondage of First Corinthians 7:15 is from *"doulou."* Should an unbeliever desert his Christian mate, the Christian must remember that he is a servant of Christ, and must not abandon Christ simply to hold on to this unbelieving mate. Let him go. One is never so bound to a mate as to be justified in leaving Christ. Nothing is said of divorce in this chapter, but rather, in the event of separation of a Christian from his or her mate, the admonition is that there are two alternatives open: (1) be reconciled to the mate, or (2) remain unmarried. A divorce and remarriage is not given as an acceptable alternative. Only fornication is the grounds for divorce in the Scriptures.

Should a Christian who is married to a non-Christian leave the non-Christian? The answer is "No." (First Corinthians 7:12-14). If the non-Christian mate is content to dwell with the Christian, then remain together. If the non-Christian wishes to leave, rather than forsake Christ, the Christian should let them leave. The Christian should bend every effort to convert the unconverted mate (First Peter 3:1,2).

A far better solution to this problem is to marry one who is a Christian. One has calculated that seven out of ten who marry outside the church will eventually leave the church. Only one in six convert their mates. What a spiritual risk to the Christian, and

to children that may be born into a divided religious home. We cannot overemphasize the extent of folly in marrying outside of Christ.

When Married?

When is one married? This may seem a rather peculiar question, but with the barrage against the very institution of marriage, we must consider it. Some have scoffed at marriage, asking, "What difference does a piece of paper make? What difference does a ceremony make? Why not just begin living together?" We would like someone to tell us the difference between whoremongering and living in adultery and fornication than the lifestyle that allows two people to just start living together without the benefit of being married.

The difference is that one is according to God's law and the other is a violation of God's law. That may not make much difference to the ungodly, but it makes a difference to those who respect God. Christians will obey the laws of the land. (Romans 13:1; First Peter 2:13,14). God is the One who performed the first "ceremony." A ceremony is bringing one to the other in recognition of a new relationship. God is the first to do this (Genesis 2:22). He saw fit to denote a point when the relationship is a reality, and so should we.

Some have suggested that marriage does not exist until sexually consumated. But if that is true, what you have is two single people coming together into a sexual relationship. That is fornication, nor marriage. Sexual relationship is a privilege of marriage, not that which makes one married. Joseph and Mary were married before they came together. If one is not married until there is sexual intercourse, and upon intercourse there is marriage, then every fornicator becomes married when he or she commits fornication. That is absurd.

When the preacher, or whoever performs the ceremony in marriage says, "I pronounce you husband and wife..." then the two are married, not before, and not at some later point. The ceremony is the point of commitment being recognized and the point where the relationship is changed. Should the groom die immediately prior to that pronouncement, the prospective bride is not a widow. But if he dies immediately thereafter, she is a widow. Even the inheritance laws of the land admit this.

Right To Marry

Who has the right of marriage? There are three classes of people who have the right to marry according to God's will. One, those who have never married (First Corinthians 7:36). Two, those who have married but their mates have died (Romans 7:5; First Corinthians 7:39). Three, those who have married but are divorced because they put away their mate because the mate was guilty of fornication. The Scriptures do not grant the privilege of marriage to any others. Respect for this teaching will prevent and resolve many of the marital problems now in existence.

Marriage is not an obligation, but a privilege. One does not sin to marry, nor does one sin to not marry. But if one marries, they are obligated to obey God's will regulating it. When one is married, they are obligated to live according to the law governing marriage.

There ought be no division over such an important matter. There is no cause for controversy, no room for compromise. Homes, souls, the eternal destiny of untold numbers of people may well be determined by the acceptance or rejection of the teaching of the Bible regarding marriage.

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Even though there are innumerable passages that teach the possibility of apostasy and that a child of God can be lost, how many times does God have to teach us something before we accept it? If we do not accept His Word one place, will we accept it if He repeats Himself over and over again?

Conclusion

(from page 24)

What conclusions must be drawn from this information presented? God's child may sin in both body and spirit. The spirit is responsible for the sins of the body. The spirit must overcome lust, the desires of the flesh, else the child of God, once saved from past sins, can return to that from which he was washed and be lost. If this is not true, why all the warnings in every New Testament book against falling away? Why all the exhortations to faithfulness? Why the condemnation of hypocrisy, lukewarmness and apostasy? Such would be needless and useless. The doctrine once saved, always saved is false, misleading, deceptive and we should never allow ourselves to be

(continued page 16)

Revival Under Josiah

We read of the reign of Josiah in Second Kings 22 through 23:28. At the time of our lesson Israel had long ago become divided into two nations, Northern Israel and Southern Judah. Northen Israel had been carried into captivity by the Assyrians but Judah still survived.

Of all the kings of Northen Israel not one is mentioned as being a righteous person or having favor with God. Of the twenty kings of Judah only six are mentioned with praise as serving God faithfully, some of those being guilty of grave errors. Most were like their northern cousins. When leaders of nations are wicked the entire nation suffers. It would be wonderful if Americans could learn this lesson, giving honor to their good leaders and repudiating the wicked.

One of the six mentioned with favor was Josiah. He was actually the best king Judah had since the days of David nearly five centuries earlier. It was under the leadership of Josiah that the last effort of reformation and revival was attempted by Judah before their captivity by the Babylonians. Some success at recovery had been enjoyed under the rule of Hezekiah about one hundred twenty years earlier, but the nation had long since forgotten that restoration. Of Josiah it is said, *"He did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah."*

Josiah's father, Amon, was a very wicked man. He died when Josiah was but eight years of age. Obviously, Josiah was but a figurehead king for some years because of his youth, but his later life reveals that someone who loved the Lord did a good job in planting a love for God and God's will in Josiah's heart. He *"walked in all the way of David... turned not aside to the right hand or to the left."*

Josiah's Acts

When he was twenty-six years old he asked for an accounting of the money in the Lord's treasury. To fully appreciate the significance of this act, we must recall what had been done during the previous reign. Worship had been neglected; the temple allowed to fall into a state of bad repair; copies of the Law of Moses had been destroyed; idols and high places for idolatrous worship had been erected; and there had been a

fanatical supression of the worship of Jehovah. This accounting was a tremendous turn-around from previous years. But it proved to be only the beginning of the efforts put forth for revival by Josiah.

During the next thirteen years the temple was repaired. Carpenters, builders, hewers of stone were employed and the breaches repaired. The entire area was restored to a reasonable facsimile of its former radiance and grandeur. The idols were destroyed in the land that had been built to the sun, moon and stars, being ground into powder. Baal, Ashteroth, Asherah, and other heathen gods of Israel's neighbors were brought down. The altars to false worship were removed. The tombs of the former idolatrous leaders were defiled and their bones scattered. Remembrance of God's prophets was restored and they were once again respected.

The houses of wickedness were also brought down and idolatrous priests were slain. Multitudes began to forsake their evil ways and worship Jehovah. God's priests were raised to their former distinction. The Passover was observed according to the Law. It is thrilling to read the step by step procedure led by Josiah that brought a wholesome religious revival to the people of the land. It is described as being like nothing else that had ever taken place in Israel because of its completeness, vigor, and devotion. Nothing compared with it in Israel or Judah since the days of Israel's glory under David and Solomon when the nation was united under one monarch and faithful to God.

Why The Revival?

What caused this great revitalization? True, it was the work of Josiah. But what caused Josiah to become so devoted to this task of rebuilding Judah and bringing it back to God? The answer is found in one of the most interesting and strange events recorded in the Old Testament.

We mentioned how previous rulers had attempted to destroy copies of the Law of Moses. But when Josiah commanded an accounting of the money and a repair of the temple, a copy of the Law was found that had evidently been hidden during the period of destruction. God's book had become "lost" but was found again (Second Kings 22:8).

The book was given to Hilkiah, a priest, then to a scribe named Shaphan, and eventually to Josiah the king. Together they began studying the Word of God. The reaction of Josiah to what

he learned is in verse eleven, *"And it came to pass when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes."* Why did he have such a reaction? Verse 13, *"...for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us."* Josiah took notice of the wide variance between what the people were and what God's Word said they ought to be. He was extremely troubled by it. He then set things in motion to correct a very deplorable condition.

He called for the priest to inquire of God what to do to bring Judah once again into His favor. Briefly speaking, the answer he got is seen in what he spent the rest of his life doing.

What He Did

How did he bring Judah back to God? What measures did he take? To summarize the activity, (1) he warred against every evil in every way; (2) he held high that which was holy before God; (3) he rebuilt the symbols of righteousness; (4) he had the Law of Moses read publicly and regularly to all the people that they might know the will of the Lord. (Second Kings 23:1,2).

That which really caused this great revival was hearing, believing and obeying the Word of the Lord. The Word rediscovered, studied, accepted and applied by men who were honest, courageous, energetic enough to expedite and follow through what the Word of the Lord demanded was what produced the revival. The people were wanting and willing to obey God. Without this disposition there could have been no revival. All the vital factors were present.

Let us make an application of what we learn. Is it not true that most of the world does not know the true and living God of heaven? The day I set this type it is calculated that there are now five billion people on this globe. How many know not the Lord? Can we doubt the increasingly reprehensible conditions in the homes even in our own land of freedom and blessing? What is the genuine spirituality in the churches? Is the nation really concerned about morality? Many who have heard of the Lord do not believe and accept His authority. Many who claim to believe in Christ are torn asunder by division, pride, denominationalism, following the doctrines of men, failing to settle upon the divine standard, the Bible, as the all-sufficient rule. Even those who profess to follow the doctrine of Christ

faithfully are often complacent, indifferent, steeped in relaxation and satisfaction, resting and at ease. As in the days of Josiah at the beginning of the revival, we stand in need of a great spiritual awakening also, one that can be produced only by a devotion to, knowledge of, and submission to the will of the Lord.

"But the task is so large it seems hopeless." Such is often argued. Many contend the world cannot be changed. Admittedly, the situation is a desparate one and the task is of gigantic proportions, especially when we view the entire scene. Fortunately for us, our success is not solely dependent upon the results of our efforts as much as our efforts put forth. We may not accomplish all we wish we could, not even very much, but unless we try we are automatcially failures before God.

Turning Things Around

But how can we turn things around in this sin-torn world? There is only one way open to us. That way is, in principle, like that which was exercised by Josiah. There must be a rediscovery of the message of the Word of God. Even though there are copies of God's Word in houses of worship and in multitudes of homes, it is a book that often goes unread, unstudied, unknown and unapplied. It is not because the truth will not accomplish what is needed that it gathers dust. It is because the Bible goes untried and people simply neither know it nor follow it.

The Word must be studied and reverenced, believed and accepted, and then assuredly applied. Individually and collectively, this is a necessity. This means that we must not only theorectically accept the truth, but in reality of daily living and practice.

Just look at the many people of honesty, courage, energy and determination that promoted the Word of God among the people in the day of Josiah. We must be as they were. When we are, we will see results from our efforts as did they. So many who profess to be Christians are guilty of adding to the decline of righteousness in this world through their neglect and failure to put the things of God first in their lives.

The only power to save mankind is the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16). When that gospel is preached, it will be heard. When heard, some will believe and will subsequently obey and come to know the joy of salvation. Whether anyone ever responds favorably to the call of Christ that comes through the gospel or not, it is our duty and privilege to take the Word to the

world. Is there any other means of producing the spiritual awakening that the world needs so badly in our own time?

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The Gospel Taken To Samaria

Our text is lengthy and you are urged to read Acts 8:1-24 before proceeding with this lesson.

The Lord's church was probably about one year old, having begun in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following the Lord's ascension. Christians had been scattered due to persecution. One territory, called Samaria, the name of both a province and a city, was inhabited by people of mixed blood, that is, they were descendents of imported foreigners and Israelites left behind in the Assyrian deportation of the ten tribes of Northern Israel. It was about fifty-five miles north of Jerusalem, situated between Judea and Galilee. The citizens had come from immigrants sent by Assyria to colonize the area vacated by the ten tribes.

There was strong and ill feeling between the Jews and Gentiles. But in some ways, the feeling was even worse between Jews and the Samaritans. It stemmed from the desire of Samaritans to assist the Jews in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple when the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity. Their request was denied because they were not "true blue Jew." Six hundred years of hostility had accumulated to the time of Jesus Christ.

Samaritan Religion

The Samaritans practiced a form of worship of Jehovah, having been taught certain tenets of the Jewish faith by a Jewish priest many years earlier. They even accepted a part of the Jewish Scriptures, but not all. They had come to anticipate the advent of the Messiah, which they believed would include them.

Therefore, they shared with the Jews many common convictions. But they had their own temple in Mt. Gerizim and worshipped not in Jerusalem.

Jesus had dealt with Samaritans both favorably and unfavorably. In Luke 9, He was refused permission to stay among them overnight, which provoked the reaction of James and John to petition the Lord to call down fire upon them. Jesus made journeys around the territory as He traveled between Galilee and Judea in order to avoid conflict. He had met with a Samaritan woman and taught her many things at Jacob's well. (John 4). There He showed Himself to be a prophet and claimed to be the Missiah long anticipated. The people came from the city of Samaria to inquire of Him and believed on Him. Jesus had also used the Samaritans as good examples in His teaching, such as in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

When Jesus gave the great commission, He said, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations..."* (Matthew 28:19). When Philip took the gospel to Samaria he was doing what that charge required. While the preparatory work for the kingdom had included preaching principally to the Jews (Matthew 10:5,6), now that the way of salvation had been revealed to mankind, beginning at Pentecost, the gospel was to be preached to one and all. Jesus had said, Acts 1:8, *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

The Preacher

Who was Philip? He was one of the seven chosen to care for needy widows in Acts 6. He was of good report, full of the Spirit, and wisdom. Later he is called an evangelist (Acts 21), having four daughters who also prophesied or taught. This is not the same as preaching (the public proclamation of the Word). Philip came to Samaria proclaiming Christ and His kingdom (Acts 8:5,12).

Having had apostolic hands laid on him (Acts 6:6), he was able to perform miracles (8:6,13). The purpose of miracles was to confirm the Word preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:1-4). Verse seven tells some of the deeds he performed. The result,

verse 8, *"And there was great joy in that city."*

Amond those converted by the efforts of Philip was a man named Simon. He was at the time of his conversion a sorcerer. We shall have more to say concerning him later.

Philip preached, people heard, believed, and were baptized (8:12), both men and women. Nothing is said of children being baptized. We never read in the Bible of infants being baptized, or even sprinkled, and sprinkling is not baptism anyway. But, like the teaching of Christ (Mark 16:16), and Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2:38), Philip taught those who hear and understand to be baptized. It is regretable that many who claim to preach the gospel will not preach what Philip preached, including Christ, His church, faith, and baptism.

Apostles' Visit

The news of conversions in Samaria reached Jerusalem. Peter and John went there (8:4), and prayed that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit, laying hands on them (8:15-17). They had already received the *"gift of the Holy Spirit"* as a consequence of their obedience to the command to be baptized (Acts 2:38). This referred to the salvation promised (Acts 2:39). What was granted the Samaritans with the laying on of hands was not baptism with the Holy Spirit, as applied to the apostles on Pentecost, but the impartation of miraculous powers which could be given in this way (Acts 19:6; Romans 1:11). While Philip had miraculous powers himself, he obviously did not have the power to impart them to others since he was not an apostle. This was a part of the apostolic work that was exclusive to the apostles. This is why there was no giving of miraculous powers to the Samaritans until the coming of Peter and John. These abilities would then be used by those who received them for the same purposes as they were used by Philip; namely, to confirm the Word as they went forward to preach it.

Returning to Simon for a moment, we read how he believed and was baptized (8:13). According to the teaching of Jesus (Mark 16:16), he was then a saved person. But he wanted the power possessed by the apostles, to lay his hand on others to grant them miraculous abilities (8:18,19). This was an improper request because it was not his work, but belonged only to the apostles. Furthermore, Peter said his heart was not right (8:20,21). Peter's description of his spiritual state was (8:23), *"For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the*

bond of iniquity." His instruction to get right again was (8:23), *"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."* Simon requested that others pray for him as well.

To Be Restored

This is a significant teaching. Simon was not commanded to be baptized again, as had been done before he ever came to Christ. Now in Christ, but one who had fallen again into sin, he was told to *"repent...and pray."* This is the divine plan of restoration for the fallen Christian.

Now the gospel, and the resultant church, had been planted in Samaria. The apostles stayed a while preaching and teaching. Philip was directed to another place, the road between Jerusalem and Gaza where he would later meet the Ethiopian.

The Word

What we learn from this account is the necessity of the preaching of the Word in order for people to be saved. We see the inseparableness of preaching Christ and His church. We must conclude that the gospel is for all, Gentile and Jew, whosoever will. We learn the purpose of miracles, the use of miracles, the passing of power of miracles, and how limited that was, to whom miraculous powers belonged, and to whom belonged the power to impart miraculous powers. We discover what people did to be converted to Christ; hear, believe, and obey, being baptized. We discover what a fallen Christian must do to be recovered; repent and pray.

The account of the gospel taken to Samaria is one of the more complete accounts of evangelism. We need to have an understanding of what took place and how it was accomplished.

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(from page 8)
victimized by it.

We should not accept the false doctrine once saved, always saved, but neither should we live lives that are out of harmony with the pattern of life defined in Scripture for those who profess to be His disciples.

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Find A Man

Jeremiah 5:1, *"Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it."*

Those were the words of Jehovah to His prophet Jeremiah, a prophet to Judah in the years immediately preceding Judah's fall before Babylon. The people of Judah were God's chosen people, chosen for the primary purpose that through them God would fulfill His promises to Abraham and bring into the world the Savior of all mankind, Jesus Christ His Son. Yet, the Lord, and Jeremiah, were distressed over the spiritual condition of this nation, and for good reason. These words are a sad commentary on their state. The Lord wanted something, but what He wanted could not easily be found even among His own people.

Note the extent to which Jeremiah was to involve himself in the search for what God wanted: *"Run to and fro through the streets...,"* back and forth, retracing your steps, searching diligently. Go to the broad places, even the market places where many people could be found, looking everywhere. The very nature of the search indicates the scarcity of that which the Lord sought.

Wanted

What was it the Lord wanted? He said, *"Find a man."* He was not looking for a male human being. Surely, many of them could be located. But He wanted a man of certain qualities of character and spirit. This certain kind of person was one that *"executes judgment,"* or as one translation renders the phrase, *"doing justly."* Also he was to be one who *"seeks the truth."*

To execute judgment meant one that dealt fairly with others, measured all things by God's standard, honest in his word and motive. He was to be what we often refer to as being "above board." You could depend on what he said and did, discharging his duties with responsibility. He word was his bond.

There is so much dishonesty, cheating, lying, stealing, in almost every realm of human activity. Daily we read of people in government, in business, doing things that are dishonest. One of

the tragic ills of mankind is this fundamental fault seen in so many. They simply are not honest people. When any nation reaches the place where honor and integrity are at a scarcity, the nation is in a deplorable spiritual condition.

God also wanted a person who sought the truth. Many of us have never really made a diligent search for what is right and wrong. We deserve no credit for having searched for the truth because we have simply taken what has been handed down to us without investigating what the Word of God teaches. While there is credit due for holding on to truth, how much of an appetite for it do we possess? Do we really hunger and thirst for righteousness? People often shun the truth, ridicule the truth, because they have no real love for truth. I suppose I shall never understand why those who profess to be God's children have to constantly be urged, begged, and pushed to the opportunities for Bible study. Surely, those who seek the truth and wish to know the will of God do not have to be shoved along.

Scarcity

The story is told of an ancient Greek philosopher named Diogenes who went through the streets of his city in daylight with a lighted lantern. When asked what he was doing, he said he was looking for an honest man. In this way he emphasized the scarcity of such people. By the search that Jeremiah was called upon to make, God emphasized the scarcity of the kind of people that were pleasing to Him in the city of Jerusalem. If you and I had lived in Jerusalem at that time, would we have qualified?

Why did the Lord want such a person? It was because his influence could be used to the preservation of the entire body of people. Paul teaches that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (First Corinthians 5:6). He was speaking of how the influence of evil can contaminate the whole body. But it is also true that good influence can sometimes be used to make things better. Bad can defile the good, but good can also drive out the evil when properly administered. Jerusalem, though warned of their impending doom because of their sins, could have been spared if they would only turn from their sinful manners and return to God. But who was there among them that could be used for this purpose?

Their Sins

As we read in Jeremiah, chapter five, we learn of many of the abominations that characterized Jerusalem at this time. In verse two, they swore by their false gods, and in verse 3, they refused to be corrected. There are some people that just will not listen. They would not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears. Their heart was hardened and closed. They were a revolting and rebellious people. In verse four, they were foolish, not knowing the way of Jehovah, but they could have known as verse five teaches. In verse six, their transgressions were many, and they were backsliders. Even their great ones failed them. Verse seven, they were guilty of forsaking the needy and were overrunning with iniquity. Indeed, the spiritual state of Judah was one that grieved the heart of God and His prophet.

Someone has rightly said that the trouble with Judah can be defined with a set of "P's"; their priests, prophets, princes, and people were polluted. The nation was almost like Elijah once thought Israel to be; namely, totally against God and none to follow Him except Elijah. While that later proved not to be exactly the case, the condition of the nation was one that could only lead to the doom predicted for it.

Religious People

Please take note that these were not irreligious people. God did not tell Jeremiah to find a religious person. There were plenty of those all around. But being religious and being righteous are not always the same. The people of Judah, like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, conformed to many ceremonies and rituals, going through religious forms, but their heart and manner of life was evil. Are there not possibly many in churches today of whom just such an evaluation could also be given? Many people seem to have the idea that their religion should not interfere with their life. But let me ask, "Is there any realm, any activity, anything in which a Christian involves himself or herself that is not to be governed by the faith he professes?" Can you name anything in the life of a Christian that ought not be regulated by the fact that he or she is a Christian? Our habits, words, thoughts, actions, associations, everything and anything must be under the umbrella of the truth that we are people of God and should conduct ourselves accordingly. If that is not as it ought to be, what is the value of following Christ in this life? While we properly observe the ceremony and ritual that is a part of worship and New Testament Christianity, should it not

determine how we live at all times?

God's Love

But it is amazing to note that in spite of all this wickedness among the people, God still loved Judah. No, He did not approve of them, but He did love them and did not want to punish them. The reason He wanted to find this certain quality of person was so that from that person and with such an influence there might be a change among the manners of the people and they could be spared. Destruction was not the Lord's desire, but He longed to save them from their fate. As Peter wrote, the Lord is not willing that any should perish but encourages mankind to repent.

This attitude was seen when Christ prayed over the city of Jerusalem. The people could have been gathered by the Lord, but they would not have it so (Matthew 23:37). It is a wonderful thought to know how the love of God extends to us even while we are yet sinners. If only we would appreciate that love sufficiently to take advantage of the salvation He offers us.

It is inescapable for us to miss the emphasis of the value of a good person in this lesson. Sometimes we may conclude that we are so small and insignificant in this world that what we do and say really does not matter. But that is a false conclusion. There is no such thing as an unimportant person. Especially is this true among the righteous. Good people can be used by the Lord to bring salvation to all.

Consider the time when God told Abraham that He would not destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if only ten righteous souls could be found. Unfortunately, they could not be found and the entire people perished.

Be One

I would persuade you that if the freedoms and the blessings of our own land are to be preserved for the oncoming generations, it is the responsibility of the present age to be righteous and do good. Those of the degenerate conduct cannot save our land. They have within them the seeds of death, not preservation and life. The value of being good is not only for our personal benefit, but for those who follow after us and those who live among us. Evidently, there was an insufficiency of good people in Jerusalem because it soon fell beneath the mighty power and

destruction of the Babylonians.

One has said that man has learned to swim through the water like a fish, and fly through the air like a bird, but has yet to learn how to walk on the earth like a man. Certainly many do not know how to walk like the man God sought.

But that day of Jerusalem has long since passed and those people failed to heed their warning. What of those of us living today? Shall we profit from their mistake or shall we persist in our own way and make the same mistake they made to our destruction and that of others? It is a decision each must make and for which each shall be held accountable.

† † † † †

May God's Child Be Lost?

Ezekiel 18:20, "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die.*" This has reference to a spiritual death, separation from God. This principle is emphasized in both the Old and New Testaments. *"The wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23). But does it apply to the child of God?

It is contended by many that once you become a child of the Lord there is nothing that can cause you to be lost in eternal doom. Even some who say they do not believe that doctrine act as if they believe it. It is admittedly a very comforting doctrine, if it is true. Little wonder that it is popular with many people.

But the question that remains on the lips of honest inquirers, "What, if anything, happens to that child who walks after the flesh? What of that Christian who turns back again into the paths of sin and remains there until death overtakes him?" While there are so-called proofs offered by religious people to show "once saved, always saved," we need to investigate not only these so-called proofs but see what the message of the Word of God really is on the subject.

The Doctrine And Influence

The doctrine is that once a person has become a child of God, God cannot and will not disinherit him regardless of what he says or does. It is said that the soul is cleansed, born again,

and therefore not responsible for the actions of the flesh. It is admitted that the flesh sins by the advocates of this doctrine, but we are told that the soul of man is not responsible and the flesh is not subject to God. This is one of the tenets of Calvinism and is taught as truth by many prominent denominational bodies. We are told that the flesh is destroyed in death because of its sins, but the soul, once reborn, can never be lost.

Consider for a moment the influence of such a doctrine. Why does it not tend to create on the part of one who claims to be saved an indifference toward his behavior and conduct, seeing that it does not matter regarding his salvation anyway? Regardless of pious denials to the contrary, regardless of what one might intend with such a doctrine, the inevitable and ultimate result of this doctrine will provoke people who think they are saved to cease their vigilance toward sin. Why should they be concerned about it anymore? If only my flesh sins, not my soul, and I cannot be lost whatever I do, and because the fault lies with the flesh and not the soul, where is the motivation to live a godly life? What would cause one to ever be concerned anymore about his spiritual welfare? If I already have that for which I hope, I no longer hope for it. But Paul says we are still hoping and have not yet attained. (Philippians 3:12; Romans 8:24; Titus 1:2; 2:13).

The influence has been to create hypocrisy, sin among the ranks of those who claim to be saved, wickedness tolerated in the church that professes this doctrine, and all of this without any fear of any recompense or punishment. The teaching that a child of God cannot fall is one of the major contributing factors for the lack of spirituality among religious people today.

E. R. Harper told of talking with some men and their conversation included a discussion about drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing, unfair buisness deals, and similarly worldly transgressions. As they separated, one of the men dropped a paper and he handed back to him. The man explained it was his Sunday school lesson for the next week. The man had agreed that these sins of the world were practiced among some Christians but that there was nothing for the Christian to be worried about concerning them because of the doctrine of once saved, always saved. Is it any wonder that more and more religious people promote these evils, participate in them, and demand that preachers soft-pedal condemnation of them if mentioned at all? Such thinking will not be tolerated among people who are faithful to the doctrine of Christ. It is a tragedy

that even among many in the churches of Christ who deny the doctrine under consideration are those who are engaged in such worldly evils. They cannot be saved pursuing such a path of life.

By a side statement here pertaining to another issue only related to our major theme, let me say to those who use beer, liquor, whiskey and other strong drinks, those who dance, gamble and the like, you may not be a gangster, a renegade, a drunkard wallowing in the gutter, or unfaithful sexually to your mate, but neither are you serving Christ faithfully. For one who professes to be a follower of Christ and still indulge in such things is as inconsistent to the truth as darkness is to light. Those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19ff).

Let the Bible Speak

Will you allow the Bible and inspired men to speak concerning the way of life following the flesh? Will you let their words be your convictions and answers to the question under discussion?

Paul

Romans 6:12,13, *"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."* Can we see that sins of the flesh prohibit one from yielding to God? How can such a one be saved in that condition? This was written to Christians already in the fold of Christ.

First Corinthians 6:19,20, *"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."* One must glorify God in both body and spirit. Who dares to say what one does does not have effect on one's relationship with God in light of this passage? The body is to be controlled by the spirit and the spirit is responsible for the body.

Second Corinthains 7:1,2, *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Receive*

us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man." Again, words as these are to Christians and are exhortations to cleanse themselves in both body and spirit. There are sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. Christ's apostle warns against them both. Christ said, Matthew 10:28, *"Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."* He was speaking to His people, the apostles. It is nonsense to say that the soul can be saved because it has no responsibility for the works of the flesh.

John

There are so many passages that refute the doctrine of once saved, always saved, that we must be selective. *"My little children,"* those who have fellowship with God, are warned (First John 1:6-10), *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Who can read these words and doubt that even children of God can and do sin, and because of sin be lost? Unless sins are confessed they are not forgiven, and if not forgiven, how can we be saved?

Peter

Second Peter 2:20-22 is a passage no advocate of the doctrine once saved, always saved shall ever be able to nullify. *"For if after they have escaped from the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."* Read it and be convinced of the truth!

(continued page 8)

What Our Example Says



JAMES W. BOYD

Recently a preacher told me of a sermon he preached that asked if brethren would really want him to preach what they practice. We have heard about practicing what you preach, but what would brethren think if preachers began preaching what is so often practiced? I have a strong suspicion that this would not be acceptable. Then why do we think what we practice is acceptable before God?

We do not properly consider the weight of influence and the demonstration of what we say we believe. How can one who says their love for Christ and the church is first and expect others to believe it, and others to be impressed with the glory of the church, when they are quite prone to putting the church, the worship of God, the study of His Word in a secondary position. It is shocking how some professed Christians not only do not show by their example that the Lord is first, but indicate they really have no intention of making Him first. Is their example, especially before the young, the lost, and the world, the kind of example that glorifies the Lord? Or do they say, by their works, that they really do not believe their words? Think about it!

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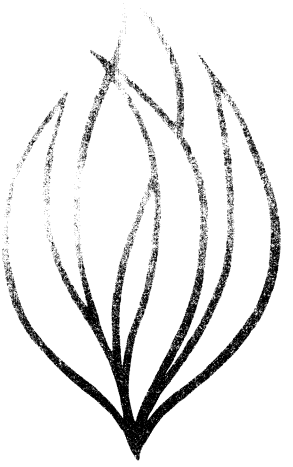

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 10**

Godly Motherhood

There are radicals who scoff at motherhood, denouncing the role of mother as something inferior to the glamourized careers in the world. But in our nation there is still a day set aside each year when everyone is called upon to pause and render honor to motherhood, each one's mother in particular. It is called "Mother's Day." It is not a religious ceremonial day, but it is a tradition when mothers are honored in special ways. While there is no Biblical authority to respect one Lord's Day above another, and Mother's Day is usually a Sunday, it is fitting and proper for us to meditate upon what the Bible teaches regarding motherhood.

One preacher honored his mother by saying, "My mother practices what I preach." Surely motherhood is one of the greatest roles God has conferred upon any human being. It is the task of building a life. As is true with all tremendous honors and privileges, there accompanies it awesome responsibilities. While father and mother are to share in bringing the child into the world and in the training of their children, the mother has a work and exerts an influence that cannot be done as effectively by any other person. She performs a service and looks well to her household where she reigns as queen of her castle, however humble that place might be.

The Lord's Return

In order for a mother to be a godly mother she needs a pattern to follow, and the Lord has provided His pattern with both instructions and records of examples what mothers should be. There is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was submissive to God's plan and to whom even the Son of God was subject in her early years. There was Lois, the mother of the evangelist, Timothy, who taught him the scriptures from his youth. We read of Sarah, Rachel, Mary, the mother of John Mark, each of them demonstrating exceptional qualities of character that go to making a woman and mother approved of God. There is another mother which shall be the center of our focus in this lesson of whom we read in the Old Testament and her name is Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, the mother of Samuel.

Hannah, though childless, longed for a child and prayed to God that she might have a child. She did not want the child for

her own sake, but that she might consecrate her child to the service of the Lord and that he might live his life to the glory of God. Hannah's child was the fruit of prayer, having prayed when she was at the house of worship.

At a very early age, Samuel was brought to the priest, Eli, where he would live, be trained in God's service, and be used the way God saw fit. Hannah was certainly a godly mother in that she was a worshipper of the true and living God of heaven, a prayerful woman, unselfish, and one who realized that her offspring belonged to God and should be used to God's glory.

The giving of her child the way she did was the utmost in personal sacrifice and self-denial. It was a heroic deed. She deprived herself of her dear child and her eyes would not daily see the light and joy of her child's face. While this kind of deprivation is not demanded of young mothers today, her self-abnegation reveals a devotion to the highest interest of both God and her son. She sought the best for the child, which is the manifestation of love. Every father and mother ought give their child to the service of God and when they do, both they and the child shall be honored.

Samuel became the great Samuel of Israel. His manliness, purity, justice, dignity, devotion to the highest and best interest of his people, his dedication to the heavenly Father, his stout vindication and defense of the ways of God may be traced to the deep piety and supreme faith and devotion to duty that characterized his mother. There is the old saying, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." Hannah bent the twig and Samuel became a mighty tree of righteousness.

From The Home

We live in a threatening period of human history unlike that which has gone before us in many ways. We should be concerned that our nation and the freedoms enjoyed herein be preserved for our descendants. This conservative and preservative influence will not come from the law-making halls of Congress, or the state legislatures. It will not be from the factories and schools, or even the launching pads and computer panels. It is not to come through armies and weapons, though they have their place. It will come from our homes, the basic and fundamental unit of society. The homes of our nation bear the imprint of the character of mothers, just as all the rest of society bears the imprint of the home. The stream cannot rise

above the fountain. The home is that fountain of the stream of national life. Mothers, more than any other special segment of society, can make the home as it ought to be. This is not to dismiss the father or other needed influences, but is said to emphasize the majestic and mighty role of motherhood in the land.

Need For Mothers

This role cannot be properly filled with mothers who love the sinful things of this world, who are given to their own selfish interests above the welfare of their households. Mothers who grant their children unlimited indulgence will not guide their children aright. Selfishness cannot get the task accomplished. Nor can children be abandoned to the follies and vices of a degenerate age. Mothers must implant in the hearts and minds of their offspring the standards of God.

Mothers will never do the work they must do when they deliberately leave their posts of duty to the neglect of their primary work in the home. While we realize this is a message that is unheeded and unwanted in our present society, it is still the message people need to hear and heed. The cultivation of selfish ambitions rather than cultivating in their children the ambition to do right and be right before God is to fail in the divinely assigned task of motherhood. What many females today have not realized is that what is called "women's liberation" is more often a return to the bondage of sin, a government for self, a repudiation of the high and holy for the beggarly rudiments this world temporarily offers.

The trail of heartbreak and agony, ruined lives, broken homes, is too pronounced for us to ever expect mothers can mold their children as they ought when they are in pursuit of lesser goals than godly motherhood. History as well as inspired Scripture bears this truth out to us.

While some complain that the sternness of spirit and the rigor of discipline in the old Puritan homes was extreme, it obviously was vastly better than the lawlessness and indulgent homes of the present. At least there was the respect of God and the family. There was the dignity of the home, a reverence toward the sanctity of marriage, a righteous upbringing of the young, a relative absense of divorce and delinquency. In our modern "progress" we are being inundated with broken homes, careers, "latch-key" children, immoralities, disrespect for authority, the

murder of unborn children by abortion, and millions of run-aways who no longer can tolerate the sorry conditions imposed on them by those who should provide a wholesome home.

Which Direction?

There is no denial that homes of the past as a rule produced firm and noble characters. Yes, "You've come a long way, baby," but who has stopped to consider the direction you have been going? If there is no call for the sternness of yesteryear and those other righteous qualities that were evident, there is a call to exercise greater vigilance than has been of late. There is the need for the maintenance of authority, the respect for which is learned at home. Disrespect for authority is also learned at home. There is the need for the cultivation of moral and religious training that must begin and continue in the home. There is the need for emphasis on an intelligent and fervent piety that will lead fathers, mothers, and children to reverence God. There is the demand that parents protect their children from the ravages of evil even as they teach them the difference between right and wrong. There is the urgency to show them the dignity of work and the danger of ildeness, pride, dishonesty, and the attitude that everybody owes me something. To a great extent what is most needful can and should be supplied by the mothers, godly mothers.

Sowing and Reaping

What we sow, we reap. That is true in every realm, and in no realm is it more evident than in the family unit and development, in which the mother is a major component. Many mothers sow in tears, work, self-denial, pain and sacrifice but they will reap in joy and find their highest happiness when they can see the purity, nobility, goodness and Christlikeness in the lives of her children. Proverbs 31:28, *"Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."* Possibly in this matter above all others it can be said of the godly mother, *"Thou excellest them all."* (Proverbs 31:29). The world groans and agonizes in need of godly mothers who instill in the hearts and lives of their children the righteousness of God.

Rather than simply having the capacity to reproduce, or to be glamourous, greedy, grasping for gain and glory, we need

mothers whose goal is godliness. The following parable, written by Temple Bailey, presents what should be the ambition of every mother regarding her children.

> The young mother set her foot on the path of life. "Is the way long?" she asked.
>
> And her Guide said, "Yes, and the way is hard. And you will be old before you reach the end of it. But the end will be better than the beginning."
>
> But the young Mother was happy, and she would not believe that anything could be better than these years. So she played with her children, and gathered flowers for them along the way, and bathed with them in the clear streams; and the sun shone on them, and life was good, and the young Mother cried, "Nothing will ever be lovelier than this."
>
> The night came, and storm, and the path was dark, and the children shook with fear and cold, and the Mother drew them close and covered them with her mantle, and the children said, "Oh, Mother, we are not afraid, for you are near, and no harm can come," and the Mother said, "This is better than the brightness of day, for I have taught my children courage."
>
> And the morning came, and there was a hill ahead, and the children climbed and grew weary, and the Mother was weary, but at all times she said to the children, "A little patience, and we are there." So the children climbed, and when they reached the top, they said, "We could not have done it without you, Mother." And the Mother, when she lay down that night, looked up at the stars, and said, "This is a better day than the last, for my children have learned fortitude in the face of hardness. Yesterday I gave them courage. Today I have given them strength."
>
> And the next day came strange clouds which darkened the earth--clouds of war and hate and evil, and the children groped and stumbled, and the Mother said: "Look up. Lift your eyes to the

Light." And the children looked and saw above the clouds an Everlasting Glory, and it guided them and brought them beyond the darkness. And that night the Mother said, "This is the best day of all, for I have shown my children God."

And the days went on, and the weeks, and the months, and the years, and the Mother grew old, and she was little and bent. But her children were tall and strong, and walked with courage. And when the way was hard, they helped their Mother: and when the way was rough, they lifted her, for she was as light as a feather; and at last they came to a hill and beyond the hill they could see a shining road and golden gates flung wide.

And the Mother said, "I have reached the end of my journey. And now I know that the end is better than the beginning, for my children can walk alone, and their children after them."

And the children said, "You will always walk with us, Mother, even when you have gone through the gates."

And they stood and watched her as she went on alone, and the gates closed after her. And they said: "We cannot see her, but she is with us still. A Mother like ours is more than a memory. She is a Living Presence."

Honor Due

So as the world may honor mothers on "Mother's Day," we who are Christians go a step further and honor those mothers who show God to her children in word, attitude, and deed. Many of us have been blessed with God's boundless favor by having a godly mother. Some hold them today only in memory. Many a lady has the privilege of being a godly mother. Some have children who are now grown and others still with infants. We pray that the influence of godly mothers might increase in our world. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." May we ever proclaim throughout the world, *"Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."* (Proverbs 31:30).

† † † † †

Paul's Sermon In Antioch About Christ

One of the best ways to learn the message of the New Testament is to study the sermons preached by the inspired men of God on the subject of Jesus Christ. This is what we propose to do in this lesson, taking as our text the lengthy reading of Acts 13:16-41, which you are urged to read in its entirety.

Paul and Barnabas were on what is known as their first missionary journey. They had enjoyed success at Salamis in Cyprus; had encountered Elymas when teaching Sergius Paulas at Paphos; John Mark had turned back from going with them, and they were now in the city of Antioch of Pisidia, to be distinquished from Antioch of Syria where the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Paul went to the Jewish synagogue, as he often did, not to worship according to the Jewish system, but to take advantage of the opportunity afforded him to speak on behalf of Christ. His sermon can be divided into four major parts and we shall consider it verse by verse.

Part I

The first portion deals with a recounting of God's dealing with Israel until Christ (verses 16-26). He addressed the people as *"men of Israel"* and called for their attention. He reminded them how God had chosen their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and exalted Israel in Egypt, eventually delivering them from Egyptian bondage. He covered many years of Israelite history with a few words.

He mentioned the forty years wandering in the wilderness, their period of service under the judges, the last of whom was Samuel. Then he turned his attention to the selection of their first king, Saul, and his rule for forty years. He next mentioned David and how God intended to fulfill His will through David.

God had made great promises to Abraham (Genesis 12,15,17,18,22). The greatest of these was the promise that *"in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."* (Genesis 12:3). This blessing was to be through "*his seed,*" (Genesis 22:18), which Paul said referred to Christ (Galatians 3:16).

David was of the seed of Abraham and Christ was of the seed of David.

Paul also mentioned how God, through David's seed would fulfill His promise of the Savior to come. That Savior is Jesus Christ. Obviously, Paul only "hit the high points" in the recollection of Israel's history because their history was not his major theme. It is not that the portions he omitted are unimportant, but his focus was on Christ and he was establishing the connection between Abraham, David, and Christ and the promise God had made. Christ was the expected one.

He introduced the immediate circumstances before the coming of Christ with reference to the work of John the Baptist and his preaching of repentance, a preparatory message for the coming of the Lord. John fulfilled his own work in pointing people to another, even one whose shoes he was not worthy to loose. Then he turned his attention to the second part of his sermon to tell his hearers of this one of whom John spoke, the one who was of David's seed, the one through whom salvation has come.

Part 2

In verses 27-37 Paul sets forth Jesus of Nazareth as the Savior and Christ. Recalling the entire opposition Jesus faced in Jerusalem, he noted it was because they knew Him not, failed to recognize Him as the One of whom the prophets spoke and how the people of Jerusalem, under the guidance and persuasion of their rulers, fulfilled the prophecies uttered years previous concerning the Messiah. He mentioned in irony of the actions of the enemies of Jesus because they did not realize that what they were doing was actually providing additional evidence that Jesus was the very One for whom they should have looked, the very One they denied.

Even though no fault was found in Him, Pilate turned Him over to the wishes of the mob for Him to be put to death. When they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, this having obvious reference to the crucifixion of Christ, Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and buried.

Then we come to a very critical part of Paul's sermon as he preached the resurrection of Christ and how there were many witnesses of the reality of that event.

Prophecies Cited

Having established that truth, he returned to the promise God had made long ago and announced that *"God hath fulfilled the same"* by the resurrection of Christ. He cites three Old Testament passages to provide Scriptural evidence for his contention. One passage he mentions specifically was a portion of the second Psalm, a prophetic psalm, identifying Jesus and the Son of God, begotten of God. Then he affirmed that Jesus was raised to die no more and that through Jesus God's gift was given, calling them the *"sure mercies of David,"* mercies from God delivered through the seed of David. Quoting also from Isaiah 55:3, where Isaiah prophecied of the blessings God would give through David, he showed these promises and prophecies were now fulfilled in Christ.

Paul quotes yet a third text (Psalm 15:10), where it was prophesied that God's Holy One would not see corruption, having reference to the fact that though He was killed, He would be raised again (Acts 2:27,31).

These prophetic words referred not to King David, for David had died and was buried and his body saw corruption. He was not the one to be resurrected in fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior. But Christ was raised again, saw no corruption, because He came forth from the tomb the third day, fulfilling the promises and prophecies of God.

It is significant to note here that Paul, in speaking of Jesus as the Son of God and the fulfillment of God's promise, and how He is the resurrected One, used some of the same prophetic passages of the Old Testament that Peter used on Pentecost to prove the very same truth about Jesus. Peter and Paul preached the same message about the same man, Jesus, and proved the same truth and identity regarding Him. This should doreve1 dismiss this modernistic and infidelic foolishness of a "Pauline" versus a "Petrine" gospel. This is one gospel, and these inspired apostles preached it alike.

Part 3

The third part of Paul's sermon includes the inevitable conclusion from the points of history and the prophetic utterances and fulfillment of them. Through this man, Jesus, there is forgiveness of sins. Only through this One is there forgiveness of sins. Here is the message men need so desparately to hear and believe. Christ is the way of forgiveness of sins, and there is no other (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

The condition that must be met by mankind in order to lay hold on this forgiveness is belief in these things, faith in the message regarding Christ. Paul preached justification by faith, just as he had written that same message in Romans 5:1. *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* It is noteworthy that Paul did neither speak nor write "justification by faith alone." When we study the whole counsel of God we learn the kind of faith that saves, which is a faith that demands and leads to obedience to the commands our Lord gives. Faith that saves includes doing what the Lord says do. How foolish for anyone to say he believes in Christ but manages to turn his mind to think he need not obey what the Lord commands.

He does remind the Jews of a point that doubtless was "sticky" with them and that is that nobody can be justified by the law of Moses.

Part 4

This portion of the sermon was designed to be persuasive to his hearers of the seriousness of their dispostion with this truth concerning Christ. It consists of warnings against unbelief and the failure to do what is required. In verse 40 he mentions to them a warning of which even the prophets had spoke. Please note how "negative" his words are at this point. Let us beware of those who claim to preach as did Paul but who ridiculously contend that all of our preaching be "positive." If we followed their directions we should fail to declare the whole counsel of God. Paul warned with strong words against unbelief. The warning was easily understandable. Unless they did have saving faith, they would perish. What an emphasis on personal responsibility to the gospel of Christ!

This is, in few words, the momentous message that Paul declared to his hearers in Antioch. This is the story of salvation, which embraced what God has done to save man, and what man must do for his own salvation. What is our reaction to this sermon about Christ? In Antioch the Gentiles sought to hear more. The Jews went away, but the next week raised such opposition to this truth that Paul said they had judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). Some believed and obeyed. Others did not. When one does hear, believe, and obey, he enjoys salvation. Until he hears, believes, and obeys he remains lost. Which shall be your response?

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God And Personal Responsibility

In order to get God's Word before us, you are urged to first read the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel and then return to this study. Without the text, too lengthy to copy here, the thrust of the lesson will likely escape you.

The people of Israel and Judah considered their suffering to be due to the sins of others, not their personal sins. It is true that people often suffer because of the wrongdoing of those around them. But it is not true that people bear the guilt of the sins of those around them, or those who have lived before them. Chapter eighteen gives emphasis to the personal responsibility each person has for what they say and do in life. It is a mistake to blame our sins on society, environment, outside conditions, and other people even though these things may contribute to our weakness. Each one is responsible before God and accountable for his or her conduct.

There was a proverb in the land that said, *"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."* The idea was that the fathers had sinned and the children were suffering because of their sins. It was true that the consequences of the sins of the previous generation were also being visited upon that generation. This is a matter that is beyond dispute how people can do wrong and bring hurt and harm on others. But the children were not guilty of the sins of their fathers, nor were the fathers guilty of the sins of their children, even though each may well have had some influence and affect upon the other.

Ezekiel was pleading with the people, however, that the time had come when no longer could anyone look to the other and point the finger of blame. *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die,"* verse 20 stressed. Each was responsible for his own sins. Death, which in this instance referred to spiritual separation from God, if not forgiven, which was conditioned upon repentance, would bring an eternal separation.

Righteousness Versus Unrighteousness

Verses 5 through 13 defines righteousness and unrighteousness. If a man be just, he will be doing what is lawful and the things that ought to be done. He will not do some things simply because they are violations of God's law. He will do other things because God has declared them to be right. Righteous people are not those who simply refrain from doing evil. Even a wooden post could be called righteous if that was all that was required. A righteous person will and must be a doer of good. James 4:17 reads, *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* A righteous man walks in the Lord's statutes, keeps the Lord's ordinances, deals truly with his fellowman, as well as refrains from doing that which God decrees is evil.

The prophet compared fathers and sons while continuing the theme of personal responsibility. First, a good father may have an evil son. The father's goodness does not spare the evil son from the punishment the son deserves. There is the old adage that says, "Every tub must sit on its own bottom." This is not Scripture, but the idea is there when we think of personal responsibility. Paul did write, Galatians 5:6, *"For every man shall bear his own burden."* The father, even though he may suffer because of his son's transgressions, does not bear the guilt of his son's evil.

Father And Son

Verses 14 through 18 speaks of an evil father that begets a good son. It is true that this is a possibility because other influence in the son's life, fortunately, overshadows the evil influence of his father's life and example. Probably many sons have been good people in spite of their father, and because of the good influence of their mother, or someone else. Some sons, seeing the results of a wicked life, choose to walk differently from their fathers. While the son is adversely affected in many ways from having an evil father, the son does not bear the guilt of his father's sins. Again, the theme is the same. Each one is personally responsible.

Verses 19 and 20, especially the first part of 19, explains why this is true. The question is asked, "Why does not the son carry the load of guilt?" Verse 20 responds, "Because of personal responsibility." Righteousness is of value to the righteous. Wickedness is destructive of the wicked.

From verses 21 through 24 we are taught that one can turn

from his evil, and if he chooses, he can turn from his righteousness. How good it is when men realize their transgressions and repent of their sins and are forgiven. How tragic it is when men who have walked in the paths of righteousness fall from going good and pursue the paths of evil. The path of life for the wicked is to turn from his wickedness. The path of death for the righteous is to turn from his path of righteousness. With such teaching how can anyone honestly contend for the false and deceptive doctrine that one is once saved and then cannot be lost? This passage ought to silence that false doctrine once and for all time, but in spite of the Lord's teaching there be those who continue to hold to their denominational dogma and misinform others regarding it.

The Lord takes no pleasure in punishing the wicked. The threats of punishment are designed to turn the wrongdoer from his ways into the manner of life that leads to eternal life. Punishment has the ability, when rightly administered and accepted, to correct and prevent people from going to their destruction. We all realize this is true with regard to the upbringing of our children. The chastening that comes from God is because God loves us (Hebrews 12:6).

New Testament Teaching

Second Corinthians 5:10 also teaches the personal responsibility that Ezekiel was teaching. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* Romans 14:12, *"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."* The teaching cannot be avoidable. Each of us stands personally responsible for the way and manner we conduct life.

Verses 25 through 32 mentions how some complained it was not fair that the Lord insisted on this. But the Lord contended that this approach to the matter was the only fair and proper approach. The way of "passing the buck" was unequal and unjust. Verses 26 and 27 repeat the benefit of turning from evil and the tragedy of turning from good. Man is a creature of choice and is capable of charting whatever course in life he decides. But whatever course he follows is that for which he must give answer and take the consequences. Verse 30, *"I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God."* The certainty of the judgment is as real as

the fairness of personal responsibility.

Cannot we see, as much as one might wish it so, that we cannot be saved for another? Nobody can render obedience to God in stead of another. If this could be done every faithful father and mother would make sure that their children would be saved. Every righteous son or daughter would ascertain the salvation of parents. Every good wife and every Christian husband would do whatever could be done to save their mate. But that matter cannot be escaped; nobody can be saved for another. There are some things in life every person must do for himself or herself. Obeying the gospel in order to be saved is one of them. Obedience nor disobedience can be transferred to somebody else.

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If You Can't Stand Now, How About Later

Jeremiah 12:5, *"If thou hast run with footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedest, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"*

Jeremiah was one of the more prominent Old Testament prophets. He is called one of the "major" prophets, called by the Lord to be a prophet during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah. Under Josiah there was a great spiritual revival, the most significant effort to return to God in the land of Judah since the days of David some four hundred years earlier. It was during this revival that Jeremiah was called. He was prophet during the reign of the last five kings of Judah.

In his early life Jeremiah seemed to have been a rather tender and retiring person, almost shrinking from public life and prominence. He was much like Saul, the first king of Israel, at the time he was chosen to be king. He was keely sensitive to injustice and very sympathetic toward the sorrows his nation was enduring. Conflict and antagonism appeared to dismay him.

One has commented that at the start of his life's work he was more of a John than a Peter.

But his timidity, tenderness, and reserved disposition changed to a large degree during his life toward a stronger, more courageous fighter, even often harsh in doing the work he was called to do. He was no longer fearful of difficulty and danger. Doubtless this change was forced upon him because of his work as a prophet of God during the days of digression from God. His times, his work, his opponents had challenged and demanded it of him. He could not have survived with any other disposition.

He filled the work of a prophet for nearly fifty years. It was during this period in Judah's history that the nation was taking giant strides toward their self-imposed destruction. Northern Israel had already fallen some eighty years previously.

State of Judah

Following Josiah's reign Judah was governed by four wicked kings in a row. They were kings that were personally corrupt, worshipped idols, and walked not in the ways of Jehovah. The people, having swelled to a revival and renewed devotion under Josiah swiftly plummeted into sin again under these evil leaders. Historically, it seems that even the people of God do not long remain faithful but suffer apostasy.

Jeremiah, along with other prophets, constantly roamed the nation, pleading, preaching, urging, teaching, warning lest the nation be ruined. His love for God, for his fellow countrymen, for the future generations, would not allow him the secluded life his personality would have preferred. His love for truth and his hatred of evil would not permit his tenderness to be a holdback from using the strong words that the situation demanded that he speak. As he stated in Jeremiah 20:9, *"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay."*

The times were evil, therefore his way was hard. He was often persecuted by the very ones he sought to help. He knew what it was to be rejected, ridiculed, shunned, and yet he spoke boldly for the Lord. He was even accused of treason for warning what the path of transgression would bring upon the nation of Judah.

Background

Let us read the four verses immediately prior to our text.

Jeremiah 12:1-4, *"Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? whereon are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins. But thou, O Lord, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter. How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end."*

Jeremiah seemed disillusioned at the circumstances in Judah. Why do the wicked seem to prosper? That did not seem right. Why do those who act treacherously seem at ease? That ought not be the way of it. Their service to God was only lip-service. God did not really rule their hearts. Why should Jeremiah, and others who sought God's righteousness, have to suffer because of such as these? The righteous seemed to have a more difficult time than the wicked. What future was there for the man who tried to do right? All of these frustrating questions bounded in the heart of Jeremiah.

God's answer was that if you cannot stand these relatively small trials and persecutions, what are you going to do when greater perils and burdens come?

When the Jordan was low, it was easy to cross. If you find it difficult when low, what do you expect when the river reaches floodstage? If troubles, slow as footmen, surpass you, what will you do in a race with horses? If in a land of peace you are not secure, how will you fare when heavier strife overtakes you? These are really soul-searching questions.

Evil Prospered, But...

God did not deny to Jeremiah that the wicked seemed prospered. But what of that? That was not to be the concern of Jeremiah. Jeremiah knew the end of the wicked would be destruction. The joys, pleasures, and rewards of sin were temporary at best. Real prosperity and security was with those who still served God though their present state of affairs was not encouraging.

God had already told Jeremiah what was coming upon Judah. Jeremiah had been warning the people of the impending

doom. It was because all seemed so prosperous that the people gave him no heed. But Jeremiah knew when the final test came the wicked would not and could not stand.

God implies that even though hardship was the present lot of Jeremiah it could and would get worse. His personal life would become more difficult. His heart would be broken as he witnessed his people seized, violated, and humiliated by enemies from without. All his work of teaching and warning would appear to have been in vain and amount to nothing. But if Jeremiah weakened beneath the complacency, apathy, and indifference of his people toward what is right, his strength would not sustain him in the more trying hours that were yet to come.

Lessons To Learn

There is much in this theme that we need to learn and apply to ourselves. Hardships and disappointments are often a part of one's life. Paul wrote, Second Timothy 3:12, *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* Those who never encounter problems and difficulties never grow stronger like they could. They never develop the confidence that they can face whatever life offers them. If we rightly consider the trials we meet, they can be turned into blessings because they give us opportunity to develop character, get a clear perspective on life, learn what is and is not of real and everlasting value.

If the smaller, insignificant, daily problems cause us to lose our equilibrium, what will we do when real trouble comes? If we fret and despair and allow ourselves to grow bitter over things which are more or less common to all mankind, how do we expect to overcome and defeat stronger forces that would destroy us? When our lives are relatively good, and we have many blessings, with so many conditions and circumstances that are well and we still find no peace, what of the days when poverty, sickness, deprivations or other forms of stress may strike? If we complain during the good days, what will we do during the evil days that come?

We often bother ourselves with many matters. It is a wise habit to often ask ourselves, "Is this thing which concerns me really worth all the bother I am allowing it to give me?" We are possibly inclined to exaggerate our troubles, "making mountains out of molehills." I do not minimize the tremendously heavy burdens that many people have to carry. I speak of those trivial burdens that are not all that important, but we often allow to

"get under our skin.

If we let those smaller things harass us, can we be able to climb the real mountains when we reach them? Probably most of us do not realize how blessed we are. If we could consider most other people of the world, we might be more appreciative of the bountiful outpouring of God's benevolence upon us.

Problems Are Commonplace

Severe ordeals often come in a person's life when they least expect them. We see people with heavy loads and wonder, "How do they take it so calmly, so composed, even in the face of these dreadful, serious, heart-rending trials they are forced to face?" We all think our problems are big ones, but most likely, if we really only knew how small they were in relation to what others endure, we would be strengthened.

The reason some people are able to "take things in stride" that are truly difficult is because they first have learned how to meet the smaller problems of life. They have in their hearts the knowledge of what really matters, and they know that this life is not all that there is to one's existence. There is another life awaiting the faithful in the Lord and for that they long. They know that the fleeting affairs of life, however good or bad, are just exactly that -- fleeting and passing. They have learned that the best life consists of fearing God and keeping His commandments and know this is their whole duty (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

We are not permitted to look into the future. We know not what we may be called upon to face. We cannot tell what a day may bring forth. The future is always uncertain, for the nation, the church here on earth, and for our individual lives. But we do know we have refuge in God. We do know we will not be tempted above that we are able to bear (First Corinthians 10:13). We do know that God has worked for our good in providing the way of eternal life (Romans 8:28). We do know that whatever transpires Almighty God loves us (Romans 8:38,39).

We Can Prevail

Life has its mysteries, injustices, inequalities and bewildering moments. We cannot escape them all. But if we cannot learn to cope with them by leaning on God and following His will, what

shall we do when it comes our time to cross the river of death? Have you ever seriously considered that moment? It awaits you someday, somewhere, sometime, and it is inescapable and inevitable. Our natural courage will not sustain us then when we view the reality of that moment. How much we shall long for the steadying hand of the Lord to hold us, lead us, guide us, lest we sink. But if we have not learned to lean on the Christ before that hour, how shall we meet and successfully pass that milestone?

The prevailing theme of our text and these thoughts derived from it is that we must meet the present with confidence, optimism, assurance, and determination. We must prepare for the future so we need not have fear of it. We must, however, prepare **now** while we have time and opportunity, knowing not when our opportunities shall be abruptly terminated. We are to prepare during life for its end. If we fail in that, we have failed in everything that really matters.

The adequate ability to live correctly both here and with God eternally is found only by being faithful in Christ. You must become a Christian through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. Then you must be a Christian, loyal and faithful each day until we leave the walks of this life. Doing that, relying on God, we shall know the joy eternal that awaits the redeemed.

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The Rich, Young Ruler

Because of the length of our text, you are requested to take your New Testament and read Mark 10:17-27 before turning to these comments. Accounts of this episode are also recorded in parallel passages in Matthew 19:16-26 and Luke 18:18-27. There are but a few variances in these accounts, but there are no contradictions. Putting all three records together we have the complete record.

Jesus came into Judea teaching the people. He was confronted by an enthusiastic inquirer that Matthew says is young, that Luke says is a ruler, and that all three writers say was rich. Hence, the identification of the rich, young ruler.

He addresses Jesus as "*Good Master,*" and the response Jesus gave has puzzled many. Verse 18, *"Why callest thou me*

good? there is none good but one, that is, God." Jesus is not saying He is bad and not good. That would be contrary to everything the inspired biographies of Christ reveal concerning Him. Atheists have leaped upon this statement and misapplied it to contend that Jesus is denying His Deity. The very opposite is true. Jesus is saying in essence, "You call me good and God is good. Do you acknowledge my Deity?" In other words, if the man did not believe that Jesus was Deity, why did he refer to Him in terms that belong to Deity? How could Jesus be good and claim to be Deity if it was not so? This is not a denial of His Deity but an affirmation of it.

The Question

Observe this inquirer more closely. He came running to Jesus which indicates a keen interest and enthusiasm and desire to learn. He was seeking something. He asked one of the most challenging questions one can pose, *"What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"* He was looking for the right thing and had come to the right One for an answer.

People so often look for the wrong things. Many who are looking for the right things often seek them from the wrong sources. How many times do people look for eternal life but turn to men, creeds, catechisms, manuals, prayer books, feelings, disciplines, everything and anything except the Lord and His all-sufficient Word? This man looked for the most important thing in all of one's existence and he had asked this question at the best time of his life to consider it; namely, while he was young. Solomon had written, *"Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth."* (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

The Answer

Our Lord's answer was, *"Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother."* (Verse 19). There was something he had to do. Eternal life was not unconditional and our Lord has never indicated that it is. He said, *"Keep the commandments."* This man lived subject to the law God had given Israel through Moses. It would be a mistake for us to think that we can serve God acceptably under that same system today because that system has been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:12). *"For the law was given by Moses, but*

grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 11:17). Repeatedly in the New Testament we learn that God speaks to man through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2; Matthew 17:5), and men cannot now be saved through the Mosaic law (Romans 3:20,28; Galatians 3:11).

This young man then makes an amazing statement. Verse 20, *"Master, all these have I observed from my youth."* Obviously, this person was a zealous person, who knew the law, respected the law, obeyed the law, having a commendable moral character. Like even some among our youth today, he was far advanced in righteousness considering his youthfulness. His conformity to the law was not faulted, nor did Jesus dispute his claim. Nonetheless Jesus responded, *"One thing thou lackest."*

To respond in such fashion is much like a doctor saying, "You are very healthy except you have cancer. Though there was may have embarked upon a zealous and sincere persuasion that

The Barrier

His problem was one of the heart. Before considering his problem, please notice the attitude of the Christ toward this person. The Scripture says, *"Then Jesus beholding him, loved him..."* Jesus had considerable respect for this man. He knew the hearts of men and He knew this man's problem. Nonetheless He loved him even though He did not approve of him. In spite of the man and his spiritual heart trouble, Jesus sought this man's highest good, which is what love is.

His problem was an attitude toward material things and his possessions. Jesus does not condemn riches per se. But the Scriptures do teach repeatedly that we are stewards and must given an account of our stewardship. When Jesus told him to go and sell what he had and give to the poor, to lay up treasures in heaven, assume his responsibilities as His disciple, the man was overwhelmed with what sacrifice he would have to make. He knew immediately that Christ must come first and there could be no middle ground (Matthew 6:24). The Lord's lesson to him was that He must have first place above all else and anything that prevented that, anything that retarded that, anything that was a barrier to this kind of commitment would be a sufficient hindrance to keep one out of heaven and eternal life. We certainly must learn this vital point of this record.

With this man his wealth was first. Sometimes others put other things first, like prestige, acceptance by the world, popularity,

social standing, education, pleasure, power, even things that are not wrong of themselves but which are allowed to crowd God out, like family, job, leisure. That which can keep us from eternal life need not be something sinister and vile, but need only be allowed to take preeminence over our service to God through Christ. Jesus meant what He taught when He said, Matthew 6:33, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...*"

The Fatal Turn

Our text says the young man went away sorrowful. It is a tragedy that he went away at all. By doing so he closed the door, the only door that was open to him into heaven for which he longed. It was not that he loved sin and the darkness of it, but he would not sacrifice whatever he had to sacrifice to be a disciple of Christ. He failed in his duty to God and refused to surrender his will to that of the Savior.

It is significant that our Lord did not say anything else to him, but allowed him to leave. In all likelihood, if we had been there and seeing one so close to salvation as to lack only one thing we might have embarked upona zealous and sincere persuasion that he change his mind. But the Lord knew something that we cannot always know. He knew the man's heart. He knew where his real affections were. He knew this rich, young ruler had made up his mind and our Lord never coerces or forces His will upon anyone. He offers salvation and invites people to come to Him and live. But if people choose to reject His plea, He will allow them to go on their way to their spiritual and eternal destruction. People who come to Christ must come of their own surrender and free-will, voluntary, because they have conviction and know this is what they must do, wanting to do it because God has commanded it. Jesus did not use high pressure tactics or create undue emotionalism. His approach was a calm, sincere, loving, firm manner of giving intelligent information and appealing to people to make a deliberate, rational response. If we come to Christ we must come that way. We must do so because we are compelled, not by over-persuasion and pressure, but from a heart overrunning with conviction and love for our God in heaven.

Who Can Be Saved

This event caused Jesus to make another startling statement. Verse 25, *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."* There have been many spurious and fanciful explanations offered for these words. But they do not appear to be that complicated. Luke, one of the inspired men who recorded this event in the ministry of Christ, was a physician and he would have been acquainted with a surgical needle. All three writers would have knowledge of needles, as would most today who read their words. Just as it is impossible for the large animal like a camel to pass through the eye of such an instrument, it is impossible for a person to have eternal life when he puts his trust and priority in something other than Christ. Christ went on to say that it was possible for even a rich man to go to heaven, but it was not possible if one put their trust in riches, which was the precise problem this young ruler had. When people will put the Lord and His way first, then salvation is possible.

We look with sadness on the foolish choice of this man. But rather than just recognizing his error, shall we learn from it? Do we allow other things to sometime crowd between us and our service to God through Christ? If you are not a Christian, what is it that stands between you and God like this man's riches stood between him and God? Whatever it is, cannot you see the wisdom of casting it aside, removing it from your path, and coming to the Savior? We plead with every reader to not turn away and continue the pursuit of the same things that have kept you alienated from your Creator that offers to save your soul in heaven. Believing in the Christ, repent, confess, be baptized, and live the way that always puts Christ and His will first with you. What better lesson could we learn from this record than to learn this?

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If you really did what everybody thinks you should, even attempt to demand that you do, you probably would not have any time or energy left to do what you should do, let alone do the things you might like to do. People often have no hesitancy to make demands on others to serve their own interests. Who is not aware of those who would impose upon others without regard for anybody but themselves? It pays to be selective as well as available for service. Otherwise, you could get overrun.

Good Lessons About Christ

Jesus said many things about Himself in order that we might understand His nature, His mission, His relationship with the Father as well as His relationship with His disciples. About nine times in the New Testament we read where Jesus used the phrase, *"I am."* Each time holds a distinct significance.

In the relatively near future I hope to present in this booklet at least two full length sermons dealing with these instances where Jesus said, *"I am."* But permit me to briefly outline them here.

John 8:56-58 Jesus taught His Deity by telling His hearers that He existed before Abraham. This asserted His eternal nature, a characteristic that pertains only to Deity.

Several times Jesus used the phrase to compare Himself with things well understood in order that people can better understand Him. For instance, in John 6 He called Himself the bread of life. In John 8, 9 and 12 He identified Himself as the light of the world. Twice in John 10 He used the phrase when He said He was the door to the sheepfold and later the good shepherd.

Another familiar statement of Jesus was when He spoke to the sisters of the dead Lazurus and called Himself the resurrection and the life. How many times have we heard His statement about being the way, truth and life in John 14? The next chapter, John 15, we hear Him saying He is the true vine.

When one reads the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4 the woman said certain things would be revealed when the Messiah came. Jesus then told her He was the Messiah, meaning the Christ, the Anointed One.

From these several statements preachers can preach an entire and very beneficial series of sermons. Probably most who have preached many years have done just that. And well they should. What better way to learn of our Lord than to give heed to the things He said about Himself and how He presented Himself! Surely, when we study such comments we can know with certainty just how He wants us to consider Him **JWB**

Could I Belive Him?



JAMES W. BOYD

It is not uncommon for people to take exception to what a preacher might teach. It is well known that many are teaching error regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. Preachers do not get overly aroused because some reject the truth even though this is always disappointing. How one objects often tells on a person, however. Consider comments I recently received from one who said he was a preacher.

He disagreed with me about the right of the guilty party not having the right to remarry. He demanded a debate, assuring me of his gentlemanly way and his love. Yet, he insinuated one is a coward who did not do what he demanded, said those who do not do what he says are not worth the salt in their bread, contended those who differed with him lacked "guts,", and so it went. His arrogance and hostility were overshadowed only by his egotism. I wondered if I could believe his assurances, and if he wrote a letter of introduction with such venom, how much would he stay on the subject in any discussion on anything. Experience teaches one the difference between being firm and forceful and just being mean and snappy. I feel sorry for him, don't you?

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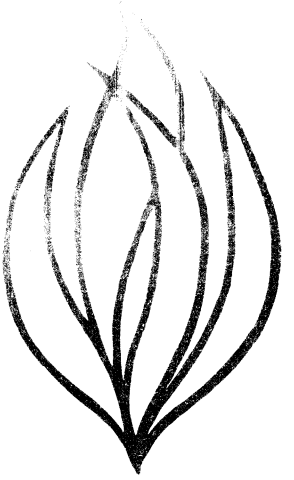
A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 11**

Jesus And The Little Children

Mark 10:13-16, *"And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."*

Every reader of the biographies of Christ have noted the love and compassion Jesus had and demonstrated toward little children. It is obvious from this passage His exceptional interest in them. People were showing their respect for Jesus by bringing their children to Him for Him to bless and even to touch. Jesus has also shown great interest in children by teaching their parents to properly train them in the ways of God, love them, protect and provide for them. We do well to teach our children that "Jesus loves the little children of the world," and to teach them to love Jesus in return.

A Comparison

But while we can admire the beautiful sentiment of the love of Jesus for children, we do not want to overlook the fact that children were more to Jesus than gentle, adorable creatures to be loved and protected. In this passage, they were His chief parable and comparison with those who make up the kingdom of God. *"Of such"* is the kingdom of God. The American Standard Version says, *"for to such belongeth the kingdom,"* and that people are "*to be as* [like, JWB] *a little child.*" According to Jesus, a well conditioned child illustrates better than anything else the distinctive features of Christian character that should belong to those in the kingdom.

Unfortunately, many well-meaning religious people have misused this passage to teach that children are lost and have tried to justify "infant baptism." They abuse parallel passages in Matthew 18:3; 19:13; Luke 18:15. There is nothing remotely found in these passages to teach that children are lost or the practice of "infant baptism." Baptism is for those who have sinned, and who can hear the Word of God, believe it, repent of their sins and confess their faith in Christ as the Son of God. To

baptize an infant implies that the infant is lost. But the truth of the matter is that Jesus used the child to illustrate the nature of the saved.

If a child is born totally depraved, doomed and damned as some teach, why would Christ desire that those in the kingdom be like them? If a child is lost, why should we want to be as they are? What benefit is it for a lost person to be as a lost person?

Not "Infant Baptism"

Furthermore, those who practice "infant baptism" do not baptize, but sprinkle water upon a child, without his consent or understanding. There is a difference between baptism and sprinkling. Baptism is an immersion, a burial, plunging beneath. Sprinkling is one of man's substitute measures to replace and displace what God has commanded. "Infant baptism" is not of divine origin but comes from the doctrines of men, and is an offshoot of the Calvinistic doctrine that a child is born in sin, guilty of inherited guilt of sin, totally depraved and doomed. Jesus teaches that this is not true by saying the kingdom of heaven is like children.

According to Roman Catholic history and theology, where "infant baptism" originated, it was not practiced for nearly three hundren years after the Lord's church was established on Pentecost in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Christ. The apostles, through whom the will of God through Christ was revealed, had been dead nearly a century before that practice was utilized.

Safe

Children are not saved because they never have been lost. To be lost one must have sinned. Sin is a transgression of God's law (First John 3:4). The child has violated no divine law. The child is safe until he reaches an age of understanding capacity and becomes accountable before God for his actions. Until then they are innocent and guiltless.

The confusion that exists among denominationalists regarding "infant baptism" is seen in the fact that some teach infants are "baptized" because they are sinful while others teach we should "baptize" infants because they are saved. Some Protestant churches have rewritten their disciplines that have first said one thing then say just the opposite. There is no Biblical authority for

such doctrines and practices.

Jesus points to children as an example like He pointed to the lily of the field, to sheep, the mustard seed, leaven and other things. He said the kingdom is *"like"* these things. They possess similar characteristics. The word *"suffer"* or permit was His reply to His disciples who rebuked those who were bringing their children to Him to bless them, love them, and pray over them. The presence of these examples of the character of those in the kingdom did not disturb or frustrate our Lord. He is most concerned that parents bring their children to Him. But this is not done by some kind of religious rite and man-made ceremony, but by teaching them His truth that the child may learn to walk after Christ. They are brought to Christ by parents teaching them and bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Childlike

What are some of the characteristics of children possessed by those in the kingdom? First, the child was born, entering a new life. So it is with the redeemed. They have been regenerated, *"born again." "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3). The old ways of sin are put to death (Ephesians 4:22-24). Citizens in God's kingdom take on a new manner of life, new goals, new loyalties. As the child is born into his physical family, those in the kingdom are born into God's spiritual family.

The child is one of confidence, faith, unwavering trust rather than suspicion and scepticism. A child will generally believe whatever those in whom he places confidence will tell him, without questioning. The readiness to accept whatever God says is the attitude of a Christian that is childlike. He takes God's Word without doubt. God said, and that settles it; he believes it. What he can understand, he studies to understand. What he cannot understand, he accepts anyway because God has spoken.

The child is unconscious of pride, self-righteousness and self-sufficiency. Therefore, the child is teachable and can be led. A true Christian will be humble and teachable also. He will allow himself to be guided by God's Word, led by the Spirit through the Word. He recognizes his inability to live successfully standing alone, and is content to keep hold of the hand of the Savior, His Shepherd, as he goes through life step by step. A Christians'

dependence on the Lord is comparable to the dependence a child has on his parents, often carried, often led, not thinking himself capable of charting his own course without guidance.

First Corinthians 14:20, *"Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men."* There is a difference between being childish and childlike. Paul admonishes the Christian to be mature in understanding. This is an exhortation to spiritual growth. But in such things as malice, be like children.

How are children when it comes to malice? They so quickly lay aside guile, hypocrisy and envy. They are quick to forget injury and hurt feelings. Children playing together can have a falling out that seems so serious but before you can turn around are happily playing together again. They do not carry grudges or harbor animosity in their hearts, even toward those who may offend them from time to time. Grudge holding seems to be beyond their capacity. How fine it would be if more adults could develop this childlike quality!

An Essential

The importance of being like children cannot be overemphasized. Jesus said, Matthew 18:3, *"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."* We see how Jesus made a childlike disposition an essential in being saved. How does one overemphasize the importance of salvation?

Often we might consider growth and reaching maturity as going from childish ways toward the ways of an adult. But in some respects, real maturity is going from the evil ways often found in adult behavior back to the wholesome and admirable qualities of a child.

Let us not miss the divine message of Christ. Mark 10:14,15, *"But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."*

Once there was a small boy who could play the piano rather well for his age. He was asked by one of his school teachers to play in the school assembly one morning. She said, "Can you play a song for us this morning?" He responded, "I can, but I won't."

Do you realize that this is the way some people are acting toward obeying the gospel. This little boy was not demonstrating an attitude that we ought to have toward the invitation of Christ. Many "can" be saved, but the "won't" because they refuse to obey.

We plead that no reader of these words will reject the salvation God offers because they are too set in their own ways to follow Him. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and will repent of your sins, then confess that faith and obey Him in baptism for the remission of sins, and God will add you to His church, which is the body and company of the redeemed.

† † † † †

Where Our Trust Must Be

This lesson is based upon an event that took place during the life of Christ on earth immediately following the discussion of the rich, young ruler. Jesus had just told the young man to forsake whatever it was that stood between him and God, even his riches, which was that which he put first. The young man went away from Jesus sorrowful because it meant he must place his confidence in something other than his wealth. This event gave rise to another teaching by Jesus concerning where our trust must be.

Mark 10:23-27, *"And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."*

Amazed

Notice the amazement of the disciples at the words of Jesus. Men are always amazed and astonished when taken out of their own little groove and have their world and vision enlarged. Many today, like then, are amazed to hear what Jesus advocated, what He stood for, what He proclaimed. Some are so shocked that they stagger in disbelief. This is because of their own finiteness and lack of knowledge and understanding. They are settled into their "ruts" and prejudices, traditions and pre-conceived notions, and when truth comes to them that varies from those things they are amazed. The doctrine of Jesus Christ is so simple, yet so profound, wonderful, workable, that many who hear it for the first time are amazed. Like some who once were sent to seize Jesus, they come away saying, *"Never man spake like this man."*

The primary theme of the teaching of Jesus here is one of trust. He first said it was difficult for those with riches to enter the kingdom. While they gave the appearance of well being, it was not so with them spiritually. Seeing the surprise of the disciples, Jesus enlarged His explanation and showed that He meant those who placed their trust in riches, like the young man who had just gone away sorrowful. One cannot trust in riches and have love for those things that are deserving of first place.

Misapplication

The message of Jesus has too often been limited in its application. This limitation has produced misunderstanding. Jesus is not casting an evil reflection on material things just because they are material. This is not His teaching. Rather He shows that trust in worldly wealth, as if that meant security for the soul, was altogether incorrect. Was not that the grave mistake of the man in Luke 12? In that passage Jesus said, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."*

Paul wrote in First Timothy 6:17-19, *"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to*

come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

Earlier in that same chapter he wrote, "*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."*

Jesus does not speak against riches, but teaches concerning our attitude toward the things that we have been given as a steward in this life. He shows the folly of placing so much concern on the material and how our emphasis should be on the things of the spirit.

Poor And Rich

Another mistaken notion some have developed from this passage is that Jesus' teaching is only to rich people. Who is a rich man? Wealth is not an absolute, but a relative matter. To some people any one of us might be called rich. There are others that we might consider rich who do not consider themselves wealthy at all. Who is rich?

People like to apply this teaching to those who have more of this world's goods than they have, but exclude themselves. One can sin in trusting in little just as much as trusting in much. Love for fifty dollars is as evil as love for a thousand. The size of the purse does not determine what is right or wrong, but the attitude of the heart.

Wide Application

Furthermore, why should we limit the thrust of this teaching regarding trust to just material wealth? The sayings of Jesus are broader than that. We are not to place the welfare of our soul on anything else such as intellectual power and attainment. Many, having some arbitrarily determined academic degree, have assumed that they are "somewhat" and think all is well because they have that degree. It has been my experience over many years that more and more people who clamor for degrees (and I speak especially of the religious degrees), have less wholesome soundness than the average member of the church. Their learning may have gone to their head, but not in the way they think.

One should not rely on his social position in the community.

What a tragedy that so many in the church are stampeded into seeking approval by the community more than remaining loyal to *"thus saith the Lord."*

Many might think because they are physically exceptional that this automatically transfers into spiritual acceptability before God. That is a mistaken idea.

Possibly the most mistaken notion of all concerning this teaching is that it applies to somebody, but not me! These words are for each one of us. They are divine words that condemn placing trust where we ought not. They are not words that place a premium either on wealth or poverty but are concerned with what we place first in life.

While the application of the teaching is properly expanded to include more than wealth, we do want to underscore the danger of wealth. The more one has the more danger there is in placing his confidence there. Jesus is not advising poverty, for then you may become guilty of burying your talents that could be used for good. But because having wealth often brings a temporary satisfaction and contentment, and because it can deceive a person into thinking all is well (like the Laodecians), we have to be alert to its dangers. Luke 12:19-21, *"And I will say to my soul, Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

The Question

Realizing from the words of Jesus that wealth cannot save, the disciples ask a question, *"Who then can be saved?"* Jesus had not taught that it was impossible for a rich man to be saved. Some of His followers and early Christians had possessions. Many of them sold fields and gave to the apostles, but while it was in their power they could do what they wished and would not have sinned. We read in the Old Testament, particularly, of wealthy men who faithfully served God even as they were wealthy, such as Abraham, Jacob, Job, David, and others. Jesus did show that it was difficult for rich men to go to heaven because they are the most likely ones to put trust in riches. Poor men, not having riches, are not as likely to trust in what they do not have anyway. He had taught that material prosperity could well bring spiritual poverty.

He illustrates His teaching with a camel and a needle's eye. It is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, just as it is impossible for a rich man, trusting his riches, to go to heaven. But if the rich man placed his trust in God, with God it was possible for him to be saved. Jesus makes it plain where a person's trust must be. Each person should say, as written on our coins, "In God we trust." This is what Jesus is saying is an absolute necessity for salvation.

One who expects to go to heaven must have the kind of confidence, trust, and faith in God that Paul expressed. Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" We can be abased and abound; we can be hungry or filled; we can be at ease or suffer; we can go to heaven, but only by the strength of God. In Him must I place my trust.

A Gift

Salvation is a gift of God (Romans 6:23). Peter told those on Pentecost, "*Save yourselves from this crooked generation.*" He did not say, "Save yourselves by yourselves," for that is impossible. But there are those things that each one must do in order to receive the gift that God gives. Obedience is an essential part in God's plan for saving man.

Obedience is not just going through rituals without understanding, sincerity, and committment. It is doing what God says, the way God says do it, for the reasons God says do it.

The probing question confronting me and you is, "*Where is our trust?*" We can know where our trust must be. The only way that we can prove we trust God is by doing His will. We are the servants of what and who we obey (Romans 6:16). How can one say, "I love God," but refuse to obey Him? (John 14:15; Luke 6:46). By our refusal to obey we are saying to the Almighty, "I do not believe you; I will not obey you: what you have done is useless; and I will be no worse off by refusing." You may not intend to be saying that, because putting in those words makes it sound so rebellious. But why is this not the way it really is?

Ask yourself, "Where is my trust?" When we have our trust where it ought to be, we will hasten to do what we ought to do.

† † † † †

Joseph
Who Saved His People

Genesis 45:4-13, *"And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharoah, and the lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy heards, and all that thou hast: and there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither."*

Beginning with chapter thirty-seven of Genesis, the story of Joseph and his brethren is told. At the time of our text Joseph is ruler in Egypt, second in power only to Pharoah. To learn the lessons of these events we need to consider three questions to set the stage: (1) Why was Joseph, a Hebrew, in Egypt? (2) How did this Hebrew rise to such great power in Egypt? (3) What is the explanation for the way Joseph acted toward his brothers when they first came to Egypt, and the way he later treated them?

Why In Egypt?

The reason Joseph was in Egypt is because he had been sold

as a slave by his brothers to Midianite merchants going to Egypt. Jacob had sent Joseph into the fields to inquire of the welfare of the older brothers. When they saw him they were provoked to slay him, but later decided upon this lesser plan of selling him.

All the fault for the enmity between Joseph and his brothers did not rest with the brothers, though they were also responsible. Jacob, the father, contributed to it by showing partiality toward Joseph as his favorite son, being born of Rachel whom he loved more than others. He provided Joseph a coat of many colors and did not demand of him the labor he expected from Joseph's brothers. All of this provoked jealousy and envy against Joseph.

Joseph had also provoked his brothers by bragging, boastfully, of his superiority over them which he determined through dreams he had showing them and even their father bowing before him. As is often the case in many disputes, fault was found in more than one place.

From Place To Place

Once in Egypt, Joseph was sold to an officer of Pharoah named Potiphar, where Joseph rose to be a most trusted servant and head over his house. But due to false accusations against him by Potiphar's wife, Joseph was later cast into prison.

But, as the saying goes, "You can't keep a good man down." Joseph soon rose to be head over all the prisoners. It was while in prison that he interpreted dreams for Pharoah's butler and baker who had been cast there. His interpretations came true, the baker being hanged and the butler restored to service before Pharoah. Later, when Pharoah had dreams and none could discern them, Joseph was called, gave their meaning which foretold seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph was placed head over all Egypt to preserve the crops of the good years to provide for the lean years. He was a wise counselor and confidential friend of the Pharoah. This explains his presense and position in Egypt.

The predicted famine spread unto Canaan where Jacob and his other sons lived. These sons were sent into Egypt to buy grain and were brought before Joseph. Not recognizing him, nonetheless Joseph readily knew them. Joseph had been sold as a slave when only seventeen. He was about thirty when brought before Pharoah, the seven years of plenty had passed and two of the famine years had gone by, so Joseph was now

about thirty-nine years old. It is easy to understand why his brothers did not recognize him. Furthermore, they would never have expected to see their brother in such a prominent position in Egypt.

With His Brothers

Joseph did not reveal himself to his brothers right away. He may have wondered why Jacob never came looking for him. He later learned that Jacob had been led to believe he had been killed by a beast. The last time he saw his brothers they hated him, were cruel, harsh, mercenary. Joseph put them through several tests to see if there had been any change in their character during the past twenty-two years. What he learned pleased him because once they were willing to sell their brother, but now they were willing to give their lives for another brother, Benjamin. There had been an enormous change for the better among them all. This being true, then Joseph revealed himself to them as the brother they had sold years ago.

The brothers were fearful that Joseph might take revenge. They wondered what Joseph would do with them. He certainly had the power to do whatever he chose. But Joseph called them near, as our text tells us, and explained all the things that had happened in a very different light than what the brothers might have expected. In his explanation we learn at least three very important spiritual truths.

Providence

First, we see the providence of God at work (verses 7,8). Joseph could see God's hand in all that had occurred. God had been with him in Potiphar's house, in prison, before Pharoah, all for the purpose of making provision for the family of Jacob, the descendant of Abraham and Isaac through whom God's great promises would be fulfilled as the father of the nation of Israel.

Joseph had undergone quite a change himself from the boastful boy of seventeen. He could have bragged before them how "I told you so" and that he had pulled himself up even from adversity. But he did not do this. He gave full credit to God and God's care. We learn that God could and did use this holy man.

In the providence of God we also see how God could and did use evil men and their wicked ways to accomplish His purposes. This does not mean that the end justifies the means, that the

wicked are not guilty of their sins, but God can use what men decide to do to bring about His will. How many times did God use wicked nations to bring His people, Israel, into hardship, to humble them, and cause them to repent and return to God! God used those Jews and Gentiles of the first century to bring the death of Christ to reality, and by that death salvation can be offered for all mankind.

In God's providence we see how the "natural affairs" of life can be overruled by the Lord. There was nothing miraculous in this, except the ability of Joseph to interpret dreams. Nothing miraculous took place when Esther was used by the Lord to preserve Israel from extermination at the designs of Haman and the Persians. But as Mordecai told Esther. *"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14). We do not and cannot always know how God may be overruling in the affairs of men and nations. Our prime concern should be that we will allow God to use us by our choice to follow His Word faithfully and thereby be ready for service to Him whatever and whenever opportunity affords.

Forgiveness

Second, we must admire the forgiving spirit of Joseph. He had been subjected to violence, injustice, ingratitude, and disadvantage over and over again. He had opportunity for some revenge. All he had to do was to give the order. But he was merciful and kind. Having given his brothers opportunity to show their penitence, he favored them in every way, not holding them accountable for all that had happened, but forgave them of their evil against him and offered a genuine benevolent attitude and action toward all.

Someone has suggested that in all this Joseph is one of the most Christ-like characters of the Old Testament. He did as God has done toward us and as He would have us do toward those that sin against us. God seeks not revenge against the sinner, but that the sinner come the way of forgiveness and be blessed. Jesus was willing to forgive those who sinned against Him (Luke 23:34). This is what we are taught to do. Ephesians 4:32, *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."*

Character

Third, we must note the value of maintaining a righteous character, even in times of adversity, or possibly we should say, especially in times of adversity. Joseph lived under severe conditions, temptations to sin, trying circumstances that would test his faith and loyalty to God. But he had a determination to do right. He, like Daniel, purposed in his heart not to defile himself. Regardless of what came his way or his lot in life, he was committed to remain faithful to the God of heaven and earth.

We learn that we ought never sacrifice a Christian and godly character to succeed, or be popular, or even to be relieved of suffering. If we feel we must sacrifice the righteous character to succeed, then we may be trying to succeed in the wrong things. If we think we must compromise truth and virtue to be accepted by others, then we are trying to be accepted by the wrong people. It was Joseph's resolve to live properly before God, in purity of life and strength of character, come what may! We learn that nothing in this life is of sufficient value to alienate ourselves from God or to stoop beneath the Christlike level.

Paul teaches that such accounts are written for our learning (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11). May we be so wise and submissive as to learn and apply these spiritual truths into our own lives.

† † † † †

The Meeting Was Cancelled

Two years ago I preached in a good gospel meeting at the Port St. Lucie church in Florida. It was well attended; lessons were well received; I was invited to come again this year. One lesson was on marriage divorce and remarriage. I do not recall one negative comment regarding the truth I taught.

Earlier this summer I received instructions not to consider the subject again. Thinking they stood for truth I had not planned to do so. But I was told such a lesson would be harmful to innocent Christians. It had not been so considered previously, but now false doctrines had been accepted among them and they wanted to hear the truth about it no more.

Nobody ties my hands like that. Would those of the first century agree to withhold truth? While they will allow a "false

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A Good Investment

Mark 10:28-31, *"And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, and children, and lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first."*

First, let us learn the meaning of the last verse of the passage. This same phrase is found in Matthew 20:16 and Luke 13:30.

In Matthew it teaches that those who enter the service of God late in life can also receive the reward from the Father. This is not taught to encourage procrastination and postponement of obedience. No one should want to serve the devil one hour longer than he can abandon him. It is designed to give hope to people of every age in life.

In Luke we learn that Gentiles, as well as Jews, indeed, people of every race and nation, regardless of when the truth was first opened unto them, can equally benefit from God's blessings.

The phrase seems to climax yet another thought in Mark. The background of the passage is helpful in coming to its understanding.

Timeless Warning

The apostles had witnessed a discussion between Jesus and the rich man. They had heard Jesus' teaching and giving warning against placing trust in that which perishes with the using. They make application of His teaching to themselves. In this they show great wisdom. Too many are anxious to apply gospel truth to somebody else rather than themselves. But the gospel is to the individual and should be so applied.

Peter speaks, *"Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee."* Matthew's parallel account of this teaching adds that Peter asked, *"What shall we have therefore?"* This may at first appear to have been a self-righteous and boastful statement by comparing themselves with the young man who went away sorrowful from Jesus because he obviously loved his wealth

more than the Lord. But we rather think Peter was simply speaking the truth and that he and the others were prompted by some concern over what their sacrifice would bring them in return. When people make investments they generally want to have some idea what to expect from them.

The context of the answer Jesus gave implies that they either were considering what forsaking all else would profit, or they had already left all and now were wondering if they had made the right decision. "Lord, we have left all, What will be the end of us. What can we expect from all of this? Have we made a good investment or not?"

We Must Choose

Peter's statement brings to the surface a powerful truth. Man must make choice if he is to follow the Christ. We may forsake all and follow Christ, or we may refuse to forsake all and decline to follow Him. But if we follow Him, we must forsake all. Not until we forsake all can we completely serve Him. Where the following goes, the forsaking must go. They are inseparable. It is strange, in light of this teaching, that people can conceive in their minds that they can follow Christ, who gave His all, even Himself, and still remain unwilling to forsake all else to serve Him.

We must understand in what sense the apostles forsook all and how we are to forsake all else. In many ways the early disciples did not forsake all, yet, they said they had forsaken all and Christ did not refute or deny their affirmation. Evidently they had forsaken all to the degree and manner that the Lord expects.

We are not to take the words in an absolute sense because that would bring upon us total chaos, confusion, poverty, and self-imposed death. It would demand we leave off food, shelter, clothing, all associations with all people, civilization, even the necessities of life. The Lord knows we have need of these things and has promised to provide them. Surely, this is not the forsaking that is under consideration.

There is no reason to think the early disciples forsook all family connections or got rid of all their possessions. In fact, we know they did not. Christ does not demand opposites; that is, He does not call for a person to abandon his family when faithfulness does not demand it. This would violate his duties as a father and provider of his own. Neither does He demand

leaving all possessions because He teaches us to be good stewards of what we have. To abandon everything would make us dependent on the unbelieving world for our daily bread, rather than working as God would have us work.

What To Leave

But there are some things that must be abandoned. Paul had to leave so many things in order to be what he was. He had power, fame, wealth, prestige, glory, influence, even above those his own age among the Jews. But he said, *"Yea, doubtless I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."* (Philippians 3:8).

Peter forsook all, but he led about a wife (Second Corinthians 9:5). He also remained in the association with his fleshly brother, Andrew.

Are we to think that John forsook Mary after Jesus gave him charge to care for her. John also remained in the company of James until James was dead.

John Mark's mother owned a house (Acts 12:12), and Philip had a family with him (Acts 21:8). Yet, it is written that they all must forsake all, follow Jesus, and we are expected to follow their example. The truth of the matter is that they sacrificed whatever was needful to be sacrificed, regardless of how costly it was to them to do so.

Two Attitudes

We must take notice of the difference between two attitudes. One attitude might be called the "give up something" attitude; and the other is the "give up all" attitude. Many people are willing to give up something but fewer are willing to give up all, putting God first before everything. The Pharisees gave a tithe and the rich gave of their abundance. But the poor widow gave of all her living, all she had. Some are willing to give up to a point, but are not willing to always put the interest of the Lord first. The giving up all spirit is like being that *"living sacrifice"* of which Paul writes in Romans 12:1,2. A sacrifice is that which is wholly given; regardless of what it takes, even everything, if necessary. But it is not necessary to literally and absolutely give up everything in order to follow Christ and for it to be justly said

we have forsaken all.

Notice what Jesus mentions as being given up; house, land, children, wife, brothers, sisters, parents. What in the affairs of our daily lives is nearer and dearer to anyone than these? Can anyone put a price on their own kin, his home, his own flesh and blood? Certainly not. But the insistence of the theme is that even these things must be given up, if necessary to follow Christ. There is no limit to what can and must be sacrificed in order to serve God and be saved. It demands giving up anything, everything, if necessary.

It was not uncommon then, or now, for people to be forced to sever even the closest ties in life to serve God faithfully. But it is clear that Jesus is not speaking literally because the rewards he mentions show that there shall be adequate compensation for whatever is giving up. But we know we cannot have other mothers and fathers, even if we could acquire other lands, houses, children, or wives. Jesus is using that which is most precious to show how much we must be determined to put Him first. Ad He taught in the Sermon on the Mount, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness..."* (Matthew 6:33), so He is teaching essentially the same here.

Forsake All

Forsaking all to follow Christ is not without its reward. Far more is gained than is given up. The Lord says we shall receive a hundredfold more in gain than that which is invested. By any standard, such a return on an investment is unbelievable. In one sense, the Lord calls for sacrifice but does not let you sacrifice because you are rewarded far more than you can sacrifice.

Again, we must insist Jesus is not teaching that if we give up a house we shall receive literally a hundred houses; or if we give up a wife we shall have a hundred wives; or if we give up a mother we shall have a hundred mothers. Such a misinterpretation is ridiculous. But what can we forsake that is of equal value to the forgiveness of sins and entrance into heaven? What is peace of conscience worth? What is divine support in time of trial worth? How can you put a price on standing in favor with God? These blessings are ours now as we follow Christ, and what is more, eternal life awaits us. Who can say we could give up enough to equal the value of all these?

First And Last

Now we are in a better position to see the meaning of the phrase, *"The first shall be last and the last first,"* as found in Mark 10:31. Ordinarily we might expect the first shall be first and the last shall be last. But those with fame, fortune, family, may be considered first in this life, but ranked last in the judgment if such things kept them from following Christ. Those who might have been considered inferior and unfortunate in this life may be the very ones who rank first with God in the judgment if they have given up such things in order to follow Christ. The way the world may rank an individual is not necessarily the way God ranks them. Those who put God first, even at the loss of being first here and now, shall be counted first with God, and that is where being first really matters.

This teaching is very persuasive and should lead us to commit ourselves to the service of God through Christ. It is not a question of how much are you willing to give up to serve God? The question is "Are you willing to put all else after God, giving Him first place in everything?" Some are not willing to give up anything. Others may be willing to give up something. But God commands that we give up all. But what a good investment it is, seeing the bountiful rewards both here and in the after life that awaits those who follow Christ! Let us so think and live that we shall sing in truth that beautiful hymn, "All To Jesus I Surrender."

† † † † †

Trying Times For Our People

There are times that try the souls of men. We live in such a time. There is reason for grave concern regarding the future of our land and the freedoms afforded its citizens. While we do not suggest that there is any infallible system of human government, we are persuaded that our system has allowed the freedoms that make possible the dignity of man more than any other. As Churchill is reported to have said that democracy was not a perfect form of government but was better than anything else.

We live in an age when mankind can literally destroy all of civilization in a few moments. As one has said, "All men can be cremated equally."

Christians should be disturbed over the dark clouds on the religious scene. History shows such has always existed, but the magnitude of problems sometimes seems overwhelming. We shall not allow ourselves to become frantic and despondent, however, because even though we know not what the future holds, we know Who holds the future. Our concern is not so much for ourselves as for the generations that follow us. We preach the word of God as the solution to man's ills, yet too many are neither aware or concerned about these ills let alone the solution to them. Being overly pessimistic is not the position to take, but a better grasp of realism is in order.

Internationally our nation has declined in recent decades. Having lost prestige among nations, both friend and foe debase our name and trample and burn our flag. We have been embarassed in many quarters of the world. The pulpit is not the forum for economic, military, and political disputes but we cite this decline as evidence that we have cause for concern. Throughout my lifetime there have been secret and diabolical commitments and agreements made by those in power of which the nation has been kept ignorant that has proved to be our undoing. More than once the goals and aspirations of the nation have been subverted at the conference tables to the extent that our influence for good has been seriously curtailed.

Gains By Enemies

The hard, cold fact is that atheistic communism has made sweeping gains in our world while we have been in retreat. Even the religions of violence and tyranny have forced America into spending itself into near bankruptcy simply for self-protection. Our enemies can and do start trouble anywhere in the world they see fit and we are forced to expend our resources to contain it lest it grow into a wildfire that incinerates us. The struggle between tyranny and freedom continues and many who want freedom flirt and give support to enemies of freedom. Communists boast they shall bury us without an all out war.

America, once a loved nation, and still a nation where millions would come if they could, has spent billions upon billions feeding hungry people, rehabilitating war torn nations, even our enemies. With a compassion and sympathy for the less

fortunate, America has done more than any nation in history to provide for others. Of course, this has been to our advantage as well as those in need. But in spite of this unprecedented aid and relief, even those who have been aided often remain our enemies.

We are accused of pride, arrogance, throwing our weight around, and doubtless, in many instances, this has been a fault. But the response to our assistance has as often been a rebuke for not doing more than even a feeble "thank you" for what is done. This climate among nations should be a cause for concern to every free American, especially Christians.

What may be a symptom of our gross unawareness is the attitude that we, among all nations of history, cannot and shall not fall. We pray that such may be the case, but where do we have the assurance that we shall not reap the whirlwind of the internal decay that has grown to epidemic proportions in our nation? What has happened to other civilizations and nations can happen to us when we run the same course.

Moral Decline

The moral decline in America is too well-documented for debate. What many have called an expanse of liberty has been nothing more than the excess of license. The moral fiber is the strength of our nation, yet, from the highest positions to the man in the street we see moral degeneracy. Some call college cheating, television scandal, exploitation, dishonesty, riots, just normal factors of national life. Well they might be. But let us not be naive and gullible and think that such does not extract its cost in time. The glamorization of evil and the suppression of righteousness is not the path to security of our nation. We still believe that "*righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*" This breakdown of moral fiber causes the Christian his deepest concerns for the oncoming generations. The very quality that has made our nation great has suffered tremendous erosion, and we are blind fools to ignore it. How long can a society pursue the road of selfishness, greed, pleasure, sin, indulgence, repudiation of what is decent, moral, and true and survive? With the lack of respect for authority, the parasite complex that others owe me, vicious crimes, deliquency of adults and juveniles, divorce, propagation of atheism and the loss of respect for the dignity of human life as seen by abortion, we have serious problems confronting us. Isaiah 5:20, "*Woe*

unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." It seems that many in America have turned things around just as Isaiah said. With a heart filled with materialistic ambitions, more concerned for power, money, and prestige than honor, truth, and loyalty to God, we have reason to believe these are trying times for the people of God.

Sin Abounds

There must be a return to discipline, self-discipline, which is a mark of genuine maturity. Work, self-control, sacrifice are virtues that many have buried and have tried to replace them with a "sexual revolution." The widespread sexual immorality in America is shocking even to nations who do not know or care for the true and living God. Pornography, not just what is called hard-core, is in evidence on television, in literature, and tragically, in the lives of millions. The continued bombardment to make socially acceptable homosexuality, lesbianism, divorce, abortion, gambling, drunkenness, fornication, are signs of our times, and they are creating trying times for the people of God.

While the way of Jesus Christ is the way of hope and solution, the forces that profess to follow Christ are so hopelessly divided that so often there is impotency and incapacity to have much influence. Even among brethren who profess to follow the New Testament revelation there is squabbling over opinions and hobbies alongside innovations that imitate the unauthorized denominational world. There have been "spiritual pygmies" in every generation, but many brethren are like parents who are awakened by the house on fire, and who argue over what clothing will be appropriate to wear while the fire endangers their children. Division is devestating to the cause of Christ and Jesus knew it and prayed for unity (John 17: 20-21). God's wrath is directed toward those who would forever be snipping at the heals of the faithful, demanding their human legalism, or arrogantly forcing their departures from the truth. With hundreds of divisions in the religious world, and the world on the brink of becoming a burning ball that would destroy mankind, with souls wallowing in the mire of sin and hell's gates forced wide to embrace the condemned, why, or why cannot those who say they love the will of God cease the injection of their human doctrines, with which they are obsessed, and abandon their schemes and projects that they think are better than truth, and

return to the work of saving souls rather than making loud noises of confusion!

A Dark Picture

You might complain at this point that I have been painting a dark picture. But this I deny. I am trying to unveil the dark picture that the sins of our nation have already painted and to which we need to assign our attention. I suppose, in typical American style, I should turn just here and simple wave the hand and say, "Everything is going to be all right." I truly believe things could be much better and that there is hope for the land of my foreparents and descendants. But it will not be accomplished by pretending all is well, and there is peace, when such is not reality.

Christ Is The Way

Our hope rests in training our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Our hope resides in the national return to morality, individual responsibility, integrity, and a separation from materialism and godlessness. The only antedote to that which inevitably will destroy America is to re-emphasize that which has made America the great nation it has been; namely, a spiritual and moral awakening and conformity to the standards of Almighty God. Do you know any other cure? To whom can we turn except to the way of God? Only solid convictions and faithfulness to them can provide the anchor for the nation lest it continue to drift, and sometimes, run, toward its own collapse. If I was not convinced of this, I would not be spending my life and energies working to that end. I know this is right because such is the warning and message of God to all men everywhere. There is the awesome need of people who will *"stand in the gap"* and live in such fashion that they can be counted on the side of truth. **It is the only way open to us. All else will prove futile.**

Where We Are

Sometimes I feel toward our homeland like I felt when I was a youngster and the family had gone into the Smoky Mountains for a brief vacation. One day it rained in torrents and there were landslides, one that took away about half of the roadway back

down the mountain. I recall traffic being backed up for miles and patrol officers carefully directed each car across the narrow ledge that could still be used. In time, it was our turn to pass the slide area. Everyone except my father walked across, as was being done with each family, and Dad drove the car. As everyone watched, and the story was repeated with each vehicle, great concern existed lest that which remained cave in.

I feel at times America is standing on a ledge that appears could collapse, but so many are unconcerned to the danger as they blindly, foolishly, defiantly run their own ways to the disregard of God. Even many in the church are straining at gnats, swallowing camels, missing the mark, restructuring and redirecting the church into paths of compromise and the failures of the world, fumbling at hobbies and imitating denominations. Like the proverbial ostrich, some hide their heads in the sands, pretending it is not so.

Woodrow Wilson once said, "I had rather be right and lose than be wrong and win." How we need thie spirit among us! Christians will not ultimately lose because they have God's promise of eternal victory. But Christians are also concerned for others, for future generations, and have respect and gratitude for that which was done in the past that has provided them tremendous blessings. Christians, though centering their concerns on eternity, are now aware that this life is the time of preparation for eternity and must concern themselves with that which is around them. Hope for the nation, we believe, is not beyond us. But we must awaken from the slumber and lethargy that characterizes so many.

We shall not stand before God in judgment as a nation, but as individuals. Each one must be concerned for his or her soul as well as the souls of others. Salvation is only in Christ. Faith and obedience to the gospel is God's plan and all who shall be saved must comply.

† † † † †

(from page 14)
teacher" to hold their meeting if he will be quiet, I will not give aid and support to those who actually do hold false doctrines, having turned from truth we both once held. So I cancelled it.

False doctrines continue to take their toll among brethren. There are many unstable "Reubens" who are members of the church, leaving truth, accepting error that accomodates sin.

John

William

Boyd



This is an very early picture of our sixth grandchild, our fourth grandson, born August 13th of this year, 1987. His parents are Bill, our son, and Lori, daughter of Clifford and Jean Reel, Onieda, TN, where he preaches.

John has a sister, Rose, and brother, Cliff. They live in Chattanooga, TN.

It goes withou saying, but say it anyway, that we are so proud of John and have loved him from the moment we heard he was coming our way. Few things, if anything, in life is as wonderful as knowledge that your children walk in truth. John will have a home where Christ reigns.

* * * * *

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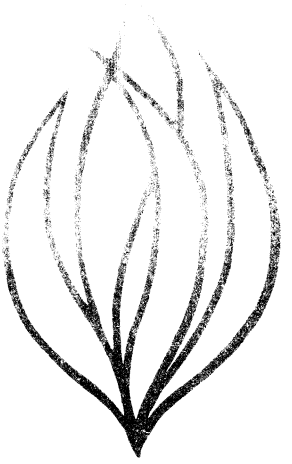

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 12**

Who Is Not A Christian

The word "Christian" is commonly heard in everyday conversation. It obviously means different things to different people because so much is included by some with the word that is excluded by others. It is fair to say that the word is misused because positions that are opposite to one another cannot both be correct, the philosophy of Humanism notwithstanding. We would contend that the term is used by many in ways that the Bible never suggests. "Christian" is used as a noun, name, adjective with reference to people, attitudes, spirits, behavior, actions, churches, and all sorts of doctrines and religious positions, even political groups. Generally speaking, the world is far more liberal than what the Scriptures allow.

As we investigate to learn how Scripture uses the term, we must remember to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). We must keep in mind that the term is a designation of divine origin. In Isaiah 62:2, *"And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name."* This prophecy notes that when the Gentiles as well as Jews are included among God's people, God will designate a name for them. In Acts 11:26, *"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* Antioch was the first congregation to include both Jews and Gentiles of which we read in Scripture.

This should forever silence the false contentions that the term "Christian" was given the disciples of Christ in derision by their enemies or as a nickname. Rather it is a divinely given name. The word translated *"called"* in Acts 11:26 has reference to that which Deity has done. This name was given apostolic approval by Peter in First Peter 4:16 and by Paul in Acts 26:28. It has been universally accepted by faithful followers of Christ from the time it was first given.

Nothing In A Name?

We sometimes hear people say, usually in defense of religious names for which there is no divine authority, 'There is nothing in a name." But nobody really believes that, It is just a way of excusing what is Biblically inexcusable. Nobody names their

children after Judas or Jezebel, or even Fido. They want the correct names on their property deeds and paychecks. Companies demand proper labels on their products. Even religious people who say there is nothing in a name take a name unto themselves to designate them as distinguished from others.

The name "Christian" gives honor to the One we follow, Jesus Christ. It was used with reference to those who were in a saved relationship with God by and through the Son and Savior He sent into the world. The name by which disciples of Christ are called is a worthy name (James 2:7). But the name is often applied to that which is not of Christ according to the Bible.

The name "Christian" is, like all names, exclusive in nature. Your personal name, your family name, is meant to include only you or your family. When your name includes you it automatically excludes everyone else. The same is true with any name properly used and understood. So it is with the name "Christian." It is inclusive but also exclusive. We should not be surprised by this. But we should learn whom God includes and whom He excludes in using the name.

Dogmatic

Many object to this conclusion that it is being dogmatic. One's attitude on being dogmatic can be objectionable. But being dogmatic, per se, is not evil. There is nothing wrong in being dogmatic and narrow as Scripture. There is nothing bigoted, self-righteous, or judgmental in an evil sense about taking Scripture without addition or subtraction. We do not find people objecting to being narrow and dogmatic in others fields of thought and activity. Only in religion do some think it must be wrong to be right. This inconsistency is seen in following recipies, dialing telephones, filling medicine prescriptions and other matters. What many have not learned is that the way of Christ is far more narrow than most realize.

Just A Good Man?

The term "Christian" is often used to include all "good" people. We hear people say, "He was a good, Christian man." It may be that a person is exactly that. A Christian is to be good. But people can have many good characteristics about them and not be Christians. Morality is expected of a Christian, but one can be moral without being in Christ. There are many people

who are upright in many ways as far as anyone can determine. They are good neighbors, good citizens, are helpful to those in need, fair and honest in dealing with their fellowman, even refraining from questionable behavior, using clean language and many other good things. But being morally good does not make one a Christian. We are not saved by our works of merit of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).

We all can be thankful for any good person. We have heard some thoughtless people say they had just as soon a person be a criminal as to not be a Christian. Well, count me out of that number. I much prefer to live next door to somebody who respects morality than someone who does not. Society is far better when people are good than when they are not. Life is more tolerable and enjoyable among good people. But the point is, we, like Cornelius (Acts 10), can be good and still be lost because being saved demands more than simply being good, as important as that certainly is. Nicodemus, Lydia and the man from Ethiopia all had many good things about them, but they were lost. Because being good is expected of a Christian many have become confused in thinking that being good is all that really matters in becoming and being a Christian.

Just Religious?

All religious people are not Christians, and none would deny that. Case after case of those who became Christians as recorded in the New Testament were first religious people. They were honest, sincere and zealous in their religious faith and practice, but they were not followers of Jesus Christ.

Not even all church members are Christians. People can belong to churches that the Lord did not establish, and even claim to be a Christian. But they cannot become Christians by following the doctrines of men and failing to obey the gospel of Christ. The Lord does not teach us just to become members of some church. He teaches us to obey the gospel and He adds us to His church (Acts 2:47).

Denominationalism has historically confused people about the importance of the church. This is an age of hyphenated Christianity, which is not New Testament religion at all. People say they are Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, and any number of denominational names, but all claim they are Christians. The New Testament knows nothing of this kind of so-called but misnamed Christianity. The church is not a

denomination, nor the sum total of denominations. Scripture has nothing to do with denominations except to condemn the error and division which it propagates and upon which it feeds. That system of religion is entirely a concoction of men, and is not of God. A person is either a Christian, and he must be a faithful Christian, or he is lost. Christ is not divided (First Corinthians 1:13).

Not In Old Testament

Obviously people who lived in Old Testament times were not Christians because the faith of Christ had not yet come upon the earth during their lifetime. Those who lived under earlier dispensations, such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, even John the Baptist, all ceased to walk among men before the will and way of Christ was inagurated on the first Pentecost following His ascension.

Not Just Any Faith

What may come as a surprise to many is that all who have faith are not Christians. One may agree with every word of the Bible, believe it, that is, giving mental assent that it is true, but such "faith" standing alone saves nobody and makes nobody a Christian.

Saving faith is an obedient faith, and without works of obedience faith is dead and a dead faith cannot save (James 2:20,26). One must obey for Christ to be his Savior (Hebrews 5:9). In no way does obedience earn salvation, but in no way does faith save until one obeys, including repentance (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38), confession of Christ (Acts 8:37; Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10), and baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; First Peter 3:21). Those in New Testament times who heard the gospel, believed in Christ, and obeyed these commands were added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47), and that church is composed of Christians. Those who have not yet rendered obedience in faith to what the gospel commands are not yet Christians according to the teaching of the New Testament.

To Be Faithful

Let us not forget that it is one thing to become a Christian and

a lifelong activity to be a faithful Christian. One can obey these first principles of the gospel and thereby become a child of God, a Christian, but renounce his Father and family and be disinherited. While he can still be called a Christian in the sense that he has become a child of God, he is not a faithful child and salvation will not be his in eternity unless he does as the Father pleads and comes home again, being restored to God's family through repentance (Acts 8:22), confession of sins, (First John 1:9), and prayer to God for forgiveness (Acts 8:22).

Sometimes people who are willing to accept just what the Bible teaches and will not allow more or less are criticized for thinking they are the only Christians. This is an unfair criticism. Nobody has the right to claim to be a Christian until he or she has done what the New Testament says one must do to become a Christian. It is neither bigoted nor self-righteous to simply *"contend for the faith"* as it is revealed.

We would that all were Christians after the New Testament order. We work to that end. But we cannot and will not compromise with error to appease anything or anybody regarding who is and who is not a Christian. We have no right to do so. We must abide by the Biblical use of the Biblical term.

† † † † †

God's Displeasure At Adultery And Apostasy

Ezekiel 16:35-42, "*Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God; Because thy filtiness was poured out and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakendness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness. And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy. And I will also give thee into their*

hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places: they shall shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. They shall bring up a company against thee, and shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou shalt give no hire anymore. So I will make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry."

This presents God's attitude toward a sinful people. In this instance the people were a special disappointment to God for they were the nation of Judah. God had preserved this people through the ages because through them was to come the Messiah. When Northern Israel was overrun by the Assyrians, God protected Judah and its capital from being overthrown. Yet, in spite of the vivid demonstration before them what sin does to a nation, Judah persisted in the ways of evil and was now on the brink of destruction.

The prophet Ezekiel, who spoke to the people of Judah before the Babylonian captivity, speaks again. The first twenty-four chapters of his book deal with the coming destruction due to the sinfulness of the nation. The theme might well be called, "Jerusalem must fall." Chapter sixteen is a warning to the people of their punishment that would come corresponding to their sins. The land was doomed.

A Picture Of Judah

Judah is pictured as a harlot, a prostitute, one guilty of whoredom. This was true of the nation both physically and spiritually. The people engaged in fornication, adultery, all manner of sexual perversions such as would characterize heathen people. Not only were they guilty of this sin of the flesh, they were guilty of heathen religions and worship practices, serving false gods, idolatry and all manner of unfaithfulness to God.

We must remember that Judah belonged to God. They were His people, the descendants of Abraham, His chosen ones. They were expected to be faithful to God as a wife is expected to be faithful to her husband. Yet, Judah had not kept the vows of fidelity and it was accurate to picture Judah as a harlot.

Who had been Judah's "lovers" with whom she had commited this spiritual adultery against God? They were the surrounding heathen and idolatrous nations such as Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and others. Judah had partaken of their ways and neglected or totally abandoned God's ways. They had adopted the very things God prohibited. The result was a flagrant violation of God's laws and gross disobedience.

Ezekiel explains that because of Judah's spiritual adultery Judah would be punished. She would be humilated before all nations. She had dishonored herself and brought shame on her name. She would soon be loathsome even to her former "lovers." But what was worse, she was an abomination before God to whom she belonged.

The Lord said Judah would be treated as a woman who breaks the vows of wedlock. Under Mosaic Law, adulterers were stoned to death. Judah also would be destroyed. In fact, Judah's downfall did come literally by stoning. The Babylonians took huge stones and hurled them against the walls and buildings of the city until it was crushed throughout. The national dignity of the nation was torn asunder and ruined.

Still being considered as a harlot, her desecration would be so complete, and she would become so hideous before all, that she would not be desirable to anyone. Such is the picture of a wicked nation that did reap what had been sown. Reduced from her former glory, now she was to be overcome because of her sins and would exist in distress and doom. Those that were once God's people brought themselves to such a state.

Our Lesson

There are valuable lessons for us from the mistakes of Judah as we observe God's attitude toward them and the way He dealt with them. Romans 15:4 reads, *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."* Paul wrote again in First Corinthians 10:11, *"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come."* Let us learn what is intended to be learned.

Adultery

Do we not understand that God is displeased with adultery?

Adultery is a sexual intercourse between a married person and another to whom the first is not married. Similarly, God is displeased with fornication which is a broader and more inclusive term. It includes adultery, such as sexual relationships between two who are not married, homosexuality, lesbianism, beastiality and all manner of the misuse of a God-given desire. It is very disturbing that such transgressions are so commonplace in our society. The minds of many in the nation have become so twisted and distorted that they have resorted to such conduct. Our society, in many areas, borders on so-called "free love." Illicit conduct is sanctioned, even promoted, especially by those whose concern is more for money than morals. Some seek gain, not God. So much of the nation's reading material is pornographic with indecent pictures. This is even found at times in the daily newspaper ads. It all amounts to a Satanic cesspool of degeneracy. The so-called entertainment world is saturated with immorality and every kind of violation is featured in movies, television programs, dramatic plays, songs, even sporting events. The "soaps" feature sex without benefit of marriage. Ninety-four per cent of sex on the "soaps" is between people not married to each other. In our land we have such a distorted concept of sex that sex is used to sell everything. Mass efforts are made to arouse sexual senses and seek satisfactions without regard to divine teaching. Premarital sex is an epidemic with accompanying diseases. Extra-marital sex is no longer looked upon as abominable by many. Our land is corrupt and seemingly getting more and more like Judah before God wiped her away.

Those who love God and respect His Word will neither engage in such things, condone such things, but will actively oppose such things. Regardless of what public standards of morality may be or have become, regardless of what becomes stylish and acceptable, regardless of what the majority says or does, regardless to what extent one's passions may be aroused by the efforts of evil people, God will damn the fornicator, the adulterer, the sexual pervert, unless they seek forgiveness of their sins, which demands repentance and cessation of them. Galatians 5:19 makes this so clear that no person of mental capacity to be accountable can mistake it. Illicit sexual behavior is a flagrant transgression and trespass of divine instruction. It is an open and defiant disregard of Almighty God, the Judge.

One not only loses virture, self-respect, purity, honor, but any hope of heaven but an assurance of hell unless forgiven. *"Thou*

shalt not commit adultery" has been God's law and remains so. First Thessalonians 4:3-5, *"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God."*

Consequences

Seeing the dire consequences of such sins, we ought to keep ourselves away from circumstances and conditions that would tempt and provoke us to seek and satisfy our passions unlawfully. The sexual drive in the human body is not sinful of itself. It is of God and therefore pure and holy. God has placed this drive within mankind but also given regulation of it. Outside of the bond of marriage sex is, has been and will be sin. It is sin against self, against others, against God. It will mean hell for those who disobey and are not forgiven.

Notice how God uses this blight of sin of adultery to define His attitude toward apostasy, turning from Him. To turn away from God is to seal our eternal banishment from His glory and assure our eternal punishment in hell. To show His displeasure toward apostasy the Holy Spirit uses the strongest of terms, and symbols, to depict that displeasure at apostasy. James 4:4, *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses; know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."* The world refers to the sinfulness so characteristic of the world. Those who side against God and choose the side of evil are enemies of God. James calls them adulterers and adulteresses. This would certainly be true of those who commit physical adultery, but here it also emphasizes spiritual adultery by being unfaithful to God and friends with wickedness.

Apostasy

Apostasy means desertion, abandonment of what was once professed, forsaking what was once held. Some teach that a Christian cannot so sin as to lose his soul once he has come to Christ. They teach a doctrine of "once saved, always saved." They teach the impossibility of apostasy in spite of what Scripture teaches. They call their doctrine the doctrine of eternal security regardless of what transpires thereafter.

The doctrine is an old one, having originated with the devil in the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted Eve with the idea that she could not fall. Even though God told them they would die the day they ate the forbidden fruit, the devil said, "You won't die. You can't fall. Actually you will be gods." So they ate, but died that day in a spiritual separation from God and were driven from the Garden of Eden.

Paul warned in First Crinthians 10:12, *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* This warning amounts to nonsense if one cannot fall. Paul told the Galatian church that some had already fallen (Galatians 5:4). Many first century Christians fell away, including Demas, Simon the former sorcerer and some brethren in Ephesus. Paul warned of disciples being drawn away (Acts 20:30). How dare some say it cannot be done. Paul warned how the church would drift into apostasy (First Timothy 4:1ff). Revelation 22:19 speaks of those whose names are blotted out of the book of life. Names were once there, but blotted out. Who says it cannot happen? It tells us in the Bible it has happened and can happen. Whose word is to be believed? Will it be some denominational clergyman with his human creed, or the Word of God? Every New Testament epistle includes warnings against apostasy and/or admonitions to faithfulness. There must be a reason for this.

What God Thinks

Second Peter 2:20-22 shows us God's attitude toward those who fall away into apostasy. Let the serious Bible student take serious note of this passage. How tragic it is for one once saved to become as Peter describes.

It is wonderful when a sinner becomes a Christian, remains loyal, lives and dies in the Lord. But when one becomes a Christian, being forgiven of past sins, only to turn back again into sin, it is a tragedy because that which was lost, although found, is lost again, worse condition than the first.

We must shun fornication, adultery and kindred sins. Remember God's displeasure toward such things and that doom awaits those who commit them.

Some may have been persuaded not to obey the gospel because of a fear that they could not remain faithful. Surely, one must remain faithful. But an awareness that one must remain faithful, and that one can fall, is a giant step toward the prevention of that fall. One need not fall. He will be more likely

to remain alert and faithful because he knows he can fall. But a race is never won if never begun. One cannot finish what he never starts. Out of Christ we remain lost. Only in Christ can we be saved. We can be faithful in Christ because God never commands what we cannot do.

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The Suffering Christ

First Peter 3:18, *"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins..."* First Corinthians 2:2, *"For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified."*

In every generation since Pentecost God's children have been called upon to suffer for the sake of Christ. Second Timothy 2:3, *"Thou therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ."* Second Timothy 3:12, *"Yea, and all that will live godly shall suffer persecution."* Matthew 5:10-12, *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Bessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."*

Our suffering should be for welldoing rather than for doing evil. First Peter 3:14,17, *"But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled... For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for welldoing, than for evil doing."* First Peter 4:12-16, *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."*

Suffering Unjustly

But when one thinks of suffering wrongfully, and for righteousness' sake, one must think of Christ. First Peter 2:21-25, *"For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committeth himself to him that judgeth righteously; who his own self bare our sins in his body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."*

We can be encouraged when we meditate on the suffering of Christ. When we measure the extent of His sorrow, we are made ashamed that we complain of our own troubles. We are encouraged to bear with patience any hardship imposed upon us because of our convictions in the faith of Christ. We realize His suffering was motivated by His love for us and we are therefore inspired to live better in spite of persecutions.

Nobility

There is much more to the suffering of Christ, His death on Calvary, than the suffering of a martyr for a cause even when the cause is just and noble. Many have suffered for noble causes. Christ suffered for a noble cause. But Peter presents a higher aspect of the Lord's suffering than that. Even in His suffering He proved (1) His superiority above all else, (2) the concern that He always has for mankind, (3) it was a necessary part of God's plan for saving mankind that He suffered as He did. We want to note three primary points in our text about the suffering of Christ. Our lesson is an attempt to preach Christ and Him crucified.

Peter presents a fact about the suffering of Christ when he said, *"Christ also suffered for sins once."* This affirms the all-sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ. He died for sins and He died only once and that was all that was necessary.

His suffering and death is given prominence in the New Testament more than His birth, being mentioned more than any other single event. Some one hundred seventy five times there is reference to His death. Between twenty five and thirty

per cent of the first four books of the New Testament are concerned with the last week of His life on earth before His death. It is apparent that the Holy Spirit, through the Word, desired that we know more about His death and suffering than most anything else about Him. He suffered for sins, carrying our sins in His body to the cross as a sacrificial victim. He is truly, *"the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."* (John 1:29).

Once

Again we give special emphasis of Scripture that He died once. Under the old Law of Moses sacrifices were made on a regular basis, some daily, some yearly. But the sacrifice of Christ was once (Hebrews 7:26,27; 9:25-28; 10:1-4). Being the final sacrifice, it was completely adequate to satisfy the God of heaven and was to never occur again. The superiority of His sacrifice is evidencned by being done once.

Romanism contends that the "mass" that is a part of their worship is the continual sacrifice of Christ. This is contradictory to the Scriptural affirmation regarding the one sacrifice of Christ.

It is according to God's plan for the redemption of man that the death of Christ provide sufficient power for the forgiveness of sin. Whereas sins were "rolled forward" year by year by the sacrifices under the Law of Moses, His sacrifice provided all that was needed to cleanse every heart and soul of every sin.

The Nature Of His Suffering

It is important that we understand the nature of His suffering. By this we mean it was a death of the righteous on behalf of the unrighteous. First Peter 3:18, *"...the just for the unjust..."* First Peter 2:22, *"Who did no sin..."* Christ did not die for His own sins. He had none. Though tempted as we are, He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). His death was for others inasmuch as *"he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man."* (Hebrews 2:9). In the announcement to Mary of His coming birth she was told how *"he shall save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21). Christ *"gave himself a ransom for many."* (Second Timothy 2:6). He came into the world to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). His blood was shed *"for the remission of sin."* (Matthew 26:28). First Corinthians 15:3, *"...how that Christ died for our sins..."* Other passages that teach the same

theme are Romans 8:3 and Romans 5:6-9. The truth is clearly established. Christ died for sins, though not His own, but for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2).

His death is rightly called a vicarious death, meaning that it was on the behalf and for the benefit of another. He served as a substitute for sinful man. Somebody had to pay for sins and God provided His only begotten Son to stand in the stead of the guilty. The good died for the bad; the perfect on behalf of the imperfect, meaning mankind.

The text also reveals the purpose of His suffering in another way. *"That he might bring us to God."* He was the atonement, which might be looked upon as the "at-one-ment." He made it possible for us to be united with Deity and in fellowship. Sin is the barrier between God and man(Isaiah 59:1,2), but Christ is *"our peace."* (Ephesians 2:14). In a sense, man declares war against God by sinning and there is need for reconciliation. God designed things that Christ would be the only way for man to be reconciled to God (John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:13).

Why This Plan?

But why did God devise this kind of plan? Could not God have devised some other way? There is no question that God could have made it possible for mankind to be saved any number of ways if He has seen fit to do so. The fact remains that He planned it through the death of Christ.

The defilement of sin is offensive to the Lord. His holiness, goodness, purity and nature demands that the sinner be separated from his sins. God's justice demands the sinner be punished. But His mercy requires that the sinner be given opportunity to live. His love said He would allow Jesus Christ to suffer in the stead of the guilty. The justice and mercy of God met at the cross of Christ (Romans 3:26). Only the spotless, sinless and perfect Being without blemish could have stoned for the sins of another. Only Deity would be sufficient for this. Therefore, Christ, as God's Son, took on the form of man, humbled Himself, became obedient to the death on the cross, that He, by death, might bring us to God (Philippians 2:7,8).

The fact that God so loved man that He sent Jesus to be sacrificed is the most powerful appeal that can be made to man to motivate him to come to God. Jesus said, *"Greater love hath*

no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13). Yet, even while we were yet sinful, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). By His death He ransomed us from the grasp of Satan. Matthew 20:28, *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."* We sold our souls to Satan by sinning, and by His death He paid the ransom price for our redemption. He bought us with a price (First Corinthians 6:20) and that price was His blood (Acts 20:28).

Salvation Provided

Though the way of salvation has been provided by His suffering, we can benefit from His death only by coming to the blood of Christ and being washed in His blood. As the Psalmist wrote, *"...wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."* (Psalm 51:7). In Revelation 7:14 the redeemed are said to have had their robes washed *"and made them clean in the blood of the Lamb."* Isaiah had prophesied, *"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."* (Isaiah 1:18).

The way God has provided for mankind for reach the soul-cleansing blood of Christ is in obedience to the command to be baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4), and this is when and where His blood was shed (John 19:34). God applies the blood of Christ to the sin-stained soul upon our obedience to His command and it is then we are raised to a newness of life, being born again, new creatures in Christ, having been washed by His blood. To refuse to obey is to discount His suffering and render it of no value or spiritual benefit to yourself. Each must decide to respect His sacrifice by rendering submission to the will of the Lord.

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Jumping At Conclusions

"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." (Proverbs 18:13). It is better to hear all of a matter before drawing conclusions. Grave mistakes in judgment are made when determined without benefit of a full knowledge of the matter. JWB

David's Charge To Solomon

At the time of our lesson David had grown old and would soon die. He had promised Bathsheba that their son, Solomon, would be the next king. But she became properly concerned over the activities of Adonijah, one of David's sons, who was engaged in a movement to become the next king himself. Having secured the support from Abiathar, the priest, and Joab, captain of David's army, Adonijah was already making plans for a coronation feast and had invited many guests.

When David was informed of this, even though confined to his bed, he quickly called Zadok, another priest, Nathan, the prophet, and Benaiah, captain of his bodyguards and the Jerusalem police, and gave them instructions concerning Solomon. They were to put Solomon on the king's mule, take him through the streets declaring him as David's choice to be the next king. When the people saw what was done they rallied behind Solomon and shouted, *"Long live king Solomon."*

This abruptly concluded the celebration Adonijah had planned and rather than becoming king he sought for mercy from Solomon, which he received temporarily.

Solomon Crowned

Because Solomon was proclaimed king so hurriedly there was no time for a genuine celebration and ceremony. So David instructed a more formal assembly and it was at that time he gave certain solemn charges to the new king, his son. Present were all the princes of Israel, the captians of the companies, the rulers who had superintendence of the affairs of state, and all the mighty men of the nation. It was an occasion when anybody that was anybody in government was invited and present.

David stood to speak even though it was difficult for him. He called for one and all to give allegiance unto God, and also unto Solomon as the incoming king. The purpose of the gathering was to secure for Solomon support from all of those who had been loyal to David. In this action we see the wisdom of David, knowing as he did that one cannot effectively lead if he cannot

depend on his followers. Many leaders, even good leaders, have failed because of a rebellious spirit on the part of those who are suppose to be followers.

Sacrifices were offered and this was followed by a great coronation feast. Solomon was hailed as the new king and anointed the second time.

Following this array of pomp and ceremony, impressive as it was, David spoke a few words. They can be divided into two parts. He had some things to say about himself, recalling his past and an old man might be excused for doing this. There was far more of his life in the past than in his earthly future. Then he turned his attention to Solomon personally and offered him sage counsel. The scriptures that recorded these remarks are in First Chronicles 28:1-10. Because of the length of this passage the reader is urged to take his Bible and become acquainted with the reading before continuing with our remarks.

David's Intent

Some great things can be learned from David's recollections of the past. He mentioned his intentions to have built a house for the Lord. It was to have been a place to house the ark of the covenant and where Jehovah would make His presence known in special manners. It was to be a most expensive and elaborately decorated edifice, richly done in every respect. Yet, David called this planned building nothing more than a footstool for the Lord. Does this not indicate the genuine humility of David and his appreciation for the greatness of God? He did not propose to build a throne for the Lord, but only a footstool, which was all he could do.

David consulted Nathan about building this house and Nathan had advised him to proceed with his plans. But this was before either David or Nathan had consulted the Lord about it. God later told Nathan, and he in turn told David, that David was not to erect such a structure because he had been a man of war and blood.

I think we have a great lesson before us how a person with honest and sincere motives can be presumptuous when they embark on something without the Lord's approval and authority. We cannot just assume that whatever we do will please God. We must inquire of His will before we draw such conclusions. God did tell David that his son would build the house David proposed and David spent much energy gathering

materials that would later be used.

This episode of David's life also tells us more about the heart of David. Doubtless he was disappointed that God had not approved what he wanted to do. But just because David did not get his way he did not turn against God. Rather than doing nothing, and pouting about it, he busied himself with additional preparations for that which would come after him.

David's Past

David also recalled how God had selected him to be king. This stirs our memory to Samuel's visit to the house of Jesse many years earlier and when all the sons of Jesse came before Samuel. But none that were there were chosen and they waited until David was brought from the fields where he had been attending the herds. Samuel anointed him. Samuel was told at that time that man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart, and God approved the heart of David.

David recounted all these things for a good reason. He was laying the groundwork and background to show how God had also selected Solomon just as He had selected David. The king, whoever he was to be, would sit on the throne of the Lord. Therefore, whoever the king was to be was obligated first and foremost to Jehovah God. His allegiance was first to God and then to the people he ruled. Is not that the way it should be for every national leader?

God's Choice

Not only had God chosen Solomon, but the Lord had promised to establish his kingdom forever. But this promise was a conditional one. *"If he be constant to do my commandments and mine ordinances as at this day..."* (verse 7). The inescapable implication is that at that moment of his life Solomon was walking the way Jehovah would have him go. We can only wish that it had remained that way with Solomon. But the story of Solomon is somewhat akin to that of King Saul who had a glorious beginning but who later turned from the way of the Lord and brought discredit upon himself and the people he led. Solomon, by marrying women from the pagan and heathen nations, compromised his faith and allowed idols to be erected and served them.

Notice that Solomon and the people were to *"observe and*

seek out all the commandments." Some people then, like now, observe what they like and ignore what does not suit them. Someway they have convinced themselves that they are not obligated to comply with all of the commandments of God and embark upon a course of selectivity, following some and omiting others. But the Lord wanted them not only to observe His commandments, but seek them out, being sure they were doing as commanded. He expects no less of people today. This is the reason for diligent study that we might know. We are responsible for both knowledge and application.

Finally, David turns to Solomon to with admonitions that would be fitting for every parent to give every child. His admonition can be outlined in three parts.

Parental Advice

First, *"Know thou the God of thy father."* This, of course, referred to Jehovah God. Solomon should not be satified with just a passing acquaintance and warm feelings toward God and the knowledge that God existed. He was to have a close association with God. As John wrote in the New Testament First John 2:3, *"And hereby we do know that we know him if we keep his commandments."* This is the kind of knowledge of God that we all must have and it cannot be ours without obedience. To know God demands that we obey God.

Second, *"Serve him with a perfect heart."* This demands a complete submission and willingness voluntairly offered. It calls for such a mind. Acceptable service to God must come from the heart. To proceed through various forms of service without it being voluntary and willingly given is to attempt to serve God but without the purity of motive.

Perfect does not mean sinless perfection, which is impossible. But it means the heart is completely surrendered to the way of the Lord without reservation. God will know if one serves Him with all the heart or not because God knows the heart. Our fruits also reveal the heart. Jesus once taught that we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Third, *"If thou seek him, he will be found of thee. But if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever."* The decision whether God and Solomon would remain as close as they were at that moment rested with Solomon. It was strictly up to him. God would cleave to Solomon as long as Solomon would honor and respect God and as long as Solomon wanted God to remain

with him, and he showed this desire by the manner of life he lived. But if Solomon wished he could separate himself from God. This is the way God has always dealt with everybody, even now. He does not force Himself upon us, but is willing to abide with those who are willing to abide with Him. Each of us must make the personal choice.

Word Of Warning

Having said all these things, David closed with a warning in verse 10. *"Take heed now, for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it."* Here was the word of caution. *"Take heed."* He would have to be strong to be the king he needed to be and to build the house David had proposed. Added to this charge, as recorded in First Kings 2:2, were the words, *"And show thyself a man."* Real manhood required maturity, knowing God through obedience to God, serving God with all of his heart, remaining faithful to God and being alert and attentive to every duty.

As we study the career and life of Solomon we are impressed how for many years he gave heed to these well chosen words of admonition from his father. It seems he later ignored them and went the way of disgrace and spiritual failure. Whether he died in such a state we cannot know for certain. But David's words should ring loud in our own ears because we all have been charged by the Lord to know God, serve God, and take heed. Our promises are also conditional upon our obedience to God.

As Solomon was given the sacred task of erecting God's temple, those who are Christians have a similar task in upbuilding His spiritual temple which is the church.

We see that Solomon began well but later faltered. We must be alert and not allow such as that overtake us. It remains with you and me to determine how it will be with us. May God's will be so respected by each of us that we shall discharge our duties to God's approval.

David, Solomon's parent, gave his son good advice and counsel. Can a parent do more? Should we not teach our young by word and deed to *"show thyself a man,"* meaning a person of spiritual quality? What higher and nobler goal for life could we present to our children?

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Paul Rebukes Peter

Galatians 2:11-21, *"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain Gentiles came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ a minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet, not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."*

Paul Versus Peter

Paul tells of this encounter with Cephas or Peter. Peter had come to Antioch for reasons unrevealed, but most likely to be of assistance in the cause of Christ as he had done in Samaria in Acts 8. But Paul says Peter stood in error in a certain matter and Paul resisted him. He opposed him to his face and before all who were concerned. Can we suppose that Peter was really a "pope" and being openly and publicly rebuked for sinning? Who could imagine such a thing toward the "pope" of Rome who claims to be "Peter's successor"?

Here were two giant pillars in the church standing at odds.

Some today might have criticized Paul for doing what he did. Some would have advised that he not cause any trouble, keep the peace, let harmony continue. But the harmony and peace had already been broken and trouble already stirred by the error of Peter. Paul did not create the situation, but began working to remedy it. Only those who are passive toward error and compromising toward truth would advise error be left alone and truth allowed to be buried for the sake of a misguided "peace." Peter had started the trouble and Paul would have been negligent not to deal with it. It is never right to appease sin and make it appear wrong is right.

Public sin was publicly rebuked. It should be done this way, especially when committed by those of prominence lest others think that sin is not sin. Prominent brethren can lead weaker brethren astray. When someone of note goes astray, all the more reason to expose the error. Peter's error was adversely influencing others, even Barnabas, Paul's companion on his first journey to take the gospel to Gentiles. Of all people who should have known there should be no racial discrimination in the Lord's church, it should have been Barnabas, unless Peter should have known it even better. It is bad when brethren err. It is worse when error is swept under the rug uncorrected. But how many prefer nothing be said or done in the face of error if brother Big is involved?

The Issue

What was the wrong Peter committed that caused Paul to take issue with him? Peter, a Jew, was visiting a church where there were Gentiles. At first he did not let this racial difference determine his association but treated all brethren as brethren. This would be expected of Peter since he had been the one to first take the gospel to Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, recorded in Acts 10. He had been outspoken at the conference in Jerusalem when such matters were discussed, as recorded in Acts 11 and 15. The conclusion of those meetings was that the gospel is for all without respect to race, and salvation was offered to everyone on the same terms. Peter was now acting inconsistently with that truth and making distinction among his brethren, fearing those who were Jewish Christians lest they not approve of him.

Certain ones came from James, meaning Jerusalem, where there remained those who were confused about accepting

Gentiles. While it was all right for Jews to follow their customs, they could not bind their religious laws seeing that the law was no longer operative, having been nailed to the cross. One of the problems with many Jewish brethren was their attempt to make their customs and laws binding on others as if such was God's will. They acted as if racial differences made a difference in one's acceptability before God.

While Peter once realized this error, now he was practicing it. He pulled himself away from his Gentile brethren under the pressure of the presence of his Jewish brethren. Paul pointed out to him that he simply could not have it both ways.

Peter's actions were disturbing and disrupting the church in Antioch. He was causing others to take this same faulty course of action. Paul did not express his personal opinion about the matter, but charged that they *"walked not according to the truth of the gospel."* It was a matter of faith.

It is not unknown for men who are usually good to sometimes bow before the fear of others and be carried away by personal prejudices. Paul reasoned, if Peter had been living as a Gentile, even though he was a Jew, why did he now require the Gentile to live as a Jew? Peter was guilty of doing the very thing he once realized was wrong. He was using his influence to perpetuate the very idea that he once knew to be error. Even today, as I write these words, names of prominent brethren among us come to mind for doing in principle the very same thing because they seem to have shifted their positions to accomodate the largest number of people rather than being consistent with once stated convictions that they preached and practiced. It is a sad spectacle to behold when good men do such a thing.

Inconsistency

It is an indication that something is wrong when one is inconsistent. One might at one time contend for truth and then depart from it and be inconsistent. He might once have contended for error and now hold the truth and he is inconsistent, but for the better. But when there is inconsistency, something is wrong somewhere, either at the first or later. Inconsistency may embarass us, but being wrong can condemn us. One should prefer inconsistency when going from wrong to right, but to go from right to wrong is both inconsistent and deadly. In this instance Peter had once been right and was now wrong and inconsistent.

Paul further reasoned if the ways of the Jews must be adopted by Gentiles to be saved, then Christ died in vain. If the old law could have saved, why was the new one given? Man cannot be justified by the old Law of Moses. Paul impressed this upon them all and showed the superiority of the faith of Christ.

Those today who wish to hold to the old law make void the grace of God. Galatians 5:4, *"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."* The truth was they were not really justified at all, but had voided their salvation by returning to that which cannot save. Paul said that would frustrate God's grace.

Such teaching does not render the Old Testament valueless. We study it and respect the record as inspired of God because all Scripture is inspired of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). There is much profit for us as Paul states in Romans 15:4 and First Corinthians 10:11, but we must recognize that the law was but a shadow of things to come (Colossians 2:17).

Dead To The Old Law

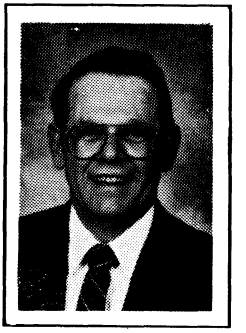
One final point of emphasis is the teaching of verse twenty. As far as the old law was concerned, Paul said he was dead (separated) from it. This was similar to his teaching regarding the Christian's relationship to the law as found in Romans 7:1-7. Paul showed that as a Christian he did not determine that his life would be for himself. He really did not consider his life to belong to himself. Once he had even said that dying would be better than living except for the good he could do for others (Philippians 1:23). His life was totally committed to the service of the Lord.

As Christians we live by faith, walk by faith, and our salvation is in the faith of Christ. The will of the Lord must be the heart and core of our thought and conduct. We are not to allow any motive except it please God. No word spoken should be outside His approval.

Alongside the condemnation of racial prejudice, let us be aware that if stalwart soldiers of the cross like Peter and Barnabas can get sidetracked into error, improperly influencing others, we certainly can. Let us be consistent, but more importantly, be right. Paul rendered the church great service when he rebuked Peter.

† † † † †

Seven Complete Volumes



JAMES W. BOYD

With this issue we have published eighty-four issues of ***A Burning Fire.*** This amounts to seven volumes of twelve issues each. Someone has suggested that a task undertaken might never have been begun if only we knew how much was really involved in doing it. While we had some idea what would be required to produce all my sermons in printed form over a period of several years, it would be fair to say that it surely has involved much more than at first realized. Not only has it demanded a great deal of time, money, energy and considerable patience, it has occupied the attention of my wife and I far more than we really intended to give it.

But there has been tremendous satisfaction for these efforts seeing the encouragement and response that we have received from so many. Our distribution is necessarily limited because of resources available for this work, but we are confident much good is being done relative to the work we have done. With prospective issues numbering about one hundred twenty five more, we just hope that things will continue to be such that someday all my sermons will be in printed form.

* * * * *

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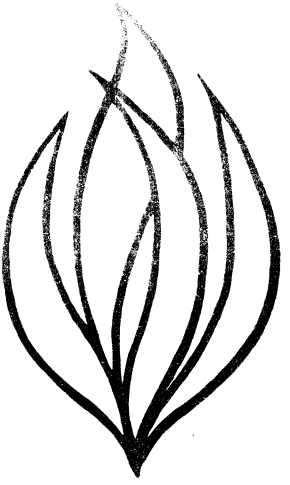

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME VIII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 1**

Daniel's Three Friends And The Furnace

A great portion of being a Christian involves spiritual growth, which involves the development of character that is pleasing to God. One source from which we learn the traits of character that God approves or disapproves is from a study of Biblical characters, their lives, the things they did that proved acceptable and unacceptable. Especially do we profit from a study of Old Testament people. After all, those things were written for our learning. (Romans 15:4).

Our study is taken from the third chapter of Daniel. As we consider the people named here, we must keep before us that they were very much like people today in that they had their strong points and their weaknesses. They were not born into this world with characteristics that manifested themselves so nobly later in life. These things had to be learned and developed by them even as we must learn and develop them. If we are not careful, we might make the mistake in thinking the outstanding qualities that are to be admired "just happened" upon them. But they had to grow to be what they were. When we see the kind of people they were, and see God's reaction to them, can we not be better informed what kind of people we be?

The three men on whom we focus were named Hananiah. Mishael and Azariah. They are better known by their Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Taken To Babylon

When we read Daniel three we find these men in Babylon where they were taken as captives in the first of the three deportations out of Palestine of the Jews by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. At the fall of Jehoiakim selected ones of the Jews were seized for special training in Babylonian ways. This included those considered to be the most skilled, the most promising, those with potential for leadership, the priests and elders, and others the Babylonians thought might be able to arouse the people into revolt and cause problems for the conquerors. They removed the potential problems.

Included in the training of these selected captives was the

teaching of the Babylonian language, physical development, and Babylonian names. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel were in this special group that was considered to be youth with promise. They were instructed how to become leaders in the Babylonian government.

The first demonstration of strong and faithful service to God was seen in their refusal to eat food that was forbidden the Jews to eat. Daniel was a leader in this refusal (Daniel 1). He purposed in his heart he would not defile himself. These three friends did likewise. Regardless of the circumstances that could befall them, they chose to be loyal to the law of God rather than submit to the king's direction to eat what was forbidden by God's law. This event, early in their training, gave indication of the kind of men they would be hereafter.

The Idol

Daniel three tells us of a huge golden image, an idol, that was erected at the king's command. There was to be an elaborate celebration at its completion. All the dignitaries of the empire were expected to be present. By this time Daniel and his three friends were officials in governmental ranks and would be expected also. They would have been very conspicuous by their absence. But absent they were. The temptation to be among the elite, powerful and renowned that often overtakes many people even today, was not something to which they submitted. Idolatry was evil and they would have no part in it.

During the feast of dedication it was proposed that all in the kingdom would, upon a given musical sound, fall down and worship this golden image. It seems obvious that the proposal was made simply to flatter the king. It did please him and the suggestion was made law with the addition that whoever refused to obey would be cast into the fiery furnace.

For most of the inhabitants of the land this posed no problem. They would not be offended because they were idolaters anyway. Bowing before another one, especially to please their king, was no difficulty. It was a source of concern for the Jews who had been idolatrous before their captivity at various times to God's displeasure, but who now in captivity were turning back to the true and living God. Especially was this a challenge to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego because their actions would be so readily observed.

These three men did not broadcast their determination to

refuse to obey, nor did they make the effort to change the law because that would been a futile gesture. But they were resolute and determined not to bow before the idol. When the signal was given, they obeyed God rather than the wicked commandment.

The Charge

This brought them before the king and they were charged with disobedience. The exchange between these three and Nebuchadnezzar is quite revealing. Daniel 3:14-18, *"Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltry and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"*

Before continuing the passage, does it not appear that the king is offering these men a second chance? Even though they had previously disobeyed, if they would now consent, all would be well. The threat of the punishment must have been something to consider at this point. Mockery that any source of deliverance was available is quite evident.

Their Response

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

This was a very bold proclamation. But the king would not have to wait until the next signal for idol worship to have their answer. They already had their answer. They had their answer from the beginning. Doubtless, this challenged the prestige and power of the king and his word, but there was One whom these three served who was greater than Nebuchadnezzar. They would die before they would turn away from the true God.

Into The Furnace

The anger of the king is evident by his command that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. No other explanation for this extravagance can be found except the extent of his rage. A normal firing of the furnace would suffice to kill the victims. But he wanted to be sure that nobody could deliver these subjects. So the three were bound and led to the furnace and cast into it. Even those who took them there were killed by the extreme heat coming from it.

Not knowing the exact structure of the furnace we can conclude that there was some way the king could see into it. How merciless must one be to even want to view the burning of a person! But he watched. What he saw was not what he expected. He was astonished and cried out, *"Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."* (Daniel 3:24,25).

He ordered the men out of the furnace. When they made their exit there was not even the smell of smoke about their clothing nor a hair singed. Such deliverance was accomplished in spite of the furnace being seven times hotter than usual.

The exact identity of the fourth man in the furnace has been the source of much speculation. There it must remain because we are not authoritatively told who it was. In verse 28 Nebuchadnezzar identified him as God's angel that delivered God's servants. Some have speculated that it was the second person of the Godhead. We cannot know and do well to simply accept the report as it is without addition or subtraction, giving glory to God nonetheless.

Their Faith

There are so many practical and spiritual lessons to be gained from this account. But let us think on just three. First, we must admire and try to imitate the faith of these three men of God. Do we not also see God's power and God's providence? These men had not been told God would deliver them. They could know how God had delivered His servants many times in the past, but there were also times when God's servants suffered. Regardless of that, deliverance or no deliverance, they would remain loyal to God, doubting Him not for a moment. Such complete submission and respect for the Almighty is noteworthy.

God could provide and had provided. Possibly God would provide again. He did.

Do we not also have the assurance from Christ that God will provide? Matthew 6:33, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."* Whatever God sees that is needful for us and best for us, if we put Him first, He will provide. While we are not promised all we want, or even what we think we need, we have the confidence in God and His infinite wisdom to provide for us as He sees best for us. We respect, praise and are thankful to Him for His providence. If only we can grow to have such a faith in Him as these men had.

God still delivers, and with a deliverance far more beneficial than deliverance from a physical death in a fiery furnace. He gives us spirit deliverance from sin. When we consider the fiery hell toward which we are rushing if we be out of Christ, what a marvelous deliverance it is to be delivered from sin that is through Christ.

Their Courage

We must also admire their courage. Their life was in the balance, but they realized something even more important was in the balance and that was their accountability before God. They courageously held to their convictions of truth. Being loyal to God meant more to them than remaining in positions of prominence, or even continuing to live.

Many of us may well have compromised under similar circumstances. There have been those who have denied their Lord for lesser reasons. Like the early Christians who died rather than forsake Christ, these men considered life less significant than faithfulness, and were men of courage to not only say so, but to act consistently with what they said. Mark 8:36, *"For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* As one studies the Scriptures and observes the kind of people God has been able to use, he will not fail to note that people of similar courage as these were necessary. Weaker, less determined people without strong purpose and conviction cannot fight the good fight of faith as God wants it fought.

Their Power

Third, we see the power of stedfastness and good influence.

They paid an awesome price to remain stedfast in the truth. But what a glorious effect they had on those around them! Too often Christians tragically fail when in the company of others as they follow others rather than remaining true to the truth. When you compromise what you know is right, you lose your self-respect But while you may temporarily gain "friends," those "friends" will not respect you because they know you have your price and your convictions can be bought. Others may not accept your convictions and disagree violently, but they usually will hold in greater esteem both you and what you believe when you stand for it at all costs. We sin so grievously when we allow our behavior to bring reproach on the way of the Lord.

The influence on Nebuchadnezzar was such that he no longer required these men to bow before his idol, but made such a change that he demanded that nobody speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, with severe punishment to any who did. The lesson of influence when God's people are loyal is worth the study by itself.

† † † † †

"I Am" -Lesson One

In John 12 we read where certain Greeks came to Philip, a disciple of Jesus, and expressed their desire, *"Sir, we would see Jesus."* We assume that you who read have a similar desire. The greatest need in our world, whether realized or not, is for men, women, boys, and girls to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The two lessons entitled *"I Am"* are intended to help us who desire to see Him as He is and to know Him better. His way is the untried and rejected, yet the certain and sure way of life.

Deity

In Jesus' debate with the Jews recorded in John 8, the Jews relied heavily on their fleshly descendancy from Abraham as proof and evidence of their acceptance by Jehovah God. Jesus sorely rebuked them for not acting like children of Abraham. Verses 39,40, *"If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the*

works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham." In verse 44 He accused them of being of their father, the devil, because of the wicked ways in which they lived. Then He further startled them by making the claim of verses 56-58.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you. Before Abraham was I am."

His claim is clear. Even though He was not yet fifty years old in the flesh, He existed before Abraham, who had lived nearly two thousand or more years earlier. He makes the claim of being an Eternal One. It is a claim of Deity, an identification of Himself with the phrase used by Moses to identify God before the Israelite, Exodus 3:14, *"I am that I am."* By this claim He asserts to have existed and declares He is the Divine One. His pre-incarnate state is clearly affirmed by His own words. Such an affirmation is in harmony with such passages concerning Him as John 1:1-4 and Hebrews 1:1-3.

This is one of the eight times recorded that Jesus used the phrase, *"I am."* This is the only time by which He declares His eternal existence as the Divine One. The other seven instances involve metaphors and allegories, comparisons, instances where He presents Himself in terms and images of something else readily understood. He used figurative language. By doing so, Jesus greatly simplified Himself, made Himself, His nature, His mission, and His relationship to His disciples more easily grasped. Our study shall center on these eight occasions, four in the first lesson, and the last four in lesson two.

True Bread

We have already noted the first instance when He teaches His Deity. Also, in John 6, on the day following the miracle of feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, the multitudes came to Him again. They came not so much from belief in Him, but to obtain more food, as evidenced by Jesus' words in John 6:26. Their motive was more for the material than the spiritual benefit. This sounds much like those today who seek Jesus for material gain, following the distorted appeal of some religious teachers that Jesus will make you rich, give you a better house, a new car, a better job, etc.

Jesus used the occasion to admonish how men ought not work primarily for just the physical nourishment, but rather for that food which was unto eternal life. He was teaching priorities. John 6:27, *"Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed."* He had taught, Matthew 4:4, *"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."*

Recalling the time when Israel was sustained in the wilderness by the manna that God provided, Jesus said, verses 32-35, *"Verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger: and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."*

Again in verses 48-51, *"I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

Jesus is teaching that man must have the proper spiritual food to have spiritual life. This food comes from the Father. This bread is a *"He,"* a person, (verse 33), which is Christ.

He declares that He is from heaven; He came from the Father; He is the bread that imparts eternal life; He is the true bread in contrast to the manna the Israelites had in the wilderness. Jesus is the living bread that provides life. All who would obtain this life must come to Him. That which He offered; namely, Himself, is that upon which we must feed our spirits.

Light Of The World

In John 8:12 Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."* A similar statement is recorded in John 9:5 and 12:46. The word *"light"* is often used in Scripture in contrast to darkness, showing the contrast between righteousness and unrighteousness.

First Peter 2:9, *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show for the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* Colossians 1:13, Paul reminds his brethren that they had been delivered out of darkness. First John 1:7, *"But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."* John the Baptist called Jesus the light (John 1:7-9). God sent the light because the deeds of men were evil and that light is Christ.

From these passages we see that people are in the darkness of sin, sometimes loving darkness more than light (John 3:19). Christ illuminates. When Christ is the ruler of our hearts and lives the darkness of sin is driven from us. To be illuminated we must obey His will and follow His directions. The result will be eternal life.

It is noteworthy that John 9:5 says, *"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."* Christ has been driven out of the hearts and lives of many. Yet, He is the one that lights the way to heaven through this sojourn on earth. Alongside this Jesus said to His disciples, Matthew 5:14, *"Ye are the light of the world."* We are lights in the sense that we reflect the light of Christ in our lives. Matthew 5:16 urges we let our lights shine that God may be glorified. Galatians 2:20, we are to let Christ live in us. Ephesians 5:8, written to Christians, *"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light."*

Door Of The Sheepfold

In John 10 Jesus twice uses the phrase, *"I am,"* in teaching the parables relating to the sheep and sheepfold. We shall consider one of them now and the second in the next lesson. Prior reading of John 1:10 is needful to understand the metaphors and illustrations Jesus uses.

Jesus said, *"I am the door of the sheep."* Here He asserts His authority by claiming to be the entrance into the sheepfold through which the sheep must pass into safety and security. Obviously, this is a figurative use of the term.

In chapter nine we read of the man born blind who receives his sight at the Lord's hand, and he became a believer. Jesus' enemies sought to negate this miracle. They had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Christ must be

expelled from the fellowship of the synagogue (9:22). Therefore, this man was cast out. By declaring Himself as the door, Jesus shows how the Jews had assumed authority to which they had no right. Actually Jesus is the passageway to the favor of God and the Jews could not presume to admit or exclude anyone. Nor can anyone do so today except by the authority of the Word of God. Jesus further stated, verse 9, *"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall not go in and out, and find pasture."* The same sentiment is expressed in John 14:6.

There are several important points we must gain from all of this. Jesus is the sole avenue to God (Acts 4:12). You can see what this does to every faith, religion, and church that is not of Christ. Also, through Him there is protection, provision, liberty, and spiritual sustenance because He is the way into the Lord's sheepfold. Others who presume to admit or exclude on any other basis than that of Jesus Christ usurp His authority. The doctrine that there are Christians faithfully serving God in the denominational world is to assert there are other doorways than Christ. There are not many ways to be saved, with each having the right to choose the way he prefers. The door is open to all, but every one must enter that way or he does not enter.

By these four uses of the phrase, *"I am,"* we can better understand the nature and mission of Jesus and our relationship to Him as well as the advantages of being in Christ. By and through Him we have life, for He is the bread of life. By and through Him we can live apart from the sinful darkness of the world because he is the light of the world. He has all authority and is the only door through which people can pass to receive the spiritual provisions God offers. All of this is founded on the fact that He is the ever-existing Eternal One, Deity, who took on the form of flesh.

† † † † †

REVELATION

A study of any part of the Bible is beneficial. Some hesitate to study Revelation because it is admittedly a difficult book. Because of the figurative language it can be very difficult. But those who read it are blessed (Revelation 1:3). Its message of ultimate victory for the faithful is an anchor to the soul. JWB

"I Am" -Lesson Two

It is gospel preaching that proclaims Christ. Included in that are the ways Jesus identified Himself. On eight occasions He uttered, *"I am."* To understand who He really is will greatly enhance our comprehension of Him and our duty to Him. Having considered in a previous lesson four times when Jesus the phrase, let us now turn our attention to four additional usuages of this identifying phrase.

Good Shepherd

In John 10 we discussed how Jesus said He was the door to the sheepfold. Also in this extended teaching regarding the sheep, the door, and sheepfold Jesus said, *"I am the good shepherd."* (John 10:11-16).

Does not this passage imply there are different kinds of shepherds because He is the good one? He was not a hireling. His motive for what He did was not for Himself, but for others. He defines a good shepherd as one whose first concern is the welfare of his sheep. He is one who, if necessary, will lay down his own life for his sheep, and does so willingly. This is precisely the kind of shepherd the Lord proved to be. For the spiritual welfare of mankind He gave His life on the cross.

Additionally, as the good shepherd, He leads His sheep to nourishment, provides protection and guidance, and when they stray He seeks them to recover them.

The good shepherd knows his sheep and is known by them. Such is the case with Jesus. There is an intimate and personal relationship between them called fellowship that reflects affection, care and primary concern one for the other. In summary, Christ emphasizes He is the exclusive shepherd, supremely good, sacrificed for His sheep, who knows His sheep and is known by His sheep. Being such a shepherd He was fulfilling the will of the Father to bring mankind into the Lord's one fold under the rule of the One Shepherd. As surely as there is one shepherd, there is one fold. When Jesus speaks of having other sheep which are not of this fold He is speaking of the inclusion of Gentiles and offering salvation not only to Jews but also Gentiles that all might be saved, and all saved the same way by the same Shepherd.

Resurrection And Life

In John 11, when Jesus was teaching beyond Jordan, word came to Him of the sickness of His friend, Lazarus. He deliberately delayed coming to Bethany until after Lazarus was dead. This was not due to unconcern or lack of compassion but because there was a greater work and teaching that He would produce from this event. It was to bring glory to God.

Upon His arrival, Lazarus' sisters said, *"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."* They obviously believed in the power of Christ to have been sufficient to heal Lazarus if He had been present. But Jesus responded, *"Thy brother shall rise again."*

Martha thought He spoke of the eventual resurrection when all shall be raised the last day (verse 24). It was then that Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"* (John 11:25,26).

The words of Jesus carried all the necessary force of both the resurrection and life. He has power even over death. Such power belongs only to Deity. Although physical death is inevitable, eternal life is available. Death is the enemy of man both physically and spiritually. But man can enjoy victory over both by and through Christ (First Corinthians 15:54-57). This victory, this resurrection, this life is conditioned upon a person's faith in Christ, his obedient faith. There is no other who has such power to make such an offer to mankind. We either make our peace with God through Him or we forfeit these blessings and subject ourselves to the punitive consequences of having rejected the Son of God. Jesus is the resurrection and life.

Way, Truth, Life

One of the more familiar statements of Jesus where He used the phrase, *"I am,"* is found in John 14:6 when He said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."* Over and over again we hear Jesus assert His exclusiveness as the way to God.

This statement followed words of consolation and encouragement that Jesus had given His apostles. He noted how He would suffer and be killed, but eventually be taken into heaven. The companionship between Jesus and His disciples had grown

tremendously over the months and years and the thought of its cessation was depressing on the apostles. He told them, 14:1, *"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me."* Then He spoke of mansions in the Father's house and they were for them. His departure from them would be temporary. He said they knew the way to come to Him.

It was then that Thomas asked, *"How can we know the way?"* Jesus responded with the statement of John 14:6. He was the way. The access to the Father was through Him. In fact, He is the only way.

He called Himself the truth. In His person and His work we find all the truth that is necessary to reach the mansions of the Father. This claim of being the truth is significant in our own time, especially when there are those who teach that there is no truth, no absolute standard of truth, no way we can be sure of the truth, that we can never find the truth but can only search for it. What is amazing is how absolutely sure some people are that nobody can be absolutely such of anything. They are confident that it is true that there is no way to know truth. Dear reader, any position that is so self-contradictory is not deserving of followship from any intelligent person. Jesus contradicts that agnosticism by declaring, *"I am the.. truth."* It is truth that sets man free (John 8:32). Until people come to Christ they cannot be delivered from the bondage of sin and will never enjoy the liberty that is in Christ.

Again Christ affirmed He is the life. Life is one of the prime themes of the gospel and so often found in the discourses of Jesus. He said He was the bread of life, the resurrection and the life, the water of life, and here life itself. Jesus is the very depository of life. Without Him there is no eternal life. All who would truly live the abundant life, both here and eternally, must come to the Father, the giver of life, and he can only come through Jesus Christ, God's Son.

True Vine

In John 15:1-10, as Jesus was possibly observing some of the many vineyards found in Palestine, He said, *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."* Again, we see a contrast in His words like that which He used when He identified Himself as the good shepherd and the true bread. According to Psalm 80, the vine was a symbol of the nation of Israel. Israel was God's vine. Those connected thereto belonged to God. With the

coming of the faith of Christ the nation of Israel no longer possessed this distinction by virtue of being Israel in the flesh. Being an Israelite no longer meant they were necessarily God's vine. This ancestral circumstance did not assure them of God's favor. Rather, spiritual Israel, the church was the blessed of God.

Christ is the true vine. One must have proper relationship with Him like that of branches in order to be cared for by the Father, the husbandman.

The disciples of Christ are the Lord's branches. Verses 5,6 *"I am the vine; ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."* Branches cannot bear fruit apart from the vine. Neither does the vine bear fruit except through the branches. (It is false doctrine of the worst sort to identify the branches as denominations. Nothing akin to denominationalism is hinted here or anywhere else in Scripture. The branches are specifically identified as people (verse 6), not religious groups and organizations that did not then even exist.)

If a branch did not bear fruit it was severed from the vine, gathered and burned. This in itself is a death blow to the false religious doctrine that once one is in Christ he cannot fall.

In saying He is the true vine Jesus makes the following points. He is the avenue of access to the Father's care and love. One must abide (keep living in) Him to bear fruit pleasing to the Father. We see the dependence the branches have on the vine and their close association thereto. We see how Christ the vine also depends on the branches, His disciples, to bear fruit in His name.

Messiah

We close these thoughts by referring to John 4 when Jesus was speaking to the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. It had become obvious to the woman that Jesus was something extraordinary. She considered Him a prophet. She had looked for the coming of the Messiah and knew that when He came all things would be revealed concerning the Fathers will and His way of saving mankind. It was to her that Jesus said, *"I that speak unto thee am he."* (Verse 25).

Above all else we must learn that Jesus was and is the long

awaited Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed one, the Savior of mankind. He identifies Himself as that. If we cannot trust this statement there is nothing He has taught that is deserving of consideration. But seeing the evidence concerning Him, there is no difficulty in accepting His teaching concerning His identity. He is the Eternal One, the bread of life, the light of the world, the resurrection and life, the door of the sheepfold, the good shepherd, the way, truth and life, the true vine and the Messiah sent from God.

† † † † †

Helping The Needy

One of the cardinal principles of Christianity is a benevolent spirit and action by Christians. As one studies the Scriptures he learns that the work of the church falls into three main categories: (1) preaching to the lost that they might be saved, (2) edifying the saved that they might grow and remain faithful, (3) ministering to those who are in need, both to saint and sinner as opportunity affords. When any of the three are neglected, to that extent the cause and purpose of Christ is hindered and weakened. This lesson, hopefully, will motivate each reader in the responsibility of helping the needy.

The law of Moses was rather precise and strict regarding duties to those who had worldly possessions, and their responsibility toward those who were poor and needy. The law of Moses was demanding and the law of Christ is no less demanding. For instance, when brethren met in Jerusalem to discuss the relationship of the Gentiles to the law of Moses, and letters were sent teaching the truth that the Gentiles are not obligated to that law, and the gospel was for all nations, the brethren were encouraged to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and to remember the poor. Galatians 2:10 reports on that meeting, *"Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do."*

First John 3:17,18, *"But whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in*

deed and in truth." Can it be possible to love God and be unconcerned for the needy of this world? Ephesians 4:28, *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."* This is a characteristic of a Christian. There is no question as to the will of God regarding this matter but disciples of Christ will be found helping the needy.

Source Of Division

Regretfully, caring for the needy has caused great disturbance and division in the church in our twentieth century. This is because some have desired to disrupt the church in the performance of this duty by imposing rules and regulations which God has not imposed. At the same time there have been those, under the disguise of benevolence, who have taken the church into activities which are not the work of the church. Both extremes have made havoc of the peace and hindered benevolence.

It is always commendable for brethren to make sure they are loyal to the teaching of Christ. But we should neither go beyond what is written nor attempt to bind what is not bound. It is just as wrong to make a law where God has not made one as it is to loose what God has bound. While some erroneously oppose the church supporting homes for orphans, others have led the church into money and profit making adventures for housing for the elderly which in no manner could be described benevolent and charitable work with which the church is charged.

When God has authorized something to be done, but has not delivered unto us the details in expediting what He commands, we must exercise our own judgment within the framework of what is authorized and get the job done. I do not see why this is such a difficult thing for all to understand. God has not authorized building and maintaining profit making institutions, nor has He specified every detail in providing homes for the homeless. I have yet to have anyone show me a system for providing a home for homeless people without a home, an institution separate and apart from the church. The home and the church are simply not the same organization. Why is that so hard to see?

It ought not be hard for people to see that providing housing for those who have means to provide for themselves is certainly not a charitable and benevolent work. I fail to see why this is so

difficult to grasp.

A Definition

James 1:27, *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."* These words were written to Christians who were familiar with the elaborate rituals of the Jewish faith. It was easy for them to get the wrong impression as to the real significance and true value of religion. Never has it been God's will for His people to attend merely to the outward observances and rituals and show no concern and feeling for the needs of others.

Even in the Old Testament (Micah 6) this was true. They were taught not to come before the Lord with burnt offerings and sacrifices and at the same time forget doing justly, loving, being kind, walking humbly. An emphasis is placed on the emptiness and vanity of form and ceremony without application of the faith in daily life, especially toward others.

James does not mean that caring for the fatherless and widows is all there is to having an acceptable faith and religion. But one cannot have pure and undefiled religion without practical demonstrations of it and rendering service to others, especially the unfortunate. There have been those who insist that this instruction is exclusively to the individual Christian and is not authority for the church to assist the needy. This seems so absolutely absurd that we wonder why anyone subscribes to an idea that would prohibit the church from helping the needy. The fact of the passage is that here is a definition of pure and undefiled religion. It does not matter whether you have in mind a person's individual faith or the faith practiced by the church, the definition is simple and plain. Just why anyone would prefer the church to have a religion that is not pure and undefiled I never have been able to fathom. Religion is either pure and undefiled or it is impure and defiled. Which kind should the individual have? Which kind should the church have? Can a church practice pure and undefiled religion, or must it refrain from practicing that kind of religion?

"Visit"

The word *"visit"* involves rendering aid, with sympathy,

compassion and benefit. Psalm 68:5, *"A father of the fatherless and a judge of widows is God in his holy habitation."* The church is the habitation of God (Ephesians 2:22) and it is characteristic of God to be mindful and helpful for the fatherless and widows. To be otherwise is to be different from God. First Timothy 5:16, *"If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed."* This is not hard to understand. Those who have needs in their own families are the ones who have the first responsibility to provide for them. The church ought not assume provision for those who have the capacity to provide for themselves or for their own people. The church can and should assume responsibility for the *"widow indeed,"* who is described as one who is desolate. There are those who have expressed such an anti-Christian attitude that they would allow a person to starve before they would spend one cent of the funds in the treasury of the church to provide for the needy if the needy person had relatives. But relatives do not always provide as they ought. They have the duty but do not always do their duty. Shall we allow faithful women who are in need, whose relatives will not provide for them, exist in her desolation? Such a thought is legalism and law-making carried to the extreme. The church does have the charge to provide for those who are in need. The duty is clear.

"All Men"

Galatians 6:9,10, *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* Paul encourages the churches of Galatia, the ones to whom this epistle was sent, not to grow weary and tired in doing good works. Facing an evil world day after day, often encountering persecution, there was a temptation to abandon the effort. But we cannot become slack in doing the things we should do. As opportunity presented itself these brethren were to do good to all men, with special emphasis upon doing good for brethren. Unfortunately some have evidently read that Paul said "Exclusively unto the housefold of faith." But this was not exclusively for brethren that these churches could and should render service and good. To restrict the charitable and benevolent deeds of the church exclusively to brethren is a false idea. It would eliminate almost

every orphan and fatherless child since many, probably most, would not even be of an age of accountability. Little wonder that those who hold to such an erroneous view are considered to be "anti-orphan" people. Keep in mind that these words were to the churches, not just to individuals who made up the churches.

I find it strange that some who contend this is exclusively for the individual and exclusively for the brethren go up a few verses and find authority for the church to support those who preach. They do this from the treasury of the church, but inconsistently deny the support of the needy from that same treasury. There are those who have adopted such a position that they would allow money from the treasury to be spent to buy fertilizer for the preacher's lawn but would deny one cent to be spent for a needy orphan or a non-Christian from that same treasury. Can anyone seriously consider that this is the attitude and spirit of Christ?

What Jesus Taught

Matthew 25:34-40 teaches the Lord's attitude toward doing benevolent work. There is presented in this chapter the judgment scene. Having earlier warned of the destruction of Jerusalem in chapter 24, and having taught concerning His return, the third major lesson is the judgment scene.

The parable of the ten virgins teaches the need for being ready for these things that were to come. The parable of the talents teaches us how we can get ready by using properly what we have available. Then there is the comparison of those who were saved and those who were lost.

In this particular presentation, nothing evil was mentioned as far as sins committed. The ones called goats were not charged with lying, adultery, stealing, or such like. Their problem rested in their failure to do good things for those in need. Proverbs 19:17, *"He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord."* Those who heard words of acceptance had performed deeds of charitable and benevolent action on others.

These points are deserving of our most serious consideration. Living a life in service to others is a part of the Christian life as much as being faithful in the worship services. Our duty is clear and our accountability is unquestionable. May it be that the Lord's church will gain a reputation among all people as people who are compassionate, sympathetic, and helpful to those deeds of charitable and benevolent action on others.

the lost by doing good as well as discharge a duty to God and others that we assumed upon becoming a child of God.

† † † † †

Sympathy For The Sinner

The lesson will be taken from the book written by God's prophet, Ezekiel, dealing with attitudes that control actions. As Proverbs 4:23 states, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."*

The prophecies of Ezekiel were not only concerned with Judah but also other nations as he foretold their impending doom. He was concerned with neighboring nations as well as his beloved Judah, especially nations like Babylon and Egypt.

The exile of the people into Babylonian captivity had come in three stages: (1) under Jehoiakim, (2) under Jehoiachin, (3) and under Zedekiah. Ezekiel had been taken into Babylon in the second stage. He warned of the eventual and total collapse of the nation of Judah and it came to pass.

The reason for Judah's destruction was the sinfulness of the people. They broke the covenant with the Lord and gave themselves to idolatry. They not only forsook the true God but filled the void with heathenism. Even though they had opportunity to do better and a chance to repent, they gave no heed to the exhortations to return to righteousness. Judah and the punishment received is an example to people today that warns against forsaking the Lord. The sure wrath of God is against those who do just as certainly as Northern Israel, Sodom, the people before the flood and other examples. Psalm 1:6, *"For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."*

Justice Of God

Was God just in executing this punishment? God is always just. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7,8). Jeremiah 21:14, *"But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the Lord."* We have no right to question God's justice or decision. His ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9) and

evil deserves punishment. What kind of God would He be that would treat righteousness and unrighteousness just alike? We accept the principle of punishment of evil in the everyday affairs of life. Are we more just than God? Why should not the same principle concerning God's dealing with mankind be questioned? As harsh as it may seem to be, Judah got what was coming and what Judah had brought on itself.

Even though the punishment was just, God took no pleasure in punishing. A father may punish his child but he hurts when he does it. When the prophets complained of burdens, the Lord showed how His burden of a rebellious people was far heavier. Ezekiel 18:22, *"For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves and live ye."* Second Peter 3:9, *"...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* Nonetheless, justice demands punishment of evil. It serves a two-fold purpose: (1) as a deterrent, (2) and as the administration of justice.

The Lord God lamented that the doom of Judah was necessary because He loved the people. Like David mourned over the follies of Absalom, God was grieved over Judah's apostasy. Christ mourned over Jerusalem as evidenced in His prayer, Matthew 23:37, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"* He would prefer for punishment to be unnecessary, but when necessary it was unavoidable. God always prefers to save the evildoer rather than punish him.

Warnings

Chapters 31 and 32 are God's warnings through Ezekiel against Egypt and its devestation. It was just a matter of time. The warnings are prefaced with words in Ezekiel 30:22-26, *"Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against Pharoah king of Egypt, and will break his arms, the strong, and that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through countries. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand: but I will break Pharoah's arms, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a deadly wounded man. But I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of*

Pharoah shall fall down; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them among the countries; and they shall know that I am the Lord."

The passages call Pharoah a monster or crocidile whose flesh shall be laid upon the mountains. As a huge tree in which many had found refuge, it shall be cut down. The sword of Babylon would come against Eypgt and subject Egypt to servitude.

Why would this be done? What provoked it? It was Egypt's pride that would be brought to nought. Proverbs 16:18, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."* Egypt was one of the nations surrounding Judah and it was a wicked nation. What was going to be true of Egypt was to be true of others with each getting their due.

Reason For Lamenting

We can understand why God, His prophets and others lamented over Judah. They were God's chosen people and were offered opportunity to be the recipients of His mercy like a father's mercy toward his child. They were not expected to be against the Lord as might be expected from those who were always idolatrous and historically wicked. Even so, Ezekiel was told to wail and lament for the multitudes of Egypt. Ezekiel 32:18, *"Son of man, wail for the multidue of Egypt."*

Why should God's prophet mourn over such wicked people in the face of their deserved doom? The answer embraces two great principles which we observe at work. (1) Justice against evil is a cardinal principle in God's dealing with mankind. (2) Sympathy for the evildoer is also evident.

Sympathy toward a sinner is characteristic of God. God hates sin and condemns it, but He loves the sinner, even sending His Son to provide for the sinner's redemption. Romans 5:6-8, *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

The Prophet's Problem

Ezekiel had troubles of his own. His own people rejected his

words of warning. They sought his counsel, but rejected it once it was given, almost mocking it. He had been taken captive from his homeland and his service in the priesthood. He suffered the death of his beloved wife and was denied the right to grieve. But still he did not ignore the distress of others.

Some feel they are the only ones with burdens. Usually our problems are not as bad as we make them to be, or as bad as many others around us suffer. You have heard of the man who complained for having no shoes until he saw the man with no feet. Another story imagines all the citizens of a city bringing their troubles to the town square and every person could take back with them whatever burden he chose. In the end they all took back their original problems.

Even though a Jew whose nation had suffered from the hands of the Egyptians, Ezekiel was taught to still find room in his heart for grief over the coming destruction of Egypt. It is the usual reaction of people to be moved by their neighbor's troubles. It is an extra quality to be moved by the troubles of those who resist you and oppose you. We should be concerned with the hardships of others and have this attitude even when they bring their troubles on themselves. Is not this the mind of Christ? Hebrews 4:15,16, *"For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need."*

Reasons For Grief

There is so much in our world over which the righteous can justly grieve. The growth and influence of sin, broken homes, wasted youth, dissipated bodies, the threat of war, hunger, poverty, disease, and on and on. But far worse than the storms and disappointments of a secular and material nature is the impending eternal spiritual doom of millions. While we are expected to condemn sin, and this is a duty before God and man, we grieve over it and sorrow for those enslaved by it. We should have sufficient sorrow to try to do something about it. Hate sin, but show love to the sinner by letting him know there is a better way. When we come to *"abhor that which is evil"* as we are taught to do (Romans 12:9), we shall be more sympathetic and sorrowful for souls that remain in sin.

Sin should grieve us because it is against God, against the

truth we love, and against people whose souls are precious. *"The soul that sinneth it shall die."* (Ezekiel 18:20).

Looking again at 'Ezekiel, if the persecuted, ignored, weary and overburdened prophet was to bewail the evil that would fall on the heathen and sinful monster of Egypt, how much more ought the Christian be sympathetic toward his or her fellowman caught in the devil's snare, realizing that the eventual result will demand eternal doom? Sin is not funny. Those caught in it are not to be hated, but pitied and as far as possible, snatched from the fires. James 5:20, *"Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multide of sins."*

We would insist that sympathy for evildoers is reasonable. With no compromise with evil, our Lord nonetheless demonstrated this trait. When we have this same attitude in our hearts it will mold our actions toward the lost. We will be less prone to seek their personal destruction, but endeavor to secure their salvation. We will want not that they go to hell, but to turn and go to heaven. We will be less inclined to "get somebody told" but more to "get one taught." We will not scoff at the reality of sin nor its destruction of mankind, but more willing to lift up the fallen as did Christ.

Ezekiel, who lived nearly six hundred years before Christ, was to manifest a spirit of sympathy even for those whose sins justifiably brought their punishment upon them. When we have the same spirit, we will seek their forgiveness before God, and rejoice with them in their salvation.

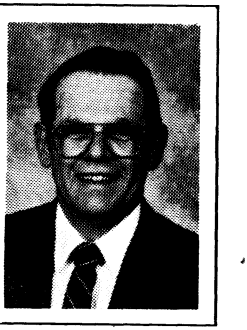
† † † † †

PREDESTINATION

The inspired writing of Paul in the first chapter of Ephesians has given many people difficulty regarding predestination. Does the Bible teach it? A reading of the chapter shows it does.

But it is error to conclude God has already decided which individuals will be saved and which to be lost. What God has predetermined is that, according to His will, those that obey the gospel will be saved and those that don't, won't. This was foreordained by the Lord and none can change it. But we can decide whether to obey or disobey. This He leaves to us. To which class do you belong, the obedient or disobedient? JWB

Make It A Good Year



JAMES W. BOYD

We do not publish this booklet according to certain dates but somewhat as Galatians 6:10 suggests, *"As we have therefore opportunity.."* Therefore we cannot know just which issue may come at what time of the year. But we publish around twelve to fourteen issues each year. This one just happens to come near the first of a new year, the year 1988.

The beginning of the year is usually a time for "taking stock" and making plans. This year is no exception, even along with certain resolutions many make about one thing or another. While we really do not place much emphasis on resolutions at the first of the year, it is a good idea to review our intentions and purposes in life. Self-examination, one of the more difficult ones to take and be objective, is of great benefit. We are encouraged in Scripture to do this several times.

It is our hope and prayer that 1988 will be a good year for the cause of Christ and that each one will renew his or her efforts to be what the Lord wants us to be. The world, our youth and our brethren need us to be faithful Christians. This we can do if we set our mind to the task.

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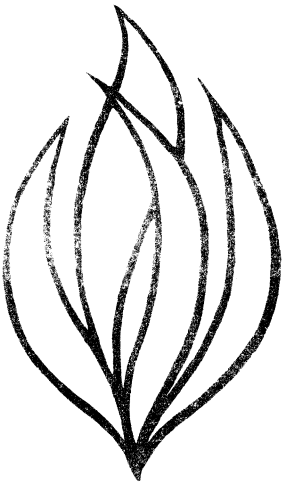

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VIII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 2**

Contending For The Faith

Our text is from one of the four books of the New Testament that contain only one chapter each. Jude 3, *"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should* ***earnestly contend for the faith*** *which was once delivered unto the saints."*

This short epistle was written to *"them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called."* (Jude 1). In other words, the letter is to Christians. Let us examine this passage and gain the spiritual value intended.

Jude addressed his readers as *"beloved."* It is always appropriate for Christians to address each other in such fashion. If it was not proper it would not have been used by inspired men. It is an expression of affection, love, genuine concern, interest, and esteem. Christians ought to have love one for another as we are taught. First Peter 1:22, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."* One of the distinguishing marks of discipleship is the love that brethren are to have toward each other. Jesus said, John 13:34,35, *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* John 15:12, *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."*

Love Each Other

It should justly be said of us as was said of Jesus when He came to the tomb of Lazarus, *"Behold, how he loved him."* It is a tragic situation that seems to exist too many times that this attitude toward each other does not abound. Why is it that so many are so inclined to live in such a way and conduct themselves with such manners that they repel one another rather than having love for each other? It seems that some brethren make it their aim to be as unloving as possible.

When brethren depart from this blessed state of love for each

other they become jealous, envious, learning to hate and be contentious. They will resort to slander and abuse, without shame misrepresenting each other. The result is that the cause of Christ languishes and souls are bewildered in darkness where there ought to be the light of truth. If there is weeping in heaven it surely must be because of the strife and animosity demonstrated so often between brothers and sisters in Christ. The estrangement that we often see among brethren is not just due to the doctrinal errors that some persist in holding and propagating, but the petty personal problems that they allow to loom so large that they cannot even be civil and polite toward each other. Rather than be courteous there are those who seem to prefer hostility. If this is not a lack of love, then we would dread seeing what a lack of love would really be.

Special Attention

Jude says he *"gave all diligence"* to the work set before him of writing this epistle. He was writing with reference to things involving the soul. He was a representative of the cause of Christ and sending God's message to God's people. Therefore, it was expected, right, and proper that he give exceptional attention to this sacred task. When souls of human beings are involved we ought to do whatever we do with diligence and discretion. We cannot be too careful in what we say, write, do, or think when these things have an influence on the eternal destiny of the spirit of man. Jude's caution and concern for his work is a lesson for us in itself. Being inspired of God he still recognized the need of diligence. If that be true with Jude, how much more ought it be true for those of us who are not inspired as was he. Even though the world around us seems to look on spiritual matters with trite and trivial attitudes, flippantly and flightily disposing of them, we should respect them with utmost seriousness and respect. It grieves the heart of those who love the cause of Christ to hear some of these preachers, even those who seem to be "somewhat" among us, who seem to think it is their task while preaching to see how many laughs-per-minute they can extract from their hearers. Everything is a joke, and they become the chief comic. The frivolous way they go about delivering their message is degrading to the gospel of Christ and they appear more as egotistical showmen than preachers of the gospel.

Salvation

Jude could not have chosen a more significant subject than salvation. Salvation in any sense is important, especially when you, your loved ones, friends, relatives and neighbors are concerned. Saving a person from a burning building is important. Rescuing one from the currents of a river is signficant. Snatching anyone from the threats, disasters, harms and dangers that threaten life is a notable achievement. But how much more important is the task of saving the lost and damned soul from the fires of an eternal hell by bringing them to the Lord and enabling them to receive forgiveness of their sins that separate them from the Almight God. Jude wrote of the most important matter that can be considered by the mind.

He called this salvation our *"common salvation."* It was common in two senses. It belonged to every faithful Christian, and it was offered to all who would come to Christ. It was not common in the sense of being inferior or of sub-standard quality, as the word "common" is sometimes used. But it had reference to the equal opportunity and benefit that the Lord Jesus has brought from heaven to mankind. We have a number of common blessings with all people of the world, such as the rain, sunshine, air to breathe, life itself. But the salvation of which Jude speaks is "common" in that it is available to all, on the same terms, belonging equally to everyone who would obey the conditions of salvation. Whether one is Jew or Gentile, black or white, rich or poor, healthy or sick, whatever be the differences we may have that distinguish people, the salvation Jesus provides is open for all, needed by all, and given to all who will partake of it.

Contend

Jude said it was needful that he write to them regarding this common salvation and to exhort them in a certain matter. Keep in mind that at the time Jude wrote, the religion of Christ was relatively young in years as far as its existence in the world. Probably many who had seen the face of Jesus were still alive. There were eye witnesses to His miracles. Yet, he exhorts them because already there was a growing indifference, carelessness, lukewarmness, coldness, and sinfulness among some who professed to be His disciples. We read of this condition from several books in the New Testament. Therefore, Jude exhorts

the Christians to *"earnestly contend for the faith."*

Since they were in need of exhortation, even though still so close to the beginning of Christianity, how much more do we need similar exhortations! We should neither be discouraged nor surprised that such a need exists among us. We are taught to exhort each other, to be cautious, alert, attentive, teaching each other the difference between right and wrong as God has declared it. If we love one another as we should, if we love the truth, exhortation, whether private or public, will never be offensive to us but appreciated by us. If we are offended by Scriptural exhortation it is a good indication that we sorely need just such exhortation.

Jude said it was needful that they contend for the faith. Contend means to struggle for it, engage in battle for its defense and propagation, strive on its behalf. It gives emphasis to the spiritual warfare that the Christian has undertaken in life. While we are not to strive over untaught questions (Second Timothy 2:23-26), we are to do battle on the side of truth. Peace at any price is offensive to God.

Wrangling, bitterness, selfishness, self-interest, disputings of this nature are not to characterize us. This is so often just what we see among brethren. But we are to engage in conflict against all forms of error and evil, opposing and exposing every false way, whether in or out of the church. We are to wage a defensive and offensive war on the side of truth. We have a common foe and we should cooperate and unite in the struggle against the foes of sin and Satan. As Paul once wrote, Philippians 1:27, "*...with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*" He also said that he was *"set for the defense of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:17).

He Tells How

Jude tells us how and why we are to strive or contend. We are to do this *"earnestly,"* meaning with sincerity, firmly, tenderly, consistently, persuasively, positively, negatively, without compromise. There is no justification for rudeness, harshness, bitterness, and haughtiness. It has been an outstanding characteristic of those who would propagate liberal tendencies among the brethren to assume such a lofty, high-handed, superior air around themselves as if all who do not subscribe, submit, and endorse their liberalistic ways are unintellectual, unintelligent, uneducated, and just not quite up

to the level that these liberalists have balooned themselves to be. This is one sure evidence that such people are not contending for the faith as Jude would have anyone do because their very disposition, attitude toward others, and egotistical manners betray them to be advocates of apostasy rather than defenders of the doctrine of Christ.

Major Source Of Error

Herein is one of the sinister impositions on the church that has come in recent decades through the "schools" under the disguise of producing a more "educated pulpit" when in reality they have produced an egotistical and confused clergyman. One of the primary sources through which the liberal and digressive influences have come into the Lord's church in the twentieth century has been the Bible departments of "Christian" schools, which are overburdened with the "doctors" of abitrarily determined academic achievements that have led them to think that they are chiefs among the brethren. They have polluted the pulpits with the theologies and theories of men, borrowing as much from denominational dogmas and agnostic declaration as from the inspired writings of Scripture. The Lord's church will do well when it ceases to pay the respect to the theological nonsense that has been unjustly exalted among us and return to a genuine appreciation for *"thus saith the Lord."* While some are to wedded to their schools that they would consider this sacrilege, the evidence is too overwhelming for honest minds to deny.

That for which we are to contend is not some party, human creed, an "ism" of the world, disciplines, manuals, cathechisms, confessions of faith, hobbies, opinions, fads, whims, personal preferences but for the faith that was once, for all time and all people, delivered to the saints.

Once Delivered

One significant truth this declaration demands is that there is no such thing as latter-day-revelation. The claim for the reception of special messages from God since the provision of the all-sufficient Scripture has served as the foundation for so many religious ideas. Many people are simply not content with the Scriptures but prefer to invent something new and additional to them. Mormonism, Catholicism, Pentecostalism, as well as

the Jehovah's Witnesses, "Moonies," Seventh-Day Adventists, Christian Scientists, and on and on, are dependent on what they claim to have been divine relevation since the faith was once delivered. But Paul warned against anyone who preached anything different from what he preached and what the Galatians had received (Galatians 1:6-9). Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26), and these doctrines were non-existent. The apostles were promised to be guided into all truth and they were not guided in these modern-day and latter-day revelations (John 14:25,26). People should take God's Word, only God's Word, believe His Word, live and do and think and believe as the Word directs. Since the Scripture itself claims to be all-sufficient, anything that is contrary to that concept is contrary to Scripture. How inconsistent and intellectually impossible it is for people to hold the Bible with one hand and try to hold to latter-day revelations with the other. Let us learn what it is for which we are to contend and be content to contend for that.

The Faith

When we contend for the faith, preaching the Word of the faith of Christ, the seed being sown in honest and good hearts will produce Christians just like it did in New Testament times. It will lead Christians to walk faithfully in the light as was Christ. Something different will produce a different people. It should be our goal and ambition to be as were those who were Christians according to the doctrine of Christ. Anything more is too much and anything less is too little. *"Contend earnestly for the faith"* should be the watchword for every child of God. It will be for those who are faithful to the Lord and Savior.

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(from page 24)

Jesus concluded the parable saying, *"No man can serve two masters."* In this world there are two who cry for our allegiance. One is God, the rightful Master; the other is unrighteous mammon, the things of this world that are often used as a tool in the devil's hand to ensnare us. This mammon, though given to the servant of God to be used and wielded in God's interest, cannot be allowed to take first place in our affections and attentions. It is impossible to serve both. We must make the

(continued back cover)

A Ram In The Thicket

This lesson should provide us encouragement and strength that we can take with us each day of life amidst whatever befalls us. Certainly one of the most thrilling, gripping, and suspense filled records of Scripture is found in Genesis 22:1-19. Would you please take your Bible and read that passage.

The main characters of the events of this passage are God, Abraham, and Abraham's son, Isaac.

At this time the relationship between God and Abraham was warm and cordial. Abraham had been loyal to God, having left the Ur of Chaldees and gone into the land of Canaan where God directed him. He had consented to circumcision which was the sign of the covenant between them. He had shown respect in his dealings with Melchizedek as well as his righteousness in dealing with his nephew, Lot.

God, in turn, had abundantly blessed Abraham with Material wealth, protection from enemies, and given him a son in his old age named Isaac. It was to be through that son that the great promises that God gave to Abraham would eventually be accomplished.

Abraham's Calling

The purpose that God had for Abraham demanded that Abraham be a person of exceptional spiritual strength, faith, and obedience to God. Through Him God would provide a great nation. Through this nation, and the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16) would come the One through whom all the nations and families of the earth would be blessed. The system of salvation, God's scheme of redemption, would be unfolded through Abraham and his descendants. The stream does not rise above the fountain, so Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, must be an exceptional fountain from which Israel would come and from which the qualities necessary could be produced.

Abraham's Trial

To perfect Abraham, making him more fit for the service he

was to render, God provided a means for Abraham to prove his integrity and faith. Abraham was subjected to a most severe test, being told to take his beloved son Isaac to a designated place and offer him as a sacrifice to God.

Surely, such a command was exceedingly difficult to understand, let alone obey. It was out of character for God to call for a human sacrifice. Sacrifices were not uncommon, but always heretofore the sacrifices were of animals. Never had anyone serving God received such an instruction as this.

It also seemed to contradict the promises God had given. Isaac was the promised son through whom the fulfillment of the promises was to come. Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar had already been sent out because he was not the promised son. Was God going back on His promises? Were the things assured Abraham to be voided?

Add to this the confusion brought on because of the great love Abraham, as a father, had for his son, the frustration is perceptible. To obey meant death to Isaac and Abraham loved Isaac. God even mentioned that love when He said, *"Thine only son, whom thou lovest."* And now God was asking him to take the life of his son by his own hands. All these things only enlarged the severity of the test of faith before him.

Abraham's Obedience

But Abraham unhesitatingly responded in obedience to God. He did not understand it and he must have been bewildered by it. Surely his heart yearned to melt rather than to obey. Receiving no further assurances and offering no objections and excuses, Abraham arose early in the morning and set in motion the activity necessary to carry out the Lord's command.

Abraham, Isaac, and two servants began the journey from Jerusalem to Mount Moriah. This must have been a somber caravan, only Abraham knowing the goal and purpose of the journey.

When the place came into view Abraham stopped, told the servants to wait, and doubtless with heavy heart and wondering steps proceeded up the mountain with his son, Isaac. Isaac was not yet aware of the purpose of the journey. He could have known from the preparations that it was for worship and sacrifice to God. He had known his father to be involved in such things many times. He poses only one question to his father, "Here is wood, we have fire, also the knife, everything but that which is

to be sacrificed. Where is the sacrifice?"

Every step of the way must have been a struggle for Abraham, being led not by sight but by faith, and even now he did not fully reveal everything to his son. He simple responded, *"My son, God will provide..."*

Once at the specific place, all other preparations made, Abraham bound Isaac and laid him on the altar. It might be said to Isaac's credit that there is no indication in inspired writ that he objected to what his father was doing. It became apparent that he was the sacrifice, but he did not question or rebel against his father. From his father he had learned submission to the commands of God. While lacking in understanding about the entire episode, his attitude must have been, the will of the Lord be done.

Then came the climatic moment as Abraham reached forth his hand and took the knife with which to slay Isaac. Would he follow through and carry out his instructions? Or would he at this crucial moment falter in unbelief and disobedience?

His willingness to obey was evident, and God, seeing this, stayed his hand before the knife fell. Genesis 22:11,12, *"And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."*

Abraham's Success

Abraham successfully passed the test of faith and obedience. His faith had sustained him and he failed not under the severest examination. Little wonder that we know Abraham as the father of the faithful. We must realize that God really did not want Isaac that day. He wanted Abraham, and Abraham proved that he belonged to God.

The worship and sacrifice was only temporarily halted, however. A ram, caught in a nearby thicket, was seized and used for the sacrifice in the stead of Isaac. How did it happen that the ram was there? Was this a mere coincidence? No, Abraham had said God would provide. When they left Mount Moriah, Abraham named the place a name which means *in the mountain of Jehovah, it shall be provided.* The name is Jehovah-Jireh. God provided the ram in the thicket.

As Isaac and Abraham came down from the mount the Lord

spoke to Abraham a second time. Praises, promises, and commendations were bestowed on him because God said, *"Thou hast obeyed my voice."* Surely, Abraham and Isaac gave cause for rejoicing, gladness, and thanksgiving even in heaven that day because of their great exhibition of obedient faith.

So many applicable lessons can be drawn from this record, but we shall confine our thoughts to only three. This does not imply that others are not of importance but we do well if we can remember these three.

Right To Obey

First, Abraham believed it was right to obey God. Regardless of whether he fully understood or not, he believed God must be obeyed. Thought the commandment was out of character for God, seemingly contradictory to promises earlier given, and as if there was no regard for Isaac, still Abraham knew confidently, it is always right to obey God without question or hesitation, letting the consequences be as they may.

Power Of God

Second, Abraham believed in the power of God. Here was the only source of comfort he had during this episode. He believed God could, if God chose, raise Isaac alive again. He had been given no assurance that God would do it, but he knew God could do it if God saw fit. He trusted in God's wisdom rather than his own. He appreciated God's power and knew in some way God would keep His Word.

We have no more reason to doubt God's power and that He will keep His Word than did Abraham. Because of this record regarding Abraham we have greater evidence that God does have power and will keep His word than if we did not have this historical account.

Providence of God

Third, and this one deserves special emphasis, Abraham believed in the providence of God. This experience on Mount Moriah confirmed his faith that God provides. In times of stress, trial, sorrow, and trouble, let us also have a similar faith that God will provide for His own. When we are tested to the breaking point, as was Abraham, know that God is near, aware,

and that He cares.

First Corinthians 10:13, *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it."* Matthew 6:33, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* Second Peter 3:9, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promises..."* As God said to Joshua, Joshua 1:5, *"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; As I was with Moses so shall I be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."*

Do not these words tell us something that is probably easier to say than to accept, but is no less true regardless of us, "There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle."

God's Love

In Romans 8:38,39, Paul writes of God's love for us, His people. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. This does not mean we cannot separate ourselves from God by our sins, but even then, God loves us even though He does not approve of us. The following poem expresses the thoughts and sentiments we wish to convey quite well.

The mighty God, Omnicient One, His ways we cannot trace,
He reckons every good begun and crowns it with His grace.
Lo, I can see Him in His Word, I will not doubt or fear,
My steps are ordered of the Lord, His guiding hand is near.
No trial can my spirit break; God will not forsake,
He will with each temptation make a way for my escape.
The future beckons and I bow, My God removes the care.
Behold, He goes before me now and will my way prepare.
He's here, and there, and everywhere in all the ways I've trod,
I've never passed beyond the sphere of the providence of God.

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Our Motives

Our lesson deals with a matter that is at the very heart of being a Christian. More than once the inspired apostle Paul admonished brethren to examine themselves, taking inventory of self. *"Try your own selves, whether ye are in the faith; prove your own selves."* (Second Corinthians 13:5). *"But let a man examine himself."* (First Corinthians 11:28). *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."* (Galatians 6:1). All self-examination must be made with the divine standard as the measure and authority.

It seems that many of us are quite capable of examining others. But the need that we have is the attitude the apostles had when Jesus confronted them with the assertion that one of them would betray Him. They did not respond, "Lord, is it James, or Peter, or John, etc.?" But one after the other asked, *"Lord, is it I?"* That was self-examination.

In no realm of self-examination are we to be profited more than examining our motives. This takes a look at the heart, the mind, our spirits, the inward man. When a crime is committed, the first thing the police consider, seeing the evidence, is a possible motive. It makes a difference why something takes place. A man might run over somebody with his car. Why did it happen? Was it planned? Was it intentional? Was it a reaction in anger? Was it an accident? The reason behind the deed is of utmost importance.

Motives And Deeds

Our motives must be pure as well as our deeds. The Lord often condemned the evil motives of people. He knew the hearts of men. *"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward...And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the street, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward...Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they*

may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." (Matthew 6:2,5,16). The deeds the hypocrites were doing were not evil, but of themselves were quite proper. But they stained the whole operation by parading themselves before others for their praises. What they were doing was motivated by the evil desire to seek the praises of men rather than the good favor of God.

God is certainly concerned with what we do. But He is also concerned about why we do it. It is not a matter of deed **or** motive, but deed **and** motive. When the motive or deed is wrong, God is displeased. We can have a good motive, and do wrong, as did Paul before he became a Christian and was persecuting the church. We can do what seems to be a good deed, but have an evil motive behind it, as did Annanias and Saphirra when they made their contributions. It takes both to be pure to please God.

There are several Biblical examples of people acting from wrong motives, even when the thing they are doing appears commendable. Certainly there are examples of men doing evil out of an evil heart. But people can ruin good things by having impure motives for doing what they do.

Saul's Gift

In First Samuel 18:21, we read of King Saul giving his daughter, Michal, to David for his wife. Did Saul wish David for a son-in-law? No. Did he wish to honor David by giving him the king's daughter for a wife? No. Did he do this because of love and affection for David or Michal or their love for each other? No. At this time David was a national hero for having killed the giant, Goliath. Saul was extremely jealous of the popularity of David with the people. He gave Michal to him, hoping she would become some kind of snare and problem for him. His motive for his deed was sinister, plotting, and undermining.

Herod's Inquiry

In Matthew 2, we read of the wise men coming to Jerusalem looking for the whereabouts of the recently born Jesus. They inquired of Herod who did not know, but he asked the wise men to let him know where Jesus was when they found him. He said he wanted to go and worship him also. That was a lie. Herod sought to destroy him if we could find him.

How wonderful it would have been if the most powerful man in the land had truly wanted to worship God's Son. It would be a wonderful step of progress if the leaders of our world cared for the Christ. But Herod's motive behind his request was evil.

Seeking Judgment

John 8:3-9 presents a classic example of evil motives. *"And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And when they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."*

These accusers had no desire for justice. They were not concerned that the law of God had been violated. They were not too supportive of the law. They did not hate the evil and love the good. Their interest was not the law, the woman, or any such thing. They were tempting Jesus, trying to ensnare Him in His words, seeking something whereof they could find fault and make accusation. They, like some today, listened to Jesus, not in order to learn nor profit from the message He delivered, but to pick at it in order to find something wrong with it. Many people listen to gospel preachers for the same sordid reason.

Kiss Of Judas

In Matthew 26:48,49, we read of Judas when he came with the enemies of Christ to seize Him in the Garden of Gethsemanne. He said, *"Hail, Master,"* and kissed him. If the motive behind that deed had been righteous, pure, sincere, this would have been one of the noblest deeds recorded in the annuls of history. If Judas had meant by that kiss to declare, "Lord, I love thee: I will never forsake thee; I will stand by thee

even in the presense of foes: I am not shamed to be identified as one of your apostles," one could not find a more outstanding, courageous and loyal deed. But his action is noted as one of betrayal and one of the most contemptuous actions even committed. He betrayed his Lord. Observing nothing more than the outward appearance, he did not seem to be so wicked. But when one knows the motive behind his action, we turn away in disgust.

Reward

There are three great motives for serving God, and God has appealed to all three to motivate man to service. First, there is the hope of reward. The gospel is composed of facts to be believed, commands to be obeyed, and promises and rewards to be enjoyed. God keeps His promises (Second Peter 3:9). As Christians we have the promise of forgiveness, guidance, providence, the resurrection, and life after death, a home in heaven. What price can be placed on such bountiful offerings and rewards to those so undeserving as are we? But God has extended them to urge us to seek that which is best for us. We serve Him looking for those rewards.

Fear

God also appeals to fear. Those who know what the Bible teaches about hell will fear hell. The same Bible that teaches of the eternal glory of heaven also warns of the eternal punishment of hell (Matthew 25:46). It is absurd to believe in the reality of one and dismiss the other. Appealing to fear is not evil. It is reality. People are often motivated from fear and much good has been accomplished through fear.

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." (Second Corinthians 5:11). *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Hebrews 10:31). The sacred record reveals God's wrath as well as God's love and kindness. There has been the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Consider the flood in the time of Noah, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. There is the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. Fear of the just punishment from a God of justice motivates us to do what is right.

Love

But the highest and noblest motive for serving God is because we love God. All three come into play, but this is the greatest motive. Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."* (First John 5:3). *"We love him because he first loved us,"* (John 4:19).

The following illustration will help us see the working of these motives in serving God. We serve God for much the same reason that a child will obey his parents. When our children are small, very often we are able to get them to do as we direct by offering them some kind of present or reward for doing so. Sometimes even the slightest thing will cause them to obey. At other times, we may have to threaten to punish them if they disobey, and this is all that is necessary to provoke them to obey. But how wonderful it is, when they have reached a degree of maturity, that they are respectful and obedient to parents because they love father and mother and want more than anything to please them. The same thing, in principle, is true in man serving God.

Let us take advantage of the opportunity before us to examine ourselves and our hearts and our motives. We want to do the right thing, but we also want to do the right thing for the right reason. What are your motives for being a Christian? What are your motives behind your words and deeds regarding other people? Is thy heart right with God? Solomon said, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."* Proverbs 4:23).

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Consider The Ant

Proverbs 6:6-11, "*Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth and thy want as an armed man."*

Written by inspiration by Solomon to his son, Rehoboam, these words were evidently given little heed by the recipient of them. Wordsworth said of the proverbs of Solomon, "They came from above and they also look upward."

A proverb literally is a comparison of things. We have a comparison in this passage between a sluggard and an ant. Possibly we should say we have a contrast between them. Proverbs teach wisdom, emphasizing the necessity of vigilance over the heart, the duty of acting according to God's unerring standards. Solomon turns to nature to reveal truths that nature illustrates to mankind.

A Teacher

In many ways nature is a teacher of men. While nature cannot teach us how to serve God, or how to be saved, we can learn much of the ways of God through nature because nature is used by God to illustrate the ways of God as Scripture reveals them. Nature might be thought of as the footprints of God, giving us evidences of the existence of God. We can even enlist nature's attributes as a helper to learn the ways of the human heart. From the ant, for instance, we shall be taught wisdom, stirred to a sense of duty and responsibility, and be motivated to fulfill our role in life more effectively.

Of course, nature, like all other teachers, can only instruct those who will "*consider her ways.*" One of the real problems in learning is the unwillingness of so many of us to be open to being taught. Many simply will not consider what they need to learn. They dismiss it without consideration. Like medicine which can help the sick, it can help only when properly applied. Anyone who will consider the Word of God can profit from it. One who considers the lessons taught by nature can profit from nature. Solomon encourages at the start that we consider the ant and be wise. It may seem ironical that man, the highest and noblest of God's creations, is told to turn to one of the lowest and simpliest forms of life and learn basic fundamentals about duty, work and responsibility. But this is the case.

Industrious

The first of three lessons we shall consider is the industry of the ant. The ant is a very industrious creature. Have you ever taken the time to watch the ants at work? There is not one

among them that is slothful and lazy. All of them are hard at work, willing to do its part. Someone has cynically said that he was in a congregation where everyone was a willing member. Some were willing to work and others were willing to let them. Consideration of the ant will shame an indolent person who indulges himself in ease, avoiding labor. The dignity of work has too often been replaced with the attitude and action of doing as little as one can do and just "get by." Exerting the least effort seems to be the goal rather than getting the work done.

Our present life is a time for action. Rest comes after this life (Revelation 14:13). To substitute rest in the time that calls for labor spells defeat. While intervals of relaxation and recuperation are needful for periodic rejuvenation, every Christian ought to have the attitude expressed in the reply of the Lord of Aldegone (16th century Dutch writer and disciple of John Calvin, opponent of Romanism), when asked why he wrote and translated so long and late day after day rather than resting. He responded, "Rest elsewhere."

Rest is right in its place. But the right thing at the wrong time becomes wrong. God watched over the sleep of Elijah when Jezebel sought his life. But had he continued to sleep when once awakened and told to engage himself in that great contest on Mt. Carmel with the prophets of Baal, then he would have sinned against God, himself, and his countrymen. The time for rest and ease is not now.

Christ, through Paul, places a premium on hard work. Ephesians 4:28, *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."* Second Thessalonians 3:7,8,10, *"For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did eat any man's bread for nough; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you... For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any should not work, neither should he eat."* This principle is true today as it was then.

The Lord did not teach that those who could not work should not eat, nor those who did not have opportunity to work should not eat. But those who would not when they could ought be allowed to go hungry until they change their ways. Christ worked: His disciples worked. Idleness brings povery and is a destroyer. The old adage says, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." God will not support without work, but by work. If

we do our part, God always does His.

Time Of Opportunity

A second lesson we can learn from the ant is that we should work while there is opportunity. The ant provides her bread in the summer, gathers her food in the harvest, makes preparations for the lean months during the months of plenty. Her embrace of opportunity is a loud rebuke to those who would put off until tomorrow what can and should be done today. Her example is like that expressed by Christ in John 9:4, *"I must work the work of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work."* As Joseph told Pharoah to lay by in store during the plentiful years so there would be ample supply during the lean years, so should we seize opportunity when it is ours.

We should not object to this on the grounds that our Savior said, "*Take no thought for the morrow...*" (Matthew 6:34). Jesus did not teach against planning for the future, but against being anxious about it. God will provide and that is not questioned. But we must take note that God provides but we ignore the opportunities provided. He provided for Egypt, but they had to lay by in store. He provided for Israel in the wilderness, but they to gather the manna. Why should we think He will provide for us in addition to the provisions He has already given but we ignore them and fail to utilize them? God is already providing for many of us but we are not taking advantage of His provision, as would the ant. Too many are living up all of their provisions in pleasure, luxury, fun and games without proper consideration they may well be using up God's provisions for the future. The words of Christ spoken regarding worry over the future are true and vital. But there are cares that call for us to use with intelligence and good stewardship the opportunities and provisions God has given us. There are cares we can attempt to carry that are burdens because of fear and doubt. But there are cares we must meet. We can expect both kinds in life. But we must exercise diligence toward opportunities like the ant does while the day is upon us.

Activity

A third duty seen by considering the ant is that of individual action and initiative. Without a chief, overseer or ruler, the ant

works as she does, motivated by her own motivations. Some people wait for others to take the initiative, letting others clear the paths, standing idle by waiting for others to do what they should be doing, at least waiting until someone directs them to act. These same people will often talk about work, but not actually work. But the ant put forth her full effort being urged on by her own sense of duty.

It seems that there are those who never work until somebody else urges them to work, or unless someone is watching so it will be known that they are working. To work only when there might come notoreity for what you do is to lack the proper motive and initiative and sense of personal responsibility to do as we ought. We should do as we ought if nobody else knows it but ourselves and God.

It really ought never have to be that Christians be urged to be a part of the work done by the church. So many become so discouraged because they have to beg their brothers and sisters to carry their fair share of the load. Nobody ought to have to be begged. Like the ant, without others having to pressure them into action, we should assume our tasks and perform them, each bearing his own burden, making sure each does as expected of us.

The exhortation to consider the ant condemns forever the lazy, neglectful, indolent, haphazard, lax, slack, indifferent approach in the performance of our tasks. What we do we should do heartily (Colossians 3:23), and with all our might (Ecclesiastes 9:10), as if we were working for the Lord, which we are (Ephesians 6:6,7). This should be true of us respecting the mundane, temporal and physical duties in life, but even more so with respect to our spiritual duties and service rendered before God as laborers in His vineyard. Spiritual sluggishness has been a plague of too many of us and it can contribute to our personal and collective ruin.

Sow And Reap

We cannot reap what we have not sown. Sowing demands effort. Unless there is sowing there can be no reaping. We cannot be prepared to meet God in judgment unless we have made proper preparation. There is a story of an ancient Grecian general who came upon a guard who was asleep on duty. He thrust the guard with his sword, leaving him dead. Being chidded for his severity, the general simply replied, "I merely left

him as I found him." The moral of the story is simple. We dare not allow ourselves to be found "napping" in those matters of life that affect our relationship with God and our eternal destiny.

† † † † †

The Unjust Steward

Read Luke 16:1-13

Our Lord often taught with parables as the means of conveying spiritual truth by narratives of earthly events. This parable is to me one of the more difficult ones to understand and it has been subjected to many diverse interpretations. So often a parable is given some far-fetched meaning which has no real basis in the parable itself, the "meaning" being read into it rather than being learned out of it. The circumstances under which the parable was delivered often sheds light on its true meaning. Usually a parable will contain just a few overriding themes with a few major truths presented. To attempt to make every little detail of the parable mean some profound something is to miss the mark in understanding parables.

The prime theme of this parable is concerned with stewardship and the proper use of this worlds goods, and alongside that a few major points of truth brought to light that we should have no difficulty understanding.

Verse one makes it plain that the prime receiver of this lesson is a disciple of Christ. This would include apostles, but also any that followed the Lord. If we profess to be His disciple then the parable is also teaching us.

A certain rich man had a steward, and sustained a similar relationship with his steward like we have with Christ. This steward was given authority and rule over the master's goods. His duty was to dispense them, use them for the master's benefit in the best interest of the master.

This particular steward was unjust, being guilty of wasting his master's goods and being unfaithful in his duty. We are not told just how he failed, but only the fact that he did. It might have been through negligence, embezzlement, or some other way. There is no indication that the steward was falsely accused and he never denied the charge against him. By his own actions he readily admits his guilt.

Called To Account

The master called him to give an account. The master had trusted him and given him charge of his goods and was indignant over his betrayal of duty. He was called to turn in his books and resign his work. We need to learn that we are stewards of God and that we are held accountable, and that there will be a day when we shall give answer to our Master for our service.

The steward now realized that the source of his livelihood was to be terminated and began to consider his future and what he would do next, once dismissed. He counsels with himself that he could not dig, for some unrevealed reason. He was too proud to beg. He could not think of any honest and honorable way out of his deplorable condition that he had brought upon himself. How much better it would have been for him if he had admitted his error, repented of his wrongs, and sought forgiveness!

But he conceived a plan that only aggravated an already evil condition. He called in those who owed his master and, to get on their good side, he arbitrarily discounted their debt, making for himself a cushion on which to fall once he was dismissed. The debtors were parties to this scheme and what the steward did was without authority and not in the best interest of the master. It was an unauthorized reduction of debt. Actually, we must consider his actions to be a continuation of a faulty stewardship.

Dishonesty

One of the lesson we learn is our Lord's displeasure at dishonesty and the misuse of the talents given us. He is displeased with bad stewardship over the earthly and material possessions entrusted to us. As the servant was unfit for continued service, if we be unjust in the use of that which God gives us, we make ourselves unfit for His service also. Honorable conduct, trustworthiness and proper consideration of the Master first is an essential characteristic in God's people.

Prudence

The master, however, praised the steward for his action, which seems to complicate our understanding at first. But he was not praising the steward for his dishonesty or frudulent

ways, but for his prudence and practical activity in providing for his own future. Even though the steward was a corrupt man, he did act wisely from his own point of view to make provision for the days ahead. This was what he commended. *"For the sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light."* The sons of this world are the children of the devil, who often put to shame the sons of light, the children of God, by having a greater readiness, more zeal, better vision in worldly matters than sons of light seem to demonstrate in heavenly matters. The Lord disentangles the steward's dishonesty from his ambition and foresightedness and energy. The former was bad, but the latter was wise. Worldly people seldom allow an opportunity for worldly gain to escape them. They will take advantage of every opening. Sons of light are often negligent and ignore opportunities to do the Lord's work and in this way one can rightly say that the children of the devil are more attentive and wise in their affairs than children of God are as they labor for the Master.

The worldly look toward the future, even though they will not look beyond this life. But the sons of light are often too indifferent toward their future in this life, and sometimes even regarding the life to come, which is the point of primary emphasis in the religion of Jesus Christ.

If worldly people operated their affairs with the same degree of complacency often seen among professed Christians in their work for God, the worldly would be bankrupt. The affairs of the Lord's church are often treated as if they were burdens, impositions, and as a result of this attitude they are not handled with efficiency and many times not expedited properly. How many times have those who are concerned about the affairs of the church seen decisions postponed, postponed, postponed, left undone and totally neglected until opportunity passes? Worldly people are often more careful, more prudent, more efficient, more attentive, more interested in their activities than Christians seem to be in doing the things God has ordained they do. It ought not be that way, but many brethren too often discard common sense and propriety, acting as if they had just as soon not be bothered with the work of the Lord.

Stewardship

In verse nine Jesus exhorts His disciples to good stewardship. They should make friends for themselves by rightly using the

material things placed in their care. They are not taugh to be greedy for and save mammon, but to use mammon for the glory of God and make friends for God. When a Christian has busied himself properly using what is in his care, when he has spent his energies saving souls, even long after he has departed from the walks of this earthly life, the ones he has saved will be a credit to the cause of the Lord. When we rightly use what is entrusted to us we shall receive our reward.

What we have can be a help in our salvation or can contribute to our damnation. If we concentrate on self, seek our own comfort and pleasure, ignore others, especially those in need, the downtrodden, weary, discouraged and those overtaken in sin, we bring condemnation on ourselves. Not enough of us in the Lord act as if we believe this, but it is true nonetheless.

The things of this life are "little" in comparison to the things concerning heaven, which are "much." As we study verses ten through twelve we learn if we cannot rightly use what we have here in this life, where we have opportunity to prove our ability to have charge over larger matters, we will prove our inability to be entrusted with greater things. This life not only is a period of preparation but also a testing ground to prove our stewardship. In another parable the Lord emphasized stewardship and said, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make the ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of the Lord."* (Matthew 25:21). To those who proved they were not good stewards the terrible words were said, "*And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth... Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...*" (Matthew 25:41).

Faithfulness

Faithfulness in our stewardship is an oft-repeated message of the New Testament. While the Lord cast a slight on things worldly, temporal and pertaining exclusively to the here and now, calling them the "*mammon of unrighteousness,*" He magnified the importance of right administration over even these things, announcing that in this way does one show his fidelity and fitfulness for heaven because of good stewardship.

Allegiance

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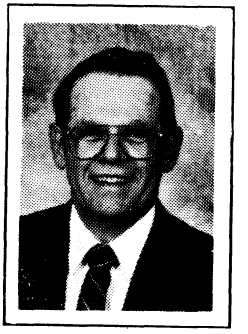
choice which will dominate.



JAMES W. BOYD

Summary

May we learn at least five lessons. (1) Misuse of our "possessions" displeases God. (2) God encourages prudence and ambition for that which is right. (3) Good stewardship is a primary exhortation in this parable. (4) Faithfulness in these things is a test by which we can prove our fidelity to the Lord. (5) We cannot serve both masters. It is either God first, or we shall not receive the eternal reward of glory.

Such a parable as this should help us see more clearly the relationship between ourselves, our Master, and that which we call our material possessions. Actually nothing we have is really our own, but has been loaned to us to be used for a short while. In time all we have will be turned into the hands of others. Therefore we must make certain we use what is entrusted to us wisely during the time we have opportunity.

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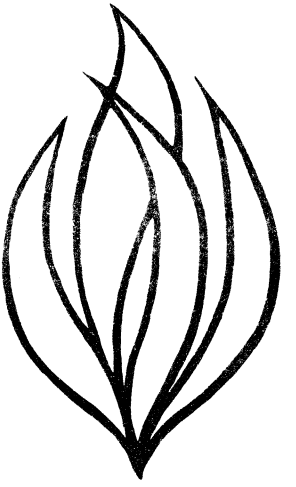

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VIII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 2**

What Must We Believe About Christ?

Acts 8:35-37, *"And Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

Acts 16:30,31, *"And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."*

Acts 18:8, *"And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized."*

In each of these passages there is the emphasis on the necessity of faith for salvation. These people heard, and they believed the message they were taught and the message contained what they had to believe about Christ. Nothing is plainer in the Bible than the necessity to believe to be saved. Hebrews 11:6, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*

While these and other passages teach faith for salvation, neither these nor any other passage teaches salvation by faith alone or faith only. That doctrine is an addition by some religious teachers that God never revealed. But scripture does teach faith and that it makes a difference what a person believes.

Faith In Christ

Everybody believes something. But to be saved from the wages of sin we must believe something specifically. In what are we to believe? More properly, in whom are we to believe? The Bible teaches we are to believe in Jesus Christ (John 3:16). This is a good and all-inclusive answer when we understand what it includes, but to just leave at that does not tell us what the Bible teaches regarding the faith we must have. We must not be content with something less than the specific teaching of the

Word of God. What does it mean to believe in Jesus? Just what is it concerning Jesus that we are to believe?

By studying the sermons preached and recorded in the Bible, considering the prophecies about Him, and the apostolic statements, as well as examples of conversion, we learn what it is we must believe regarding Jesus. When a person truly believes what the scripture teaches he should have no hesitancy to do what the scripture commands. His reluctance or refusal to obey is evidence that he really does not yet accept the scriptural testimony about Jesus Christ.

Son Of God

We must believe that He is the Son of God. Matthew 16:16, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Matthew 3:17, *"This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."* Luke 22:70, *"Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am."* This was the Lord's affirmation of His identity as the Son of God. Acts 8:37 tells us the confession the man of Ethiopia made regarding Christ. John 8:24, *"I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."*

Can there be any question in the mind of any honest Bible reader as to the identity of Jesus as far as Biblical revelation is concerned? Those who knew Him, His own witness, the words of the Father, the early Christian, all say the same thing. But to accept Jesus as the Christ and Son of God demands acceptance of other significant facts about Him.

Savior

We must believe that Christ is the Savior and that there is no other Savior (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). John said of Him, John 1:29, *"Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."* First Timothy 3:15 teaches He came into the world to save sinners. This was His mission. We either shall be saved by and through Jesus Christ or we shall not be saved. His name, Jesus, means Savior.

His Birth

Believing Him to be the Son of God demands that we believe the record regarding His birth by the virgin Mary. Matthew

1:18-23 records the fulfillment of the prophecy given by Isaiah in Isaiah 7:14. No other one could fulfill such a prophecy.

It is most regrettable that there be those who profess to be Christians who deny what the Word of God teaches about His birth. Just why they would believe the Bible when it teaches He is the Son of God but then deny the Bible when it teaches about Him being born of a virgin is beyond rational explanation. So many in the Protestant world deny this Biblical fact. But let it be affirmed without any fear whatever of successful refutation that nobody can honestly claim to accept the Bible and deny the virgin birth of Christ. It is senseless to claim to believe in the Almighty God and then deny what God has recorded just because it does not happen to accomodate someone's fanciful system of modernist theory, or even one's personal experience. Since God created the entire universe, who has the audacity to claim He could not provide the birth of His Son in this fashion?

His Works

To believe in Christ demands that one believe that He lived, taught, and performed miracles just as the Biblical record affirms. Acts 1:1, *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach."* John 2:23, *"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did."* Peter's preaching at the household of Cornelius included *"how God anointed Jesus of Nazereth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."*

His Words

When He taught He did not teach as others taught (Matthew 7:29) because He taught with authority. And well He did because He was Deity in the flesh. All authority belonged to Him (Matthew 28:18).

To believe in Christ requires that we accept His teaching about morality and the proper conduct toward other people as well as service to God in worship. It is unreasonable and inconsistent to claim to believe in Christ but reject His Word. Jesus said,John 14:15. *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* Luke 6:46, *"And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I*

say?" If one does not accept what Christ taught about salvation, the church, the judgment, and all other matters that He discussed, how can he sincerely claim that his faith, confidence and trust resides in Christ? Matthew 7:21, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* It matters not what subject is under consideration. That which Jesus taught, and has authorized to be taught, must be accepted and believed the way He taught it, with the application intended, or his faith in Christ is suspect and invalid.

His Death And Resurrection

We must believe not only that our Lord lived, taught, and performed miracles in this life, but that He was eventually arrested, persecuted, carried before a series of trials where justice was mocked, and led to Calvary to be crucified between two thieves as if He was a criminal. First Corinthians 15:1-8 includes these matters along with His burial and resurrection as the fundamental facts of the gospel by which we are saved. Luke 23:46, He said, *"Into thy hands I commend my spirit."* Luke 23:52,53, *"This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus, and he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in as sepulchre that was hewn in stone wherein never man before was laid."* As for His resurrection, Luke 24:5,6 *"And as they were afraid and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee."*

We either believe these things or we do not. There is no middle ground. We cannot accept part of them and reject another part. It is either all or nothing. We are not allowed what might be called a "supermarket" kind of faith in the revelation of Christ, that is, we go through the scripture and take what we wish and discard what we happen not to want. Concerning the Bible and its record of Christ, we are not granted the privilege to "pick and choose." We either choose to believe it all or we have picked the path of disbelief and damnation for ourselves.

His Kingdom

Faith in Christ demands that we accept the fact that He established His kingdom, the church. It demands that we believe

that after His ascension (Acts 1:9) we are assured of His ultimate return, the resurrection of all the dead, and the judgment before God. We must believe that He is now reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords. To deny this is to deny Christ and the role the scripture has assigned Him.

His Return

Of no less certainty is the promised return (Acts 1:11), *"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."*

All of these things that we have noted briefly we must accept to be true. This is what it means to believe in Christ. With inspired testimony before us, given through eye-witnesses, proven and verified by the power of God, we should have no difficulty in believing, especially when we realize that our eternal salvation or damnation depends on our response.

In Acts 8, when the Ethiopian believed, he obeyed, being baptized. The same was true of the jailor in Philippi, Lydia, the Corinthians, the people of Samaria, and every account of conversion to Christ. Those who received the Word were baptized on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41).

It is no different today. When one truly believes, he will obey, being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38). Knowing what to believe, and what belief requires, we have before us the path to salvation. May it be that each of us will go that way.

† † † † †

(from page 12)
me to a building, blindfold me, give me directions how to reach a certain place in that building, and if your directions are reliable and I follow them as given, I can know I am at the specified place even if I never take off the blindfold. Having confidence in your directions and having followed them, can there be any doubt I am where I intended to be?

Are you saved? You are if you have obeyed His Word. Until you do obey, the answer remains "No" and will remain that way until you obey. Please take advantage of the opportunity that is yours to obey while that opportunity abides.

† † † † †

A Mind To Work

Our lesson is taken from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. Paul wrote, *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."* (Romans 15:4). There are many lessons we need to learn from the account that we now shall consider.

In Captivity

The record begins with the Jews in captivity. Following the reign of Saul, David, and Solomon the nation of Israel divided into two nations: Judah on the south and Israel on the north. These nations existed side by side for many years. Eventually, due to the sinfulness of the people, God allowed Assyria to overrun Northern Israel and take them into a captivity from which they as a nation never returned. Judah continued for over a century longer, but finally fell to Babylon for the same sinful reasons. They were taken into a captivity for a period of seventy years. This captivity was coming to a close during the time of the events recorded in Nehemiah. In fact, Babylon had fallen and the Persians were now in control. The Persians had already allowed many of the Jews to return home. Just as their captivity had taken place in three stages, so their return was accomplished in three stages. The first was under the leadership of Zerrubabel at which time the temple was rebuilt. The second was under Ezra who led the people in a great religious revival and return to God. The third stage was under Nehemiah when he led the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. This last phase is the subject of our study.

In Shushan

Nehemiah was the cupbearer for the Persian king, Artexerses. The king noticed a distinct change in the usually pleasant countenance of Nehemiah and asked him why. Nehemiah then told him it was because of the news that had been brought him by his fellow countrymen from Jerusalem. *"I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem, and they said unto me.*

The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." (Nehemiah 1:2,3). The walls had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon when Jerusalem had been destroyed by him. Without the walls the city was easy prey for whoever would wish to plunder and pillage. The city was without defense against marauding nomads, robbers, beasts, whatever. Therefore the people were in disgrace.

Why Nehemiah Cared

These bad conditions grieved Nehemiah because he cared about his people who were the people of God. He cared about what this situation was doing to the name of God before others. The effect is revealed in Nehemiah 1:4, *"And it came to pass when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."* But Nehemiah did more than mourn, fast and pray. He was not content to stop there. He decided to do something about it. This is the first lesson we need to learn. It is well and good to be concerned and show concern in times of distress and need by our actions. It is worthwhile to pray. But coupled with that must be action that will affect the situation. Nehemiah determined to take action. He made up his mind that something could be done and he set out to do all he could. He acted.

Leadership

We now see Nehemiah leaving the Persian palace at Shushan with his face toward the distressed city of Jerusalem; a leader with a holy purpose and cause to attack a problem and engage a task that needed to be done. He had no personal ambitions in this matter, but he wanted to remove the reproach of God's people and the name of God before others.

Every noble task must have good leadership if it is to be accomplished. Those who lead must have the devotion and dedication that it takes to do the work. Too many who lead lack the proper determination. Many worthwhile efforts do not succeed because of the lack of good leadership, the lack of vision. *"Where there is no vision, the people perish..."* (Proverbs 29:18). Nehemiah furnished the kind of leadership this job required. Notice the steps he took.

Knowledge

First, he thoroughly acquainted himself with the situation. He wanted to not only understand why the task had to be done, but what had to be done, how it could be done, when it could be done, and who could get it done. He went to the scene where things were needed. One has said, and properly so, "You cannot lead where you will not go; you cannot teach what you do not know." Nehemiah went and learned first hand for himself. He went to count the cost. His counting of the cost was not to determine whether he would tackle the job or not. He had already determined to get the job done. He counted the cost to determine what it was going to take to get it done. He viewed the ruins back and forth, up and down, getting the facts and conditions clear in his own mind. Having done that he was in a position to develop solutions and make plans.

Plans

Good plans are necessary in getting a job done. But let us learn that plans do not work. Regardless of how wonderful plans may be, plans do not work. People must do the work. We need plans to prevent waste and haphazard efforts. We ought not go at a task with the "hit or miss" approach. That seldom succeeds and the risk of failure is great when that is the manner of approach. But there is nothing magic in having a plan by itself, even a good plan. But Nehemiah got the whole matter clear before he even told anyone why he was there. He took the initiative. He was a leader.

Followship

Nehemiah not only knew the need of good leadership, but he also knew the essentiality of good followship. Regardless of how good the leadership may be, without followship, Nehemiah could not rebuild the walls alone. So he had to enlist good followship. Good plans are not much use when there is nobody to execute them. He needed an informed, aroused, determined and enthusiastic body of followers. He called the people together and rehearsed before them the plight in which they existed, the needs they had, and offered his proposals. *"Then I said unto them, ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with*

fire. Come, let ys build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me, and also the king's words that he had spoken unto me." (Nehemiah 2:17,18). This last remark referred to permission he had secured from the Persian king before he left Shushan to use supplies that belonged to the king. Even before he left for Jerusalem he had an eye on materials by which to do the work.

Now the opportunity to get things done was before the people. The success or failure of the project rested not only on Nehemiah but also on the people as well. Nehemiah called for a decision, but one that was based on correct information. The challenge was placed before them. It was not just a push forward on enthusiasm and "pep rally emotion." It was not just a fanciful dream. The followers had to be sold on the need and what was at stake enough to commit themselves to the task. They had to decide based on conviction rather than some supercharged and temporary fervor. And sold they were! What a good persuader Nehemiah must have been that day. Notice the reaction!

Attitude

The essential ingredient in their story of success was their attitude. Nehemiah won their hearts. They were motivated by their attitude. The question before them really was whether they cared enough to assume the work? Did it really matter to them? Did they want the reproach removed? Would they do anything about it? What was their attitude? Until now they was languishing in distress. Would they seize this opportunity? Their answer is one of the more thrilling responses of which we read in the Bible.

The Response

They said, "*Let us rise up and build.*" (Nehemiah 2:18). Their answer revealed their attitude. What was that attitude? Nehemiah 4:6, *"The people had a mind to work."* There it is. They were willing, ready and able to do the job and sincerely wanted to do it. They were convinced and convicted about the matter. They had the disposition to get to the task.

Their answer reflected confidence in themselves, confidence in their leader, confidence in the nobility of their task, confidence that the need must be met, and confidence in the

Almight God whom they served. They were optimistic and had hope. Nobody said, "That can't be done." Nobody whined, "It is a good idea but we had better wait a while and see how things go." Nobody complained, "It is too big for us." Nor did anybody suggest, "This is a good idea and you have our best wishes as you attempt it." The old adage prevailed that would persuade, "Can't never could, but can can." Everyone felt keenly a personal responsibility in the matter. Each had a willingness to do his or her part. Together they knew they could do what was needed. This was their attitude toward the work and their response to the opportunity. If only we can learn that such an attitude and response is an essential ingredient in successfully laboring for the Lord.

Overcoming Opposition

We must remember that not everyone in the vicinity was in sympathy with the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. The Jews had their enemies and there were those who enjoyed their weakness. So there was opposition and hindrances thrown in their path as the work proceeded. From the time their many opponents heard about the intent they began to undermine it and attack it from first one angle then another. They sent word to the Persian king accusing Nehemiah of trying to raise a rebellion against him and set himself up as a king. They tried to discourage the workers with ridicule of the quality of their work. They tried to stall and slowdown the progress by urging Nehemiah to stop work and negotiate, come down to the plain of Ono for dialogues and discussions. Each effort they made had some impact for a while. Plots were made to kill Nehemiah, especially if he had accepted their invitation to come to Ono to talk. Nehemiah's answer to that ploy was simply, "O no!" He told them he was doing a good work and did not have time to "mouth" with those who opposed it. He was unwilling to compromise anything. Even though the enemies waged physical destruction against the work, forcing the Jews to labor during the day and stand guard during the night, almost as if they were building with one hand and protecting their work with the other. But night and day, without even so much as changing their clothes, they had to stay on the job. **But the wall went up.** That is what mattered. In fifty-two days they were able to erect the wall, an accomplishment once considered beyond their reach (Nehemiah 6:15). They proved they could do it by doing.

Prayer

Their efforts were constantly coupled with repeated prayer (1:4-11; 2:4; 4:1-5,8,9; 6:9). This showed on whom they relied. This showed the combination of their own efforts and their humility and dependence on God. It is one of the most inspirational and wonderful episodes of cooperation between man and God of which you read in the Bible. There was splendid cooperation between leaders and followers. Workmanship won the day. The result was success. And let us realize that a tremendous measure of success was enjoyed almost from the beginning simply because they were willing to try. But they were able to enjoy total success because they erected that wall.

Principles We Can Apply

The principles utilized in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem are rather obvious, are they not? These principles are useful and applicable for us in upbuilding the church of our Lord in the midst of a world of sinful darkness. We must recognize the need, get the facts, make the plans. There must be leadership, followship, workmanship, cooperation and prayer. There has to be devotion, dedication and determination. These great and vital ingredients are indispensable in doing the Father's business. There must be the positive attitude, with a relentless persistence even against resistance. And this attitude must be demonstrated in the things that we actually do. We can accomplish our task just as they were successful in accomplishing their work.

Every congregation has needs. What if every member of the congregation keenly senses his or her personal responsibility toward the work like those Jews sensed toward rebuilding that wall? With lost souls all around us, do we not have a cause? As David once asked his brother when criticized for suggesting he would meet Goliath, *"Is there not a cause?"* Spreading the gospel is the primary work of the Lord's church with respect to this sinful world. Getting to heaven is the eventual goal of every Christian. Part of that work is reaching others. A successful work cannot be done only by a "faithful few" Is it not much better for a congregation to have the "faithful many?" Is it not profitable for each individual to be among that noble number?

Most congregations have the manpower to get our task done, at least to be more productive in it. Various plans and programs that have proven scriptural and effective are available. The

major program is *"preach the word,"* without which Word there can be no salvation. There is the desparate need for more brothers and sisters to be involved and to realize personal duties toward the Lord, the church and the lost exist. Those who just will not work, refuse to cooperate, who choose to hinder and drag rather than help, ought never be allowed to stifle the efforts of those who do care enough to be about the Father's business.

Grateful For The Past

Those of us living today can give sincere thanks for the work that has been done in the past. Whatever efforts we make we will make standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. But while we respect and commend the past, we must consider the present and look to the future. Someday our own time will be considered the past. Will those of the future be able to look upon our time with thanksgiving because we assumed and discharged our duty faithfully?

Does it not come down to this question? Can God count on you and me? The welfare of the church, the salvation of souls, including our own, is dependent on how we respond to that question. Our first step is to enlist in the Lord's work force by becoming a Christian, then rising with others to the glorious work He has assigned us, and expects of us.

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(from page 24)

You Can Know

Suppose you and a friend suffer a break in friendship and you inquire of him what you must do to make matters right again. He writes you and tells you what you must do. When you have done it, all is forgiven. So you follow his directions and do as he directs. Are you forgiven? If you can rely on the word of your friend, you can be sure all is forgiven.

We believe the Word of God. When He tells us to do thus and so and then He will forgive, we walk by faith, doing what he directs. We can know we are forgiven because God is true to His Word. To doubt it is to doubt His Word. To want and ask for something more than His Word is to question the validity of His Word. By His Word we can be sure and certain.

One other illustration and the lesson will end. You can take

(continued page 5)

Do We Have The Right To Be Wrong?

One of our most cherished liberties in the United States is religious freedom. Many nations do not afford its citizens such a liberty. Nations under the rule of Communism, Mohammedanism, Romanism and other tyrannical systems are not allowed what most of us take for granted. Many other nations have what they call "state religions" that are traditional in those countries, and are financially supported through taxation of everyone. Every citizen whether they subscribe to that religion or not must pay his taxes to promote and sustain that faith.

In our nation this has not been historically true. It is necessary that we become aware, however, that today in America the religion of secular Humanism is being supported through state funds and taxation because the basic doctrines of the Humanist religion are being proclaimed in the public schools. Other forms of religion, such a Christianity, are being denied equal rights and opportunity. This is a breach in the religious liberty and separation of church and state that has characterized America.

Religious freedom as we have known it in this nation is eroding right before us. Romanism has never been too kindly toward religious freedom where it has power to control. Even in our nation there has always been strong pressure from Catholicism that it be granted special favors from government even at the expense of others. Many Protestant faiths have fallen into line because they desire money from the federal treasury for their churches and religious institutions and are willing to conform and compromise to whatever the governmental bureaucrats demand, even sacrificing basic principles to get the money. Unwilling to afford the propagation of their own faith, they are willing and anxious to take government financial subsidy and the governmental control that goes with it. No faith, however, is worth its existence if those who hold it are not willing to support it without resorting to forcing others to share in its support. We dare not close our eyes upon these attacks at religious freedom. We need also to be aware that schools once considered "Christian" have also surrendered much of the ground of religious freedom by taking federal money and other forms of governmental support. Even as I write these words

there are buildings that have been built at government expense now standing on what brethren have called "our Christian schools" where it is now illegal to conduct Bible classes in them because they were built by federal funds.

False View

But many people have a very false concept of religious freedom. Freedom of religion was never intended by our founding fathers to mean the enforcement of freedom from religion. It was not intended to be a license to oppress and oppose religion as is presently being done by many. It was not the intent of the nation's founders to allow the formation of a state church and state religion, but neither was it intended that the arm of government, including laws, courts and appropriations be used to drive faith in God out of existence, as is being done. We have witnessed the banning of any semblance for prayer from public schools, the termination of Bible reading, the introduction of atheistic doctrines in textbooks, even the rewriting of history to accomodate those who are anti-religion. One could name a number of infringements against religion while doctrines and religions that are contrary to the Bible are being promoted in the regular school curriculum.

Another false view of religious freedom it that a person can believe and practice whatever he wishes and it makes no difference even to God. Some contend that so long as you are honest and sincere in whatever you believe that this is all that is essential and God will accept it. This has been the dominant characteristic of most of the denominational world over the years. It is necessary, however, to say that many who say it does not make any difference what you believe contend with vigor that what they believe is right and others are wrong.

The "Right"

Two positions or beliefs that are opposite to one another cannot both be right, even though the religion of secular Humanism even now contends that in spite of contradictions both views can be right. Our question is, "Do we have a right to be wrong? Am I free to do and believe whatever I wish and expect equal benefit?" It ought to be obvious to honest observers that the attitude that "anything goes, everything is beautiful in its own way, I'm OK and you're OK, do your own thing" causes

division and confusion as well as being a sinister depressant of a desire and motive to seek and learn the truth. Many today, seeing the chaos of our times, have sought to resolve the matter by contending there is no such thing as truth, or if truth exists, we cannot really know what it is and only at best can search for it, never sure of anything actually being true. This is a colossal and intellectually dishonest "cop out." We wonder how those who say we cannot know truth, cannot know what is right, can be so confident that they know we cannot know truth and cannot know what is right. Does not their very contention contradict itself? Are positions that "shoot themselves in the foot" really deserving of our subscription?

The problem with many others is that they want no authority over them whatever, much prefering to "do their own thing" regardless of what it is without anybody suggesting they might be wrong or anybody prohibiting them from doing whatever they want to do regardless of consequences to others. They despise the necessity to conform to the will of God because the will of God does not allow mankind to indulge itself in whatever is desired. Cannot we see that the question we are discussing has several sides that need investigation?

Legally

From at least three points of view a person certainly does and should have the right to believe and do whatever he wishes in matters of religion. Whether his convictions are correct or false before God, he still has the right to hold them in certain areas. First, legally he has the right under the laws of our land to be religiously free. Our Constitution guarantees freedom of religions, meaning one can hold to whatever religious faith he chooses. It will even allow freedom from religion if one does not wish to profess a religion. He can have the religion of no religion. Our laws do prohibit the government from establishing and demanding any certain religion, but government is bound to protect the rights of people to hold whatever religious views they wish, so long as these views and the practice of them do not infringe on others and deny others their rights in the matter. This has been called the doctrine of separation of church and state and has been historically interpretted in our land. We are in full agreement with such a charitable position and are thankful for it.

This principle is a blessing to the Christian who is taught of Scripture to obey the laws of the land (Romans 13:1,2). This

permits the Christian to practice Christianity without government interference, but rather enjoying government protection from others as he practices his faith.

This freedom has often been abused by many religionists because they will do most anything in the name of religion and get away with it. The worst and most devious money-making schemes on earth are disguised under the garb of religion and protected by religious freedom. Mind control and exploitation has been practiced by the cults in the name of religion. There has been much suffering because of these abuses. But we must keep clearly in mind the distinction between the use of freedom and the abuse of it. Just how to prevent all abuse and retain the use is one of the more perplexing problems we face.

Choice

Second, religious freedom does grant an individual the right to choose his faith. Do you realize that God even allows a person that right? God does not force a person to even accept what God requires. One can choose to reject God if that is what he wants. To be pleasing to God a person must be taught and convicted of the truth, then willingly, voluntarily and submissively surrender himself and his will to the will of God. We are drawn to God through teaching (John 6:44,45). We are persuaded to believe what we believe (Second Corinthians 5:11), not forced. If a person ever becomes a Christian as the Bible teaches it must be as a result of his own choice and willingness to serve God on God's terms and God's way.

Willingness

Third, and this is closely related to the previous notation, the very nature of the faith of Christ requires there be freedom of religion because Christ wants both mind and body. Men can force other men to do certain things regarding the body by physical force. Physical power is often used, even in some religions, to make people do some things. But men can still control their hearts and minds even under those circumstances. We must never allow anyone to capture our mind against the Lord. Being a Christian comes from within and manifests itself without. The heart and mind of man must be taught and trained according to Scripture.

So we must conclude that in these areas there is religious

freedom: legally, even permission from God, and because of the very nature of the faith of Christ.

But even though we have the right to exercise our decisive power free from the force of others, even be wrong, we still must bear the consequences of our choices. We are accountable and responsible before God (Galatians 6:7,8; Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12). While our religious freedom delivers us from other people, we are not free FROM religions in the sight of God, nor are we free to believe and practice whatever we wish and still have God's approval and have the right to expect His blessings.

Limited Freedom

Whatever is at variance from Scripture is a violation of the will of God and is wrong religiously (Second John 9-11; Proverbs 30:6; John 12:48). The Scripture is inspired of God, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient and authoritative (Second Timothy 3:16,17). If a person wants the blessings that God offers and promises, spiritually and physically, he must accept and abide in the teaching of God. He is not free to do whatever he wants, whatever he thinks, whatever he decides, whatever he likes, and still expect the benefits just the same.

If we want to be saved by Christ, and there is no other Savior (Acts 4:12), we must obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). If I do not obey Him I cannot appeal to religious liberty and demand salvation anyway. While God will allow me to do what I want, He does not promise to bless me regardless of what I do. God's spiritual blessings, and many physical blessings, are conditional. If I do not meet these conditions, then my exercise of religious freedom and doing things my own way will deprive me of God's favor.

Right About Faith

Notice how this applies in certain matters. If one wants the fellowship of Deity and the blessings He offers he does not have the right to be wrong about faith in God. A person may choose to be an atheist and no other person has the right to force him to do otherwise. The government does not have the right to demand he believe. This does not mean believers cannot and should not take issue with him, attempt to teach him and show him the folly of his disbelief. The Scripture teaches that one is a fool that does not believe in God (Proverbs 14:1; 53:1). It does

not mean the atheist should not be restrained from infringing on the rights of those who do believe. But he can be an atheist if he wants to be one. But he will live the life of a fool and die the death of the lost and suffer the hell of the condemned because of his choice. His exercise of religious freedom, even freedom from religion, has its consequences before God that he cannot and will not be able to escape.

Right About Christ

Neither does a person have the right to be wrong about Jesus Christ and expect to be pleasing to God. God will not force anyone to accept His Son if they choose to reject Him. But the time is coming when every eye shall see Him and every tongue shall confess Him, but then it will be too late for those who have rejected Him (Philippians 2:10,11; Romans 14:11). While one can deny Christ in this life if he wishes, he does not have the right to expect to go to heaven in the next life (John 8:24; Acts 4:12; John 5:23). Such a one is anti-Christ and stands condemned (First John 2:22,23).

Right About The Gospel

No person has the right to be wrong about obeying the gospel and still expect salvation. The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16) and to fail to obey means eternal separation from God (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). Man has the power to choose, but it makes a difference what he chooses. He has the freedom to choose, but his choice bears certain consequences he must bear.

Right About Life

Similarly, no Christian has a right to be wrong about the kind of life he is to live, his worship and work in the kingdom. Error, neglect, following the sinful ways of the world will bring eternal damnation while following in the footsteps of Christ will bring eternal life. One is religiously free to follow whatever path he desires. But if he follows the ways of the world he must give account to God and also expect to be dealt with in this life by faithful brethren because this is the will of God.

People have sung songs with such phrases, "It's my life; I'll live it the way I want to; throw it away if I want to." In one sense

they can do just that. Many are playing the role of fools and doing that very thing. As some have said, "Everybody has a right to be wrong, at least once." Well, this is the idea some hold, but Scripture does not allow one the right to be wrong before God and God be pleased with him.

In one way religious freedom might be defined this way: you have the right to go to hell any way you might choose, but to go to heaven you must go the way of the Lord or you cannot go. We rejoice in this freedom and need to be aware of the encroachments the sinister forces of Satan are making against it. We have for too long assumed nothing could take this precious liberty from us. Others have lost freedoms because of their lack of vigilance and the same can occur among us in our nation. We want out children and grandchildren to enjoy true religious freedom which is the freedom to do the will of God without harassment and persecution from without, including the government and those from whom the government is supposed to protect us. But we must not ever forget what religious freedom really is and what it is not. We have no right, ever, to set aside the authority of God as revealed in His Word.

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The Evidence of Pardon

Are you saved? Do you believe that your sins have been forgiven? If you should die at this moment would you go to heaven? The question involves whether you are *"in Christ"* or not. Are you a spiritual child of God? Can you think of a more important matter to consider?

The answers people give to these questions reflect tremendous uncertainty. People will say, "I hope I am saved," or "I think so." Others may respond, "I sure want to be saved." Many are convinced that we cannot know for sure and must wait, in the dark, until the judgment before we find out. They live life in doubt and uncertainty about the most significant matter in our existence. Many are just not sure about it.

There are others who can answer straightout, "No, I am not saved." Still others are very confident and answer, "Yes, I am sure I am saved."

Regardless of how we answer the question, this lesson has something for us. If you are not saved we will learn how to be saved and be sure about it. If you have doubts we can learn how we can ascertain our state or condition. Even if we are confident we are saved we shall learn again the basis upon which we must determine the answers. We may learn that we can be confident and content and yet be wrong about it. While we may learn that we can be confident, we may discover we have only thought ourselves saved but are not.

We do not look with favor on those who try to persuade us we cannot know about such things. Our Lord has revealed His truth and there is no reason for us to doubt His Word or our ability to know. If we are aware of God's truth, then we can determine whether we are saved or not.

Saved Or Lost

Let us first be convinced that at this very moment we are either saved or lost. People can be divided into these two groups. First John 5:19 distinguishes these groups. *"We know that we are of God."* That is the saved group. *"And the whole world lieth in wickedness."* This refers to the lost. Acts 11:14 speaks of the saved while Second Corinthians 4:3 speaks of the lost. There are only two eternal destinies revealed to us in Scripture. The one is heaven and the other is hell. There are the sheep and the goats.

People are lost due to sin (Isaiah 59:1,2). We all are guilty of sin (Romans 3:23). Without belaboring those points of truth, and accepting them as truth, it should be obvious to us that we need pardon or forgiveness from that which bars us from heaven. Romans 4:7, *"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."* Seeing how the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and we cannot save ourselves by ourselves (Ephesians 2:8,9), and that there will be no sin in heaven (Revelation 21:27), we must rely upon a Savior. God has provided is the Savior we must have.

Jesus, The Only Way

Jesus is the only way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Second Timothy 2:10). Salvation is a gift (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8,9) that God gives when we meet certain conditions. God has a part in man's salvation. Due to His love,

mercy, grace and concern God has demonstrated all of these qualities by offering His Son (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-9). Due to the sacrifice of Christ we have hope of salvation in heaven through Him (John 20:30,31). Without that which God provides and what Christ has done there would be no further need to discuss man's salvation. There would be such a thing possible except for God's part in God's plan.

Man's Part

Man has a part in his own salvation. While we are not saved due to our own merit and works that would earn salvation (Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:3-5), nonetheless there is that which we must do to partake of the salvation God gives. Christ saves the obedient (Hebrews 5:9). We enter the kingdom of heaven by doing the Father's will (Matthew 7:21). *"Save yourselves..."* was Peter's admonition on Pentecost (Acts 2:40). He did not say they could save themselves by themselves or without Christ. That is impossible. He was emphasizing that we have something to do to receive the gift God offers. Just as there is a giver of a gift, so there is a receiver. We must do certain things to receive the gift. Even then we do not merit what God gives. We only meet the conditions He has specified in order to receive His gift.

False Evidences

People often rely on false evidence for their salvation. Some cite a strange experience which they tell (testify) and others hear it and vote on its validity. Some claim to hear that "still small voice." Some claim to have what is "better felt than told." People are urged to "receive Jesus" without ever being told what that really includes or involves. It amounts to simply crying, "Lord, Lord." Such will not produce salvation. Just asking God to save you and then thanking God for salvation is not what Scripture teaches.

People can honestly, earnestly and sincerely believe what is false. This is a study within itself that is worthy of serious consideration, but suffice it now to say that just being honest, earnest and sincere (all of which is essential) does not mean that what one believes to be true is actually true. It just proves they think so. There must be better evidence than what a person thinks or feels. There is a popular song that suggests, "It can't be wrong 'cause it feels so right." That is the devil's lie and many

are deceived thereby. Even the mothers of pagan religions who toss their baby daughters into the river to the crocidiles feel like the anger of gods is pacified. Is such a one sincere and honest? Certainly! But does that mean she is right? Certainly not! Nor does one "pray through" to salvation, or as one was heard to say at the mourner's bench, "weep through."

Not By Feelings

Since so many cite how they feel, and their feelings as evidence of salvation, this needs further investigation. Consider Jacob when he was led to believe Joseph was dead. How did he feel? Scripture says he would not be comforted because of so much grief. But were his feelings reliable evidence that Joseph was actually dead? Joseph was not dead.

Consider Saul of Tarsus as he made havoc of the Lord's church. Did he feel he was doing right? Let him tell you about it (Acts 23:1). Was he right in doing what he was doing? Certainly not! Even Jesus warned how people would persecute His disciples thinking they were serving God (John 16:2). Who would contend they were acceptable before God just because they believed they were doing His will?

During World War II there came a report of a boy that was said to have drowned at sea. You can imagine the grief of the family and community. Later a report came that is was a case of mistaken identity. You can now imagine the relief and joy. But still later came a third report that the first report was accurate and the boy was dead. What frustration and torn feelings! But were those feelings reliable evidence about the truth?

We have read how some have thought they had received a fortune through inheritance and even spent lots of money before they learned it was not so. Can you rely on your feelings?

Please pay close attention to the next point because it is crucial to proper understanding. Feelings are produced by what a person THINKS is true. But that which they THINK is not true simply because they THINK so. It may not be true at all. One does feel good when he knows he is saved. But one does not know he is saved simply because he feels good about the matter. He may feel good and still be lost, only deceiving himself or being deceived by some other. Feelings are produced by what we THINK. Our evidence of salvation does not rest on unreliable and uncertain feelings. But there is a way we can KNOW we are saved and there is evidence upon which we can

depend to be reliable and true.

Romans 8:14-17, *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth withness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."*

Paul Was Certain

Paul was writing to Christians and said, *"We are the children of God."* This is a very certain and positive declaration. There does not appear the slighest doubt in his mind. He knew. We ask just how he could be so sure? Paul said it was because of testimony. More precisely, it was due to dual testimony; testimony given by the Holy Spirit and by our own spirit. Please notice a matter of tremendous distinction here. These two testimonies were one WITH the other. It was not one TO the other, nor one FOR the other, nor one APART FROM the other. It was one WITH the other, that is, in the company of the other, alongside the other. Both testimonies were necessary to determine the conclusion, *"We are the children of God."* Now let us consider the two testimonies.

How does the Holy Spirit bear witness and give testimony? Ephesians 6:17 tells us that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. Jesus said a man is made alive by the words of Christ (John 6:63). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). It is the implanted Word that saves the soul (James 1:21). Peter brought *"words"* whereby Cornelius and his house could be saved (Acts 11:14). We are begotten by the gospel (First Corinthians 4:15). There is no word from the Spirit except the inspired Word of truth. Many are brought to God by being taught, by learning, having heard the Word (John 6:44,45). There is no salvation or record of conversion separate and apart from the hearing, believing and obeying the Word of God. The Holy Spirit operates on the hearts of men by and through the Word of God, not a direct operation, but through the means of the Word. What testimony we shall ever know from the Spirit is what we read and learn from the Scriptures.

But is not there something extra somewhere? Is not there something in addition to the Word? Paul declares the Scriptures

to be verbally inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative and all-sufficient. That does not allow for anything else (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We are warned against adding to or taking from His Word (Galatians 1:6-9). We must abide in the doctrine of Christ, His doctrine (Second John 9-11). The faith has been once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and Peter said he preached all things that pertain to life and godliness (Second Peter 1:3). After all, Christ promised the apostles that the Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26). There is no truth apart from God's revealed will regarding salvation outside of His Word. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Two Testimonies

What does the Spirit teach? We learn that man sins and is lost because of his sins. He cannot save himself. He must rely on a Savior. God has provided that Savior who is Jesus Christ who died on the cross at Calvary for our sins. Man must come to Christ which demands faith, repentance, confession and baptism into Christ, bringing him into a new life in Christ. We might add that the testimony of the Spirit informs us of God's great promises as well as warnings of wrath toward the disobedient.

Alongside that testimony is our own. We are aware whether or not we have complied with what the Word requires of us in order to receive God's gift. If we have obeyed, we are saved. If we have not, nothing we can say about it will change it and we are still lost in sin until we obey. It is that simple.

First John 2:3-5, *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in him."*

We not only can know, we can know that we know. When can we know? When we keep His commandments. A person can know whether he has done what the Lord says and the reasons the Lord says do it. God does not tell us to do something and then leave us wondering whether we have done it or not. We can know we are saved when we have obeyed His commands. Are we to think we are saved and be confident about it even though we have not done what He commands?

(continued page 12)

Elisha's Tomb



JAMES W. BOYD

Various accounts in the Bible may be hurriedly read and we do not give them the meditation they deserve. One such record that comes to mind is that which is recorded in Second Kings 13, the deatn and burial of Elisha and an amazing event that took place at his tomb some time later.

It seems that one had died and was being buried in the same tomb as Elisha. When the dead man's body touched the bones of Elisha he revived and stood erect. What a startling thing this must have been to witness. Without a doubt it must have made a vivid impression on those who were there. But there is more to this than might first come to our minds.

Obviously, it was a miracle. Miracles were for the purpose of showing the power of God and confirming the message of His messengers. Elisha was God's prophet and had preached and warned Israel repeatedly. They usually gave no heed, however. But with this event, why could they not see that God's power and truth had been revealed through His prophet and learned to obey God's message? It did present opportunity.

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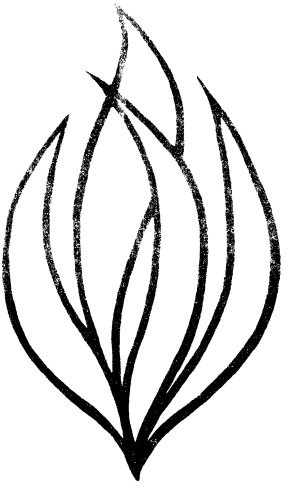

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Abound In This Grace

The story is told of a preacher who was challenged to spend the night in a haunted house. He accepted the challenge, but to his surprise, about midnight, spooks came around him. Frightened, he began to pray, but the spooks did not leave. He read the Scriptures, but they did not leave. He then prepared to pass the collection plate and immediately they scattered. This seems to be the attitude of many on hearing lessons regarding giving.

Second Corinthians 8:1-7, *"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed upon the churches of Macedonia, how that in great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves, praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. Insomuch that we desired Titus that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also."*

Help For Brethren

Paul raised funds among Gentile churches for Jewish brethren in Judea who were in need because of famine. He had given instructions to the church in Corinth, First Corinthians 16:1,2, *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."*

Contributions were received from Galatia, Asia and Macedonia. The churches in Macedonia were upheld to the Corinthians as examples in giving. They had responded over and beyond expectations, counting it a privilege to give. They had learned well the teaching of Christ, Acts 20:35, *"It is more blessed to give than receive."*

Although afflicted and in deep poverty, they gave of their own accord, to the fullest extent, even beyond their power. In doing so they became rich in the Lord by their liberality. As marvellous as was their deed, the attitude of heart that motivated the deed is also remarkable.

Key To Proper Giving

What was the reason they gave the way they did? If ever there is given us the "key" to successful giving we have it in this account. Do you ever wonder why some congregations are able to do many things that others never attempt, in such areas of work as missions, expansions, benevolence and various good works authorized of God? It is not always because they are richer than others. It is because they give better than others. While we are concerned about HOW MUCH to give, we must be concerned about HOW TO GIVE. These Macedonian brethren first gave of themselves. They were committed to the cause of Christ.

In Revelation we read of the church in Laodicea who thought themselves in need of nothing, but in the sight of God they were poor, wretched and blind. The church in Macedonia was poor, even in poverty, but rich in the sight of God because of their liberality.

The reason some give liberally is because they know that what is in their power is not their own, but they are stewards of that which has been granted temporarily to them by the Lord and that it all belongs to God. They realize they shall give account of how they used what God allows them to control. They know that they are not their own (First Corinthians 6:19).

Second Corinthians 9:6,7, *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart so let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."* Shall we not reap what we sow? Shall we not reap even more than we sow?

Once a rich man, who wished to do something helpful for a carpenter who was in need, hired the carpenter to build a house. The rich man left town for a while, leaving everything to the care of the carpenter. The carpenter did a shoddy job, cutting corners, using inferior materials. But when the rich man returned he gave the keys of the house to the carpenter to be his own house. How the carpenter then wished he had been more

attentive in doing his job properly. In similar fashion God has entrusted us with certain duties and opportunities. The house we build will be our own. How are we building?

Treasures In Heaven

When we give as we ought we are laying up treasures in heaven. Matthew 6:19, 20, *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*

The tale is told of one who went to heaven and was being escorted to his eternal home. He was led by many glorious mansions and he inquired if one belonged to him. Being told, "No," he was taken to lesser mansions which he assumed would be his. Again he was told, "Not yet," and on he was led to the lowliest and humblest of dwellings. Disappointed he asked why this was all he got. The reply was given, "We did the best we could with what you sent us." You can tell where your heart is if you will discover where your treasure is.

Purposing

Notice Second Corinthians 9:7 instructs that we purpose our giving. This means to plan, intend, giving thought to it, making a commitment. While some cringe at the word "pledging," this is what is involved. The reason faithful brethren fear the word "pledging" is because of the abuses executed in the denominations about giving. But with some it might be because they prefer giving in an unplanned, haphazard manner, giving God their "leftovers."

Whether one calls it planning, purposing, pledging or whatever, our giving is to be after proper consideration, as we have prospered, intentional, of a free will, dictated by how much we love the Lord. What one gives is between the person and God. But we must make sure our attitude is right and our actions are acceptable.

Attitude

Notice the proper attitude. We are not to give grudgingly, or

of necessity or because we feel we just have to give something. We are told to give cheerfully, willingly, because we get to give, and as God has prospered us. The New Testament sets no specific percentage for giving as did the Mosaic Law. Some may hide behind the absence of a given percentage in order to give less than the ten per cent the Jews gave. Actually, calculations indicate the Jews gave as high as one third. Do your own figuring. What if God allowed us to prosper in proportion to what we give? How many would be willing to live on ten times their contributions?

There is a spiritual beauty in giving because it is Godlike and Christlike. One complained upon hearing a sermon on giving and said, "All I hear is give, give, give." Think about it and you will see that this is a fair commentary on the real nature of Christianity. Look what God has given. Consider what Christ has given. Look what heaven offers and the gift of forgiveness, fellowship with Deity, hope, purpose in life, providence, protection. Second Corinthians 8:9, *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."*

Cannot Buy God

Our giving is not a repayment to God because we can never repay God for what He has provided for us. It is as the song suggests, "It demands my life, my all." But giving is our expression of love for the Lord. By giving we prove our sincerity of our love (Second Corinthians 8:8). How much do you love God? Your giving is a good indicator.

The Christian has many duties and privileges. Giving is one of both. We dare not neglect it. By giving we worship God, Solomon wrote, Proverbs 3:9, *"Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of thine increase."* Giving does not cost but pays. What money that is in our control is the property of God, loaned to us for a while, and we have the responsibility to handle it according to his will. It should not be used wastefully and wantonly upon our indulgence. Does He not deserve the use of it? We must constantly be attentive to the proper acquisition of money and the proper distribution and expenditure of it. Let each examine his heart and consider his deeds in giving.

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Repentance

Our theme is one that rings throughout the Bible as one of the prime messages of God's prophets and preachers through the ages. The subject is repentance, without which there is no salvation for man from sin.

"*Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*" (Acts 17:29-31).

Paul preached this message in Athens before the philosophers of his day who were considered worldly wise. He had noted their gods and altars and "*his spirit was stirred in him.*" He taught them of the living and true God, insisting that repentance was necessary to salvation.

Jesus said, *"I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3). Peter wrote, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* (Second Peter 3:9). The very first command given in answer to the question asked by believers as to what they must do was, *"Repent..."* (Acts 2:38). This was on Pentecost. To a man who had heard Philip preach the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ in Samaria, and had believed the message and had been baptized only to fall away again into sin, Peter instructed him, *"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness..."* (Acts 8:22). Over and over we hear the admonition to repent. John the Baptist came preaching the coming of the Savior and the kingdom, urging people to prepare themselves, commanding them, *"Repent ye."* (Matthew 3:2).

Attack The Barrier

Repentance attacks one of the Satanic strongholds and barriers between God and man. One of the most powerful obstacles to salvation is the obstinacy of the human will.

Consider a few Biblical examples of this.

Saul

God sent King Saul to destroy the wicked people of Amalek (First Samuel 15). Saul wrought a great victory over these enemies of Israel, but he did not do what God instructed. Yet, upon his return from battle and hearing the inquiry from Samuel regarding the preserved sheep and cattle, he insisted, *"I have performed the commandment of the Lord."* (First Samuel 15:13). Of course, he had not done so. If so, what meant the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen, as well as the presence of King Agag? Saul explained that the people had spared those things for sacrifice to God. Samuel told him that the Lord had rejected him because of his disobedience. Even though he agreed that he was instructed to destroy everything, and in face of the undeniable evidence that he had not done this, he contended, *"Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord."* (First Samuel 15:20). Blaming his wrongs on the people, he stubbornly defended himself in his evil ways. Samuel told him, *"Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."* (First Samuel 15:22,23). The fall of Saul was due to his own obstinate will.

Naaman

In Second Kings 5 we read of Naaman, captain of the Syrian army, who was a leper. Upon learning through an Israelite maid of a prophet in Samaria that could heal him, he went there in search of his health. He made several mistakes by going to the wrong man, expecting cure from the wrong source, but eventually came to the home of the prophet Elisha. He was directed to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River and he would be healed. But this angered him and he was about to return to Syria in a rage. He refused to obey the simple command given him. What was his problem? It was his pride and his own stubborn will that he should be healed another way.

It is the desire of every gospel preacher to have the ability to persuade people to repent. This is the hardest task. Once a

person has truly repented, the rest of the acts of obedience come relatively easy. Truly penitent people will not hesitate to confess Christ, be baptized, and do what must be done to live a faithful life as a Christian. But while we bemoan our own inability to get people to repent, we must remember that even the Lord Jesus had this same trouble with people. *"Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum. which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."* (Matthew 11:20-24). Again Jesus said, *"The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here."* (Matthew 12:41).

It is important to establish just what repentance is and how it is produced. Sometimes we can place a concept in perspective by learning what it is not, and by learning just how it relates to things closely connected with it. This we shall now do.

Relationship With Sorrow

Repentance is closely associated with sorrow, but it is not the same as sorrow. True, there is no repentance until there is sorrow, but there are two kinds of sorrow. *"Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."* (Second Corinthians 7:9-11).

Paul had written them earlier in First Corinthians regarding a

sinful brother, one taken in sin such as was not even found among the Gentiles (First Corinthians 5). The Christians there had tolerated that sinfulness rather than sorrowing over it. Paul wrote strong words of condemnation of both the sinful brother and the rest for not being offended by sin. He wrote for the salvation of them all. He urged that matters either be corrected or the sinful brother be disciplined. Second Corinthians shows the success of his efforts because the church was made sorry for tolerating sin and the sinful brother was provoked to repent also. They were made sorry after a godly sort. That kind of sorrow produced repentance. Worldly sorrow produced death.

Two Kind Of Sorrow

The reactions of Peter and Judas illustrate the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Peter, when confronted with the fact he had denied the Lord went out and wept bitterly. He was sorry. But he also turned again to serve the Lord. Judas betrayed Christ, and his evil was apparent to him. He was also sorry, but not after a godly sort. He hanged himself rather than returning to the Lord. He was sorry he had been caught in his wickedness whereas Peter was sorry he had offended the Christ. Godly sorrow, though it is not repentance, precedes repentance.

Reformation

Repentance is not the reformation of life. Reformation is the fruit of repentance. As godly sorrow goes before repentance and produces it, reformation of life follows repentance. The reader is urged to now read Luke 3:7-14. Here we learn where John the Baptist taught the necessity of the fruit of repentance, which is a changed life. In Acts 16 we see the evidence of repentance in the behavior of the jailor toward Paul and Silas. Earlier he had commanded their beating. Later he washed their stripes. There had been a change in his manner. Paul wrote, *"How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein."* (Romans 6:2). Genuine repentance produces a reformed life.

Repentance stands between godly sorrow and a reformed life. It is the change of the will, change of mind, the renunciation of the stubborn, rebellious sinful will of self, and the humbling of oneself before the will of Christ. As Jesus taught, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross*

and follow me." (Matthew 16:24).

Repentance is demonstrated in several Biblical characters. Saul of Tarsus was once a persecutor of Christ, but later a preacher of Christ. He was once an antagonist, but later an advocate of the Lord. What happened? He had repented. *"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20).

Naaman Again

Look again at Naaman. Once he was in a rage. Later we was in the river. What happened? He was persuaded to repent or change his mind. That resulted in a change of behavior.

"But what think ye? A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not, but afterward he repented and went." (Matthew 21:28,29). This tells us what repentance is.

Led To Repentance

The Bible teaches that a person is led to repentance two ways. These ways are not one apart from the other but both working together. One way is by preaching the terror of the Lord. Did not Christ warn of the coming judgment and condemnation of those who refused to repent, as quoted earlier from Matthew 11:20-24? Did not Jonah provoke the people of Nineveh to repent by warning them of destruction that would befall them because of their wickedness (Jonah 3:4,5)? Paul wrote, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences."* (Second Corinthians 5:10,11). Is the warning of punishment really calculated to produce repentance? Just seriously consider the question yourself. Consider what it means to be lost, doomed, damned, heading for an eternal torment of hell from which there is no escape unless you now repent? When you read of the wrath of a just God against the wickedness that defiles His holiness, and His hatred of sin, can you be content to continue in the ways that show your contempt

and distrust of the very God that made you, sustains you, and shall judge you? Surely, the warnings of hell are warnings of love intended to lead people to repent.

Goodness Of God

The other way men are led to repent is by preaching the goodness of God. *"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."* (Romans 2:4). Consider the beauty of the world in which we live and the manifold provisions of it. Look at the operation of nature that God has set in order. Think not only of the physical blessings, but the spiritual blessings He provides through the giving and sacrificing of His only begotten Son. Has there ever been a more meaningful demonstration of love, mercy, grace and compassion to a more undeserving horde of violators than that which God has demonstrated toward sinful man? Let your mind dwell on the promised glories of heaven offered to the faithful. Does this not bend your will and your heart to turn, to change your mind, to reform your life as a result? *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8). What greater love could one show than that which God has shown? *"We love him because he first loved us.."* (First John 4:19). This leads us to repentance.

Barrier To Heaven

Let us be convinced, however, that the rejection of the command to repent will bar us from heaven, keep us from the fellowship with Deity, prevent the forgiveness of our sins, and cause our eternal sorrow in hell. Repentance is indispensable to our spiritual well-being. *"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted* (turn again, ASV) *and I should heal them."* (Matthew 13:15).

The stubborn, rebellious and unyielding human heart must repent if ever the joys of the Lord are to be ours to enjoy. *"Except ys repent... ye... shall perish."* (Luke 13:3).

It is noteworthy how God has included repentance in His plan to save the sinner who has never come to Christ as well as

including it in His plan to restore the fallen Christian. The first plan demands faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism. The second includes repentance, confession of sins, and prayer. Both include repentance.

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Nathan Rebukes David

Second Samuel 12:1-15, "*And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; and it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.*"

"*And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul. And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah, and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.*"

"*Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy*

neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die. And Nathan departed unto his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick."

Love And Courage

Although it may not at first be so considered, this story is one of great love and courage. David generally is considered as a wonderful person, one that feared God, loved because of the Psalms, and the man after God's own heart. Yet, just preceding our Scripture there was a very dark chapter in David's life. He committed adultery with Bathsheba who was later found to be with child by David. David brought her husband home from battle in order to remove suspicion from himself as the father. When Uriah refused to go to his wife David got Uriah drunk, but that did not work. Then David conspired with Joab to have Uriah placed in the heat of battle without proper support so that the enemy might kill him. Once Uriah was dead David took Bathsheba for his wife. He went to great lengths to cover his sin. Surely, if a man usually good like David could and would do such a dastardly deed it is not too surprising that those sometimes considered good might also get involved in sin even yet. Such too often is a reality among even brethren.

God sent Nathan, His prophet, to David. Nathan had been a friend and associate of David for a long time. He had advised him on building a temple to God, and had faithfully performed in loyal service to David. Nathan told David the story we read in the text. Whether this actually happened or whether the story was framed for this incident to convict David of sin we cannot know. But such a story would appeal to David's sense of justice, if a sense of justice remained with him. We will not recount the story but urge each one to be sure to be familiar with it.

The question that had to be answered was whether David would properly respond to the story or not. Would David see the injustice, lack of consideration and compassion, the lack of pity displayed? Did David think fairness and honesty were still

righteous virtues? What would be his attitude toward one who sorely mistreated another?

Anger

David's anger was greatly kindled. The sin of the rich man appeared big, ugly and sinister. As yet he did not realize how the story fitted his own behavior. Is it not strange how we are so able to see how evil the actions of others are, or seem to be, but cannot see the same thing in ourselves? How often even brethren turn in revenge toward a brother with vicious accusations, not realizing that they stand guilty of the very things of which they accuse another! Although their sins were not identical, in principle they were the same or similar. If anything, David's sin was far worse than the rich man's sin because one involved animals while the other involved people.

Certainly David's reaction was that for which Nathan hoped. Had David heard the story and reacted indifferently, nothing could be accomplished in bringing David to his sense and repentance. When a person does not care about the difference between right and wrong there is little to nothing anyone can do to bring him to repentance.

David demanded the man restore the lamb fourfold. In fact, he was so outraged that he thought the man actually deserved death. What seemed to have incensed David the most was that the rich man *"had not pity."* If there had been pity and compassion such a thing could never have occured. Truly David was seized by the attitude of righteous indignation against this rich man. He still retained a keen awareness and concern for right versus wrong, recognizing injustice when committed. He called for justified punishment.

Guilty

Then comes the thrilling part of this record. Nathan turned to David and accused him of being that very man. David had already condemned the evil deed and the guilty party. Nathan simply pointed out how David fitted the circumstances. Nathan showed great love for David by telling him, in essence, "David, you have sinned and are going to hell if you do not repent." Some people might not consider this as love, but what greater thing could Nathan have done at this moment than to bring David's sin to his attention and warn of the necessity of

correcting his wrongs he had committed?

Do we not also see the great courage of this prophet? What if David had taken another reaction to the story? What if he had flown into an angry rage once he was himself accused? David had the power to have Nathan killed if he so chose. Nathan did not know what the outcome would be when he went to David with this mission. Nathan risked his life to do his duty before God and on the behalf of the welfare of David.

Nathan further shamed David reminding him how God had already given him everything anyone could ever want and would have given him more if he desired. David had not been thankful enough for the blessings he had already received. There was no way out for David. His guilt was obvious, his sin was known, and the condemnations of it were those of his own verdict. Nathan showed David how David had despised the Word of the Lord and had done so very convincingly, pointedly, firmly, without hestitation, but kindly! What a courageous and loving deed Nathan did that day!

One lesson we must learn that is so overwhelmingly significant is that Nathan told David that David had despised the will of God by being disobedient to the will of God. This is no minor consideration to consider. This point demands we respect the seriousness of obedience. Even though we may not intend to do such a terrible thing as to despise God and His will, this is precisely what Nathan said David did when David was not obedient. His deliberate determination to do what he wished, and follow his own pursuits, showed his contempt for God, at least at that sad and sorry moment of his life.

Confession

It must be said to David's credit that when he was confronted with his sin, having it impressed upon him the enormity of his transgression, he was humble and honest enough to simply respond, *"I have sinned against the Lord."* He confessed his long list of wrongs. He did not grow angry at Nathan who had called them to his attention, as sometimes people do. He did not blame his sin on others, as many are inclined to do when it is evident they have done wrong. Even though he was once capable of adultery, lying, conspiracy, betrayal, murder and an attempted cover-up, he showed evidence now of a man who, down deep in his heart, wanted to do what was right, but had done shamefully. He had sinned grievously, but was penitent.

David emphasized that his sin was against God. He had sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, Joab, the entire nation of Israel, and the child who died. But he recognized that all sin is against God. As he once wrote, Psalm 51:4, *"Against the, thee only have I sinned."* It is a serious matter to consider one sinning against another person. But the seriousness is magnified and compounded when we realize that all sins are directed against God and God holds us accountable.

Because David acknowledged his sin and gave evidence of his regret and sincere penitent attitude, comfort and mercy was extended to him in forgiveness. Had his pride and arrogance been such to prevent his confession and sorrow, can we even suppose he would ever have been forgiven? But by humbling himself, even though a king, he bowed himself before the truth and the God of heaven, he was pardoned. Psalm 31:9, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord,"* was obviously his state of mind.

Consequences

Although he was forgiven, there were certain consequences of his sin that would be suffered. The guilt was removed but calamity would follow in its wake nonetheless. We can be forgiven, but it is not uncommon that the fruits of our violations of God's will will still produce hurt and harm for us. The child would die. The sword would never leave David. What may have been as difficult for David as anything else was that there would come constant rebellion and heartache. As one continues to read David's life he discovers the many instances where his own flesh and blood brought him to despair time and time again. Did he not suffer much from his sons Adonijah and Absalom? Surely, we reap what we sow!

We, like David, although trying for the most part to do right, may sin, doing much additional wrong in trying to cover our sins the wrong way. There is a right way to cover sins and that is by having them forgiven.

When sin is covered by being washed away by the blood of Christ when we obey Him in baptism, sin is covered completely and forever. For this reason we must come to Christ in obedience to the gospel that our sins, *"though they be red like crimson,"* can be removed and we can stand pure and clean before God. This necessity rests upon us all.

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Sufficiency And Power Of God's Word

The larger portion of the world does not have real respect for the Bible. Rather, many have adopted philosophies, theories and man-made ideas as their religious base. They have no place for the Scriptures. Often people are taught that the Bible is untrue and not from God, even casting doubt on the existence of God.

These realities disturb us, although we are neither surprised nor overly alarmed since this has been the reaction of mankind toward God since the Garden of Eden. That the Bible is a divine revelation can be proven through investigation of information called Christian evidences. Once proven to be what it claims for itself, we ought to believe the Bible.

Ironically, some say they believe the Bible to be from God, but contend it is an insufficient guide and reference for modern man. Even religious leaders have sung this chorus. One way or another many are saying the Bible is a dead letter, possibly of some benefit for those of the past, but unworkable and impractical for our age. Through the years men have devised creeds, catechisms, manuals, and all sorts of religious "authorities" to replace or improve the Bible. Claiming the Bible is old fashioned and out of date, some constantly inject into religious life their new doctrines and ideas, some intending to supplant the Bible and others intending to complement it.

The Biblical Claim

Second Timothy 3:16,17 tells us the Scriptural claim for itself. *"All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect; throughly furnished unto all good works."* This is a claim of inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, authoritativeness and all-sufficiency. Therefore, the Scriptures are either sufficient for mankind today or this claim renders anything it teaches unreliable. Regardless of who or what religious group it may be, if they are not content with God's Word alone, without the creeds, disciplines, rulebooks, manuals, confessionals, latter-day revelations, etc., it is

intellectually impossible for them to consistently claim to believe the Bible. The Bible alone must be the guide because it forbids any addition or subtraction.

This matter is serious because contentions that the Bible is insufficient for our time causes a disregard of it and study of it is neglected. People will turn to search for truth elsewhere. Following other standards has caused division among professed believers in Christ. All of this leads to people living and dying in sin, ignorant of the truth and the only way of salvation.

All-sufficient

Is there any defect, weakness or inadequacy in the Word of God to accomplish what He wants His Word to accomplish? Consider the account of the creation in Genesis. Genesis 1:3, *"And God said, let there be light."* We are told, *"And there was light."* Genesis 1:9, *"And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place and let the dry land appear."* Again, *"And it was so."*

Genesis 1:11, *"And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herd yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth; and it was so."* So it goes through the record of the creation. God spoke His Word, and just as He expressed, all things were done. The Word was adequate to accomplish what God wanted. Psalm 33:9, *"For he spake and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast."* Psalm 33:6, *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made and all the host of them, by the breath of his mouth."* This does not give the appearance of insufficiency of the Word.

God warned He would bring the flood upon the earth and destroy sinful mankind (Genesis 7:14). Through Noah He warned and called people to repentance, but man regarded not His Word. But all that God expressed regarding the flood and man's destruction was accomplished. Only Noah and his family lived because, having been told what to do, they believed and obeyed the Word of God. Again, does not this proclaim the sufficiency of the Word to accomplish God's purposes?

By the Word of God John the Baptist made ready the way of Christ. John 1:6, *"There was a man sent from God and his name was John."* John preached the glad tidings of a coming Savior. Luke 1:16, *"And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God."* God's Word that was preached by John was sufficient to prepare the godly women to share in the

great work of the Christ. God's Word, through John, was sufficient to prepare men to be called by Christ and be His apostles, earthen vessels, ambassadors. God's Word was so powerful that they were ready to be fellow workers with Christ in presenting the scheme of redemption. Again, we can proclaim with confidence that God's Word was and is sufficient to do the work that God intends it to do.

Power To Resist

When Jesus was on earth He was shrewdly tempted by Satan, as recorded in Matthew 4. Knowing the humanity of Jesus and being aware of human frailty and vulnerability, Satan repeatedly appealed to Jesus to conform to Satan's will. Through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, Satan tempted Christ in all points as we are tempted. But He remained sinless (Hebrews 4:15).

What did Jesus use to fend off Satan's darts? Matthew 4:1-11 teaches that He utilized the Word of God time after time. It was sufficient to defeat the devil's purposes until Satan saw the futility of continuing because of the determination of Jesus to stay with the powerful Word.

We want to be saved from the wages of sin. God wants us to be saved. He has revealed the way of salvation in His Word that is sufficient to save us. It reveals all mankind needs to know and must know and do to be saved. There is no other source to which we can turn.

James 1:21, "*...receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*" Romans 1:16, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation...*" Other passages to consider to document this conclusion are Mark 16:15,16; John 6:63; First Timothy 4:16; Second Timothy 4:1,2; Matthew 7:24,25; Luke 8:11; First Peter 1:22,23, and many others. Do you still think the Word is insufficient to save even though God in His Word declares its power and sufficiency over and over again?

Isaiah 55:10,11, "*For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to be eater, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.*" No statement could declare the

sufficiency and power of the Word any more forcefully and with greater certainty that what Isaiah wrote.

Even though many are not aware of it, or they possibly simply reject it, when it comes to the Bible, it is not a question at all whether it is sufficient if one accepts Biblical teaching. It is. God said so. Nothing else is needed; nothing more is allowed; nothing less is adequate.

Question Of Faith

The question is not one of power or sufficiency but whether one accepts and believes God's Word as God has revealed it. When a person does not accept that truth it makes a tremendous difference in his life and his eternity. Rejection means he will live and die in sin, in a spiritual state of condemnation, forever lost.

On the other hand, upon belief and obedience to the sufficient and powerful Word one is brought to Christ and enjoys the salvation the Word is capable of providing because it reveals the Savior and His way of salvation. When people of the past heard the Word, believed it and obeyed it they were baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, being then added to that company of the saved the Bible calls the church (Acts 2:41,47).

Why should we not say, as did the godly Joshua of old, *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* Take God's Word which will afford the abundant life here in this life in fellowship with Deity and lead us into the eternal bliss of heaven after this life is finished.

† † † † †

Something We Did Not Do

The parable of the talents has several lessons for us. But one we must observe is how the servant to whom one talent was given was condemned, not because of something evil that he did, but because of his failure to attempt to do anything. To simply hide and bury your talents is to bring condemnation as well as committing what is wicked. As we have opportunity, we should do good. To know to do good and not do it is also counted as sin (James 4:17). This could prove to be the downfall of many of us. Such truth ought motivate us to get busy and stay busy doing the work of the Lord.

Our Besetting Sin

Hebrews 12:1-3, *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith: who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."*

This passage follows chapter eleven where was paraded before us the lives and actions of men and women of the Old Testament to whom the Lord points as examples of faithful people. Consider them. There is Abel who offered an acceptable sacrifice to God by faith (verse 4). Noah, being warned of God of the coming flood, believed God and built the ark to the saving of his house (verse 7). Abraham, the father of the faithful, by faith left his home, sojourned to a distant land, even offered his son Isaac, always trusting God (verses 8,17). Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, David, Samuel, Sarah and Rahab are mentioned. The writer said that time would fail before he could name all who subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, waxed mightily against the forces of evil, suffered persecution, were martyred, all because of their unswerving and stedfast faith in God. One could find it difficult to assemble a more glorious host of faithful servants of God than those named in Hebrews 11.

Call To Faithfufulness

Opening chapter twelve, the writer, probably Paul, noting these brilliant examples and evidences of faith, urged that his brethren be like them and run the race before them as faithfully as they of yesteryear.

Life and service to God as a Christian is presented as a race to be run. Other times we have it as a fight to be fought, a work to be accomplished, a journey to take. To run this race successfully we must lay aside whatever may be a hindrance to us. *"Lay aside every weight."* (Verse 1). No runner wins the race when he is encumbered with extra weights about his legs and ankles.

Such must be discarded.

Dump The Cargo

In October 1957, the *Saturday Evening Post* told the story of Air Force Major Samuel Tyson and his harrowing experience over the Pacific Ocean. He was flying a Strato-crusier from Travis Air Force Base in California to Honolulu, Hawaii. The engines developed trouble and one propeller was cast off, wrecking a second engine, leaving the plane with the two engines on the left side. The accident had cost them some fuel so it was necessary to run the remaining engines at the greatest efficiency possible. It became apparent that the safe altitude could not be maintained with the weight the plane was carrying. Then came the order to dump the cargo, including luggage, mail bags, every non-essential piece of equipment. All were jettisoned from the plane. This proved to be enough, and after six and one half hours they landed safely in Hawaii.

Those that made that eventful trip arrived safely in Hawaii even though they all had lost some things valuable to them. But to a man, all thought losing whatever had to be lost was worth being alive and not crashing into the sea.

Spiritually speaking, we have to dump the cargo of sinful things, all excessive weights that we cannot successfully carry through life and still have eternal life when this life is over. Some have difficulty doing this. But we must plead with us all that whatever may be required of us we must do it. Not only the sinful pleasures of this world, the satisfaction of the flesh, but even things that are not evil in themselves must be set aside when they hinder us from faithfully serving God. This might require a change of jobs, severance from friends and associates, or anything and everything else that stands between us and faithfulness. All such things are too heavy for us to carry through life and still win the prize and wear the crown.

The Besetting Sin

Paul writes of *"the sin which doth so easily beset us."* The word *"beset"* is found only once in Scripture, here in Hebrews 12:1. *"Beset"* means to surround, press hard on all sides, harass and perplex. It is certain, especially in the context of the book of Hebrews, that the sin Paul has in mind primarily is the sin of apostasy, falling from the faith. One of the major themes

of Hebrews is the necessity to remain faithful to the faith of Christ. All manner of hardships were being imposed on Christians, especially those who had come from the ranks of the Jews. They were being pressured to give up the way of Christ and return to Judaism. Throughout the thirteen chapters of the book are warnings against falling away and the consequences of apostasy. We find repeated exhortations to faithfulness, the virtue of faithfulness, even in the face of temptations to give up, quit, and surrender the fight. This temptation was pressing them from every side. It would have been far easier to cease the battle and "go along" with the pressures.

It is no different now than then as far as temptations to leave the faith. We live in a world where there seems to be an ever-increasing number of distractions trying to destroy our faith. While we all may have one or more sins which tempt us more severely than others, the sin we are constantly tempted to commit is to bow to that which would lead us from the Savior.

Different Sins

Sins attractive to one person may not be so attractive to another. One may be tempted to be greedy while another is tempted with prestige, popularity, power and fame and will do whatever gains this for them. Some may feel the tug of the lust of the flesh, or strong drink, while others may be tempted to curse, be dishonest or something else. Many are bombarded with the temptation to be negligent, indifferent, have an unforgiving spirit or a desire for vengeance. From selfishness to stinginess, from an angry and uncontrolled temper to a lack of gratitude, there are innumerable variations of worldliness and conduct that is unbecoming to a follower of Christ with sins of the heart as well as the body.

My sin may be being unjustly critical while you may be full of egotism and pride. Could gossip, prejudice, bigotry, or just plain failure to put Christ first in all matters be our sin to which we so easily submit? I mention these sins, not because they are worse than others, but to provoke thought within us regarding what besets each of us. The influence of our besetting sins is destructive to ourselves and those around us. We need to lay them aside whatever they be.

Years ago, when sailing ships were the pride of oceans, one ship thought to have found good wind and travelled a long distance. But at the next reading and observation, because of an

undetected undercurrent, distance had actually been lost during the day. So it can be in our voyage in life on our way to heaven. Man's course may appear right, progressive and good, but the undercurrent of his besetting sins may be driving him contrary to the direction he wishes to go.

Lay It Aside

As Christians we must lay aside these weights and these sins that surround us and press hard upon us. We cannot run the righteous race and see God if we continue to indulge ourselves in sinful ways that relegate God and His will to second place in life. Rather, we must look unto Jesus, the author, finisher or perfector of our faith, and follow His guidance and direction.

Let us be reminded of the endurance of Christ on the cross and how this was done on our behalf. He also conquered death and the powers that would destroy us. He offers salvation to those that come to Him. But we must come. If we do not we shall not win the race nor wear the crown.

This Biblical lesson is one that should provoke within each of us a period of self-examination, to discover and take note of those sins that are so attractive to us, sins into which we seemingly fall with such ease. We must learn to discipline ourselves according to His will in order to overcome temptation and not sin rather than be overcome by sin. James 4:7, *"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* This is a notable and deserving admonition in view of our besetting sins.

† † † † †

Are There Christians In All Denominations?

Is it really true, as some contend, that there are Christians in all denominations? The Bible teaches us about Christians. But there is not a word about denominations. They exist without any authority from God whatsoever. Those who obey the gospel are not added to some denomination.

There is only the one church and it is not a denomination. Christians make us the church. The only way anybody that ever became a Christian could be in a denomination is to forsake the Lord's church and join himself to something that has no relationship with Christ. There are no faithful Christians in human denominations. The two are incompatible.

Perverting Romans 14

Romans 14 has been used, or rather abused, by some to make it appear that God will accept error and that we should have fellowship with those in error. The chapter speaks of the weaker and stronger brethren and how we should have forbearance one for the other. But the passage is not discussing doctrinal differences, but differences over matters that are nothing more than matters of human opinion.

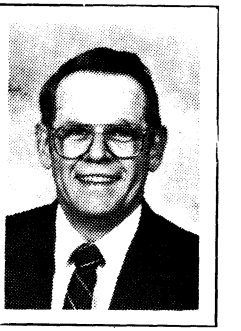
We are to be charitable toward each other in matters that really do not matter, such as whether to eat meat or not. One commits no wrong whether he eats or refuses to eat, so long as he does not violate his own convictions or conscience. But contending that we be forbearing over such things is a far cry from saying, as some do, "doctrinal differences make no difference." More recently we hear and read how some are saying the use of the mechanical instrument of music falls into the same category as the subject under consideration in Romans 14. This is as false as a three dollar bill.

How we are to worship God is not a matter of indifference or human opinion. We are to worship in truth, and that requires that we do what is according to revealed truth. Without the authority of God for what we do we are acting presumptiously and of our own authority. We have no more right introduce another kind of music into the worship offered by Christians than we have to introduce some other kind of ingredients for the Lord's Supper. God has told us what to do and when we act by the Lord's authority we will do that and be content with it.

Those who teach and practie false doctrines must be taught and their errors must be corrected if fellowship is to be maintained. Those who may hold some matter of human opinion different from us are permitted to do that as much as we are permitted to hold our opinion, but never to dividing the body of Christ over such things.

To abuse Romans 14 to suggest we have justification for ignoring the differences over music in worship is, as one very properly explained, is like mixing apples and hammers. They are not of the same category. We have no right to judge or condemn another in matters of opinion, but in those things where God has spoken we have no right to add to nor take from what He has declared. When we all learn this fundamental truth and abide in it we shall no longer hear the clamoring for "unity in diversity" in matters of "thus saith the Lord."

Are "Good Works" A Blank Check?



JAMES W. BOYD

It will not be argued but all agree Christians are to be doers of good works. On this matter the Scripture is replete. Scripture furnishes us unto all good works. But are we authorized to involve the Lord's church in whatever work somebody calls good? Do we not still have to have authority for what we do? We surely do.

Schools operated by our brethren have done much good, especially before liberalism invaded so many of them. There are still advantages in what are called "Christian schools." Because of these benefits some get carried away and advocate the church assume the work of financially supporting these schools. But their mistake is that the church is nowhere, ever, taught to be responsible for teaching mathematics, science, basketball or home economics. Such is simply not the work that the church has authority to do. That belongs to the home.

It is most unfortunate that some seem to think the Lord died for the church so the church could finance their school. Many are radically demanding the church support such work from its treasury. Some do it. But nobody does it with authority and approval of God's Word.

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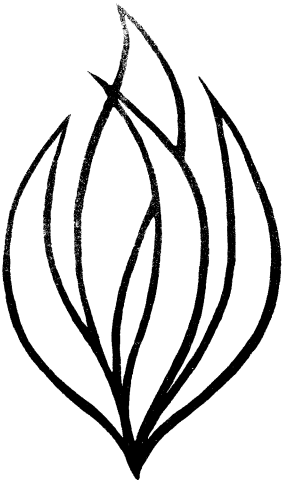

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VIII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 5**

We Have A Mission In Life

God made several great and wonderful promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). He would be the father of a great nation. His descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens and the sands of the sea. Those that blessed him would be blessed and those that cursed him would be cursed. His people would have a land for their homeland. Then the greatest of all the promises was that through his seed would all the familes of the earth be blessed. Paul identifies that seed as Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). It is because of God's use of Israel in bringing the Savior to the world that the history of ancient Israel is important to us.

During Israel's history there were time they prospered and times when they were in adversity, even captivity. After leaving Egypt, wandering in the wilderness, taking Canaan, being ruled by judges, the people asked for and God reluctantly allowed them to have a kingdom. For over one hundred twenty years the kingdom was united. But it then divided into two nations, Israel on the north and Judah on the south. Northern Israel was eventually taken into Assyrian captivity from which they, as a nation, never returned. Judah was later taken into Babylonian captivity for seventy years. After Babylon was overthrown by Persia, the Persians allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and the captivity was over.

While under the Persian rule the Jews narrowly escaped being exterminated at the command of the Persian king. That which prevented it was the brave and noble action taken by a young Jewish woman who was made to realize that she had a mission in life. She was persuaded that the things that had happened unto her earlier in life was to prepare her for service to God and her people. Through her the people were spared. You may have already identified Esther as the one of whom we speak.

Meet Esther

The account begins when the Persian king, Ahasuerus, deposed his queen Vashti because she refused to display her physical beauty before the lustful and drunken princes at a celebration of the king. As punishment she was removed from being queen. In her place came Esther, selected by the king to

be his new queen after an involved selection process. Esther was a Jewess, although the king knew it not. She was an orphan, having been reared by her godly cousin, Mordecai. Under his guidance she obviously learned to fear God and have respect and love for her people and their place in God's plan. During her youth Mordecai supplied her with a resevoir of good things from which she could and did draw later in her life.

Mordecai came under the intense hatred of a high official in the Persian court named Haman because Mordecai would not bow down before Haman when Haman rode through the streets. Haman, in order to get revenge against this solitary Jew, devised a plot that would annihilate all the Jews, and dispose of Mordecai. He concocted certain accusations against the Jews that were not true, such as how the Jews refused to obey the voice of the king. Haman asked the king for money and permission to carry out a widespread slaughter against the Jews. A decree was sent forth throughout the land that on a given day all citizens were to rise up against the Jews and slay them until they were no more. Neither Haman nor the king realized that Esther was a Jewess, nor that Mordecai was a cousin to her.

Mordecai's Grief

Upon hearing the decree, Mordecai was stricken with grief. *"When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes and went out into the midst of the city and cried with a loud and a bitter cry. And came even before the king's gate, for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province whitersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting and weeping and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes."* (Esther 4:1-3).

News reached Esther of the sorrow among the Jews and particularly of Mordecai. She sent messengers to learn of the trouble and was informed of the impending destruction. Mordecai urged Esther to go before the king and make supplication on behalf of the Jews. Esther responded, *"All the kings servants and the people of the king's provinces do know, that whomsoever, whether man or woman shall come unto the king in the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre that he may live; but I have not been*

called to come in unto the king these thirty days." (Esther 4:11). In other words, for her to approach the king would be risking her life. Mordecai sent word, *"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:13,14). To paraphrase, Mordecai was telling Esther there was a time to speak. This was the time. Risk or no risk, the need was there and action must be taken. Mordecai was confident that God would preserve His people and keep His promises to Abraham because he said enlargement and deliverance would come from some other source if Esther neglected the matter. But she and her kindred would be destroyed. God wanted to use her. She had an opportunity to render service to God and her people. She needed to be convinced that she had been allowed to be where she was in order to be used for good purposes. She had a duty and she was in place to perform that duty. She had been brought to her station for just that reason. Now, would she fulfill her role or would she falter?

Sense Of Duty

Esther was obviously convinced of her responsibilities. She went before the king and was received. She invited him to a banquet, and then to a second banquet to which Haman was also invited. At this second banquet she exposed Haman's plot against the Jews and how she was also a Jewess. She asked that her people be spared. In the end, the king, though unable to rescind his decree, did allow the Jews to protect themselves to the extent that the planned extermination was foiled. In fact, Haman was the one who perished.

Her Mission

Esther's purpose for existence was the preservation of Judah. Her entire life was designed to bring about this opportunity for her to render such service. God was overruling in the affairs of men, but doing so through the use of those who would allow themselves to be used for God. Mordecai realized this and made Esther realize that we all have a mission in life. *"Who knoweth*

whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" In the spirit of self-sacrifice, putting the needs of others before her own personal welfare, she obligingly allowed herself to be used for higher purposes. She fulfilled her mission in life.

Surely, we all must be impressed with the fact that we live in momentous and important times. They are even tumultous. The world is moving swiftly and is restless, disturbed with wars, riots, crime and corruption. One has described the world with the one word, nervous. Everything once thought nailed down is being pulled up and broken. The pace of living is so rapid and complex that people generally are in a state of fear, confusion, frustration and anxiety. We may long for more tranquil times, but who but knows that we have come to this time for use in God's service at just such a perilous period.

Life Matters

Every period of one's life is important whether in the days of youth, in the strength of manhood, or the maturity of later years. All are important. All offer opportunities and responsibilities that cannot be accomplished at other times. Much is to be done in every stage of existence of a human being. Some may bemoan, "If I were younger, or older, or this or that." But there are missions and purposes in life regardless of age, circumstance or situation of life. Let us be impressed as was Esther that we all have a mission in life. We have a charge to keep. We have a responsibility to perform. We may not always know and understand fully about it. But real noble men and women go about their tasks of duty without fanfare and noteriety, often with praise or recognition, but doing as God would have them do nonetheless. Each has a contribution to make, an example to set, a role to play that nobody else on earth can fill. Each has an objective and goal to reach, a challenge to meet, a problem to solve, a blessing to be and enjoy.

Yes, we live in a time when God is ridiculed. His word is set aside for human reasoning and worldly wisdom. Christ is ignored and His will dismissed. Passion is exploited, morals are collapsing, wars, threats and anti-Christ doctrines abound. Such has become a large part of daily existence. Sin runs rampant through society and evil seems to prosper. We may long for the "good old days" when such did not seem so open and obvious. But we live now, in the midst of all the havoc of a sinful world. God needs people to keep the flame of truth burning brightly.

We just may have been privileged to live in such a time as this and to serve as our purpose in life.

For Such A Time

We live in a time to serve, when opportunity knocks so often and loudly. There is the need for godly people to stand for what is right. Righteous living is a real challenge in our time. There must be examples of life the way God wants it lived. Every hand must be given to the task for the promotion of the good, especially in the face of the floods and otrrents of evil that are sweeping so many away in the tide of torment. We do not live yesterday, and may not live tomorrow. We live NOW, and we must act Now and be glad we can serve God NOW. The faith, the truth, our blessed children, must be preserved and shown the way of true life. Our freedoms in Christ are too precious to allow them to be swept away without doing all, risking all, for their protection and preservation. *"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

In my lifetime the church has suffered from the battering of atheism, denominationalism, humanism, worldliness, division, liberalism, human legalism and other digressions. The church, even at the hour of this writing, is suffering from a lack of commitment to the truth by many who claim to be members. We stagger in bewilderment at what has invaded the hearts and lives of brethren in their imitation of error. But who knoweth whether we are come to the kingdom for just such a time in order to preserve a remnant and keep the truth alive in the world. The devil has his henchmen all around, and God must have His soldiers to fight the good fight of faith. Yes, we have a mission in life.

Just One Person

We must be alert to the dangers and opportunities. Esther was just one person, but she was one who did what she could. I am but one, and you are but one. But, like Esther, we must realize we have a mission in life. We must preserve, protect, defend and proclaim the truth of God to the world with vigor, vitality, militance, with conviction and dedication. As surely as God could and did use Esther and spared the Jews, He can, through us, accomplish what is needful in our own day. It may well be that we personally will not prosper, but what of that? Woodrow

Wilson once said, "I had rather suffer defeat in a cause that will eventually be victorious, than enjoy victory in a cause that shall eventually suffer defeat."

But the inspired Paul said it better and gives us more confidence when he wrote, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18).

It is our life's duty and privilege to "*fear God and keep his commandments.*" In this way we shall recognize and fulfill our mission in life.

† † † † †

The Sting Of The Adder

The fact that most people in the world do not accept something to be true is not evidence that it is not true. Truth is not determined by counting noses nor is it altered by what either a majority or a minority may think about it.

Proverbs 20:1, *"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."* Proverbs 31:4, *"It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted."* Romans 13:13, *"Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying."* Galatians 5:19-21, *"Now the works of the flesh are these; ...drunkenness, revellings, and such like..."* Proverbs 23:31,32, *"Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpant, and stingeth like an adder."*

Proverbs 6:27, *"Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?"* Neither can a person, community or nation accept the destruction of its moral foundations and please God or continue to be blessed. Because of this truth God's people face a tremendous problem and a gigantic task. The evils brought upon mankind by the consumption of alcoholic beverages are so numerous and hideous that only a mention of them is sufficient to those who are abreast of the conditions in

our land. No honest person can deny the destruction of drinking strong drink. To contend otherwise is to betray either ignorance, dishonesty or unreasonable naivte.

You shall not be bored with the staggering statistics of the millions of gallons of alcoholic beverages being consumed, the dollars wasted in the cleaning up of the havoc caused, the divorces, ruined lives, crime, twisted minds and bodies, accidents, deaths, hate, immoralities, etc. that flow from alcoholic beverage consumption. These statistics change from year to year, usually for the worse, and the story is always the same; namely, that there are few sources of human misery that surpass the drinking of strong drink. One can tally the gallons consumed, but can he know the gallons of tears shed, the hours of black despair, the hungry and ill-clothed children that cry in the night from fear and neglect, the pain, misery and lack of love because of people who drink alcohol? How many hours of suffering can be recorded on the cold statistical charts that report the ravages of this plague?

If you be one who considers drinking, even socially, to be acceptable, or that there is anything decent and honorable about it, then let me invite you to the wards of the mental hospitals loaded with alcoholics, everyone a patient because they started their downfall with a drink. Talk with those behind bars because of crimes committed under its influence. Read their letters and learn what a "blessing" to mankind drinking has been. Go visit the taverns and see the youth being depraved. Try to comfort the family of a husband and father upon whom they lean for support, but who is often too drunk to provide. Observe the occupants of skid row where so many have drifted, wasting their abilities and talents and sinking ever lower to their graves because they thought drinking would not be so bad. Rush to the hospital in the dead of winter's night and view the mangled and bleeding bodies being brought in, even of innocent people, whose injuries have been inflicted by those who think it is all right to drink. After doing these things, see if you can lift your glass and your voice in praise of the stuporous beverages as if nothing is evil about them. If you can still think well of it, then you can be sure that your own heart is so sordid and full of contempt for truth and right that there are no words capable of defining adequately your own degeneracy.

Not Just Records

The next time you see a chart denoting the tragic results of drinking alcoholic beverages, do not just consider it a record of so many numbers and events. Think of it as it is, each number representing a person, a soul, a body, a life. Rather than a simple statistic, think of the flop houses and gutters where many drunkards seek shelter. Consider the unmarried mothers who lost their virtue and sold their souls because of drinking. Remember the wineoes and bums in the bread and soup lines, now so deranged mentally and physically that they cannot provide for themselves. Do not forget the ragged, cold, dirty and uncared for children in the dark, damp and musty hovels they call homes, lacking food, suffering abuse, because of those who are supposed to care for them are among the drinkers of America.

As you view these statistics and your mind's eye sees the indecencies wrought by this social cancer, then see if you can smile at the next comic portrayal of a drunk. See if the next truck taking alcoholic beverages is just another delivery truck. See if you think the corner liquor store is just another market. See if the attractive ads over television are really that attractive. They tell lies about drinking, not the truth. There is no greater fraud and lie being put before the public than the message of the beer and liquor people.

Those Who Promote It

Such people have no conscience and would do anything for material gain. They may be prominent, even popular, but they are the devil's scum. You may condemn prohibition if you wish, but you do so ignorantly, not realizing the cost in human misery the repeal of prohibition has caused this nation. Crime was less; divorces fewer. All the hardships imposed by alcoholic beverages were less. Legalizing the beverage of strong drink has the approval only of those who either do not care about mankind, have no regard for the will of God, seek personal political power, or financial gain. All who endorse it in any fashion are wicked servants of Satan and they shall never shake that distinction until they repent and reform.

Someone must fight this blight. But who will it be? Civil leaders will not. They usually drink too much themselves, as well as wanting the votes of those who drink. Advertisers will not because they love the money that vile industry pays them. The same goes for the producers and distributors of it. Religious

leaders are often timid about it because too many of their parishoners consume it and they dare not antagonize those who pay their salaries. The war is left for the true, New Testament Christian to fight. By this I do not include these socializing, half-hearted, two-faced hypocritical church members who talk one way and drink and act another because they lack conviction to stand for the truth. Only people who love God and mankind, who respect the values of morality, who hold in reverence the Word of God will and can wage the warfare.

What Can Be Done?

What can a person do about this malady among us? It seems the task is overwhelming and daily the forces of righteousness appear to be losing ground in this conflict. But we must determine that God and one person can make a difference, produce even a righteous majority, and be on with the fight. Resolve that never, under any circumstance, will you be a party to its consumption. Resolve that your home will never be contaminated with it, even by having it on the premises. Let your young know the evil of it. You cannot hide them from the fact that it flows like water after a hard rain, but you can by word and deed show them the difference between serving Satan and glorifying God.

You can educate yourself and others about the results of its consumption. It is America's number one drug problem. Over half of those killed on highways are the victims of drinking alcohol, either themselves or some other. It would be bad enough if only the drinker tore his body apart, destroyed his property, and damned his soul. But so many innocent ones suffer because of his travesty. Even though society generally has morally decayed to the place that one cannot turn around without the destructive dragon being thrown at you, you can be a soldier of God and let all around you know the lies of that industry. The bottom line is that you can show respect for the Word of God and never give drinking alcoholic beverages any nod of respectability.

Sympathy For Victims

You can have pity on those burdened with alcoholism. One can be so addicted that he is diseased with it. If alcoholism is only a disease like other diseases it is the only one we advertise

its cause in order to promote it, make money producing it, taxing it, laughing at it, and simply considering it a social maladjustment. Actually, it is a self-imposed disease resulting from sin. Alcoholics need care, love and understanding, but not approval of their drinking. They need to know the error of their way. While showing concern and care, we must also be concerned for those elements that brought them to such a state. One of our prime targets must be the beverage itself. Without drinking they would never have become alcoholics.

The deception that alcoholic beverages are legalized in order to control them is a lie that flows from the mouth of liars. The promoters of the beverage ever seek more and more outlets, greater consumption, larger sales, regardless of the ever expanding destruction resulting from their product. Control has never been the real goal. Gain is their god and goal and this is that for which they care and nothing else.

Woe To Many

Woe to that man, woman, boy, girl, business, nation, politician, church, club, school or whatever that in any way tends to encourage the consumption of alcoholic beverages that inevitably and inescapably ravage all who use them and those around the users. The spiritual, moral, physical, mental and intellectual decay and rottenness that always follows in its wake makes it impossible to say one good thing about it.

Those who, in any way, take a flippant, lukewarm or indecisive position in this matters live each moment of their lives as compromisers with the devil and are under God's wrath. The production, promotion, sale, consumption or even a passive attitude toward such things is to snarl defiance in the face of God, spit a cynical scoff against humanity, and show one's personal depth of unrighteousness.

The Biblical View

There is not any question or doubt that the Bible shows how God hates drunkenness. Drunkenness is a matter of degree. One does not have to be wallowing under the table, vomiting in the gutter, or even wobbling in the street with a certain legally determined percentage of alcohol in his blood to be drunk before God. God commands abstinence from those things that even appear to be evil. We may expect a pagan, heathen,

barbarian, worldly person, a humanist or modernist to pollute themselves with it, and smear their garbage over the face of the globe. But there is absolutely no excuse or justification for anyone professing to be a follower of Christ having anything to do with it. There is no such thing as a "Christian drinker." When one drinks he is no longer a faithful Christian, but a fallen soul who has ceased to follow Christ. Christians have no part nor lot in such things. Strong drink is their enemy and those that use it are in Satan'a army. not God's.

For one who hopes to live eternally with God in heaven, there is no middle ground regarding it. If you think so, it probably is not the first time you have been deceived and sorely misguided.

Another Side

On the other hand, one who wages battle against this sinister blight does so with the knowledge and assurance that to the extent he opposes the consumption of alcoholic beverages he serves a righteous and noble cause that is harmonious with the God of heaven. The very idea that a child of God could hold any compatible view with alcoholic beverages is abominable in itself. How much havoc and destruction does it take to convince some of unrighteousness? Professing to be a Christian and having kind words for the consumption of alcoholic beverages is the height of hypocrisy.

It has been my experience to know some who have turned from the truth because of drinking church members. Even many of the world, in the denominations, have a greater sense of right and wrong in this matter than to acknowledge any justification for it. When those who are lost, those outside the body of Christ, see those who profess to be among the saved using and condoning drinking, they are turned away from anything and everything the so-called Christian professes. Certainly the hypocrisy of another person will not save anybody. But to the hypocrite we can boldly say, "God's Word being true, you shall never see heaven if you continue the self-imposed damnation on your soul."

That mankind shall ever be rid of this malady of soul, body and mind is very unlikely. Too many prefer serving the devil rather than serving God. But each one of us has the capacity to determine that we will never defile ourselves with such a thing, and never lend even a word or deed of acceptance toward it.

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The Church As A Family And A Bride

As has been stated many times, we learn new things in terms of things already known and understood. The Bible presents the church of Christ to us in terms of other relationships that enables us to grasp the significance of the church, its relationship to Christ, and our relationship to one another. The church is as a kingdom, a building, and a body. In this lesson we shall investigate Scripture that presents the church as the family of God and the bride of Christ.

The Bride

First, consider the church as the bride of Christ. This calls upon our knowledge of the institution of marriage. In Ephesians 5 the apostle illustrated the relationship between Christ and the church as that of husband and wife. Reference to God's people in this way is not the first time the Scriptures have used this illustration. The nation of Israel, God's chosen people in the Old Testament, was also presented as a wife to God (Isaiah 54:5). Fidelity, subjection, love and obedience was expected of Israel unto the Lord. The Lord protected Israel and provided for her as a husband does a wife. Israel in her disobedience is pictured as an unfaithful wife and one who played the harlot. Especially is this the picture in Hosea.

In Matthew 25 and the parable of the ten virgins, the bridegroom that came was Christ. In Matthew 8 the disciples of Jesus were criticized for not fasting, but He pictured Himself as the bridegroom in verses 14, 15. *"Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then they fast."*

John the Baptist, the forerunner and herald of the coming of Christ, also presented Jesus as the bridegroom and he (John) was but the friend of the bridegroom. John 3:28-30, *"Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the*

bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

As A Marriage

In the Roman letter Paul used the marriage relationship to teach that the old law has been taken away and all men are now accountable to God under the law of Christ. Romans 7:1-4, *"Know ye not, brethren, [for I speak to them that know the law,] how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."*

The Jews were formerly "wedded" to the Mosaic Law. But their former husband was dead, since the old law was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way (Colossians 2:14). Now, as Christians, they were "wedded" to another husband. The new husband was the One who was raised from the dead, even Christ. Whereas they were once subject to the Mosaic Law, they now, as Christians, were subject to Christ and such is true with all men. As they were as a "wife" to the Mosaic Law, as Christians they were now a "wife" to Christ.

The most extensive passage of Scripture showing the relationship of Jesus and the church as husband and wife is Ephesians 5:23-33. You are urged to lay aside the lesson for a moment and concentrate on that passage from your Bible.

While the passage teaches many of the duties of husbands to wives and wives to husbands, the primary teaching has to do with the relationship between Christ and the church. By this comparison we can see more clearly our duty to the Lord Jesus, our subjection to Him, and His love and provision for us.

A Family

The second way we can understand the nature of the church, in this lesson, is to see the church as the family of God. There is no tie on earth that binds good people together that is stronger than the tie of kinship. How often do people say, "Blood is thicker than water?" This old adage simply emphasizes the tie of kinship. All kinds of favors and considerations are extended to one another for the simple reason of being kinfolk.

There is a tie that binds that is stronger, closer, more sacred than the tie of physical kinship. This is the spiritual tie that exists among faithful brethren in the Lord. This is because Christians make up the family of God. We are brothers and sisters one to another.

In Matthew 12:46-50 we read, *"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."*

No Disrespect Intended

Jesus was not speaking disparagingly of His fleshly kin nor disowning His physical family. He used this opportunity to teach the stronger kinship, the spiritual kinship, that kinship that comes from doing the will of the Father.

In Ephesians 2:19 Paul speaks of the church, those to whom he had addressed that epistle, as the household of God. First Timothy 3:15 specifically identifies the "*house of God, which is the church of the living God.*" In Galatians 6:10 Paul speaks of doing good unto all men, then adds, *"especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* In each of these passages the spiritual kinship is that of God's children making up His family.

Analogies

As family, God is the Father (Second Thessalonians 1:1). Christ fits into the picture in a very unique fashion. When the church is presented as a body, Christ is the head. When the church is the kingdom, Christ is the King. When the church is a building, He is the builder, the cornerstone, and the foundation

upon which it is built. When the church is taught to be God's family, Christ, the divine Son of God, is as our elder brother. Depending upon which scriptural illustration we are using, Christ assumes different postures and relationships to those who belong to God.

Romans 8:14-17 teaches we are the sons and daughters of God. This was addressed to members of the church. Similarly, Second Corinthians 6:14-18 teaches the same thing. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

As Christ assumes varying postures, so those who are members of the church take on different postures. The church as a kingdom means we are citizens. As a body, we are members of the body. As a building, we are the living stones. As a marriage, we are the bride. As a family, we are the children of God.

Let me speak freely to those of us who are brethren in the Lord. Seeing we are of the same family, children of God, then we are brethren, and that ought to make a difference in our attitudes and actions toward one another. In one sense all the human family is one family and we can rightly speak of the brotherhood of man because we all have descended from the first parents, Adam and Eve. But the brotherhood that exists because of being spiritual children of God surpasses the physical brotherhood.

"Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above." On goes the sentiments of that beautiful hymn that shows the glory of being brethren in the Lord. There should be unity, love, consideration, affection and everyone seeking the other's highest good as we follow the will of the Father.

We Be Brethren

Do you recall the dispute that arose between the herdsmen of Lot and those of Abraham? That dispute potentially was a threat to the relationship of Abraham and his nephew. But Abraham was determined to prevent any severance between them. The reason he gave why there should be no such problem was, *"For we be brethren."* That made a great difference. It still should make a great difference among those who belong to God and consider one another as children of God.

The familyhood of the church is further borne out in the fact that we are born into God's family. By the new birth (John

3:3-5) we enter the kingdom, which is the church, which is the family of God. By that birth in water and the Spirit we become new creatures in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17), being raised from baptism to walk in a newness of life (Romans 6: 3,4), this newness due to the new birth. By this birth we are added to the membership of the church (Acts 2:47), which is the family of God.

From these two illustrations we see our subjection to Deity. As a wife is subject to her husband, so the church is subject to Christ. As a child is subject to his or her parents, so we, as God's children in His family, are subject to Him.

Wedded Or Born

In view of these Biblical truths, we urge one and all to be "wedded" to the Lord by obedience to the gospel. We plead that every reader obey the commands of the gospel and be born again, born of water and the Spirit, born into God's family.

The seriousness and glory of these truths is that those who make up the bride, the church, shall be those that enter heaven. Those who are God's children shall live eternally with Him while those who continue to live as children of the devil shall exist in hell with him in eternity. By faith, repentance, confession of our faith in Christ as God's Son, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins, we obey the gospel that brings us into this favorable and acceptable relationship. Being faithful unto death assures for us the benefits made possible by the grace, love and mercy of God as manifested through His Son, Jesus Christ.

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(from page 23)
expression of love as revealed in these passages, then our cold and caloused heart will be numbered among the lost to suffer the fires of an eternal hell.

"Do you not feel, dear brother, His Spirit now striving within? O why not accept His salvation, and throw off thy burden of sin?" The Spirit, through the Word, is teaching that we may learn and be drawn to God.

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The Church As A Building And A Body

Scripture presents the Lord'a church in a variety of ways. It is often compared with things with which we already have considerable knowledge. This lesson will consider the church in two ways, as a building and as a body.

We have no difficulty understanding what a building is. We know the components of it, the important parts of it, its purposes, and other information. Therefore, let us take our knowledge of buildings and learn how the church is like a building.

Foundation

Matthew 16:16-18, *"And Simon answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* Jesus said He was going to build something. What He would build, therefore, is like a building. That building He built was the church.

First Corinthians 3:11 informs us of the foundation upon which the church is built. *"For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* The truth that Jesus is the Son of God is the *"rock"* upon which the church stands. Anything built by Christ and upon Christ must command the serious consideration of every person who expects to go to heaven by Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22, *"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye are also builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."* This language was sent to the church in Ephesus and once more we see the church presented as a building.

The foundation mentioned here is that of the apostles and prophets. They are considered the foundation only in terms of the message they preached, which was Jesus Christ. Again, the whole existence and support of the church rests on the person, Jesus Christ. For this reason Paul declared, *"We preach Christ."*

Cornerstone

Christ is called the cornerstone. The cornerstone of a building, especially in ancient construction, was the most important stone of the structure because everything was ultimately measured by that stone. In fulfilment of prophecy (Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22), and as Peter wrote, (First Peter 2:6,7), this cornerstone is Christ.

Fitly Framed

Notice this building is *"fitly framed together."* We have seen constructions that were sloppily done, doors sagged, windows were out-of-line, walls that were not straight and floors unlevel. Not so with the Lord's church. Like the temple built by Solomon, every piece fit perfectly with every other piece. So it is in the church when the church is as the Lord designed and erected it to be.

God's Habitation

Like the temple, the church is the habitation of God. This is also taught in First Corinthians 6:19,20.

Turning to First Peter 2:5, we again see the church presented as a building. *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."* These Christians to whom Peter wrote made up a house, a building, a spiritual house. They were the stones, living stones, that composed this house.

Sometimes we hear people say the church is not a building, and in the sense they are speaking, this is correct. The church is not a physical edifice, but it is a spiritual house. This distinction has been made necessary because some have made laws regarding the use of church buildings that God never ordained as His laws. The stones that make up the church are people, living people, saved people.

A Body

The Bible also presents the church as a body, the body of Christ. Ephesians 1:22,23, *"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."*

Ephesians 3:6 called the members of the Ephesian church *"fellow members of the body."* The gospel is for both Jews and Gentiles in one body (Ephesians 2:16).

Like any normal body, there is one head and the head has but only body. The head of the church is Christ (Colossians 1:18), and the church is the body. Ephesians 4:4, *"There is one body..."* What does this do to the doctrine that one church is just as good as another church? Such a doctrine is obviously false because there is but one body, one church, and that church is not composed of denominations, something of which the Scriptures reveal nothing except to condemn the division denominationalism propagates and upon which it feeds. The Bible does not speak of the bodies of Christ but the body of Christ. This harmonizes with what Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 when He said, *"I will build my church."* Church is singular.

Unity

An outstanding significance of the presentation of the church as a body is the necessity of oneness, unity, harmony, and cooperativeness of the members of the body, being of one mind and one judgment. The church as a body pictures for us the relationship we have to one another as well as to Christ, the head. It presents the duties we have to Christ and one another in operating as a body. First Corinthians 12:12-27 is an extensive passage denoting the one church being composed of many members, who are individual Christians. This writing is so easily understood, as well as the implications of it, we need not belabor the point further.

There are other ways that we study from time to time that show us the nature and composition of the church and its distinctiveness. It is always important that we recall how Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23). From this we cannot escape the necessity and importance of being a member of the Lord's body, His church. We must be among those living stones to enter heaven. We should strive to be a stone that fits.

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Drawn To God

Can there be a more beneficial study than the consideration of the words of Christ? The reader is urged to first take the Bible and read the lengthy passage of John 12:23-33, putting special attention on the brief statement, *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."* We respect the evaluation of Jesus' teaching in John 7:46, *"Never man spake like this man,"* so we want to study this teaching.

The personal ministry of Christ was entering its final stage. He would soon endure the cross. He looked toward the hour of His death as an hour of trouble, necessity and glory. It would be trouble for Him because of the agony, suffering, humiliation and rejection. But He knew that He could not be spared from that hour because this was a part of His earthly mission. Rather than consideration for Himself, He prayed that the Father's name would be glorified.

Necessity

He realized it was an hour of necessity. Like the grain of wheat that must fall into the ground in death in order to bring forth harvest, so He must die to bring forth the harvest of souls unto the Father. It was necessary that He die because man was unfit to atone for his own sins. Only the perfect Son of God could accomplish it. It was necessary that He die, be buried, and be raised so that the prince of this world, Satan, be subdued. The time was at hand for that great conflict between good and evil, God versus Satan, life versus death, that would affect all mankind. A decision was soon to be rendered whether Satan could hold Christ captive in death or Satan's grip over man be broken by the resurrection of Christ.

Glory

The hour was one of glory because after His death He would be raised and exalted. The name of the Father would be glorified by what Jesus would do. The Father's name had been glorified often by the words and works of Jesus, but in His death on the cross there would be produced an additional and supreme glory. God had glorified Him and would glorifiy Him

again, even as He glorified the Father.

About Life

Having this view of His inevitable death, Jesus made three pronouncements to all who would hear Him. Verse 25, *"He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."* We have but one life upon this earth. It should be lived properly and enjoyed. But often we do not know what are the more important matters of life. It is a time of preparation for eternity. This life is not an end in itself. A person who lives this life according to one's own will, saving it for himself or herself and a worldly and sinful existence of embracing the evils of this world, shall lose it. It is a tragedy that anyone would so strive for the earthly things and lose his spiritual welfare, only to have the earthly gains taken from him anyway. As Jesus said, *"For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Mark 8:36).

Those who put the Lord first, loving self and one's own will less than the Lord and His will, will preserve life and enjoy everything of real value.

The Lord's pronouncement is a profound statement of values and priorities. He points man toward a sense of values that is a divinely given value system.

About Service

A second expression is in verse 26. *"If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor."* In this way Jesus offers mankind an invitation, extending promises to those who accept His offer. We are invited to serve Christ. But to serve Him we must follow Him. John 10:37, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."* Matthew 16:24, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."* First Peter 2:21, *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."* Luke 9:23, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."*

To follow Christ means living life the way He would have us live it. It requires being Christlike in word, thought and deed. It means letting His way become our way; His rule be our guide.

First Corinthians, 11:1, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."* Second Corinthians 5:15, *"And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."* Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

The reward for following Christ is that we shall be where the Lord is. John 14:1-4, *"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."*

About Coming To Him

The Lord's third pronouncement is in verse 32. *"And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."* He defines the manner of His death. He would be lifted up on the cross. He makes reference to an Old Testament event in John 3:14,15, *"And as Moses lifted up the serpant in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."* As Israel was delivered from death at the bite of serpants when they beheld the brass serpant lifted on a pole by Moses, so mankind can now escape spiritual death by beholding Christ lifted up on the cross.

Actually Christ was lifted up from the earth in two other senses although the primary reference of our text seems to be His death on the cross. He was lifted up from the tomb, and lifted up into heaven when He ascended from the Mount Olivet.

By these words Christ also designates how men would be brought to Him. Man would be drawn to God. But none shall be forced, against his or her will, to come to Christ. But those that come must first be attracted to Him. His death would provide the spiritual magnetism to draw people to God. By showing love, God would gain man's affection, and man would respond, and gain salvation.

The Word And The Cross

How this drawing is accomplished is revealed in John 6:44,45. *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."* Jesus is not teaching universal salvation but giving the conditions of salvation. Man is drawn to God as he hears and learns what Deity has done for man's salvation. Those who come are drawn by the knowledge of the death of Christ and what their proper response to Him is. While Galatians 5:11 shows the cross to be offensive to some, *"...the offense of the cross...,"* Galatians 6:14 shows how the cross is something in which to glory. *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the whole world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."* The cross, rather than being an offensive defeat, is a mark of victory and source of spiritual blessings found only in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

What makes the death of Christ so attractive? By the death of Jesus, God has demonstrated the extent of His love for mankind. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..."* (John 3:16). First John 3:16a; 4:9, *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us... In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."* The death of Christ draws men to God because by it man can know that, even while we were sinners, God commended His love toward us by the death of Christ (Romans 5:8). Except for the love God has for mankind the cross would have no attraction and there would be no invitation to salvation. The drawing power is the love of God for us.

Seeing how much love has been bestowed toward us we ought to return that love. First John 4:19, *"We love him, because he first loved us."* When we have the proper appreciation of God, and the kind and quality of faith in what He has done for us, we are drawn to Him. Again, we perceive that the real power for bringing salvation upon sinful humanity is the immeasurable love of God.

If we reject the pull, the attraction, of the Savior and Lord who has shown us this love, there is no other power, no other way provided for us to come to God and reach heaven. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6). If our hearts are not warmed by this

(continued page 16)

Killing Christianity

We really expect there to be opposition coming from those outside the body of Christ. Humanism is the rampant religion of our day. The extent to which this damnable philosophy has been adopted does cause tremendous concern for those who believe in the dignity of man, the Deity of Christ, and the Bible as the Word of God. We can expect those of the substitute religions, pouring out of alleged "latter-day-revelation" to show animosity toward the truth of God. We can expect the worldly and earthy elements of society to resist the truth because they love the darkness.

What probably is the most heartbreaking of all is to see brethren devouring one another, not over matters of "thus saith the Lord," but over their own personal opinions and judgments. Of late it has become almost commonplace to read of brethren taking other brethren to court, or threatening to do so. What is astounding is that men once considered among the best are endorsing such measures as proper. We witness the attempts to destroy and tear up good work done by others simply because somebody did not agree with every personal judgment about people, activities and matters where there ought to be charity. The lack of love among brethren is killing the cause of Christ as rapidly and surely as anything the vile and vicious of this world have ever proposed. Destruction from within has always been the most deadly.

With the bombardment against the very Word so dominant and prominent in society, and the sinful conditions of the world growing worse and worse, why cannot brethren lift their sights above their personal pettiness, jealousies, envies and attitude of revenge and set their course on a higher level? Why should brethren, once thought to be pillars, be turning their attentions to getting even with others, bringing the cause of Christ to shame and public ridicule by their anti-Christian behavior toward each other? Liberals delight in the suicide of the cause that stands for the truth. Enemies of Christ rejoice in what some have committed themselves to doing. Standing firm in the faith is no excuse to tear the body of Christ apart over personal matters. Defense of truth does not justify slander, nor does faithfulness embody getting revenge on others. Killing Christianity is a serious crime. Many need to think more soberly about what they are doing as they promote self rather than Christ. JWB

To Our Missionaries



JAMES W. BOYD

Everyone has a mission in life, as one of the lessons of this issue suggests. In that sense all of us who labor for the Lord are missionaries regardless of our geographical location. But using the term in the way most consider it, those who have gone into foreign or domestic fields where the cause of Christ is scarcely known, we ought to give thanks for such people as they do battle for the Lord in some of the most difficult situations one could imagine.

Most of us have not done work outside of our homeland. Many of us have never even been outside our borders. This in no way minimizes the work we have done. But we should have great appreciation for those who go one step beyond, probably many steps beyond, accepting the sacrifices and hardships, adjustments and strains, that mission work demands, of which many of us know very little from first hand experience. I, for one, have great compassion toward those who have tried to take the gospel to distant lands. I have nothing but admiration for faithful brethren everywhere, but a special prayer is lifted on behalf of those, whether near or far, who are doing mission work. Godspeed.

* * * * *

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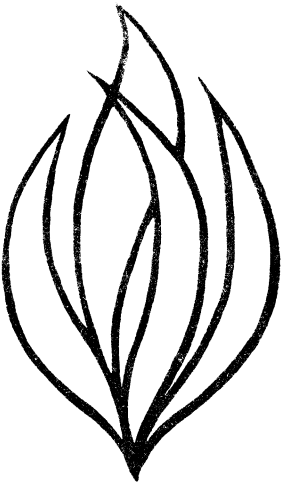

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VIII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 6**

God Dwells With The Humble And Contrite

Do we not need lessons that encourage development of character? There is value, power and spiritual usefulness in humility and contriteness. In the midst of evil throughout the nation of Israel, Isaiah 57:15 was written, and it said, *"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."*

The opening phrase contains a magnificent description of the greatness of God. We see His majesty in the words, *"high and lofty One."* We see His permanance in the statement, He *"inhabiteth eternity."* His honesty, purity and moral integrity is found in the words, *"whose name is Holy."* His graduer is beyond human conception and comprehension. His rule and supremacy is above all the universe. These exalted traits of God stagger the minds of men because of His splendor, dominion and immensity. The greatness of God brings man into a state of reverence and awe as he wonders in the thoughts of God.

Humility Of God

What is equally amazing is that God would voluntarily humble Himself to dwell with mankind. I recall when I was a very young boy an older boy named Roy Fleming. Roy was a member of the church, captain of the local high school football team, a fine athlete and somewhat of a hero to our little community. Once he let me sit beside him at church services. I was amazed that he would even allow me to be on the same bench with him. This is but a frail analogy, but what a far more wondrous thought that we can be in the company of God because God is willing for it to be so. Mankind in weakness, frailty and sin and God in all His glory just does not seem compatible. There could be no compatibility except for God's grace toward us.

Possibly the reason the Holy Spirit had Isaiah to write these words at the start of the passage was to set before us the magnificence of God in order to magnify God's willingness to dwell with man. It certainly shows the extent of God's concern

for man, lowering Himself, as it were, to be with such an inferior being as man.

But God does not dwell with every person as He does with those of certain quality and characteristics. He does dwell with the humble and contrite.

Two of the avenues whereby men are tempted to sin are human weakness, including fleshly lust and passion, and man's feelings and attitudes of self-sufficiency, self-reliance and pride. Such qualities in the heart of a person will lead him to set God and His law aside. On the other hand, humility and contriteness are traits that war against the commission of the sins born of weakness and pride.

Contrite

To be contrite means to be penitent and sorrowful in spirit because of having offended God. God will dwell with the penitent. We have every reason to be penitent for sins because every sin is against God. Repenting of sins is a duty God has assigned upon mankind if mankind expects to be forgiven and restored into God's fellowship. If one does not repent, he will surely perish (Luke 3:3,5).

Acts 17:30, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent."* Second Peter 3:9, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

Humble

Humility is the proper temper one must have before God. It is the opposite of feelings of self-reliance without God. It is the opposite of one of the major themes of the religion of Humanism. It embodies the recognition of dependence, especially on God. Humility is a synonym for *"poor in spirit."* James 4:10, *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."* First Peter 5:6, *"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."* Matthew 18:4, *"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* Matthew 23:11,12, *"But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall*

exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." Jesus said, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Those who recognize their moral and spiritual deficiencies will enjoy favors and blessings from the hand of God. Only when one is humble is he prepared to enter into the submissive and dependent union with God; a union that enables him to partake of the divine nature and become partners with God in joy and glory. Without humility this necessary union is prohibited.

Proud hearts murmur under rebuke as did Israel. The proud reject divine warnings such as those that God gave through Noah. Those lacking humility will dare to oppose God as did Pharoah of Egypt.

Why God Dwells With Us

The purpose of God dwelling with man is also revealed in this passage in Isaiah, *"To revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."* The exhausted and dying traveller who has been plundered, wounded and abandoned to die on the Jericho road was not revived by the aid of the Samaritan more than are the souls and hearts of people who are treading life's weary road, but are revived by the presence of God. God sheds light on the gloom and darkness. He brings hope to those in despair. He lifts up those who are cast down and gives rest to the weary. The deep contrition and humility of a person opens the door of the heart and allows the entrance of God. The comfort so needed and longed for is still wanting until God inhabits the heart.

For these purposes God comes to live with the humble and contrite. Mankind, bent low under the weight of guilt and a sense of unworthiness, so crushed by his own degeneracy and helplessness, needs the sustenance and guidance the Heavenly Father offers through His Word.

It Is Not Weakness

We must not misunderstand the nature of humility and contriteness. These traits do not produce, nor are they the product of, weakness, but they reflect strength. To admit unworthiness is to manifest strength, not weakness. The proud and haughty heart is an admission of weakness. Proverbs 16:18, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a*

fall." While all peoples of the earth, all armies of heaven, all inventions of man cannot stay His hand nor alter His course of action against His will, the cry for mercy of the humble and the pleading of the penitent and bruised heart has always secured recognition from God and moved the heart and hand of God when that cry comes from the child of God. Where else is such power for man to be found that could compare with gaining the attention of God by being humble and contrite?

These qualities are not to be confused with being spineless. They are not incompatible with a vigorous spirit. They are not in the class with timidity. But they are admissions of imperfection. With these traits one can even succeed and not be swayed off course by pride. Peter was humble, yet aggressive. Jesus was humble, yet He even overturned the tables of the merchandisers in the temple, condemnd sin, warned of destruction and was forceful. Humility only makes one small in his own eyes and grateful that he belongs to One greater than he. These qualities allow a person to stand with awe and silence before what he does not know, and yet drives him to learn all he can.

Examples

The Old Testament gives us two striking examples of these virtues under discussion. When Moses was on Mount Sinai the Israelites made a golden calf. God's wrath was kindled against them and He said, *"I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiffnecked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation."* (Exodus 31:9,10). But Moses approached God on behalf of the people. Exodus 32:30-33, *"And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."* The result of this plea was that God punished Israel with a less severe punishment.

Another event was following David's census of Israel. The implication of that census was David's reliance on his own strength of numbers rather than God. As a result God threatened to punish the entire nation. First Chronicles

21:16,17, *"And David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued."* David's desire to bear the full weight of God's wrath and his plea for mercy for the people revealed his penitent spirit, one that was void of pride and self-sufficiency. God forgave the sin and changed His intentions toward Israel.

At no time is it God's purpose and desire that any should perish. He desires for all to live eternally with Him in heaven. He must be and will be true to His character, however. He has set His face toward those of a contrite and humble spirit, awaiting justification to bless even the frailest of creatures.

Lesson To Learn

In view of these truths, what is the most applicable lesson we can reap? We learn that the lofty God can and does dwell with lowly humanity when certain conditions prevail; conditions within the power of man to develop and possess. We can learn that man, full of sin and lifted with pride, is unfit for God's fellowship and companionship. We learn that there is a power and appeal available to us if we possess the humble spirit and contrite heart. The prayers of the humble and contrite will be lifted toward heaven and when prayed by His children these prayers are heard by the Father and answered according to what His infinite wisdom determines.

Should not this truth motivate us to develop humility, with a penitent mind, manifesting our submissiveness to the Lord by being obedient servants of God? Should we not recognize our dependence on God, and by consulting His Word, be led into the fellowship that God provides for all who come? God has the right to command and direct all persons to bow to His authority because He is God. Every soul that rejects His rule does so in the knowledge that he who dishonors God destroys his own spiritual welfare.

† † † † †

The God We Worship

The nature of worship is such that the worshipper is changed as he gradually takes on more and more of the character of the One who is worshipped. True, reverent and earnest worship molds the worshipper into the likeness of the Superior Being. Therefore, we must have a knowledge of the traits and characteristics of God, then worship Him sincerely and faithfully to become more like Him.

The concept that a person has about God has much to do with developing his own spiritual nature and condition. The only source that is reliable from which we learn of God is God's own Word, the Bible. While any attempt to discuss God necessarily imposes upon us certain limitations, and this because of our own finiteness, let us embark upon an investigation of the subject of God, confining ourselves to only a few of the revealed characteristics of Him. Such a study will enhance our love and respect for the Word we worship.

There are some things we have come to know about God that are so familiar that only a passing reference is necessary to serve as a reminder for us. God is revealed as the Creator, all-powerful, all-wise, ever-present, possessing infinite wisdom, power and authority. But let us pass from these better known qualities to some others.

God Is Spirit

God is a Spirit. He is not a material being, nor does He inhabit a physical body such as the spirit of man does. John 4:24, *"God is a Spirit..."* All matter was created by Him. All life and activity, whether mental, moral or physical, ultimately has come from Him. Mind existed before matter. Matter is not eternal in nature. Inasmuch as something cannot come from nothing, we know that mind existed before matter and is eternal. That Mind is God.

Man has been created in the spiritual image of God, not a physical image because God is not a physical being. Man is more than flesh, but is also spirit, having received that spirit from the *"Father of spirits."* (Hebrews 12:9).

One, Yet Three

The term translated "*God*" so often in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word "Elohiem." Many are surpised to learn that this is a plural word. Even from the word called "God" there is the insistence of the plurality of persons in the Godhead. The Scriptures reveal there is only one God; that is, one Godhead, but the Godhead is composed of three persons who are identified as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While three is a number more than one these three compose the singular Godhead or Godhood, are one in nature, purpose, with each fulfilling His own specific role alongside the others. Admittedly, the understanding of the nature of God as three persons is not the easiest matter for people to comprehend. But we should not be too amazed when we find ourselves incapable of fathoming the nature of God. After all, there is quite a difference between Deity and mere humanity.

Words To Moses

Let us consider God as presented in Exodus 34:5-7 when God was conferring with Moses. *"And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the childrens' children, unto the third and fourth generation."*

God came to Moses and proclaimed His name. This was not simply to announce His name, but to make known to Moses His nature, office, power, work and position in the universe. He identified Himself as Lord. The word *Lord* means ruler, governor or master. God is all these things to the universe He created, and this is why all in the universe must bow to His authority and be subject to His rule. Having been told that God is Creator, and now Lord, we see Him as the omnipotent Maker, Master and Preserver of all things of the universe. He is not a tribal or national God, but the God of all creation.

Merciful And Gracious

God declares Himself as being merciful and gracious. This means He abounds in good will, full of pity for mankind, ready

to bestow blessings and favors upon man even though man is not deserving nor can man merit what God gives. God delights in the genuine happiness of all, having provided guidance for man whereby he can be happy if only man will go the way that God has prescribed. He bestows blessings, not only to the satisfaction and delight of His creatures, but because this is His nature and is according to His will that He do so. Cannot we be ever grateful for such a God as the One we serve?

Psalm 86:15, *"But thou, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth."* This passage repeats some of the information in Exodus 34. Being Ruler, He demands submission to His authority. Yet, even when people are disobedient, and this is much to His dislike that man would defy Him, He is not rash, but slow to anger. He forbears with those who practice sin, being patient with them, in the expectation and desire that they turn from the wickedness of their way and return to Him. We are not to think that there is no limit to the slowness of God's wrath because Scripture bears record of the execution of God's wrath too often for anyone to doubt it. But He does not act hastily even against that which He has called evil.

God Is Loving

That God is abundant in lovingkindness and truth reveals He has no desire for ill toward any, but seeks good for all. There is no deceit in Him or false impressions, but frankness, candor and verity in all things. God is the source and His Son the embodiment of truth, sincerity and uprightness.

It is profitable for us to remind ourselves again, however, that His slowness to anger, His lovingkindness, and the trait of forbearance are not to be confused with indulgence toward sin and an endless toleration of wickedness. Sooner or later He will crush such things, and eventually all must bow to His will, willingly or otherwise. The impossibility of God justifying unrighteousness in the sense of ever giving it approval is manifested in His gift of His Son to take away sin. We are to understand these gentle descriptions of God and the phrase, *"He will by no means clear the guilty,"* as a warning to man that He does not forever ignore sin as if it was nothing. Sin is totally offensive against Him. He suffers long with the sinner but only because He hates sin and seeks the deliverance of the sinner from sin before it produces its eternal ruinous effects.

The same law of God that brings good to those who are in harmony with His rule also brings evil and destruction to all who are out of harmony with Him. It is left to each person to make the choice whether to serve God and be blessed, or disobey God and suffer the eternal consequences.

God Hates Sin

God's intolerance of sin is seen in His characteristic of His holiness. To be holy means to be pure, clean, set apart and sanctified. When it has reference to God it denotes Him as pre-eminently good and all things pertaining to Him are sacred. His name is holy! His dwelling place was called the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament. His Son and His Spirit are Holy. Because of Him even His people are called a holy people. The mountain where He gave His law is called the holy mountain, referring to Mount Sinai, and again a mountain where Jesus was transfigured. His system of faith is the most holy faith and His laws are holy laws. Because of His holiness He cannot and will not allow sin to exist before Him favorably and eventually He will destroy it and those who persist in defying His will.

Just

Righteousness and justice are the foundations of His throne. Psalm 97:2, *"...Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."* Righteousness is the observance of the rule of right. Psalm 119:172, *"...for all thy commandments are righteousness."*

Justice is the quality of being fair and equitable to every being that is entitled, without partiality or favor or discrimination. If we be sinners against God, we should fear the justice of God. Sin deserves punishment and the *"wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23). Second Peter 2 shows the impartiality of God regarding sin and sinners. If we choose to be among those who worship God and follow His teaching we praise His justice. Regardless of who we are, what our lot in life may be, who were our foreparents, our background or whatever, God impartially extends salvation to all mankind through Christ and on the same terms. Acts 10:34,35, *"Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respector of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is*

accepted with him."

God hates unfairness and injustice. We all can see such as this manifested in so many forms in our sinful world. Favoritism arbitrarily bestowed is not a part of the nature of God. He does favor His spiritual children but only because they have made themselves, through Christ, different from the servants of the devil in this world and did this by obeying His will and coming to Him by His Son, Jesus Christ. He who would dwell with God and enjoy the heavenly home must also love justice, truth and uprightness even as God loves these things. Those who love God must love righteousness and justice because God possesses these very characteristics.

Some are confused in thinking that mercy, compassion, lovingkindness and grace are in some way incompatible with the strictness of obedience, justice, law and righteousness. God unites all these traits in His character. It is a misguided and distorted human sentiment that contends these qualities have insurmountable barriers between them as if they cannot exist within the same being at the same time. But God combines every good quality in Himself and in the perfect and exact proportion as should be. There is no imbalance or lopsidedness in the nature of God.

For instance, God hates sin but loves the sinner, even willing to forbear and forgive if the sinner will seek forgiveness God's way. But should the sinner refuse and rebel, God's will toward the sinner will be exacted. The sinner someday will see the wages of his evil and God's gentle patience will come to its end. Then every person of the universe who has been clinging to sin will be destroyed from the presence and favor of God (Second Thessalonians 1:6-10).

God Can Be Known

To know God, to know about God, to know His character, and to grow into His likeness is the work God expects of every person here on earth. His revelation of Himself to man has been given to this end. He has revealed Himself through His Son and for this cause Christ came (John 1:18; 14:7). To become like Him is to give honor and glory to Him. John 17:3, *"And this is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and him who thou didst send."*

The One sent refers to Jesus Christ. John 14:9, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."* Verses 20, 21, *"At that day ye*

shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

To worship God means to honor His Son. John 5:23, *"That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him."* We urge all mankind to be a worshipper of God in heaven who is revealed to us by His Son and in His Word.

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The Bible

It would be impossible to present in one lesson, certainly in the brevity of the lessons we feature in this booklet, a very exhaustive study of so vast a subject as the Bible. But the source of all we know of God and His will for mankind is found in the teaching of the Bible. It reveals the basis of our faith, hope and meaning of life. It is important that we study the Bible itself, but there are times when we need to study about the Bible also.

Second Timothy 3:16,17 are two significant verses that read, *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."* This passage contains what Scripture claims for itself; namely, to be the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Word of God.

Major Question

Whether people realize it or not, the most important question before responsible human beings is, "What must I do to be saved?" The Bible provides the answer. The very question implies that man is lost in sin, separated from God and a life in heaven, cannot save himself, stands in need of a Savior, and there is something that he must do to take advantage of the salvation offered to him by God through Jesus Christ. Man, in

his weakness and sinfulness, aspires to something better and longs for the satisfaction of the yearnings of the soul, even though he is not always aware of it. To live in sin is not the desirable state for mankind. To consider salvation involves the capacity of man to take hold of a higher life, a better state, even to be able to enjoy fellowship with Deity.

It is reasonable to expect God to communicate with His noblest creatures. It is also the capacity of mankind to mentally, morally and spiritually display qualities of being able to receive revelation and instruction whereby he can be acceptable to the God who created him. The Bible claims to be that revelation. It is God's message to man.

From God

This book, the Bible, is not of human origin, but comes from Deity, as our opening text insists. It reveals not only man's origin, his mission and purpose in life, where he came from, why he is here, what he is to do while here, and where he is going. It accounts for man's weakness and sinfulness. It explains his longings for a better state and his capacity for appreciation of a higher life. It reveals the nature of man and gives the explanation for the dignity of the human being above all else of God's creation. Such information could not come from the minds of men, but only from the mind of the Supreme Being, Jehovah God, the One of whom the Bible speaks.

Unlike books of human origin the Scriptures are marked with unprejudiced impartiality. Deeds and words of people, even their thoughts, are laid bare without discrimination, without abuse or eulogy. Even the thoughts of people are exposed, as only Deity could know.

Even though men of different eras, with varying degrees of learning, conditions of life and circumstances were used to pen the Scriptures, they were led as they wrote by the One Spirit, and the message they produced is one continuous stream of perfect harmony throughout the sixty-six books that constitute the one book. Over forty writers were involved, covering around fifteen hundred years from the first writing until the last, in the languages of Hebrew, Greek, and portions of Aramaic. Yet, it is void of contradiction, inconsistency and error when rightly divided. It is beyond human capacity to match such an accomplishment. This is irrefutable evidence of the divine origin of the Bible.

Authoritative

A noticeable trait of the Scriptures is how it speaks positively and with authority. It is not a book of maybe-so, mere probabilities and guesses. It speaks as certainly of the future as of the past. It is the characteristic that many, who prefer to "do their own thing," find the most offensive about the Scriptures. Such people do not approve or accept anything certain and sure.

The Bible presents divine truth, not human reasoning and philosophy. Jesus said, *"Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17). Such is the nature of the Scriptures.

The writers were men guided by the Holy Spirit (Second Peter 1:20,21). Yet, it is evident that there were times when even they did not fully comprehend the significance of what they wrote. This is not to say they did not realize they were writing God's Word, but they did not understand all that Deity had them to write. Such lack of understanding of what was written would not be the nature of a book totally coming from the minds of the writers. Human knowledge and wisdom could not have produced much of the information in the Bible because so much is found therein that the writers could not possibly know of their own knowledge, research and investigation. They could write what they did only because One who did know used them to write it as He saw fit to reveal it.

The moral code, doctrine for human conduct, is pure, wholesome, uplifting, simple, understandable and always for the benefit of those who would follow God's way. No immoral man or group of men would have produced such a book because it would be so self-condemning of their immorality.

Its Fruit

Tangible evidence that the Bible is God's Word is before us. Jesus once taught, *"By their fruits ye shall know them."* What is the fruit of the knowledge and faithful practice of the teaching of the Scriptures? The Bible has met the test through the ages. Wherever people have learned and applied the Bible mankind has been better mentally, morally, socially, intellectually, physically and spiritually. It is unfortunate that the Bible has been blamed for many evils, but this is to falsely accuse the Bible. Evils have not come because of the Bible but because some who said they followed the Bible did evil rather than

following the Bible. Those nations that have upheld standards presented in Scripture have prospered. The opposite is also true. Compare the state of civilization, the level of respect for human dignity and life, the state of womanhood, the care for the elderly and infants, with those areas of the world where the Scriptures are either unknown or disrespected. Illiteracy, ignorance, disease, and other plagues of mankind have been attacked and put to flight where people have had the good sense to have respect for the Bible. Enlightenment, freedom, production and blessings abundant are found where the Bible is THE book. This is not only true throughout the world but can be seen as true even within a given society and nation.

We can know by its fruits, what follows in its wake, that the Bible is not just an ordinary book produced by ordinary, or even extra-oridinary people alone. It is a divine book produced by Deity through the use of chosen and inspired men. History, as well as present conditions, confirm the notion that the hope of the world is the message of the Bible in the person of Jesus Christ and His doctrine. As surely as any peoples depart from its codes and moral teachings, just as surely shall that nation ultimately bring upon itself destruction, poverty, strife and ruin.

Certainty

Can we be sure that we have the Word of God? The evidences of its integrity, completeness, genuineness and reliability are manifold. We need not go back beyond the last inspired writers to know what constitutes the complete Word of God. Alleged latter-day-revelations are of men, not God.

What inspired men considered to be inspired is inspired. What Christ, His apostles and the writers of Scripture accepted as Scripture is what we ought to accept as Scripture. From ancient Jewish writings, as well as the Bible, it can be noted what they considered to be inspired of God.

Without taking the space necessary to present the long and abundant evidence from ancient manuscripts, translations, commentaries, historians, friends and foes of New Testament Christianity, as well as various catalogs denoting the inspired books, plus the assurances in Scripture that God's Word would not be destroyed (First Peter 1:25 for example), we know that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, as we now have them, were given by inspiration. The Jews, to whom the oracles of God were committed (Romans 3:1), listed the books of the

Old testament and they correspond to the thirty-nine books we have in the Old Testament. Jesus also spoke of the books that now compose the Old Testament when He mentioned the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms; the very divisions that the Jews recognized to include inspired books. These are the same books we have today. There are enlightening studies of this subject of great length and detail that are available and are worth the time and effort necessary to study them and be assured of such conclusions as stated here.

God Assures Us

We cannot set aside God's assurance that His message to man will not be banished from the earth. The providence of God in preserving His Word is as certain as the miraculous nature of its production.

From the beginning it has been taught that man cannot find the true good by his own wisdom and ingenuity. *"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23). Man's efforts fail to attain righteousness without the way of righteousness that God has provided. Man, without God's Word, like water, seeks the lowest level. Has not this been proven to humanity through the ages? Mankind needs a guide and God has provided that guide. There is not one good thing that man can discover that has not already been revealed to man by the Word of God.

There is no way that anyone can reasonably, logically, consistently and sensibly explain the existence of the Bible except by the explanation of the Bible itself when it reads, *"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."*

God, using the vocabularies of those He chose, had them to write His message and will, overseeing and superintending every word in revealing His Word. Because of this, we can turn with confidence to the Scriptures and read. When we apply what God has taught, we shall be blessed.

† † † † †

The Faith of Abraham

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." (Romans 4:20).

The Message Of Nature

Christians believe in God, Jehovah of heaven. Their faith is based upon the evidence that demands that conclusion. He is the only true and living God and this fact is accepted by Christians. He is their Father and the Father of the Savior, Jesus Christ. Although He is a Spirit (John 4:24) and cannot be seen by the physical eye, this in no way diminishes or detracts from His existence and the certainty of it. There are manifold evidences all around us that proclaim His reality. Belief in God is under attack constantly especially by those who wish to go their own way and do their own thing. This has, unfortunately, been a sorry part of the story of man's existence. Atheism is nothing new. Liberalism and the philosophies of modernism are not modern. They do sometimes assume different disguises from one generation to another. Today, on nearly every front of human activity, education, politics, even theology, wars are being waged against the reality of God and that Jehovah is God. The attacks are often presented as great "scholarly" works, but always contain the insidious ridicule of religion for which atheists are renowned. Regardless of how vicious and venomous are these determined attacks against the reality of God the evidence of His existence cannot be destroyed nor honestly ignored. This is not to say they are not ignored, however.

Consider The Evidence

To increase our faith in God and to provide a defense for our convictions and to assure the minds of both young and old as well as to convince the gainsayer, let us briefly consider just one of the many strong voices of witnesses that declare the reality of the existence of God. Let us hear the message of nature, the earth, the heavens, the universe, and things therein. Have you ever considered conducting a conversation, as it were, with nature? It is not as unreasonable as it first might appear. Job 12:7-10, *"But ask the beasts, and they shall teach thee: and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind."* We can learn and profit

from our learning as we sit as the feet of nature and let nature be our teacher. But what does nature have to tell us about God?

Creator

It does tell us something of its Creator. Psalm 19:1-4, *"For the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their time is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he set a tabernacle for the sun."* Even though literally without voice or speech or language, nature "speaks" to every man and every tongue. The "words" of earth, heaven, day, night ring throughout the world that the hand of Jehovah hath wrought this. The birds, beasts, fishes and all nature declare unto us the reality of God. The fact that nature declares God's glory necessarily implies that it declares the existence of God.

How does nature make this declaration of God and Him as Creator? It speaks of the wonderful order of natural things. First Corinthians 14:33, *"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace..."* None can observe the great design, harmony, regularity, system and exactness of nature and then intelligently suppose that all of this was the result of some blind, accidental and random chance. We even set our timepieces by the performance of nature. Even the cheapest watch is complicated, intricate and detailed in design. We know that the watch has come into being by design and intent, being made by one of great intelligence and ability. How could one suppose that all nature, far more intricate and wondrous, more exacting and perfect and precise, could have come into being without intelligence, a designer and maker of great power?

The Universe

Our universe speaks of the vastness, size and immensity of itself that is so great that is surpasses human comprehension. The extent of our own nation staggers the imagination when one finds himself in the giant open fields of the west, or among the mountains both east and west. The tremendous size of our planet, though we can compass it, cannot fully be absorbed even by those who travel it. Yet, our planet is relatively small in comparison to the universe. The earth is only one among

millions, possibly billions, of planets that stretch beyond the telescopic range of man'a greatest inventions.

It speaks of the unseen and shows the unseen to exist. Some reject God because they say they cannot see Him. They complain they cannot pray to an unseen God because they doubt He answers. Neither can we see the wind, but we see evidences of it. The same can be said for the radio waves, sound, thought, and any number of unseen things. Someone has properly written, "If a radio's slim fingers can pluck a melody from night and toss it over a continent or a sea; if the brilliant notes of a violin are blown across a mountain; or a city's din; if songs like crimson roses are culled from thin blue air; why should mortals wonder if God answers prayer."

Providence

Nature also speaks of providence. Scientists tell us that the factors on this earth which are combined in such marvelous complexities to make life possible are vastly numerous, even beyond number. One has counted more than one hundred special conditions which are necessary as pre-conditions to human life, but that number has long since been set aside as far too few. Furthermore, these complexities must all be in proper proportion and exist simultaneously. The exact chemical composition of the atmosphere, the distance of the earth from the sun, the proper oxygen content, on and on and on can the necessities be listed from outside the body as well as the innumerable conditions from within the body must be there before life of man can exist. The laws of mathematical probability make it absolutely impossible to believe that all these wonderful, marvelous, complex systems and essentials "just happened" together in some unknown fashion, and from that impossible happening all things, even life, has come. The evidence cries aloud that man does not stand alone and that GOD IS. This is the message of nature.

Death And Resurrection

Nature reminds us of something we regularly witness and that is the reality of death. Every autumn the leaves fade into the cold and wintry months and they tell the same story. The darkness of death overtakes life.

While nature tells us of death it also tells us of a resurrection.

That same forest that seemingly died in the fall and winter leaps to life again with the coming of spring. All nature proclaims the principles of life from the dead. The planting of the grains of wheat in the soil is so they may die, and from that death a new plant springs to life. One of the best illustrations of this is the behavior of the seventeen year locusts of Maryland and Virginia. For seventeen years, as worms, grubbing in their darkness thirty feet beneath the earth's level, they suddenly come forth in beautiful wings as if summoned by an archangel, sending up a din of siren-like sounds as they fly.

Life, death, resurrection, all are depicted for us in nature. Whenever, and if ever, the problems, burdens, injustices and complexities of life cause you to wonder, or have the slightest doubt that God exists, that God cares, the message of nature can and does not only restore your confidence in the conviction that GOD IS, but makes you wonder how you could have ever entertained even for a moment a doubt about it. So overwhelming is the abundant evidence.

We can know for sure that these things are true because the Word of God has informed us that nature has a message, and gives us the general outline of that message. As we study nature the details are supplied. They all send forth the same proclamation, "There is a God in heaven."

Nature's Silence

There is a message that nature cannot speak concerning God. It does not tell us of His characteristics. Nature does teach us of some of the WORKS of God, but the message of forgiveness, redemption through Christ, duty and accountability, eternity, these come only through the WORD of God. The gospel of Christ is the Word that teaches us these spiritual matters. Only the story of Jesus Christ extends the hope of the soul that is marred by self-imposed sin.

Even though nature declares God's glory, and thereby His existence, and this glory is magnificent, there is no glory to be compared with the glory revealed in Jesus Christ. He is God's most precious message to mankind. Christ in prophecy, His birth, life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension, His coronation and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords, standing now in heaven as our intercessor, the only Savior, makes Him the greatest of all blessings and messages. We cannot learn of Him through nature. For this knowledge we

must turn to the revealed, inspired, infallible, authoritative and all-sufficient Scriptures.

Christ wants to save each of us. It was for this reason tht He left the portals of heavenly glory and took on the form of a man in His birth by the virgin Mary, Deity in the flesh. He lived the life He did, died the death He died, came forth from the tomb and went back into heaven that He might be God's provision for the salvation of mankind.

To benefit from Jesus Christ we must come to Him in obedience to the gospel of Christ. Faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ is the way, God's only revealed way, to come to Christ. With the evidence around you demanding your response, we plead with one and all to hear, believe, and obey. Be saved in Christ and know the joy of being a spiritual child of the God that is in heaven, whose existence is affirmed even by the existence of our world.

† † † † †

Covetousness

There are certain seasons of the year in our society when the giving and receiving of gifts takes a prominent role. At Christmas season, weddings, graduations, birthdays, Valentine's Day, other times, gifts take front stage and receive attention. There are many occasions that prompt the spirit of giving and receiving. These are not wrong and the giving and receiving of gifts often produces some of the happiest times of the year.

It does seem sometimes that throughout the year there is such an emphasis and concentration on getting more and more material things that we lose sight of more important matters. Therefore, a study of covetousness is always timely. The Scriptures address this particular matter as sin and does so frequently and definitely.

Luke 12:13-15, *"And he said unto them, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."*

Definition

Covetousness is defined as an attitude of insatiable desire of gain, being greedy of gain, grasping, seeking to get. To earnestly desire, even to immoderate and excessive desire, is especially related to the desire for money and the things money buys. We must remember, however, that the use of the term *"covet"* is not always in the sense of a fault. First Corinthians 12:31, *"But covet earnestly the best gifts..."* First Corinthians 14:39, *"Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy..."* These gifts were to be desired because they would provide ability to further the cause of Christ. In this study, however, we shall use the term in the way it is most frequently used and that is in the sense of sinful and excessive desire for material things.

Condemned

Covetousness is denounced and forbidden by the Lord in both the Old and New Testaments. Exodus 20:17, *"Thou shalt not covet."* Romans 13:9, *"Thou shalt not covet."* Whatever this involves is forbidden. While covetousness is blessed by the wicked, it is abhorred by the Lord. Psalm 10:3, *"For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth."* An inclination to covetousness is opposite of the ways of God. Psalm 119:35,36, *"Make me go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness."*

God's people, past and present, are not covetous because God did not and does not allow them to be. Such a heart would becloud their judgments and decisions. The rulers over Israel were not to be covetous. Exodus 18:21, *"Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties and rulers of tens."* Likewise those who rule over the church, the elders or bishops, are not to be covetous men. In the list of divinely noted qualifications in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 we find the words, *"Not covetous," "not given to filthy lucre."*

Covetousness is to be shunned to the extent that we, as Christians, are not even to keep company with those who are covetous. First Corinthians 5:11, *"But now I have written you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be... covetous..."* Ephesians 5:3, *"But fornication, and all covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints."*

A Heart Problem

Covetousness is a matter of the heart. It lives in the heart and produces evil by first corrupting the heart that in turn corrupts life. Mark 7:21-23, *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evil things come from within, and defile the man."*

Because of covetousness, Annanias and Sapphira lied to both men and to Deity. Because of covetousness Achan stole from that which was to go to the Lord's treasury. Because of covetousness the unjust steward defrauded his master and without discretion or authority reduced the indebtedness of those who owed his master. Because of covetousness Judas betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. Because of covetousness Ahab was a miserable man until many evils were perpetrated against Naboth and his vineyard taken from him. Because of covetousness, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, brought disgrace and leprosy upon himself, lying about his actions and seeking gifts for himself from Naaman and under false pretenses. Because of covetousness Lot chose the splendid fields which lay toward Sodom, a city so wicked that God eventually destroyed it with fire and brimstone. Lot's wife, looking back toward the city she must have loved, was turned into a pillar of salt. Proverbs 15:27, *"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house."* How many modern homes are disturbed because of greediness on the part of both husband and wife as well as children?

Futility Of Covetousness

People would be less covetous, possibly, if they could realize the folly and vanity of covetousness and the emptiness of that which he covets. As Jesus said, *"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* Do many of us live as if everything depended upon we we have, get, own, possess, and what we think belongs to us? Do we not realize how temporary these things are? We are but temporary stewards of what we call ours. *"For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"* (Matthew 16:26).

Gain does not satisfy even once obtained. Ecclesiastes 5:10, *"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that*

loveth abundance with increase; this also is vanity." These words came from a man whose material wealth was immeasurable for abundance. If wealth could satisfy, Solomon should have been satisfied.

Job, once wealthy, then in poverty, and then again wealthy, said, Job 31:24,25,28, *"If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much;... This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above."*

Paul told Timothy, First Timothy 6:5, 9-11, *"Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness; from such withdraw thyself... But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows."* We need to ask ourselves what is most valuable to us; riches that perish with the using, or salvation in heaven for eternity?

Covetousness Is Sin

Again, emphasizing the sinfulness and folly of covetousness, Paul wrote, Colossians 3:2, *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."* In verse five he defines covetousness as idolatry. He exhorted that covetousness, along with other sins, be mortified or put to death. He warned, verse 6, *"For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience."* Covetousness is a trait of the old man of sin which Paul said was to be replaced with the new man of righteousness.

Covetousness is not just a problem with the rich. That it is a problem for the rich is evident. Matthew 19:23,24, *"Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again, I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."* This was a problem for the one the Bible student knows as the rich, young ruler.

If we take a close notice, we shall see that the covetous person was often not rich at the first, but was covetous for riches. Achan, Gehazi, the unjust steward, Judas and others who were led astray by their covetousness did not have what

they wanted. Covetousness is a sin committed by both the "haves" and the "have nots." We should desire freedom from covetousness. Such freedom has been attained in the past by the people of God. Abraham, upon delivering the king of Sodom, took no spoils from him even though they were offered. He coveted no man's possessions.

Freedom From Covetousness

Paul was free from covetousness. Acts 20:33-35, *"I have coveted no man's silver, gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Our prayer should be that of Proverbs 30:8, *"Remove from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with good convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."* We want neither poverty nor riches, but sufficiency. Sufficiency is as adequate as an abundance. Our Lord knows what we need and has promised to provide what we need if we seek Him and His church first (Matthew 6:33).

First Timothy 6:6-8, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."* Hebrews 13:5,6, *"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."*

This does not make all ambition, progress, even riches necessarily evil of themselves. It does serve as a warning, exhortation and divine teaching against covetousness, becoming unbalanced in our desires, having an inordinate, immoderate and excessive desire for material things; being greedy and grasping as if all depended in getting and holding. Many sin in many ways trying to satisfy their craving for more and more. The Lord's message is, Luke 12:15, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness."*

† † † † †

What If?



JAMES W. BOYD

Questions can be profitable or they can be useless, even destructive. If may well be the path of wisdom when contemplating something in the future to ask, "What if I do this or do that?" This kind of inquiry could be very valuable in determining which course of action would be the best in a given situation. To ask the question at those times is very much akin to counting the cost before embarking upon some effort. Even Jesus encouraged this (Lk. 14:28).

There are times and circumstances when the question, "What if...," could produce more harm than good. For instance, when something tragic has occured, how many times do we start reliving the conditions and badger ourselves uselessly by wondering, "If only I had done this or that, possibly it may have been avoided." We are most presumptuous to think we can rewrite history. We do our best at the moment and we really can do no more. Hindsight is perfect. But rather than wondering, "What if...," have you ever thought things might have been worse? What's done is done! We may learn from the past, but it is useless to keep asking, "What if this or that." We have to go from now!

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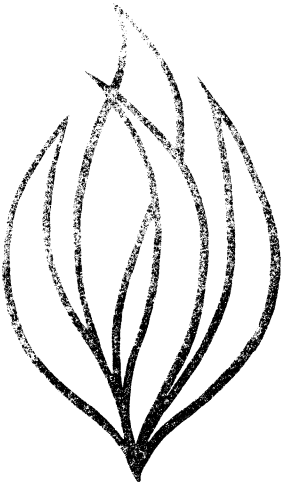

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VIII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 7**

Three Lessons From Romans

The inspired epistle to the Roman church is one of the most profound writings in the world regarding religious matters. When we suggest the study of three lessons from Romans we are not suggesting there are so few lessons therein that we need to learn. We shall consider just three.

Romans was written by one of history's greatest men, the apostle Paul. It was written on the greatest theme, the system of salvation that God provides through Christ. It was written to one of the first century's most notable churches, a church known for its faith, knowledge, love and loyalty to the truth.

By the time the Holy Spirit had Paul write these inspired words Paul had been preaching Christ's gospel for nearly twenty years. He had completed two missionary journeys and was involved in a third. He had suffered much for the cause of Christ, enduring persecution, encountering opposition from both Jew and Gentile, adversaries from within and without the church. He boldly debated the Jew who contended that one must be circumcised or he could not be saved. He debated with the pagan Gentiles and philosophers among them concerning the true and living God of heaven. He brought his vast experience, knowledge and love for Christ and His church to bear in these words, as well as being guided by the Holy Spirit in what was written.

His Theme

He introduced his theme when he said, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith."* Beginning with verse eighteen of chapter one through chapter eleven Paul presents a series of profound arguments regarding the doctrine of Christ and the scheme of redemption. Beginning with chapter twelve he exhorts his brethren to their Christian duties in light of the truth he had previously presented in earlier chapters. It shall be our intent to learn only three of the great

lessons found in Romans.

Grace

Romans 3:24, *"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."* Paul believed and taught salvation by the grace of God. Ephesians 2:8,9, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast."* Paul taught that it was by a divinely given system that included the grace of God that man could be saved. The benefits of this grace were appropriated by man by man's faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other way to be saved except by this system that involves God's grace and man's faith.

This system includes other elements. James 2:21 asks, *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?"* In verse 24, James wrote, *"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."*

These words have to be considered in light of what Paul wrote in Romans 3:20, *"Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin."* The law under consideration here is the Law of Moses, by which none can be justified before God. The law was never designed nor intended to bring justification for mankind. One thing the law did was to define sin and the sinfulness of sin. It was not God's scheme to redeem mankind.

Justification

The Law of Moses is considered to be a law of works because the only way one could be what God wanted one to be under the law was to do something that was impossible to do; namely, live perfectly without sin. There are theoretically but two ways by which a person can be justified. One is by a system of his own works of merit whereby he earns and deserves salvation; the other is by a system of forgiveness of his sins. This last system is offered graciously by God to those who believe and obey the law of Jesus Christ.

Let us illustrate. When a person is accused of a crime, if he is innocent of that crime and proven so, then he is set free because he deserves to be set free. He is not guilty. By his own merit he

should be set free. However, if he is guilty as charged, he can be set free only through forgiveness and pardon extended him by the grace of the court.

If a person commits murder, he is a murderer. He may be forgiven of his crime, but never on the basis of his own merit for his works were evil. He may do a million correct things thereafter, but none of them, nor all of them combined, would make his murder of another proper. Still he may be justified by being pardoned by an unmerited favor granted him by those in authority.

The point is that we can never be saved because we are righteous enough to deserve salvation or could ever earn the right into heaven. We can be acceptable before God only when God forgives us of our sins. This forgiveness is offered by the grace of God toward man and to those who have faith to obey His commands, His law and system. Even when we obey the Law of Christ we have not and cannot earn salvation. Luke 17:10, *"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do."* If ever we see God in His glory it will be by the system of grace of which we partake by an obedient faith.

Not Earned

Unfortunately, some have taught error that there is no law and no works for man to do. The truth is that we must do the works of obedience required in the Law of Christ. Even then we are not relying upon works of our own merit because by these there is no salvation. Grace does not dispute law, and obedience does not dispute faith. The system of salvation embraces God's grace, mercy, love, the blood of Christ, as well as man's faith and obedience to the Law of Christ. There is no excuse for taking one component of this system to the exclusion of any other component.

Never lived there a person so perfect that he could earn heaven. Only Christ, the Son of God, lived in sinless perfection. If one could live perfectly, then he would have no need for the blood of Christ and could by-pass God's Son on his way to eternal glory. But Jesus said there was no other way than His way (John 14:6). Has there ever been a day in our lives that we could contend that every deed, thought, word and attitude were perfect in every way? Has there ever been a day when some

noble deed might have been done was left undone? Who would dare suggest they could be saved by their own merit?

When Paul wrote Romans 3:9-18, citing Old Testament statement, he proved the point that *"they are all under sin."* Verse twenty-three, *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* Our first lesson from Romans is that salvation is by the grace of God and is ours when we believe and obey the Law of Jesus Christ.

Grace Covers

The second lesson takes less time to tell. Romans 5:12, *"Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin..."* All the briers, thistles, thorns, sickness, pain, sorrow, jealousies, enemities, hatreds, wars, bloodshed of anger, death and every evil thing has come as the result of the mighty tide of sin let loose with the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Every person since that time has been bombarded with temptation and partaken of sin, with the exception of Christ who was tempted but sinned not. The influence and power of sin cannot be adequately measured because of its magnitude.

Yet, the grace of God that is offered through Christ is more abundant to and superior than all sin. It can cover all sin. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven when brought beneath the grace of God by obedient faith. Grace, with a more powerful hand than sin, meets this dark onrushing tide of woe and death and rolls it back, freeing man from its peril and giving man glory, beauty and honor that the wonders of Eden never surpassed. Romans 5:20,*"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."* There is no extent of sin that grace does not have power to cover.

Through Adam mankind lost access to the tree of life, but through Christ the tree of life is ours in the Eternal City of heaven. Through Adam we die, but through Christ we live. Through Adam we lost our physical bodies, but through Christ we gain our spiritual bodies. Through Adam we lost the glories of Eden, but through Christ we gain the glories of heaven. Through Adam sin came rushing against mankind, but through Christ sin is forgiven and it loses its power to destroy.

Furthermore, because of God's grace and its power over sin, we live this life in hope and assurance, having been pardoned and washed clean by the Lamb's blood when we obeyed the

Law of Christ that calls for baptism into Christ. We have fellowship with Deity and the redeemed of all ages, enjoying the outpouring of His providence while in this world. Our second lesson is that grace not only opposes sin but is more powerful than sin and makes man spiritually whole and renewed.

Same Plan For All

The third lesson pertains to a mistake the Jews made. They thought because they were fleshly descendants of Abraham that they were acceptable to God. It never occured to the Jew that Gentiles could also be God's children. The Gentiles were not among the elect.

Paul declared, Romans 10:12,13, *"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* God created all mankind. He knows mankind. He has made His offer of grace through Christ to all mankind. All shall be saved the same way; namely, by the system of salvation that includes grace, mercy, love, blood, faith and works of obedience to the Law of Christ.

Romans 2:28,29 identifies God's chosen people, spiritual Israel. *"For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter whose praise is not of men, but of God."* The same truth is presented in Galatians 3:26-29. *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus; and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* As Peter declared at the house of Cornelius, Acts 10:34,35, *"Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respector of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is acceptable with him."* Everyone is saved the same way. The same plan is offered to all, and all must follow that plan which includes grace, mercy, love, blood, faith and obedience to the Law of Christ.

Having taught these three lessons, and many, many more, Paul began chapter twelve with various admonitions to those who come to Christ. The personal question facing each person is how much longer will those who are separated from Christ be

content to keep their eternities in danger and their souls in damnation before they arise and do the works of obedience that are motivated by faith in Christ that enables them to be washed clean by the blood of Christ that the grace, mercy and love of God has provided?

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Is Christianity Just a Burden And Sacrifice?

There are those who consider being a Christian a burden. To them it is a lifelong series of unpleasant sacrifices. There is the constant call to worship, the necessity of giving of finances, duties regarding the sick and needy, solicitations to help this and that, Bible study periods, even prayer becomes a task and weight that must be patiently borne. Furthermore, there is the obligation to give up the worldly, sensual pleasures of drinking alcoholic beverages, modern dancing, gambling, etc. You have to always be careful about your example, your speech, your habits, your friends. Many things from which others derive much please are forbidden. Therefore, as they see it, Christianity is an imposition of burdens and sacrifices. Is this the correct outlook on the religion of Jesus Christ?

Just Get By

Some "Christians" are inclined to do just as little as they think they can in the service of God to "get by." They attend as few services of worship as they can, usually only Sunday morning and that not always with regularity. They give the minimum their conscience will allow regardless of their prosperity or the need. Prayer and Bible study are considered intrusions on their time. They really do not want to go to hell and miss heaven, so they meet what they have determined are the minimum requirements, careful not to do much more. Like Andrew Jackson after many wars and political campaigns and duels, when he decided to "join the church," one question the pastor put to him was, "Do you forgive your enemies?" Jackson replied, "Is it

absolutely necessary?" Being informed that it was, he answered, "Well, if absolutely necessary, I will." It is this attitude among too many church members that makes this lesson so relevant. It is doubtful if such people can enter heaven with that viewpoint because they have missed the mark so badly. They are trusting in their own goodness, minimum though it is, and this will never suffice. They do not want to even be too charitable in that direction. How could anyone conclude they have understood the religion of Christ when this is what dominates their attitude and action?

Not Always Easy

We would never suggest that being a Christian is a soft bed of roses and a life of ease. It is far from that in this wicked world that is so overflowing with things that are anti-Christ. As the song asks, "Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease; while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?"

Even though the early Christians bore the burden and sacrificed much more than most are called upon to do in our land in order to be a Christian, they did not consider Christianity in terms of burdens and sacrifices. Let us read from the New Testament and sit where they sat for a while a get a proper perspective. Possibly we can attune our hearts to be more in keeping with the truth.

Romans 3:10,23, *"As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one... for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* First John 1:8, 10, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... if we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* We need to recall the introduction of sin into the world in the Garden of Eden that opened the floodgates of sin into the world. Our world has become engulfed as people have followed their own way rather than the way of the Lord. Out of Christ a person is in sin, doomed, damned, helpless and hopeless to retrieve himself from this dreadful spiritual state. A great need of our time is more people to realize their lost condition and their need of redemption.

Paul emphasizes this reality in Ephesians 2:12,13, when describing the state of people before they came to Christ. *"That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of*

promise, having no hope, and without God in the world; but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him... and not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." The word translated *atonement* in the King James Version refers to the reconciliation. Many, estranged from God because of sins, lost and without hope, can be reconciled to God because Christ came, brought hope, provided the way to make peace with God that was destroyed by transgression.

Redemption

Listen as Peter writes, First Peter 1:18-23, *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."*

The key thought is redemption through Christ. We sold our souls to Satan by sinning, and Christ paid the penalty and bought us back from the bondage of sin. Until He did that, there was no provision for man to be forgiven.

Paul teaches that God *"delivered us out of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."* (Colossians 1:13). Until God did that, makind was destined to remain in the darkness of sin. But Christ purchased us by His blood (Acts 20:28). As in other lessons of this issue we see the interworking of a number of components in the plan of salvation.

A Privilege

Since we have been purchased by His blood, we do not belong to ourselves to do as we determine, but to do as His will commands. First Corinthians 6:19,20, *"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God's."* In view of this teaching, doing as He wishes is not a burden, but it is the right and proper thing to do. Does a drowning man feel the one who throws the rope imposing upon him by telling him to grab the line? Is he not grateful for the opportunity and privilege afforded him by the rope and is grateful to the one who tossed it his direction? So it is with those who were drowning in the tempest of sin and who came to understand how God, through Christ, has thrown us the rope of salvation, so to speak. Why should we feel taking hold of the rope is a burden and a sacrifice? Is it not the most wonderful blessing which we can come to know? Why should we ever think that what God requires of us is anything but a privilege and benefit to ourselves?

New Creatures

The early Christians were taught that they were new creatures. Second Corinthians 5:17, *"Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature."* Upon becoming Christians people enter a new world, a new state, with a new set of values and a new standard by which to measure life. They have a new manner of life and a new destiny with a new concept of life, its purposes, and what really matter. Some things once considered burdens are no longer burdens and sacrifices and obligations to merely be tolerated. They now become privileges, challenges, opportuntities to bring glory to the name of Christ who saves us. While a person may still be introduced by the same name, have the same address, look the same outwardly, inside he is a *"new creature."* What a difference from his earlier state! *"Christ in you, the hope of glory."* (Colissians 1:27).

A striking example of this is the life of the apostle Paul. Hear this former persecutor of Christians in Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* Did Paul consider the things necessary to become and remain a faithful Christian just a burden and sacrifice?

Philippians 3:7-11, *"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of God by faith; that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."*

What Is Expected?

Since Christians are new creatures from what they were, it is logical and reasonable to expect a nobler life from them. Colossians 3:1-10;.12-17 is a lengthy passage the reader will do well to consider at this point in the lesson that shows the distinctiveness of the way Christians are to think and live.

Romans 6:2, *"We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein."* Another passage that points to the responsibility to live clean and righteous lives is First John 1:6,7, *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."*

Christianity does involve assuming a yoke. We exchange the yoke of sin, which we cannot carry successfully, for the yoke of righteousness. Jesus said, *"Take my yoke upon you..."* (Matthew 11:29). There is the demand of self-denial (Matthew 16:24,25). But is this a burden? Does the successful athlete consider his training nothing but a sacrifice, hardship and burden? No, he realizes it grants him a privilege to grow and develop. Does the successful parent look upon the care of his child only a burden and hardship, just an imposition upon him? Not if he considers if correctly. Hard though it may be at times, it is his joy and opportunity. His love for the child and the helping the child become what he can be makes all his efforts worth his time, energy and effort.

Opportunities

Realizing how we were once doomed in sin, bound for an eternal hell, then being made aware of God's love, grace, mercy

and forgiving attitude, seeing that He sent Christ to pay the price for us by becoming the sacrificial lamb, extending to us the invitation to come and be counted among the redeemed, how can we think of serving God in terms of burdens, sacrifices, hardships, when they are but opportunities to glorify His name, strengthen ourselves, and stay faithful in the walk toward heaven?

The primary point is that when we count our blessings we will consider Christianity in terms of blessings, not burdens. We will look with joy, happiness, contentment, satisfaction and hope on the way of the Lord.

Sentiments in one of our songs says, "Sure I must fight in Jesus name: Increase my courage Lord. I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by thy word." When that illustrious day shall come and our rewards shall be received, we will better understand why Paul wrote, Romans 8:18, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."*

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Justified By Faith

"Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1). No person that says he believes the Bible can honestly deny that we are saved by faith in Christ. This was written by an inspired apostle named Paul to those that composed the church at Rome. It was a message of salvation and justification. It was the way of peace with God. It showed how and by whom the spiritual blessings are obtained. *"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). *"I said therefore unto you that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). *"Without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* (Hebrews 11:6). *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."*

(Romans 1:16). Salvation is by faith. But that is not the entire story of salvation.

Had Paul said that salvation is by *faith alone* or *faith only* that would have given us a genuine and unsolvable contradiction of Scripture. James wrote, *"By works is a man justified and not by faith only."* (James 2:24). Romans 5:9 teaches we are justified by His blood. That would be in error if we are justified by faith alone. Even though some preach salvation by faith only, the only time that phrase appears in the Bible is where James says it is not that way. The inconsistency of the doctrine is seen when those who teach it also teach salvation by grace, prayer, repentance, etc. We once heard Billy Graham teach that salvation is by believing, repenting, confessing Christ and being humble. Most *faith only* people reject the necessity of baptism, but will include the necessity of love, confession and repentance. When you hold to such a false doctrine consistency is not something you particularly want to emphasize. If salvation is by all these things in addition to faith, why exclude baptism which is so plainly taught repeatedly in the Bible?

Kinds Of Faith

When Paul teaches we are saved by faith, what kind of faith is he considering? The Bible presents to us different kinds of faith. *O ye of little faith."* (Matthew 8:28). *"I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel."* (Matthew 8:10). *"Him that is weak in faith."* (Romans 14:1). Abraham *"waxed strong through faith."* (Romans 4:20). *"Faith apart from works is dead."* (James 2:26). *"By works was faith made perfect."* (James 2:22). Faith that is made perfect or whole and complete is a faith that works, a faith that produces obedience. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. In the very epistle where Paul teaches we are saved and justified by faith (Romans 5:1), he spoke of the obedience to faith and the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). It is evident that Paul speaks of a faith that obeys what is commanded. Otherwise it is not saving faith.

Let us determine even more certainly the meaning of the phrase *"by faith"* because that is the very phrase Paul used in our text. We turn to Hebrews eleven where the phrase *"by faith"* occurs repeatedly. In this chapter our attention is called to some of the outstanding people and events of the Old Testament. Hebrews 11:4, *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that*

he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

Abel

Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Abel's sacrifice was offered by faith. Therefore we know that God instructed him what to do and he did as God instructed. Everything that was included in offering the sacrifice was included in the phrase *"by faith." "By faith"* means more than simply believing what God said. It involves doing what God says. Notice that Abel acted, not simply a mental assent to the truth that God instructed. *"By faith"* Abel *"offered."* Faith includes obedient action.

Noah

"By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of righteousness which is by faith." (Hebrews 10:7). We do not know how long it took Noah to build the ark. There is the indication that one hundred twenty years were spent preaching and giving time of reprieve to people after God decided to destroy the wickedness of men. Regardless of how long it took Noah, everything he did was included in *"by faith."* What if God had warned Noah and then Noah said, "God, I believe you, but I do not think I need to build this ark!" Do you think Noah would have been saved by his faith alone? The Bible says, *"Thus did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he."* (Genesis 6:22). The finished ark and the ultimate salvation of Noah included his confidence and trust in the Word of God delivered to him and his obedience to what that Word directed. *"By faith"* included obedience to God's commands and the meeting of God's conditions. When a Christian reaches heaven it will be *"by faith"* also. Everything necessary to get to heaven is included in the phrase, *"by faith."*

Abraham

Hebrews 11:8, *"By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went."*

Notice the passage says, *"By faith Abraham... obeyed..."* Obedience is an act of faith. His faith would have been useless if he had not acted. His faith was perfected because he acted. His faith took him from the Ur of Chaldee to the land of Palestine. The phrase *"by faith"* includes every step he made in that journey. His obedience was not a work of merit, but it was a necessary work of obedience.

Hebrews 11:17,18 also speaks of Abraham. *"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called."* The full account of the trial of Abraham is found in Genesis 22. The point we want to study here is that Abraham offered Isaac *"by faith."* This is the same phrase used in Romans 5:1 that teaches us how we are justified or saved. Just what was involved in this action of Abraham? He took Isaac, laid him on the altar and lifted his knife. Everything that was done during that heart-rending episode was said to have been done *"by faith."* Now consider the plain teaching of James regarding this same Abraham. *"Was not Abrahan our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works and by works was faith made perfect?"* (James 2:21,22). It becomes clear that there is an inseparable connection between faith and works of obedience. Over and over we are impressed that the faith that saves is the faith that obeys what God directs.

Jericho Walls

One of the easiest examples of saving faith to understand is also found in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Verse thirty reads, *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days."* There is no doubt that the walls fell by faith. The matter of concern is when the walls fell by faith. Did the walls fall by faith alone? Absolutely not! They fell *"by faith"* upon the obedience to the commands God gave regarding the march around the walls one time each day for six days and seven times the seventh day. If they had not obeyed those commands their faith would have profited them nothing. Are we to think that Joshua and the Israelites could have responded, "Lord, we believe in your power and know that you will do as you have said. Of this we have complete confidence. But this marching business is too much. It does not seem to

have any connection with removing the walls. So we expect to enter Jericho by faith alone." We all suspect that the walls would have stood and Israel would have been turned away. Why cannot people see now that salvation is *"by faith"* but that faith includes meeting the conditions God has specified, such as repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ? Doing these things is not denying salvation by faith but is proving that the faith one has is a saving faith. Faith is made perfect by obedience. When did the walls fall? It was after the people obeyed. When is one saved *"by faith"*? It is after one does what God commands, including baptism.

Isarel At The Sea

The last example that demonstrates the meaning of *"by faith"* is in verse twenty-nine of Hebrews eleven. *"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned."* This turns our attention to the record of Exodus fourteen and the deliverance from Egypt. Some contend that baptism is not included in the phrase *"by faith."* But baptism was included in that phrase in this instance. Israel was not saved from Egypt the moment they believed that God could and would deliver them. Not only were they not yet saved the moment they believed, their enemy was not destroyed the moment they believed. All of these blessings were theirs only when they reached the other side of the sea. Everything that it took to get from one side of the sea to the other was done *"by faith."* Something was done. Israel had to go into the midst of the sea with the walls of water on either side of them and the cloud above them. They were completely submerged beneath the dual substance of the cloud and the sea. Paul says they were baptized in the cloud and the sea (First Corinthians 10:1,2). Just as John used water as the element when he baptized Jesus, and Philip used water when he baptized the Ethiopian, and Peter used water when he baptized Cornelius and his house, the Israelites were baptized in the cloud and the sea. Paul says it was *"by faith."* The phrase *"by faith"* included action, including baptism. There can be no question in the minds of honest people that such is the case.

Let us summarize the major points of truth we have learned. In every instance in Hebrews eleven the phrase *"by faith"* involved more than mental assent, trust, agreement and confidence. It included action. It involved obedience to whatever

command God had given whether it was a sacrifice, building the ark, offering a son, marching around walls, or being baptized in the cloud and sea. Paul teaches we are saved *"by faith."* That includes whatever God has commanded regarding salvation. Paul never taught, nor did any other inspired teacher, that we are saved by faith alone or faith only. There never has been a more deceptive doctrine and it is false to the core. Yet, that is the dominant doctrine of salvation among most denominations. It shows how much respect for the Word of God some have.

We have also learned that salvation or justification *"by faith"* includes baptism just as *"by faith"* included baptism with the Israelites at the Red Sea. In order to be justified and enjoy with God and Christ the peace offered, we must make our faith perfect by our obedience to the conditions God has given for the reception of the gift of salvation. Otherwise, our faith will be a dead faith that cannot and will not save.

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He Came To Save Sinners

"Faithful is the saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..." (First Timothy 1:15). The author is the Holy Spirit; the writer was Paul; and the one to whom the passage was first addressed was Timothy. It is a statement of reemphasis of the basic mission of Jesus Christ for coming to this earth. No verse is any more comprehensive in this matter than this one unless it is Luke 19:10, *"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."* Again, John 6:38, *"For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me."* Such declarations have thrilled the hearts of serious people since the days of the first century. They have never ceased to bring joy, comfort and hope to mankind.

A newspaper reported the plight of a boy who lived along the banks of the Mississippi River following the spring thaw of ice of the north and the heavy rains. Levees broke and waters flooded the lowlands engulfing a small town under fifteen feet of water. Many drowned and much property, businesses and

homes were totally destroyed. A relatively small boy managed to climb atop a house. He was cold, wet and hungry and able to feel the house quiver beneath him under the pressures of the pounding waters. His death seemed but a moment away. But he was spotted by rescuers circling overhead in a helicopter. They hovered lower, dropped a rope to the lad who anxiously took hold, and he was pulled to safety only moments before the house collapsed and was washed downstream.

Without Christ

A person without Christ is in a similar state as the boy on the roof. Humanity has engulfed itself in a flood of sin, helpless before the pounding of temptations, clinging to life in desparate need of spiritual rescue. The boy's danger was physical peril, but the danger of one in sin is spiritual. This is a greater peril than any physical peril one can imagine. This peril can and does have eternal consequences. Many are unlike the boy who realized his danger. Some are wandering about seemingly unaware and unconcerned for the spiritually disastrous situation they are suffering.

Sin came into the world with the transgression of our first parents. *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world..."* (Romans 5:12). When Adam and Eve sinned the floodgates of evil were opened and sin has flowed rampantly in the lives of their descendants. Sin and its wages have plagued mankind ever since. None are sinners or are guilty of sin simply because of the sin of the first pair, but sin and temptation to sin has been encountered by all and *"all have sinned."* (Romans 3:23). Sin is a transgression of the law of God (First John 3:4). Everyone is a sinner because of his or her own sins (Romans 5:12), *"...for that all have sinned."* Even those who are Christians will sin (First John 1:8). *"There is none righteous, no, not one."* (Romans 3:9,10).

Our Guilt

Convincing ourselves and others of guilt of sin is often difficult. Human beings are inclined to defiantly deny their guilt and thereby deny their irrefutable need of forgiveness. But when we accept the revelation of God, there will be no question in our minds that we need to be freed from sin. John records, *"Everyone that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin."* (John

8:34). This is the worst form of slavery. We who sin and remain in that state are in servitude to Satan. To remain in his service will be to receive the wages of sin, which is a spiritual death or separation from God (Romans 6:23; Second Thessalonians 1:8,9). Paul writes that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). James also states, *"Let no man say when he is tempted I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:13-15). In both of these passages the word translated *death* means *the miserable state of the wicked dead in hell.* It refers to the wretchedness in the lower world. We should consider these passages and their significant meaning. They ought to be allowed to rank high among the solemn, shocking and soul-disturbing warnings that God has graciously given unto man regarding the devestation of sin.

Lost In Sin

Those who live and die in sin have nothing to which to look forward unless they are rescued. Refering to the small boy again, all he could see before him was fear, horror, hopelessness and physical death in the swirling waters below him. *"And cast ye out the unprofitable servant unto outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 25:30). *"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."* (Matthew 25:41). *"And these shall go away into everlasting punishments, but the righteous into life eternal."* (Matthew 25:46). *"He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb, and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever and they have no rest day nor night..."* (Revelation 14:10,11). *"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."* (Revelation 20:10). *"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."* (Revelation 20:14,15). Second Thessalonians 1:8,9, *"...in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know*

not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." All such words are given to us by God to convince us of our lost and hopeless condition when we are out of Christ. Surely, there is no consolation offered in these verses that the weary soul desires. But such is our destiny without Christ.

There is the story told of a man who walked through some deserted mining region and he was overtaken by the darkness of night. He lost his way in the darkness and his danger was great because he might step over some precipice, or down some open shaft and gloomy pit and be dashed to pieces or trapped without anyone ever knowing what became of him. Fortunately, he realized his peril and stopped and began to cry aloud for someone to help him. One who lived nearby heard his cries for help, took his lantern, and being familiar with the terrain, hurried out toward the pitiful wails of the lost man. The glimmering light came nearer and nearer the lost one until the rays of the lantern made the surroundings as bright as day. The lost man was lifted to his feet and guided safely through the surrounding danger toward the cottage of security.

Who could doubt for a moment that this rescue was due to the one who answered the call? He heard the cry and acted on behalf of the lost one, bringing him to safety.

Spiritually speaking, people are lost like this man, travelling the dangerous road of life in the darkness of their own sins, unable to find the way to safety alone. Every person, like the man of the story, can and ought cry out for someone to save them. But who can lead a person to spiritual security except Jesus the Christ? He is the only Savior (Acts 4:12). Paul said, *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..."* as our text states. Just as the man that was lost saw the light and followed his rescuer, so must we come to the light of truth and follow Christ for our salvation.

Christ Came To Save

Christ came into the world to save sinners. This is a refreshing word for our spirits and words that provide hope in the midst of a sin-burdened world. When the Lord was born in Bethlehem the angels announced Him as Savior (Luke 2:11). When the Samaritans heard and saw Jesus they recognized Him as Savior. *"Now we believe... for we have heard for ourselves and know*

that this indeed is the witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." Jesus did not come primarily to condemn the world, but to save the world (John 12:47). Condemnation of evil was part of His mission as He sought the salvation of man. Salvation, however, was uppermost. The truth of Christ and His message is what the world needs so much.

Christ became our Savior only at great sacrifice. Romans 5:18 teaches that it was through one act of righteousness that He brought justification to man. This has reference to His crucifixion on Calvary's cross. By His death on the cross He paid the price for the sins that we have committed. There is a painting of a little girl talking to a figure that represents Jesus and she is holding His hand with the nailprints quite evident, and she is asking, "What happened to your hand?" That which happened to the hand of Jesus was the cost that He bore in order to be our Savior. To be sure, all that led to that climatic moment of His supreme sacrifice was part of His sacrifice. His willingness to leave the glory of heaven and take on the form of man to endure temptations and trials were parts of His bitter sacrifice (Philippians 2:5-8). His humilation before men, being betrayed by one of His own number, forsaken by all and deprived of justice and mercy in order to bestow justice and mercy was part of His sacrifice. Jesus became our Savior only at heavy costs to Himself. But thanks be to God that God was willing to send His only begotten Son and that His Son was willing to do what He has done for us. Otherwise, "*To whom shall we go?*"

Paul said, *"Faithful is the saying..."* that is, here is something on which we can depend to be true and sure. Here is that which deserves our confidence. Jesus came to save sinners. He is the author of salvation (Hebrews 5:9).

There Is More

Hebrews 5:9 does not stop with telling us Christ is the author of salvation but continues, *"He became the author of salvation to them that obey Him."* What if the boy on the roof refused the rope extended to him? What if a starving man rejects the food offered him? What if the sick will not take the medicine prescribed for them? What if the man lost in the mining area had not wanted salvation, refused to cry out, and refused to follow his benefactor? What of that person who is accountable before God but will not obey Jesus Christ? Can they enjoy salvation

anyway? He came to save, but who will be saved? Those who hear and do. Who among us will be in that number?

† † † † †

The Creed Of The Church

The title of this lesson can be very misleading in view of today's religious terminology unless we understand what we have in mind. We shy away from the word *creed* and for good reason. The word has come to refer to something we never find in the Bible. Actually, a creed is simply a formula of religious belief and a brief statement of the same. When we understand it in that sense, it is a good term. But many understand it to refer to a set of rules, laws, and doctrines conceived and arranged by religious leaders of a denominational body to denote the distinctive features of that denomination. Denominational creeds are foreign to the Scriptures. In this sense, the church of the Lord has no creed because it is not regulated by doctrines of men but by the doctrine of Christ. Neither is the Lord's church a denomination.

The word *creed*, like the perfectly scriptural terms of bishop, pastor, sancitification and other words have been so misused and misunderstood that explanations are always necessary when they are used correctly. However, the term *creed*, although not a Biblical term, does convey a Biblical idea. Strictly speaking, the church does have a creed inasmuch as there is a formula and system of religious faith that the church upholds and follows.

Meaning Of Faith

The word *faith* is used in different senses in Scripture. Sometimes it refers to the entire doctrinal system which God has revealed to us in the Scriptures. Acts 6:7, *"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."* Acts 13: 8, *"But Elymas the sorcerer [for so is his name by interpretation] withstood them, seeking to turn away*

the deputy from the faith." Galatians 1:23, *"But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed."*

More frequently the word *faith* is used to refer to the state of belief, trust, confidence, a condition of understanding and acceptance. Matthew 15:28, *"Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."* John 8:24, *"I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* Mark 16:16, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."*

Again, Romans 14:23, *"And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."* Here the word *faith* refers to a person's individual conviction. Whether his conviction is right or wrong, true or false, is not in question. It means what a person thinks is right. Many times, however, what may be a very strong conviction (faith) is not accurate and harmonious to the will of God. It is, nonetheless, a sin to violate your own convictions, your conscience, because anyone that would do that is not ever being honest with himself.

Faith also denotes faithfulness, fidelity, reflected in obedience to the system of doctrine in Scripture. Romans 1:8, *"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."* Paul was commending these brethren for their loyalty to the truth.

All Meanings Related

As could be expected, there is a close relationship in all of these shades and senses of meaning. To review, one *faith* is THE FAITH revealed in Scripture, which is the will of God. Another *faith* is man's belief, trust and confidence. A third *faith* is man's personal conviction and conscientious thought. A fourth sense of *faith* is a description of a person's loyalty to the first faith.

Only one of these is a perfect faith. That is THE FAITH that refers to the infallible will of God, the system of Christ, the religions of which He is the Founder. Certainly, our loyalty is not perfect. Neither can we boast that every personal conviction is always accurate, although we can measure and know whether it is or not. We can examine our convictions by THE FAITH and

when found to harmonize we can know they are accurate. Our faith in the sense of belief may not always be mature, perfect and whole. There is such a thing as a weak faith, and a faith that will not save because it will not cause one to obey. But THE FAITH, the doctrine of Christ, is without flaw. Its author is the Omnipotent Deity. This faith is the divine standard by which all things are governed religiously.

Wonderful, indeed, would it be if the church today would always be loyal, putting trust and confidence in Christ, holding to accurate convictions as are revealed in THE FAITH. The creed of the church is THE FAITH as delivered by Deity through the Holy Spirit and inspired men, now embodied in the inspired Scriptures (Second TImothy 3:16,17).

Human Creeds

Too often the standard used in religion has been a creed composed of what somebody believes. Obviously, men ought to practice what they believe to be true. But what men believe to be true is not necessarily what God has revealed to be true. Men may honestly believe that Jesus was just another man, exceptional, but only human. They may believe sincerely that sprinkling water is acceptable baptism. They may believe that regular worship is unnecessary. But in all three instances they would believe an untruth. Their belief is not a reliable standard.

If mankind would ever unite under the creed of Christ it must be by acceptance of nothing more or less than the inspired creed. Every attempt to unite people religiously is destined to failure and is futile unless there is the acceptance of the same divine FAITH.

For this reason we plead with all people everywhere to throw away the human and denominational creeds and be content to take just the Bible, God's Word. The divisions that are multiplied throughout the world find their roots and their sustenance in the creeds of religion that people have either written, or hold to, instead of or alongside of the Bible.

The Divine Creed

It is evident that *"God hath spoken"* to man with purpose and design in order that mankind might understand Him and obey His voice. If we cannot understand Him, why would He send us His message at all? To contend that people cannot

understand God is to be forced to accept one of two distressing positions. (1) God could not present His will so man could understand it, or (2) God would not present His will so man could understand it. We want neither side of that sordid coin.

People can understand the Bible alike. Millions do. When people do not see the Scriptures alike, one of three conditions exists. (1) One understands and the other misunderstands, or (2) vice versa, or (3) both misunderstand, possibly in different ways. When they both understand, they will see it alike. This is either true or God is the fault of the very division He condemns. He is the cause of what Jesus prayed would not exist (John 17:21). He makes it necessary to disobey the very teaching His inspired apostles gave in First Corinthians 1:10.

If a merchant misuses his yardstick, it is not the fault of the yardstick or the one who made it. When a surveyor misreads his chain and compass, is that the fault of the instrument? When a mathematician errs in applying proper rules of mathematics, are the rules the cause of the error? So it is when people misread, misapply and misunderstand the Scriptures. So often this is done in a effort to harmonize a predetermined denominational creed with the true and genuine formula of faith that God has revealed. But the Bible is not the fault, but mankind.

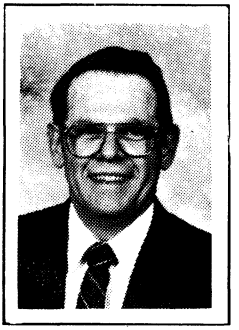
Our Plea

To *"speak as the oracles of God,"* (First Peter 4:11), speaking where the Scriptures speak and remaining silent where the Scriptures are silent, neither adding to nor taking from, is not making man or any other measure the judge of men. The creed of the church cannot be, has not been, nor shall ever be anything other than the Word of God. For THE FAITH we ought to contend (Jude 3).

It is the plea of faithful Christians that we all let the Bible be our creed, rejecting anything and everything that is not from its authority; accepting anything and everything revealed therein. You can take a copy of the Bible and have stamped across its cover, "THE CREED OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST."

† † † † †

Flood Evidence



JAMES W. BOYD

My reading brought me to material that contends that animals of every kind died in great numbers and were buried almost instantly. Neither man nor beast could have made such a thing as is often found to have happened. Carcasses would have been devoured by nature's scavengers before nature would have buried them. or man could have buried them in the enormous depths where such is often found. Furthermore, mingled together are the remains of animal and plant life. Large animals, small animals, mammals, sea creatures, all thrown together cannot be accounted for except for tremendous action of water. Not even pestilence nor drought could have produced such phenomenon. There is only one explanation that meets scientific and Biblical necessities and that is the great flood at the time of Noah. That this will be denied can be expected. But that it is true is something the skeptic will have to face and cannot overcome.

It is so much easier to believe God's truth than to try to explain it away in order to accomodate theorists who prefer to remove God and make us all just meaningless beasts.

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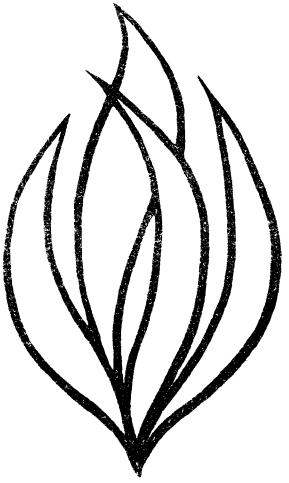

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME VIII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 8**

Must One Be A Member Of The Church of Christ To Be Saved?

Our lesson raises the question that is so often asked of members of the Lord's church. Doubtless there are times when it is asked by those who actually seek to criticize, find fault, or attempt to ridicule the truth. But are there not those who may ask this question quite honestly and sincerely? Whatever be the motive behind the question, if it is answered at all, it must be answered according to the Scriptures. Certainly this is true regarding the question, "Must one by a member of the church of Christ to be saved?" Answers that spring from prejudice, whether pro or con, will not suffice. The standard must be the Word of God.

Some people are heard to say that they like various members of the church, count them as friends, but cannot accept the idea that one must be a member of the church of Christ to be saved. The question intimidates some brethren because they feel it is very delicate one and they do not wish to offend anyone with their answer. But delicate or not, it is really not that difficult to answer, provided (and this is a big condition) we stay with the Bible. We want to answer this question completely, kindly, most of all Biblically and with a certain sound that becomes the doctrine of Christ. Anything less is no answer worth hearing.

About Morals

Members of the church of Christ, as we speak generally of them, recognizing that there always be individual exceptions in every generalized comment, do not consider themselves necessarily better morally than many other people. Surely, Christians ought to be moral. One cannot follow Christ and practice immorality with His approval. But there are moral people in almost every religious group. Especially is this true among the religious world that likes to call itself *Christian*. We do not want to be found condemning the good in anybody. Furthermore, let us state clearly that if God wants to save everybody, even unconditionally, that will be fine with members

of the church of Christ. However, believing the Bible to be true, we do not believe there is a chance of that. We do not hate other people. We seek the salvation of all people. We do not despise those with whom we have differences, even great differences. One cannot hate another person and follow Christ. We hate error and evil, but not people. We want to be saved and we want to understand the Word of God, and desire the same thing for people everywhere. God forgive us if this is not true. How can we be true to Him otherwise?

Denominations

One source of difficulty arises from the fact that when members of the church of Christ speak of the church, we mean something very different from what is generally understood in the minds of those of the denominational world. We do not have in mind any denomination whatever. We are not the *Church of Christ* denomination. If a religious party is a denomination, it is not the church of Christ. If it is the church of Christ, it is not a denomination. There is no kinship between the church of which we speak and denominationalism. We disclaim any such denominational designation, being strongly opposed to the existence of any and all denominations. The reason for this is simple. The Bible never speaks or authorizes denominations. We admit that one does not have to be a member of a denomination, any denomination, to be saved. We would agree that one denomination is as good as another. But when we speak of the church, we are talking about the church the Bible reveals, and that has no relationship with denominationalism. Those who believe denominationalism has God's blessings are obliged to produce Scripture to show that God had denominations in mind when He gave the world the church.

The Kingdom

When we say, *church of Christ*, we mean the kingdom of God, the body of Christ, the family of God, and other such Biblical designations that identify the church revealed in the Bible. This is how the New Testament speaks of the church. Why should men take it upon themselves to speak of it in ways other than the way the oracles of God speak? (First Peter 4:11). The church is the army of the Lord and those who are Christians are soldiers in the Lord's army. The church is the company of

the saved on the earth (Acts 2:47). This is all we mean by the phrase, *church of Christ*. It is a possessive phrase, showing to whom the church belongs. Christ died for it, purchasing it with His own blood, is the Savior of it, its head, foundation and cornerstone. He built it. It is indeed His, *the church of Christ*. This is what Paul called congregations of Christians in Romans 16:16, *"The churches of Christ salute you."*

We often read of the kingdom of God, or kingdom of heaven, the ultimate destiny of the church as well as the source of its origin and design. These are phrases that show the kingdom is from heaven and belongs to God. It is the same as the kingdom of Christ. The kingdom and the church are one and the same. When Christ promised to build His church, He also promised to give to the apostles the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:16-18; 18:18). He used the terms *church* and *kingdom* interchangeably. It would have been absurd to promise to build one thing, but give the apostles the keys (authority) to something else, or something different. Jesus taught that the seed of the kingdom is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). But when the Word of God is sown in honest and good hearts it produces the church everytime.

Surely, no genuine Bible believer would contend that one can be saved outside the kingdom of God. There are two spiritual kingdoms with one belonging to the Lord and the other the kingdom of Satan. Those in the church in Colosse were said to have been *"delivered ... from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son."* (Colossians 1:13). Those in the church were and are the same ones that were and are in the Lord's kingdom.

Soldiers of Christ

When one is a citizen in the kingdom of God he is also a soldier of the cross. The Christian life is pictured as a walk, journey, race, warfare, labor in the vineyard, and other ways. Paul told Timothy, *"Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."* (Second Timothy 2:2). Paul urged brethren in Ephesus to *"put on the whole armor of God."* (Ephesians 6:11). This indicates a soldier going into battle. He urged all to *"fight the good fight of faith."* (First Timothy 6:12). As he neared the end of his days on earth Paul said he had, *"... fought a good fight."* (Second Timothy 4:7). Furthermore, Christ is the captain of our faith (Hebrews 2:10). All of these expressions are military terms,

further showing that one who serves Christ is His soldier.

There are two great forces antagonistic to each other; namely, good versus evil, right versus wrong, darkness versus light, God versus Satan. Every person is on one side or the other. There is no neutrality even though some have deceived themselves into thinking they can remain uncommitted. Christ said we are either for Him or against Him (Matthew 12:30). We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). When we speak of one being in the church of Christ, we only mean that he is enlisted in the army of the Lord. Who would contend we can be saved while serving in the army of the Devil? One must be in the Lord's army.

His Body

The church is called the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18). Christ is its head and Christians are members of the body (First Corinthians 12:27). This figure is used to show the relationship of Christ to Christians and vice versa. When a person is under Christ he is under the control of the head. When one is separated from Christ he is as one never belonging to or being cut off from the body. Would anyone who believes the Bible suggest for a moment that one can be saved apart from Christ? If so, what is the need of Christ?

Our redemption is in Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). Salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). He is the Savior of the body (Acts 4:12), and there is but one body (Ephesians 4:4) and the body is the church. So there is but one church of which Christ is head and Savior (Ephesians 5:23). This is what it means to be a member of the church of Christ. It means being a members of His body, being in Him, where salvation is.

God's Children

The church is also called the family of God (First Timothy 3:15). The family of God, or house or household of God, is that which includes all His children. There is no such thing as being a child of God outside of His family, spiritually speaking. But the church is that family. That is the definition of the church. When one is *born again* he is born into the family of God. He becomes a child of God. At one and the same time He becomes a member of the church because that is what the church is, His

family that is composed of His redeemed children.

Too many have listened too long to too many denominational teachers that have taught that one does one thing to be saved but something else to become a member of the church. It is true that you do one thing to be saved and something different to join some denomination. But what one does to be saved is exactly the same thing one does to become a member of the Lord's church. Those who have heard the gospel, believed in Christ, obeyed the gospel in repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ, as did those on Pentecost, are added by the Lord to the church, just as were those on Pentecost (Acts 2:47). One cannot be saved without being *born again* (John 3:3, 5). One cannot be saved outside of God's family. Therefore, one cannot be saved outside of the church of Christ. Keep in mind, this never refers in the Bible to some denomination of human origin for which no authority from God exists that gives it a right before Him to exist.

Which One?

But someone may justifiably ask, "What denomination does one join when he becomes a Christian, when he enlists in the Lord's army, when he enters the body, when he is *born again?*" Is it not fair to suggest that people today ought to *join* the same denomination that people joined in New Testament times? Of course, there were no denominations then. People did not join any denomination. They obeyed the gospel and were added to the church and were called *Christians* (Acts 11:26). If people could be and were Christians, members of the Lord's church without being in a denomination then, why cannot the same be true today? Indeed, it can, and indeed, it must be that way if it is to be Biblical. This is what members of the church of Christ are urging and pleading with the world to do and to be.

"Can one join a denomination anyway?" First, why should he? What benefit is there in belonging to that of which nothing is said in Scripture? Furthermore, we are not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11) and those that teach a different doctrine (Second John 9-11). The divided, chaotic, confused and contradicotry nature of denominationalism makes it an abomination against the prayer of Jesus when He prayed for unity (John 17) and flies in the face of Paul's inspired condemnation of division (First Corinthians 1). We are and should be interested in New Testament Christianity which is

revealed by the authority of Christ. Denominationalism has no divine sanction or origin. What we do must be done in the name of (by the authority of) Christ (Colossians 3:17). One cannot support a denomination by the Lord's authority. He never condoned such a thing as the spectacle we see around us.

Where Salvation Is

So the answer to the question we have studied is clear and simple when we understand what the Bible teaches respecting the church, what it is, and of what it is composed. One cannot be saved outside of the church of Christ. If one can, why did Christ build it, die for it, and promise to save it? Why did Paul say He would save it and never says anything about Him saving anything else? Where is the Biblical evidence He will save anything else, something else, or some substitute of man's concoction? The answer is clear, but not always readily accepted. But those who want just the plain truth of the Bible will readily and easily accept it and will conform to the teaching of Christ regarding entering and remaining faithful in the church. By faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins one is saved from his past sins, enters the church by being added by the Lord, enlists in the Lord's army, becomes a citizen in His kingdom, and is counted by the Lord as one of His children and in His family.

† † † † †

The New and Living Way

Hebrews 10:11, *"Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."*

In this passage the inspired writer is making a contrast between the old and the new. He speaks of entrance into the

holiest by a new and living way. This calls to mind the two compartments of the tabernacle, and later the temple, one being the Holy Place and the other the Most Holy Place. These two compartments are typical of the church and heaven. The one had reference to the Mosaic of Judaistic system, the old way, and the other to Christianity, the new and living way.

Into the Holy Place would go the Jewish priests to perform their assigned duties. Into the Most Holy Place, the holiest, would go the high priest once per year to offer the blood of atonement for the sins of the people, including himself.

Christ, High Priest

Christ, our high priest, has entered into heaven with His own blood as the atonement for the sins of mankind, but not His own sins for He did no sin. We have entrance into heaven, the antitype of the Most Holy Place, by a new and living way, not the way that characterized the Mosaic system of entering into the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, the type of heaven. This new and living way has been made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ and He was the sacrifice, His flesh being on the cross. Now in the holiest or heaven He serves as our high priest and lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

The way of salvation provided by Christ is new because it is not the way of former dispensations. A dispensation is simply a system by which God governs man for a period of time. On this point regarding dispensations the religious world generally is in great confusion and misunderstanding because they fail to rightly divide the word of truth. There are three dispensations revealed in Scripture. The first is the Patriarchal; the second is the Mosaic, which applied exclusively to the Jews; and the third is the Christian under the authority of God through Christ. We are not to think that people who lived in former dispensations cannot enter heaven or that they can never be forgiven of their sins. The sacrifice of Christ was of such nature that His blood flowed backwards and forwards, so to speak, from the cross to cover the sins of faithful and obedient people. But the way people in former dispensations served God is not the way we now serve God, but now it is by the new and living way.

Types

The sacrifices of former ages were typical of the one sufficient

sacrifice of Christ. Those sacrifices at best only moved the sins of the worshippers forward year by year. It eventually took the blood of Christ to actually provide for the washing away of their sins as well as the sins of those of us who live this side of the cross of Christ.

During the personal ministry of Christ here on earth we often read where He simply spoke sins forgiven. During the preparatory work of John the Baptist the people were taught to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4), looking forward to and believing in the One that was to come (Acts 19:4). But today we live under the new and different way.

Prophesied to Come

This new and living way was predicted in former ages. Beginning with the eviction from Eden in Genesis 3:15 we have inferences, prophecies, promises of the new covenant that was to come. The way of salvation offered to people today is not the way of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Nor is it the way of Moses, Joshua and David. It is not the way that was preached by John the Baptist whose labors were preparatory for the new and living way. The new and living way is the way provided by and through Christ and according to His faith or religion. Matthew 28:18, *"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."* It is to Jesus Christ that we must look.

The old law given through Moses lasted until it was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way (Colossians 2:14). It was only to exist until *"the faith which should afterwards be revealed"* was revealed (Galatians 3:24). Jesus said that part of His mission was to fulfill the old law (Matthew 5:17). He did not remove it by destroying it but by fulfilling it, accomplishing its purposes. That old law has now been abolished (Ephesians 2:15). We do not turn back into the revelation concerning former dispensations to learn of the new and living way, but we turn to the new covenant (Hebrews 9:15; 10:9).

New, Not a Renovation

This way is new and not the old made over. Nor is it a postscript attached thereto. Rather than being a system for just a family as in the days of the patriarachs, or for a solitary nation, as was the Law of Moses for the Jews, the faith of Christ is of universal application and offered to all. For this reason it is to be

preached to the whole world (Mark 16:15,16). Galatians 3:28 teaches the gospel is for all as does Acts 10:34, 35 and Romans 10:13.

The new and living way was not preached in former ages except in prophecy and promise. It began to be heard on Pentecost (Acts 2). It was presented after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and after He had ascended into heaven. It was proclaimed first when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost as Jesus had promised them (Luke 24:46, 47). Peter referred to the events on Pentecost as the *beginning*. (Acts 11:15).

Includes Baptism

Included in this new and living way into the *holiest* is baptism *"in the name of Christ."* (Acts 2:28). That which is done *in the name of Christ* simply means that it is done by His authority (Colossians 3:17). While John the Baptist baptized for the remission of sins, his work was done before the new and living way was presented and the baptism he administered was not by the authority of Christ who had not yet been glorified. In Acts 19 we read where Paul encountered some who had been baptized by the baptism preached and practiced through the preaching of John the Baptist, and Paul realized they were lacking. He baptized them like those baptized on Pentecost, *"in the name of the Lord Jesus."* or the baptism by His authority and faith.

Only One

This new and living way will never be superceded by some other way. There is and shall be no other way because Jesus is the way and there is no other (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

This new and living way was not even in effect while Christ was upon the earth. It was not until after His death, burial, resurrection and ascension that it was first preached in His name. For this reason nobody can look to the events concerning the thief on the cross, or any other whose sins may have been forgiven by Jesus during His earthly lifetime, as the new and living way now in force.

Many religious people, doubtless honest and sincere, often cite as their authority for certain religious practices various things done under former dispensations. It is true that we learn from things written aforetime (Romans 15:4) and the things which

happened unto them serve as examples for us (First Corinthians 10:11). But the similarities and principles of the God-man relationships of former and different systems are not the specific ordinances of God now binding upon people today who are amenable to God through Christ. What is binding is that which has been declared so by the authority of Christ.

The reason Christians today do not observe the Passover, various feast days, holy days, Sabbaths, animal sacrifices, make pilgrimages to Jerusalem, use instruments of music in worship, burn candles and incense, etc. is because these were traits of former ages. Under Christ we observe the Lord's Supper, sing, pray in the name of Christ, are baptized for the remission of sins in His name, worship every first day of the week, etc. because these are parts of the system given through Christ, the new and living way of which our text speaks as the way into the holiest.

Jesus, the Way

The way is new because it is different from earlier system. It is living because it is now alive, in effect, vital, and the only way to eternal life. It is based on the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the One who made it possible by His shed blood, as our text states. Even though dispensations contributed to its gradual revelation and development, and faithful people of former days predicted it, received promise and prophecy of its coming, even presenting pictures, types and representations of it, it became God's way for redeeming man on the first day of Pentecost after our Lord returned to the holiest.

Now, almost two thousand years old, having already lasted longer than did the Mosaic system, and possibly even longer than did the Patriarachal period, it will ever remain new, fresh, sufficient, exclusive as God's power to save (Romans 1:16). If any would hear the words, "*Well done...,*' it will be because he or she has come to God by the new and living way.

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Can you think of anyone among your acquaintances that is an unfaithful Christian? What have you done lately to try to restore them to the Lord? Would it not be a good thing to use part of this day reaching out for the fallen and wayward child of God? What would be a better spent effort?

Ready To Give Answer

Because there is such division religiously in the world, members of the Lord's church often find themselves discussing matters of religion with those who differ with their convictions. You occasionally hear of some people holding the absurd position that one ought never discuss religion and politics. It is sad that many cannot enter discussions without losing objectivity, losing their tempers, and allowing discussions to degenerate into personal arguments rather than arguments of the issues involved. But the only way unity can be attained is for people to have and hold a knowledge of the Word of God. Taking the gospel to the world demands a discussion of it. We simply cannot fulfill a very great Christian duty if we do otherwise.

You Tell Him

Have you ever had anybody to ask you to address a third person with the request, "Tell him what we believe." Preachers have this asked of them quite often. The implication is that the person making the request cannot tell another what he believes and why. It is evident that many people, in and out of the church, are living on a *borrowed faith,* something they have heard from someone in whom they have confidence, and have accepted it without question, never measuring it by the Word of God. This is the root of traditionalism, false religion, apostasy and other forms of departure from the faith of Christ. Something is woefully lacking when a Christian must turn to someone else and request, "Tell him what we believe." While we can assist one another in learning, eventually we ought to know the truth for ourselves and be able to convey that truth to others.

The Roman Catholic is instructed to tell non-Catholics who might inquire concerning their religion, "You must talk with my priest." This has been told me numerous time as I would engage Catholics in discussions concerning the faith of Christ. They have been told that they cannot understand the Bible, and this is an ability that belongs exclusively to the priest. While many Protestants would reject Romanism, they have about the same response to questions about their faith. They will say something on the order of, "You will have to talk with my pastor." It

amounts to the same thing. Members of the church are just a guilty at times when they would respond to others by saying, "You will have to ask my preacher."

This is not as it ought to be. Peter said, First Peter 3:15, *"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."* Each Christian should continue to study and learn sufficiently to explain to others the basis of his convictions and the faith of Christ.

We Are Priests

First Peter 2:9 identifies Christians as a *"royal priesthood."* Every Christian is a priest. There are no human intermediaries between the Christian and God except the Lord Jesus, our High Priest. Each of us has the ability and privilege of approaching God through Christ and we have the capacity to understand God's Word sufficiently to know what to do to be saved and how to live faithfully before God as His child. Again, this does not forbid helping one another to learn and grow. But it means that each of us has a duty to know why we are what we are and be prepared to tell others.

Paul admonished in Second Timothy 2:15, *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* We are expected to develop some skill in *"handling aright"* God's Word. One major reason many in the church cannot give an answer to others for their faith is because they neglect study. Paul commended the noble Bereans because they seached the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). Is this the kind of Christians we are? If we would study the Bible, regularly, faithfully, diligently, we could recapture the description of being *walking Bibles* like brethren once were called. We would not have to always rely on others to give answers for us.

Basic Truths

Let us concern ourselves with a few basic truths which we affirm and each one try to learn for himself or herself the foundations of these truths so we can relate them to others. Our position is that the Bible is the Word of God and our only authority in matters religious. Whatever it teaches, whether we are concerned with how to become a Christian, how to worship,

how to live, the work of the church, marriage and the home, the Bible is the final authority. We contend as did Peter, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11).

We also would contend, as a basis upon which to build, that the Bible is God's blueprint and roadmap to heaven. Therein we find His will, the facts of the church, all things necessary to living the way of godliness that brings salvation. In the midst of the chaotic confusion of the doctrines of men, churches of men, philosophies and feelings of men, it is our plea that we take God's Word and take God at His Word.

God

Our faith begins and ends with God. Mark 12:29, 30, *"And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment."* We believe in the existence of Deity and the God of heaven as the only true and living God. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Judge of all things. He has shown His love toward man and expects man to return that love.

Christ

We believe that Jesus of Nazereth is the Christ, the Son of God. As the Ethiopian confessed in Acts 8:37, *"I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."* We cannot be a Christian without this conviction. When He was born He was named Jesus, a name common among men. But He was not just another man. He was Emmanuel, *"God with us."* He came as the promised Messiah, born of the virgin Mary, to be the Savior of mankind from sin. He is the only way to God (John 14:6).

Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit as a person of the Godhead along with the Father and Son (Matthew 28:19; Second Corinthians 13:14). The Holy Spirit is not an *it* but is revealed in Scripture as a person of Deity. There is one God (one Deity) that is composed of three persons. The Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of the universe, the establishment of the church, and is involved in the conversion of sinful people. It was by and

through the Holy Spirit that the will of God through Christ has been revealed (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13).

More Basics

The Bible teaches the plan or system of salvation, including what God has done to provide salvation, and what man must do to partake of what God has provided. By His love, mercy and grace toward man, the Father sent the Son into the world to shed His blood for the remission of man's sins. In order to be saved one must come to Christ by obedience to the gospel, including faith in Christ as the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of our faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. When one is baptized He is washed clean spiritually by the blood of Christ which was shed in His death (Romans 6:3,4). As far as Scripture reveals there is no other scheme available to man for salvation.

The Scriptures also teach the necessity of faithfulness in Christ. Having become a Christian, God expects one to be what he has become. Loyalty to the will of the Lord, being dependable as a servant to Him, wavering not nor falling away is the path of faithfulness. Revelation 2:10, *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."*

Work and Worship

This faithfulness and loyal adherence to His revealed will must abound in worship and work. Every Christian has the responsibility to assemble with the saints for worship each Lord's Day, the first day of the week. In this worship we are to abide with what the Scripture reveals are the acts of worship, which include singing, praying, teaching, giving and partaking of the Lord's Supper. There is no authority for using instruments of music in worship to God under the authority of Christ. There is no authority for getting money through rummage sales, bingo games, etc. There is no authority for burning candles, incense, counting beads, or things designed to make people *feel good* and then calling it worship to God. We are to worship *"in spirit and in truth,"* (John 4:24), which demands worshipping with reverence and the proper attitude, and according to the Word of truth. *"Thy word is truth,"* Jesus said. (John 17:17).

Faithfulness to Christ includes doing the work of service that the Lord authorizes. There is a work for the church as a body

and there are many things the individual Christian can and must do to be a faithful child of God. The work of the church is to preach and teach the gospel to the world, care for the needy as opportunity affords, edify and build up the church in the most holy faith, and worship God as God has directed. The individual must allow his entire life, activities, at home, on the job, in the school, at play, wherever and whenever to be regulated by the will of Christ. We are to follow in His steps, imitating His example. While doing good works is not sufficient to save, they are essential in being faithful as a servant of the Lord.

More to Know

We believe in the Biblical structure and government of the church with Christ as the head, local congregation being overseen by elders, served by deacons, and every members composing the body. We disclaim any authority for these super-ecclesiastical organizations and hierarchies that men have devised. The church must retain faithfulness in government and in the mission of the church. The church constantly stands in danger of erosion from such truth.

The Bible teaches the return of Christ, the resurrection of all, and the judgment of all according to His will. His coming will mark the end of the world and the entrance into heaven or hell; the righteous having been forgiven and saved by the blood of Christ shall enter the glories of heaven, and the lost shall be eternally banished from the presence of the Lord into eternal hell, fire and brimstone.

We all can readily recognize that these are but a few statements and a very brief summary of even these matters regarding certain convictions that we must hold because the Bible teaches. They can only be summarized in such a brief lesson, and each position deserves persistent study. But so it is with each matter before us, whether it be our relationship to civil authority, fellowship, standards of morality, home, marriage, divoce, remarriage, how we dress, where we go, what we support, the name we wear, everything and anything must be under the umbrella of revealed truth. We should learn why we do not sacrifice animals nor observe Easter. We should know why we relieve the poor, eat unleavened bread when observing the Lord's Supper. We must be ready to give answer to those who ask. They need to know and it is our duty to learn sufficiently to be able to respond kindly, firmly, consistently and

Biblically to those matters asked of us.

Let us go forward from this lesson with a renewed determination to study and learn. Let us not allow ourselves to become passively content. The salvation of mankind is at stake, including our own.

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The Risen Lord Will Come Again

Acts 1: 6-11, *"When therefore they were come together, they asked him saying, Lord wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."*

This is Luke's record in Acts of the Lord'a ascension into heaven. The earthly ministry of Christ was completed. His mission had been accomplished. He had given final instructions to His apostles concerning the establishment of the kingdom, the church. This record is of immeasurable significance because of the basic and fundamental truths it affirms.

His Authority

This event affirms His authority over all things. It affirms Jesus as the Son of God. It affirms the Father was pleased with the work He did while on earth. It affirms His resurrection because all of this occurred after He had been lifted to the cross, buried

and raised. The apostles were eyewitnesses of the risen Lord. It affirms that His kingdom was soon to be established with certain beginning marks being specified, such as the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. But it also affirms the point of this lesson and that is that this Jesus, raised upon the cross, raised from the tomb, raised into heaven, will come again in like manner as He ascended.

Many people are mindful of the birth, life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ, who obviously are not too concerned that He shall return. Some have taken Biblical truths and polluted them with human doctrines, pagan customs, material vanity and religious inconsistency, developing religious *holy days* around some of these events, such as Easter, Christmas, etc. They smack more of a man's attempt to soothe his conscience once or twice a year by mentioning something concerning Christ but living the rest of the year as they want, regardless of His will. These celebrations have become more a mockery of Christ than an exaltation of Him anyway, seeing the commercialization surrounding them, the riotous behavior, drunkennes, and a parade of religious piety that displays more ignorance of the Word of God than respect for it.

He Will Come

The true Christian believes the birth of Jesus by a virgin, His perfect life, His death on the cross for the sins of mankind, His burial as prophesied, and His victory over death and the grace of His resurrection. They also believe He ascended as the record declares. But they also have confidence in the truthfulness of the statements of the men in white apparel that He will come again. Do we live as if we really believe He is going to come again?

The early Christians believed He would return. Second Peter 3:1-13 is a text that deserves investigation on this subject. Verses three and four tell of mockers that would come, crying, "Where is he? He said he would come but we see nothing of him. Everything is going along as before." Verse five says they wilfully forget the power of God, His creation and sustenance of this world, the event of the flood at the time of Noah, and that God is not boxed into time frames of human design and invention. Verse eight teaches that one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day with God. Time is of no consequence to Him in fulfilling His promises. We cannot judge God's work according to our calendars and clocks that we set.

Verse nine informs us that God keeps His promises. He has never failed to do so. Therefore, we can have confidence that the promise of His return is valid and reliable.

The anticipation of His return is a major element of Christianity. Verses ten and eleven assert that at His coming the world will end, and there shall be the judgment. Also read Acts 17:31. Christians will have a new habitation, a new residence. His coming will make the fulfillment of the Christian's hope. Destroy the assurance that Christ will come again and you have gutted much of the appeal of Christianity. The faith of Christ is reduced to just just another philosophy of life, but no more authoritative than any other, and with no more contribution toward giving this life meaning than any other.

When?

Many people have made the mistake of speculating as to when He will return. I do not know, but neither do you, nor does anyone else on earth. Only false prophets make the attempt to tell us. During my life there have been those who have set dates, even climbing mountains to meet Him when He comes, only to have themselves proved to be false prophets and followers of false prophets. There is a song in many song books that brethren use that puzzles me why it is used. It is entitled, *Jesus Is Coming Soon*. Nobody knows about that *soon* part. He is coming, but where does one get that *soon* business? We ought to be more consistent with Biblical teaching than to sing error. Jesus said, Matthew 24:36, *"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only."* That ought end the speculations of men.

But not knowing *when* does not prevent us from being assured He will come. Peter and Paul have said He would come *"as a thief in the night."* (First Thessalonians 5:2; Second Peter 3:10). This means His coming will be unannounced, unexpectedly, without *signs* denoting when. Life will be going on as usual, marrying and giving in marriage, eating and drinking, etc, as Jesus Himself declared in Matthew 24:37-39. The importance is not so much *WHEN* as is being prepared whenever it occurs. This we must emphasize.

What He Said

Jesus taught, *"I will come again."* (John 14:3). Again, He

said, John 5:28, 29, *"Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* When He returns He will have abolished all rule and power, and the last enemy, death, will be completely overcome (First Corinthians 15). When He comes the judgment of all shall take place (Matthew 25:31ff). He will deliver the kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24).

The return of Christ is a cardinal point in the doctrine of Christ. It is that for which the Christian hopes and expects. Peter said, *"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness... Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."* (Second Peter 3:11,14). His promised return provides us motivation to live *"soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."* (Titus 2:12).

Gives Meaning

What value would there be to engage in religious performances if He does not return? There is coming the time when we shall give answer for what we have done in life, whether good or bad (Second Corinthians 5:10). This fact we could ignore if Christ is not to return.

Of what value are the worship services, the Lord's Supper as a memorial to Him, the God-ordained rituals, godly conduct in daily life, if there is nothing that awaits us but death and the grave and nothing thereafter?

The emphasis of the lesson concerning the return of Christ is the reason for becoming and being a faithful Christian. The Bible calls for the glorification and praise of God through Christ. But involved in that is the recognition that the risen Lord shall come again. Because of this inspired revelation we must seriously consider the Master's invitation and expectations of us. We cannot ignore our accountability to Him and the commands given to us that God expects us to obey.

This involves becoming a Christian by faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. At the same baptism one enters into Christ and His body, which is the church. Having obeyed that, it is required of us that we be faithful in life, in work and worship, in daily life as a

follower of Christ the Son of God. All of these things take on added significance in view of the announcement that the risen Lord shall come again.

That inevitable and unavoidable day and hour will be a moment to be dreaded by those who choose to reject Christ. But what a glorious day it shall be to those who have entered His fold and have remained faithful therein.

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The Rejected Stone

Matthew 21:42-44, *"Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."*

When Jesus spoke these words He was quoting Psalm 118:22 and He made application of that prophecy to Himself and the rejection of Him by His hearers. He was stating in essence, "I am the stone which you builders are rejecting. I am the stone you are overlooking that is the chief cornerstone in God's building. I am the one you are setting at naught." Of course, this was a figurative expression, but we understand what He meant. Here was a stone, cut to perfection, prepared to be the most important stone in the building, the one by which all the rest of the structure was to be measured, yet, it was being set aside, ignored, discounted, rejected, not even considered. Jesus compared Himself and the treatment He was receiving to this rejected stone in this analogy.

Another Application

After the establishment of the church, we read in Acts 4:11, 12, *"This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under*

heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Peter, the preacher, applied this statement to Jesus Christ. He did so again when he wrote First Peter 2:4, 7, *"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious... Unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner."*

The record of Jesus being rejected is found in the Word of God for a purpose. The summary thought is simply that the very One which men sought to repudiate and reject, the only One to whom anyone can look for salvation, is exactly the One who is precious before God and the One chosen as the most important of all, who is head of all, the center of all, and who filleth all in all. What a tragic mistake men made in rejecting Christ!

The Jews of the first century did reject the Anointed One, the Christ, the promised Messiah. When Jesus was before Pilate they cried, *"His blood be on us, and on our children."* (Matthew 27:25). When Pilate exclaimed, *"Behold, your King!"* they cried out, *"Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar."* No clearer rejection of anyone can be expressed than the rejection of Jesus by the Jews of that day.

It seems strange that the Jews would reject Him since He was a Jew. The prophets of the Jews had foretold of Him and even described Him so that they could have identified Him when He came. Greater knowledge and respect for that revelation could have made a difference. Jesus and His apostles took the message of the coming kingdom first to the Jews. The life and work of Jesus and His fulfilment of the prophecies should have convinced them He was the Son of God.

As Prophecied

But He was treated as Isaiah had specified in Isaiah 53:3, *"He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not."* Philip, when preaching to the Ethiopian as recorded in Acts 8, used this very statement to open his sermon when he preached Jesus to him.

With such advantages, why did the Jews reject Him? John 1:11 reveals, *"He came unto his own and his own received him*

not." We are made to wonder why. Possibly a few observations will help us understand their rejection of Him. But we are not altogether concerned with why they rejected Him as much as we are concerned with why people today reject Him. As we study we shall discover that the reasons of rejection then and now are essentially the same, at least in principle.

Why He Was Rejected

Jesus did not fit their preconceived notions and their arbitrarily determined mold. They perceived there would be a powerful political figure that would challenge the Roman authorities that ruled them, who would remove the Roman yoke, and deliver them into political freedom. But Christ was not interested in establishing an earthly and political kingdom. He taught His hearers, *"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."* His concern was religious and spiritual, not political and material. John 18:36, *"My kingdom is not of this world... but now is my kingdom not from hence."* He could not have made is clearer.

Even today there are those who are confused about the nature of His kingdom, even looking for Him to violate His own explanation about His kingdom and return to establish an earthly empire, ruling from Jerusalem. That neither was nor is the emphasis of Christ nor His goal.

Some reject Him because of His lack of material wealth. Then, as now, some measure a person's worth by the amount of his material wealth. Many of the greatest contributors to the civilization and benefit of mankind have come from among those who live lives in relative poverty. This includes poets, composers, scientists, artists and others of many kinds. It was unthinkable to some of the Jews that their king would be from the humble and modest circumstances that characterized Jesus's earthly existence and ministry.

The Saducess were the wealthier class of people. Jesus taught many things which contradicted their basic concepts and fundamental doctrines. He neither sought their wealth nor catered to it. Matthew 8:20, *"Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."* He was not considered very important by many because of His lack of worldly and material resources.

He Was Unlearned

Some of the Jews rejected Him on the basis of His lack of formal education. Today we live in a society that mistakenly considers a person *somewhat* simply because he has an advanced education in some field. Even in matters of religion, there are those that consider the persons with some degrees to be the authorities and scholars regardless of how foreign to the revealed truth of God his positions may be. This infection is often seen in the ranks of those who claim to be Christians among the efforts of restoring New Testament Christianity.

Who is a truly educated person? Who is the possessor of wisdom? The arbitrarily determined academic degrees bestowed by human institutions of learning do not necessarily mean a person has attained true knowledge or wisdom. In fact, it may give rise to justified suspicion, seeing what is studied and the kind of instruction one often receives in gaining these degrees.

We do not suggest that formal education is foolishness. But can one really claim to be educated who is so ignorant of the faith of Christ which has had such an impact on the history of mankind? We would insist that the process involving classrooms and testbooks does not necessarily mean a person is educated. Education demands knowledge which can be gleaned by the process of classes and books. But unless on can intelligently apply what he knows, tempering his knowledge with wisdom from above as revealed in Scripture, a wisdom that regulates life, a wisdom that is harmonious with the will of God, he may well be nothing more than an *educated fool.*

Jesus never attended the rabbinical schools. For this reason He was considered *unlearned.* John 7:15, *"How knoweth this man these things, seeing he has never learned."* It sounds much like we hear today when people ask, "How does he know anything? Where did he go to school? What kind of theological degree does he have?" Such a nonsensical standard of measure! With Jesus, they ignored the fact that He was the Son of God and preached heaven's message. Similarly, some today discount faithful gospel preachers who rightly divide the Word of truth but who do not possess, or if they possess do not parade, a list of degrees after their names to receive the praise and glory from men. Because He did not meet their artificial standards they questioned His worth. It was then, as now, like Paul wrote in First Corinthians 1:26, *"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."* Those who are the elite and elevated in the eyes of the world so often have no time to fairly consider

the simple beauty and profoundness of the gospel.

The Real Reason

At the root of the rejection of Jesus was His hatred of sin and His love for righteousness, just the opposite attitude of those who rejected Him. It is still the same today. His intense condemnation of sin is unquestioned. Consider Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41, 42; Luke 10:15. In these verses Christ shows how Capernaum was considered to be a great city and outwardly it appeared beautiful. But inwardly the people were full of decay, transgression and moral filtiness. While men might have considered the city powerful and prominent, exalting it to the heavens, they were ready to be cast down to hell because of wickedness. The same them is found in all of these passages.

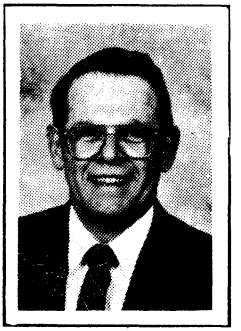
Nowhere does one read stronger words of hatred of evil than the expressions of Jesus in Matthew 23 against hypocrisy. Today there are those who look with contempt on strong wrods against evil and evildoers. But they forget that such was the manner of the perfect Son of God. By what reasoning do they dismiss strong words as being unkind, lacking in love, inappropriate? They criticize Christ. They need to become better acquainted with the Lord.

Just as intense as His hatred of evil was His love for truth and purity. Consider His matchless sermon on some unnamed mountain as recorded in Matthew 5, 6, 7. Study particularly what is called the *golden rule*. Meditate on His teaching about love, even for enemies. Jesus came exposing error and presenting truth. Because the works of men were evil, because they loved the darkness of sin, the light of Jesus Christ was repulsive to them and they rejected it and Him. They simply loved the wrong too much to have appreciation for the right (John 3:19-21). Is that not the case today in our world?

For these and other reasons, our plea is for one and all to come to Christ and be blessed of God. Honor Him and enjoy the benefits He will give. Be aware that there is nothing but defeat and eternal separation from God if we follow any other course. Ask yourself, "Will I also reject the precious and tried cornerstone?"

† † † † †

No Fear of God



JAMES W. BOYD

Romans 3:18, *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."* This phrase used by Paul is actually a quotation from the Psalm 36:1. It is used in the context of Paul's contention that *"we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin."* (3:9). I can rightly be considered as the explanation why *"there is none righteous, no, not one,"* and the other sordid descriptions of sinful people found in verses ten through eighteen. Does not our verse describe our own day and age? Is not the reason for the rebellion against the Almighty that we see so prominently around us due to the lack of *fear* of God?

Fear sometimes means being afraid. Other times it carries more the idea of respect and reverence, such as in Ecclesiastes 12:13, *"Fear God, and keep his commandments."* People have either lost, or possibly never possessed respect for God. Listen to the way they abuse His name in their profanity! Consider their violations of His will with impunity! Note how even so-called Christians will ignore worshipping Him! Where is the reverence toward God among us? This explains man's sinfulness.

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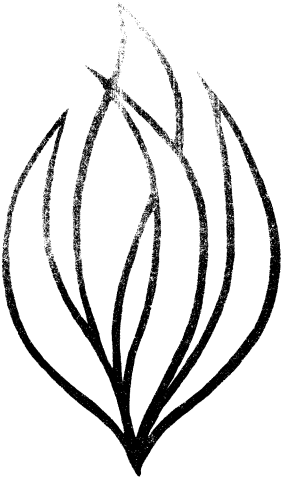

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME VIII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 9**

Christine Ward Hale

1897 - 1988

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

(Psalm 116:15)

We have come to this hour because of the death of another loved one. Although we are choked with sadness, and that because of the finality of our association together here on earth, as it is with God, there is a preciousness about it with us also. The preciousness of this hour was made possible by the one we honor and to whom we pay respect.

Her name was Christine Ward Hale. She was also known by several other affectionate names, such as, sister Hale, Christine, Tina, Mother, Attie, and since the coming of her grandchildren, "Big Ma."

"Big Ma" was born March 3, 1897, having then lived over ninety-one years of age, death coming on April 20, 1988. Her life literally spanned one of the most momentous periods of human history, going from the days of the horse and buggy to men walking upon the moon. But we need to be reminded that some of the more important events that transpire on this earth do not make headlines in newspapers nor will be included in paragraphs of history books. We would insist that her life is far more enduring than such things of the material ventures over which people marvel. She lived her life vigorously, energetically, doing what she did with all her might. Most important of all, she lived her life righteously.

She was born to humble, yet, genuinely refined and godly parents, Dr. and Mrs. J. S. Ward. Uniquely, she attended only one school, Nashville Bible School that came to be David Lipscomb College, beginning in the first grade and continuing until she obtained the Bachelor of Literary Arts degree.

On October 24, 1908, at the age of eleven, she was baptized into Christ by E. A. Elam in an outdoor baptismal pool between the present Harding Hall and the first Avalon Hall. She was also married in Harding Hall to Clyde Hale in 1925. Much of her life centered around the school to which her father was so attached and where he labored many years.

Her life made a difference, not only to those who lived alongside of her, but to generations that follow after, and will favorably affect those yet to be born if time continues. We wish to talk about her life and those areas of life where she excelled. Every word is intended as a tribute to her.

A Friend

"Big Ma" excelled as a friend. She was known for her hospitality, ever serving as a gracious hostess, building her own self-esteem through service to others, opening her home to others even when inconvenient to herself. She was capable of establishing and maintaining longtime friendships. Bennie Lou Reynolds of Atlanta, who has preceded her in death, spoke after sixty years of acquaintance that Christine was the best friend she ever had. Even as her memory faded where she did not recognize her own children, within recent years she readily recognized a childhood friend, Eunice Hammond, and a loyal and beloved cousin, Evelyn Jordan.

A Grandmother

"Big Ma" took great pride in her grandchildren beginning with her only granddaughter, Amy, and continuing with her five grandsons, Bill, Stephen, Ward, Mark and Sam. It is fitting that these fine young men, along with Amy's husband, Lowell Hagewood, will serve as her pallbearers today.

Each of these grandchildren took advantage of opportunities to do for her in their special way as needs arose, especially during her last years of infirmity. "Big Ma" earned, and she received, their love, honor and respect.

A Sister

How lovingly and proud she would speak of "my sister and my brother," almost as if nobody else had a brother or sister.

She held such love for Robbie, Truman, and their mates, Charles and Mary. She deeply loved their children, the Brewer boys, Neika, and Jimmy Ward. She was known by these nieces and nephews as "Attie."

A Daughter

She rendered love and service to her Mother and Papa. As a young woman she cared for her mother during times of her mother's illness. She was a companion with her father as they traveled together across the state when he lectured on beekeeping, going to and from his preaching appointments, meeting him upon returning home from work at Life and Casulty Insurance Company where he served as medical director. One of her favorite expressions was, "Papa can fix it." To her there was nothing her father could not do. Singularly, each year on her own birthday she sent a gift to her mother. She cared for them until death separated them.

A Wife

Christine gave devotion, love, service, companionship and support to her Clyde. She served as his co-worker in the Lord's vineyard. She often spoke of his handsome looks, keeping him neatly dressed for his work. She proved to be a genuine help meet and suitable for him.

In her younger years she was strong and active, unselfishly giving understanding, recognized to be the "power behind the throne," sharing good years and lean years, standing side by side in the joys as well as the hardships as a faithful wife to a faithful gospel preacher for over fifty years. Her husband did, indeed, as is stated of the worthy woman in Proverbs 31, praise her as a worthy woman.

A Mother

In this relationship she may have excelled above others already mentioned. Unselfishly she worked hard and sacrificed willingly on behalf of her two daughters, Ann and Rosalyn. She was a keeper of the home, preparing meals, entertaining, sewing, keeping her yard with beautiful flowers she planted herself. Such are the memories her children cherish about her.

She provided a home where love reigned, good examples were set, standards implanted and dignity prevailed. In her role as mother she knew what mattered and she kept her priorities in order.

A Chrstian

She was faithful in worship, giving in service, a teacher of children in Sunday School in her earlier days, working in putting out the church bulletin, sitting with the ill, comforting the bereaved, offering words of optimism and encouragement to all around her, sharing her optimism and resolution. She stedfastly upheld the hands of her husband as he preached the gospel of Christ.

We suggest that she excelled in the other areas of life because she was such a faithful Christian. She let the way of Christ be the guiding light of her life.

When most of her memory was gone, and physically she was barely able to be taken to the hour of worship, she could still sing from memory the songs of praise and worship that she had sung since childhood. She was fortunate to have been schooled under such preachers of the gospel as Lipscomb, Elam, Sewell, Harding, and she held N. B. Hardeman as one of the best. These were men who were preacher friends of her husband and father; men of unwavering courage, faithfulness, uncompromising of truth, who preached soundly from a thorough knowledge of God's Book.

Home

So imbedded in her mind was her loyalty to worshipping God, even as life slipped away she would, when restless, often speak of the need to go to church. Dominant among the words that came to be the last ones she could speak that we could understand were Mother, Papa, school, home and church. It may well have been characteristic of the difficulty she suffered that she would recall such things. But the point we do not want to miss is that these things impressed her the most. They were the last portions of thought to pass from her.

We shall ever remember "Big Ma" most impressively as one

who loved the church, family, school and home. She loved her home with Mother and Papa, Robbie and Truman, on Caldwell Lane. She loved her home with Clyde and her daughters on Graybar Lane. It was because of her love for the place she called home that she remained in her little log house so long, possibly even longer than ordinarily might be thought expedient. But we all knew of her love for home. It was a sad and difficult day, a day long dreaded before it came, when it was necessary to take her from her home, and only then because it was essential for her own welfare.

During her last years, when she was mentally and physically drifting away, years that proved to be a long good-bye, she was attentively cared for by Ann Dearing and grandchildren, until finally other arrangements had to be made. Her closing years were with Rosalyn when she received constant love and care to the last. She died with her daughter holding her hand, finally passing away in quietness after days of struggle, in a place and in a room that she, knowing little else, came to call home.

She always had a desire to be at home, which she considered hour with hope, confidence, understandable sadness but with joy for her release, that she is now and eternally with God at home.

Charles R. Brewer was a man of many talents, not the last of which was being a masterful poet. He once wrote lines to a poem called *Curtain Call* that seem so fitting for this time.

Sooner of later
The time comes to all.
Life's drama ended,
The curtain must fall.

May the Master then say,
With His hand on your brow,
"You've played your part well,
You may go home now."

(Following these words, Buddy Arnold sang the beautiful song, *"Going Home,"* after which appropriate and affectionate

remarks were spoken by her nephew, Shumann Brewer. Funeral services were at the Roesch-Patton Funeral Home in Nashville, Tennessee, internment in Woodlawn Cemetary, where her body was laid beside that of her beloved husband, Clyde, and in the same plot of other loved ones who had gone before her.)

James W. Boyd

What Are Churches For?

There is a need for words of warning. Paul said, *"Warning every man..."* (Colossians 1:28). Pinpointing danger is not often received well because people prefer not to be disturbed, even when the issues involved are serious. However, those who prefer truth to comfort and acceptance by the crowds are not deterred from warning, especially with respect to matters affecting the Lord's church. This lesson points to dangers concerning the function of the church. It asks, "What are churches for ? What are they supposed to be doing?"

The reason for the existence of the church since Pentecost has been to worship God and proclaim the gospel of Christ to a sinful world. The church, and the world generally, needs to understand this. Because the religious world, including many churches called churches of Christ, have strayed from this prime function and branched into a wide variety of other activities, the role of the church has become blurred.

Misnamed Religion

We prefer not to believe it, but the truth is that what is called "Christendom" has become woefully impotent in the world. It certainly does not possess the force and influence it claims, and it is not near what it could be. The manifold "isms" of men have failed to provide for man's spiritual needs, actually contributing to confusion and frustration with its inescapable dissipation of power and resources that follows denominational attitudes and divisions. In some instances there has been an increase in

church attentance at various religious groups but it smacks more of being misguided, superficial and hollow because there is no noticeable change in lives. What is called "Christianity" has certainly not stemmed the swiftly advancing tide of sin, as is evidenced in the fact that atheism is the fastest growing religion in our nation. Of course, most of that which is called "Christianity" is far removed from what the Bible reveals. But even among those who profess to "restore Christianity" there is an attitude of compromise and a will to "go along" with whatever happens to be the tide of the times. Therefore, even though Christ and the faith of which He is Author is the hope of the world, the average American (not only Americans) is not really impressed. What many see in churches today is hardly the world-influencing, heroic, sacrificial and agressive movement the Scriptures define.

The Word

As we ponder this less than consoling thought, we affirm that the Word of God is true and the fault lies with those who profess to be Christians. The fault does not abide with the doctrine of Christ. The Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God to man and if only mankind would give it the respect it deserves there could be such a better world now and in the hereafter for all. Christianity in its truthful simplicity and purity is unbelieved, untried and cast off without fair consideration. Still, the church of the Bible sends forth the message that it is the world's hope. Faithful Christians are busily engaged in sending that message and attempting to dismantle the man-made substitutions for the Lord's church. It is only when the oracles of God serve as the standard can the needs of man be provided. We can restore form, doctrine, work, spirit and attitude of the faith of Christ. But there is always the danger of departing from the true path. This danger is very much in evidence of our times (1988) because so many have obviously lost sight of the reason for the existence of the church.

Apostasy from truth usually comes slowly, so slowly that the inattentive are not aware of it. If it came abruptly more would recognize it. But it is the grading inching away that goes unnoticed that brings havoc eventually. In a spirit of zeal and passion for activity, with a sincere desire to do good, many are prone in haste to follow the paths of digression rather than adhere to the authenticity of the Word. Let us explore this more.

Busy - Busy- For What?

Religious people are engaged in so much activity and "busy-ness" that they often lose sight of the Lord's business. While there are many activities in which we can involve ourselves as individual Christians that produce various benefits for mankind, so many of these things are of lesser importance than the mission and function of the church. Who would contend that coaching a little league baseball team ranks alongside providing opportunities for worship on Lord's Day? Whoever would has lost sight of things. Yet, as one observes many religious groups, you would think the sports leagues have become the priorities for the church.

Not only are churches involved in that for which there is no authority of God, things that are not the work of the church, but sometimes matters of minor significance, such as paving a parking lot, seem to be dominant even to the exclusion of preaching the gospel to the lost of the world. Brethren can readily spend large sums for such conveniences (which are not wrong in themselves) but stumble and argue and wrangle and postpone and wait and put off and hesitate to undertake preaching the gospel.

It is customary for many of us to lay the blame for public indifference to Christ at the feet of our times, the secular emphasis, the Humanistic educational systems, etc. Surely, all such things have taken as deadly toll. But that is only part of the trouble. A great amount of blame can be laid at the feet of those who wish to restructure the church, compromise the true mission of the church, turn the church into just another social order, often more akin to a recreational organization and the "poor man's country club." The world trivialities have become center stage. More enthusiasm can be raised for a gymnasium than just about anything. Ball teams, playrooms, entertainment, gimmicks, and things of like sort will arouse a congregation to a fever. But brethren who seek funds to supply their physical needs while they go to fields of labor to preach the gospel can hardly find invitations to make their appeal. You cannot lay blame for that at the feet of anybody but church members, especially elderships and preachers who are at the base and source of such disgusting situations.

For What Are We Known?

Something is wrong when a preacher is known more for his jokes, his sports prowness, his keen personality, than his soundness of doctrine and militant manner of presenting truth and opposing error. He may please the "laity" but he is repulsive to the God he says he serves. He misses the mark.

Churches have sponsored ball teams, sports tournaments, fashion shows, dinners for this and that, musical shows, and even spent huge sums of money providing physical facilities for recreational activities. Is this the institution bought by the blood of the Son of God? Is this the charge He gave to His people? Is this the work He gave them to do? Is He interested in providing "Mothers' Day Out," kindergarten, play camps, schools for secular education, seminars of art and music and how to feel good about yourself? All the while the pulpit, classes and literature speak with uncertain sounds, if not outright unsound sounds. These situations are not invented nor imagined. They exist, not only in the denominational world, but among groups called churches of Christ who are led by project promoters, college fund raisers, and schemers who make it a profession to make money from whatever they can sell a gullible and ignorant eldership to finance, and gain for themselves a "big name." As we note the emptiness of denominationalism, let us be honest and admit how like them so many so-called churches of Christ have become in recent years.

From the mail received in church officies, the promotions in church bulletins, the ads in brotherhood journals, pleas come to give to this camp, support this college, attend this lectureship (which as often as not will include false teachers that cannot be trusted to teach the truth). Why should faithful Christians support schools whose lectureships have for years on end been little more than ecumenical councils that uphold false teachers and false doctrines among churches of Christ?

Brethren and churches are urged to attend this rally, buy these tickets, go to this fund raiser supper for some brainstorm of somebody who is accountable to nobody for anything and does little more than beg money from everybody. Such is so often the order of the day among us.

Is It The Work Of The Church?

Many of these things have a place and as individuals we might find it to our liking to support them. But the erosion so obvious today is that more and more parasites on the church treasury are

being invented, and nobody seems to even want to ask, "Is this what the Bible teaches and authorizes as the work of the church?" Why should that not be the first question?

It is not the mission of the church to build secular schools, recreational centers, gymnasiums (deceptively called Family Life Centers), bathhouses for camps, trips to Disneyworld, or even just build a grand and ornate building, even though places of assembly are authorized. As said earlier, greater enthusiams and contribution can be raised for cushions in the pews than support for needy mission work in distant lands.

Just where so many brethren got the idea to adopt the new emphasis for the church we find hard to determine. But the glamor boys of the hip- hip- hurrah approach, alongside the flashy and sensational have led the way. Schools, papers and preachers, who once deplored this digression, are now not only warming up to such things but are right in the middle of them because it brings in money, power, fame, and satifies their personal ambitions for their own pet projects. This writer has opposed such things with such intensity that it is obvious he is no longer considered acceptable by those who have succumbed to the pressures to "go along" and "get along."

The Truth Is Unchanged

Regardless of how far removed from the truth churches of Christ drift, now more like a run than a walk, the truth remains. The work of the church is to worship God and preach the Word to the lost, edify the saved, and provide for the needy as opportunity affords. Other lessons showing the Bilical authority for these acitivities have been repeatedly presented and shall be again. This one serves as a warning against what has and continues to happen among us.

While many are not aware of Christ, not even concerned about sin and their condemned spiritual state, Christ remains the only Savior and His church is the only church approved before God. The church's colossal failure to keep this foremost in its activity is a tragedy and there is payment to be made by those who "fiddled on the game court while souls burn in sin."

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15). But you could never get that from the heavily staffed, constantly fed, multi-activity programs of some churches; programs that are weak on truth, strong on compromise, heavy on having a good time. It breaks the heart to see this

denominational tripe so abundant among brethren.

Authorized?

The function of the church is not just activity, but authorized activity. We have been saved to save, and we accomplish this by spreading the gospel throughout the world. Maybe the reason many have left this emphasis is because they do not know the Word themselves, and therefore find it easier to invite somebody to play ball or eat dinner than teach them the simple plan of salvation.

When we keep the true purpose of the church before us, the trivia that has bogged us down will melt like snow under a hot sun. The foolishness of much expenditure, staffs, equipment, programs, etc. will discontinue. Truth, and salvation for the lost, will once again become paramount. But we have "gone along" with the digressive trend for so long that it will likely be some time before we can look with confidence upon churches of Christ with informed elderships and preachers and members to really do what churches are for. Many congregations are little more than flickering and dying embers of what they once were and could be for Christ. They have joined the "with it" generation. We once knew what churches were for and grew rapidly and souls were saved and God was glorified. May the day not be too afar that more and more of us will once again become aware of it.

† † † † †

(from page 23)

century past. Nor are we in World War II. We are living in times of political danger, moral collapse, educational ruin and the destruction of everything Christians hold near and dear. Why should we not consider these issues above the prattle of more jobs, better pay, free lunches, etc. I am well aware that there are people who would vote for most anything and anybody if they would promise them ten cents more on the hour. But is it not reasonable to expect the Christian to consider the moral issues, those things that so vitally affect the welfare of Christianity, more than the material, earthly, strictly civil and political matters? I sure think so. JWB

Two Men Went To Pray

Most who will read these words will be people who profess to be religious, holding an interest in Christ and the church. But did you ever attend a worship period and come away thinking, "I did not get much spiritual help from the worship today?" Did you ever have the experience of being present and leaving with the feeling that it all meant very little to you? Have you ever sung the songs, prayed, studied, eaten the Lord's Supper, and given of your money, only to feel that you really had received very little, almost nothing, from it all? If ever that has been the case with you, and many have even openly expressed they have felt this way, this study we now make can be of real benefit for you in the days that may still be yours in life.

We must admit that sometimes the songs, sermon, etc. are more meaningful than at others. The lesson the preacher preached may have been more applicable to us at one service than at another time. The wording of the prayers may have been more moving and expressive of our sentiments than at other times of prayer. We must realize that the worship services are conducted by mere men, not angels or some heavenly host. Therefore, we must make some allowance for imperfections and inadequacies in the people who lead us in our collective worship. But let us turn to our text and pursue the matter further, for we shall learn other things we need to know.

The Text

"*And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others, Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed this with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*" (Luke 18:9-14).

Our plan of study shall be in three phases. One, look closely at the two men involved. Two, listen to them pray and analyze their prayers. Three, take note of the attitude and evaluation of their prayers by Jesus and see the result of them. Generally speaking, we can see that Jesus was rebuking one kind of behavior while placing His approval on another kind. It provides us with an answer as to why our worship periods may not be more "meaningful" to us.

The Pharisee

First, consider the two men involved, a Pharisee and a publican. Pharisees usually appear in the Bible as people we do not like. They possessed certain qualities that are repulsive to most people. Yet, in spite of this, are there not some good things about this man? We dare not overlook the good even as we cultivate a distaste for the evil. Too often we likely close our eyes to the good qualities in people because we focus so heavily on the evil ones. With all the evil about this man, there was much good. Let us take note of it.

He was a religious person, as most who read these lines will admit to being. Had you not rather live among religious people than those who are irreligious, anti-religious, caring nothing whatever for things sacred, having no standards of morality, living for the devil openly and without shame, blatantly, defiantly, rebelliously, riotously waging war and raging against God? Surely, even though people can be religiously wrong, sometimes fanatically religious to the repulsive extreme (such as those we witness in Iran at this time, 1988) generally speaking religious people have many qualities about them that make them better company, better citizens, better neighbors, better friends than those of the other sort.

He also talked about his religion. This is not a bad thing. There is nothing wrong in letting other people know you are religious. We are to let our light shine before others to glory may be brought to God (Matthew 5:16). There is a difference, of course, between letting your light shine and just shining your light. The latter we ought to avoid lest we be found hypocrites and our religion be more of a show for our glory rather than for God's glory.

Very likely, if the Pharisee were living among us today he would be some kind of church member, maybe even a member of the Lord's church. This is not to say that church members are

Pharisees. Some like to ridicule members as all being Pharisees and that is certainly not so. But this man, like church members, did make some open and recognizable effort at being religious in worship, manner of life, words and deeds. It is very true that just being religious is not enough to please God. But it is also true that there is no way to please God without being openly religious. Christians are religious. So let us not condemn the religious nature and involvement of this man.

If we knew this Pharisee better, very likely we would find him to be a person who lived a very moral kind of life. Most did, even though some did not. He would not rob, cheat, kill, commit adultery, etc. Many evil things he would not do, and this out of conviction to standards he considered supreme. The world in its present evil would certainly be better off if more people would abstain from some of these things. Likely his life would not be characterized as living in such fashion as if this life was all there is to existence. Eat, drink and be merry would not be his motto. He believed in the spiritual realm of life and that there is life after physical death. Unlike the Saducee who denied the spiritual realm, he knew the necessity for disciplining himself in this life to be prepared for the next one. Many Pharisees were hypocrites. But even a hypocrite realizes that some things, if done at all, are so shameful that they ought to be hid from the sight of others. Some do not even have that degree of decency about them but boastfully parade their degeneracy for all to see. So when we see this Pharisee, with all his faults, we might wish that there were more such people in the world. He would be an improvement over what we see among many.

But there was something about him that makes him shameful. He was a very arrogant man and not open to instruction. His pride contributed to his downfall. As Solomon wrote, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."* (Proverbs 16:18). But his greatest offense was his self-righteousness. Everyone was out of step but him. He looked up to himself and looked down on all others. To any right-thinking person this is an obnoxious trait. There is a vast difference between being righteous and being self-righteous and inflated over it to the exaltation of self.

The Publican

Take a glance at the publican. The first reaction toward a publican is to frown upon him. There is much about him that, if

he was the usual publican, that does not deserve admiration. Most publicans were dishonest, although not all. They were considered traitors by their own countrymen since they sold their services to the hated and despised Roman occupation force, They are repeatedly classified alongside sinners, almost synonymous with them. They were not above lying, cheating, extorting, taking advantage of others. Since most people considered the publican a doomed person, many of them simply lived up to this expectation. In this publican we could probably find much that was disgusting.

But, again, let us not let the bad hide the good. At least he was a humble man. Someone has said, "In order to go up, you first must come down." In the same vein, "Victory belongs to those who surrender to God." This man was very aware of his own sinfulness and he was not proud of it. He was not so proud as to deny his sins, but he rather confessed his sins before God While he knew he was unworthy, he nonetheless asked God to forgive him.

These two men came to the same place to worship in prayer. Listen to them as they pray. From their prayers we can learn their motive for being there and the quality of their heart. We shall discover why one was acceptable and the other disapproved before God.

The Pharisee's Prayer

The Pharisee thanked God he was not like other men. But that is where he made a serious mistake. He was like other men. He was especially glad he was not like the publican, but he was like the publican. He told God he was not an extortioner, unjust nor an adulterer. This may well have been true. He proceeded to tell God all the bad things he did not do and all the good things he did do. If you listen to the Pharisee you might think God ought to be very grateful that such a one as he would consent to be on God's side. He was like other men in that he sinned just as they did. He might not have sinned in exactly the same fashion, but he was guilty of sin nonetheless. This he conveniently overlooked.

The Pharisee did not come to pray seeking God. He was seeking to glorify himself. He was merely paying a duty and satisfying his appetite to be considered religious. He came to get rather than to give honor to God. He was so concerned with his "righteousness" that he was blinded to his need for forgiveness

of his sins and his need for God.

Possibly this is why we do not derive more benefit from worship services. What is our attitude when we come to worship? For what reason have we come? Do we say within ourselves, "Lord, I am glad I am not like the Catholic, the denominationalist, like those who forsake the assembly, the gambler, drinker, lewd, immoral? Lord, I'm so glad I am so good." Have we come seeking God's favors and blessings that are offered through worship? Have we come to give glory and praise to Him? Do we seek His forgiveness? Or are we looking for some kind of emotional and psychological uplift, excitement, "turn on," to make us feel good? Have we come more to get than to give? Are we present because others expect us to be there or because we want to be there? Do we simply want to appear godly and righteous? Are we present at worship because we love God and want to exalt His name to the world?

There are those who would change the worship services into some kind of religious pep-rally so everyone could go home feeling good and impressed with the actors who performed before us. Is this the reason for worship? Maybe we attend with the idea we are paying our dues to God and therefore He owes us something, His providence and love in return. Do we come to soothe our consciences? Why do we attend worship services? This is at the heart of the matter. Are we self-centered or God-centered?

His Attitudes

There are three attitudes revealed in the Pharisee's prayer. One, his attitude toward himself. He felt he was better than others, mainly by being present at that prayer hour as well as other things. His religion was an outward display. He was a religious show-off. Surely, Christians ought to be better than other people because they are following the footsteps of Christ. But let us always remember that whatever goodness there may be about us is because we have partaken of Christ. Cannot we be good but still be humble about it? The Pharisee said he was not like other men, but he was. He was flesh and blood just as others. He was subject to temptation and victim of sin as others. He missed the pointed. He sinned just as all do (Romans 3:23).

Then there was his attitude toward others. All others were beneath him. They were as worms and not on his level. He was critical of everyone else in everything. Yes, there are things

deserving of criticism that we shall see from time to time. But to only see the faults of others and not even investigate the possibility of our own faults is to be a hypocrite (Matthew 7:1-5). Others were simply not worthy of his association because they were unclean. He was so superior and others so inferior.

Thirdly, notice his attitude toward God. Did he need God? Was he praying for a just and righteous purpose? Where does he solicit God's mercy upon him? How could a man call upon the sinless God and yet think so highly of himself? A prerequisite to approaching the Lord's throne is that we recognize His superiority and our own unworthiness. Did he think he needed God or was he convinced God needed him?

The Publican's Prayer

The publican's prayer was in the opposite direction. There were no compliments for himself, no self-praise, no excuses for his evil, but a humble prayer that solicited God's mercy upon him as a sinner in need of forgiveness. Here we read of a pleading petition, the acknowledgment of dependence on God, and a confession of his own lack of worth. He knew that God is the source of strength and all good things. He knew his need of God. He came asking God and to exalt God. Is not this the attitude we are to have when we come to sing, pray, study, give and partake of the Lord's Supper? If we are to receive benefit, is it not to be our purpose and goal to worship "*in spirit*" (John 4:24) with reverence and respect for the All-mighty God of heaven and earth? Could this possibly touch upon the reason we come to worship, leave, still feeling empty and that the period was not spent well? Have we missed the whole thing because of an improper heart?

We cannot improve on the items or avenues of worship that God has revealed. Men ought not try to devise ways and means to express their love for God that are not according to His will and by His authority lest we fail to worship *"in truth."* (John 4:24). Worship embodies the concept of submissiveness to the will of God, or it is a feigned exercise. We can always improve on the human side of worship. Those conducting the services should strive to do what they do in the best manner they are capable. But we must individually begin in the heart, each one studying his or her own motives and purposes, and be sure we are alligned with God's intentions for worship.

Jesus said the Pharisee went to his house worse off than when he came. He thought he was something, but he really did not get anything from his religious exercise because he did not come to give the worship to God as he should have. The publican went to his house justified, that is, forgiven and approved. If we come to worship as the Pharisee, as if we need nothing, proud, arrogant, self-righteous, seeking self rather than God, wanting to feel good rather than be good, the result of our worship will be what it was with the Pharisee. But when we come humbly as did the publican, seeking forgivenss, seeking to give God the glory due Him, we shall be exalted before God.

Two men went to pray. But only one was rewarded. We will do so much better if we come to worship with the thought, "What can I give to God that will honor Him," rather than, "What will I get out of this today?" We will get, when we give. When we seek to get and not give, we will lose it all.

† † † † †

Jumping To Conclusions

Luke 13:1-5, *"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*

It is indisputable that the primary teaching of Jesus in this passage was the necessity of repentance lest we perish. But there are secondary lessons presented also.

He recalls two events of disaster with which his hearers were evidently familiar. Pilate wrought slaughter against some Galileans, killing them even as they were offering sacrifices. Also, the tower in Jerusalem near Siloam had fallen and killed

eighteen people. Some evidently concluded from these disasters that those who suffered were more wicked than others and were punished in this fashion.

But Christ shows that they had jumped to a false conclusion and made an incorrect judgment about the events and those involved. It was not necessarily true that those who suffered were more wicked than others. He was simply using these two events to illustrate how destructive sin in and how those who do not repent will perish. There is also a lesson pertaining to making judgments of others based on partial and incorrect information.

The Wrong Conclusion

People often err in their judgments of others and jump to conclusions that are wrong. If this lesson could be learned it would help us see the folly of making hasty judgments of others, especially when the judgment we conclude is detrimental toward others.

Romans 2:1-3, *"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"* Matthew 7:1-5, *"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerst not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brothers eye."*

Making Judgments

These passages teach certain truths relating to our association with other people. What does Christ and Paul mean when they forbid making judgments? We are not to think that this is designed to stifle our faculties in making decisions, comparisons, discriminations and preferences. Such things are absolutely

necessary in the conduct of life, even essential in living a Christian life. It is impossible to live life without making judgments, even of people, including friends, companions, marital mates, leaders in the church and civil government. We are compelled to make some judgments. But obviously, there are judgments of a certain kind and nature from which we are to abstain. Jesus said, John 7:24, *"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."*

God is the judge of mankind (Hebrews 13:4). Judgment is made through Christ (Acts 10:42; Second Timothy 4:1). We shall be judged according to the Word of Christ (John 12:48). There are judgments that Deity makes. There are judgments that people must make. But they are not judgments that are of equal substance, especially when other people are involved.

No human being is capable of rendering judgments that are reserved for Deity to make. Human judgment is fallible while God's judgments are infallible. Men often see nothing but the outward appearance while God can and does consider the heart (First Samuel 16:7). Men can make judgments and condemn themselves while God, who is sinless, is incapable of being condemned. When men denounce sin in others they are called upon to also recognize sin within themselves.

Is it not true that the judgments made by men often excuse and even condone wickedness? But God's judgments are true, righteous, incapable of anything except perfect justice. It is not uncommon for men to be very unmerciful, short of longsuffering, even desirous to condemn. God is able to sympathize, understand, longs to save, while never being indulgent toward sin nor compromising toward error.

Authorized Judgments

When the Word of God authorizes people to make judgments people must realize the limitations of their abilities and recognize that they are also at times sinful. Making judgments is not forbidden to people, but the teaching emphasizes the need for self-examination.

James 4:11, 12, *"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgest his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgest the law; but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another."* Romans 14:13, *"Let us not therefore judge*

one another any more..." The kind of judgment that is forbidden to men is that which would usurp God's place, passing judgment on that about which one is not capable or sufficiently aware. This condemns condemnations based on improper evidence. It forbids assuming and impugning motives that have not been admitted. It prohibits the attempts to judge another's heart and intent, even as it does not forbid judging actions and the fruits of actions.

There are some matters the full truth of which surely must be known only to God. Paul urges forbearance and a reluctance toward hastiness in coming to conclusions. Since we are often less than fully qualified to render judgments, and certainly not infallible in making judgments, we ought not pronounce sentence in those areas where we are not given the authority. There are some prerogatives that God has reserved to Himself.

Judgments of Paul

Making quick judgments and jumping to conclusions are ways that we can violate the inspired admonitions we have read. Paul was often the victim of those who judged him unjustly and without sufficient evidence. Jesus was certainly a victim of such malicious and irresponsible conduct by others. Let our attention be drawn to three occasions in the life of Paul when he was subjected to conclusions too hastily reached, recorded in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two of Acts.

All three events took place in Jerusalem closely following each other. Paul had returned to Jerusalem after making preaching tours among the Gentiles. Some of the faithful brethren received him gladly and rejoiced at his reports. But others said Paul had taught against the Law of Moses and against God. What had Paul actually done?

Paul Preached Christ

Paul had preached Christ, teaching that circumcision was no longer necessary for salvation and right relationship to God. He preached a new covenant, a more excellent way, the perfect way of Christ. He had eaten with the Gentiles. But none of this was against the Law of Moses because the Law of Moses was not against the Law of Christ. The former law pointed toward the later law. Some did not understand the function and inherent termination of the Mosaic Law and therefore, on that

misunderstanding, made faulty judgments. It was not until Jerusalem was destroyed in A. D. 70 that the Law of Moses became physically impossible to be observed. It was actually terminated with the death of Christ on the cross. It began on the mountain in Sinai and ended on the hill at Calvary.

Similar criticism had been raised against Jesus. He came not to destroy the law, however, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17,18). The Law of Moses was not the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. It was through Christ that the promise was accomplished. (Galatians 3:16).

Paul held no enmity against the Law of Moses, but respect. He did understand its place and function in God's scheme of things. To teach what the law itself taught concerning itself, that it was for the Jews alone and only for a temporary span until faith came, was not violating it as some had erroneously concluded. Actions taken by Paul in Acts twenty-one showed he respected the Jewish customs even as he recognized the end of the law. (We do err to conclude that the actions taken by Paul in Acts 21 were sinful actions. Some good brethren have jumped to false conclusions regarding Paul's actions when they charge him with sin and inconsistency.) But there were some that had concluded Paul had been attacking the former law and raised such a tumult that it took Roman authorities to protect Paul from being killed by a Jewish mob.

The chief captain who saved Paul also jumped to a false conclusion (Acts 21:33-36). He thought Paul was an Egyptian that had previously attempted to direct an insurrection against Rome with four thousand men. Believing this he had Paul bound with chains immediately. It was not until Paul asked to speak to the crowd that the captain learned the truth of his identity (Acts 21:37-39). Paul was not the person the captain had thought in his hasty conclusion. He acted without proper and sufficient evidence.

Mob Judgment

Paul's sermon to the crowd that day that taught salvation was available for Gentiles as well as Jews triggered another mob scene. The captain had Paul taken into the castle, commanding that he be scourged. Again the captain, having once thought him an Egyptian, now thinking him to be merely another Jew, jumped to a false conclusion, not realizing that Paul was also a Roman citizen. It was unlawful for a Roman citizen to be beaten

without trial and condemnation. Acts 22:25, Paul asked, *"Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?"* This prompted the captain to immediately cancel the scourging.

Our point should be clear enough by now. Judging others, condemning other, without sufficient evidence, lacking knowledge of pertinent circumstances, acting without mercy, anxious to believe the worst, judging motives, intents and matters of the heart, are forbidden by the doctrine of Christ.

This in no way contradicts the propriety of judging deeds, the fruits of deeds, words, doctrines, even displayed character of people. God's will could not be executed in our lives without making judgments. The lines God has drawn between truth and error must be observed. When we obey God and condemn what He has condemned we are not making sinful judgments but respecting the judgments God has already made and revealed in His Word. To do otherwise would be to judge God by essentially declaring that we know better about such things than God and God has made faulty decisions. That would be a fatal blow to our own spiritual welfare.

We have God's standard by which to measure all things. We must respect it and abide by it. This includes being cautious lest we, like the people who condemned Paul, and the Roman captain who mistook Paul repeatedly for something other than what he was, be as guilty as they of violating a specific teaching of Jesus Christ.

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(from page 24)
view. I cannot look into the eyes of my children and grandchildren if I should vote for men who have consistently cried for our nation to reduce its power and turn millions upon millions under the bondage of atheistic communism. It is the atheism which I hate more than the communism. But they go together.

Whether or not we open our borders to every immigrant on earth is of some concern to me. But more than that I am concerned whether our freedoms shall be preserved so Christians can worship without molestation and the preaching of the gospel of Christ allowed to have free course among us. It just seems to me that good brethren need to wake up and live in our present times. We are not in the Great Depression of half a

(continued page 11)

Religion and Politics

Like most other people in the year's heat of political activity, I have heard again and again the old statement, "Politics and religion don't mix." While there is one sense in which this is true, I have often thought this was a stupid statement, especially for the Christian to make.

To be sure there are many political matters that are not religious in nature. Also there is much that goes on among politicians and their activities that does not seem to be influenced even by morality, let alone religion generally. But, as I look around, I even see much in religion that is incompatible with the religion of Jesus Christ. So I am not too surprised that politics and the faith of Christ often do not mix.

But there is another sense in which religion and politics should mix. Especially is this true for the Christian. I know that some have the mistaken view that Christians should never have anything to do with civil government or political matters in any way. Some even demand abstaining from voting, even on issues that are totally moral in nature. While Christians should not be party to the evil of politics, who would question that our nation would be better if more genuinely Christian people were making the laws and governing the affairs of state? Voting is a privilege granted every citizen in our land that we can consistently exercise as a Christian. But for whom should we vote?

It has always seemed ridiculous to me for somebody to contend they believe something and then support the very people that oppose what he believes. In candidates you will never find anybody who totally agrees with all you believe. But are not some matters more important to the Christian than others? Should the deficit mean as much to us as abortion? Should the trade balance concern us as much as the misnamed Equal Rights Ammendment that would bring havoc on many moral situations? How do we oppose war and then vote for men and parties whose policies have consistently taken us into war? It seems to me that high taxes and high inflation, as obnoxious as they are, are not near so repugnant to the Christian as the public advancement of Humanism in our schools and the dismissal of reference to God among our children.

I vote nearly every time I can. But may I not vote for the men and parties that have brought us the flood of alcoholic beverages upon us. I shall not vote for those who claim homosexuality is just another acceptable lifestyle and pass laws to promote that

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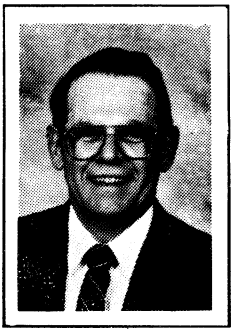
A Godly Heritage



JAMES W. BOYD

There is a statement made by the psalmist that is recorded in Psalm 61:5 that strikes us with considerable impact. It is one that provokes great thanksgiving and at the same time compels us to take note of one of the most important duties we have in life.

" For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name." A heritage refers to that which passes from an ancestor to a descendant. The psalmist considered those who had gone before him and had reason to be grateful for what had been passed to him. His emphasis was on his heritage in spiritual matters, that which is most important. He realized he was most blessed to be the beneficiary of that which had been provided for him by those who respect God. What a blessing was His!

At the same time, having received so much, did he not have the duty to make sure that those who followed after him could be thankful for their godly and spiritual heritage? Is it not true that the spiritual heritage of our children and grandchildren depends on how we live our lives before our Creator and Judge? May we give the future a godly heritage!

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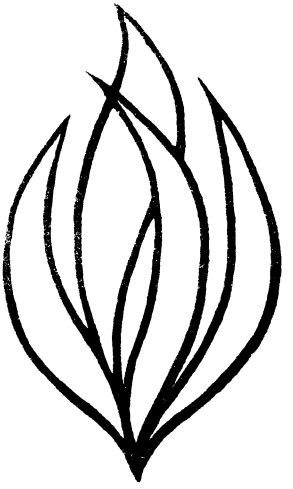

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME VIII **NUMBER 10**

Romans 8: 1-17

Let us make this lesson a profitable adventure into the Scriptures. Before reading the opening remarks, please get your Bible and open it to the text. We shall make repeated reference to it as we proceed.

The message of chapter eight of Romans is a message to Christians and is one of hope, reassurance, and a reminder of the promises that God has given to the obedient believer. It calls attention to the difference between salvation and condemnation like the difference between spiritual life in Christ and spiritual death in sin. Paul, the inspired writer, reveals to the Christian the relationship Christians have with God and the hope they can entertain because of this relationship. The message of the chapter belongs to the child of God.

Verse One

Verse one presents the theme of the entire passage under consideration. *"There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."* Does not this have an appeal for us? Is not this for which we strive? It is another way of saying that salvation is in Christ as opposed to being separated from Christ. Such a statement ought to make the heart of the Christian rejoice, knowing he is in Christ.

But those in Christ walk (live) not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Comments on this thought are reserved for later in the lesson.

Verses Two through Four

Read verses two through four where Paul speaks of three different laws. The first is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ. It is this law by which we are made free, the same law which James calls the "*perfect law of liberty.*" ***This forever banishes the false idea that there is no law involved in the system of salvation.***

Eternal life is found in Christ and His gospel (John 1:1, 4; 6:48; 14:4; 20:30,31). Jesus presented Himself to the Samaritan woman as the water of life (John 4:13,14). The basic message of the New Testament is that the life of the spirit of man

is found only in Christ. The law of the Spirit of life makes one free from another law Paul mentions.

The second law of the passage is the law of sin and death. Romans 6:23, *"The wages of sin is death."* Sin separates one from the Lord and if unforgiven this separation shall be an everlasting state. The law of sin and death can be simply stated, "You sin; you die."

The third law mentioned is the Mosaic law that was not and is not able to deliver one from the grasp of the law of sin and death. Moses' law was weak, imperfect, unable to forgive sin (Hebrews 8:7; 10:4). That law was not designed to be the scheme of redemption for man. Therefore, God sent Christ in the flesh, Deity in the form of humanity, to condemn sin while in the flesh, and provide the law of the Spirit of life. Christ came *"and for sin,"* that is, as a sin offering. The law of the Spirit of life set in operation by Jesus Christ could accomplish the spiritual victory over sin that the old Mosaic Law was not designed nor capable of producing.

Verses Five Through Eight

Paul draws a contrast between those in Christ and those who are not in Christ by using the terms *"carnally minded"* and *"spiritually minded;"* *"in the flesh"* and *"in newness of spirit."* To be *"in the flesh,"* minding the things of the flesh, means to be carnal, sensual and impure. To walk (live) after the flesh is to give our time, thought and energies to the sinful things of this world. To be carnal minded is to consider this life more important than the next life. Fleshly minded people are bent on wickedness, devoted to doing the forbidden things, given over to the affairs of the here and now, without regard to the Spirit.

Those in Christ do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit. This is descriptive of those in whom the righteousness of God is manifested. Those in Christ are attentive to the things of God, seeking the Lord and His kingdom, putting His righteousness first in life, concerned with the message of salvation and its spread throughout the world, caring for the homeless and needy, suppressing the evil of lust and carnality.

It is impossible to be carnal minded and a friend of God. Verse seven tells us why. The carnal mind is enmity against God. So long as one remains in the flesh, by which Paul means attending to the sinful flesh more than the spirit, he cannot please God. He is not submissive and does not accept that he is

subject to God as he ought to be, even though accountable to God nonetheless. Failure to please God will mean eternal condemnation.

Verse six shows that walking in the flesh is the way of spiritual death. To have life, to have peace with God, that peace Paul calls *"the peace that passeth understanding, "* (Philippians 4:7), we must be spiritually minded. By these words Paul teaches that a Christian does not live according to the sins of this world. The Christian is in the world but is not of the world. It is one thing for the Christian to be in the world as his domain, but quite another for the world to be in the Christian.

Verse Nine

Paul affirms that Christians are not *"in the flesh,"* which means they are not entangled in the evil matters of this world. Having disengaged from sin by coming to Christ, having been bought with the price of the blood of Christ, the Christian's prime concern is to be the Lord's possession and enjoy fellowship with Deity. He entered into this fellowship when he was baptized into Christ, and from that time even his body became the temple of God (First Corinthians 3:16, 17). If Deity does not dwell in a person, if one does not have the Spirit of Christ, which refers to the Holy Spirit, he is not in Christ, none of His, and is condemned in a state of sin. Deity dwells with and in the Christian as the Christian walks (lives) according to the Word delivered by the Holy Spirit.

Verse Ten

If Christ be in us, the body, the flesh, the carnal mindedness, is dead because both cannot live in the same life at the same time. They are incompatible. One drives out the other. Man's body, the flesh, is often the source of sin as he uses his body to satisfy his lusts. This is the reason man's body is sometimes called *"sinful flesh."* But being in Christ means to war against the sins of the flesh and the Spirit of life produces righteousness in him. These concepts are majestic and fundamental.

Verse Eleven

The thought of this verse should be encouraging and reassuring to the Christian. It reaffirms our faith and hope of the

resurrection. Acts 2:32, Peter announced that God raised Jesus from the dead. If the Spirit of God dwells in us, we shall also be raised to life without end. We are not to think that if we pursue a wicked course that we shall cease to exist at physical death (John 5:28,29). But Paul here deals with those in whom the Spirit dwells and asserts that this life is fleeting, passing, temporary, but there is an eternity with God awaiting us. Those who mind the ways of God shall be raised by the same Spirit that raised the Son of God from the tomb.

Verses Twelve Through Fourteen

These verses present a summary and conclusion to what has just been presented. Having discussed how there is no condemnation in Christ, the law of the Spirit of life, the spiritual versus the carnal, Deity dwelling with the Christian, and the ultimate resurrection, all matters of great consolation and hope for the Christian, Paul insists that the Christian is a debtor not to live after the flesh and the sinful ways of the world, but that he owes it to God to walk in the way of life after Christ. To live after the flesh is to die spiritually. Therefore, we should mortify (put to death) the fleshly deeds and allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit as He leads through the Word. Such as do this are called sons of God. We can be spiritual children of God.

Verses Fifteen Through Seventeen

Read verses fifteen through seventeen which places emphasis on sonship. As sons of God we are not under servitude to a law that provokes fear, and we do not serve God primarily through fear. Certainly we fear hell, and the revelation of the reality of hell is intended to cause fear. Fear is one motive for serving God. But there is a higher motive, and that motive is love for God. We are not living subject to a law that simply condemns sin, but under the law of the Spirit of life that saves. Therefore, our motives for serving God are motives of love and appreciation for what God has done on our behalf.

In John three Jesus presented the process of becoming a child of God as the new birth. We are born into the family of God. Here Paul uses a different illustration to show the same entrance into the same relationship, that of adoption. An adopted son is one who did belong to another, but by the adoption process has assumed the name, rank, position and relationship of a son as

much as if he was natural born. He is loved and considered in the same light. In sin Christians were formerly the children of the devil, but now have been adopted into the family of God, the church, the company of the redeemed. Being God's children, Christians are heirs of God and stand alongside Jesus Christ, having the same heavenly Father. The faithful shall be glorified with Him if they suffer in service offered Him.

We can know of this Father-child relationship because of the dual testimony of the Holy Spirit and our own testimony. The Holy Spirit, through the Word, has revealed what is necessary to become a child of God. This is the Spirit's testimony. We know whether we have done what the Spirit teaches or not. By comparing what the Spirit teaches with what we have done we can know of our condition and relationship before God. If we have obeyed the Spirit, we are the sons of God. If we have not yet obeyed the the testimony given by the Spirit, we are not yet children of God but remain children of Satan.

As children of God we have the blessed privilege to call upon God as our Father, and enjoy the safety, comfort, security, protection and providence of God that belongs to those who are members of His household.

With such words as these, coming through the pen of an inspired writer, the Christian ought to read these passages and be lifted with increased expectancy of heaven. He should be encouraged to live a godly and pure life, more determined than ever to serve God faithfully. Such words ought to motivate those who are not yet Christians to become a Christian as well as motivate the Christian to continue to walk in the light.

† † † † †

DO NOT BE A MODERN JEHU

There is a statement made about Jehu in Second Kings 9:20 as he was rushing to make an attack on both the King of Judah and also the King of Northern Israel. Watchmen saw a chariot coming but did not at first identify its occupant. But there was something about the way the chariot went along that told who was coming.

"The driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously." The same thing might be said of many today as they rush hither and yon. Does this sound like you? JB

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

We read of the event under consideration in all four of the records of the life of Christ (Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:30-45; Luke 9: 7-17; John 6: 1-15). It is the report of a miracle by Christ that was a miracle of physical supply. Other miracles were miracles of healing, raising the dead, expelling evil spirits, calming the elements, and other supernatural occurrences. There are other miracles of supply worked by Jesus, such as changing water to wine, filling the fishermen's nets with fish, supplying tribute money, and feeding four thousand (not to be confused with this miracle.)

This miracle, like all the others, was for benefit rather than for destructive purposes. Even when the Lord caused evil spirits to go into swine and they ran into the sea, and when He caused the fig tree to wither, these were miracles of benefit because it is always beneficial to destroy that which should be destroyed.

As noted, all four of the biographers of Christ report this event with their records varying slightly. By no means do they contradict each other but they complement each other, one giving a point that another may omit. With the four accounts we have the complete record.

Background

The events leading to this occasion shed light on the scene. By gathering information from the four records we learn from Matthew that John the Baptist had recently been beheaded. Naturally, this was a disappointing and disturbing tragedy to those who had been disciples of John before coming to Christ. It was, therefore, a period of anticipation and uncertainty with no way of knowing what might happen next, and what would become of those who were weaker and subject to turning away.

From Mark we know that Herod was seeking Jesus, thinking He was John returned from the dead, or some other. The life of Jesus was in grave danger.

Luke informs us that the apostles had just returned from preaching tours which Jesus had commissioned them to make. They had not yet had opportunity to report their experiences to Christ. The entire situation was one that necessitated a period of rest for Jesus and His apostles so they might see all the situation,

get their bearings, have a good "heart to heart" discussion. It was a time of crisis for them.

Yet, it was nearly impossible for them to get away together so long as they remained in the cities because of the multitudes that thronged around them. Mark 6:31, *"For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."*

No Place To Rest

Jesus suggested they go to a deserted place where they could be alone, have their talks, and rest as they needed. They left the busy western shore of the Sea of Galilee and went to the relatively lonely shore on the east side of the sea. They were not forsaking the work, but were making it possible for the work to proceed, seeing much needed to be done privately.

But it was not long before the deserted place was crowded because as the Lord and the apostles left by boat for the other side, the multitudes went by land and soon came where they were. Luke records how Jesus turned them not away, received them, spoke to them, healed many that were sick. So another busy day was spent doing that which was good, even to the interruption of a much needed respite.

As the day wore on and the evening approached, it became apparent that the multitudes had no food. Being in a deserted place there was no place to secure food. Jesus set the stage for His miracle of supply by asking the disciples what was available for feeding the multitude. Andrew responded that there was only what we might call a small lunch of five loaves and two fishes, *"but what are these among so many?"* Nonetheless, Jesus had the crowds seated, gave thanks to God for what they had, caused the disciples to dsitribute food to everyone. Here was the miracle of supply. From the scarce amount, Jesus was able to provide a sufficiency for all. At the end, even twelve baskets were filled with leftover food. The immediate reaction of this miracle was, *"Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world."* (John 6:14).

Power of Christ

There are several very important truths we need to recognize that stem from these records of this miracle. First, there is the power of Jesus Christ. Out of that small provision of loaves and

fishes He produced enough to feed this huge multitude. How did He do it? Obviously, there was a miraculous, instantaneous production. We are not too surprised that He had such ability seeing He was involved in the creation of the world (John 1: 1-3). As the world ponders the questions, "From where did this universe come, and what of our own origin?" the Biblical record is the creative power of the Lord.

We can bear witness of the productive power of God in our own lives. We have become so familiar with the processes called the "laws of nature" that we might forget who established these laws by which even human beings are brought into this world. The sowing and reaping of crops, whereby there is provision for food for the whole world, is the result of the power of God. God geared this entire process. The production of a new ear of corn, another grain of wheat, another herd of cattle, all bear record of the power of God in whom we believe.

It is not unreasonable to think that He who could speak this universe into existence (Hebrews 11:3) could provide food for five thousand. It would be unreasonable to contend that He could not do such a relatively small thing.

God can, will, and does supply every need mankind has. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."* (Matthew 6:33). Those who were fed that day came not with anxiety about physical bread, but with concern for spiritual life. Nonetheless, they were provided with both needs, physical and spiritual.

Happy indeed is that person who has sufficient understanding to appreciate God as the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Thoughtful is that person who prays to God, *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* realizing the ultimate source of his sustenance is God. The providential care that ruled the day on that Galilean shore many years ago is just as sure and unfailing now as then for those who put Him first.

Love, Help, Care, Provision

In this episode does not Jesus teach us that we should render loving help and care for others? He manifested compassion on that multitude. He was interested in their welfare. We are told to walk in His steps (First Peter 2:21). His steps often walk the path of benevolence toward others. He considered His apostles as fellowlaborers and assistants in His mission that included

benevolent deeds. He employs us yet to this end. It was Christ who taught man who was his neighbor and how it is Christlike to provide for those in need. Only in cases where people have become captive to human traditions and human dogmas, and in hearts that lack compassion, are benevolent actions repulsed. Does the compassion of Jesus Christ abide in my heart and yours as He expects of us?

There are two other prominent precepts taught here. Doubtless some continued to follow Jesus primarily seeking the meat that perishes, expecting repetitions of such wonderful work, not seeking the spiritual bread that enriches and nourishes the soul. Jesus took note of that less than noble motive for following Him on the very next day (John 6:26). But this majestic transaction has a much deeper meaning than those to which we have already called attention.

Evidence

Let us not overlook how this miracle provides another unbreakable link in the chain of evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, even as He claimed. Furthermore, it set the stage for additional teaching regarding Him being the bread of life (John 6:28-25). He is the One who provides the manna from heaven which, if man shall partake, shall never hunger (John 6:48-56).

Those who followed Jesus into the desert place were doubly fed. Temporary physical provision was given them. But far more important than that were the words Jesus spoke to them about the kingdom, and His admonition that they labor for meat wich does not perish.

Gratitude

One additional precept we must note is the example of Jesus in giving thanks. Whenever appropriate, and never for the purpose of display of outward piety, Christians ought to pause to give thanks for their blessings from God. Is it too much to say, "Thank you"? Families ought to pray over their meals as well as other provisions of life. Children need to be taught by word and example how God is the source of their blessings. None ought ever be ashamed of "saying grace" before a meal. We rather ought to be ashamed if we we are ashamed. Faithfulness in "little things" makes faithfulness in "bigger things" easier, and

more likely.

While this is a miracle of supply, calling to mind the Lord's care and concern for our physical as well as spiritual welfare, it caused the people then, and should cause people now, to recognize Him as the promised One. Moses had foretold of such a prophet. All the prophets had predicted the coming Messiah. This evidence is vital to us. But there is no question that Jesus would have us to be primarily concerned for the soul. He invites us to come to Him, and we accept His invitation by obedience to the gospel. Only by coming to Him shall we have life and salvation He came to this world to offer to all mankind.

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Be Ye Separate

Most people seek the approval of those around them. We all like to be liked. In order to be liked and accepted, people tend to conform to the pattern of life like those around them. This is apparent in the way we dress, think, talk, where we go, what we do, what we are for or against.

Much of this conformity is of no real spiritual consequence and often is actually good and necessary. Nobody can argue against fitting into the environment in which he lives provided the environment is not evil. Nobody in their right mind desires to be a deliberate misfit. It is a virtue to be able to adapt and adjust to situations. Paul learned to be content in whatever state he found himself. It is honorable to do what others believe to be honorable (Romans 12:18). It is good when people can work together smoothly. We must remember that adapting and conforming are not always the same.

A Subtle Danger

But this conformity can be dangerous, especially to the Christian. It has its limits. In the desire to be accepted, if we are not careful, we can compromise truth and right. It has always been hard for the Christian to find his place in the midst of a sinful world. Too many things are anti-Christian in this world.

Second Corinthians 6:14-17, *"Be ye not unequally yoked*

together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Three Phrases

There are three key sentences in this passage we shall investigate. *"Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.. come ye out from among them and be ye separate... touch not the unclean thing."* The teaching of this passage is far easier to understand than to practice.

The passage does not mean withdrawal from all contact with the unbelieving and wicked people of the world. Some have so thought, and wrapped their skirts around them and withdrawn from all society behind the walls of monastaries and convents, having no association with the world, being as hermits, living alone in their self-righteous piety and goodness.

Christians, however, are to swim in the main current of life, even though so often they must swim against the current. Christ came eating with sinners and publicans; never to condone their evil, but to influence them to seek Him as Savior. He could not have done this if He refused all association, nor can we. The apostles and early Christians lived in the midst of pagans. On the night of His betrayal Christ prayed, *"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."* (John 17:15).

Fallen Brethren

First Corinthians 5:9-13, *"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators; yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, covetous, or an idolater, or a*

railer, or a drunkard, or an extorioner; with such a one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

Discipline

Evil persons in the church are to be disciplined for their soul's sake. But this is not to advocate a complete disassociation from all sinners. To do that would nullify the Great Commission to take them the gospel. Life could not be lived and we would have to leave this world. Paul is not calling for a total "hands-off" seclusion from everything and everybody around us. But what was he demanding?

What does the passage really mean? It requires the Christian to discontinue any intimate association with others that prevents him from being faithful to Christ. Separation from whatever so degrades the standard of morality, truth and duty to God must be avoided. This is true no matter who is involved or what is the cost. We cannot serve God while trotting along with Satan.

Association With Sinners

When Jesus associated with sinners the stream of influence always flowed His direction. So must it be with us. When the wicked pull us downward we must part company. If continued association is leading another to Christ we should make the most of it for the promotion of what God calls righteous. While we can never partake of evil with anyone for any reason, if our voices can be heard, clearly and distinctly, on the side of truth, without compromise or leaving a false impression of conding error, we might be wise to continue the relationship until such is not the case any longer.

Often the question is asked if this includes marriage. Certainly it does. Marriage is the most intimate relationship between human beings on earth. But we must also recognize it does not apply exclusively to marriage, but to any and every relationship, social, economic, educational, recreational, whatever.

Unequally

The key word is *"unequally."* There is to be no entrance into

nor a continuation in any association or relationship that deprives the Christian of his or her fellowship and followship of Christ. It is one of the most inclusive commands of Christianity. Five times Paul expresses this idea.

It takes spiritual and moral strength to sever ties with others. Where does the Christian find this strength? The strength is found in the promises of God. Reread verses 16,18 and 7:1. These promises are meaningful to a true Christian and will provide sufficient strength to obey this teaching.

We live in a world where being accepted, popular and approved is sometimes a standard of value and success. Even some Christians use this standard. But such is a vain and deadly measure. Christians are to be lights in the world of sinful darkness, reflecting the brilliance of the Son of God (Matthew 5:16). We cannot succeed in our Christian mission by conforming to the very error we are to oppose. Christians are those who, in the face of opposition and temptation, dare to be different for righteousness' sake.

Abstain

For this reason Christians abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing, immodesty, unclean habits as smoking and chewing tobacco, dishonesty, profanity, and other forms of sinful worldliness. We are in the world but are to teach the world, live exemplary lives before the world, and not be partakers of the sins of the world (First John 2:15; James 1:27; 4:4; Romans 12:1,2).

I have often used the phrase in my preaching, "You sometimes cannot tell a church member from a non-member. They live the same kind of life, have the same goals, are equally immodest and profane, smoke the same brand and drink the same beer, go the same places, and do the same thing." Often there is no real difference in manner of life between them even at the hours of worship. They both are on the golf course, in the boat at the lake, traveling, visiting, sleeping, etc.

Noah and his family were saved only because they were separate from the rest. Abraham was called out of Ur. Lot was spared after he fled Sodom. Israel fell because they were like the nations around them. The early church went into apostasy by compromising with heathen and human doctrines. Demas forsook everything because of his love for the world (Second Timothy 4:10). Separation from evil has always been necessary.

The Old Testament prophets urged people to be different. One of the great hindrances to the advance of the cause of Christ today is the worldly living of members of the church. We should learn the meaning of First John 5:19; First Thessalonians 5:22; Titus 2:12; Colossians 3:1,2; Romans 6:16,17; James 4:4, and other passages. Read them. Read them now.

In summary, the Christian must continually examine every activity, association, relationship of life, making sure it is no stain of compromise with evil. May we heed this teaching and let the light of truth shine in our lives. Otherwise, we are under the *"bushel"* to our disgrace and to the offense of God.

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Our Great Leader

First Peter 2:20-25, *"For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously; who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."*

We have leaders in all fields of human activity such as farming, medicine, construction, commerce, law, war, peace. Only a few are leaders and most of us are followers. In almost every realm, relatively few do the thinking, working, paying, planning and guiding. In our text, Jesus Christ is presented as a leader, one who has gone before us, leaving us footsteps to follow. Especially do we need a leader in religion and matters of the soul. No area is more important for us.

We can survive without good leadership in some things better

than in others. Mistakes in some activities are not fatal nor near so tragic as they are in others. Mistakes in travel directions are not as serious as mistakes in the operating rooms of hospitals. But we cannot afford to be misled regarding our service to God. Our existence in this life, and our destiny in eternity, are at stake. Therefore, we must have a leader that is competent in every respect to assure us the safe journey from here into eternity. We must find such a leader.

Who Is Qualified?

What kind of leader can be considered completely qualified? Since the matter is so important we must have one who is perfect, who has always thought, said, acted and lived right before God, in harmony with the will of God, and His righteousness, justice and truth. We cannot afford to depend on one who is groping about in uncertainty, but one who is well acquainted with the pathway to heaven. Since we are but mere human beings in this life, we need one who knows how to sympathize with the frailties of man, who understands the temptations faced by man, and who has overcome every obstacle. We need one who will not forsake us when the going gets tough, and who has never lost a battle to our foes. We need one who has proven to be a victor over the enemy. Can such a leader be found?

Luther

History reveals many great religious leaders. For instance, there can be no doubt that one of the greatest since the cross of Christ was Martin Luther, the sixteenth century thinker and reformer. He was a man of great courage, deep conviction, brilliant intellect, positive and determined in action and confidence. It took a brave man to defy his world and snatch the oracles of God from the domination of the pope and to encourage the common man to learn the Word of God. Whereas kings, emperors, and other powers had fearfully bowed before the then existant papal power, this obscure, but scholarly Romanist priest broke Rome's hold on the lives of much of the world by nailing a challenging ninety-five point thesis on the door of a Romanist church on October 31, 1517 that exposed the religious errors of Romanism.

No coward would have publicly burned the papal denuncia-

tion of his actions and denied the wrongfully assumed authority of the papacy as did Luther on December 10, 1520. Without question, this man, his actions, and the repercussions that followed, has influenced the religious thinking of millions upon millions, even to this day.

Even so, are we willing to entrust our soul to him, and put our hand in his and say to him, "I will think as you thought, speak as you spoke, do as you did, follow you withersoever thou goest." No, we are not willing to do that because we know Luther was not always right.

Wesley

What of another outstanding religious figure named John Wesley? His name will ever be remembered because of his attempts to revive what he called "heartfelt religion." In his day, formalism, ritualism and cold, hard legalism had become the sum and substance of religion. People had a form of godliness, but the evidence was their hearts did not belong to God. The warm, sincere, spiritual worship commended in Scripture had been displaced by long robes, needless ceremony, heartless and vainly repetitious prayers, and clerical titles. Wesley reminded how *"man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart."*

Such a work as was done by John Wesley was sorely needed, and needed yet when the same hard, cold formalism of religion captivates the scene. Unfortunately, some have gone to another extreme of emotionalism apart from conformity to the law of God. But the point we make is that Wesley and those who thought like him contributed much to religion and in some instances he led people to a better understanding of New Testament Christianity, although he was still far removed from the simplicity and purity of the faith once revealed.

But in spite of his power and lasting influence, who is willing to follow Wesley as if he was perfect and never erred? Can we afford to blindly accept all that he said and wrote? Do we have no higher and more reliable standard by which to measure truth versus error than the understanding of John Wesley? Great as he was, he was not divinely inspired as to reveal a faultless doctrine and practice.

Campbell

There is another great name worth mentioning. Alexander Campbell was a powerful reformer and restorer in the eighteen hundreds and he deserves the esteem many hold for him. Few men have exhibited greater wisdom, ability, perception, courage and knowledge of the Bible than he. He, along with his father, Thomas, challenged the religious world that had become hopelessly confused in Protestant denominationalism to surrender all that originated with man and return to New Testament Christianity as is revealed in Scripture. He met infidelity in the person and arguments by Robert Owen in their debate in 1829. He met and routed the champion of Romanism in 1837 by debating Bishop Purcell. With the battering ram of Scripture and logic he caused the walls of sectarianism to crumble. This man, called the "sage of Bethany," used the force and power seldom seen in exalting the faith of Jesus Christ. He called for all mankind to allow Christ His rightful place, and for unity among believers on the basis of truth, teaching that as we draw near to Christ we automatically draw near to each other. Standing on the shoulders of great reformers who had gone before him, he and others made the restoration of New Testament Christianity the theme of their work.

But even though Campbell was a good man, a scholar with few peers, a skilled workman with language, reasoning and Scripture, who is willing to take him as final authority and declare him as their "father" of their faith? I will not. Today it is pathetic that some obligingly call Campbell the founder of their church. He never intended to establish a church. He may well be the founder of churches as some churches contend for themselves. But that is their own misuse of Campbell and not his doings. He wanted to restore the Lord's church. But who is willing to stand before God in judgment on the platform erected by the authority of Campbell or any other restorer? I am not and will not. Was he perfect in every respect? Did he have complete knowledge in all things? Can he fill the qualifications demanded to assume leadership for the salvation of all mankind? No, he, as all other human beings, was not infallible, nor did he desire to be considered so. There is nothing I do or practice in religion by the authority of Alexander Campbell nor any other man.

So it goes with every great religious personality of the past, including the great influence upon "Christian" thought as well as leaders and founders of the world's many religions. It is the error of the religious world generally to be following men in their virtues and faults rather than seeking the One who is the only

qualified leader.

The Bible Greats

Shall we find such a leader in the Bible characters? Can we take Abraham? He is yet known as the "father of the faithful." Through him God gave many great promises and produced the nation of Israel. With faith he left his home in Ur, showed his obedience at Mount Moriah, followed the way God directed throughout his life, twice called the "*friend of God.*" He is upheld as an example of faith and obedience.

But in spite of his distinctiveness and greatness that none of knowledge would deny, are we to believe he thought, spoke, acted without mistake, or has the power to bring salvation to our souls? Scripture reveals the weakness of Abraham as well as the way God used him to bring into reality God's scheme of redemption. But he was not the Savior God sent into the world.

We meet other great religious leaders in the Bible, such as Moses, Joshua, David, Peter, Paul and the list can be extended. But we are forced to ask the same questions concerning them as we have of those we mentioned earlier, in and out of the Bible.

Our search for the competent leader and guide comes to an end as we examine the New Testament. He is in the person, not of such men as Stephen, John the Baptist, or other notable men of God, but in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and Him alone. Although we imitate the example of these good men of which we read, we can confidently imitate them only to the extent they followed Christ. As Paul wrote, First Corinthians 11:1, "*Be ye imitators of me as I am also of Christ.*"

Only Christ

We find our leader in Christ as the sympathizer of the fallen, the spotless and sinless One who was Deity in the flesh, the Christ of Nazereth, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. He it was who came into the world to save sinners (Luke 19:10), lived the perfect life, died on the cross to make atonement for the sins of the whole world, was buried but raised from the dead as conqueror over our enemy, and who even yet serves as our Intercessor and Savior, the hope of the world and eternal glory. He it is who was and is the very personification of truth and righteousness. In answer to the question as was asked by Peter, "*To whom shall we go?*" The

answer is Christ, and for the reason Peter stated, *"Thou hast the words of eternal life."* (John 6:68).

Since He is the leader, we marvel that all do not hasten to walk in His footstpes. Why would one prefer Satan, who seeks our detriment? Why turn to men, whose ways have proven fallible and faulty? Why not turn to Christ who has proven to be a friend to sinners and saints? Why live the way without hope when the way of life is open before us? Why even attempt to walk at a strained distance from Him, failing to take advantage of the benefits of a closeness to Him? It is unthinkable that anyone could consider floundering in darkness when light is offered.

Whether we follow the leader God has provided or not is a personal decision each one makes for himself or herself. As the song asks, "Who will follow Jesus, standing for the right?" That wonderful invitation of Jesus is noted in another hymn, "Footsteps of Jesus." Would that we all will say, "We will follow the steps of Jesus, where e're they go."

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The Blessings Of A Christian Family

Being a member of a family is something that most of us have in common. All have been and are now a part of some family, although many are estranged from the family. We wear family names, have family memories and backgrounds. Not everyone has pleasant recollections of their family, but for most people the concept of the family arouses thoughts of love and closeness. How sad this is not always the case.

Those of us who are married can recall the very special day that was our wedding day. We stood before a gospel preacher and pledged our lives and love to one we had chosen for our companion in life and who had chosen us in return. We recall the exciting preparations and even the nervousness and happiness of the hour of the ceremony. We especially hear in our mind that moment when we were asked, "Do you take this one whose hand you hold to be your lawful wedded mate, to

live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of marriage? Do you promise to love, honor and cherish her, in sickness and in health, adversity and prosperity, and do promise to forsake all others and keep thyself unto her alone as long as you both shall live?" Then came the very sincere and genuine response, "I do." A similar promise was made by the mate-to-be with respect to you. Such memories are sacred. The promises are sacred. Upon them, as the teaching of God declares, another home came into being and was founded.

To those who are not yet married we want to say that we hope, if it be your desire, that you will someday find someone worthy of your love and you will be worthy of their love in return. We hope that someday, in the presence of God and loved ones, you will make your promises for life. The decision to marry is the second most important decision in a person's life, second only to the decision to be spiritually wedded to Christ. It is most unfortunate that too few consider it so.

According To God's Word

To have a marriage as it ought to be, God's Word must be consulted, His favors sought through obedience and prayer, and the will of Christ to rule. No home, however successful in other ways that it might become, can ever attain the fullest measure of joy and divine approval that it ought to have until it is truly a Christian home.

Therefore, we urge with insistence to the unmarried that they marry a Christian, marry for life, marry in view of eternity. It is far better to remain unmarried than to marry into a relationship that will cause the condemnation of your soul and the souls of others, especially prospective children.

Blessings Await

There are indescribable blessings awaiting those who enter and remain in a Christian marriage and Christian home. One blessing is companionship. Genesis 2:18-25, God's revelation of the origin of the home, tells us, "*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.*" Another word to describe this companionship is love, a love that sweetens with every passing day and year. It ripens and seasons the longer you remain together. Robert Browning wrote, "Grow old along with me, the best it yet to be: the last of life for which

the first was made."

Not only is this husband-wife companionship enriched, but there is no value that can be placed on the Christian companionship that surpasses the blessings of children and grandchildren. Is it not wonderful to hold your child in your lap, and even wipe away a tear from his or her face? It is thrilling to take your little daughter's hand and lead her safely across the street. How do you put a price on talking to and working with a precious son? When they have grown to manhood and womanhood and stand tall and straight before God, how can you express your gratitude sufficiently? I do not wish to imply that one must marry and have children to know the meaning of love, even some aspects of family love. I am simply trying to magnify the blessings of family and convey the thought that family life, with mate and children, provides one of humankind's most basic needs and blessings. The need to be needed and loved, the need to love another, is found in the family. We cannot reach full happiness apart from genuine live. In this context consider Paul's writing in First Corinthians 13:4-8, 13, *"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth... And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."* The easiest place to find these qualities is within the framework of a Christian home and family.

Opportunitites Unlimited

A second blessing of a Christian family is the opportunity to enlarge our experiences, interest and knowledge especially in matters of a spiritual nature. As a family we are one unit. But we remain individuals with varying interests and talents. Even in the mundane and secular realm we have different interests, but as a family we can share them with each other and grow closer together as a result. I never cared much for fishing (just waiting until some fish decides to act) because I had rather instigate than wait. But what a joy it was to go fishing with some of my children and see them enjoy themselves.

Christians have consideration for each other and try to enourage one another in those things that contribute to a useful

life. Members of the family "work" to make life pleasant and profitable for each other. They have a similar goal in life, live by the same standards, and can be of immeasurable assistance to each other in pursuing the activities of life within the boundaries of Christianity. Nowhere does the common concern for one another blossom more beautifully than among the members of a Christian family, all working with and for one another. To be with those of a kindred spirit is a benefit that strengthens and satisfies in a way nothing else can do.

Needs Met

Christian marriage provides for mankind's biological needs. God created us with certain drives and appetites, such as thirst, hunger, sexual desires, etc. In marriage, and exclusively in marriage, is the sexual desire for a mate to be gratified. Furthermore, with each member of the family fulfilling their specific roles, provisions of a physical nature are provided. Parents provide for their children. The breadwinner labors to provide for the family. God knew what makes the human heart happy and He gave us the home.

A tragedy of our time is the extensive degree of indifference many have toward the nobility, honor, sacredness and sanctity of marriage. It is entered into lightly and lived within flippantly. Promiscuous sexual activity outside of marriage has become a national scandal. What the world calls pre-marital and extra-marital affairs are nothing less than outright fornication and adultery that damns the souls of those who commit it. "Sexual activity" is the code word for unmarrieds who do not respect God's law. What has been the fruit of such degenerate conduct? We see broken homes, children neglected, morality and self-respect dipping to a low ebb, unwanted children, abortions, diseases that are rampant. It would seem that people who claim to be intelligent could see the devestation their disregard of God's way produces and then cease their sinful manner. In a Christian home there is a loving respect for God's standard of morality and the joy that comes from following God's way is what separates Christians from the servants of Satan.

Security

The Christian home provides a sense of security for the members of the home. So many problems of life arise from a

feeling of insecurity. A large portion of this insecurity among children is because parents are "too busy" seeking their own personal interests and ambitions without due regard for their responsibility toward their child. Even though it is not a popular thing for which to contend in our time, it still needs to be said and I have no hesitancy to say it. Mothers who leave the home, seeking their careers outside the home, working more because of greed than need, and turning their children over to the care and rearing of others, have produced a generation of untaught, insecure, floundering, wondering, unstable, misguided and bewildered young people. Is money worth what the mother away from home is costing? We deny that it is. We are not opposed to women working outside the home per se. We are strongly opposed to wives and mothers neglecting their primary duty to the home and family regardless of what provokes it. With the abundance and luxuries we see in so many homes where wife and mother work outside the home, we are not persuaded that the need has caused abandonment of the home for the factory and office, but a selfish quest for personal careers and ambitions for materialism.

United We Stand

Everyone in the home needs to know they are cared for and the members of the family stand together. Let the husbands provide (First Timothy 5:8) and let the wives attend to the home (Titus 2:4,5). You may not like this formula but time proves it works best. You may not have as much of this world's goods, but you will more than likely have an overflow of what God calls good. Rather than considering the performance of work and duty in the home as degrading and second class, as some would have our wives and daughters to think, caring for the home, children, and attending to the provision of the mental and emotional security which they are capable of providing, it is the noblest and most productive career a woman can have. The tide of secularism has played havoc with homes over the land, but the Christian home holds firm to God's ways and puts first things first with every member of the family gaining from it.

With there being so many things that threaten and intimidate out there in the sinful world, with so many challenges, with injustices and disappointments abounding everywhere, the Christian home is a harbor of safety from the outside world. At home each member will find guidance, encouragement,

support, and will know the family stands by them and with them come what may. We have to be so careful when in public as we strive with the pressures, stresses and strains that are commonplace. But home is where we can take refuge from that if and when the home is as it ought to be. There others sympathize and assist each other over the bumps in the road of life. What a blessing to have such a home!

This does not imply we can be uncaring about how we behave at home. It implies the opposite. As one little girl said, after being away from home visiting others for several days, "It is nice to be home where I don't always have to try to be so nice." We do not infer that rudeness and indifference should be allowed in the home. But the home should be where you can "unwind" and be with those who understand and care. This may be one of the reasons people love being at home and with their families.

Everybody Helps Everybody

The most significant blessing of a Christian home is that it provides a relationship where everybody is helping everybody else to get to heaven. This is the prime goal of marriage and the intent of a Christian marriage. Fathers, mothers, children, all laboring together make sure that the circle of the family will not be broken around the throne of God. We are members of God's spiritual family (Romans 8:14,16), as His sons and daughters. God pictures His people as a family relationship. He originated our earthly families and as surely as we are to help all our brethren to go to heaven, even more are we to help our kin to see God in His glory at the last day.

Those who have had a Christian family know the blessings. Many who have been deprived for one reason or another from having such a home have missed so much. Many of them recognize their loss. That is why they have committed themselves to provide a Christian home for their mate and children. We dare not waste the golden years of family life whatever be the stage in which we are living; whether recently married, with young children, grown children, or back to Mom and Dad alone again. Even when our home may include aunts, uncles, in-laws, cousins, brothers or sisters, we all should use our influence to let Christ reign over the home. Those who succeed in having such a home will forever praise the Lord above for the blessings it provides.

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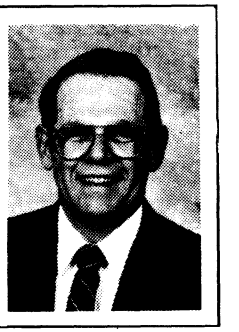
Labor In Vain



JAMES W. BOYD

Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia because they were being bombarded with false doctrines regarding the relationship between the Law of Moses and the new covenant of Christ. Because some had fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4) and their attitude toward him and his message had changed, he grieved, "*I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.*"

Paul knew what is was to have people come behind him as he went from place to place preaching the gospel and destroying the work he had done. He knew what it was to have former friendships uprooted as he would leave after a period of laboring in truth and love and having others destroy both friendships and place in question the truth he had taught.

Many faithful gospel preachers have suffered similar circumstances. Especially is this likely to happen in times of digression and apostasy such as the church has experienced in recent decades. Once faithful churches who loved sound doctrine and faithful preachers no longer have the same attitude toward either sound doctrine or those who preach it. Error that often follows after takes a deadly toll. How tragic!

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

VOLUME VIII **NUMBER 11**

And Death Cometh

It is said that Louis XV, king of France, so feared death that he decreed that the very word "death" should never be spoken in his presence. Every effort was to be made that he not see evidences of death or any monument that would remind him of it. Whether this story is true or not I do not know. This seems to be a very extreme attitude. But nearly all of us have some kind of escape mechanism that prevents us from letting ourselves accept the fact that we shall die. We usually think of death as an event somewhere in the long and distant future. It is something that happens in other families, some other city, some other state, some other people we do not know. We act this way even though evidences of death are all around us. But it seems unnatural when we apply death to ourselves and more natural to apply it to others.

But death is inevitable for every person. We consider this more seriously when death strikes someone close to us. Death reduces all men to the same rank, whether rich, poor, king, peasant, sinner, saint, young, old, healthy, sick.

A Solution

Even though death is usually considered to be ugly and cruel, it does have within its power the solution to many problems and the relief from many burdens. Because of the existence of death mankind is better able to properly evaluate the purpose, function and meaning of life. *"It is appointed unto man once to die,"* is the message of Hebrews 9:27. Ecclesiastes 3:2 teaches us there is *"a time to die."* So let us make no mistake on this theme. One day every living person will breathe his or her last breath. This may be considered a morbid thought, but realistically it is facing what is inescapable.

Why do people fear death as we do? Why are we not able to have the calmness and serenity of spirit like the child when he prays, "Now lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take?" But how many actually have such peace when they consider dying? To most of us, even the study of the subject is disturbing and therefore many never study it.

We can explain some of this fear because there is so much

that is unknown about death. People seldom long to enter into any realm from which there is no return and which is unexplored. This explanation has some merit.

Fear of Death

There was a time when people could rightly fear death. But with the coming of Christ the battle against death and Satan was fought and won by Jesus Christ. Death and the grave was wrested from Satan. Job asked, *"If a man die shall he live again?"* (Job 14:14). Christ answered the question with a definite, "Yes." This life is not all there is to a person's existence. Man shall exist in eternity and can live with God in eternity. What a victory over death!

In one sense Jesus made death a thing of beauty and something to be desired. Psalm 116:15, *"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."* Jesus made death the passageway from an existence where dwells sin, sorrow, pain, anguish, disease and humiliation into one where there will be no more tears, dying, crying, despair, and no more good-byes. Death is not just an end of life, but the beginning of an eternal life. It is not just a closing of a door, but the opening of an eternal door into a better place.

Paul wrote, First Corinthians 15:51-57, *"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

We should develop the same view of death as did Paul in Philippians 1:21, *"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* Paul endured much suffering and his physical body was worn out, having been made tired in the service of God. He had often been heartbroken, laboring long for righteousness. To continue to live meant further service for Christ and he was willing to do this if the Lord thought that best. But also he was willing to die because he considered it gaining peace, rest, and life with Christ

and the reception of his reward.

Going Home

It is not uncommon for some people, as they lie on sickbeds, bent with age or disease, lonely after years of service, to say, "I want to go home," meaning they are ready to die and go to the heavenly home. This world is not the home of the saints of God. It is only a temporary dwelling place. It is heaven that holds fascination for us because we set our hearts, minds, love and affections on the things above rather than on the things of this world (Colossians 3:1,2). As the verse in a favorite hymn reads, "Earth holds no treasures but perish with using, however precious they be. Yet, there's a country to which I am going. Heaven holds all to me."

Prepare to Die

Many people fear death because they know they are unprepared to die. It was said of Robert E. Lee that he always left his office as president of Washington and Lee University as if he would never return. One day he did not return. But he left everything in a continual state of readiness to meet God as far as his earthly affairs were concerned.

Paul lived in a state of readiness to meet God spiritually. He had fought a good fight, finished his course, kept the faith. He knew that when the time came for his departure that he would receive the crown of righteousness that God would give him. (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

Some fear death because they cannot afford to stand before God with their lives cluttered with sin, standing as monuments of disobedience, rebellion and disrespect toward God. Some reading these words may be in just such a state. None of us can ponder such words and turn away indifferently. Christ is the author of salvation to those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). If you have not obeyed His terms of forgiveness, you certainly are not ready to stand before His judgment throne. You have every reason to fear death. Death holds no hope for you, but only the assurance of the just recompense of your defiance of your Creator and Judge.

It Will Come

But whether you are ready to die or not, death is coming. Unless you are prepared to die you cannot say, as did David, Psalm 23:4, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."* For you there is nothing of comfort to be found anywhere in God's Word. You cannot say as David concluded that great Psalm, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

People have a right to fear death when they are impenitent. They have allowed Satan to encircle their hearts with pride so strong that they are unwilling to admit they need to be saved. People should fear death when their hearts are hardened, their eyes closed, and their ears stopped to the truth.

People can fear death because of the sinful lives they live. Life colored with immorality, profanity, drunkenness, evil habits, envy, jealousy, greed, lying, sins of the tongue, worldliness, and all the things that contaminate the soul, is a life wasted. The iniquity of this world is the personal iniquity of many. They follow the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19ff) rather than bearing the fruit of the Spirit. They cannot inherit the kingdom of God in that spiritual condition.

Does it amaze you that even some who profess to be Christians have a right to fear death? Becuase they have not kept first things first, not retained their allegiance and loyalty to Christ, are not living consistently with Christian teaching, are more concerned for pleasure, power, popularity, prestige and worldly gain, they are not prepared to meet God. The hypocrite and apostate has no more promise of salvation in heaven than the alien who has never come to Christ.

Those who profess to wear the name of Christ but do so flippantly, lightly, without self denial and lacking faithful living make themselves fit subjects for the terrible warning of Peter, Second Peter 2:21, *"For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn from the holy commandment given unto them."* When one just plays at Christianity, death is a fearful thought. Such people are disinherited from the promise and eternal inheritance awaiting the faithful.

Facing Death Confidently

The only ones who can face death with confidence and

without fear are the faithful, working, serving, loyal children of God who are in Christ. The life of a Christian is the most beautiful life one can live. But also is his death. Revelation 14:13, *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."*

This does not mean that a Christian faces death without any concern. He still faces many unknowns. But what he fears because he does not know, he knows that his Father knows. The Christian does not die without hope as do others (First Thessalonians 4:13ff). He looks to God as his shield and protector. He has God's assurance that all will be well with his soul. He knows when he must enter the chilling waters of death that the Lord Jesus shall meet him there. He does not have to cross that Jordan alone. The Savior will take his hand and lead him home. He will know as Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 7:1, *"The day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth."*

Die in Hope

There is no reason any of us should not have this hope and assurance. God through Christ, His Son, has provided this hope to all who will come to Him through His Son. God's love sent Christ and Christ's love led Him to the cross to pay for our sins that we might be forgiven and stand before God justified. We are saved by His blood which is applied to our sin-stained souls when we obey the commands of the gospel to believe in Christ, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Christ, and are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, being raised to walk in a new life in Christ, born again, new creatures in Christ (John 3:3-5; Second Corinthians 5:17).

Yes, the day of death cometh to one and all. The day of wrath cometh to the lost. The day of salvation in heaven cometh to those who are faithful in Christ. Glory and praise be to God for such a salvation!

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(from page 24)
the open sea without chart, compass or sail. All one is expected to do is to take God's Word, take God at His Word, and follow His Word through Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. This will lead to heaven. Denominationalism has no Biblical authority for existence. Why should anyone want to be a party to such as thing as Protestantism which is so foreign to God's will?

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What Do You Believe About The Devil?

Consider what some have said about the devil. A compromise decision was reached some years ago by the Church of England whose Convocation of Canterbury decided to allow the devil to remain in their catechism for a trial period of seven years while eliminating references to "his works." I suggest to you that the devil is in their catechism in more ways than they would like to admit. But their attitude reflects the attitude of many. Members of the general public are mainly very skeptical about the concept of the devil, this entity to whom all evil can be ascribed. Many confess outright that they do not believe in the reality of the devil. Probably for most "men-in-the-street" the devil is merely a handy personification of the principle of evil and no more.

Even religious opinions on whether the devil really exists or not vary considerably. The Roman Catholic Church does contend for belief in the reality of the devil. But a spokesman for the Methodist Church explained that it is reasonable to say that the opinion in the Methodist Church on the question is not uniform. The idea of a personal devil, an entity in his own right, is not widely held by Jews. Hinduism does not involve belief in the devil, contending there is no such thing. Moslems do believe in the existence of the devil. Spiritualists do not believe in the devil, but believe that to make errors is a part of our own evolution. So much error and confusion exists about the devil.

What Is Your View?

One of Britian's leading sellers of occult books points out that he sells few books dealing with the devil. Some contend that the devil is a part of theology but they are anti-religious, therefore, deny the devil exists. Others say politicians are the devil. That may take some study regarding many of them. Still others say the devil is simply their own personal projection of evil as they see it. Others say the devil is man's animal instinct, his lower self. So it goes on and on. Many views from many people! But what do you say? What do you believe? Is the devil real? If so, how to you consider him?

Slanderer

The word "devil" means slanderer, usually used to refer to a being thought to be a chief of all spirits. The name given the devil is often Satan. There are others. Some versions call lesser devils simply demons, lesser spirits who are agents of Satan.

Satan means adversary, opponent, antagonist. Matthew 16:23, Jesus said to Peter, *"Get thee behind me Satan."* Christ was not calling Peter the chief of demons, but called him that in the sense of one who was at that moment obstructing the Lord's purposes. The name Satan is used only four times in the Old Testament but much more often in the New Testament. To gain a clearer understanding of Satan we must consider both Old and New Testaments, but primarily the New.

Just an Influence?

It is obvious that many consider Satan as only an influence, not a personal being. Satan is an invention of the imagination, we are told, only a projection of evil as one sees it in his own mind, only a concept used to express whatever may be in disagreement with one's own personal ideas and ambitions. We have heard it said that the idea of the devil is simply an old-fashioned "religious bugaboo." But what saith the Scriptures? How does the Bible present the devil? Rather than leaning on the varied and unfounded opinions of men, what does the source of divine revelation teach? Seldom do many people ever consult the Bible to get valid answers to questions.

A Real Being

The Bible presents the devil, Satan, as a personal existing being of evil. That this is contrary to the popular views makes no difference regarding the truth. We are discussing a Bible subject and if we believe the Bible we must believe what the Bible teaches about the devil. How inconsistent and intellectually dishonest it is to say one believes in and follows the Bible but turn around and dismiss what the Bible teaches on any subject. We either believe it or we do not believe it, and we must take the consequences of our choice. But there is no doubt the Bible presents the devil as a real being.

Many questions can be asked about him for which Scripture does not give specific answer. Contrary to what some think, we

contend that we have little revelation about the origin of the devil. There are many theories and inferences, all the way from the devil being co-existent with God eternally (which we stoutly reject) to the doctrine that the devil is Lucifer of the Old Testament, which is also highly suspect. Whether we know his origin or not does not dismiss his reality. Wrangling over untaught and unrevealed questions may be interesting, but unprofitable (Second Timothy 2:23). Why spend time preaching the speculations and maybe-so's of men?

His Nature

We know somewhat of the nature of Satan. He is a tempter, as is evidenced by the tempting of Eve in the Garden of Eden and the tempting of Christ in the wilderness, recorded in Matthew 4. He is called an old serpant in Genesis, and this serpant is identified as the devil, Satan, in Revelation twenty. This serpant obviously had powers not common to serpants of the field, having the ability to sepak, communicate and deceive. The serpant was apparently an agent for a more powerful power. He not only conversed with Adam and Eve, but also with Christ. First Thessalonians 3:5 must refer to the devil as a tempter.

Peter calls him an adversary in First Peter 5:8. He is the opponent of mankind, especially Christians, walking about, seeking spiritual destruction, in the manner of a roaring lion. He is active, subtle, alive, constant, sly and powerful.

Other Identifications

Other references identify him as an angel of the bottomless pit, the prince of this world, the accuser, the god of this world, the father of lies, the prince of the air and the prince of devils. The concordance will cite even additional ones. All such descriptions depict him as the source of evil just as God Almighty is the source of good. The devil seeks to produce the worst in man and for man, appealing to that which is basest in man, showing just the opposite of God who seeks the best and noblest in man. As moral goodness is composed of love, truth, purity, holiness and such like, accordingly the very opposite characterizes the devil. As one becomes a servant of the Lord when he does what is right, so one is the servant of the devil when he lives a life of wickedness and sin. We are servants of

what and whom we obey (Romans 6:16-18).

Additional evidences that Satan is a personal being are found in Jude nine where mention is made how he disputed with Michael, the arch-angel, over the body of Moses. If the angel Michael is a personal being, and none can deny such is the presentation in Scripture, then the devil must be also.

He is the slanderer of both God and man. He whispers lies to mankind in his effort to separate man from God, misrepresenting God as he did in Eden. Proverbs 16:28 warns, *"A whisperer separateth chiefest of friends."* His general purpose is to break the bonds of communion between man and God and once they are broken, to keep them broken.

He accomplishes his work through temptation, trial, enticements to satisfy the fleshly lusts that exist in the body and mind and do so in a sinful way. Once a person surrenders to his temptations the devil has separated him from God and he become a servant of his master, Satan. So shall he remain until that person turns from him and comes to the Lord seeking forgiveness, which is possible only through Christ.

Demons

Earlier we mentioned that the word "devil" is sometimes used to refer to inferior or lesser evil spirits, sometimes called demons. It is safe to say that there is much about these beings that we do not know. There is much about those in whom demons did dwell that we do not know. We have some information, however, and enough to know that demons are agents of Satan. These demons of which we read in Scriptures were spiritual beings, at enmity with God, having power to afflict humanity (even against the will of the victim), power to speak, having knowledge and intellect. Their descriptions are akin to the descriptions of angels (messengers) with the emphatic difference that they were wicked rather than righteous. But all of this underscores their reality and personal existence. Twice Jesus linked these demons to their chief (Matthew 12:24-30). If demons were real spirits, can one doubt their chief must also be?

We are forced to accept the Biblical contention of the literal understanding of these passages as they pertain to the reality of evil spirits, subjects of the chief evil spirit, Satan.

Do such demons exist among mankind today? Regardless of how we answer, this one point we want to make clear. We know for certain, because the Bible teaches it, that they did exist, and existed among people in Bible times. Whether they do

now or not really does not have a bearing on the reality of the devil as being a real person. In either instance, Christ and His apostles did not deal with imaginary projections of the mind nor were they duped by superstitions. It is strange that men can believe in God and reject the existence of the devil, believe in heaven but deny hell, say there is righteousness, even admit there is unrighteousness, but cannot differentiate between them. The same Bible that informs us of one also informs us of both.

While Jesus lived on earth demons possessed men against their will. We believe they were allowed to do this to enable Christ the opportunity to show the power of righteousness to be superior to the power of evil by granting Him occasion to cast them out and denounce them. We would never accept any doctrine regarding demons or any other subject that deprived mankind of the power of choice. Having the power of choice is relavant and essential in serving God faithfully. God will not force men to do evil nor allow the devil to force men against their will to do evil. God does not even force men to do good.

A Place Prepared

The Lord has prepared a place for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Hell was not prepared for mankind. God does not desire any to exist in eternity with the devil. He has provided for man's deliverance from the power of the devil.

Some say they believe in the Lord and His power. James tells us that even the devils believe (James 2:13). For this reason I know that salvation is not by "faith alone." If it was, even the devils would be saved. Devils have even acknowledged the power of His name over them (Matthew 8:29; Acts 19:15), and even look for the judgment in terror. This is more than what many do today. Devils believe God is and that Christ is His Son. Do you do more than they?

There is much about this subject we do not know because God has not revealed it. We refrain from the broad and fanciful speculations that often characterize discussions about Satan, demons, hell, etc. But information is more than adequate to convince the honest mind of the reality of it all.

Escape from Satan is to flee to Christ. There is no other to whom mankind can turn and be saved. Why should anyone be willing to exist in eternity with the devil in hell, the one who seeks his harm, when he can come to Christ who seeks only his good and eternal salvation?

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Beware Of The Leaven

Matthew 16:5-12, *"And when his disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Saducees. And they reasoned among themselves saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread. Do not ye understand, nor remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Saducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Saducees."*

Jesus gave many warnings to His disciples and this was one of them. The disciples had not brought bread with them and because of this they at first misunderstood His warning. He was not speaking of literal bread. He reminded them of the occasions when with little He had fed many. That of which He warned was the doctrine or teaching of the Pharisees and Saducees.

Leaven

The most prominent idea associated with leaven is corruption and its ability to penetrate. Leaven can penetrate and diffuse itself, changing the particles with which it comes in contact into its own nature. It was such properties of leaven to which Jesus points when He speaks of the leaven of Pharisees and Saducees. Corrupt doctrines, false teachings, powers to secretly penetrate and contaminate, causing fermentation of the whole of mankind is that of which Jesus spoke.

Why did the Lord warn against their teaching? It was because much of what they said was wrong, twisted, destructive and harmful to man's spirit. It was not beneficial. It was contrary to the truth of the Lord, consisting of sprinklings of truth but corrupted by the inclusion of the doctrines of man. Matthew 15:7-9, *"Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and*

honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

The Pharisees would also teach a misinterpretation of the letter to the disregard and violation of the spirit and intent of the law. At other times they manifested a gross misunderstanding of the law altogether, both letter and spirit.

The Pharisees and Saducees taught many errors that were characteristics of their day, but many of the same errors in principle are still being taught now. If Christ's followers needed this warning then, it stands to reason they need it now. If their "*leaven*" would corrupt then, will it do less now? First John 4:1, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* First Thessalonians 5:21, *"Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good."*

Man's Laws

One of their errors was making laws where God had not made one, and allowing laws God had made to be ignored in favor of their own. Matthew 15:2, *"Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread?"* It is good hygiene to wash one's hands before meals, but these people had made it a religious law and rite to be observed as if it had been directed by the Lord. They made that custom a law as if it was on equal authority with laws God had made. Christ had not any objection to their custom per se, except when they tried to bind it upon other as if it came from God. So long as their customs violated no law, He found no fault with them. But they assumed authority to make laws where God not done so.

That attempt is still made today regarding customs and expediences involving human judgments. Even the church has been divided by those who have attempted to bind a certain method for caring of orphans, how weddings are to be conducted, how buildings can be used, as well as laws forbidding Bible classes, using more than one container at the Lord's Supper, forbidding the use of all human literature in study. This is akin to the leaven against which Christ warned.

Extremists

They also would go from one extreme to the other, insisting on their customs and traditions even if it meant violating God's law. Matthew 15:3-6, *"But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions? For God commanded saying, Honor thy father and mother; and He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. This have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition."* They were supposed to give to the work of the Lord. But they were also to provide for their parents. It was not one of the other, but both obligations were upon them. But they did not provide for their parents because they said everything had been given as a gift to God. They ignored the Lord's directions, loosing what He had bound. This is as liberalistic as the former error was humanly legalistic.

This error is still being made now. For instance, God has bound the kind of music Christians are to offer in praise to Him. We are taught to sing. Some prefer to add another kind of music with instruments. They take the liberty of adding to what God has said and following their own wishes, loosing what God has bound in order to do what they want, or what they think will be all right anyway. Does not God show us that usurping His authority is sinful? Do we have the right to be presumptuous? Neither preacher, elder, deacon, member, nor anybody has such a right before God!

God does not allow women to teach and usurp authority over a man. Some do not like this rule and "do their own thing." Is this not loosing what God has bound? God says baptism is a burial (Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12). Why do some contend that sprinkling or pouring is just as proper as what God has taught? This is another example of making the commandment of God of none effect. Many examples are there of men taking unwarranted and unauthorized liberties. Just because we may want something or like something does not mean that it has God's approval and acceptance.

More Revelation

Another matter where Jesus condemned the Pharisees was their unwillingness to be satisfied with the revelation God had given. In the Old Testament we read of many prophecies that

foretold the times of Jesus Christ. Ample evidence was provided whereby they should have recognized Him as the promised Messiah. He even revealed signs by which they could identify Him and the coming of the kingdom. But that was not sufficient for them. They were ever clamoring for more signs, more evidence, additional proofs, something they dictated rather than what God revealed. If they refused to believe on the basis of the evidence God provided, would they have believed if God had provided more evidence?

Matthew 12:39-40, *"But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall be no sign given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* By such words our Lord spoke of His forthcoming death, burial and resurrection. But more signs were requested. No number of signs would have satisfied them.

Many today are malcontent with the revelation God has given and they clamor for, and even claim to receive, more than God's all-sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). They collect catechisms, edicts of councils, disciplines, manuals, prayer books, creeds of various sorts, special visions, latter-day revelations, their own "experiences and feelings." We often hear people talk about God coming to them and telling them something that nobody else has ever heard, seeing things from God that nobody else ever saw. Such are the claims of Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, the Roman pope, Pentecostals, and many others. In view of the several assertions in the Bible of its own sufficiency, and that the full revelation has long ago been completed, we wonder why some will not take God at His Word and take the Word He has given.

Materialists

The Saducees, somewhat different from the Pharisees, denied the resurrection (Matthew 22:23). They, like some now, contended that this earthly life is all there is to man's existence. This accounted partially for their immoralities, for why should one be moral when they shall not have to give account to anyone about anything? If there is no heaven or hell, no spirit of man, no life after this, man being nothing more than a highly evolved animal as our youth are being taught in all levels of education and entertainment, what reason is there for anything

since it all amounts to nothing anyhow?

Atheists, humanists, materialists, like communists, even Jehovah's Witnesses, all tell you there is no heaven or hell. Evil men either cease to exist upon physical death, they say, or probably all men, good or evil, simply cease to exist, depending upon which group of truth deniers you have in mind. What difference is there between those today deny the resurrection and life after death and those who made the same denial in years past? Since Christ taught that their doctrine was corrupt then, is it not equally corrupt now?

Religious, but...

An outstanding characteristic of the Pharisees and Saducees was their earnest desire to be religious. But they were careless about being righteous. Israel constantly had this problem among the people. There were those in Jesus' day who loved to parade their piety and religion in a showy way to be seen of men. They would pray on street corners, paint their faces as if they were fasting, wore special garments to indicate they were religious, had special titles and received special greetings (Matthew 23: 5-7). Do such things sound familiar and modern?

Tell me wherein is there are difference between what they did and what we can see all about today! Consider the glorious title of clergymen in which they boast. Look at the special garb many wear. Listen to the public displays before others as they parade themselves as pious. This was called hypocrisy then. What is it now but the same thing? Cannot we see that there is as much reason for us to beware of the leaven of false doctrines and practices as it was for the early disciples?

When Jesus condemned such things of the Pharisees and Saducees, the disciples when they heard it said, Matthew 15:12, *"Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?"* Wait a minute! Do you mean to suggest that Jesus offended some people by what He taught? The Scriptures say that He did. But is it not always unloving to offend? Evidently Jesus did not think so. Did he run and apologize to these sinners? Or did He seek opportunity to "tone down" His teaching, even change it, if it would be more acceptable? I do not read that He did. Some today would advise this of every preacher. But Jesus did not say He was sorry that He had told them the truth they needed to hear.

Jesus did not deliberately seek to offend anyone but the truth He preached was often offensive to those who loved their own ways more than truth. Christ chose to warn of the destruction of sin rather than soothe and just "get along" with those in error. He had sufficient love, strength, faith and courage to say what was needed even when it might not be well received nor wanted. This was far greater love than if He had compromised.

His response on being advised that He had offended some was, Matt. 15:13,14, *"Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up. Let them alone; they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."* He identified His accusers for what they were. They were blind leaders. He announced what their eternity would be. He warned His disciples to have no part of them and not be counted among them.

Let us learn this great warning from Jesus as we take note of religious error around us that smacks of the same stripe as the leaven of the Pharisees and Saducees. Rather than be poisoned spiritually by it, feed upon the Bread of Life that we may live.

† † † † †

The Weight of the Cross

For the sake of space, and because our readers have Bibles, we do not ordinarily present the more lengthy texts of our lessons. But the subject under consideration seems to deserve, almost demand that we present it in its entirety.

John 19:1-18, "*Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that he may know that I find no fault in him.*" We pause in the text to recognize this startling statement by Pilate. We wonder since he found no fault in Christ, why the scourging, and why did that not end the matter? Why not set Him free? Back to the text.

"Then came Jesus forth wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him; for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was more afraid, and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?"

Pause and Ponder

Let us pause again in our text. Pilate was worried but he sought to assert his authority. If he had the power to release Jesus, having found Him innocent of the charges against Him, why did he not do it? Back to the text.

"Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." This would specifically refer to Judas and the Jews generally who had sought His death and were involved in His captivity.

"And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him; but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar." Now the Jews were getting close to Pilate because he was concerned more for himself than for Jesus.

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour; and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your king!" From this remark it appears that Pilate knew the Jews were doing what they did from motives other than true loyalty to Caesar and Rome, and certainly not from loyalty to God who was their King.

Their Cry

"But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar." If ever there

was a deliberate repudiation of God and their heritage as God's chosen people, this was the hour.

"Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew, Golgatha; where they crucified him, and two others with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst."

Possibly we would be more impressed if we had been present at this vivid scene of trials, persecutions, mockery, ridicule, betrayal, disloyalty, inhumane treatment and various forms of evil manifestations, hearing the shouts of the mob, seeing the injustices committed, watching the spectacle of cowardice and dishonesty, listening to the outpouring of hate, hearing the wailing, and even shuddering with the thuds of the hammers as the nails were driven through the flesh into the crosses, accompanied with groanings and pain.

But let us focus our attention on one phrase. *"And he bearing his cross..."* Other accounts tell of Simon of Cyrene being compelled to carry Jesus' cross, but this was after Jesus fell beneath it and was unable to carry it any longer.

Not on Pounds

The weight of the cross is not to be measured in the number of pounds of wood. It was in the burden of the sins of mankind that we see its weight. *"He by the grace of God should taste of death for every man."* (Hebrews 2:9). *"And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world."* (First John 2:2). He was as John the Baptist had identified Him, *"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29). He gave that we might receive; He died that we might live; He suffered that we might be forgiven.

In life Jesus knew the cross awaited Him and so taught. He said also, Matthew 16:24, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."* Luke's account adds the word "*daily.*" (Luke 9:23). All who would benefit from the cross of Christ must bear a cross. It is not a cross of wood, nor for the sins of mankind, but the cross of responsibility toward God through Jesus Christ, which includes the denial of self and the surrender of will to Him.

Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in*

the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Paul had given up his former life to live for Christ. He turned from his selfish ambitions and desires of a worldly nature to serve Christ. Where the man named Saul once lived now the man named Paul was living and governed and directed in life by the will of Jesus Christ. Though alive in the body, *"in the flesh,"* he was as a dead man, committed to living according to the will of the Son of God.

Galatians 6:14, *"But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."* What does Paul mean? He did not glory in what this world offers. He measured not accomplishments by worldly standards. He gloried in the cross, its meaning and importance for mankind. He rejoiced in what he had accomplished by virtue of being a Christian. This is a statement of priorities and purpose in life, noting God's standards and what really counts and matters in life.

The Shame

Bearing the cross of responsibility to God has several requirements. We must bear the shame of the cross, as the song suggests, the "emblem of suffering and shame." We speak not of just the actual crucifixion, as shameful as it was, but all that pertains to the ignominious death of Christ. He was executed as if He had been a criminal. From the manger to the cross, Christ suffered the sneers of people. Galatians 3:13 says He was made a curse for us. Even now, Jesus is so despised by the world and so is the cross. People scoff and laugh at the doctrine of a vicarious death, a death on behalf of and a substitute for another. They ridicule that He merely died the death of a martyr for a cause, and a misguided cause at that, not on behalf of mankind. Some say He was but a schemer whose plan born of vanity backfired and He got Himself killed. Today, the Christ bears this shame before others, but it is a shame a reproach we gladly bear.

Preach the Cross

To bear the cross means to preach the cross to the world. The event and its significance must be proclaimed. First Corinthians 1:18, *"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."*

First Corinthians 2:1,2, *"And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."* Without the cross, mankind would be left hopeless in his lost state. Because of the cross there is hope, because of the redemption and reconcilliation provided by the cross.

From the World

Bearing the cross means divorcing ourselves from the sins of this world. It has to do with daily living and making godly decisions, asking, "What would Jesus have me do?" This includes our conversations, attitudes and discharges of duty. To love this world and conform to it violate inspired apostolic teaching (Romans 12:1,2; First John 2:15).

Bearing the cross includes responsibility to the Lord's church. The existence of the church is inseparable from the cross. There is no way to honor Christ and His cross and at the same time ignore His church. The church was purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28) which was shed on the cross. His blood is the His blood (Romans 5:9) shed on the cross. His blood is the cleansing agent of sin. The church is composed of the saved, those who have been forgiven of their sins, and have entered into Christ (Acts 2:47). Without the cross there would be no church of Christ.

The Glory

There is glory connected with the weight of the cross. Because there is glory in serving God, just as there was glory in the provision for the forgiveness of sins, glory in humanity having spiritual fellowship with Deity, glory in salvation, glory in the eternal reward of heaven, so there is glory in the cross by which all these spiritual blessings are made possible.

Jesus bore the weight of His cross. We must bear the weight of our crosses also. "Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me." The matter before me, and you, is whether we will bear the weight of our cross as He did His.

† † † † †

Can Protestantism Survive?

History reveals a close tie between Protestantism and the freedoms that we enjoy in this nation. Even though America is not and never has been a Christian nation in the Biblical sense of the term, it has been predominantly a Protestant nation religiously. But today it has become a very diversified and pluralistic society. Romanism in America has made some dramatic and not always expedient changes in recent years away from their history when Rome dominated so much of Europe and other areas of the world.

Freedom from tyranny and respect for the individual and personal rights as human beings has generally characterized Protestantism. It was born in protest to a dictatorial religious power ruled by the papacy in Rome. It has stood against the usurpation of authority by the state over the individual.

But Protestantism today is most often considered in terms of many churches, many names, many faiths, many doctrines, many creeds, everyone doing just about whatever they want, whatever they like, with the adoption of the false philosophy that everything is beautiful in its own way, I'm O.K. and you're O.K., do your own thing. While refusing to submit to the assumed authority of the pope, the need to conform to religious standards at all has about vanished. Certainly there is little if any respect for Christ and the Biblically revealed faith.

A Great Power

History affirms that Protestantism has been a potent force in the past in the promotion and protection of religious freedom. Its existence still affects much of the world. But can that movement survive? Leading Protestant leaders are asking this same question.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "United we stand; divided we fall." A greater than he said, Matthew 12:25, *"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."* In spite of this, Protestantism seems to be proud to be composed of hundreds upon hundreds of churches divided one from the other. All of them claim to be a part of the Lord's church and claim they are acceptable to God. Not only do their doctrines differ, they often

contradict each other. If their claims are accurate, that God is happy with them all, it causes one to wonder just how mixed up and confused can God get! Is the house of God in this disarray that Protestantism contends?

If Protestantism as we observe it is of God, why did Jesus pray as He did for unity in John seventeen? What reason was there for Paul to ever condemn division as he did in First Corinthians one? We have never, in nearly four decades of preaching and dealing with Protestants, laity and clergy, heard an intelligent explanation and answer to these questions. Nor do we really expect any. The very face of Protestantism is an affront to the teaching of the Bible.

Results of Division

A contributing factor to the fall of the Roman empire was the division that sapped it of its strength. Just as the division was Rome's weakness, division constantly proves to be a great enemy of confused Protestantism. The Lord said, Matthew 15:13, *"Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."* The Psalmist wrote, Psalm 127:1, *"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it..."* In the face of such teaching, how can reasonable minds declare that it makes no difference what one believe or to which church one belongs? Either the Bible is right or Protestantism is right. But it is an impossibility for both to be right. They are poles apart, and there is no compromise between them.

Protestantism is an overgrown tower of Babel in religion. The word "*Babel*" means confusion, coming from the time God confused the languages of rebellious people. If God is the founder, builder and supporter of all these churches, why should not a person be a member of more than just one of them? Why not join two, four, or all of them? Why must anyone surrender to any particular creed of one church rather than some other? Will God be angry if a man is a member of more than one of "His churches?" Nonetheless, Protestants join only one.

Just Any Church?

All my adult life I have heard Protestants talk about one church being just as good as another church, but I have not been convinced they really believe what they say. If they really believed it, they would not join just one to the exclusion of all

others. If they really believed that they would work to close their doors as soon as possible and unite with some other church for the sake of unity. If they really believed it, they would not be so opposed and hostile to those who leave their church for another. Nor would they have such hatred toward those who really believe it does matter what a person believes and does in service to God.

If one can be saved outside of some church, why be a member of it? Is not salvation the goal? What right does a church, wherein is not the salvation Christ brought, have to even exist before God? If there is nothing essential in some church that does not exist in some other church, why should it survive? It offers no real benefit.

Taking the doctrine that one church is just as good as another to its logical conclusion, we would have to admit they are all of equal value. If all are right, then none are wrong. Every man can go his own way, according to his own likes and choices, make up his own rules, and be his own god and authority. But how can reasonable people contend all are right when one says "up", but another says "down." One says, "black," but another says, "white." One says "left," and another says, "right". Plain common sense is enough to know that one church is not just as good as another. Ask any denominationalist, "Do you believe your church is no better than any other?" Regardless of their answer, then ask, "Then why do you belong to one instead of another; or one instead of them all?"
believe one is as good as another. They only say that to include everybody. But they do not really believe it.

Our Lord said, *"By their fruits ye shall know them."* (Matthew 7:20). Even a casual glance at the fruits of Protestantism ought cause Bible believers to turn from it with haste. Protestantism repudiated the authority of the pope of Rome only to establish a multitude of "little popes" according to whatever church you have in mind. The authority of the Bible is dismissed in either circumstance.

Pathway to Atheism

Step by step, with the claim that each can do as he sees fit so long as he is honest and sincere, the attitudes of people are cultivated to accept atheism. Jesus knew this would be the fruit of division when He said, John 17:20, *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as thou Father, art in me and I*

in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Who is so naive as to suggest the world generally believes in Christ? Who is so out of touch with reality to deny that atheism, humanism, with its accompanying doctrines, is the fastest growing religious philosophy even in America? Are we so blind as to deny the chaotic confusion Protestant denominationalism has created and cultivated minds of people to deny everything concerning God?

We live in a society that has become sloven and sloppy as well as irresponsible because of a misguided "tolerance." We need to understand what tolerance is. It means to allow something to exist rather than prohibit. But it does not mean the acceptance of just anything that comes along as if it is acceptable to God. In a sense God tolerates even sin in that He allows sin to exist if people choose to sin. He never tolerates it with approval. God does not consider just anything man wants to be acceptable. People have the right before God to believe what they want but they need not expect God to accept it. It is wrong to tolerate false religions in the sense of considering them just as good as the religion Christ established. It is right to tolerate them in the sense of granting religious freedom. But bear in mind, each shall give account of his or her decisions and performances of duty before God. This Protestant "anything goes" is wrong, wrong!

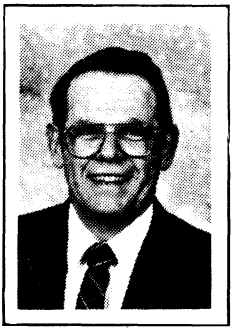
Protestantism is in a spiritual fog and even Protestants are becoming aware of it. We see union meetings, the joining of forces, the making of new merged denominations. The doctrine of "unity in diversity" is born of man's religious rebellion against the authority of God. This false doctrine even has its advocates in the ranks of the digressive and apostate Churches of Christ, not to be confused with the church of Christ. The idea to "agree to disagree" is not unity, but heresy.

If whatever you do is all right, why merge? Why have a union meeting? Why negotiate, as some do? Why "summit" and search for unity with the irenic spirit of compromise and surrender to each other rather than to God? Why not just keep on the way things are if God accepts just anything honestly done and sincerely believed?

Thankfully, nobody has to be a Catholic or Protestant or any other such thing. We can be just what people were in New Testament times who had heard, believed, obeyed and continued in the gospel of Christ. We can be Christians. To be a Protestant is like being a sailor on a sinking ship, floundering in

(continued page 5)

Miraculous Prophecy



JAMES W. BOYD

Modernists have concluded, even before approaching the Bible and considering the evidence, that there is no such thing as the miraculous. Therefore, having this predetermined and entrenched bias, when they come to the prophecies of the Bible they flippantly dismiss them. They accuse the Old Testament prophets of lying by pretending to foretell the future, and they accuse the New Testament writer of lying when they say certain prophecies are fulfilled in New Testament events and persons. There is no way they will accept miraculous prophecy.

Nonetheless, the testimony of men whose integrity is unimpeachable is that God, through chosen and inspired prophets, did predict numerous things regarding their future, and equally reliable, honest and inspired men recorded fulfilment of those prophecies. Obviously, such foretelling as is found in Scripture was beyond normal human ability. It was the result of the supernatural. It goes to affirm with certainty that God's hand was in it all. When we read of prophecies made hundreds of years before their precise fulfilments, is not our faith increased?

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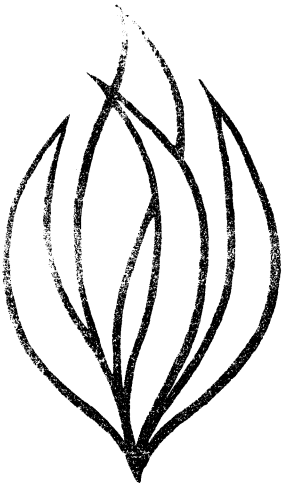

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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His Judgment Taken Away

NUMBER ONE

Acts 8:32,33, *"The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away; and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth?"*

This was the passage being read by the Ethiopian just prior to his conversation with Philip, the evangelist. It concerned Christ and the time when He would stand before His accusers, wicked men, and be judged. This prophecy, made nearly seven hundred years before His birth, was the text that Philip took and "*preached unto him Jesus.*" We identify the passage as Isaiah 53:7,8 in the Old Testament.

The theme of three lessons is the denial of justice to Christ when a fair and impartial judgment was withheld from Him. Justice is one of the majestic words of our language, like duty, work and freedom. It is the quality of being fair and honest, impartial in our dealing with others.

Trials

When a person is accused of a crime and brought before the tribunals of authority, the trial is supposedly conducted to establish truth and from that truth establish the guilt or innocence of the accused. In establishing truth, only true testimony ought to be allowed. Other than this the proceeding becomes a mockery of justice. When one is found innocent, justice demands that the accused be set free. When one is found guilty, justice demands he be punished. Even when found guilty justice is often tempered by mercy. But in the trial of Jesus He neither received justice before, after nor during the trials, and certainly mercy was never extended Him, but denied Him.

From the time of His illegal arrest until His death on the cross a large portion of the process that occured was unjust as well as illegal. We shall not concern ourselves overly with the illegalities but with the injustices. Legality does not always insure justice anyway. Even today, many things are legal that cannot be called just. The laws of men are not always fair and equitable.

In the trials of Jesus false testimony by hired men was

allowed. Even false witnesses did not agree among themselves. Yet, on the basis of their words, His enemies declared Him guilty. Justice was perverted in allowing Jesus to stand as a guilty violator. Rather than there being any evidence of mercy there was deliberate cruelty perpetrated against Him by officials. Well can it be said, *"In his humiliation* (the time when He fully emptied Himself, JWB) *"his judgment was taken away."* Even a form of righteous, fair and impatial judgment was denied Him.

His Generation

The phrase, *"Who shall declare his generation,"* goes to underscore the injustices against Him. It was the custom among the Jews when they took a condemned prisoner to his execution that opportunity was given to any who would step forward on behalf of the prisoner and say whatever might be commendable about him. There were so many things everyone present knew that was commendable about Jesus. Doubtless, many of those present had been recipients of His compassion and miraculous power. Yet, opportunity to mention any good concerning Him was not allowed. This breach of justice and custom only characterized the afflictions Jesus suffered. The prophet Isaiah revealed how this would be the case in the conduct of wicked men involved. The Lord was denied every enactment of fair treatment.

Our study shall proceed along the lines of an investigation of the circumstances of His arrest, then His trials. We say trials, plural, because the trial of Jesus was actually a series of trials. There were three ecclesiastical or religious trials before the Jews, followed by three civil trials before Roman authorities. We begin with the vivid scene of His arrest which led to mankind murdering the Son of God. Yet, in this tragedy, we witness the most glorious gift ever given, the greatest manifestation of love, and the provision for the salvation of mankind.

His Arrest

The arrest of Jesus took place near the gate of the Garden of Gethsemane soon after the hour of midnight. As one travels east from Jerusalem, going out at the east gate, the ground slopes downward toward the brook Kidron. Crossing the brook and continuing eastward one climbs the slope toward the Mount of Olives. On this slope were several gardens, one of which was

the Garden of Gethsemane.

From where Jesus and His disciples stood,having gone there after observing the last Passover, one can look westward down the slope of the Mount of Olives and toward the east gate. There were two groups of men involved in the affairs of this important night. One was the small band with Jesus; the other the hastily called posse which sought Him. Standing with the Lord one can picture the shadowy mass of people emerging from the east gate, moving downward toward the brook, and starting upward toward the place where Jesus was. This latter group was composed of the temple police, priests, Jewish leaders, possibly even some of the Sanhedrin (the highest Jewish court), and doubtless elements of the rabble of Jerusalem who had been hired to oppose Jesus. They carried swords, staves, torches and lanterns in anticipation of a search for Jesus and His disciples, prepared even for resistance.

Judas was the leader of the mob. For thirty pieces of silver he had covenanted to identify Jesus with a kiss. They did not want to make the mistake of taking the wrong man and allowing Jesus to escape. Judas knew Him well and could lead them to Him. He came before Jesus and said, *"Hail, Master,"* and planted a kiss upon Him. Jesus said, *"Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"* How insolent and improper it was that Judas chose this way to betray Jesus. The spitting, buffeting, ridicule and mockery that Jesus later received was more tolerable than this kiss, an act associated with love, the kiss of a mouth that had once confessed Him, preached Him, eaten with Him, and drunk from His cup.

Jesus Responded

The posse expected Jesus to attempt an escape. To their utter surprise Jesus stepped forward and asked, *"Whom seek ye?"* They replied, *"Jesus of Nazareth."* Jesus calmly responded, *"I am he."* As boldly, deliberately and astoundingly as that, His enemies could lay hands on Him. His initiative certainly must have made them feel ridiculous with their swords, staves, etc. as if they were to hunt a desparado. The Bible says His enemies fell back from Him rather than seizing Him.

Christ sensed the danger facing His disciples and said, *"I told you that I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way."* Even as He surrended Himself to those wicked ones He sought the safety and welfare of others.

It was at this point that Peter jumped forward with his sword and took a swing at one of the mob. It is speculated that his aim was bad, probably wanting to strike the head, but missed and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest name Malchus. This action might have touched off a fight had it not been for what the Lord said and did.

He told Peter, *"Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?"* By these words we learn that there is a place for the sword, but taking the law into one's own hands is not acceptable. The sword is a symbol of power and authority and that authority did not belong to Peter in this case. We have to realize the action of Peter as being noble, brave, well-intentioned, but hasty and born of ignorance of the significance of what was taking place.

It must have been surprising to both friends and foes that Jesus not only spoke to Peter in this fashion but reclaimed the damage Peter had done. He healed the ear of Malchus in the presence of them all. Why this deed did not turn the mob from their mission can only be explained in the intensity of their hatred of Christ and how stubborn was their will to destroy Him.

The Disciples Fled

The disciples were now thoroughly frightened and confused and fled into the night, leaving Jesus alone at the mercy of His foes. They seized Him, bound Him, conducted Him back down the mount and across the brook, into the dark streets of Jerusalem toward the palace of the high priest, a sinister man who was waiting for them.

The first act of taking away the justice Jesus deserved was over. More and worse measures were to soon follow. Without legal warrant, no charges being made, He was seized.

Why This Way?

One of the strange and bewildering mysteries surrounding His arrest is why the mob chose to take Him the way they did. He was in the city repeatedly prior to this, but they laid no hand on Him. Luke 22:52,53, *"Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves?*

When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your dark hour, and the power of darkness." Were they afraid of the people? Were they armed because of fear? Did they realize they were dealing with One whose power they could never match? It was an illogical procedure, but one that had been foretold centuries earlier.

We read how Peter followed the mob at some distance (Matthew 26:58). He was far enough away not to be identified with Jesus, but not close enough to do either himself or Jesus any benefit.

Actually what the enemies of Christ were doing was adding to the evidence that proves Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, but they were not aware they were doing that. Their actions were intended to be hostile and their motive was to destroy Him.

In the next lesson we shall observe the first series of trials as Jesus went before Jewish officialdom. The third lesson will concern His civil trials before Romans authorities. In this three part study we are motivated by the desire to see how unjustly Jesus was treated, and come to a greater realization that He endured it all that we might be saved. In this realization we hope all who read will be inclined to show love and appreciation for Him and to Him by conforming our lives to His will.

† † † † †

His Judgment Taken Away

NUMBER TWO

When preaching a series of sermons it is profitable to spend a few moments at the beginning of each segment in review of previous lessons. However, in writing sermons this is not needful because the reader can easily review previous pages as he chooses.

When we left Jesus at the end of the last lesson He was being led through the dark streets of Jerusalem toward the palace occupied by the high priest. His enemies had Him well in hand.

Six Sessions

Jesus underwent three religiously controlled trials before the

Jews before He was subjected to three trials before the Roman authorities. Palestine was then a province of the Roman Empire and the Jews were subject to the Roman governor named Pontius Pilate. It was Rome's policy to allow her conquered subjects a considerable degree of local rule, reserving certain matters for themsleves. Among the prerogatives Rome reserved for herself was the execution of the death penalty. Even though Jews might pass a death sentence against someone according to their law, they were not permitted to execute it. The Jews had already determined in their mind that Jesus must be put to death, and therefore, there was the need of the Roman trials that followed the religious ones.

Before Annas

Jesus was first taken before Annas, an elderly man of some seventy years of age who had been high priest nearly twenty years before this time, but who had been deposed by Tiberius from that position. In his place was his son-in-law named Caiaphas. In reality Caiaphas was more a figurehead than an authority among the Jews because Annas was still virtually the prime ruler of Jewish society and theocracy.

Annas asked Jesus about His teaching (John 18:19). The Lord replied, *"I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret I have said nothing. Why askest thou? Ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said."* (John 18:20,21). Annas was "fishing" for some accusation that could justifiably be placed against Jesus. At that point he had none to make, even though Jesus had already been arrested. In essence Jesus threw a challenge to Annas to produce his charges and his witnesses and evidence to sustain them. The guard standing nearby must have recognized the humiliation of Annas and came to his defense, slapping Jesus at His remark. Jesus then said, *"If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"* From this Annas could see that he had before him no ordinary adversary. This entire procedure was the bidding of the Jews, so the Jews should have had the evidence to justify it. They were a bit late to try to concoct some "evidence" with which to accuse Jesus.

As one surveys all the religious trials, it seems that this first session, this one before Annas, admittedly an illegal action because Annas had no legal authority, was to make it plain that

the actual leaders of the Jewish people desired His destruction and operated behind the scenes in the entire conspiracy. They had to "get the word" from the "big boss" before they went further. And they got it.

While this illegality and injustice was being conducted, a hastily called meeting of the Sanhedrin was assemblying. All the formal actions by the Jews had to be made by the authority of the Sanhedrin, the most powerful and supreme ruling body among the Jews.

Legal Ratification

Having received the word from Annas, Caiaphas had to ratify everything in order to make it acceptable to the Romans. Darkness still prevailed, and this became significant later.

Several "witnesses" were brought against Jesus. Their testimony was prearranged and they were well instructed what to say. Again, this adds to the injustice and unfairness of it all.

Christ was charged with blasphemy against the temple, a crime punishable by death according to the Jews. Matthew 26:61, *"And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."* This man misquoted Jesus and misunderstood what He actually had said. We read in John 2:19-21 when Jesus spoke words similar to these. He had said, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... But he spake of the temple of his body."* He was not talking about the Jewish temple or the temple of God. Nor did He say, "temple of God." But to this charge Jesus answered not a word. Would it have made any real difference to those who were determined to kill Him if He had spoken?

Their set of mind is proven by another question asked of Jesus and His answer. Luke 22:67-71, *"Art thou the Christ? Tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe; and if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am."* This was an affirmative answer. *"And they said, What need we any further witness? For we ourselves have heard of his own mouth."* Has there ever been any group of people more prejudiced against another man than of this occasion? Were they not already decided what they would accept and reject even before the evidence was presented? In their failure to recognize Him from

the prophets, and in their ignorance and vindictiveness, they said His admission of His identity negated any need of investigation. To them His claim condemned Him. Whether His claim was true or false did not seem to concern them.

They became so angry and upset at Jesus that they shouted and cursed. Even Caiaphas rent his clothes. It became a wild assembly. Jesus and His teaching had so exposed their evil, deflated their egotistical hypocrisy, and deprived them of their following, that His acknowledgement as the Son of God destroyed their self-composure. They then pronounced Jesus worthy of death. Wild animals could not have acted with less reason and intelligence.

Even a Third

The third part of the three religious trials was made necessary because the first two were illegal and could likely be dismissed by the Romans. The trial before Annas was before one who was not in accepted authority. Jesus before the Sanhedrin, although assembled to make things legal, was also illegal because it was against the law to pronounce someone to death while darkness prevailed. So a third session had to be conducted once daylight came. It seems that these enemies of Christ went out of their way to accomodate certain regulations as they deliberately condemned an innocent man to death. So this third trial was brief and nothing but a formality.

Between Trials

But what happened to Jesus between the second and third session, both before the Sanhedrin, gives emphasis to the fact that justice was denied Him. Jesus was thrown as prey to the rabble of the palace much like raw meat might be thrown to a hungry pack of wolves. They flung the prisoner about from one to another only as a mob can do. They slapped Him, beat Him, cursed Him, pushing and knocking Him with laughter and slander. Caiaphas, as well as other members of this august Jewish council, held their peace and allowed it. It could well be that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who are thought to have belonged to this council, witnessed this degradation being perpetrated against the Son of God. Surely there is no hatred nor bigotry as cruel and intense as religious hatred and bigotry.

But with the breaking of the dawn the horseplay and abuse

subsided, the death penalty was quickly ratified in daylight, and Caiaphas and his underlings took Jesus toward the Roman Praetorium to present Him before Pontius Pilate and the Roman rule. There they expected the death penalty to be confirmed and the execution of Jesus to become a quick reality.

Which Punishment?

By these actions the Jewish accusers of Jesus once again demonstrated their desire for revenge and their hatred of Jesus Christ. According to Jewish law, as revealed in Deutoronomy, blasphemy was to be punished by death by stoning. Also the stoned one was to be hanged with his hands fastened together (Deuteronomy 21:22; Leviticus 24:16). The manner of execution by the Romans was crucifixion, a slower and more agonizing way to die. But the Jews did not care whether this part of their law was observed or not. Anything that would rid them of Jesus was what they would accept and it mattered not what it required. As much as they hated the Romans and their dominion over them, they hated Jesus more. In this way they would be able to force Jesus to a more painful and disgraceful way to die. This pleased them.

So we see the Hope of the world being led away by this ruthless religious mob to a place where they would bend every effort and use every influence to hasten the end they desired. They took Him to the heathen Gentile court.

Before The Gentiles

Our final lesson shall center on the trials before the Romans. Even if there should have been a turn of events at this point, we can already see how proper and fitting are the prophetic words of Isaiah regarding the trial of Jesus and how His judgment was taken away.

With the information we have thus far considered, how can anyone look with indifference upon Christ and His death at Calvary? As terrible as was His physical agony and abuse, that was the lesser part of His suffering. Consider the mental agony. He was forsaken by those nearest Him, cursed by those He came to save, denied by His own people, abused by those He wanted to help and had helped. Have we ever known of instances when mankind did so stain and corrupt their souls as when the enemies of Christ mistreated Him?

Again we ask, why did He do it? It was for me and you that we might be forgiven of our sins, live a blessed life here on earth, and enjoy heaven for eternity. Does not this impress you?

† † † † †

His Judgment Taken Away

NUMBER THREE

We now turn our attention to the trials of Jesus before Roman authorities. John 18:28-30, *"Then led they Jesus fromCaiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover."* Does it not strike you as odd how the enemies of Christ were meticulous in not defiling themselves by entering the Gentile courtroom, but did not seem to have much concern over hiring false witnesses, making illegal arrests, inventing accusation, and sending an innocent man to death?

Before Pilate

The passage continues, *"Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to thee."*

Pilate was no real friend of the Jews and he seemed to resent the impudence as if they had come to tell him what he had to do. They told Pilate that Jesus was guilty or they would never have brought Him to Pilate. They wanted Pilate to agree with their decision without any investigation on his part. They said in essence, "We know he is guilty. The fact that we brought him here is all the proof you need. Condemn him and be done with it." But Pilate did not respond the way they wanted. *"Take ye him, and judge him according to your law."* Pilate was telling them if they were so certain about Jesus deserving death, then they should take care of the matter. But he knew, as did they, that they could not execute Jesus because putting a person to death for crimes, real or imagined, was not their right under the Romans. Pilate was really humbling them into reconizing how he had the authority.

Pilate asked, *"What evil hath he done?"* Their first reaction was that nothing more needed to be said. They had already decided He was worthy of death. But this was no testimony. This was not proof. This was not even an accusation. This was merely an inflated assertion. Pilate was not moved by it and took Jesus privately inside the palace to question Him.

New Accusations

When the Jews saw that their assertions would not suffice, they began to make accusations, but not the same ones they had made in their own courts. They invented accusations to fit the circumstances. Now they accused Jesus of things that were designed to prejudice the mind of Pilate. "He refuses to pay taxes. He claims he is king. He is not loyal to Caesar." Such was the tone of their charges.

Jesus did teach the people to pay their taxes and told them to render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's. He even paid the temple tax the Jews were required to pay. While He claimed to be King, the nature of His kingdom would not rival the civil power. His was a spiritual kingdom. He had violated no law of the Romans.

In private Pilate asked Jesus, *"Art thou a king?"* Jesus explained to Pilate the nature of his kingdom. John 18:36, *"My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence."*

In this conversation with Jesus Pilate was convinced that Jesus was no evil man and the charges against Him were false, motivated by hatred and prejudice rather than loyalty to Rome. Accordingly, he went before the Jews and said, *"I find no fault in him."*

This stirred consternation and frustration within the Jews and their dissatisfaction was evident. They began bringing additional charges, trumped up, distorted, half-truths. *"He stirs up the people all the way from Galilee where he began down to Judea."* Upon hearing that Jesus was from Galilee Pilate thought he saw a way out of this problem, at least for himself. Learning Jesus was a Galilean, and Pilate's jurisdiction did not extend into Galilee, and that Herod Antipas, who did rule Galilee just happened to be in Jerusalem at that time, he decided to send Jesus to Herod. After all, Herod had the rule over this man and knew the Jewish laws better than Pilate.

So the first of three sessions ended with Pilate trying to shift the responsibility of making a decision regarding Jesus from himself to Herod. He was satisfied that he was forever rid of the matter. Certainly, Jesus was denied justice and should have been set free. He was judged to be guiltless but was denied His freedom nonetheless. Is that justice?

Before Herod

But if justice was perverted before Pilate, it was more perverted before Herod. The second trial was shorter than the first, but was more physically brutal. For Jesus it was one of the most humilating experiences during His entire suffering. Herod began by asking irrelavent questions, seeking to soothe his personal curiosities. But to such questions Jesus gave no answer. Herod demanded that He perform some miracle for his entertainment. But again, Jesus maintained His strict silence.

Herod then began making sport of Him. A king needed a robe, so he had a robe put upon Him. The court laughed and Herod, in his arrogant and egotistical manner, dismissed Jesus from his court with mockery and derision, sending Him back to Pilate. He acted as if he really had no time for such a One as Jesus. Just men cringe at the thought of a presiding officer making abuse of the accused and allowing such maltreatment. But in all of this, "*His judgment was taken away.*"

Back to Pilate

The third of the three trials was before Pilate again. It seems while Jesus was with Herod that Pilate's wife sent a message to Pilate advising him to have nothing to do with this *"just man."* With this warning ringing in his ears, Pilate subjected Jesus to another private examination. It appears that Pilate was seeking some way to save Jesus, but at the same time not offend the Jews that he ruled.

After the questioning he again announced that he found no fault in Jesus. This surely should have ended the matter and Jesus set free if justice had prevailed. But then we see Pilate as he made a fatal mistake. He suggested, *"I will chastise him and release him."* This he offered as a compromise, hoping this would satisfy the Jewish wrath. But he did not realize that one cannot meet evil halfway. He should have stood for the right. He had no reason even to chastise Jesus. Pilate commited the

sin of compromise. In this way he allowed the wedge to enter that led eventually to allowing the death sentence to be completed. If Jesus was guilty, then crucify Him. If innocent, then let Him go. But why this chastisement except to look for the impossible position halfway between right and wrong?

Release Him?

Pilate sought another way to release Him. It was custom to release one prisoner at the time of the Jewish Passover. Who should be released? There was another man in bonds named Barabbas, one convicted of insurrection, robbery, murder, condemned by both Jews and Romans. *"Whom shall I release?"* asked Pilate, expecting the Jews to release Jesus before they would release such a one as Barabbas. The answer he got was not what he expected. They wanted Barabbas released and Jesus killed. This they cried at the insistence of their leaders. *"Why? What evil hath he done?"* Pilate asked. But the mob, led by the priests and other Jewish leaders, urged Pilate to condemn Jesus.

Pilate still held to the hope of saving Jesus even after the Jews rejected the compromise of chastisement. He decided to scourge Him anyway. In scourging the victim is stripped, stretched against a post, and unmercifully whipped by ropes containing bits of stone and bone so that the blows would rip into the flesh, tearing it until the victim bled. Not infrequently the victim died under the pounding he received. Jesus did not die, but can you imagine His pain as the result of this brutality?

Mockery

Before dressing Jesus again in His own seamless garment, the soldiers of Rome made sport of Him again similar to what happened before Herod. They cast a purple robe about Him as Herod had done. A king needed a crown so they made Him one from a thorn tree and pressed it upon His brow. The king needed a sceptre so they thrust a reed into His hands. Then, mockingly, they marched around Him, bowed before Him, slapped Him, covered His bleeding body with their spittle. When they struck Him they would cry, *"Tell us who hit you."* Can any fairminded person not be repulsed at such injustice?

In this humiliated condition Pilate brought Jesus before the mob. Possibly this scene would quench their thirst for vengeance

against Him. But it did not. It only whetted their wicked appetite for His death all the more. *"Crucify him,"* was the shout that grew louder and louder. Pilate announced, *"Behold, your king!"* They answered, *"We have no king but Caesar."* God was to have been their King forever, but by these words we see the degraded level to which the Jewish nation, under their leaders, sank. *"Let his blood be on us and our children,"* was their defiant reply.

Pilate then withered and bowed before their pressure. Matthew 27:24, *"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the of this just person; see ye to it."*

Pilate allowed himself to sentence an innocent man to die. Luke 23:24, *"And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required."* He released Barabbas and delivered Jesus to be crucified. So the final chapter of His trials came to an end.

Justice was taken from Jesus from beginning to end. Without indictment, He was arrested. Without verdict, He was condemned to die on the basis of false testimony. He was judged and found innocent, but condemned nonetheless. Even His accusers could not say what evil He had done. After the trials, as He went along the way toward Golgatha the injustices followed Him. The railings and mockeries continued. One thief who was also crucified that day, said, Luke 23:39-41, *"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss."* Well did Isaiah prophesy, *"In his humiliation his judgment was taken away."*

There is no better way to conclude these lessons than to again ask the question, "Why? Why did He suffer all of this?" It was a manifestation of God's love for me and you. It was His willingness to die that we might be saved from the condemnation of hell because of our sins. He did it for our temporal and eternal benefit, even eternal life in heaven.

What do we say to One who has done as He did for us? Can we turn away as if it was nothing? Or shall we come to Him and receive the blessings He has provided?

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Miracles In the Christian Dispensation

Acts 3:1-11 records what was obviously a miraculous event. Peter and John enabled a man that had been lame from birth to leap up, stand and walk. Acts 4:22 says the man was forty-two years old. Even those who were enemies of the apostles could not deny that a miracle had been performed (Acts 4:16). This is but one of many miraculous deeds of which we are informed in Scripture that were done by the apostles and others even after Christ had ascended into heaven.

It is not the purpose of this lesson to prove the performance of miracles as historical events. We accept the testimony of witnesses that were on the scene at the time these things were done. Because of the evidence we have reason to believe they were accomplished. Surely the testimony of eye witnesses is far more reliable than that of skeptics who come along eighteen or nineteen hundred years later. Rather we are concerned with the role of miracles in the Christian age. Miracles were performed in the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages as well as the Christian Age. But Christianity is founded upon the miraculous. Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, performed miracles Himself, gave such power to others, and even though crucified and buried He was raised from the dead and has ascended into heaven. All of this is supernatural. Although we cannot know all the mysteries surrounding miracles, we can know what God has revealed. We do know that all that pertains to life and godliness has been revealed (Second Peter 1:3).

Why Miracles?

What was the purpose of miracles in the early days of the Christian Age? They were used to prove, substantiate, verify, confirm the message that was preached. Even in the Old Testament as well as the New, God sent out His messengers with power to verify their words. The miracles performed by Moses before Pharoah was to prove his divine calling. This power removed Moses' excuse, "*They will not believe me.*"

Jesus used miracles so that we might believe Him to be the Son of God (John 20:30,31). *"And many other signs truly did*

Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." Peter said of Christ, Acts 2:22, *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazereth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know."*

Apostolic Miracles

The apostles performed miracles to prove God was the origin of their message. Jesus promised them such powers for this very use. Mark 16:20, *"And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."* Hebrews 3:2-4 reveals the word was thus confirmed. *"For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will?"* We must conclude that the purpose of miracles in the Christian age was that mankind might know the gospel story is true and reliable.

Miracles were also used to demonstrate the power and glory of God. When Moses performed miracles, such as the second time when water was brought forth from rock, Moses assumed some credit for the deed unto himself (Numbers 20:10) rather than giving full glory to God. This misdeed prohibited his personal entrance into Canaan. When Jesus came to Bethany and learned that Lazarus was already dead and friends and relatives were deeply grieving, some said, John 11:37, *"Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?"*

When Jesus commanded the stone to be rolled away Martha questioned the wisdom of the action (John 11:39). But Jesus knew what He was going to do and informed Martha the reason behind His coming and His actions. John 11:40, *"Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God?"* The raising of Lazarus was for the benefit of Lazarus and his loved ones, but more to demonstrate the power

and glory of God.

Nicodemus knew of the miracles of Jesus and gave God glory and credited God with power (John 3:2). Peter and John, when they raised the lame man in Acts three took no credit to themselves but credited the power of the miracle to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Not to Save

Miracles were not performed to save anyone from sins directly apart from the preaching of the Word. Miracles were involved in the scheme of salvation and the Word was confirmed by them. But there is no salvation apart from hearing, believing and obeying the Word. Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, but he was not saved on that road. Annanias later went to him and preached to him what to do to wash away his sins (Acts 9, 16, 22). Peter and Cornelius saw miraculous visions that brought them together, but it was the preaching of the Word by Peter that convinced Cornelius how to be saved. The Spirit brought Philip and the Ethiopian together, but it was the preaching of Philip that led the Ethiopian to obey the gospel. There is no evidence for us to suppose anyone is saved from sin by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, some miraculous action, or that conversion is a miracle. Conversion becomes a reality according to spiritual law of hearing, believing and obeying truth.

Everything in God's physical world began with a miracle. The creation was a miracle. God spoke, and it was so. What we call the laws of nature were then set in motion to sustain the world. Also the church was established in the presence of the miraculous (Acts 2). With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, manifested by sounds as of a rushing mighty wind and tongues as of fire upon them, the church began. The early church was endued with miraculous gifts of healing, teaching, signs and mighty works. The apostles performed miracles. Those upon whom they laid their hands were also granted miraculous powers. This was God's way of providing evidence and proof for the early church to sustain their message. That message has been confirmed and is now embodied in the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 4:16,17).

Cessation of Miracles

With the death of the apostles and those on whom they granted miraculous gifts, and the completion of the revelation now in writing, the purpose and personnel involved in the miracles of the Christian age was terminated. This is as Paul has taught (First Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:11-13).

We are sometimes asked if we believe in miracles. The answer is that we do believe the miracles as they are recorded in Scripture. Because we believe the Scripture message we do not believe miracles are being performed today. We believe in miracles for the purpose for which they were to be worked, for the time they were given, involving the ones to whom such power was granted, and the record that when these things were accomplished the miraculous age ceased.

It is hardly fitting for people to ridicule the reality of God's miraculous power. While full understanding and explanation escapes us, there is much even in nature that we do not understand that appears before our eyes, yet we do not deny it. We do not fathom all the mysteries of gravitation, electricity, the complexities of the operation of the body, what makes things grow and develop, the radio waves through the air, and an innumerable host of things, things we neither see nor can touch. Being limited in understanding is no excuse for denial of the evidence. We should seek to comprehend as best we can why God used miracles and their significance to the faith of Christ.

Climatic Miracle

The resurrection of Christ was a miracle. It is a manifestation of power that verified the claim that Jesus is God's Son (Romans 1:4). The resurrection provides hope, gives purpose to life, assures us of the existence of the spirit and immortality. It is the basis for ultimate victory to those in Christ. It gives us good reason to place our faith, trust and confidence in Christ. This is why we should love and obey Him.

We shall not be saved by a miracle even though the way of salvation was confirmed by miracles. We shall be saved by obedience to God's laws of salvation that include faith in Christ as the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of our faith, and obedience in baptism for the remission of sins and into Christ, whereupon God adds us to the company of the saved which is His church.

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Micah, the Prophet and His Message

It is my conviction that the study of the Old Testament prophets can be one of the most profitable studies of the Bible in which we can engage. Unfortunately, few really know very much about these prophets.

The truth found in Micah was not only for his day, but in principle is applicable to people of every generation. These are fundamental moral laws that have come from God that underlie the structure and are woven into the fabric of human society. When these laws are ignored or violated they bring disintergration of the society and the structure will eventually collapse. It crumbles because of decay from within. A careful study of history will confirm this observation.

Even those who were God's chosen people, Israel, were not immune and exempt from the ravages of sin, but paid the penalities in disaster and oppression. Micah dealt with the evils of his time as well as being concerned with the ultimate coming of the promised Messiah. His work was both forthtelling and foretelling. Like all the prophets of God he was an unusual man because of what he was, what he did, what he said, and how he said it. Our own day needs more men of the quality of the prophets and fewer preachers who seek to please men. We need no clergymen at all.

The Days of Micah

What was the time of Micah? We learn from several books of the Old Testament that relate to this historical period, such as Second Kings, Second Chronicles, Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and others. Politically, Israel had been divided into two nations for nearly two hundred years. Assyria was the dominating world power and threatening to engulf both Northen Israel and Southern Judah. During Micah's lifetime Northern Israel did fall and was taken into captivity. Much of Judah was destroyed but Jerusalem was spared because in one night God destroyed one hundred eighty-five thousand Assyrian troops and the remaining armies fled homeward.

Micah foretold events which he lived to witness, especially

concerning Northern Israel. He cited that nation an as example not to be followed by Southern Judah. His was a time of political upheaval, unrest, national instability, and a people under constant threat. The people of God were not a world power but were often easy prey. Their future was in doubt and the dark clouds surrounded them everywhere.

The social condition of Israel and Judah seemed to have provided a tremendous motivation for Micah to do the work God called him to do. In the light of God's truth, so many conditions were foreign and strange to the ways of the Lord. The people practiced violations of His will. In the face of this Micah had the courage to deliver powerful, effective, convicting messages in denunciation of the social conduct of the nation.

Micah 1:2-7, *"Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is; and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For, behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? Therefore, I will make Samaria as a heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard; and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof. And all the graven images thereof shall be beaten to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burned with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate; for she gathered it of the hire of an harlot, and they shall return to the hire of a harlot."* Micah 3:2 seems to characterize generally the attitude existing, *"Who hate the good, and love the evil."*

Micah's Attitude

Even so, Micah possessed a deep sympathy for those who stood right with God but were treated wrongfully. He had nothing but indignation against those who exercised cruelty and gave sanction to the evil conditions of the land. A reading of Micah impresses us greatly.

Micah 3:9-12, *"Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood,*

and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money; yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."

Wicked Leaders and Followers

The judges were subject to bribes. The religious leaders were weak, immoral, corrupt, seeking their personal wealth, pleasure and fame rather than the spiritual good of the people under their care. The political leaders were dishonest and these was a scandal in high places. Unfortunately, these conditions were ignored until they became the rule rather than the exception.

Among the people was a lack of integrity, determination and conviction. With both great and small the easy way, rather than the right way, was their custom. The general moral corruption of society and sin was rampant in the official and family life. This will bring any nation to its knees. Micah, being informed of God as well as seeing this condition, warned sternly of God's wrath against the nation.

But there was such calloused greed, sacrifice of morals, compromise of principle that Micah could not move them. Micah 7:2, *"The good man is perished out of the earth; and there is none upright among men; they all lie in wait in blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net."* The princes, prophets, priests and people were steeped in pride and stubborn perversion. Such was the time of Micah.

Religious Corruption

As far as religion, there was a scornful, skeptical, reckless kind of religion among them. Those who professed religion were either idolaters or insipidly weak and complacent, involved in a variety of worships. The only preaching they tolerated was the undemanding, unrequiring kind that permitted them to live as they wished. They sought life without godly purpose, but prefered ease, plenty and pleasure. Micah 2:6, *"Prophesy ye not, say they to them that prophesy; they shall not prophesy to them, that they shall not take shame."*

God's Prophet

Against this sordid background arose Micah, God's prophet, one of a quartet of spiritual giants, including Isaiah, Amos and Hosea. Micah was reared with a peasant background, a country boy, and he strongly denounced the sins so characteristic of city life. We know almost nothing of his preparation for his work except the Lord came to him and he preached what the Lord told him to preach. Micah 1:1,2, *"The word of the Lord that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth and all that therein is; and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple."*

He was a man of unfeigned sincerity, maintaining a stern and unrelenting, uncompromising, fearless attack on the evils of his countrymen. He, like all of God's prophets, was concerned, aroused, excited and disturbed that people whom God sought to save were so indifferent, overbearingly evil, arrogantly rebellious against the God of heaven. His was a message that not too many took seriously because they did not consider him sufficiently sophisticated and cultured. But what he lacked in these vain qualities he was amply supplied with the right message and manner in telling people the will of the Lord.

Not many today would probably want Micah for their local preacher. They would not invite him to conduct their gospel meeting or be their teacher. He was open, clear, precise, unwavering in condemning sin, not just a general condemnation but with specifics. What some would call a lack of diplomacy and love, God considered as an abundance of devotion, dedication and sense of righteous duty.

His Message

Micah's theme was two-fold: (1) man's relationship to God, and (2) man's relationship to his fellowman. His was a message that encouraged people to love God and one another. In God's name he fought against man's inhumanity to man. Micah 6:12, *"For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth."*

He warned that the course of the nation regarding God must be altered or doom would surely follow. Micah 2:1,2, *"Woe to*

them that devise iniquity, work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage."

Micah foretold, and later witnessed, the fall of Northern Israel. He warned of the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and prophesied doom for the evildoer. His was not a "wet finger in the air" type of message, determining first which way the wind was blowing to suit his hearers. He preached what God told him to preach. This was what the people needed whether it was what they wanted or not.

Word of Hope

But there was a happier side to his message. Having foretold the captivity, he also foretold the return. He mentioned the coming of the Messiah, and that He would be born in Bethlehem. Micah 5:2, *"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."* He even told how Judah could be spared. Micah 4:1,2, *"But in the last days shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."*

The only hope for the nation was a return to a life of honesty in government, ethics in business, sincerity in people, morality in the home, and humility before God in obedience to the truth. Religion was not to be just a pretention of piety and ritual. He distrusted form alone. Micah 7:7,8, *"Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"* God wanted them to recognize the difference between truth and error, creed and conduct, obedience and inward purity from

form and ritual. The people were religious but not righteous. Micah urged a religion of conviction, not convenience. He called for the cessation of deception, but a daily life of conformity to what was right before God.

Relevant to Us

Micah's words have a distinct, unmistakable application for us. His charges against Israel and Judah can and ought be made now. The same evils will produce the same results. Hope and recovery is in coming to Jesus Christ.

If you lived during Micah's day, would you have been one who would "tone him down" or one who would without shame hold up his hands? Do you stand with God's Word today? Even as some ridicule the idea of standing and what one stands for, when sin is condemned, would you endorse that condemnation? When lethargy and complacency are exposed, does its exposure fit you? When warnings are offered against evil, do you scoff or do you pay attention? When the way of hope is announced, where is your allegiance? When the plea of the Lord is ignored or rejected, what about you? We live in tumultous times as did Micah. Will God's Word flow through us as it did through him, not as though we are inspired as was he, but through our knowledge of the truth derived from the study of the Bible?

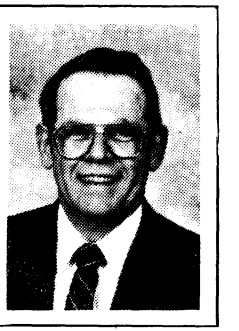
† † † † †

PSALM 22:1

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" These words are probably best remembered because they were quoted by Christ when He was on the cross (Matthew 26:47). There has been considerable difference among Bible students about the significance of this passage and Jesus' use of it. But consider this and see the majesty of the phrase and His use of it.

The Psalm is Messianic in nature. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. Even as He was dying on the cross He cited Scripture to further substantiate His claim. Those who knew the Word would recognize this phrase and connect it with the Messiah. Even as He died He was pleading for mankind to accept Him as the promised Christ.

VOLUME EIGHT



JAMES W. BOYD

It has been something over six years since this project of producing my sermons through ***A Burning Fire*** was undertaken. With this issue eight complete volumes of twelve issues each have been published and distributed.

But I think it is fair to say that the work and expense involved has been far more than was contemplated. This is because our our lack of experience and knowledge of what all is involved in producing such a booklet regularly.

But in spite of that, few things we have undertaken have brought as much pleasure and sense of accomplishment as getting the gospel message into print and knowing that others are reading it, others are learning, and faithful brethren who receive it have supported the truth that has been taught. We know of souls that have been converted to Christ because they have consistently read these lessons. We hear from many who tell us about the good they have derived from it. This makes it worth all our effort.

Lord willing, having material for ten more volumes, we plan to produce them, issue after issue. *"Pray for us."* (Hebrews 13:18).

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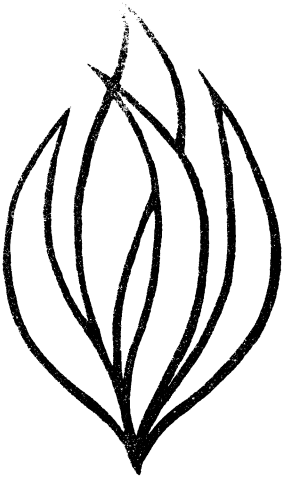

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IX James W. Boyd **NUMBER 1**

Doing Good Unto Others

The reading of James 2:14-26 should be completed before studying this lesson further. This is the text from which the thoughts are motivated and derived.

We often hear it said that it is better to see a sermon than to hear one. This simply means that good words are well and fine, but words apart from works are nothing. Matthew 5:16 teaches us to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, like a city set on a hill. Our influence is to radiate all around to the glory of the Father. Our deeds are to bring glory to Him. But to fulfill our mission we must be examples before others, not only in saying what ought to be said but also in doing what ought to be done.

It is a sad reality that many of us who profess to be Christians do not practice our faith very diligently. Christ found many people like that during His personal ministry and employed scathing language in condemning their hypocrisy (Matthew 23). While we may accept as truth that we are to be the followers of Christ in order to enter heaven, are we convinced that this involves adding works to our words? Can one be a true follower of the Lord as we are taught to be (First Peter 1:22) unless he DOES like Christ as well as TALK like Christ? Luke said he recorded what Jesus began both to DO and TEACH (Acts 1:1). With these introductory thoughts before us, let us make application of them in the realm of benevolence and doing good unto others.

Definition

We can define the attitude of benevolence as a disposition to do good. Certainly Jesus was a benevolent person. Acts 10:38, *"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him."* Could any except a benevolent person teach such a lesson as that of the good Samaritan where failure to assist those in need was condemned and lifting up the fallen was commended?

It was Jesus who showed God's blessings to be upon those who rendered assistance to the needy in Matthew 25:35,36. In the same passage Jesus revealed God's wrath against those who failed to do the same merciful works. Do not His miracles of

mercy, compassion, healing, helping, His words of sympathy alongside His deeds of relief reveal a benevolent Master?

In Every Dispensation

Let us be impressed that benevolence is one of the God-given injunctions that transgress dispensational lines. Abraham in the Patriarchal Age was kindly toward others. The Jews under the Mosaic Age were commanded to be benevolent. In both Old and New Testaments this is a repeated theme. Leviticus 25:35, *"And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him; yea, thought he be a stranger, or a sojourners; that he may live with thee."* Psalm 140:12, *"I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor."* Psalm 146:9, *"The Lord preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down."* God is described as *"the father of the fatherless"* (Psalm 68:5), and *"the refuge of the poor"* (Psalm 14:6). Zechariach 7:9,10, *"Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassion every man unto his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart."*

David wrote, *"Blessed is he that considereth the poor."* (Psalm 14:1). The wise man Solomon said that the show of mercy is a way to happiness (Proverbs 14:21). Furthermore, not only do we have positive pronouncements urging benevolence, but expressions of curses against those who refuse benevolence. Deuteronomy 27:19, *"Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow..."* Exodus 22:22-24, *"Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless."* Surely, as we observe God's attitude toward those of the past who were or were not benevolent, plus the recognition of the benevolent attitude and action of Jesus, we should be sufficiently motivated to be benevolent.

Our Duty

Why are not people more active in benevolence? We suggest four reasons that may apply to many of us. First, we are not

sufficiently aware that such work is our responsibility. Did you ever see the phrase, "I am third?" It abbreviate the priorities of God first, others second and "I am third." But there are times when "I" should head the list. When we think of responsibility toward those in need, too many of us are willing to let others be involved while we do nothing. We have individual and collective duties in this area. When Christ rules and reigns in the heart we shall go about doing good toward others as a duty belonging to us, not just others, the church, the government, or somebody else before ourselves. The old adage that "charity begins at home" is very relevant.

Small Things

Second, possibly we wait until we think we can do some great thing. Little efforts do not bring recognition and praise like big things do, so we wait until we can make a big splash. Naaman almost missed his chance for healing because the command given him called for humility and obedience. *"If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing wouldest thou not have done it?"* The "big" things are nothing more than combinations of many little things and each is important. Your best, standing alone, may not appear too significant, but your best, with my best, and the best of others will accomplish what needs to be done. We must be sure we do our part. Even a charitable cup of cold water does not go without the Lord's notice.

Opportunities

Third, we do not always recognize our opportunities for doing good. There is the story of a woman of relatively meager means who heard over the radio about a family whose house burned. She called the station and got the name and location and made contact, taking with her some small baked goods by which she wished to show kindness and sympathy. This Christian lady was later influential in bringing that entire family to salvation in Christ. She could have said it was not her business. The Red Cross or someone else will provide. She could have said she did not have much to give and done nothing. She could have done as many members of the church do, call the preacher or elders and dismissed it. Some seem to think that mere notifying the preacher or elders ends their work. But she saw her opportunity, seized it, did what she could, and the ultimate results were

glorious. When we have a benevolent heart we look for opportunities to do good works toward others.

Sharing

Fourth, the reason some of us do so little in benevolence is because we are unwilling to share, sacrifice, and deprive ourselves for the benefit of others. We are selfish. I am persuaded that many who have opposed ways and means of helping the needy are basically selfish, looking for some "scriptural" way to do nothing. But can we afford to fare sumptuously every day without trying to help others (First John 3:17)? This is a grave problem of our nation. We live in a land of plenty, and we can be glad that our nation has probably been the most benevolent nation in history. I am confident this is part of the reason for our own prosperity. But we have so much relatively. We live in a land of abundance, dieting, food surpluses, while much of the world starves. I know there are many contributing factors to this condition, but never let it be because we lack compassion and do not seek to help.

Are you cold, hungry, naked? Do not most of us have ample supply? This is not evil to have adequacy, or even abundance. But should we think that all of our desires must be met without giving thought to those whose basic necessities are not met?

Human suffering and need is real and widespread. We know the primary work of the church is not to provide the world's breadbasket. But a part of our faith requires work as well as word. Many suffer because of their own sins, but it is also true that they are in need. Many innocent people suffer and lack. Children are to be pitied and helped. Whatever be the cause that provoked the hardship, as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men. This especially should be done for those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

Restoration

As we restore New Testament Christianity, let us restore in the heart this benevolent word and work. Why should others be know for having more compassion for the needy than the Lord's church? In Acts four there were none that lacked because brethren were benevolent. First Corinthians sixteen shows the brethren were instructed to lay by for the relief of others. Second Corinthians eight teaches the churches of Macedonia were

commended for their giving even as they were in deep poverty themselves. Acts twenty-two, the Antioch church determined to send relief to brethren in Judea. Did not Jesus teach, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive?"* (Acts 20:35). Consider the texts of Romans 12:20, James 1:27, Luke 3:11, and possibly our attitudes will be brought more in line with that which pleases God. The New Testament message includes benevolence.

We can afford to be merciful because we have received mercy. As has been said, "There, but for the grace of God, I go," when we see another in need. We have been blessed in order to bless others. As we have been forgiven of sins, surely, we can show kindness to those in distress. Saying, *"Lord, Lord,"* will not suffice. Let us show our faith by our works, glorify God by our good deeds, tell God we are thankful and appreciative by sharing our blessings benevolently with those who are not as fortunate. Is not this, too, a part of being like Christ? We are persuaded it is.

† † † † †

The Church in Antioch of Syria

Christians work together in building the Lord's church and causing it to grow and prosper in those things for which it was established. But in doing this work we are expected to follow the Lord's pattern. We are not involved in building some religious order. Our concern is for Christ, His church, and the salvation of souls. This church was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Scriptures this church is revealed to us. We read of many congregations, their successes, problems, setbacks and history. We can learn and profit from what is told about them. Our lesson is intended to call attention to five characteristics of the church in Antioch of Syria, not only because of our interest in that church and the early church generally, but to learn more of that by which we are to be guided today in promoting the cause of Christ.

By the Word

The church was established by the preaching of the Word. Acts 11:19-21, *"Now when they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."*

When the gospel is preached, heard, believed and obeyed, nothing is produced except the church of Christ. People went forward *"preaching the word... preaching the Lord Jesus."* Great numbers heard, believed and obeyed. *"Much people was added unto the Lord."* (Verse 24). Preaching the Word of God never produces denominations, but only the Lord's church. Secular history informs us that possibly as many as five to ten thousand people became members of the church. This was the church where Paul and Barnabas worked together for a whole year (Verse 26). This was the place where *"the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Verse 26). This was a congregation that included both Jews and Gentiles (Verses19, 20). This was a notable New Testament church.

Benevolence

The church was a benevolent minded church. Acts 11:27-30, *"And in those days came prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great dearth throughout all the world; which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar, Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea, which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."*

When it was learned that Jewish brethren were in physical need, Antioch, which had received spiritual help from Judea, now had opportunity to return the favor. Each one gave as they could, and Paul and Barnabas took what was given to the elders of Jerusalem who obviously took the oversight of its distribution.

For a church today to be like this first century church there must be the attitude and action of benevolence toward the

needy. So often this phase of the work of the church is neglected. Realizing that it is not the primary thrust of the work of the church, it is nonetheless an important manifestation of the spirit of Christ to do good. *"As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* (Galatians 6:10). First John 3:17, 18, *"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."*

It is most unfortunate that some have created grave problems for the church over how benevolent work is to be done. They have divided churches, making laws where God has made none, and imposing their self-made restrictions and demanding everyone conform to their opinion. God has commanded certain work to be done. Sometimes He has also commanded how the work is to be done. When that is the case both the work and the method are binding upon us. But when God has commanded a work but has not specified how it is to be done, then we are at liberty to exercise our own judgment in methods used. There is room for opinions, and none should be so contentious about their own opinion that they would create strife among brethren over it. Much benevolent work demands the exercise of human judgment as we must do the best we can. The eldership of the local congregation has the duty and authority to decide what is best for that congregation. Unless the church is practicing *"pure and undefiled religion"* (James 1:27), how can it be pleasing to God? There are several methods for doing this, but the fact remains that it must be done.

Preached the Word

The Antioch church was also mission minded, by which we mean they were concerned about sending the gospel around the world to the lost. Acts 14:25-27, *"And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia, and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God has done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they abode long time with the disciples."*

No church can fulfill its purpose for existence without working

to spread the gospel message. This is the primary work of the church. It is to be regretted that many congregations today do not do this phase of the work as extensively as they are capable because they have sidetracked themselves into recreation, secular education, social activities, playground provisions, and other irrelevant matters. One main reason for having a strong local church is so that church can and will take the gospel elsewhere, near and far. Churches that "keep house" or major in minors, providing trivia, have missed the mark.

There is no separation from evangelizing the world and preaching the gospel. Antioch was once a mission field with no church. Preaching brought it into existence. Winning lost souls became the purpose for its existence. First Timothy 3:15, *"...which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."* The church is not simply for association, as some kind of club, but we have been saved to save. For churches to involve themselves in unauthorized activities and simply cater to the satisfaction of their own happiness and "good times" is to display a lack of concern and misunderstanding of the reason the Lord Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood by which the church was purchased.

Building Itself

Antioch was a church that was concerned for itself with emphasis on teaching and edification of itself, building itself in knowledge and spiritual strength. Becoming a Christian is essential but it is just the beginning. Being a Christian must follow thereafter. Faithfulness is required of the child of God. The church that does not grow spiritually in grace and knowledge of Christ (First Peter 3:18) will soon be lost to the cause of Christ.

Antioch had an impressive number of teachers. They were not a mere "staff" to provide fun and games for the members as we so often see today. Acts 13:1, *"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas, and Simeon, that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."* Acts 15:35, *"Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also."*

There was no such thing as a clergy-laity in Antioch. They did not have the professional staff. Every Christian was a servant of

Christ and busied themselves to teach others and one another. The religion of Christ is a taught religion (John 6:44,45) and the church is an educational institution to teach the will of the Lord. Any church neglecting its teaching program invites weakness, which is a forerunner to digression and apostasy. Nobody can lead a church astray where its members know the will of the Lord. Somewhere along the line of history Antioch fell away and no church exists there today that is faithful to God and patterned after the New Testament church. The failure of edification is at the root of such tragedies.

Churches grow strong and remain strong by good strong and diligent teaching. First Thessalonians 5:11, *"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."* Every member should lend his support to every effort made in this realm of the work of the church.

Opposing Error

The Antioch church was determined to stand for the truth. They were zealous for and jealous of the truth. Error was not tolerated to pollute the congregation, at least at this time. Problems arose in the church due to false teaching from some who came from Jerusalem who taught that it was necessary to continue to obey certain commands peculiar to the law of Moses (Acts 15:1). This caused no small stir when Paul and others withstood these teachers. Galatians 2 shows how even Peter and Barnabas were carried away temporarily with such teaching. Knowing that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (First Corinthians 5:6), Paul would not surrender the truth and the church did not shy away from facing the issue until the proper solution was reached.

They could have said, as some do even today when problems arise, "Leave it alone and it will go away. We don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. Let's keep the peace and create no strife." But they loved the Lord, His church, the truth, the lost and saved enough to realize that error does not just "go away." They wanted peace but not at the price of compromising truth. They knew that peace and unity can only be enjoyed when truth is upheld among faithful brethren. It is to the credit of the church in Antioch that they met the problems and defeated them with a hearty application of the truth. So must we do today.

In summary, the five great qualities of the church in Antioch were: (1) It was founded by the preaching of the gospel; (2) It

was benevolent minded; (3) It was busy spreading the gospel elsewhere; (4) It was strong through edifying itself; (5) It withstood error and stood for the truth. Here is a Biblical demonstration of what a local church should be and do. This is the goal and continued purpose for every local congregation. God wants it that way and we must work earnestly that it be that way. By doing so, God will be glorified, souls will be saved, including our own.

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Truth: Is It Changeable and Variable?

There is a rather widely held view regarding truth that is called progressive revelation. It contends that truth is not absolute and objective, but relative and subjective. What may have been true religiously and morally in the past is not necessarily true now. There is no body of eternal and unchanging truth. What may be true for people in one part of the world is not true for others. Truth varies and changes according to circumstances. So goes this position.

Those who hold to this progressive revelation philosophy consider those who hold to a definite and unchanging standard of truth as antiquated, old-fashioned, and certainly not of our time. For anyone to think that religious truth was established nearly twenty centuries ago and is still the standard today is to them unthinkable.

An example of this progressive revelation concept in religion is an event in New York when one Sunday the clergyman, finding attendance rather sparse in winter months due to weather and sparse in summer months due to vacations, changed the Lord's Day worship to Wednesday because nearly everybody was then in town and might attend. There are much worse examples in this era of "do your own thing as you think or feel." There being no right or wrong anymore, whatever anyone prefers becomes their personal standard and God is to accept it whatever it is, especially if it is done honestly and sincerely.

The Enduring Word

As we consider modern man's progressive revelation idea, aside from those who claim God is still speaking to them with special messages that others never hear, there are pertinent Scriptures that should be read. Proverbs 14:12, *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* John 17:17, *"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth."* Matthew 24:35, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."* First Peter 1:24,25, *"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."* Second Timothy 3:16, 17 affirms the infallibility, inerrancy, inspiration, authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures and allows for nothing more or less. Multiplied passages can be added and though much can be said of each one it is certain that their theme contradicts the progressive revelation concept. We shall be judged by the word of Christ (John 12:48) and the apostles were guided into all the truth (John 16:13). The faith has been *"once"* delivered (Jude 3) and Peter said *"all things"* pertaining to life and godliness had been given (Second Peter 1:3). There is no compatibility between the Biblical teaching and progressive revelation presently advocated by some.

Universal

God has two kinds of law; natural or physical and spiritual or moral. We can learn much about God's moral laws by studying His physical and natural laws. Let me explain. God's physical laws are universal, applying the same to all people, for all time, wherever they are on earth. The law of gravity is just as real today as in the days of Pharoah. It applies in America and Africa, whether day or night. The same is true regarding the laws of mathematics, chemistry, etc. The point is sufficiently made, God's laws, rightly understood, have not changed. Therefore, we are not too surprised to find a universal, all-encompassing standard in His spiritual and moral laws.

Narrow

Even though many dislike it, the fact remains that truth is

narrow. Many religionists have tried to expand it and have labeled all who are willing to accept God's standards as they exist as bigoted, narrow, less than educated, and something undesirable. The way to heaven remains strait and narrow (Matthew 7:13,14) regardless of the attitudes of people concerning it. People do not change God's laws.

People generally do not really object to the narrowness of correctness. They wish they could do as they please and think if they will it so it is so. Suppose you wish, however, to dial a telephone number. Are you at liberty to dial whatever you feel is correct, in whatever order you might prefer? We have a new long distance system that is supposed to save money, and it does. But we have to dial about twelve consecutive numbers, being precise with each one, and in proper order, to reach the desired place. Nobody really complains, but all understand. We know truth is narrow. This is but a trivial example.

Dispensations

Before we are too hasty, we must admit there has been a change in God's way of dealing with man. Depending upon the dispensation involved the principle may remain steady but the specific ordinances have changed. Under the patriarchs some things were done, commanded and allowed that were forbidden the Israelite under the law of Moses. There is even more change for those of us who live this side of the cross and who are subject to Christ. But these changes are of God, designed of God, revealed by God. What we are considering is whether there have been changes in truth since the will of Christ became operative with the establishment of His kingdom on Pentecost after His ascension. Let us consider a few matters and the points can be extended to almost infinity.

Has the Lord changed His will regarding profanity since the will of Christ began? Under the Mosaic Law profanity of God's name was prohibited (Exodus 20:7). In the new covenant this same teaching is included (Matthew 5:34-37). We are not to speak profanely, not because of the authority of the Law of Moses but because of the authority of Christ. Ephesians 4:29, *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth..."*

While modern man is hardly known for keeping his word, lying is in vogue if thought expedient, and cursing and profanity commonplace, where is there any Biblical evidence God has changed His mind about it?

Under the Ten Commandments lying was forbidden (Exodus 20:16). Those under Christ are also taught, Ephesians 4:25, *"Therefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor..."* Liars shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8). Modern man offers all kinds of explanations for his deceptions and lies, but is that divine evidence that the truth on the matter has changed? The practice does not determine the standard. The standard should govern the practice. Here is where many go astray in their thinking.

Still No Change

"Thou shalt not steal," (Exodus 20:5) is another Old Testament command taken into the law of Christ (Ephesians 4:28). People tend to think shoplifting is not stealing but only a disease. Taking what belongs to another without permission remains theft. To excuse oneself with rationalizations that you have not been treated fairly, that others are richer than you, that it will never really be missed, does not diminish the sin of stealing. The embezzler may intend to "pay it back someday," but he is stealing. Cheating is stealing. God's laws have not changed just because more and more people have seared their consciences regarding right and wrong.

This same thing is true regarding fornication, adultery, and all manner of sexual perversity. Fornication is a broad term that includes even lesbianism, beastiality, homosexuality, as well as sexual intercourse between those who are not married to each other. The claim that these sexual drives are natural, and some quite unnatural, is no excuse for defying God's law. God knows of these drives, and God has regulated them and provided for their satisfaction in the framework of honorable marriage. Nobody will ever find God's "progressive revelation" that allows for this "new morality" binge upon which so many have embarked. To attempt to excuse it is an attempt to justify sin.

In no area has this progressive revelation attitude been more evident than in the attitudes and doctrines concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage. Matthew 19:9 and 5:32 still allow only one cause for divorce, and that is fornication. God's law does not smile upon divorce but contends marriage is for life. Some seem to think they can divorce for just any cause provided they do not remarry. This is wrong, wrong, wrong. Furthermore, God's will does not allow the fornicator the right of remarriage. Regardless of the many causes for divorce the state may permit,

or even the permissive legality that does not even call for a cause, God's law is unalterable and the will of Christ remains the same as always.

Source of Truth

There really ought not be a difficulty for any of us to fathom the point this lesson makes. To learn the truth, consult God's Word. Whatever is not harmonious thereto is wrong before God. What is true now has been true since the Holy Spirit had Scripture to be written. It is the same truth under which future generations, if they exist, must also live and give answer before God. Man is not left to chart his course without God.

Some say, "I am keeping the spirit of the law if not the letter." How can one even learn the spirit of a law without the letter of it? Who has the right to dismiss the letter and declare the spirit to contradict the letter? Obedience is what is expected, not explanations for why you think you can disobey acceptably. To contend one is obeying the spirit but not the letter is to admit disobedience. Obedience requires doing the right thing with the right motive in the right way. When Uzzah reached out and touched the ark he could have claimed a good spirit. But he was struck dead. When the Pharisees prayed they claimed the right action but the spirit was impure. It takes both to be right before God. When Paul was talking about the letter and spirit he was talking about the old Mosaic Law in contrast to the law of Christ. He was not giving a "out" for failing to obey what the Lord commanded under the guise of obedience in spirit.

God's Rule

What would you think of players in a game who changed the rule to accomodate themselves as the game progressed? Could the game be played at all? Only when all participants subscribe to the same standard can there be any order or reason to what is done. The same principle stands in matters religious. It is not what do we want, what do we like, what are most doing, how pleasing is it to us, nor anything of this kind. All that matter is, "What does God teach us in His Word?"

God's laws are neither out-of-date nor irrelvant to our day. They have not changed since delivered through inspired men of the new covenant. Christ is the authority and total authority, now and until He returns and the end of all things. This attitude

of progressive, subjective, alternative, varying, changing revelation is of the devil and we must recognize it as Satan's deception to destroy the souls of unwary people.

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Important Matters to Those Out of Christ

The hour of worship is particularly important to the Christian because this is his worship to God. But it can also be of great importance to those who are not Christians because during these worship periods the Word of God is taught. Alongside our singing, praying, giving and partaking of the Lord's Supper, truth is presented that relates not only to the Christian and how he must live, but also information from the Bible regarding the condition of those who are out of Christ and what they must do to be saved from sin. Usually there are several present in a worship assembly who have not yet responded to the Lord's invitation and have not obeyed the gospel. There are young people who need to be taught the way of the Lord. Many have friends and relatives who need to be taught how to become Christians.

This lesson can be of special concern to those who are not Christians, but also to Christians who want to reach the hearts of the lost. This is primarily addressed to those not yet in spiritual fellowship with Christ. It is not an attempt to simply condemn one in his present state because God has already warned of that state. But the lesson is presented in the hope that those who have not yet come to Christ will hasten to do so before opportunity for salvation escapes them.

The Need

You first must realize you need to be saved. Many prefer to think this is not the case. Paul said, Romans 3:10, *"There is none righteous, no, not one."* Romans 3:23, *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* Isaiah 59:1,2,

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

Sin makes one unclean, impure, spiritually defiled and unfit for heaven. No uncleanness shall enter heaven (Revelation 21:27). Only those whose names are in the book of life shall enter therein.

Probably there are few people, if any, that would profess to be perfect and without sin. Those who would so claim make a grave error and only compound their sin by so claiming. But many feel they are not "bad sinners" and that sin does not really have an effect on them. We all must realize that none of us can be righteous enough to earn nor merit God's gift of salvation. That is what salvation is; a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8,9). We all stand in need of someone to save us from sin. Christians have already recognized that need and have surrendered to that One who can save. It is those who are out of Christ who need to be saved and that means they must accept the reality of their sinful state. If one believes what the Bible teaches he will not quibble over this important point but will readily acknowledge as others have, *"I have sinned."* In sin there is no salvation. Only in Christ is there salvation.

God's Provision

Thankfully, God has provided for salvation. John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Man cannot save himself by himself, and God knows that. He gave the way of salvation which is Jesus Christ. Why did He do this? It was because of His love for mankind even as a sinner. Jesus said, John 15:13, *"Greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friend."* Yet, Jesus went a step beyond to lay down His life for those who were still alienated from God and not His friends.

Jesus Christ is the only way God has or will provide (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). This was the mission of Christ, to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). We all have sinned, but the gift of salvation is by Christ (Romans 5:12,15). That God has provided for sinful mankind at all is a marvel above marvels. Man could never be

worthy of what God has done for him. We can only be grateful and humbly submissive that God has paved the way because He loved us as precious, immortal souls.

Realizing the need of salvation and knowing Christ is the way of salvation does not mean everyone will be saved. For one to be saved he must come to Christ. He must accept Christ. We hear people being urged to "accept Christ" over and over, but few seem to understand what this involves. We do not read of people being told to simply receive Christ as personal Savior, raise hands if you want to be saved, sign a card, or send us your name (usually with a contribution) if you want us to pray for your salvation, pray for the Holy Spirit to come on you, and other such admonitions that the world hears from the multitude of false teachers. These "ways to accept Christ" are human doctrines and can avail nothing to the spiritual benefit of the soul. One cannot believe everything he hears.

Obedience

One major point that so many people ignore is the absolute necessity of obedience to the will of the Lord in order to be forgiven of sin. Hebrews 5:9, *"He* (Christ, JWB) *became the author of salvation to them that obey him."* We show our love by obedience (John 14:15). We show our friendship by obedience (John 15:14). Unless we obey what He has commanded by what right do we claim to possess the forgiveness of sin?

People on Pentecost asked what they had to do to be saved and were told what to do. Peter emphasized, *"Save yourselves..."* (Acts 2:40), meaning there was their part in God's plan for their salvation. God had done His part in providing Christ, His life, death, resurrection and ascension. Man has something to do also (Matthew 7:21). We must search the Scriptures to learn what it is we are commanded to do, when to do it, and know that when we obey we can know we are saved because God is true to His Word. Until we obey we can be just as sure that we remain lost.

Hear

The New Testament teaches we must hear the gospel. This is why the gospel must be preached (Mark 16:15,16). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). We are

saved by the word (James 1:21). Nobody can be saved without hearing the truth (Romans 10:14). Those that come to God are drawn to God (John 6:44). The next verse teaches how we are drawn. *"It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."* Those that come must hear, be taught and learn. There is no salvation apart from the Word. Truth makes us free (John 8:32), and God's Word is truth (John 17:17). We would not even know we were lost or that we cannot save ourselves or that God has provided a Savior except the Word so informs us.

Believe

Next, we must believe the Word. John explained why he wrote the book of John. John 20:30,31, *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life in his name."* We cannot please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). John 8:24, *"For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* Our faith is in Christ as the Son of God. Repeatedly the Scriptures teach salvation by faith. Nobody that believes the message of truth denies that salvation is by faith. Unfortunately, some have added the word "only" or "alone" to the passages where God has not added them and have taught salvation by faith alone or faith only. Never does Scripture teach this and nobody that teaches the truth teaches it.

Repent

We must also repent of our sins. This means to turn, turn from sin to Christ. It involves a change of heart or mind. You must resolve to change course. Failure to make such a resolution, which is prompted by God's love for us and by our godly sorrow for sins, is to lock us into the lost state. Repentance is commanded of everyone (Acts 17:30). It was the first command Peter gave to believers on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). All must come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9). Search these passages and learn. The necessity of repentance is taught in Luke 13:3. Without it salvation is impossible.

Confess

But we also must confess our faith in Christ. *"With the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* (Romans 10:10). As Peter confessed, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,"* (Matthew 16:16), so must we make a similar confession. The Ethiopian made this confession before he finished his obedience (Acts 8:37).

We are never taught to confess we are already saved. We are not taught to declare some "experience." Men invent emotional responses and lead people into them but these do not render obedience to God. We simply confess the truth regarding Christ, the foundation upon which the church is built, the Deity of Christ as the Son of God.

Baptism

Before one is counted as a member of God's family, one of the saved, the church (Acts 2:47), he must be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). We are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was shed (John 19:34). Here is where the sinner comes in contact spiritually with the saving blood of Christ by which one is justified (Romans 5:9).

Baptism is *"in order to"* the remission of sins. It is the way sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). Nobody who teaches truth teaches that the power of salvation is the water itself. But nobody who teaches the truth will dismiss baptism being involved in salvation (First Peter 3:21). It is not a question whether we are saved by faith, or by His blood, or by His grace, etc. But WHEN are we saved by these things? It is when we have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine the Romans had already obeyed (Romans 6:16-18). Being buried in baptism, they were raised to newness of life. They, like the Corinthians, became new creatures in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17). They were *"born again,"* (John 3:3,5). Why religious teachers strain themselves out of joint to avoid doing what the Bible so plainly commands is beyond comprehension except they prefer to be saved their way rather than the simple way God has provided.

Having been baptized, is there anything more to enter heaven? Indeed, there is. Being baptized means you have been *"added"* to the church (Acts 2:47), which is the company of the saved. It means you are *"in Christ"* (Galatians 3:27). Your past sins are forgiven and you are now a child of God.

But God expects His children to live as His children in faithfulness (Revelation 2:10). *"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life."* Loyal, faithful, worshipful service is involved in living the life in a Christlike fashion.

Having been born into His family, nothing more needs to be done to be born. But a life is to be lived to remain one of God's heirs (Romans 8:17). Laborers in His vineyard, servants of the Master, soldiers of the cross, whatever way you wish to define the way of a Christian, this is a lifetime profession and necessary to go to heaven. You never outgrow your need of fellowship with Christ, and you retain that fellowship by walking in the light as He is in the light (First John 1:7).

Those outside of Christ should consider these matters. If they will seriously consider the alternative, eternal condemnation and separation from God in hell, they will be additionally motivated to do their part as God has prescribed it. God wants all to be saved. But only those who do His will have His promise of salvation.

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What Is Sin?

Whether people realize it or not, admit it or not, one of the most urgent needs is the sense of the reality of sin. Many have lost that awareness. Many behave as if sin does not exist. The reason some are so insensitive to the reality of sin may be explained as follows: "If you laid a heavy burden on a corpse it would not feel the load because it was dead and insensitive to realities." This is why some do not recognize sin for what it is nor feel the weight and burden of it. One denominational leader said over television that sin was not in the vocabulary of their denomination anymore.

The tendency of our time is to deny the reality of sin, or soften it and explain it away until nobody really gives it much concern. Sin is refered to as merely a mistake, an error, an affair, poor judgment, ill behavior, anti-social activity, a disease,

anything and everything except what the Bible calls it. Too often labels deceive. To soften a label and make the contents of a bottle of poison less dangerous is vicious. You may put a label on a bottle that says "oil of vitriol" and many will not be too careful with it. But you call that sulfuric acid and put the skull and crossbones warning of possible death on it, this will cause more concern. So it is with sin. No amount of whitewashing will ever change its blighting devestation.

What is sin? How does the Bible define it? The Lord does not leave us without an answer but has specified four definitions of it as well as giving examples of it and warnings against it alongside the condemning consequences of it.

Transgression

First John 3:4, *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law."* The law refers to God's law. Sin is lawlessness, a violation of God's authority. To transgress is to go beyond limits, overpass the bounds established by authority. Literally it means to miss the mark, step across lines which God has drawn (drawn for our own welfare). Second John 9 warns of sinning in such fashion by going beyond the boundaries of the doctrine of Christ. Too many, even some brethren, fail to realize the seriousness of being presumptuous and act without God's authority. Whether one commits something forbidden, or omits something commanded, or adds to or subtracts from the Word of God, it is sin. It exceeds, transgresses, crosses the will of God. This is true whether we are concerned with morality, worship, the work of the church, the plan of salvation, daily behavior, or anything else the Lord has revealed.

Violation of Conscience

Romans 14:23, *"And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."* The word *"faith"* is used in different senses in Scripture. It can refer to the entire religion of Christ (Jude 3), our belief (Hebrews 11:6), or, as here, one's personal conviction, what he believes, without regard to whether his belief is true or false. This passage is misused at times to teach a truth taught elsewhere. While we are to be governed by the faith of Christ, His doctrine and religion, this passage is not declaring everything outside of

that body of teaching to be sin. Whether to build a one story or two story house for your family is not a matter of *"thus saith the Lord."* But it is not sinful to build either house. In this passage the word *"faith"* refers to one's personal convictions. It forbids the violation of conscience. Anything that you cannot do with a clear conscience is sinful for you to do, even if the thing is not sinful in and of itself. This is not to say that anything one thinks is right is necessarily right before God. It is to say that doing what contradicts what you believe to be right is dishonest to your convictions, is a violation of conscience, and ought not be done. It is not of *"faith."*

In this context Paul is discussing the eating of meat, a problem that arose among Jewish converts who had been taught that certain meats were *"unclean"* and not to be eaten, as taught in the Mosaic Law. Also, there was a problem about the meat of animals that had been offered to idols and whether eating that meat was paying homage to the idol. Paul taught there was nothing wrong with the meat (First Timothy 4:4). But, if one ate, thinking it was wrong, he was wrong for eating, not because there was anything sinful or contaminating about the meat, but because he was violating his convictions. If a person will bow before pressure to do what may be innocent, but he thinks it is sinful, he will bow before even sinful things under sufficient pressure. We must be honest to our convictions.

God gave man a conscience as a guide, but it is not an infallible guide. The conscience responds according to the way it is trained. We must train the conscience to be offended when the will of God is offended, and not be offended when things innocent before God are done.

It is worth mentioning here that we ought to be careful about offending the consciences of others also and exercising our liberties and rights when they could lead another away from Christ. We should not allow our "rights" to be turned into "wrongs" by ignoring others and their consciences.

Unrighteousness

A third definition of sin, First John 5:11, *"All unrighteousness is sin."* We can understand this by considering the opposite of unrighteousness, which is righteousness. Righteousness means doing right and being right by following the Lord's commands. To obey is righteousness and to disobey is unrighteousness.

We have several catalogs of sin in Scripture that specify some

of the violations by people (First Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 5:19-21). Hackneyed expressions such as "times have changed, we are only human, we live in a modern age, everybody's doing it" do not alter the commandments of God, either what He says is to be done, and what He says must never be done. All unrighteousness constitutes sin before God and those who sin are responsibile and answerable for their sins.

Omission

Finally, and this definition does give the serious Christian considerable concern because he wants to do right, James 4:17, *"To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* Did you know you can sin by doing nothing? We usually consider sin as doing something we ought not do, and this is included. But we are taught we can sin by not doing what we ought to do. Christianity is a way of daily life that imitates Christ. Wasted opportunities to serve God and man may be the major failing of many professed Christians. It was said of Jesus that He went about doing good (Acts 10:38). He is our example and we are to follow in His steps (First Peter 2:21,22). If He did good, shall not we? To not to do good is to sin.

I recall hearing one very mature and seasoned brother say that such sins as profanity, stealing, lying, various forms of immorality were not his major concern because he had learned to control himself and meet those temptations rather successfully, although he never let down his guard. But his concern was whether he was doing all he ought to do, or even coming close. This is not to say that we shall earn our way to heaven by our good works, but it is to say that we shall forfiet heaven if we stand before God without a record of good works. The sin of neglect is of concern to all dedicated Christians.

This definition applies to our work in spreading the gospel, edifying the saints, restoring the fallen, caring for the needy, faithfulness in worship, all the sides of Christianity that call for the doing of positive good. When one reads of the judgment scene in Matthew 25:41-46 he is made aware that those who were rejected were not accused of having done something wrong, but were accused of failing to have done something they should have done. Failure to discharge responsibility is sin.

Result of Sin

What can we say about the ultimate results of sin? Romans 6:23 and James 1:15 both teach that sin brings spiritual death, separation from God. Adam and Eve, while in Eden, lived in purity, beauty, happiness and in sinless fellowship with God. Later we see them driven out under the curse, doomed to die physically, and out of favor with God. What happened? Sin entered their lives.

Judas once sat at the Master's feet, being taught, given power to perform miracles, teaching others. Later we see him sneeking through the darkness of Jerusalem to return the betrayal coins, then onward where he hanged himself, his body later falling and being dashed to pieces. What happened? Sin had been allowed to enter his heart and he followed its lead to his destruction.

The prodigal son left home healthy, wealthy, but not very wise. Later he is hungry, in the pits for swine, friendless and wretched. What had happened? The answer given is the result of sin. Peter declared that even if all others forsook Christ he would die before he would do so. But we see him crying bitterly, having lied, cursed and sworn that he never knew Christ. We see the results of sin.

Over and over God's book tells us what we must know and realize. Let us therefore be aware of sin, recognize sin, know what God defines as sin, avoid sin, and when we do sin seek forgiveness of sin through the only Savior, Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.

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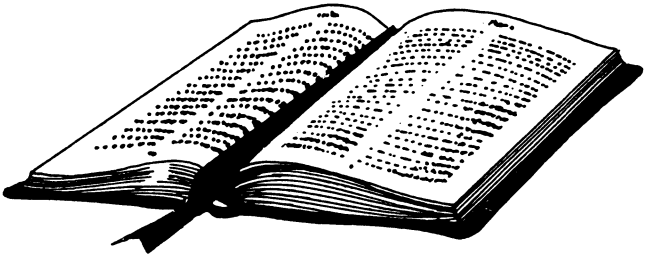

Trivializing Jesus



JAMES W. BOYD

Many get upset when depraved movie producers misrepresent Christ, making Him an indecisive and totally human being, stripping Him of His Deity and showing Him as a trivial character. This disgust is justified. We have the same attitude toward blaphemous distortions of the Son of God.

What strikes us as strange is how some can parade piously in objection to perverted films about Christ because His Deity is attacked but uphold so-called Bibles that openly, arrogantly and intentionally do the same thing, only worse, because these Bibles are misrepresented as being the Word of God. To attempt to make *"almah"* mean something less than virgin, to remove the designation of Jesus as *"the only begotten Son of God"* does injury to His claim of Deity. How some of these promoters of perverted Bibles, even among us, think they act consistently to speak out against a sinister film that undermines the identity of Christ but condone and encourage as reliable so-called Bibles that do the same thing is more than can be explained. Could it be that something other than conviction determines their actions? God knows!

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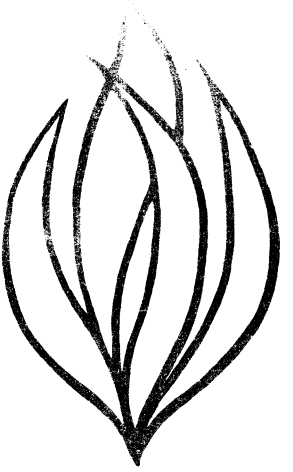

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IX James W. Boyd **NUMBER 2**

Fear:
A Prelude to Greatness

Fear is often discussed in the Bible. The word is used two ways. It can have reference to respect, reverence and dutiful obedience. Solomon said, *"Fear God and keep his commandments."* It is also used with reference to a basic emotion known to man. It is defined by Webster as a painful emotion marked by alarm, dread and anxious concern. When one is fearful in this sense he is afraid, scared and disquieted. He has feelings of uncertainty, lacks self-confidence and assurance. He recognizes his need of assistance. It is this second sense upon which our study centers. Fear is an emotion common to people of every generation. It is so widespread, and so disturbing, that the general reaction to fear is negative, being looked upon as something undesirable and evil. But it is not always that way as we shall discover.

The chemical reaction of the physical body in times of fear is interesting. When frightened the adrenal glands pour adrenalin into the bloodstream profusely, much like putting high octane gasoline into the fuel line toward an engine. One becomes hyper-active. In a sense it "supercharges" a person, making him more active, stimulated, aroused and alert. Sometimes this increase of bodily activity is very noticeable. Other times, however, fear seems to almost paralyze a person to the extent they can neither move nor speak.

There is a type of fear called stage fright. Every preacher has experienced it and some of us always have it to some extent. But even that uncomfortable feeling provides extra power and energy needful for the task. It may even provide more than is needed, causing the hands to tremble, knees to wobble, the mouth to become dry and possibly the tongue to be extra active.

Sometimes the response to fear is very weakening. As one scared man explained, he wanted to run but could not. He wanted to shout but could not utter a sound. In any circumstance, most people usually associate fear with that which is at least a momentary unpleasantness.

Not All Bad

Why did God make man in such a way that he should feel fear? It is because all fear is not bad. Indeed, it is very worthwhile and can be used to provide for our safety and motivate us to the performance of tasks that otherwise we might not be able to do. Those who train speakers assure us that a certain amount of fear is helpful in speaking. We hear of "superhuman deeds" being done at times of emergencies, such as fires, when people have been known to lift and carry objects from a house that they otherwise were never able to move.

Nations are aroused to danger and threat through fear. Prepardness for emergencies can often be urged upon people when motivated by fear. Students may be led to do better preparatory work for their classes when the fear of expulsion, or the fear of not getting a job, is mentioned to them. It causes them to work harder. So we cannot demean all fear.

Fear has been used by the Lord and often has been a prelude or the beginning steps toward great accomplishments. Consider some Old Testament demonstrations of this.

Instances of Fear

Hebrews 11:7 tells us that Noah was warned of God and *"moved with fear."* Certainly Noah had respect for the Word of God. But who could doubt that a prediction of the overflowing of the entire world with water was not a frightening consideration? He was motivated to obedience in this way.

"Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" when God called him from the burning bush. Because of fear, his sense of personal inadequacy, and offering one excuse after another why he should not do what God called him to do, he was humbled before God. It was the beginning steps of a life of immeasurable service to God.

Before Esther crowned herself with glory for saving Israel from annihilation at the instigation of Haman, she was possessed with fear. Mordecai told her to make a plea to the king for Israel. She was afraid to go before the king except at his request. If an appearance displeased him, it could mean death. But we know how she overcame this fear and acted.

There are several examples of fear before momentous events recorded in the New Testament. Consider Peter in Luke 5:3-11. Jesus was walking along the shore of the sea of Galilee. Some had fished all night and caught nothing. But when the Lord told them, *"Launch out into the deep,"* lower their nets once again,

they caught so many fish that the boat began to sink. Peter was astonished, so much so that Jesus had to reassure them by the words, *"Fear not."* This occurred immediately prior their leaving all and following Christ.

Earlier in Luke's record, 1:26-30, we read where fear came upon Mary, the mother of Jesus, just before the greatest of her works was about to begin. She had been chosen to bear the Son of God into the world in human form. This announcement struck fear in her heart.

So it was with the Philippian jailor at the earthquake when Paul and Silas were jailed in his prison (Acts 16:28,29). The experiences of that evening were frightening to him. Fear played a role in making him receptive to the gospel that was preached to him. He heard, believed and obeyed to the salvation of his soul. So we cannot discount the value and contribution that fear is capable of making, the humility it can bring, the inadequacy it can underline, the realization for help in time of need that it emphasizes. It softens the heart and makes it pliable.

Fear of Hell

There is absolutely no doubt that the Lord's warning of hell strikes fear in the heart of any who hears it and has confidence in the Word of God. The Bible reveals to us death, both physical and spiritual. It tells us for the lake of fire and brimstone, eternal punishment. There is the warning of weeping and gnashing of teeth, separation from God, an eternal abode with the devil and his angels, the outer darkness. Who is so bold as to not have fear when he realizes there is such awaiting those who refuse to obey God? God uses fear as one of at least three motives for serving Him. The motive to receive reward is another. The response of love because God loved us is the noblest of the three. But fear does have a role.

The Bible is not written to scare people primarily. But this element is definitely therein. Many hardened people, faced with the reality of death and the prospect of an eternal hell have been moved to open the heart to the presentation of the loving message of salvation.

Fear has longed served a vital role in making people realize their inability to meet the great hereafter. It has made people see that they cannot save themselves and turn to seek the comfort of salvation that is provided only in Christ.

First John 4:18, *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love*

casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." To consider one phrase: nobody questions that fear hath torment. We have all experienced it. The best and purest motive for serving God is responding to His love by loving Him in return. Such love is exemplified by obedience to His commands (First John 5:3). But many never consider the goodness and love of God until they are shaken by the fear of the consequences of sin. Fear has caused the alien sinner to weep. It has caused the fallen Christian to see the folly of his apostasy. It often provokes people to give the Word of God a fair hearing. Such is the very nature, purpose, intent and design of warnings. This is why we are warned.

Less Fear

But as love for God grows, we become less and less fearful. Those who have genuinely matured do not fear death and the judgment as do others. They know, because of their obedience to His will and His faithfulness to His Word, that all is right between them and their Creator and Judge and they do not fear these unknown situations to the degree that most of us do. As that love grows, fear is disposed. One comes to so completely trust in God that he no longer is fearful.

We are convinced that any rational and reasonable person that believes the Word of God will have a certain fear of hell. If a person fears hell, that may well be the start toward salvation. For the first time in a person's life he may be willing to listen to the truth regarding himself and God.

Jude twenty-three speaks of saving some with fear, pulling them out of the fire. Many may be won to Christ by gentle persuasion. Others by the appeal of love. Jude urged even the use of fear as one means to save souls.

If there was power within me to create sufficient fear in the hearts of others to cause them to seriously consider the condition of their souls before God, you can be sure fear would be one of the instruments to be used. If fear can assist in snatching anyone from the fires of hell, we should use it. If the motive of love and reward will not touch the cords of the heart to favorably respond to God, and fear will do it, we should use it. If these appeals will not move people, there is no hope for their souls.

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The Dangers of Following Men

Those familiar with the Bible know that Jesus Christ is the head of the Lord's church. Paul wrote that God *"raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."* (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Peter states we are to be followers of Christ, walking in His steps (First Peter 2:21). When Jesus called His apostles, He said, *"Follow me."* (Matthew 4:19). His invitation to mankind is, *"Come unto me..."* (Matthew 11:28). Jesus Christ is our leader and guide in this life and there can be no other.

Use of Men

Nonetheless, it is the will of Christ that men fill places of responsibility and leadership in the government of His church, His kingdom. He entrusted the revelation of the gospel to His ambassadors, the apostles, earthen vessels, as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. The organization of the church includes people other than the head and His apostles. Christ is the head of the church and Christians are the members of His spiritual body. Christians are congregated into local congregations which are overseen by a plurality of men of certain specified qualifications that are called elders, bishops or pastors. To assist them and the church as special servants are other men of special quality called deacons. Contrary to widespread thought and practice in the religious world, the New Testament does not authorize any organization of the church having universal oversight of the church. But each congregation is autonomous, self-governing, independent of others, not tied together by any kind of ecclesiastical heirarchy, but only by a mutual faith, hope, love, doctrine and practice.

Yet, there are these positions of labor that must necessarily be filled with men. In this sense, a limited extent, men become

leaders in the church and the rest of us are followers. They function with a limited and delegated authority, not as primary authority.

Most Are Followers

Most people are followers regardless of the realm under consideration. Few are leaders. Many times, especially in the church, we find too many chiefs and not enough Indians. This usually produces strife and is a hindrance to the work. Some men are better qualified to lead than others. This is true in the church just as it is true in the business world, sports, civil government or other areas. But there are sometimes those men who feel they MUST be leaders, who so crave the distinction that goes with leadership, who strive and campaign to be leaders, qualified or not, that they set themselves as religious authority. The pope is an extreme example of this. But it is a similar wrong, as we heard in one congregation, when a brother stood one Lord's Day morning and announced before the congregation that from that day forward the church should look upon him as an elder. Needless to say, however, his term of service was short.

Julius Caesar said he had rather be first in a village than second in Rome. Some people love to have the preeminence that much. At times there are brethren who display the same attitude. They had rather be a leader even in some divisive faction than be a lowly servant for the whole church.

Third John nine speaks of the man named Diotrophes who was a church regulator, fond of first place, loving to have preeminence among his brethren. All we know of him is what we read in this passage. We do not know if he was an elder, preacher, deacon or something else. But we do know he wanted to be "church boss." Everything had to go his way, and if it did not he would not cooperate or participate. There is no concrete evidence that the issues involved regarding him were truth versus error or matters of doctrine, but the problem was his personal love of power. He even opposed the venerable apostle John. He would not receive brethren who were laborers with John. Obviously, he had a very exaggerated and exalted opinion of himself. He loved to have the preeminence and be leader of all, expecting all to follow him.

Some years ago I read of a Baptist author who wrote in a publication of that denomination about Diotrophes. He had no

specific person in mind, but was simply dealing with this "I-am-boss" attitude. Several wrote him blistering letters accusing him of making a personal attack on them. Some cancelled their subscription to his paper. Was that not a classic case of the hit dog howling? The shoe fit and they refused to wear it. The guilty conscience was quick to see its owner in such a setting.

The Lord's church does not need "leading brethren like Diotrophes." This growing practice of awarding plaques and awards to "super" brethren as the Christian of the Year, Soul-Winner of the Year, etc. is about as trashy and trite as brethren can get. Showing appreciation is one thing, but this takes things far beyond propriety. Who is anyone to so designate any other one as such? Do they know everybody and their labor for the Lord? What an appeal to vanity and a display of brotherhood politics! It is shameful and ought not so to be!

Who Is First?

Jesus taught that first place was to those who serve the most (Mark 9:34). It belonged to those who received Him with a childlike faith (Luke 9:46-48). He further said, Luke 22:24-26, *"And there was strife also among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."*

The mark of good leadership is not that men praise their human leader, but praise God whom they serve. John the Baptist was a preacher. People heard him, but they went not away praising John. They followed Christ (John 1:37). John said, *"He must increase, and I must decrease."* (John 3:30). Leaders should possess this attitude.

Unfortunately, at times personally ambitious people reach places of power, decision and influence in this world, even in the church. Dreadful and destructive things usually follow. While a great portion of blame belongs to the ambitious one, do not those who willingly follow such men also bear much blame? Some follow a man simply because the man is thought to be "somewhat," a big man, a big preacher, a high-up somebody. Too little attention is paid to what some men teach and practice. Because they are "big" many blindly accept whatever they say and do. They are impessed with a person's prominence and

noteriety regardless of what he is or for what he stands.

Word of Warning

We send along a stern and serious warning to brethren. We warn against following men as if they were the masters. We warn against any man, however notable in the past or present, as if he possessed ultimate authority. We want to consider some of the dangers involved when brethren make the mistake of following men. Especially is this warning timely when all around us "leading brethren" profess to compose a "summit" when they gather for their deliberations, which are as often compromising sessions with denominational people and doctrines. We ask, "Who made such people a 'summit,' and who are they to assume such a distinction?"

The greatest danger in following men is to your own soul. You can be led astray from the truth by other people. God has revealed His truth to man through Christ, now embodied in His verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and sufficient Scriptures. All men have the opportunity to know the truth. Too often too few know the truth but this is no fault of God but the fault of men for failure to study the Word, or failure to preach the Word. When one does not know God's Word he can be easily led astray into a wide variety of religious errors by men he has raised to some pedestal. Romanists do what their priest tells them. Still others accept whatever some preacher says, especially if he is prominent, has some arbitrarily determined academic degree, or is widely known. We need to ask ourselves just what is the basis of our faith; men or God's Word.

We would not destroy justified confidence in faithful preachers and teachers. But we would not have any person simply follow any man however well informed he might seem to be. Jesus warned against the blind leading the blind and both falling into the pit (Matthew 15:14). Those who are not blind are those who are guided by the written Word, and subscribe thereto as the lamp unto their feet and light unto their path.

Blind Following the Blind

If you follow men you will follow them into misdeeds. No human being does everything perfectly. None accomplished that except Christ. Being human, people falter, stumble, fall and digress. They often bring reproach on even the good things they

have done in the past. They are subject to being overtaken with a fault, such as jealousy, envy and other sins. When you follow men, even into good works, when they go astray even your good works are held in ridicule. Brethren have sometimes promoted worthy efforts, but when the leader of those efforts goes astray, as sometimes happens, brethren become confused, disillusioned, embarrassed and their work reduced to naught.

No human ever reaches the plane of infallibility. To follow mn

No human ever reaches the plane of infallibility. To follow man is to displace Christ from His rightful place. Which is the more important to you in a gospel meeting or a Bible class; the preacher who preaches or the message he preaches? Is it right to support the truth only when one you like is preaching but not other times? When the Lord Jesus is the leader of men, what right do we have to become followers of men who would place themselves as the leader?

True enough, Paul said, First Corinthians 11:1, *"Be ye followers of me."* But he added, *"...even as I also am of Christ."* Our eyes are on the Lord, not some man. We dare the devil to mislead us into apostasy and digression from the truth when we are content to simply let men guide us. We cannot prevent falling away unless we follow the One who never fell.

When you hear the truth, and you learn it, believe it because it comes from the Bible and you know it comes from the Bible, do not reject it simply because you may have learned it first from some man. Investigate what men tell you even as the noble Bereans did (Acts 17:11). Do not accept something as truth until you have determined its validity from Scripture. Following men is a risky adventure that cannot produce good. Following Christ is a certain adventure that cannot be wrong.

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Our Issues Are Not Dated

For a number of reasons we do not put dates on our issues. However, it so happens that this one will be mailed in mid-November with the next to follow after the mail rush of Christmas holidays. You can expect a time gap between this issue and the next you receive. JWB

The Man and the Plan

It is often correctly stated that there are no two people exactly alike. Would it not be a monotonous world if we were all alike? It is true that we differ. Some are tall; others are shorter. Some are young; others are older. Some move very quickly while some are ever so slow. The differences are almost infinite in number. This is very obvious in the physical realm.

Of greater importance is the difference between people in the realm of their thinking, attitudes and views of life and temperaments. In matters of religion this is particularly true. There are many churches, many doctrines, many practices. Is it really important what we think, how we feel, what we do? These many differences among people only reflect the real spiritual differences. In this lesson let us notice one particular area where there is wide variance of thinking. It is an area where there truly ought to be unity. It has to do with the Christ, His person, and the doctrine which He authored. We are concerned with the preaching of Christ and the preaching of doctrine.

Person

There are those who emphasize the person of Christ almost to the exclusion of everything else. They talk about the nature of Christ, His kind and gentle qualities, but they insist that we leave doctrine alone. Such people are often very pious, at least outwardly. They claim to be very spiritual. Often they are highly emotional, but not always is that true. There are times when they abandon revelation and reason and cast off self-control and talk about seeing the Lord Jesus in the flesh, talking with Him, having visions, hearing voices in the night, and similar claims. Some are heard to shout and wail, making a great spectacle of themselves, even though doubtless sincere.

It is tragic but true nonetheless that many people reflect no regard for the doctrine of Christ. They minimize the nature of the church and how to become a Christian. They seldom teach on the Biblical manner of worship or any other matter they consider "doctrinal." They contend that doctrine is of no consequence; that people can follow and believe whatever doctrine they choose with equal benefit so long as they are honest and sincere. They are heard to admonish others to

"preach Christ" and in their highly emotionalized feelings, they are not concerned even for what Christ has taught. One is reminded of the words of Jesus in Matthew 15:8,9, *"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* This shows that what is taught does matter. Doctrine is important. Doctrines of men in contrast to the doctrine of Christ is the difference between being approved and disapproved of God. So many have never realized this truth!

Doctrine

But like pendulums on the clock, others swing to the opposite extreme. They so emphasize what they call "doctrine" that they seldom mention anything else. It is true that all teaching is doctrine. But what they mean by doctrine includes only such things as the plan of salvation, the organization of the church, the manner of worship, etc. They seldom preach about the person, Jesus Christ. To them the religion of Christ is nothing more than a set of rule, laws and a veritable checklist of do's and don't's. Doctrine looms so large before them that they never concentrate on the character of Christ or the nature of His example before us. They act as if their faith is in a creed rather than a person.

This approach to the religion of Christ is just as one-sided as the first extreme. Such thinkers have not yet matured and know not the fulness and richness of being a follower of Jesus Christ. Their approach is threadbare. They talk as if they never heard of the grace of God, the cross, the resurrection. Listening to them one might get the impression that salvation is earned by keeping a set of rules and that alone. Have they forgotten that such passages as Ephesians 2:8,9 and Luke 17:10 are still in the Bible? Why should such teaching be minimized?

The result of such extremes is destructive to the spread of the truth regarding Christ and His Word. Those who emphasize Jesus and ignore His doctrine look at their religious friends as "legalists," while those that speak only of "doctrine" and never the person, Jesus Christ, consider their religious friends as soft and liberal. Each group is pushed further and further apart and into their unique extremes.

Person and Doctrine

The truth is that the religion of Christ includes both person and doctrine. It is not either Christ or doctrine. If we preach and practice that which God sent into the world we will preach Christ and His doctrine. In fact, there is no separation between them. Why should anyone want to separate the Lord from His Word? We should maintain the balance in presentation of the truth as the Scripture does and preach the whole counsel of God.

Christ is the founder and the very heart of Christianity. The whole of man's service to God relates to Him. He is the central personality of the entire Bible. The church is important because of Him. He is its Savior. The doctrine of baptism has significance only because of its relationship to Christ. It is in baptism that we are united with Christ. We are baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27). The Lord's Supper has importance because it commemorates Christ, His death, burial and resurrection. So it is with every part of the doctrine of Christ and the practice of New Testament Christianity. Everything is important because it relates to God's only begotten Son.

But another factor we must consider is that Christ did teach and preach doctrine. He did deliver a plan of salvation. There is the law of Christ. This law is revealed unto man in the Bible. There are commands, do's and don't's that must be respected and obeyed.

God's Plan

The plan of Christ for saving man began with God's love and grace and mercy as was manifested through the gift of His Son. Man was lost in sin and unable to redeem himself by himself. He needed a Savior and God provided that Savior, who is Jesus Christ. Man could never merit even the opportunity to be saved, let alone salvation itself. But God has offered him this opportunity through Christ.

It was God's plan that Christ die on the cross for man's sins and by His blood we are redeemed. He bought us by the awesome price of His death. Without what Deity has done there would be no intelligence in continuing a discussion about the plan of salvation. There would be none.

But it is also true that as God has provided the way, man must come the way God has provided. To do this many must meet certain specified conditions laid down by God. Unless man meets those conditions he cannot enjoy the benefits of Christ's death. Even as he meets these conditions he does not earn

salvation, but without obedience to them there is no salvation for him. By obeying the terms of pardon man accepts what God has offered to give.

Man's Part in God's Plan

Such conditions are man's part in God's plan for saving man. They include believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. Following being raised a new creature in Christ, man must live a faithful life of work and worship before God, living in the fellowship of Deity and the redeemed, with the hope and promise of heaven in his heart. This is not man's plan. It is God's plan. When men follow God's plan they are relying on God for salvation. Why else would Christ invite people to come to Him except they must come to Him to be saved?

It is utterly impossible to preach the whole counsel of God as inspired men preached it and try to preach Christ without preaching His plan of salvation, His doctrine. Please notice John 3:3, *"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Jesus is teaching doctrine. He is teaching the necessity of the new birth. This involves water and the Spirit (John 3:5). The message of the Spirit is the plan of salvation which includes baptism into Christ (Romans 6:3,4). Upon obedience, one is raised to walk in newness of life, a new creature in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17. He is born again.

Notice the charge Christ gave His apostles in Matthew 28:19,20, *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."* Does He not emphasize doctrine? Is not this the plan of salvation?

Plan at Work

On Pentecost, the day the church began, Peter preached and his sermon is recorded in Acts two. It was a dynamic sermon preeminently about Jesus Christ as Lord. However, toward the conclusion, Peter taught the people to repent and be baptized. He preached doctrine. This people had to obey in order to be saved by the Christ Peter preached. It was impossible for him to

preach salvation through Christ, the person of Christ, without preaching the Person's plan of salvation.

In Acts 8:35ff, Philip met the Ethiopian who was reading from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. The prophecies were about Christ. The Ethiopian at first did not understand until Philip began at the same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus. What did Philip preach? He preached Christ to this man. Later, the man requested to be baptized. How did this "doctrinal" matter get into the discussion? Obviously, Philip had included that "doctrinal" matter while preaching Christ. Preaching Christ includes preaching the doctrine Christ delivered regarding the plan of salvation. You cannot preach Christ without preaching the law of Christ. You cannot preach the law of Christ without preaching the Person, Jesus Christ.

The teaching done by the apostle Paul included Christ and His doctrine. Consider Acts 17:18, First Corinthians 2:2; Second Corinthians 1:19. There is no question but Paul preached Christ. Yet, this same man taught the doctrine of faith (Acts 16:30,31). He taught the doctrine of repentance (Acts 17:30). He taught the doctrine of confession of Christ (Romans 10:10). He taught the doctrine of baptism (Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:27). In dedicating himself to preach nothing save Christ and Him crucified, he preached the Lord's plan of salvation and everything else the Lord commissioned to be taught in His name or by His authority. Again, we insist, it is impossible to preach one without preaching the other.

Both

Therefore, we see it is not a matter of Christ OR doctrine. It is preach Christ AND His doctrine. It is a grave error to attempt to omit one or contrast one against the other. To love Christ is to obey His commandments (John 14:15). The only way we can demonstrate our love for Christ is by obeying His law.

Away, then, forever, with this false idea of "preach the man and not the plan." Rather let us do as we are directed and preach the man and His plan, preach the man by preaching His plan, preach the plan by preaching the man. Anything less is to fall short of our duty before God and man. To stress one, ignore and/or depress the other, to make either seem dispensable, is to misrepresent truth. May we not ever be guilty of doing so.

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Divine Nourishment

Of the some 600,000 fighting men who escaped from Egypt and heard the song of deliverance after emerging from the baptism unto Moses in the cloud and the sea, only two persons who were over twenty years old at the time finally entered the promised land of Canaan. They were Joshua and Caleb. The rest shared in the deliverance from Egypt but failed to reach the home God offered them. Why? Hebrews 3:12,19, *"Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God... So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."*

It is a hard truth but we can be blessed with the forgiveness of our past sins and yet fail to enter into the eternal joy of heaven. When one believes and is baptized his past sins are forgiven and he enjoys salvation from sin (Mark 16:16). But people can forget that they were purged from their old sins (Second Peter 1:9) and not endure in faithfulness to the end (Matthew 10:22). Paul warned, First Corinthians 10:12, *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* Having become a child of God we are expected to live as one.

The distance from Egypt to Canaan was not great. Yet, it was forty years after the exodus from Egypt before Israel crossed Jordan. Because they believed not the good report of Joshua and Caleb after they had spied the land, but chose to believe the faithless report of the other ten spies, Israel was made to wander until all that generation perished in the wilderness.

It is true that the time in the wilderness educated Israel for their future destiny. It gave them opportunity to receive God's law and become acquainted with the Lord. They were schooled to trust and obey Him, which they did not always do. They learned they must live separately from the pagan and heathen nations. They developed that wholesome ruggedness that the school of adversity taught them. They were disciplined, chastened, humbled and made fit for their inheritance.

A Type

All of this was typical and a pre-picture of the Christian life. John 17:15, *"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."* It is

rightly said that Christians are IN the world but not OF the world. Christians must be trained for future triumphs and schooled through facing temptations, enduring conflicts, and being heroic in a wicked world by living righteously. We spend our lives being made fit for the inheritance of the saints. Colossians 1:12, *"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."* To be made *"meet"* is to be made suitable.

Exodus 15:22 through 17:7 tells of the Israelites in the wilderness at a time which was very distressing to them. They had successfully fled Egypt but were confronted with the need of food and water. We read how God supplied them with manna, quail and water from rock. Their nourishment was given them from God. The wilderness provided no sustenance and they were dependent on Jehovah for their daily food and drink.

Our Wilderness

Life in this world is to the Christian somewhat like the wilderness. We are but strangers and sojourners passing through on our way to our eternal destiny (First Peter 1:7). This world does not furnish us the spiritual nourishment that we need. We do not curse the world because we realize there is much beauty and glory in this earth and its treasures which God created. There is happiness to be enjoyed in this life. This should provoke an unceasing gratitude unto God for such things. When we consider the wonders of nature, sun, moon, stars, waterfalls, mountains, valleys, seasons, crops, animals, the freshness of the morning air and the glory of the sunset, when we consider such things as we should we see they are teeming with grandeur. It is like our daughter once said when she was very small, "It is such a beautiful world. Why is it so hard?"

Life does have its hard parts. For some life seems to be a process of going from one hardship to another. Evil is often mixed into the cup of life. But most people will not consider all of life to be a burden and imposition. All is not bad. But as far as supplying us with the spiritual needs, this world is unable to provide. The spiritual blessings of pardon of sins, fellowship with God, purpose for life, hope for eternity, the promise of heaven and escape of hell, all these things cannot be found by the offerings of this world. We, like Israel, must look to God for the supply of these spiritual needs.

Bread

God gave Israel their bread to eat from heaven. John 6:31-35, *"Our fathers did eat manna in the desert, as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."*

The Israelites received physical food, not from Moses, but from God. But the physical food is not the food and nourishment of the soul. That which nourishes the soul is the *"true bread,"* which Jesus identifies as Himself.

As the Israelites had to gather their food daily, so should we seek our daily supply by feeding upon the teachings of the Lord. Paul commended the Bereans because they searched the scriptures daily (acts 17:11). Only those who "eat" Christ, meaning to appropriate unto oneself the way of Christ, shall live by Him. He is the way of eternal life.

There were times when the Israelites murmured and complained about that which the Lord provided. How could we ever tire or complain about the spiritual food God provides for us? Do we long for the fleshpots of sin as Israel longed for the fleshpots of Egypt? They brought God's wrath upon themselves, and so shall we if we grow weary of feeding upon Christ. If we turn again to the weak and beggarly rudiments of this world, how shall we be supplied? Shall we not invite our own downfall? Indeed, we would perish in the wilderness.

Drink

God gave Israel water to drink from the rock. First Corinthians 10:3,4, *"And did all eat the same spiritual meat and did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."* The rock which Moses struck from which poured the sustaining water was representative of Christ. The rock in the wilderness provided physical water and relieved their bodily thirst. But Christ provides the spiritual drink that satisfies the longings of the soul.

As Israel wandered in the wilderness, searching for water, failing to find it, how often people today wander in life searching and digging for relief of the spiritual tragedy of sin but looking in the wrong places. The history of our race is largely a history of man's efforts to satisfy the cravings of the spirit. People have sought it through wars, art, superstitions, philosophies, wealth, health, pleasure, fame, fortune, withdrawal from life, indulgences of passion, worldly frolics and solitude. The end result has been the same time and time again. They satisfy not. After every earthly fountain has been drained the soul of man remains athirst. Even when it is thought that water has been found, in time it proves to be the bitter water of Marah or the temporary refreshment of Elim.

Their supply and help came from an unexpected source. It came from an unpromising rock. This is it with us and Christ. Christ was and is considered by many to be offensive, the *"rock of offense"* (Romans 9:33). Unto the Jews He has been a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness (First Corinthians 1:23). Though considered unpromising, the crucified One is the only source where the thirsty and perishing soul can find a fountain of mercy, love, life, forgiveness, and can drink forever. Moses smote the rock in the wilderness and life-giving water flowed. Jesus of Nazereth, the Son of God, was smitten for our transgressions and from Him flows the life-giving stream of spiritual healing and cleansing. Jesus is the Rock of Ages, the One cleft, split, broken for me and you and all mankind. now and until the world ceases to be.

The Rock

The Scripture says the rock *"followed them."* This had reference not to the literal rock that Moses truck, but to the One represented by that rock. Christ was with Israel in their season of distress and gave the needed provision and relief. So it is with Christ and those of us who are His people even now. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), *"a very present help in time of trouble"* (Psalm 46:1). Our Lord will never forsake us, and His stream of mercy that flows on our behalf shall never be exhausted (Hebrews 13:6). Whether in youth, old age, sickness, health, prosperity, adversity, life or death, His love and truth never faileth (Romans 8:38,39; First Peter 1:25). It is as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, John 4:13,14, *"Whosoever drinketh of this water*

shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

While God provides through Christ the divine nourishment we need, each one must partake of what is offered from himself or herself. Of what value would it be to an Israelite for Moses to strike the rock and water pour forth, or manna fall and be gathered daily and placed before the hungry, but those in need of nourishment refused to eat and drink? Even so in vain has God opened the fountain of life for those who will otherwise perish in the wilderness of sin if they reject the One God has provided. There is drink enough for all, but only those who come and drink shall live. Revelation 22:17, *"And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."* We drink, or die. John 7:37, *"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."*

When the journey is ended and this barren wilderness shall have been safely traversed, it shall be said of us, Revelation 7:16,17, *"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."*

† † † † †

The Ground Was Cultivated

When you read of digressive movements coming into an area with seeming success, such as the invasion of Boston Church heresies, you can be sure the field has been fertilized and cultivated to make the success possible. With years of compromise, "go-alongism," churches promoting recreation, secular education, weak Bible departments, worldliness, false teachers all around, and few elderships and preachers saying, doing or writing anything against it lest they be branded as unloving and judgmental, I say you can be sure heresy and apostasy of some sort will find a paved roadway. It is impossible that the timid, all-positive, "loving " kind of religion has either the power or will to deter such intrusions of error.

Unless and until brethren change their attitude toward opposing error, error will continue to have marvelous progress.

The Faith of Rahab

We turn to the Old Testament and the early history of Israel for our study. Israel left Egypt, wandered for forty years in the wilderness. Moses had turned the leadership into the hands of Joshua who then led the nation across the Jordan River into the promised land of Canaan. They came against their first obstacle which was the walled city of Jericho. It was a woman who had much to do with the success of Israel in taking that city. We read of her in Joshua chapter two, also New Testament references about her in the books of Hebrews and James. Our study concerns Rahab, particularly emphasizing the faith of Rahab. The quality of her faith is like that which we must also have to be saved and be pleasing to God.

We urge you to first read the second chapter of Joshua before continuing with this lesson. Without this Biblical background in mind we cannot keep our facts accurately before us and will likely miss the points of the lesson.

Her Character

We shall first consider some lesser matters before we study her faith. What kind of woman was Rahab? She is identified as a harlot, which usually means a woman of loose moral character and conduct. Was Rahab a prostitute? She may well have been. There are evidences that she may not have been and we should consider them. (1) The word translated "*harlot*" sometimes was used to refer to nothing more than an innkeeper, a hostess. Josephus treats us with this information. (2) Even harlots were rejected by their families among the people of Jericho. But evidently Rahab had good relations with her family. (3) It is very unlikely that the spies, being on the business of God's people and selected because of their quality, would frequent a house of prostitution. So we are not far afield if we conclude that Rahab may not have been the degenerate type of person she is usually pictured to be.

The character of Rahab is not our theme. What she was at the beginning of this account is not so important as what she was at the end. This is true with everyone. What people have been in the past is very important, but not near so important as what they later become. Even more, it is important to know what

people can become and in which direction they are going.

Did She Lie?

But another lesser matter. Did Rahab lie to the king of Jericho as to the whereabouts of the spies? Obviously, she lied to protect them. Does this mean that God approves of lying if good may come from it? Not at all! Biblical commands against lying are specific and pronounced. Neither is there any evidence that God approves of lying that "good" may come. Paul condemned doing evil that good may come (Romans 3:8). There is nothing reported to suggest that God gave sanction to Rahab's actions. He neither instructed her to lie nor pronounced her lie innocent. *"Thou shalt not bear false witness"* was, is, and ever will be God's will. We have no doubt that God could have provided for the safety of the spies many ways without the lie. But as God has so often done, He used the actions of people, actions of their own choice, both good and evil, to work His will.

The significant thing about Rahab is her faith, its quality and characteristics, as well as the actions taken based on her faith. Hebrews 11:31 points to her as an example of faith. *"By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."* James mentions Rahab as an example of faith and works combined. James 2:25, *"Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?"* She was a person of great and noteworthy faith.

From Whence Came Her Faith?

How was it that this Gentile woman came to have faith in God? Romans 10:17 teaches, *"Faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* When one hears the Word and the evidence contained therein, he is convinced of the evidence and faith is created in the heart. Faith is a way of knowing based upon the evidence. It was this very process that produced Rahab's faith. Joshua 2:10,11, *"For we have HEARD* [emphasis, JWB] *how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt, and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we HEARD* (emphasis, JWB) *these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man,*

because of you; for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath."

Singular

There are four outstanding qualities of Rahab's faith. First, it was a singular faith, by which we mean it was faith that was her own personal, individual faith that belonged singularly to her. Although all Jericho had heard the same message she heard, and others were fearful, she believed in the true God of Israel. The parable of the sower (Matthew 13) teaches us the various reactions people can have to the sowing of the seed. Her reaction was one of conviction and belief.

Such a position was personally hazardous for her, living among heathen people as she did. She might have been thought guilty of treason and forfeited her life. But evidently she did not fear to believe, nor to stand singularly alone if need be. She did not allow what others thought to determine her convictions. So many people weaken, bend and break beneath the pressure imposed on them from others. Many do not have the spiritual backbone to stand, doing their own individual thinking, but are swept along with the crowd whichever direction the crowd goes. But such was not the nature of Rahab. Nor can faithful people of God allow themselves to be the kind that can be tossed to and fro, going whatever direction the wind might be blowing at the time.

People of God have always had to have a singular faith. Individual conviction is the only worthwhile conviction. A "borrowed faith," meaning a conviction assumed simply because others have assumed it, will not sustain us. Joshua had this kind of faith when he said, *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* Elijah had it in his contest with the prophets of Baal. Peter, though not at first, had it when he said, *"We ought to obey God rather than men."* Paul had it when he withstood false teachers and gave them no place. So must we develop a singular faith.

Sympathetic

Second, her faith was a sympathetic faith. She was not only concerned about herself, but also her family. In making the covenant with the spies she included her kin. She appreciated the dangers they also faced. She was determined to believe for

herself and also for what influence she could have on others. She had a great love, sympathy, compassion and interest in the welfare of others. She, a woman reared in a heathen environment, showed more concern for her kin and their physical safety than many "Christians" demonstrate for their kin and their spiritual safety. Even parents often drift along ignoring the spiritual training of their children as if such indifference will have no negative effect. Many are blinded to the spiritual destruction they make possible and probably for their own young. Certainly we know each will stand accountable before God individually. We shall not be judged as a world, nation, community, church or even a family. But what we do vitally affects those around us (Romans 14:7). Our influence on others is good reason for us to believe the things of God.

Sanctifying

Third, her faith was a sanctifying faith. The word "santify" means to set apart, make holy. Sanctification is not some mysterious special direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Rahab was set apart from her friends and neighbors because she believed. It made her different. It caused actions by her that others would not have committed.

Too often you cannot tell as Christian from a non-Christian without a church directory. They lives are similar. They seem to have the same priorities, goals and ambitions in life. They drink the same brand of beer, smoke and/or chew the same kind of tobacco, tell and laugh at the same dirty stories, use the same kind of profanity, and are even found side by side on the same dance floors, even the same lakes or golf courses on Sunday mornings. How can you tell some are Christians?

John 17:15 teaches we are in the world but not of the world. Rather we are to be a peculiar, distinctive people (Titus 2:14). It is to be regretted that the faith of some seems to make no real difference in their manner of life. When such is true, the person does not have the same genuine faith that Rahab had. Her faith placed her into a select group. She dared to be different.

Saving

Fourth, the faith of Rahab was a saving faith. Anyone who reads the Bible knows the necessity of faith to be saved. What all do not know is that faith alone does not save, denominational

teachers and doctrines notwithstanding. Faith alone is dead (James 2:17, 20, 24). Jesus said, Matthew 7:21, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my father who is in heaven."* John 12:42 tells of some who believed in Jesus but would not confess him. Who could claim they were saved anyway? Agrippa believed, but he never obeyed (Acts 26:27). He was almost saved, but not altogether.

In contrast, as taught in Hebrews eleven, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, David, Samuel and unnamed others were people of faith. Their faith acted, however. It was not a mere mental asset. By their works their faith was made perfect, whole, complete (James 2:22). The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Faith that will not produce obedient action harmonious with the will of God can avail nothing (James 2:26).

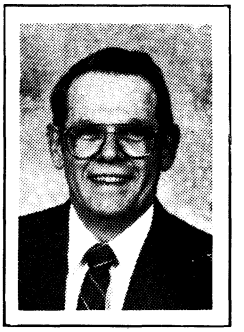
Rahab's faith caused her to receive the messengers, hide them, send them out another way. She believed and acted accordingly. The result was that she did not perish with the rest. She had a saving faith.

What of Us?

But this woman has long since been dead. What of our faith? Paul says these things were written for our learning (Romans 15:4). Is our faith like that of Rahab; singular, sympathetic, sanctifying and saving? God has provided every evidence needful to believe in Jesus as the Christ the Son of the living God. The Word has provided sufficient evidence to convince the honest and good heart of this truth. We have every cause to live life the way He prescribes. By coming to Him we can have every promise, hope, assurance and security the Lord offers the soul Therefore, it is left for us to render obedience to His commands to repent, confess Him, and be baptized for the remission of sin, and live faithfully before Him.

† † † † †

Regarding Isaiah 7:14



JAMES W. BOYD

Joseph was comforted and reassured by the Holy Spirit that Mary's conception was the work of God, not man (Matthew 1:18-25). If Isaiah's prophecy had ever been fulfilled by a natural conception and birth, as some "dual-fulfillment" people claim, how could Joseph be comforted to know that Mary's conception was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy? If the prophecy had been fulfilled once by a natural conception and birth, Joseph would have reason to doubt Mary's fidelity to him. Joseph knew Isaiah's prophecy had never been fulfilled previously. We wonder why "modern scholars" cannot understand it.

Many Old Testament passages have less direct reference to the virgin birth, but this one is specific and unquestionably prophetic. To give ground to modernists who want to remove the Biblical teaching of the virgin birth is treason against Christ. It betrays one's own lack of soundness and loyalty to truth. This is not an area to compromise with anti-Christs. All should be stedfast in the singular application of Isaiah's prophecy to the birth of Jesus Christ, just as the inspired Matthew taught and just as faithful Christians have contended.

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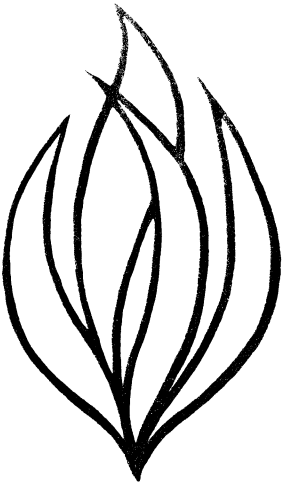

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IX James W. Boyd **NUMBER 3**

The Good Shepherd

Our text is the lengthy and familiar passage of John 10:1-18. What you are about to read is intended to be studied alongside an open Bible at this text. Jesus is presented to us in several ways in Scripture that illustrate to us our relationship to Him, such as a vine and we are the branches, as head of the body and we are members of that body, as the cornerstone and foundation of the building and we are the living stones, as king over His kingdom and we are the citizens. But of all the pictures of Christ that is probably the best loved is that which portrays Him as the Good Shepherd.

The land of Jesus, Palestine, was familiar with the shepherd scene. Since the days of Abraham, and probably earlier, the inhabitants knew and understood the fortunes and experiences of the shepherd and the business of sheepkeeping. Jesus drew upon that knowledge to depict important truths regarding Himself, His people and the relationship between them.

There are two major presentations in the text that use the same word picture. One emphasis is on Jesus as the door of the sheepfold, and the other on Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Sheepfold

Verses one through six is the scene of a sheepfold where sheep are kept overnight. It is like a corral. The porter is left in charge until the next day, and opens the door for the sheep in the evening and morning. Each shepherd knew His own sheep and the sheep recognized the voice of its shepherd and would follow when called.

Verses seven through nine present Jesus as the door of the sheepfold. Keep in mind the sheepfold was the place of safety, comfort and protection and served to shield the sheep from the elements and wild beasts as well as preventing the sheep from being scattered in the darkness of night. Entrance into the fold was through the door.

God has provided a sheepfold which is His church. Here is the place of salvation and protection from the ravages of sin and Satan. Those who are saved are added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). Christ is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23). The only way one may enter into this haven of salvation

is through Jesus Christ.

Just as the sheep must have proper nourishment, food and water, they must go through the door to reach it. This is not picturing an entrance and exit of the church, but simply shows that as sheep must use the door to gain their needs, so must mankind go through Christ to obtain the spiritual nourishment necessary for them. He is the only way (John 14:6) and there is no other (Acts 4:12). All spiritual blessings are in Him (Ephesians 1:3).

One cannot climb into the spiritual sheepfold any other way than the door God provides. One cannot go in and out for spiritual nourishment except through Christ. He is the door, the only door. False teachers, pictured as thieves and robbers, cannot provide.

Jesus as Shepherd

But Jesus as the door is not the major portion of the text, but rather the second application of the shepherd scene is the more important. Here Jesus draws a contrast between Himself and false shepherds, showing what He does for His people.

A false shepherd, or a hireling, is not primarily concerned for the welfare of the sheep. His chief concern is himself, his gain and his personal welfare. When danger threatens he flees, shirking his responsibilities and leaving the sheep exposed as prey to whatever danger that comes against them. Is this not what false teachers do? Do they not pervert truth and go the way of men, leading them into spiritual poverty and starvation, condemnation and destruction? Many in Jesus' day were false teachers as false teachers continue to exist now. They have little concern for the flock but great interest in their own gain, fame and glory. They preach and teach what is necessary to bring them such things, being more like financial profiteers than keepers of the flock.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who seeks the good of His sheep. *"I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly."* (Verse 10). Because of Jesus mankind can have a full, abundant, sufficient and successful life both here and in the hereafter. He is the kind of shepherd that would sacrifice himself for the benefit of those in his care. In fact, Jesus did exactly that. *"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep."* (Verse 11).

David was that kind of shepherd when he placed his very life

in danger by wrestling the lion and bear to save his sheep (First Samuel 17:34-37).

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." (Verses 17,18). Jesus had reference to His forthcoming death, burial and resurrection. All of that demonstrates His concern and sacrifice for His sheep.

Evil Shepherds

Ezekiel 34:1-10 teaches us God's distaste for wicked shepherds. *"And the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God to the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, ye clothe you with wool, ye kill them that are fed; but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd; and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill; yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, saith the Lord God, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock, therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at thier hand, and cause them to escape from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves anymore; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them."*

A good shepherd *"goeth before his sheep,"* leading rather than driving. He protects, seeks the lost, takes his flock to the still waters and green pastures.

Jesus struck a stinging blow at the pride and self-righteousness of the Jews when He taught that Gentiles as well as Jews would be included in His flock. *"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."* (Verse 16). Just as there is one shepherd, there is also one fold, one church.

The Shepherd Psalm

One of the favorite passages of Scripture for every Bible student is that great shepherd psalm, Psalm twenty-three. As one reads it he is impressed with the emphasis of the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. It is a passage that fills the heart with hope, comfort, and serves as a reminder of the bountiful blessings for man provided by the Shepherd. Without the Lord we would be scattered sheep, lost and in danger. Man in sin is pictured by Isaiah 53:6, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every man to his own way."* What a magnificient and inexpressible privilege to have the Son of God to be our Shepherd over the soul.

The Sheep

But there is another consideration we must see. We have noted Jesus as the door and the shepherd. But the implication is that we are the sheep. To admit we are sheep is to admit we need guidance, and are helpless alone. It is to admit that we can and do stray, get lost and wander. Though our Shepherd is good, are we to conclude the sheep are without any responsibility? Did not the sheep hear the shepherd's voice, being familiar with it? Are we not to familiarize ourselves with His voice through His Word? Did not the sheep follow where led? Are we not to follow where Jesus leads us? Can we rebel and refuse Him and still expect His care to provide anyway? While we observe the greatness of the Shepherd, do not overlook the duty that belongs to the sheep.

Peter pictures Christ as our shepherd. First Peter 2:25, *"For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now turned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."* There awaits the gift for those who follow the Shepherd. First Peter 5:4, *"And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."* While this is said specifically of faithful elders, the principle is true for every sheep. As one has said of

the loving care given the flock by the Good Shepherd while we live on earth, and remembering the ultimate glory, "All this and heaven, too." This is the blessing of having Jesus Christ as our Shepherd.

If one is not a Christian he is not in the Lord's sheepfold of salvation. None of the benefits belong to him. Even as the Lord longs for you to be counted among His sheep, this is a matter that each individual must decide for himself or herself. He is willing to be your Shepherd through life and into eternal glory, but you must choose to be His sheep. Even now, through the gospel, He calls.

† † † † †

Who Is A Liar?

Our lesson is from the inspired writing of the apostle John. John is often considered in terms of a man of great love, kindness, tenderness and closeness with God. He is generally considered to have been the disciple to whom Christ gave the charge and care of His mother Mary when He was dying on the cross. The gospel according to John is one that emphasizes the love of God for man, the love of Christ for the lost, and the love that man is to have toward God and his fellowman. Therefore, John is often called "the apostle of love."

But there was a side of John, though not contradictory to that of love, that is coarser, more blunt, one that hardly sustained his reputation of the popular notion that gentleness was his only trait. Mark 3:17 identifies John as the brother of James and a son of thunder, implying exceptional zeal and aggressiveness, with a forcefulness that at times was almost ferocious.

One of those times is recorded in Luke 9:54 when Jesus was coming into a Samaritan city but was not well received. John suggested a stern and rather hrash action against them and thought the Lord would *"command fire to come down and consume them."*

Another time when John was more aroused was when he and his brother James caused dissension among the apostles by

asking for places of special honor and privilege in the Lord's kingdom.

Five Times From John

What John wrote was not his own will but the will of Deity who guided him. His words of teaching were inspired and infallible. This same John wrote letters to Christians that we call First, Second and Third John. In First John, five times he identified those he called liars. He asks the question, *"Who is a liar?"* The word *"liar"* is a very strong term and many are provoked to great anger when it is applied to them. Many are even slow to apply the term to those who are obviously just exactly what the word suggests. The Scriptures have strong and condemning words toward those who are flippant and irresponsible concerning telling the truth.

Most people have some respect for what they think is the truth. They do not always know the truth, but they respect what they think truth is. Sometimes you encounter those who are liars, who know they are liars, God knows they are liars, and they have little respect for the truth even when they know better. But they are generally the exception.

In our judicial courts witnesses must assure the court that their testimony is the truth. Failure to tell the truth is perjury and those who are guilty of perjury are subject to punishment. A lie is the opposite of the truth. Whatever is not truth may properly be called a lie, although many times people do not intend to lie. Lying is one of the most reprehensible and despicable deeds of the human family. But it is frequently done.

The reason we need to consider John's definitions of liars is because he mentions some that people do not generally place in that category. We usually think of those who deliberately deceive, mislead, misrepresent and falsify to be the liars. They are. But John assigns the term to some who simply do not hold to what God has declared to be true. The reason for the lesson should be easily grasped, seeing that John wrote in Revelation 21:8 that among those that shall be in the lake of fire and brimstone are *"all liars."*

Walks in Darkness

First John 1:6, *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."* Those who

claim fellowship with God but at the same time live lives of sinfulness are liars, according to the Holy Spirit. Darkness and light cannot exist at the same time in the same place. Light is often used in the Scriptures to denote purity and goodness. Darkness is to depict wickedness. Just as darkness and light cannot exist together, neither can sin and righteousness remain side by side in the same heart and life harmoniously.

Darkness is used to define the kingdom of Satan from which the saved have been delivered (Colossians 1:13). It depicts evil, corruption, impurity and that which is opposite to God and His Son, Jesus Christ and that which He taught.

To walk in the light means to live in harmony with the Lord's law. Such harmony brings us into fellowship with God and is necessary to maintain that fellowship. Therefore, we are deprived of fellowship with Deity if we choose to go the dark and dreary way of sin, but inconsistently and erroneously still claim fellowship with Him. This should provoke us all to examine the path of life we trod.

Admits No Sin

In the same chapter, verses eight and ten, John said the one who says he has no sin is a liar. He calls them liars in two ways. (1) Truth is not in them. (2) Their claim makes God a liar, something which it is impossible for God to be and do (Hebrews 6:18). Jesus did not sin, *"neither was there guile found in his mouth."* (First Peter 2:22). Since Deity cannot, has not, and will not lie, and Deity says that we all do sin, those who take issue with that are the liars.

It is characteristic for people to attempt to escape their guilt and responsibility for sin. Sin has been called just a weakness, a disease (such as drunkeness), of some other softening of the matter of sin. But we need to hear God and learn the weight and wages of sin, its destructiveness and havoc. We need to develop a genuine reproach and hatred toward sin. To deny that we do sin is to bring condemnation upon ourselves. Please note these words were written to those who were already Christians. So away with that false doctrinal notion that Christians do not sin and cannot sin so as to be lost. Christians make a serious mistake not to pray to God for forgiveness, being of penitent heart. There is a different relationship with God between the Christian who sins and the sinner who has never come to Christ. Christians have the privilege of prayer and can

ask to be forgiven. To deny sinfulness is to make ourselves liars.

Disobedient

First John 2:4, *"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."* Refusal to obey God makes one a liar. Notice verse three. We can know that we know God if we obey God. It is futile to claim this saving knowledge and at the same time defy His commandments.

To know God means more than simply having knowledge that God exists. Many who are lost know God exists. They even admit His existence. The knowledge of which John wrote refers to the close relationship between the Christian and God, like that of parent and child, Father and son or daughter. The Christian knows God's characteristics, likes, dislikes, His will, His expectations, and enjoys His presence. To have enjoyed good fortune does not necessarily mean that one is acceptable to God. Sometimes people are heard to say that the Lord has been with them over the years and that the Lord has walked hand in hand with them through life and blessed them as a father would a child. Yet, it cannot be so because they have not ever obeyed and entered into that saving knowledge and relationship with God that can be ours only upon obedience to the gospel. If we really know God we will obey His Word.

Denier

Also in First John 2:22 we read, *"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son."* This makes many people of this mixed up world, even many religious people, liars and subject to the lake of fire and brimstone.

Some consider Jesus as nothing more than an influential first centurty Jewish teacher, a good man, and other respectable things, but not the Son of God and the Christ. To refuse to confess Jesus as the Christ the Son of God is to make oneself a liar, John teaches. This would include all infidels, atheists, agnostics, those who serve other gods in other religions, such as Jews, Mohammedans and others who may even claim to serve Jehovah but deny Jesus as the Christ. The failure to confess Christ is tantamount to denying Him (Luke 12:8,9). We are either for Him or against Him (Matthew 6:24; 12:30). It is

equally impossible to say you believe God but deny that Jesus is His Son. Jesus repeatedly affirms He is the Son of God. He either told the truth or He is a liar, an unthinkable conclusion. Verse twenty-three makes this point with force. *"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father, but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.'*

Lacks Love

Finally, First John 4:20 identifies a liar this way. *"If a man say I love God, and hateh his brother, he is a liart; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"* Love brings forth actions and expressions of kindness, consideration, respect and helpfulness. Hateful words, spiteful behavior, rudeness, deliberate injury shows a lack of love.

John reasons so sensibly. It is natural to love what is nearby and can be seen. But if we cannot love our brother who is nearby and very visible, how can we say we love God whom we cannot see? The "*son of thunder*" hurls a thunderbolt against those who withhold love of others. Those that love God will love those whom God loves.

Jesus taught that loving each other is a way that we show we are His disciples. John 13:35, *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."*

In these five ways John identifies a liar. If we be indicted by these words, let us stedfastly examine our hearts, remove the lies, replace them with truth, escape the lake of fire and brimstone, be the people of truth that God expects, not only telling the truth, but conforming to the will of God in our lives. Let us never be justifiably defined as a liar as John has defined them. Truth makes us free (John 8:32).

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Holiness

Holiness is the quality of being the set apart and peculiar people of God because of having been washed pure of sin by the blood of Christ. It is the condition of being sanctified, separated from sin and united with the Lord. jwb

The Faith Once Delivered

Jude 1-4, *"Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called; mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."*

There has always been a need to emphasize the benefits gained in a firm religious faith. Faith has been an asset to youth, people in old age, marriage, home, society generally. The loss of faith has been a major factor in moral decline, rebellion, frustration and confusion. But not just any faith is beneficial. The faith of Christ is that faith that benefits.

It is a low and demeaning estimate of His faith or religion to have a flippant attitude toward truth and speak with shallow mind as many do as if all faiths are of equal benefit, or one faith as being just as good as another, or that just any sincere faith can lead one to heaven, or that there is no infallible standard of faith by which to ascertain right and wrong. There are absolutes in religion just as in other realms. The idea of letting the conscience be the guide and that honesty and sincerity are sufficient is an affront to the faith of which Jesus Christ is the author and founder.

It cannot be amiss to make inquiry into Jude's words about the faith once delivered to the saints. Jude, like Paul, urges adherence to ascertained truth. Paul said, Second Timothy 1:13,14, *"Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and in love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us."* Titus 2:1,8, *"But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine... sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."* There is that which is sound and that which is unsound. There is right and there is wrong.

Our text makes four assertions and imposes one obligation.

We shall discuss these in order, noticing the basic religious facts revealed in this passage.

The Faith

The first assertion is the existence of an organized and formal body of truth called *"the faith."* The word *"faith"* is used differently in Scripture. Sometimes it means to believe or trust, simply a mental state that leads to action (John 8:24). In Romans 14:23 it refers to one's personal convictions, what one believes to be true without regard whether that conviction is true before God or not. It refers to what one holds in his conscience. Also, faith is used to refer to the thing believed, an objective faith, the truth accepted, which embraces the whole Christian system (Galatians 1:23; Second Timothy 4:17). This last meaning is what Jude means when he writes of *"the faith."* That there is such a body of truth is also affirmed in Ephesians 4:4 where the inspired pen wrote, *"There is one faith."*

Once Delivered

The second assertion is that *"the faith"* was *"once delivered."* Emphasis now is on the word *"once."* The faith once delivered means that the revealed faith lacks nothing and has been fully revealed. It was completed when the last inspired writer put aside his pen. *"Once"* is translated from the Greek word "hapax" which means that which is of perpetual validity, once for all, lacking nothing, never in need of repetition in the sense of alteration or changes later. *"The faith"* never needs revising or up-dating. It does not mean that we are not to repeat the gospel story. But it means the revelation from God to man is not continuous, but is an accomplished fact. *"Once"* is the same word used when Paul was stoned *"once."* Hebrews 9:27 speaks of man being *"appointed once to die."* Christ was *"offered for sins once."* There is no inadequacy in the revelation, nor shall there be need for additions, post scripts, prefixes or suffixes.

This assertion is very vital to us inasmuch as many religious cults and doctrines are built on the claim of continuous and/or latter-day revelations. Mormonism, for instance, is founded on the claimed latter-day revelation God is alledged to have given Joseph Smith. Seventh-Day Adventism is founded on prophecies and writing of William Miller and Ellen G. White who claimed latter-day revelation. Christian Science is the same but

based on the claims of Mary Baker Eddy. Romanism is based on progressive and ever-changing revelation from God as claimed by the popes and councils. Pentecostals claim God still speaks directly to them today.

If God's revelation is ever-changing, being altered, could one ever really know what the truth of God is from one moment to the next? Roman Bishop Purcell said in 1837, "We never call the pope in any sense God." But look how that has changed. They call him Holy Father. The doctrine of his supposed infallibility was not even adopted until 1870, and made retroactive. That Mary bodily entered heaven is another Catholic latter-day revelation, that even contradicts Scripture (First Corinthians 15:50). The same is true of all the various claims of God speaking directly to the religious leaders of the various sects. Protestantism fares no better because all of their creeds are unauthorized by Scripture. They all have come since Jude wrote that the faith was once delivered. Read such passages as First Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:11-13; Galatians 1:6-9; Acts 20:26; Second Peter 1:3; Second Timothy 3:16,17, and know that God has fully revealed His will to mankind and that will is now embodied in the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Scriptures, the Bible.

To Men

The third assertion of Jude is the authority of *"the faith."* *"The faith"* was delivered. It was delivered to men, not invented by men. It came as promised. John 14:25,26, *"These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."* John 16:12,13, *"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come."* Galatians 1:11,12, *"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

"The faith" was delivered unto the apostles. First Corinthians shows that the apostles were men as other men outside their apostolic office. *"But I keep under my body, and bring it unto*

subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be as castaway." But they were the ones through whom *"the faith"* was announced. First Corinthians 2:12,13, *"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."* Second Peter 1:20,21, *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*

Three terms in the New Testament are used with reference to the apostles and how Deity used them to announce God's truth. Those terms are *"ambassadors,"* (Second Corinthians 5:20); keepers of the divine embassy with delegated authority; *"earthen vessels,"* (Second Corinthians 4:7), being human beings who were inspired of Deity; and *"witnesses"* (Acts 1:8), a term denoting the validity of the testimony of the apostles. They were the first to preach the unsearchable riches of salvation. Their message was of God, not of man.

Saitns

The fourth assertion is that *"the faith"* was once delivered to the saints. This does not have reference to the deliverance of truth through the apostles, already discussed, but *"saints"* refers to those to whom the truth was directed for their custody, care, proclamation and protection. Neither the apostles nor the other saints were granted power to change, alter, diminish or expand the truth. But they were to be the trustees of it and see that the world had opportunity to hear it. First TImothy 3:15, *"...the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."* We cannot expect the children of the devil to preach the Word. This is the work of God's people.

A Duty

Before making these four assertions Jude imposed a solemn duty. *"Earnestly contend for the faith."* This implies engaging in warfare, a contest, in competition with Satan for the souls of mankind. It notes a struggle, defense and promotion of *"the faith"* with all of our heart. Colossians 3:23, *"And whatsoever*

ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord." Romans 12:11, *"...fervent in spirit..."* Galatians 4:18, *"But it is good to be zealousy affected always in a good thing..."* This conveys the idea regarding our approach to contending for the faith. Jeremiah said, *"Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully,"* meaning negligently. (Jeremiah 48:10).

There are several reasons why we must contend for the faith. (1) An inspired writer has commanded it. (2) *"The faith"* is the gospel of Christ, God's power unto salvation. (3) Only by following *"the faith"* can one be lifted to salvation. (4) All spiritual blessings are ours through obedience to *"the faith"* that brings us into Christ. (5) There will always be those who will contend against it.

Second Timothy 4:3,4 reveals how some will not endure sound doctrine. Second Peter 2:1,2 warns of false teachers, as does John 4:1. Contending for the faith will bring conflict, sacrifice, persecution and rejection. But we must *"stand fast in the faith."*

Error takes many forms and is very deceitful. Teachers of error will even appear as angels of light. We must ever be watchful, hold the line that God has drawn, compromise no revealed truth, and be stalwart soldiers of the cross. We must determine that false ways and those who advocate them, in or out of the church, shall not pass.

Though this passge is relatively brief, it is a soul-stirring portion of truth. We who profess to be disciples of Christ have the duty and opportunity to heed these words. May we not fail our Lord in earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints!

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In an article, January 1945, about J. W. McGarvey and the difference between his inconsistencies and the consistency of David Lipscomb regarding instruments of music in worship and the missionary societies, J. M. McCaleb wrote of brother McGarvey, "McGarvey, though opposing the use of instruments in worship, would cooperate with those who used them. He held the undesirable position of trying to run with the hare and at the same time keep with the hounds."

Why Marriages Succeed

Our nation has a very unenviable divorce rate, presently about one out of two marriages ending in divorce. This is cause for alarm not only among those who respect the will of God, but also for economists, historians, psychologists, law enforcement agencies, educators and others who are concerned for the welfare of the future of our nation. The disintergration of the home cannot be denied. Furthermore, there are rabid and active opponents working for the total destruction of the home as we know it and have learned from the Bible.

There are many reasons why marriages fail and these deserve study. But we can learn all the reasons for failure and still not know why marriages succeed. In an all-inclusive statement we can say that marriages succeed because a man and a woman who love one another and decide to live together in marriage listen to God.

There is much in Scripture pertaining to marriage, the home, husbands, wives, and the rearing of children. Those who succeed obey the voice of God. Let us consider a few areas where they listen to Him.

Purposes

Husbands and wives listen to God when He tells them that marriage is a divine institution with spiritual purposes (Genesis 2:18,22). Marriage came from the mind of God, as did the church. It is more than a social, legal and economic contract. Instituted by God, it is for the good of mankind (Genesis 2:18).

One of the primary purposes of marriage is to provide companionship, helpfulness, procreation. It is also to avoid fornication. Marriage is a relationship that is designed in which one helps the other to please God in life and to go to heaven when this life is over. In marriage we are not dealing with just men, women, society, civil laws, etc. We are concerned with the souls of people. Any disposition of marriage must include God who originated it. Marriages are more likely to succeed when the spiritual side of it is respected.

Adults

Marriages succeed when the husband and wife listen to God when He tells them that marriage is for adults. The divorce rate among those who marry in their teen years is four times higher than the deplorable national average. God said, *"Let a MAN* (emphasis, JWB) *leave his father and mother..."* Marriage is not child's play. It requires more than physical maturity. There must be a reasonable degree of emotional, mental and spiritual maturity to handle the duties and privileges of marriage.

We sometimes hear people blame marriage failure on incompatibility. More often than not it is irresponsibility due to immaturity. It is a case where "children" have attempted to assume an adult role. In marrying too early in life we also see the danger of brief courtships that do not allow for the discovery of the levels of maturity. One mate may say to another, "You do not seem to be the same person I married." If they married very young, you can be sure after a very few years they will not be the same people because they married while they were still growing up. They should wait until they are grown.

Oneness

Successful marriages are enjoyed when husband and wife listen to God as He teaches the oneness of marriage. *"The two become one flesh."* There is to be the leaving of parents and the cleaving to each other. There is to be unity and oneness in handling the finances of the home. There is to be unity in the matter of faith. There is to be loyalty to one's mate above everyone else except Deity. No in-law or outlaw can drive a wedge between a husband and wife who are loyal first to each other. The reason others can sometimes contribute to splitting a marriage is because the married ones are not united as they should be. In marriage it is no longer me-my-mine, you-yours. Everything becomes we-us-ours. Unless we listen to God in this respect we invite trouble. Even blessed children should not be allowed to divide husband and wife.

Love

Marriages succeed when husbands and wives listen to God when He teaches there must be love in the home. Love is seeking the other's highest good. Wives are to love their husbands and husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Too often people think of love only in terms of

sexual relationships. This is involved in marriage, and is an expression of love that God reserves for the husband and wife. Sexual relationships outside of the bond of marriage are sin, whether it be before marriage or after marriage. How can there be the trust, mutual respect, esteem and admiration one for the other when such unfaithfulness to the vows of marriage are in evidence? How can there be the holding up of each other's hands as is necessary in marriage when there is betrayal?

Two major complaints made by wives and husbands are: (1) she nags and belittles; (2) and he constantly critizes and finds fault. Such is simply a manifestation of the lack of love. Love will unselfishly seek what God has decreed to be for the good of the other. Certainly we are not to be totally blind to the faults of the other. But the motive behind noting the faults is all important. Is it to hurt, ridicule, degrade and harm, or is it to help the other improve and overcome fault? We need the insight of each other, but we do not need the barrage of criticism designed to humiliate and destroy. Furthermore, marriage partners need to be considerate in choosing the time to mention faults and shortcomings. Some have done it so openly and publicly to the hurt and embarrassment of the other that it scars. This is not a manifestation of genuine love.

Sexual Relationship

Marriages succeed when people listen to God regarding the sexual association in marriage. First Peter 3:7 and First Corinthians 7:2-5 gives us the divine mind in this realm. One purpose of marriage is to provide for the satisfaction of the sexual appetite. In marriage it is a relationship that is sacred, pure, holy and undefiled. Outside of marriage it is a degenerate behavior that reduces people to the level of animals. There is no way for even this sophisticated and permissive society of today to so glamorize sin as to make it acceptable before God and before those who love God.

Though there be many similarities between husband and wife, there are also tremendous differences and these differences must be respected. There are differences other than physical differences. God made us so as to complement each other. The bodily association must include the greatest respect for the body of each other. The body is the temple of God (First Corinthians 3:16). Your body belongs to your mate and vice versa. Yet, each body deserves the utmost care and kindness. The sexual

relation in marriage is not merely an animalistic craving being satisfied. It is, as already stated, an added language of love.

Many enter marriage without understanding the functions of the body. This can be learned without carnality and sinfulness. The duty of parents is to see to it that their children know the sacredness of the body, its function, and how God intends its use. Young people ought not have to learn such things from the alley, restroom walls, filthy language of peers or through fornication. Explicit and reverent material is available to assist parents in the discharge of this duty.

Unselfishness

Marriages will more likely succeed when partners listen to God and apply the Christian virtue of selflessness. Selfishness is often at the tap root of marital problems. When we see husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives loving their husbands in return as the church is to love Christ, there is the basis for a happy home. But the disposition to have "my way" and seek only what "I want" will soon destroy a marriage.

God teaches that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). This does not contend that the husband is superior and the wife inferior. Each is superior in his or her role and realm. Each becomes misplaced outside that realm. There is no room for a tyrannical husband or a domineering wife. In both instances that only brews marital strife. Selfishness makes marriages unhappy. Selflessness contributes to a successful marriage.

Duration

Marriages are more likely to succeed when both listen to God when He teaches that marriage is for life, "till death do us part," in sickness and health, prosperity and adversity, for better or worse, good times, bad times, all times. Marriage partners must enter marriage with that understanding and intent. Anything less is to distort what God has implanted. It has been that way since the beginning, Jesus said in Matthew 19:8. This idea of trial marriages is an abomination to every nation.

In conclusion, as goes the home, so goes the nation, society generally, even the church. The home is the basic unit of society. From the home comes the population of everything. The stream cannot rise above the fountain from which it flows.

Those in marriage and those contemplating marriage must learn these things and keep them in mind throughout marriage. Such doctrine from Deity is indispensable for a successful marriage. God's richest blessings will abide with those who will listen to Him and heed His Word.

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Why Not Submit To The Inevitable?

Isaiah 1:18, *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord..."* Our lesson makes an appeal for us to be sensible, reasonable and act accordingly.

To speak of something being inevitable is to speak of those things that cannot under any circumstances or conditions be avoided. There are a number of inevitables, such as, if we continue to live, we shall grow older. Leaving this life is something we cannot escape. The Bible further reveals that there awaits everyone the resurrection, judgment and eternity. While there are many matters of life that are not "set in concrete," the matters mentioned above are inevitable. Most people resign themselves to the inevitable even though they do not always do so with grace and composure.

Most reasonable people, and we like to think of ourselves in that light, would rather gain or benefit from something than suffer loss, especially if they have to do that something whether they want to or not. Let me illustrate. When I was young I received a small allowance of money each week provided I did the various chores that were assigned me. But whether I did those chores willingly or unwillingly, I had to do the chores. Only if I did them willingly did I receive the allowance. I could do them and be blessed, or do them and not be blessed, possibly even be punished. Either way I had to do them. Only if I did them as prescribed would I benefit. Which way do you think was the way that was reasonable for me?

God has revealed the way He has provided for us to be saved. He saw man in sin and unable to save himself, but He loved man and sent His Son to die on the cross to save man. Man, in order to receive the benefit of what God did must believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins. Some obey the will of God while others do not.

Of course, God does not force salvation upon anyone. But if we are to be saved we must obey the plan God has devised, designed and delivered. But whether we do what we are supposed to do with a willing heart and receive His blessing of forgiveness of sins, or refuse to do what He says, we shall do these things He commands eventually. If we do not do them in this life, willingly, we shall not receive the reward. But the point we must insist is that we shall eventually do them anyway. Is it not more reasonable to do them at the time and in the way that will be of benefit to the soul?

Not Forced to Believe, Yet...

You may think nobody will ever force you to believe, repent, confess Christ, or be baptized, but that is not true. If you do not do these things because you wish to serve God, you will do them some time in your future by force, but without receiving any benefit.

Jesus said, *"I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). Hebrews 11:6, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him..."* John 3:16 also teaches the absolute necessity of faith to receive everlasting life. One may refuse to believe in this life, but, John 5:28,29, *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the grave shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* Romans 14:10, *"....for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."* Jesus will be our Judge (Second Timothy 4:10). We shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48) and He alone has the Word of life (John 6:33). All will be believers that day.

The day of judgment may be somewhat of a surprise for many. Can you imagine the surprise for the brothers of Joseph when they learned that the very one they had offended and rejected was second to Pharoah and in his hands was the

decision of their very life? If someone had told them such would happen before they left for Egypt they would never have believed it. But when they saw him, surprised or not, there was Joseph over them. Just so, you may not believe in Christ as the Son of God, Savior of mankind, and Judge of all, but on that day of judgment there will not be anyone to question it.

Thomas doubted for a while that Jesus had been raised from the dead. But when Jesus spoke to him and showed him the evidence, he believed. John 20:27,28, *"Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."*

But if we wait until the judgment to believe, it will be too late for our salvation. Nothing changes our destiny once this life is finished. Once the doors are shut they remain so. Opportunities gone will be recalled but only in memory. Cannot you see how reasonable it is to believe now while it is to your advantage?

Not Forced to Repent, Yet...

Again our Lord said, Luke 13:3, *"I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* Paul said, Acts 17:30, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent."*

Repentance involves sorrow for sin, turning from sin, making up one's mind to leave sinful ways. It is a prerequisite to forgiveness of sins; something which involves all mankind (Romans 3:23).

There is a certain pleasure derived from sin (Hebrews 11:25) and this is sin's appeal. But its rewards are temporary and ultimately its wages is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Christ asked men to cease sinning. *"Go and sin no more."* (John 8:11). Some give heed to His voice while others continue the path to death.

But the time is coming when everyone shall cease to sin. They will stop it. When a man dies he has done his last evil deed, spoken his last profane word, thought his last wicked thought. From that time forward he will abide by the Lord's will. It is the Lord's will that the rebellious shall receive just recompense for their deeds. Man has the power of choice while he lives, but

after physical death overtakes him, no longer is choice his to execute.

Since it is inevitable that we shall cease to sin, why not stop sinning now while it can do us some spiritual good? You cannot escape repenting and turning from sin any more than you can escape believing that Jesus is who He claimed to be.

Not Forced to Confess, Yet...

Again, Jesus taught the necessity to confess Him (Luke 12:8,9). Similarly, Romans 10:9,10, *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* One cannot be saved without confessing Christ. Some respond in obedience while others choose to defy and deny Him.

But what saith the Scriptures? Philippians 2:9-11, *"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* Romans 14:11, *"For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."* This includes those who confess Him in this life as well as those who refuse to confess Him now.

The point we make is that we all shall confess Him. It is inevitable. Why not make that "good confession" while there are blessings to be received for doing so rather than waiting until forced to confess Him but without benefit?

Not Forced to be Baptized, Yet...

Jesus taught baptism to be saved (Mark 16:16). So did Peter (Acts 2:38). Saul was taught the same thing (Acts 22:16). Paul taught it as the avenue *"into Christ"* (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). Is it not strange how some people rebel against baptism? But it is folly to anyone to think they shall escape being baptized.

The baptism now required is water baptism (Acts 8:36; 10:47). This is an immersion in water for the remission of sins. Here is where one reaches the saving blood of Jesus Christ as we are baptized into the benefits of His death, and His blood

was shed in His death (John 19:34; Romans 6:3,4).

But should anyone refuse to obey this water baptism, there awaits another baptism, the baptism of fire (Mark 3:11), which John said Jesus would adminster, and this in the context of separating the wheat from the chaff (Luke 3:16,17). A similar thought is presented in Revelation where we are told of the wicked being cast into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8).

Baptism in water while we live helps us. Baptism in fire is reserved for the disobedient. But baptism is inevitable. It is simply a matter of our choice which baptism it will be for us.

We plead with each one to simply use good judgment and show yourself reasonable. We are commanded to believe, repent, confess and be baptized. We shall do each of these things sometime under some circumstance. Will it be while there remains opportunity for salvation, or shall we wait until these things are forced upon is without benefit?

† † † † †

An Awakening Is Needed

There are many who are very busy promoting and sponsoring various "youth meetings" among the young of the churches of Christ. Having a meeting of young people may have certain potentially good effects, but too often it is nothing more than an additional effort by those who are no longer in love with the truth to get the young away from the influence of parent, home and local church in order to indoctrinate them in the ecumenical and denominational compromises that the promoters and their invited teachers have adopted.

A lot is made about having action among the youth and the appeal is made that these episodes are "a lot of fun." More and more there are those among the "youth leaders" who equate "spiritual" with "fun." It sounds like Oral Roberts shouting, "Something good is

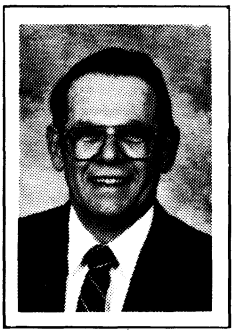
going to happen to you." The impressionable young are often captivated by the enthusiasm and "go-get-em" atmosphere and are subjected to subversion of the truth more than they realize.

We have to realize that there are sponsoring churches whose leaders either do not know, do not want to know, do not care, or will not pay any attention to what is being preached by many today. They are either being led by their "promoter youth minister- pastor- preacher" or they have decided it is better to "go along" with error than to stand for the truth. You cannot warn some brethren of digression. Possibly they do not know enough about the truth to recognize heresy when it is presented. Whatever be their problem, they would like to indoctrinate our young with their doctrines and undermine the faith that sound parents, elders and preachers are trying to instill in their hearts.

We send a word of warning to brethren everywhere about these "great youth meetings." Know the speakers who are being set before the young before you send your young to them. When unsound men are on the program, why on earth encourage it anyway? The seeds that are being sown in these meetings will destroy the purity of the faith in the oncoming generation if allowed to continue.

What is being put forth as an interest in the young is the strenuous effort to cause the church to digress into apostate paths to the liking of the popular, compromising, unsound, denominational, "love-me-and-let-me-do-my-own-thing" philosophy. There are several of area wide meetings conducted over the end of the year, around holiday seasons, and other times. From what we have seen of the programs year after year, we find no reason for faithful brethren to give any endorsement to them whatsoever. JWB

A Clean Slate



JAMES W. BOYD

Years ago children in school wrote their work on slates provided them. After a while the slate was full, possibly with various errors on it. But all that was easily remedied by wiping the slate clean and beginning with a clean slate.

When one sins he marks on his slate of life, making a blemish and stain. He cannot stand approved in that condition. God saw that and provided His only begotten Son to die on the cruel cross of Calvary so that people might come to Jesus Christ and by the blood of Christ have his slate wiped clean, so to speak. He could begin new and fresh as if he had never made his past mistakes.

What a marvelous and blessed thing God did for us! How could we ever repay Him for such a benefit? The fact is, we cannot repay Him. Nothing we can do would ever repay Him. But we can and do show our love and appreciation by coming to Christ, receiving the new start, and doing all that we can to keep from marking our slate with transgressions.

How about your slate? Have you come to the Lord to have it wiped clean? You cannot clean it by yourself. He waits to help you.

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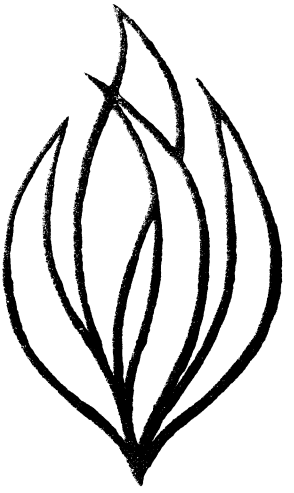

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THIS ISSUE

Ten Commandments

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VOLUME IX James W. Boyd **NUMBER 4**

First Commandment

The words of the Ten Commandments have thundered across the centuries. They are based upon eternal and unchanging principles. They deal with fundamental matters of human behavior, forming a guide for the course of a normal and happy life. They have to do with the relationship between God and man and man with his fellowman. In an age where some contend everything is relative, the Ten Commandments present a certain, positive and negative, objective and absolute standard of righteousness. They are very broad in scope and the principles and specifics expressed are expressed in few words.

The heritage of the English speaking world reflects a respect for the Ten Commandments. The Decalogue serves as the basis for the legal system of modern law and order in the Western world. The preambles of forty-seven states acknowledge God's law as the basis for constitutional government. Our founding fathers of these United States recognized the authority and validity of the principles of the Ten Commandments. In many laws there is the recognition of the intent of them. But to honor God's law in the legislative halls with pious resolutions and constitutions is not enough. People must receive these truths into their hearts and walk accordingly.

Precisely when the Ten Commandments were given we are not informed except in relation to events recorded in Scripture. While archeological discoveries date them about fifteen centuries before Christ, the giving of them was at Sinai when God gave Israel His law by which that nation was to be governed until the coming of Christ, at which time they would no longer be the authority, giving way to the will of Christ. This event at Sinai was about fifteen centuries before Christ. Mount Sinai, in the range of the mountains of Horeb, is in the southern portion of the Arabian Peninsula between the two gulfs, Suez and Akaba.

Not From Men, But God

Some have contended that the Ten Commandments were derived from a code written in Babylon called the Hammurabic Code which predates the Ten Commandments. Even though there be some similarities between them, the differences are more apparent necessitating the conclusion they came from

separate, and possibly opposite sources. That Code could reflect principles given by God years earlier in the Patriarchal Age which had been passed down. This would explain similarities.

Originally, the Ten Commandments were given audibly to Israel and later, at God's command, written on tablets of stone and given to Moses. They were given as the first part of the law of God given to Israel exclusively after Israel had been led from bondage out of Egypt and were on their way to the promised land of Canaan. They were given for Israel and their descendants until the coming of Christ. However, although nailed to the cross as was all the Law of Moses, nine of the ten have been incorporated into the will of Christ, the single exception being the command regarding the Sabbath, but even in the nine there are expansions in the will of Christ over the Ten Commandments that go further and deal with both acts and attitudes of heart from which actions flow. But just here we make the point that the principles of all ten, rightly divided, are found in the will of Christ and this we shall sufficiently prove as we discuss each commandment.

No Other Gods

Exodus 20:3, *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."* Jesus was asked by the Pharisees which is the greatest commandment (Mark 12:29-31). They asked hoping He would be unable to answer or that His answer might in some way alienate Him from those who might differ. Jesus spoke positively and plainly by saying, *"The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There in none other commandment greater than these. "* Jesus was not giving the order of the Exodus record but the commandment upon which all others ultimately stand or fall. His answer reflects the acceptance of the first commandment in the order of Exodus that there must not be any other before God. This commandment is the foundation upon which the authority of everything else must rest. It is wrong to relegate God to a secondary place. Sin against our fellowman is wrong, not only because it is against our fellowman, but primarily it is against God. All moral duties of man are derived from God.

If a human being is nothing but a human animal and is only a more highly evolved form of beast, then why is it wrong to treat our fellowmen as we might some beast? Some do this very thing, unfortunately. Without this commandment there would be no basis upon which people should have respect for other people. There would be no authority to which people are amenable and accountable. Without this first commandment there would be no right or wrong, truth or error, or standard by which to determine anything to be authoritative.

Oneness of the Godhead

The unity of Deity is affirmed. *"The Lord our God is one Lord."* To argue for the oneness of Deity does not negate the existence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as Deity. The Hebrew words translated "one" indicates a compound unity. It is used to define the husband and wife relationship becoming "one flesh." Even so, they remain two distinct persons. Genesis 11:6, *"Behold the people is one..."* refers to the citizens of the nation. But they remained distinct individual persons. So it is with the oneness of God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit form the one Godhead, or Godhood, the one Deity, but they are three distinct divine persons. This oneness is affirmed in the commandment even at a time when polytheism was rampant in the world.

Israel was not the last people that needed this first commandment. Many pagan, heathen and otherwise false gods have been and are worshipped, possibly under different names than in yesteryear, but still in business nonetheless. William Jenning Bryan listed some modern gods as gold, fashion, fame, ease, intellect, travel, war, passion, change, drink, etc. But anything that absorbs the soul's attention away from God and claims uppermost affection in the heart is a god that displaces the true and living God and violates this law and commandment. This first commandment identifies the only rightful claimant to man's inner throne. There is none other than God. Nor can there be any substitute or co-regent with God.

There are other gods more noticeable in modern society. Some worship science. While we have good appreciation of science, the idea that science can and does displace God and that science can provide for all we need is folly. One has correctly said, "All our sciences are no more than tools to increase our power of getting whatever we already want. And

unless the supreme authority of God tells us how to use our new tools, we shall use them exactly as the savage uses the club, to beat out our neighbor's brains." All one must do to see the truth of this statement is to consider the world in which we live and note the abuses of the marvelous discoveries of science and how unprincipled men turn such things into threats against other people.

Some Other Gods

Society, before which many bow, is a fickle god. This god does business under the guise of popularity and public opinion. To give the will of society precedence over the God-given values of right and wrong is spiritual suicide. *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* (Proverbs 16:25).

Many will worship at the feet of the majority, pattern their very existence according to what they perceive everybody else is doing. They kneel before the pressures of the majority and the crowd, doing what they think they should to win the favor of people without proper regard to what God has taught us. Such a god as society is ever shifting itself, never stable, never reliable, never satisfying, always fleeting and so often dead wrong.

But who would deny there exists the god of self. There are infinite varieties of this god, all of which include selfishness, personal ambitions above and instead of righteousness, lusts, conceits, personal preferences serving as rule and standard. People can, and many are so inclined, to make themselves their own god. When this god takes the throne it demands the sacrifice of anything and everything, even the good, in order to be pleased. Living for oneself is the least pleasurable way of life. If one's neighbors do not get rid of him, he dies in boredom and lovelessness. Jesus commanded that this god come down from the throne. Matthew 16:24, 25, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."*

Closely akin to that last god is the god of humanity. It is a religion more commonly known today as Humanism. This religion recognizes nothing higher than man. There is no eternal authority to which one stands accountable. There is no god but only man. "Man is the most." This religion is only a modern echo of the devil's contention in Genesis 3:5, *"Ye shall be as*

gods, knowing good and evil."

Man is not God

If man is god, what a miserable god he is! He is doomed to strut and fret during his brief hour on earth, then only doomed to die as does the brute beast and rot in the grave. Some god! He is unable to sustain his life or even live in peace with himself or others. What kind of mind would encourage us all to adopt a faith that is so inadequate, hopeless and unpromising? What wretched god is the god of man!

Ezekiel 28:2, *"Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God, Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said I am as God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God."* These words of condemnation of the evil and wicked ruler are applicable to any and all who hold the view that each one is accountable only to himself or to nothing higher than mankind generally. We are not our own lawgivers and judges.

Is it possible to include a complete list of the false gods men have and still worship? Probably not! Some worship the state, their children, businesses, rivers, money, animals, statues, knowledge, mountains, cows, beetles, serpents, crocodiles, you name it, probably some have it as a god to worship. Some even carve from wood and stone their gods. Once a soul turns from the true and living God of Heaven, there is no limit to which he can go in his continual making of gods.

Wherever civilations have perished there has preceded that fall and destruction a turning from God. This has been noted in ancient history, in the darkness of the Gentile world, among the Jews, and is easily observed in the despair, havoc, ruin and turmoil in the world of our time.

The first commandment is still the first and shall ever be. May we worship the Lord God of Heaven. Nothing but sorrow can flow from any other course. Let us remove ourselves from all other gods, idolatry, that may tantalize us for they can only produce our spiritual disaster. "Our souls, O God, were made for thee, and never shall they rest until they rest in God."

† † † † †

Second Commandment

For many people the second of the Ten Commandments seems anticlimatic to the first. But it embraces thoughts more in detail regarding gods than did the first all-inclusive commandment. Exodus 20:4-6, *"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."* The unfortunate attitudes taken by many regarding the teaching of this commandment has torn asunder the faith of Christ and created a never ending number of "sacred" images as well as extreme positions that denounce all pictures of any kind of anything.

Just what does this negative commandment forbid? It obviously refers to worship that is related to images, religious images. The context of the passage, and Exodus 20:23, *"Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold,"* shows that it forbids images that are to represent and denote Deity. It does not forbid the making of all images. It prohibits bowing oneself before images, worshipping them or using them to worship God. It forbids the making of them for such purposes.

Men cannot know what the spiritual image of Deity looks like anyway and they are forbidden to create such things as if they represent Deity. Who can picture his own spiritual image, let alone that of God? Such is a futile attempt and the attempt is forbidden by this second commandment.

Even Pictures?

Some have taken this thought to the exclusion of all religious pictures, art, statues, etc. This does not forbid aesthetic arts, nor all religious pictures. It depends on the art and the picture and how it is used. Art that intends to depict Deity is forbidden. Nothing here outlaws pictures of mere human beings, or representations of a human being. What of the pictures some

draw of Jesus? While Jesus is Deity, He was also humanity, fleshly, while here on earth. Only that which represents His humanity is in keeping with this commandment. To attempt to draw the Deity of Jesus would be wrong. Christ plainly had a human and visible form. We know not what that was nor His personal appearance. We are confident that what we usually see, Jesus with long hair as if He was some early day "hippie," is out of keeping with the teaching of Paul regarding long hair on men (First Corinthians 11:14). Neither do we know the personal appearances of Mary, Paul, Peter or any other of the New Testament characters, or even the animals upon which the Lord rode into Jerusalem. That which is forbidden is the making of images that try to depict Deity that we simply cannot depict by physical art. We are forbidden to bow before such things or use such things to stand instead of the One before whom we do bow. Is not this the very fault Israel committed when Moses was on Mount Sinai and Aaron fashioned the golden calf? They knew the calf was not God, but they bowed themselves before that which represented God and that was sinful.

Use of Images

The advocates of images claim they do not worship the image, and only use the image to worship what the image represents. This is what Israel was doing. Paul called that very thing idolatry (First Corinthians 10:7). Not only is the worship forbidden, even bowing before the images, but presenting something as if it represented God for the purpose of worship is likewise forbidden.

John was even forbidden to bow before an angel (Revelation 22:8,9). Peter forbade Cornelius to bow before him and worship him (Acts 10:25, 26). In spite of such teaching and examples we find many still bowing before their images, worshipping men, kissing their rings and statues, etc. Rather than realizing God made man in His image some have attempted to make an image of God in keeping with their own desires.

There were many great thinkers, writers and religious leaders who seriously protested during the first four centuries against any image making. Imagery was one of the many ideas of paganism that gradually was adopted into what was called "Christianity." It was a part of the process of digression and apostasy from the truth. To avoid even the appearance or confusion with idolatry, no statues were placed in the buildings

used by early churches (Short History of the Catholic Church, page 65). The man the Catholic Encyclopedia calls the Father of Church History called the use of images a "heathen custom." Imagery is not authorized in the New Testament but is forbidden as idolatry. It is the result of apostate doctrines and a carry-over of pagan superstition.

The extent to which some advocates of images have gone is seen in the difference between the presentation of the Ten Commandments in the Catholic catechisms and what is read in Exodus twenty in the Catholic Bible. In the catechism commandment number two is left out and two commandments are made of the tenth commandment in order to make ten. But in the Catholic Bible the second commandment still stands. Show this to your Catholic friends and ask for an explanation. You may open the eyes of some to the fallacy of their faith.

Biblical Images

We must realize, however, that advocates of images will cite what they call Biblical examples of image making and their use. They remind you that Moses was told to make an altar and place above it cherabim. These were winged creatures in the likeness of man, bird and angel. The high priests bowed before them as God directed. But has God directed such bowing before images that have come from man's design and origin? God designed the cherubim. Only the priest bowed before them. This is not a parallel to what some advocate today.

They remind you that Moses made a brazen serpent at God's command. This was for the people to behold when bitten by fiery serpents to prevent death. But there is a tremendous difference. God commanded its construction as a means to show His power. The people did not worship before it. When they began to do that it was destroyed (Second Kings 18:4) when good king Hezekiah was producing a great religious revival and casuing the people to return to the Lord. It was broken into pieces because the people had begun to burn incense to it. Is there a difference in this from burning candles before the image of Mary, even an image never authorized of God for any purpose?

Often we hear that Christ never mentioned the Second Commandment. It is true that He did not mention it with the same words Moses used. But what His apostles taught was by His authority. Listen to Paul as He thundered against images in

Acts 17:29. Who can doubt the will of Christ in light of such teaching? In spite of this record, many will perpetuate the religious lie that there is a connection between an image and God that God approves. This form of idolatry is among the evils of the Gentiles in the pre-Christian age which Paul cited denoting their degeneracy (Romans 1:18-25).

Why Is It Wrong?

Just why is it wrong to bow before and worship an image? It is because God has forbidden it and this is reason enough. But even our own reasoning should show why. To have to have an image means that our spiritual senses are dull. No man living in daily communion with God needs a picture to help him worship God. If a man craves such help he lacks a spiritual consciousness. A truly spiritual worshipper needs an image to help him no more than a man with perfect vision needs glasses. Worship is not sensual, but from the heart. Conceptions of God cannot be realized by imagery unauthorized of God and are, therefore, not subject to visualization in art or painting. God is light, love, truth, kindness, grace, mercy and Spirit. Such cannot be transformed into any production by man.

To breifly summarize the main points of the Second Commandment, remember it forbids worshipping and bowing before images that represent Deity. It goes further to forbid the making of images representing Deity. It does not forbid all images for all purposes, but those that are intended to represent Deity and for the purpose of worship. But the Old and New Testament forbid the idolatry it is. Imagery cannot depict Deity and is incapable of doing so and man ought not even try.

When one is tempted to bow before man or image, our hearts and mouths cry out, "Stand up," even as Peter exclaimed to Cornelius. May God enlighten our hearts through His revealed Word that men will lift their bodies from all prostrations before men and human devices and lift their eyes and hearts on high where the Lord God forever lives and reigns. Then He shall be pleased and we shall be approved before Him.

† † † † †

May God bless you in 1989.

Third Commandment

Exodus 20:7, *"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."*

How marvelous is the name of the Lord God! The name of God would includes all the various titles that define and describe His nature, His truth, His attributes, His character and authority. It would embrace identifications of His purpose and providence. The name of God signifies all that God is, all that He does and commands.

His name is holy. Psalm 111:9, *"Holy and reverend is his name."* His name is to be reverenced as that which is sacred. Isaiah 57:15 also defines the name of God as holy, worthy of reverence. Nehemiah 9:5, *"Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted in all the earth, who has set thy glory above the heavens."*

God's name and that of His Son, who is a person of Deity, a member of the Godhead, is often mentioned in a way and manner requiring the highest adoration and affection. Not only is that true in this third commandment, but also in such passages as Matthew 6:9, *"After this manner therefore pray ye; Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."* Philippians 2:9, *"Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."*

His name signifies His authority. It is the only name under heaven whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). What we do in word or deed is to be done *"in the name of,"* which means by His authority, the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17).

Nothing in a Name

There are those who say there is nothing in a name. They have a reason for saying that. They try to defend the utterly anti-Christian system of denominationalism and suggest that the various names being used by various religions are mere tags and labels without significance. If they really believe that, why are they not willing to sacrifice names they have chosen to wear which are not Biblical and accept that which is authorized without addition or subtraction? But it is obvious that those who would contend thusly in religion do not accept the unimportance

of names in any other realm of human venture. It is not true regarding the products we buy, what appears on our paychecks, the places we go, the people we meet, or how we name our children. Everyone is mindful not only of his own name but the names of others. It matters. It matters to God as well about names and we would do well to admit it.

God gave many names and even changed many names. He called Adam, Jesus and John by the names He assigned. He changed the name of Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel. He has given the disciples of Christ the name Christian. How dare any man contend there is nothing in a name when the Lord God of heaven has indicated otherwise! The name of Jesus was given by God through the archangel Gabriel. *"Thou shalt call his name Jesus."* Did it matter what they named the child? Therefore, let us not trifle with the name of God, use it vainly or irreverently, flippantly and even connected with profanity.

An Expansion

Christ expanded on the third commandment when He taught His disciples to pray. The third commandment says not to take God's name in vain, which is a prohibition and a negative approach toward honoring the name of God. Jesus presented a similar truth by the positive approach and taught the name of God was to be hallowed, meaning reverenced, adored, praised and honored. It is not enough under Christ to simply refrain from misusing God's name, but it is encumbent on those who will be saved to present His name properly.

There are a number of ways the third commandment can be violated. It is transgressed with profanity, cursing, swearing, which are base and low vices. Such only reveals uncouth minds and the admitted inability to express oneself without stooping as low as man can stoop in speech. George Washington issued an order on July 4, 1775, "The General most earnestly requires and expects a due observance of those articles of war, established for the government of the army, which forbid profane cursing, swearing and drunkenness." Earlier he had written, "Witness how much I have both by threats and persuasive means, endeavored to discountenance gaming, drinking, swearing and irregularities of every kind." One could devoutly wish today that all men of public life would follow the direction and example of our first president. He recognized that

the name of God is holy and reverend.

No Small Matter

How terribly guilty is that soul that trifles with the holy name of God! Is not God's name heard often in the market place being used in shameless profanity and vulgarity by young and old, male and female? The name of God is man's last and only hope. When death strikes, when in pain, agony or grief, when the heart is broken and dreams have been smashed because of want and despair, when overcome by destitution, when strength has been drained into weakness and youth gone into old age, when joys have faded and glorious grown dim, the only One to whom we can turn with confidence and call upon for that which we need is the glorious name of God. Will a person profane that very name? Why will he? Surely, he is prompted by a certain form of near insanity. Profanity relieves no pain, gratifies no appetite. It is not considered honorable by the good or the evil. It is a manifestation of the tongue gone beserk and the mind running wild without control.

Some have tried to diminish the enormity of guilt of profanity by contending that the person misusing the name of God does not really mean what he says. This may be true that he does not fully grasp his enormous sin. But that only compounds his guilt. Calling on God without sincerity is utmost folly. Calling on God to do things in a whimsical fashion suggests the height of disrespect. Profanity even suggests that God just might do what He has said He will not do, thereby, a gross misrepresentation of God. It is to slander Deity.

It is a serious thing to call upon God to damn anyone or anything. If a man be damned it will be because of his own faults. Man's wickedness destroys him for he casts himself against God's righteousness. God will be his judge. But we err to profanely cry for God to damn someone as an outburst of our anger and hatred.

Another violation of the third commandment is in the frivolous, light and flippant use of sacred names. Some do this to adorn their amusing and entertaining stories. Isaiah said some *"make mention of God... but not in truth, nor in righteousness."* Oddly, this violation is committed often by professed believers who doubtless would rather honor God. They know not what they do!

Those who pray, *"Hallowed be thy name,"* should hallow it

by mentioning His name only with reverence and respect for Him. The early scribes did not even write the name of Jehovah when copying ancient manuscripts except they went through rituals designed to hallow His name. Some would write His name but never with a pen that had written anything else previously and never use the pen again for anything thereafter. While these forms of respect are not required, it is a manifestation of the respect that many have had toward the name of God in days past. A dose of this attitude would be a great breath of fresh air in our world today.

Hypocrisy Violates

Although not often considered, but certainly true, hypocrisy violated the third commandment. Is it not reprehensible for a man to say, "Lord, Lord," but rebel against the Word of the Lord, refusing to obey His commandments? When prayers are uttered to God but worded to please men rather than God, when people give alms to be seen of men, when they outwardly go through rituals but in life dismiss the law of God, is this not a mockery of His name, even blasphemous?

We also understand that the presumptuous use of God's name is to profane it and violate this third commandment. Pretending to do something in His name, by His authority, when He has not so authorized that thing, is to misuse His name. To simply say we do something in the name of the Lord does not make it so (Matthew 25). We must do what we do in His name, by His authority, or we have no right to use His name in connection with it. Not every high-sounding operation flourishing under the alleged banner of Christ is actually of the Master. How many times do religious people operate under His name, but they have not received direction or permission from the Lord to assume they have His authority?

In Acts 19:7, some were shouting the name of Jesus and calling upon His name to do certain things they desired. But they were not of God and were thereby abusing the holy name of Deity.

Just as the Decalogue thunders against those who would profane God's name, we would remind ourselves that this also would include the name of Christ. How often we are subjected to the vile tongue of many around us by hearing the name of our blessed Savior used and abused in the slanderous and wicked speech that characterizes so many! Loose jest, idle

words, insincere oaths, vulgar stories that are connected with the name of Jesus is no less a sin than a similar action connected with the name of the Father or the Holy Spirit. Ten times Jesus is called *"God."* Even though He became man as we are men, we recognize the two-fold nature of Him while on earth as humanity and Deity. The name of Jesus Christ is not to be misused. It seems this is the norm, however, for so many.

Hallowed be Thy Name

The opposite of profaning the name of God and taking it in vain is to hallow His name. Let us therefore hallow His name in worship, and by serving Him daily in meekness and fear or respect, trusting Him and obeying His commands. Those who genuinely reverence the name of the Lord will not wish to ever use it in vain but rather will be outraged and deeply offended with others around do so. Let us not let the violators of this divine teaching cause us to lose our sensitivity when the name of Deity is violated.

Psalm 69:30, *"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving."* Psalm 96:2, *"I sing unto the Lord a new song, bless his name."* Psalm 148:5, *"Let them praise the name of the Lord for he commanded, and they were created."* Psalm 145:21, *"My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever."*

† † † † †

Fourth Commandment

Exodus 20:8-11, *"Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."* This is the commandment of our study.

The Jewish Sabbath was observed on our Saturday, the seventh day of the week. The word "sabbath" means seventh,

taken from the Hebrew word meaning a day of rest. Three main principles are borne in this fourth commandment: (1) the principle of rest from honest labor; (2) the principle of a rhythmic pattern of perpetual worship; (3) the principle of work itself.

To Israel at Sinai

Originally the Sabbath was given to the Israelite nation. There is no evidence that Adam, Abraham or others who lived prior to the giving of the Law of Moses at Mount Sinai observed the Sabbath. Genesis 2:3, *"God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his work."* But the question is, did God sanctify that day immediately upon completion of His creative work, or later when He gave the Law of Moses? We must remember that Moses wrote Genesis 2:3 several years after the Ten Commandments were given to Israel. There is no indication that the early patriarchs knew anything about observing the Sabbath Day.

Further evidence to consider is that this commandment is said to have been given at Sinai, as recorded in Nehemiah 9:13, 14, *"Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai and spaketh with them from heaven, and gavest them right commandments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments; and madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandest them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant."* This tells us these commandments were made known at Sinai.

Reason For It

The reason God required observance of the Sabbath is stated in Deuteronomy 5:15, *"And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out from thence through a mighty hand and a stretched out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day."* Because they had labored, worked, slaved so long and been deprived of worship and rest by the heathens, God gave them this Sabbath.

The Sabbath was exclusively for the Israelites because God said, *"It is a sign between me and the children of Israel..."* (Exodus 31:17). The entire Law of Moses, including these Ten Commandments, was given just to the Israelite nation.

More than the seventh day weekly observance was involved

for the Jews. Leviticus 26:2, *"Ye shall keep my sabbaths... I am the Lord."* The plural, sabbaths, is used extensively in the Old Testament. God's name is joined to all of them. In the course of fifty years the number of sabbaths the Jews were to observe totaled nearly sixteen years, more than a fourth of the time. There was not only the Sabbath each week, but the Passover, the day of first fruits, the feast of trumpets, the feast of the tabernacles, the Sabbath of years, the year of Jubilee and the days of atonement. Little wonder Paul later described the old law as a *"yoke of bondage"* and a yoke *"which neither our father nor we were able to bear."* Furthermore, the restrictions concerning the Sabbath were severe and violations brought severe punishments. There was to be no work, not even gathering sticks for a fire, no cooking, no travel.

What of Us and Now

We might wonder where is the application of the fourth commandment upon Christians? It is not binding upon Christians, except in the principles it demonstrates, because the old covenant was to extend, as God said to the Jews, *"through your generations."* This limited the extent of the Jewish dispensation. Whereas every other of the Ten Commandments is included or expanded upon in the new covenant of which Christ is mediator, it is significant that the command to remember the Sabbath is not included anywhere. The fourth is an exception in this matter. As we have said before, so say we now again, the reason we believe and accept the other commandments is not because God gave them to the Jews through Moses, but because Christ included them in His will. We are to obey them because of the authority of God through Christ, not because of the authority of God through Moses.

Is it not true that Jesus observed the Sabbath? He did, because He lived under the Law of Moses as a Jew. He never bound its observance upon His followers after the coming of the kingdom of heaven, however.

Christ, His apostles and the early Christians worked, rested and worshipped. It would be intemperate to do otherwise. But this was not in observance of the Sabbath. The early Christians assembled on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:1, 2). It was that day that they partook of the Lord's Supper and gave of their means. The first day of the week was the day of the week that Christ arose from the dead;

the day that the church began on Pentecost; and these facts are attested in the inspired Scriptures as well as secular history. There is nothing in the faith of Christ that includes the observance of the Sabbath Day.

We see then the distinction between the fourth commandment and all the others. The other nine are included or expanded in the will of Christ, but this one is limited, and omitted, except for the principles it teaches which we have already noted.

Regarding Work

No study of the fourth commandment would be complete without at least a passing attention being given to the words regarding work. *"Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work."* Rest from work implies that there first must be work from which one can rest. The necessity of work is borne out in the new covenant of Jesus Christ. Henry Van Dyke wrote, "This is the gospel of labor; Ring it ye bells of the kirk (church, JB), The Lord of love come down from above, To dwell with the men who work."

Man's good and happiness is connected with work. Eden was not a place of idleness but of work. *"The Lord God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it."* (Genesis 2:15). There is even activity in heaven. In Jacob's dream the angels were not idle but ascending and descending the ladder he envisioned. Jesus is preparing mansions for those who shall enter therein. There is activity in heaven. Jesus worked on earth. *"My Father worketh even until now and I work."* We are children of a working God and beneficiaries of a working Savior. We should honor their calling by a life of diligent and faithful work. Paul taught if one would not work he should not eat (Second Thessalonians 3:10). It is important to note that the same commandment which speaks of a day of rest also speaks of six days of labor. While many offer much talk, concern and emphasis on the rest, there may not have been sufficient emphasis on the other six days.

False Philosophy

The philosophy entertained in the minds of too many is to do less and less and receive more and more. This ultimately has its limits. It may be difficult to determine which is the more reprehensible, the professional, willful loafer and shirker, or a

governmental system which harbors and encourages such behavior. James Vance said, "God is on the side of the worker. The worker has rights. The willful idler has none, whether he belong to the idle rich or the idle poor."

To ignore God's decree calling for man to work is as wrong as any other violation of His will. Nothing worthwhile has been built by people that tried to do as little as they could, but by those who try to do as much as they can. Consider our own great nation. Our land is great because God has blessed us, but this blessing has been given in response to work. This nation affords the greatest freedoms on earth, such as the freedom of worship and religion. But these freedoms are ours because they were accomplished, with God's providence, by long, hard, sacrificial work. It is fair to raise the question whether the attitudes of doing less and less for more and more will preserve for us these precious liberties we have inherited. If our enemies outwork us they shall outlast us. This is according to God's divine principles of labor.

Relaxation and leisure have their place and in their place they are proper and right. There are serious and justifiable questions being raised whether the increase of leisure has been beneficial to society or detrimental. A tragic paradox of our nation is that the very blessings of God that have brought us to prosperity and strength are being so abused and misused that they may become our undoing because they give rise to increased laziness, slothfulness and lack of the sense of personal responsibility to work. With fewer and fewer working days, much fewer than known among the Jews, what an oddity that the man with only one day of rest found it easier to attend worship and be attentive to spiritual matters than our own generation which is given usually two days of rest, shorter days to work, and more days off work than has ever been known.

Those who violate the principles of the fourth commandment are willful idlers, neglectors of worship, who have secularized the day of worhip for their worldly pursuits. The Lord's will regarding work is broader than most consider. But the Lord's will regarding worship is not to be set aside for labor and the mundane, secular and world activities.

A Big Misconception

A common fallacy among us is the assumption that labor has only to do with the man that works with his hands. This has

become a connotation with many that is unjustified. To labor refers to the man who works with his hands, but also to the thinker who works with his mind, the statesman, preacher, planner, clerk, salesman, writer, artist, engineer, doctor, whose labor is not all physical but possibly more mental than physical. Regardless of one's honorable occupation the law of God regarding labor applies. All who live harmoniously with the principles of the fourth commandment will work, rest and worship.

Some complain, *"Sunday is the only day I have."* They use this as an excuse for not worshipping God and attending to matters they prefer to do. But quite the opposite is true. Sunday may well be the only day you do not have. It is the Lord's Day. While we do not observe Sunday as did the Jews the Sabbath, there are certain duties to be discharged on Sunday we dare not overlook. In one sense all days belong to the Lord. But because of our duty of worship, Sunday is especially a day when we should plan to do what we are taught to do regarding worship. To omit worship and use the day for the satisfaction of other appetites is to miss the teaching and principles of the fourth commandment.

† † † † †

Second John 9 - 11

The Holy Spirit used the apostle John to send a short letter to one identified as the *"elect lady and her children."* Whether this referred to a specific woman and her physical children or to a congregation is a matter that is disputed. Regardless of which it is, the truth taught in the epistle is what matters to us.

Earlier in the letter, prior to our text, John had stressed how they loved the truth, were in the truth and walked in truth and he rejoiced in this fact. He previously emphasized truth, love and self-examination. Now he warns of deceivers in the world as he had done in First John 4:1, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* It made a difference to John, to Deity, and should to us, whether one taught truth or error.

John's three letters denounced those who denied that Christ

had come in the flesh and denied His Deity, the basic fundamental and foundational truth upon which all else about the faith is founded. He called such people anti-Christ, which means to be against Christ and what He taught. When one opposes and resist what Christ taught He opposes Christ (John 12:48). One rejects Christ by refusing to receive His words.

John prefaced his warning with the admonition to examine self. *"Look to yourselves..."* (verse 8). This is similar to Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders recorded in Acts 20:28. Both warnings imply the possibility of apostasy and the necessity of constantly being vigilant, alert, attentive and on guard. God wants His children to remain faithful (Revelation 2:10). But this faithfulness demands knowledge of the truth, belief of the truth, and practice of the truth. It also requires resistance, opposition, exposure and disposal of error. We must realize the destructiveness of error and the evil nature of false teachers, however well-meaning they may be or appear to be. One big mistake some make is to treat error too lightly and minimize how deadly it really is to the soul.

In our text (please take your New Testament and read), John, often called the apostle of love, presents a broad and sweeping principle regarding our attitude and action toward false doctrines and those who advocate them. His teaching deals with fellowship with God and the faithful. His words, certainly prompted by love, are strong, severe and exacting.

Whosoever

In verse nine, John says, *"Whosoever."* Who is included? There is no partiality to this universal application. None are excluded. As in Revelation 22:17, Romans 10:13 and Matthew 19:9, the text applies to all. Some act as if some teaching does not apply to their friends, family or favorites. But it includes the prominent as well as the lesser lights, the rich and the less affluent, even those outside the kingdom as well as those in the kingdom, also those who may once were faithful but who now teach error alongside truth. This teaching includes me. As you may well guess my next comment, it includes you and yours.

Transgresseth and Abideth Not

The word *"transgresseth"* means to cut across, go beyond, exceed the limits. It is present tense which signifies a continued

action rather than a one time violation. Unfortunately, some confuse progression with digression. A cigarette ad appealing to women to smoke says, "You've come a long way, baby." That is true. But in which direction? It matters because there are boundaries beyond which we dare not go. While we are not in the line-drawing business, Christians are in the business of recognizing and respecting lines that God has already drawn. Some berate standing still and call for movement. But all movement is not necessarily good. If one does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, remain within its boundaries and limits, but goes outside of them, the consequences are lethal.

Doctrine

The *"doctrine of Christ"* means what Christ taught or His teaching. It is not just teaching about Christ, although this is certainly included. But it means the teaching He brought, what He taught personally and that which was taught and revealed by His authority as men were guided by the Holy Spirit. It is similar to the phrase, doctrine of Balaam, doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:14, 15) and the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). It means what they taught. This text includes what Jesus taught on any subject and whatever He commanded (verse 6). His doctrine is the only authority and standard by which to measure. It even includes the text under consideration.

Result

The result of transgressing and abiding not in the doctrine is, as John states, one *"hath not God."* Do you realize how serious this is? This is spiritually deadly. One is severed from God, has no fellowship with God and is in condemnation. Strong word from the apostle of love! Such words are similar to those written by Paul in Galatians 1:6- 9 where an *"anathema"* or *"accursed"* is pronounced on those who teach a different gospel.

On the other hand, those who do abide, remain within the limits and confines of His doctrine, have both the Father and the Son. It is impossible to have the Father without the Son and vice versa (John 5:23; First John 2:23). This means the doctrine is inclusive, exclusive, restrictive, narrow, demanding and exacting with borders. Who shall say otherwise? This is plain, clear, unambiguous and certain. We either accept it or we reject it, but we cannot change nor alter it.

Not only are we not to traffic in false doctrine, John instructs us regarding those who do. Verse ten has the word *"if."* John anticipated those who would teach false teaching and gives instructions how to deal with them. We cannot totally prevent people from teaching error, but there is something we can and must do regarding them and their error. We are prohibited from giving them *"godspeed,"* literally a favorable greeting that is supportive of them or even implies and appears to be an endorsement of them. We cannot condone nor be indifferent toward them and the error they teach. While we are never to be rude, we can have no fellowship with them nor leave the impression we wish them success or consider them sound in the faith. We are to have no fellowship with darkness (Ephesians 5:11), but even that is not all. This same verse teaches we are to reprove that darkness. One who is a false teacher cannot be supported and accepted into one's company. There is no difficulty in understanding this. The problem arises regarding our will to obey.

Godspeed

John tells us why it is so necessary not to bid *"godspeed"* to those who teach error. We become partakers with them in promoting false doctrine. In Third John, verses one through eight, John noted how Gaius helped faithful brethren and in so doing helped the truth. Conversely, to help a false teacher is to help error. We cannot even appear to do so. There is a validity to the charge of guilt by association. Even though Christ at times did associate with sinners, He never said or did anything that advanced their cause, but rather condemned their error. and taught them the truth that would correct their error. It is ridiculous to think Christ would be in the company of false teachers to assist them in their growth as some weak and digressive liberal brethren are willing to do today. Tragically, those who do assist false teaching are also seen before youth rallies, lectureships, in pulpits and on pages of publications by by churches that profess faithfulness. This is gross inconsistency and error! If one does not want to be guilty of the charge of guilt by association, he may well need to change his associates.

Ironically, some reject the teaching to reject false teachers and the ones they reject are those who reject false teachers. Some support error by constantly berating and criticizing those who oppose false doctrines.

Go - Along- ism Demonstrated

Second John 9 -11 forbids a very prominent sin among brethren that is rightly described as "go- along- ism." Some continue their association with those who openly teach error. They encourage them and condone, use them and promote them. They run in their pack, are found at their functions, numbered in their company, even encouraging young and old to sit at their feet, generally playing Peter when he showed cowardice and attempted neutrality by warming himself at the fires of the enemy of Christ.

There are so many demonstrations among us of the violation of this passage. Some conduct joint services with denominations, promote their works in growth seminars. One preacher even rang the bell for the Salvation Army as a good-will gesture. While that organization does much good, as do most denominations, it is an avowed denomination that teaches errors such as salvation by faith alone and the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Consider the willingness of many to continue fellowship with the advocates of the modern dance, Masonry, social drinking, adultery, premillennialism, unity in diversity, Crossroadism, the use of the instrument of music in worship, accepting the Christian Church denomination, the absurdity of imitating instruments by the voice, and on and on. How could one violate Second John 9- 11 if going along with such doctrines, practices and advocates of them does not violate it?

False teachers are invited for gospel meetings, youth rallies, even though their doctrinal errors are pointed out repeatedly. False teachers generally cry they are misunderstood or taken out of context. The truth of the matter is they are understood and their errors are compounded because of the context. Some excuse their sin of helping false teachers by saying many others are using these people. So what? Is truth or the crowd our standard? Others say, when a false teacher is exposed, that they have already invited him and it is too late to cancel him. Such insipid and cowardly treason to the cause of Christ is characteristic of many who like to profess faithfulness to Christ but who show their disloyalty to Him.

Other Violations

Some who preach even join denominational ministerial associations, fluently quote from false teachers, continue to

support schools, Bible depratment, papers and others who teach error. Some churches are controlled by men who are called elders who seemingly cannot take a breath lest they first check with some editor, college president or so-called "scholar" who has drunk deeply from the waters of denominational and modernistic apostasy and heresy. Some elders they are!

It is not love to go-along with error. It is treason. Bidding Godspeed to those who teach error defies John's writing. While some wail pitifully that we may have lost confidence in them, how can you retain confidence in those who surrender and compromise, showing repeatedly they are unwilling to stand for the truth and willing to ignore what is not theirs to compromise! Churches once known to stand for truth against the invasion of digression have turned the other way and are now part of the digression. The desire to follow the crowd, be big, be accepted, be counted among the pack has provoked many who preach and multitudes of men called elders to place the dagger of betrayal into the backs of faithful brethren and the cause of Christ. Some know not what they do, but others know what they do because they have been shown what they are doing.

What can be done about this sorry situation is difficult to determine, but one fact is certain. God will not hold people who transgress and abide not in the doctrine guiltless. Nor will He declare righteous those who bid Godspeed to such false teachers. What provokes a person who says he loves the Lord, loves the brethren, loves the church, loves the lost, to just go-along with those who teach error, those who send forth an uncertain and unsound sound, who mix truth with error and deceive the people? The truth is they stand condemned before God because they are lacking in spiritual backbone to stand up for Jesus and be His loyal soldier. This traitorous attitude is sapping the life out of the church of our time. Those who should be standing against digression have themselves joined the digression.

Will to Obey

The difficulty with Second John 9- 11 is not understanding its meaning. It is possessing the willingness to believe and obey it. Many brethren simply ignore and dismiss it as if it has been removed from Scripture. Others only give it lip service. They do the "passover" and refuse to pay attention to it. Their rules of

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fellowship are determined by friends, family, fame, fortune, fanfare, finances and their favorites rather than THE FAITH. Only when brethren learn this passage and respect it will the advance of digression among us be slowed. Then we shall see the cessation of support for schools, papers, speakers, lectureships, youth rallies, programs, promotions etc. where those who teach error are condoned, coddled, promoted and featured. Will that day ever come? With most, probably not! History tells us that. But that day has already come and will ever remain with those who are resolved to be truly faithful to God. Whether you will be of this good company is your own decision.

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Plans call for discussions of the remaining of the Ten Commandments to appear in the next two issues. The length of the lessons determined how and when each discussion could appear. We hope you will look for them and profit from them. JB

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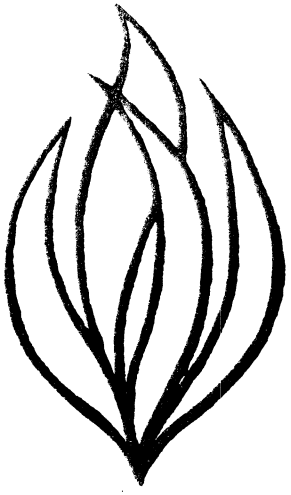

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Fifth Commandment

Exodus 20:12, *"Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."*

Charity is not the only thing that begins at home. Thoughtfulness, truthfulness, honesty, uprightness, good citizenship and respect for authority all begin in the home. Lawlessness often begins in the home because there one can learn to disrespect authority as well as learn to respect it. If the world is ever going to be a better place there first must be better homes. The lesson regarding the home from the Word of God must be learned and practiced. So much of the degenerate behavior seen in our world can be attributed to the collapse of the home and its falling away from being what God ordained it should be.

The welfare and salvation of society rests in the family and the reconstruction of family virtues and values, parental authority and responsibility, and the obedience of children to their parents. There is much disrespect toward the older on the part of the younger, and much of this is because of the disrespectful way many who are older have conducted their lives, treated their mates and their children.

The family is the nucleus and spring of society. There can be no spiritually and morally sound nation unless such is characteristic of the home. It is also true that there can be no sound church unless there is soundness in the home because the influence of the home, generally speaking, is greater than that of the church. The home often determines the direction of the church rather than the other way around. The state and the church are both ordained of God, as is the family. The home was instituted in Eden's purity and sinlessness and is the oldest of God's institutions. The home heavily influences both state and church, even though influences go both ways.

A God-Given Provision

The fifth commandment, learned, believed and obeyed is one of the surest safeguards, a near guarantee, for correct and righteous human behavior. It gives the blueprint for the reign of law and order. It makes possible a life of peace, security and happiness. It will provide, especially for the young, that solid

foundation upon which life can be built and lived as God would have it. When children obey their parents they learn to obey those in charge of schools, government officials, employers, and all others with whom they will have to deal in life. While children obey parents they are doing more than learning the right ways and obeying parents. They are obeying a distinct command and expectation of God. All just authority echoes the voice of God. Our holy obligation as children of God is to obey God. The child's holy obligation to parents bears the imprint of the God-man relationship.

By Example and Decree

Christ set the example for honoring parents. Luke 2:51, He went down to Nazareth and *"he was subject unto them."* His first miracle was undertaken at the request of His mother. As He died on the cross He remarked, *"Woman behold thy son,"* and to another (probably John) He said, *"Behold thy mother."* In this fashion, even as His life was going from Him, He showed care and concern for His mother and instigated the means for her continued provisions in this life.

This fifth commandment is bound upon the Christian by apostolic authority. Ephesians 6:1-4, *"Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; [which is the first commandment with promise] that it may be well with thee and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nuture and admonition of the Lord."* The obligation children have to parents is not a one-way street. Parents have obligations to their children. There is no law of God that says children must obey their parents in doing that which is wicked. Many parents are not respected because they are not respectable. To be honored one must strive to be honorable. Parents must in some measure earn and deserve respect as well as demand it. Parents earn it and children learn it. It is futile to expect children to respect parental authority when the same parents do not have respect for divine authority.

Paul's comment on this commandment was, *"For this is right."* It will ever be right to honor and obey parental authority. Parents who have served God and their offsprings with patience, devotion, sacrifice, self-denial (even of necessities), provided the physical and medical care for their children, prayed for them without ceasing, toiled without intermission, hoped through

good times and bad, lavished their children with genuine love akin to the love God has for His children, such parents (and there be many of this quality) are entitled to the highest place of living honor, second only to the honor we offer unto Deity. To fail to obey and honor such parents is to sin against God by defying His commandment.

Dishonorable Parents

Parents who are indeed worthy of honor may reap life's richest rewards, but the unworthy parent who has set a sordid example before his or her young can well expect to reap as they have sown, also. Many "parents" are deserting their own flesh and blood, abusing their own children, even maiming and killing them, casting them off as if they were nothing. Many deprive them of the barest needs because of parental degeneracy like drunkenness, being a "social butterfly" and the seeker of fame and fortune of their own careers, flitting hither and yon, attending to everything their own selfishness demands at the overwhelming cost of leaving the care and upbringing of their children to some other. No less are the sins of the irreligious, profane, worldly, godless and indifferent parents who take no thought for the spiritual welfare of their children, but who may, at the same moment of spiritual neglect, lavish material abundance upon them. What a vast horde of unworthy parents are marching across the scene of history in our time and we are seeing daily the disastrous results of such conduct in the lives of people of every age.

Extention of Honor

What many seemingly have never learned or forgotten is that duty to parents does not end with childhood days at home and under parental supervision. Christ rebuked some adults who dishonored their parents when their parents were dependent on them (Matthew 15:1-9). They were giving to God but neglecting the care and provision of their parents which was also commanded by God. Christ condemned such inconsistency and accused them of making God's Word null and void and displacing the commandments of God to conform to their own traditions. They committed the mistake of making secondary duty a priority over a primary one.

Providing the necessary care of parents in their old age, when

they are sick, when they can no longer provide for themselves, is as much a duty God has given children as for children to obey parents when the children are young. There may not be found some ideal way to provide the special care some parents may need. Being aged and sick is something far less than an ideal existence. None who have ever been involved in providing such care would suggest that it is always easily done. But whatever else may be said on the subject does not displace the duty that children have toward parents, and it should be considered a privilege to care for those who once cared for you. One of life's tragedies is to witness a neglected and ignored father or mother whose life is almost spent, whose children seem to lack even natural affection one would expect. So many children, although adults, are so concerned for only their own ways, their own ambitions and their own selfishness that they neglect parents.

Continuing After Death

Honoring parents need not end with death, but only with the death of the child. Holding parents in honor in precious memory is to continue to honor father and mother. How sweet and reassuring, comforting and strengthening it is to recall the days of youth when the hands of father and mother were tending to our needs and guiding our hearts, showing us by word and deed the way we should go. When parents have crossed Jordan, those who have been so blessed to have had godly parents will come to appreciate more and more what benefits they received from their parents.

Errors Regarding Parents

There are some things that ought not be done that some confuse as giving honor to parents. In some societies there is a strong ancestor worship. Only God is to be worshipped. Civilizations that have engaged in ancestor worship have distorted their relationship to their parents and to God. Placing the will of parents before the will of God is to again get priorities confused. There are some who may never become Christians, children of God, because their parents were not Christians. Some hold the church back in its mission because their parents used to do things differently. To be sure, when our parents followed the truth, and we follow the truth, we walk the same paths, but only because we both are following God. But with the

changing of situation and conditions that are inevitable along the way of life, there may be various means of doing the same work that God wants done. We should not be so wedded to such things as once devised by our foreparents that we do not utilize more efficient and productive means of accomplishing the goal. This would be an improper attitude toward parents. At the same time, tried and proven means and methods should not be cast away hurriedly simply for the sake of doing things differently. We dare not fall into the deceptive manner that things new are always best. To have the attitude that some display to always do things differently may reflect we are more concerned with what is new than with what is true.

Neither does this fifth commandment include the adoration of self-appointed ecclesiastical leaders who call themselves "father" and claim a spiritual parenthood over others. Jesus said, Matthew 23:9, *"Call no man you father on the earth, for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven."* This does not forbid calling our male parent by the term "father" because the Holy Spirit uses the term in that sense many times in Scripture. This does forbid using the term with reference to a spiritual title or distinction, looking to such as one elevated in rank as if he was the go-between of God and man. Romanism, as well as other religions, has grossly violated this teaching of Christ through the years. The practice is wrong and should be discontinued.

The Best Way

What is the true way to honor parents? To live a godly and decent life before all men as God's child is a crown of everlasting glory to fathers and mothers. The greatest honor a child can bestow upon his parents is to live a consecrated and faithful Christian life. This builds for the parents a monument that shall endure after the passing away of stone.

True honor begins with genuine love for parents. It is manifested even in "little things," like keeping in contact with them, showing interest in their lives, as well as doing those things for them that need to be done. Letters, calls, gifts, remembrances, words, visits, honor of their views and respect for their advice are such things that parents may lawfully claim and expect from their children. Speaking respectfully of them, refraining from abusing them, being conscious of their feelings, trying to make their days bright as possible, all are ways and means of showing the honor to parents which they deserve.

Even when one is married and the first loyalty is to his or her mate, there is no cause to dishonor one's parents.

Honoring parents brings blessings to the child as well as the parent. Virtue has its own reward. The serenity of conscience is likened unto the peace that passeth understanding. One who honors his or her parents will most likely rear children who in turn will honor them. The Jews were promised a long existence in Canaan if they honored their parents. Their dishonor of them and loss of respect for parental and divine authority is what cost them their happiness and continued possession of the land.

Two Failures

There are two types of failures in the parent-child relationship. One is the slackened discipline of children to the point of abandonment. Parental authority has been weakened by poisonous philosophies which say, "Let the child express himself, without discipline, lest you warp his personality." Time has already proven that the most warped personality walking among men is that person who has been spared discipline, never learning self-control, never having been properly taught the difference between right and wrong. Punishment for wrongs committed, restraint wisely and firmly applied, is a blessing to one and all who receive it. It is God's way of teaching respect and cannot and will not be surpassed or equaled by the devices of men, especially those created by those who care nothing for the spirit of mankind and the existence of God. Sparing proper discipline has produced an age of license, rape, arson, murder and similar inhumanities one toward the other in our nation which is a shame and disgrace before history and the world at large. Righteousness, restraint and respect for parental and other authorities are acquired traits, not something inherited. They must be taught. What failure has been the sorry lot of many lives on this score!

A second type of failure is the domineering, autocratic, dicatorial parent who fails to properly consider the personal dignity and worth of the life and soul of the child. *"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath"* has been violated by many, even well-meaning parents. Children are like coiled springs when they are born, pressed down at birth. But they must eventually be released. When they are so pressed during their formative years and not allowed to gradually uncoil under supervision, when the hour comes for them to be released they

will fly away in every direction. When the pressure is gradually lifted, however, being carefully managed, the spring will uncoil but stand where it should.

Protector of the Home

The fifth commandment is the guardian of the home. Godless forces are running loose in the world and sowing the seeds of distrust, dishonor as well as defiance and disrespect. A prime order of business for the Christian is to stabilize the sanctity and honor of the laws of God concerning the home. Let the home be treasured, parents honored, disciplined learned, authority accepted and respected! Let intelligent youth join hands and hearts with concerned adults, and together they will be able to slay the dragons of evil that threaten everything that is good, pure and proper before God! Together, through Christ, an overwhelming victory will be won for all!

If the home and family are lost, society will degenerate to conditions heretofore believed impossible because of the extent of wickedness. May God grant that home, marriage, parent and child relationships be made to stand in the strength of the Lord!

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(from page 24)

"change" are often guilty of seeking change for the sake of change. Let them show from Scripture what should be changed. While they ridicule and deride the plea and those who make it as being "traditional," we insist that it is Biblical and that which they wish to use to displace it is nothing other than false doctrines and human traditions in its early stages.

For a moment, let us suppose that the world would give heed to our plea. What would be the result? Immediately, there would cease to be the divided and chaotic state of denominationalism because nothing in Scripture authorizes the existence of any denomination, past, present or future. Atheism could be put to flight because believers would take the sword of the Spirit and begin to wage an effective warfare against it rather than against others who believe God exists. The false doctrines from the manuals, human creeds, disciplines, catechisms, confessionals, conferences, councils, feelings, summits and subjective attitudes would be abandoned for the lack of Biblical authorization. People could concentrate on being devoted to improving their

(continued back cover)

Sixth Commandment

On the surface the commandment, *"Thou shalt not kill"* may seem easily understood. It is short and to the point and appears there may be not too much to consider. But there is more involved than first might meet the eye because the commandment introduces and suggests many related matters.

There are hints and insinuations involved in this teaching that raise some of the most profound teaching of the Bible. Therefore, we must appraoch this study with caution, being careful to consider all the counsel of God and not focus our attention too narrowly lest we omit what God includes or become guilty of adding what He has not included.

What did the commandment mean to the Israelite people to whom it was originally given? Genesis 9:5,6, *"And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man."* Because man is distinctive, being created in the image of God, being spirit as well as flesh (Genesis 1:26,27), God prohibited man taking another's life. Punishment for disrespect of life was to forfeit one's own right to life.

Go back even earlier in the history of the human family and observe God's displeasure toward Cain because he killed his brother Abel. So the sixth commandment is a restatement of a truth that has existed from the beginning.

Murder

The word translated in our English language *"kill"* literally means murder. All killing is not murder. Lives are sometimes lost accidentally. We have noted that taking life as punishment was not forbidden. Even life taken in warfare is not under consideration here because the same God that gave the sixth commandment often commanded Israel to wage war. Obviously both God and Israel understood these distinctions. They also realized that it did not refer to taking animal life because animal sacrifices were commanded of them in worship to God. What is prohibited in the sixth commandment is murder; the intentional, deliberate destruction of innocent human life or taking into one's

own hands, as it were, the right and power of avenging that does not belong to the individual. There was a lawful manner and reason for taking a life but there was the unlawful taking of life also.

Romans 12:17-21 teaches the Christian a different attitude and action toward enemies than personal vengeance. A practice of what we call the Golden Rule would forever banish murder from society. This commandment, included also in the doctrine of Christ, forbade taking personal vengeance and committing murder. Let us consider some related matters.

Civil Power

Under the new covenant of Christ Paul teaches the right of civil power to wield the sword, an instrument of death, in its service to God as a minister of God, ordained of God, as the civil power does the work that God has appointed of government (Romans 13:1-7). Sometimes people make the grave mistake of confusing what God taught is the work of the church and the work of government. They also confuse the means and methods God allows in the conduct of the church and government. The spiritual warfare of the church does not resort to carnal warfare and physical action. But the work of government not only allows it but calls for it with God's direction and approval. It is gross error to contend that the civil power must be governed and regulated by the rules and directions God has given for the conduct of the spiritual kingdom. Even Jesus recognized this distinction when He was taken by His enemies, but He said His kingdom was not of this world and if it had been then would His servants fight (John 18:36). By this our Lord shows there is a difference between the operation of the spiritual kingdom and the conduct of the civil power.

The issue of the role of civil government is not our primary theme, however, but is only one of those related matters that is suggested in consideration of the sixth commandment.

Mercy Killing

In our time there is much talk about what is called mercy killing, the taking of life from those who are terminally ill, possibly infirmed beyond any hope of recovery, maybe even advanced in years, suffering and with the desire to pass from this life. Are we given the right to take the life of those who are so

infirmed? This commandment certainly relates to this question.

We must ever remember the sanctity and sacredness of human life due to the fact that we are created in the image of God. Suffering provokes sympathy within the breast of every sensitive human being. To witness those near and dear to us in situations of hopelessness provokes the deepest emotions within us. But we cannot allow our emotions to overrule the teaching of God. Willful, deliberate, intentional destruction of innocent human life is murder. While it is difficult for us to bear, and often difficult to understand why certain conditions prevail, we have no authority to dismiss God's teaching to accomodate our feelings. We are of the strong conviction that such provocation of death violates this very divine sentiment, *"Thou shalt not kill."*

Warfare

Due to the limitation of this discussion we do not intend to extensively discuss the matter of taking life in times of warfare. Realizing this is a highly controversial matter, it will suffice in this study to simply contend that the sixth commandment does not address that subject because all killing, even in such conditions as warfare, punishment or self-defense, are not murder in the sight of God. The same God that gave this commandment permitted each of these things, The role of a Christian in government is another highly controversial matter, but we would contend that the government is an ordained minister of God for the performance of that which is good. It is very inconsistent to suggest that children of the devil are the only ones who can have fellowship with God in doing what God calls good while His own children are prohibited from it. Again, we must be reminded that the conduct of civil affairs and the conduct of the spiritual kingdom are not regulated by the same regulations from God. Each serves a function and the functions are not identical anymore than the function of the home and the church are identical, although overlapping at times. Even the home and the church operate under different rules. Parents may well resort to spanking children in their upbringing. But certainly the church never has the right to engage in such discipline on its members. But Christians can consistently be involved in both home and church. So can Christians be involved in the proper performance of the affairs of the church and the affairs of civil government.

"Don't Convert Too Many"

We would like to suggest that each one do some serious consideration of the matter of a Christian as an officer of civil government or as a soldier by thinking of something once presented to me by one of my children even when he was somewhat young, but his reasoning was more profound than one might think. He asked me if only non-Christians could attend to the affairs of government (as some teach), especially as the enforcement of the law, protection of our liberties, preservation from wicked invaders, even self-defense. When I suggested, as I then thought, that Christians should never be involved in such matters and that God would provide so the Christian would never have to be involved, he remarked, "Then we better not convert too many because there would not be enough left in the world to provide the protection and execute punishment against the wicked." I thought about that and suggest you think about it also. Does not even this necessitate the propriety of God's people being involved in matters that God has ordained? I am of the conviction that it does permit such activity. All will not agree with me, but I consider them to be as wrong as I once was.

In Matthew twelve, when Jesus was accused of casting out devils in the name of the devil, He commented, *"How can one enter into the house of the strong man, and spoil his goods except he first bind the strong man?"* The implication is that the strong man could rightfully protect himself and his properties against the injuries and harm an intruder might bring against him. We have the God-given duty to provide for those who are in our care and custody, including our families. Does this provision mean only the supply of food, shelter and clothing? Does it not also mean their spiritual provisions? Would it not also embrace their protection from evil doers? We are convinced that it does. Self-defense and defense of others is the motive here. The taking of a life in that process is neither the motive nor the goal. Inadvertently the loss of life may occur. But murder is not what is committed and murder is what the sixth commandment forbids.

Not to Hate

Jesus carried the commandment even further than did the Law of Moses. Matthew 5:21,22, He spoke against hatred, the

motive behind murder, as being a sin as much as the actual murder. Hatred against others is not tolerated by our Lord. We should show love even toward enemies. We should never deliberately seek their harm. While we consider our love for our enemies, we must also consider love that we must have for those of our care that our enemies might seek to destroy or harm. Surely, love for family and brethren, even self, takes priority over love for those who seek destruction. That there are priorities involved in loving is not a debatable matter. All will consider that proper and expected.

"Thou shalt not kill" is not as broad as many believe. All killing is not forbidden. Murder, born of hatred and intent to harm, is forbidden and totally incompatible with the will of God. Such it was for physical Israel and such it remains for spiritual Israel, the people of God, the Lord's church, Christians.

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Seventh Commandment

The study of the Ten Commandments is no easy task. While we might concentrate on one commandment by itself and that not be too complicated, the Ten Commandments are rather broad and sweeping principles that introduce many other related subjects that can become rather involved and therefore demanding of more study. Such is the case with the commandment now under consideration.

Exodus 20:14, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery."* This commandment not only takes us into the realm of sexual activity, but also into marriage, divorce, remarriage, the sanctity of the marriage bed, obligations and responsibilities as well as privileges and limitations in marriage. The teaching of God has meaning on all these themes and we must learn what God has taught. We do well to approach such subjects with an open mind because we are often too easily pressured to allow current conditions, trends, emotional feelings and personal involvments to cloud our ability to see what is actually revealed. It is wrong to ignore laws that God has announced, but equally wrong to make laws that God has not made. This is a fault often involved

in a study of sexual morality. We are wise to be dogmatic only insofar as the Scripture teaches.

Many Views

We must be aware that there are many varying views held by people regarding adultery, marriage, divorce, remarriage and kindred themes. The variety does not mean that we cannot know what is right and wrong, but it does underscore for us that it demands more of us to determine right and wrong. Because there are many views we must be assured that the positions we take are the positions Scripture teaches and not be carried to and fro by what others may or may not think. While we would not attribute to any one person to have the knowledge of all questions that may be raised, we would insist that the resolution of all difficulties in these matters is existent in Scripture.

What was forbidden to the Jews in this command in Exodus 20? Many Jews took a very narrow meaning for adultery as simply the taking of another man's wife. But this covers only a small portion of the morality involved. Such a definition does not identify the guilt of sexual intercourse in the event neither participant is married to anybody. We cannot conclude that sexual intercourse outside of marriage, if it does not involve married people, is acceptable to God. There are other laws of God that forbid such immorality. But as for the Jews, this commandment, strictly speaking, was the sin of sexual intercourse between a man and another man's wife. The man was defined as an adulterer and the woman as an adulteress. There were other teachings that condemned fornication, defined as whoredom.

Interchanging Terms

In the New Testament the terms adultery and fornication are often used interchangeably. Webster's Dictionary defines adultery as violation of the marriage bed, having to do primarily with illicit sexual intercourse of married persons but not married to each other. Fornication is considered a much broader term even in Webster's Dictionary that would include not only adultery as previously defined but also all other perverted and illicit sexual intercourse, such as relationships outside of marriage, homosexuality, lesbianism, incest, beastiality and such like. Often the terms do appear together in various listings of sins

and for good reason since the Jews had formerly held the terms with some considerable distinction.

However, in the language of the New Testament the terms are so often used interchangeably, both referring to sexual intercourse between persons who are not married to each other. We must recognize these meanings and conform our conclusions accordingly.

Former Times

This commandment, which is also repeated and enlarged in the new covenant of Christ, raises the question about men of God of former dispensations that had more than one wife. Were they guilty of the very thing God here forbids? It is evident that God's original intent in marriage was for one man and one woman to remain one flesh for one lifetime. I know of no circumstance or teaching that suggests God ever changed that intent. In fact, this is what Jesus plainly restates when discussing the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage in Matthew nineteen. So we have no misgivings as to God's intent regardless of what some men of former ages may or may not have done. We know that the will of God today is under the authority of Christ and one man, one woman, remaining one flesh for one lifetime is the rule of God.

That some of former ages had many wives is certain. Lamech was the first of whom we read having more than one wife. But so did Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, and others. Solomon was condemned for allowing his many wives to take him into idolatry but there is no specific condemnation of him for having many wives. This is not to say that this was approved by God, however. David bore sons by six or eight different women. The twelve patriarchs came from four women, but the father of them all was the one man named Jacob.

According to the definition of adultery and this seventh commandment, these men were guilty of the very sin forbidden. We have to note that this commandment was given after the lives of those we have mentioned who lived in the Patriarchal Age, but David and Solomon surely lived subject to it. David was rebuked for his illicit relationship with Bathsheba but was never rebuked, as far as the record shows, for having already had several women to wife.

I do not profess to know why this was allowed. I do know that God has at times allowed that which He does not approve,

and I do know what He approves, indeed, what He allows and disallows under Christ because that will is spelled out concisely and precisely for us. I also know that Jesus taught it was because of the hardness of heart that it was done, but *"from the beginning it was not so."* The rule for us is clear.

Our Standard

We can also be assured that the conduct of those of the past dispensations is not the standard for us today. Whatever they did, whether with allowance or even approval (and we do not read of God's approval of such arrangements), we are under a different system and the perfect will of Christ that enjoins God's original intent in marriage. Those of former ages did not abide with God's intent, but Christ has restored that concept without doubt as ascertained by His own words.

Jesus said that fornication was reason to allow divorce (Matthew 5:27-32; 19:3;9). He did not command divorce, but He allows it if for the cause of fornication. There is always the course of forgiveness. Fornication means illicit sexual intercourse, which means intercourse between those not married to each other.

Some Jews had different views regarding the matter of divorce. Deuteronomy 24:1 was interpreted and misinterpreted. The cause for giving a divorcement bill was *"uncleanness in her."* Some contended this meant an illicit sexual relationship while others said it could include anything about the woman that the man did not particularly like and therefore allowed divorce for any cause. Jesus' teaching gave credence to the first position rather than the second.

Under Moses various grounds had been allowed, but that is not the case under Christ. Moses never approved of divorce nor commanded a divorce, but in the event of divorce he commanded a writing of divorcement, a legally ascertained severance of marriage before society. But again, we remind ourselves, *"but from the beginning"* is our standard.

Duration of Marriage

The inescapable conclusion from the teaching of Jesus is that marriage is for the lifetime of the parties involved. If one dies, the other is free to remary if he or she chooses (Romans 7). There is one exception to this law of lifetime duration of

marriage. Fornication allows the non-fornicator to divorce the fornicator and the non-fornicator can remarry without guilt of adultery, but the one who is the fornicator and the one the fornicator may then marry both enter into a spiritual and physical state of adultery and will remain therein so long as they remain in that realtionship. From this conclusion there is no Biblical refutation.

Salvation is dependent upon repentance and repentance will not allow one to continue in sin. This does not mean there must always be complte restitution because this is not always possible. But those guilty of lying cannot continue lying; those guilty of stealing must cease stealing; and those in adultery must come out of the adulterous relationship. Many have allowed the multi-married people of their association, even within their families, to color their thinking and compromise this teaching. Many have allowed the strongly emotional appeal of the existence of children born of an adulterous union to cause them to set aside God's law regarding who has the right of marriage. This is why we earlier gave words of caution that we seek what Scripture teaches and not allow ourselves to be misled by such irrelavant matters.

The Adultery Considered

The adultery under consideration is not spiritual adultery but physical. The context makes this clear. Jesus sent forth His strong teaching demanding moral purity and defending God's original intent regarding home, marriage, fidelity, morality and the sanctity of the marriage bed. Transgression of these sacred vows that demand keeping one only to his or her marriage partner are not to be condoned. In our society this is one of the more obvious and blatant violations of the will of Christ.

One need not reflect very long to understand the reasoning of God behind such teaching. Unless the conclusions we have mentioned are ture there is no protection for the sanctity of the home and marriage. Defilement of the home by divorce and the attending consequences make havoc of the stability of society and the welfare of everyone involved. Nations have sown seeds of their own destruction when the home and family were allowed to crumble. This reality of history should arouse us to urgent concern for our own land that presently has the highest divorce rate of any nation of the world.

We must impress God's laws on this subject upon the minds of our young, not only for the sake of their homes of the future, their marriages, their morality, but their salvation and faithfulness to God. To prevent the problems of divorce is more easily accomplished than the solution because the solutions often are shattering. The way to prevent the tragedy of divorce, adultery, fornication and the many related defilements, is to teach respect for the law of God and obedience to the principles of this seventh commandment. It stands as a guardian of marriage and the home.

God's grace never allows or grants license to sin or to continue in sin. Marriage is for "keeps." Any other approach to it is to invite disaster to life and eternity. Let us teach this seventh commandment and urge moral purity, entrance into marriage without the stains and scars of sexual transgression, and teach the sanctity of this holy relationship by demanding there be no violation of the commandment.

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Decide for Christ

This is a plea for those souls that are not yet in Christ. We are persuaded that it is logical and reasonable to decide to be a Christian. When God made man He made him a free moral agent, capable of making choices and decisions. Alongside this power is the necessity of making correct decisions. Making decisions is a very personal and individual matter. There are many things that we must decide and must decide for ourselves one by one. This attribute of mankind can be his glory or it can be his undoing depending upon the decisions he makes.

All who travel life's highway know that there are times when we are at the crossroads, so to speak, and must decide which direction our lives will take. We reach the forks of the road. Many decisions in life are relatively trivial and insignificant. If we make the wrong choice in such matters it can be easily rectified and no real harm is done. Other decision are far more important because they affect not only the present but the future, even

eternity. Some decisions, if made incorrectly, cannot be so easily corrected, if at all. We can spend a lifetime reaping results of wrong decisions. Decisions that have a deep, lasting, even eternal effect must be carefully and intelligently made.

Most Important Decision

There is no decision more important than the one we make regarding Jesus Christ, whether we realize it or not. Our decision affects every area of our existence. What will you do with Jesus? On this decision hinges your path in this life, your moral guide, your ambitions, your manner of living, your influence on others, your associates, and your eternal destiny.

This is a decision that cannot be evaded nor avoided. It is a matter that must be resolved one way or the other. Many decisions can be postponed without any effect that is too serious. But postponement in the matter of Christ is equal to rejection of Him. Christianity allows for no middle ground. Attempts at neutrality are futile. We either decide FOR him or we decide AGAINST Him.

Calls for Decisions

In the Old Testament, when Elijah came before Israel at Mount Carmel, Israel was wallowing in the state of indecision. First Kings 18:21, *"How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."* Israel was lame, weak, condemned and rejected because they would not decide FOR God.

Years earlier Joshua had also confronted the people. Joshua 24:14,15, *"Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*

Moses called to Israel to make decisions. Deuteronomy 30:19, *"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."* Only the right decision would preserve the people.

Matthew 6:24, *"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* Matthew 12:30, *"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."* We would insist that these passages and these words of Christ demand that we decide FOR Christ.

Refusal is Rebellion

Once sufficient knowledge of Jesus Christ is known, refusal to obey is nothing less than rebellion against the authority of God. God does not expect or even want decisions based on ignorance. Before one can come to Christ certain knowledge is necessary. One must know that God exists, that Christ is God's Son, that he is lost in sin, that he cannot save himself, that Christ is the only Savior, and that he must come to Christ His way in order to be saved or otherwise remain lost and damned. That way demands faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins.

God, through Paul, declares, *"Now is the day of salvation."* Once a person has this knowledge, to refuse to submit to the will of God is to bring upon oneself his own condemnation because he remains in his sins. Every moment one remains out of Christ he remains in the spiritual kingdom of Satan. There are only two spiritual kingdoms, God's and Satan's. Those in God's kingdom have left the darkness of sin and entered into the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13).

Be Reasonable

God only expects us to be reasonable. It is only logical and reasonable and sensible for a person to surrender his will and life to the Son of God. After all, we owe our very existence to God. Is it not reasonable to serve our Creator? The creature is expected to worship the Creator. We know that life is brief and we shall someday die, then stand before God in judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Is it not reasonable to be prepared to meet God? The only way to make preparation is to come to Christ (Acts 4:12), since He is the only way of salvation.

What if there was no hereafter? What has a person lost by coming to Christ in that event? He would have lived his life the best possible way by imitating Christ. But since we can know

there is life after this one, what has one lost if he does not come to Christ? He has lost everything. Coming to Christ and deciding for Him is a matter where we have everything to gain and nothing to lose. To refuse to decide for Him we have everything to lose and nothing to gain.

Futile

Indecision is an attempt at futility and is dangerous at best. Every time, every day you do not decide FOR Him you give Satan additional opportunities to captivate your soul forever. Every time the appeal of love of the Lord strikes your heart and fails to penetrate only makes it hardened and easier to continue to refuse Him. This can happen until even the truth and love of God will have no influence on you. Every delay is a vicious gamble of your soul and eternity. Only Satan tells you that you have plenty of time to come to Christ. In a brief moment, your time, your life, your opportunity for salvation can be snatched from you forever. Like in the days of Noah, God's Spirit will not always strive with you and He now does call you through the gospel message. You could yield to the Lord's Son and no longer risk your soul.

Involves So Much

We also suggest another reason you should decide FOR Christ. There is just too much involved for your indecision to be justified. This is not of the trivial decision of life. It involves your present life and how you shall live it. It involves your influence even upon those closest to you. It involves your talents and abilities and how they shall be put to use. It involves the destiny of your soul.

Fathers and mothers are usually held in such high esteem by their children. Yet, many parents are influencing their young to follow them into the jaws of an open hell. On the other hand, parents could be creating a favorable atmosphere and lending encouragement to their precious young to live their lives righteously and in service to God that leads to a heavenly home. It is worth considering becoming a Christian because of the impact it could make on those around you.

Matthew 7:21-27 describes two men who built houses; one on the sand and the other on the rock. The one built on sand was by the foolish man who heard the Word but did not heed it.

The wise man built his house upon the rock and he is like the one who heard and heeded the Word of God. Which of the two characterizes you? We plead tenderly and urgently, decide FOR Christ.

† † † † †

Have We Outgrown Our Plea?

Two questions are raised by this subject. What is our plea? Has it become outmoded, outdated or too limited? In other words, has the brotherhood "matured" to the point where a new plea should take the place of the one we have been making? There are those who so contend.

A general definition of our plea to the world is for the restoration of New Testament Christianity in every generation, restoring all things essential and required in the faith of which Christ is the author. The plea is not of recent origin nor peculiar to our homeland. The very plea itself implies there has been an apostasy, a falling away from the faith revealed in Scripture. Otherwise, there would be no need for restoration.

Ulrich Zwingli, in the sixteenth century, was an early reformer and attempted a restoration. Others have risen from time to time either calling for reformation of existing religious bodies or a restoration and return to primitive Christianity. Down through the ages since the apostasy that was predicted by the apostles men have raised similar pleas.

The efforts have not made significant impacts on the religious scene, however, until the restoration efforts in this country in the 1800's. To be sure, the Reformation Movement, that gave birth to Protestantism, was of tremendous significance to the religious conditions in the world. But "reformation" falls short of the "restoration" that calls for a genuine return to Christianity as revealed in Scripture.

Early Efforts

Beginning among Presbyterian clergymen, men began to

visualize the church of the Lord as found in the Bible. Grieving over the division, confusion and strife among religionists who claimed to be Christians, and seeing professed disciples of Christ promoting conflicting doctrines and practices, tearing at each other in competition, they began searching the Scriptures and calling for all people to be united on the basis of Biblical teaching. The standard was to be no more and no less than *"thus saith the Lord."* Breaking away from the various sectarian bodies then in existence, taking God at His Word, and taking only God's Word, the movement began to grow and churches patterned after the New Testament teaching were the result. This remains the plea that we have today. How this plea could be wrong is impossible to see, if one respects the Bible.

There are those matters which we strongly believe because the Bible teaches them. We have no human creed (a creed is simply what is believed). Our creed is Christ. Everything we say and practice, teach and endorse, is to be in harmony with His will. It must be according to the Lord's authority. That which is either more or less than Scripture cannot be accepted. Truth will at times create division between those who are willing to follow God's Word and those who are unwilling to do so. Many religious bodies have the same problem as the man who testified in court. When asked by the judge if he told the whole truth, the man responded, "Yes, your honor, and a whole lot more besides." This is what has caused problems in religion. Too many are not content with the all-sufficient Scripture but have added a whole lot more besides.

Authority

Not only does our plea call for the Bible as the standard, the New Testament in particular, even as Scripture itself requires, but the plea is for the return to authorized religious practices. It is right to call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things Bible ways. We should speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). It is right, for example, to practice baptism for the remission of sins. It is right to insist that baptism be immersion. It is right to teach and practice the observance of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. It is right that Christians conform in daily living to the doctrine of Christ. It is right to deplore division and exhort for unity based upon revealed truth. Doctrinal purity in teaching and scriptural practice go hand in hand. Both are essential. Without this there can be no restoration of New

Testament Christianity.

But have we outgrown that plea? Is it no longer a valid movement? Should we move from it to a broader base and wider appeal? Have we become so sophisticated, intelligent, tolerant, educated and sufficiently mature to change our plea and be more accomodating toward those who take a different religious position? Some are clamoring for such a change.

Some Things to Consider

Have we outgrown the plea that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, the only Savior of mankind? Multitudes are being taught that this is too narrow because it does not allow for the salvation of those who would choose another lord. Even clergymen in denominational bodies have denied that one must be a Christian to be saved. Shall we adopt their stance?

Have we outgrown the Lord's doctrine in morals, marriage, ethics, purity of life? Much of the world has never accepted the way of Christ, finding it too confining and limiting of their "self-expression" and so called freedom. It seems that we hear more and more, even among those in the church, offering laxity toward drunkenness, adultery, dishonesty, lasciviousness, greed and immodesty. The modern dance, alcoholic beverages, filthy entertainment are too often found among professed church members. Unfair dealing, lying, gluttony, lust, covetousness of material gain and an emphasis on the physical rather than the spiritual is a large part of the lives of most people of the world, and even many who call themselves followers of Christ. Can one can rightly be called a follower of Christ and ignore what He said and did and live contrary to His will?

Have we outgrown the plea for real unity based on truth? Unity in diversity is the craze of some minds. While atheism advances rapidly, efforts toward some kind of so-called unity have been spawned, but on the basis that "you go your way, I go mine; I'm O.K. and you're O.K.; everything is beautiful in its own way; do your own thing." Some say all we must do is be honest and sincere and love. They neither understand unity nor love. Those clamoring for unity in diversity show no signs of desiring unity, but just union. Actually what they promote is fellowship in spite of division.

But is it not true that this unity in diversity philosophy is what has given rise to the division that genuine unity should cure? Too many seek agreement with each other to agree to disagree.

To agree to disagree is not unity but heresy. We cannot "get together" at the sacrifice of God's truth. Peace at any price is the way some would have it. To ignore differences and only dwell on areas of agreement does not produce unity. It covers up division with a deception. Truth, however, is not negotiable and compromise of any point of truth ought never enter the mind of anyone who professed to follow Christ. Right cannot be sacrificed on the altar of so-called unity. Unity, not mere union, is our plea. As Paul urged in First Corinthians 1:10, we must not have division and the way to have unity is to speak the same things, be of the same mind and judgment, which demands following the same standard. Let us repeat! The only acceptable platform for unity is to stand firmly on God's Word, doing what God teaches, without addition, subtraction, substitution, alteration or human innovation.

Have we outgrown the Biblical plea how to become a child of God? Some seem to think so because they no longer teach what the Bible does. Have we created a "better" plan of salvation? Do we have the right to begin teaching salvation by grace alone, or faith only, or praying through, or even baptism regardless of correct understanding of its significance? Is it too dogmatic to still preach faith repentance, confession and baptism like the Bible teaches? True, this excludes those of the denominational world from the blessing of salvation because they do not follow God's plan. But who thinks he has the right to conclude that anybody can vary from God's plan and then "claim" God's blessings anyway?

Is It Really Maturity?

Issuse after issue and point after point can be raised and the same questions asked. Those listed are but examples. How can people outgrow truth and become "too mature and developed" to leave what Scripture teaches in order to expand and enlarge the fellowship? Our task of taking the gospel to the world is a gigantic one. But we shall not accomplish what God wants done by looking for short-cuts by altering His message. The plea that has been made is proper and sure because it is Biblical. It should be our determination to stick with it, not simply because those before us made the plea, but because we have the same convictions they had and hold these convictions for the same reason they did; namely, it is the Word of God. Those who seek

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individual lives into conformity with Scriptural requirements. It would truly be a time of "Onward Christian Soldiers!"

But we are realistic enough to realize that our plea will not likely be heard and heeded because it would require sacrificing too many "sacred cows." Manikind is very steeped in his own way in preference to the way of God. But whether anyone pays attention to the plea or not is not our major concern. We have the duty to make the plea, founded on the Bible, and to preach it, practice it, and persist in it regardless of what reactions come as a result, whether favorable or unfavorable.

Have we outgrown our plea? No, and it is impossible for us to do so. Some may abandon it and turn aside from it into religious error. But it cannot be improved because it is *"thus saith the Lord."* Instead of thinking we have become too "spiritual and mature" and now need a new message, as some suggest, we should be busier at the task of proclaiming the truthful message we already have. This would terminate this new "unity in diversity" heresy. We should turn our spiritual weaponry against sin, denominational error, digression, modernism, atheism, and seek the salvation of those yet lost. If we were really maturing we would be more solidly supportive of the plea to restore New Testament Christianity than ever.

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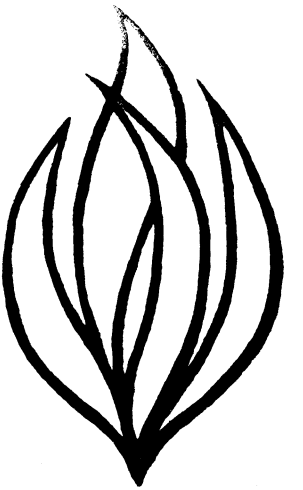

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Eighth Commandment

Exodus 20:15, *"Thou shalt not steal."* Like most of the Ten Commandments, this one is also incorporated into the system of Christ even as it was a part of the Law of Moses.

This commandment gives recognition to the right of private ownership and provides safeguards of it. It is not surprising to find this safeguard of property alongside other solemn safeguards of life and morality because of the imposition of stewardship and responsibility. This commandment deals primarily with the handling of material things. Of course, things are not supposed to be of primary importance to the Christian anyway. But since they exist and must be used for the sustenance of life and each one has the responsibility to rightly use what comes into his possession, we are not surprised that God has provided certain protections toward properties that makes stewardship possible.

Historically, property rights have been grossly abused. Many attempts have been made to set them aside. Laws regulating property are often ignored and overrun. Experiments that abandon the right of private ownership have been tried only to end in miserable failure, even though they may have been invented with a motive for the common good. At this moment our world is embroiled in a wordlwide conflict between systems that deny private ownership and systems that defend and encourage private ownership. But history has taught mankind, if only mankind would learn, that the abolition of private property and the rights thereto constitute the abolition of the virtues of industry, thrift, emotion, prudence, stewardship and personal dignity. The eighth commandment protects these virtues by protecting the rights of ownership that motivate and cultivate these virtues.

Not Communism

It has been contended by some that the early Christians demonstrated true and perfect communism. Earl Browder, leading communist in the United States, once said that the communistic system he advocated and Christianity were connected and that he was simply trying to bring into reality, on a worldwide fashion, what existed among the early Christians. But this is not true. Christians enjoyed private ownership while

communism limits it and denied that right. The pooling together of their resources to assist the needy was a voluntary and temporary measure while communism confiscates property and places it all under state control. The early Christians distributed to each as they had need, but communism intends to give everybody the same and equal portion. So the two systems are not only not the same but contradictory.

Philip, Mark's mother, Barnabas, the centurion, all owned property. Annanias and Saphirra were punished, but not because they had property but because they lied about what they had given. Peter affirmed their right of distribution of their possessions. Rather than denying the right of private property, the faith of Christ encourages it, requiring those who have possessions to treat their possessions as a trust given to them by God and they are stewards that shall give an account of what they did with what came under their control.

Ownership Obligations

Among the obligations that are inherent with ownership is that of being generous and charitable toward those who are without. Ownership is not only a privilege, but in one sense, a duty. Let me show why we contend it is a duty to seek ownership.

As Christians we are morally obligated to help those who are in need (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 4:28; First John 3:17). Can one shirk this responsibility by deliberately keeping himself poor and without means to help? Poverty may not always be avoided. But deliberate poverty can be avoided through work. The deliberate and wilful avoidance of accumulation of possessions and seeking poverty is to shirk duty. You throw a burden on those around you to provide for your needs. You make it impossible for you to be of benefit and assistance to others who are in need. We are to labor to provide for ourselves and those of our own, not only that we may live but have to give to those who suffer misfortune and have need.

Many people of God in the Old Testament were people with great possessions, such as Abram, Job and others. Many strong Christians through the ages and even today are people who have great material wealth at their disposal because they have been profitable servants, good managers of that which came into their care, and they have gained and increased, some in manifold abundance. Many buildings stand today in which brethren meet for worship because good Christians had

accumulated an economic surplus and made the acquisition of the building possible. Schools, missionary efforts, religious journals, orphan homes and many other good works are done because some have used their talents and earned, even a large surplus and abundance but who have used what they earned to provide for such things. It is a false and vicious accusation to contend that all who are wealthy have gained their wealth in a crooked and underhanded fashion. While doubtless many have done this, many have not.

Possessed by Possessions

We must give a word of caution at this point. It is a talent in itself to be able to rightly use great wealth and not let it possess the possessor. Some who have received large sums have allowed it to control their lives and it ruined them and damned their souls. Some who have never had much have also failed to show ability to properly use even the little they have. But because some misuse what is placed into their trust does not mean material ownership is evil. It is the *"love of money,"* not money itself, that is at the root of all evil. One's attitude toward what he has is what counts whether he is rich or poor or in-between. His attitude will determine what he will do to acquire wealth and how he will use it once he has acquired it.

We err to think it is impossible for the rich to go to heaven. He assuredly cannot please God if his riches come first with him before God. This, sadly, is too often the case. The reason this is such a danger to the rich is because they might be inclined to put their trust in their riches, and in their own abilities to get gain, and forget God. But if a person has the talent, ability and opporunity to earn, and then uses what he earns to the glory of God, realizing he is responsible before God for talent, ability, opportunity and the use of wealth, then that person can be the means of blessings for multitudes.

Acquiring Material Things

The eighth commandment protects not only the right of ownership but also governs the means of acquiring ownership and possessions. A person may have wealth because of his labors, through purchases and investments, by inheritance, or even from receiving gifts. All of these are honorable means of gaining possessions. But all devious methods of acquisition are

forbidden to a follower of God. Gambling is wrong because it is an attempt to circumvent God's approved ways of having. It is the effort to gain something for nothing. It results from the lust for possessions without the toil. Its presence has demonstrated repeatedly that is discourages work, thrift, industry and even morality.

This commandment deals primarily with the acquisition of wealth by means and methods that violate the rights of others. Theft, fraud, dishonest transactions, larceny, cheating, swindling, embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, violations of trust, excessive charges, misrepresentative tax payments, shoplifting, non-payment of debts, padded expense accounts are all examples of taking what does not belong to the taker. Our courts and laws usually make distinctions in these matters based upon the varying definitions given to crimes, the amounts taken, extenuating circumstances and other matters. But such distinctions do not abide in the Word of God. Regardless of the procedure used or the amount involved, such things are violations of the rights of ownership and they constitute a violation of the command, *"Thou shalt not steal."* To contend otherwise would be to contend against the Word of God and commit the worst theft of all, stealing from God's Word. Jeremiah 23:30, *"I am against the prophets, the Lord said, that steal my words every one from his neighbor."*

Robbing God

Our world is suffering from wholesale theft of the Word of God. Truth is being withheld from people who have the right to hear it. Truth was withheld during the Dark Ages with opposition to translating the Bible into the tongues of common men. It is withheld by many parents from their children by their neglect to see that children are properly taught the will of God.

Widespread theft of truth is apparent in many lands where the proclamation of the gospel is outlawed, even the distribution of the Word through print being prohibited. For the sake of being and remaining popular and accepted by the world there be many who are even supposed to be proclaimers of truth who withhold truth that needs to be heard. There are preachers who may not teach overt error in their sermons but who are not faithful to God enough to preach what needs to be heard, saying only what he thinks his hearers want to hear. He thereby protects himself, his position, his salary, his standing and

acceptance by others. Is it not a fearful thing to steal God's Word from others regardless of the way the theft is committed?

Another terrible theft is stealing from God. Malachi 3:8,9, *"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation."* Notice the question, *"Will a man rob God?"* The answer is, "Yes." How can men rob God? They do so by keeping out of God's treasury that which ought to be in it. Achan robbed God when he took the spoils of Jericho and hid them in his tent because the spoils belonged to the Lord's treasury. Since people of old could and did rob God by withholding from God's treasury what ought to have been placed there, why cannot people today also be justly accused of robbing God when they do the same thing? Not only can men rob God of funds, but also of time, energy and devotion that God and His cause are due.

Christ's Answer

The faith of Christ provides the antidote to stealing. Christianity is the cure that destroys greed, selfishness, materialism and the motives that prompt people to acquire possessions wrongfully and use them wrongfully. Christianity upholds the virtues of work, thrift, prudence, diligence, industry, stewardship, giving and helping others. It teaches us what is the right relationship between ourselves and the material things of this life. All things are God's and we are but loaned a few of them for a short while and in time we shall turn everything to someone else and then give an account of how we got them and what we did with them as well as our attitude toward them.

The faith of Christ appeals to the heart of man to be compassionate, considerate and respectful of others and what they have just as he would want others to so regard him and what he has. He cultivates no love for any material thing that would lead him to take or get it wrongfully. He will not deprive another of what belongs to them. He will not steal. This is what this commandment forbids.

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Ninth and Tenth Commandments

This is the final lesson on the Ten Commandments and in it we shall consider the last two. We have seen that each commandment guards something that needs protection from defilement of any kind. They protect the authority and power of Deity. The second protects man from false worship of images. The third protects the sacredness of God's name. The fourth protects the virtue of work and the privilege of rest. The fifth protects parental authority and respect of parents. The sixth guards the sanctity of human life as the seventh protects the sanctity of the home. The eighth protects property rights. The ninth guards against deliberate deception and protects one's right to a good reputation against false words.

The Pharisees considered this command only to apply to court procedures. Exodus 20:16, *"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."* While court procedure would be included, it certainly would not be limited to that. Jesus expanded this principle in His covenant to embrace the whole area of human speech and communication. Under the old law they were not to swear to a lie. Under Christ *"every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."*

The echo of this commandment vibrates throughout the New Testament. Inspired writers condemned backbiting, whispering against others. James 4:11, *"Speak not one against another, brethren."* The Colossians were warned not to lie to one another. Among those cast out of the celestial city included *"every one that loveth and maketh a lie"* (Revelation 22:15).

A Sin Against All

Bearing false witness is a crime against God and man. Civilized nations rank false testimony as committing a great crime. Perjury in courts is a felony and punishable by imprisonment. In our day we have seen many people perjure themselves, be indicted and sent to prison. But for every offense of perjury there must be a million equally sinful infractions of the ninth commandment. There are so many ways it can be

transgressed.

It is violated by slander, half-truths, intentional deception, evil insinuation, false claims, misleading promises, fraudulent advertising, deliberate misquotations and ever so many similar things. Thse actions violate both the letter and spirit of the ninth commandment.

Socrates once said, "The flatterer is the most vicious among tamed beasts; and slander the worst among wild beasts." But what a glorious company have endured the wrath of the undisciplined hordes through the ages who have shown no respect for telling the truth. There was Joseph who was slandered and against whom lies were told. Naboth was killed on the basis of false testimony. Stephen, Paul, Silas and others bore the reproach of false accusers. None have suffered more from lies than did our Lord of glory as He was accused of gluttony, drunkennes, blasphemy, treason and outright lying. His disciples have been accused of falsely stealing His body from His grave. Countless times has false testimony been brought against good people and against truth.

Abuse of Freedom

Some have even tried to contend that prohibiting the "privilege" of lying is a violation of freedom of speech. Freedom of speech does not include the right to lie. Lying is not an accepted privilege but a sin. Whether one speaks orally and audibly or puts the lie on paper, he is guilty of sin because he has the obligation to tell the truth. Freedom of the press does not include the right to lie and misrepresent but sadly many who publish papers, secular and religious, have never learned that fact of righteousness. Many people in public life suffer because of false witnesses. Certainly gospel preachers have been victimized by servants of the devil, both in and out of the church, by the vile lies that enemies of truth will pour out against them. Why is it that many do not seem to realize the value of truth above lies?

The Liar's Father and Destiny

The first liar was the devil. He lied through the serpent to Eve concerning the results that would come when she violated God's prohibition to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He has not ceased to lie to mankind nor solicit the services of many

to perpetuate his lies. Jesus called him a *"liar and the father of all lies"* (John 8:44).

The liar's destiny is hell (Revelation 22:15). *"Without are the dogs, socerers, the idolaters and every one that loveth and maketh a lie."* Revelation 21:8, *"...all liars... shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone which is the second death."*

In contrast, Paul said that Christians are to think on those things that are true and of good report. Our Lord is the very essence of truth and the personification of it. We must also be a people of truth, speaking the truth as well as living the truth.

Covetousness Forbidden

The tenth commandment takes into account the inner thoughts of people. In some ways it is the most difficult of all the Ten Commandments to obey because it does rule and regulate the heart of man. Exodus 20:17, *"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's."* Luke 12:15, *"Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness."* Then the Lord added, *"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* Paul said that covetousness is on the same wicked level as idolatry. He used idolatry to define covetousness. Does not this tell us Deity's attitude toward being covetous?

Covetousness is behind many violations of the other commandments. Desiring anything unlawfully that is thy neighbor's covers a great many things. It may be his honor, position, trust, affection, rank, reputation, status or good name that can be coveted by others. Men's eyes are entertained by the glitter of things they do not have. Materialistic designs and ambitions have overwhelmed the good sense of many masses of people. This greed and aspiration for the wealth of this world has caused people to do some of the most unmentionable things in order to have what they coveted. How many sins are compounded because of a covetous heart?

Obedience to this tenth commandment strikes a death blow at the root of all evil, the love of money. If one does not covet, have an unlawful desire for material gain, he does not have such love for material possessions and will avoid committing the grave evils so often committed by mankind in order to get, get, get.

Leaders of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments

were not to be covetous people. So contagious is this sin of the heart that Christians are to avoid company with those who are greedy and covetous.

A Futile Pursuit

Man's ceaseless desire for material things is folly. What if he gains the whole world? He must soon turn it over to someone else in but a relatively brief time. If he gains the whole world and losses his soul, which is quite likely as he pursues the fleeting riches of the earth, he has made a terribly bad deal. The history of wealth and wealthy people shows that material things of life do not bring contentment regardless of how much one might gain and control. One's earthly happiness and spiritual blessedness, his peace of mind and salvation cannot be purchased or received through possessions. Life is composed of things far more important than such as that.

Religious people are not always free from covetousness even though following faithfully the religion of Christ will drive covetousness from the heart. Demas was a religious man and a companion and fellow worker with the apostle Paul. But he loved the offerings of this present world and forsook Paul and all that he and Paul had together upheld. Annanias and Saphirra had possessions but it proved to be their undoing when their greed and selfishness provoked them to lie about their contributions. Covetousness has caused people to lie, steal, commit adultery, murder, dishonor parents and God, violate every commandment in every imaginable fashion.

Not Only the Rich

What many do not realize is that covetousness is not simply a sin of the rich. Doubtless many who are rich are subject to being covetous and may well be. This was true of certain ones in the Biblical record. Many, upon becoming rich, are no longer covetous because they have what they coveted. The poor are subject to being covetous because they do not have what others have and have not attained the level of possessions they crave. Most of the examples of covetousness in the Bible have to do with those who are not wealthy, such as servants, stewards, and men of lesser estate value. Are there any people anywhere who would dare claim they are immune from the temptation and spiritual disease of being covetous? We are all subject to this

temptation toward this sin and must stand alert and on guard.

Another View

All covetousness is not sinful, but at least once was actually admonished. Paul urged his Corinthian brethren to *"covet earnestly the best gifts"* (First Corinthians 12:31). All desire is not evil. Immoderate, excessive and unlawful desire is sinful. There are desires that are right and uplifting to mankind while there are desires that, if fulfilled, degrade and produce spiritual damnation. We must learn to covet that which is good to the extent we can better serve the Lord. But we must be careful not to covet that which is forbidden. Even in coveting what is right we must be sure of our motives for wanting the good and make those motives pure and honorable. We should never do evil in order to fulfill desires even for that which is good.

As with all of the other vices which are resisted, condemned and opposed in the Ten Commandments, the cure is found only in Christ. Jesus kept all of the commandments perfectly. To understand our relationship between ourselves and material things, God and eternity, and understand as Christ would have us understand, we must have a heart free of covetousness.

Principles Abide

The Ten Commandments were a part of the law that God gave Israel through Moses. That law has been nailed to the cross, taken out of the way, is no longer binding on anybody, not even the Jews. But the principles, and even some of the specifics of the Ten Commandments are binding upon everyone because they are a part of the law of Christ under whose authority we all live and before whom we shall stand in judgment.

As great as the Ten Commandments were and are, they do not contain the way of forgiveness, the way of eternal life, the plan of salvation. One should not allow himself or herself to be misled, as many falsely teach, that obeying the Ten Commandments will take you to heaven. There is much more to obeying the will of God than just the things taught in the Ten Commandments. But these are certainly a vital part, under Christ, in doing the will of the Lord.

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What Kind of Church Ought We To Be?

NUMBER ONE

Together we form a local congregation. What kind of church are we? I am not asking what is our name, or even the doctrine we teach, believe and practice, although these things are vitally important. The world has varying ways of defining and identifying a church. It may be big or small in number; popular or unpopular; strict or loose; conservative or liberal; Catholic or Protestant; or other distinctions with which the world is acquainted. But regardless of man's classifications, the important question is, "Are we the kind of church the Lord approves?" This is what counts. If God does not approve, nothing else really matters at all.

We can know what God approves by studying the congregations of the New Testment. Those churches, like the one to which we belong, were composed of people. They had good points and shortcomings. In the Scriptures the good is commended and the bad is exposed, condemned and corrected. By closely observing the Lord's approval or disapproval through the teaching of the apostles we can know what God wants, expects, accepts and rejects. This teaching enables us to shun the evil and pursue the good.

There is no better church to serve as an example than the church in Philippi. That church never seems to have given Paul an anxious moment. We learn of it in Acts and the letter to the Philippians primarily, but from other books as well. Nearly everything said of it was commendable with words of encouragement which make it a good church to imitate.

Established

Acts fifteen and sixteen records the establishment of the church in Philippi. Paul was on his second missionary journey, having visited several churches he had established on his first journey. The Holy Spirit directed him from Asia to Troas. In Troas Paul saw a vision of a man from Macedonia saying, *"Come over into Macedonia and help us."* He obeyed that call,

entered the continent of Europe, went to the city of Philippi and preached the gospel.

The first converts were Lydia and those of her household. He found them worshipping alongside a river and gave them opporunity to hear the gospel. They heard, believed and obeyed the Lord in baptism.

Later, Paul was in prison because he offended the local soothsayers. But this gave him opportunity to preach the gospel to the jailor who heard, believed and obeyed. These conversions marked the beginning of the Lord's church in that city and on that continent. The church in this city was composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

This church was the kind that caused Paul to be thankful to God for them every time he thought of them. Philippians 1:3,4, *"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy."* Are we the kind of church this inspired apostle would commend in such fashion? It was not the case of every church with which Paul was acquainted. But there were good reason for Paul's attitude toward them.

Organized

This church was properly organized. Philippians 1:1, *"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."* They showed respect for God's governmental arrangement for the church. A bishop is the same as an elder as is evidenced in Acts twenty where Paul asked the elders of Ephesus to meet him and he referred to them as bishops or overseers. There was not one bishop over several churches but a plurality of bishops over each congregation.

We can conclude that these men were qualified to serve in this capacity. It is unthinkable that Paul would be grateful for a church that allowed men to serve as leaders who ignored God's qualifications as found in Titus one and First Timothy three. This church, and many since then, was blessed with the right kind of leadership. Just having men who are called elders is not sufficient nor proper. More attention must be given to those who assume the oversight of local congregations. For too long this has not been handled Biblically and men who are not qualified have occupied these influential places far too long and too often.

Liberal in Giving

The church in Philippi was also one that was liberal in giving. Paul help up the Macedonian churches as examples for the church in Corinth to imitate in the matter of giving (Second Corinthians 8:1-5). They gave liberally even though they were poor. They urged Paul to accept their gifts. They even gave, Paul said, beyond their power. Do you think the congregation to which you belong deserves such a distinction?

They were stedfast in their support of Paul in his labors. Chapter one, verse five, *"For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now."* Chapter four, verse sixteen, *"For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity."* This indicates their missionary and benevolent spirit. They gave of their own accord. As Paul stated in Second Corinthians 8:5, *"But first they gave their own selves to the Lord."* If there is a "secret" to sucessful giving, this is it. One who has given himself or herself will likely, readily, willingly, actively and stedfastly give of their means. God approves churches who are like this church in this area.

Steady

The Philippian church was steady in its work. It was not "on fire" one day and lukewarm or cold the next. Paul noted, *"from the first day until now"* they had been agressively active in their doing good. They were zealous, diligent, intent on growing in faith and standing firm and true. He spoke of their "*progress and joy in the faith,"* (1:25), and how they were *"standing fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel, in nothing affrighted by the adversary."* (1:27).

Churches can engage in good works authorized of God with zeal and fervor, but if they are not attentive, they can become sluggish and sloppy in their work. When such occurs, everything that can be done to revive its efforts ought to be done. It is hard to stay on "top" all the time, but good churches are reliable and dependable because they never slacken their pace but are always pushing the cause of Christ to the world. It is the constant and steady growth that endures. The spurts and explosions may provoke headlines in brotherhood "brag sheets" but the church in Philippi was not of that sort.

Love

Another quality of the brethren in Philippi that every church must desire was their brotherly love and devotion. They loved the Lord above everything and everybody else. This caused them to be devoted to His cause. This also made them love one another. Love for God leads one to love His Word, love the lost, and love the faithful brethren with a specialty. It was love that tied them together in unity in Christ because they stood together for the truth in doctrine and practice. Paul knew the value of brotherly love and also knew how limiting the lack of love is on any congregation.

There were several admonitions Paul gave these good brethren. Knowing that the devil never ceases to seek the undoing of faithful brethren, Paul spoke to them, not so much to correct as to assist them in preventing error. In chapter three, verses 12-14, *"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* Paul knew the necessity to keep on keeping on. He encouraged this in them because he knew faithfulness was essential.

Heart and Life

High in his thoughts was their unity. Chapter two, verses one through four takes note of the value of being likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord and one mind. He urged humility (2:5-8) in the likeness of Christ. He reminded them to continue their working (2:12-16). Concerning their manner of life, he said, (1:27), *"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ."* As for fears, trials and harassments Paul gave them admonitions in Chapter four, verses six, seven and nineteen that would sustain them.

Paul knew the concern for the inner man and the thought of the heart. Chapter four, verses eight and nine, *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace*

shall be with you."

Such was the church at Philippi. It was organized, liberal in giving, mission and benevolent minded, consistent in work, always doing its best rather than a "hit and miss" program, growing in unity, standing stedfast in doctrine, known for its love and one that was considered by Paul to have respect for warnings and encouragements to faithfulness.

Is this the kind of church we are where we are members? To what extent are we like they were? What efforts do we intend to make to improve the situation and be more like them? We can all do better and should resolve to be a part of efforts to make things more as they should be. Paul described what that church was to him. He called it an *"odor of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable , well-pleasing to God."* (4:18). It is important how we rate before God.

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What Kind of Church Ought We To Be?

NUMBER TWO

This is a second lesson with this same title. But the approaches are different. We together make up a local church. What kind of church are we? We speak not of size in numbers, wealth of the members, and certainly have no reference to denominational identity because the Lord's church is not a denomination. But we are concerned only with whether we have God's approval. Without that nothing else really matters.

As we noted in the first lesson, regardless of what other people think or what we think of ourselves, what God accepts is what is important. We can know what God wants, expects, approves and condemns by studying the churches revealed in the New Testament such as the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Philippi, the seven churches in Asia and others. In this lesson we have compiled several traits which we are certain ought to characterize every congregation.

Authority

We must be a church where Christ is the supreme authority. One of the real weaknesses evident among present-day churches is the laxity toward authority. Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18), and is head of the church (Colossians 1:18). The church is not a democracy as some denominations boast. All matters of faith have been settled and revealed in God's Word. God speaks to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2), and we are to hear Him (Matthew 17:5). Too much in religion has been determined by what people want, like, prefer, traditions and human philosophies, feelings and other such unworthy standards. What we do must be *"in the name of"* Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17), and this demands a *"thus saith the Lord."* We must *"speak as the oracles of God"* (First Peter 4:11).

Worship

We ought to be a church of people who are faithful in worship. This is certainly not the case with many. Hebrews 10:25 still applies. It is a sin to forsake the assembling together. The question, "Do I have to attend all the services of the church?" never falls from the lips of faithful brethren. They do not consider worshipping God a "have to" matter but a "get to" matter. Faithful brethren never have to be begged to worship.

Liberal in Giving

Alongside these things, we must be a church that is liberal in giving. Prosperity may be the downfall of many professed Christians. We can become too selfish, indulgent, skimpy and tight-fisted to contribute as we should. Worldly pursuits can take first place. We live in a land of abundance and this can be a temptation to put too much confidence in material things. The secret formula to giving is to first give ourselves to God as did the early Christians (Second Corinthians 8:5). You never have to beg people to give liberally who have given themselves to God. It comes naturally for them to give of their means.

Working

We ought to be a church that is concerned with doing the work that God gave the church to do. The work of the church is

saving souls by the preaching of the gospel. Nothing is superior to that and nothing should be allowed to supplant that. This requires a knowledge of the gospel, a love for the Word of God, a love for the lost, and a determination to do this work. *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,"* is still the charge to God's people.

Too many churches already have detoured themselves from this thrust and have embarked on efforts of recreation, secular education, entertainment, and have become not much more than a country club. Doctrine is either ignored, ridiculed or suppressed, but getting numbers and money, having recreation centers which are called "family life centers" for fun and games, have taken over the efforts and energies of many. These things have no place in the work of the church, but are only indications of the extent of apostasy among brethren and the disregard to do what is authorized and not go beyond Scripture.

Singing That Lies

A problem in our time is the risk of singing lies. We sing "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord," but will not even be faithful in worship. "I Love To Tell The Story," we sing, but who have we told lately? "We'll Work 'Till Jesus Comes," and from the look of things some must believe He has come and now they have quit. "Rescue the Perishing," but how many can we name we have rescued in the past year? "Stand Up, Stand Up, For Jesus" has been heard in the halls of worship, but many seemed ashamed of the faith and the exclusive and inclusive nature of the gospel plan of salvation. Digression, compromise, support of false teachers, "go-along-ism" has captivated the mind and ways of many. Another song that ought to haunt us is, "Must I Go Empty Handed?" Has our record of reaching the lost been productive? So much effort over the past years has been directed toward fighting movements among us that destroy the faith that we have slackened the evangelistic fervor that should characterize the church.

Truth

We ought and must be a church where the truth is upheld. Regardless of whatever else we do, if we do not hold to the truth our efforts are for naught. Truth is under attack in society, religiously, politically, by denominationalists to the feminists,

liberals, in and out of the church, in schools, homes, government, everywhere. Sacred values are denounced and being replaced by the revolution of man against God. Our task is the proclamation of truth. We must defend it, stand by it, live it, without compromise and appeasement to anyone, anytime, anywhere for any reason. It is tragic to see churches that once were known for their soundness and stedfastness now drifting with the currents of digression, seeking peace at the cost of truth, compromising with false teachers, going along definatly, ignorantly with error and apostasy. Schools, papers, preachers, elderships are being subverted under the barage of "unity in diversity."

The church is not to seek the path that may be popular to the world, but the path the Lord has trod. That which attracts the most people is not necessarily that which is right. Many have failed to understand this and have concluded that numerical growth is success. Some make quite a display of large financial contributions, often the money being directed into efforts that are not even the work of the church at all. If a church does not teach sound doctrine, defend sound doctrine, and its members strive to live according to sound doctrine, whatever else may be said of it amounts to nothing because it is not approved of God.

Active

The Lord's church should be aggressive, zealous and consistent in its activity. We always have need to improve. But there is no reason to be impressed with "flash in the pan" explosions, gimmicks, booster schemes that bring reproach on the noble and sacred cause of Christ. To watch some churches operate you would think they are more like a circus than a congregation of the saved.

It is also painfully noted that many churches that claim to be "conservative" in doctrine are dead because they do little to nothing for fear that they will do something wrong. Some of the wild and digression activities among us are provoked by gross inactivity among those who loudly shout for sound doctrine but do so little. Doing nothing is already wrong. While lukewarm, haphazard, half-hearted approaches to the work of the Lord is reprehensible, we are expected to do more than just "keep house and hold our own." At least we must be militantly persistent in trying to get the job done. Discouragements are bountiful in number, but we cannot afford to become weary in

well doing. If we do not engage in the cause of Christ with interest, enthusiasm and dedication, just how do you think we shall ever impress anyone else to be concerned? It ought not take brethren weeks, months, even years to make decisions and be about the Father's business. Neither ought we confuse "busy-ness" with the Father's business. We are to be a people ready unto every good work and go about our work with diligence and with all our heart.

Many other traits mark a church as being what God approves, such as being Scripturally organized, with brethren having unfeigned love one for another, where members guard their tongues lest they sow seeds of strife and discord, with a exhibition of cooperation and concern for the welfare of others. Yes, you have heard all this said before. But I am reminded of the story told about Marshall Keeble who went to a place to preach in a gospel meeting. His first sermon was on repentance. His second sermon was also about repentance. Nobody commented to him about it, however, thinking he might have forgotten what he had preached earlier. But when his third sermon was also on repentance several confronted him and wanted an explanation why he did not preach something else. He said, "You have not done that yet, and that is why I keep preaching it." Preachers keep saying these things to brethren and some grow tired of hearing them, but so few are really doing anything about what they hear.

You read in the Bible about the churches in Rome, Philippi, Berea and many other places. Paul had words of commendation for many of them because of their faith, their assistance in spreading the gospel, their love and sincerity. He noted their willingness to accept and respond to words of correction. He was aware of their stedfastness and faithfulness to truth. If the Holy Spirit wrote a special letter to the church to which you belong, similar to the letters the Lord sent to the churches of Asia, what could be commended? What might be condemned? Let us be aware that the letters to the churches of the New Testament apply to churches today as far as teaching us what God expects of us. Whether God approves of the church to which we belong or not depends on the members, what they are, what they are doing, where they stand and the direction they are going. How is it where you attend?

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The Master's Touch

Luke 8:43-48, "*And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him and touched the border of his garment; immediately her issue of blood stanched. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude thronged thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.*"

At the beginning of this account we see a diseased woman. She had made every effort to recover her health, even spending all she had. At the end of the account we have the same woman but now healed. The passage also indicates that she was spiritually well also because of the saying of Christ for her to be of comfort. With faith in her heart she had touched the Master. The difference between the woman at the start and the woman at the end was the contact she had with Jesus Christ. From someone sick, ordinary and sinful she had been changed into someone pure, whole and healthy by His touch.

Sought His Touch

Wherever Jesus went He was thronged by people who sought even to touch Him and receive His touch. Luke 6:19, "*And the whole multitude sought to touch him; for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all.*" Mark 3:10, "*For he had healed many: insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues.*" Mathew 14:34-36, "*And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment; and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.*"

The influence of Jesus, His touch on their lives, their coming in contact with Him, having His hands and His imprint upon them made their lives worthwhile, restored, valuable and wonderful.

The Touch of the Master's Hand

'Twas battered, scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste time on the old violin
But he held it up with a smile.
"What am I bidden, good people, " he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?
A dollar, a dollar; now two, only two,
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?
Three dollars once, three dollars twice,
Going for three?" But no!
From the room far away a gray haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow.
Then wiping the dust from the old violin
And tightening up the strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet,
As sweet as an angel sings.

The music ceased and the auctioneer
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said, "What am I bid for this old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two,
Two thousand, and who'll make it three?
Three thousand once, three thousand twice,
And going, and gone," said he.
The people cheered and some of them cried,
"We don't quite understand.
What changed its worth?"
Swiftly came the reply,
"The touch of the masters hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and torn with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd
Much like the old violin.
A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,

A game, and he travels on,
He going once, and going twice,
He going and almost gone.
But the Master comes and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand,
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.

The Leper

Christ is our Master. What has the Master's touch meant in times past? Matthew 8:1-3, *"When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."* In this case the Master's touch was a cleansing touch. The defiled and unclean man with a disease that was gradually destroying his body, cut off from society, no cure being known, was cleansed.

Leprosy is a type of sin because sin defiles, makes one unfit and unclean before God. It destroys man spiritually. Man alone possesses no cure. Jesus showed His power over leprosy and in so doing His power over sin. The Master's touch meant that the man was no longer defiled and unclean, but could be readmitted to society and association with others. So the spiritual touch of the Master, our contact with Him, will bring our readmission into the presence of God, clean and pure with sins forgiven.

Peter's Mother-in-Law

Matthew 8:14-16, *"And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto them. When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils; and he cast out spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick."*

Troubled by fever and weakened by it, the Master's touch not only brought healing, but quiet and reassurance, giving relief that allowed her to return to useful service. So with us! Life is often upset by turmoil as we struggle under the havoc, violence, disappointment and destruction that invades our lives. But the touch of Christ in life can restore us to useful service to God and man.

His Disciples

On another occasion the touch of Jesus reassured His fightened disciples. Matthew 17:5-8, *"While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only."*

Fear often possesses the heart. Nothing in life is sure. Many things bring us insecurity. There is nothing in this world in which we can place full trust and confidence. Though we long for security it is not to be found except through the Master's touch. His touch gives us hope, confidence, strength and peace that nothing else can provide, and that cannot be wrested from us. His promises not only comfort us in this life but give us joy and gladness that we shall be God's heirs of eternal life.

The Blind and Deaf

Matthew 9:27-31, *"And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes saying, According to you faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it."*

The touch of Jesus is an illuminating touch. It was said of Him that He went about doing good, including making the blind to see.

But there is a blindness far more deadly than physical blindness. That is spiritual blindness in sin. Jesus said of some, *"Having ears they hear not; having eyes they see not."* Many are spiritually blind, religiously blind, not even aware that such is the case with them. We must learn God's will to be sure we are not among that number. Only by seizing the Master's hand, being guided by His touch, can we escape the spiritual blindness and be lights in a world of sinful darkness.

The touch of Jesus was also a liberating touch. Mark 7:32-35, *"And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand*

upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue, and looking up into heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straitway his ears were opened and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain." Being physically deaf and unable to speak is pictured as being in bondage. Jesus liberated this person from this physical captivity and by His touch people can be liberated from spiritual bondage also.

There is a bondage that cannot be compared because of its devestation. That is being in the bondage of sin and servitude of Satan. One may be able to physically hear and speak and at the same time be in a far worse handicapped state than those physically burdened. One who stops his ears and closes his eyes to things spiritual is the world's most pitiable prisoner. Truth sets one free (John 8:32). Jesus liberated this man of whom we spoke, and He is the One that can liberate us from the bondage of sin. This was His very mission to this earth (Luke 19:10; First Timothy 1:15).

There are additional things that could be said of the touch of Jesus. It was a touch of healing, cleansing, reassurance, illumination, liberation and was ministered with compassion and tenderness. He showed tender love toward little children when He touched them. There was the time with Jairus and his daughter, an occasion when His touch brought life (Luke 8:54), like the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:14).

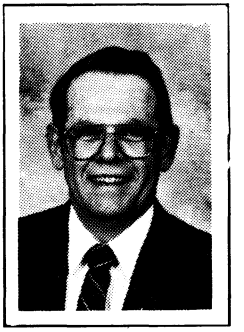
As we study the times when the touch of Jesus is mentioned, two facts come to mind: (1) the power of the Master's touch; (2) not once did Jesus force His touch upon anyone, but each time it was sought and willingly received. Jesus brought Himself within reach, but only when people reached for Him, desired Him to come into their midst, truly wanting contact with Him, did His touch bring forth the blessings.

Jesus makes Himself available to us. He is not far from any of us. But to be blessed by His touch we must desire and seek it with faith in our hearts and in obedience. When we do receive the Master's touch in our lives we will be far better than before.

"Have thine own way, Lord, Have thine own way,
Wounded and weary, help me I pray,
Power, all power, surely is thine,
Touch me and heal me, Savior divine."

† † † † †

Ashamed to Answer



JAMES W. BOYD

I was privileged to read a series of questions asked of one who claims to be a gospel preacher, but he would not answer. One of his elders did answer, but said those who inquired ought to be ashamed for asking them and blasting them as dangerous hypocrites. Of course, he signed his notation with "love."

Is it shameful to ask what one believes about the inspiration of the Bible, the kingdom, mechanical instruments of music, the work of the Holy Spirit, the creation, the Lord's Supper, baptism, worldliness such as drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing, mixed bathing, divorce, women leading prayer, modern versions, heaven and hell, spiritual gifts, fellowship of denominations, etc.?

Since we are taught to give answer for what we believe, why is it shameful to ask others what they believe? Why call those who inquire dangerous hypocrites? Could it be because the one who was asked does not believe truth and prefers to hide that fact? We contend the shame belongs to those who will not answer such relevant, pertinent and timely questions. We commend those who want to know what is believed.

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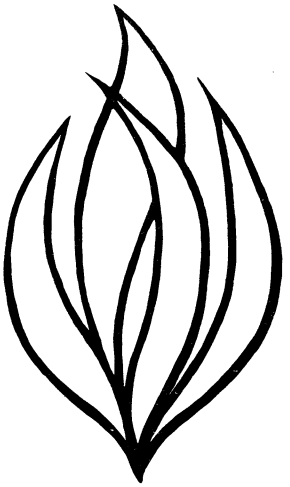

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Holding Up Each Other's Hands

Exodus 17:8-13, *"Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one one the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."*

Israel had but shortly crossed the Red Sea in their deliverance from Egypt. They began to encounter various obstacles as they went through the wilderness toward Sinai, such as food and water shortages. But they also were faced with the nomadic people, such as the Amalekites, that raided and pillaged their victims with hit and run tactics.

Moses, Joshua, Aaron, Hur

Israel won a great victory against these raiding parties in this account, but notice the people that were prominently mentioned in that victory. There was Moses, God's chosen leader of Israel and possibly the greatest leader the nation ever was to have. There was Aaaron, his brother and mouthpiece, who would soon become the first high priest and a prominent man in the early history of Israel. There was Joshua, the eventual succesor to Moses, a mighty man of war and of faith. There was also a man named Hur who is mentioned only twice in Scripture. He is but a minor character relatively speaking; certainly not in the same class as the previous three. But we see him here in an important role. From this we learn that there is no such thing as an unimportant person, especially when that person is doing the will of God.

During the fighting that occurred, Moses held forth the rod of God. That rod was used to often during the Israelite sojourn from Egypt to Canaan. That was the rod thrown before Pharoah that turned into a serpent. It was stretched over the Red Sea when it was parted. Moses used it to smite the rock from which came forth water. It was an instrument through which the power and authority of God was manifested. When Moses upheld the rod over the field of battle Israel prevailed. The opposite resulted when, having grown weary, he let down the rod to rest his hands. It was here that Aaron and Hur performed such a simple but invaluable service by holding up Moses' hands during the time he was too weary to do so by himself.

A Constant Warfare

Let us draw a lesson from the principle in operation in this event. The forces of good and evil are in constant warfare. It is not a physical but a spiritual warfare (Second Corinthians 10:4). The power of God unto salvation is the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16). The Lord's Word is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). When the Word of God is held aloft the forces of Jesus prevail. But, as when Moses alone could not uphold the rod over the conflict with Amalek, neither can just one successfully fight the battle alone without help from others. Not just the leaders can carry on the fight, but it takes the "Hurs" also. We are all to be soldiers of the cross in the army of the Lord. As such, we must cooperate and assist each other. We have an obligation to hold up each others hands as we uphold the Word of God. When we support, encourage and relieve one another, we are doing more than rendering service to each other. We are supporting the cause of Christ in which we are all enlisted to fight.

How frustrating, confusing and disheartening it is to think that you do not have the support of others while you are doing the work of the Lord! In the Old Testament we read of Elijah who was once so discouraged that he thought he was the only one that loved the Lord. He was informed that there were seven thousand that had not bowed to Baal. But having gone so long without support and encouragement, fighting battle after battle, his spirit, zeal, determination and even his courage had waned. He was so bent, nearly broken, that he was ready to quit and die and let everything just go.

It is doubtlessly true today that many faithful brethren are

pushed almost to the same point. Many good works are never accomplished, possibly never even attempted, because we fail to hold up each other's hands. Preachers get discouraged. Elders can be made to feel useless and ineffective because it seems nobody cares. Possibly members of the church drift into digression and apostasy for much the same reason. We are taught to *"bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."* (Galatians 6:2).

How To Do It

Consider some ways we can hold up each other's hands. More than most realize, faithful attendance at worship services is a boost to others. At times elderships have soldiers in the army that act as if they have no responsibility because they are full of excuses, often negligent and indifferent, haphazard in ther worship. How would you like to preach for a congregation, and preach faithfully the truth that must hear and believe to be saved, the truth that brethren say they endorse, but the membership, at least a sizeable portion of it, is absent time after time? How would you like to labor with those who complain when they are urged to be faithful? Is that holding up each other's hands? Is that upholding the power of God?

How would you like to prepare a lesson, as Bible class teachers do regularly, and then so few show up for the class as if what was being done really did not matter to them? We are such hindrances to each other by absenteeism. This deliberate absenteeism is one of the greatest problems facing the Lord's church today. There may be several causes for it, but it reduces itself to a love of this world and a disinterest in the cause of Christ, even among professed "Christians." Members run into problems in life, and rather than leaning more heavily on the Lord, they take it out on the Lord by disassociating themselves from His and His people. Why is that?

I know of no surer way to discourage fellow Christians than to think your presence at worship is not important. Do we really have the right to treat God and each other that way? We are duty bound to support the efforts made to proclaim the message of truth to a lost world. We need to help each other.

Cooperation

We can hold up each other's hands by working in harmony

and unity with those of like precious faith, cooperating under the leadership. I takes very little character when everything is going your way to cooperate. Most anyone can create harmony and unity if they get their way in every matter. It is on those occasions when decisions and programs that may not be altogether to your liking that you are called upon to demonstrate real character. We are speaking of matters of human judgment and opinion, not matters of revealed faith. The eldership of a congregation must guide the entire body in such matters. Not everybody can always be one hundred per cent pleased every time. Nor should anyone think they have to be. We need to learn to work WITH brethren rather than AGAINST them; responding to the call of work with the attitude of cooperation. Standing with oneness in doctrine as we must, we should strive for harmony in the performace of our task.

Giving

Another way we hold up each other's hands is through giving. It goes without saying that the financial part of the Lord's work is more than one or even a few can carry. It takes everyone doing as they ought. In most congregations the bulk of the contribution comes from a minority. This is not always because the minority has greater wealth, but because the minority gives as the Bible teaches us all to give. When one does not give as he or she ought, he suffers a three-fold harm. One, he is deprived of the blessings that come with liberality and sacrifice. Two, it is an unfairness to brethren to allow them to carry the financial ball while you also enjoy the use of facilities and rejoice in progress that you did not help promote. Third, and this counts most of all, failure to give as you ought is to disobey God. Does that matter to you? It should!

Living

There are many other ways to hold up each other's hands, but one additional suggestion we offer in this study. Supporting the truth by a godly life and offering an encouraging word is uplifting to everyone around you. When brethren suffer difficulties in life, what a benefit for them to have their brethren speak words of genuine concern and consolation, offer a helping hand, help them through the hard places and rough side of the mountain, lifting them up when they stumble. When sin

overtakes a brother, do we not see how we need to hold up each other, not condoning or winking at sin, but seeking to restore the fallen one to faithfulness again?

We all recognize that an ungodly life by a member of the church inflicts harm on the whole body. How many times have people been turned away from the truth that is preached because of the hypocrisy in the lives of those who profess to uphold it? I recall preaching a sermon on a moral issue with which most have no real problem as far as verbally endorsing the lesson. But later one who was present but was not a member of the church came to me and told me that he knew for a fact that some of the leaders in the congregation did not believe what I preached and violated the truth in their lives. Whether that was true or not, I at first could not tell. It later proved to have been true. But the truth is often buried beneath the rubbish of ungodliness in the lives of church members. Is this upholding the truth? Is this upholding each other? Certainly not! The religious faith of many good brethren has been held up for ridicule because other brethren subvert it by wickedness. We must never be apologetic about the truth. We are not the originators of it, but the proclaimers of it. We have the task to teach it and practice it. Failure to do so is detrimental to everyone.Godliness is one way of upholding each other, even as we strive to assist each other in getting to heaven.

We may never be a Moses, an Aaron, or a Joshua. But there is not one Christian who cannot be a Hur and hold up the hands of others, such a preacher, teachers, elderships, and good brethren as they labor faithfully and soundly in their taks. We are to help each other reach the glories of heaven. Is there a nobler endeavor in which we could be involved? Help each other!

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(continued from page 24)

These are words of optimism, wisdom, hope and determination that embody the ideas of retrospection, introspection and prospection.

Let us close this lesson with the earnest admonition that we all spend some time and thought in retrospection, introspection and propsection. It will make a difference, both in this life and in eternity.

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Nothing But Leaves

Mark 11:12-14, 20-25, "*And on the morrow when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon. And when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever. And his disciples heard it... And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig free dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance said unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*"

This is the record of an event just prior to the crucifixion. There are two matters of concern in the passage: (1) the power of faith and prayer, and (2) the action regarding the fig tree. Our concern in this lesson is with this action. It has been a puzzle to many. Another lesson shal discuss the first subject.

The Event

Let us understand what actually happened. Christ saw a fig tree. There were leaves on the tree. He went to get fruit from it, but He found nothing but leaves. He pronounced a curse upon the tree and it withered. This was not a fit of anger nor a deed of vengeance, but an object lesson demonstrating a certain truth He was presenting. In doing this action, Jesus was not unlike many of the prophets of old who also acted many of their prophecies to make them more understandable.

Jeremiah buried a garment, allowed it to rot, and declared that Judah would likewise be destroyed. He once took a bottle and broke it, saying that Jerusalem would also be broken.

Ezekiel imposed upon himself a famine to demonstrate the

famine that would come to Judah. He also took a hair and cut it into three pieces, burning one, throwing another to the wind, and cutting the third with a sword, but keeping back a small portion of it. By this he illustrated what was to come upon Judah, burning, scattering, death, but the preservation of a remnant. So the action of Jesus was an object lesson. It was also the manifestation of miraculous power. It was not one of destruction of what was good, but a constructive act through the destruction of what deserved destruction. Jesus was demonstrating a side of Deity that some tend to forget; namely, that God, although merciful, is also capable of executing justice and severity. Jesus would have presented the Father deceptively if, while showing God's compassion, He had not also shown His wrath against what deserved it.

Justified Indignation

Why was Jesus so indignant toward the tree? There are two important reasons. But we must understand something of the nature of the fig tree to understand the reasons. Figs appear before the leaves. The presence of leaves would indicate the presence of fruit if the tree was producing as it ought. It was not the time to expect fruit, but the tree gave the impression it bore fruit by the presence of its leaves. The tree presented itself to be something it was not. It stood as a lie; guilty of pretense; and example of hypocrisy. It was stealing nutrition from the soil, but did not deserve the space it occupied because it was not doing what it was supposed to do.

Jesus showed at other times His displeasure when something that has a function, purpose and mission was not performing that function. Matthew 3:10, the words of John the Baptist, *"And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."* John 15:6, *"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."* Matthew 5:13, *"Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of men."* Luke 13:6-9, *"He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on*

this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." One can be patient and longsuffering with that which does not perform properly, making every effort to give it time and opportunity, giving it assistance. But one must realize there comes a time when nothing works and the thing that is of no value needs to be removed.

Symbol of Evil

The fig tree stood as a symbol of conditions then and now. The Jews were guilty of hypocrisy, talking one way but acting another. All their talk was not in error. Matthew 23:3, *"All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not."* James 1:22,23, *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer. he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was."*

This tree, by no bearing fruit, but only leaves, gave the appearance of goodness, but it was not good. It was guilty of pretense, not performance. So the bold action of Jesus was a stern condemnation of every form of hypopcrisy and insincere showiness.

We have a function, purpose and mission. Solomon said, *"Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."* Ecclesiastes 12:13. We are to glorify God, spread the tidings of salvation, reflect the brilliance and beauty of Christ in our lives, bear good fruit, let our light shine to the glory of the Father in heaven, be the pillar and ground of the truth.

Jesus found the fig tree far from what He had a right to expect. Does He find the same in us? John 15: 2,8, *"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit... Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."* Do we appear to be something we really are not?

Becoming and Being

We recognize that there is more to serving God than BECOMING a Christian, even though this is absolutely essential. But there is also the duty of BEING a Christian and this involves bearing the kind of fruit Jesus wants.

One may ask, "But was there not something beneficial about the fig tree, even though it did not bear fruit?" Yes, it possibly gave shade, even provided a place where a bird might build a nest, etc. But that was not its primary purpose. As far as its primary duty was concerned, it was useless. I have a wristwatch. It might be used as a toy, a paper weight, an ornament or some other way. But if it will not keep reasonably accurate time, it is useless for the purpose for which it was made. (I have a watch like that and you probably do also.)

We see the Lord's displeasure with the fig tree because of its hypocrisy and because it was not fulfilling its primary function. Let us now make an application and learn and profit.

The Lord teaches us to attend worship. But even that can be only a show and pretense if we are not striving to live a Christlike life each day of life.

Membership in the church, the body of Christ, is essential to salvation, but if we considered it merely a mark of social respectablity and do not assume the responsibilities of the body we are like the fig tree. Even prayer can be *"nothing but leaves"* if we do not pray with earnestness, faith, sincerity, according to His will, in His name, and couple prayer with a pure life. Prayer was a mark of hypocrisy for one man in Luke 18. Turn and read of him. Proverbs 28:9, *"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."*

Reason To Be

As individuals and as a congregation we have a primary purpose for existence. It is not to gratify self and gather material accumulations. We are not here for mere social contracts, fellowship, benevolent deeds, etc. We are for the glorification of God by our lives and are to work for the salvation of the sinful souls around us by teaching them the saving gospel. It is not our aim to entertain, nor to operate a "fun and games" religion. We are not primarily given to calm emotions and soothe nerves. It is not our task to just try to make people feel good about themselves. A church may have much activity but it never really be *"nothing but leaves."* A church that fails in its duty to proclaim, defend and live by the truth is a church of leaves. But

God expects the church to be the pillar and ground of the truth (First TImothy 3:15). This truth is what the world desparately needs. Are we making anything more than a pretense, an outward appearance, a superficial showing?

Surely we can profit from this action of Jesus and we will if we allow it to motivate us to analyze ourselves as individuals and congregations to see if we are bearing fruit or just leaves. It is possible to have a lot of "busy-ness" and still not be doing the Father's business.

Before we can bear fruit we must be a part of the tree (John 15:1-8). We must become attached to the vine, who is Christ. This we do when we obey the gospel by beliving in Christ, repenting of our sins, confessing our faith in Him, and being baptized into Him for the remission of sin. Then we are prepared and ready, and expected, to bear fruit.

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Power to Remove Mountains

This lesson is a companion study to the one immediately prior to it because they are taken from the same context of teaching found in Mark eleven. Mark 11:20-26, *"And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shalt not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespassess."*

The grand and primary work of the Lord on the earth was to

provide atonement for mankind, the way for man to be saved from sin. It was His mission to seek and save the lost by making satisfactory reparation for man's offences against God, dying in man's stead, purchasing with His blood a people who would belong to God.

Not only did He come to provide the way to heaven, but to provide the way by which the way of salvation would be made known to every generation. This necessitated extensive effort by preparing His apostles for the work of taking the good news to the world. As time drew nearer for Him to die and return to heaven, His efforts took on an air of urgency and intensity. He warned against dangers they would encounter. He tried to prepare them for the suffering, disappointments and difficulties of infinite variety they would meet. But He also spoke to them words of assurance as they would go about the work of gathering souls for the Lord. Such is the theme of the words of our text.

To Whom the Application?

These words were spoken to the apostles. But is there no application to us today? We contend that the sentiment of these assurances extend to all laborers in the Master's vineyard. The work of saving souls from sin, begun by the Lord with His life, death, burial and resurrection, continues to this day, being accomplished through human beings who preach the message of salvation He brought. Every Chrsitian can appropriate this gracious language of the text as if it was addressed to him, as far as the major theme is concerned.

What exactly is the assurance given here? Consider again verse twenty-three. *"For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shalt not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."* This is not to be understood literally. This is figurative language. The apostles are never reported to have actually moved literal mountains. His people were soon to enter upon a task which would seem as difficult as moving a mountain. The mountains represent the obstacles, adverse forces, hardship and troubles that awaited them. We use the word "mountain" in this sense in the popular song, "Climb Every Mountain." One who solves problems is sometimes called a "rooter up of mountains." The immorality of

paganism, bigotry and barbarism would seem insurmountable obstacles in the poathway of success in preaching the gospel.

The apostles needed and received assurance of power and strength sufficient for the task. They needed something superior to the foe. By these words Jesus assured them that not enemy was too great that they could not conquer by the power made available to the children of God.

We Need Power

A faithful Christian is evidence of this power. He may be the lowliest and feeblest child in the kingdom and the world scarcely aware he is alive. Yet he wages a warfare against the flesh, battling against darkness. Sin and Satan strive to foment rebellion in his heart against the Savior. These are "mountains" in his way. But the "mountains" of temptation, discouragement, heartbreak are hewn down. The "mountains" of the guilt of sin and the sentence of spiritual death are made level. He presses on, gaining in goodness and cleansed of spiritual pollution until he finally triumphs into the eternal peace and joy of heaven with God. His existence and manner of life is living proof that he, as God's child, takes mountains and casts them aside.

Consider the struggle of the fellowship of faithful Christians generally. Our main assignment is to be the pillar and ground of the truth, the supporter, proclaimer and defender of it (First Timothy 3:15). We face enemies and are attacked by antagonists right and left. There are foes without and sometimes within that inflict discomfort. But as is the theme of Revelation, regardless of the foes, the church of God shall prevail. Truth is yet in the agony of conflict and contest and the battles are not all won. In spite of almost unbelievable barriers, God's people, like a mighty army, gives evidence of a power that is able to conquer the most severe hindrances. In this way we still show the capacity to cast mountains into the sea, such mountains as atheism, communism, tryranny, slothfulness, lukewarmness, ignorance, poverty, hunger, legalism, liberalism, egotism, division, denominationalism and all other blights on the human scene regarding the soul.

Power of Faith

What is the secret of this marvellous power? Jesus said, *"Have faith in God."* Faith in God is that power that produces

victory and overcomes the world. We are to have faith, not in ourselves by ourselves, but in God, expecting success, not because of our strength, but because of His. Though we are insufficient of ourselves to remove mountains and barriers to heaven, we become sufficient in Christ when God intercedes on our behalf (First Corinthians 10:13).

This faith is an act of the intellect, heart and soul of man. It is the acceptance of God as Creator, Preserver and Judge. It gives reverence for His love as manifested in Jesus Christ. It is a faith which even provokes man's conscience to respond, producing submission and obedience to the Word of the Lord. It recognizes the supremacy of good over evil, accepting the truth that man is capable of seeing, knowing and doing what is right before God.

The Lord tells His children not to doubt in their hearts. It is not always easy to remove all doubts. On every hand mankind is bombarded with skepticism and infidelity designed to destroy faith in God and create doubt. Doubt is the first step toward denial. We are told the Bible is insufficient, unture, uninspired, counterfeit and contradicts science. We are assured that the elements of heaven and earth came not by the Word of God but by some fantastic explosion of unknown substances and that all things have naturally developed as the result of this chance and accidental aggregation of bodies. We are taught that were are nothing more than highly developed and highly evolved animals, void of soul, having no accountability to God, coming from nowhere, here for no reason or purpose, making no difference how we live life, and going nowhere when it ends.

Unbelief

Even people professing religious faith deny the Deity of Christ and such revelations as the miraculous birth by a virgin, His resurrection, that He is God's only begotten Son, and other matters pertaining to Him. Philosophers tell us that truth is no absolute, but relative; nothing is right or wrong except as one might think it right or wrong to himself.

One major explanation for man's personal and worldwide problems is His doubt of God. The tendency to doubt is crippling, causing one to be hesitant, fearful and suspicious. Would you cross a bridge that you doubted could sustain your weight and would likely collpase beneath you?

When we do not believe in what we are doing we cannot do it well. When we doubt that life came from the Supreme Being we

do not live it very well. Teach a boy he came from an animal and he will likely behave in similar fashion. Teach him he came from God and he will have reason to become more like God. Many have failed to anchor themselves to the stable truth of God and are like ships without rudders, being tossed to and fro; as trees being uprooted with the winds of the tempest. By doubting we become impotent and maimed, of no value to self or others. The doubting soul is starved. The inner man become lean, feeble, weak, and the outer man corrupt, vile and base. It is essential to successfully living life and being victorious over that which would destroy that we have a mighty, living, active and obedience faith in God.

Antidote of Doubt

How can we counter the effect of the poison of doubt? There are several ways available to us, but let us consider just one; namely, the universe in which we live. It is boundless, yet in perfect harmony and rhythm. *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork."* (Psalm 19:10). From whence comes this immensity and precision, this absolute order and punctuality of our universe? Some say it is the result of natural law. But we ask, "Who is the lawgiver?" All law must have some origin. A design must have a designer. The universe reflects the existence of a skilled maker, an intellectual power of immeasurable ability. We are compelled by observation of the sublimities and harmonies of our universe to assign their origin to an intelligent Creator.

The world in which we live is one of God's "books" to show His reality. There is the book of nature which reveals God's works. There is the Bible which is God's Word. One shows there is God and the other reveals the God that is.

When we consider man, his powers to think, love, remember and aspire, again we are forced to realize the origin of man must be higher and greater than man himself. When we meditate on history, consider the conscience, study morality, character and the nobilities exhibited in the lives of many people, the simplest, most reasonable and logical explanation is, "The builder and maker is God."

In light of the evidence available, it is not hard to believe in God. The evidence creates faith, and the Word provides the evidence (Romans 10:17). Jesus said such faith is a power that will enable us, His people, to move mountains of trial, hardship

and all other seemingly insurmountable hindrances in life that would otherwise prevent us from being acceptable to our Creator and Judge, the Almighty God of heaven.

Furthermore, we are assured of having power to do what God expects regarding living purely, reaching the lost, meeting the challenges of daily living in Christ. That power is the Biblical faith in God.

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Law and Faith

Romans 3:31, *"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law."*

It is important to understand the context of the passage. The word *"faith"* means the faith or religion from heaven of which Jesus Christ is the founder. The word *"law"* refers to the law of Moses, as it is so often used throughout the book of Romans. A great portion of the book of Romans is a presentation of the contrast between the law of Moses and the faith of Jesus Christ.

Moses' law was a law of man's good works. Salvation was actually impossible under this law because no person can live perfectly. Salvation that is based on man's merit and his own righteousness will never be achieved. This is because it is not in man to always be able to do all that he ought to do, or refrain from every transgression. In contrast to that, salvation under the faith of Christ is based and founded on the goodness and Deity of Jesus Christ. Therefore, salvation is apart from the law of Moses but is enjoyed by and through the faith of Christ. Romans 3:28, *"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."* Galatians 2:16, *"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."*

Not Destroyed

Paul rightly assumed, as he was guided by the Holy Spirit, that this truth regarding the law might provoke some to think the

faith of Christ made the law of Moses without any value and was even a repudiation of Moses' law. It is true that the law was taken out of the way being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), and we are dead to the law, being married to another (Romans 7:1-7). But the faith of Christ did not destroy the law of Moses, nor was that ever the intention or mission of Christ (Matthew 5:17,18). The law was abolished, set aside and replaced (Ephesians 2:15). Note here that most modern versions embrace a contradiction in their rendition of Matthew 5:17, 18 and Ephesians 2:15. The faith of Christ showed all the more that the law of Moses had come from God. Galatians 3:24, *"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."* The purpose of the law was accomplished. The law showed that man could not be saved by his own goodness. The law defined sin and condemned sin. But it did not provide for salvation from sin. Because of the law we have before us spiritual nomenclature and terminology by which we can learn and grasp the system of salvation through Christ. The law was not sinful (Romans 7:7), but did provide a knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). It gave people moral sensitivity and kept the Jewish nation intact for the coming of the Messiah. It provided types and shadows of the faith of Christ that was to come (Hebrews 10:1). It offers figures of the true (Hebrews 9(24).

Rather than thinking the faith of Christ undermined and made void the law, while it did fulfill it and take it out of force, it proved the law to be from God and it served as a prime development and gradual revelation of the system of salvation through Christ. Even so, Paul stresses how salvation is by faith and not the law (Romans 3:28).

Not All Law

Unfortunately, this remark by Paul has been misapplied to teach that the faith of Christ releases people not only from the law of Moses but from all law. Such would release man from all regulation and restraint. Since the principle of law shows right from wrong, this difference would no longer exist if mankind is subject to no law. He would be free to follow his own conscience, his own will, his desires, being accountable to nothing and nobody but himself.

Some have even gone so far with perverting this truth as to teach that those who depend to any extent on obedience to any

law they make void the faith of Christ. They say that this would be an attempt to be saved by works. They have taught there is a conflict, rather than a contrast, between the law and the faith. Their cry is that to contend we must submit to any law is to deny salvation by faith.

Such "reasoning" causes people to reject the necessity to obey the commands to repent, confess Christ, be baptized, live righteously or anything else the Lord has commanded. Such things, they say, have no part in being saved. This is actually an advocacy of lawlessness and permissiveness without any dire consequences.

Law Abides

It is true that one cannot be saved by works of the law of Moses. It is also true one cannot be saved by works of which he can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), or works of his own righteousness (Titus 3:5). But this does not negate the absolute necessity to perform the works of obedience that the faith of Christ requires. God's commands are law. Faith in Christ does not release one from the need to obey, but imposes upon everyone that need. There are many other laws from which the faith of Christ does not release us.

Faith does not release us from the laws of nature, sometimes called the physical laws. Who releases us from the law of gravity? Or can we place our hand on a hot stove burner and no longer expect to be burned if we have faith? Are not we still subject to the law of sowing and reaping? Whether we have knowledge of such laws, or are ignorant of them, we are subject to them and must conform to them or bear the consequences.

Faith in Christ does not release us from accountability to civil law. We are not, as Christians, privileged to disobey such laws simply because we may not like some of them. Romans 13:1-6, First Peter 2:13,14 both teach our duty to such powers. Faith in Christ makes it binding upon us to obey the laws of the land. Only in instances where the laws of the land might force us into conflict with the higher law of God shall we disobey, as did the apostles in Acts four. *"We must obey God rather than man."* Being a Christian makes a person a good and lawabiding citizen.

Faith in Christ certainly does not release us from moral law. Moses' law included moral as well as ceremonial precepts. Morality is essentially a law of doing good. The religion of Christ also contains a moral code. It is the highest, noblest, purest code

known to man. Faith in Christ does not suspend us from answering to morality. It enforces our obligation to be moral. The law of Christ enlarged and expanded on the moral teaching found under Moses. Whereas Moses forbade murder, Christ even forbade hatred. While Moses condemned adultery, the Lord even said to lust was sinful. Instead of an eye for an eye attitude toward offenders, the Lord taught love and forgiveness. Morality is more binding on a Christian than ever before in his life once be comes to Christ.

Christ's Law

Faith in Christ, rather than releasing us from all law, binds us to a law that Paul called the law of faith. Romans 3:27, *"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith."* James called it the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). This is the same as the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus mentioned in Romans 8:2. Sin is lawlessness (First John 3:4). Where there is no law there is no transgression (Romans 4:15). The very existence of sin proves the law abides.

The law of faith is the same as the gospel of Christ, the truth that Jesus said would make us free (John 8:32). It is God's system under the authority of His Son. This system requires obedience to that law. There is no conflict between salvation by faith and salvation by obedience to the law of Christ. One is a part of the other. They are inseparable. Inasmuch as a person cannot be sinless of himself, he must rely on Christ for cleansing and the way of cleansing is revealed through the gospel. Salvation is according to Christ's spiritual law.

Delivered From Two Laws

There are two laws from which we are released by the faith of Christ. One is the law of Moses. The Gentile world was never subject to it anyway since that law was only given to the Israelite nation. The second is the law of sin and death. Romans 8:2,3 *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."* The law of sin and death simply stated is: you sin, you spiritually die. In Christ we are free from this law. Even though we sin, we can be made spiritually alive. The wages of

sin need not be suffered (Romans 6:23). This is why His law can be called the law of liberty (James 1:25). It makes us free, as does the truth (John 8:32). Without the faith of Christ, which includes law that must be obeyed, there would be no deliverance from sin even offered to mankind.

There is eternal danger in ignoring and neglecting the law of faith. The sacrifice of Christ is the only way one can be saved (Acts 4:12). It is God's remedy of the consequences of sin. There is perfect harmony between salvation by faith and salvation by works of obedience to the law of faith. God has established a spiritual law, a rule of authority (this is what law is) by which we are saved. That is identically the same thing as *"the faith"* by which we are saved (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16).

† † † † †

Retrospection, Introspection, Prospection

Our study is of three words. Words are simply wonderful because they are symbols of ideas and thoughts. They are tools of communication. They have meaning. With words people can be motivated to action, have their emotions aroused or calmed and comforted, possibly incited to serious thought. Words are used to convey thoughts from one mind to another. God has chosen words to convey to mankind His own mind. By words He has revealed what man needs to know, to do and to be. Our lesson centers on three words, not one of which actually appears in the text of Scripture, but all three convey a thought, an idea and a concept that one finds expressed repeatedly in Scripture by other words. These three words are well-considered at the close of a year, but consideration of them can be beneficial at any time. But they are most appropriate as we take time to do some serious thinking about ourselves and our world. These words are retrospection, introspection and prospection.

Looking Back at the Past

Retrospection means to look backward and contemplate and meditate on the past. It is the process of review, looking again at what has already been done. It is not always good to look back. Israel looked back once they had left Egypt. While in Egypt they considered their existence almost unbearable. But once they were delivered, and the hardships of the wilderness confronted them, they looked back longingly to the bondage from which they escaped. They longed for the fleshpots of Egypt. Lot's wife looked back when Sodom and Gomorrah were being destroyed, evidently with some yearning to return to that which she was forced to forsake. But we know the disaster that overtook her by looking back. So all retrospection is not good.

Paul once warned brethren to *"forget the things that are behind."* (Philippians 3:13). In the past there may well be some things we would prefer to have been different. The mistakes we made may cause us to wish we had another opportunity to avoid. But Paul did not want brethren to brood, worry and fret over the past. What is done is done. To borrow trouble from yesterday can become a hindrance to the present and the future.

But there is a great value in looking back if we have the right purpose and attitude in looking back. Have not many good things happened in the past that we would do well to make happen again? Is there not much in the past that is worth imitating? The reason the study of history is so useful to us is because we can learn lessons from the past, learning from our experiences and the experiences of others. Paul told us that the things written aforetime were for our learning (Romans 15:4), and the events regarding Israel serve as examples for us (First Corinthians 10:11). The observance of the Lord's Supper has an element of looking back. It is a memorial, a remembrance of Christ and that which He did on the behalf of sinful mankind. So important is this act of retrospection that we are commanded not to forsake the assemblies (Hebrews 10:25), especially when this communion is made. The Gentile Christians were exhorted to remember what they were prior to coming to Christ, such as being aleinated from God, without hope, without God, having no promise (Ephesians 2:11,12). By comparing the past when they were out of Christ with being in Christ they could be grateful. The Lord wanted the Ephesians to remember that from which they had fallen (Revelation 2:5) and return to their first love. Looking back can be a very profitable exercise. Whether it is good or bad depends on why we are looking back and what we intend to do with what we observe from the past.

As we look back over the rapidly passing weeks of the past year, what events have taken place, and what have we learned from them? What have you done for the Lord? Have you kept your promises? Are you more faithful? Have you reached the goals you set? Does looking back bring regrets? Do you see more clearly the mistakes and know better how to avoid them? Do you see sadness and trouble? Are you better fit to cope with it now that you have experienced it? Has there been real progress in your home life? What of your spiritual life and service to others? Are you made to rejoice over the successes? Let us engage in retrospection, but only for a while, because the past is gone and cannot be recalled.

Looking Within at the Present

Introspection is to look within. It involves self-examination. We need to appraise and evaluate our lives. It is called, in the business world, taking inventory or counting the stock. It is to consider ourselves, not as we might have been in the past, but as we are at the present.

The present cannot be encumbered with brooding over the past. We would waste the present to even dwell too long on what might have been. All that we have is now. We must be the best we can be now. Regardless of the past, now is what really matters more. Robert Burns once wrote, "Oh would some power the giver give us, to see ourselves as others see us." We might not be too happy with what we see at times.

But we are not all that concerned how others may consider us. They may see good or they may see what they consider to be bad. But what interests us most is how God sees us. The way God sees us is the way we really are. The way others see us may just be a human judgment from outward appearances, but God looks on the heart (First Samuel 16:7). God knows the hearts of people and what we really are is what we are in the heart. This does not minimize the importance of what we say and do, but it does emphasize the importance of the inward man. God is able to know and judge the inward man. How does He see us at the present?

Introspection is a very personal matter. Nobody can self-examine for us. The very concept of self-examination means that only we can make this introspection for ourselves. But the gospel requires that we look within. *"Look to yourselves,"* (Second John 8). *"Considering thyself,"* (Galatians 6:1.

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith," (Second Corinthians 13:5). *"But let a man examine himself,"* (First Corinthians 11:28). *"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye,"* (Matthew 7:3-5). Many have thought this passage forbids making any judgments about others. That is not so. It is teaching us to examine ourselves. If we will, we can be of greater benefit to others to also see their own faults.

Self-examination demands making a comparison. We do not measure ourselves by ourselves, for this, Paul says, is not wise (Second Corinthians 10:12). But we must look into the mirror of God's Word. We must compare ourselves with the perfect law of liberty. We must consider Jesus as the standard. We must compare what we are with what we ought to be, and what we could be. We should consider out strengths as well as our weaknesses. There are good things as well as bad things about each of us. We should look at our habits, actions, words, attitudes, deeds, plans, ambitions, priorities, values and every phase of our lives. This is more than a self-imposed psychoanalysis. It is real soul-searching. It is a serious scrutiny of our hearts as well as our lives totally.

As we look within, how different are we from a year ago, if we can remember? Are we more spiritual-minded? Are we quicker to forgive? Are we stronger in the faith? Are we more determined than ever to live for Christ and like Christ and work as laborers in His vineyard? Do we love the church more? Do we show that love? Are we studying His Word more? Are we slower to harsh criticism, gossip, but quicker with words of comfort and support? Would we be ashamed to have certain portions of our lives exposed to the whole world? What if everybody in the church had the same attitude as I do or you do? What if all acted as we are now acting in life? Would the church be better or worse? Would the world be better or worse? Engaging in introspection is not an easy task. In fact, like retrospection, there may be times when it is painful. But again, there may be those things that give us courage and comfort. Introspection demands such a stern honesty that we all may find it difficult to do the job as it ought to be done.

Looking Forward to the Future

Our third word is prospection. Where do we go from here? This word calls for looking into the future, not as a fortune teller or a prophet, but to consider plans, set goals, determine objectives, and generally chart our course for the days that may yet be before us. We need not only to determine our goals but to seek ways to reach them. This is called prospection.

In looking ahead, looking forward, we must first realize that tomorrow may never be. This is the reason our present is so important. But to linger in the past, or dwell exclusviely on the present and possibly be satisfied with things are they are, we run the risk of retardation of our growth. One fundamental Christian principle is preparation for the future and making ready for not only what may be, but most assuredly, making ready for what inevitably will be. The reason for looking back is so we can make the future better. The reason for examining ourselves in the present is to see wherein we need to make adjustments and alterations in life, so we may know what is the right course of action for the future. Nor do we want to become onesided and become mere dreamers and planners and never do anything about our dreams and plans.

But let us learn this. To set noble goals in life is commendable, as far as it goes. But that is not enough. Many goals are not reached, not because they are out of reach, but because we do not spend sufficient time and energy in prospection as to how to reach them.

What do we really want for the future? Do you want more knowledge of God's Word? There are ways to accomplish this. Do you want your home to be more what God has designed the home to be? Do you want to be more faithful in worship? Do you want to give up habits than are harmful? Do you want to control your tongue? Do you want your children to see a righteous example in your life? Do you want to be more helpful to those who are less fortunate? All these goals are admirable and are within our reach? There are ways to reach them. We may not develop rapidly the character we want to become, but we need to be about the task each day. But we need to know where we are going and why. This is what prospection enables us to accomplish.

There is a hymn we sing that would seem to express what every Christian should desire for the future. It reads:

More about Jesus would I know,
More of his grace to others show;
More of his saving fulness see,
More of his love who died for me.

More about Jesus let me learn,
More of his holy will discern;
Spirit of God my teacher be,
Showing the things of Christ to me.

Another hymn states it this way:

I want to be more like Jesus,
And follow him day by day.
I want to be true and faithful,
And every command obey.

I want to be kind and gentle,
To those who are in distress,
To comfort the broken hearted,
With sweet words of tenderness.

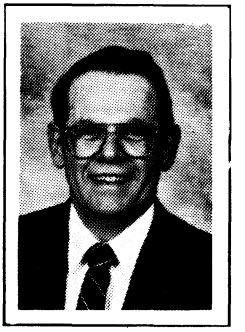
I want to be meek and lowly,
Like Jesus, our Friend and King.
I want to be strong and earnest,
And souls to the Savior bring.

More and more like Jesus
I would ever be.
More and more like Jesus,
My Savior, who died for me.

What aims could a person have that would exceed these? Every individual and every congregation can subscribe to such goals. How fine it would be if we would live each day so that when we look back we can look back with pleasure and consolation. How fine if we would so plan our future that we could look forward to it. How fine if we would live today in the best possible way before God. Paul wrote, *"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 3:13,14).

(continued on page 5)

A Drastic Solution



JAMES W. BOYD

Christians, like others, watch television. Often it is difficult to find something decent to watch. So much programming is filled with profanity, immorality, violence and filth. Now and then writing campaigns are encouraged to appeal to TV officials to clean up their programs. But let us not be naive. Most of those in charge of TV productions do not care about morals. They are only concerned with fame and fortune. Like the liquor industry, they will sell their souls, and and the souls of your children if it will line their pockets a little bit more. Most are anti-God, anti-religion, immoral and corrupt in their personal lives and consider wickedness the norm that everyone should follow.

So appealing to the TV industry to clean up TV is like asking a dog not to bark. Their nature, by habit, is to dip as low as the market will allow for their material.

One thing we can do to prevent their filth being poured into our homes and minds. WE CAN TURN THE TELEVISION OFF. While this is not the total answer to TV trash, surely Christians can find something better to do than drink the sinful slop of television's worst.

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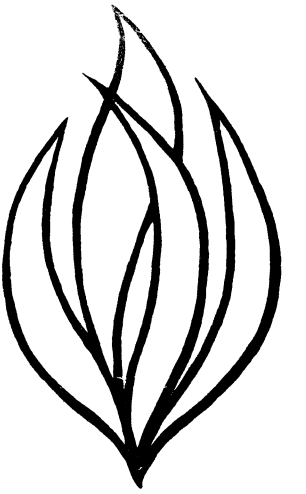

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IX James W. Boyd **NUMBER 8**

If Christ Be Not Risen

The reading of First Corinthians 15:12-19 is essential for this study. We urge the reader to take his own Bible and read the entire text and then return to these comments.

The First Corinthian letter dealt with many misunderstandings and problems that beset that church, including confusion about the resurrection. There were some who were denying the reality of the resurrection by contending there was no such thing, especially no resurrection for everyone. The resurrection of Christ had been preached as a vital truth of the faith among them and was believed by those who became Christians. The acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God was dependent on the factualness of His resurrection. It is part of the foundation of Christianity. To deny it is tantamount to denying the Deity of Christ, the Rock upon which the church is built.

The Sadducees denied the immortality of the soul of man, the reality of the spirit, life after this one, angels and the resurrection. Modernists continue to make such denials. Jehovah's Witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of Christ saying He was raised only in spirit and that His body is preserved somewhere as a memorial to God's love. In spite of these denials the New Testament makes it plain that the resurrection of Jesus is a plank in the platform and a theme in the message of the gospel. Romans 1:4 teaches that God declared Jesus to be His Son by the resurrection. This is not the only evidence God has provided to sustain that truth, but it is the climatic one. The Deity of Jesus Christ and the reality of the resurrection stand or fall together. If Jesus was raised, there is a resurrection. If there is no resurrection, Jesus was not raised. Our study considers the differences it would make if Jesus had remained in the tomb as Paul discusses these difference in First Corinthians chapter fifteen.

Preaching in Vain

First, the preaching done by the apostles and early evangelists was in vain. Our preaching of the same message today would also be in vain. The first part of the chapter informs us we are saved by the gospel, which includes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. If He was not raised, the gospel is false.

Surely none would contend we can be saved by a false gospel. It would not be God's power unto salvation as is affirmed in Romans chapter one, verse sixteen.

Paul and Peter show the necessity of obeying the gospel to be saved (First Thessalonians and First Peter). If the gospel is false, it would be of no benefit to obey it. Rather than man being saved *"by the foolishness of preaching"* (First Corinthians 1:21), that which the world considered foolish, all preaching would be foolishness and vain.

Furthermore, the apostles would be false witnesses inasmuch as they claimed they testified as directed by God. This would make God an accomplice in their lies.

Faith Vain

Second, not only would the preaching be empty, vain and useless, the faith of those who believed it was also vain. Their faith would be no more than a pathetic delusion, beautiful to consider but worthless. We are saved by faith. But to trust in a Lord that was no more than just another man would be to lean on a broken reed.

The resurrection was cited by Jesus as a sign to prove He is the Messiah and Savior of man. It is the sign of the prophet Jonas (Matthew 12:39,40). If there is no resurrection, there is no sign and there is no proof that He is what He claimed to be. If he did not come forth from the tomb as even He prophesied, the entire Christian system and everything about it is nothing more than another human philosophy without authority, not from heaven and no better than anything else somebody may invent. This is a serious matter.

Still in Sin

Third, Paul told these brethren, *"Ye are yet in your sins."* Few staements of Scripture are more shattering than this possible conclusion. Sin condemns man, separating him from God. Sin transgresses God's law (First John 3:4). It defiles and prevents fellowship with God, dooming man into an eternal punishment. No sin or unclean thing can enter heaven into the presence of God. The tragedy is enlarged by the fact that we all sin (Romans 3:23).

The only way known to secure remission of sin is by believing and obeying the Lord. Sin must be blotted out, forgiven

(Romans 4:7,8). Christ came to the earth, lived, died, was buried and rose again to provide the way of remission. This is God's part in God's plan to save man. If the resurrection is false there is no provision for forgiveness. Not only have those who have followed God's plan been deceived, they remain in sin and there is no way for mankind by which he can ever be delivered from the guilt and wages of sin. It is a gloomy, somber, desparate, pessimistic, frightening and hopeless thought, *"Ye are yet in your sins."*

Dead Have Perished

Fourth, those who lived and died faithful to Christ have gained nothing, but have only perished. The church in Thessalonica had misunderstandings about the resurrection and the return of Christ. They were concerned about those who died in Christ before His return. Paul dispells their misgivings in First Thessalonians 4:13-18. They did not die without hope, but in hope. Revelation 14:13, *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord..."* is valid. Hope is founded on the resurrection.

Shall we agree to be true that life properly lived is of no more benefit than life lived in wickedness? Have those who suffered in being godly done it all for nothing? Have they simply ceased to exist and labored valiantly for no eternal reason? Could there be any sense of justice to treat wickedness and righteousness alike?

No Hope

Fifth, if there is no resurrection, even we ourselves who profess Christ are of all men most miserable and to be pitied. If our hope extends only to the edge of the grave and ends with physical death then life is one gigantic hoax. All of our determination to live righteously, the suffering for the cause of Christ, disappointments, deprivations, patient endurance is no more than a misguided and misspent life. It has accomplished nothing that shall last.

We firmly believe that living life as a Christian is the best way to live even if there was no life beyond the grave. But much of the appeal and purpose of life and being a Christian would be destroyed if there is no resurrection.

Paul showed the differences it would make if Christ had not come forth and there is no resurrection: He is not the Son of God; the preaching of the gospel is in vain; believing the gospel

is also vain; guilt of sins remains and there is no hope; the dead faithful have only perished and their efforts had just as soon not have been made; and those still living in Christ are a deluded and pitiable lot of deceived people.

But He Arose

But after showing these differences if Jesus had failed to come forth, Paul declared in verse twenty, *"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."*

With this declaration he is echoing what was announced shortly after the Lord arose. Matthew 28:5,6, *"And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said, Come, see the place where the Lord lay."* Paul affirms with complete and unqualified confidence that none of the dire differences he has mentioned are real: Christ is the Son of God. His preaching and the preaching of Him is not in vain nor was faith vain. Christians are not yet in sin and neither have those who have died faithful in the Lord perished. Rather than being pitiable, the believer is of all men most blessed.

By His resurrection Jesus became the firstfruits, the pledge, the guarantee and expectaion of the resurrection of all. All shall be raised, both the righteous and unrighteous (John 5:28,29). Who is so dead of spirit and dull of conscience that His resurrection does not motivate and thrill our hearts to seek His way in life?

Who Will Benefit?

As glorious and marvelous as was His resurrection, and as awesome the resurrection of all shall be, as far as one's salvation is concerned, Jesus had just as soon remained in the tomb except one comes to Christ to receive the nenefits of His resurrection. We do not want to be rasied unto damnation, but unto life. Only in Christ is this possible. Little wonder the invitation of the Lord should be heard and heeded with utmost respect and positve response.

† † † † †

Obedience to God

Hebrews 5:8,9, *"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the author of salvation unto all them that obey him."*

First Samuel 15:22, *"And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."*

If we could summarize with one word the sum total of man's duty to the Lord the major word would likely be "obedience." Solomon said, *"Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). In this lesson we want to investigate what it means to obey God. The principles of obedience to God have been the same in every dispensation even though the specific commandments have varied. The principles of obedience for Abraham, Noah, David, Joshua, people on Pentecost, the Ethiopian and for us have been the same. We will not deal so much with specific commandments but with principles.

First, turn to the dictionary to see what is said of obedience. It means to execute the commands of, carry out what is directed, to do as directed or commanded. When an officer in the army gives an order to a soldier and that soldier does what he is told to do we say he has obeyed the command of the officer. When a father gives certain instructions to his son and the son does what the father has directed we say he has obeyed the father.

Willing to Obey

But there is a necessary difference between obeying directions given by an officer or a parent and rendering acceptable obedience to God. The difference is very significant. For instance, if the father told his son to mow the lawn, the son may well get the mower and mow the lawn, but he may not have do it willingly. He may have fussed and pouted all the while he was mowing. He mowed the lawn but his heart was not in it. The soldier may well have done as the officer commanded but if he had his way he would not have done it. He did not want to please the officer but felt he had to do what he was told

nonetheless. But he did not do what he did with a willing heart.

But obedience to God, an obedience that is pleasing to God, must be done with the right motive and from the heart. The attitude as well as the action must be in conformity with His will. This leads us to the first of four qualities of obedience to God that we wish to observe.

From the Heart

One must obey God from the heart, doing what he does willingly. People talk about "heart-felt" religion, often meaning something emotional. But the "heart-felt" religion of the Bible is when the heart or mind of man obeys God sincerely and voluntarily. True New Testament Christianity springs from the heart or it is not true New Testament Christianity. Romans 6:16,17, *"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered you."*

Not Forced

Genuine obedience to God cannot be forced. It must come from within before it is real. It may even be painful at times to obey, but still what we do must be done willingly. Sometimes it may be painful to follow the directions of the doctor, but we do what he tells us willingly because we know it is what must be done. It is not always easy to say, "I was wrong; I am sorry; I must change." It is not always easy to be shunned by former friends and even family in order to stand with God, but we must do so sincerely and willingly if that be required of us. God wants my heart. He does not really possess my life until He has the heart, mind and will.

Right Motives

Closely related to that point, obedience to God must come from the right motive. We may do the right act, the very outward act the Lord requires, and still fall short of properly obeying Him. To obey men may be accomplished by just doing the right act, like mowing the lawn regardless of attitude. But our motive and attitude is important in obedience to God.

Action and attitude are part of Christianity. For example, one man may hit your head with his elbow and your head hurts. But it was an accident. He did not intend to do it. Another may hit your head with his elbow, but did it deliberately. The first man apologizes while the second is glad he did what he did. The head is hit and hurts both times. But who cannot see the difference between these two episodes? The difference is the motive behind the deed.

Again, two men may be on trial for taking another life. One is set free while the other goes to the gas chamber. What is the difference? One did what he did because of an unavoidable accident, or possibly through self defense. The other acted from malice, animosity and premeditated hatred. Motive made the difference. We all can see the distinction.

Motive and Deed

We can do wrong in action while the heart or motive is pure and right. We can do right in action even with an evil and sinister motive. God knows the heart and motive as well as the action. Both count with Him.

Simon, the former sorcerer of Acts eight, wanted to buy the apostolic power. Peter said his heart was not right. The power he wanted was not evil, but his motive made him impure. Ananias and his wife gave liberally to the Lord, but their motive was evil which prompted them to lie about what they had given. Saul gave David Michal for David's wife, but he hoped she would be a snare unto him. The action seemed noble and generous, but the motive was evil. Peter drew his sword to protect Christ. His action was out of place and Christ rebuked him. But who can doubt the sincerity of motive at that point in the life of the apostle?

Therefore, to obey God our intent and purpose, the motive behind the deed, must be considered. It matters with God.

Right Understanding

Again, we cannot obey God without a certain amount of correct information. Christianity is a taught religion (John 6:44,45; Matthew 28:18-20). We cannot obey right when we have been taught wrong. Doing what we do to obey God may be a good motive, but unless that which we do is what God

wants done, and we do what we do with understanding, it is not obedience as the Bible requires.

In Acts eighteen Apollos came to Ephesus teaching John's baptism which was a part of the preparatory work for the coming of Christ. What Apollos did not then know was that John's baptism was no longer valid because the Lord had come. Those who did what Apollos was telling them to do had to be baptized again because they could not obey right when they had faulty information and their actions were founded on error, not truth. When people are baptized today they may even obey the right manner, that is, be immersed. But they must have the correct information concerning their actions in order to obey from the heart, the seat of understanding. One cannot be taught that he is saved before baptism and obey the New Testament command because the New Testament teaches baptism is necessary to salvation. One cannot be baptized just to join some denomination because the Bible never teaches about any denomination, never authorizes the existence of any denomination in the past, present or future, let alone that one is baptized to join one of them. The action may outwardly appear good, but the understanding makes the action of no value.

Right Action

But obedience obviously demands the actual doing what God says must be done. Even with the correct information, proper motive and a willingness to obey, obedience must include the actual doing what is commanded.

One illustration of doing what is commanded is when the blind man went to the pool of Siloam and washed his eyes as Jesus directed (John 9). He went willingly, with the right motive, the right information, and he acted as he was directed. That man obeyed and went his way seeing.

The Jews on Pentecost, after hearing Peter present the irrefutable evidence that Jesus was both Lord and Christ, and after asking what they must do to be saved, being willing to obey and having received proper information, three thousand of them having the right motive, did what they were commanded to do; namely, repent and be baptized. They were blessed with forgiveness of sins and were obedient.

These four principles of obedience have always been involved. We must obey God to be saved. Christ will save, but only those who obey Him. We cannot reject His commands and

expect His rewards. "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" (John 14:15). Obedience means doing the right thing, with proper understanding, for the right motive, the right way and the heart converted submissively to the will of God.

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Five Exhortations to Christians - Part One

First Corinthians was written to meet pressing problems in that congregation. They suffered from division, immorality, an abuse of the Lord's Supper, holdover conduct characteristic of heathenism, a lack of brotherliness, irreverence, confusion about cardinal points in the doctrine of Christ and many other matters of sinful conduct and ignorance. These were trying times for the people of God in Corinth. Pressures were against them from within and without and they were not responding to them as they ought. The Holy Spirit through Paul sent words of rebuke, correction and instruction alongside sentiments of admonition and encouragement. For these Christians to continue as they were would mean the loss of their souls because God does not accept sin and error of people even when they are His children.

The church has never seen an age when it did not face problems. The church faces many threats and dangers in our time. The guidance that Deity gave the churches in New Testament times how to be faithful is relevant and necessary for churches today. In this lesson we shall consider four of five exhortations to Christians and study the fifth in a second lesson as presented to us in First Corinthians 16:13,14.

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be "strong. Let all your things be done with charity."

Watch

Paul advised his brethren as a commander would his troops or a sentry on duty. He was mindful of the war between the forces of good and evil and how Christians, as God's soliders in His army, must be alert, on guard, ready, prepared, attentive and

always taking heed to the dangers to the soul thrust upon him from Satan.

Our enemy is the devil (First Peter 5:8). Therefore, the devil, known as the Tempter (First Corinthians 7:5; First Thessalonians 3:5; Matthew 4:1-11, makes it essential for Christians to be alert. Mark 14:38, *"Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."*

We must be on guard against deception. *"Take heed lest any man deceive you."* After citing the Israelites as examples of what not to imitate, Paul wrote, *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* (First Corinthians 10:12). We are urged by the Christ to be watchful in view of His return (Mark 13:32,33). We endanger our souls if we are careless, spiritually asleep, indifferent toward sin, negligent of our growth in Christ, and thereby make ourselves subjects to be easily overcome by the enemy.

Ezekiel 33:1-9 is a classic and oft-quoted passage of Scripture that emphasizes the need of alert watchfulness, not only for the watchman's sake, but for the sake of others. There will be no preservation of our spiritual welfare if we ignore such teaching.

Stand

The faith refers to the religion of which Jesus Christ is the author and founder. It is the entire Christian system, including morals, observances, work, worship, standards, priorities, goals, ideals, purposes in life, as well as other other points of doctrine in the revelation of the doctrine of Christ.

First Corinthians 15:58, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* Like a mighty tree with roots running deep will hold firm against the strongest of adverse winds, like the Rock of Gibraltar that does not forsake its position, like the surging sea-going vessl that plows through stormy waves though beaten on every side but remains on course, ever moving toward its destination of the harbor of safety, so must we be as we move toward the eternal safety of heaven.

Paul admonishes faithfulness which simply means to keep on keeping on. Both the old and young in Christ must learn to resist the currents of sin and not allow themselves to be tossed to and fro. This can be accomplished only by establishing firm convictions grounded upon "*thus saith the Lord.*" It demands

strong resolutions and determination to stand faithful in Christ against whatever may present itself to lead us astray whether that influence comes from within the ranks of the church or from any other source of whatever magnitude.

We must learn to say "NO" to the ways of the sinful world (Romans 12:1,2). We must say "YES" to the duties and obligations the Christian assumes when he comes from the waters of baptism. This means denying self, putting God first, faithfulness to and in His church (Matthew 6:33; 16:24; Luke 9:23-26). Nothing is more important.

Similar, but Different

There is a similarity between stedfastness and stubbornness. The first is commendable and the second is contemptible. Both give the impression of standing firm. But stedfastness is standing firm in the way of the Lord while stubbornness is standing firm in your own will. It is opposite of denying self.

One person standing firm in righteousness encourages others to also stand firm. Consider the lives of Moses, Joshua, David and Paul. One student being faithful under temptation will lead other students to be faithful. One member of the family being immovable in Christ will lead the entire family that direction. One congregation unwilling to bend before the pressures to conform to digression and liberalism may well be just what other congregations need to see in order to be encouraged to do the same thing and remain faithful.

Every Christian should strive to be a spiritual Stonewall Jackson, the great warrior of the Confederacy, who in three years of warfare never suffered a defeat in battle even though usually outnumbered in both men and weapons. In the first conflict at Bull Run, May, 1861, as his troops were about to break and run, Jackson rode his horse into the heat of battle and refused to give ground. He stood like a stone wall. His soldiers saw him and rallied, turning the tide of battle in their favor. What a great influence for good is any Christian who stands for truth and right even in the midst of the hordes of error!

Behave

This admonition has to do with our conduct. Paul urges that his brethren *"quit,"* or behave, like mature people, in a manly fashion, being noble in conduct. Many problems are caused and

agitated by petty and childish behavior. Paul teaches Christians, as soldiers under fire, to be grave rather than cowardly; mature and manly rather than weak and compromising. If there is something the Lord's church of our day sorely needs among preachers, elders and members generally, it is the maturity not to compromise with error.

Paul knew from personal experience the severity of persecution (Second Corinthians 11:22ff). He knew the hardship imposed by problems and pressures. He cautioned against discouragements and disappointments. He stressed that his brethren develop a quality of boldness, courage and intelligence to act like spiritually mature people.

Some brethren have to constantly be pampered, petted and begged to do what they ought. They pout and throw their tantrums if they do not get their way. They put their grievances on their shoulders just daring anyone to touch them. Such things are marks of immaturity unbeoming a child of God, a source of strife among brethren and the fuel that ignites into blazing destruction. Paul urged these Christians in Corinth to face life head-on, even in times of stress, be not fearful, whimpering and sullen, but conduct themselves in a manly fashion that should characterize a follower of Christ.

Strength

Without spiritual strength we cannot accomplish the first three admonitions. To be strong is something more easily said than attained. Strengh in the Lord does not come by accident nor by some kind of chance operation. Many remain weak throughout life because they do not exert themselves properly in doing what is essential to gain the strength needed.

Just as we cannot grow physically without proper food, activity and care, it is also true that we cannot grow spiritually without proper nourishment and spiritual exercise. The food for the soul is the Word of God. The activity needed is the service and work that God has commissioned and authorized for the church. Those who are seldom in attendance at worship, who consider the services something optional, who are not regular students of the Word, who do not make themselves available for the work to be done, whose lives are inconsistent with their professed faith, soon become spiritually emaciated. Growing in strength is not an optional matter. It is command from Deity (Second Peter 3:18). He expects us to do what He says. God

commands it and has informed us how we are to grow. To not grow is disobedience. Therefore, to refuse to do those things necessary for growth is defiance against God. How could it be considered any other way?

Growth comes gradually, but it does come when the efforts are made. Nothing is asked of us by our Lord that we cannot do. God has provided the food, and brethren are willing to help each other. Parents must grow for their own sake, the sake of their children, the sake of the church and for the sake of righteousness in the world. Leaders must be strong. How can the strong bear the burdens of the weak if there are not strong ones (Galatians 6:2)?

Consider these four admonitions in a serious and sincere way and then proceed to study the fifth one that the next lesson presents; an admonition that is a direction and encouragement to faithfulness and Christilikeless that God desires in each one of His children.

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Five Exortations to Christians - Part Two

We begin this second part of this lesson with a brief review of the major points made in the first. The epistles to the Corinthians were written to deal with a number of spiritual problems that had arisen in the congregation. The brethren faced persecution and opposition from without as well as their problems among themselves. To enable the church to properly meet and respond to this crisis Paul wrote words of inspired instruction how to deal with all of these matters. But he also included words of encouragement and admonition to equip the brethren to successfully weather the storms before them.

Our first lesson considered the first four of five exhortations of First Corinthians 16: 13,14. They were (1) watch, (2) be faithful or stedfast, (3) behave in a mature manner, and (4) be strong. Now we turn our attention to the last exhortation.

"Let all your things be done with charity." This is somewhat of an umbrella exhortation without which the first four could not

be accomplished. It answers the question as to why the first four ought be accomplished. Watchfulness is a duty, but it should be motivated by a love for God, truth and the souls of fellowmen. Standing fast is sometimes confused with stubbornnes. But the distinction between them is whose will is followed and why. The love one has in his or her heart for what God has decreed to be right is the motive behind stedfastness. Manly behavior is inseparable from love. We must do whatever we have to do to become strong. But being strong spiritually necessitates the possession and practice of love. The word *"charity"* expresses the idea of love in action. The first four qualities are beneficial only if clothed in love.

First Corinthians thirteen is often called the "love chapter" of the Bible because the virtues of love are cataloged for us. It certainly is not the only chapter where this Christlike trait is emphasized. Written to the church in an age when miracles were still being performed for the confirmation of the gospel, love is said to be greater than the power to speak in tongues, or languages that have not been naturally learned. The gift of prophecy, the power to make known the will of God, is of great value. Yet, love is even greater. Miraculous knowledge, given to assist God's early church to do what they otherwise could not do in spreading the gospel, is also surpassed in greatness by love. Such faith as to be able to move mountains, surmount all difficulties, was an invaluable asset to the cause of Christ. But even that pales when compared to the virtue of love. Paul mentioned good works and sacrifices that are offered before God. But without love all these things become nothing more than the noise of tinkling cymbals and the clanging of brass. These gifts, without love, would prove to be without profit.

Why Love is Superior

Why is love considered superior to these things that cannot be counted as nothing? It is because the motive and manner of what we do is of such importance to God. Love is more lasting (verse 8). It shall never fail. These gifts would continue until the completed revelation of the will of God was fully made known. But they served a temporary function involving revelation and confirmation. Then they would be taken away, their purpose being accomplished. But not so with love. Love was not only needful when Paul wrote Corinth but would ever be needful. The permanence of love makes love greater than other qualities

and the gifts with which it is compared in First Corinthians thirteen and other passages.

Paul teaches that love causes a person to be longsuffering, patient and enduring. Love is what makes one kind, considerate, gentle and affectionate. Those who love hold no envy or jealousy in the heart. Envy is often the parent to hate and other deeds of wickedness.

Those possessing the virtue of love do not vaunt themselves, thrust themselves forward above others, seek the highest seats for their own glory nor display their egotism. Rather they possess a genuine humility with a willingness to let others receive the praise. Closely akin to this quality is not being puffed up with inflated opinions of oneself. Those who seek the welfare of others, which is the real definition of love, never seek their own advancement at the expense of the welfare of others. As noticeable as any malady in the church of our time are those who seek prominence and say and do whatever is necessary to attain it. Those who love have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:1-8) and do not thirst for recognition and praise of men.

More Traits of Love

Loves guides a person in his behavior so he will not act haughtily. He will give due honor and respect to worthy ones around him. It is a sorry quality to see people, even some who profess to be followers of Christ, attempting to promote themselves by degrading others. It has become a practice of late for some to advance their own acceptance by denouncing those who contend for sound doctrine. But love does not allow one to "look down his snooty nose" at anybody nor consider oneself superior due to his finances, education or self-proclaimed righteousness. Is it not inconsistent to look down on others that you consider to lack the high degree of love that you assign to yourself? What is that about the legs of the lame being unequal?

A person whose heart is filled with love is not easily provoked into doing what is wrong. Anger is controlled. Exasperation is never allowed to go unchecked. He realizes there are some things that cannot be overcome but must be endured. A heart of love is not overly hasty, excitable and spontaneously passionate, but rather is serious and calm, looking soberly at all things.

Another goodness of love causes one to seek the good in everything where it is possible. It may not always be found. But love will cause one to put the best contruction on the acts of

others without impugning motives, but not allowed to think evil of others when there is no cause or justification for doing so. A person of love is made to rejoice when righteousness is in evidence just as he grieves over unrighteousness. He is never glad in any wrongdoing of himself or others.

Other qualities of love include bearing all things, covering evil rather than gloating over it, believing all the good he can learn, hoping for the best in everything, suffering and enduring evil rather than manifesting a spirit of vengeance and retaliation. In all these ways the virtue of love is superior to even miraculous powers. At the same time, we must never confuse love with toleration of sin and making light to error.

We must take note how the description of love in First Corinthians thirteen emphasizes the positive and constructive characteristics. Love builds rather than primarily seeking to destroy. Even when love for truth necessitates destruction of error it is because of the desire to build on truth and not destroy those in error but the error some hold. As Paul concluded that "love chapter" he mentioned faith, hope and love and declared that love is even the greater of the three.

Throughout the Faith

Indeed, love is a prominent and dominant theme and stream that flows in full force in the faith of Jesus Christ. There are many, many passages where the Master and those inspired to teach in His name have stressed this basic asset to our spiritual welfare. Without taking the space to write all such passages down, let us close by urging each reader to spend some time in serious study, taking your concordance and tracing the many passages on love, noting their context and the actions surrounding genuine love. Love motivates action and determines the manner of conduct Paul says should govern and control everything we do. This is a quality that is like Deity (First John 4:8,16). It is a virtue that will equip us to remain faithful through any and all difficulties we may encounter in living the quality of life God expects of each Christian.

What Love Demands

But never let us forget that there is no such thing as genuine love approved before God without obedience to His commandments. *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John

14:15). *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."* (First John 5:3). It is a gross error to look upon love as the totality of being faithful to God unless you include and understand that love must embrace obedience. The claim of love where there is not obedience is a hollow and vain claim. We hear many today speak fluently and repeatedly of love but they fail to show love for the truth or respect the need to obey the will of God. They can speak so disparagingly of those who do teach the necessity to obey in order for love to be genuine. The idea that love is everything is false. Love, however, is to be behind everything and included in everything. This is the major thrust of the fifth of these five admonitions Paul gave his first century brethren and which the Holy Spirit through the Word continues to deliver to each Christian today.

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Social Drinking

We realize that the world at large does not accept the truth that will be presented in this lesson. We also realize that there be many who profess to be Christians who do not believe it either. But we also realize that neither the world nor the members of the church have to agree with something in order for it to be the truth. In fact, it is often the case that the majority attitude can be held suspect because the majority has so often been wrong down through the ages.

We shall present the truth of God regarding the "social drinking" of alcoholic beverages. It is certainly a study that is needed in our time because so many are drinkers and there is such a compromised attitude everywhere on this and just about everything else related to it. Even some who do not wish to actively promote the drinking of such beverages are unwilling to stand against this evil.

The young need the wisdom of God in this matter but more often than not they hear and see nothing but the promotion of drinking. Non-Christians need to know what God expects. Regretfully, many who have been baptized need to demonstrate more respect for the truth than they have done thus far.

We shall not attempt to compel anyone to take a stand on this vital issue without the foundation of God's Word being that

upon which we stand. You would think that those who say they love the Lord would be persuaded by the Biblical evidence. In many cases this is the happy circumstance. But in many others, even what God's Word teaches makes little to no impression. Nonetheless, we shall make it so plain that none can misunderstand, and can know if they continue to defy God's Word that they do so to the damnation of the soul.

By Its Fruits

We can know a thing by its fruits, that is, the results produced by it. A good tree will produce good fruit and an evil tree will produce evil fruit (Matthew 7:16,20). *"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."* This is true whether it be men or the practices of men. The evils brought upon mankind by the consumption of alcoholic beverages are so numerous, obvious, hideous, that no honest person can deny its destructiveness. Of course, here is part of the problem; namely, so many are defiantly dishonest. Truth is not what they want. They want what suits them and not what pleases God. So the evidence of all the havoc of the alcoholic beverage makes no difference to many. But should it not make some difference to those who say they love God?

We shall not bore each other by reviewing the multitude of reliable statistics of the ruin caused by drinking. We can total the millions of dollars spent, the millions of alcoholics, the twisted minds, the diseased bodies, the crime, divorces, broken homes, destroyed property, lost lives, loss of manpower from jobs, accidents, poverty, pain, waste. Maybe we can total the gallons consumed. But who can measure the heartbreak, pain, lack of food, shelter and clothing, both of adults and innocent children. How do you measure the fear, beatings, insecurity, shame, humilation and regret? A cold statistical chart can never reflect the human suffering that has been brought upon the human family because of the consumption of alcoholic beverages. There is no way for a honest person to show that first benefit to mankind in drinking alcoholic beverages. There has never been shown one good thing to come from it, ever, anywhere.

Not Just Alcohol

Let us be clear what we are considering. We are not simply talking about alcohol.We are not talking about the use of

medicine or preservatives in food. We are talking about drinking alcohol as a beverage. While some may frown on what they call too much drinking, we are talking about drinking it at all. We are talking about the social drinking that has become so commonplace and socially accepted. Everywhere you turn, right and left, on nearly every television program, repeated commercials, billboards, that which is called the cocktail parties, the beer on the way home from work, the visit to the local bar, the consumption of beer, whiskey, brandy, wines, etc., the social drink is before us. There are some who would agree that getting drunk to the extent of totally losing control is wrong. But they will condone a limited amount of drinking, failing to realize their inconsistency and continuing disrespect for the truth.

Matter of Degree

What we need to understand is that drunkenness is condemned. But we also must understand that drunkennes is a matter of degree. This is not only proven from Scriptures but has been repeatedly proven by medical science. The state has declared a certain alcoholic content in the blood to be legally drunk. But that is an arbitrarily determined figure and the amount is not the same in every state. One state says you are drunk with a certain per cent of alcohol in the blood while another state may say some other per cent. Can one drink whiskey in a place and be drunk, but step across an artificial boundary and all of the sudden not be drunk? Legally this may be done. But he is still in the same condition both places. The fact is, when one drinks he becomes drunk to some degree, regardless of how much he has consumed. If five drinks make one so drunk he cannot function at all, one drink certainly impairs him to some degree. If five drinks will make one "dog drunk, sot drunk," one drink makes him drunk to some degree. It is drunkennes in both cases. One is simply more incapacitated than another. Even with one drink the heart, lungs, blood, muscles, reflexes, mental power and stomach are adversely affected. The more one consumes the greater and more pronounced the effects, certainly. The more consumed the greater the problem. But the fact remains that drunkenness is existent in every case, one drink, ten drinks, fifty drinks, and drunkenness is that which the Bible condemns (Galatians 5:21). How many passages do you need before you accept God's truth?

You cannot dismiss this and be honest with the truth. You may dismiss it, but that does not change the truthfulness of it. You are just denying the truth. If you are of that disposition, you are on your way to hell anyway.

We have heard the so-called Christian argue that some drinking is not wrong. but drinking too much becomes wrong. He tries to parallel it with eating food. Some food is all right, but gluttony is wrong. That is right about food. But the two are not parallel. Some say getting drunk is no worse than overeating. But what does that prove except both are wrong? Gluttony does not make drunkennes any less sinful. But food is essential to life. Alcoholic beverages are not. Consuming food in moderation is necessary and acceptable, but drunkennes is not acceptable in any degree. Drunkenness is sinful. How many times must this be emphasized for it to sink in? You cannot do wrong in moderation.

Temperance

To be temperate, or moderate, means to exercise self-control. Christians exercise self-control by doing what is right and abstaining from what is wrong. One cannot lie in moderation. One cannot steal just a little bit and it be acceptable. One cannot commit adultery now and then and God be pleased. Doing wrong is always sinful. So it is with drinking alcoholic beverages. Drunkenness is wrong and is a matter of degree. First Peter 4:4 speaks of the *"excess of riot."* This is not talking about rioting excessively. It means rioting is excessive, out-of-bounds, off-limits. How much riot can one create and still be pleasing to God? He can create no riot at all because rioting is excessive. There is an excess that is called rioting. The same passage talks about the excess of wine. How much wine is excessive? The drinking of wine is excess regardless of the amount. We are aware that many will dismiss this, but they cannot change it. To such people we can only say you are flying defiantly into the face of reality and God when you deny His Word. But you will pay for your sins. The trouble is that so many others will probably suffer because of you.

A person that steals once only steals moderately in comparison with a person who steals fifty times. But in either case, he sins. One may not drink until he cannot walk or loses consciousness or falls flat on his face. But you are beyond God's limits with that first drink. Moderation means doing what is right

moderately and temperately and abstaining from doing wrong altogether.

"Banqueting"

In First Peter 4:3 we find the word *"banqueting."* That word means taking strong drink in small amounts. It does not mean drinking until you drop. It means taking strong drink in small amounts. One may do this until he drops, but it means taking strong drink in small amounts. Is that not what happens at cocktail parties? Is that not what one does when he drinks beer? Can you think of how one can drink alcoholic beverages any other way than by taking it is small amounts? He may continue to take small amounts until he has taken a large amount, but he does a little at a time. This is exactly what the Scriptures say was characteristic of the sinful lives of people who walk not according to the ways of God. We might add here that the phrase *"excess of wine"* literally means *"winetaking."* No amount is specified or indicated. Winetaking is called excess. Do you accept what God's Wrod says or are you still determined to do whatever suits you? This whole matter is simply a matter of submission to the will of God or not. Those who drink defy God. That is all there is to it. It is that simple.

Why Want to Defend It?

Before we get down to even stronger evidence, let me ask, "Why would a Christian who professes to imitate Christ want to defend the practice of drinking alcoholic beverages anyway?" Many do try to justify it. We shall consider these attempts in a moment. But why would one even want to do that? When the harm done by drinking is so prevalent and obvious, what makes anyone want to defend it? Obviously, those who manufacture, distribute, sell and consume the stuff do not care about much else except their indulgence, pocketbooks and appetites. God and their fellowman mean nothing to them. Truly, they could care less. They want money and that is the main reason the industry florishes. There is no honest effort in the government to do anything substantial about the number one drug problem in America. There is no intention of curtailing the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Most of those in charge are drinkers and getting money and political support from the industry is the number one priority.

We suggest you do some research on your own as we have. Visit the mental hospitals and see those whose minds have been ruined by the drink, and then see if you come away advocating the "innocent" use of it. Remember that every alcoholic began with a social drink. Every one of them! They were not deranged and diseased before they contaminated their bodies and minds by drinking. They became that way. Look at them and then give the beer commercials a standing ovation! Go to the tavern and see the faces of the depraved, debached people. Talk to those behind the bars of jail cells who committed crimes while under the influence of alcohol and then see if you think well of it. Try to comfort that family whose child has been crushed by an automobile driven by some drunk and see if you still think it is just an innocent pastime and recreation. See the poverty that the drunk and his family suffer, if the family is even still intact. Talk to the jobless who cannot hold a job because he drinks. Look at the battered children and wives who have been knocked about by some drunkened husband and father. Go to the emergency rooms of your local hospital and see the bloody bodies brought in night after night because somebody had to have their drinks. See that person who has sold his or her virtue while under the influence of alcohol. Look at the blurry eyes and scarred bodies of the victims of alcohol. We challenge you to do a little of this kind of investigation and see if you can go home, open your refrigerator door and drink your beer and think nothing is wrong with it. When you drink you are voting for such tragedies as mentioned to continue. You are giving your influence in that direction. There is no more sure hypocrite on God's earth than the so-called Christian who condones drinking. If you will do some personal research, and can still come away saying there is nothing wrong with it, knowing that it all begins with the social drink, the little drink, the first drink, then you have sunk to such a low moral level of thinking that probably only hell itself can give you what you deserve.

Influence

Social drinking is wrong because of the influence of it. God calls the strong drink an adder (Proverbs 23:32). An adder is a very poisonous reptile. Its venom is deadly. Would you place such a creature as that in your refrigerator? Would you have it on your table? Would you walk around with it in your hand? Would you let it be around your children? Would you give it to

your neighbor? If you would you are a bigger fool than we know how to handle. Are you not aware of God's condemnation on those who would cause another to stumble? Does that make any difference with you? We shall give account for our influence just like everything else of our lives. We are to let our light shine to the glory of God, not to the damnation of others. Paul warned to abstain from the appearance of evil. No man lives without influencing those around him. How many young people have been led to the devil's slaughter under the influence of alcohol because they first began drinking because their very own parents set the example? We hear fools says, "Learn to take your liquor. Learn when you have had enough." You have had too much to have that first drink. Nothing good ever comes from it. It is the way of eternal damnation and a miserable existence on earth.

But some religious people stupidly, ignorantly, defiantly and blasphemously try to justify it. They just as soon try to prove stealing is right by teaching the parable of the Good Samaritan. There is not that first portion of evidence in the Bible to justify social drinking or the consumption of alcoholic beverages. The only thing we read about it is a proper use of alcohol for medicinal purposes, not as a beverage.

What Jesus Made

But did not Jesus make wine and serve to others? Jesus made wine. But what he made was the Greek word "oinos." That word is used to refer to both fermented and unfermented wine. There is no way to cite what Jesus made and prove He made strong drink. Christ lived perfectly under the old law. The law forbade giving your neighbor strong drink (Habakkuk 2:15). Are we to think Jesus violated that teaching? Tose who were at the wedding feast were not drinking intoxicating beverages. They were able to discern taste even after their supply was exhausted. This is not the case with the consumption of intoxicating wine. What they had was called *"good wine,"* which means void of spirits. It was not a fermented wine. To try to tie Jesus, the Son of God, with a social drinking event is blasphemy of the most sordid kind. It was not so and no living person can prove otherwise. Wine is not always fermented. It is also the pure juice of the grape. Even grapes while still on the vine are called wine in the Bible. Certainly that is not intoxicating in that state.

What Timothy Took

But Paul told Timothy to take wine for the stomach's sake. Correct! If you are positive you have the same trouble Timothy had, you ought to drink exactly what Paul advised. But be sure you know what he had and what he drank. No, this does not justify the beer, whiskey, brandied wines and liquors that people consume today. Again, what Paul told Timothy to take was "oinos" which does not necessarily mean something intoxicating or a strong drink. Even if it was of that nature, this is a case of taking alcohol as medicine, not a social drink. There is no case for alcoholic beverages here.

The Lord's Supper

Do not we use wine in the Lord's Supper? Jesus called the drink used in the Lord's Spper the "*fruit of the vine.*" The Jews often referred to anything that came from the vine as vine. This does not imply a fermented or strong drink at all. Can you show that the fruit of the vine was strong drink? If you can, all you have proven is that such wine is permissible in observing the Lord's Supper. You have not shown that such wine is permissible for social drinking. But consider how the Lord required unleavened bread at the Passover Supper. This was the bread used in the Lord's Supper inasmuch as the Lord's Supper was instituted at the event of observing the Passover Supper. The Lord would not allow any bread that was fermented or leavened. Are we not presumptious to think that He would permit a drink of such quality and nature? All the evidence is against fermented wine being used in the Lord's Supper. Even so, this is no case for alcoholic beverages.

Elders and Deacons

Some turn to the following argument. Elders are forbidden the use of wine. If strong and intoxicating wine was used in the Lord's Supper, elders could not partake of it. What a position to hold! Deacons were *"not given to much wine."* This is no different from the elders. Deacons were not permitted to drink a little bit of intoxicating beverages. Whatever they were allowed, they were allowed only in moderation. What they were allowed was "oinos" and you can never show that means strong drink necessaily. The language primarily refers to a disposition of the man who is to be a deacon rather than to drinking habits.

So it is with any and every effort to justify that which provides

nothing but harm. Paul said to prove all things and hold fast to the good. Are you ready to contend that the alcoholic beverage, the alcohol industry, the result of the consumption of that beverage is good? If you are, there is nothing that will make any sense to you because you have abandoned basic integrity and honesty of judgment. You cannot secure a righteous judgment. There is no way to show that early Christians ever drank alcoholic beverages or strong drink or intoxicating drinks with approval.

On the other hand, there is abundant evidence that it is sinful to drink. Time and space for this extended article does not permit citing the numerous passages to this end, as we have done in similar lessons on the subject which are available from many sources. Even as I write I have at my side a sheet of paper containing seventy-four passages of Scripture that show drinking strong drink to be wrong. If you find one that shows it is right then you have found seventy-four contradictions in God's Word. Do you really believe God contradicts Himself? Are you willing to contend that God contradicts Himself in order to justify what has been proven to be a damnable plague on mankind from the first time men got drunk? If this evidence against drinking, little or lot, is not convincing, I must declare that you just do not really care what evidence proves. The very idea that any Christians would consider drinking of alcoholic beverages acceptable before God is disgusting, lamentable and tragic. Influence, fruits, damage to body and brain, as well as numerous specific Scriptural condemnations, anyone of these evidences is enough to cause everyone who loves the truth of of God to forever banish any sympathies for the alcoholic beverage from his mind and life. Whether this means anything to you or not depands on how honest you are and how much you are dedicated to follow God's truth.

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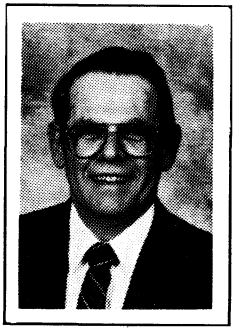
Figurative or Literal Son?



JAMES W. BOYD

Teaching is heard from modernists, and now from writings, sermons, college classrooms and lectures of some who call themselves members of the church of Christ, that Jesus was not the literal and actual Son of God, but only His Son figuratively. This really means He was not God's Son but only designated as a symbol or kind of description that was not actually and literally so.

But the child delivered by Mary was born. He could not be born with first being conceived. He could not be conceived until begotten. Who was responsible for that begettal? Was is a human being or Deity? Whoever it was, the child was the literal and actual son of the one who beget Him. There is no escape from this conclusion. He was not merely a son figuratively, but a son literally and actually. Who begat the child born of Mary?

Deniers of truth claim Jesus was totally human, both father and mother being human. But Scripture says He was begotten of Deity and born of a human but virgin mother. Those who teach that Jesus is God's Son only figuratively teach denial and rank modernism regardless of pious denials they belong to that class.

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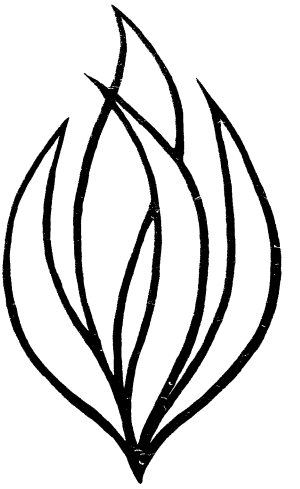

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME IX James W. Boyd **NUMBER 9**

Basis For Unity

Oneness and unity are very popular concepts among people today, especially in religion and politics. Togetherness has been given a boost by widespread publicity of efforts that profess to promote the cause of unity. The Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church a few years ago was celebrated as an effort to produce unity. The mergers of churches among Protestants have been productive of a certain kind of "togetherness" even though it has not necessarily produced unity. Some of the largest, wealthiest and most prominent denominations have adopted new and different rules, beliefs, names and doctrines in common with other participating denominations. There are additional plans in the works among many religious people that are designed to bring unity of some fashion.

This is quite a switch from a few years ago when the leading denominational leaders were advocating division in order to allow everyone the opportunity to choose the way of serving God that was most acceptable to themselves. But the results being produced are more union than unity; more of an agreement to disagree rather than unity. It certainly is not producing the unity of which we read in Scripture.

Among members of the church of Christ there has risen renewed efforts to merge with the Christian Church. Various meetings are taking place for the purpose of creating a "friendship" atmosphere in order to bring the two groups into some kind of single body. But these efforts are producing more of the same kind of thing the denominational efforts are producing. Unity based on friendship is not what the Bible teaches. This "unity in diversity' doctrine is heresy because it simply is an agreement to disagree even on matters of doctrine, the allowance of difference to continue, each being permitted to preach and practice whatever one desires and others simply accept it as acceptable.

It has been stated that we should agree to disagree because the important thing is to "just love each other. If you disagree, that's beautiful." One said he dreamed of the time when there was no Baptist Church, Methodist Church, no church of Christ, but all would just be brothers.

One denominational leader expressed the similar idea. 'There is no unanimity in doctrine, and we need diversity. We can be

unified and still have diversity in many areas, including the way which we interpret Scripture." The plea for "unity in diversity" has been the cry of some who profess to be members of the church of Christ but who no longer advocate what they once taught and what faithful brethren continue to teach.

We cannot ignore what the prophet Amos said in Amos 3:3, *"Can two walk together except they be agreed?"* It seems that there are number of "wise men" today who would issue with the inspired prophet and contend that this part of the *"word that the Lord hath spoken"* has become outdated.

The kind of union being accomplished results from negotiation much like that of nations trying to draw a treaty between them, or like labor and management coming to a new contract. "You give up this; I'll give up that." Past convictions are sacrificed and are no longer important to some. Doctrine is changed and whatever somebody wants is accepted. That which was once disbelieved can be believed and that which was once believed can be denied without any adverse consequences.

Roman Unity

Romanism also wants unity. They would have everyone under the authority of the papacy. Many Protestants have said this is no longer a serious barrier to getting together. To a great extent the Vatican Council was a move to gather the naive and gullible Protestant world into a compromise disposition and come under the influence of Rome. Romanists have presented themselves as being more tolerant and have lulled many into complacency of Rome's ultimate goal of domination. The determination to rule over everyone has not been changed in Rome, nor has there been a retreat by Romanists from the position to suppress every other religious view but Rome's view. Where Rome has the power this suppression is very much evident and practiced without shame.

So much that is called "Christian" is not what the Bible defines as being of Christ. There are even "Christians" who are willing to enter into religious fellowship with those of the Jewish faith who deny Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of mankind. All such things are happening under the passion for what is called "brotherliness and unity." Ministers, Roman priests, Jewish rabbis and all kinds of clergymen attempt to work alongside each other as if their differences make no difference. Once I attended a meeting announced to be about the Dead Sea Scrolls. It

turned out to be a meeting of a local ministerial association and met at a Jewish synagogue. Since it was supposed to be a historical lecture rather than a religious service, I decided to remain for the historical speech. But the meeting was opened with a prayer, led by a Methodist minister, who said that out of respect for their host, the Jews, he would not pray in the name of Christ. Before that day was over he was informed that he showed more respect for the host than for the Lord he claimed to serve. I saw to it that he heard this.

How many religious people, even members of the church of Christ, will refer to a Roman priest as "father" in spite of the specific prohibition of such a thing in Matthew 23:9. These things I have emphasized to show the fervor for unity, oneness and togetherness and the price many are willing to pay to have some semblance of it. It is an infection of compromise, void of Biblical teaching, malignant with the exaltation of man over God and His Son, saturated with the insipid "just be honest and sincere" attitude and that is all that is necessary. More and more of the graduates from schools operated by members of the church of Christ are pouring out this same religious venom from their pulpits and writings. It is so evident in their compromise with digression and denominationalism.

None of These

The church of the Lord revealed in Scripture is neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jew. Unity is not a new subject not a new plea. The Founder of the faith of Christ prayed, John 17:20,21, *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* Jesus taught unity in John 10:16, *"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."*

The apostles repeatedly urged brethren to be of the same mind, judgment, and stand together in the same standard, condemning division and factions of those who followed different doctrines (First Corinthians 1:10; Galatians 1:6-9). The idea of unity is of Christ, but the way to acheive that unity must also be of Christ. Psalm 127:1, *"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it..."* Union is not

necessarily unity. It matters not how much people get together if God's will is not respected and served.

Anything for Togetherness

I am amazed at what religious people outside the church are willing to do for a misnamed unity. But I am stunned, embarassed and ashamed at what some members of the church are willing to do. Basic fundamental principles that are indispensable to restore the faith of the New Testament in our time are being cast aside. While there have been numerous and needless divisions over matters of human judgment among brethren, we cannot allow the desire for unity to permit us to abandon the idea that what one believes no longer really matters that much. There are those who are now saying the doctrine of Christ about music in worship, marriage and divorce, the kingdom, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the Lord's Supper, and even that Jesus is actually and literally the Son of God are not worth dividing those who prefer to say they remain united.

Division is a waste, creates confusion, destroys influence and paves the way for infidelity. As one little boy moaned one Sunday as his mother went one way and his father went another, "I wish God had made only one church." The truth is, that is exactly what God did. But people have left His way for their own. One major reason atheism grows is because those who claim they believe in Christ are so hopelessly divided to the disgust of everyone.

Division results from disrespect of divine authority. Following different rules cannot bring unity. Those that encourage division by being unwilling to abide in the doctrine of Christ are enemies of God, not His friends and servants.

The Only Basis

There is only one basis for religious unity. It is respect for the truth of God as revealed in the Bible. Please consult the array of Scriptures I cannot quote for the sake of space, but cite for your investigation. Galatians 1:8,9; Philippians 1:27; 2:1,2; First Corinthians 1:10; Second Timothy 3:16,17; First Peter 4:11; Second John 9-11 and others that could be added.

There can be no allowance for variance where God has spoken. There can be no addition or subtraction from His Word. We can only allow what God allows and must forbid what God

forbids. We must have divine authority for all we do (Colossians 3:17). Unity can be produced only through soundness and loyalty to the doctrine of Christ. Such a contention is not legalism, partysim, nor void of love. It is love for the truth and is held because of the motive of love for what God has spoken. One does not show "love" by ignoring the doctrine Christ taught. It is shameful that many even in the church no longer have a real love for the truth but prefer some kind of disgressive oneness with those who follow doctrinal error.

Christians must work for unity but never compromise truth. God hates every false way and so should we. This may demand that we stand against some brethren betimes. Paul did (Galatians 2:4,5; Romans 16:17; First Corinthians 5). False doctrine produces division. Truth produces unity.

Allowed Judgment

There is a realm where human judgment must be exercised and is allowed. Man's judgment cannot set aside God's revelation, however. There are matters where God has made certain things necessary but has not been specific how to accomplish what He demands. Men must do what God said nonetheless, using his own judgment to carry out these things. But consideration of each other in matters of human judgment, opinion and allowable options should never be taken into the realm where divine authority has spoken and must never set aside the necessity of His authority for what we say and do.

Why should one think that holding firm to the faith is not having the right spirit? Why should one sacrifice love to stand sound in doctrine? This is not necessary. Where one goes so should the other. Love does not allow compromise, however. Standing firm does not demand dictatorial legalism of human ways. How else can we show love for Deity except we obey (John 15:14; First John 5:3).

The basis for unity is *"speaking the truth in love."* (Ephesians 4:15). We must do the right thing with the right motive. We shall teach the truth and nothing else, but with a love for God,His truth and our fellowman, especially brethren. We shall hate no person, but hate every false and evil way while we love even those who follow destructive ways. We shall not compromise one point of the doctrine of Christ to simply "get along" with anybody, anywhere, anytime. To do so would be a victory for Satan. Human opinions shall not take rank with

divine truth. Nor shall divine truth be relegated to the same optional position as human opinions.

The church in every age has been beset with weaknesses and problems. Our age is no different. The forces of morality are crippled by division. Those who follow liberalism or human legalism have must for which to answer in creating division. Only a kind but firm stand for *"thus saith the Lord"* will be acceptable. Extremes begat extremes. Truth will dispel all error. Unity is possible but only on the basis of truth. Truth is knowable, attainable and sufficiently revealed. On this we take our stand in life and on which we rely for the welfare of the soul before God in eternity.

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All The Counsel of God

Acts 20:26,27, *"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."*

It is probably fair to say that this lesson is one to which most will listen politely but do very little about conforming to its teaching. The speaker was Paul. The hearers were the elders of the church at Ephesus. Paul was nearing the end of his third missionary tour. He had asked the elders to meet him in the city of Miletus as he was making his way back toward Jerusalem. These words are a portion of Paul's farewell to these brethren.

There were many important admonitions and warnings given during this session between the apostle and the elders. We shall consider this one statement by Paul, not only to get a better grasp of the work that Paul did, his word, deed and attitude, but to understand his sense of responsibility and the discharge of his duty that we also should develop and discharge.

It is an understatement to say that this was a solemn comment. It indicates Paul understood that he was his brother's keeper. He knew he had a duty to those around him and would be accountable for his influence. Beginning with Cain and Abel to the story of the Good Samaritan we are taught responsibility toward others. Paul spent his life trying to discharge that duty.

Paul Was Pure

He said, *"I am pure from the blood of all men."* Paul was not denying he had been guilty of shedding blood. As a persecutor of the same Christ that he later preached he had caused much grief and suffering, even bloodshed, consenting to the death of Stephen and doubtless countless others. But he had reference to having discharged his responsibility toward other people. He had done what he could to persuade Jew and Gentile to accept the salvation offered by Jesus Christ on the terms of the gospel. Their blood, their sins, their punishment was on their own hands, not his. He was not accountable for the fact that they refused to follow Christ. Their lost condition was not because he had failed in his duty toward them but was their own doing. He was pure of their blood. This should be the desire of every Christian toward everyone around them. We should want to have done what we can do that others might be saved. We cannot be as Pilate and wash our hands of our responsibility. We should work to be able to say with Paul, *"I am pure of the blood of all men."*

Why He Was Pure

How was it that Paul could be sure that he had done his duty? He explains what he had done to qualify him to make such a statement. *"I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."* Had Paul pulled back, withdrawn from teaching God's Word, withheld any part of it, watered it down to please men, tampered with it to fit men rather than serve God, sought to soothe and satisfy rather than save, given his hearers what they wanted in preference to what they needed, he could not have claimed to have done his task. He would stand accountable before God for having failed in his duty. Paul did not compromise truth in any fashion in order to accomodate anyone that did not wish to accept it.

How confident can you be that you are pure from the blood of those around you? How many, near and far, have never been told the story of salvation through Christ? This strikes us all with a sense of guilt. I speak not of those in distant lands, states and countries, although these are included. I know that no one person can cover the entire earth by himself. But what of our friends and neighbors in various religious bodies that are still lost because they have not yet obeyed the gospel? What of even

members of our families with whom we have contact so often? To ask the question about our duty is to indict most of us with neglect in the primary matters of Christianity. That we have not accomplished our task is apparent. How long before we arise to the task in greater zeal and put preaching the Word foremost in our lives, putting the interests of God before our own? Or is it not better to state that we should make our interests harmonize with His?

We do not detract from the many good things done over the years by faithful brethren. These things are said to provoke each of us to never be content with having done a small part of the job. While we shall likely never bring the world to Christ, it is our responsibility to see that Christ is preached to the world. What people do regarding Him after hearing His truth is their own responsibility.

Preach It All

We wonder why many who preach do not preach all the counsel of God. It must be proclaimed so people can know what God expects. We cannot teach what we do not know. There is no portion of revelation from God that we can dismiss as unimportant. Obviously, we cannot declare all of it at one time. But surely, over the years, we should be rightly accused of having proclaimed it all.

Those who preach dare not go beyond what is written, neither adding to nor taking from. Doing so invites God's anathema upon oneself (Galatians 1:6-9). The things we must do, the things from which we are to abstain, morality, promises, hopes, commands, virtues, warnings, all are a part of God's counsel. There are positive and negative themes in Scripture. Why do some seem to think that there is something superior to emphasizing one side of truth to the neglect of the other side?

It is appropriate to say at this point that there is a serious responsibility assumed upon becoming a Christian. This responsibility is enlarged when one becomes a teacher. James 3:1, *"My brethren, be not many masters [teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."* This was not written to frighten nor discourage people from teaching, but to impress upon them the seriousness of their work and the responsibility that is their's in that work. Whether one teaches publicly or privately, he has a duty to not withhold the truth that must be taught for any motive or reason.

Whatever the Consequences

Because adverse consequences may result from declaring the whole counsel of God we still cannot afford to let this deter us from doing it. Jesus forewarned His apostles that times would come when they might have to shake the dust off their feet against those who refused to hear. There are many, yea, most, that will reject the truth today. But this does not mean we can cease to proclaim it. We heard of a so-called gospel preacher degrading a point of truth recently because, as he explained, "Christian Church people do not accept that as an argument." It matters not whether they accept the lesson of Nadab and Abihu and the necessity for having authority for what is done. The truth is the truth whether they or anyone accepts it or rejects it. Why should we profess to be preachers of truth if we think we should dismiss any part of it simply because some do not accept it? Whose will are we to follow?

Truth is not always joyfully received. Are we surprised? We should not be. Jesus said, John 15:18, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."* John wrote, First John 3:13, *"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you."* We must stand ready to proclaim and defend the truth at all times. Many so-called preachers will do this unless it places in jeopardy their income, popularity and acceptance. Paul said he was *"ready to die if needs be"* for the truth. He was set for its defense.

Much truth is unpopular to the world. With atheism, modernism, liberalism, humanism, permissiveness, indulgence, worldliness and compromise dominating the scene, alongside brotherhood lethargy, indifference, ignorance and the infection of "go-along-ism," those who will declare the whole counsel of God are not often received very well.

But gospel preachers are not in a popularity contest anyway. We are battling for the souls of men, women, boys and girls, the welfare of the home and church. If those who profess to preach the truth will not preach all the truth, without fear or favor, just who can we expect to undertake the task?

An Awesome Duty

Take your Bible and consider the charge given in Ezekiel 33:1-9. The passage is too long to write here, but please read it. It states the very truth that Paul realized and discharged. God

gave Ezekiel a duty and expected him to fullfill it. It is no different with Christians today. The church is to proclaim, defend, protect and advance the truth in this world (First TImothy 3:15). The attitude that we are saved, we know God, let us be therewith content, will produce our own downfall. Preaching the gospel to the world is the number one work of the church. If and when present day members of the church assume the stance that this is important, as many have seemed to assume an importance to recreation, entertainment, fun and games, then we will come closer to being able to say with Paul his claim of being pure from the blood of others. How can Christians take the funds of treasuries and build themselves playrooms with souls dying by the thousands without ever having heard of Christ? It is beyond rational comprehension and certainly an afront to faithfulness!

It is equally bewildering how some allow their "preachers" to be more of a public relations promoter and playground director than one who knows and preaches the whole counsel of God. It is a disgrace before God. The indisputable fact which Paul comments is that we have a duty, there can be no departure from God's counsel, there can be no compromise with error regardless of who, whether in or out of the church. There can be no slackening of the pace to win souls. Rather there must be a self-examination by every Christian (not just those who preach publicly) regarding the work of reaching the lost. We cannot afford to go about this work as timidly and sloppily as is so often done.

Let us make no mistake. These words are neither sensational, overly-critical nor overdrawn in application. With the world, even the society of our own nation, collapsing in sin around us, with abundant spiritual and moral decay, with truth being buried beneath the increasing rubbish of false doctrines, we either do the job or we and our children shall be among those that perish. Let us be fully aware that so long as we live we have this duty to God and mankind to declare all the counsel of God to the whole world. Only in this way can we ever be pure of their blood.

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Grace Through Faith

Romans 3:24, *"...justified freely by his grace..."* Ephesians 2:5,8,9, *"...[By grace are ye saved]... For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."* Titus 3:3-7 includes the phrase, *"...that being justified by his grace."*

Paul was the inspired writer of each of these phrases. The theme is salvation by the grace of God, accrediting the salvation of man to God. Anyone who believes the Bible believes that man is saved by grace. Paul had been preaching between twenty and twenty-five years, had been on three missionary journeys, endured opposition from Jew and Gentile, boldly contending with those who insisted that one must be circumcised to be saved. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit utilizes his vast experience and knowledge and directs him to write this teaching.

A cardinal plank in the Christian platform is salvation by grace. It is not a question whether we are saved by grace or not because we are. But we must learn when we are saved by grace; how are we saved by grace; what is the meaning of salvation by grace. Unless we understand we shall misunderstand.

Grace means unmerited favor, receiving an unearned gift, being rewarded on the basis of the merit of another. When we speak of grace we have in mind God's part in God's plan for man's salvation. It is that which God has done and without which there would be no salvation.

Not Grace Only

The Bible does not teach salvation by grace only. There is no such statment nor insinuation in Scripture as if there was nothing else involved but God's grace. If salvation was by grace alone, all would be saved because Titus 2:11 tells us the grace of God has appeared to all. If some were saved and some lost then God would be a respector of persons, a trait inspired writers denied. If anyone was lost it would be God's fault or because of God's inability and inadequacy of His grace to cover sins. This is also denied in Romans 5:20.

When a person sins, if he received his just due, he would die and suffer eternal punishment for his deed. That man can be

saved from sin at all is due to the grace of God. God is under no obligation to the sinner. Whatever provision God has made for man's salvation is due to God's favor extended to man, a favor man could never deserve. What God has done is not a payment of debt to mankind. As we learn more fully the entire system of salvation we learn that many elements are involved. It is a system of faith, blood, works of obedience to the law of Christ, but we are now considering more closely the fact that the system is one of grace.

Grace and Works

Paul contrasted salvation by grace with salvation by works or law. While there are works of obedience commanded in the law of Christ, there are works by which we cannot be saved. Certainly we are not saved but condemned by the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19ff). Nor are we saved by the works of the law of Moses (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; 5:4). Our texts included the teaching that we are not saved by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9). Let us consider an illustration of this last kind of works.

One may be accused of murder and is brought before the proper tribunal. If declared innocent he deserves to go free because his works make it so. If he is found guilty he may be set free by the grace of the court, forgiven, but not because of his own works and their worth. His deed would condemn him but the grace of the court freed him. Regardless of the number of good deeds he might perform thereafter, he would never make his action of murder a righteous one. So it is with man in sin. He can never do enough good by his own works of merit to erase the guilt of even one sin.

If man never sinned, lived perfectly, he would never need the saving blood shed on Calvary. God would owe him heaven because he deserved it. Romans 3:9, 10, 23 removes that possibility forever. Who could say that there has never been a day without a sinful word or deed or thought? Who could claim such a thing for his entire lifetime? Our redemption and forgiveness is due to the grace of God and never apart from it. It is never by the kind of works of our own personal worth or merit. Mankind just cannot earn heaven.

But this does not mean that man has no works of any kind to perform in order to be saved. God's system of grace is also a system of law (Romans 8:2; 7:22; 3:27; James 1:25; Galatians

6:2; Romans 7:25). Law must be obeyed. Abraham was saved by works (James 1:21), but by what kind of works? Matthew 7:21 teaches the necessity of our doing the will of God. On Pentecost Peter told people what they had to do to receive the remission of sins. He further instructed them to save themselves. They could not save themselves by themselves, but there was a role they must perform in order to be saved. They were not passive in the matter. Christ is the author of eternal salvation to the obedient (Hebrews 5:9). While salvation is by grace, it is by grace that is appropriated through faith (Ephesians 2:8). We have access to this grace by faith (Romans 5:2).

Faith

Faith is a work (John 6:29). To be saved by faith is to be saved by works and by works we take advantage of the grace God has extended. Faith is a work of God because God commanded it. But it is man that must believe and exercise that faith. Faith causes man to work (Galatians 5:6). Such works of obedience to the law of Christ are motivated by love. Such work makes faith perfect (whole, complete) (James 2:22-26). While we read of different kinds of faith in the Bible (weak, dead, little perfected, great) the faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Paul mentioned at the start and finish of that great epistle on grace and faith the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). There is no conflict between grace, faith and obedience to law.

Obedience

So we can see that when one obeys God he is saved by grace through faith. When a man obeys from the heart that doctrine delivered he is not trying to earn his way to heaven. He is respecting the grace system that includes faith and obedience. When is man saved by grace? It is when he obeys the law of Christ. Saved by faith is appropriating the benefits of the grace of God. All the faith in the world and all the obedience in the world would avail nothing except the grace of God has declared it to be essential.

The book of Romans teaches extensively about God's grace. There is great antagonism between grace and sin and how grace is more abundant than sin, more powerful than sin, able to remove all sin. All of the briers, thistles, sickness, pain, sorrow, jealousy, enmity, hatred, war, bloodshed of fellowmen, death

and everything evil exists because of the mighty tide of sin unleashed in Eden. No person, except Jesus Christ, has escaped the guilt of sin. He lived perfectly (Hebrews 4:15; First Peter 1:22). Even the Lord was subjected to temptation but never yielded to it. The influence and power of sin cannot be measured because of its magnitude.

Grace Sufficient

Yet, the grace of God that is offered through Christ (John 1:17), is more abundant and powerful and superior to sin. Grace, as with a mighty sweeping hand, meets this dark onrushing tide of spiritual devestation, death and woe and rolls it back, freeing man from its peril, giving him glory in its stead. Romans 5:20, *"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."* Through sin we lost access to the tree of life, but through Christ we have entrance into the gates of the eternal city. Through sin we spiritually die, being separated from God. But by grace through Christ we are quickened, made alive. Through sin we lost our physical bodies, but by grace we receive an incorruptible spiritual body. Through sin we are lost, but by grace we are saved. Regardless of how deep and crimson the stain of sin is, the grace of God is sufficient to blot it out forever. Away forever with the idea that one can become too evil to be saved and could never be forgiven. One may well go so far that he will not heed the call of the gospel, but if one does what he is taught to do in the law of Christ, the grace of God will cover his sin. It covered the slaughter of Christians as committed by Saul of Tarsus. It covered idolators, adulterers such as at Corinth. It even covered the murder of the Son of God such as Pentecost. There is no such thing as an unpardonable and unforgiveable sin when and if the terms of pardon as given in the system of grace are met by an obedient faith.

Offered to All

One final point on the grace of God. Romans 10:12,13, *"For there is no difference between the Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* God created mankind, saw man's need of salvation, provided a system of salvation and offered salvation to all who would come to Him. He is no respector of persons (Acts 10:34,35). The

need of salvation is universal and the offer is universally made. The first century Jews never considered salvation to be open to Gentiles but considered themselves saved because they were fleshly descendants of Abraham. Paul taught that the one who is a child of God (Jew) is one who has been spiritually circumcised (putting away sin, Ephesians 2:11-13) rather than those physically circumcised as required under Moses. None have reason to boast. None are elected to salvation except on the merit of Christ. All shall be saved the same way. We are lost due to our sins. We can be saved due to the gify of God's Son who shed His blood by which we can be washed clean.

In summary: Salvation is by grace; appropriated by faith; a faith that leads to obedience to God's law and enables us to reach the saving blood of Christ. We reach that blood when we obey the command to be baptized (Romans 6:3,4;. It is then and there that the grace of God saves us from sin and we are able to rise to a newness of life.

† † † † †

No Man Cared For My Soul

The Old Testament provides us with great spiritual thoughts and displays of eternal principles in God's dealing with mankind alongside vivid accounts of outstanding personalities in the history of Israel. It teaches us the gradual unfolding and revelation of God's scheme to redeem man. One of the more notable characters of the Old Testament is David.

The first king of Israel was Saul. It was during his reign that David rose from an obscure shepherd boy to a national hero by his encounter with Goliath. Throughout his life he was a renowned warrior and for many years the backbone of Israel. When he killed the giant Philistine the people sang his praises, proclaiming how Saul had slain his thousands but David his ten thousands.

Saul, failing to recognize the value of David to his kingdom, and unwilling to accept David's rise to prominence, grew jealous and set out to destroy David. As a result of Saul's pursuit of him, David became a fugitive, fleeing for his life, going from place to

place, trying to stay alive in the very nation he had helped preserve and defend.

More than once it seemed that Saul had David cornered and David's death seemed inevitable. But as Saul would move for the kill, God would intervene and enable David to escape. In such times, when all seemed lost, David would utter cries of distress to the Lord. He realized he had no hope and no refuge except in God. By himself he would be powerless, without a way to escape, subject to his enemy. Even those he befriended would betray him if convenient for them to do so.

David Could Remember

Later in life as David reflected upon those distressing times, the Holy Spirit caused him to write the prayer for relief and deliverance such as he had prayed. This is the nature of the one hundred forty second Psalm.

"I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I showed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was not man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me."

His pitiable plea is much like that of a sinner who realizes he is under condemnation, having no escape from the torment that awaits him, being alone, helpless, exposed to ruin that the devil has provided. All people that reach the age of accountability before God are in that state at one time or another because all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and none has the power to redeem himself or herself standing alone.

The extent of David's anxiety and grief is seen in the words, *"No man cared for my soul."* Nobody cared whether he lived or died or what he did. This is an expression of complete dejection, a sense of being abandoned, one of loneliness and resignation to destruction and despair. He felt so unwanted and undeserving. Has David been the last to suffer such feelings? Is it

not true that every sinner who has realized his separation from God knows what David is saying?

Care for the Soul

What is it to care for the soul of man? It involves recognizing certain things, including the fact that man is an immortal being. Man not only has a soul, but is a soul. He has been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). God is Spirit (John 4:24). Therefore, man is spirit as well as a fleshly body. Acts 17:28 teaches we are the offspring of God and God is named as the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9). Job 32: 8, *"There is a spirit in man."* Second Corinthians 4:16 speaks of the inner man and outer man, having reference to the immortal soul within the mortal body. Solomon says of the body that it returns to the dust from whence it came, but the spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The soul is that part of man which differs from the body and is not dissolved by death of the body nor ceases to exist at the death of the body. It is the spirit of man and it survives physical death at which time there is a separation of body from spirit (James 2:26).

To care for the soul includes the conviction of its worth. The care we give something generally is in proportion to the value we place upon it. A child is more valuable than his toy. A diamond is more valuable than a piece of glass. We ought to care for the soul because of its worth.

Jesus placed the value on man's soul. Matthew 16:26, *"What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* A person makes a serious mistake to think he is of no value. The Lord considers him or her worth more than the whole world. This is why it is a tragedy that even one soul is lost.

Danger to the Soul

Caring for the soul includes the recognition of the danger to which the soul is exposed. First Peter 2:11, *"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul."* Matthew 10:28, *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

James 5:20 teaches a soul can be saved from death.

Therefore, the soul is exposed to death, spiritual death, which is an eternal separation from God and His blessings.

The most precious of things pertaining to man, his soul, is open to the gravest and most treacherous kinds of dangers.

Effort to Save

Caring for the soul includes a zealous exertion to the salvation of the soul. A person would be considered cruel who would allow even a beast to suffer and not give reasonable effort to relieve it. But there be many who make less effort to save the soul than would a fireman to rescue a kitten from a tree. Having the power to save the perishing soul and neglecting what must be done to that end is beyond expression and comprehension.

To my fellow Christians, let me remind you, if others had not cared for us we would also perish. Somebody cared enough to teach and persuade us to serve the Lord. Is it not ingratitude if we do not make similar efforts to save others? Possibly greater efforts would be made by us if we were truly convinced that those who die out of Christ have no word of hope. Such an attitude is fatal to the one who is lost, but it is also fatal to those who should be making the effort to save.

We can be saved through the Word of God. James 1:21, *"...receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls."* First Peter 1:23, *"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."* It is by our obedience to that truth that our souls are purified (First Peter 1:22.)

Not All Do Care

But one of life's hard realities is that not everyone will care for your soul. Who is it that does not care? Obviously, those who deny you are a soul do not care. Those who deny the existence of God do not care. This includes many otherwise intelligent people, even highly educated people, who make themselves fools by declaring there is no God (Psalm 19:10). Such people pollute our colleges and universities and contaminate every realm of life's activities. The sophisticates of the present modern and progressive age who place total emphasis on the material to the neglect of the spirit, even denying the existence of the spirit, have no concern for your soul.

Such people deny the inspiration of the Scriptures, the reality

of the miracles recorded therein, mock the Deity of Jesus Christ, and would also destroy your faith with sophistry and fallacious "reasoning," pseudo-science and would remove forever the standards of morality given by our Lord. They would have you live hopelessly as are they.

Those like the ones Paul mentioned in Philippians 3:19, whose god is their belly, have no care for your soul. Their glory is their shame. They mind earthly things, taking pride in the very things for which they ought be ashamed. There is an abundance of people willing to sell their souls for the mess of this world's pottage, even as Esau sold his birthright. They are willing to forget God and the need of salvation while grasping for the temporal, fleeting, sinful pleasure, power and recognitions this life can offer. There be those whose morality, virtue and honesty is so near non-existence that they will dissipate themselves for gain, and would do the same to you, by peddling to you that which defiles both mind and body. They are the merchants of vice, crime, illegal drugs, pornography, alcoholic beverages, nicotine, sensuality and lawlessness. They care not for your soul. They are more concerned for dollars than decency, loving money more than morality.

False religious teachers corrupt the Word of God by including the doctrines of men as found in their creeds, disciplines, manuals, catechism, philosophies, prayer books, confessionals, theories and theologies. They negate God's commands as something optional. They allow what God forbids and bind what God does not bind. They discount God's goodness and scoff at His severity. The religious world is blighted by those who seek not your good, but your goods. They are devoted to hobbies, compromises, seeking fame and fortune with sacrifices of truth, acting as hirelings, puppets and lackeys for their own profit.

All the good intentions, beautiful and pious actions in the world cannot offset the carelessness for man's soul when one is willing to depart from the truth and so teach. Beware of those who would flatter you with enticing words that are contrary to God's Word!

Parents often show no care even for the souls of their young. The last people on earth you would think would not care for the soul would be a father or mother. The true Christian parent cares more than the child shall ever realize until that child also becomes a Christian parent. Doubtless many parents, who think they love their children, would be offended if accused of not caring for their children. They work long and hard to provide the

physical needs. But what of the spiritual needs? Parents have such tools as authority, words, discipline, power, example, strength and God's written guidance to bring up their children in the nuture and admonition of the Lord.

But does one show care for the child's soul when spiritual training is not put first in the home? Where is the care when the matters of the Bible and Christ's church are relegated to secondary positions? Where is the care when a poor example is set? What care is there when the parent does not obey the gospel? These are basic questions that deserve answers.

Who Cares?

Who does care for the soul? Obviously, God does, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit (John 3:16; First Peter 5:6,7). We sing the song that asks, *Does Jesus Care?* There is never a time when He does not care. How He wept over the city of Jerusalem because He cared (Matthew 23:37). He wants all to come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9). Consider what He has done on man's behalf and the question of His care is answered.

Angels care. There is rejoicing in heaven among them over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15:7)

Gospel preachers care, as do sincere Bible class teachers. Elders care. Loved ones in Christ care. None who shall read these words can ever cry as did David when he thought, *"No man cared for my soul."* It is sad when anyone thinks nobody cares. But it is sadder still when one does not care enough for his own soul to obey and be saved. This is a care that nobody can give for you. Do you care for your own soul? If so, how much? What will you do to reflect that care? Will you obey?

† † † † †

Do You Make Him Famous?

Mark 1:28, *"And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee."*

The things Jesus did were talked about by many people. This is the way people came to know of Him. Should not we be talking about Him so His fame will spread abroad today?

The Test of Fullness

There is but one point of major emphasis in this lesson. By the time we reach Deuteronomy eight in reading the Bible, Israel was free from Egypt, living under the leadership of Moses, and nearing the end of forty years in the wilderness. Leadership was soon to change hands from Moses to Joshua who would take Israel across Jordan into the promised land of Canaan. Moses spoke to his people, rehearsed God's law, and reminded them of the covenant made with the Lord.

Chapter eight is the recollection of the hardships and rigors of the forty years in the wilderness. It had been a time when Israel was helpless without God. God had supplied them their food and drink, clothing and protection, guidance and direction. Under these circumstances, with a few exceptions, Israel found no difficulty in remaining humble and mindful of the providence and love of God. The trials and tests of the wilderness had called forth faith, courage, endurance, devotion and determination. Some had failed and rebelled against God, turning to idols. But soon the nation would face a new and different kind of test. A new day was dawning for Israel.

Another Kind of Test

Their wanderings would soon cease and they would build permanent homes. The poverty, hunger and thirst of the past would soon be behind them and they would inhabit a good land with brooks of water, fountains, grain, vineyards, fig trees, houses, flocks, peace and prosperity. They would have rest and rejoice that their battles were won, their trials behind them, problems conquered, and all would be well. But this would be true only to a limited extent. Having faced the test of adversity, they would now face the test of prosperity.

Often this second test is more difficult than the first because it is more deceptive, subtle and blinding. It often takes a stronger character to be true to God in success than in hardship. Blessings, wrongfully accepted, misunderstood and misapplied, can become as a millstone about our necks. Moses therefore warns Israel lest their coming to prosperity be their undoing and they fall victim to its perils, even though they had passed the many tests of wanderings.

This is a timely thought for our land of relative abundance. It is needful for everyone who seems to succeed. The principles of Deuteronomy eight should concern us, especially as we see multitudes seeking more and more material gain, hosts of people discarding spiritual values in their mad rush for pleasure, power, popularity and possession. We hear repeatedly of our greatness and accomplishments, the praise of our own genius, as if God has had nothing whatever to do with our welfare and good fortune. It is a rare thing for men to assign credit to God that things are as well with us as they are. Pride runs rampant in the land and haughtiness is prevalent. Materialism has become the watchword. All of this has created a neglect of the soul.

The Temptations

The perils Israel would face would be temptations to be self-indulgent and over-indulgent. Whereas poverty demanded discipline, rationing, denial, restriction and dependence, wealth can lead to extravagance, indulgence, waste, selfishness, gluttony and surfeiting. People in need cannot indulge in things that men of abundance feel they can afford. But people of abundance are tempted to indulge themselves in that which they do not need, even to their own destruction.

Self-indulgence is a violation of good stewardship, a departure from discipline, and can and will eventually cause ruin. Solomon warned, Proverbs 23:2, *"And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite."* This refers to those who surrender themselves to their own lusts, desires, appetites and wants.

An abudance of this world's goods, if not kept under control, will weaken moral fibre and character, spoiling one into thinking he must accomodate every whim, wish and fancy. Great danger exists in losing possession of possessions and becoming possessed by them. There is power in wealth. It takes courage, morality, high standards and self-control to rightly handle that power and use it to God's glory.

Material prosperity tempts man to forsake God. It does not have to be that way, but too often is. Paul warned against this (First Timothy 6:10). *"For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."* When one is in the shade of ease he is liable to forget God and how He sustained him under the heat of the sun. When at rest we can forget how it was in time of labor and trouble. Good

fortune can becloud the memory of God's providence. Often the mercy of God is remembered only when we suffer loss, but too seldom when we enjoy gain.

Shall We Forget?

We plead for God's hand to supply us but once supplied we forget about the hand that provided. Is it not improper to be mindful of God only when we are asking of Him, but forgetful of Him and neglectful of gratitude once we have received from Him? Who can justify such attitudes and actions?

Probably the tendency to forget God in good times stems from the sin of pride, making ourselves our own gods. Moses warned Israel lest *"thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."* Adversity may depress; but prosperity can cause us to be presumptuous, arrogant, self-willed and puffed up. When people reach heights never before reached, they may be prone to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. They may begin to feel that their success is due to their own power, the might of their own hand, rather than remember they are but co-workers with God and helpless without Him. Pride is akin to making a god of oneself. *"Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."* (Proverbs 16:18). Having a full table and plenty of everything can become our undoing. God resisteth the proud and prosperity tempts one to become proud. When that is the case, our bounty becomes our enemy rather than our friend.

Many Fail

It is the exception, not the rule, that frail men can pass the test of prosperity. Consider Israel, both individuals and the nation, once they entered the land that flowed with milk and honey. Many otherwise good people in less wealthy circumstances have met their physical, mental, social and spiritual ruin when they became "better off" materially. Jesus said, Matthew 19:24, *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."* He taught, Matthew 6:19,20, *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where*

thieves do not break through nor steal." Less wealthy people are likely to feel more keenly their dependence on God while the wealthy may be inclined to trust in riches (First Timothy 6:17). Jesus does not condemn riches per se, nor prudence in using one's talents and diligently acting intelligently regarding material wealth. He condemns placing trust in the perishable and giving little heed to the matters of the spirit.

Nebuchadnezzar failed the test of fullness. He said, *"Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a house of the kingdom by the might of my power..."* (Daniel 4:30). But he was brought low, driven to live with the beasts until he recognized the power of God. The rich fool of Luke twelve fell victim to his own success and was unable to cope with plenty, being deceived into thinking his material welfare reflected his spiritual welfare. The rich man of Luke 16:19-25, though clothed in purple and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day, was blinded by his wealth and indifferent to the poor. *"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."* (Luke 12:21).

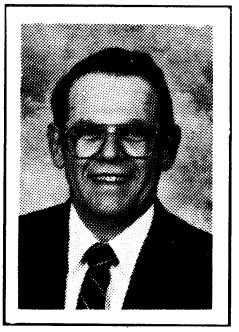
The very nation Moses warned often fell into apostasy under the influence of their prosperity. They eventually lost their land altogether and their identity as a nation. Repeatedly they were deluded by their successes into forsaking God, only to suffer ruin and collapse. This is the lesson and warning we must heed and not allow ourselves to become victims of a similar destiny.

Who Is Wealthy?

We may be inclined to categorize as wealthy only those who have more than we do we. But wealth is a relative matter. Comparing most of us in our land with the people of the world generally, we would fall into the classification of the wealthy. We have our physical needs provided, health care, luxuries, freedom, family, opportunities, jobs, protection, plus the unspeakable spiritual blessings that are in Christ. We never know whether there will be ill winds of adversity or the good breezes of prosperity to come upon us in the future. Most realize the need of God in hard times. But the admonition of this lesson, exemplified before us by Israel, that we must remember the Lord in good times as well as hard times; in the calm as well as the storm ; in victory as well as defeat; in joy as well as sorrow.

† † † † †

Virgin or Just Girl



JAMES W. BOYD

Luke teaches the virgin birth of Christ. He declares by inspiration that an announcement was made *"to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary."* (Luke 1:27). She was a virgin when the announcement was made to her. In spite of her virginity, she would bear a son whose name would be Jesus. The Today's English Version removes the word *"virgin"* and changes it to merely a "girl." While a girl may be a virgin, it is not necessarily so. Another passage affirming the virgin birth would be removed if we adopted the absurd position that the version one uses is merely a matter of opinion, as some collegiate adminstrators would have you believe. Let those who think so get up and preach that Mary was just a "girl". They might discover many brethren do not believe a preacher can preach from just any version and still teach the truth. Advocates of the perverted versions will tell you just about anything. They are as unreliable as the modern perversions they condone. Why do professed believers wish to uphold so-called "bibles" that lie about our Lord? Is there no shame in Israel?

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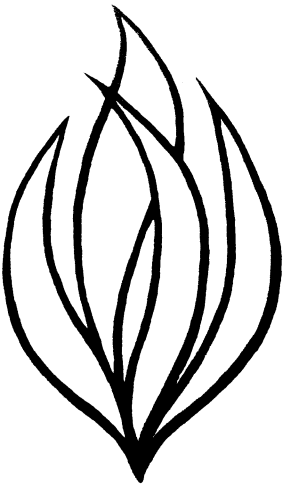

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IX James W. Boyd **NUMBER 10**

Coals of Fire

What does it mean to be a Christian? It means being Christlike and living as He would have us to live. Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* First Peter 2:21, *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps "* First Corinthians 11:1, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ."*

This includes the development of a character, disposition and attitude like His. It involves conversation, outlook on life, hopes and ambitions. There are many sides to the character of Christ and they are all good, noble, worthy and perfect. Our lesson today considers one of them. First Peter 2:23, *"...when he was reviled he reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not."*

When Christ was abused and wrongfully persecuted He did not return evil for evil, nor did He desire to do so. This is so different from the usual human reaction to strike back, give back as much or more than one has been forced to take, retaliate and get revenge. Getting even and setting the score seems to be mankind's norm.

Life is not too bad when all is going well, when we are being treated considerately, decently, kindly and even firmly but fairly. It is when it goes the other way that we face a character test. No credit is due when we suffer patiently because we have done wrong and are buffeted for it (First Peter 2:20). But when no wrong has been done, even good has been committed, and you are still berated, your motives impugned, you suffer from the lies and mistreatment by others, then your Christianity is strained (First Peter 2:20).

Peace

Christians try to live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18, *"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."* Romans 14:9, *"Let us follow the things that make for peace."* The Christian does not deliberately seek conflict. Conflict has always been the state between the obedient and disobedient. *"Beware when all speak well of you..'* (Luke

6:26). A godly life will produce persecution (Second Timothy 3:12). But when it comes, how do we take it? What will be the effect upon us? What shall be do? Considering how some people are, it is good that they are against you. But what is our reaction toward them?

Consider our Lord, His behavior and attitude. Matthew 5:11,12, *"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."* Matthew 5:43-47, *"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?"*

First Peter 4:12-16, *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings: that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or as a busybody in other men's matter. Yet it any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God on this behalf."* Romans 12:14, *"Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not."* Romans 12:17, *"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men."* Romans 12:19-21, *"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."*

Not Avenge

Notice Paul mentions vengeance and avenging ourselves. To avenge is to justly punish the evildoer. Vengeance is the punishment justly administered. It is not evil of itself. The right to avenge and administer punishment belongs to God. First Thessalonians 4:6, *"because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified."* We are not to devise our own means of punishment even when we recognize the justification of punishment. This means we are not to take authority into our own hands, not take the place of God, but give place to Him and His wrath. We must recognize the difference between God's righteous vengeance and man's personal vengeance. While the Christian is not a pacifist toward all foes, he operates according to God's will and within the avenues God has provided for his defense and protection against evildoers.

God's vengeance will result in justified punishment. Man's revenge is getting even, seeking to harm because you have been harmed, paying back in kind as has been received, retaliating, giving evil for evil.

God's vengeance is an exercise of justice and divine wisdom. Man's revenge is a demonstration of hatred and the desire to hurt because you have been hurt. The motives are different as well as the goals.

Even now in this life God has revealed various avenues of vengeance that He uses. Civil government is one instrument of such power (Romans 13:3,4). We are not to take the law into our own hands, but the exercise of civil power to punish is ordained of God. Parental government is another avenue of God's power. Discipline in the church is yet another. While this is never a pleasant process, it is designed and commanded by God. It cannot be ignored lest the guilty think evil is good, and all be guilty of displacing rather than giving place to God's wrath. Actions of government, the home and the church ought never be to inflict harm, retaliation and injury per se, but administered out of respect for God and His way of avenging the violation of His Word.

Futhermore, those who die with unforgiven sins will suffer God's vengeance for eternity. Second Thessalonians 1:8,9, *"In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."* But we are not to seek revenge nor assume authority that is not granted us. We are to

obey God in this matter.

Good for Evil

Instead, we ought be willing to give our enemies what he may need, whether it be food, drink or whatever is to his benefit. To simply refrain from seeking revenge is only half the battle and half the victory. Overcoming evil with good is our goal. By doing good, if there is any degree of goodness within the one who has done us wrong, such a course may bring them to be ashamed and turn from their evil. It may not always work that way. But this is what it means to heap coals of fire on their heads. Goodness may even melt the enmity he has for you. At least, it will deprive him of being able to say evil against you justifiably. Reread First Peter 3:14-16 and consider Titus 2:8, *"Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part my be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."* To seek to inflict revenge so as to harm is to be overcome of evil. By doing good we overcome evil with good.

Who benefits most when goodness and kindness is done? Revenge turned Joab into a merciless, rebellious and blood-letting man filled with hatred and betrayal even of friends. Samson got revenge but destroyed himself in the process. Even if revenge may cause suffering to your enemy, the one filled with a vengeful spirit is always a loser. When goodness is given even when evil has been received, the giver of goodness is always the victor. David, a victim of Saul's jealousy and rage, could have killed Saul on more than one occasion. But he chose to serve him well and spare him, remaining loyal, even mourning Saul's death. He became the victor.

Joseph could have taken revenge on his brothers who sold him into slavery. He had the power. But he provided for them and their loved ones. He is know as the most Christlike character of the Old Testament. Returning good for evil is what God has done for us. Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

They Followed Christ

See how the followers of Christ imitated Him in times of injustice. Peter and John were imprisoned for preaching the gospel. But they counted it joy to be counted worthy to suffer

for Him (Acts 5:41). Stephen, being stoned, prayed, *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."* (Acts 7:60). *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."* (Romans 10:1). Second Timothy 4:16, *"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."* He said he counted his losses for Christ's sake as gain (Philippians 3:7). It was for the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 1:12).

Our supreme example is Jesus Himself. Luke 23:33-47 shows He was not bitter toward His enemies. Kindness was still within Him. He compromised not one truth, condoned no sin, stood unmovable in the will of His Father. His enemies could not turn His goodness into malice nor His beneficent spirit into wild anger and revenge. They maimed and broke His body, but not His spirit. Even His grief was not for Himself but for those who viciously mistreated Him. In His dying breath His words were prayers on their behalf. His actions were firm, His word unmistakable. But even as darkness fell over the earth at His death, His love even for His enemies allowed the soft light of the morning of righteousness and the dawn of hope fall upon lost and sinful humanity.

Our admonition is that we rise up and follow Him when the fiery darts of evil come our way. While it is easier said than done, whether it be words against us, deeds to malign us, distortions designed to deceive and destroy us, let not the truth be shaken within us, but with a renewed determination to stand firm in the right, seek that which is best for all, even those who seek to bring you to nothing, who deny the truth to which you are committed, and even defame His church to which you belong. Any other course of action or thought would be contrary to God's will and will result in our own detriment.

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A Kinder and More Gentle Church

Many brethren need to work harder along this line than is presently evidence among us. Standing stedfast does not require being mean and ugly. Some have never learned this. JB

Lessons From Nebuchadnezzar

Character study is one of the profitable methods of gleaning the message of God, learning the kind of person we ought and ought not to be. Generally, we cite those godly people as those from which to learn. Certainly, those are the ones we are to imitate. But the record of those less godly, even wicked, can teach us. From them we can learn what traits of character to avoid. A study of Nebuchadnezzar is of considerable historical interest, but he was not a commendable kind of person, although one of history's more notable ones.

His career was marked with personal boldness, power, eccentricities, and even a period of insanity. God has seen fit to show us something of the man in the inspired Scriptures because of his relationship to the people of God and an important period of history in the unfolding of God's scheme of redemption for man.

Nebuchadnezzar was the son of the founder of the great Babylonian empire. This empire eventually became world-wide under Nebuchadnezzar. Until that time no nation had achieved power on its equal. This man was the head of the Babylonian forces that conquered and destroyed the land of Canaan and the city of Jerusalem, taking its inhabitants into a period of captivity. He was able to defeat another major world power of his day, Egypt. He built a kingdom so rich and prominent that estimates of either his wealth or power are without calculation.

At Jerusalem

Nebuchadnezzar's capture and destruction of Jerusalem was one of the most devestating ever recorded. It was without doubt one of the darkest moments in the history of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Under his guidance and direction the city was not only brought to starvation, but eventually plundered, disgraced, humiliated, mercilessly abused, its inhabitants removed and the city burned. The sacred places in Jerusalem were especially his targets. The learned and valuable people of the land were removed first, leaving only the least and those considered nothing much more than rabble. With some of

the very implements and tools that the priests of Israel used to worship God Nebuchadnezzar engaged in the most riotous and blasphemous behavior in order to desecrate that which was holy to Israel.

At the height of his reign, however, he was subjected to strange and astonishing dreams, as recorded in Daniel. One such dream was God's forecast of the coming of His spiritual kingdom, the establishment of the church of Christ (Daniel two). Daniel interpreted that dream to depict four kingdoms, Babylon being as a head of gold of a awesome image. Three other kingdoms were to follow. In the days of the fourth empire God would establish His kingdom. These kingdoms were Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. In the days of the Roman empire came the Lord and the beginning of the church, God's kingdom, on the day of Pentecost.

His Dreams Continued

But there was another very disturbing and distressing dream he had that was also interpreted by God's prophet, Daniel. It had to do with Nebuchadnezzar personally (Daniel four). It foretold of his overthrow by his enemies, at least temporarily. He was forewarned how he would be treated as a beast of the field and would survive by eating grass. Such a thought was a humilitation beyond anything this monarch could imagine.

A closer look at the character of Nebuchadnezzar, both from the Bible and secular records, shows he was a public and notorious idolater by making, worshipping and commanding others to worship his idols and images (Daniel three). It was his passion for his idols that caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to be cast into the fiery furnace when they refused to obey his orders to bow before his gods. His wrath was so inflamed that he caused the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual in order to punish these children of Israel. As we see this man of great worldly power, we also see a man who paid honors to senseless and powerless images of gods of his own making.

Nebuchadnezzar is known in history as a man of relentless cruelty. His victories were accomplished through a reign of terror. Those who fell before him were treated unmercifully. This is evident in certain Biblical notes, such as the murder of the sons of Zedekiah before his own eyes, and then putting out the eyes of Zedekiah (Second Kings 25:7). Was this not also evident

in casting the three Israelites into a fiery furnace? Was not the seige of Jerusalem evidence of his inhumane treatment of others? Such was characteristic of his actions.

History records that Nebuchadnezzar, somewhat like Alexander the Great that came centuries after him, had an insatiable desire for power and an inordinate ambition for personal glory. He was never satisfied with what he had conquered but always wanted more and more. He drove his armies relentlessly until victory upon victory that brought him glory was accomplished. When one considers how much good can be accomplished when people turn such ambitions in noble and righteous directions, we are all made the more sorry that Nebuchadnezzar so wasted this talent that could otherwise have been so commendable.

His Pride

As we learn in Daniel 4:30, Nebuchadnezzar was an exceptionally proud and haughty man. Of all his gods, he considered himself the greatest god of all. He prided himself for what he had done, and gave no credit to anyone or anything else for his victories. He was void of any comprehension that the true God of heaven was superior to him. He was a person of a big "I" and a little and insignificant "you."

God humbled Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:33ff), exactly as Daniel had interpreted his dream. He was allowed to be subject to others, obviously losing his authority and grip over his kingdom. He had to live out of doors, eat grass, and was despised by all. His was a loss of friends, prestige and power; the very things that meant so much to him. In a degraded and humiliated state he was deprived of human association. When we consider the kind of man he was, we are inclined to agree that he had earned and deserved whatever evil that befell him.

But God allowed his humilation to be temporary until it accomplished God's purposes. These things continued until this once proud monarch was brought to his knees and forced to recognize the true God of heaven. No longer did Nebuchadnezzar claim such glory as he had done, but began to attribute greatness to God. Indications are that this man was sincere in a penitent and reformed attitude and action of life. Nebuchadnezzar might well be classed alongside others of the Bible that once walked the way of destruction, and later removed his blinders and saw the light.

Four Lessons

We can learn at least four significant and applicable lessons from what we know about this man of long ago. First, God is the only true and living God. The world is not left untouched by the power and direction of God. We do not always know how God manages things, but we have His word that He oversees the affairs of men through His providence. Regardless of what takes place in the world, God is not removed from His throne. Even the events surrounding Nebuchadnezzar were used by God to bring His saving plan closer to a reality through Jesus Christ.

Second, we see the folly of pride and self-glory. In the Bible we read of several such people whose pride brought about their ruin. Consider Haman, in the book of Esther, who wanted to destroy Mordecai but who was hanged on the very gallows he intended to use to hang Mordecai. Herod in the New Testament fell victim to his pride as he considered himself as a god and was brought to disease and death. Did not Adam and Eve fall victim to the temptation to be more than what they really were and violated God's commands? Was that not an appeal to vainglory? Proverbs 16:18, *"Pride goeth before destruction; and a haughty spirit before a fall."*

Third, we are impressed with the value of divine favor. We cannot defy God and succeed. What "success" we think we achieve is but a temporary and fleeting earthly gain that must perish. Real prosperity belongs to those who are rich toward God (Luke 12:21). Even if we gain the whole world, but lose the soul, we have made a bad bargain and suffer great loss. Even if all the world be at our feet, when we are not right with God we are not right.

Fourth, from a survey of the life of this man, Nebuchadnezzar, we see the value of humility. When one humbles himself before God we see God's loving mercy and blessings extended to him. The humiliation of the proud can be the means of exaltation. It can bring them to an awareness of matters that really matter that they otherwise have never given proper consideration. God must have seen even in Nebuchadnezzar a potential of qualities that were admirable if only they could be turned into a more productive direction. Everything indicates that Nebuchadnezzar learned some of these lessons quite well with the experiences that came his way and the words of God that he heard from the Lord's great prophet, Daniel. While we cannot go so far as to say that Nebuchadnezzar will be among those in heaven, for this

would be saying more than the Bible reveals, we can see a distinctive turn in the man. This we can commend to all who are out-of-step with righteousness.

How thankful we can be that the same God that dealt with that monarch of old is still God of all. He even extends His mercy toward us through His Son, Jesus Christ. How wise we would show ourselves to be to recognize our need and come to Him so that we may be blessed by Him.

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A Sorrow Not To Be Regretted

We shall discuss sorrow with special notice of one kind of sorrow. Sorrow seems to be an inescapable part of human existence. Because this is true heaven becomes all the more attractive. There will be no tears nor sorrow, no sickness nor dying, no mental and physical pain and agony. No more will the saved suffer disappointment and loss of any kind.

When sorrow strikes it is an unwelcome intruder. We dislike having to endure it. But there is a sorrow that we can experience that is not to be regretted even though most sorrow is regrettable.

Second Corinthians 7:8-11, *"For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent; for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly manner that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."*

In Corinth

These words were written to the church in Corinth, a church established by the preaching of Paul. Having come from Macedonia into Greece, he reasoned in the synagogues, teaching Jews and Gentiles (Acts 18). His work met opposition and he was driven from the synagogue. But he went next door to the house of one named Justus and continued his preaching. His efforts met with success (Acts 18:8), and he remained there for a year and six months, *"teaching the word of God among them."*

After Paul left Corinth Apollos came and watered (not watered down) what Paul had planted, having already been taught the way of the Lord more perfectly by Acquilla and Priscilla. He used his ability of eloquence to help the church grow.

After the departure of Apollos the church was beset with a series of severe and church-shaking problems. There was division, a factious spirit, licentiousness, a lack of love, immorality among the members, an abuse of the Lord's Supper, the misuse and misunderstanding of the miraculous gifts, envy, and other kinds of disorderly conduct. Not much was being done among them to correct the problems. It took a letter from Paul to set before them the truth they were supposed to follow. This letter is known to us as First Corinthians.

Stern and Severe

A study of First Corinthians reveals the letter to be one of rebuke, stern in tone, severe and right to the point in the issues involved. Some today would have accused Paul of lacking love to write in such fashion. The letter was filled with things to do and things not to do. There were instructions how to handle the problems and the problem makers. The condemnation of evil was forthright and absolute. Obviously, the Holy Spirit thought the occasion called for hard words and strong, disciplinary action. In that letter Paul did not hesitate to move against sin in the church in a definitive fashion. He did not just condemn sin generally, but much more. He condemned specifically the mind and manners of the Corinthian brethren that were wrong.

But there was something that bothered Paul. Having no desire to "skin the brethren," but having the duty to correct their evil, he pondered how those brethren would react upon receiving his words. Would they only rebel against the truth all the more? Some do that when truth is brought against their sins. Or would

they respect the truth, his apostolic authority, and give heed to what he wrote to them? Of course, he hoped for the latter response.

For some time he waited for word from Corinth. Meanwhile, he continued his preaching from Ephesus to Troas and into Macedonia. In time, Titus, who had taken the letter to Corinth, came to him with the report of their reaction to his apostolic directions.

The Good Reaction

Titus reported that the vast majority of the church accepted what he had said with a good spirit. A few rebelled, but certainly not the bulk of the congregation. They were not intensified in their error, nor defiant. Rather they grieved over their sins that Paul had noted. They purged out the old leaven, even withdrawing from the disorderly, and showing evidence of correcting the matters wherein they erred. Paul was therefore comforted by this report and rejoiced over their attitude toward correction and their determination to follow truth.

Then Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, wrote what we call Second Corinthians. While in this epistle he dealt somewhat with the rebellious that remained, the letter for the most part is filled with encouragement, congratulations for their successes, and urgings to continued stedfastness. This kind of letter was more pleasant to write and more pleasant to receive.

In chapter seven Paul pleaded with brethren to receive him. He longed for a place in their hearts. He was proud of the church in Corinth and desired that they also have a concern for him as he went about preaching the gospel. Of course, Paul was an apostle and it was far more important for Corinth to accept Paul and his teaching. His words were words of authority.

He Caused Sorrow

Then he spoke of sorrow, yea, two kinds of sorrow. One kind was a sorrow not to be regretted. Whereas his former letter had been rather forceful and uncompromising and the truth therein cutting into the decayed matter of sin in their midst (Hebrews 4:12 teaches that the Word of God will do just that), he was not happy to have caused them sorrow. He was sorry they had to suffer sorrow as they did. But he was not sorry he had so

written. He was sorry it had been necessary to write in that fashion. He was sorry they had suffered grief and shame because of what he had said. But while he was sorry about that, he was also very glad.

He was sorry he had to expose their sins. It is never a joy to cause uneasiness, to provoke discomfort and disturbance in the minds of others. It is no pleasure to produce a sense of guilt, disgrace and humiliation. Nathan did not relish the opportunity to tell David, *"Thou art the man."* John the Baptist did not gloat over his rebuke of Herod and Herodias. But sometimes such things are necessary (Second Timothy 4:1-4). Reproving and rebuking are involved in preaching the Word. Is it not obvious that with many there is far too much of an attitude of pacification toward sin and compromise with sinners?

Nobody in his right mind would deliberately create sorrow unless there was a far more beneficial goal to be reached. Paul loved these brethren enough to inform them of matters they needed to know. He was willing to risk his acceptance by them to accomplish the salvation of them. They could not continue as they were doing and then go to heaven after this life. He knew that and they needed to know that.

He was sorry, but he was glad he had made them sorry because they became sorry for their sins. This sorrow provoked them to repent and get right with God. Second Corinthians 2:2, *"For if I make you sorry, who then is he that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me?"* How could anybody regret causing sorrow that led a lost soul to be saved?

Two Kinds of Sorrow

There are two kinds of sorrow. There is godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. One may well be sorry for his sins and that sorrow not be a godly sorrow. He may just be sorry he got caught and sorry he has caused himself so much trouble. We have seen people like that, haven't we? They were not sorry of the sort that they wanted to cease their wrongdoing. Such people are not sorry enough to change and do better. Judas was sorry for having betrayed Christ, but his was a worldly sorrow. Rather than appealing to the Savior for forgiveness he chose the coward's way and hanged himself.

But one can be sorry for his sins and this sorrow lead him to repent, seek forgiveness and do better and be better. Peter sinned when he denied Christ. He went out a wept bitterly. Who

can deny he was sorry? But of what sort was his sorrow? Does not his life thereafter show us his was a godly sorrow? He turned again and gave his all into the service of the Christ.

It is this godly sorrow that we ought not regret. Repentance is essential for salvation (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). That which leads us to do what must be done in order to be saved, although it be painful, is not to be regretted. We have never heard of a painless way to inform others they are lost and doomed for hell unless they turn. We have heard and seen many who were aroused, disturbed, and even angered at first, but who were made sorry to the extent they repented and obeyed the Lord in baptism.

Romans 2:4 teaches, "*...that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.*" When one realizes the goodness of God, and then becomes aware of his sins against God (and all sin is against God), he is cut to the heart (as on Pentecost) and is made sorry. His sorrow, and his realization of his offence against God, causes him to turn to God and be saved. His godly sorrow is never regretted, but is recognized as that for which one can be humbly grateful.

Our sorrow for sins can never equal the sorrow our Lord bore for our sins on the cross. But our faith, plus obedience to repent, confess Christ, and be baptized into Christ can wash us clean by the saving blood of Christ. How glad we are then that we have been made sorry!

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Sin as Seen In Judas

Salvation has an appeal and beauty only to those who first realize that they are lost and need to be saved. Many do not obey the gospel and come to enjoy salvation because they never have accepted the fact that they are lost and on their way to an eternal hell. They are undisturbed, content as they are, satisfied and really resist being bothered. Nonetheless, whether they accept it or not, they are lost.

Paul teaches that all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and none are righteous (Romans 3:10). This includes us all. Sin is a

transgression of God's law (First John 3:4), and we are guilty of sin because we have all sinned (Romans 5:12). Because sin is subtle and deceptive many are not convinced of its destructive power. But this is that which separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). If only mankind could be convinced that the wages of sin is death, separation from God eternally (Romans 6:23)! Sin is far worse than most consider it.

Judas

The name of Judas is synonymous with evil, betrayal and sin. He certainly committed a terrible deed by betraying more than just a friend, more than just another man, more than just an innocent person, but the perfect Son of God. He sold Him to His enemies for thirty pieces of silver, but what he actually sold was his own soul. It proved worse than he ever imagined.

"Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet Jeremy saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me." (Matthew 27:3-10).

In another account we read, *"Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was a guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem, insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldema, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let not man dwell therein, and his*

bishoprick let another take." (Acts 1:16-20).

No Contradiction

Skeptics have pointed to these two passages in their attempts to discredit the Bible and said they are contradictory. A contradiction exists only when both accounts cannot be true. It is not a contradiction simply where the two accounts do not report exactly the same things. One may report something the other does not, but so long as both could be true there is no contradiction. These accounts are not contradictory but complementary to each other.

One says Judas bought a field and the other says the priests bought the field. The simple explanation is that the priests used Judas' money to buy the field.

One says Judas hanged himself and the other says he burst asunder in the midst. There is no reason both could not have occurred. He hanged himself and either remained there until decay was sufficient for his body to tear apart, or the rope could have broken and his body fallen and he burst asunder.

Matthew says the prophet was Jeremiah when actually the prophet was Zechariah. There is only one Hebrew letter difference between the two names and there may have been an error by the copyist. Most likely, since Jeremiah was the first book in the Jewish arrangement of the prophets his name is used to denote the prophetic books. None of the apparent difficulties are hard to explain. There is no contradiction and there is nothing herein to shake out faith in the infallibility of the Bible. But more importantly, there are lessons to learn about sin and its consequences.

Consequences Are Worse

Sin is always worse than we figure it will be. All sin is against God. When Joseph refused to be seduced by Potiphar's wife, he said he refused because he would not sin against God (Genesis 39:9). His sin would have been against Potiphar, his wife, himself, but more importantly, it would have been against God.

Moses warned the two and one half tribes that if they failed to keep their promises to the other tribes after crossing Jordan that it would be a sin against God (Numbers 32:23). When David was confronted with his sin of adultery with Bathsehba by the prophet Nathan he confessed that he had sinned against God

(Second Samuel 12:13). Yes, many others suffered because of his sin, but his sin was worse than he figured because it was against God. When Ananias and Sapphira lied concerning their contributions Peter said they had sinned against the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Sin is not just against other people or self, but against the Almighty Creator, Sustainer and Judge.

The consequences of sin are worse than we figure them to be at first. Adam's sin proved far worse than could have been imagined. By the transgression of Adam and Eve sin entered the world (Romans 5:12). Cain's punishment for murdering Abel was more than he felt he could bear (Genesis 4:13). Judas may have figured that Jesus would find a way to escape from His enemies and not suffer as He eventually did; certainly not be slain. This is not unreasonable to think because Christ had escaped the hands of potential captors earlier (Luke 4:29,30).

On "skid row" in most any large city there are men and women who once were respectable, prominent, successful in the affairs of the world. They never figured that social drinking could bring them to their degraded state. Those who use drugs have too late recognized how they have damaged their bodies and minds, and even destroyed the future of children they may produce, because of their foolishness in using drugs. It is all worse than we ever figure it would be. The lives of young and old alike are scarred with damage, regret, shame, disgrace, destruction of self-esteem, because they sinned, but figured sin would not be as bad as it really is. It is always more destructive than we can consider. Yes, sin pays. It pays sometimes in a few moments of pleasure and gain. But the eventual and final wages of sin is eternal separation from God unless forgiven.

The law of sowing and reaping teaches that we reap not only what we sow, but more than we sow. Hosea 8:7, *"For they have sown the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind."*

No Escape

Again, Judas shows you cannot get away from your sins. You do reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7,8). Moses said, *"Be sure your sins will find you out."* (Numbers 32:23). After David's sin was exposed he was warned that he would suffer within his own family. He lived to see such horrible evils among his own children. One son ravished a daughter. One son murdered the ravisher. Another son rebelled against his father. Another tried to take his throne when he was on his death bed but before he

died. He could not escape the violent consequences that sin produced for him.

Some of us may think we can sin in secret and not be found out. But Luke 12:2 teaches, *"For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known."*

Who was it that accused Judas of his transgression? Did anyone point the finger of accusation at him or expose his misdeed? There was nobody but himself that did that. His own conscience gave him no peace. It tormented him into confessing his crime and guilt. It drove him to suicide. Friend, even if we escape being found out by others, we have to live with ourselves. Even if we can harden our hearts and consciences, we will someday stand before God in Judgment. *"For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the deeds done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Not by Yourself

Judas shows that you cannot undo your own sins by yourself. He brought back the money that he had received and admitted he had betrayed innocent blood. He even killed himself. But in spite of all of his agony and retribution, this alone could not and did not remove his sins. Judas repented in one sense, that is, he was sorry that he had been discovered and that the events that resulted turned out to be as bad as they proved to be. But unfortunately, he was not sorry in the right way. He was not sorry enough to seek forgiveness of the Lord. He thought that if he made things right by himself that it would be enough. How mistaken he was! Yes, one must attempt to right his wrongs, but there is more to covering our sins than that. We cannot remove our sins alone.

We need to think of the difference between the way Judas acted toward his sin and the way Peter acted toward denying the Lord. Both sinned. Both were sorry. One kind of sorrow produced forgiveness and the other only brought death. Peter repented to serve the Lord. But Judas only repented to destroy himself. Paul wrote of the two kinds of sorrow in Second Corinthians 7:10, *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death."*

Even though man has a part to play in his own salvation (Acts 2:40), and must work out his own salvation (Philippians 2:12),

he cannot save himself by himself nor is it his prerogative to work out his own system of salvation. He must work the system that God has provided. We cannot be saved by our works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), nor by our own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). The only way to remove our sins is that they be forgiven (Romans 4:7). This involves and includes coming to Christ. That is the provision God has made. There is no other way (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). Christ is the author of salvation (Hebrews 5:9), and He came into this world for the very purpose of saving mankind from sin (First TImothy 1:15).

Forgiveness

There is no sin too grave, dark or sinister that cannot be removed by taking advantage of the grace of God (Romans 5:20). Even as degrading as was the sin of Judas, he could have been forgiven if he had sought forgiveness from the proper source. So can you and I be forgiven. By putting our faith in Christ, repenting of our sins with a godly sorrow, confessing our faith in Christ and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, we can walk before Him and in the light as is He, and be forgiven, have hope, be assured that heaven will be our eternal home. We need not be the captive of Satan and the sufferer eternally for our sins. As bad as sin certainly is, and it is worse than we think, because of God and His Son, we can be saved from its wages.

† † † † †

A Kinder and More Gentle Nation

President George Bush has spoken of making our nation a kinder and more gentle nation. Seeing the violence, greed, prejudice and bitterness that abounds in the land, we sincerely hope his goals are realized. We need a kinder and more gentle nation.

That which will produce this desirable quality among us the gospel of Christ, heard, believed and obeyed. The awesome task resting upon us is to make sure this glorious gospel is proclaimed. The benefits are immeasurable. JB

Tomorrow: The Devil's Weapon

Mark 10:17-22 tells the story of the rich, young ruler who came to Christ asking the important question, *"Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"* Upon being told to sell his possessions and give to the poor, and because of his obvious attachment to his wealth, the man went away sorrowful. He came close to being saved, but not all the way.

Matthew 25:1-3 tells the story of the ten virgins awaiting the coming of the bridegroom and the marriage celebration. Five had made adequate preparation and entered into the feast, but five others, although they had made some preparation, had not prepared sufficiently and were refused entrance. They almost did enough but not quite.

Felix and Agrippa (Acts 24:24-27; 26:28) had opportunity to obey the gospel and enjoy salvation. But for one the convenient season never came and the other was merely almost but not altogether saved.

There are many things about these stories that are different, but there is one theme in them that is similar and leaves us cold and disappointed. We have an unanswered longing on their behalf and wish that someone could take action for them, recalling for them that significant moment in their lives when they could have prepared to meet God. Their refusal and postponement strikes us with sadness and emptiness, realizing their present hopelessness. They could have been counted among the saved, but they let the opportunity come, and pass them by, and did not take advantage of what was offered them. They all seemed to be obsessed with the idea that there was plenty of time yet for them to do what they must do.

A Fleeting Interest

In these three people we have examples of people who had some interest in Christ and possessed a momentary conviction. But like an aircraft zooming through the clouds, emerging for just a moment into the brilliant rays of the sun only to be lost again amidst the overcast, these people appeared for a moment in the light of opportunity, then disappeared again and forever

away from the rays of hope.

One of the most effective weapons in the arsenal of the devil to deceive man is the plea that man has plenty of time. There is a fictitious story of three evil spirits standing before Satan. Satan asked, "Who will go and persuade men to accomplish their own ruin and how will you do it?" One said he would tell man there is no heaven. But Satan concluded that the goodness of God cannot be hidden. Another said he would tell mankind there is no hell. But Satan knew that justice demands both reward and punishment and thinking people would not accept that plea. A third said he would simply tell man, "There is heaven and there is hell and preparation must be made. But there is no hurry about it. There is plenty of time yet."

What A Lie!

Nobody could tell you a more deadly lie than to leave you with the impression you have plenty of time to be saved. Two boys were walking across a frozen river on ice. But the portion on which they stood broke away from the bank and began drifting toward the center of the current. One jumped quickly to more solid footing. The other delayed and hesitated, only to be carried into the deep cold waters and to his death.

He was going to be all that a mortal should be- tomorrow.
No one should be kinder or braver than he- tomorrow.
A friend who was troubled and weary he knew
Who'd be glad of a lift and who needed it, too;
On him he would call and see what he could do- tomorrow.

Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write- tomorrow.
And thought of the folks he would fill with delight- tomorrow.
It was too bad indeed, he was busy today
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way.
"More time he'd have to give others," he'd say- tomorrow.

The greatest of workers this man would have been- tomorrow.
The world would have known him had he seen- tomorrow.
But the fact is he died and faded from view
And all that he left here when living was through
Was a mountain of things he intended to do- tomorrow.

Tomorrow is like a chain that binds people to some

loathsome habit. It is a barred and bolted door shutting people from their dreams. It is the epitaph of graves of those who failed and came short of life's goals. It is a downward path that leads us to the land of regret; a word engraved over the realm of the lost; a slumber that paralyzes the energies of men; the call that beckons men to forsake duty. It is as a sword of destruction upon which we fall; as a word of the tempter and deceiver of mankind.

Now is the Time

Jesus said, John 9:4, *"We must work the work of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work."* His words inspired the sentiments of the song, *Work for the Night is Coming.* The night is coming and now is the day, the time of opportunity. If we have not worked in the day we are hopelessly lost. If we refuse the opportunity to be saved, it may never return to us again.

The young are so susceptible to this deception. They live at a period of life when all seems to be in the future and life unending. But what guarantee do even the young have for another day? James says life is as a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away (James 4:13ff).

Do we realize that on the other side of the world, even as you read these words, there are weapons that can terminate our earthly existence before we can even know it is upon us? Our life is uncertain. The only certain fact about life is that it shall end. Ecclesiastes 9:5, *"For the living know that they shall die..."* Doubtless, Solomon had such in mind when he instructed the young to remember their Creator in the days of youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1). The present is all that any of us can claim.

We probably do not consider the blessing of time as we ought. There are two ways of considering time. (1) As water from a fountain, forming an endless stream in abundance, giving pleasure, something with which to play and be enjoyed, or (2) as men adrift on the high seas, or crossing a desert, who realize that every drop of water they have is life. Someone has suggested that time is the substance from which life is made. Poor Richard's Almanac included, "Doth thou live life? Then do not squander time; for that is the stuff from which life is made." We can hardly place a proper value on time. It is not to be wasted, but rightly used.

Make the Most of It

William Jennings Bryan, one of world's greatest orators, won nomination of his part for the presidency three times around the turn into this twentieth century. It is generally accepted that his golden speeches before huge crowds carried the day for him. After one such speech one commented that he had probably spoken even more brilliantly to smaller groups than his speeches at the conventions. But then Bryan added, "That may well be true. But the convention was my opporunity and I made the most of it." Like him, we must appreciate the value of now. Now is the day open to us. Hosea 10:12, *"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground; for it is the time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."* Shall we wait too long to appreciate the present until the blessings of opportunity pass us?

A prisoner awaiting execution was the son of a poet who had tried to show his son the Bible. But he had ignored his father. But in his last days he read, studied, prayed and found what life could have been. His last words were, "My regret is beyond my power to express. All once looked forward with hope and joy to what I was to become. Now every mother and father prays their child will never be what I have become. I did not seize my opportunity when it was before me."

Carlyle wrote, "Cherish what is dearest while you have it near you, and wait not till it is far away." But more important than any writing of man are words of divine inspiration. Ephesians 5:16, *"Redeeming the time..."* Second Corinthians 6:2, *"For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the day of salvation."* Hebrews 3:12,13,15, *"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin... While it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation."*

We Have Now

What is it that we have that is so valuable and precious? God offers us in our time those things which belong to our peace, especially our spiritual peace for the soul. We have an open door through which we are invited to pass that takes us into the

room of salvation and every spiritual blessing. Many before us have entered: those on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian, Lydia, Saul, Cornelius, the jailor, and countless others of whom we read in Scripture. Asking what they must do to be saved they were told to believe, repent, confess their faith and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. They did as taught and seized their opportunity while the hand of Jesus was still extended toward them.

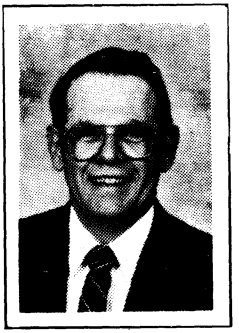
This warning should sober us. Every rejection shortens the day of opportunity. Every refusal makes the heart less responsive to the call of God as given in the gospel. Astronomers tell us of heavely bodies whose orbits draw them nearer and nearer toward each other. They approach the closest point and then turn away. Thereafter every second, minute and hour finds them further apart. So it is with mankind and response to God. We can draw nearer and nearer to Him. But delay, postponement, refusal to enter His service forces us to drift further and further away from God and to the soul's eternal damnation.

Today is the key to success; the ladder by which we can climb to heights sublime. Today is the sunlight that brightens the pathway of happiness. It is the sword with which we can smite temptation. It is as a voice that calls us from slumber that is otherwise fatal. Today is that which the redeemed recognized as their advantage and blended it with eternity.

Little wonder that Paul urged, *"Now is the accepted time... now is the day of salvation."* Psalm 119:57-60, *"Thou art my portion, O lord; I have said that I would keep thy words. I intreated thy favor with my whole heart; be merciful unto me according to thy word. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."* The golden moment of salvation is before us. It is here - now. Will you accept the invitation of Christ to come to Him, obeying His commands, and being added to the company of the saved? Why do you wait?

† † † † †

No Shortage, but Help Welcome



JAMES W. BOYD

Those who do not preach regularly probably do not fully realize the difficulty at times in knowing just what to preach next. Preachers, knowing their sermons must be Biblical, try to determine what is most needful at a given moment, what truths needs to be brought to remembrance, and he studies not only his lessons but must decide which lesson just when. It is not always that easy. There is vast material in Scripture to be sure, but which text, which topic at which time is not that easy to decide.

This is where extensive Biblical reading is most helpful. But also ideas from sermon books, sermons others have preached, articles from brotherhood papers and other sources can be of real assistance. We need not think we must always be original, but Scriptural. I doubt if any of us are very original. After all, the gospel has been preached for twenty centuries. But serious study, and ideas from others, can help us arrange our material and know the best way to present it.

Next time you hear your preacher preach, you can be fairly sure he spent considerable time deciding just what to do at that time.

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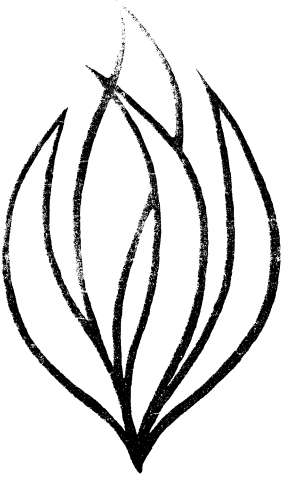

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IX **NUMBER 11**

The Work of a Preacher

First Corinthians 1:18, 21, *"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God... For after that in the wisdom of God the world by widsom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."*

Mark 16:15, 16, *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."*

Romans 10:13- 17, *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord , who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

Proclaimer

All of us have a duty to spread the gospel to everyone, but it is the preacher who is the public proclaimer of the Word. The work of a preacher is one that many of us who preach are hesitant to publicly discuss because we are so closely and personally connected with it. Some may assume you are promoting yourself and impugn your motives when you preach such a lesson. Some might accuse you of drawing attention to yourself, elevating yourself, defending yourself, and other such things. Yet, the work of a preacher is a Bible subject which many do not know and understand, even some who preach.

There are many good brethren who sincerely appreciate gospel preachers, but not everyone does in the world, or even in the church. None can realize the nature and seriousness of such a work more than those who have given their lives to the work. Being a preacher is not like other occupations where you punch a time clock, go to work, come home from work, time on, time

off, office hours, daily schedules, etc. This is said only to emphasize the difference in preaching from other occupations. Preaching is a way of life that dominates life, not only for the preacher but also his family if such he has. The work is constantly with you in everything you do or say, where you go, what you have. You are always a preacher, not just when in the pulpit. It is a work that, by its nature, cannot be regulated, compared or described like other honorable work. Many have not appreciated this fact as they ought.

His Authority

Let us consider what the preacher is NOT. He does not have authority by virtue of preaching to rule the church. He is to preach with authority (Titus 2:15), but he does not make the decisions for the congregation nor should he be expected to do so. Elderships must assume this task. He, like other members, labors under the oversight of the eldership. While his advice and counsel may often be sought because of his study knowledge and experience, he is not the authority over the church. He is not a substitute or displacement of the eldership, nor should anyone expect him to discharge the duties of the eldership

No Substitute

Neither is he a substitute for a working membership. Some evidently think so because they talk about the preacher "taking up the work." Often this is what actually happens. While others sit by and let him "take up the work" because he has been "hired to work for us" and we can sit back, this is a mistaken concept of a preacher. He is not "hired help." He is a brother in Christ serving in a specific and unique capacity. When he visits it is not the church visiting. He is not an errand boy for the congregation. It is not even his task as a preacher to organize, supervise and promote all the programs and plans of work for the church. He is not the congregation's public relations man. Some churches look to the preacher to be everything from the janitor to the chairman of the building committee; from selecting who is to serve at the Lord's table to ordering literature. This is not his work nor should it be imposed on him. Some must think because they have a preach they do not have anything to do. Little wonder many preachers suffer "burn out."

Counsellor

Preachers are often called to solve problems in people's lives. This is sometimes called counselling. He is not a professional counsellor, however. He is asked to help because of his knowledge of the Word and he is usually glad to be of whatever help he can be. It is a very frustrating role he is called upon to play, however. Too often his advice is sought but ignored, then he becomes the target of criticism when things do not work out happily. It is not uncommon that his assistance is solicited but it only brings him grief, false accusations, disappointments and criticism because many people do not want counselling or advice. They want somebody to side with them in every dispute and somebody to take their side and agree with them. When the preacher does not do this he is considered incompetent. As helpful as he might be along these lines, such is not his primary function.

Preach

A preacher is to preach the Word. He is to bring glad tidings of salvation. This is his number one work. All else revolves around this. Every opportunity he has or can make he will preach and teach. Congregations should encourage him to do this and cooperate with him as he arranges to preach.

He is obligated before God to speak sound doctrine (Titus 2:1, 8, 15). He must preach the whole counsel of God, positively and negatively (Acts 20:27, 27). He is to keep that which is committed to his trust (First Timothy 6:20). He is to teach that others may also teach (Second Timothy 1:13). Second Timothy 4:1-5, *"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."*

His Life

The preacher must guard his personal life and habits, financial

affairs and morals. He cannot be an effective preacher and live against what he preaches.

He must maintain a steady study of the Word he is to preach. When he does the study and research that is required, there must be prayer and meditation. It takes time; far more time than many realize. It takes some more time than others. Brethren should be patient and cooperative with him in this. Study and preach; preach and study. This is the heart of the task. The preacher's mind is never released from it nor should it be. Anything else he does, regardless of how demanding, must not be allowed to interfere with this. He cannot rely upon his oratorical ability, personality, humor, secular wisdom and such like. He must know the Word, preach the Word and live the Word. This is a consuming work mentally, emotionally, spiritually and very physically demanding.

Truth Offends

Uphappily, he often finds the truth he preaches is offensive to some who hear him. This was true of Christ and His apostles. While this is to be expected, it is an unpleasant and disappointing experience. Yet, he cannot swerve from his commitment to the truth in order to accomodate any hearer. Often the same sermon that offends one will convict another. At no time does he dare apologize for the truth even though it may cost him his pulpit at a given place. He has to live before God and give answer to Him whether anybody approves of what he teaches or not. The aim of every faithful gospel preacher is to please God, not men (Galatians 1:10). At no time does he allow a desire to please and be accepted cause him to offend God. He is fortunate when he can please God and possibly a few man at the same time.

Regarding Error

His preaching must be balanced. He must bring to light all truth and its applications. Failure to preach the positive and negative side is negligence. Exposing error is as much a part of preaching as declaring truth. No responsible preacher seeks to alienate anyone. He wants to win their hearts for Christ. He wants friends as much as the next person. But he is often criticized as if the truth he preaches, which some reject, originated with him. Some will praise him if they like what he

says, but tear him to pieces if they disapprove of other truth he declares. When we hear a preacher preach, the first question we ought to ask is, "Is it the truth?"

Meeting Opposition

Preachers soon learn that most of his opposition will come from those who reject his message. Some will attack him personally because they do not want to admit they reject the truth he preaches. It is also possible that he preaches in such a manner that he offends needlessly. This he can and should avoid and correct when it is mentioned to him. But truth causes disturbance at times and uneasiness among those who do not want to conform to it. Preachers are the last in the church who want to cause problems because they are always the first to go when problems arise regardless of the cause or source of the problem. But he will not forsake his sacred task regardless of personal consequences for doing what a preacher must do. More often than not he must discharge his duty receiving bare minimum sustenance from brethren, but he does it.

Whoever preaches to you and for you, you better hope and pray he will teach you the truth regardless of the consequences to himself. Beware of that person who is looking out first of all for his own welfare! You better hope and pray that he has the courage to say what should be said and not just what tickles your ears. You better hope and pray that he will stand fast on the Word, by the Word, with the Word, proving his message from the Word. You better hope and pray he will never bow to the many pressures from within and without the church to alter, compromise, soften or otherwise tamper with God's truth to accomodate those who do not approve of it. While he must always try to improve his manner and method, take heed of his attitude, increase his knowledge and skills in doing his work more effectively, you better hope and pray that he will never bend or break beneath the discouragements and sacrifices that are imposed upon him, not only by those of the world, but as much by worldly, digressive and vindictive brethren, weak elderships, and a vocal but antagonistic liberal or human legalistic minority. Whenever you reach the point that you only want to hear what soothes and praises you, compare yourself with the word quoted from Second Timothy 4:3, 4.

Everybody knows, and the preacher is more aware of it than most anybody, that everyone will not approve of the preacher.

He is just another human being and has his personal pecular characteristics like everyone else. Regardless of how fluent, scholarly, effective, kind or forceful he might be, there will be other qualities he may lack than some would prefer. He will not be perfect. Sensible preachers do not even try to please everybody because he knows he cannot. He wisely serves to please God, hoping others will serve to please God also. That is all the faithful gospel preacher seeks from anyone. He is gratified when his efforts are appreciated by faithful brethren.

God's Son

We all do well to remember that God had but one Son, and He was a preacher. Preachers do not seek your praises, but your salvation. They ask not for your possessions, but fair support in leading you to live for the Lord. They seek not anything more than your life for Christ. There is no more noble and needed work on earth than preaching the gospel. I do not say that because I preach. I preach because I believe it is true.

Preachers have faults and shortcomings. If he does not realize it it will not be long before somebody reminds him of each one of them. But we need to concentrate not so much on the man as on the message of God the man preaches. Consider it; measure it by the Word; investigate it; believe it when proven true; obey it; and live by it everyday. Also help the faithful preacher defend it.

Probably never has there been a time when gospel preachers need the cooperation, encouragement and support as now. The onslaught of error runs rampant in and out of the church. Digression, liberalism, modernism, worldliness, indifference, rebellion, immorality, all kinds of "isms" leading people astray hold sway. Only the gospel can turn the tide and save the soul. It is the task of the preacher to preach it. Pray for him as he labors because he knows before the world is right side up it must be turned upside down. Usually he is trying very hard to fill his role. Know his work and help him do it.

† † † † †

When Peter said, *"Silver and gold have I none,"*
the lame man knew he was a preacher.

Admonishing One Another

Parents are taught to rear their children in the nuture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Paul said the things written aforetime were for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11). Romans 15:14, *"And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to admonish one another."* We admonish each other in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16).

To admonish means to instruct, counsel, warn, reprove, rebuke, teach, bring to mind what we may already know but that which needs to be ever brought before us.

The Text

Second Peter 1:1-15, *"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace unto you, and peace be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice though now for a season, if needs be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them did signify, when it testified*

beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. Wherefore gird up the lions of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation."

Peter Knew the Need

See the old soldier of the cross, Peter, as he is about to lay down the armor and cross the river of death, entering into the joys of the Lord. His primary concern was the salvation of his brethren. He had lived a long and useful life in service to God, having fought many battles, known dangers, seen pitfalls. He felt keenly the need to admonish his brethren lest they forget certain principles by which they must live.

If Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit, knew the need of admonishing how much more should we also recognize the need? There is so much to distract us from Christian living and away from the pure, noble, upright life. There is so much in the world to tempt and deceive, draw away and entice. Peter wrote, First Peter 5:8, 9, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."*

Some teach that a Christian cannot fall, but the Bible teaches no such thing. Admonitions are given to prevent falling away. Why would the writers of Scripture give admonitions against falling away if one could not fall anyway?

What Jesus Said

John 15:1-6 is where Jesus presented Himself as the vine and we as the branches. Some braches, dead, worthless, unfruitful, were cut off and cast into the fire. Christ is the vine; God is the husbandman; and Christians are the branches. If the Christian does not bear fruit to the glory of God he is cut off and cast

away. Hebrews 3:11-15, *"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; while it is said, Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation."*

What have you produced for God? What are you producing now? What do you intend to produce in the future? When you are going to produce? We cannot produce ignoring worship, without prayer, study, righteous living, honesty, purity, liberal giving and doing good to others. We cannot fare sumptuously every day and neglect the needy. John 15:8, *"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."* Producing good works is essential to salvation lest we be cast away.

Bought

We are admonished by the reminder that we are bought by the blood of Christ. The church is composed of Christians. These are people who have been purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28). First Crinthians 6:20, *"Ye were bought with a price; ye are not your own."* First Peter 1:18, 19, *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."* This means we are not left to live life as we see fit, but as God has taught. We need this daily reminder as we go through the activities of earthly existence.

Warned

Is there not also the need to be warned of the deceitfulness of material things? Not many admit to being wealthy. But riches are a relative and comparative matter. Compared to the average person in the world Americans are wealthy. When we see the clothes, cars, vacations, luxuries, etc. that are in abundance among many (these things are not evil in themselves), we should not deny our material emphasis and material abundance.

But when we see how much is contributed to promoting the cause of Christ, we wonder if we are not near spiritual poverty.

How many would be willing to conduct the rest of the affairs of life on ten times their weekly contributions?

There is so much work to be done in fighting God's battles. This takes finances, energy and effort, time and thought. But the church's ability is often restricted, not because members do not have the money, but because members do not give the money. Have we ignored the apostolic warning and admonition above the love of money? First TImothy 6:9, 10, *"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."* Jesus taught, Luke 12:15, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* How far removed are we from the ancient brethren of Laodicea who thought themselve rich because of an abundance of material things, but were in spiritual poverty (Revelation 3:15- 19)?

Enrolled

The Bible teaches the Christian has his name enrolled in heaven. The Lord sent seventy disciples on a mission. They returned and made report, rejoicing over their power over demons. Luke 10:20, Jesus said, *"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rejoice rather because your names are written in heaven."* There is genuine cause to rejoice when our names are written there on the page bright and fair.

In describing the judgment, John wrote, Revelation 20:15, *"And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast in the lake of fire."* But it is possible for us to have our names removed from the heavenly scroll. Exodus 32:33, Jehovah said unto Moses, *"Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."* Psalm 69:28, *"Let them be blotted out of the book of the living and not written with the righteous."* Paul said brethren of Philippi had their names *"in the book of life."* (Philippians 4:3). But we are warned our names can be blotted from the book of life (Revelation 22:19).

God does not enroll those who do not confess and obey His Son. God will not keep on His roll those who are unfaithful to His Son.

All such Scriptures are written to admonish us. They do not say God is unable to save, cannot save or will not save when we meet His conditions. They do teach that we must pay attention and allow ourselves to be admonished, be fruitful, not neglectful of our duties, even after we have been baptized. Others before us have been cast out who were disloyal to God. We shall not be an exception if we follow the same deadly path.

Conclusion

The sum of the matter is expressed in Second Corinthians 15:21, *"Jehovah is with you while ye are with him,and if you seek him, he will be found of you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you."* None could put it plainer or stronger. These truths do not discourage our service to God, but all the more encourage us to faithful service and to give heed to admonitions. Learning these admonitions, let us show love one toward the other and admonish one another.

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Come and Help

Acts 16:6-12, "*Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis, and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia and a colony; and we were in that city abiding certain days.*"

This is an account of part of what we call Paul's second missionary journey. Paul, Silas and others were busy preaching

and strengthening churches in Lystra, Derbe, Phrygia and Galatia, doing a good work. They planned additional efforts in Asia and Bithynia, but the Lord forbade them working their plan. It was not because their plan was wrong, because they were carrying out the great commission. But it was because there was other work the Lord had for them to do which was more urgent at the moment. An opportunity was already cultivated and the time of harvest was nigh. God wanted them for a more productive work.

Come and Help

At Troas Paul was informed by a vision what God wanted them to do. He heard a plea from a man from Macedonia, *"Come over... help us."* The words *"Come... and help"* have a ring of urgency about them. They are words of pleading and recognition of limitations and the need for assistance. They express dependency and expectancy. Such words can and do arouse interest, compassion and action in people.

One of the most pathetic men I have known was a man less than forty years of age who was physically strong and had a good job, but he had been unfaithful to his wife, was back to drinking and his job was threatened because of his conduct. His debts were overwhelming him. He turned to me and said, "Please, help me." We found a way to help, beginning with his conversion. He overcame his problems and he and his family today, as I write this, are faithful in the Lord's church.

I recall visiting with an elder into a home of a young husband and wife who were having serious differences. They poured out their troubles and begged us to find a way to help. We offered what we could and tried our best. But both were too rigid in their views and would not resolve their differences, later divorcing. This was a very say experience for the elder and me. But how I remember the cry for help.

Surely, the Lord used the plea to Paul that would come closest to touching his heart and the quickest way to bring action from him. *"Come... and help."*

Help on the Way

The plea of one caught in the swirling rivers of despair, dependence, hopelessness and helplessness is the cry for help. It is our duty to answer that call to the extent we can. Paul saw his

duty; answered the call; and help was soon on its way. How reassuring it is to know when there is a need that help is coming.

Some years ago the report was made of an elderly couple travelling through the desert of Utah who got off the highway and were lost. Search parties were sent out, but their water supply was soon depleted and death seemed imminent. Then a pilot in an airplane spotted their car and saw them nearby. He dropped water and supplies along with a note that said, "Help is coming." That note, as much as anything else, gave them strength to survive until help arrived. How fine it is when Christians have the spirit of helpfulness in their hearts and actions.

Jesus is our example of willingness to help. Matthew 15:22-28, He helped the woman whose daughter was vexed. In Mark 9:17-24 He helped one who was possessed with an evil spirit, releasing him from his burden. In Matthew 11:2-5 He helped so many and that which He was doing was used as evidence that He was the One that was prophecied to come. We are to follow in His steps, not being able to do the miraculous things He did, but having the same attitude and disposition to helpfulness that He demonstrated.

We may grow weary at times of being asked to help. But to whom does the cry to help come except those who can and will help? Only those whose heart can be touched will respond. Where else can those in need turn except to those who can and will help?

Paul Helped

Paul heard the call. He could help. He was willing to help. He did help. He soon was preaching the gospel on the continent of Europe for the first time in history. Remembering how he helped, later he called upon his Philippian brethren to help two sisters in that good church to settle a dispute of some nature between them. They needed help and brethren were made to realize we ought to help each other.

Have not others helped us in life? Others have taken the time, money, energy, care and concern to see about us. Even where we are privileged to worship, somebody back there in the past cared enough to help get the work started. Can you count the ways God has helped you?

Help From God

In First Samuel seven Samuel is recorded to have called Israel together at Mizpeh, but the Philistines took advantage of them and threatened an attack. Samuel called upon God for help and God rescued them. Samuel later *"took a stone and set it between Mizpeh and Shen and called the name of it Ebenezer saying, Hither hath the Lord helped us."* (First Samuel 7:12). We sing sometimes, "Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by thy help I've come."

Who among us is not aware of God's help thus far in life? We have been dependent for food, shelter, clothing, care and God is the giver of every good gift (James 1:17). Psalm 33:20, *"Our soul waiteth for the Lord; he is our help and our shield."* Psalm 46:1, *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."* How many can acknowledge His help in times of sadness and tragedy, temptation and discouragement? Even in times of prosperity He is a source of help to keep us soberminded, thankful and humble. Seeing how He has helped us, cannot we be of the same mind to help others?

When cries for help come our way, how do we apply the Golden Rule? Do we really treat others as we would want them to treat us? To what extent do we manifest a Christlike helpfulness? Are we like the priest and Levite who went by on the other side, or the Samaritan who helped? Can we be content for the "Lazarus" nearby to have nothing more than crumbs from our table?

Sinners are crying for help and brethren often look the other way. Children need spiritual guidance and help. All that is available to God to be used in spreading the gospel is what He has entrusted to us. Who else will see that truth is proclaimed if we do not? Many may be robbing God and not giving as they ought, thereby keeping the saving gospel from the hearts of many. If we fail in our stewardship, if we heed not the cry to *"come and help,"* shall God be pleased with us in our comfort and luxuries of life?

A Continuing Call

The Macedonian call is ever before us. We cannot be content to just "keep house for the Lord" while others are dying in sin. Not all can be helped because all do not want help. Not all will respond to help when offered. No one person or congregation can do everything alone. But this does not dismiss our responsibility to be busy doing what we are able to do.

The story is told by one of our brethren who was laboring in a foreign field, going from place to place, preaching almost constantly. Where the missionaries went the killing, hatred, stealing, etc. ceased. Churches were established. Lives were made better. Civilization became a reality as well as souls forgiven of sins and saved. One man who had heard the truth and obeyed it urged the preacher to come to his village. There was a limit what one man could do, however. With the duties already upon him and working night and day, with laborers so few, he simply could not physically make the journey. The native was greatly disappointed and turned away. But he turned back long enough to say, "When we stand before God in judgment and my people are condemned, I'm going to tell God on you."

When the gospel was taken to Scandinavian areas, one new convert turned to the preaçher and asked, "Why did you not come sooner?"

Such questions rend the heart. Each of us should ask if somebody might not tell God on us. Somebody may wonder even when we go why we were so late in coming. It may be because too few of us are really converted to the task before us to see that the lost hear the Word that they might be saved. Within driving distance of many churches that are plentifully supplied there are states and counties where the gospel is unknown in its truth and simplicity. Do we turn a deaf ear to that? Or do we resolve that we shall devise ways and means compatible to truth to do whatever we can to answer the call that comes to us, *"Come... and help?"*

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We hear more and more of churches that are having difficulty finding qualified men among them to serve as elders because they have failed to rear their children to be faithful. Scripture demands that while children are in his home they be faithful. We wish more parent would give more attention to properly guiding their house so they could be elders in the church.

More on the Lord's Return

We shall study from Second Peter chapter three as well as other passages. Anticipation of the Lord's return is at the heart of the hope of the Christian. But His return has been the target of both skeptics and speculators, those who disbelieve He will come again and those who see fit to predict when and the conditions involved when they have no such revelation from God. Both classes, skeptics and speculators, have existed even since New Testament days and the writing of Peter in this chapter deals with much of their error.

Promised Return

The Lord said He would return (John 14:1-4). The angels declared, Acts 1:11, *"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."* Paul said the Lord Himself shall be the One to descend (First Thessalonians 4:16).

Second Peter 3:1,2, Peter stated he was writing to remind his brethren of things they already knew but which they needed to keep in mind. Such things had been spoken before by the holy prophets and apostles.

Second Peter 3:3, 4, Peter mentions the exitence of scoffers and skeptics. They lived then and they live now. It is always upsetting to godly people to hear the truth of God ridiculed and shunned, but the scoffers may not realize that their very existence goes to prove the apostolic prediction to be true. The scoffers held to a theory akin to what is called the uniformitarian theory that evolutionists uphold even yet.

Second Peter 3:5,6, Peter accuses such skeptics of willingly ignoring certain historical facts. They denied the power of the Word of God, the flood at the time of Noah as reported in Scripture. In our study we shall for a moment pass by verse seven and return to it later.

In verse eight Peter teaches that time is of no consequence to God in the performance of His promises. One day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. What some skeptics might consider to be a default on a promise is nothing more than God fulfilling the promise when He sees fit. God has not revealed any timetable regarding the Lord's final return. For

one to fault God for not keeping His Word reflects ignorance on the part of the skeptic.

Promises Are Kept

Furthermore, Second Peter 3:9 emphasizes that the Lord does keep His promises and is not slack toward them but rather longsuffering to mankind, not wanting anyone to perish, but preferring all to repent. What some have counted as slackness on the part of God is actually kindness and longsuffering on the part of God. It just shows how far afield from the truth those who wish to repudiate God's will can get.

Second Peter 3:10 takes note of such instances of skeptical ignorance, but also notes that their ignorance changes nothing. *"The day of the Lord will come..."* He will come *"as a thief in the night."* This means that He will come unannounced as to the specific indications and signs whereby one can know the time of His coming. Rather he will come unexpectedly except for the assurance that someday, in God's wisdom, He will come. The same teaching is stressed in other passages such as First Thessalonians 5:2; Matthew 24:36-39. As the Matthew record states, life will be continuing as usual just as it was in the time when the flood at the time of Noah came upon the wicked inhabitants of the world.

When He Comes

Notice some of the events that are revealed that shall occur when the Lord returns (Second Peter 3:7, 10, 12). It will mark the end of the world with the greatest conflagration ever known because even the elements shall melt with fervent hear and the earth and the works therein shall be burned up. This either will or will not occur. Peter said by divine guidance that it will occur. Was he a false prophet? Do we deny what Peter wrote and repudiate the only religious authority known to mankind that has come from heaven, the Scriptures? This teaching strikes a death blow at the theory that calls for the Lord to establish an earthly kingdom upon His return because there will not be any earth for anybody to establish anything.

Second Peter 3:9 also teaches His return marks the end of man's probation. His last opportunity to get right with God will be gone. Salvation will be offered no more. Since *"the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation,"* (verse 15), the end of

that longsuffering is the end of that opportunity.

Resurrection

Another event, not recorded in Second Peter three but in First Corinthians 15:20-26 is of importance. This fifteenth chapter emphasizes the reality of the resurrection, affirming the resurrection of Christ as the first fruits of all who die (verse 20). He is the forerunner and pledge of the harvest. His resurrection assures the resurrection of all mankind and is the guarantee of that resurrection.

Verses 21 and 22 note how sin and death came through Adam and transgression. But the resurrection and life came by and through Christ.

Verse 23 teaches the arranged order and plan by the Lord of that resurrection. Christ was raised first. Afterward, they that belong to Christ shall be raised. This passage deals with the resurrection of the righteous. It teaches that the righteous shall be raised at His return (First Thessalonians 4:13-18). Other passages that we shall soon consider teach that both the righteous and wicked shall be raised the same day and hour.

Verse 24 speaks of the end. Christ's return marks the end of things as was also revealed in Second Peter 3. But what is of tremendous significance to the child of God, the citizen in the kingdom of God, which is the same as the church of Christ, that kingdom shall be delivered to the Father. His return will not mark the setting up of His kingdom but the delivering up of His kingdom to God the Father. This marks the entrance into the eternal glory of heaven for the saints.

Christ is now ruling and reigning and is now King of kings and Lord of lords over His kingdom. He shall reign until He puts down all rule and authority and power. Verse 25 tells how long He will reign. All His enemies shall be conquered. The last enemy is death (verse 26) which shall be overcome with completeness with the resurrection from the dead of everyone. Certainly, we can understand how the resurrection marks the end of the rule and power of death. Christ riegns and shall reign until then, and that end will occur at His return. The same term of rule was announced by Peter in Acts 2:34, 35.

Thus Far and More

Let us summarize to this point. We have learned that Christ

will return; He has been raised; all others shall be raised; and this will occur at the end of all things. It is then that the kingdom, the church, will be delivered to the Father. Death will be destroyed by the resurrection, and the last enemy overcome.

John 5:28,29 teaches that all the dead, good and evil, shall be raised and raised the same hour. When will be the great day of the resurrection? Martha gives us this answer when she was discussing the resurrection with Jesus in John 11:24. *"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* The last day obviously marks the end of this world as well as the time of these other events already noted, including the resurrection.

Judgment

John 12:48 tells us that all shall be judged by the Word of Jesus Christ, and that also will occur the *"last day."* Mathew 25 presents to us a part of the judgment scene that will occur when the Lord returns (Matthew 25:31). Second Thessalonians 1:7-10 reveals the judgment to occur when the Lord is revealed from heaven.

Prepare

We return to our original text in Second Peter three. Verses 11, 12 and 14 urge us to respect the need of preparation for that day. Inasmuch as all of these things are coming to pass, seeing that all shall be dissolved, the heaven shall be on fire and the elements shall melt, the dead to be raised and the judgment to follow, it ought to be evident what kind of persons we should be. We should be holy, godly, without spot, blameless and found in peace with the Lord, which is possible only by faithfulness in Christ.

Consider the word *"hasting."* It is not to be confused with something hasty, but means earnestly desiring. Since the Christian earnestly desires the eternal reward in heaven, and awaits the return of his Savior, expecting and desiring that eventual event to be in his future, he knows the necessity to prepare for that return.

Second Peter 3:13 speaks of a new heaven and new earth. This present heaven and earth is our present place of habitation. But when the Lord returns it shall be no more. The place of habitation for the redeemed will be that new place called heaven where God lives. When the Lord comes again will be the day of

entrance into the eternal glories of this new habitation, this new heaven and earth, with Deity.

Peter knew there were skeptics and speculators. He exposed the fallacies of those who denied His return and those who thought they could predict when His return would be. He knew such people might arouse great emotions with sensational and fanciful speculations and imaginative theories of various kinds. He revealed adequate information from heaven to refute both classes of false people. He knew that teaching regarding the Lord's return would be twisted and wrested by the unlearned and unstable, as were certain writings of Paul so wrested.But these things we can know, understand and believe. We take hope in these truths and accept them as an essential part of the saving doctrine of Jesus Christ.

Ten Points

In summary, what have we learned? (1) The Lord will return. (2) His delay does not nullify His promise to come. (3) His delay extends man's opportunity and probation. (4) He will come unexpectedly without signs to announce it. (5) It will mark the end of the world. (6) It will mark the end of His reign and the to be saved. (7) It will mark the end of His reign and the deliverance of the kingdom to the Father. (8) It will be the day of the resurrection of all. (9) It will be the day of judgment. (10) It will be the day of entrance into the heavenly reward for those who have made proper preparation through Christ.

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Money Matters

Why should we study about money and giving? Why is it so important? The answer is because it is a Bible subject. There is more on the subject of money, the right attitude toward it and the proper use of it than there is on the Lord's Supper, baptism, marriage and many other subjects we all consider important. This is reason enough for our study. First Corinthians 9:11-13, *"If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of*

this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?" Philippians 4:16, *"For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.'* Romans 10:15, *"And how shall they preach, except they be sent..."* All of these passage tell us why this study is important. Money is a means of getting the gospel to the world by supporting those who preach it.

Ephesians 4:28, *"Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."* The needs of others that they cannot provide for themselves is why we need to study money matters. First Timothy 5:16, *"If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed."* There are those for whom the church has responsibility and we need to learn to give in order to provide for them as Scripture directs.

Proverbs 3:9, *"Honor the Lord with thy substance; and with the firstfruits of all thine increase."* Giving is a way of worshipping God. Philippians 4:17, *"Not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account."* Paul urged them to supply his need, not just for himself, but for their development. Acts 20:35, *"It is more blessed to give than receive."*

Proof of Love

We are to give as a way of proving our love. Second Corinthians 8:8, *"I speak not by commandment but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love."* These are a few of the Bible reasons for knowing what God teaches regarding money, its acquisition, attitude toward it and disposition of it.

Who does God expect to give the financial support needed for the conduct of the work of the church? The answer is simple. God looks to Christians. Who else cares? Acts 2:42 speaks of brethren having fellowship, joint participation, sharing their goods in carrying the burdens. First Corinthians 16:2, Paul addressed the brethren and told them to *"lay every one of you by him in store."* The *"you"* referred to Christians. Everyone

must be involved. It is not a task for those of greater abundance only. The financial integrity of the Lord's church depends upon each member learning and doing as God says in this matter.

Since we are the children of God, and seeing how God has given to us, it is only reasonable and right that we also give to God. Our very lives have been given to us by God (Acts 17:5). God gave His Son (John 3:16). Ephesians 5:2, 25; First Timothy 2:6 both show that Christ gave Himself as a ransom for us. He offers to give us rest (Matthew 11:28). When God gives He gives liberally (James 1:5) and He is the giver of every good gift (James 1:17). First Cortinthians 15:57, *"But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."* Deity has given so much. Is it strange that Deity expects humanity to give?

Stewards

We can give acceptably only when we understand our relationship with the material things around us and under our control. First Chronicles 29:10, 11, 14, *"Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation and David said, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel, our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power, and the glory and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all... But who am I and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."* This David said following a great contribution by Israel unto God. He said they only gave God what was His already.

Matthew twenty-five and the parable of the talents shows that we are but stewards of that which belongs to God. We are not owners, but only have certain portions entrusted to our care for a while for which we shall give an account to Him to Whom it belongs.

First Corinthians 4:2, *"Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."* God warned Israel that in their prosperity they would forget the very source of their wealth. Deuteronomy 8:17,18, *"And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for he it is that giveth*

thee power to get wealth, that he may establish this covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day." The rich fool of Luke twelve made the mistake of thinking his wealth was his Job 1:21, *"Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither: The gave and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord."*

It Is His

People make such a foolish mistake to talk about "my money" and "God's money." There is no such distinction in reality. When money is in my pocket, it belongs to God. When I put it into the collection basket, it still belongs to God. Ownership does not change. Stewardship changes. When it is in my pocket I am the steward of it. When I give it into the collection plate, the eldership assumes stewardship over it. But it always belongs to God.

When it is in my pocket I am to use it to fulfill my obligations. When in the plate the eldership has responsibility to use it according to that which is authorized in Scripture for the church. At times the duty I have may overlap the collective duty all the church has together. At such times that for which I can use my money is the same for which the church can use its money. But I have personal duties, responsibilities and privileges that do not belong to the church nor for which the church has authority to be involved. It is a false doctrine that teaches that because the money always belongs to God that whatever I as an individual can do with my money the church can do the same. This is false because responsibilities and authority differ. But we must understand that never is what we have our own. It is God's. We are caretakers and we shall give an account.

How and How Much

How are we to give? How much are we to give? These are not the same question. How involves the heart. How much involves the amount. Matthew 6:1-4 warns against giving to be seen of others. Matthew 10:8, *"Freely ye have received; freely give."* Second Corinthians 9:6,7, *"But I say unto you, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver."* We

are to give *"as God hath prospered you."* (First Corinthians 16:2. Luke 12:48, *"For unto whom much is given, of him shall much be required."* Second Corinthians 8:12, *"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath and not according to that he hath not."*

There were several tithes that were applicable to the Jews. But there is no specified percentage or amount revealed in the new covenant. Some may hide behind this to justify doing less than the Jews. But we never read in any age or dispensation of people giving less than a tenth. We are to give liberally, cheerfully, bountifully, as we have prospered, with intent, planning and thought, as well as sacrificially. The widow gave of all her living (Luke 21:2). The Macedonians gave in their poverty (Second Corinthians 8:2). Some early Christians even sold their possessions in order to give (Acts 4:37).

The early church gave upon the first day of the week (First Corinthians 16:2). Strange how some realize this means every first day of every week in the matter of money, but somehow ignore this when it comes to observing the Lord's Supper, doing so only once a month, or quarterly, or whensoever the mood suits. But the language of First Corinthians 16 is the same as Acts 20:7. We can also give at other times as opportunity affords and need demands (Galatians 6:10). Some have been known to borrow money to live. Some have even been known to borrow money to give to the Lord.

The "Secret"

If there is a "secret" to successful giving it is found in Second Corinthians 8:5 where it is said those brethren of Macedonia *"first gave of themselves to the Lord."* One who truly gives himself to God will work toward proper giving. He will strive to be sacrificial in his giving (Romans 12:1, 12). We are not our own nor does what we have belong to us (First Corinthians 6:19, 20). Here is the key to proper giving. Deny self and put God and His kingdom and righteousness first (Matthew 6:33).

God once rebuked Israel because some were robbing God (Malachi 3:8). The way they were doing that was by refusing to give as they ought. People have, can and probably still do rob God when they fail to give as taught in Scripture. Money matters are important matters because money matters.

† † † † †

Studying Leadership



JAMES W. BOYD

There has always been some attention paid to study of leadership in the church. Maybe much of the effort along this line has escaped my personal attention. But I am encouraged to see what appears to me to be a stronger emphasis of late on this theme. Lectureships, special meetings, class studies are being devoted to it. Brethren have written some excellent books on leadership generally and on the elders, deacons, preachers and others leadership roles.

Leaders should be sobered, alerted and better equiped by the stern warnings and condemnations against leaders that do not assume and discharge their duties properly. Everyone needs to be informed of the duty of leaders to the congregation and the duties of the congregation to their leaders. Recognizing how prevention is far better than even a cure, more study and application of the qualifications for leadership is in order. While there may be some exceptions, generally speaking as goes the leadership will go the church.

We would commend to brethren everywhere a renewed emphasis on the work, authority, attitude, opportunity and rewards of leadership.

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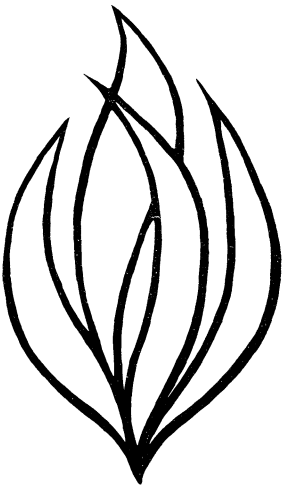

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME IX James W. Boyd **NUMBER 12**

True Wisdom

The definition of wisdom is the quality of being wise, having the ability to judge and deal with keen perception various facts as they pertain to life and conduct. When one is wise he is able to distinguish between that which is bad from that which is good. But he is able to do even better than that. He can distinguish between things, both of which are good, but one is better than another. He knows the difference between the superior and the inferior.

In First Corinthians chapter one Paul writes of the wisdom of this world in contrast to the wisdom of God. Worldly wisdom, wisdom belonging to men as pertains to this world, is inferior to the wisdom of Almighty God. In fact, worldly wisdom is characterized as foolishness when compared to the wisdom of God (First Corinthians 1:18-31).

James 3:13, *"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom."* Here is the way to tell whether one is truly wise or not. Let his manner of life be such that the graciousness of godliness will be evident. This will be the evidence of his wisdom. He can prove himself wise when there is enthroned in his heart gentleness and meekness.

James 3:14-16, *"But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom decendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."*

Two Kinds of Wisdom

We can understand the contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom that is from above. Both kinds of wisdom will manifest itself in the attitude of heart and manner of life.

In verse seventeen, James writes to contrast evil wisdom with the wisdom that is from above, which is wisdom indeed. *"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."* Jewish sages agreed that true widom came from above. It was not the attainment by the genius of man, as was worldly wisdom. True wisdom is a gift

from God that can belong to man when man does as God directs. True wisdom is, as one describes, "the breath of power of God and a pure influence from the glory of the Almighty."

James uses eight words to describe this wisdom from above. Let us give a brief consideration to each of them.

Pure

In verse seventeen there is the word "*pure*" from the Greek word "hagnos." The root meaning of this word is to be pure enough to approach gods, pure enough to go before that which is higher than self. To the Greeks this word had a ceremonial meaning. One was considered pure when he had undergone a proper ritual of cleansing and was therefore allowed into the presence of the one that was worshipped. It was altogether a ritual purity, not a moral or inward purity.

In Christian usage, the word includes not only the outward and ritualistic purity but also the purity of mind or heart as well. Therefore, true wisdom is wisdom cleansed of an evil heart and ulterior motive. One who is truly wise places emphasis on both outward purity of life but also on purity of mind and thoughts.

Peaceable

A second word is translated *"peaceable"* from the word "eirenikos." It has a very special meaning which infers the right relationship between man and man, but also between man and God. We are all aware of this two-fold relationship that we have in life. True wisdom will provide the right relationship in both instances.

There is a kind of wisdom that is clever, arrogant and separates one person from another as one looks with contempt on his fellowman. There is a kind of wisdom that is cruel and takes delight in hurting others with clever and cutting words. We might call such a person with this kind of wisdom a "smart-aleck."

There is another kind of worldly wisdom that we could define as pseudo-intellectualism which is a wisdom of men designed to seduce people away from loyalty to God and His will. We see evidence of this so-called wisdom among so many who like to profess themselves to be scholars.

But true wisdom tends to bring men closer to each other and

closer to God. That which divides what ought to be united is not wisdom as much as it is foolishness.

Gentle

A third word is translated considerate or gentle (epieikes). We are told this word is difficult to translate with equality. It implies doing more than just what is demanded in the written law. True wisdom enables one to know how to apply law and not wrongfully use law, forcing applications that are destructive rather than beneficial. There is always the possibility that man would be stricter than God in some instances. It is possible to read a law with such precision that one would actually violate God's intent for the law. For example, when Paul wrote regarding the eating of meat, while the eating was lawful, there also had to be consideration of others. Even though one had his "rights," he would be wise to be cautious in using his "rights" lest he do harm to others. Such wisdom knows how to properly mix justice and mercy, law and gentleness. Matthew Arnold said of true wisdom that it was "sweet reasonableness."

Easily Entreated

A fourth word, translated "*easy to be entreated,*" sometimes meaning to be open to reason, is the word "eupeithes." A wise one is not stubborn but can be persuaded. He is in possession of conviction, but at the same time is open to being taught and convinced. This does not imply weakness of conviction but a willingness to hear another appeal. True wisdom is not so rigid, austere, stern and harsh as to shut out additional information should such be relevant and applicable. A wise man will listen to others with an open mind, being skilled in knowledge to discern what he hears. When evidence demands, he will yield to persuasion. He knows when to change and when to resist. It is not always weakness nor a disgrace to change one's mind. The old adage, "Wise men change their minds; fools never do," is sometimes befitting. We are truly wise to always be ready to conform to the will of God whatever that conformity may require of us.

Mercy and Fruits

We shall consider the next two descriptions together. They are

"full of mercy and good fruits." The world mercy, like the one translated pure, includes more in Christian thought than it did among the Greeks and in their religions. Mercy reflects pity for the person who is suffering, especially unjustly, in the mind of Greeks. But to the Christian it reflects pity for those in trouble even when the trouble has been self-imposed. This is like God whose pity went out to man even when man was lost because of man's own transgressions. This kind of mercy is sympathetic, not deliberately vindictive. Mercy is withholding punishment even when punishment is deserved. It is closely related to grace which is granting favor when favor is not merited.

Sometimes we may be apt to comment that a person brought his problems on himself and summarily dismiss any concern for him because he did it to himself and deserves what he gets. It may be true that he or she is at fault, but this does not mean we are unconcerned nor shall we "wash our hands" of him or her.

True wisdom includes even more than pity for the man who has inflicted himself. True wisdom produces good fruits in the form of practical assistance. Christian mercy is not just an emotion, but includes action. The mercy that God extended was not simply an emotion. God did something for mankind. Can we claim we possess true wisdom and true mercy when we do not allow our pity to lead us to helpfulness?

Impartial

The next description of true wisdom is *"without partiality,"* which conveys the thought also of being without uncertainty, without variance. A wise man knows his own mind, is not wavering, not divided within himself. He is not one thing today and something different tomorrow. He is stable and dependable. He chooses his course and is stedfast in it as long as that course shows itself to be right before God.

It seems that some must think it clever to never make up their minds on certain matters. They are always "studying the issue." They are never able to weigh the evidence and come to a conclusion. While we ought not be too hasty in jumping to conclusions, we are expected to *"prove all things and hold fast to that which is good."* (First Thessalonians 5:21). Some seem to prefer the uncertain sound, remaining unclear, ambiguous, indefinite, beating around the bush and never decisive.

They may even boast how open minded they are and reserved in judgment. But it is altogether possible that they are

like the words of an old song that said, "When I'm not near the one I love, I love the one I'm near." They are fickle and seek to please whomsoever may be in their company at the time. We have seen some who profess to be gospel preachers with this characteristic. We do not want to confuse fear, hesitantcy, flightiness and uncertainty with true wisdom. Some seem to be *"ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."* (Second Timothy 3:7). But true wisdom will lead one to learn it, know it, and hold to it.

Without Hypocrisy

Finally, true wisdom is without hypocrisy. It does not display a mere pose, pretense, just acting a part. The wise man does not deal with deception and disguises, concealing his real aims and motives. It is not wisdom to keep others guessing and wondering. Such breeds doubt, invites suspicion, and destroys confidence. True wisdom causes a person to be honest and above board rather than pretending. The hypocrite is a foolish person. Few things have been as severely condemned by our Lord as hypocrisy (Matthew 23).

James 3:18 concludes, *"And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."* The seeds that produce a rich and righteous harvest cannot flourish in an atmosphere where proper relationships are not obtained and maintained. Nothing can grow when people are bitter toward each other and standing at variance.

In churches where these evil traits are evident the affairs are corrupted with strife and tension. The ground becomes barren and sterile rather than productive for the Lord. In such conditions all the striving for true wisdom is rendered ineffective and is without reward.

With these Biblical descriptions of true wisdom before us, wisdom which is from above, may we turn our attentions more and more to the acquisition of it through study and prayer (James 1:5). I will bring us blessings and will magnify and glorify the name of God.

† † † † †

A New Testament Beatitude

The Bible is a book containing many beatitudes. A beatitude speaks of blessedness that characterizes certain traits of mind and action that makes one happy before God. Christ cited eight beatitudes in the introduction of the sermon He preached on some mount, recorded in Matthew 5, 6, 7. Psalms opens with a beatitude. There are over one hundred beatitudes in the Bible. The word "blessed" or "blessings" occurs over six hundred times. So it is proper that the Bible be considered as a book of blessing, or beatitudes.

One of these is found in Acts 20:35, *"I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

These words of Jesus are not found in the first four books of the New Testament. It is one of those morsels of the bread of life that fell from His lips that is not recorded elsewhere. John wrote that the world would not contain the books that could be written of all that Jesus did. But we have all that is necessary and what is all-sufficient (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

Unfortunately, many do not agree with Jesus in this statement. His thinking clashes with that of so many of us. Mankind, in his greed, covetousness, selfishness, has a different philosophy about giving and getting than what the Lord taught.

Giving is looked upon by many as necessary nuisance, and this includes giving to the work of the church as well as giving generally. Getting is the goal. Giving is one of those matters in life from which many wish to escape, not realizing what harm they are doing to themselves if they were never offered the opportunity to give.

A Sensitive Nerve

Unquestionably, the "nerve" that runs from the heart to the pocketbook is a very sensitive one. It is so sensitive that it has caused many preachers to shy away from discussing it. When he does, there are always those who impugn his motives and accuse him of seeking more for himself. As one man once said, "All I hear is give, give, give." That, my reading friend, is not a bad commentary on the religion of Christ. God gave. Christ

gave. Christians give. There is far more on giving in the Scriptures than there is on the plan of salvation.

The real reason that "nerve" is so sensitive is because it is inflamed with the poison of sin. Preachers do their hearers a real service to probe into the subject and teach people to give as they ought. Let us consider the Lord's truth on this theme and learn why it is more blessed to give than to receive. Then we can *"honor God with our substance,"* (Proverbs 3:9), and obey apostolic instructions regarding giving (First Corinthians 16:1,2; Second Corinthians 8:9).

Basically and essentially, giving is like God. God is concerned about blessing our universe. It was the joy of giving that moved God to create man and give man life. The same motive prompted Him to offer redemption to man (John 3:16). He is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Salvation itself is a gift (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8,9).

It is more blessed to give than to receive because it is in the true imitation of the Son of God. The Lord lived among men to give enlightenment, comfort, guidance, hope and deliverance from sin. He came to offer mercy and salvation. His life was not one of being ministered unto, but one of ministering to others (Matthew 20:28). Precious little of this world's belongings did He ever have. *"The foxes have holes and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."* (Matthew 8:20).

Biography

Our text, Acts 20:35, is almost a one line biography of Christ on earth. It is the story of His life. His very mission embodied giving up and giving for others. He gave up equality with the Father in heaven to take on the form of man (Philippians 2:5-8). He gave Himself for our sin (Galatians 1:4). He gave Himself to redeem us (Titus 2:14). One of the clear distinctions between "givers" and "getters" is found in the lives of Mary of Bethany in contrast with Judas Iscariot. Both were present at a supper prepared for Jesus (John 17). Mary took very costly ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus to honor Him. Judas complained that such use of the ointment was wasteful and ought to have been put into the treasury that he kept. But the Bible reveals that Judas was a thief and stole from the bag. Malachi 3:8 raises the question, *"Will a man rob God?"* Judas gives the answer. The actions and failures to give as we ought is also evidence that the

answer is in the affirmative. We can rob God as much by failing to "put in" as by deliberately "taking out."

The human family divides itself into the Marys and Judases. Some seem to think the world owes them a living and they only live to get. Others recognize their debt to the world and to God and live to give. Some serve God for what they think they might get out of it materially. There are even preachers who appeal to people on the basis that serving God will get you a better car, better house, better job, more clothes, etc. But there are others who serve the Lord and their fellowman because their love is so great that they want to do something good for others and they want to honor God with what they have in their stewardship.

Giving is the unselfish, sacrificial, blessed example of our Lord. He has set the example for us to follow.

For Our Benefit

But again, it is more blessed to give than to receive because giving enlarges a person's life. We all believe Paul when he taught that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7,8). The Lord said, Luke 6:38, *"Give and it shall be given unto you."* There is the story about the preacher who preached in a small rural church and whatever financial support he received was the amount that was placed in a little box just inside the doorway. People passed the box as they entered. One Sunday he took his small son with him to this small church and he put in his contribution as he entered. He conducted the services, did his preaching, almost everything was left for him to do. After it was over he went by the box to get what was given. All that was there was what he himself had given. He was rather disgruntled about it. His son noticed his displeasure and said, "Dad, if you had put more in you would have got more out." Truer words can not be spoken when it comes to rendering service unto God. The reason some do not get much from their religion is because they invest so little in it as to time, energy, prayer, thought, work and money.

Another story is about a man who went to heaven and began looking for his mansion. Angels led him down one street, then another, and the mansions on each street kept getting less and less fine. Finally they came to the doorsteps of a rather modest place and the man expressed great disappointment. But the angel explained, "We did the best we could with what you sent ahead to us." The story carries the point we want to make.

We are not to give just so we can get. We may not get very much in this life at all, except hardship, persecution and even death. To give for the purpose of getting is to destroy the purity of motive in giving. But being blessed is a promised return to those who give as they ought. In fact, we get far more than we ever give. We have often suggested that God makes it hard to sacrifice. Yes, He teaches us to sacrifice, but He blesses us so abundantly with things that matter that we do not feel we have sacrificed at all.

Treasures in Heaven

Giving is an investment, not an expense. It is laying aside eternal securities (Matthew 6:19,20). That which a man treasures most is that which is dearest to his heart. It is folly to let our treasures be of the earthly sort because they shall corrode, rust, be consumed and cannot last. They are temporal at best, and even then, we cannot take any of it with us (First TImothy 6:7). They shall all perish with the using. Jesus taught that such treasures are deceitful because they seem to be what they are not. They cannot give security for the soul. They are not even the means to happiness in life. How many wealthy people are living in an earthly torment because they have trusted in riches and have leaned on that which cannot sustain them? Read about the rich man in Luke twelve and see how deceived he was when he had relied on his wealth for his soul's security !

We injure the soul, endanger our hope of heaven, and are very subject to missing what really counts in life when we concentrate on earthly wealth to the neglect of the spirit. Only that which is invested in spiritual things shall remain beyond the river of physical death. We lay up treasures in heaven by giving.

One man was quite successful financially and decided to give fifty thousand dollars to the church. But later he suffered business reverses and lost his fortune and had to start again. Someone asked him if he did not wish he had that fifty thousand back again. His answer was, "No sir, that is the only amount of my fortune that I really saved." We can fare sumptuously every day and die and be in torment if we fail to put material things in their proper place and use what we have to the glory of God.

We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). This is a common error that many are making today by trying to be Christians but still having such a love and desire for money and the things that money buys. We can use mammon for service,

but if we are not careful we shall become the servant of it. Many have done that and we are subject to that also. Only when we are honest in its acquisition, possess the right attitude toward it, and faithful to God in its disposition as good stewards can we receive personal and eternal blessings from the material things of this world. By giving as we should, we can be counted a worthy steward of that which is entrusted to us. After all, temporary steward is what we are. We are stewards of that which belongs to God, which he has loaned us for a while, and we shall turn it all over to somebody else sooner or later.

As Ye Receive

When Christ sent out His apostles He gave them great powers, such as power to heal the sick, cast out demons, etc. Then He taught them a great principle that we need to learn. *"Freely ye have received; freely give."* (Matthew 10:8). Again He taught, *"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."* (Luke 12:48). It is that way with me and you and with what we have.

On the basis of these thoughts, let me urge you that you take another consideration of your contributions. I do not appeal to you just on the basis of the need that the church constantly has for more funds. That will always be with us. It should be that way. I appeal to your faith in Christ and your confidence in what He said when He said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

† † † † †

Attend Gospel Meetings

People talk a great deal about wanting to help spread the cause of Christ and encourage others to be saved. Well, one way that is readily available and open to nearly all of us is to support efforts to preach the gospel such as is done in gospel meetings. Some seldom attend them, even at their home congregation. But each one can be a significant help in this if we just would. Will you become one who is known to hold up the hands of others and attend?

The Nature of Christ and the Significance to Us

Who is Christ? What is Christ? Regardless of how you ask it, it is of paramount importance to our civilization, our age, our children and ourselves. It is important whether we realize the extent of that importance or not. As the conflict against Christianity expands in the world, this question is asked more and more by the young, friends, enemies, everyone. Some say one thing and others something else. We need the truth set before us concerning Christ more than ever.

Most all agree that Jesus of Nazereth lived on the earth, although there be some who would even deny that. Some of the bitterest enemies of the Lord contend He is but a fable and myth character, created out of Jewish folklore and imagination, with stories invented about Him by His friends and expanded as time progressed. But most are not so blind to the evidence of His life and existence on earth. They agree He was a real person, having human faculties and walked among His fellowmen.

But there is strong disagreement as to who Jesus is or was. This question deals with His Deity, not simply His humanity. Was He merely another man, even though exceptional, but nothing more? Did He exist as a conscious being before His birth by Mary? Does He live now? If He is more than merely another human being, of what rank is He? What kind of being was He on earth? Was He truly God in the flesh, endowed with all the distinctive attributes of Deity, yet His own separate and distinct personality?

Such matters may well extend beyond the grasp of human reasoning and comprehension. We are compelled to rely upon testimony and witnesses who saw Him, heard Him, and wrote concerning this matter. It is the Bible to which we must turn for there, and only there, can we find reliable testimony concerning the nature of Christ and the significance to us.

Deity and Humanity

The Scriptures teach that He was God as well as man. In some respects, even while on earth, He was one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In other respects, He was distinct and

particularly so while in human form. Let us consider the Biblical evidence that He was God as well as man.

Names

His names were names given to Deity. Isaiah 9:6, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son if given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."* In this prophecy concerning Christ there is no question that the prophet gave Him identifications denoting Deity.

John 1:1, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* Verse fourteen identifies the Word as the One that was made flesh and dwelt among us. Deity is assigned Him here.

"But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." (Hebrews 1:8). Here the Son is called, explicitly, by the term "God."

The name, Jehovah, is considered to be the most sacred of all the names given to Deity. Jesus is included in that name. Psalm 83:17,18, *"Let them be confounded and troubled forever, yea, let them be put to shame, and perish, that men may know that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the most high over all the earth."* The same point is made in Isaiah 42:8, Psalm 97:7, regarding Jehovah. *"Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods."* In Hebrews 1:6 the inspired writer refers to this passage and applies it to the Son of God. There is no question but Deity is asserted concerning Him.

Isaiah 40:3, *"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."* This is an obvious reference in prophecy to the work of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ (Matthew 3:1-3). Isaiah called the One before whom John would go as God or Jehovah. All these names attribute to Jesus the names of Deity.

Exclusive to Deity

The Scriptures ascribe to Jesus the power, honors and rights that belong only to Deity. Jesus has the power of creation.

Genesis 1:1 tells us God created. John 1:1-3 tells us *"all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made,"* referring to the Word that became flesh. If Jesus Christ Paul wrote, *"...who created all things by Jesus Christ."* (Ephesians 3:8,9). *"For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in the earth, visible and invisible..."* (Colossians 1:16,17), with reference to the Son of God. Likewise Hebrews 1:10 asserts His creative power.

Only Deity is the proper object of worship. *"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve."* (Matthew 4:10). Yet, this honor is given to the Son of God (John 5:22,23). *"Let all the angels of God worship him."* (Hebrews 1:6). *"Wherefore God hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:9-11). Surely, no additional evidence is needed to show that Jesus Christ is a proper object of worship. Such was to be given Him as recorded in Revelation 19:10; 22:9).

Deity also has exclusive rights and prerogatives which no other has. Yet, Christ has these things. The general tone and scope of the Bible is that God has the right to forgive sins. Is it not evident that Jesus both claimed that right and exercised it while on earth (Luke 5:20-25)?

The Godhead

In addition to the names, power, honors, and rights of Deity, the Scriptures frequently represent the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as coordinate agents in such works as the creation, providence and the redemption of man. These three make up the Godhead, the Godhood, and are in oneness. As for Jesus, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* (Colossians 1:9). The term "Elohim" of Genesis 1:1 in the Hebrew, translated *"God,"* is a plural word. All three persons of the Godhead are included. Genesis 1:26, *"Let us make man in our image..."* expressed the plurality of the Godhead. The Father was involved (Psalm 102:25). The Holy Spirit was involved (Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13). The Son was involved (John 1:1-3). So all three are included in the plural term *"God."*

This same relationship is expressed in the authority for baptism (Matthew 28:19,20), and again all three are included in

Second Corinthians 13:14.

The Scriptures further ascribe to Jesus Christ as on an equality with the Father and one with Him. *"My Father worketh hitherto and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."* (John 5:17,18). *"I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy, and because that thou, being man, makest thyself God."* (John 10:30-33). *"Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?"* (John 14:8,9).Other passages that teach Jesus and the Father as one can be found in Philippians 2:5-8 and John 17:20,21. Nothing could be stated with greater plainness and clarity than these words.

Is Christ Inferiror?

But do not the Scriptures speak of Christ as being inferior to the Father? For instance, *"For we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that he, by the grace of God, should taste of death for every man."* (Hebrews 2:9). Again, *"I can of mine own self do nothing, as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."* (John 5:30). John 14:28, *"Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father, for my Father is greater than I."* All these passages indicate an inferiority of Christ relative to the Father, at least in some sense.

As we seek understanding we must first realize that God's Word does not contradict itself. So there is a sense in which the Son was inferior to the Father. This had reference to His humanity, not His Deity. The very relationship of Father and Son implies a greater and lesser in some sense. But there is no doubt that He who became flesh and dwelt among us was Deity. His inferiority in the flesh was for a specific purpose of dying on behalf of mankind, and it only underscores the teaching that Jesus was Emmanuel, God in the flesh, God with us.

Other Biblical evidences of the Deity of this Person should be studied, such as His brith by the virgin Mary, the manner of His works, His Words, miracles, and the way He fulfilled prophecies. Of course, there is the resurrection by which He was declared to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). But all these are deserving of special study in themselves. We have in this lesson noticed some of the candid and explicit declarations of Scripture that proclaim the nature of Jesus Christ as simultaneously while on earth being of dual nature, humanity and Deity.

So What?

What is this to us? It means that what He said is true. It means that His commands must be obeyed. He has authority and we are accountable and subject unto Him. We shall give an account of our lives before Him. We are answerable to Him for what we say, do and think. Our salvation depends on our disposition toward Him in our idividual lives. That is the significance to us of the nature of Jesus Christ. If He had never lived, or was nothing more than just another splendid human being, the whole matter would be drastically changed. But inasmuch as Jesus of Nazareth was God's Son on this earth, and now reigns in heaven, our responsibilities regarding Him are awesome.

† † † † †

The Church Age

There exists a widely held theory regarding the church and the kingdom connected with the events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ that asserts a literal one thousand years reign of Christ on the earth which is to begin upon His return. It is called the millennial theory or future kingdom theory. It contends that the kingdom of God has not yet come into existence but it yet in the future.

The advocates of this theory agree that Christ came to establish His kingdom but because He was rejected by the Jews He postponed that kingdom, returned to heaven, provided a temporary and substitute measure called the church, and He will

succeed in establishing His kingdom the next time He comes even though He failed to do so the first time in spite of the many predictions and promises of God that He would.

Jesus at the time of His return, according to the theory, has the right to be a king now, but has not yet taken His place on the throne. The conditions of prophecy that call for the existence of the Roman empire will be renewed, the Jewish temple restored in Jerusalem, and those saints who are living at the Lord's return will be taken into a seven year rapture, the wicked shall suffer a period of tribution, then Jesus will return yet again and then there shall be a literal actual and physical carnal warfare called Armegeddon. After the Lord's victory in that battle He shall begin to reign on His throne in the city of Jerusalem which shall last a literal one thousand years.

As stated, this doctrine has many variations to it and is held by many denominationalists. It was once a prominent issue among brethren in the churches of Christ but was successfully routed. Unfortunately, with the growth of Biblical ignorance and the advance of digression we see evidences of compromise toward this vain theory among some today. Some count the doctrine nothing more than whether women should wear veils and define it as a "gray area" topic over which there ought be no division.

Obviously, the theory makes the kingdom and the church separate institutions. We are told that we are now living in the "church age" but not the kingdom age.

Proof of Falsity

Surely, no honest person would deny that the theory would be proven false if it can be shown that the kingdom has been established already, and that the church and the kingdom are one and the same. If it can be shown that Christ is already reigning as King of kings, and the church is neither an afterthought nor a substitute and temporary measure the theory must be false. While the theory contends that the Jews will be miraculously transported back to Palestine and saved, if it can be shown that Jew and Gentile must be saved the same way, the theory must be false. If it can be shown that the establishment of the kingdom of Christ was not contingent upon the Jews accepting Him anyway, the theory must be false. If the Bible teaches nothing about the so-called "rapture" and "the tribulation" of the theory, the theory must be recognized as nothing more than a speculative, fanciful and anti-Biblical

imagination by misguided religionists.

In Second Peter three where Peter discusses the return of Jesus Christ the one thousand year reign doctrine is made an impossibility because when Christ returns the elements shall melt with a fervent heat and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up (not just laid bare as the perverted New International Version states in one of its many accomodations with false doctrines). Where is anybody going to set up anything on a non-existent earth?

Was Christ a false prophet? If so, can we trust Him? He declared that the kingdom would come in the lifetime of some of those to whom He then spoke (Mark 9:1). He and John the Baptist had said the kingdom was *"at hand,"* which means nearby and soon to be (Mark 1:14,15). This was promised nearly two thousand years ago. If Christ missed it then, could we have confidence that He will keep His word next time?

New Testament Christians were taught they were already in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). How could they have been in something that has not even yet come into existence? This idea that the kingdom was not established and the church is a substitute for a temporary period or age makes the Old Testament prophecies as well as New Testament revelation unreliable if not outright fraudulent.

While we do not have the space in this single lesson to destroy every facet of the theory and thereby show its fallacy, let us consider Daniel the second chapter. Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the meaning of the image the king saw. He saw an image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron with feet of a mixture of iron and clay. Daniel said this represented four kingdoms, the first of which was Babylon. This image was ground to pieces by a stone not made with hands, of divine origin, one from God, and that stone grew into a kingdom that surpassed all previous ones. That stone would come in the days of the fourth of the four kingdoms (Daniel 2:44). Following Babylon came the Persian, then Grecian, then Roman empires. It was in the days of Rome that Jesus came and the church was established. It was then that the kingdom was established as Daniel had prophecied would come to pass.

Daniel 7:13,14 teaches that the Son of man, Jesus, would return to the Ancient of days, the Father, and be given a kingdom. Jesus did return to heaven after His resurrection and was given the kingdom as foretold when the events of Pentecost

and the stablishment of the church transpired.

More Evidence

Really nothing more needs to be said to remove the theory from the realm of truth. But consider the promise of Jesus to establish the kingdom with power in the lifetime of some of His hearers (Mark 9:1). That power was identified as the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). That power came (Acts 2) and the prophecies were fulfilled, the church established and the conditions for the establishment of the kingdom were met.

Isaiah 2:2,3 tells what was to happen in the last days (which Hebrews 1:1,2 defines as the time when God speaks through His Son). Joel also had foretold the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days. Peter quoted Joel on Pentecost and said *"this is that"* which Joel prophesied. What was to happen? The mountain of the Lord's house, which is the church (First Timothy 3:15), was to begin. Hebrews 12:22-28 refers to the mountain of the Lord's house that was to begin at Zion, which verse twenty-eight identifies as the kingdom, and which verse twenty-three identifies as the church.

Luke 24:46-49 teaches that the message of remission of sins would begin from Jerusalem, and this was stated after His death burial and resurrection were already accomplished. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem as instructed and power came upon them as promised and all these things began then which was the time of the establishment of the Lord's house or kingdom. The fact remains, if the kingdom did not come as had been foretold, God defaulted on His Word. Who can believe that?

Mystery Revealed

Ephesians 3:8-11 teaches that Paul wrote to enable men to see that which had been a mystery for ages. But it is no longer a mystery. It was *"by the church"* that the wisdom of God was made manifest. The very existence of the church was and is a demonstration of the wisdom of God and His plan to save mankind. This was *"according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."* This plan was no afterthought upon the failure of Christ to establish His kingdom. The existence of the church had always been in God's plan and purpose. So the theory that degrades the church is necessarily a false one and one that denominationalists must give answer to

God for having propagated.

The church is called a **kingdom** to emphasize certain features of it just as it is called a **family** or **household** to stress the family relationship of those in the church. It is called a **temple** to emphasize the worship features pertaining to it. It is called the **body of Christ** to show the unity with Christ, the authority of Christ over it as its head, and the fellowship and relationship with Christ and among members of the body. It is called a **kingdom** to teach the governmental features of it.

More Evidence

Futhermore, Christ, when He instituted the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:29,30) said He would not partake of it with them again until in the kingdom. Where? In the kingdom. Yet, First Corinthians 10:21 we find the Lord's Table in the church and First Corinthians eleven commands to partake of it. Therefore, the church and the kingdom are one and the same or you have the apostle Paul giving instructions that violated the teaching of Jesus. Who can believe that?

Passages before Acts two point to the coming of the kingdom and passages thereafter point back to Pentecost and the reality of the existence of the kingdom. Mark 1:14,15, the kingdom was at hand, soon to be, nearby. Matthew 6:9,10, Joseph of Arimathea took down the body of Christ from the cross and he *"waited for the kingdom of God."* Obviously, it had not come at that point in time. Is he still waiting?

Mark 9:1, it was to come during the lifetime of those to whom our Lord then spoke. Matthew 16:15-20, Peter was to receive the keys of the kingdom. Has he received them? Has he ever used them? How can he use them now since he has long since died? If the Lord could not establish the kingdom because the Jews rejected Him, who will have similar power to prevent Him establishing it next time? Their rejection did not change God's plan (Romans 3:3). And Jews and Gentiles shall be saved the same way (Romans 10:12; Acts 15:9-11). How many times must the theory be proven false before honest people reject the theory and adopt the truth?

Acts 28:3, Paul testified (bore witness) of the kingdom in Rome. Colossians 1:13,14, those in that church had been translated into the kingdom. Did it exist? If not, explain how they were in it? Hebrews 1:8 speaks of the kingdom in the present tense. Hebrews 12:28, brethren had already received

the kingdom. Revelation 1:9, John was in the kingdom as a brother to those in the churches that were addressed.

This is It

We are living in the church age, no doubt about that. But it is also the kingdom age because the church is to the kingdom the same thing an automobile is to a car. They are the same. The doctrine that teaches otherwise is false and demeaning to Christ.

If the Jews are saved, they shall be saved the same way as Gentiles (Acts 15:9), not some miraculous transportation to Paletine and a miraculous conversion. Why men wish to pervert the Lord's Word and degrade the Lord's church is for them to explain. But thanks be to God that the kingdom promised is the church and is realized, and we can be members or citizens of it.

† † † † †

What The Young Deserve

People talk a lot about underprivileged young people. Do such really exist? Our answer is, "Yes." But many are not underprivileged in the way many people think when they talk about the underprivleged. Usually people mean that some young people are lacking the material things of life. They grow up in poverty or inadequate educational opportunities. This is too often truth of both young and older people. Often the young are victims of circumstances over which they have no immediate control. With many who are older their difficult circumstances are sometimes self-imposed, but not always.

Materially underprivileged children are said to be the cause of juvenile deliquency. It is true that many poor children get into trouble. But it is not because they are poor. Many people who are poor never get into trouble because of stealing, fighting, etc. On the other hand, there are many who are reared in the lap of luxury who get into all kinds of trouble. So the factor causing juvenile deliquency must be something other than material wealth or the lack of it.

There are those things that young people deserve; things they ought to have; things that the older generation owes them. Too

often we hear people clamoring, "I want my rights. I want what is coming to me." This may sound fair, but if the truth were known, what they deserve is not always what they want.

We hear much about the "generation gap" and how the older generation has failed the oncoming one. In many instances this is true. It is not true with all and with most there is no generation gap. There are those who would like to destroy the work of parents and create and exploit their creation of a generation gap. Generations have always looked at things from different viewpoints, as would be expected. But generations have always learned to live happily together when both follow the Lord. Possibly this generation gap does exist with many because young people have not received what they deserve, or want what they do not deserve. Too many are overprivileged in matters that do not matter and are underprivileged in matters that really matter.

What is Undeserved

Let us consider some things young people do not deserve and have no right to expect to be handed them. The world does not owe them a living. Work is a four-letter word that many young people think only applies to somebody else. Paul taught work. Jesus worked. The Father works. Work is not a curse nor a part of a curse. It is a cure to many ills and a blessing. No work; no eat is a Biblical principle that ought to be applied more than it is.

The world owes nobody pleasure, luxury, ease and freedom from problems and responsibilities. The world owes nobody success. Success depends on the person as much as any other factor. Ten per cent inspiration and ninety per cent prespiration usually is the stuff from which success is made.

The world owes nobody freedom and escape from the consequences of behavior. We reap as we sow. To the young Solomon wrote, "*...but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*" (Ecclesiastes 11:9). We are accountable for our conduct. Today many are crying it is the fault of society for whatever happens to them, never the individual. That is foolishness gone to seed. Nobody makes you act like a devil. Nobody forces another to behave worse than animals. People are responsible and they have no right to be immune from the consequences of their behavior.

The world does not owe anybody happiness. That great blessing comes from within as one conforms to the will of God.

It is not created by the environment. Environment has a part in how we feel about things. But one can have that inward blessedness regardless of his environment.

No person can ever deserve heaven. We cannot earn it, merit it, deserve it, or erase one sin by ourselves. Sinners deserve condemnation.

Human Rights

Please note that the Declaration of Independence declares the truth that there are certain inalienable rights a person has by virtue of the fact that he or she is a person, a human being. Of course, if evolution was true there would be no basis for human rights because we would all just be highly evolved animals. Evolution destroys human dignity and all reason to treat other humans with consideration befitting the human race. Young people have rights because they are human beings. This includes the unborn child in the mother's womb. This is ordained by the Lord because He created man in His spiritual image. When these inalienable rights are violated the abuser should be punished and restrained. Just what all these rights include are matters of great disagreement. But we do not have the right to deprive others of their rights in order to obtain ours. No man has a right to mistreat his neighbor.

Concerning young people, it must be realized that their rights must correspond to their responsibility and duty. Some want rights without assuming responsibility for properly using those rights. They want privileges without duties. Young people are deserving all the same rights as an adult when they can assume the same duty as adults that go along with those rights. This is one of the causes of the generation gap. Rights without responsibility is the watchword for too many youths.

What is Deserved

What do young people deserve? They deserve proper instruction, training and discipline. God said to parents, *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."* (Proverbs 22:6). *"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nuture and admonition of the Lord."* (Ephesians 6:4). We pity that poor underprivileged child who has never had parents to show him the difference between right and wrong, or chastised him when

he violated the right, and rewarded and encouraged him when he did the right and avoided the wrong. How else can a young person know if he is not taught? There is nothing inherent or innate in him that tells him right from wrong. That is a matter of training and teaching. He deserves to receive this.

It is not love to indulge the child and deprive him of the knowledge of the will of God. *"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother."* Proverbs 1:8). Similarly we read words of wisdom as *"Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding."* (Proverbs 4:1). *"My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother."* (Proverbs 6:20). *"He that spareth his rod, hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."* (Proverbs 13:24). *"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."* (Proverbs 22:15). *"Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell."* (Proverbs 23:13,14). *"Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old."* (Proverbs 23:22). *"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."* (Proverbs 29:15). Any child, allowed to reach physical maturity without instruction, training, disciple and example is undeprivileged.

Some have gone to the sinful extreme in correcting children and abused the child. This is neither taught, warranted nor sanctioned by the will of God. Discipline is not the same as child abuse. Older people must learn the distinction.

Blessings of Duty

Young people deserve having duties to perform according to their ability. Youth is not a time for the fulfillment of all of the matters of life, but a time for preparation. A young person is not supposed to be an adult nor supposed to live all the phases of life in their youth as if they were small adults. Many parents have not yet learned this important point and treat their children as if the children were just smaller adults and must be involved in adult matters on a smaller scale. This is nonsense!

Children need chores and work to teach them to be responsibile and to learn the job of doing tasks successfully. They cannot handle adult matters but there are things they can do. Yes, they often fuss about it, like adults do, but the adage is

still true, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop."

Life imposes responsibilities. The sooner one learns to deal with duty the sooner he will be equipped for the realities of life. Doing everything for them is not really helping them, but hindering their development.

Christ in the Home

Young people deserve a home where Christ reigns supreme; where there is love, consideration, sympathy, kindness, a strong father and mother image, where successes are shared with enthusiasm and where failure are shared so they can be turned into advantages and learning experiences alongside encouragement to overcome obstacles and disappointments.

A home that provides security, comfort, where the rule is to love God's way is a home that is truly a blessing to the young. We may be able to teach our young how to make a living but fail to teach them how to live.

Young people deserve a home where each person is appreciated and loved. Some get sick of home and leave it as soon as they are able. Others, when they leave, get homesick, because they remember the love of the home. Home is where one is accepted and loved for what he or she is, but always being encouraged to be what you ought to be and are capable of being. Home may include criticism, but corrective and constructive criticism in kindness and helpfulness.

A good home is not determined by the address, household furnishings, the number of cars in the garage or driveway. The humblest of dwellings are often the best homes. A good home is determined by love, loyalty to Christ and one another, where all are taught to respect the respectable and have reverence for Deity. Parents have the duty to set the tone for the home in such things. Young people are underprivileged and deprived when such as this is lacking.

There is a moving story about a lady who once answered a knock at her door and a little boy asked, "Does Jesus live here?" This is a question everyone of us ought to ask regarding our homes and strive to make it a place where Jesus lives.

Right to Obey

Young people have the right to obey God when they reach accountability. *"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy*

youth..." (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Young people deserve an example before them of obedience to the gospel. Parents cannot lead where they will not go. How will children ever be impressed with the need to obey the gospel when father or mother or both ignore the Lord and refuse to obey Him?

Young people deserve the opportunity to develop their talents. They deserve the opportunity to learn and study the Lord's Word. They deserve Christian association to aid them in their upbringing. The church seldom overcomes the influence of the home in matters of leading children to Christ. Young people have a right to a good church that is interested in their soul.

No person, young or older, has a right to live life any way he pleases, but as God pleases. God gave life. Life belongs to God. To deprive God of our live is to take from Him what belongs to Him.

We might suggest many other things young people deserve and we may be able to provide many things for them. But if we fail them in their training, instruction, discipline, work, example and service to God through Christ, we have sinned against the child and we have failed them in what matters most.

The young person deserves a place of refuge in his years of growth. Home should be his haven where he or she can take problems, frustrations, joys, and where self-esteem can be developed, respect for authority held aloft, and God is the ruler of home.

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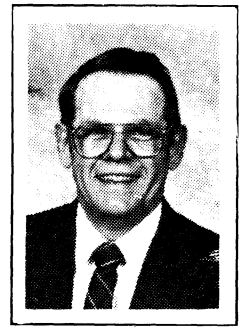
Nine Volumes Completed



JAMES W. BOYD

When ever a big step is taken toward a cherished goal you enjoy a sense of success and accomplishment. This is true even in those projects that you undertake that may not seem to be so significant to some others but are very significant to you. I suppose this is somewhat the way I feel with this issue of this booklet I call ***A Burning Fire.*** It was several years ago that I decided to put the sermons I have preached through the years into print in some form. The booklet you have before you is the form chosen to accomplish this.

This issue marks the completion of nine volumes with twelve issues each. It also is just a bit past the halfway point of publishing all of the sermons that I hope to publish in this fashion.

I have been more than rewarded for undertaking this project because many have commented to me of the spiritual benefit they have received from reading the material. That is precisely what I intend to accomplish. ***A Burning Fire*** is just one method I am using to spread the gospel of Christ. Besides the personal enjoyment of producing it, I do gain great satisfaction in knowing that people in many places are exposed to truth.

* * * * *

A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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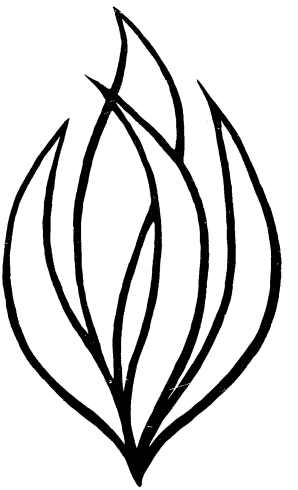

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME X James W. Boyd **NUMBER 1**

Joshua's Farewell Address

Parting words, farewell addresses and death bed statements of great men live long after they have gone. Such words have great meaning because of the greatness of the one who spoke them. History records many soul-stirring and thrilling final remarks uttered by great men, kings, presidents and men of renown for one reason or another. How well many can remember the words of General Douglas McArthur before Congress as he concluded fifty-two years of military service for his country. Both friend and foe alike consider his speech a masterpiece.

The greatest remarks were those of the Lord Jesus as He was about to ascend into heaven. His remarks included that Great Commission to *"go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* In the Bible we have the farewell words of men like Moses, Samuel and others. We want to consider in this lesson six major points that were made by Joshua in his farewell address before the nation he had led for so many years.

Joshua was one of Israel's greatest men. He had been loyal to Israel as a spy, a mighty warrior, faithful servant of Moses and the successor to Moses. He was the conqueror of Canaan, the administrator of the division of the land to the tribes, a man whose life was characterized by faith, courage, determination, stedfastness and a long association with God.

His final words are found in Joshua 23 and 24. What we want to study is found in chapter 24. The chapter begins with Joshua recounting Israel's history from Terah, the father of Abraham, down to his own time. He reminds Israel of some principles how God deals with men and what God expects in return. His words are as useful to us as to Israel of long ago because even though

Even though we serve under a different system, we serve the same God. The principles of God's dealing with mankind have not changed. Nor have the characteristics of God changed. Joshua makes six primary points in his speech.

God's Promises

Joshua told how the Lord keeps His promises. *"And behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts and in your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning*

you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing has failed thereof." (Joshua 24:14). Earlier we read in Joshua 21:45, *"There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass."*

That the Lord keeps His promises is echoed in the New Testament. *"For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could sware by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."* (Hebrews 6:13-15). *"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised."* (Hebrews 10:23 *"Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised."* (Hebrews 11:11). *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise..."* (Second Peter 3:9).

The Lord has made great and precious promises to the Christian, such as forgiveness, protection, providence, fellowship and heaven. Our God always keeps His promises.

God's Power

Joshua noted how the Lord gives evidence of His power. *"And ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you..."* (Joshua 23:3). He calls Israel to witness of the manifestations of the power of God.

It seems with many it is easier to accept what can be seen than that which cannot be seen. People more readily accept the physical than the spiritual. That which annot be seen is accepted by faith, but not a blind and gullible faith, but faith based on evidence (Hebrews 11:1). The Lord is called *"invisible"* in Colossians 1:15 and First Timothy 1:17. This is because God is Spirit (John 4:24), not *"like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."*(Acts 17:29). Even so, God has revealed Himself to man by the presentation of evidence of His presence and reality so we *"walk by faith and not by sight."* (Second Corinthians 5:7). Paul wrote, *"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."* (Romans 1:20). Psalm 19:1, *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handywork."* God has not failed us in providing sufficient evidence of His existence and

power. As we observe nature, we know there is God. As we study the Biblical history of Israel, the prophecies and the fulfillment of them, the influence of Christianity, the indestructibility of the Bible, all these things show the existence and power of God. In every age, these things testify of Him.

God and His People

Joshua also said the Lord fights for His people. Joshua 23:3, *"For the Lord your God is he that hath fought for you."* He reminded them of their victories over Egypt and their deliverance from bondage. He could have mentioned their trials in the wilderness on their way to Canaan, the taking of Jericho, Gideon over the Midianites, David over Goliath. Regarding the nations that had a part in humbling Judah, Zechariah said, *"Then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle."* (Zechariah 14:3). Nehemiah told his followers as they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, *"Our God shall fight for us."* (Nehemiah 4:20).

God has always been mindful of the battles His children must fight. He is *"not far from everyone of us."* (Acts 17:7). He is our Shepherd that provides for us even in the presence of our enemies. Even in death we are to have no fear for He has promised to be with us (Psalm 23). *"The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."* (Hebrews 13:6). When you fight for what is right, the Lord fights with you and for you, just as He has always done for those who love Him.

God's Expectations

The Lord does expect man to obey His will. *"Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left."* (Joshua 23:6). Strict obedience is one of the superior themes of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Even though we are not under the law of Moses, we are under law, the law of Christ. Being under grace in no way dismisses the necessity that we must obey the law of Christ. Obedience has always been required by the Lord. It was required of Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Israel. It is no less required of us. *"He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9). *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven,*

but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21). As Samuel said to Saul, *"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."* (First Samuel 15:22). When confronted with threatenings if they continued to preach Christ, Peter and John responded, *"We must obey God rather than men."* (Acts 5:29). We are the servants of what we obey (Romans 6:16-18). Our hearts are purified by obeying the truth (First Peter 1:22).

Sin and Its Consequences

Joshua also reminded Israel that God warns His people of evil and the consequences of sin. *"That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, not bow yourselves unto them."* (Joshua 23:7). *"Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God. Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall makr marriages with them, and go in unto them and they to you. Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you."* (Joshua 23:11-14). God warned them.

Why does God warn man in such strong terms? It is because He is a loving, merciful and kind God who wants man to avoid sin and self-imposed destruction. He wishes to put man on guard and keep him alert to the wiles of Satan. It is much the same reason a godly parent will warn his children of danger and evil. It is for the child's welfare.

Both the Old and New Testaments contain God's warnings. He warned Noah of the coming flood and how to be spared from it (Hebrews 11:7). In Ezekiel 3:17, *"Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore, hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me."* We ought to be grateful that God cares enough to warn us. Paul described his work of preaching, teaching and warning every man *"that every man may be perfect in Christ Jesus."* (Colossians 1:28). Paul warned elders, preachers, congregations, saints and sinners alike. *"Now we exhort you brethren, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."*

(Acts 20:31). *"I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you."* (First Corinthians 4:14). Joshua tells us God is gracious to us in giving us warnings.

God's Threats

Finally, from Joshua we learn that God keeps His threats just as surely as He keeps His promises. *"Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon us which the Lord your God promised you, so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you. When ye have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them, then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off this good land which he hath given you."* (Joshua 23:15,16).

God is a God of reward. But He is also a God of recompense. *"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."* (Hebrews 10:30). We err to rely on His promises but ignore His warnings and threats. One is as sure as the other. If He were otherwise, He would not be reliable nor just. We need to learn that hell is as real as heaven and damnation as sure as salvation.

As surely as the five wise virgins entered the marriage feast, the five foolish ones were excluded. As surely as the five and two talent men were commended and rewarded, the one talent man was condemned. As surely as those that fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick were welcomed, those that did not were disowned (Matthew 25). God keeps His threats.

In summary, the six points Joshua made are: (1) God keeps His promises; (2) God has given evidence of His existence and power; (3) God fights for His people; (4) God expects man to obey Him; (5) God warns His people of evil and its consequences; (6) God keeps His threats.

History shows that Israel failed to give heed to the great truths Joshua preached to them. But will be do any better? Will we profit from their error? While we serve the same Jehovah God, will Joshua's address do any more for us than Israel allowed it to do for them?

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Inspiration of the Bible

There can be little doubt that this lesson deals with one of today's religious battlegrounds. The Bible is here. None can deny that. But how did it come into being? Where did it come from? Strange as it may sound, many Christians do not know. Many young people have never been informed.

Is the Bible just another outstanding piece of literature but nothing more? Is it wholly of men? Is it wholly of God? If wholly of God, how did it take the form it now has?

We contend that men would not have produced the Bible even if they could have done it because it condemns too much that men love and commends many things from which men turn away. The contents of the Bible are beyond the scope of human knowledge. If the Bible came entirely from men the writers would have condemned themselves because the Bible claims to have come from God. The writer would be calling themselves liars and condemning lying at the same time. That hardly sounds likely and probable.

But if the Bible came entirely from God, how do you explain the obvious difference of styles of writing found in it? Was it presented to man all written out, like the first set of the tablets of stone given to Moses? Why are there four accounts of the life of Christ on earth rather than just one? Why is there such a variance of vocabularies in the books?

God and Man

The truth is that the Bible is a product of the combination of God and man with each having something to do with it. We want to learn just what each has done. Peter wrote, *"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (Second Peter 1:21). Holy men, guided by the Holy Spirit, produced the Bible.

Is the Bible inspired? If so, what is the nature of that inspiration? Even modernists and unbelievers will admit that there is a sense in which the Bible is inspired, if you let them define inspiration. The Bible claims that it is inspired of God. *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly*

furnished unto all good works." (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Scriptures are replete with such expressions as *"thus saith the Lord," "The Lord said,"* and similar words. The writers of the Bible never claimed that they wrote of themselves, but claimed they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

So the claim of the Bible is not that it merely contains the word of God but that it is the very word of God. Notice some of the statements we find in it.

Attitude of Jesus

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (Second Peter 1:21). God said to Moses, *"Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say."* (Exodus 4:12). David wrote, *"The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue."* (Second Samuel 23:1,2). Jesus endorsed the Old Testament in its three divisions (Luke 24:44). These three divisions, as the Jews divided them, correspond to the thirty-nine books that we have in the Old Testament. He placed His endorsement on the record of creation (Matthew 19:8), the account of the flood at the time of Noah (Matthew 24:37), and even the record of Jonah and the fish (Matthew 12:40). While unbelievers today may consider such accounts as mere legends, Jesus considered them historical. No man can claim to be a true follower of Jesus and contend that Jesus did not know what He was talking about regarding these matters.

When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, He used the word of God to put him to flight (Matthew 4). *"It is written..."* has always been the most effective weapon against Satan. All three of the quotations that Jesus cited came from the book of Deuteronomy. Little wonder that the skeptical and modernistic critics of the Bible, who are servants of the devil, have made their first attacks against Biblical integrity on this book.

Jesus promised His apostles that they would be guided in what to say (Matthew 10:19,20; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). On the day of Pentecost, the apostles spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). What Paul preached did not come from man, but was revealed to him through Christ (Galatians 1:11). What the Thessalonians received was not the word of

man, but of God (First Thessalonians 2:13). In Cortinth, Paul said he spoke not in *"words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Spirit teacheth,"* (First Corinthians 2:13). This is verbal inspiration. John, in Revelation, urged the seven churches of Asia to *"hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."* Unquestionably, the Bible claims to be the inspired, all-sufficient, infallible, inerrant and authoritative word of God.

There are those who object to using the statements of the Bible to support its own claims. But this is illogical, unfair and discriminatory. If one wanted to determine the contents of a bottle, must not he study its contents? If the nature of a nugget of metal wished to be determined, must not one study the nugget itself? So it is with Scripture.

Nature of Biblical Inspiration

What is the nature of the Biblical claim of inspiration? Some would say it is inspired only as was Shakespeare, Milton, other writers of fame. They would strip away all signs of Deity regarding it. But Paul asserted that the Scriptures were inspired of God, literally meaning "God breathed." They were filled with the breath of God. They are the product of the Divine Spirit. They were given through the Holy Spirit.

Inspiration implies an influence from without, producing effects which are beyond natural powers. Those who wrote were therefore overshadowed power outside themselves, and that power was God. The power was not some "force" but the personal true and living God of heaven.

Inspiration is more than just receiving a revelation. When anyone is informed of something they have received a revelation. If someone tells you the time of day, you have received a revelation. Inspiration is the reception of a revelation, but a revelation from God and that revelation is preserved from error, is absolute, and is infallibly accurate. Everything revealed in the Bible is inspired, therefore, the inspired ones were infallibly guided in their record. Anyone who claims to believe the Bible but denies the verbal and plenary inspiration of it just does not really believe the Bible.

Some have said that only the thoughts of the Bible are inspired, but not the words. The thoughts are inspired. But how are the thoughts expressed without words? These words are not man's interpretations of what God was saying and thinking. Peter said (Second Peter 1:21) that such was not the case. Jesus

promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would not only provide how to speak but also what to speak. This is the inspired word itself. Paul delivered sermons in the very words the Holy Spirit chose to use.

While the Holy Spirit moved the penman to write, the Spirit used words from the vocabularies of the writers to express Deity's thoughts. Inspiration did not make man a mere robot. It utilized human faculties, using the distinctive features of each writer, but so overshadowed the selection of words from the vocabularies of each writer that the word is in fact the word of God. In this way the divine thoughts are revealed through inspired words written by inspired men.

The writers were not mere machines. The divine side, God, gave through men, clearly and faithfully, what Deity wished to reveal and communicate, using human means of communication that the writers possessed. Such is the nature of the inspiration of the Bible.

Inspiration did not make these men immune from bodily affliction. It did not grant them infallible knowledge as astronomers, doctors, economists, etc. They were inspired as teachers and writers of God's word. It did not even make them immune from temptation and sin. It meant that what they wrote was truly reported. They reported the lies of the devil, the evil deeds of men, the good things of men, the actions of Deity, all of it just as it was.

The Evidence

There are irrefutable evidences that this is the nature of the Bible. Even though the Bible is not a scientific book, when it speaks of scientific matters, it speaks correctly. Many statements of a scientific nature are found that could not have been known by men at that time. Isaiah contemplated the rotundity of the earth. Job mentioned the emptiness of the northern sky. David wrote of the paths or currents in the sea. Job mentioned how God hangeth the earth on nothing. There is not one proven scientific fact that conflicts with the scientific information discussed in the Bible. How could these writers, living hundreds and thousands of years before men of science discovered these things, have known of them except the Creator of it all informed them of it?

There is impartiality in the Bible. When men write of their enemies or their heroes their biases come through. But in the

Bible God's heroes are reported doing both good and evil. There is fairness, frankness, even of the "worthies" of the Bible like Abraham, Moses, David and Peter. This is not characteristic of writings of purely human origin.

Unlike human writings Scripture does not cater to human curiosity. Where was Moses buried? What did Christ look like? How did Paul die? Where was Joseph's house in Nazereth? All these things men want to know and if humans had chosen what to include, such trivia would have been in it.

The unity and oneness of the Bible is a marvel. Even though the Bible is composed of sixty-six books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament, it is one book from start to finish. Even though over forty different writers were used, and the writing time spanned over fifteen hundred years, there is one story, one central personality (Jesus Christ), one theme (God's way of saving man), one primary goal and purpose. It is as a portrait painted by different artists in different times, in different countries, unknown to each other, each painting a portion of the protrait, and when their work is completed and compiled there is a magnificient portrait. How else can that be explained except divine guidance and oversight?

The prophecy and fulfillment element of the Bible cannot be answered as evidence of divine inspiration. It is only denied and brushed away with the wave of the skeptical hand, but not answered. How could men foretell events over which they would have no control literally thousands of years before they occurred, and they happen just as they predicted, except there was divine oversight in both the prediction and the fulfillment? Space prohibits the citation of the multitude of prophetic statements and their accomplishment, but Bible students are aware ot these things.

Add to all this the indestructibility of the Bible even though many efforts to destroy it have been attempted, the anticipation of false doctrines and answers to them even before the false doctrines were concocted, the influence of the Bible in every sphere of life down through the centuries. There can be no doubt but the Bible is not an ordinary book, not even an exceptional book, but it is the word of God as it claims to be.

The Inescapable Conclusion

That being so, it is authoritative and man is accountable to God by the things revealed in the Bible. The Bible tells us from

whence all things came, even man, why we are here, how we are to live while here, and where we are going. It gives us hope for eternity and the guiding light for life. The revelation of the Scriptures will be that by which we shall all be judged in the last day. Thanks be to God that He so loved us to give us His word, that we have it, that we can learn it, believe it, obey it, and enjoy the blessings of God that are revealed in it.

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Are Miracles Reasonable?

Most people like to consider themselves as being reasonable, rational, intelligent people. In reading the life of Christ we find ourselves reading of many miracles, such as Jesus walking on water, turning water to wine, stilling the tempest, feeding the thousands, healing the sick, casting out demons and even raising the dead. Not only in the life of Christ but in the Old Testament and many places in the New Testament we read of miracles worked by prophets, apostles and others. They are presented as historical records of actual happenings. We ask, "Is it reasonable to believe these accounts are true and accurate?

Let us be impressed with the seriousness of this question. Many deny the miraculous. There are those who say they would like to be a disciple of Christ of whom the Bible speaks but they cannot accept the records of the miracles. If the reports of the miracles are not reliable, how can we accept anything else written therein to be reliable? If they are not true, does not this place every other revelation of the Bibler suspect? But on the other hand, if the records of the miracles are true, is it not reasonable to contend for the credibility of the Scriptures in all other teachings? What we are contending has to do with the matter of authority, inerrancy, infallibility, reliability and credibility of the Bible. As we shall note later, it even involves more than just these matters.

Definition

Just what is a miracle? Sometimes a miracle is erroneously defined as simply something wonderful, marvelous, sensational,

exceptional, mysterious or something that happens for which a knowledgeable explanation cannot be offered. People call everything from escaping injury in an automobile accident to winning a footbal game a miracle. But such definitions miss the mark. A miracle is an interference with nature by supernatural power. Supernatural is the key word in discussing miracles. Something other than nature and its laws operate. It is above and beyond the laws of nature. A good definition of a miracle is, "God steps in and operates in ways contrary to what one expects in nature."

Four Attitudes

There are four attitudes toward miracles, three of which are skeptical of them. Miracles are called superstitions of primitive people. People like Abraham, Moses and even Paul and Luke were primitive in their thinking, naive and superstitious, according to some. What they could not understand and rationalize they called a miracle for want of a better explanation, we are told. But as you read about these men, you soon see they were exceptionally intelligent, well informed, competent people and far from being outmoded. Even today their writings are superior. Miracles cannot be brushed aside as reports by a primitive and superstitious people.

Some say the records are deliberate deceptions. Again, many thing can be said about the Biblical writers, but dishonesty is not an accusation that will stand. They were people of the highest ethical standards rather than deceivers.

Some say the miracles are merely legends that have grown through the years. Nothing but stories that were enlarged until gradually they were said to be historical records of the miraculous. But these accounts were not developed over long periods of time. Eyewitnesses, on the spot reporting, people of the time and place saw, heard, and knew these events first hand. They were not conveying "hand-me-down" stories.

Others say the records of the miracles are actual historical reports of real events. Of course, this is what the Bible contends, and we contend for the Bible. But is this a reasonable explanation? In the words of Isaiah, *"Come, let us reason together."*

Why Miracles?

Why were miracles performed? Read John 3:2; 20:30; Hebrews 2:3,4; Mark 16:19,20; Acts 2:22 and learn that miracles were performed to prove the claims of Jesus, prove and verify the very message that the apostles taught, showing that Christ was approved of God and that the truth was being spoken by them. Now we have to admit that it is reasonable for one who claims to be the Son of God to provide something as evidence of His claim. Jesus did that. It is unreasonable to think that He would expect people to accept what He said without any evidence that it was true. We would have to contend that it is reasonable to expect miracles whether they ever occurred or not? But we believe they occurred.

What is the nature of a miracle? As we have noted, it is a supernatural event. Miracles were not done to be freakish, capricious, for show, entertainment or anything such thing, but always constructive in nature and for the promotion of good. Even when there was the destruction of something evil, this was for the good. Miracles were designed to do something, not just display something. They were designed to exhibit the character of God and teach His truth. They are always established by witnesses, often large numbers of them.

In working miracles, God is often simply doing something quickly and on a smaller scale that He does through nature all the time. The feeding of the thousands (five and four thousand) from five loaves and two fishes or seven loaves and a few fishes, was miraculous. But we must remember that God provides through natural laws all the food mankind eats anyway. He does this in thousands of fields year after year, as the farmer sows and reaps the harvest and the food is purchased and distributed.

All healing is "divine healing" inasmuch as God heals. But the healings recorded in Scripture were done contrary to what nature provides. It is not unreasonable to think that God, who created the entire universe, would have the ability to intervene if and when He so chose. Surely, the One who set the laws of nature in motion has the power to regulate them, speed them up, disregard them, slow them down, or whatever He may decide to do. Considering the power of God, miracles are not unreasonable.

Are They Reasonable?

The explanation and reasonableness for miracles is found in the first verse of the Bible. *"In the beginning God..."* Once one

has accepted the reality of God nothing else recorded in the Bible concerning God is difficult to accept. Men cannot go beyond three words into the Bible before they disagree over the basic foundation. In fact, some now even deny there was a beginning, but most are not so foolish. Science and experience shows that something does not come from nothing. Everything is the result of a cause. It had a beginning. The Bible says that God existed before anything else was and attributes the power for the existence of all things to God. The Bible does not set out to prove the existence of God, but begins with the premise that God is. The Bible reveals God. Nonetheless, evidences are found throughout the Bible for the existence of God, which is another deserving theme from our present one. But from the front to back, the Bible declares, *"I am that I am."*

Once you admit the all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present, eternal God, the rest of the Bible presents no difficulty. The evidence for the existence of God is overwhelmingly one-sided. It would be unreasonable to think that God could not do such things as the miracles recorded in the Bible. Therefore, the reasonableness of miracles reduces itself to belief in God and His existence. It is absurd to believe in God and deny the creation, which was a miracle.

God Is

The existence of God is proved by the law of cause and effect. Is it reasonable to believe that this massive, immense, intricate universe just somehow accidentally happened? The probability of such a thing is totally impossible and such cannot even be mathmatically expressed. That nothing was and something just happened and produced this universe is the most unreasonable and absurd explanation mind can feature. Matter is not eternal. We are not so foolish as to contend a building just happened, pr a car just happened, or a watch just happened. How ridiculous for people to contend that nothing existed but something happened and here we are.

Some have taught that the earth was thrown off the sun. There is no evidence for this, but when you want to deny God, evidence is not important. Even so, where did the sun come from? You still have not eliminated the existence of God. It was a right powerful and wise sun that had the capacity to provide what this earth provides with just a throw off!

We are told that all living things, plant and animal, came from

a single living cell that somehow evolved and over the eons of time we have come to the point we are now. It is not yet determined what we might become. One of the biggest lies perpetrated on an otherwise educated society is the contention that organic evolution that says all living things have evolved from a single cell is a fact. It is not a fact, and not even a remote possibility. Scientific fact proves evolution impossible. Yet, in the frantic search for something other than God before whom we live and to whom we must give account, the lie of evolution is taught as a fact. We need only ask where did the original cell come from to show how unreasonable is the denial of God. Evolutionary theory not only denies God, but denies the Bible, denies scientific fact, denies every decent and worthy virtue in the world. But most evolutionists deny the existence of God anyway.

The complexity, design, plan, pattern and system of our universe proves the existence of a supreme mind, designer and planner of it. From the microscopic to the expanse of outer space, there is evidence of intelligence behind it all. The events of space probing so prominent today can be accomplished only because of the precision of the operation of this universal and colossal accident or explosion, as some explain. All the design has no purpose behind it at all, some say. That is what the deniers of God would have us believe. Such is most unreasonable.

The One Explanation

The only reasonable explanation for the existence of the universe is the reality of God. The reality of God makes belief in miracles reasonable.

Christianity was founded upon the miraculous. There is no such thing as a non-miraculous Christianity. The way of hope, life, salvation, peace, joy, eternity in heaven and all else is founded on the miraculous. God stepped in, doing for man what man could not do for himself. The incarnation of Jesus was a miracle. His perfect life was a miracle. The affirmation and confirmation of His teaching was accomplished through miracles. No faith rests so completely on the reasonableness of miracles as does the faith authored by Christ. Nothing is more reasonable than the miraculous because nothing is more reasonable than the contention that God is.

The age of miracles has come and gone. There is neither the

need for them, nor do those endued with such power survive today. The fact that miracles are not being performed today says nothing against the power of God. God does not have to keep proving and proving and proving His power nor His Word. That has been done and has been confirmed and we are expected to accept it on the basis of testimony that cannot and will not be shaken by the theories and philosophies of the "wise" men of this world.

We confidently say to one and all, let no man shake your faith in the records of God's operations as recorded in Scripture by the appeal that they are unreasonable. The testimony, evidence and proof of the reasonable of miracles is on the side of historical reality.

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Why Some Quit the Church

We begin by noting that there is a difference between a reason and an excuse. An excuse is designed to release one from his duty without revealing the real truth behind the desire for release. A reason seeks release but tells the truth as to why. A Christian should never have either an excuse or a reason for wanting to forsake his duty to Christ and the church. It is a sad thing that some do quit.

Many offer excuses why they never become Christians, such as, they are too bad, or they are good enough, too young, too old, can't hold out, intend to someday, too many hypocrites in the church, etc. The real reason is that they do not love the Son of God and do not have sufficient faith to lead them to obey.

Some are very much against the church and offer as their excuse such things as the church being too narrow-minded, intolerant, hypocritical, old fashioned, etc. The real reason is that they are untaught, or prejudiced, determined to go their own way, unsubmissive to God's truth, misinformed and closed of mind. Why should anyone ever decide to go to hell because of somebody else?

Still others who have become members of the church will quit. Peter shows the tragedy of those who turn back in Second Peter

2:20-22. They offer such excuses as too sick, too tired, too busy, have to work, transportation, first one thing then another, excuses that never keep them from doing anything else they want to do. But the excuses do not reveal the real reasons. In this lesson we want to discuss four reasons behind their quitting. There are others than these four that we could also examine.

Shall We Stand?

Some who quit do not like the stand for the truth that the church must take. What they refuse to accept is the fact that the church does not determine what ought to be upheld. Christ has determined that and revealed that in His word. Brethren only have to decide whether to obey Christ or not.

Many brethren really resist the church taking the Lord's side regarding worldliness. The cares of this world have choked out their love for the Lord. They want the things of this life so much that they will sacrifice Christ in order to have them. They are too steeped in ungodly living and do not wish to give that up. They resent the church teaching against drinking, dancing, smoking, immodesty, gambling, dishonesty, gossiping, etc. because those things are part of their lives and they refuse to abandon them. They do not like the condemnation of the evil, sex-crazed movies, television shows, literature and magazines because they watch them, read them, subscribe to them and enjoy them.

They do not like the church to take God's stand on marriage, divorce and remarriage because they, or someone they know, have become involved in sinful situations from which they have no intentions of leaving.

They do not like to hear the church present lessons on attendance at worship, or cheerful and liberal giving, putting God first, because that interferes with their sports, their fun, their vacations, their popularity and pleasure and having more possessions. When the truth gets in the way of what they want they feel uncomfortable and had rather not have to hear about it, so they quit.

The question that Paul once asked, *"Am I your enemy because I tell you the truth?"* must be answered, "Yes," by many who quit the church. Nobody becomes more agitated and resentful toward truth than church members who wish the other brethren would tone down the condemnation of sin and the proclamation of Christian duties.

Not Quite Quitters

Some do not quit entirely, but they drag their feet, complaining always against faithful brethren who stand for God's word, finding fault with every exposure of their sins, attacking the messengers of truth because they cannot handle the message of truth. They have the foolish idea that they can ride two horses at the same time even though they are going in opposite directions.

Some others, who do not quit altogether and do not complain out loud, choose the route of inconsistency and hypocrisy, pretending to follow Christ but resenting every step of the way. They are all diseased with the dislike of the church standing for the truth, which is the what the church must do.

Some have been known to quit because they do not like somebody else who is a member. It may be an elder, the preacher, somebody, anybody. We ought to make sure that whoever and whatever we dislike is based on the Scripture rather than on personalities, peculiarities, opinions and personal enmity. Scriptual problems can be resolved by scriptual processes. Why should anyone take out their dislike of another against God and turn on Him?

Who Suffers?

Who is hurt the most when someone quits? Is it the person who is not liked, or the person who quits? The one who quits is on his way to hell regardless of how ugly somebody else may be. What could be worse than eternal condemnation? Salvation is faithfulness in Christ whether you like somebody else or not. Disloyalty on my part to Christ does not change the essentiality of faithfulness. Letting somebody else, especially somebody we do not like, keep us out of heaven is foolishness gone to seed.

If ever you consider quitting the Lord's church because of some of the members, you better consider who gets hurt. Do you realize who you are offending? True, eveyone is hurt when anyone quits a faithful church. But never does the failure, fault, or weakness of somebody else give you sufficient justification to neglect your sacred duty to God.

Keep before us the words of Jesus, *"No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven."* (Luke 9:62).

An Avenue of Apostasy

Some quit because they marry outside the church and under that influence they lose their zeal to be faithful to it. I am aware that there are many people who have married non-Christians who have not only remained faithful themselves but have converted their mates. If this be your case, be thankful it turned out that way. You are the exception, not the rule. Those who have studied the matter tell us that seven out of ten who marry outside the church eventually leave the church. We have known many, many people who have gone that deadly path. Only a small percentage ever converts their mates.

Many children are lost to the cause of Christ because only one of their parents cared for the Lord's church. The other did not. The children were torn in frustration and confusion and did nothing for the Lord. There is not an adequate way to express the heartache and trouble that has come into the hearts of many brethren because they married outside the church.

Many who marry non-Christians do not leave the church but they become rather bland and shy regarding the truth. They do not stand as they once did. They are prone to compromise and minimize truth in favor of their mates. They are often so critical of the church because the church must take the Lord's position which the non-Christian resents. Homes that are divided religiously may have a degree of happiness now and then, but they can never be what God wants the home to be because Christ does not reign supreme in that home, even at the top.

One of the leading causes for the apostasy of Israel was that they married those outside of God's family and people. This polluted their thinking and their faith suffered. Even though repeatedly warned against it, they persisted in it and it brought their ruin. These things were written for our learning, but many just will not learn.

Marrying one who shares your faith is a safeguard against apostasy. How can people do this thing to themselves and their children they may have? Do they care only for themselves that they leave out God from their marriage? Here is the closest human relationship on earth, and God is omitted. We need all the encouragement we can get to live life faithfully. How contrary to good sense to deliberately place the added burden against yourself by entering a marriage with one who does not put Christ first in life!

We do not apologize for denouncing mixed marriages. If you

had seen as much trouble in the lives of others because of such things that most preachers see, you would not see it any other way than the way we have presented it.

Did They Really Start?

Some quit because they may never have really started. They were not converted. They went through a form for some motive, but their heart was not changed. They became a member like somebody joining a club. They held reservations in their mind even as they verbalized their professed convictions. They became a member to please somebody else rather than the Lord. They did not really obey God, but had other motives for doing what they did. Maybe they were misled by over-zealous "soul winners" who did not teach them sufficiently, and when they did come to understand the true cost of being a Christian they melted away. We would not pretend to judge their hearts, but these things are matters of reality with some.

Nothing short of genuine commitment to the cause of Christ will please God. Somebody has said that nobody can be sure just who really belongs to God. We do not subscribe to this view because by the word of truth we can tell who is and who is not a Christian. Being unable, however, to judge another's heart, we may be deceived regarding some. But God knows the hearts of all people. We can tell, as far as outward appearance is concerned, who is indicating faithfulness, but what the inward man is we leave to God. When a person comes to be baptized we ask them if they believe that Christ is the Son of God. Only God knows if they are telling the truth when they say they do. We have to accept what we are told because we are not judges of another's heart. Whether one has really been converted to Christ is between them and God. We can know if we are saved. We may not be one hundred per cent sure of all others. But we must insist that they do what they do in compliance with God's commands, not only outwardly, but inwardly. We can determine the outward, and leave the inward to God and the person involved. Evidently some have gone through the motions outwardly but it becomes evident later that their motives were not as they should have been. They turned away.

This is not to say that all those who fall away never were really converted, as the Baptists erroneously teach. People can fall away and leave that which they once truly and obediently accepted. But some have seemingly fallen away from what they

appeared to accept because they either were not aware of what was expected, or really never accepted it from the heart. There is difference in being "wetted" in baptism and being "wedded" to the Lord.

Same End

Regardless of why some quit the church, his soul is lost. Does it really matter why one quits when the result is hell in every case? Whatever be the provocation and temptation to quit God, it is folly to do so. Let nothing cause you to quit His church as it strives to continue faithful. You be faithful to Him in His body. Salvation will never be enjoyed in heaven any other way.

† † † † †

Christ and His Kingdom

It is obvious to the Bible student that this subject is so extensive that one must confine himself to certain portions of it at a time. We shall center our attention on when His kingdom began, hoping that this information will enhance our respect and appreciation for it and understand its place in God's scheme of man's redemption.

The term "kingdom" is used in two senses, even though it speaks of the same institution. It is the church, here and now (Colossians 1:13). It is also the future existence of those in the church, the eternal abode in heaven (Acts 14:22). It is never used with reference to some earthly kingdom with Christ as an earthly king reigning in Jerusalem for a thousand years.

The kingdom, or church, has always been in God's plan. In Ephesians 3:11 Paul explains how God directed him to preach to the Gentiles, who had previously been excluded from the covenants, and how they would be made equal with Jews in receiving the offer of salvation. The existence of the kingdom was evidence of God's wisdom and was according to God's eternal purpose. As a building is evidence of the wisdom of an architect and builder, so the church is evidence of God's wisdom in saving mankind. This plan existed in the mind of God *"before the foundation of the world."* (Ephesians 1:4). As a painting existed in the mind of an artist before being put on canvass, so

the church was in the mind of God before it became a reality.

Old Testament

In both the Old and New Testaments we read of prophecies of the coming of this kingdom. Daniel 2 tells of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of an image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron with feet a mixture of iron and clay. He saw a stone *"not made with hands"* smite the image and break it into pieces and grow throughout the world.

Daniel interpreted that dream as five kingdoms. The first was the Babylonian, then the Persian, Grecian and Roman empires. The fifth, the stone, was the kingdom of the Lord to be established during the days of the fourth kingdom (Daniel 2:44).

Again in Daniel, chapter seven, Daniel saw a vision of one like unto the Son of man coming to the Ancient of Days in the clouds and receiving a kingdom. When one reads Acts 1:8,9 he sees the fulfillment of this prophetic vision with the ascension of Christ in the clouds to the *"right hand of God"* and being given His kingdom where He now reigns from heaven, which is His throne (Acts 7:49).

Isaiah two contains a prophecy of when the kingdom would come and where it would be established. People were going to the mountain of God, the house of God, which was the kingdom of God, the church of God (First Timothy 3:15). The word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem and include all nations. These things would take place in the *"last days,"* the last age (Hebrews 1:1,2). The fulfillment of these things is recorded in Acts two.

Acts two is also the record of the fulfillment of Joel two when Joel prophecied of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days. Peter said of the events on Pnetecost, *"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel."* (Acts 2:16).

From these Old Testament prophecies, and many others that could be cited, we learn that the kingdom would come in the days of the kingdom which corresponds to the Roman empire. It would come after the ascension of Christ into heaven. It would begin in the last days at the city of Jerusalem, accompanied by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and would extend to all nations of people.

New Testament

In the New Testament, closer to the time of the beginning, we hear John the Baptist preaching that the kingdom was *"at hand."* (Matthew 3:1). *"At hand"* means nearby, soon to be, nigh upon us. Jesus taught the same thing (Matthew 4:17). When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray He taught them to pray for the kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10). (Billy Graham contends this prayer was never answered, at least, not yet.) Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the same message and He also taught that it would come with power in the lifetime of some of His hearers (Mark 9:1). This power is identified as the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Jesus promised, even after the death of John the Baptist, that He would build His kingdom (Matthew 16:16-18), where the words kingdom and church are used interchangeably. He taught how a nobleman would go away and receive his kingdom before returning (Luke 19:11ff), and applied the teaching to Himself.

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ and His disciples were taught He would not commune with them again in this manner until in the kingdom (Mark 14:25). We read of apostolic instructions to partake of the Lord's Supper in First Corinthians eleven when Paul wrote members of the church to observe that supper. This proves the kingdom had come by the time Paul wrote, and that the kingdom and the church are one and the same institution.

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ He stated that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in His name beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47ff). This would occur when power came upon the apostles. Having already learned that the power would be the Holy Spirit, we read of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem and they preached repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38).

Those who took down the body of Jesus from the cross still waited even at that time for the kingdom (Mark 15:43), which proves the kingdom had not yet come at the time of His burial. Acts 1:6 shows His disciples were still looking for the kingdom just prior to His ascension, which proves the kingdom did not come until after His resurrection and ascension.

Its Beginning

Acts two records the coming of the Holy Spirit, in the city of Jerusalem, in the last days, in the days of the Roman empire,

after His ascension, with the message being preaching that Jesus said was to be preached. All of it was happening in the lifetime of some who had heard Jesus preach. Everything foretold in both the Old and New Testaments came to pass that day regarding the establishment of His kingdom. Beginning with Acts two the kingdom is in existence, and people are said to become members of it, observing the Lord's Supper in it. Not one thing that was prophecied in this matter of the beginning of the kingdom was lacking. Therefore, from Scripture, we must conclude that the kingdom had its beginning (Acts 11:15) on the first Pentecost after the Lord's return to heaven.

Why is this so important to me and you? We need to understand that God has not changed His mind nor altered His promises and prophecies. He did not go back on His word of prophecy. The kingdom came and now exists. God kept His word. Salvation is in His kingdom rather than in the devil's domain. The terms of entrance into the kingdom are the same conditions for salvation. When one hears, believes and obeys the gospel he become a citizen in the kingdom of God. Those in the kingdom have been *"delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son."* (Colossians 1:13). They are also in the church.

Someday, according to God's wisdom and good pleasure, the Son shall return to claim His own, and those in the kingdom shall be delivered up to the Father into eternal glory (First Corinthians 15:24; First Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Illustration

Permit a brief illustration. Should one wish to become a citizen of the United States, what is the process?. He must first recognize he is not a citizen. He must want to become a citizen. Having heard of the land, he must comply with the laws of this country whereby, when he obeys them, he is given citizenship.

The same principle is true in leaving the kingdom of the devil and entering the kingdom of Christ. We must recognize we are alienated from Him because of our sins. We must desire to be a citizen of His kingdom. We must comply with the terms of entrance into His kingdom, which are faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and burial in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins. One is then added to the church (Acts 2:47), is born again (John 3:3-5), and is given citizenship into the kingdom composed of the redeemed.

(from page 24)

As should be the case with all good citizens, we must remain faithful to the King. Here is the importance of the matter of the beginning of the kingdom and how one enters it. What was taught in the first century regarding it is still true today. What was heard, believed and obeyed must be heard, believed and obeyed now. What was given then will be given the obedient now.

† † † † †

A New Work Began July First

After four very pleasant years with the Rock Island church here in Warren County, I began "full time" work with the East End church of McMinnville last July. I leave Rock Island with the highest regard for its eldership and membership. My work there permitted me to preach in many gospel meetings and those brethren have been exceedingly good to us and loyal to the truth. I can heartily commend the Rock Island congregation as a sound church and wonderful Christians.

While the arrangements at East End will limit the number of meetings for each year to five, I look forward to working with the brethren there. The opporunity and possibilities for the future look bright. Pray for us all.

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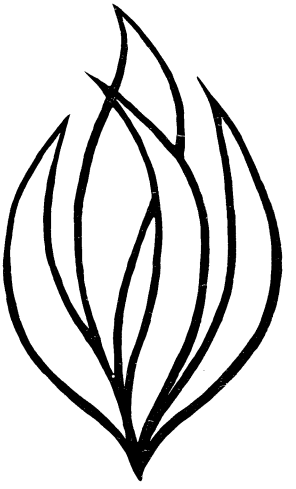

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME X James W. Boyd **NUMBER 2**

Where Did We Come From?

The material of this discussion has been and will continue to be a battleground for believers in God. The question asked receives two very opposite answers. One, we came from God, the Creator. Two, we are the result of accidental chance and materialistic evolution.

Bible Answer

The Bible answer is clear. *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* (Genesis 1:1). *"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them."* (Genesis 1:26,27). *"And God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."* (Genesis 2:7). *"And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man."* (Genesis 2:22). *"For in him we live and move and have our very being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."* (Acts 17:28). The Biblical answer is plain and simple. God created man, then woman. God gave him a body, breathed life into him, gave him a spirit in His own image. Man is a body, soul and spirit.

Evolution's Answer

Contrary to the Biblical answer is the evolutionist's contention that all form of life on earth today came from one lowly form and this development was gradual and altogether by natural means, nothing supernatural about it. Evolution is sometimes presented as the "man from monkey" doctrine. But actually it is the theory that man, monkey and everything else that lives, plant and animal, came from a single primitive cell through the process of naturalistic evolution. We are told that life came from dead matter, and that mind and spirit came from a mindless and spiritless universe.

Evolutionists explain, "The most striking phenomenon in biological evolution is the emergence of mind out of apparently mindless universe." Darwin pointed out that no supernatural

designer was needed since natural selection could account for any known form of life. The earth, evolutionists say, was not created, but evolved, as did the animals and plants that inhabit it, including humans, minds, souls and everything else.

When asked to explain the origin of life, evolutionists offer no explanation but hold to "spontaneous life," life that somehow just came into being accidentally. According to this doctrine (spontaneous generation) many species of animals were supposed to arise spontaneously from non-living matter. For example, insects were believed to originate from dew, frogs and toads from the muddy bottom of ponds under the influence of the sun, skippers from cheese, and fly maggots from flesh. Even now, life might conceivably arise anew from non-living matter if the various elements contained in protoplasm were to unite in the proper quantities and in the proper relationships to one another. While the principle of organic evolution (supposedly) accounts for the great variety of plant and animal life, how the first living things came into existence is not explained. But often today evolutionists take a stab at origins and contend that something happened in the midst of nothing accidentally and "BANG!"

Until such a theory can be demonstrated and proven, it is a lie to contend that evolution is a scientific fact. Nonetheless, the lie is being propagated everywhere that everything came into being without intent, design, plan, purpose, no God, no intellect, only some unexplained explosion from something that did not exist and from that somehow life eventually arose and evolution took place and here we are.

Evolution and Science

Evolutionists claim their position is supported by scientific discoveries, but the very opposite is true. The Biblical viewpoint is not unscientific and contradicts no known scientific law and demonstrable action. We all are aware of the great strides in the field of science and science is not deserving of ridicule. The facts of science are not disputed. But the contention that science supports this evolutionary theory is nothing but an unproven and unprovable assertion. Science does not support evolution. What man has been able to prove runs contrary to the claims and essentials of the evolutionary theory. Repeatedly, the findings in archeology, anthropology, geology, biology, zoology, paleontology, psychology and physiology are friends of the

Biblical record of creation. It is a lie to say otherwise.

Two Areas

Two areas where evolutionists have leaned heavily for support is in the fields of paleontology, the study of fossils, and geology, the study of rocks. The study of fossils is the study of the remains of living creatures preserved in stone, petrified, hard parts of animals, imprints, tracks, etc. in stone. Such a study does not present the gradual evolution from one level of life to another, from one kind of life to another. The opposite is found; namely, the coming into existence of life, fully developed and mature, already divided into various parts and kinds. Paleontology has reversed some of the sequences of development that evolutionists once said were proven fact. Paleontology furnishes conclusive refutation of the Darwinian theory.

The geologic record does not conform to the demands of uniformitarianism which denies the supernatural, even such catastrophies as the Noahic flood. It contends that everything has developed, and is still developing, along the same lines and laws as always. But the layers of the earth have caused havoc among the evolutionists because what is found in the rocks just does not fit the evolutionist's theories, contradicts them, but never contradicts the Biblical record.

One used to hear quite a lot about the expectancy of the discovery of the "missing link." In fact, some evolutionists were so obsessed with finding it that they invented it with fraudulent "finds" which were the work of their own hands. Not only are there "missing links," there has not even yet been found evidence of the chain they say must exist. It takes gullible and naive faith, not faith based on evidence, to believe in that theory. Such links as the Java Man, Piltdown Man, Cor-magnon Man, and others have all been proven to be no missing link at all. They are nothing but a few scraps of bones here and there from which theorists have "created" the entire creature they suppose once had those few bones. One such "missing link" turned out to be nothing but the knee cap of an elephant, once proclaimed as the skull of pre-historic man.

One thing science has proven in the laboratories and that is that like produces like. But this is what the Bible says (Genesis 1:11,12,20-25). Each plant, animal and human produces after its own kind. Science has never been able to present the evidence to support transitions from one kind to another. The

first undisputed traces of animal life which appear exhibit the same distinctions as now exist. They were formed in the remote ages into groups apparently as distinct from one another as they are at the present time. This is truly a great fact that has been a source of marked perplexity to those who hold the view of evolution. Several noted geologists have spent considerable parts of their professional careers seeking some evidence of living forms in the pre-Cambrian strata. After some eighty years of search, this effort must be said to show a singular lack of success. Darwin himself admitted, in the book, *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin,* "When we descend to details we can prove that not one species has changed." As to the explanation of evolution, Darwin said, "At present no satisfactory direct answer can be given." Things have not changed regarding this matter.

Evolutionist's Futility

Several attempts have been made to explain how evolution works. Some have said natrual selection, mutations, both of which have been generally discarded because experience shows that both tend to harm and lower the forms of life rather than elevate and raise them to higher and more sophisticated forms that evolution demands.

Similarities between various levels of life does not prove a common organic origin, nor disprove the creation by God. Similarities might well be expected since God created all things. Similarities tend to show a common creator rather than a common fleshly ancestor.

The lack of evidence on the side of evolution is noteworthy. Especially is it noteworthy since books, programs, articles and speeches are constantly being produced that claim evolution is a foregone conclusion. It just is not the truth. Those who debate the issue are finding it more and more difficult to defend the evolutionary contention and refuse to do so more often than accept the challenge. In fact, few debaters of the matter can be found that will openly defend evolution under the criticial eye of investigation. They promote their cause through insistence, smug sophistication, intellectual dishonesty and ridicule of whatever does not suit their views.

What is even more damaging to evolution is the inability to explain how mind sprang into being and how dead matter produced life. Never has this been demonstrated and everything science knows shows such cannot be. Science is limited to

working with what exists, anyway, and cannot deal with origins.

A constant thorn in the flesh of atheists is the question, "From whence came the first cell?" They say it just happened, somehow, sometime, accidentally and life just popped into being from a naturalistic combination and from that has come everything, absolutely everything that lives on earth today. For men who are often otherwise intelligent to accept such irrational schemes is amazing. It is impossible that it could happen by chance. It cannot even be mathematically expressed the odds are so tremendous. But not only the first chance happening, but all the millions of other "beneficial chance events" that would had to have occurred for things to be as they are. Evolution is just totally absurd. One could more readily believe that a wristwatch was the result of an explosion in the junk yard than to believe the evolution doctrine.

Can You Believe It?

Some years ago while watching a scientific explanation on the origin of life, a reporter, Frank McGee, laid this one before his hearers, and he did it seriously as if it was supposed to make sense. Once upon a time this earth (the origin of which was not explained) was visited by creatures from outer space (their origin was not explained). But these creatures found the climate of earth not to their liking (I have seen places like this, myself). So they packed up and went home. but leaving behind some of their garbage. That word "garbage" is the word the reporter used. From that "garbage" life began to emerge and evolve and here we are today, the result of some very talented trash. I know some people are trashy but how could anyone present such "garbage" on national television in good conscience? Yet, it was done and done as a viable explanation of life on earth. Evidence? None! But evidence is something those who deny God do not realize they should have.

It is evident that this immense, huge, complex, intricate and precise universe has a purpose, meaning, designer, planner and was brought into being by some intelligence. Chance is no explanation whatever for the existence of things, nor the existence of man. To contend for long spans of time and chance is nothing but to "cop out." It is no explanation at all.

Intimidation

We are told that most scientists accept evolution, and this may be true. It is also true that more and more competent scientists are denouncing evolution as the absurdity it is. We may live long enough to see the day when the theory is as antiquated as the square earth theory. The reason most scientists are evolutionists is because only one side of the evidence is taught them in the institutions of learning and their colleagues and professors make no bones about it. You are uneducated and ignorant if you question them. The so-called "wise men" of the world once thought the world was flat also. Hardly any science book of even a few years ago is credible today. One thing is certainly evolving, changing, shifting, never standing still, and that is the "facts of science." It is the height of arrogance and pride to turn the back against creationism when the evidence is not even compared. Evolution is neither a science nor knowledge, but falsely called science, or pseudo-science (First Tmothy 6:20).

In our increasingly humanistic and secular society people are intimidated if they believe the Biblical record or even believe in God. The "wise men" are making fools of millions as well as themselves. We stand without reservation on the position that believing that God created this world and all things therein makes far more sense, fits the evidence, and gives more substance to existence than any evolutionary theory whether it be branded atheistic, agnostic, theistic or whatever. No explanation is more rational, scientifically compatible, logical, believable then, *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."*

Many would be shocked at how many clergymen have compromised the truth of the God they claim to serve and have opted for evolution in order to be considered acceptable. But if all people everywhere should deny the truth, does that change it? Truth is truth and will remain so!

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(from page 17)

How far removed from truth some have gone!

But the truth that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was born of the virgin Mary still stands. We believe it and preach it and urge all brethren to be faithful and true to this truth and the evidences God has given to sustain it.

† † † † †

Enemies of the Cross

"Brethren be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. [For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." (Philippians 3:17-19).

As astounding as it might sound to the faithful child of God, there are those who choose to be enemies of the cross. History tells us of events in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries called the Crusades. They were certainly not Christian in the Biblical sense of the word. They were a fanatical series of militaty conflicts between "Christian" Europe and the Mohammedan world for control of Palestine. In Europe, where Catholicism ruled and placed such emphasis on relics, the "Christians" wanted possession of what some considered to be the greatest relic of all, the "Holy Land," and sought to deliver it from those they considered to be enemies of the cross.

The result was several military efforts, each with declining success, to capture and control Palestine, liquidate all enemies and infidels, whether Jewish or Mohammedan, all heretics (which meant anybody who questioned papal domination and authority).

None Were Friends

There is no question that the Jews and Mohammedans are enemies of the cross of Christ, but neither is their any doubt that those who instigated and executed these Crusades were not Christians as the Bible teaches. Such warfare is not the way that Christianity is to advance.

Jesus once said, *"My kingdom is not of this world."* (John 18:36). Paul wrote, *"[For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of stongholds...]"* (Second Corinthians 10:4). Ephesians 6:12 gives the Christian armor and it is not one for a literal, carnal warfare, but a spiritual warfare.

The cross of Christ had enemies in the past and has had them all along. The first enemies of which we read were Jews. With fair means or foul, legal or illegal, they tried to silence the

message of Christianity. Even from within the church came the digressions of Judaizing teachers who falsely preached that Gentiles, in order to come to Christ, must accept the law of Moses. They attempted to bind circumcision and other matters as part of the faith of Christ (Acts 15:1; Galatians 5:1-4). They attributed salvation to the works of the law rather than the system of grace, faith, blood, obedience and the law of Christ that was purchased by the blood of Christ. Paul said such were perverting the gospel (Galatians 1:7).

Paganism

Pagans and heathens and their idolatrous gods are enemies of the cross of Christ. Any religion that teaches there is more than one Deity (Godhead) is an enemy of the cross of Christ. In Athens, Paul said, *"For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To The Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands..."* (Acts 17:23,24). But they mocked the truth that he preached (Acts 17:32).

It is a wonder that Christianity, the cross of Christ, has survived through the ages seeing the intense hatred and enmity that has been raised against it from every side from its infancy until now.

Isms

Enemies of the cross have arisen through the years of ecclesiastical history. There are vicious, potent and diabolical enemies now. Modernism, atheism, secular humanism are the most deadly facing the truth today. These philosophies deny everything the Christian cites as authority. They reject the Bible, the Deity of Christ, life after death, the existence of God, miracles, the virgin birth, the spirit of man, the resurrection of Jesus, the efficacy of His blood, whatever.

Such enemies wage their warfare on many fronts, such as pseudo-science in the educational institutions, textbooks, television programs, political forums, even in seminaries and churches that claim to respect Christ.

Denominationalism has long been an enemy of the cross even though they claim to be a friend. Faithful brethren have

done battle against denominationalism, and though some are now compromising God's truth to "go along and get along" with denominations for the sake of peace, faithful brethren still combat the denominational menace.

Denominationalism causes and feeds upon division, confusion and chaos, creating waste, doubt with creeds and churches of men rather than of God. The denominational world has done more than Darwin, Marx or anyone else in paving the way for the advance of atheism and humanism. It has sown the sseds into the hearts of generation after generation that it does not matter what one believes just so long as honesty and sincerity prevails. They have adopted names, doctrines, theories, theologies, philosophies, etc. that are contrary to what God has revealed in His Word, and the result is that more and more people wonder if the Bible is from God at all.

The clergymen of denominations have much for which to give answer before God in judgment for promoting their religions which are departures from the word of truth.

We have already referred to moralism and humanism, but more needs to be said. Humanism contends that "man is the most" and there is no need for God, or any god. It denies there is absolute truth and standards. It is the preacher of "do your own thing" religion and life. While it calls for "morality," it destroys any possibility for a standard of morality. If there is no God, whose standard is to be followed?

It is somewhat irnonical that the very position of humanism, denying right and wrong and rejecting God, laughing at the Bible, ridiculing life after death, has destroyed any basis, reason, motive or purpose in being what they call good and moral. If humanism is right, nothing matters whatever. Sin, hell, heaven, rightousness are not realities and make no difference if there is no way to determine which is which. We are not going anywhere anyway according to this teaching.

From Within

But not all enemies of the cross of Christ are outside the church. One deadly enemy is the division and schism that exists. While there is much religious division outside the church, the church bleeds internally for the same reason. One truth we need to understand is the following: those who cause trouble in the church are those who (1) teach false doctrines and practices, or (2) those who demand conformity to their opinions in matters of

opinion. Those who resist the invasion of false doctrines and false teachers, and who insist on allowing what God allows are not those who create havoc for the church. Error, not truth, causes division among brethren.

Division often reaches the point of bitterness, lying, back-stabbing, bad-mouthing, poisoned-penned brethren who will likely as not be big-name brethren, editors, college presidents, pulpit preachers even of big and prominent churches, attacking anybody who dare raises questions about what they say and do. Some of the most vicious diatribes that have been leveled against this writer has come from just such men, men who were compromising truth with error, diseased with "go-along-ism," teaching and practicing error, and who considered it an offense to even have what they said and did questioned and investigated in light of Scripture.

Self-Appointed Elite

We have in the church a "scholastic elite" who have been schooled in liberalism and modernism who have been pouring their errors into the church, even in schools where they teach as much as any other one source. The compromising religious politicians and liberal editors have aided and abetted them in their goal of restructuring the church to be more acceptable to the world. Their tactics include ridicule, intimidation, threats, lies and character assasination in order to promote their heresies.

Matters of opinion have rent the church asunder, such as the anti-orphan home and anti-cooperation hobbies. Matters of faith are issues in the church because some inject false doctrines, promoted through perverted "versions," false teachers fellowshipped, digressive programs endorsed and advertised as if truth really no longer mattered. Why are not such things enemies of the cross?

This biting and devouring of one another is tearing the church apart. But there is no way to stop it until error is removed. The trouble today is that error has been so adopted in many churches that little can be done. The warnings against apostasy and the demand for authority for what is said, done and taught are being ignored in favor of what Brother Big or some "scholar" has decred.

Worldliness and hypocrisy in the church is one, possibly the most potent, weapon against the cross in the devil's arsenal. Strange how Christians provide the devil with one of his most

powerful weapons! What better way to cause people to scoff at Christianity than to have the capacity to array a host of people who claim to be Christians but who are practicing the very things the Lord condemned and omitting what He commanded?

Some have refused to become Christian because of hypocrisy in the church. Of course, such people will not be excused from their duty to God. We cannot go to heaven on the sins of somebody else. But what a sad and distorted display so many present by the daily lives they lead while professing to be a Christian!

What To Do

But what can be done? To bemoan bad situations is not enough. Nothing will be done until another enemy, the enemy of lethargy, indifference and inaction, is removed from the hearts and lives of brethren. This "let-the-other-fellow-do-it" attitude has put many to sleep and they are content on the sidelines. "Spectator religion" is all they have. They just watch, but not participate! That is the way it is with many. The only time they get aroused is when somebody says they ought to act. They never speak up, stand up, or can be counted for truth.

The enemies of truth are sapping the strength from the church because members of the church are allowing them to do it. We have brached out into the fun, food and frolic fellowship with games, gyms, glamour and gimmicks and the sound, solid message of salvation has been dimmed in the process. So much of the church suffers because so many obviously take the lethargic and contemptible attitude, "So what?"

The goal of any who oppose the cross is to ultimately destroy it and its influence, whether intended or not. But in contrast to the emenies of the cross, there are those who are like Paul, *"But God forbid that I glory, save in the cross of out Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."* (Galatians 6:14).

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(from page 22)

The work of evangelism is the work of the child of God. May we each one concern ourselves with our primary task.

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The Virgin Birth of Christ

That Jesus was born of a virgin is a basic and fundamental cornerstone of the doctrine of Christ. While Christmas is not His birthday, neither is His birth a false and imaginary tale designed to exalt Jesus as modernists teach. Even though some contend that the birth of Christ does not matter whether Mary was a virgin or not, this is simply untrue. It does matter. To doubt it casts a bad reflection on the integrity of the Bible as well as question one of the God-given evidences of the Deity of Christ.

The birth of Jesus by a virgin demands the Deity of Jesus in the flesh. His Deity demands His authority. His authority demands man's obedience. Because men do not want to obey the way of Christ they somehow must dissolve the evidences of His position of authority and this demands the removal of evidences of His Deity. To remove such evidence requires them to attack the virgin birth of Jesus.

But one can no more be a faithful disciple of Christ and believe the Word of God while denying the virgin birth than one could deny the efficacy of His blood, resurrection, ascension, kingship, or any number of other fundamental truths regarding Jesus the Christ. The Scriptures address themselves to the virgin birth as one irrefutable evidence of His Deity and is an inspired presentation of His nature.

First Hint

The very first hint from God that He would redeem man contained the suggestion of the virgin birth. When God was speaking to Satan, Genesis 3:15, *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel."* God spoke of the seed of woman, not the seed of man and woman. She would produce a manchild (*"his heel,"* the ASV uses the pronoun *"he"* rather than *"it"*). Satan would inflict a wound against this manchild, but the child would inflict a mortal blow to Satan.

It was Jesus Christ that was afflicted and did afflict Satan. Science has long proven that it takes the seed of both male and female to produce a child. For a long time it was erroneously thought that the womb of woman only served as an incubator

for the seed of man. But now it is known that male sperm and female eggs must fuse in a process called fertilization. It takes both to produce a child. Yet, this passage suggests that the female egg would develope a manchild with no mention of fertilization of the male. The One of whom God spoke was to be the *"seed of woman."*

Born of Woman

In God's good time Jesus was *"born of woman"* (Galatians 4:4). The woman that gave birth had not had physical relationships with a man. So we see here in the very first indication of God's plan to redeem man the suggestion that man's salvation would be accomplished by and through one who would deliver man from Satan and by the One that would come only by the seed of woman. This necessitates a virgin birth.

In Isaiah 7:14 we have an explicit statement of the Old Testament that prophesied the virgin birth. *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."* Matthew said this prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:22,23). If he said this was it, who can deny it?

The setting of the prophecy was that Syria and Ephraim were threatening Judah and King Ahaz. Isaiah advised Ahaz not to depend upon Assyria for help, but to look to the Lord. He said the two nations would be brought down as *"two tails of smoking firebrands."* Ahaz was encouraged to ask for a sign of God's deliverance, but he refused. Then Isaiah said God would give a sign to Judah, all the nation, not just Ahaz. The sign would be that a virgin would bear a son whose name would be Immanuel. A sign was something miraculous. A normal conception and birth is no miraculous sign. Isaiah was not speaking of a normal birth in his time but the virgin birth of Jesus.

Furthermore, Isaiah said in the time it would take for a child to reach maturity, Syria and Ephraim would be without power. This would be a comfort to Ahaz and Judah that Judah would survive and the enemy be destroyed.

The sign was miraculous. A young, marriageable, unmarried and chaste woman would conceive and bear a son. Matthew tells us what fulfilled that prophecy and he was inspired. Why cannot those who say they believe the Bible be content with what the Bible says about it? No other birth could possibly have

fulfilled that prophecy because no other son was born of a virgin and named *"Immanuel."* Some contend for what they call a dual-fulfillment, which is the contention that someone, somewhere in Isaiah's day was also meant. But if such a person ever existed we have no location of him or his virgin mother, or one of his name. The dual-fulfillment position is nothing but a foolish attempt to compromise with modernists that deny the prophecy had anything to do with Christ but only somebody in Isaiah's day. Matthew settles the matter, if you accept Scripture. If you be one who has been trained scholastically in the liberal seminaries and swallowed their lies you will likely keep looking for some way to harmonize liberalism and the Bible with theories like dual-fulfillment or outright modernism.

Perversions

Some modern "versions," like the Revised Standard Version in particular, have changed the word *"virgin"* to simply read "young woman," thus removed the prophecy of the virgin birth. Even some of our ridiculously liberal preachers have tried to defend this modernistic perversion of Scripture. Yes, Mary was a young woman. But calling a woman a young woman does not say of her what calling her a virgin says of her. Isaiah and Matthew said *"virgin."* We will have to let the unbelievers, the modern translation perverters and the "scholarly" preachers sink together in their own error. I have no respect for any man who claims to be a gospel preacher who will take the side of those who deny the virgin birth of Christ and try to defend their revision of God's evidence of His Deity. Nor do I ever expect to respect them. Why should anybody?

Again, Isaiah 9:6,7, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth ever for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."*

His Name

The names given to the child to be born indicates Deity as well

as humanity. How could any fleshly child be called by names denoting Deity except He be begotten of Deity and born of woman? Only by the virgin birth could this become possible and be reality. By the virgin birth of Jesus by Mary He was the fleshly descendant of David, being born of woman, but He was conceived in her by Deity, making Him the Son of God. The New Testament makes it plain that Isaiah's prophecy refers to Jesus Christ and no other.

Jeremiah 31:22 prophesied that *"the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth. A woman shall compass a man."* Many attempts have been made to explain this passage without reference to the virgin birth, but none fits the needs of the passage. Some have said it means a woman shall protect a man, but that is nothing new then or now. Others have said it meant a woman would embrace a man. That's new? Still others said it referred to a woman having a manchild in her arms, or in her womb. That is not new. Every manchild has been there. But a woman having a manchild in her womb without the agency of man is certainly a new thing in the earth.

The context of the chapter shows it has reference to Christ. It speaks of the judgment against Satan and a spiritual restoration which was the mission of Christ. It speaks of the new covenant to come (Jeremiah 31:31) which Hebrews makes clear is the covenant of Christ (Hebrew 8:8). In that context the passage is understood as an anticipation of a new thing, a virgin birth.

New Testament Evidence

In the New Testament we have several references to His virgin birth. We have already noted Matthew's inspired interpretation of Isaiah in Matthew 1:22,23. Strange how some today think they have greater insight into the meaning of Isaiah 7:14 than did this inspired apostle and writer.

Prior to that verse, Matthew 1:18, we are told how Mary was with child *"before they came together."* Luke 1:27, Mary is called a virgin when Gabriel announced the coming birth. Luke 1:34 tells how Mary affirms she had not known man. Luke 1:35 tells how she would conceive the child. *"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."*

Not until after the birth of Jesus did Mary and Joseph live together in marriage and the conjugal relationship of husband

and wife (Matthew 1:25).

The modern "versions" have rewritten just about everyone of these passages and in so doing have removed by the new words the necessity of the virginity of Mary. How and why so-called preachers of the gospel will recommend, applaud and defend these distortions and these books that take away divinely-given evidences of the virgin birth of Christ and His Deity I shall never understand nor accept them as being true to truth. They play the role of a double-minded compromiser.

In Matthew one we read the genealogy of Jesus. In step after step we find the phrase how this one begat the next one. Yet, when we approach the birth of Jesus there is a significant change. *"And Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."* (Matthew 1:16). The fact is, Joseph did not begat Jesus. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. The term *"only begotten"* used in John's writings is the revelation of the incarnation of Deity.

Only Begotten

John 1:1,14 identifies Jesus as the Word and the Word became flesh. How else could the eternal Word become flesh except there be the virgin birth? He was begotten of God and born of woman. The very notations about Christ and the descriptions of Him denote the virgin birth.

Repeatedly Jesus is called the *"only begotten Son of God."* (John 1:14, 18; 3:16,18, First John 4:9). This comes from the word "monogenes" which cannot be translated correctly as the modern "versions" attempt when they say merely "only" or "one and only," and now one has it "unique" and has even adopted the word "beloved." To say Jesus was the only child of God would be a false stament since Adam is called a son of God. The Israelites were the children of God. Even Christians are His sons and daughters. The redundant rendering by the NIV, "one and only," reflects a determined stance to adopt the new rather than the true. Jesus was certainly unique and beloved. But all men are unique and beloved. That says nothing of Deity as the term *"only begotten Son of God"* demands. Some contend it has nothing to do with the virgin birth, but they are dead wrong. The very first time the Holy Spirit used the term was by John when depicting the incarnation. How else was that accomplised accept by the virgin birth? There is good reason to hold suspect the scholarship and soundness of anyone who

seeks to "ape" the liberals and modernists and who wish to defend perversions that remove evidences of the Deity of Christ.

He Is Lord

Matthew 22:42-46 has David calling Jesus, *"Lord,"* as he did in Psalm 110:1. Yet, Jesus was also called the son of David. Fathers do not call their sons, *"Lord,"* meaning Master. How could Jesus be David's son and still receive the calling, *"Lord?"* It could only be in the fact that Jesus was a fleshly descendant of David and born of the human virgin, but the Lord of David inasmuch as He was begotten of God and was Deity taking the form of flesh. Though the passage is not explicit in its demands of the virgin birth, it is implicit and cannot be understood without the necessity of the virgin birth.

In Philippians 2:5-8 we read of how Deity took on the form of man. How else was this done except by Jesus becoming human through being born of the virgin Mary who conceived Him by Deity? That statement in Paul's epistle looks back to the reality of the virgin birth and Paul acknowledges its historicity. This idea that the apostle never believed that Jesus was born of a virgin is absurd in the light of this passage. Paul accepted the truth revealed in Matthew, Luke and John.

These are some of the Biblical evidences of the virgin birth of Jesus and His Deity, authority and man's accountability to Him. To deny the virgin birth is to deny the Deity of Christ. To question the virgin birth is to question the Deity of Christ. To remove evidences of the virgin birth (as modern "versions" do) is to remove divine evidences of the Deity of Christ. No true friend of the Lord will be a party to such as that nor defend it.

Beware of Changes

In this lesson we have cited some sixteen specific passages that demand the virgin birth of Jesus Christ either explicitly or implicitly; in anticipation or as historical fact. It is not to be considered a small thing that ten of these sixteen passage have been so changed in one modern "version" or another so that they could not be used as evidence of the virgin birth. That is how serious the modern version question is. But some say it makes no difference regarding fellowship even if one endorses, promoted and preaches the message of the modern "versions."

(continued page 6)

The Basis For Effective Evangelism

Great emphasis is given in the New Testament for evangelism. *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:19,20.

Romans 10:13-17, *"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God."* Acts 8:4 reads, *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the gospel."* Second Timothy 2:2 instructs, *"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also."*

Evangelism is going and telling the story. We hear people say, "We can evangelize the world in our generation." And so we can. We have the means, methods, money and members. That which is often lacking is the desire, determination and will. To the extent that is lacking we will not evangelize.

Something First

But there is something else that must precede the means, methods, money and men, and even the will to evangelize. This is the burden of this lesson.

We are being told that religion is losing its influence in our world, especially in our American society. Some brag and boast of this. This is disturbing, but we believe it is true. It is realistic to recognize it. The religious revival that followed World War II has subsided and waned away. In its place has come a definite moral decline and laxity in behavior that bears deadly fruit

every day. It makes one wonder if there was much genuiness in the fervor of the so-called revival.

Increasing numbers are being taught and accepting the denial of the existence of God. Secular humanism is dominating the educational scene. Churches have lost members and membership is in decline. Those that are experiencing growth, especially among churches of Christ, are those who have gone the way of denominational fashions of fun, food, frolic, entertainment, recreation, or cultism. The depth of spirituality seems to be shallow. There is a craving for the emotional and moving, but not the converting and conforming to the Lord's standards.

The influence of God-fearing people has lessened and is evident everywhere. Some are even talking in terms of the post-Christian era. What we often see today that is called Christianity is nothing but a human perversion of it. In too many instances we only see a few twitchings of dying muscles that have lost its grip on things. One poll informs us that seventy per cent of America's teenagers have made up their minds not to have any kind of religion. This they have been taught by schools, over television, by some political and sport celebrities by word and deed. "Do your thing" is the standard.

Some say Christianity will not die, and they are right. But the reason for saying so is often wrong. The church shall prevail eternally, but history shows that truth has been surpressed in the past and over long spans of time. What of those millions who will never hear and know God's message? Do we care that they will likely be our own descendants? The Dark Ages ruled the affairs of the world for centuries. What is there to keep that from being repeated when we are going the same way?

The reason we are Christians is because those before us saw the need to evangelize, go and tell the story. Those who come after us are dependent on us doing the same thing. Christianity is but one generation from practical extinction. There is no doubt that evangelism is the need of our day.

Where Evangelism Begins

There are three factors that must exist before there will be an effective evangelistic activity. It begins with the church. "*These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" (First Timothy

3:14,15). The primary work of the church is preaching the gospel, spreading the Word. It is generally conceded, by friend and foe alike, that the religious people set the moral and spiritual level in a community. Unfortunately, this has been some of the problem. The moral and spiritual level has gone down, down, down, because many church members have compromised with the world, have become less and less militant, unwilling to take a stand lest they offend somebody, lest they place their material welfare in danger. So many church people have either joined the world, or have chosen to become passive and timid about what is right and wrong.

A church that merely reflects the desires and ambitions of the community and merely gives additional expression to the culture and level of the morals of the community is of no value to the cause of Christ. It has nothing to offer. It has no right to be called a church of Christ.

Many churches today have become little more than respectable religious clubs that as often as not give blessings to whatever members are doing as they are meeting the demands of Christianity as authorized of God. This is a widespread weakness of churches today. Such churches can never attract sinful humanity because there is not enough difference between them and the world.

A major charge against religion today is the inconsistency of those who are involved in it. Anti-church movements prosper because church members give them all the ammunition they need to grow. Too many have a form of godliness, but not Christlikeness. The doctrine of Christ has been compromised to satisfy the clamoring of the theologians and seminary trained clergymen. The worldly minded have a haven in many churches. Drinking, dancing, adultery, cheating, immodesty, materialism, can all be found in great array among many churches. The frivolity and foolishness of emotionalism has displaced conversion. Fewer and fewer even know the cost of Christian living, let alone display a willingness to submit to it.

Effective evangelism begins when those who call themselves Christians are truly a body of people with faith and convictions that cannot be moved; people who have separated themselves from the sins of this world; whose mind is set on things above; who are disciplined, trained, informed, directed by the Bible and who dare to stand up and be counted.

Proclamation

A second necessity for effective evangelism is the proclamation of the Mighty Savior. Jesus can be described in many ways, such as a noble example, master teacher, miracle worker. But only when He is proclaimed as the Savior of mankind by virtue of being the Son of God is there to be effective evangelism. Salvation of the spirit of man is the message that must be preached and Christ is the only Savior.

The world is not in meed of a better philosophy, more majestic church buildings, paved parking lots, air-conditioned "sanctuaries," or fellowship halls and gymnasiums. It needs a Savior; a guide in life and a warning of eternity. Mankind wants to go his own way but he needs more than simple reform. He needs to be reborn.

We do not need the "new morality" which is nothing but immorality. We do not need the paltry excuses, explaining away sin, psycholigical sedatives and the removal of individual responsibility before God for our lives. We need the humble confession of dependence on God, acknowledgement of our lost condition in sin, the gaping jaws of an eternal hell, and that there is one Savior, Jesus Christ.

The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). Attempts to woo and win by playgrounds, sensationalism, entertainment, oratory and the "cream of wheat" sermonettes is a waste of time and an opium to the mind.

The cross is the attraction that must be presented. If that is not sufficient, then those who reject it seal their own doom in spite of all that God and man can do. It is the truth that makes the alcoholic quit drinking, the prostitute to clean her life, the broken homes be healed, the wrecked lives remade, the delinquents behave, etc.

Some churches today have the finest buildings, every convenience, big staffs, all kinds of methods and means of communication, and what are they doing with them? Many are simply telling pretty stories and letting people think all is well when actually hell awaits them because they have not obeyed God.

In recent years some churches of Christ have gone "bananas" over methods and have forgotten the message. With all the advantages of modern technology and communication, still the world grows worse and worse and distortions of the truth multiply. Those who have the commission to take THE STORY to the world have been sidetracked in pursuit of money, numbers, glamor, acceptance by the world, and neglected the

real task of evangelism.

Much energy and effort of God's people in recent years has been expended shoring up its own defenses from attacks within by liberals and modernists. The collegiate element has swallowed the digressive teaching gained from denominational seminaries and schools have become primary centers for the promotion of apostasy. While a few years ago the churches of Christ were known as a Bible centered people, today when you see a sign denoting a Church of Christ, you have no real idea just what might be meeting there anymore. Digression and apostasy has taken a deadly toll.

Churches have the greatest message men can hear, the changeless, timeless, saving Word of God. Its voice must be distinctive and not just another echo of the same kind being poured out by denominationalism. We must call men from the darkness of sin into His light, not just make them feel good about themselves, pacify their troubled minds over the affairs of the day, and give them a "good time" with trivia. The truth preached is the only way to evangelize the sinful world. "*But we preach Christ crucified...*" (First Corinthians 1:23.) Anything less than *"thus saith the Lord"* amounts to nothing.

A Burdened Heart

There must be a burdened heart and concerned spirit within the child of God. We can be orthodox in word and have an uncaring attitude and the job of evangelism will never be done. We can become so obsessed with show before the eyes of others that we lose the attitude of Paul who was willing to spend and be spent for the cause of Christ and salvation of souls (Second Corinthians 12:15). This may be one of our biggest problems.

Noah's very soul was vexed because of the sinfulness around him (Second Peter 2:8). He was distressed by it. Therefore he preached God's righteousness. He did not convert many, did he? He saved only his family. How many of us will do as much?

We can study means, methods, etc. about evangelism all we want and never amount to anything regarding it. It is all too evident that we need to go to the heart of the matter and build again a converted church that will care enough for souls to "preach the word." We must look within if we are ever going to activate effective evangelism. If and when we will do that, then someday means and methods may seem more appropriate.

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ARTICLE: Must Everybody Do Just Like Me?

There are matters of faith that God expects everyone to believe alike and practice alike. There are also matters that involve human judgment and opinion where everybody does not have to think and do just alike. Matters of faith are determined by "*thus saith the Lord.*" Matters of judgment and opinion arise when determining how things should be done when there is no *"thus saith the Lord,"* but still must be done.

I do not enjoy being critical of others, especially of those who are preaching the gospel. Gospel preachers receive so much criticism and so much of it is unjustified because they are criticized for doing their work as God would have it done. But there are some areas where some preachers need criticism because they seem to think everybody must do just what they do and if you do not you are not quite as committed to the cause of Christ, not as devoted, not as dedicated as they have thought themselves to be. Consider the case in point.

Through the years I have heard some who preach be criticial of those who devote their full time to working with the church and are what we call fulltime preachers. They are accused of being parasites off the church, lazy, not able to hold other jobs and other derogatory remarks are made about them, often by those who are what we call part time preachers, those who may earn their livlihood other than by preaching. Why should the man who earns his money in other ways think his way is the only way and others are less than what they ought to be if they are fulltime preachers? Must everybody do as they do?

On the other hand, I have heard fulltime men berate those who have other occupations to support themselves and their families but who also preach. They are called "jack leg" preachers, whatever that is supposed to mean. Some talk as if somebody that is not fulltime is somehow not doing as he ought and is not as devoted and dedicated as others. They have no right to think and say such things. I get tired of hearing the boasting of people who seem to believe everybody must serve in the kingdom the way they do or something is just not quite as committed as they think they are.

Paul was supported in his work. He also made tents at times. No man who is a part time preacher, earning his living in other ways, is inferior to the fulltime man. Nor is the fulltime man less than one who is not dependent on brethren for his living support. Each one serves and serves in the way he thinks he is best suited for his circumstances and conditions. Who has the

right to become the judge to say what everybody ought to do? Some preachers have been forced from fulltime work to sustain their families, but continue to preach as they have opportunity. Are they less than loyal to Christ? Does one have to be a fulltime man to be faithful? Should he see fit to alter his work in ways expedient to his needs, does this make him less than what he ought to be? Who can say so?

At the same time, when a man leaves other occupations to devote himself to preaching fulltime, why are there some who are fortunate to have other means of support and take little or nothing for their work be critical of those who must live by the gospel they preach and be sustained by brethren? Such self-righteous attitudes and comments that come from some preachers border on the disgusting. It reveals that they must think everybody must do just like they do or somehow something is amiss. Such conceit, arrogance and attitude of superiority is unbecoming to anyone, especially from preachers toward other preachers. It is shameful and the self-centered, egotistical, know-it-all fellows need to trim their plows. Just because a man changes his work in the kingdom is no cause to accuse him of putting his hand to the plow and looking back. He still serves and serves effectively and in the way he knows he serves best. Just who does the critic think he is to berate the work of another just because he chooses to work differently?

Some are so self-righteous that they are in foreign fields while others criticize those in foreign fields as being people who could not make it at home. Such rot as that is reprehensible! May God's blessings abide with faithful brethren whether they have chosen to work at home or elsewhere. They have the right to make that choice without being degraded by somebody else who chooses to serve in other ways and places. It is not fitting for such attitudes and comments to be heard among preachers or brethren anywhere. It reflects a sorry heart in the critic.

Some preach fulltime at one church. Others fill in for others. Some are part time. Some go long distances. Others stay near home. Some hold meetings. Others write and publish papers. Why must we think everybody must do just like we do before they are really first class workers in the vineyard of the Lord? Such as I have been discussing ought be erased from existence among us. And believe me, and I know whereof I speak, some have a good bit of erasing to do.

Thank God for every laborer, every faithful gospel preacher, whenever and wherever he preaches the truth. JWB

The Precious Death



JAMES W. BOYD

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Psalm 116:15).

While most of us will likely consider death, either our own or that of someone near to us, as being a tragic loss, God does not consider the death of those who are His in the same light.

There is something very beautiful about the life that has been lived in faithful service to God. That beauty will be an influence for good long after the person who so lived has left this life.

The death of a faithful saint, a Christian, is like going home. Having lived and loved among men in the manner of the way of God, he now leaves the joys and sorrows of this life and is ushured into an eternal existence of the most sublime reward. God welcomes him home. He has served loyally and persistently against the powers of evil and labored diligently on the side of what is good, right and pure. His passing is therefore a precious event, even though those left behind will mourn the departure of such a one from their company.

The death of each of us can be precious in the sight of God if we will walk according to His will while on this earth. Make this your aim.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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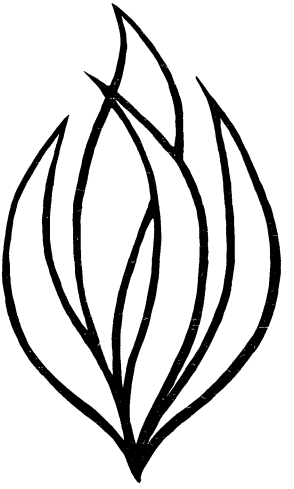

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME X James W. Boyd **NUMBER 3**

Every Christian Ought To Attend Every Service

"Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (Second Timothy 2:2-4).

Some sermons reprove; some rebuke; some exhort; some do a little of all three. Some lessons are more applicable to one than to another. Some lessons are well received; some rejected, even in anger. Experience as well as Scripture forewarns those who preach that his hearers can be friendly or hostile. Regardless of all of that, he must preach the word. *"He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favor than he that flattereth with the tongue."* (Proverbs 28:23).

No sermon is chosen or preached just to offend. But the truth will offend those who are set against it. When people hear what they do not like or what contradicts what they say and do they react differently. Some will investigate in order to learn. Some grow angry. Some just ignore the sermon. Some will say they agree with it, but continue to live contrary to it.

Some complain about lessons on attendance at worship. "We need more spiritual food, answers to our problems, comfort, encouragement, how to deal with day-to-day stress and strain in Christian living." All of this is true. It is because this is true that we need lessons on faithfulness in attendance to worship and study periods. This is where the spiritual food is served; where the answers are offered; where the comfort and encouragement is given. If we will listen to sermons with the attitude of Samuel, *"Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth,"* we will profit from such lessons on the necessity of attendance at every worship service.

Absenteeism

Over the years we have determined that only eighty per cent or less of the members of the congregation will attend some service during the course of a week. It is not the same eighty per

cent each week. This means twenty per cent of the members will not be in attendance at any service during the week. This takes into account the sick and those who are away from home, which is all too frequent for some.

Only two thirds of the members of a congregation are present at their home congregation on a given Sunday. About fifty per cent do not attend Bible study. Two thirds of the members are absent at mid-week service and just about the same on Sunday evening, sometimes even less. So whether you consider it important or not, the fact remains that many members have never learned, never respected, or just do not care about their responsibility concerning attendance at every service.

Worship Expected

God expects worship from His people (John 4:23,24; Matthew 4:4). Worship was a part of the Old Testament life as well as the New. Paul attended the worship (Acts 20:7). The early brethren were stedfast in it (Acts 2:42). The Jewish Christians worshipped (Philippians 3:3). Worship is what we do at every service. We sing, pray, study, and on Lord's Day we also eat the Lord's Supper and give of our means. Does this matter? Can we exclude it?

It is evident that attendance was a problem in the early church (Hebrews 10:25). Some had the custom of being absent. The person who refuses to attend worship is refusing to worship as he ought. Not only is his absence a mark against him, but his attitude toward worship of God with his brethren compounds his spiritual problem.

The true and loyal Christian desires to worship God. We are to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Can one worship in proper spirit if he wishes he did not "have to" be present? True Christians never seek to avoid worshipping God. They seek the opportunity and look forward to it.

Worship is a privilege as well as a duty. True and loyal Christians never have the attitude, "Do I have to attend?"

Willfully Absent

It is obvious that some even plan to be absent. It is not that they cannot be present, but they plan to be absent by planning to do something else at the very hour designated for worship. They plan week-end trips without consideration of worship.

They plan vacations, outings, visits, rest, recreation, entertaining of guests, making money, all sorts of things that conflict with worship. Even athletic events and school programs have been given first place before worship of God.

We are aware that sometimes conflicts arise and with a little thought and planning the conflict can be resolved. I recall one year when the public high school scheduled graduation exercises that conflicted with the worship services of the church. Some members were involved in both. The elders were considerate and scheduled the services at a different hour so both events could be attended by those involved in them. But, wouldn't you know it? The very ones for whom the change was made to assist them ignored the worship altogether. Now if that is not a mark of putting lesser things first there is not a Jew in Jerusalem. In the words of James, *"My brethren, these things ought not so to be."* We could do better than that if effort was made.

Example

We ought to be present for the sake of a good example. No man lives to himself (Romans 14:7). We all have and shall give account for our influence. We ought to give up whatever we have to give up in order to be a good example (Romans 14:1; First Corinthians 8). Deliberate absenteeism is sin. Attendance is a good example. *"To whom that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17).

Can anyone really question that deliberate absenteeism is a bad example for outsiders as well as insiders to observe? What do you think Jesus would plan to do on Sunday evening? Where do you think Jesus would plan to be at the Bible study hours? Do you think He would ignore the mid-seek services? Are we not to walk as He walked and follow in His steps? Little wonder many young people do not respect the church and worship services. Their parents and others have taught them, by example, to do whatever you want even if it means missing the worship services.

At the hour of every worship service we are saying to our brethren, to our lost associates, and to God, one of two things. It is either, "I care and want to worship," or "I don't care and won't worship." Only if we are physically unable to be present do we have reason to be absent.

Presence of Christ

Christ is going to be present at every service. "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" (Matthew 18:20). Tell me you do not care about that! We often make special efforts to be in the presence of this world's notables when we can. But what of being with the Son of God, the One who lived and died to save you from hell?

I was in a meeting in northern Alabama one year at electioneering time. A prominent candidate was speaking in a nearby city one night of the meeting. Where do you think many were, including some elders and deacons? Yes, they went to hear their candidate for election rather than support the gospel meeting. You can be sure they heard about that before that meeting was over. As I recall now, for some reason I never was invited to go back there for any other gospel meeting. Do you wonder why? But can you imagine such as that? Is that the strength of the kingdom of God?

Nourishment

When we come we are offered the opportunity to feed upon the truth and learn what God wants of us so we can be pleasing to Him and bring glory to His name. Does that make any difference? Yes, it does. Does that make any difference to you? Failure to know the Word is at the root of many who fall away. Failure to love the Word is at the heart of apostasy.

Paul taught the Word of God to the Thessalonians and he said, "*He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit.*" (First Thessalonians 4:8). It is not just men who are offended, but God is displeased at absenteeism due to disrespect for His Word.

Faithful attendance by members helps the church to grow. Loyalty is an essential ingredient in growth. How can we expect others to care when we leave the impression that we do not? Financial ability of the church to do the work God wants done is reflected in faithful attendance and contribution. Too many leave everything up to somebody else and assume they have no responsibility at all. They are sadly mistaken and their heart is confused, but everyone suffers because of it. No church can fill its mission when members are haphazard about attendance.

These truths are really beyond the realm of debate. Yet, many brethren reject them. Not many will come out loud and say they reject them, but they reject them just the same by what they do,

or what they do not do. But if you ignore such things as we have brought to your attention, you are in for one more hard time trying to justify your position before man or God.

Dear friend, resolve, here and now, to be faithful from this day forward to all the services of the church. We must leave it with you to decide who will benefit the most.

† † † † †

Everyday Religion

Should you take a concordance and check the words, *"daily, day by day, every day, each day,"* you might be surprised how many, many times they appear in Scripture. We hear people talk about everyday clothes, Sunday clothes, Sunday shoes, everyday shoes. Some people seem to have a Sunday religion and others have an everyday religion. Some put their religion on once or twice a week while others wear theirs everywhere, all the time.

Some who profess Christianity give the appearance that Christianity is only a social matter, a club to which they belong, a respectable thing to hold membership. They "go to church" rather than go to worship. The church building is a place to go and see and be seen on Sundays, provided nothing else comes up that appeals to them. When they have "paid their dues" to the Lord on Sunday they feel they have done their duty. They greet and are greeted and that is about it.

It Is Daily

Being a Christian does provide social advantages because it offers opportunity for fellowship and association with God's people. We make friends and enjoy activities of many kinds with people who share our convictions, standards, goals and ideals. But Christianity is not just a "Sunday" thing.

Under the Law of Moses the Jews had daily services and sacrifices. For example, (Exodus 29:38,39), lambs were slain on the altar daily. Incense was burned every morning (Exodus 30:7,8). The things written in the Old Testament are for our

learning (Romans 15:4) and for our example (First Corinthians 10:11). As their religion was a daily matter, so is the Christian faith.

Those activities mentioned were performed by the priests. Under Christ every Christian is a priest (First Peter 2:5; Revelation 5:10). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that we, as priests of God, are to have daily activities in serving God under Christ as did they when they served God under Moses.

Prayer

What does daily Christianity involve? It involves prayer. The burning of incense was a type of prayer (Revelation 5:8; 8:3). Incense was burned daily and we are to pray daily. Jesus taught us to pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread."* Obviously, this was a daily prayer. David prayed daily. *"Evening and morning and noon, I will pray, and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice."* (Psalm 55:17). *"Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction, Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee."* (Psalm 88:9).

Knowledge

Daily Christianity involves daily study of the Bible Emphasis on daily Bible readers was once heavy among brethren, but has waned through the years in our Bible study classes. Being a daily Bible reader was something for which to strive. John 5:39, *"Ye search the Scripture for in them ye think ye have eternal life."* We are commanded to "*Study to show thyself approved unto God..."* (Second Timothy 2:15). The noble Bereans searched the Scriptures *"daily"* to learn what was true (Acts 17:11). The blessed man of Psalm one found his delight in the law of the Lord, *"and in his law doth he meditate day and night."*

Children are sent to secular schools five days a week and are in various classes several hour each day. Yet, some think one or two hours in a class at the church building is sufficient time to devote to Bible study in an entire week. Little wonder there is such a growing ignorance of the Word of God among members of the churches of Christ in some places. Even if a child was faithful in attendance at all worship services and Bible classes each week he would get less Bible study than he gets in arithmetic.

Growth

We are commanded to grow spiritually. Yet, such growth is impossible without feeding on the sincere milk of the Word (First Peter 2:2; Second Peter 3:18). Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Father."* (Matthew 4:4). Would we consider a person properly fed physically if he partook of food only two or three times a week? Yet, the soul, which will exist eternally, is given less than that with many folks.

Evangelism

Daily Christianity involves daily concern for the lost. There is a song that has a verse, "Lead me to some soul today." Jesus said, *"I sat daily with you in the temple."* (Matthew 26:55). He taught someone every day. The early church was active in winning souls daily and souls were added to the saved daily (Acts 2:46; 5:42).

Today we often seem too busy with many matters to involve ourselves in talking to others about salvation. We talk about the weather, politics, games, finances, the world's conditions, but seldom if ever a word about the Lord, His church, salvation, and things that really matter. Paul said, *"I ceased not to warn you night and day with tears."* (Acts 20:31). This is a part of daily Christianity.

Building Up

Daily Christianity involves daily exhortation and edification. This means we are to advise, warn, encourage, instruct and build up one another. Christians have many duties. Some are duties to non-Christians and some are duties to brethren in the Lord. We can never forget that Satan wants to recapture the soul of some brother or sister. Hebrews 3:13 teaches, *"Exhort one another daily, while it is called today."*

In the event that one of our number falls, our exhortations are to be designed for his restoration (Galatians 6:1; Romans 15:1,2). We do not want one of our physical family to just drift away and no effort made to help him or her. We ought have such love for our spiritual family as well.

Christlike

Daily Christianity means daily living in the imitation of Christ, in word, manners, attitudes, speech, actions toward others, filling our duties. We read much about "fruit bearing" in Scripture. The fruit we are to bear is the *"fruit of the Spirit"* as found in Galatians 5:22ff). How you live your daily life, how you treat your family and associates, how you react to your responsibilities, what kind of character you are developing are all serious components of daily Christianity.

Service

Daily Christianity involves daily ministration or service to others. So many are in need of so much. Opportunities to help are almost limitless. The first problem the early church encountered was over providing for those who were lacking physical needs. There was a daily ministration. Men were appointed to see that such work was not neglected but expedited in the best manner. We each have daily needs. Some are not able to provide their needs. They need help. Those who have are to provide for those who lack. To have and not share is to show a lack of love for God (First John 3:17,18).

When I was just a lad I was a member of the Boy Scouts. Among the things a good scout was to do was a good turn to somebody else every day. That is what the Christian is taught to do. Daily service is an important part of daily religion.

Cross-bearing

Being a Christian every day involves cross-bearing. Jesus said, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* (Luke 9:23). All that we have said to this point is a part of cross-bearing, because it involves Christian duties. But it can well include things that are not pleasant to endure.

Bearing the cross was painful for our Lord. Cross-bearing may bring distress to us also. Not everyone you meet will be pleased that you are a Christian or that you are trying to walk in the steps of the Savior. You may be called upon to endure ridicule, persecution, exclusion from others, being considered unacceptable because you will not do what Christians cannot do. You may have to set aside many thing that others do because you have decided to go to heaven by putting the Lord first in your life. You cannot even have your own way in things because you

must always consider, "What would Christ have me to do?" Then you must follow His way. To bear His cross means to submit to whatever may be demanded of you for faithful service as a Christian. It is not the burdens in life that are common to all. It is a performace of Christian living. Many of the habits, activities of this world will be "off limits" to the child ot God.

We do not bear the cross to pay for our forgiveness because we can never earn salvation. But bearing the cross is an essential part of being a Christian everyday. Bearing the cross is a figurative expression because we will not bear a literal cross as did Jesus. But it means we must carry our duties to the limit and fulfill them as a child of the Lord. Jesus said, *"He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me."* (Matthew 10:37). The song asks, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free?" The next phrase gives the answer. "No, there's a cross for everyone and there's a cross for me."

Daily Results

Everyday religion, everyday Christianity will produce everyday results. It will bring everyday blessings and benefits. It will see souls saved, the saved strengthened, the needy served, life being lived to the glory of God. Daily Christianity enables the Christian to say, "There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle." Daily religion keeps us in daily contact with the Father through the Son as we walk according to the revelation of the Spirit in Scripture.

What kind of religion do you practice? Is it an on-off affair? Is it a Sunday thing, and that not even regularly? Or have you grown to the place where Christ is with you each step of the way because you are following His lead and walking His way, each day? This is the religion He wants for us all.

† † † † †

WHO SAID IT?

I really don't know that anybody has said it. But if they have not, somebody should. Surely, the idea has been expressed in many ways. "You cannot get to heaven on the blunders and sins of others." That ought to be self-evident.

Why The Word Became Flesh

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us [and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father], full of grace and truth." (John 1:1,14). *"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."* (First TImothy 3:16).

These passages teach that Christ is Deity, and was God as well as man, man as well as God. He was on earth the combination of Deity and humanity. As His name implies, the name *"Immanuel,"* He was *"God with is,"* God manifest in the flesh.

Our question for study is WHY did God become flesh? Why the incarnation, that is, Deity taking on the form of humanity? Why was the Second Person of the Godhead given a fleshly and bodily form and come to this earth to live among men as a man?

Demands of Justice

There are several answers to these questions, but we shall concentrate on one, the primary one. We first must consider an eternal and indisputable principle of truth. Law and justice, when violated and offended, demands something. It demands a repayment. Psalm one teaches, *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, ncr sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night."* First John 3:4 defines sin as a transgression of the law, meaning, God's law. God holds man responsibile for his transgressions. The father who never holds his children responsible for their actions will soon have the mortifying experience of seeing all kinds of disorder prevail in the home and family. This same thing is true in schools, in the state, in society generally. Each one must be held responsible. The demands of law and justice must be met or anarchy, lawlessness

and chaos will dominate the scene. God knew this when He banished from His presence angels that rebelled against Him (Jude 6; Second Peter 2:4).

But what is sufficient to meet and satisfy the demands of justice in the event of violations against God's will? What is the proper punishment for a crime is a constant problem that men face when executing civil justice. How many years of confinement is deserving for a crime? When should capital punishment be administered? Parents wrestle with this matter all the time. How much punishment is due the child when he does wrong? What is a just penalty? We do not wish to minimize the great moral problem here. Too little is ineffective, and too much is counter productive. If the problem is so great in the smaller matters of this world, how much greater is the problem when God, the perfect Creator, is offended and His will violated? Just what is satisfactory punishment for sin?

Only God, the offended one, can determine this. Paul wrote, *"For the wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23). This refers to spiritual separation from God. From the events of the Garden of Eden there was a mystery of mysteries as to what God would deem sufficient penalty for sin. The penalty was death.

Justice and Mercy

Psalm 89:14 reads, *"Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne; mercy and truth shall go before thy face."* Now we have the question before us, "How could God be just and merciful at the same time?" Justice demands that offenders pay the penalty. Mercy calls for withholding from the offender the punishment he deserves. Yet, God is said to be both just and merciful. For man who sins, justice means spiritual death, but mercy means spiritual life. How would God accomplish both?

The way God accomplished and demonstrated both justice and mercy is the story of the Bible. Herein is the answer to our question as to WHY the Word became flesh.

How surprised Satan and his hosts must have been to hear the first hint that God would not only destroy Satan but also provide a way of salvation for man. *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed, it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel."* (Genesis 3:15). Just how would God accomplish this?

How intently must the father of lies watched as the first animal sacrifice took place. Would such a sacrifice be sufficient to meet

the demands of justice and provide mercy? No, this was not the way. True enough, *"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission."* (Hebrews 10:4). But no animal sacrifice was adequate to pay the penalty (Hebrews 9:22).

How concerned Satan must have been when he learned of the promises that God gave to Abraham. *"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."* (Genesis 22:18). How would God bless all nations through the seed of Abraham?

How suspiciously Satan must have watched the giving of the first covenant to Israel through Moses that called for many sacrifices and offerings, works of merit and ordinances to obey. But all these things proved to be and were designed and intended to be but a shadow of things to come (Hebrews 10:1). They were but a schoolmaster, leading to something else (Galatians 2:24). The old Mosaic Law could not do what needed to be done (Romans 8:3).

Payment For Sin

God's wisdom regarding the satisfactory payment for sin and the salvation of mankind was a matter the ancient prophets desired to know and inquired concerning it (First Peter 1:10). Even angels, principalities, powers in heavenly places desired to look into this matter (First Peter 1:12). But it remained a mystery, a matter unrevealed, as to how God would be both just and merciful at the same time.

In time, Christ was born. *"But when the fulness of time was come God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law ."* (Galatians 4:4). The Word became flesh. He was made in the likeness of man, being found in fashion as a man (Philippians 2:7,8).

No sooner had Jesus come from the waters of the Jordan River, having been baptized of John, He was assailed by a disturbed, suspicious, fearful and shrewed Devil with cunning temptations (Matthew 4). Satan attempted to destroy any power Jesus had or might have to overcome sin right at the very start of His mission. Through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, in the way and manner by which he had subverted mankind in the Garden of Eden, he sought to undermine the Christ. But he was defeated in every attempt as the Lord Jesus properly and skillfully wielded the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Even so, Satan, sin, death and man's torment was not yet defeated. Justice had not yet been met for

sin. Forgiveness could not yet be offered. The way of escape and the way into the Holy of Holies was not yet provided.

The Role of Christ

Having lived a perfect life and proving His identity as the Son of God, eventually Jesus was seized and sacrificed on the Roman cross at Calvary. Once for all time, once for all mankind, the Son of man died, tasting death for every man (Hebrews 2:9; 9:12,28). With this sacrifice the penalty for man's sins was paid. *"And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."* (First John 2:2). With His death on the cross, the demands of justice were met. His flesh was torn and His body mangled for the sins of the world (Romans 8:3). Even though He died, on the third day, He arose from the grave (Luke 24:46). In this way God broke the bars of death and Satan's grip on man was forced loose. Man now had the opportunity to be free. Atonement had been made. Satisfactory reparation for injury had been accomplished. God Himself had accomplished it by and through the death of His only begotten Son. Justice was appeased and Christ's death was a demonstration of justice being meted out. By this act God showed Himself to be both just and the justifier of the offended. *"To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."* [*Romans 3:26*].

God was just in that He exacted due penalty for sin. He was the justifier in that He now offered salvation to the sinner and extended to him His mercy. With the penalty paid, the just dying for the unjust, the righteous dying for the unrighteous, now the unrighteous could be made righteous and the unjust could be made just.

By the death of Christ on the cross, the basis and merit for man's salvation was secured. *"Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first how that CHrist died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."* (First Corinthians 15:1-4). Now God's will and His law, the demands of justice had been sustained, and yet, the violator could be saved. We begin to understand WHY the

Word became flesh. It was to pay for our sins and provide the way of our forgiveness and salvation.

Two More Truths

In addition, the Lord's death on the cross showed two other vastly important truths. One, the way of salvation was planned from the beginning (Ephesians 3:9). It was never God's intention to allow sin to pass without a just and adequate recompense. God knew from the beginning that He would exact justice.

Two, no sin could ever be pardoned on any other basis than the merits of the blood of the innocent Christ. It is evident that all of the sacrifices of the Patriarchal and Mosaic altars had not taken away sin, but were faithful illustrations and types of that one great sacrifice on which all must depend and without which no sacrifice would have any value. Man, the sinful one, could not pay for his own sins and be saved. Someone perfect had to pay for Him. Those before Christ's death, as well as those of us who have lived since His death, are saved by His blood (Hebrews 9:15; Romans 5:9). The blood of Christ flowed backwards as well as forwards from the cross, cleansing the faithful of their sins. Nothing less than the blood of God's Son was deemed adequate by God for the redemption of man. *"Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12).

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus had prayed, *"O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."* (Matthew 26:39). It was possible for Jesus to escape the horrors of the cross and to have been delivered from His suffering as far as God having the power to release Him. But it was not possible if God's plan for man's redemption was to be accomplished. This plan was God's plan. It was that plan that provided justice and mercy at the same time. Jesus was willing to do what had to be done for God's plan to become a reality.

Now we see the primary reason WHY the Word became flesh. There are other reasons, important but not primary, such as enabling Him to be the High Priest, allowing Him to be our example, giving Him opportunity to teach His will and standards, etc. But the provision of justice and mercy is the principal purpose of the Word becoming flesh.

What in Return?

What shall we give in return for such a sacrifice? Paul taught us to be a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1,2). As the poet has written in the following lines:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

We plead with everyone not to deprive themselves of the benefits procured for them through the infinite merit of the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In this lesson you have had presented to you the pre-existence of the Savior, His incarnation, God's justice and mercy, the mission of the Christ, His death, resurrection and saving blood. This is God's plan for man's salvation, and man need only to obey the commands of the gospel to benefit from what God has done.

† † † † †

The Way Of Justification

"Now we know that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe, for there is no differemce. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forebearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:19-26).

The theme of the passage is the way man is justified before God. It tells of the way man is made right with God. It does not say all that the Bible teaches regarding this way, but we shall investigate other Scriptures alongside this one.

The importance of such a study is realized when we consider that all people face death, the resurrection, the judgment and eternity. Our eternity will be in one of two places, heaven or hell. The way of justification is the way to heaven. There is nothing we need to know that is so important as the way of being justified before God.

Definition

We need a clear understanding of the term *"justification."* We can get this understanding by considering the ways it is often used in our language. Consider a man accused of a crime. He is tried, found innocent, set free and is acquitted. He deserved his freedom. He earned it. He was not guilty. His works were not evil. We say his release was justified.

Another man is accused, tried, found guilty, but is set free on the basis that he was justified in his action. Possibly he acted in self defense or other conditions warranted what he did. Again, according to the law, he deserved to go free even though he actually had done that of which he was accused.

But Paul's use of the term is different from the first two we just noted. Here a man is tried, found guilty as charged, and there was not reason or excuse for his deliberate transgression and rebellion. If he is set free it will be because he is forgiven and pardoned. Paul's use of justification is treating the guilty as if he was innocent. This is what God does when He justifies sinful man. Man is guilty of sin and without reason or excuse, but God allows him to be delivered from its wages.

Redemption means buying back. Something is sold but is bought back or ransomed. Man sells himself to Satan by sinning. Justice demands that sin be punished, accounted for, and the price paid. But Christ has paid the price by His blood in man's stead, and man is redeemed. This is what it means to be justified before God.

Not by the Law of Moses

Paul began with reference to the Mosaic Law. People are accountable to whatever law is over them. Israel was

accountable to God under the law that God gave them at Mount Sinai through Moses. That law had several purposes. Paul says it gave knowledge of sin (verse 20). Sin is a transgression of the law (First John 3:4). The existence of the law proves that all do sin. None can answer in their own defense, and all mouths are stopped.

That law was a temporary measure to bring us unto Christ (Galatians 3:24). Christ fulfilled the purposes of the law and the prophets. *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am come not to destroy but to fulfill."* (Matthew 5:17). That law has been taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14).

The way of justification is not by the Law of Moses. It never was God's intention for that law to be the way of justification. It could never justify (Romans 3:20; Acts 13:39; Galatians 2:16; 3:11).

Even the prophets bore witness that the law was not the way of justification (Romans 3:21). In Galatians four Paul cites events recorded in the Old Testament and the Mosaic Law to show the relationship that exists between the Law of Moses and the New Covenant of Christ. The old law is like Ishmael and the new like Isaac, the promised child. As Ishmael was cast out so was the Law of Moses (4:30). It is the will of Jesus Christ to which men look for the way of justification. It is *"by faith of Jesus Christ,"* His system (Romans 3:22). None are justified by the works of the old law (Galatians 2:16). The reason the old law does not save is because the way of salvation is the way of faith (Galatians 3:11). The Law of Moses was a law of works and merit. One would have to live perfectly under the old law to be justified because that law made no provision for forgiveness without Jesus Christ.

Universal

Paul gives four chracteristics of the way of justification. It is universal in nature. Salvation is open to all, Jew and Gentile. *"For there is no difference."* All are in need of salvation because all have sinned. Ancestry, color, other differences among men are of no consequence when it comes to the way of salvation. All can be saved, but all must be saved the same way.

Conditional

The way of justification is conditional. If it was unconditional then all would be saved regardless of their attitude toward God and His Son. There would be no cause for being rightous before God or serving the Lord. What kind of God would God be if He treated goodness and evil the same way? Justification is conditioned upon faith in Christ and according to His faith or religion. It is not by faith only and the Bible never teaches it as such. But it is by faith. From other portions of the Bible we learn that saving faith is the faith that obeys. Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* But the point necessary to be learned here is that salvation, justification, is conditional. Man has his part and it must be met. Even then, he is not earning deliverance, but is doing what God says he must do to receive God's gift of salvation.

By Grace

Again, salvation is by grace (Romans 3:24). Grace is unmerited favor. Salvation is not by grace alone any more than by faith alone. But without God's gracious actions toward man there would not be any salvation. *"For by grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of work, lest any man should boast."* (Ephesians 2:8,9). Even though there are conditions to be met, salvation is given to man and man cannot boast of his own righteousness. He is dependent on God for his justification.

By Blood

Justification is made possible by the blood of Christ. God made Him to be the propitiation, having reference to the satisfactory sacrifice that appeases God's wrath against sin. A propitiation is something given in order to render something favorable that had been unfavorable. It is a matter of reconciliation between God and man. Christ is the atoning sacrifice.

John identified Jesus as the propitiation in First John 2:2 and 4:10. Jesus was the all-sufficient sacrifice (Hebrews 9:20-28). Hebrews 10:10, *"We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*

The all-sufficiency and extensiveness of the blood of Christ is shown in verse twenty-five where it is implied that the blood of Christ is actually the forgiving power for sins committed both

before and after the cross. The blood of Christ flowed backward and forward to those who had met the conditions of the law under which they lived.

Jesus is the Just One. Only He could become the justifier. Only He could meet the requirement of the Just dying for the unjust. This sacrifice was offered so the wages of sin could be paid and God could justify the offender, the believer in Christ. At the same time, the justice against sin was paid by the death of Jesus the Christ.

One Way

The way of justification is the only way to be made right with God. It is separate and apart from the way of meritorious works of the Mosaic Law. It is open to all who will meet the conditions. It is made possible by the grace of God which has been manifested through the shedding of the blood of Christ.

But of what value is there to you, reading friend, that God has given this great way of justification if you ignore the Christ that made it possible? All have sinned, and that includes me and you. You cannot be saved in your sins but must be saved from your sins. God has provided the way and that way is through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Will you obey Him and receive the benefits of His actions on your behalf? Will you repent (Luke 13:3); confess your faith (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:10); be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; First Peter 3:21)? When one does as God has prescribed, he will be blessed as God has promised. Until one does as God has prescribed, he is in sin and caanot be saved in that state.

† † † † †

CHURCH GROWTH

All faithful brethren want the church to grow, numerically and spiritually. But if the emphasis is on the numerical to the neglect of the spiritual, you have labored in vain. When the emphasis is on the spiritual and there is also increase numerically, you enjoy two-fold success. Priorities matters. Seek first things first.

Jesus, the Bread of Life

Christ was the master teacher and unsurpassed preacher. Some of His great discourses include the Sermon on the Mount, His teaching to Nicodemus on the new birth, His lesson on the water of life to the woman at Jacob's well, and His teaching to the apostles before His crucifixion. We want to study His sermon on the bread of life found in John chapter six.

Forty-six verses are involved in the background of this sermon, the sermon itself, objections that some raised, and the results of the sermon. Do you have your Bible nearby?

The day before this sermon Jesus had fed the five thousand, walked on the water before the eyes of His apostles, and the multitudes had come to Capernaum seeking Him. But their motives were not always the best. *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled."* (John 6:26). Jesus urged, *"Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him hath God the Father sealed."* (John 6:27). They asked, *"What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?"* (John 6:28). His response was, *"This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."* (John 6:29). His hearers were unwilling to accept that and asked for a sign of Him. Although He had already shown many signs, wonders and miracles they still refused the testimony and asked for more and more.

Manna

Jesus pointed to manna as a sign given to their fathers in the wilderness (John 6:31). Then He used this reference to bread, manna, which sustained the life of the Israelites in their wanderings as a place to begin His sermon on the bread of life.

John 6:32,33, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world."* Moses had not given them the manna, but God through Moses. The same is true regarding the *"true bread."* It is from God and is offered through the One *"which cometh down from heaven."* The

bread of which Jesus spoke was bread that would give eternal life. That bread was a person, *"he,"* which cometh down from heaven.

Upon hearing of such bread, His hearers quickly requested, *"Lord, evermore give us this bread."* (John 6:34). They were not yet attuned to the idea that Jesus was speaking of spiritual bread. Verse sixty-three says, *"It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."*

The Source of True Bread

Having shown that heaven was the source of the bread of life, He identifies that bread. John 6:35, *"I am the bread of life."* Obviously, this is a figurative statement like such statements as, *"I am the door; I am the vine; I am the way; I am the good shepherd; I am the water of life."* But Jesus shows how this *"bread"* is completely adequate, sufficient, fully satisfying, lacking nothing. Also verse thirty-five, *"He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."*

Christ continued His teaching as to how man partakes of this bread of life. It is by believing in Jesus and coming to Him (John 6:37, 40).

The reason Jesus is the sufficiency for life is presented in His statement of verse thirty-eight, which is a rather comprehensive statement concerning the mission of Jesus. *"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me."* Jesus often prayed, *"Thy will be done."* It was God's will that the lost be given opportunity to be saved. It is God's desire that all be raised in the resurrection unto eternal life. He is not willing that any perish (Second Peter 3:9). There is no question as to what God prefers for every individual.

Response

The response to this teaching was unfortunate. Some *"murmured"* in skeptism and disbelief. They rejected the claim of Jesus as the bread of life. To them He was Joseph's son. How could He say He was the bread of life and had come down from heaven?

Jesus taught how man partakes of the bread of life. John 6:44,45, *"No man can come to me, except the Father which*

hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they all shall be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."

Jesus had already taught that those that come to Him shall not be turned away (Verse thirty-seven). He had already shown that those who come to him do so by faith (Verse forty). Now He shows that none can come to Him unless they are drawn to Him by the Father. The way the Father draws men to Christ is through teaching and learning. Those that come are those that are drawn. Those that come are those that have been taught and have learned. Those that come, therefore, are drawn by the Father by being taught and by learning. This is the way that God draws mankind unto Christ. The appeal is by the Word.

"Faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17). *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."* (Romans 1:16). *"He begat us by the word of truth."* (James 1:18). *"Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."* (James 1:21). There is no salvation for anyone separate and apart from the Word of God. This is the means Deity uses to save humanity. We are *"begotten through the gospel."* (First Corinthians 4:15). Man is saved by the gospel (First Corinthians 15:1,2). The only way the Bible teaches that mankind can partake of the bread of life is by hearing, learning, being taught the Word of God. This is the way that mankind eats His flesh and drinks His blood in order to have eternal life. He consumes Christ into his own life. The gospel saves because it tells who is the bread of life, who is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. As the Israelite fathers ate manna in the wilderness and died, we have the opportunity to partake of the spiritual bread of life and live.

A Turning Point

This sermon proved to be a crucial turning point in the ministry of Christ. His acceptance and popularity, for the most part, had been on the rise until this event. But this sermon was a serious revelation. *"I am that bread of life."* (John 6:48). *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven."* (John 6:51). Unless a man eats and drinks Christ, there is no life (John 6:53-56). This statement is not a reference to the Lord's Supper because we do not eat the body and drink the blood of Christ at

the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a memorial to the body and blood of Christ. Christ is not referring to a literal and actual eating and drinking of His body and blood. But as we absorb Jesus into our lives, as we consume His ways and follow them, as we make His will that guiding light of our will, our spirit is nourished, and it is not we that live but Christ living in us. The failure to partake of Christ in this way spells spiritual death rather than spiritual life eternally.

But some were offended at this teaching. They either did not understand it, or just refused to accept it. They hardened themselves against it. Even many of His disciples rejected His claim and verse sixty-six tells us, *"From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked with him no more."* But they acted like a starving man turning his back on the only food that could give him life.

Question and Answer

It was at this point that Jesus asked His apostles a question. *"Will ye also go away?"* (John 6:67). It was Peter, as was often his case, that quickly responded, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."* (John 6:68,69).

They knew the source of life, and so do we. The living and true bread of life is Christ. They partook of him, and so must we. We rejoice that they did. But only I can partake of Christ to my benefit, and only you can partake of Christ to your benefit. The living bread is before us. The table is now spread. *"Whosoever will"* may come and live because of the bread of life.

† † † † †

BUSY, BUSY, BUSY

Certain seasons of the year are busier for some than at other times. Some folks stay running about full capacity most all the time. Everybody is busy doing something, even some who are busy at doing nothing. But make sure your "busy-ness" harmonizes with His business.

CHURCHES I APPRECIATE

You might think a gospel preacher would have respect and appreciation for every congregation. But why should he? Even the Lord did not. Just read the first chapters of Revelation. While He loved those people He was very displeased with them and did not appreciate what they were or what they were doing.

Personally, I have been fortunate to have had many opportunities to work with churches that deserve respect and appreciation. Not only is true of churches where I have worked as the regular preacher, but the many churches where I have been privileged to preach in meetings. It is impossible to say I have always appreciated all these churches. Some I really respected but they decided to go with the digressive drift and trend, adopt Bibles that teach false doctrines, or side with those who have abandoned truth on serious and multiplied matters. No, for such churches, their preachers and elderships, I have lost respect and appreciation of them. Truth is too important to continue to extend fellowship to those who war against it.

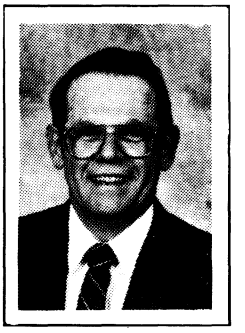
But there are many good brethren who are sound in the faith, who want sound doctrine, who are kind, benevolent, with a mind to work, with a missionary zeal, a concern for both the lost and saved. For these it is easy to have respect. They invite a preacher into their company and they allow, expect, even demand that he preach "*thus saith the Lord.*" They would not tolerate anything less or more. These are the kind of churches that faithful brethren, loyal preachers, not only love, but admire, appreciate and respect from the heart.

It would be wonderful to suggest that wherever you find a building with the identification over the door, "Church of Christ," that you would find people who respect divine authority, work and worship according to His revelation, and are in truth the church that belongs to Christ. Sadly, while this was true to a much larger extent a few years back, the inroads of innovations, compromises, departures and apostacies among the liberal and humanly legalistic elements have divided the church over and over again. You just cannot have that confidence by just considering what is over the doorway.

Brethren need to investigate churches before they extend fellowship to them. They should not be content to just "go along to get along" because error runs rampant among those once noted for their Biblical knowledge, faith and practice.

James W. Boyd

Thank You, Thank You, Thank You



JAMES W. BOYD

Do any of you remember Private Gomer Pyle on the comedy routine on television? It was a good, clean program with very few exceptions. One thing that always got me tickled was the way he would drawl, "Thank you, thank you, thank you." I feel the same way he expressed to so many of you who have spoken and written words of encouragement to me about ***A BURNING FIRE.*** Yes, it does take considerable funds and considerable work. But I am confident it is accomplishing considerable good. Brethren, we cannot always know just what may be accomplished for the cause of Christ by our efforts, great and small. But it is gratifying to me to know that something positive is being done, truth is being taught, others are enjoying and profiting from these labors. I just do not know how to "thank you" for your support.

Of course, we get some objections now and then. But they can be counted on one hand. They are offset overwhelmingly by the good things from faithful brethren.

So let me say along with Gomer how much I appreciate each reader.

* * * * *

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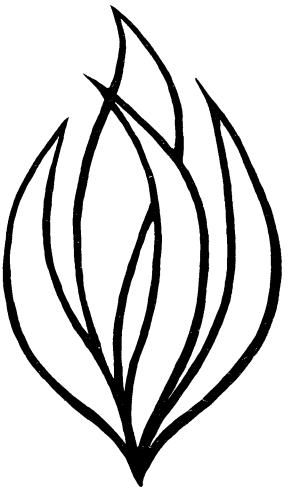

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME X James W. Boyd **NUMBER 4**

Has Your Home Been Robbed?

There is a master thief loose in the land, always at work, striking wherever he can. He picks our pockets, robs our homes, steals our most valuable possessions. He even lifts the spiritual seed from the hearts and minds of those to whom it is offered. He plants doubt, fear, error in its place. We know who the thief is and even many of the ways that he works. But too often we show slight concern about it.

This thief is so deceptive and sly, sometimes the theft is so gradual that those who are being robbed are not even aware of it. They go on about life so satisfied, as if everything is fine. They are so fascinated by the human solutions to problems, spellbound over the temporary and worthless offerings of the sinful world, that they lose sight of real treasure.

We hear much about burglary, larcency and homes being entered and property stolen. It is almost an epidemic in many places. But we all need to look about our homes. We may discover that we have been robbed, and have not even been aware of it. Precious things have been taken from us.

The Bible

Where is the Bible in your home? Certainly you have one somewhere. Nearly all homes have a Bible, don't they? It may well be covered with dust or other reading material because it is used so infrequently. It may be pushed back on some back shelf. You may as well not have one for all the benefit you get from it. Some people keep one around for emergencies, like sickness, weddings, funerals, or a visit from church people, especially the preacher.

But where is the Biblical influence in your home? Many homes are far more influenced by newspapers, magazines, journals, television, which often are not even fit to be seen and read, but are being consumed by the mind. Many homes have been robbed of the *"lamp unto our feet, and the light unto our pathway."*

Wherever the Bible is not prominently used in the home, ignorance of the will of God prevails. Confusion and

misunderstanding will reign where understanding is needful. Trust in God is displaced by trust in self, or some other human being or material something. The Bible has been robbed from many homes today and the result is disaster.

Worship

Where is the family worship in your home? "The family that prays together, stays together." This says more than we may at first recognize. Families that pray together show a common respect for God. They know what matters. Their values are in proper order. Prayer is one manifestation that the family is founded on something sound and eternal. Families like that seldom suffer the ravages of divorce, delinquency, hatred, quarreling, strife, bickering and separations. There is no force on earth more powerful to cement families than mutual love and respect for each other and God. Love for God keeps people loving one another. Families can take tensions and problems from outside and inside the home when they have their feet planted on solid spiritual truth.

Every home needs a two-way communication with God in Bible study and prayer. Most homes have radios, televisions, telephones with extensions, with all kinds of messages coming and going back and forth. Has your home been robbed of communication with God? Does your child know what it is to hear his father pray? Does he pray? Does he study his BIble, if of age to do so? Do you?

Values

Satan has really taken a deadly toll in many homes in disturbing the values of the home. The abundance of material things is often counted better than matters spiritual and eternal. Fun, rather than genuine joy and happiness, is sought. Seeking the praise and acceptance of the people of the world is the goal of many homes more than approval before God. Financial and other physical aspirations exceed the determination to serve God. Secular education is preferred to enlightenment of the soul. Money comes before morals. Pleasure is the name of the game with so many.

Little wonder that young people grow up confused and empty. Look at what has been taken from their homes. They hardly had a chance to see or know anything of real value. With

the home being little more than a filling station, both parents out making money, children neglected, the right and wrong according to God being ignored, how can anybody expect much more than what we are reaping in society today?

Discipline

The home that is without firm and kind discipline has been robbed. Adults need to practice self-discipline and the young need to be disciplined. To discipline is to train. *"The rod and reproof give correction, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."* (Proverbs 29:15). So many children are just allowed to physically grow up. They are not guided nor taught. Given no basic values, they are left to make decisions without the ability and knowledge to know how to make decisions. They do not even know what matters. How can they make intelligent and worthwhile decisions?

Character is formed by discipline. This involves more than chastisement, though this has its place. It is showing the child the way he should go. Words, accompanied by deeds, is the way to train. Some parents say so little to their children, do not even know what their children are thinking, who they are, where they go, what they are doing, with whom they run, and set such a poor example before them as well. Most of the fault for wayward youth lies at the feet of the parents of the home. So many have failed because of their own selfishness and greed and their children suffer and the home decays.

Authority

A home where there are no rule enforced is a home that breeds contempt for authority. The overbearing tyrannical rule will crush a child and turn him into a rebel. Also, the home that is lax and permissive will produce a leach on society and a shame to the home. What every home needs is the moral and spiritual guidance found from our Lord in the Bible. But many who are the authorities in the home think they are smarter than God and dismiss Him completely. So much of the problems of society and the home are brewed in the home that fails to exhibit proper respect and exercise of authority. Children either learn to respect authority or learn they can rebel against it. How is it with you and yours?

Thankfulness

Has your home been robbed of thanking God at mealtime? Has Satan removed that out of the way at your house? You may think this is unimportant, but it teaches a basic truth that God is the source of our blessings and thanksgiving to Him is expected and proper. It is not more than courtesy to thank those who give to you. We teach our young to be rude and uncouth to think that whatever they get is from our own efforts alone. Grace at meals gives glory to God. He deserves all the honor we can bestow. The least we could do is to thank Him at mealtime. But some families are like a pen of hogs, who just snort in eating and stuffing, giving no thought to the source of their blessings. Like the hog filling himself with acorns, he never looks up to see from whence they came.

Lord's Day

What consideration is given the Lord's Day at your house? More and more families consider Sunday just another day off from work to do as they please, go boating, play ball, sleep late, play golf, do anything you want. They never give God a thought even on Lord's Day. This is being taught in our society as the "in" thing. Even members of the church act like the worship services are an intrusion on "the only day I have."

Fruit borne proves the point. There was a time when people worshipped God on the first day of the week, spent time in spiritual thought, used the day for families and visiting and worship, attended to the affairs of the church, rested, gave themselves to good self-examination before God, and considered what really matters in life. But today, there is the constant blaring of sports, riotous living, even using the day to get more dollars in overtime. Merchandising is rampant. Even people who call themselves faithful Christians will absent themselves from the assembly of saints in the local church to have their good times. Some defiantly excuse themselves by taking the Lord's Supper with them as if this satisfies the teaching of the Bible. Such arrogant rebellion against truth is commonplace among brethren and it is wrong as can be!

We may not like the truth, but the truth is that the nation was a better nation when the stores were closed and ball games were played on Saturday. There is such a prepondrance of secular and sinful thought among people today that even attending

worship is considered odd. What a pity and shame! Has your home been robbed of properly using the Lord's Day? Does everybody at your house know that the first day of the week is the day of worship before everything else, that it belongs to God, that it is a time for studying His Word, showing love for each other, attending to the soul?

Maybe you heard about the preacher announcing a most important business meeting to take place one Sunday afternoon. It so happened that the matter had to be decided but it was Super Bowl Sunday. The members were so overtaken in the world that this posed a problem for them. The preacher announced the meeting for six o'clock sharp and reminded brethren that it was one of the most important meetings in the history of the church. But then he added, "In case of overtime we will postpone the meeting until next week." This is the mentality of many today. Their homes have been invaded by the world, even things that are not sinful in themselves have pushed the primary things into second place. As I was growing up, nobody treated Sunday like just some other day. Even denominationalists had more respect than that. Today, however, you hear and see all kinds of activities accompanying neglect for the way of God. Yes, there may be times when "the ox is in the ditch," but if that persists, you either ought to sell the ox or fill up the ditch. This "sign of our times" is one of disregard toward the Almighty. And at your house, how is it?

Real Treasure

If your home has been robbed of its spiritual treasures, do not you think it is about time that they are either recovered, restored and protected? Has not the way of Satan been eroding the firm foundation of spirituality in your home long enough? It is time you "put your foot down" on the devil's neck, rearrange whatever needs to be rearranged so God gets first priority at your house. We put all kinds of alarms, window latches, lights, signals and warnings around the house to protect our physical properties. This is useful. But do not you think you need to pay more attention to the warnings coming your way about the spiritual robbery that may well be taking place right before you?

We do not have any recommendation for some new-fangled device to warn you of the devil or to keep him out of your home. The only device we know is the one that has worked everywhere it has been seriously and genuinely applied. That is

a good and regular serving of the Word of God. It is strange that the very thing that Satan wants to take from us the most is what can keep him from robbing us at all. We need a Christian oriented set of values, family worship, respect for the Lord's Day, two-way communication with God, example, discipline, respect for authority, thanksgiving at meals, character building in the home. The home will do more along these lines when the church will teach the home to fulfill its mission. Then things will be protected and preserved. The church cannot take the place of the home, nor can the church very often overcome the home and what the home does to its members.

Members of the home, mostly the parents, that have allowed Satan to take away what matters from the home can get these things back there if they will. But who will? That is up to each one. Unless you get and stay busy at the task your home will continue to be pillaged until it is spiritually impoverished. Then you can think about for eternity, in hell.

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(from page 24)
interested in them and would like to do this and ask them to please read them. Offer to discuss anything with them, answer their questions, try to find answers to whatever objections they may raise, but get them into the Bible this way. One tract each month to ten souls can teach a lot of truth in a a year's time.

Get involved. Get involved in soul-winning. Try it. Your effort could mean the difference for somebody in eternity. *"Go, teach, baptize..."* is what our Lord commanded His apostles, and through them to us to take His message to a world that needs it.

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IT HAS ALWAYS PUZZLED ME

Here sits a congregation known to be digressive, liberal and constantly going off on doctrinal errors one after another. The preacher and elders all go along with just about anything except sound doctrine. And somebody says of one of the members, "But they are sound, aren't they?" If so, what are they doing giving support to such a congregation? Can anybody explain it?

Because of Baptism

The Scriptures teach that baptism is essential to salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; First Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27, and others). When we obey the Lord's command to be baptized we change our relationship with God. Whereas we were out of Christ and lost, at baptism we enter Christ and the company of the saved (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:47). It is in baptism that we meet the saving blood of Christ and our old sinful allegiances are cut and our new life in Christ begins. When one believes that Jesus is the Son of God, repents of his sins, confesses his faith in Christ, and is baptized into Christ for the remission of God, God adds him to His church, having washed away his past sins, counting him as His spiritual child, and the person starts toward heaven with the Lord.

But baptism also means other things. It means assuming obligations and responsibilities that he had not assumed before he was baptized. Surely, he was answerable unto God, but before baptism he had not decided to take on what God assigns him. While baptism is the final step one takes to get into Christ, it is the initiating step for the rest of life to live in keeping with the purposes and in harmony with the accomplishments of baptism.

New Life

Because of baptism the new Christian must walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-13). There is a new relationship that begins at baptism. He is now "*in Christ.*" The old life of sin is put behind him. At baptism he is given, as it were, a new and clean paper upon which to write his record of life. We assume the obligation to live a life in obedience to righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). This matter must be taken seriously.

The former life of sin, the old man, is put off and the new man is put on (Ephesians 4:22-24). Paul asked, *"How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"* (Romans 6:2). If one continued to live the same old sinful life after baptism that he lived before being baptized he would live inconsistently to the cleansing of baptism. Rather we are to abstain from evil (First Thessalonians 5:22), denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world (Titus 2:12). We are to be transformed, living sacrifices for God

(Romans 12:1,2). Again, this must be taken seriously.

Nothing is more jarring and reprehensible than a baptized person living a sinful life and in sinful relationships. Baptism for the remission of sins gives us a new life and we are duty bound to live a Christlike life.

Unity in Christ

Because of baptism we must work for unity in Christ. After Paul tells us that we are baptized into Christ, he added, *"For ye are all one in Christ."* (Galatians 3:28). At baptism we are baptized into the one body (First Corinthians 12:13). When baptized we are added to His church (Acts 2:47). The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23) and there is one body (Ephesians 4:4). There are many members in this body (Romans 12:4,5) but only one body (First Corinthians 12:12).

Paul corrected the Corinthian Christians for divisions that existed among them (First Corinthians 1:10) and taught them to be united. Paul told the church in Philippi, *"Only let your concersation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:27). Again, *"Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."* (Philippians 2:2).

If one allows himself to become the source of strife, division, dissension against the truth, being contentious, stubborn, demanding his own way in matters of opinion, with the attitude that demands conformity to him or he will ruin, lacking cooperation with his brethren, he has forgotten something significant about his baptism. It is the duty of every child of God to stand fast in the faith, and one part of that is to work for peace, harmony, oneness, togetherness, unity in the body of Christ based upon "*thus saith the Lord.*" So serious is it to create divisions by false doctrines and self-appointed opinions, Paul warned, *"Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them."* (Romans 16:17). Such do not belong in the ranks of the faithful. In a season of digression, such as has existed among brethren for several decades now, such people may well be more numerous than those who will talk in oneness in the truth.

Regarding Worship

Baptism means you assume the duty and privilege to worship. One who has never been baptized has the duty to worship God because he has the duty to be baptized and the baptized one must worship God. A nonsensical doctrine now is heard among brethren that everything one does is worship. Such false teachers do not understand the distinction between glorifying God in all they do and worship. All worship, properly conducted, glorifies God. But we also glorify God in our life and service which is not the same as worship. All worship is service but not all service is worship. This is so obvious that it seems nobody ought have trouble with it except there be those who want to inject into worship innovations unauthorized of God and lay the foundation for it by falsely claiming everything you do is worship.

Those baptized in Acts 2 worshipped (Acts 2:42). The Christian is the only one who has the right to call God his spiritual Father. How could a child of the devil call God his Father? How could one who has rejected the death of Christ properly observe the Lord's Supper? How could one who has never obeyed the gospel sing the songs that speak of obeying the Master?

But just as it is inconsistent for one who persists living in sin to try to worship God, it is inconsistent for one who has been washed clean by the blood of Christ to neglect, refuse or make substitutions to worship God. We are to be present at the assemblies of the local church (Hebrews 10:25), offering sacrifices of praise (First Peter 2:5), worshipping in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

Growth

Because of baptism we are obligated to grow spiritually. We are born into the family of God at baptism (John 3:3-5), and as surely as a baby is born is expected to grow, so we are to grow as a child of God. Growing is not an optional matter but a command (Second Peter 3:18). Nobody considers a newborn child mature. No recently baptized person is a mature Christian. Baptism is not the end of things, but the beginning.

There are certain things one must know in order to become a Christian. Doubtless many have not been sufficiently taught, have been dunked in water, without realizing the step they were

supposed to have been taking. But one does not have to know everything to start being a Christian. But he cannot be content to remain a babe, either. We are to feed on the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby (First Peter 2:2). To refuse to study the Bible is to refuse to take spiritual nourishment by which we grow in the Lord. This is why faithful preachers of truth urge brethren to be present at Bible study periods, worship servicves, gospel meetings, studies at home, correspondence courses, reading good and sound Biblical material, etc.

Hebrews 5:12-14 talks about those who should be teachers but have not grown, are still unskillful in the word, still babes, not able to take the meat and are still on baby food.

Not Everything

Do not misunderstand. Baptism is very significant and essential to go to heaven because the Lord made it a condition, an act of submission and obedience to His will. But let us not attribute to baptism what it does not accomplish. Let us realize the duties we assume at baptism. Baptism is not the all-time cure for all things for the rest of life. It has its most important place in God's scheme of things. But when one is baptized, he must realize that this places him in a relationship and situation toward God that imposes duties and responsibilities that he dare not shirk. Too many teach that we cannot fall, but, after baptism many involve themselves so little in their duties that they act like they think they cannot be lost.

In summary, because of baptism and being forgiven of sins we are to strive to live a life void of sin.

Because of baptism we are united in Christ and should work for the unity of the body, the church, on the basis of truth.

Because of baptism God becomes our spiritual Father and we have the privilege and duty to worship,as He has directed.

Because of baptism we are born again and are new babes in the family of God, but we also assume the obligation to do all things that are necessary to grow spiritually in the Lord.

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be sure to see the back cover

Before and After God

"And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in time past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ [by grace are ye saved], and hath raised us up together, and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:1-9).

Life and Death

We have presented to us two very opposite spiritual conditions; one of life and the other of death. These were the past and present states of those Paul wrote. The present state was life because they had been made alive or quickened. The past state was death because they were formerly separated from God. This has reference to spiritual life and death, not physical life and death, because the ones to whom the words were addressed were not physically dead. Spiritual death is caused by man's transgression of God's law (First John 3:4; Isaiah 59:1,2).

What is the difference between a trespass and a sin? In the long run, there is none. Both are violations of God's will and produce spiritual death. Some have reasoned that a trespass is a "minor" offense while that which is terned "sin" is a "major" offense. There is no justification for such reasoning. James 2:10,11 reads, *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law."* To some adultery may not seem to be as bad as murder. Surely, the immediate consequences may not appear to

be as evil. One takes a person's life and the other destroys the body and virtue of two people. But both are sinful before God and violators will be condemned by Him if they are not forgiven.

A trespass is a violation of commission. One can sin by failing to do as he ought (James 4:17), or by doing as he ought not. A trespass is the latter. In either case, one has transgressed the law of God and God holds him or her responsible.

Before Being a Christian

Paul talked about their condition before they became Christians. They walked according to the evil ways of this world and the way of the devil. They had a spirit of disobedience. They lived to satisfy their appetites and lusts, in sensuality, following their own will. When one is spiritually dead he is like all others who are under wrath and condemnation of God. *"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh... that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."* (Ephesians 2:11,12).

Peter described one's spiritual state outside of Christ in First Peter 4:3,4, *"For the time past of our life will suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries, wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot speaking evil of you."*

Again, Ephesians 4:17,18 *"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye heanceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, beling alienated from the life of God through ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."* Such passages define the spiritual state of those who have not yet come to Christ.

Now in Christ

But the ones in Ephesus to whom Paul wrote were in spiritual life. They had been brought over from the dominion of death to life. Like the ones in Colosse, they had been delivered from darkness and translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). They were no more servants of sin, but servants of righteousness, as Paul mentioned in Romans 6:16-18).

To enjoy spiritual life is the result of being *"being raised up with Christ."* (Verse 6). Romans 6:3,4 teaches we are raised to walk in newness of life. Ephesians 4:22-24 teaches that we put off the old man of sin and put on the new man. Romans 6:8,9 teaches that Christ was raised from the dominion of death to life.

Consider the above passage closely. *"Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."*

Romans 6:11, *"Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."* Second Timothy 2:11, *"It is a faithful saying, For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him."*

Spiritual life means sitting in heavenly places, that is, in a state appointed by the will of heaven, a most desirable state. We have been lifted out of the ways of sin and the guilt of it, and have taken our places alongside the Lord and eventually, if faithful, in heaven itself. The spiritual life is a restoration of a happy, favorable unity and relationship with God. This is the state in which one must be when he dies if he is to go to heaven to God.

How It Was Done

What brought about this great difference between spiritual death and spiritual life? Verse four of Ephesians two tells us, *"But God..."* Here is the difference between what WAS and what IS. God makes the difference. Without God the former condition of spiritual death remains. With God we see the difference between death and life.

In Ephesians 4:22-24, to which we have referred, Paul speaks about being *"renewed in the spirit of your mind."* He speaks of putting on the new man, taking a new nature of righteousness, holiness, one of God's own creation. This difference was due to what God has done. Man has gone from being lost in sin to being saved in Christ and the glory, honor and credit belongs to God.

In what way has God made the difference? It was because of His rich mercy and His great love for man. God's love and mercy made the difference (Ephesians 2:4,5).

How has His love and mercy made the difference? It was because of Christ. The love and mercy of God was manifested in Christ. *"But now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."* (Ephesians 2:13).

There is no separation of the love and mercy of God from the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We are saved by His mercy (Titus 3:3-7). He commended His loved toward us through the blood of Christ (Romans 5:6-9). Ephesians 2:16 teaches we are reconciled to God through the death of His Son. *"And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."*

God, loving man even in his sinful condition and spiritual death, granted unto man an unearned, unmerited, undeserved favor. God, by His grace and not by man's own acheivements, but through His Son, Jesus Christ, has provided the way of the rescue of man from spiritual death and paved the way for man to know and enjoy spiritual life. *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 6:23).

Man's Past

Even though spiritual life is a gift that God gives, man still has a responsibility to receive and accept that which God offers. Ephesians 2:8 tells us, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith..."* We appropriate unto ourselves the benefits of the grace of God that have been provided through the blood of Christ by faith. We are delivered from sin when we obey that form of doctrine delivered (Romans 6:16-18). Christ is the author of salvation, but to whom and for whom? (Hebrews 5:9). He offers to all, but only those who obey shall reap the benefits. The fact that man is to obey what God has told him to do in no way diminishes the fundamental truth that salvation is due to the grace of God. It simply shows that salvation is not by grace alone, as some erroneously teach.

Our faith and obedience in no way earns God's gift. Our faith and obedience is simply God's way for us to receive the gift He gives. Faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins brings us into contact with the saving blood of Christ, which God provided through His love, mercy and grace. We are his servants whom we obey (Romans 6:16). Even in our obedience, God is the One to Whom the credit belongs for man's salvation.

Now we can see more clearly the difference between spiritual life and spiritual death, and who makes the difference. It is a matter of BEFORE AND AFTER GOD. May these truths lend themselves to encouraging each one to believe and obey so the

gift of God can belong to them.

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The Seriousness Of Leadership

Some lessons run the risk of offending more than others. When you begin to talk about leadership, those who lead are often inclined to assume a very defensive posture and close their minds. Sometimes the families of leaders get terribly aggressive and hostile if anything is suggested that might cause someone to think their relative is not a capable leader. But let's face it. Much of the leadership in the church is far beneath the expectations of God and brethren. It is a serious problem in the Lord's church and has been throughout my years of preaching and long before that. But we must rise above personal pettiness and seek principles of truth regarding leadership in the church.

Every organization of people must have leadership, and the church is no exception. Of course, Christ is the head and through the inspired teaching of the Bible as given by inspired men we have our road map. But there are places of leadership that must be filled by men today. The governmental structure of the church calls for elders, deacons, preachers and teachers, and all these are people, just plain human beings that have to function in a capacity of leadership. We have more leaders than we might at first suspect. In addition to those named, and without special office, we have those who lead the congregation in song, prayer, who serve publicly in worship, who assume responsibilities that involvbe a number of other brethren. Each worker has his duty and influence. To assume a place of leadership, regardless of how "small" some may consider it, is a serious matter.

Need to Delegate

Moses once got bogged down trying to do more than he was

physically capable of doing and received advice to get help. He would remain as leader, but others would also lead in lesser capacities (Exodus 18; Numbers 11). When Moses was gowing old and a successor was being considered, Moses told God, *"Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd."* (Numbers 27:16,17). It was recognized that there must be leadership, and there are several levels of leadership.

"Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore, this saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them. Behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:1,2).

This is a divine warning of desolation, misery, sorrow and impending doom upon those who are leaders who did not prove themselves to be the right kind of leaders. Israel of the north had already fallen before Assyria. Judah of the south was in steep decline. The spiritual state of the people was deplorable. They were as scattered sheep, even worse than scattered because they have been driven away. Who was responsibile for all of this? God placed the burden upon the pastors, shepherds, the leaders of the people.

The Leaders

Who were these leaders? They were the priests that led the people in the rituals and gave the impression all was well because of the outward observance of forms of religion. But the manner of life of the people and priests made their observances an abomination before God.

Their leaders were also the prophets who prophesied falsely concerning good things to come in order to please the powers in office and pacify the masses of unsettled and sinful people. They told their hearers what the hearers wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear, just like a lot of preachers today. They failed to proclaim the truth and protect and preserve the spiritual welfare of people. They lined their own pockets with money, power and prestige. They were so like many today who fill pulpits and lull people into an unjustified security just so long as they get their pay, which too often is more than any man on

earth is worth. Preachers can be and have been bought.

Their leaders were also the princes, rulers and elders of the people who had authority. They shirked their duty, closing their eyes to evil rather than leading the nation into righteousness. They had not *"visited"* the flock, that is, provided and cared for them as their duty demanded of them. They were more concerned for themselves and their positions than they were the fortunes of the nation and the generations yet to come.

The Result

The result was that Judah had come to a sorry state of spiritual decay, ignorance, lethargy, complacency toward righteousness, committing sin without pain of conscience. They were on the brink of destruction, having wasted their talents and about to be overcome by their enemies. It was because of the reprehensible leadership that went before them.

James 3:1, *"My brethren, be not many of you masters* [teachers], *knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."* This might seem to discourage people from being leaders, but that is not the purpose of the passage. It is designed to provoke leaders to take their work seriously. Why? Because they have greater opportunities, heavier responsibilities, therefore, have more for which they must give account. To whom much is given, much is required.

Souls are dependent upon leaders being and doing what they ought to be. When the blind leads the blind, they both shall fall into the pit. Ezekiel was instructed to be a watchman. If the watchman failed, not only the watchman would suffer, but the whole city (Ezekiel 33:1-9).

Right Place but Wrong Person

Because leadership is such a serious matter, no person ought ever be placed in a work for which he shows inadequate qualifications. Men have been made elders and deacons and placed in pulpits for such reasons as having money, being popular, because of political back-scratching of those already in leadership, family ties, other such things, without proper consideration of the spiritual qualifications a leaders ought to have. The church always suffers, not just for a while, but for years, when that occurs in a congregation. There are few things worse in a congregation than having the wrong man in the right

place. The desolation lasts for years, maybe even generations. If an unqualified person is suggested for leadership, for God's sake and the sake of brethren as well as the man, do not put him in leadership. If such a man is already there, try to dislodge him without tearing up the whole church. He is, was, and will forever be a hindrance. We recognize this fact in every other realm of life, in factories, businesses, schools, teams, whatever. Why is that so hard to understand in the Lord's church?

No person ought to assume leadership that cannot and will not function. You may have heard the story of the football player named Leroy. The team was taking and sever licking and every runner was being smeared unmercifully. But the coach knew that Leroy was a good runner, and kept yelling to the team in the huddle to give the ball to Leroy. Time and again they gave the ball to somebody else with disastrous results to the man and team. With the coach still yelling to give the ball to Leroy, one player finally yelled back, "Leroy said he did't want that ball." Some want it and ought not be allowed to carry it. Others that can carry it often are not willing to do it. Neither one ought to be given the ball.

Pillars in the Church

Someone once defined an elder as a pillar in the church. He sure was. He held up just about everything anybody ever wanted to do. It may sound needless to say, but by all means should men be put in leadership who will uphold God's truth and who tell the truth. It may sound impossible, but some of the biggest liars I have ever met on this earth were serving as elders in the church. This I know for a fact. They will compromise God's truth to squirm around to have their own way and be acceptable to those around them. I have seen it happen time and again. It is required of elders to be able to convict the gainsayers (Titus 1:9), by the use of sound doctrine. How can one do that who is not acquainted with sound doctrine, but runs to his favorite (liberal) preacher, some college president, his wife, or some other "advisor" every time he has to take a stand? Surely, others can help him. But eventually he must learn the difference between truth and error and stand up and be counted for truth. So many just shy away and timidly, cowardly, refuse to even defend the faith. A leader must be able to stand for the truth, buy the truth and sell it not, defend it, fight for it, teach it, live it, and never compromise it.

A leader must be enthusiastic about his leadership role. They have to be out front. You cannot lead where you will not go. Leadership is not given to a man to honor him, as some must evidently think. It is to get a job done. Leadership is a work to do, not simply a position to hold. If a man cannot get behind a work, he sure does not belong out in front of it. No church can move forward with only brakemen and nobody knowing how to work the throttle.

Every leader, regardless of how "small" his lead, ought to be an example. He ought to attend the services faithfully. His attitude and spirit of cooperation ought manifest Christianity. He must be loyal to the local work where he leads. We cannot win battles with disloyal soldiers and we cannot win battles when leadership cannot show how the fight is to be waged. If a person cannot conduct his life as a faithful Christian, he surely ought to step out of the way when it comes to leadership. It is terrible to have some man who will not pay his debts to be an elder. It is tragic for some adulterer, or one with a foul mouth, to be leading singing or prayers. Sometimes dishonest men are leading the church. What can you expect people to think of the church in situations like that? This idea that some have to give a person a class or make him an elders and maybe he will start being faithful is the devil's folly, but often followed. "Let's make him and elder and maybe he will stop criticizing." What on earth gets into people's minds to think like that? Yet, that has been heard and obviously been done.

Time to Step Aside

When a man is hindered through health, family, business, whatever, from doing what he must do as a leader, why does he not show love for the Lord and His people to get out of the leadership? While none are perfect nor are expected to be, the brethren have a right to expect one in leadership to give the time, energy, effort, whatever it demands or let another take the reins. One of the greatest retarding factors to the stedfastness and aggressiveness of a church is a leader who will not function, whatever be the reason. The seriousness of leadership demands he either be at it or get out of it.

The Lord knows the value of experience. This is why older men of training and experience are chosen as leaders. Novices do not belong at the head of the line. Just as Christians are to grow, so are leaders. It is no disgrace for someone to be more

mature than you, but it is a disgrace to remain immature. The five talent man gained more talents than the two talent man, but both were blessed because both did what they could.

Sometimes a congregation is ahead of its leadership. Like the story of a man running through the streets and asking if the people had seen a group pass that way. When asked why he wanted to know, he responded, "I am their leader." Some leader he was! They were far ahead of him. It is no disgrace to be a one talent man if you are busy using your talent. But we ought not place a one talent man in a five talent job. Biblical qualifications for elders, for instance, are there for a reason. We have no right to set them aside to accomodate anything or anybody. When the work gets bigger than the leadership, the leaders ought to have the work at heart, secure help, or step down. But the sad story usually is that so many who lead think they have a divine title to rank and power and they hold it until they destroy everything around them.

Help or Hindrance

The problem so often is that the man who is a hindrance to the work does not recognize it. He needs to be helped to do a better job or given help to recognize he needs to get out of the way. We do not suggest "getting rid" of anybody. That smacks of a bad attitude. We are suggesting that the cause of Christ is a most serious business. A person is no more "once an elder, always an elder" than once saved, always saved. We do not endorse the view some have adopted to let elders serve for a year or two and then they are automatically removed. This would breed politics, cause some to ever be trying to win favor at whatever cost. Running for office is not the way. Some would be glad to remove sound, faithful men in order to bring their digression into the church. But it if far better to get the right man in the right place of leadership, whatever the level and duty, than it is to have to get the wrong man out.

Those who assume leadership may be assuming great opportunities to work for the Lord, or they may be taking on their spiritual death warrant. Leadership is a most serious matter. More care should be given to it.

† † † † †

Operation Involvement

This lesson is intended to plant in the heart two or three truths and suggest ways we can put these truths into constructive action. Unless we act on truth, truth will be limited in effect.

"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Bible students recognize Mark 16:15. Also, *"And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."* (Second Timothy 2:2). *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."* (Acts 8:4). These three verses have a common theme; namely, telling others the story of God's relationship to man and preaching the gospel of salvation.

Someone has said, "You are interested only as you are involved." That is certainly true when it comes to saving souls from hell. One of our deficiencies in the church today is the relatively small number of us involved in leading others to Christ. We often refer to this effort as personal work, but it does not fully express our duty.

There are many methods of teaching the gospel to the sinful world. Person to person is one way of going into all the world. It is a way of showing individual concern for the spiritual welfare of others. We do have the obligation to tell others of Christ. Without that knowledge, they cannot believe, obey and be saved. While some will not hear and will reject the gospel. there are some who will hear and heed if we take the truth to them. Regardless of what they do with the truth, we still have the duty to take it to them.

Too often we erect church buildings, teach classes, have preaching twice on Sunday, conduct Vacation Bible Schools, one or two gospel meetings a year, distribute printed material, make announcements, all of which we commend. But the attitude sometimes seems to be, "Well, here it is for them. Let them come and get it." We agree that they ought to come and get it. But most will not. We have to take it to them. "*Go*" is the very first command of the great commission Jesus gave.

Personal Work

This phrase has been coined, "I don't care how much you

know until I know how much you care." Personal contact is a way of showing we care, and offers an opportunity to tell the message others need to know about Christ.

Christ was a "personal worker." Christianity is a very personal matter. We shall stand before God individually. One soul is worth more than the whole world. Some of the great lessons of Jesus recorded in the Bible were taught to just one person, like the water of life to the woman at Jacob's well, the new birth to Nicodemus, salvation to the house of Zachaeus.

The early church were personal workers. Philip taught the Ethiopian (Acts 8(. Acts 5:42, *"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."* When persecuted and scattered they went everywhere teaching and preaching.

When in the better land,
Before the bar we stand,
How deeply grieved our souls will be;
If any lost one there
Should cry in deep despair,
You never mentioned Him to me.
You helped me not the light to see.
You met me day by day,
You knew I was astray.
Yet, you never mentioned Him to me.

No preacher or group of others can do what you can do. Each one needs to be involved in leading others to salvation. Can we be content to just invite them to attend our services and let them go at that? Maybe that is all they will let you do. But how many of us are trying to do more than that? We do not want to get the idea that going to heaven involves just being baptized and sitting down. We are God's watchmen and workers. Are we doing our job?

Why are we not more involved in personal work? Some lack knowledge and do not try. But you can tell people what you did to become a Christian. Knowledge is something that can be gained with study. You do not have to know everything to know something. Tell others what you know of the Lord.

Requires Time

It takes time and too many are too busy in too many things to

take the time to show concern for the souls of others. Are you not glad that others did not so occupy themselves that they never showed any interest in you? Are you not glad somebody encouraged you, taught you, persuaded you to obey the gospel? Why not do as much for somebody else?

Most of us possibly feel that we have "done our part" when we attend the services of the church, or extend an invitation. That is well and good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. No person can give himself or herself totally to one area of effort. But the sad truth is, many look to the preacher to do the personal work for the congregation just like they look to him to have the sermons and classes. Personal work is something all can and should do, if only we would.

We get discouraged when it seems that nobody is very interested in studying the Word of God. But it is our task to try to get them to listen. Be prepared for many to turn you down. But somewhere, someone, someday might be in heaven because you did not quit trying because some turned you down. Regardless of how the other person reacts to the gospel, we still have the duty to take the gospel to him or her. After we have done that, and tried to win the soul to Christ, then we are sad if they reject it, but we are glad because we tried.

Success

When you try, you cannot fail. This may sound like you should expect a convert everytime. We should. But that is not our point. Many times you will try, teach, persuade, and nothing seems to come of it. But even when you are turned down, you have not failed. You may not have reached every goal that you set. You may not have acheived everything you wanted. But you have not failed. Trying is a large measure of success. Trying means that you have obeyed a divine command to take the truth to another. That cannot be checked off as a total failure.

Some will be better at this type of work than others. Some are better preachers than others. Thankfully, men do not have to wait until they are the best preacher in the world before they try. We are not going to be judged according to what the other fellow does anyway, but according to what we do in relation to what we could have done.

If you cannot sing like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,

You can tell the love of Jesus,
You can say He died for all.

If you cannot cross the ocean
And the heathen land explore,
You can find a heathen closer,
You can find one just next door.

We doubt that anybody really disagrees with anything that has been suggested and taught here. But what are we going to do about it? We are trying to show interest in others through visitation programs, attending the sick, reaching absentees, the wayward and non-members. We do not want to neglect these dear people. But we do not have to have some high-powered, highly organized machinery and system for individual Christians to get busy winning souls. Possibly it is expedient to have someone constantly pushing the effort and reminding others to work; even helping them when needed. But this comes down to the individual Christian doing an individual task. What are we going to do about it?

Suggestions

You might begin by building a good tract library and giving tracts to others on a regualr basis. Some even have set up tract distribution points throughout the city where they live and have taken the job to keep them filled. This might well produce some personal contacts for additional study.

You might ask if you can visit a person in whom you have interest and when you get there ask him or her his thoughts about the church, Christ, sin, salvation, heaven, hell, the gospel, etc. Find out if he is interested, what he knows, what he needs to know, and let him know you want him to go to heaven. All of the efforts we can make, through the media, pulpits, classes, gospel meetings, etc., none seem to get to the people quicker than sitting down with them and sincerely discussing the teaching of the Bible.

Private Bible studies cannot be beat as a method of carrying the gospel to the lost world. But one point of emphasis this lesson want to make has to do with tracts. Would you send ten people one tract per month for the next year? First, you read the tract and know what you are sending. Tell them you are

(continued page 6)

Daniel Briggs Boyd



This fine young fellow was born October 9, 1989 to Stephen and Carol and is our seventh grandchild, the fifth grandson. He lives in McMinnvile with his parents, sister (Allison) and brother (Tyler). You can imagine the joy and excitement his arrival has produced for everyone in the Boyd family as well as Martha Corlew, his maternal grandmother. We and Martha are in full agreement that Daniel has wonderful parents and is a blessed child.

As is true with all of our precious children and grandchildren, our fervent prayers shall rise daily on his behalf as they have since the day we learned he was coming. What a wonderful child has come to us!

* * * * *

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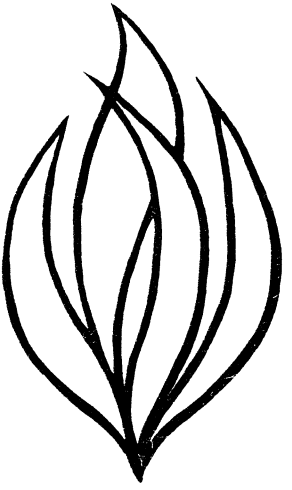

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME X James W. Boyd **NUMBER 5**

Apostasy, Reformation and Restoration

We wish to trace Biblical and historical facts regarding the church to help us appreciate the efforts to restore New Testament Christianity in our own sin-sick world. We want to explain why there is so much religious confusion and division and where all the many churches had their origin. We want to warn faithful brethren that if we fail to adhere to the faith of God and cease to demand Biblical authority for what we teach, preach and practice we shall bring another digression and apostasy upon future generations.

The church began on the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ (Acts 2). Guided by the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit the church grew and numbers were multiplied. Christians followed the inspired directions given them.

The government of the church of Christ was Christ as the head (Ephesians 1:22,23). Local congregations, independent of one another, organizationally, were formed wherever groups of Christian lived. These congregations were overseen by elders or bishops, served by deacons, preacher and teachers and all the other members making up the membership of the local church. Other than Christ as the head and the authority of Christ through the apostles as the rule, there was no ecclesiastical structure of the church.

The rule of faith was the inspired word of God, no more and no less. They walked according to the word delivered them. The message was the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11).

The worship was simple, plain and according to divine guidance. They partook of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, had music in worship which was always singing, gave of their means, studied God's word and prayed to God.

The terms of admission into the church were the same terms of salvation. The church is the body of Christ, the company of the saved (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23). What one did to be saved was the same thing one did to become a member of the church, the saved. There was no such doctrine that you did one thing to be saved and something else and different to join the church of your choice. That is a false doctrine promoted later by denominationalists who neither understand the New Testament

church nor have proper respect for the Biblical teaching concerning it.

The standard of measure for life was determined by the word of God. The brethren were tied together by a common faith and love, in the fellowship as sons and daughters of God, of one accord, one mind, the same doctrine, name, practice, as saints of God, imperfect but striving to imitate Christ. When they erred they were corrected. When they walked faithfully, they were commended. As we read of these corrections and commendations we can know what pleases and displeases God even today. The church grew and the gospel was preached to the whole world (Colossians 1:23).

Apostasy

But there came a falling away from God's truth. Space prohibits quoting all the passages that affirm this and predicted its coming. Some of the scriptures we need to consider are Matthew 7:15-20; Acts 20:28-31; Second Thessalonians 2:1-2; First Timothy 4:1-3; Second Timothy 4:3,4; Second Peter 2:1,2. Because of the prediictions of apostasy Paul urged, *"Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good."* (Second Thessalonians 5:21). John wrote, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God."* He continues by telling why he urged this. *"Because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (First John 4:1). This array of scriptures ought to forever silence the false teachers who teach that one cannot fall once he has been saved. Nothing is more misleading than such false teaching. The presence of warnings is enough to know the reality of the possibility to fall.

This divinely predicted apostasy did not occur quickly nor in a brief span of time, but over many years, even centuries. It gradually developed as all digressions and apostacies do. This is the reason so many are blinded to the reality of the drift of things today. They see only the here and now without considering the trends and directions taken.

There was a change in the government of the church. There was disrespect for God's arrangement of a plurality of elders over one congregation, and there developed one elder or bishop over a plurality of congregations. What digressive men devised was just the opposite of God's way. There finally arose five areas that were involved in a great power struggle for supremacy. These five were Jerusalem, Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria

and Antioch. Through a series of military and political events, these five were narrowed to two, Rome and Constantinople.

The "bishop" of Constantinople, John the Faster, in the year 588, declared himself the universal bishop. This angered Gregory the Great, "bishop" of Rome, who described such a position and title as presumptious, anti-Christian, blasphemous, infernal, diabolical, vain and bold. You get the idea that he opposed it. Yet, the sucessor to Gregory, Boniface the Third, laid claim to the title himself, and with the aid of Phocas, emperor of Rome, made it stick whereas John the Faster faded. Hence, we have the first Roman pope in the year 606 A.D. There was this gradual development of an eccelsiastical hierarchy and special clergy and priesthood of which the New Testament reveals nothing.

There was departure from the simple doctrine of Christ with the introduction of many human doctrines and superstitions, such as the sale of indulgences, religious holy days, relics, purgatory, holy water, celibacy for the priesthood, burning of candles, instrumental music, sprinkling for baptism, auricular confession to the priests, transubstantiation, and on and on.

There was the wholesale departure from the Bible as authority. Alongside the Bible was placed creeds, edicts of councils, popes, synods and traditions. Things reached the point that there was little to no similarity between what was then called "Christian" and what the New Testament described as Christian. This Roman Catholic power dominated the scene for many years. It is the period of history that historians call "the dark ages," but which Catholic historians call "the golden age of the church."

Attempts to Reform

Into this hideous religious tyranny and darkness came men like Martin Luther, a Roman priest. He strongly opposed the erros of Romanism and spoke out against them. He was certainly not the first to oppose the dictatorial rule of Rome. Before him were people called the Albigenses and Waldensians who lived four hundred years before Luther. They resisted the apostasy, but were exterminated, banished and persecuted out of existence. There was John Wycliffe, who translated the Bible for the common man. His action was so resented by the powers of Rome that forty-four years after his death his bones were dug up, burned, and the ashes scattered into a river. This shows how

intense were the actions of Rome against efforts to reform it and bring the Bible back as the guide.

John Huss, another Roman priest, was strangled and burned at the stake when he denounced Roman error in 1415. William Tyndale, in the late fourteen hundreds and just prior to Luther, gave the world a translation of the Bible the common people could have and read. For his efforts he was also strangled and burned at the stake.

But Martin Luther was the most prominent of those who attempted to reform Romanism that had become contaminated with almost every kind of doctrinal and moral error one could imagine. Partly due to his own courage and convictions and partly due to German warlords who sought deliverance from Rome politically, Martin Luther was able to oppose Rome and survive. He nailed ninety-five theses on the door of a Catholic Church showing the errors of Romanism. He also publicly burned the excommunication papers the pope sent to him. While he never left the Roman church, he made great attempts to reform that church. Because of his partial success, and his efforts, the movement that is called the Reformation Movement is usually dated from him.

Other great reformers were John Knox, John Calvin, Ulrich Swingli, John Wesley and a host of others. But the early efforts were slow to take hold and the breaking of the grip that Rome had on the world was difficult. But it gradually developed.

Confusion and Division

The results of the Reformation Movement are mixed. There was a breath of fresh air that swept over the religious world as people began reading the Bible and seeing the difference between what was and what ought to have been. But there was also the introduction of denominationalism with parties forming after this man, taht man, this doctrine, that doctrine, this place, that place. Division became the norm among opponents of Rome. Whereas Luther never wanted to establish another church, his followers did just that. Whereas the rule of the pope was displaced with many, the rule of other men took place. The result grew until it is evident that the Reformation Movement produced another gigantic error just as bad as Romanism. Protestant denominationalism has no more Biblical basis than does Roman Catholcism. Down through the years came the Lutheran Church, 1530; Presbyterian, 1536; Episcopal, 1534;

Baptists, 1611; Methodists, 1739; Congregational, 1581; until now there are literally hundreds of denominations, each with its own name, doctrines peculiar to itself, practices that contradict the Bible and other denominations, and, what is most serious, religions that have no foundation in the revelation of God but have come from the minds of men.

This division and confusion paved the way for atheism, humanism, skepticism, modernism,and a denial of just about everything that the Bible identifies as being of Christ. One of the tragedies today is how people generally have no Biblical concept of what Christianity is supposed to be. They look at Romanism and Protestant denominationalism and call that "Christian." But that is not what Christ established nor endorsed.

Restoration

In our land of religious freedom, where men could speak and write as they saw fit, a blessing that was often denied people in Europe under Roman and Protestant domination, honest and sincere people began to turn to the New Testament. They studied and learned how foreign all of that in the religious world really was to God's word. They took the Bible as the sole authority in religion just as the Bible demands. They began to called for people to *"speak as the oracles of God,"* and abandon their denominations for the church revealed in the Bible. They started what is sometimes called the Restoration Movement. James O'Kelley, 1792, a Methodist in Virginia and North Carolina, declared that the Bible should be the only guide. Independently, and unknown to him, there were men like Elias Amith and Abner Jones, New England Baptists, had come to the same conviction and denounced the divisive human creeds that governed denominations. Barton W. Stone of Kentucky and Maryland, a Pesbyterian, gave leadership to the movement of returning to the Biblical truth regarding Christ and His church. Later, Thomas and Alexander Campbell were prominent in writing, speaking, debating and preaching for a return to the *"old paths"* of New Testament Christianity. They urged all men to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. Authority was the crucial issue and these people cited the Scriptural claim for the Bible as authority.

From many faiths, different areas, emerged people of like faith and convictions, taking nought but God's word, planting the "*seed of the kingdom,*" the word of God, in the hearts and

minds of honest and good people who wanted God's word above the word of men, preaching, teaching, believing, obeying what the Bible taught, without addition and subtraction. They wore the same name as the early Christians, taught the same doctrine, formed the same governmental arrangement, upheld the same terms of entrance, stressed the same standard of life, preached the same truth. As Peter had command, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11).

Result

The result was the only result one can expect from such an effort. When the truth is sown in the hearts of people, heard, believed and obeyed, it produces Christians and the church of Christ. That is always the result. Not until men sow the tares of human doctrines can one produce denominations. Seed produces after its kind. The word of God produces the saved, the church for which Christ shed His blood (Acts 20:28). Wherever, whenever, whosoever will take God's word and that without addition and subtraction, without alteration and innovation, there will be Christians, the like and kind of the New Testament.

This is the plea of faithful churches of Christ today. It is one of life's greatest blessings to have the opportunity to uphold the truth of the Bible without the infractions of human doctrines. It is the work of restoring New Testament Christianity according to Scripture. The Bible claims to be God's inspired word, infallible, all-sufficient, inerrant, authoritative (Second TImothy 3:16,17), and it is the work of the church to preach and teach that word (First TImothy 3:15). It is the plea to go back behind the confusion and division of denominationalism, back behind the tyranny and dictatorial policies of Romanism, back behind the reformatory efforts of well-meaning men, back behind the apostasy that the apostles predicted, all the way back to the church of the New Testament that began in Jerusalem and then restore New Testament Christianity as the Lord delivered it. When people today will do what they did then, teach what they taught then, believe what they believed then, obey what they obeyed then, practice what they practiced then, they will be what they were then. What were they? They were Christians, the church, the saved, God's kingdom, the redeemed, children of God and His family.

Why should not the world have the opportunity to know,

believe and obey the truth without the soil of Romanism, Protestantism, creedalism, modernism, humanism and every other Satanic "ism" that has plagued mankind and damned his soul? We are of the conviction the world needs this.

We do not want another church, but the New Testament church, patterned according to that which is revealed in the Bible. God help us work for that, live for that, even die for that if need be. Our souls, and the souls of many that follow after us, depend upon it.

† † † † †

The Seven Ones

Lesson One

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all." (Ephesians 4:1-6). Our study of this text shall be presented in two lessons. We now consider the part that is certainly an admonition to those of us who are Christians.

The child of God is to walk worthy of the vocation. His vocation is his employment, his occupation, his profession, that which one does in response to a call to action. The Christian is called to serve God through Christ. Christianity is the imitation of Jesus and is to be the number one occupation of the child of God. Paul urges brethren to live up to that calling.

God Calls; Man Answers

Our call comes to us by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). The gospel is the good news of Christ. That gospel calls mankind to enlist in the army of the Lord that we might obtain glory. Learning that we are sinners and need the Savior, learning that Jesus Christ is the only Savior, we are called to

Him by His invitation to be saved. When we obey the terms of pardon as given in the gospel we thereby answer His call (First Peter 3:21). God calls and we must answer. He calls by the gospel and we answer by obedience. This call comes through the Word (Romans 10:17) rather than some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit, something strange, mysterious, better felt than told or a still small voice alongside some "experience."

Having responded to that call, we are to possess certain qualities, such as humility, gentleness, patience, a forgiving spirit, love. We are to spare no effort to keep the peace by maintaining unity. Paul makes a special plea for unity in verse three. Making this effort and keeping that as a goal will produce peace one with another. Peace is the resultof genuine unity and oneness. As men draw closer to God they draw closer to each other. Men can have peace with each other and not be close to God. But the peace that Paul urges is peace that results from unity because men are close to God.

Having made this plea for unity, Paul presents the basis of unity and the oneness of certain essentials of Christianity. Inasmuch as oneness exists in these essentials, we ought to work for oneness among ourselves.

One Body

There is one body. What did Paul mean by the term *"body?"* Colossians 1:18, *"He is the head of the body, the church."* First Corinthians 12:27, *"Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular."* This was written to the members of the church in Corinth. In this epistle of our text, Ephesians 1:22,23, *"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all thing to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."* The teaching is clear. The body is the church and there is one body, therefore, there is one church. Those who accept the teaching of the Bible have no problem with that even in the midst of the existence of many churches in the denominational world. We accept the truthfulness, power and authority of this teaching and reject denominationalism because of it. While many contend that one church is as good as another, Paul says there is only one. We believe Paul. True enough, one denomination is as good as another. But there is one body which is the church and it is not a denomination nor has kinship with denominationalism.

Our understanding is enlarged in Ephesians 2:13-16, *"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace, and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."* There is one church and there is to be oneness in the church among the saved that compose the church.

Prior to the cross the Jews and Gentiles were estranged, there being a wall between them. That wall was the Law of Moses. One race was chosen through which the Savior was to come. The others were *"aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."* (Ephesians 2:12). When Jesus died on the cross, that which divided them was removed (Colossians 2:14). The cross was the means of reconciliation among men as well as between men and God. This reconciled state is enjoyed in the one body which is the church. We are there united with God and brought into fellowship with Him and the saved. Peace among men and peace with God is in the church. It is here that men have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks (Isaiah 2:4).

The church has many members, but there is only one body (Romans 12:4,5). The church is composed of people; a people who have obeyed the gospel and walk faithfully therein. The glory of the church is seen in the fact that being in the body is the same as being in Christ. *"We being many are one body in Christ."* (Romans 12:5). We are baptized into one body (First Corinthians 12:13). We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). Being in Christ is important because salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). The saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47), which is the one body. There are no saved outside of the church of Christ. Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23).

While the religious world agonizes in discord and division, the Bible continues to teach the way of unity in the body, the church. This is the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17:21). Paul condemned division (First Corinthians 1:10). The inspired answer to division is the one body. Those who teach there is

one church teach truth. Those who teach otherwise teach error.

One Spirit

There is one Spirit. This is reference to the Holy Spirit, the One who is often referred to as the third person of the Godhead. To say He is the "third" person is not intended to relegate Him to a position of inferiority, but only to take note that three persons compose the One Godhead or Deity. It is but a manner of speaking of Him as is done in Matthew 28:19, 20 and Second Corinthians 13:14 where all three are mentioned, the Father, son and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was active in the creation (Genesis 1:1,2). *"The Spirit of the Lord moved across the face of the waters."* The Holy Spirit is active in the work of the redemption of man. He guided the apostles following the ascension of Christ as promised (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13ff). His guidance was through the word given (Acts 2:4; First Corinthians 2:6-8, 10, 12-13). He conducted the writing of the Scriptures (First Peter 1:20,21; Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Holy Spirit is active in every conversion, operating by and through the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, which was given by the Spirit.

We should also note that the Holy Spirit is not some powerful "it." Repeatedly there is the use of the personal pronouns with reference to Him. This designates Him as a person, with personality, a living being of Deity. Many false doctrines have arisen out of the misunderstanding that the Holy Spirit is only some kind of glorified, supercharged influence or power and nothing more.

One Hope

There is one hope. Our calling, having come through the gospel that was delivered through the Spirit, provides us with hope. Anyone without hope is to be pitied. Those who have hope are truly blessed.

Paul wrote, *"For we are saved by hope."* (Romans 8:24). There is the necessity of remaining faithful having once come to Christ. The hope that is extended to us keeps us motivated to remain faithful and in this way we are saved by hope. Hope is a gift from God (Second Thessalonians 2:16). It is called the helmet of salvation (First Thessalonians 5:8; Ephesians 6:6). The Lord has given exceeding great and precious promises

(Second Peter 1:4), and we expect the fulfillment of these promises that God has given to those who come to Him through His only begotten Son. Destroy the hope of the Christian and you destroy the appeal of Christ.

Our hope is not on material things, but spiritual. While we are promised God's providence in that which He sees we need (Matthew 6:33), we have not been promised luxury and material wealth. It is a glaring and materialistic error of some religious charlatans that would extend to mankind the idea that serving God will necessarily get them a bigger house, nicer car, finer clothes and more money from a better job. This is rank materialism and contradicts what the Lord promises.

The hope of the Christian transcends the fleeting, temporal, unstable, perishable offerings of this world. Our hope is not so small, limited and confined (Matthew 6:19). Our hope looks upward and outward, beyond the tribulations. troubles, frustrations, woes, temptations, sadnesses and hurts of this earthly life. "Our hope is built on nothing less that Jesus' blood and righteousness." Our hope is that after the battles of this life are over, we shall live eternally with God and the redeemed in heaven for ever and ever with end, where there is nothing to mar our joy. It is this hope that keeps our determination alive and fresh. We know that with God we can overcome the world, and all that would seek to destroy us, even death and Satan.

Paul had this hope in his heart. *"For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."* (Second Timoty 4:6-8). The same hope that burned so intensely within him, burns in the hearts of faithful Christians today. It is that hope that encourages, strengthens, motivates God's people. It gives us power to endure and the resolution to remain loyal and stedfast in faithfulness. Yes, the heavely home, the hope of the soul, sure and stedfast, is the one hope of which Paul writes by inspiration (First Thessalonians 4:13ff). The remaining four "ones" shall be discussed in the next lesson.

† † † † †

The Seven Ones

Lesson Two

This is the second of a two-part study of the seven ones that are listed by Paul in Ephesians 4:1-6. We have considered the first three, plus the opening admonition to the Christian to develop certain characteristics and acquire certain qualities necessary to walk or live as a Christian ought.

One Lord

There is one Lord. The word *"Lord"* means Master. This might have been very strange to hear by people who were accustomed to having many masters, lords, gods, and worshipping them. The Ephesians had a goddess, the idol Diana, that they worshipped more than any other of their gods.

God has crowned His Son as King of kings and Lord of lords (First Timothy 6:15). This passage shows that if Jesus is King, He is also Lord and vice versa. Inasmuch as there is one Lord, and Jesus is that Lord, then it follows that Jesus is also King, now, and out goes the false doctrine that teaches He has not yet established His kingdom. This very moment Jesus is ruling and reigning over His kingdom as King.

The Christian has no other Lord that he serves. God has not appointed nor allowed any earthly dignitary nor heavenly host to even so much as represent the one Lord as to share His rule and authority. At this moment, Christ is at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13; Colossians 3:1). This phrase designates the highest rank and authority, unsurpassed by any other and equaled by none. Jesus is as Peter announced on Pentecost, *"That God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ."* (Acts 2:36).

This being true, we dare not exalt any above Him. The Humanistic heresy that exalts "man as the most" is contradictory to Christianity. We dare not trifle with the word of the King. We must respect His authority (Colossians 3:17). There is not any command that we can consider optional and unimportant. There is no promise or warning that we should not heed. He is Lord of all and there is the one Lord, Jesus the Christ.

It is this same Lord before whom we shall stand in judgment and be judged according to His words (John 12:48). While the

world struggles over what shall be religious authority, Paul settled the matter here in the affirmation that there is one Lord.

One Faith

There is one faith. How can that be, seeing that there are so many faiths in the world today? Is not that terribly narrow? We must admit that it is narrow. But truth always is narrow. The statement of Paul is a great distance away from what most believe, even many who call themselves Christians, but who really are just members of denominations of which the Bible never speaks. Often people are heard to ask, "Of what faith are you?" They ask as if one was as good as another, or as if God approves more than one. The world is very mixed up on religious views because people have not believed this statement of Paul that there is one faith.

The world, and its leaders, will advise, "Choose the faith of your choice." But never did Christ nor those authorized to speak by His authority or on His behalf teach such a thing. So many have just accepted the idea that we have a choice and they never question the propriety of it. What people need to be encouraged to do is to seek God's choice and follow that. The scripture teaches there is one faith.

Jude three urges us to contend for THE faith. Paul said he had kept THE faith (Second Timothy 4:7). THE faith is God's one great system, plan, program, scheme of redemption, the gospel, the doctrine of Christ. This is not of man's origin (Galatians 1:11,12), but for man's benefit. That faith is THE faith of which Christ is the author.

This means that Islam, Judaiam, Buddaism, all the other religions that are found in our world are not of God. One cannot be faithful to the religion of Christ and contend that anybody can reach God through any other faith. This includes Masonry as well as other religions some try to follow alongside the religion of Christ. Man's desire to please himself and his neighbor has often caused him to compromise this truth, but this truth cannot be changed. God has spoken.

There are those who would contend that the faith of Christ is the only faith but would at the same time contend that all the various denominational faiths are acceptable before God. The burden of proof that this assumption is true rests upon those who so contend. Show it from the Bible! Paul said there is one faith. What right does anyone have to say there are more?

One Baptism

There is one baptism. Inasmuch as seven baptisms are mentioned in the Bible, it may sound strange to read that there is (present tense) just one. But this means there is one baptism that God now approves, expects, autho izes and commands. There is one that is operative. One does not allow for more than one. Regardless of how eloquently one might argue for more than one, he is still confronted with the plain, positive and easily understood statement that there is one baptism.

The Bible talks about the baptism of the Israelites in the cloud and sea, which referred to their crossing of the Red Sea. It mentions the baptism administered by John the Baptist as a part of his work as the forerunner of Christ, baptizing those who looked for the coming Savior. There was the baptism of Jesus personally at the hands of John. Another baptism applicable to Christ was His baptism of suffering, baptism being used in a figurative manner. Jesus taught the baptism of fire, which is the eternal punishment and yet to come upon the lost. He also promised His apostles the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which took place on Pentecost. He commanded the baptism of the Great Commission, which was water baptism, into Christ, for the remission of sins, by His authority, and to last until He comes again. These seven baptisms are all in Scripture.

At the time the apostle wrote, *"There is one baptism,"* the baptism that was being preached and practiced was water baptism, in the name of Christ, into Christ, for the remission of sins, into the body of Christ, and a burial. (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:27; First Crinthians 10:13; First Peter 3:31; Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4).

The one baptism is the baptism administered by men, not the Lord, as was the case with the baptism of the Holy Spirit and will be the case with the baptism of fire.

We might spend just a moment on the contention that the one baptism is the baptism of the Holy Spirit because some claim to be baptized of the Holy Spirit now. They also contend for water baptism. That makes two baptisms, so something is amiss already with their doctrine.

Possibly a brief comparison between the baptisms will clarify somewhat. Holy Spirit baptism was never commanded, but promised. Water baptism of the Great Commission was commanded. Holy Spirit baptism was to be administered by Christ. Water baptism was to be administered by man.Holy

Spirit baptism is not essential for salvation. Water baptism is. We cannot escape the fact that only the apostles were promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit and they were the only ones to receive it. But the baptism that was to be preached to all included everybody for all neded to be saved.

Neither is there any room for sprinkling, pouring, or "triune" baptism in the New Testament. Baptism is immersion and all agree that baptism is immersion. Men have added substitutes to what God has authorized, but when you add these substitutes you add other baptisms. The Bible says there is one.

Like the other "ones" mentioned in the text, the statement that there is one baptism is not difficult to understand. It is just a matter of whether one believes the Bible or not.

One God

Finally, there is one God. This brings up the subject of idolatry. An idol is simply something or someone that is put before God. When God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, He said, *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."* (Exodus 20:3). Whenever Israel did turn to other gods they received God's wrath and punishment. Paul told the Thessolonian Christians *"how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."* (First Thessalonians 1:9). Pagans have fashioned for themselves gods of every sort, even *"changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things."* (Romans 1:23). They *"served the creature more than the Creator."* (Romans 1:25). Paul preached to the Athenians, *"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things... Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."* (Acts 17:24,25,29).

We might be inclined to think of idolatry only in terms of some image of paganism. Certainly this would be idolatry whether in the African jungle, an oriental temple, or a Catholic cathedral. But whatever is allowed to come between us and God becomes our idol. It might be our quest for pleasure, drive for power, prestige, wealth, etc. Even things that are good in themselves

and not evil can be allowed to take first place with us, such as our families, sports, businesses, vacations, etc. Many people will displace God in their lives, sometimes for a while and sometimes permanently, in order to lay hold on the paltry and temporary offerings of this world.

The one God means one Deity. Deity is composed of three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These three are one Deity. That there are three persons in the one Deity or Godhead (Godhood) in no way contradicts the teaching that there is one God. The term *"God"* in our text is probably reference to just God the Father inasmuch as the Lord (Son) and Holy Spirit had already been specified. But God often refers to all persons of Deity, the Godhead or Godhood. *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three agree in one."* (First John 5:7). All three persons are addressed as Deity in the Bible and we recognize this truth.

Foundation for Unity

With these seven "ones" we have the basis for unity. It is a sin against God and man to promote division by teaching contrary to the doctrine of Christ (Romans 16:17). Everything about His doctrine falls into one of these seven categories. Unity is not acheived through negotiation and compromise, but through surrender to the will of God. Peace with God is ours as we surrender to His will. Peace among men can be attained only as men surrender to the revelation of God. Of some matters, Paul stoutly affirms, *"There is one..."*

† † † † †

that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." (John 12:48). His words shall be the standard by which our lives shall be weighed and measured. *"Never man spake like this man."*

Therefore, we plead that each one hear the sweet voice of Jesus as He softly and tenderly calls us to Him. Hear Him as He says, *"Come unto me... I am the way."*

† † † † †

Never Man Spake Like This Man

The Bible includes the words of many great people. They are greater than most people because many were godly people, led by God, like God in their behavior. But there was One who spoke that was different from all the others. He had a different sound than what man had ever heard before Him. He stands out above all the rest. Jesus spoke as men had never spoken.

"And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done? The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him, and the Pharisees and chief priests sent officers to take him." (John 7:31,32).

The people had mixed reactions toward Jesus. *"Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him. And some of them would have taken him, but no man laid hands on him."* (John 7:40-44).

Officials sent officers to take Jesus, but they returned without Him. When asked, *"Why have ye not brought him?"* the only answer they gave was, *"Never man spake like this man."* They had been overwhelmed with what they heard and how it had been delivered.

Different

What was it about the sayings of Jesus that made them so distinct from all others? Jesus was not outstanding because of His fashionable clothing, or riches, or political power. He did not attract people to Himself because of His physical appearance. Isaiah 53:2 said of Him in prophecy, *"He hath no form nor comeliness that we should desire him."* His appeal was not through high education of this world or academic learning. So many today are impressed with various speakers because of the string of academic degrees they have attained. Do we not realize

that some of the world's biggest fools have such things because they deny God? So many of the problems of digression and apostasy that are attacking the church and the doctrine of Christ today are coming through the seminary trained, collegiate influences from within and within the church. We ought not be swayed by those who would have you believe their "superiority" because they have academic degrees. Many of us have them as well, but so what of that? As often as not, getting those degrees has so stained a person that he is not near as sound in the faith as those who have simply studied the Book.

Jesus did not get attention by being a good actor or pretender. But it was because He had something to say and because of the authoritative way that He said it. He spoke as the Son of God that He was on this earth.

No one had ever spoken with such authority as did Jesus. Men had spoken FOR God, with God guiding and inspiring their words. Their authority had been delegated to them. But none had spoken AS God for none could. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, *"It hath been said... but I say unto you..."* At the end of His sermon it is written that He taught as One having authority (Matthew 7:29).

The Messiah

When Jesus and the Samaritan woman had a conversation, we read, *"The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ. When he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he."* (John 4:25,26). Again, *"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."* (John 8:12). In verse 23, *"Ye are from beneath, I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world."* Verse twenty-eight, *"When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things."*

After His ascension into heaven the apostles spoke in His name and by His authority. He had promised them the coming of the Holy Spirit who would guide them, teach them, bring all things to their remembrance (John 14:26). When Paul taught he said he taught the commandments of God (First Corinthians 14:37). The authority of the apostles was and is real because authority was delegated them from the true source of authority,

Jesus Christ. They were the ambassadors of Christ (Second Corinthians 5:20) and the *"earthen vessels"* (Second Corinthians 4:7). Their authority was derived from the Immanuel. *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* (Colossians 2:9).

His words produced divine results. There was power in His words. He could, by speaking, still the tempest, calm the elements, heal the sick, give sight to the blind, let the lame walk, the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak. Such evidence was presented to John the Baptist to reassure him that Jesus was the Lamb of God.

But there was also tenderness, love, compassion in the speaking of Jesus as He spoke men's sins forgiven, encouraged the weak, sympathized with the sorrowful. The power of His word is seen when He said, *"Lazarus, come forth,"* and Lazarus came forth from the grave alive again.

None before Him nor since could speak with such complete power and produce such results as did Jesus. Never man spake like this man.

Even though His words were divine and powerful, there was a simplicity about them. Some seem to think they are called upon to display their learning rather than acheive the learning of their hearers. Two listeners were attending a lecture and listened for a while, until one turned to the other and said, He sure must be smart. I cannot tell what he is talking about." Two others were listening and discussing the speech and the speaker and one asked, "What is he talking about?" The other responded, "He does not say."

It is said of the preaching of Christ that the poor had the gospel preached to them and the common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). His words were such that Isaiah prophesied of His message, *"the wayfaring man, though fools, shall not err therein."* (Isaiah 35:8).

Real Learning

Away with all of this parade of worldly learning by those who preach as if that matters. Bring more of the way and manner of Christ and Paul. Paul said, *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in*

much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (First Corinthians 2:1-5).

With authority, power and simplicity of His speaking, His words were made vibrant because they were firm, right to the point, precise, sometimes even stern. Some feel firmness and kindness cannot exist at the same time. But Jesus demonstrated both. Sternness may reveal greater compassion, even compassion sufficient to cause one to speak in ways he might not prefer, but which are necessary to accomplish the needed good of the hearer. Jesus spoke kindly, but firmly, even sternly.

How He Did It

We sight as examples for the reader's investigation, space prohibiting copying the long texts here, Matthew 21:13; 23:13;33; John 8:43-45. Jesus used words that were fierce and firm when the occasion demanded it. But they were to preserve and save, not to destroy anything but what was evil. We can see why those who heard Jesus came away saying, *"Never man spake like this man."*

But Jesus was different, not only because of His manner, authority, simplicity, firmness and kindness, but also because of the subject matter of which He spoke. He spoke of God as no other had spoken of Him. He claimed God as His Father. *"I and my Father are one."* (John 10:30). He claimed God sent Him and He was the Christ. *"I am one that beareth witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me."* (John 8:18). He taught of God as being perfect and the giver of good gifts. He taught God's providence and care and His nature. This was in order to permit man to know the Father, how God rewards and punishes, that God is a God of live and wrath, mercy and justice.

He taught about man as none other had taught. He taught the value of the soul being worth more than the whole world. He taught the proper relationship between husband and wife, parent and child, neighbor to neighbor, citizen to government, and even behavior toward enemies. He presented man's responsibility to God and the duty to obey God. He offered the solution to the problems that confront and confuse mankind. He came to teach and show the right way to live and how to be

prepared for death. *"Never man spake like this man."*

His most glorious message was the way of salvation from sin. He told of its cost. *"The Son of man must be lifted up."* (John 3:14). God gave His only begotten Son out of love to save man (John 3:16). Salvation can be ours upon obedience (Hebrews 5:9). *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."* (Mark 16:16). *"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."* (Matthew 11:28). He taught the new birth (John 3:3-5). He brought hope to sinful and undeserving humanity. He offered forgiveness and heaven. He cited Himself as the way. *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6). *"Never man spake like this man."*

Far Reaching

He also taught about life beyond the grave. Centuries earlier Job had asked, *"If a man die, shall he live again?"* (Job 14:14). Christ answered, *"But whosoever drinketh of the water of life that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."* (John 4:14). *"I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall not hunger... I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man shall eat of this bread he shall live forever... I live because of the Father, so he that eateth me, he shall live because of me."* (John 6:51-57). *"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also."* (John 14:1-3).

He not only taught life after death, but the resurrection of good and evil (John 5:28,29). He died but was raised and became the first fruits of them that slept (First Corinthians 15:23). Those that are His shall be raised to be with Him in heaven for ever and ever (First Thessalonians 4:13-18). For these and other reasons we can say as did those of long ago, *"Never man spake like this man."*

But there is one more reason we wish to mention why He was different from all others who had spoken or shall ever speak. We shall be judged by what He said. *"He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words hath one that judgeth him; the word*

ARTICLE: IS LOVE A CAMOUFLAGE?

A great amount is said of "love" and the need for "love," but often the cry for "love" flows from people who seem to use "love" as a deceptive device for Satan. Some have a completely false and distorted concept regarding real love as taught in the Bible. They think it is simply a sentimental, smiling, pleasing and congenial association with others. Evidently, some think love means, "Do not ever cross me on anything I say or do because if you do it shows you do not love me." Others confuse love for people with love for whatever people do. They are not able to see how a person can hate sin and still love the sinner. But this is precisely what Jesus did (Romans 5:8). Bible love is seeking the other's highest good whatever might be the cost to oneself.

So often there are those who like to accuse others of a lack of love when the truth is the one they accuse possesses love like the Bible teaches. What the accusers generally think is that because one hates sin he must not have love for people. The accuser likes to say a brother does not have proper Christian love for others when he opposes error when what he really wants is to be accepted regardless of what he says, does, thinks, believes or practices.

Unfortunately, there are some openly pious preachers who like to exhort brethren to love one another (and this should be the case), but at the same time show an obvious disregard of love for the truth, the purity of the church, sound doctrine, and even brethren who are doing their best to manifest loyalty to the truth of Christ and encouraging those in error to repent. Sometimes people are accused of lacking love but the truth is they know the only way to show love for the lost is to show him the way to be saved and that he is lost until he obeys the will of God. Pleasing a sinner in his sin is not love. Paying no attention to sin is not love. Trying to be accepted by never condemning sin is lack of love. Such may win friends among the sinful, in and out of the church, but cannot make one acceptable before God. Providing a haven for those who rebel against truth is not a manifestation of real love. It is treason to the cause of Christ and treachery to the lost soul.

Such "love" is only a camouflage of a subtle device of Satan to persuade those in the Lord's church to ignore and tolerate sin and doctrinal error so the world will find us more appealing. We urge brethren to never allow such to be named among you.

James W. Boyd

ARTICLE: TACTICS OF LIBERALS

We know there are those who promote and defend liberalism. They are plenty in number. We know faithful brethren must stand for the truth against them. But we can better withstand them when we recognize the tactics they so commonly use. They betray themselves by the tactics they adopt. Their tactics seem to fit a pattern of behavior. Consider a few such tactics.

1. If you write them they will likely ignore you. Seldom do liberals answer letters which suggest their liberalism. If they answer at all, do not expect them to deal with the subject at hand because they will pass over it.

2. If you talk to them directly have witnesses because it is not uncommon for them to misquote you and misrepresent you to serve their own unholy purposes.

3. They object strenuously to anybody who objects to their liberalism. They seemingly reserve the right to object solely for themselves. All others are troublemakers with sinister motives.

4.They will ignore the evidence of liberalism even when presented to them or made available to them by an article, tape, or some other irrefutable evidence. They prefer to neither read nor hear the evidence in order to maintain an aloofness and not be required to take a stand one way or the other. They are constantly "studying the matter," but not really. They have already decided the liberal way and often do not wish it known.

5.When pressure mounts, they may begin to act, such as trying to bring pressure on faithful preachers or others who oppose and expose their liberalism. They complain to the elders of such preachers hoping the elders will be without backbone and clamp down the faithful preacher. They brand faithful churches as "anti" and try all kinds of intimidations.

6. They talk much of love, kindness, consideration and exhibit such characteristics less than any people on earth.

7. At all costs they avoid dealing with the principles involved but will soon resort to personal and judgmental remarks of a derogatory nature regarding the expressions, attitudes, manners, tones, etc. of those who resist their liberalism. Distraction from

the issues at hand is a favorite manuever.

8. They will attempt to sidetrack any discussion or inquiry into unrelated and irrelevant matters in order to draw attention away from their liberalism that they promote and defend.

9. They will go to great lengths to find some fault somewhere in anything at all with those who oppose their liberalism, obviously thinking if they can find a wrinkle in faithful brethren this justifies their liberalism. If and when they find some fault in somebody, all that proves is that there is some fault in the one who recognizes their liberalism. They are still servants of the devil in promoting and defending liberalism.

10. After all else fails, rather than repent, which is the last thing on earth their pride would ever allow them to do, they will turn again to their original tactic to ignore the whole thing and keep right on going down the same path of liberalism they so adore.

Brethren who love the Lord, His Word and His church more than life itself are very well acquainted with these and other sinister tactics of deception so consistent with a liberal mind. You can be sure that those who behave, or misbehave, themselves in this fashion are only showing themselves for what they really are. They are liberals and should be noted as such.

Years ago, when Ahab met Elijah, he tried so hard to label Elijah as the troubler of Israel (First Kings 18:17). Elijah gave way to such a thing not for a moment. He rather said, *"I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house..."* Then he went on to tell Ahab how he had been the real trouble, *"...in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."*

So it is with liberals who have their actions and words called into question. They act like the robber who blamed all his trouble with the law on the night watchman who caught him in the act of stealing. He never considers himself to be the troubler that he is to the cause of Christ. Beware, brethren, of such tactics of liberal people and those who would support them. Be strong and fight for the truth.

James W. Boyd

How Do We Hear?



JAMES W. BOYD

We are warned in Scripture to take heed what we hear (Mark 4:24) and how we hear (Luke 8:18). We may not always be able to control everything that might fall on our ears, but much of it we can. And whatever we do hear we can take care how we hear, that is, what effect it might have on us. We can use self-control and self-discipline regarding our reactions to such things. But do we hear any better than the next fellow? What I am asking is whether we pay any attention to what we hear more than others even when we hear the gospel truth of Jesus Christ? Do we respond any more favorably before God than those who reject His Word altogether?

Yes, most would say they hear better when it comes to hearing God's Word. We often criticize those in religious error for just not paying real attention to the revealed truth. This criticism is justly given. But when I hear the commands to assemble faithfully being taught, and see brothers and sisters act as if such a command was never given, it does make one wonder how we hear.

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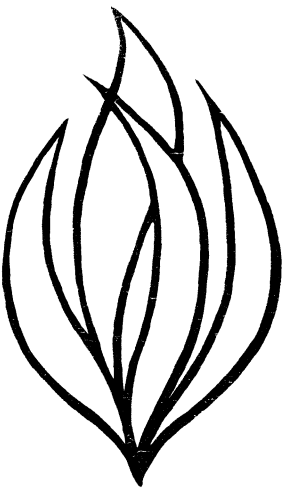

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Is the Young Man Safe?

We who are older should sense more keenly the responsibility that we have toward those who are younger whether we are parents or simply interested in their welfare. There are probably no verses in the Bible that should strike a parent with attention more than Ephesians 6:4 and Proverbs 22:6. *"And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."* Our lesson centers on one of the tragic questions of the Bible, asked by King David as he sat at a gate of a little place called Mahanaim which was but a short distance from Jerusalem. He was not there by choice but had been driven there as a result of a revolt against him led by his own son, Absalom. The question was, *"Is the young man Absalom safe?"* (Second Samuel 18:29).

About Questions

The Bible raises many questions and they are not all asked for the purpose of extracting information. The very first question of the Bible was asked by the devil. *"Hath God said ye shall not eat of any tree in the garden?"* (Genesis 3:1). This was not asked for information, but as a means of creating confusion and doubt in the mind of Eve. The devil knew that doubt was the first step toward disobedience.

Another question was asked by God of Cain, *"Where is thy brother, Abel?"* This was an embarrasing question to Cain, seeing how he had murdered his brother. God knew what had happened, but raised the question to impress upon Cain his responsibility and the enormity of his crime. Cain responded by asking a question, *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* He asked this in an effort to escape his guilt.

Job asked, *"If a man die shall he live again?"* Christ asked, *"What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"* Neither of these questions sought information, but showed the inestimatable value of the soul.

Some questions are asked in order to trick, deceive, entangle and ensnare. But David's question was asked for information. He wanted to know. *"Is the young man safe?"* It is somewhat

strange that this would be the question on his lips at that time, considering the manner of the character of Absalom and the events of the moment.

Absalom

Absalom was a very wicked person. He was murderer, having killed his half-brother, Amnon. Because Amnon had ravished Absalom's sister, Absalom took the law into his own hands and punished Amnon by death. Prior to killing Amnon he had nourished hatred and vengeance in his heart for two years. As a result of his crime he had to flee from Jersusalem for three more years before he tried to use Joab, David's captain, to make reconciliation for him.

When Joab refused to intercede on his behalf, Absalom resorted to blackmail and violence, threatening to destroy the crops of Joab unless he helped him.

When he returned to Jerusalem, he remained there for two years before being permitted into the courts of King David. During this time he was busy building hatred toward his father and plotted to overthrow him. He would sit at the gates of the city and when citizens would enter the city to have some matter settled by the king, Absalom would complain that they would not get justice and David was really unconcerned about them, and if only he could be in charge they would see better days. The Bible says he stole the hearts of the people away from David. This was no little accomplishment seeing how the people had adored David from the time he had slain Goliath.

Absalom finally asked leave to go from Jerusalem to Hebron on the premise he was going to keep a vow he had made. He was given a leave of absense. But it was not to keep a vow, but to muster his forces to revolt against David. He led the rebellion and did what no other enemy of David had been able to do, that is, drive David off his throne and from his capital city.

David's Flight

David leaving Jerusalem was a low point in David's life. He was fleeing for his life, his heart was broken, his own son was rebelling against him, his forces were in such disarray that he knew not what to expect from them, and some of his trusted advisors had sided with Absalom. He knew that it was in part his punishment for his own sins. But however philosophical David

viewed the situation, there can be no doubt but the character of Absalom was contemptible and reprehensible. He was a liar, a revolutionary, a murderer, a subverter and blackmailer.

But after this initial success by Absalom it soon became apparent that David's army had not forsaken him. David began operations to recover his throne. The armies of David and Absalom met on the field of battle. It was a case of son against father and father against son. What a tragic situation! The son had disgraced his father and would have gladly sacrificed his father to secure his own unholy ambitions. Yet, before the battle begins David instructs his men and all his captains, *"Deal gently with the young man for my sake."* Absalom deserved severe treatment, but for David's sake, he pled that Absalom not be harshly treated.

The Conflict and Absalom

A great conflict followed and some twenty thousand fell in the forest of Ephraim. Absalom's army was routed, scattered and crushed by the more experienced, better trained, better led armies of David. David anxiously awaited word of the outcome as he sat at Mahanaim.

A messenger came toward him, then another. David asked the question, *"Is the young man Absalom safe?"* It is remarkable that this was what was most important to him. He did not ask the outcome of the battle, how many lives were lost, or whether the throne was recaptured. His concern was for his son, Absalom.

The answer he received told the story. *"Would that all the enemies of David were as Absalom."* Absalom was dead, and his mangled body was buried beneath a pile of stones deep in the heart of the forest of Ephraim. No, Absalom was not safe. In reality, David's inquiry about the safety of his son had come much too late. He should have asked that long before now. It was too late to do anything for Absalom.

Too Late

David should have asked that question when he chose Absalom's mother to be his wife. She was the daughter of Talmai, the king of Geshur, a heathen land and of pagan people who cared nothing for the true and living God. David violated God's law by taking her for his wife. That marriage was not

motivated by love and respect for God or anyone else. It was purely for selfish and political interests, seeking alliances to enhance his own power. He took her, not asking what kind of mother she would be for his children, or what spiritual effect she would have on the lives of those around her. So many enter marriage without ever giving God and His will very much thought. No, Absalom was not safe even before he was born. He was not safe in the selection of his mother.

David should have asked, *"Is the young man safe?"* when he was looking with lustful eyes upon Bathsheba, when he was ruining the home of Uriah and conspiring to have Uriah killed in battle as if it were nothing. He should have been concerned when he was lying, trying to cover his sins by commiting more sins. No child is safe when his father or mother is engaged in matters that are evil. How many parents today are putting stumblingblocks in the paths of their own children, pitfalls into which the young might fall, placing mines in their roadway to explode to their harm, and doing this by their own evil?

There is no evidence that David gave time, attention and interest in the training of Absalom, spiritually or otherwise. There was not the proper discipline when Absalom did evil. Spiritual training was obviously lacking, seeing the kind of person Absalom was. Parents harm their children immeasurably when they withhold proper discipline from them, when they are not attentive to the upgringing of their children, when they are too busy with other things, such as house, jobs, sports, fulfilling their own ambitions, etc. David was a busy man. He was guilty, however, of neglect relative to Absalom. Absalom was not the first son, nor the last, to have to suffer because his parents were not what they ought to have been, nor dealt with him as they should have done. The stones that covered the pit in the forest of Ephraim wherein did lay the body of Absalom was a monument to parental neglect of a child.

Self-rebuke and Regret

The question, *"Is the young man Absalom safe?"* is a heart-breaking question because there is so much self-rebuke in it. In Absalom's death David saw more than the death of his son. While he could know that Absalom had reaped as he had sown, he also knew that much of the blame was his own. Young people have responsibility, but so do those who are older. It is a terrible thing for a parent to realize that the suffering and

tragedy visited upon his own children are the results of his own sin, neglect and selfishness. David wailed, *"O my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son."*

The Worse Loss

David was experiencing the deepest grief one can know. He had a son to die before and he had already suffered that. But he knew that he could go to him even though he could not bring him back (Second Samuel 12). But now he was not only reliving the agony of the death of one of his children, but he knew he had helped to make it that way. Nothing now could be done. His question of concern had come too late.

We must wonder how many parents today should be raising the question regarding their own children while there is time for them to do something about their duty toward that child. Is your child safe? Is he safe if you do not give him the advantages of a Christian example? Is he safe if you are neglecting his spiritual training to live God's way? Is he safe if you are overly occupied with other matters that you neglect him? Is he safe with the friends and companions he has? Is he safe in the recreation he has, his education, where he goes and what he does?

Do It Now

If we do not discharge the duty of love now, while we have time and opportunity, we may be the one who someday will ask, "Is my child safe?" but we will be asking too late.

John Greenleaf Whittier wrote:

For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest of these, it might have been.

It might have been different with Absalom if it had first been different with David. What we who are older do makes a difference. We cannot lead where we will not go. God help us to show our love toward our young by living before God according to His Word.

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How the Devil Keeps Man Unsaved

Beginning in the Garden of Eden there has always been a conflict between good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, God against the devil and vice versa. God loves man, provides for him, teaches, warns and offers salvation. The devil wars against man seeking his destruction, using deception, doing all he can to persuade man to remain separated from God. Peter calls the devil our adversary (First Peter 5:8), which means enemy. Paul speaks of recovering those who have been taken captive by him at his will (Second Timothy 2:26).

Some do not believe in the existence of the devil, but the Bible leaves no doubt about his reality. It is grossly inconsistent to accept the reality of God and deny the reality of the devil. The same Bible teaches both.

The devil is called a tempter (Matthew 4) and this is because of the means used by the devil to ensnare the souls of all people. *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:13-15). Through the avenues of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (First John 2:15-17), the devil entices man to do that which is evil, thereby separating himself from God. Having caused man to sin through appealing through temptations, the devil tries to keep man from returning to God and being saved from the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Our lesson draws attention to the ways the devil keeps man lost.

The Devil's Methods

Generally speaking, the devil is very effective at using half-truths which are nothing less than lies, indeed mechanisms of deception. Through false teaching, vain plhilosophies and false teachers the devil persuades man that sin is not real, but just an imaginative concept handed down from the ages of superstition. "You are not a sinner, and what if you are?" He

will often persuade a morally good man that he is not lost and therefore, there is no need to do anything about being saved. Certainly, if sin is unreal, or if one is not lost, the plea to be saved from sin seems something ridiculous. The devil has persuaded many very effectively this way to remain as they are.

But Paul teaches that sin is real and that all have sinned (Romans 3:9,10,23). We must keep in mind that the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). The resolution as to whether sin is real and we are sinners when we transgress God's law is a simple matter. The Bible teaches that sin is real and all have sinned. If you do not believe this, then nothing else on the subject of salvation will have any real significance to you anyway. The Scriptures teach of the saved and the lost. Whether we accept that reality or not is not going to change the truth regarding it.

But the devil persuades, "Well, even if sin is real and you are a sinner, you are not the only one." This is true. All have sinned. We are not alone. But are we to conclude that we shall be saved just because others are lost? This is a time-worm appeal of Satan to get people to relax their concern simply because somebody else is in the same condition. Two wrongs never made a right, and one sin does not justify another. Because somebody else is in sin does not relieve you of your lost spiritual condition.

His Powerful Weapon

The devil constantly pleads with the lost to consider the hypocrite who is in the church. Sure enough, he can be found. Even Christ has His Judas. Hypocrisy has always been a favorite weapon of the devil to mislead and deceive the lost into thinking that it makes no difference about being in the Lord's church. While the saved are in the church, that is no guarantee that all who claim to be in the church will be saved. There is such a thing in Biblical warning as falling away and going back into sin. But the devil pleads, "You are just as good as some already in the church." That may be true to some extent. But what of that? That only means that both you and the hypocrite shall go to hell. Because somebody else fails in their duty does not dismiss your duty. Nobody is going to heaven on the sins of somebody else.

While the devil was pointing to the church and finding hypocrisy he could have pointed to the loyal, faithful, godly, sacrificial Christians who always put the Lord first in life. He

could have noted the pure, devoted, hard working servants of righteousness who are faithful in their tasks. But he does not cite these people. He wants everyone to compare themselves with the weak, immature, sinful, hypocritical church member because that way they may not look so bad.

Why not compare yourself with the best Christains you know? Better yet, why not compare yourself with the standard, who is Christ?

To those who are members of the church, let us be careful never to be one to whom the devil can point and use to discourage someone from being a Christian. To those who look at the faulty members of the church, none of whom have ever claimed perfection, but who are striving to live as close to God's will as they can, you are trying to hide behind such people, and anybody behind whom you can hide is closer to the Lord than you are and bigger than you are. Other sinful people are not an accepted excuse for you refusing to come to Christ to be saved.

Who Can Know?

"But how can you ever find out what is right? Look at all of the division in the religious world." The devil even calls attention to all the smart, scholarly, trained people who are bogged down in division and tells the common man that he is naive to think he can ever learn the truth.

Jesus knew that division would create unbelief (John 17:20,21). But while the devil through his servants tells you that you cannot know the truth the Lord tells us that we can. *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). You do not have to know everything to know something, and know it for sure. God would not make it necessary for us to know the truth if we could not know it.

Most of the division in the religious world is over things not in the Bible anyway. People are divided over what men have added and subtracted from the faith of Christ, calling their inventions "Christian" just the same. This folly that we cannot know, but can only keep searching for truth, denies the Scriptures. Take the Bible, the Word of God, and search the Scriptures, and you can come to a knowledge of the truth. Denominationalism has done more to discourage honest Biblical study than most any other movement on earth. Once you teach people that nobody can know, and that it really does not make much difference what you believe anyway, little motive is left to

expend the effort necessary to learn what God's Word teaches.

But if you turn a deaf ear to the devil's pleas that you are all right as you are, that sin is unreal, that you are not lost, and that you cannot know the truth, he does not give up his efforts to keep you lost. "You can't afford to be a Christian. Look at what your friends might think. You would be condemning other people. You would have to change religions. You would be saying your dead relatives who followed other ways are lost."

Some people do care what others think, and we all should. But the problem with many is that they care what others think more than they care what God thinks. Some who believed on Jesus would not confess Him because they loved the praises of men more than the praises of God (Matthew 12:42,43). One must even put family in a secondary position when it comes to serving God (Luke 14:26,27,33). There are costs to being a Christian (Luke 9:23,24) and some are unwilling to pay them. But we should be more concerned with what God thinks than what anybody else might think.

A Necessary Change

Yes, if you are not a Christian, to become a Christian, if you are already religious, you must change your religion. If you are in a denomination, you must leave that and become a Christian. If you are in the Jewish faith, or Islam, or the many other religions, to be a Christian you must change your religion. But you are not condemning others in so doing. You are not given the power to save or condemn anybody, living or dead. If one is condemned it is because he or she rejected Christ and did not come to Him. In coming to Christ you are doing what you must do to be saved; not condemning anybody.

Whatever you do is not going to affect the eternal destiny of your dead relatives anyway. If you think they were honest and sincere and acted on their convictions, and you have learned what they never learned, how can you honor them by being anything less than honest and sincere and acting upon the truth that you have learned? Most of the examples of conversion, if not all, that we find in the New Testament are of religious people. They were taught to change religions. Why should that be so unexpected? If changing religions is discrediting to foreparents, then why did the Lord teach people to change religions? Instead of thinking you cannot afford to come to Christ, you do better to think if you can afford to refuse Him and

die without hope.

Other Persuasions

But then the devil might persuade, "All right. Be a Christian. But you can't hold out. So many have fallen by the wayside. You will too. The standards are too high and you are too weak."

True, others have fallen, the standards are high, we all are weak. But we need not fall if we follow the Lord's lead. *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* (First Corinthians 10:13). *"Wherefore he is able to save them to them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."* (Hebrews 7:25). When we sin we have an Advocate on our behalf (First John 2:1). God has given us directions whereby we need not fail. Satan tells you that you cannot hold out faithful, but the Lord tells you that you can. Who do you believe?

But if the devil sees you will not be swayed by these tricks and lies, he may appear to give in somewhat by saying, "All right. Be a Christian, but just do not become one right now. Later, maybe, but give it more time." Satan is smart enough to know that postponing what ought to be done is one of the most effective ways of never getting something done. Every moment one remains out of Christ gives opportunity for teaching, influence and circumstances that might dissuade one who is almost persuaded to be a Christian to turn from it and never come as close to the Lord again. He knows that, and you need to be aware of this deception also.

"Wait until you get older. Wait until the teen years have passed. Wait until you are married. Wait until your mate comes with you. Wait until you are more settled. Wait for this and wait for that." Just so long as you are willing to wait the devil is pleased because he has persuaded you to remain lost. In time, by continued postponement, he will find ways and means to drive all desire for being a Christian from your heart.

What Then?

How will it be with you as you stand before God in judgment

trying to explain how you rejected His only begotten Son on the basis that you intended to obey Him someday, but just waited?

These are but a few of the ways the devil persuades people to remain in condemnation. Has he been successful with you so far with such as these appraoches, or some other? When life is over, will it really matter very much what plea the devil used to keep you lost? You will be just as lost regardless of the plea you heeded. Can't you understand that?

Put the devil to flight like Jesus did. Take the Word of God and use it. When the devil raises some temptation to remain lost, says to him, *"It is written..."* and then do as the Scripture demands. Remember, *"Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provacation."* (Hebrews 3:15). Now is the accepted time.

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The Day You Die

What is your life? There have been many attempts to define life. Some picture it as a battle to be fought, a race to be run, or as a ship on the high seas that leaves one port (birth) and sails to another (death). Shakespear likened life to an act on the stage and we are all actors until the final curtain falls. Others have called it a leaf of paper on which we write until there is no more space. It has been called a game to play with each one in his position until the final whistle blows ending the game. Life has been simply defined as that span of time between birth and death. Whatever way one may choose to describe or define it, it must end. Life is never finished. It just stops.

Hebrews 9:27 tells us, *"And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment."* Solomon said there is a time for many things including *"a time to die."* (Ecclesiastes 3:2). James said life was a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes (James 4:4). The only way to escape death as has been experienced by all those who have gone before us is to be living when the Lord returns, and even then we shall be changed (First Corinthians 15:51-53). All of us will cease to be as we are now.

When?

When will the day of your death come? You may know the date of death of some loved one or prominent person. But when will be the date of your death be settled? *"Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."* (Proverbs 27:1). It may be sometime today. Obviously, we do not know. Even if we remain until the coming of the Lord we cannot know because that day is not revealed unto us (Matthew 24:42). But it will come eventually. The Scriptures emphasize the brevity and uncertainty of life and the certainty of death (James 4:13-16). Have you ever seen the instability of the vapors that rise from the spout of a tea kettle? Is it secure and stable? Is it not void of permanence? So is life. When will the day of your death be? Will it be soon? Is it distant?

Kind of Day

Have you ever wondered what kind of day it might be, the day you die? Will it be one of sunshine, rain, wind or storms? What season will it be? Will it be Summer, Winter, Spring or Fall? It will be one of these. We have been at the graveside when it was raining, snowing, bitter cold, intensely hot, when the sun was hidden behind clouds, when it was soft and warm. Will your death possibly be at night, near the stroke of twelve, or early in the morning, or even during "rush hours?" Who can tell? How many of us would really want to know anyway? Though these things we cannot know, we know it will be sometime, do we not?

Where?

Where will you be when death inevitably overtakes you? You may be at home, on a visit, attending to business, at some special event. It may be beside the machine you operate for a livelihood, or behind your office desk. Possibly it will be in a hospital, in your own bed or chair, your own backyard or even beside the road.

Doing What?

What will you have been doing just prior to your death? Will you be alone, with friends, with family, or among strangers? Will

you have left everyone the way you would want to have left them, with kind words, a smile, possibly even a prayer? Or would you have left them with a scold, a fight, a sneer, a cross word and in animosity? Just how will it be when you go out into the next world? How will you be remembered by those who remain? That day is bound to come.

How?

We know not when, where, nor how we shall die. It is keenly impressed on my mind a family friend who died slowly, agonizing in pain after a long illness of suffering, each day wondering, and almost hoping, that life would be terminated. I recall my mother telling me how my father died. He arose from his bed early one morning, went to the window to pull down the shade to prevent the sun from shining into his face, returning to the bed, and in a moment breathing his last breath. There was no warning.

I once read of a lad, only twelve years old, who was called to supper by his mother. He had been playing across the street in his friend's yard. Before the eyes of his friend and mother he was struck down by a passing automobile. This is not an unusual thing. The first funeral I preached in South Bend, Indiana was of a man who had gone to deliver some paint and was killed in an automobile accident instantly. Another dear sister, just a hour before she was to babysit with our children, was wrapping Christmas presents, ran out of ribbon, dashed across the street for some more, but never got back because she was overrun by a car. Death comes in many ways.

A sobering story I read was of a soldier that had returned to this country after being in battle. He telephoned his folks that he was safe and coming home. He replaced the receiver, went out of the booth, a runaway truck knocked down some live electrical wires and he was electrocuted. You can recall many experiences of your own and many situations. The stories could go on and on because each death is a story worth telling. But the point is that death came and that day was the day of death for that person. Death is no respector of age, wealth, health, geography or anything else. The point is that regardless of when, where or how, death will come to me and to you.

Face the Reality

Am I trying to be morbid or create fear in you? I certainly am not trying to be morbid. Create fear? Possibly, to some extent. Enough to arouse you to serious thought. But the primary motive is to help us all be realistic and face the fact there is an eternity awaiting us. The Lord used fear to awaken and arouse us, and possibly it is good that we fear some things. It is not easy to face these matters. We do not wish to dwell on morbid things. But it is senseless and foolish not to give them some consideration. We live so much of life in imagination and make believe that we run from unpleasant realities. But they do not go away just because we push them from the mind.

Does it surprise you for me to tell you that when, where or how you die is not the most important matter about death? Yes, we are concerned about such things. We concern ourselves with so many matters. For instance, what did you do today? What occupied your time? Time is the substance from which life is made. If you could know that today would be your last, would you have lived it differently? Did you fret over what to serve at the next meal? Was mowing the lawn really that important? Would you have fixed your car? Or whatever you did, did it really matter if you could have known this was your last day? Surely, there are some things we would have done differently if we had known, but we could not have known and therefore we did what we felt was demanding of us. This is an essential part of living and these seemingly trivial matters, although relatively insignificant, do matter to some extent. But on the day of one's death, are they the most important thing?

Only when we consider the day of our death can we focus proper attention of what really counts. So many of us are missing the mark in the things that matter. Read Luke 12:16-21 and 16:19-31. Here were people who lived, like you are living now, who missed what is important. *"What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Mark 8:36). This helps us to consider the important things.

Things That Matter

May I suggest to you some things that matter, even on the day you die? How did you treat your family? Did you love your wife or husband as you should? What of your children? Did you treat them with respect, kindness, concern, seeking their highest good? It will matter on the day you die.

How did you use your influence? You have influence

(Romans 14:7) and you shall give an account of it. This is why Paul urged us to abstain from the appearance of evil. Was your life's influence on the side of good or evil? That will matter on the day you die.

What example did you manifest day in and day out? Was God glorified or could He be ashamed of you (Matthew 5:16). How did you speak to other people (James 3:3-12). Did you control your tongue? *"For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."* (Matthew 12:37).

Whether or not you showed love for others, especially your brethren, will make a great difference on the day you die. The two great commandments are named by Jesus as loving God and loving your neighbor (Matthew 22:35-40). Will your life have been wasted or wisely spent? What heritage do you leave for others? Will you face God empty-handed? Will you be likened unto the prodigal son in the swine pit, or as one who returned home? Are you to be like Judas who destroyed himself? "Oh the years of sinning wasted, would I could recall them now."

How did you meet your responsibilities in life? We are not responsible for many things of our lives because they were out of our control. But there are so many, many things for which we are responsible. What I make of myself, do with my talents, how I live, what standards I used to measure, what I am before God and man, for these things I am personally responsible. Robert E. Lee once said, "Duty is the sublimest word in the English language." Whether he was right of not, duty is important. How you did your duty will be important on the day you die. The sence of duty has caused many people to even face death rather than turn their back on duty.

Did you "brighten the corner where you are?" Not many of us shall ever have an impact that affects the whole world. We can do something about the corner where we live. Will anybody else be in heaven because of you, or will somebody else be in hell because of you? This will matter on the die you die. The reason they matter is because, *"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that everyone may receive the things done in the body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Solomon wrote, *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Relationaship to God

What matters most is our relationship to God. To be among those who shall enjoy heaven we must live *"in Christ"* and die *"in the Lord."* Salvation is *"in Christ."* (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation *"in Christ"* (Romans 8:1). The blessed are those who die *"in the Lord."* (Revelation 14:13). All spiritual blessings are *"in Christ."* (Ephesians 1:3). When the final hour of my life, and your life, shall have ticked away, all that matters is: **Have I been a true and faithful child of God in Christ?** All that matters is whether we have fought a good fight, kept the faith, finished the course, as Paul said in Second Timothy 4:6-8. After we breathe our last, no treasure of earth is of any value to us, but only those treasures laid up in heaven (Matthew 6:19,20). The song reads, "Earth holds no treasures, but perish with using, however precious they be. Yet, there's a country to which I am going. Heaven hold all to me."

These thoughts are not sensational, but true and realistic. This paragraph may be the last you shall ever read, or that I shall ever write. Someday it will be that way. We must be impressed that how we stand before God is the itmost urgency of life.

When your span on earth is o'er,
What awaits on yonder shore?
Ask not where, nor when the day
Nor the how you end your stay.
But fear the Lord, and His way keep
And death will be but blissful sleep.
You'll start your flight to world's on high,
On the day that you must die. JWB

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It Depends How You Count It

The calendar shows that February has fewer days than any of the other months. We do not doubt that is true by actual sunrises and sunsets. But why does it seem this cold, cold month drags on and on. It makes Spring look so good.

Encouraging Words From Haggai

Judah had returned from seventy years of Babylonian captivity. This return was like the rebirth of the nation, a deliverance from Egypt, a new and fresh start for Israel. They were given divine instructions to establish again national life and religion. Through that nation God would reveal Himself and Jesus the Christ would come.

The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and others had kept before the people that the exile would not be the end of this special nation through which God planned to fulfill His promises to Abraham. Even though they had violated God's law and suffered the resulting losses, this did not nullify the yet unfulfilled promises of the seed through which all the families of the earth would be blessed. The nation would return to the homeland, and this they did.

There were three great restoration leaders in the return of the Jews from captivity. As there had been three major migrations from Judah into Babylon, so there were three great migrations from Babylon back to Judah. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, each in his own time, there was the rebuilding of the temple, the great religious revival, and the restructure of the walls of Jerusalem. The prophecy and work of Haggai came in the context of the return and effort led by Zerubbabel and the rebuilding of the temple.

Rebuilding the Temple

When the Jews reached Palestine they enthusiastically began the work on the temple. They laid the foundations and set up some altars. But the work stopped. This was due to outside opposition from adversaries, but also due to the indifference on the part of the Jews themselves. The enthusiasm of the beginning waned away. This inactivity extended for some fifteen years. The nation was not prospering as had been expected. The religious activity had not been restored. It was into this stale and stalled situation that Haggai, God's prophet comes.

Haggai was a man of unconquerable faith and an iron resolution with a burning zeal for the restoration of the temple.

He had the ability to arouse people to action. He is more noted for his sternness than his softness, but his sternness was motivated by an unquenchable love for God, God's people, God's ways and God's temple.

The prophets of the Old Testament were both proclaimers and predictors. Their work was that of foretelling and forthtelling. Haggai was a prophet more in the category of a preacher than one who foretold the future, although there were future elements in many of his words. He spent his words denouncing sin, warning of judgment, instructing in the law, and encouraging his brethren to duty and action. He met great difficulties in his work, but his task was crucial to the future of the nation. In the two chapters of Haggai we have four discourses that he gave to the people.

Rebuke

The first of Haggai's words were words of rebuke. The people were living in error and inconsistency and this had to be called to their attention. *"Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built."* (Haggai 1:2). In other words, many were saying that the rebuilding of the temple was a good work and ought to be done, but "not right now." The time was not right, according to them. They needed to wait for better times. It seems that the history of those who profess to serve God is often blemished with those who say they agree with some work but who always find a way to defeat it by saying, "We better wait until a better time." This has been true in many efforts undertaken for growth and building. It has postponed many mission efforts and other works of the church. It has choked off much benevolent work. "Don't do it now. Let's wait and see what happens and how things might go."

Surely, there is to be intelligent consideration before any work is undertaken. But with some folks there never is the right time to get on with it. This was the problem among the people of Judah regarding the temple rebuilding.

But they were so inconsistent in their actions that they proved themselves faithless and selfish. *"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?"* (Haggai 1:4). The people must have thought the time was ripe for building their own houses and doing what they wanted to do for themselves. But building the temple of God ought be

postponed. It did not make sense. Some say today that we lack money, ability, training knowledge, etc. to do what needs to be done. But they readily assume other activities that take the same or similar demands if it is what benefits them personally. It is strange how some leaders have wailed that it is a bad time to borrow money to build or restore a house of assembly, but borrow money for their own businesses and homes. Some say we cannot afford to assume responsibility for support in some mission field, but find no difficulty to buy on credit whatever they wish to get for themselves.

It was true that the nation of Judah was not getting anywhere. *"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; he drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put into a bag with holes."* (Haggai 1:6). The people were busy scurrying here, there and everywhere doing what they wanted to do, but had failed to put first things first. Haggai exposed to them their sin. We must add here that when these people faced their neglect and transgression they soon got busy with the work on the temple.

Discouragement

But they faced another problem from those who hindered the work by being a source of discouragement. Judah had been in exile for seventy years. There were some who had gone into exile and had now returned who could recall the former temple before it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. They were much older but they remembered. As the new temple began to rise from its foundations again, some standing by were heard to say, in essence, "It's nice, but it does not compare with the one I remember." "It's not like the earlier one." "Your work is inferior to what was done before." Haggai said, *"Who is left among you that saw this house in her glory? and how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?"* (Haggai 2:3). These words that belittled the work were discouraging to those who labored.

There is no indication that the critics were helping to improve matters at all, but only stood by and criticized. They seemed to have forgotten that the first temple had been destroyed because they, and others of their generation, had brought calamity upon the nation by their sins. If they had been busier encouraging the efforts rather than mocking them the work could have

progressed faster. We once heard a brother respond to some critics of him and what he was doing, something they all agreed needed to be done but some did not like the way he was doing it. He said, "I like the way I am doing it better than the way you are not doing it."

The critics of the new temple, however, were wrong in their evaluation of the work. *"The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts, and in this place I will give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."* (Haggai 2:9). So the work continued in spite of this hindrance. Some have thought possibly Haggai used these words with reference to the spiritual temple, the church, that was to come.

Revival

We mentioned that things were not going well in Judah as they should have been because of the neglect to attend to first things first. But with the teaching of Haggai and his encouragements to get on with the work there was renewed effort. The people started in the right direction again. But they became impatient and began to cry, "Where are the blessings we are supposed to receive?" They had started to work again, and they wanted rewards immediately. This specific complaint is not made in the text of Haggai, but this attitude is implied in chapter two, verses eighteen and nineteen. *"Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomgranate and the olive tree, hath not brought forth, from this day I will bless you."*

Haggai was trying to show his brethren that their reward was not to come when they began the task, but when they completed it. They had started again in the right direction, but they had not accomplished the goal. The harvest was not yet in storage. The trees had not yet produced their fruit. For fifteen years they had sown the seeds of indifference, selfishness, inactivity, drifting along the wrong direction, putting emphasis on the wrong things, following the wrong advice, tolerating sin, and they had no right to expect an overnight change in conditions just because they had rounded the corner and started the right way. No man has a right to expect the field to be completely plowed just because he has started his tractor. No man has a right to expect an immediate harvest just because he

has sown his seed. People get things into a bad way over a period of years and then wake up to see their folly and make a turn around and sometimes get impatient and expect things to clear up overnight. Haggai was telling his people that things do not work that way. They were to be commended to have started but they were supposed to finish the work, not just start it again, in order to be blessed.

It is no different in principle today. Faithfulness and patience, stedfastness and continuation is what brings results. People can start a plan of action, but the test comes in completing it.

Encouragement

Finally, Haggai does speak about the future and gives them an encouraging word. He told them that God would protect them from their enemies and their heathen adversaries would be overthrown. *"Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth, and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen, and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother."* (Haggai 2:21,22). These people would be established again. Their purposes for having been chosen of God would be accomplished because, *"I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts."* (Haggai 2:23).

Today we have encouraging words from God just as Judah received them through Haggai. If we will refuse to give heed to the words of faithless men who always plead for postponement of everything and waiting on every action; if we will neither be among nor listen to those who only criticize and belittle every effort we put forth; if we will not grow impatient for rewards before we put for the needed labor; if we will put first thing first in our lives and establish righteous priorities, God shall bless us as He did Judah. Our enemies shall be overcome as were theirs. Our promises are not that we shall overcome physical enemies, but the spiritual destroyed of the soul. Eternal happiness and spiritual protection shall be ours. As we labor in the building of the Lord's house, the church, we have God's assurances with us as did the people of Judah when they were erecting the physical temple in Jerusalem. Let us avoid their mistakes and be encouraged in Haggai's instructions.

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The Three Crosses

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left." (Luke 23:33).

At Forrest Lawn Cemetery there was a painting of the crucifixion scene that was very realistic. You could sit and look at it and almost imagine being present outside of Jerusalem at that event. The hill of Calvary, also called Golgatha, is called *"The place of the skull."* (Matthew 15:22). Some have surmised that this identification was given because this was the place of crucifixion. Others have thought it was because the hill appears from a distance like a crown of a human skull. However about that, it was at this place that God's Son was crucified alongside two transgressors. *"And with him they crucify two thieves, the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors."*(Matthew 15:27,28).

Cross of Rebellion

While we usually fix our attention on just one cross, in this lesson let us consider all three crosses. Each had a certain significance about it. On the one side was the cross of one of the thieves. This man was dying IN sin. His was, to the last, a cross of rebellion. Even as he died he scoffed at Jesus. *"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us."* (Luke 23:39). More tragic than the physical anguish he suffered was his hatred and contempt cast toward the One on the center cross. We wonder why? What had Jesus ever done to him or anyone else that would arouse such feelings within this man? Without reason, except his own hopelessness and frustrations, he showers Jesus with enmity and scorn. But do not many do so today?

This thief typifies the illogical, unreasonable, nonsensical unbelief and hatred that many in the world have toward the Christ. In spite of His perfect life and all the good He did, the hope He offers, the love He manifests, many hate Christ. The reason they hate Him is because Christ condemned sin and they love their sins. *"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light,*

because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be repoved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3:19-21).

Consider the statement of the thief again. *"IF [emphasis, JWB] thou be Christ..."* Has there ever been any real doubt about it? Has not there been abundant and manifold evidence proving that truth? There is no "if" about the identity of the Christ. But in these words we see the doubt and skepticism of unbelief, and an attempt to deny the claim of the Christ even as they were hanging on crosses.

He challenges Christ, *"Save thyself and us."* His attitude is, "Even thought I disbelieve and scorn you, do something good for me." What impudence! Why call upon Jesus for favor while railing against Him at the same time? How like many today who encounter hardships in life, who care nothing for God, but lash out against God because of their adversity and blame God! They act as if God owed them everything and they owed God nothing. They are all TAKE and no GIVE.

How many souls have perished on this cross of rebellion from that day until this? How many still lose all, having the same attitudes toward Jesus as this one IN sin, dying on the cross of rebellion?

Cross of Repentance

Consider now the other thief on the other cross. How different he was from the first one. One was dying IN sin, but this second thief was dying TO sin, separating himself from his sin. One was dying on a cross of rebellion but the other was dying on a cross of repentance.

At first it appears he may have joined the railing against Christ and he also wanted deliverance. But when he spoke, he did so, not to scoff, but to worship and plead.

He first directed his words to the other thief. *"But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds. But this man hath done nothing amiss."* (Luke 23:40,41). There is unmistakable respect and reverence in his heart as he is before God. While he admits his sinfulness, he recognizes the innocense of Jesus. Few statements are as comprehensive concerning the life of Jesus as

this one by the thief. *"He hath done nothing amiss."* Jesus lived a perfect life and never sinned. This is one of the evidences of His Deity and the truthfulness of his claim.

Then he turned to speak to Christ and said, *"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."* (Luke 23:42,43). His was a humble petition to one he considered as the Lord. He looked upon Jesus as one who would have His kingdom. The situation implies that he knew the kingdom of Christ was spiritual rather than earthly because Jesus was also on the cross. An earthly kingdom from Him was not likely under these conditions. Only a spiritual kingdom was in his thoughts. Jesus knew that for which he was asking, and granted unto him spiritual benefits. He answered in the way to satisfy his plea. This thief's approach and attitude of heart was such that Jesus responded, *"Today thou shalt be with me in paradise."*

What a difference in the thieves! One saw Jesus as a dying imposter. The other saw Him as Lord. One considered Him a pretender. The other saw Him as a King. One saw Jesus as a sinner dying for his deeds. The other saw Him as one dying for the sins of others. One was dying IN sin. The other was dying TO sin. One was on a cross of rebellion. The other was on a cross of repentance.

Cross of Redemption

We now focus attention on the third and middle cross on which the Son of God was hanging. His was a cross of redemption where He was dying FOR sin. *"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."* (Hebrews 9:12). *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spott."* (First Peter 1:18,19). *"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."* (Titus 2:14). *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."* (Ephesians 1:7). *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the*

likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." (Romans 8:3). *"For even Christ pleased not himself, but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."* (Romans 15:3). *"That he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man."* (Hebrews 2:9). *"And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world."* (First John 2:2). *"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."* (First Corinthians 5:21).

It Was For Me

The death of Christ on the cross was a vicarious death, the just dying for the unjust, one instead of the other. He was not merely a martyr for His cause, but *"the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29). He is our Passover (First Corinthians 5:7). *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed."* (First Peter 2:24).

The thieves died because of their own sins. Christ died for my sins and yours, and those of all mankind. God could deal with us and our sinfulness either through justice of mercy. If he dealt with us in justice without mercy we would have to suffer for our sins. If He dealt with us in mercy without justice, how could God be called just? Justice does not allow good and evil to be treated alike. But God did deal with us in justice and mercy because justice and mercy met at the cross of Christ. *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."* (Romans 3:23-26). Justice was met by the penalty being paid by Christ. Mercy was extended by the merit of His blood to sinful mankind, and man was given the opportunity to be free from the wages of sin.

Let us magnify the glorious Christ who was the only perfect One. Only He could die for the sins of others because He was without spot or blemish. Any other would at best die for his own sins, and none can even do that, because the death of no man is

(continued back cover)

(from inside cover)

adequate penalty for sin against God. The Father appointed His Son, Jesus Christ, as the one way of salvation and there is no other (Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

We point you to these three crosses on Golgatha. One cross is of rebellion, another of repentance, the third of redemption. As we look at the middle cross, we can sing, "I must needs go home by the way of the cross; there's no other way but this." Again, "There was one who was willing to die in my stead, that a soul so unworthy might live." Of our sins we can sing, "They are nailed to the cross." Jesus went to the cross,. and "He carried my sins with Him there."

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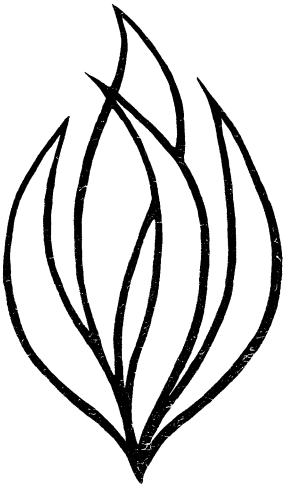

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME X James W. Boyd **NUMBER 7**

A Mighty Fortress

The text of our study is Psalm forty-six and these eleven verses should be read before continuing. The reading of it will be a blessing because it is a psalm of assurance, confidence, praise of God, comfort to the believer and an encouragement.

It is generally thought that David wrote most of the Psalms, but the exact authorship of many of them cannot be specified dogmatically. As for Psalm forty-six, there were many instances in the life of David that were characteristic of the sentiments of this psalm, so we rather believe that the Holy Spirit used David to write it. Just what particular occasion may have motivated it we cannot be sure.

There is a song composed by Martin Luther entitled, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." It is sometimes called the battle hymn of the Reformation. It expressed patriotic fervor and has the quality that stirs confidence, hope and the daring in the heart of the believer to fight the good fight. It is said that Luther caught in this hymn the meaning and message of Psalm forty-six. As First Corinthians thirteen is called the "love chapter," and Hebrews eleven called the "hall of faith," this Psalm is a "psalm of faith."

From verse one we conclude that it is good to have faith in God, who is presented to us in three ways. He is our refuge; a place to hide and be covered in safety from the storms and dangers. He is our strength; a guarantee of stability, stedfastness and power. He is our help; the source of assistance and the One who lifts up, heartens and saves in the time of need.

Tumult Versus Serenity

In verses two and three the writer presents a contrast between the tumultous world in general and the thoughtful serenity of faithfulness to God. The earth may be moved, the mountains carried into the seas, the waters may roar, the mountains shake and tremble, and everything that man has considered firm and secure, lasting and stable, is subjected to collapse and commotion. But what of that? God is our refuge and strength and help. Therefore, *"will not we fear."*

One has commented on this passage by writing, "At this moment... we have the tumult of war, the unrest and anxiety of statesmen and nations as to the balance of power. In politics at home there is the strife and contention of parties. In the commercial world there are countless anxieties and fierce competitions. Even the religious world is not free from the noise of controversy and the din of party strife. In every realm of life there is unrest and tumult to a greater or lesser extent. All things are in commotion."

This sounds like the writer was describing our present day, but he was not. This was written back in 1892 before most of us were born. We do not wish to minimize the turmoil of our times, but only call to our attention that such has always been the case in our world in varying degrees. Little wonder this world has been described as a vale of tears. Job said (John 14:1), *"Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble."* But God has seen His people through trouble in the past, does now and will again. This is the assurance of Psalm forty-six.

Why Our State?

Why is our world in such a state of frustration? It is because mankind is unable to live as we should without God. The turbulence of the world is made so directly or indirectly because of sin, lust, uncontrolled passion, greed, hate, unchecked ambition, selfishness, etc. Because of sin there is never to be found in this world the complete peace that cannot be interrupted. Nothing in this life is stable and secure.

There is a realm, however, where strife and commotion is unknown and cannot dwell. But it is not in this life. We only get glimpses, fleeting tastes, of that realm now and then while here on this earth.

But even so, in the midst of all the worldly havocs, *"will not we fear."* Why is it that even in the midst of earthquake, invasion, disaster, desparate situations that the believer is not overwhelmed? Why is there no foe too strong, no danger too much, for the one who holds firmly to the hand of God? Why can the believer look with such confidence upon God as his refuge, strength and help? The psalmist answers with four reasons that we wish to observe.

Calm Amidst Confusion

One, from verse four, instead of the fear-instilling confusion of this world, there is the supply of refreshing life-giving waters that provide grace, comfort and nourishment. The city of God is a symbolism for the place of habitation of God's people which corresponds to the Lord's church today. In that city is given a free-flowing stream of mercies that bring rich blessings to the citizens of God's city, the place of supply and blessing.

Two, from verse five, security is assured because of God's presence. *"God is in the midst of her."* His presence was the security of ancient physical Israel. His presence is no less with His people now. His presence makes His city unlike the threatening world that quakes and roars. His presence means stability. *"She shall not be moved."* Here is that which is dependable and will last. Here is something upon which we can look and can count on it, for it is without end. As the song says, "When all around my soul gives way, He still is all my hope and stay." God is the Rock of refuge; the Haven of rest; providing for us the anchor of the soul.

Three, *"God shall help and that right early."* Our undaunted state of mind is attributable to this guarantee. God, in His time, at the proper season, with utmost speed, will assist us in time of trouble.

We all love the parable of the Good Samaritan because that man acted in the likeness of God. Trouble befell the traveller and the Samaritan gave the needed assistance. Not only was his help immediate, but was also promised for the future, even in the surrounding of the gravest peril. At no time is help so welcome as in the time when we are beset with problems and troubles. The Psalmist tells us that God is ever present with us to see us through each trial.

So It Can Remain

Four, from verse six, we can remain serene in this life because the power of God is greater than that of our enemy. The heathens rage, kingdoms are shaken, but the enemy shall melt beneath the utterances from the voice of God. Sometimes it seems the wicked have their own way and we have temporarily fallen before our enemies. But that is not forever. Why should we fear? When our enemies are at His command and the Lord of hosts is with us, our ultimate victory is secured.

In verse seven God is identified as the God of Jacob, which means He is also the God of Abraham and Isaac, the God who

created all things by the power of His Word. It is that same God, Jehovah of heaven, who has promised and who is our refuge. There is no other like power and might as our God.

Beginning at verse eight, the psalmist turns our attention to two worthy considerations which add to our security and confidence. One is the works of God and the other is the glory of God. He mentions two works in particular. One is the *"desolation he hath made in the earth."* This desolation is against the enemies of the righteous. By such desolation the Lord is saying, "Do you not see how vain it is to fight against Jehovah? Is it not clear that all your noise, rush, fury, roar and fear and boasting is but empty prattle? Can you not realize how senseless is the struggle against the eternal and omnipotent God?" His work of judgment, condemnation of evil and the destruction of wickedness gives hope, assurance and comfort to the righteous.

Verse nine mentions another work of God, that of giving a true and lasting peace. This peace is not obtainable in this world by this world. God acts so as to render His enemies incapable of prosecuting their devastation by the destruction of their very implements with which they wage their evil war. *"He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire."*

Three Kinds of Peace

When the weaponry of the forces of evil is taken away, then peace can come to the people of God. There are three kinds of peace available to us: One, peace with out fellowman; Two, peace within ourselves; Three, peace with God. We can have peace with God in this life, and even to a large measure have peace within ourselves and others. But so long as there is the existence of sin and temptation, the peace of the latter two kinds can be interrupted and taken away.

As a final reassuring note, the psalmist mentions the glory of God. God is saying to a distrubed and confused world wherein we must live as His people, *"The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."* (Verse eleven). This companionship and fellowship with God will be sufficient for all our needs. The following makes the point quite well:

Two painters each painted a picture representing his conception of the peace that Jesus gives. The first chose for his scene a lone sea nestled away in the mountains. It was a calm sea. Not a breeze was blowing. Not a ripple disturbed the surface. Not a cloud was in the sky. It was night and the bright moon was casting her reflection on the mirror of the placid water.

The second painter three on his canvass another sea. It was a wild and restless sea. The biostrous wind was beating upon its bosom and giant waves were rolling and foaming in their fury. Every tree on the shore was bending to the might of the terrific storm. Out of the midst of the angry sea and above the thundering waves a giant rock lifted its head. In the top of the rock a dove had built her nest. There she found repose. There she was resting, undisturbed and unafraid.

The latter scene, and not the former, describes the peace that Jesus gives. The first is only stagnation; the last is peace. In the peace that comes from above there are two elements; calm and storm; tranquility and commotion; silence and turbulence; inward stillness and outward strife. The Lord does not promise his people a peace of perfect surroundings, or ideal circumstances. He does not guarantee them immunity from trials, persecutions, reverses, opposition, temptations, unjust criticisms, tribulations and such like. No, not at all. *"In the world ye have tribulation,"* He said. Instead He gives his people peace in spite of these things. Within the soul of that man who trusts the divine power and walks humbly with his God there is established a holy calm that refuses to be disturbed by the angry elements around him and beneath him. He has made the Rock of Ages his refuge. He is not afraid.

Because of God's judgment against evil, and His granting peace to His own, His matchless and boundless glory, we can take heart and be comforted and have no fear in our restless and turbulent world.

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The Old, Old Story

The story of the Bible is not the history of mankind. The story of the Bible is the story of the redemption of man from sin. In this lesson we shall provide an overview of this story.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Genesis 1:1). In six days God created this entire, immense, complex and precise universe, supplying it with the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms. On the sixth day He created His most glorious creation, man and woman, Adam and Eve. Because mankind is in the spiritual image of God, man is the superior of all that God created. On the seventh day God rested, or ceased His creation.

God placed man in the Paradise of the Garden of Eden, mankind's first home. But man rebelled against God, eating the forbidden fruit, transgressing God's command, bringing sin into the world and severing himself from the fellowship with God that he formerly enjoyed. Man was driven from the garden, from the tree of life, apart from God and doomed.

Genesis 3:15 offers the first hint of God's intent to redeem man from sin. *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."* This was part of God's curse against Satan and God's promise of man's salvation.

Sin and the Flood

Sin found fertile soil in the mind and actions of mankind. God directed Cain and Abel to worship, commanding an animal sacrifice. But not unlike many people today, one did as he was directed, and the other did what he wanted. Abel's sacrifice was accepted and Cain's rejected. This caused Cain to grow jealous and commit the first murder, killing his brother Abel.

As the world became more populated it grew worse. *"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air, for it repenteth me that I have made them. But*

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." (Genesis 6:5-8).

Obeying God's instructions to build an ark, Noah and his family, a total of eight souls, were spared the destruction of the universal flood.

Following the flood, beginning with Noah's family, the earth was populated again. But mankind continued to pursue ways that were contrary to the will of the Creator. They were then directed by God to scatter throughout the earth, but they chose rather to be centrally located and built a tower to thier own glory. They wished to make a name for themselves. But God frustrated their plans, confusing their language, making this tower impossible. The tower is called the Tower of Babel, which means confusion.

Call to Abraham

In time, God called Abram to leave his idolatrous homeland in Ur of the Chaldee. God gave him many great promises. Abram was promised that he would become the father of a great nation which would have a land of their own that God would give them. Those that blessed him would be blessed and those that cursed him would be cursed. There would be descendants as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars of the heavens. Most important of all the promises, in his *"seed"* all the families or nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:2,3). From this point in the Bible going forward, all the rest is the story of the fulfillment of God's promises to Abram, and the *"seed"* was Jesus Christ (Galations 3:16).

Abram's name was changed to Abraham. He came to Canaan. Abraham was a man of great faith and was called the friend of God. He became the father of the Hebrew people.

His promised son was named Isaac, and Isaac's son was Jacob. God's plan was to be fulfilled through Jacob and his descendants. Jacob's name was changed to Israel, which means "prince of God," and Jacob became the father of twelve sons who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

In Egypt

Jacob's favorite son was Joseph. The jealousy of Joseph's brothers caused them to sell him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him. Though a series of injustices came upon Joseph, it all eventually resulted in him being raised to second in power

in the land of Egypt. Because he was an able man, with the help and providence of God, he interpreted Pharoah's dream that warned of seven years of plenty that would be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph advised Pharoah to appoint an administrator to preserve the food during the good years so there would be ample supply during the years of famine. Pharoah appointed Joseph.

When the famine years came, not only did Egypt suffer, but also Canaan where lived Jacob and Joseph's brothers. The brothers came to Egypt to buy grain. In time, after much intrigue, deception, investigation and inquiry, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and sent for Jacob. The entire household of Jacob moved to Egypt and were given the land of Goshen in which to live.

Following the death of Jacob, and then Joseph (Exodus 1:7-10), things took a dramatic and tragic change for the worse for the Israelites who were growing rapidly in number. The Pharoah became afraid of their growth and used numerous means to suppress their increase, but Israel continued to grow. In the midst of these conditions, with slavery now imposed upon the Israelites and their young sought until killed, Moses was born. Hidden during his infancy among the reeds of the river, he was eventually discovered by Phaorah's daughter who took him as her own son to be reared as her son in the Egyptian palace. There Moses lived the first forty years of his life.

When he was forty he made a premature attempt to bring relief for the Israelites and his efforts resulted in the necessity for him to flee Egypt for his life. He went to Midian where he tended the flocks and herds of Jethro who became his father-in-law. There he lived another forty years.

Exodus

At the age of eighty, God called Moses out of the burning bush and commissioned him to return to Egypt and lead Israel out of bondage and into the land that God had promised Abraham. With Aaron, his brother, Moses began the task that would occupy him the last forty years of his life. By working miracles, bringing plagues against Egypt, Moses finally coerced Pharoah to let God's people go. They crossed the Red Sea and marched toward Mount Sinai where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and all the rest of the Mosaic Law that was to guide Israel through every phase of their existence for the next

fifteen hundred years.

Finally, the mantle of leadership fell from the shoulder of Moses and was given to Joshua. By now Israel had wandered forty years in the wilderness.

Canaan

Joshua led Israel in taking Canaan from the heathen people that occupied it, beginning with Jericho. After taking Canaan, the Israelites lived the next three hundred years under a decentralized government of Judges, men that God would raise up in times of crisis to be leaders of the people. We read during these years of such men as Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Samuel and others.

But Israel, seeking to be like the nations around them, demanded a king. God granted them their rebellious desire and the first king was Saul, then David, then Solomon. It was David who brought the nation into power and prominence and Solomon who heaped lavish wealth and glory on it so that all nations admired the brillance of Israel. It was to be through David, the descendant of Jacob, that God would bring about the fulfillment of His promise to bless all nations.

After Solomon the nation divided into two nations, the ten tribes of the north called Israel, and the two tribes of the south called Judah. Through many years these nations existed side by side, sometimes as enemies, sometimes indifferent to each other, sometimes as allies. Israel grew worse and worse, disregarding the work of such prophets as Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos, Hosea and others. God eventually allowed Assyria to overrun Israel and take them away in captivity from which they never returned as a nation.

Southern Judah lasted about one hundred thirty-five years longer. All of Judah's kings were of the family of David. Its history is characterized by much evil, with sprinklings of revival now and again. But failing to heed the lesson of their northern cousins, their wickedness brought them into captivity by the Babylonians which lasted for seventy years before they were allowed under the Persians to return to ther homeland.

With the urging of such prophets as Haggai, Malachi and others, men like Zerrubabel, Ezra and Nehemiah led the people in restoring the nation. The temple was rebuilt; the walls of Jerusalem was raised again, and a great religious revival was experienced in the nation is Israel.

Lord to Come

In the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, we read a prophecy of one who was to come to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. *"Behold, I will send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me... And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers..."* (Malachi 3:1; 4:6). *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."* (Malachi 4:5). This is a prophecy of the coming of John the Baptist which is explained in detail in the New Testament record.

Here the Old Testament story ends and some four hundred years pass before the time when the New Testament record resumes the old, old story. Between these testaments during this four hundred year span, secular history shows the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies, particularly of Daniel two. Following the Babylonian empire there came Persia, then Greece and eventually Rome. Palestine was under the occupation of the Romans when John the Baptist came on the scene and when Jesus the Christ was born. John came preaching repentance, preparing the way for Christ, just as Malachi had propheisied. John preached that the *"kingdom is at hand."*

Enter Christ

"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." (Galatians 4:4). God, through love, mercy and grace, sent His Son, born of the virgin, reared under the Mosaic Law, living a perfect life during thirty-three and one-half years on earth, to complete God's plan for redeeming man from sin.

Jesus provided abundant evidence that He was the Son of God, Deity in the flesh. He performed miracles, taught God's will, fulfilled prophecies, lived perfectly, and completed the system of salvation that had been in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world, dying on the cross of Calvary for the sin of mankind, raised the third day following His burial, ascending in heaven to the right hand of God where He now rules and reigns over His kingdom, the church, which began on the first Pentecost after His ascension.

Before He ascended He gave His apostles that great charge or commission to "*God ye into all the world and preach the gospel*

to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved and he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15,16). Such has been the charge to God's people since.

Kingdom Comes

On that notable day of Pentecost, Peter, with the other apostles, being guided by the Holy Spirit, preached the gospel of salvation in the name of Christ. The promises of the kingdom had been fulfilled and the Savior was a reality. Those who heard that sermon believed what they heard, obeyed the commands to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38), and were added to the church (Acts 2:47). All of the conditions that had been foretold that would mark the coming of the kingdom culminated on that day. The kingdom was called the church.

The Word of God spread throughout the world. From that time until this day those who hear, believe and obey the gospel of Christ become spiritual children of God with the duty and privilege to live their lives in the manner of God's Word. They know that if they are faithful and stedfast, unmoveable and always abounding in the work of the Lord, when the time comes for them to leave this life via death that they shall be in the hands of their heavenly Father and will be ushered into eternal glory in heaven after the resurrection and judgment. *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."* (Revelation 14:13).

The story of the Bible is a glad tidings, but it also has a tragic note about it. Those who do not come to Christ through obedience to the gospel have the assurance that they shall be banished into an eternal torment of hell.

This is the old, old story of Jesus and His love; or the redemption of mankind. This is the theme of the Bible with the central theme of redemption and the central person, Christ. Here is the revelation of God's love and manifestations of it. Here we have God's own revelation of His will for His creatures. Thank God He loved us to provide for us redemption and the old, old story how He has made it possible for us to live eternally in the glories of heaven.

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Is the Church a Dynamic Force in the World?

At the end of the eighteenth century it was estimated that twenty-five per cent of the world was called "Christian." This was to use the term "Christian" very loosely, not Biblically. Even so, nearly two hundred years later it is estimated that less than eight per cent of the world can be so identified. Some have estimated as low as four per cent. This is sobering, especially when we realize how all that is called "Christian" most certainly does not deserve the name according to the Bible.

Yet, many who are truly Christians see no need for concern or alarm and are evidently content to bask themselves in the artificial light of indifference, lukewarmness and half-hearted service to God. If this year you earned twenty-five thousand dollars, but the next you would only earn eight, possibly four, would you be concerned? This is happening to the so-called "Christian" world, and still many sing, "I love thy kingdom, Lord," and will not even attend worship services faithfully, let alone govern their daily lives according to Biblical teaching.

Not many miles from where I once preached regularly, in one community there were about one hundred fifty families that stated in a census that they "preferred" the church of Christ and would be interested in establishing a new congregation. Yet, of those families two out of three were not even faithful at the time. They gave as their excuse, "There is no church nearby." Three to five congregations were within five miles of their residences. Some of these people drove from fifteen to twenty miles each day to their jobs. Such is an example of the spiritual poverty in the minds and lives of many who have been baptized. There is a void where there ought to be devotion, dedication and fervor for truth. That very attitude has sabotaged and nearly paralyzed the church for decades, and it has infected congregations everywhere. There is no excuse for it.

The Charge to Keep

Is the church today a dynamic force in the world? Jesus said, *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the*

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:19,20). Far too many have never grasped the seriousness and extensiveness of the great commission. Without being cynical or belittling of noble efforts many have made and continue to make, too often the great commision in modern practice has been, "Go ye therefore and have some kind of church among people of good reputation and financial means, with a building the community will respect, hire a preacher, and conduct services."

You may think this is an unfair evaluation of things. But it is time for putty-minded and unstable brethren to awaken to the facts of reality regarding the churches of Christ and cease living in a make-believe world that all is well or thinking the church is really packing a punch. Only in a few rare instances has the influence of professed New Testament Christians been felt with the distinctiveness that is supposed to characterize the faith of Christ.

In Jesus' day the power of Rome spread its tentacles over most of the known world. There was an increasing degradation among the nations and a growing contempt for law and order. Religion was overrun by paganism and seemed to make little difference in the way people lived and conducted their lives. There was religion, but precious little righteousness.

Turned Upside Down

But the religious world suddenly shook from the impact of a force that was felt throughout the entire Roman Empire. The new faith became the main topic of conversation. It was discussed on every corner, and even in the palaces of the worldly elite. It aroused everyone from emperors to the lowliest beggars and humblest peasants. That new force was the faith of Jesus Christ and the influence His church was having in the world as the message of truth was being proclaimed.

What were these people who had been purchased by the blood of Christ doing to make such an impression? They were not trying to make an impression simply for the purpose of making an impression. That can be done many ways. They were preaching an unadulterated, uncompromised, pure and powerful gospel of Christ. They condemned the sins of men by the authority of God and proclaimed the way of salvation

through Christ. They coupled their words with their deeds.

People from all walks of life took notice and many were added to their ranks. They insisted upon a loving submission to Christ and obedience to His will. Their efforts were often met with fierce, even violent, opposition, hatred, persecution and rejection.

But their faith was a dynamic force in their world. *"They turned the world upside down"* and "filled" the places where they lived with their message. The church everywhere was spoken against because it was known everywhere by the distinctive, authoritative inspired message it preached and lived. The world was not able to ignore it. They knew it existed and why. Those who opposed it could not withstand the truth. The truth was evidenced in the lives of the disciples. Can we say that this is the case with the churches of Christ in our own day?

Take a Look

Let us lift up our eyes and see our world. Theft, wordliness, immorality, drunkenness, divorce, drugs, false doctrines, atheism, humanism, riotous living, deliquency, indency, pornography, lawlessness, wars, vice, abortion, child abuse, secularism, materialism, greed, evolution, crime and worldly living are running rampant and unchecked. These are the traits of our day. You need not trespass the boundaries of your own area where you live to note such crimes against both God and man among the populace. Why does not the Lord's church affect the world more effectively?

There are too many who sit in the pews of the buildings who would not have the pure gospel preached in the condemnation of sin if they had their way about it. They do not want anybody to cross anybody else regardless of what is being said or done. They prefer that all anybody does is to soothe the one next to him. Conformity to the world and compromise with error is more the concern of many than conversion to Christ and living like a Christian.

This world is a sinful place. *"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness."* (First John 5:19). Since when has it been the case that God wants the sinner to be anything but ill at ease in the light of the gospel? The gospel is a gospel of peace only when people accept it and confrom to it. Too many so-called "Christians" have swallowed compromise and sin and have sought the means of diplomacy,

tact, scholarship and deception as the solution to man's ills rather than repentance and obedience to the truth. They have longed to "go along" with everything around them and have decided to they will not walk in the *"old paths, where is the good way."* (Jeremiah 6:16). They seek religious respectability before the community at the sacrifice of the narrowness and precision of the gospel and the person, Jesus Christ. Such is an embarassment to them. They are ashamed of the gospel. There is such a need for brethren who will send forth sound words and sound doctrine and condemn the sins of the world and proclaim the way of holiness as the only way like the Bible teaches. We have for too long drifted away from that to have much of an impact on anybody. How can we expect to be a dynamic force in the world for good when we have become so much like the world? Surely, one reason persecution is seldom coming from the devil is because we are not bothering him very much.

Beg Brethren

Something is dreadfully amiss when professed believers have to be begged to even worship regularly. Only about one out of five can be aroused to really be concerned about sending the gospel to places other than where they are. Some have the money to build playgrounds and gymnasiums but have no money to help struggling works less than a day's drive from their cathedral-like buildings and playrooms. We have such little concern for the Far and Middle East, South America, etc., as well as vast regions in our own nation that know not God. Being bogged down in pettiness, having to expend so much of our energies in fighting a rearguard action against liberalism and digression, the church has retreated into a declining position. There is more concern among many with building colleges than establishing congregations. Those who want to follow the New Teatament pattern are being ridiculed as old-fashioned, uneducated traditionalists. Money, men and materials have been channeled into gimmicks and gadgets for getting crowds and what have we reaped? The church has fewer and fewer people who really know and stand for the truth and less influence than anytime in our lifetime. Just why some persist in wanting to follow the lead of those who have led us into paths of decline is beyond us to understand.

The politics among preachers and the propaganda of compromise among papers has dulled the sensitivity of brethren

to the seriousness of sin and the mission of the church. While the early church turned the world upside down the world today scarcely knows the churches of Christ exist.

The first church would not allow people to think one god was just as good as the true God. They would not compromise any point of truth for advantage to themselves, for business, power, prestige, popularity or advancement. They declared in no uncertain terms the *"whole counsel of God"* and people knew the difference between truth and error whether they accepted that difference or not. The early church was not afraid of being labeled as extremists and radicals when they were only standing for the truth. They knew what they believed and practiced and knew why. Their faith was extreme and radical compared to the heathenism, paganism and sinfulness around them. They were neither ashamed nor afraid to be persecuted for righteous' sake.

They refused to look upon Jesus Christ as only one among many alternatives. They considered Him the One and exclusive way to God and said so. Their view of their faith was that it was applicable to the whole world, not just a few. The gospel is for all because all need the gospel because all have sinned and all need to be saved. They were not content to simply preach to themselves and among themselves, but went out into the world.

They did not enter the service of Christ with reservations, but with a commitment to follow Him in every way, every day. They did not put the things of this life first. They would not condone sin among themselves. They were willing to die before they would surrender God's truth.

It Could Be

The church today could be a dynamic force in the world, but it is not fair to say that the anemic demonstration of faith we see today is much of a force. We must return to the way, manner and message of the early church when it did make an impact on the world. We must regain a world-wide view of things. Many do not even have a very wide community view. Some are content to "go along" with just about anything, everything, anybody and everybody if it involves friends, favorites or family. Too many are happy to just "keep house" and "play church." Well, that will not get done what God expects us to get done. Such conduct may ease the consciences of some but it will not save the lost nor retain the saved.

When we realize the world must be staggered into the

realization that it is doomed in sin and bound for hell, then possibly some in the world will be sufficiently aroused to investigate the truth. Before we save the world we must shake the world from its complacency and indifference toward God and sin. We have to challenge people before we can change them to God's way. We must show the world that being a Christian makes a difference before we can convince them that it does by mere words.

Is the church a dynamic force in our world? Only in spots here and there, now and then. As we said before, most do not even know the New Testament church exists or that it matters whether it exists or not. They are steeped in this world, in various religions, in nothingness, to the point that the feeble presentation of a compromised message that too often is being preached does not make an impact. But that can change. Whether it will or not remains to be seen. What do you intend to do about it?

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What Is Your Excuse?

"Then said he unto them, A certain man made a great supper and bade many; and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said unto his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in hither the poor, the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." (Luke 14:16-24).

The Parable

The first part of our lesson will be an analysis of the parable the Lord taught. A certain man prepared a feast and extended invitations to many. When all was ready, everyone who had accepted the invitation were told to come. But rather than coming, they began to make excuses for not coming.

This angered the host and he invited others to take their places. Those least expected to be invited were invited. Those who had been invited but refused to come would now not be allowed to come at all.

Notice the excuses. One bought land which he claimed he had never even seen. It is not likely he was even telling the truth but simply offering a wild excuse.

Another said he had bought oxen without knowing their ability to work and needed to find out their worth. This was doubtless a lie for who would ever make a purchase on that basis? It was but an excuse.

Another said he had married and gave no further explanation but just rejected the invitation forthwith.

Notice that the master of the house, the host, did not believe any of the excuses were valid or sufficient for refusing to partake of what had been prepared.

God Rejects Excuses

So it is with the Lord and us. Jesus taught this parable to teach us the mind and attitude of God. He has provided us a spiritual feast. Not all are willing to accept His invitation. Not all who have accepted it shall enter into His great feast because they are loaded with excuses for not doing what they ought. As the host in the parable was angered with those who flippantly excused themselves, so God is displeased when people reject His calling through the gospel. God has never accepted man's excuses for not doing what God has directed man to do. We need to learn this.

When God called Moses at the burning bush to lead Israel out of Egypt, Moses offered several excuses why he could not and should not do it. In the New Testament Felix heard Paul preach the gospel but offered as an excuse for not obeying that it was not a convenient time for him. God did not accept the excuses of Moses, nor will He accept the excuses of anyone for disobedience. Yet, many today still will attempt to get around

doing what God teaches by offering excuses. If there is not some hindrance that can be overcome, it is something else invented to justify self for not doing God's will. Is not this a foolish path to follow, knowing that God will not accept excuses?

What are some of the excuses people offer for not being a child of God? One that is mentioned may be your excuse!

No Need

"I live a good life. I do not need to be a Christian." Some think that they are already Christian anyway even though they have not obeyed the gospel and never reached the blood of Christ. These people have the idea that becoming a Christian is only something really bad people need to do but not those who are moral, even religious.

It is true that there are people whose lives would not have to be changed very much to live a Christian life because they are already doing many things that should characterize a Christian. But morality is not sufficient to make one a child of God, even though morality is essential to go to heaven.

To be saved one must live a good moral life, but he also must be *"in Christ."* Salvation is *"in Christ"* (Second Timothy 2:10). Those out of Christ are lost in their sins. Even that good and moral law-abiding citizen who is religious and is a good neighbor is not "*in Christ*" until he obeys the gospel of Christ, being baptized to reach the saving blood of Christ. If one could be a child of God while remaining out of Christ, pray tell me why Jesus ever had to leave heaven at all? Salvation is dependent upon the righteousness of Christ, and out of Christ man has no access to heaven. Christ is the only way to be saved (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). The Bible is clear on this.

In Acts ten we read about the good and moral man named Cornelius. But he was lost. This is why Peter came to teach him and tell him what to do to be saved. When he learned what to do, he did it.

Too Evil

But some have the very opposite excuse. They contend, "I am too evil. God would never forgive me of all the wrongs I have done." Somehow, they have the idea that only good people ever come to God. The fact that one does realize he is a sinner is in his favor because now he knows he needs a Savior.

That Savior is Jesus Christ.

"But there are some things I must change before I become a Christian. I must learn to do better, leave off bad language, evil habits, sinful things of my life. Then I will come." But do you really think you can overcome evil by yourself? If you could, why did Christ die for you? Do you not know that with God's help you receive as His child that overcoming your sinful manners can be more easily accomplished? What ever gives a person the idea that he has to become perfect before he can be cleansed of sin? Christians are not perfect people. They are people who have come to Christ by obeying the gospel to be washed clean of sins by His blood and having been forgiven are striving with all their heart, soul, mind and strength to walk after the way of Christ. If we all waited until we had Satan defeated then there would be no need for Christ. We cannot defeat the devil by ourselves.

Yes, there are some things one needs to change, like attitude toward sin, one's mind about Christ, repentance being essential. But once you have reached His blood by being baptized into His death you begin to grow stronger as a spiritual child of God, resisting temptation because you will have the encouragement, motivation, goal and desire to overcome in order to remain faithful to the One who died for you.

Hypocrites

"But there are just too many hypocrites in the church." Here we can agree. Even if there is only one, that is too many. It is good for one to have a distaste for hypocrisy. Such a person will likely try very hard to be loyal and faithful as a child of God once he has come to Christ. He recognizes the inconsistency of sinful living as a Christian. Would that all did!

But nobody shall ever be excused from their duty before God because somebody else failed in his or her duty. We are not saved by the sins of hypocrites but by the blood of Christ. We cannot hide behind the sins of hypocrites and expect God to overlook our deliberate disobedience.

If you do not like hypocrites, then why are you living outside of Christ and heading for the same eternal destination as they where you will be locked together for eternity? Does that make much sense? Who can explain that?

Furthermore, not everybody in the church is a hypocrite. Why not focus your attention on those who are honest, sincere,

stedfast, righteous and working at the task rather than being blinded by some few who are hypocrites? Let's face reality. Hypocrisy among Christians is a hindrance to many, but neither the hypocrite nor the one who uses the hypocrite as an excuse shall escape the wrath of God.

After all, no hypocrite is our standard. Not even those who weconsider righteous are the standard. Christ is the standard. Follow Him. We need to remember, not everyone who stumbles and falls is a hypocrite. Some are weak, growing, trying hard against many difficulties and doing the best they can. But they know they must be *"in Christ,"* and are not trying to hide behind somebody else, making excuses, for disobeying God.

Don't Know Enough

"But I don't know enough to become a Christian." That may be true in many cases. There are some things one must know before he or she can obey the gospel. But a study of the book of Acts will soon equip you with sufficient information to obey. In Acts eight the Ethiopian obeyed after he was taught one lesson. Likewise was it true with Lydia and the jailer in Acts sixteen. Sure, they had some background, but that is easily gained. We must make the start!

We must know that God is; that sin is real; that sin separates us from God; that we all sin; that we must be rid of the guilt of sin; that we cannot save ourselves by ourselves; that we need a Savior; that God has provided a Savior; the Savior is Jesus Christ. We must know that He lived, died, was buried and rose again, ascending on high to His throne over His kingdom the church. We must know the church is composed of the saved and to become one of the saved we must be washed clean of sin by the blood of Christ which we reach when we obey the gospel, believing that Jesus is the Christ, repenting of sins, confessing our faith in Christ, and being baptized into Him for the remission of sins. It is then we reach the saving blood and rise to walk as a new creature in newness of life.

We also must know that our Savior expects and commands loyal faithfulness to walk as He walked. This involves living life. We have the promise that those who do such things shall live with God eternally. This we must know. Now, you already know that even if you never knew it before now.

I'll Wait

Some excuse themselves on the basis that they want to wait! Wait for what? Wait until I am older, or until my mate comes with me, or until this or that. But God does not want you to wait if you see your duty and recognize your responsibility. He expects you to obey. Your coming could also be an encouragement another needs to also come. Why do you wait? What do you expect to gain by waiting? You might well lose everything by waiting.

After all is offered, whatever be the excuse, think more clearly and you will understand that whatever be the excuse, God does not accept excuses. It really matters very little what kind of excuse one might concoct. Until he obeys the gospel he is lost and if he dies that way he will forever be lost!

People sometimes say they are afraid they cannot hold out faithful. Good for you! At least you are aware you must be faithful! Some contend the family might object. So what? We must please God more than anyone else!

Think about it! When you stand before God in judgment, and there is His Son who gave all for you, do you really think some excuse is going to cause God to grant you salvation anyway? You have been warned, and kindly so. Give heed!

The story of the life of some people is, *"They began to make excuse."* What a reason for spending eternity in hell and missing the eternal joys of heaven! Obey today!

† † † † †

> *"For it was said to me by the word of the Lord, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest."* (First Kings 13:17).
>
> The prophet was explaining his actions. To him, at that time, it was enough that *"the word of the Lord"* had instructed him what to do. He needed no further direction.
>
> When people have enough respect for God, then *"the word of the Lord"* will be enough for them. Love for God means obedience to His Word (First John 5:3). JWB

The Forks of the Road

There are numerous times in the course of life that we come to what we call "the forks of the road," by which we mean we must make a decision which direction we intend to go. We often delight in making choices, but sometimes choices are imposed upon us whether we like it or not.

Making decisions is a very important matter. Our lives on earth as well as out eternal destiny is determined by the choices and decisions that we make. The time of choosing is both one of potential danger but also one of great opportunity.

In our daily lives we must make decisions in matters that often are not too grave. The most serious matter we shall ever consider has to do with who we will serve in life, God through Jesus Christ, or self.

History and Scripture both show how the Lord's church has had to make decisions and choices which way to go. In both Old and New Testaments we have record of God's people choosing this way or that way; sometimes to their benefit and the glory of God; sometimes to their detriment because they did not choose to follow God's way.

The church in our county, as

well as elsewhere, exists in crucial days. With digression threatening on every hand, false doctrines being preached and endorsed by some, we have the necessity to either choose to stand by the faith without compromise or "go along to get along" with false ways and those that promote them. Since error is being injected into the ranks of the church, brethren everywhere are having to make the decision whether to please God or others.

Joshua proposed to Israel to choose whom they would serve, but he announced his determination that he would serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15). Every church, elder, preacher, Christian brother or sister must make the same choice as did he. Anything less will be wrong.

It is disturbing to observe how some seem to find it difficult to decide whether they will fellowship error or stand for the truth. This ought not require second thought. We must obey God regardless of how this affects our relationship with others. It is our prayer that brethren in this county will prove their loyalty to truth in these crucial times of potential apostasy and hold fast the sound words of the doctrine of Christ with kindness and firmness. Would the Lord be pleased with anything else?

Damage from Drinking and Dancing



JAMES W. BOYD

Worldliness among members of the church continues to be a damaging effect on the cause of Christ. Little wonder that some outside of the church see no advantage to being in the church because some in the church act like those who do not care for the church.

I know of one "preacher" who told me that he personally opposes dancing but has never preached on the subject where he preaches. Well, he is not opposed to it much or he would have enough courage and love for the truth and his people to preach on it and condemn it for the sin that it is. When you hear and see what the members of that congregation are saying and doing you soon realize that drinking and dancing are as much a part of their lives as breathing and the fact that both are condemned in Scripture makes no difference to them whatsoever. But it has influence on others!

More than once those outside the church have commented regarding the people of that congregation and they have no respect for them. The trouble is, they lose respect for the church everywhere because these worldly members have so sorely misrepresented the church. For shame!

* * * * *

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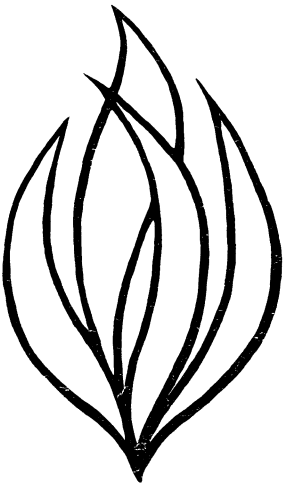

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME X **NUMBER 8**

James W. Boyd

Things That Make for Peace

John 17:20,21 *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."*

Ephesians 4:4-6, *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Philippians 2:2, *"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."*

First Corinthians 1:10-15, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name."*

A common theme that runs through all of these passages is unity, peace among brethren, harmony among God's people. That the early Christians considered oneness as a vital ingredient in their faith is beyond dispute. Through the years faithful Christians have deplored religious division, even warring against it, exposing its causes, not only that which is propagated by denominationalism, but division in the ranks of the body of Christ.

Harm of Division

Division among Christian brethren is even more damaging to the cause of Christ than the religious division that characterizes the world. But such has been experienced since the beginning of the church in various quarters. Division in a local congregation is one of the worst tragedies that can be experienced in the

spiritual life of a Christian. The frustration, hurt, heartache and harm that is done leaves scars on the lives of all involved, and the handicaps on the church may take generations to remove.

The early church heard, taught and practiced religious oneness. Acts 2:46,47, *"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* This is a wonderful statement of unity, peace, cooperation, harmony and oneness among brethren.

Paul wrote in Romans 14:19, *"So then, let us follow after things that make for peace."* There are those things that divide. But there are also those things that make for peace. Peace can be the rule (Colossians 3:15), and God's people can be united. We are called to peace (First Corinthians 7:15).

Who Prefers Division?

I find it hard to believe that there are many people who would prefer problems, strife, conflict, division and contentions rather than unity, harmony and peace. There may be some, but not many. To be sure, there are those who prefer to have their own way in everything rather than have peace, just as there are those, who, for the sake of peace, are willing to sacrifice truth and compromise what is not theirs to compromise. But division is often the result of pettiness and jealousy. While we want peace, and should work for peace, peace at any price is a price that is too high. Our cry must be for unity based on truth, not at the sacrifice of truth. But most want peace. How can one claim to believe the Bible and not want the unity and oneness it teaches? Possibly we are not as aware as we ought to be of those things that make for peace.

We have to be idealistic, but at the same time, realistic. It is not likely that there will be religious peace here on earth. Life would be much easier and more pleasant if it could exist. The same could be said of division among Christian brethren. But many divisions can be corrected and avoided if we will learn what makes for peace. Actually, unity begins with the individual assuming his personal responsibility to work for it. Like the phrase, "A better world begins with me," so the thought, "Unity begins with me." We want to mention five things that make for peace and that result in happiness, joy and fellowship that God

want among His people.

Love

First Corinthians 16:14, *"Let all that you do be done in charity."* This strikes at the very source of strife and conflict because it deals with the heart and the motive behind all actions. It deals with the greatest of all emotions, and that is love. Love prompts many things, but Paul said to let love be the motive behind everything. Like a good parent who does everything that he does for the child out of a motive of love, whether it is comforting, sympathizing, feeding, correcting, chastening, everything is done through love, so should all our motives be. Christians are to love God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, God's Word, the saved, the lost, even enemies if such we have. Have you ever noticed how all of God's commands, instructions and prohibitions are motivated by His love for mankind and how He seeks man's highest good in everything? He loves those He chastens (Hebrews 12:6). Love is a Godlike motive (John 3:16). Love will help bring peace.

Selflessness

Philippians 2:3,4, *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themsleves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."* This is a negative approach to the same positive teaching we have just considered. Paul admonishes that we not let faction, strife, selfishness lead us in what we say and do. A factious man, even when he is right, stirs up division. Usually he is wrong, not only in what he is promoting but the manner he is doing it. Vanity, pride, self-glory and the ambition to be considered "somewhat" is often behind the actions of people. It seems almost impossibly for some to ever admit, "I was wrong." How can the error of division be overcome when such attitudes prevail? Motives of jealousy, vengeance, self-superiority, stubbornness and self-righteousness all contribute to division. We must look on the positive side to the humility and lowliness of mind taught by Paul and Peter (First Peter 5:5-7). We just do not behave in such evil manners toward those we love by berating, unjustly criticizing, picking and finding fault however insignificant the matter may be. Most of us could really improve in this area.

Truth

Closely akin to these things is the teaching of Paul in Ephesians 4:15, *"Speaking the truth in love."* We have stressed the necessity of love and now wish to stress the necessity of truth. There cannot be unity that God approves without truth. God does not smile upon all unity, nor does He condemn all division. He makes division necessary in some instances, such as when there be those who do not have a love for the truth and those who love the truth cannot and should not remain in fellowship among them. There is not approved peace unless the harmony is founded and grounded upon the truth. Where truth is neglected there should be division unless all go the way of error. Error cause division; not truth.

We should speak *"sound doctrine"* (Titus 2:1); *"sound speech"* (Titus 2:8). There are those who receive *"not the love of the truth"* (Second Thessalonians 2:10). The Word of God is truth (John 17:17). In the same prayer where Jesus prayed for unity He defined truth as God's Word. The two are inseparable; truth and peace.

Too often there be those who wish to use the "soft pedal" on certain truth, hoping the benign neglect of it will avoid strife. But avoiding truth is at the heart of contentions. Error cannot be "swept under the rug" as if it did not exist. Some rebel at the exposure of such sins as social drinking, dancing, adultery, lying, materialistic greed, theft, divorce, absenteeism, etc. There is not a subject in the Bible at which somebody, sometime, does not raise objection to the truth about it. But dodging truth creates no peace. It only strengthens the power of evil that would suppress truth. We can know this even if we did not know a Word of the Bible. Just look around you in the affairs of the world and see if the suppression of truth is not a vicious cause of division.

We show the love we are to have by teaching and standing for the truth, living the truth, defending it, and not withholding it. Who could doubt Paul's love for others. He labored night and day with tears, publicly and privately, from house to house, and said, Acts 20:28, *"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."*

Standing Firm

The weakness of Protestantism is evident in its contention to "agree to disagree," seeking peace without contending for the faith, ignoring differences, brushing aside errors as if they did not matter. Has it brought unity among Protestants? No, nor shall it ever bring unity. If people want peace, including brethren, the truth must dominate. It cannot be accomplished by mergers, union meetings, resolution, "summits," restructuring the church to accomodate division, or trying to convert God to accept man regardless of what man does, says, thinks or wants. This doctrine, "I'm O.K. and you're O.K." is foolishness. Some believe "everything is beautiful in its own way." More folly! We must stand stedfastly by the oracles of God without wavering if there is to be the unity that God approves.

While we do this we must be gentle, meek, kind as well as strong and firm (Second Timothy 2:23,24; Galatians 6:1). Standing firm does not require bitterness, harshness or self-righteousness. Unfortunately, some must consider strong words to be opposite of gentleness and meekness. But consider again the preaching of Christ and His apostles, who were both strong and gentle. Being gentle is not being weak. Meekness is not the same as weakness. Anger is not the same as courage.

Consider how the good surgeon wields his scaphel with precision, firm and bold, but gentle. So we must wield the *"sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."* (Ephesians 6:17). Failure to be gentle is a temptation when fighting error because error is so hideous. But truth upheld gently will produce peace. True, some try to take advantage of a gentle approach and run roughshod over those who hold to truth unless a more forceful manner is used. But this is a serious problem for them and we ought not imitate them.

Discipline

There is another measure that makes for peace and that is not as easily done as said, but necessary betimes. Romans 16:17, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."* Disciplinary actions may be the only way to maintain peace. Withholding fellowship from those among us who do evil, teach falsely, is necessary to preserve unity when the evildoer will not repent. True, disciplinary actions divide the faithful from the unfaithful. But the source of the problem is not the discipline, but the sinfulness of those who will not turn again

coupled with the neglect of discipline. Parents know when they discipline their children there may be moments of estrangement, but the discipline did not cause it. It was caused by that which necessitated discipline.

Paul teaches in many places that there is no way to maintain peace if the peacebreakers are allowed to go unchecked. False doctrines, immorality, walking disorderly, promoting apostacy, all such causes division and those who are guilty must either repent or be disciplined for the sake of harmony and unity. In this matter the twentieth century church has been negligent beyond toleration and we are reaping the results of division and a worldly, unconverted, sin-tolerating brotherhood. Digression is evident through false doctrines taught by false doctors and too often their mouths are not stopped. Discipline must be counted among those things that make for peace.

In summary, what are the things we have mentioned in this lesson that make for peace? They are love, truth, gentleness, discipline and the restraint from doing what is done from motives of selfishness.

The best time for a congregation to learn these things is while peace prevails. Too often, if we wait until strife has invaded, emotions run too rampant for people to be objective toward the truth. While we must work for peace even in the midst of strife, it is better to work for it before strife, never surrendering to the ways of the devil that would divide the people of God.

† † † † †

(from page 20)

came in sorrow, but they left in joy to tell others. All they thought and said centered on the resurrection of Christ. Its meaning was that the hope, assurances, comforts and promises the Lord had extended were certain and upon them they and all the human family can rely.

When we realize the resurrected Christ, we can grasp the same significance as did they. God's plan for the redemption of man and eternal life was now complete. As Peter wrote, teaching the necessity of baptism to be saved, he attributed the power of salvation to the resurrection of Christ (First Peter 3:21). As the crucifixion paid the penalty for our sins, the resurrection confirms the hope of eternal life. Here is the basis for Paul's declaration that Christ is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

† † † † †

Is It Truth We Really Want?

During the trials of Jesus many people said many things, first one thing was heard, then another. Christ said He came into the world to bear witness of the truth. John 18:37, *"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."* When Jesus said this, Pilate asked, *"What is truth?*

In the midst of so much confusion, especially the chaotic conditions that exist in the religious world, with one shouting one thing, other contending for various points of view, Pilate's question is very appropriate for our time. Some would have us believe that the only truth is that nobody can know the truth, even it is does exist. They teach that everything is relative and nothing is absolute, therefore, nobody can say anything is true and be sure about it. This doctrine carries the concept that there is no right or wrong, good or bad, except as each might feel it for himself or herself. The fundamental flaw of such a philosophy is that it is self-contradictory. If there is no truth, how can we be sure it is true that there is no truth? If nobody can be certain about anything, how can anybody be certain that nobody can be certain? If there is no right or wrong how can we know we are right and not wrong when we contend there is no right or wrong? Any position that "shoots itself in the heart" is not deserving of acceptance among intelligent people.

There is Knowledgeable Truth

The Bible affirms there is truth and truth can be known and be known to be the truth. First Timothy 4:3, it is evident that Paul believed people could *"know the truth."* Hebrews 10:26 teaches that people can receive *"the knowledge of the truth."* Jesus said, *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). Let us consider other passages that show us certain things about truth and let it be magnified and exalted in our thinking.

To answer Pilate's question, Christ said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life."* (John 14:6). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the demonstration, example, personification and source of truth. John 1:17, *"For the law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."*

Christians were sanctified, set apart from the world, into the service of God, cleansed from sin by the truth, and that truth is the Word of God. Jesus prayed, *"Sanctify them through thy truth; Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17). Truth is said to be the fruit of the Spirit. Ephesians 5:9, *"For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth."* The Holy Spirit was promised to the apostles that He would *"guide you into all truth."* (John 16:13). Truth is revealed by Deity, by the Holy Spirit, through those apostles Jesus had chosen for that task.

John 3:3-5 teaches the necessity of being *"born again."* James 1:18 tells us we are begotten *"with the word of truth."* If there is no truth there surely cannot be a new birth. First Peter 1:23 shows we are *"born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God,"* which we have noted already is the truth. The verse preceding declared how *"ye purified your souls in obeying the truth."*

Second Thessalonians 2:13 teaches we are chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and *"belief of the truth."* Second Corinthians 6:4-7 declares we are approved servants of God *"by the word of truth."* The truth is the measure and standard by which we can know.

Consider a few other scriptures to impress upon us the presence, reality and obtainability of truth. Third John 4, John said he had no greater joy than to hear that *"my children walk in truth."* We are admonished to hold fast to the truth (First Corinthians 5:8; Second Corinthians 13:8). How could anybody do that if truth were not ascertainable, obtainable and in exitence?

When Paul preached he preached truth. Acts 26:25, he spoke forth words of truth and soberness. *"We spake all things to you in truth."* (Second Corinthians 7:14). This is enough so let us go forward.

Not All Accept Truth

In any consideration of the subject of truth we must take note that not everybody is going to believe and obey the truth. Is this not very evident, both in the Scripture record and in our own observation of the world? Jesus said, John 8:45,46, *"And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?"* Second Peter 2:2, "*And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be*

evil spoken of." Romans 10:16, *"But they have not all obeyed the gospel."* Galatians 3:1, *"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth?"* Here Paul is talking to church members. Even church members do not always want the truth.

Romans 2:8 speaks of these who are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness. Some resist the truth (Second Timothy 3:8), and fight against it. Paul warned of others who would turn away from from the truth (Second Timothy 4:4). They preferred teachers who would tickle their ears rather than teachers to teach them the truth. So many prefer what they want rather than what they need.

Standing by the truth can win you enemies, however. Galatians 4:16, *"Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?"* It is obvious that the answer to the apostle's question is a strong affirmative with some. John 8:40, *"'But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth."*

Mission of the Church

Even so, the church has as its primary mission the work of upholding and proclaiming the truth, being the *"pillar and ground of the truth."* (First Timothy 3:15). Furthermore, we are required to expose false ways. *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* (Ephesians 5:11). When Paul encountered erroneous conduct, even from leaders in the church, he said he did not give place to such a thing, no, not for an hour (Galatians 2:5). Some seem to never learn that opposing error is upholding the truth.

Pilate and Truth

With this vast array of passages before us, and there are numerous others that could be added, let us turn again to Pilate's question, *"What is truth?"* Did Pilate really want the truth? All people do not have a love for truth (Second Thessalonians 2:10). Some *"received not the love of the truth,"* They had no appetite for it. Did Pilate? He asked for truth. He heard the truth. But he rejected the truth. Was it because what he heard was not what he wanted to hear? Did it not suit his situation at that moment? Did it leave him too obligated? If he accepted the truth, how would he get himself out of the dilema he was handling? The fact is, Pilate was seeking some

"expedient" way to help himself, and the truth was not what he really desired. We see this in his cowardly act to wash his hands, as it were, from responsibility. His problem remained, however, because he could not so easily dismiss his duty.

Examine Thyself

Let each one examine himself. Do we really fare differently from Pilate? Does the question offend you? We like to think we are different from that man, but there is no doubt that we are subject to making the same grave error Pilate made by not really wanting to know what the truth is.

When brethren do not attend their own home congregation's gospel meeting, will not even read good, sound, Bible materials provided them, will not bother to learn regarding grave issues facing the church, civilization, the family and young people, who act as if they are content in their ignorance and do not seem to want to know, is it unfair to ask the question, "Do they really want to know the truth?"

After nearly four decades of preaching the gospel, I am convinced most of the world does not want to know. Dealing with brethren has convinced me that many brethren do not want to know the truth. I recall one brother who was endorsing a preacher, and when I tried to show him the man was teaching falsely he would not even read the material provided him. Did he really want to know the truth?

Acts 20:26, *"I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God."* The Holy Spirit guided the apostles *"into all truth,"* but do we want to know what they preached?

In New Testament times some wanted only part of the truth; the part they had already obeyed; the part that harmonized with what they were already doing; the part that soothed and pleased them; the part with which they already agreed. But the rest of truth that contradicted their habits, their goals, ambitions, and exposed their false doctrines and sins, that called on them to fill their responsibilities or anything that disturbed them, they did not even want to hear it. Does this reflect an attitude of really desiring truth?

Specifics

Let me be more specific and offer a few examples. Regarding the nature of Christ, who was both human and Deity at the

same time, the truth declares that He was born of the virgin Mary, performed miracles, was resurrected from the dead. Why is it that so much of the liberal, "progressive" denominational world rejects these affirmations of Scripture? The same book that tells us anything of Christ affirms these things about Him.

Truth declares that there is the one church, His body, composed of the saved, which is His kingdom, of which we must be members if we live in heaven eternally. Why do people still contend one church is as good as another, or that you can be saved in any of them, or even in none of them if you choose? Do such people love the truth?

The same question could be asked regarding the steps of salvation, the gospel plan of faith, repentance, confession and baptism into Christ. Why do people think this can be set aside and they can successfully follow their own way that ignores God's way? Do they want truth?

What of Us?

But before brethren get too smug, having usually agreed that the above mentioned matters are truth, how do we react when teaching is offered regarding liberal giving? What do we say and do about God's pattern for discipline? How do we respond to the teaching against worldliness, including dancing, drinking, smoking, adultery, lying and immodesty? We do not have to ask what many brethren believe concerning faithfulness in worship. They have demonstrated that truth does not move them.

When we realize that the primary work of the church is evangelism, benevolence and edification, why is it that many can pinch the dollar regarding these things, but have no hesitancy when it comes to paving the parking lot, replacing the kitchen, sponsoring Boy Scouts or ball games? What does truth mean to those who claim to be Christians when these matters arise? While much of the world rots under pornography, abortion, drunkenness and adultery, some brethren still "mouth" against voting, obviously willing to surrender the whole of creation to the devil without even using legitimate weaponry at our disposal as responsible citizens to oppose the advance of moral degeneracy. If we be the "*salt of the earth,*" we ask again, should not truth receive more than convenient lip service?

I think these are hard, convincing and convicting questions. But what is more important? Whenever you study a lesson, attend a class, listen to a sermon, read an article, you should

ask, "Is it the truth I really want?" If it is, you will find it in Scripture and should conform to it.

Truth Abides

It is hard to fight against truth. Acts 9:5, *"It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."* Second Corinthians 13:8 shows when we think we can oppose truth, the truth will not change. *"For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth."* God's truth does not and will not change (First Peter 1:25). Whether we want it, reject, accept it, refuse it, believe it and obey it, the truth remains the truth. We must learn to want the truth more than anything else. *"Buy the truth, and sell it not."* (Proverbs 23:23). This must be our watchword! Let us be like Samuel. *"Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth."* (First Samuel 3:9). David said, *"I have chosen the way of truth; thy judgments have I laid before me."* (Psalm 119:30). Let us know when we stand for God's truth we are standing for that which shall stand forever. Psalm 100:5, *"And his truth endureth to all generations."*

† † † † †

Strength Plus Effort

"Yet now be strong, O Zerrubabel, saith the Lord, and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work, for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts." (Haggai 2:4).

The book of Ezra tells of the laying of the foundation for the second temple which was built after the return of Judah from Babylonian captivity. With eagarness and enthusiasm of the people, the debris of the ruins of the first temple was cleared away and foundations laid for the construction of the new one. But because of opposition, selfishness and indifference, the ardor and determination of the people cooled, and the work was stalled for fifteen years.

Into this stale situation God called Haggai the prophet to reprove the people for their neglect and to get them doing what they ought to be doing in rebuilding the temple. The people were shocked by the preaching they heard. It disturbed them. They had never heard anything like it and they were aroused.

The preaching did not set well with some. But the message of Haggai was just exactly what was needed. They were fortunate to have in their midst one that would tell them what they needed whether it was what they wanted or not. They needed the message that awakened them to see that their state of affairs was not good and correction was very much in order.

In time, more and more of the people saw the correctness of the message of Haggai and once again threw themselves wholeheartedly and enthusiastically into the Lord's work of rebuilding the temple.

His Message

What was it that Haggai preached? He showed them the need of the work that was before them. The Lord's house was being neglected and was allowed only second place in their activities. This is often the case with people in the church today. The church is the house of the Lord (First Timothy 3:15), and many neglect the building of it.

Haggai urged them to build that physical building. We are also urged to build up the temple of God which is the church today. Is there even one Christian who doubts for a moment the dire need to work for Christ and His church? This is so apparent that we will not belabor the point.

What Haggai taught is summarized in our text from Haggai 2:4. There were two dominant admonitions that he gave the people, to the leaders and the followers; one, be strong, and two, work. These two cannot be separated. There can be no work where there is no strength, and strength must manifest itself in the work that must be done. The message of Haggai is a modern message that the church needs now.

What Is Real Strength?

What makes a strong church? How does one tell if a church is really strong? We cannot tell by numbers because numbers do not tell the spiritual strength and faithfulness to the Word of God. Obviously, a strong church with many members is better for the cause of Christ than a strong church with few members. But strength is not determined by numbers. So often the large churches are the weakest spiritually. Some have grown numerically large because of weakness and compromise, sacrificing truth to get numbers. What a deadly price to pay for

size! Some of the greatest victories of the Bible were won by small numbers that were loyal to God. Consider Gideon against the Midianites, who defeated the Midianite hordes with three hundred men. Jehovah chose Israel, not because it was large. Once they began to depend upon their numbers they began to wane in power. Subtraction of numbers can contribute to real strength. Long ago a pioneer preacher gave a report on a gospel meeting where he did the preaching, but reported no additions, but a few subtractions and the church was in a better condition than it had been in years. The truth is a two-edged sword that will save but also drive away those whose heart does not love the truth.

A church is not strong just because it has a fine meetinghouse, large contributions, prominent community people as members or other such measures that many seen to think so important.

The church is strong when the members have a sacrificial attitude, being truly converted to Christ. A church is strong when it will stand without compromise of the truth in order to "get along" with others. The church is strong when the members live each day in a Christlike fashion, at home, school, work, wherever and whenever. The church is strong when it demands and stands for *"thus saith the Lord."* It is a strong church where members seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, whether it be ten people or ten thousand in number. When spiritual and heavenly concerns dominate the thoughts and lives of members, that church will be a strong church. It is when the individual members of the church are strong that the church is strong. When the church insists on the standard of the Lord, and is willing to exercise discipline toward those who defy the truth, that the church is strong. When a church is active in spreading the gospel, aiding the needy, building up itself, that the church is strong.

Necessity of Work

The second admonition Haggai gave the people was work. What is a working church? What makes a church go to work? Just like a church that is strong, a working church is when the members of the church are working. So many measure their Christianity by the evil things they do not do. They do not lie, steal, commit adultery, etc. All this is as it should be, but that is not the whole story of being a Christian. The way some measure their Christianity a wooden Indian outside a cigar store

would qualify because it does not do evil things either. There are many things a wooden Indian does not do. In fact, the wooden Indian never does some of the things some members of the church do, such as gossip, tell dirty stories, drink alcoholic beverages and other such things.

But when the contribution is collected, the wooden Indian will not give. He never vists the sick, attends no Bible classes, teaches nobody, offers no encouraging word, not one good things can be attributed to him. A working church is a church where members are doing good, not just refraining from evil (Titus 2:14; James 4:17).

What gets a church that is not working as it should to really start working with enthusiasm and vigor? I wish I had a "quick fix" solution. All I can suggest is a constant exposure of the need, a call for genuine devotion to the plain, narrow, unswerving uncompromised revelation of God. There must be the ceaseless emphasis on God's love for man and man's need of the Savior. What it means to be lost must be impressed upon saint and sinner alike. What God has done through Christ and what man must do to be saved must be the burden of our preaching. No church is what God wants it to be without these guidelines.

The leadership must be active and aggressive, determined and courageous with far-sighted vision, being out in front of the congregation leading them into spiritual activity. Every church needs a leadership that stands for the truth against all error. Leadership must present the plan of attack to be used in carrying out the work of the church that the Bible authorizes. Did you ever see a man pushing a chain down the street? The chain must be pulled from the front. And so it is with the church. I have never seen a strong and working church where it lacked a vigorous leadership.

Right Frame of Mind

A working church must have members who are willing to work. When the membership will allow this thing, that thing, anything, some other thing, to be a hindrance to the affairs of the church there is a real problem. Someone has suggested that all members of the church are willing. Ten per cent are willing to work, eighty-five per cent are willing to let them, and five percent are willing to hinder. The percentages may not be accurate but who can doubt that such groups exist? There is

such a need for members of the church to show more concern for the church and the lost. We cannot rely upon the "professional clergy" composed of self-inflated ministers with large staffs to do the work of the church. When someone else works, they are doing their work, and not your work. Nobody can do your work for you. This "let-the-other-fellow-do-it" attitude has stifled the church too often. When the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt is was because *"the people had a mind to work."*

Weakness and lack of work prevented the erection of the temple. The people had become careless and concerned only for their own personal welfare and personal plans. They seem to have been forerunners of too many among us today in this negligence. While they were looking back on former glories and past accomplishments, viewing how things used to be, they had blazed a long trail of "do-nothing" and allowed themselves to drift off course.

God told them to be strong and work, and He would be with them. Here is the promise of divine presence and power. That alone ought allay all fears and doubts within us. Man's strength and labor standing alone is insufficient. But with God, all things are possible.

Israel could look back on the record and see how God had worked mightily for them and with them so often. There was the deliverance from Egypt, providence in the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, even now the return from Babylon. But do we not also have their records, but even greater and more precious promises and assurances from God through Christ?

The matter reduces itself to putting first things first in life. God will be with us when we are strong and working. It is up to us to be busy doing our part. God is faithful and we can be certain He will do His part.

† † † † †

(from page 24)

What is of greatest value to you? What do you hold to be your pearl of great price? What is it which above all else ranks supreme in your existence? We must learn that all is lost which cannot be eternally saved. We brought nothing into this world and we shall carry nothing out. This whole world and all of its offerings shall terminate someday. But the soul will last somewhere forever.

† † † † †

The Women at the Tomb

Matthew 28:1-7, *"In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did quake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee."*

Christ had been crucified, His body buried in Joseph's tomb, the Sabbath was passed, and it was the breaking of light on the first day of the week. Certain women were coming to the tomb where Jesus was buried.

While they came there was an earthquake and God's angel descended in his dazzling appearance and rolled away the stone from the mouth of the tomb. The entrance was now opened where all could see that the place where was laid His body was empty. No longer was the body of Jesus there.

At the Tomb

When the women arrived they saw that the stone was removed and saw the angel. Luke mentions two angels. They were perplexed and afraid, bowing themselves to the earth. Their fears were increased when they noted that the body of Jesus was gone. The stress and strain of the past three days and the intense hatred they had witnessed against Jesus was sufficient to arouse their worst fears as to the disposal of His body. But their fear was abated with the words of the angel. *"Fear not ye."* He encouraged them to not be afraid. This greeting was customary of heavenly creatures as they would confront a frustrated, bewildered and frightened humanity. This was often the greeting of Jesus to His disciples. The women had come seeking the body of Christ, but, not finding it, they were

anxious. Actually, if they had found it where they supposed it would be we all could have fear.

The absence of the body from the tomb is cause for rejoicing, although these women did not so understand it just yet. The body gone is evidence that death no longer is the victor, nor does darkness and blackness await us. Fear, hopelessness and despair are removed and a joyful life beyond this one is assured for the faithful. Life does have meaning and this life is not all there is to our existence. We are not the helpless victims of the wiles of Satan and the sufferers of torment.

Is it not somewhat ironical that the absence of the body, which at first struck fear in the hearts of these women, is the first of many evidences God has given mankind of the resurrection of Christ? The empty tomb gives us courage, hope, strength and determination for victory through Christ.

Seeking Christ

The angel said, *"I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified."* There was no doubt but they were there because of their love for the Lord. They came to show honor to the Perfect One. But they did not really know Him as they ought to have known Him. Should they not have expected an empty tomb rather than a filled grave? Coming to put spices and ointment on a lifeless form had been their mission, but He was not among the dead. They sought Jesus at the wrong place. He was alive. Upon their ears fell the greatest announcement since the angels had declared the birth of Jesus nearly thirty-three or more years earlier and recorded in Luke 2:8-11. *"He is not here; he is risen; why seek the living among the dead?"* We sing the glad chorus, "Up from the grave he arose.!"

Jesus had been sought many times prior to this. Mark 1:37, *"All men seek thee,"* Jesus was told. During His life His fame spread abroad because of His words and work, particularly His miracles of healing. Messengers were sent to Him to such an extent that He was often hindered from the preaching He came to do. Multitudes gave Him no rest.

At His birth Herod sought Him, but only to kill Him (Matthew 2). Again, John 6:24, *"When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum seeking for Jesus."* Mark 3:31,32 records the time when His family came seeking Him. The scribes, Pharisees and other enemies were constantly

seeking Him in order to take Him and dispose of Him. John 7:25, *"Is not this he, whom they seek to kill?"* In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked the leaders of the mob, *"Whom seek ye?"* (John 18:4). Many had sought Jesus for various and sundry reasons, some honorable and some dishonorable. These women came seeking Him out of love for the One who had blessed their lives. But they had come to the wrong place.

We, too, must seek Jesus if we please God and receive the rewards that God offers (Hebrews 11:6). We must seek Deity with diligence. But we seek a living Lord. John's book records how He is the living bread of life and the living water of life. Hebrews 7:7,25 affirms that He lives. He identifies Himself in Revelation 1:18, *"I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore."* Because He lives we can live this life with spiritual success and live eternally with God in heaven.

We Can Know

The angel invited these women to examine the tomb which was a mute witness to His resurrection. *"Come, see the place where the Lord lay."* They could know for themselves and could tell of it with confidence. Just so, we must come to know the truth of the resurrected Christ for ourselves. But how can we know, seeing we have no tomb into which we can gaze? We can know and be certain by the evidence presented to us.

Romans 1:4, *"And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."* His resurrection was not the first evidence given to prove He is the Son of God. Twice the Father had personally confessed Him as *"my beloved Son."* The signs, miracles and wonders had one prime message. Jesus is God's Son. The way He fulfilled the prophecies pertaining to the promised Messiah was additional evidence. But the resurrection was the climatic, superior, indispensable and irrefutable evidence that Jesus is the Son of God.

An empty tomb was before them. They became eye-witnesses of these things as did the apostles who later ran to the tomb. Peter said, Acts 2:32, *"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."* Jesus said to Thomas, who at first doubted the resurrection, John 20:27-31, *"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

Had Been Prophecied

The angels reminded the women that Jesus had risen just as He said He would. Matthew 12:39,40, *"An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the hearts of the earth."* Matthew 17:22,23, *"The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men; and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again."* Matthew 20:17-19, *"And Jesus was going up to Jerusalem and took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him; and the third day he shall rise again."*

The startling events of those dreadful days had been foretold, not only by Jesus, but by the prophets of old. Peter recalled, Acts 2:26,27, the prophecy of David and how it referred to Jesus and His resurrection (Acts 2:29-31). In view of the abundant forewarning, we sometimes wonder why the disciples were not more expectant of the things that occurred rather than so completely amazed by them. From our vantage point we might wonder, but they were still darkened in understanding, unable as yet to grasp the full significance of these events. Doubtless, we would have been no more alert to them.

The Difference

We should join with glad hearts with these faithful women, the apostles and others who gazed into the empty tomb as we remember the cry of the angels, *"He is not here. He is risen."* The women left the tomb, obviously troubled and shaken by this experience, but quite differnt from the way they came. They

(continued page 6)

Paul's Balance Sheet

"Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more, circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (Philippians 3:4-11). *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."* (Matthew 13:45,46).

The Parable

In the parable of the pearl merchant, Christ depicts a man, probably leaving home with a bag full of gold, going to the market place where pearl sellers displayed their gems. The man sought goodly pearls. He finally found one that excelled all others. He desired it exceedingly and obviously inquired as to its price. He then gave all his gold, sold all his possessions and gladly parted with everything he had in order to lay hold on that one goodly pearl. Such is the action of one who realizes the value of the kingdom of God.

In the letter to the church at Philippi he speaks of his losses that he considered gains and his gains that he considered losses. As a business man considers his assets and liabilities, making a balance sheet to determine the state of affairs, Paul presents his "balance sheet" showing what he gave up and what he gained.

What Paul Gave Up

What did Paul give up to be a Christian? He sacrificed his religion. Notice in the Philippian text the conformity to the Jewish law that earlier characterized him. Even after he became a Christian he spoke with respect for the Mosaic Law, even though he knew that mankind was not amenable to it any longer. While he willingly gave up the old law and the Jewish faith, it was very costly to him to do so. He gave up what he formerly considered to be right.

This meant that he gave up a rich and illustrious ancestry. Paul was not only a Jew, but when he said he was *"of the stock of Israel,"* he denotes that he was a true descendant of the patriarch Jacob. He was not a proselyte from a Gentile nation, but one who had the advantages that belonged to those who were of a direct line from the venerable pillars of the Jewish nation. Paul was of real "blue blood" and aristocracy.

He was also of the tribe of Benjamin, the one tribe that remained loyal to Judah, the tribe of David. No Gentile blood was ever intermingled into his family, but he was *"a Hebrew of the Hebrews."*

He had been trained and educated in Judaism, having knowledge of language, customs, traditions, rituals and doctrines. He was one of the best informed people in the land, having studied at the feet of the great Jewish teacher, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). No more patriotic Jew could be found than Paul.

He gave up his religious party, the Pharisees. There was not a sect among the Jews more strict in the customs and traditions of the Jews than the Pharisees. None were more zealous for the old law, at least in word, than his party. Acts 26:5 tells us he was born a Pharisee, which means his father before him was a Pharisee. He was of that sect that considered the Jewish traditions to be observed with equal respect and reverence as the law of God.

Furthermore, his religious life dominated his existence. He considered Christianity as heresy and a threat against his faith. He carried his convictions into the arena of actions. *"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, commited them to prison."* (Acts 8:3). *"And Saul, yet breathing threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were man or woman, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."* (Acts 9:1,2). *"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught*

according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into the prisons both men and women." (Acts 23:3,4). *"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it, and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers."* (Galatians 1:13,14).

Because he was the kind of person he was in the Jewish faith, to become a Christian meant the termination of great power, prestige, wealth, reputation and stature among his own nation. When this man became a child of God through Christ, he was at the top rung of the political and religious ladder among the Jewish people.

But notice Paul's attitude toward such things. *"Those I counted loss for Christ."* The advantages of birth, pedigree, education, reputation, things he once valued highly, he no longer considered them as gain. He came to the point that such things were considered obstacles and hindrances to receiving that which he now deemed of so much greater value. *"I count all things but loss."* Not only did he turn away from his former things, but whatever might arise in the future, if it was not to help him serve God through Christ, these also would be rejected. He had found *"the pearl of great price"* in Christ Jesus. *"And do count them but refuse."* His former glories were, by comparison to serving Christ, as but trash and garbage, waste matter, worthy only of being burned up, blown away and disspelled.

What Paul Gained

While giving up all of that, what had Paul gained? Turning now to the other side of his religious ledger, Paul calls our attention to the profit side. If Paul had only given up and there had been no profit in doing so he might have announced himself spiritually bankrupt. But as Paul saw it, there had been a very valuable and profitable increase.

He said he had replaced all his cancelled gains by one single item, using but one word to define his gain; namely, Christ. *"That I may win Christ."* To Paul, having Christ was worth infinitely more than all else that this world combined could have afforded him. We need to ask ourselves if we have this same attitude toward the Lord Jesus.

How did Paul describe having Christ? It was more than simply knowing about Christ, or even understanding His doctrine. It means to be found in Him. Being *"in Christ"* was important to Paul. This referred to a spiritual relationship that he had with God. He wrote in Second Timothy 2:10 that salvation was in Christ. In Ephesians 1:3 he said that all spiritual blessings were In Christ. In Romans 8:1 he said there was no condemnation in Christ.

Having Christ meant putting complete dependence on the righteousness of God through Christ for salvation rather than on himself, or his obedience to the old law. Paul realized that one cannot be saved by his own merit (Titus 3:3-5; Ephesians 2:8,9). Mankind must depend upon the merit of Christ to be saved. Paul knew he could benefit from the offerings of God only by coming to Christ.

Having Christ meant knowing the Lord as Savior, being in fellowship with Him, looking to Him as the redeemer, guide, teacher, protector and sustainer of life. It meant partaking of and developing the characteristics of Christ in his own personality and life. It meant to have life because of the resurrection of Christ.

It also meant, and Paul learned this over and over, that he must partake of the sufferings of Christ. Few Christians have endured as much as did Paul from the hands of the enemies of God in order to be a faithful Christian. But he knew it ultimately meant an eternal life in heaven.

Paul was a highly educated person. But to him, having this relationship with God through Christ meant excellency. By comparison, everything else paled into insignificance.

He Knew What Mattered

Jesus taught, *"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul."* Paul lived in true conviction to this teaching. He followed the Lord's footsteps. He did what was necessary. He paid whatever price was to be exacted. He risked whatever had to be risked. It meant friends, family, material gain, acceptance, job, possession, pleasure and even brought suffering, ridicule, pain, hardship and persecution. But such would not be allowed to interfere to cause him to refuse Christ. So it must be with us. There is nothing that we can allow to interfere in life that keeps us from being faithful to the Word of God and putting Christ first in all things.

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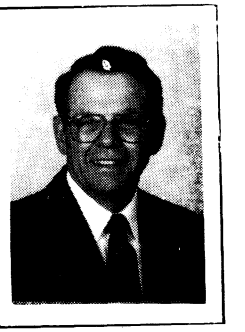
Another Testament?



JAMES W. BOYD

The Mormon Church sponsors ads on television contending that the Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ. Now we have the Old Testament, New Testament, and another testament. But the last one is just another false claim by men to prop up a false religion by the claim on latter-day revelation just like the Jehovah Witness cult, Seventh Day Adventist, Christian Science, Jim Jones, Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swygart, Oral Roberts and such like. The whole bunch of them is false and contradicts the Bible.

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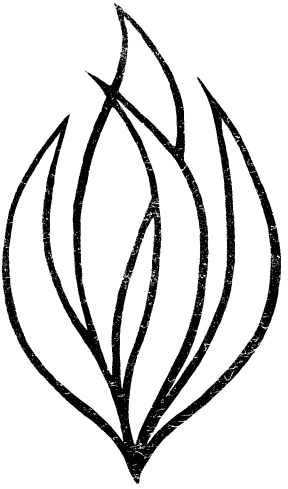

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Fellowship of Saints

Acts 2:42, *"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

There is a word found a number of times in the New Testament in the Greek that is variously translated. The word is "koinonia." It is translated "fellowship" in Acts 2:42; "contribution" in Romans 15:26; "communion" in First Corinthians 10:16; and "communicate" in Galatians 6:6. The word means a sharing in common, holding a mutual interest, mutual activity, a partnership with each other, participating together. Our text says that the church in Jerusalem continued stedfastly in this fellowship. Our lesson proposes to study what this fellowship is and what it means to those involved.

Fellowship is a well illustrated concept in the teaching that calls for unity. Saints make up the church, the body of Christ. Just as there is to be harmony and unity in the physical body, so there is to be a similar harmony and unity in the Lord's spiritual body, each member of the body functioning as it should, in fellowship and mutual interest and commonly working with every other member that works harmoniously.

First Corinthians 12:25, *"That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another."* In Christ all the selfish, secular, artificial distinctions generally prevailing in the world among people are removed in our spiritual fellowship and brotherhood together (Galatians 3:28).

Have No Fellowship

There are some things with which the Christian is to have no participation and fellowship. First Corinthians 10:20, *"I would not that ye have fellowship with devils."* Ephesians 5:11, *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* Neither is there to be fellowship with unbelievers (Second Corinthians 6:14), false teachers (First Timothy 6:3-5; Second John 9-11), those who are immoral (First Corinthians 5:9-11,13) those who create division by false doctrines (Romans 16:17), or those who walk disorderly (Second Thessalonians 3:6). It is unfortunate that too many who

profess Christianity are not respectful of the prohibitions regarding fellowship revealed in Scripture.

In what are Christians to have fellowship? We are to have fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as well as one another (First John 1:1-3,7). The fellowship of Christian brethren is such a strong tie because that which binds man to man is that which binds man to God when people come to God through Christ. As Jesus prayed, brethren are to be one (John 17:21). This oneness is the basis for all areas of Cristian association and fellowship.

Worship

We have fellowship in worship (First Corinthians 10:16,17). Here the word is translated "*communion*". The text is speaking of the Lord's Supper, one of the items of worship under Christ. The cup is the emblem of the blood of Christ. By drinking the cup of the Lord we proclaim the Lord, expressing our attachment to Him and to each other. The bread in the emblem of His body. We commemorate His death, burial and resurrection by observing the Lord's Supper, but we also acknowledge our brotherhood with each other. It is easy to see how we have a mutual interest in this activity in which we participate together. The same is true in the other items of worship, such as singing, praying giving and studying the Word of the Lord. It is a serious matter to forsake the assemblying of ourselves together, not only because we disobey God's command, not only because we fail to commemorate the Lord Jesus, but also because we neglect fellowship with our brethren in a way that God has prescribed.

Work

We also have fellowship in working for the Lord. Christians are like laborers sent out in the Master's vineyard (Matthew 20:1). They form the corps of workers for the Lord. First Corinthians 3:9, *"For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."* This presents the unity and harmonious working together that is to characterize the brethren. Paul considered Apollos a co-worker with Paul planting, Apollos watering, and God giving the increase. He often spoke of other brethren as his fellow-laborers in the Lord. We have a common cause; the cause of righteousness. We work

alongside each other, supporting each other, encouraging each other, spreading the message of salvation to a lost and dying world. We busy ourselves in caring for each others physical and spiritual welfare. This because we are saints of God in fellowship one with the other. *"For we be brethren."*

Faith

We even share in our spiritual thoughts and convictions. First Corinthians 1:10, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* This requires we have the same standard and measure. It means we so mold our hearts and minds that we learn to think alike, speak alike, be recognizable by our speech and attitudes and actions in our lives.

Philippians 1:27, *"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."* In the essentials of the faith we stand as one. Our thought, understanding, goals and convictions regarding God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, His church, the plan of salvation, the pattern of worship, heaven, hell, sin, Satan, on and on, we are in step with each other, none "*walking disorderly*" or out of step and out of line, but each with his eye on the steps of Christ and living consistently therein. Our fellowship extends into the realm of these convictions, allowing with charity differences in matters of human opinion and judgment, but demanding oneness in those things spoken by the Lord. This all is based on our stedfastness in the *"one faith."*

Caring, Bearing, Sharing

Fellowship among brethren also includes the practical realm of sharing in suffering. First Crinthians 12:26, *"And whether one member suffer, all members suffer with it."* We make up the body of Christ as individual members. We are to *"bear one another's burdens"* (Galatians 6:2). There is a mutual sympathy, compassion and care for each other. Just as with the physical body, when one member is injured or harmed, the whole body grieves . So should it be with members of the body

of Christ.

Just as we share our mutual woes and mutual burdens bear, we also share in our joys. First Corinthians 12:26 continues, *"Or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it."* Christians will delight in the radiance of other brethren, even when that radiance surpasses their own. Christians do not consider themselves as rivals and competitors. When a brother has ten talents and succeeds, we all rejoice. If we have but one talent we do what we can with it, and all rejoice when we succeed. As brethren in the Lord, having fellowship one with another, we learn to *"rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep."* (Romans 12:15). Is not this to be expected as a natural consequence among those in fellowship? How could we have love for each other and manifest anything differently in our lives?

Salvation

Jude speaks of our *"common salvation"* (Jude 3). We have a mutual salvation in the same hope, based on the same Savior. Because our fellowship is holy and sacred through Christ, each one partakes of the salvation along with all others who come to Him. We are otherwise like lepers, doomed to an eternal spiritual death, unclean, exiled and excluded. But having been cleansed by the blood of Christ we now share in the inclusion among God's people, being received of God and all the saved. Just as we have the same God, the same Lord, the same Spirit, the same body, the same faith, having been baptized with the same baptism, and hold the same hope, we have that which is common to all who are faithful in Christ. This is a part of Christian fellowship. In addition, we enjoy the same divine providence and shall live together in the same eternal home of heaven when this life is finished.

Association

But we also have a daily and early fellowship on earth in our association with each other. We converse together, have daily contact in various affairs of life. Our paths cross from time to time and we are made glad to be in the company of faithful brethren. Malachi 3:16, *"They that feared the Lord spake often one to another."* This is characteristic of Christian brethren.

One of the most strengthening and encouraging by-products

of being in the assemblies together for worship is the opportunity to see, greet, talk, with those of like faith and Christian conviction. Often the times of assembly are the only times that many brethren have opportunity to be with each other because the duties of life take them into different places and they seldom see one another.

To nuture this association, helping is to "make friends of God's children," Christians come together for various occasions, such as eating together, even playing together; all such things that can and do contribute greatly to understanding and knowing one another. It assists in maintaining the unity of the church, strengthening the bonds of concern for each other. How can we grow in love one toward the other without some opportunity for association together? This is an activity in which individual Christians should take part, availing themselves of opportunities of such relationships. This is too often considered the only means of fellowship, however. But we have already shown a host of other areas of fellowship. But this is certainly one branch of our mutual concern, mutual participation and demonstration of mutual goals.

We Be Brethren

When we understand and appreciate fellowship of the saints as the Bible teaches, we see its warmth, beauty, brotherliness, comfort, unity and encouragement. We are in a company composed of the redeemed who are walking hand and hand and heart in heart with each other, helping each other get to heaven and serving under the leadership and guidance of Jesus Christ, our elder brother. Because of our common convictions, standing together in God's truth, being brothers and sisters in God's family, we have a common ambition and seek to help each other reach that ultimate reward.

The next time you sing, "Bless be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love," consider with gratitude the provision from God for Christian fellowship in all the various areas wherein it is manifested. Seek the fellowship with the faithful and avoid fellowship with that which is prohibited and excluded. Nuture and protect fellowship with the saints and defends its sanctity, *"for we be brethren."*

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Proverbs 6:16-19

Sin rises from ignorance, thoughtlessness, carelessness, weakness, slothfulness, lack of alertness and similar sources. But Proverbs six deals with sin that comes from one who studies to commit sin. What that person does, says and thinks is intentional and devised. Out of rebellion he commits evil deliberately and willfully.

Seven sins are mentioned in this passage that God says He hates. Hate is a strong word, but it is the one chosen by the Holy Spirit to convey the intensity of the Lord's displeasure at these things. While we learn that God hates sins, we also must learn to make the distinction between hating sin and hating the sinner. God loves the sinner and has demonstrated that love by providing His Son as the way of forgiveness, showing through Him the right way to live, warning mankind of pitfalls, and offering eternal salvation. But do not confuse God's love with God's approval. Although God loves the sinner, because of His hatred of sin He does not approve of the sinner.

"These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." We shall now consider each of these sins.

Proud Look

The Lord hates a proud look. Such a person is one who depends on himself alone, considering himself the all-sufficient person without need for anything or anybody. He is so proud. As Paul wrote, they are the people who *"professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."* He considers himself above the rest of his fellows, arrogant, snobbish, carrying an air of self-acclaimed superiority above everyone else.

This kind of person reeks with a "big I" and a "little you" attitude. He *"thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think."* (Romans 12:3).

It is good to have a certain amount of self-confidence and self-esteem. But we must recognize our dependence on God, the guidance of His Word, that without God we are nothing,

and place our confidence in Deity, not self. Humility is not determined by appearance alone, nor by tone of voice, quietness or a pious look. But like pride, is shows itself in manners. Pride of often the great hindrance to people. Humility, the opposite of pride, is a condition of heart which God is able to judge. He is pleased with the humble spirit, but repulsed at the proud and arrogant individual.

Lying Tongue

The Lord hates a lying tongue. His extent of anger is vividly noted by the category in which He places lying. Revelation 21:8, *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death."* A lie only serves the devil and is the basis for destruction of what is true. It is a vicious sin of the tongue (James 3:6).

A lie is a weapon of persecution. Matthew 5:1o-12, *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."* The tongue can speak the truth or lies. It ought not be used for both (James 3:10).

Shedding Innocent Blood

The Lord hates hands that shed innocent blood. This is a very comprehensive way of describing an unmerciful person. We expect those who are guilty of crimes to receive the punishment deserved. But at times even the guilty receive mercy. But the innocent deserve mercy. Failure to be merciful to the guiltless is a most unmerciful act.

Murder of innocent people, abortion, other deeds whereby the innocent are made to suffer at the hands of their offenders, is looked upon with hatred by Almighty God. Christ was a victim of people such as are described here. He did not sin, neither was guile in His mouth. He was accused, but no evil proved. Though He often spoke to people, large numbers and small, He only taught what was true, condemning the evil and doing good, always with the motive of love and the desire to be

helpful. Even so, though He was approved of God by signs, wonders and miracles, merciless hands took Him and slew Him on the cross of Calvary.

None shall see heaven except by the mercy of God (Titus 3:3-5). As God has shown us mercy, should we not show mercy to others? God showed mercy to the guilty. Shall we withhold mercy from the innocent? Again, we should not confuse God's mercy as condoning evil or approving error. But God demonstrated by provision for escape from the consequences of sin and guilt, that although man stands guilty as charged, Christ died that we might be considered innocent and not suffer the wages of sin. Since the lack of mercy is so opposite to God, little wonder He hates the unmerciful who shed innocent blood! When we reject the gospel, we reject the mercy of God.

Inventors of Evil

The Lord hates the heart that devises wicked imaginations. This refers to plotting to do evil, planning to sin, not something accidental or through weakness, but deliberate and willfull. Evil begins in the heart. Proverbs 4:23, *"Keep thy heart with diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."* Matthew 12:35, *"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."* Matthew 15:18,19, *"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man."*

Rather than a heart that devises such things, the Lord pleads that we have a pure heart (Matthew 5:8), and a heart whose motives, intents and designs are free from the forces of evil. The way of God governs both the deeds of man and his heart. The heart can be pure and his deeds sometimes evil through weakness. The heart can be impure with deeds deceptively good. God wants both the heart and deed to be correct and He hates that heart that seeks wrong in preference over right.

Mischeif Makers

The Lord hates feet that be swift in running to mischief. It refers to a person who delights in evil, both his evil and others. Like Romans 1:32, they are like *"those who commit evil and*

have pleasure in them that do them." They are not sorry for their sins or the sins of others. They delight in sin, seek ways to defend the practice of sin, attempt to make it acceptable, even deny sin is sin, running after that which is wrong and participating in it. We should mourn over evil and error. It should pain our hearts and disturb us that people would engage in so much of this world of evil. It ought to grieve us that the will of Almighty God, the benevolent Father of heaven, is so arrogantly and blatantly defied by mankind, realizing that those who do so shall perish in the fires of an eternal hell.

False Witnesses

The Lord hate false witnesses that speak lies. Lying has already been mentioned and condemned by God. Here we have special attention focused on false teachers. False teaching cannot produce life but only destruction. Second Peter 2:1,2, *"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift dedtruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of."* First John 4:1, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* Jesus warned, Matthew 7:15, *"Beware of false prophets."*

Those who hold error in spite of the truth are rebellious and unsubmissive to the will of God. They show no love for God nor man. Often they talk the longest and loudest about love, love, love. But they know the least on that subject and practice it almost none at all. They become enemies of those who do love the truth that they refuse to follow.

Mankind is expected to bow before the will of God, unquestioning, without murmuring, without defensive manuvers and manipulations, but more concerned for what God says and wants than what others may say or want.

Over the years one will likely encounter those who will walk in the way of truth when it is easy, popular, acceptable to those around them and relatively pleasant. But when walking in the light becomes more difficult, when it demands making decisions and taking stands that would infringe on worldly goals and ambitions, when it causes them to lose power and material gain, they will forsake truth and go their own way, do their own

things, brushing God aside. The Lord expressed His great disfavor toward such people.

Dividers

The Lord hates one who sows discord among brethren. Psalm 133:1, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."* This is one of almost countless passages in the Old and New Testaments that admonish, encourage, commend and command oneness, peace among brethren, unity and harmony among those in God's fellowship. To be guilty of disrupting that condition is to violate God and His will. First Corinthians 1:10, Paul warned the Corinthian brethren because of the divisions among them. Philippians 1:27 urges unity and oneness among brethren. Division is painful, destructive, weakening and will cost the loss of precious souls. Of course, there is something worse than division and that is the sacrifice of truth in order to keep peace. But even here, the cause of division is error. Error causes division. Unless everyone surrenders the truth and adopts error division will result. But woe to those that promote and cause the division and strife because they have been advocates and defenders of that which is contrary to God's truth.

What causes division among brethren? What produces peace among God's people? The first question usually is answered when we consider the teaching being done. Truth promotes unity and error divides. Often when there is division it is because somebody begins to teach false doctrines that faithful brethren cannot and will not fellowship. Also, at times, there are those who simply must have their own way in everything even where human judgment is involved and take that determination to the point of contention and division. Woe be to that person who, in personal ambition and promotion of self, causes strife and division in the ranks of the body of Christ! Some have shown themselves willing to sacrifice truth and peace among brethren in order to have there own way; have something they can "boss;" make themselves somewhat over somebody else. To have peace with such people demands peace on their terms rather than on God's terms. When the peace and unity among brethren is shattered somebody stands guilty of sin. Amos 3:3, *"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"* The standard of truth must be respected and obeyed by everyone. There must be more concern for others than for self in matters that call for

the exercise of human opinion and judgment. There must be concern for *"thus saith the Lord"* in matters where God has spoken. To be the cause and source, the focal point and promoter of strife and division among brethren in the church is to be guilty of piercing the body of Christ as surely as did the Roman soldier when Jesus was hanging on Calvary's tree. The way to promote unity is to promote truth. Those who love truth will stand united. Unity is not acheived favorable before God through compromise, negotiation, unity in diversity, agreeing to disagree, or any such things.

A serious investigation and consideration of the things that the Lord said He hates should strike fear in our heart. Let us avoid these sins and make ourselves better servants of God, promote the good and contribute substantially to reaching our ultimate and eternal goal of a home with God in heaven.

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Paul's Prayer for Colosse

Number One

Colossians 1:9-12, *"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."*

We are not sure who established the church in Colosse. Possibly some of the disciples converted by Paul while he was in Ephesus for several years went there and preached the truth. Paul was in prison in Rome at the time that he wrote this epistle. The primary purpose of it seems to be a warning to the brethren against Judaistic teachers, Oriental philosophers, and other heretics that corrupted Christianity.

Paul evidently considered the church there a good church because he commended it in so many ways. He was thankful for

their faith, their love for the brethren, and the hope they had (1:4,5). Have you ever wondered how Paul might feel toward the congregation to which you belong?

Paul and Prayer

In verses three and nine of chapter one Paul said he prayed for these brethren. He obviously believed in the power of prayer. Christians are not fatalistic, with the attitude, "whatever will be, will be." Christians believe that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16). The word "effectual" means adequate.

Paul practiced prayer. In Acts 20:36, *"And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all."* Second Corinthians 13:7, *"Now I pray to God that ye do no evil..."* Again, Philippians 1:9, *"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment."*

Not only did Paul practice prayer, believing in the power of prayer, he taught others to pray. *"Pray without ceasing."* (First Thessalonians 5:17). *"I desire that men pray in every place."* (First Timothy 2:8). *"I exhort that prayers be made..."* (First Timothy 2:1). Prayer was a part of Paul's life.

The prayer we have under consideration was an intercessory prayer, which means it was a prayer on behalf of another. *"We pray always for you."* (Second Thessalonians 1:11). Paul urged others to pray for him. Second Thessalonians 3:1, *"Finally, brethren, pray for us."* We ought to pray for each other, our nation's leaders, the sick, those who are lost, the bereaved and the saved. Too often mankind tries to fight his battles in this life all alone when God is ready and willing to give aid in time of need. Do not deprive yourself of the blessing of prayer.

Knowledge

Paul prayed here that his Colossian brethren would be *"filled with knowledge of his will with all spiritual wisdom and understanding."* To be filled is not difficult to understand. We drive into a gasoline station and tell the attendant to "fill 'er up." If we then get only a dime's worth of gasoline, we know we are not going very far. Nor will people get very far spiritually on a dime's worth of knowledge of God's will. We need to "fill 'er up." Is not this the way to really go places?

Possibly too many of us are contented with little knowledge.

We have noted over the years that many are ignorant and seemingly prefer to remain so, judging by the effort and interest they put forth to expand their knowledge. But Paul prayed that these brethren abound in knowledge. The church of Christ was once known among all religious people as a people who knew the Bible. But we would not suggest that this is necessarily our reputation now.

In the world the ignorance of the Bible is appalling. We recall that a few years ago on a question and answer program over the radio that sometimes one category of questions was the Bible. We seldom hear of such a thing anymore. But we were delighted when someone selected that category because it gave us an opportunity to test ourselves as well. I suppose the reason the category is so seldom mentioned anymore is because people lack interest and knowledge of the Bible.

A story is told about the time the contestant was asked to identify Dan and Beersheba. One "bright" student responded that they were husband and wife like Sodom and Gomorrah. Possibly some who are reading this will not see the humor in it because they do not know enough of the Bible to know that all four names are names of cities.

Lack of knowledge is not due to lack of intelligence or ability. People know how to earn a living, details on world affairs, ball scores and names of athletes, movie stars, even the sordid facts of depraved lives. Possibly some who claim to be Christians know more about the "soaps" on television than they do the Sermon on the Mount. (I have often wondered why they were called "soaps." Do you supposed it is because they need cleaning up.) Could you even teach a person the simple plan of salvation if they asked you how to be saved? Why do people know other things but not the Bible? It is because they put their minds on other things rather than the will of God.

Are We Hungry?

Matthew 5:6, *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."* Many have no appetite for the spiritual bread of life. They do not read good religious literature, even though they devour the daily newspaper. They will read magazines with all kinds of sinful episodes revealed, but never a good book on Biblical inspiration, church history, Bible characters or Bible geography. While they read the obituary column and the funny papers,along with the

sports page, they cannot find time to be a daily Bible reader. We want to take the Bible like capsules, not like daily food necessary to sustenance. We want one dose to last us all week when we ought to be like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17(11).

It is really not too difficult to tell why some go off on extreme tangents, hobbies, philosophies and evil ways. They are ignorant and seem to like it that way. Even many are zealous, but without knowledge, like the Jews of whom Paul wrote in Romans 10:2.

The church in Colosse might put many congregations today to shame as far as fruit bearing, increasing, possessing faith, hope and love. Yet, Paul says there was room for growth and he wanted them to be filled. To be filled takes time, work, study, sacrifice and personal effort. How many are willing to invest in Biblical knowledge like that? You have heard of the hen and pig viewing a sign picturing a breakfast of ham and eggs. The pig commented to the hen that the production of an egg was just a day's work for her, but to produce his part of the picture meant a personal sacrifice. This is what it takes to ever be filled with knowledge of the will of God.

Know His Will

Paul stressed that we know the Father's will. There are many things we can come to know, even many religious ideas and doctrines. But we must know God's will, book, chapter and verse, *"thus saith the Lord,"* and learn to *"speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11).

Do you suppose too many of us are willing to have knowledge "by proxy?" Are we willing to let the preacher know, or some elder, or someone else, but never feel the need or duty to know for ourselves?

A young man or woman may become valedictorian of the class, summa cum laude, attain the highest academic honors, but not know the Bible, live the life of a fool, and die going headlong into hell. A person may be an authority in his line of work or profession, but without the knowledge of the Father's will he is sorely lacking in what really matters.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). We are saved by the gospel (First Corinthians 15:1,2). The word is that by which our souls are purified (First Peter 1:22). The truth makes us free (John 8:32). God's Word keeps us from sinning (Psalm 119:11). Nothing else guides us like the

Word of God (Psalm 119:105). God's will is what Paul said we need and we need to be filled with it.

Understanding and Wisdom

Furthermore, we need spiritual understanding and wisdom. There is a line of difference between knowledge and wisdom. We may possess certain factual information but lack wisdom to properly use it. There is a difference between a wise man and a foolish man (Matthew 7:24-27). In that passage both men had knowledge, but only one had wisdom. James 4:17 teaches that one may know, but not act on what he knows, and sins. James 1:6, *"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."* Wisdom comes by application of Scripture (Second Timothy 3:14,15). The Scripture teaches not only WHAT but also HOW TO USE THE WHAT. Knowing God's will is essential, but by itself is insufficient until wisdom puts that knowledge into obedient action.

If you have read intently, possibly you have learned something you did not know heretofore, or maybe you have been reminded of previous knowledge. But the question before you is, "What do you intend to do with Paul's instructions?" Do you think he would pray for us the same way he did for the church is Colosse? Surely he would.

God wants us to be filled with something, brethren. What is it according to Paul's prayer? It is knowledge. What knowledge must we have? We must have knowledge of God's will? To what extent are we to have this knowledge? It must be to the extent that we be wise by applying it. Just how do you suppose we get started in this direction? When do you plan to start studying?

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The Next Issue

It is planned that the next issue of ***A Burning Fire*** will be devoted mostly to matters about the church, its organization, number, name, builder, foundation and when and where it began.

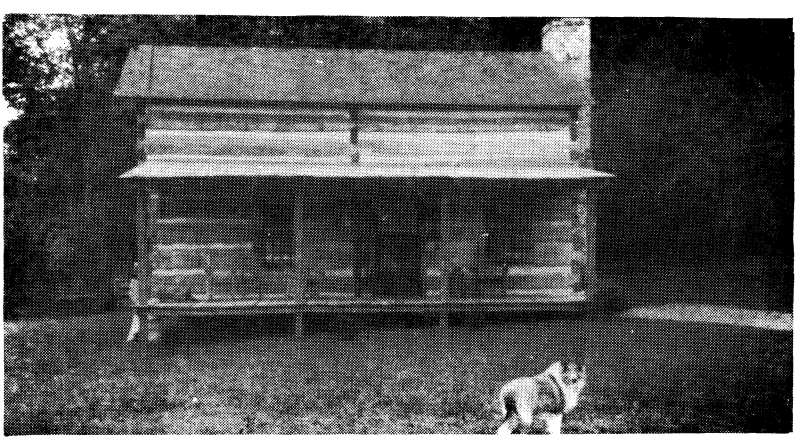
Paul's Prayer for Colosse

Number Two

We refer you to the text given in the first lesson, Colossians 1:9-12, and the prayer recorded there that was prayed by Paul for his brethren in the church in Colosse. Having considered the first part of that prayer in that earlier lesson, we have learned that there was much good in that congregation and Paul commended them for that good. But he also warned against the false and vain philosophies that were being taught to which they might become subjected and overturned. He showed them, even though they had strengths, that there was room for growth, and urged them to move forward. He prayed that they would be *"filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."* He also prayed, *"that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."* This last phrase now commands our attention.

The Walk

The term "walk" is often used in Scripture to speak of one's manner of daily living. Psalm 1:1, *"Blessed is the man that*



"Buck," my good dog, is watching over my cabin that I use for my office, study, library and where I produce from start to finish, ***A Burning Fire.***

walketh not..." in certain paths of life. The Christian life is called a walk in First John 1:7. Enoch, Noah and others are said to have walked with God. They lived righteous and godly lives, allowing God's will to direct their steps. When we sing the song, "When we walk with the Lord," we have reference to the same idea, that pertaining to daily life before God and with Him.

Paul uses the term "*walk*" to admonish Christian living. Notice a few instances. "*Let us walk honestly as in the day.*" (Romans 13:13). "*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*" (Galatians 5:16). "*And walk in love...*" (Ephesians 5:2). "*Walk as children of light.*" (Ephesians 5:8). "*Let us walk by the same rule.*" (Philippians 3:16). "*As ye therefore received Christ, so walk in Him.*" (Colossians 2:6). The word refers to the way to live life.

Paul prayed that these brethren would walk a certain way which he calls "*worthy.*" This refers to their manner of life being consistent to what the Lord is to us, what He wants from us, what He has done for us. First John 1:7, "*If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*"

Peter also wrote, First Peter 2:21, "*For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*" This tells us the way we are to walk. We are to live like Christ. Ephesians 4:1, "*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*" If we profess to be Christians we are expected to imitate Christ. This kind of living results from knowledge and the practice of wisdom.

Whom to Please

Notice Paul included, "*...unto all pleasing.*" This does not mean we are to strive to please everybody, but that we are to strive to please God in everything. "*Wherefore we labor that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.*" (Second Corinthians 5:9). Pleasing God is the goal. With the word "*all*" we have a second emphasis in this prayer on the wholeness, completeness and fulness of our service to God. Be filled with knowledge and be pleasing in all things to the Lord. The Lord wants the whole man, all of the time. Partial, on-and-off Christianity is not acceptable to Deity. While we might content ourselves with being pleasing in some things, sometimes, God wants us to give the one hundred per cent

service in our lives.

This is reasonable expectation, seeing what God has done for us. We expect this in most other matters, even secular and mundane things. If the lady of the house cleans the house, prepares the meals, cleans the clothes, performs tasks that are not the most exciting in life, there should be a good consistency in that work. Suppose a meal is prepared and the biscuits are good, but the meat is burnt, the coffee lukewarm, the desert fair. Would we recommend that as a first class dinner? We can expect better, even though we overlook such things because they really do not matter that much. But in matters of service to God all things are important. Being right in one area does not give us license to ignore God's will somewhere else. Being a daily Bible reader does not dismiss our duty to assemble on Wednesday evening, if such is the time of meeting for study. Earning a livlihood for the family does not mean we can curse, swear and other such things. Honesty in business does not mean we can forget about prayer, visitation or other work. Being good to the family is right and commendable, but does that remove all responsibility in the other areas of Christian living? You even expect more than that from your automobile. Would you want a car that only had a good motor, but no brakes; good seats, but no lights. James 2:10, *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."* This does not mean if one lies he is also guilty of fornication. It means if he lies, or whatever violation he commits, he is a violator of God's law and shall be held accountable.

We realize that we are human beings with frailties and weaknesses, often stumbling and sinning. While we cannot be perfectly sinless, what excuse is there for us to strive for anything less? Whoever said living a Christian lie was easy anyway? It is a challenge, a fight, a struggle, and a constant uphill battle against forces that would destroy us. But the victory belongs to those who are faithful in the Lord.

Prevention

What Paul was trying to do for these brethren in Colosse was to prevent their shame, disgrace and avoid spiritual harm that could come upon them. He knew how hypocrisy, saying one thing but doing another, hurts and injures everyone. He, like Peter in Second Peter 2:2, when writing about false teachers, *"by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of,"*

would bring them to naught unless they were alert and aggresive. He knew, like he wrote in Titus 2:5 concerning the misbehavior of some women, that their conduct would bring reproach on the whole cause of Christ.

When Christians are like the world, the church is wounded, the truth discounted and souls misled. If a man who is not a Christian gets drunk, this is sinful and shameful. But how much worse when a man who professes to follow Christ does such a thing. Evil and sinful activities, like dancing, smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, profanity, loving money, gambling, all forms of immorality, when practiced by brethren and sisters in the church, everything decent for which they say they stand is brought low. One of the gravest problems facing the church today is not that the church is in the world, but that too much of the world is in the church. Paul prayed that these Colossian Christians would make living like Christ a full-time job.

Bearing Fruit

Paul also prayed that they would be *"fruitful in every good work."* One who does not bear good fruit is either a bad branch or a barren tree. In Matthew twenty-one Jesus cursed the barren fruit tree because it did not produce as it ought, and thereby, He taught us a lesson. John 15:1-8 teaches that a branch that is unfruitful shall be cast off and burned.

Bearing fruit means producing good, doing good, being good, the positive side of Christianity. It includes winning souls, faithful worship, living honorably before all, doing your duty to family, being truthful, and on and on. Have you ever heard somebody described as a Christian and they said he never cursed, nor drank beer, lied, murdered, etc.? But a fence post has those qualities. What good a person does also counts. That must be taken into consideration as a mark of a Christian.

Long ago most of us have been taught that the best way to avoid evil is to be busy doing good. A mind filled with good things has no room for evil things. So it is with one's life. The person who does not do wrong does well, as far as he goes, but he has not gone far enough until he does good.

Most preachers have been told at one time or another that "you cannot tell people not to do certain things." But the Lord did just that. But He did not stop there . He tells people what to do instead of doing the evil things.

Increased Knowledge

Paul prayed for *"increasing in the knowledge of God."* This is not exactly the same as that for which he prayed in verse nine. He was not just repeating himself. We need to have the knowledge of God's will, but we also need to know Him as our spiritual Father, which can only be attained through faithful obedience to His will. Paul once wrote, *"I know whom I have believed..."* (Second Timothy 1:12). He did not just know about God, HE KNEW GOD.

Christ, as Shepherd, knew His sheep and we, His sheep, can know the Shepherd. This implies a closeness, familiarity, oneness, kinship.

I like the story of two men who were asked to read Psalm twenty-three before an audience. It illustrates the point I seek to make. A great actor read the Psalm with great diction, voice inflection, clear and distinct, and the audience listened intently, bursting into applause when he finished. An old Christian also read the Psalm. His voice cracked at times, but with reverence, quietness and awe he spoke the words. The audience, when he finished, stood silent, some even with tears in their eyes. When asked to explain the difference in the reactions, someone responded, "The actor knew the Psalm, but the Christian knows the Shepherd." This is the kind of knowledge Paul wanted for his brethren. John's words are appropriate. First John 2:3, *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."* This knowledge comes from being filled with the knowledge of His will, walking worthily, bearing fruit, uphill, downhill, good times, bad times, all the time, through thick and thin, living life as God has taught us to live it.

Strength

Paul prayed that his brethren be *"strengthened with all might."* He placed no limit on how strong they could get. Can one ever become too strong spiritually? Can anybody be too faithful? Is it possible to do too much good? The strength for which Paul prayed was *"according to his glorious power;"* that is, to the extent of God's power. This is an impressive way of urging that they be strong to their fullest capacity. How could anyone ever conclude they need no more study, no more work, can miss worship, have done enough. One sure sign of growing weakness is to think that we are strong enough. *"Let him that*

thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (First Corinthians 10:12). What a marvelous goal Paul sets before us!

We all have observed those men and women who are such fine, admirable pillars of truth with Christlike characters. Let us know that they did not become that way easily and overnight. They gradually grew to such a state of spiritual strength and nobility. Such character comes from feeding on the Word of God and applying God's will in daily life. The character we admire in others, that reflects the beauty of Christ, can also be our character. Let us all pray for ourselves and others the same prayer Paul prayed for these Christians in Colosse.

† † † † †

The Good Samaritan

The text is familiar to the Bible student and is rather lengthy to include here. If you will, please refresh your mind with the record in Luke 10:25-37 and then proceed with this study.

Never was the divine sincerity of Jesus Christ more evident than when He dared to tell this story and teach the lessons contained in it. He was teaching at a time when His own race hated Him because He had exposed their hypocrisies, self-righteousness and racially prejudiced spirit. Teaching this lesson, like several others, contributed significantly to His death because it was so offensive to His hearers and did not flatter their self-centered egos as they had become accustomed to hearing from their own teachers. They failed to realize that Jesus told them the truth that could free them from their own narrowness, bigotry, complacency and sinfulness. The truth He taught makes one free and leads those who conform to it into lives of great usefulness and joy, both here and in eternity.

The story was told in answer to a question posed to Him from a lawyer. *"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"* This is a great question and deserving of an answer. There is nothing in the question itself to suggest trickery or that would reveal the sinister motives for asking it. But Jesus tells the story and allows the questioner to discover the true answer for himself, seeing that the man knew the law. *"What is written in the law? How readest thou?"* Herein lies the answer to the inquiry given to Jesus. We could paraphrase His answer by saying, "What does the Bible

teach?" This is where we get our answers.

The lawyer answered, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."* Jesus commended his remark and admonished the lawyer to be obedient to that teaching.

The Real Issue

It was not a matter of knowing what was right with this man, but the question that was really pending was whether he would submit to the truth he knew. He sought a way to escape obligation that the law imposed upon him. He was willing to justify himself. He asked, *"Who is my neighbor?"* Yes, he knew right from wrong. He knew his duty. He wanted to dodge it. This provoked the story that Jesus told that illustrates the great truth regarding love for God and neighbor.

The man who fell by the side of the road was a victim of human lust, greed and abuse of power. He was attacked by thieves, robbed, beaten and left to die as a result of inhumane treatment. But there is something more tragic than physical and material loss. Spiritual injury and the loss of the soul because of sin is far worse. Our spiritual destruction is more self-imposed than was the suffering incurred by this man on the road to Jericho. Though there may be many influences that tempt us to sin, in the final analysis, we enter into sin because we choose to sin ourselves.

There is much in the world that survives and thrives by feeding on the works of the flesh. There are many in the world who would make your physical and spiritual welfare their prey for their own selfish and personal benefit and earthly profit. But this victim is a symbol of all human suffering, representing all who are in need in one way or another. Many are hopeless, helpless, totally dependent on the mercy of others. They have been victimized and mistreated, whether by others or through their own evil, and left to die.

Broken Reeds

By coincidence, and what would at first seem to be a turn of good fortune for the victim, a priest came that same way where the man was lying. Surely a religious leader, who was to be an example for others, one who had knowledge of the law and

knew his duty, surely he would hasten to offer help to the sufferer. But the priest saw the man and refused to help, passing by on the other side as if the victim was not there or was totally unnoticed. How could he do this? He saw the plight of the man. But sometimes people are not so quick to help others because they have never developed compassion, sympathy or an understanding of the poverty, hunger, suffering and despair that are everyday circumstances for many people. These conditions are admittedly unpleasant, disturbing, soul-shaking, but they exist and many of us are so heartless that we ignore them.

The priest was obviously hardened, insensitive and indifferent to the problem of human suffering. But our Lord was not that way. Even in the Old Testament, when people were evil, religious but not righteous, the Lord told them, *"I desire mercy, not sacrifice."* Sacrifice is essential and worship indispensable, but it is vain unless accompanied by a righteous life, a spirit of helpfulness, mercy, benevolence and love for others. The same thought is found in James 1:27, *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."* This is a definition of pure religion. We cannot have a pure religion without a benevolent attitude and action. This priest never learned that. How well have we learned it today? We are so often concerned about form, ritual, some of which is important, concerned about position among men, opinions and traditions which are not that important, that the weightier matters of the will of God, judgment, mercy and faith are neglected. We seldom find a picture of a more contemptible person than this priest whose religion was all word without good work that God expected of His people.

But another man also came that way somewhat later. He was a Levite, a servant in the temple and worship. He, like the priest, was a prominent religious person. But there was no difference in their reactions toward the needy. He saw the victim and followed the first man, passing by on the other side.

Doubtless, both of them, if asked, could have offered excuses for themselves. Most who refuse to do their duty are good at justifying themselves. But the facts remained, and it cannot be brushed aside, they had the opportunity to help and they did not care enough to help, did nothing, and went on their way without concern for the fallen man.

A Different Attitude

The Samaritan arrived on the scene and looked on the situation differently. He saw the man, went to him, bound up his wounds, provided for him the best he could, nursed him, took him to shelter, provided for him further to the extent of his ability even after he had to continue his journey. The priest and Levite might condemn the Samaritan as a sinner and a "dog," but it is easy to see who was the better person. The Samaritan may not have been among the chosen Jewish race, but the Lord approved what the Samaritan did more than He approved what the priest and Levite did not do. It might be well that we asked ourselves at this point which of the three we would rather be when the day of judgment arrives?

But why did the Samaritan help this man? He encountered all of the fearful circumstances surrounding the scene as did the others. He might have offered some excuses. But he helped because he had compassion on him. His compassion would not allow him to dodge his responsibility. He had a good heart, a clean conscience, convictions that would force him to take advantage of this opportunity to do good. He could not afford to let it be handled any other way. James would tell us, in light of James 2, that this Samaritan's faith led him to work. His religion was not so bounded by human creeds, personal ambitions, legalistic ideas and traditions of prejudice that he could not aid those who needed assistance, whether they were his own people or not. What a lesson there is for us today!

Lessons for Us

There is no doubt as to who was the good neighbor. There is no question as to whom Jesus is upholding in this story. The lessons of the parable are explicit and numerous. We see the vanity of a religion that cannot help those who are in need, regardless of who they are. We see the hypocrisy of a faith without compassion and sympathy toward the less fortunate. We see the evil of selfishness and unconcern for our fellowman. We see the emptiness of excuses and the blackness of such legalistic and prejudicial attitudes that would prevent benevolent action. We see the religion that Christ taught includes a benevolent attitude and action toward the poor and needy whoever and wherever they may be, to the extent of our opportunity and ability. There is something basically anti-Christ about a person, church, idea or doctrine that would prevent God's people from demonstrating compassion and service when

(from page 24) it is needed.

How often our generation is content to pass by on the other side. We spare ourselves, disguise our selfishness under excuses. We are too busy to get involved. We may not be able to help everybody, therefore some of us do not help anybody. We deceive ourselves, but not God.

When we pass by on the other side we sin against the needy; rob ourselves of one of life's most enriching experiences; and show an unconcern for what God would have us do and be. Helping somebody else is a way of helping ourselves.

God Did Not Pass By

What is God, Christ and the Holy Spirit had looked upon mankind, victimized by his own sins, and passed by on the other side? Where would be our hope? How would we ever reach heaven or escape hell? Are we so ungrateful for what God has done for us that we cannot show mercy and compassion toward others? Shall we not "*go and do likewise?*" Would not the world be better if we would ?

We see the Lord's will in this record and the words of James falls heavily on our hearts. *"To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17).

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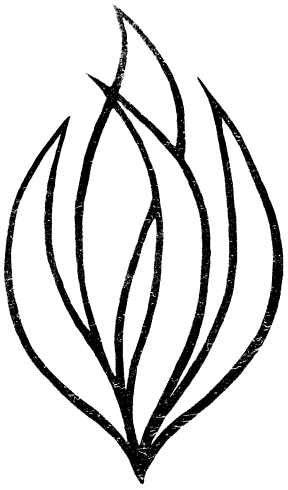

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Church: Organization

We live in a day when many are much opposed to what they call organized religion. Inasmuch as the Lord's church is organized, their hatred extends to the church and those who are members of it. It would seem that all would recognize that any group, religious, social, political or whatever, must have some form of organization and governmental control in order to exist.

There are many religious organizations in the world and many of them have brought such reproach against religion that everything religious has become their target for destruction. But the Lord's church is organized. Why are we organized as we are rather than the way other religious bodies are organized? Why do we differ from them?

The more we know about the church the better able we shall be to restore the Lord's church of the first century in our own time. The Lord established the church and it has been set in order according to His authority. People have not always adhered to the Lord's way. One of the great digressions from truth is in the area of the organization and governmental structure of the church. Throughout history men have taken it upon themselves to devise various church governments, changing, "improving," altering, restructuring God's plan. History has produced synods, councils, general assemblies, conferences, conventions and all kinds of systems by which men have chosen to regulate and control religious bodies.

But what does the Scripture teach regarding the church of Christ? Did God ordain a certain system? Or did He leave it to man to decide and devise whatever system man chose?

Monarchy

The government of the church, according to the Bible, is properly called a monarchy. It is ruled by a single person, the one all-powerful head who has all authority and absolute power. He is a King. This person is Jesus Christ. (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23). Christ does not and will not relinquish *"all rule and all authority and power"* (First Corinthians 15:24) until He comes again and delivers the

kingdom to the Father.

The church is not a democracy and is not to be governed by majority rule. Men do not determine such things by vote or conference. Mankind has not been granted the right to legislate rule and regulations, doctrine or practice, for the church. Any attempt by anyone to assume such power is to usurp the authority of the head, Jesus Christ.

Delegated Authority

Did not the apostles make rules for the church? They revealed the rules that Deity has established, but they did not make them of their own accord. They used the keys of the kingdom to make known what the Holy Spirit informed them to reveal. Even then, they revealed not by their own authority, but by the authority delegated to them by Christ. He promised them that power and work (John 14:26; 16:13,14; Galatians 1:11,12). This right and power of revelation has never been granted to any but inspired men. It is not in the inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The early Christians continued in the *"apostles' doctrine"* in the sense that they continued in what the apostles taught as they were guided by the Holy Spirit what to teach and reveal as the will of God through Christ.

Does the church not have a right to make laws for itself? Other organizations do. But there is no place in Scripture that allows the church to make or revise divine law. It has the duty to be the *"pillar and ground of the truth"* but not the inventor and instigator of "truth." The power of the church to legislate is an anti-Biblical notion many have adopted.

What about what is called the Jerusalem Conference? Did not the church legislate on that occasion? No, it did not. Brethren came together, and under the guidance of inspired men as the Holy Spirit directed, they recognized truth they had not recognized heretofore, but they did not bring that truth into being at that time, nor did they do anything other than to insist that everyone accept the truth that God has already revealed. Paul declared what God had done. James said what was done seemed good to the Holy Spirit. The prophets of God had already foretold the inclusion of Gentiles as well as Jews into the faith of Christ. Christ had already been preached to people other than Jews. That gathering did not invent or legislate truth, but submitted to truth. There was never any need for revising, up-dating, or in any way tampering with the revelation God has

given us on any subject. Man is prohibited from doing this (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11).

The Head and the Local Church

Christ is the head of the church, and after Him the words taught by His apostles according to His authority. The first organic unit after that is the local congregation. There is not a word in the Bible authorizing any super-ecclesiastical body to govern the church that is larger than or superior to the local church. This must be accepted, not because of personal preference, but because this is the pattern Scripture authorizes. This means that every local congregation is autonomous, self-governing, under Christ. Each is free and independent from other congregations to operate and manage its affairs and do its work without direction or intereference from other congregations or some super body.

Congregations may choose to cooperate and help each other, advise and counsel together, but always as equals, never with one assuming control or authority over another. Attempts to set up authoritative and governing organizations to dictate or supervise the churches is a violation of the New Testament pattern.

At the same time, this autonomous state is not to be considered as a license for local churches to teach and practice whatever they wish that is outside of the body of truth and then expect no comment or criticism from other brethren. Independence was never intended to provide a shield for error. Some have thought, because congregations are autonomous, that no matter what they say or do it is nobody's business but their own. This is a glaring error and an abuse of the divine government. The battle between truth and error is everybody's business, anywhere, anytime.

Local Structure

How is the local congregation to be governed? Again, we remind ourselves that everything must be done *"in the name of"* Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17), which means by His authority. The early congregations were overseen by men who possessed certain revealed qualifications (First Timothy 3; Titus 1). The apostle Paul ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23). These overseers are called elders, bishops, pastors, shepherds,

presbyters or overseers. They always exist in the plurality, each congregation having more than one to supervise the work and affairs of the local church. There is to be no one-man-rule in any congregation. For the preacher to operate according to some kind of one-man "pastor system" is not Biblical.

The church in Ephesus had elders (Acts 20). First Peter 5 called the elders, shepherds, pastors, literally feeders of the flock. These identifications convey the multi-nature of the work.

The duties of these man are taught in Acts 20:28, 35; Titus 1:9; First Thessalonians 5:12,13; James 5:14; Hebrews 13:17; and First Peter 5:2,3. They are to take heed unto themselves and the flock, feed the church spiritually, help the weak, exhort in sound doctrine, convict the gainsayer, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, be longsuffering to all, exercise oversight, not lording it over the flock, visit the sick, watch in behalf of the souls of the members of that local church, rule the church and see that the mission of the church is performed by the authority of Christ and under their supervision.

These are God-appointed duties, a delegated work. They cannot make, alter, nor revise God's rules, but are to see that God's ways are followed. In matters that call for human judgments, they have the authority and responsibility to make the choices on behalf of the congregation.

Deacons

Another group of special servants of the local church are deacons. The word "deacon" means a servant or minister. Again, there are specific qualities a man must possess before being appointed to this office or work. Their duties are not as specific as those revealed for elders, but they are servants for the church, operating under the oversight of the eldership as do all members of the local congregation.

A female deacon, a deaconness, that refers to a permanent office in the church that is a female counterpart to a deacon, is not taught in Scripture. That women could, did and should serve is not disputed. That they can violate the limitations God has placed on women leading in the church is absurd, but often violated nonetheless. Therefore, they cannot serve as elders or deacons in the church.

Unlike many religious organizations, the governmental structure of the Lord's church is relatively simple. It does not

give place to human ambitions of glory, honor, titles, positions and superiority when the work is rightly considered and properly executed. If and when people are content with God's order, the work God gave the church to do is done efficiently and Biblically. Only when people think they can "improve" on God's pattern to the problems often experienced in church affairs arise to the surface.

Place of the Preacher

Since many religious bodies give authority to their preachers (calling them pastors, a term the Bible uses for the elders or overseers), it is worth our investigation to note the place of the preacher in a local church. There is no reason that only one man be "the" preacher. Many brethren can and do preach. But usually one man does most of it. He is a preacher, having no more authority to oversee the church than any other person of the church. He has the authority to preach the word (Second Timothy 4:2), but he neither has the authority to operate the church, nor should he be called upon to do so. Too many elderships want the preacher to do their work while the elders do the work of deacons and the deacons given very little to do, and many members doing nothing at all. This is not what God intended nor designed.

If it were not for the practice of many turning such power into the hands of preachers, or preachers seizing this power for themselves, these comments would be unnecessary. It is the fault of many preachers to attempt to dominate the affairs of the church, run the church, and manipulate others for his own purposes. When he does this he is outside his realm of work. But neither is he to be looked upon as just "hired help" and be treated by the eldership and members in ways they would treat no other member. The abuse many preachers suffer at the hands of his brethren is something every preacher of many years knows first-hand, unless he has been exceptionally fortunate. Sometimes he avoids any abuse by simply compromising the truth he should preach in order to stay in peace with brethren. This is a contemptible excuse for a preacher.

Preachers and all members of the church need to be warned against those false teachers who, for reasons of promoting innovations and false ways, have attempted to remove authority from elderships. Only in that way can some of their seminary, college-trained, professional clergymen get hold of the church

and promote their error. The preacher is in an influential place. He is expecred to be as influential as he can be. His advice and counsel is usually worth hearing. But he has no more authority than any other simply by virtue of being a preacher, except to preach the word with all authority of Christ behind him.

Lest We Forget

Keeping these matters before us, these issues of major concern in the effort of restoring New Testament Christianity in our own age, will prevent us from digressing from the divine pattern. While we are aware that some deny the New Testament is our blueprint, we contend such positions only further the advance of apostasy and the design of some to rule their own way. As to the kind of government the Lord's church is to have is determined by asking, "What does the Bible teach and authorize?" Once God has spoken that settles it, and we ought to believe it and follow it.

† † † † †

The Church: Name and Number

This lesson is familiar to the faithful Bible student but must be taught to all the world. Many do not know these things and many who know them do not respect them. Familiarity in no way minimizes the importance of repetition of basic truth. Departure from the truth is made possible when fundamental matters are taken for granted and are not studied and taught consistently and repeatedly. Information concerning the Lord's church is often so distorted and misrepresented that is it not too much to say that God's church is the misunderstood church.

We are aware that there now exists many churches in the world, literally hundreds upon hundreds. They vary in name, doctrine, faith, practice, message and in a multitude of lesser ways. They have similarities, but are divided one from another by major differences. Denominationalism is the prominent characteristic of what is called "Christendom" today, with its

mass of chaotic confusion, division and contradiction which is in evidence because of the existence of so many churches.

Sometimes people are inclined to accept something as true and acceptable simply because it has been that way a long time. We are glad that medical science has not been deceived that way or we would still be ignorantly "bleeding" people to treat high blood pressure. The age of things in religion does not necessarily prove it right or wrong by itself any more than does size, power, finances or degree of acceptance. Time has aided in the developement of attitudes such as one church being as good as another; that it does not matter to which church one belongs; that the various churches are but branches of the Lord's church; that God accepts the existence of many churches; that names are unimportant. But all such thinking is contradictory to Biblical revelation.

One major problem among religious people trying to come to a knowledge of the truth is the desire to make God fit what exists rather than changing what exists to fit God. Are we trying to convert God to men, or men to God? We should be interested only in what the Bible teaches and be content therewith, seeing it claims all-sufficiency. This lesson shall show that the Bible teaches there is one church and find how Scripture identifies it.

Singular

Matthew 16:18, *"...upon this rock I will build my church."* These are the words of Jesus. Notice the word used, church, which is singular in number. He did not promise to build many varying churches.

Ephesians 1:22,23, *"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."* The church is the body of Christ.

Colossians 1:18, *"And he is the head of the body, the church..."* Ephesians 4:4, *"There is one body."* First Corinthians 12:20, *"But now are there many members, but one body."* As surely as there is one body with one head there is one church. All of these passages harmonize in that central theme. How can anyone honestly read the Scriptures and conclude otherwise?

John 10:16, *"...and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."* We have no problem recognizing there is one

shepherd, who is Christ. Why do people have a problem recognizing there is one fold? If there is more than one fold, would not this allow for more than one shepherd?

The church is presented in the Bible as the family of God. First TImothy 3:15, *"...the house of God, which is the church of the living God..."* The term *"house"* refers to God's household or family, just as it does in Acts ten and Acts sixteen with reference to the family of Cornelius or the family of the jailor. In giving qualifications for elders Paul wrote in First TImothy 1:3, *"...one that ruleth well his own house,"* having reference to his own family. The Lord has a house, which is a spiritual family of brothers and sisters in Christ. It is the church and always spoken of in this sense in the singular.

Who Are The Branches?

"But the various churches are branches of the one church," some are heard to contend. If that be true the burden of proof rests on those who so contend. They have a problem with the verses teaching oneness we have quoted. We ask, "Where is Scripture to teach such a position?" If this is true it makes unity unnecessary even though the Lord prayed for unity and Paul condemned division. It might end a lot of religious strife because then everybody would agree that it makes no difference what you teach, practice or believe. Is the unity taught in the Bible nothing but an agreement to disagree, unity in diversity, each going his own way with equal authority, benefit and approval? If so, wherein does that differ from division? Nobody desires unity and oneness more than faithful Christians. But dare we attempt to have "unity" at the sacrifice of truth?

The only passage to my knowledge that any have ever attempted to use to find Biblical support for the divisions of denominationalism and that many churches are merely branches of the Lord's church is John 15:1-6 where the branches are specifically identified as people rather than denominations. Denominations have no Biblical authority for their existence. Where is the passage? Jesus said, *"If a man abide not in me..."* Nothing even suggests He speaks of various and differing churches; certainly not denominations that did not exist until nearly six hundred years after the Lord's church came into existence on Pentecost.

The apostles and early avangelists wrestled with many problems in the early church, and while division was one of

them, this thing of denominationalism was not present. They simply did not exist, but the Lord's church did. Therefore I know that the Lord's church is not composed of many different denominations.

It is reasonable to think that the same vine could produce grapes, pumpkins, oranges, apples, watermelons and bananas at the same time? It is equally unreasonable to think Christ is the founder of all the contradicting denominational bodies.

One Church

The conclusion is inescapable if you teach and believe the Bible. There is one church. Any church that contends for more than one church cannot be teaching the truth regarding the church. Those who contend for one church are teaching what the Bible affirms.

When the Bible does speak of a plurality of churches it uses the word in the sense of local congregations, local churches. Romans 16:16 is an example, *"The churches of Christ salute you."* Revelation 1:4-7 is another, *"...the seven churches which are in Asia."* Also we read in Galatians 1:2, *"...churches of Galatia."* These were not different denominations, but local congregations in different localities that taught, believed, practiced and worshipped the same way, following the same rule and authority; being one in the essentials such as government, doctrine, work and worship.

Do Names Really Matter?

There is also a popular idea in religious circles that there is nothing in a name, when you speak religiously. It is true that wearing the right name is not all there is that is important. But the notion that what name you wear is unimportant is not true in religion or any other activity and realm. Nor do people believe there is nothing in a name, even religiously, althought to justify denominationalism they will say that.

God evidently considers names important. Genesis 5:2 He called Adam by his name on the day he was created. He gave and changed the names of Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel. He even designated the name that John the Baptist would wear. He specified the name of His Son. *"Thou shalt call his name Jesus."* Christ was prophecied to have the name Emmanuel, Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Prince

of Peace, all found in Isaiah chapters seven and nine. If you think there is nothing in a name then you have a different viewpoint from God.

In other areas we recognize the value, even the necessity of correct names. This is true in business, naming your children, names on checks, trademarks, etc. Would you name you child Jezebel or Judas? Why some consider names unimportant is not difficult to discover. It is because the religious denominational world has a wide variety of names and in the desire to defend and retain these unbiblical names they have adopted the foolishness of contending there is nothing in a name. But they do not really believe it themselves because they are insistent on wearing their particular denominational name to the exclusion of all others. Consistency is not apparent in denominationalism.

As The Oracles

While the church is never called by a proper title in the New Testament, it is given several significant descriptions and identifications. More often than not it is simply called *"the church."* After all, since there is only one, why identify it with divisive denominational terms?

First Corinthians 1:2, the church is called *"the church of God."* We have read several places where it is called the body of Christ, the house of God. Romans 16:16, referring to several congregations, we find the phrase, *"churches of Christ."* All of these terms show possession; showing that the church belongs to God and Christ. *"The church of the living God"* is found in First Timothy 3:15, and *"the church of the first born"* in Hebrews 12:23. If there was only one automobile in all the world, one would not have to specify the brand to identify the automobile. Since there is only one church that belongs to God it can be identified simply as *"the church"* and that should be sufficient. It would be sufficient, except men have organized and invented their own denominational churches to the confusion of the entire religious scene.

The redeemed people who make up the church are called saints, disciples, and the proper name *"Christian." "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Acts 11:26). The same name is found in First Peter 4:16 and Acts 26:28. By this name we honor the founder, builder, foundation and Savior of the church, Jesus Christ. *"Christian"* means one who is of Christ. This name was given by God as Isaiah prophecied He

would give His people a new name (Isaiah 62:2). The word *"called"* shows that Deity gave the term.

Of Other Names

Names that give distinction to men (Luther, John the Baptist, etc.) or doctrines, governments, or anything else are without Biblical authority. Some might complain, "You want the name Christian just for yourself." That is not true. It is true we only want the name *"Christian,"* but not just for self. We would that all people everywhere would be content to wear this Biblical name and exclude the many divisive and unbiblical denominational names that men have accumulated to themselves. It is always right to *"speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11).

One additional point with respect to wearing titles that is the practices of clergymen of the denominational world. That also is without authority, even contrary to the teaching of Christ. There are those who must heap to themselves some distinction above others in the "church" with titles that set them apart as being "somewhat." They call themselves Reverend and many other self-glorifying titles. Jesus taught, *"Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven."* Yet, men will wear religious titles of Father. Can you imagine Peter, Paul, James and John being called Reverend, the Right Reverend, Holy Father, or some of the other titles men heap upon themselves? Did not Jesus teach against the attempt to exalt oneself above others? (Matthew 20:24-28).

Even the term "minister" is not a title and should not be so used. The word simply designates one who serves. I prefer being called simply a preacher rather than anything that would be used as a title. Preacher simply defines my work. I get disgustingly amused as some who harp against the church for being "traditional" but who used descriptive terms of work as titles. They will write about Bishop This, Elder That, Pastor Somewhat. The rage today is to be called Doctor Something. There is a sickening mania among some to give everybody some title. We have seen some church letterheads with a list of titled staff personnel that would rival any corporation in the country. This is a display of arrogance and violation gone to seed.

The terms elder, brother, sister, preacher, minister, etc. define the work involved but are not titles and ought not be so used. Job wrote, *"Let me not, I pray you, respect any man's person, neither will I give flattering titles unto any man. For I know not*

to give flattering titles." (Job 32:21,22). We need more Jobs. Servants of God who work for Him do not seek nor allow such things concerning themselves.

Such then is the teaching of the Bible regarding the number of churches Jesus built and the identifications used for that church. There is sufficient beauty in truth and it ought not be marred with the ideas, doctrines, practices, inventions and ambitions from men. We have no right to take liberties with God's revelation, but we have the privilege of conforming ourselves to it. Let us be busy in doing just that.

† † † † †

The Builder and Foundation of the Church

With so many matters confronting us in life, if we are not careful, we can lose sight of our eventual goal, slip loose from the declarations of God's truth that anchor the soul, and lose sight of what really matters. We need to refresh our minds and keep informing ourselves and those not yet in Christ of the basic, fundamental, first principle and elementary points of the doctrine of Christ.

First Peter 3:15, *"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."* We have a hope which we expect to realize. We need to know and be able to teach why we all must be Christians. Our material in this lesson, although familiar to some, is not know to all. Even to those that know it we would remind ourselves of the words of Peter in Second Peter 1:12, *"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth."*

It is important that we be in the Lord's church, that body He has promised to save. One church is not as good as another, nor are we allowed the right to choose the church of our choice as if it did not matter. We are urged to choose the church of God's choice.

The Builder

Psalm 127:1, *"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."* No church is the right church unless it was built by the right builder. The very existence of a religious body is evidence that it was founded by someone and upon some foundation. There are hundreds of churches and all of them had a beginning and started by someone. The right builder of the church that God approves is Jesus Christ. Christ did not build hundreds of churches, each contradicting the other, different onefrom another, teaching things that He never taught nor authorized to be taught. It is important to be in the church that Christ built.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised to build His church. The church belongs to Him and He is the founder of it. If a church was founded by Henry the Eighth, John Wesley, Joseph Smith, Martin Luther, or any other person, it is not the church Jesus built. This fact eliminates all denominations from being the Lord's church because Jesus never built a denomination. Most of them acknowledge someone else as their founder anyway.

In Matthew 16:19 Jesus gave authority to Peter and later to all of the apostles, giving them the *"keys"* to the kingdom. Nobody else could ever assume such authority to say what Jesus said or speak in His name as did the apostles and other inspired men. Nobody else has the right to instruct regarding the Lord's church except they teach what those authorized to teach had taught. Those who would preach truth have no right to teach anything other than what Jesus authorized the apostles to preach and teach. Christ alone possesses all authority as was given Him by the Father. He alone had the right to build the church. Only that which He built is approved of God.

Not by John

The church was not established by John the Baptist. The term "Baptist" is a term denoting what John did, not the name of the Lord's church. It is not an authorized religious name to be worn by anybody. While some say the church was established during the life of John, Matthew 14:10 tells how John was beheaded by Herod and it was two chapters later in Matthew sixteen that Jesus was still talking about building the church in the future. John was dead before the church became a reality.

In Matthew 11:11 Jesus said, *"Verily I say unto you, among*

them that are born of woman there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." How could that be? His complimentary words of John the Baptist also shows us that John was never in the kingdom because John was dead before the kingdom, the church, was established on Pentecost.

An illustration can help us here. One might say that there is none greater in elementary school than John, but he that is least in high school is greater than he. This can be said only because John is not in high school. The church Jesus built was not built in John's lifetime.

Nothing Could Prevent It

Even the gates of Hades could not prevent the establishment of the Lord's church (Matthew 16:18). Nor shall Satan be victorious over the Lord's church. His church, the kingdom, is an everlasting kingdom. Those who are faithful citizens therein shall never be destroyed but shall live eternally with God. Even the death of Christ did not prevent its coming (Acts 2:31). Nor can all the power of Satan drive it from existence.

But notice what Jesus said when speaking of religions founded upon the traditions of men. Matthew 15:9,13, *"But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men... But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."* Churches built by someone other than Christ have not the hope of eternal life founded on truth. This is a blessing that belongs only to those in the church that Christ built.

Regardless of our prejudices, previous learning or misunderstanding, this is the truth. We must live and shall be judged according to this truth. But does not this truth motivate us and provoke us to want to be sure we are in the church that Christ built? How do you consider the matter?

The Foundation

Not only is Jesus the builder of the church, He is also the foundation upon which it is built. No building or institution can be stronger than its foundation. The church that claims to be the church of the Bible must also have the foundation the Bible declares it must have. Matthew 16:16-18 tells us the church is built upon that great truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of

God. Christ promised to build it and He identified the foundation Rock upon which it stands.

There are varying views among men as to what is the Rock upon which the church is founded. Some have said the church was built on Peter. But you can take away Peter and the church remains. But take away Christ, and what is left? The truth is, the Rock is the truth Peter confessed concerning the identity of Christ as God's Son. Needless to say, you remove that fact and nothing about the church or Christianity can stand. Nothing remains. because authority is destroyed.

There are several reasons why we can be sure the Rock is Peter's confession. The word translated *"Peter"* is a different word from that which is translated *"rock."* Peter is from "petros," while rock is from "petra." The first is masculine gender and the second is feminine. The first means a mere pebble or stone while the second means a solid, massive ledge of rock. One was small enough to be tossed about while the other was a mountain. Surely, words of such difference would not refer to the same thing in the same sentence.

The Lord had given Simon the name Peter or Cephas. It means a stone (John 1:42). Rather than declaring Peter as the Rock on which the church is built, Christ drew a sharp contrast between Peter and the Rock upon which the church is built.

One Foundation

Such a conclusion is inescapable also in the light of First Corinthians 3:11, *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* Ephesians 2:20 speaks of the foundation of the apostles but only with reference to what the apostles preached; namely, Christ. Isaiah 28:16, *"Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone of sure foundation."* In Matthew twenty-one Jesus applied that prophecy to Himself, not Peter. Peter did not apply that prophecy to himself, but Christ (Acts 4:10,11). Peter knew what the foundation of the church is (First Peter 2:7). We wonder why people cannot grasp it today.

We are not made to wonder why enemies of the church will constantly strike against the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. When one does not wish to be subject to Christ he must do something to destroy the authority of Christ. Christ as the Son of God means authority. When one does not want to serve God but live his own way and "do his own thing," he must satisfy

himself someway with some excuse for not doing so. When one seeks to destroy the church and that for which it stands he must uproot, if he can, the foundation of the church because if he can do that the entire structure of Christianity collapses.

Many have this desire and this explains the reason for atheism, skepticism, modernism, humanism, existentialism, and other "isms," even that which has been called a "new hermeneutics," and other "isms" that are vicious and venemous enemies of Christ, His Word and His church. This is why such liberal organizations as the National Council of Churches and the liberal seminaries and colleges seek to undermine His Deity. They are not content to be guided by the Word of God, seeking their own subjective way in preference to God's way.

But the truth regarding Christ, the foundation and builder of the church, remains. Like the legendary anvil that has withstood the battering of many hammers, so the truth stands against all its foes. And so shall it ever be.

† † † † †

When and Where the Church Began

With the motive to refresh our minds and to inform, we study a subject that assumes the church does exist. If this is not apparent in our own day it certainly was obvious in the days of the first century of which we read in the New Testament. A study of the church is far more important than many realize. It has more to do with our eternal salvation than many admit. But not only is the knowledge of when and where the church began of importance to us eternally, it also has some very day-to-day applications that are useful and needful for us in living the Christian life. Especially is this true in the work of spreading the borders of the kingdom.

Such a study ought to increase our respect for the church and the significance the Lord has placed upon it. We need to have reverence for the divine side of the church. While the principles of God's dealings with man have been essentially the same in every dispensation, the specifics are different now than under

the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages. We live under the will of Christ and shall be judged by His words (John 12:48).

When we realize that the church belongs to Christ, we understand that we cannot take an indifferent attitude toward the church that is His. Furthermore, since the church is His, bought by Him by His blood, built by Him, all that concerns the church concerns Christ. Everything from the terms of entrance to the ultimate disposition of the church is significant because of Christ and His relationship to the church.

Once we realize the truth that the church is composed of the saved, we begin to see more clearly the importance of the church to ourselves. Christ is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23). So if we expect to be saved, we must be in His church. Outside of Christ there is no salvation and the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23).

Not A Denomination

I seldom if ever preach about the church that I do not emphasize we are not talking about a denomination. There simply is not anything in the Bible to justify a denomination. Why should I preach about one? It is a shame that even many in the church have so little knowledge of the church that they, like others who are confused in religion, consider the church to be just another denomination. That is not so and never has been so. If a church is the church of Christ it is not a denomination. If it is a denomination it is not the church of Christ. Therefore, we have no real concern about the details of various denominations except to oppose them and the division upon which they feed and which they propagate. Why should anybody want to uphold what they never find in God's Word anyway?

We study the "when and where" of the beginning of the church together because so many of the passages that speak of one, speak of both.

The Kingdom

We need to emphasize one additional point of introduction. Let us learn from the Scriptures that the church and the kingdom of God and Christ are one and the same. We will offer here just one or two passages proving this even though there are many others we could cite. Those in the church in Colosse were said to be in the kingdom. *"Who hath delivered us out of the*

power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." (Colossians 1:13). Church members were citizens in the kingdom. *"And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven."* (Matthew 16:16,17). Here our Lord used the terms "church" and "kingdom" interchangeably. How foolish it would have been for Him to build one thing but give the apostles the keys to something else.

We could talk about passages that teach how we are baptized into Christ, into His body, and how one enters the kingdom by being born of water and the Spirit. All these things go to prove the church and the kingdom to be one and the same divine institution from God.

Not in Former Ages

Men have presented a number of doctrines regarding when the church began. Some have even contended it began in Abram's day. Others say in the time of Moses. Many teach it began during the life of John the Baptist. (Another lesson in this book deals with this error.) Some even claim the church has been established but not the kingdom and that the kingdom is yet to come in the future, even though Paul spoke of those who were already in the kingdom. Just how some could already have been in the kingdom if the kingdom has not yet come is an insurmountable problem for those who try to separate the church from the kingdom.But when we know the truth of the Bible as to when the church or kingdom began, obviously anything at variance with that truth is error. We shall learn when it did begin, not when it did not.

In Jerusalem

Let us consider eight signs the Lord said would accompany the beginning of the kingdom or church. Isaiah 2:2-4 gives us three signs. *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house*

of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths, for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

To All Nations

The kingdom would begin in Jerusalem. It would begin *"in the last days."* All nations would flow unto it. In other words, people of all nations would be included. It would not be a nationalistic economy like the Judaistic or Mosaic system. The *"house of the Lord"* refers to the church. Paul called the church the *"house of God."* (First Timothy 3:15). Doubtless the house of God and the kingdom of God refer to the same thing and both refer to the church.

In The Last Days

The *"last days"* are defined for us in Hebrews 1:1 as the time when God speaks to man through His Son. The Bible presents to us three dispensations. A dispensation is a system by which God governs man for a period of time. God governed men under a Patriarchal system, then Israel under the Mosaic system, and now all men under the system of Christ. The church began at the very beginning of the last dispensation. Joel had prophesied of its beginning in Joel two, to which Peter made direct reference in his sermon on Pentecost and said the events of Pentecost fulfilled Joel's prophecy. There is no use looking for another place than Jerusalem, nor another time than the last days, for the beginning of the church that belongs to Christ.

In the Days of Rome

Daniel two records a more specific time from a dream of Nebuchadnezzar and the image he saw in his dream. This is the fourth of the eight signs to which this lesson refers. The Babylonian king saw an image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron with feet of a mixture of iron and clay. A stone, *"not made with hands,"* that is, from God, smote the image and broke it into pieces and

grew to fill the earth.

Daniel's interpretation of the dream was that the image represented four kingdoms of which Babylon was the first. The stone smiting the image was the kingdom of God and the symbolism of His kingdom being superior to all the others. It would be in the days of *"these kings,"* the kings of the fourth kingdom, that God would establish His kingdom.

Following Babylon came the Medo-Persian empire, then the Grecian, and finally Roman. It was during the days of the Roman empire that John the Baptist came preaching the *"kingdom of heaven is at hand,"* which means nearby or soon to be. Christ and His apostles preached the same message. It was during the time of Rome's domination of the known world.

We need not look anywhere else but Jerusalem, or any other time than the *"last days,"* more specifically, during the days of the Roman empire for the establishment of God's church.

In Their Lifetime

Sign five is a statement of Jesus. *"And he said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."* (Mark 9:1). In the lifetime of some of those to whom Jesus personally spoke the kingdom would come. It either did, or Jesus is a false prophet. Furthermore, it was to come with power, and Jesus identified that power as the coming of the Holy Sirit (Acts 1:8). This ties perfectly with the prophecy of Joel to which Peter referred in Acts two, the day the Holy Spirit came on the apostles; the day the church began; the day the kingdom began.

Coming of the Holy Spirit

Sign six, already mentioned, is the prophecy of Joel. *"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions, and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit."* (Joel 2:28,29). Peter said this would take place in the *"last days."* We might be wise not to be dogmatic in explaining every facet of this prophecy in detail. But we would suggest that Peter knew what he was talking about when he said of the events on Pentecost, *"This is*

that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," and let it rest that. The sign of the coming of the kingdom with power was the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

After the Ascension

The seventh sign to which we refer is the prophecy in Daniel seven of the Son of Man going to the Ancient of Days and receiving a kingdom (Daniel 7:13,14). This had prophetic reference to the ascension of Christ (called the Son of Man to emphasize His humanity as well as Deity) and His return into heaven to the Father (Ancient of Days). Once there, and assuming His place at the *"right hand of God,"* a phrase denoting authority and rule, His kingdom was given Him. This came on Pentecost, shortly after the ascension.

The Message

The eighth sign of the coming of the kingdom was what Jesus said would take place *"at the beginning."* Luke 24:47, *"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name beginning at Jerusalem."* This is exactly the message that is recorded as being preached in Acts two on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Christ into heaven. (Acts 2:38).

The church began, as is evident from New Testament testimony. Christ is declared as its head (Ephesians 1:22,23). Churches existed in many cities. Letters were sent to many congregations. Elders were ordained over churches. People were members of the church. But now we can determine the exact time when the church began and how people became members of it. This is important because people become members of the church, the saved, the same way today.

Finding the Beginning

Let us come backward in establishing the time. Begin in Acts five when the church was obviously in existence because Ananias and Saphirra sinned and their punishment struck fear on all the church. It existed then. Come back to John the Baptist, who preached the kingdom was *"at hand."* But it did not come in his lifetime. He was beheaded by Herod for preaching the truth concerning his adulterous realtionship with

Herodias. Even after his death Jesus was still promising to build the church in the future (Matthew 16:16-18). So it is easy to see the church did not come in the lifetime of John the Baptist, denominational teachers notwithstanding. It came sometime between Jesus' promise and Acts five, however.

The first time we read of people being in the church is in Acts two when we read of the saved, those who had heard, believed and obeyed the gospel, were added to the church (Acts 2:47). Even after the resurrection and ascension of Christ the apostles were still looking for the kingdom (Acts one). So it had not come by the time Jesus was lifted into heaven. We should not have expected it to come before the ascension in view of the prophecy of Daniel seven that we mentioned.

Signs Fulfilled

But Acts two is important because on that day the power came. The Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles. They began to preach as the Spirit gave them utterance. Manifestations of power were evident. The apostles could miraculously speak in languages they had never learned so that people of many nations could hear the gospel. They were in the city of Jerusalem. The old law had been nailed to the cross, and this was the first day of the new age. Rome, the fourth empire, was in power over the land. Christ had ascended. Many who had heard Jesus preach were still alive. The message Jesus said would be proclaimed was proclaimed. What sign that had been foretold as denoting the coming of the kingdom failed to take place on that first Pentecost after the Lord's ascension? Friend, everything that had been prophesied occurred.

Furthermore, from this point forward we read of the church in existence. People were added to it. Congregations were established near and far. The gospel spread and people were saved by the Christ. The events at the house of Cornelius reminded Peter of certain things that had taken place *"at the beginning."* (Acts 11:15).

Pentecost

On the day of Pentecost many heard the Word, some three thousand believed what they heard, and obeyed what they were commanded to do; namely, repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Those that did that were added to the church.

This is how people entered the church then. This is how people enter the church that belongs to Christ now.

Having once begun, the church can never begin again. In or around the year thirty-three A.D. (some say 30 A.D. depending g on the calendar count one uses) the church of Christ, the kingdom of God, the company of the saved, began.

Are you a member of that church? Have you done as did those in Bible times to enter the church of Christ? Until you do, you are lost, for the church is the saved, and it is the church, the body, that Christ shall save (Ephesians 5:23). It is the kingdom that Christ shall deliver to the Father when He comes again (First Corinthians 15:24). We urge everyone to be in His church and live faithfully until death overtakes us.

† † † † †

Comments That Encourage

Below are several expressions received lately regarding this booklet, ***A Burning Fire.*** Included is just the comment without identification of the one who sent it or from what locale. But such words as these do a great deal to encourage this effort and renew determination to continue its publication as long as possible. A sincere thanks to everyone.

"I received your book, ***A Burning Fire,*** from a relative earlier this year. I read it over and over again. It was very inspirational to me. May I please be put on your mailing list?"

"I enjoy reading another man's copy. Keep up the good work."

"Thank you for your continuing help through the publication, ***A Burning Fire.*** I find it very helpful in my personal study."

"I just want to write a note to let you know how much I enjoy each issue of ***A Burning Fire.*** I look forward to getting them."

"We enjoy reading ***A Burning Fire.*** Keep up the good work."

"Please keep it coming I appreciate the good, sound material in this paper."

"We thoroughly enjoy and appreciate this. It is our favorite because of clarity and truth. Thank you."

Many have written and simply said, "Thanks."

"I use ***A Burning Fire*** for both Sunday sermon material and radio lessons. It is a valuable work you do."

"I truly appreciate receiving ***A Burning Fire*** and its quality and soundness.

"I enjoy and appreciate ***A Burning Fire*** more than words can express. It is a real aid for a young preacher like myself and I do want to keep receiving it.May God bless you for your service to other preachers of like precious faith."

"I always pass it on to others to read because it is so good."

"When it comes I sit right down and read every word and often reread it. The lessons are so good."

"I find your book very intersting and informative."

"I get a lot of good material out of this book. Keep up the good work. I, for one, really benefit from it."

"I thoroughly enjoy reading ***A Burning Fire.*** It's well written and very practical for our day. The truth never changes."

"I read all of each issue as they come. They are kept for future use by myself and others."

"Thanks for continuing this fine publication."

Recently I printed a picture of one of my grandchildren on the back cover and one wrote, "I like the picture on that issue better than the one usually on the back."

I have copied these comments not for boasting but to let it be known how much I appreciate the encouragement I receive from those who read ***A Burning Fire.*** When I get words like these I am like the person on the car commercial on television, "Who could ask for anything more?" JWB

Many Do Not Read



JAMES W. BOYD

Is there any real difference between the person who cannot read and the one who will not read? Yes, there is a real difference in ability. But as far as receiving the benefits of reading, there is none. One has not yet developed the talent and the other buries it.

Many, even brethren, do not read, at least, not much. It is difficult to encourage some to read every day from the Scriptures. Most can read but have decided they will not. At least they do not read the Bible or good material that helps them learn the way of the Lord.

Yes, those who can read will seldom miss the newspaper and all its columns. They read directions about various items of interest. But their hunger and thirst to know about God's Word and God's people does not seem to exist. They are content to remain ignorant, but to their peril.

We should be careful what we read because it influences our mind and life. But we cannot afford to stay uninformed, misinformed concerning the matters of the soul. It is fair to say that what we read reflects to a great extent what our heart truly treasures.

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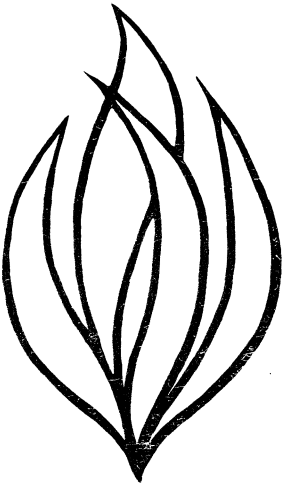

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME X James W. Boyd **NUMBER 11**

Church Discipline

Number One

Something is wrong with a preacher or anyone else when he feels he must apologize for preaching any portion of the truth of God. Yet, some feel apologetic (not in the sense of defending) regarding this subject. We are aware that there be some who strongly object to a discussion of the theme of church discipline for various reasons, or should I say, excuses. But if any apology is due it is because of the failure to preach on the subject enough to keep brethren informed about it and the necessity of it.

Often the objection raised is that it is not the proper time to discuss it. They claim to have no real objection to discipline but they never seem to determine an appropriate timing to do it. There may well be times when a certain study may be more effective than other times. But no part of the truth is untimely. The gospel is to be preached *"in season, out of season."* (Second Timothy 4:2). We would agree that the study of church discipline may create fewer problems when there is no disciplinary matter before the congregation and the church is at peace. But again, when there are disorderly members being tolerated may be just the time the study is needed the most. Paul certainly thought so because he discussed discipline with Corinth at the very time there was a pressing need for it.

Trouble over church discipline often arises because people will allow personalities to mean more to them than principles of truth. Being in ignorance of the Word of God, they twist and wrest the Scriptures to make them fit some particular problem, person or situation and try to make the Scriptures apply directly to that person, problem or situation without warrant. The only way to remove trouble about church discipline is to have a knowledge of the truth on it and love that truth more than anything else.

Questions and Answers

Our study shall consist of asking several relevant and pertinent questions on the subject and search the Scriptures for the answers. But let us begin by quoting a pamphlet entitled, "The Forgotten Commandment." We cite these remarks, not as divine authority, but because the sentiments he expresses are

such that we can and should concur:

A lack of discipline is responsible for the chaos in which the world finds itself. Disregard for authority is evident on every hand. Discipline has faded into almost complete obscurity in the affairs of nations, states, communities, and has all but disappeared from the church of God. No home can be strong without discipline. No church can properly function without discipline. No nation can stand if its people flagrantly disregard discipline.

The early church believed and practiced discipline. It always disciplined with the right objective in mind. The early church grew and multiplied because it worked constantly to maintain its purity. Discipline was used over and over to accomplish this.

Today, about every sin that can be found in the world can also be found in the church. There is a tendency to wink at sin among God's children and excuse it with the excuse that to try to correct it is to meddle into peoples' lives. This is not true. It is the duty of the church to reprove, rebuke, exhort - even to cull out, delete, to withdraw fellowship from all who walk in an unruly manner and will not repent.

The matter of discipline has been carelessly handled in many cases. Discipline has been used as a means to get even with someone -as a club with which to destroy. This is not New Testament discipline and the ones who practice such are themselves in need of discipline.

When a tree is pruned and kept in a healthy state it bears more fruit. When the rotten apple is thrown out of the peck the others are saved. When an infected member of the physical body is either restored or removed the entire body

> functions more perfectly. When the church is kept pure by prunning, weeding out, even by withdrawing in the extreme cases, it will grow as we have never seen it grow before.

We are hard-pressed to see how anyone could disagree with these sentiments if they have the welfare of the church and their brethren collectively and individually at heart.

What is Discipline?

What is meant by discipline? Whether we are talking about discipline in the home, state, church or wherever, it can be divided into two areas, preventive and corrective. Most people think of discipline only in terms of correction and punishment. But this misses one major part of discipline. Discipline is training. Training molds, strengthens, perfects, directs correctly, as well as making corrections. Discipline also includes punishment, rebuke and chastisement. Discipline is a means of enforcing obedient and orderly conduct. It is the rule or system affecting the manner of one's life. Training in obedience to a given standard is discipline, according to Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.

According to these definitions, we can see that every sermon, every Bible class is included in discipline. These are efforts to properly train. This is preventive discipline. Reproving, rebuking are also a part of discipline in the corrective area. Discipline includes punishment but punishment is only one form of discipline. In our homes we teach our children the way they should go, and this is preventive discipline. We punish them when they misbehave and this is corrective discipline. The same principle applies when dealing with church discipline.

There has been this kind of discipline in every dispensation. In the Patriarchal Age God instructed Adam and Eve what they were to do. He also punished them when they violated His will. God warned Lot and his wife about escaping from Sodom. Lot's wife was punished when she disobeyed. The people were warned in Noah's day and punished in the flood. In all these cases there was corrective and preventive discipline.

In the Mosaic Age God gave the law of Israel for their instruction. Israel was punished when they defied God. They were told what to do with the treasures and spoils of Jericho. When this was violated not only Achan but the entire nation

suffered. Over and over we could cite examples of both kinds of discipline in this dispensation.

The Christian Age records disciplinary actions. There is the very sever case of Ananias and Saphirra when they lied to the Holy Spirit in Acts five regarding their contributions and were smitten with death. The Corinthians were taught regarding the standards of morality and the immoral one was to be taken from their company if he did not repent of his sins. So we have no reason to be surprised that discipline is appropriate now.

Who is to be Disciplined?

In one sense every person is to be subject to discipline because every person needs the training and direction from God. For this reason the church should maintain the best teaching program it is capable of having. Preventive discipline is applicable to all.

In the event preventive discipline fails, Paul instructs, *"Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us."* (Second Thessalonians 3:6). Again, *"If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed."* (Second Thessalonians 3:14). Disorderly is defined as not walking after what the apostles taught. Those who do not obey the word are disorderly. It means "not according to the order of things." It can be illustrated by a soldier who will not keep in step and breaks the ranks.

Second John 9-11 teaches, *"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed: for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds."* To add to or take away from God's Word makes one subject to disciplinary action.

Titus 3:10-11, *"A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."* A heretic is a factious man who shows more concern for part than the whole; who pays little to no attention to the Word and does as he wants to the injury of all.

First Corinthians 5:1-5 presents a severe problem of immorality in the church. *"It is commonly reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in the body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."* Paul called for disciplinary action to purge the sin (flesh) and save the soul (spirit).

"Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." (Romans 16:17). Again, Titus 1:9-13, *"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves even a prophet of their own said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth."* This is calling for disciplinary action.

Personal Offenses

One who trespasses against a brother and will not repent of it is the object of discipline. Matthew 18:15-17, *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church, but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."*

Let us notice that in every instance, the discipline is meted out only in cases of overt action and regarding observable sins. Discipline is not executed in matters that remain merely matters

of the heart. We do not infer that sins of the heart are not deadly. We simply point out that the sins subject to corective discipline are sins that are observable and detectable; sins that have possibly shown an evil heart but the showing is evident. While we can and must discipline preventively in matters of both heart and action, we are limited in disciplining in a corrective manner in matters of the heart because man is limited in knowing the heart. When we try to judge the heart we have over-stepped our prerogatives and entered into the realm where only God is able to know (First Samuel 16:7). We can discipline in matters of adultery (overt action) but are limited in matters of lust, unless lust has demonstrated itself. Judging the heart is left to God and forbidden man (Matthew 7:1-5).

In answer to our question, "Who is disirderly?" we quote an adequate comment by G. C. Brewer when he wrote, "Any person who sins is in need of the encouragement and admonition of faithful Christians; but only the person who sins and is impenitent, defiant, and shows the purpose to continue his sins should be considered disorderly." And, "We would say that any person who persists in sin, any sin, or who refuses to repent or correct his sins, should be regarded as disorderly and should be dealt with as such."

Purpose of Discipline

What is the purpose of discipline? The Lord has given us in His Word the purposes for disciplinary action. Before we consider them, let us give attention to this word of caution. If the motive for disciplinary action, preventive or corrective, is not the same as the purpose the Lord has given, then God will judge and the one whose motive is impure stands as condemned before God as one who should be otherwise disciplined. It is possible that an evil motive may not be known by other brethren because motives are matters of the heart and are not always detectable to other men as we have noted. But we will not deceive God in this or any other matter. While we shall consider in a second lesson just who does the disciplining, we are now concerned with the motive and reasons for disciplinary action.

First Corinthians 5:5 shows that the purpose of discipline is to destroy the sin (flesh) and save the sinner (spirit). Let us emphasize that discipline is for the purpose of saving. The sinner cannot be saved if he continues in his wickedness. Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are*

spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." The word *"restore"* means to mend, re-equip for further use, to recover. Preventive discipline is directed to avoid sin. Corrective discipline is used to correct sin when it is not avoided. Discipline is to save the lost. Administration of discipline, as stated by G. C. Brewer quite well, "may look hard, but it is far better than to let the man be self-deceived and remain in sin till he must at last hear the same sentence pronounced by the Lord in the awful word, 'Depart.' Then it will be too late; and we, if we have connived at his sin, and become partakers of his guilt, will have to share his doom."

Second Thessalonians 3:14 already quoted cites discipline so that the sinner *"may be ashamed."* It is designed to cause sufficient shame that the sinner will come out of his sinfulness. We can see that discipline is used because somebody loves somebody else enough to help them. We do not show love to let sin go unchecked. You show love by doing what is needful to turn the sinner from the error of his way and save a soul from death (James 5:19,20). Those who look upon disciplinary action as an insult have failed to learn God's Word. We do not consider the doctor insulting when he prescribes medicine when we are physically ill. We do not consider him insulting even if we have to have an operation and have part of us removed, if it is to save life. Why should we think brethren have lesser motives regarding the soul?

Discipline is to save the church from being overrun with sin. First Corinthians 5:6,7, Paul wrote, *"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaventh the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened."* One spiritually diseased member affects the whole body. It must be cured, restored, or the whole body could die. Sin attracts sin. The Lord desires a church that is pure, holy, without blemish and wrinkle (Ephesians 5). In Revelation 2:5 the church in Ephesus did not correct the faults in it and the Lord said He would remove their candlestick, their light, from the whole church. Rebuke is for the purpose that all may be sound in the faith (Titus 1:13). If sin goes unchecked in the ranks of God's people it will not be too long before the whole world winks at sin and hypocrisy becomes the norm. The world will look with reproach on the very body of Christ. When God's rules are allowed to be broken and nothing said or done about it, the salt loses its savor and a bushel is placed over the lamp.

It is the work of the church to proclaim the truth to save the

world. What will the sinful world think of the church if those who compose the church have so little regard for the very message they are to preach? The attraction of purity is one of the drawing forces of the church. Dare we hide our light under the bushel and still expect to be the light of the world?

Once again, in order to emphasize, if we love those in sin, love the church, love the lost of the world, love the fallen brother, whosoever, we will love this truth regarding church discipline. Only as lack of love would allow us to suppress it.

Additional points regarding church discipline will be discussed in the next lesson.

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Church Discipline

Number Two

Without taking time and space to review the previous lesson, let us pursue the theme of church discipline by continuing to ask important questions about it and find God's answers.

How to Administer

How is discipline to be administered? Preventive discipline is administered by teaching, preaching, training, informing, and showing by example. How corrective discipline is to be administered is dependent upon the nature of the transgression that must be handled. Is it a personal matter between brethren? Is it a private issue? Or is it a public transgression known far and wide and involves all? Personal offenses can become public offenses if they are not corrected on the personal level. Public offenses cannot be corrected privately or on the same scope as private problems. The effectiveness of discipline would thereby be nullified. Many are involved in publicly known sins. The whole church is affected openly.

Private -Personal

We earlier read from Matthew 18:15-17 regarding a personal issue between two brethren. The one who has been offended

has a responsibility to go to the offending brother and to try to settle the issue between them. Usually this will settle most situations when brethren are men of good will. Brethren of good will will seldom find it impossible to solve their problems. The reason the offended one has the duty to go to the offender is because the offender may be in a bad spiritual state and would never initiate a solution. It is also possible that the offender is not aware he has offended his brother. How could the offended inititate a reconciliation to a problem about which he is unaware?

If the two parties are not able to settle the situation on a quiet and relatively calm plane, then the offended one should take one or two others with him to discuss the matter with the offender. Please note the "low key" approach to the problem thus far. It is not an open rift but a private affair. There is not the rushing to many, many others and spreading the problem. But there is the restricted approach to those involved and as few of others as is necessary. Surely, a few brethren together can settle nearly every matter that would ever arise between two brethren on a personal level when all involved really want a solution. This is often a real barrier, however!

However, if the matter be so serious and no solution is reached by this time, the issue should be taken before the whole church with the hope and intent that the consideration of the whole body will be brought to bear on those involved and a solution found. There is the pressure of all the brethren on the evil doer. If a sinful brother defies the whole church and refuses to make correction, then he is to be considered an outcast, not because the others are so righteous, but because he has made himself so unrighteous. The offender should clear up his offense regardless of what anybody else does or does not do. If he will not, he is to be numbered among those with whom faithful brethren no longer will have fellowship until such time as he repents of the error of his way. This is clear.

Personal problems and disputes ought not be allowed to become public disputes. They ought to be solved on the personal level and then allowed to die. Some prefer to blast out against others sometimes even before the one they are blasting is even aware of the personal offense. But when personal offenses are not settled and it becomes a matter for the whole church to handle, then things have become intolerable.

Public

Next, let us consider the administration of discipline when the transgression has been public before all, known to many, recognized by all and possibly involving many and affecting the whole congregation, even the whole brotherhood. When a brother sins publicly, openly, it is already outside the level of a personal issue, but the very nature of the offense, be it evil behavior, false teaching, whatever disorderly manner he commits, makes it a public issue for the church. Such a case is found in First Corinthians five where one man's immorality was threatening the welfare of the entire church. We cannot cover public sins in a private manner. This would destroy the purposes of discipline; namely, the preservation of the church and the example of the church before the world it strives to save. It is necessary that the world knows that the church opposes sin, even in its own members. *"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may also fear."* (First Timothy 5:20). There is value in public rebuke that cannot be dismissed.

It is not proper for one to openly sin through conduct or teaching and expect to cover it up quietly and others never even know that sin has been confessed and forgiveness sought. It is not proper for one to openly teach error and then go into some room and quietly admit he was wrong to a few but never make correction openly as he taught. As one has illustrated, Johnny may make a mistake on his paper at his desk in arithmetic and correct it with only he and the teacher knowing about it and all is well. But let Johnny make the mistake at the chalkboard for all to see and nothing be done, then the whole class can and will be detrimentally affected. Public sins cannot be swept under a private rug lest the force of discipline be lost. We have seen in our time many false teachers want special treatment and "save face" by not openly admitting wrong. But it is better to save the soul than preserve one's pride and save face.

Furthermore, you should allow time for the one in error to be shown his sin, but you can talk to a person just so long. Eventually, it must be recognized that the sinner is not going to repent and discipline is mandatory. Judgment must be used to determine how long this time may be. But it surely must not be so long that when disciplinary measures are taken they have really lost their affect. It should not be so long as to make it appear the sin is being condoned. There comes the time when rebuke is no more the way, but rejection is in order (Titus 3:10,11). Paul said after the first or second admonition, reject.

Withdrawing Fellowship

If public pressure does not cause the sinner to turn, he must be avoided, company from him withheld, and fellowship withdrawn from him. To withdraw fellowship from a brother is the last and final effort to which we resort to cause the brother to repent. After all other efforts, preventive and corrective, have failed, *"Let him be unto thee as the Gentile and publican."* Deliver such a one to Satan (First Corinthians 5:5). Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly (Second Thessalonians 3:6). Mark them and avoid them (Romans 16:17). This is as much a command from heaven as the one teaching baptism. It is God's will, not man's. The church cannot just allow sinful matters to exist without attention, nor can problems be disposed of through neglect and indifference. Just turning your back and pretending sin does not exist is often the way sins are handled in the church, but that is not the way God says to deal with them.

When one has had fellowship withdrawn from him that one is not just written off and forgotten. He is not to be treated like he was an enemy (Second Thessalonians 3:15) even though contact and association is limited. He is a fallen brother. Yet, we are to have no company with him, not so much as even to eat with him. There is no cause to hate him, but we must do what we are allowed to do to teach him the error of his way and turn him back again if possible (James 5:19,20). But we must never leave the impression with him or any other we condone his sin.

Who is to Administer Discipline?

All who preach and teach administer preventive discipline. Every good example is preventive discipline. Therefore, every Christian ought to be involved in preventive discipline. All have a power of influence and should persuade others to do right.

As for corrective discipline, again it depends somewhat on the nature of the problem. In personal offenses, the offended is to initiate the action as stated. In public transgressions the whole church is involved and the whole church has the duty to administer discipline. As with other matters pertaining to the local church, the eldership should and must take the lead. In matters of withdrawing fellowship, every Christian must cooperate lest the purpose of the action be lost and the sinful soul never brought to repentance. Paul says, *"Ye being gathered*

together." (First Corinthians 5:4,5). All are involved. If some obey God and disfellowship a sinful impenitent brother but others ignore it as if sin was not to be rebuked, then disciplinary efforts will probably be so ineffective that the sinner will remain lost and those who refuse to cooperate are to blame. The responsibility rests upon all.

In the final phase of this study we consider some of the more often suggested objections to disciplinary action. We begin by saying there ought not be any objections since God has commanded that they be exacted. But still some raise objection.

It Is Judging

That's right. We must recognize the difference between making judgments God has commanded and those God has forbidden. There is a difference between drawing a line by our authority and recognizing the line God has already drawn and revealed. When we obey God we are not sinning. To disobey God is to judge God and declare Him to be wrong. Should we attempt to exercise disciplinary actions in matters that are strictly of the heart there is valid complaint. But disciplinary action deals with the actions and observable sinfulness. We do not judge sinfully to recognize sin. We must judge to obey what God has said. To do otherwise is to commit sin.

But Everybody Sins

Nobody that knows the truth denies that (First John 1:8-10). I suppose even God knows that, and knew that when He commanded disciplinary action. But it is not true that one must be sinlessly perfect before he can exercise discipline toward another. All do not persist in sin. All are not disorderly, impenitent, defiant, rebellious. All do not teach false doctrines and divide the church with such. The very fact that God commands discipline ought inform us that somebody must do it.

But It May Cause Trouble

It will cause more trouble when it is not done. It will only cause trouble among those who do not love the lost and love the truth. Those kind of people may well get upset. But discipline, rightly done, is saving, not destroying. Would God command something that was designed to just cause trouble?

Did not God know what He was doing when He commanded it? Only when some are rebellious will it cause trouble. But this is trouble caused by truth and we shall not be guiltless if we seek to avoid this kind of trouble by sacrificing the will of God. When we all obey God there will be no trouble. It might cause trouble if people are not taught what discipline does and how it is to be done. This is why teaching the subject is imperative.

Leave It to God

I am for that! This is what we do when we hear what God has taught and when we comply to His teaching. We are leaving it to God. The Lord forbids addition or subtraction from His Word. He adds to the church and He takes away. He has told us who He adds and who He takes away. Indeed, leave it to God. When we obey we are leaving it to God.

Attitude

But a closing word about our attitude when discipline, preventive or corrective, is administered. There must be the love and desire to save a soul from death, spiritual death. There must be the willingness to act as love demands. We do not show love by ignoring sin. There must be constant self-examination. There is no room for a self-righteous or better-than-thou attitude. There must be an ever-present respect for the will of God. Unless the God-given purpose is our purpose we shall go astray in this matter of discipline.

There is nothing the devil loves more than for a Christian to sin, continue in sin, fall away, bring reproach on Christ, and damn his own soul. How Satan rejoices when such is the case. We are provoked to ask if we love the fallen brother as much as the devil. Will we put forth the difficult work of disciplining each other in order to save each other? It would be wonderful if preventive discipline would take care of all the problems. But the devil deceives and prevention is not always secured. So God, lovingly, has designed and delivered corrective measures. Since God loves us enough to provide these procedures, surely we ought to love God and one another enough to carry them out as He has taught us.

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A Supernatural Event

The birth of Christ is sometimes called the Christmas Story. In the minds of many people the two are synonymous. But from the Biblical view they are not the same and some facts worthy of consideration must be noted. We do not know exactly the day, month, year that Jesus was born although we can approximate within certain limits. We do have evidence that it was not during the time of year when many celebrate His birth. The Bible does not authorize any celebration of the birth of Christ. To observe religious ceremonies that God approves we need Biblical authority or we become guilty of adding to the revealed Word of God which is prohibited. For these reasons faithful and knowledgeable Christians to not commemorate Christmas as the birth of Christ nor celebrate any other so-called religious "holy day" that has come into existence by the authority of men.

Authorized Attention

None should object to attention being given to His birth at anytime. Rather we are glad that people want to have recognition of His birth but would emphatically contend that all must be kept within the realm of what is authorized of God. We are glad that our nation has a day called Thanksgiving Day when attention is focused on being grateful to God for the blessings we receive from Him. But to consider a special religious "holy day" is to go beyond what is written. Unfortunately, only on these special days do some people ever give God any attention at all. Some do not even do so then but use the days for additional degenerate conduct. The season called Christmas has become more of a commercial enterprise and an excuse for indulgence, a time of revelry and sinful conduct rather than a glorification of Jesus Christ and recognition of His birth. During the season alledged to remember Christ there is the desecration of much that is sacred and holy and the will of Christ openly defied.

But the Lord's physical birth was a tremendous event. The spirit of giving that is observed during the Christmas season is commendable and worthy of encouragement. But we must seek to proclaim the Lord all year long and not just during certain seasons. We must admit it is refreshing to hear songs of

Christ amidst the noise of atheism, materialism and worldliness that even denies the birth of Christ by a virgin. With war, immorality, greed, crime and hatred abounding all around us, songs and words concerning Christ, when they are accurate, provide a brief and welcome respite from such evil. In this lesson we wish to emphasize the birth of Christ as the supernatural event that it was, and how it affirms the eternal nature of Christ and His Deity.

Historical and Supernatural

His birth is a historical event noted by both secular and sacred history and stands as part of the eternal sequence of events God designed. Christ existed before His birth as Jesus in Bethlehem. John 17:5, *"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."* John 1:1-3, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."* This *"Word"* is identified as God's only begotten in verse fourteen. His birth was a giant step in God's plan for man's redemption. Galatians 4:4 teaches He was born of woman, thereby becoming human as well as Deity. Many passages assert this fundamental truth regarding the nature of Jesus Christ. The historicity of His birth is attested by such an overwhelming mass of evidence that it is beyond refutation.

Was the supernatural event in a natural setting? Luke 2:4-7, *"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; [because he was of the house and lineage of David:] to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."* What could be more natural, even though not what usually was expected at the time of one's birth? Nothing miraculous is in evidence in the place of birth except it was prophesied that Bethlehem would be the place. But the supernatural was soon to be much in evidence in addition to the miraculous conception that had occurred earlier.

There was the star that was seen by the wise men (Matthew

2:2). Then the angelic hosts sang His praises (Luke 2:8-14). There was the revelation that a Savior was born (Luke 2:11). The setting was earthly but the event was miraculously announced as it was the result of a miraculous conception. Here was a supernatural event with supernatural distinctions and markings. When we deal with the birth of Christ we are dealing, not only with certain physical events that transpired, but with spiritual truth that often cannot be reduced to terms that will be accepted by those of a degenerate, materialistic and finite mind who want to force even these things in the naturalistic mold. The birth of Christ is predominantly miraculous from the announcement to Mary to people coming to worship Him in the stable. It is the event when God became flesh; the incarnation. Such is not a mere theological doctrine and concept, but a fact to be accepted by faith on the basis of the evidence and testimony of Scripture regarding it.

Keep in mind that Jesus Christ is the way that God has provided for mankind to be able to meet God favorably and be reconciled to Him. Access to God is through the person of His Son. It is not an irrational idea, therefore, for Deity to assume the nature of flesh. It would be strange if His birth had been anything other than supernatural and miraculous.

By The Virgin

The reality of the birth of Jesus by a virgin is an integral part of New Testament Christianity just as is His resurrection from the dead. There can be no acceptance of Christ without the acceptance of both events. There can be no acceptance of Scripture without acceptance of what Scripture teaches concerning Christ, including His birth by a virgin and His resurrection. There is hopeless inconsistency in that part of so-called "Christendom" that would say they accept Christ but reject as truth either the record of His birth or resurrection.

His birth by the virgin was the first of a long series of supernatural events surrounding Him. His perfection, His powers, His authority, His teaching, His atoning death, His victory over death, His ascension to the Father are all evidences of the same basic truth; namely, Jesus is God's Son, Deity in the flesh. To deny any one of these things about Christ is to make oneself anti-Christ.

His birth brought hope never before presented to mankind. Matthew 1:21, *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt*

call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Of this One Peter preached, *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12). Jesus said of Himself, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6).

The Effects

The birth of Christ was a supernatural event with immeasurable effects. No man can exhaust the implications of His birth. Profound, and yet so simple, this beautiful record thrills the heart of every person, even a child, that hears it. It causes the wise to wonder and the child to love.

The effects of His birth are varied. He came, not to bring peace, but a sword (Matthew 10:34). The peace He brought was peace between man and God, not necessarily peace between men and their fellowmen. Such cannot be expected since some reject the Christ that brings peace. From the very start of His life He was controversial, a target of enemies of truth, a victim of evil, but God's Son and the proclaimer of righteousness and salvation. In many ways He brought not unity but separation because some would become children of God and others would choose to remain children of the devil. But He did bring the way to re-establish peace with God for all who would follow in His steps.

One effect of His birth is seen in Christ changing the lives of people. Sinners are made saints by Him. Hatred is turned into love when His way is followed. Spiritual death is changed into spiritual life. No other can produce such effects as these except the Son of God. He also produced a fellowship that transcends racial, cultural and national boundaries. He brought into being the kingdom of God, which is His church, which includes people of every tongue, background and race who will respect Him and work His righteousness (Acts 10:34,35). He brought humanity into oneness with Deity. The birth of the Lord Jesus, proving His Deity, is at the foundation and cornerstone of the gospel, God's power to save mankind.

In sharp contrast to the effects of Christ in this world, what has atheism ever produced that is beneficial to mankind? Can there be named even one benefit? Yes, some atheists have produced benefit to others, but not because of atheism, but in spite of it. What can those who would destroy the dignity of man, the

standard of morality, the basis of civilization offer to anyone?

The birth of Christ brought rejoicing to many even as it struck terror and fear in the hearts of others. Here was the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies given years before as God moved into our world among men in a way and in a measure never before known. Bethlehem is the place where the eternal became temporal; where the Creator became as the creature; where God became man even as He remained God.

In the supernatural birth of Jesus Christ God accomplished something that never can be equated, surpassed nor repeated. On our own planet God became man's Friend and Neighbor, our Savior and Protector.

Proper Perspective

While we would not wish to go beyond the authority of God's Word to commemorate a day or season and turn it into some kind of religious celebration of this miraculous event, we, as believers of truth, lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son as John 3:16 dictates. (Shame on those even among us who would like to be considered "scholarly" that would remove God's revelation that declares Jesus as His only begotten Son.) We would encourage all men everywhere to turn their attentions to the Biblical record of His birth and believe what is written. Let the true significance of His birth direct us into a recognition of our duty to Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. We would rally all mankind during the Christmas season and all through the year to renew their determination to withstand the blasphemous onslaughts of the skeptic and work that the truth of God's Word will not perish from the hearts and lives of all generations.

Finally, seeing His birth to be miraculous, how many of us see the importance of our relationship with Him? Being God's Son, only through Him can we escape hell and enjoy heaven. Because of His birth and the nature of it along with the manifold evidences given in God's Word concerning Him, we urge one and all to be Christians, seek His forgiveness, become God's spiritual child in His church through faith, repentance, confession of faith that Jesus is God's Son and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins where we reach His saving blood.

† † † † †

How Can We Improve The Home Front

In Second Kings we read of the Shunamite woman. When we meet her she had no child and asked the prophet Elisha for a son. A son was born to her and her husband and there was great rejoicing. But tragedy struck the home. The son became ill and died. The woman again went to the prophet for aid. As Elisha saw her coming he sent his servant to meet her and make this inquiry, *"Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? It is well with the child?* (Second Kings 4:26). These are questions we need to be asking today about our homes?

In America it is all too obvious that in millions of homes all is not well. While great optimism may be evident at the marriage altar and the doors of a "heaven on earth" seem to await, the new relationship often turns into the gateway of an earthly hell. The forces against the family and sanctity of marriage have taken a deadly toll from society. When you marry the right person there is nothing more wonderful. When you marry the wrong person, often for the wrong reasons, there are few things worse and sorrow follows.

One of four, and in some localities one of two, marriages are ending in divorce. Our divorce rate is higher than in any nation on earth. Hundreds of thousands of youths are torn apart from their parents because of divorce. Millions are living with one parent because of the breakdown of the home. I have never seen nor heard of so much divorce even among members of the church. Furthermore, even where divorce does not occur, many homes are unhappy, maladjusted and miserable with the accompanying unfaithfulness, conflict and frustrated children.

A Corrupt View

Too many have viewed marriage through the eyes of a degenerate Hollywod and the trashy magazines so abundant in our society. These are loveless, selfish, sex-obsessed relationships without the spiritual emphasis and God-given purposes of marriage even being considered, let alone respected. America is bombarded with the advice from the prominent and popular figures who have made miserable failures of their own

marriages. There are even elements that seek the dissolution of marriage and the home, promoting free-love communes and the acceptance of all forms of sexual perversions and violations of the will of God. How much wiser and more successful marriages would be if those involved paid attention to the Designer and Originator of the relationship.

Our homes must be improved if our freedoms and society shall stand. Nineteen of twenty-two civilizations had already crumbled before they reached the low level of home disintergration already evident in our nation. Does this not concern you? The breakdown of the home precedes every fall because the home is to exercise influence in molding the coming generations. When the home is not as it should be, neither will society be as it ought to be. You cannot sow to the flesh and reap life. How can we improve the quality of homes in America, even among those in the church?

A Spiritual Tragedy

Seeing the disasters of failure, we must recognize this failure as a social, but more significantly, a self-imposed spiritual disease and seek the proper medicine. Solutions proposed by men have never succeeded. The corrections needed are sometimes hard to take, but considering the alternatives, we would be wise to hasten to take what we need. So many pulpits bemoan symptoms of home failure but refuse to come to grips with the real problems. Fearful of offending the sinful, the remedy given by the Lord is most often unheard, and even less often heeded. Too much preaching is as one described it, "Yo preaching," meaning a combination of yes and no, take it any way you want. One would think that those who are serious regarding the marital problems and family destructions would want something better than the insipid mouthings of social manipulators, social workers, sociologists of atheistic bent and men who promote their philosophies of "wisdom" rather than the way of divine wisdom.

Marry A Christian

The first suggestion for improvement we make is for Christians to marry those of like precious faith. This is to avoid a multiplicity of problems before they ever arise. So many leave the Lord in favor of their mate when they do not consider the

Lord in selecting their mate. Leaders in every religion warn against mixed marriages because such a divided position on such serious matters inadvertently produces problems. Frankly, it is frustrating and aggravating to have people totally ignore this sound wisdom, then in a few years coming crying to you to help them out of the mess they are in regarding their mate. What can one do when people fly into the face of truth and reason? Indeed, *"the way of the transgressor is hard,"* but convincing people of that is not easily done. They have seen their parents do it and someway, somehow think the division they have witnessed in the home will escape them. They act like stubborn fools and with parental encouragement.

Second Corinthians 6:14-18 teaches against relationships that are incompatible with being a Christian. This is not only applicable to marriage but to all relationships. But listening to this divine teaching would certainly include the closest human relationship in life, that of husband and wife. How can a Christian expect to have Christ in the home when the mate is not even a Christian? The marriage that God approves includes a man, a woman, and Christ. Why do people not consider the Lord when selecting a mate? What of the effect and influence on children that may be born into that home? Where is the common principle and basis of truth upon which decisions shall be made when the Lord is left out? There are fifty times less divorces among those who marry those of like faith than otherwise when both are active and together in the faith.

Women in the Home

I can hear the wail and cry from fools from every quarter when such is even suggested. The point is not taken very well on our disintergrating society but it cannot be repealed and the fruit of its opposite is destroying us. Women must return to putting the home before their personal careers in the world. It is not male chauvinism but the Bible that teaches the woman is to guide the house, love and take care of her family, place her work as a wife and mother before other things (Titus 2:4,5; First Timothy 5:14; Proverbs 31). The "smart alecks" of our time think God is out-of-date. But that simply shows what fools they are. While the world favors monetary gain, recognition, material advancement, these things are sought at the sacrifice of the home. Wives, husbands are children and paying for it in a tragic way. Whether a woman works outside the home is not the full

issue. So often her choice is based on selfishness rather than sacrifice. Is it because of need, or greed, that has taken mothers from their children, brought them into flirtatious encounters in the world, weakened the moral fibre of the home? It is impossible to ignore the increase of juvenile delinquency, child neglect, unattended children, child abuse and related tragedies with the increase of the wives and mothers leaving their primary work as God has assigned it to pursue their selfish and worldly ambitions. Would to God such people could not even physically have children! They do not deserve them. Some even kill them in the womb rather than carry them to birth. What vicious servants of the devil they show themselves to be. With the number one cause of wayward children being parental neglect, how can one successfully argue against God's will? Society may be pushing women into more and more competition with men in areas she does not belong and urging her to abandon the areas where she is especially suited but godly women push back. Whatever be the cause bringing this travesty upon society, nobody who is honest and fair with the facts can argue with the corresponding and disastrous effects on the home.

There is no career for women that surpasses that high calling of guiding the house, homemaker, caring and attending for the family, providing security, love, a sense of belonging and identity that the mother in the home can give and the mother away from the home cannot provide. While the world places glamour,praise, money on the pedestal, this is foreign to God's intent. If the women returned to the home the families would be happier, ample jobs would be available for provisions, lawlessness would decrease, children would be better guided, the nation more stable and the homes far richer than the money brought in at such sacrifice of what really counts. The home's physical gain is often made at the sacrifice of its spirits welfare.

Morality

There must be the return to the Lord's standards of purity. God condemns fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianisn, and all other forms of illicit sexual conduct. When God says *"thou shalt"* and *"thou shalt not,"* there is no room for rationalism to the contrary. The educated fools of our day have led people to believe the "new morality" of old degeneracy is the way and look what it has produced for us all! What many casually call "affairs" are nothing more than sin that damns. The

immorality of America is rampant.

Some years ago I heard a television panel composed of a Protestant clergyman, a Jewish rabbi and a Catholic priest discussing America's morality. They were at odds on many points, but in agreement on one. They all considered the Biblical standard of moral out of fashion for our age. These theological servants of hell were undermining the only thing that kept things decent. They could offer nothing whatever to check the advance of the moral decline and the attendant diseases and evils in its wake. Our universities operated at state expense are too often nothing more than state-financed brothels where the student is taught there is no right and wrong about sexual conduct. Why the fruits of this hideous philosophy does not impress these "wise men" is beyond comprehension. The diseases, malformed children, insecurities, mental breakdown, divorces, etc. that are produced seem to have no place in the concerns of these "experts" as they ponder the theme of morality. This is quite a contrast to the law of our loving Lord.

The law of Christ teaches no sexual union outside of marriage, before marriage, but absolute faithfulness in marriage. Variance from this is sin and God holds the sinner guilty. To use premarital sex as a "proof of love" is to lie with abandon. How could one really love another and encourage and participate with them in that which damns the souls of both of them? That is love? Can you not see how spiritual sick are the minds of many even regarding love? It is not love, but lust. Only the application of God's rule of conduct will deal properly with the moral malady besetting our land.

Strong Fathers

There must be the return to the strong father in the home. The husband is to be the head (Ephesians 5:23). Something is wrong when that is not the case. Either the man is weak and unwilling to assume his responsibilities, which is not manly, or the woman is dominant, unwilling to subject herself to her husband, which is a sorry demonstration of womanhood, but more like a demonstration that all the Jezebels are not dead. Usually, both share in the blame when there is not a strong father in the home.

There is no such thing as the husband being superior or the wife superior. Each is superior in his or her realm. But each is a source of stress and malfunction when outside of their realm.

One of the finest things that was ever said in the Bible of any man was said of Abrham, Genesis 18:19, *"He will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord."*

Spiritual Emphasis

There must be the spiritual emphasis in the home. It may sound trite but it is true. Families that pray together, usually stay together. This summarizes the usefulness of being spiritually active in the home. One study has shown that ninety-five per cent of the divorces that do occur do so in homes where one or both did not attend worship. In homes of church going families, one of fifty-seven still suffer divorce. But what a difference! That figure doubtless is not so encouraging today as when the survey was made because there has been such an increase in divorces even among church people who have followed the ways of the world more than the way of Christ. We now even have a diluge of false doctrines trying to accomodate adultery and sinful so-called marriages so people can "do their own thing" and still be considered respectable, even among brethren. The Lord's wrath shall ultimately be poured out on such teachers and those who follow their sinister doctrines. Such false teaching only encourages more home destruction.

A person has no more right to destroy the home than he does to destroy the church, assuming the home is acceptable to God. They both have come from the mind of God. But to leave God out of the home is cut away the very heart of it. A home that fails to honor God, His Son, His church, His Word, can never expect to reap the rich reward of spiritual success God intends. The home is even a greater spiritual influence, especially on the young, than the church. The home can support or tear down the efforts made by the church regarding spiritual matters. The home, the spring from which all else comes, when polluted, pollutes everything else. To make matters better, we must concentrate on the improvement of the spring.

We cannot turn our backs on these principles and expect improvement. If we will give heed to them, teach them, insist upon them among brethren, we shall be blessed. The place to begin is your home, my home, and try to influence all homes in God's direction.

† † † † †

Paul Was Mistreated



JAMES W. BOYD

While reading from Acts recently I noticed something I had never seen before. It is not a major item but interesting to me nonetheless. When Paul was seized in Jerusalem the chief captain had to rush in and take Paul lest the crowd kill him (Acts 21). The captain's name was Lysias (Acts 24:22). Paul was allowed to speak to the crowd but it only made matters worse. Eventually he was taken to Caesarea before Felix. Charges were made but Felix made no decision, explaining he would wait until Lysias could come down and testify. Did I miss something? He never came.

For two years Felix kept Paul as a prisoner, but Lysias never testified about the case of Paul. It was a short distance from Jerusalem to the court but he never came. Why was Lysias never brought to testify?

The answer lies in Acts 24:26 that tells of Felixs desire for a bribe from Paul, which he never received. There seems to never have been any intention of hearing additional testimony about Paul. So there Paul remained, unconvicted, but held nonetheless to satisfy the greedy goals of an evil man. He suffered much for the cause of Christ.

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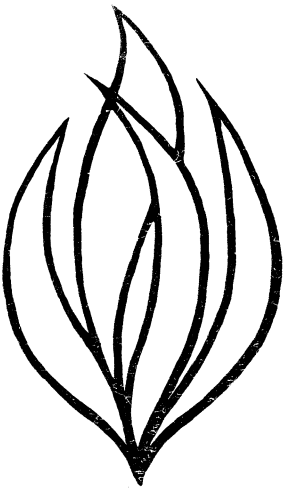

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME X James W. Boyd **NUMBER 12**

Paul Writes Colosse About Christ

Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, addressed the Epistle of Colossians to his brethren in Christ, mentioning at the first that God was the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and that he was thankful for their faith in Christ. But who is this Christ? What kind of person is He? What can be known concerning Him? Paul spends many words in this letter telling his brethren more about Christ, possibly reminding them of many things they already knew, refreshing their minds, and all the while giving additional food, spiritual meat, whereby they might grow in Christ.

Although Jesus came to this earth nearly two thousand years ago to save the world, much of the world today knows little or nothing about Him. Many who profess to be Christians do not fully appreciate His greatness because their knowledge of Him is so limited. Christ is the theme of the Bible; the very center of it, the central personality in it, the One through whom the very purposes of God's revelation to mankind is accomplished. All that came before Him pointed to Him and all that has followed after Him points back to Him.

He Preached Christ

Paul said He preached Christ and Him crucified (First Corinthians 1:23; 2:2). Second Corinthians 4:5, *"For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord."* When Philip went to Samaria and when he preached to the Ethiopian, his message was Christ and His kingdom (Acts 8:5,35). Christ was the message of the first century and He is the needed message in our century. The only reliable source of information we have concerning Him is from the inspired Word of God, the Bible. Let us learn certain truths about Christ from various passages written by Paul in the first two chapters of the book of Colossians.

King

1:13, *"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."* By this Paul affirms Jesus as King over His kingdom. The Colossian

brethren were in that kingdom. They entered into it by being *"translated,"* or changed, converted to Christ. They had left the darkness of sin and entered into the kingdom of light.

From Paul's comment I can know that Jesus is King now, and that His kingdom exists now and people can be citizens in it now. This, by itself, is a death blow to the false doctrine of premillennialism.

Redeemer

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." To redeem means to buy back. We sell our souls to Satan by sinning, and Jesus Christ has paid the ransom price by which we can be bought back and returned to God. We are bought and redeemed by His blood (First Peter 1:18,19; Acts 20:28; Matthew 20:28). *"Without shedding of blood is no remission."* (Hebrews 10:22). Animal sacrifices would not suffice (Hebrews 10:4). Jesus bought us back by His own blood (Hebrews 9:12). As Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:7, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins..."*

Head

"And he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Christ is head of the body, the church. None surpasses Him in rank and authority nor is even equal or shares His supreme authority except as He has delegated it to be used. All things must meet His approval and His will is the standard of measure for the church. He is the final court.

Such designations as king, head, preeminent one, effectively elevates Christ to the place of dominion and superiority. Saying He is the *"first born of all creation"* does not mean Christ is a created being even though He took on the form of man by being born of woman. This has reference to the rank of supremacy that belongs to the firstborn. The firstborn of an Israelite family occupied a special priority and position above his brothers and sisters, assuming the headship of the family in the event of the death of the father. So Jesus is superior to all that has been created. He is second to none.

Reconciler

Right along the same line as a Redeemer, consider 1:20-22. *"And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight."* Mankind is spiritually dead in sin because of his transgressions of God's law (First John 3:4). In that state he is bound for the eternal hell. In order to have eternal life in heaven mankind must be forgiven of sin. Christ, our Redeemer, is peacemaker between God and man, making it possible for man to partake of this much-needed forgiveness whereby man can have life. This was accomplished only because God provided the way of salvation that includes the death of His Son on the cross.

Deity and Humanity

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature." (Colossians 1:15). John 14:9 reads, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father..."* It is not that Christ and the Father are the same person, but that there is total unity between them as members of the Godhead. While Deity is Spirit (John 4:24), Jesus took on the form of humanity (Philippians 2:8; John 1:1,14). He is the One who is *"the express image of his person."* (Hebrews 1:3). His name, Emmanuel, means *"God with us"* (Matthew 1:23). John wrote, First John 2:23, *"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; He that confesseth the Son hath the Father also."* To not give honor to Christ renders it impossible to honor the Father (John 5:23). The Deity and humanity of Christ are declared.

Paul's identification of Christ as the image of the invisible God makes it plain that Jesus was both Deity and humanity. While some admit to the reality of His humanity, they deny His Deity. But the same Word that informs us of the one fact also tells us of the other. This being true, Christ is not with whom to trifle, nor can there be obedience to Christ nor can one be correctly baptized *"in the name of Christ"* who denies the very nature and person of Jesus the Christ. Rather, He is deserving of all the praise, honor, glory and respect we can give Him and we must be submissive to Him.

Creator

1:16,17, *"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."*

This, like other passages mentioned, expresses the eternal nature and Deity of Christ. Christ is presented as Creator of the physical world as is expressed in John one. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit were all involved in bringing the world into existence. Genesis 1:1, *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* The word *"God"* is the plural word Elohim which denotes the plurality of person of the Godhead at the very start of revelation. Hebrews 1:1,2 affirms the same truth of His presence at creation and participation in it. He *"upholds all things,"* holds all things together, is the Sustainer of the world.

Unmistakenly, He announced Himself and His pre-existence before His birth in Bethlehem when He said, John 5:58, *"I say unto you, before Abraham was born, I am."* It is expressly stated here, like in John 1:1-3, *"He is before all things."* Revelation 22:13 echoes Paul's declarations about Christ when Christ calls Himself the Alpha and Omega, the first and last, the beginning and end. There could hardly be stronger and more definite words written by anyone affirming His eternal nature and Deity than what Paul has written and which is corroborated with many other New Testament scriptures.

Rank

1:18, again He is called the *"firstborn from the dead."* We have noted how this affirms His unsurpassed rank and position. But He was not the first to die, nor the first to be raised from the dead. But we serve a living Lord, not a dead martyr or past hero. He died, but He lives (Hebrews 7:25). He was the first to die to never die again. Because of Him all can live, even with God. Christ is the firstfruits of the dead, being the first to die and live again but to die no more (First Corinthians 15:21-23). Whether we be living or have already died physically at the time of His return, we shall live with Him if we be found faithful in Him (First Thessalonians 4:13-18).

There are several other passages where Paul shows the

wholeness, completeness and all-sufficiency of Christ, a fact too often not appreciated. 1:19, *"...in him should all fulness dwell."* 2:3, *"In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* 2:9, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* 2:10, *"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power."*

Sufficiency

Such words as quoted leave no doubt as to the all-sufficiency of Christ. As He stated before His ascension, all authority and power belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). All we must know, all we must do, all we must be to be pleasing to God is to be found in Christ. Only in Him is there to be found the wholeness and completeness that mankind lacks. Fulness is not found in worldly living, following the flesh or the wisdom and doctrines of men. Nor shall the discoveries of science, however valuable to humanity, can man be whole. The triumphs of the physical cannot provide the salvation of the spiritual. Fulness is in Christ, the all-sufficient One.

Little wonder that Paul labored for Him, lived for Him, urged others to do likewise. We wonder why all people, coming to this knowledge of Him, do not come to Him with thanksgiving, rendering obedience to the gospel, and living their lives in Christ. After all, this is what really matters.

† † † † †

Release From Law

Galatians 2:16, *"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."*

Romans 7:6, *"But now we are delivered from the law..."*

Romans 3:28, *"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."*

When we take note of the way some are using, rather misusing, some of these verses we are prompted to ask, "From

what law are we delivered? What is the relationship between law and salvation through Christ?"

Release From All Law?

We hear some contend if one has faith he is free from all law, bound by nothing, saved by grace alone, and enjoys total and absolute freedom in Christ. He is subject only to what he thinks is right, guided by his feelings, using his own will and conscience as the standard by which to measure. Is this the meaning of being delivered from law of these verses?

We quickly observe if every person were permitted to be a law unto himself, being governed only by what he wants, likes and feels is right, there being no absolute right or wrong except as he thinks it within his own heart, there would be as many governments as people and nothing but anarchy, chaos, confusion and intolerable existence would reign.

Some say we are free and have used this to justify the doctrine of the so-called "new morality" which challenges opposition to adultery, fornication, or any other conduct previously considered immoral. The Harvard Divinity School has specialized in promoting the idea that we are delivered from law, meaning all law. The University of Princeton teaches that a list of "cans" and "cannots" has no meaning. All kinds of sexual intimacies are justified on the basis that we are not under law, meaning no law.

The Episcopal Theological School contends, "No sexual relationship should be absolutely condemned, but one enters into every decision making moment armed with all the wisdom of culture but preapred in one's freedom to suspend and violate any rule." How can they say this? They say we are delivered from law, law under Christ, and then pronounce this law of their own. This is the message of many denominational groups and their anti-Christ clergymen, and some of our own brethren are partaking of the same kind of moral garbage.

But alongside the teaching that we are saved by grace and grace alone, we are even hearing misguided and liberal brethren teaching that there is no law under the system of Christ because we are delivered from law. They do not go quite as far, yet, as do denominational heretics in contending you are permitted to do whatever you wish and whatever you think right in everything, but their inconsistency lies in the inability of their position to say anything is wrong. If there is no law to which we

are subject, who can say anything is wrong? To say something is wrong is to admit there is a law. And just who ordained the law that there is no law whatever?

Furthermore, in recent years we hear some of our "Christian college trained preachers" preaching how some of God's laws are essential to obey and others, though important, are not essential and leave room for discussion whether we must obey them or not. While thinking people realize this is a most arrogant and presumptious position for any human being to take toward any command of God, many unsuspecting youths are being misled by it. It is another throw-off from the false doctrine that we are delivered from all law. But we are forced to ask those who hold such views just where they learned the law that says some divine law is essential and must be obeyed and other divine law (commands) are optional? Who made that law? We decry and denounce the attitude, especially in matters of the soul, that would teach people that submitting to God's law is to deny freedom in faith.

Nothing New

This is not a novel doctrine. Denominationalists have been preaching and practicing optional obedience throughout their histories. The permission to do what you like and all will be well anyway as long as you are honest and sincere has not characterized those who have sought to restore New Testament Christianity, but we hear it among so-called brethren more and more. I say "so-called" because they are no longer faithful in Christ because they are no longer loyal to His doctrine.

Faith and Law

Scripture does not teach that faith nullifies all law. Romans 3:31, *"Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."* Paul wrote of the *"law of Christ."* (Galatians 6:2). He taught how the Mosaic Law could not free us from the law of sin and death but that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus can and does (Romans 8:2,3). There is a law in which he delighted and that was *"the law of God after the inward man."* (Romans 7:22). There is the *"law of faith."* (Romans 3:27), which is the *"perfect law of liberty."* (James 1:25). Only a rebel against God would contend we are free from all law. Is it not significant that the very epistle that emphasizes

grace and faith as much or more than any other epistle (Romans) also necessitates conformity to law? Why should we conclude there is an incompatibility between them except we no longer love the truth?

Romans, Galatians and Hebrews compares and contrasts the law God gave under and through Moses with the faith of Christ. The Mosaic Law was a law of works. Salvation was based on man's merit for keeping the law. Of course, he could not keep the law perfectly and the Mosaic law made no provision for the forgiveness of sins except in prospect through Christ. But forgiveness is offered under the faith of Christ on the basis of the merit of the blood of God's Son. The faith of Christ delivers man from the Mosaic Law and from the concept of salvation by man's meritorious works. But the faith of Christ does deliver us from the law of sin and death, but not all law. Just what does one think we must obey except it be God's law? Here is where the problem lies. Some think we do not have to obey God at all.

Not All Law

The Mosaic law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Romans 7:1-4 teaches the Christian is married, not to Moses' law, but to another who is the resurrected Christ. The old law was not repudiated nor destroyed (Matthew 5:17,18), but fulfilled in and by Christ (Luke 24:27). Rather than destroying the old law, the faith of Christ showed the law to be from God (Romans 3:31; Galatians 3:23-25).

But even a small amount of honest thinking will demand we reject the doctrine that we are free from all law. Are we made free from the laws of nature? Is it not still true that when one jumps from the top of a building he falls, possibly to his death, being pulled down by gravity? Have we rejected the law of gravity? Can one place his hand on a hot stove and the flesh not be burned, or does the law of nature still operate in this matter? Do not try it! Are we not also subject to the law of sowing and reaping, not only in the material realm, but also the spiritual? (Galatians 6:7,8). Whether we be ignorant of the laws of nature or not, negligent toward them or unintentionally violate them, when we do transgress them we shall bear the consequences. Nobody of good sense argue otherwise.

Nor are we released from civil law. Civil disobedience has become popular against the laws people do not happen to like. But the Christian realizes his duty to obey the laws of the land

(Romans 13:1-6; First Peter 2:13,14) so long as they do not necessitate a violation of the law of God (Acts 5:29). Do you think you can run roughshod over civil law on the basis that you are now under the grace of Christ? To suggest such a thing exposes the foolishness that we free from all law.

The faith of Christ does not release us from God's moral laws, although some act like it. Man has lived subject to God's moral standards since Eden. Both the Mosaic Law and the faith of Christ contain an abundance of moral teaching. It is the height of blasphemy to hear some abuse and misuse Scripture to justify immoral conduct.

We have already mentioned that the faith of Christ releases us from the Mosaic Law. The faith of Christ releases us also from the law that says, "You sin; you die." This is the law of sin and death. We are made free from spiritual bondage by obedience to the truth of Christ (John 8:32; Romans 6:16-18).

Bound by Law

But rather than being delivered from all law we, as children of God, are bound to the law of faith (Romans 3:27). Because salvation is by the merit of Christ no man has any reason for boastfulness and pride. But to declare that we are free from all law is to dismiss the authority of divine command and release man from the necessity to obey God. Such false doctrine destroys the entire Scriptural teaching concerning obedience and actually turns man loose to "do his own thing" and that with God's approval. Who could possibly claim respect for Scripture and contend for such heresy?

Peter warns of those who bring damnable heresies into our midst. Nothing is more contemptible than doctrines that would dismiss the authority of God and necessity of man to obey Him. It matters not whether one is a modernist of the denominational seminaries and clergy, or a self-proclaimed scholar among our own brethren who is misguided and digressive because he has been drinking from the pitchers of error, to teach people the doctrine of deliverance from all law because of the grace of Christ is damnable heresy, plain and simple. What right does some professor or preacher at some large, rich church have to declare doctrines so blatantly and arrogantly in violation of plain truth? Just who do these promoters of apostasy think they are? Let us not be guilty of damning our own souls by teaching such religious trash, or being led astray by the egotistical "wise men"

among us who would persuade us to accept their error.

But thanks be to God we can be free from sin and free from the wages of sin and free from the law of sin and death by the grace of God and our obedience to His law! Even when we obey we have not earned our salvation, but have only accepted His gift by doing as He commands we must do to accept it.

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Luke 12:1-7

It is not only interesting but very profitable to select a passage of Scripture, read it, study it, meditate upon it and learn the many true and useful lessons it reveals from heaven. We wish to consider the following passage:

"In the meantime, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for a farthing, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not, therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Multitudes

It was characteristic of the ministry of Jesus that He was followed by huge multitudes of people, sometimes packed so

closely that they were virtually standing on each other. It is wonderful to recall that people desired to hear the words of the Savior that much. How fine it would be if such was the existing attitude of the multitudes of people today. But it is seldom that way. It is not because people shun crowds. Consider the athletic events, even the revelry of wild music concerts. People will come to hear some worldly celebrity, an entertainer, even evil people. How they push and shove with delight to do their shopping, even in the worst kind of weather. But our world does not crowd to hear the gospel message, the only message of eternal value. So few, relatively, have any interest in the things of God and the soul of man, except some worldly famous false teachers, like the pope, who manage to draw great numbers. Most consider it an imposition to come to a comfortable building, heated or cooled as the need may require, to hear the Word of God.

Internal Indifference

Actually it is not too surprising that the world is indifferent when even professed Christians often choose to abstain from worshipping God and feeding upon His Word. It sounds fantastic and unreal, but just consider the ways of many in the church who are irregular in this duty. You do not have to go far to locate "mission fields." Few church buildings that teach the truth and stand for sound doctrine are overcrowded. Sometimes crowds may enlarge during the Christmas and Easter seasons, but this is more evidence of "playing church" than serving God.

The numerical strength of a congregation is most often calculated on the Sunday morning worship attendance figure. I suggest this is misleading. That usually does not reflect the spiritual strength and interest of the church, but an inflated and deceptive evaluation. It probably does not indicate the number of saved at that place. To really see the size of a congregation we best consider the attendance at Bible study, or Sunday evening, or even mid-week assemblies and gospel meetings. A congregation is far stronger with an attendance of one hundred Sunday morning, Bible study, Sunday night and mid-week assembly than one that is five hundred Sunday morning, two fifty for Bible study, two hundred Sunday evening and one hundred at mid-week. As we think along these lines we might ask ourselves if we really contribute to the strength or weakness of the congregation we attend! The evidence is that many

brethren have been innoculated with Christianity just enough to not really have it at all.

Leaven of Hypocrisy

Christ warned His hearers to beware of the characteristic of the Pharisees which was hypocrisy. Leaven is used in making bread, producing fermentation and gradually permeating the entire mass of dough with a transforming influence. Jesus teaches that the influence of the Pharisees is like leaven because they pretended to be what they were not. They were fakes and deceivers who liked to leave the impression of being religious and being followers of God but actually were not.

Hypocrisy does more harm to the church than all the outside forces of antagonism can muster. The outsiders can sometimes cause trouble but the hypocrite causes strife, division, reproach, disgrace, misrepresentation of Christ and makes outsiders think everyone in the church is that way.

Paul wrote, First Corinthians 5:6,7, *"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened."* Very likely many members of the church think that token service is sufficient because they are influenced by Pharisaic leaven.

Who is Deceived?

In verses two and three Jesus shows the hypocrite is actually the one who is deceived. Hypocrisy is self-deception. One thinks himself successful in his pretense until he is finally awakened to see what he really is and the result of his conduct is disastrous. God knows the words and deeds of us all even when other people do not. Each shall give an account before God for what we say and do in life (Second Corinthians 5:10). God even knows the contents of the heart (Acts 1:24; First Corinthians 4:5). People cannot deceive God (Galatians 6:7,8). As Moses warned some of his fellows, *"Be sure your sins will find you out."* (Numbers 32:23). This ought to motivate us to be what we propose to be and stand for what we say, really doing what we contend ought to be done.

Divine Advice

Jesus gave timely advice to His followers in verses four and five. This is of particular value to the Christian who stands in constant danger and persecution. We are subjected to intimidation and humiliation. Some are subjected to threats, harassments, even torture and death. Jesus taught us not to fear even martyrdom. The worst an enemy can do is take your physical life. This is not a minor matter, to be sure, but after that he can do no more. This body is not the totality of man anyway. Destruction of this body and physical life does not destroy the person. The early Christians were martyred by the thousands rather than surrender their convictions. They were able to face death because a dead body does not mean a dead soul. What a contrast between those who are often unfaithful, lukewarm, compromising and afraid and those who are willing to give all, even this life, to be faithful to Christ!

False Security

Sometimes we may think ourselves safe if we are absent from physical threats. But that may be the gravest danger. We will not be as alert and attentive, failing to demand of ourselves what is expected, becoming complacent, lax, confusing physical safety with spiritual welfare. Those of us living in America are subject to this subtle danger because we live in a land of religious freedom where we are protected by the civil powers to worship as we decide. We live in a land of relative abundance materially, even with luxuries and blessings that most people of the world never even can consider.

It has historically been true that nations in prosperity often turn away from the source of their blessings. Israel, in their strength physically and materially, would often depart from God. In their dire needs they would usually be the strongest spiritually. Little wonder that the poor, humble and weak according to the measures of this world prove to be the most devout servants of God.

Who to Fear

While we ought not fear those who can harm us physically or take away our material goods, there is One whom we should fear. He can destroy spiritually. This is usually thought to refer to God Himself who is a God of justice, wrath, vengeance and has the power to condemn. Hebrews 10:31, *"It is a fearful thing to*

fall into the hands of the living God." God must be reverenced for judgment's sake as well as His love and majesty. We should never fear the displeasure of other people more than the displeasure of God. As one preacher friend stated to me, "I had rather die without a friend on earth and be right with God than have all the friends of the world and be separated from God."

We think we should also fear Satan as he goes about seeking whom he may devour. We should be aware of his agents who would provoke us to say, do or think sinful things that can cause our spiritual doom. Good men and good causes have always had evil opponents.

While the primary reference is to fear God because He has charge of the soul and His will governs its disposition, Jesus warns us of spiritual danger lurking around us and that we must be on guard for the soul's welfare.

God is the Answer

Verses six and seven teach us that God is mindful of His children. This is a blessed thought! We sing a song that confesses, "The Lord has been mindful of me." Of all the millions upon millions of people for whom He cares, still the Lord is mindful of me. Such a thought is comforting and encouraging as well as sobering. It strengthens us, giving hope, peace and assurance with the knowledge that someday, in God's providence and scheme of things, we shall have the eternal heaven that is prepared for the faithful. For this blessing we praise His excellent name!

Who cannot enjoy and profit from consideration of such matchless spiritual teaching as was done by our Master, here and elsewhere? We must learn and then must live accordingly.

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"***A Burning Fire*** is one of my greatest reading enjoyments. The sermons in these small books are among the very best. I thank you for including me on your mailing list. I pray that God will continue blessing you in your work and efforts."

As has been expressed by me many times, but always with utmost sincerity, I deeply appreciate these comments from readers. It makes me realize the need and makes me grateful I can do something positive and constructive toward the spiritual welfare of others. JWB

Is God Dead?

It has been said, "We must recognize that the death of God is a historical event. God has died in our time, in our history, in our existence." Another said, "God is dead, and the church is his tombstone."

Such statements are so irreverent and blasphemous that we find it repugnant to quote them even to introduce the lesson. Yet, this is the claim of many prominent people, even religious leaders, who have received widespread publicity and recognition as they spew forth their mockery of truth, threatening the faith of many, especially the young who have not grounded themselves in truth, and enlarging the influence of atheism.

The Fool

Many have foolishly equated scholarship with liberalism and the denial of God. But we agree with David when he said, *"The fool hath said in his heart there is no God."* Paul wrote about people who professed themselves to be wise but were fools (Romans 1:22. I have known some of these "eduacated" fools.

The obituary column is not where one might expect to find the name of God. Some say the idea is so foolish that we need not even talk about it. We know that God can take care of Himself and will survive these attacks as He always has. It is not a matter of God's survival but our own and those around us. If one is swayed by this false contention he is marching toward hell. We have a duty to grant everybody opportunity to know better and to hear the evidence on behalf of truth.

Not a New Doctrine

Such a doctrine that God is dead is not new, having been advanced by Nietzche, a nineteenth century philosopher, who tried to dispose of God. It is just another form of vice and sophisticated infidelity with all of its attendant evils. What is new about it is that it is declared by some who profess to be "Christians." One leading advocate a few years ago of this heresy was a professor in a Methodist school, Emory University, that raised twenty-five million dollars as a "Christian" school. But with his teaching he was not rebuked but retained.

Heresy is not new to denominationalism as it attempts to retain the name "Christian" while denying Him and His teaching. They have done this to baptism, the Lord's Supper, the church, morality, just about anything and everything being replaced with the doctrines of the "wise" men of "scholarship." If anyone wonders why we should oppose denominationalism, just look at what denominationalists say and those who care for the teaching of the Bible will know it must be opposed.

What They Really Mean

What do these people really mean by the contention that God is dead? Let us also learn what they do not mean. They do not mean that man has lost sight of God. With this we could agree. They do not mean that many no longer take the existence of God seriously. Again, we are sad to note this is true and we agree. They do not mean that God's influence in many lives has diminished. Everyone can see that.

They say God is dead only to make way for a new history, a new humanity, new morality. Just as Satan must be defeated before the kingdom of God can advance, to them God must die before the new order can dawn. It is a promotion of the idea that the concept of God is merely the invention of man who could not explain things otherwise and it is now outdated and irrelevant since man has become so smart that everything can be explained by science and there is no need for God. They do not believe God really ever lived except in the mind of man. Man created God, not God created man.

Whereas God places emphasis on this life AND the next, they contend that God is dead and now we can concentrate only on this life, the here and now, work for social, economic and political solutions to the ills of mankind to the exclusion of any life beyond this one. In other words, God has died because man no longer finds Him useful nor to his liking.

The Religion of Science

The false doctrine contends that science has the answer to every question, having disproved the Bible, the supernatural, and now we have a logical and scientific answer for every question and problem. Can anyone of intelligence really believe that science has answered everything and solved all the problems? The doctrine simply tries to bury God and put some

self-proclaimed "wise" man in His place. It is another futile attempt by men to remove themselves from responsibility and accountability to a higher power than themselves. All gods have not died because many men have become their own gods.

They teach that God's will is not relevant to our time. The truth is that God's will is unknown and untried. The world generally is ignorant of God and His Word. This is the fault of those of us who serve Him and who have failed to get the message to the world. One would do well to pause here and read Romans 1:18-32, noting how these characteristics of people who cast off God are so similar, often identical, to characteristics of our own day and age. We dare not confuse the issue. God is not dead simply because some smart-aleck wishes He was. Man is the one who is dead in sin even as he liveth.

Many want a new history, new order, new humanity, new morality, new standards and new gods rather than the God who lives. One of the biggest lies propagated in our day is that science has disproven the Bible and the supernatural. There is not one proven scientific fact that must be denied in order to believe the Bible. Nothing has proven to be more unstable and ever-changing than the shifting positions of science. Even with all its accomplishments, which are legion and remarkable and for which we are grateful, it is incapable of dealing with spiritual matters. Let none be deceived into thinking that science is the answer to the ethical, moral and religious issues of mankind. Furthermore, there is a growing number of competent scientists who are quick to say this very same thing.

Gross Inconsistency

Incredible and inconsistent as it is, some claim to follow Christ but deny He is the Son of God, denying His teaching, and assigning Him as nothing more than an exceptional man and great teacher. They will be heard to say that God is dead but not Jesus. It is intellectually dishonest to try to separate Jesus and the Father. First John 2:23, *"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also."* John 14:9, Jesus said, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."* Some make the hideous mistake to attempt to take the respected name of Jesus Christ and misuse Him to advance their false doctrines. Such is dishonest. But dishonesty is a trait of those who deny God.

Where is the evidence that God is dead? They do not mean

God is merely disbelieved or lost His influence, but is non-existent. Seeing the lack of godliness in the world they assume God has died, never was, not understanding that man is the one who has died in sin. God is not dead simply because some know Him not. He is not dead because some would like to put Him in a test tube and weigh and analyze Him as they would some material substance but cannot because God is Spirit. Man's unwillingness to conform to God's teaching and travel his own deceptive road is no basis to conclude God is dead.

If It Were True

The implications of such a contention are disastrous. If God is dead, non-existent, the Bible is false; there is no right or wrong; there is nothing to prayer; no immorality; no immorality; no standard or sin or salvation; no reason for life; no hope, law, authority, justice or anything else. Nothing is of any value to mankind whatsoever.

Notice the Scripture. Matthew 16:16, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* God lives. Matthew 22:32 asserts that God is the God of the living, not the dead. How could God be the God of the living if He is dead Himself? Paul said the brethren in Thessalonica had *"turned from idols to serve the living and true God."* (First Thessalonians 1:9). John 16:67 teaches that Christ lives and we shall live by Christ, but Christ said, *"I live by the Father."* So the Father must live. Romans 16:26 calls God eternal. The Old Testament is replete with passages that teach the living God. (Psalm 9:7; 41:13; 92:8; 93:2; Jeremiah 10:10 and others.

Heresy

The God-is-dead heresy is stopped in its tracks when God said, *"I am that I am."* God is and shall forever be. His very name, Jehovah, means the eternal and existing One.

Paul preached to a group of skeptical intellectuals in Athens at Mars Hill as is recorded in Acts 17:24-31. He said God lives; He is near us; He made us; He shall judge us; He has ordained Christ His Son as our Savior; and we can live eternally with Jehovah provided we come to Him through His Son. *"No man cometh to the Father but by me."* (John 14:6).

Doctor Altizer of Emory University, an advocate of the

God-is-dead doctrine was challenged to honorable and public debate by several scholarly and faithful brethren. At first he accepted, but later declined without explanation. What is dead is the false and blasphemous doctrine that he and other unbelievers propagate.

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What Jesus Said About Himself

The central person of the Bible is Jesus Christ. Everything that occurred before His birth pointed toward Him and that which has transpired after His ascension points back to Him. Many had much to say concerning Him. The Old Testament prophets foretold of Him; John the Baptist prepared the way for His coming; the apostles and early evangelists preached Christ and Him crucified. But what did Jesus say of Himself and what did He acknowledge regarding His identity?

We do not suggest that what He said is more important than what inspired writers of the Bible have testified because their testimony and the word of Jesus came from the same divine source. But it is interesting to learn how the Lord Jesus presented Himself to the world. From what He has said we get a better understanding of His nature.

Son of God; Son of Man

Jesus referred to Himself as the *"Son of God"* and also the *"Son of man."* Some have counted and say that Jesus called Himself the *"Son of man"* eighty-one times; more than any other single designation. Matthew 16:13 is one example, *"Who do men say that I the Son of man am?"* By this designation He confesses His humanity and identifies Himself with the human family by showing He understands and synpathizes with the life of a human being. He was born of woman (Galatians 4:4); fashioned as a man (Philippians 2:8); was not ashamed to call other people His brethren (Hebrews 2:11); was also a partaker of flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14); *"for verily he took not on*

him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16).

He readily accepted the designation of the *"Son of God."* Twice the Father is recorded to have confessed Him as His Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). After Jesus had called Himself the Son of man He accepted Peter's confession that He was the Son of God (Matthew 16:16). When standing before His accusers and judges He was asked, *"Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am."* (Mark 14:61,62). A similar admission was made before Pilate (Matthew 27:11,12). Accepting this identification caused some of His enemies to accuse Him of blasphemy. But it is evident that Jesus recognized Himself as God's only begotten Son.

Mediator

Because Jesus was both humanity and Deity He became the one mediator between God and man (First Timothy 2:5) and qualified to be our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). By this dual nature He became the only avenue of approach to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). His very name, Emmanuel, means *"God with us."* (Matthew 1:23). John wrote, 1:14, *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, [and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father], full of grace and truth."*

Preacher

Jesus regarded Himself as a preacher. It has been said, God had but one Son and He was a preacher." Mark 1:33, *"And he said unto them, Let us go into the next town, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth."*

A preacher is a herald, a proclaimer of a message. Jesus preached a message of authority. Mark 1:22, *"And they were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes."*

He, like all preachers, told a message of glad tidings. Romans 10:15, *"And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things."* The Lord Jesus came into the world with an announcement from God; a truth never before heard in its fulness; that salvation was provided and fellowship between humanity and Deity was

offered. Like some who went to seize Him but heard Him preach confessed, *"Never man spake like this man."* (John 7:26. There never has been a greater preacher.

Yes, there had been great preachers prior to Christ. There was Noah, a preacher of righteousness. There was Jonah who was most effective at Nineveh. Even Solomon was known for his wisdom and his fame was worldwide. But the greatness of Jesus surpassed them. Matthew 12: 41,42, *"The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here."*

Jesus was a great preacher, not only because of who He was, but also because of the message He preached. His message was a divinely given proclamation from God to man. John 17:16, *"Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me."* Again, John 8:26, *"I have many things to say and to judge of you; but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him."* John 8:28, *"...but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things."* John 12:50, *"...whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak."* He did not preach human opinions, philosophies, theories, airing doubts, weaving fine-spun and fanciful imaginary theologies. He proclaimed God's indisputable, unanswerable and eternal truth, insisting that people hear and heed it.

He Taught the Kingdom

Among the subjects He taught was His kingdom. Matthew 4:23, *"And Jesus went about all Galilee... preaching the gospel of the kingdom."* The kingdom of God, which is the church, is God's society of people on earth who have been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. Jesus summoned people to accept God's will and citizens in God's spiritual kingdom wherein is salvation. Through Christ God's love was reaching out to recover the lost, hopeless, helpless, doomed and damned human race. Even as He warned of God's wrath against sin and the evildoer, He told of God's offer to pardon all who came to Him through Christ.

He Preached Repentance

The preaching of Christ also included the command to repent. He said, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* (Matthew 4:17). *"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3). He preached baptism in order to be saved. Both faith and baptism were mentioned as conditions for salvation in Mark 16:16.

He Preached About Man

The great preaching of this great Preacher included divine truth regarding man's lost condition, His own mission to this world to save, the coming of God's kingdom, God's love, God's gift of His Son, God's gift of salvation and God's terms for pardon. He also preached of God's wrath against evil and His warnings to the disobedient.

Prophet and Teacher

Jesus also regarded Himself as a prophet. Speaking of Himself He said, Matthew 13:57, *"A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house."* A prophet is both a foreteller and a forthteller. He predicts and also proclaims. He is one who is very close to God, within the counsels of God, one to whom the mind of God has been revealed, and one who speaks for God.

Jesus considered Himself a teacher, as did most of those who were associated with Him. He often accepted the address of *"Rabbi,"* which means a great one or an exalted teacher. Such a term was usually reserved by the Jews for the wisest and most prominent teachers among them. Six times Jesus is called by this word, sometimes translated Master. It is used with reference to one who leads others in the paths of virtue and righteousness; one who is in charge and has authority to guide.

More than sixty other times Jesus is called a teacher or said to be teaching. All kinds of people called Him a teacher, such as His own disciples, friends, foes, Pharisees, Saducees, people who sought His help as well as those who wanted to learn truth.

Jesus taught in all kinds of places and circumstances, such as the temple, synagogues, in the cities, villages, on the open way, by the seaside, from a boat, around a table, in a mountain, on the streets and in an upper room. When you study the life of

Jesus you are left with the impression that more people would have recognized Him by the term, Teacher, than probably any other designation. When the disciples were sent to prepare for the last Passover, they were told to simply say, "*The Master [Teacher]saith...*" (Matthew 26:18), and that would suffice to identify who wanted the room.

There are additional ways that Jesus identified Himself or allowed Himself to be identified, but this will be sufficient to provoke within us an enlarged respect for Him, which is our goal for such a study. He recognized that He was human and divine, the Son of God and the Son of man. He was a preacher of God's will, prophet and teacher, and what is so important to us all, our Mediator and High Priest.

What Jesus knew of Himself is important. But it is important we also recognize Him for who He really is. The question was once asked, "*What think ye of Christ?* Again it was asked, "*Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?*" Each of us must inquire concerning our own regard of Jesus. Whether we are saved or shall remain among the lost depends on how we consider Him, not just what He knew of Himself. Once recognizing that His identifications of Himself are true, we must believe in Him, and obey Him in repentance, confession of faith in Him and baptism into Him for the remission of sins.

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More Comments Received

"I have enjoyed the work you have done in ***A Burning Fire*** for several years. I hope you will be able to continue."

"God bless you for your good work."

"Please keep sending me ***A Burning Fire.*** It is of great benefit to me."

"We are thankful to God that there are still preachers like you who preach His Word as it is written. May God bless you with many more years."

"Excellent material. Well balanced. As far as I can tell in total harmony with Scripture. It is hard to find material that I can recommend to congregations and individuals. I pray that God continues to grant you health and time to continue this worthy effort."

"A friend of mine let me read one of the little booklets named ***A Burning Fire*** and I enjoyed it so much I am asking that my name is put on your mailing list. I feel it will help me and mine to live a better Christian life."

One of my letters recently received came from a foreign country and told how the booklets are read and reread, preached and studied in classes and sermons, passed from person to person until it falls apart."

"I use it in the class for ladies that I teach each week. Nearly every lesson comes from your material. I can count on its soundness. We are all receiving benefit from what you send in ***A Burning Fire."***

"The people in our area hear your lessons quite often over the radio because I use them ever so often on my program. I can always depend on the material you send to be true to the Book. Thank you."

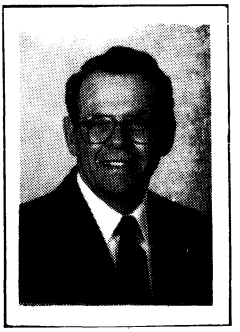
"I wish the whole world could read your publication."

"I have read your publication ***A Burning Fire*** and enjoyed it very much... was impressed with your strict adherence to the Scriptures."

"I was given several old copies of your fine book and found it very rewarding."

"We thank you very much for regularly sending us your booklet entitled ***A Burning Fire.*** These books have helped us in many ways. We use their contents for Sunday School, preaching and also place them in our study rooms for visitors to read. Your work is very helpful to us. We therefore write and thank you very much for such precious gifts to feed our souls. Man can not live on bread alone but on every word that cometh from the mouth of God. You are really feeding us His Word daily. Thank you, indeed!!"

Cornelius and the Holy Spirit



JAMES W. BOYD

The Holy Ghost fell on Coernelius and his house as Peter began to preach (Acts 10:44; 11:15). It was a direct operation of the Holy Spirit and enabled them to speak with tongues (languages) and magnify God. Those who had come with Peter were astonished that such would occur, but were then convinced that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as Jews , and the report of it served that purpose (Acts 11:18). It was not to save Cornelius because he was saved by the words Peter spoke to them (Acts 10:33; 11:14). It was evidenced that the gospel is for all even as God had intended.

Some contend this was another baptism of the Holy Spirit. But this is questionable. The event did not do for Cornelius what the Holy Spirit did for the apostles in Acts 2, so there was some difference. The likeness was that it was a direct operation, a like manner, but not a like measure. What Cornelius received was more akin to power granted by the laying on of apostolic hands than the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but in a direct fashion. The matter is not too important, but whatever about it, the purpose nor power was the same as Acts 2, but the manner received.

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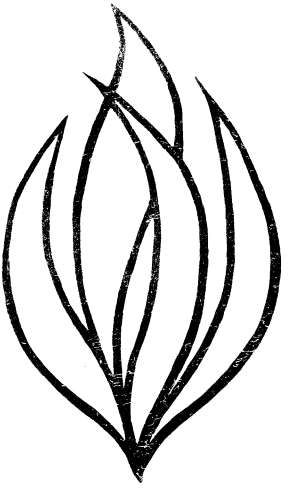

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Love

Number One

First Corinthians 2:12,13, *"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things which are freely given us of God, which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."*

This passage, alongside others, affirms the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. The words chosen in Scripture were not coincidentally written. They are not words of man's choosing even though taken from man's vocabulary. They are words that Deity, the Holy Spirit, chose by which the will of God is revealed to man. God's will in God's chosen words is what we have in Scripture.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, a language that has the unparalleled ability to express shades of meaning. Often an entire series of Greek words are used, each expressing a slightly different shade of meaning, but translated by just one English word. Our language, English, does not have this same shading ability as does the Greek. We can, however, learn the shades of meaning and know the will of God.

The English word "love" is used to translate four Greek words, actually more when you consider the various verb and noun forms. We do not have to be Greek scholars to understand this and understand the variance of meanings.

Greatest Virtue

Without question love is the greatest of all virtues. Matthew 22:36, *"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment."* Love is the prime characteristic of the Christian faith. It is the canopy or umbrella under which all other virtues find meaning and value. First Corinthians 13:13, *"Now abideth faith, hope, charity* (love), *these three, but the greatest of these is charity* (love)." Let us consider these four Greek words that are translated by the single term "love."

Eros

One Greek word translated "love" is the word **eros.** This word is used mainly to express love between the sexes. It is sometimes used as patriotism, love for country, and even the passion of ambition. But mostly it speaks of physical and sexual relationships. With usage the word has acquired a low, base and immoral meaning, like the English word "lover" is sometimes used to refer to a partner in illicit sexual intercourse. Such love is not compatible with the New Testament or Christianity and does not convey Christian love. Although the word **eros** is in the Greek language it is not found in the New Testament. Never does Scripture include as love something that is immoral and impure as is often spoken among people today.

Storge

Another word is **storge** which is a love of a different nature. This has to do with family affection, love between parent and child, sometimes love that people have for the ruler of the nation. A similar idea is expressed is Romans 12:10 where Paul wrote, *"Be kindly affectioned one to another."* The emphasis is on the familyhood of God's people. The church is not only an institution, the body of the saved, but a family in special relationship and fellowship with God and each other.

Philia

The word most commonly found in Greek generally that is translated "love" is the word **philia.** It is not, however, the word used most in the New Testament, but is used in the Greek language generally most often. It has a great warmth about it. It means to look upon another with high regard, respect and esteem. It includes friendship, even the respect that should and does exist between husband and wife. It includes physical expressions of love, but the emphasis is more on the closeness, warmth, respect and high regard for each other. Matthew 10:37 uses it. *"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* Again, John 11:3,36, concerning Jesus and Lazarus, *"Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick... Behold, how he loved him."* The same idea is in the expression of the love Jesus had for John. John 20:2,"...*and to the other*

disciple, whom Jesus loved."

Agape

The word translated "love" found most frequently in the New Testament is the word **agape.** It is the word the Holy Spirit chose to express Christian love. In a few cases **philia** is used, but that is rare. **Agape,** and various forms of it, is found over two hundred fifty times; far more than any other. Singularly, the word is rarely used in other Greek writing, we are told. It seems to carry a special meaning that is more peculiar to Christianity. Therefore, to understand Christian love we must delve into the meaning of **agape.**

We are made to wonder why the other words were relatively abandoned in favor of a word seldom found except in the New Testament. **Eros** has a definite association with that which is vile, illicit and immoral. **Storge** is tied mainly to family affections and is not broad enough to include all that Christian love embraces. **Philia** is used regarding those near and dear to us, such as friends. **Agape** is a term that is even broader than love for friends, mate or members of the family. Christian love extends in ever-widening circles. **Agape** reveals how far reaching Christian love really is.

Areas of Love

Certainly love begins in the family (Ephesians 5:23,28,33). Love in the home is one of the very best showcases for displaying Christian love. But love for family is natural and expected. It requires little effort to love kith and kin. The adage, "Blood is thicker than water," recognizes the natural tie in families. When love is taught and exhibited in the family, however, love outside the family is easier to cultivate.

Christian love goes beyond the family to the brotherhood. First Peter 2:17, *"Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."* John 13:35, *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* One of the cries of the heathen as they observed Christians was, "Behold, see how these Christians love one another." It is always a serious handicap to the Lord's church when there is bitter wrangling from within. The church is misrepresented. The church should stand in love and united in love; united on matters of faith where God has spoken, and charitable toward

each other in matters calling for human judgment. Woe be to that person or persons who perpetuate strife on matters of a personal and judgmental nature.

But Christian love extends beyond family and brotherhood to include neighbors. Romans 13:9, *"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."* Galatians 6:10, *"As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* James 2:8, *"If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well."* Christian love looks upon all people as creatures in the spiritual image of God. There is no unimportant person simply because they are persons.

Even to Enemies

But Christian love, uniquely, extends even to enemies, when such one may have. Matthew 5:43,44, *"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."* No matter what one is, what one does, we are to love them. No matter how wronged we have been, or injured, insulted or slandered, the Christian love pities the evildoer. Christian love, like ripples made in a pool of still water when a stone is tossed into it, extends itself in ever-widening circles until it covers all.

Deliberate and Wilful

There is no particular virtue in simply loving our kin because this is natural. Loving those who love us is not difficult. Christian love is an emotion, but one that is deliberately called forth. It is a wilful achievement, even if it be against nature to love. Christian love has to do with the heart of man, his intellect, his mind and does not demand love in return in order to love. It is not a natural response, but a deliberate victory of the will that produces certain attitudes and actions toward all mankind regardless of who or what they are.

This is not to say that we love everyone just alike. We cannot do this and it is humanly, mentally and emotionally impossible. This is recognized by the various shades of meaning of love. There are priorities even in love. But it does require a certain special and basic quality and outlook toward others. What is that

special and basic outlook?

Real Love

Here we find the real meaning of **agape,** the word Deity has chosen most often to express Christian love. Matthew 5:43-48, "*Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For it ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publican so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.*"

This expresses the extent of love, even to love enemies. God is the leader in love. Why are we to love even our enemies? It is in order to be like God. God sends His rain on the just and unjust alike; on the evil and good. That means, no matter what a person is, God seeks nothing but that person's highest good. This bears repeating! Love means seeking the other's highest good. This is the maturity and wholeness (perfection) that is characteristic of God. This is the very root of Christian love. All else springs from this concept and every other virtue finds its beginning and value in it. This is the canopy under which everything about the Christian faith operates. This is not to say, as some mistakenly contend, "Love is all." There is much more than love in Christianity. But it does show the underlying foundation of the faith. This is the meaning of **agape,** that special term that teaches Christian love which means seeking the other's highest good. Future lessons shall focus on this measure of love, what it implies, requires, allows and how it relates to all associations, even between God and man and man and his fellowman.

† † † † †

Love

Number Two

When we speak of Christian love in the context of people loving people, we must realize that such love is the *"fruit of the Spirit"* (Galatians 5:22). Such love does not spring from within us because of our goodness, but the source is Deity. Man cannot and does not originate and develop such love without Deity. When the Holy Spirit takes possession of a person's life, which is accomplished as the person follows the Word of God, this love fills his heart and he grows more and more like Christ in his attitudes toward others. It is impossible for one who is not a Christian to possess and exhibit Christian love. One may see the desirableness of such love and even recognize it as the solution to problems, even mentally accepting the truth that this love is what God expects. But one cannot live in Christian love until Christ lives in him.

Unworkable?

There are those who are skeptical and critical about Christian love. They misunderstand it. They contend that such love is unworkable and impractical in this imperfect and sinful world. Christian love is seeking the other's highest good. But some think this means to allow everybody to do whatever they want. They say such love would permit the world to be dominated by the criminal element, the evildoer, those who possessed the greatest power. They think it would demand letting all people have their own way. Of course, if that were the case, life would be impossible and disorder would prevail. Christian love is not simply letting everybody have their own way. In fact, it is quite the contrary to that. If we seek the other's highest good there are times when we may have to resist him, oppose him, even punish him. Christian love is not to be considered permissive and simply allowing people to "do their own thing" without regard to the consequences to themselves and others. Does not God love us? Does not God often oppose mankind in what man sets out to do? Love enforces rules. It does not dismiss rules and laws. It is not love to be permissive and without restrictions. That could be the worst thing for another and not their highest good.

Love is not vindictive nor does it seek revenge. But love will

demand that evildoers be checked for their own good and for others. So the criticism and misunderstanding about love only reflects how much more we need to learn concerning it. It is not the fault of God or the love He teaches that some of us misunderstand and misapply love.

Foundational

We learn that love is as the Bible defines and teaches is the basis of every perfect relationship in heaven and in earth. This is one reason that **eros** is not love. **Eros** involves immorality, impurity and sin. There are many passages that show love as the basis of perfect relationships and we shall confine ourselves to but a few.

Love is the basis for the relationship between the Father and Son. John 3:35, *"The Father loveth the Son..."* John 14:31, *"...that the world may know that I love the Father."* These were words of Jesus speaking of this relationship.

Love is the attitude that the Father and Son have toward humanity. John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world..."* Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his own love toward us..."*

To love God the Father and Christ the Son is the basis of man's duty to Deity. Luke 10:37, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind..."* Christianity is not simply man submitting to the power of God or cowering under the threats and warnings that God has issued. It is in its best stage man surrendering to the love of God and returning that love to God. The very substance and body of the faith is our love for the Lord. We have not seen Him except by faith we have that is based in the evidence that God has provided. Yet, we believe in Him and love Him. First Peter 1:8, *"...whom not having seen, we love."*

We sing two songs that express the idea adequately. "O, how I love Jesus," and "I am so glad that Jesus loves me." Love is the basis of the relationship between Deity and humanity.

Likewise, love is the basis for the relationship between Christians. John 13;34,35, *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* John 15:12,13, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I*

command you." First John 3:11,23, *"For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment."* Christians have been described as a people who love Christ and each other. So we see that every conceivable relationship in heaven and earth that is right, proper, perfect, pure and holy is based on love. Does not this emphasize the greatness of this virtue?

God Loves Man

We must consider God's love for man because without knowledge of that love we cannot understand the quality of love that the Lord expects of us. First John 4:7,8, *"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love."* It is not that we worship love. God is the origin and spring of the kind of love that seeks the others highest good. What are some of the characteristics of this love of which we are the beneficiaries?

God's love is universal. John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world..."* Acts 10:34,35, *"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."* Titus 2:11, *"For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men."* There is no person that is outside the embrace of the love of God. It is not restricted to families, tribes, nations or races. It is extended to all humanity.

God's love is a sacrificial love. Ephesians 5:1,2, *"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour."* By His death on the cross, the sacrifice of sacrficies, Deity has demonstrated His love toward man. First John 4:9,10,*"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* The price that was paid for our ransom was the blood of the sacrificial *"Lamb of God"* (John 1:27) sacrificed at Calvary. Revelation 1:5, *"Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood."*

God's love is given even though it is undeserved. This is an astonishing quality of God's love. Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* In our sins we merited nothing except the damnation that awaits those who are lost in sin. But God was not content to let conditions remain like that, but provided for our release from spiritual bondage.

More About His Love

His love is merciful. After defining the Christian's spiritual state before he became a Christian, Paul said in Ephesians 2:4,5, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, [by grace ye are saved]."* We are saved by the unmerited favor of God and we are not capable of earning our salvation. This does not negate the necessity of our obedience because obedience is not a way of earning, but is only meeting the conditions whereupon God gives us the gift of salvation. Obedience is the way of receiving. God's commands are not harsh, dictatorial and ruthless, but every command is for our highest good.

God's love is a saving love. Second Thessalonians 2:16, *"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace."* Salvation, everlasting life, stems from God's love. Paul addressed these words to those he said were *"chosen... to salvation through sanctification."* (Verse 13). To be sanctified means to be cleansed, set apart, and by this manner afforded the provisions of God's love.

God's love is strengthening, bringing victory. It is not an over-protective, softening love that makes man weak and ill-equipped for daily living. Quite the opposite is true. God's love makes conquerors of those who otherwise would be defeated in sin. Romans 8:35-37, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."*

God's love is enduring. Romans 8:38,39, *"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, not things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be*

able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This speaks of God's love for man, especially His children in Christ. Human love is sometimes fickle rather than lasting. It can be crushed, lost or withdrawn. But regardless of situations, changes, circumstances, God never ceases to love any person. This does not mean all will be saved. This does not mean God approves of all one does. But it does mean that God never ceases to seek our highest good.

And Still More

God's love is rewarding. James 1:12; 2:5, *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him... Hearken, beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?"* There is that *"crown of righteousness"* that we shall receive when we, like Paul, have fought a good fight, finished our course, and kept the faith. (Second TImothy 4:6-8).

God's love is chastening at times. Hebrews 12:6, *"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."* Parents can readily understand this. We often chasten and discipline our children, not because we seek their harm and not because we do not love them, but because we do love them and seek their highest good. They must be guided, trained, rebuked when wrong, and shown the way of right. We may not always know how God chastens us. Through His Word we have His will and that will includes the assurance that He does chasten those whom He loves. Through His providence God is mindful and watchful over His children. His love is of such a quality that is does not withhold essential discipline when needed. It is not indulgent and permissive.

The love of God is universal, sacrificial, undeserved, merciful, saving, strengthening, enduring, rewarding and chastening. How great is the love of God for mankind!

With these thoughts we pray that our understanding of love is enlarged and our appreciation of love will grow, making us better fitted for service before God, both now and in the hereafter. The next lesson shall consider man's love for God and some prime traits of the love we are to manifest in our own lives.

† † † † †

Love

Number Three

We turn our attention to love from the viewpoint of human duty to God and others. We shall include a large number of passages of Scripture to learn what the Bible teaches, how it reads, what it includes and specifies regarding love as the Lord expects from man.

Man's Love for God

The New Testament has much to say about man's love for God. This love must be exclusive in nature. Matthew 6:24, *"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* Matthew 10:37, *"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* There is room for only one supreme loyalty in the Christian heart and that must be toward Christ. The Lord cannot and will not share first place with anything or anybody. He is the Lord.

Man's love for God must be founded on man's gratitude to God and God's love for man. First John 4:10,19, *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love him because he first loved us."*

Man's love must be an obedient love. There cannot be a separation of love and obedience. John 14:15, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* John 14:21, *"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."* John 14:23,24, *"Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words... He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings."* Second John 6, *"And this is love, that we walk after his commandments."* First John 2:3-5, *"And hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; and hereby we do know that we are in him."* First John 5:2,3, *"By this we know that we love the children of God when we love*

God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."

More than a usual number of scriptures have been cited to document the connection between obedience and love because this needs to be impressed upon our minds. Too many have the concept that they can ignore or disobey what God says, but yet claim to love God. The only way we can prove before God that we do love Him is to do what He commands. Saying we love God is insufficient. It requires doing His will. We do not "honk" if we love Jesus, as a bumper sticker once suggested, but we must obey if we love Jesus. This tendency among some to claim to love but refuse to obey is foreign to the truth.

Man's love for God is outgoing, by which we mean that it reaches out and extends to others. First John 4:12,20,21, *"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us... If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?... And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."* There simply is no such thing as loving unless we seek the other's highest good.

This brings us to our next consideration of love, and that is the love Christians are to have for their fellow Christians. Love is the distinguishing badge of the Christian society. First Corinthians 16:14, *"Let all your things be done with charity* (love)." Some dislike the word "charity" as found in the King James Version, possibly because they have become infected with some modern speech perversions to the point that any rendering found in the KJV is rejected by them. But there is a sense in which "charity" conveys more the Christian doctrine than the mere word "love."

Many people consider love as only an emotion without recognizing the necessity of that attitude and emotion doing something. Christian love acts. Christianity conveys not only an attitude but an action which manifests itself. Charity suggests action as well as emotion. Charity is a good selection and should not be hastily set aside. John 13:35, *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."*

A church where there is bitterness, backbiting, strife and hostility among its members may be called a church, but it is certainly not the kind of church that pleases God. Does it even have the right to call itself a church of Christ if it persists in that

behavior? The world should know the Lord's church for the love brethren have toward each other.

The church is built up by the power of love. Ephesians 4:16, *"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."* Love is the cement that holds the living stones together. It creates the climate that is conducive to growth. It is the food that nourishes fellowship. Without it churches cannot stand strong but will crumble into pieces.

Love and Leadership

Love is the motivating power for leaders of the church to do their task well. When Paul wrote to brethren in Corinth he reminded them of his love. Second Corinthians 2:4, *"For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you."* When Paul corrected brethren it was not because he disliked them nor hated them. His words were strong and his condemnation severe and certain. But he was motivated to lead them the way he did because of his love for his brethren.

This same kind of love will prohibit leaders from lording it over others, seeking their own prominence and prestige, desiring to dominate. He leads because of love.

This carries over to the attitude followers are to have toward leaders. First Thessalonians 5:13, *"And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake..."* Sometimes members do not show the right attitude toward their leaders. They heap upon them criticism, resentment, rebellion and then wonder why the leaders do not do better even under the barage of hostility. There should be a mutual love between leaders and followers. When that does exist, the will of the Lord shall prevail.

Let us now consider the characteristics of love. Romans 12:9, *"Let love be without dissimulation."* This means love must be without pretense, but sincere. First Peter 1:22, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."* Peter is calling for sincere, genuine, unpretended love. Love is not just a surface pleasantness, but an honest and genuine attitude in the heart.

Love is to be without ill-will. Romans 13:10, *"Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."* Love envieth not, is not easily provoked, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, seeks what is good for the other, and never the injurt of another (First Corinthians 13).

Christian love is generous. It is a love that gives. Paul told the Corinthians, while also urging them to give on behalf of the poor in Judea, Second Corinthians 8:24, *"Wherefore show ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf."* Love is proven to be true by giving. The mainspring of Christian living is Christian love. Like the love of God who gave (John 3:16), we are to give to God and to those who need our assistance. God did not love because He gave, but He gave because He loved. So should it be with us. Love should provoke generous giving.

More About Love

Christian love is so practical. It is not merely a kindly feeling and a pious thought and good wish. Christian love accomplishes things. Like faith, it works. Hebrews 6:10, *"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."* First John 3:17,18, *"But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."* A love that will not work is as dead as a faith that will not work.

Ephesians 4:2 teaches that love is forbearing. *"I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love."* Not only are we to refrain from injuring others, as we have noted, but we are to possess that quality of endurance and patience toward one another. Love suffers long and is kind, bears all things, endures all things (First Corinthians 13). This does not suggest we ignore and tolerate evil in each other, but that we are patient and kind as we help one another overcome evil in our lives. Even Christians have to put up with a lot from each other sometimes, but are willing to do so because they love each other.

Never could love be Christian love without the forgiving spirit.

One cannot love without being willing to forgive those who trespass against him. Love never places an obstacle in the path of the wrong-doer who wishes to get right. Christian love is like the love the father manifested toward the prodigal son when the son returned home having repented of his errors. In First Corinthians Paul urged severe action regarding one in immorality. In Second Corinthians the action Paul commanded was sufficient to restore him. Paul said his brethren should forgive him and comfort him, and by doing that they would *"confirm your love toward him."* (Second Corinthians 2:8).

Is Love Blind?

Christian love is not so sentimental that it shuts one's eyes to the faults of others nor fails to be realistic. Love is not blind. Love recognizes faults but loves anyway. Paul wrote sternly to Corinth but regarding faults he said he dealt with them as he did because he loved them.

You have heard it said that love is blind, but not Christian love. Christian love sees things as they are, realistically, but is powerful enough to do whatever is necessary to help overcome faults. It may require rebuke, discipline, or whatever God requires. Love which shuts its eyes to faults and sins in order to avoid unpleasantness is not Christian love because Christian love never shirks responsibility toward other people. Blind love would be harmful, not helpful. Christian love seeks the highest good for others.

Christian love controls the way we use our liberties. Galatians 5:3, *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."* Ephesians 4:15, *"But speaking the truth in love."* Love is the motive behind speaking the truth and governs the manner of proclaiming it. Love and truth are never contrary, but go hand in hand. Because we love others we will even forego our "rights" if it would be for the benefit of others. Truth is sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant, but always consistent and compatible with seeking one's good.

Love is the bond of Christian fellowship. It is binding. Colossians 2:1,2, *"For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and the Christ."*

It was love one for the other that caused Paul to make a special request for a favor from Philemon concerning a former slave named Onesimus (Philemon 9). *"Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ."* We are at liberty to do favors for each other because of love.

Love is the power behind our faith. Galatians 5:6, *"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."* Faith works, and loves makes it work. Love is the quality that can make the Christian live a mature, whole, complete life, called perfect. First John 4:18, *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."* Colossians 3:14, *"And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."*

Such then are the basic characteristics and products of Christian love. It is all summed up in the phrase that Christian love is seeking the highest good of others. Beyond all question, Christianity is built on love. It is the greatest of all virtues, the primary quality of the religion founded by the Son of God, the umbrella under which all else falls, and is found practical in man's love for God and his fellowman. May God help us love as He has loved us.

† † † † †

What Christianity Does

Should a salesman come to you with a product that was new to you and asked you to buy it, there are several things you would want to know about it. From where did it come? Who made it? How much does it cost? But mostly you would want to know, what does it do? What good is it? What need or desire does it fill? What benefit does it produce?

Many are asking similar questions about the faith of Christ. There may have been a time when most accepted the fact that the faith of Christ was beneficial, but that is not always true today. Enemies of the Lord have done much to sow distrust concerning Christianity. How would you even define Christianity to the non-Christian? We might want to define it much like we

define electricity; that is, in terms of what it does. The World Book Encyclopedia defines electricity this way, "We know what it is by what it does." We can define Christianity the same way.

In our day of the cynic, skeptic, and growing irreligious attitudes, Christianity is often scorned, cast aside, ridiculed, left untried and repudiated, even said to be without value and useless in our day as something irrelevant to out needs. It is said we need something up-to-date, new and modern because we are in the "post-Christian" age. There are reasons why many are reacting to the way of Christ in this negative fashion.

The influence of secularism, humanism, communism, materialism and the confusion of denominationalism have all contributed to this resentful attitude toward Christianity. The ignorance and evil influence of the world places emphasis on man, self, the physical side of life to the neglect and denial of the spirit of man. The frustrations of the sinful world have overcome many and led them to atheism. The church has not adequately conveyed to the world the real nature and benefit of New Testament Christianity.

It may be while we have properly emphasized the faith of Christ in terms of its origin, its Founder, its early history, its doctrine, its costs, we have neglected to tell people what it does and therefore they really have not been informed regarding its essential value. Many who profess to be Christians so live as to detract from Christianity and actually repel others, not showing anything particularly distinctive and beneficial in their lives for being a professed follower of Christ. When the Christian shows it has not done very much for him in living a godly life, how can you expect the non-Christian to be impressed? It is a worthy thought, "If you were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

A "Doing" Religion

The Bible makes two points very clear about the faith or religion of Christ. (1) It is a doing religion (Matthew 7:21; James 1:22; Acts 1:1). As Jesus both taught and did, we are to follow His steps (First Peter 2:21). (2) Christians are different because of what they do and what they refrain from doing. They are a peculiar, distinctive people because of their manner of life and relationship to God (Titus 2:14; Galatians 6:10; James 4:17). They learn to abhor evil, abstain from it, and hold fast to the good (First Thessalonians 5:21,22). Though in the world, they

are not of the world (Romans 12:1,2; First John 2:15).

Let us consider a few things Christianity, when believed and obeyed, will do for mankind. Let us see the need it fills and recognize how essential to our welfare the faith of Christ is.

Salvation

First, it is the only faith that fills the greatest need mankind has and that is salvation from sin. This is true whether anyone realizes it or not. Its truthfulness is not dependent upon its acceptance. In a day when there is much emphasis on social reform, social revolution, social concern and change, most have overlooked this greatest contribution of Christ. We all sin (Romans 3:23; 5:12), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We cannot redeem ourselves by ourselves and must have a Savior. There is only one Savior and that is Christ (Acts 4:12; John 8:32; 14:6). Meeting or failing to meet this need determines our eternal destiny. Is it not strange that this greatest need of mankind is usually placed on the back shelf even as people grope in darkness and confusion, failing to realize that being free from sin is the first step in overcoming those things that threaten, harass and destroy mankind? At the root of man's ills is his spiritual poverty.

Should a person conquer the world, solve his physical problems, and not save his soul, he has failed. *"What shall it profit...?"* (Mark 8:36). While the Word of God is his lamp and guide (Psalm 119:105), if he shuns it, he cannot solve his problems. He has not the capacity to direct his own steps properly (Jeremiah 10:23), and he will only deceive himself into thinking a way is right when it is wrong (Proverbs 14:12). *"Thou hast the words of eternal life,"* Peter said of Christ in John 6:66-69. There is no other to whom we can go.

In This Life

But the contribution of the faith of Christ is not confined to the benefits in the next life exclusive of this one. Should one ever think the Word of God is irrelevant, he should consider the host of blessings derived from it as listed in the longest chapter of the Bible, Psalm 119. Some say that Paul never preached to a nuclear scientist or a space age person. What if he did not? Man's spiritual needs have not changed, nor will they. Man does not need a new and different gospel, but he needs to learn and

apply the gospel God gives. Of course, if a person is sick and he is ignorant of or refused to take the curative medicines he has no right to expect benefit. But he does not have the right to denounce the medicine either as if there is no cure. Most are casting Christ away, not knowing what they are refusing, then accepting counterfiets and distortions that cannot provide what he needs. This is really an unfair approach to Christ.

The faith of Christ deals with one of mankind's most threatening ills and that is the domestic problem concerning the home, marriage, divorce , and the most intimate relationships of life. None who are aware of the realities of our time would deny the magnitude of the problems. What is more needful than for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25), and wives to love their husbands and their children (Titus 2:4)? While not going into depth here for lack of space, we affirm there is no marital problem for which the Word of God does not provide the solution.

There is the issue of rearing children. The parent-child relationship is taught in Scripture. What is more needful than for parents to train their children in God's way (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4), and for children to obey their parents? (Ephesians 6:1). To honor parents is a divine directive and if obeyed, many of the stresses and ills of our time would soon dissipate. Juvenile and adult deliquency is traceable to violations of God's Word in this area of life.

Man to Man

In man's relationship with his fellowman, we are taught to love our neighbor as ourselves. We would seek the other's highest good if we applied God's will. So many seem to think that the "Golden Rule" (Matthew 7:12) has been repealed or never existed. Consider if you will what a beneficial revolution the world would experience if all would bend their efforts to follow even this one teaching!

As nation wars against nation, and the faith of Christ is not a political government, and while self-defense is surely allowed by Scripture both individually and collectively, nations could live in peace one with the other if the citizens thereof would attune their lives, attitudes and ambitions to that which Jesus taught.

Drug addiction, especially the number one drug problem in America which is alcoholism, have solutions only in the way of Christ. The teaching to not abuse the body and prohibition of

the consumption of alcoholic beverages are so relevant and needful today. While some wail and cry over the plight of mankind because of these abuses, they either do not know or will not apply the solutions that the Son of God has authorized. Many are busy applying social "Band-Aids" to these spiritual cancers. But the way of Christ would solve them.

We are confronted with world-wide racial strife. But God taught that He is no respecter of persons on that basis (Acts 10:34,35), and there can be no oneness and unity in the human family without Christ (Galatians 3:28). We are physically brothers (Acts 17:26), but we shall never consider each other as we should until we can dispose of the hatred, prejudice and suspicion we hold against each other. These hideous qualities must be replaced with fairness and respect for human dignity, but that will not occur until we follow the teaching of Christ. While we are not all alike and there is no sin to note our differences, we waste our efforts to remove the enmity between men by marches, riots, suppression, making and breaking laws, nightriders, etc. Such never avails the desired result but the will of Christ in the heart will produce solutions.

God's Remedy

Who can deny that our nation, as well as nations around the world, has been beset with a tidal wave of lawlessness. We are told that one of six youths under eighteen years of age have a police record. While this seems astoundingly high, we have to be mindful of the crime that sweeps across the human family. We can rightly assign many reasons for this, but only the teaching and obedience to the will of Christ will produce solutions in this area. Capital punishment, which God has ordained governments to use against criminals, is being dismissed, or inconsistently applied, and replaced by a misguided "compassion" for the criminal as opposed to the concern for the victim and potential victims. Christians are taught to obey the laws of the land. *"Fear God and honor the king..."* (First Peter 2:17). Who could suggest this would not improve the quality of human relationships and produce better societies if obeyed?

We see millions of people flooding the mental hospitals, suffering nervous breakdowns, burdened with worry and anxiety, falling beneath the pressures of daily living. Too many are too busy striving for the wind of material gain, following a

false value system, attempting to remove guilt without repentance, allowing their consciences to destroy them rather than correcting their sense of values. Solomon teaches that such striving is vanity and vexation of spirit. Seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness is the assurance of provision (Matthew 6:33). What could be more relevant and useful than the solution to these maladies of the mind and life?

Evil Hearts

At the source of man's ills is an evil heart filled with greed, lust, pride, envy, immorality. The Word teaches the need of a change of heart. Man's life does not consist of his possessions (Luke 12:15). From the heart comes the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23), so we must be more careful concerning what we think (Provebrs 23:7). We must let our mind dwell on the good (Philippians 4:8), and set our hearts on things above (Colossians 3:2). If we would put to death the old man of sin (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22), and renew the spirit of our minds (Ephesians 4:23), pride would be replaced with humility, envy replaced by rejoicing with those who rejoice, purity would replace immorality, and giving would displace greed. Who says that the faith of Christ is not beneficial and needful for our day?

When people follow the faith of Christ, if their poverty is caused by their own laziness, they will learn to work because the gospel teaches if one will not work neither should he eat (Second Thessalonians 3:10). The rich will learn to share with those who are in need. Money by itself has never and can never win the war against poverty. There are too many spiritual factors involved to leave spiritual values out of consideration of a solution. Talents given and talents used are a part of serving the Lord and one another.

What could be more useful to humanity than the warnings against the pitfalls into which many fall? Should not the down-trodden be encouraged, brotherly love exhibited, provisions made for family stability and community peace? The gospel of Christ will not only cure the disease of sin, but offers many preventive measures that, when followed, will allow mankind to avoid so much heartache and tragedy that his sins would otherwise bring upon him. Christianity will cause him to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, house the homeless and attend the sick.

The dread blight of hypocrisy is so evident in our world. Not

only is there hypocrisy in religion, but the deceptive pretense is evident in every field of human endeavor. Basic and fundamental honesty is a scarce commodity in society. Sincerity and truth are often lacking in dealings between people. What is more relevant to man's needs than to be able to rely on the integrity of others? Yet, even among many who profess to be Christians there is a near void of plain old-fashioned truth and honor such as God would have all men partake.

The Best Will Rise

Christianity will bring out the best in an individual. When death pursues each one, where else can one find the comfort, hope, consolation and security that the promises of God through Christ offers him? Where else can you find the reason to life and the motivation to live it profitably as God has designed it except in the way of Christ? Where else is there such emphasis on the dignity of human life? What teaches both young and old how to live and how to die? How could anyone question the benefit of the faith of Christ for our world?

Christianity teaches men to have patience in tribulation, and gives him that which he cannot provide for himself. It recreates him in the image of Christ, washing him clean by the Lord's blood and guiding him aright through life. No philosophy, no human theology, no other religion can offer such blessings and fulfill them as the faith of Christ. Every command God gives man is for man's good. No other faith really gives us the reason for being better than that faith that teaches we are created in the image of God. We are here for a purpose and we have a mission to accomplish. We stand accountable before God and we face the judgment to be followed by heaven or hell.

Yes, every realm of human activity that is proper is made even better when one follows Christ. Both history and Scriptures cry this message. His way is the more excellent way because of what it does. It is more glorious when we realize it is exclusively the faith that God approves. We cannot stop wars with mere weapons, nor crime with law. Hate will not be conquered with secular knowledge nor love created by legislation. But in Christ all these blessings can be ours.

What does the faith of Christ do? It makes man a real man, not just a highly evolved animal that some contend we are. It makes him fit for association with Deity. It not only offers the solutions to man's earthly ills and the best life in this world one

can have, but all that and heaven, too.

Wherever, whenever, whoever walks in the light as He is in the light is blessed of God. What the faith of Christ has done for others, it will do for you, even all who come to God's Son. But how can we expect His blessings if we remain aloof and apart from Him? Will you see these truths and obey God?

† † † † †

A PREACHER PROBLEM

This is not written to excuse brethren who preach but an attempt to focus attention on a matter he and all brethren must face. A preacher probably runs the greatest risk of anyone of being accused and being guilty of Phariseeism. I specify the characteristic named in Matthew 23:3, *"All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not."* This is especially hazardous for preachers because "saying" is their prime occupation in life. No responsibility takes priority over public proclamation of the gospel.

"Preach the word" is the apostolic admonition. That which is to be preached is the *"perfect law of liberty."* Preachers are not to proclaim opinions as Christ's doctrine nor present themselves as if they were the standard by which all must be measured. His message must be a *"thus saith the Lord,"* but he may have as many difficulties as the next human being in living up to what he must proclaim as infallible truth. Surely, this accounts somewhat for the emphasis on the responsibility of teachers stated in James 3:1, *"Be not many of you masters* (teachers), *my brethren, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."*

We have all urged preaching brethren to "practice what they preach," and good admonition this is. We have all understood the inherent weakness in the attitude that says, "Do as I say and not as I do." But when we get right down to the bare facts of reality, every preacher must include some degree of that element in his work.

Who can say with the confidence of inspired Paul, *"Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you."*

(Philippians 4:9). Must we not provide some qualification because of our failings? Only Christ harmonized to perfection that which He would *"do and teach."* So we see the dilemma in which one who preaches finds himself. It is not his problem alone, however.

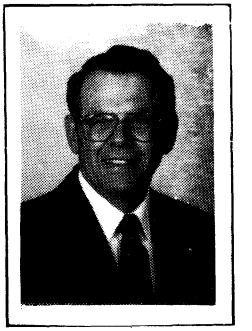
Finding problems is easy. Where is the solution? Unfortunately some who preach have succumbed to the temptation to alter their message to fit themselves and accept the sins of men. Recognizing their inability to live perfectly, they withdraw from declaring *"the whole counsel of God"* because they cannot completely live up to it themselves. But this does not solve the problem, but actually aggravates it because it lowers the standard toward which we all must strive. Some think to condemn is to make sinful judgments and since none is perfect all condemnation of sin must be abandoned. But we do not judge wrongfully, however, when we proclaim judgments God has already made and revealed. Yes, we must constantly work to remove our *"beam"* but if preachers abandon the exposure of the *"mote"* until all of his own faults are completely removed, neither he nor anyone else will continue to preach, positively or negatively, the gospel of Christ.

As much as possible, more than others, a preacher must do his utmost to live as he preaches. But he must recognize his own faults, strive to grow as he must, and brethren must respect the fact he is also a faltering human being like they are. One preacher complimented his mother by saying, "She practicies what I preach."

With the help of the Lord and encouragement from brethren and family, plus a determined personal effort, preachers are more likely to be less like the Pharisees in this matter, even though they will ever stand in jeopardy of this inconsistency by the very nature of his humanity and weaknesses and his task of preaching the perfect way. JWB

It has well been said, "Immodest clothing reveals more than one might think. It reveals disrespect for the Word of God and a rebellious heart as well as a spirit of disobedience."

The New Hermeneutics



JAMES W. BOYD

We have another heresy among us. Hermeneutics has to do with understanding the Scriptures. Some have become "educated" in man's philsophies and have decided we need a new approach to the Bible. Seeking what they call unity (actually it is only agreeing to disagree rather than unity), and seeing that all are not united, some think we need to do something that will produce unity. So they have decided to look at the Bible differently. Instead of taking God at His Word they contend we can place whatever meaning we wish on whatever is said and everyone accept whatever anybody else decides. This sounds ridiculous but it is only because the new approach is ridiculous. What we should want is truth more than unity. To have unity at the sacrifice of truth is heresy.

Contending the Bible is no pattern for Christianity, this allows everybody to go whatever direction one might wish. To think that our "Christian" schools are contaminated with such malarkey is heartbreaking. But such false doctrine flows like water after a downpour among the elite "scholars" of our schools. No wonder truth suffers!

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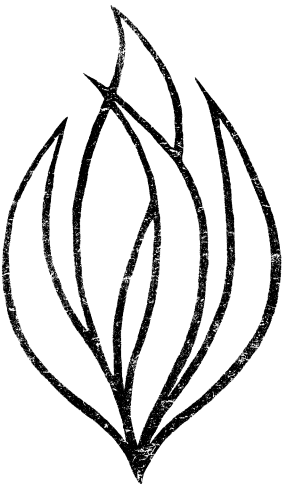

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Obedient Spirit

In Numbers, chapter thirteen, we read the report that the twelve spies gave after they reviewed the land off Canaan as Moses directed them. Before continuing in this lesson let me urge that you read from your Bible Numbers 13:25-33. After forty days on their mission the spies reported that the land was a land that flowed with milk and honey. But they also had a negative report concerning the inhabitants of the land, saying that they were giants, had walled cities, and they made the Israelites appear by comparison to be but grasshoppers.

The report was very discouraging to the people of Israel. *"And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God that we had died in this wilderness!"* (Numbers 14:2).

Two spies, Joshua and Caleb, gave a different slant to the report. *"And Joshua, the son of Nun, and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes and they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us unto this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord; neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them and the Lord is with us; fear them not."* (Numbers 14:6-9). But the people reacted against them so strongly that they wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb. The actions and attitudes of the Israelites and the ten spies demonstrated a spirit of disobedience to God.

In the New Testament Paul wrote of the Gentiles, *"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."* (Ephesians 2:2). He warned those of such a spirit, *" Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."* (Ephesians 5:6)

Israel was made to wander in the wilderness one year for each day the spies were gone; hence, the forty years in the wilderness. All those twenty years old and upward died in the wilderness except two.

But Joshua and Caleb were of a different spirit. *"But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land wherein he went; and his seed shall possess it."* (Numbers 14:24).

What Is Obedience?

Obedience to God requires more than an outward performance of mechanical acts such as a soldier might perform at the command of his general. He might do exactly what he is told to do, but hate every minute and movement involved. But so long as he carries out his orders it is said that he has obeyed his commander. But obedience to God involves more than that. Obedience to God must come from the heart. *"Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you."* (Romans 6:16,17). Obedience to God involves attitude as well as action.

When we worship, the heart is involved. Jesus said, *"God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24). The heart is involved again in living the righteous life as noted in Second Timothy 2:22. *"Flee youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."* Even our service before men is to be as service before God because of the heart. *"Not with eyeservice, as men pleasers; but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."* (Ephesians 6:6).

Obedience means doing the right thing, but with the right motive, intent, understanding, voluntarily, willingly, and with a desire to please God. So we must develop in the heart the right attitude toward the commands of God to us and possess an obedience spirit.

Do you have an obedient spirit? How can we know if we have an obedient spirit? What are the marks of an obedient spirit? A closer look at Joshua and Caleb in the events of long ago will help us see what is the obedient spirit we all must have and display.

Humility

It means having a spirit of humility, submission, denying self. The proud egotist never bows to the will of another, even to God. He is all for self, having to have his own way. *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ... being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."* (Philippians 2:5,8). Our attitude must be, *"Not my will but thine be done."* As Jesus taught, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* (Luke 9:23).

Joshua called the refusal to go up to Canaan a rebellion against God. It was his desire that they obey God regardless of the cost to themselves. He was humble enough to put God before himself.

Even if Alone

An obedient spirit also means doing what God says whether anyone else is willing to obey or not. While we are not to parade our faith around for others to see in order to praise us, or do what we do simply to be different, we must do what God says is right whether we stand alone or in the company of just a few or many. Joshua and Caleb had to stand alone. So did Daniel, Moses and nearly every other faithful servant of God. Doing right just because others do right is not really having an obedient spirit. Those that will obey just because others do will likely disobey just because others do. While we do not dismiss the value or the power of a good influence, our reason to obey must be more than simply obeying because somebody else does. We need to be as was Joshua at the close of his life when he said, *"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* (Joshua 24:15).

Have you ever noticed that sometimes when people have a falling out one might say he will repent or forgive if his adversary will? Or one might say he will obey the gospel if his wife or her husband obeys. What do you mean, "If somebody else does?" The spirit of obedience means you will obey, you will do what is right, even if nobody else does. The attitude we must have is, "What would God have me to do?" We are not to ask, "What are others going to do?" It is easier to do right when others do right, but we must do right anyway.

By His Will

An obedient spirit means doing what God commands whether it pleases us and our personal whims and preferences or not. Whether we even think it is reasonable or not does not enter into it. It is not the spirit of obedience to obey God "up to a point."

We can be sure that every divine directive is for our good. But even if we cannot see, we should obey nonetheless. One might say, "But I don't see why I must to this or that." So what? If we have the spirit of obedience we will obey anyway. Cain could have argued that way. Nadab and Abihu had that attitude. Joshua could have said the same thing when told to march around Jericho so many times. Naaman could have quibbled that way when told to go to Jordan and wash. Christ might have stated something like that when He had to go to the cross.

Some today rebel at being baptized in water because they say they do not see any sense in it. That is not the point. We must obey whatever God tells us to do whether it appears reasonable to us or not. To obey just when it suits me or you is not true obedience. This would make man a judge of God's commands, putting man before God.

Some sons were instructed by the father to plant grain in three fields. One field was to be in corn, another in barley and the third in wheat. The sons agreed with the decision about the first two fields, but thought oats would be better in the third field and acted accordingly. How many times did they obey their father? Not once! They always acted as they saw fit. That is not the spirit of obedience.

Not Just "Get By"

The spirit of obedience does not allow for doing the least that one can do in the service of God. Some think they can "get by" with doing as little as possible. They will not do one thing more. What would you think of a parent who never did anything for the child more than just what was absolutely necessary and demanded of the parent? How much would you say a husband loved his wife if he never did more for her than what he thought he just had to do? Would not something vital be missing?

Why do some children of God wish to serve God with that attitude? The spirit of obedience asks, "How much can I do?" It does not ask, "How little can I do and get by?" It never asks, "Do I have to attend all the services of the church?" "Do I have to give again and again?" Absenteeism is a symptom of an even worse spiritual malady that absenteeism reflects. It reflects heart trouble. It lacks the spirit of obedience.

A man once asked me if I thought Hebrews 10:25 means he had to come on Wednesday night. I told him it did. But even if it did not, he would likely lose his soul because of the sorry attitude he had toward worship and Bible study. He had not considered it that way previously.

Against Opposition

An obedient spirit means obeying God even when you meet opposition. People of God will meet opposition, even persecution (Second Timothy 3:12). It has been said that the spies and Israelites had a "grasshopper" complex. Joshua and Caleb did not minimize the difficulties facing them. But they had a different spirit about them. *"Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it."* (Numbers 13:30).

What we must ask is, "What is right?" before we ask, "What are the consequences of doing right?" Some count the cost of following Christ to see if they want to follow Him. But others count the cost to learn what it will require of them so they can do it. They have already decided they will follow Christ regardless of the cost or opposition.

Opposition can come from friends, families and many sources. As you study the lives of the faithful of God they all faced opposition. Yet, they did what God wanted them to do because they had the spirit of obedience. Daniel, Moses, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, Paul, name them and see if that is not the case with them.

Love

The spirit of obedience says, "I will obey God because of my love for Him." Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). *"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* (Luke 6:46). *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grevious."* (First John 5:3).

I have seen bumper stickers that read, "Honk if you love Jesus." Friend, any old goose can honk. You do not show you love Jesus the same way you get a dog out of the road. You do not show you love Jesus by such trivia and parading of nonsense. You show you love Jesus by doing His will.

There are commands to obey to become a Christian and commands to obey to be a faithful Christian. We must do what He says with the right attitude, motive, intent and understanding. In other words, we must have that spirit that says, *"Not my will but thine be done."* We must do what is right even if others do not. We must do what God says even if we do not like it or know why He commands it. We must do all we can and not as little as we can. We must do what God says in spite of opposition. We must obey because we love Him as He first loved us. That is what it means to possess an obedient spirit; the kind of spirit that will enable us to live with God eternally.

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The Face of the Lord

Psalm 27:8, *"When thou saidest, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek."*

The Bible often speaks of the face of the Lord. John 4:24 teaches that God in not a physical being, but *"God is a Spirit."* Yet, to assist us in knowing God, God has revealed Himself in terms that allow us to understand Him as best as our limitations will allow. He uses what is linguistically called anthropormorphism, meaning that God has used the traits and features of man to describe Himself. This is to impress upon us that God is a real person. He speaks of His face.

Deity became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (First John 1:14). Man can know God because God is revealed to man by the face of Christ. Second Corinthians 4:5,6, *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* Jesus said, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."* (John 14:9). This means one can learn of God by learning through Christ.

The physical features of the face of Christ remain unknown to man. There have been many imaginations portrayed in paintings, but there are no valid actual or literal impressions or descriptions of His face. But we must not shut our eyes to His face because Scripture tells us important things about the face of the Lord. The face of the Lord speaks primarily of His character, a symbol of the true personality of Deity, especially as seen in Christ.

Against Evil

First Peter 3:12 teaches, *"The face of the Lord is against them that do evil."* Such are the evidences in both Old and New Testaments. Consider Eden when mankind sinned and turned from Paradise and the tree of life because of his transgression. The flood in the time of Noah gives evidence of God's face against evil when the wicked were destroyed. Sodom and Gomorrah stand as witnesses

of this truth. In the New Testament we read where Christ twice cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, being filled with holy and righteous anger against those who had turned the house of the Lord into a den of thieves. That God's face is against them that do evil is seen in the judgment scene and the sentences to be pronounced by the Lord on the evil and good (Matthew 25:41,46).

Religious teachers generally agree that during that period of history called the Dark Ages when Romanism dominated so much of the world that the anger of God was stressed to the neglect of His love and compassion. For the past century the love, kindness and compassion of God has been stressed to the neglect of the Lord's anger against sin. People no longer fear punishment nor the wrath of God. It is wrong to think of God as an over-indulgent grandfather who raises no opposition to sin. Yes, our God is good and loves everybody. But God does not love evil and He does not approve whatever people do. God is love but this does not allow man to carry on a flirtation with sin. Love is not blind permissiveness. The need of our age concerning the knowledge of God is to know that God is love and that God is just.

Must Accept Both

Paul taught, Romans 11:22, *"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God..."* We cannot have one without the other because they go together. While we thrill at His holiness, purity and righteousness, these very traits are the reason He is against the evildoer. The attitude of the world is not to be too disturbed by sin. This in itself is a reason to be disturbed. Sin destroys mankind. What a plight one is in to have the face of the Lord against him.

Nothing stirs God more than sin, even more than physical distress. When Jesus healed the man of palsy recorded in Matthew 9:1-8, He first dealt with the man's spiritual malady before turning attention to his physical distress. A physical ailment is tragic, but not near as much as spiritual condemnation. A mark of one's godliness is the degree of his pain at sin. The people on Pentecost were pricked in their hearts because they recognized they had sinned. We should be like God. Psalm 45:7, *"Thou lovest righteousness and hateth wickedness."*

His Determination

Luke 9:51, *"He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem."* This passage has primary reference to the direction Jesus traveled as He went toward the city. But the direction of His face at that time reveals a quality of character. Jesus was on His way to face the last days of His earthly ministry, including His arrest, betrayal, humiliation, mockery, suffering and death on the cross. Even so, His face was set stedfastly, immovably, toward Jerusalem. He was going to deliberately enter the city, fully determined to do the will of the Father and committed to provide the salvation of mankind. His time had come. He had foretold of these hours many times even as God's prophets before Him had done. As He later prayed, *"Thy will be done."*

Sometimes the enemies of Jesus present Him as a weak, withdrawn, fearful, effeminate, shy person, lacking in resolve and void of the true spirit of greatness. But what does one see in the face of Jesus? He strides unflinchingly, undisturbed, undismayed with calmness, courage and poise that goes with commitment. There are few moments in the life of Christ on earth when His glory radiated more.

His Brillance

Matthew 17:2, *"And was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."* Such was the countenance of Jesus when transfigured (changed) on that unnamed mount in Palestine in the presence of God, Moses, Elijah and His own apostles. In but a few days He would experience the darkest hours of His earthly life. But when matters were at their worst the Lord was brilliant and radiant, physically and spiritually. Someone has said of devoted Christians, "When the world is at its worst the Christian will be at his best." Such is the imitation of Jesus. His face was as the sun.

Why this extraordinary radiance and at this time? It was because of the events surrounding it. His Deity was again acknowledged. The Father said, *"This is my beloved*

Son," as He had done at the time of Jesus' baptism by John. It was a genuine glorification and identification of Jesus.

It was a time of a divinely directed proclamation of His majesty. Second Peter 1:16-18, "*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount,*" Never again could the glory of Christ be questioned.

It was a time of recognition of the superiority and authority of Jesus Christ. He was superior to all laws and dispensations of the past, even the greatest messengers that came before Him, such as Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet. They were not on equality with Him. It was Jesus to whom all must now pay allegiance and give heed. Of Him God said, *"Hear ye him."* His face was dazzling and bright to accompany the brilliant proclamations made concerning Him on this occasion.

A Smitten Face

This same face of Jesus, physically speaking, was smitten by His enemies. They spit on His face and bruised Him as they proceeded to kill Him. Matthew 26:67, *"Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands."* Because of who He was, what He taught, His perfect life, His redeeming message, His face was despised by the wicked people then and now. It is beyond our vocabulary to adequately supply descriptions of the infamous injustices the face of our Lord suffered and endured.

But someday we shall come face to face with the face of our Lord. This will be the day of judgment. We shall know the dazzling nature revealing His majesty. We shall behold a face belonging to the One whose personality and character has been revealed to us, even the face that was mistreated in order that we might be saved. "Face to face with Christ my Savior! Face to face, what will

it be? When with rapture I behold Him; Jesus Christ who died for me."

Face to Face

On that day each of us shall stand face to face with Christ. We then must face the facts revealed concerning Him. We must face the commands He has given. We will face the promises He offered and the threats He warned. What will our face-to-face meeting be? Will it be like the time He turned His face toward Peter after Peter had denied Him? (Luke 22:61). *"The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter."* Or will it be like the time when Stephen saw His face as he died under the stones that took his life. Stephen said, *"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."* (Acts 7:55,56). Our face-to-face meeting and the nature of it will be determined by what we do regarding Jesus Christ in this life.

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Daniel, The Boy Who Stood Like A Man

The reading of Daniel, chapter one, is essential to this lesson. Please take your Bible and postpone the study until you have read the passage.

The time of the lesson was when Judah was in Babylonian captivity, having been taken there in three stages: one, under Jehoiakim; then Jehoiachin; then Zedekiah. Daniel was among those taken in the first deportation.

He was also among the young men selected for special training by the Babylonians because he possessed the qualities which made him good material. He was without blemish, strong physically, well favored, one who got along well with others, skillful, wise, with better than

average knowledge and understanding, the kind of lad who could stand before kings with composure. He was a young man of great promise and potential alongside others who were chosen.

Involved in his training was the change of names. Daniel's name was changed to Beltashazzar (not to be confused with King Belshazzar). Also the training included a certain diet, food and drink that was set before them. They were taught the Chaldean language and ways. It was with regard to their diet where we see the manly characteristics of this young lad come to the surface.

A Forced Choice

Being a Jew, there were certain foods forbidden him lest he defile himself. He was forced to make a choice. If he ate he would violate God's law. If he did not eat he ran the risk of disfavor of his captors with unknown and uncertain consequences. Let us understand the nature of his alternatives. It was not left to Daniel to decide what was right and wrong. God had already decided that, It was not a question of knowledge with him because he knew the law of God. It was simply a question of whether he would obey God or not.

This is much the same decision confronting people today. God has decided and revealed in His Word right and wrong. Many times people know what God has said. They simply must decide whom to serve. In the comfort and security of our situations we may at first think Daniel's decision should have been an easy one. But consider the pressures upon him. He could reason that he was in a strange land and not there by choice. What else could he do except comply with the wishes of his captors? The king's servants had commanded it. Dare he defy them? He had already been told he would risk himself and others if he disobeyed their directions. Furthermore, who would ever know? It seemed that most everyone else was going along with the command. Why should he be different. He could have considered doing this thing just once in order to relieve a difficult situation with intentions to obey God hereafter. All of these excuses and rationalizations could have been suggested by him. These

are the same kind of pressures facing people who consider serving God today.

Sometimes we get the idea that only the young are beset with pressure from their peers and situations. These pressures follow us all the days of our lives. If we do not learn to handle them while young we will likely be subverted by them somewhere down the line.

His Greatness

Daniel's greatness is seen in verse eight. *"But Daniel purposed in his heart he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank..."* Daniel purposed in his heart he would obey God rather than disobey Him. He made up his mind to do right even in difficult conditions. Here is an example of godly manhood and strength. Regardless of what losses may beset him or others, whatever be the consequences to himself or others, with him it was , *"Thy will be done,"* and he was determined not to waver from it. God was first, last and always in Daniel's decisions. How is it with you and me? Do we have this same disposition?

Yes, he counted the cost, not to see if he would obey God, but only to learn what God expected. Whatever the cost, he would obey God.

We are made to wonder where Daniel learned to take such a righteous stand. We are not specifically told. But we know that he could have learned it only from the will of God. Somebody had taught him and that somebody had done a splendid job of it. We know he could not have learned it by being indulged in sin and folly in his earlier days. He would not have so learned being allowed to "do his own thing" and go his own way. Nor could he have learned this stand by following the counsels of this world that teach to conform and get ahead at whatever cost to the truth. The Jews were taught to teach their young and somebody did what they were supposed to have done with Daniel. How we sin against our children to fail to give them the same kind of stalwart and unmovable strength of righteousness.

God Is Mindful

Let us not take lightly the statements of verses nine, seventeen, nineteen and twenty where God promised blessings and provisions to those who obeyed Him. Where do people get the idea that God is not aware of His own and that He fails to provide for them? When people do right, God knows it. When they decide the righteous path, God supports them in it. We see it in the life of Daniel. We see it in the promises of Christ (Matthew 6:33), and we have even seen it in our own lives. When Daniel made the decision first to follow the will of the Lord, then God acted on his behalf. Provisions were made to enable Daniel to remain faithful. But notice, he had to make his decision first. Then came the blessings of God.

Lessons to Learn

There are certain lesson we must draw from this account. It is always right to do right and always wrong to do wrong. It is never right to do wrong and never wrong to do right. Ultimately, we never lose anything of lasting value when we do right and stand up on the side of God's truth. Regardless of what it costs us, we are always more blessed than the losses we suffer.

We learn that God will provide for those who stand up for His way. It is never to our advantage to yield to temptations and pressures to do wrong. Regardless of the consequences, right-doing is better than wrong-doing. In our day of liberalism modernism various "isms" within and without the family of God, the theories of evolution, humanism, immorality, mass confusion, attacks on the Bible, digression in the church, the raging of the heathen on every hand, we must learn to stand. We must develop the same spiritual backbone that Daniel possessed and displayed. God has not promised ease and comfort in service to Him. What He has promised is expressed with the following poem.

God has not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through,
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.
God hath not promised we shall not know

Toil and temptation, trouble and woe.
He hath not told us we shall not bear
Many a burden; many a care.
But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the laborer, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, and undying love.

How wonderful for each of us if we would develop the same noble virtue exhibited by Daniel on this occasion. Would we not be better servants of the God of heaven?

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Men Against Jesus

One of our fondest desires is to know Jesus and understand His work and His religion. We can be assisted in this when we also understand His opponents. You can know a person, a movement or an idea not only by its friends but also by its enemies. We wish to take a look at some who chose to oppose Christ, especially observing why they sought to destroy Him and His teaching. Basically, the same reasons that cause people to oppose Him while he was on earth are the reasons His cause suffers opposition today.

It is truly difficult to understand why there was such hostility and venomous hatred toward Him. Why should anyone who lived such a life of service, love, kindness, good deeds and sympathy toward others incur such savage resistance from anyone? Yet, it began early in his life and grew in intensity with the passing of time and events. Again, we can generally say that His opposition was motivated among those who transgressed what He taught. They can be divided into three major groups; (1) the scribes and Pharisees, (2) the Sadducees, (3) and the priests and elders of the people.

Scribes and Pharisees

Opposition to Jesus that arose early and stayed most persistent came from the scribes and Pharisees. To

understand why we must understand how they considered the Jewish law. To them there were the Ten Commandments, the Pentetauch, and their oral traditions. The first two came from God while the third consisted of man's opinions and doctrines. Yet, traditions were the most important with them. They made it their business to make rules and regulations, declaring them binding on everyone, enforcing them with unrelenting zeal as if such rules were God's laws. They were not beyond violating God's written laws to uphold their human traditions and opinions. One such instance of this was noted by Jesus and recorded in Matthew 15:1-9 regarding washing hands and honoring parents. Not only did they assign certain washings, but they had to be done a certain way. They refused to sustain parents saying their funds were already committed, even though God commanded honoring their parents even to providing for them. They considered healing a man on the Sabbath Day a violation of their traditions, even though the law allowed even relieving animals in distress.

As long as one showed outward conformity to their doctrines, they considered him all right regardless of the condition of the heart. Their faith was one of human legalism, external form, designed for the expert and professional religionist. They looked upon the sinner and publican with contempt and as being untouchable, being a disgrace to have anything whatever to do with them, even to helping them. They were self-righteous, narrowing God's love only to themselves.

Jesus had a head-on collision with these people. He taught God's will was above any and all human laws and opinions. His religion was for the common man; even the poor had the gospel preached to them. He acknowledged the propriety of certain outward piety, but condemned the hypocrisy being exhibited. He stressed internal purity as well as external ritual. He condemned their self-righteousness and urged self-denial. He taught that God loved the Jew, but He also loved all men, even sinners, and desired that all be saved. He did not teach God's approval of all, but He did teach God's love for all. Jesus could not have crossed and contradicted the scribes and Pharisees much more than He did if that conflict had been His primary goal in life.

Sadducees

The Sadducees were the aristocrats, the wealthy, the politically powerful and materially well-to-do people, the "high society" of Jerusalem and Judaism. They were bitter enemies and rivals of the scribes and Pharisees, denying the resurrection and judgment to come, rejecting oral laws as well as written laws. There were written laws they would accept, but only portions of those. Jesus accused them of error because they did not know the Scriptures. *"Ye do err not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God."* (Matthew 22:29). Is this not why many err today?

While the scribes and Pharisees would have little to do with the Roman conquerors, the Sadducees collaborated with them, staying in political and religious power, controlling the seat of the high priest. But, strangely, in Jesus these two groups found a common foe. As much as they hated each other, they hated Jesus more.

Why were they so eager to join with their rivals to destroy Jesus? It is because they misread Him, considering Him a political rival and one who might lead a revolt against Rome. Such a revolt, if successful, would remove their privileged positions, luxuries, wealth, power and material prosperity. So they accused Jesus of being against Ceasar, even though Jesus denied His kingdom was of this world (John 8:36). In fact, Jesus taught that one should pay tribute to Ceasar and obey the laws (Matthew 22:21). While admitting He was to be a king, He was a spiritual king, not a competitor to earthly powers.

But the Pharisees accused Him of blasphemy because He said He was the Son of God, and the Sadducees accused Him of treason. A charge that would arouse prejudice in the minds of Roman authorities.

Jesus also taught against the folly of material wealth and power when compared to spiritual treasures (Matthew 6:19-21). You can imagine how this set with those who placed so much emphasis on such things. Jesus taught not to be anxious about food, drink, clothing, etc. , but rather to seek God's kingdom and righteousness before anything else (Matthew 6:33). This ran against their fondest earthly ambitions.

Priests and Elders

The third group of opponents consisted of the priests and elders of the people. Their opposition came more slowly, being centered around Jerusalem and the temple while much of the work of Jesus was done in the countryside. But in His last days on earth, when He was in the city of Jerusalem, teaching, healing, rebuking, the priests became dominant on the scene in the plotting for His death. Matthew 26:3,4, *"Then assembled together the chief priests and the scribes, and the elders of the people, into the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him."* Matthew 27:1, *"When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death."* They were the ones who conspired with Judas (Mark 14:10). They were behind His arrest in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:47). They hired false witnesses against Him (Matthew 26:59). They urged the mob to call for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27:20).

Why did they do this? The priests had become a very privileged body of people. They lived royally off the people of comparative poverty. They took advantage of their power over the people because they were supposedly between man and God under the Jewish law. They had position, prestige, respect, honor, rank, title and control. They were determined to retain it.

Like the other opponents, especially the scribes and Pharisees, they stressed ritual to the neglect of righteousness. Therefore, they came in for their share of rebukes from our Lord and they resented it.

He Was a Threat

The greatest menace to them was the teaching of Jesus that He would fulfill the old law and accomplish its purposes.This would mean the removal of the law and its replacement with another. It meant there would be a change in the priesthood. In the faith of Christ every person who comes to God through Christ is a priest and needs no man through whom to approach the Father.

Jesus was also a great teacher and had great influence among the people. They were jealous of this displacement of them by a lowly Galilean. They were supposed to be the instructors of men.

The removal of the old law would also mean the termination of animal sacrifices; one of the primary duties of priests. As far as the priests were concerned, opposition to Jesus was a life or death struggle for what they considered themselves to be. Either Jesus had to go or their way would have to go. Their vested interests were at stake.

So all the loveliness, beauty of character and truth of His life counted for nothing among them. The scribes and Pharisees considered Him a threat to their human religions; the Sadducees considered Him a threat to their station in life and their materialism; and the priests and elders considered Him a threat to their lifestyle and continued dominion over the people. Without doubt, Jesus did cut across the blind folly of political and social ambition, and showed the essentiality of His spiritual kingdom soon to come. He did fulfill and remove the old law, accomplishing its purposes and removing the Levitical priesthood forever. This being so, they conspired together, even though enemies one of another, to crush a common foe, declaring Him worthy of death and pursuing that goal to its end.

Defeat or Victory?

The cross may at first seem a victory for those who opposed Him. But actually it was but another magnificent step forward in God's provision for the salvation of all mankind who will receive Him. His enemies ignorantly, although intentionally, called for the sacrifice by which His blood was shed; the very blood by which we can be justified.

Many still oppose Jesus and for much the same basic reasons. How the world is plagued with human religions and traditions, people of price, wealth, power, sporting their opinions and doctrines above the doctrine of Christ! Self-righteousness and external piety still characterize many. But Jesus Christ, having been raised

from the tomb, and now by the right hand of God as King of all, demands obedience to the will of the Father above everything else, in humble submission, denying self, loving truth and purity in both heart and life, seeking His kingdom first.

The enemies of Christ made their choice about Him. We must also decide concerning Him. We are either for Him or against Him (Matthew 12:30). On our decision hangs the success of life and our place of eternal destiny.

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Entry Into Jerusalem

This study must be preceded by the lengthy reading of Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-44 and John 12:12-16. Obviously the reading is too long to be included in our text, but you have them in your Bible. We urge you read them first.

All four biographers of Jesus record what is called His triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. It was a triumph for Jesus and His disciples. It is better understood as a loving appeal to the people of that city to accept Him for who He is, the Son of God, the coming King. It reveals the extent to which Jesus went to bless mankind.

Jesus and His disciples had been touring Palestine. Luke 9:51, "*And it came to pass when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.*" Mark 10:31, "*And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them; and they were amazed, and as they followed they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him.*" Jesus had traveled this way many times under different circumstances. This was to be His last journey. The road to Jerusalem was not an easy one for the Lord to take. No man looks forward to the agony of death on the cross. He had told His disciples, Mark 10:33,34, "*Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered up to the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, and they shall mock him, and*

shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him; and the third day he shall rise again." It was a lonesome walk even though His disciples were with Him. It was in many ways a road that He had to travel alone for none could make the journey for Him. He compelled Himself to go to Jerusalem.

What Was Before Him?

What awaited Him there? There would soon be the encounter regarding the fig tree, the second cleansing of the temple, the last observance of the Passover, His discussion with His disciples, His prayer in the garden, Judas' betrayal, His humiliation before mock trials and hostile tribunals. Eventually, the death on the cross was to follow. But after this, in three days, His resurrection. He was going toward the culmination of His work on earth; marching straight into the hands of His enemies. There was already a price on His head. The eyes of authorities marked His every move and condemned Him as a criminal. He was arrested at the first convenient moment. The people, knowing these things, even wondered if He would come to the Passover at all (John 11:56,57).

Jesus could not have chosen a time when Jerusalem had more crowds and intense religious feelings than this time. Jews in Palestine, even the world over, thronged to keep the Passover. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, suggests possibly three million people were in the city. The Passover was one of the most sacred and best observed Jewish celebrations. Jesus could not have chosen a time with greater opportunity to accentuate His message, but neither would there be a time when there would be more opposition.

The crowded conditions, the religious intensity, only emphasize the deliberate manner of His entry. It was a planned action rather than something done on impulse. He had told His disciples what He intended to do. He had them assist Him by securing an ass upon which He could ride. Zechariah had prophesied the event nearly five hundred years earlier (Zechariah 9:9).

His Courage

The deliberate way of His entry reveals it as an act of supreme courage, which is a mark of Christ, and should be the mark of all who profess to follow Him. Sometimes courage may be born of impulse, born under the pressure of a sudden emergency, when there is no time to think the matter through or weigh the consequences. Action is sometimes almost an instinctive impulse. Such courage is admirable.

But there is a higher courage and that is the courage of one who has considered his actions and sees clearly the dangers and personal consequences. It is the courage of having counted the cost and finding it awesome but he deliberately pursues the right course of duty nonetheless. This is the type of courage manifested by Jesus here. This courage makes us love Him and respect Him all the more. He knew His duty and the dangers, yet, deliberately went to Jerusalem. What strong love motivated His journey!

Why?

Why did He do it? Sometimes we learn why things are done because it is explicitly stated. Other times we learn by the way some action is used. His reasons are not explicitly stated, but notice how He used this event.

Jesus used a method of action at Jerusalem which was often used by Old Testament prophets. It was a dramatic, symbolic action that presented the message. Men might fail to listen, but they were less likely to fail to see. Ahijah foretold to Jeroboam that ten tribes would revolt against Rehoboam by taking a garment and renting it into twelve pieces, giving ten to Jeroboam. This was impressive of the message he delivered.

Jeremiah walked about Jerusalem years earlier with a yoke on his neck forewarning Judah of the slavery that was to come if they did not repent. This dramatic and symbolic action was commonplace in the preaching by Ezekiel. Jerusalem's entry was a presentation of the Lord's message by a meaningful and unmistakable attention getting deed. His purpose was to teach the message that it

might enter the heart through both the eye and ear, even though the ear had so often been dull of hearing and the eye blinded by prejudice.

His Message

What was the message He conveyed? It was the same message He had been preaching over three years. He claimed to be the promised King, the successor to David's throne, the coming King of God's everlasting kingdom. Such a role had been announced at His birth (Luke 1:31-33). He had acknowledged this before Pilate (John 18:33-37). The entry into Jerusalem symbolized and emphasized this message.

In the eastern and oriental world the ass was a noble beast, the beast upon which kings rode when they came in peace. It was the horse that was ridden by warriors. When David proclaimed Solomon to be the king after him he had Solomon placed upon an ass and taken through the streets as he was acclaimed king. Jesus was appealing to Jerusalem to make Him a throne in their hearts and acknowledge Him as God's Son, the promised King to come, the King of a spiritual kingdom, universal and everlasting. Here was one more dramatic appeal in a long line of loving appeals Jesus had made that He might be accepted and give salvation to others. He said in essence, "Will you, O Jerusalem, accept me for the One I said I am?"

Reactions Toward Him

Luke says the disciples cried, *"Hosanna, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."* The Pharisees insisted Jesus stop His disciples from saying this. But Jesus answered, Luke 19:40, *"I tell you, that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."* What was shouted was truth. Whether others accepted that truth or not, it did not alter the truth in any way.

For the most part, the people rejected Him, causing Him to later say, Matthew 23:37, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her*

wings, and ye would not!" What a pity for those people! What an opportunity they had! But their rejection was their loss and neither did it prevent the kingdom from coming. It did exclude them, if they remained of that frame of mind, from entering therein.

His assertion of divine royalty, His action of supreme courage, His offer of love and salvation is remarkable. Was it all for naught? For those who reject Him it amounts to their condemnation. They doom themselves to an eternal hell. But for those who receive Him as He is, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Son of God and Savior of the world, it was a great manifestation of His love. It provides additional evidence upon which we base our faith in Him. Its very revelation is a demonstration of Deity's concern for the spiritual welfare of mankind. We stand in awe and marvel at the gracious, loving and noble action of Christ that He took on behalf of us all.

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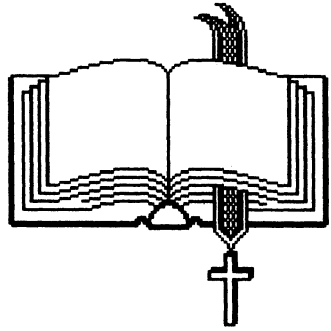

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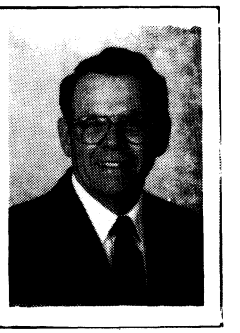

JAMES W. BOYD

As is true with all material things, some of my equipment finally went out and stayed out. This is what happened to the typesetting machine that I have been using for years. Of course, it was old and much used when I acquired it, so I cannot complain about the use I got from it for many issues. But it is a difficult thing to replace such equipment because of the expense.

I have decided to go with a computer arrangment and a desk writer. Thanks to one of the good preacher brethren in our area, Tony Lawrence of the Bybee Branch congregation who is quite informed and capable with this type of equipment, I hope to be able to have enough information to operate it before too long.

* * * * *

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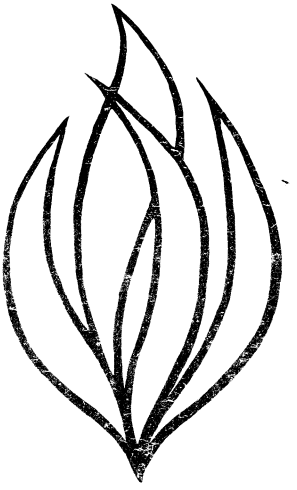

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 3**

Testing Discipleship

Number One

Acts 11:26, "*And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*" We wear the name Christian in honor of Christ. First Peter 4:16, "*Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.*" But before that God-given name was assigned to the people of God they were called disciples, not as a name but to show a relationship. The name Christian was not given until both Jews and Gentiles were being added to the church. Even after the name was given they were known as the disciples of Jesus.

Who is a disciple? A disciple is one who believes in the doctrine, discipline, teaching of his teacher. He is a follower, a learner, an imitator, one who serves as servant to his master. All kinds of men have disciples, both good and evil. False teachers have their disciples. But a disciple of Jesus Christ is one who learns of and lives in the way of Jesus Christ.

True Discipleship

What are the marks of true discipleship? Let us consider the words of Jesus, Matthew 10:24," *The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.*" Therefore, from the position of authority Jesus has announced the standards and tests of true discipleship. One may pride himself or herself by professing to be His disciple. But whether we are acceptable to Him or not depends on how we measure according to what He has declared as tests of discipleship.

Luke 14:26,27,33, " *If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot*

be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple... So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

There are three major points we must recognize. Here is a test that is absolute, definite and inflexible. Unless a person "*hates*" certain ones, takes up his cross, and forsakes all else, he cannot be the Lord's disciple. Three times these verses include the phrase, "*cannot be my disciple.*" Whatever is involved is essential to discipleship.

Hatred and Loyalty

This is not the suggestion of hatred in the sense of animosity and hostility included here. Hatred of people is contrary to all that Jesus did and taught. It is a test of loyalty that is under consideration. The meaning is that one must love all else less than he loves the Lord. No relationship, however near or dear, can mean more than loyalty to Christ and His will. There must be a complete surrender to Him. This demands total commitment to Christ in the Biblical sense. Where this kind of loyalty exists in the heart there will be no shirking of duty, no partaking of the sinful ways of the world, a divorce from materialism, even no stain of deliberate absenteeism from periods of assembly for worship. Rather there will be prayer, Bible study, good works, purity of life, liberality, wholesome attitudes manifested in righteous living. So often the faith of Christ has been blighted before the world by those who profess to be His disciples but hold back and serve Him with reservations, making exceptions to His will where they see fit.

Cross-bearing

We must understand the distinction between cross-bearing and enduring the burdens and hardships of life that are common to mankind. Sometimes when people have suffered tragedies and losses of one sort of another they are heard to say that this is their cross to bear. This attitude of resignation and determination to face hardships is commendable, but this is not the kind of cross-bearing the Lord means here. This cross-bearing can be avoided if

one so chooses. One must willfully and deliberately decide to take up this cross. He will not be forced or compelled, like Simon of Cyrene, to bear His cross. This must be done voluntarily.

This cross-bearing involves self-denial, self-sacrifice, surrender of will, admission of sins, forsaking sin, even restitution where possible. Cross-bearing demands making the cross of Christ the gateway to a new and different life, accepting the standards and authority of Christ as the guide of life for daily living. It is a choice and acceptance of all the consequences that may follow because one decides for Christ.

Cross-bearing is illustrated by the event in the life of Christ where He was asked by the rich young ruler how to have eternal life (Luke 18:18-24), where it became evident that the ruler was not willing to bear the cross. It is illustrated in Matthew 8:19-22 where Jesus insisted proper priorities be established and followed in life. There comes a time of decision when we stand at a crossroads and can either go the way of God or the way of gold. We must choose Christ. We pursue sacrifice, service and surrender or we seek men, money and materials. We must decide who shall be first in our lives. It must either be the strait gate or the wide gate; the narrow way or the broad way; life or destruction.

To make the wrong choice, or to refuse to voluntarily choose the Lord's way above everything else is to disqualify ourselves from being His disciple. Luke 9:23, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."*

Obedience

A second test of discipleship is that of continued obedience. John 8:31,32, *"As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."* Discipleship implies beginning your walk with Christ but there also must be faithfulness in that walk. It begins with faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ. We have several accounts of such conversion in Acts chapters two, eight, nine, sixteen, eighteen and

twenty-two. Discipleship begins with submission to the will of Christ, but His will must continue to be respected and obeyed. This explains why every epistle written to Christians includes admonition to faithfulness, stedfastness, alertness against falling away. The situation where one does fall is described in unsavory terms in Second Peter 2:20-22.

John 6:59-69 records where people who had begun to walk with Jesus listening and learning. Yet, having begun, later hearing teaching that offended them, they turned and walked with Him no more. They ceased to be His disciples.

Sometimes people hesitate becoming a Christian for fear they "can't hold out." There is no justified excuse for not becoming a Christian. Fear of what might be in the future is not an acceptable excuse for refusing to come to the Son of God. We would be deceptive to suggest there is no need to count the cost and enter into Christ with determination to remain loyal. But there is nothing to justify coming to Him to give Him a "trial run," anymore than refusing to come because you fear you may not be faithful. A race never begun is never won.

After one surrenders to Christ he learns more and more of His will for life. If he will continue to obey in **being** a Christian as he was in **becoming** a Christian he will not rebel against Him nor leave Him. Being willing to start is essential, but not to be confused with the necessity of being willing to continue. We are His disciples **if** we continue in His Word.

Love Demands Obedience

John 15:9,10, "*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*" As children of God Christians are blessed because God loves His children. We are taught to continue in that love. Never will God cease to love us, but shall we ever cease to love God? Some have done this. Shall we? We are taught to follow the example of Jesus in this matter as in all else. Jesus did abide in the Father's love by keeping the Father's commandments. We

shall abide in the Father's love and the love of His Son as we continue to keep His commandments.

First John 2:3,4, "*And hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*" This second test of discipleship involves making a decision as much as does the first test. Just as we must willingly decide to put Him first, forsake all else, bear the cross of discipleship, we must decide in spite of being confronted, confounded and confused with temptations of Satan to grow with Him or go from Him. True discipleship means continuing in obedience, doing what is needful to grow spiritually. The only alternative to spiritual growth is spiritual decay.

Let each one examine himself or herself for true discipleship: (1) Will we deny self, put everything and everyone else after Him, take up our crosses and bear whatever consequences may come because of our deliberate decision to follow Him? (2) Will we continue in His Word in faithfulness to the end? Two other tests shall be discussed in the next lesson.

* * * * *

We may try and fail, but we are sure to fail when we do not try.

* * * * *

Testing Discipleship

Number Two

Acts 11:26, "*And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*" In the first lesson discipleship was defined as one who believes and follows in the doctrine of his master, a follower and learner, an imitator and servant. A disciple of Jesus Christ is one who has learned of Christ and lives in the way of Christ. The marks of true

discipleship are the subjects of these two lessons. Jesus gave at least four tests whereby we can know true discipleship that He approves. We have already mentioned how one must place loyalty to Christ above everything and everyone else. He must also bear his cross with a deliberate and willful choice to walk with Christ. We also mentioned the necessity of not only becoming a Christian but being what we have become. There must be continued obedience to His Word.

John 13:34,35, "*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*"

Please note that discipleship is conditional. If certain conditions exist then we are His disciples. If this condition does not prevail, how can we rightfully claim true discipleship just the same? Therefore, here is another way we can sever our relationship with Christ if we choose, or another way we can prove the genuineness of our discipleship if we choose.

Love Each Other

No people on earth have greater reason for brotherly love than Christians. We have the same spiritual Father; belong to the same spiritual family, have been bought by the same blood of the Son of God, have the same hope, and are blessed with the same spiritual blessings of forgiveness and fellowship with Deity. We fight the same battles for truth, have the same enemies, and seek the same heaven. Furthermore, no people on earth could have a greater need for brotherly love than Christians. Being of the same body, when one suffers, all suffer (First Corinthians 12:26). When one has cause to rejoice, we all have cause to rejoice. When the devil ensnares even one, a painful affliction is heaped upon us all. When the devil is resisted by even one, all are strengthened as a result. With the foes of the faith of Christ leaving no stone unturned to inflict harm against all who profess Christ, even as they militantly, aggressively, massively, savagely and deceptively attack to destroy, we need brotherly love among us. Love is the result of unity and unity is the result of love for each other and love for the truth of Christ.

Brotherly love craves to bless, help, restore, heal and enrich each other. Love for God, brethren and truth furnished the basis for our communion and fellowship with each other without which such things cannot exist nor survive.

The lack and void of brotherly love spells a defective discipleship. Where there is envy, strife, backbiting, undermining, jealousy and division there is obviously the lack of brotherly love. Where there is rebellion against the revealed truth of God, the sowing of discord with false doctrines, the undercurrents of dissension, there is evidence of the lack of brotherly love. When we speak of brotherly love, as some are very prolific in doing, we must ask if our actions are the actions of brothers in a common cause that accompany our pious words. It has been our unfortunate experience that some who cry the loudest for what they say is "brotherly love" have been the most cutting, vicious, subverting and even lying people we have met on earth. They show little to no respect even for the truth of God when presented to them.

Fellowship Broken

Jesus made allowances for circumstances where fellowship of brethren is disrupted by persistent and willful offenders. He has taught us how to deal with such people. Consider such passages as Romans 16:17; Second Thessalonians 3:6; First Corinthians 5 and the matter of fornication; Galatians 1:6-9; and in personal confrontations, Matthew 18:15-17. At the same time we first seek restoration of the ruptured ties between brethren (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19,20). Even when the most severe actions have to be executed, brotherly love is neither forgotten nor cast aside. Those who offend are sought, being talked to rather than just talked about. Second and third efforts at recovery are made. But there comes a time when faithful brethren, in order to retrieve the soul that is in sin, must show a brother's love for both the erring soul and the faithful brethren as well as the truth of God enough to withhold fellowship until repentance is evident. Even then, brotherly love is not dismissed even though fellowship is dissolved. We do not show love as God would have us show love to leave the impression that sin and

error are condoned and sinners can continue in sin with the acceptance of other brethren.

Brotherly love is sowing seeds of peace by conformity to truth. This truth is to find lodging in honest and good hearts. Brotherly love will cause one to reject being a part of rumbling and grumbling over matters of opinion. Brotherly love builds by working for harmony and cooperation among brethren with the standard of truth being the platform and foundation upon which the brotherly ties are built and maintained.

Just as the star on the chest of the sheriff shows him to be sheriff, and his uniform announces to all he is what he claims to be, so brotherly love is the Christian's badge and uniform that he is a true disciple of Christ.

Fruit Bearing

The fourth test we mention is the fruit bearing test. John 15:8, "*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*" The very life of the Christian is to bring glory to God. Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" How can mere man bring glory to the glorious Deity? This is done as he partakes of the ways of Deity and displays his allegiance by the kind of life that he lives.

The faith or religion of Christ is the most usable and practical faith humans can follow. When God made man he was mindful of man both inwardly and outwardly. The faith of Christ is relevant and applicable to man both inwardly and outwardly. The Lord taught purity of heart, pronouncing blessings on those of a pure heart. He urged that one's treasure is where his heart is. We are taught to set our affections on things above. Matthew 15:18 also teaches, "*But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.*" Cultivating and possessing the right kind of heart is most important in being a disciple of Christ.

The matter of fruit bearing deals with the outward man, the visible manifestations of a righteous inner man. While men have no right nor power to properly judge the

heart of another (God does), we are to be, as one said, "fruit testers." Observing fruit that is borne is not to be confused with sinfully judging another. The Lord said not to judge having reference to judgment that is prohibited, obviously. But the Lord also commissioned judging righteous judgment (John 7:24). So we can know He does not condemn all judging. He also taught, *"By their fruits ye shall know them."* (Matthew 12:33; Luke 6:43,43; 7:20). In the parable of the sower that which produced good fruit was good ground. If it did not produce fruit you could know it was not good ground. Jesus also denounced the fig tree for its failure to produce at all. Disciples who do not bear good fruit are not good disciples. John the Baptist told the Pharisees and Sadducees, *"Bring forth therefore fruit meet for repentance."* Matthew 3:8.

Good Fruit

What is the fruit of true discipleship? It is a changed life from the life of sin (Romans 6:2). It means one walks as Christ walked (First John 2:6). The thief steals no more. The immoral lives morally. The hater loves and the worldly abandon the ways of the world. The drunkard ceases his drinking. The adulterer comes out of adulterous relationships. No more does one work the works of the flesh but bears the fruit of the spirit of Galatians 5:22,23.

Also involved in fruit bearing is the reaching for and winning lost souls to salvation. The faith of Christ is more than just a creed and code of ethics although such is included. It is a crusade for righteousness and the salvation of the lost and precious souls. To have been redeemed obligates the disciples to address himself or herself to the supreme work of winning others to the Redeemer. That discipleship requires the ceaseless efforts to convert others. It demands service to others, being solicitous for the spiritual welfare of others, fervent and forceful in producing fruit of more souls and reaping the harvest for the Lord. The empty-handed and unproductive Christian is like that branch that is cut away because it bears no fruit (John 15:2).

How then can we determine the validity and genuineness of our discipleship? This is done by measuring ourselves by the standards of discipleship that Christ, the Master, has

assigned. We must forsake all others, place Him first in our lives, bear our cross for His sake, continue in obedience to His Word, love one another fervently, and bear the good fruit to God's glory. *"Then shall all men know that ye are my disciples."*

* * * * *

Christian Liberty

Christians need to know the truth. They also need to be aware of charges made against the truth. One of the charges often heard is that preachers, teachers and members of the church are not allowed enough freedom. The church has become too restrictive, some say. Consistently, those who forsake the church speak of their "new-found freedom" in their new religious affiliations. They say they enjoy a free fellowship and free church.

The love of freedom runs deep in the hearts of people over the world and particularly in our nation. But what is our liberty in Christ? How is it defined? Like everything else about the faith of Christ we must learn this from Scripture.

Freedom and Liberty

Hear the words of Christ on the subject of freedom. *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). Obviously, there is no freedom of the kind of which Christ speaks without truth. Jesus defined truth. *"Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17). Whatever freedom in Christ involves and allows must be determined by the Word of God.

John 8:36, *"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."* Freedom is ours because of Christ. There is no freedom apart from Christ. First Corinthians 7:22, *"For he that is called in the Lord being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant."* A Christian is called by the gospel and is identified as the Lord's freeman.

Galatians 4:26,31, *"But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all... So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."* These passages speak of the church and its freedom. Galatians 5:1, *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."* This freedom in Christ is worth holding. It is evident that there is a Christian freedom.

Romans 8:21 tells of the *"glorious liberty of the children of God."* Second Corinthians 3:17 says, *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."* James 1:25 speaks of the *"perfect law of liberty."* The freedom under consideration cannot be separated from Christ, the church, faithfulness, the Spirit and the law of Christ.

The greatness of liberty in Christ is made even greater when we realize that Christians were not always free but once in bondage. Romans 8:21 mentions the *"bondage of corruption."* Romans 6:17 says that *"ye were the servants of sin."* John 8:34 teaches, *"Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin."* Romans 3:23 shows how this applies to all because, *"all have sinned."* Therefore, all responsible and accountable people were once in the bondage of sin. But Christians are now free from that bondage. Let us proceed.

Free From What?

This raises the question, "From what are Christians free?" Romans 6:16,17; 7:6; 8:2,3 all teach we are free from the law of sin and death. First Thessalonians 1:10 teaches we are free from wrath. Second Peter 1:20 teaches we are free from hopelessness and estrangement from God (verse 19). Romans 8:1 teaches we are free from condemnation. Galatians 2:3-5 informs us we are free from the laws that men would bind which God has not bound.

When we realize that such things which held us in bondage are the things from which we are delivered, we rejoice in the freedom in Christ. But what some have failed to grasp is that freedom in Christ has its limitations and responsibilities. We are not free from everything. We hear "scholars" speak of academic freedom as if they have the right to teach anything whatever they choose without responsibility to anybody. Freedom is so often interpreted

to men, "do my own thing, say whatever I will, regardless of the consequences to self or others." Some think they have the right to believe, teach and practice whatever pleases them and satisfies their consciences and God will accept it and everybody else should also. But such abuse of the idea of freedom has promoted all kinds of immoralities, disobedience and rebellion against authority, divine and human. Some think freedom of speech means you can say anything you wish anytime you wish and anywhere you wish. "We are free from all law," some religious leaders have dared to proclaim.

Romans 6:1,2, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*" Some, impressed with greatness of God's grace and the need of this grace have concluded that they have permission to sin because this would expand the grace of God as it covers sin. But freedom from sin did not include freedom to sin.

First Corinthians 8: 8,9, "*But meat commendeth us not to God, for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.*" We are not bound by human opinions in matters of indifference. But neither are we to think we are free from the way we influence others. Christians are never free to think what they do is nobody's business. There may even be things that, of themselves, are permissible, neither right nor wrong, that we cannot and do not do if they cause another to lose his or her soul.

Not "Do Your Own Thing"

Christian freedom is not doing whatever you wish, saying whatever you like, teaching and practicing whatever you think and want. It is limited. We are always in servitude, either to Satan or to God. We are never totally free in every respect. When we leave the servitude of Satan we enter the service to God. Such is the theme of Matthew 11:28-30 and Romans 6:16-18.

Those who often abuse freedom, misunderstand it, criticize what they call the "power structure" of the church, are liberal in their philosophies and doctrines. This kind of

language is the same used by elements of our society who seek to overthrow the order of authority in every realm. Much of the political, social, civil and religious unrest pours from the liberalism so many have adopted and their abuses of freedom.

Seat of Power and Authority

The church is charged by some of being too authoritarian as if there is no authority at all. Authoritarianism is said to violate one's freedom. That there can be abuses of authority, none would deny. But shall we conclude that abuses of authority renders all authority null and void? Shall we conclude that abuses of freedom means there is no freedom in anything? Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines authoritarianism as advocating the principle of obedience to authority as opposed to individual liberty. Inasmuch as there is a limit to the freedom of the individual by the authority of Christ, there is in a true sense authoritarianism to be exercised in the church. All that we do is to be done in his name, which means by His authority()Colossians 3:17). All authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 28:19). There will be punishment to those who obey not (Second Thessalonians 1:7,8). Paul told Titus, *"These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority."* (Titus 2:15). Even though the charge of authoritarianism is meant to deride the church, if a church is the Lord's church there must be recognition of authority. Herein has the Protestant world protested against God in the overthrow of His authority. Herein is the sinister and destructive power of liberalism.

There is a "power structure" in the church, although not always the sinister kind some charge. Jesus is King. We are subjected to His Word. Elderships do have authority to oversee the church. Some resent all authority and prefer what they call freedom. But such freedom is not true freedom. It is rebellion. To preserve true freedom there must be respect for authority, and authority must be respectable. When either is absent, trouble prevails.

Is Freedom Suppressed?

I have been preaching many years and yet not heard heard faithful brethren suppressing thought, inquiry and

investigation. At the same time I have heard faithful brethren insist that matters be settled according to divine authority. Those who want to "do their thing" inject false doctrines, bind opinions, introduce denominational imitations and innovations, set aside the necessity of authority for what is said and done, and then charge the brethren with suppression if challenged.

One former preacher praised a certain church because he was now allowed to speak on any subject anyway he wanted and nobody would challenge him. (We wonder if the freedom to challenge what somebody does not accept has been suppressed.) To prevent and refuse to the liberals the right to sow their seeds of division, discord, heresy and apostasy provokes them to wail, "Denial of freedom." The real trouble is they are in rebellion against *"thus saith the Lord."* What is condemned is license to sin and that is called deprivation of freedom. You can rest assured that if you challenge a liberal's contentions you will be subjected to vicious abuse and nobody will attempt to restrict your freedom faster than a challenged liberal.

If the time comes in any church when that church ceases to discipline its membership and require submission to the Word of God, that church becomes no more worthy to be called "of Christ." When people rebel against the teaching of the Bible and relegate only to themselves the right of freedom, misusing the genuine and true freedom in Christ as taught in Scripture, they no longer are servants of God but have turned like the dog to his own vomit again and the washed sow to the mire. When the mouths of gainsayers are stopped, how they cry, "No freedom." Such people are adequately described in Second Peter 2:17-19.

When we realize how bad sin is and know freedom from sin in Christ, and that we are delivered from the old law, and understand that we are free to walk in the way of Christ, we will have grasped what freedom in Christ really is. Christ will return and deliver His kingdom to the Father as Moses delivered Israel into Canaan. Then we shall know our eternal spiritual freedom that is ours through Jesus Christ.

* * * * *

Love's Memorial

By the fifth day of the last week in the life of Jesus before His death time was running short. There was still much to be done and little time in which to do it. It was the Passover season, the most celebrated of all the Jewish holydays. Jerusalem was extremely crowded with Jews from all over the world who had come for the Passover. Jesus spent most of His days in the city and would retire in the evenings to a little community nearby named Bethany.

Mark 14:12-17, "*And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover? And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, where is the guestchamber where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. And his disciples went forth and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. And in the evening he cometh with the twelve.*"

From this record we learn that Jesus, a Jew, faithfully kept the Passover, living as He did under the Mosaic Law. The events that were soon to occur were planned and intended. The entire procedure had been determined from the start.

The disciples could locate the proper place from a man carrying water. This was an unusual sight in Jerusalem because women were usually the ones that did that task. When evening fell we find Jesus with His chosen twelve alone and together in the upper room, away from the throng, ready to attend to this sacred observance, and to engage in other spiritual events that are more meaningful than His disciples could realize at the moment.

What Was The Situation?

The atmosphere of the gathering was not as one might at first have expected. You might think all would be calm and quiet and the situation characterized by peace and relaxation among close and intimate friends. But not so! It was tension shrouded with mystery and the air of impending disaster, as if they expected the unexpected. This was because Christ had already foretold the events that would follow (Matthew 20:18,19). They were now in the very city where such things were to occur. The somber mood of Jesus on their journey added to the mystery of the environment. For Jesus, it was a trying hour, especially since He not only knew what faced Him but because He also knew the attitude and actions that His disciples would take. These things added to His distress.

What was the situation regarding the twelve? There was strife among them over who would be the greatest after His departure. Even in the shadow of the cross, the disciples seemed to exhibit more concern for their personal ambitions, having jealousy one toward the other, than a concern for the coming grief and pain of Christ. In order to teach the vanity of such pride and impress the lesson of humility, Jesus washed His disciples feet, teaching service rather than the desire of personal greatness.

Later He would be betrayed by one of His chosen company, even one who had come to the Passover Supper with Him. Peter, also, in spite of boasts to the contrary and doubtless boasts that were uttered with good intentions, would deny that he even knew Christ, not once, but thrice. The situation in the upper room was unique because of the distressing heaviness on the Lord and the failure of the disciples to grasp the seriousness of these events.

The Bread and Cup

Into this array of circumstances we read of a deliberate and far-reaching action taken by Jesus. Matthew 26:26-30, *"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the*

remission of sin. But I say unto you, I will not drink it henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Paul wrote of this event in First Corinthians 11:23-26, "*For I have received of the Lord that which I also have delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come."*

Love's Memorial

These verses record the institution of the Lord's Supper. It was a simply action, taking bread, blessing it or giving thanks for it (Luke 22:16-20), giving it to the apostles, and following a similar routine with the fruit of the vine. The ingredients were unleavened bread (which was the kind of bread used at the Passover Supper), and fruit of the vine (there being no evidence that it was fermented wine.) These ingredients did not become and never were the literal body and blood of Jesus. Even after His prayer of thanks their substance changed not. It was still called bread and the fruit of the vine. But this was a symbolic action by Jesus and these ingredients represented His body and blood. It was to be partaken in memory of Him.

To further affirm that it was a memorial that He was establishing twice Paul said that Jesus said, "*This do in remembrance of me.*" The Lord's Supper commemorates Christ and what He had come to do on the behalf of mankind in delivering mankind from sin.

While the Lord's Supper was instituted at the observance of the last Passover Supper, the two are not to be confused, even though there are certain similarities. The Passover was to serve in remembrance of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 12). That feast would keep alive in the memory of the Israelites what God did for them. It stood as a silent witness of liberation through the blood of the Passover lamb that had been sprinkled about their doors.

Proclaims Christ

Jesus set Himself forth as the sacrifice for sin. First, Corinthians 5:7 says Christ is our passover. John 1:19, John preached, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*" Christ is the means of salvation, liberation and redemption. Without Him there would be no freedom from the wages of sin. His death brought reconciliation between man and God (Ephesians 2:16), and this simple but meaningful memorial acknowledge Him and what He did.

First Corinthians 11:26 says it is to "*show*" or proclaim the Lord's death. Here is an announcement and official proclamation. What is hereby proclaimed? Primarily it proclaims Christ and all things pertaining to Him, with emphasis on His death. That it was to be observed until He comes again implies His resurrection and ultimate return. The Lord's Supper sends forth the publication of these things from His birth in Bethlehem to His return some day.

When a Christian partakes of the Lord's Supper he does so in memory of Christ and all about Him. He proclaims his faith in Christ as Savior, as God's sin-offering, as reigning King and coming Lord.

A Reminder

Finally, the Lord's Supper is a reminder of the reality of sin and of God's love for man to save him from sin (John 3:16). The Lord's Supper recalls to the mind our enslavement to the destructive power of sin. It is the sinfulness of mankind that made the cross necessary. The very sacrifice the Lord's Supper commemorates was for us. Behind the suffering of His sacrifice was the hopelessness of sinful humanity, doomed to an eternal hell. God recognized this and provided for man through Christ. Romans 5:6-9, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we*

shall be saved from wrath through him.' The Lord's Supper is truly a memorial to the love of God.

* * * * *

Blending of Wills

Toward the end of the Colossian letter Paul included several personal greetings to his fellow servants. Among them was chapter four, verse twelve. "*Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*"

One of the ways to describe and explain the existence of the evil, the wrong and the conflicts in this world is that there is a clash of wills. Neighbors are against neighbors; husbands against wives, children against parents, and in all such instances it is simply one will against another. This same type of clash extends beyond personal, conflicts to international clashes between nations. In the final analysis, the evil, the trouble and sin in this world reduces to a clash between the will of people against the will of God. Since Eden this battle between man's will and God's will has been raging. It is a war of wills; the created against the Creator.

God's Will and Our Will

We need to understand two very significant matters concerning the will of God as it relates to man. It is God's will that we have a will of our own. God created man for His own purposes and the primary purpose for the existence of man is to glorify God and do the Father's will. But God created man a free moral being, having the power of choice and volition, with the ability to make his own decisions, having the power to choose what to believe and what to reject, to whom or what to be loyal and what to oppose. This extends even to man's capacity to decide whether he will serve God or rebel against God. God has created man with this power and He will not subvert it.

We are not mere robots playing out some programmed existence without anything to say about it. We are not machines wound up to run a certain course over which we have no power. We are rather intelligent and morally responsible spirits. While God desires fellowship with us and has provided the means for this fellowship to be attained and maintained in spite of man's sins, God does not force this fellowship upon man against man's will. Not only does God offer man this fellowship, but man must willingly and deliberately choose and seek this fellowship.

We must also recognize that it is the will of God that people live peaceably with each other and at peace with Him. The Lord opposed the havoc and strife so evident in the world. The enmity, conflict, war and tensions one against the other is not what God has designed for man. This comes because of man's choices. It is a battle of the will of one against the other and the will of mankind against the will of Almighty God who created man a free agent.

Way of Peace

The way to peace between people is for people to first have peace with God. As one grows closer and closer to God, and another grows closer and closer to God, it is inescapable that they will grow closer and closer to each other. It is in Christ that the prophecies of old are fulfilled where men beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. In Christ the middle wall of partition is broken down and enmity is abolished between people and peace established.

Therefore, in order for the ravages of sin to cease, in order for peace to reign and conflict, strife and evil to be checked and overcome, there must be an end to the battle of wills. Instead of a battle of wills there must be a blending of wills. There must by the mixture of the will of man with the will of God so the lines of demarcation between them cannot be distinguished. While man must continue to have his own powers of choice and exercise his own will, he can do this only within the limits and according to the precepts of the divine and revealed will of God.

Is it possible to blend man's will with the will of God? Evidently God thinks so because His revelation is to that

end. Is it easy to accomplish? Nobody has ever suggested it is easily done. Can we expect perfection in this blending? No, not to the extent that man will reach sinless perfection.But there can be a blend in the sense of completeness, maturity and approval of God by forgiveness of man's sins. The will of God for mankind is within man's reach.

How Is It Done?

How can this blending be accomplished? When we speak of mixing the two wills we do not want to imply man gives a little and God gives a little and through negotiation and compromise the two will can come together. Nothing could be further from the truth. The will of God is perfect. It is man that must change and conform his will into the likeness of the will of God. God's will is perfect in every respect. Man's will is imperfect. The creature is not above the Creator just as the servant is not above his lord. The perfect does not bend to accommodate the imperfect, but man must come to God. This means the imperfections of man must be erased and this is accomplished by the system of salvation from sin that God has designed and delivered through Christ.

There are two very important factors that must exist in blending man's will to God's will. There is also one peril we must recognize and against which we must guard.

Know God's Will

To blend my will to God's will I must first understand His will. Colossians 1:9, "*For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.*" Ephesians 5:17, "*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*" The fact that we are expected to understand God's will is evidence sufficient to know that it is possible to understand it. But to have understanding we first must have knowledge.

That mankind might know His will, God sent Jesus Christ to this world that through Him His will might be revealed. God speaks to man through His Son (Hebrews

1:1,2) the message men must know (John 1:17) because it is that will by which we are sanctified (Hebrews 10:10). Jesus revealed that will through teaching and living. Acts 1:1, *"...all that Jesus began both to do and teach."* John 4:34, *"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."* He sought not His own will but that of the Father (John 5:30). What He made known was that which He had heard of the Father (John 15:15).

The only source from which we gain knowledge of the will of the Father is the Word of God. God revealed that will through the apostles as they were guided by the Spirit (Ephesians 3:3-5). That revelation is now recorded in the inspired, inerrant, infallible authoritative and all-sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,16). Can anyone doubt, in the light of these points, the value of Biblical knowledge and the necessity of Biblical study? Without study there is no knowledge, no understanding, no blending of will, no peace with others or God, but only the onslaught of sin, conflict, strife and evil. Ignorance explains much of the sin in the world. Hosea 4:6, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."*

Do God's Will

We must not only know and understand His will but we must do that will. Matthew 7:21, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* Jesus illustrated the wisdom of doing with His teaching about two builders, the wise and the foolish, the one building on the foundation of rock and the other on sand. The one who builds on rock is like the one who hears and does God's saying. James 1:22, *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only."* It is possible to know and understand God's will and never do it. Undertaking God's will demands a commitment in every realm of life. Whatever we do must be by His authority (Colossians 3:17). It requires non-conformity to the world, but transformation of the mind (Romans 12:1,2). It insists that we do the will of God from the heart (Ephesians 6:5,6). This includes abstaining from evil (First Thessalonians 5:22). Reception of the promises of God is conditioned upon man doing God's will Hebrews 10:36, *"For ye have need of patience,*

that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."

Everything in life is to be governed by the question, "What would the Lord have me to do?" Our emotions, the manner of earning a livelihood, our speech, recreation, homes, marriages, care for the body, mind and spirit, every situation and circumstance must be guided by the will of the Lord. Without understanding and undertaking God's will we cannot blend our will to His and the loss is ours to suffer.

There is a grave peril against which we must guard and avoid at all costs. We dare not attempt to undercut God's will in favor of our own. When we do what God wants only because it satisfies our own will we are really serving self, not God. The world too often tries to make God fit man as man is, even in sin. Many act as if the Lord ought get up-to-date. To them God should see how things are and bend His will to suit us and accommodate our trespasses. This is so often the approach being used by man. It is the opposite of the attitude of Christ when He prayed, *"Not my will but thine be done."*

Whose Will Is First?

We may believe many things and do many things, but find ourselves pulling and tugging at God, trying to push Him into our mold. Many try to make Him conform to their standards while searching for loopholes in their favor to get around doing what He has commanded. Some brethren have even come up with the false doctrine of "essential and important commands versus non-essential and unimportant commands." Who is any man to declare anything God has said to be non-essential and unimportant and push it aside to accommodate mankind in sin? Such an effort is not only false, but futile and will destroy those who teach it and adopt it.

The only approach to the will of God is like that expressed by young Samuel in Second Samuel 3:9, *"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."* We must be like ancient and early Israel who declared, *"All that the Lord hath spoken we will do."* Job said in Job 13"15, *"Though he slay me, yet will I*

serve him." In the words of First John 2:17, *"He that doeth the will of God abideth forever."*

Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way,

Thou art the potter, I am the clay;

Mold me and make me after thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still.

* * * * *

Give Me Your Attention, Please!

Surely, no reasonable person who claims to be a child of God would want to advance the cause of digression and apostasy among churches of Christ.

Yet, this is being done by many. Not only are there spokesmen who are advocating false doctrines more in the imitation of denomination than after the revealed doctrine of Christ. But not only those who names are prominent are undercutting the cause of Christ.

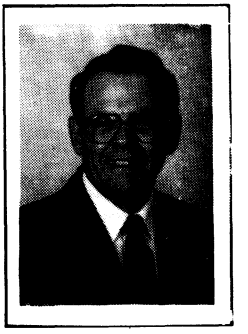
Those who "go along" with error and refuse to stand against it are doing their part to destroy the church.

Too many times we hear and see people who talk as if they really want to see truth prevail among us. They will even bemoan the advances of liberalism and other forms of digression.

But on the other hand they will support false teachers, use their literature, attend their big events, advertise the activities that feature the prominent promoters of digression, and then piously act that everyone ought consider them sound and solid.

Such inconsistency is unacceptable to any honest mind. Brethren ought take note of such double-takers and unstable sort and realize that such "go alongism" is eating the heart out of the faithful efforts of the church.

Learning a New System



JAMES W. BOYD

Those who have had experience with learning how to use computers will appreciate what I have been trying to do in recent days. The ads in newspapers and on television about the simplicity of operations is a bit oversold in my opinion. I see more and more the wisdom of the cartoon I have seen in a number of offices, "To err is human, but if you really want to foul it up, use a computer." But everyone keeps encouraging me that time and practice will prevail. I sure hope they are correct.

I have good instruction and feel confident that if others can do it then I can eventually do it a little bit. I already have proven that I can produce the type for a booklet and this issue is tangible evidence. Surely, progress awaits.

* * * * *

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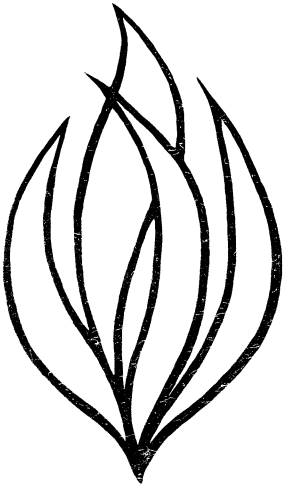

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 4**

Jesus Brings Good News About God

The distinguishing characteristic about the teaching of Christ is that He brought good news that is called the gospel. His is a message of salvation for mankind who was otherwise hopeless and helpless, doomed and damned. But He also brought us teaching that revealed good news about God. He told us and showed us things about God that had not been known or properly understood previously. His revelation was often in stark contrast to the misconceptions the Jews and pagans had regarding Deity.

The Jews had a long history of contact with the true and living God. Yet, their knowledge of Him was inadequate, incomplete and often they had a distorted concept of Him. One dominant consideration of God that they held that was very correct is that God is holy. Repeatedly in the Old Testament we read of God as the Holy One. *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts."* (Isaiah 6:3).

What is Holiness?

For someone or something to be holy means that there is a distinctiveness about it. To be holy is like being sanctified, set apart, separate from others. There is a uniqueness that places that thing or being in a special position. Such is the nature of God. In relation to mankind God is on a different scale, in a different sphere, separate from mankind because of His righteousness and absolute perfection in every quality.

The concept of the holiness of God influences the way the Jews thought of God. They considered Him almost unapproachable because of the vast difference between themselves and God. It was considered to even be dangerous to approach God. God had once said to Moses, *"You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."* (Exodus 33:20).

When Israel was encamped at Sinai they trembled in the presence of God. No man nor beast was to even approach the mountain when the presence of God was there lest they die. In their worship and in offering sacrifices only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place to offer the blood of atonement. Others were not permitted into the presence of the Lord the same way. It was deemed a fearful matter to come before God.

The power, as well as the righteousness of God, was emphatically impressed on the Jewish mind. Exclusive service and worship belonged to Him. There was to be no other God. God was so majestic, powerful and awesome that it was thought impossible to comprehend Him. It is true that it is impossible for man to fully understand Deity, but the Jews seemed to think it reproachful for man to even make the attempt to understand Deity. Therefore, there was little effort to be close to God or even understand what could be understood about Him.

His holiness was so absolute that it terrified the sinner. The fierce wrath of God against evil was repeatedly manifested before them. God's power to destroy sin was evident. This struck terror in their hearts at times.

All of this amounted to a reverence and respect for God that was profound among the Jews. The scribes, when copying the law, took special precautions and observations regarding the writing of His name. This reverence was not unwarranted, but should continue to exist among all people to a greater extent than we observe it today. But there was a side of God that the Jews failed to grasp.

Pagan Gods

As for the pagan and heathen world that worshipped gods of their own creation and invention, they had a different attitude toward their deities. Generally speaking, they considered their gods to actually be enemies and totally hostile toward man, completely detached from the affairs of man and indifferent to the welfare of man. Man was more a victim of the gods and they were to be feared and pacified lest the gods turn loose their anger against them at the slightest provocation. When all was going well they

considered the gods to be pleased. But when hardship came upon them they felt the gods were displeased and something had to be done to pacify them, even though they were not quite sure what should be done.

Their gods were thought to have no concern for man, but all the gods were interested only in their own pleasure. They never walked among men but lived in a trouble-free serenity, unless something provoked them. The gods were considered heartless, without pity, uncaring, not even aware of man's existence, or if aware, they took pleasure in making man's lot in life difficult and painful. Some people today still have this twisted and wrested view of the true and living God is heaven.

It was into this realm of thinking that Jesus came with revelation about God, good news about God, that mankind had not heretofore known and understood. He contradicted the heathen concepts of deity. While He did not contradict the Jewish view of God regarding the reverence and respect that is due God, and He taught that man should respect the holiness, majesty and power of God, He shed additional light about God that gives us a greater insight into the nature of our Creator and Judge.

God Can Be Known

Jesus taught that God can be known by man. God has revealed Himself to man. Christ came to reveal God to man. John 14:8,9, "*Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath see the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?*" It is not that Jesus and the Father are the same Divine Being, but that Jesus revealed the nature of the Father. Therefore, mankind could not just know about God, but could know Him with a personal relationship as a companion, friend, comforter, guide, as well as Lord and King. God is not a God who hides Himself from man in total mystery, but to the extent mankind is capable of grasping the nature of Deity, God reveals Himself, even sending His Son to earth to show Himself through His Son, and allow mankind to know His nature. God can be known, closely and warmly.

Rather than God being detached from man and unconcerned about him, God is very much involved in human affairs. Acts 17:27, *"He is not far from every one of us."* His concern for man is seen in His promise of providence, the way He has worked out the means of salvation for man, as One who cares for us, who hears and answers our prayers, showing us through His Word the right and best way to conduct life. He even sends rain on the just and unjust. He has not just wound up the earth like a clock and turned it loose, but is aware what takes place, overrules in His own manner, and watches over us day and night. How different from the pagan view of God!

God is Unselfish

Unlike either Jewish thinking or pagan thinking, Jesus shows us that God is One who does what He does, not for His own benefit alone as men perceive it, not simply to seek His own glory and pleasure, but He is a most unselfish God. God gives. He gave life. He gave His Son. He gives salvation. He gives every good and perfect gift. Every revelation, command, restriction and instruction is for man's benefit and good. The God Jesus taught is the God of genuine love, seeking the good of others. True love is selfless. While all of this abounds to God's glory, and He is worthy of it, His work was on behalf of His creatures and is characterized by the giving of Himself for man's glorification.

He Forgives

In sharp contrast to the gods who desired to punish and make life difficult for man, God is a forgiving God. True, God is just and will punish the evildoer. But He offers to forgive man when man will meet His conditions. He called men to repentance, not willing that any should perish (Second Peter 3:9). There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7).

God sent Jesus into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world (John 3:17). Even as God hates sin, He loves the sinner. The reason He hates sin is because sin destroys those He loves. Sin prevents the salvation of God's creatures. Because of His love for mankind He has provided the way of salvation. If anyone is destroyed it

will be because they have not come the way of salvation God has provided and not because God finds pleasure in inflicting man.

God Can Be Approached

Possibly more startling to both Jew and pagan was the teaching of Jesus that God not only is approachable, but God desires man to approach Him. God has initiated the way of approach, inviting man to come to Him and even seeking man to be reconciled to Him. Some of the greatest words spoken by the Christ were the words of invitation to come to Him in Matthew 11:28-30. Again, in Revelation 22:17, it is evident that Deity and those who belong to Deity invite all to come. James 4:8, *"Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you."* Men formerly thought God should not be approached, and to do so was to invite death. But Jesus taught that coming to God did not mean death, but life. As the parables revealed how the woman sought the lost coin, and the shepherd sought the lost sheep, so God seeks the lost person that He might save him and be united with Him. Such a concept of God had not previously been understood by either Jew or pagan.

The Love of God

Jesus also revealed a newness about the width and breadth, the narrowness and precision of God's love. God loves all mankind and His love is this broad. He loves each individual. His love is this precise. God is not a tribal or national God, but the God of the universe. He is the God of all. He not only loves every tribe, nation, and all the world, but every individual personally that is in the world. God's concern is for the individual. This stems from the dignity of each person who is created in God's spiritual image. One has commented, "God loves each of us as if there was only one person to love." There is no way for anyone to be "lost in the crowd" when it comes to the concern God has for him or her.

He is Father

Finally, Jesus presented God in a way never presented before His teaching, at least as completely. God had been looked upon as Father, but there is more than one meaning

to being a father. In one sense, God is the Father of us all because He created the first parents from whom we all have come. But the fatherhood of God carries the concept of love, fellowship, a day-to-day relationship, as one who nourishes the child in body, mind and spirit, equipping him daily for life. Jesus showed God as our Father like this.

He is not the spiritual Father of all, but only those who belong to Christ. Hence, the necessity of being *"in Christ."* He cannot be the Father of the obedient and disobedient in the same way. The Christian is the one who can call God, "Father," and is a son or daughter of God (Romans 8:14; Second Corinthians 6:17,18).

Jesus was very discreet in calling God, *"Father."* He used the term with utmost reverence, considering the term sacred and with immeasurable respect. But He also used the term, *"Abba, Father."* (Mark 14:36). *"Abba"* means Father, but in a more intimate, warm and close sense, as a child might address his loving parent that could not be used by other children. Translators have found no completely adequate synonym to convey the full nearness and loving closeness associated with the word, *"Abba."* Paul used the term twice (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6) to embrace the warmth as well as the reverent in the concept the Christian has of God. Nobody used this term regarding God before Jesus used it.

Seeing the harsh, cold, aloof and dreadful way that deity was comprehended before Jesus came, cannot we see how His revelation of God is good news? God is not "out there, somewhere," unapproachable, heartless, uncaring, unknowable. While He remains holy, powerful, majestic, unselfish, forgiving, demanding and just, He is actually seeking the fellowship with man, concerned for man, for each person, as a loving Father, desiring for man to be near Him that He might bestow His riches upon him as His child. God reveals Himself through Christ who is our only approach to Him (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). Come to God and allow Him to be what He desires to be for and with you by obeying the gospel of Christ!

* * * * *

Voices of Concern

Our title is also the title of a book published several years ago that attacked churches of Christ. These attacks were written by men who once were members of the church, but for reason best known to themselves and God, they were caught up in the upheaval of rebellion against the church and turned to rend that which they once believed, being engulfed by liberalistic and modernist thought.

There is no reason for the Lord's church to be totally immune from criticism since the church is composed of people. People are not perfect and there is always room for growth, improvement and correction. But to denounce the divine side of the church because of the frailties of members is quite another matter. The bulk of criticism in the book is aimed at the faith of Christ.

Who?

Who are these accusers? They are former members, preachers, teachers, missionaries, and some who were reared in Christian homes and attend "our" schools, but who pursued their theological degrees in the seminaries (cemeteries) of liberal schools. They are generally people who have been very impressed with what they call intellectualism and the arbitrarily determined academic accomplishments. Often they are people who have swung like pendulums from one extreme to another, all the way fro anti-Coca-Cola to pro-liquor, from the doctrine that the church cannot help anybody except its members to the philosophy that the church is to provide everything from recreation, entertainment and all the desires of life.

What?

What are they saying? They frequently misrepresent over and over with cynicism, assuming what they need to prove. They justly criticize inconsistencies of members, the difference between words and deeds, Sunday-morning

Christianity, hand-me-down religion, and inexcusable hypocrisy. **But what faithful gospel preacher has not done this?** Let the half-hearted and hypocritical church member know that he provides fuel for the fires of the church's enemies by his worldly life. The lukewarm and insincere church member is the best weapon Satan has in his arsenal against the truth.

Their line is predominantly liberal theology, patterned after the denominational line. They speak of the church as a segment of Christianity rather than the true church. Doctrinal differences should make no difference, according to them, but open membership to all who "believe." Unity-in-diversity, which is agreeing to disagree, is their theme. They wail they are not "free" in churches of Christ to do what they want because the church is "unconcerned" about social problems. They even teach the insufficiency of the Word and all religious truth, to them, is not in the Bible. They rebel against what they call "the power structure." They accuse the church of spiritual immaturity because we fear to have "our pet doctrines" investigated. The church is only a band of "Bible worshippers," according to their criticism, and proponents of what they call legalism. They are against conformity to any law, placing great emphasis on psychology, philosophy and what they call "scholarship."

Why?

Why do they make such charges? What are their motives? Let God judge their motives. We shall judge their fruits. They may be concerned but they are obviously not concerned about following the teaching of the Bible, not concerned about the church revealed in the New Testament, and not concerned for brethren in spite of pious claims to the contrary. They are concerned about restructuring the church to make it acceptable to the denominational world, wishing to promote liberalism, and are willing to tear the church apart from its Biblical paths.

Let us add here that liberals in every field are working toward the same general goal whether it be political, economic, religious or whatever. They want to promote change for the sake of change and uproot standards that are upheld by God-fearing and Bible-believing people.

While they say they deplore efforts to deny the Lord, they lend their support to the same people and movements that work to that intended and announced end. They have adopted a position that contends if you can't bear them, join them. To overcome social ills they have abandoned the only solutions there are. They offer no alternatives but only tear down.

Whatever be their concern, their vicious attacks concern me because some will believe them. Young people will be led astray by them, especially those who attend classes in "our" schools. The Biblically ignorant are prime targets for their errors. It shows how weakly the doctrine of Christ has been preached over the past years by many and have cultivated the church to be vulnerable to such influence.

The book, VOICES OF CONCERN, was published a few years ago and it hit the brotherhood with an impact that shocked some. Some never believed anybody could ever be as vicious as they were in their attacks and naively thought nobody would listen. But this teaching that has been done in our schools in the training of preachers has been done so thoroughly that many pulpits and pews were ripened to receive their heresy, and the fires of apostasy now roar almost out of control. This diabolical digression has been sweeping over the church with torrential power. The Ketcherside Movement, the new doctrines of Rubel Shelly, the classroom teaching in the schools, the literature from the publishing houses, the mouthings of "clergymen" from the churches (especially those near the schools, in metropolitan areas, and with large numbers and finances) have jumped on the bandwagon of "church bashing." So many elderships are weak, timid, misinformed, gullible, ignorant of truth that they no longer (if they ever did) insist on sound doctrine. Many of the membership demand preaching that soothes rather than saves, and the digression that those who chose to shut their eyes and thought could never happened has so swept the church, schools and papers that in many localities where there once was a church of Christ there is no nothing more than a Church of Christ denomination. Churches, schools, papers and people once respected for upholding truth will now not even allow truth to be preached. Preachers once desired because of their firm and strong stand for Biblical truth are slandered, ridiculed and victimized by the

"loving and irenic" apostates. Programs once introduced to proclaim truth have become puny, compromising and ecumenical and are now destructive weapons against the church and truth.

Churches of Christ?

So many churches no longer deserve the identification as a church of Christ. They have departed from the faith and followed the modern Baals of our time. Just plain honesty has been displaced by a pragmatic (whatever works and gets crowds) philosophy and message.

In the Schools

Doubtless there have been some good men who have taught truth in the schools. But many have failed to teach truth and even those who say they stand for the truth will not, have not, and are not likely to expose the error now accepted, tolerated and promoted by nearly every school among us of which I have knowledge, and I have made a point to find out. The schools have been, are, and will likely continue to be the more sinister source of digression among churches of Christ. While this is "heresy" to some to criticize their beloved schools, these same people have little criticism for those of the schools who propagate heresy against the truth of God. Possibly for the sake of what they call "academic freedom and standing, desiring to hold on to jobs, they have chosen the path of "wisdom" to go along as if everything was harmonious with the Biblical truth. Unsuspecting parents have shed bitter tears over the corruption of the faith of their young at the very schools where they sent their children because they thought the schools would assist the home in grounding them further in the faith. But in fact the schools have undermined their confidence in the truth and uprooted Biblically-based convictions in favor of the liberals trends and digression.

The schools are not the only source from which these insidious apostasies have come, but it is a denial of truth to contend that they have not ben and still are a major factor and dominant source of it. The use and tolerance of false teachers on the faculties have been the undoing of the credibility of the schools regarding Biblical teaching. They may well produce excellent secular and academic

work, but as far as teaching the Bible and training preachers, they have become servants of the devil. I advise any parent who sends his or her child to one of the so-called "Christian schools" operated by "our brethren" to warn their children not to believe what they are taught because it is as likely to be heresy as truth. The unsuspecting young can and will be led astray. What the young preachers coming through the schools are doing and preaching today is evidence enough to convince any honest mind what I am saying is true. How many times have we wrestled with school-trained preachers even about fundamental points. They were either not taught the truth or were taught error on many matters. They have told me where they learned what they now believe and they got it while attending "our schools." They come out of thee places with a greater loyalty to change, some man, their school, than the truth. They have been infected with error and they go to pulpits overseen by men who are called elders who have lost interest in truth and are more concerned with peace, numbers, fame and finances. They stand before filled pews of Biblically untaught and worldly-minded members and pour out their nothings to the satisfaction of their flock.

We Are Concerned

Those who love truth have good reason to be concerned about such things as the unity-in-diversity movements, the denominational imitations, the subtle undercutting against the inspiration of the Bible, false doctrine on marriage, divorce and remarriage, evolution, dancing, drinking, immorality, grace only and no law doctrines, various cultish "isms" and the list goes on and on.

The day is already overdue for people who are truly serious about staying with the truth to rise up and contend for the faith against these children of darkness who pose as angels of light. **It is past time for those who say they love truth to continue throwing sops of support and encouragement to the very ones tearing the church apart with their heresy.** If we fail the oncoming generation and the Lord to stand for the truth we shall contribute to their condemnation, and our own.

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How Bad Is Sin?

First John 3:4, "*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*" This refers to transgression of God's law, either by word, dead, thought or neglect. Preachers have longed for the ability to adequately convey the enormity of the power of sin. They have searched for words, figures of speech and illustrations that could impress minds and present sin as it really is. So often the pleasures of sin blind people from seeing how bad sin is. The frequency of sin has seared consciences and made people less sensitive to it.

The only gauge we have with which to measure the enormity and hideousness of sin is the punishment that God has decreed against it. Bear in mind, God is infinite in mercy, love and compassion. So when we find punishment that God enacts against sin, the better also we are to understand just how evil sin really is.

Hardship Aplenty

Some have questioned whether there is any punishment for sin in this world or the world to come. One thing is certain. Even the world is weighted with the vast burden of woe, pain, misery and death. How do you explain it? Life is strewn with tears. The earth is dotted with graves. Hearts are anguished and grief and distress abounds. Do you know why? The Bible teaches this is due to sin. Romans 5:12, "*For if by one man's offense death reigned by one...*" There is no other explanation for the ills that characterize this world except they are the results of sin that was introduced into the world by the sin of Adam and Eve. While nobody is guilty of the sins of their ancestors, there are many consequences of the sins of others that all must suffer and endure because they are in this world. While there is hardship and woe due to other's sins and our own sins, we are most concerned if there be punishment for sin in the future world. What does the

Bible teach about this? None have passed over to return to tell us his experiences. Our information cannot be experimental, but can only be ours by what God has revealed. What has God revealed about punishment in the next world? We pursue our investigation by asking several relevant and important questions.

Punishment After Death

Is there such a thing as any punishment after death? Luke 12:4,5, *"And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that they have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him."* There are those who can inflict harm in this life, but not beyond this life. But there is something God can do to a person after death that is called casting into hell. That is worse than physical death and comes after physical death. There are other passages that teach the same thing but this answers our question and we move on. Yes, there is such a thing as punishment after physical death.

When does this suffering begin? Luke 16:19-31 shows there is not only punishment after physical death as we have already determined, but the punishment we now consider begins as soon as we die. The rich man was in torment, in hell (hades, which is the unseen and intermediate state of the dead between physical death and the resurrection). This was not his place of eternal punishment, gehenna, hell. But again we have our answer. Punishment begins at the point of physical death.

Is there to be a final judgment for each one" Hebrews 9:27 assures that after death there is a judgment to come. Acts 17:31 assures us that God will judge us through Christ. Second Corinthians 5:10 makes this point as clear as language can teach it. Matthew 12:41,42 shows the resurrection and the judgment. John 5:26-29 teaches that all shall be raised and judged. Only by denying the Scriptures can one conclude there will be no judgment. When Christ comes the judgment will take place (Matthew 25:31-33). All shall be before Him. Revelation 20:11,12 makes this certain.

Will there be any punishment of sin after the judgment? We know there is punishment prior to the judgment for some. Notice again the scene of Matthew 25 and specifically read verses thirty-four and forty-one. *"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* The reality of the devil's hell is assured.

Points on Punishment

What will that punishment be like? How can we describe it? How long will it last? It will be eternal and without end. There will be no hope of its termination or ever leaving it. There will be no relief. How long will heaven last? The same word is used to tell how long punishment will last as how long heaven will last (Everlasting or eternal, Matthew 25:46). Even though this is beyond our comprehension, is not the extent of hell defined for us sufficiently to know that we want to avoid it all all costs?

While there are no words that can adequately describe the joys of heaven, so it is with the inadequacy of words to describe the horrors of hell. Many have conjured up the most awful scenes they can imagine in their attempts to describe it. But such is speculative and of little use. We will be content to let Scripture speak.

There will be pain, weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30_. There will be no rest (Revelation 10_20). It will be a place of unquenchable fire (Mark 9:48). It is torment (Revelation 14:11) where *"the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."* It is a place of darkness (Matthew 25:30), indicating it is removed from the Father of light. It is a place where there is consciousness and awareness of one's fate and where he can remember his misspent life and recall the wasted opportunities to be saved (Luke 16:19-31), which was even true of the torment before the judgment.

If you are horrified at the thought of such a place, you should be. Hell is real and the Bible affirms its reality as much as anything else in Scripture. We cannot grasp the

full impact of such a place where there is nothing of God, but only the devil. But God has warned us of it to enable is to avoid it.

Possibly we can understand better how bad sin is with this information. If sin is so bad that a God of love, compassion, mercy and grace is compelled by His holiness to punish the sinner, can their be any doubt what our attitude toward sin must be? Cannot we see why we must *"abstain from all appearance of evil,"* learning to *"abhor that which is evil?"* (First Thessalonians 5:22 and Romans 12:9).

Hell Can Be Avoided

But why should we live and die in sin and be punished? Why should anyone be content to face judgment unforgiven? Why consent to such an eternal existence in hell? Why not escape that? God has provided the way of salvation. Why should we not diligently pursue that way? There is peace with God and freedom from sin. There is the path of reward that we can follow. The saving blood of Christ has been shed and we are invited to be washed clean by it.

I am sure that faithful gospel preachers earnestly desire the power to convince mankind and let all see what sin is and just how powerful and destructive it is. If we would see it then there would not be any sinners who would by-pass the opportunity to lay hold on salvation. Rather they would hasten to obey. All we can say is to show you God's gauge that when one dies in sin he goes to torment and eventually into hell. But being in Christ means that all will be well with ours souls.

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Does it ever occur to many of us that the Lord is serious about our need to worship Him faithfully? We should not trifle with the need to be present every Lord's Day in assembling with the saints!

People Not At Home

The Bible tells about people away from home and that God recognizes many are not at home. He even knows why it happens that they are not at home as well as their condition and state while away from home. We read of what God has done for people away from home and how He has made provision for people to return home again.

Home means different things for different people. With most home is a sweet and precious word that brings forth thoughts that we love to ponder. If the home is as it ought to be it is a desirable place and relationship of peace and happiness, joy and security, where one is accepted and pretense is neither wanted nor expected.

Home is more than a house, an address where there is furniture. Home is where there is love, caring and mutual interest, a company of loved ones and familiar surroundings. Many beautiful poems, songs and stories have been written about home. When one is away from a good home he misses it. Most people love home wherever it is and what it is. "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." One might move away, but he enjoys returning to what he calls home. He enjoys visiting but is always glad to get back home. Why is it that home means so much to so many?

God Gave the Home

God designed the home, gave it to mankind. Like the church, the home is of divine origin and is the oldest of God's divine institutions. The home exists for the benefit of mankind and God planned that through the home many of man's needs, blessings, training and guidance would come. The first home was the Garden of Eden, the home of

Adam and Eve. When we trace the home, we ultimately go back there and to God who gave it.

Adam and Eve found themselves away from home because of sin. They had disobeyed the voice of the Lord and gave no heed to the warning God gave them. They were separated from the tree of life and driven from the garden, their Paradise home, and not allowed to return. This is what sin does to people. It deprives them of great blessings that God had rather bestow upon them. But sin drives them from happiness, security and the providence of God.

Abraham Left Home

In Genesis we read about Abraham being away from home. We find him wandering in Canaan and Egypt. No land was there he could call his own. He even had to buy ground from strangers for a place to bury his dead. He lived in the heathen land of Ur of Chaldees but now was away from there, but for a very different reason than was Adam and Eve away from home. He left Ur because God told him to leave and go to another land. He obediently left. Sometimes people find their love for home will cause them to disobey God. Here we see a man away from home because of his love for God, assuming duties God has given him. This is often true of preachers who must make changes of residence and separate themselves from loved ones and places they have known in order to do the work of spreading the gospel. When Paul was on his missionary tours he was away from home.

Those who leave home to do the Father's will make sacrifices. They leave friends, family and familiar circumstances. It is difficult if not impossible for those who stay home to understand the impact of such things on life. But there are rewards also that tend to offset many sacrifices. God has always blessed those who are away from home because of their love for Him and call of duty.

Joseph Sent From Home

We find Joseph away from home because his brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt. Later he served in Potiphar's house, but was sent to prison. Later still he had risen to great heights of authority. Sometimes people are away from

home due to circumstances beyond their control. They are not there by first choice. Many have experienced this kind of thing even as they served their country.

Even so, Joseph allowed the Lord to use him while he was away. The Lord made provision for the preservation of Jacob's people, the nation through which would come the Messiah. Transfer of jobs, getting education, sickness, many things necessitate people leaving home. They can still allow God to use them profitable for good. Faithful Christians have always taken the gospel with them when they left home. Many churches have been established over the world by brethren taken from home because of wars. The early church was scattered by persecution but preached the gospel wherever they went.

Israel Not At Home

After Israel divided we find Judah in Babylonian captivity for seventy years because they had rebelled against God, disobeyed His will, turned to idols, lived wickedly and ignored His promises and warnings. If they had served Him they were promised prosperity and warned of the loss of home should they fall. Because of a hardness of heart and stubbornness of will they were taken away. People cannot expect the blessings of God and home when they throw themselves against the very truth and power that provides those blessings. Some complain that God has not blessed them more than He has. Probably they are blessed already more than is deserved. But they never serve God, yet, expect Him to pour out blessings upon them anyway.

The Prodigal

In Luke fifteen we see a young man feeding swine and eating the food that the swine did eat. This lad was in the last place you might expect to fin him. He was away from home in a foreign land, in need and want because he had spent all his living in wicked living and wasted his talents. He was now in poverty, friendless, a long way from home. His home was a place where he was loved and people cared for him, where he could work, and be happy.

He had not been driven from home but was away because he wanted to indulge himself and live life his own way.

He thought himself wise enough to cope with the world and cast off the ways of his father's house. He went into the world of temptation with selfishness, sensuality, shortsightedness and lacking wisdom sufficient for good judgment and soon lost all he had in sin and rioting.

But this particular story has a happy ending because he went back home and was received by a loving and forgiving father. The message of this story is the way God longs for His people who have strayed to return to Him again. The wayward Christian is lost and away from the Father, but he can return if only he would. The Lord above longs for just such a return.

Jesus Left Heaven

For about thirty-three and one half years our Lord was away from His heavenly home. Having existed with the Father and Spirit, He took on the form of man for a third of a century, being born in Bethlehem, reared in Nazareth, traveling to Jerusalem, Jordan, Galilee, found in the temple, by the seaside, on the roadway, in homes, teaching, preaching, healing and eventually being nailed to the cross and placed in the tomb, always away from home.

This world was not His home, nor is it the ultimate home of His disciples. After His resurrection He returned home and there will remain until He comes to take His disciples home with Him forever. This world is but a place of sojourn for pilgrims and life is "*a time of sojourning.*" (First Peter 1:17). While we are here we are really away from home (Second Corinthians 5:6). We are now but strangers and pilgrims on our way home (First Peter 2:11).

The Bible tells of many people not at home. It is a divine record of God's way for mankind to live this life of sojourning as he makes his way home. Knowing that this world is not home for the Christian, God leads and guides by His Word the path to follow. "We must needs go home by the way of the cross; There's no other way but this." Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the only way (John 14:6).

A missionary couple returned from their field of labor after many years and was disappointed that nobody met them at the dock. Many others had come on the same boat

and were met. Some were dignitaries, prominent people, and others just plain folk. But as the preacher studied the situation and was hurt his wife cheered him by saying, "We are not home yet."

There will be a joyous welcome for the redeemed when all of God's singers get home. *"Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." (Galatians 6:9).*

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Building on the Bible

The last part of the twentieth century has experienced world revolution. Despite periods of relative peace, the world has been on the edge of a volcano that has often erupted. There seems to be no immunity from destruction. Governments are overthrown, cultures shattered, sacred traditions cast aside, the world is full of noise, confusion and chaos. Possibly the world has always been this way, but our age has surely seen its share. What people thought was nailed down has been pulled up. With mass murders, bazaar behavior, gang violence, lawlessness, our era has been explosive. Such is evident in the doubt, fear, skepticism and godlessness of people. One has described our age with the single word, "nervous."

This is strength, seeing people have more knowledge, education and scientific progress that we are told holds the cure for everything. But have such things produced the utopia promised? Obviously, it has not. They cannot.

We Live Now

Into this explosive age we have been called by the gospel to serve Christ. We may wish we lived some other period when things may have seemed more secure. But we live in the present, this century. What can we do? To what do we anchor ourselves to prevent being tossed about with every wind? Do we allow ourselves to simply drift along by

uncharted and uncontrolled currents of degradation? Shall we bow to misdirections of revolution, even against God?

Our answer is a firm, "NO!" There is a reliable guide and a foundation upon which can take our stand and not be moved so we can live confidently with the assurances that such a way is right and eternally lasting. Jesus said, Luke 6:47-49, "*Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man which built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.*"

Build on the Rock

We build the house of our lives on solid rock when we hear and do the will of God. In the Bible we have the firm foundation we need because we have the truth of God, truth about ourselves, life and eternity. One dominant characteristic of Christ was His dogmatic and unwavering endorsement of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God. He often criticized human traditions, vain religions, even aged institutions, cherished beliefs and misinterpretations of Scripture, but never did He belittle, side aside or contradict Scripture. Would we all would be so wise!

There are those who do not hold this view of Scripture as did Christ. Those who follow Him are told our faith is in a dead book rather than a living Lord, and that we have such a zeal for the Bible that we are guilty of "bibliolatry," have a paper pope and such like. Some claim that sooner or later we shall see the Bible is full of errors, cracks, flaws, historically and scientifically, and when we do we shall lose our faith. If the Bible were shown to be such we would have no basis for our faith or source of authority. The Savior and Scripture stand or fall together because all we know of the Savior is revealed in Scripture. The reason some have lost faith in Christ is because they have been convinced the Bible is false. People always leave the Christ of the Bible when they leave the Bible. They adopt some kind of Christ of their own making, but not the true Christ.

But in spite of the reckless, vicious, radical and slanderous efforts of the enemies of Christ, not one jot or tittle of Scripture has fallen.

The Bible is not God

No intelligent Bible believer is guilty of making the Bible an idol. While He treats the Word of God with respect, gratitude and submission, it is not because the Bible is an idol, but because He respects God and accepts the Bible as the Word of God. Victor records once advertised with a dog listening to the phonograph, and the slogan was, "His Master's Voice." So it is with the believer and the Bible. The Bible reveals His Master's voice.

The reason our tottering, trembling and shaking world is on the brink of universal disaster is because people have rejected the Word of God. That Word always has been relevant to the needs of mankind. The tragedy of our day is that the Word has been buried beneath the rubbish of this world. The light has been smothered under the refuse of sin. Even more tragic, the Word has been in many cases buried even among those who say they serve the Lord. This is as amazing and absurd as what happened in Judah as recorded in Second Kings 22 with the finding of the law.

While repairing the temple the book of the law of God was discovered. The Word had fallen into such disrespect and disuse that it was lost. The result was the failure to know and learn. Sacred vessel were used in idol worship. priests were consecrating themselves to the service of Baal. Cult prostitutes plied their trade in the temple itself. Sons and daughters were burned as sacrifice to false gods. Heathen temples were erected. Every desecration imaginable had become a reality, all because the people had lost the Word of God.

As its loss brought degradation, finding it, learning and applying it brought restoration. Idols were torn down, altars to Baal destroyed, vile worship ceased. Josiah, the king, was horrified at the wickedness, neglect and departure from the truth and did all in his power to institute a reform. He engaged in the cast task of teaching the people the Word of God. Second Kings 23:1,2, "*And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah*

and of Jerusalem, and the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people both small and great, and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord." It was needful for all the people great and small, leaders and followers, to know all the Words of the Lord. So it is today!

A Lost Book to Many Today

If God's chosen people, dwelling in the promised land, could and did lose His Word, right in the temple, surely we know it can be lost in a world of rebellion against God. It has been lost as far as most of the religious world is concerned. While we do not yet read of prostitutes operating out of church buildings, we hear so-called ministers talking about the "new morality" contending for "gay" churches where homosexuality is acceptable. The moral standards of Christ no longer are useful to them. Non-Christian teachers have been invited to use facilities of churches that call themselves Christian. There even be atheists who claim to be Christians. This is like claiming up is down, right is wrong, yes is no. There even be so-called Christian who claim God is not so narrow to insist that all men approach Him through Christ, in spite of John 14:6, Acts 4:12. They deny the inspiration, sufficiency and infallibility of Scripture and anything in Scripture they do not like they ignore. The emphasis on the material and human wisdom to the neglect of revelation from God is dominant among many, which shows how far removed from truth the world has gone.

Such an attitude in the hearts of men is one avenue Satan uses to attack truth. Some rise up in indignation at this and say, "Not so!" Some challenge and reject the contentions of skeptics. But the ignorance of the Word of God is just an effective way to show disrespect for it as Judah's losing it or skeptics attacking it. Sometimes a direct attack on the Bible provokes a defense of it. Ignorance on the part of those who claim to believe it only surrenders the truth without even giving the devil a fight.

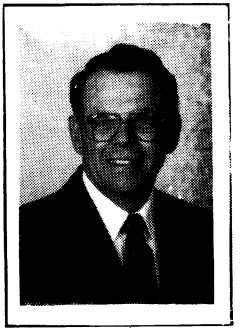
Hosea 4:6, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*" You cannot please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6) and you cannot have faith without the Word (Romans 10:17). You cannot know the message of truth without study (Second Timothy 2:15). If one wishes to usher in anarchy, godlessness and violence upon his head and those of oncoming generations, if he wishes to crown Satan as king, and turn the world over to heathenism, bringing terror, persecution and destruction to believers, and invite the sacrifice of life and the abandonment of eternal bliss for friends, children and self, just remove the only barrier now holding back the flood of chaos. Just refuse to know and live the teaching of God. Just fail to build your life on the Bible. Just let the craze for change and something new, sensational and exciting replace the two thousand year old tried and true gospel of Christ. You do not have to become a monster, murderer, raise riots, indulge in immorality. Just fail to build your house upon the rock. Let the petty, trivial, temporal, worldly things mean more to you that standing for the truth in a sin-stained and sin-ruined world. Allow the world to crowd out worship, Bible study, godly living. By this you will make a significant contribution to the forces of evil.

But a person or a church that knows the Bible will not digress if it truly believes it. But if not taught and know not the Bible, it can be carried anywhere and everywhere by most anybody at anytime. On what are you building your life and staking your eternity? We plead with one and all to build on the Bible, the authoritative, inspired, inerrant, infallible and all-sufficient Word of God.

* * * * *

I truly hope and pray these lessons of this issue have been of some spiritual benefit to you. If so, the efforts made are fully rewarded.

Abraham, an Example



JAMES W. BOYD

Great Bible characters provide for us living demonstrations of what God would have us to be. We all know how Abraham is repeatedly upheld before us as one who had obedient faith. But there is another trait of this man we might overlook. Was he not also sympathetic toward those facing their destruction because of their sins? When he learned God would destroy Sodom did he not plead on their behalf if some righteous people could be found among them? We know such were not found, but Abraham did not desire to see them destroyed. Nor do we rejoice over the condemnation of any. We long for the salvation of everyone. We must be sympathetic toward those who sin and work toward their forgiveness.

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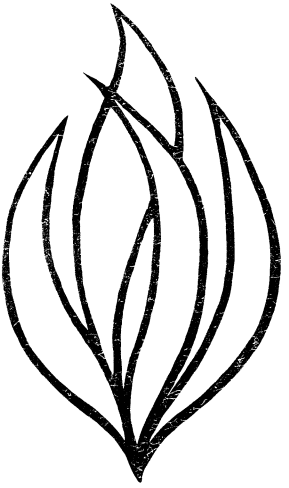

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XI James W. Boyd NUMBER 5

The Holy Spirit, A Person

Every Bible subject deserves study. Some subjects require more study than others. Some have more immediate application than others. Some are more basic and some are more difficult, but all deserve study. We need to know what Scripture say about the Holy Spirit.

This has possibly been a neglected subject because it does have difficult parts. But once studied we believe we will see that there is no justification to neglect it anymore. The Holy Spirit is prominently mentioned in Scripture. People know something about God the Father and God the Son, but less about God the Holy Spirit. We need to break the shackles of ignorance, superstition, traditions and doctrines of men and learn what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is the only source we have from which to learn. We can learn from nature that God is. We cannot know anything about the Father specifically, or Christ specifically, without Scripture. Nor shall we ever know anything about the Holy Spirit without Scripture. If the Holy Spirit informs man of truth separate and apart from the Word, we wonder why nobody has ever known anything about the Holy Spirit except where the Word has been taught!

Acts 17:19, *"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."* Colossians 2:9, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* The term "Godhead" refers to Deity or Godhood. As the word "manhood" is used to express that which makes a man a man, the term "Godhead"" or "Godhood" refers to that which makes Deity what Deity

is. In Christ is seen the whole and fulness of Deity. There is but one God, meaning one Godhead or Godhood.

The Godhead

The Godhead is composed of three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is eternal and equal with the Father and Son. He was present at the creation (Genesis 1:1,2). The Word "God" in verse one is Elohim, a plural word, meaning the Godhead, including all three persons. John 1:1-3 shows the presence at creation of the Son and the Father. Therefore, there was a plurality of persons involved in the creation. Genesis 1:26 reads, "*Let us make man in our image.*" Again, plurality is involved.

In the New Testament all three were present at the baptism of the Son (Matthew 3:16,17). All three are mentioned when the Son gave the "great commission" (Matthew 28:19). All three are mentioned in Second Corinthians 13:14. The Godhead is not three aspects of one person, nor three Gods, for there is one God or Godhead. But the Godhead is composed of three divine persons in unity and oneness.

A Person

The Holy Spirit is presented in Scripture as a person. While there is much about the nature of Deity we cannot know for lack of revelation, there is much that is revealed and this we should learn. The Holy Spirit is not a glorified "it," nor just an influence or mystical power. The Holy Spirit is more than the mind, temper and disposition of the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit is presented with personal pronouns in Scripture, such as John 14:26; 15:26, 16:13,14, and other passages.

We know that like produces like. Life produces life. The Holy Spirit lives for He gives life (Galatians 6:8). The Holy Spirit has mind (Romans 8:27). "*He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit.*" The Holy Spirit has the power of choice, the ability to make decisions. Acts 16:6 shows the Spirit decided that Paul was not to preach in Asia or Bythinia but in Macedonia.

The Spirit is life, light, love. He works, speaks, acts, blesses, reconciles, transforms, glorifies, bears witness, restrains and forbids. All of these traits point up the fact that the Holy Spirit is a person just as is the Father and Son. He is not simply a thing, influence or an "it."

Holy Spirit Was Involved

Having noted the presence of the Holy Spirit at creation, we also note how He functioned with the Father and Son in that creation. It is said of the Father, Jeremiah 51:15, *"He hath made the earth by his power; he hath established the world by his wisdom; and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding."* Psalm 33:6,7, *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth... For he spake and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast."* Jehovah spoke the world into existence. The agent through whom this was done is called the Word, the same designation given to Christ in John 1:1 and the One through whom He has spoken (Hebrews 1:2). The Holy Spirit gave life, enacted laws and organized the material universe, moving and brooding over that which was created which suggests organization and the giving of system to the universe. *"By his Spirit the heavens are garnished."* (Job 26:13). The placing, arranging and adorning of the heavens with planetary bodies that were created was by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit functioned in the spiritual creation as well as the material creation. Genesis 1:26, *"Let us make man in our image."* Man is not in the physical form of God because Deity is a Spirit (John 4:24). Therefore, this refers to man as having and being spirit as God is Spirit. Involved in the creation of man's spirit were all three persons of the Godhead.

Certainly the Holy Spirit functioned in the creation of the spiritual kingdom of God, inasmuch as the apostles who preached the gospel by which the kingdom came into existence spake as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). The fact that the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation, both material and spiritual, only confirms the major points we have learned thus far. The Holy Spirit is of the Godhead, equal and eternal with the

Father and Son, possessing the attributes of a person, having functioned in all the work said to have been done by Deity.

In Both Testaments

We find the Holy Spirit prominently mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament the Father is mentioned more prominently and in the New there is more mention of the Son. But the Holy Spirit is mentioned in both. What we know about the Father in the Old Testament came by the Holy Spirit (Second Peter 1:21). What we know of Christ in the New Testament came by the Holy Spirit (First Corinthians 2:12,13). This means that the entire revelation from Deity is a result of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13).

Even though the Holy Spirit is not mentioned as prominently in the Old as the New, twenty-three books refer to Him specifically. Sometimes He is called the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jehovah, the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit. We see Him at creation, involved when dreams were interpreted, giving visions, in the construction of the tabernacle, imparting to certain ones special powers, speaking through the prophets, striving with men in wickedness even before the flood of Noah. Over and over He is mentioned.

In the New Testament we learn of His relationship to the salvation of mankind. Nearly two hundred sixty-four references have been counted mentioning the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. The New Testament can almost be called the book of the Holy Spirit because the New Testament is the revelation of the dispensation of Christ, the system of specifics and principles Deity has given mankind, and it all came through the Holy Spirit. To understand the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ is to understand the mission of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit continued the work of salvation for mankind after the ascension of Christ.

We close this first portion of an extended study of the Holy Spirit by citing a few instances referring to Him in the

New Testament. The child born of Mary was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was called the Son of God, but conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20), which is proof positive that the Holy Spirit lives and is Deity and a part of the Godhead or Godhood as we have noted.

The Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. He was present at His baptism. By the power of the Spirit demons were cast out. Fifty-seven references in Acts alone shows the Spirit guiding the apostles, granting them power to perform miracles to confirm the message of truth they preached. Yes, the Holy Spirit is a living person of Deity.

* * * * *

The Bible and the Holy Spirit

The veracity of the faith of Jesus Christ is dependent on the truthfulness of the Bible. This truthfulness depends upon the inspiration of the Scriptures. If it is not inspired as it claims, it falls beneath the level of honorable writing. It would be a forgery and deception. If it is not inspired it cannot make one wise unto salvation, does not reveal the mind of God and man is left without a guide or anything infallible upon which he can depend. It claims to be inspired of God. Second Timothy 3:16,17, *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto every good work."* What does this involve?

In a sense the Bible is a blending of the divine and human. There is the blending of the two in the person of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, the Word becoming flesh, God and man in one person. The church is designed of God, established by Christ and He reigns over it as His kingdom. But it is not composed of angels nor spirits, but human beings. So there is the combination of the divine and human. Such can be said of the home. It is a combination of the divine and human. God gave the home

and humans compose it. The Bible in similar fashion blends the divine and human. God chose men to record God's will for man. Inspiration literally means "God-breathed." The writers of the Bible were inspired of God as they wrote. What they wrote came from God, not themselves. Yet, the human element was involved in its production. Inspiration is the divine and miraculous revelation and guidance of God to the human mind. For this reason, God having guided the minds of the writers of the Bible, the Bible is called the Word of God.

Inspiration and Revelation

There is a difference between inspiration and revelation. A revelation is not necessarily inspired of God. Even men often reveal things to other men. Revelation simply means unveiling that which has been veiled. Divine revelation, however, is the result of inspiration. The Bible is a divine revelation because by this means God has revealed Himself and His will to mankind. Deity makes Deity known to humanity and uses humanity to do it.

Theories of Inspiration

There are several theories concocted by theologians about inspiration that might be considered lest we be led astray from the real truth on the subject. Part truth and part error can be very destructive. You ask some religious person today if they believe the Bible is an inspired writing, many will answer that they do. But at the same time they deny that the Bible is the very Word of God. That may sound contradictory but not to them because of what they mean by inspiration. They do not mean what the Bible says, "God-breathed." They mean the writers were moved by some experience, emotion, desire as might be experienced by poets, play-wrights, novelists or literary champions. The thought of the Bible, to them, has no higher source than some exceptionally talented man or group of men, and therefore, does not express the mind of God. This theory is totally foreign to the Biblical teaching regarding the nature of Biblical inspiration.

Others take a rather extreme view and think the Bible has been produced somewhat like a letter a business executive might dictate to his secretary. To them every word and

phrase not only came from the mind of God but there was not any use whatever of the human element except as a stenographer. But this view has complications that cannot be dismissed. It fails to explain why there are different styles of writing as found in the Bible. If God just dictated it and the writers just acted as recorders the same style should prevail throughout the book. But the difference in styles is strong evidence that humanity was involved in the writing of it, serving as more than mere copiers. To be sure, there are portions that are obviously dictation. We shall explain the different styles shortly.

A third false view of inspiration is that God inspired the thoughts and left it to the human writer to express those thoughts the way the writer chose and the best he could. If this be true, the Bible is not really the Word of God but only men's commentary on the Word of God. The entire Bible would be subject to error to the extent that men who wrote may have misunderstood God's thoughts, possibly even completely failing to accurately relate what God intended. This view makes the Bible little more than a private interpretation of God's Word. This is the view that most "translators" of the modern speech versions adopt and for this reason they have taken great liberties with truth.

The Truth on Inspiration

There is a tinge of truth in each of these false theories but the views are false because of the errors in them. Every word did come from God. Every word that is used to express God's thoughts was approved by God and therefore infallible. But God used the talents, vocabularies, styles and even experiences of the writers to reveal His mind. This explains the different styles of writing. God miraculously and directly had the oversight of the writing and made sure that every word was infallible and inerrant; hence, God-breathed.

It is here that we come to the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the inspired Scriptures. It was by and through the Holy Spirit that Deity guided and informed the writers what to write and how to write it. The Holy Spirit is that person of the Godhead that supervised the writing. The Bible is properly called the work of the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit that exercised the divine power over both

words and thoughts of the Bible. For the sake of space, we shall not give the lengthy quotations of verses that affirm what is said here, but cite references for your personal study. Second Peter 1:21; First Corinthians 2:6-8, 10, 12, 13; Hebrews 1:1; 10:15,16; Acts 28:25; Nehemiah 9:30.

Writers Were Spirit Led

Sometimes the writers wrote of things they had personally experienced. When such was the case the Holy Spirit guided them in the selection of what was to be included and approved the words used. Sometimes the writers wrote of things they could not have experienced. Then the Holy Spirit not only guided the writing, but also supplied the information the writer could not have known otherwise. Therefore, the entire body of Scripture is of divine origin and supervision.

Let us note that both Old and New Testament writers claimed regarding what they wrote. Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon and all the prophets said they were given the Word of God and that the Holy Spirit spoke through them. The Jews divided the Old Testament into three divisions; law, psalms and prophets (Luke 24:44). Jesus Christ placed His stamp of approval on those divisions, endorsing all of them to be God's Word. Forty-five per cent of the words of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the words spoken by Jesus. Ten per cent are direct quotations. Jesus told the New Testament writers that they were to speak by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:20). *"For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."* Paul affirmed the inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, all-sufficiency and authority of Scripture in Second Timothy 3:16,17, previously quoted in this lesson. Over and over, from Genesis through Revelation the writers say, *"The Spirit saith expressly," "thus saith the Lord,"* or terms to that effect. There can be no doubt as to the Biblical claim of inspiration. The writers denied they wrote of themselves. There is equally no doubt that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit was the Person of Deity that revealed the Word.

The Inspired Word

The recognition of the Bible as the inspired Word of God is all important to the faith of Christ and mankind. If it is

not what it claims to be, what reason is there to accept any portion of it as being valid? If the Bible is nothing more than something totally of man, it has no more authority than anything else anyone else might produce.

God used human beings, their words, styles, talents, experiences, vocabularies, to express His thoughts and reveal His mind and will, miraculously overseeing, revealing, choosing and guiding what was written to assure the completeness and perfectness of what was written. The Holy Spirit accomplished this very work.

* * * * *

Christ and the Holy Spirit

The relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit is akin to that between Christ and the Father because all three are persons of the Godhead. They are so united and exist in oneness and entwined that what one does all three have a part. There is complete harmony, togetherness and cooperation among all members of the Godhead.

But there are several revelations about the relationship of Christ and the Holy Spirit of which the Bible speaks and when we learn this information we are assisted in better understanding Deity.

There was unity and joint action between Christ and the Holy Spirit at the creation in both the material and spiritual creation. We also read of the prophecies by the Holy Spirit through the inspired writers of the Old Testament of the earthly life of Christ which later became a reality. This shows a direct contact one with the other. The Holy Spirit gave such revelation long before He came.

The Holy Spirit associated with the Second Person of the Godhead (Christ) after Jesus became flesh and was involved in His earthly ministry. This association began

with the incarnation when Christ took on the form of humanity. Luke 1:35, *"The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God."* Joseph was told by Gabriel, *"Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."* (Matthew 1_20). God miraculously fathered the child Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

Other Associations

The Holy Spirit was prominent as He accompanied Jesus wherever He went and in whatever He did. He was at His baptism and transfiguration. He led Him into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan (Mark 1:12). The Scripture says that the presence of the Holy Spirit was with Jesus without measure. John 3:34, *"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, for he giveth not the Spirit by measure."* There was no limitation on the communion between them but Jesus enjoyed the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to the fullest. The life of Jesus was under the control of the Holy Spirit and He manifested Deity to the fullest while on earth. Colossians 2:9, *"For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."*

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit aided Christ in executing His earthly work. While Christ was the only member of the Godhead to become flesh, the Father and Holy Spirit fully shared in all that Jesus did. It was prophesied by Isaiah and recalled by Jesus (Matthew 12:18) that the Holy Spirit would be with the Messiah while He carried out His work. Matthew 12:28 shows how Jesus did not cast out demons by the power of Satan. He showed that Satan would not cast out demons because that would be destructive of his own evil kingdom. Therefore, inasmuch as the demons or devils were being cast out, it was evident that the power by which He was casting them out was not the power of Satan but the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth He read from the Old Testament, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor."* Closing the book He said, *"Today hath this scripture*

been fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4:18,21). By this Jesus acknowledged that He taught and spake by the Holy Spirit.

Cooperation in Everything

Acts 1:2, Jesus gave commandment to His apostles *"through the Holy Spirit."* There can be no question as to their harmonious relationship during the teaching, miracle working, prophecy fulfilling, commandment giving ministry of Christ on earth.

The Holy Spirit was with Jesus in His death and resurrection. Christ shed His blood as an atonement for sin by dying on the cross. His blood became the cleansing power of sin (Hebrews 9:13,14). This was done *"through the eternal Spirit."* After being buried in the borrowed tomb, Jesus rose from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11).

The crowning work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ, the Redeemer. When Jesus was promising His apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, and outlining the work of the Holy Spirit, He said, *"He shall glorify me."*

The relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit included cooperation in the creation, prophecy, incarnation, His earthly ministry, and His glorification. It continues in the teaching of the doctrine of Christ that is done by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God.

Christ revealed Deity to man (John 14:8,9). His mission was to do the will of the Father (John 4:34). He also revealed the Holy Spirit. We have a fuller revelation of the Holy Spirit in the teaching of Christ than in any other portion of Scripture. It is not surprising that this is true inasmuch as it is said of Jesus that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Colossians 2:9).

Jesus Taught About the Holy Spirit

John records more of the teaching of Jesus pertaining to the Holy Spirit than any other writer. As already noted, Jesus discussed the reality of the Holy Spirit as a person. He revealed the nature of the Holy Spirit as much as we can know. He outlined the work of the Holy Spirit,

particularly the relationship and its purpose between the Holy Spirit and the apostles. Generally speaking, after Jesus ascended the Holy Spirit would continue the work that Jesus began while on the earth; namely, the salvation of mankind. That work would begin with the apostles. For want of space, instead of quoting the many passages denoting this work, we will only cite them for your investigation. John 14:16,17,16; 15:26; 16:7,13,14; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8. To summarize, Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, guide them, bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had taught them, provide them with all truth, comfort them, give them power to spread the gospel, enable them to effectively bear witness of Jesus and confirm that which they declared. They would soon after His ascension be baptized (submerged, overwhelmed beneath) the power of the Holy Spirit.

As for the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the world, read John 16:7-11. Jesus outlined the work of the Holy Spirit after His departure. The fulfillment of these promises began with the apostles on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts, the second chapter.

On that day, a Jewish feast day that came fifty days after the Passover, and ten days after Jesus ascended, the Holy Spirit did come upon the apostles as promised. There were physical manifestations of His presence such as sound like a mighty wind, tongues as of fire upon each apostle, and the ability of the apostles to speak in tongues or languages they had heretofore never learned or known, but languages that were audible and understandable to their hearers in the language of their hearers. Acts 1:5 says, as promised, they were baptized of the Holy Spirit. That day, for the very first time, the full and whole truth regarding Jesus of Nazareth being the Christ and Savior, the Son of God, was proclaimed. By the coming of the Holy Spirit the apostles sent forth God's plan for the salvation of man through Christ and the beginning of the church or kingdom that had long been foretold.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

This topic merits an entire lesson (which can be read in Volume II, Number 5, page 5). The Holy Spirit was said to come to convict the world of sin, righteousness and

judgment. By the preaching of the Word the apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit and speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4), people were convinced of sin, righteousness (God's plan for making man righteous), and the coming judgment, hence the necessity to prepare for it. They asked what they had to do and Peter told them to repent and be baptized. By the Holy Spirit the Word was spoken and people were won to Christ and salvation. Through the Word the Holy Spirit continues that work.

In the events of Pentecost we see the relationship of Jesus and the Holy Spirit extended to the establishment of Christ's church which He promised to build upon Himself as the Son of God.

* * * * *

Measures of the Spirit

Much of the nature and scope of operation of the Holy Spirit can be understood when we understand what is called the measures of the Spirit. All of the actions and powers of the Holy Spirit have not been equally applicable nor equally bestowed to all people. The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles differently than His association with Christ, both of which differs from His relationship with some of the early Christians, all of which differs from the relationship of the Holy Spirit and Christians today. Let us begin our study with John 3:34, *"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."*

Without Measure

We have noted in earlier lessons the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is evident from John 3:34 that the power and presence of the Holy Spirit abiding with Jesus was to the fullest extent, without measure, without limitations whatsoever. This is what would be expected in view of Colossians 2:9 which teaches that in Jesus dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one Godhead. What involves one, involves

all three. Jesus is the only One of the whom such is said. He is the only One who could qualify for such a description. The first "measure" of the Spirit is actually no measure or limitation at all, but without measure.

Baptismal Measure

But to others there were and are limitations. Consider as a second measure the baptismal measure which was granted to the apostles. All is not revealed about the baptismal measure that we might want to know. This scarcity of revelation has led some to invent theories, speculations and commit errors regarding it. Some have tried to make the baptism of the Holy Spirit force conclusions that, if they were true, would contradict much that is revealed that is simple and clear in revelation. We should be content to abide by what is revealed and whatever else there is, if there is anything else, let it remain with the unrevealed (Deuteronomy 28:29). Foolish and unlearned or untaught questions only create confusion (Second Timothy 2:23)

It was prophesied in Joel 2:28 that the Holy Spirit would come. Peter quotes this prophecy as being fulfilled with the events of Pentecost. The term *"pour"* in Joel is figurative, like term *"fell,"* indicating the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit by the apostles. The measure is not mentioned in this prophecy. But these terms grant no substance to the ridiculous argument that baptism is a pouring. Knowledge of the meaning of baptism allows nothing but immersion, overwhelming, plunging beneath. The apostles were fully submerged under the control of the Holy Spirit in what they taught that day.

John the Baptist had said Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). Matthew three gives a parallel account and this shows that not all to whom He preached would be so baptized. Some who heard Him were wicked, disobedient, even a *"generation of vipers."* Surely, such were not designated to be the recipients of the baptismal measure. Therefore, it is evident that some to whom He preached would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and some would not. Just who is made clearer when we hear from Jesus and see the fulfillment of the promise. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles (John 14,15,16, and

Acts 1). They were the ones to whom the Holy Spirit was given in the baptismal measure (Acts 2).

Specifics on Holy Spirit Baptism

There are important specifics about the baptism of the Holy Spirit we must keep in mind. It was miraculous manifestation of divine power. The recipients were endued with power from on high. It was not for the purpose of saving the recipient from sin, nor to get him into Christ. It was not a command to be obeyed, but a promise to be received. Christ was the administrator, not man. It came not as a result of the petitions and requests of man. It is not the "one baptism" of Ephesians four because that baptism is the baptism being preached and practiced at the time by Paul and others which was baptism in water, in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins, as administered by human beings to penitent believers who had confessed their faith in Christ.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was designed to accomplish certain purposes and did. It was to clothe the apostles with power from on high (Luke 24:49), endowing them with inspiration and information (John14, 15, 16, and Acts 2:4)). It enabled the apostles to perform the miraculous, even to speak in unlearned but understandable languages (Acts 2:4, 6, 8) and empowered them to perform that which could, would and did confirm the Word they preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). Nothing was left that was needed and they were guided as they preached by Deity.

Cornelius

There was another occasion where some have thought it to be an instance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We reject that position, however, even though we agree it was a miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit that was in some points like that which occurred on Pentecost. What happened in Acts ten at the house of Cornelius was that the Holy Spirit *"fell"* on them. It does not say they were baptized of the Holy Spirit. When Peter was later explaining the events at Caesarea (Acts 11:15-17) he said it was like that which occurred on Pentecost. But in what respect was it exactly like that which occurred on Pentecost? It was like it in that it was a direct operation of

the Holy Spirit. If it had been the baptismal measure identical to that received by the apostles on Pentecost they would have been as inspired as Peter and Peter would have no need to preach to them at all for they would have possessed as much infallible knowledge and power as he. We rather contend that what Cornelius and his house received was more akin to another measure of the Spirit, a third measure we shall soon discuss, which was usually granted by the laying on of apostolic hands, but in the case of Cornelius was granted directly. The direct action of it has caused some to think it was totally like that on Pentecost. The entire procedure was to convince Jewish brethren that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews, and it did that very thing (Acts 11:18; 15:7-9).

That Paul was baptized of the Holy Spirit at some unspecified and unrecorded time is implied inasmuch as he became an apostle after Pentecost as one born out of due season.

Again, the purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Caesarea was to convince the Jewish brethren who had travelled with Paul to Caeserea, and later the church composed then mostly of Jews, that Gentiles could be saved as well as Jews and the same way.

Gifts of the Spirit

The third measure of the Holy Spirit may be defined as the gifts of the Spirit (First Corinthians 12:1). We must distinguish between the Holy Spirit as a gift (second measure) and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The baptismal measure was a gift of the Holy Spirit in that the Holy Spirit was given and received. But we are now concerned with special gifts, powers, abilities granted to some by the power of the Holy Spirit These gifts are listed in First Corinthians 12:4-11.

Without investigating each gift specifically in this lesson, let us know that the nature of these gifts was miraculous. They were not given to every Christian but selectively. The gifts were not the same. One person would possess one gift and a second person another and different gift. Possibly some might possess more than one gift. Not every gift was considered of equal value, but all were given by the same

Holy Spirit, each having certain profit and usefulness. They were nine in number in the text cited and fall into three major classifications.

Some gifts were intellectual power, wisdom, knowledge, faith. Some gifts exhibited faith, such as working miracles, healing, ability to know prophecies, teach, foretell, discern spirits, know dispositions and hearts of men. Others were gifts of tongues, the ability to speak and translate languages which were not normal, native and natural to the possessor of the power.

These gifts were destined for temporary use in the church, to be displaced, to end once their purpose was accomplished. That purpose was to be exercised until the full complete revelation of God was attained. They were for the edification of the church (First Corinthians 14:5) and confirmation of the truth (Mark 16:20; First Corinthians 14:22). They served much as does a scaffold in the erection of a building. While under construction the scaffold has a purpose. Once the building is built, it is taken away. The gifts served in the infancy of the church until the full revelation, *"that which is perfect,"* had come. Once it had been revealed the gifts were no longer of use. The Word has been given and confirmed (Hebrews 2:3,4). Now men learn and know the will of God for man from inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16, 17).

The Gift of Acts 2:38

Here we read a phrase, *"gift of the Holy Spirit."* This is not a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit nor a promise of miraculous gifts. Verse thirty-nine defines what is under consideration beginning with the word *"for,"* taken from the word "gar," which indicates a forthcoming explanation of what has just been said. The *"gift of the Holy Spirit"* is the same as the salvation that was promised through the seed of Abraham. The promise mentioned included those present, their children, the Gentiles, even us and all who will come to Christ. No promise in the Bible is as extensive as that except the promise God made to Abraham that through his seed all nations or families would be blessed, which had reference to Christ (Galatians 3:16).

Third Measure No Longer Given

Not only has the function of the gifts been accomplished but there are other evidences of their termination. Those receiving these gifts did so by the apostles laying hands on them (acts 8,19). Such was the case in Samaria. Philip, on whom apostolic hands had been laid, performed miracles, but obviously could not grant such power to others. It was not until the apostles, John and Peter, came that these gifts were granted to Samaritan brethren. The apostles could work miracles, and could bestow such power on others. But these was unique to them. This power to bestow gifts on others was what Simon wished to buy, but he was told it was not any of his business.

It was after Paul laid hands on those in Ephesus that those people could speak in tongues. His presence was required to grant this power.

With the passing of the apostles, and those on whom they laid hands, so passed the gifts. Furthermore, the purpose of the gifts, to confirm the Word, is already accomplished and there is no need for them. There is today neither person nor purpose for the miraculous. As for those who claim such power, where goes the claim must go the demonstration.

The fourth measure of the Spirit will be discussed in the next lesson. We have noted these three: (1) without measure; (2) baptismal measure; (3) spiritual gifts; as well as the explanation regarding what happened at the house of Cornelius and the gift of the Holy Spirit of Acts 3:38.

* * * * *

We Had Best Get at It

It seems that time just goes by in such a hurry. I have heard it said that as we grow older it seems to be that way. The Bible certainly teaches life is swift. So if we ever are going to get anything worthwhile done, we better start today and get at it. It will not be long before life is gone. There is much to do little time in which to do it.

The Holy Spirit and Christians Today

This lesson will discuss the fourth measure of the Holy Spirit as a follow up to a previous lesson. While Christians today do not have the same association with the Holy Spirit as did Christ, nor has he nor can he have the same baptismal measure as did the apostles, nor does he nor shall he possess miraculous spiritual gifts, there is a relationship between the Holy Spirit and Christians today. We can speak of this as fellowship and as the Spirit dwelling in us and us in the Spirit (Romans 8:9; First Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Second Timothy 1:13,14). There can be no doubt that the Holy Spirit is active in the life of a Christian and acts on the behalf of the Christian. But there is a vast difference in saying the Holy Spirit dwells and abides in us and with us and saying <u>how</u> He does this.

The Scripture also asserts that the Father and Son dwell in us (Second Corinthians 6:16; First John 4:5; Colossians 1:27; Ephesians 3:17). Therefore, in addition to the dwelling with the Holy Spirit, all members of the Godhead are said to dwell in us. All three direct and influence our lives by the power they exercise. How Deity exercises this power we must learn from passages other than those cited.

Galatians 3:2 teaches that the Galatian Christians received the Holy Spirit by the hearing of faith, the message of faith, the gospel. The way the Holy Spirit abides with the Christian is by the gospel. The faith comes by the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:17), never separate and apart from the Word. The Holy Spirit was received when people heard and properly responded to the gospel. That this in Acts 2:38 does not refer to miraculous powers has been studied in the previous lesson and to so contend is to force an unwarranted conclusion.

Ephesians 3:7 teaches that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. But again, faith comes by hearing the Word, as in Galatians 3:2. There is no dwelling of Christ in us apart from the Word.

Filled With the Spirit

Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18 are parallel passages. To be *"filled with the Spirit"* is to *"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."* Therefore, it is certain that the Godhead dwells with and in the faithful Christian leading and influencing by the Word. This is the way the Father and Son sustained their relationship (John 15). All of the influences on the human heart by the Holy Spirit are accomplished through the hearing and application of the Word. Without the Word there is no relationship.

The doctrine that there is a personal and actual indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the physical body of the Christian is foreign to the truth and there is nothing in Scripture that will sustain such a doctrine when we take all that the gospel teaches on the subject. We are not "little deities" walking about as one would have to conclude if the personal indwelling doctrine were true. As we obey the Word of Deity, so we have fellowship with Deity. The dwelling one with another is just another way of expressing the fellowship humanity can and does enjoy with Deity when one is in the Lord.

Holy Spirit Leads

Romans 8:14 teaches we are led by the Spirit. But how does the Spirit lead? It is not by some mysterious, miraculous, better-felt-than-told experience. We are not to expect a direct operation as was received by Noah, Abraham and Paul. But we are guided by the Word of truth that God has provided for us. There is no question that the Spirit leads, but we must remember He leads by and through the Word of God.

Romans 8:16,17 teaches that the Holy Spirit testifies that we the children of God. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit we could neither be the children of God nor could know that we are the children of God. But the testimony of the Spirit, not to our spirits, but with the testimony of our

spirits, we can know we are God's children. The Spirit has testified what is God's way of saving us. Our spirits can testify whether we have done as God has commanded. The two testimonies together, one with the other, informs us of our spiritual state. The testimony of the Spirit is in the Word of God.

Source of Comfort

The Holy Spirit is a source of comfort to the Christian. Jesus identified Him as the Comforter to the apostles and through them to us as we follow their doctrine (John 14:1-4; Second Corinthians 1:3,4). Paul wrote in Second Corinthians 7:4, *"I am filled with comfort."* The early church enjoyed the comfort of the Spirit (Acts 9:31). The Christian is comforted by the words Paul wrote in First Thessalonians 4:18. The things written aforetime were for our comfort through the Scriptures (Romans 15:4). In times of distress, sorrow and weakness we seek God's comfort from His Word and our knowledge of it. The promises found therein given to Christians serve as the basis of our comfort and hope and are the work of the Holy Spirit. *"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."* (First Thessalonians 4:18). The words are of the Holy Spirit.

In Growth

The Holy Spirit assists us in our spiritual growth. Once having become a Christian we are to grow (Second Peter 3:18). Romans 15:16 teaches we are *"sanctified by the Holy Spirit."* Just as the work of the Holy Spirit is involved in converting us to Christ, His work continues in our growth in Christ. We become more and more like a son rather than the servant of sin that we were as we partake of that which is offered through the Spirit. The Spirit does this work through the Word. We are sanctified by the Word (John 17:17). Having been set apart from our sins and from the world by obeying the Word, we grow as we feed upon the sincere milk and meat of the Word.

Even thought we are forced to conclude that the Holy Spirit operates on man through the Word, let us not confuse the Holy Spirit as being the same thing as the Word. While there is perfect harmony between the Word and the Spirit, the Word is the instrument and means used by the Spirit to

operate on man. It is similar as a surgeon operates on his patient by the use of his instruments. What the Scripture attributes to the Holy Spirit as to leading, guiding, directing and influencing man, saint and sinner, is also said of the Word because the Word is used by the Spirit to this end. Ephesians 6:17 speaks of the Word as *"the sword of the Spirit."*

To Us and For Us

There is another work and service rendered on behalf of the Christian for the Christian. Let us distinguish between what the Spirit does **to** us and what He does **for** us. What He does to us is by the Word. What all Deity may do for us we must confess limited knowledge for there is limited revelation in this area and we do not profess to comprehend all the workings of Deity.

There are those things that are done for us. Because of the dwelling of the Spirit, the Spirit serves as an intercessor for us (Romans 8:26,27). Again, there is a difference between a mediator and an intercessor. We have only one mediator (First Timothy 2:5) and that is Jesus Christ. There may be many intercessors, even as we can intercede on behalf of each other in prayer (First Timothy 2:1). But we learn that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. He intercedes according to the will of God and does not by-pass the Christ through whom we must go to come before God. A mediator is one that acts between two parties by belonging to both parties. An intercessor pleads on the behalf of another, representing another. Christ is both mediator and an intercessor. The Holy Spirit intercedes. as stated, even we can intercede for each other.

For instance, there be those times when we cannot pray as we ought , but even then our groanings are taken before the throne of heaven through Christ and offered to God by the intercession of the Holy Spirit. We are aware that some have a different view of Romans 8:26, but their views separate man from his own spirit as if they were different entities. We are confident the above view is consistent with Scripture throughout.

What a glorious blessing it is to know that the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf and takes into account our

sufferings that may well disable us from praying to God as we ought. Because of this intercession we can proclaim as did Paul that He *"is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."* (Ephesians 3:20).

Providence

We must note the difference between Deity dwelling in us and the providence of God. By the providence of God we refer to the participation of Deity in the affairs of men even though we know not how He does it except through natural means. Like the Biblical assertion that Deity dwells in us and we in Deity, we accept the Biblical assertion of the providence of God and have no reason to dismiss it just because we do not fully understand all involved in its operation.

Providence is not a miraculous operation. God answers prayer by providence today, not the miraculous. The life of Joseph is a good example of the providence of God in operation. We dare not attribute everything that occurs in life as the operation of God's providence because many things happen in which God has no involvement. Sin often brings certain conditions upon mankind and God does not bring them. There be those things that happen even to Christians simply because Christians are in this world and are human and experience many things such as are common to the human family.

We see the providence of God in operation in the life of Esther, especially as Mordecai explained to her, *"Who but knows that thou art come to the kingdom for such as time as this?"* As the account of the life of Esther unfolds we see God's providence in operation to the preservation of His people that were still in bondage.

Fruit of the Spirit

One other area of association between the Holy Spirit and the Christian today that we mention is that the Christian is to bear good fruit (John 15:8), and that is the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22,23. Such fruit will distinguish us as Christians and identify us as Christ's disciples. Such fruit drives evil from our lives as well as motivating us to righteousness.

While Christians today have a different relationship with the Holy Spirit than some in the infancy of the church, we are thankful for what the Scripture reveals concerning our present fellowship with Deity, including all three persons of the Godhead.

* * * * *

One More Lesson to Come on the Holy Spirit

This issue has presented five lessons related to the Holy Spirit. While we are not so naive as to think everyone will agree with everything we have presented, we are confident such teaching is true and consistent with what Scripture reveals on these themes. Space prohibited us from including a sixth lesson that we have intention of presenting as the first article in the next issue. It will be entitled, Against the Holy Spirit.

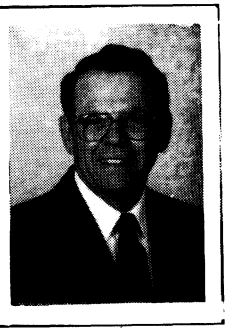
Our inability to fully comprehend all there is about Deity, even all that is revealed in Scripture about Deity, is not due to any inadequacy on the part of Deity. It is because we are limited and finite human beings. If we were to be able to grasp all there is about Deity we would be as Deity. None should ever be so brazen and bold as to become overly dogmatic about his knowledge of Deity.

But fortunately, we have sufficient revelation and we can understand so much of it that we search the Scriptures and conform our thinking accordingly.

* * * * *

Please do not get angry with anyone for opposing denominations. Jesus said, *"Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."* Matthew 15:13.

Always Attendance



JAMES W. BOYD

So often it seemed that every time he went to the doctor the doctor talked about being overweight and warned against the danger to his health. He became rather sensitive about it. Can you guess what was the problem with this particular patient? Yes, it applied to him.

When he occasionally went to worship it seemed that somebody would mention to him how they missed him so frequently from worship and sincerely wished he would not be absent because it endangered his soul. He became sensitive about it. Can you guess what was the problem with this particular brother? Yes, it applied. Anyway, how could he know what they always talked about? He was among them so infrequently he could never tell.

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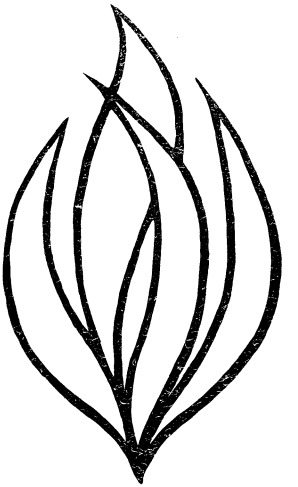

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XI James W. Boyd NUMBER 6

Against the Spirit

This is the sixth in a series of six lessons concerning the Holy Spirit, including the Holy Spirit as a Person in the Godhead, His relationship with Christ and involvement in producing the Bible, the four measures of the Spirit and the present day relationship with the Christian. Scripture also has somewhat to say about being against the Holy Spirit. Whatever is included in being against the Holy Spirit , it is certainly spiritually disastrous. We read of people resisting the Spirit, lying to the Spirit, defiling the temple of the Holy Spirit, despising the Spirit, grieving the Spirit, quenching the Spirit and blaspheming the Spirit. These fall into the category of being against the Spirit.

Resisting the Spirit

Acts 7:51: Stephen charged his Jewish hearers with resisting the Holy Spirit like their Israelite forefathers had done. How had the forefathers resisted the Holy Spirit? It was by refusing to heed the message of God as proclaimed by God's prophets. The prophets were directed in their preaching and warning by the Spirit (Nehemiah 9:30). To refuse the message was to resist the Spirit. Making this charge led to the stoning of Stephen. But even today, when people resist God's message from His inspired Word, the Bible, which was given through the Spirit, they are also guilty of resisting the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:3,9: Annanias and Saphirra sold property and gave a portion of the proceeds to the apostles for the work. Their sin was pretending to have given all and lying about what they did. Lying is the very opposite of truth and diametrically opposed to Deity and everything for which Deity stands. So abominable is lying that liars are said to be among those who will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, the second death (Revelation 20:8). Peter said they had lied to the Holy Spirit.

A Serious Matter

Man sometimes does not realize the seriousness of sin. When one lies he lies to more than just his fellowman, but

also to God. Every sin is against God and lying is said to be a sin against the Holy Spirit.

First Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20: When we study these passages we are no longer made to wonder why faithful gospel preachers have and continue to preach against drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking, overeating, fornication and other abuses of the body, often committed by evil behavior and bad habits. Christians realize their body belongs to God. We are not our own but have been bought with a price, the blood of Christ. We have no right to defile the body because it is said to be the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The temple in the Old Testament was a sacred building, the dwelling place of Deity. To defile the temple was a grievous sin and brought God's wrath against the violator. In Jesus' day, on two occasions, He drove those out who made His Father's house a den of robbers. They were defiling the temple.

God now dwells, not in temples made with hands (Acts 17), but in His people. Your very body is said to be the temple of Deity. As one follows the Word, Deity dwells in him. Deity is no less displeased now than back then when people defile the temple. To do so is to sin against the Holy Spirit.

Despising the Spirit

Hebrews 10:26-29: Here we read of despising the Holy Spirit. The word "despise" means to insult or treat with contempt. How does one do such a thing toward the Third Person of the Godhead? It is by falling away from the truth having once accepted it. Hebrews was written to forestall apostasy or departing from the faith. To become a Christian and then fall away into unfaithfulness for whatever reason or excuse is said to be the same as trampling underfoot the saving and sanctifying blood of Jesus Christ.

People were sorely punished for violating the Law of Moses. How much worse it is to turn from the salvation given by Jesus, God's Son. When we consider how the Lord looks upon unfaithfulness, we are made to see how important it is for us to ever be faithful. To turn back to the

lost state from which we have come is said to treat the Holy Spirit with insult and contempt.

Grieving the Spirit

Ephesians 4:30: How does one grieve the Holy Spirit? Notice the sins in the context of Ephesians 4::25-32. There are sins of doing what ought not be done. There are sins of failing to do what ought to be done. Lying, losing the temper, holding grudges, letting the devil have his way in your life, stealing, refusing to work, refusing to give to the needy, evil language, neglecting to teach, holding wrath and bitterness in the heart, failing to be kind, forgiving and tenderhearted are all listed. Just as you may grieve over that which is contrary to your desires, so these actions are contrary to the Spirit's message and brings grief to Him when people commit them.

Quenching the Spirit

First Thessalonians 5:19: *"Quench not the Spirit."* The figure here implies that the Holy Spirit is like a fire and lights the fire of goodness in our hearts and lives. When one is so ignited he has a burning zeal to do the Lord's will and has a passion for doing right. To prevent the Holy Spirit from igniting a fire for righteousness within us would be to quench the Spirit. To discourage, hinder or otherwise block the spread of God's Word and doing of good works authorized of God is like pouring water on a fire and quenching its power. People sometimes "throw cold water" on first one good work and then another. We must be careful lest we become guilty of quenching something that the Holy Spirit takes delight in igniting. The Holy Spirit ignites by and through the Word. Therefore, we need to learn the Word and apply it lest we quench it and the Holy Spirit.

Blaspheming the Spirit

Matthew 12:31,31: The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a much disputed matter. It is sometimes called the unpardonable sin. Blasphemy is a sin seen throughout the history of the human race toward Deity. It would be naive to suggest that the identification of this sin is as simple as some would contend because honest, well-informed and

good men often differ in their view as to what this sin is. As with other matters where revelation is scarce, it is unbecoming to be overly dogmatic in conclusions drawn regarding blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

We are taught many times that Christ came to save mankind from all sin. His blood can wash away any and all sins provided one meets the terms of forgiveness and obeys the conditions. Any sin becomes unpardonable if and when one ignores God's plan. We believe this is the teaching in First John 5:16 regarding the *"sin which is not unto death"* and *"a sin unto death."* This is not the same as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Some say the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was giving the devil credit for the miracles Jesus performed. Certainly to do that would be a vicious attack against Christ and the Holy Spirit. But we are not convinced this is all there is involved in determining the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Others are inclined to consider this sin to be the deliberate and continued repudiation and rejection of the testimony of the Spirit, remaining in open rebellion and disobedience against the Spirit until death. This also is a view with problems.

Jesus said whoever spoke against Him would be forgiven (assuming conditions are met), but to speak against the Spirit would not be forgiven. Blasphemy does involve speaking against the Spirit. Just what reason there is that speaking against Christ should be less fatal than speaking against another member of the Godhead is not made clear to me. There were those who spoke against Christ during His earthly ministry who were offered opportunity to accept Christ and be saved beginning with Pentecost. In fact, it is reasonable to think that some who even attributed the working of miracles by Christ to the devil rather than the Holy Spirit heard the same offer. Some who were urged to accept Christ during His ministry refused, but when the message of the gospel delivered by the Holy Spirit was preached they had opportunity to obey. But if they rejected that message, where else could they turn for salvation? The only way to be sure you can never be forgiven of sin is to turn down the Word of the Holy Spirit regarding Christ and His will. The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). To reject the Spirit-given gospel is spiritually fatal.

Only by accepting it can one be saved and eventually see heaven. This seems to be the more consistent view of what this sin involves.

To sin against the Spirit in any of the above ways is to erect a barrier between ourselves and our goal of heaven. Rather than sinning against the Spirit, may we open our hearts to the Word of the Spirit in all things and receive Him as we receive the truth He has delivered and is now embodied in the Scriptures.

* * * * *

A Four-Fold Indictment

We in America live in a most blessed land. But there is good reason for Christians to be concerned about our nation. If our nation is distorted, cursed and despised over the world, and often it is, it may be partially due to our own failures. One of the responsibilities of the church in uncertain and unstable times is to tell of those things that are certain and changeless. It is our duty to send forth the warnings of God and the admonition that, *"Righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is a reproach to any people."* (Proverbs 14:34). This is what is intended by this brief lesson and we solicit the eye and ear of the honest, knowing that the dishonest do not care anyway.

Before tragedy fell upon the nation of Judah, God's prophet Zephaniah wrote, *"She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God."* (Zephaniah 3:2). Here is a four-fold indictment against that nation. While they could hear, they would not listen. They refused to obey. The voice of God was ignored. They were unwilling to accept discipline and correction. They trusted not in God but in other things, even themselves. They did not draw nigh to Him Who had so blessed them.

Whether we are dealing with a person, city or nation, God's truths and indictments against sin are the same. Here were a people whose consciences had been seared by

the hot iron of rebellion. Their heart was not honest before God. They refused to be taught, having cast away faith in favor of folly. They allowed their relationship to God to deteriorate. Which of these four indictments could be applicable to our own blessed land? Which might be applicable to me or you as individuals? The four indictments are related rather than totally separate. A good conscience functions when truth has been accepted. Truth, when accepted, produces faith in God. Faith in God is necessary for a proper relationship with God and ignites obedience. Let me say it another way. When the right relationship to God is broken because faith is abandoned, then truth will be denied, which allows the conscience to become seared and insensitive. Consider these indictments one by one.

Disobedience

First, "*She obeyed not the voice.*" Whose voice? God's voice is the one in particular, but really they listened to nobody. Here was the hard heart in operation. Some people simply will NOT pay attention even to God and will stand in defiance of evidence they cannot refute, but can only ignore. Is there not something wrong with the conscience of many of our people when blinded by the material and sensual gratifications, wallowing in prejudices, following the wisdom of this world rather than God? The statistics are staggering when reports are made about the immoralities among our population. We will not cite any here because they change so rapidly. But with the increase of sexual sins, crimes, riots, rebellions, desecration of things holy and sacred, what justification is there to say America is getting better rather than worse?

Historians tell us that our land is the most immoral and undisciplined people on earth today. There is less respect for authority and the weakest kind of religious faith among the oncoming generation than has been in our history. This is to speak generally because there are many individual exceptions. But parents are more permissive, less involved and concerned, negligent, selfish, materially ambitious than our nation has witnessed. Some are not even concerned and would deny this is true. But the truth exists even when those who hate truth deny it. Wishing truth away or denying it does not change it.

Parents and young people today have the greatest challenges and obstacles against doing right than probably any generation in our history. For this reason we truly admire those who refuse to bow to evil, even though the proportion of such people in our overall population seems to grow smaller with each decade.

With the moral, political and religious decay so much in evidence there are still those who will say, "Sleep on." Do they care nothing for the oncoming generation? There are some "Christians" who lend their support to the very forces, political and educational, that are working stedfastly to undermine and destroy every vestige of the faith of Christ from the life of this nation. America's conscience is not so sensitive to sin. The media exploits and advances this insensitivity.

While the moral degradation is extensive, what may even be worse is the willingness of people to accept it, live with it, "go along to get along." We rapidly are becoming a nation where the voice of God is seldom heard above the noises coming from the dins of iniquity.

Will Not Hear

Second, *"She received not instruction."* It is not that no instruction was given. But you cannot tell some people anything, anytime, about any subject. They know it all even if they are heading to destruction. Our people are willing to deny truth and reality about God, morality and things sacred. They deny the failures, sins and true conditions of our homeland. Many reject all discipline, crying, "Freedom," when what they mean is license to sin. They disrespect duly ordained authority on every level, being swelled with self-pride and arrogance against God.

Meanwhile, others are like Pilate. They either wash their hands of it, or ask, "What is truth?" as if there is no such thing. Many know right from wrong but refuse to act accordingly. They, like Jerusalem and Judah, smart under instruction and the exposure of their transgressions. With sophistication, they dismiss the warnings of God and remain smug rather than sincere.

Israel stoned the prophets sent to her rather than accept the message they brought. So it is often the case today in principle. What preacher who truly stands for the truth is warmly received by the masses today? Yes, there are those preachers who are warmly received. They are more the servants of the devil seeking their own gain and glory by pleasing their hearers rather than being angels of light they profess to be. How did Herod and Herodias treat John when he told them the truth? What did the Jews do to Jesus when He told them the truth? Those kind of people are not all dead and not all of them are outside the church.

No Trust

Third, "*She trusted not in the Lord.*" They said they believed in the Lord but they lived as if God was dead. They did not abandon their rituals and ceremonies, even their long flowing robes (which are plentiful among religionists today). We might say they "went to church," but their true love was the way of the world, not of God. They compromised their faith enough to be comfortable as they were, going their own way, the Word of the Lord notwithstanding. Like many today, they paid lip service to God even while their heart was far from Him. Religious but not righteous was their character.

In our nation's pledge of allegiance to our flag, we say, "One nation under God." On our money we read, "In God we trust." We open ball games with a prayer and even Congress begins with prayer. Some want prayer in schools, but laws prohibit it, allowing rather the teaching of anti-God theories to be taught. America has been known in history as the land that trusts in her wealth and weapons. There has been much said about America's trust in God. Doubtless this is true of many even yet. Our land was founded by God-fearing people and our laws reflect their faith in Almighty God. But what must God think as we elect godless leaders and see their revelry and corruption? What must God think when we see evidences of greed, lust, sensuality, violence and dishonesty on every hand, and immorality paraded as if there is nothing wrong with it? What must God think of our motto and printed money when the ravages of the alcoholic beverages sweep the land and laws are legislated to advance its profitability to its producers and the havoc to its victims relatively ignored?

Do we really think God is impressed that America trusts Him? While many openly denounce Him and His ways and even "believers" timidly and passively sit idly by, why should He continue to bless America?

Not Draw Near

Fourth, *"She drew not near to her God."* Because Jerusalem had seared her conscience and silenced her prophets, rebelled in corruption, denied truth and abandoned faith, it came eventually to that last step of severing relationship with God altogether.

Communication with God is a two-way street. God speaks to man by and through His inspired and all-sufficient Word. Mankind speaks to God through prayer. How shall we stand if we cut our tie with God in both personal and national life? How shall we avoid impending ruin that our enemies seek if we reject the only power, strength and hope we really have, who is the God of righteousness?

Our recovery and survival depends upon our waking from our spiritual slumber, stupor and indifference and return to God. We must establish again our ties with God, trust Him, accept His corrections and instructions and obey His voice. The need of our day is to come to Christ, personally, one by one, in obedience to the gospel and conformity to His will in daily life. Do you agree?

* * * * *

Moment for Reflection

By the time you read this issue of my sermons the year 1990 will be almost finished. Indeed, life is as a swift ship (Job 9:26). Whatever we intend to do this year must be done very soon. But we still have time to plan for a productive year for 1991, if the Lord wills. Let us use our time wisely for it passes us by so rapidly. JB

Gehenna

Truth has two sides. One is pleasant and the other unpleasant. There are lessons that are pleasant to study and others are very disturbing because they contain some very hard sayings. But to preach the *"whole counsel of God"* (Acts 20:27), we must preach both sides.

People have various attitudes toward hell. Some deny there is such a place just as they deny there is a heaven. Some contend for the place of reward but deny there is a place of punishment. Such inconsistency! Others say they believe there is a hell but never preach about it, or try to gloss over it and soften the horrors of it. Some dislike the appeal to fear for serving God. It cannot be denied that the revelation of hell does cause fear. But while love is the highest motive for serving God, fear is a lesser motive and a very real one. God uses it. Hebrews 10:31, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

Two Sides of God

The Bible teaches that God is merciful, kind, loving, gracious, gentle, forgiving and of such qualities of tenderness as a Father who loves His children. But it also teaches that God is just, righteous, holy and is a God of wrath and anger. Justice demands reward and punishment. God could not be just if He treated goodness and evil just alike. The holiness and righteousness of God demands that He be angry toward wickedness.

In the book of Revelation we have suggestions of the grandeur and glory of heaven. Words cannot adequately describe how glorious it is. Neither can words adequately describe hell. But there is sufficient description of both to make it easy for us to decide which we prefer.

There is punishment after death and the judgment. We have other lessons that substantiate this fact but for the

sake of space will not go into that area here. But there should be no doubt in your mind of this truth.

The Place

This place of punishment is called hell (Matthew 10:28; 23:33). This is the word "gehenna," used twelve times in the New Testament. It comes from the Hebrew word "Go-hinnom" or the Valley of Hinnom. This valley was a deep and narrow glen south of Jerusalem where Ahaz introduced worship to the fire gods and Jews even offered their children to the false god, Molech. It became an abominable place to the faithful Jew. Later it became the location of the common refuse, the city dump, into which were cast the bodies of animals, criminals and all sorts of filth. There they were burned. Because of the depth and continual burning there, with smoke ascending from it, it became the symbol of the place of spiritual punishment and from whence hell took its name. This place of punishment is synonymous with the second or spiritual death.

Who?

The Bible informs us who shall inhabit hell? Most people will go there (Matthew 7:13,14). This is a hard saying and harder to realize. It is distressing to think that any one of us might be in that number.

Hell is the place for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). The list of evildoers in Revelation 21:8 and Galatians 5:19-21 shows us who shall inhabit hell. There are only two spiritual kingdoms and two spiritual destinies. One kingdom belongs to God and is destined for heaven. The other kingdom is of the devil and it bound for hell. Those who work the works of the flesh and follow the ways of sin are in Satan's kingdom and under his dominion. These have justified expectation of hell.

Persecutors of the church shall be in hell (Revelation 20:19). So shall these who obey not the gospel (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Christians who fall away and are not restored, who depart into apostasy, will be there (Second Peter 2:20-22). How this should arouse the lukewarm, indifferent, lethargic,

negligent, worldly-minded member of the church! How this should warn those who introduce unauthorized innovations and doctrines among brethren! How this should motivate us to good works (James 4:17), and encourage us to *"abstain from all appearance of evil."* (First Thessalonians 5:22). How this should provoke us to *"seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.!"* (Matthew 6:33).

Description

Hell is as ugly and dreadful as heaven is marvelous and beautiful. Hell is a place of suffering (Matthew 25:30). The descriptions of the New Testament are penetrating to the mind of the most awesome suffering one can imagine, and beyond imagination. It is a place of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:10). The fire is unquenchable (Mark 9:44,45). It is a lake of fire (Revelation 20:15), a veritable baptism of fire (Matthew 3:12). It is a furnace of fire (Matthew 13:42).

It is also described as a place of outer darkness (Matthew 25:30), removed from the *"Father of lights."* Some may ask, "How can there be fire and darkness at the same time?" My answer is that I do not know nor do I have to know to believe it. I have confidence in the revelation of God's Word, knowing He speaks of spiritual things here. It will be as God declares it whether I understand it all or not. Friend, you had best do the same thing!

Eternal

Just like heaven in one respect, hell will never end (Matthew 25:46). It is a place where the worm dieth not (Mark 9:44). Some teach that the wicked, at their death, will be annihilated and cease to exist. But the Scripture teaches that there is existence for both the righteous and the wicked after death (John 5:28,29), and there is consciousness (Luke 16:19-31).

Hell will be a place of regret for all who go there. So many will be in hell that could have so easily escaped it. They will have had numerous opportunities and there were those who constantly urged them to obey God and be saved. They will remember those invitation songs and those prayers

and loved ones who loved them enough to warn them and plead with them. If they had one more opportunity to leave the *"wages of sin"* they would not have any hesitation. But their opportunities will be gone and no hope remains.

What of Me?

As we study this subject, we are also aware that most people never think of hell except in terms of other people, seldom themselves. Some never think of it at all, except to use the word in their profanity. But realizing that the same Bible that tells of salvation and heaven also warns of sin and hell, we are sobered into the reality that we must do the will of our Creator. If we go to hell, it will not be because God wants us to perish (Second Peter 3:9). It will be because we refused to accept His gift of salvation offered through Christ. How foolish we be to deny ourselves of His bounty, but invite upon ourselves the wrath of a just God!

* * * * *

The Lord and Hagar

Genesis 16:1-11 should be read with this lesson. By the time of our text, God had already made great promises to Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, the nation would have its own land, his descendants would be numberless, and through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. These things were stated even though Abraham had no heir. Furthermore, he and his wife, Sarah, were old and she had always been barren. Yet, God promised him they would have a son through whom these things would come to pass.

Sarah's Plan

Sarah seemed to have decided God promised too much and needed some assistance. She devised the plan whereby she could provide Abraham an heir through her handmaid, Hagar. Inasmuch as Hagar was her servant the child would belong to Sarah and Abraham.

After Hagar conceived, trouble arose between Hagar and Sarah. As is the case, human plans that are substitutes for God's plan breed trouble. Because it was thought to be a reproach for a woman to be barren, Hagar looked with contempt upon Sarah and became arrogant and superior in her attitude toward her. Her rebellious ways and unsubmissive spirit toward her mistress was a mistake. It soon became intolerable for Sarah.

Sarah had the power to do something about it and told Abraham that he must put Hagar in her place. Abraham told her, *"Do to her as it pleaseth thee."* Sarah dealt with her harshly until Hagar fled from her presence into the wilderness. Hagar's behavior had brought her sorrow and despair, taking her from the necessities of life to doom.

By now Hagar must have felt that nobody cared for her. It certainly seemed that way as far as those around her were concerned. Even though part of the problem had been self-imposed, she had also been a victim of maltreatment from others. She felt as the Psalmist once wrote, *"No man cared for my soul."* We see a lonely, helpless, desperate slave woman with child in the wilderness reaping what she and others had brought to pass.

Hope for Hagar

But the situation changed and a ray of hope and light beamed upon her because the Lord cared. He came to her and inquired about her. It always makes a difference when the Lord is near. Even though Hagar was not a deserving person, not of the family of Abraham but an Egyptian and a slave, yet, the Lord cared. This must impress us. There is no such thing as an unimportant person in the sight of God.

Hagar, at this low point in life, was much like others now in the world. They are not deserving because of their conduct and are outcasts, often due to their fault. Proverbs 13:15, *"The way of the transgressor is hard."* Sinners make life difficult for themselves and often have nobody else to blame but themselves.

Other people can see the sinner in trouble and lacking sympathy and compassion pass it off with, "He is getting

his just desserts." Too few are really touched with the plight of the weary, downtrodden, discouraged, lost and condemned. Like the priest and Levite, many of us pass by on the other side. We need more Samaritans!

But our God is a God who cares even for the unworthy. Peter said, *"Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you."* (First Peter 5:7). What a gracious, comforting and beautiful thought! We can be thankful for such a God who cares for the unworthy because we all qualify. We all sin and deserve spiritual death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). We can be glad Christ died for us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:6-8). Hagar had reacted badly to her blessings and had been brought down. There was no place to go and none to whom she could turn, except God. In this humbled state, she sought God and the Lord heard her affliction (Genesis 16:11). The Lord helped her after she had *"looked after him."* (Genesis 16:13).

When Do You Seek God?

It is not uncommon for people to omit seeking God while enjoying sufficiency. Often people never *"look after him"* until they reach the end of their rope. Not until something or somebody humbles them do some ever turn to God. In fact, God cannot and will not do for the proud, haughty, self-sufficient person. Such a one is simply beyond help in that state. It is significant that before Peter said, *"He careth for you,"* (First Peter 5:7), that he wrote, *"Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time."* (First Peter 5:5,6). When we realize we are hopeless, helpless, doomed and damned apart from God, we will find it easier to sacrifice pride, self-will, selfishness and stubbornness or whatever else that hinders us from coming to God. Out in the wilderness Hagar was alone, not needed, unwanted. But in that wilderness she was given opportunity and found the door of recovery and redemption after she humbled herself.

The Way for Hagar

The Lord gave Hagar instructions that would relieve her of chaos. *"Return to thy mistress; and submit thyself under*

her hands." There was the need of spiritual correction. She was told to repent, turn around, go back, do whatever she must to make amends and start over. This would require "losing face," and admitting guilt, acknowledging error and repudiation of her former ways. It demanded the opposite of pride. But repentance and submission was the only way to restoration. *"Return... and submit thyself... I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude." "Behold , thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shall call his name Ishmael."*

The name Ishmael means "God hears." Even when no one else was listening, none seemed to care, God cared and heard and offered the way back. She went back, doing as God instructed, resumed her place, gave birth to her son who became the father of a multitude of mighty people.

The encounter between the Lord and Hagar is very similar to that between God and people today. Having alienated ourselves from God by our own sins, we must "lose face," humble ourselves before God and man, seek the Lord in our affliction.

The Lord's instruction to us is similar to that given to Hagar. Return and submit! Repent and obey! For those who will there awaits the reward of forgiveness, fellowship with Deity and the promise of eternal life. Otherwise, there is nothing before us but death in the wilderness of sin.

* * * * *

A Strong Home Base

Matthew 7:21-27, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built*

his house upon a rock; and the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a man which built his house upon the sand, and the rain descended, the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

That which is built on a strong foundation has durability and dependability. That which is built upon a weak foundation cannot stand under the pressures, tests and trials. The great strength of the Lord's church is the Lord Himself, its foundation of truth, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Matthew 16:16).

The Church

The church must be strong because of its task as the *"pillar and ground of the truth."* (First Timothy 3:15). It is built on truth and supports the truth. A weak church cannot fulfill its mission regarding truth.

It is through the church, the corporate body, that much of the activity of a Christian is expedited and discharged. Of course, he has his individual duties as a Christian that does not include the entire body. There is no super governing body in the New Testament church larger than the eldership over a single local congregation. The local church serves as the home base of operations. To do its work it must be a strong home base. Brethren of a local church undertake certain work, obligating themselves in benevolence, preaching, teaching, at home and abroad, guidance and worship. To assume such responsibility is a privilege as well as an obligation. The church has an interest in the physical and spiritual welfare, not only of those who are members of the body of Christ, but all men everywhere. Millions are dependent upon the local churches doing their duty. We must give a good account of ourselves in the home church and this demands a strong home base which the local church is.

For a local church to be a strong home base it must possess certain qualities without which it cannot do its work. These qualities are of such nature that there is always

room for growth and improvement. Where they do not exist, they can be developed. Where they do exist they can be expanded and improved.

To the Truth

A strong home base must be devoted and dedicated to the truth. How can a church be the pillar and ground of the truth when there is laxity toward the truth? Regardless of how many missions it supports, benevolent work it does, activities it promotes, a church builds only wood, hay and stubble and cannot stand the final test if not dedicated to the truth. This means the Bible is first, last and always the standard of measure and source of authority. Unless a *"thus saith the Lord"* dominates and overshadows everything pertaining to that church, unless the church is led by the revealed oracles of God, it cannot and will not be a strong home base.

Leadership

A strong home base must have a strong leadership, which includes elders, deacons, preachers and teachers who lead in different capacities. The preaching must be Biblical, vigorous and planned. Elders must lead by upholding the Word, living an exemplary life and making decisions with discretion, wisdom and compassion.

How could a church be considered strong if those in the lead are not devoted, involved, wise and have a proper mixture of gentleness and firmness? There must be visions, confidence, imagination and faith in the cause. Leaders must be out front showing the way, quick to encourage, never losing contact with followers, but always anxious to serve and help.

Leadership must also be willing to obey God and purge from the members those who persist in unfaithfulness. This failure causes grief to the church of Christ. *"A little leaven leaventh the whole lump."* Leaders must lead in keeping the church pure or else the church will become a reproach to the name of the Savior.

Followship

There must be a strong followship. Successful leadership depends on a loyal followship. Leaders cannot do their job unless there is the cooperation and willingness on the part of those they lead. Thankfully, most brethren realize their duty to the leaders and to God and do follow. The problem often encountered is a rebellious few who will disrupt whatever they can unless everything goes their way.

Another hindrance in good followship is that not all will allow themselves to get involved in the work. The leadership too often has to depend upon the "faithful few." The "spectator complex" has possessed too many. They had rather watch than work. We need to ask, "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?" Nobody can build a strong home base on local members who do not see their personal responsibility and get involved in a submissive and cooperative manner.

Loyal followship includes faithfulness in attendance to the assemblies. It includes liberal giving and obedience to the authority entrusted to the eldership (Hebrews 13:17). God has given the eldership the duty to oversee the flock, expedite the work of the local church, maintain the truth and uphold the purity of the body. He has given them the necessary authority to conduct the work assigned them. Those that follow must be willing workers with them

There are many matters of human judgment that must be determined in the affairs of a local church. The eldership has the right and duty to make such decisions and a good followship will abide by them. No church can be a strong home base if the truth is not upheld, nor can a local church be strong unless there is respect for the decisions in matters of judgment that are made by the eldership.

Love

A strong home base will be noted for the love that exists among its members for one another. Paul wrote, *"Let all your things be done with charity."* (First Corinthians 16:14). The American Standard Versions says, *"love."* Love, being the strongest and most noble of emotions and motives of the heart, will cause brethren to seek what is good for one another. It will prohibit one from doing that which is detrimental and harmful toward his brethren.

Whether to love or not love is not an optional matter. We either learn to love as God taught or we cannot live in obedience to His will. But we must be cautious and not let ourselves think that love is to be equated with the soft, sweet, mushy, permissive nothingness that some want regarding the truth. Some have wrongfully concluded that to object to error or exclude what God has excluded while requiring what God requires is being too strict, harsh and lacking in love. It has been our experience that those who want this kind of so-called "love" are those who are the quickest and most willing to destroy those who are determined to stand for the truth. Actually, there is no way to genuinely love separate from standing for the truth.

Where love truly exists, cooperation, fellowship, brotherhood, courtesy, consideration and unity will naturally follow. This is true because those who love one another love the truth above all else. The tie that binds our hearts in Christian love is our loyalty to the Lord's Word.

Have you ever known of a congregation where these qualities existed that failed in its performance? Have you ever known one to truly succeed where these qualities were not noticeably present?

* * * * *

Ready for the Meeting

Paul wrote, *"But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing."* (Galatians 4:18). Congregations often involve themselves in what is called a gospel meeting. Gospel meetings have proved to be a profitable method of getting the Word of truth to others, both the lost and the saved. A gospel meeting is certainly a good thing and when the church to which we belong conducts such an effort we ought to be zealously affected in it.

Paul gave this instruction in the context where he presented the relationship between the law God gave through Moses and the new covenant He gave through

Jesus Christ. There had been teachers among the brethren who were drawing disciples away, taking them back into the ways of Judaism. They were being zealous in recruiting brethren into apostasy. Paul wrote how good it is to be zealous in what is good, but what was taking place was not good. He wrote to stem the flow of digression from the truth. He did this by reminding them of their attitude toward him and his teaching in times past.

In verse eighteen Paul states an abiding principle of Christianity. We can make numerous applications of this principle and we wish to now apply it to being zealous in the conduct of a gospel meeting. This pertains to each one.

Jesus said in Mark 16:15, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* Matthew 28:19, *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations."* We dare not take this duty lightly. A gospel meeting is one effort to carry out this commission given first to the apostles and through them to us. It is an effort to reach the lost with the truth, recover those who may have fallen, and strengthen the saved.

Are They Relics?

Some would have us believe that the day of the gospel meeting is over. In times past there were tremendous numerical and spiritual successes enjoyed in gospel meetings not often seen today. Many congregations had preaching only once per month and maybe less often. Today, many churches that conduct gospel meetings have good sermons preached to them nearly every week, several times during the week. This may account for what some might consider a slackened interest in gospel meetings. If so, it ought not be so. If a gospel meeting is not a success the fault lies not in the method but most likely in the members and their failure to be ready for it and support it. This is a failure that could and ought be corrected. It is true that not very much is accomplished when members of the local church reflect an attitude of indifference and disinterest toward what is being done. But more than likely the failure or success, to whatever degree, is determined before the meeting ever begins. It depends on proper preparation for it.

Is Truth Preached?

A gospel meeting is successful whenever the truth is preached. It cannot be successful without the truth. Huge numbers might attend but without the truth it is a Satanic victory. It is more beneficial when more people hear the truth, when members bring their lost friends and relatives to hear what God has declared through His Word. Without the gospel there can be no salvation because the gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The more people present the more soil into which the seed can fall, germinate and take root.

Whose Responsibility?

What follows may sound overly critical and it is critical of brethren, but not unjustly or unkindly done. Some must think that the church runs by itself without anybody doing anything. It would not "run" at all if left to many who call themselves church members. They do not do much of anything, anytime, to see that the church succeeds in its God-given assignments. They feel no sense of responsibility to God or their brethren. They will not ever try to be present at most of the services during the gospel meeting. It has been my observation that one half to two thirds of the members of a local church will be absent during the services of a gospel meeting. But somehow, such people think this does not have any detrimental effect on the efforts put forth. What it shows is how little many members care about the lost, or, for that matter, about God and His work. These "drones" do more harm than good to the cause of Christ. If you asked them, "Do you want the church to shut down?" they would probably say, "No." But their actions say, "Yes." How can anybody expect the sinful world to be impressed with the importance of the truth when so many members are working on the side of the devil to dampen and hinder the efforts to save the lost by preaching the Word?

Brethren Can Even Be Rude

A gospel meeting is not for the benefit of the visiting preacher. It is not, however, considered good manners or being polite to invite a preacher to a gospel meeting and then members not cooperate and work for it. That is just a lack of courtesy and is plain rude. But many brothers and

sisters have no qualms about being rude in this matter, The visiting preacher takes time from his work, much of which he has to get done anyway by doubling his efforts. He leaves his family, spends extra hours of study and preparation for the gospel meeting, delivers his lessons. Often he spends considerable funds coming and going and not always is properly supported financially for his work. He does the best that he can and has to endure the humiliation that the very local brethren who invited him to come will not even hold up his hands, being absent, not bringing others to hear the truth he is called upon to present. A congregation ought to mean business in a gospel meeting, or not have one. To have a gospel meeting just to be having something going on is not a very highly motivated effort. It then becomes nothing much more than a conscience soothing effort for lukewarm and half-hearted so-called Christians.

Put it in Our Plans

Let us change the tone somewhat. Let us offer some constructive suggestions, mostly to individuals, and indirectly to each one. The best thing one can do when a gospel meeting is planned is for each member to plan to be among those who will be present at every service. Something might prevent perfect attendance, but we should plan to be present every service. Some never intend to come at all, and others think once, maybe twice, including Sunday morning, is enough. Everyone should plan to have perfect attendance. If not, why not? You expect the visiting preacher, the local preacher, the elders, etc. to be present. You should come just as much as they, not just if it is convenient with other plans. Make it convenient. Feel responsible, because you are. Set those dates aside for God's work. Gear your activities to accommodate the meeting rather than squeezing in a service or two provided other things do not interfere. It is a matter of priority that we should establish. What comes first with you? Where does God fit in your life and activities?

Invite

Make a list of those you can bring or at least invite to come. Specify which friends, neighbors, relatives you intend to personally contact. Those people need you and

need what is to be heard. Do them a favor and give them your consideration. Very likely you will be the only contact with truth they have. Do not forsake them. Let them know you care for their souls.

Talk It Up

Start immediately once the announcement is made about the meeting to talk enthusiastically and optimistically about the meeting and what can be done during that period. It reflects an attitude the way people talk. It builds a good attitude it they talk properly. Do your part in creating a positive and uplifting attitude among everybody about it. Do not just assume everyone knows it will be a good thing. Be a booster of good works. Make it your aim to be sure that this attitude spreads. Be zealous in a good thing. This is some of the best advertising than can be done.

Special Efforts

The congregation might have a special concerted effort for a larger attendance at Bible study for the first Sunday of the meeting. This automatically presents potential new prospects for teaching. It shows an attitude of interest in people and the desire for their welfare. We want numbers, not just to have numbers, but because each number represents a precious soul that must be saved.

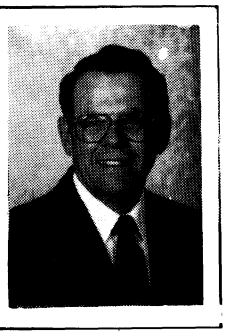
Do We Sing the Truth?

We need to work in every way we can for the gospel meeting so when the time comes and we sing, "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying," we will have tried to do just that. We will not feel like hypocrites when we sing, "I want to be a worker for the Lord." How can we sing, "Seeking the Lost," if we have not sought the lost? Can we honestly sing, "We'll Work 'Till Jesus Comes," if we won't work? Brethren, these things matter to God.

Paul said be zealous in a good thing, and the gospel meeting is certainly a good thing. Who will obey this apostolic instruction the next time there is a gospel meeting where you regularly attend? How about you?

* * * * *

Joseph, Like Christ



JAMES W. BOYD

It has been noted that possibly the most Christ-like character of the Old Testament was Joseph. He suffered so much from the hands of his own people, but when it became apparent that God was using him for the preservation of the family he never held a grudge nor sought vengeance, but rather demonstrated a forgiving spirit that can only be likened to Christ. Why do we burden ourselves with hatred and desire for revenge? Who is hurt most by holding grudges? What a generous contribution we can make to peace among men if we could only look with consideration and forgiveness toward those who despitefully use us and abuse us. It may not be the easiest thing to do but we will be the winner and better for it. JB

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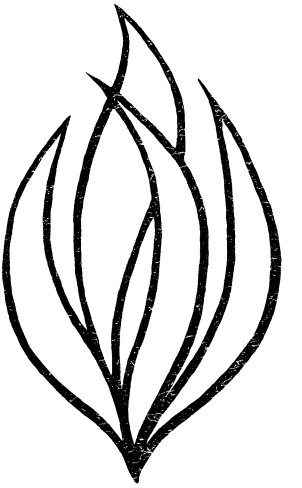

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 7**

Paul in Athens

Number One

Faith in God and confidence in the Bible as the Word of God is under constant attack and ridicule. Many have fallen beneath the power and influence of skeptics and their irreligious persuasions dedicated to the overthrow and destruction of the faith of Christ. One prime source from which this skepticism pours is the collegiate, university centers dominated by an intellectual community, rationalistic professors and materialists whose efforts are to "free" mankind from what they call "superstition" and religion. Their efforts have met with success among many uninformed and inexperienced youths who sit in their classes.

Many youths go to college with faith and return from college in doubt, confusion and frustration, having been subjected to atheistic, communistic, socialistic, humanistic philosophies that are designed to crush faith. Since society places such a premium on higher education and has raised the high-degreed instructor to the undeserved pedestal of "expert" in everything, these "down-with God" people have given rise to an unprecedented instability and confusion for many. Rather than educating the young, they are determined to indoctrinate the young with the doctrines of disbelief and humanism.

We have confidence that the facts of history, science and the truth in every realm are on the side of true New Testament Christianity. Only the unproven theories and philosophies of "smarter-than-God" men contradict the Bible. But people are selling their souls cheaply, forfeiting their holy privilege of thinking, and rather yielding their minds too willingly, deserting the sacred convictions too easily, partaking of the paralyzing, pessimistic

inadequacies served by the liberal theologians and so-called scholars of our time.

Many Are Misinformed

One reason some have not embraced Christianity, or have forsaken it, is because they are so misinformed and ill-informed. It is not because of the facts, or because it is unreasonable to follow Christ. But in their young and impressionable state, while seeking an "education," they are subjected to the theories of the "scholars." Christianity as revealed in Scripture has been so distorted by both Protestants and Catholics, that the unbelievers have been able to misrepresent true Christianity with impunity.

This danger of the agnostic, infidel and atheistic professor has been minimized by many parents and church leaders. The very ones God has charged for the proper training of the young are naive, indifferent, complacent and often compromising toward this onslaught against faith. There is no more fertile field for the advance of atheism than in the area of "education."

Many of us know the agony of doubt during youth. Some fear what might be discovered that will undermine their faith. We have no need to fear such things. We do have the need to establish ourselves on the ever-stable and everlasting truth. How can we do this? By turning to the only source of authority, God's infallible, inerrant, authoritative, all-sufficient and inspired Word can we do this (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Our present series of lessons concentrates on Paul's sermon in Athens as recorded in Acts 17:16-34. Keep your Bible by your side as we study.

Athens and Her People

Let us be acquainted with Athens and the man, Paul. Athens was a city not dissimilar to our intellectual centers. It was a city of people with intellectual and artistic capacities. Yet, Athens failed to find truth, had no power for a higher ethical life, did not know God, and was a city that existed without hope of anything and unable to offer anything, certainly not hope.

Paul's message is in stark contrast with the confused and vague contradictions that dominated Athenian thinking. Athens was a city with great intellectual attainments, wisdom of men, scientific and philosophical notions. You might think one could rely on what came from Athens. But such was not true. Athens demonstrated the foolishness of relying on the wisdom of men and ignoring God. We lean on a broken reed to lean on "education" alone.

But let us praise Athens. Greek culture has stamped itself upon Western culture in almost every field of endeavor. Athenian art, philosophy, science, literature, ethics and politics have survived the ages until now in various degrees. It remains prominent in many realms of our modern world. In literature, scholars agree it is unsurpassed. In creative art, it has no peer. In architecture, what exceeds the monuments, temples and buildings of ancient Greece, particularly Athens? Sculpture, mathematics, astronomy, natural science, medicine have all enjoyed contributions from Athens. Greece produced Plato, Socrates and Aristotle. As the Roman system of government has molded much of Western law, Greece gave us much political theory of government, even democracy. Such concepts of justice, liberty, law and democracy, parliaments, public opinion, all have the Greeks as the original architects. Similar things could be noticed about their contributions to drama, inventions and history. We do not downgrade the intellectual capacity of Athens, nor dismiss its impact on mankind. Their thirst for knowledge was passionate and often even fanatical.

Their Religion

Most interesting was Greek religion. They had no well-defined rule of faith. It was a mass of contradictory fables, obscure in meaning. Religion varied from one period to another. It is hard to trace it. They had a god for almost every action, impulse, virtue, vice and whim. There was a god of violence, fear, revolution, sports, drunkenness, madness, persuasion, sleep hunger, etc. All were personified in some god. They even made an alter to *"the unknown god"* (Acts 17:23), lest they omit one somewhere.

They formulated no religious doctrines, no church, no creed, no preaching, even thought oratory was one of their notable practices. Their religion had little to no bearing whatever on their daily lives and moral conduct. The gods were even thought to be guilty of crimes, but there was no real conception or sense of sin. Their religion did not concern itself with conscience. Whereas the Puritan faith considered one's relationship to God as all-important, the Greeks considered such a relationship as completely unimportant, even non-existing. Nothing was religious truth, but "truth" was as one personally felt it himself. They failed to establish or determine any real final and objective truth.

They were as Paul described the city of Corinth, *"The world by wisdom knew not God."* (First Corinthians 1:21). In all their knowledge they made themselves fools.

Their State of Mind

The result was unrest, fear, pessimism, hopelessness, despair and the expectant collapse that dominated Grecian culture of which Athens was a center post. It was into this intellectual city that the lonely figure of Paul, the apostle of Christ, came. No more staggering challenge ever faced man that this which faced this proclaimer of Christ. He was before intellectualism, human wisdom, self-sufficiency, pride, haughtiness and humanity as its "wisest." But they were without God.

Paul

Let us take a moment to see Paul. There is such a vast difference in men. Now and then there comes forth the exceptional person who is able to influence the thinking of almost the entire world. Of those who have lived since Christ, Paul has proven to be the most influential. This is not because of himself, but because of the message he preached. First Corinthians 2:2, *"For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."* Galatians 1:11,12, *"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."*

Paul traveled extensively by foot and boat in order to preach Christ and stir up the hearts of people and produce convictions. He upset the strongholds of error and sought to deliver man from the darkness of sin. It was said of him, and those with him, that he turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Not only did he influence by preaching, but also by writing as the Spirit led him to write. Nearly twenty centuries have not exhausted the wealth of wisdom of his inspired words. Thirteen, possibly fourteen, books of the New Testament were penned by Paul

Paul was always a man of exceptional zeal, religious fervor, faith and conscience. A Roman citizen and a Jew by blood and religion, he was converted to Christ. This man, once a persecutor of Christ, became a preacher of Christ. He was highly trained scholastically, having studied at the feet of the renowned Jewish rabbi named Gamaliel. Seeing the Lord on the road to Damascus, being told to enter the city and there he would be told what to do, he did as instructed. From the time of his conversion he preached Christ as the Redeemer of man from sin. If ever there was a giant among Christians, it was Paul. He is the man who delivered the sermon on Mars Hill in Athens.

A Proven Vessel

By this time in his life Paul had already suffered much for the cause of Christ. He had been stoned, beaten, threatened, jailed, harassed and more hardships were to come. Verse sixteen reveals something to expect when Paul encounters the intellectuals of Athens. *"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."* Paul was stirred, indeed, provoked to righteous anger as well as pity, The multitude of idols, gods and altars stimulated, motivated and irritated him. His learning as a Jew had taught him to loathe idolatry. His love for mankind caused him to be vitally concerned for Athens. His determination that truth be heard would not allow him to stand idle. He knew the truth and his heart was smitten that there, in the world's greatest center of learning, the most foolish thing that men could create and practice dominated the scene.

Paul began the work he came to accomplish; namely, preach Christ. *"Therefore he disputed in the synagogue with*

the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him." (Acts 17:17). As was his custom, he began in the Jewish synagogue where he could find people with some common ground with him. But he went beyond the synagogue into the market places, meeting the Athenians on their own home ground, disputing with idolaters, pagans anyone and everyone with whom he could converse. He made his points with clarity, preaching Christ and salvation. It was not very long before he attracted the attention of the philosophers of various sorts. *"Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection."* (Acts 17:18).

It was this encounter that led to his opportunity to preach at Mars Hill, the great gathering place of the rulers, thinkers and intellectuals of the city in that day. There he had opportunity to proclaim the truth of God before a skeptical and scholarly crowd.

* * * * *

Paul in Athens

Number Two

Our study continues with emphasis on Acts 17:18-21. The philosophy of the Epicureans was to make pleasure the end of all existence. They believed gods were for the purpose of reaching satisfaction of every whim and desire. They denied that there is a life after this one, so they concluded, "Eat, drink, be merry, for tomorrow we die." Their attitude was that there is no real purpose in life except to be happy, enjoy pleasure and satisfy oneself. It is not difficult to imagine the impact of such thinking on the morals and daily lives of the population, especially with those who followed this standard, or lack of one.

This philosophy continues until now. It is the theme of atheism and humanism and explains much of the sordid and immoral conduct of those who have thought that life is for nothing except to "do your

own thing." With no God, no rules, no standards, no accountability, what is there to restrict anything anyone might wish to do?

The Stoics were quite different. They were stern, emotionless, intellectual, extreme in asceticism or self-denial. Pleasure was not the prime purpose of life for them, and even pleasure did not come from satisfying your desires, but by suppressing them until there was nothing you wanted. This extreme view led to the renunciation of necessities of life and withdrawal from reality. To them life was only to be lived so one could die. Such pessimism, uselessness and lack of purpose one could hardly imagine!

Point of Common Interest

In Paul and his message they found something of common concern, however, and both wondered and puzzled over his teaching. *"What will this babbler say?"* Paul set forth strange gods to them because he preached Christ and His resurrection. They took Paul to the Areopagus, the place of their high court and hall of discussion on Mars Hill. They appeared to have interest in his message, but their interest was not what one would have hoped. Their motive was simply a yearning to hear something they had not heard previously. They were in pursuit of whatever was new, dazzling, exciting, sensational and different. They idolized knowledge, wanting to know in order to know. They had no intention of responding to what Paul taught.

They were like some today who always talk of a new outlook on life, the need of a new religion, a new code of conduct, a new approach to everything. They act as if they are more interested in the "new" than the "true." As you listen to them you are soon impressed that they think nothing of importance ever happened until they came upon the scene of life and whatever might have happened was insignificant unless they thought of it. Pride, arrogance, sophistication and haughtiness characterizes such people and their philosophies.

Such were the men of Athens. *"For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or hear some new thing."* (Acts 17:21). Living in a far-out, ivory tower of unrealism, they were impractical, pessimistic, pleasure crazed, but well-informed as to what people were thinking even though

abounding in frustration, confusion, instability and hopelessness. Actually, they were not much use to anybody and certainly producing nothing of eternal good.

The Prime Themes

Paul's sermon noted three dominant themes: (1) the nature of God and the creation of the world; (2) the resurrection of Christ, the Son of God; (3) the coming judgment for all men. What many then and now might consider irrelevant, especially to the all-knowing intellectual, constituted the major emphasis of the preaching of truth. Even though Paul answered questions nobody was asking, he answered questions that everybody ought to be asking.

Paul began with reference to an altar he had seen with the inscription, *"To the unknown god."* (Acts 17:22,23). The city was religious, having many gods. It is ironic that they professed so much knowledge, yet they accepted a god about which they knew nothing. Paul used that as his entrance, saying that he would tell them about God of whom they were ignorant. This got their attention.

The True God

What did Paul affirm about God? Concentrating on verses twenty-four through thirty, we hear Paul say that God made the world and all things therein. Both the Old and New Testaments assert that God created the world out of nothing, ordered it, shaped it, fashioned it, by the sheer power of His Word, voluntarily, speaking and bringing it into existence. At the first it was a shapeless mass, but He arranged it as He saw fit. The origin of the world is God.

This necessarily contends for God's existence before the world's existence. God is eternal in nature while the earth is created and temporal. It had a beginning. Material did not exist before mind. Mind brought matter into existence. God existed without the world, but the world could not exist without God for He created it.

Paul's statement also affirms that God is spiritual, not physical as the world He made. He is not like gold, silver, stone or like the idols of Athens. He is present everywhere, not far from any one of us. He does not dwell in man-

made temples like a physical being. Paul taught that he did not worship a god that he had made, but the God that had made him.

Furthermore, God is the giver of life and man is God's offspring. Man would not have life except it was given to him by God. From one man came all peoples. God placed man in his habitation, his place to live, this earth, and man is sustained by God. It is *"in him we live, and move, and have our being."* (verse 28).

More of His Nature

The inescapable implications of this is that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and ever-present, the Lord and Master of all things. It is not possible that we fully comprehend God or His creation. To do so we would have to be on an equality with God. We cannot know how God has done what He has done except through His Word. But while we are limited and finite and He is infinite, we must not restrict God and His capacities to the limit of our understanding and abilities. The nature of God surpasses our own or else we would be as God.

Even though there is much concerning Deity we cannot know or explain, the Biblical explanation and account of God, the creation, the world, the nature of all things, is the easiest of all explanations to accept because it is reasonable, logical, scientifically accurate and harmonious with all known truth. It is a mistake to think that science and the Bible are opposed to each other. Men's theories and philosophies often contradict the Bible, and misinterpretations of the Bible contradict some science, but there is harmony between God's world and God's Word.

Limitations of Science

Science, a study of this world and its material nature, cannot tell us about the origin of the world. Explaining origins is beyond the ability of science which deals with what is here and that which can be tested, measured and proved by empirical methods. None can test the origin of the world in a laboratory. We must rely on revelation.

Many theories have poured from the minds of men regarding origins that contradict Scripture. But these theories will also contradict what can be proved through science. They are ever-changing, being modified, shifting to accommodate later discoveries. They exist without proof and scientific demonstration. Philosophies have been devised based on certain facts, but arbitrarily compiled to formulate hypotheses and explanations that remain unproved, unsupported and imaginative guesses.

On the other hand, the known and provable facts remain on the side of the Biblical account. Earth had to have a beginning and science has proved that. Matter is not eternal and science proved that. The Bible has taught both facts long before science demonstrated it. The world had to have a first cause, and the Bible designates God as that Cause. Effect has to have a cause. God is the Cause and the world is the effect.

If we reason together, we know even though the world came from nothing material it came from something. That something is God. From nothing, God created the world. The orderliness, precision and design of the operations of nature demands an orderer and designer. It is unreasonable to think this vast and intricate universe "just happened accidentally."

What Genesis Teaches

The Genesis record affirms the primacy of water, light before the sun, land before life, the fixity of the "kinds" of animals, animals before human, and the cessation of creative activity. Scientific data has been accumulated through the years that is harmonious with each affirmation. Just how could an ancient writer like Moses or Job have known with such accuracy these facts except God revealed them to him?

Even though the Bible is not intended to be a scientific book, but rather God's revelation concerning salvation for man and man's relationship with God, yet, it is scientifically accurate when it speaks of scientific matters. We are not surprised that the work and Word of God harmonize. There are numerous examples of the consistency between the Bible and science on detailed

matters that is not adequately explained without God. Scientists have no knowledge that can destroy any Biblical truth and revelation. Nor is there real substance to the alleged contradictions within the Bible .

Conclusion

What is the conclusion and consequence of Paul's teaching concerning God? (1) God is. (2) God is the Creator and Sustainer of all. (3) God is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present Spirit, the source of life. In view of this, Paul taught man is accountable to God and must repent (verse 30), turning from idols to the true and living God. This demands faith based on evidence God has provided. God does not ask that we take a "leap in the dark." He gives evidence to verify His Word.

We, like Paul, say to the intellectual skeptic that there is the God of heaven and that even the heavens declare the glory of God. The Bible begins, *"In the beginning God..."* Once that is accepted, the rest of the Bible is easily accepted. So Paul taught and so we also believe.

* * * * *

Paul in Athens

Number Three

Another theme of Paul was the resurrection of Christ. This had been a prominent part of his preaching since he had seen the risen Lord as recorded in Acts nine. First Corinthians fifteen is considered the resurrection chapter where Paul stressed the reality of this event regarding Christ and eventually all of us.

Of the three dominant themes at Athens only the resurrection belongs to the realm of history. The creation was pre-historic, in that it occurred before man was on the earth. The judgment is yet in the future. But the resurrection is presented in Scripture as a historical event

just as Jesus was a historical character. We know He lived, where He live, what He did, and know many of the characters of His day from other sources than the New Testament. Just as the Bible is not intended to be a science book but is scientifically reliable when it speaks of such thing, neither is the Bible primarily a history book, but when it speaks of historical matters it speaks accurately.

Christ in History

The encyclopedias record the fact of Christ and we use the designations B.C. and A.D. that testify of His birth. But not only did He live, He died. We know more details of the hours prior to His death than we know of any other person of ancient history. We know more about His last week of life from the New Testament than we know of all the rest of His life combined. We know of the six trials (three before Jews and three before Romans), what was said to Him, what He said in the few times He spoke, how He was treated, even some details of arranging for false witnesses against Him and their perjured testimony. We even know the name of the man who carried His cross to Calvary, and the statements the Lord made while on the cross. When we speak of the death of Christ we are not talking about a myth or fable as some skeptics would have us believe, but historical data about a real person.

The Resurrection of Christ

Something happened to the body of Jesus. What was it? The New Testament says He was taken from the cross by Joseph of Arimathaea, placed in a new and borrowed tomb in a garden near the place of crucifixion. It also records that three days later the tomb was empty. We contend the historical records of the New Testament are reliable and we have no reason to doubt them.

A resurrection means a rising from the dead, coming forth from the dead, a return to the state of the living from the state of the dead. There can be no resurrection without a death. What died? The soul does not die as does the body. Jesus had said, *"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."* His body died, but not His spirit. Ecclesiastes 12:7 teaches that the body and spirit separate at death, as does James 2:26. If Christ conquered death at all, His body had

to be delivered from death's power. His was a bodily resurrection. To speak of the resurrection of Christ as being anything other than a literal, bodily and actual resurrection is to misrepresent what the Bible declares and is to deny the resurrection of Christ altogether.

The resurrection of Christ is crucial to New Testament Christianity. On the truthfulness of the resurrection hangs the credibility of the gospel, the church, the integrity of Jesus and His real identity. If He did not come forth from the dead, He is a false prophet because He foretold that He would rise again the third day (Matthew 16:21).

The resurrection of Christ is an essential part of the revelation of Christ to the world. It is at the heart of the gospel (First Corinthians 15:1-8). It is the Biblical explanation of God's plan for saving man, the fulfillment of prophecy, an event witnessed by the apostles, and even as many as five hundred people at once saw the resurrected Lord. His resurrection is a declaration that He is the Son of God (Romans 1:4). It is not the only evidence of that truth, but without it the other evidences would stand in contradiction. Paul wrote, *"If Christ hath not been raised from the dead, then our preaching is vain."* (First Corinthians 15:14-19). If no resurrection, there would be no church because the church is founded on the truth that Jesus is the Son of God, which was proved by His resurrection. If you take the resurrection out of the gospel message you have removed that which makes the New Testament coherent. The New Testament does not simply say to follow this great leader, but teaches that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who was proved to be who He claimed to be by His resurrection from the dead.

Burial

As for the burial of Christ, all we know about it is what the New Testament records. Keep in mind the status of reliability of the New Testament writers in other historical matters. We know who took His body from the cross, who wrapped it with spices in burial clothes, and even where is was laid; namely, a tomb near the scene of the crucifixion in a nearby garden. There is no evidence from any source to contradict any fact of His burial as is recorded in the Bible. We know of none who seriously challenge the

record of His burial. There are two primary testimonies that cry out that Jesus rose from the dead.

The Empty Tomb

First, there is the empty tomb. An empty tomb alone does not prove Jesus rose from the dead. But if the resurrection is true, the tomb must be empty, and it was empty. Women saw it was empty along with Peter and John. Even guards reported it was empty. The enemies of the Lord never denied the emptiness of the tomb.

Some have offered other explanations for the emptiness on the basis that the resurrection is unreasonable and unacceptable to them. They cite the report of the guard, saying, *"Say ye, his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept"* (Matthew 28:13). As one can see, this is what the guards were told to say, not what they saw. But is this testimony itself reasonable? Did all the guards sleep at once, and at the very hour the body was supposed to have been stolen? They were on duty and to sleep was punishable by death. Are we to think all would ignore this?

Furthermore, if all were asleep, how could any of them testify what actually happened? Can you be a reliable witness to what happens when you are asleep? Such "testimony" could be nothing more than speculation, not eye-witness information.

How could the disciples steal the body without arousing some of the guards? Why would they want to steal it anyway? Their hope was founded on the assurance that Jesus would come forth. If He would not rise their own hope would be dashed. Would they hold to such a hope even though they knew it was unfounded, and even risk their lives and suffer persecutions for teaching what they knew was false? Is that a reasonable conclusion? Surely, we have no problem dismissing what the guards said.

"Explanations"

Some contend that Joseph took the body to another tomb. But there is no evidence for that. Why would he risk his life for a meaningless deception? Remember that soldiers were sent to seal the tomb, not Joseph. They would have known

if a body was there or not. To have sealed an empty tomb would have been to jeopardize their lives.

Others say the women went to the wrong tomb. But is it likely that all the women, plus Peter and John, went to the wrong tomb? Was the angel who spoke to them mistaken also? Why did not the enemies of Jesus produce the body from the "right" tomb when the claim was made for the resurrection and explode the whole contention?

Others have said that Jesus did not die, but only swooned on the cross into unconsciousness and later revived by friends and went on with the plot to deceive. But the record says that blood and water came from His body, indicative of death. Guards noted He was already dead when they broke the legs of the others, but not His. Could one survive three days in a tomb having suffered what He did? Could He have removed the stone, overpowered the guards and escaped in such a physical state? Absolutely not!

These things are mentioned because they are offered by the intellectual skeptic who says the resurrection is unreasonable. But such "explanations" only show how unreasonable are the skeptics. The fact of the empty tomb stands as evidence against the denials if skeptics.

He Was Seen

The second major evidence of His resurrection is the number of personal and physical appearances of Jesus. At least twelve times, in different places, before different people, as many as five hundred at once, Jesus came unexpectedly, eating, drinking, walking, talking, being heard, touched and seen. While skeptics cry , "Mistaken identity," we contend that those closet to Him would not have mistaken Him. They were in His immediate presence. Is it likely that five hundred would be simultaneously deceived? Keep in mind that those who saw Him had doubted what they had heard about His resurrection and did not expect to see Him. Yet, they did. The necessary psychological conditions for mass deception were simply not in existence.

The Conclusion

The only logical and reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from the evidence, in spite of suggested alternatives, is that the grave of Jesus was also the birthplace of the indestructible conviction that Jesus conquered death and come forth from the grave. When He did, prophecy was fulfilled and the Sonship of Jesus was confirmed. Our faith and hope continues to rest on the validity of this event, and it stand even beneath the vicious blows of unbelievers down through the ages.

The resurrection was the second major theme of Paul's sermon on Mars Hill, and we preach the same truth today to an unbelieving and skeptical world so influenced by the so-called "wise men" intellectuals who deny whatever they either have not done or do not understand.

* * * * *

Paul in Athens

Number Four

When Paul preached in Athens at Mars Hill he stressed the basic matters of Christianity to an unbelieving, self-sufficient, worldly-wise, intellectual community. Even though some mocked and ridiculed his message, Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ before these self-acclaimed experts whose "wisdom" had become their vice as well as their virtue. They were very much like some that Paul described in Second Timothy 3:7, *"Ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth."*

Paul preached Christ, His life, death, burial and resurrection. He had begun His sermon by explaining to them the true and living God, the Creator of all thing. Finally he turned His attention to the inescapable coming judgment of all mankind. Our text is Acts 17:30,31.

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given

assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

Coming Judgment

In Athens, as in other localities, Paul preached that there was a great day coming, definite in the future, that would involve all men, at which time entrance would be made into an eternal destiny. Even though such preaching was new to Grecian religious thought, a final judgment is a very reasonable expectation. The fact that some cry, "I have never heard of anything like that," does not alter the facts. It is not necessary for man to understand every reason for every action of God before he should accept it. But the judgment is reasonable and understandable. Judgment is commonplace in the affairs of men.

It is inescapable that we make many judgments every day. In courts, before judges, in daily experiences, weighing evidence and measuring by standards are everyday happenings. Why should people doubt that there will be an accounting before God since there is an accounting being given before one another all the time? If the mundane matters of life have sufficient significance to warrant the exercise of judgment, certainly that which concerns the existence of man, his world, life, spirit, spiritual and eternal matters warrant the making of judgments.

Biblical history reveals how God has made many judgments of people, events, angels, nations, cities, etc. With this record before us, why should anyone really question that there will be a final judgment?

The Standard

Paul's remark about the judgment infers another major truth. It insists the existence of a standard by which people should live. It demands that there is right and wrong. There is that which is acceptable to God and that which is unacceptable. Furthermore, it contends that justice shall prevail, eternity is real, and immorality is true, or else why a judgment at all? The final judgment to come dismisses the atheistic, materialistic, humanistic doctrines that there is no God, no standard, no right or wrong, everything relative, and no life after this.

Not only does the daily necessity of judgment, the meaning of life, and God's other judgments sustain the reasonableness of a final judgment, but morality demands it. Have there not been many injustices perpetrated through the ages that have not been properly punished or even challenged? What of the unconfessed murders, thefts, unsolved crimes, lies and various sorts of unpunished blasphemies and sins for which the guilty have not repented? Is all this nothing? Does it not matter? Does not morality and justice demand that such things be accounted? Any realistic mind knows many deeds of goodness and nobility go unrewarded here. If good and evil are to be treated alike, wherein is there justice and morality at all? Again, we insist that the reality of a judgment where all is measured and the fruits are reaped is not only reasonable, but unreasonable not to expect it.

The Judge

But who has the right to render judgment on all mankind? No mere human could ever qualify because it demands infinite power, knowledge, agelessness, understanding, a capacity for total and infallible justice, and the power to extend mercy to whatever degree might be given. Only Deity could qualify as Judge. Only the Creator, Sustainer, the giver of life, One eternal in nature, all-knowing, all-wise, all-seeing, ever-present could render the judgment the world must receive.

Genesis 18:25 affirms God, the Judge of all, shall do right. Romans 2:16 teaches that God shall judge even the secrets of men. Such matters are those that only Deity could know.

God, in His Word, has declared many of His judgments, and that His judgments shall be administered through His Son. It will be by *"the man whom he hath ordained"* that judgment shall be rendered. That man is Christ. John 5:22,23,27, *"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him... And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man."* Second Timothy 4:1,8, *"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus*

Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom... Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." God is the Judge but His judgment is through His Son, Jesus Christ.

There are many questions pertaining to the judgment for which we have no Biblical and authoritative answer. For some questions we are provided limited and partial answers. Some are completely answered for us.

Those to be Judged

Who will be included in this final coming judgment? John 5:28,29 shows all shall be included. This is why the gospel is to be preached to all. Second Corinthians 5:10, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."*

When will this judgment take place? We know neither the day nor hour (Matthew 24:36-39). But our lack of knowledge of when in no way invalidates its certainty. Scoffers will come denying it shall occur (Second Peter 3:3,4,7,10), but *"the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."* His coming will be unannounced as far as the exact time, but God has already announced the certainty of that day.

What shall be judged? What shall be weighed and measured? Ecclesiastes 12:14, *"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."* We shall be judged according to our works (Revelation 20:13). Therefore everything about life here on earth has significance.

What will be the criteria, standard and measure the Lord shall use? John 12:48, The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Those who believe not (John 3:18), obey not (Second Thessalonians 1:7-10), who have lived wickedly (Revelation 21:8) shall be judged.

Paul said the judgment will be *"in righteousness."* (Acts 17:31), which is defined in Psalm 119:172 as the

commandments of God. The Lord's perfect law of liberty will be that by which we shall be judged.

And Then...

Matthew twenty-five pictures the judgment scene as a separation of the saved from the lost. This judgment will be the sentencing of each one into an eternity of heaven or hell. The decision regarding our eternity will have been made by each one in this life. It is our choice.

All this strikes us with awe, even fear. But for those who serve the Lord faithfully in Christ, it will be a day of rejoicing. Let none of us by-pass salvation.

Some treated Paul's sermon with scorn, dismissing it as nothing. Few were touched by it. This intellectual center was less attuned to truth than most any other place Paul preached. Truth was not well received, but it still is the truth. Some people are just too steeped in their own"wisdom" to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"After these things, Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth." (Acts 18:1)

* * * * *

The Command, Order and Promise

Matthew 6:24-34, *"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field which today is and*

tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought saying, What shall we eat, or, what shall we drink, or withal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

This passage is a portion of what has been called the preamble to the Christian faith, the Sermon on the Mount. We will concentrate on the thirty-third verse, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."* Our lesson provides us a sense and level of values, helping us gain and retain those things with which we are concerned daily. The passage consists of a command, an order or priority, and a promise. It discerns the relative value between the spiritual and the material.

The Command

The command is to *"seek."* We are told to seek God's kingdom and God's righteousness. This demands a deliberate choice of action and effort on our part, a deliberate searching, striving after through sacrifice, putting forth special effort with the sincere intent to find. It calls for looking and pursuing for something of great value. Finding what is sought is not coincidental or accidental, but intentional. People may sometimes just run across something of value and find a bargain, a treasure, without exerting much special effort. But we are commanded to seek out something with a craving for it.

That which is to be sought is God's kingdom, which is His church. Colossians 1:13, Paul tells those in the church that they are in the kingdom. As one preacher illustrated, "The church is to the kingdom the same thing an automobile is to a car." Therefore, all things pertaining to the church must be the object of our fervent search. This teaching magnifies the greatness of His church and forever banishes the idea that the church is something optional.

We are to seek God's righteousness, which Psalm 119:172 defines as the commandments of God. Righteousness is right doing as God has commanded it. As expressed in Matthew 5:6, we are to hunger and thirst for it, recognizing the need of it, desiring to know what God says in order to do what God directs. The attitude is, *"Not my will but thine be done."* Here is man's prime goal and purpose in life. This is his most noble function, that of hearing and heeding the will of the Lord.

Order

The seeking of the kingdom and righteousness is of the first order. While we are involved in many matters of life, nothing is to occupy the place of first priority above this seeking. This is easily understood though not so easily obeyed. First means first, foremost in rank and importance. Who can mistake what is taught? Nothing else can occupy or share first place with it (Matthew 6:24).

What does this teaching tell us in circumstances of conflict between the interest of the church and other interests of life? Will we heed what is taught? It means the church before self, social activity, business, pleasure or whatever. Some might wish to dismiss this as "preacher talk" but you just remember the preacher that taught it.

There are times when Satan tempts us to forget to put first things first, whether it be material or personal matters. But can we afford to omit or neglect to follow God's order?

Promise

Consider the promise that is made when this teaching is obeyed. *"All these things"* refers to the material necessities which Jesus had mentioned. Man gets so concerned about his physical welfare that he can be led to neglect his spiritual welfare. Some act as if they think God does not understand that we have physical needs. But Jesus said, *"Your heavenly Father knoweth you have need of these things."* Is it not strange how we worry and fret, striving for the earthly things, having no assurance of success, but Jesus promises success, as God sees what is best for us, provided we put first things first? He does not promise all we might want, or think we need, but He does promise

what we really need. But the promise is a conditional one. We must obey the command and keep matters in proper order.

Something more wonderful than this promise is not stated in this passage. Material provisions are secondary to spiritual blessings. Having what we need materially is like a by-product that follows the spiritual benefits of serving the Lord. Our greatest blessings are those pertaining to the soul through Christ. These are also ours when we seek God's kingdom and His righteousness first.

What price can be placed on forgiveness of sins which would otherwise prevent us from entering heaven? How do you value fellowship with Deity, hope, love, and understanding the eternal meaning and purpose of life? After all these things even while we live on earth, we have heaven to which we can look forward.

The lesson is brief but not difficult to grasp. But who will truly believe it and demonstrate that conviction by deeds? What are your values in life? Are they as God has evaluated them? What are you seeking during your brief span of life? Is it what God says should come first? How much do you consider the promises, both materially and spiritually, that God has made? Does your life reflect confidence in His Word?

To keep things in balance, we are not saying, nor did Jesus, that all material pursuits are evil. We do understand that life does not consist of the possessions we temporarily have on this earth (Luke 12:15). God knows what is essential to sustain life on earth. He has promised to provide if we would put first things first. So we encourage one and all, self and others, seek Him before and above all else, and all will be well with you.

* * * * *

Should We Not Say, "I told you so!"

It has been considered by some that saying, "I told you so," is a bit rude. But it is not always the case. Sometimes it is a good way of impressing upon people how they were informed and warned and then they paid no attention to what they knew, went ahead anyway, and then had to suffer the consequences of of their folly.

Brethren are now suffering from the invasion of modern versions (perversions) of the Bible even though they were repeatedly warned against such books of error.

We hear among some the doctrine of grace alone without any law, salvation by faith alone and you need not even know the correct reasons for baptism, women preachers and teachers in mixed assemblies, instrumental music, even partaking of the Lord's Supper on Saturdays, and other such heresies. Such things are taught in various so-called modern versions of the Bible.

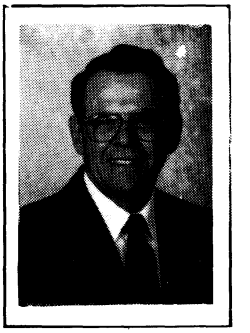
Some claimed, "The errors in these versions would not hurt us!" But when people follow the liberals and the "wise men" of our colleges and partake of error, it is not surprising that these errors are soon found among us.

So-called versions teach what would not be allowed in pulpits and classes. But now the errors are taught from pulpits and classes. Feed on error! Follow error!

Modern versions have contributed to the digression among churches of Christ and those who have tried to ignore or play down the impact of such perversions shall not stand guiltless before God or man for helping to cause it.

Many of us warned against them. Too few gave heed. Now we see and hear among churches that which could not have been imagined just a few years ago. But, "I told you so," and look what is happening! Maybe some will start listening next time justified warnings are given! JWB

Special Series This Issue



JAMES W. BOYD

If we really desire to preach the gospel, we should study the sermons preached by the apostles. Some criticize the church today for "answering questions nobody is asking." Others say the gospel is irrelevant in our educated and intellectual society. Let us take a page from the preaching of Paul. We will see the criticisms are nonsense. Paul was in the city of ancient intellectualism and preached God as the Creator, Jesus as the resurrected Savior, and the coming judgment. Nobody was asking about these things, but they should have been. Our series discusses Paul's sermon on Mars Hill in Athens. We would insist the message he preached needs to be preached now. Faithful gospel preachers still preach this same truth.

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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 8**

Anno Domini

Our lesson is especially appropriate as we pass from one calendar year to another. The words "anno domini" are Latin for "the year of our Lord." It is abbreviated as A.D. The year 1991, A.D. indicates approximately one thousand nine hundred ninety one years since the birth of Christ. While much of the world ignores Him and is ignorant of Him, yet, the entire world dates the events of history according to his birth.

Let us consider the phrase, "the year of our Lord." Let us think of the forthcoming year, whatever that year might be, as a year that truly belongs to the Lord rather than to self. It is the Lord's year. In just twelve short months we will have swiftly run through another calendar. What shall we be able to say of this current year once it is passed? Will it have been a year of the Lord?

As with all other matters regarding our relationship with God, this is a very personal matter and each must make the decision for himself. It is a decision that must be made early in the year lest part of the year be gone before we start our direction. May we outline a course of action that each can take that would do much to make the year a year of God.

Conditions in Samaria

Turning back to the Old Testament, let us set the scene before us of an event in the long ago. Samaria was under siege from Syria. The Syrians had a stranglehold on the city, nothing permitted to come in or out. The people were on the verge of starvation, and what food was left was of tremendous price.

Second Kings 7:3,4, *"And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why*

sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they kill us, we shall but die." Siege or no siege, these four men had a difficult life suffering from leprosy. They had a choice from three alternatives: (1) go into the city and die of starvation with the others; (2) stay where they were and die there; (3) surrender to the Syrians with the hope that the Syrians might provide for them. The Syrians could do no worse than kill them, and they were going to die with either of the other alternatives. Their only hope for life was the third alternative, and this is what they chose.

Second Kings 7:5-7, *"And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life."*

Not What They Expected

To the surprise of the lepers they found the well-furnished camp vacated. The Lord had caused the Syrians to flee, thinking they were going to be attacked by a superior force. They had left all of their provisions behind them.

Seeing the tremendous abundance, the lepers began indulging themselves to the fullest, plundering tent after tent, hoarding up everything they wanted. They gloried in their good fortune and were for a time oblivious and unconcerned about the plight of the masses of people in Samaria that still were very much in need. Even though the city was no longer in danger, the people were not aware of it. There was great supply available but those that needed it were not informed of it.

Verse nine tells of a change of heart and action by the lepers. One said, *"We do not well: this day is a day of good*

tidings, and we hold our peace." The enemy gone, with food in abundance, they knew they needed to tell others about the salvation that was before them for the taking.

They returned to the city and told of their finding. There was some skepticism among some, but soon the report was confirmed and the people rushed out to the camp and were spared the disaster they anticipated. The good ending of this account is attributed to the fact that the lepers came to realize something we must realize also. Good news deserves to be told. Those who know it are obligated to tell it, and especially when others are so dependent on it.

Good News

Since Jesus was born in Bethlehem, lived in Palestine, died, was buried and raised from the dead to offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who would follow Him, this good news deserves to fall upon the heart and ears of everyone. Since there is a source of joy, peace, hope and life for mankind, all people ought to know about it. But who will tell it? Who can tell it except those who know it? Just as the lepers were the only ones who could tell their good news, Christians are the only ones who can tell the good news, the gospel, of Jesus Christ.

We dare not do as did the lepers at first and simply indulge ourselves in the blessings of God, unconcerned for others. The world is sin-cursed and spiritually starving. The faith of Christ is God's great blessing to all nations. The very nature of it demands that it be spread abroad.

We ask, "Could it be that we are not sufficiently impressed as to the worth of our spiritual blessings to the degree that we want others to know of them?" Let me ask, "Would you inform others if you had the cure for cancer? Would you keep silent if you had the solution to international tensions and a sure prevention of future wars?"

It may sound strange, but many "Christians" act as if they have nothing worthwhile to tell. They do not act as if starving people need what they know. They do not rejoice as we might expect of a dying man who has been given life. If we are not impressed and thankful for our redemption, how can we expect others to desire it?

One historian has predicted that the twentieth century will be noted as the century when America became aggressively anti-Christian. There is only one way to prevent it. This is a day of sin, rebellion, disbelief and the scoffer is having his way. It is a day of spiritual starvation and people are besieged by Satan and the forces of evil, and often through choice. But it also a day of great discovery, good news, a day that can be a day of deliverance and spiritual abundance. Christ has come and has done His work in providing for mankind's salvation. God cares for us, loves us, wants us for His spiritual children, and has provided the way to come to Him. We know that way is revealed in Scripture. How can we keep silent and keep it to ourselves, not being concerned for others and future generations?

Love for the Lost

There is no surer sign of a converted person than his passion for the lost. You cannot be a faithful Christian and not care about souls around you. But how else do we show we care except by telling them the glad account of redemption? There is not one for whom the Lord does not have great interest. "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,*" was a part of His final instructions to His people (Mark 16:15). Millions know not of the love God has for them and their way of security.

True, some will not hear it and cast it aside once they do hear it. Others will scoff and ridicule. Some will contend that such a message is "too good to be true" and dismiss it. But we who know the favor of God cannot retract the preaching of salvation because some might reject it. Fishermen do not pull in their lines because every fish is not caught. We are fishers of men and we cannot afford to abandon the cause of saving souls.

We can make any forthcoming year a "year of the Lord" if we will devote time and effort to the saving of some lost soul. If each Christian would resolve to tell the story of Jesus and His love to his family, friends, neighbors, fellow-workers, acquaintances, some will hear and heed even if many, probably most, might not. In a proper manner, with the perfect message, we can come to the end

of this year and look back upon it with great satisfaction that we did, indeed, make it a year of the Lord.

Living each day in the faithful service of our Master is needful to make the year one for God. Worshipping, studying, praying, conducting ourselves in the imitation of Christ is what we must do. But without fear, timidity or apology, we should be active in reaching for others. Will you be among those who will let the glad tidings of spiritual plenty be known? Will you start today, and not let any part of the year slip away?

You talk about the weather,

And the crops of corn and wheat;

You speak of friends and neighbors

That pass along the street;

You call yourself a Christian,

And like the gospel plan;

Then why not speak for Jesus,

And speak out like a man?

Are you ashamed of Jesus

And the story of His cross,

That you lower His pure banner

And let it suffer loss?

Have you forgot His suffering?

Did He die for you in vain?

If not, then live and speak for Jesus,

And speak out like a man!

* * * * *

What Doth Hinder Me?

Take your Bible and read Acts 8:26-39, the record of the conversion of the man from Ethiopia. Our attention shall focus on the question, *"What doth hinder me to be baptized?"* Christian friend, let someone who is not yet a Christian read this brief study. It could bring them to the Savior with understanding and conviction.

After Philip preached and the Ethiopian heard, baptism was requested. Before Philip baptized him, however, there was a point of concern that had to be settled. Nothing hindered this baptism because the Ethiopian, having heard the gospel, believed it, and knowing what he must do, obeyed as he was taught, and went on his way rejoicing.

What hinders people from being baptized today? Obviously something hinders them. From time to time all hindrances are removed and overcome and one comes requesting to be baptized in obedience to the gospel plan. But many hear and do not respond favorably. They are lost and bound for eternal punishment as they are. Yet, when opportunity is afforded them to obey they turn away and refuse. Since Deity has done all that Deity is going to do, having provided salvation through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and with the inevitable judgment coming for us all, and it being clear as to what man's duty is, what doth hinder? Let us stress that whatever it is, it is costly because it prevents salvation. But we are convinced that there are honest and sincere people who would be baptized except they are confused, misinformed and simply do not realize the importance of baptism. There are also some, doubtless, who are just prejudiced, ignorant and intend to remain so. Some may be stubborn and too filled with pride to surrender to Jesus Christ.

Confusion

Some are hindered because they are confused as to what is truly valuable in life. We love to live, but often are mixed

up as to what is the real meaning of our existence. There is a confusion of values.

Careless

Possibly there are some who do not care about life, and some even destroy their lives. But most people are busy striving for something that they consider to be of some value. Some seek fame, worldly prestige, worldly knowledge, comfort, ease, pleasure, material gain, etc. Others just want to live life the way they please without regard to their duty to God and their fellowman. "Do your own thing" and "what's in it for me?" is the philosophy that has captured so many. They want no restrictions and even deny the existence of God before acknowledging any accountability to Him.

Duty

But no person rightly understands life until he realizes that his primary duty is to *"fear God and keep his commandments."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Even if one gains the whole world but loses his soul he profits nothing (Mark 8:36). Life does not consist of our possessions (Luke 12:15). *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."* (Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 11:10). *"In the way of righteousness is life."* (Proverbs 12:28). People need to ask what they hold as their priorities. Once they get this matter straightened out, they will be more inclined to follow His directions.

Need

Others are confused as to the necessity of salvation. Many false teachers have taught that sin is only as one thinks of it. They contend that there is no such thing as sin that damns the soul, if there even is a soul. Others teach that, even if sin is real, being a good moral person, a good citizen, a providing father, one who pays his debts, has few vices, and is a respectable person in the community, even religious and member of some church is all that they need. Thinking this, they will not act. Nobody acts until they realize they must act. Probably the masses of people who are concerned for the soul have the idea that they shall enter heaven because they have a "pretty good record."

The Bible teaches that salvation is not earned nor merited. We cannot be good enough to go to heaven on our own righteousness. Those that are saved must be *"in Christ."* This is where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10), and where all spiritual blessings are provided (Ephesians 1:3). Escape from condemnation is *"in Christ"* (Romans 8:1). We can be saved only through Christ (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). How many times must people read this to accept it? Nobody is *"in Christ"* until they have obeyed what Scripture teaches one must do to get into Christ. *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ."* (Galatians 3:27). Without being baptized, the Bible shows you have no other way to enter Christ.

In the various examples of conversion in Acts, we find Cornelius (Acts 10), Saul (Acts 9), Lydia (Acts 16), and all the others who were good moral people still lost because they were not yet *"in Christ."*

Cost

Some are hindered because they are confused regarding the cost of being a Christian. Being a Christian does have costs because the life of a Christian is a different, restricted and regulated life with many things that must be done and many things that are not to be done. There are duties of work, worship, sacrifice, purity, morality and other such matters that some have not properly considered. We do not doubt that there are hypocrites in the church because some have not counted the cost or are not willing to pay the cost. Hypocrisy on the part of a so-called Christian has been a barrier to many from considering becoming a Christian because they are repulsed by such hypocrisy they see in the lives of those who do not take the cost of Christianity seriously. It is important, however, that we note how the hypocrite is not acceptable to God and is not an acceptable excuse for anyone to refuse becoming a Christian. It simply means that two souls are lost, both the hypocrite and the one out of Christ.

We are not to think that any of us will reach perfection before we are baptized, or even after being baptized. Even those *"in Christ"* will sin (First John 1:8-10). Christ is the only one to live perfectly (First Peter 2:22). But we, like Paul, *"press on toward the mark for the prize of the high*

calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). We are not expected to be perfect even though we strive toward perfection. But we are expected to be faithful and keep on keeping on walking with the Lord (Revelation 2:10).

While some may think they are good enough to be saved without obeying the Lord in baptism, the Bible teaches that nobody ever reaches that point. The fact that we cannot be good enough is why we must be baptized because in baptism we are washed clean by the blood of Christ (Romans 6:3,4). Our victory is *"in Christ"* (First Corinthians 15:57). Until one is *"in Christ"* he remains lost.

Knowledge

Some are hindered from being baptized because they are confused as to how much truth they must know before they can be properly baptized. How much did those in the New Testament know? They were taught that they were in sin, could not save themselves, needed a Savior, God had provided a Savior and that Jesus Christ is the Savior. They were taught how to get into Christ and what it means to be in His body, the church. The early evangelists preached Christ and His kingdom (the church). When people learned these things, they inquired what they must do, and when told to be baptized following repentance and confession, believing what they had been taught, they obeyed and were added to the saved, the church.

There was much that they had to learn thereafter. Their knowledge of worship, daily living, all the unique duties and features of being a Christian had yet to be taught them. But having made the commitment to follow Christ wherever it took them, knowing these things, they were able to begin. They knew they were dependent on God and the blood of Christ and they learned how to reach that blood and were washed clean of their sins. With this knowledge, they were baptized. Do you already know as much, including the meaning of repentance and being in the church? If so, what doth hinder you to be baptized?

Some think they have been baptized when actually they have only been sprinkled. Thinking this, they do not submit to baptism. Some think they have been baptized because they were immersed, but they were immersed

without knowing the purpose of baptism as the Bible teaches. They were immersed to join some denomination or because they thought they were already saved or something other than *"for the remission of sins"* and to get into Christ which is essential to salvation. Such people need to follow the teaching of Acts nineteen when Paul found some who had been immersed with an invalid baptism. They were baptized again, this time *"in the name of the Lord Jesus,"* meaning by His authority, as He commanded, for the reason He taught. Only then were they right before God.

Errors

Men teach so many false doctrines that many are confused just what they must do to be saved. It is not because the Word of God is confusing, but because men have substituted their own doctrines. Some say we have nothing to do and that it is entirely God's work. Others say to "pray through," expecting some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit to save them. "Just place your hand on the radio or television," and say some statement the false teacher reads to you, is the message of some. "Simply ask Jesus to come into your heart," is often heard from others. On and on are the many false answers men give as to how to be saved. What does Scripture teach?

In Acts two the people on Pentecost were told to repent and be baptized. Acts eight, the Samaritans heard the gospel, believed it and were baptized. Again Acts eight, the Ethiopian heard the gospel, believed it, confessed his faith in Christ and was baptized. Acts nine, twenty-two and twenty-six, Saul heard the Word, believed it, repented and was baptized. Acts sixteen, Lydia heard, believed and was baptized. Acts eighteen and verse eight, *"And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized."*

When we take the whole counsel of God, we see that people heard the gospel, believed it, repented of sins, confessed their faith in Christ, and were baptized for the remission of sins and into Christ. When they did this they were added to the saved, the church (Acts 2:47). These are precisely the steps that Jesus said must be taken (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; 12:8,9; Mark 16:16). There is no need for anyone to be confused over this all important matter.

Now is the Time

Some may be confused as to when to act. "Am I too old? Am I too young? Should I wait? When should I be baptized?" It is the plea of the devil to get people to postpone doing what ought to be done immediately. Having an understanding of what is involved, there should be no hesitation.

The Lord says we should act while there is time and opportunity. As our hymn says, "Today is the day of salvation; tomorrow may be too late." In the New Testament those who were properly taught and were convicted were baptized immediately, straightway, the same hour of the might, even while traveling along the road. They did not wait nor allow the devil to plant additional hindrances in their way. Salvation was too important for them to let needless delay hinder them.

If you have not been baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins you are in a lost spiritual condition. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, will repent of sins, confess your faith in Christ and be baptized today, the Lord will add you to His church, the company of the saved, and into the fellowship of the redeemed. Whatever may have hindered you in the past, it is not worth your precious soul. It is not worth suffering hell and losing heaven.

* * * * *

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

The pattern of presenting these sermons in this booklet makes it necessary to ask the reader to read the longer texts from his own copy of the Bible. The amount of space required to reproduce what is already in your hands does not justify copying the lengthy passages. Please read John 13:1-17.

Observe that this is a record of a very important event in the life of Jesus on earth. It took place during His last week just prior to His crucifixion. Several momentous events occurred during those few days, including His entry into Jerusalem, discourses with Greeks, cleansing the temple, stormy sessions with His enemies, giving instructions for the observance of the Passover and others.

This event took place on what we call Thursday evening during the week of the last Passover. It was during this gathering that He instituted the Lord's Supper, choosing the ingredients to be used and assigning the significance of them, and noting when this memorial was to be observed once His kingdom came. The passage also tells how He washed the feet of His disciples.

A Difficult Hour

It was a trying and sad time in the life of Jesus. This was His final assembly with His hand-picked apostles before His death on the cross. After this would come the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the heart-rending experience of being betrayed by Judas, being turned over to His enemies, the trials and crucifixion. All that Jesus could expect from this moment forward was the worst kind of mental, emotional and physical pain, grief, torture and disappointment. Verse one tells us that Jesus knew His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father. He knew the end was near.

This was a sad hour also because He dearly loved His apostles. Saying good-bye often comes with difficulty among loved one, especially when you know there awaits great hardship for all involved. Even though the apostles were not aware of the implications of all that was taking place, Jesus was very aware of what it meant to Him and to them, as well as to us.

We are reminded of the sad farewell given to Paul, recorded in Acts 20:36-38, when Paul said good-bye to his brethren of Ephesus with whom he had labored so patiently and faithfully. Their mutual love was strong.

Jesus showed His love for His apostles this night by calling them His friends, praying for their welfare and

guidance, asking for their protection, and even being an arbitrator for their release when the mob came to seize Him. Verse one reads, *"Having loved his own... he loved them unto the end."*

Lacking Preparation

This was also a sad hour for Jesus because those whom He loved were still so unprepared and unsuspecting of what would soon take place. Men would array themselves against the Son of God in a vicious and determined manner. Whenever people do this it always results in their detriment. What was ironic about the vindictive actions taken this night, they would be done by the very ones Jesus came to save and to whom He went first. Truth would be mocked and God would be blasphemed as He was ridiculed. Justice would be denied and hatred displayed. This must have been exceptionally difficult for our Lord.

Not only that, His own chosen twelve would forsake Him, one betraying Him, and another denying he ever knew Him, not once but thrice. They all would be ashamed and afraid to be identified with Him. All of this was in the heart of Jesus as He rises to perform the service of washing the feet of His disciples.

Why did Jesus do this? What did He seek to accomplish? We can more easily grasp and understand what Jesus was doing if we know the background of the occasion and become aware of a serious problem that had developed even among His apostles.

The Problem of Judas

One problem was Judas and his behavior. Jesus loved Judas, but Judas allowed greed, jealousy, hatred, selfishness and other evils to find root in his heart. He cultivated himself so that the devil found fertile soil to plant the seeds of betrayal.

Ambition

The apostles had argued among themselves also. They discussed who would be the greatest after Jesus left them. They did not even comprehend the impact of Jesus leaving,

but still they argued over rank and position. While Jesus was with them this subject need not arise. But He told them He would leave and rather than be concerned about that, they were concerned who would be chief among them.

This is not the first time this problem had arisen. James and John came with their mother to Jesus one day and she asked Him the favor that her sons would sit on His right and left hands in His kingdom. She did not understand the nature of the kingdom He was to establish, nor the impropriety of her request. But she touched off maneuvering among them for position. Jealousy aroused them (Matthew 20:20-24). Luke tells of this trouble on this very evening (Luke 22:24), *"And there was also strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest."*

With all of the trials hovering over Jesus at this moment, He was pained to see this strife among them, their competition, their concern for self, desire for power, prestige, rank among men. It was a sorry display of misunderstanding on their part. But has this desire for rank among brethren ceased to exist?

Words, Not Deeds

Jesus, having often taught His disciples by words, now turns to teach them by deeds. He teaches a lesson both they, and every follower of Christ, must learn. He assumes the role of a servant, even though He is Master of all. He humbles Himself and performs the menial task usually done by the lowly.

He had said, *"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 18:4). *"But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."* (Matthew 20:25-28). A similar teaching is

recorded in Luke 22:25-27. Jesus, the Master, was teaching humility and service to others, doing as He had spoken.

This task of washing the feet of the disciples was something none of the others had assumed. To have done so would have been an admission of lowliness and not becoming of one seeking position. When guests came to a home the servants of the host would perform this work. But now, all wanted to be the guest of honor, important and prominent. Being in a rented room, none felt obligated to serve. So Jesus humbled Himself before them and does what the others thought beneath them to do.

Particular attention is given to Peter's reaction to this. When Jesus came to him he seemed to realize that Jesus was doing what some of them ought to have done, and he refused to let Jesus wash his feet. But Jesus said in substance, "Either you let me teach you this lesson or you have no part of me." Peter quickly relented. Is it not true that we cannot have fellowship with Christ if we are void of humility and have a willingness to serve? Read Philippians 2:2-8 and learn how Jesus humbled Himself and served. Is He not our example to do as did He?

I have often tried to imagine the scene when Jesus bowed before Judas to wash his feet. Judas was still present and knew that he planned to betray Jesus. Jesus also knew what Judas had planned. What a tense and agonizing moment it must have been for Judas and Jesus, seeing how Judas was condemning himself.

His Real Lesson

By washing the disciples' feet Jesus was teaching, by a great and unparalleled object lesson, the blessedness, appropriateness and Christlikeness of service and humility, the sacrifice of pride that must be a part of Christian character. How the Lord must grieve when there is strife among brethren over position, rank, power, prestige and glory among men. Did not John severely condemn Diotrophes because he wanted to have preeminence among the brethren (Third John 9)?

By this action Jesus answered the great question with a great answer. "Who shall be the greatest?" The Lord responds, "The one who is humble and serves."

James 4:6, *"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."* Luke 14:7-11, *"And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms, saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him, and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."* Proverbs 29:23, *"Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud."*

Not Worship

Some have mistakenly made "foot-washing" a religious act of worship, a ceremony, as if the act itself is what Jesus was commanding. They call it a "church ordinance." It is never so identified in Scripture nor is there any example anywhere of the early church practicing washing feet as an act of worship or anything other than an act of hospitality. It is mentioned only once after Pentecost (First Timothy 5:10), and it is a qualification for women who were to be supported by the church. She was to have demonstrated hospitality, Foot-washing is listed several times as an act of hospitality and caring for the needs of others, but never a religious act in worship. Foot-washing is an act of kindness, service, hospitality and ought not be changed into something the Lord never taught nor intended. It is not a religious ceremony. To so use it is more of a display of pseudo-piety than anything else. Usually, both feet are not washed by those who contend this act is what Jesus was commanding.

When Jesus said, *"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.*

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you." He explained the meaning of His words. *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him."* If He served, so should they. He, as Master and Lord, was to send them forth. They were not above doing what the Master did.

When He encountered Peter's refusal to accept His service, Jesus told him he did not understand what Jesus was doing. Peter could see that Jesus was washing feet, but that was not what He was really doing as far as the significance of the act was concerned. He was teaching a lesson we all must learn which is humility and service.

Matthew 23:12, *"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."* James 4:10, *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he shall lift you up."* Colossians 3:12, *"Put on therefore as the elect of God... humbleness of mind."* First Peter 5:5,6, *"Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."*

* * * * *

Two Things I Think You'll Want To Do

1. If you have not yet ordered your copy of the book, *System of Salvation*, Comments on Romans, you need to do that right away. 288 pages and Hardback ; $10 per copy (tax included); plus $2 to ship it to you.

2. You don't want to miss the back cover this issue. You may never forgive yourself if you should overlook it.

The Way of Seth and Cain

Matthew 7:13,14, *"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."*

Matthew 12:30, *"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."*

There are two directions that a person can go. One way leads to destruction and the other to life. Strange as it may be, most will take the broad way that destroys. Each must make his individual choice who to serve and which direction to go. He cannot decide to just stand still and remain as is. Life, time and the nature of right and wrong insists that we be moving one direction or the other.

In the Old Testament the two ways that people can go are exemplified by the ways of Cain and Seth and their descendants. After the murder of Abel a curse was placed upon Cain which was, he thought, greater than he could bear. Cain had a son whose name was Enoch (not the famous Enoch who walked with God). Cain's son built a city. The descendants of Cain are listed in the last part of Genesis, chapter four. They were a very enterprising, highly skilled, trained and accomplished people. But they were an ungodly race.

Of Cain we read, *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."* (Hebrews 11:4). Abel acted by faith, which implies God had given instructions what was to be done and Abel did as instructed. *"Faith cometh of*

hearing and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17). By his obedient faith Abel was declared righteous.

About Cain

Cain became wroth, jealous and later murdered his brother, even denying his guilt when confronted with it. *"Where is thy brother Abel?"* the Lord asked him. Cain answered in a manner to pretend innocence and ignorance, asking, *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* Cain's sins are numerous. He was guilty of disobeying God's instructions regarding the sacrifice, guilty of will-worship (doing things according to his own will rather than God's will), jealousy, envy, uncontrolled anger, murder, lying, hypocrisy, and attempting to escape personal responsibility. First John 3:12 tells us that he was wicked and his works were evil. Jude eleven warns of false teachers and states, *"Woe unto them, for they have gone the way of Cain,"* the way of woe, sin and death.

The descendants of Cain continued his iniquity in their own lives. They were not guilty of Cain's sin, but were guilty of their own sins. Doubtless they were highly influenced by their wicked ancestor. Lamech was the first polygamist, a man of personal vengeance and murder. Cain's descendants were not savages, uncivilized, cave men, but people of exceptional capacity and ability. Jubal was a musician. Jabal was a herdsman. Tubal-Cain was a worker of copper and iron. Some were farmers, builders of cities, and other accomplishments. They developed a rather high level of civilization and skills.

Lesson to Learn

Herein is a lesson that those of us in our own modern, scientific and sophisticated era need to learn. Civilization is not a substitute for a proper religious faith. High standards of living in a material world do not replace the necessity of obedience to God. We often hear people extolling the value of education as if that was the solution to all of man's ills. They urge people to develop skills, train themselves, have equipment, build schools universities, etc. in order to have a higher standard of living as far as the material side of life is concerned. All

such things have certain value. But that is not the end of the matter.

Our nation has the highest standard of living of any nation in the world. Literacy rates are higher than many places in the world. We have stressed education to the point that some have made learning their god. But all this has not made Americans more moral, more peace-loving, more honest or more dependable. In fact, as the nation has placed an emphasis on these things the lives of people generally have become more corrupt, sin abounds, evil is adored and we have a generation that calls evil good and good evil.

We are not anti-education. But when we stress education to the neglect of spiritual, religious and moral training we are only building a nation of civilized animals with great skills. They are more dangerous than anybody. By education we only doctor the symptoms of man's degeneracy and never deal with his real problem, which is sin. The nation is suffering from a barrage of misplaced priorities.

Crying to Us

The development of civilization is proper and can be a blessing. But it also can be a curse when not guided and controlled by faith and morals. Skill is a blessing when seasoned and directed. But skill can be a curse when left without guidance and when considered to be the solution to all of man's needs, wants and goals. Scripture and history are crying to us to learn this truth before disaster.

The reason nuclear energy is a danger and threat to mankind is because of the lack of morality among people. That power could be of great benefit to mankind when channeled and controlled properly. But because of the void of faith and ethics that God would have us follow, we constantly face the danger of blowing the world to pieces.

We live in a world with ever-increasing pressures to suppress the importance of strong moral convictions. Learning that is sought outside the framework of religious discipline from God is one of the spiritual "cancers" that has diseased the educational processes in our nation. A

dominant theme among the nation's so-called "scholars" is to ridicule the reality of God, destroy faith in the hearts and minds of the young, replace God on His throne with man on the throne, having the universal edict to "do your own thing." But no person is truly educated who is ignorant of God's will regardless of how accomplished he might be in his worldly and intellectual pursuits. He is just a highly trained and knowledgeable creature without restraint.

Proverbs 1:7, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."* Psalm 111:10, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth forever."* When a person respects and obeys God, he is by far a greater contributor to the welfare of his fellowman than all of the "wise men" and their inventions who care not for God. The lineage of Cain proved this. They had skills, civilization, cities, etc. but we have no example of any of them walking with God.

True Wisdom

As for the relative value of human wisdom to God's wisdom, Paul wrote, *"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."* (First Corinthians 1:25). What some call *"foolishness,"* Paul says is better, stronger, wiser and more beneficial than the wisdom of men. *"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, the Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain."* (First Corinthians 3:19,20). Godly people had rather their children learn their "A, B, C's" in heaven than to read Greek and shoot rockets in hell. It need not be an either-or situation. One can be educated, civilized and godly. But the line of Cain is a line of human wisdom being placed above God's wisdom and the result is pride, vanity, sin, exaltation of man above Deity, and rebellion to man's own harm. It is the way of death.

Too many are trying to measure God by man's standard rather than measuring man by the infallible standard of God. This attitude and action constitutes one of the most

threatening hazards facing the world. To sacrifice God's truth on the altar of what is called "education and scholarship" is a demonstration of the foolishness of men.

Genesis 4:25,26, *"And Adam knew his wife again: and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord."*

People of Seth

While Cain's descendants pursued one course that proved to bring hardship upon themselves and brought more and more sin into the world, Seth and his posterity took another course. They went the opposite direction. They sought the ways of the Lord.

There is not a great amount of revelation concerning Seth and his descendants except this. We do read of one man named Enoch that seemed to characterize that lineage. Genesis 5:24, *"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not: for God took him."* The implication of this statement is that Enoch was of a certain quality of character that God brought him into the halls of immortality and into the presence and company of God.

Another descendant of Seth was Noah. He is presented to us as one who was upright before God and his generation. He walked with God (Genesis 6:9), and found favor in the sight of the Lord and he did as the Lord commanded him (Genesis 6:22). He was the man who lived in the midst of a generation that had decayed to such low levels that God determined to destroy mankind, even repenting that He had made man. But Noah was able to be righteous and even rear his family to be upright to the point that God spared Noah, his wife, Noah's three sons and their wives. This family preserved the human family.

Their Choice

We are not to think that the people of Seth ignored the development of their skills and abilities. Noah was able to build the ark, which was not a small engineering

accomplishment. The difference between these two families is where they placed their emphasis, what they considered most important, and how they acted in response to their very different convictions. The line of Seth enjoyed the fellowship with Deity, the blessings of immortality with God and are even yet noted for the wisdom of their choice of direction in life. They chose life while Cain and his people chose death.

As noted earlier, each one is forced to make his choice. As Moses neared the close of a life of one hundred twenty years, having spent the last forty of them leading Israel from Egypt toward the promised land of Canaan, he said to his people, *"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."* (Deuteronomy 30:19).

In similar fashion, Joshua, who succeeded Moses, as he came to the close of his illustrious career as the leader of Israel and the deliverer of Canaan for Israel, said to those he led, *"Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood,* (having reference to the swollen Jordan they had crossed ,JWB) *and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* (Joshua 24:14,15).

Your Choice

As you read this lesson, please be impressed with the necessity of choosing which direction you will go. In the inspired words written by Paul in Second Thessalonians 3:5, *"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."* May it be that you will know the salvation in going the way of Seth.

* * * * *

Our Lord Knew It

Wish We Would Learn It

When Jesus prayed for unity, recorded in John seventeen, the eighteenth verse tells us one reason why He wanted unity. *"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."*

One contributing factor to the growth of disbelief in Christ is the chaotic division that exists among those who profess to be Christians. This condition has been propagated and exploited by the denominational world to the extent people of sense realize that no person of sound mind would ever originate it. Therefore, they dismiss the Christ.

But many reject the Lord's church for similar reasons. The division among those of the church presents a distorted Christ. Some years ago those steeped in human legalism divided the church with "anti" doctrines that tore the church apart in many places. More likely today, the church is not only being divided but restructured and destroyed by the liberal digressives. Teaching doctrines foreign to truth but more compatible to denominationalism, they are making havoc of the church and causing division and alienation from faithful brethren.

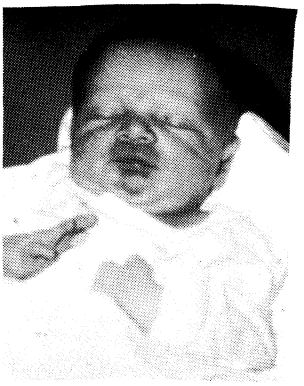
What is astounding is how some, who profess soundness, continue to use, promote and endorse the men, schools, events, programs and papers that promote this digression.

Neither those who transgress the doctrine of Christ nor those who bid them Godspeed are faithful to God and they violate Second John 9-11. It is most disturbing how so many who are doing such things do not seem to really care.. JWB

William

Lee

Hagewood



On December 19, 1990, this fine boy was born to Amy and Lowell Hagewood. Amy is our daughter. Lee joins his older brother, James, in their home in Nashville, Tennessee.

Lee is our eighth grandchild, our sixth grandson. Mrs. Jean Hagewood, Franklin, Tennessee, is the other grandparent. We look forward to loving this little boy as we have already since we heard he was coming our way. He is blessed with such a wonderful father and mother.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME XI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 9**

Ahab

Character studies are profitable in coming to a knowledge of the Bible. Amid historical wreckage of the nation of Northern Israel lies a king whose name was Ahab. He was on the throne once ruled by the idolatrous king Jeroboam. *"And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him." (First Kings 16:30,31).*

But even from his wicked life we can learn and profit. Ahab had abundant spiritual deficiencies. Some characters are admirable and we should imitate them. Others are abominable and we should learn to avoid their ways, and escape the results of their tragedies. Ahab is of the latter sort. He had at least four symptoms of spiritual disease.

Pouter

Ahab was a pouter. First Kings 21:1-4, *"And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth, the Jezreelite, had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoke to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned his face, and would eat no bread."*

You would think a leader would be a person of greater dignity, self-control, and maturity than to pout when he did

not get his way. But Ahab went home and crawled into bed, and gazed at the wall, refusing to even eat.
Naboth refused to sell, and we can understand why one might choose not to sell the land he had inherited. He had that right. In fact, he was obligated to preserve it for his heirs as had been done for him. Yet, Ahab reacted like a long-faced pouter when he was refused.

Pouting accomplishes three things: (1) It attracts attention to the pouter, temporarily. (2) In time it makes the pouter sick, being detrimental to good mental and physical health. It is much like holding a grudge, and having a vengeful spirit. It harms the person of that nature more than anyone else. (3) It exposes the weak and immature character of the unstable pouter. But pouting never accomplishes any good.

Pouting is a coward's way of hitting back, getting even against someone or something he does not like. It is not a Christian tool. The more one observes a pouter, the more one is convinced that the pouter really enjoys pouting.

There is a story of two brothers who lived in the same house. They had a spat, and walled up the doors leading from one side to the other, each keeping himself in his section. It was inconvenient with the kitchen on one side, the bathroom on the other; the front porch one place and the basement off limits to the other. A mutual friend suggested they get together. But the reply was, "No, we had rather stay mad." So often it is that way with some people, especially people who pout. They are not "happy" unless they are unhappy, and unless they can make a fuss over something and pout about it. They had rather hurt themselves and others than to discontinue their pouting. They enjoy it. They has a bad case of Ahab's spiritual disease.

Coward

Ahab also let others do his fighting for him. First Kings 21:5-7, *"But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard."*

Even though he was king, he lacked the courage and strength to stand for himself and for what he desired. He showed himself willing to let Jezebel do his fighting for him. She began to act, and in a viciously wicked way.

There is a difference in having people stand **with** you in a fight, and having people stand **instead of** you in a fight. Letting another stand in your place when you ought to stand for yourself is an error committed by many good men as well as evil. It is a mark of weakness, fear, cowardice, and a lack of manliness. Especially is this true when you are called to stand for some truth. Some will not oppose sin, but are glad to see somebody else oppose it. They do not want to become involved lest they become hurt in some way. They are willing to let everybody else fight and suffer whatever hardship may come as a result of standing. They will shirk their duty and allow others to carry all the load. How many times have I seen this happen, even among brethren.

Shirker

Shirking responsibility is often evident. It is not uncommon for people to fail to hold up the hands of those who take the lead. Warriors of God sometimes have to fight a rear-guard action against some of the very ones who ought to be in the fight themselves. Parents let the church or school do what the parents are supposed to do. Father will let mother do all the spiritual training, even as his example is negative to what she is trying to do. Church members "hire" a preacher to do all their work. When false teachers arise from time to time, many just go and hide and do nothing, not even support those who try to refute it. Is such as that Christlike?

Ahab's conflict with Naboth was an evil one that revealed a flaw in his character and he was willing to let somebody else fight his battle, evil though his battle was evil. Are you guilty of doing this? If so, you probably have a case of Ahab's spiritual disease of being a shirker.

Again, Ahab let evil go unchecked without doing what he could, and had the authority, to stop it. Jezebel's wicked

plan was this. "*So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people, and set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blapheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.*" (First Kings 21:8-10). This was legalized murder.

Conspirator

No person can fail to see the conspiracy and wickedness in all this. Few could have done anything to stop it. Of course, Jezebel could have stopped it because she started it. The rulers of the city to whom she sent the letters could have stopped it. What characters they must have been! But Ahab could have stopped it also. While he did not conceive the plan, nor conspire for false witnesses, he was the king and the seal was his, but he kept still. He allowed Naboth to be falsely accused and killed. He had the authority to act, but he did not act.

He was responsible because God held him responsible. God sent Elijah to him, and Ahab was told, "*Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?*" (First Kings 21:19). No people faithfully serve God who will let sin proceed before them and not do what they can to see that righteousness prevails. To neglect, ignore sin, pretend all is well, or attempt to sweep duty under the rug, so to speak, only aggravates the violation of responsibility. To ignore wrong does not and cannot correct it, and it certainly is not showing oneself a friend of the truth. To allow evil to go unchecked is something for which many shall stand condemned.

Hater of Truth

Finally, Ahab hated those who told him the truth. Early in his reign, when famine was in the land, God sent Elijah to Ahab. When these two men met Ahab said, "*Art thou he that troubleth Israel?*" His bitterness toward Elijah was intense. But Elijah responded, "*I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou*

hast followed Baalim." (First Kings 18:18). Ahab hated Elijah because Elijah told him the truth.

On another occasion, when Ahab and Jehoshaphat joined forces to fight Syria, Jehoshaphat asked for a prophet. *"And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."* (First Kings 22:7,8). Micaiah told him the truth, and this he really did not want.

After the terrible deed against Naboth, God sent Elijah tc Ahab again to tell him of his sin. But Ahab considered God and Elijah as enemies. As Elijah approached, Ahab said, *"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"* (First Kings 21:20). Ahab was a person suffering from the spiritual deficiency of hating truth and those who spoke it.

Ahab cannot be considered without considering his spiritual errors, such as characterized this weak, sinful, wretch. Though prominent among men, he was foolish and evil. He was an abomination before God and a hindrance to the welfare of Israel. Pouting, letting others do his fighting, allowing evil to prevail, hating truth and the ones who told him the truth, he was a dark blot on the history of Israel.

How different from Ahab is the Christian to be! As Paul wrote regarding the Old Testament, we can learn from the past (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:6-11). Will we learn from Ahab and avoid being the kind of person he was? Will we avoid his mistakes?

* * * * *

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System of Salvation

let me encourage you to do so right away! This is my commentary on the book of Romans, a hardbound book, 288 pages, for only ten dollars ($10.00), plus two dollars ($2.00) for shipping it to you. Thank you.

A Christ Centered Church

The church of the Bible is the church where Christ is the very heart, soul, and center. If we would be the New Testament church, we must be Christ centered. Our emphasis, theme, burden, and message is to be Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We want to learn how we can detect a Christ centered church.

First, we ascertain that it is right and necessary that the church be centered on Christ because He is the head of it. It is His body. He founded it and is the foundation of it. He purchased it with His own blood, reigns over it as King, and has all authority pertaining to it. Christ is the Savior of the church. Without Him there would be no church of Christ. It would be highly improper for the church to be centered or identified without anyone or anything else other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

There is no separation of Christ and His church. Some seem to think that emphasis on the church in some way detracts from Christ. They like to talk about "churchanity" as opposed to "Christianity." That is a trite phrase, but also one of the marks of a soft, false teacher who speaks lightly of the church. The early evangelists and apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, preached Christ **and** His church. It was not either/or with them. The relationship between Christ and the church demands both be preached. You cannot preach the head without the body, nor the Savior apart from the saved, nor the King separated from His kingdom. And why should anyone want to attempt it? Beware of digressive tones that would separate Christ and the church.

In Word

The Lord's church is Christ centered in Word. The church is the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*" (First Timothy 3:15). Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). "*But we preach Christ...,*" Paul wrote in First Corinthians 1:23. "*For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*' (First Corinthians 2:2). Christ told His apostles to "*preach the gospel.*" (Mark 16:15). Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian (Acts 8). Whatever is revealed in Scripture concerning Christ, or related to Christ, as all Scripture is, is to be preached. He is to be glorified, praised, and presented as the One to whom people are directed. It is His will that is to be taught.

We are to proclaim Him as Lord (Philippians 2:11), as the Son of God (Matthew 16:16), as the Savior of men (First Timothy 1:15), and as the Christ (Acts 2:36).

For those who call themselves preachers to spend their time offering reviews on secular books, politics, economics, military advice, biographies of prominent and famous people of the world is to misuse the pulpit. The church is to proclaim the doctrine of Christ, by which is meant the doctrine Christ taught and authorized to be taught. Titus 2:1, "*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.*" Second John 9-11, a passage even many brethren seem to have removed from their Bibles, "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed. For he that biddeth him Godspeed is a partaker of his evil deeds.*" Paul warned against any so-called gospel other than what he had preached and that brethren had received (Galatians 1:6-9).

In Work

As in Word, the church must uphold Christ in its work. There is always the danger that a church will "major in minors, and minor in majors." Particularly is this a danger in a time of digression, such as we now witness

about us. Many present-day churches of Christ are getting away from the mission of the church, providing entertainment, recreation, gymnasiums, secular education, little league games, virtually invading the realm of the home, and being nothing much more than a poor man's country club. When a church fulfills its mission it will be busy. But it can be busy and still not be doing what the Lord commissioned the church to do.

The prime work of the church is to glorify God and spread the gospel of Christ throughout the world. The members are to live Christlike lives. There is a realm of benevolence to relieves the suffering of the needy. Also the church must build itself up, not just numerically, but more important, spiritually, a work called edification. But we must never "let the tail wag the dog."

One of the marks of digression historically has been for the church to become organically and financially involved in areas of activity for which there is no Biblical authority. When this happens the divinely assigned work of the church lags and becomes a sideline, if not eliminated. As an example, some churches have been financially unable to assist men to go into foreign fields of labor because their payments on their recreational facilities kept them burdened. Such a church could not qualify as a Christ centered church.

In Life

The church must show itself Christ centered by the daily lives of its members. The disciples are called Christians (Acts 11:26). One who is a Christian is a baptized believer, in Christ, following Christ, imitating Him in his life. A Christian who strives to live like Christ will not conform to the evil of this world. What the world sees of Christ, in many instances, is only that which is reflected in the lives of those who profess to he His disciples. When there is not that distinction due to godly living in the Christian's life, how can the church be called Christ centered?

A deadly, sinister relaxation and liberal permissiveness has gripped the world, even the religious world, in morals and ethics. The sinfulness of this world was once

opposed by religious people. But now, openly, such things as drinking, dancing, lasciviousness, adultery, immodesty, gambling, smoking, divorce, etc. are tolerated among so-called Christians. The love of this world, with its greed, prestige, pleasure, social standing and power is far too evident among even members of the church. Such behavior has compromised the truth, and can be found in most any congregation. **This ought not so to be.** Too many brethren act as if this does not really matter. But it matters to the point that it has brought reproach on the holy name of Christ and His church.

Voices in the world, and some in the church, admonish brethren to "liberalize or lose members." Some elderships, fearful of losing members and finances, have relaxed their stand for truth to accommodate the worldly-minded members. Some who are of that stripe have gone out from us, but many others have simply been tolerated, and that toleration is sinful.

God or Men

We need to ask ourselves if we seek to please men or God. In Jesus' day some turned and walked with Him no more because of His hard sayings. But He never did retract His hard sayings to accommodate those who rebelled against them, nor did He apologize that His truth offended them. **Nor should we.** When we teach today what He taught, and what the inspired men taught, we may witness the same reaction among many people. But so be it! As much as it pains us to see anybody turn away from the truth because they love this evil world, like Demas, we have the duty to stand for the truth regardless of the reaction among others. Already too many have taken their eye off the goal and looked so longingly at the "*fleshpots*" of spiritual Egypt and of this earthly life.

It would be an indication of good spiritual health when brethren would become alarmed and aroused when they hear of teaching and practices among them that are not Christ centered, regardless of their source. It would be good if brethren would become disturbed when the doctrine of Christ, at whatever point, is defied and sin openly condoned, especially in the ranks of the church.

A Christ centered church is one whose members conform to Christ in their living.

This is Our Task

To build and maintain a Christ centered church in a sinful world is a difficult task. There are pressures from without and within to compromise, and depart from the truth, escape the hardship, and be at peace with everyone. There has developed a "go along to get along" attitude that has engulfed the thinking of many brethren who were once sound in the faith. These pressures are not likely to lessen, but in all probability increase as society generally becomes more arrogant, defiant, materialistic, and self-willed. But still we must plead for a Christ centered church.

To do what God expects of us demands that we adhere to the pattern revealed in the New Testament. Even though some today denounce what they ridicule as "pattern theology," this is still what God demands. A Christ centered church is not made one by beautiful buildings, large numbers, big contributions, many activities, acceptance by the community, a membership composed of the wealthy and prominent, a "namby-pamby" message of surrender, compromise, and accommodation of sin and false doctrines. Only by strict allegiance to "*thus saith the Lord*" can there be a Christ centered church. It is the task of every Christian to see that the church is just that way.

The church is composed of people who have been washed clean of their sins by the blood of Christ when they believed and obeyed the gospel being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, and God adding them to the church. The church depends on Christ, and Christ must be at the very core of all pertaining to the church. He is to have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18).

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From Doubt to Certainty

You should take your Bible and read the seventy-third Psalm, and keep it available for additional reference as you study this lesson. The lesson is intended to encourage us, keep life in its proper perspective, see things as God sees them, and enable us to live life more as God would have us live it. Certainly these goals are worthy.

God's Word is a *"lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."* (Psalm 119:105). Life is often fraught with challenges and pitfalls that yawn before us. There are those times and circumstances when understanding is lacking, and we wander in confusion, bewildered, and frustrated. Skepticism and doubt have often brought fear and uncertainty into the lives of even some of the strongest people. The inconsistencies, inequities, and injustices that we observe and experiences in life make us wonder why such things are allowed. When we see good suppressed and evil adored, we are prone to ask, "Why try to be good? Does it pay? Is following God the best way after all? Is it worthwhile?" We do not think it blasphemy to admit that these questions and problems have overtaken many who once loved God and sought to please Him. We do not think it improper to consider them since they can also beset us.

The Psalmist wrestles with such things in Psalm 73. He expresses some of the perplexities and uncertainties created by doubt. He asks some of these same questions that bother people today. He responds to the inquiry, "Why serve God?" He draws a conclusion from his inquiry by determining that we are at our best, and far better in every way, when we trust God.

A Clean Heart

Verse one affirms a great truth. "*Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.*" Of this he is certain. No doubt exists in his mind that God is good to those who have a clean heart. Please observe this qualification of being a recipient of God's blessings; namely, a clean heart.

Our hearts can be clean only when cleansed by the Lord . He cleans our hearts when we come to Him by and through His Son as revealed in His Word. First Peter 1:22, "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.*"

What led the Psalmist to be so confident of this truth? By what line of thought, revelation, and reasoning did he become so sure of this position? Verse two shows he did not always have this same confidence. "*But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.*" There had been a time when he was not so dogmatic and positive , so sure as to assert what he did in verse one. He realizes there was a time when he knew his faith was slipping and the foundation on which he stood did not seem to be so strong and unmovable.

Once in Doubt

In verses three through fourteen, there is no question but the Psalmist was once skeptical of his choice in life to serve God. There were various things that had caused him to develop this skepticism. What had created his doubt and uncertainty within him?

Let us not be too self-righteous nor too hasty in judging the Psalmist for these feelings because many have wondered, if even only for a moment, about the things he expresses. He had allowed himself to become envious of the wicked. In his attempts to be righteous, he had developed self-pit. He felt cheated and left out of the "good things" of life, even though they were not good.

As he looked around him he could see the wicked prospering. They were strong to the point that even the reality of death did not deem to concern them. They did not appear to have troubles like many others. They were enjoying life to the fullest even though they were proud, violent, corrupt, wicked, and lofty in speech. They spoke against heaven and questioned the wisdom and knowledge of God. They were guilty of blasphemy. Yet, at the same time, their cup was full, and God's people seemed to fall before them. The wicked took from the righteous. Evil men relished the fatness of their gain, having all that their hearts could desire, and were apparently at ease, living in luxury, riches, and gaiety. He saw all of this and was tinged with envy.

On the other hand, here he was trying to do what was right, and was aware of his own sinfulness, seeking the Lord's mercy and His way, but was apparently being chastened and plagued rather than rewarded. All he did seemed to be in vain. What profit was there in what he was doing? What was the use of serving God? Those who did not serve Him seemed to get along better, at least as well, as those who did. So wrestling with such things, his faith waned, his confidence sagged, and he was not so sure that the way of righteousness was the best way.

The Explanation

But this apparent inequity and injustice had an explanation. His doubts could be answered. Verse fifteen, *"If I say, I will speak this, behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children."* He realized that such thinking was offensive and detrimental to himself and to others. Verses sixteen and seventeen, *"When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end."* His pain and grief was intense over these things **UNTIL** he went to God with it. His dilemma seemed so huge and overwhelming until he brought it to God and got His answer. When he learned God's viewpoint of this problem, then he understood, and his doubt was soon dissolved, and his certainty reaffirmed. Not until he got the overall look at matters did he grasp it. Focusing only on the present presented him with a distorted perception. Not until he raised his outlook and

remembered that his existence consisted of more than the here and now that he saw as God saw.

God Helped Him

What did he learn from God that helped him? Verses eighteen through twenty, *"Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one waketh, so, O Lord when thou awakenest thou shalt despise their image."*

The end of the wicked is destruction. The place where they stood was not stable and secure as it seemed, but slippery, and they shall fall. Desolation is their ultimate destiny, and they shall terminate in terror. As in a moment, they shall reap the harvest of their iniquity because they have made themselves subjects to be despised by the righteous God. Their apparent prosperity on earth did not assure them for prosperity in the next life. Like the rich fool in Luke 16, *"Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedset thy good things... but now... thou art in torment."* The so-called "good life" in sin here in this life did not bring them approval before God, but rather His wrath toward them.

Once the Psalmist saw the end of the wicked, he was both grieved and shamed. Verses twenty-one and twenty-two, *"Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee."*

A Better View

It was not so difficult for him to see how mistaken he had been in his evaluation of things, and completely wrong he had considered matters. His understanding was utterly void of the real truth regarding the righteous and the wicked. He was grieved because of the destiny of the wicked. None can rejoice in knowing what will become of the wicked. But he was also ashamed because he had been so foolish to become envious of such people, and to have allowed his confidence in God to be shaken by such things, by the temporal, material, worldly prosperity of

others in this world to bring this skepticism into his heart. He was ashamed to have ever doubted that the Lord's way is best.

Turning from his doubt, he began a more profitable exercise, a faith-building exercise, by counting his blessings that were his because of his faith in God. Verses twenty-three through twenty-six, *"Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."*

No Fear

With God with him, he had no need to fear, knowing God's care for him. He was sustained by the hand of the Almighty and guided by divine counsel. He had the hope and promise of being received into glory. How could the things of this world ever compensate for such blessings? Contrasting the end of the wicked with the end of the righteous, the reward of this world seemed so paltry, and "the toil of the road" seemed nothing; indeed, such a small price to pay for the reward God gives. Like Paul wrote, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."*

He, not the wicked, had the real blessings. He had God, not only in heaven, but even here in this life. Though his flesh fail, though he be weak, though he seemed to have so little by worldly standards, God was his strength and his portion, a prosperity that could never vanish away.

Now He Knows

Therefore, he concludes, *"For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works."* (Verses 27,28).

Now he has made the full circle from certainty to doubt, and back to certainty again. Now he knows better than ever the truth that is good to them of a clean heart. Now he knows what really matters and counts in this life. No longer will he be deceived about the affairs of this world, or shaken by what seems to be the success of "those in the wrong." His faith is strong and he is certain in his trust in the Lord God.

Cannot we also be encouraged to serve God through the fair consideration of this Psalm? Can we see more clearly what should be the emphasis and priority in this life? Will we not be better able to see through the facade of worldly success as it seeks to blind us from seeing spiritual success?

In a world of instability and uncertainty, dispensing with doubt and recognizing what is certain can be a source of strength to one and all. We plead for everyone to live in security with confidence, holding firm and stedfast the faith of God.

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Faith In God

Hebrews 11:6, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews has been tabbed as the Hall of Faith because so many are named, their deeds are recorded, and their faith led them to act the way they did. Their faith produced obedience to God. Such is the quality of saving faith. It is said of them, *"...the world was not worthy"* of them.

Verse one defines faith. *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* Faith is founded on evidence, and provides assurance of the

reality and truthfulness even of things that are not tangible and visible. Faith includes trust and confidence in the heart of man of the spiritual realm. It will embrace confidence in the future , past, and present.

Essential

This lesson will center on three major truths that are affirmed in verse six. First, there is the absolute necessity of faith in order to be pleasing to God. To a person who is unconcerned about spiritual matters, this may not impress him. But there is coming a day when everyone, believers and unbelievers, will know there is more to the human being than his flesh and bones; more to life than the here and now; more than simply the physical realm, but there is also the spiritual realm.

There are several realities that we recognize as spiritual that are intangible and invisible, such as mind, thought, ideas, values, hopes, etc. It is the utmost folly to deny the existence of the spiritual just because one cannot see it, measure it in a test tube, weigh it on a scale, or handle it with his hands. In this spiritual realm there is God. *"God is a Spirit..."* (John 4:24). There is much concerning God that is revealed in Scripture. The Bible is the book that shows the relationship between God and man. Man is subject to God and accountable to God. Without faith, there is no way open to man to be acceptable to God. Faith is essential.

Reality of God

Second, we must believe in the existence of God, *"that he is."* God is not imaginary, but a reality. We believe in the existence of God because of the evidence of His existence. Those who would accuse us of simply following an ancient superstition have not considered the reasons why we are confident of the existence of God. The Bible furnishes much evidence of God, but some reject the testimony of the Bible. But they are *"without excuse,"* for their disbelief, because God has furnished us tangible evidence of His existence. True enough, we cannot know the nature of God, our duty to God, our relationship with God, the commands of God, and many other things relating to God without the Word of God. But our very

world furnishes us evidence irrefutable that God exists. It is reasonable to believe while unbelief is unreasonable in light of this evidence.

Even those who deny the existence of God have faith and confidence in something, if nothing more than their own thoughts. Why should it be considered unreasonable to believe in God while others believe in their own ideas? We do not take a "blind leap into the dark" to conclude that God exists. Nor does God expect us to believe that way. For this reason He has provided us that which appeals to the mind, the intellect, the ability to discern the information we already possess to know **God is.**

Whose "faith" is the most reasonable, logical, sensible, and harmonious with tangible evidence, the faith of the atheist who denies God, or the faith of the Christian who accepts the existence of God? For one to be so confident that there is no God he would have to know everything, lest the one thing he did not know was, God is. The atheist has no evidence to support his contention. He would have to be everywhere to know there is no God lest the one place where he was not could be where God is. He would have to become as God to know God could not be.

For every result there must be a cause. The universe exists. It had to come from something. No explanation that man can offer for the existence of the universe can escape the necessity of the First Cause. Matter has not always existed, and science has proven that as a fact. Mind exists; matter exists. Matter has not always existed. Which existed first? Where is any evidence that matter can produce mind? But the explanation that God, Mind, the First Cause, brought the world into being harmonizes with the facts of the case.

An Accident?

One of the most nonsensical and unreasonable positions one can take with respect to our world is to suggest that this intricate, precise, detailed, immense universe, with its interdependent systems, just happened accidentally, without purpose, intent, or design. One can see the design of our world. That cannot be disputed. There must be a

designer. To think that the present world could have come to pass by chance, hit-or-miss processes is beyond reason and experience. Nothing can be shown to substantiate such a claim. Even yet, mankind, in all of his genius and wisdom, cannot explain the origin and existence of life without there first being life from the start. Science can prove that life comes from life, and has proven it over and over. Never has there been evidence that life comes from non-life, which one must accept if he denies the reality of God.

But this lesson is not intended to explore the many evidences God has given. But these are mentioned to underline the essentiality of faith, and that one must believe in the reality of God.

Rewards

Third, we are also expected to believe that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. Is not this reasonable? We are not to look for His rewards apart from our faith in Him. The seeking must precede the reward. It must be a diligent, earnest, careful, sincere, and industrious seeking to know the truth regarding God to be the recipient of God's spiritual blessings. This truth affirms God's concern for mankind and His desire to bless us. "*For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angles; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*" (Matthew 16:27). Why should it be thought strange that there is a reason for life? Is it reasonable to think that good and evil would accomplish the same results? What would be the purpose of life if there was nothing at the end of it but the grave, regardless of how well or sordidly life had been lived? Is there no such thing as justice and fairness?

Man cannot find his way through life by leaning on his own wisdom. He must rely on the direction and instruction from Him who has created all things. It is sensible to expect the Creator to take notice of those who follow His will, and those who determine they will not.

Yes, we believe God is concerned, and has provided for us. We believe in the power of prayer, or else we would not utilize it. There would be no cause for prayer if there

is no God. But we believe because evidence demands we believe. God rewards those who believe.

These three unshakeable truths are included in Hebrews 11:6. (1) It is necessary to believe in God. (2) We must have confidence in the existence of God. (3) There is reward for the believer.

The Kind of Faith

In this Hall of Faith of Hebrews eleven we see the nature of the faith which is taught. It is an active, responsive, submissive, obedient faith that works. It is not just a mental acceptance of certain truths. It demands doing the will of the One in whom we profess to believe.

Faith is a way of knowing. Men can know things through experience, or by empirical evidence. Men can also know things by logical reasoning from the evidence before them. One does not have to experience a thing before he can really know it. In fact, faith based on evidence is more reliable than that which is based on experience because one does not always comprehend and understand his experiences. He often draws false conclusions from them. The evidence cited in God's Word and world is sufficient to convince any honest mind that will investigate that evidence of the truthfulness concerning faith, even that of Hebrews 11:6.

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How Do You Read Mark 16:16?

Coming to worship on Sunday morning we see people going separate ways. Some obviously have no intention of worshipping God in any fashion. They plan to stay at home, go boating, fishing, swimming, traveling, working or shopping. Others give the appearance of going to assembly somewhere with somebody to worship God. But even these go different directions, to different churches,

believing different things, practicing different forms. If all follow the same Bible, and believe in the same God, expect to be saved by the same Christ, why cannot they worship together?

Some explain that people cannot see the Bible alike, or interpret it differently. We need to be careful with such explanations lest we place the blame for the division and confusion on God. The Bible was authored by Deity. Is He the fault for religious division? Did He give us a Bible that commands unity, but that prevents it? First Corinthians 13:34 denies God is the author of confusion. If people **cannot** see the Bible like, would not that make God the one to be blamed?

Understand Alike

Not only can people understand the Bible alike, it is impossible to understand it differently. One may understand, the other misunderstand, and division result. Both may misunderstand differently and divide. But when both understand, they will be united, or else God and His Bible are at fault.

To interpret something means to get its meaning. God's Word does not have contradictory meanings. When two people get the meaning, they will be together. Otherwise, the division is God's fault.

Religious division and confusion exists because people have added to the Bible, taken from it, injected their own doctrines , followed human traditions, accepted the views of preachers, teachers, clergymen, theologians, and religious doctors, rather than *"thus saith the Lord."* What people ought to do is take God's Word and take God at His Word. Many times division is caused because people do not read what God has said. They do not wish to hear the truth. To demonstrate this, let us consider one passage, Mark 16:16.

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." This is not a difficult passage, yet there is hopeless division over it, but without justification. People do not hear what God has said.

Not Be Saved

Some read the passage, "He that believeth and is baptized shall **not** be saved." Who does that? The atheist, agnostic, infidel, humanist, any and all who deny the reality of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the inspiration of the Bible, sin, heaven, hell, eternity, including the need for salvation. They have no use for anything revealed in Scripture except to criticize it and attempt to find fault with it. That number seems to be growing. This is why you have more and more people going boating, fishing, working, etc. at worship hour. Such people have never and will never contribute to the moral and spiritual welfare of mankind because they have no basis for such things. Therefore, faith and baptism are meaningless to them. Salvation is foolishness. They do not believe anybody will be lost or saved because they think this life is all there is and when it ends, that is the complete end. But please take note that their scoffing does not remove the evidence for the very things they deny, nor does it alter the passage one syllable.

Believe Not

Some read, "He that believeth **not** and is baptized shall be saved." Who would do that? Roman Catholics and all others who "baptize" infants do this because they believe infants are born guilty of sin. They actually do not baptize them, but only sprinkle them and call it baptism. Baptism is a burial (Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12). The very word , *baptizo*, means to plunge beneath, submerge, bury. In the Bible baptism included going into the water, coming out of the water. But these people sprinkle infants who cannot believe. They will even practice their rituals over unconscious unbelievers, even unborn children. But faith must precede baptism, according to the Bible.

The doctrine that children are born guilty of sin, and totally depraved, is not from the Bible, but from confused religious minds. The soul that sins must bear responsibility, but the child has done no sin, nor is capable of being responsible (Ezekiel 18:20). Jesus used the child as an example of those in His kingdom (Matthew 18:4; 19:4). Why would Jesus want us to enter

His kingdom and be like a child if that child is depraved and lost? The doctrine of inherited sin is brutal, makes God unfair and unjust, condemns helpless children spiritually because of his foreparent's violations of God's law. Descendants may well suffer many consequences of foreparent's sins, but the guilt of sin is not one of them. He is not yet accountable. He is safe and will remain so until he partakes of evil himself.

Baptizing or sprinkling unbelievers, either one, cannot change Mark 16:16. Every example of conversion to Christ concludes with baptism. The doctrine of "baptismal regeneration," that the power is in the water, or even the act of baptism, is not Biblical. The power is the blood of Christ that saves. But one is baptized to reach that blood (Romans 6:3,4).

Not Baptized

Some read, "He that believeth and is **not** baptized shall be saved." Who would dare rewrite God's Word this way? Those who teach salvation by faith only, which includes most Protestant denominations who omit baptism for salvation in spite of Mark 16:16. To them baptism is optional, not even necessary, just the first act of obedience after being saved, or a ritual to join some denomination.

Contrast that with what Scripture teaches. Peter commanded baptism (Acts 10:48). Is his apostolic command optional? He said, "*Baptism doth now also save us,*" (First Peter 3:21). Was he wrong? Did he really mean it? He also commanded, "*Repent and be baptized... for the remission of sins...*" (Acts 2:38). Why did he include baptism if it was unnecessary? Why did Ananias command Saul of Tarsus to be baptized and wash away his sins, if baptism has nothing to do with washing away sins? (Acts 22:16). Over and over there are references directing people to be baptized to be saved. If optional, why?

Please note that Jesus did not put that "not" in the passage like "faith only " people do. Jesus made belief **and** baptism conditions of salvation. Wonder why they don't? In fact, every passage in the New Testament where

baptism and salvation, or its equivalent, appear, baptism always comes first. Does this not mean anything to us? To remove baptism from God's plan to save man demands that we take away from His Word, and deny it is true. That is a serious mistake to commit.

Some Accept What Christ Said

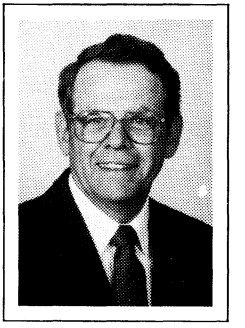
There are those who say, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."* Who would do that? Everybody that teaches what Jesus taught does that. Mark 16:16 is as simple to grasp as two plus two equals four. Faith plus baptism equals salvation. While this is not the whole plan, as far as the relationship of faith and baptism is concerned, our Lord made one as essential as the other. It is not that people cannot see it alike. Some are not even looking at it. Others are not listening. Many are not hearing what the Lord said at all because men have changed it to suit their own ways, and their own peculiar denominational dogmas.

But say cry, "Jesus did not say that you would be condemned it you were not baptized." The last part of the verse does not include baptism, does it? Why be surprised at that. The last part of the verse discusses being damned. To be damned, all you have to do is not believe. Those who do not believe will not be concerned about repentance, confession, baptism, or anything else. Nothing matters to them until they believe the gospel. But if you believe the gospel you will not want to be damned, but saved. To be damned, just don't believe. That will take care of your damnation.

But if you want to be saved you must meet the conditions of salvation Jesus spoke. When people do that, follow what the Lord taught in Mark 16:16, and the rest of the counsel of God teaching the conditions of salvation, they shall be recipients of God's spiritual blessings. Until they do obey, they will remain lost.

* * * * *

Delayed Discipline Costs Souls



JAMES W. BOYD

We must always be cautious that disciplinary action is not taken too hastily. Measured judgment must be exercised lest great and unnecessary harm be created by acting to quickly. However, the error brethren usually make is one of acting too slowly, or, in many cases, not at all.

For whatever reason, the usefulness of discipline to recover the lost is voided by needless delay. Hearts become hardened, issues clouded, sentiments aroused, and sin appears tolerated, thereby leaving the church open for reproach, keeping the church defiled, and, most seriously, failing to win the fallen home again.

God expects His will to be obeyed, not rendered ineffective by procrastination and negligence.

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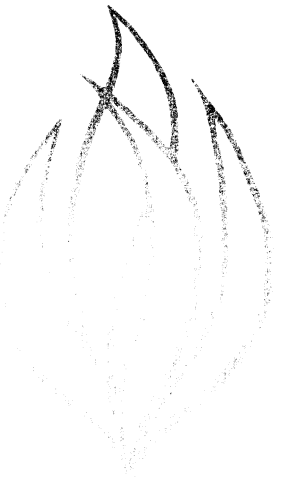

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XI James W. Boyd **NUMBER 10**

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

"The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me, and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth." (Habakkuk 1:1-4).

The prophet is asking the same question basically that all have asked. Why does evil persist? Why do people have to suffer in this life? Why does God not stop it all? Does God not care that the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? Why is there war, disease, pain, and injustice?

Few matters are more real to the human being, and at the same time, more frustrating and puzzling than this matter of human suffering. Why does God allow it? These matters have provoked people to misunderstand God altogether. Men have said unkind and untrue things about God. They have accused Him of injustice, cruelty, and unconcern. Some have become to frustrated and bewildered that they have rejected God, even denied He exists. They ask, "If God is good, why does He allow what so many must endure?" Too often people fail to see that more is involved in suffering than the existence of God.

It is no difficulty for any one of us to list innumerable fashions of human suffering, and we shall not belabor that matter. It is too well known for us to question. We see the suffering not only of the wicked, which might have some explanation on the grounds that they are receiving their

just due. But do we not also see the suffering of the righteous, even the innocent, and the young? Do we not ask, "Why?"

We Have Limitations

As we approach this study, let us pray we do so cautiously, being aware that we are finite creatures and have limitations, even in our capacity to understand some things. Is there any promise or guarantee that we shall understand all that this life offers? Are we to dash to bits what we can know because of those things that we might not ever know? Would that be the mark of wisdom? We persuade it would be folly to take such a position.

Let us not assume that we can fully understand this problem of human suffering. We do ourselves justice to recognize our limits of knowledge and understanding all that exists and takes place in this vast world. Can we even presume to fully satisfy ourselves with an answer, let alone satisfy all others? We do not know all of God's ways, but only know those that He has seen fit to reveal. We have not knowledge of all His goals, purposes, designs, and the manners by which He accomplishes what He desires. He has oversight over His creation, but just how He exercises it all we dare not pretend to know.

But our caution must extend to asking, "Do we have the right to question God as to why He does what He does, or allows what He allows?" We should not pursue this matter as if we are putting God on trial, or as if He owes us explanation. If we ask such a question as we are asking, let our motive be only to enlarge our understanding of what is apparent around us so we might have sufficient courage and knowledge to bring glory to His name.

Many have answered the question regarding human suffering in very, very misleading and wrong ways. Some have suggested that suffering is only an illusion, only in the mind, but not real. Such is like the philosophy of Christian Science. This is totally unrealistic. It does not answer the problem, but ignores it. While we are aware that there are functional disorders, mentally induced, certainly this is not true of every ill and suffering experienced by the human family. When a man has lost a

leg, he is not merely imagining it is lost. When a father upon whom many depend dies, the hardship imposed is not merely in the mind. It is real. Death, disease, loss, and pain are real to life. Such an disposition of suffering is foolishness.

The Result of Sin

Some say that suffering is the result of sin. This is so true that we are inclined to let the matter rest with that. But this does not give us the whole answer, because some, such as infants who have not sinned, also suffer. With the transgression of the first pair, sin entered the world (Romans 5:12). Sin has from that time until this been the most crucial problem mankind faces whether he is aware of that fact or not. But there is much more that can and must be said if our understanding is to be enlarged very much. While this answer is on the right path, it is not yet adequate. But while we may not fully answer the question, there is much more revealed to us that provides us sufficient understanding and comfort amidst suffering than simply to explain it as the result of sin.

The Innocent Suffer

We all have seen the innocent suffer. The Biblical record presents this as well as our experiences in life. Job was accused by his *friends* of having sinned, and offered that as their explanation for his hardships. But we know that was not why he suffered. He was being subjected to temptation to test his faith in God, not because he was being punished for his sins.

Jesus taught, "*There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that those Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*" (Luke 13:1-5). It was not because of their personal sins that these hardships befell those people.

Again, *"And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him saying, Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."* (John 9:1-3). Obviously, the innocent suffered, but not because of personal sins, even though sin was in the world. So the broad and unqualified answer that suffering is due to sin only goes part of the way.

Some have even suggested that the devil is more powerful than God. But that defies all we can learn about God. The three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, *"God is able to deliver us."* (Daniel 3:17). *"All things are possible with God."* (Matthew 19:26). Did not the Son of God amply demonstrate His power over Satan while on earth during His ministry in driving out demons, raising the dead, healing the sick, even conquering death and the grave Himself? God is not powerless before the power of Satan. But this leads us toward an explanation that offers considerable assistance to us. The explanation for human suffering rests upon one or two fundamental Biblical principles of which we can be sure.

God is Limited

This first principle may surprise you, even startle you. It may sound contradictory at first, but it is not. God is limited only because He has limited Himself. He is not limited by Satan, man, or any other force greater than He. He has limited Himself by His own will and His own laws which He has set in motion and operation. He is limited by the very nature of His character. His laws and character make it impossible for Him to do some things. For instance, God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). This would violate His very nature. He cannot be tempted with evil (James 1:13). He cannot look upon evil with approval (Habakkuk 1:13). He could not do such things with consistency to the Being He is. This is not a contradiction to the affirmation that all things are possible with God. This is within His own prescription pertaining to what He says He will and will not do. The very limitations He has imposed on Himself is an exercise of His limitless power?

We quite naturally ask, "Why has God limited Himself?" Again, let us be sure we ask for the purpose of understanding rather than doubting the will of God for Himself or for us. God has made man a creature of freedom, with the power of choice, a free moral agent. To be sure, God has decreed that man must enjoy or suffer the results of his choices. But God has made man to bring glory unto God. Man is to honor God. How else could man honor God except by his own choice? Would it be an honor to God if God forced man to honor Him? Man is not a mere robot, already programmed for everything he says, does, thinks, chooses, etc. Man is a free creature of choice. Therefore, God has limited His own intervention into the affairs of man in order to allow man to make his choices. God limits Himself to let man be man. Otherwise man would be less than what God created him to be. We suggest that God has limited His intervention in the matter of suffering because it would prevent man from fully exercising his powers, and experiencing the consequences. As man is, he can rightly use his powers and fulfill his duty in life to honor and glorify God.

There Are Laws

God has established certain laws, physical and spiritual. If man violates those laws he brings suffering upon himself. Galatians 6:7,8, *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."* Has not this been demonstrated in nature, in the history of man, in the ways of Israel, even in our own lives? Who can doubt the truthfulness of this principle? In order to bless man, God established certain laws that produce blessings when observed and obeyed with respect. But when those same laws are violated, they bring suffering. We can illustrate this with the law of gravity. We all know the blessings involved in that law. But should one defy that law, like casting himself over a cliff, can he expect no harm to befall him? This goes a long way in explaining why much of the suffering of man exists. He trespasses established laws that are intended for man's good. It is similar to the fact that Jesus came to save, but those who reject Him shall be lost. The gospel saves, but it also condemns those who submit not to it.

All Suffering Is not Evil

Let us understand, that while suffering is due to sin, all suffering it not, of itself, something evil. This has been difficult for people to see, but upon examination we can clearly see that this is true. Furthermore, all suffering is not due to one's personal sins. Often it is because of the sins of others than a person suffers. There are those situations we might at first consider to be good and beneficial that can actually be harmful hindrances. How many have perished on the rocks of riches? Some falter on fame. Others plummet to the bottom when they obtain power and honors. While on the other hand, what is sometimes considered loss proves to be a blessing in disguise. It depends to a great extent on our attitude toward such things, and how we handle them. The rich fool of Luke twelve thought himself doing fine, but his wealth cost him his soul. The list is long of those whose prosperity destroyed them. The list is also long of those who rose above their hardships to reach heights they would not have otherwise reached except through the challenge of their adversities.

Is it not true that when a man is down he is more likely to look up to the Lord, more inclined to consider more than the here and now, and give eternity greater consideration? Sometimes illness has proven better than health, and poverty more blessed than riches. Death has been a blessing to many rather than a continued life on earth.

In my acquaintances of the past was a man that seemingly could not be reached with the gospel. Not until he was smitten with cancer did he turn his thoughts to the life beyond. On his death bed he told me that his cancer proved to be one of the greatest blessings he ever had because it took away his false security, and made him think of things more important. He died in Christ a saved man.

Suffering as a Blessing

Suffering can be a blessing. When Moses made the choice of enduring the affliction with the people of God rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season, he suffered. But it was ultimately to his profit. "*For which cause we faint not, but though out outward man perish, yet*

the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (Second Corinthians 4:16,17). Facing tragedy, loss, catastrophe, setbacks, and various disappointments, things that once seemed so important do not remain so important. Suffering helps us keep things in perspective, and maintain proper priorities. The *"thorn in the flesh"* suffered by Paul was designed to keep him humble, and recognize his dependence on God. We dare not become to self-sufficient in our own eyes that our pride leads us away from God.

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." (Hebrews 12:6). When God chastens us He is dealing with us as sons for our own profit. While for the time it is difficult, ultimately, it bears fruit for our benefit. David wrote, *"It is good that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes."* (Psalm 119:71). When we see the physical things around us to be as they really are, temporal and unstable, we realize more than ever the value of the soul and the importance of salvation.

Suffering can develop us into a blessing for others as a source of comfort. *"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."* (Second Corinthians 1:3,4). We have heard the phrase, "Saved to save." It is also true that we are comforted to comfort others. When you have stood where others have to stand you can sympathize, and comfort them like you otherwise could not do if you have never suffered yourself.

Suffering helps us to build character. James tells us it helps to build patience (James 1:2-4). Peter tells us it helps to build a strong faith (First Peter 1:6,7). How else can we learn of our own real quality if we are never put to the test? If God provided us immunity from all suffering, would we learn to serve Him out of love, the highest motive, or merely from self-interest to escape the unpleasant things of life? *"Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (Second Timothy 3:12). We are not promised heaven on earth. We can use suffering to

provoke us to seek heaven all the more. God has promised us a safe harbor, but not a calm sea.

People can and do suffer because of their personal sins. Sometimes we suffer because of the sins of others. We do influence one another (Romans 14:7). The drunkard suffers because of his own sins. His family also suffers. The sins of parents hurt the parents, but also hurt the children, even though the children are not guilty of those sins. Because we live among people we see the innocent suffer because of the waywardness of the guilty.

All Suffering Cannot be Removed

We are not capable of removing all suffering just as we are incapable of removing all evil. But we must keep our attention on the destiny of the soul that flesh and blood cannot inherit. We dare not follow the foolish advice that Job's wife gave him, "*Curse God, and die.*" (Job 2:9). These things are a part of human existence. Paul once wrote, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer* (permit,JWB) *you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*" (Second Corinthians 10:13). There are those things that are "*common to man.*"

But God has promised His children they can overcome and/or endure whatever befalls them. This verse teaches that whatever happens this day, God and I together can handle it. This is easier to say that to live, but it is the truth. God cares for us (First Peter 5:7). "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.*" (Psalm 46:1). We have been assured that there is a place called heaven awaiting the redeemed (John 14:1-4).

Romans 8:28 is also a passage of assurance. "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.*" This does not teach that everything that happens is good. This has primary reference to what God has done for man. What God works is for our good. There are those things that work for our harm. But if we stay with the Lord, we can conquer that which opposes us, and would destroy us.

As we are called upon to suffer, we must remember that suffering was no stranger to Christ. He suffered for sins (First Peter 3:1), although not His own sins (Hebrews 4:15). He suffered the humiliation heaped against Him even as He sought man's salvation. He suffered on Calvary, and knew body pain and heartache. His suffering was in order that we might be glorified, even if we do have to suffer while we live here on earth. Paul stated a great conclusion, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.*" (Romans 8:18). Such assurances give hope and comfort to those who are the children of God.

* * * * *

How Shall the Young Secure Their Hearts?

We confront many questions, but few more serious than the one of this lesson. Some questions deal with trivial things and can be easily answered and even if answered incorrectly, the matter is not overly serious. Other questions are more difficult and far-reaching. The answers are not only of temporal concern, but eternal consequence. Such is the question regarding the young.

It is not sufficient to find the answer for just one generation, but something that will be applicable for every generation of youth. We ought not think that the answer varies from one generation to the next. But we must be impressed that every generation must have God's answer.

Why is this such an important matter? To secure means to make confident, free from doubt and fear, to provide comfort and certainty so there can be stability. This is so needful because the devil and all of his forces and agents are busy trying to destroy the souls of the young. If they cannot be secured, they can be destroyed. If those who can assist the young to secure their hearts do not do it,

Satan will see to it that they shall be overcome. When the young person is your child, you can see the seriousness of it all the more.

There are those intent on destroying faith in God and the Bible as His Word. They plant doubt, constantly sowing seeds of confusion in order to uproot confidence. Satan wishes to undermine the foundation for life that God prescribes in order to prevent the person from fulfilling his mission and purpose in life. The forces of evil seek the instability and uncertainty in the hearts of people because that kind of heart is ripe for the sowing of the seeds of temptation that produces sin.

The Right Foundation

Neither the old nor the young can build on a foundation of sand and withstand the inevitable challenges that come in life. They will become "*like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.*" (James 1:6). Paul urged his brethren to strive for perfection and told them why. "*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*" (Ephesians 4:14). Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica to work among the brethren "*to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith, that no man should be moved by these afflictions.*" (First Thessalonians 3:2,3). The need of stability is repeated over and over.

We are taught to be secure and stedfast in order to receive the eternal blessings of God. First Corinthians 15:58, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" In a world overrun with confusion , threats, violence, hate, and skepticism, where material things of life are proved to be unstable and temporary, with pressures to do evil pounding us on every turn, young people need an anchor for the soul that is sure and stedfast, or else they will perish with the wickedness of the world. Sin destroys, and the young must be equipped to guard against it, avoid it, prevent it, and if overcome by it, seek forgiveness that God has provided. This is a most crucial matter and we must come to grips with it.

A Secure Heart

The heart of the youth must be made secure. No person, young or old, is going to continue to do wrong, but will seek that which is right, when from within comes the determination to do right. In the early years of life, parents are able to restrict, restrain, and control the child from much evil. This they ought to do. But the time soon comes that parental restraint is not sufficient because the child must gradually assume responsibility for his own actions. He will soon be outside the watchful eye of parents. He must do right because he knows to do right, and wants to do right. Each person must learn to discipline himself. Inasmuch as behavior stems from the heart, when the heart is made secure, and is on guard against sin, then the life is secure. The securing of the heart does not just happen, however. There is no magic formula, and it cannot be done by mere wishful thinking and hoping. Nor will it likely to be done by the young person left to stand totally for himself. It takes the combined effort of parent and child, working together. Even though it begins entirely with the parents, gradually, but certainly, it will continue as the child learns to control himself.

Parents

We want to suggest four efforts by which the heart of the young can be made secure. First, the parent must provide guidance. Fathers and mothers must set the standards by word and example. *"Train up a child in the way he should go..."* is directed primarily toward parents (Proverbs 22:6). *"Fathers provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."* (Ephesians 6:4). *"He that spareth his rod, hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."* (Proverbs 13:24). The level and content of guidance to be given the child is determined from the Word of God.

By proper instruction, showing the good, restraining the evil, with love, consideration, provision, discipline, and chastisement, the older is to guide the younger. By example, which is more powerful than words, the child can formulate his values, his concept of right and wrong, his duty and privileges of life. When word and example are lacking, or misdirected, the child's heart is not likely to

ever be secure regarding that which is most important to him. The devil will move in and lead that precious youth into a life that eventually leads him to hell.

Responsibility

Second, there comes the time when the child must assume more and more responsibility for his own life. He must do his own study (Second Timothy 2:15), and not be content to live according to a borrowed faith, a faith accepted just because somebody told him what to believe. When a young person has convictions that are true to God's Word, his convictions will be like those of his parents, provided all convictions are true to God's Word. This idea that the young must necessarily have a different view from his foreparents is fallacious. But one must know the truth because he knows the truth from the source of truth.

There are many things others can do for another. There are things we can help each other to do. But there are some things each one must do for himself. Young people must learn the truth of the Bible, give heed to the revelation therein, exert their own effort to know and do the will of God. As they gradually assume greater freedom and independence from parents, a mark of real maturity is that they accept this responsibility with seriousness. The combination of parental guidance and the acceptance by the youth of his own responsibility will contribute to securing the heart of the young.

Companions

A third area where it takes combined effort of parent and child cooperation is in the associations of the young. Many young people are led into evil ways by the influence of their peers. Too often, not having reached sufficient maturity to make up their own minds properly and follow the right ways, for fear of being excluded, they will follow the crowd, going places, doing things, saying things that they think will make them acceptable by their associates, but are damaging to their spiritual welfare.

In view of this reality, it is startling to see how indifferent some parents are in what they allow their children to do in cultivating friends and associates. Little wonder that some

young people seek the world before they seek the Lord. All of their friends act that way. We are so inclined to blame the faults of our children on his friends, but have we given proper consideration of our own permissiveness relating to whom they have as friends? It is essential that people develop the right kind of friends.

First Corinthians 15:33, *"Be not deceived; evil companionships corrupt good morals."* (ASV). Proverbs 13:20, *"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."* Proverbs 28:7, *"He that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father."* In the song where we admonish each other to "yield not to temptation," we sing a phrase, "shun evil companions," We sing, "Take time to be holy," and urge one another to "Make friends of God's children." The kind of people whose close association we cultivate will have an influence on us. For this reason parents and youth need to be very cautious in the selection of friends. There is value in situations where Christian association can be nurtured. Friends can help or hinder one in his Christian life.

Opportunity

Fourth, our young must be given opportunity to apply Christianity in their lives **now.** They should be encouraged to abstain from the evil, but they must be encouraged to do the positive good that is expected of a child of God. Sometimes people speak of the young as the church of tomorrow. Many young people are already a part of the church of today. They must be taught to exercise their sense of right and wrong as they have learned from Scripture. Decisions must be made by them to the extent they are capable. The ability to discern between right and wrong is gradually developed with growth like every other part of Christianity. Learning to serve, to give of oneself for others, to be included in the work and worship of the body, are things that must be provided for the young. They will not likely push themselves in such things, but may well have to be pushed. But it is the duty of the older to see that they have this opportunity. Only then can they grow to be like Jesus who went about **doing** as well as saying good.

The way of youth often is very frustrating to both young and older. This has been true with every generation, and it

will continue to be true. But God, through His Word, has revealed to us how the young must secure their hearts, and how it can be accomplished. When there is the right combination of proper parental oversight, with the youth gradually assuming his place and duty, the church teaching and encouraging everyone in the way they should walk, the young will grow strong in the Lord and be able to resist the devil who would harm them, now and forever.

* * * * *

Satan's Compromises

Second Corinthians 2:11, "*Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*" Ephesians 6:11, "*Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*"

Paul warns his brethren of Satan's devices and wiles, which are his methods and maneuvers to deceive and mislead. Just as the Christian is provided an arsenal of weapons with which to fight the good fight of faith, so Satan has many weapons also which he uses to capture precious souls and retain them in spiritual bondage.

John mentions the devil's avenues of temptation in First John 2:15 as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. He also uses false doctrines, difficulties of life, disappointments, hypocrisy among those who profess to be Christians. He uses every means to create doubt, and encourage people to postpone doing what they ought to do, or turn away from the righteous things they have done.

The Weapon of Compromise

Another device that is not always so easily detected is Satan's use of compromise. Compromising the truth is mixing it with error, retaining enough truth to appeal, but containing enough error to condemn. It is like mixing sugar and sand. What there is that seems good is no longer of use because it is contaminated with what is detrimental. The use of compromise is a gradual,

deceptive mechanism to render the hearts and minds of people insensitive toward truth and willing to accept error.

We have an Old Testament demonstration of the use and appeal of compromise in the negotiations between Moses and Pharoah. We see how the tool of compromise works, and we also can see how the devil uses it even yet.

God's requirements were expressed by Moses, but Pharoah offered a number of compromises, each one falling short of what God required. He offered counter proposals, substitutes, something less than and different from the required. God sent Moses to lead Israel from Egypt. He required a complete departure. "*Let my people go,*" was the command. All of the Israelites were to leave and never return, taking all of their possessions with them. Pharoah's response to this command was, "*Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.*" (Exodus 5:2).

Moses persisted with the Lord's instructions, but Pharoah resisted. Egypt was subjected to a series of plagues that demonstrated the power of God over Egypt, Pharoah, and all their false gods. Pharoah began to relent just a bit under these pressures, and began to offer compromises. So it is with Satan. When he sees a person who seems determined to do what is right, and will not surrender to him, he will offer compromises and attempt to subvert that person in whatever way he can.

Just Sacrifice

God commanded that Israel be allowed to leave. Pharoah proposed, "*Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land.*" (Exodus 8:5). Israel could go and sacrifice, but they had to remain in the land. But nothing short of leaving the land altogether would suffice to obey God.

We must realize that God expects us, upon coming to Christ, to go all the way out of a life of sin, and not continue therein. Romans 6:1,2, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*" Read Second Corinthians 6:14-17. We cannot stay in the sinful world, a sinful state, and serve God at

the same time. We must decide who we shall serve. Evil habits, adulterous marriages, profanity, drunkenness, lies, lasciviousness, false doctrines, self-will, on and on, all must be abandoned

Don't Go Far

Seeing Moses refused his first offer, Pharoah tried again. *"I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away: intreat for me."* This was much like the first, but Pharoah realized that worshipping God in Egypt would be an abomination for the Israelites. So he would let them get just outside the border into the wilderness, but not far. His offer accommodated one objection, staying in the land, but did not accomplish God's direction to leave and not return.

This reminds us that Satan does not mind people leaving him just a little bit, so long as they stay within easy grasp. He does not mind people "going to church on Sunday," but he would prefer they did not. But surely he does not want you to be "fanatical" and attend every service. He does not mind you giving something now and then, but to give as you have been prospered, regularly, cheerfully, sacrificially, and in order to show love for God is too much. He might not mind you saying a prayer before a meal, but praying fervently, daily, earnestly is something he does mind. He does not even mind you getting involved in a few good works, so long as that does not become the goal in life. He objects to allowing the standards of Christianity be your guide.

God says that man is to sacrifice himself, be a living sacrifice, become bondservants to the Lord. But some are like the little boy who fell out of bed. When asked to explain how that happened, he answered, "I guess I went to sleep too close to where I got in." This may be the problem with many in the church today. They do not get "in" enough to keep them from falling "out." They are not sufficiently removed from their former works of evil. Peter described people like that in Second Peter 2:20-22.

Leave Your Families

The third compromise Pharoah offered to the unrelenting Moses was just another "blind" that failed. Moses said, "*We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks , and with our herds will we go.*" Pharoah countered, "*Not so.*" He would not allow them to take their families and possessions. He knew he could keep them if their families were left behind.

This is something the devil knows about us. When we profess to follow Christ, we cannot forget about our loved ones and be content to leave them behind. We must take our families with us. To be able to stand on that day at the right hand of the Great Judge and say, "Behold, here am I Lord; here also is my wife and the children which thou gavest me," would be joy enough to fill the heart of any ransomed man.

Sometimes I have heard parents say, "I intend to leave it to my child to make up his own mind about church, church activities, God, his social life, friends, education, etc." This is a strange and foreign attitude from what God expects of parents. Parents do not leave other matters of lesser nature totally to the child, such as eating properly, brushing the teeth, going to school, and similar matters. Eventually each one must decide for himself, but it is the divine duty of parents to see that the child has the proper material, instruction, and example by which to formulate an intelligent and righteous decision in favor of God and His righteousness. The child must be taught, guided, trained, disciplined, and not left to themselves. Without this oversight they will not even know the difference between right and wrong, and will have no basis upon which to make good decisions. God has provided parents for children for many reasons, and it is time for many parents to find out what they are. It was unthinkable to Moses and the Israelites to go to the promised land but leave their children in bondage. We have seen some parents, unable to take their children with them because the child rebels, and the parents turn around and return to bondage with them.

Leave Your Possessions

The fourth compromise offer from Pharoah was, *"Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your hearts be stayed: let your little ones also go with you."* He gave a little bit more, but not enough for God's requirement to be met. He wanted them to leave their possessions because he knew they would return for them.

When one comes to God through Christ he must bring all that he has into the service of God. We are stewards of God's properties. What we have materially is not really our own, but we are caretakers for a while. We are not to think that only that which is placed in the collection basket at worship service is all that belongs to God, and the rest that we have is ours to do whatever we wish. We are accountable for it all. We ought not misuse anything that God has placed in our care and for honorable use.

There is the story of a man about to be baptized, and one reminded him to take his wallet out of his pocket. But he responded, "I think I had better give that to the Lord also." At least he had the right concept and attitude. We "*honor God with our substance.*" (Proverbs 3:9). We cannot leave behind what God says to take with us.

Do you see how Pharoah backed away little by little, but never enough? Can you see how he tried to accommodate some of the demands, but not willing to do all, trying to negotiate a compromise with Moses?

"Let us go," Moses said. "Only worship in the land," was Pharoah's response. "We must leave the land completely," Said Moses. "Only don't go very far," said Pharoah. "We must take our families," said Moses. "Leave your children," answered Pharoah. "We must take our possessions," demanded Moses. "Leave your possessions," said Pharoah.

So went one compromise offer after another. The design behind each of them was to disobey God. Whenever Satan can get man to serve God only partially, which is not proper service, Satan has succeeded in his attempts to subvert man's soul. Only when we reject Satan's compromises can we please the Lord.

Let us not be *"ignorant of his devices,"* but alert to the subtle ways he manipulates. Let us not be content to serve the Lord only with half a heart, and deceive ourselves into thinking this will be enough. Obeying God is not like shopping at the supermarket where you take what you want and leave what you do not want With God, it is service to Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must do as did Moses and let Satan know that we will not fall for his compromises.

* * * * *

Thankfulness

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations." (Psalm 100).

In November of each year our nation observes a unique holiday called Thanksgiving Day. To my knowledge, with possibly one exception, we are the only nation to have such a day set aside for such a purpose. This celebration had its beginning around 1620, and has gradually become a national day of observance. The first such day was proclaimed in 1789. Quoting from one source as to how it began, Dr. Franklin says that in a time of great despondency among the first settlers of New England, it was proposed in one of their public assemblies to proclaim a fast. An old farmer arose, spoke of provoking heaven with their complaints, reviewed their mercies, and showed that, instead of appointing a day of fasting and complaint, they should appoint a day of thanksgiving. This was accordingly done, according to this source, and the custom has continued ever since.

Not a Holyday

We do not celebrate Thanksgiving Day as some special religious holyday, nor any other such day, because they are not authorized in Scripture. We must have authority for what we do religiously (Colossians 3:17). No day is special in and of itself. The first day of the week carries some distinction because on that day we are to assemble for worship, but it is the worship that is special, not the day, even though the first day is specified. But the idea of thanksgiving is a noble one and certainly like Christ, not only in the Fall Season, but throughout the year, every year.

Giving thanks is a very reasonable activity as well as a Biblical one. One wrote, "If an exhausted, weary, needy traveller should rest at the foot of a castle wall, and some one from the walls above dropped to him a supply for all his needs, could he keep from looking up to see who had relieved him? So it is not possible for a true Christian, who lives daily out of the alms-basket of God's providence, not to look with thankfulness to that Father who liberally supplies all his need."

Another has said, "An ungrateful man is like a hog under a tree eating acorns, but never looking up to see where they come from." We would contend that it makes good sense and good reason to be grateful. The ingrate is to be shunned because he had a despicable character.

But more significant than that, thankfulness is Biblical and Christlike. It is amazing how much the Bible says on this subject. Jesus is our example in offering thanks. On several occasions the Scriptures mentions where He raised His voice toward heaven and prayed a prayer of thanksgiving. *"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, of Father, Lord of heaven and earth..."* (Matthew 11:25). *"And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me."* (John 11:41).

Offered Through Christ

We learn that thanksgiving is to be offered to God through the name of Christ. *"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus*

Christ." (Ephesians 5:20). The writings of inspiration by Paul are plentifully supplied with such expressions as, *"I thank God; God be thanked."* Such is typical of Christian manners and respect to the source of blessings.

The Bible also mentions many things for which men have offered thanks. Nehemiah thanked God upon completion of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls (Nehemiah 12:31,40,46). Thanks was offered for food (Mark 8:6; Acts 27:35; First Timothy 4:3,4). Thanks was given in remembrance of God's holiness, mercy, and goodness (Second Chronicles 5:13). Paul gave thanks for His unspeakable gift of His Son (Second Corinthians 9:5). Other things mentioned in thanksgiving are the power of Christ, His rule and reign over His kingdom (First John 1:12). The reception of the Word by others, and good works done in the Lord were noted (First Thessalonians 2:13). Romans 7:25 offers thanks for deliverance from sin. First Corinthians 15:57 mentions victory over death and the grave. We are to be thankful for wisdom and power (First Corinthians 14:18); the triumph of the gospel (First Corinthians 1:4; Second Corinthians 2:14); for the conversion of others (First Thessalonians 2:13; Romans 6:17); for love, zeal, and faith exhibited by others (Acts 28:15); Romans 1:8; Second Thessalonians 2:13). Psalm 100 mentions the nearness of God, while Second Corinthians 1:11 and 8:16 thanks is offered for the supply of bodily wants and needs. After all, James teaches, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of light, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* (James 1:17). Who could list all the things for which men have properly given thanks, and still should?

Frequently we read in Scripture exhortations to be thankful. *"O give thanks unto unto the Lord"* is found often in the Psalms, such as Psalm 136. The Psalmist also made resolutions to be thankful (Psalm 18:49; 30:12). In fact, we read where thanks was habitually offered by Daniel (Daniel 6:10). Sacrifices of thanksgiving are mentioned in Psalm 116:17).

Ingratitude

The opposite of being thankful is ingratitude. This is a detestable characteristic. One wrote, "Nothing more

detestable does the earth produce than an ungrateful man." Men have described ingratitude with various analogies. One very fitting one is likening the ingrate to the Dead Sea that takes in the fresh waters of Jordan, makes them salty and bitter, and gives nothing but briny death to everything around it.

There is a story told about a soldier in a war in 1854 who was wounded in battle, fell into a ravine, was helpless and probably dying. The only one to see him fall was one of the enemy. But this enemy came to him, stooped over him, gave him water, bound up his wound, revived him, lifted him from the ravine, and signaled to the wounded man's comrades where he was. When the helper rose to leave, the wounded man turned his weapon against him and killed him. Whether this is a true account I do not know. But it does illustrate the wretchedness of ingratitude.

When Paul was describing the worst sort of people, the most sordid and depraved kinds of humanity, among the things this inspired man listed was, "*Neither were they thankful.*" (Romans 1:21).

Is it not the attitude toward blessings that causes one to be thankful or to be an ingrate? Some consider blessings something only for which to ask, but never for which to give thanks. Some always expect to receive, but never give. Some take their blessings as a matter of course, nothing for which one should sense any obligation to the source of them. Some think that everyone receives blessings, "Why not me? I work hard and deserve them just as much as anybody else." They consider their blessings as payment for what they do. Some are not thankful for what they have because they are so preoccupied with the possibility of losing it. Some grieve over what they have lost to the point they are never grateful for what they have. Even adults act like a child who cannot enjoy his ice cream cone due to fretting over being without one when he finishes it. Nothing among our earthly, physical, and temporal blessings shall remain for long anyway. How foolish not to enjoy them, and be grateful for them while they are ours to use to the glory of God!

Greed

Some are not thankful for their blessings because their greed makes them want more and more. Failing to be thankful is a mark of covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Being malcontent because we do not have an abundance is ingratitude. Sufficiency is as adequate as an abundance. Half a loaf is better than no loaf. Rather than complaining for not having an abundance, true followers of Christ are thankful for even a small portion. After all, Christians have more and better blessings than anyone else because we not only have physical blessings, but spiritual blessings which are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). How can you measure the worth of the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with Deity and the saved, hope of eternal heaven, blessings that none can take from us if we will only be faithful to God? How tragic that we would complain for not having more of the fleeting and passing things.

Blessings Come From God

But we realize with James that all blessings come from God. Our lives should be filled with thanksgiving and praise, making sure that our gratitude is genuine, sincere, and true, not only on a national holiday like Thanksgiving Day, but throughout our entire life. Even in times of adversity, holy men of God lifted their voices in praise. Even when persecuted and mistreated, early Christians gave God thanks they were counted worthy to suffer for His name (Acts 5:41). Let us always lift our voices in tune with the sentiments expressed by Job, *"The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord."* (Job 1:21).

With whom had you rather be compared? Luke 17:11-19,*"And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God. And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that*

returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."

In this record Jesus healed all ten, yet only one turned back to thank Him. To say, "Thank you," is to speak beautiful and noble words. To observe a day of thanks is a noble and admirable gesture. But the real way to say thanks to God is by the way we live day by day, from one Thanksgiving Day to the next.

Just as a physician judges the condition of a person's body by the way it functions, and not by the words a person may say about his condition, so God knows our gratitude, or lack of it, by the way we live, and not just by good words that we might say.

Let us therefore resolve in our hearts to possess the spirit expressed in Psalm 79:13, "*So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks forever; we will show forth thy praise to all generations.*

How thankful we ought to be for God's plan for saving us, His gift of Christ, Christ's gift of His life, the gift of salvation, the revealed will by which we can live, and eventually enter eternal glory.

* * * * *

Permit me to mention once more the availability of my commentary on Romans.

System of Salvation

This is a 288 page commentary, hardback book, that I can send you for ten dollars ($10.00), plus the expense of shipping which is two dollars ($2.00). It can be useful to you in your study, and would be an excellent gift to others in whom you have special interest. Order from me, **James W. Boyd, Route 11, Box 90, McMinnville, TN, 37110.** Thanks!

Next Issue:
Standing in the Old Paths



JAMES W. BOYD

Faithful brethren are familiar with the plea to stand in the old paths, Jeremiah 6:16. It has been the persuasion of faithful brethren that we all should return to the New Testament as our pattern and guide. In recent days we have heard much about a so-called "new hermeneutics," a "new" approach to Scripture. Upon analysis, it is apparent that it is not new, but is as old a man's rebellion against God's Word. Alongside this "new" thing is the ridicule of following the old paths. It is said the New Testament should not be our pattern, and the plea to follow the old paths is irrelevant and foolish. Next issue we shall discuss in several lessons the importance of **Standing in the Old Paths.**

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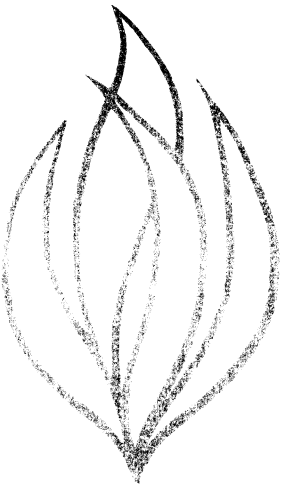

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XI James W. Boyd NUMBER 11

Standing in the Old Paths

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Jeremiah 6:16, *"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein."*

What Some Are Saying

The following lessons, even though they are separated into four sections, should be considered as one major, overriding theme. One lesson builds upon the other. They must be taken as a unit in order to hear the plea. I want to stress the need for this theme and the reasons why we must stand in the old paths. We want to consider that in which we are to stand and how to stand.

We hear and read many statements today, both in and out of the church, that make such a study imperative. The attitude and actions being manifested by many toward the way of God is threatening and challenging. Some content, "Don't moralize on adultery, drunkenness, dishonesty, etc." We fail to understand this inasmuch as these things have to do with morality. "The question (regarding sex, JWB) is not if, but with whom and why," many youths are being told by their instructors and peers. "Nothing is spared from change. It is inescapable, therefore, that the Christian church (Christian used as denominations might use it, JWB) should be in process of change as radical and demanding as that of the so-called secular world." This kind of advice comes from some religious leaders. "Organized religion cannot escape change," we are told. We are also advised that it is right to only obey those laws you consider just, and that even physical violence may be morally justifiable to produce what some may consider to be desirable social change and reforms.

There are those who present the gospel as irrelevant to our times. "The church must listen to the world so that we can find out what language the world is using today,"

which means, so we can communicate a relevant message. We are informed that "Paul did not live in the twentieth century. He never spoke face to face with nuclear scientists or residents of Harlem. What language would he use if he tried to communicate with modern scientists? What would he quote if he addressed an audience in Harlem?"

The idea being pressed is obvious. Biblical language is inadequate to teach the world the gospel of Christ. We must get "with it," and convey spiritual things of God in "hip" terms. It is a slap at preaching that relies upon *"thus saith the Lord"* to communicate God's Word. It reflects contempt for the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11).

Even Brethren

Even brethren are writing without shame extolling the virtues of liberal thought, form criticism, existentialism, theistic evolution, and a religionless "Christianity." Youths are heard to say, aping their mentors, "Denominational preachers speak to me better than church of Christ preachers." They proclaim such doctrines as partaking of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week is of ourselves, not of God, and instrumental music in worship is just a matter of opinion. Some say the anti-instrument stand is a separatists "shibboleth." There are books coming from the presses denouncing what some call "Southern theology," because churches in the southern regions of the United States that have stood firm in the faith contend for that faith. It is a slash of snobbish ridicule by those who would run rough-shod over the truth, trying to make truth appear to be a sectional commodity. "Church of Christism" is the definition given to what we preach and teach by those who are set to restructure the church more akin to denominationalism. "Preach Christ, not the church," we are taught. On and on it goes with similar expressions that reflect a certain and definite departure from that which has characterized faithful gospel preaching for decades and centuries.

Is It New?

But are the cries of the liberal innovators and reconstructionists really new? Have their words not been heard before? We contend that those who scoff at the old

paths today are "Johnny-come-latelies" who are parroting worn out cliches that were proven false before they were born. They are but a part of the Satanic revival to discredit truth and plunge the church once again into spiritual digression and apostasy.

For instance, "It is the common conclusion among the more liberal and progressive brethren that the above-minded class (referring to the early efforts of restoration, JWB) have, for years past, been exhibiting a stubborn and perverse stupidity in reference to the progress of the age.

"Long since they became a real pest upon the body ecclesiastic, by standing directly in the way of those grand conceptions being realized which the more literary, refined, and charitable brethren have presented from time to time for adoption of the Christian brotherhood.

"It is really provoking to think that so many propositions for the adoption of means and practices intended to popularize our religious movement, and break down these distinctions between us and the other denominations which have to some degree united them in opposition to us, should be so stupidly and perversely opposed." Such were words by Carl Crab, recorded in The Search for the Ancient Order, Volume II, page 136, **back in 1872.** So the clamor to make the truth palatable to denominations who hold error is not a new idea. The ridicule and denunciation, mockery and criticism of the old paths which rang loud and clear once before in the brotherhood once committed to the old paths is being heard again today. The words, attitudes, and actions of those malcontent with Scripture wounded what is called the Restoration Movement once before, and some today seek to destroy it now. That which brought liberal, digressive, and modernistic bodies into existence a century or so ago will produce the same disaster among us today.

But we contend that the same truth of the New Testament, the old paths, will produce children of God, Christians, the church of Christ today as it did in the days recorded in the New Testament. While some say it is useless to attempt to restore primitive Christianity, and would even desire it be done, those of greater respect for Scripture will subscribe to sentiments expressed in 1869 by Robert Graham (SftAO, page 132, Vol. 11), "...there is among ourselves a falling off from the simplicity of the gospel, a conforming to the mode of the 'other' denominations, the loss of zeal for the spread of the gospel

for fear people will think us solicitous only to build up a party, the decrease of Bible reading and study among us of late, the growing disposition to recognize the distinction of clergy and laity in our churches, and among much more that might be named, our conforming to the unscriptural phraseology of sects, to say nothing of our adopting many of their anti-scriptural customs. With the uniform experience of past ages before us, the tendency of men to make the gospel popular under the plea of extending its influence, and that, too, even at the cost of its purity and power to save, should make us keen to detect and fearless in our condemnation of all departures from the faith."

Now, as in the days of the Old Testament prophets who called men back to God, and in the days of men this side of the cross who urged a return to Scripture and the old paths, the plea for true New Testament Christianity as revealed in the Bible has been met with ridicule, indifference, snobbery, sophistication, with truth rejected for the intellectualism and doctrines of human wisdom. Yet, the need for man and the benefits for man still abide for the faith once delivered. That faith consists of the old paths to which we tenaciously hold, and without hesitation proclaim to friend and foe alike.

What is to Come

Part II will be a lesson on Isaac, who showed great wisdom in digging wells once dug by those who went before him. Part III is a study of attitudes we should have toward those who have attempted to restore Christianity in years gone by. Part IV will mention some of the major areas, certainly not all, that compose the old paths to which we must stedfastly turn and preach with fervor without compromise or alteration. May God add His blessings to these investigation.

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PART TWO:
ISAAC, DIGGER OF OLD WELLS

Genesis 26:18, "*And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham; and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.*"

This is the record of a historical event that contains the demonstration of great moral quality and value. Herein we find the path of great wisdom, and a reliable course of action. Isaac digged again the wells which his father Abraham had opened years before him. This lesson wishes to stress the action and draw from it.

Reasons for Digging

Why did he do this? There are at least three prominent reasons: (1) There was need for water. With his flocks, herds, people, and a famine in the land, he proposed to go to Egypt. But the Lord told him to stay in the land. He had to have water. (2) The Philistines, envying Isaac, had stopped the wells with stones and earth. If water was to be brought up, the wells had to be reopened. (3) He knew he could not improve on the location of those wells or the quality of water which flowed in their depths.

We need to heed the voice of history as it cries unto us. When we see the old paths of truth forsaken, we have to wonder why we should want to imitate the spiritual apostasy and failure this always produces. Do the liberals really think they are saying anything new or progressive? All of their derogatory prattle can be read in history almost verbatim in the tirades against the old paths uttered by the advocates of digression years ago. Modernism is not modern because it is the same age as the subtlety and deceit of Satan. Look where the descendants of digressives are today and see if you wish to give heed to the voices of liberalism and modernism. Are they not mired in the filth and scum of the rankest infidelity and spiritual adultery? Is this where we want to go, and lead our children?

Modernism, liberalism, digression, heresy, apostasy, whatever you wish to call it, is not a new battleground, but it continues to be a deadly and constant one. Salvation is not the prime task of the church according to apostates. The Bible cannot be understood alike they say. Clergymen of every stripe have drunk deep from the wells of intellectualism and infidelity until the

churches they serve no longer stand for much of anything holy.

Even the Lord's church has become burdened with many liberals who cherish theological and other kinds of academic degrees rather than the old paths, and who, at the same time, display contempt for the true in favor of something they think is new. It remains to be seen how many churches of Christ shall survive the onslaught of the professors, pastor-pulpiteers, presidents, and promoters of programs who are modern-day Philistines, busily engaged in filling the wells digged before us. If the sophisticated self-acclaimed "scholars" of many Bible departments prevail, the people of God will be led from Canaan to drink of the brackish waters of denominational Egypt rather than dig again and drink deeply from the wells of truth in which flows the water of life. Too many are too slow and too reluctant to recognize the sources from which detrimental digressive doctrines and evil influences are pouring into the ranks of the church.

Between Two Others

Isaac was a great man who lived between two other men who overshadowed him. They were Abram, his father, and Jacob, his son. Isaac was not an innovator, nor one to instigate great change. There was nothing particularly sensational, dramatic, or earth-shaking in his adult career. Whereas Abraham had left his home in Ur, and showed repeatedly his great faith from Moriah to the rescue of Lot, and before Melchizedek, and Jacob was a flamboyant, colorful character with one exciting and moving event after another from youth until death, Isaac simply carried on the great tradition of faith in God, and was a necessary link in the chain of divine purpose. Some are great for what they initiate. Others are great for what they preserve and keep alive. The latter was the greatness of Isaac who kept alive that which was deserving to be kept alive, and continued the march toward the coming Savior.

We should realize, as did Isaac, we owe a great debt of gratitude to those who have dug wells before us; wells from which we are privileged to drink and possibly do not appreciate as we should. When we drive through the countryside and see rows of tall and stately trees down a fence row, we wonder who planted them. We enjoy them, but the one who planted them probably never did see them

in their glory as we see them. We are indebted to those who have built bridges over chasms and rivers so we can safely and quickly cross over. Frankly, it is disgusting to hear the people of digression clamor for change just for the sake of change, downgrading those who have gone before them, as if nothing of significance ever happened before these new wonders appeared on the scene.

One Great Quality of Abraham

It is a mark of greatness in a man, or a generation, to build for the future, to dig wells for generations yet to come. Abraham did this when he originally digged his wells. Civilization dies and real progress stagnates if people go backward or concentrate too long on themselves to the neglect of those of the future. I think of the founding fathers of our nation, many of whom were already aged men, who risked their all for a nation in which they could live but for a short time, but who had in mind their descendants. How little tribute we pay to such people who provided us freedoms that we may take for granted. These things are ours because of the sacrifice, toil, and tears of those before us. Abraham was not thinking only of himself when he digged his wells, but also his descendants who would inherit the land after him. Isaac appreciated what his father had done, and kept alive what was deserving. He, too, was not just concerned for himself.

Consider how few things we enjoy and take for granted that we have totally worked out ourselves, discovered for ourselves. We did not invent them, but others did. This is true of many material, mechanical, electrical, push-button things. Somebody figured it all out and made if possible. We come along and push a button, and may even fuss if it does not work immediately and perfectly.

This is also true of many sacred and spiritual truths that have been learned, written, and preserved in our world by those who were brave enough, wise enough, sacrificial enough, and strong enough to keep the light of truth burning brightly in a world of sinful darkness. This they have done in spite of many efforts to extinguish that light. How foolish, mistaken, conceited, and servile to pride are we when we think what we accomplish we have done without the help of those who have gone before us. How

selfish, egotistical, and spiritually immature and unjust we show ourselves to be should we speak disparagingly of the noble men and women of the past who often carved from near hopelessness great blessings of beauty.

Potential Mistakes

People are inclined to make two grave mistakes regarding the past. It is folly to think that only the things of the past are what is good, and use whatever was in the past accomplished by men as our religious authority. But it may be an even worse folly to discard the useful practices and proven principles of timeless truth and experience in order to latch on to that which is unstable. It is even worse yet when those who are untried, unproven, unstable, and are imitations of failures come forward to deride, ridicule, and war against people, deeds, truths, that have built the very platforms on which the present generation is privileged to stand; solid platforms that those who mock could not begin to build.

Disrespect of age, our heritage, the past, the old paths is a sin so prominent in our time. This is a violation of divine law. It is even evident in the church. God's Word does not lend itself to condone such disrespect. There have been wells digged before us which have been and still are under grave danger of being filled up by modern Philistines. Respect for the past does not stifle real progress, but guides it. If we be as wise as we would like to think we are, we would be modern-day Isaacs and dig again those wells, seek their fresh, life-giving, soul-satisfying waters, and quench our spiritual thirst with blessings that pour from them. This craving for the new has caused some to sacrifice soundness and compromise truth. They confuse being busy with the Lord's business. They want denominational Egypt rather than the pure wells of Canaan.

Much of the world drinks from defiled and polluted waters, being filled with the produce of the unclean, depraved reservoirs and fountains of corruption. Hence, we see the turmoil, wickedness, lawlessness, unrest, and degradation of our time. Many grope, seeking wistfully in desperation for the water of life that satisfies the longings of the soul. But too often, rather than expend the energy to reopen old wells that repeatedly prove valuable, they prefer

to dig new wells that repeatedly prove to be impure, shallow, temporary, and dry up in the drought of trial. Pride, arrogance, ignorance prevent many from digging where pure water has always been found.

Our Need Today

We need to return to the ways of the past in so many matters. We can hear some cry, "Traditionalist, legalist, on and on." It is strange how some who deplore the labels of liberal and modernist are profuse in labeling anybody that questions their elite judgment. "We must progress, go forward, move onward and upward, grow and glow," is the wail we hear. We do not disagree with that. But let us not confuse digression for progression, forward for backward, onward and upward for downward, and growing and glowing for puffing up and burning out. As we move, let us be careful which direction and stay on the right path. Some have moved far from Jerusalem and the way of God. Failing to heed the past and respecting it does not improve anything. Rather we stand in danger of going beyond the authority of God (Second John 9-11).

Paying attention to the old is taught in the Scriptures. Romans 15:4, *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."* First Corinthians 10:11, *"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."* Beware of those who only cry, "Future, future," without ample regard for the past.

God's Way

It is not by accident, but divine design, that older, seasoned, experienced, and faithful men are elders of the church. It is not an accident that adults are over the home rather than children. Proverbs 16:31, *"The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness."* Proverbs 22:28, *"Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set."* When Judah was running headlong to destruction in sin, going the path of Northern Israel, Jeremiah warned, *"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your*

souls." (Jeremiah 6:16). But many are like the last part of that verse, *"But they said, We will not walk therein."*

We need to partake of the spirit of the past. Sometimes we hear people say, regarding what is called the Restoration Movement, the effort to restore New Testament Christianity in our time, that the older generation restored the form and doctrine, but now we must restore the spirit. It is true that many today do not have the right spirit. But the implication is that those of old did not have it either. I say to you that neither the form nor doctrine would have been restored except by the righteous spirit manifested over and over by those of the past. Nothing whatever of value could be restored by the flippant, arrogant, unstable, flighty, sophisticated, conceited, and intellectual disrespect so often seen today. Our "scholars" need a good dose of Proverbs 3:5, *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."*

We need the spirit of sacrifice seldom found today. We need the love and devotion to first things first, keeping a sensitivity toward worldliness, having respect for truth in manner of speech and daily dealings, a sense of honor, integrity, justice, and duty. We need the spirit of dignity for mankind and the willingness to obey. While we hear some saying, "We must think for ourselves," and nobody objects to that, we wonder how the church exists among us today except for those who thought for themselves rather than following the ways of denominations some would have us follow. Thinking for oneself does not necessarily mean coming up with different conclusions. Re-examine the evidence, yes. We want no borrowed faith. But when those before us believed and obeyed the truth, and when we believe and obey the truth, we shall be as they were. It is ridiculous to brand everything as human tradition just because somebody believed it before we came along.

The Glorious Gospel

If more people would think rather than just think they think, they would see the beauty, relevance, value, usefulness, and glory of the gospel message nearly two thousand years old. It is a message that must be upheld before a cynical and sinful world by God's noblemen who realize its worth and who are determined to keep it alive among men. People have sought to discount God, Christ, the Bible, the church, etc. The world changes, but not the

truth of God. There is no improvement men can make over prayer, worship, the Bible, Christian virtues, the doctrine of Christ on any point. We might at times improve some methods, but never the message.

Jude 3, " *Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints.*" Here is where we must set our hearts, minds and lives. The What Isaac did, digging again the old wells, resounds with a brilliance and wisdom that ought to motivate us to preserve the ancient truth of God for ourselves and for the generations yet to come. The preservation of ancient truth is a beautiful ministry that is open to every soul. It is necessary for true greatness in the sight of God.

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PART THREE: THE RESTORERS

Before the 1800's there arose people who realized the need of going back to the Bible, back past the days of the origin of denominations, before the dominance of Romanism, prior to the apostasy of which the Scriptures warned, all the way back to the revealed faith of Christ found in the New Testament. The movement is usually called the Restoration Movement, not to be confused with the earlier Reformation Movement led by Luther and others that produced Protestantism. This restorative effort was not intended to produce a new church, nor just another church among the existing churches of human origin. It was the effort to return to the old paths, to dig again the spiritual wells of true Christianity.

The idea behind restoration work is to put back in its original place. That which was to be put in its original place was the church of which Christ is founder, head, and Savior. Men with names like Stone, Smith, Campbell, Jones, Scott, and many others reminded the world that we should speak where the Scriptures speak and be silent where the Scriptures are silent. As Peter had written"*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). It was a call for the Biblical teaching that the

Bible is the sole authority in matters religious (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It was the determination to sow the seed of the kingdom in honest and good hearts and allow that seed to produce the kingdom, which is His church (Luke 8:11; Colossians 1:13). Contending that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), the gospel was preached, people became Christians, no more and no less, detached from the denominational world, but attached to Christ. The New Testament church flourished.

We will not review the history of this effort except to say that it has seen good times and difficult times. It has met problems and many have digressed into human legalism, while others have pursued liberalism. But the work stays alive, although the advance of liberalism among the advocates of restoring New Testament Christianity has stifled its growth and progress until now there are indications that there is less and less interest in the faith once delivered.

In Our Time

Our day covers a span of nearly four decades of preaching the gospel as of this writing. We have seen the church be a fast growing religious body with missionary zeal, benevolent spirit, and souls saved. We have also witnessed division due to human legalism. But presently we suffer liberalism. The church now faces some of its greatest dangers and threats, not because of the newness of its enemy or the attacks against it, but because there is such Biblical ignorance among us, such a desire to be big and accepted, such conformity to the sins of the world, and the intensity of those who are determined to once again turn the church into nothing but a digressive denomination among other denominations. Our biggest problem is the effort to liberalize and secularize the church. There is a clamor for change for the sake of change. A passionate desire to imitate the deeds and words of religions around us is strong. But let us turn our attention to the attitudes held toward those people of the past who worked to restore primitive Christianity. There are legitimate and proper ways of considering them as well as erroneous ways. Keep in mind that the burden of their work was to call people to stand in the old paths, even though they were not perfect, nor ever professed to be.

A Biblical Call

The call of the restorers, to seek the old paths, is firmly grounded in Scripture as we have already noted. Consider in this connection Galatians 1:6-9; Jude 3, Second Corinthians 11:1-4; Matthew 18:19ff; Second John 9-11. There is not the slightest hint of change or variance in the gospel that is to be preached (Second Timothy 3:16,17; First Peter 4:11; First Corinthians 2:13,14). While we live in a changing world, there are those things that do not change, and God's Word is one of them. It never needs updating or revising. Man is basically the same; as is sin, the avenues of temptation, God, the gospel way of salvation, and His church. Only departures of men from the truth make such things appear to have changed. In a changing world we must learn to distinguish between the changing and the unchangeable.

The preaching recorded in the New Testament was not, strictly speaking, an effort to restore. It was to originate the faith, putting things in place for the first time. To restore implies there has been a departure from the faith, as the inspired writers foretold. It is designed to put things back in proper order and place.

The Old Testament contains much preaching to restore. The preaching by Ezra, Nehemiah, and many prophets was to call people back to the way they had left. They made their appeal to the Word of the Lord as the authority to follow. There was no appeal to what some may have thought, wanted, or pleased men. Their entire thought was preaching what God told them to say without change.

The Only Standard

The call to those who preach today is to make the Word of God the basis for everything. Any preacher who does not make his appeal on *"thus saith the Lord"* has no business in the pulpits before people who say they love the Lord. There is no place for the folly of secular book reviews, pep rallies, preaching reform without regeneration, theologies learned in seminaries, or sounding forth messages designed simply to make people feel good about themselves. This was not characteristic of New Testament preachers, and ought not be once named among us. But, alas, many have opted for such nonsense.

A serious restudy of the restorers and their work can be of great benefit. There is historical value, and we can see how we are historically connected with honorable and noble efforts of the past to exalt Christ and His church. We can learn from their learning for they were true scholars of the Bible, believing the Bible to be God's Word, and did not seek to exhibit their "learning" by quoting from those who think they are somewhat, but who do not have respect for the inspiration of the Scriptures, and are ignorant of the plan of salvation.

Their Spirit

As much as anything else, we need to partake of their spirit of concern, love for souls and the truth that saves, their willingness to stand, their courage and stedfastness. We wonder how many critics living today, who pour from the factories of clergymen, have the fortitude and spiritual backbone to even hold a candle to those great people of yesteryear who fought the good fight! Have we seen the dedication and spirit of sacrifice among the self-professed experts of our time, the academic "scholars" who denounce their works that was once the norm among faithful brethren? While some contend those former restored the form of Christianity but not the spirit, we contend that the present spirit of compromise, disobedience, and cowardice can never restore anything except more digression. We should wield the sword of the Spirit against the weaponry of Satan and false doctrines as they did. They were successful in battle after battle. If one wants good study material, study their writings, debates, and sermons. There is more Bible in what they said and wrote than in all the denominational and theological foolishness that so often comes from pulpits among us, especially among the more numerous, financially secure, worldly and prominent congregations. Why do those who say they are preachers fill their libraries with the garbage of modernist writers and denominational clergymen than with works of those who have stood for truth and remained true to His cause? Is it not because they love the ways of men more than the way of God?

Attitude of Ridicule

There are basically three attitudes one can hold toward the early restorers in the Restoration Movement. Two are wrong and the third commendable.

Some delight in ridiculing those of the past. They make snide remarks about them to discredit them, labeling them old-fashioned, fogies, irrelevant to our "enlightened" age. It has amazed me how some contend people today are so "enlightened" and yet sin runs more rampant, Biblical ignorance is more prominent, and disrespect against God so intense that the world becomes more and more dangerous in which to live. Just what do these latter-day "wise men" call "enlightenment?" Are we "enlightened" the more we defy God?

Some of these who ridicule noblemen often speak of "love." They know nothing of love as the Bible teaches. They think love is compromise, emotionalism, sentimentality, permissiveness, a mushy tolerance of false doctrines and worldliness. That kind of "love" is their calling card. They are noted for it. Unable to take the Bible and sustain what they contend, they seek to convert, not man to God, but God to man as man thinks man ought to be allowed to be. Unable to defend their faith, they denounce those who defend **the** faith. Many have been, and more will likely be, deceived by such vicious servants of the devil who pose as ministers of light. Their major appeal is a self-determined, intellectual superiority, knowledge of human philosophies and theories, but with little regard for what the Bible does teach. Unable to take a stand and withstand, they smear and slash past and present who still stand on the Rock that cannot be moved.

It is certainly not a notable and honorable stance to attack the persons who can no longer defend themselves, using ridicule and slander, just because one cannot undo what they taught by Scripture. Yet, some of our people have stooped to such tactics and are not above being venomous and vile in their characterizations of the early workers of God who urged people to stand in the old paths. Shame!

Not Our Authority

A second faulty attitude is to consider the early restorers as authority. The charge is often heard, as if it was general among us, that we preach the doctrines of the restorers, not the Bible. It is one thing to make such a charge, but has proven to be quite another to cite precisely

what is meant. Let those who so charge be specific and show what is taught by the authority of any man, other than the inspired men of Scripture! To simply say we teach our own peculiar doctrines while "other denominations" teach their doctrines is a slanderous lie until those who so charge have the courage to prove what they charge.

Does one turn to Campbell to show the church is the kingdom? Does one turn to Stone to prove the necessity of baptism? Do we follow Scott in observing the Lord's Supper every first day of the week? These restorers taught these things, but for the same reason we do. They are taught in Scripture. Some outside the church, and others whose ministry is to attack the church, are going to give account for the lies being propagated about gospel preachers and faithful churches. While some misinformed and ignorant brethren may have cited those of the past as authority for what they believe, no faithful member of the Lord's church turns to anything other than *"thus saith the Lord"* for authority. No man nor group of men formulate the doctrine of Christ. If there is Biblical authority, it is true, Without it, it deserves no hearing. Some attack straw men.

There is the area of faith and the area of opinion. Matters of faith are where God has spoken. Matters of opinion are where human judgment must be exercised to expedite what God has spoken where details are not given. Nobody has any business contending his opinion must be followed as if it was God's law. Nobody has any business dismissing anything God has authorized, adding to what God has said, subtracting from His Word, or injecting false and human doctrines. But we see today so many who are saddling the church with much for which there is no authority, pushing their innovations and additions, burdening and dividing the church with trivia that comes not from God, but only appeals to the desires and ambitions of men, particularly the worldly and ambitious.

Some today, unable to cite Biblical authority for what they have decided to do, cite what they call "time honored positions" held by various leaders of the present and past. What difference does it make how "time honored" a position is if it is not Scripturally authorized? Such is designed to liberalize and secularize the church, taking the church into activities and areas never taught for the church in the Bible. This attitude toward what early restorers may have thought, using them as authority, is as wrong as holding them in contempt with ridicule.

The Correct Attitude

We show the proper attitude and respect for the early restorers and their labors when we display the same wisdom they displayed by going to the Bible, standing in the old paths, contending for the faith, defending it, promoting it before all, "*speaking the truth in love.*" We have the right attitude when we realize the Bible and only the Bible can be cited for authority, and that we must have authority for all we do (Colossians 3:17). The better we know **the book,** the less likely we are to be tossed to and fro (Ephesians 4:14), and be carried away into the certain digression the present trend is taking. We must insist the ancient landmarks be not removed, and stand with the early restorers in their respect to the inspired Word. God has drawn the line of truth. Shall we respect it or not?

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PART FOUR: WHERE TO STAND

Having established the need of standing in the old paths, and pointing out the proper attitude to hold regarding the early restorers and the Restoration Movement, and emphasizing that it is absolutely essential to use the Bible and only the Bible as authority for what we say, do and believe, we now turn our attention to just a few of the basic and fundamental matters as to what it means to stand in the old paths.

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). This Word must be preached (Mark 16:15). Standing in the old paths begins with the content of the message, **the faith once delivered** (Jude 3).

Although at times it can be very unpopular to simply stand, there is nothing else to do if we please God. We may not convince everyone around us of the truth, and we must not be knocked off track by their rejection of it. We must learn to endure whatever be the consequences of standing in the old paths regardless of others. Many early Christians were martyred rather than surrender or deny **the faith.** They knew, however, the need of standing firm.

Much that this final lesson includes will be familiar to the faithful students of the Word. It is the old,

old story of Jesus and His love. But we shall discuss certain matters where the "old Jerusalem ring" seems to be confused in many places with a "new" heretical noise. There are matters where sound words and sound doctrine have been set aside for other messages. The topics under consideration have become the front line in the battle between truth and error, faithfulness and apostasy.

The Authority

Christians must always show they care about people, truth, the present, and eternity. It is a worthy thought that suggests, "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." We learn to care because of what Scripture teaches. It is not unfair nor unreasonable to think that many are ignorant of the truth because they do not care what they do, believe, how they consider others, or the things that really matter. They are not convinced of the inspiration of the Bible (Second Timothy 3:16,17; First Corinthians 2:12,13; Second Peter 1:20,21, and others). Unless we know the place for Scripture, its origin, and how God has brought it to us, we are not likely to consider it as authority. The denominational world has compromised, negotiated, dialogued, humanized, protested, mythologized, merged, ridiculed, tolerated false doctrines, and summarized the Scriptures until they have no authority, nor give the Bible the respect it demands and deserves. Christ is authority (Matthew 28:18), and we shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48). Once you abandon the inspired, all-sufficient, infallible, inerrant, authoritative Word, you have no guide. The Bible is the only source available to know the Lord. Once this fact is firmly established you have that upon which you can build, something to learn, a reliable guide and standard by which to measure.

We are in a virtual life and death struggle to sustain in the hearts and minds of people the reality of the integrity and validity of the Bible. Without this conviction there are no paths we can travel with any assurance or certainty.

Deity of Jesus Christ

The Scriptures teach the Deity of Jesus Christ. No person who has ever walked this earth has been maligned,

attacked, and castigated like our Lord. Modernism and liberalism has made intense attempts to discredit His identity as the Son of God. They would teach that Jesus of Nazareth lived (although some even deny this), that He was a masterful teacher, even a good man, but not Deity in the flesh as the Bible teaches. Is it not strange that anyone could consider Him a good man while He lied regarding His identity as God's Son? What blatant inconsistency!

The overwhelming Biblical evidence is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. There is no doubt what the Bible teaches on this point (John 1:1,14; Matthew 1:20,23; 16:16; Acts 2:36; John 3:16). Passages affirming His dual nature are plentiful. One may not believe it, but there is no doubt that it teaches His Deity. From the evidence we must make known to the world who He is. Anything whatever that detracts from this fundamental truth must be resisted with diligence. The validity of the Christian faith rests on the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God.

Plan of Salvation

We must return to the old paths regarding God's role in saving man, as well as man's part in God's plan. God saves us by His grace, love, mercy, and blood of Christ. Without this there would be no salvation. Man alienates himself from God by sin (Isaiah 59:1,2), and we are all guilty of sin because we personally partake of it (Romans 3:23; 5:12). We cannot save ourselves by ourselves, but must rely on that which God has provided (Ephesians 1:7; 2:8,9; Titus 3:3-5; John 3:16).

Man must do his part in God's plan (Hebrews 5:9). Even as man obeys he is not earning nor meriting salvation. Salvation, however, is conditional. If we do not obey we shall not be saved. Nothing is more urgent than for sinful man to learn that he must believe in Christ (John 8:240, repent of his sins (Luke 13:3), confess his faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38).

While I was preaching in a gospel meeting a denominational person remarked to me after my sermon on the plan of salvation, "You people are still saying the same old thing you said fifty years ago." She meant it as a criticism, but such was a compliment. When one preaches

the truth he will preach the "same old thing" that has been preached since Pentecost.

We need to present the plan of salvation regularly. I do it every service. This "come forward if you feel you have a need" stuff is no invitation which one can accept with knowledge and conviction. Who does not have a need or want to do better? The question is, "Who wants to obey the gospel of Christ and be saved from sins by His blood?" We must preach the old paths of entering Christ. Some ridicule this by calling us "five-steppers," (hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized). What of that? It is the truth, and the truth must be preached.

The Holy Spirit

We must teach the role of the Holy Spirit in converting, leading, and guiding mankind. Christ promised the Holy Spirit to His apostles (John 14,15,16),. a promise fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit's work was to reprove (convict) the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment by the preaching of the Word given the apostles.

Scripture does not teach the Holy Spirit operates directly upon the heart of man separate and apart from the Word. There is no special guidance, mysterious voice, feelings or emotional reactions that should be thought as the work of the Holy Spirit. Some mistakenly assign the Holy Spirit as the source of their experiences, especially if there is something about the experience that they do not understand. But we do not find Biblical basis for the literal, actual, personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which we are led, guided, and instructed. It is unfortunate that some are malcontent with the all-sufficient Word and seek something extra and special beyond what God offers. For God to choose to do special favors of this nature for some and not for all contradicts the teaching that He is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35). The Spirit dwells in us as we abide in the Word of God. He influences, leads, directs man by the Word. When people understand this they will respect the Word and obey it rather than be looking for that "something special" to overcome them.

The Church

The old paths include showing the place of the church in God's plan of salvation for man. This doctrine of "preaching Christ, but not the church" is heresy of the devil. One cannot possibly do it. Denominationalists have falsely contended one church is as good as another, and that it makes no difference to which church you belong so long as you are honest and sincere, but not the gospel.

The church is composed of people, but a different and peculiar people. It is composed of saved people, those who have obeyed the gospel, being redeemed by the blood of Christ. While one denomination is as good as the next, the Lord's church is not a denomination. Christ is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23). The church is the saved (Acts 2:47). Even some among us have decided the ways of denominational error suit them better than the old paths of truth. Just how one expects to be saved outside the church, His body, is yet a mystery. Can the body be separate from the head and survive?

Certain and Sound Speech

The language of Ashdod is often heard. Some contend the church is an organism, not an organization. The church is a living body, an organism, the body of Christ. But it is also a kingdom, an organization, with Christ as its King. There is a governmental system that Scripture reveals for operating the church. Why would one make it either/or, when it is both? Faithful brethren must once again teach the hearts of baptized believers the sanctity of the governmental structure of the Lord's church.

Doctrines held where one eldership oversees several congregations is foreign to truth, must be repudiated and branded as digressive. The tampering with the government of the church was historically one of the major departures from truth that produced the Catholic Church. Shall we go that way of heresy again?

Worship

The battle continues over the worship under Christ. The early church worshipped through prayer, singing, study of His Word, giving, and the Lord's Supper. Through the years men have sought to add and change the avenues of worship to make them "more meaningful," introducing their own ways, doctrines, rituals, and innovations. The

church today still must contend for singing without mechanical instruments of music. The only reason we need to refuse them is to know that their use is without authority. There are numerous other reasons, but this one is sufficient. My father used to say that there were three reasons he did not do certain things; First, he did not have the money, and the other two did not make any difference. That settled that. The same is true regarding instruments. There is no Biblical authority for them and that ends it.

Faithful brethren must contend for the observance of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. Uncertain and false sounds are heard now and then from denominational imitators that it does not matter when or how often the Supper is eaten. The Bible teaches when, and that settles that for the faithful.

The Work of the Church

As much as any other area we must stand in the old paths regarding the work of the church. While some recognize the error of perverting the worship, they run headlong into perverting the work of the church, involving the church in such unauthorized activities as recreation, entertainment, secular education, and social reform without regeneration of the soul. We recently heard of one church having a car wash just to do good things for the neighbors. Do you really think this is the reason our Lord shed His blood and purchased the church, so we could wash cars for our neighbors? The church is the *"pillar and ground of the truth"* (First Timothy 3:15), not just a service club. It has the duty to *"preach the word"* to the lost and saved. When do we return to the task assigned us and leave these trivia that enamors so many? When one thinks of the funds spent to build gymnasiums, jogging tracks, weight rooms, tennis courts, fellowship halls, family life centers, contributions for teaching biology, chemistry, mathematics, and supporting ball teams, etc., one wonder just when and where such brethren ever acquainted themselves with the Word of God?

The benevolent work of the church usually suffers for lack of funds, yet many think there are sufficient funds for their "fun and games, friendship evangelism." While the church starves and withers because of lack of spiritual nourishment from the Word, some brethren are rampant on being accepted by the community, doing those

worldly things that denominations have found to produce numbers. The work of the church is to save the lost, sustain the saved, help the needy. This is what characterizes the old paths. When we set our hearts and minds on doing the will of God, the church will not be burdened and troubled by the social, recreational, and economic pursuits that some wish to unload on the church. "Go with the gospel" is the message of truth. Too many have allow the gospel to go.

Christlike Lives

The old paths will insist on the imitation of Christ in daily living. How can we know what Christ would have us do when we are not built up in the most holy faith with the knowledge of His Word? Purity of life, **abstinence** from sin, such as drinking alcoholic beverages, modern dancing, smoking, taking drugs to "get high," cursing, adultery, lying, stealing, cheating, will become our watchword when we live by the old paths of righteousness. Does not the church suffer today because of the imitation of the world rather than the practice of the Word?

As Christians we are to put off the old man and put on the new. Love and friendship of the world is not compatible with faithfulness. While we live in the world, we are not to be of the world.

More we could add, including the theme of genuine love as taught by the Lord, lessons on the origin, purpose, and destiny of mankind, the cross, the resurrection, the coming judgment, the absolute necessity of obeying the Lord. If only we would search the Scriptures and see what is so. This is what standing in the old paths demands.

We would have thought it nigh impossible, certainly unlikely that a struggle would be occurring in the Lord's church over the role of women in the church seeing how explicit are the teachings of the Word of God on this subject. Some love the ways of the times more than the old paths of God. Again, we prefer the old paths of truth.

Closing Words of Wisdom

F. G. Allen once wrote, (Search for the Ancient Order, Vol. II, page 463), "While we remain true to the principles on which we started out, there is no earthly power that can impede our progress. But the day we leave these walls and go out to take counsel with the world, will

mark the day of our decline. We have nothing to fear from without. Our only danger lies in the direction of indifference and compromise. While we are true to God in the maintenance of these principles, the divine blessings will be upon our work. But should they ever be surrendered, ruin will as certainly follow as that the Bible is true."

"What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). *"Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9). *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18). *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that you labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (First Corinthians 15:58). Some of old said they would **not** walk in the old paths. Let us resolve there will be no other paths in which we shall even think of walking.

* * * * *

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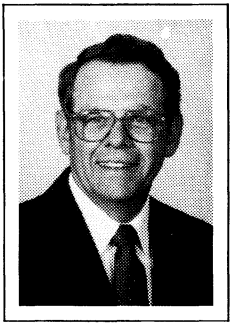
Attitudes Have Changed Regarding the Old Paths



JAMES W. BOYD

Some who wage war against the old paths would have us think they have not changed doctrine, but only bad attitudes that they once held toward those in error. **This is not so.** If they had bad attitudes toward those they considered wrong, they sure continue sinister attitudes toward the church now with their ridicule, sarcasm, and air of superiority.

The attitude they have changed is toward the Bible as authority. They no longer accept it. With the position of the "new" hermeneutics, and denial that the Bible is our pattern, there is nothing anybody can do that cannot be considered acceptable, except to consider the Bible as the final authority. **That they cannot tolerate.**

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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Andrew

John 1:35-42, "*Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.*"

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ. He came preaching, "*Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*" (Mark 1:3). He preached, "*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" (Matthew 3:2). Mark 1:4 also records, "*John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*" John 3:28-30, "*Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice; this my joy is therefore fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

Who Was Andrew?

Among those who heard John identify Jesus as the "*Lamb of God*" was a man named Andrew. Over half of the time when Andrew is identified it is in reference to his more famous brother, Simon Peter. Andrew became one of the

twelve apostles, but not one of the 'inner circle" with Peter, James, and John. He was a fisherman by occupation, not a noted man as the world regards men. Nor was he as conspicuous for his work in the New Testament record as some others. Relatively little is said of him when compared to Peter, James, John, Paul, Barnabas, and others. He wrote no record of the life of Christ as did Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He was not known to be eloquent like Apollos, or a son of exhortation like Barnabas. He was not the great soul-winner like Paul. Even yet, he is not as recognized as Timothy and Titus.

Sometimes people think if they cannot be among the "greats" that they will do nothing and be nothing. What a terrible mistake! But Andrew was not of that perverted disposition. Jesus once said, *"And to every man his work."* (Mark 13:34). Paul wrote, *"Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor."*(First Corinthians 3:8).

Soul Winner

Andrew went about his work in such fashion that he stands as an example for soul winning. He seems to have been quiet, persistent, and faithful in his task. He is noted for introducing people to Christ, a real missionary in what we sometimes call personal work.

Believed

What qualified Andrew to be a soul winner? First, he was convinced of the truth regarding Jesus. To Peter he said, *"We have found the Messias."* This was not a guess with him. He did not say that Jesus could possibly be the Messias, or that He was someone they needed, or even one who offered something pretty good. But there was complete assurance and confidence. He was positive without doubt. "We have found the Messias. The Christ is come. We know Him." This was his attitude. Unless one is convinced of that truth himself, how can he expect to convince others?

The faith of Andrew was in the person, Jesus Christ. "We have found HIM." He had not just found someone, or some organization, a code of doctrine and ethics, because

Andrew accepted **HIM.** Without the acceptance of the person there can be no real acceptance of His teaching. When one rejects the teaching it is evident he rejects the person. But Andrew's confidence was in Jesus. So must it be with everyone who is convinced concerning Christ, and who would lead others to Christ.

We want to repeat for emphasis' sake, and to make the clear the truth, that our faith is in Christ, the person. But how can there be a separation between the Person and the Person's doctrine, church, identity, etc.?

He Sought Others

Andrew was qualified to be a soul winner because he sought others to come to Christ. He made a deliberate, intentional effort in that direction. Would you want to let others know if you had come to a knowledge of the cure for cancer? Could you keep it within yourself and refuse to let others be aware of it? Certainly not! The child of God in Christ has more to offer than the cure for cancer. He has the message of salvation from sin. Cancer is hideous and dreadful, but is confined to this world. Sin, hideous and dreadful, contaminates this life and brings ruin eternally to those who are not saved from its bondage. Is there not something essentially selfish and wrong in a professed Christian who has been forgiven to not tell others of the forgiving Christ?

The first one Andrew sought was Peter, his fleshly brother. Like Cornelius, he "*called his kinsmen and his friends.*" (Acts 10:24). When Peter eventually did so much for the cause of Christ, do not you think Andrew rejoiced that he had sought him? Surely, he knew that the day he brought Peter to Christ was a good day's accomplishment.

What did Andrew tell Peter? He simply told him of his faith and the reason for it. He had evidence from John and the prophets. He himself had been with Jesus. Who cannot do as much as Andrew did? He knew the blessings of being with Christ, and wanted Peter to know the same joy. Andrew realized that phrase that someone has coined, "We are saved to save." "*Restore unto me the joy of salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach*

transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee." (Psalm 51:12,13).

Another instance when Andrew introduced others to Jesus is recorded in John 6:5-9. "*When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?"*

The matter of feeding this multitude was such that Philip concluded it could not be done. Neither did Andrew have any real solution to offer. But he obviously brought the lad with his "lunch" to Jesus, and Jesus took what the lad possessed, and with it blessed the multitude , and provided for them all. This was one of the miracles performed by Jesus during His personal ministry.

Glad Andrew Acted

There are several heroes in this event, and surely Andrew is one of them. What if Andrew had done nothing? Sometimes those of us who preach and teach, as well as parents, feel we are accomplishing so little regarding those with whom we work. It may be that we are too inclined to overlook what seems insignificant, but in reality, is important. From Andrew, who brought the lad with his small amount of food, we should learn not to consider anything or anybody without significance. Nobody is too <u>small</u> to be brought to Christ. There is no such thing as an unimportant person because we each have a spirit that shall survive this earthly life. As one commented, "You can count the seeds in an apple, but you cannot count the number of apples that may come from a seed." So we should learn to be an Andrew and consider everything and everybody to be of potential. We should not despise the day of small things, (Zechariah 4:10), and think only what is <u>big</u> is good.

Again, John 12:20-22, "*And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: the same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.*"

These people wanted to see Jesus and know more about Him. While they may have been Gentiles, or proselytes, the natural hesitation of association between them and Jews was not considered important. They may have been Jews from Grecian areas. But when Philip was approached by them, he did not seem to know exactly what to do, and he took them to talk with Andrew, who "majored" in introducing people to Christ. He knew what to do, and with Philip, took them to Christ. This was characteristic of Andrew.

As we stated, these people might have been Gentiles. Andrew may well have remembered the teaching from Jesus such as is recorded in John 10:16, "*Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*"

Need for "Andrews"

The Lord's church needs "Andrews" today who have an interest in saving the lost. The early church had this concern. Even under persecution, when the church was scattered abroad, the Scripture says, they "*went every where preaching the word.*" (Acts 8:4). They had the Andrew attitude.

Notice the chain of growth. Jesus found Philip, and Philip found Nathanael. John the Baptist found Andrew, and Andrew found Peter, and look at the host Peter found, such as those on Pentecost, Cornelius, and countless others. What a tragedy if Andrew had not been a sturdy link in that chain. How many would never have known salvation except for the work done by this good man!

"One man tells another," is in essence what Paul says to Timothy Second Timothy 2:2, "*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*"

Someone taught me, and someone taught you. Probably you are the result of the combined efforts of many people having taught you. But do we not have the obligation to teach another so that they can know the joy and hope of salvation in Christ as we have come to know it? This is a part of that great commission, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" (Mark 16:15). It is not sufficient that we depend upon a few preachers to do this task. Each one, to the extent of his ability and opportunity, should become an "Andrew." Otherwise, souls that could be in heaven in eternity will never be saved.

"If you cannot sing like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell of the love of Jesus,
You can say he died for all.

If you cannot cross the ocean,
And the heathen land explore,
You can find a soul much closer,
You can find one just next door."

* * * * *

Christian Recreation

First Corinthians 10:31-33, "*Whether therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*"

Paul states a fundamental rule regarding conduct as a Christian that is applicable to every realm of life. All we do should aim at the glory of God, giving no offence to others that would hinder them from being saved. Especially does Paul teach we must consider the welfare of the church in all our activities. We wish to apply this principle in the realm of recreation that is suitable for the Christian.

What It Is

First, recreation is simply recreating, refreshing, restoring, renewing of the mental, physical, and emotional strength. Our Lord, being human as well as Deity, after a busy day in His labor, rested. Mark 6:31, *"And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while; for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."* He needed to get away from the multitudes, visiting friends, teaching, and all His work, and be refreshed with rest and recreation. Our subject, properly understood, is something needful to the body and mind, and we ought have periods of time for it.

To Each His Own

Second, what may be recreational for one may not be for another. A truck driver does not usually like to take a long drive. A brick layer may not want to play baseball. A teacher or student may not relax with a good book. A mail man who walks his route does not choose a stroll. There is too often the tendency in some to condemn a form of recreation that simply does not appeal to them, but it does appeal and is helpful to others.

Third, we ought not approach the subject of recreation for the Christian with an entirely negative approach. There are those things that are not acceptable and we need to be aware of them. But we also must determine what is acceptable and available to us that can be used within Christian principles. First Thessalonians 5:21,22, *"Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil."*

Let us make eight scriptural tests of recreation. All human activity can be categorized into three classifications: (1)That which is always right; (2) That which is always wrong; (3) That which may at times be right in itself, but sinful because of other circumstances and factors. It is this third area where we have the most difficulty in choosing. Some things may appear quite innocent, but under certain circumstances can be very harmful. This is not the same as situational ethics that contends everything is relative,

no right or wrong at anytime, but only what you think at the time. We reject that philosophy as anti-Christian.

Conscience

Test One: Will this activity hurt my conscience? Romans 14:23, *"For whatsoever is not of faith is sin."* Faith in this passage refers to one's personal conviction. It is wrong to violate what you think is right. Your convictions may be in error, and this does not teach if you think something is good that it is, or if you think something is bad is must be bad. It teaches that doing what you believe to be wrong is wrong whether the action is wrong in itself or not. We cannot be honest if we do what we think we ought not. Our consciences must be trained according to God's Word so they will be offended when we violate His will, and be at peace when we are in harmony with His will. If we are not conscientiously comfortable in what we are doing, we ought leave it off. When in doubt, don't.

Body

Test Two: Will this activity be harmful to my body or mind? There are activities that can harm rather than help. Some even dissipate rather than recreate. Our bodies belong to the Lord (First Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20). If a Christian does that which abuses the body, he errs. Recreation is designed to take care of the body and help it grow, develop, be revitalized and made stronger. If some things are overdone, they can injure the body and ought be left alone.

Pure

Test Three: Does it appeal to the indecent and lustful in mankind? Paul told Timothy, *"Flee youthful lusts."* (Second Timothy 2:22). Is the activity done within New Testament standards of modesty? No form of pleasure or recreation ought to be done where there are strong pressures that arouse unholy thoughts, and appeal to the lust of the flesh or eye. This is one of several reasons why swimming in mixed company of male and female is off limits to the faithful child of God. The attire is immodest.

There are activities where anger is often provoked, and unruly conduct is the norm. Unless one can control his temper in these things, he should seek something else.

Our world and society is suffering from an intoxication of appeals to the flesh. We as Christians must stay away from such things. Even though some cry, "You cannot be extreme," we must remember that we must be a Christian, even if some may think it is extreme. The Christian is going to bend toward right without the tint of wrong lest he become a hindrance to himself and others near him.

Influence

Test Four: Will this action harm other people? Romans 14:7, "*None of us liveth to himself...*" We all influence others. The manner of life of a Christian can and does have an impact on other people. We cannot have the attitude that what we do is nobody's business but our own. We must ask, "What will people think of me as a Christian in this activity? What will other Christians think? What effect will it have on my role or representing Christ in this world? How does it affect the church, its reputation and influence?" Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" We have to consider this in choosing our recreational activities.

Christians are taught to refrain from that which causes another to stumble (Romans 14; First Corinthians 8,9,10). People have been heard to say, "But this does not hurt me." While that may be true, what of others? You could be the cause of leading others to lower or relax safeguards which they need to stay faithful before God. Even if we are strong, and not easily tempted or swayed, someone else may not be so strong, and we can "*sin against the brethren,*" (First Corinthians 8:12), by ignoring them and what they think. We become a tool for Satan rather than for God. Many Christians have destroyed their good influence because they have persisted in various forms of recreation that causes others to sin. It is not too much to expect a Christian to put the salvation of souls, and the glory of God, before his own recreation. Already we can see how careful we must be to choose wisely and with a mind toward purity in selecting how we enjoy recreational activities.

Associates

Test Five: Will this action take me among evil companions? First Corinthians 15:33 warns against that sort of thing. We influence others, but others also influence us. As one has said, "You cannot play in the mud and not get dirty." Psalm 1:1, *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."*

We have to be concerned what kind of people generally are involved in this activity. There are places a Christian cannot go and associates with whom he cannot be too friendly, lest temptation to leave the good for the bad be too strong. James wrote, *"Friendship with the world is enmity with God."* (James 4:4). Christians need to be careful about doing acceptable things, but also to do them with people and in places where the devil cannot slyly entice them.

What Would He Do?

Test Six: In a measure, this may be the "acid" test. Would Jesus do this? When you know a person well enough, you can be rather certain what he would do and think about a matter. The better we know the Christ, the easier it is for us to decide what we ought and ought not do. Christians are to follow His steps (First Peter 2:21).

Many problems of recreation that temporarily confuse us would be answered if we would try to picture Jesus in that activity. Would it be like Christ to be doing it, or approve of it for others? Do you think He would be glad to join you in it, or rebuke you for it? Would He dress as you have and act as you do? Surely, there are those popular activities that we might want to do, but when we test it by asking, "Would Jesus be with me and approve?" we can see we ought abandon some things and stay near the way of Christ.

After Prayer

Test Seven: How does this action of recreation seem after we have prayed about it? You might think it strange to pray about recreation. But the Christian ought pray about his activities. A good rule is, "If you cannot pray over it, don't do it."

Prayer is strengthening and sobering. It helps bring realities into sharper focus. Some things seem innocent enough until exposed to the light of prayer. Can we ask God to bless us in what we do? Or are we just a little ashamed to talk with God about it at all?

Consistent

Test Eight: Does it conflict with my duty to worship? Does it lessen my interest in worship and Bible study? Does it deprive me of faithfully partaking of the Lord's Supper, giving as I should, etc." We have no vacation from worship. Our duty to God always must be first before anything else. Too often, fun and games have displaced God. Such activities as that should be omitted in life.

We conclude that, while it is not always easy to determine just which recreation is proper, we are better able to decide by asking and honestly answering these questions. We probably do not accomplish too much to go through a catalog of activities and stamp them, "Yes," or "No." But we need to apply principles to each proposed activity of recreation. We need to think about these things in choosing our vacations. After all, did not we promise God we would be faithful to Him above all else? If we cannot keep our word regarding recreation, something is lacking.

* * * * *

While He Lingered

Genesis 19:15,16, "*And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.*"

Chapter eighteen tells how God had told Abraham He would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because, "*their sin is very grievous.*" (Genesis 18:20). Abraham asked, "*Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?*" (Genesis 18:23). God said He would spare the cities if ten righteous men could be found in them. Evidently there were not ten there, and the cities were destroyed.

While Lot was living in Sodom he was visited by two angels from God who warned Lot of the coming destruction (Genesis 19:12,13). Lot in turn warned his married daughters, but his sons-in-law mocked him (Genesis 19:14). Then a strange thing is said of Lot in our text.

The angels had to hasten him to leave the city. He lingered to the point that they had to take him by the hand and bring him out. We are made to wonder why Lot hesitated to leave, knowing as he did what was coming. Why did he not demonstrate a greater faith in God and His Word? He certainly believed in God. He was a righteous man, and Abraham had him in mind when he sought the preservation of the cities. Second Peter 2:8 describes Lot as a just and righteous man who knew the city was wicked and that it deserved the destruction that was coming. His soul was vexed by the unlawful and immoral deeds of the inhabitants. He had every reason to get out as fast as he could leave. But He did not.

He did not deny the truthfulness of the warning. He also knew the way of escape. The angels were pleading with him, yet, he lingered. Why would be do that?

Why Linger?

The Bible does not give us a specific answer to our question as puzzling as Lot's behavior may seem to us. But there are a number of plausible explanations that can be suggested. Maybe he hated to leave some of his family behind. He might have thought of considerable monetary investments he would lose. After all, he had pitched his tent toward the plains for material gain. Could it be he misunderstood the nature of God, thinking God would never do such a thing to anybody regardless of how wicked they were? Some forget that the merciful and gracious God of love is also just, and an avenger against those that do

evil. What kind of God would God be if He treated goodness and evil just alike? There are other explanations possibly for his hesitation. But none justified his stall.

His Folly

Whatever might have been his reasons, we cannot fail to see the folly of his delay. There was nothing to gain and everything, including his life, to lose. Time was precious and the situation was an emergency. Judgment on Sodom was sure and there was no escape from it. Everything was crying to him, "***GO!***" It did not make any sense whatever for him to linger. How foolish we can see Lot was under those conditions!

But have we not seen many others acting just as foolishly today? Both the young and old, men and women, boys and girls, hesitate in doing as they ought in obeying the gospel, and it makes no more sense than it did for Lot. In fact, the consequences of lingering are worse.

Life is brief on this earth at the longest. James 4:13,14, "*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*" Thousands pass into eternity every day.

Judgment

To be sure, all that die shall be raised (John 5:28,29). But the day of judgment is coming (Hebrews 9:27; Second Peter 3:10). This world shall not stand, but shall cease to be when the Lord returns. The destiny of each one will either be heaven or hell (Matthew 25:46). Have we not been sufficiently warned, (Acts 20:31), and that these things are inevitable, (Revelation 20:12,13)? Meanwhile, the way of salvation is open to us, (John 14:6), even as it was before Lot. There is only one way (Acts 4:12). Why does anybody hesitate to do what the Lord has commanded man to do in order to be prepared for that day and hour? Why does anybody see fit to linger unprepared? Why do you wait, dear brother?

One thing we know. While God is merciful and his angels or messengers are appealing to mankind now to get right with God, God will not send someone to lay hands on us and force us out of bondage of sin into the security of deliverance. If one is delivered, he must go on his own decision, voluntarily, willingly, submissively, obediently, or he will surely perish. It will be far worse than the physical destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Excuses

But people make many excuses for not coming to Christ. Some say they are good enough already, while others say they are not good enough to come. Some cry they are too young, while others say they are too old and waited too long. Still others say they could not hold out faithful. Often we hear people complaining of hypocrites in the church, yet, they are refusing to obey God because of hypocrites, not realizing that they that never come to Christ and the hypocrites shall both be lost in hell.

It is sad that many are misled to believe they are secure when actually they have not yet obeyed God. They have been taught false doctrines of men, and they "feel" everything is well, but they are still lost. They have been told they must wait until God calls them in some special way, by some emotional experience, not realizing that God is already calling them through the gospel, (Second Thessalonians 2:14), but they are not responding.

But after all is said and done, no matter what may be the excuse one offers for hesitating, there not only is an answer to offset the excuse, but so long as they continue to obey the Lord they cannot be saved. To doubt this is to doubt the warning God has already given us repeatedly. How do you expect God to be pleased with you if you persist in turning away from His commands?

The only reason a person ought not be a Christian is because he has not yet heard and obeyed the gospel. He has not yet learned what he must do to be saved. Once he knows, there is no excuse for hesitation. What one must do to be saved can be related in a few lines.

Doing

First, be assured there is something you must do (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:9; Acts 2:40). Nobody can read these inspired words and doubt that a man plays a part in God's plan for saving man. People who heard the gospel in New Testament times were not Christians just because they heard the gospel. They asked what they must do (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 16:30). Once they were told, they acted in obedience.

You must believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (John 3:16; 8:24; Acts 16:31; Hebrews 11:6; Acts 18:8). Even though some teach that salvation is by faith alone, that is a false doctrine and never found in Scripture. But make no mistake, one must believe in Christ. It is in Christ where we must place our faith, trust, and confidence. There can be no salvation without the right kind of faith.

You must repent of your sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 17:30; Second Peter 3:9). The message of repentance, the change of mind, is one of the essential steps in coming to God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

You must confess faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10; Acts 8:37). We are not told to confess our sins, or that we believe God has saved us. It is implied that we admit our sins by coming to Christ. We are told to confess Christ.

You must be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Baptism is a divine command for salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16; First Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). How much more Biblical evidence and revelation does anybody need to be assured of these things? How could God have expressed the matter any clearer?

In the New Testament, when people were so informed, they acted, and did so without hesitation. Saul was told not to tarry (Acts 22:16). Those on Pentecost were obedient that day (Acts 2:41). The Ethiopian stopped his chariot and obeyed (Acts 8:36-38). The jailer was baptized straitway (Acts 16:33), the same hour of the night. Lydia obeyed there by the river (Acts 17:14,15). You do not see them waiting, hesitating, postponing, refusing for some reason because they did not wish to deny themselves salvation God offered them. Nor did they wait until what so have called "Baptism

Sunday." Such as that reflects a lack of understanding of the urgency in obeying the gospel.

Why Wait?

Once our time of opportunity is passed, which is confined to this life, and while we have presence of mind to respond from the heart (Romans 6:16-18), we shall have no other opportunity. It is not difficult for any honest person to see the folly of lingering in the state they are, outside of Christ, lost, and without hope.

Do you wonder why God spared Lot? Whatever may be the reason, the record of Lot's deliverance from Sodom ought serve as a reminder to us that hesitation and delay is to play into the hands of the devil and surrender the call of God to the desires of Satan. As the song echoes, "There is danger and death in delay." We see that in Lot. Wonder why some cannot see it in themselves?

* * * * *

What Makes Jesus Different?

People have different attitudes toward Jesus. Some consider Him as just another man, although exceptional. They look at Him as a great teacher, influential, but radical. But they would disrobe Him of His Deity, deny that He is the Son of God, and reduce Him to the same level of all other descendants of Adam. Some even deny that He was a real person, although these are few in number because the abundant historical evidence is too overwhelming for this to be seriously considered. But they think He is a myth, and a product of imagination.

Jesus is thought by some to have been a schemer with noble motives who tried to pull off the greatest hoax in history by making people think He arose from the dead. There is a

book entitled The Passover Plot that was on the best seller list for some years that makes the contention that Jesus deceived people into thinking He was God's Son, and devised a plan to appear to come from the dead, but a plan that backfired and He got Himself killed.

Of course, the only reliable source of information we have concerning Jesus is the inspired Word. The truth about Jesus is either there or it is not to be found. His life was noticeably void of characteristics that usually distinguish one person from another. Hebrews 2:14-18, *"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted."*

This passage presents the very heart and core of Christianity. Jesus took on the nature of humanity to make peace between God and man. Was Jesus a man? Galatians 4:4, *"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law."* Yes, Jesus was a human being. Philippians 2:7,8 and Romans 8:3 teaches this truth as well. He had similar physical qualities, subject to hunger, weariness, pain, sadness, being tempted as all other humans are. We find Him eating, weeping, sleeping. How then was He different?

Not Different Because...

He was not different because of where He was born. Bethlehem was an insignificant village near Jerusalem, an unlikely place for God's Son to come into the world. It was not as if He was born in a palace, even the capital city, or some place of prominence.

He was not different because He was of prominent parentage of the earth. Mary, his mother, and Joseph, her husband, had no place of distinction among men. Joseph

was a humble carpenter, a respectable trade, but not one of public glamor. They had no social standing of importance. They were of modest means as is seen in the sacrifice offered at the birth of Jesus of two turtledoves, the sacrifice of the poor. They lived in the despised city of Nazareth. Jesus never became socially outstanding even though He had friends, attending social events, and performed His first miracle at a wedding. But they were not the kind of family that attracted attention. We have to look elsewhere for His distinction.

His childhood did not set Him apart except for the event recorded in Luke and His visit to the temple. He grew as other Jewish boys, "*in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.*" (Luke 2:52). He was obedient to Mary and Joseph (verse 51). He did have exceptional knowledge of the Law, but we read little of anything else about His younger years.

His distinction is not in the length of His life. It was rather short, being only thirty-three or thirty-four years. Of the nearly thirteen thousand days He lived, we read of only approximately fifty of them. John does says, John 21:25, "*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.*" He was on the public scene only three and one-half years. One has said that Methuselah added years to his life, but Jesus added life to his years.

The personal appearance of Jesus was not His drawing appeal. We know nothing of His appearance except for Isaiah's prophetic comment, "*...he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.*" (Isaiah 53:2). He did not dress in the latest styles, nor attract attention that would cause Him to appear different. His enemies had to secure the services of Judas to point Him out when they went to seize Him. He was not unlike many other men in this regard.

Jesus was not a political figure, a great athlete, a conquering general, a war hero, inventor, author, or builder of earthly empires. Such things do not set Him apart from the rest. He is different in spite of the lack of such things that usually differentiate people. It seems as if

God intended to take away such things from Him so that His real appeal would not be confused with these paltry and trivial matters.

He Was Different Because...

Scripture shows us why Jesus is different. He is the Son of God. "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (Matthew 16:16). This is what puts Jesus in a class by Himself. He was Deity in the flesh, divine and human at the same time. No one before or since Jesus was in this category. Nor shall any ever be.

We have noted His humanity. What says the Scripture of His Deity? He was born of a virgin in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-20, 25; Luke 1:26-35). He had an earthly mother, but His Father is God. Let us insert here that the irreverent manner that many modern so-called versions of Scripture rewrite passages that assert this truth regarding Jesus is one of the reasons we abhor these "perversions." They are influenced by modernist and infidel thought and remove many God-given evidences of His Deity. Why anyone who claims to be a Christian would endorse such perversions of God's Word is beyond good sense.

Some contend that Joseph was Jesus' father. But if that were true, how do you explain Joseph being willing to take her for his wife when he knew he could not be the father of the child? How do you explain him being comforted when the angel told him this was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy? How could Mary be with child and yet without knowing a man?" How do you explain Genesis 3:15 where God said the seed of woman would bruise the head of Satan, and Satan would bruise His heel? Jesus was not the seed of man and woman, but woman.

Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit, the "*only begotten Son of God,*" a phrase some would-be "scholars" among us deny is even in the Bible. His very name is "*Emmanuel,*" which means "*God with us.*" (Matthew 1:23). Such words have no meaning except in view of the virgin bearing the Child.

In the genealogy of Jesus we read how Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob, Jacob begat Judah, etc. Yet, in Matthew 1:16 we read, "*Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.*" The Bible insists on the birth of Jesus by the virgin. The virgin birth declares His Deity. For this reason God could and did say, "*This is my beloved Son.*"

Other Differences

Inasmuch as Jesus was different, distinguished and set apart because He was Deity, we expect to learn of other differences about Him. He was sinless (Hebrews 4:15; First Peter 2:22). He fulfilled all the ancient prophecies (Matthew 5:17,18). He possess authority that none other could possess (Matthew 7:29; 28:18). He could forgive sins (John 1:19; Matthew 9:1-6). Being God's Son, by His death, "*the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*" (Isaiah 53:6; First Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 9:28). The death of no other could accomplish what His death accomplished. He is the only One through whom we have hope of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

The New Testament abounds in testimony and evidence that He is who He claimed to be. John 20:30,31, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.*"

Christ is different because of who He is. His distinction is His Sonship, His Deity. On this fact rests everything about Christianity. Remove that fact and there is nothing more valid about Christianity than any other philosophy or religion.

In this lesson we have exalted Jesus as the Christ, God's Son. But have you exalted Him as He deserves? Do you believe in Him as He is? Have you come to Him as you must in order to be saved? We urge every person to consider the evidence and re-examine the indisputable testimony of Scripture concerning Him, and act in obedience to His will.

* * * * *

Sin

The very mention of sin produces varied reactions among people. One need not mention any particular sin specifically, but just "sin in general," and he will soon learn that many people have no concern about the matter whatsoever. Believing there is no such thing as right or wrong, to them sin is an irrelevant, old-fogey superstition of centuries past. To others, sin may exist, but only insofar as one might personally consider something to be sinful. It is a purely subjective matter with them. There is no objective measure to determine sin according to some folks. What you may consider as sin, I may not, and there is no way to tell who or what is right, some say. There are, according to them, no absolutes.

Mention sin and some immediately assume a defensive posture because they realize they stand guilty, but unwilling to either admit, excuse, attempt to justify, or seek forgiveness of it. Most consider sin as something bad and to be shunned, but something of which "others" are far more guilty than themselves.

Many of us will condemn sin generally, but shy away from condemning sin specifically. When we pray, "Forgive us of our sins," we might demand of ourselves that we name one we would admit. We need to be more specific regarding sin, privately to God, if not publicly.

Sin, regardless of people's varying dispositions toward it, is real and widespread. Romans 3:23, "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" Therefore, to comment on sin is to comment on a pertinent, relevant, applicable, personal subject to everyone. Whatever sin is, all responsible people have been guilty of it one way or another, at some time or another. Each of us should be motivated to investigate this matter with a genuine personal concern about our spiritual welfare.

Facts About Sin

Scripture teaches sin is the most fearful contamination in the world, and the source of human problems because it produces human depravity and spiritual death, which means to be separated from God. Regardless of what we may accomplish or overcome in this life, unless we defeat the "*wages of sin*" we will have failed, not only in this life, but for eternity.

People classify sin, sometime in a very anti-Biblical way. There are what we call big sins and little sins, mortal sins and venial sins, your sins and my sins. The Bible does teach there are sins of commission, omission, sins of the flesh, mind, public and private sins. But sin is sin regardless of classification. This idea of big sins, little sins, mortal and venial sins comes from the imagination of men who minimize the onslaught of sin against man.

How would you classify hate, drunkenness, immodesty, stealing, adultery, murder, envy, jealousy, gossip, or greed? Is one really worse than another? While the immediate consequences or results from sins may be more severe with one sin than another, one is guilty of sin whatever way he sins. Murder may produce more drastic consequences at the moment than a lie, but both offend the holiness of God and condemn the sinner.

The Bible defines sin as lawlessness or transgression of the law (First John 3:4). "*All unrighteousness is sin.*" First John 5:17). Violation of one's conscience and conviction is sin (Romans 14:23). Leaving undone what ought to be done is also called sin (James 4:17).

Origin of Sin

Sin began in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-6). There was a violation of God's directives, sin entered the world, and all continue to sin (Romans 5:12). The avenue to sin is temptation, coming by the lust of the flesh, eye, and pride of life (First John 2:16). Satan used these approaches to Eve, and also to Christ (Matthew 4:1-11).

Sin begins in the heart. Proverbs 11:20, "*They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the Lord: but such as are*

upright in their way are his delight." Proverbs 6:18, *"An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations..."* Proverbs 4:23, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."* Matthew 15:18,19, *"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."* Matthew 12:34,35, *"O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."*

Beginning in the heart, sin becomes a reality by the process of growth from lust to sin (James 1:14,15). It is the result of sin that makes sin so fearful. It may temporarily produce pleasure (Hebrews 11:24,25). But, as James and Romans teach, it produces death, separation from God. Also see Isaiah 59:1,12 in this respect. It makes one a servant in bondage (Romans 6:16). It shows that a person is of the devil (First John 3:8). Finally, sin will prevent one from entering heaven (Revelation 21:27).

In this life we shall have a constant warfare against sin (Romans 7:14-24). Peter warned, *"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* (First Peter 5:8).

Prevention of Sin

What can we do to prevent sin? It is better to prevent sin than to have to be forgiven of it. Obviously, since sin comes from the heart, we must *"keep thy heart with all diligence."* (Proverbs 4:23). But there is no way for the heart to be made pure without obedience to the truth, the Word of God (First Peter 1:22). This demands a knowledge of God's Word. Remember how Jesus used the Word of God to withstand the temptations of Satan in Matthew, chapter four? *"It is written..."* was His weapon. We have this same weapon to defend ourselves against sin and avoid it. Psalm 119:11 reads, *"Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee."* Putting on the armor God has provided enables us to resist sin (Ephesians 6:11). Growing as a Christian will prevent sin (Second Peter 1:5-10). This demands feeding on the *"sincere milk of the word."*

Overcoming Sin

But once we have sinned, we are powerless of ourselves and by ourselves to overcome its havoc. We are dependent on God. God has provided the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, to "*taste of death for every man.*" (Hebrews 2:9). "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Redemption is through His blood (Ephesians 1:7). We are made nigh to God, having once alienated ourselves by sin, by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13). We can become the victor over sin rather than the victim of sin because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:13,14). This is the way God has manifested His grace toward mankind.

The only way for sin to be properly covered is for it to be forgiven (Romans 4:7,8; Psalm 32:1). We must reach the cleansing blood of Christ in order to be forgiven. We reach that blood in baptism when we are baptized into His death, for this is where His blood was shed (Romans 6:3,4; John 19:34). Having reached His blood by entrance into His body (First Corinthians 12:12,13), we are to "*walk in the light as he is in the light.*" (First John 1:7). Being faithful in that lifelong privilege, having fellowship with Deity, He will keep us clean from sin.

We must not think that remission of sins can be ours unless we obey the commands to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Sin destroys and it will destroy you as well as me. But "*in Christ*" we are the sons and daughters of God (Galatians 3:27). Then, even our most dreaded and deadly enemy and foe, Satan and spiritual death, can be defeated, and the victory will be ours through Christ (First Corinthians 15:57).

* * * * *

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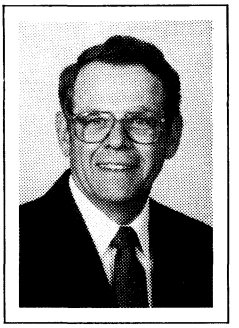
Our Sins Are Washed Away



JAMES W. BOYD

Revelation 1:5, "*Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.*" The blood of Christ is the cleansing agent by which our sins are washed away. It is, therefore, not a question whether sins are washed away, or even a question of what is the cleansing agent. The question is, "When does the blood of Christ, the cleansing agent God provides, wash away our sins?"

Ananias said to Saul, Acts 22:16, "*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" It is when we are baptized into His death, where He shed His blood, that our sins are washed away by His blood (Romans 6: 3,4).

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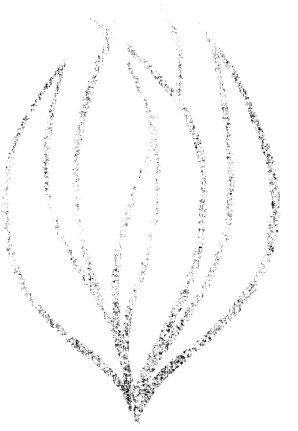

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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First John

CHAPTER ONE

Someone wrote the phrase, "Rediscovering the Bible," and it caught my attention and interest. Continuing to read, I learned the meaning of his phrase. He said, "I have taken a step toward understanding the Bible. I have decided to read it."

True enough, the dust on many Bibles is not because the book is dry. The Bible is a very popular book, but one that few read and understand because they have been persuaded that it is out-of-date and irrelevant to our times. But that is not so. It is untaught, unread, untried, misapplied and unknown. People need to rediscover it and respect its power and richness, learn its message, and live by it. They need to start reading it.

Some people think they are engaging in Bible study when all they are doing is studying about the Bible, or pouring over what somebody says the Bible teaches rather than becoming acquainted with it themselves. It is the work of a teacher and preacher to help people rediscover the Bible. How can he best do this? We all can read many books that contain "do's and don't's" regarding teaching the Bible. But surely one of the most helpful efforts anybody can make is to encourage them to get a Bible, open it, read it, study it, word by word, line by line, precept by precept. In this way the spiritual truths of God will become familiar, and even provoke us to serious study. We do not suggest a mere casual reading will produce understanding. That takes study. But study begins with a serious reading of the text itself. This is how we propose to investigate the three short epistles, First, Second, and Third John. Please take your Bible and carefully read the ten short verses of First John, chapter one, and then return to our remarks.

This chapter can be outlined into five major themes: (1) the nature of Christ, (2) John's credentials and source of information, (3) the purpose for this testimony, (4) the incompatibility of God and sin, (5) five conditional statements.

The Nature of Christ

Once we truly know and appreciate the nature of Christ, our respect for Him, His words, deeds, and life will be greatly enhanced. When we know His nature we will have the answer to the question, "Why should we pay attention to Jesus Christ?"

Verse one speaks of Him as being "*from the beginning.*" He is eternal in nature. This is a characteristic that belongs only to Deity. It is not true of animals, the vegetable kingdom, humanity, or matter. It is true only of Deity. We see Jesus as Deity.

We also see His humanity for He lived among men who heard, saw, and touched Him. The chapter presents His dual nature of Deity and humanity. He was as foretold, Emmanuel, God in the flesh.

He is also identified as the Word, as in John 1:1,2. This Word is most surely Jesus as the Word is identified as the "*only begotten of God,*" (John 1:14). He is the giver of eternal life. As Jesus said at the tomb of Lazarus, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" (John 11:25).

He is called the Son of God in verse seven. We cannot overemphasize the importance of His Sonship. It is upon this foundational rock and truth that all of the religion of Christ ultimately rests (Matthew 16:16-18). This fact is what gives authority to all that He said and did. If He is not the Son of God, then He is undeserving of acceptance because He claimed to be God's Son.

Verse seven also teaches that forgiveness is through the blood of Christ. This is in harmony with so many other passages of Scripture that teach the efficacy, effectiveness, force, and power of His blood. The blood of Christ is the cleansing agent of man's sin-stained soul. This blood, shed on Calvary's cross, is the essential ingredient in God's plan for saving man that demonstrates that the merit of our salvation is Christ.

John's Credentials

How was it that John could write as He did? What are his credentials? For what reason should we have confidence in his testimony?

John was an apostle of Christ, a recipient of the promise that he would be guided by the Holy Spirit in the things he taught. Jesus promised His apostles, "*But the*

Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26). *"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me, and ye shall also bear witness because ye have been with me from the beginning."* (John 15:26,27). *"Howbeit, when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."* (John 16:13,14). This is the Lord's promise to His apostles of inspiration, divine guidance, infallible revelation to be given unto them.

What John wrote is inspired Scripture. Paul affirmed the inspiration of Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We conclude that the testimony of John is deserving of our attention and acceptance because the things he wrote are from God.

But John was also an eye-witness of the things of which he wrote. He had seen the Lord, touched and heard Him. John was privileged to be of the "inner circle" of the apostles that include Peter and John's brother, James. There were times when the Lord was especially with these three. John knew whereof he wrote.

Nobody today can bear witness for Christ as did John. When Scripture speaks of bearing witness or giving testimony, it refers to one who was either an eye-witness or an inspired person. None so qualify today. We preach their testimony and witness. We are not witnesses for Christ in the sense the Scripture uses these terms. John did not write of some super hero of Jewish fable, some mythical and imaginary figure. Jesus was real and lived among men. John was among those who knew Him. The Holy Spirit chose from the information John had personally experienced and caused John to write of such things. One may criticize other people for a variety of things, and even the apostles can be criticized at times. But there is no evidence anywhere to accuse them of being liars or false witnesses. They possessed the most honorable kind of character, and were men who would even die rather than repudiate that which they knew to be true.

These infallible, irrefutable, unmistakable sources are of great importance to us. We are not reading some

man's opinion, a human commentary, no guesswork or hand-me-down tradition, no doubtful message, no uncertain sound, but a reliable, genuine, authentic, fully affirmed and miraculously confirmed message from God.

Why John Wrote

John mentions two prime reasons for this testimony. He wrote so human could have fellowship with Deity (verse three). It is a marvel in itself that Deity would extend to sinful humanity the opportunity to have that fellowship. Our fellowship is with God, the Son, and those who are followers of Christ.

John also wrote *"that your joy may be full."* (Verse four). Man can never know the extent of real happiness, the heights of joy to the fullest, when he is out of fellowship with God. People yearn and seek for happiness in many ways, often in ways that prove detrimental rather than beneficial. God wants man to be happy, and has provided for man the way of life that he can be happy. But happiness is not attainable as God would have it be so long as people reject the way of God. Happiness is not found in that which this life offers, nor in the material things of this world. Real joy is found in companionship, oneness, closeness, and communion in the distinct relationship with the called, so often called *"in Christ."*

God Verses Sin

This chapter also presents to us something of the nature of God in that it shows the incompatibility between God and sin. God is light; sin is darkness. The two cannot exist side by side at the same time. An elaborate statement that emphasizes this is found in Second Corinthians 6:14ff). We should be impressed how offensive sin is to God. We can take no defiled thing with us into God's glory and presence (Revelation 21:27).

We wonder where some get the idea that God will tolerate sin in the sense that He will accept people in sin regardless of the way they live and act toward Him and His truth. Why should God tolerate sin? Has He not defined sin, warned of it, given measure to prevent it, condemned it, and even provided the way of forgiveness of it? God is not to be considered as an over-indulgent grandfather that has no concern about right and wrong.

There is no harmony or peaceful co-existence between God and sin. They are opposite as light and darkness.

Conditional Statements

The fifth section of this first chapter consists of five conditional statements. We want to think, not only of the curses and blessings that follow certain conditions, but the conditions themselves. We are not able to determine the results because God has already determined them. It is within our power to choose to obey the conditions that produce specific results, both good and evil.

Verse six teaches that claiming fellowship with God while living in sin is to make oneself a liar. This is the grossest kind of hypocrisy; namely, claiming to be what one is not. As Paul wrote in Romans 6:2, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*"

Verse seven teaches that the right relationship with God is maintained only if we walk in the light as He is in the light. We cannot walk in darkness and stay in fellowship with Deity. Walking in the light means to live as the Lord has directed. Right living keeps us in contact with the saving blood of Jesus Christ. This does not mean we shall live in sinless perfection. It does mean that we "keep on keeping on." Faithfulness is within us to accomplish, and this is what God expects. As the blood of our bodies flows through the body keeping the members of it pure, so the blood of Christ flows through His body, the church, keeping its members clean and pure so long as they remain loyal and faithful.

To claim that we are without sin in our lives even as Christians, is self-deceptive. Truth has escaped us if ever we think we are sinlessly perfect. Similarly, verse ten teaches that we make God a liar to say that we do not sin. God says we do. To claim that we do not is to stand in defiance of what God says. It is to say, in essence, "God, you told a lie." This is a most serious result of claiming sinlessness. Even as Christians we stand in need of constant contact with the blood of Christ that keeps on keeping us clean, the real meaning of the word "*cleanseth.*" We have repudiated His Word if we say we are without sin.

Verse nine teaches one of the conditions we must meet to be forgiven. This was written to Christians who sin. It is a part of what can be called "the second law of pardon." There is but one law of Christ by which men are saved. But the law applies to those who have never come to Christ as well as those who have come to Him and fallen away. Those who have never come to Him are to believe in Him, repent of sins, confess their faith in Him, and be baptized for the remission of sins. The Christian is to confess his sins as one of the conditions for forgiveness. This is not a condition for the alien who has never come to Him. In addition, Acts 8:22 teaches the fallen Christian that he is to repent and pray for forgiveness of sins. When conditions are met, we have God's forgiveness.

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CHAPTER TWO: VERSES 1-14

Again take your Bible and read with care this passage. It is important that you see these words yourself that the Holy Spirit caused John to write. Let us consider them.

Did you notice in the opening verse the phrase, "*My little children?* Is this not an endearing expression that conveys great affection the writer has for the reader? It is not that those who would read are the literal and physical children of John, but that he is assuming a position and relationship like that of a father toward a child, teacher toward student, a revelation of genuine love for those addressed.

Chapter one taught the incompatibility of God and sin, characterized as light and darkness. Our fellowship with God is dependent on our walking in the light. Inasmuch as God desires man to enter into fellowship with Him, and continue in that fellowship, we have divine instructions that encourage the prevention of sin. It is better to prevent evil than overcome it. Even sin that is forgiven leaves scars. Thankfully, God has provided strength and guidance to assist us in avoiding sin. This is the preventive side of the gospel which is as much a part of the gospel as the corrective side of forgiveness.

Two-fold Role of Christ

Verse two has more information regarding Jesus Christ and His relationship with those who are His. He is an advocate as well as our propitiation. An advocate is like a lawyer, an attorney, one who represents us, who pleads on our behalf when we are incapable of pleading for ourselves. Christ, being totally righteous, is the only One qualified to appear before God. Sin cannot stand in God's presence. Christ, God's Son, makes petition on our behalf. He is the One who will confess us before the Father when we have confessed Him before the world.

The word *"propitiation"* conveys the idea of that which renders man favorable before God. We separate ourselves from God by our sins (Isaiah 59:1,2). The anger of the just and righteous God against wickedness is pacified and satisfied by that which the Lord Jesus has done for us in His death on the cross. God could never be considered just if He looked upon righteousness and wickedness with the same result. The penalty for sin had to be paid, and Christ paid the price. He is the atonement that God provided. If there had been no cross, there would have been no atonement for the sins of man. For the second time in this epistle we have emphasized before us the power of the blood of Christ, the value of His sacrifice to us. It is evident that God intends to save man by the tragic, yet at the same time, glorious death of Jesus Christ.

We Can Know

Verses three through six drives a spike through the heart of agnosticism, doubt, and a maybe-so faith. It is a vicious affront against all that is holy to teach that man cannot know the reality of God, his own salvation, or that he must go through life guessing about himself and his relationship with the Father. While there are people who would contend that there is nothing which we can know absolutely, John says we can know and tells us how we can know that we know.

When we keep the commandments of God we know God, not just know about God, but know Him with the intimate relationship of the Savior and the saved. We should concentrate, however, on meetings God's conditions. Our knowledge of this relationship is not ours because of the way we feel, nor can it be derived through what men say. It is knowledge of which we can be sure when we obey God. To claim that we have this knowledge,

but at the same time do not obey Him, is to make ourselves liars and separate ourselves from the truth (verse 4).

Maturity

Those who keep His Word enjoy maturity, which is the meaning of the word *"perfected."* This is the way we know that we know Him. This includes obedience to the commands that bring us to Christ, but also faithfulness in life and walk before God as Christians.

From the Word of God we can learn the will of God. Without this knowledge we cannot know what God wants or expects of us. It is amazing that people have to be urged to study the Bible and learn the message of truth when it is only from that message that we can learn how to know God. But let us repeat for emphasis' sake, our comfort, assurance, guidance, and knowledge of salvation is in His Word, by His Word, and through His Word, and it is not provided any other way.

Love

Another section of this passage teaches concerning a commandment that is called both old and new. The commandment is to love. The world, generally, and many religious people in particular, have little to no concept of the love taught in the Bible. Some think of it only in terms of indulgence. Some consider it only in terms of sex. Some have even suggested and acted like they think that love means toleration and acceptance of sin. But God loves, and at the same time hates every evil way.

The commandment to love is old because it was taught in the Old Testament. A lawyer approached Jesus and asked Him,"*Master, which is the great commandment of the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self."* (Matthew 22:36-39). Jesus was quoting from Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5. The teaching to love was not altogether new, seeing it was taught long before Christ.

To love is an old commandment also in that these readers, disciples of Christ, had been taught to love previous to this epistle. At the very beginning of His personal preaching, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus

taught love. The apostles all taught love. Love was not totally new to those who walked with the Lord Jesus.

But there was a newness about love that men had never heard before Christ, and had not seen demonstrated as they did in Christ. We are taught to love as Christ loved. "*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*" (John 14:34). Paul taught (Romans 12:19-21), as did Jesus (Matthew 5:44-46), that we are to love, not only those that love us, but even our enemies if such we have. Christians will have enemies if they walk faithfully before God. The love Jesus manifested was *agape*, which means "seeking the other's highest good." His love was self-sacrificial for the benefit of another. Mankind had never really had such love demonstrated before them as fully and completely as was done in the mission and service of Jesus the Christ. While men can show love by giving life for another, Jesus even showed a greater love by giving His life for those who were enemies of God in sin (Romans 5:6-9). The love that characterized Christ was manifested in His hatred of evil. He hated evil because He loved the sinner that sin was destroying.

Love, like God Himself, is presented in these verses as light, and hatred is pictured as darkness. We cannot walk with God, stay in the light, and hate other people. The one who hates others is said to be in darkness. Such a one is walking in sins, knowing not where he goes, blinded, with no spiritual sight. It is the one who loves that is walking in the light.

Sin, or darkness, is what causes one to stumble. There is no cause to stumble in the light. Having love in the heart is a preventive quality as well as a positive quality for doing good. It keeps one in the light.

This passage surely is one of the more significant passages when we study the subject of living life as Christians. We need to remember that God is concerned with our quality of life as it relates to others. Especially is this a matter of concern for those in the family of God which is His church. We must have love for truth, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, brethren, our fleshly families, friends, neighbors, the saved, lost, and even our enemies. This is the new commandment which is directed from Deity to humanity.

After presenting these great themes, the two-fold role of Jesus as advocate and propitiation, the way we can

know God and know that we are His, and the new commandment, we reach a passage that offers us considerable difficulty as to its complete meaning. Hard passages are not unusual in Scripture. But that does not mean we are unable to gain from them. It may require more study and meditation than the more easily understood ones.

The Difficult Passage

Verses twelve through fourteen have two sets of phrases, three phrases in each set. We are assured that they give emphasis to certain blessings that belong to those who are in Christ. Just precisely the identity of the children, young men, and fathers, we would not wish to be dogmatic. In view of the context, however, and the fact that the epistle is written to brethren in the Lord, there is reason to believe that these terms refer to Christians in various stages of spiritual growth. It is obvious that there are those who are weak and unlearned, babes in Christ, who have not yet grown very much. There are others who have more maturity about them. Then there are those who can be considered mature, not sinlessly perfect and infallible, but mature Christians. Regardless of the specific identity of these three groups, certain facts are brought to light for us.

(1) Christians have been forgiven of sins because of Christ. (2) Christians know God and have a saved relationship with Him, a close and intimate spiritual association and fellowship with Deity. (3) Christians have overcome Satan, not by their own power, but through Christ. (4) So long as the Christian remains strong and lets the Word of God abide in him, he shall continue to have power over Satan, and it naturally follows that they shall enjoy spiritual victory.

The passage, among other thoughts that it provokes, is like that of Ephesians 1:3, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."*

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Three lessons on the three epistles by John are in this issue. We will continue in the next edition of *A Burning Fire.*

CHAPTER TWO: VERSES 15-29

It is imperative that we first read the actual text before we consider the comments to follow. Having read these verses, let us turn our attention to gleaning from them the divine message God has given. In our analysis we can outline this passage into three major themes. (1) The love of the world is forbidden. (2) There are warnings concerning the antichrists. (3) We find admonitions to faithfulness and righteousness.

Love of the World

What is the world that we are not to love? Whatever it includes, to love the world is to prove a lack of love for God. It is impossible to love the world and love God at the same time. Whatever is meant by the world, it is a foolish endeavor and a futile effort because it shall pass away. Loving the world is presented in contrast to abiding in the will of God.

The term "world" is used in different senses in Scripture. Jesus said, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" (Mark 16:15). Here the "world" refers to the geographical areas of the earth where people live. The gospel it to be preached to everyone, everywhere.

Christ said, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...*" (John 3:16). The "world" here refers to the people of the world who are in need of the salvation that Christ brought into the world. We are to love people. But there remains a sense in which we are not to love the world.

The use of "world" in our text is like that found in John 17:14-16 where Jesus said, "*I have given them, thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*" "World" is used in this passage once to refer to this earth where we live, but also with reference to the evil that characterizes this world. It is rightly said that the followers of Christ are in the world (earth), but not of the world (sin). We live on this earth and are among people on the earth, but we are not to

live nor partake of the ways of evil that characterize the manners of evils that are so evident all around us. Lust, pride, and the fruits thereof are avenues of temptation used by the devil to tempt us to sin. Such things are not to be allowed to have place in our affections. These were the very avenues that Satan used in tempting Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the same ways he tempted Christ in the wilderness as recorded in Matthew four.

To be worldly-minded is the opposite of Paul's admonition to the Christian in Colossians 3:1,2, *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."*

Loving the ways of the sinful world is totally incompatible with faithful and righteous living. The Christian is to neither seek, nor engage in and practice such things. It is wrong that he promote, encourage, or in any way seem to give sanction to the lustful, proud, sinful, and worldly practices and manners. Nothing is more inconsistent than a Christian, who has been cleansed from sin, to continue in sin. Surely, one of the problems facing the church, one of the hindrances to a better influence of the church in the world, is the failure of so many members to separate themselves from worldliness, choosing to go the way of the world even as they profess to follow Christ.

For this reason, the drinking of alcoholic beverages, smoking, lascivious dancing, various forms of cheap behavior toward the opposite sex, profanity, vulgarity, and such like, are out-of-bounds for those who are serious about serving the Lord. Paul wrote, *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein."* James wrote, *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."* This language is plain enough and there is no room for misunderstanding it.

Warnings Against Antichrists

John begins this section by addressing his readers with a most endearing and affectionate term, *"Little children."* In this way he not only was like a father unto them, who cared and provided for them, but one who also taught and guided them aright.

The meaning of *"the last time"* is reference to the last age, the last dispensation, the Christian Age. A dispensation is a system of rules by which God governs man for a certain period of time. There are three such periods in Biblical revelation: (1) the Patriarchal Age, (2) the Mosaic Age, and (3) the Christian Age, which is the last age there will be. When Christ returns the Christian Age shall end, and the world will end. This is the age when God speaks to man through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2). In this age there are those who array themselves against Jesus Christ, denying His authority, His Deity, accusing Him rather accepting Him. Of such people John warns.

Those who deny Christ do not belong in Christian fellowship. John calls such "antichrist" because they are against Christ. It is a tragedy in our day and reflection on the consistency of many religious people that they are willing to embrace in religious fellowship even those who do not acknowledge Jesus to be who He claimed to be. Such is commonplace in the denominational world, who, for the sake of pseudo-brotherliness, will even have religious fellowship with those of Judaism, modernism, liberalism, etc. that deny Christ as Deity and the Son of God. Some of our more "loving" brethren had committed the same evil.

The denial of Christ is even more than denying Him as the Son of God. It is equated with the denial of Deity altogether. To deny the Son is also to deny the Father. John wrote, *"That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him."* (John 5:23). There is no such thing, according to Biblical teaching, in accepting God, the Father, and being acceptable before Him, and rejecting Jesus Christ, His Son.

There were those in John's day, as well as now, who have pursued this blasphemous and infidel pathway concerning Christ. Even some who once were believers have turned away. They have gone out from among brethren because they no longer held the convictions that faithful brethren hold. They have become apostates. Their apostasy is evidence that they do not belong among brethren anymore. There is no fellowship between believers and unbelievers, according to the Bible. Those who profess to follow Christ ought to be embarrassed and provoked to repentance if they have ever entertained the idea of extending fellowship to those who repudiate Christ. Such an attempt is a disregard of the teaching of John.

They Already Knew

Verse twenty-one shows that John's readers were well aware of the truth. He was writing them, but not because they were uniformed. Does not this remark by John explode forever the false notion that some have put forward that we cannot ever come to know the truth, but can only search for it? There are those, even in the church (and they ought to be disciplined), that deny we can know that God exists, or that we can know anything for sure. Of course, they know for sure they are right. That teaching is nothing but agnosticism at its worst form. It is a shame that anyone who would profess to be a believer of the Bible would ever suggest such a false doctrine. John said his readers knew the truth. They also knew that the truth was certain and sure and was not a lie. He was writing to them to reaffirm and emphasize the truth they already knew so their minds would be even more impressed with truth than ever before in their lives.

Back in verse twenty John mentioned that they had received an unction or an anointing from the Holy One that enabled them to know. We shall have something to say about this in the third section of the chapter. Suffice it to say here that the nature of this anointing was most likely a miraculous gift, such as was given during the early days of the church and in the age of the miraculous. One such gift was miraculous knowledge. Whereas we must learn through study, the early Christians had no New Testament in writing as we have now, but were privileged to be granted miraculous knowledge through the laying on of the hands of the apostles. In this way, they knew the truth, just as we can know it through the Scriptures.

Those who denied the truth concerning Christ, His Deity and authority, are called liars and antichrist. All today who are of the same disposition and rejection of Him fall into this same category.

Admonitions to Faithfulness and Righteousness

John urges the brethren to hold fast to that which they had come to know, the truth from God that they had from the beginning. They had learned the true nature of Christ, His gospel, His church, and the more excellent way. John pleads that they not let false teachers seduce

them into error and lead them astray. The Christian can be sure that the devil will use whatever means at his disposal to entrap the Christian and take him into apostasy from Christ and his salvation.

Continued faithfulness in Christ would mean the continuation of the promise of eternal life. Notice this is a conditional matter. Sometime we hear some teach, "Once saved, always saved." But John did not teach it nor believe it, or he would not have warned his brethren in such a manner as he did against falling victim to false teachers. If one cannot fall and be lost, even though he has once come to Christ, the statements of John, inspired of God, are senseless and meaningless. We are not inclined to take a position that would so describe an inspired message.

The last verses of this third section return to the thought of verse twenty and the unction or anointing these brethren had received. There are a few points about this of which we can be certain. (1) The unction came from Christ. (2) It resulted in these brethren knowing the truth concerning Christ. (3) It did abide in them, giving them the ability to discern between the truth and the error taught by antichrists. (4) It was given during the age of the miraculous. We conclude that John had reference to the spiritual and miraculous gift of knowledge.

John's plea is that they remain in Christ, abide in Christ, live in Christ, stay faithful in Christ. Two specific reasons are cited why they must do this. (1) It was because of the second coming of Christ. He would appear. (2) With His appearance would come the judgment. There would be no need for these brethren to face the inevitable judgment and be shamed, but they could anticipate it with confidence and boldness because they belonged to Jesus Christ. By these words John asserts they would at some time stand before God and be judged.

John describes Jesus as being righteous. This is one of the noble and divine characteristics of Him. Therefore, it would naturally follow that those who walked in His steps would develop similar characteristics as the One they followed. Doing righteousness is evidence that one is a child of God. It is not the only evidence that is necessary, but the doing of righteousness is a trait of a Christian, those who have been "born again."

In summary, John urges his brethren to hold to what they had learned, continue with the Lord in that teaching, that Jesus was coming and there would be a

judgment, they should be found doing as they ought. They were not to follow the ways of the world, and be aware of the antichrists that would, if they could, lead them into spiritual destruction.

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He Became Flesh

John 1:1,14, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (as we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*"

The central fact of Christianity is that Jesus Christ is Deity, and came into this world as a man. Jesus is both God and man. In Him Deity took the life of a human. This is called the Incarnation.

We may wonder, ponder, try to explain, attempt to understand, and some may even want to explain away, deny, and reject the Incarnation. But the believer accepts the Biblical declaration that Jesus of Nazareth is Emmanuel, which means, God with us. We wish in this study, and somewhat of a companion with the study of First John, consider the Incarnation from the three viewpoints of the Father, the Son, and of mankind.

Father's View

Scripture makes it plain that from the Father's point of view the Incarnation was an act of God. God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of man. Romans 8:3, "*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.*" This was an act of God's love. Romans 5:8, "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" It was Deity who was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Second Corinthians 5:19, "*To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself...*" Jesus is God's unspeakable gift (Second Corinthians 9:15). The Incarnation that took place in Bethlehem in a stable

nearly two thousand years ago when the virgin Mary brought forth Jesus, was an act of God's love for humanity.

Son's View

Inspired Scripture also makes it plain that, from the viewpoint of Jesus, the Incarnation was a sacrifice. It tells what Christ gave up to become man, what He did, what happened to Him in the breaking of His body and shedding of His blood. Second Corinthians 8:9, "*Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.*" The fullest expression of His sacrifice is found in Philippians 2:5-11. One version says He "*emptied himself,*" that is, He deliberately, willfully, sacrificially gave Himself, depriving Himself of heavenly glory, and became as other men. He did not come with pomp, ceremony, and notoriety, but humbly. He came not as a king with great reputation and fame, but as a despised servant. He subjected Himself to the Father's will to obey that will. Never was there such a complete giving of self for another as that given by Jesus Christ. He left heaven, became flesh, lived a life of humiliation, service, suffering, and dying an agonizing death in pain and disrepute, all for others.

God and Man

Although He became a man, still He remained Deity. But by becoming man, the infinite, limitless characteristics of God were replaced by the finite and limited characteristics of humanity in many areas. The qualities of Deity had to be abandoned to become man.

This is illustrated to us in various ways. God is omniscient and all-knowing. Yet, in His earthly ministry, there were things Jesus indicated He did not know. When asked certain questions about His return, He said, "*But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.*" We do not doubt He could have known if He chose to know, but He chose not to know that day.

God is omnipotent, all- powerful. Although Jesus had great power, Jesus often wearied physically and needed food, rest, sleep, and relaxation. Again, He chose not to have all power when He was man.

God is omnipresent, ever present, everywhere. Yet, Jesus, as would be true of any human, was subject to the

laws of space and time while on earth. It is admittedly difficult, if not beyond our ability to grasp, to understand the nature of Christ on earth. But the fact that He was both God and man is duly established and repeatedly affirmed.

By becoming flesh, Jesus had to abandon certain traits of Deity, possessing a visible, physical form, but He did not abandon His moral perfection, goodness, justice, reverence, and love. However hard to understand the matter of Deity in the flesh, make no mistake about the reality of the event. Matthew 1:18-23, Luke 1:26-35, passages too lengthy to include here, should be read in this connection. Romans 1:3 speaks of God's "*Son Jesus Christ our Lord which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.*" First John 4:2,3, "*Hereby know ye the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world.*" Galatians 4:4, "*But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.*" Inspired penman make it clear that Jesus was really and truly man, but also really and truly God. Never was there any question or doubt in the mind of Jesus as to His identity and dual nature.

Man's View

But what of the Incarnation from man's viewpoint? The great motive behind it was God's love for man (John 3:16; First John 4:9). The great benefit for man is salvation and eternal life (Romans 5:8-10). We are saved by His blood, reconciled to God by His death, and have hope of eternal life because He arose from the dead. Jesus said, "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father...*" (John 14:9). In life Jesus revealed God to man. John 17:26, "*And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*" In life He is our example. First Peter 2:21, "*For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*" First John 2:6, "*He that saith he abideth in him ought also so to walk, even as he walked.*"

By becoming man He became our comforter, as one who can and does sympathize and understand. He cares

for us (First Peter 5:7). He knew sorrow, joy, friendship, enemies, trials, temptations, successes, and failures. Hebrews 4:15, *"For we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."*

By becoming man He became man's Savior. By and through Adam and Eve sin entered into the world (Romans 5:12). Tragically, all of their descendants have sinned in various ways (Romans 3:23). The wages of sin is death, or separation from God (Romans 6:23). Because of sin, man is without God, hopeless, lost, with no promise, only a dark and dismal future of despair, involved in a condition from which he cannot redeem himself by himself. He is dominated and doomed by sin, and helpless in its grip.

Into this condition came the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem. Because of this we can join the chorus with the heavenly host and sing, *"Glory to God in the highest."* With Him came God's provision for man to conquer and overcome man's hopelessness. In Christ we who sin can become partakers of His righteousness and be saved. Such is the significance of the Incarnation to mankind.

About Christmas

There are those who celebrate Christmas Day as the day of the birth of Jesus. The truth is, we do not know the date of His birth, nor are we to celebrate any such day as a religious "holyday." It is sufficient to know that such information is not important. It is needful to know that His birth fulfilled God's promises and prophecies given through the ages by His prophets. Where He was born is significant because the prophets had foretold the exact place. That He was born, did come, is what matters.

His birth was announced unto shepherds (Luke 2:8-20), and later to wise men from the east who came and inquired of Him (Matthew 2:1,2). We today should seek the One born in the stable and placed in the manger. We will also be wise to come and worship Him, glorify and praise His name.

No ordinary child was this Jesus, son of Mary. He had no earthly father, but was the *"only begotten of God."* He was the promised One, the Savior and Redeemer of

man, the Son of God. The birth of Jesus was the event when God became flesh.

* * * * *

The Nobleman's Son

John 4:46-54, "*So Jesus came again unto Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was not going down, his servants met him, and told him saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth; and himself believed, and his whole house. This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee.*"

Who Was This Man?

This nobleman lived in Capernaum about twenty miles from Cana. His son was sick and about to die. He requested that Jesus come to Capernaum and do what He could for the son. He did not seek Jesus out of curiosity, nor did he desire to tempt Jesus as many others were doing. His was not the recognition of a spiritual need, but he urged Jesus to come out of concern for the physical welfare of his son. His loved one was about to die and he was so concerned. It was an urgent matter because the son was "*at the point of death.*" Time was very much in essence. But we emphasize that his desire at this time was relief from physical distress.

Jesus knew the man lacked spiritual faith, as is evident from His remark in verse forty-eight. We might even consider Jesus giving a mild rebuke for being concerned for the physical more than the spiritual. He may have been expressing a disappointment in the man's prime interest. It was not, and is not, the primary mission of Christ to aid people physically. While He was concerned about physical problems, else He would not have been so involved in healing, He used healing to accomplish a nobler and more important goal of spiritual concern.

Jesus Cared

So often, though not in this specific instance, the word "*compassion*" is used with reference to Jesus' attitude toward many who were in distress in some fashion. But His miracles were done primarily to prove to people that He was from God and that they accept the message of salvation. John 2:23, "*Now when he was at Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.*" John 3:2, "*And the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*" Jesus used His miracles to prove He was the Messiah. Matthew 11:2-5, "*Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go, and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" When His miracles would not convince the people of His identity, He would cease working them and leave. Matthew 13:58, "*And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*" By and through His concern for man's physical distress and the desire for man's welfare, by the use of His divine power to heal the sick, He was able to command their attention, capture their confidence, and then teach them the word of life He came to deliver.

The confidence the nobleman had in Jesus at this point was obviously limited. He did not see Jesus as the Messiah or Son of God. He must have thought Jesus could not do anything unless Jesus was on the scene where the

problem existed. There is no indication that he believed Jesus was able to do anything at all if the son died. He did not have that kind of faith exhibited by the centurion in Matthew 8:8. "*The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*" Furthermore, there is no hint of spiritual interest by the nobleman regarding Jesus.

Jesus said, "*Go thy way; thy son liveth.*" He did not go with the nobleman, but He pronounced the son healed. The power of His word was the power of Christ. The man accepted what Jesus said, knowing nothing of any result that had occurred regarding his son. It is not unlikely that he was only assured that something would be done.

Result of the Miraculous

The son lived. What a glorious thing! How thankful must the father have been! By comparing the time of the son's recovery with the time of Jesus' words, the nobleman knew it was Jesus who had healed the son. The result was a more mature, complete faith in Christ. Now He believed in Him, not only as a healer and helper in time of physical suffering, but as the Lord, the spiritual Deliverer and Guide. Not only did the nobleman believe, but his family also.

It goes without saying that Jesus no longer is among men in the flesh to perform such mighty works. He has completed His mission of providing salvation for all, ascending into heaven until His return. His Word is confirmed and His identity declared. The purpose for miracles has long ago been accomplished. But the account of these miracles reveals some basic principles of bringing people to believe in Christ, which is the number one work in life as children of God and His church.

We see the principle of having compassion for people in their physical distress. First John 5:7, "*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*"

We can also see that the right use of relieving physical needs can win confidence and provide opportunity to teach the Word of life. Benevolence for benevolence's sake alone falls short. Many cannot be reached on the basis of a spiritual need because they do not

realize they have such a need. They possibly might be reached first through provision of a physical need, and then led to recognize their greater need. It is in this way that we can show we truly care for them. When people see Christians helping others, they will be more attentive to what the Christians have to say. We can tell them of their spiritual need and they will already be convinced that we have nothing but their good in mind.

Our Only Hope

In many lands Jesus Christ is unknown, and yet, He is the only answer there is to the needs of the people living there. Brethren have shown concern for such people and have used benevolence as a means to arouse their attention and interest. They have done deeds of genuine compassion to gain the opportunity to present the gospel. This does not suggest that doing the benevolence is the ultimate goal. It does not teach a "social gospel," which many do not even understand even though they accuse others of preaching a "social gospel." It is following a path that Christ Himself took to open hearts and minds.

Christians are blessed with salvation, and in our land, we are blessed with many physical resources in abundance. We do well to remind ourselves of the words of Christ, Luke 12:48, "*For unto whomsoever much if given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*" By our physical resources we have an opportunity to let the light of saving truth penetrate the darkness of sin that dominates the lives of so many.

Why This Lesson?

Several motives provoke this kind of lesson. We need to learn what Jesus did while on earth. But we also need to rehearse the basic principles in doing our Christian duty. We should be motivated into a greater liberality regarding giving and greater participation in responsible and authorized benevolence.

Brethren have sent many men into countries where they are able to apply their medical skills and other talents to help the physically deprived and needy. While they were doing that, efforts of a productive nature were also being used to teach those that were helped the gospel of Christ. For

many in distant places, who are not so blessed as are we, time is running out because they are physically diseased and spiritually lost. By providing physical aid and taking advantage of it to teach spiritual salvation, we can imitate Christ to the saving of souls.

* * * * *

***A Burning Fire* Keeps Burning**

Beginning with this issue, I begin the twelfth volume of my booklet. The first eleven were produced in nine years, so I have produced a bit more rapidly than one issue per month.

Already there is prepared sufficient material for some six to seven more volumes which I plan to produce if the Lord grant me health and sufficient resources to do so.

By design, I have not made any charge to receive ***A Burning Fire.*** I am not unmindful nor ungrateful for those who have voluntarily assisted in its production from time to time, but the vast majority of finances has been from my personal funds and I want it that way. It is one way I can make a personal effort to spread the gospel.

I have never claimed originality in the lessons produced. They are simply written sermons I have attempted to preach through the years since 1952. Naturally, I have believed them to be worthwhile and stand humbled by the response received. But the truth in them has been preached by many others before me, and I have doubtless gleaned many of my sermons from others. Thank God for them! I solicit continued prayers in this work. **JB**

RESTORE THE FALLEN



JAMES W. BOYD

Galatians 6:1, concerning those taken in a fault, Paul wrote, "...*restore such an one...*" This means to recover him from his fallen state (James 5:19,20). The ideal is that the fallen brother will repent and continue in fellowship with God and brethren. Efforts are not always successful, however. If there is no favorable response, after efforts are made,"*tell it to the church*" to enlist everyone's assistance. "*But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.*" (Matthew 18:17). This demands withdrawing fellowship. Even then he is not counted as an enemy, "*but admonish him as a brother.*" (2 Thess. 3:15). But he is now a brother out of fellowship with faithful brethren.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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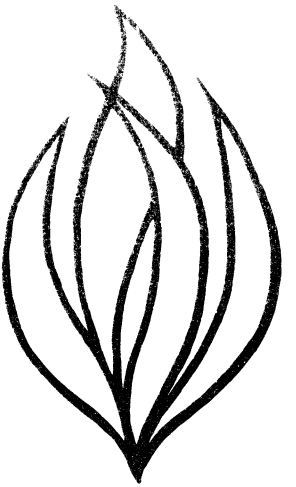

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James Samuel Boyd Graduates BC

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First John

CHAPTER THREE

People who are serious about Christianity have many questions for which they desire Bible answers, especially concerning their relationship with God. Such questions may include, "Spiritually speaking, whose child am I? How can one tell who is a child of God? What is expected of a child of God? What is sin? Is it possible for a child of God to sin so as to be lost? What are the important characteristics of a child of God? Why does the world hate Christians? How serious is it to fail to love one another? How attentive is God to the cry of His children? On what conditions will God answer our prayers? How would you summarize the duty involved in Christian living?"

These questions are answered, in part, in this third chapter of First John. If I were to give this chapter a title or describe its theme, I might be captured by the phrase, "How blessed it is to be a child of God."

Once again we urge the reading of the passages under consideration before continuing with our comments. This is a very important step. Read the first ten verses, and then let us proceed.

The Child of God

The first ten verses of chapter three discuss the child of God. In verses one and two we are taught that we are children of God by virtue of God's love bestowed on us rather than by our own merit. Salvation is by the grace and love of God. Without it we could discontinue any discussion of the theme of salvation.

The world may not accept the Christian, nor recognize him as God's child. The reason this is true is because the world did not accept Jesus Christ. There is such a wide difference between righteousness that Christ taught and the sinful ways of the world that the world generally repudiates Christ and those that would follow Him.

Nonetheless, Christians are God's children, and when Christ comes again we shall be blessed beyond measure. It is stated that *"we shall be like Him."* Just what all this might include we are not able to tell. But most

certainly it conveys the concept of being with God, and being a child of God. It does not mean we become gods.

Those who have this hope purify themselves from the pollution of sins. They become pure through obedience to the truth, and remain pure as they walk after Christ. It is expected of the Christian that he live a life of purity. We do not understand that this means sinless perfection, even though that be the goal. But his life is to be the opposite of transgression, which is a definition of sin. The inconsistency of a Christian continuing in sin is seen in the fact that, once being purified from sin, seeing how Christ has taken away our sins, inasmuch as there is no sin in Him whatsoever, we should imitate His direction and example.

Not a Life of Sin

Verses six and seven insist that being a Christian necessitates the cessation of a life of sin. A child of God cannot keep on living in sinful ways. We cannot deny that we will and do sin (1:8,10; 2:1), but sin will not dominate life, but rather the Christian will strive to live in the way of righteousness. The words, "*sinneth not,*" has a progressive meaning, and means that a Christian does not keep on sinning. He must not only become a Christian, but he must live as a Christian, once becoming one.

To keep on the pathway of sin shows one to be of the devil rather than a child of God. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. We dare not allow ourselves to be led astray by thinking that we can stay in sinful ways and still be righteous. If we would be counted righteous, we must live righteously.

As we learn in verses eight and nine, those who are born of God do not keep on sinning. It does not mean that he is incapable of sin, nor does it teach the impossibility of sin. Rather it teaches the inconsistency of sinful living, and incompatibility between sin and being a Christian.

Verse ten shows abstaining from sin is the way one manifests and demonstrates himself to be a child of God. Even those around us should be able to tell the difference between our lives and those who live after the ways of Satan. It is a serious blemish against the church that too many who claim to be Christians have not taken seriously this imperative regarding living separate and apart from

the sinful world. Righteous living, as well as loving the brethren, are marks of discipleship.

The Theme of Love and Hate

Returning to the text, read verses eleven through fifteen, a passage that continues with the theme initiated in verse ten, that of love. The message of the gospel is a message of love, seeking the other's highest good. It includes God's love for man, man's love for God, and man's love for his fellowman.

The Christian is not like Cain who demonstrated his jealousy and hatred toward his brother. The world, like Cain, hates the Christian for much the same reason that Cain hated Abel. Abel was righteous and Cain chose to do his own thing and go his own way. When Cain was not accepted by God, he grew angry toward his righteous brother and killed him. In this he showed himself to be evil. Jealousy, hurting and harming of others is not a mark of being a child of God.

Christians need not to be astonished or surprised that the sinful world hates them. You might think it overstated to contend that the Christian is a target of hatred, but experience, as well as revelation, underscores the truthfulness of that reality. Even though it is disconcerting to the Christian, he must realize that if he does not conform to the evil ways of the world, he is not included by the world, he is rejected by the world, but he has passed from spiritual death into spiritual life because his sins are forgiven through Christ while the sinful world is still in the bondage of sin. The world despises the difference between itself and those who follow God.

God Loves Us

Verses sixteen through eighteen let us know how we can know that God loves us. It is because of the death of God. Actually, it was Christ who died on Calvary's cross, but John said that God (Deity) laid down His life for us. Is this not an affirmation of the Deity of Jesus Christ? Indeed, so! His love was greater than even the greatest love that men can show; namely, giving his life for a friend (John 15:13). But Christ died even for His enemies while they were yet in sin (Romans 5:6-9). As His followers, we

ought to be self-sacrificial for our brethren, seeking their highest good, concerned for their welfare.

One way of manifesting our love toward others is sharing what you have with those who are in need. We cannot claim to possess love as God would have us to possess it if we withhold from our needy brethren. James wrote in similar tones, "*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*" (James 2:14-16). We cannot escape the logical plea of verse eighteen to do as well as say. Attitudes are as important as actions, but actions reflect attitudes. It takes both to be a child of God and to demonstrate that relationship with God.

We Can Know

Verses nineteen through twenty are not so easily understood with just a casual reading of them. Having read them, let us look into them and see what is taught.

We are shown that we can know that we are of the truth. We do not have to go through life guessing, wondering, in agnostic style. Even though some say there is nothing we can really know, just accept by faith, they show they do not understand the nature of faith and contradict the statement of John that we can know we are in the truth. Our hearts will inform is whether we are in the truth or not. But we must look into this matter more.

The passage assumes something not explicitly stated. It implies that our hearts and consciences have been trained according to the truth of God. The passage is not teaching that we have some kind of inherent, built-in informer that lets us know right from wrong. Such things must be learned. We can be taught wrong and never would our hearts condemn us, and our consciences would not offend us even when we did wrong because we would think what we did was permissible. Our hearts must be trained.

Assuming that such is the case with the heart, and we do what is right, we will have a pure conscience and our heart will not condemn us. This is not because the heart of man is the infallible standard, but because the Word of God is the infallible standard by which the heart

has been trained. When the heart is properly taught, and we are not condemned by the heart, we can have confidence, boldness, assurance that all is well. This is because God, the author of the Word, is greater than the mere conscience of man. While we are to live harmoniously with our consciences, we must be sure they are taught and trained correctly according to the Word. When such is the case, our consciences will pain us when we do wrong, and commend us when we do right.

Prayer and Obedience

Verse twenty-two teaches that our petitions to God are dependent on our obedience to His commandments. If we live sinful lives, even though the Christian is given the blessing of prayer by which to approach the Father through Christ, we deprive ourselves of this benefit if we live displeasing to God. Prayer is a blessing conditioned upon faithfulness and keeping God's commandments.

Verses twenty-three and twenty-four present to us the commandment that is the base of our relationship with God. We must believe on Christ and love one another as He has commanded. This faith and love will provoke us to be obedient, and obedience will result in our fellowship with Deity.

We can know we have this fellowship because the Spirit informs us. We have the assurance that Deity abides, lives with us, as we live with Deity. Romans 8:16 goes into greater detail concerning the dual testimony by which we can know our relationship with God. The Spirit has given the testimony regarding our responsibility with God. Our own spirit testifies whether we have obeyed the divine commands or not. The combined testimony determines whether we are children of God. When we keep His commandments, we can know that we are His children.

This chapter, which speaks of the Father-child relationship that is enjoyed by the Christian, is a chapter of great comfort, assurance, certainty and blessing to those who have decided to follow Christ. It emphasizes the joy and wisdom of following God rather than the sinful ways of this sinful world.

* * * * *

CHAPTER FOUR

As we approach this chapter, we might consider it as an inspired commentary on First John 1:23, "*And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.*" This is a chapter with the theme of faith in Christ and love for God and man. It is imperative that one first read the passages under consideration because the Biblical text is not included alongside these comments due to lack of space.

Truth verses Error

Verses one through six present a contrast between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Then, as now, many deny Jesus as the Son of God. There are many false prophets, false teachers, propagators of all kinds of doctrines and ideas. John warns the Christian to not believe just anyone and everyone that comes along teaching something, even if he seems to be a religious teacher. But put the teacher and the teaching to the test before accepting them. Like First Thessalonians 5:21, "*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*" There are so many who are naive and gullible, and who accept most anything somebody tells them without questioning or comparing it with truth. They embrace it into their hearts and lives. John tells us not to do that.

How does one test a teaching? In New Testament times there were those who had miraculous knowledge and ability to discern truth from error (First Corinthians 12). We have already seen that John spoke of some who had received an anointing that enabled them to know truth from lies (2:27). Today, we must measure by the same standard of truth that is now recorded in the inspired Word. This is the same truth by which brethren measured when that truth was in inspired men. That truth is inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient, and authoritative (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

One test that was to be applied was to ask, "What is taught concerning the identity of Christ?" This is the first test. Unless one passes this test, there really is not much use going on with other questions. Those who deny Jesus is

Deity and that He appeared in the flesh are not of God. This eliminates many religious teachers today from being reliable and credible. They deny the basic and fundamental truth regarding Christianity. They identify themselves as being antichrist. Such false teachers were in the world then and they are in the world now. We must reject both them and their doctrines.

The passage does not say that confession of Christ as God's Son is all that is necessary to be considered a true teacher. There are other truths that must be held and taught. But this is the fundamental basis of all else. If one does not confess the true identity of Jesus as Christ, the Son of God, God in the flesh while on earth, he is to immediately be shunned. Such teachers are of the world. True teachers are in the world but not of the world.

To remove the Deity of Christ, His claim as the Messiah, is to undercut everything else He said and did. It would prove Him to be a fraud and an imposter. It would destroy His authority to speak on anything. Even His teaching that condemns wickedness would be suspect. One of the reasons people disbelieve in Christ is because they want to live life in a wicked fashion, feel no guilt, allow no rebuke, and "do their own thing." The difference between those who know God and do not know God is determined by what they do regarding truth and error.

More About Love

We next turn attention to verses seven through eleven, and also verse nineteen. John speaks of loving one another. Actually, he is not changing the subject from the necessity to "*try the spirits,*" but is showing the place of love and then urging his readers to test spirits as to whether they love or not.

The source of love is God. This is a divine quality that man can develop as he walks in the paths of God. God is the very expression and demonstration of love. The passage does not teach that "love is God." Some talk so much about love, and as often as not, have no real understanding of the term as the Bible teaches it. To hear them, you would think that love is everything and everything else is nothing. But God is the very origin and manifestation of love. To not love is to show oneself not belonging to God. For this reason, we are to love one another, seek the other's highest good.

God has shown His love for mankind by sending Jesus Christ, His Son, into the world (John 3:16), whose mission was to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). Through Him we can live life more abundantly here and in the hereafter.

He Paid the Penalty

For the second time in this book John identifies Christ as "*the propitiation for our sins.*" He was God's provision to satisfy divine wrath against wickedness of which mankind is guilty. His death provided the penalty that justice demanded because of sins, and at the same time enabled the just God to offer forgiveness and salvation to those who are guilty of sin. Jesus paid the ransom price and redeemed us from sin. John reasons that since God has loved us to such an extent, it is only reasonable that we also love one another.

Notice that God loved mankind first; not that mankind loved God first (verse 19). It began with God. When man loves God it is in response to God's love for man. His example is clear and we should follow it.

God Dwells in Us

In verse twelve through sixteen, having emphasized the necessity of love, John uses love as a test to determine whether God dwells in us or not. This is not to be understood as some kind of literal, actual, personal indwelling of God. The Spirit of God dwells in us to the extent that we partake of His spirit and follow His will. When one does not love, he is not following the will and way of God and God does not live with him. But when one loves, at least in this matter, he is right with God. Acknowledging that Jesus is the Christ is one way to prove one is a true teacher. Loving others is another test that shows one to be of God.

It is beyond our comprehension that Deity would condescend to have fellowship with humanity at all, seeing His holiness and man's sinfulness. But, when certain conditions are met and the godly manner of life is pursued, God promises to be with us. Faith in Christ and love for others, as was expressly stated in First John 1:23, are marks of abiding in God and God in us.

Even though we have not and cannot literally see God, God dwells in us. God is Spirit (John 4:24), and does not have a physical form as do we in this body. But the love of God is real, and man's imitation of that love is real, and the Spirit of God is real, and fellowship between man and Deity is real. Men actually saw the Son and acknowledged Him as the Savior of the world. Our confidence is in Christ and we lean upon the love of God for us as the basis for our hope.

Benefits of Love

In verses seventeen through nineteen, love continues to be the prime emphasis. Not only is love evidence of a true spirit and approval of God, but consider the other benefits of love and the blessings it produces. We can have boldness, which means confidence, in the day of judgment. The day of judgment is before us all (Second Corinthians 5:10), and instead of it being a day of shame (Romans 9:33; 10:11), it will be a day of victory and rejoicing because we are in Him. The unknown regarding death, the judgment, eternity, causes great apprehension and fear among men, as can be expected. But those of the true spirit need not fear, because they will not see condemnation.

Love drives away fear. The more we love, the less we fear. Fear of punishment is certainly one of the ways that God motivates mankind to be saved. He also motivates us through the offer of reward. But when men love the Lord as they ought, they will serve God motivated by that love more than through fear or reward.

We have stood by the bedside of people who faced death with great terror. They had not lived as God would have people to live. They had not looked upon Christ as God's Son and did not come to Him. But we have also watched the final hours of others who faced death serenely and with security because they were God's child, and they knew it because they had obeyed His commandments. They were not afraid of the judgment that awaited them. They were bold and confident, not arrogant and proud, but assured because of their confidence in the Word of God.

Liars

This chapter closes, verses twenty and twenty-one, with John demanding that each of us make a close self-examination. Searching our hearts and seeing what is really there is essential. Is love abounding, or is there hatred for others? To claim to love God and at the same time hate another is to make oneself a liar. Again, John uses this strong term of denunciation. Without love we are false prophets. Without love God does not dwell in us. Without love we cannot truthfully claim to love God.

Five times John, called the apostle of love, has used the term, "*liar,*" (1) with reference to those who claim fellowship with God but live in sin, 1:6; (2) referring to those who deny they sin, 1:8,10; (3) those who claim to know God but do not obey Him, 2:4; (4) those who deny Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, 2:22; (5) and those who claim to love God but hate others, 4:20. The condemnation of liars is a fearful thing to contemplate (Revelation 21:8).

Let us ask ourselves, "Are we true spirits or false spirits?" The answer depends on our attitude toward Christ and toward others. The theme of this fourth chapter is faith in Christ and love for others.

* * * * *

CHAPTER FIVE

We continue the same procedure as in previous chapters, relying upon the reader to use his own Bible for the reading of the text. While this may not be as convenient for the reader, the space required is too extensive if we include the text, so it is best to take this route. After all, Bible students need to be familiar with their own Bibles.

The Necessity of Faith

We cannot be a child of God without faith in Christ. This needs no argumentation. Christ is the Son of God, the "*only begotten.*" (John 1:14, 3:16). To love God one must also love His Son. Such is the message of verses one through three.

We also learn the way that we can know if we are children of God. We can talk love, and this is well and good as far as it goes. But if that is as far as it goes, it falls

short. We are to obey the commandments of God. This is the way God has declared that we show our love.

We can know, not guess or just wonder and hope, but know if we are children of God, depending on what we do with His commandments. Please take note how inseparable God has linked faith, love, and obedience.

To consider Christ as merely a man, or just some great teacher, is not to believe in Him as we must. We must accept Him as Deity, God's Son. This is not all that God commands, but this emphasizes the essential nature of believing in Christ.

God's commandments are always for our own good. They are not grievous nor too burdensome to be obeyed. Whatever God has directed of man is for man's benefit. For this reason we ought never murmur or complain against what God has commanded, but readily and willingly obey.

4-5

Good versus Evil

Again, verses four and five remind us that we are in the world but not of the world. Our task is to overcome the evil of this world rather than being overcome by it. Sin is all around us. The world is abounding in evil. We wonder what our world would be like if there were not those in it who encouraged righteousness, refused to follow the ways of sin, and made war against evil. Who is not aware of the struggle between good and evil in our world?

Remove God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible, and you remove all reason and basis for anything righteous and good. Herein is the hideous destructiveness of atheism, humanism, and all forms of anti-God philosophy. While many people concern themselves in what is called "social reform," they have rejected God. There is no reason or standard for social reform if there is no God. The real way to improve society is to bring people to respect and obey the commands of God. Evil cannot be overcome by man's might and power. Only through Christ can evil be defeated. The Christian will overcome the world by faith and confidence in Christ.

Regarding Christ

4-13

The next portion of the text is considered by many as the most difficult part of First John. While there may

be portions of it that we find difficult, there are fundamental truths that we can learn from it. It begins with verse six that speaks of Jesus Christ. Someone came and that someone was Christ.

Verses eleven and twelve teach that God gives eternal life to those who believe in Christ. Life is in the Son, not apart from Him. But what else does the passage teach?

Christ came by water and by blood. We dare not become dogmatic in the meaning, but some things we can know. It is true that Christ's ministry began with His baptism (in water) and ended on the cross (by blood). What occurred between these two events constitute the ministry of Christ on earth. The Holy Spirit bears witness of what Christ did. His witness is the Spirit of truth.

There is controversy over verse seven whether it even belongs in the text. We are persuaded that it does. Even if we are wrong about that, we are sure that the text teaches nothing that either contradicts anything taught elsewhere, nor teaches anything that is not taught elsewhere in Scripture. We do not believe, however, that anyone has a right to add to or take from Scripture. But while there is controversy over this verse, we have looked at the evidence, which admittedly is not all that convincing either way, and have concluded that it is Scripture. Some like to take this verse to task, and with it try to degrade the King James Version of the Bible in favor of perverted volumes of modern speech. Nothing could be more ridiculous and foolish. The passage, even if it did not belong, does not fall into the same category as passages in perverted so-called "Bibles" that teach false doctrines, and contradict truths taught elsewhere.

Assuming that it belongs, it teaches the oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which we learn other places as well. If it does not belong, nothing is lost if the verse is left out because of the same teaching elsewhere.

The three witnesses that testify of Christ that John mentions are the Spirit, water, and blood. The testimony of the Spirit is precisely the same content as the ministry of Christ. They agree that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

John reasons if men will accept what other men say, how much more ought men accept what the Holy Spirit says is true. To believe the testimony of the Spirit, and keep on believing it, is to enjoy the presence of the Holy

Spirit. To disbelieve is to make oneself a liar. It accuses God of being a liar for saying that Jesus was His Son.

Therefore, the acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God not only is according to divine testimony, but reasonable, logical, and the only way to be made acceptable before God. Without it, we cannot be saved.

God Answers Prayer

John's readers were already Christians. He has mentioned several great themes thus far in this epistle, such as the nature of Christ, fellowship with the Lord, the blessings of being a child of God, testing the spirits, faith, love, judgment, and others. Yet, in verses thirteen through fifteen we have additional words that give assurance that the good things of which he has written belong to them. They can know that they have eternal life. We have already learned that they have eternal life in hope and promise. Here is something in which they can place their confidence and be strengthened in the knowledge of this relationship with God. Evidently, Christians need reassurance as they struggle in this wicked world to be reminded of the certainty of their blessings which are found in Christ.

The passage informs the reader that God is not unmindful of the Christian. His children have an avenue of approach to Him, and He will hear them. Being a believer, we have the promise that He will hear if we ask according to His will. We cannot just ask for anything, just any way, and expect Him to answer just as we have asked. This is not what is promised. But, as earthly fathers respond to the petitions of their children, our Heavenly Father will respond to our petitions as He sees is best for us. This is another truth of which we can be sure; namely, that God hears and answers the prayers of His spiritual children. In view of the fact that many speak of prayer, let us take note that the assurance of being heard and answered is given to His children, not those who remain aloof and separated from Christ in the world.

Sin Unto Death

Not only is it proper to pray for one another when we sin, but it is improper to pray for what John defines as a "*sin unto death.*" To understand the meaning, we must

draw upon knowledge that we glean from other passages regarding sin, and the way God forgives sin. John mentions sins that are not unto death, but also mentions a sin unto death. Since the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), it might seem that any and all sins are sins unto death. But a sin that is forgiven is not unto death. We can be delivered from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2,3). Sins that are forgiven will not be counted against us (Romans 4:7,8).

Therefore, it is proper to pray to God that He will forgive the sins of a brother if and when the terms of forgiveness are met. Of course, God has promised to do this. We pray for the fulfillment of that promise. Sins cannot and will not be forgiven unless the conditions of forgiveness are met. It does no good to pray for sins to be forgiven when the one who is guilty will not repent of his sins. God will not go against His own will and forgive sins when man rejects the terms God has given.

A "*sin unto death*" is a sin of which a brother will neither repent , nor will confess (Acts 8:22; First John 1:9) A "*sin not unto death*" is a sin that will not condemn because it is forgiven, the terms of pardon being obeyed.

Verse seventeen gives us another of the several definitions of sin as revealed in the Bible. Fail to do good (James 4:17), violate the conscience (Romans 14:23 transgress the law of God (First John 4:3), or commit unrighteousness (First John 5:17) all constitute sin.

Words of Certainty

The closing verses, eighteen through twenty, include three things of which John was sure, and in which we can have equal confidence and certainty. One, even though as children of God we can sin, sin is so incompatible with being a child of God, we will keep ourselves away from sin all that we can. Two, we can know that we are children of God according to the standards already discussed in this book, and in Romans 8:16. While the world is in wickedness, we are in God. Third, Christ has come, and we can understand Him, know Him, be in Him, and in so doing have the assurance of life eternal.

The last verse, twenty-one, is an admonition that, if not heeded, would destroy the hope the Christian has. To turn to an idol, whether physical or mental, would be to

place something or someone before God. This is the surest way to destroy one's spiritual acceptance before God. God must be first. The Christian knows this, and lives accordingly.

The word, "*Amen,*" literally means, "so be it." In other words, having written the great truths of this epistle, John concludes by saying, "Let it be as I have written." To this, every faithful child of God will say, "Amen."

* * * * *

Second and Third John

Because of the relatively short length of these two epistles, it seems appropriate to study them in one lesson. They are similar in structure, and ideas presented, as well as the purpose of them, even in some of the language used. Because of their similar terminology, we have confidence that the same man who wrote the book of John, and First John, also was the one the Holy Spirit used to write these two short letters.

SECOND JOHN

In verses one through four John calls himself, "*the elder,*" probably having reference to comparative age. Who is the "*elect lady*" to whom the letter is addressed? It was either some congregation, or some faithful Christian woman and her children. Whether we can ascertain this with certainty is subject to question. Regardless, it was from an apostle of Christ to followers of Christ. When the Scripture leaves a matter uncertain, we are wise to leave it that way rather than attempt to be so sure about such things of which we cannot be sure.

John mentions three things he had in common with his readers. One, they have a love for one another. Two, they both loved the truth. Three, they both had the truth dwelling in them. This means they were walking, living, conducting their lives in harmony with God's truth. John found it easy to have exceptional love for such people, even

as we can. He sends a very gracious greeting to those who loved him and the truth enough to live according to it.

Motive

Verses five and six is where John reminds them of the highest motive for any endeavor. It was obviously not the first time they had been taught to love. In that sense it was not a new commandment. The teaching of love had been prominent in the doctrine of Christ from the start. The writings of John are so filled with teaching regarding love that John has been called "the apostle of love." The newness of love, as taught by Christ, was that we are to love as He loved.

John defines what he means by love. While there are those who speak of love as if it meant nothing more than sweet talk, toleration of sin, a mushy permissiveness this is not as John defines it. A word of advice is passed along in this connection. Brethren, be careful of those people who talk, "love, love, love." They often prove to be the most vicious, undercutting, back-stabbing, unstable and unreliable people anywhere. They "love" only so long as you do what they want, and you allow them to use you for their purposes. If you do not "go along" with them, even in error, they will rend you asunder, as they shout, "Love."

To John, loving was doing what God commanded. Obedience is inseparable from genuine Christian love. John had noted this earlier in First John 5:3. Men may talk of love, encourage love, express words of love, but the way to have and demonstrate love is to do what God has taught. John reflects the teaching of Jesus when Jesus said, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" (John 14:15).

Warning

Verses seven and eight include warnings against false teachers and the havoc they cause. To some, to expose even a false teacher is not "loving." But we do better to rely on John than those pseudo-lovers. These false teachers were antichrist because they denied that Deity had come in the flesh. To deny that truth is to deny the basic fundamental rock upon which all of Christianity is built. Their kind are not all gone from the earth. Many such antichrists run loose today, do they not?

Christians must be on guard, attentive, alert, vigilant, lest the alluring false ways lead them from the truth. Here is positive proof that Christians can lose what has been gained. But the reward can be ours.

Who is the false teacher? Verses nine through eleven deal with this matter, as well as the extent of our association with false teachers and our attitude toward them. Those who go onward, beyond, step outside the boundaries and limits of the doctrine of Christ are false teachers. To be true to the truth, one must abide within the divinely given limits of His teaching. One that operates according to his own authority has violated the boundaries of truth. Those who transgress the limits are false.

What is the doctrine of Christ? It is the doctrine or teaching that was given by and through Christ, spoken by Christ, and taught by those who were appointed and inspired to teach in His name, or by His authority. This includes information about Christ, but much more. It is everything, every precept, command, teaching, that came from God through Christ. It includes apostolic teaching as well, for they taught as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, bringing what Christ taught to their minds (John 14,15,16).

Have Not God

The seriousness of going beyond the doctrine of Christ is seen in the statement that those who do so have not God. Only those who abide within His doctrine have the Father and the Son.

Faithful Christian people will shun false teachers. They will not extend fellowship to them. They will not bid them, "*Godspeed,*" or wish them well in their endeavors. They will make a distinction concerning them, and will not encourage, support, condone, cooperate with, have anything to do with false teachers. To do so is tantamount to saying to them, "I am with you, even in your error." It is to count them as allies and one becomes just a guilty of their error as the false teacher. Generally speaking, brethren in our time pay far too little attention to this teaching of Christ. Discipline of those who teach error is a rarity among present-day churches. They have this sick attitude of "go-along-ism" that has invaded the ranks of Christians to the extent that one can teach, support, promote, endorse just about anything, except those who will not support just anything, and still be considered faithful

and fellowship is extended. This is a mark of disgrace on our age. It is the paving of the way of digression that we are experiencing more and more. But whether brethren care for the teaching of John or not, it remains true, and if we be as loyal to the truth as we say we are, we would not tolerate false teachers in our pulpits, pews, colleges, classes, lectureships, and elsewhere. But, as stated, few have much use for the Word of God along this line today.

John closed by telling his beloved readers that whatever else he wished to tell them he would do so in person. This implies his expectation to visit them in person, as indicated in verses twelve and thirteen.

THIRD JOHN

This short epistle is addressed to one named Gaius. Obviously, there is a great love and affection between John and Gaius because of the exceptional greeting of great warmth. The basis of their love was the relationship each one had with the truth.

Gaius

In the first four verses it is evident that John had heard news about Gaius, that truth was in him, that he walked in the truth. What a compliment to receive! Gaius was what the Lord wants a Christian to be. This good report concerning him brought John joy.

John was interested in his material welfare as he was in his spiritual welfare. He prayed that Gaius might prosper in both realms of life. He referred to Gaius as his child, probably in the sense of teacher and student, one who was older writing to one who was younger, and had been led to Christ by John.

In verses five through eight, John adds compliments and commendations to Gaius. From this we can learn what good things we should imitate to also be considered pleasing to God.

What Gaius did, he did well. He was not a slacker. Not only did he do good for his brethren, but for strangers as well. All the church knew of his good deeds. He was busy letting his light shine (Matthew 5:16). Particularly good was he in helping brethren when they came his way. Hospitality was one of his distinguishing marks. He

served God by serving others and helping others in their service to God. He recognized that good brethren were in fellowship in the truth, and deserved what help he might give them. He was busy in doing this.

Diotrophes

There was some strife where Gaius lived, as seen in verses nine through eleven. While Gaius did good, received good brethren, helped them along, there was a man named Diotrophes who was quite opposite. This man wanted to be "big dog in the kennel." Everything had to go his way. If someone did not bow and scrape to him, and do just what he wanted, he would "throw them out." He was possessed with the desire to be "boss." I have known men in the church, particularly men in places of authority, who acted as if God had granted them some special dispensation to "boss" everybody in the congregation, especially the preachers. They even have spoken of their role as being "boss." This is a tragic situation for anyone to develop. But we have known such people.

The only way Diotrophes could "throw his weight around" was to speak malicious and evil words against others, forbidding, casting out, objecting to whatever from wheresoever, demanding that everyone support him and his way. This was likely in matters of judgment, human opinion, because we are to follow the truth in matters of faith. He may have even demanded the support of his errors. Some do that.

John said Diotrophes would be remembered when John came, indicating that John intended to set him down at that time, and return him to a more acceptable manner of conduct among brethren. John teaches that going the way of Diotrophes is evil. Probably nothing is more detrimental to the welfare of a local church than to have a Diotrophes in it, an elder, or anyone, who must run everything his own way, and woe be to those who do not abide by him!

Demetrius

In contrast to Diotrophes, there was another man named Demetrius, for whom John had some kind words. Like Gaius, Demetrius was a good man, of good report, who was strong and faithful to the truth. Gaius and

Demetrius are examples of the kind of Christians we ought to be even as Diotrophes is a demonstration of what we should try to avoid.

As in Second John, John closes his letter with expressions of desire and intent to pay a personal visit and see them face to face (verses 13,14). With these loving words of departure, he closes, giving emphasis to personal affection one for the other.

* * * * *

Warring in the Flesh Against the Flesh

Second Corinthians 10:3-6, "*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.*"

This is one of many passages that defines and describes what it means to be a Christian. Christian living is pictured in the Bible as a race to be run, a pilgrimage, labor in a vineyard, service to a king, even a warfare.

Our Opponent and Enemy

We have a foe. There is a conflict, and we have a mission. There are weapons to be used in this fight, both offensive and defensive. Paul wrote Timothy, "*Fight the good fight of faith.*" (First Timothy 6:12). He said, "*I have fought a good fight.*" (Second Timothy 4:7). We are to "*war the good warfare.*" (First Timothy 1:8). Timothy was told to "*suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*" (Second Timothy 2:3). If we would be Christians we must enlist in the Lord's army, which is the church, and look to Jesus as the "*captain of our salvation.*" (Hebrews 2:10). We must prepare for battle with intensified training, following the commands of the Lord.

Meaning of Flesh

Paul notes that we "*walk in the flesh.*" The Christian is flesh in that he lives in the body. Philippians 1:22, "*But if I live in the flesh.*" He lived with a body that has all the needs, desires, wants, appetites such as is common to man. Becoming a Christian does not mean our body changes. In the body we, like Paul, are tempted and tried, Satan appealing through the propensities, inclinations, weaknesses, and desires of the flesh. John warns of the lust of the flesh (First John 2:15). An appeal to the flesh was the way Satan approached Eve, Christ, and all people. We should avoid temptation and pray, "*Lead us not into temptation.*" We are taught to "*flee youthful lusts.*"

Temptation cannot be avoided because we live in a world of sin and we are flesh, subject to the devil's appeal. It is not temptation alone that destroys, but yielding to temptation. Christ was tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). The development of sin from lust to destruction is revealed in James 1:13-15. "*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*"

God has not placed any desire or need in the body that is evil in itself. Such things are right and good. God has provided a way for the satisfaction of every need and desire within His will. Man's trouble is that he seeks satisfaction outside the will of the Lord.

Satan's Appeal; Our Control

By appealing to our fleshly side, Satan leads us to seek satisfaction of our desires in an unlawful and sinful way. Before becoming a Christian we "*lived in the lusts of our flesh.*" (Ephesians 2:3). As Christians, we are to "*put off the body of the sins of the flesh.*" (Colossians 2:11).

We cannot escape being flesh, nor can we totally escape temptation. We must wage a determined, diligent warfare against sinful fulfillments and unlawful satisfactions of the needs and desires of the body. Christians learn to control the body, limit and restrict it, in keeping with what God has decreed is right and lawful.

To accomplish victory over the flesh is the goal of our warfare. The mind or will must control the passions and lusts of the body. The soul must have power over the body rather than the body being in control. First Peter 2:11, "*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.*" Romans 7:22-25, " *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*" Paul recognized this great conflict rages with each of us as it did with him. First Corinthians 9:27, "*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*" Anyone can surrender to the body. But it is the person of character and conviction that controls the body.

Spiritual Warfare

God has mercifully and adequately given us weapons for this warfare. Our weapons are " *not according to the flesh.*" We are not speaking of a carnal warfare, but a spiritual one where spiritual weapons are used. We seek the overthrow of Satan's strongholds, and casting down his deceptions. We overcome the arguments against God's way, bringing the thoughts, mind, and heart into obedience to Christ. Ephesians 6:12, "*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*"

When Jesus was seized, He said to Peter, "*Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.*" (Matthew 26:52). The physical sword has its place, but not to spread the influence and faith of Christ. The borders of His kingdom are not enlarged through physical warfare. How different from the Mohammedan faith! John 18:36, "*Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence.*" So we need not expect to find carnal weapons at our disposal to fight the "*good fight of faith.*"

The Mind and Will

When a person's mind is in harmony with the Holy Spirit, his mind will prevent his body from satisfying fleshly lusts unlawfully. Galatians 5:16,17,"*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*" Man's will, being brought into subjection to the will of God, will not allow him to do evil things that he might otherwise do.

Ephesians 6:10-18 is an extended passage that presents the armor God has provided. While reading this passage, notice our spiritual weaponry is presented in terms of physical weapons. The purpose of the armor is clear. "*Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil..., Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*"

Truth is a weapon. Lies, falsehoods do not equip us to control the body. Righteousness is right-doing as God commands it. The gospel is God's power to save. There is no victory over our foe without the gospel.

Other Weapons

Faith is our shield. The reason many are crushed beneath temptation and sin is because they have allowed themselves to be seduced by the vain and false philosophies that destroy faith. We cannot please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). First John 5:4,5, "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*" How different is this message from that offered us by the skeptics, atheists, infidels, humanists, and those who preach the agnosticism that we cannot really "know" truth. Faith in God, Christ, the Holy Spirit prepares a person's mind to exercise regulation of the body according to God's directions.

Salvation is a part of our armor. Salvation is the great gift from God to man. It comes with forgiveness of sin that would otherwise bar us from eternal life with God. While many do not give proper consideration to life after death, the Christian does and knows he is saved, enjoys

salvation now, and, remaining faithful, is assured of his place with God. This reality motivates, encourages, and urges him forward in faithfulness to exercise godly restraint and control over the ways of the flesh.

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, a two-edged sword that cuts offensively and defensively. Man cannot rely on human wisdom, philosophies, theologies, psychiatry, or anything above the Word of God. Little wonder we are commanded to study (Second Timothy 2:15), because the Word is our powerful tool to advance against Satan and defend ourselves against his blows. Without the Word and the knowledge of it, we are easy prey.

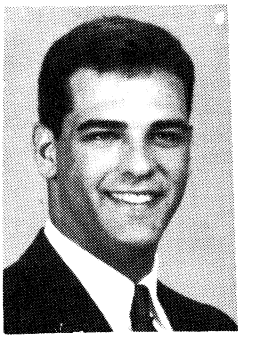
Prayer is one of man's links with Deity, and our vital supply line in the life of His army. Prayer shows our dependence on God, recognition of His majesty, enabling us to express ourselves to God, to praise Him, thank Him, and make petition to Him. With such weapons, rightly used, our hearts and minds are strengthened in this spiritual warfare against the sinfulness of the flesh.

It is accurate to describe our warfare as a matter of life or death, spiritual life or spiritual death. "*The wages of sin is death.*" (Romans 6:23). But the verse continues, "*But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" We cannot cast aside the weapons God has provided us and expect to defeat the spiritual enemy. Without what God has provided us, we are helpless and hopeless. As fleshly beings we would have no way to repel that which destroys us. We will either win the war or lose it, individually. Each must fight the good fight. Jesus was able to overcome the world, (John 16:33), and through Him, so shall we.

* * * * *

In this issue are the last four of seven lessons on First, Second , and Third John. One of the better attended and more instructive gospel meetings I have preached was when I preached six of these seven lessons, beginning on Sunday night through Friday night. Time prohibited the last one. But people came, with Bible in hand, and we studied from the Scriptures these inspired revelations directed primarily to Christian people. I suggest others might plan similar efforts. People appreciated it.

James Samuel Boyd Graduates!



May 7, 1991 will always be a day to remember in the life of our youngest son, and a proud day for his father and mother. Sam received his degree from David Lipscomb University that day, and this means that all four of our children have a college education. For this we are very grateful. Because of his character and personality, being a faithful child of the Lord, we have so many reasons for which to give thanks regarding Sam. A notable milestone has been reached by him, and our entire family with his accomplishment. He is to be congratulated.

* * * * *

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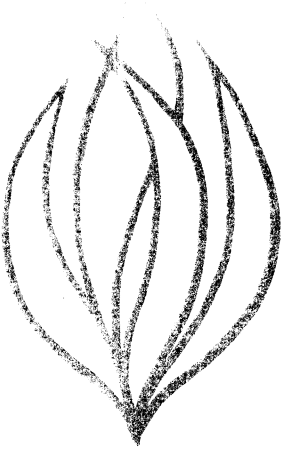

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XII James W. Boyd NUMBER 3

Our Underestimated And Unprepared Youth

Without any intention to misrepresent young people, there are two words that I suggest describe so many young people today. These words are ***underestimated*** and ***unprepared***. Neither convey derision toward youth. One refers to an error that many of those of us who are older make regarding young people, and the other refers to something often lacking in young people. It is a shortcoming often found among older people as well.

First Samuel 17:33 reads, "*And David said to Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock.*" This statement was made by David during the time when Goliath was challenging Israel. David had come to the camp with supplies for his brothers, but he heard and saw the defiant giant. Even though nobody was willing to accept Goliath's challenge, David offered himself to fight him. Saul's reaction was, "*Thou are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth..*" On the basis of age, Saul would have denied David the opportunity to defend Israel and save God's people. Saul considered David unprepared for such a fight. Because David was young, Saul underestimated him.

David's Difference

Possibly Saul's evaluation of David would have been correct with many of the youths of Israel. But David was different. How was he different? David had faith in God and put his trust in Him. He had been taught and had learned to walk in the paths of righteousness rather than to lean on his own wisdom, power, ability, and talent. He leaned on God. We know the outcome of the conflict between David and Goliath.

What of our young people" Do we discount them and disqualify them too quickly, simply because they are young? Have we underestimated them? Are they really as unprepared as we think? If they are, are we not the ones responsible for their preparation? There is a way for them to be prepared for the life they must live and it lies to a great extent with those of us to whom their care has been entrusted to assist in that preparation.

While some youths would not wish to admit it, few of them realize how dependent they are on the older generation. Often older people are not as aware as they ought how dependent youth is on the aged. It is obvious that many young people are not prepared to serve God and are not being prepared. Someone has said, "Never has one generation of youths been told so much that they are so superior, yet, at the same time are they so ill-equipped to really meet life and live it successfully as God would have them to live." Another has said, "Seldom does one see a generation that considers itself to know so much and be so wise, yet, manifest such ignorance of things that really matter, and behave so foolishly." Whether these estimates are valid, we do not wish to argue. Possibly there may be some overstatement, but probably much truth lies in there. But each generation needs to be prepared for life before God. If the young are underestimated and unprepared, surely a great portion of the blame rests on those who have gone before them. Our lesson will center itself on the responsibility of the older generation.

Serious Problems

We see all around such evidence of moral and spiritual decay in the "rock and roll" culture, with drugs, unwed mothers, pornography, drunkenness, and every sort of anti-social behavior. These may be extremes and not represent all youth, to be sure. But there is a real concern for the less extreme because so many youths are without moral standards, wandering about without spiritual guidance and restraint that is essential to the building of noble character. This is not because there is no standard, but because the standard is ignored. We have seen several decades of degeneracy being promoted on a large scale and the fruits are being witnessed everywhere. What is sown must be reaped, and the harvest is becoming of such

concern because the very fibre of the nation seems to be unravelling. Young people, though bearing some of the fault for this condition, have been let down by many of the older generation.

They have been let down at home. Many have houses, but not good homes. Parental delinquency breeds juvenile delinquency. Neither money, social standing, nor any such thing is an adequate substitute for a good home that is governed by spiritual guidance, emphasizing spiritual qualities. There is lack of discipline, many parents not knowing where their children are or what they are doing. Youths are granted liberties usually extended only to adults, and the young are proving themselves incapable of handling these freedoms because they have neither matured nor are they instructed how to choose between right and wrong.

American youth has been butchered by divorce, unwed parents, parental neglect and selfishness of parents who seek their own welfare without regard to the effect on children. American homes have let down American youth in so many instances. But we pass forward.

The schools have not been what they should be. Secularism and materialism has captured the educational scene on every level with few exceptions. The motive for learning is money, power, self, not service. Education has been separated from the guidance of God and morality to the point we have vast hordes of educated animals.

There is probably no one place where the faith of Christ has been under attack more than in the public and private school systems of this nation for several decades. Humanism is the guidepost. That many are becoming aware of the deficiencies of the school systems is one hopeful sign for future improvement. But too much emphasis is on better buildings, equipment, curriculum, with a continued negative attitude toward proper behavior.

Failure of Churches

Youths have been let down by churches. Why are so many young people anti-religious? It is partly because religion has shown so little influence in the lives of older people. It

is because Christianity has been so polluted with human doctrines and hypocrisy that the true faith is only discovered with great difficulty. Churches have become so secular, political, recreational, social, and economical that they have abandoned the role of emphasizing God, His Word, salvation, and the need of being cleansed of sin.

Young people are let down when they are not taught and shown the proper attitude toward honest labor. We have built a welfare state where many expect hand-outs and think it is their right to get them, feeling cheated if they do not receive them. To rear a person to think the world owes him a living is to maim him for life. So many want to do as little as possible, having no aspiration any higher than "getting by," or getting it easily. Honesty, doing a good job, are not the goals of enough youths. As one has said, "The first thing many young people want to know about a job is the pay, how much vacation, and when can they retire, and with how much." Too many never think about what service they can render in life, or being a benefit in their work for others, even earning so they can help. Slothfulness and slackness has been the calling of many. This parasite attitude has eaten away at the core of honest endeavor. The nation crawls with leeches who contribute nothing, but seek to siphon away the life blood of others who work.

Wrong Goals

Many youths have been misled to think that a "high standard of living" is the ultimate goal of life and success. Who has learned that enough is as bountiful as an abundance? People feel cheated if they do not have all they want. They seem to think, in spite of the words of Jesus, that man does live by bread alone. Some, like the rich fool of Luke twelve, think all is well because they do have plenty. They waste themselves and their resources like the prodigal of Luke fifteen.

Bad Examples

But has the older generation given them the right example to follow? The youths do not own and operate the television stations, instigate the programs, control the radios, movies, and newspapers. Who owns and operates the bar rooms, taverns, liquor stores, pornography magazines?

Who is really responsible for the teaching that results in the flood of violence, vulgarity, immorality, murder, and death so commonplace in our society? Can that be blamed on the youth? Or are the young people more often the dupes which are the victims of the ploys of older ones who seek money, anyway they can get it? For money, American adults have sponsored the vilest corruption the world has known and exploited the youth in getting it.

But this gives us sufficient scenes of our present reality. Reviewing shortcomings alone is of little value unless we seek and follow some constructive steps to make our young people modern-day Davids, capable of facing modern-day Goliaths.

Every Christian should sense his own duty in this matter. Churches should attack the problem with vigor and determination. Parents must first make their homes Christian, with respect for the Bible, prayer, and the God-given foundations upon which a young boy and girl can build the right kind of life. Sincerity, love, insistence on obedience, teaching, and showing the way of right can accomplish the good our young people must hear and see.

How to turn the school's negative influence around is hard to prescribe because so much of the power of the educational systems lies in the hands of those who have little to no respect for God and His Word. The hypocrisy rampant in schools operated by those who say they are Christians is a gigantic barrier to good education. Nelson Bell wrote, "Where godless teachers scoff at the Christian faith, or in other ways try to undermine religion, they should be dismissed for contributing to the delinquency of minors." This should include teachers and all others connected with education. With this thought, we would concur, but our diversified society makes this positive and constructive move difficult to achieve. Everybody seemingly has their "right" to curse God, but those who choose to serve Him are cut down.

Many have sought schools operated by men and women of faith instead of what the state offers. This has historically been beneficial, but often today even some of these schools are contaminated with professors and leaders who have drunk deeply from the same foul waters as others and

delight in passing along the doctrine that the "old fogey" past must be uprooted and replaced with the "knowledge" of the modern, often skeptical, "scholar." How many years it will take before people get their eyes open and see the fruit being borne cannot be predicted! But may God hasten the day!

The Solution

You may have noticed a lack of Scriptures thus far in the lesson. We have been observing the situation as it exists. But the one, primary, essential passage relevant to this discussion is Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*" Training is the key to preparing. The home is the basic unit of society and the first training ground. Until the homes have more regard for God's intent for the home, we can only expect the situation to continue or grow worse. The church is to be the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*" Unless the church maintains a strong stance for the truth and against error it renders itself useless for mankind. Why should the church be little more than an echo of the sinful, materialistic, pleasure-seeking world?

Who can possibly know what "giant" stands before our young? Changes occur so rapidly and the world is unstable. Dare we send our children into it unprepared and easy prey for the forces of the devil? We do not want to make the mistake of Saul, and declare them unfit simply because they are young. But we must make sure they are prepared. Our task is before us and our duty is clear. Satan is our foe and God is our helper and strength. Our failure is the doom of our own flesh and blood, but our victory will result in the salvation of us all.

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ISLAM

With so many in the world following the faith if Islam, and most of them hostile to us and our faith, believing it right to defend and spread their faith through "holy wars," we need to acquaint ourselves about this religion, and see it for the system it really is. JWB

Subject to God Through Christ

The Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Over thirty-eight hundred times reference is made to God's Word, "*thus saith the Lord,*" and other references to what the Lord has spoken. It is man's lamp unto his feet and guide to his path because it tells man of his original, purpose, how to live, and eternal destiny. It shall endure forever (First Peter 2:25).

The Bible teaches that man is accountable to God (Acts 17:31; Second Corinthians 5:10). Therefore, an understanding of the Bible is vital to our welfare. The fact that we shall be held accountable shows that God expects us to know His will, and obey it. It was given for that purpose (First Corinthians 2:12,13). While we recognize there are portions of Scripture that we find difficult to understand, we can know and believe the truth to the salvation of our souls (John 20:30,31).

In order to know, we must study (Second Timothy 2:15). Understanding demands "*rightly dividing*" or "*handling aright*" the word of truth. We have to respect all of the Scripture as inspired of God, but realize that all of it is not applicable to us today as far as giving us the will of God that He expects us to follow under Christ. This statement requires further elaboration. Let me illustrate.

The Question

The most important question a person can ask, whether he realizes it or not, is, "What must I do to be saved?" There is something man must do to please God (Matthew 7:21). In Scripture we read many things people have been taught to do and not to do. Which of those things gives answer to this momentous question for you and me? This leads us to discuss dispensations.

A dispensation is a system of rule over a span of time by which God governs man during that time. We live subject to the same God as did those in ancient days, but we live under different rules and a different system of religion. Our failure to understand this will prevent us from knowing what applies today, what is now expected, for what we are accountable.

The Scriptures present three dispensations, each with distinguishing characteristics, although some traits are common to all three. Let us now turn our attention to these things.

Patriarchal Age

The first dispensation is called the Patriarchal Age because it was a period of father rule. We read of this period entirely in the Old Testament. The word **patriarch** means **father.** This period was characterized by God speaking to the heads of families and through them giving His instructions. It was a family religion where the father served as priest or go-between between God and man. Such men as Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived under such a system.

There was not a written law, but God's directions were orally given. It called for worship in the form of animal sacrifices, altars, etc. We read of sacrifices offered by Abel, Abraham, Noah and others that were pleasing to God. Cain offered an unacceptable sacrifice in this same period.

We must notice that the principles of faith and obedience were very prominent in this age, as we shall observe them to be in all three dispensations. Even though they believed and obeyed laws and rules that were peculiar to them and their time, these principles were dominant. In Hebrews, chapter eleven, we read of various people in the Patriarchal Age who, "*by faith,*" obeyed what God told them do to.

Mosaic Age

The second dispensation is called the Mosaic Age because it is characterized by God speaking to the nation of Israel through the laws that He gave through Moses. Beginning at

Sinai, God directed this one special nation of people in this fashion. The laws that God gave to Moses were never for any other nation except Israel. Whereas the Patriarchal Age consisted of a family religion, this age was one of a national religion. As the fathers served as priests in the first age, there was a special priesthood, taken from among the tribe of Levi, under this system.

Similar to the first, this second age also included worship by animal sacrifices alongside other rituals of worship. There were many observances of days, years, seasons, feasts, fastings, washing, pilgrimages, and other formalized manners of worship.

The Mosaic Age was characterized by a written law even though God also often spoke directly to various ones. It was intended and designed to be a temporary system, exclusively for Israel, until Christ came (Galatians 3:24,25). It provided the coming Christian Age with examples and lessons (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11), that would be applicable to those under Christ. It was not intended to be lasting, but was taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross, fulfilled by the coming and mission of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:14; Matthew 5:17,18; Ephesians 2:15; Romans 7:1-7; Galatians 3:18, and others).

But we see again the operation of the principles of faith and obedience, God's mercy and grace, blessings to those who conform to the will of God, and God's wrath being manifested against every evil way.

Under Christ

The third dispensation of the Bible is the Christian Age, so called because it is the period when God hath spoken through His Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1,2). This age had been the goal of the first two. As early as Genesis 3:15 arrows had been pointing to the coming of man's Savior, the seed of woman, the redeemer of all mankind. God made great promises to Abraham, including the one whereby all the families of the earth would be blessed through his seed, which Paul identified as Christ (Galatians 3:16).

This system and period, that will extend until the return of Christ and the end of the world, is the "*last days*" and final dispensation. It came into authority on the first day of Pentecost following the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ, when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles as Jesus had promised, and the good news of salvation through Christ was first announced to the sinful and doomed world.

Whereas the former dispensations were either a family or national religion, the faith of Christ is for all men everywhere. It is a universal religion and the inclusion of accountability extends to everyone. For this reason the gospel is to be preached to every creature.

Like the Mosaic Age, there is the written law of Christ, which is the New Testament revelation. It is the gospel age, the age of the existence of the kingdom of God that had been foretold, promised, prophesied, and gradually unfolded in plan during the former ages. Jesus is now reigning as King over His spiritual kingdom, which is the church. Those who are in the church are the same ones who compose the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). It is an age when men must respond to the will of God as revealed through the authority of His Son, for there is no other to whom we can turn for salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

As in former ages, there is the necessity for worship, faith, obedience, and the manifestation of the grace, love, and mercy of God. Blessings belong to the obedient and punishment can be expected by those who choose to ignore God and His Son.

Apply This Truth

Now a practical application of what we have learned is before us. Concerning the all-important question, "What must I do to be saved?" we turn not to directions that may have been given to the patriarchs or the Jews through Moses. We must learn the will of God as it came through Christ, for it is obvious we live subject to God in this age, the others having long ago terminated.

To learn how to worship God today, we turn not to learn what Abraham or Moses did, but what the early Christians

did as they were guided by the inspired apostles. Whereas some of the principles of God's dealings with man are the same from age to age, the specifics of God's ordinances and commands have varied. Noah was told to build an ark, but we are not so commanded. Moses was commanded to cross the Red Sea, but we do not cross that sea. Abraham was never commanded to eat the Lord's Supper or be baptized, but we are. Instrumental music may have been heard in former ages, but that is not authority for today. Animal sacrifices no longer are offered because Christ was once offered for the sins of man, and that is the all-inclusive and sufficient sacrifice to which all previous sacrifices were but types and forerunners. Circumcision was a part of the Mosaic system, as were the Ten Commandments, but they are not included in the Christian system. We are not to steal, to be sure, but not because God through Moses told the Jews not to steal, but because God through the authority of Christ teaches us not to steal. It is a matter of recognition of who has the authority. All authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 28:18). "*The law came by Moses, but grace and truth through Jesus Christ.*" (John 1:17).

The authority of Christ extends through the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, and as inspired men committed to Scripture that which is inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient.

We shall stand before God in judgment, as shall all others who have ever lived, regardless of the dispensation under which they lived. But we shall be judged according to the words of Christ (John 12:48), and all others shall be judged according to the laws under which they lived.

Unless we "*rightly divide*" the Scriptures according to dispensations, we shall remain in the confusion of the present religious world that has taken part of this system, that system, another system, and mixed them all together and produced no system that has ever been ordained of God. Each past age had a God-given purpose. Now all men are subject to God through Christ. Do you know what Jesus has commanded? Have you obeyed Him? We shall answer when God shall judge us by Him (Acts 17:31).

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The Dangerous Christ

The second chapter of Matthew records the birth of Jesus Christ and the surrounding events of that momentous occasion. The birth of Christ by the virgin Mary brought forth songs of praise from the angels, made the shepherds rejoice, and wise man came bringing gifts and worshipping. The prophecies of old were fulfilled and Deity had taken the form of humanity. But at the same time the birth of Christ, the Son of God, struck terror in the hearts of some, and brought danger to them. While we usually do not associate Jesus, the lowly Nazarene and loving Savior of mankind as a source of danger and threat, yet, He was so perceived by some at His birth, and even yet by many today.

Herod was troubled when he learned of His birth from the wise men. He deceptively sought to know His whereabouts under the guise of wishing to worship Him, but actually seeking opportunity to kill Him. So vicious was he that Joseph, being warned to flee the land, took Mary and the Child to Egypt until Herod's death. When they returned, they went not to Jerusalem, but north to the insignificant village of Nazareth where He grew to manhood.

A Threat to Some

For some the glorious Savior and Christ is a deliverer, provider of hope, joy, peace, and salvation. But for others He is a disturber who startles, confounds, resists, and condemns the wickedness they practice. While it may seem incredible that the One born in Bethlehem is a danger to anyone, it was so considered about Him from the moment of His birth until now. But for whom is Jesus Christ a danger? We shall mention only four groups of people.

Christ poses a threat and hazard to those who have a closed mind and a prejudiced heart, those who have their own little world, thoughts, doctrines, and who would not allow what they believe to be investigated in the light of the Bible,

the Word of God. What they hear from Jesus disturbs them because it means they are in error and they wish to continue as they are undisturbed. Error cannot withstand the truth, and those in error are fearful of the truth. A closed mind often caused Israel to depart from the Lord. "*And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee.*" (Ezekiel 3:7). Israel often would refuse to listen to the message of God through the prophets.

A closed mind prevented Herod and others from realizing the truth that had been foretold by the prophets. Nathaniel had a closed mind and prejudiced heart the first time he was told of the coming of the Christ. He said, "*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*"

One of the blind spots of the scribes and Pharisees was a closed mind. John 12:39, 40. "*Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.*" Jesus was often grieved and angered at their hardness. Mark 5:3," *And when he looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.*"

We are still warned against a hardened heart. Hebrews 3:8, "*Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness.*" Our Lord has not fellowship with those who close their minds against the truth. Only those of honest and good heart will maintain communion with the Lord.

A Danger to Others

Christ is a danger to the selfish, who seek their own gain and exercise their greed, even through the exploitation of others. The selfless Christ is not pleased with the selfish person. Yet, so many seem to live life to get for themselves and have no concern for others. They would even sacrifice their duty to God in order to have the paltry offerings of this world.

What must the Lord think of anyone who would traffic in sin, selling and promoting wickedness, immorality, disease, strong drink, harmful drugs, smutty literature, etc. just to get more money? Those who are the merchants of vice may be considered somewhat in the eyes of their fellowmen, but the contrast between their manner of life and that which Jesus taught should make them very uncomfortable. They have no liking for this Christ born in Bethlehem.

Enemy of Hypocrisy

Christ is a danger to those who are only casually and formally religious. Inasmuch as we are among the religious people of the world, we should take a close look at ourselves. Is our service to God sincere, sacrificial, whole-hearted? That little Babe placed in the manger grew to become a very outspoken opponent of pretense and hypocrisy.

Hosea 6: 6 reads, "*I desire mercy, not sacrifice.*" God was not rejecting the need of sacrifice as He had commanded, but emphasized that worship must be coupled with righteous living. Many are religious, but not righteous. Proverbs 15:8, "*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.*" Proverbs 28:9, "*He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.*" There are no stronger words to be read in Scripture than the denunciation by Jesus of hypocrisy found in Matthew, chapter twenty-three. How He condemned those who put on such a display of being religious, but who followed their own ways more than the ways of God; who wanted everyone to think them pious, but who were wicked within. Jesus said they were full of iniquity, outwardly prim and proper, but corrupt and rotten of spirit. They were as vipers, serpents, and were children of hell.

Why did the Lord speak so harshly toward these hypocrites? Did He hate them? No! He loved them even while He hated their sin. Christ showed Himself a danger to those who would make a show of religion, whose faith was more word than work, convenience rather than conviction, one of pride rather than personal devotion, who

served out of compulsion rather than compassion, from a fear of hell more than a love for God.

How the Wicked Fear Him

Christ is also a danger to those who choose to live an immoral, defiant, rebellious, disobedient life. His entire mission was to do battle with evil because He knew that evil is man's worst enemy. His love for man would allow Him no other course than to resist the devil and his influence.

The work of Christ, even as our work after Him, consists of a spiritual warfare against the forces of wickedness wherever wickedness is found. Those who choose the side of wrong against the Lord shall be eternally punished (Second Thessalonians 1: 6-9). Christ came not to judge and condemn the world, but to be man's Savior (John 12:47). But, in the same passage, Jesus said His Word would judge, and those who rejected His Word would be condemned. God will judge through Jesus Christ (Second Timothy 4:11; Acts 17:31). While He saves, He shakes and startles those in sin. He makes us uncomfortable in complacency, fearful in our selfishness. He can be our salvation, or the means to settle our separation from God eternally. He will be either my redeemer or my ruin. The same is true for you, depending upon our individual response to Him. We do ourselves a favor to ask, "Will Christ be a danger to me, or a deliverer?"

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A Request for Assistance

When you have a change of address, if you wish not to miss any issue of
A Burning Fire,
you must notify use early enough to make the change on the mailing list. Please keep this in mind!

The Centurion of Great Faith

As is true of many lessons we print, we rely upon the reader to read lengthy texts from his own Bible. The text just now is Luke 7:1-10, and Matthew 8: 5-13. Notice that one account includes statements and details not included in the other. There are no contradictions. Contradictions do not exist when both can be true. Taking the two records together we find additional information in one that is not found in the other. Taking them both we have the full inspired record.

By this time in the ministry of Christ the Lord had preached the Sermon on the Mount, performed many of His mighty deeds, and He had become widely known, with favor among many, but disfavor among others. He comes to Capernaum which was located near the Sea of Galilee. Multitudes heard Him preach and followed Him wherever He went.

Jesus was always the main character in circumstances involving Him. Yet, there were lesser characters surrounding Him that are worthy of notice. We shall focus attention on a certain centurion, a Gentile, a military officer in charge of one hundred men. Let us consider his attitude and the evidence of the condition of his heart.

A Gentle Heart

This man's attitude toward his servant was expressed in two ways, and his words and deeds tell us a great deal about his character. The Bible says his servant was "*dear unto him.*" While many in his position were ruthless, merciless, and demanding toward others, this man demonstrated the capacity for loving his fellowman regardless of what level of society he might be. A servant was considered by most to be a lowly one.

He was compassionate, sympathetic, and kind, without cruelty toward those who were subject to him. These are qualities that Christians must possess. First John 3:17 shows we cannot shut up our heart of compassion from others and claim the love of God abides in us. Ephesians 4:32, "*Be ye kind one to another.*" This is a mark of a person who professes to follow Christ.

Our world today staggers and reels beneath the burdens and blows of man's inhumanity to his fellowman. There is prejudice, hatred, envy, violence, war, murder, robbery, assaults, exploitation, and every other kind of abuse being practiced against people today. Behind such deeds lies an evil heart that needs to be changed, regenerated, born again in Christ. The only way to keep man from becoming evil or correcting his way once he has become evil is to change his heart toward Christ.

This centurion's heart shows his attitude in that he sought Jesus. He was not content that all was well with him personally. He grieved for others in distress. He was not unconcerned, nor unwilling to detach himself from the plight of others. He was willing to become involved in action on behalf of others. Man's inhumanity to his fellowman is only aggravated by selfishness, disinterest, unconcern for the welfare of others. A concerned heart will produce concerned action. It did with this man. To cause one who is unconcerned to become concerned demands a change of heart toward the way of Christ.

A Humble Man

A noble characteristic of the centurion shines forth in this event like light pierces darkness. It was his manifestation of humility. He was a conqueror, a man of power and authority, yet, he humbles himself to seek the favor from a lowly Jew, who was actually a subject because of Roman domination of the area. He was reluctant to approach Jesus himself, but asked the elders of the Jews, those who knew Him, to appeal to Him.

Even when Jesus agreed to come to his house, he counted himself unworthy of the Lord's blessing and presence. The elders told Jesus how the centurion had been more of a benefactor for them than a ruler over them. Verse five,

"For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue." The Jews considered this centurion worthy of whatever favor Jesus could bestow. Verse four, *"He was worthy."* But he said of himself, verse six, *"I am not worthy."*

This quality of humility is a Christlike virtue (Philippians 2: 5-8). He taught His disciples service and humility in John thirteen. Luke 14:11, *"For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."* First Peter 5: 5,6, *"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."*

A Reverent Man

This centurion also showed genuine respect and consideration for Jesus and His authority. He did not ask Jesus to come to his house. He said, *"Trouble not thyself."* He was aware that a Jew would be considered unclean and defiled to come into the house of a Gentile. He sought no embarrassment for Jesus on this score.

He respected the power of Jesus. He did not even consider it necessary for Jesus to come personally. All He had to do was to say the word.

He was considerate and respectful of the authority which he obviously attributed to Jesus. He knew what authority was because he exercised it himself. At the root of so much trouble in the home, church, society, schools, and elsewhere is the failure to respect duly ordained authority.

Disrespect for authority finds its roots in the home. No nation can rise above its spring, and the home is the spring of national life. The levels of society are set by the home. The Lord knew the home is where respect for authority begins. God gave the Jews the fifth commandment of the Ten Commandments, *"Honor thy father and thy mother."* To Christians Paul wrote, *"Children obey your parents..., honor your father and mother."* (Ephesians 6: 2,4). The home that fails to provide

training that calls for respect of authority plows the ground, sows the seed, and often reaps the crop of disrespect for authority and all the inescapable problems and heartaches that such brings. People do not come into this world evil and rebellious. They learn to be that way. It begins in the home. Either at home, in the military, from Jewish law, or some similar sources, this centurion had learned to respect authority and He respected the authority of Jesus Christ.

A Man of Faith

That for which this centurion is best known is his faith. In this he excelled. Jesus marvelled at his faith. Only two times did Scripture say that Jesus marvelled. Once was here and the other was when Jesus marvelled at the unbelief of the people of Nazareth (Mark 6:5).

This man's faith would have been impressive even if he had been a Jew. Jews were expected to believe more readily because they had greater opportunity. They enjoyed a long heritage of contact with God. They had the prophecies of the coming Messiah. Jesus was a Jew. But this man's faith was greater than found in all Israel (verse ten).

A Greater Lesson

Jesus took advantage of the occasion to teach another lesson. Many, from every direction, would come to the Lord, not just those from among the Jews, God's chosen race of people for many centuries. They were chosen because through them the Messiah was to come. The time had come when ancestry no longer determined who is or is not a child of God (Matthew 3:9). John the Baptist had preached this. As Peter said, Acts 10: 34,35, "*Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.*" Jews who would reject Jesus would not be counted as children of the kingdom, but would be cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (the description of torment of the unprofitable and disapproved servants ,Matthew 25:30).

We must also see the folly of Jews trying to serve God on the basis of who were their ancestors. Nor can we today

stand approved by a borrowed faith. Each one must come to a knowledge, love, and conviction regarding Christ for himself. It does not necessarily mean we will differ from what our foreparents believed. If we believe the truth, and they believed the truth, we shall believe the same things the same way. It means that each one must have in his own heart the faith of Christ. Serving God is an individual matter. We cannot serve Him by proxy. There is no one that can "stand in" for us in matters of religion. Second Corinthians 5:10 makes it plain we each shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ and we shall be judged individually.

The Blessing

Jesus healed the centurion's servant just as the centurion asked. Cannot we see the greatness of Christ in this deed? But we see notable qualities in this centurion that we would do well to imitate. They include (1) love, (2) compassion and concern for our fellowman, (3) sincere humility toward oneself, (4) respect for the divine and sacred, and (5) faith, so much as to cause even our Lord to marvel.

* * * * *

What About the Thief?

Our text is Luke 23: 39-44. Please consult your own Bible and read. Because of its length we shall not include it.

Have we not heard many times people contend that they shall be saved like the thief on the cross? It is unfortunate that this event has been so abused and misused by false teachers to mislead and deceive people regarding the way God saves people today. When people ask, "What about the thief?" I am inclined to respond, "Well, what about him? Is he an illustration of the way of salvation through Christ for us?"

Two thieves died that day with Jesus. One thief railed at Jesus while the other sought His favor. The response that Jesus made to the one seeking favor has given rise to at

least three false doctrines. (1) Some contend we can be saved like the thief, that is, a simple request. (2) Others say the thief is an example of **death bed conversion**. (3) Still others argue that baptism is not essential to salvation and one can be saved only by faith. All three of these doctrines are closely related and equally false. What does the passage teach? What is applicable for us today?

His Request

For what did the thief ask? He said, "*Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom?*" Did the thief understand the nature of the kingdom that Christ was to soon establish? Possibly he realized it would be a spiritual kingdom, not one of this world (John 18:36). But if he did, he would have been rather unusual, seeing how even the apostles still had misconceptions about it at this late date. Did he know that being in the kingdom was the same as being one of the spiritually saved? He may have so understood, but he did not specifically ask for spiritual salvation. Remember that most who heard Jesus looked upon Him to establish an earthly kingdom that would rival the Roman empire, at least shake off the Roman yoke from the Jews, and grant them national independence and stature like the days of David and Solomon. Was the thief an exception to this misconception?

Did the thief expect a miracle from Jesus and that he would be taken down from the cross, being physically saved miraculously from his present plight? Again, we have to admit this may have been in his mind. He could possibly see the signs that identified Jesus as the King of the Jews. He may have known something of the works of Jesus and His miracles. But the fact of the matter is that we have to engage in speculation when we try to determine exactly what the thief had in mind. We are not specifically told. We best understand his question by referring to the answer Jesus gave him because we would think J knew what he meant and responded accordingly.

Let us suppose now that the thief was actually asking for the salvation of his soul. Some believe this was the nature of his request. Does this mean we can be saved as he was? Jesus said, "*Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.*"

Wherever Jesus went that day is where the thief went. Where does the Bible say Jesus went?

Hell and Hades

Acts 2:31 teaches that Christ went to **hell**, which is the translation of the word **hades**. **Hell** is also the word used in the King James Version to translate **gehenna**. **Gehenna** and **hades** are not the same even though the same English word is used to translate them. **Hades** refers to the temporary, intermediate, unseen state of the dead. **Gehenna** means the place of eternal punishment. It is not an error to translate both words by the one word **hell** inasmuch as dictionaries give **hell** both meanings. The American Standard Version makes a distinction between them by translating **gehenna** as **hell** and transliterating (giving an English sound) to **hades.**

But Jesus said He was going to **Paradise**. Therefore, the **Paradise** where Jesus went was into the intermediate state of the dead, or **hades.** It was not into heaven where the Father is. John 20:17 notes that even after His resurrection He said He had not gone to the Father.

Where Jesus went is the same place entered by Lazarus in Luke sixteen, which is also called Abraham's bosom, the place of care and safe-keeping. The rich man also went into this intermediate state of **hades** or **hell**. From all of this it is apparent that **hades** is divided into two parts, one a place of torment and the other called Abraham's bosom, or **Paradise.**

Is This the Way?

Even if Jesus and the thief went directly into heaven where the Father dwells, which is not the case, this event would not prove this is the way we get to heaven. We are saved by the gospel (Romans 1:16). At the time of the thief on the cross the gospel was not yet in operation nor complete. The gospel includes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (First Corinthians 15: 1-4), and these things had not yet been accomplished. The thief lived and died before the gospel became the way of salvation. The gospel way was first preached at Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2). The thief lived and died while the Mosaic law was still operative.

We live under the new will of Christ (Hebrews 9 :15-17; Galatians 3: 23; Colossians 2: 14). While Jesus was alive He could dispense with His blessings any way He saw fit, and this is what He did regarding the thief. But after His death, the benefits through Christ come through His will.

Let me illustrate. Before 1913 nobody paid income tax. There was no such law. But suppose I now ignore my duty to pay income tax on the basis that patriotic and law-abiding citizens before 1913 did not pay them. Cannot we see we are subject to a different system? So it is regarding the thief. He was not subject to the gospel system as we are today. Therefore, we cannot look to the event of the thief on the cross as the way we shall be saved.

Unfortunately, some cite the thief as an example of **death bed conversion**. They mean that one can refuse Christ until the final moments and then, while on the death bed, simply ask Jesus for salvation and they shall be saved. None would doubt a dying man is sincere in wanting to be saved. But shall we deceive people to think they can ignore the will of Christ that demands their obedience to His commands? Where do we find anybody being saved this way after His will came into effect? There is such a thing as being almost but not altogether saved (Acts 26). One can wait too long to even be able to render obedience. He may still live and realize his lost condition, but he has no hope if he has not done what the Scriptures teach one must do to be saved. What human being has the right to tell others we can dispense with the will of Christ and enjoy His blessings anyway?

Is This for Us?

Even if this was an example of death bed conversion, does it really apply to you? Are you on your death bed? Cannot you obey the commands necessary to be saved? You condemn your soul to rely on this event as the way you can be saved. You will never find comfort in it. It does not apply to you, nor to anybody now living.

Some deny baptism is essential for salvation and cite the thief. Nobody can prove he was or was not baptized. Many were baptized by John the Baptist looking forward to the coming of Christ. Could the thief have been among them?

He could have been, but we certainly do not know about this. But the fact remains that he never lived subject to the command to be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins, first commanded on Pentecost (Luke 24: 47, Acts 2:38). But you live since that command has been delivered. Why do you think you can ignore it and claim salvation like the thief? All others in the Bible who lived after Pentecost and were saved were baptized to be saved (Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, 16, 18). There is no example of conversion after Pentecost without baptism.

The Scriptures teach baptism is necessary to be saved. The Scriptures deny salvation by faith only. The apostles taught and practiced water baptism, for the remission of sin, in the name of Christ. There is one baptism (Ephesians 4: 4,5). One may ignore it, ridicule it, deny it, mock it, and refuse to obey it, but that changes nothing about it. His soul is lost until he obeys (Hebrews 5: 9).

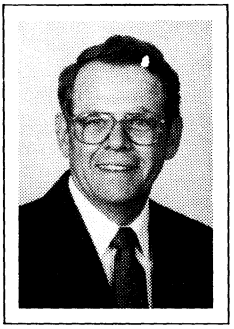
Have you been led to think you can be saved like the thief? Do not be misguided any longer. Measure what you have done by what the Scripture teaches the gospel requires. Salvation is by the blood of Christ (Romans 5: 9), and we reach that blood when we are baptized into His death (Romans 6: 3,4). This is where He shed His blood and tells why we are raised to a new life as new creatures in Christ (Second Corinthians 5: 17). We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3: 27). To rely on the way the thief received whatever blessings he may have received is to attempt to appropriate to yourself something that does not apply to you. Hear, believe, and obey the gospel, and salvation will be given you by the Savior.

* * * * *

NEXT ISSUE

We intend to include some lessons relating to the possibility of falling away, something some contend cannot be done once you are saved. But the Bible teaches one can fall, some did fall, and shows us some ways that will make us fall away. Seeing how faithfulness is essential to reach heaven, these lesson will be very relevant to the spiritual assistance of us all. JWB.

The Mailing Goes Up and Up



JAMES W. BOYD

Not complaining! Just taking note of a reality! The first time I mailed this booklet, ***A Burning Fire,*** the **mailing** cost was $17.33. This issue is going to be around $80.00. Just like paper, ink, plates, negatives, every element in producing ***A Burning Fire*** mailing has risen through the years. But we have every intention of keeping it going as long as we can, to as many as ask for it. But you see why I do not advertise for larger circulation. I wish I could. It now costs $.85 per copy to send it overseas. Once it was merely $.49, and that is the slow SURFACE MAIL,which delays delivery, not AIRMAIL, which is prohibitive. But we believe the benefits are worth the effort and expense. How do you put a price on a potential saved soul?

* * * * *

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A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME XII James W. Boyd NUMBER 4

A Sure Way to Fall

Our lesson is taken from the book of Hebrews. The aims and purposes of the Holy Spirit in producing the book were several. It presents the superiority of Christ over all others, and the superiority of the system of salvation by Him over all other systems. As great as was Moses and the Mosaic law, the covenant of Christ surpasses it. He is greater than all men and angels. He is declared as Deity.

The book also teaches the relationship between the old law given through Moses and the new law which came through Christ. This is one of the most needed understandings among religious people. The failure to distinguish between what was done in previous dispensations and what is to be done now is a source of much religious error and confusion.

But one of the major themes is concerning apostasy. Hebrews, like Romans and Galatians, is designed to prevent apostasy, and if apostasy has already occurred, to correct it.

A False Doctrine

It is strange in the light of such writings as Hebrews that some would contend for the false doctrine that once one is saved one will always be saved regardless of what he does or believes thereafter. Here is an entire New Testament book intended to prevent and cure what some say could never happen anyway. One should read in this connection Second Peter 2:20-22, Galatians 5:4, John 15:2,6, and be further solidified in this conviction that one can be lost even though once saved. The doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy did not originate with God and his people, but with the devil in the Garden of Eden when he spoke with Eve, and was given a boost among Protestants by John Calvin. Paul warned, "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" (First Corinthians 10:12). Why would anyone suggest you cannot do what Paul warned us to take heed and prevent?

Hebrews 5:12-14, "*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*"

Christians were in danger of falling and this tells why. It was their own failure to learn and grow. As a result they were unable to distinguish between good and evil. They were in danger of falling not only because of things committed, but because of failure to do what Christians are supposed to do. When one becomes a child of God he cannot stand still. He will either grow or wither and die. He goes forward or he will slide backward.

The Reason

The inability to teach others and discern between good and evil stems from a lack of knowledge of God's Word and the failure to properly use and apply that knowledge. Jesus used the Word to resist temptation. When confronted in the wilderness by the devil and was tempted He responded, "*It is written...*" The Word is a powerful deterrent to sin. Likewise it is our guide in life, a lamp to our feet, and a light to out path (Psalm 119:105). One has a road map for life in the Bible. But just possessing a copy, but not knowing and following its directions avails nothing. Man cannot direct his own steps successfully (Jeremiah 10:23). Things that seem right in his own eyes may not be right in the eyes of God (proverbs 14:12). How can one make the important decisions in life if he does not even know the direction he should travel? God once said, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*" (Hosea 4:6). Ignorance of truth is an invitation to disaster. We are commanded to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (Second Peter 3:18). Failure to do this is to dare the devil to take your soul, and gives him an advantage over you. He is your adversary (First Peter 5:8) who seeks your destruction.

Overcoming evil with good has never been the easiest path of life, yet, this is the path the Christian must trod (Romans 12:21). How will you ever do this if you do not know how or what is good and evil?

The opening verses of Hebrews six encourages the Christian to "*go on unto perfection.*" This is not demanding that we be sinlessly perfect for that is beyond our ability (First John 1:8-10). Perfection means wholeness and completeness, maturity and spiritual strength. It emphasizes the standard and goal for which we must constantly strive. As Christians we must grow and grow.

Disastrous Consequences

Regarding those who fall away, for whatever reason that tragedy may occur, they are victims of failure to learn and discern, know and grow. Hebrews 6:4-6, "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*" Let us realize the sinister significance of apostasy. It is to crucify Christ afresh. One aligns himself with those who murdered the Son of God. Can you picture yourself as being one of those of that mob that cried for His death? The very thought should be repugnant and offensive. Yet, this is what falling away means. You trod under foot the Son of God and count His blood an unholy thing (Hebrews 10:29).

You Shame Christ

You put Him to an open shame. Recall how He was mocked with a crown of thorns and a robe, humiliated and ridiculed as a criminal, carrying His own cross, shamed as they spat upon Him, beating Him along the way! Do you think you fit into that picture alongside the man who said, "*He said he was the Son of God; let us see if God will have him?*" Will you join with those in laughter as He suffered? This is what one does when he falls away from Christ. Such should impress us with the seriousness of apostasy. It is no light and little thing to backslide. It is more than just" missing church." We may tend to think of our deliberate absenteeism from assemblies as a minor thing. But such is a sure sign of a dying soul. Our performances of duty, manifestations of loyalty, actions depicting love for God show our growth. Does not the absence of such

things show our decline and failure? Falling away is gradual, sometimes so gradual, we do not detect it if we are not alert and diligent. But it is deadly and has eternal consequences.

What Does This Mean?

What does it mean, "*It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance?*" Get the picture of whom these things are spoken. These people were once enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, partakers of the Holy Spirit. They were Christians. There has been and will only be one sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 10:26,27). Hebrews 9:28, "*So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...*" He died for the whole world (First John 2:2). We have but one Savior, and He is the only way (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). To turn from Christ is to turn from our only hope. Therefore, having once come to Him, but turning away, there is no other to whom we can turn. So long as one remains rebellious in stubborn rejection of the Son of God, it is impossible for such a one to be saved. He cannot be renewed with that frame of mind and disposition. While there is no sin that cannot be forgiven provided the terms are met, it is possible for one to become so hardened in sin that nothing will move his heart to repent. He places himself beyond reach in that state.

Hebrews 6:7,8, "*For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth the herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God, but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.*"

This illustrates the fallen man and his condition. Just as good ground that once has been blessed with rain and all that is necessary to produce good, but then bears thorns and briers is therefore rejected and cursed, so it is with the person who has been blessed with good things, but produces evil, and hence, rejected and cursed. That person who became a Christian is expected to bear good fruit to the Lord. But should he turn away, he cannot be accepted. All the rejected Christian has to anticipate and expect is meeting a just God, a God to whom vengeance belongs. Mercy is extended now, and this is the day of mercy. When we stand before God in judgment that will be a time of justice. God, who does not allow His Word to be defied,

will vent righteous wrath on the wicked, including the apostate.

Something to Fear

In view of this we can heartily agree with the statement of Hebrews 10:31, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* Where can that soul trace his destruction to have begun? It can be traced back to the time, place, and occasion when that person failed to seize the opportunity to grow, to feed upon the spiritual good God provided, and failed to learn what he had to know so he could do what he had to do to please God.

Few lessons more forcefully emphasize the importance of Bible study than these thoughts and passages from Hebrews. Apostasy, which damns the soul, begins with the failure to learn, a lack of study, the refusal to know. As surely as growth is a preventive to apostasy (Second Peter 1:5-11), failure to learn and grow is a sure way to fall and be lost.

* * * * *

Three More Ways to Fall

Our lengthy text is Hebrews 10:23-31, which the reader should consult before continuing this study. We remind you that one of the prime purposes of Hebrews is to show the superiority of Christ, to show the relationship between the law of Moses and the new covenant given through Christ, and to prevent and correct apostasy, the falling away from Christ. The general admonition of the epistle is that Christians must hold fast to the faith. The faith refers to the religion of which Christ is the author. The book is an encouragement to loyalty and faithfulness to Christ. In most every book of the New Testament there is this plea to the believer. For example, First Corinthians 15:58, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord,*

forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Galatians 6:9, "*And let us not be weary in well doing, for is due season we shall reap if we faint not.*" Revelation 2:10, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*" In view of these teachings, there can be no doubt but that it is possible for a Christian to fall and be lost. If this is not true, then these words have no meaning or significance. Nor can there be any doubt that God wants His children to be faithful and live with Him in heaven.

One reason given in our text for remaining faithful is because God is faithful. This means God's Word is dependable. We can count on God to keep His Word. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise (Second Peter 3:9). First Corinthians 10:13 also states that God is faithful. Since we can count on God, can God count on us? We have a duty in this regard.

Love and Good Works

This passage cites three responsibilities of Christians which, if neglected, renders us unfaithful to God. There are three duties listed that are necessary to remaining faithful.

The first is love and good works. It goes without saying that without love we have no part of God. It is equally evident that God calls us to good works. It is not surprising that love and good works are listed together. The religion of Christ is founded on love (John 3:16). The faith is sustained by love (First John 5:3). Love is more than a mere emotion. It is a motivation to action (John 14:15). Love moves one to do as he ought. Titus 2:14 teaches that Christians are expected to be a people zealous of good works. James 4:17 warns that the failure to do good is a sin. So important it is for us to do what is good, James says, James 2:18-20, "*Yea, a man may say, thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith without thy works and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*" Couple all this with the teaching of First Thessalonians 5:22, "*Abstain from all appearance of evil,*" and you must accept the combination of love and good works, and that faithfulness includes doing what ought to be done and refraining from doing what ought not be done.

Faithfulness to Christ demands positive good in addition to abstinence from evil.

Assemblying

Verse twenty-five teaches the duty of Christians to assemble. Some would contend this is an optional matter, but who can say any command of God is optional? This does not simply teach to assemble on Sunday morning, but rebukes forsaking assemblying. Why does this not include each time the church assembles? We contend it does. While it is true that being a faithful Christian includes more than "going to church," as some flippantly speak of worship, it does includes the assemblies for worship. There is unfaithfulness to the faith when there is unfaithfulness to assemblying. Many take the matter entirely too lightly. One of the first signs of slipping and backsliding is the negligent attitude and practice toward assemblying for worship.

It is amazing that some consider worship a burden rather than a privilege. They act as if they do not enjoy or benefit from worshipping God. Do not they cherish fellowship in worship with their faithful brethren? Are they not interested in being instructed in the ways of the Lord? Is it too much to praise His holy name, the One who died for us? Where do people get the "have to" attitude rather than the "get to" attitude toward worship? It is true that we are dealing with a duty, but we are also dealing with a blessed privilege.

It Is Much More

Absenteeism from assemblies is more than missing a club meeting. Deliberate absenteeism is a sin because it violates a divine command. Any absenteeism is detrimental, even when justified and excusable, for such things as illness, or the essential care of the sick, or unavoidable events that deprive one of fulfilling their intentions. But to try to rationalize with excuses absenteeism with the trivial and trite things we have heard through the years smacks more of hypocrisy! Many allow the affairs of this life to interfere with this sacred matter. Obviously, many have soothed their consciences and satisfied themselves, but how many really think disobeying God's commands satisfies God?

One of the genuine problems and real hindrances to the cause of Christ in our time is the negligence of so many who profess to be disciples of Christ in the matter of assemblying with their brethren as God has commanded. How can one sing, "O, how I love Jesus," but really they do not mean it except one hour per week on Sunday morning, and not even then if company is coming, trips are planned, or other desires crowd in and crowd out worship? Too many have imitated the denominational attitude that worship is optional. But it is a matter, not of convenience,, but of conviction. Loyal Christians are never heard to ask, "Do I have to attend every service?" You may not realize it, but Hebrews 10:25 teaches you have left your first love and are on your way to totally quitting God when you adopt the belief and practice of forsaking the assemblying with others. We contend such a thing is a sure way to fall.

Sinning Willfully

The third sure way to fall we mention is to willfully sin. The one who willfully sins commits three errors at once. (1) The sin he commits is one sin. (2) He places himself before God, which contradicts the Lord's direction to deny self. One cannot fail in this and be the Lord's disciple (Luke 9:23). (3) He violates his own conscience because he is doing what he knows to be wrong.

When we sin, is it because we do not know right from wrong and therefore we sin ignorantly? Acts 17:30 makes it plain that one can so sin. We are guilty of sin even if committed ignorantly. But such is more likely to be corrected when knowledge displaces ignorance. But when one willfully sins it is not a matter of knowledge. It is more a matter of rebellion and defiance of divine authority and is the deliberate refusal to let the Lord govern life.

Notice what Scripture says of one who willfully sins. He has "*trodden under foot the Son of God.*" He has "*counted the blood wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing.*" Can you think of anything more deadly to the spiritual welfare of a person than such transgression? We are sanctified by the blood of Christ, cleansed by His holy blood. To willfully sin is to declare by deed that which God calls holy to be unholy. A willful sinner has "*done despite unto the Spirit of grace.*" This is to defy and do injury

toward Deity with a high hand. Such a one can expect a *"fierceness of fire and a certain fearful judgment."*

God Holds Man Responsible

Those who lived under the law of Moses were held responsible for their lives according to the law under which they lived. Those that disobeyed were punished accordingly. The writer, by inspiration, asks therefore, *"How much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy"* who disobeys God's law that He has given through His Son? Can we expect salvation even while turning against the Savior?

Hebrews 10:35,36 is the plea to every brother and sister in Christ. *"Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."*

Let us resolve to live loyally, faithfully, persistently in the service to God through Christ. In love and good works, in faithfulness regarding the assemblies, in refusing to allow self-will to dominate, and rejecting the attitude and action of willfully sinning. Verse thirty-nine reasons, *"But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."*

* * * * *

"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him."
PROVERBS 26:12

"Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth."
PROVERBS 4:5

What Jesus Said of Love

Jesus was the great Master Teacher. Luke said that he was recording things that Jesus began both to do and to teach (Acts 1:1). Matthew 5:2, "*...and he opened his mouth and taught them.*" The Jews, Nicodemus, and others called Him, "*Rabbi,*" which means an exalted teacher. It was a term reserved for the most distinguished and honored teachers. When men heard Him they came away saying, "*Never man spake like this man.*" To multitudes and individuals, in synagogues and on mountain tops, from ships, at feasts, in the way, or an upper room, Jesus came teaching and preaching.

He was a great teacher, not only because of His style and manner, not only because of His use of parables and illustrations, or the way that He drew conclusions from Old Testament teaching, but His authority, His directness, as well as His simplicity figured prominently in His teaching. Even the poor had the gospel preached to them. But He was a great teacher because of **WHAT** He said. Regardless of how eloquent, refined, or impressive a speaker may be, in the final analysis the content of his message is what really matters.

Used, Misused, and Abused

In this lesson we want to study what Jesus said on the subject of love. The very word and idea of love is so often used, but just as often abused and misused. It is obviously an overworked, but underpracticed and distorted concept. It is meant to embrace everything from mere sentiment, emotionalism, even as an excuse for permissiveness and indulgence to surrender to fleshly passions. People have used "love" to justify rebellion, treason, immorality, and all manner of sin. Today almost any and every kind of vice is explained as love. Every kind of violation of decency and honor is somehow defined as a manifestation of love. From the spoiled child to the "hippie," from the looter and rioter to the sensual

degenerate conduct of many, from compromise with sin to disrespect of parents and the authority of civil law, all are somehow explained as "love."

Is there no way to know what real love is? Indeed, there is. Jesus spoke regarding it. For a complete study on the subject we would have to study what He personally said as well as what was said by His authority through the apostles and the New Testament writers who were inspired to write as they did. Our lesson shall be confined to what Jesus said and what is recorded in the first four books of the New Testament.

A Basic Concept

Love is fundamental to Christianity. Matthew 22:36-40, "*Then one of them which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*"

When Jesus was asked, "*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" Jesus asked what the law said. It was answered, Luke 10:27, "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.*" Jesus approved of this answer.

Kinds of Love

In the Bible there are different kinds of love. Significantly, sexual immorality is never presented as love. This is significant because so many today classify fornication as love. Nothing about sin is akin to righteous love.

There is love in marriage, love between parent and child, love between brothers in the flesh, love between brothers in the Lord, love even for enemies, man's love for God, and God's love for man, especially for His spiritual children. In each of these relationships the basic idea of love is present. Love means an earnest desire for and an active and beneficent interest in the well being of the other. Briefly defined, love is seeking the other's highest good. In

each instance there is the denial of self and concern for the other. Indeed, the literal meaning of the word "agape," which is used far more than any other word in the New Testament to convey the thought of love means seeking the other's highest good."

God Loves Man

The love of God, that is, the love God has for man, takes first place in the teaching of Christ. God first loved His own Son (Matthew 3:17). John 3:35, "*The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.*" John 15:9, "*As the Father hath loved me, so I have loved you; continue ye in my love.*" John 17:24, "*Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world.*"

God loves the whole world (John 3:16). God has a special love for the believer. John 16:27, "*For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*" The love of God for His children, even His wandering children, is seen in the parable Jesus taught called the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). The real hero of that story is the loving father who symbolizes God. Whatever love may exist in man, whether directed toward God or toward his fellowman, springs from the love of God, that is, God is the source of love. John 13:34, "*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*" John 15:12, "*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*" Christ loved His disciples before they loved Him. First John 4:8, "*He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*" It is not true that love is God, but love is a characteristic of God.

Misplaced Love

It is possible to love what ought not be loved. Jesus reproved the Pharisees for their unnecessary show of a misdirected love. Matthew 6:5, "*And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward.*" Matthew 23:6, "*And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues.*" Luke

20:46, "*Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts.*"

Another misdirected love is seen in the fact that men loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil (John 3:19). This is why so many rejected Jesus. John 5:42,43, "*But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name and ye receive me not...*"

Jesus also warned against a divided love. He emphasized that He must have first place in man's heart. Matthew 6:24, "*No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" Matthew 10:37, "*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*" Putting the Lord first seems to be one of the more difficult lessons some have to learn. In all matters, every decision, activity, and pursuit, the Lord and His will must be first. How often do we fall short on this score?

We ought to love the Lord very much because Jesus taught, "*To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.*" (Luke 7:47). Inasmuch as all have sinned, who has not been forgiven much? We are like the woman of whom the Lord said, "*Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.*" (Verse 47).

Love for Others

Jesus taught, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" (Matthew 19:19). He, by the parable of the Good Samaritan shows us who is our neighbor. Whenever and wherever we find one in need and we have opportunity to lend assistance, he is our neighbor. The only solution to our national and international strife is for people to first have the proper respect for themselves, and then, in turn, have similar respect and love for all others.

Jesus also said, Matthew 5:43,44, "*Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*" Christ made love, even for enemies, a mark of discipleship.

Another identifying badge of being a Christian is given in John 13:34,35, "*A new command I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" How unloving and opposed to Christ is strife, hatred, backbiting, jealousy, envy, and division among brethren. John 15:12,17, "*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you... These things I command you, that ye love one another.*"

Love and Obedience

The supreme test of love is our obedience to Him. John 14:15, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" John 15:14, "*Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*" John 14:21,23, "*He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him... Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*" Is it not strange how far removed people have gone from this test of love? They claim to love God, yet defy, deny, decry, violate, and disobey any and whatever command of God they choose. How can people claim to love God and tear asunder the very Word of truth that God has delivered unto men? There is no love apart from obedience. Love and obedience cannot be separated.

Jesus showed His love for man by His complete sacrifice of Himself. He had taught, John 15:13, "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" He taught the greatness of love and what was the greatest love. He exemplified both the greatness of love and in giving of Himself He committed the greatest manifestation of love. This love extends to us even today.

If you would know, understand, experience love, you must come to Jesus Christ for that knowledge and understanding, and follow Him in life. To have love in your heart you must take from the Lord, the source of love. To those who become His children, God showers His love. "*He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him.*" (John 14:21).

* * * * *

Restoration Preaching

The church began on the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ (Acts 2). It was prophesied that there would be a falling away (First Timothy 4:1-3). History reveals that such actually occurred. The church became so changed that it was unrecognizable by New Testament standards. There were changes in government, doctrine, worship, terms of entrance, nearly all of the identifying characteristics of the church. It evolved eventually to the time of the first pope, 606 A.D., and the period of Romanist domination of the Western world.

During what Rome calls the "Golden Age of the Church," the period when the papacy had such power, dissent toward Rome would arise from time to time, but would be persecuted out of existence. In the late 1400's and early 1500's came the Reformation Movement led by such men as John Wycliffe, Tyndall, Luther, Knox, Calvin, and others. They were not the first to attempt to break the Roman yoke, but they were more successful because there was also economic, political, and military rebellions against Rome operating at this time in history.

But the attempts of the Reformation Movement only splintered people religiously. There was not a return to the Biblical concept and pattern of the church. What was produced is what we now identify as Protestantism, and the multitudes of denominations. Instead of an allegiance to the pope, people began following other men and human doctrines.

Early Efforts to Restore

In the later 1700's and early 1800's there were serious efforts made, not to start something new, not to reform what existed, but to restore the church as revealed in the New Testament. Men named Stone, Campbell, Smith, Scott, and scores of others were leading figures in this effort. They chose to "speak where the Bible speaks,. and be silent where the Bible is silent." This is a reasonable paraphrase of the apostolic admonition to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11).

The result was that the gospel preached by the apostles was heard again. The seed of the kingdom was sown. It produced the only thing the gospel will produce namely, Christians who make up the church of which Christ is founder, Savior, and head. These efforts prospered, but not without many hardships and problems. Problems may well have been expected since this concept of returning to the Bible as a standard ran against the creeds that otherwise dominated religion.

Even within the movement to restore the church there came problems. Division took a deadly tool with the introduction of human innovations for which there is not divine authority, such as the missionary society, the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship, and other imitations of denominationalism. The work has been hindered, but not stifled.

In our time the church still faces, with increasingly heavy efforts, the tide of liberalism and permissiveness, the desire to turn the church into a denomination like others, compromise of basic and fundamental truths in order to "go along to get along." As with Israel, the desire to be like the nations around us has caused many who once were stedfast in the faith to turn and digress into liberalistic apostasy.

Attitude Toward the Past

We wish to concern ourselves with the attitude we should have toward the past, the early restorers, their work, and their message. Today they are called old-fashioned, out-of-date, old fogey, irrelevant, and those that still respect them are "knuckleheads," according to the loving liberals. It is said there ancient men of the past restored form and doctrine (which is even now being denied in many quarters, claiming the New Testament is not even our pattern), and we must restore the proper spirit. Such judgmental snobbery one seldom witnesses! Those who talk in such fashion are often heard to mouth "love, love, love." If ever there existed an element of people who seemingly know little to nothing about genuine love and what to love, and who practice love less than anybody, it is that element of people who talk it incessantly and viciously attack anybody who does not adopt their liberalism. To them love is but an emotion, a sentiment, that will permit and tolerate everybody to "do their own

thing," God's will notwithstanding. The rank liberals have been bitter in their attitude of the great students of the Bible who led the early efforts of restoration. They hold in contempt anybody who does respect them. They clamor for a new message for our new age. To restore the faith of the first century is to them an absurdity. The faith God revealed must be updated, we are told, and revised, and re-interpretted to fit our times, according to these wiser-than-God "scholars."

We often hear then called for a restudy of positions taken by the early restorers. This is always a timely call lest we become followers of men rather than God. A restudy of the Scriptures is obviously overdue among them, however. Truth has nothing to fear in investigation. The problem created by those who say we must restudy is that they change for change's sake. If we do not change our views from the views of those who came before us, we must necessarily be in error. But the thinking person will know that if they believed truth and we believe truth we will believe alike. If the early restorers were right in some matter and we are right in the same matter, there will be no difference. The idea that there must be a difference or we have not sincerely restudied is ridiculous and intellectually absurd on its very perverted face.

Benefits of Study

There are benefits involved in restudying everything. Every generation must be taught everything. We must make the faith our own rather than simply have a borrowed faith from others. But does this demand that there be variance between our convictions and those of the past? Certainly not, if we both follow the Scriptures!

By restudying we see the timelessness of their message and the Scriptural basis of their plea. We can learn from their learning without making them our authority. Contrary to the "wise men" of academic training from the theological schools, they were men truly scholarly, although few, if any, now in the "Christian schools" really consider those righteous men of the past to have been "scholars." Only these "wise men of today" are to be considered "scholars," even if they do not believe a thing the Bible teaches.

From the study of their work we can detect trends, drifts, as well as the honorable goals they had in mind.

We can partake and learn from their courage, integrity (an ingredient too often lacking in the liberal mind), their spirit of dedication and sacrifice. We see how they met the attacks of those who opposed Biblical preaching. We see how they encountered the denominational world.. Instead if ridiculing their spirit, if more today had the same spirit the church would be far stronger and better informed doctrinally and more consistent in practice. With the spirit today many have who seek to uproot and change just to have something new, nobody would have been able to bring the church and the truth of the gospel to their generation. The pygmies are barking at the giants.

There is always a danger of letting men of the past become the authority. There are some who have evidently done this. When trying to prove some point, they cite some man rather than Scripture. But never have I heard a faithful brother use these men other than to cite their view with respect to their learning, never as the final word or authority. Faithful brethren do not do that. Christ is the authority (Matthew 28:18ff), and we have preached that consistently. There is nothing that faithful brethren believe or do simply because some giant of the past contended for it. We recognize the necessity of divine authority for all that is said and done. We would that all who profess to be restorers would ever have this same attitude toward authority.

Some Denounce the Past

While liberals denounce the restorers of yesteryear, others who have appreciation for their work of the past are misusing them to further their own ends. The goal of some of there "restudiers" is to find endorsement from the past for some new innovation they wish to foist upon the church today. They wish to secure the dignity and stature of respectable men to their digression and apostasy. It is a strange approach to Scripture that says we must find and do something new and different, or we have not really studied. We must be aware of the mania that possesses some for change, regardless of which way and toward what. Some cull words and works of restorers dealing with other issues in an effort to make it appear they would have "gone along" with the new wave of digression they persistently propagate. This is basically dishonest, but this is no problem to a liberal, and is about what you can expect

from people who have denied the New Testament is a pattern and are determined to "do their own thing." They lie when they claim they stand where restorers stood. They abuse and misuse what those men of the past said and did.

Finding it impossible to crush the influence of sound doctrine and sound thinking of the past, some seek to make the restorers their partners in their unauthorized ways. I predict that in coming years one will hear more and more appeals being made to adopt some new twist on the grounds that some prominent men of the past so thought. I would only respond, "So what!" What if somebody did think some faulty way? Probably their words are being misrepresented anyway. But even then, that would not prove anything except that this is what somebody thought. Scripture is still the basis for the standard and this is that for which they contended as well. Is it not strange that once having denounced the early restorers as lacking scholarship and lacking the "broad view" that some wish to cite the same men they denounce to further their own inventions of heresy?

Sinister Efforts are Afloat

The positions taken by early restorers are being misused to try to make it appear they held unbiblical views regarding inspiration, the acts of worship, the oneness of the church, the plan of salvation, the purpose of baptism, the work of the church, etc. They have forsaken the need for Biblical authority and follow the majority thought, what some "modern scholar" has decreed, some unity push contends. (These present-day unity efforts are not efforts to produce unity. Unity is founded on acceptance of truth.. These efforts are for the purpose of creating fellowship in spite of division.) Some already have the church involved in secular education, recreation, entertainment, sports, becoming not much more than another religious clan with social aims and community acceptance. They seek salvation from depression, boredom, secular ignorance, physical disease, material poverty, rather than salvation from sin that Christ brought (First Timothy 3:15; John 17:17; Romans 1:16; James 1:21).

In Jesus' day there were those who attempted to equate human opinions and traditions on a par with "*thus saith the Lord.*" (Matthew 15:1-3,9). There be those today who attempt similar things by equating whatever view

some restorer had with divine authority. Restoration preaching is not the proclamation of human opinions or what somebody thinks, whether current or in the past. It is the proclamation of the gospel as revealed in Scripture. New Testament preaching was not "restoration" preaching in the sense it was restoring the church. It produced the church. Our preaching is restoration preaching in that it is to put back in its original order the church New Testament preaching produced. We might, for classification sake, say New Testament preaching was originating preaching and our preaching is restorative preaching, but it is the same message. Only the difference in time allows for the difference in classification.

To What Do We Appeal?

In the early days of what is called the Restoration Movement, there was no appeal to what men thought, what men wanted to do, nor what pleased men. Their thought in searching the Word of God was to learn what God had to say. Can we be honest and do less? Any preacher today who does not make his appeal to the Word of God has no business in the pulpit. But does this mean there will be absolutely and necessarily a dramatic difference between what those of the past preached and what we preach? If the early restorers preached the apostolic gospel, and we preach the apostolic gospel, we will be preaching the same as did the apostles. This is what we are supposed to do.

We respect the early restorers and are leery and weary of those who search their works hoping to find support for their digressive innovations and hobbies. We respect the noblemen of the past, but never cite them as authority. Nor shall we flippantly cast aside their learning in favor of the foolish, liberal, trite, shallow, inconsistent emptiness being heard among those who are more clergymen than preachers, more school puppets than true teachers of truth.

Restoration preaching is book, chapter, verse, "*thus saith the Lord,*" divine authority ungirding it all, the "old paths" plotted by the ancient landmarks of inspired truth. Let us beware of the sly, subtle, charismatic servants of the devil who would abandon Scripture, misuse the restorers, and lead the church further into apostasy.

* * * * *

Notice our change of return address. Thanks to the Arlington church, we have used their address and mailing permit for the past several years. While we paid the postage, we are grateful for their assistance.

Having been preaching at East End now for two years, it seemed more expedient to use our own permit. Beginning with this issue, mail should be sent to *A Burning Fire*, East End Church of Christ, 102 Edison Street, McMinnville, TN, 37110. JWB

Concern for the Unknown

It is expected and considered natural for people to have an interest and concern for members of their family, their loved ones, other people who are dear to them. This is true whether they are near or far away. We are concerned about our neighbors and people we see day by day. We are likely not near as concerned about their spiritual welfare as we ought to be, or we might be doing more toward their conversion to Christ and spiritual growth.

But the Christian does not limit his concern to those he may see and know right around him. Let each one examine himself as he asks," How concerned am I about those I do not personally know, seldom if ever see, and may never see?" Are we really concerned about their spiritual welfare. The major point of our lesson is that to be Christlike, like early Christians, we must be concerned about all mankind, showing interest in them, whoever they are and wherever they live.

The Great Commission

Consider what we fondly call "the great commission." Mark 16:15, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" Matthew 28:19,20, "*Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the*

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..." Was not the Lord concerned for all people everywhere? Does he not also charge His people to similarly be concerned? What must He think of His people who are not concerned and do not show that concern?

Jesus

Consider again the concern of Jesus as seen in the fact "*that he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man.*" (Hebrew 2:9). Romans 2:32 tells us that God "*spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all.*" His concern extends beyond those of immediate acquaintance and association. His interest is not bounded by geographical boundaries. Hebrews 9:15 teaches that Christ "*is the mediator of the new testament that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant.*" Christ showed concern even for those who lived prior to His coming to earth and who lived under former dispensations. The death of Christ was necessary in order for those under Moses' law to be forgiven. The sacrifices made under that earlier system were typical and predictive, a shadow of things to come, pointing to the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Forgiveness was not possible except by His blood. So in His death we see the Savior's concern for those who lived before His earthly life, those He would never meet and with whom He would never converse personally as He did with those in Palestine during His earthly ministry. Are there any people, anywhere, at any time in history, for whom the Lord Jesus has not been concerned?

Paul

Notice the letter that Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome, some with whom he had enjoyed association, but most of whom he had never seen. Romans 1:8-15, "*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if by any means, now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart*

unto some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."

He said he never ceased to mention them in prayer. He longed for their personal fellowship. He wanted to grant them some spiritual gift, a power that could be bestowed only by apostolic hands. He wanted both them and himself to be comforted together. He wished for fruit among them, a harvest of souls for God. He was therefore ready to preach the gospel to them. Although he had never seen them, and with exceptions, did not know them, and they were far from him, having only heard about them, he was vitally concerned for them and their soul's welfare.

Paul, Again

Colossians 2:1,2, "*For I would that ye know what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.*"

Those in Colosse and Laodicea had never seen Paul. Yet, he had great concern for them. He wanted them to be comforted. Doubtless, they were enduring persecution for the cause of Christ. He prayed they would stand united, with understanding of the mystery (the system of Christ). As in Second Corinthians 11:28, "*Besides those things which are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*" Was there any brother in the Lord for whom he was not concerned?

Consider Galatians 6:10 and his concern, for the spiritual welfare but all the physical welfare of others. "*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*"

Peter

On Pentecost Peter preached the gospel, offering hope and salvation through Jesus Christ. At the conclusion of his sermon, having given answer to the question, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" and having responded, "*Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,*" he said words that showed his personal concern, but more than that, the Lord's intent and concern for people everywhere, not just those of that day, in that era, but for all time to come, both Jew and Gentile. He said, Acts 2:39, "*For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*"

The Church Today

We cannot but wonder if the church today shows that much concern when huge expenditures are made for the physical and trivial material things, often of luxury and abundance, heaping upon ourselves much goods to the neglect of the work in distant lands. How brethren can bring themselves to take funds given to expand the cause of Christ and use them to provide themselves playgrounds, gymnasiums, extravagant comforts, and then sing about the needs of the lost? How can elderships spend thousands of dollars in a moment for physical things about properties, rugs, cushions, paved lots, and comforts, but then haggle for weeks on end about a few paltry dollars toward mission work? It is enough to raise the question of sincerity of our concern. Let some sensational personality who does more entertaining than teaching come into our midst and we swarm to drink it in, while the hardworking and sacrificing missionary must beg, plead for a hearing, and then be made to feel like a beggar, even an intrusion into the routine of brethren.

The Lord is universally concerned? Are we truly following His steps if we be otherwise? Shall not we live, teach, pray, go, work, be personally involved in the spreading of salvation? As suggested, let each examine himself, but let each be concerned and show that concern by things we do, not just words we speak and write (James 1:22).

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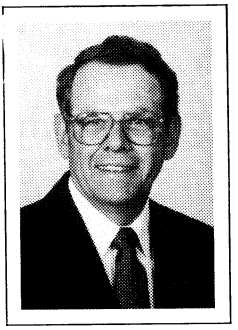
Commentary on Romans



JAMES W. BOYD

This is a verse by verse commentary called **System of Salvation.** No book emphasizes God's grace, mercy, and love more than Romans. It also emphasizes the blood and resurrection of Christ as God's part in God's plan to save man. While it teaches man cannot be saved by his own merit, it also emphasizes man's part in God's plan, including faith and works of obedience to the law of Christ, and the relationship of the old and new laws. Romans is a great doctrinal treatise. The book sells for $12 (no tax or postage added), 288 pages, hardbound in an attractive blue cover, and very readable type.

You may order from me at the return address on this issue of ***A Burning Fire,*** shown below. JWB

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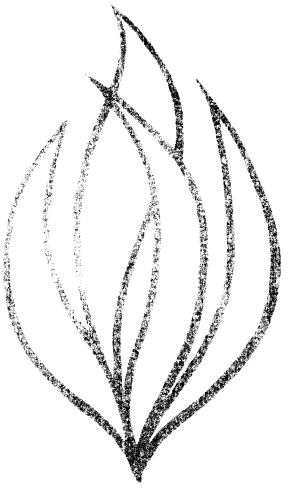

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME XII James W. Boyd NUMBER 5

Sermon for Mother's Day

Each year there is a day that is designated as Mother's Day in our nation. This is not because there is a Biblical direction for a special day to honor mothers, but it is a custom of our people as a nation. It is in harmony with the Biblical injunction to honor parents. There is no special religious ritual attached to Mother's Day, nor is it placed as a special holy day by the New Testament Christian. But it is a time for expression of attitudes, and the exercise of a privilege to honor mothers. This honoring of mother, like that of honoring father, is a duty taught in the Word of God whether we have a special day called Mother's Day or Father's Day or not.

Why do we have such a special day as Mother's Day? The actual observance of this day grew from a modest beginning in 1872 as a day dedicated to peace. On May 9, 1914 then President Woodrow Wilson signed a resolution of Congress commending its observance. The next year the President was authorized to declare Mother's Day as a day of national observance, and it has been a national custom to this day.

But the honoring of motherhood is not of man, but of God. We honor mothers, not because of a Congressional resolution, but because of a divine teaching. We honor mothers, not just one day of the year, but throughout the year. In ancient times, as today, motherhood was considered a great and special blessing. God commanded through Moses, "*Honor thy father and thy mother...*" (Exodus 20:12). The same teaching is in the new covenant in Ephesians 6:2.

Our day is often characterized among many with a glaring and obvious disrespect for age, the past, parents, and authority. We could wish this day might be a day of

real significance in learning more perfectly the will of the Lord regarding respect for parents. Proverbs 30:11, "*There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.*" This could be said of many in our time.

Meaning of Honoring Mother

What does it mean to honor your mother? It may include paying her a visit, giving her a gift, sending her a card, making a telephone call to her, writing her a letter, even wearing a special flower on that day to commemorate whether she is living or dead. All these things are nice, but there is much, much more, things of deeper significance. To honor means to regard and treat with great respect and esteem. The very definition includes both the heart and the manifestation of the attitude in the heart. It is a disposition toward mother that demonstrates itself in deeds.

This would include the way we speak to her and of her. While many may consider it old fashioned, referring to mother by her first name seems to place her on the level no different from any other. But mothers are on a level that demands more consideration, special consideration, than other relationships. Our address of her should reflect this unique relationship and her rank and position. It is a serious mistake to speak of her as "the old woman," because many use that terminology to convey disrespect. There is no more warm and beautiful term than to simply call her, "Mother," or similar words that denote she is in a special place in the heart and life. This discarding of formality between parent and child does something to detract from the respect children owe parents. We acknowledge that parents are friends. But they are far more than just another friend. They are parents. They deserve recognition that they are not just another among others.

Obedience

Honoring mother cannot be separated from obedience to her, especially while under her charge and care. Ephesians 6:1 teaches children to obey parents. This is commanded just before and is based upon the teaching to

honor father and mother. How could one think he honors his parents if and when he ignores and disobeys them? Proverbs 1:8, "*My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.*"

Obedience to parents must be taught and learned. Children do not come into this world naturally knowing to be obedient. They have to be trained to obey authority. Disrespect for authority, just as respect for authority, is learned, and this learning begins in the home. The lawlessness, rioting, immoral conduct, all reflects the breakdown of respect for authority in the home where parents have failed in guiding aright their children. We see all around us in society the dire results of disrespect for authority, the evils of indulgence, spoiled and bratty children whose parents never taught them to obey. The most frustrated young people today are those who have not been taught to respect authority. They do not even know right from wrong, nor how to make decisions because they have been given no basis by which to govern their lives. Children who are taught to obey parents and love parents will have a completely different approach to life and toward God as well as all other authorities under which they will be subjected in life. It begins with parents and must be followed by children. While there are certain commendable interests manifested in the "buddy" relationship with parents, we dare not let it reduce itself to the point that respect and honor for parents as parents is diminished.

Giving Care

Honoring parents includes caring for them in their time of need. Proverbs 23:22, "*Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.*" Common sense, fair play, and natural affection show that we should care for those who cared for us. Who has cared for us more than mother? Of course, we speak of mothers who are honorable and who attend to their prime duties. It is unfortunate that many women have been led astray from their prime work into paths of selfish gratification of their own ambitions to the neglect of their children.

First Timothy 5:8 reads, "*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.*" The Jews in the time of Jesus were in line for condemnation when they neglected the care of their needy parents. Matthew 15:4, "*Honor thy father and mother, and he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.*" He went on to show that they, by their traditions, had set aside this commandment of God. They did not use their resources to provide for their parents by contending they had already committed their substance to something else, as if that relieved them of their divinely appointed responsibility. Surely, parents who have given their very lives for the benefit of their children should not be cast aside when they grow old. This smacks more of paganism and heathenism than Christianity. We set aside a command of God to fail to provide care for their needs in their hour of need.

Showing Love

We honor mothers when we show genuine love for them. This includes more than merely sentiment. We may take it for granted that our mothers know we love them, but it is proper that we make special effort to let them know we do. This warms their hearts and encourages them as well as giving us opportunity to render honor to whom honor is due. Mothers do not grow too old to receive affection. The embrace of a child, regardless of her age or the child's age, is a part of the small reward children can give parents. Proverbs 15:20, "*A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother.*" What a brilliant light of joy is cast into the life of a mother when her children show their love and affection for her.

One of the saddest stories I have ever heard was that of a mother who was burned and scarred when saving the life of her son from flames. She became stooped and bent with work and sacrifice to educate him. But on the day of his graduation he was so ashamed of her appearance that he refused to even introduce her to his friends. Hell could not be too hot for such people! How could anyone ever reduce himself or herself to be ashamed of a godly mother? It is beyond reason and deplorable in any language.

Manner of Life

But is there a way to honor mother more effectively than to live a godly life? Words may fail to adequately express our feelings toward her. Our contact with her may be limited because of various circumstances that come in life. We may be able only to show through gifts that we care. But whether your mother be living or dead, carrying forward in your own life the way of God that she taught you, that she lived before you, is the greatest manifestation of honor that you can bestow upon her.

Why is this true? It is true because you not only honor her, but you honor what she honored above all else. You honor God!

Someone has said that there is no mother like the mother that reared us. We add to that, there is no blessing any greater than a godly mother. I am among those who know this blessing.

It is still true that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. The world needs mothers who love the Lord and guide their young in His paths. Mothers have such tremendous burdens and responsibilities. They exert such care and concern, and often without the resources she really needs. Their hearts surely are the biggest in the world. Their children are their prime interest and concern as they serve God. Let us honor them for their work's sake. Pray for each one as they strive to please God and do their duty. When they reach the sunset of life, do not fail to keep them on the pedestal they deserve in your heart. They are among those to whom honor is due. For these reasons we can be glad we have mothers, Mother's Day, and God's teaching concerning mothers.

Possibly we who are Christians need to be busier than we are encouraging young mothers in their role in life. There is no nobler work in the kingdom of God than the kind and molding hand of a mother whose loyalty is to Christ, her husband, and her home.

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When God Said, "No," to David

Second Samuel, chapter seven, is the text. It begins with David doing some serious thinking. When he became king he built his palace with the help of Hiram, king of Tyre. The Lord had given him peace from his enemies around Israel. But David took note of where the ark of the covenant was housed. Verse two reads, "*See now I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.*",

The ark of the covenant was a sacred piece of furniture in the tabernacle, in the specific area called the Most Holy Place which was separated from the rest of the tabernacle by curtains. Within the ark were tablets upon which were written the Ten Commandments, the rod of Aaron, and a pot of manna. It just did not seem proper to David that such a sacred item remain in what he considered lowly circumstances. Why should he live so sumptuously and this sacred item continue in relatively inferior conditions? If David had been living today and considered such things, he may well have asked, "Why should I have such a fine home for myself, and the building of assembly be in such a rundown state? Why should I have a new car, but the program of work of the church be so pitifully financed? Why should I enjoy conveniences and pleasure, but the financial support for missionaries be at such a minimum? It seems that I am getting the best of things and God is getting what is left?"

Relevant Questions

Are these not questions we ought to be asking today? Do not many of us live luxuriously in this nation even as the world dies for lack of the gospel? Can we be content to spend on ourselves while most of the world is ignorant of man's only hope? David's conscience bothered him, as should ours. So he planned to do

something about the situation. We should plan to do something to change things also. David decided to build a temple to the glory of God and house the ark there instead of the tent structure of the tabernacle.

David consulted Nathan the prophet and teacher of God's law. Nathan advised, verse three, "*Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee.*" From Nathan David got the "go ahead." But Nathan made a serious mistake. As we later learn, the Lord was not with David in this venture. Had Nathan consulted God before he gave his advice he might have learned to advise David differently. The first order of any teacher and advisor is to learn what the will of God is. Advice is sometimes cheap and presumptuous. Nathan presumed that this seemingly noble idea was good, but he failed to include God when he gave his advice.

In all matters, the Christian must inquire, "What would the Lord have me to do?" In realms of economics, education, recreation, earning a livelihood, political, social and professional matters, what is the will of the Lord? We would not suggest that God will tell a person whether he should be a grocer or a dentist. But the will of God will tell the grocer not to sell alcoholic beverages. It will tell the Christian it is better to be a dentist than a gambler. All decisions and actions of the Christian must be made according to the will of God and harmonious therewith. More consultation with the Word of God will inform us of the mind of God and such knowledge will have an influence on our thinking and goals in life.

God's Response

Through Nathan David was told not to follow his plan to build the temple. God had brought David from nothing to being king. Even so, it was not up to David to decide such matters. We might say that David had a "hot" idea, but God poured "cold water" on it.

There are times when God says , "No," to man, even His own people. Just a parents often have to say, "No," to their children, God says the same to His children. Why does He do this? For the same reason parents say no to their children. It is for the child's own good. While man

may not like God's negatives, those who love the Lord will respect and obey them. Our indulgent, permissive, and self centered generation has not yet learned this. Too often it seems our determination is to follow whatever we want, God's will notwithstanding.

The problem in this matter with David was that God had not authorized it. God never asked for such a thing. While David's motives were not questioned or rebuked, his plan was presumptuous. To serve God we must have God's authority through Christ for what we do (Colossians 3:17). This is the reason we do not use instruments of music in worship, count beads, or have doughnuts and coffee on the Lord's table.

God's Reasons

We can see at least two reasons why God refused to allow David to build the temple. First Chronicles 22:8 says that David was a man of war and had shed much blood. This disqualified him in God's sight. Again, if David was allowed to do this presumptuous deed and succeed, expecting to receive God's approval later on, then whose authority was governing Israel? Presumption is a sin of unclean, self willed people. Such people are not even afraid to speak evil of dignitaries (Second Peter 2:10 . What right does man have to take matters into his own hands and act without God's authority? It is Satanic that many religious people have adopted the idea that they can do whatever they like to do whether God has authorized it or not. This action may well have been the specific matter in the mind of David when he later wrote by inspiration, Psalm 19:13, "*Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins...*" When God said, "No," to David's idea, God encouraged a definite and inflexible opposition to what is not authorized. Why should we think it is any different in serving God today seeing that all authority has been given to Christ (Matthew 28:18)?

It was not that God was displeased that David sought to honor Him. In fact, God later authorized Solomon to build the temple. He even allowed David to gather materials for its eventual construction. But God has never shown pleasure with the man that takes it upon himself to do things pertaining to honoring God

according to man's will rather than God's. Man is to honor and worship God (John 4:24; Matthew 4:10). God has instructed him how to do this. There are five items of worship authorized in the New Testament; namely, singing, giving, praying, studying His Word, and partaking of the Lord's Supper. We cannot worship God just any way we happen to want and like. Worship involves submission to the will of the one worshipped. Our submission of will must give place to what God says He wants. This attitude is a part of honoring and worshipping God acceptably. Those who devise innovations, substitutions, additions, alterations, or make subtractions do not please the Father, but themselves. If men would give heed to the lesson taught regarding David's proposed temple, much of the division in the religious world would melt away beneath the warm light of truth. We must be sure we do what God authorizes, being equally sure we do not go beyond what is written even if it makes us feel good, pleases our sense, or is according to what we consider attractive. Why do men become dissatisfied with the ways of God anyway? What man has ever improved on what God has prescribed?

Obedience and Character

This lesson is substantially one of obedience and character building. Consider David once more. How would you react if you saw what you considered a need, and proposed great plans to fill that alleged need, had good and pure motives behind your proposal, but were stopped from doing it? Would you feel resentful, rejected, rebellious, discouraged, disappointed, ready to give up and quit, enraged? Would you have the attitude that you would do it anyway? All of these reactions are common among people when their favorite ideas are not enthusiastically received by others. This is true among husbands, wives, and children in the home. It is true regarding preachers, elders, deacons, teachers, and other members in the church. It is true among national and political leaders. People have a tendency to allow themselves to be offended when their ideas are not always considered the best way to go, or when such ideas are shown to be unacceptable.

We realize that there are some people who seem to make it a profession to throw "cold water" on anything and everything. They prefer to block, hinder, and stop any effort they did not propose first. They are real pillars in the church, in that they hold up everything if it was not their idea. We can only have pity for such people, but cannot allow them to stand in the way of what is good and right.

What was David's reaction when God said, "No?" Beginning with verse eighteen through verse twenty-nine we read some of the most beautiful and impressive words of praise of God found anywhere in Scripture. David expressed his gratitude to God, glorified His name, and found no fault and took no offense in God's will whatsoever. You do well to pause a moment and take your Bible, turn to Second Samuel 7:18-29 and consider these inspired words.

David's Response

David had learned to respect what God says. He had often sought answers to questions and God had often said yes to what David asked. Therefore, it is not really surprising to find David obeying God when God said no.

David is called the man after God's own heart. True, this was specifically referring to his early life. But surely David's attitude here, his submission to the will of God, must add to the reasons he was so considered by the Lord. Since these things are written for our leaning and admonition (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11), shall we learn what God intends for us to learn?

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DID YOU NOTICE? This matter of David building the temple could have been forestalled if only there had been prior consultation with God and learning what God authorizes? This is a lesson so many in the church need to learn, in this day of digression and apostasy, doing your own thing, and worldly wisdom. JWB

Gideon

In the book of Judges we read of the rises and falls of the Israelite people. They went through cycles, beginning by serving God, becoming rich and sinful, turning to idols. God would then chastise them and allow them to be overrun by their enemies. Under this hardship the people would repent and cry unto the Lord. God would select and raise up one called a judge to lead the people from their servitude to their enemies and bring independence among them once again. They would return to serving God, only to shortly see themselves living sinful lives once again as their abundance blinded them as to the source of their blessings. Over and over it went through that long history of Israel, particularly during the period of Judges. We read of one of those judges in Judges, chapter six through eight, whose name was Gideon.

Reading what is said of this man we see the working of God and man together. We see a man filled with doubts, weaknesses, and strengths. We see God's power and the way God answers man's questions. Basically, man and God are the same now as then in their relationship with each other, so we can expect to find abundant spiritual guidance in the life of Gideon.

The story of Gideon begins with Israel under the yoke of the Midianites. They had been forced to make their homes in mountains and caves, being driven from their cities. The Midianites persecuted them by plowing under their crops, killing their livestock. Judges 6:6, "*And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianite, and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.*"

Enter the Angel

The Lord sent an angel to Gideon. "*The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.*" Gideon's response to this greeting was, "*Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is this all befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from*

Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." (Judges 6:13).

Gideon missed the mark badly. He failed to note that Israel had sinned and was reaping as had been sown. He failed to remember that the righteous often suffer because of the wickedness of the evildoer. He acted as if the cause of their trouble was God, not Israel's sins. Gideon was not always perceptive in his thinking, nor always a man of courage, faith, and noble action. When we first meet him we see a bitter and resentful man, doubting God, questioning God's power, blaming God for their plight rather than the real cause. He is complaining against God, badly misunderstanding and feeling unfairly mistreated. He was not different from what many are today. People too often are frustrated and ask why this exists and why that happens. They doubt and blame God. The devil bombards them as he did Gideon with situations and circumstances that take advantage of our weaknesses and creates doubt toward God. How many thoughtless souls are deceived by such Satanic devices?

Sure enough, Israel was in a deplorable state of affairs. The angel said, "*Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have not I sent thee?*" In other words, rather than arguing with Gideon who was at fault, he tells Gideon there was something he could do about it. Gideon had the opportunity to remedy the situation about which he was complaining.

Excuses Atop Complaints

As so many react in this situation, Gideon, having complained, now makes excuses why he should not do anything. He demonstrated no faith or responsibility whatever. Verse fifteen of chapter six reads, "*Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.*" He says, in substance, "I cannot do anything about it. Why me? I am the last one you should expect to act."

Many doubting, frustrated, and complaining people who seek explanations recognize that situations are not as they should be. But when they are asked to assist in remedying the problems, they act like Gideon did here. But the Lord

promised to be with him and gave him a sign to confirm that promise. "*Surely I will be with thee.*" (Verse 16). In this way God encouraged Gideon and revived his dying and doubting faith. By His Word, God still bolsters our faith.

God then gave Gideon an assignment (6:25,26). "*And it came to pass the same night that the Lord said unto him, taker thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that it by it. And build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.*" There was much idol worship still continuing in the land. Gideon took ten man and did as the Lord commanded. It created a great furor round about, but he obeyed the Lord. Let us center our attention on what Gideon did. There are four significant accomplishments this action of destroying the altar to Ball produced.

Four Accomplishments

First, that which deserved to be destroyed was destroyed. Second, that which needed to be built was built. Third, opportunity was given to Gideon to use the encouragement and newly revived faith he had. From this time forward there are no words of doubt or complaint from him, and he ceased his excuses. He had become personally involved in doing something about the deplorable state if Israel. While he was inactive and complaining he was filled with doubt. When he began doing what needed to be done he became committed and all the former darkness was dissipated by the light of doing good. There was no more room for skepticism. Fourth, this performance of a relatively minor task equipped him for a larger and more significant task that would affect the entire nation of Israel. Beginning with thirty-two thousand men, which was reduced by the Lord to ten thousand, then to three hundred, Gideon and those three hundred drove the Midianites from Israel and they became free men once again. They returned to serving the Lord. It is when men perform small deeds well that God entrusts to them the larger ones. To be able to do big things, one must first learn to do well the small things. We could be better servants if we learned this.

Present Needs

What was accomplished by Gideon's action needs to be accomplished again in principle in our time, individually and collectively. We need to war against evil wherever it raises its ugly head. We need to build in order to do good, returning to God. We sorely need to get active and do something about our faith. We should be involved in specific works of Christian labor. Just being churchgoers is not enough. We must cease to be just pew fillers, observers, spectators, and become participants in the work of the Lord. By doing whatever tasks we can do we will equip ourselves for greater service. In this way we become qualified to grasp opportunities that may arise in the future. We should never look disparagingly upon small things. One of Zechariah's condemnations of Judah was that some had come to despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10). The Lord did not commission Gideon to the larger work before he had proved himself in lesser matters. Some only want to do what is big, noisy, sensational, and will bring them notoriety. This is not the attitude God wants of His servants.

There are many great, wonderful, and noble men and women of the Bible of whom we can read, study, and from whom we receive encouragement and can learn exceptionally profitable lessons. We need to imitate their godly characteristics. Surely Gideon is among them.

He proved to be a man of humility, courage, faith, leadership, and obedience. But he was not always such a person, was he? He grew to that rank. From a complaining skeptic he went to a respected and godly leader, setting aside excuses, getting active in doing what God wanted, diligent in what was set for him to do, seizing every opportunity for righteousness. Shall we try to do likewise?

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DID YOU NOTICE? In the account about Gideon he was told to build the altar to God, "*in the ordered place.*" Was it left to Gideon to build it just anywhere he thought best? Indeed, not. He had God's directions and was expected to

follow them. This lesson people in the church sorely need to learn in this day of digression and apostasy. JWB

Bible Answers to Baptism Questions

Why is the subject of baptism one of the more controversial questions among religious people? There are various ideas and doctrines circulated and many questions asked concerning baptism. Unfortunately, there are many varying answers given to the same question. This is because too many are answering questions according to creeds, catechisms, manuals, prayer books, confessionals, disciplines, feelings, ancestors, clergymen, etc. We ought to stay with the infallible, inerrant, inspired, all-sufficient, and authoritative Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Let us consider some of the more often asked questions on the subject and "*search the Scriptures.*"

Number One

Is it really an important subject? Some do not think so, but this reflects disrespect for the Word. Anything the Bible teaches is important. God must say a thing only once to make it important. Baptism is mentioned over one hundred times in the New Testament. We may dismiss it, but we do not change the fact it is important.

Number Two

Were people baptized in Old Testament times? They were not, with one major exception. When the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea it is said they were baptized (First Corinthians 10:1,2). They were immersed in the dual elements of the cloud and sea. Some have suggested that Naaman was baptized (Second Kings 5). But this was a dipping of seven times in the Jordan. It not called a baptism even though he was immersed and there are some similarities. Baptism was not commanded of people in Old Testament times and it did not apply to

them. But because we do not read of David, Abraham, and others being baptized has no bearing whatever on our responsibility under the law of Christ.

Number Three

What was John's baptism supposed to accomplish? The baptizing John did was a part of his work of preparing a people for the coming of Christ (Matthew 3:3). He baptized in Jordan (Matthew 3:6) when people confessed their sins (Matthew 3:6). It was for the remission of sin (Mark 1:4) that was preceded by faith and repentance (Matthew 3:2).

Those baptized were taught that "*they should believe on him which should come after him, that is Christ Jesus.*" (Acts 19:4). The effectiveness of John's baptism ended when Christ came and His will was announced on Pentecost. From Pentecost forward people were baptized in the name of Christ, meaning by His authority (Acts 2:38; 19:4,5). There is no record of people who were baptized by John's baptism before Pentecost being baptized again. In Acts 19:5 it is evident that those who Paul baptized again had been baptized after John's baptism ceased to be valid. John preparatory work was of God and adequate while operative. Once Christ came, his baptism no longer was that which was to be obeyed.

Number Four

What is the physical action of baptism? It is immersion. Baptism means a burial, plunging beneath, submersion. The word "*baptize*" is not a translation but a transliteration, simply giving the Greek word an English sound. But "baptizo" means immerse. The examples of baptism show it is a burial (Acts 8:38,39). When Jesus was baptized He went into the water, was baptized, and came out of the water. This action is not what takes places with the substitutions of men like sprinkling and pouring. Furthermore, it is specifically stated that baptism is a burial in Romans 6:3,4 and Colossians 2:12. We are buried with Him in baptism.

Both secular and sacred history affirm that the early church practiced burial in water for the action of

baptism. Pouring and sprinkling came as human substitutions gradually evolved. But such practices violate the teaching of God and cannot fulfill what the Scriptures demand.

Number Five

Is the baptism I must obey a water baptism or Holy Spirit baptism? Never has anybody ever been commanded to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit baptism was promised to the apostles, not commanded of them or anyone (John 14, 15, 16; Acts 1:8). Holy Spirit baptism was administered by Christ (John 14:26; Matthew 3:11). The baptism He commanded that His followers practiced was administered by men (Acts 10:48; Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:16). That which the apostles preached and practiced when Paul said there was one baptism (Ephesians 4:4,5) was water baptism, in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins, into Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:36; Galatians 3:27; First Peter 3:21).

Some ask if we can expect to experience both baptisms, and the answer is no, because there is only one (Ephesians 4:4,5). There is no more reason to think there are two baptism than to think there are two of all the other things mentioned of which Paul said there is but one.

Number Six

Is baptism necessary to salvation? Some men say not, but the Lord gave it as a condition for salvation (Mark 16:16). Peter said baptism saves (First Peter 3:21). Annanias said sins are washed away when baptized (Acts 22:16). Are divine commands necessary to obey, or are they optional? Peter commanded the household of Cornelius to be baptized (Acts 10:48). Salvation depends on our obedience (Hebrews 5:9). Nothing is clearer in New Testament teaching than the truth that baptism is a command men must obey to be saved. While denominations have attempted to reduce it to nothing but a sign of existing salvation, or a way of entrance into their denomination, the Bible does not present baptism in such fashion.

Number Seven

What really happens at baptism? What is it for? Acts 2:38 teaches it is for the remission of sins. Acts 22:16 teaches sins are washed away in baptism. Galatians 3:27 teaches it as the way to get into Christ, as does Romans 6:3,4. When we are baptized into Christ we are at that moment baptized into His death where His blood was shed (John 18:31). It is there that the blood of Christ is applied to our sin-stained souls and we are raised to walk in newness of life, new creatures "*in Christ.*" (Second Corinthians 5:17). It is then that the new birth (John 3:3-5) is accomplished, born of water (baptism(, and the Spirit (by the teaching of the Spirit).

Number Eight

Does baptism put you into the church? Yes, because when one is baptized into Christ he is likewise baptized at the same moment into His body which is the church (First Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22,23). The same act of obedience that brings salvation is that which causes God to add one to His church (Acts 2:41,47). You do not do one thing to be saved and then something else to "join some church." What you do to be saved is what you must do to become a member of the Lord's church because the Lord's church is composed of the saved. It is unfortunate that some false teachers teach people to be saved and then join the church of their choice. God does not teach such, and God does not give man a choice. Nor are there many churches approved of God. There is one body, which is the church, and those who obey God in baptism for the remission of sins are added to His church.

Number Nine

Is being baptized to be saved a system of salvation by works? The question calls for a yes and no, depending on whether you understand that the Bible teaches there are different kinds of works. Nobody can be saved by works of the old Mosaic law, or works of his own merit and righteousness. But there are works of obedience that makes faith perfect (James 2:20ff). Even believing is called a work (John 6:29). Unless one obeys, his faith is

a dead faith (James 2:26). When one is baptized he is depending on God for salvation and makes his appeal to God by being baptized (First Peter 3:21). Baptism is man's part in God's plan for saving man. Obeying is the way we partake of the benefits of God's grace, and the way our faith becomes a saving faith. Even when we work the works of obedience we are not earning salvation, nor attempting to do so. We are meeting the conditions God has given for man to receive the gift of salvation he offers and gives.

Number Ten

Is baptism "water salvation"? It has been called that by some who ridicule God's plan. Was Naaman's healing in Jordan "water healing"? Was the water that which healed him? No! Neither does the water have the power of itself to save. Water is the element into which many must be baptized in order to reach the saving blood of Christ. Nobody has ever taught that the power is the water, if they teach truth. To so charge is to make a false charge. But to contend that we can ignore what God has commanded and still receive the blessing He has offered is arrogant and defiant of His will. We are saved by grace, by faith, by blood. That is beyond debate. But when are we so saved? It is when we do what God has commanded us to do!

Number Eleven

Were people always baptized in New Testament times? Not everyone obeyed God. Not everyone was saved. But those that heard the Word, believed the Word, and obeyed the Word did so including baptism. Every example of conversion to Christ recorded in the New Testament after Pentecost was brought to completion with obedience to the act of baptism (Acts 2,8,9,10,16,18).

Other questions that are asked, but this will suffice for this lesson.Whatever we need to know about baptism is revealed in Scripture. The doctrines of men do not tell us what we must learn and obey. We "*speak as the oracles of God,*" (First Peter 4:11), and urge all people to hear and heed the Word of the Lord.

Jesus is Coming

Some of our Lord's last words on earth were, John 14:1-3, "*Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also.*"

Acts 1:9-11, "*And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*"

First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is a lengthy passage that closes with full assurance of the Lord coming again. Paul ended the First Corinthians letter with the word, "*Maranatha,*" which means, "our Lord come." The message of the Bible is plain in its teaching that Jesus is coming again.

We read of other "comings" of Jesus. He came to this world in the form of flesh, fashioned as a man, Emmanuel, God with us. He came to His disciples after His death and resurrection. In a sense He came when the Holy Spirit overwhelmed the apostles, and in the sense of executing wrath and judgment against Jerusalem in the destruction of that city that He foretold (Matthew 24:47). But we speak in this lesson of His final and personal coming.

Varied Reactions

People react in various ways to this revelation. Some scoff. Others are curious. Some are glad and many are fearful. There are many questions that people can raises, and can justifiably be raised, about this forthcoming event. Because there are many questions for which God has not provided inspired answers, some in lacking revelation have jumped into speculation and fanciful theories, They have invented entire religious systems centered around their speculations, guesswork, and invented theories, such as premillennialism. But there are answers to basic questions revealed and are given to us for our learning.

When will Jesus come? Some declare confidently that Jesus is coming soon. There is even a song that some brethren mistakenly sing that so declares. It ought not be sung. This is misleading. We have no way of knowing when the Lord will return. It may be soon, and may be before you finish reading this lesson. It is not a question whether He could come soon, but whether we have any evidence that He will come soon. This we do not have. Sensational preaching has been delivered about the so-called "signs of the times" by denominational clergymen and many have fallen victim to these speculations. Matthew 24:36,43; 25:13 shows clearly we do not know and cannot know when that return will be. But we can be just as certain that the day of the Lord will come.

Apostasy First

Paul said He was coming, but foretold an apostasy beforehand (Second Thessalonians 2:1-4). He said it was already at work in his own day (verse 7). But he said the apostasy would not come while he was still standing in its path. History shows apostasy did overcome the Lord's church. Even so, this does not tell us when Jesus will come.

Delay has caused some to think He is not coming at all. The parable depicting the return of Matthew 24:48-51 is an encouragement to be ready whenever He comes. Being prepared is what the Lord emphasized rather than the time element as to when. Second Peter 3:1-10 says He will come as a thief in the night. That means He will

come without announcement. Matthew 24:37-39 teaches that life will be continuing as usual, as in the days of Noah before the flood came. The signs to which some erroneous teachers point recorded in Matthew 24 are signs Jesus gave that would appear before the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, not signs to announce His final return. Whatever those signs mean and were, they have already occurred because Jesus said, verse thirty-four, "*Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.*"

In view of the certainty of His coming, but the uncertainty as to when, Peter said, Second Peter 3:11, "*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of person ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.*" In other words, seeing the return is certain, how should we live? Can there be any doubt how we should live?

We might note here that the day of His final return will be the last day (John 11:24). It is the day that there be the resurrection (John 5:28,29).

The Reasons for It

Why will the Lord return? It will not be to set up His kingdom. We can be certain of this because His kingdom already exists. Those in the church at Colosse were already in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). He said the kingdom would come in the lifetime of some of those to whom He personally spoke (Mark 9:1). The church and the kingdom are one and the same, and it came into existence on the first Pentecost after His ascension in fulfillment of kingdom prophecies. Christians are a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6). John said he was in the kingdom (Revelation 1:9). John the Baptist had preached that the kingdom was "*at hand,*" meaning nearby, soon to be, nigh upon us (Matthew 3:2). Christ now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. Peter said, Acts 2:30, that Christ was promised to be raised to sit on David's throne, and would receive that throne after His resurrection (verse 31). The apostles were witnesses of His resurrection (verse 32), and Christ is now on the right hand of God (verse 33), having received the promise the Father gave Him. To sit on the right hand of God

denotes His rank and authority. Stephen says the throne is in heaven (Acts 7:49), not on earth.

Christ will not return to begin a literal one thousand years reign in Jerusalem. There is nothing in Scripture that teaches the "rapture" of premillennial doctrine, or the so-called Great Tribulation, an earthly reign of Christ, etc. His kingdom is not of this world (John 8:35). There is no Scripture that teaches He will ever set foot on earth again. Rather, the redeemed shall meet Him in the air and ever be with the Lord (First Thessalonians 4:17). Old Testament prophecy teaches that no descendant of David will ever reign in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 22:30), and Christ is a descendant of David. Jehoiachin, of the seed of David, and also known as Coniah, was next to the last king of Judah, where Jerusalem is. The last king was not his seed, but his uncle, Zedekiah. If Christ did set up an earthly kingdom and rule from Jerusalem then He would break and make false the inspired prophecy of Jeremiah. "*This saith Jehovah, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah.*"

End of the World

There will be no earth on which the Lord, or anybody, can set up anything when Jesus comes. Second Peter 3:12,13, "*Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being of fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.*" The redeemed shall have a new habitation when He comes again, but this earth and all pertaining to it shall be no more.

When He comes it will be the day of the resurrection of all. John 11:20-27 teaches the day of the resurrection is the last day. There is no day after the final day and final return of Christ. There will be only the resurrection and judgment. John 5:28,29 says the day of resurrection will be the judgment day. First Thessalonians 4:13ff teaches the day of resurrection is the day of the Lord's return. First Corinthians 15:24-26 teaches that Christ will reign

until the last enemy shall be destroyed, and the last enemy is death, which will be destroyed with the resurrection of all.

Again, the Lord will come to deliver His kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). Those in the kingdom shall be with God eternally. Those outside the kingdom, which is His church, shall not be so delivered.

Judgment

Christ will come to separate the good from the evil, the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the chaff (Matthew 25:31-46). He will come to render vengeance against the disobedient (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9; Matthew 7:21-23). He will come to bestow reward on His servants (Matthew 16:27; Second Timothy 4:6-8).

What will be the manner of His coming? Acts 1:11 says it will be as He ascended. He will come with clouds (Revelation 1:7). Every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7). He will be with holy angels (Second Thessalonians 1:7; Matthew 25:31). He will come as a "*thief in the night*" (Second Peter 3:10; First Thessalonians 5:1-3,6). It will all occur in the twinkling of an eye (First Corinthians 15:52). It will be accompanied by the destruction of the world and man's resurrection (Second Peter 3; John 5:28,29). It will obviously be a moment, the likes of which has never been nor shall ever be again. It will be fearsome, momentous, awesome. Yes, Jesus is coming. We are sure because the Bible tells us so.

Are We Ready?

Whether we are ready for that day matters. We have been warned to be ready. We are instructed to prepare. We have been promised God's blessings if we will follow His will. The only preparation is to be faithful in Christ. We enter Christ by faith, repentance, confession of faith, and baptism into Christ. We, thereafter, are to abide in Him and walk in the light as He is in the light (John 15:6-10; First John 1:7). Then, when He comes, regardless of when, all will be well with our souls.

* * * * *

Parents, Be Specific



JAMES W. BOYD

The welfare of the Lord's church is greatly dependent on parents teaching their children concerning Christ and the church. It is all too apparent that many youths have been allowed to reach maturity without knowing there is but one church, the body of Christ, and that he saves the body (Eph. 1:22,23; 4:4,5; 5:23). They think one church is as good as another and that salvation can be outside His church because parents are not being specific. Fault lies also with preachers who teach such a "fuzzy" message regarding salvation that young people miss the truth. We ought never be ashamed to present the truth on these matters even though some in the world do not accept them. Show genuine love for your child! Teach him!

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Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XII James W. Boyd NUMBER 6

Preaching God Wants

God wants preaching. First Corinthians 1:21, *"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."* While there are many methods for spreading truth, preaching was, and is, and shall forever be the number one way ordained of God. To preach is to publicly proclaim the gospel of Christ. We want to encourage every means being used to advance the cause of Christ that is proper and within the framework of His will. But especially we want to take note of preaching and the kind of preaching God wants.

Not all preaching pleases God. Galatians 1:10-12, *"For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."* Preaching should first and foremost be that which God wants. James teaches that friendship with the world makes one an enemy of God. We can never please all men anyway. They best we shall be able to do is to please God and possibly some men (First Thessalonians 2:3-6). Beware of that so-called preacher who sets his goal to please men. He will have to compromise truth to do so, and still he will not accomplish his goal.

What is the World Getting?

What kind of preaching is the world getting? Someone has said it gets the "Heinz variety"; that is, fifty seven varieties. People hear everything from novel reviews, political discussions, speculations, human theologies, philosophies, hobbies, vague and obscure generalities, intellectual emptiness, and after dinner speeches doctored with the flowery and smooth speech of deception and

substantially nothing. It is like the time two men were listening to a preacher, and one turned to the other and asked, "What is he talking about?" The other responded, "He don't say."

Of the Book

Preaching that God wants will, first of all, be preaching from the Bible, and true to the Bible. We are to "*preach the word*" (Second Timothy 4:1-4). God's Word came from God and is inspired of Him (Second Timothy 3:16,17; First Corinthians 2:13,14). The Bible not only contains God's Word, but is the infallible, inerrant, inspired, all-sufficient, and authoritative Word of God. Second Peter 4:11, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" This teaches the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture, and preaching should be according to "*thus saith the Lord.*"

The nature of the Bible is such that we either accept all of it or we reject it. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Without faith we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). We cannot live without His Word (Matthew 4:4). The Scriptures testify of Christ (John 5:39). We shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48). What has been written has been written that we might believe (John 20:30,31). William Jennings Bryan, when asked if he believed the story of Jonah being swallowed by the fish, replied, "If the Bible had said Jonah swallowed the fish, I would have believed that, too." So must be our attitude toward the Scriptures.

Some deny the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament. Some make strenuous efforts to "explain" them in naturalistic terms. How people can deny the work of Christ and still claim to be Christians defies reason and smacks of intellectual dishonesty. Jesus endorsed the account of the flood at the time of Noah (Matthew 24), and the account of Jonah (Matthew 12), and Lot's wife (Luke 17). Is it man's prerogative to tamper with the Word of God, especially in view of condemnations against those who would do so? Actually, there is no justification and cause to accept any of it if you deny any of it. I once had a relative to tell me she believed the account of the resurrection, but not the virgin birth of Christ. That is not

even consistent with common sense. The same Bible that tells us of one records the other also. Who was she to select and choose which to accept? Some accept faith but deny baptism. Some accept the Lord's Supper but deny the necessity of assemblying. Consistency is a characteristic with which some obviously are not familiar nor do they respect the need of it.

Exalts Christ

God is pleased with preaching that exalts Jesus Christ and Him crucified. First Corinthians 1:23,24, "*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews stumblingblock, and unto the Greek foolishness. But unto them which are called, both the Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*"

There are multitudes of passages that teach the preaching of Christ, such as First Corinthians 2:1-5; 15:1-4; Romans 1:1-4,16; First Thessalonians 2:8,9. Consideration of each of these is deserving of comment for which we do not have space in this written lesson. But preaching of Christ should embrace His pre-incarnate state, His birth by the virgin Mary, His life, words, miracles, deed of all sorts, His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, including the promise of His return, His warnings, and promises of reward to the faithfuul. Everything related to Christ is proper material for preaching that God wants.

Certain and Clear

God wants preaching that makes a clear distinction between right and wrong. We realize that some today even deny there is such a thing as right and wrong, but we question how could they know such a position is right. We read of the condemnation of the doctrines of men and error. We should preach the doctrine of Christ and truth. Matthew 15:9, "*But in vain to they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" Galatians 1:6-9 warns against perverted "gospels," which are not the gospel. Repeatedly man has heard God's prohibition of adding to or taking from what God has taught in His Word. Error is to be exposed and opposed, and truth is to be proclaimed and followed.

Positive and Negative

There are both positive and negative elements in the truth of God. Once a preacher was advised to preach the Word like a car salesman may sell his car, not knocking the other follow's product, but only extolling his own. But the preacher reminded the salesman that either car will get you to your desired destination, but truth and error will not take you to the same place. Leaving others alone who are in error cannot be an imitation of Christ and His apostles. The advocates of an "all positive" gospel are very negative toward negative preaching. They say, "Don't say don't." The difficulty they have with negative preaching is that it runs against the grain of being allowed to do whatever they want to do. Preaching must be balanced and must include "*all the counsel of God.*" Preaching the Word involves rebuke and reproof as well as exhortation (First Timothy 4:1-4). One cannot preach the gospel by centering and confining himself to the either/or position concerning positive and negative preaching.

There is a philosophy in the world about rearing children that says we should never frustrate them by saying no to them. The fruit of such as that is frustrated people who know not how to distinguish between right and wrong. They do not know how to make a decision because they have no basis for making it. The mark of maturity is the ability to discern both good and evil (Hebrews 5:14). What the Lord says we are to do must be included. What the Lord says not to do must be included. The "rub" with many, even some church members, especially those of the liberal bent, is that they do not want to be disturbed in their sins and prefer that preachers "leave me alone."

Exalts the Church

Preaching God wants exalts the church. The church of Christ is the glorious church. It is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). While now and again we hear some so-called preacher talk about preaching Christ and not the church, that we worship Christ and not the church, we remind one and all that when one preaches the message of the Bible he cannot separate Christ and His church. When Philip preached in Samaria he preached Jesus Christ and His kingdom (Acts 8:12). Christ died for the church

(Ephesians 5:25), and will save the church (Ephesians 5:23). He is the foundation of the church and He built it (Matthew 16:16-18). It is an admission of Biblical ignorance to talk about preaching the man but not the plan, preaching Christ but not the church. We honor Christ when we honor His word and work. Paul declared the church to be a glorious church (Ephesians 5:27). We do not exalt the church to the neglect of Christ when we preach concerning the church. We exalt Christ by exalting His body, which is the church, which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Why people find this difficult to comprehend is difficult to comprehend.

Convicts the Sinner

God wants preaching that will convict the sinner of his guilt of sin and that tells him what God has done and what he must do to be saved. Some have even gone so far as to deny the reality of sin. Others define sin as nothing more than what you do not accept, but each has his own way and standard of measure. John says, "*Sin is the transgression of the law.*"(First John 3:4). The law is the law of God. One can violate that law by doing what ought not be done, or failing to do what ought to be done, as the Word of God defines. The work of the Holy Spirit is to prove the world guilty of sin (John 14:8). He does this by and through the preaching of the Word, the same kind of preaching that was done by the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit in their preaching.

I once heard a so-called elder say of the preaching of a so-called preacher, "It was a wonderful sermon. It disturbed nobody, and nobody became aroused. It was just plain truth." We wonder what he would have said concerning the sermon of Peter on Pentecost, or of sermons preached by Christ, Paul, and other evangelists of the early church! When they preached their hearers were disturbed because they were told they were in sin, lost in sin, doomed in sin, could be released from sin, but they must take advantage of God's provision for forgiveness or they would be eternally lost.

So much so-called preaching today only lulls people with a lullaby while they remain in sin. Some can hear some preachers and never even learn what they must do to be

saved, or even if they need to do anything. They get a steady diet of how everything is beautiful in its own way, and learn how to feel good about themselves. Someone has said that some preaching is without distinction. It is "yo" preaching; part yes, part no, and never able to tell the difference. Patting the evildoer on the back and making him feel good about himself will never save his soul. Consider the preaching God ordained for the prophets of old. Then you will have an idea of the kind of preaching God wants regarding the condemnation of sin and the presentation of the way to be saved.

Comforts and Troubles

Someone has said, "Preaching is to comfort the troubled and trouble the comforted." You can listen to some so-called preachers year after year and never know that anything or anybody could ever be contrary to the will of God, except those who believe one could be contrary to the will of God. The latter are often severely condemned and criticized. Some preachers are of the sort that constantly criticize those who oppose false doctrines, but never will they say a distinctive word openly about those who promote false doctrines or their deceptions. They will possibly mention love, grace, and mercy, but usually even that is not truthfully preached because they present it in such a fashion as if that is all there is to the way of salvation. They act ashamed of faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism. They do not emphasize the necessity of a faithful life in Christ that conforms, not to the world, but to Him. They are heard to say, "Receive Christ as your personal Savior," and never preach the terms of salvation as the Bible teaches them, or only now and then. They tell people to only believe, raise their hands if they want to be saved, but never preach the message Peter and Paul preached that the Bible teaches. They tell people to expect a miracle or some kind of direct work of the Holy Spirit upon them rather than the truth they must believe and obey. The world is filled with false teachers who seek their own gain and make merchandise of preaching rather than proclaiming God's truth to the salvation of the souls of their hearers. Unfortunately, the church has become contaminated with the "people pleasers" also.

Once it was the stated intent and practice over the program called the Herald of Truth to briefly state the terms of salvation every program. Now you can listen time after time and never even know you need to be saved. You get massive doses of human philosophy, psychology, thinks-so's and maybe-so's. That same church that controls that program now emphasizes feeling good about yourself.

Builds the Church

God wants preaching that builds up the church with exhortation and edification. He wants preaching that keeps the church pure and free from error in doctrine and practice. He wants preaching that maintains Christian living, demanding purity of life, that feeds the child of God so that he may grow to spiritual maturity and do the work of being a child of God. First Thessalonians 3:10, *"Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith."* Second Peter 3:18, *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

These are a few characteristics that should characterize all preaching. It is the kind of preaching that God wants and the kind that elderships and memberships everywhere should demand. Preachers who will not preach all the counsel of God should be rushed from their pulpits into the streets and never allowed to return until they show they comprehend the kind of preaching God wants. Sadly, so many have allowed the silly nothings and the mouthings of the clergy-type speakers until the church has become ignorant of the truth, soft toward error, and overflowing with liberalism, hypocrisy, worldliness, and digression. But there is a kind of preaching that will save (First Corinthians 1:21), and this we must preach.

* * * * *

PARDON ME! But I have a hard time having respect for these preachers who never expose error, continue to fellowship those who promote error, trot in cadence with false teachers, attend their "pow-wows," particpate with them, and can only condemn those who do oppose error. They claim to "love," but what do they love? Where is love for truth and those who contend earnestly for it? JWB

What Kept Christ on the Cross?

Matthew 27:41-43, "*Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him; for he said I am the Son of God.*"

Mark 15:29-32, "*And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.*"

Luke 23: 35-37, "*And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be the Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.*"

These are three inspired accounts reporting on the same circumstances. They do not all say exactly the same thing. One account may include something another does not include. There are no contradictions between them, however. It is when we put the three together that we get the complete inspired record. They complement each other.

As expected, there is much in common in the three accounts. Each speaks of events and words spoken surrounding the death of Christ. Each notes the mockery, derision, and ridicule heaped upon Jesus even as He died on Calvary's tree. There was no mercy extended Him whatsoever. Each tells of the implied denials and challenges of His identity as the Son of God. Each tells of

the dares for Him to come down from the cross. "We will believe if you come down," they would say. We wonder if they would, seeing how many miracles had been performed before them already, yet they remained enemies of the Lord. Some today say if they could see a miracle they would believe in Jesus. But the power behind the miracles is exactly the same power behind the record of the miracles. Why would you think one would believe one and not the other? Our faith is not in the miracles, although we are sure they occurred. Our faith is in the One behind the miracles and behind the revelation of the miracles.

The Challenge

The challenge to Jesus to come down from the cross must have been a tremendous temptation for Christ. After all, He had the power to do so. Had He not come that men might believe on Him? Here was what seemed to be an easy and sure way to secure many converts. It was similar to the temptation of the devil when Jesus was in the wilderness for Him to simply bow down before Satan and the devil would retreat from the world (Matthew 4:8-10). It was even more a temptation because it would bring immediate relief from the excruciating agony He was suffering. He was human as well as Deity. But He did not come down. What kept Jesus on the cross?

The Nails?

He had been nailed to the cross and as we consider the physical circumstances we have to ask if it was because of these nails that He had to remain until death. He had been securely fastened with spikes through His hands and feet, sufficiently secure to support His body weight. Was this why Jesus remained on the cross?

Surely, we would not think that the Lord's power was so small that the nails prevented His descent. The One who by the power of His voice created the entire universe, who could calm the elements by speaking to them, who walked on the water, would find the nails a minor obstacle. The One who parted the Red Sea, brought the flood at the time of Noah, delivered Israel miraculously in battle after battle would find the nails as nothing. We cannot believe this was the reason He stayed.

The Soldiers?

Was it the presence of the Roman soldiers that made His attempt to come down a futile one? Would He consider it a useless gesture, knowing they would immediately seize Him again? It was not this. Soldiers were later stationed before His tomb to prevent anything happening to His body, but they were not able to retard anything. Actually, the soldiers and others could not even have seized Him except He surrendered Himself to them. He could have called twelve legions of angels for His protection if that had been His will (Matthew 26:53). Pilate could have had no power over Him except is was given him (John 19:10,11). No man nor group of men can prevent what God is determined to do. Others had sought His life during His personal ministry and He escaped them many times. It was not the soldiers that kept Jesus on the cross.

A Martyr

Was it because Jesus wanted to die such a cruel death so as to make Himself a martyr, as some skeptics have surmised? Such an explanation is unreasonable in the light of the fact that Jesus had earlier prayed that this cup of suffering pass from Him (Matthew 26:39). He had no desire to die such a death except it was the will and plan of God to accomplish the system of salvation for man. He had surrendered His will to the Father's, but not because He wanted to die. He was willing , but not wanting to die.

Useless in Defeat?

Was it because He realized it was useless that He even make the attempt to come down? Did He consider such an effort to be futile? Was He truly defeated, exposed as a pretender as His enemies claimed? Was He but an imposter whose scheme had finally run its limit, and now He was being justly punished for His blasphemy as charged? One of the ironies of the cross of Christ is that the One who died that day gives life and is the only one remaining from all those who were present that day. What was temporarily considered as a defeat of Jesus was but a giant step forward toward ultimate victory. What was thought at the time to rid the world of Him was but the finishing of God's plan to save man from sin.

Sin Took Him There

From the study of the Word it is easy to discover the sins that took Jesus to the cross. We need to be impressed with them. Romans 8:3 teaches He was made sin, that is a sin offering, for us. By His sacrifice He condemned sin. Hebrews 2:17 teaches that it was the sinfulness of mankind that took Jesus to the cross. Romans 5:10 teaches how man alienates himself from God and it is by and through Jesus Christ that reconciliation with God can be accomplished. The death of the Son of God provided the only power by which man could be saved (Hebrews 10:4; 9:12). Romans 5:9 teaches we are justified by His blood. This blood was shed on the cruel tree.

Even considering the immediate surroundings we see that pride, hate, jealousy, love of money, desire for position, ignorance of God's Word, blindness, hardness of hearts, following false leaders, denial of truth, perjury, all played a role in taking Jesus to the cross. Each of these sins are present in our own world.

But once He was there, and having power to come down if He chose, what kept Him there? Especially in view of the challenges and dares hurled at Him during His suffering, Why did He remain suspended between heaven and earth?

God's Love

That which kept Christ on the cross is at the very heart of the religion of Christ. It was God's love for sinful man. Ephesians 2:4,5, "*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved).*" Consider what lies behind this statement.

The prophets of old had foretold of these things (Acts 3:24). Was God to be true and faithful to His Word? The promises had been made and included the coming of the Messiah by whom salvation would be offered. Would God now invalidate all of that which had transpired? Jesus stayed on the cross because of His love and respect for the Word of God. Had He come down, what would that have done to what God had declared would take place? How much confidence could we have in the Word of God that

would be altered for His own benefit and to man's detriment?

Mankind was lost in sin, hopeless, helpless, doomed, and damned, without means to save himself by himself, but in need of a Savior. Payment for sin had to be made. Justice demanded it. Would each man pay for himself by being eternally doomed, or would there be another to die in his stead? Here is why Jesus remained on the cross. It was His love for sinful man that He endured the most painful of deaths. Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."* John 15:13, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* Jesus even went beyond this in dying for His enemies. John 3:16 tells us why Jesus remained on the cross. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..."* First John 3:16, *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."* First John 4:10, *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* His blood is the atoning power.

Think for a moment. What if Christ had come down as challenged. Could we trust Him? Could we be so confident in His Word? If He had come down, wherein would be the power for our forgiveness? Ephesians 1:7, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."* He shed His blood *"for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:28). Where would be the soul-cleansing agent if He had come down?

Taken Down From the Cross

A few hours thereafter, when all suffering was gone because death had finally brought Him relief, loving hands did take Jesus' body from the cross. Luke 23:50-53, *"And behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor, and he was a good man, and a just, (the same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid."*

But the death of Jesus was not the end. On the third day, this same Jesus that was crucified was raised by God from the dead (Acts 2:30-32). The resurrection declared in terms forever irrefutable, indisputable, and unmistakable, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 1:4). With the resurrection of Christ an accomplished fact, God's plan for saving man and offering to man eternal life was near completion. Soon it would be declared for the first time in its completeness on Pentecost. How much more glorious for Christ, how much more beneficial to mankind, that Jesus did not come down from the cross, but was raised the third day from the tomb!

Jesus remaining on the cross demonstrates God's love and provides the basic appeal of the gospel. John 12:32, *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."* Jesus was lifted up on the cross, lifted up from the tomb, lifted up into heaven. Having been lifted up, He calls through the gospel to all men and women everywhere to come to Him for salvation. It was love, God's love, Christ's love, that kept Jesus Christ on the cross. It was love for me and you. How do we respond to such love?

* * * * *

Today's Youth Facing Today's Problems

Solomon advised, "*Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth...*" (Ecclesiastes 12:11). God is concerned about the spiritual welfare of youth and so should everyone, young and old. It is in the interest and genuine concern for their welfare that this lesson is presented. Our lesson is primarily directed toward those who are in the days of their youth and addressed to them.

There are seven facts we first must recognize. One, young people are the youths of today, and they are those for

whom God is concerned. Two, there are many problems youth must face in this world. Three, they will not be a youth for very long. Time will take care of that. Four, today's youth is not the first to face problems. Nor are they the only ones today facing problems. Five, youth is neither inferior nor superior to adulthood. Adulthood and youth are obviously not the same. They do not have the same responsibilities, opportunities, nor capacities. Youths cannot be adults just yet and adults cannot now be youths. Adults have problems youths cannot solve, and vice versa. Farmers have problems and merchants have problems. Their problems, even though related, are not the same. Neither is superior to the other. Neither is inferior to the other. There is a great difference between adults and youths we must remember. Adults have once been youths, but youths have never been adults. Adults, therefore, have some advantage to see and understand both periods. Youths sometimes seem to forget this. Six, there are some matters which youths cannot yet handle because they are not in the position to handle them. There are matters of leadership, guidance, control, duty that pertain to adults that do not yet pertain to youths. Even though youths may be affected by many things over which they have no control, this is life. Such is true even in adulthood. Seven, there are many problems about which there is much that youths can do. In fact, if these problems are not handled now to the extent they can be, youths will be forever handicapped.

Preparation

Youth face the issue of preparedness. Many who are now adults neglected this issue and now find adulthood overbearing. Youth is a time for preparing for future life. Actually, all of life is a time for preparing for eternity. But especially are the days of youth a time to set your standards. Too many youths build ceilings over themselves while young that they cannot penetrate once they are adults. Too many leave the years of youth and enter adulthood unprepared. They must become prepared socially, mentally, physically, and most important of all, spiritually. It is tragic that emphasis in placed on lesser preparations to the neglect of the spirit.

Youth is a time for education, though not exclusively for youth. No person is truly educated who is not acquainted with the Bible. As one becomes an adult he is forced into life that demands a state of readiness. If youths have failed to prepare they face immeasurable problems. While not yet encumbered with the duties and responsibilities of adulthood, young people need to avail themselves of opportunities to prepare themselves in all areas. Our advice to the young is, "Don't blow your chances."

In a Hurry

Young people often are guilty of pushing life. It may not do much good to even mention it, but it is something young people need to recognize. Youths are always wanting to be older than they are. It is somewhat like adults wanting to be younger. Youths are impatient to "grow up." They seem to think that everything worthwhile is for later life. Grass is always greener on the other side. This is not necessarily so. Each age of life has its blessings. Youths should give life all they can give it now in the days of youth, and reap the harvest. Failing to get from life what is intended in youth will make adulthood less wonderful.

Youths are somewhat like green apples. If they are not allowed to ripen, they will only be hard and bitter. You cannot push the maturing process too fast or it will backfire. Growth and development always takes time.

Many parents and other adults are guilty of pushing the young into maturity before they are ready for it. They encourage early dating, clothing that is immodest, adult activities and privileges, structured and controlled activities to the extent the child does not have time nor opportunities to ever be a child. Young people are not small adults. They are young people. We should let them get the fullest from that period of life without trying to make them little adults before they are adults. They cannot successfully be little adults. We see ten and twelve year olds dressed like they were twenty-five. It is a mark of offense against the child and a manifestation of some stupidity of the adults responsible. We see teens keeping hours like they were already mature. Many have

freedoms, lacking guidance, that only leads to their corruption. Then we wonder why some of them get frustrated with life, burned out on life before they have hardly entered adulthood. We can understand why some youths get bored with life so early. They have been forced to live it all before their time.

Peer Pressure

Youths need to face the problem of social pressures called peer pressure. There is tremendous pressure to do what those around you are doing. All people, young and old, are subjected to the pressure to conform in order to be accepted and liked by others. This is a problem that stays with the Christian all the days of his life. But he must remember that even though he is in the world, he is not to be of the sinful world. Because this problem is a lifelong matter, young people need to learn to cope with it early in life.

Youths need to learn to be themselves and not imitations of others. They need to learn to think for themselves rather than blindly following the way of the crowd. If you follow others you will never be your own person. Surely, all should try to be socially acceptable to a degree, friendly, courteous, fair, gentle, pleasant, and polite. But all must learn to stand on their own feet, be independent of others to the extent that they do not let others govern their lives. You should never compromise what is true and right before God to get along and go along with anybody. One talent youths must develop is the ability to stand even if they have to stand alone. God's people have always had to be such people. Who makes up your mind? Who decides what you do? While you are subject to your parents you must allow yourself to be guided by them and their guidance should be according to the Word of God. But you should not let pressure of being accepted, being liked, being popular have the controlling influence over your life. Unless you learn to discipline yourself to stand for truth regardless of others, you are subject to being tossed to and fro all your life from one error to another. The guidance given you from the Word of God must be allowed to determine your life. You are most fortunate if you have parents who love you and love the Lord to instruct you in His

ways. Let God be your guide. Permitting the crowd to set your standards if fatal to your soul.

Adult Hypocrisy

Youths are troubled over what they perceive to be the hypocrisy in adults. A hypocrite is one who pretends to be what he really is not, and really doesn't intend to be. He does what he does for show. He says one thing but does another. Some of the strongest language of condemnation found in the Bible is in Matthew, chapter twenty-three, where the Lord Jesus condemned hypocrisy. That adults, as well as youths, are often guilty of this pretense is not to be denied.

Children are born into a world where everybody cares for them, every decision is made for them in their early years, and they learn to love and trust the adults around them. They assume what adults say and do is always right. But as youths grow older they come to realize that adults do not always live according to what they say nor are they always what they ought to be. Even those in whom youths have placed their confidence sometimes prove to be a heart-breaking disappointment to them. The response to this awareness that there is often inconsistency among adults sometimes causes some young people to think nobody is honest, nobody cares, nobody really is trying to do what is right. But this response is wrong and the conclusion is wrong. It is foolish to throw overboard all truth because somebody in whom we place confidence does not live according to truth. That is not the fault of the truth. We do not do this in others matters of life. Why should we do it in matters of the Bible, the church, and religion? Are you going to quit going to doctors because some of them get sick? Are you going to violate the law because some law enforcement officer violates it? Shall you cease to ride in a car because some driver drives recklessly? Are you going to discard God's teaching on marriage because some divorce? Are you going to get rid of all your tires because one goes flat?

Nobody is perfect, even adults. Not all adults are hypocrites, however. All who make mistakes are not hypocrites. Adults are human beings and are facing

many problems, temptations, threats of which youths are not yet aware. This is not to excuse adults for evil conduct, but it is to simply encourage youths to face realities regarding adults. Only Christ was perfect and only He is the standard by which to measure all things. Even parents are not perfect. Preachers and elders are not perfect. Young people are not perfect either.

It is a good sign that you are reaching a higher level of maturity when you can understand the difference between what a person ought to be and what he actually is and see the difference between what you have been taught and what sometimes people do. Adults may aggravate the problem for youth by their inconsistent lives, but even the youths must remember to set their sights on Christ, not on any human being. While it may be rather disturbing to go from the realm where all is sublime and be shocked into reality that all is not perfect, this is a part of leaving the innocent world of childhood and entering into the world of reality and adulthood. Do not let human frailties shake your confidence in God.

The Problem of Sin

Youths, like adults, face the problem of sin. When one sins he sells his soul to Satan. Sin separates one from God. One cannot live his life as God would have him live it if he remains in sin. Everyone must ask, "Will I live in sin, or in Christ?" Each one must make a personal decision in this matter. These are the only two realms available in which we can live. We have to obey the gospel to enter Christ.

Today's youth must face today's problem of sin. It comes through drugs, alcoholic beverages (America's number one drug problem), temptations to immorality, dishonesty, lack of respect for authority, and forsaking God. But youth can face these matters and overcome them when they align themselves with their Creator and Judge. Face today ,and tomorrow you will be able to face tomorrow. Unless you learn to handle today, what will be the end of you tomorrow? We cannot carry the burdens of yesterday, today, and tomorrow at once. Life is to be lived one day at a time, and we are capable, in

Christ, to successfully carry our load. We can have joy and gladness as we live, and help others carry their load.

Following the crowd, rebellion against God, swallowing whatever you are told by the worldly sort may sound exciting, emotional, new, and "cool". But a good life is accomplished only by being good as God defines good.

The Solution

Meeting today's problems, like all other problems of life, can be met only when there is a strong and Biblical spiritual foundation and guidance. "How shall the young secure their hearts, and guard their lives from sin?" It is by following the Word of God. Youths need not despair nor be discouraged. Life in Christ is a wonderful life, full of purpose and meaning, blessings and benefits, with each day being worthwhile and productive. Problems are challenges and tests of our worth. Problems can become stepping stones rather than stumblingblocks.

When youths and adults work together before God, the young can secure their place and be what God intended them to be. Nothing is more challenging than a young life. The future is open and the limits are extended. May God help us and youths everywhere to defeat the devil and bring glory to God in life.

* * * * *

Being Personally Involved

Our lesson consists of several questions designed to provoke thought and preferably to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). Who was not shocked when they read of the slashing of a young woman in broad daylight before scores of witnesses, and she was crying for help from those who stood by, but none came to her aid? None even called the police, even an ambulance. She was left on the

sidewalk to bleed to death. Witnesses were asked why they refused to assist her, and their answer was almost always that they did not want to get involved. This is not fiction but an event that has been committed in our sin-saturated society. The abandonment of personal responsibility for our own sins, and the abandonment of responsibility toward others is a mark of our time. Such hideous crimes only reflect the extreme in attitude that has reached epidemic proportions among people not wanting to get involved. The idea of "live and let live" has given way to the idea of "live and let die." The way of Christ, however, is "live and help live." Has even the church escaped this attitude of not wanting to get involved?

As we read of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), we ask, "What if the Samaritan had been afflicted with the diseased attitude of not getting involved?" Would he be cited as a nobleman today? Why did he become involved? The priest and Levite acted like many are acting today. Which of the three showed love for his fellowman? Even though it was inconvenient for him, and possibly dangerous, he had genuine love for his neighbor, and for what was right. He did what ought to have been done. His motive for helping was his sincere care.

Nehemiah

In the Old Testament we read of a man named Nehemiah. He was a slave and the cupbearer to the king of Persia. He was told of the deplorable conditions around Jerusalem, his homeland (Nehemiah 1:3). This report grieved him, but his grief was not mere sobbing and wailing. He resolved he would be involved and do something about it. He could have taken the attitude that things were bad, but that it was not his responsibility. He could have concluded that somebody ought to do something, but not him, and dismissed it.

It is wonderful to read of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the removal of the reproach from God's people. But it would not have happened if Nehemiah had said, "Why does not brother So-and-So do something?" Would anything have been rebuilt if he had not made

that personal sacrifice, made the plans, instigated the initiative, and encouraged others and himself to the work?

The People's Reaction

Notice the reaction of the people when Nehemiah put the challenge before them to erect the walls. They did not say, "This is a great idea, Nehemiah, and we hope you succeed." They did not say, "Let others do it." They said, "*Let us rise up and build.*" Was not this a people willing and ready to get involved?

There is the story told about a little Centre College team meeting mighty Harvard on the football field. To the surprise of everyone, Centre won. When asked for the explanation, the answer given was, "There were eleven men involved on every play." All became involved in the work at hand. The Scriptures tell us that the walls were rebuilt in fifty-two days, but it also tell us why. It was because, "*The people had a mind to work.*" (Nehemiah 4:6). Such genuine personal dedication is what it takes to get the job done.

Jesus once said, John 4:34, "*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*" Again, John 5:17, "*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*" John 9:4, "*I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.*" The attitude of Jesus is clear and obvious. He was personally involved in the Father's plan. When He was only twelve years of age He said, "*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" Such was His manner all the days of His life upon the earth.

We profess to follow Christ. Let us stand before the inspired words of Paul in Romans 12:1 when he says, "*I beseech you, therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*' A sacrifice is that which is wholly given to another. Christ wholly gave Himself to accomplish the Lord's will in saving man. He became personally involved. While the world may say we ought not get involved, can not we see

how this contrasts with the way of Christ? Do we imitate the world or do we imitate Christ?

Story of Leroy

The humorous story is told of a boy named Leroy, a star football player . Leroy was injured in a game and had to sit on the bench during most of the game. The fans kept clamoring for Leroy to play because the other team was literally beating them physically and by a huge margin in the score. Finally Leroy was sent into the huddle with instructions from the coach to the quarterback to give the ball to Leroy. The team came out of the huddle, but another ran the ball. The coach shouted to give the ball to Leroy. Again, another ran the play and was knocked down viciously. The angry crowd kept yelling, "Give the ball to Leroy." The coach dashed on to the field and asked the quarterback why he did not give the ball to Leroy as he was told. The quarterback answered, "Leroy said he didn't want that ball." His attitude is that of too many who call themselves Christians when it comes to the work of the Lord.

Jesus said, Matthew 7:21, "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*" What we do is important. There must be doctrinal purity. But unless the doctrine is applied and there is action, what doth it profit? There must and can be both sound doctrine and sound practice. Can we actually say we follow the pure doctrine when we have the doctrine to be involved, but are not involved?

Listen to the inspired words. James 1:22, "*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.*" James 4:17," *To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" Acts 4:34,35, "*Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.*" Acts 8:4, "*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*" Are not these clear examples of how the early Christian became personally involved in the cause of Christ?

We Encounter Problems

We live in troubled times. Every age has had its troubles, but there can be no denying that this age faces many serious and far-reaching disturbances. Among the problems in the church is the "spectator concept" of Christianity. Someone has suggested that most congregations are composed of people who are 100% willing. Ten per cent are willing to work, and the other ninety are willing to let them. There is no doubt but that most professed Christians want to see the Lord's cause prosper and progress. They want the sick visited, the lost taught and saved, the needy relieved, the discouraged encouraged, etc. But how many are willing to get personally involved, being among those who will cooperate and can be counted to do their share of the work? We are in dire danger of excusing ourselves into an eternal hell by our refusal to get involved.

Actually we have no aversion to being involved or committing ourselves to many things. But in what are we involved? To what are we committed? We have our homes, clubs, ball teams, social interests, pleasures, hobbies, etc. But how many will commit themselves to make even one visit per week for the cause of Christ? How many will prepare themselves to teach one person the gospel, especially the young? How many will even support the preaching the gospel by their presence, their funds, their moral support? Have we never learned what it means to "*seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?*"(Matthew 6:33).

Second Corinthians 13:5, "*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.*" Paul, speaking of brethren in Macedonia and commending their giving, said of them, Second Corinthians 8:5, they "*first gave their own selves to the Lord...*" The attitude of Saul of Tarsus was, Acts 9:6, "*Lord, what would thou have me to do?*" Submission to His will and a willingness to be involved is essential to salvation. Samuel once said, "*Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth.*" (First Samuel 3:9). Is not this the expectation God has regarding us all? Is not this the attitude children of God ought to have regarding personal responsibility? Can not each of his be as was Samuel?

What Involvement Shows

Since being involved does manifest love, dedication, and understanding of duty to the Father, what does unwillingness to be involved manifest? As deplorable as the neglect of duty was regarding the young woman of whom we spoke at the start, is that the worst sort of neglect? Are there not voices crying and pleading for salvation? If only they could know the truth that we know!

These cries are familiar to you. "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" "*Be ye stedfast...*" "*Come unto me.*" "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*" As the world slashes His doctrine, abuses His body, the church, tramples underfoot His blood, we hear the Master pleading with us to help. Do we stand idly by, unwilling to get involved? When Jesus says to us as He once said to some when some of His disciples were going away, "*Will ye also go away*" (John 6:67), what will our answer be?

There are other voices we should hear. Did you ever look deeply into the eyes of an innocent child and read the questions written there? There are questions he cannot yet verbalize or ask. But what of him? What of his soul? What if his training? What of the great blessings of God as they pertain to him? Will he be taught properly? Will he know truth, morality, honor, purity, the church, salvation? Whose duty do you think it is to see that such things are provided for him? Will the light of truth be kept burning brightly until he can assume the task of carrying the torch forward in his generation? Dare we merely answer, "I hope so," but refuse to get involved to assure that it will be so? Dare we become so seared of conscience that we turn a deaf ear to the cries of spiritual error, ignorance of the Bible, hopelessness, and despair that come from the vast majority of our world, many of whom do not know, and many who do not even as yet care? But we know! Do we care? Serious questions are these? There are responsibilities we cannot place upon others to bear. They are ours.

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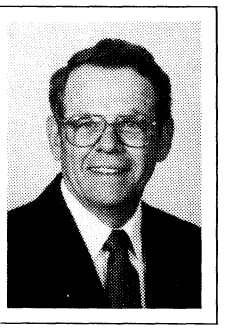
A Fatal Mistake



JAMES W. BOYD

People make many mistakes of various kinds in their religious pursuits. Most it them are due to their disregard of the authority of the Scriptures, substituting their own standards for the will of the Lord. But even some who say they respect the Bible make a fatal blunder when they conclude they can "interpret" the Bible for themselves, meaning to give it whatever meaning they like for themselves. To interpret means to get God's meaning; not impose your own meaning. People would be offended if others treated their words to make them mean whatever they wanted. Why will any presume it is all right with God to treat His Word with the same kind of disrespect? JWB

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XII James W. Boyd NUMBER 7

Will Good People in All Churches Be Saved?

The nature of this study demands that it be approached with caution and care. We have no desire nor right to assume the role of God, or pass judgment on the basis of our own standards pertaining to the destiny of anyone. But there is a difference between making judgments on our standards and recognizing the standards of God's judgment. God has already revealed His judgments, and we make a serious blunder to assume God did not mean what He has revealed. We realize that some do not care whether anyone is saved or not. But we assume that good people want to know the will of God and are interested in the subject. We must not start with ourselves and make God fit us. We must start with God and surrender to His will, whatever that includes.

This subject arouses considerable religious passion, even heat and anger at times. It really should not. It has separated families and friends. But sometimes the way of the Lord will do that (Matthew 10:34-37). But we must follow the Lord, not kinfolks. This question deserves an answer because there are many good people in the world, and many churches. We cannot be swayed by sentiment, but by Scripture. If we do not have God's answer, we have no answer at all. The very question indicates several widely held misconceptions.

What Same Believe

Some believe it makes no different to which church you belong. They are heard to urge people to join the church of their choice. They say that one is as good as another They probably do not really believe that because they have chosen one above all others. But they say it anyway. We do not doubt the honesty and sincerity of

those who believe this as much as their lack of logic and Biblical basis. Even so, being honest and sincere does not relieve us from the need to be right.

Religious people generally are divided in this country as Catholic, Protestant, or Jew. There are many other religious distinctions throughout the world. Does it make any difference? Certainly it does, and I think all realize this. They just say it does not. But by their choices and practices they show they believe it matters. The Protestant world refuses allegiance to the pope while the Catholic demands it. The Jew even denies the Deity of Christ. Can anyone who believes in Christ suggest that makes no difference? Protestantism today represents just about anything and everything one can imagine in religion from the most rank modernist to those who still hold on to some tenets of the law of Moses. Actually, Protestants are about as well anchored as the latest pronouncement of some theologian, council, conference, etc, and their views change from day to day because they say the religion of Christ must be kept relevant to today's generation, as if the truth of God in the Bible is not. We must contend that one who is either Catholic, Protestant, or Jew, or of any other religion is in troubled religious waters. The Bible does not sustain any of them. *"If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11). If we obey this we shall never be in any of those religions. The beauty of truth is that none need be among them. One can be just a Christian as the Bible teaches. Have you ever seriously considered that fact? You can be just a Christian without all of the additions and subtractions that characterize religion generally.

One Church

The Bible teaches there is one church (Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:4). Christ built one church (Matthew 16:16-18). The church is presented as the bride of Christ (Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 5). How many brides to you think our Lord has? Is He guilty of spiritual adultery and bigamy with many brides? Why will not people accept the truth that there is only one church mentioned in the New Testament? Is this too narrow? Is this too exclusive? Evidently it is for many. But the question should be, "Is

it the truth?" Certainly, it is! It is the inspired writing of Paul that so affirms. Christ knew how many churches He would build. Where in Scripture is the idea suggested for denominational bodies? Where is the insinuation that the one church is composed of many different denominations, wearing different names, teaching different doctrines, practicing different religious practices, promoting ideas contradictory to each other and to the Word of God? Denominations have yet to present that first Biblical evidence for their right to exist before God. Matthew 15:13 warns, *"Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."* No denomination has been planted by God.

Once I went into a city and was looking in the telephone directory and saw St. Mark's Methodist, St. Luke's Episcopal, St. Paul's Baptist, St. John's Catholic, etc. Does anyone acquainted with the Bible really think that these inspired servants of God would produce such division and establish or endorse such churches that vary so widely? Having heard the Lord's desire for unity, and having taught against division themselves, what do you think they would think of such a condition?

"You People Think..."

In an attempt to dodge the force of such points, denominationalists wail, "You think your people are the only church." Please, for a moment, forget about "our people." Regardless of "our people" or "your people" the fact remains that the Bible teaches there is one church. Whether that is "our people" or somebody else remains to be determined from Scripture. But once it is accepted that there is one church much of the division being promoted through denominations will immediately be recognized as false doctrine gone to seed.

Yes, we are convinced, like most other people are about themselves, that we are right. With some folks the only ones who cannot be right are those who think they are. We wonder how they can conclude they are right to so think? To contend against there being one church is not to quarrel with me or anyone who so believes. Your problem is with the Lord and His revealed Word that teaches it. It is certainly not wrong to agree with God.

It makes a difference whether you are in His church or not. Christ purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28). He is the head of it (Ephesians 5:25). He will save the church (Ephesians 5:23). There is one body just as there is one Lord (Ephesians 4:4,5). Will good people be saved in any Lord of their choice? Certainly not! Then why think good people will be saved in any body or church of their choice? From what source ever arose that idea anyway?

One's Belief Matters

When one contends the church does not matter he is actually contending that what one believes does not matter. Churches do not teach and believe the same things. But Paul said there is one faith (Ephesians 4:5). How dare any man say we have the right to the faith of our choice! Had one just as soon be a Hindu, Moslem, or Shintoists as a Christian? No, most so-called Christendom would not think so. But there is just as much divine evidence for the existence of those religions as there is for denominationalism. If you doubt it, take your Bible and find the verses that authorize such religious confusion as that upon which denominationalism exists, feeds, and propagates.

During the life of Jesus on earth there were some who turned from Him when He taught sayings they did not wish to accept (John 6:60ff). Many turn from Him on this matter also. They are determined to have many churches regardless of Scripture. Is it wrong to plead for people to simply accept the Word of God? We seek to condemn nobody, but to save through the gospel. The church of Christ is not a denomination. If a church is a denomination it is not the church of Christ. If it is a church of Christ it is not a denomination.

Being Good

The question "Will good people in all churches be saved?" places undue emphasis on just being good in order to reach heaven. Surely we realize one must be good, but that is not sufficient. We cannot be saved by our own merit, our own righteousness, our own good works. To be saved we must be "*in Christ*" where there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1), where there is salvation

(Second Timothy 2:10), where there is every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). Good people can be morally good and still be lost. Consider the man Cornelius in Acts ten. What good qualities he had, but was lost until Peter preached the gospel to him and he obeyed it. The Ethiopian of Acts eight was a worshipper of God, a reader of Scripture, an obviously honest and trusted person being the queen's treasurer. Yet, he was lost and had the gospel preached to him to be saved. Saul of Tarsus was a zealous and religious man, doing all that he did with good conscience. But who could contend he was saved even as he persecuted Christ by persecuting the church (Acts nine)? It takes more than being good to go to heaven, even though being good is essential. It just is not sufficient. One must be "*in Christ.*"

If we depend upon morality to be saved we by-pass the blood of Christ. If we can by-pass His blood to be saved, then why did He have to die at all? The fact is, the way of the cross leads home, and there is no other way.

When we obey the commands of the gospel to believe (John 8:24), repent (Luke 13:3), confess faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10), and are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4), we are then "*in Christ*" and are added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47).

Let God Speak

It is important that we have the attitude, "*Speak Lord, thy servant heareth,*" not the attitude, "Listen Lord, accept me just as I am!" We must ask what the Lord would have us do, not the attitude that He accept us regardless of what we do.

The answer to the question, "Will good people in all churches be saved?" is "**NO.**" The reason is because there is only one church. It takes more than just being good to be saved. Salvation is in His body, His church. We must obey the gospel to enter therein.

This is not to speak evil of other churches as much as to exalt the only church the Bible reveals. This is not trying to say who is wrong as much as saying what we

can know it right. This is to magnify the fact that one must obey the gospel to belong to the only church which Christ has promised to save. This is to speak of the church of Christ before there was any such thing as a human denomination. Christianity in Biblical form is not denominational, without kinship with denominationalism. If you have trouble accepting this teaching, then you need to "*search the scriptures*," and learn what the Bible teaches, and cease to be misled by the doctrines of men. Your soul is too precious for you to be lost because you accepted the fallacy that it does not matter to which church you belong.

* * * * *

The Language of Ashdod

First Corinthians 1:10, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing; and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*"

Language is a mode of communication. Words are signs of ideas and thoughts. They have meaning and are used to convey thought from mind to mind. Scientists speak in scientific terms. Doctors, athletes, even teenagers, have a language all their own. What does this have to do with God, man, and the Bible?

God has spoken to man in various ways, but now through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,12). His will is recorded for us in the inspired (God-breathed) Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). God has used words to convey His mind to the mind of man. When one speaks of Bible ideas, Bible thoughts, Bible teaching, he does it best by using terms that properly express Biblical expression.

Peter wrote, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11).

God is concerned with the proper expression of His thoughts to the extent that the Holy Spirit guided the original expression of them, overseeing and supervising each word as it was committed to writing (First Corinthians 2:12,13; Second Peter 1:20,21). While God used the vocabularies of men, even their styles of writing and experiences, He selected that which would be written so as to exactly reveal His mind.

Sound Words

There is a way of speaking that is neither sound nor wholesome (First Timothy 6:3-5; Second Timothy 1:13). To use unsound, uncertain, unwholesome words will gender strife, evil disputes, confusion, and envy. What is said has meaning. Therefore, what is said ought to be said correctly and be right with Scripture. Paul urged Titus to use sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:8). Even when he was teaching regarding the use of tongues, the miraculous ability to speak in languages not normal, native, and naturally learned, he warned against confusion and uncertain sounds (First Corinthians 14:6-11). Some are always having to explain what they have said, and then explain their explanations, because they find it to their liking to speak words of ambiguity, unsound and uncertain ideas being conjured by their speech. One of the finest compliments that was ever paid to a preacher was when a small boy told the preacher that he understood what he was teaching. He used words that conveyed the proper thought and used words that were Biblical.

It is evident that the words one uses and how one speaks, the terms he expresses says a lot about him that is important. Matthew 26:73, the maid said to Peter as he warmed himself by the fire of the Lord's enemies, "*Thy speech bewrayeth thee.*" How Peter spoke told on him.

Ashdod Speech

There is very little difference between the words "*Shibboleth.*" and "*Sibboleth.*" But in Judges twelve it was

enough to mean the difference between life and death. It was enough for Jephthah to know who was friend or foe.

In Nehemiah thirteen, following Judah's return from Babylonian captivity, God's law was read to the people. It was found that the Ammonite, Moabite, and other heathen people should not come into the congregation of God. Various reforms were instituted as a result of learning God's law. Among these reforms was the putting away of wives taken from among the heathen. They were also required to put away the worship of Ashdod, a false god. This intermingling had caused problems. Nehemiah 24:13, "*And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.*" God's people had become so entwined with those who were not God's people that they could not speak as God's people should speak, but spoke a mixed language, half of idolatry and half of God. They spoke the language of Ashdod.

There be sounds and words spoken today in the church that are not wholesome. They are not sound speech but uncertain and confusing sounds that produce strife and division, causing misunderstanding. The reason for this is much as it was in Nehemiah's day. The people of God have partaken so extensively of the ways of error, studied do diligently the doctrines of men, listened so intently to false teachers, and tried so hard to "go along to get along" with everybody, that they no longer are capable of speaking as the oracles of God, but have a mixed language, part of Scripture and part of the errors of men. Too many have imitated the misinformed, uninformed, mistaken and spiritually declining denominational world that they sound as much like denominationalists as people of God, if not more so.

Behind Denominations

We have heard some say the church is fifty years behind. Behind what? Behind the false ways of denominations? Behind the doctors and theologians who do not teach truth? Why should we care if we be behind them? I would prefer that we not even be on the same road, let along behind them!

Such language sounds innocent enough on the surface, which only adds to the danger of it. Some is downright wrong and saturated with false doctrines. Some is deceptive and misleading, and conveys an ambiguous message. God's messengers ought not be guilty of confusing Bible terms and sending forth uncertain sounds that create misunderstanding. We have the problem today that some even use Biblical terms to teach unbiblical doctrines. While we must teach, apply, explain, illustrate, we dare not move away from the fundamental concepts or the necessity of comparing spiritual things with spiritual words. After all, Christian are to be a Bible people. We are to "*preach the word,*" not some confused language of religion.

What are some of the sounds we ought to avoid for the sake of truth? What are these terms that splinter us, causing division because we are not speaking the same things?

Christ and the Church

Some say, "Preach Christ, not the church." I know why denominational clergymen say this. They do not have much confidence in the body of Christ. They contend that one church is just as good as another. They have turned away from the Biblical teaching that there is one body. They believe people can be saved separated from the body of Christ. They have adopted denominationalism rather than New Testament Christianity. But why would anybody who professes to be a gospel preacher ever utter such nonsense?

The challenge goes forth to one and all, in or out of the church, to show how one can preach Christ and not the church, and still preach the whole counsel of God as instructed. You cannot separate Christ from His body, the church. You cannot separate the King from His kingdom. Why try to sever the Savior from the saved? The very attempt is to desecrate truth and plunge headlong into denominational error. Such sounds ought never come from pulpits. They never do come from pulpits that preach sound doctrine. It comes from Ashdodic disciples.

Organism versus Organization

Another says, "The church is an organism, not an organization." So many brethren have committed the error of making things either/or when such is not the case. Which is correct? Christ is Savior or Christ is the Son of God? Bible students know that both are right? Why try to make it either/or?

There be those who wish to dismiss the Scriptural organization and government of the church and replace it with human designs. They think they can improve on what God has delivered. The first major digression of the early church was in its government. Today we see people devising new systems and schemes for ruling the church that have no Biblical foundation.

It is true that the church is an organism in the sense that it is the living body of Christ. But it is also organized and has been instituted so it is correct to speak of it as an organization and institution. Words have meaning. These words convey nothing but truth concerning the church.

Witnessing

Now and again we have heard brethren speak of "witnessing for Christ," giving their testimony and testifying. But every time the Bible speaks of such things it has reference to what inspired people did. It was not simply telling one's story or even just teaching. Some religionists today still think God speaks to them as He did the apostles, and they claim to be as inspired as the apostles. I heard a Baptist preacher say on television that he was as inspired as Paul, then he witnessed.

Biblically speaking, witnessing was more than telling what one knew of Christ. It was not simply relating a personal experience. How sad when brethren get up and say, "What I wish to say is simply my personal testimony." They have become infected with the language of Ashdod and false doctrines. Witnessing was revealing what the Holy Spirit guided and inspired people to reveal. It is a gross misuse of the term to think that anybody can "witness for Christ" today. We have

the full and complete record of His will in Scripture. While we must preach what has been "witnessed" by inspired men, we are not the witnesses. One should not be surprised if he is criticized as thinking himself inspired when he uses terms that belong only to inspired people who were eye-witnesses regarding what they taught.

Misused Words

Of course, we have heard the terms pastor, sanctuary, Easter, and many other misused terms characteristic of the denominational world. There are pastors, but they are not the preachers. They are the elders, or bishops, or overseers, the shepherds of the flock. There was a sanctuary, the tabernacle and temple. But what a gross error to refer to the auditorium of our building as the sanctuary. It is not more holy than any other building of itself. It sounds very "religious: and appeals to the "pious," but it is the language of Ashdod.

More and more we see and hear brethren talking about their Easter services, their Easter programs, even having joint services with those of denominations. This is blatant digression and apostasy from the truth and those who do such things reflect either an ignorance or rebellion against the Word of God, and neither is commendable.

While some deny the use of the word "clergy," many preachers have become nothing more or less than a hireling clergyman. Some even talk about the Lord's Supper as a sacrament. More and more churches are adding to their "staff." Where one man used to be able to do the work, not it takes a "staff." One reason for this is because some churches have branched off into areas of activity for which there is no authority and have to have somebody to man their programs, so they have their "staff." They have everything from Playground Directors to Gymnasium Attendants, Minister to Men, Minister to Women, Minister to Teens, Minister to Ministers. You have never seen the like of "titles" it simply reflects what some people have been consuming. They have become half Ashdod and half God and [illegible]

"Buzz Words" of Liberals

Some perfectly good words are being used to convey false ideas. Take the word "dialogue." Most people will sit down and talk, but the more sophisticated have their "dialogue." There is nothing wrong per se with the word "dialogue" except it usually means people coming together to negotiate, compromise, give-and-take, to find ways to have fellowship without having to be united in the truth. This is a far cry from "*speaking the same things*" that Paul commanded.

Then you hear about the "sinful nature of man." This term has long been used to teach the false doctrine of guilt of original sin, being born totally depraved, guilty of the sin of Adam and Eve, inherited sin from birth. Of course, as brethren have adopted the New International Version as if it was the Bible they have become more and more conversant with this phrase because the NIV teaches this false doctrine and uses that term over and over again. What a classic example of brethren eating from the troughs of denominational hog pens! That man sins is not questioned. That we have a "sinful nature" by inheritance is false. When we become sinful it is because we have acquired that nature, not because we have inherited it like the phrase "sinful nature of man" has long expressed. Ashdodic language is heard among some!

Then we hear that we must "communicate." This is well and good. I hope I am communicating with the reader now. Nothing wrong with the word. But unfortunately there are those who use it to suggest that we alter the message and bring things up-to-date in order to reach the outsider. We are told we cannot reach the "baby-boomers" without instrumental music, so we must "communicate" with them, that is, surrender opposition to mechanical instruments of music in worship. We are told that people no longer care for such terms as redemption, righteousness, truth, sin, baptism into Christ. They prefer to hear about being assimilated into the blessed, believing truth as you see it, getting a new start, feeling good about yourself.

Not long ago we read of one "learned" counsellor who spoke of the pathological family, emotional incest, and

psychological divorce. These terms have no meaning whatever, let alone words that convey Biblical thought.

Unity in Diversity

Much in vogue as I write is the phrase "unity in diversity." This is much like speaking of a white blackbird, or a the wings of a turtle. All in the world this is to those who promote it is an attempt to "get together" regardless of the cost of doing so! They are willing to agree to disagree and call it unity. It is not unity, but heresy. They really do not seek unity because unity is achieved by conformity to truth. They seek acceptance and fellowship in spite of division, desiring to retain their diversity and remain divided even on matters of "*thus saith the Lord.*" It is one of the most sinister and deceptive doctrines to blaze across the brotherhood in years. It is the very heartbeat of denominationalism. It is actually nothing different from the doctrines of Unitarianism where everybody can "do their own thing" and "everything is beautiful in its own way." How and why people who profess to have a love for the Word of God can spew forth such verbal perversion is beyond comprehension.

The plea for unity is sound and Biblical. But we cannot have what the Lord wants us to have if we speak so differently that we no even know what the other is saying. When we attach meanings to words defined to suit ourselves, how can we expect there to be harmony? There can be nothing but more division and confusion.

If brethren would spend more time with the Bible and less time wallowing in the mire of false and denominational verbiage there would be more harmony. If we would take seriously the apostolic teaching to "*speak as the oracles of God,*" we would be much improved. Teaching Bible things in Bible terms, using Bible names, proclaiming Bible ideas in Bible terminology is what God expects. Who is so wise among us that he thinks he can improve on that?

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The Glorious Church

Our text is Ephesians 5:22-32, a lengthy passage where Paul discusses the Lord's church. Our center of attention will be on the phrase, "*a glorious church,*" found in verse twenty seven. Peter said, First Peter 2:5, that the church is composed of living stones, referring to people who have obeyed the gospel. The church is pictured as a building fitly framed together (Ephesians 2:21). Human beings, with faults and weaknesses, often guilty of sin, make up the church. In spite of this, it is the Lord's church. He gave Himself for it, He is the head of it, He desires it for Himself, and Paul calls is a glorious church. It is a church that is deserving of glory and the glory of it must be maintained.

What does the term "*glorious*" mean with respect to the church? It means the same as it means anywhere else. The church possesses attributes and advantages, qualities and characteristics that deserve and receive glory. It is often the target of attacks of slurs and criticisms from enemies, and even creates problems for itself at times. Yet, it is deserving of honor, respect, and praise. It is to be elevated to a rank of distinction because it is magnificent and delightful. The church has a splendor and brilliance about it that makes it peculiar and worthy of special recognition. Such is not true of just any and every church. We speak of the Lord's church as revealed in the Bible. We do not refer to any denomination or the composite of denominations. The church of the Bible is never presented to us in Scripture in terms of denominations.

Why is the church glorious? How can the glory of the church be maintained before the world and before God?

From God

First, the church is glorious because it was planned and prophesied by Almighty God. It is of divine origin. Through the prophets of old, like Joel, Isaiah, David,

and all the others (Acts 3:24), God foretold of the establishment and nature of His church, His kingdom. That which once was a mystery is now revealed. The wisdom of God is manifested in the very existence of the church (Ephesians 3:10,11).

Head

The head of the church is a glorious head, which is Christ (Colossians 1:18). It was purchased by a glorious price, the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). It had a glorious beginning (Acts 2). According to the promises of God and as the prophets had foretold, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles who preached Christ and Him crucified to those present, proving that Jesus was the long anticipated Messiah, the Son of God, Lord and Christ, the Savior of mankind. Upon hearing this gospel, believing and obeying it, the people were added to the glorious church (Acts 2:47). This is the way, when and how the Lord's church came into existence. Prior to this the church had been spoken of in future terms. After this it is spoken of as existing. It came into being under divine guidance in fulfillment of divine promises. It was a glorious beginning.

Builder and Foundation

The church has a glorious builder and foundation. Matthew 16:16-18 teaches that Christ built the church and He, as the Son of God, is the founder and foundation of it. That upon which the church is built is the rock of truth that Jesus is God's Son (First Corinthians 3:11). Anything so closely associated with Jesus Christ is of necessity glorious.

Relationship

The church sustains a glorious relationship with Deity. What is that relationship? Those in the church are citizens of His kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Those in the church compose His family or household (First Timothy 3:15). The church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5, our text). Those in the church are "*in Christ*" because the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). The glory of being "*in Christ*" is presented in Romans 8:1

where we learn that those *"in Christ"* are not condemned. Salvation is *"in Christ."* (Second Timothy 2:10). All spiritual blessings are *"in Christ."* (Ephesians 1:3). When we are baptized we are baptized *"into Christ."* (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized into the body (First Corinthians 12:13).

Its Mission

The church is glorious because it has a glorious mission. First Timothy 3:15 presents the church as the *"pillar and ground of the truth."* The church is not to make truth, legislate truth, alter truth, update truth, tamper with truth, add to nor take from truth, but to support and proclaim truth. The church is the Lord's army waging a spiritual warfare against the forces of evil, using the *"sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* as its weapon. It is not the mission of the church to provide recreation, secular education, entertainment, fun and games, or to be all things to all people regardless of what it is. The church is more than another social club with religious overtones. It is the people of God with God's mission as prime importance.

In view of such glory, glory related to the Lord's church, it is improper to discount the church, relegate it to unimportance, think it is not essential and unnecessary. It is folly to believe one can be separated from the church and still be approved of God. We cannot and will not give place to anyone anywhere who would push aside the preaching of the church and the glory thereof. Some say, "Preach Christ, not the church." The truth is, we preach Christ when we preach His church.

The Saved

Even though the church is composed of people, we are a glorious people. This is in spite of our frailties and shortcomings. It is because we have the right relationship with God in Christ. It is because we are God's people, owned by the Lord, purchased and cleansed by His blood, made holy and sanctified by Him, the saved of the earth. This is not a matter for haughtiness or self-righteousness, but thanksgiving and sincere humble gratitude. The church is the saved.

The church is deserving of glory, not because of any merit of man, but in spite of man. It is glorious because of the merit of Christ to whom the church belongs.

Denominationalism has always sought to make the church unimportant as if it really makes no difference pertaining to salvation. They will say, "*The church does not save you.*" Nobody ever taught that it did among faithful brethren. But the Bible does teach the church is the saved. This expression they use is just an attempt to justify the existence of the many denominations. They cannot find one justification from the Bible for denominations so they invent trite phrases. We agree that one denomination is as good as another. But none of them exist by God's authority, and none are as good as the church that belongs to Christ. People sometimes say there is a tendency to glorify the church rather than Christ. We have even heard so-called gospel preachers make such a ridiculous statement. We do not worship the church, nor use it to displace Christ. But there is no separation of Christ from His church. What God has joined we do well to leave joined. You cannot glorify God while discounting the church for which His Son died. You do not honor God by deflating His church or its members. You cannot honor God without honoring His Son. Just how do you honor His Son if are disparaging toward His body? Paul said to the church in Thessalonica, "*We ourselves glory in you...*" God glorified the church (Romans 8:30). Since glory means to exalt, why would anyone who loves God not have a desire to exalt the church? It is a glorious church!

God's Part and Man's Part

How shall we maintain that glory? If it be the Lord's church it will always be glorious. The divine side of the church can never see improvement from men. The only source that can detract from the glory of the church will be the sinfulness and inconsistency of the people who compose it. The doctrine it is to uphold, the terms of entrance, its worship, its government, and all other divinely given characteristics cannot be improved. But the lives of the people who make up the church will always have room for improvement.

Notice the church is not to have spot or blemish, wrinkle or stain. One enters the church clean and pure, having been washed by the blood of the Lamb. As we walk in the light as He is in the light, we keep the church pure and clean (First John 1:6,7).

Love

The church will be kept glorious from man's part when love abounds for God, truth, the lost, and one another (John 13:34,35). Love is seeking the other's highest good. It is not mere sentiment, nor turning to your neighbor in worship and saying, "I love you." People can do that and stab you in the back before the sun sets. Many faithful brethren have been the victims of "liberal love." That is more form and pretense than the love the Bible teaches.

Purity

The church will be kept glorious when there is purity in the lives of its members. We are to abstain from evil and do good, being the peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:12; James 4:17; Romans 12:1,2).

Truth

The church will be kept glorious when we adhere to the truth. We cannot vary from God's teaching lest we think we have license to chart our own course. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. Truth is not ours to compromise, negotiate, or ignore. We either obey it or we become unacceptable before God. Following the doctrines of men, the hobbies of extremists, the programs that divide and promote men rather than truth are to be shunned. Digression is always a threat to God's people. History is stained with the people of God leaving the ways of God. When such occurs, the glory of the church is tarnished.

Kept Clean

When sin does arise in the ranks of the church, the church will be kept glorious when efforts are made to restore the fallen. If restoration efforts fail, there must be the divinely taught discipline for the sake of the

sinner, the saved, and the glory of Christ and the church. *"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."* (First Corinthians 5:2-5).

The maintenance of the glory of the church is the business of every Christian everywhere. It begins with God and remains with us as we live in Him. Let us not be guilty of misrepresenting the Lord and His church by lives that are contrary to His way. Make it your aim to always do what you should so others will glorify God (Matthew 5:16).

The Lord Shall Save It

The glory of the church is finally evidenced in that it is the body that the Lord shall save (Ephesians 5:23). It is the kingdom that shall be delivered to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). It is then that the redeemed will know the fullness of the truth of Romans 8:18, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."*

* * * * *

Make Your Election Sure

Second Peter 1: 5-11 is where we find what is often called the list of "Christian graces" or "Christian virtues." Then Peter adds, *"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."*

Periodically in our land there comes election year when the citizenry selects those who will govern the nation, state, city, or community. There is the abundance of political activity, much of which is relatively offensive and tedious to many people. Every candidate tries his

best to make sure their election. There is a slight difference in meaning, however, in that and our text as we shall discover.

The term "*election*" is used six times in the New Testament. "*Elected*" is used once, "*Elect*" is found twenty times. We have four questions to ask and answer as we study this lesson.

(1) What do these words mean?
(2) How and when is one elected, and to what?
(3) What does it mean to make it sure?
(4) How does one make his election sure?

Elect

The word "*elect*" means chosen, referring to people who are chosen. In the Old Testament the term once had reference to Christ (Isaiah 42:1). "*Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.*" There is also a New Testament reference to Christ as the "*elect.*" First Peter 2:6, "*Wherefore also it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*" When Christ was on the cross even His enemies remembered that He claimed to be the "*chosen of God*" (Luke 23:35).

But it is also used with reference to the Christian. When Jesus predicted the temporary lifting of the siege of Jerusalem, (Matthew 24:31), He said it would allow the elect to escape. Those "*in Christ*" are said to be the elect (Second Timothy 2:10). First Peter 5:13 uses the term with reference to the church. Those who put off the old man and put on the new man are called "*the elect of God*" (Colossians 3:12). Those who have been sanctified and cleansed are the elect (First Peter 1:2). The elect refers to those of the faith (Titus 1:1). Ephesians 1:4 teaches the elect were chosen from the foundation of the world. In other words, God determined who would and would not be saved before the world began. We shall see that this was not a choice of specific individuals but of classes of people. Those who believed and obeyed His plan would be saved. Those who did not would not be saved. This was set before the foundation of the world.

The Process

"*Election*" is that process by which one is elected. First Thessalonians 1:4, "*Your election of God.*" God does the electing and has devised and delivered the process by which this election takes place. This we shall investigate more further into our lesson. We can summarize the meaning of these terms by saying that Christians are elected by the election process of God to be the elect.

How and when is one elected? What is that process? Actually, we are simply asking, how is one saved? It is God who elects because it is God who saves. He is the "Who" that does the electing. But what of the how and when?

By examining the letters Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica we can learn how and when God elects one to the elect by His process of election. The Thessalonian brethren were elected (First Thessalonians 1:4). They were called into His kingdom (First Thessalonians 2:12). They were called into a way of life that was clean and holy (First Thessalonians 4:7). They were called by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). Paul preached the gospel of God to them (First Thessalonians 2:9). They had received (accepted and obeyed) his preaching "*as it is in truth the word of God*" (First Thessalonians 2:13). Peter said the elect are "*purified in obeying the truth*" (First Peter 1:23). Therefore, when one hears the gospel (the means God uses to call), and accepts it in faith and obedience, he becomes one of the elect. Who does it? God does it. How does God do it? He does it by the call of the gospel. When is one elected? It is when he hears, believes and obeys the call of the gospel?

Make It Sure

What does it mean to make our calling and election sure? We mentioned political candidates working hard to make their election sure. But there is a difference with the Christian election. The candidate works hard in political events to be elected. The Christian is already elected upon his obedience to the gospel, and now works to make sure he does not lose what he has gained by the grace of God's process of election. Whatever it means to

make your calling and election sure demands our priority in concern. Here is something we must do.

"*Sure*" means firm, fast, stable. The very admonition to make it "*sure*" implies the possibility of falling, even though once elected. There are certain things one must do if he is not to fall. Second Peter 1:10, "*For if ye do these things ye shall never fall.*"

We make our calling sure to the extent that we are faithful in Christ. Revelation 2:10, "*Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.*" First Corinthians 15:58, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord..*" First Corinthians 10:12, "*Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.*" Second Timothy 4:6-8, "*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.*" All of these passages show the necessity of faithfulness and the possibility of falling away.

How?

How does one make his calling and election sure? He does this by spiritual growth and adding to his own character the Christlike qualities, such as Peter mentions in verses five through seven of Second Peter one. He does this by growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ (Second Peter 3:18). He does this by feeding upon the sincere milk of the word and maturing to be able to partake of the meat of the gospel, applying what he has learned and manifesting his learning by his manner of life (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Specifically mentioned by Peter are such qualities as faith, virtue (courage), knowledge, temperance (self-control), patience (stedfastness), godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (love). Peter said, "*If ye do these things ye shall never fall.*" But what if we do not do these

things? Are we to think that our election is just as secure? If so, what was the purpose of writing this passage? Surely, it makes a difference.

We can briefly summarize the major points. There is the necessity of being among the elect, and being elected by God's process of election. This process involves hearing, believing, and obeying the gospel of Christ, including repentance, confession of our faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ. We must secure and make fast that state and relationship with God that is called "*the elect*" lest we fall away and be in a worse state than the beginning (Second Peter 2:20-22). How do we do this? It is by growing and maturing in Christ and by continuing in His will once we have come to Him.

We read in Scripture of some who did not make their calling and election sure, like Demas. Some are like the seeds that fell on unproductive ground (Matthew 13:5-7; 20-22). The admonition is that we do those things necessary to make sure we remain faithful.

* * * * *

History has a way of repeating itself, at least in principle. This is one of the reasons Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, "*Whatsoever things were written aforetime we written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*" Except for the fact that history does repeat itself, the past would be no teacher at all.

As we study from the Old Testament we encounter such passages as Jeremiah 2:12,13, "*Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye every desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*"

This is what happens when people chose to go their own path rather than the "*old paths*" (Jeremiah 6:16). We see this in the present liberal digression in the church. JB

A Good Comment on Books

In a class a few years ago taught by brother Rex Turner, he commented on books of value in study of the Bible. With emphasis first on the Bible, he urged upon us the reading of books written by the faith brethren, especially those of years gone by. He noted how some who wrote today and profess themselves as "scholars" cannot compare with the true and faithful scholarship of men who were devoted to New Testament Christianity rather than a host of theological theories. He warned us against "studying more and more about less and less."

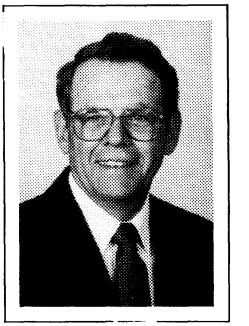
Time and again some of our present day "scholars" have ridiculed those of the past. It is to the shame of today's minds and an exposure of conceit to classify the great pioneers of the past a men without scholarship. Brother Turner, as well as many other brethren, are urging the preachers of today to fill their libraries with the writings of sound men rather than some outpouring of just "men of religion."

Another worthy comment we heard was that no man who does no appreciate God's plan of salvation could properly be called a Bible scholar. Now this would eliminate so many writings from that undeserved elevated level on which some have put the theologians of our day. Some of our own brethren, who seemingly would like to the "theologians" and who imitate the senseless multiplicity of words so characteristic of pseudo scholarship[, write as if they prefer the latest theories to sound doctrine.

All in all, from brother Turner, we received sound advice regarding the use of books. He motivated us to seek "*the old paths where is the good way*" rather than the resurrection of false doctrines of the past in a new dress.

The above article first appeared in my bulletin in 1975 when I preached in Jacksonville, Alabama. I think it is relevant today as much as then, if not more so. JWB

Insist on His Word



JAMES W. BOYD

When you go to the doctor and he prescribes certain medicine, you expect the pharmacist to give you exactly what the doctor ordered.

In matters of the spirit, why rely on substitutes, maybe so's, human opinions, doctrines of men rather than the Word of God? Should not your preacher tell you what the Great Physician has ordered? Does he have the right to give you anything more or less than that anyway?

We have never understood why so many brethren, including elders, will allow people to come before them and preach the false doctrines of denominations, and compromise the truth of God to appease those in sin. Do they really think the "wise men" of our time know better than what our Father in heaven has prescribed? JWB

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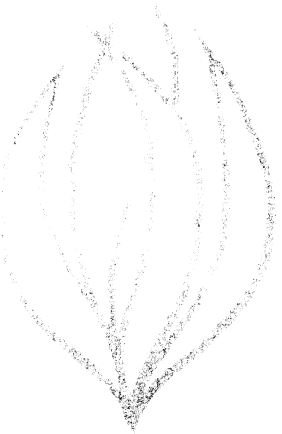

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 8**

Rightly Dividing The Word

"*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" (Second Timothy 2:15). The lesson is a concentration on the phrase, "*Rightly dividing the word of truth,*" or as stated in the American Standard Version, "*Handling aright the word of truth.*" Whatever this entails, involves, and includes, we are to pursue it with the greatest energy and diligence. There is work involved. To obey this teaching demands study, effort, and is vital to show ourselves approved before God. Without diligent effort, shame will be ours to endure.

It is all too evident that much religious confusion, division, and error stems from man's inability and/or unwillingness to rightly divide the Scriptures, the word of truth. Jesus said, "*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.*" (Matthew 22:29). This effort is so important in matters of how to worship, when to worship, how to be saved, the nature of God's dealing with man, man's daily service and life, the church, man's relationship to man, and one significant matter after another. All these things become confused when we fail to rightly divide the word of truth.

Much of the contention in our day that we need a new religion, something up-to-date and relevant, a new gospel for our new age, is based upon man's failure to rightly divide the word of truth, thereby failing to see how useful, applicable, practical, and beneficial the religion of Christ is for our time and for all time to come. The Scriptures that reveal the faith of which Christ is the author, just as they are, are adapted and fitted for mankind just as he is. So our need is not a new faith, new message, new religion, or a new Bible. Our

need is to see the religion of Christ as it really is and learn how man is blessed when he conforms to it.

Two Great Divisions

The Bible is divided into two great divisions, the Old and New Testaments. There are sixty-six books altogether with thirty-nine in the Old and twenty-seven in the New. The division by chapters and verses is a human division that certainly facilitates the study of the Scriptures. But these divisions are not so important as other divisions.

The Old Testament can be divided into books of law, history, poetry, and prophecy. The New can be divided into the revelation of the life of Christ on earth, the history of the early church, epistles or letters, and the final book of prophecy dealing with the theme of eventual victory for those who are redeemed and remain faithful.

Every portion of the Bible is God-breathed, verbally inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and all-sufficient. Such is the teaching of Second Timothy 3:16,17; Second Peter 1:20,21; John 16:13, and other passages. Every portion has its value. The things written aforetime were for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 9:9,10; 10:11). Let us dismiss from our minds here and now any notion that any part of the Bible is fruitless and undeserving of study.

But let us also learn that all is not binding on people today. Some have thought that the portions not binding are not worthy of study. But this is fallacious. You cannot know what is binding without knowing it to begin with. Furthermore, even though some of the Scripture is not binding today, the knowledge of that portion makes understanding of that which is binding easier to understand and apply. This leads our attention to another division of the Bible that is of utmost importance, and that is the division according to dispensations. A dispensation is simply a system by which God governs man during a certain period or time. While God does not change in nature, He has changed the way He has governed man.

Divided By Dispensations

There are three dispensations revealed in Scripture which are called, for want of better terms, Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian. Just because we do not live under all three does not mean the Old Testament is not inspired of God or worthless. Far be it from the truth that we should ever so think. But the covenants between God and man have changed as God has designed and intended. We need to understand these changes and dispensations. We live under the dispensation of Christ. The significance of this will become more apparent as we proceed.

The first dispensation is called the Patriarchal Age. It was a period of father rule, God speaking to the heads of the families, a family system, without written laws, but God governing each family as He saw fit. Such men as Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others lived under this manner of God dealing with man.

Next came the Mosaic Age, a special period when God governed Israel through a special law. This law was exclusively given to Israel at Mt. Sinai through Moses. It was a law that was designed to be temporary, "*until Christ came,*" (Galatians 3:24-26). When Christ came the law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), and He took it out of the way by fulfilling and accomplishing the purposes for which it was given (Matthew 5:17,18). "*He taketh away the first that He may establish the second,*" (Hebrews 10:9). The law was to be the guiding law for the Jews in every realm of their national and individual life. It was not the fulfillment of the promises that God gave through and to Abraham (Galatians 3:15-19). It was not an evil law, but one that was limited in scope and purpose. It defined and condemned sin without providing forgiveness of sin. That people are not now under the law is emphasized in the books of Romans, Galatians, Colossians and Hebrews.

Today, we live under the authority of Christ. :*Whatsoever ye do in word and deed, do all in the name of (*by the authority of, JWB) *the Lord Jesus Christ,*" (Colossians 3:17). "*Hear ye him,*" was the Father's instruction (Matthew 17:5). All authority belongs to Him

(Matthew 28:18). The system by which God speaks to man now is through Christ (Hebrews 1:1,2). It is a universal religion, in contrast to the family and national religions of earlier dispensations. Unlike the Patriarchal Age, and like the Mosaic Age, we have a written covenant, that being the new covenant. It has its beginning on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ and will continue until time shall be no more, at His return, the resurrection of all mankind and the judgment. All living today are accountable before God, if accountable at all, according to the teaching given by the authority of Christ.

Unless we are aware of these division and distinctions regarding the Scriptures, when we read from the Bible, we shall not know whether that passage is specifically to us or to someone else who lived under another dispensation. This dispensation division is of far greater importance in knowing God's will than the divisions previously mentioned.

That we might be impressed with the importance of these things, let us consider a few matters. Some today worship by burning incense, using instruments of music, having a special priestly class and priestly garments. Are these things valid under Christ? No, they are not. Why? They belonged to the Mosaic Age and are not part of the will of God for people today. The reason there is so much error taught regarding the way of salvation is the citing of the thief on the cross as an example of how we can be saved. But this fails to rightly divide the word of truth. The thief lived and died while the Mosaic law was intact. The Christian Age had not even begun because nobody was told how to be saved in the name of Christ until Pentecost. The thief did not live subject to the conditions taught from that day forward.

Abide in the Doctrine

But someone might complain that the new covenant does not tell us not to do these things. But that is to ignore what the new covenant does teach. We are told how to worship, how to be saved, etc. We are also told not to add to nor take from what the apostles taught (Galatians 1:6-9). We are told to abide in the doctrine of Christ, that is

His doctrine of which He is the author (Second John 9-11). We are forbidden to take matters from previous ages and apply them now unless there is Christ's authority to do so. While we read that the things written aforetime are for our learning, we are not told to do the same things. One of the things we can learn from those living under the old law is that we are not to do that which the Lord commands not (Leviticus 10:1,2).

What would you say to the reliability and competency of a druggist to whom you took your doctor's prescription for medicine, and the druggist took the liberty to add to it or take from it as he liked? We would not trust the welfare of the body to such a person. Then why do we trust the welfare of the soul to those who do the same thing to the will of God that the druggist did to the doctor's prescription?

Sabbath keeping, tithing, animal sacrifices, incense burning, Passover observance, special priesthood, holy sanctuaries such as the temple, and many other things are characteristic of former systems, not the Christian Age. Hebrews 7:12, " *The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.*"

Matters Found in Both Testaments

Are there not found certain matters of the Old Testament that are binding upon us? Yes, but not because they are in the Old Testament but because they are also included in the religion of Christ. Nine of the Ten Commandments given on Sinai are included in the doctrine of Christ, and expanded by the Lord. Many moral principles are found that are applicable now because those principles are embraced under Christ. For instance, we are not to steal, not because Moses said not to steal, but because the authority of Christ teaches us not to steal.

By the study of the Old Testament we learn the gradual God-directed unfolding of God's plan for redeeming man. We see the manifestations of God's power, love, severity, mercy. We read the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, that Messiah who came in the person of Jesus Christ. We take notice of their fulfillment in the New

Testament. We see the types, shadows of the Old that point toward the New. We see how God keeps His Word, both His promises and His threats. We learn of His love of the good and His hatred of evil because of His love for people He created. From the study of the Old, connected with the New, we see the unity, singleness of purpose and personality revealed in the Bible from Genesis through Revelation. We find examples and principles to follow. But we live answerable to God by what is required in the New Testament under the Christian system.

When we handle aright the New Testament we read the evidence given in the first four books that proves Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and the promised Savior of mankind. We read of His kingdom (the church), and its early growth. We learn what people did to enter into the salvation He provides. From the epistles we learn how the Christian is to live, work, worship, serve, and what faithfulness to God includes. We read of the eventual triumph of good over evil and the joys awaiting the faithful Christians in heaven, the home of glory.

We must rightly divide the word of truth in order to answer the most serious and eternally significant question one can consider. That question is, "What must I do to be saved?"

* * * * *

Is the Bible For Man Today?

Much is being said about the Bible being out-of-date, not for our age, irrelevant to modern man and his needs, therefore cast aside by many. Even religious people are by-passing the Scriptures, seeking for something special, some direct message from God separate and apart from the Bible. Is the Bible, just as it is, adapted to man just as he is? We are not considering a Bible with changes but the Bible as it exists now, as in our reliable versions.

Some think the Scriptures have no life, no power, nor are even useful for our busy age. So let us consider the question whether the Bible as it is right now is applicable to man as he is right now.

The Bible, as it is, is the inspired Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It was revealed by the Holy Spirit (Second Peter 1:20,21). Instead of man asking for a special guidance from the Holy Spirit, he ought to give heed to what the Holy Spirit has already provided. When we hear or read the Scriptures we are hearing or reading what the Holy Spirit has to say to mankind. Second Samuel 23:2, "*The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my mouth.*" Acts 1:6, "*Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spake.*" The letters to the seven churches of Asia in the first chapter of Revelation include, "*Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*" John 14, 15, 16 reports the promise of Christ to His apostles that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, guide them into all truth, and bring to their remembrance what He had taught them. The Holy Spirit would reprove the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This He did by and through the preaching and revelations made by the apostles. First Corinthians 2:13 teaches the Spirit did not merely present ideas, but selected the very words to express the mind of Deity. While the writers of the Bible were not infallible in all their actions, they were inspired in what they wrote (Second Peter 1:20,21; Galatians 1:11). For this reason we can concur with David when he wrote, "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway.*" (Psalm 119:105).

Understandable

Let us also be mindful that the Scriptures can be understood. If they could not, they would not be of any value. It is amazing how some false teachers who do not accept the message of the Bible will quote the Bible to teach people they cannot understand it.

When the Lord preached even the common people understood, not just the "scholars" and self-proclaimed experts. The Scriptures were publicly read and

proclaimed in both the Old and New Testaments. Why was this done if one cannot understand them? We can understand that which was once a mystery before it was revealed. It is now revealed (Ephesians 3:3-5). Ephesians 5:17, "*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*" We are to study to show ourselves approved unto God (Second Timothy 2:15). Why study if we cannot understand anyway? Paul told Timothy, "*That from a babe thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*" (Second Timothy 3:15). Because it can be understood we are to "*preach the word.*" (Second Timothy 4:1,2)

All-Sufficient

Not only is the Scripture inspired and understandable, it will furnish us unto all good works. It is the all-sufficient message from God. Whatever God wants and expects from man can be learned from the Scriptures. Scripture authorizes whatever we must do in service to God, and if something is not authorized we must not go beyond the things that are written (First Corinthians 4:6). We must do what we do "*in the name of,*" meaning by the authority of, Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). His will and authority is revealed for us in Scripture.

There have been many changes in many things through the history of mankind. But the Word of the Lord endureth forever (First Peter 1:25). Man cannot direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23). "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" (Proverbs 14:12). While there be some who want the Holy Spirit to send them some special message today, we would ask, "Why?" If the Holy Spirit did not provide a message that men could understand and was adaptable to man as he already is in the first place, what makes them think that He could or would do it now? Would His second effort be any more reliable than the Bible?

Confirmed

The Bible, just as it is, is already confirmed by the Lord. To confirm means to verify, ratify, authenticate, show it

is true. Mark 16:20 tells of Jesus commissioning His apostles to go and preach, assuring them of miraculous power by which they would confirm the word they preached. Hebrews 2:3,4 teaches that the word was "*first... spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.*"

Since none is inspired today as were the apostles who were baptized in the Holy Spirit, the Bible has been finished, and its message confirmed, and we are to "*contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.*" (Jude 3). We have neither the need nor the power of the miraculous to confirm the Word. It does not need to be confirmed again. God has already provided His evidence of confirmation. It is now a question whether we accept what God has done or not. No preacher today needs to perform something miraculous to prove his message. What he must do is show that his message is according to the Word of God.

So the Bible just as we have it is inspired, fully revealed, understandable, all-sufficient unto every good work, and confirmed. But does it fit man? Does it meet man's needs today? Let us look a man, just as he is. Is he basically different now than when the gospel was first made known to man? Does God think we need more?

Man's Will and Intellect

Man still has an intellect, the ability to reason and understand. Psalm 119:130, "*The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*" Psalm 11:10, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" The Bible can change man's mind from doubt to belief by providing evidence of that which is true (Romans 10:17). The Bible appeals to man's intellect.

Man still has a will, the power to make decisions, to accept or reject whatever he wishes. The Scriptures recognize this. The gospel is presented by persuading men to what is right (Second Corinthians 5:11), not through force. The teaching of Scripture urges man to make decisions that will be of benefit to him. It calls for

man's willingness to do the will of God and shows an unwilling mind and heart is not acceptable to God. Man must serve God from a heart of desire to serve. The magnet by which God draws man unto Himself is the love He has shown by sending Christ to be lifted up on the cross for man's sins (John 12:32). God draws man to Him through teaching and learning (John 6:44,45). The Bible appeals to the will of man.

Temptation and Sin

Man is still subject to temptation as he has been since Eden. The devil's avenues of temptation are the same. First John 2:16, "*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*" Satan used these avenues against Eve, and also against Christ. He still uses them against people today. James 1:15 shows the progression of temptation leading to sin.

All sin (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Forgiveness of sin is the only way to have our sins not counted against us (Romans 4:7,8). The way of forgiveness is still Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7). What could be more relevant to the needs of man than that message of the Bible that reveals his sinful condition, what God has done to save him, what Christ has done to provide forgiveness, and what man must do to take advantage of what Deity has done?

Same Needs

The material needs of man are basically the same even though the form of these needs may have changed from generation to generation. Food, shelter, clothing, medicine, etc. are still our needs. The spiritual needs of man remain the same. Of the two classes of needs, the greatest of these is spiritual. "*What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*" (Matthew 16:26). The Scriptures teach us the source of all spiritual blessings as being "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3). The Bible provides for the most serious needs of all mankind.

What is more relevant in this life than that which makes man happy, secure, useful, and a richer, sweeter

life overflowing with meaning and purpose? Obeying the teaching of the Bible will make your home a better home, provide you true and lasting success in things that matter that neither time nor Satan can take from you against your will. Jesus came to give man an abundant life here and in the hereafter (John 10:10).

What is more relevant than that which develops man to his full potential for goodness and righteousness? Following the Bible man learns to love, give aid, be kind, comfort, strengthen, build up, lift up, withstand and endure. The problem regarding the Bible today is not that it is estranged from the needs of modern man. It is not that is it behind the times and irrelevant. The problem is that it is unknown, unstudied, unlearned, untried, underestimated. It is abused, not used. It is slighted and ignored. Is it fair to declare the medicine that cures to be of no value if the medicine is not applied to the disease?

Man, as he is, needs faith, hope, love, courage, character, and spiritual salvation. All of these are to be found in translating the teaching of the Bible into our daily lives.

John said, John 20:31, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.*" Indeed, the Bible is for man today! Do not deprive yourself of it!

* * * * *

Who is a Christian?

First Peter 4:11, " *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" We not only should use Bible words to express Bible thoughts and teachings, but we ought use Bible words the way the Bible uses them. It is not proper to use Biblical terms to mean something other than what the Bible means in their use. There are many words that are as often misused as they are properly

used, such as church, saints, bishop, pastor, priest, and many others. This is also true of the way the world uses the term "Christian." It is used in a much broader and inclusive sense than what the Bible means by it.

The name "Christian" is usually and generally respected and considered an honorable name, representative of goodness, purity, and righteousness. This is not always the case with everyone, however. Many look upon that name with great hatred, contempt, and reproach.

We have heard the term "Christian" attached to even political parties, warring factions engaged in literal military conflicts, any and every kind of operation whether it is in harmony with the will of Christ or not. It is attached to churches, schools, businesses, and many other things that would constitute an abuse of the term rather than a Biblical use of it.

Anything in a Name?

But it is strange how some contend there is nothing in a name. People do not feel that way in other matters of life except religion. They have their businesses and want them named after themselves. They buy products and want "name brands." Ford would not allow Chevrolet to place a Chevrolet name on their its cars. The canned goods in the store are identified by names that are protected by patents and other regulations. People are generally careful about naming their children. But when it comes to religion people somehow abandon all sense and reason. It is nothing but a transparent attempt to somehow justify the use of many varying names of churches in which the denominational world delights.

The Lord considered names important. He gave names to Abraham, Sarah, John (the baptizer), Israel, and even Jesus. If God considers names important, who are we to say otherwise? It was God that gave the disciples of Christ the name "Christian."

Isaiah 62:1,2, it was prophesied, "*For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the*

Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all the kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called be a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." Righteousness would go forth from Jerusalem. Gentiles would also be included. At that time God would give His people a new name.

Acts 11:26, the church in Antioch was an intergrated church in that it was composed of both Jews and Gentiles. The passage reads, "*And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*" This is a specific and direct fulfillment of the words given in Isaiah. The name "Christian" was not a derision given to the followers of Christ by their enemies. It was not a nickname given to them by uncaring people. It was a name that honored Christ and was given to them by the Lord Himself. The word "*called*" refers to that which Deity has done. James 2:7 speaks of "*that worthy name by which ye are called.*"

Biblical Usage

The term "Christian" is used three times in the New Testament. By studying these instances we can determine who is a Christian. There are other passages that identify those who have the right to that name but our study will be confined to these three.

Acts 11:19-26 is the one to which we have already mentioned. Without giving here the entire lengthy passage, suffice it to say that the term was stamped upon those who heard the gospel, believed it, and obeyed it. Focus attention on the word "*turned*" as found in verse twenty-one. We know this word means more than just repentance, a change of the mind. It includes action as well. Like the phrase "*be converted*" in Acts 3:19, it includes even that part of conversion that follows repentance, completing the complete turning from sin to Christ. To learn what all this involves we should consult Acts 2:38. "*Repent ye and be baptized...*" The people in Antioch heard the gospel (verse twenty), believed it (verse twenty-one), and turned to the Lord (obeyed it). By following this divinely given process they became the followers of Christ and were granted the privilege of wearing the name that gives honor to Him.

Paul teaches that we should be named after the one whose disciples we are (First Corinthians 1:13). Brethren in Corinth were wearing names after various men. People do that even yet. He condemned that practice. It is to be condemned even yet. Paul asks, "*Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?* " Of course, they were not. "*Was Paul crucified for you?*" If course, he was not. It was Christ that had done that for them. Therefore, they ought not be called after men, even though those men were admirable in many respects. They ought to be called after Christ. Those who had the right to wear the name of Christ were those who were His disciples, having become so through faith and obedience to the gospel. A Christian is one who has been baptized into Christ for the reasons the Scripture teaches, and who continues to follow in His steps as any faithful disciple would of his Master.

The Conclusion Stands

Some might object that this "de-Christianizes" many religious people who claim to be Christians. We would answer that regardless of what conclusion must be accepted, the fact remains that the Bible used the term to identify penitent, baptized believers. By what right do we call anyone a Christian who has not done what the Bible says must be done to be called a Christian? Many have erroneously taken unto themselves the name "Christian" even though they have not obeyed the gospel of Christ. This is a brazen fallacy among denominationalists and is presumptuous. But you cannot "de-Christianize" those who never have become Christians as the Bible teaches. We simply affirm what the Scripture says. That is not wrong.

Agrippa's Use of "Christian"

Acts 26:27-29, "*King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am except for these bonds.*"

Paul was before Agrippa having been arrested because he had been preaching the faith of Christ. In his defense he continued to preach the gospel. It was his opportunity to preach to these worldly leaders in their courts the glad story of salvation as the prophets had foretold. Paul was convincing and Agrippa was almost persuaded to be a Christian. Paul wanted him to be as Paul was, except for being in bonds.

Look more closely at Paul. Paul had once been an unbeliever, but now a believer. He had obviously made a change of mind (repentance) regarding Christ, and being instructed to be baptized (Acts 22:16), he obeyed. Because he had done this he could wear the name Christian.

From the time of his conversion he busied himself seeking others to be Christians. There is no consistent way for one to claim to be a follower of Christ and walk in His steps and be indifferent toward those who are yet lost, but seeking the lost "even as did our Lord.

The difference between Paul and Agrippa was that Paul was "*in Christ,*" having been baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). Forasmuch as he was now "*in Christ*" he wore the name that honors Christ.

Peter's Use of "Christian"

First Peter 4:12-16 is a passage that warns and encourages the Christian regarding persecution and hardship that may come his way because he is a Christian. Suffering is not uncommon to the human family. People can suffer for doing good as well as for doing evil. Peter urged the Christian not to be ashamed if he suffered as a Christian. He warned them against suffering for doing evil; however. But Christians can expect some to be hostile toward them. Second Timothy 3:12, "*All that will godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" Jesus said, John 15:18, "*If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.*" John wrote, First John 3:13, "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" But while suffering is not to be taken lightly, suffering for the cause of Christ is noble and one way the name of Christ can be glorified. Those who suffered in New Testament times had the attitude toward

suffering as depicted in Acts 5:41, "*And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name.*" Matthew 5:10-12, "*Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*"

No Other

There is no authority in Scripture for disciples and followers of Christ to wear any other religious name than that of Christ. We wonder why men think it proper to take unto themselves names which show allegiance to men, doctrines, governments, systems, ideas that are not even related to what Scripture teaches and authorizes! Is it not another instance where men consider God's Word inadequate and God's way insufficient?

What name do you wear religiously? Is it more, or less, or other than the name found in the oracles of God? We can be Christians without additions or subtractions. What right or need have we for any other name?

* * * * *

Problems Facing the Church

This is not a lesson that makes one happy. The very subject is unpleasant. We do not consider it in order to express pessimism nor create depression. But we must face certain realities as we serve the Lord. We are going to consider some problems facing God's people in our time, not so much concentrating on specifics as with general problems that give rise to many aggravating situations and circumstances. Specific problems usually

come from larger issues that must be recognized and corrected before the specific matters can be rectified.

Who would dare set himself forth as an expert as if he knew all the problems facing the church? Most of us are only aware of things in a relatively small area of the world compared with the church over all the world. Furthermore, what is a problem in some localities may not be the case in other places . Each locality may have its own peculiar set of problems, but often they overlap. But we wish to consider some matters that are probably characteristic of brethren in many, of not most, places.

It is nothing new for the church to face problems. It has been that way since Pentecost. This is not said to minimize the seriousness of problems, but only to help us get and keep things in perspective. We need to be aware of problems, but we should not think that merely being aware of them will correct them or cause them to go away. But if we are ever going to do something beneficial in correcting problems we must first become aware of their existence.

The church faces problems that come from within and from without its ranks. Our lesson will center attention on problems that we create for ourselves and come from within. Often, these are by far the most difficult ones.

Ignorance

There is even among brethren a growing ignorance of the Bible. This is not being judgmental in an evil sense. It is to observe what is the case. It seems that so many in the church, young and old, have such a wide lack of knowledge, even of fundamentals. This is serious seeing the emphasis in the Bible on knowing what the will of the Lord is. The Word provides the evidence upon which our faith is founded. Lack of knowledge of the Word can only mean a weak faith.

We are to study the Bible (Second Timothy 2:15), but it is evident that many members of the church neither study nor show much interest in Bible study opportunities afforded them by the local congregations.

Even though Jesus said, Matthew 4:4, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,*" so many place such importance on the material side of life to the negelect of the spiritual side that they do not learn His Word. Jesus taught, John 5:39, "*Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.*" Yet, so many do not search the Scriptures as did the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11). As in the days of ancient Israel, Hosea 4:6, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*"

When members of the church know the Word of God, they will not only remain faithful, cannot be led astray by the whimsical manners of men, but will be aggressively active in doing the will of the Lord.

Without knowledge there will be weak faith, no guidance, disapproval from God, dangers of apostasy, and loss of salvation. Christianity is a taught faith (John 6:44,45).

The Way It Was

Churches of Christ were once known as a Biblically informed people. It would not be fair to so characterize the church generally that way now, even though there are many who know the Word. There has been an emphasis on academic degrees alongside a de-emphasis on "*thus saith the Lord*" in preaching and teaching. Some who preach are trained in religion generally, but not the faith of Christ. Opinions of religious authors and theologians are more in vogue than the inspired writings of Scripture. Human literature, human wisdom, human reasoning are taught in classes rather than the Word. We have become a people that follow men all too often rather than learning from the Bible the way of God.

This drift has been accomplished under the guise of being more relevant for today, as if God's Word is not a sufficient guide for today. In some churches, if there is any Bible study at all, it is more from what some men have concocted than what the Holy Spirit has revealed. What a contrast to speaking as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11), and preaching the Word (First Timothy 4:1-4) as Paul instructed Timothy to do.

Confusion

The result of this trend toward ignorance has been more language of Ashdod, imitation of denominationalism, unsound and uncertain sounds, non-Biblical doctrines, division, confusion, apostasy, digression, and a general disrespect for the Word itself. When you realize that the law of sowing and reaping is still operative, it is frightening to consider what is happening and will happen to the future generations as we see the church becoming less and less like the New Testament church and more and more like the ways of men around us.

A major problem that has arisen is confusion over what is the work and mission of the church. You would think this would never be the case among us. You would think in light of the teaching that Christ came to save the sinner (First Timothy 1:15; Luke 19:10), and the church is His body (Ephesians 1:22,23), that the gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16), that it would not be difficult to determine the work of the church as spreading the gospel to the saving of the lost. Especially ought we understand this since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15).

We also must be reminded that what we do must be authorized by Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). The written Word is the source of that authority (Second Timothy 3:16,17). So many brethren seem to have ignored the need for authority because they look longingly toward doing what denominations do. We are not left to do just anything and everything somebody wants to do. We have a work that is to be done, a distinctive work of the church, and we must confine ourselves thereto.

Wrong Goals Create Problems

But some, in order to get numbers and finances, have shifted the drawing power from the gospel to recreation, and social reform without conversion to Christ. Some have gone wholesale into entertaining, providing fun and games for every age, secular education, baby sitting services, political actions, even joining the world in demonstrations for first one cause then another. The

work of the church is the spiritual salvation of mankind through spiritual reconciliation with God.

I once heard a man spend fifty minutes of a so-called sermon urging the congregation to put his college in their budget. Since when did it become the work of the church to provide tennis courts, science laboratories, gymnasiums, etc. for schools? Some seem to think that if they throw in some Bible classes alongside side everything else that this justifies the church financing the whole scene! We only ask for Biblical authority for such as that before we accept it.

Individual/Collective

One manner used to confuse the work of the church is to contend that whatever a member of the church can do the entire church can do collectively. The fallacy of that is that there are duties the individual has that are not always parallel with the duties of the body, the church. Even though the church is made up of individual members, everything the individual does is not a part of the corporate work. It is perfectly acceptable for the individual to conduct a profitable business, but not the church. The idea that the church can do whatever an individual can do is false doctrine that has taken millions of dollars from the treasuries of churches that was given for the work of the church but used in areas of activity where the funds should not have gone, and the work of the church is abandoned to that extent. Some have spent huge sums on recreational facilites while missionaries go begging. "*My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*"

Please the World

The church is being overwhelmed with the emphasis and concern with this world and is failing to "*set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.*" (Colossians 3:2). While we are in the world, we are not to be of the world. Worldliness has sapped the influence and power of the church everywhere. We are to save the world, not conform to the world (Romans 12:1,2). Love of the world has generated a lax, worldly minded and permissive people toward immorality, drinking,

dancing, gambling, and many other worldly excesses we see about us, and among some so-called Christians. Pulpits have become silent as death in condemning the sins of the world among the members. (It might cost the clergy-preacher his high paying job and popularity).

It is evident that many in the church are striving for their pleasure and material gain more than the welfare of their souls and the souls of their children. If you doubt this, just observe closely the tremendous loss from the church of the young among members of the church. Family after family has so stressed this world that their children are not "*in the Lord.*" Jesus taught, Luke 12:15, "*Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" Paul warned, First Timothy 6:7-10, " *For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*"

Worldly emphasis has helped create the preacher shortage. While there is seemingly no shortage of those clamoring to get on the "staff" and payrolls of churches, there is a shortage of faithful men who will preach the gospel without fear, favor, compromise, or perversion. There are those who readily compromise truth in order to retain their level of income. Covetousness affects the contributions and hinders the work that could otherwise be done. Works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19ff) still prevent entrance into the kingdom of God. We need to ask if we are influencing the world or is it the other way around. The willingness to discard as useless whatever has gone before and the craze for the **new** without regard for the **true** has captivated the ambitions of too many, and the church is reeling beneath the pounding it takes from the worldly minded members. The reproach that is heaped against Christ because of the worldly lives of so-called Christians cannot be measured for magnitude of it and the damage it causes to His cause for which He died.

How people can live for the world and claim to be of Christ is an inconsistency that cannot be explained.

The New Rather Than The True

Change for change's sake is the watchword with some. While we may improve our methods and expedients that are lawfully used, some have changed the message and mission in order to appeal to the world, bringing people into fellowship without converting them to the convictions they must possess to be children of God. Many are being deceived by the lies of false teachers who say they only wish to change in matters of opinion, but upon examination of their message, it is obvious that the message they preach conflicts with the doctrine of Christ. We are naive to think false teachers are sincere. It is increasingly evident that the lives of many members of the church are not lights in the world nor are they the salt of the earth. They hide the light of truth beneath the bushel of hypocrisy and imitation of error. It still rings true, however, that we are not to love the world (First John 2:15-17), and when we are friends with the sinful things of the world we are no longer friends of God, but His enemies (James 4:4).

Liberal and Modernism

Doctrinally, the church is beset with modernism and liberalism. This really has no relationship with being modern or generous either one. Modernism is a system of thought that denies the Bible is the Word of God, denies the miraculous, denies even the existence of God, including the Deity of Christ and the evidences of it. Modernism contends the first eleven chapters of Genesis are myths and only figurative language. Liberalism embraces the doctrines that have divided and torn the church through the years, as men imitate the substitute churches of denominationalism, adopt doctrines of men, slander faithful brethren to gain their own fame and fortune, and generally disrupt the brotherhood in order to create a "do-your-own-thing" approach to religion. Forsaking the need for authority for what is said and done, they go their own way, ridicule the "old paths," and heap unto themselves teachers of error. Many churches, once faithful, are submerged by liberalism.

This attitude toward Scripture has seeped into the church through brotherhood papers, books, Bible departments of schools, modern speech so-called versions of the Bible, the "scholars" who have absorbed the modernistic teaching they studied while gaining their religious titles and degrees at the semenaries operated by modernists and denominationalists. It has gained favor through big-name brethren who have had influence, but who have digressed from the truth. For years on end these people have been polluting the minds of generation after generation until the church is staggering from the blows of digression and apostasy. The climate that only the "intellectuals" have any right to say or know anything, that others need to keep quiet, has captivated the "thinking" of too many. As in the day of Paul, those who profess themselves wise are fools because they have turned their heads from Biblical teaching and adopted the ways propagated by men in contrast to truth (First Corinthians 1:17-29).

Lethargy/Apathy/Peace at Any Price

But atop all this is the pathetic and tragic lethargy and indifference that holds control of the minds of members and their leaders alongside the disposition to "go along to get along." This is not a problem with all, nor is this something brand new among brethren. Revelation 3:16 and the lukewarm church in Laodicea blazed the trail for this kind of religious stupor. So many manifest a "who cares?" attitude. So many are unwilling to take a stand. So many are unwilling to work and bear their part of the load.

You may see a lot of activity here and there, but often it is activity that is not the Father's business, but just busy-ness. You hear a lot about love, love, love, but it is not the love of which one reads in Scripture but a permissiveness and tolerance of sin, an acceptance of false doctrines and doctors, a pseudo-love that appeals to emotions but fails to manifest itself in genuine deeds that seek the other's highest good as God defines the good. Some who cry for love are among the most vicious people on earth. They have no love for the truth nor those who stand for it and defend it. Their love is for

their own bellies, their own way, and whatever means that gains for them their goals and ambitions.

This lethargic indifference is seen in letting the other fellow do his work and mine, too. It is seen in being against everything and for nothing. It is evident with the lessening interest in evangelism. Many churches are merely "house keeping" for the Lord and not even doing a credible job at that. It is seen in the decline of accepting personal responsibility, the unwillingness to cooperate and work. Interest is centered on self and what one wants, what makes one feel good, rather than what is the revealed will of God. There is compromise of truth, and "dialogue" with those in apostasy under the guise of seeking unity. They seek not unity, but fellowship in spite of division, and in spite of God's prohibition of it. They preach we are have "unity in diversity," which means to agree to disagree, and that doctrinal differences make no difference.

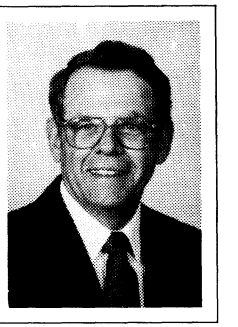
The church is now plagued with the development of the "staff" and clergy of congregations, the soul-winning experts without each Christian making his or her effort to even be faithful, let alone be soul winners. It is seen in the attitude that nothing applies to me, but everybody else ought and will do what is necessary. This is a strength-sapping and energy-draining disposition against the welfare of the church.

Nonetheless, all is not evil, and the Lord has promised to be with us. With these and other problems, like the lack of discipline, weak leadership, failure of training, absenteeism, the Lord's people face hard times. It is up to the faithful to try to prevent, face, solve, overcome, and endure the problems in the church without developing hatred and bitterness toward those in error, for that would destroy us. Problems mean that we must be sure and more determined to keep step with the Master.

We work for a remnant to keep the flame of truth burning brightly after our term of service ends in physical death. May God help us to be faithful to Him.

* * * * *

Comment on Rom. 10:4



JAMES W. BOYD

Paul states emphatically, and it seems most difficult that anyone could misunderstand such a forthright declaration, that Christ is the end of the law. The word "*end* means goal, target, that which was in view. The coming of Christ was that toward which the old law pointed. "*End*" here is like the term "*end*" in First Peter 1:9, where Peter wrote, "*Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*" The goal, target. that which is in view of faith, is salvation. In like manner, Christ was the "*end*" of the old law of Moses. It is the same thought as in Galatians 3:23-25 which teaches the purpose of the law was to bring to Christ.
(From page 150, **System of Salvation,** by JWB.)

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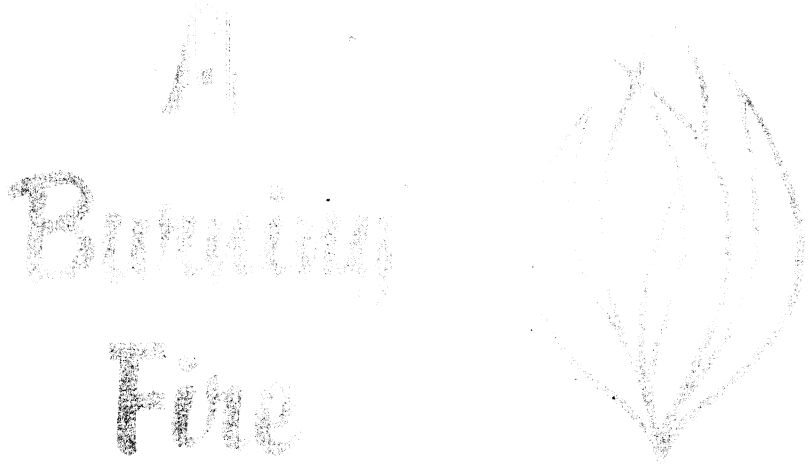

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 9**

Ready to Meet Goliath

In First Samuel, chapter seventeen, we find the record of one of the greatest battles ever fought between opposing forces. It was a battle of two human beings. The victory was one of the most significant in the history of mankind. Aside from the interest and adventure of this thrilling event, and the impact it had on ancient Israel, it is still useful to us today, providing us with practical lessons and illustrations of truths we need to know and respect. It was the battle between David and Goliath, one of those accounts of the Old Testament "*written for our learning.*" (Romans 15:4).

The effect of this struggle was tremendous upon so many. First, there was the nation of Israel. They were again victorious over a historical enemy. Second, the Philistines were affected and driven to a new defeat before the people of God. Third, the effect upon David personally was immeasurable because it sent him rocketing to high praise before the nation. In such a short time he leaped from a mere shepherd lad in Judah to a great warrior and national hero. He embarked upon a career of service before Israel that would occupy the remainder of his life.

The Background

Israel and the Philistines had come to battle, as was often the case between these two nations. But instead of going into full warfare as on other occasions, Goliath, a Philistine giant, stepped forward with a challenge. "*Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am I not a Philistine, and ye the servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I*

prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us?" (First Samuel 17: 8,9). He proposed, rather than a wholesale war, a one-on-one fight, winner take all. He would represent Philistia and Israel should choose their man.

The challenge sent fear through the Israelite camp, even to Saul. Meanwhile, David, a shepherd, had been sent by his father with supplies to David's brothers who were in Saul's army. While he was there, he was afforded the opportunity to hear Goliath make his repeated challenge. David inquired what would be done for the man who accepted the challenge and fought the giant to victory. He spoke of taking away the reproach from Israel that had arisen by this giant who defied the armies of the living God.

Eliab, David's older brother, heard David making such remarks and rebuked him, telling him he should return home and tend *"those few sheep in the wilderness."* He accused David of having come just to see the battle.

The Battle

Bible students know well the series of events that followed. David was taken to Saul and, after some discussion, was allowed to go meet the giant. Saul offered David his armor but David refused it. He took five smooth stones and his sling. Upon approaching Goliath, the giant cursed and ridiculed him, boasting how he would give David's flesh to the fowls. But David responded, *"Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."* (First Samuel 17: 45,46).

The outcome is well known. David finally beheaded the giant, Israel pursued the Philistines, and a great victory was won for Israel that day. But our study is not to simply recount these events, but center our attention on another thought suggested in the course of events.

When David was taken to Saul as one who volunteered to fight the giant, Saul would have denied him that opportunity on the basis, *"Thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth."* (First Samuel 17: 33). What preparation did David have for such an undertaking? So much was at stake, and the lad was untried with the implements of war.

Being too young is often reason enough not to grant youth to do many things. They should not be expected to discharge adult duties while so immature and inexperienced. It is unfair to them and to others that may have to depend on their performance. But was David without preparation for this encounter? Our ability to meet the foes of life depends how well prepared we are. Battles are lost, or won, in the preparation stage. Games played on the court or field are in a real sense decided in practice sessions. But our text suggests three great battles David had fought and won prior to meeting Goliath that equipped him for this supreme moment.

Battle of Self

David had won the battle over self. He had self-control, self-confidence, but was not arrogant nor egotistical. He could control his temper under trying and provocative circumstances. He did not allow the ridicule and provocation from his older brother, Eliab, to destroy his confidence nor provoke him to rage. He did not lose his composure when harsh words were thrown at him by the giant. One who was filled with pride, a show-off, with more talk than substance, quick to fly into rage and anger, would have been a misfit for this crucial time. He was neither intimidated, nor did he strut for the applause from others.

When his brother would have stopped him, he simply reasoned, *"What have I done?"* He argued, *"Is there not a cause?"* None could deny that there was a cause. Somebody needed to do something and David merely recognized that. So he persisted in his inquires.

Standing before Goliath, he did not cast aside caution and wisdom, but kept a sober and cool head about him, controlling righteous indignation, and did not allow

passion to blur his judgment and vision. His hand was steady and his mind unclouded as his vision was clear. He had charge of himself. This is a mark of genuine maturity whether exhibited by the young or old.

Battle of Fear

David had also conquered the battle of fear. "*Let no man's heart fail because of him,*" said David. Everyone else was afraid, but not David. There was a reason for his courage. He was not indifferent to the power of Goliath. He did not underestimate nor minimize his enemy. But he was not frightened by him. He had faced danger and possible death before this.

While a shepherd lad tending his sheep a lion and a bear had attacked his sheep. Unlike a mere hireling, he rose to the occasion, recovered the sheep, and killed the intruding beasts. He knew what it was to risk his life in the line of duty. He knew how to respond when duty called. While cowards cannot be trusted and are likely to cut and run, David knew that to die while doing what needs to be done is victory even if apparent defeat follows. To preserve oneself and neglect duty was worse than death to David. His actions are akin to the words of Jesus, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*" (Luke 9: 23,24). His courage was not arrogance, but a trait of character he had developed earlier that made him ready to meet Goliath.

Battle of Unbelief

David had also conquered the battle of unbelief. "*The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, shall deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.*" What a great expression of faith in God! He gave the credit for his former successes to God. David was not relying upon himself, his skill with the sling, his own confidence. He had relied on God in times past, and he was doing the same this time. He had the attitude of Paul, "*I can do all things through him that strengtheneth me.*" The reason he had been able to win the battle over self and fear

was because he had faith in God. As Paul wrote, Romans 8:31, *"If the Lord be for us, who can be against us.?"*

Cannot we see that this historical record has many practical lessons for each of us today? We have our own challenges and "Goliaths" in life. There are many things that threaten our peace, happiness, stability, security, purity, and faith. We are beset with temptations on every hand. No person, especially those that love God, are ever free from the constant pressure from Satan to conform to the world, commit sin, "go along to get along." Peter warned of the devil's mission in First Peter 5:8, *"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* The devil is a far more potent foe against us than Goliath was against David. Goliath could only take David's physical life. The devil can bring us spiritual death. We must be prepared to do battle.

Shall we learn that "with God, we can"? Will we learn to control self, often our worst enemy and weakness? Shall we muster bravery rather than fear, knowing that every temptation has a way of escape because God has promised it (First Corinthians 10:13)? Shall we not remember that temptation is not just an opportunity to sin, but also an opportunity to grow by not yielding to it? With control of mind and temper, having self-confidence with courage, and with faith in God that undergirds it all, no "Goliath" will make us panic into dismay that characterized most of Israel in the long ago. Rather, we shall be like David, even when we have what may seem to be inadequate weapons, and without the armor of human construction, and be able to fight the good fight of faith to eternal victory.

* * * * *

We would not exchange this blessing for all the world, would we?

"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

FIRST PETER 5:7

Salvation is Personal

There are those who like straight talk, preaching that is clear and understandable, that does not "beat around the bush," but gets to the point. Unfortunately, there are those who shun such preaching. Generally speaking, those who shun it really do not want the truth in any form. They just lay the blame for disliking truth on the clarity with which it is presented.

This lesson calls attention to some very simple, plain, direct statements, words that need to be heard by all mankind because they come from the Lord. There is no subject of greater importance to the human race than the subject under consideration. This is true whether anybody in the world believes it or not. Truth is not determined by how many receive it or reject it.

It is strange how some are not attracted by plain, simple, direct statements from God. It most likely due to their dislike to having to make decisions and being held responsible for them. Language need not be harsh, unkind, nor cruel to be plain and direct. But even the Word of God is often discounted because some just refuse to be disturbed.

What will be written in this lesson will be more immediately applicable to some than others, as is the case with most lessons. Some may have heard these things previously and have responded to them obediently. Some may have heard them in the past but set them aside thus far. Some may never have heard them. Possibly some young person may fall upon these words not having heard them before and will be instructed. But it is the intention to leave no doubt or confusion in anyone's mind who reads the importance of them. Preaching the gospel ought to be so clear that the hearer will know what the will of the Lord is. Our subject is about salvation and that is it a personal matter.

To say that salvation is personal is not to say it is a secret and none of anybody else's business. A lost soul is the business of every saved person. We are to be interested in each other and assist one another in doing the will of the Lord. Proverbs 11:30, "*He that winneth souls is wise.*"

What God Has Done For Man

After all that God has done to save man, and all that others may do to encourage someone to be saved, there remains something each one **must** do himself in order to be saved. The jailor asked, "*What must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16: 30). On Pentecost people asked, "*What must we do?*" (Acts 2: 37). Saul asked, "*What would thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9: 6). It is not what God must do, or what Christ must do, or what the Holy Spirit must do? It is not what must my neighbor do. But what must I do?

God has done all that God is going to do to save you. This is not to say that Deity is not working to save you. He works by and through the preaching of the Word of God (Second Thessalonians 2:14). But He has already made full, complete, and sufficient provision for our salvation and there is to be expected nothing additional from Him.

What has God already done? He manifested His love toward man by sending Christ (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Christ came as a gift who tasted of death for every man, shedding His blood for the sins of all (Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 2:9,10; First John 2:2). God's part in His plan to save man was motivated by His love, grace, and mercy toward man as demonstrated through the gift of His Son to die for our sins in our stead, and show us the path of life, urging us to come to Him rather than to follow the sinful way that leads to eternal separation from God.

Christ arose from the dead (Matthew 28: 5,6), ascended into heaven to the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-11; Romans 8: 34) where He reigns on His throne (Acts 2:30). In keeping with His promise to His apostles (John 14, 15, 16), the Holy Spirit came, guiding them in what they preached, and empowering them to work miracles by which they confirmed the Word they preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2: 3,4). The message of salvation, the

gospel (Romans 1:16), was preached by these inspired and Spirit-led men, and that message of salvation is now the inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The invitation of the Lord to mankind is extended (Matthew 11:28-30), and it is man's option to obey or disobey. His choice will determine His eternal destiny.

In light of all that Deity has done, what more can God do? He will not force one to be saved against his will. God has done for the sinner what the sinner cannot and could not do for himself; namely, provide the sacrifice for sins, the blood of Christ, the atonement and propitiation which was Christ. He has provided hope, assurance, and a place of spiritual security. He has revealed His plan whereby we can leave sin and enter Christ where there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). God's plan, when followed, will take a sinful man in his sins, cleanse him by the blood of Christ, and make him a citizen in God's kingdom, composed of the saved. Nothing other than the gospel is needed. We need no new facts, commands, doctrines, threats, warnings, nothing whatever. We have God's way before us and He has revealed it to us in His Word.

If God did anymore, forcing man to obey, He would violate man's free exercise of choice. Man was not created a robot, but a free moral being, capable of decision, having the power to choose whether to be saved or remain lost. Salvation is never earned, but given upon conditions that man must obey what God tells him he must do. God has acted. The next move is man's.

Now It's Our Move

To emphasize how personal salvation is, let us remind you that nobody can or will make the next move for you. Like it or not, there are some things only you can do for yourself. Others may express concern, pray, teach, encourage, urge. But ultimately, salvation is up to each one. No friend, parent, mate, preacher, grandparent, nobody can do for you what the Lord says you must do. Peter taught on Pentecost, after telling his hearers what to do, he said, "...*every one of you.*"

If one desires to be saved, he must be sufficiently interested in salvation and will want to know what is the next move he should make. For this information mankind must rely on the New Testament record. No manual, creed, religious teacher, kinfolk, or even our own feelings can inform us, but "*thus saith the Lord.*"

John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" John 8:24, "*For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*" Hebrews 11:6, "*But without faith it is impossible to please him.*" Acts 16:31, "*And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*" There is the absolute necessity of faith in Christ. Never does the Bible teach salvation by faith alone, but repeatedly it teaches salvation by faith.

Luke 13:3, "*I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*" Second Peter 3:9, "*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*" Acts 17:30, "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*" The first thing Peter said to the believing inquirers on Pentecost was, "*Repent.*" (Acts 2:38).

Luke 12:8,9, "*Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man confess before the angels of God. But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.*" Romans 10: 9,10, "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" Acts 8:37, "*And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*"

Acts 22:16, "*And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" Acts 2:38, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,*

and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." First Peter 3:21, "*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*" Mark 16:16, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.*"

That the baptism spoken of is water baptism is evident from Acts 8:36, "*See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*" Also First Peter 3:21 as well as Acts 10: 47,48 makes it abundantly clear that this is water baptism. Ephesians 4: 4,5 teaches there is one baptism. Therefore, inasmuch as the baptism being preached and practiced when Paul said there is one was water baptism in the name of Christ for the remission of sins and in order to get into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6: 3,4), we should obey the command to be baptized in water.

Once "*in the Lord*" we dare not fall away as is described in Second Peter 2: 20-22. Once saved, we must keep saved (First Peter 1: 5-11). When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Second Corinthians 5: 10), it will be a personal matter.

So the matter of heaven or hell depends upon what response each makes to the gospel call. God has provided and revealed what He has done, and revealed what we must do, inviting us to come to Him for salvation. The matter is a personal one and calls for a personal response. It is up to each one to decide.

"*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*" (Second Corinthians 5:11). In the words of Paul, Acts 26:29, "*I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am...*" Paul was saved. He was a Christian. It is my prayer that such is the case with all.

* * * * *

What you have just read must be acted upon while you have time and opportunity!

Baptism: A Doctrine of the Devil?

A Baptist preacher once said, "Those who say you must be baptized to be saved are teaching the doctrine of the devil." He added that the moment one believes Jesus is the Christ he is saved. Whether what he says is right or wrong is of tremendous importance. Those who teach and follow the doctrines of the devil will be lost. The Bible is filled with strong words against false teachers and those who follow them. Such comments as made by that Baptist preacher leaves little doubt regarding his attitude, and that of most Baptists, toward baptism.

The only way, not just the best way, to learn the truth of God is to "*search the scriptures.*" Let us see what the Bible says and teaches and learn what is taught about baptism. Let us learn what inspired men had to say. God's truth, when attacked, mocked, ridiculed, and castigated as the doctrine of the devil deserves defending. We are "*set for the defense of the gospel*" as was Paul and expressed in Philippians 1:17.

Baptism of John

Listen to what John the Baptist preached. Keep in mind John was "the Baptist," meaning the immerser, and was not a Baptist, something you never read concerning any person in the Bible. Mark 1:4, "*John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*" Mark 1:8 teaches that John practiced water baptism. From Matthew 3:7 we read how the Pharisees and Saducees came to his baptism and "*he* (John, JWB), *said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*" Is it not obvious that the water baptism that John was preaching

and practicing had to do with escaping wrath? Was John not preaching and practicing the very thing that the Baptist preacher called the doctrine of the devil?

That Baptist preacher is not the first to think such things of John's baptism. Matthew 21:33-36, Jesus asked some who questioned Him whether the baptism of John was from heaven or men. They would not answer. Obviously Jesus contended it was from heaven. How says anyone that John's teaching is a doctrine of the devil?

John's father, Zacharias, was told by the angel how John would be great in the sight of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, turning people to God, making ready a people for the Lord (Luke 1:14-17). Does this sound as if John would be teaching a doctrine of the devil?

Zacharias said of John, Luke 1:76,77, "*And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.*" John baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). Did he preach a doctrine of the devil?

Peter's Sermon

On Pentecost the apostle Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit, commanded his inquirers to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Did he preach a doctrine of the devil, even as guided by the Holy Spirit? He even told them why to be baptized. It was the same reason Jesus taught in Mark 16:16. Did those on Pentecost obey a doctrine of the devil? This was not the only time Peter preached what some call "the doctrine of the devil." Acts 10:47,47, he commanded those at Cornelius' house to be baptized. Baptism was not optional with them. Consider what else Peter taught in First Peter 3:21 where he preached baptism saves. Did he teach the devil's doctrine?

What Paul Taught

Paul taught the necessity of baptism. Galatians 3:27, "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" Here, as in Romans 6:3,4, Paul

teaches we get into Christ by baptism. Salvation is "*in Christ.*" (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation "*in Christ.*" (Romans 8:1). All spiritual blessings are "*in Christ.*" (Ephesians 1:3). Had Paul obeyed the doctrine of the devil in Acts 22:16? The Baptist preacher would claim Paul was already saved on the road to Damascus. If so, the Lord did not know it because He told him to go into Damascus and there it would be told him what to do. Paul did not know he was already saved because he spent three days in fasting and prayer without rejoicing. Ananias did not know he was already saved because he told him how to wash away his sins. If he was already saved, why be baptized to wash his sins away? Was Paul taught a doctrine of the devil?

What Jesus Said

Christ taught the same thing in Mark 16:16 and Matthew 28:19,20. How presumptuous and defiant of truth can one become to suggest that John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, and even Christ all taught a doctrine of the devil, just because one's creed teaches salvation by "faith only," a doctrine never taught in Scripture anywhere? When you teach baptism for the remission of sins you are in good company, such as those of the Bible who taught it long before us.

Quite often opponents of baptism misrepresent the doctrine of Christ by ridiculing baptism as "water salvation." Ridicule does not dismiss what Scripture teaches. Denominationalists ought to have learned this by now, but many have not. Nobody who ever taught the truth on the subject has suggested the saving power from sin is the water itself, no more than one would teach the waters of Jordan healed Naaman from leprosy (Second Kings 5). We are saved by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7). But His blood was shed in His death (John 19), and we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4). This is when and where we reach the saving blood of Christ which enables us to walk in newness of life.

Saved by Works

Baptism is called by some an attempt to be saved by works. We need to know that there are certain kinds of

works by which one cannot be saved, such as works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), works of our own merit (Titus 3:3-5), works of the Mosaic law (Romans 3:20). But there are works of obedience by which faith is made perfect, the kind of works by which Abraham was justified (James 2:20-26).

Peter urged his hearers on Pentecost to "*save yourselves...*" They could not save themselves by themselves, nor could they be saved on the basis of their own righteousness. But there were works of obedience they had to obey before they would be saved. This is either true or Peter's words make no sense whatever. Baptism is a work of the same kind as repentance. Man does the repenting. When one repents, is he trying to be saved on the basis of his own merit? No, he obeys what the Lord has commanded, depending on the Lord for the gift of salvation.

Not Faith Only

We are saved by faith (not faith only), but even faith is a work (John 6:29), a work of God. It is not that God must believe, but that it is God's will that man believe. Man does the work. A faith that will not work in obedience is a dead faith (James 2:26). How much life is there in a corpse? No Bible student denies we are saved by faith. No Bible believer contends we are saved by faith alone. Hebrews eleven, the chapter on faith, shows in each example given people of faith working, active, obedient.

We are not saved the moment we believe. Romans 10:13ff shows step-by-step how the Word leads us to salvation. We hear the word, believe it, call on the Lord to be saved. There must be the calling on the Lord that comes after faith. John 1:12 shows faith to give right and power to become the sons of God. But having such right and power does not mean that one is yet a son of God. He must exercise that right and power, and he does so by obedience to what is commanded. Romans 6:16-18 teaches one is made free when he obeys the doctrine delivered. That which must be obeyed is a "*form*" of a doctrine that saves. That doctrine is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4). The "*form*" of the doctrine is baptism (Romans 6:3,4) as

Paul had just explained. This is proof conclusive that we are not saved the moment we believe.

Which Doctrine is of the Devil?

Rather than baptism to be saved being a doctrine of the devil, it is the Baptist doctrine that one is saved by "faith only," the moment he believes, that is of the devil. John 12:42,32 reveals men who believed but would not even confess Christ. Were they already saved? Even demons believe (James 2:19). Are they saved? If salvation was by "faith alone" then when Peter was asked on Pentecost what his hearers should do, and they obviously believed what he had said about Christ or they would not have asked, he should have told them, "Nothing. You already believe. That's it. It's done." But he didn't say that, did he?

No man has the right to ask another to do anything other than what the Lord has taught. But no man has the right to declare the doctrine of Christ to be the devil's doctrine. The Biblical evidence is so abundant we wonder why people retain their loyalty to false doctrines that would lead them to avoid obedience to a divine command, and then obey that command for the purpose revealed. You can be sure, until you do what the Scripture commands of you, there is no word of hope for your soul. Believe this and live. Reject is and suffer the dreadful consequences.

* * * * *

The Transmission of Faith

Since we are "*justified by faith*," (Romans 5:10), "*saved by faith*," (Ephesians 2:8), "*the just shall live by faith*," (Romans 1:17), "*without faith it is impossible for please him*," (Hebrews 11:6), and we are to grow in faith (Second Thessalonians 1:3), it becomes imperative to know how

faith is gained or generated. We are not born with faith. We did not always possess faith. There was a time in our infancy and early childhood when we were mentally incapable of faith. How is faith (the faith that saves, justifies, etc.) created in the human heart? By what process does it grow?

Romans 10:11-17 is a passage of tremendous revelation of step-by-step procedure on our subject. Salvation is the goal. Before salvation one must call on God. Before he can call he must believe. Before he can believe he must hear. Before he can hear there must be the proclamation of the Word. Salvation begins with the Word of God. Romans 10:17, "*So then faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" The message of heaven, relayed to man, makes faith, calling on God, and salvation possible. (Notice there is something between faith and salvation, which is calling on God. So we know one is not saved the moment he believes.)

John 3:3-5 teaches the necessity of being "*born again.*" First Peter 1:23 teaches we are born again by the incorruptible seed which is the Word of God. Without the Word there can be no new birth, and without the new birth there is no entrance into the kingdom of God.

Matthew 13:1-9 presents the parable of the sower. It is explained in verses 18-23. Luke 8:11, "*The seed is the word of God.*" Without the seed there is no plant, no growth, no fruit, no salvation (John 15:2,8).

To create faith the apostles went forth preaching and teaching the Word of God (Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:15,16). This is the reason Paul taught Timothy to "*preach the word.*" (Second Timothy 2:2). Scripture reveals no other way whereby faith is transmitted to or created in the heart or mind of the human being. Acts 14:1, Paul went from city to city "*and so spake that a great multitude both of Jews and also the Greeks believed.*" Acts 15:7, "*Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe.*" Acts 18:8, "*And many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized.*" James 1:18,21), "*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth..., and*

receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls." Only by the Word can he grow spiritually (First Peter 2:2).

Today we must tell the same apostolic teaching to lead people to have faith, call on God, and be saved. Our message is embodied in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). John 20:30,31, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.*" Everyone who believes, somewhere, sometime, must be taught the Word of God because the way of salvation is the way of teaching and learning (John 6:44,45).

Must Have Knowledge

Nothing further really needs to be said for us to know the absolute necessity of Biblical knowledge. We cannot be saved, grow, and produce without it. It makes one wonder why Bible classes are not filled each time they meet. Hosea 4:6, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*" Let us consider some erroneous and misleading doctrines put forth by some as to how one gains faith.

How Faith Does Not Come

Faith is not created by a Bible lying on a table gathering dust. It seems some must think the Bible is like a magic wand. They have it around for good luck. They only consult it at weddings and funerals or when some question or argument arises. They have several Bibles. But a Bible unread and unstudied is of no value. You might not consider throwing it out on the garbage heap, but as far as your spiritual welfare is concerned, you might as well. One buys a Bible, or is given one, but it must be studied in order to have faith. I wonder if it is honorable and fair to read Scripture over a corpse of a person who has rejected the Bible throughout life?

Faith is not transmitted existentially, that is, through confrontation with crisis or some experience, possibly a

tragedy in life. It is true that some events in life shake a person loose from that to which he has been holding and he becomes aware that he lacks what is needed. Some experience may make one more receptive, openminded, and willing to hear the truth. How many people, parents, mates, friends, have even prayed that something might happen that would cause the unbeliever to consider the gospel? But such events of themselves never produce faith. Without teaching, learning, knowing, hearing the Word of God, one will not know and cannot know what to believe. Tragedy might break the hard crust on the soil of the heart, but only the seed can produce faith.

Faith does not come by prayer apart from the Word. Prayer is good, but it will not, by itself, produce faith. The apostolic message must be planted in the heart. To pray but not study is folly. There is no need to expect prayer to be answered favorably regarding others if those others will never consider the Word. Paul prayed that the Jews might be saved (Romans 10:1,2), but spent his life seeking opportunity to teach them the truth.

Faith is not created by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Never is such taught in the Bible. The Holy Spirit brought the Word as Jesus promised (John 14, 15, 16; Acts 2; First Corinthians 2; Galatians 1), and the Holy Spirit does operate on the human heart. But He does so by the use of the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). The heart that rejects the Word rejects the Spirit. People who clamor for and wait until there will be a direct operation on them by the Holy Spirit clamor and wait in vain. Those who have been taught and have learned are those who are drawn to God (John 6:44,45).

If people could be made to believe by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, we would not need preaching, missionaries, Bibles, etc. All we need is for the Holy Spirit to get busy. If He did not operate on some, whose fault would it be? Why do people try to blame God for the lack of faith when they neglect and reject the means God has provided to produce faith?

Faith is not transmitted through inheritance. Some may say, "Nobody claims that anyway!" Maybe not, but some

act like it. Some seem to think if their mates or children have faith that will suffice for them also. Ancestors who believed are great blessings and examples. Godly parents will be attentive to seeing their children are taught. But if anyone has the faith they must have to be saved it will be because they have learned and believed, not because somebody else did. Regardless of the faith of others, we cannot be saved on a borrowed faith.

Faith does not come simply by studying "about the Bible."It is not produced by speeches that entertain. It is not created through recreational activities or following the doctrines and theologies concocted by men and what some "professor or scholar" thinks. For this reason we are confident that much that is called preaching, and much activity by some churches misses the mark because much being heard and done does not teach the message of God's Word.

By the Word

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. That this is the prime mission of the Lord's church is evident from First Timothy 3:15 that tells us the church is the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*"

But one will not be saved simply because the Word is studied or preached. There must be the acceptance of the Word and obedience thereto. There are many "scholars" in the world who know much "about the Bible," and even much of the Biblical message. But they do not accept what is taught in it, and therefore, have not obeyed it. Without the Word there is no salvation, but the Word must not only be heard, but believed and obeyed.

By and through His Word God has provided the evidence necessary to believe. If and when we accept that evidence, we will believe. When we truly believe we will respond obediently. Does not such truth make you realize the importance of learning what the Word teaches? May God ever help us to give ourselves to searching the Scriptures. This is where we will discover the will of God and will then be able to do what we must in order to personally know the joy of salvation. What a

blessing it is that we have the Word of God. We can show our appreciation for it by studying it.

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Why Do You Look One Upon Another?

Genesis 42:1-3, "*Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die. And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.*"

This question was asked by Jacob at the time of great famine. Famine was not uncommon for Palestine and such events had occurred during the lives of Abraham and Isaac. But one place where this famine was not heavily felt was in Egypt. This was because Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharoah predicting seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine, and under the leadership of Joseph preparation for the famine had been made by conserving supplies during the good years to cover the hard years. But Jacob and his family were suffering in Canaan. News reached Jacob that there was grain in Egypt.

The question suggests several revealing and instructive points that, if we take them in the right way, we can be helped today in working for the Lord and being faithful stewards in the tasks before us.

What They Lacked

It was not just grain that was lacking. It seems the sons of Jacob lacked leadership and initiative. The need for food was obvious, but the sons just looked at one

another. They were doing nothing about it and proposing no solutions. So often people are heard to say, "Things will work out." That may be an expression of faith, but it may not be entirely true to say that. Things do not work. People work. With the providence of God and the cooperation of people things can be made to work out.

Jacob realized the need for action and gave instruction. Realizing and recognizing a need is a large part of good leadership. Taking the initiative in doing something is also a large part of it. Just sensing a need but doing nothing is negligence. One of these sons needed to step forward, rally the forces, offer a solution, take the lead, motivate the others, shed some light, provide a plan with hope, guidance, interest, and enthusiasm. No work moves forward to successful completion until somebody either does that or allows it to be done.

Two Necessities

There are two essential ingredients to getting things done. There must be leadership, and there must be followship. Each is dependent on the other. Leadership must come first. Jacob's sons did not provide it. They were in difficulty but were only looking at each other.

The question emphasizes the importance of vision and knowledge. Men cannot do what they do not first visualize. Progress begins with a dream, a plan, a thought, a goal. Progress depends upon knowledge of the need and how to reach the goal. Without it things falter.

There seems to be three kinds of people regarding work that needs to be done. Some see things as they are; they are realistic. Some see things as they ought to be; they are idealistic. Some put the real and the ideal in proper balance, seeing how things are, and seeing how things should be, and seeing more how things can be done. The latter ones are the ones who get things done.

Those who are merely realistic are on a treadmill, standing still. Those who are idealistic often make thoughts their aim and do nothing unless they can do everything to perfection. Those with good balance realize there is always room for improvement, but they

optimistically set the motion for improvements. They know they must branch out beyond limited borders, past self-imposed restrictions, and give new thought and action an opportunity to produce. In working for the Lord, however, we must always remember to do whatever we do with divine authority and not go beyond His will.

It seems the sons of Jacob did not know of grain in Egypt and had given no thought to going outside of Canaan to get food. Their lack of knowledge and vision meant the entire household of Jacob was in danger of extinction. In reality, the promises of God to the great patriarchs were threatened.

Need of Action

The question emphasizes the need for activity. Seeing the need, dreaming of the need and solution, planning the plan are all wonderful and needful as far as they go. But until there is activity, doing, getting to the work, nothing is really accomplished. Nobody will ever invent a substitute for expediting the work. Plans never work. People work plans. We must plan our work, then work our plan.

So many plans are encumbered with useless red-tape. There is often wasted effort and needless motion, improper preparation, and impractical "busy-ness." Usually, the more simple the plan the easier to work it. Things need not be complicated and drawn out to be effective. Usually the opposite is true.

Success depends on widespread involvement. In group action, like a church working together, the more people who get involved the greater the participation and fellowship, the greater the interest and sacrifice, the greater the likelihood of success. Just as an engine must have all its parts at work to be the most effective, everybody needs to be informed, included, instructed, intent, improved, and involved. The Lord's work does not belong to just a few.

People at work for the common good and for the cause of Christ will be a people at peace, progress, promoting to produce. Sometimes when something needs to be done it

ought to be said, "Don't just stand, looking at one another. Do something." This is essentially what Jacob said to his sons.

Just Looking

The mistake of the sons of Jacob at this moment was just looking at each other. If matters had been left to them the families would likely have starved to death. Fortunately for everyone, Jacob possessed the needed qualities of leadership, knowledge, vision, and realization of the solution. Because of Jacob, Joseph, and the providence of God, the family of Jacob survived this famine and the nation of Israel which came from this family, and through which came the Messiah, grew to the great nation it became. The promises were filled.

Could it be that we just sometimes look at each other? Are there not many needs spreading themselves before us? Do we not need to formulate and execute plans to take the gospel to the lost?

Homes are being corrupted, divided by divorce, children misled. One of America's present tragedies is the destruction of the foundations of our society by the destruction of the sanctity of home and marriage. Can we afford to just look at each other?

Hebrews 5:12, "*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not strong meat.*" Why do we just look at one another in face of the need for teachers? Why do we not study, learn, grow, and develop?

The faith of the young must be created and preserved. The saved must become involved in reaching the lost. The moral standards as taught in the gospel of Christ must be proclaimed and practiced. The fallen need to be restored, the sick, bereaved, and needy must receive care. How can we allow ourselves to just be looking upon one another? Doubtless many of us are fully aware that we cannot afford to be negligent, but are not as diligent in

the pursuit of our duties before God as we are able to be, and should be.

Our Stewardship

We must ask the question, "What kind of stewards are we going to be with what God has provided us? What kind of workers will we be in the God given work before us?"

Possibly too many of us are waiting. For what are we waiting? This is difficult to determine. Some wait for somebody else to get started. Success does depend on somebody getting started. Why should I wait until somebody else gets started, however. Cannot I also get things started? Have I tried to get things started?

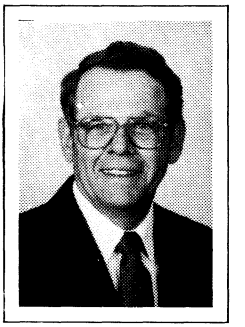
Some are always crying, "Now is not the time." Surely, good timing has its place. But the Scriptures teach that we must work in the day, the now, while we have time and opportunity. Now is the time. Always waiting for a better opportunity, a better time, may sound like thinking, but it is likely procrastination. It sounds much like Felix after hearing Paul preach and his cry for a "*convenient season*" to obey the Lord . Being like Felix ought not give us comfort.

Someone has suggested there are two kinds of people who are willing regarding work. Some are willing to work. Some are willing to let others work. Should we not be among the first group?

Jacob's question to his sons should be taken to heart by those of us who profess to be disciples of Christ in this sin stained world. It is a very personal and applicable question for each of us. When we have knowledge, leadership, followship, initiative, visions, dreams, plans goals, and then will get to work, then shall we be letting our light shine to the glory of God (Matthew 5:16). Until then, "*Why do you look one upon another?*"

* * * * *

A Warning from the Past



JAMES W. BOYD

In 1846, a very personable and likeable man named J. B. Ferguson moved to Nashville to preach for a church there. A tireless worker, he soon won the hearts of many, became editor of a religious paper. The church grew financially and numerically. As Ferguson was reaching his heights of popularity, especially among many of the community, some brethren began to take note of the false doctrines he preached. He had held these things privately for some time, but as he became more popular, he began to openly announce them. Faithful brethren challenged his doctrines and exposed him. But by then Ferguson had built a following and the church was torn apart. Some considered the exposure of his error as persecution of the man. The church in Nashville suffered a great loss because of him. It could have been avoided if brethren loving the truth had marked him. Ferguson died in obscurity, but the church suffered much because of him in his time.

* * * * *

A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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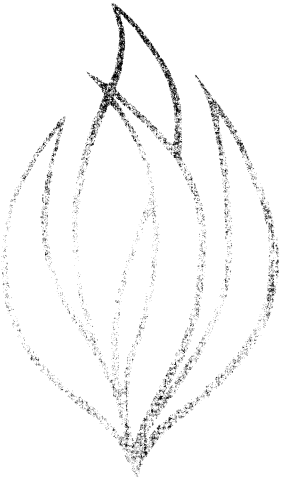

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME XII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 10**

Why Oppose Error?

Since it usually is difficult and often unpleasant, why does one raise opposition against others and their doctrines? It usually results in conflict. Nobody likes conflict. Why oppose error and run the risk?

People have varying attitudes toward what they believe to be religious error. Some ignore it because to them anything one wishes to believe is all right with them. It makes no difference what a person believes according to their way of thinking. Of course, this cannot and does not apply in any other realm of life, but somehow it seems to have validity with some in religion.

Some think error will some way just go away. They have a Gamaliel attitude toward error (Acts 5:34ff), and think that it will die of its own weight. Gamaliel gave the advice to simply leave a thing alone, and if it is right it will survive, and if it is error it will die. Eventually this will occur. But many may be lost in the meanwhile. Is it not strange that nobody takes this attitude toward physical diseases? Why should we think this will happen? If this were true it would seem that error would have long since passed away.

Some slash out against error with such venom that they destroy more than they intend to destroy. They are guilty of "throwing the baby away with the bath water." Seeking the destruction of evil, they are careless and also destroy the person they profess to love and want to save. Our opposition must be directed toward error, not toward persons except as they advocate error. We must oppose false principles and precepts, and extend hope and assistance to those who have been captivated by false ways. There are Biblical ways to do this very thing. Let us discover the attitude we must have.

The Biblical View

The Biblical attitude toward error must be that of Christ who hated what is wrong but loved the one doing the wrong. One can hate sin and love the sinner. Sin should be hated because it destroys the person we are to love.

Space prohibits making comment on the vast array of passages we wish to cite that teach the right attitude toward error. But if the reader takes the time to read each one and consider it, we are confident that the extended study of these verses will produce great learning relevant to opposition to error.

Philippians 1:17, Paul was set for the defense of the gospel. Matthew 15:9, doctrines of men will make worship vain. Titus 1:9, the gainsayer must be convicted. Titus 2:1,8, sound doctrine and sound words must be the standard. Galatians 1:6-9, only what the apostles preached is to be preached. Romans 16:17, division is caused by contrary doctrines. Second John 9-11, to have God one must abide in the doctrine of Christ. We are prohibited from bidding "*Godspeed*" to false teaching. Second Peter 2:15-19, false teachers are described. Second Peter 3:15-17, truth can be wrested to one's destruction. Second Corinthians 6:14-18, truth and error cannot abide together. First Corinthians 5:6,7, error must be purged. First Timothy 6:20,21, error causes one to err from the faith. Second Timothy 2:15-18, profane babblings increase ungodliness.

These references could be multiplied that deal with the damage to the soul that error produces. It is evident that God hates every false way and those that love God will love what He loves and hate what He hates (Psalm 97:10). To love truth demands opposition to error.

Error is in the world generally, even in the church at times. To oppose it is not making oneself a judge or "playing God," as some charge. If we be obedient to God we will recognize and respect the judgments He has made and already revealed in His Word. To fail to oppose what is wrong is to disobey the very Lord we say we serve. Those who are critical of opposition to error should take note.

Is It Love?

Some have the attitude, "Love me, and leave me alone." True love for another will not allow us to leave people in error alone. Love will demand making the attempt to rescue them from the error they hold. Opposing error is not hating people, but loving people. While some may think intending to do right, or thinking something is right is sufficient, they are grossly mistaken about that. Error is man's enemy and we must oppose it.

Let us now consider four Biblical words and place them in proper sequence according to their meaning. Then we shall easily see why error must be opposed.

First Corinthians 12:25 gives us the word "*schism.*" First Corinthians 3:3 speaks of "*divisions.*" Galatians 5:19,20 includes the word "*heresies.*" In Second Thessalonians 2:3 we find "*falling away.*"

"*Schism*" is derived from the word that means to split, rend, tear apart. It denotes the split. In Paul's usage it does not refer to the parts that result from the tear, but the tear itself.

"*Divisions*" picture the scattering apart, separation, things that stand apart one from another, like the word "*factions.*" In the New Testament , schism is the tear or split, and divisions are the parts that result from the tear or split.

"*Heresy*" comes from the word meaning "take with hand," which conveys the concept of making a choice or implying the act of choosing. Heresy refers to making a choice regarding a belief or doctrine by choosing to accept a doctrine that is false or in error. It is heresy which causes schism which results in divisions.There will be no divisions without schisms, and no schisms without heresy. Before we look at the concept of "*falling away,*" there is more that should be said about heresies.

Two Kinds of Heresies

The Bible presents two kinds of heresy. One is brought in and incorporated into the body of truth with the attempt

to intermingle and combine truth with doctrines and philosophies of human origin. Such an unholy union results in choosing false beliefs or heresy, heresy producing a schism, and the schism producing division.

Another kind of heresy is caused by misunderstanding and misapplication of a given portion of truth, a wresting and misuse of Scripture. Many of the hobbies that have caused hurt to the body of Christ have resulted from this sort of heresy, although there is a growing awareness that many today aggressively seek to combine truth with error. In both instances the result is the choosing of false ways.

Regardless of the kind of heresy involved, when one takes a false idea into the mind (heresy), often a party will form around that false idea, a schism is soon to follow, and that results in division.

Apostasy

Thus far we have been talking of that which often occurs in the ranks of brethren. But now we turn to yet another phrase, "*falling away.*". This term describes the ultimate result, the completed process, the final severance and apostasy. It may refer to the whole body falling away from the truth, or it may refer to certain division or factions of the body that fall away from the truth. When the whole body, or part of the body, falls away, division is no longer the proper description, but the term apostasy is more appropriate. All apostasy involves division, but all division has possibly not yet matured and ripened (rottened, may be the better term) into outright apostasy. Divisions can sometimes be cured before total apostasy occurs.

Paul said an apostasy from the truth would take place before Christ returned (Second Thessalonians 2:1-4). The "*mystery of iniquity*" was already at work in Paul's day (verse 7). History shows this apostasy became a reality. Beginning with departures from God's government of the church, the formulation of human doctrines one after another took place, such as a change of worship and work, man's tampering and altering with almost every point of the doctrine of Christ, especially the standard of

authority by which everything is to be measured. The result was Roman Catholicism. Romanism, as it is often called, is total apostasy from the truth. It is not the Lord's church. It is more than just a division, but a complete falling away. While division causes the cessation of fellowship, certainly there can be no fellowship with that which is apostate.

Is It Christianity?

Some think that Protestantism is Christianity. But a study of the Scriptures show this is not possible due to the additions, subtractions, departures, and contradictions to God's Word that characterizes Protestantism. On April 17, 1521, Martin Luther made his famous protest against Romanism. But his protest was not against the church of the Lord, but an apostate church. Protestant churches that have come as a result of the Reformation Movement are defections from apostate bodies, either Romanism, or some other Protestant body. In other words, Protestant churches are not defections from the Lord's church, although such could come to pass. They are not mere divisions from the true church of the Lord, but divisions from apostasies. They never have been a part of the body of Christ. Therefore, they cannot be Biblically or historically identified as His church.

Where did all of this division and apostasy start? It began when error was accepted in the mind that gave birth to heresy, which resulted in a schism or tear that produced division that led to complete apostasy. Obviously, that which is apostate does not please God.

Now we can understand why we must oppose error. It is because of what it produces. It offends the truth, deceives, perverts, distorts, pollutes, and makes men unacceptable before God. It makes one's service vain, and places his soul in danger of eternal spiritual death, dividing, and causing apostasy from the true and living God. This is a serious matter to put it mildly.

Tired of God's Way

There can be, and usually is, religious error in almost every area of religious thinking. This is because so many are malcontent with the revelation of God's will in Scripture, wanting more, desiring their own way, seeking additional revelation, claiming to receive it, and propagating doctrines of man's own inventions and imaginations. People have been divided over the identity of Jesus, the nature and work of the Lord's church, the origin of man, how to be saved, how to live as a Christian, worship, the source of Scripture, our eternal destiny, you name it and there can usually be found variances of thought among religious people somewhere.

The Bible teaches that truth must be heard and error opposed. The same verse that tells us to preach and exhort also tells us to reprove and rebuke (Second TImothy 4:2). The same verse that exhorts sound doctrine says we must convict the gainsayer (Titus 1:9). Both positive and negative efforts must be made on behalf of truth. Salvation depends on it.

Error often does its work slowly, gradually, almost without being perceived. While it operates deceitfully, it operates decisively. There can be no legitimate compromise with error lest heresy is produced, and the sequence to apostasy follows thereafter.

Truth and Error Are Opposites

Because we, as Christians, are forbidden to cooperate with error, or bid "*Godspeed*" to those who promote error, we cannot sanction or condone error. We must be strong, entrenched in truth, informed and determined. We can unintentionally and inadvertently contribute to the spread of spiritual maladies if we be of another disposition. One cannot adopt or espouse error, openly proclaim it, fellowship those who do, cooperate with it, or propagate it. But a more subtle way to be a friend of error is to take the position of remaining silent, doing nothing, saying nothing, allowing it to grow and proceed without opposition, surrendering to the devil without even waging the good fight of the faith.

Ephesians 5:11 teaches, "*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*"

Some partake of the ways of darkness. Others will refrain from that but never oppose it. To be true to God we must not only have no participation with error, refrain from condoning it, but also wage an aggressive spiritual warfare against it. Error must be opposed whether it arises in an individual, a local church, anywhere in the brotherhood, or the world generally. Truth is our business and error is our enemy.

Admittedly, opposing error is not a joyful or pleasant work generally, but it is ordained of God. He expects us to do it. Therefore, let us fight the good fight of faith that the crown of life may be our prize.

* * * * *

Will Your Anchor Hold?

James 1:2-4, 12-15, "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing... Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*"

First Corinthians 10:13, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"

From these verses we are informed of several basic and fundamental points regarding trial and temptation. Temptations are ever before us and such is common to man. The devil tempts man to do evil, not God. He appeals to us through our own lust, thereby drawing us away into sin. It is not sin to be tempted because even the Lord was tempted yet never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Temptation and trial can be turned into a blessing if faced properly. It can be used to help us grow and develop patience and lack nothing. The man that can endure temptation is blessed and shall receive the crown of life. God helps the Christian when faced with temptation by providing a way to escape. He helps him to endure what he cannot escape (First Corinthians 10:13).

Temptation Allowed

While God does not tempt man to sin, He does allow man to be tempted. If God did not allow man to be tempted man would have no power of choice between serving Him or the devil. Man honors God by choosing to do right. To disallow him to do anything except right would deny man of his free moral agency and disallow him to honor God.

It was in this sense that God "tempted" Abraham in Genesis twenty-two, giving Abraham the opportunity to either obey or disobey what God commanded of him. While God does not appeal to our lust to tempt us to do evil, He does allow us to be tried in order to test us and give us opportunity to prove our devotion and loyalty to Him.

It should not be thought strange that we face temptations and trials. First Peter 4:12,13, "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you,as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*" Second Timothy 3:10-12, "*But thou hast fully known my doctrine, my manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord*

delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

God allows Satan the power to call in question our faithfulness and loyalty in whatever fashion Satan chooses. He challenges us to see how dependable we are and whether we can stand in the hour of trial; to see if our anchor will hold in the storms of life.

The Man Named Job

An example of Satan tempting man and challenging his faith was that concerning Job. Job 1:6-12 tells of a conversation between God and Satan concerning Job. Satan contended Job served God only because God had blessed him abundantly and "*made a hedge about him*" to protect him from temptation. He was contending that it is easy to believe God when you have all your heart's desires and when there is plenty. But he challenged Job's faith that it was no more stable than his possessions. If Job was deprived of them, Satan contended, his faith would fail and God could not depend upon him. Therefore, God allowed Satan to do with Job whatever he wished as long as he did not attack Job's person.

Shortly thereafter, Job lost his oxen, asses, camels, servants, and sheep. His children perished when wind collapsed their houses. But even after such losses, Job said, Job 1:21,22, "*Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.*"

Satan was not content yet. Job 2:1-7 tells how Satan now reasoned that man served God only as long as he was not personally touched. He said if a man lost health, which is greater than riches, he would forsake the Lord. So God allowed Satan to smite Job with boils from head to foot.

In addition, Job was beset with harassment from those who should have encouraged him in time of trouble. Three "friends" came to talk with him and accused him of sin, citing that as the cause of his woes, and urged

him to repent so the punishment would be lifted. Even his wife said, Job 2:9, "*Doet thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die.*" Job said, Job 2:10, "*Thou speaketh as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.*"

Job Did Complain

There were times when Job complained, not understanding why all these things were happening to him. Job 10:1, "*My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in bitterness of my soul.*" Job 14:1, "*Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble.*" Job 17:1, "*My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me.*" He even went so far to say, Job 13:15, "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.*" Job 19:25,26, "*For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*" Not only the loss of property, children, friends, but even if it cost him his very life, he would not renounce his faith in God. Job's anchor would hold.

Job's sufferings were not in vain. Chapter forty-two reveals God's approval of Job. Job withstood all of the trials and tribulations heaped against him. He had demonstrated that God could depend on him. The Lord lifted the siege against him. Job 42:10,12, "*And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends... So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.*"

What of Our Anchor?

Can the Lord depend on you and me? If we were challenged, would our faith sustain us? Will our anchor hold in the storms of life? Try to recall the last time you were tested. Was Satan right about you by contending you would succumb to temptation and fail to be dependable before God?

Let us not pride ourselves in having strength too quickly. First Corinthians 10:12, "*Wherefore let him that*

thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Galatians 6:1, *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."* (Emphasis, JWB).

In Matthew 26:31-15 we read where the Lord told His disciples they would flee from Him. Peter affirmed that he would die before such as that would be his lot. Who can doubt the sincerity of Peter's intentions? Who could question the motive behind his words? But Satan tried him as he had never been tried before (Matthew 26:56-58; 69-75), and Peter failed the test by thrice denying that he even knew the Lord Jesus.

Temptation is more easily met when we realize that each temptation is Satan's challenge of our personal strength and loyalty of our faith. The point in question with each temptation is whether we will allow Satan to turn us. Is Satan right in thinking our faith and dependability cannot withstand the test? James said, *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* Paul wrote, First Corinthians 9:27, *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."* It takes effort and sacrifice to successfully fight temptation. Instead of becoming discouraged to the point of losing our faith, we should thrill in the knowledge that facing and overcoming trials is to hand Satan a bitter defeat.

Time to Examine

Let each examine himself and ask, "At what point am I most vulnerable? Where might I be most easily tempted?" Would it be the love of money and the things money can buy? (First Timothy 6:9,10). Is it in the realm of morality? (Second Timothy 2:22; First Corinthians 6:18; First Timothy 5:22; Galatians 5:19-21) It might lie in the desire for acceptance, popularity, and approval of others. (Exodus 23:2; First John 2:15-17). Many have accommodated sin in order to stand well with the world, turning aside from the truth for the praise of the majority, which has been a weakness of mankind from the beginning.

Our weakness may be with the tongue, (Ephesians 4:29; James 3: 9,10)), or our selfish ambitions, pleasures, secular interests over and above the work of the Lord. (Matthew 6:33). Whatever be our weakness, Satan will pursue it and try our loyalty, attempting to break down our faith.

There is the story of a preacher who had one son. His life was wrapped up in that boy. The child became ill and the father prayed night and day for his life, but the child died. But this man knew our lesson well. He saw what Satan would have him do. He knew the devil sought for him to renounce God, cease his work, grow bitter in disappointment, curse God, and die. His awareness of Satan's wiles caused him to renew his faith and grow stronger, to rise above his burden, to profit from his trying experience, rather than be crushed beneath it. His son departed, but he became more determined than ever that heaven would be his home and he would be reunited with his son again.

What of you and me? When trials come, can God count on us? Are we reliable and dependable? Will our anchor hold? It will if we realize this is one way Satan works against us. It will if we wholly lean on and look to the Lord.

A Great Promise

There is a promise God has given the Christian that is found in First Corinthians 10:13 that is deserving of another mention. "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*" We might paraphrase that promise by something that is far easier to say and write than to live, but it is true whether we live accordingly or not. "There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle." May God bless us with the insight and foresight to be aware of the ways of Satan, and not let anything cause us to swerve from the right way of the Lord.

* * * * *

Nonconformists

When Rome was at its height of power and glory there appeared on the scene a disturbing "*sect*" of people called Christians. They were people who dared to be different, but for good reason. It was an era of great immorality, lavish living, abundant luxury, but these people refused to be defiled by the sensual and sinful practices of those around them. It was a time when life was cheap, yet they placed a very high value even on one precious soul, contending, as did their Lord, that one soul was worth more than all the world. They refused to be absorbed into the wicked and degenerate society of their day. They did not subscribe to the idea, "When in Rome, do as the Romans." They were nonconformists.

In time, Rome initiated a studious effort to stamp out Christianity, contending that the followers of Christ were disturbing to the pagan unity and devilish ways of living. There is no doubt that the Christians were very much out of step with the rest of the world. But their enemies entertained the false illusion that a man's conscience can be controlled by human law, intimidation, and persecution. So the faith of Jesus Christ was declared illegal to practice. All were to bow before the power and rule of the Caesar, conform to the pagan customs, live like the rest of the Romans, and say nothing in opposition to the grievous conditions regardless of how antichrist they were. Those who were nonconformists were threatened with death. Many did die rather than surrender their convictions of the truth of God. They would not deny their faith, their Savior, nor conform to Rome, not even compromise their conscience to "get along" with anybody.

From Paul

One Christian, guided by the Holy Spirit, wrote Romans 12:1,2, "*I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy,*

acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." "Times have changed since those ancient days," some may wail, and in many ways this is true. But human nature has not changed. Wickedness still abounds even though the methods of doing evil may be varied to some extent. But the pagan, unbelieving world is still trying to stamp out Christianity and its influence in the hearts and lives of people. In many portions of the world there are those being physically forced to conform to the ways of the world. In other parts, people are being taught and persuaded to cast off Christ and adopt for their manners the ways that will surely lead them to an eternal hell.

In the passage cited Paul urged every Christian to be a nonconformist as far as following the ways of the sinful world. The life of a true Christian stands in constant rebuke of those who accept the standards of this world in faith, morals, and lifestyles. There is good reason for each Christian to be alert and on guard because in his desire to make Christ known, and have people to follow Christ and be accepted, there is the temptation to make Christ, His church, and His doctrine accommodate and fit the ways of the world that refuses to believe Him as He really is. We wonder how many have "accepted" a "popular Christ" which is not the real Christ at all! To attempt to gain numbers at such a price has been a grave error some Christians have made through the years since Pentecost. A crucified Christ is still a stumblingblock to many (First Corinthians 1:23,24). The gospel is anathema to Satan and his disciples. John 15:18, "*If the world hate you, ye know it hated me before it hated you.*" First John 3:13, "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" First John 5:19, "*And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*" Christ and the sinful world are simply not compatible. To be friends with the world is to be an enemy of the Lord (James 4:4). We have to make a decision who is going to be our friend, and with whom shall we be friendly. Will it be the Lord above, or the sinful people in our world? It is certain we can't have it both ways. It is not possible to have it both ways.

Is Popularity Always Good?

It has been true in the past, and is true now, when the church becomes popular with the unbelieving world something is seriously wrong with the church. Christ runs counter to evil. We are the possession of Christ, committed to be His imitator. Therefore, we must stand with Christ against the sinful world. Doing so will often incur the wrath of the world. Second Timothy 3:12, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" Sometimes this persecution comes from "brethren" who have professed to follow Christ, but who really admire the ways of the world a lot more.

Popularity with the world means apostasy and death to the church. Conformity and compromise are effective tools of Satan to corrupt the company of the saved, the church. There is great strength in standing, even when one must stand alone. As one elder said to me, "One man and God make a majority." Satan knows the power of being a nonconformist. Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death." That personal stand did as much, possibly more, for the cause of freedom than the deeds of thousands who were bent on saving themselves. Martin Luther, challenged before the Diet of Worms for the things he believed, said, "Here I stand, so help me God, I can do no other." He did more to break the tyranny of Romanism than did millions who meekly bowed and conformed to Papal rule. Paul declared, Romans 1:16, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ...*" and his conviction has moved more people in the direction of God than all the intellectuals, insipid clergymen, the lukewarm compromisers, and worldly-minded church members could ever do. These men, especially the inspired ones, were nonconformists.

Upside Down

The early Christians were accused of turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). How could they accomplish this when millions of professed "Christians" today cannot keep it right side up? The answer is clear and plain. They did not conform their faith to match the ways of the world. They had the truth and refused to "water it down" to fit the times. They dared to buck the tide of

public opinion in error even when it proved to be inconvenient and dangerous. They dared to believe when others doubted. They were willing to risk reputation, acceptance, popularity, family, livelihood, and even life itself for what they were commissioned of God to say and do. They chose death rather than live an empty, cowardly, short-circuited, compromised life. Christians today are challenged to do no less.

The words of Paul, "*Be not conformed to this world,*" have a tremendous meaning, relevance, significance, and cry out for obedience. These are words that cut like a sharp sword across the hypocritical, half-hearted, lukewarm, sinful ways of life of too many professed "Christians" and false teachers in and out of the church. These are not comfortable words, but have the tone of righteous and spiritual warfare. They separate the sincere from the feigned, the weak from the strong, the true child of God from those who are just religious. Such words the members of the church today need to hear and heed.

Set Our Minds

We must not be conformed to this world mentally. The world is engaged in a gigantic brainwashing effort. By advertising, conversation, philosophy, education, every media, the Christian is beset on every side with sinful and secular propaganda. The "man of distinction" drinks his whiskey. The mature, discriminating mind, we are told, will enjoy violence, immorality, lawlessness, such as is portrayed in movies, over television, and in magazines.. The "thinking man's tobacco" pollutes the body as much as any other. Only the indulgent life is the exciting life, some lie. Hence we have pornography, lewdness, every sort of perversion and the diseases they produce. Some of the works of hell are even called "art," such as in so-called music, painting, sculpture, etc.

Yet, above the world's den of lies we hear, Philippians 2:5, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ.*" We read, Colossians 3:2, "*Set your affection on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*" Reread Paul's inspired words of Romans 12:1,2. Christians are

called the light of the world, children of the day, and directed away from the darkness of this world of sin.

Buffet the Body

We must not conform to the world physically. Our bodies are not to be given to gratification of lust, evil passion, indulgence of the flesh, and the desecration of the temple of God (First Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20). Our dress, posture, actions, manners, all should be for the honor and glory of God. We are created in God's spiritual image. By our own sins we became contaminated. But having been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb we are to walk in the light, walk in the truth, being not conformed to this world, but conformed to Christ, as taught in Romans 8:9.

We are not to be conformed to this world socially. Satan would have us lose our distinction and be absorbed into the secular society to imitate and/or condone the earthy image, being like those around us, doing as they do, going where they go, saying what they say, being what they are.

Christ said of His followers, John 17:16, "*They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*" The unwillingness on the part of some "Christians" to "*come ye out from among them and be ye separate*" has been the source of much disharmony, inconsistency, spiritual weakness, strife, division, and misrepresentation of the Lord's way.

The Gulf Stream is in the ocean. But we are informed it is distinctive from the oceans and its current and color can be detected even as one goes through the waters. It maintains its warm flow even in icy waters of the North Atlantic. We must be like that stream.

In, But Not Of

Believers are **in** the world but are not **of** the world. We cannot be chilled by the indifferent, godless, sensual society in which we must live. Our social contacts are to ever have the flow of influence for Christ, not for self, sin, or the applause of the world.

We must not conform to the world spiritually. Men have the inclination to "go along" with the crowd. The church today is infested and infected with this attitude. Whatever seems to be "big" there are many who accept it for no other reason that its "bigness." We are to be sure we know and follow God's instructions. For this reason we are to "*try the spirits*" (First John 4:1). The only way to be sure is to know the Word, taking nothing else as the standard. With pressures from within and without to compromise what the Bible authorizes and enjoins upon mankind, true Christians must be stedfast, immovable, unwilling to conform to the deadly digressive trends to the left or the right. A determination to stand on the Word will often bring criticisms and reproaches, making you the subject and object of all sorts of spiritual and mental agony. You may well become the victim of those who cry "love" but are the most sinister merchants of hatred of truth the world has ever witnessed. You will be counted as an enemy by the deceitful, hypocritical, and double-minded person. But as Peter said, so we must obey, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). The Bible is the authority, the only authority, and there must be authority for what we preach and practice (Second Timothy 3:16,17; Colossians 3:17).

Not Just Religious

No nation was ever more religious than ancient Israel, even prior to their captivity. Their temples were filled; their altars ran red with the blood of sacrifices; their streets rang with the joy of festivals, feasts, and holy days. They had their rituals and prayers, priests and prophets. But there was a shallowness and insincerity in it all. It was not of God, and even when not so far removed from God it was nothing more than lip service. They did not display the manifestations of surrendered hearts and lives. They were not obedient.

Their lives between their religious events were as the lives of the pagan and heathen nations around them. Their sins were the sins of those who were not of God. For the purpose of commerce, power, prestige, popularity, material gain, and acceptance, they conformed to the world around them. They were afraid

of being called "fanatic." They feared true and genuine piety, and their outward piety was pretense. They would not dare to be different for truth's sake.

A true Christian is a nonconformist with respect to the evil ways of the world in which he lives. He will never abandon his faith in the way of Christ to compromise in any way with the ways of the world. He knows that even the attempt is to betray the Son of God afresh. Rather, he keeps his eye and heart on Christ, striving in all things that the will of God be done in him and through him, regardless of the cost to himself. May we learn to obey Romans 12:1,2.

* * * * *

God's Basis for Unity

John 17:20,21. "*Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one; as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*"

First Corinthians 1:10, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*"

The first verse is a part of the prayer Jesus prayed to the Father. The second is included in Paul's letter of corrections to the church in Corinth. One expressed the desire of the Master and the other the inspired instruction of an apostle of the Master. Can there be any doubt in the mind of any that the Lord wants people to stand together in oneness and unity in Him?

The cause of Christ has suffered historically and immeasurably because of the division among those who profess to be Christians. Even among those who are

God's family and who teach the truth, progress and spiritual prosperity has been hindered by the constant rising of one issue after another that causes division. Congregations that once were growing and doing the work that the Lord's will specifies have hit periods of stagnation and digression because of division.

Where Unity Exists

There are congregations where unity and solidarity of purpose exists. While there are imperfections in the best of people, and these imperfections are notable in the congregations to which they belong, they are united in the truth, they teach the truth and strive to live according to the truth. They have like faith, goals, and intentions. They put forth continued effort to maintain and strengthen this quality among them.

When one analyzes the work of most faithful congregations he will notice that each effort is worthy and deserving of support. The work of the Lord is vast and demands support from each Christian. This includes evangelism, benevolence, and edification, or stated another way, saving the lost, helping the needy, and strengthening and retaining the saved. Occasionally special efforts in these fields will be promoted that requires the studious and informed participation of everyone. Obviously, not every one will be as enthused over every program as they might over some other one. It is expected that one might have a zeal for one work while another may be more zealous in another. But we must stand united, together, each doing his part, that the entire work of the church be carried forward and expedited properly. The work, under the oversight of the eldership, should be authorized by Scripture, balanced in the three areas as the need is determined, carefully considered, and within reach of ability. But what we want to emphasize in this lesson is the need for unity in doing what must be done, which demands cooperation and personal participation. As in all other matters, we must turn to the Word of God for the instruction we must have. Other sources cannot provide for us what we need. God has revealed His will in the Bible and it is on that we now focus our attention.

We must keep before us, and make known to others, God's platform or basis for unity among us. It is given in Ephesians 4:3-6. *"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Unity is possible only as we respect the Spirit's unity that involves the oneness of such as Paul mentions. We contend that everything about New Testament Christianity will fall under one of the seven ones, under one of these headings, and strict adherence to this will produce the unity among Christians that God expects.

The one body is the one church, bought by the Lord's blood, composed of those who have obeyed the gospel. and thereby been washed clean by the blood of Christ, added to the church by the Lord. The church is not a denomination, nor composed of denominations, but people who are *"in Christ"* because they have done what Scripture teaches must be done to be *"in Christ."* To be *"in Christ"* is to be in His one body, which is He church.

The one Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit, one of the three persons in the Godhead, which guided the apostles in delivering the will of Christ, which will remain the only guide today through the Word given, by which we serve God acceptably.

The one hope is the fulfillment of the purpose of life, the hope of eternal heaven with God.

One Lord denotes Jesus Christ, the Master of mankind, the Savior that God has provided. There is no other (Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

There is one faith, not many faiths. Man does not have the right to choose the faith of his choice anymore than he has the right to choose whatever church he might desire. One faith is not as good as another faith. THE faith is THE faith, the religion, the will of Christ. It is

the same today as when delivered by the Holy Spirit through the apostles, and will remain unchanged until the day He returns for His own.

There is one baptism. Even though Scripture speaks of several baptism, the one baptism is the baptism that was being preached and practiced by divine guidance when this passage was written, and is a burial, in water, in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins, and into Christ.

There is one God and Father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the only true and living God, the Creator and Judge of mankind, who is in heaven.

Truth Has Suffered

Through the years the cause of truth has suffered the disastrous results of division among people and their separation from God. The cause of atheism has been advanced because of the division among those who say they follow Christ. As Jesus warned, many do not accept the fact that God sent Him because those who claim to follow Him are so embedded in their own ways that produces division. To satisfy men, rather than God, to accommodate greed, hate, fear, war, bigotry, human doctrines, sin in the church, prejudice, and violence, God and His way have been perverted and distorted. Division can only produce harm when the Lord's Word is not constantly used as the standard. This is why Jesus prayed for unity and Paul condemned division.

We can be united only as we are united with Deity. This oneness can only come through Christ and by obeying His teaching. It shall never be produced by creeds, manuals, catechisms, disciplines, and doctrines and negotiations that men have composed. The so-called "unity meetings" some concoct do not and cannot produce unity because the goal is not unity, but fellowship in spite of division. Some have sought what they falsely call unity through agreeing to disagree. But such is not unity. Unity in diversity is not unity but heresy. God does not want people to simply agree to disagree. He wants them to agree with Him and follow

His revealed truth and be united as is the Father and Son.

Stand on the Word

It is on the Word of God that we must take our stand. The efforts to seek peace and unity through power and exploitation of others cannot succeed. Unity cannot be achieved by compromise, negotiation, or ignoring differences. It cannot be acceptable to God if truth must be sacrificed to have unity and peace. All of the schemes, "summits," councils, etc. that men can arrange cannot produce unity, but usually advances and further implants division. Some dismiss division as unimportant, but our Lord is not one of them. Only by people hearing, believing, obeying, and living according to the truth as revealed in the Scriptures can there be the oneness God wants, and expects. There will be no peace until all submit to "*thus saith the Lord.*" Surely, it is the hope and prayer of every sincere person who has respect for the Bible as the Word of God to want this unity. But we must have and enjoy it on God's terms. No other way will suffice. We can have unity in error, and God is not pleased with such unity. We must have unity in truth. Only then will God smile upon unity.

Every congregation, and every member of every congregation throughout the brotherhood should take seriously the matter of unity in Christ. As members of the local congregation, we should pledge ourselves to be promoters of peace and unity on God's foundation of truth, working cooperatively and as effectively as we know how for His cause. The result will be our salvation and the name of God will be glorified among men.

* * * * *

When I was a youngster, and that is beginning to seem like quite a while ago, there was a special emphasis placed on reading the Bible every day. Bible class teachers always counted those who read every day, and used various means to encourage it. Such a practice is not out-of-date, but very relevant to what we need. JWB

I just got back from a very sad experience. My wife and I went to the funeral of a young man who was only in his twenties. Death to a young person is not that unusual, but the tragedy surrounding this one drove a sharp pain through my heart and I am sure through the heart of everyone who heard about his death.

You see, this young man was a member of the church. You might think that such would bring relief and hope because of his relationship with Christ. Ordinarily this would be true. But this young man took his own life.

I don't suppose we ever really know what goes on the mind of that person who destroys himself. It is sometimes thought that such a one cannot be responsible for his actions because no person in his right mind, we might think, would ever do such a thing. Of this, however, we have no way of being sure.

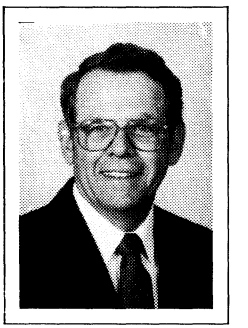
The preacher did an exceptionally fine job with a most difficult task. And the entire episode was complicated and made even heavier by the fact that his parents have divorced. I was told by one person who knew the circumstances surrounding this young man that he never really adjusted to that destruction of his home and the tearing apart of his father and mother.

They were both present at the funeral of course. In fact, they were leaning on one another quite heavily. We might not be able to truly understand how burdened their hearts must have been over the death of their child, and especially under these circumstances.

By the time you read this article this sadness will likely have escaped the memory of many people. I don't think I can put it away easily for quite a while. It will ever be on the mind of others who were so closely touched and grieved over the event.

But I just have to wonder if we take into proper consideration what we do and how it affects others far worse than we could ever imagine. It does behoove us to be more careful, doesn't it? I can't help but wonder if things might have been different with him if his home had not been destroyed. Maybe not. But maybe so! JWB

Good News and Bad News



JAMES W. BOYD

It just seems like bad news travels so much faster than good news. I really cannot explain it. You let some accident happen and everybody becomes aware of it in just a short while. Sometimes good fortune befalls someone, and it may be days before you would ever learn about it. The same thing seems to be true when somebody does something they ought not have done. My, how swiftly flies through the air, as it were, the report of how somebody did what they ought not. Still, when people are busy day in and day out doing good for others very little notice is taken of it. Don't ask me to draw any great moral truth from all this. I cannot. But it does seem to be one of the facts of life.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XII **NUMBER 11**

James W. Boyd

His Best -- Our Best

Many are familiar with the advertising slogan of the Hallmark Greeting Card Company that says, "When you care enough to send the very best." Their implication is that when you really care for the person to whom you send a card you want them to know how much you care and will send them the very best card available, which to them is a Hallmark card.

It was once suggested to me that their slogan could serve as a fairly accurate commentary on what God has done for mankind. God cares for us and has sent something, rather someone, for mankind's benefit. He sent the very best. Nearly two thousand years ago Jesus Christ "*took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of man.*" (Philippians 2:7). In the small city of Bethlehem Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. In this fashion God sent His Son into the world to save man.

Sent by the Father

Scripture makes the dogmatic and unmistakable claim that Jesus was sent by God the Father. Repeatedly in the book of John this proclamation is made. For the sake of space, we cite but a few.

John 5:22-24, "*For the Father judgest no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.*"

John 6:28, 29, "*Then said they unto him, What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said into them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*"

John 7:16, 28, 29, "*Jesus answered them and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me... Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am; and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him, for I am from him, and he hath sent me.*" This kind of assertion is also found in John 8:28, 29; 12:44, 45, 49, and many other passages. Over and over the truth of Jesus is taught. He was sent of God the Father.

Hebrews 3:1 calls Jesus the Apostle and High Priest of our profession. An apostle is "one sent." God's will was done through Him. When one accepts Christ He accepts the Father. There is no acceptance of one separate from the other. The only way anyone can do the will of God is to do the will of Jesus, His Son (John 14:6). This is the message that our world needs to hear, know, and heed.

The Father not only sent the Son but was with the Son in all that He said and did. Jesus has since returned to the Father who sent Him. John 16:5, "*Behold, I go my way to him that sent me.*"

Manifestation of Love

In sending Jesus, God showed His love and care for mankind. "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16). Notice He sent His only begotten Son. He did not send an angel, nor simply return to earth one of the great persons of the past. No heavenly host would suffice. He sent the very best. With fair and honest people there should never again be the contention that the Bible speaks of anything other than the Deity of Christ, that He was merely a man and nothing more, just one of the prophets, or merely a great teacher. He was all these things, but He was and is the divine Son of God. If we do not believe the Biblical message we make Jesus a liar for this was His claim. If He was a liar, why should anyone admire and honor Him in any way?

The Spirit

After Jesus accomplished His task on earth He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-11). God was not through sending, however. God sent another (John 14:26) who was the Holy Spirit. Why did God send the Holy Spirit? Jesus said He would comfort, teach, bring to the remembrance of the apostles what Jesus had taught them (John 16:7, 8, 13, 14). In sending the "third person" of the Godhead, which consists of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the very best of excellency and Deity was with man.

The Apostles

God also sent forth the apostles of Christ that He had chosen. John 13:20, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.*" John 17:18, "*As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent then into the world.*" John 20:21, "*Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*" To receive the apostles (by receiving the message they preached) is to receive God. Matthew 10:40,, "*He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.*" "Receive" in these instances is in the sense of believing and obeying Him.

Whereas Christ and the Holy Spirit are Deity and without imperfections, the apostles were mere men, earthen vessels, with sin and weaknesses, albeit inspired of God.. "*We are also men of like passions with you,*" (Acts 14:15). Their greatness was not in themselves but in the apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42), in which the early church continued stedfastly. Their greatness was in their use of the "*keys of the kingdom,*" (Matthew 16:1-8). The fact that they were inspired of the Holy Spirit, speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance, (Acts 2:4; First Corinthians 1:11,12) and that their message came by divine revelation (Galatians 1:11,12) is the reason for their greatness. What they taught came not from themselves or from other men, but from God. They were sent by the Father. Thus far we have seen how God sent His only begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the apostles with the proclamation of the Word of God as revealed through Christ.

The Message

The message they preached, being sent from God, is the very best, the good news, the gospel, the only message of hope, forgiveness, redemption, and salvation for mankind. Their message was all-sufficient to furnish man unto every good work (Second Timothy 3:16,17), make him whole and complete in the sight of his Creator and Judge. Truly, God has cared enough to send the very best.

But how much do we care about God and what He has done? We sing songs of praise to His name and glorify Him in worship. Our words are to be sacrifices of praise (Hebrews 13:15). But is it more than mere lip service, or do we really care? Let each examine himself.

The Lord said to seek His kingdom and righteousness first (Matthew 6:33). Do we do this" There can be none alongside of Him for He is to be first (Matthew 6:24; 10:37; Philippians 3:8).

Do We Care?

Do you show your care by the example you live before others (Matthew 5:16)? Some evidently do not care very much about themselves, those around them, or the will of God, or they would not live as they do? They would not refuse to obey His Word. They would not hesitate to become Christians and live accordingly. Most "church people" show they "care" when it is convenient for them, but how many really care all the time? Let us apply the card slogan and engage in some self-examination, taking time to measure ourselves by the Biblical standard, comparing our daily behavior and manner of life, relationship to God and the church, by what the Bible teaches. Do we care enough to send our very best toward God?

Let us ask if we care enough to worship our very best. Are we faithful in attendance at worship? Are we sincere in what we say and do at worship? While we all know that there is more to Christianity than "going to church," part of Christianity is worship, and this is a part that too many neglect. Did you ever know a person who really cared for the things of God who was indifferent toward attending the

worship services? If one knows the teaching of the Bible he will not dismiss this lightly.

When we sing, do we do our very best? When we pray, is our prayer fervent and sincerely genuine? When we study, do we do so in order to learn the truth that we might make personal application? When we observe the Lord's Supper, is it with understanding and reverence? Are we doing our best?

When we give, do we give our best, or does God get our leftovers? Do we plan our giving before our pleasures, luxuries, and even necessities? In the Bible, God's people gave of the firstfruits. Their sacrifices were of the best animals, without spot or blemish.

In our work for the Lord, do we show we are sending Him our best? A Christian is a servant of God and his fellowman. We are to help the poor, care for the sick, lift the fallen, comfort the bereaved, encourage the distressed, support the strong. These things are done by taking positive and definite action. Possibly we often overlook our fellowman because we are so involved with ourselves. Do we provide time and means that it takes to lend assistance, make a visit, deliver aid, attend funerals, even send a card of concern and encouragement? Do we go about our work with the enthusiasm that it demands and deserves? We would not dare give our jobs, by which we earn our livelihood, our unconcern. Do we care do the Lord's work that way?

Do we care enough to study our best? Those who truly study know that study is exhausting and demanding of time, energy, and strenuous effort. Many have excused themselves claiming a lack of capacity and ability, but this is not true. God intends for us to know the truth. This takes study on our part. He does not ask what one cannot do. More often than not, people who do not study simply reflect unconcern and do not care enough to spend the effort. We can learn if we try.

Way of Destruction

Ignorance of the Bible is frightening because ignorance will destroy (Hosea 4:6). We cannot keep the soul

spiritually alive, favorable before God, by a once-per-week sermon injection. Many are not even taking spiritual milk, let alone growing toward taking meat. We need our classes and our private study. It ought not be spasmodic and haphazard. Those who study are those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). To not study reflects a lack of appetite for the bread of life. If we would only realize that faith, obedience, service, all proceed from knowledge of the Word, we would possibly be more likely to do our very best (Second Timothy 2:15).

The bottom line may be expressed like this, "Do we care enough to do our very best?" Even man's best is burdened with inadequacies and imperfections. But does God deserve less than our best? He cared enough to send the best. Shall we not heed the admonition of the hymn, "Give of your best to the Master"?

The best you have is yourself. Paul, when explaining the liberality of the churches in Macedonia, said, "*They first gave themselves.*" (Second Corinthians 8:5). How does one do this? He does this by obeying the commands of the gospel; faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. Then rising to walk in newness of life as a new creature in Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Second Corinthians 5:17) he lives faithfully and loyalty (Revelation 2:10), realizing that "*it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.*" (Galatians 2:20). This is the way we send God our very best.

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What Happened to the Body?

Our text is Matthew 27: 57-66 and the account of the removal of the body of Jesus from the cross, its burial, the visit of certain women to the tomb of Jesus, but particularly the request of the Pharisees that a guard be

placed at the tomb in order to prevent anything that might give substance to a claim that He could arise from the dead. Their request was granted and the tomb was sealed and a watch assigned to guard it.

Those who are Christians properly understand the implication of the resurrection of Christ. There is a story of a Mohammedan who was chiding a Christian who said, "You have no shrine designating the resting place of your Jesus. We have the tomb of our prophet." The Christian responded, "You are right. You have a shrine and we do not. We do not have a corpse either because Jesus is not among the dead but the living."

It is generally admitted that a man named Jesus of Nazareth lived in Palestine and that His opposition to the errors of the people led His enemies to have Him crucified. It is acknowledged that He died on a Roman cross, His body buried, but on the third day His body was missing from that tomb. Our question is, "What happened to the body of Jesus? What says the evidence?"

What Scripture Says

The Bible reports that God raised Him from the dead, and that He now lives, rules, and reigns at the right hand of God, and that He will come again to receive those who belong to Him and deliver them to the Father (Matthew 28:6; First Corinthians 15:20; Acts 2:31; 13:30; Romans 1:4, and other passages that could be cited.)

Those who deny He arose have overwhelming difficulties. While they often belittle the faith of believers, calling it a blind and naive acceptance of superstition, and that the faith of Christians is only a psychological advantage that is not rational nor intelligent, the Christian responds that his faith is based on the evidence. We maintain that belief in the resurrection of Christ is far more logical, intelligent, and easier to believe than any of the alternative explanations skeptics have invented to explain the empty tomb. God has never asked man to believe anything that is not intelligent, nor something without evidence to sustain it. Faith is not a "leap in the dark," but conviction based on evidence. It is always easier to believe the truth than skeptical imaginations that have no

foundation in fact. Neither the young nor the old ought be frightened from their faith because of the scoffing, denying, ridiculing of those who *"professing themselves to be wise have become fools."* At the same time we do not take lightly the efforts to discredit the resurrection reality and must consider what skeptics have said.

Only Unconscious?

The school of rationalists of Germany said that Jesus was not dead, but only unconscious. They claim He was buried, revived, pushed away the stone, and walked away. This is sometimes called the "swoon theory." There have even been books written advocating this "explanation."

This theory admits much truth. It admits that Jesus lived, that He was on the cross, that He was buried, and came forth from the tomb. But they contend He never really died. What say those who were on the scene?

John 19:32-34, *"Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other, which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs, but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water."*

The reason for braking the legs of the crucifixion victims was to hasten their death and allow the removal of their bodies before the Sabbath. The division of blood from the other liquids of the body indicates death had already come. Their first-hand testimony is of greater substance than the guesswork of skeptics two thousand years removed from the scene.

Are we to believe Jesus could revive with sufficient strength after such an ordeal to be able to remove the stone? What of the guards placed there? If Jesus did as they claim, when did He actually die? Why is there no evidence anywhere to substantiate their claims? Could He do what they said He did when He was so weak before His death that He could not even carry His cross? There were scholarly and qualified people living then who wrote of these things, even those who rejected Jesus. Why did they not produce evidence to contradict the resurrection? This

explanation is totally without support. The claim of the skeptic is less believable than the Biblical record. As Paul said to Agrippa, Acts 26:8, *"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"*

Imagined?

Some say it was a resurrection of sorts, but only in the minds of the apostles, visions, hallucinations. But can we believe that over five hundred people at once had the same hallucination (First Corinthians 15:6)? There was at least twelve separately recorded appearances of Jesus after His came forth, even to people who did not expect to see Him? Were these things experienced by people who all of them were unbalanced? If it is so thought, where is the evidence of it? How do you explain that people walked along the road with him, heard Him speak, touched Him, ate with Him, people who would recognize Him and knew Him? To think that this was all an imagined event and only in the minds of the apostles is beyond rationality.

The apostles were just carried away with the idea of the resurrection, some contend. They wanted it so badly that they really thought it happened. They knew better but wished it had been true so much that they went forward proclaiming it anyway.

It cannot be denied that the apostles were bold in their testimony of His resurrection. But is it reasonable to believe that those who once were so cowardly and unfaithful to Him that they forsook Him when He was seized would, after His death and obvious failure, risk their lives for something and someone they knew was a hoax? Talk about being unreasonable! This would be the climax of it. People do not risk their lives for what they know to be a lie when advocating the truth would be more beneficial for them. There is no evidence that the apostles were dishonest men, except Judas.

Stolen?

Some say the apostles stole the body. But how could they get by the guards placed at the tomb to prevent just such a thing? Would the guards be indifferent to them, knowing that the absence of the body and the breaking of the Roman

seal would mean their own deaths? If the body was stolen, where did the thieves place it? Where is there any evidence they did this? The story the guards were to tell was placed in their minds by their superiors. They also told what happened while they were asleep. Can people really do that? They knew it was not true (Matthew 28:13). If it had been true they would have died, but their superiors promised to cover for them in advance. Were all the guards asleep, as they claimed? Were all of them asleep at the same time and none awakened by the commotion? Do you really think this is likely? The disciples simply had no opportunity to steal it, nor the capacity to expedite the theft.

Some contend the enemies of Jesus stole the body, convincing the guards to let them have it. But why would His enemies wish to empty the tomb?The absence of the body would only give rise to questions and would be negative to their cause. Again, would the guards risk their lives and allow the enemies of Christ, the Jews, to have it? The only reason His enemies would want the body would be to produce it if ever the claim was made that He arose from the dead. How they could have punctured the sermon of Peter on Pentecost about Jesus being raised from the dead if they produced the body! They never did this. Nobody ever claimed to have it. Strange the thieves never told anybody what they did.

The difficulties of the skeptics are far greater than simple faith. All the enemies of Christ could do after His resurrection was to threaten and charge His apostles to preach no more. That is all they can do now. They have no truth on their side. But the truth was preached in the very city outside which walls the crucifixion had occurred just a few days earlier, and three thousand believed what was preached, and obeyed as commanded, and there was no refutation of it from any quarter. It is still preached now, and shall ever be preached.

New Testament Theme

Note the great emphasis the New Testament places on the preaching of the resurrection. It is one of the fundamentals of Christianity. We cannot take for granted that the young will believe for they will hear the raving of the skeptics. But they need to know that there is not one objection that

has ever been raised against it or can be raised against it for which there is no answer. They must be informed of the evidence of its truthfulness.

Acts, often called the book of conversions, is also a book about the work of the Holy Spirit after the Lord's ascension. It is also a book where the resurrection is a central theme. Acts 1:1-3 begins by citing the fact that Jesus was raised and that there were infallible proofs that nobody living or dead could refute. Chapter two, the first gospel sermon, Peter preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Chapter three, again Peter preaches that theme. Chapters four, ten, and thirty-three we hear it preached and affirmed. Over and over, chapter after chapter, sermon after sermon, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified, but raised from the dead the third day.

The resurrection is at the heart of the faith of Christ. Romans 1:4 declares that God declared Jesus to be His Son by the resurrection of Christ because the resurrection asserts His Deity, the basis upon which salvation rests. Faith is connected with the resurrection. Romans 10:9, *"That if thou shalt confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."*

The resurrection is connected with repentance. Acts 17:30,31, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."*

It is connected with baptism. We are raised as He was raised (Romans 6:3,4). In First Peter 3:21, having shown that Noah was saved in the ark by water and how our baptism also saves, Peter said it was all possible and based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He lives

Because Christ rose from the grave, all mankind can look to Him, turn to Him with confidence and trust, and know that he has a Redeemer and the Redeemer lives. We can

know that In Christ we can also overcome all that would destroy us in this life and the life after this. Though we shall die physically, we shall be raised and if we die in the Lord, our resurrection shall be to eternal life in heaven with Deity (John 5:28,29).

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To Make A Great Local Church

Mark 3:8, "*And from Jerusalem and Idumea, and from beyond Jordan and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him.*"

Luke 8:38,39, "*Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away saying, Return to thine own house and show how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.*"

People were attracted to God through Christ and the great things He did. Matthew 11:2-5, "*Now when John heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them.*" Acts 1:1, "*The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.*" In a similar way we can cause people to be attracted to God. Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"

The church has a work to do. First Timothy 3:14,15, "*These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" The church is to proclaim, defend, practice, and support God's truth.

Let Nothing Stop the Work

We cannot allow anyone or anything to hinder or retard that divinely ordained work. Nehemiah 6:3, when Nehemiah was challenged to stop his work to "dialogue" with his enemies, said, "*I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?*" We must have the same attitude as did Christ when He said, John 9:4, " *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work.*" Christ was doing the work the Father ordained that He do.

Inasmuch as God is to be glorified in the church (Ephesians 3:21), and this glory is provoked by our works (Matthew 5:16), and the work is to be done by the local church at work and individual lives, then the work of the local church ought to be of prime importance and concern to every Christian. Each should long to be a part of building a great local church.

False Measures of Greatness

What does it take to have a great local church? Greatness is not necessarily found in numbers, money, size, acceptance by the world, grandeur of the meetinghouse, or any such trivial matters. While these have a relative value and deserve some concern, all these things can exist and the church not be a great church in the sight of God. How well a church may be accepted in a community does not determine greatness before God. How many of the community's prominent people are members does not make a great church. There are at least four major matters that determine a great church, assuming that the church is first and foremost true to the Bible. In one way of thinking, being true to the Bible is really all that

matters in being a great local church. But other factors will contribute to its greatness as we now consider.

Leadership

One, there must be good leadership. Two, there must be the recognition of and dedication to the purpose of the church by every member. Three, there must be proper planning of the work undertaken. Four, there must be a great and authorized program of work. We shall now comment briefly on each of these qualities.

There must be good leadership. Scripture does not demand a perfect leadership for such would be impossible among men. Leaders are not perfect at their best. There are qualifications given by God for those who oversee the church, who serve as deacons, preachers, teachers, just as there are qualifications for faithful members. The Bible emphasizes the spiritual quality of man, his maturity and knowledge of the Word, and the consistency in his life to that Word.

The eldership is not a mere board of directors, making decisions, and approving or disapproving proposals. They are to be examples to the flock they guide, attentive to the spiritual welfare of every sheep, exercising the oversight of every effort, feeding the flock the spiritual food of the Word, aggressively taking the lead in directing the local program of work, as well as using the authority they possess and making the decisions incumbent upon them to see that the work of the church is done as God wants it to be done.

Deacons are to be as the term suggests, servants of the church, cooperative, active, promoters, pushers, assuming their duties and discharging them under the oversight of the eldership.

Preacher and teachers must "*preach the word,*" as revealed in Scripture. Ephesians 4:14 admonishes that we speak the truth in love, without fear or favor, without compromise, doctrinally sound, declaring the whole counsel of God (Titus 2:1,8; Acts 20:26). No church can be a great church that does not adhere to the truth and teaches it as God has revealed it.

Power of Unity

There must be unity among the leaders and followers. Each one must be working for His sake, for the good of the entire body of Christ. Judges 5:2 (ASV) says the leaders of Israel took the lead and the people willingly and offered themselves to the task. So must it be with good all involved in the church.

There must be the recognition by the entire church of the greatness of the work the church is called by God to perform. Being the pillar and ground of the truth means reaching out to the lost for their salvation. It is to be soul conscious with evangelistic zeal, seeking and saving the lost. Too often soul-winning is confined to a few people on salary. Many of those are not too busy either. Teaching is often restricted to the same number, sometimes due to the lack of others to teach.

Cannot Wait

There must be the creation of the sense of urgency about salvation among brethren that they will, using friendliness, warmth, sincerity, and firmness of truth, teach those they know who are lost the unsearchable riches of Christ. Soul-winning is given great priority in Scripture. It is so among us? Our work is a work with eternal consequences. Every Christian has been saved to save. Why do not more of us realize this great work and be about the Father's business?

Besides saving the lost, the church must strengthen the saved, encouraging them to faithfulness. Here is the reason for Bible study classes, periods of spiritual nourishment. Such is essential to building and growing spiritually. There is no excuse for a local church to not have opportunities for members to learn more and more of Christ. To dispel Biblical ignorance is a large part of our work in the church.

Attitude

Alongside these things there must be the compassionate, sympathetic helpfulness toward those who are in need, a work often called benevolent work. This does not mean

the church is to provide everything for everybody regardless of who or what it is. That which the church is to do must be authorized by Scripture (Colossians 3:17), but too often this part of the Lord's cause is neglected and overlooked. But not by all!

Planning

Building a great church by which others can be influenced to glorify God involves good planning. It takes foresight and vision. Our cities, the telephone company, airport commissions, businesses, they all plan, even years in advance what they intend to accomplish and how they expect to accomplish it. Too often the church just "keeps house" and drifts along reacting to events, but not pressing forward toward its goals. We must learn what needs to be done, how to get it done, what we want to accomplish, establish priorities, and learn the means of implementing methods to do what God wants us to do.

Involvement

Decisions must ultimately be made by the eldership, but every Christian is involved. Many things are left undone that ought to be done because too many members are waiting for some official and organized plan of attack. This can be helpful in some undertakings, but we need not wait to be personally busy in the work of the Lord.

Furthermore, leadership needs advice, consultation, suggestions, proposals, and encouragement. Without leadership and followship, how can the work be done? Leaders do not always have all the good ideas. Everyone ought to make what contribution to the furtherance of the work they are able to make.

Authority

But always there must be a good and authorized program of work. Leadership, followship, plans, words, all are vital, but all are for naught if the work program is not authorized of God and put into action.

Churches should concern themselves with mission efforts, leadership training, emphasis on teaching and retaining the young, encouraging the home to fill its role in the spiritual life of every person. The public proclamation of the Word cannot be minimized. Various media ought to be used to "*preach the word.*"

It Takes Work

All these things demand people, time, sacrifice, work, money. But they will contribute to building a great local church. These things are presented with the hope and prayer that each reader will be motivated to be busier in the kingdom, carrying his load, showing a genuine concern for souls, and the glorification of God among men. Together was can and must build for the cause of Christ. We can make the local church to which we belong a great local church.

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Hosea's Indictments of Israel

Hosea was a prophet of God, listed among the "minor" prophets, not because he was less inspired or his message less important, but because the book he wrote is comparatively less in volume than others. His life and work was among the people of Northern Israel, beginning approximately one hundred years before Northern Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians. After one hundred twenty years or more of a united country, God's people were divided into two nations. Judah was on the south and Northern Israel on the north. They coexisted for over two centuries until the ten tribes of Northern Israel were taken away into captivity by the Assyrians from which they never returned as a nation. Some who lived in that area fled to Judah when Assyria took the land and carried the names of the tribes

forward with them. Of the two nations, both of which were rebellious against God, Northern Israel was the worst. There was not one king of Northern Israel that receives good marks of faithfulness to God.

His Appeal

Hosea was a prophet whose approach was less harsh and stern as Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. He made a stronger appeal to the emotions of the people, the softer side of man. He pictured the nation as an unfaithful wife to God. Even so, God was willing to forgive and take Israel back unto Himself, if they repented. Hosea's appeal was made for Israel to respond to the love of God rather than appealing to them with emphasis on their punishment if they did not.

But he was no more successful than the other prophets in bringing Israel to God. Regardless of the method the prophets used, Israel rejected the message. They were like those in the times of Jesus on earth who would neither hear John nor Christ either one, even though they were different in their manner (Matthew 11:16-19).

We are not to think that Hosea was less precise in citing and condemning the sins of Israel. His love and appeal is not to be equated with an attempted compromise with Israel. His indictments were God's indictments, sure and to the point. Inasmuch as the things written aforetime are for our learning (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11), let us profit from the past.

There are people in every age who partake of the same sins of Israel. Sometimes those who claim to be Christians are guilty. Sin does not change, even though the way of committing sin may vary from age to age. When violators of God's law become numerous, history shows not only the personal downfall of the sinner, but a national disgrace and collapse as well. Because we want to be acceptable before God, and are interested in the welfare of our nation and future generations, as well as eternity, we need to know, avoid, and turn from such things that humiliate a nation and bring destruction.

They Forgot God

Israel forgot the source of her blessings. Hosea 2:8-10, "*For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand.*" This is the first of eight indictments Hosea made against Israel.

How many today realize how abundantly blessed we are? How many give the glory and praise to God for such blessings? Are we very much different, as a nation, from the rebellious people of old? Fortunately, there are many who know that God is the giver of every good gift (James 1:17), but there seems to be an ever-growing number who think our land is great, prosperous, and wonderful because of the might and power of man. They have forgotten the source of our blessings.

Ignorance

Hosea condemned Israel for lack of knowledge of God's will. Hosea 4:6, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.*" Hosea 6:6, "*For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*"

This same tragic ignorance of God's will existed in Jesus' day. In answering questions placed before Him, Jesus said, "*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures...*" (Matthew 22:29). How many know and care what God's will is in our time? Even among those who profess to care there is an indifference toward learning. In spite of the teaching to study (Second Timothy 2:15), and that we shall be judged by the words of Christ (John 12:48), many content themselves in ignorance and complacency about their ignorance. While truth frees (John 8:32), ignorance will ensalve. Truth, in order to free us, must be known by us. We have to wonder how many who are irregular at Bible study periods are guilty of inconsistent and unfaithful

efforts to know God's will. We are confident that no person, or group of persons, can be led astray by some smooth-tongued orator, or egotistical professor-preacher, when they know the message of the Book. But when one does not know, he can be led anywhere.

Pride

Israel was indicted because of her pride. Hosea 5:5, "*And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them.*" Is it not tragic that Judah would not learn from the things that happened to their northern relatives? But will we learn from what happened for both Judah and Israel?

Proverbs 16:18, "*Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*" Arrogance, conceit, egotism, self-confidence that is allowed to degenerate into self-centeredness are the companions of ignorance. When one is ignorant, he often smarts, chaffs, blisters and pouts when the Word of truth runs counter to him. He gets puffed up. A knowledgeable person realizes the folly of thinking of oneself more highly than he ought to think, realizes his dependency on God, and is not so easily deceived.

Hosea labored in times like our own, with material prosperity being enjoyed, and little concern for much else except having "things." But he made his message plain that the people were swelled with pride, plenty, and self-sufficiency, in their own eyes.

Instability

Israel was also guilty of instability. Hosea 6:4, " *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.*" Hosea 13:3, " *Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.*" The people were not dependable. Reuben was lacking in stability and it was said of him that he was "*unstable as water.*" (Genesis 49:4). Satan can beguile the

unstable soul (Second Peter 2:14). James 1:6, "*For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*" The Lord wants us to mature and grow strong (Ephesians 4:12,14). Only in this way can we stand (First Corinthians 16:13). Christians are not to be the kind of people that drift along with the crowd, but people who are stedfast with conviction. First Corinthians 15:58, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*"

There is a difference, however, between stedfastness and stubbornness. Stedfastness is standing firm in the will of God. Stubbornness is standing firm in one's own will regardless of the will of God.

Wrong Fellowship

Another sin of Israel, often seen today, was the mixing of God's people with the sinful people of the world. The desire to be like those around them brought Israel down. Hosea 7:8-11, "*Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this. Ephraim is also like a silly dove without heart; they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.*"

There are great pressures upon God's people to follow the sinful ways of the world. The world wants to set our standards, determine our goals, choose our coming and going. But we must give heed and "*Come ye out from among them.*"(Second Corinthians 6:14ff). First John 2:15-17, "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" Romans 12:2, "*And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.*" James 4:4, "*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*"

Jesus said of His followers, "*They are not of the world even as I am not of the world.*" John 17:14b). This is a lesson that many professed Christians give evidence of having never learned, or show an unwillingness to obey.

Corruption

Hosea also indicted the people of Israel for corruption. Hosea 9:9, "*They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah; therefore he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins.*" "*By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.*" (Hosea 4:2). "*Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.*" (Hosea 4:11). Corruption takes many forms, such as lying, stealing, rioting, unchastity, foul language, drunkenness, bribery, dishonesty, homosexuality. The most corrupted people of all as described in Isaiah 5:20, "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*"

To corrupt means to defile, make impure, unclean, to change from a sound state to a depraved and putrid state. To be corrupted is to be like the "*old man*" of Ephesians 4:22. This is the reason we are to put him off and put on the "*new man.*" The reason there are corrupt nations is because there are so many corrupt people in those nations. Matthew 7:17, "*Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*"

Backsliding

Israel was indicted for backsliding. Hosea 11:7, "*And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him.*" How the heart of God must have grieved as He saw the nation He had nurtured, preserved, protected, guided, and for whom He had made provision slide away from Him into the paths of unrighteousness! Do we think He is less displeased to see Christians turn back to that from which God has delivered them, and turn away from Him? (Second Peter 2:20-22; Hebrews 2:1-3a).

God will not drive us back from Him. Satan can only tempt us back. If we go back it is of our own volition. We can choose to backslide. It is obvious by the words of Hosea that backsliding is not only possible, but is characterized by a religion of words apart from deeds. The people were religious, but not righteous. Rendering lip service, not full service, to God is not what He expects or accepts. (Romans 12:1; Matthew 15:8; 23:3).

Idolatry

The last indictment concerned other gods. Hosea 13:2, "*And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen; they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.*"

Israel sinned by worshipping gods of their own making, which were not gods, but idols constructed according to their own will. Like the people of Athens to whom Paul spoke many years later, and the Gentiles described in Romans one, and the heathens throughout the world today, they served not the true and living God. But around us also are many idols. Whatever is allowed to come before God, the worship of God, learning of God, working for God, becomes an idol to us. One of the Christian's most prominent idols is secular pursuit. Parents put other things before the church, in spite of Matthew 6:33, "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*" Then their children imitate them and the spiritual welfare of generation after generation is neglected. Are we to think God overlooks our idols any more than He ignored Israel's idols?

It is a costly and deadly shame of our time of abundant blessings how so relatively few put the things of God first in life. If He is considered at all, He is at best given second interest with so very many. Surely you are not of that number.

Alternatives

With Israel it was "repent of perish." We look upon their history with sadness because they would not heed the prophets and the warnings against their unrighteousness. Israel preferred the stiffnecked attitude. They pressed on to personal and national disaster rather than turn from their sinful ways. With similar choices before us, will we be any wiser? We can follow the way of truth and be acceptable before God as an individual and a nation. But before that is a reality with anyone, obedience to the will of God must be the mark of life.

* * * * *

You may not know it, but...

... if you are among those people who still believe in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible as the Bible teaches, still believe there are different roles for men and women in the church, still believe instrumental music is without divine authority, still believe there is one church and that denominationalism is without divine approval, that salvation is not by grace alone, that baptism is necessary for the remission of sins, still believe that the church of the first century should be restored according to the pattern given in Scripture, and many other such things, you have been classified by the liberal leaders of digression among us as committed to irrelevant traditions of the church of Christ, are part of "a small and declining group of right-wingers" who are not interested in the needs of people, but only concerned about perpetuating unbiblical traditions of human and sectarian origin.

The reason we know this is the case with you is because Rubel Shelly, of the Woodmont Hills church in Nashville, has declared it so, and that settles that. The fact that Shelly once preached the sound truth of God and has now left it, and viciously attacks it with sarcasm, ridicule, and misrepresentation must be ignored. Could he and his liberal crowd of "scholars" be questioned? JWB

Calling Names



JAMES W. BOYD

With many people, calling anybody's name when you are pointing out error is unforgiveable. We have never understood why one should take such an attitude since the apostle Paul did it often in his writings, and he was directed by the Holy Spirit what to say. To just give a blanket condemnation to calling names is to criticize the Holy Spirit. Surely we ought be careful about doing that, just as we should be careful about calling names. There is an evil way to do it all right. But when there are those who are tearing up the church with false doctrines and many are being deceived by them, their names should be attached to their works for all the be warned. This we try to do.

* * * * *

A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XII James W. Boyd **NUMBER 12**

Immortality
NUMBER ONE

These lessons on immortality are designed to assist us in possessing a better understanding to know our own nature, and to see man's relationship with God. It deals with the present and the future of man. Admittedly, we are launching out into the deep with this subject, but one we must consider vital.

The dictionary defines immortality to mean imperishable, destined to live in all ages, an unending existence. We ask, "Is man immortal? Is he capable of being immortal?" The answer is not given in the Bible with a simple yes or no. There are several matters that demand consideration, but we can determine the Biblical answer with complete confidence.

Before we can answer our questions we must be precise in the definition of immortality because there are different definitions given to it. One might say he believes man is immortal, but not mean what the Bible teaches about immortality at all.

Three Ideas Generally Held

There are three most prominent concepts regarding immortality. (1) We continue to live in our works and words, like Shakespeare, Socrates, Lincoln, etc. There is an unending influence in the memory of others. Actually this is not that the person is immortal, but the immortality of what that person said or did while he lived. Most agree that men are capable of such "immortality" even though few will really be immortal in this sense. Most of us may be remembered by some for a while, but after the passing of years, unless for some reason we have been exceptionally influential, we will not likely be held in memory many years after we leave this life.

(2) Some say one is immortal and continues to live in his descendants. We give our descendants life, therefore, a part of us continues to live as long as they live, and descendants after them. It is true that genes and traits are passed from one generation to another. However, if one's lineage ceased, and that happens often among families, one's immortality would cease, and that is not immortality. If one did not have any fleshly descendants they could never be considered immortal.

(3) There is the Biblical teaching regarding immortality, which we shall substantiate with book, chapter, and verse. It contends for the actual existence of a person, a continuation of life after this life on earth, that will never cease. It is a spiritual existence, an unending existence in a realm in a spiritual form. Even though the material body decays, the spirit of man continues to live and even the mortal body is changed into that which is immortal. (First Corinthians 15). We shall show in these lessons that this is the Biblical view, and also become aware that this contradicts the materialistic philosophy of the nature of mankind.

Materialism

It is important that we understand the basic contentions of materialism. It is one of the philosophies being accepted by more and more people today, aggressively promoted by all anti-Christian thought, such as atheism, humanism, and cultism. It poses a great peril to Christianity, striking at the very heart by teaching error with respect to the nature of man and the universe of which man is a part. The materialistic philosophy is not just an over-emphasis on the possession of material things, although this is an off-shoot of it. But it contends that the entire universe contains only time, space, and matter, being void of spirit. It denies the existence of God, claiming that everything can be perceived and understood rationally, materialistically, as opposed to revelation. Included in the all-encompassing material nature of the universe is man also. He is totally flesh, bone, blood, material, and the physical end of man is the total end of man's existence.

We now consider Biblical evidence for the immortality of man. One may not believe man is immortal, but he cannot be fair and honest with the Biblical testimony and deny the Bible teaches it. The Bible teaches man is more than material and physical, but is also spiritual, and it is the spiritual part of man that lives after physical death.

Matthew 10:28

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell."

This proves that man is more than body. Men can destroy the body, but not the soul. God is able to destroy the soul in hell. God makes eternal disposition of the soul. The word "*destroy*" does not mean "cease to exist," but "to give over to eternal misery," according to Thayer's Lexicon. Only man's immortality can explain such a statement and the life of the soul apart from the body. There are other passages we shall consider.

Matthew 22:31,31

"But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but on the living."

Jesus quoted from Exodus chapter three and the time when God called Moses to lead Israel from Egypt. At the time that God called Moses, as well as in the day of Jesus, the patriarchs mentioned had been physically dead for hundreds of years. Yet, Christ contends that God is the God of the living, not the dead. He spoke in the present tense, "*God is...*" not God was. Therefore, the patriarchs are still alive, even though their bodies have died. Somewhere, in some fashion, they exist. This is what the perfect Son of God taught, and only the immortality of man can explain such a teaching.

Luke 9:29-31

This is an account of the transfiguration of Jesus. "*And as he prayed the fashion of his countenence was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.*" How could Moses and Elijah be present, years after their earthly life had ended if they were not immortal, living beings? Only the reality of immortality can explain their continued existence and presence.

Luke 16:19-31

This is the familiar account of the rich man and Lazarus. Though they lived in very different circumstances on earth, they both died, and they both still lived after physical death. This is the point we wish to make without covering all the story and its implications. Some say you cannot prove anything from this account because they say it is just a parable. But it is not identified in Scripture as a parable like other parables. Even if it is "just a parable," the parable taught the truth. Jesus did not deceive the people with something that would convey a lie. This teaches life after physical death. Reward and punishment after this life is also taught. Man's awareness of his state and consciousness exists, and he has the ability to remember. Even though the body be separated from the spirit, the spirit lives. This is the immortality of man.

Acts 23:6-9

"*But when Paul perceived that one part were Saducess, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Saducess: and the multitude was divided. For the Saducess say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or and angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.*"

Paul used the weapon, "divide and conquer," when he was being tried by the Jews. But the noteworthy thing of this passage as it relates to our subject is that an inspired apostle of Christ acknowledged the truthfulness of the teaching that there is the resurrection from the dead, that spirits do exist, and therefore, mankind is not merely a material entity. We have this apostolic endorsement of the position that affirms the immortality of mankind.

Second Corinthians 5:6-9

"*Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.*"

The death of the physical body occurs when the body and spirit are separated. James 2:26, "*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*" Paul's absence from the body did not mean the cessation of his existence. It meant he could be with the Lord. His body would die but a part of him would live. Philippians 1:21-24, "*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ: which is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*" There was life after this one for Paul.

Second Peter 1:13

"*Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance. Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me.*"

Peter knew his life on earth was soon to end. He would leave this tabernacle, his body, the temporary dwelling, but he would continue to exist nonetheless. This affirms the immortality of man. Second Corinthians 5:4, "*For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened:*

not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

Revelation 6:9-11

"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them: and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

What we have before us here are those who had been martyred for the cause of Christ, killed physically, yet were still alive, obviously very much in existence and awaiting the final judgment and eternal victory. How else can one understand and explain this situation except by the immortality of man being a reality?

Summary

The passages cited show man to be more than body. They show the patriarchs, prophets, and early Christians who had physically died still alive. They show good men and evil men who had died still alive. We have seen inspired endorsements by Paul of the resurrection and the reality of the spirit world. These New Testament teachings affirm that the immortality of man is a basic, fundamental, cardinal, and essential part of the doctrine of Christ. To deny the immortality of man leave us with no explanation of such passages and no reason to accept anything Christ and His apostles ever taught on any other subject.

* * * * *

Man being spirit is the reason human life is sacred and provides the basis for human dignity.

Immortality

NUMBER TWO

The materialist denies the existence of God, the spirit of man, the immortality of man, arguing that man has evolved from lower forms of animal life, differing none from other animals except that man is more highly developed, having evolved to a greater and more complicated form of life. He contends that man, like everything around him, is nothing more than a material creature.

This materialistic view of man, consciously or unconsciously, lies at the base of much of the degenerate behavior among people today. When one believes there is nothing to man but material, nothing but matter, that life is limited to the here and now, he may adopt the "eat, drink, be merry" philosophy. He sees no responsibility for what he does and does not really care because, after all, this is all there is. He sees no reason for existence, having come from nothing, here for no reason, making no difference what he does, and going nowhere. So what is there to motivate a person to conduct himself properly? Indeed, why should anybody think there is a standard of conduct to which we are obligated? This is the basis of the materialistic and humanistic doctrines being taught in our world, and studiously in our country. If one is just an animal, why not act like one? Why not indulge yourself and ignore others? Why not satisfy the flesh? Who cares? What will it matter? And who will ever call us into account anyway? When people are convinced that this life is all there is to their existence, they have no fear of doing whatever they see fit, and they have no motive to do anything but what pleases them. This is the cloth from which atheism, humanism, and similar views are cut.

Soul

What the Bible calls man's spirit, the materialist calls simply the "force of life" that is common to all animals. It is true that the Bible speaks of animals having souls. This may surprise some readers to learn this. Genesis

1:20,30, "*And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.*" The word translated "*life*" is the same word often translated "*soul.*" "*And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herd for meat: and it was so.*" Again, "*life*" is the same word as "*soul.*"

But we must understand that the word "*soul*" has more than one meaning. (1) It may be used to refer to the entire man, as a part for the while. Acts 2:41, "*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*" First Peter 3:20 speaks of "*eight souls,*" referring to eight people. (2) It sometimes refers to life that is common to both man and beast, as we have already noted. (3) It is also used interchangeably with reference to the spirit of man, that which makes man distinctive from other living creatures. We shall note these passage momentarily.

Man is said to be both soul and body. Actually this is with emphasis on man as a two-fold being. But man is also portrayed as a three-fold being in some other passages as body, soul, and spirit, making a distinction between soul and spirit.

Genesis 2:7

"*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*" Matthew 10:28, "*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" First Corinthians 5:3, "*For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed.*" Here these terms "*soul*" and "*spirit*" are used interchangeably. There is no distinction made between soul and spirit.

First Thessalonians 5:23

"*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Hebrews 4:12, "*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerned of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" These make a distinction between soul and spirit, with soul referring to life that man has in common with other creatures, and the spirit referring to that unique quality of man that is in the image of his Creator (Genesis 1:26), for "*God is a Spirit.*" (John 4:24).

The Bible teaches that a man's spirit can know (First Corinthians 2:11), can exercise free will (Matthew 26:41), can be morally pure or impure (Second Corinthians 7:1). In these respects the spirit is the same as man's heart or mind which reasons, thinks, determines, wills, purposes, etc. The spirit of man is revealed in his attitudes and emotions (Acts 17:16; First Corinthians 16:18). The spirit of man is presented as the immortal, invisible part of man (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 24:36-40; Hebrews 12:9,23).

So we see that the word "*soul*" may refer to the same thing as the "*spirit*" when there is distinction made with the body, the mortal part of man. But it is often used in a more limited and more precise way when it refers to that part of man that is made in the likeness of Deity, the immortal part of man.

Summary

We can now draw this summary. Man is physical, made of the dust of the earth, matter, a material being, which is mortal and which shall return to that from which it was made. Man is also a creature of life which activates the body, which ceases at physical death of the body, which is a common characteristic with other living creatures. Man is spirit, a spiritual being, in the spiritual likeness of God, the immortal part of man that survives physical death and continues to exist. It is this quality that distinguishes him from animals, and places him in a higher level of life. It is the inner man. More

often than not, in Scripture, man is simply defined as body and soul, using "*soul*" to include man's "*spirit.*"

We might want to ask, then, "Which is the real ME?" All three parts make the real ME while I am here on earth. Whatever I say, do, think, or where I go affects the whole man as a single entity, mortal and immortal. While we are composed of three parts, we are one person. The immortal part is temporarily housed in the mortal part awaiting release that comes at the time of physical death.

These facts raise several pertinent and relevant questions. From what source comes my spirit? Where is the spirit going? We realize that we are now plunging into "deep water," so to speak, and are quick to admit that we are not completely sure of our knowledge of all that we might like to know. There are some things about which we can have confidence because God has revealed them. There are others that must remain undisclosed because God has not revealed them. There are matters about which we have sparse revelation and this usually invites speculation, which is more often very unprofitable. We add the question, "When does one become a living soul?" There are four ideas suggested as an answer to this last question that we shall notice in the third segment of this series."

* * * * *

It Really Does Matter What We think About This!

Immortality

NUMBER THREE

Our physical bodies come from our physical parents. But our spirits come from God, the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9). Ecclesiastes 12:7, "*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*" We can know the giver of our spirit, and the eventual return of our spirit.

Just when does one become a living soul? Adam became a living soul when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). But nobody since that time comes into being the same way as Adam did, nor does anybody come full-grown as he did. We come into existence by the natural laws of procreation that God ordained beginning with Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28). So we cannot say that we are not living souls until we are breathing the air around us. There is other evidence to be considered.

Matter of When

Some believe that God created all spirits at once, in the original creation, and as one's body is formed He joins the body and the pre-existent spirit. Evidence for such a contention is remote at best. It has been suggested that this is the reason we think we have been places when we know we have not been there. But that is not much evidence that God created all souls from the beginning.

Others believe that God is continually creating spirits and joining them to bodies sometime between a conception and birth, or possibly at conception, or possibly at birth. We know that God is the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9; Ecclesiastes 12:7). We know He created the first spirits (Genesis 1,2). But can we accept the view that the body is older than the spirit any more readily than the previously mentioned idea that makes the spirit older than the body? Again, we have to ask for better evidence for either of these views before we are convinced.

Another view is that we derive the immortal spirit indirectly from our physical parents just as we obtain our physical body from our physical parents. This is easier to dismiss because even though the body comes from earthly parents by the natural law of procreation, God is the Father of spirits, not our earthly parents. But there may be an element of truth in this contention. Like others, it involves great speculation and is indefinite.

Another view, ~~and the one to which this writer subscribes,~~ is that we can only speculate, we do not

know, because the answer to the question is not fully revealed. There just is not enough evidence to draw a hard, fast, dogmatic conclusion as to when body and soul are united. It is enough to know that the spirit comes from God and we will let God take care of when the body and spirit are joined. I ~~do not profess to know.~~ However, I favor the view that body and soul are united at conception. But there is another matter of importance here that we cannot overlook. Reason abortion is murder.

Does It Matter?

Does it make any difference? It surely does. It does not make any real difference concerning the immortality of the human being, or knowing that there is a mortal and immortal part of man. When an unborn child is aborted, is this the destruction of a soul? Man does not have the power to destroy the soul. He may well separate soul from body, but he cannot destroy the soul under any set of conditions once it exists. Is it murder to abort an unborn child? There may rage a battle over this and many questions over the entire matter can be raised for which we have no definite answer. But there is something we can know we sure without question whatever. The abortion of an unborn child is the destruction of innocent human life. It is human life because it is the product of human beings. There is no doubt about this. We affirm with confidence that abortion of an unborn child is murder regardless of our limited knowledge as to just when God joins body and soul together because murder is the deliberate and willful, premeditated destruction of innocent human life. That is the definition of murder.

It is worth noting that becoming a "*new creature*" is not realized until the "new birth" (John 3:3-5; Romans 6:3,4; Second Corinthians 5:17). It may appear than one is not counted as having a soul until one is born. If that be true, in abortion we are still dealing with human life, and that matters, regardless of the view you take. We have some unanswered questions dealing with human life, and it is always the wise course to be safe in such situations. If the unborn child already possesses a spirit, and the likelihood is that it does, then abortion is plainly wrong. Even if the unborn child does not possess

the spirit until birth, it is the destruction of human life, and is wrong. Regardless of how one considers these matters for which we do not have all the answers, the Bible places animal life and human life on different levels. We best respect that difference.

(Abortion and when life begins is not the theme of this lesson, but the reality of the immortality of the human being. However, Biblical evidence from the testimony of David and Jeremiah about themselves, concerning John the Baptist before his birth, the use of the Greek word "brephos" to denote both the unborn and born child, all show the unborn to be a living human being. This means the deliberate, willful, premeditated destruction of innocent human life is murder regardless of what name one uses, even abortion.)

From Here to Where?

Another question for which we have more information is, "Where do we go from here?" Job asked, "*If am man die, shall he live again?*" (Job 14:14). Christ answers that for us with a definitive YES.

When Jesus comes again all shall be raised (John 5:28,29_. We shall not be annihilated as some falsely teach. Those who refuse to accept Christ shall be raised to damnation. Those who are "*in the Lord,*" (Revelation 14:13), shall be raised to life everlasting with God. At one's death there is an entrance into Hades, the unseen state of the dead (Acts 2:27,31). Hades is in two parts, Paradise (Luke 23:43), which is the same as Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:23, and torments (Luke 16:23). When Christ died He did not return immediately to heaven (John 20:17) where God is (Matthew 6:9). He went to the intermediate state called Hades (Acts 2:27). There, whether in Paradise or torments, one awaits the judgment, and the sentencing into heaven or hell (gehenna).

If We Are Living Then

What of those who are alive when Jesus returns and are not in the graves? They shall be changed (First Corinthians 15:51,52), and caught up with the

resurrected ones to meet the Lord in the air (First Thessalonians 4:15). They will not experience death in the same way as those before them had done. They will not have a funeral. But their earthly existence will be terminated and the body and spirit shall be separated nonetheless.

This revealed concept of the end of earthly life for those that are living when the Lord comes is harmonious with the basis meaning of the word "death," because death means separation. When people physically die today there is the separation of body and spirit. The separation of body and spirit will also be true then.

Why is all this important? Admitting that there is so much about the nature of man, immortality, etc. that we do not understand, does it matter all that much? Once an atheist asked a Christian, "What if you are all wrong about there being an existence after death?" The Christian responded, "The better question is what if I am right and you are the one that's wrong?"

Weight of Evidence

The evidence is one sided that man is body, soul, and spirit. The Bible enjoys abundant evidence to sustain its claim that it is the revelation of God to man, and it contends that this life is but a portion of man's existence. Eternity is awaiting us and we must prepare for it. The things of this world, the flesh, shall perish. But the things of the spirit will continue and deserve, yes, demand priority and attention.

Because man is immortal in spirit, life has meaning, purpose, and we are accountable for how we live it. By this fact of immortality we are motivated to "*seek those things which are above.*" Immortality means victory over death (First Corinthians 15:54). It demonstrates the glory of God and calls for praise of His Son (First Corinthians 15:57). It is Christ who brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (Second Timothy 2:10). Only He has immortality (First Timothy 6:16), and is able to grant it to man.

* * * * *

God's Love

Hebrews 11:6, "*But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*" It is easy to believe God when we consider the evidence in both God's Word and God's world. Once we are assured that God is, we can come to know God as well as know about Him. As we learn of Him, we move forward to be aware of God's love, the love God has for mankind.

Four Manifestations

This love is manifested in four areas, though we do not limit His love to just these four. His love is manifested in the creation, in His protection, His warnings, and His offer of salvation.

First John 4:16, "*And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*" This does not teach that love is God, or that love is everything. It reveals an essential quality of God and one for which He is known, and that quality is love. God is the very source of love. Love that God has extends to every person. This is repeatedly stressed in Scripture.

Love is difficult to define. It is, in this respect, like electricity, which is best understood in terms of what it does and how it is manifested. Love is an emotion, an attitude, a spiritual quality, invisible and intangible, but recognizable in the actions motivated by it. God has not simply said He loves man, but has demonstrated it.

Creation

God has shown His love for man from the beginning of the world, even in the creation. Genesis one and two gives the inspired record of the creation. Things did not just happen to come into existence. Our world is not the result of some unexplainable accident of nature. If so,

from whence came nature itself? Our world did not originate by a naturalistic process. There is no evidence that we are but creatures of evolution that came into being someway, somehow, sometime. We, and the world around us, are the result of rational, intelligent, decisive action by God. By the power of His Word, He spoke, and things came into being. Hebrews 3:4, "*For every house is builded by someone, but he who built all things is God.*"

Genesis 1:26-31; 2:7, 20-25 records the creation of mankind. Love is shown in that everything necessary for the sustenance of life for man existed before man was created. Love is shown in that God gave man dominion over all else He created. Love is shown in God's provision of a help meet, or one suitable for him to be his companion in life and for life. In the phrase, "*Let us make man,*" all three persons of the Godhead are specifically included in the creation of man. Special dignity was given to man as is evidenced in the fact that God breathed into man's nostril's the breath of life, that man is created in the image of God, given an elevation and distinction unknown in any other creation of God.

What more marvelous display of love for man in creation is there than to have given man a spirit as He is also Spirit (John 4:24)? Man not only has a material body as does all animal life, but he also is spirit and soul as God, a quality that enables man to have fellowship with Deity ,and grow into likeness of Him. No other creature was given such position and distinction. None other received such affection and special rank as that which God has given to man and his descendants.

Protection

His love is also shown by His merciful protection of His own. One reassuring and comforting thought given in the Bible is First Peter 5:7, "*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*" In times of trial, hardship, danger, persecution, and threats God is mindful of us. The Hebrew writer expressed this confidence in God's ability of protection in Hebrews 13:6, "*So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*" Note the same confidence of God's merciful protection in Psalm twenty-three. See it when

Israel was about to enter the era of the United Kingdom. First Samuel 12:22, "*For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake; for it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people.*"

When Israel was threatened by the Philistines, God provided for their protection and Samuel erected a stone as a memorial of it. First Samuel 7:12, "*Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.*" When in captivity, God closed the mouths of the lions for Daniel. He protected the faithful Hebrews from the fiery furnace. Again, Ezra 9:9, "*For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolation thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.*"

Note that God's protection and mercy granted to fleshly Israel was most often physical protection from their heathen enemies, famine and bondage. Protection is granted to spiritual Israel, the Lord's church, also. It is to be expected that persecution will come (First Timothy 3:12). We are involved in a spiritual warfare rather than a carnal one. In time of temptation we have God's provision of a way to escape and endure (First Corinthians 10:13). We wear the armor of God into battle (Ephesians 6). We fight the good fight with His weaponry, being able to quench the fiery darts of the evil one, holding the shield of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, fighting with the Word of God which is the sword of the Spirit, inflicting mortal blows upon our spiritual adversary, the devil (First Peter 5:8).

God has not abandoned His people nor left them helpless at the mercy of the currents, waves, winds, and drifts on the sea of life to be tossed about to and fro as the devil wishes. He has assured us power through His Word to overcome and know victory. We are assured that even what may appear to be defeat in this life, if we be found faithful, we shall know eternal victory and reward. In the final accounting, those in Christ shall enjoy heaven in God's mansions prepared for them. What greater manifestation of love can we imagine?

Warnings

A third way God has shown His love is by the warnings He has given man through His Word. Why does a parent warn his child of dangers, as a hot stove, a sharp knife, and other dangers? Is it not because he does not want the child harmed? It is not because he wants to deprive the child, disallow him proper freedom, but because of his love he does not refuse to warn the child.

For the same reason, His love for man, God warns man of temptation, sin, hell, because God does not want any to be lost (Second Peter 3:9). Therefore, He urges us to be aware of the wiles of Satan lest we be overcome. Without commenting on each passage, we simply record several references that underscore this truth. Please read Galatians 5:19-21; First Thessalonians 5:22; Second Thessalonians 1:7-9; Second Peter 5:8.

Some have false ideas about right and wrong, love and hate. Some have developed false concepts toward warnings. It is not unseemly for love to motivate warning against punishment, and condemnation of sin. To warn of error is not simply finding fault. Some condemn preaching of the warnings and threats of God. They denounce it as offensive, and a manifestation of hatred toward others. Just the opposite is true. As Paul wrote, First Corinthians 4:14, "*I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.*"

God knows what is harmful as well as what is helpful. His love warns us of the harm just as His love tells us of what is good. Those who proclaim His will to others will do as God has done and warn as well as promise. Such was evident in God's charge to Ezekiel 33:1-9.

Is it not interesting to notice that Jesus taught those things that are necessary to salvation, but He often did so accompanying His words of instruction with words of warning? Take notice of John 8:24; Luke 13:3; 12:8,9; and Mark 16:16. In each instance, citing a condition of salvation, He spoke words of condemnation if these conditions are not met. We can be grateful that God loves us enough to give us warnings that we might avoid many pitfalls into which Satan would lead us.

Salvation

Beyond question, the greatest manifestation of God's love for man is the offer of salvation through His Son. Romans 3:10,23 teach we all sin. The wages of sin is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Without the grace, mercy, and love of God there could be no salvation because we cannot save ourselves by ourselves. Without God's provision we are doomed, damned, hopeless, and helpless in the bondage of sin, alienated from God, afar off in darkness, and strangers from His promises.

Yet, there is a way to be saved because of what God has done. The way of salvation is Christ (John 14:6), and Christ alone (Acts 4:12). To be saved we must obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Salvation is made possible by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4). Christ is God's precious gift to the world which is lost in sin.

What was God's motive for sending Christ? It was His love for mankind (John 3:16; Romans 5:8,9; First John 4:9,10; 3:16). Mankind was in the dark, swift, swirling turbulent waters of spiritual destruction. But God loved enough to send His only begotten Son to save rather than allow us to be drowned in perdition with no hope.

Should we speak words from now until His return, the sum of them could not adequately extol the greatness of God's love as shown by His unspeakable gift. Paul wrote, Romans 8:38, 39, "*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Nothing will keep God from loving man. God does not always approve of what we do, but God will never cease to seek man's highest good, which is the best definition of love. Whether we stand approved before God depends on how we respond to His love. Man can quit loving God, or possibly never come to love God at all. But God loves man and that will never cease to be.

Because God loves man, man should love God in return. First John 4:19, "*We love him because he first loved us.*"

Seeing how God's love is manifested by His deeds in creation, protection, warnings, and the offer of salvation through His Son, should not our love also be noted with deeds? Indeed, deeds of obedience to His will is how we return His love. It is not enough to simply say we love God., but show we do by obedience. John 14:15, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*"

* * * * *

Duty of the Church to the Preacher

There are many reciprocal duties among Christians. There are duties between members, between elders, between deacons, between elders and deacons, elders and preachers, preachers to members, on and on. This lesson is concerned with the duty that a congregation has toward one who preaches, especially at the local congregation regularly. Just as a preacher must know his duty toward those who hear him preach, the hearers have duties to him and need to be aware of the them.

Courtesy

Congregations owe the preacher personal courtesy. Should this even have to be mentioned? Yes! The preacher is usually the one who has been invited to be where he is, and has accepted the invitation. He has made necessary arrangements to accommodate the congregation, so the congregation should make accommodations for him and his family. It is nothing but Christian to be courteous to everybody. You might be surprised how some evidently think that courtesy afforded them is not applicable to preachers. With some it is always "open season" to shoot at preachers over anything. Preachers should receive as much personal consideration as any other member.

Congregations must realize the preacher has a tremendous four-fold accountability: to himself, to his family, to the congregation, but most of all to God. He does not mount the pulpit to just please, entertain, or display personal wisdom or talents, but to proclaim God's Word. Paul wrote, Galatians 1:10, "*For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*" First Corinthians 2:1-5, "*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*" Acts 10:29b, 33b, "*I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?... Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*" Preachers preach with the souls of men in mind, and the realization that those out of Christ are lost, and the gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Without obedience to the gospel one cannot be saved (First Thessalonians 1:8,9). He has the right to expect the congregation to want him to "*preach the word*" (Second Timothy 4:2). No faithful preacher will allow himself to be like those described in Second Timothy 4:3,4, who are teachers who simply appeal to their hearers, even with error if need be. He must preach salvation for the lost, preservation of the saved, being true to his convictions that have been drawn from the revealed Word of God.

Congregations owe preachers a courteous hearing. Preachers are warned, Titus 2:1, "*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.*" Hearers are also warned, Luke 8:18, "*Take heed therefore how ye hear...*" Hearers ought never do anything to detract from learning. They have a duty to consider what they hear and measure it in the light of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). To create disturbance while one is preaching is very rude when done deliberately.

Consideration

The message deserves consideration. Sometimes lessons have a number of points and we lose attention at times. Possibly attention falls on just one or two things we do not like and we totally dismiss everything else that was said. Sometimes we may hear something with which at first we disagree and it disturbs us. But we need to hear him out. Some are inclined to brand lessons and preachers as negative or positive on the basis of one presentation, refusing to really listen to all that is being taught. That is unfair to both the preacher and yourself to listen in such fashion. Some will only comment with disapproval when they are not pleased with a lesson, but seldom express approval at anything that is ever said or done by the preacher. Is that proper or consistent?

Every preacher will likely provoke mixed reactions regarding his manner, tone of voice, language, etc. What appeals to one may repel another. This is a matter of human opinion and personal preference. While method and manner are important, the message is that which we should weigh carefully. The first question to be asked upon hearing a sermon, is, "Is it the truth?" Error is often accepted or overlooked because the hear likes the preacher. Truth is sometimes rejected because the hearer doesn't like the preacher. It is not uncommon for attempts to be made to discredit the message by discrediting the messenger. Those who do that are the losers, as well as the preacher. Particularly is this common when one opposes the message, but cannot muster sufficient Biblical evidence against the message, and the only alternative is to undermine confidence in the messenger.

The truthfulness of a sermon is determined by the Word of God. "*Thy word is truth,*" said Jesus (John 17:17). We are duty bound to measure the lesson by the truth (First John 4:1). No gospel preacher ought object being questioned and tried by the Word. It is a healthy practice for hearers to do that. A faithful preacher wants people to follow Christ, not him, or error. Preachers are not infallible and may not always be correct. This was true in New Testament times, even of good men (Galatians 2; Acts 18). Paul did not mind having his words checked (Acts 17:11). Christ urged this measuring (John 5:39).

Correction

When one finds a preacher in error, like Priscilla and Acquila did Apollos, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, who spoke boldly and fervently, they taught him "*the way of the Lord more perfectly.*" (Acts 18:26). He accepted their teaching. They did not shy away from him, nor try to talk against him behind his back. They loved him and the truth, as well as those who might later hear him. They showed him the truth.

It is certainly not a Christian act to condemn the message, reject the message, and just blast the messenger. The message ought to be inspected under the light of truth. Rejection ought not be based on preference of preachers. Preachers have the right to have their errors pointed out and truth explained. They also have the right to expect those who say they love the truth to conform to the truth once it has been preached.

No hearer ought to be offended when some sermon transgresses what they presently believe or practice. Why is it that two people can hear the same sermon, one will repent, and the other get mad? Is it not because the seed the preacher has sown falls on two kinds of soil? One is determined to do what he wants to do, while the other is determined to do what God wants, rejoicing in the truth. Faithful brethren will support and endorse sound doctrine. They are hungry for it. Many were offended at the preaching of Jesus, Paul, Peter, etc. Just because somebody gets ruffled is no reason to discount the sermon and get at the preacher.

Support

Preachers have a right to expect congregations to support the truth with words of endorsement, and with material support for the one who proclaims it. First Corinthians 9:14, "*Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.*" First Timothy 5:18, "*For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the laborer is worthy of his hire.*" Galatians 6:6, "*Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.*"

More than mere words of endorsement, and material support does the preacher have the right to expect from the congregation. How disappointing it is to work hard preparing a lesson of truth, and then half or more of the brethren do not care enough to even attend and hear it.

Hearers, after checking the message against the revealed Word of God, have the duty to believe it, live it, stand for it, defend it, oppose its enemies, and teach it to others. Nothing is more reprehensible than a hearer declaring war against the truth, ignoring it, belittling it, scoffing at it, or giving ground and encouragement to those who oppose it, attacking the preacher while doing it. What the preacher has a right to expect along this line is what God expects of every Christian concerning the truth.

He Sows the Seed

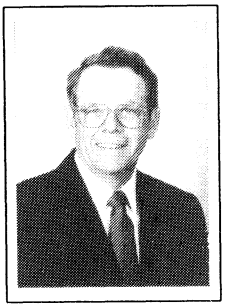
Congregations must realize that each time the preacher preaches, his message offers an opportunity that may never come again. These opportunities may be of greater magnitude than we realize. Preaching is sowing the seed of the kingdom., It may just be what you need at the time. It may answer some question, provide the Biblical solution to some problem, fortify against some temptation, bring recognition to some duty to God or man. It is a dangerous omission to deliberately be absent from the sermons the preacher preaches.

Usually, following a sermon, everyone is given opportunity to get right with God. The invitation of the Lord is extended. Can we afford to ignore this? The one who preaches deserves your support, respect, consideration, not because of him, but because of the glory of what he preaches, the gospel of Christ.

Someone has coined the phrase, "God had but one Son and He was a preacher." How should we treat that preacher? Romans 10:15, "*How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things?*"

* * * * *

Strange Baptist Doctrines



JAMES W. BOYD

According to the Baptist Church Manual, salvation is before and without baptism. It says one cannot be in the New Testament church without baptism. This means one can be saved outside the New Testament church. But baptism is necessary to be in the Baptist church. So it admits the New Testament church and Baptist Church are not the same, so one can be saved outside the Baptist Church. The Manual teaches that one cannot rightly partake of the Lord's Supper until baptized. This means that even though one is saved, he may be excluded from the Lord's Supper. You can go to heaven without baptism, but cannot eat the Supper nor be a Baptist without it. The Manual admits baptism is a divinely given "duty," but it must be a duty one can ignore and still be saved. Strange doctrines that will ignore the New Testament church, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, but can still be saved. We best stay with the Bible rather than Manuals or any such things!

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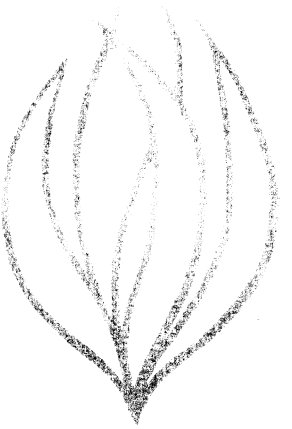

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIII **NUMBER 1**

James W. Boyd

Respect of Persons

Our text shall be James 2:1-13. The reason for the study is mentioned in the text itself, verse twelve, "*So speak ye and so do.*" In this passage we have a charge to keep and a responsibility to teach and practice what is taught herein.

Among the several methods of study is the profitable method called textual study where we open the Bible, read, and ponder the message, learning the mind of God as revealed there, really digging into the divine message.

So often today when one thinks of respect of persons he thinks of racial problems and racial prejudices that exist. This is certainly one area where the principles of this lesson can and must be applied. But the text deals more specifically with another kind of respect of persons, and so we shall follow the text.

Verse One

James begins by referring to his readers as "*my brethren.*" This is a warm and affectionate salutation, very fitting in view of the strong rebuke that was to be forthcoming because of infractions against the will of Christ that was being practiced.

Verse one speaks of "*the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" which has reference to the entire Christian system, the religion of which Christ is the author and founder. The word "*faith*" is used to represent the whole of Christianity. The message is, to paraphrase, "Brethren, do not hold to Christianity and at the same time be showing partiality and special concern for the rich and highly favored of the world." Such favoritism and exaltation of people because of worldly considerations is foreign to the spirit of "*the faith.*"

It is very difficult to reach a rich person with the gospel anyway. He has the temptation to place his dependence on his wealth rather than the lowly Nazarene. Paul said, "*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.*" (First Corinthians 1:26). So often they are too proud to come to Christ. How inconsistent to honor them above others when they enter the assembly.

Revelation 2:9, "*I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich)...*" Materially those in Smyrna were poor, but spiritually they were rich in God's sight. Contrast that condition with Laodicea where they thought themselves rich, increased in goods, and lacking nothing. The Lord said they were "*wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*"(Revelation 3:17).

If we today neglect the humble, faithful brother or sister in the Lord while heaping undue attention to the famous, prominent, materially successful notables of this world, even those not Christians, what kind of examples are we showing ourselves to be? The charge from heaven is thereby violated.

To honor brethren for their work's sake in the Lord is one of our privileges (First Thessalonians 5:13). But why exalt, in the church and before the church, the political office holder, the entertainer, the academic scholar, the famous sportsman, etc? These things say nothing of one's spiritual qualities. He might even be a false teacher. One can excel in all these things and still not be acceptable before God.

We have noticed how many brethren will "jump on the wagon" to proclaim someone who is noteworthy in the worldly affairs, sports, politics, money, entertainment, etc. and have lived to regret it because the prominent later show themselves to be poor examples. We have even noted how some brethren have paraded "beauty queens" before the young, taking no account of the immodesty connected with the acquisition of their fame, and brought them before the young as something to imitate. It is tragic that such who are so set in following the

world bring reproach against the church. Let Mr. Big Shot come around and everyone gasps with awe. Let brother and sister Faithful come around who has no such flare and nobody really cares. Such characterizes some assemblies, even those that call themselves "Churches of Christ."

Verses Eight and Nine

"*If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.*" (James 2:8,9).

What is the "*royal law*" under consideration? It is the law of the King, the law governing the kingdom. It is the law of Christ, which includes such teaching as loving thy neighbor as thyself. It also embraces the teaching, "*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.*" (Matthew 7:12). Even many who call themselves Christians, even leaders in the church, sometimes treat people as if this teaching was never given, or did not apply to them as well as others.

To love your neighbor is not the whole law, but is a part of the law, and that part that directly relates to the subject under consideration in this portion of Scripture. It is that part of the law of Christ that James contends was being violated by his brethren. To be deficient in the performance of this duty is to stand condemned by the law of Christ as a sinner, a transgressor of the law. The deficiency that is condemned is showing respect of persons according to worldly standards.

Verses Ten and Eleven

Just how serious is this transgression? "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.*" (James 2:10,11).

To violate God's law in one point is to be guilty of violating God's law. Obviously it does not mean one is guilty of every transgression, but he has offended the authority of God, violated the law of God, and stands condemned and in need of forgiveness. The same authority that teaches we are not to commit adultery also teaches not to kill. Doing either one is to show disrespect for God's authority. The One who taught one point taught them both. The One who taught against adultery and murder has also taught against showing respect to persons because of worldly fame, wealth, etc.

Verses Twelve and Thirteen

This is the message that James says is to be spoken and practiced. We should consider it in view of the coming judgment that shall be administered according to the "*law of liberty.*" (Verse 12).

In the judgment there shall not be respect of persons according to their riches, power, prominence in the world, social status and other such things that some consider to be of primary concern. We shall be judged according to the way we have lived before God and His will.

Those who come into our midst as faithful brethren, regardless of the matters that artificially designate people of "worldly worth," must be considered as brethren in the Lord because of their relationship with Christ. We must show love and mercy without respect to such things as those by which others may judge, lest we be deprived of the mercy upon which we must depend. "*For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy, and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*" (James 2:13).

* * * * *

The Real and The Ideal

As a person matures he encounters problems, is constantly facing the need for adjustments, decisions, selections. He must ever evaluate everything. This is an inescapable part of the maturation process.

One problem the young person meets rather early in life comes as he goes from the idealism of childhood into the realism of maturity. Everybody is somewhat shocked when reality is crammed upon them. There is a real difference in this world between what ought to be and what actually is. The very young are taught what to do and not to do. They are instructed concerning what is right as opposed to what is wrong. Deciding between right and wrong is sometimes easier than deciding between what is good, then better, then best - the ideal. From parents, Bible teachers, preachers, and other sources of teaching, the young are taught how things ought to be, how people should treat each other, what everyone should do and refrain from doing.

Yet, they are not very old before they are subjected to how things really are in life. They are made aware that the ideal, and the measures used in teaching them, are not always what they see in life. Let me illustrate.

What Is Real

Young people are taught to love. But they grow up seeing so much war, hatred, killing, violence, and suffering. They observe exploitation of the poor, the misuse of power, lying and cheating in business, loafing and short-cutting on the job. They soon learn that all judges are not fair, that life is not fair, that all policemen are not honest, that every preacher is not even trying to live by

what he preaches, and even parents are not perfect. This is sometimes a very shattering experience.

It is aggravated in the church with division, gossip, strife, backbiting, false doctrines, and such things that too often are real. In school there is cursing, smoking, drinking, immorality among their peers, drugs, etc. They may even be snubbed by those they considered friends, and mocked by others when they are trying to do what they have been taught is right. The real is just so far removed from the ideals they are frustrated.

This has been a problem for both young and old alike. Some are shocked beyond belief. Some panic and cringe in fear. Some know not what to think, or to whom they can turn with confidence. Their foundations are shaken, and they know all is not well. They have entered the dangerous waters of adjustment to the fact that the ideal is not the same as the real world.

Our young generation is not the first to enter such waters. Every generation does it. There is danger to minimize the impact on the present youth, however, simply by dismissing it as something that everyone must face. I am convinced this is a very, very difficult time in which to rear children as God wants them to be. Yes, everyone must face it. But everyone does not face it successfully. Many are overcome by this transition period. They are drowned in the swirling waters of doubt and confusion. They perish before they even know there is solid ground to be found. They never recover. It is of some help to know that others have entered these hazardous waters and made it safely to the other side called adulthood without being scarred and scathed beyond repair. It is a trying time for the young as well as their parents. But many have made the trip of transition from the ideal to the real quite well. But let us be sobered by the fact that many are not successful!

What To Do

How do you face this realistic problem? Some rebel against everything around them whatever it may be. They show their rebellion in their manners, dress, language, etc. They revolt, riot, destroy, burn, generally

create as much havoc as they think they can. They disobey every level of authority, including parents, civil law, and God. They demand a change! But they are not very certain what to change, or even why. Many display an air of "down-with-everything; up-with-nothing."

Some will attempt to pretend the inconsistencies between the real and ideal simply do not exist. They will try to ignore the gap between them. They use various forms of escapism. Actually this is cowardly and solves nothing for anybody. It usually aggravates problems.

Some have advocated, since the standards are not being followed, that there really is no standard, or what standards there are must be changed to fit what is. More and more people are living as if there was not right or wrong, and no need to discern concerning conduct. Yet, they seem to be the most miserable of all who encounter this disparity between the real and the ideal.

Others will admit there are standards, even God-given standards, but they are too busy trying to convert God to man, rather than convert man to God. They take God's Word and twist it around to make whatever they are doing acceptable. To illustrate, some have even taken the Bible to "prove" the acceptability of homosexuality.

Tragically, some give up the fight and cease to try to make any sense to life. They have never learned why they are alive. They think they cannot make it, or there is no use trying, and even destroy themselves in suicide.

The Way

While people are using all these false and ineffective means to cope with the variance between the real and ideal, let us recognize we have a problem and accept the fact as a challenge rather than an insurmountable obstacle and barrier to a good life. We can be freed by truth (John 8:32). We are not in heaven while here on earth. This earth was never designed to be our heaven. But there is hope; there is a way; there is a solution; and life is worth living once you understand your own worth and your mission in it. We must learn and follow God's truth.

How can we find the truth? Cannot we seek truth with the aid of others? Cannot we learn truth for ourselves without having to be "burned" through personal experience of "*kicking against the pricks?*" Cannot we profit from what has gone before us (Romans 15:4)?

Cannot we remember that everything worthwhile has its costs? Nowhere does God promise us an easy life, a "bed of roses" without any thorns, with everything and everybody sweet and good. Even though there are glad moments and times of rejoicing, it is not always that way, as one soon realizes when he compares the real with the ideal. "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" (Second Timothy 3:12). Christ offers us an abundant life, here and in the hereafter, but can we expect it without paying the price of conforming to His will?

Let it be insisted that each of us must learn the truth for ourselves. This does not mean you must learn every truth in every realm of human knowledge. But it does mean you must learn the truth in that which matters. But you do not have to learn every truth by yourself, throwing off everything others have learned before you and taught you, but you must learn it yourself. We cannot live the life God wants of us using only a "borrowed faith." Unfortunately, there are some who think this means we must disbelieve whatever came before us and invent something new. Not so! But we must have our own personal faith and conviction. Those who love us and teach us usually urge this even as they teach us what is of God. Wise men profit from the experiences and teaching of others who have been along the way. Wise men will give heed to the Word of God. Every generation must be taught and learn everything. When we finally accept this truism, then we are in a position to pursue the truth with confidence that we can know the truth, and practice the truth with success. It is a pressing urgency that we know this! There is no short-cut to spiritual victory! But there is a way because God has provided it!

God is the Way

The way to ride the tempest of the difference between the real and the ideal is to put confidence in God. Learn from His will what He says is right and wrong. This means that a knowledge of the Bible is indispensable. Many youthful "Einsteins" learn how to make a living, but never learn how to live. They cannot make proper decisions because they do not even know the seriousness of their choices, let alone the standards by which choices should be made. God's Word tells us what our goal should be, and how it is to be reached. Not until a person is informed concerning the will of God can he overcome the problems the imposed adjustments demand of him.

Part of our problem in facing the ideal-real issue is the attempt to let God have His way, sometimes, but we reserve the final judgments for ourselves. Unless God rules our lives, we cannot succeed. **Compromise does not work!**

We also must resolve that we must not abandon the fight. "*Let us not grow weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*" (Galatians 6:9).

Look at Yourself

Acquire and maintain a spirit of self-examination, striving to be fair and objective as possible, considering our weaknesses, but also our strengths. An unbalanced self-evaluation will produce cross-currents in these dark waters of uncertainty that could capsize us. "*Prove your own selves,*" was Paul's admonition. As you look at others, remove the beam from your own eye. This will enable you to see more clearly how to help others in removing their blemishes (Matthew 7:1-5). We are probably over-educated in seeing the faults of others, and may curse the world in which we live. But cursing it will not correct it. How can we be of any assistance toward correction if we blind ourselves to our own faults and talents?

It helps some to realize that all mistakes and errors people make are not due to Satanic hypocrisy. Not everyone is trying to pretend to be what they really are not. Even many who blunder are sincere, striving to

improve, but they are ignorant, possibly because they prefer to be that way, but often weak, frail, but pressing on. This does not mean we ignore wrong, nor allow ourselves to go along with wrong. But we must know that not everything needs changing. Only the bad needs changing. We must not throw out the good while reproving the bad. One hard lesson is learning the difference between what should be changed and what retained. But we better learn it as fast as we can!

Consider Your Heart

Face it! Our own attitude is a deciding factor in the movement from the realm of the ideal into the realm of the real. "*Let all that you do be done in love.*" (First Corinthians 16:14). Do not confuse compromise with compassion, or love with liberty to do-your-own-thing. But this deals with our motives, which is a matter of the heart. If we will not be self-seeking, nor seeking change for change's sake, nor asserting our own superiority over all else, but seeking the other's highest good as God defines the good, then we shall make a beneficial contribution in life. Love for God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, His church, His Word, His people and the people of the world will at least provide you a firm basis of operation. Without it you cannot really succeed. (First Corinthians 13:1-3). We may do many things, but motive is of paramount importance.

None of us are unique in facing this frustrating episode in life of witnessing the gross spread between the ideal and the real. But when we realize it exists, and get a grasp on our own foundations that are laid solidly on Christ from Biblical revelation, we will not only be victorious over it, but will be a valuable assistant to many others around us in overcoming it. Complacency and indifference, like compromise, is never the right way.

We may not be able to change the world. The devil and his influence is very much in evidence. But we can brighten the corner where we are. We may not bring the world to Christ, but that is not our assigned task. It is our job to take Christ to the world. What the world does about Christ ultimately is a very personal and

individual decision. We may not save the world, but like Noah, we can save ourselves and our loved ones. We shall be able to come to the close of life with the satisfaction we lived on God's side, and we shall be met in eternity by the Savior and hear the words, "*Well, done.*" Is that not of value?

Others have met this problem and have made and are still making contributions toward the ideal in spite of the real. Now it is your turn. You might do better than those before you. But you will not do as well except God is your guide.

* * * * *

Rewards From Christ

Man is called by the Lord to worship and serve God in life. Ecclesiastes 12:13, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*" This calling comes through the preaching and hearing of the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14; Romans 10:17). God calls man and draws man to Himself through Christ (John 12:32; 14:6). This is accomplished through teaching and learning. John 6:44,45, "*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*"

God calls and man must respond to that call. God motivates man to respond favorably and come to Him, appealing to man through the fear of hell (Matthew 10:28), through the expectation of reward (Matthew 5:12), and by His own goodness and love (Romans 2:4; First John 4:19). We shall concentrate on the second motivation.

Reward Passages

Matthew 6:4, "*That thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.*"

Mark 9:41, "*For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.*"

Hebrews 11:26, "*Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of reward.*"

Hebrews 11:6, "*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*"

Matthew 19:27-29, "*Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*" Peter asked a very logical question that all ask when considering discipleship. Where is the benefit in following Christ? We might add here that too many want to know what they can GET out of anything they do more than they want to know what they can GIVE for the benefit of God and others. God is not appealing to selfishness by offering rewards. He is motivating man to do what is good and right. Selfishness is evil and God does not tempt man to do evil (James 1:13). Giving rewards is God's way of manifesting His love upon those who return His love. Rewards do encourage us to respond to God's love. It helps us to understand the nature of man and God's compassion toward men.

Not Something Earned

We are never to think that we receive from God spiritual rewards because we have earned them or merit them. Men may toil and reap certain rewards from their labors

and may be due them (First Timothy 1:18). But we cannot earn the spiritual blessings God gives. His gifts are not in payment for our righteousness. The glory and honor for man's reception of God's gifts belongs entirely to God.

God's gifts can be classified as physical and spiritual, or temporal and eternal. There are blessing for this life and for the life beyond this one. Every blessing is from God (James 1:17). It is a good admonition that we sing, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one, count your many blessings, see what God has done."

Not all physical blessings are conditioned upon man loving God. Matthew 5:45, "*That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.*" The wicked often prosper in the material things of life. They can gather the fruits of the proper application of certain principles of gain as much as anybody. We should not fret over their prosperity. We have to consider their ultimate accounting. Proverbs 24:19,10, "*Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious of the wicked; for there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.*" Psalm 37:1-3, 16, 25, "*Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed... A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked... I have been young, and now am old; yet, I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread.*" But even the wicked are indebted to God for life, health, opportunity, material gain, etc., even though they honor Him not.

What Is and Is Not Promised

Christians are not promised a material abundance in this life, but are promised an abundant life (John 10:10). But we must remember, Luke 12:15, "*And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" There is more to life than material things,

even though some material things are necessities. It is well that the child of God read and reflect on the promises of provision found in Matthew 6:25-34. We are not promised all our wants, but our needs as God sees we have these needs. But as great as this assurance of material provision is, this reward and blessing is less significant than the spiritual rewards.

All of the spiritual blessings from God are not confined to the next life. Many are receive and enjoyed here and now. Only the child of God is promised the spiritual blessings. Ephesians 1:3, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*" One must be "*in Christ*" to have God's spiritual blessings. It is important that we know how to enter Christ.

Man can know that his sins are forgiven. When we realize that we do sin (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:3), there can be no comfort of mind without knowing our sins are forgiven. Upon certain conditions God forgives sin (Acts 2:38; 3:19). Salvation is "*in Christ.*" (Second Timothy 2:10). We do not have to live life in fear and dread of condemnation (Romans 8:1). That which bars a person from heaven, the barrier of sin, can be removed. Colossians 1:14, "*In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*"

This does not mean we shall no longer be tempted. First Peter 5:8, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*" But it means, First Corinthians 10:13, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*" When we do sin, First John 1:7; 2:1, "*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin... My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*"

Peace

In Christ we have that much desired blessing of peace. First Corinthians 7:15, "*...but God hath called us to peace.*" Ephesians 2:14a, "*For he is our peace...*"

There are three kinds of peace. (1) There is peace within ourselves. Even in time of trouble, we can have peace within. John 16:13, "*These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace...*"

Few things are more desirable than a good conscience. When you know you can face yourself, and can live with your own deeds, even know that you are doing right, know that you are a part of something greater and bigger than you are, then you are blessed indeed. We can have this peace within ourselves when we are in Christ.

(2) Following Christ can produce peace with our fellowman. We realize that it can also produce conflict with others. How mankind has plotted, schemed and searched for ways to live peacefully beside each other! Yet, there seems to be more and more strife and warfare. Of course, it takes two to have peace between the two. One cannot make peace by himself. Not all people will follow the Lord, and when that is the situation there cannot be peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34-37).

But when two will walk with Christ they will also be walking together. The closer one draws to Christ the closer he is to others who draw near to Christ. Christ brought peace and reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14-16; Galatians 3:28,29).

The sweetest peace that can exist on this earth is the genuine love and fellowship of Christian brethren. What a tragedy when one will allow sin and error to break it.

We who are Christians must understand that armies, wars, councils, treaties, world organizations, etc. cannot and will not bring peace. To have peace there must be the conversion of the hearts of mankind to the will of God. Even though these things have a place and are useful in maintaining some semblance of peace, it is in the Lord

and in His church where people "*beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.*"

(3) The third kind of peace that we have in Christ is the greatest of all three, and that is peace with God. Romans 5:1, " *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" We declare war against God by our sins. We must be reconciled to God, and only through Christ can this reconciliation be realized. Ephesians 2:16, "*And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.*"

To live in peace with God means life has meaning and purpose. We can enjoy the sense of accomplishment of that which is eternally worthwhile., We are permitted to live even to our last days without regret. We live day by day with what Paul calls "*that blessed hope*" in the heart (Titus 2:13). Who can measure the value of dying at peace with God? (Revelation 14:13).

Blessings to Come

The blessings we have been naming are both physical and spiritual. But they are blessings we can enjoy in the here and now. The grandest blessing of all is the reward in heaven. Matthew 5:12, "*...for great is your reward in heaven...*" Romans 8:16-18, "*The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" Second Timothy 4: 6-8, "*For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*" First Peter 1: 3-5, " *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth*

not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

The reward of heaven, an eternal existence of bliss and joy in heaven that shall never be interrupted, is far too marvelous for adequate description. But such shall be the eternal destiny of those who live and die faithful in Christ. As John wrote, First John 3:2, "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*" While the full import of that statement may escape us, we cannot doubt the glory of reward that awaits us.

* * * * *

The Spirit of Caleb

There is great meaning for us in Romans 15:4, "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*" Again, "*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come.*" (First Corinthians 10:11). Man not only can profit from his own experiences, but he who is wise can also profit from the experiences of others. Although many details of life may change through the years, man, his basic needs, the principles of truth, remain essentially the same year after year.

There are two equally erroneous concepts regarding the new and the old. Some have the idea if something is new it must be bad, and only the old is worthwhile. Others have the opposite thought that if something is new it must be good. Our standard must be if something is right according to God's Word it is good, otherwise, it is bad. God has revealed to man in His Word the right and wrong principles and specifics. The Scriptures furnish us completely unto every good work (Second Timothy

3:16,17). "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway.*" (Psalm 119:105). Often God informs us of His will by revealing the lives of those who have lived before us and His evaluation of those lives.

Attitude of Heart

One necessity in serving God properly is to possess the right attitude of heart. "*Keep thy heart with all diligence for our of it are the issues of life.*" (Proverbs 4:23). God wants man to have the right kind of spirit within him, the correct frame of mind and disposition. "*Blessed are the pure in heart...*" (Matthew 5:8). We are to "*...call on God out of a pure heart.*" (Second Timothy 2:22). In the Old Testament we read of a man whose spirit, attitude, was acceptable to God and who is presented to us as an example to follow. The man of whom we speak was named Caleb. We wish to consider six attitudes he possessed that we would do well to imitate.

Consider the Man

Let us first become acquainted with Caleb. Caleb was an Israelite who lived during a crucial period of Israel's history. He was among those who were led by Moses out of Egyptian bondage. He spent some forty years of his life with Israel in the wilderness, and was involved in conquering the land of Canaan. He was one of the two men over twenty years of age that left Egypt that God permitted to enter the promised land. His successful entry was largely due to his attitude and how it was manifested by his words and deeds. His life was hard, dangerous, and a continual struggle for survival. God speaks of Caleb in the following manner when He denounced the ten faithless spies, "*But my servant Caleb, because he hath another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereunto he went, and his seed shall possess it.*" (Numbers 10:24). He was a man of a different spirit and it made a difference.

Israel had left Egypt and had come to the southern borders of Canaan. Moses sent out twelve spies to view the land. They were gone for forty days, returned, and gave their report. "*And they went and came to Moses and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of*

Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran to Kadesh, and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. And they told him and said, We came into the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled and very great, and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south, and the Hittites and Jebusites and Amorites dwell in the mountains, and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan." (Numbers 13:26-29). The conclusion of most of the spies was, "*We be not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof, and all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. And there we saw giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants, and we were in our sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.*" (Numbers 13:31-33).

Upon hearing this the people murmured against Moses and Aaron. "*Would God we had died in the land of Egypt, or would we had died in this wilderness.*" (Numbers 14:2). This fearful, faithless attitude is in deep contrast with the spirit of Caleb. He said, "*Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it.*" (Numbers 13:30). This may well have been the finest hour of his life. But the people paid no attention to him and would have stoned him, and Joshua who stood with him.

Faith

Caleb had a spirit of faith in God. God had brought the people from Egypt to the promised land as He said He would. Israel had received God's provisions throughout their journey in the wilderness. The land was just as God said it would be, flowing with milk and honey. With God, taking the land was possible, yea, certain. Caleb did not minimize the size of the task, but, like Paul said concerning Christ, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" (Philippians 4:13). Caleb trusted God. Should we not imitate his faith?

Courage

Caleb also had a spirit of courage. His courage was directly the result of his faith. Though the opponents were strong, even giants and had walled cities, he was not afraid. Along with Joshua, he said, "*If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us, a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us; their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us, fear them not.*" (Numbers 14:8,9). His courageous attitude was similar to that which David expressed many years later, "*Let no man's heart fail because of him, thy servant will go and fight this Philistine... The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.*" (First Samuel 17: 32, 37). Today we must be mindful of the warning in Revelation 21:8, that among those that shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone are, "*...the fearful.*" The lack of courage to stand for the right and against the wrong is not to be characteristic of us. We must never weaken and surrender to the evil world.

Cooperation

Caleb had the spirit of cooperation. He said, "*Let US* (emphasis, JWB) *go up,*" not let me do it or you do it. "*WE* (emphasis, JWB) *are able to overcome it.*" Working together the task could be accomplished. Good men, working side by side, for the common good and a single goal can accomplish wonders. There is strength in unity. United we stand and divided we fall. This same attitude possessed the people of Judah under the leadership of Nehemiah when time came for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. They said, "*Let US* (emphasis, JWB), *rise up and build.*" (Nehemiah 2:18). Caleb sought no power, rank, personal glory or gain. He wanted to cooperate with others, encourage others to cooperate. Today we must have this same attitude toward the work we are to do for the Lord. Hand in hand and heart with heart we can do what God wants done.

Optimism and Enthusiasm

Caleb had the spirit of optimism and enthusiasm. This is evidenced in his words. "*Let us rise up AT ONCE AND POSSESS IT.*" (Emphasis, JWB). He had the "we can" attitude. "Can't never could; but can can." He was burning with zeal. He wanted action. Now was the time. The task was before them and his call was, "To the work." "They can who think they can." There was no need to delay but to go up "*at once.*" Success was theirs to have. They could possess the land. Delay was only destructive to them. Opportunity was knocking and if unanswered it would go passed them.

Unfortunately, Israel did hesitate, deliberate, procrastinate, and did not go up. They were not allowed to enter the land until another forty years of long, arduous, weary wanderings in the wilderness, and until death had overtaken all those twenty years old and older, except Joshua and Caleb. Certainly proper planning is necessary in tackling a work. But there eventually comes a time for action and deeds. If no action follows, both the optimism and enthusiasm will drain away and the opportunity departs. Every Christian ought have the attitude, "Let us be up and at it."

Submission

Caleb had the spirit of total submission to the way of the Lord. God said of Caleb, "*He hath followed me fully.*" What a commendation! Often a dreadful spiritual plague dominates, handicaps the life and service of many professed Christians. Indifference, lukewarmness, half-hearted service, partial service, reserved obedience is the case. A religion of convenience is not conviction. Inconsistency, conflicts of interest often are evident, and the Lord is forced to take a "back seat" and second best. There is not enough of the attitude that we sing, "All to Jesus I surrender." To follow God fully means to give God His way, every day, every time, all the time, in whatever situation. Christianity is of such a nature that man cannot be a true disciple if he does not follow God fully. Since God gave His only begotten Son, and He gave His life, why should we expect God to be pleased with us when our devotion, worship, dedication, service, obedience and daily life is stained with worldly pursuits, personal whims, blighted by negligence, marred by an

"on and off, now and then" kind of religion? The lesson of putting first things first and following God fully is one we all need to study. "*He that findeth his life shall lost it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*" (Matthew 10:39).

Patience and Endurance

Finally, Caleb had the spirit of patience and endurance because he had hope. Through no fault of his own, in spite of everything he could do to prevent it, Caleb was denied entrance into the promised land at that time. Because of the sins of others he was subjected to the wilderness for forty years. Such was a trial of personal stability , patience, and the power to endure. There was the temptation to be discouraged and abandon the goal, just give up, quit, with the attitude, "What's the use, nobody cares." He could have become bitter and blamed his suffering on others. Throughout these forty burdensome years he never lost hope for himself or Israel. Such a spirit is indispensable for today's servant of God. "*He that endureth to the end, shall be saved.*" (Matthew 10:22). "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*" (Revelation 2:10). This means we will be faithful not only "until" death, but faithful even if it means faithfulness means death.

We now draw a few conclusions. How much better and more dutiful servants of God we would be if we had the same spirit within as was within Caleb! We need the spirit of faith, courage, cooperation, optimism and zealous enthusiasm. We need total followship and submission, patience and endurance with hope. In this way we shall build better families, communities, congregations. This way we can make significant contributions to generations yet to come if time continues. Furthermore, regardless of others and their destiny, like Caleb, it will lead us to the eternal promised land of heaven. Is it not worth it all?

* * * * *

With this issue we begin our thirteenth volume.

Liberal Inconsistency



JAMES W. BOYD

Liberals hate criticism, unless they are doing the criticizing. If you expose publicly the error they teach publicly they cry "Foul." (They contend we must come to them privately about it. That way they can ignore it.) But they are quick and ready to publicly criticize you for publicly criticizing their publicly taught error and feel no necessity to approach you privately first. Faithful brethren do not mind being "*ready to give answer,*" but liberals must feel they are excluded from that. Let them publicly criticize whatever they wish. Faithful brethren won't cry. They do not have to come to us privately before they oppose publicly what we do publicly. But they ought to at least live by the rule they have concocted for others. But you hear them publicly criticizing others for publicly critizing their publicly taught error, demanding they be approached privately, but feel no need to comply to their own rule. Inconsistency is a trademark of liberalism and liberals. JWB

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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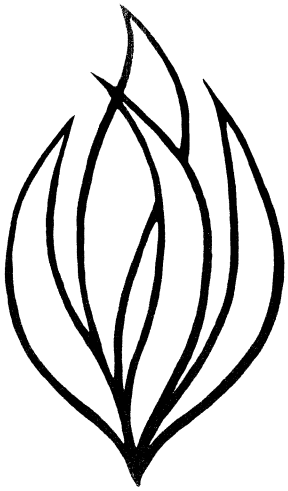

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIII Agnes M. Read **NUMBER 2**

Prophecy Concerning Himself

Have you ever wondered what it would have been like to have lived in Bible times and been a part of the tremendous events recorded? Would you like to have talked with the great men of the Bible? There are two conversations, not exclusively, but two I would have wanted to have heard. One is mentioned in Exodus 18:7,8, "*And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent. And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done unto Pharoah and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the Lord delivered them.*" Would it not have been thrilling to hear Moses tell of his appearances in Pharoah's court, his encounter with the magicians, the plagues, crossing the Red Sea, the fall of the Egyptian army, God's provision of water and manna, and on and on? We have the inspired recorded, and that is sufficient, but to have heard him tell it to Jethro would be something special.

The second conversation that would have been tremendous is mentioned in Luke twenty-four. Two of those close to Jesus were on the road to Emmaus discussing the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus and the report of His resurrection. Jesus joined them. However, they were not at first aware of who He was. Jesus took advantage of the opportunity to teach them concerning the prophecies as they related to Himself. Verse twenty-seven reads, "*And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*" What a privilege to have heard Jesus teach the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament prophets and have Him show how they applied to Him!

The significance of Jesus fulfilling the prophecies cannot be overstated because these stand as irrefutable evidence that He is the Messiah and knowledge of the

prophecies ascertains this truth. Acts 3:18, "*But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.*" Acts 3:24, "*Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.*" John 5:39, "*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*" John 5:46, 46, "*For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*" Matthew 5:17, 18, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*"

God expects us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. But God has also provided mankind sufficient evidence whereby we can believe and know with certainty that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son. The fulfillment of prophecies concerning Himself are demonstrations of this truth regarding Him.

Genesis

There were vague prophecies concerning Christ even before the more explicit ones given by Moses and others. Genesis 3:15, "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head; and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" The One who would bruise the head of Satan was the "*seed of woman.*" This is an obvious reference to the Savior. Equally obvious is the implication of a virgin birth. He was not the combined seed of man and woman. He was the seed of woman, providing His humanity, but conceived by the Holy Spirit, providing His Deity.

The promises from God to Abraham until Moses included many references that would be accomplished only in Christ. But Jesus spoke of those prophecies from the time of Moses, so let us confine ourselves to a few of them spoken by the prophets concerning Him.

Isaiah

Isaiah 7:14, "*Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*" Matthew quoted this prophecy (Matthew 1:23), saying it concerned the birth of Christ. "*Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet...*" (Matthew 1:22).

Micah

Micah had prophecied, "*But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose going forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*" With clear reference to the eternal One who was to come, the little city of Bethlehem was announced as the place from which He would come. Matthew 2:1-6 tells the story of the wise men who came to visit the King of the Jews and to worship. They were directed to Bethlehem, as the prophet had written, and where Jesus was born of the virgin Mary.

Micah had also prophecied He would come from the tribe of Judah. That Jesus was of that tribe is noted in His genealogy in Matthew 1:2, and by express statement of Hebrews 7:14, "*For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah.*"

Isaiah, Again

Even more specific regarding His ancestry, it was prophecied that He would be of the house of David. "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord will perform this.*" (Isaiah 9:6, 7). Jeremiah said, "*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.*" (Jeremiah 23:5).

Again, the recorded genealogies of Jesus in both Matthew and Luke affirm that Jesus was a fleshly descendant of David, as the prophets had foretold.

Jeremiah

In Jeremiah 32:5 we read, "*Thus saith the Lord, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children because they are not.*"

Matthew records how Herod, seeing that he had not received the information from the wise men that he sought, attempted to kill the infant Jesus by slaughtering the babies around the area where the Messiah was to be born, hoping to destroy the child. Matthew 2:17 says, "*Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying...*", and then quoted the words written in Jeremiah 31:5.

Hosea

Because of Herod's determination to destroy Jesus, we read in Matthew 2:13-15, "*And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.*" This was reference to a prophecy by Hosea in Hosea 11:1.

Zechariah

At this point the reader should read Matthew 21:1-9 and the record of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem at the beginning of His final week on earth before His crucifixion. The people cried out, "*Hosanna to the son of David; Blessed it he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.*" (Matthew 21:9). Jesus came into the city riding upon an ass, the royal beast on which Jewish kings rode. This detail had already been

prophecied hundreds of years before in Zechariah 9:9, "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*"

Psalms

Psalm 41:9, "*Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.*" Zechariah 11:12, "*And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.*" Matthew 26:15 records that as the exact price the chief priests gave to Judas to betray Jesus.

After Judas returned the money, seeing he had betrayed innocent blood, the money was used to buy a potter's field, a place for burying strangers and the poor. This is said to fulfill a prophecy by Jeremy (Jeremiah). Actually the prophecy is recorded in Zechariah 11:13. The explanation is that in the listing of the prophetic books, the Jews listed Jeremiah first, and his name is used to refer to prophetic books, not specific reference to a book written by Jeremiah. Zechariah was, of course, one of the prophets and his book is the prophetic book.

Many Others

Other prophecies which Jesus fulfilled are such things as His silence when standing before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7). Matthew wrote, "*And he answered him to never a word, insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.*" (Matthew 27:14).

Isaiah 53: 9-12 tells how He would die alongside malefactors. "*Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.*" (Matthew 27:38).

Psalm 22:18 prophecied that men would cast lots for his garments. Matthew 27:35 reads, "*And they crucified him; and parted his garments, casting lots; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my*

garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots."

Psalm 34:20, "*He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken.*" John 19: 32,32, "*Then came soldiers, and brake the legs of the first and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs.*" Another detailed prophecy fulfilled!

Of the entire proceedings regarding His mock trial and death, Jesus had said, "*Thinketh thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that this it must be?*" Over and over, record after record, prophecy after prophecy, we read of those things that would transpire concerning the Savior of mankind. Jesus fulfilled them. It was for our sake, and that we might have the evidence to convince us of the truth that we must believe in order to be saved. These are the kind of things He discussed with the two disciples as they walked along the road to Emmaus.

We do not have a record of all that Jesus said and did, nor possibly every prophecy He fulfilled. We do not have a detailed account of His explanations given on the road to Emmaus. But we have all that is needed to prove to us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and all that implies. "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.*" (John 20:30-31).

* * * * *

One of the most difficult things I find to accept as I grow older, having preached the gospel now for forty years this June, is to see churches and brethren that I have known, with whom I have labored, to whom I have preached, both as regular preacher or in gospel meetings, and see them now defiantly set aside the truth we once upheld together, and see them seek to be like the nations round about, and act as if truth had never been their first love. JWB

Matters of Faith and Opinion

Our lesson deals with authority. An understanding of this subject is important because it affects unity, and the effectiveness of the church at work. Misunderstanding has has created problems, divisions, and apostasy. Psalm 133:1, "*Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*" That which disrupts unity is a serious matter for those who love the Lord. The only way to have genuine unity is to have an understanding of the truth and follow it.

What do we mean by matters of faith and opinion? Matters of faith are those things imposed upon us because God has spoken concerning them. Matters of faith are those revelations in His Word that make up the faith or religion of Jesus Christ.

The Faith

Jude three speaks of "*the faith*" once delivered to the saints. Matters of faith are those points that are embodied in that faith, that exist by the Lord's authority and direction, that are to be believed and practiced because they are revealed by God. Matters of faith are those truths that come to us by the Word (Romans 10:17).

For instance, the Bible reveals the terms of entrance into the company of the saved, the church, to be faith, repentance, confession of faith, and baptism into Christ. These are matters of "*thus saith the Lord.*" The Bible reveals the avenues of worship to be singing, praying, the Lord's Supper, giving, and proclaiming His Word. We cannot add to nor take from what God has said. There is no room for deviation from them (Galatians 1:6-9; Second John 9-11; Revelation 21:18,19; First Peter 4:11; Colossians 3:17). They cannot be violated without sinning against God's authority.

Opinion

Matters of opinion are matters that demand and allow the exercise of human judgment. There are matters commanded and authorized of God (matters of faith) for which specific directions as to how to carry out these things are not given in every detail. The details have to be supplied, nonetheless, and are supplied by human judgment. When God gives a command or direction, and tells how it is to be expedited, then the command and the way of carrying out that command are matters of faith. But when God has given command, direction, or permission for something without giving details as to how it is to be expedited, the command must be obeyed, but man must use his judgment to supply the details that God has not specified. Opinions are involved, and human opinions are not infallible and are subject to question and variation. We are to be charitable toward one another respecting matters of opinion.

For instance, we are commanded to go and preach the gospel. We are told to preach, and what to preach. These are matters of faith. But we are not told how to go. We must use our judgment. We may go in whatever way seems the most expedient, whether we walk, run, ride, fly, float, etc. One may prefer to walk, and another prefer to fly. It is a matter of opinion and we must allow each one to exercise his own judgment or opinion.

We are commanded to teach, but the method of teaching is not specified. We may use chalk boards, radio, television, tracts, etc. When we teach we may use the lecture method, question and answer method, whatever one thinks best for the situation. It is a matter of opinion.

We are told to baptize, and this is a matter of faith. God has spoken. But where we baptize is not specified and that is a matter of judgment so long as we have ample supply of water to immerse. That is a matter of opinion.

The use of such judgment cannot and must not alter the thing commanded, neither take from it or add to it. We are to carry out what is commanded. There is no right or wrong way of doing it when God has not directed which

way, and the way we choose does not violate His will in any other way. Some ways may be better than others, but which way one chooses is a matter of opinion.

Whose Opinion?

In matters of congregational efforts, someone must decide which opinion will prevail. Obviously, everybody cannot do everything "his way" because there may be several ways of accomplishing something. Those with the responsibility and authority to decide in matters of opinion for the congregation are the elders of the church. They have the oversight and are the overseers (First Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28). Their decisions are to be obeyed and respected by the members (Hebrews 13:17). They decide only in matters of opinion, not matters of faith, because the Word has already been revealed the matters of faith. In matters of opinion there must be charity and consideration one of another.

Cases in Point

To illustrate further, consider financing of the work of the church. First Corinthians 16:1,2 and Second Corinthians 9:6,7 teach we are to give, a free-will offering, as we have been prospered, as we have purposed, cheerfully and liberally. There is no authority for fund raising through raffles, pie suppers, carnivals, rummage sales, business ventures, etc. But as to how the collections may be gathered there is room and need for human judgment. Some may wish to "pass the plate by the people." It would be just as acceptable with God to "pass the people by the plate," though possibly not as expedient. This decision requires judgment.

Consider the music in worship. God has spoken and every time He says sing. He did not say to just make music (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). For this reason we reject so-called translations that include the words "make music" which God never said. No man has the right to introduce another kind of music that does not have God's authority. Playing instruments produces another kind of music that is unauthorized and therefore wrong. But whether we use song books, have two or four songs, song four part harmony or all sing the

melody are matters of judgment and opinion. On these matters God has not spoken, although the command to sing must be expedited some way.

Regarding the work with which the church is charged, we are to preach the gospel to the lost to save the lost, edify the saved, to preserve the saved and/or recover the fallen, and render benevolent aid to those who are in need as we have opportunity. For each of these areas of work we have a "*thus saith the Lord.*" These are matters of faith as to what the church can and cannot do with God's authority. Unless an activity is authorized it cannot be lawfully expedited in any way. No man, board, or any group has the right to saddle upon the church secular education, entertainment, and such things as building gymnasiums for fun and games. No man can arrange some unauthorized organization to do the work of the church. The government of the church is sufficient to do the work the Lord has given the church to do. It is not the work of the church to be involved in secular schools, politics, athletic games, nor to usurp the role of the home or the civil government.

Decisions Must Be Made

Doing the work of evangelism, edification and benevolence requires many human decisions because every detail in doing that work is not revealed in Scripture. Who shall we send into the mission field? Where shall we send them? How much is adequate support? What equipment is needed? Shall we conduct classes? Where shall we assemble? Who is to teach at what time? How do we care for the needy, such as orphans, widows, destitute, etc.? All these things are required in doing the work, but the manner of doing it is not a matter of faith but opinion. Somebody decides.

As for carrying for the homeless, the church is not designed to be the home. It cannot be the home. There are no elders over a home. But the church provides for the homeless by providing a home. How these provisions are to be supplied falls into the realm of the unrevealed but necessary judgments.

A Very Clear Example

One other illustration makes the distinction between matters of faith and opinion very clear. Hebrews 10:25, First Corinthians 11:20, Acts 20:7 all teach the command to assemble on the first day of the week. No man can set that aside without violating God's will. But still there are matters of judgment that must be determined. Where shall we meet? At what hour on the first day of the week do we meet? How long shall we assemble together? All these things are matters of human opinion.

To ignore these principles of faith and opinion is to ignore the difference between the Lord's church and denominationalism. It is to invite confusion, strife, and division. Departure from these principles has brought havoc to the church too many times, from liberals as well as those who would bind human laws. Those who ignore God's authority by loosing what God has bound, or binding what God has loosed, create problems for God's people. We have no right to dismiss any matter of faith. We have no right to make any matter of opinion a matter of faith.

History shows how disrespect for this distinction has created barriers between individuals, congregations, and retarded the cause of Christ. The denominational world is often guilty of disregarding matters of faith. Brethren have also been guilty of confusing matters of faith and opinion. We need to recognize the difference, abide in His authority, have authority for all that we do, bind what God has bound, and loose what God looses.

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The Church is a Haven For Sinners

A haven is a place of safety, a harbor of protection. Those in the church are those who have turned from sin, been cleansed by His blood, added to the church and enjoy the spiritual security from God. Thanks be to God for the church as a haven for those who have left sin. But woe to any church that becomes a haven for sinners who persist in their sins. Some churches include in their membership anybody whether they have left sin or not. This is not the kind of haven the church must be. JB

Thoughts in Threes

We shall discuss some basic and fundamental themes of the gospel of Christ in this lesson. They shall be presented in six groups of three points each. Knowledge of such things are vital to our spiritual welfare.

Group One

There are three facts we must consider. (1) All who obey not the gospel of Christ are lost and remain lost until they obey. All have sinned (Romans 3:10,23; 5:12). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). Those who obey are the saved (Hebrews 5:9). If one does not obey he shall be punished (First Thessalonians 1:6-9). Regardless of who we are, where we live, or when since the day of Pentecost we live, the gospel of God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and those who reject it are lost.

(2) The gospel is the power of salvation (Romans 1:16). Paul told the Corinthians they were saved by the gospel (First Corinthians 15:1-4). We are saved by the Word (James 1:21). By the Word God calls us (Second Thessalonians 2:14). We are saved by the doctrine (First Timothy 4:16). Christ is the only Savior (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). We learn of Him through the gospel revealed in the inspired Scriptures (John 20:30,31). We must be born again (John 3:3-5), and we are begotten by the gospel (First Peter 1:23). Paul said the Corinthians were begotten through the gospel (First Corinthians 4:15). Since faith is essential to salvation, we need to understand that faith comes through hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

(3) We cannot expect the children of the devil to spread the saving gospel. This is the work of the children of God. Men are not saved by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word of God. Salvation is according to the law of Christ, not by some miracle. This is the reason for the commission to go and

preach the gospel to all the world (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16). "*Preach the word*" was the apostolic command (Second Timothy 4:2). One cannot be saved without calling on the name of the Lord, nor can they call on Him in whom they have not believed, nor can they believe on Him of whom they have not heard, nor can they hear without a preacher, and the preacher must be sent (Romans 10:13-17).

Group Two

The second set of threes logically follows the first. To win souls, lead them to Christ and salvation, demands there be the exertion of power (1) There must be heart power, by which we mean, love. There must be love for God, love for His Word, love for the lost. Paul's heart's desire was the salvation of other (Romans 10:1). Possibly this is why more of us are not trying to win the lost. We lack love. If a child was in danger on the highway, we would exert all of our energies to save that child from physical death. How much more should we be concerned in saving those who are in danger of spiritual death!

(2) Saving others demands head power, by which we mean knowledge of the saving message. We cannot teach what we do not know. Paul urged Timothy to teach others, who would in turn teach even more (Second Timothy 2:2). To know demands that we study (Second Timothy 2:15). We may have a zeal to serve God and save the lost, but zeal without knowledge is destructive (Romans 10:2,3). We cannot overemphasize the need of knowledge.

(3) In addition to heart power and head power there must be foot power. There must be the actual going to another with the truth. To say and do not makes us unprofitable (James 1:22). We must be about the Father's business.

Group Three

The third set of threes are matters that are immeasurable and beyond comprehension. (1) We cannot fathom the value of a soul. Jesus said it was worth more than the whole world (Matthew 16:26). An awesome price was paid for the soul (Galatians 1:4). How much do you

value your soul? Better that we ask, how much do we value the souls of our children, friends, brethren, and neighbors?

(2) We cannot measure eternity. There really is nothing with which we can compare it. We have heard stories that try to show eternity. One says it is like a bird flying from the west coast with a drop of water from the Pacific Ocean to the east coast to the Atlantic, then back again. When the bird has emptied one ocean into the other eternity will have just begun. Another says it is like a spider weaving a web from here to the sun and taking one grain of soil from here to there each trip and when the earth is removed eternity will just be staring. This does not illustrate eternity, but it does illustrate our inability to comprehend eternity. Yet, we are assured that we shall exist in eternity. Matthew 25:46, "*These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*"

(3) We cannot put a measure on everlasting punishment. Second Thessalonians 1:9, "*...who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*" It is ever being destroyed but never destroyed. It is ever dying but never dying. It is ever burning but never consumed. Even such terms as "*lake of fire and brimstone, second death, weeping, gnashing of teeth, outer darkness*" do not give us a full understanding of the punishment of hell.

Group Four

This takes us to three impelling motives for serving God. (1) There is the fear of hell. Hebrews 10:30,31, "*For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*" Hebrews 2:1-3a, "*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...*" The fact is, we shall not escape. Peter makes

this reality vivid and documents it by God's dealing with those of the past in Second Peter 2:4-9.

Warnings of hell are intended to appeal to mankind through fear. When one knows what the Scriptures teach regarding hell he is inclined to want to avoid hell at all costs. This is God's way of disturbing and arousing the sinful soul to face the reality of his lost condition.

(2) God motivates us also through the offer of reward. Once Peter asked the Lord, "*What shall we have therefore*" (Matthew 19:27-29). Paul wrote in Romans 8:18, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" Matthew 5:12, "*...for great is your reward in heaven.*" Second Timothy 4:6-8, "*For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give unto me in that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*" Revelation 2:10, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*"

Just as the knowledge of hell strikes fear, the knowledge of an abundant life here and in the hereafter appeals to us through the expectation of reward. This is another of God's ways to bring out the best that is in us, provoking us to seek the way that brings forth such blessings.

(3) The highest and noblest motive for serving God is a response to God's love by loving in return. First John 4:18,19, "*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him because he first loved us.*"

As a parent may produce obedience from his child through the threat of punishment, or through an offer of reward, he is most pleased when the child responds simply because of his love and respect for the parent. So it is with God and our obedience unto Him.

Group Five

Another set of threes focuses on the three areas of the gospel. (1) There are facts to be believed. These facts include such things as the revelation concerning God, Christ, Holy Spirit, church, plan of salvation, the nature of man, etc. Inspired testimony gives us the evidence of things to be believed.

(2) There are also promises from God that are to be enjoyed and appreciated. We have the forgiveness of past sins, companionship and fellowship with Deity and the saved, provisions for this life, the power to endure and overcome evil, and the eternal promise of heaven.

(3) There are also commands to be obeyed. One can do one of two things regarding a command, whether human or divine. He can either obey it, or disobey it. God has given certain commands that must be obeyed before the blessings of God are obtained and given. The promises of the gospel are conditioned upon obedience to the commands to believe in Christ as the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins.

Group Six

The last set of threes are the three periods of our existence; namely, the past, present, and future. (1) The past is gone and cannot be recovered. Yet, there may be sins committed in the past that remain upon our guilt-stained souls and will remain until forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ.

(2) There are certain events in our future that are inescapable. We shall live until inevitable physical death. God has assured us of the return of the Savior, the resurrection from the dead, the judgment, and entrance into eternity. From these there is no escape for anyone (Hebrews 10:27; John 5:28,29; Second Corinthians 5:10).

(3) The present is ours to use. We can take advantage of the present to have our sins blotted out by reaching the saving blood of Christ when we obey the commands of the gospel. The present is all we have, but we do have that. Yesterday is forever gone, and tomorrow may never be. Second Corinthians 6:2, "*For he saith, I have heard*

thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Hebrews 3:15, *" Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts..."*

There will come a time in our existence when we shall reflect on the thoughts presented in this lesson whether we give them serious thought now or not. When that time comes, how will we consider them? Will we be blessed in that we gave heed to the truth of them and acted accordingly? Or shall we consider them in the dismal and insurmountable gloom of regret?

* * * * *

Three Things the Devil Wants to Do

Every person, regardless of how many friends he has, has at least one enemy. This is true of Christians and non-Christians. That enemy is the devil. First Peter 5:8, *"Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* We are called to resist this enemy. James 4:7, *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."*

The devil is presented in Scripture as a tempter, oppressor, one who seeks to ensnare mankind, deceitful (the wiles of the devil), having the power of death, the father of lies, and when allowed, he can fill the heart to do evil. He is called the devil, Satan, a dragon, an old serpent. He is the enemy of mankind because he seeks the overthrow, failure, injury, harm, and spiritual death of everyone.

He Exists

Some may laugh at the teaching about the devil, choosing to reject his reality. To some he may be, as one

little boy said, like Santa Claus, he is your daddy. The smugness, sophistication that usually accompanies the rejection of the Biblical teaching of the devil is punctured when we realize that the same Bible that teaches of God also teaches about the devil. The same book that gives man hope of eternal life also warns of eternal damnation. Consistency and common sense will not allow one to accept the reality of God and deny the reality of the devil. The evidence for the existence of God is overwhelming. When you consider that evidence, then you will be convinced that God is, and laughing about the devil would not appear quite as intelligent as some would have others to believe.

The Bible presents the devil as working, producing works in a very diligent way. Our study centers on at least three things the devil wants to accomplish with respect to mankind. When we know his goals, we can blunt his attacks. Forewarned is to be forearmed.

His First Goal

If you are not "*in Christ*," or in the Lord's church, Satan wants to keep you out of Christ and His church. Why? It is because the church is composed of the saved (Acts 2:47). Salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). There is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1). God is glorified in the church (Ephesians 3:21). God's wisdom is manifested by the church (Ephesians 3:10). The very existence of the church, the saved, is a humiliation to the devil. One who is not "*in Christ*" is doomed and damned, and that sad condition is precisely what Satan wants for every person.

How does he keep people out of the church? He uses lies and deceit. He conveys, through his agents, that sin is only an old-fashioned concept rather than a reality, and man should not worry about it. He has people teaching that one can be saved outside the church. He has his preachers ridiculing the church, misrepresenting it, saying that one is just as good as another, and that it is not essential to salvation. He has provided substitute churches for the one body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4). All of this misinformation is digested by people who fail to

study God's book and Satan destroys the attraction and appeal of the Lord's church in the minds of those who give heed to the doctrines of the devil. Those who are outside of the church are playing the devil's game the very way the devil wants them to play it, and they are running headlong to their own doom just as he desires.

His Second Goal

If you are in the church, having seen the folly of the devil's attempts to keep you out, the devil wants to draw you back into the sinful world from which you have been delivered. Why? He knows, even if Baptist preachers do not, that "*the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.*" (Second Peter 2:20-22). James 4:4 warns, "*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*" First John 2:15-17, "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.*"

The Lord Jesus taught, "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, or love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" (Matthew 6:24). But the devil wants man to think the Lord is wrong about it. He would persuade people in the church that they can walk with God and walk in the sinful paths of the world at the same time without any problems to them. Many have evidently accepted this lie of the devil.

Yes, the devil uses his "missionaries,' and he uses many avenues of temptation against man as man tries to be faithful to the Lord. He has proven his ability too many times for the person of reasonable mind to doubt his power. He has far too often been able to cause members of the Lord's church to backslide and as a result be lost.

We are not to think that all was done once we have believed, repented, confessed our faith, and been baptized

for the remission of sins. That is essential, but not all-sufficient. Revelation 2:10, "*...but be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*" We must, like Paul, keep the faith, finish the course (Second Timothy 2:4-6). For this reason we are urged to stedfastness; First Corinthians 10:12, "*Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" First Corinthians 15:58, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor in not in vain in the Lord.*"

The devil never accepts defeat until he is forced to accept it. He cannot win once life has been lived faithfully "*in the Lord.*" Revelation 14:13, "*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.*" Paul realized the persistence of Satan in First Corinthians 9:27, "*But I keep my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*"

The first sign of falling away into apostasy is negligence toward the periods of worship. Many ignore Hebrews 10:25 that commands we not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Those going the wrong direction will begin leaving out Bible study (Second Timothy 2:15), both at home and with brethren at Bible study periods. They begin to associate more and more with evil companions (First Corinthians 15:33), and renew their love for the things of this world (Second Timothy 4:10). The devil would want you misled into thinking that once you have been saved, you shall always be saved. It is true when one comes to Christ he is saved from his past sins and those sins shall never be accounted against him anymore. But that does not mean you cannot sin in the future and leave the way of salvation. Isn't is strange thing that there be those who profess to preach the gospel of Christ are busy doing the devil's deceptions telling people that once they have come to the Lord that they cannot fall? But one can fall. Why else would an inspired writer of the New Testament constantly warn against falling if such a thing was impossible anyway? Paul told some of his brethren in Galatia that they had already fallen, already had done what some

denominational preachers keep saying nobody can even do (Galatians 5:4). What an awesome day awaits those who have pretended to serve God but have declared the devil's message! A Christian can sin and when he does he needs forgiveness (First John 1:8-10).

While we cannot be perfect, nor does the Lord expect us to be sinlessly perfect, we can be faithful, and this is that which is essential to being with God in heaven. The devil wants you, the Christian, to ignore that spiritual truth.

His Third Goal

But if the devil does not keep one out of the church, nor is able to get one in the church to leave the church, he still has that which he wants to accomplish. He tries to make the Christian as worthless to the cause of Christ and salvation as possible. Whatever tends toward encouraging people to be saved is what the devil wants to terminate. He tries to make the Christian worthless to the cause of Christ because he knows a bad influence from professed Christians will drive people into his wicked arms. Again, he has been far too successful.

One Christian said it correctly, "We have been saved to save." This is true. John 15:2, "*Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*" The Christian is not to live for himself, but for Christ (Second Corinthians 5:15). Without doing good works, our faith is dead (James 2:26). It is possible that many who are in the church are of little to no value for the progress of the message of salvation, or helping the church fulfill its God-given duty.

Bearing fruit is not confined to bringing others to Christ, although this is one large part of it. It also demands daily Christian living. Actually, those who can render the church the greatest harm and hindrance are those who are members of the church but who live as if it made no difference how they live. They profess to be followers of Christ, but in reality, are often more the followers of Satan in the things they say, do, where they go, what they seek, what they support, what they

condone, where their heart lies, their ambitions, conversations, and motives.

There are doubtless too many who are truly "Sunday morning pew fillers" with their names on the church roll who think that is all that matters. If there is even one, that's too many. But what of all the other duties and privileges of being among the company of the redeemed? When brethren have to be begged to study God's Word, urged to attend periods of worship to the Father, pushed to perform every duty, nothing being done by anybody that captures their interest, what are they but drags on the cause of Christ? They cannot be saved that way, but they also present a distorted picture of what a Christian is. When members smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, lie, cheat, commit adultery, marry, divorce, and remarry without regard to the Lord's teaching on the subject, gamble, show themselves greedy, covetous, jealous, bitter, vicious, unforgiving, and possessing a foul mouth, what image do they present of Christianity? Of course, they are not being Christians like that, but they profess to be and many will judge what a Christian is by what they do. They make the devil so proud. He surely has one of his own in the midst of the people of God to undermine righteousness from within.

He Has His Methods of Operation

How does the devil get church members to serve him as worthless and obstructing members? He gets them to hide their light under the bushel of worldliness. He encourages them to be satisfied with as little as they can do and still think they can "get by." He tells them the lost are not really all that lost and sin is not really all that devastating, and that maybe God will someway save the lost even though they are not obedient. He lies to Christians so Christians will not seek the lost by convincing them that being honest and sincere is all that really matters. He preaches the false doctrine that doctrinal differences make no real difference. He convinces them that we can have "unity in diversity." He gets the self-professed scholars to declare all manner of false doctrines and because of their so-called scholarship many naive souls will accept it as true. He

has a trainload of such people like that in the schools and pulpits even as I write these words, producing lectures, books, papers, seminars, etc. that declare that God does not really mean what He has said after all. Some people will blindly follow the self-acclaimed experts.

He convinces church members that other matters of life, things of the here and now, deserve more attention, even before the Lord's church and it's mission. He tells them to always make room for business, job, home, sports, games, clubs, associations, fun, frolic, etc. He creates the same old problem over and over by getting people to get their priorities mixed up. He says in essence, "After all you have to make a living." He would have people to think God does not understand that fact. He would have them forget the Lord's promise of Matthew 6:33, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*"

One of the devil's most successful methods is to convince church members that even if they do not function, others will, and the grace of God will cover them anyway, as if the benefits of the grace of God are unconditional. But "Let George do it" has been the attitude of downfall for many baptized believers. Through compromise, and the fatal spiritual disease of going along for the sake of peace, the devil wins battle after battle.

Be Not Deceived By Him

Will you let the devil persuade you? Will he be allowed to use you? Will he succeed in his ambitions regarding you? He is interested in you and seeks his way with you. Will he keep you out of the Lord's church? If not, will he draw you back into the ways of the world to your damnation? And if he fails in both of these first efforts, will you allow him to use you as a hindrance to the very cause you profess to espouse? Let none of us allow that. We are not immune to his ways, but we can retain our loyalty to the Lord. We have the choice and we must make it.

* * * * *

She Did What She Could

Bible students are acquainted with the event in the life of Christ when "*there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.*" (Mark 14:3).

Not everybody thought highly of what she did. Not everybody was pleased with it. Her actions did not suit all who observed it. In fact, some were even indignant at the effort she had made. Others contended that what she had done was just a waste, and suggested that something better could have been done with the ointment than what she did with it.

Poor woman! How could she possibly please everybody. The fact is she could not, and glory to God, she did not even try to please everybody. But she pleased the Lord and He commended her for the "*good work*" she had wrought on Him. While some had other ideas about her actions, the Lord considered an excellent thing.

He further commended her because He said of her, "*She hath done what she could.*" How much better would this world be if everybody would do as much? What she did, doing what she could, is still preached and is as Jesus said it would be, "*a memorial of her.*"

Helen Keller said, "I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; I will not refuse to do the something I can do." How wonderful!

Sometimes people would discourage the saints by contending, "You can't change the world. You can't solve every problem. You can't fight every battle." That is not the point at all. You can do what you can and, believe me, if the Scripture teaches us anything, we had better be doing what we can because we shall be held accountable for that. If more would do what they could there would not be such a burden on those who are trying so hard.
JWB

In Death There is Great Loss



JAMES W. BOYD

Paul said it was gain for him to die (Philippians 1:21). We realize the spiritual gain that was his, and for all of God's saints, when they leave this life to go to be with the Father. But in death there is a great loss also, especially at the death of a knowledgeable, faithful servant of God. The great loss is suffered by those who survive and remain on the field of battle.

Tommy Swann wrote, "When an old person dies, a library is lost." People have marvelled at transplants of human organs from one to another. What a wonder if the minds of some could be transplanted and the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom be preserved! Of course, that will never be because the mind, the heart, the soul, is absolutely individual.

Many precious brethren have died of late. We grieve at our great loss even as we rejoice in their great gain.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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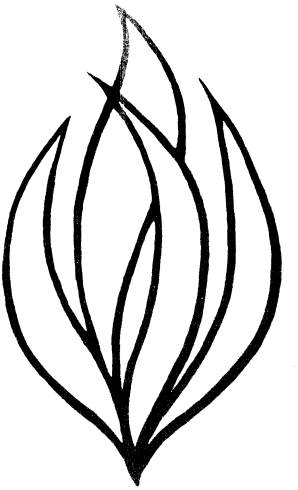

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Uphold the Plea

The Lord's church began on the first day of Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. The characteristics of His church are revealed to mankind in the Bible. By those characteristics the church can be identified. It is called the body of Christ, the church of God, churches of Christ, the kingdom of God, the house or family of God, and other identifications that show possession. Its members are called disciples, Christians, saints, priests and other terms found in Scripture.

The governmental organization of the church is relatively simply. Christ is the head. Members are organized into local congregations. Congregations are organized with elders having the oversight, deacons who serve, preacher and teachers, and all the membership making up the body. Each congregation is autonomous or self-governing inasmuch as there is no super-ecclesiastical organization of the Lord's church larger than a local congregation.

The creed is Christ and the written creed (meaning what is believed) is the Bible. The worship consists of singing, praying, observing the Lord's Supper, giving, and proclaiming the Word of God. The terms of entrance are hearing the Word, believing in Jesus as the Christ the Son of God, repenting of sins, confessing faith in Jesus as the Christ, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins by His authority (in His name).

The church is united in mind, doctrine, and practice, speaking the same things, speaking as the oracles of God, tied together by the bond of faith and fellowship in Christ.

The work of the church is to evangelize the world with the gospel, edify and build up itself (the saved), recover those who may fall away, and render benevolent and charitable deeds toward those in need as opportunity presents.

The inspired history of the early church shows the Lord's people doing the Lord's work the Lord's way. The New Testament gives us His pattern and blueprint to which we must adhere if we would be the Lord's people and do the Lord's work.

An Apostasy

As prophesied, there came a falling away from the truth (First Timothy 4:1-3; Second Peter 2:1,2; Acts 20:28-30). The apostasy did not occur rapidly but gradually over a long period of time. Many of the departures from truth occurred concurrently. There was first a change in the governmental structure of the church into an ecclesiastical hierarchy. The names of the church and its members were changed. Human creeds were introduced alongside of, and then instead of, the Bible. Traditions, doctrines of men, superstitions, and combinations of truth with pagan and heathen practices perverted the church away from God's pattern. There was a change in the manner of worship, the terms of admission, the mission, purpose, and work of the church. Very little was left untouched by the apostasy.

Down through the years when these changes were taking place there were voices that cried out against them, but to no avail. Many warned of the error involved, pleaded for people not to follow men but to return to God. But they were ignored, silenced by persecution and death, intimidated into retreat and the apostasy rolled. Human history entered into the period historians call the Dark Ages.

Reformation

Eventually, after several centuries, there were those who could raise their voices in opposition to the ruling powers, primarily the Roman Catholic Church, and survive. Their voices were not silenced but heard. They would not be ignored nor intimidated. Such were Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Ulrich Zwingli, and many others who are considered the "fathers of the Protestant Reformation."

Moving rather rapidly now over history, suffice it to say that the Reformation Movement did not reform existing Romanism as was first intended. Rather it produced Protestant denominationalism with its many names, churches, doctrines, creeds, practices, etc. All that characterizes the confused, contradictory, and chaotic religiously divided scene so evident today was produced to a great degree from the Reformation.

Restoration

In the eighteenth century men began to see the gross inconsistency of denominationalism. They began the plea for a return to New Testament Christianity. They urged people to go back behind denominationalism, the apostasy,, all the way back to "thus saith the Lord" of the Scriptures. They urged that men preach what was preached then, speak as the oracles of God, speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where the Bible is silent, require what Scripture requires, neither add to nor take from what the Bible teaches, recognize the Bible as the all-sufficient religious authority it claims to be (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

Prominent men involved in this plea that had its beginning in Europe but found fertile soil in America were James O'Kelly, Elias Smith, Abner Jones, Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and a host of others. Their plea was based on the irrefutable principle of sowing and reaping, sowing the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God, into hearts as was done in New Testament times. What the seed produced then it would produce again.

Such a plea captured the attention of thousands upon thousands. Many battles were fought and won against the die-hards of denominationalism. The Lord's Church was restored, and that period has come to be known as the early days of the Restoration Movement.

More Seeds of Error Are Sown

Unfortunately, the dark clouds of Satanic apostasy raised other storms for the church to endure. Two vastly different approaches were adopted toward the Bible. One

said we are permitted to do whatever the Bible does not specifically prohibit. The other says that we are to do what we do "*in the name of Christ*," which means by His authority (Colossians 3:17). Second John nine forbids transgressing the doctrine of Christ, but binds abiding in the doctrine of Christ. This was the unsupressible contention of faithful brethren.

These two approaches finally produced division over such innovations as the missionary society and instrumental music, neither of which has authority from Scripture. One was a organization separate and apart from the church that assumed to do the work of the church that rivaled the church. The other was wrong because it added another kind of music in worship than that which God had repeatedly commanded and authorized.

Since these original divisive intrusions into the otherwise growing restoration efforts of the Lord's Church, there have been more innovations, such as the church becoming involved in politics, entertainment, secular education, fun and games evangelism, observance of "holy days," women preachers, raising funds through raffles, rummage sales, etc. rather than the free-will offerings as Scripture teaches. Those who launched upon the sea of digression modestly and cautiously have drifted so far away from the shores of truth that they now admit to being nothing but a denomination among denominations, practicing open membership, not even requiring what the Bible teaches is absolutely necessary to be considered a child of God, adopting all manner of false doctrines, and on it goes.

Years and years of faithful labor was plowed under by liberal digressives and apostate people and their ways. Entire congregations, properties, preachers, members were taken away from the loyal and faithful plea of staying with the Bible, and they went their own way, the way of the world, and "did their own thing." The real tragedy of this and any other apostasy is the loss of souls. One cannot be saved and defy God and His will.

But Truth Rises Again

Even so, the remnant remained and the church began to grow and prosper once again until, numerically, it outnumbered the digressive elements that spring from the departure of restoration principles.

But history has a way of repeating itself. Today, even as these words are written, some of the same false ideas, practices, innovations, organizations, attitudes and doctrines are dividing the church. The wail is "unity in diversity," which simply means agreeing to disagree and "do your own thing." We hear of "new hermeneutics," which is neither new nor hermeneutics, but denial of truth. Change is the watchword regardless of why. Compromise is the fashion. "Go along to get along" replaces conviction. Schools, large metropolitan churches, "big name" preachers, brotherhood papers are all calling for the relaxation of the plea to stay with the Book, but learn to practice a pseudo-love by tolerating whatever anybody wants so long as they are honest and sincere, regardless of the revealed will of God in Scripture.

The cause of restoration is noble and right, but it suffers from the Lord's enemies, being allowed again to be retarded, splintered, abandoned, in order to become accepted by the world and large numerically.

The Only Way to Unity

The only way to unity is faithfulness to God and hold tenaciously to the teaching to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). There must be Bible authority for what we say, believe, and practice, because the Bible is the sole authority. Unity based on truth is the only true unity. The plea shall never be outdated nor irrelevant. It is our sacred duty before God and man to uphold this plea regardless of the cost to ourselves and those around us.

* * * * *

Meeting God

Amos 4:12,13, "*Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The Lord, The God of hosts, is his name.*"

This text is sometimes used to encourage preparation for judgment day. Emphasis is placed on the phrase, "*Prepare to meet thy God.*" The necessity to prepare for the judgment when Christ returns is stressed in both the Old and New Testaments, but this is not the primary theme of the prophet here. There is another very important lesson taught here.

The context and background of this passage is important to understanding it. Israel was in rebellion against God. God, through Amos, reminds Israel of what God had done in the way of punishing men and nations who chose to defy Him. Moab, Edom, Ammon, Syria, the Philistines, Nineveh, Sodom, Gomorrah, the world before the flood are mentioned in Scripture as recipients of God's wrath because of rebellion and defiance of the Almighty. "*Thus will I do unto thee, O Israel.*" This was God's warning if they repented not. They would experience the same doom and penalty as others.

Meeting God

The phrase, "*Prepare to meet thy God,*" is figurative language. There are different ways one can meet God. Here it depicts a battle scene, a confrontation. By Israel's conduct God has been challenged. Now God gives His answer to that challenge. He tells them to meet Him in battle, meet Him on the issues wherein they had defied Him and rebelled against Him. They should put themselves on guard. When men challenge the authority and power of God, God accepts the challenge. Before He deals with them, however, He warns the defiant ones.

Amos is appealing to Israel before deciding to continue their rebellion and challenge of God to take another look at the One they are opposing. They are making themselves the opponent of "*The Lord God of hosts.*" The word "*hosts*" means armies. God of hosts means the God of armies and of battle. It is a statement of power. The prophet pleaded for Israel not to array themselves against God. The emphasis is on the futility and sure disaster that will follow when one places himself on the opposite side of God. Having given this warning, Amos reminds Israel of certain things about God which serve as His reasons why they should not continue rebelling.

Omnipotent

The first reason is because God is omnipotent, or all-powerful. Amos cites His creative power. "*He... formeth the mountains and createth the winds.*" The existence of the physical world argues for His reality and power.

Science is a study of the physical world that God has created. Science, true science, is demonstrated information as it pertains to the physical world. It is not true scientific knowledge unless is can be demonstrated. Guesses are no more than that.

On the other hand, the Bible is God's revelation to man pertaining to the spiritual world, primarily. Although the Bible is not designed to be a science book, it is not unscientific, nor anti-scientific, but in many instances it is pre-scientific in its revelations concerning matters with which science deals. The Bible revealed certain scientific truths about the physical world before man could know it was true through science, discovery, experiment, etc.

We live in a highly scientific age, and right thinking people appreciate the benefits of scientific progress. But there is no contradiction between what science can prove and what the Bible teaches, even in matters of scientific nature. God is the author of the book and the Creator of the world. We would not expect there to be contradictions between the two. Sometimes scientists become very unscientific and enter the field of speculation and philosophy and suggest anti-Biblical ideas. Sometimes

Bible students fail to understand the Biblical message and misinterpret certain passages in a way that contradicts what science can demonstrate. But when scientists stay with what can be proved, and Bible students stay with the message of God, there is no clash, but consistent harmony. The idea of "Science versus the Bible" was born of the clash between misinterpretations of the Bible and science, or pseudo-science and the Bible.

Pre-scientific

Notice a few pre-scientific pieces of information found in the Bible. The five fundamental elements of science-time, space, matter, force, and motion - are all in Genesis 1:1. Moses, not having a laboratory, knew this because of divine revelation from the One who created all things. It was not ancient wisdom and knowledge of his day that caused him to write this way.

Moses said God gathered all the seas (oceans) into one place or bed. Science knows all oceans are literally connected, gathered into one bed. Here is a statement of scientific fact of which Moses could not have possibly known through travel, experiment, etc. Only by divine revelation could this have been declared.

In Job chapter thirty-eight over forty questions of scientific subjects are mentioned for which Job had no source of information other than God.

Job 26:7 tells of the starless northern sky long before men with telescopes proved it so. So is the matter of the rotundity of the earth, the rotation of the earth on its axis, the paths or currents in the oceans, the cycle of evaporation and rainfall, the sound of light, and many geographical facts for which there was no measure at the time of writing. Written from revelation rather than experimentation and personal investigation, God, who made such things, revealed them unto man. All this demonstrates the power of God. Amos was warning Israel not to oppose such a One as God. How could they expect to be successfull in that?

Omniscient

A second reason not to oppose God is because God is omniscient or all-knowing. He can even know man's thoughts, man's mind, his motives that lie in the inner recesses of his heart.

God's knowledge embraced the prophetic statements that were prophesied hundreds of years before they were fulfilled. Only an all-knowing Being could foretell with unerring accuracy that which would come to pass. In many instances, even minute details were predicted and fulfilled.

One significance of Jewish history is that it was written in prophecy fifteen hundred years before it occurred. The coming of Christ, with all the facts about His life on earth, of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David, would be born in Bethlehem, His humble circumstances, His teaching by parables, His betrayal, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, all were foretold. There are so many specific points regarding Christ that literally occurred. But those who spoke for God foretold them centuries prior to the events.

Prophecy and the fulfillment of it is an unimpeachable evidence of the divine origin of the Bible. No man or group of men could have known such things, or produced such a document without divine guidance. We might illustrate the work of the prophets in the foretelling of events as if they were marksmen with bows and arrows, shooting from different distances, toward a target they could not see, in darkness that prevented their vision, and yet, when light is shed on the target after they all have shot their arrows, each of the arrows are in the middle of the target. Who would consider this a mere accidental or coincidental occurrence?

Moses lived fifteen hundred years before Christ and "shot" prophecies regarding Christ. David, one thousand years before Christ, did the same. They were followed by Daniel, six hundred years prior to Christ, and then came Malachi, four hundred years before Christ. All of the prophets contributed to the prophetic revelation. Then when the light of the truth of the New Testament is turned on Christ, every prophecy is fulfilled. Amos was

pleading with his Israelite brethren not to array themselves against such a One.

Omnipresence

The third reason Amos cited not to fight against God was because God is omnipresent, or present everywhere. He "*maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth.*" The mountains are His stepping-stones. He exists in light and darkness alike. Here the reader would enhance his appreciation of the ever-presence of God to pause to read Psalm 139:1-2.

Amos exhorts Israel that those who oppose God are on the wrong side. The challenge to prepare to meet God, in open confrontation, is a warning for them not to be so foolish as to attempt it. Preparing to meet God in the sense of overcoming Him is a fatal mistake.

Another Preparation

Preparing to meet God in order to be with Him, to come to Him, is as rewarding as opposing Him is fatal. The Old and New Testaments speak of the "*habitation of God*" where God has residence and men may meet Him on favorable terms. Exodus 20:24 tells us that God records His name where the sacrifices are made. This would be the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34), and the temple (First Kings 9:3). In the New Testament the church is the habitation of God, His temple (Ephesians 2:22). It is here where God and man meet in fellowship.

Only in the Lord's church can we be with God (Revelation 21:3). Outside of God's habitation we stand opposed to Him, and have no more possibility of success than Israel. Nobody can prepare to successfully oppose God.

How will you meet God? Will it be to fight against Him, or to be with Him? Each shall face God in the judgment. How it will be depends on how we react to the Lord's invitation to obey the gospel, being saved and added to His body, the church.

* * * * *

Peace on Earth; Good Will Toward Men

The reader is urged to read Luke 2:1-15 for background material and the text for this lesson. Space demands that we ask you to do this.

The text is a familiar one to Bible students. Especially is this text heard during what is called the Christmas season. The concept of peace, good will are cherished by many people. In a world overrunning with strife, turmoil, wars, struggle, hatred, the very tone of the words ,"peace and good will," bring a measure of solace.

But many have sorely missed the mark in the application of this text. It has to do with the mission of Christ to this earth, but not in the way many think. What is the peace mentioned here? What is the good will? Unless we consider the passage in its context, we will likely misapply this Scripture as many others have done and lose its true significance. People have assigned meanings to it to their liking, like the idea of "getting along with your neighbor." While this idea may be distantly suggested, this is not the import of the praises uttered by the heavenly hosts at the birth of Christ.

I read where one wrote, "This portrays a vision of a time when people can live and children can grow up in a world that is not threatening to destroy them." This is a false commentary and is not suggested in the passage. Such smacks more of some premillennial utopia here on earth. That is not what the Bible teaches.

Isaiah 9:6, "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*" Jesus is called the "*Prince of Peace*" in prophecy. The gospel is called the gospel of peace (Romans 10:15). The kingdom

of God is one of joy and peace (Romans 14:17). The preaching done by the apostles and early evangelists was about peace by Jesus Christ (Acts 10:36). God is said to be the author of peace (First Corinthians 14:33). The birth of Jesus was heralded as the coming of peace (Our Text).

What Peace?

But what is the peace that Christ brought to this world? At the very time these words, "*Peace on earth,*" were spoken by the heavenly hosts, the world was at peace among nations. It was in a period of the Roman Empire when there was no record of wars going anywhere . Since His birth there has been much strife, wars, struggles, etc. Some, seeing this and thinking that Jesus was to bring peace among the nations, have rejected Christ. Are we to expect a world of tranquility and a cessation of all tensions, the end of strife, the termination of all wars, because Christ brought peace? We will not expect this if we understand the peace He actually brought.

What did Jesus mean in Matthew 10:34-36? "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against the mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*" How can Christ bring peace, and yet, not bring peace? Obviously, there is more than one kind of peace. What kind of peace did Christ bring?

Romans 5:1, "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The peace that was brought to this earth by Christ is peace with God. This is a spiritual peace that can be ours regardless of the circumstances and conditions in the world around us. This is more than mere contentment and ease of mind. It is a relationship with God.

Man alienates himself from God by sin (Isaiah 59:1,2). Christ came and is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). He preached peace (Ephesians 2:17). He died in order to reconcile man to God, providing the way of forgiveness of man's sins that alienated him from God (Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20). We are reconciled to God by Jesus

Christ (Second Corinthians 5:18,19). Christ made reconciliation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17). The peace Jesus brought has to do with the removal of the sins of mankind. Seeking this peace with God may often bring one into conflict with other people.

Not World Peace

The praises spoken by the heavenly hosts at His birth did not promise a world free of struggle. Rather it was the announcement of the coming of the way for man to be reconciled to God. Christ did not come to merely provide peace between men. He came to provide peace between man and God. As men are reconciled to Christ, they can and will be reconciled to each other. But a social and community peace was not His prime goal.

To be sure, peace, in the sense of harmony and tranquility among men, is a very desirable condition. But peace between men can be attained while men are spiritually lost, living in sin, even rejecting Christ, and denying God. There are many who care nothing for God and His Son who have peace among themselves. Men can stand arm in arm, hand in hand, heart in heart in a social peace and still be very rebellious and alienated from God. Consider how heathen and atheistic nations have a measurable peace among themselves.

Peace between people does not always follow Christ. Did not some reject Him during His life on earth? Did not strife and struggle follow Him? Some accepted Him while others rejected Him. There will ever be strife between the two. From this there is no escape. The birth of Jesus Christ brought a struggle into the world rather than social peace. It is easy to see why following Christ is sometimes described as a warfare, a spiritual warfare, a fight and battle against evil, spiritual forces. The forces of God are at odds against the forces of Satan and so shall they ever be. Because of this, even though we are to try to live in peace with all men, it is not always possible (Romans 12:18).

The emphasis of the words, "*Peace on earth,*" is that Jesus Christ came to offer man the way of salvation and

to be at peace with Deity. It is another way of saying He came to seek and save the lost.

Whose Good Will?

"*Good will toward men*" is an expression of God's love manifested toward man. Just as the coming of Christ was to bring spiritual peace between man and God, so was His coming a demonstration of God's good will toward an undeserving humanity. The phrase rings with the same meaning as John 3:16, Romans 5:6-8, Ephesians 2:8. God's mercy, grace, love, kindness, unmerited favor toward mankind is seen in the sending of His Son to earth to live and die on behalf of the salvation of man who could not atone for his own sins.

So often we think of the phrase, "*Good will toward men,*" as describing the mission of Christ as bringing men together that they might get along in society with each other and be considerate toward one another. We put the phrase in the context of people having a good attitude toward other people. It is true that as two people follow Christ they will develop good will toward each other. But all do not follow Christ. This is only a secondary by-product of the mission of Christ. Jesus did not come to establish a religion that simply enabled people to get along together. That is one of the faults and mistakes of what is called the "social gospel." We recognize that converting people to Christ offers the greatest hope for the recovery of man in his economic, political, social, and other mundane relationships. But the good will expressed in our text is far more than that. The heavenly hosts were not expressing what we might want between people. They were rather praising God for the magnanimous overflow of His grace as He showed that grace by sending His Son to dwell as a man among men to save them from their sins.

Vertical

The real significance of the phrase, "*Peace on earth; good will toward men,*" has a meaning much deeper than the superficial calmness and composure on the man-to-man relationship. It is more than a horizontal matter. It is rather vertical. It is a phrase having to do with the

God-man relationship. The birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was the occasion for the accomplishment of the divinely-given provisions of the way of salvation and spiritual peace for mankind with His Creator and Judge. It was the disclosure and revelation of God's benevolence, kindness, and love for mankind. It revealed God's readiness to forgive and to save.

All the glory, praise, and honor for such things belongs to the most high God, the God in the highest, the God of heaven. With a proper understanding and appreciation of the words, "*Peace on earth; good will toward men,*" we can heartily join the chorus of the heavenly hosts in the praise, "*Glory to God in the highest.*"

But who will be wise enough to take advantage of what God has offered? Who will come to enjoy this peace with God so extended through God's good will? Will you be among that number? You can be, but only by coming to Christ through obedience to the gospel. This calls for faith in Christ as the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of that faith, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. This is precisely what the Bible says we must do. We urge one and all to submit to God's Word.

* * * * *

Anger Without Sin

Ephesians 4:26, "*Be ye angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*" This is one of nearly five hundred Biblical references to anger, being angry, and wrath. Students of human behavior recognize anger as one of the most powerful emotions in the disposition of mankind. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Bible has much to say about it.

What is anger? It is a synonym for rage, fury, indignation, wrath, emotional excitement induced by intense displeasure. The intensity of anger is usually proportionate to the intensity of the displeasure. It is an unpleasant emotion, Anger can be moderated and

tempered by varying degrees of self-control and self-discipline. Anger is commonplace among people and manifests itself in many ways.

Some have the idea that becoming angry is sinful in itself. They equate anger with a lack of self-control and parallel being angry with the loss of temper. This is a mistaken notion. Sometimes, far too often, anger and lack of control go together, but not necessarily so. If it is true that being angry is sinful, then we have a real contradiction in the Bible because Christ became angry, but He never sinned. How can we understand the anger of the Lord, His apostles, and others? Christ, when angered, did not sin. Numerous times the apostles manifested anger in response to provocation, yet, did not sin. The text teaches that one can be angry and not sin.

Anger can be wrong and often is allowed to become sin. Anger certainly provides opportunity for sin. Anger is wrong when it is without provocation or for a justified reason. It is wrong to become angry over matters that do not warrant anger. Many temptations to sin confront us when we are angry that will not confront us under other conditions. But the Bible makes it clear that there is a difference between anger and sin just as there is a difference between all unpleasant circumstances and sin.

The Anger of God

We read of the anger and wrath of God, Christ, and the apostles. But when were they angry? What made them angry? Why were they angry? How did they behave when angry? When we learn these things we will learn about acceptable anger in contrast with sinful anger.

Studying the Scriptures that speak of the anger of God, we see His anger can be properly defined as righteous indignation. The Lord, because of His perfectness and holiness, His standard of righteousness, is angry at certain things. Nehemiah 9:17, "*...but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness...*" God is not quick to be angry nor hasty to manifest or execute His wrath. Nahum 1:3, "*The Lord is slow to anger.*" But in verse six, "*Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness*

of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him." The Scriptures also speak of His anger and wrath being hot, fiery, rendered with fury, kindled, and smoking. God is a God of wrath and anger.

Why Is God Angry?

What makes God angry? Surely, we ought to be angry at that which makes God angry. Exodus 22:22-24, *"Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless."*

Exodus 32:10, when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai and the people were practicing idolatry, *"Now therefore let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation."*

Grumbling and complaining provoked God's anger. Numbers 11:10, *"Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased."*

Some With Whom God Is Angry

Ezra 8:22 shows God's anger against those that forsake Him. *"His power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him."* Second Chronicles 28:11, *" Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which you have taken captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you."* God was angry at those who were angry against His people. He is angry against the heathen (Psalm 79:6). He is angry at those who go their own way (Psalm 106:39,40). The hypocrite is the object of His anger (Job 36:13; Matthew 23).

John 3:36, *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."* God is angry toward the disobedient (Colossians 3:5,6). His anger was against Moses when Moses offered excuses for not doing

as God told him (Exodus 4:14). Numbers 22:22 teaches God is angry toward those like Balaam who are willing to compromise with evil. Joshua 7:1, God was angry at Israel when there was sin in the camp until corrected.

Jesus looked with anger on those whose hearts were hardened against the truth (Mark 3:5). Twice He cleansed the temple (Matthew 12,21), and demonstrated a physical expression of anger toward those who desecrated the Father's house. The cruel, rebellious evildoers are the object of divine wrath because of what they do. God does not lose His temper or self-control. He is in full possession of Himself and what He does, yet, angered.

Are We Angry Like Him?

Seeing how God is angered at certain things, and since we are His children, will not these things also provoke anger within us? Is God pleased if we look with indifference at that which angers Him? Children of God do not take lightly or passively things which provoke God's wrath.

One British author said of himself and his work, "The tribute I am most eager to deserve is one that would say I am among those who will not take evil good-naturedly." A hindrance to truth comes from alleged friends of God who "take evil good-naturedly." God does not do that! The ability to become indignant at sin is Christlike.

The Warning

Seeing anger is not sin, we must heed the warning regarding it and "*sin not.*" Misdirected anger, without control, or with an evil motive, produces sin. Anger in defense of error is misguided. Anger that manifests itself in profanity, vengeance, saying and doing evil, is to be avoided. The Bible speaks of sinful anger that accomplishes no good but only harm. Genesis four, Cain was angry at Abel. Jonah four, Jonah was angry because God did not destroy Nineveh. But God "*repented*" or changed His mind when the people repented, changed their minds about sin. Jonah seems to have prefered destruction of them to salvation for them.

Luke fifteen, the elder brother's anger was born of jealousy. Matthew 21:46 and Luke 4:28,29 speaks of anger of the Pharisees and others who sought to destroy Jesus because the truth He taught applied to them, and they refused to accept it. Many get angry at preachers today for about the same reason.

Exodus 32:19, "*Moses' anger waxed hot.*" He was reckless in throwing down the tablets of stone upon which God had engraved the commandments. John 7:23, there was anger toward Jesus because He healed a man on the Sabbath Day. Anger was demonstrated against the apostles, such as stoning, imprisonment, beheadings, other persecutions. Such is sinful anger.

Let us cite other passages for additional study on the subject that pertains to sinful anger. Proverbs 15:18; 16:32; 19:19; 27:3,4; 29:8; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Matthew 5:22; Ephesians 4:31,32; Colossians 3:8; Titus 1:7; James 1:19,20.

Summary

As Ephesians 4:26 requires, learn what deserves anger and what does not. Learn to exercise anger with self-control and temperance. Avoid sinful anger and sinful manifestations of anger. Satan can use your anger if you permit it. But anger can be a blessing to you and to those around you when kept within the limits and boundaries of the Word of God. Let us work in developing the ability to be angry, using anger for righteousness' sake, but avoiding the sins that so often can and do accompany anger that gets out of control.

* * * * *

There must have been some liberals present at the contest between Elijah and the false prophets of Baal. When challenged to defend what they said, Scripture reads, "*And the people answered him not a word.*" (First Kings 18:21). You try to be fair with a liberal and ask him to back up what he loudly proclaims, his best and only defense is to act like those people. When truth was shown by Elijah the people accepted it. But not liberals!

Can We Afford Biblical Ignorance?

There are so many Scriptures dealing with the necessity of Biblical knowledge that we must confine ourselves to but a few in any one study. If the amount of Scripture pertaining to a subject is any measure of emphasis on the theme, then the knowledge of the Bible is one of the most emphatic teachings of the Bible. We shall center our thoughts on whether we can afford the "luxury" of not knowing the Bible. Is knowledge of the Bible an optional, take-it-or-leave-it matter? Can we afford it as an individual, or as a nation? There is a price that must be paid to have knowledge. Are we willing to pay it? There is also a price to be paid for ignorance. Are we willing to pay that?

Isaiah and Hosea were prophets of God during the same historical period some seven to eight hundred years before Christ. But they labored in different geographical areas. Isaiah worked in Judah in the south while Hosea was in the northern area of Israel. They faced common problems and their messages were similar. The same sins existed in both nations. They received about the same reaction from the people. The most prevalent sin among the people and at the root of their problems was ignorance of the will of God.

Isaiah 1:2-6

In Isaiah 1:2,3, "*Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider.*"

The ox and ass are among the least intelligent animals. Yet, the ox knew his owner and the ass knew the source of his supply. But the people of Judah were not only ignorant of the will of their Father, but were unwilling

to be otherwise. They "*doth not consider,*" that is, were not concerned.

The mistake that they were making is the same mistake that many are making today. As Isaiah, and all the prophets showed, the people were too busy in a society of relative plenty, enjoying their pleasure, centering their lives on earthly affairs, having neither the time or interest in being students of God's holy precepts.

Their rebellious attitude and ignorance of the Word of God had its results. Isaiah 1:4-6, "*Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*"

They had forsaken the Lord, provoking His wrath. Rather than making progress, as they had deceived themselves into thinking, "*they are gone backward.*" Does this not picture so much around us, even the liberal apostasy among some in the church in our time? The "*head is sick, and the whole heart faint.*"

In their ignorance, Isaiah was inspired to write that they would revolt more and more. Those who know not the truth of God have no deterrent to their continued rebellion. The ultimate result is seen in verse seven, "*Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.* He went on to tell how their land would become as Sodom and Gomorrah.

Isaiah 1:10

Not only was Judah's problem presented in this first chapter, but also the solution to their problem is found there. Verse ten, "*Hear the word of the Lord... give ear unto the law of our God.*" God did not want their assemblies while they were partaking of their sins. He

did not want their sacrifices while they remained in their abominations. Rather, Isaiah 1:16-20, "*Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil. Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye will be willing, and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*"

Knowledge, coupled with obedience, would bring blessings just as surely as ignorance coupled with rebellion spelled their doom. Do we learn the lesson now, or do we learn it later in our destruction?

Hosea Four

In Hosea four, this tenderhearted prophet preached to his people in Northern Israel. He probably lived to see Israel humiliated, swallowed by the invading Assyrians, and taken into captivity that permanently removed that nation from the scene.

Why did this happen? Hosea 4:6, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forsaken the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.*"

This was the nation that had heard such great prophets as Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and others. Admonitions, instructions, warnings galore had been sounded throughout the land for generations. There was no excuse for their ignorance. Opportunity had been theirs repeatedly to return to God. Their ignorance was willful and deliberate.

Again, we need to be reminded why they were so willing and deliberate in their ignorance. It bears repetition because it is not unlike many today. Verse seven, "*As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame.*" In their prosperity

we see what low levels of living they had reached. Hosea 4:1 says there was not truth in the land, no mercy, no knowledge of God. Swearing, lying, killing, stealing, adultery, blood-letting were their characteristics. When the knowledge of God's truth makes its exit from a people, the door is opened for the entrance of anything and everything vile and corrupt. Shades of our time!

The prophets would plead, "*Hear the word of Jehovah.*" But the people gave no heed. The national pulse beat grew weaker and weaker until the death of the nation was inescapable. What a high price to pay for ignorance of God's will! Ignorance demands its price and will extract it from those who are content to remain so.

Only to the Willing

A working knowledge of God's will comes only to those who are willing to pay the price in study, work, meditation, research, and devotion. No generation has had a monopoly on Biblical ignorance. But it is blatantly obvious that Biblical ignorance is at flood-tide in our time , and that is probably the most damning influence in the land, yea, the world. Biblical ignorance is the reason atheism exists. It is the foundation of the "new morality." It supports rebellion against authority, the rioting, drunkenness, prejudice, hatred, and uncontrolled crime. It all finds fertile soil in minds which know not and care not for the will of the Lord.

The conditions in Northern Israel as cited by Hosea, and those in Judah mentioned by Isaiah, are disturbingly similar to reports being published concerning our land. The law of God, being unalterably true, must be learned, respected, and obeyed. Seeking God's forgiveness through His Son, Jesus Christ, and resolving to let His way be the way we will go is the one and only preservation for our people. Unless we, the people, cease striving for pleasure, riches, satisfaction of the flesh above the holy and sacred things of God, how shall we escape what has overwhelmed nations of the past? Can we walk the pathway of desolation and degeneracy and not experience the same results that others have experience who preceded us? Is there any real reason to believe that we shall somehow be the first people to sucessfully

repeal the law of sowing and reaping? (Galatians 6:7,8); Proverbs 14:34).

First Corinthians and Romans

Two passages from Paul's inspired pen we want to mention convey a similar thought. First Corinthians 10:11, "*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*" Romans 15:4, "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.*"

Will we become simply another land, another people, worse than the ox and ass, and pay the high cost of low living that comes from Biblical ignorance? Does it not concern us that even our governmental agencies, the educational systems, the various elements of the media are attempting to crush from the minds of all they can reach the good influence of the Biblical message? Even religions are joining forces with admitted servants of the devil to retard knowledge of the Bible.

Or shall we determine that we shall learn, follow, and propagate the message of God to the world whose "*head is sick, and those heart is faint?*" The hour is late, and we are already seeing the price of Biblical ignorance being exacted in our society. It just takes one or two generations for truth to be removed from the minds of a society. We are already down the road of disaster a long way in many, many circles. What this means for our children and grandchildren should concern everyone. The only solution is Christ, and the only ones who shall proclaim Christ are those of us who say we believe He is the Son of God. In what way will you contribute to the advance of the cause of Christ among those around you?

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Redefining for Digression



JAMES W. BOYD

Words have meaning. But those who seek to take the church into realms of apostasy by their heresies redefine words to suit their goals. There is nothing wrong with the word, "change." But the change they seek is to change God's law to suit man. The word, "love," has long been abused to now mean acceptance of whatever anybody wants, unless they want the difference between right and wrong. Those kind of people are not to be "loved" as those who tolerate sin. "Progress" is a faovrable word, usually. But some mistakenly confuse what it is to progress with digress. Even "worship" is now said to call for the "Holy Wow!" What next? Changing words to suit their aim is the way of the transgressor, but the God's Word does not change to suit the whims of men.

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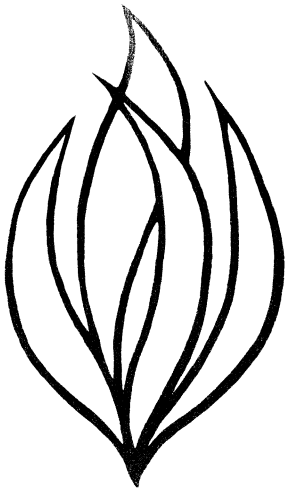

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIII Agnes W. Read **NUMBER 4**

Why Are We Losing Our Children?

We properly make great efforts to take the gospel to the whole world. Many noble deeds and sacrifices are being made by many people in this effort. God will bless them for it! At the same time, while it is not true of all, many are losing their children. Leaders in the church have suffered such losses. Compare the number of small children in Bible study with the number of young people in the teenage and young adult classes and you can see that somewhere along the line we have many "drop-outs." Faithful brethren who labor among the youth warn of the increasing apostasy among the young, the lack of genuine spirituality, a growing Biblical ignorance, disrespect for Biblical authority, and either the inability or unwillingness to stand for the truth even when taught. Again, we want to say this is not an indictment of all. But it is true of many, even many who have been reared in what we consider Christian homes.

From what are they being lost? To what are they being lost? They are being lost from the church, truth, efforts to restore New Testament Christianity in every generation. They are being lost to other religions, denominations, non-religion, anti-religion, atheistic and worldly pursuits. Many who are retained are lukewarm and indifferent. Some have estimated that as high as fifty per cent of our young people, "reared in the church," are leaving. What is being lost are precious souls. These are souls with good opportunity to go to heaven settling into a course of life that leads to hell.

Why is this drain taking place? Can we plug it before others go that way? Some years ago I spent several months inquiring, reading, interviewing, questioning young people, parents, teachers, anyone who has much to do with the spiritual life of the young, seeking answers to this problem. An analysis of my findings show there are a number of factors that are contributing to the loss of our young.

It Starts in the Home

Basically, the attitude and action of the home dominates the scene. The fault lies there more than any other place. We like to blame everybody and everything other than where the blame really lies. There is no profit in that approach. The home is not the sole cause, but it is probably the prime cause of the loss of the young. We need to take this medicine and do something about it. Parents cannot "play church," putting other things first, and then expect their young to put God first. It seldom happens. Parents have failed so often to teach by word and example what a Christian should be.

God placed the prime responsibility of spiritual training of a child on parents (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 11:19). We need to study, not just passively read, these verses. The first business of every parent is to see to it that the child knows God and his duty to God.

Parents display such attitudes that are sickening and disgusting. "They are young only once. Let them have their fun and good times." We need to lean that no time is a good time that does not put God first. To indulge the young is detrimental to them. They become ill-equipped to meet their sacred duties. This attitude implies that it is unpleasant to serve God. It is just a deprivation. It suggests that there is plenty of time someday to learn about God. To say they are young only once suggests that possibly God does not know that. Yet God says, Ecclesiastes 12:1, "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.*"

What Do You Expect?

Can we rear a child fifteen or so years in the atmosphere where God, the church, truth, Christianity, morality are secondary to school, games, television, pleasure, movies, etc. and expect them to be grounded in first things first? Children are taught at home what is of prime importance.

Can we allow children to pursue social interests, conform to the crowd, seek popularity, engage in

unchristian recreation, lasciviousness behavior, filling their minds with the moral trash produced by the degenerate minds of the movie, magazine,and television industries, and expect them to love the pure, noble, moral and clean things of life?

Can we hold out to them the idea that "success" is financial success, acceptance, worldly recognition, and expect them to follow the Christ who never sought such things?

Too many parents have neglected to teach and demonstrate in their own lives the loyalty God expects from a Christian. Yet, somehow, they think their children will seek what is good above all else. Yes, the problem of losing our young is first and foremost, above all else, a reflection of the home.

Other Situations

Some young people are lost when they enter into circumstances that discourage Christianity. Sometimes it may be unavoidable, such as when they might be forced from home into the armed forces. The trials are hard and they need every encouragement and prayer. Many are lost, or at least show their lack of concern for Christ, during the years when they seek higher formal education at colleges and universities where God and His will are considered irrelevant and stupid. Take a young boy or girl out of high school and sit him at the feet of some "wise" scoffer and mocker who take shots at God all the time, teaching infidelity as if he knew everything, it certainly has a detrimental effect on many youths. They hear the truth ridiculed and they do not know enough truth to resist the error, nor are they in a position to be able to defend it even if they were informed. The devil has many of his servants in the chairs of learning in our educational systems.

A Major Drain

Others are lost by disregarding the Lord's teaching regarding marriage. They marry outside the church and are further drawn away from the truth. They ignore God's laws on marriage and divorce (too often having

been led astray by false teachers in the church regarding this subject), and once finding themselves in a bad circumstance, they remain there rather than please God and repent of their sinful state and come out of it. Often young people are subjected to a divided home religiously, or to one or both parents being indifferent toward God. This has destroyed the faith that could and should have been nurtured.

Still others become the victims of those who constantly berate the Lord's church, criticize it, belittle it, and reduce it to nothing more than a denomination among denominations that needs restructuring. These liberal, lying, "new lights," often speak of the church as being out-of-date, answering questions nobody is asking, lacking love, full of tradition, hypocritical, stagnant, etc. How can any person constantly hear that Satanic barrage and have respect for the church? They lose interest when they are convinced of such harangue. Such critics often cater to, adopt, and admire the message and methods of denominations. They like to impress the young with their sensationalism, emotionalism, promotionalism, "jive talk," unorthodox dress and conduct. They create and then exploit what they call the "generation gap," and wean the young away from the wise counsel of faithful parents, godly elders, sound gospel preachers. They call for an abandonment of the past, whatever it was, and an adoption of the "new" even if it is not true.

Negligent Older People

Parents and church leaders and teachers too often sit idly by, complacent, gullible, naive, even cooperating with such things, and uproot the sound and solid religious heritage our young deserve. That heritage includes faith in God, love for family, love for the church of the Bible, the sanctity of the home, conformity to God's standards of morality. Too many young are being served huge helpings of modernism, immorality, compromise, permissiveness, foul speech, Marxism, anarchy, rebellion, "down with everything, and up with nothing." The "do your own thing" attitude has captured the souls of many, and this "go along to get along"

sickness that is often evident among some older people has taken many of the young away from God.

These critics of God's way are sometimes politicians whose personal lives are in shambles, educators who worship at the altar of their own wisdom, the social gospel clergymen who do not have much regard for the soul of man or his eternal destiny. Some act more like brotherhood "fun and games" directors who are called "youth ministers," who think it is the work of the church to provide playgrounds, gymnasiums, pleasure trips, etc., and put their emphasis there. Many "youth seminars" have been little more than sessions to convince the youth that the elderships, gospel preachers, and parents who hold to the Word of God, are "irrelevant." Too many youth leaders impose the adventuresome, inquisitive spirit of youth to exploring paths that have repeatedly proven digressive. The efforts of godly and determined Christian parents have no more deadly enemy among the young that these flighty, flippant, "cute," know-it-all youth workers who constantly ape liberal digressives and degrade the Lord's church, and ridicule the nobility of the past.

The church has a role regarding parents and youth. It is the same role that it sustains to all people, young and old. It is not to assume the work of the parents and home, providing recreation, secular education, etc. It ought not coddle and condone sins regardless of who is involved. Rather than thinking the answer lies with singles classes, single again classes, youth seminars where brainwashing goes on, week-end retreats that take the young away from Lord's Day congregational worship in favor of "lakeside worship," the church has the God-given task of preaching and teaching the same saving gospel to everyone. To "*preach the word*" by reproving, rebuking, and exhorting is the work of the church. Ignorance of the Word of God and the lack of respect for it is at the heart and base of the loss of young people. It would be better to study the Word rather than engage in "problem solving" where participants share ignorance. The church deserves the full support and cooperation by every home in assisting in such efforts.

Did You Ever Consider This?

We must add that parents have a duty to other parents. It is sinful to place stumbling blocks before young people. Parents and their young are responsible for their influence. It is not merely "my own business" what my young people do, where they go, how they dress, what they are allowed to do. Inasmuch as young people influence one another, and peer pressure is heavy, parents have the responsibility to see to it that their young set a good example. It is not unheard that young people who are trying to do right, and parents who are trying to train them right, meet with the most aggravating opposition from other "Christian" parents and young people who are content to follow the world. We have heard it said, "It's nobody's business but ours if my children attend the dance." That is as false as a three dollar bill. Every member of the church, parent, child, elderships, preachers, all are effected adversely. We need to ask if the influence of our home is contributing to the cause of Christ and encouraging Christlike conduct, or is it as often as not like the influence of the sinful world.

Every young person is a gift from God. None can be lost without it being an eternal loss. Experience warns that many do fall away. Let us resolve that we shall make that number as small as possible. Teach the young, show the young, what being a Christian really is. Follow the teaching of the Bible, not the ways of the world. Show them how to resist the influences that are evil when they cannot avoid them. But many of these influences can be avoided with parental concern, teaching, and guidance.

There is not one young person we can afford to lose. Are you really willing for your son or daughter to go to hell? Certainly, you are not. Just how studious and diligent are your efforts, at home and in the local church, to see to it that they follow Christ?

* * * * *

One of the tragic realities of recent years is how many schools, colleges, and universities operated by brethren are now more a hindrance to faithfulness among the young than helpers of the home to keep them strong and build them up.

Paul In Rome

One way that we can learn God's truth is to observe the demonstration of Christianity as practiced by the Lord's apostles. We can see what actions and attitudes God expects of His people. This is the approach of this lesson.

Certainly, Paul was one of God's noblemen. So much is to be learned from his life that we must restrict ourselves in any one study to something specific. We want to observe Paul when he was in Rome as is recorded for us in Acts 28:16-31. Before continuing this reading, we invite you to read the text from your New Testament, then return to our comments.

At this time Paul was in Rome as a prisoner. Although a prisoner, he did have some special privileges because he was living in his "*own hired house*" with privileges of receiving visitors. He was allowed to teach and preach while there with considerable freedom. Just why he enjoyed this unusual circumstance we are not informed, but possibly it was because he was a Roman citizen, and as a Christian he was opposed by many Jews which Romans considered problems anyway.

Why Was He in Rome?

Paul was there as a prisoner because he had been falsely accused by the Jews in Jerusalem as having violated the law of Moses, broken Jewish customs, defiled the temple, desecrating what the Jews considered holy and sacred, and other such crimes. These accusation were based on prejudice and misunderstanding of what Paul was saying and doing, and founded on distortion of his actions. Only by the intervention of Roman authorities was Paul's life spared from a riotous mob in Jerusalem and from others who intended to assassinate him. It seems if the Romans had their way concerning Paul he would have been set free. But because of the insistence of the Jews that he not be released, but tried before them under threatening conditions, Paul made an appeal to go before Caesar. He could to this because he was not only a Jew

but a Roman citizen. This citizenship granted him this privilege.

It was after a series of hearings before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa that he was sent to Rome. He was now in Rome awaiting his trial before Caesar.

Paul called for the Jewish leaders in Rome to visit him. It may seem strange that he would call for representatives of the very people that had caused him to have to be in Rome. The Jews had been his persecutors, not his allies. But Paul knew that the most favorable way of spreading the gospel of Christ was to preach to Jews first. This he had done on his various tours. He and the Jews already had many things in common in addition to being of the same nationality. They both believed in the reality and authority of God. They both served the true God of heaven. They both believed the message of the prophets of the coming Messiah. What Paul wanted to tell the Jews in Rome is how Christ had fulfilled these prophecies and all men must come to God through Him. They shared a strong religious heritage.

The Jews that visited Paul had not heard of the charges that had been made against him, but they had heard about Christians, who they called a sect, and how "*everywhere it had been spoken against.*" (Acts 28:22). Paul wanted to tell them of Christ, contending that he had been bound because of his proclamation of "*the hope of Israel.*" (Acts 28:20). Since God's promises to Abraham and that "*in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,*" (Genesis 22:18), Israel had looked for the Messiah, the hope of Israel. He would not only be the hope of Israel, but for the whole world.

Paul's Message

Just what did Paul preach when he preached on the hope of Israel? Acts 28:23 says that "*he expounded and testified the kingdom of God.*" Verse thirty-one, "*Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ...*" Paul was preaching Christ and the church just as Peter had done on Pentecost, as Philip had done in Samaria, and gospel preachers have done down through the years. The kingdom of God, which is

the church, and Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, offers not only the hope for Israel, but for the world.

As one listens to much that is being preached in the religious world today it is significant to observe that Paul did not preach the philosophies and speculations of men. He was not preaching the continuation of the law of Moses, social reform with "band-aid" programs of activity, nor did he dwell on the political, military, and economic issues of his day. While those issues existed, and were of relative importance, they did not constitute the burden of the messages of inspired men. Nor should they be the subject of our messages today. Christ, "*the hope of glory,*" (Colossians 1:27), was the theme of apostolic preaching, along with the proclamation of all things pertaining to His kingdom.

One reason the world is not more impressed with the glory of Christ in our time is because too many who profess to preach the gospel have diverted their attention away from Christ and His church to other matters, especially the secular and mundane matters. Such reduction of the emphasis on Christ and the church has taken a deadly toll. It is not too uncommon to hear some deride the preaching that centers on Christ and His church. Matters "more relevant" are what some want. But what is more relevant for any generation than the saving truth of the Savior and the saved?

He Backed It Up

As with other preachers of truth, like the other apostles and New Testament evangelists, Paul gave full proof of His message. Paul once wrote, "*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*" (First Thessalonians 5:21). John wrote, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" (First John 4:1). Paul documented his message with an appeal and reference to the inspired prophets of old which the Jews already respected. He turned to the Scriptures. Bible students will remember the nobility of those in Berea who searched the Scriptures to determine what they heard was the truth (Acts 17:11).

Paul told the Galatians that the law was a schoolmaster "*to bring us unto Christ.*" (Galatians 3:24). Hebrews 10:1 pictures the system under Moses as "*a shadow of good things to come.*" The promises and prophecies that God delivered through the prophets of the Old Testament form a foundational basis and evidence to prove that Jesus is the fulfillment if those things that had gone before Him.

On Pentecost Peter cited Joel and David as prophets concerning Christ and the day of Pentecost. Others quoted from Jeremiah, Isaiah, Habakkuk, Zechariah, Daniel, Moses, in fact, all the prophets had foretold of those days concerning Christ and His kingdom (Acts 3:24). Just as Paul had done in Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and other cities, "*he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures.*" (Acts 17:2).

What the World Needs Now

How the world today needs the message of the Scriptures! First Peter 4:11, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" Second Timothy 4:2, "*Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine.*" Titus 2:1, "*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.*" He added in verse eight, "*Sound speech, that cannot be condemned.*" Second John 9, "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son.*" Second Timothy 3:16,17, "*All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" A "*thus saith the Lord*" may not always be what people want, but it is always what people need, and must hear. It may not be popular, but it is proper.

The Reaction

The reaction to Paul's preaching and teaching in Rome was much as it had been in other places where he had preached the gospel. Acts 28:24, "*And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.*" There

was even confusion and division among those who heard Paul and "*they agreed not among themselves.*" (Acts 28:25). Were these reactions really very different than those we see today when the gospel is preached?

Paul's reaction to their reaction is noteworthy. Having seized the opportunity given to him to preach the truth, and seeing it dismissed by some of them, he once again cited the words of the Old Testament, this time from Isaiah, where he had commented on the hard hearts of the people, and how they closed their ears and eyes to the truth. There were times when Paul remained for extended periods to continue to preach the gospel among those that were receptive. There were times when he had shaken the dust off his feet and moved to another place. Here he could not leave, being a prisoner, but he rebuked those who rejected the truth nonetheless, as Jesus had done recorded in Matthew 13:15.

But the rejection of some did not provoke him to forsake the preaching of the message. He turned to the Gentiles as he had done so many times (Acts 28:28). After all, he had taught that the gospel was needed by all, and was offered to all. He continued to preach the Christ and His kingdom as opportunity was afforded him for two years, receiving all who came to him.

What was the disposition of Paul's trial in Rome is not told us in Scripture. Tradition, and certain indications in Scripture, suggest that he was released, travelled extensively into other areas, only to be arrested the second time, returned to Rome, and executed. Be that as it may be, if the Holy Spirit had wanted to concentrate on those things we would have been given information regarding it, but we have what is adequate.

Why He Did As He Did

Why did Paul do as he did in Rome? Was it not because of his strong desire for others to be saved, such as he had expressed in Romans 10:1? Was it not because he knew the gospel was God's power unto salvation? (Romans 1:16). Was he not trying to fulfill what he considered an obligation? (Romans 1:14).

With patience, determination, knowledge, personal sacrifice, courage, and self-denial, Paul preached the unsearchable riches of Christ and His church. Even though imprisoned, he never slacked his pace. He had "*not shunned to declare... all the counsel of God.*" (Acts 20:27).

The gospel was preached to all the known world in the lifetime of the apostles (Colossians 1:23). It was not done because it was easy, or because they had such modern "miracles" of communication as we have whereby we can cover wide and vast areas with the gospel with a single voice. It was because there were people of the kind and quality of Paul.

The world now needs to hear the message of truth. What the world does with it after hearing it is the world's responsibility. But that the world has opportunity to hear it is the responsibility of you and me as Christians. Preaching the truth to the lost and the saved is still the primary mission of God's people. If we would develop and cultivate the same attitudes and actions as characterized men like Paul, we would soon be able to say of our age what was said in Paul's age, that the gospel "*was preached to every creature which is under heaven.*" (Colossians 1:23).

* * * * *

If things go as planned, the issue you are presently reading will be mailed sometime near August first, or thereabouts. This simply means that we shall be in the midst of summer months.

Where I live there are a number of congregations, and many are small as far as membership, but they are strong believers in preaching the gospel. Therefore, there are many gospel meetings in progress throughout the summer. In fact, you could almost find a gospel meeting somewhere nearly every evening.

Brethren, we should support gospel meetings. Truth is being taught, the lost being saved, the saved being strengthened, the wayward restored ,and God glorified.

Simon's Heart Trouble

The book of Acts has been called the book of conversions because there are several accounts of men and women being converted to Christ. In Acts two we read of the Jews on Pentecost. Acts eight tells us of the Ethiopian and the Samaritans. Acts nine and twenty-two informs about Saul of Tarsus, later known as the apostle Paul. Acts ten gives us the conversion of the Gentile, Cornelius. Acts sixteen is the record of Lydia and the Philippian jailor. Acts eighteen tells of those in Corinth.

We want to focus attention on one man who was converted when Philip preached to the Samaritans (Acts 8), but who did not remain faithful. In Acts we learn not only the way an alien sinner becomes a child of God, but also what one must do to be restored if he falls away.

The gospel was originally taken to Samaria by Philip, who is called an evangelist in Acts 21:8. It is significant that a Jew took the saving message of God to the Samaritans. The Jews and Samaritans had no association with each other politically, socially, geographically, and religiously. Their animosity toward each other stemmed from many years in the past. When Israel was overrun by Assyria and depopulated by the captors, except for a few, the Assyrians imported others into the land who became the ancestors of the Samaritans. There was some inter-marriage between these imported people and the remaining Israelites to whom a priest was sent to teach the people the law of Moses. Gradually, these people of mixed blood adopted a form of Judaism, having their own temple, their own mountain of worship, sharing with the Jews the expectation of a Messiah to come, who would be the Savior of the world.

Rejected by the Jews

But because of the defilement of the bloodline, the Jews disavowed them. Their troubles began as far back as Judah's return from Babylonian captivity and the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. By Jesus' day the racial feelings were intense. They considered one another as dogs, refusing to eat with each other, or have association, considering each other as outcasts. Once the Samaritans refused to allow Jesus, a Jew, to remain overnight in their area. So a Jew, Philip, taking the gospel to the Samaritans is noteworthy. He obviously considered the value of their souls regardless of other attitudes. He must have realized that the gospel is for all and that all needed the gospel.

The Gospel and the Response

What did Philip preach in Samaria? Acts 8:5 says he preached Christ. Verse twelve says he preached concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. What Philip preached was Christ and the church.

The people heard this message and gave heed to it (verse six). Philip verified his message by performing miracles (verse seven). He was one of the seven in Acts six on whom the apostles had laid their hands, evidently granting them power to do what they did (Acts 6:6). The people believed what they were taught and were baptized, men and women (verse twelve). We learn from other Scriptures the necessity of confessing Christ to be saved. So we can observe what Philip preached and what the people did. They heard the word, believed it, repented, confessed Christ, and were baptized. This brought great joy to the city (verse eight). There were miracles of healing to document the authority of the words preached. Salvation from sin belonged to them through the long-anticipated Savior.

Among those who heard and obeyed was this man named Simon. He had been a sorcerer who bewitched, tricked, deceived the people with his antics into believing that he was some great one. But when he heard the truth of salvation through Christ, he believed and was baptized (verse thirteen). Sometimes it is surprising who will obey the gospel. Some you think will, will not; and some you think do not care will obey.

We note how some people today say that Simon was not sincere in what he did and was never really saved. Of course, there is no evidence whatever for that contention, but there is great motivation for them to say that because they hold to the false doctrine of "once saved; always saved," and it distresses them to see one who had heard, believed, and obeyed later found in spiritual disaster. Simon disproves their false doctrine. But they love that doctrine. Therefore, they make the charge that Simon was not sincere. They contend that anybody who ever turns away from the truth never really believed the truth anyway. This is the only way they can prop up their doctrine in the face of the overwhelming evidence that one can come to Christ but later disavow the very Lord he once confessed. We wonder if Simon's sincerity would ever have been questioned if the record merely stopped with his baptism and did not tell about his apostasy. Do you not find it of some import that Luke, God's inspired writer, said that Simon believed, just like the others? Have we any substance to doubt his sincerity anymore than the sincerity of those others who did the same thing he did? This only shows the absurd limits some will go to hold to their false doctrines in spite of the Biblical record.

Luke said he was baptized in faith. Jesus had promised, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*" Do you suppose Jesus was unfaithful to His promise, and just withheld salvation from Simon so this false doctrine could be upheld? When a person does what the Lord commands, are we in a position to say he is insincere until he either admits it, or God reveals it? A person's sincerity, like his understanding, is between that person and God. True, one cannot be taught wrong and obey right. But Simon was taught right and did what he was taught. We have no legitimate alternative but to respect him as a saved man once he had been baptized.

Apostles Come Down

Later, Peter and John, who were apostles, came to Samaria to lay hands on certain brethren granting them miraculous powers, just as they had done for Philip. Philip evidently did not have the power to allow others to perform miracles. This was an exclusive power of the

apostles. When Simon saw what the apostles could do, he wanted that power and offered to buy it (Acts 8:18,19).

Simon made two glaring errors. First, he was not interested in that power for the good he could accomplish for others. This is made evident when Peter told him his heart, the seat of motives, was not right. Second, he thought this power could be bought. There are always people who think money can buy anything. But they, like Simon, have to learn that many things money cannot buy.

The Source of His Trouble

At the root of his trouble was a heart problem. We speak not of the vital blood pump in the physical body, but the mind of man, the center of his thinking, understanding, reasoning, etc. Peter told him, Acts 8:20, 21, 23, "*Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God... For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.*"

Let me insert here a reminder that the Good News For Modern Man, sometimes called Today's English Version of the Bible, which is a gross wresting and distortion of God's Word and nothing but an inferior commentary and paraphrase, has Peter saying, in terms of profanity to Simon, "May you and your money go to hell..." Peter never said that. Peter never used such language. The TEV, like the RSV, NIV, LB, etc. are perversions of the Bible, not versions. We have yet to hear from a person, in or out of the church, that could justify the promotion of such volumes that blatantly abuse the Scriptures and teach error!

Simon was on his way to perdition in his spiritual state because his heart had become corrupt. He was not right with God. It is not that he never had been right, but he was not right then. He had been once saved, upon obedience to the terms of salvation. But he had turned away to such an extent that Peter describes him as being "*in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.*" Who could contend that anyone in such a state as that was

still among the saved? Simon is an example of the person that Peter describes in Second Peter 2:20-22.

Now What Would He Do?

Would Simon remain in that apostate condition? Peter told him what he had to do to be forgiven. Acts 8:22, "*Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*" Repent and pray is the way of restoration. Simon was not told to repent and be baptized again. This he had already done. When he obeyed the gospel he was saved from his past sins, and, like those on Pentecost, was added to the church (Acts 2:47). Now, as a child of God who had strayed, he was told to repent and pray.

John also wrote something pertinent to such a one in First John 1:9, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" Taking all that Scripture instructs the Christian who has fallen, we learn he must repent, confess his sins, and pray to God for forgiveness. This is not the way for one to become a Christian, but the way for a Christian who has fallen to be restored.

Thankfully, we read that Simon's attitude toward his condition was obviously penitent and he requested that his brethren pray for him also (Acts 8:24). He was made right with God once again.

Some Have a Similar Problem

The reason some never become Christians is because they have heart trouble. Their heart is hard and they refuse to hear and heed. But some, who once favorably responded to the Master's call, have turned back into the ways from which they came. One cannot be saved in heaven when he turns back into sin and leaves the fold of the Lord. The reason some remain unfaithful, even though they once started out right, is because they have heart trouble. Until one will give respect to the will of God and do what God says, there is no way to be saved.

* * * * *

Falling Need Not Mean Failing

We recognize the great spiritual power and success of the Bible heroes. Many of these are specifically named in Hebrews eleven and other places. There is a tendency to view these people as being more than men, bigger than life, almost superhuman and different from the rest of us, as if this difference explains their success and power.

They were different, but because they became different. Their difference was acquired and learned. Basically, they were no different from the rest of us as far as being human is concerned. The great qualities for which they are noted can also be possessed by each of us.

Have you noticed how some of the Bible heroes erred during certain periods of their lives? Indeed, they are examples to follow (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11). They are examples to us in three ways. Sometimes they are deserving of being followed. Sometimes they exemplify what should be avoided. There are also records of them that show us how to recover and revive when we have been overcome or fallen.

As we seek to imitate their good, unless we accept them as men and not superhuman gods, unless we consider their blunders and sins as well as their strengths and goodness, we may likely despair in our own times of weakness and stumbling. We might even be tempted to give up and quit trying because we can never be as they were. We run the risk of writing ourselves off as failures and abandon the effort to live the life of a Christian.

Falling and Failing

It is not uncommon for people to sin (Romans 3:23). This is not an attempt to justify our sins, but to merely explain a reality. We sin, then often we ask ourselves, "Where did I fail?" We want to impress upon each reader

as they read this lesson that there is a difference between falling and failing. This is not just a matter of semantics, but a very true and real consideration of spiritual conditions. Failure is not necessarily determined by one fall, or even several falls. Failure is determined by how we react and rebound when we fall. Failure can be the result of falling, but it does not have to be that way.

Success depends upon faithfulness, not perfection. If we must be perfect, sinlessly perfect, to get to heaven none shall ever get there (Romans 3:23; First John 1:8-10; First Corinthians 10:12). When we sin, we can do something about it. We must do something about it. While some might teach that we are "automatically covered by the grace of God" when we sin, this is deceptive and misleading. Some also teach that we are totally passive regarding forgiveness of our sins and we have nothing to do. The Bible does not teach salvation by grace alone. Those who so teach are false teachers.

We want to consider the sins of some great and faithful people of God, not to degrade them, but to note their reaction when confronted with their sins. Surprisingly, some fell in the very areas of their acknowledged strength. But once they sinned, that was not the end of things.

Abraham

Abraham was commendable in so many ways. He is called the "*friend of God.*" (James 2:23). Galatians 3:9 identifies him as "*faithful Abraham.*" The term "father of the faithful" is derived from this passage, alongside Galatians 3:29.

When God called Abraham to leave his home in Ur and go to the place that God designated (Genesis 12:1), verse four says, "*So Abraham departed.*" His faith led him to act as God directed.

Hebrews 11:17, "*By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac...*" This was another manifestation of his great faith. Yet, In Genesis twelve, Abraham lied about his wife Sarah, saying that she was just his sister.

He did this to protect himself, fearing that someone might kill him and take her if they knew she was his wife. This was most certainly a lack of confidence in the providence of God to preserve him and fulfill the promises made unto him. He did this not just once, but twice (Genesis 20).

Even after God had promised him a son by Sarah, he consented to be party to a scheme devised by Sarah whereby he might have a child through Hagar. Inasmuch as Hagar was Sarah's handmaid, it would be considered Sarah's child. But this was not God's plan nor His promise. Once again we see the lack of faith in God and His promises, His power, by this man who is now known as a man of great faith. Surely, he never disbelieved God would give him an heir, but stumbled over how God would do it. These were colossal blunders on his part. None could question he had fallen in these instances.

Once realizing how weak he had been, Abraham could have cried, "I have failed, I am too weak, I am unworthy, there is no hope for me, I am not worth saving, there is no use trying anymore." Sometimes people say and act that way when they sin. But that is not what he did. Someone has suggested that the trail of Abraham could almost be traced by the smoke that ascended from the many altars of sacrifice he made. He "kept on keeping on," following the directions of God. He persisted in being obedient in spite of these setbacks.

Noah

Consider the man Noah. He was doubtless a person of tremendous moral strength and personal conviction. He lived in such a wicked age (Genesis 6:5). But he kept himself clean and withstood the pressures to follow the majority to destruction. He was strong enough to lead his own family safely through the punishment that was wrought against the wicked. He and his were spared in the flood. All of us who are parents would do well if we would be as successful with our children as was Noah in sparing them from drowning. Noah is said to have walked uprightly and was a perfect man, walking with God, a good man and obedient (Genesis 6:9,22).

Yet, after the flood, and after the crisis of his life, we find Noah in a drunken state, unclothed, and involved in something evil, possibly immorality. Other sins are implied in Genesis 9:22. We wonder how a man of his stature could stoop so low.

He could have reacted to this sin by saying, "I have failed, there is no good in me, I am hopeless and beyond repair, I may as well do as the wife of Job once advised, just curse God and die." Some think that when they sin.

But in spite of his folly, he recognized his sin. We conclude this because he is held before us as an example to mankind. His penitent spirit is evidenced in that God allowed him to live another three hundred fifty years beyond the flood. He is called by Peter a "*preacher of righteousness.*"

David

David, the most glorious king of Judah, having survived ridicule, injustices, pursuit of enemies, the threat of death from heathens as well as his own countrymen, from Saul to the Philistines, having won every war in which he was involved, is surely described properly as a man of nobility, purity, wisdom, and the highest resolutions and intentions.

In spite of these outstanding qualities, the Bible student is aware of the sin of David with Bathsheba, and the multiplied sins he committed trying to improperly cover his sin.

But David's fall did not result in his total failure. Later, when the great prophet, Nathan, confronted him with the enormity of his crimes, he acknowledged them, confessing, "*I have sinned.*" Even though hardship stalked his steps from that day until his death overtook him, he returned to a right relationship with God. Had he not done so, his fall would have certainly meant his failure, even eternal failure.

Peter

What a tremendous man was the apostle Peter. We all admire him. He was the one who confessed, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" He also once said, "*To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" He insisted that his love for Christ was so strong that he would die for the Lord before he would ever deny Him. He is known for his confessions. But he is also known for his denials of Christ. He did the very thing that he was so certain he would never do. He even cursed and swore regarding it. Three times his denials rang out.

That could have been the beginning of the end for Peter. But is was not to be. He realized his evil deeds and went out and wept bitterly. He later rejoined his fellow apostles and spent his life working, preaching, suffering, standing firm for the cause of His Savior. His life is a far greater confession of Christ than the denials he uttered.

From each of these we learn the lesson that to fall need not mean to fail. There are others we could cite, such as John Mark, who quit in the middle of a missionary tour with Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas saw in Mark potential that Paul did not at first see. Later, however, Mark received strongly worded commendations from Paul as being one who was useful and deserving of being accepted by the churches. The Holy Spirit chose him to be one of the writers that told of events during the life of the Son of God on earth.

Paul and Others

Paul was once a blasphemer, a persecutor. But he later became a preacher and an apostle of Christ.

The "prodigal son" wasted his life and substance (Luke 15). But he later came to himself and returned home to his loving father.

The Jews cried out for the crucifixion of Jesus. But many of these same Jews became the first members of the church of Christ on Pentecost.

Simon, the sorcerer, so fell as to be described by Peter as being "*in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.*" Yet, he repented and prayed for forgiveness.

Possibly, we have witnessed runners in a race, who stumbled and momentarily lost ground, only to make the comeback and win the prize. We have seen athletic teams blunder and fumble and make mistakes and look as if they were trying to lose. But they rallied and won the contest.

It Could Happen

Even though one could well be a failure because of a fall, these people did not allow it to happen. Neither should we. They took renewed courage and arose with determination to stay in the good fight and "keep on keeping on." They were crowned with success.

We do read of some who fell and failed because they did not recover. We think of Cain, Saul, the first king of Israel, Judas, Demas, and others who left their first love.

James 5:19,20, "*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*" James 5:16a, "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another...*" Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*" First John 1:9, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" Acts 8:22, "*Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*" Revelations 2:5a, "*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works...*"

Our Primary Thought

These passage teach that, even though one falls, he need not fail. He can be restored. He can come back to the Lord. He can start anew. What a glorious thought that God has so loved us that He has not only provided the

way for us to come to Christ and be saved from past sins and enter fellowship with Him, but should we make the tragic mistake of ever turning from Him, He has provided the way for us to come back to Him. Can we ever question the extent of the love of God?

One truly fails when he never comes to Christ, the only One who can save. He truly fails when, after coming to Christ but returning to the ways of sins, is not restored again to Christ. One succeeds when he comes to Christ and then lives faithfully, dying "*in the Lord.*"

We would encourage every reader to take heart. Regardless of what has been in the past, you can go to heave. "*Though your sins be as scarlet, they can be as white as snow.*"

* * * * *

The book of Psalms is unique in many ways. It not only contains the shortest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 134 containing only three verses and fewer words than any other, but also the longest chapter, Psalm 119, with 176 verses. Also, it contains more chapters than any other book.

People who love the Lord have often turned to the inspired writings in Psalms, finding the guidance, comfort, encouragement, strength, for themselves as they see unfolded before them the matchless wisdom, power, glory, and grandeur of God.

May we suggest that you make greater use of this marvelous portion of inspired Scripture as you study. You can be sure you will never exhaust the beauty, information, wisdom, and confirmation of truth that you will find there. It will always lift your soul and give you greater determination to continue faithful in the service of the true and living God the book glorifies. JB

* * * * *

Helping the Home in Crisis



JAMES W. BOYD

We are facing a crisis with respect to the homes in our land. Divorce is running rampant and the merciless toll upon men, women, chidren, the church, and the natin is devestating. How can the church help in this situation?

We must be compassionate toward those who have problems. But we must teach them God's will regarding the home, marriage, divorce, remarraige. The false doctrines some are teaching do not help, but hinder. We must not be guilty of trying to accommodate the sins of the world, but teach people the forgiveness of sins comes through repentance and correction of the evil ways of life.

Because so many marriages have been broken without scriptural grounds, and because so many have remarried without God's permission, some seem to think the solution is to teach a different gospel regarding the subject. The truth, and only the truth, makes us free (John 8:32), not the ways of the world.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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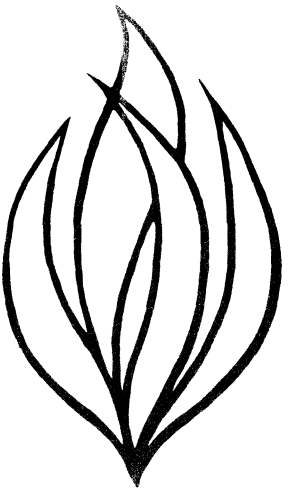

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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Know Your Bible

NUMBER ONE

The Bible, the Book of books, the Scriptures, is the Word of God. Second Timothy 3:16,17 teaches it is inspired of God, therefore infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient, written by over forty men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. They lived and wrote in a variety of places, using different languages, of different occupations, possessed different levels of learning, over a period of some fifteen hundred years.

One indisputable evidence of the divine guidance of the Bible is its unity. Composed of sixty-six books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament, yet one book, with one theme (God's plan for redeeming man), one purpose (the salvation of man from sin), and one central Person (Jesus Christ). Without contradictions within, it is perfectly fitted together, the result of miraculous oversight by Deity in composition.

Man's Greatest Need

Man needs salvation from sin and knowledge how to live. This he can have by coming to Christ through faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ. But he first must know what to believe (Romans 10:13ff). This calls for study (Second Timothy 2:15), a duty too often neglected or given secondary importance.

Knowledge of the Bible is essential to know how to live. It is not in man to direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23). Scripture provides information as to purpose, meaning, and significance of life. It answers the question, "*If a man die, shall he live again?*" Without this knowledge he cannot make proper decisions in life, discerning good from evil (Hebrews 5:14). To what other source can man turn with confidence to solve problems we face? "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Father.*" (Matthew 4:4). This Word is a "*lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway.*" (Psalm 119:105). Without the Bible we cannot know what is of true and everlasting value, or how to set priorities in life. From the Bible we learn how to rear

our children, live alongside others, be useful in life. More important, we learn how to have eternal life in heaven with God and the redeemed (John 5:39).

In this lesson we shall show this unity of the Bible as one story from start to finish. We shall get a panoramic view of its message, presenting the relationship of one part to other parts, focusing attention on Bible study, Bible knowledge, Bible application in life. We want to be motivated to learn and tell the old, old story.

We Begin With Genesis

Genesis informs us of the origin of all things, including the world, mankind, everything God created by the power of His Word. The first man and woman were Adam and Eve. From them have come all people. We read of them in the Garden of Eden, a Paradise, before the intrusion of sin that resulted from submission to Satanic temptation. They were driven from the garden.

Their first two sons, Cain and Abel, were examples of worshippers. Abel offered his sacrifice by faith, doing as God said. Cain went his own way. Jealousy by Cain provoked him to commit the first murder, killing Abel.

The descendants of the first pair were both good and evil. We read of patriarchs like Enoch, who walked with God, and Methusalah, who lived nine hundred sixty nine years. But as generations followed, the world grew worse and worse, more and more sinful, until God repented He had made man and determined to cleanse the world of wickedness. Hence, the flood came in the time of Noah, and the preservation of the race by the ark.

After the flood, the earth was repopulated, and men once again turned from God, building for themselves a tower to serve as a monument to themselves and prevent their dispersion. It was left unfinished, however, when God confused their tongues. It is called the Tower of Babel.

Enter Abraham and Family

God called Abraham to leave the Ur of Chaldees and go as God directed him. This is a milestone in revelation.

God gave Abraham great promises, such as he would be the father of a great nation, his descendants numberless like the sands of the seas and stars of heaven. God would bless those that blessed him, and curse those that cursed him. His people would have a land of their own. The greatest promise was that through his seed, all nations would be blessed. This referred to Christ (Galatians 3:16). At the time the promises were given, Abraham was old and without children. Nonetheless, each promise came to pass, and the story of the Bible from that time forward is the record of God keeping His promises made.

Abraham went to Canaan with Sarah, his wife, and Lot, his nephew. We read of his prosperity, sojourns into Egypt, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the rescue of Lot, the episode with Hagar and Ishmael, and eventually the birth of the promised son, Isaac.

Following Isaac there came Jacob, the father of twelve sons, who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. A most interesting record is given regarding one son, Joseph, being sold into slavery, his life in Egypt at Potiphar's house, in prison, and finally before Pharoah to whom he interpreted dreams that foretold of coming years of plenty to be followed by famine. Joseph was elevated to second in rank throughout all Egypt.

During the famine, Jacob's other sons came to Egypt to buy grain. They had to make their purchase from Joseph, whom they thought was dead. In time, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, and all of Jacob's family moved into Egypt, into the land of Goshen. There they grew into a nation, only to later be enslaved when a different Pharoah became fearful of them.

Moses On the Scene

When Israel was suffering in bondage, and every effort was made to exterminate them, Moses was born. Moses was reared in the palace of Pharoah as the son of Pharoah's daughter, and lived there his first forty years. At his effort to deliver an Israelite from an Egyptian taskmaster by killing him, Moses was forced to flee Egypt, and spent his second forty years tending the flocks of Jethro, who had become his father-in-law.

The third forty year period of Moses' life began with God calling him from the burning bush to lead Israel into deliverance and to the land of Canaan, the land of promise. The reluctant Moses accepted the task, returned to Egypt, demanded Pharoah to free Israel. But it was not until the accomplishment of the ten plagues that Israel was allowed to leave. Israel was spared destruction from Pharoah's effort to recapture Israel by passing through the Red Sea on dry land.

Moses led Israel to Mt. Sinai where God gave Israel the law that was to govern that nation until the coming of the "*seed*" of Abraham, Jesus Christ. For forty years Moses led Israel, listening to the constant complaints and murmurings of the Jews until they reached the eastern banks of the Jordan River. There Moses relinquished the leadership to Joshua, and died in Mt Nebo, or Mt. Pisgah. Through the forty years of wanderings by Israel in the wilderness God provided them water and manna to eat, guiding them by day with the cloud and the pillar of fire by night.

The Rest of the Pentateuch

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy reveal the contents of the law that God gave Israel through Moses that governed every facet of life. The Law of Moses was for Israel alone, never a universal law from God for all people. Just precisely what was the relationship of God and the rest of the people of the world during this Mosaic Age is not altogether revealed. The story of the Bible is the story of God's plan for saving man, and the Savior who was to come through Israel. This explains the inclusion of God's dealings with Israel as well as the limited information regarding God's relationship with other peoples. Israel was the chosen nation, the descendants of Abraham, the people through whom the Christ was to come into the world.

History Books

In the book of Joshua we begin reading the history of Israel in taking the land of Canaan, the cities of Jericho, Ai, city after city, and area after area. The land was then divided among the tribes. Great stories and lessons from

these accounts are found concerning such people as Joshua, Rahab, Achan, and many, many others.

After the conquering of the land, and after the death of Joshua, God ruled Israel with the loosely organized system of judges for some three to four hundred years. It was an age of cycles that began with prosperity, digression into sin, suffering at the hands of enemies, repentance, God raising a deliverer (a judge), deliverance from enemies, and a return to serving God and prosperity. Over and over this cycle was repeated in Israel. The account of fifteen judges are recorded in the books of Judges and First Samuel. We read of people like Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, and the last judge, Samuel. The book of Ruth relates events that occurred during the period of the judges.

Kings of Israel and Judah

First Samuel relates the work of the last judge and the first king of Israel. Weary of God's ways, and desiring to be like nations around them, Israel requested and God allowed them to have a king. Saul reigned for forty years, followed by David for another forty years, then Solomon for the third forty years when Israel was a United Kingdom. It was a time of growth, power, wealth, prestige, taking of territory, and the victories over enemies. This was due largely to the reign of David. After Solomon the nation suffered a division into two nations, the ten tribes of the north calling themselves Israel, and the two tribes of the south known as the nation of Judah. The descendants of David continued to reign over Judah.

For about two and one half centuries these two nations existed side by side, sometimes as enemies, sometimes as allies, sometimes indifferent to each other. Not one of the nineteen kings of Northern Israel are commended as being righteous. Only few, around six, of the kings of Judah receive special commendation. Northern Israel was invaded and conquered by Assyria and taken into captivity from which they never returned as a nation. About one hundred thirty-five years later, Babylon overthrew Judah, taking them into captivity, from which they returned seventy years later.

After Captivity Until John

The return was accomplished in three stages. Under Zerubbabal the temple was rebuilt. Under Ezra there was a great religious revival. Under Nehemiah the walls of Jerusalem were erected. The book of Esther tells of the providential care and preservation of Israel when in captivity and under threat from Persian plots to destroy the Jews.

During the history of Judah and Northern Israel, and the time of Judah's return from captivity, we read of the work of the prophets who preached, warned, prophesied, condemned the sins of the people, called for repentance that did not come until destruction overtook them. Many of the prophecies foretold the coming kingdom of God, the establishment of this spiritual kingdom, the church, the Messiah, and the assured fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham.

The Old Testament closes with a prophecy in Malachi of one who would come and do a great work, the very work that was done some four hundred years later by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, the Christ.

Even though there is no writing from God for the four hundred years between Malachi and Matthew, God, through such prophets as Daniel, predicted events that would pertain to Israel during those centuries. As these events transpired, the time of the coming of the Messiah was drawing nigh. The New Testament continues unfolding of God's plan for the redemption of man.

* * * * *

NUMBER TWO

Between the Testaments

The Old Testament closed with the Jews having returned from captivity in Babylon. By the time of the New Testament a great part of the Jews had scattered throughout the world. This dispersion began under the Persian Empire that followed Babylonian rule. The Jews

fared rather well under the Persians with some exceptions. They were also respected by Alexander the Great, the Grecian conqueror. He recognized their intelligence, industriousness, integrity, and stability. He used them for his own favor. When Alexander died his empire was divided into four parts among four of his generals. Palestine was given to the Ptolemy family who ruled Egypt. While he and his sons generally favored the Jews, there was constant struggle between Egypt and Syria for the land of Palestine. The Jews were subjected to constant persecution and warfare between them.

During these stages of historical importance, the Old Testament was translated into the Greek language, called the Septuagint Version. That version was often quoted by New Testament inspired writers. This translation and the dispersion of the Jews had a tremendous impact upon the spread, knowledge, and vigor of Judaism and the expectancy of the Messiah.

When the Syrians conquered Palestine and taking it from Egypt, the Jews were severely persecuted. Their worship was terminated, the temple desecrated, everything possible was done to humiliate the Jews and destroy them and their religion. But both survived.

Actually the extreme cruelty administered by the Syrians against the Jews "backfired" because it strengthened the resolve of the Jews to drive the Syrians from their homeland. This they did under the leadership of the Maccabees. After a successful revolt against the Syrians, for approximately a century the Jews enjoyed relative independence. But internal struggles for power finally brought the Romans into the area about 63 B.C. After several appointed rulers, Herod the Great was given power in Jerusalem and he ruled when Jesus was born.

Into the New Testament

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the records of what we know of the life and activities of Jesus Christ. Six months before His birth, John the Baptist was born. Jesus was born as prophesied to the virgin named Mary who was espoused to Joseph. Because of threats against His life He was taken to Egypt where He remained until

Joseph was instructed to return to the land of Canaan and make his residence in Nazareth. There He remained until about the age of thirty years.

Before continuing with the account of the life of Christ it is well that we know that only about three and one half years of the life of Christ were involved in His ministry, and probably less than thirty days of those three and one half years are specifically recorded. Very little is known of the life of Jesus from the time He returned from Egypt into Nazareth until He was thirty years old. We do have the record of His visit to the temple at the age of twelve and the assertion that He was subject to Joseph and Mary during those years.

These four books, rather than being a complete biography of the life of Christ, serve a different purpose. John 20:30,31, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God and believing have life in his name.*"

The outstanding events in these four books include His baptism, the temptation by the devil, His preaching the sermon from an unnamed mount, the selection of His apostles, the way He fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, His travels, teaching, preaching, performing miracles to confirm His word, and establishing His identity as the Son of God. For approximately three and one half years He was active in Galilee, Samaria, Judea, and only once or twice venturing outside these provinces.

These books also reveal how envy, jealousy, and hatred mounted against Him. He was betrayed, seized, subjected to a series of mock trials before both religious and civil authorities, and even though declared innocent of the crimes of which He was accused, He was subjected to all manner of indignities and humiliations, and finally crucified as if He were a criminal. He was buried in a borrowed tomb, and there remained for the prophesied three days and nights. When He died He fulfilled the function of the Law of Moses, taking it out of the way,

and it was abolished by being fulfilled. It is no longer God's law for any man, including the Jews.

But He arose from the dead by the power of God and thereby declared to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). He was seen by many witnesses after His resurrection, at least twelve appearances being recorded, once being seen by as many as five hundred at once.

Having given promise to His apostles of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and having given them the commission to go and preach the gospel to the whole world, Jesus ascended into heaven to receive His kingdom, assuming His place of authority by the right hand of God on His heavenly throne , King of kings and Lord of lords.

The History of the Early Church

The second chapter of Acts details the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles as Jesus promised, and the establishment of the Lord's kingdom which is the church. On the first Pentecost after His ascension, the promises and prophecies of God were accomplished. The kingdom came and salvation was offered to sinful man on the merit of the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. For the first time repentance and remission of sins was preached in His name. Those who heard the message of salvation as preached that day, believed and obeyed it by repenting and being baptized, and added to His church.

From then until now the church has existed, the kingdom is a reality, and salvation for man is given when man meets the conditions that God announced through the apostles.

In Acts we have several records of people being converted to Christ, what they were taught, what they did, and the result of their obedience. Acts gives us a portion of the history of the early church, its growth, governmental nature, and the spread of New Testament Christianity throughout the known world. The lives and works of the apostles, particularly of Peter and Paul, are revealed.

The Story Continues in the Epistles

Following Acts the Bible furnishes us twenty-one epistles or letters that the Holy Spirit had inspired writers to write to Christians. Some were addressed to individuals, some to a specific local congregation, others to Christians generally. From the epistle of Romans through the epistle of Jude, we learn of the manner of life the Christian is to live, what are to be his goals, ideals, priorities, and mission in life. We learn how to worship, the necessity of preparation for the Lord's return, the coming resurrection, judgment, and eternity. These epistles repeatedly urged the Christian to be faithful and remain loyal to the Savior and His way. Without the guidance from these epistles we would be at a loss for much of the nature of Christianity.

The Story Closes

The great and loving story of God's plan for saving man through Jesus Christ concludes with the book of Revelation. That book is not, as many mistakenly seem to think, a copy of tomorrow's newspaper, foretelling everything that shall happen between then and the end of the world. Rather, it is a book of optimism, hope, expectancy, victory for the faithful, and eventual triumph of good over evil. It is a book where the glories of heaven are unfolded in figurative language, making us realize its reality and the grandeur of it, exceeding even our fondest dreams. Even though persecution may beset our path, there is no despair, no defeat, but joy, peace, love, goodness, and eternal bliss with God and the redeemed awaiting the faithful Christian, God's child.

The book of Revelation was primarily dealing with events and conditions then faced by the early church, and the highly symbolic and figurative language of it sends forth the message of assurance to one and all who remain faithful and loyal to Christ.

The Bible is the old, old story of Jesus and His love. This is the Book of books that we must study, know, believe, and obey. Herein is revealed man's hope for this life and the life to come, Jesus Christ, the hope of glory.

* * * * *

Unknown Tongues
NUMBER ONE

An attempt to preach and practice New Testament Christianity requires an understanding of the Biblical revelation of our subject. It was a New Testament phenomenon that was not characteristic of previous dispensations. Isaiah spoke prophetically of them (Isaiah 28:11), and Paul referred to that prophecy in his discussion of tongues in First Corinthians 14:21. Tongue speaking was one of the nine spiritual or miraculous gifts or powers characteristic of the early church as listed in First Corinthians 12. Many, even though they teach different and contradictory doctrines, claim that they are possessors of "tongue speaking" power miraculously today. One wonders if the Holy Spirit is placing His endorsement on their confusion.

There are five groups of verses dealing with this subject. Two lessons are intended to give a brief investigation of each group and Paul's inspired regulations of tongues.

Mark Sixteen

Mark 16:15-20. For the sake of space, we urge the reader to consult his Bible at this point and read these verses in order to know what revelation is under consideration.

It says, "*These signs shall follow them that believe.*" The signs are the powers the apostles would receive. The "*them*" refers to the apostles of verse fourteen, and those that believed their message and were granted these powers. Not all had these abilities. But wherever the gospel is preached even yet, the report of these miracles are preached.

It is important to note that the passage does not say that these signs would continue to be worked and reworked. In fact, the duration of these powers is not discussed in this passage at all. That is found elsewhere.

Among the signs mentioned is "*new tongues.*" They were not new in the sense that they had never been spoken

before by anyone. They were new to those who would be speaking them by this power. The tongues were for a sign (First Corinthians 14:22). They were used to confirm, verify, prove, authenticate the message preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). The message has now been verified and confirmed and even committed to Scripture.

It is interesting to note that those who claim to have miraculous power to "speak in tongues" today even as recorded here do not perform the other miraculous deeds mentioned. This leaves them very suspect that they have any such "tongue speaking" power either.

Acts Two

Acts 2:4-11 Please read. This is a record of events on Pentecost in Jerusalem. The apostles spoke in tongues as the result of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them as Christ had promised (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 1:8). People from many nations who spoke different languages were present that day, and yet, they heard these Galileans speaking languages not native to Galileans. The tongues spoken were languages (Acts 2:4,6,8,11). The languages spoken were new to the apostles, but were not new to the hearers. They did not speak unintelligible babble, but languages that the hearers could understand. It was a miracle of speaking.

We are not to understand that an apostle rose to speak and spoke some weird noise and everybody understood the one noise in his own speech. Rather, the apostles could speak the many languages so the hearers could be informed. They spoke languages that were not normal, native, nor natural to them, languages they had not learned, but now could miraculously speak. They did not speak gibberish induced from emotional reactions. This was not some "heavenly language" or ecstatic blabber.

Acts Ten

Acts 10:46. At the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, this Gentile and those of his house spoke in tongues. Peter had seen a vision in Joppa instructing him to go there, and six Jewish brethren went with him. Cornelius told

Peter why they wanted him (verse 33), and Peter responded that the gospel is for all.

As Peter began to speak, the Holy Spirit came upon these Gentiles and they began to speak in tongues (Acts 10:44,46). This reminded Peter of the event on Pentecost in the direct manner, not measure, of the coming of the Holy Spirit at that time (Acts 11:15-17).

Paul wrote that tongues were for a sign to the unbeliever (First Corinthians 14:22). On Pentecost they were a sign to those who did not believe in Christ. Here they were a sign to the six brethren who came with Peter that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The report of it was later a sign to other brethren as well (Acts 11:17,18; 15:7-9). This is the way that those to whom Peter later explained the events understood the purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:18). These things were not the way to save Gentiles, nor show they were already saved. The gospel had not even been preached to them yet. It was a miraculous event showing the universality of the gospel, and as evidence to the Jewish brethren in Christ who were with Peter that what was taking place had God's approval and direction.

Acts Nineteen

Acts 19:1-7. You must read it. Paul was passing through Ephesus and found some there who had been baptized of John's baptism, but who knew nothing of the Holy Spirit. One who has been baptized by the authority of Christ has heard of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Matthew 28:19). Obviously, these had not been baptized correctly; that is, for the right reason and by the right authority. Paul took them and baptized them again, this time the same way Peter taught people to be baptized on Pentecost. John had baptized looking forward to the coming Lord. But the Lord had already come, lived, died, been buried, and raised. John's forward looking baptism was no longer valid. We can learn here that when one has been immersed, but with the incorrect understanding and for the incorrect reason, the proper thing to do is to baptize them again, and correctly.

After their baptism, Paul laid his hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit, being granted miraculous powers, the ability to speak in tongues, and they did.

We must inject here the way the Bible teaches people received these miraculous powers. In Acts two and ten they were given directly by the Holy Spirit. Here, and other places, they were given by the laying on of apostolic hands. In Acts eight, Philip, who performed miracles, (verse six), evidently did not have power to enable others to perform miracles. But when the apostles, Peter and John, came to Samaria, they laid their hands on some and they received such power (Acts 8:14-17). Simon, who wanted to buy that power was sternly rebuked and was told this was not any of his business (Acts 8:20,21). This was an apostolic prerogative entirely.

On of the reasons Paul wished to visit the brethren in Rome was to impart to them a spiritual gift (Romans 1:11). His presence was required in order to do that. One reason we know the miraculous age has ceased is because the apostles, who performed miracles, are dead, and those on whom they laid hands are dead. The power to impart such gifts belonged only to the apostles.

First Corinthians

First Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 contain a discussion of miraculous or spiritual gifts found in the early church. Chapter twelve lists nine gifts, among them the power to speak in tongues. Chapter thirteen, often called the "love" chapter, does discuss love, but in context shows the superiority of faith, hope, and love over the use of miracles. The miracles would vanish away, fail, and cease. There was a "*more excellent way,*" (First Corinthians 12:31), and that is the way of love.

Chapter fourteen reveals limitations, restrictions, and regulations regarding the use of the gift of speaking in tongues which we shall discuss in the second lesson.

The tongues are called "*unknown tongues.*" The word "*unknown*" does not appear in the Greek text, and is in italics in the reliable King James Version to denote that

it is an added or explanatory word. The tongues were not unknown in the sense that nobody could understand them. They were languages that various people spoke customarily. They were unknown to the speakers. The languages were not normal, native, and natural to them, not having been learned as people can learn other languages, but were given to them miraculously for the purpose already discussed. They were known miraculously. Again, they were not unintelligible babble, gibberish, and emotional raving.

Before going further, let us gather up in summary what we have learned. Tongues were peculiar to the early church, not to previous ages. They were prophesied to occur. The ability to speak them was due to the supernatural, or miraculous. They were understandable and intelligent, not senseless blabbering in a hyper-emotional state. They were tools to convey and confirm the message of truth that was preached. They were used to take the gospel to every nation. They were possessed by certain ones either by direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or by the laying on of apostles' hands. We have learned in what sense they were "*unknown.*" We learned they were a sign to unbelievers, and a temporary measure, never intended to be permanent. We shall discuss this matter further. The use of them was governed and regulated by divine direction, which we will consider in the following lesson.

* * * * *

NUMBER TWO

There are a number of regulations in Scripture concerning the use of tongues. Obviously, this power was used when needed and not for an emotional outburst, or as a show to be seen of men. There was no need for them when everyone present understood the same language.

Not every Christian had this ability (First Corinthians 12:8,30). Nor was it to be used unless there was an interpreter (First Corinthians 14:11-13). The power to interpret was also a spiritual gift (First Corinthians 12:10). First Corinthians 14:18 indicates that some could speak in more languages than others. The use of tongues

and the interpretation of them was to avoid confusion and reproach in their use (First Corinthians 14:23).

Most of the regulations of tongues are found in the fourteenth chapter. Tongues were for a sign (verse 22), to edify and clarify. To merely speak in tongues just to speak in tongues would accomplish no good purpose. The speaker might understand, but hearers would not. How different this is today among some who claim this power! They will burst forth in some gibberish that neither they nor anyone else comprehends.

Regulations

Those who spoke in tongues were not to speak at the same time, but "*by course*," that is, in an orderly manner, one after the other (verse 27). Obviously the speaker had control over using tongues. Some today claim they cannot hold back when the Spirit moves them and they join with many others and all start their babbling at the same time. What confusion!

Notice also that women were forbidden to use this gift (verses 34,35). Even in this type of assembly where tongues were used, which is unlike any assembly today because tongues are no longer used, women were expected to respect the teaching of First Timothy 2:12. The women were not prohibited from all teaching. In fact, older women are taught to teach younger women, their children, and even have assisted in teaching men under certain conditions (Proverbs 1:8; Titus 2:5; Acts 18:36). Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). The prohibition of women teaching is where she assumes rank, authority, position, or status over the man. There is no record of Christian women violating this rule. We read of no women preachers or women teaching in mixed assemblies. Those who wish to ignore this Biblical prohibition need to produce Biblical authority for what they do. This was not merely a cultural matter.

Does it not strike you as strange how the modern so-called tongue speakers are more often than not the women? They get involved in their exercises more than the men. What kind of respect for the Bible is this?

Contrary to the present and popular concept of tongue speaking, this gift was not the greatest gift even when the gift was used (verses 5, 19). Teaching so as to produce understanding was considered far better (verse 19).

There are people of many religious groups who still claim this miraculous power. Ironically, they all accuse the others of being frauds. But we are inclined to agree with all of them and consider them all as frauds. They do not do the same thing, nor for the same purpose, nor by the same power as was done in the early church. This miraculous gift, like all others, has ceased.

Cessation

As already noted, the apostles who had the power are dead. Those on whom they laid hands are dead. The gifts were specified to cease when that which is perfect is come (First Corinthians 13:8-10).

Notice, this does not refer to the coming of Christ. It does not say,"When that WHO is perfect," but, "*that which is perfect.*" It refers to some thing, not someone. It refers to the "*faith once delivered.*" (Jude 3)., the "*perfect law of liberty*" (James 1:25). For a time God's truth was embodied in inspired men, earthen vessels (Second Corinthians 4:7). But now His all-sufficient will is embodied in the completed and confirmed Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Not only are the people gone that used these tongues, and the power so used now, but the purpose for the use of tongues has already been accomplished; namely, the confirmation of the Word (Hebrews 2:3,4; Mark 16:20).

A similar teaching is found in Ephesians 4:11-13. Paul was speaking of those who labored with miraculous power (verse 8), not people of today or people down through the ages. He said these gifts would exist "*till we all come in the unity of the faith.*" This does not mean, as some modern perversions of Scripture have mistranslated, until we all believe alike. That day will never exist. It refers to "*the faith*" completely revealed in its oneness, completeness, and fulness. Until that was

accomplished these gifts would remain. After that, they would cease.

Notice in First Corinthians 13 that the cessation of these gifts would occur while faith, hope, and love continued to abide. When the Lord Jesus returns faith will become sight, and hope will become actual and fulfilled. You do not hope for what you already have (Romans 8:24). Yet, these miraculous powers would cease while these three characteristics continued. Love will continue even after Jesus returns. Therefore, I know that the failing to these gifts was not to wait until Christ returns, but before He returns. It was to terminate when the full revelation, given in portions, was fully given.

Their Purpose

As has been illustrated properly many times, tongues and other miraculous powers were like a scaffold used to build a building. While the building was being erected, the scaffold served an essential purpose. But once the building was completed, the scaffold is removed. While the revelation of God was being revealed, part by part, these gifts were useful and God considered them necessary. But once the revelation was fully given, there remained no more purpose for them. This fact in itself shows the folly for the contention of continuous revelation, latter day revelation since the time of the apostles that some claim for themselves today. When you hear someone claim to have received some extra-Biblical message from God, and someone else makes the same claim, then another and another, and they do not even agree but often contradict, you can be sure that the Holy Spirit is not providing that confusion. It results from the unwillingness of men to be content with what God has revealed, wanting more and more and more.

It is also noteworthy that those who claim to speak in tongues today still have to study and learn languages that are not their native and normal languages just like the rest of us. If they possessed the gift of tongues, they could speak without that study. But they do not, cannot, and will not. What they do is to engage themselves under some hyper-emotionalism and taught procedures of babbling vowel sounds without sense or meaning and

have the audacity to call it miraculous tongue speaking like the days of the early church. It is false to the core!

The Holy Spirit Operates

There is no question but the Holy Spirit operates on the hearts of men today. Every person converted to Christ is converted as a result of the operation of the Holy Spirit. But that operation is not a miraculous and/or direct operation. The Holy Spirit operates through the use of the inspired Word of God, that was given by the Spirit, that furnishes us completely in everything we need and must have in service to God.

If and when people will be willing to accept God's Word, they will cease their contention and expectation of the miraculous manifestations that they falsely claim to possess. The so-called tongue speaking claimed today is supposed to designate that a person is being "spiritual," and somewhat superior to others. What it really demonstrates is a lack of faith in God's Word and the desire that God do something special for them that He never promised to do for them. It is like the request of the rich man in Luke 16 who wanted something special for his brothers, something more than what God had already provided.

When someone asks you, "Do you believe in tongue speaking?" you must be careful of your answer. "NO," we deny that anyone today speaks in tongues as did the early Christians recorded in the Bible. "YES," we believe that the early Christians did speak in languages unknown to them through natural means and through normal learning, just as the inspired record reveals.

* * * * *

Mark Twain once said, "I'm opposed to millionaires, but it would be dangerous to offer me the position." As Scripture teaches, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*" (First Timothy 6:8).

Our Kind of World

It is presumptuous to assume one can speak with unfailing certainty on this encompassing subject. The scope of it should not cause us to look away, however. We need to know the direction the world is going and what we can do about it.

We live in a small portion of a very large world. Several billion people inhabit our globe, with numerical increase daily. It boggles the mind to list the problems facing mankind about population, let alone prescribe all solutions. We confine our thoughts to the world near us, realizing that today events on one side of the earth may affect lives everywhere. But we start at home with matters confronting us daily and directly.

Christian people are concerned about the world even as was God. Our concern is not simply physical, social, financial, environmental, etc. Rather, our emphasis is spiritual, contending as do the Scriptures, that mankind is in sin and needs to change. He may alter temporarily his environment and solve some problems, but he must eventually deal with the reality of sin. The thrust of the doctrine of Christ is, "*Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.*" (Acts 3:19). Once this becomes primary, then spiritual growth and development will lead to improvement in all other things.

The Spiritual Disease

Many have said society is sick, but do not realize the disease is self-imposed and is sin. People cannot deny personal responsibility for their evil and then blame "society." God holds each one accountable for what he does in this body (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Many philosophies, theologies, ideologies are contributing to the problems of man rather than contributing to their solutions. Doctrines are being propagated that will uproot and destroy everything we hold sacred, even human life. Humanism, atheism, communism, evolution, "do-you-own-thing" doctrines

are all designed to create more havoc rather than man's good. Our world is diseased with these things and deny all that Christ said, did, and taught.

Liberals Are Enemies of Truth

Many people who claim to be religious, who even say they believe in God and the Bible, continue to affiliate themselves with liberal churches that undermine the truth across the whole spectrum. Liberal denominations are dominated by modernism and skepticism, playing the same tunes as the forces of evil that would enslave mankind. The irrational, inconsistent, and anti-Christ positions of liberal churches and their clergymen are apparent all around. Probably truth has few enemies more sinister than liberal religions. They cloak themselves in piety, but work for the cause of the devil in morality, doctrine, and even politics and international movements that intend to bury everything that is true concerning God and His Word. Polls reveal the disbelief of the Bible by the vast majority of clergymen. The mainline denominations are polluted with seminary trained agnostics and atheists. To them the authority of the Scripture has been replaced by the subjective sophistication of the self-appointed scholar. They do not teach faith, but doubt. Their hearers will never learn God's truth from them.

Some deny whatever they dislike about the Bible. They deny man's spirit, heaven, hell, judgment, miracles, sin, forgiveness, eternity, absolute truth, even that there is a right and wrong. What can the world expect after being indoctrinated by these Satanic servants of evil and darkness except God's wrath and punishment? This is our kind of world.

Sowing and Reaping

We need only mention the horrendous crime of our land to know that society in our kind of world is reaping more and more the sowing of false ideas in the minds of the populace. If we are all animals, as the educational systems and liberal churches teach, why have respect for your fellowman more than an animal? If this life is all there is, why not do-you-own-thing, regardless of how it

affects others? If there is no truth, who is to condemn anything anyone does? Why not lie, steal, commit adultery, cheat, murder, or anything else? Such doctrines in our kind of world provide no safeguard for anyone from anything. Our kind of world finds more and more adopting such self-destructive patterns of thought and behavior.

Our kind of world has turned out marriage, the home, sexual relationships, and morality as God teaches. They bring nothing good to replace it. The pace of down-with-God and up-with-nothing has quickened in our world.

Racism is prevalent throughout the world. Some social manipulators would mix everything as if that would solve everything. It solves nothing but generally destroys personal pride and creates more hatred. The sociological experimentalists are willing to use their fellowmen as guinea pigs to experiment with their philosophies. Conflicts are raised to fever pitch. Social and civil upheaval runs rampant. When we learn that we are not all alike, then we can have peace. When we learn that all can be spiritual brethren in Christ, we can have peace. But in our kind of world the will of Jesus Christ is usually ignored and never tried.

Even the educational systems, colleges, universities in particular, are proponents of the abuse of freedom of speech to print, propagate, and shout profanities, obscenities, and the usual moral decay that flows readily from the corrupt and degenerate mind. The self-appointed intellectual geniuses seemingly cannot express themselves without profanity, gutter talk, and vulgarity. Yet, they claim to be the "educated ones." In our kind of world we have the weak, timid, cowardly compromisers who dare not raise objections lest they lose their positions, prestige, money, and power. The evil influence of profanity from the media has had a disastrous effect on the sensitivity of the minds of another generation to the point where God's name can be used with irreverence and profaned with impunity. What manner of depravity has captured our people to whom this is proper use of the freedom of speech?

A Futile Effort

Our kind of world has been besieged with the idea that legislation and negotiation can produce a better generation. The failure of people to see that improvement and correction must begin in the hearts of people has given support to the idea that you can pass a law and that will solve it. When that does not solve, then pour money on it. Our kind of world has yet to come to grips with the inward man. The social reform programs, the "social gospel" of liberal religions, the "band-aids" of human invention have never, can never, and will never provide what mankind needs. Our world must learn of Christ, forgiveness, righteousness, purity, goodness, godliness , responsibility, and such like. Until that is a reality, our kind of world with all its havoc will dominate human existence for the most part.

The Gap

Does it not strike you as significant that some create a generation gap between the older and younger generation, denouncing everyone over thirty, and on some misguided basis contending that inexperience, lack of knowledge, enthusiasm, emotionalism, subjectivism, and zest for life holds the key for every solution? The "pepsi" generation has shown more depravity in a few years than was evident for centuries prior to their time. The "baby-boomers" show no signs of even good sense in many regions. At least the "old hypocrites" of yesteryear had enough self-respect to pretend to know right from wrong, and tried to hide their wrong rather than blatantly, arrogantly, display it for all to see! Our kind of world runs against God in its disrespect for the elderly and the ways of old that have proven to be beneficial through the years. Some seem to think to parade vice is a virtue. Newness for the sake of newness is the watchword of many in our kind of world. Some who decry the hypocrisy among the elderly seem to think the elderly have a monopoly on hypocrisy. But how can any generation be serious about human rights, dignity, law, order, fairness, morality, etc. when authority is something just to be overturned? How can anyone consistently plead that we are nothing but beasts, having come from nowhere, here for no reason, no guidelines while here, and going nowhere but to the grave?

The failure of parents is a mark of our kind of world. The disrespect of the sacred by many of the young is characteristic of our kind of world. The situation is grave and the task for those who are determined to be what God teaches us to be becomes increasingly difficult and fraught with opposition.

Our kind of world is saturated with alcohol, suffering the ravages of drug abuse. The tragedy of ruined lives has no impact on those who promote it and profit from it. Lives, young and old, are lost due to the consumption of alcohol, drugs, etc. That the body is God's temple and should not be desecrated is dismissed. Money, not morals; gain, not God; profit, not purity is the god of our kind of world. We and our children live around it.

This is not pessimism but realism. We dare not deceive ourselves, nor be gullible and naive, blinding our eyes to the kind of world around us. God has created such a beautiful place for us to live, but sin scars it.

Only One Solution

It's not "fun and games" religion some have adopted, but God's power to salvation (Romans 1:16). There is hope, joy, inner peace, and a good life open to all. There is the church patterned after God's blueprint. Unless we allow ourselves to become overly influenced by the world, we can lay hold on these good things. But we cannot bend down in fear and be intimidated , but meet the challenge.

Though the world be clouded with darkness, Jesus Christ is that ray of brightness for mankind. The way of Christ is not just a way, nor one among many ways, but THE way, and there is no other. Once we are convinced of that, then life takes on a different perspective, meaning, hope, purpose, and goal. This world is our field of labor, not our rest. Even though the world is contrary to our Savior, we persist. This world is not our final home. We are pressing toward heaven, just passing through this dark and sin-diseased habitation. When Jesus returns we shall enter into eternal bliss reserved for God's children.

* * * * *

A Four Issue Series



JAMES W. BOYD

Beginning with the next issue, and for three additional issues, we shall concentrate on the themes of the **Sermon on the Mount,** as taught by Jesus and recorded in Matthew, chapter five, six, and seven. There will be a total of sixteen lessons in this series.

As Bible students know, there are many varied subjects discussed by Jesus in that early sermon where He preached the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). His sermon tells us the nature and many details that would be embodied in the kingdom that was soon to come, and did come on the first Pentecost after His resurrection. We hope the study will benefit us all.

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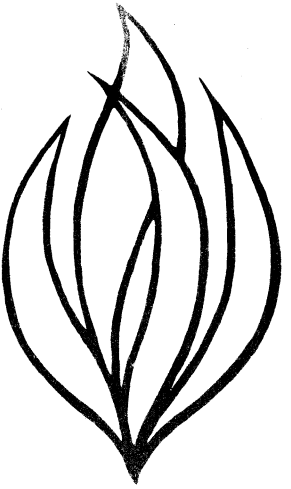

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Sermon on the Mount

Lesson One - Matthew 5:1-4

Matthew one tells us of the announcement to Mary of the coming birth of Jesus. Matthew two records His birth and the events shortly thereafter until Jesus is taken to live in Nazareth. Matthew three reveals the preaching by John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. Matthew four begins with the devil's temptation of Jesus and the beginning of His earthly ministry and preaching. "*From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" (Matthew 4:17). "*And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease among the people.*" (Matthew 4:23).

Matthew five, six, and seven gives us that sermon from some unnamed mount in Palestine that we call the Sermon on the Mount. Just what was that sermon? First we need to understand what that sermon is not, because many have assigned it a purpose and place that misses the mark. It was not just the presentation of an ethical code by which all human relationships might be developed. It was not simply a recipe to be happy. It is not a salve for the social suffering or a prescription for social reform. It is not just a moral code to smooth the social and civil conflicts. It is not the plan by which nations deal with nations, or something so broad as to include and embrace everything that is falsely called Christian in our world. While these elements may have some presence within the sermon, to consider it in such light is to bypass the Biblical definition of the sermon.

The Context

This sermon, like every other portion of Scripture, must be studied in context. That would include John's announcement. "*Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.*" (John 1:29). That was a major part of the preaching of John the Baptist. Jesus was

proclaimed as the One who would remove that which stood as a barrier between man and God; namely, SIN.

Gospel of the Kingdom

It also must be considered in the context of the preaching of John and Jesus regarding the coming of the kingdom. John preached the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and so did Jesus. Just before the Holy Spirit had Matthew begin the Sermon on the Mount, He had Matthew to record how Jesus began preaching the gospel of the kingdom. The kingdom was soon to come. It had not come as yet, but was nigh, at hand. What Jesus was to preach was the message of the kingdom, that which characterized the kingdom, the revelation of the nature of the kingdom.

His Doctrine

As the sermon closes the Holy Spirit had Matthew again to remark that what Jesus preached was "*his doctrine*" (Matthew 7:28). It was a doctrine that had not yet become applicable and would not until the kingdom came. But it was a distinctive body of doctrine that belonged to the kingdom and was uniquely that of Christ in contrast to all others, including the old covenant with Israel given through Moses. This sermon is the preamble to the new covenant or testament of Christ. Hebrews 10:9 notes that Christ came to take away the first in order to establish the second. This new covenant would not become effective until after His death (Hebrews 9: 16,17). But the Sermon on the Mount is a preview of the kingdom that would soon be established, indeed, was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. This sermon announced the nature of that kingdom, the new dispensation and its character, a revelation of those things peculiar to the kingdom over which Christ would be King. The entire sermon was preached in contemplation of the kingdom that was nigh, and that, once established, would last until the end of time. It is a sermon that points to Pentecost and the church that began that day. It is in this context that this sermon must be studied. There is no accurate way to study it apart from the kingdom or church. It embodies the doctrine of which Christ is the author and founder,

which the church is to be the pillar and ground (First Timothy 3:15).

It is not a sermon just preached to Jews and not Christians, as John Clayton has contended. True, as yet there were no Christians when the sermon was preached, but it was the doctrine of the kingdom. With such error Clayton (a promoter of the new Jubilee Church, an apostate denomination) laid the foundation for the false doctrine that the things taught in the sermon are not binding on the church today. Many false doctrines float about trying to exclude people today from accountability to the doctrine of Christ. Clayton's doctrine is among the more blatant and obviously incorrect views of the Sermon on the Mount. Others would exclude it on the grounds that it was preached before Pentecost, therefore, has nothing to do with the new covenant. This ,too, is a tragic view of the gospel of the kingdom which includes this sermon.

Beatitudes

The introduction of the sermon is usually called the Beatitudes, from Matthew 5:1-2. The word beatitude means blessedness. Some have called it happiness. But blessedness, while it may include happiness, is more than that. Happiness is a joyful state because of what happens around us. It is a temporary condition created from without because of environmental conditions. Blessedness is a state of being, a spiritual condition, that results from being in the right relationship with God. It comes from within, having taken its roots in the conversion of the heart that results in the righteous way of life. The beatitudes describe the condition of those in the kingdom, the nature of those who are right with God because they are citizens in this spiritual kingdom that belongs to God. In this kingdom there is an inward peace, contentment, joy, blessedness that is not affected by the ever-changing environmental state in which one lives. This is a spiritual blessedness. Each beatitude is a statement of a gospel principle, a preview of the kingdom.

We now turn our attention to study only the first two of these principles or beatitudes, and will proceed

throughout the entire sermon line upon line, precept upon precept (Isaiah 28:10).

Poor in Spirit

"*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 5:3). Often when people use the term poor they have reference to material things, or that which a person has or lacks. That is not the use of the term here. Man is a spirit. The phrase "*poor in spirit*" refers not to what a man has as much as what a man is. Such a person is one who realizes his dependence on something or someone other than himself. He is humbled by the reality that he is not self-sufficient. He accepts what Jeremiah taught, "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.*" (Jeremiah 10:23). The one who is "*poor in spirit*" depends on God for guidance. He does not put his trust in material things, man's wisdom, even his own wisdom, or human philosophies. He puts his trust in God and His Word. He is dependent on God.

With such a person God dwells. "*For thus saith the High and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite one.*" (Isaiah 57:15). Such a one is destitute of pride and self-sufficiency.

Isaiah 35:8-10, "*And an highway shall there be, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those, the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, but the redeemed shall walk there; and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*" This is a prophetic statement pertaining to the age of the church. Who is the "*fool*" of this passage? It speaks not of a simpleton, but is the same as the wayfaring man. It refers to a man who is unwise about the path he must travel. He is unfamiliar with the territory through which he must go. He is in need of guidance, and he recognizes that need. He is the

ransomed of the Lord who understands his dependence on God. They are the ones who travel the way of holiness.

While keeping this prophetic statement in mind, let us read from First Corinthians. Chapter one gives a contrast between human wisdom, Grecian philosophy, and divine revelation. Chapter two is a reminder from Paul that he did not bring his message of the gospel to them with "*excellency of speech.*" which has no reference to oratorical manners, but refers to the way human philosophies were usually presented. His wisdom was not the wisdom of men but divine revelation, words which the Spirit teacheth. In chapter three he exhorted the Corinthian brethren "*to become a fool that he may be wise.*" (Verse 18). What he was exhorting is that they might realize their dependence on God and God's wisdom and be wise, rather than rely on their on self-guidance without God. The fool of Isaiah and the fool of First Corinthians refers to the same humble, contrite people who are :*poor in spirit,*" not proud, arrogant, self-sufficient, but those who follow the directions of the Almighty. Such would possess the kingdom of Christ.

They That Mourn

Matthew 5:4, "*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*" While there are many passages that teach us that there is comfort for those who are weary, comfort for those in sorrow, comfort for those with trials and troubles, this passage is not teaching that. It is a passage that speaks of the nature of those in the kingdom. The mourning is a spiritual sorrow. It is to be understood in the context of the entire sermon; namely, having reference to the kingdom of Christ and His mission as deliverance from sin. Those who mourn in this passage do so because of their sins and the sins of those around them. They are grieved because of sin. They mourn because of the lost state of the world. They are those who look for a Savior from sin.

Inasmuch as salvation from sin was soon to become a reality in Christ and in His kingdom, they would be comforted upon entrance into that kingdom. Their comfort, for themselves and others, rested in the hope

that would be offered through Christ. We can be sure this is the significance of this beatitude when we consider some prophetic statements made on this subject

Isaiah 61:1,2, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the days of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.*" This passage refers to that which Christ would do. It speaks of His mission of mercy and deliverance from sin. We can be sure of this application of this prophecy because Christ applied this prophecy to Himself. "*And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias* (Isaiah). *And when he had opened the book he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering the sight of the blind, and set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book and gave it again to the minister and sat down. And the eyes of all them, that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.*" (Luke 4:17-21). The preaching to the poor, or the weak, was to those who were "*poor in spirit*" as mentioned in the first beatitude. The preaching that comforts those who mourn because of sin refers to the preaching of the gospel of salvation, the gospel of the kingdom, which Jesus was preaching. Comfort for the mournful was to be found in the coming of Christ and His kingdom.

A similar thought is presented in Matthew 28-30. There Jesus said, "*Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto you souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" Those who are ladened and burdened with sins shall find their rest in Christ. They are the same ones who mourn over their sins and the sins of the world. They shall have their comfort in Christ. This rest and comfort is to be enjoyed when one enters the

kingdom that was to come about three years after Jesus preached this sermon.

"*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make strait in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough place plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*" (Isaiah 40:1-5). This prophetic word to "*comfort ye my people*" by the coming of the Lord was accomplished in the work and message of John the Baptist in preparing the way for Christ, through whom comfort was to come (Matthew 3:3). It was John who preached the coming of the Lamb of God, and the kingdom in which there would be comfort by the forgiveness of sin. Comfort from sin is a fruit of the Lord and His kingdom that was nigh, at hand.

It becomes obvious that the second beatitude pointed to the kingdom and the relief and blessings that would belong to those in the kingdom. This kingdom had its beginning on Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection.

To briefly summarize this first lesson on the Sermon on the Mount, we remind you that the sermon is the gospel of the kingdom, the doctrine of Christ, the new covenant, the characteristics of the kingdom and those in it. Blessed are those who depend on God. Of such is the kingdom. Blessed are those who grieve over sin. Comfort is found in the kingdom.

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Lesson Two - Matthew 5:5,6

In this second lesson on the Sermon on the Mount, we intend to consider two more of the Beatitudes which are principles of the gospel, the gospel that would

characterize the kingdom that Jesus would establish. In our first lesson we studied the first two Beatitudes. Each of them begins with the word "*blessed*" which refers to a spiritual state that belongs to those that sustain a certain relationship with God. The "*blessed*" are those that would be citizens of this soon-coming kingdom, that is, soon to come in relation to the time the sermon was preached.

Just a brief word of review of the first lesson is in order. We noted how this Sermon on the Mount must be considered in its context, like every other passage of Scripture, The context involves the preaching of John with his reference to Christ, "*Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.*" (John 1:29). John's preaching also included, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,*" (Matthew 4:17), a message also preached by Christ. The sermon is presented in view of the removal of that barrier between God and man, which is sin, and the establishment of that promised, prophesied, purposed, and planned kingdom which the redeemed would compose. The sermon is not merely a recipe of some kind of earthly happiness, nor a cure for all the social ills, political and civil strife of the world. It is more than another moral and ethical code. It is the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23), the doctrine of Christ (Matthew 7:28,29). It was presented by Christ, who was not just another interpreter or teacher of another law, but the Lawgiver with authority. The sermon is the preamble of the new covenant which He would establish. It is the forecast of the nature, character, and principles of the Lord's kingdom that would begin on Pentecost. It is a sermon that points to the church and magnifies it.

The first two Beatitudes are in Matthew 5:3,4. They teach that "*blessed*" are those who realize, appreciate they are wayfarers, strangers in a foreign land, passing through where they have never been before, in need of guidance and direction, who are without self-sufficiency, pride, but humble, contrite, and looking for God for their guidance. The kingdom belongs to such. Also, "*blessed*" are they that mourn over their sins and the sins of the world, that barrier between God and man. Their relief, comfort and rest is to be found in the mission of Christ

and by being citizens in the kingdom. Their comfort will result in the forgiveness provided by the Lord.

From the context of the sermon, from the Old Testament prophecies, especially from Isaiah that foretold the coming of the Christian age, the kingdom and the nature of it, we could establish these meanings.

The Meek

Verse five, "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*" In the minds of many, meekness is synonymous with being passive, timid, shy, almost submerged beneath an inferiority complex. But this is not the meaning of meekness. Numbers 12:3 reads, "*Now the man Moses was very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth.*" Now the terms shy, timid, passive, do not describe the man Moses. As we study his life we see a man of courage, strength, determination, power, outspoken, and aggressive. He was not a milquetoast type of character, withdrawn and unable to cope with things around him. He was nobody's pushover.

The basic element of meekness is inner mastery, self-control, a supremacy over one's own will, maintenance of one's faculties at all times, a strongly self-disciplined person. A meek person is as a captain of the ship on course, even through the stormy seas, but always in control, keeping the ship on course, even though the raging waves and storms are all around. One has remarked with a homemade definition of meekness as, "having the ability to idle your motor when all around you provokes you to strip your gears." Meekness is having great power, but having it under control.

How appropriate and encouraging this would to be the hearers of Jesus, many of whom would soon become citizens in the kingdom that would soon begin. They would be surrounded on every side by hostile elements, not only from the cruel Roman government, and the prejudices and persecutions that would be theirs to endure from the Jews. Paul warned brethren, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" (First Timothy 3:12). But those in the kingdom would be a self-disciplined people. They would

have self-mastery over themselves. They would radiate and propagate the message of God's kingdom throughout the earth in spite of opposition. The provocations of the wicked would not throw them off course nor defeat them.

The promise on inheriting the earth is not a literal, material inheritance. Such a thought prostitutes and degrades the higher and holier inheritance of the meek. The kingdom would not a material and earthly kingdom, but a spiritual one. The quality of character of those of the kingdom would enable them to cover the world with the principles of the kingdom, the gospel itself, the gospel that was being presented even with this sermon. In that sense they would inherit the earth.

Isaiah has said in prophecy of this kingdom, (Isaiah 61:1), "*Good tidings would be preached to the meek.*" The meek would in turn take those good tidings and cover the earth with the. Isaiah 11:9, "*For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*" This did not mean that all would conform to the message of the glad tidings, nor all would have the knowledge of God in their hearts. But it meant that the message of the gospel would stretch over the earth. Similarly, in Habakkuk 2:14, "*For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*" It would be in this fashion that the meek would inherit the earth. It would be by the gospel story that they would teach and exemplify in their lives and spread in the world.

The phrase, "*inherit the earth,*" is much like words in the commission given to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:10), "*See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant.*" Jeremiah was not to become a military conqueror of the kingdoms and nations. Nor would he become a magistrate ruling over them as some kind of monarch. But as a teacher of the message of God he would be superior over all kingdoms and nations and would dominate them through the message he proclaimed.

Again, First Corinthians 16:2, "*Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?*" Paul did not mean that

Christians would command the courts and be the judges among men in that sense. But as they taught the teaching and doctrine of Christ and the principles of the kingdom, those principles and doctrine would indict the world and pass judgment upon it through them.

This beatitude is but another forecast of the spread of the gospel of the kingdom and the character of that which was soon to come, and did come with Pentecost. The disciplined of the kingdom would cover the earth with the gospel.

Those That Hunger and Thirst

"*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.*" (Matthew 5:6). Let us focus attention on the word "*righteousness*" and determine its meaning. It is not a reference here to the virtues of God or His quality, or how good God is. It is used in the same sense as it is used in Romans 1:16,17, "*For I am not shamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*" The term refers to God's plan for making sinful man righteous before God. It is the system of justification. It means God's laws and commandments by which man is made righteous. It is used in the same sense as in Psalm 119:172, "*All thy commandments are righteousness.*" The commandments that God has given to man is for the purpose of making man righteous, or better yet, leading man to partake of the righteousness God gives him. It is that scheme of redemption revealed first through Christ and the inspired apostles, and now in the inspired Scriptures.

The goodness of God and His virtues are even found in the Old Testament. One does not have to wait until he reaches the gospel to know of such things about God. But only in the gospel does one find the way that God saves man and justifies him even from his sins.

The term "*righteousness*" is used similarly in Romans 10:3, "*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not*

submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Paul was speaking of his Jewish fellow countrymen. Instead of following God's system of salvation through Christ, they were persisting in going their own way and following their own system and the Law of Moses which was already nailed to the cross when Paul wrote.

Again, Matthew 5:20, "*For I say unto you, Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.*" Jesus was telling them that they just had to live better lives than the scribes and Pharisees and according to a better system. He was not telling them they must do more good works, be more deserving of salvation. This would smack of a system of salvation by meritorious works. We have heard this verse used to try to prove the Christian ought to give more than ten per cent of his income because the scribes and Pharisees gave that much and we must do more than they. While that may have some merit, that is not the import nor meaning of the phrase.

Jesus was comparing the Mosaic system that the scribes and Pharisees followed with the kingdom that was soon to come. The comparison of systems was not one of degree of virtues, but of kind and substance. No one can reach heaven by following the traditions, customs, doctrines of men, even the Law of Moses to which the scribes and Pharisees were outwardly committed. One must soon follow another system; namely, God's plan for making man righteous as is revealed in the gospel of the kingdom.

Jesus is teaching that those who have the appetite for God's scheme and plan of redemption for man shall be well supplied, and find their fill, in the kingdom that was soon to come. Again, the beatitude, like the others, is pointing toward the kingdom, the church. All who hunger for God's way will find their satisfaction and provision in the kingdom.

To summarize the first four beatitudes let us say, blessed are they who realize their need of guidance and their dependence on God, who are humble enough to seek

God's guidance and who do not simply rely upon themselves or on other men.

Blessed as they who are disturbed and mourn over sin that separates man from God, for in Christ and His kingdom they shall find the rest and comfort from that grief for which they yearn.

Blessed are those who possess that inner mastery and self-control. In spite of opposition, they shall cover the earth with the gospel principles and the kingdom shall penetrate the world.

Blessed are those who want God's way and have the appetite for the salvation He offers. By coming to Christ and entering His kingdom they shall find that for which they are seeking.

Keep in mind the context of the sermon and how it points toward Pentecost. It is a sermon that exalts Christ and the church, and how the blessings of God are bestowed through Christ upon those in the church.

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Lesson Three - Matthew 5:7-12

Without giving time and space to further review, for this is not as needful in writing as it would be in speaking, and having gone over the first two lessons with reviews, let us pursue the study of the kingdom, defining the nature and charter of the kingdom that would soon be established, and was established on Pentecost. We have the doctrine of Christ and the preamble of His way in this sermon of the gospel of the kingdom.

The Merciful

"*Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.*" (Matthew 5:7). This beatitude reflects the quality of forgiveness, that forgiving spirit of God that is a prominent trait of God and a prominent characteristic of the blessings enjoyed in the kingdom.

God is merciful and extends His mercy to man through forgiveness of sin, that which separates man from God. The system of salvation is a system of mercy and grace or unmerited favor. Titus 3:5 teaches, "*He saved us.*" How did He save us? Included in that which produces salvation is the mercy of God. But the beatitude emphasizes that to be a recipient of God's mercy, we are expected to be merciful. To be forgiven, we must be forgiving.

That we are saved by the grace of God is an indisputable point in the doctrine of Christ. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.*" (Ephesians 2:8,9). Without God's grace there would be no forgiveness available.

In the parable of the wicked servant (Matthew 18:21-25), we are taught the Lord's displeasure with the unwillingness to forgive. That is made clear. That wicked servant received mercy but would not extend mercy. Matthew 6:14,15, "*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*" To obtain mercy we must extend mercy. This beatitude is a preview of the system of mercy that is a part of the plan of salvation, a part of the kingdom of God.

Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8, "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.*" Many passages of the Bible exhort us to moral purity, such as, "*keep thyself pure,*" (First Timothy 5:22), and "*keep thy heart with all diligence,*" (Proverbs 4:23), and "*whatsoever things are pure... think on these things,*" (Philippians 4:8). But this passage does not refer to moral purity, but to purity of understanding. The phrase, "*for they shall see God,*" unlocks the meaning of the purity that is under consideration. They shall "*see,*" have a clear perception and understanding. The term "*pure*" is used in this beatitude as it is in James 4:8, "*Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.*" The double-minded person is one who is

confused, mixed up, lacking clear perception and without understanding. He thinks one way then another, or both at the same time, and is in chaotic bewilderment. His vision is unclear. But the person with the purity of heart of which this verse speaks is one who sees things straight, gets them in order, has the truth unmixed from the elements of error, and comprehends that truth.

Ephesians 1:18, Paul prayed for brethren that "*the eyes of your understanding being enlightened*" shows he wanted them to "*see*" things clearly with understanding and not be double-minded. It is with the heart that one understands (Matthew 13:15). Those of a pure heart are those who perceive, comprehend, and understand, not being defiled with error and misinterpretation, but having a pure heart.

It is said of them that they shall "*see God.*" John 3:3 also uses the phrase that one cannot see the kingdom except he is born again. One cannot have the right relationship with God outside the kingdom. Not until one's view of God is proper, and he understands what the will of God is, can he or will he enter the kingdom.

The kingdom, then, in prospect as the Lord preached, the kingdom that was soon come, is made up of those whose hearts know the truth. They are in that blessed state of being right with God. This beatitude simply expresses another mark of distinction that characterizes that kingdom which was to begin on Pentecost. It is another Pentecost pointer.

The Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.*" What is the peace under consideration? There are several ways in which one might have peace. He can be at peace with other people. There may be a difference and dispute, but that can be settled, and they can be at peace. But the peace under consideration here is far more than that which can exist between people. As we look around us we find many people who are at peace with each other, but are not right with God spiritually. The peace Jesus teaches is more precise and distinctive.

Christ is called the Prince of Peace in prophecy (Isaiah 9:6). The peace that He brings is peace between man and God. It is reconciliation. "*And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.*" (Ephesians 2:16). "*And having made pace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself, by him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven.*" (Colossians 1:20). Man alienates and separates himself from God by sins (Isaiah 59:1,2). We sell our souls to Satan by sinning. Christ makes peace by providing forgiveness of sin. "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Romans 5:1). This peace is accomplished through the cross (Colossians 1:20). The peace of which Jesus speaks is spiritual peace, the removal of the barrier between man and God. Once man is reconciled to God all is well with his soul.

Who are the peacemakers? Christ is the primary peacemaker. Those disciples who would tell people how to have peace with God are peacemakers. Romans 10:15. "*How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things.*" When one tells the story of salvation, the plan of redemption, the good news of Christ as Savior, he is being a peacemaker.

Peace with God can belong only to those who come to the kingdom. We enter that kingdom by obeying the commands of the gospel of peace. The Lord is saying that the nature and composition of that kingdom would be people who are at spiritual peace with God. As they perform their duty as children of God they will be messengers of the gospel of peace and would assume the role of peacemaker.

The Persecuted

The final beatitude embraces three verses, but they are connected in thought. Matthew 5:10-12, "*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*"

One thing that can be expected by those in the kingdom of Christ is opposition. Christians shall be buffeted from every side by hostile elements, ideologies, people and actions. Because one is loyal to Christ he will arouse the antagonism from those who do not love Christ. "*All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" (First Timothy 3:12). Persecution, though not sought and even avoided when possible, is a normal course of events and will characterize existence in the kingdom. But in the midst of being subjected to railing, abuse, false accusations, misrepresentation, threats, injustices, and injuries of one sort or another, those in the kingdom can endure them. Such things can be turned into advantages when rightly considered. We have God's promise that we shall not be tempted above that we are able to bear. We shall have a way of escape (First Corinthians 10:13).

James 1:2-4,12, "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing... Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him.*"

First Peter 4:16, "*Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.*" The early church was persecuted but they rejoiced "*that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*" (Acts 5:41).

While such a preview of the kingdom might discourage entrance into it, it would also impress the fact that those in the kingdom would be at war with the forces of evil and the kingdom of Satan. Christians would be in the world, but not of the world. Yet, the world would be against the kingdom of Christ. To the Hebrew Christians, "*But call to remembrance the former days in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions, partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.*" (Hebrews 10:32,33).

The first citizens of the kingdom of Christ were not the first to suffer for righteousness sake. God's prophets of the Old Testament down through the ages were victimized by those who loved evil and refused to hear God's word. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micaiah, Elijah, Elisha, all of them were the targets of evil men.

Nonetheless, the reward of those in the kingdom is great. "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" (Romans 8:18). The kingdom shall be delivered to God (First Corinthians 15:24), when the Lord comes again. "*If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.*" (Second Timothy 2:12). "*For great is your reward in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:12).

When one considers the alternative to being in the kingdom, that is, being out of the kingdom, when he realizes the eternal hell that awaits, the hardships of citizenship pale into insignificance, especially in view of the everlasting nature of the reward.

One final observation on this beatitude, and that is the necessity of remaining faithful therein. Jesus is saying that there may well be hard times for those who come into His kingdom that He is describing. But even under such persecution, we cannot turn back if the blessings of God would be enjoyed. We must remain faithful in the kingdom against all opposition.

As the sermon progresses, we shall find expansion of these precepts. There will be applications of these principles. He will teach a specific doctrine based upon what is included in these beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount is the doctrine of Christ, and the beatitudes open the way for us to see more clearly the nature of the kingdom over which He reigns as the eternal King.

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Have you ever taken time to open your Bible, concentrate on a specific passage until the meaning is clear to you? Try it!

Lesson Four - Matthew 5:13-16

Thus far we have noted two Biblical identifications of this sermon preached by Jesus. One, it is described as the doctrine of Christ, His doctrine (Matthew 7:28,29). It is not an interpretation of a law that was given by Moses or scribes and Pharisees, but the presentation of a new law by the Lawgiver, as one having authority. Two, it is called the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). This refers to the kingdom that at the time the sermon was preached was still in the future, but the kingdom of God that did come on Pentecost. The sermon is the preamble of the new covenant, the forecast and preview of the nature and characteristics of that kingdom that was to come, over which Christ now reigns as King of kings.

Similitudes

We have considered eight beatitudes, pronouncements of blessedness upon those of certain quality. Those in the kingdom would possess a certain relationship with God; namely, citizens in His kingdom. We now turn to the study of three similitudes in Matthew 5:13-16. A similitude is kin to the parable and allegory in that there is a presentation of likeness between two things. There is a comparison made between things that have similarity. Jesus presents the kingdom and the members of it in the likeness of things with which His hearers, and we as readers, have some understanding. This enables us to learn something about the kingdom. We must keep before us the truth that the kingdom is the church. Christ in reality is exalting the church in the Sermon on the Mount. It strikes us as somewhat strange how some today are repelled at preaching about the church, considering it to be rather insignificant, but the Lord Jesus spent His first sermon exalting it.

Salt

"*Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under the foot of men.*" (Matthew 5:13).

In this comparison Jesus takes recognition of the fact that the kingdom would be in the world, even though it would not be of the world. It is not a worldly, earthly, physical kingdom, but a spiritual one. Nonetheless, the citizens are living in the world. The "*ye*" refers to those who would be in the kingdom, those who would be Christians. Christians are like salt, which emphasizes the desired effect and influence the Christian is to have on the world around him.

Consider the work and power of salt. Salt possesses a savour or a flavor, a quality of influence with various powers. It has the power to season. It can be an antidote to corruption. It is useful in healing and cleansing. It has the power to preserve, to save, to prevent corruption. It can create thirst, and even be used in melting ice.

But if the salt has lost its good and useful qualities, it is of not value, but only deserving of being discarded. So it is with the Christian who does not retain his beneficent influence in the world. Without the influence of the Christian, to what can the world turn, and where can the world look to find the qualities that are so needful?

The good powers like salt that the Christian possesses do not come inherently from himself, but are derived from the Christ. As is taught in John 15:5, "*Without me ye can do nothing.*" As a branch apart from the vine cannot produce fruit and fulfill its mission, so the salt (Christian) cannot preserve, save, flavor, cleanse, etc. without Christ. When the salt (Christian) has lost his savour or quality of good influence, he is deserving of being cast out.

What causes salt to lose its power and valuable qualities? Being mixed with clay, or some alien and foreign substance, becoming adulterated or corrupted in some manner, contaminates the salt. So long as the salt is pure it is potent in its powers. The same is true regarding the Christian, the citizen of the kingdom. When the Christian becomes tainted and corrupted with sin, he is "*good for nothing.*" This is the trouble, possibly, with much that is called "Christianity."

Only in the kingdom is there hope for mankind. Therein is salvation. Therefore, it is of the utmost priority that the church be kept pure. It must be pure in doctrine, preaching sound doctrine (Titus 2:1), sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:8), neither going beyond or taking from but abiding within the doctrine of Christ (Second John 9-11), not speaking the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:9), but speaking as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11).

Likewise, members of the church must keep themselves pure in their manner of life. They must keep themselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27). A church member who will persist in sin is corrupted and cannot serve as he ought in the kingdom of God. When there is such contamination, the Christian has lost his savour, and becomes deserving of being a castaway.

Light

"*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*" (Matthew 5:14,15).

Christians are compared to light. Several times in Scripture is such a comparison made. Ephesians 5:8 refers to Christians as children of light. Peter calls his brethren children of the day. Philippians 2:15 admonishes the Christian to "*shine as lights in the world.*" Colossians 1:13 says the Christian has been delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Being in the kingdom is like being in the light.

Light serves good and beneficial purposes. Visibility is the primary benefit. "*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*" (Second Corinthians 4:6).

Light will drive out darkness. For this reason some who love the darkness of sin do not love the Christ nor those who reflect His light. "*And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness*

rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be manifest that they are wrought in God." (John 3:19-21).

Much of the vegetable kingdom could not survive but for a short time if there was the total deprivation of light. Light is life-giving. Light is life-sustaining, as well as necessary for sight.

The church, or kingdom, is to be God's light in this world of sin and darkness. Light and darkness are often used to contrast righteousness and sin.

The light of the Christian comes from a source other than himself. In reality, the Christian serves as a reflector of the brilliance of the Son of God.

The light of the Christian can be dimmed, and often is. Jesus used the simple illustration of men lighting candles in order to receive light. It would be senseless to put that candle under a cover or bushel. That would destroy the usefulness of the light. Men put candles on candlesticks that they may benefit from the light. The Christian is to let his light shine. "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:16). By good words, good deeds, day to day consistency in imitating Christ in life, holding fast the word of truth, the influence of the Christian contributes to good.

The motive for righteous living is not that men may praise you, but that they may glorify the Father whom you serve. Is it not worth our consideration that we may well distort the light of Christ what we are supposed to reflect because of our misdeeds? Can people really get a fair and proper impression of what it means to be a Christian by observing our lives?

There is a difference between letting your light shine, which we ought to do, and just shining our light for others to see us, which is promote self, not God.

City on a Hill

Also in these verses the kingdom is presented as a city set on a hill. Just as a city on a hill is in plain view and cannot be hid, so should it be with the kingdom of God. God's kingdom, His church, universally and locally, when it is as it ought to be, is something with which must be reckoned. It cannot be ignored. It will have an impact for truth in the community and nation round about. Even though some might war against the kingdom, and disagree with its message, the kingdom must be determined to preach the Word, stand for it, get the message out to others, contend earnestly for the faith. It should strive to be an influence in the community that others must consider. It will be forceful, militant, aggressive, and dedicated to the upholding of God's will, and will busily engage itself in encouraging everyone to do the same. All the power of influence that the church has must be mustered together to promote "*this saith the Lord*" whenever and wherever possible.

Just as the city on the horizon stands out, so God wants His kingdom to stand out as the peculiar people in the world. The peculiarity must be because of the distinctiveness of life that is lived by those in the kingdom.

Each of these three similitudes, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the city set on a hill, makes it incumbent on each Christian to strive to develop and possess those qualities of influence on the world in which he lives. The Christian is not to be a hermit, nor pull within his shell. He is intended to make a difference in what goes on by demonstrating the way of holiness as prescribed by Christ.

Following these similitudes, Christ turns His attention in the Sermon of the Mount to specific matters that characterize His doctrine.

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The next few issues of
A Burning Fire
will be devoted to the
Sermon on the Mount.

One Way to Prevent and End Apostasy

Those who keep abreast of what takes place in the wonderful brotherhood of brethren know that the Lord's church has suffered terribly in recent decades a drift from the truth. Many have quoted the observation, "Brethren, we are drifting." But in reality many have already drifted, probably beyond the point of recovery.

Few things could be counted more tragic than to see people who were once faithful in the Lord turn away and follow Him no more. We read of people doing that in the Scriptures. The descriptions of such behavior are very disturbing to those who love the souls of brethren. But even entire congregations, where once the sound doctrine of truth was preached, are so far removed from their moorings that they cannot be truthfully called a church of Christ anymore. They have become a denomination born of apostasy. Could it have been prevented?

We are confident that no congregation has to drift as so many have done. One way that will prevent the problem from getting the upper hand, and if not prevent it can correct it, is for those in leadership to properly discharge their responsibility. They have the authority to do it. Too many times they are lacking in conviction, fearful, seeking their own popularity and acceptance, loving the praises of men more than the truth.

They must insist that truth, and only truth, be taught from the pulpit and classroom. They must convict the gainsayer, confront and mark the false teacher, not allow him to continue sowing the seeds of digression.

Far too often those in charge endorse, promote, even encourage the very ones who will take the church away from the truth. They should know better, could know better, and some do know better, but they allow it anyway. What a woeful day the day of judgment will be to such wicked shepherds!

It is not true to say that nothing can be done about what is making havoc in the church. When those in leadership act as God would have them do, this thing could be prevented, stopped, even turned around. JB

Confusion Doth Reign



In relatively recent days there were two very controversial issues raging in our nation at the same time. One was over the death penalty and the execution of a convicted multi-murderer, and the other over the right of women to abort unborn babies. Great numbers were shouting and demonstrating on both sides of these matters. But what struck me as so amazing is how some people, even the same people, can clamor so viciously for the protection of the guilty, and be just as aggressive for the murder of the innocent. Capital punishment is allowed by God's Word, but the murder of innocent unborn children is not. How can a nation survive when its people get things so backwards? JB

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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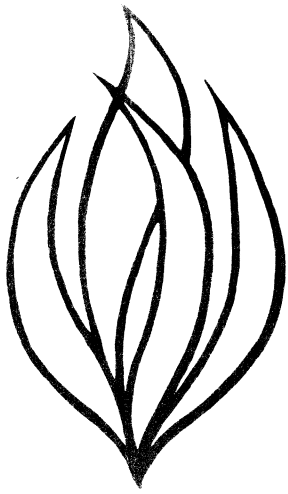

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIII Agnes M. Reed NUMBER 7

Sermon on the Mount

Lesson Five - Matthew 5:17-20

We have come to the place in the study of the Sermon on the Mount where Christ no longer speaks in the generalities of the Beatitudes and Similitudes of the first portion of the sermon, but directs His attention to specific precepts of His doctrine.

Keep in mind that the Sermon on the Mount is the doctrine of Christ, the gospel of the kingdom, preached in anticipation of the coming of the kingdom that did come on Pentecost. The sermon is a forecast, a preview, of the nature and characteristics of His spiritual kingdom. Through the remainder of chapter five He speaks of specific matters, two of which we shall consider in this lesson. Both have to do with the superiority of the system of Christ over everything else that has gone before Him, whether from God or from man. He speaks of the relationship between the Old Testament under Moses and the New Testament of which He is the mediator. He also contrasts His will with the customs and traditions of men.

Fulfill, Not Destroy

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; and whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17,18).

We now concern ourselves with a source of great religious confusion and false doctrines in the religious world. There is no conflict between the law given through Moses and the covenant of Jesus Christ. The law preceded the new covenant by some fifteen hundred years and was given to

Israel, through Moses, by the Lord. Christ did not come to destroy the law, or destroy the work done by the prophets who lived and labored under that law. Paul teaches that He did abolish it (Ephesians 2:15). There is a difference between destroying and abolishing which we shall discuss.

Let us consider some other Biblical statements that tell us what Christ did and what happened to the old law. Colossians 2:14 teaches it was done away, abolished, and taken away. Galatians four uses an Old Testament event to show the relationship of the two covenants. Abraham had a son by his wife, a freewoman, named Sarah. Sarah and the son Isaac represented the new law. Abraham also had a son named Ishmael by Hagar, Sarah's handmaid, a bondwoman. Hagar and Ishmael represented the old law. When time came when there was no place for both Isaac and Ishmael, Paul asks, "*What saith the scriptures? Cast out the bondwoman and her son...*" (Galatians 4:30). Christians are the children of the freewoman, not the bondwoman. Christians live under the new covenant, not the old covenant God gave Israel.

Even though Christ did not destroy the old law, He did remove it by fulfilling it. If He had destroyed it, there would have been nothing left to fulfill. He took it out of the way by accomplishing that for which the law was given. "*Then he said, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first that He may establish the second.*" (Hebrews 10:9). The old law was to be temporary. "*But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.*" (Galatians 3:23-25).

The Law Was Not Contrary to the Promise

The law of Moses was not contrary to or against the promises of God (Romans 7:7). They brought us to the fulfillment of those promises (Galatians 3:25). God gave certain promises to Abraham, including the promise that through his seed all families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 28:14). Paul said that seed was Christ (Galatians 3:16). The fulfillment of the promise was not the giving of the law, but Christ fulfilled the promise, and

the purpose of the law. "*Brethren, I speak after the manner of men, Though it be but a man's covenant, yet, if it be confirmed, no man disannuleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promises, but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*" (Galatians 3:15-18).

Why Was the Law Given?

Why, then, was the law given? We have already learned it was to bring to Christ (Galatians 3:24). While it did not provide for the forgiveness of sin, it did define sin (Romans 7:7).. It was added as a guide for Israel, the nation through which the Messiah was to come, because of their transgressions (Galatians 3:19). But what that old law could not do, the Christ accomplished. "*For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God.*" (Hebrews 7:19). "*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.*" (Hebrews 8:7). We cannot be saved by the old law. "*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*" (Romans 3:20). "*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*" (Romans 3:28). The law served as a shadow of things to come (Hebrews 10:11).

During the life of Jesus on earth the law was still in effect for the Jews. Jesus was born of a woman, made under the law (Galatians 4:4). When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount the law was still in effect. To teach men to break that law was to teach them to disregard the authority of the Lord. But those who would be in His kingdom that was to come would be people who had respect for the authority of God. They would not teach men to break any command of God. Whether it was the old law, or whether it would be the new law, when God had spoken, it would be characteristic of those in the kingdom to respect His will and teach others to do so as well. What Jesus is teaching is that the old law would be brought to an end, but meanwhile, respect for the

authority of God was important. Not even the smallest portion of it was subject to human alteration. The jot and tittle were the smallest marks of Hebrew writing. Even such minute things were not to be bothered. "*Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.*" (Deuteronomy 12:32). This principle was true under the old law and also under the new (Galatians 1:6-9; Second John 9-11; Revelation 22:18,19).

Christ brought the Mosaic Law to an end. Luke 24:44 tells us that Christ did what He did "*that all things must be fulfilled.*" Acts 13:29 teaches that those who crucified Christ "*had fulfilled all that was written of him.*" Romans 10:4 reads, "*For Christ is the end of the law...*"

Modern Versions Pervert

It is noteworthy that the so-called modern versions of the Bible distort this passage in the Sermon on the Mount, making it teach differently than what God has taught. The TEV says that Christ said He did not come to do away with the old law. But the Bible says repeatedly that He did do away with it. The TEV says He came to give it meaning. But it had meaning before Christ ever came. Christ did not give it meaning, but fulfilled the meaning. Nearly all of the modern versions have Christ saying He did not abolish the old law, but also has Paul saying that He did abolish it (Ephesians 2:15), which would be an inexplicable contradiction between Christ and Paul. What is so tragic is that our own brethren, particularly those in Bible departments of schools operated by our own brethren, are promoting these perverted Bibles and teaching our young that they are reliable versions of God's Word. They are not, and those who teach that they are do the church of Christ and His cause a serious disservice. Fatal doctrinal error does not seem to be of great concern to some of our "scholars" as much as their acceptance by the academic community. Parents who send their children to the "Christian schools" must be aware that false ways are being taught and promoted on campuses with a passion.

Who is the authority in matters religious is plainly revealed in the New Testament. "*Whatsoever ye do in*

word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Colossians 3:17). To do something "*in the name of*" someone means by their authority. "*The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ.*" (John 1:17). We are made free by the truth (John 8:32), not by the law of Moses. God made Christ preeminent over all things (Colossians 1:18). All authority belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). In the presence of the lawgiver, Moses, and the great prophet under that law, Elijah, God said, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him.*" (Matthew 17:5). Can there be any doubt in any honest mind that Christ is the way, truth, and life (John 14:6)? His way is not a postscript to the old law. It is a new covenant (Hebrews 10:20). "*He hath made the first old.*" (Hebrews 8:13). God now speaks through Christ (Hebrews 1:1).

The failure to understand the relationship between the law of Moses and the law of Christ has caused many to attempt to bring certain things in the old law into the Christian realm for which they have no authority from Christ. Such things as observing the Sabbath Day, instrumental music, burning incense, a special priesthood, observing holydays, abstaining from meats, such things are part of the old law that was nailed to the cross. People say you can be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments. But the Ten Commandments were a part of that law that God gave to Israel through Moses. We are not under the Ten Commandments. Nine of the ten have been embraced in Christ's covenant, with some expansion on them. But we do not steal because of the authority of Christ, not Moses. We must understand this distinction between the law or we allow ourselves to be subject to many false views and doctrines that men teach in religion.

Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees

"*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 5:20).

The Lord slightly changes the subject under discussion, but not very much. He had been comparing the law of Moses with His own law, but now He compares His law with that which governed and guided the Pharisees and

scribes. One might at first think that the scribes and Pharisees were guided by the law of Moses, but this is not accurate. They made a pretense of being guided by that law, but they had added to their religious regulations their many traditions, customs, and rituals that they considered as binding as that which had come from God.

Consider the word *"righteousness."* It has the same meaning here as it does in Romans 1:16,16 where Paul said the gospel revealed God's righteousness. He was not talking about a virtuous attribute of God, but rather the way God makes man righteous, the way of justification. The commands of God when believed and obeyed will make a man righteous because of the merit of Christ. Righteousness refers to God's plan and the system of salvation under Christ in contrast with the system that the scribes and Pharisees advocated.

One of the problems that the Jews had was expressed in Romans 10:3. *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."* The Jews were ignorant of the way that God intended to save man. They were insistent on their own way. Therefore, they had not submitted to the way of the Lord.

Matthew 15:3,6,9, *"Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" "Thus ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." "But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* What we are taught at this point is that we must follow a system that exceeds the system the scribes and Pharisees were following. Jesus is showing the superiority of His doctrine over any human tradition, custom, or whatever. Not only was the system of salvation through Christ superior to that from man, but it was superior to that which had been given through Moses.

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If you change your address, please let me know. JB

Lesson Six - Matthew 5:21-30

We have been considering this sermon in its context and according to the scriptural definition of it. It was preached at the outset of the personal ministry of Christ. It was preached in the light of the teaching of John the Baptist that Jesus was the "*Lamb of God*" (John 1:29). It was in anticipation of the coming of the kingdom (Matthew 4:17). It was the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). It was the doctrine of Christ (Matthew 7:28,29). It was a preview and forecast of the nature and characteristics of the kingdom that came on Pentecost.

The sermon was introduced by the Beatitudes, which were pronouncements of blessings upon these of certain quality and relationship with God. They were followed by Similitudes, certain comparisons the Lord made to describe to us the nature of the kingdom, like salt, light, and a city set on a hill.

Then He turned to specific precepts of His doctrine. He discussed the relationship of the old law that God gave through Moses, and the way of the scribes and Pharisees which included human traditions and customs, and the superiority and sufficiency of God's way through Christ. He emphasized the prohibition of man tampering with the revealed authority of God. We turn our attention to two other precepts of the gospel of the kingdom; namely, the sin of hatred and animosity, and the sin of a lustful look. Both have to do with morality and conduct toward one another.

Murder and Hate

"*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that they brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy*

gift. Agree with thine adversaries quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." (Matthew 5:21-26).

The Mosaic law commanded, "*Thou shalt not kill.*" (Deuteronomy 5:17; Exodus 20:1). This meant, "*Thou shalt not murder.*" Murder has become a very prominent sin of our society. The command did not forbid all taking of human life. At times it was permitted, even commanded, in such as war, and capital punishment. What was prohibited by the command was murder. There is a difference. Even in the New Testament the government is given the power to defend its authority in war and capital punishment (Romans 13:4). But the deliberate, intentional, purposeful taking of innocent human life, motivated by hatred and the desire to dispose of another, was prohibited. Respect for the dignity and sacredness of human life is a part of God's requirement because man is created in the image of God.

The scribes and Pharisees had expanded on that law to include, "*Whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.*" which meant that those who violated God's law would also face the Jewish tribunals, councils, and other courts, leading to their punishment.

But the law of the kingdom is more far reaching than this. A hostile heart, one full of scorn, contempt, and hatred makes one liable to the verdicts of judgment. It deals with anger, an attitude of the heart. To speak the word, "*Raca,*" was to speak with such reproach. It was to accuse one of looseness of life and morals. Those who would so accuse would be called to prove the charge. Making irresponsible charges against others would not be characteristic of those who made up the kingdom.

To say, "*Thou fool,*" with hatred toward another as if they were wicked and reprobate when they were not, would place the soul in jeopardy. Those in the kingdom would not entertain hatred of people, even though they hated the wickedness and evil some people commit. Murder was wrong under the old law, as well as the new.

But hatred is also a sin under the doctrine of the Christ, even though murder may never take place. To hate is a sin just as murder is sin. "*Whosoever hateth his brother in a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*" (First John 3:15). The superiority of the gospel system is seen in that it cuts to the heart, motive, and mind of a person as well as discerning his evil and outward deeds. It includes attitudes as well as actions.

Affects Worship

Just how serious this matter is can be seen in the fact that one's worship is discounted if the heart be burdened with ill-will, resentment, grudges, and animosity toward others. Such must be purged from the heart before the gift of sacrifice is acceptable. One may have differences with another without having an evil heart of hatred toward the other. He will seek reconciliation and agreement. Those in the kingdom prefer to settle differences on the basis of God's Word rather than hold grudges that stifle the present and harass the future.

The Lord warns that when one has a justified cause to be opposed to you, you do better to settle the matter, lest by your unwillingness to do so be the reason for a greater hardship to come upon you. Few things are more destructive to a person than one who is in error but stubbornly persists in that wrong. Christ shows that the heart of the citizens of His kingdom will be of a different and more noble quality.

Lust and Adultery

"*Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. But if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of they members perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*" (Matthew 5:27-30).

Jesus is teaching that lusting after a woman is just as much a sin as committing adultery. The thing that prevents actual adultery is opportunity. The desire for gratification with one with whom such is unlawful is the sin of lust. Lust includes not only the unlawful desire, but the will to satisfy that desire if opportunity were given.

This point of the gospel of the kingdom, like the one just discussed, goes beyond the overt action, the external sin, but deals with the heart of a person. It deals with the thought of the mind. In this the law of Christ is superior to the law of Moses. It is concerned more with the inward man than the old law while retaining concern for the outward man. The gospel proposes to check the first emotions of sin, and stifle the impulses that lead to sinful attitudes and deeds.

Looking upon a woman in admiration of feminine beauty is not what is condemned. Often the scripture notes the beauty of a fair woman. What is condemned is the sensual look, the intentional sensual excitement by use of the eye which creates unlawful desire.

There may well be that many men are evil in mind, lustful, and give in to the pursuit of sensual gratification of sexual desire. But there is no evil in the desire itself, nor the satisfaction of it in the bonds of marriage (Hebrews 13:4). But the fulfillment outside of marriage is abominable before God. There is no Christian manliness in that man who does not respect God's law regarding his behavior toward woman. Those in the kingdom strive to be pure in body and mind (First Timothy 5:2).

But we must remember that the exposure of the body is the natural and proper way of arousing interest and desire between the sexes. For this reason the Christian woman will be modest in her attire (First Timothy 2:9,10). A woman who is not discreet, but immodest in dress and manners, and indecently exposes her body to a man's view will likely create lust in his heart unless he keeps his heart under control. In her disrespect of her own body, and in disregard to God's Word, some man might be provoked to sin. But she shall also be condemned for her sin of immodesty. When a woman

wears abbreviated attire that overexposes her body she is a sinner before God.

Christian mothers and their daughters have a duty before God and man not to offend in this matter. Evil men may think you are attractive and desirable. But godly men, and the Lord, will think you cheap and sinful when you are not modestly dressed.

It is true that many fashions on the market today do not allow modesty by the wearer. Some have surrendered to the godless fashions and those who produce them without pain of conscience. Others, however, have returned to making their own garments rather than commit sin. God bless them!

While Jesus singles out the eye and the hand for possible destruction, He is not teaching mutilation of the body. The eye and hand are precious to us. But even that which is precious must be sacrificed if necessary in order not to sin. It is better to do without something precious than to be in hell.

The world does not look with favor on the teaching of Jesus Christ against a heart of lust or a heart of hatred. But those of the kingdom have respect for His Word. Such things as controlling the heart characterize those in the kingdom of Christ.

* * * * *

We Have Our Work Before Us

Even though this issue will come to you some months after I have typed this, let me tell you that I am presently in a motel room in Indianapolis, Indiana, soon to begin a gospel meeting at the Shelbyville Road church. It is a beautiful Sunday morning. But outside are many people going about their affairs, and obviously they are not dressed for any effort to worship God today in any way. They seem committed to the world and their own way. Who could doubt that we have much to do? I must go and invite at least one of them to go with me to worship. Who knows what they may think? JWB

Lesson Seven - Matthew 5:31-42

The precepts of the Sermon on the Mount to now be considered dominate much of the study that people give to the sermon. Keeping in mind that the sermon is the doctrine of Christ, the gospel of the kingdom, the preamble of the new covenant, the forecast of the nature and characteristics of the kingdom that began on Pentecost, we turn our attention to see what the Lord said on the subject of marriage and divorce, making and taking oaths, and a notable difference between the law of Moses and the will of Christ in dealing with resistance and forbearance of evil.

"*It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*" (Matthew 5:31,32). It is appropriate that we read other words of Jesus on this same subject in Matthew 19:3-9, "*The Pharisees also come unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He said unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*"

God's Intent

First, note that Christ reaffirms God's original intent regarding marriage. One man, one woman, no more twain, one flesh, no putting away is His will. That is the way God designed it. Romans seven teaches the only

honorable way for a marriage to be dissolved and that is the death of one of the partners. Anything else is going to involve sin. The only dissolution permitted at all, the only exception to the rule that marriage is for the rest of life, is in the event of conjugal, sexual infidelity. To defile the marriage bed is abominable against God and one's mate. Sexual union in marriage is honorable, but otherwise it is sin (Hebrews 13:4). God does not require a person to remain united with another who will not be faithful to the vow to "keep thyself only unto" him or her. Scripture does not reveal any other grounds for divorce.

Consider how this differs with so much that is allowed today. We must conclude that any divorce that is not because of fornication is not a divorce that God accepts. A so-called marriage union may be called marriage when one has been previously married but has divorced for other causes, but in God's eye it is not an acceptable marriage, but is adultery. It is nothing more than legalized adultery.

God never intended marriage to end in divorce. Moses allowed divorces and demanded they have legal recognition, but only for the protection of the parties involved. It was because the people were so stubborn against God's will. But such was never God's desire or design, and Jesus reaffirms God's law regarding the permanent nature of marriage. Marriage must be entered into with the same intent as God designed for it when He instituted it in the beginning.

Some say that one can never divorce and remarry under any circumstances. But to make that conclusion one must ignore the exception that Jesus Himself gave in both the fifth and nineteenth chapters.

Basic

One can raise real and hypothetical cases where marital entanglements are tremendously complicated. But no man has the right to set aside these basic fundamentals of marriage and divorce as given in the doctrine of Christ. They are strict and inflexible. They are so much that way that the apostles recognized it and suggested it

was better to never marry. It may be better if one is not willing to abide by what the Lord has taught concerning marriage. Staying unmarried is not always the worst thing that can happen. But if one does marry, he and she must obey the Lord's will regarding it.

Instead of allowing people to grow up thinking this "try-it-a-while" attitude toward marriage is permissible, we need to teach that which the Lord has said. The lifetime union is what Christ teaches.

There is a deadly and sinister doctrine being taught that when one becomes a Christian, even though he has been living in adultery because he is not properly married, that at baptism his unlawful union somehow becomes lawful. When one becomes a Christian his past sins are forgiven, even adultery. But nothing in Scripture suggests that baptism makes an adulterous relationship a sanctified marriage. To so teach and advise is to mislead and will cost the souls of those who are misled as well as the false teacher. To be cleansed of sin, only to return to sin, means to be lost in sin.

Every marital problem will have its peculiarities. But no solution can be accepted that does not honor the fundamentals given in the Sermon on the Mount.

Regarding Oaths

The next point Jesus discusses is oaths. "*Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not foreswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God;s throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black, but let your communication be, Yea, yea, Nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*" (Matthew 5:33-37).

The text implies that some were avoiding the performance of that which they promised to do. Some were taking oaths made on something they considered less than the name of the Lord, and did not feel

compelled to keep their word. An oath in the name of God was binding to them, but an oath on the temple, heaven, earth, or themselves could be broken if it was convenient to do so. Jesus is teaching that one should keep his word in every case, and not make exceptions such as were obviously being made.

There are several ways one can sin with the tongue, such as lying, profanity, gossiping, tale bearing, perjury, cursing, vulgarity, irreverence, taking God's name in vain, and other ways. Making an insincere promise or vow is also a way to sin. Jesus said your "yes" and your "no" ought be sufficient, adequate, and reliable. People get into trouble by saying things they do not mean, or feeling compelled to underscore their words by pronouncing some oath, profanity, or something like that. James warns, "*But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath, but let your yea be yea and your may be nay, lest ye fall into condemnation.*" (James 5:12). Such ought not be necessary for those of the kingdom. They ought to be people of truth and able to convey their thoughts without making oaths.

But there is another matter than must be discussed here. What is the Christian to do about legal oaths, such as in civil courts, or on various documents that require a statement of swearing or affirming something to be true? Is there any difference between affirming and swearing that something is true? There is no real difference. If one is wrong, both are wrong. We are asked to make such oaths of affirmations on death certificates, insurance papers, social security documents, tax forms, in court testimony, etc. You are to assure that you are telling the truth.

Already Promised

For the Christian to promise to tell the truth is asking nothing of him that he has not already promised the Lord long ago. It is but a tool of the civil power to enforce the law and punish perjury and lying. But what did Jesus do when faced with that circumstance?

When Jesus was before the high priest, the priest demanded, "*I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.*" (Matthew 26:63). Jesus responded to that demand by acknowledging that He was the Christ. The word "*adjure*" means to answer under penalty. It is the same as promising to tell the whole truth, nothing but the truth, as one is required to do when called into court for some reason to testify. So we do no wrong to obey the law of the land in this case and swear to tell the truth under those circumstances.

Neither must it be wrong to call on God to be witness to what you say. Paul did this on several occasions (Romans 1:9; Second Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20). He did not do this flippantly, with profanity, but with utmost reverence for God.

The teaching has to do with one's fidelity, honesty, and integrity. A man's word ought be his bond. Those in the kingdom are to be people who do not take a light and frivolous attitude toward the truth. Their word can be trusted by those who hear it.

Regarding Revenge

"*Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*" (Matthew 5:38-42).

These words outline a set of principles that govern those in the kingdom, that kingdom to which all men must belong if they are going to heaven. They present a viewpoint and a spirit that is to be possessed and exercised toward God and man.

Moses' law called for the "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" kind of response. The one who injures is injured in return. It was the principle of equal revenge and

retribution for evil. It was literally carried out and executed by the powers that ruled. The individual was not left to carry out the law under his own vengeance, but it was done according to the law.

But under the law of Christ there is a variation noted. There are times we must not resist, but forbear. The Lord is not teaching us to just be a door mat for everyone that wishes to step on us and offend us. The Lord Himself often used strong words and actions of resistance against evil, such as driving the money changers out of the temple, and looking with anger upon those who were rebellious. He is not teaching an unqualified and unlimited non-resistance.

The idea is to acquiesce when you can and comply passively against those that would take advantage of you. Forbearance is not always playing into the hands of the evildoers. We are not taught to never resist regardless of the circumstances that may be imposed upon us, such as an attack against our loved ones or our person. But there are matters in which it is better to forbear and let the other man have his way than to fight back. Turning the other cheek, going the second mile, giving more than is demanded of you, are terms that express the willingness of those in the kingdom to pursue peace and not retaliation. Vengeance belongs to God and God will take vengeance in time (Romans 12:19). It is not always necessary that we have our own way or that we are victorious over those that oppose us. In those matters where we can conform to the wishes of another, where God's will is not violated in doing so, the gospel of the kingdom teaches us to give in rather than resist, even the score, or get even with retribution as was formerly the case.

Jewish people were often physically abused by the Roman authorities. They were subjected to the demands of Roman soldiers to carry burdens. Rather than retaliate and seek vengeance, Christ was teaching that it is better to forbear and even do more than expected.

This is surely one of the hardest of the characteristics of the kingdom we find to obey. There seems to be within us a spirit to hit back when we are hit. There are times

when not providing protection is a neglect of duty. But there are times when we should not resist. We do not want to displace God and assume it is our right to settle all matters here on earth to our satisfaction.

* * * * *

Lesson Eight - Matthew 5:43-48

As we continue a study of the gospel of the kingdom, the doctrine of Christ, this preview and forecast of the characteristics and nature of the kingdom that was to soon come, and did come on Pentecost, we reach the point where Jesus presents one of the most revolutionary concepts men have heard. It is not revolutionary in the sense that it is revolting and offensive like much that is called revolutionary today. But it is revolutionary in that it is a radical change from what people had formerly been taught and quite different from what many think today.

Actually, the next point of concern in the Sermon on the Mount is point number three in a series of three points that began with verse thirty-eight of chapter five. Jesus showed how the "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" concept was no longer proper. He also went a step further to insist that there are times and circumstances when we should not resist, but acquiesce and forbear before our enemies. Now He makes the third and very dramatic pronouncement regarding both an attitude and action toward enemies that we should have. It is this pronouncement that we shall study now, beginning with Matthew 5:43-48.

Regarding Enemies

Before reading the text let us note that the teaching acknowledges the possibility, even the probability, that those in the kingdom would cultivate enemies along the way. We are not to be surprised at this (Matthew 10:34ff; Second Timothy 3:12). This fact of life may be why so much of the Sermon on the Mount dwells on the subject of persecution, enemies, hardship, and how to deal with

it. Jesus warned, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*" (John 15:18). "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" (First John 3:13). But what must be our heart and habit toward those who are enemies?

"*Ye have heard that is hath been said. Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*"

In the Old Testament, people were taught to love their neighbors (Leviticus 19:18), but another attitude existed toward enemies. "*Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.*" (Deuteronomy 23:6). For fifteen or more centuries that course reflected somewhat the natural and immediate response toward one's friends and foes.

Love

But under the gospel of the kingdom Jesus gives four specific attitudes and actions toward enemies that are quite at variance from the law of Moses. These four are found in verse forty-four. (1) Love your enemy. (2) Bless your enemy. (3) Do good unto your enemy. (4) Pray for your enemy. This is the kind of attitude and behavior that one is expected to offer toward loved ones and friends. But it is certainly out of the ordinary when such exists toward those who "*despitefully use you, and persecute you,*" take advantage of you, seek your hurt or injury in some way. This is the reason His teaching is so revolutionary.

To love another person is to seek that person's highest good. Christian love is not manifested to every person the same way because we sustain various relationships.

But Christian love always keeps the standard of seeking the other's highest good. The demonstration of Christian love is not always the easiest course to follow, nor the most popular one. It may not be the most peaceful one, or even the most pleasant. But it is always the right one.

Often the way of Christian love is showered with joy, gladness, warmth, comfort, and such similar qualities, but not always. Jesus would not have us to agree, compromise, surrender to error or evil in order to enjoy those benefits. But this does not change the fact that the gospel of the kingdom is love for all.

Love for one's enemy may take the form of sympathy, compassion, pity, or other forms like unto these. Consider the attitude of Jesus toward Pilate, Judas, Peter, who denied Him, and those who crucified Him. Did He not pray, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*"? On the other hand, love for one's enemy may take the form of rebuke, discipline, opposition to the sinfulness the enemy is committing. But in all circumstances and conditions, God wants us to love, even the enemy, that is, seek his highest good.

Bless

Even though your enemy may seek your harm and injury, you are to bless your opponent, which is the very opposite of what he seeks for you. To be willing to bless another is the willingness to confer upon them whatever genuine benefit and prosperity you are capable of bestowing if the opportunity arises. We could never seek their prosperity in evil. But we would want them to enjoy prosperity in that which is good. To bless your enemy is another way of saying you seek their good, you manifest love, you have a willingness to assist them in attaining that good. Your afflictions caused by them will not be considered so great that you would withhold what they need if called upon to supply that need.

Do Good

Christians do not seek revenge and are not retaliatory and vindictive. Rather they do good, not rendering evil for evil. "*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but*

rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:19-21).

To love your enemy and bless him is certainly the right attitude toward him. But there is the need to go even further and do something to his benefit. There is the need for good action. People live by a variety of principles. For instance, some live by the principle of doing unto others as they do unto you. Others follow the rule of doing unto others before they do unto you. You find some who take advantage and exploit others, abusing others. Still some follow the doctrine of doing unto others the way they would like others to do toward them. The rule of the kingdom is to treat all men with love, seeking what is best for them as God defines the best. This goes for your adversary as well as your ally. We are to do good to others regardless of what they do toward us.

Pray

The fourth part of this revolutionary doctrine presented by Jesus is that we pray for our enemies. To mention the name of your enemy in prayer requires love and good will. To talk with God on behalf of those who choose to be your opponents is to be impressed with the gospel of the kingdom. It is a marvelous thing how the doctrine of Christ, when and if applied, can accomplish such spiritual benefits for ourselves as well as for those around us. We are not likely to seek one's harm after we have asked God to help in seeking his good.

Jesus notes that such an attitude and action toward enemies is necessary to be a true child of God. Inasmuch as the children of God are the same ones who are citizens of the kingdom, we see this teaching describes an essential characteristic of the kingdom that was soon to be established. Children are generally expected to imitate their parents. "*If ye were Abraham's children, ye would to the works of Abraham.*" (John 8:39). A child of the devil will act like the devil (John 8:44). But a child of

God is expected to act like God wants him to act (John 8:47). Inasmuch as God has an unconditional love for all men, so should His children have such a love for all. God does not approve of all men, and neither should His children. God will not save all men and His children should not imply that He will. But God does seek all men to save all other men because He seeks man's highest good. So should it be with His children. As God sends the sun and rain on the evil and good, on the just and unjust, so we must love our foes as well as our friends.

Earlier in this sermon (Matthew 5:20), Jesus had said the righteousness those in the kingdom were to follow had to exceed that which others were following. The way of living had to be different and better. The system of righteousness that would characterize the kingdom would be superior to what others followed. To only love those who love us would not reflect a superior standard. Even those who are transgressors will do as much. To salute, greet, only our brethren is no mark of distinction because even those who are known to be unacceptable will do that. Those in the kingdom are courteous, gentlemanly, above board in their dealing with all men, even enemies as well as good brethren. This is because they follow the standard that exceeds.

Perfect

The sum total of this portion of the sermon on attitudes and actions toward enemies points out the character of God, the nature of His kingdom, and how we, as citizens of it, are to be like Him. God is perfect, so must we be.

The word perfect has more than one meaning. God is perfect in every sense. It means sinless, faultless, flawless, no blemish whatever. This is beyond possibility for frail humanity. Even those in Christ are not absolutely sinless. "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*" (First John 1:8,10). But perfect also means completeness, maturity, having reached a high level of development. Man strives to be as sinless as he can. But he also reaches higher and higher degrees of maturity and spiritual development as he grows in Christ. This

matter of being perfect as God is perfect expresses the concept of spiritual growth that is to never discontinue as long as we live. As we live under the new and better covenant, we are to assimilate and appropriate to ourselves the spiritual qualities akin to God Himself. Peter calls it partaking of the divine nature (Second Peter 1:4).

A serious application of this profound yet simple precept of the doctrine of Christ will remove from our lives, our world, much of the strife, hatred, stress, tension, animosity, bitterness, and sin among people. It would make our existence on earth more pleasant. Talk about something relevant, applicable, usable, up-to-date, and needful for our generation! What is there that is more so than the Sermon on the Mount? Such is the gospel of the kingdom. To the extent we respect the Teacher, we will respect His teaching.

* * * * *

How Come This "Campbellite" Stuff We Keep Hearing?

Most brethren have been called "Campbellites" by denominational people at one time or another. They are led to do this by a prejudiced clergy who just abhor the simple plea to return to New Testament Christianity. They are so wrapped up in denominationalism, and their churches of human origin, they just can't conceive of anybody not belonging to a denomination. They just won't allow it. They would prohibit anybody from being just a Christian and a member of the church of which you read in the New Testament. Neither will they be honest with the historical facts regarding Alexander Campbell and the efforts

made by many to restore the church as the Bible reveals it. It is too much for them.

The fact is, efforts to return to the church of the Bible began before A. Campbell ever set foot on these shores. It began among Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and others without ever having heard of the man. Churches of Christ existed in England after Catholicism, and Protestant Reformation, a century or more before A. Campbell was born. How could such folks be called Campbellites with any degree of honesty? Dishonesty may be at the heart of the term "Campbellite."

Even in the county where I live there existed a church of Christ before A. Campbell was ever in America. Only a prejudiced clergymen, who shows his ignorance of history and the Bible, would ever say Campbell, or any man founded the church of Christ. Why don't some of these people show more honesty with truth, and admit the church exists separate and apart from denominationalism? Nothing we believe or do is believed or done by the authority of Campbell or any other human. We follow the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17).

Unfortunately, some, even among brethren who have chosen liberalism over truth, have given away the plea to restore New Testament Christianity. They openly confess they have no interest in its restoration. Here is one of a number of places where we part company. I am interested in the church of the Bible because, of all the churches that exist on earth, that one is RIGHT. JWB

Lazarus Is Sick



The record begins with Jesus beyond Jordan where John first baptized. Word came that Lazarus was sick in Bethany. He was the brother of Mary and Martha. "*Lord, behold, he who thou lovest is sick.*" But Jesus did not react as we probably would, going immediately to his side. Jesus knew this was an opportunity to glorify God and identify Himself as the Son of God. He remained where He was for two more days, then left for Judea. There may arise events in our lives that may at first not appear to be all that they can be. Even sad situations might be turned into something that would bring glory to God if only we would use them that way. We ought keep a sharp eye for opportunities. JWB

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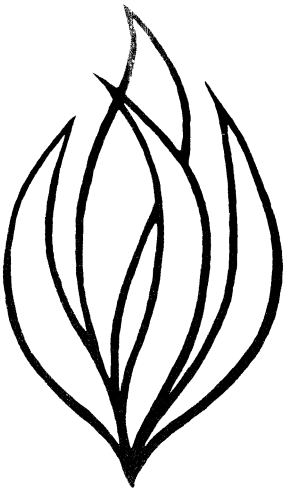

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIII **NUMBER 8**

James W. Boyd

Sermon on the Mount

Lesson Nine - Matthew 6:1-8; 16-18

Our study of this sermon takes us into chapter six of Matthew where Jesus discusses a subject that was often discussed during His personal ministry, and that is the subject of hypocrisy. Keep in mind that this sermon is the gospel of the kingdom, the doctrine of Christ, the preamble of the new covenant, a forecast and preview of the nature and characteristics of the kingdom that Jesus was soon to establish, and did, on Pentecost.

Thus far we have studied the eight Beatitudes, three Similitudes or comparisons of the kingdom, eight specific precepts of His doctrine. We studied the relationship of the doctrine of Christ to the Mosaic Law, also to human traditions, the sins of hate and lust, the taking of oaths, marriage and divorce, the quality of forbearance, and the right attitude and action toward our enemies. Chapter six opens with remarks regarding hypocrisy, especially as it is demonstrated through a religious exhibition and showiness.

Warnings

"*Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what they right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogue and in the corners of the streets that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father*

which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him." (Matthew 6:1-8). "*Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in heaven, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."* (Matthew 6:16-18).

By these words Jesus condemns a religion of unnecessary show and display of self. Citizens of the kingdom are not exhibitionists and do not parade their religion before others in order to win the praise and plaudits of men. Christianity does manifest itself. We have already learned that Jesus said, "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:16). But there is a difference between letting your light shine, and just shining your light. Christianity is not showy, pretentious, ostentatious, designed to be a way of seeking acclaim, attracting attention, and receiving the admiration of others for oneself. It is one thing to do what you ought because it is right and allow whatever natural consequences of that deed take place that may cause others to glorify God. But it is quite another thing to do something, even what you ought to do, in such a way to be seen of others in order that others will be impressed with your goodness, piety, and praise you for it. Christianity does not appeal through the spectacular, sensational, festive, public display. It does not make its appeal through the eye, ear, or physical sense in a manner that is showy and pretentious. Unhappily, much promotion in religion today has been reduced to entertainment, showmanship, and even carnival-like atmospheres. Men use everything, all kinds of gimmicks and attractions to draw a crowd, entertaining rather than edifying. But such produces praises of men and publicity for men rather than glory for God.

The very nature of Christianity is such that discourages advertising of our deeds in order to stimulate public applause for ourselves. The appeal of the gospel is not reflected by circus-like environment, big names of the world to attracts crowds, horn-blowing and the many gadgets and ploys being used, in and out of the church, to attract.

Motive

As has been seen to be true in many of the precepts of the gospel of the kingdom, the motive behind the deed is no more and no less important than the deed itself. We must take care that we do not do that which is wrong. But even when we do that which is right, we must guard our motives for so doing. It takes the right motive behind the right deed to be right with God. Either a wrong motive or a wrong deed is a displeasure to God.

There are four ways to do wrong, and one way to do right. (1) Doing a wrong deed with the wrong motive. (2) Doing the wrong deed with the right motive. (3) Doing the right deed with the wrong motive. (4) Doing nothing for fear of doing something wrong. The way to please God is to do the right thing with the right motive.

Alms-giving

Jesus cited three specific illustrations of the point He made. First, in alms-giving. To give gifts was a commendable activity. Charity is something the Lord approves. The showy manner of the charitable acts is what Jesus condemned, and the evil motive made it repulsive. When men do what they do to receive glory of men, they may well be praised by their fellows. Many people are sufficiently shallow to be impressed. But that is the sum total of their reward. There is no heavenly reward.

But to give alms, gifts, charity, in an inconspicuous manner, from a motive and desire to do good, though it may not cause you to be praised by men (they may never even know of it), God takes note of it. He knows your attitude of heart and He will be pleased with both your attitude and action.

The phrase, "*Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth,*" is a figure of speech that has its application in doing your righteousness without the search for praise from others. Hypocrisy in alms-giving is obvious when giving appears to be for good and charitable works, but it actually becomes a means of receiving congratulations from others. Such an attitude and action is not that which is to characterize those in the kingdom. Some might never do anything of a charitable nature if they knew nobody would ever know it except God. Possibly this was the sin of Annanias and Saphirra who said they had given so much when actually they had held back a portion. Possibly they did what they did and lied about it because they wanted others to think they were more charitable than they really were.

Prayer

A second illustration had to do with the manner of praying. Jesus is not condemning the posture of standing when one prays. Nor is He condemning public prayer. It does not mean one must literally go into a closet and shut the door before he can pray. We read of prayers being offered in many situations in the Bible that had God's approval. The spirit of His words is to be applied. Prayer can be properly and improperly made anywhere. What He is condemning is the showiness of prayer.

Prayer is a noble, beneficial, spiritual activity. God has blessed people with the opportunity for prayer. Certainly the Lord is not condemning prayer or praying together. This must be considered in the context of His teaching against hypocrisy and public display of religion. Later in this Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray. The Lord does not approve of people going about their practice of prayer in such a fashion that simply attracts attention to themselves that others may observe and offer praise to the praying people for their devotion and piety.

To pray just so others may see you pray, to pray with words that are designed to impress men rather than make a humble thanks and supplication to God, is to commit the hypocrisy of which Jesus speaks. Some have their "prayer voice," this overly pious and unnatural

tone when they pray. Some use such flowing, glowing, flowery speech that one is more attracted by the verbiage than the sentiments expressed. While we are content to let God judge the hearts of others, we should be careful not to pray in such fashion that smacks of a display of our righteousness. Being genuine is a quality that must exist in prayer. When one prays like that which Jesus condemns, something sacred is turned into something profane. A divine privilege is subverted into an exercise of self-glory. To demonstrate this outward righteousness does not reflect submission nor humility that is mandatory in acceptable prayer.

Christ cited the heathen practice of "*vain repetitions*" as another mark of hypocrisy in prayer. Such produces nothing, but only draws attention to oneself. Sincere repetition is not condemned. But the constant repeating of phrases, thinking that the mere repetition of them has some benefit, is just so much mechanical verbosity. Oratory, proceeding through ritual and liturgy is not a display of true piety, but of an imitation of heathen practices. We must guard against playing to the audience rather than praying to God.

The vanity of such repetition is underlined by the realization that God knows that for which we have need even before we ask. Prayer is not for the purpose of informing God of our need. He already knows that. It is to ask God to supply that need. It is a recognition of our dependence on God, and an opportunity to show gratitude toward God for His providence.

Prayer, like other avenues of worship, is a highly personal matter. It is between man and God, the individual and God. Even when others may direct our thoughts in prayer, the use of the avenue of prayer is between you and God, me and God, each one and God. This avenue ought never be a man-man activity where one man makes a religious display for another man.

This teaching regarding the abuse of prayer is followed with the teaching of Jesus on how to pray which we defer to our study until the next lesson. In verses 16-18 Jesus gave one other illustration of His teaching against hypocritical and showy religious practices that is in

order for us to consider now. We shall return to the teaching on prayer in our next lesson.

Fasting

The third illustration He uses has to do with fasting. Whereas the first two illustrations involved a continual activity required by the law of Moses, that of alms-giving and prayer, fasting has scarce mention in the ceremonial observances of the Old Testament. It has no doctrinal directions in the New Testament in the sense of a command or requirement. Fasting had gradually become attached to the Jewish traditions. It has been exercised in past ages, as well as now, in times of mourning, sorrow, calamity, stress, and meditation. To fast as a Christian ritual is without authority and is as out of place as foot washing as a ritual. Nonetheless, at the time Jesus was teaching, fasting had become a sign of one's religious fervor and devotion.

Hypocrites pretended to fast so as to appear religious. It was all show. They would look sad, make up their faces to appear hungry, when they were not doing anything with sincerity, but with a desire to show off. They put on this form to impress others. It reminds one of the human tradition of Lent, Ash Wednesday, and similar things where people put ashes on their faces, and fast, and do other such things of outward display that has no Biblical authority behind it.

Christ admonished, even when you fast, do your best to look your best. Nothing, even of a traditional nature that suggests piety, is to be corrupted into a display of oneself for self-praise. God knows the heart, God knows the deed, God will reward as He sees fit, and that ought to be enough for us because that is all that matters.

To summarize this teaching we might add, if a man is truly and sincerely pious, devoted, consecrated, he cannot help but be a city as set on a hill. But if he has to parade his words, deeds, dress, manners, etc. to show others he is righteousness, that is an indication that he is not near so righteous as he thinks, nor righteous as he ought to be.

There are few subjects where Jesus used stronger words of condemnation than when He was discussing hypocrisy of the Pharisees in Matthew twenty-three. This hypocrisy was the "*leaven*" against which he warned others. "*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees...*" Their doctrines and behavior was not to be imitated. Honesty, sincerity, righteous deeds motivated from a good and honest heart is what the Lord expects of those who will compose His kingdom.

* * * * *

Lesson Ten - Matthew 6:9-15

In chapter six of Matthew, in the midst of teaching that condemns hypocrisy of a show-off kind of religion, Jesus teaches on the subject of prayer. Matthew 6: 9-13, "*After this manner therefore pray ye. Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*"

The context of this teaching is very important to a full understanding of it. While condemning a religion that exhibits itself for the praise of men and receiving their plaudits, He shows that right actions are also important as right motives. Get the significance if we will. The teaching of Jesus Christ is such that those who serve Him faithfully in His kingdom must do so with both the heart and deed, attitude and action.

Matthew 6:6 has already emphasized the very personal nature of prayer. It is a matter between man and God. It is a sacred relationship that deserves every consideration and reverence. The very subject of prayer must be considered with a reverent frame of mind.

What This Prayer Is Not

These words of Jesus are not to be used as some sort of liturgical, ritualistic form of prayer. They are not like a "paternoster" (a word formula repeated over and over again as if there is some magical charm or power in the mere repetition of them like the Romanist practice). Neither is this the "Lord's Prayer" as if Jesus was praying this prayer on this occasion. He is teaching how to pray, not praying. On another occasion (Luke 11) Jesus used many of the same terms found here in responding to the disciples' request, "*Lord, teach us to pray.*" But let us remember that the very fact He taught prayer shows that prayer is by His authority.

An analysis of the teaching reveals it falls into three parts. (1) Words of praise of God. (2) Petitions unto God. (3) Recognition of God as the source of all blessings. The prayer contains nine phrases which we wish to consider briefly.

"Our Father Which Art In Heaven"

Is it not obvious from this address that prayer is an activity by those who are children of God? Prayer is a privilege of the Christian. God has given this opportunity to those who are His spiritual children. Those who are still the children of the devil do not address God in this fashion as "*Father.*" God is not yet their spiritual Father. Actually, there is no way for those apart from God to address God. One must come to God through Christ before he has the privilege of prayer and the promise to be heard.

Under the law of the kingdom one is not a child of God by virtue of his ancestry or because he is of the fleshly stock of Abraham. We become children of God by having been cleansed by the blood of Christ when we obey His command to be baptized. The offer for man to be a spiritual child of God is made both to Jew and Gentile alike and on the same terms and conditions. "*Whosoever will may come.*" Galatians 3:28,29, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye Christ's, the are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise*" It is the Christian that is blessed with the avenue of prayer.

The God to whom we direct our prayers is the God which is in heaven, Jehovah, as revealed in Scripture.

"Hallowed Be Thy Name"

This is an express of adoration. It is simple, yet sincere in praise of the Lord, His glory, and His name. It is an admiration of Him. Prayer should include words of praise to and of God. Those in the kingdom are worshippers of God. "*But the hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*" (John 4:23,24).

"Thy Kingdom Come"

Those who are the disciples of Christ would make up the citizenry of His kingdom. We must remember that at the time this sermon was preached the kingdom had not yet come. It was still in the future. It was later established on the first Pentecost after the Lord's ascension into heaven. It was the mission of Christ to build that kingdom that would be composed of the saved, which is the church. Here He was teaching His disciples that it was then proper to pray that the kingdom would come. Today the kingdom has long ago come. We would not properly pray these same words with the same meaning as originally given by Christ because the kingdom now exists. Then it did not. Those who teach the kingdom has not yet come encounter multiple contradictions of their position from Scripture. It is entirely proper that we pray for the spread of the borders of the kingdom, and that the kingdom might come into areas and among people who have not yet come to the Lord. But that was not the significance of the phrase when Christ was teaching His disciples how to pray.

"Thy Will Be Done"

This is an expression of subjection and submission that must characterize those who are in God's kingdom. It is the attitude that we always want God's will to be done in our lives, and even throughout this earth, just as His will prevails in heaven. It is the will of God that takes

center stage here. Citizens of His kingdom do not submit to their own will, the will of men, or to the will of Satan, but to the will of God.

"Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread"

What a wonderful recognition of God as the source of our physical blessings as well as our spiritual provisions. Later in this sermon, in this same chapter, Jesus teaches the providence of God. Here He shows the propriety of asking God for such physical provisions. We do not pray in this way to inform God what we need as if He was unaware of our needs. But we show our realization of dependence on Him and our respect for Him as our Provider.

Notice again that for which we are to pray. (1) Pray for daily provision, not abundance for all time. (2) Pray for bread, that which is necessary for life, not for luxuries, indulgences, etc. James 4:3 advises, "*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*"

"Forgive Us our Debts..."

This is a call for mercy. We do not deserve forgiveness. For those not in Christ, the way to receive mercy is to obey the gospel and come to Christ's blood. But for those who are already children of God, we have the privilege of prayer and can ask God for His merciful forgiveness. We are in the body where His blood flows to keep the faithful clean (First John 1:7). Luke says, "*Forgive us our sins.*" When we sin we place ourselves under obligation to God and those against whom we have sinned. Sin is not truly forgiven until forgiven by the Lord. "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*" (Romans 4:8).

Forgiveness of sins is conditional. Christ provided the way of forgiveness by His death on the cross. But man must come that way to be forgiven. Even this prayer is not to be understood that God forgives if we refuse to obey the conditions of forgiveness that He has revealed. One condition for forgiveness is stressed immediately following His teaching here about prayer. That condition is that we ourselves are forgiving. "*For if ye forgive men*

their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14,15).

The request for forgiveness is an open acknowledgment of one's need of forgiveness. Something basic to being forgiven is to accept the fact that forgiveness is needed. All have sinned (Roman 3:23), but some seem to act and talk as if that did not apply to them. Until one accepts this fact regarding himself, he will not be penitent, nor desire forgiveness, nor have any inclination to be obedient to the terms of forgiveness.

"Lead Us Not Into Temptation"

We should not mistake the power of temptation. "*Let not man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.*" (James 1:13-15). We should pray for the guidance of the Lord, but not expect some kind of direct intervention which He has not promised. His guidance is in His Word (Psalm 119:105), "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path,*" and we should pray that His Word would have free course in our thinking and actions. As we follow His Word we are following His will and will be led aright.

Even so, even in the kingdom, we cannot forget that our adversary, the devil, walks about as a roaring lion seeking to devour (First Peter 5:8). Satan will use any and every means to appeal to the Christian to sin and fall away. The three basic avenues of his approach are the ones he used against Eve, and also against Christ in the wilderness. John mentions them in First John 2:16 as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Our prayer should be that through the providence of God and our following His Word that we shall not be subjected to temptation, but delivered from it. We must try to avoid temptation whenever possible. We cannot be very sincere in this part of prayer if, while we are asking that we not be led into temptation, we are going and doing in such a fashion that places temptations before

us constantly and needlessly. Christians in the kingdom do not seek, but wish to avoid, opportunities to sin.

"Deliver Us From Evil"

This is a very logical follow-up statement to "*lead us not into temptation.*" The Lord knew that we cannot escape every temptation. We live in this world where temptation and sin is all around us. Satan, the prince of this world, abounds. While we are to avoid temptation all we can, we are aware that all temptation cannot be avoided. At such times we must, as James instructs, "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" (James 4:7). Our prayer should be that when we are tempted and tried, we will not submit to the temptation and sin. It is not sin to be tempted. Christ was tempted, but did no sin (First Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15). We can withstand the temptation to sin. "*There hath no temptation taken you but as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*" (First Corinthians 10:13). We cannot trifle with temptation and sin, seeing that the"*wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23).

"For Thine Is The ..."

In this final phrase we return to the words of praise. In it we have the mission and purpose of prayer. It is to glorify God. "*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*" Prayer ascribes to God the homage due Him. Our manner of prayer, while not necessarily expressed in the exact words of the Lord's lesson on prayer, is certainly to be with the same intent and sentiment, patterned after this teaching. We should include the three major and basic elements of prayer; namely, praise, petition, and recognition of God as our Provider of blessings. This certainly does not exhaust the Biblical teaching regarding prayer, or even the example given here. But it suffices as we move to another matter of doctrine in this gospel of the kingdom.

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Lesson Eleven - Matthew 6: 19-34

"*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal; But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal; For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness. No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" (Matthew 6: 19-24).

Three main points are discussed in this passage that serve somewhat as a launching pad from which we go into a consideration of the providence of God. (1) Laying up treasures; (2) keeping the eye single; (3) and the impossibility of serving two masters. These three points deal with a major conflict of man as he strives to serve God in a material world.

The Christian's emphasis must be on matters of eternal nature, of spirit import, and earthly and temporal matters must be secondary. "*Set your affection on things above, not on things on earth.*" (Colossians 3:2). If the heart is on this world it will not be on God. Our treasures should be of the imperishable, spiritual sort.

Christ uses the eye to illustrate a fundamental truth. The eye is the organ of light for the entire body. If the eye is diseased, blurred, or double-visioned rather than a single image that is clear, precise, and distinct, the body will not be enlightened. So it is with the eye of the heart, the eye of understanding (Ephesians 1:18; James 1:8). Just as the physical eye must be single and clear, so the eye of the heart (mind, ability to comprehend) must be clear and set on one object of prime loyalty, or else we will be in spiritual darkness. We cannot serve two masters. Our master will either be the Lord or mammon, which refers to the material things of this world and this life. Attempts to live for this world, putting the

matters of this world (however important) before God, is to suffer spiritual double vision and darkness. Such is not to characterize the kingdom's citizens.

These words lead us in the Lord's discussion regarding man's anxiety about material things. There are certain material matters that are necessary for life, and we are expected to be good stewards of material matters placed in our care. Yet, such things must be kept in their place lest they become hindrances to our spiritual welfare.

He Does Not Condemn Material Things

Jesus is not saying that material things are themselves evil. Nor is he saying that we can be indifferent regarding our responsibilities concerning material matters. He is not condemning ownership, even though it is at best our stewardship. He does not place a premium on indigence, poverty, and a lack of prudence regarding material matters. If He was doing that He would be contradicting teaching concerning the proper use of material things and our responsibility regarding them (Second Corinthians 12:14; Matthew 15: 3-6; 25:14-30; First Timothy 5:4,5; Second Thessalonians 3:10). This He did not do.

He is using the figure of speech where the less important is totally denied in order to emphasize the more important. He taught in similar fashion in John 6:27, "*Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life...*" Jesus does not here forbid working for a living for yourself and those dependent on you. He is not forbidding making adequate provision for temporal needs. He is simply showing where the emphasis must be when one follows Him. We are expected to be more considerate of things permanent than things transient.

If the eye of the heart, the mind, is clear and precise, we will know that we cannot serve God and mammon at the same time. One or the other must take pre-eminence. The truth we must learn is that God comes first.

"Take No Thought For..."

In another figure of speech, Jesus stresses the greater by denying the lesser. "*Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*" (Matthew 6:25). Jesus is not prohibiting all thought and attention to material matters, for some of that is essential in living. The American Standard Version read, "*Be not anxious...*" over such things. We now are really getting into the discussion of the providence of God. While certain material things are vital, Jesus is teaching that God will provide. It is not that man may sit down idle and expect God to do everything for him. God expects man to cooperate and use that which God has already given him. But God promises provisions when certain conditions are met.

Jesus is not forbidding giving "forethought," in the sense of planning, but He is forbidding "foreboding," in the sense of anticipation and worry. We do not suggest that this is an easy teaching to obey when the trials and pressures of the material world build up against us. We are saying that Jesus says, "Do not worry over material matters." His words give peace of mind to those in the kingdom in a world of uncertainty. They are designed to direct our attention to matters of greater significance and consequence. After all, God will provide.

A Reasonable Appeal

Christ makes the most reasonable appeal one can imagine to show the uselessness and futility of worrying and being anxious over such matters. For the sake of space, we urge the reader to take his Bible and read just here Matthew 6:26-32. This reading is vital to our study.

The Fowls

"*Behold the fowls...*" Here is an illustration of God's natural provisions. "*He feedeth them.*" "*Are ye not better than they?*" Certainly, we are, because man has been created in the spiritual image of God. No fowl, nor any other of God's creations are so designated except mankind. If God is not unconcerned about such creatures, He will not be unconcerned for us and our

earthly existence. Being anxious will not add to our provision.

The Lilies and the Grass

" *"Consider the lilies... the grass of the field..."* He clothes them. Shall He not clothe us? Lilies, grass are here today, gone tomorrow. Man is of greater nature than such things. Then the Lord adds, "*O ye of little faith.*" To forebode, worry, be anxious, overly concerned about material matters and provision is a manifestation of a lack of faith in the providence of God. Gentiles were engrossed in the mundane, earthly matters to the neglect of the soul and eternity. But those in the kingdom are to possess a different view of life and the matters of earth.

God Already Knows

The futility of worry and anxiety is seen in the fact that God knows what we need in material matters (verse 32). Referring back to previous studies (Chapter six, verse eight), God knows what things we need before we ask. We do not pray to inform God of our needs so much as to give recognition to God that we realize He is the One who supplies our needs. God provides. And the God who provides says such things are not of first priority.

What Is To Be First?

"*But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*" (Matthew 6:33,34). The kingdom of God refers to the church. Everything related to the church deserves and demands our first concern, including its work, worship, mission, existence, etc. God's righteousness means God's plan for making man righteous, or the justification of man. It is the plan of salvation, the scheme of redemption, the system of salvation, the way that our sins are forgiven. In other words, the church and God's way of saving man must take first place in the lives, affairs, actions, ambitions of those in the Lord's kingdom. Even such

necessary matters as the material needs of life cannot be first. God must be first.

What About Today and Tomorrow?

We are not to worry about tomorrow. We need to live today as best we can. The things that may come tomorrow cannot be handled now. Each day has all that we can properly handle. We cannot live yesterday over, and we cannot skip into tomorrow. The cares, needs, problems, challenges, of today are all that we need to care for now because that is all that we can do right now. As each day dawns, as each tomorrow becomes today, God will provide. "*I have been young, and now I am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*" (Psalm 37:25). "*Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*" (Proverbs 30: 8,9).

We are not able to tell what a day may bring forth (James 4:13-15). For those in the kingdom there may be some days that are dark, difficult, and dismal, as well as days that are bright, joyful, and full of success. Such has been the case of God's people throughout human history. But each day brings its own challenges, blessings, and problems. We are not to borrow trouble from yesterday nor from tomorrow. With each day bringing its own responsibilities, we are not able to shoulder more than one day at a time. We will become overburdened and break under the strain if we try.

Because of God's providence, there will be sufficient provision as God, in His infinite wisdom, sees we stand in need. The final chapter also includes words about God's ability to provide for us which we shall consider when we get to that point in this gospel of the kingdom, this preamble of the new covenant, this doctrine of Christ, that which points toward the coming of the kingdom which did come on the first Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

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Lesson Twelve - Matthew 7:1-5

We now begin a study of the third of the three chapters that are devoted to the sermon preached by Christ on some unidentified mount. It is an appropriate time to review some of the basic fundamentals in understanding this sermon because the reader is not likely to read this entire series at one sitting.

It was preached by Christ at the beginning of His personal ministry. The context of the sermon is the message of John the Baptist that Jesus is the "*Lamb of God.*" (John 1:29). It is in the context of Jesus' preaching the need to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 4:17). He came preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:4). It is the doctrine of Christ (Matthew 7:28,29). It serves as the preamble of the new covenant, a preview and forecast of the nature and character of the kingdom He would establish, and did establish, on Pentecost.

At this point Jesus had presented eight Beatitudes, three Similitudes, eight principle precepts of distinction of His gospel, plus condemnation of hypocrisy, a lesson on prayer, a discussion of the providence of God, and the necessity of putting first things first. We next encounter the essentiality of following the right standard and authority, as opposed to following men or self.

Regarding Judging

"*Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then thou shalt see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*" (Matthew 7:1-5).

Few passages have been more misunderstood and misapplied than the one under consideration. People have taken the words of Jesus and twisted them, wrested

them, turned them around, and used them against some of the very commandments that Jesus gave.

Sometimes we can better understand a thing by first seeing what it does not mean. Let us consider some ideas that this passage cannot mean except we have blatant contradictions in the Word of God. In this way we may be able to clear away some of the debris of error men have taught about this passage.

Jesus is not saying, "Pass no judgments whatever on anything or anybody." There are several irrefutable evidences that He is not teaching the total prohibition of all judgments. He said Himself, "*Judge righteous judgment.*" (John 7:24). Obviously, there is a way to judge unrighteously, but there is a way to judge righteously. Righteous judgment is contrasted with unrighteous judgment. In John seven, what had appeared to the Pharisees to be a violation of the law of Moses was not a violation at all. Healing a man on the Sabbath Day was not sinful. Actually, it was very compatible with the law of Moses for it provided for relieving either man or animal which was in dire circumstances, whether on the Sabbath or any other time. They had made an unrighteous judgment. But some judgment is not only allowed, but required in serving God. Therefore, Jesus is not prohibiting making judgments altogether. But the standard must be right and the understanding of the standard must be clear.

Necessary Judgments

We have to know the difference between right and wrong. How else can we "*discern both good and evil*" (Hebrews 5:14)? The most frustrated, confused, easily misled people on earth are those who do not know how to distinguish between right and wrong. They have no knowledge of the standard by which to measure. Young people, left to "decide for themselves," who have never been taught God's standard by which to make decisions, often find themselves not knowing what to do or which way to turn. It is indispensable in discerning good from evil that we make judgments. Decisions are judgments.

Elderships cannot fulfill their divinely given task if all judgments were prohibited. To take heed to themselves and to others requires making judgments (Acts 20:28). Keeping the flock free from error demands making judgments. Sometimes judgments have to be made regarding teaching, people, character, reputation, abilities, etc. Certainly the Lord did not assign them a duty and then make it sinful for them to discharge that duty. So we know all judgments are not forbidden.

Elders or bishops must "*convince the gainsayer.*" (Titus 1:9). A gainsayer is one who acts or speaks against truth. There must be a recognition of error and then efforts made to convert the one who holds it. This demands judgments. How foolish for someone to teach error and the eldership discharges its duty by opposing that error and the one in error cries, "Don't judge me!!" They must judge him. They must condemn the error he espouses. Anything less would be to shirk their duty.

The passage does not prohibit condemnation, publicly or privately, of sin. False teachers, especially among liberal brethren, misuse the Sermon on the Mount in an attempt to silence anyone who would oppose their sins and false doctrines. They accuse one of "judging" if one opposes what is wrong. Certainly it is judging. But it is judging righteously, and it must be done. Jesus did not teach against sin and error, and then prohibit the opposition to sin and error. We cannot fight the good fight of faith with only positive teaching. There must be negative teaching as well. The armor of the Lord provide for the defense of the truth and an offense against error. We are to pull down strongholds, cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God (Second Corinthians 10:5). The sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:17) is the Word of God, and it is a sharp two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). It cuts forward and backward, defensively and offensively, for the truth and against the wrong.

How else could Timothy reprove, rebuke, and exhort if he never made any judgments (Second Timothy 4:2)? But it is not uncommon in our day of permissiveness, compromise, and digression to hear some say, "Don't condemn because the Bible says not to judge." The one

who so complains has just made a judgment and condemned those who he says judged him. How inconsistent can a thing be? Such a misunderstanding and misuse of truth totally misses the mark. The passage is not to be abused to as to provide a haven for false doctrines and sinful practices.

First Corinthians 6:2 teaches that the saints are to judge the world. This is done by preaching the gospel, practicing the truth, upholding the right, and condemning the wrong. Like Noah, who condemned the world (Hebrews 11:7), so must people of God today make judgments and warn the sinner of the error of his way.

Jesus said, later in this sermon, "*Ye shall know them by their fruits.*" (Matthew 7:16,20). "*Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*" This makes making judgments necessary and indispensable.

We might add that Jesus is not giving man a way to escape being judged. It has been wrongfully asserted that if we will never judge, then we will not ever be judged. That is not so. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*" (Second Corinthians 5:10). God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world by Christ (Acts 17:31). We shall not escape the judgment.

What It Means

To say what a passage does not mean is not yet to say what it does mean. First, Jesus calls for judgment to be made according to the same standard for all. Verse two emphasizes that the same standard is to be used. There is not one standard for me, another for you, a third for your neighbor, a fourth for the fourth man, etc. There is not one for my family and another for yours. There is not one for elders, preachers, and deacons, and another for members. Romans 2:1-3, "*Therefore thou are inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against*

them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"

All have sinned, even though not necessarily and precisely the same way, but all are guilty of sin nonetheless (Romans 3:23). Sin is sin. The same standards ought to be applied to all. Salvation is the same for us all. Judgment ought be made on the same basis also. What is wrong for one is wrong for another in the same situation and position. We have different duties and positions, yes, but the same standard is to be applied where it is applicable. Favoritism and partiality in applying the measure is a fault that men are guilty of committing.

Use God's Rule

Not only must we abide by the same rule, but it must be the correct rule. We are to judge by God's standard. We have no right to judge by our own standards. When we make judgments, it must be that we are not making them on the basis of our own authority, but we must recognize the authority of God and recognize the judgments He has already made and revealed in His Word. Any other measure will have the inherent defienciency of human wisdom altogether.

Judgment is not to be made by comparing ourselves with ourselves (Second Corinthians 10:12). We might do this and come up looking fairly good, but the standard is faulty. Even though we may appear to pass the test, the test itself will not pass.

We must not be hasty and make judgments on superficial appearance. "*Judge not according to appearance.*" (John 7:24). Things are not always what they at first appear to be on the surface. We are not to try to judge the heart of another because we are incapable of doing this. This is a capacity that belongs exclusively to Deity. "*Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart.*" (First Samuel 16:7). This is the judgment that is forbidden. We cannot judge motives, intents, and the heart of others unless they have revealed it to us.

Certainly we cannot make judgments based on the law of Moses because that which was once the standard for the Jews is no longer a standard for anybody. It has been taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14).

Too many simply let their consciences be their guide, but this is a faulty standard because consciences are trained, and if and when they are trained incorrectly they will produce an incorrect decision for us. Consciences are to be followed, and it is sinful to violate the conscience (Romans 14:23). Even so, the conscience must be trained according to the will of God for it to be reliable. Paul, while Saul of Tarsus, once persecuted and made havoc of the church with all good conscience (Acts 23:1; 24:16). But who could contend his conscience was a right standard of measure in that situation?

All matters must be judged according to the all-sufficient scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Unless something measures happily with the Word of God we must leave it of, leave it out, leave it, period . It is deserving of condemnation.

Respect the Limits

We must learn our limits. While we must make certain judgments, we are not to pass sentence on anyone. That belongs to God. There is a difference between determining God's will about right from wrong and then assuming the right, authority, and power to sentence another. We have no more right to pass sentence than we have to set up our own standards. However, we must respect and proclaim what sentence God has said will be passed. When we tell others what God says, we are making no judgments of our own. When God says stealing is sinful, and thieves shall go to hell unless they repent, we make no evil judgment nor do we pass sentence on others on our own authority and power. Sometimes we hear preachers pass sentence on others at funerals on people who were apparently good people, and they preach them right into heaven. We have no such right. We can have hope and expectation for one's soul because he was a faithful Christian because God extends that hope. But to presume to pass sentence on anyone,

one way or the other, is presumptuous and goes beyond the limits of our right and ability.

Self-Examination

Let us not miss the emphasis of the passage calling for self-examination either. While judging is a dominant theme, so is the need to examine self. We have a tendency to ignore our own faults while seeing clearly the faults of others. We are not prohibited from seeing the faults of others, and even calling them to the attention of others. But we are foolish to think that we have none. We must ever take stock of our own lives and see wherein we, also, may be in need of correction. Those who are unwilling to look at themselves, thinking that all the "motes" are in the eyes of others, and ignore the "beams" in our own eyes, are not serving God properly.

The passage does not require that one be perfect before he can recognize error and sins in the life of others. None can be sinlessly perfect. But recognition of sin and error is required of us all.

One reason for removing the beam out of our own eye is so we can be more helpful to those who have motes in their eye. This requires self-examination. To fail to self-examine while condemning others is hypocritical. The Lord's attitude toward hypocrites cannot be mistaken. He has already expressed Himself in this Sermon on the Mount concerning such things. He speaks even with more force in Matthew twenty-three on the subject.

Such then is the teaching of these five verses. There is to be the one and same standard of judgment, God's standard. There is to be the right standard of judgment, again, God's standard. We are not to pass sentence, but leave that to God. We must recognize and except our limitations. At the same time we must accept and recognize the judgments God has already made and not contradict them because that would be judging God. And we certainly must involved ourselves in self-examination. Actually, we can help one another through righteous judgments.

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When the Trumpet Shall Sound



"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel , and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these word." (First Thessalonians 4:16-18). Without doubt we are not able to comprehend the full significance of that awesome day when Christ returns, the judgement, and entrance into glory for the redeemed. But I am sure that everyone who believes the Bible to be God's Word wants to be *"in Christ"* on that day.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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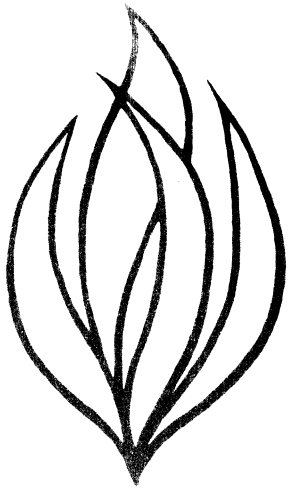

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIII **NUMBER 9**

Answer III Read

Sermon on the Mount

Lesson Thirteen - Matthew 7:6

After the Lord had given His teaching concerning the making of judgments, He said, "*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*" (Matthew 7:6). This lesson will concentrate on just this single verse, taking note of what things are included in this teaching.

At first, the words may seem extremely harsh because of the comparison and analogy made of dogs and swine to people. But rather than being a harsh statement, it is one that suggests there are limits beyond which one need not go in trying to convert the lost. There is a definiteness in this teaching and many people equate anything that is definite with harshness. Some would likely rise up at this point and even criticize the Lord for being too hard on sinners.

Dogs and swine are beasts and have no sense of appreciation for things sacred. They have no power of discernment between things holy and anything else. They have no sense of values regarding such things as relate to the soul and spirit of the human being. When something valuable is placed before them, they might ignore it or treat it as if it had no value. They show no respect or concern for the refined than they would the unrefined and worthless. To them a garbage can is of as much value as a finely set dinner table. Dogs and swine will even trample under foot things precious, not realizing or caring about what they do or the value of what they trample.

What Jesus is teaching is that the way of truth, that way which the disciples were soon to proclaim to the world, is holy, sacred, and deserving of the greatest respect because that is the way of God. Yet, He knew that there would be those who were so evil, profane, impious, and wicked that they would have no reluctance to treat it

with disrespect through ridicule, indignities, and contempt. Not only would the truth be so treated, but those who taught the truth and tried to follow it would also be subjected to contemptible treatment. When the Lord talks about some being like dogs and swine, He was referring to the nature of their character and their attitude toward the very thing for which He would die.

Disrespect for the Sacred

We surely see many manifestations in our own day when things holy and sacred are being subjected to the most abominable injustices and blasphemies. So-called worship services have been turned into periods of licentious music, lascivious dancing, activities more akin to the road house and dance floor than those expected in a house of worship. The teaching of the Scripture is sometimes presented in terms that are vulgar, cheap, degrading, and likened unto the "jive talk" of the most uncouth nature. The truth of the Bible is made to appear to condone the very things our Lord has condemned. Someone will say, "The good book says..." when they have no real respect for the Bible and misapply and distort what it does say. It is not unheard of for people to quote Scripture in a fashion as to give it a so-called double-meaning, one which is evil and sinister.

Have you listened closely to the so-called gospel songs that people perform? The beat of them is as jazzy as the most worldly sounds. The singers jump and dance around like rock-and-roll noise makers. Their bodily movements are as sensual as anything you have seen or heard even among the most noted reprobates. Possibly this is the "holy wow" the digressive liberals who have torn the church apart with their heresy would like to present for the "baby boomers."

In the address of God, some think it is the "in" thing to refer to the heavenly Father in trite, "good ole buddy" terms, failing to honor and glorify His name and His Deity. Prayer is made as if it were just a conversation between two next-door neighbors. Reverence and respect is totally lacking. The name of Deity is repeatedly used

in profanity. Only those who have the attitude of swine and dogs toward sacred things would do such a thing.

There is not very much about God that has escaped the sacrilegious conduct of the irreligious, ungodly, and degenerate. It is great sport to them to mock that which is considered holy and sacred by Christians.

People of Responsibility

As one studies the conversions revealed to us in the Bible, he soon becomes aware that those who were converted were people who at least had some sense of responsibility toward things higher and nobler than they. Those who revel in the deliberate malignities are seldom touched by the appeal of the gospel. They have no use for it whatever. To them it is something at which to poke ridicule and scorn.

How disgusting it is to see religious people attempt to win over such degenerates by making the gospel appear to go along with them. It is most improper to present the gospel in the language of the ungodly. For instance, some years ago, Billy Graham attended a rock-and-roll revelry in Florida that was inhabited by the long-haired, unwashed, free sex, drug using degenerates. That they needed the gospel like everyone else, probably more than most, is not questioned. But to talk about being "turned on with Jesus," as he did, "being on a trip with the Lord," "being a swinger with Christ," is to drag the holy and sacred through the muck and mire of the worse sort. To talk about the "man upstairs," or address professional golfers and identify Jesus as "the greatest pro of them all," is degrading to Christ. What ever happened to speaking as the oracles of God? (First Peter 4:11). To some, this is communicating. But plain language in dignified speech communicates. To attempt to present the truth in the garb of sin is repulsive. One preacher said he understood why some did not study the Bible. It was because they did not like a book where the hero gets killed in the middle of it. Some have even called Christ the first hippie. This is what Jesus was talking about when He talked of casting pearls before swine. The pearls of truth are being trampled under foot

to the disgrace of those who do it, but also to the dishonor of God.

A Miserable Excuse

The excuse by religious people for talking to others in this terminology is to "communicate on their terms," we are told. Does it do it? There is no evidence whatever that it causes any respect for the Christ. It only suggests that the manner of life and way of speaking that characterizes such wicked people may be acceptable before God as they are. They need to learn some new words. It actually repels even the wicked from the truth to hear truth cheapened in such fashion. It is a shallow and sickening compromise and manifests a spiritual sickness among those who would attempt to convey the gospel in this way. They crave being accepted by anybody, even to the dishonor of God. While there will be those who would speak disparagingly of sacred things, shall we encourage it by doing the same ourselves?

Those kind of people do not want the truth. They love their sins so much they only mock the truth. To present the truth before them repeatedly, only to see and hear them abuse it, is to cast pearls before dogs and swine.

Of course, we should take the gospel to all the world. But did not Jesus teach that there would come times to "*shake off the dust of your feet,*" and go elsewhere? (Matthew 10:14). Did not Paul actually do such a thing? (Acts 13:51). Are we obligated to continue presenting the truth only for it to be trampled and ridiculed? This is the very thing Jesus is teaching ought not be done. The truth ought to be more respected than to allow it to happen. We may not keep people from denouncing the truth, but we can keep from placing it before them in order for them to keep on denouncing it. Leave them and go elsewhere. They have denied themselves the right to hear it anymore.

Others Who Reject Truth

There are those who reject the truth but are not blasphemous against it. There are those who may not agree with the truth, but are at least respectful toward it.

These are not the dogs and swine under consideration. We once had some Mormon "elders" to come to our home and present their "testimony" and I respectfully listened and allowed them to complete what they wanted to say. When I began to question certain things about their doctrine, these young boys became very angry and denounced me as a dog and swine because I would not receive their teaching as they presented it. They walked out the door almost shouting something about Joseph Smith being God's prophet. Just because someone does not accept a thing does not mean they are the dog and swine of which Jesus spoke. Even when one is respectful in denying the truth, he is not among dogs and swine. To deny Mormon doctrine is certainly not denying truth.

Jesus is teaching that holy things and holy matters deserve holy treatment. It is not lack of love for the lost for us to withhold teaching them truth when their repeated reaction is to trample the sacred. Rather, it is a manifestation of love for the truth and respect for the holy to not persist in doing what results in the truth being smeared by one of the devil's servants.

* * * * *

Lesson Fourteen - Matthew 7:7-12

"*Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*" (Matthew 7:7-11).

Jesus returns to the subject that He had discussed previously in this sermon. He suggests matters about making petitions unto God, which includes prayer, and also discusses the providence of God in addition to what was discussed in chapter six.

There is that quality about the Greek language that is both interesting and beneficial for us to recognize in these verses. When the verb is in the present tense it carries the idea of a continuing action rather than simply a one time action. In other words, the word "*ask*" does not refer to a single request, but actually means to keep on asking. Jesus is talking about those who will keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. This suggests a continuing desire to receive the blessings from God, not just a one time supplication for them. There is constant recognition of dependence on God as the source of blessings. Within the heart of those who make up the kingdom, there is this ever-present, constant, always pressing desire to grow and move forward, more and more like Christ. Certain blessings and benefits will come to those who ask, seek, and knock.

Conditional Blessings

Some of God's blessings are unconditionally given. For instance, there are many physical blessings given to everyone whether they have any respect for God or not. Each one receives the sunshine, rain, the benefits of the law of nature. But the spiritual blessings that God bestows are conditionally received. There are certain things one must do in order to receive these blessings. Forgiveness of sins, fellowship with Deity, the providence of God, the hope and assurance of heaven in the next life, are all spiritual blessings that belong only to those who are "*in Christ.*" (Ephesians 1:3). Until a person meets the terms of pardon, meets the conditions for entering into Christ, these spiritual blessings are still ahead for him, offered to him, but not yet his. But God expects man to want these blessings He offers through His Son, Jesus Christ.

In verse six, Jesus had just spoken of some who would not have any concern or respect for the holy and sacred matters. They would treat them as a dog or swine would treat costly riches and pearls. In contrast to them are those of verses seven through eleven who have an interest in that which God offers. They have a growing, continual yearning for them. They will keep on asking, seeking, and knocking as they journey through life, and come to Christ, realizing that the way of Christ involves

all of life, and that being a Christian is an everyday matter. They have a never ceasing hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God.

Jesus now assures us that God is able to provide for such as those who want His blessings. His reasoning is simple and clear. If a son asks his earthly father for some benefits, as bread, or a fish, would the father who loves the son give him a stone or a serpent instead of what was needed and requested? Certainly not! Since the Father in heaven is so much greater and superior to any father on earth, how much more will He be able to provide the things needed by His children? If men know how to give good gifts, surely God will give good gifts to His children.

A Notable Parallel Passage

In Luke 11:13 there is a parallel passage on this teaching. There Jesus said the Father would give the Holy Spirit to those that ask Him. Some have taken this to mean that God will grant unto all those that ask the same measure of the Holy Spirit as was granted to the apostles on Pentecost. They believe they have some miraculous powers, something superior to everyone else, some special gift that places them on a pedestal apart from others. They believe there is some kind of personal, literal, actual indwelling of Deity in them. The Scriptures teach that God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwell in the Christian, but only as the Christian follows His Word. The Scriptures do not teach that Deity takes up an abode within our bodies, making us mini-gods wherever we are. In Luke the Holy Spirit is put for the things of Matthew that God gives and provides. The Holy Spirit is not a "thing" but a person of the Godhead. Matthew 7:11 and Luke 11:13 help explain each other. It refers to God's provision of the spiritual blessings that are granted through the Holy Spirit and the Word given to those who meet the conditions for entrance into Christ, and who keep asking, seeking, and knocking.

To summarize, Jesus is teaching that those who so love the things of God that they will keep on asking, seeking, and knocking, shall keep on receiving, finding, and having these things opened to them. God is able to

provide and does provide the blessings that will be enjoyed by such people.

The Golden Rule

We come to verse twelve that is sometimes called the Golden Rule. "*Therefore, all things whatsoever that ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.*" (Matthew 7:12). Like so many other passages, people take this one out of its context, lifting it away from its setting, proclaiming it as the all-sufficient rule by which our relationship with each other is to be guided. But as often as not some very vital points are misunderstood regarding this verse. It is not meant to be a cure-all for all human relationships unless we understand the place of the will of God regarding it. The very location of the verse in the sermon is of tremendous significance.

From the first of chapter five until verse eleven of chapter seven Jesus has been teaching WHAT the will of God is. Beginning with verse thirteen, He teaches so as to motivate His hearers to DO that will. Verse twelve is a pivotal verse. We cannot get its full import without the word ,"*therefore.*" "*Therefore*" is a connecting word meaning it connects what has been said previously with that which is to follow. What follows "*therefore*" is how we are to treat one another. But what has been presented before the "*therefore*"? Christ has been teaching the will of God through Him. He is saying, "In view of this will, seeing what the gospel of the kingdom is, and noting the authority behind it, you should treat one another a certain way." Jesus is not simply teaching us to treat others like we want to be treated. He is not saying, "You treat other people like they want to be treated so they, in turn, will treat you like you want to be treated." The paraphrase, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," might lead us to think this was His message. While there is much merit in the thought of the paraphrase, and might be considered to be included in the passage, cannot we see how such a thought displaces the will of God as the standard of treatment, and inserts the will of man as the standard for treatment? Could we ever say, "You lie for me, because that is what you would want me to do for you?" Can we ever think, "You cover

up for me and cheat for me, because, if things were the other way and our places were exchanged, you would want me to do that for you?" Are we to understand that Jesus is saying, "Find out what the other fellow wants and do what he wants because you would want him to do whatever you want?" No, this is not the Golden Rule as the Lord taught it. Man's wants, likes, preferences, are not the standard to determine treatment one toward the other.

God's Will Must Prevail

Jesus is teaching that we must always consider the will of God in our treatment of others. He is saying in essence, "Seeing what the will of God is, you treat others according to the will of God, and you want and expect others to treat you according to the will of God." Can you now see how on the one hand the will of men might be injected as the standard, whereas Jesus is teaching that the will of God is to be the standard? We are to treat one another the way God would have us treat one another, not simply as we or they might want. What does God want?

It is not God's will that we ever seek revenge against each other, or hit back when we are hit. It is not His will that we try to humiliate each other, seek to destroy each other, assume a dictatorial and superior air over one another. We are not to snub one another, or slander each other, or lie to or about one another. We should not ignore one another, take advantage of each other. Although this is the way many treat others, this is foreign to the will of God. We are not to sin on behalf of others, even if it might seem to be of assistance to another. We are not to do whatever somebody might want us to do, but do whatever is the will of God.

It is God's will that we treat one another with courtesy, fairness, kindness, truthfully, and in love, seeking the other's highest good. We are to be helpful toward each other, sympathetic, and unselfish. We are even expected to stand firm in the faith for our own benefit and that of others.

It is God's will that we lift up each other, not knock down each other. It is not too surprising that many in the world of sin will treat each other differently than what the will of God prescribes. But is it painful when your own brethren will turn and rend you as if the passage of Matthew 7:12 had never been spoken or written.

Jesus said this was the law and the prophets. Under the old law that God gave Israel through Moses the dominant theme was, "God's will be done." Under the prophets who lived subject to the Mosaic system and by the directions they received from God, this was their guiding principle, "God's will be done." Under the new covenant of Christ the same theme prevails. As Jesus prayed when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, "*Not my will but thine be done.*" So it is in our treatment and conduct toward each other. The will of the Lord be done, and not our own. This is the Golden Rule. Without the emphasis of the will of God being the standard, we will miss the major thrust of the teaching.

Christianity is not just a single action, but rather a continuing, growing, expanding, "keep on keeping on" way of life. God will provide what is needful to those of that disposition. In view of the will of God, we are to treat each other according to that will.

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Nearing the End of the Series

With two more lessons, the sixteen lesson series on the Sermon on the Mount will be concluded. Space permitting, we shall also include a short lesson regarding evangelism, which is most appropriate following the study of the Sermon on the Mount because of the nature of the Lord's sermon and our responsibility to proclaim to the world His gospel.

Again, we should study His Words, not only for ourselves, but for whatever benefit we might be able to bestow upon others as we try to teach them.

Lesson Fifteen - Matthew 7:13,14

We are now coming toward the close of this matchless sermon that Jesus preached on some unidentified mount in Palestine at the very beginning of His personal ministry and preaching. Beginning with chapter five, Jesus has been teaching WHAT the will of the Lord is. The sermon is the preamble of the new covenant of which Christ is the mediator. The sermon is the gospel of the kingdom, the doctrine of Christ. Verse twelve of chapter seven dealt with the way we are to treat others and expect to be treated by others in view of the gospel standard Christ set forth. In these closing paragraphs we have three separate efforts by Christ to persuade His hearers to DO the will of God that He has taught. He provides motivation for obedience.

"*Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*" (Matthew 7:13,14).

In this remarkable statement Jesus sets forth four sets of two items each. There are two gates, two ways, two destinies, and two groups of people. The statement is a series of contrasts between the two's. The gates are different, as are the ways, groups, and destinies. These contrasts are the first of three efforts to show His hearers the way they, and we, should choose. He urges us in this manner to follow His doctrine.

Two Gates

Consider the two gates. One is wide and the other is strait, which means narrow and enclosed. The implications of the wide gate are easily understood. Such a gate is easy to enter, taking almost no effort. Being wide, those who pass that way can carry many things with them. But the strait gate is hemmed in and not easily entered. In fact, it is very difficult to enter. Being narrow, one is not able to take whatever he might wish through the gate with him. Take note that Jesus did not

make the gates wide and narrow. He is merely taking note of the reality of the two gates.

Christ urges men to enter the strait gate. He does not force anyone to go that way, but pleads with them to do so. He does not have to tell anyone to enter the wide gate. They do that of their own choice and accord. The wide gate leads to destruction. All enter that gate when they sin, having reached the age of being accountable and responsible before God. As Paul said, "*All have sinned...*" (Romans 3:23). When one sins he automatically enters the wide gate and starts his pathway toward eternal ruin. But Christ pleads with men to enter the narrow and strait gate.

The word "*enter*" implies the necessity of some effort on the part of the one who would enter. Luke 13:24 records the words, "*Strive to enter in at the strait gate.*" The word "*strive*" is translated from the Greek word from which we get our word , "agonize," make an extreme effort, go to all lengths, fight painfully, constantly to enter the strait gate. It may be easier for some to enter than for others, but it takes effort on the part of all who would enter that gate.

The Lord expects us to enter the strait gate. He said to enter, and He meant for man to enter. Picture a man with a burden upon his back as he approaches the narrow, strait, hemmed in gate. He would like to take his burden with him, but there is not room. His burden, like man's sins, are cumbersome, and cannot be taken through the strait gate. They must be left behind. Before one can enter the strait gate that will lead to the blessings of God, one must leave his sinful ways and thoughts behind him, and be forgiven of his burdens that he cannot take with him. It is sad, but true, that many, upon learning they cannot take their sinful ways with them continue their way down the way that leads to destruction. They prefer their burden of sin to the joys of the Lord.

One additional thought is that each one must enter the gate for himself. Nobody can enter the strait gate on behalf of another. We can encourage each other, and

persuade each other, but ultimately it is a personal matter to which each must attend for himself.

Two Ways

Consider the two ways, or roads, that one might travel. One is broad, easily traveled, plenty of smooth pavement, downhill. But it is a very deceptive way because it eventually leads to fatality. It is the way of self-gratification, sin, indulgence, disrespect, and disobedience to God. It is the way of the transgressor that eventually becomes a way that is hard.

In contrast, there is the narrow way. While the other is somewhat like a wide open thoroughfare, this one is steep, often having stumbling blocks and hindrances along the path. It is narrow because it is shut in by restrictions and commandments, do's and don't's. It is not the super highway with its appeal for satisfaction of fleshly lusts, but it is like a bumpy, backwoods road in comparison. Though narrow, it is wide enough for all to travel if they would. But it is narrow enough to exclude those who are wicked. These two ways are symbolic of the two ways of life, one for sin, self, and Satan, and the other for God and His glory.

Two Groups

Now consider the two groups of people Jesus mentions. All mankind is pictured in these verses. None are excluded that are accountable before God. These two groups are defined in relative terms, one being called the "*many*," and the other being called the "*few*." The broad way is more crowded because it is the popular, easy, sinfully pleasant way. People can travel that way along with the majority without restraint, discipline, or denial. Many choose that way of life along with that group of people. But many will not make the effort to enter the narrow gate nor travel the narrow way.

But the "*few*" will go the way that is narrow. Even though much is required and at times the costs are demanding, there are those who choose to leave their sins behind, enter the strait gate, and travel through life on the narrow road.

In view of this passage, have you not wondered why most people think they are going to heaven? One survey has suggested that eighty-six per cent of those who answered the inquiry about whether they think they will go to heaven or not were confident they would. But the Lord implies that the majority will not go the right way. This being true, does it not behoove us to stop long enough to make investigation and be sure concerning the most important matter of our existence; namely, are we on the right road as the will of God has defined that road? Not only shall the criminal, villain, profane, and degenerate person be traveling that road, but also the negligent, disobedient, indifferent, and lukewarm. This is the way traveled by liars, cheats, murderers, gossipers, the immoral and worldly people. The faithful Christians compose the "*few*" on the other and right road.

Two Destinies

At last, consider the two destinies the Lord presents. The Bible is a great book in that it tells man from whence he came, why he is here, what he is to do while here, and where he is going. We have no choice as to our being here. But our duty is set by the Lord while we are here. There are purposes for our existence. But our destiny, we can determine. While God has already predetermined which gate, which road, and which group will enjoy which destiny, we have the power to choose the gate, way, group, and destiny we wish. Man is created as a creature with the power of choice. Jesus is presenting these realities with the goal of motivating us to make the right choice. When one has entered the wide gate through sin, if he continues on that broad way with the "*many*" group, he shall suffer destruction. But if, after having sinned and started on the wrong road, he will turn to the strait gate, leave his sinful burdens behind, travel the narrow way with the "*few*" group, life eternal shall be his to enjoy with God. Someday, for the faithful, when the last hill is climbed, when the final stumbling block is passed, when the beckoning of the devil to forsake the way and take an easy detour is heard no more, and the last step is taken, there is joy forever.

There really is not a more serious question that one can ask concerning himself than the question, "Which gate,

way, group, and destiny for me?" You can decide for yourself, and each one must and will decide.

We enter the strait gate by obeying the gospel commands to enter Christ. We travel the narrow way by being faithful as a Christian. We shall be in the company of the saved, onward marching toward the life that God provides for the redeemed.

* * * * *

Lesson Sixteen - Matthew 7:15-29

By the time we reach the last portions of the Sermon on the Mount, we have had many major precepts and principles of doctrine given us by Christ. There remains but two major points, both of which very logically form a part of the persuasive conclusion of this preamble to the new covenant of Christ, His doctrine, the gospel of the kingdom. Having preached WHAT the will of God is, and having shown in a series of two's what our choice should be, He now warns against false teachers that would lead astray, offering strong exhortation to obey.

We have studied eight Beatitudes which are characteristics of those in the kingdom; three Similitudes comparing the kingdom to the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and a city set on a hill; the difference between His new covenant and the old law given by Moses; that the way God makes man righteous is the gospel, which exceeds all other systems, and is the only way. He gave specific teaching regarding hatred, murder, lust, adultery, marriage, divorce, oaths, when resistance is appropriate, and loving both friend and foe. Chapter six discussed the Lord's displeasure at hypocrisy, a lesson on prayer, where true treasure is, keeping the heart clear and precise , focused on God rather than mammon, the impossibility of serving two masters, and the providence of God. The first part of chapter seven taught the proper standard for making judgments, the refusal to defame what is holy and sacred, God's ability to give man what man needs, the Golden Rule, and the series of two's we mentioned.

Christ preached these words, as did His apostles later, in the expectation that many would reject them. But He also knew some would receive them and live accordingly. He also knew that there would be those who would subject His followers to philosophies, ideologies, theories, and doctrines that are false, leading them astray. So He graciously warns of such in order that those who love the Lord might be aware and stand fast.

A Warning in Matthew 7:15-10

"*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth corrupt fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them.*"

A false teacher never presents himself as an enemy, but a friend. Enemies are immediately opposed and recognized if announced as such. A false teacher comes as a friend and gains a foothold, winning confidence of others, appearing among the flock as another sheep. But they are as destructive to the flock as a wild and ravening wolf. Satan can and does present himself as an angel of light (Second Corinthians 11:4). Deceptively, with charm, personality, and appearance of sincerity and knowledge, the false teacher gradually makes his way into the hearts and minds of others.

How can one know a teacher is a false teacher? They must be put to the test. "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" (First John 4:1). Nobody should object having what they teach measured by the Word of God. That which clashes and is at variance with the Word is false. We cannot measure with that with which we are unfamiliar. Discerning between truth and error begins with knowledge of the Word. People without knowledge can be deceived and led astray. The ill-informed, misinformed, uninformed are easy prey for false teachers. Knowledge protects us.

The ultimate destiny of the false teacher is that he is cast away and destroyed. But if one follows a false teacher, Jesus said, "*And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*" (Matthew 15:14).

Obedience Taught in Matthew 7:21-27

"*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he which doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock, and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.*"

Christ teaches the wisdom of obedience and the folly of disobedience. Having taught as He did, Jesus expects man to conform to the doctrine from heaven. There is more to following the Lord than knowledge of His will. There is more than a religion of words. There must be compliance, obedience, the doing of His will, action in life. Not just any action will suffice, but action that is authorized by Him. It must spring from a good and honest heart, but also be right as His will reveals it.

Jesus shows the disappointment for any whose faith is merely verbal. We would emphasize that the actions intended to glorify the name of God must be in His name, according to His authority. Doing as we wish is not acting in His name. There must be the doing of the right thing for the right reason. Action and attitude, the right motive behind the right deed, is what Jesus taught.

The Firm Foundation

Building upon the right foundation is essential. No house is more secure than its foundation. A house built upon a weak, sandy foundation cannot stand when adversity comes against it. On the other hand, the house built on rock cannot be moved. So it is with man's service before God. There is no surer, stronger, more dependable foundation for life than Christ. He is the only tried and true foundation.

To hear and do is the way one builds upon the rock foundation. It takes hearing, understanding, comprehending, and intellectual grasp of what the will of God is. Then it takes following in daily living with obedience to that will. Trust and obey is the only way. Otherwise, we build in vain because our spiritual house will collapse, being on the sands of human doctrines.

How tragic it is to be given the opportunity to build on the rock, but neglect that opportunity for the paltry offerings of this world. When one persists in living his life his own way, the way of sin and death, he builds on that which will not sustain him. His destruction is inevitable. By this illustration of building on sand or rock, Jesus presents the importance of all that has been taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon Ends

Those who were privileged to hear this sermon originally were sufficiently discerning to know that Jesus taught differently from other teachers. They not only marvelled at the content of it, but they detected another difference. Other teachers, the scribes, priests, rabbis, taught the old law as mere interpreters of that law. They would read and explain the details of the law to the people. But they were not the origin and source of the law. The law did not come from them, even from Moses, but from God. It was not their law in the sense that they were the authority behind it. They could teach only what had been revealed. This is all that preachers today can do with the gospel. We can only preach what the Lord has revealed. Man is not the authority.

But when Jesus taught, He taught as One having authority. He was not merely an interpreter of the

teaching. He was not a fellow student of the law. He is the Lawgiver. It came from Him. It existed and had power because of His authority as the Son of God. The message had come from the Father (John 7:16), but He and the Father were together. What Jesus did, Deity did. What Jesus taught, He taught as God. Jesus was different from all other teachers in that He was not just another rabbi, prophet or teacher. He was the Son of God on earth, revealing God unto man and teaching man the revelation of heaven as the One who had come from heaven to deliver it. That which He asserted to be true was demanding of greater respect than anything ever heard before because of Who the teacher was. The doctrine is His. It is the gospel of the kingdom of which He is the King.

It Is Authoritative - Matthew 7:28,29

"*And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine. For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*"

The source, power, support, and authorization behind all that Jesus said was Jesus Himself, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of man. There is no higher authority. Hence, the necessity to hear and obey His sayings.

Following this sermon Jesus embarked upon a three and one half year period of personal ministry, preparing for that great and notable day when the kingdom, of which this sermon was preview and forecast, would be established. On the first Pentecost after His resurrection, His kingdom came into reality. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles, on that day, proclaimed salvation in His name for the first time. Those who heard, believed, and obeyed were added to the church, the kingdom of God. They were the citizens committed to live according to this preamble, this Sermon on the Mount. All are subject to it, obligated to submit to it. Those is the kingdom have accepted it. To ignore this sermon and profess to follow Christ is to heap disgrace against this worthy proclamation.

* * * * *

To Evangelize

The word "evangelize" is not found in our English translations. We do read of evangelists, and the meaning of evangelizing is found with emphasis in the New Testament. To evangelize means to instruct in the gospel, and convert one to the faith of Christ. The New Testament uses words like preach, teach, edify, admonish, instruct, and similar expressions. To evangelize includes these things and more.

When we comprehend the implications of the term "evangelize," we are impressed with the fact that whatever this involves, this is the primary work of the church. This involves the process whereby Christians bear fruit to the glory of God. As children of God we are to no longer serve self, sin, and Satan, but God and our fellowman. Certainly the greatest service one can render to another is to bring him to Christ and the salvation Christ provides.

There are many kinds of evangelistic efforts. Each one results in varying degrees of success. The real success of evangelizing is the salvation of a precious soul, once lost, but saved from sin and brought into fellowship with Deity through Christ.

Successful evangelism is ultimately accomplished one person at a time. We may teach and preach to masses, and this we must do. We may even declare the gospel unto nations through electronic methods. But the desired result, the conversion to Christ, must be produced individual by individual. Nations are converted one person at a time. There must always be that personal response to the gospel. So evangelism involves reaching the individual with the saving truth.

Requires Motive and Action

To evangelize there must be action on the part of the Christian. The first command of the Great Commission of Jesus to His apostles and through then to every Christian is, "*Go ye into all the world,* (Mark 16:15). "*Go*

ye therefore..." (Matthew 28:19). Jesus said, Acts 1:8, "*But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall by my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*" This He commanded just before His ascension when speaking to His apostles. The early saints acted in this matter. Acts 8:4, "*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*"

The motive behind this action is as Paul expressed in Romans 10:1, "*Brethren my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.*" There is no salvation apart from hearing the Word (Romans 10:13-17; James 1:21). Every Christian has a duty to do his own going. Sometimes we say, "Either go yourself or send others." What we really must do is go ourselves AND send others.

Near and Far

Too often we think of evangelism only in terms of distant lands. We respect those who do go to distant lands with the gospel. Their sacrifices and efforts reflect an understanding of evangelism that many of us who stay at home never comprehend. But we must also keep in mind that evangelism can be accomplished near home, with friends, family, neighbors, even our own children. All efforts are vital in getting the work done that Jesus charged. We can be a part of going by sending others, but we can also be a part of going by teaching someone near us. The lost cannot be saved without it. Whether we go personally, provide funds for others to go, or both, evangelism demands going. We must place emphasis on the sinner "coming," but not to the neglect of our "going."

Preach the Gospel

With the going there must be preaching and teaching of truth. That which is to be preached is the gospel (Matthew 28:19,20); Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:4). None will be saved without the gospel being preached (Romans 1:16; 10:11-17). First Corinthians 1:21, "*...it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*" Preaching and teaching was at the heart of the mission

of Jesus Christ. Matthew 4:17, "*From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Paul taught the necessity of preaching the Word (Second Timothy 4:2). He was one who went to Antioch, Jerusalem, Rome, Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, Corinth, Athens, place after place. He taught in schools, synagogues, homes, marketplaces jails, halls of judgment, by the river's side. Always his message was the gospel. First Corinthians 1:23,24, "*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*"

Philip preached Jesus to the Samaritans. He taught the kingdom of God (Acts 8:5,12), giving warning against preaching anything else (Galatians 1:6-9). People may hear many messages and each one may produce certain results. But there is only one message that will evangelize because there is only One that will save. There is only one faith (Ephesians 4:4,5), and one Shepherd and Savior (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

We must know, therefore, that to successfully evangelize means giving emphasis to the way by which one is "*delivered... from the power of darkness and translated... into the kingdom of his dear Son.*" (Colossians 1:13). It is popular in religion to omit, minimize, substitute, and change the message to accommodate the doctrines and sins of men. But without the pure gospel, heard, believed, obeyed, evangelism cannot succeed.

Confirmation

Successful evangelism also involved confirmation. Acts 14:22, "*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith...*" Acts 15:41, "*And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.*"

These passage have no reference to some man-made ritual that some undertake to perform over children who have been sprinkled as infants. This is not an exercise to admit one into full admission and communion of the church as practiced by some denominational bodies. To confirm means to edify, strengthen, exhort, build up,

teach more, providing that which is needful for spiritual growth and maturity.

The necessity of confirmation is seen in the repeated exhortation to grow. Second Peter 3:18, "*But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" Study is required (Second Timothy 2:15). We are to be doers and not mere hearers (James 1:22). Only through confirmation can one prevent apostasy. God is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24) provided we partake of the food of the Word by which we are strengthened and made capable of resisting the devil and remaining faithful to the Lord.

Over and Over

There is a great need for a Christian who is taught to be taught and reminded over and over. The church most likely to fall away is one that is untaught. Division is more possible. Lukewarmness, indifference, apathy, and succumbing to a mere house keeping operation is more probable when the church, the saved, are not taught more and more. Without confirmation there will be less loyalty, less devotion, more worldliness and hypocrisy alongside compromise. One generation of untaught Christians will plunge the church into another apostasy that will extend for generations. The soul once saved, but unconfirmed, will turn again into the entanglements of the world from which he was delivered.

Confirmation is necessary to Christians to worship, refrain from the appearance of evil in their lives, do good works, respect authority, win others to Christ, reflect Christ and bring glory to God. One reason the Lord's church is beset with so many battles from within is because so many brethren are not taught as they should be. They have been baptized but went to sleep beside the water. Confirming brethren is that essential part to maintain and retain faithfulness by growth and increased spiritual strength.

Involves Me and You

Evangelism involves going, preaching, confirming. It also involves me and you to do this going, preaching and

confirming. The work of the church is carried to a successful end only to the extent that each child of God is involved in going, preaching, and confirming. If Christian, the ones who profess to care for souls, do not evangelize, just who will?

The importance of this work might be emphasized in two ways. What if you and your loved ones were the ones who were unsaved, out of Christ, doomed, without hope, without knowledge of truth, possibly even without knowledge of your own spiritually disastrous state! Would evangelism be important to you? Would you care if anyone evangelized? Had you just as soon die apart from Christ? Or would you want somebody, somewhere, to bring the gospel your way?

It can be emphasize again by just reminding us of the Lord's displeasure with those of us, His children, who make no effort to do their best in His service. Someone loved you enough, Christian brother and sister, to teach you the truth. Do you not think you ought to do as much for some other? Are not these thoughts the mind of things about which we can do something? Will you do something about them?

* * * * *

When and If You Move!

Please advise us of your new address as soon as possible so we can continue to send you each issue of ***A Burning Fire.*** If you fail to do this, the Post Office sends your booklet back to us, we pay additional postage, and the booklet never reaches you. Thanks for this assistance.

We have some good lessons
in the works for the next issues.
I hope they will benefit you.

One Passes; Another Begins



I try to keep ahead in the preparation of *A Burning Fire* because unexpected interruptions can always arise. At the time this paragraph is being written there remain several months in 1992. But time moves so swiftly that 1993 will be upon us by the time this issue reaches you. As always, most of us reflect a moment on the previous year, and make plans for the next. It is my hope and prayer that each of us may serve our Lord well during the coming months, if permitted to live. After all, the primary purpose for our existence is to bring glory to God. We do this by our conformity to His pattern of things. Let us respect His Word and use this hour to resolve to be like Christ.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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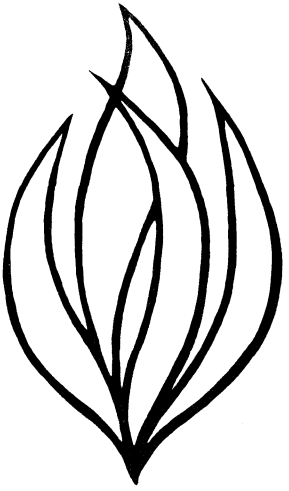

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIII **NUMBER 10**

James W. Boud

Do You Recommend Your Religion?

Number One

The question may be insulting to some because they think everybody knows they recommend their faith. But I believe it is a fair and timely question. Often people take too much for granted. They drift along with the crowds, go the way of trends, are pulled along by the currents, rather than being sure where they stand and that their stand is for Christ. They assume they recommend their faith, and assume it is deserving of recommendation. But it may not be the case. David said, Psalm 66:16, "*Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.*" Among other things, David is saying to his readers and hearers that he heartily recommends his religion to the world. "Let me tell you of the faith I hold, and how it benefits me." He was not offering just a testimonial, but a proclamation of what he believed and why.

A study of religions generally reveals some religions are vain, shallow, empty, and inadequate because they are not from heaven. Many worship gods they have made rather than the God who made them. The Scriptures speak of vain worship and vain religion. While we do not seek to offend by asking, did it ever occur to you the possibility that such might be a proper description of your religion? Is it not profitable to stop long enough to find out and know?

We may not always realize it, but each day we live we are either recommending our religion or renouncing it as not being worthwhile or worth the effort it takes to follow it. We must do some self examination alongside a serious comparison of our religion with what the Bible teaches. We shall ask the question, "Do you recommend your religion?" in four areas: (1) in light of the Scriptures, (2) by the way we live, (3) by the way we support it, and (4) by the way it works for us and all who follow it.

The Message

Do you recommend your religion in the light of Biblical teaching? Indeed, can you turn to Scripture and find recommendation of it? Can you prove your religion? Does God approve of your religion?

First Peter 3:15, "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*"

If someone came to you and requested, "Tell me about your faith and why you hold to it," what kind of response would you offer? Can we give an answer to those who have a right to inquire? Many would only give such answers as convenience, following the ways of their foreparents, friends, or someone else. Some go the way of human traditions and creeds. It is also surprising and disappointing that many people seem to think it makes no difference what you believe, but they think that way only in matters of religion. Even many brethren seem offended if you ask them why they believe and practice certain things, as if they have no obligation to give answer or show reason for their faith.

We Need Bereans

God does not approve every religion, every message, every practice. For this reason we are to "*examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, and prove your own selves.*" (Second Corinthians 13:5). "*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*" (First Thessalonians 5:21). "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" (First John 4:1). If we show ourselves approved of God we must study (Second Timothy 2:15).

This the noble Bereans did (Acts 17:11). Jesus warned, Matthew 15: 8,9, "*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain to they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" We are to abide in the doctrine of Christ (Second John 9). If our religion is not found in His doctrine, regardless of how

well suited we might think it is, God does not approve of it, and it is not worth recommendation.

The day is coming when the Lord will say to some, "*I never knew you.*" (Matthew 7:23), even though they had been religious, even thinking they did what they did in His name. But it was not according to His authority or in His name. We must follow the teaching that the Lord has given if we expect Him to acknowledge us as His.

Make Sure

Thomas serves as a good example of making sure our beliefs are well founded (John 20). We usually think of Thomas as "doubting Thomas" because he doubted Christ had risen from the dead as some had told him. But it is well to consider him as "cautious Thomas."

Jesus had met with His disciples (Verse 20), but for some reason Thomas was not among them at that time. (Think what he missed by not being assembled with his brethren!) Later he was told, "*We have seen the Lord,*" but he answered, "*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*" (verse 25). Thomas was simply insisting on evidence before he believed. He wanted proof.

This was not unreasonable because Jesus had warned, Matthew 7:15, "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*" Again Jesus warned, Matthew 24:4,5, "*Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and deceive many.*"

Later, evidence was provided him (verse 27). At a subsequent gathering when Thomas was present, Jesus said to him, "*Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing.*" Then Thomas answered, "*My Lord and my God.*" He was now sure. Evidence had convinced him.

We need to be sure as Thomas. In a world of confusion and many conflicting voices, we must make our calling

and election sure (First Peter 1:10). We can be sure by the evidence provided by God in His confirmed Word (John 20:30,31). Can you recommend your faith in light of what the Word declares?

What of the religious name you wear? To what church do you belong? What of the way you worship? Is the work you do done according to His Word, by His authority? What do you believe about eternity, sin, salvation, heaven, hell, morality, the home, marriage, etc.? Do you turn to some latter day revelation, a catechism, a church discipline or manual, or a confessional to determine your faith? Considering all the many "authorities" people use in religion, it ought to be evident that God does not approve of such chaos and contradictions!

By Your Manner of Life

But do you recommend your religion by the life you live? This gets very close to us. Does our faith and life complement each other, by which I mean, do they harmonize? Or do we say we believe one thing but live as if we believe something quite different? Does your life make your convictions more attractive to others, more appealing, easier to see in you what you believe by what you do? Or does your inconsistency leave one wondering just where you stand and what you believe? After all, we are the only epistle some will ever read (Second Corinthians 3:2). This is unfortunate, but often this is the case. It is as one asked, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, is there really enough evidence to convict you?"

If a man's faith and religion does not affect his life, even change his life, he needs to change his religion. The religion of which Christ is the author changes people from what they are toward what they should be (Romans 6:2, 16,17,22; Second Corinthians 5:17). We are not to be the same kind of person, one in sin, following sinful ways, but a "*new creature in Christ.*"

The change we must know is not only a change of relationship with God, which takes place upon becoming a Christian when we obey the gospel, but involves that spiritual growing process whereby we become more and

more like Jesus. Christianity is a way of living, a life of conviction, not one of mere convenience and conformity to this world. Our lives must "*adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.*" (Titus 2:10). The fault Jesus mentioned so vividly concerning the Pharisees was that they would say one thing but do another. Matthew 23:3, "*...for they say and do not.*" The Holy Spirit condemns "*having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.*" (Second Timothy 3:5). The problem with the Israelites so often in their history was that they were religious, but not righteous. People can perform rituals and forms, even that which is commanded, and their lives and hearts not be in harmony with God.

You have heard it said that you can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time. We need to realize we cannot fool God any time. We shall reap as we sow (Galatians 6:7,8).

Our Example

What we do speaks louder than what we say. One may be heard to say he does not recommend drinking alcoholic beverages, but when he drinks them he recommends them. The same with smoking, or any other habitual vice. Philippians 1:27, "*Only let your conversation* (your manner of life, JWB) *be as becometh the gospel of Christ.*" Matthew 7:16-18, "*Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*" James 2: 14, 18, "*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?... Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.*" The point is that we recommend, or renounce, our faith everyday. A man's faith is in his heart, but it is shown in what he does.

Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glory your Father which is in heaven.*" A light bulb does not shine so you can see it, but see what is in the room. A Christian

"shines," by his works, not that he might be seen, but that God will be seen. Professing Christ is not enough (Titus 1:16). "*They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*" Reprobate does not simply mean wicked, vile, like a scoundrel, but worthless, without value. If we do not recommend our faith by actions we become reprobate. James 4:17, "*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*"

Religion and Life

Have you ever heard it said, "Religion and business do not mix." Or "religion and politics will not mix." "Religion and recreation do not mix." While we must not confuse the faith of Christ as business, politics, or recreation, if the religion is the religion of Christ, it must influence the way a person does in every area of life. The way of Christ makes a person a better neighbor, student, worker, citizen, parent, whatever. Paul recommended his religion by deeds.

Philippians 4:9, "*Those things which ye have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with you.*" First Corinthians 11:1, "*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*" Galatians 2:20, "*I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*"

A religion that does not govern one's life, all the time, is not the religion of Jesus Christ. So let us ask ourselves, "What kind of recommendation does my day to day manner of life provide concerning the faith that I profess?" We profess to follow Christ, we ought to walk as He walked (First John 2:6).

In the second lesson on this theme, we shall examine other matters that contribute to our recommending our faith and religion.

* * * * *

Do You Recommend Your Religion?

Number Two

We shall not review the previous lesson. This is an advantage in writing sermons that speaking them does not have. When one preaches a series of lessons he finds it expedient to review previous lessons in order to attain the connection from one to the next. In writing, this can be done by simply referring to the former lessons.

Our Support

Do we recommend our religion by the way we support it? "Here comes a lesson on giving," some might complain. Yes, but is there no need for it? Are you giving as you should? Those who give as they ought never raise objections to lessons on the subject. They rejoice over their privilege to give and the opportunity to learn more about it for themselves and the opportunity for others to learn. Only those who are not doing as they ought will squirm and rage against sermons on giving. "Giving" is a good single word commentary on the religion of Christ. Consider what God has given us. He gave life itself, the world in which we live, every good and perfect gift, even His Son to die in our stead. Has He not given of His love, grace, and mercy that we might be saved? Consider what Christ gave in His example, sacrifice, and hope. The Holy Spirit gave us the Word that leads to heaven. When you truly understand the religion of Christ you understand why giving is such an essential part of it.

But giving involves more than just money, although this is included. That the faith must be supported by Christians is elementary information. Who else cares enough for the Lord, His will, and the souls of mankind to support it? A religion that does not find support for it from among those who profess it is an unworthy religion. It is an admission of weakness and emptiness

to look to others who do not profess a certain faith to support that faith. Some turn to government for support, or business ventures, raffles, even gambling, carnivals, selling ads, etc. to raise funds for their religion. This is an unmistakable sign that their faith is not THE faith of which Christ is author and founder.

Endorsement

People are not hesitant to recommend various products they use, such as detergents, automobiles, cold remedies, food, etc. Most actually take some pleasure in being able to recommend to their friends those things they find useful. Manufacturers have long understood that the best recommendation and support they can receive is a sincere recommendation and endorsement from those who use their product. The same principle is true concerning the faith of Christ.

Second Corinthians 4:13, "*I believed and therefore have I spoken.*" The word, "*therefore,*" means Paul was about to give a reason for believing. He did not believe because he had spoken. He spoke according to what he believed. His words and actions were governed by his convictions. He was simply unable to keep silent on a matter of such universal importance and benefit as the faith of Christ. When he went to Athens, Acts 17:16, "*Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.*" Paul was not ashamed to recommend his faith to one and all.

But too often we think only in financial and monetary terms. While this is not to be minimized, and giving is an item of worship, and by our giving of our means we give honor to God with our substance (Proverbs 3:9), there is more. It would be worthwhile to spend time dealing with monetary giving as Scripture teaches it, however. (First Corinthians 16:1,2; Romans 12:8; Second Corinthians 9:6,7). But there are other ways that call for us to support and endorse the faith. We strongly suggest all these ways be included in our service to God because He has the right to expect us to recommend the faith in every way that is available to us.

Worship

Faithful attendance at worship and Bible study periods is an additional way. So many who call themselves Christians take this privilege and duty so lightly. They do the cause of Christ such harm. Possibly they do not intend to be a hindrance, but they can be and often are. When non-Christians see professed Christians care so little for obedience to the commands surrounding worship and Bible study, just how do we expect them to be impressed? We withhold recommendation of our faith by our irregularity in attendance, forsaking assembling, as well as show contempt and disregard for the command of Deity.

Offering words of encouragement to each other, cooperating with each other in the work, acts of kindness and goodness, all are ways to show we recommend the faith. There are times when conflicts between what this world demands and what the Lord demands arise before us. Only in times of such conflict are we really able to show our priorities and to demonstrate the Lord is first with us. Without any conflicts of concern, we never are faced with such an opportunity. Just how do we do when we have to make choices? Do we recommend our faith, or do we go the way of the world, the way we want, the way others pressure us to go? It is most inappropriate for Christians to allow social events, recreation, vacations, friends, family, the mundane matters of this life, to become a superior concern to us before our loyalty to Christ. Christians are to be "*zealous of good works,*" (Titus 2:14), "*ready unto every good work,*" (Titus 3:1), "*full of good works,*" (Acts 9:36), "*careful to maintain good works,*" (Titus 3:8), and be "*fruitful in every good work,*" (Colossians 1:10). This gives support to the faith when we obey these expectations.

There is the story of a hungry, cold child gazing through a store window at a doll. One lady observed and her heart was touched. She bought the doll and gave it to the child, fed her, clothed her warmly. As they parted the little girl asked, "Are you God's wife?" Is not this what the church should radiate, being the bride of Christ? We are to be found supporting the Lord's way to the extent

people will think we are God's, not for our glory, but His. When we do this, we recommend our faith.

By the Way It Works

Do we recommend our religion by the way it works, not only for us, but how it will work for all who follow it? What good is your religion to you? Does it provide that which is sure and stable?

When we experience good fortune, does our religion provide soberness for us to temper us, lest we be swelled with pride? Does it provoke us to thanksgiving? In times of crisis, does it provide the support, comfort, assurance, and courage we must have to overcome, and if we cannot overcome, to endure? When you are lonely and sad, discouraged and suffering because of some great loss, where does your religion come in?

Surely, we must have a week long religion, not just a Sunday religion. We need that which we practice every day, and one that blesses throughout the week, whatever the week may produce. Christianity, when hungrily partaken of, and consistently applied , will work for the benefit of the Christian.

First Corinthians 10:13, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*" We can paraphrase the basic meaning of this promise of God to His children when we say, "There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle." This is God's own promise.

Psalm 3:3, "*Thou art a shield for me.*" Psalm 84:11, "*No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*" Hebrews 13:5, "*...for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*"

Because God is man's help, refuge and strength, we may say we "*...will not fear what man shall do unto me.*" (Hebrews 13:6). In Christ, through Christ who loved us, we can be "*more than conquerors.*" (Romans 8:37).

We can say with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, "*Our God is able.*" (Daniel 3:7). As Paul wrote, "*...able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.*" (Ephesians 3:20). What more could one want? All things needful will be provided if we seek Him, His righteousness, and His kingdom first (Matthew 6:33).

Forgiveness

But most important of all, the religion of Christ provides forgiveness of sins. Christ came to bring peace between man and God by providing the way of salvation, the way of forgiveness of sins, that barrier that man erects between himself and God. By following His will we can be saved from what will otherwise destroy us in hell. We can have peace, hope, purpose, strength for life, as well as a guide for life. All this is offered, as well as the eternal reward of heaven. We can recommend our faith, if our faith be THE faith, because THE faith is the only way that does this for us, and for all who will love His appearing (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

In summary, can we, do we, recommend our faith? If it be THE faith of Christ we are obligated to do so. This is a part of being faithful in THE faith. Can we prove it is THE faith revealed in Scripture? Do our lives show we believe it is important and commend it to others by the way we conduct our lives? Do we support it in all the ways and avenues open to us, with time, talent, prayer, money, deed, word, and work? Can we recommend it because of the blessings we receive from it?

Knowing that the way of Christ is God's way for man, the only way He approves (Acts 4:12; John 14:6), we recommend to you a serious study of THE faith of which we read in Scripture, and urge each of us to make that faith our religion.

* * * * *

Why does it seem some brethren have such a hard time deciding on which side they will be, the Lord's or the liberals? Some like to play both sides. Is that recommending THE faith?

Are We As Wise As They?

The most important part of any lesson is the Biblical text. You are urged to read the lengthy passage, Matthew 2:1-12, one part of the story that never grows old with the telling of it. It is a story of history that teaches us concerning the way we should go.

The birth of Jesus was in Bethlehem, and was followed, possibly as late as two years later, by a visit paid the Christ by wise men. We do not know with certainty how long after His birth they came, nor do we know the number of them that came. It has been often concluded that there were three wise men, but this is determined because three gifts are mentioned. We can only be certain that there were two or more?

They are said to be wise men. In what ways were they wise? Are we as wise as they proved themselves to be? Surely, the Holy Spirit did not use the term loosely and without meaning when they are called wise. Their wisdom may well have been worldly wisdom. Even so, we cannot escape being impressed with the wisdom they manifested surrounding their visit to Christ. We must remember, however, that worldly wisdom is not necessarily wisdom in the sight of God.

Two Kinds of Wisdom

Man's worldly wisdom often proves to be his downfall. Jeremiah 9:23,24, "*Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.*" Man's relationship with God determines the boundaries of his wisdom.

There is a wisdom that "*descendeth*" (James 3:15), and is earthly, sensual, and devilish. It takes one downward. First Corinthians 1:19-21, "*For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*" It is evident that what man considers wisdom is not always what God considers wisdom.

Who is really a wise person? James 3:13, "*Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness and fear?*" His manner of life determines whether he is wise or unwise. The men of Matthew chapter two proved themselves wise by what they did. There are at least eight marks of wisdom manifested by these men that we shall mention briefly, with the question before us, "Are we as wise as they?"

Interested in Christ

First, they were wise because they were interested in Christ. Having heard of him sufficiently to inquire concerning Him, they came to visit. We are also wise to show interest in Christ. How tragic that some manifest no interest in the Son of God. He is our hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). He alone hath the words of eternal life (John 6:68). He is the way to the Father (John 14:6). What a wonder that all are not concerned with the means of salvation, forgiveness, spiritual success, and the life beyond this one.

Searched for Christ

Second, they were wise in that they made a search for the Christ. This took effort on their part. Some may have a passing interest about Christ, but not sufficiently to search for Him. The Lord taught that "*the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, SEEKING* (emphasis, JWB) *goodly pearls.*" (Matthew 13:45). Would he ever have found the goodly pearl, the pearl of great price, if he had never sought for it?

Luke 13:24 speaks of striving to enter in at the strait gate. The word strive is akin to our word agonize, implying effort, even with difficulty if necessary, to accomplish entrance. They made the effort.

Personal Search

Third, they were wise because they did not let someone else do their searching for them. Herod sought the child, although his motives for doing so were sinister. But he could have probably succeeded if he had not depended upon the wise men to do his searching for him.

Today, too many are willing to let others search for Christ in their stead. They look to parents, husband, wife, child, preacher, anybody. While we surely can and should assist each other in every way we can to come to a knowledge of the Christ, there are those things where "*every man shall bear his own burden.*" Nobody can be saved for you. Nobody will be lost for you. Nobody can do the work of searching and learning the truth without each one showing cognizance of his personal responsibility in the matter. The wise men did not make this mistake. They showed wisdom.

We simply cannot trust in men, but only in the Lord. Even those people we love and trust cannot be our ultimate standard. It is possible for people to be misled. First John 4:1, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" The men of Berea were called noble because they searched the Scriptures daily to learn what was so (Acts 17:11). We are taught to "*prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*" (First Thessalonians 5:21). Jesus warned about the blind leading the blind and both falling into the pit (Matthew 15:14). Did not the foolish virgins depend too much on others (Matthew 25)? Inasmuch as each shall stand before the seat of judgment (Second Corinthians 5:10), each should be personally concerned with learning the truth for themselves.

They Asked

Fourth, they not only did their own searching, but they were wise in that they were not too proud to ask for assistance and guidance when they needed it. They did not possess the know-it-all attitude. Like the Ethiopian who was reading from Isaiah, when Philip asked if he understood what he was reading, he responded, "*How can I except some man guide me?*" (Acts 8:31). He forthwith invited Philip into the chariot and allowed himself to be taught.

Did not Apollos act wisely to permit Acquila and Priscilla to teach him the way of the of the Lord more perfectly? (Acts 18:26). Many other preachers might have had the attitude that others could not really teach them anything. Even though this man was mighty in the Scriptures, and eloquent, he was willing to accept guidance from others. We are doomed to ignorance when we conclude we cannot learn more than we know. This does not mean that what we already know is necessarily incorrect. It means that there is always room for growth in knowledge, and others sometimes can help us. A mark of an educated man is the realization that he does not know everything, even though some with the highest academic degrees act as if they think they do.

These men in our text, the men from the east, were wise to make inquiry, even if it was from Herod, to learn the whereabouts of the One they sought.

Followed the Light

Fifth, they followed the light God provided. First it was the star in the heavens; then the light afforded them from the prophets who had foretold of the One to be born in Bethlehem.

God has also given us light to guide our feet in this life toward heaven. "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my pathway.*" (Psalm 119:105). We have the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, all-sufficient Scripture to serve as our guide (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

Paid the Price

Sixth, they were willing to pay whatever the price to find the Christ. From wherever they came, they knew not what it would require of them to succeed, nor how long it would take. But they obviously committed themselves to the task. They had a goal and were dedicated to it.

What is the cost of discipleship? Luke 9:23, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" Jesus said we are to forsake all that we have (Matthew 19:27), meaning that nothing can come first before Him. We cannot serve Him with reservation. Christ gave His all. Can we be expected to do less? We are to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). Is it loyal service to follow His will only when convenient, only when it fits our own plans and will, only when we think it does not demand too much of us? Are we like the man who said he would follow Jesus as long as Jesus went with the crowd?

Persistence

Seventh, they were wise in that they never stopped until they found the child. Obstacles they encountered , but they did not quit.

Today ,we may meet obstacles in our desire to be faithful servants of the Lord. These things can even come from people close to us, even family, friends, job, and may demand changes of habits, associations, attitudes, putting away the old man of sin and putting on the new man of righteousness.

Jesus spoke of some who were not far from the kingdom, but they were not yet in the kingdom. The rich, young ruler asked what to do to be saved, but went away sorrowful because, though ever so near, he would not put the Lord before his wealth. But the wise men did not allow any obstacle to cause them to turn away. They kept on keeping on in spite of the fact that the road was not always easy and smooth.

They Worshipped

Their gifts were not "leftovers." Frankincense, myrrh, and gold were riches. They knew the Christ deserved the

best. The Macedonian Christians gave even in poverty because they first gave of themselves (Second Corinthians 8:3). Giving to the Lord is a display of wisdom as well as love and sincerity.

These men who came from the east were wise because (1) they were interested in Christ; (2) they searched for Christ; (3) they searched for Christ for themselves; (4) they sought assistance when they needed it; (5) they followed the light God provided; (6) they were willing to pay the price whatever it took; (7) they would not quit, but stayed with the task; and (8) they worshipped Him. Are we as wise as they?

* * * * *

Man's Origin, Purpose, and Destiny

The scope of this title is so overwhelming and inclusive that it ought to be obvious that in the space allotted for this lesson we shall mention only a few of the more prominent matters relative to it. This lesson deals with what we are, how we think of ourselves, which in turn will have a great bearing on how we think and act toward others. It deals with material that is at the same time a source of frustration for many, but contentment for others; unhappiness as well as joy. The failure to know and appreciate our origin, purpose, and destiny is to invite for ourselves a life of emptiness, wicked living, a sense of uselessness, and the concept that life is hopeless. This is the problem in the lives of many today.

On the other hand, knowledge of our origin, purpose, and destiny will give life satisfaction, hope, dignity, radiance, abundant joy, and will serve as a deterrent to

evil plus a motivation to do good. This lesson goes a long way explaining why, in the same society, with some there is a glowing joy, and right alongside others who live in deep despair.

Until one knows where he came from, why he is here, and where he is going his life will be a great mystery. That pressing question as to "what life is all about" will remain unanswered until we understand this subject.

But we can know. The Bible gives us the answer to all three areas of concern, origin, purpose, and destiny. This is one of the evidences of the divine inspiration of the Bible and a reason for its greatness. In the inspired writings that God has provided through inspired men guided by the Holy Spirit. He tells us that which we need to know.

Origin

The Biblical explanation of man's origin is brief and simple. Genesis 1:27, "*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*"

There is the living spirit of man that is housed in this material body made of the dust of the ground. This spirit remains inhabited there until what is called death, physical death, when the spirit and the body are separated (James 2:26). Ecclesiastes 12:7, "*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*" Such an explanation of man's origin is harmonious with all that man has learned, all that he does know, and all that he can demonstrate to be true. This explanation gives man his dignity and distinction as a human being, and is the reason we can even speak of such things as human rights, human dignity, self-respect, and it shows that human life is sacred. This is why animals are killed for food for man, but man is not killed to feed animals. This is why the killing of innocent man is murder and the killing of animals is not. This provides the reason for man being and doing differently from all other of God's creatures. This is the basis for morality and the necessity of proper relationships among humans. Man is

of God, having come from God, has been created by God, has a duty to God, and is both body and spirit.

Since none observed the beginning of man, we must rely upon divinely given revelation to know how it came to pass. Whether one believes the Biblical record or some other explanation, such as organic evolution, it is a matter to be decided by the evidence. It is not a matter of observation, but revelation. The origin of man cannot be determined scientifically because the nature of science is too limited to be involved. Science deals with that which can be observed, tested, weighed, measured, and demonstrated. Such is impossible with man's origin.

The question we must answer is which of the explanations put forth, creation or evolution, dignifies man, harmonizes with what we can observe and otherwise know. Which is reasonable, logical, believable, and concurs with the evidence available.

Is it reasonable to believe that such a marvelous and intricate creature as man is just the result of some undesigned, unintended, unplanned, naturalistic accident without purpose whatsoever? Inasmuch as the evolutionary theories contradict many provable processes and scientific facts, and creation violates not one, which is the most reasonable to accept?

We accept the act of creation by faith, but not a blind, naive, ignorant, superstitious, unsupported faith. Faith is founded on revelation and evidence. The evidence is so overwhelmingly one-sided as to the origin of man that we must conclude that the claim that evidence supports evolution is one of the most deadly and deliberate lies being perpetrated among mankind today. Creation, not chance, is the origin of man. Genesis 2:7, "*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*" There can be no "improvement" on that explanation.

There are basically two kinds of evolution regarding the attitude toward God. There is atheistic evolution and theistic evolution. Atheistic evolutionists deny the existence of God altogether. They claim that man is

totally material, and the result of naturalistic happenings, the result of chance, only a more highly evolved animal than other animals. Their explanation removes any and all reason for the existence of man or purpose for his life. It destroys the dignity of mankind. his distinctiveness from the animal world, the need or propriety of morality, or any basis for what is called "human rights." Humans are only living things, and nothing more. There is no "oughtness" regarding his behavior any more than among beasts.

They claim that something existed (although they know not what it was nor from whence it came) and that something somehow exploded (like the "big bang" theory). From this came unexplainable naturalistic events that eventually, somehow, produced a single living cell. That cell somehow began to evolve into a multi-celled creature. Through eons and eons of time, in a natural way, this single cell ultimately evolved into what is called man. Their contention is that from something non-living there came life; from the single cell came man. In fact, from this single cell they tell us everything that lives eventually came into being, plant and animal. You may not have known that when you eat vegetables you are eating a far removed relative.

With this kind of outlook toward humans, little wonder there is clamoring for abortions, the destruction of the unwanted, even some talking of the disposal of the sick, aged, or otherwise "undesirables." Human life has no sacredness among evolutionists nor can there be if they hold fast to their theories. Evolution neither explains where we came from, why we are here, or where we are going except from nowhere, for nothing, and to the grave. What a concept of human life?

Theistic evolutionists with futilely try to please error and truth at the same time. They do not deny the existence of God but contend that God used the process of organic and naturalistic evolution to produce man. The only real difference between an atheistic evolutionist and a theistic evolutionist is the source of the original single cell from which all life on earth is supposed to have come. Atheists say it just happened from something that exploded and someway developed.

Theistic evolutionists say God created the single cell and turned it loose to follow its natural development.

Both systems have the same problems scientifically, the same dilemma, the same unanswered questions and inconsistencies. Both lack evidence that such a developmental evolutionary process from a single cell to man has ever occurred. The incongruities of man originating in such a fashion hold with equal force against both kinds of evolutionists. It is really foolish to speak of atheistic evolution and theistic evolution when the evidence is against there being any such organic evolution as they propose to ever have taken place at all.

Biblically they face the same problems. The Bible teaches that God created all things in six days (Exodus 20:11), some of our compromising and modernist so-called "scholars" notwithstanding. The word "*day*" comes from the Hebrews word "*yom*" which when used with a numeral refers to what we call a solar day, or a twenty-four hour day. Each day had an evening and a morning.

Some evolutionists contend that "*day*" refers to long periods of time. We admit that "*day*" does not always mean twenty-four hours, but it does when used with a numeral. Furthermore, since each day had both evening and morning, if the evolutionists were right, they disprove the possibility of naturalistic development. There would necessarily be long periods of darkness which would make impossible the growth of vegetation. Everything would freeze and die for lack of light.

To contend for evolution contradicts Jesus. How anyone who would claim to be a Christian can hold to a theory that contradicts the Lord only demonstrates the inconsistency and egotism of theistic evolutionists who say they are Christians. Jesus said God made them male and female "*from the beginning*" (Matthew 19:4). Was He wrong about that? If He was, what does this say about His Deity? Scripture says man was man from the time there was life in him. Genesis 1:27 teaches humans were created, not evolved. There is no way an honest mind can hold both evolution and the Bible. You will have to become mentally polluted with anti-God philosophies in

the "halls of learning" before you can become that ridiculously stupid and nonsensical.

Furthermore, that things produce after their own kind is a proven fact and is demonstrable and observable. Nor does life come from non-life; mentality from no mentality. Man was made lower than the angels and superior to animals, not just another animal that out-developed others. Man came into being as a man. There is absolutely no room for the organic evolutionary process in the Biblical or scientific record. There is no room or reason for the attempt to harmonize between what God reveals in His Word and the unprovable, impossible, accidental explanations of those who do not wish to have God.

Purpose

It should be obvious that since man was created by God that there is a reason for man's existence. The "explanation" by organic evolution removes any reason for man's existence. Solomon said, Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*" Man is to live before God, in God's way, and shall be held accountable for the way he chooses to live. His reason for existence is to show fear (respect) to God by obedience to God.

Romans 1:21 teaches we are to glorify God. First Corinthians 11:7 reminds that we are in the image of God and for the glory of God. We are also to cause others to glorify God (Matthew 5:16). We are to walk worthy (worthily) before God (First Thessalonians 2:12).

Life is composed of many activities, privileges, duties, and opportunities, both good and evil. It is intended that in life man be good, do good, as God defines good. In this way he brings glory to his Creator. If man fails here he fails in what matters regardless of that in which he might otherwise succeed. If he succeeds here but fails in all else, he has wonderfully fulfilled his reason for existence. All that we do, in occupation, recreation,

education, religion, family, everything, should be to the glory of God (First Thessalonians 10:31).

The only way to glorify God is to love and obey Him and His will. In our age, since Pentecost, this means becoming and being a faithful child of God through Christ. One cannot honor the Father unless he also honors the Son (John 5:23; First John 2:23). The only source of information regarding His will is in the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and all-sufficient Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

God wants man to be happy, both now and eternally. He has taught us the course of life that produces this blessedness and He knows better than do we. But He has also graciously warned us of the paths that produce destruction so that we might avoid them. But He has even done more than that. He has provided a remedy for our self-imposed destruction through sin. He offers us the way of redemption and salvation.

Our mission in life and our reason for being is to do His will. Though fame, fortune, and favor of this world escape us, we fulfill our purpose through Christ. Even if fame, fortune, and favor of this world be ours, we miss the mark if we serve not the Lord.

Destiny

But this life is fleeting, temporary, and shall end (Hebrews 9:27). Life is as a vapor (James 4:14). Ecclesiastes 9:5, "*For the living know that they shall die.*"

We are but sojourners and pilgrims passing through, on our way to another life. This world is not our home for any of us. But where are we going? It is evident we do not remain here in this life. If there is no other existence for man, then the purpose of life is invalidated and life would be meaningless.

The destiny of man is an eternal one because man is an immortal being. Matthew 25:46 speaks of everlasting or eternal life or punishment. Even though the body dies, this is not so with the spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Even this body shall be raised into a spiritual body (First

Corinthians 15). That we shall exist eternally has been predetermined by the Lord and we have no choice in that matter. The matter that is not yet determined is where each one shall exist. We have a choice about this.

Man is given a choice of his eternal destiny. We are free moral agents with the power of volition and decision. We can choose for ourselves where we shall exist. Our eternal destiny specifically is not forced upon us. But our choice is limited to either heaven or hell.

There is not a great amount of revelation in the Bible of either place. But there is sufficient description for anyone to know where he would rather be.

The very nature of this choice is that each one must choose for himself. None can choose for another. It is a very personal and ye final choice. There are two ways open to us (Matthew 7:13,14), and we will go one or the other. The attempt to make no choice is to not choose the way to heaven.

Christians know where they came from, why they are here, how they are to live while here, and where they are going. They know that man is both body and soul or spirit. These things God has revealed. For this reason the Christian order his life according to the will of Him who shall judge in the last day (John 12:48; Acts 17:31).

When one recognizes his origin is God, then fulfills his divinely appointed purpose to glorify God in this life by lovingly obeying God, then his eternal destiny of happiness if given him by the Lord. Reward and salvation is already assured by God's own promise to the obedient and faithful who through their obedience and faithfulness partake of the grace of God, and the benefits of the blood of the Savior. The faithful Christian has a home in heaven which is reserved for him, a crown of glory that shall never fade.

* * * * *

Have you tried to bring someone to Christ lately?

Critics Who Lack Conviction



Why is it so often the case that there be those who are severely criticial of anyone who criticizes false doctrines and identifies those who teach error, but are never quite able to bring themselves to criticize false doctrines and those who teach error? They can lambast with all manner of derogatory and insulting terms those who stand fast in the faith and prove from Scripture what is truth, but they display no such conviction themselves to the truth, and refuse to say anything against that which is dividing the church and causing souls to be lost. With too many there is cowardice and lack of conviction. Timidity to stand against error is really treason to the Savior. Shame!

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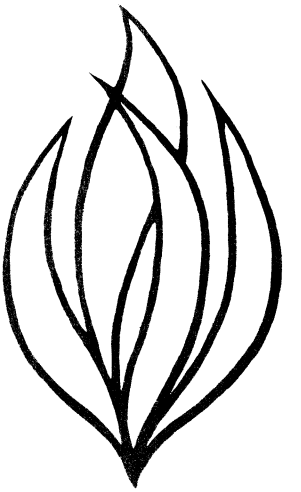

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIII James W. Boud **NUMBER 11**

Day of Good Tidings

Our lesson is taken from the seventh chapter of Second Kings and an event that occurred eight hundred to nine hundred years before Christ. The people of God were divided into the two kingdoms of Northern Israel and Southern Judah. Benhadad, king of Syria, besieged Samaria, the capital of Northern Israel, with the result of a terrible famine in the city. The severity of the famine is seen in the high price even for substance that was not to be eaten. People resorted to even eating their children, and starvation was driving them insane.

In the midst of this plight, Elisha, the prophet of God, said, Second Kings 7:1, "*Hear ye the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.*" In other words, there would be food supplies in abundance and at a reasonable price. This prediction was so different from what then existed that most refused to believe what he had to say.

Verses three through five introduce us to some special characters. There were lepers in the gate that faced dire alternatives. They reasoned they could remain where they were and die, or enter into the city and die of starvation with the rest, or go over to the Syrian camp, running the risk of being killed, but possibly finding food and help. Of these alternatives, they naturally chose the only one open to them that offered any hope whatsoever. So they proceeded to the Syrian camp.

What They Found

When they came to the camp they found it totally abandoned. The explanation for this abandonment is revealed in verses six and seven. "*For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled*

in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life."

Finding no man, they did find plenty to eat and drink, along with treasures and valuable supplies. They began to enrich themselves, enjoying to the fullest their discovery. Verse eight, "*And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver and gold and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent and carried thence also, and went and hid it.*" In a very short span of time they had gone from hopelessness and despair, poverty and hunger, into an environment of abundance, joy, and feasting amidst wealth.

One leper took note, verse nine, "*We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace.*" As he reflected upon his good fortune he became aware of that good fortune, but also remembered the need of those left in Samaria. He knew he had a duty toward others to let them know of the abundance that was available. He was also conscious that withholding this news from those in need would eventually bring his own condemnation. This was a day of good news and it must be spread to others.

The Application

Let us make a spiritual application of the principles involved in this awareness of this leper. It is a very simple and easily understood application. Jesus said, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" (Mark 16:15). The word "gospel" means "good news, glad tidings." At the birth of Jesus the angel said, "*Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*" (Luke 2: 10).

The news of the kingdom of God is called "*glad tidings*" (Luke 8:1). When Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia he said his messages were as "*glad tidings,*" the fulfillment of the promises made to the ancient fathers (Acts 13:32). Romans 10:15. "*How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things.*" The gospel of Christ is good news.

Why is the gospel such good news? Consider mankind separated from and without the gospel. Sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:1,2), and is transgression of the law of God (First John 3:4). All have sinned (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Apart from God we are as strangers and foreigners (Ephesians 2:19), aliens from God's people, outside the covenant relationship with God, without promise or hope, without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). Without Christ mankind is lost, doomed, damned, frustrated, confused, hopeless, helpless, in doubt and insecurity, with nothing awaiting him but an eternal hell.

Saved by the Gospel

But the gospel is God's way of saving mankind from sin (Romans 1:16). We are saved by the gospel (First Corinthians 15:2). That seed by which we are begotten and by which we are saved is the Word of God (James 1: 21; First Peter 1: 23). By the power of the gospel the former state is displaced with forgiveness, security, purpose in life, hope, cleansing, sanctification, fellowship with Deity, divine providence, and eventually heaven. Those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel receive the blessings that come from heaven. Those of us who are Christians are much like the unfortunate lepers whose situation changed when they came upon the plenteous camp. We are the ones who have been so fortunate to have gone from spiritual despair, poverty, and hunger of sinful Samaria to now feast at the provisions of the Lord, partaking of His abundance, and basking in the glory of His salvation.

But do we also possess the same awareness and consciousness of our blessings as did the lepers? Are we truly sensitive to our own spiritual good fortune? How concerned are we for those who are still suffering in the starving Samaria of sin? Do we really grasp our duty to the present age to go to them with the gospel, preaching and teaching the forgiveness of sins through Christ? We are to be the pillars of the truth, proclaiming and upholding the truth of God before the world (First Timothy 3:15). Are we as involved in doing this as were the brethren of the first century who went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:4)? We must take stock of our

concern for the lost lest we, like the leper who if he withheld the good news he discovered, would receive a sure retribution for failure and neglect (James 4:17).

Someone has rightly said that we are saved to save. Christ loved us, and we must love others. But can we truly love others who are yet in sin if we do not teach them the way of salvation?

We Have Opportunities

Possibly it would help us to consider some of the opportunities we have to discharge this duty. Making personal contacts, visitation, showing interest in the sick and bereaved is a place to begin. We could be more attentive to funerals. Such times have often been the turning point in the lives of survivors when special interest is shown them and kindness extended.

Everyone should try to teach someone. Not everyone must be a public proclaimer of the Word. But we have learned to converse with people on many subjects and we have the ability to converse with them about the soul. Helpful material and training is available to assist us in doing this work effectively. But how many take advantage of such things?

Most congregations conduct special efforts to teach the gospel in addition to the classes and sermons regularly. Gospel meetings are special times when men of ability and learning are invited into our midst to preach the Word. Not only do many fail to bring others with them, some do not faithfully support such efforts themselves. Some do. Whether we realize it or not, this marks the level of our interest and concern in souls. The very least we could do is to uphold the hands of those who are preaching the Word. We do this when we are present.

One way that is utilized by many is through the distribution of printed materials. Various tracts and other pieces of literature are available and these things contain precise information that the lost must learn. Some have taken the task of distributing encouragements for daily Bible reading among their neighbors with calendar cards suggesting passages for

reading. Placing good tracts in proper localities for others to take and read is one inconspicuous way of spreading the gospel. Enrolling others in correspondence home study courses is another good effort.

More That You Can Do

When the truth comes under attack where you are, whether in the home, at your place of occupation, or even in the church, we can turn our good fortune into the benefit of others by standing firm for the truth without favor or compromise. Often erroneous doctrines and practices arise, and many times Christians are a silent as a tomb regarding it. As one preacher said, "They get lockjaw." They are afraid to stand up for truth, and choose the path of "go-along-ism" as their course of non-action. One reason false ideas can make headway and get footholds is because those who possess the knowledge of the truth refuse to do their duty and tell others the glad tidings of truth.

It would seem without much argument that if I truly am grateful for my own salvation, if I am concerned for lost souls around me as the Lord expects me to be, if I realize my duty as a Christian and have the desire to perform it, if I take seriously the warning of retribution against those who refuse to do their duty, then I, like the lepers of long ago, will realize that today is a day of glad tidings and I will not hold my peace, but will go to others and tell the story of Jesus and His love. Can we be faithful Christians and do less?

* * * * *

God's Part In Man's Salvation

Ephesians 2:8,9, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.*" This is one of the

great passages of Scripture that tells of God's part in man's salvation.

Our lesson is one that should cause us to love God all the more. The passage is familiar because it presents a basic ingredient in God's plan for saving man. An analysis of the passage shows how man is saved, and how man is not saved. He is not saved by works of which he can boast. It does not say there are no works involved in being saved, but a certain kind of works will not save. Salvation is not by man's merit, not God's payment for good that man does. Man cannot deserve, earn, nor merit salvation.

Two Parts

Salvation is the result of actions taken by both God and man. What man must do is of value only because of what God has done, and because God says it is of value. Man's part is that of obedient faith. God's part might be classified under the heading of grace, an unearned favor bestowed upon man as a gift from God. Romans 6:23, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" Our lesson shall discuss God's part in God's plan for saving man, leaving man's part for another study.

First, why did God do anything at all to save man? It is because man sins and deserves condemnation (Romans 3:10, 23; 5:12). What difference does that make? It means spiritual death to the sinner (Romans 6:23; James 1:13-15). Man places himself in a predicament from which he cannot extricate himself by himself. He is doomed, damned, hopeless, and helpless. He is dependent on someone to save him.

God's Love

Why God acted at all is explained by the love of God for man. "*God commended his loved toward us...*" (Romans 5:8). "*For God so loved the world...*" (John 3:16). "*Herein is love: not that we loved God, but that he first loved us.*" (First John 4: 10). How God has manifested that love is revealed to us in Scripture. Just here we establish the need of man for salvation and the necessity for God to

do something for man because man is dependent upon God. God's motive for acting on man's behalf is because of God's love and grace. We are saved by God's mercy (Titus 3:3-7).

What has God done? For a long time God's plan for redeeming man was unrevealed, even a mystery (First Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:1-5; Colossians 1:26). But His plan is no longer a mystery because it has been revealed by revelation from God through His holy prophets and apostles, now embodied in His Word. We can know His plan by reading what inspired men wrote. Let us go back in time in our thinking to that dark moment when sin entered the world and observe the gradual unfolding of God's plan which has existed from before the foundation of the world.

God's Plan Unfolds

In pronouncing curses on Adam, Eve, and Satan because of sin, God said, Genesis 3:15, "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" Not much of the plan of salvation is revealed in this passage, but there is enough for us to know that God would provide a way for mankind from the spiritual injury inflicted by Satan through One who would be the seed of woman. It is significant what is not said. It was not said that Satan would be bruised by One of the seed of man and woman, but only woman, which is an indirect reference to the manner of birth of the One who would come; namely, Christ, by the virgin birth.

God later gave promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). Included in the promises that concerned a great nation, a land they would have for their own, blessings upon those that blessed Abraham and curses upon those who cursed him, God said, "*And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*" That seed referred to Christ (Galatians 3: 16). It becomes unmistakable that God would provide for mankind. A similar promise was given to Isaac and Jacob.

Just prior to the death of Jacob, Jacob blessed his sons. He somewhat narrowed down the lineage through whom

God would fulfill His promises of blessedness for man through the seed of Abraham. Jacob said to Judah, Genesis 49:10, "*The septre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*" This referred to the coming of Christ, who was of the tribe of Judah. The septre was the symbol of being king.

A Prophet to Come

In Deuteronomy 18: 15,18, God told Moses to say, "*The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall they hearken... I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto me, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.*" In Acts 3:23, Peter said that prophecy referred to Christ. More and more the plan of God unfolds. There arises the expectancy of One who was to come who would accomplish for man what God intended to provide.

At Sinai and through Moses, God gave a special law by which Israel was to be governed. The law was not the way of salvation (Romans 3:20). The law was only a shadow of things to come (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). The law was a temporary measure for the Israelites alone (Deuteronomy 5: 1-3) that was to be operative until Christ came (Galatians 3:22-25). The law was eventually nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14) because Christ fulfilled it (Matthew 5:17). It was not destroyed but was abolished (Ephesians 2:15) because its purpose for existence was accomplished. But the law was not the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Galatians 3: 18,19).

Israel's Role

As Biblical history unfolds we recognize Israel as God's chosen nation through which these promises were to become realities. The land of Canaan became their homeland. They became a kingdom and there were numerous prophecies pertaining to the seed of David and prophecies made by David. David was a descendant of Abraham. The Messiah would be of the seed of David. He

would be the Son of God, begotten of the Holy Spirit. He would be devout, teach in parables, and be betrayed. Men would cast lots for His garments, and He would be nailed to the tree, counted among criminals, given vinegar to drink, and buried in a borrowed tomb among the rich. But He would also be raised from the dead and given the throne of David. David's literal earthly throne was a type of the spiritual throne to come. His kingdom would be universal.

Throughout the history of the United Kingdom of Israel, then the period of the Divided Kingdoms, into the times of exile and after the return of Judah from captivity, prophets foretold of the One who was to come and the kingdom He was to establish. "*Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days,*" speaking of the days of the Kingdom of Christ.

The Kingdom to Come

Daniel said the kingdom would come in the days of a fourth empire and would never end. The fourth empire corresponds to the Roman empire. Isaiah said He would be born of a virgin, sinless, meek, quiet of spirit. He told when the kingdom would come and where. It would be in the "*last days*" and begin in Jerusalem. This was foretold some seven hundred years before Christ was born of the virgin Mary.

Zechariah said He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver, but also prophesied the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem which did take place just prior to His betrayal and crucifixion. Minute details of the life, work, death, burial, and resurrection of the One who was to come to be a sin offering for all mankind are presented to us from the Old Testament prophecies.

It was even foretold of one who would come to prepare the way for the Lord, which had reference to John the Baptist (Malachi 4: 5,6). And did these things actually come to pass as foretold?

Prophecies Come True

Finally, the prophecies began to be fulfilled with the coming of John, "*the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord and make his paths straight.*" (Matthew 3: 3). The long-standing prophecies from God became historical events one by one, precisely as foretold. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, in Bethlehem (which place was prophesied). He was taken to Egypt and called from there as the prophet had said. He lived in the despised city of Nazareth as foretold. Point after point was accomplished.

John the Baptist announced, John 1:29, "*Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.*" John said, "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" (Mark 1:15). The Messiah was on the earth and His name was Immanuel, "*God with us,*" as the angel had said would be the case. Galatians 4: 4,5, "*But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*" Jesus Christ is the One God promised by whom we can become children of God.

Soon to Come

Jesus taught that the kingdom would come in the lifetime of some of those to whom He spoke (Mark 9:1). He was the One who would come to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). It was in Him that the promises made to Abraham were fulfilled (Galatians 3:16; 26-29). He was the Prophet made like unto Moses that was to come (John 1:45; 5:46; Acts 3:23). He came from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). It was through Him that the law of Moses would accomplish its purposes (Galatians 3:19, 23-25; Romans 3:21,22; 10:4). He was the seed of Abraham and of David, the One to rule on the throne (Luke 1:32). He was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16), and the Savior of mankind.

But the sending of God's Son was not the completion of God's part in man's salvation. How would Satan bruise the heel of the seed of woman? How would the seed of woman bruise the head of Satan and deliver man? This was accomplished by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Evil men took Christ to the cross and there He

was bruised. But the power of God made Him victor over death, hell, and the grave by the resurrection from the dead. The great, merciful, gracious, and loving act of Deity that made the final provision for the salvation of man was the death and resurrection of Christ. There payment was made for sins and justice satisfied. There mercy was extended to sinful mankind. Justice and mercy met at the cross of Christ. Hope was offered.

By His Blood

Matthew 26:28 teaches His blood was shed for the remission of sins. Romans 5:1-8 teaches it was because of God's love that Christ died for us. Hebrews 2:9 makes it plain that it was God's plan that "*he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man.*" By His blood was are saved (Hebrews 9:12; Romans 3: 24,25; 5:9). We have redemption through His blood (Ephesians 1:7). He became our Passover Lamb (First Corinthians 5:7).

"O to grace, how great a debtor,
daily I'm constrained to be."

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found;
was blind but now I see."

Yes, God's part in God's plan for saving man was the provision of the soul-cleansing blood of Christ, given by the grace, love, and mercy of God. After describing spiritual conditions before coming to Christ, Paul said, Ephesians 2:1-7, "*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).*" God makes the difference. What can wash away my sins? Thanks to the grace of God there is the blood of Christ. We must reach His blood. There is no other way.

* * * *

The Twenty-Third Psalm

A reading of this psalm is suggested at this point before continuing with the study. Possibly many readers can quote it from memory.

There are several reasons for choosing to discuss this particular psalm, and some of them are very personal and need not be specified. But this psalm has sung itself into millions of hearts. It comes from Deity through the writing and voice of the sweet singer of Israel, David, and brings forth words of peace, trust, rest, joy, guidance, comfort, and fellowship. The language is simple and plain, chaste and understandable. The notations are realistic, and it is certainly applicable to those who love the Lord even today.

In this psalm we have a picture of God in love with His people, having grace toward our needs, comfort for our sorrows, joy for our successes, and climaxed with the divine message of hope and expectation. Many griefs have been put to rest by its sweet assurances. Many sadnesses have been driven away and confidences restored, anxieties dispelled, bringing victory rather than defeat to the hearts of those who walk after God .

We may divide the psalm into three very logical divisions, each one showing something of the relationship between God and His child. (1) God is as a shepherd and we are His sheep. (2) God is as a guide and we are His followers. (3) God is as a host and we are His guests.

God as Shepherd

"*The Lord is my shepherd.*" We are as weak, foolish, thoughtless, unprotected sheep. God is our provider, preserver, and protector. Let us emphasize the word "*my.*" While God is concerned with the masses of people, what a joy to know He also is concerned with me as an

individual. I am His and He is mine. There is this emphasis on the personal benefits our relationship sustains and are defined herein. Therefore, He supplies all my needs, physical and spiritual, for body, soul, mind, heart, spirit, all the various parts into which man might be divided and composed. As sheep look to their shepherd, so we look unto God.

"I shall not want." I may not even know what is best for me, but God does. He provides the rest, refreshment, nourishment, forgiveness, cleansing, guidance, fellowship, comfort, and security that I must have to live life properly and successfully. He makes me fit for service to Him and others and from Him comes the power to serve. I shall not lack anything that is necessary to the fulfillment of my purpose for existence. He will see to that.

One notable thing about His provisions is that they are great and abundant, but not an end in themselves. They are a means to an end. God created us for life, now and forever. In Christ we have the abundant life. Because of Him and what He provides we are prepared for the struggles as well as the successes along the road of life, even into the life beyond this one on earth. There are battles to be fought, works to be done, foes to be met, friends to be won. While we know not what a day may bring forth, because of Him there is nothing that will happen that God and I together cannot handle if only I will lean on Him. He restores, refreshes, and renews so we may enter into the challenges of each day with confidence and strength. How blessed we are to have such a Shepherd as our Lord! What a joy that we can be among His sheep!

God as Guide

Nor shall we lack for guidance. He leads as our guide and we are His followers. Beside the still and calm waters we go. Even into the valley of the shadow of death. The inevitable looms before us with all of its unknowns. But just as He honors us, even in the presence of our enemies, and provides for us in the face of our foes, He supplies the blessings so abundant that our cup overflows with bounty from Him. He takes us by the

hand, as it were, to comfort and lead us through even the experience of death. We do not have to "cross Jordan alone." With Him the dread and fear evaporates. "*I will fear no evil for thou art with me.*"

Man can follow one of two paths in life. He can go the way of wickedness or the way of righteousness. One brings destruction and the other brings fulfillment here and throughout eternity. It is so important where we are on our journey, and it may even be more important the direction we are traveling. But with God as our guide, we are led in the paths of righteousness.

So I go on not knowing
I would not if I might;
I'd rather walk with God in the dark
Than to walk alone in the light;
I had rather walk with him by faith
Than to walk alone by sight.

It seems inevitable that some suffering must come. Some days the sun refuses to shine and sorrow forces itself into life. It may be by disease, disappointment, harassments, frustrations. Such things we cannot hope to bear alone. We lose our way. When the heart is breaking and the dark shadows gathering, and the tears flowing, what are we frail human beings to do? We take courage and strength from the fact that God is our guide. We shall be attended by goodness and mercy all the days of life.

Valleys that are dark to others are lighted by the Lord. This is the way it is for the Christian. We place our hand in His and travel on.

A Pointed Poem

As we read the following poem, please notice the change of pronoun from "*I*" to "*we*" in the fourth stanza.

My plans were made, I thought my path all bright and clear,
My heart with song o'erflowed, the world seemed full of cheer.
My Lord I wished to serve, to take Him for my guide:
To keep so close that I could feel Him by my side.
And so I travelled on.

But suddenly, in skies so clear and full of light,
The clouds fell thick and fast, the days seemed as the night;
Instead of paths so clear and full of things so sweet,
Rough things and thorns and stones seemed all about my feet.
I scarce could travel on.

I bowed my head and wondered why this change should come,
And murmured, "Lord, is this because of aught I've done?
Has not the path been full enough of pain and care?
Why should not my path again be changed from dark to fair?"
But I still travelled on.

I listened - quiet and still, there came a voice:
"This path is mine, not thine, I made the choice:
Dear child, this service will be best for thee and me,
If thou wilt simply trust, and leave the end to me."
And so we travelled on.

God as Host

Our psalm presents the beautiful home at the end of the journey. Life may well be beset with pitfalls, but such things will not be in the eternal home with the Lord. There God is host of the heavenly home. We will be His guests. The redeemed ones, who have been made a kingdom of priests here on earth, shall live with God in never-ending joy. It is only then that our understanding will be complete. We shall know that the toils of the road were nothing when we get to the end of the way. Romans 8:18, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*"

The assurance of such a home serves a two-fold purpose. It is our goal because to such an existence we long to go. But is also provides us motivation and hope, giving meaning to life as we live here and now.

So we see these relationships of shepherd and sheep, guide and followers, host and guest. Such is our relationship with Almighty God. How can these things be? It is all made possible by the love of God for us, the sacrifice of Christ for us, and our surrender to Him. Paul said, Romans 5:10, "*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*"

By His blood that which would otherwise bar us from heaven is removed. By His life, death, and resurrection He says to us, "Do not be afraid of life, for I have lived. Do not be afraid of death, for I have died. Do not be afraid of eternity, for I hold in my hand the keys to all those mansions over there."

Two Men and the Psalm

The story is told about a banquet attended by a great actor. His ability at expression was exquisite. He was asked to quote the twenty-third psalm. When he finished the audience burst into applause and shouted praise for his ability and performance.

There was also an old preacher present and he was politely asked to repeat the psalm also. He did, with utmost reverence and conviction. When he finished there was absolute silence.

One turned to another and asked why the difference between the reactions. He was told, "One knew the psalm. The other knew the Shepherd."

Is God your shepherd, your guide? Will He be your host? Why stumble along the way of life when you can have life and that more abundantly? Why suffer loss and total ruin when you can have the blissful home of the soul? Why struggle alone when this relationship with God is offered by God Himself? Make it a reality for you that you can say, "*The Lord is my shepherd.*"

* * * * *

The Presence of God

Psalm 16:11, "*Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*"

There are several passages that could be cited to introduce this lesson. This passages is in the midst of a Messianic prophecy having to do with words cited by

Peter on Pentecost as referring to Christ. Our concern and emphasis is on the phrase, "*in thy presence.*" That idea is often found in Scripture in various terms, such as thy presence, the presence of God, words that suggest fellowship, communication, association between God and mankind. However, the phrases do not always means the same thing and there are differing senses in which there is the presence of God and man with each other. As we study these senses we shall learn much of the relationship between Deity and humanity, sometimes the presence of God being inescapable, and other times a matter of human choice.

God Always Present

First, there is a sense in which God and man are in each other's presence always. Regardless of whether one is righteous or evil, all are in the presence of God because God is omnipresent, which means God is everywhere, with everyone, all the time. There is no time when one can totally escape being before God.

Hebrews 4:13, "*Neither is there any creature that is not manifest before his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*" Proverbs 15:3, "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*" Luke 12:2, "*For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known.*" We must conclude, therefore, that all men, everywhere, at all times are in the presence of God. Their spiritual condition does not affect the presence of God in this sense. He is there.

God With His Children

Second, even though God is with everyone, there is a special and unique sense in which God is with those who are His spiritual children. He maintains a warm and intimate association and fellowship with those who come to Him through His Son. As Jesus was about to ascend into heaven at the conclusion of His earthly service, having given the "great commission," He added, Matthew 28:20," *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*" This was specifically said to the apostles, but inasmuch as the apostles did not live until

the end of the world, it obviously embraces all who believe on Him through their Word.

John wrote concerning the relationship of Deity and the Christian. First John 1:3, "*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*" This teaching relies on the child of God being in the presence of God.

Psalm 140:13, "*The upright shall dwell in thy presence.*" This does not mean that the wicked escape His presence, as noted in the first sense, but that the upright have a relationship and association with the Father that does not adhere and pertain to those yet out of Christ.

With God in Worship

Third, even with the Christian there is yet an additional sense in which God is present. God is present when we worship Him. Once a small lad was told by his father that they were "going to church," meaning they were going to the worship assembly. The little boy asked, "Who will be there?" The father responded, "I do not know who all might be there, but I know the Lord will be there. That is why we are going."

Psalm 100: 1,2, "*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing.*" Worship is directed toward God and is in the presence of God. We should always be mindful when we are assembled for worship of the presence of God. Matthew 18:20, Jesus said, "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" When Christians come together according to the authority of Christ, He is spiritually present. The teaching of First Corinthians 10:16, referring to the observance of the Lord's Supper as a communion, brings this same presence to mind. At such a time there is an intimate dealing one with the other.

God With Us at Death

Fourth, so complete is the Lord's presence that we do not escape Him even at death, if we have made provision for

Him to be with us. Psalm 139: 7-12 is a passage the reader is urged to consider (not written here for length) that underscores the presence of God in whatever circumstance His children might find themselves.

In the Twenty-third Psalm we find the phrase, "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" It is as the hymn suggests, "I won't have to cross Jordan alone."

God at Judgment

Fifth, Hebrews 9:27 tells us, "*And it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.*" It is predetermined that we shall die, though when, where, how, and in what spiritual state we are not predestined. None shall escape physical death, the resurrection (John 6:28,29), the judgment, and eternity either in heaven or hell. Matthew 25:31-34,41 pictures the judgment scene as all nations are judged. Some shall hear words of reward while others shall hear words of eternal banishment. But the point we make here is that all shall hear one sentence or the other when we are before God.

Second Corinthians 5:10, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*" Some in the resurrection shall be raised to life and some to condemnation, but all shall be raised , judged, and shall pass into eternity.

Raised to be With God

Sixth, there is yet another sense in which some shall be privileged to stand in the presence of the Lord. When Paul wrote the brethren in Thessalonica and answered their concerns about the resurrection and the welfare of the faithful who had already died before the Lord's return, he gave them inspired assurance that all would be well with the departed. First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is a favorite passage of man because of the hope and comfort it provides, especially at times when we are called to bid farewell in this life to faithful loved ones. Paul assured them that the dead in Christ shall rise

first, then we shall be raised and join them in the air. "*...and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*" This refers to an eternal presence with God that begins when the redeemed enter into the never-ceasing glories of heaven. This will occur when the Lord Jesus returns.

In Second Thessalonians 1:9, in a passage where Paul describes the eternal punishment of the lost, the said banishment from the presence of the Lord characterized that punishment. "*Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*" Hell is an eternal separation from God while heaven is to be eternally in His presence.

Consider All Six

The first and fifth senses of the presence of God are unavoidable regardless of our relationship with God. But the other four are determined by man's choice. It depends on what one does about Christ. Out of Christ one will not enjoy these four senses of the presence of God, but only in Christ where there is salvation (Acts 4:12; John 14:6; 2 Timothy 2:10).

* * * * *

The Doctrine of Romans 5: 1,2

Romans 5:1,2. "*Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*"

This is a familiar and deeply loved teaching. We sing the song, Tell Me The Story of Jesus. One verse includes, "For those who know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest." The doctrine or teaching of Christ is a source of delight, joy, comfort, and assurance to the child of God.

The book of Romans is a book devoted to revelation of the doctrine of Christ as written by the apostle Paul as he was guided by the Holy Spirit. If I were to give Romans a title I would choose the title, The System of Salvation. As much as any other one book of the Bible the book of Romans brings to light the fundamental matters of the way God saves man. I have written a commentary on the book of Romans and for this reason call my book The System of Salvation.

Chapter five includes many basic fundamentals of Christ's doctrine. These points are cherished, loved, held tenaciously, and taught by those who have committed themselves to Christ. Knowledge of them is essential to becoming, being, living, and growing as a Christian. With a great sense of joy we shall consider some of the truth as it is presented to us in these two verses.

There are four basic points made in these two verses. (1) Justification by faith; (2) peace with God through Christ; (3) the grace of God; (4) the hope of the Christian. Each is a sermon in itself, but our discussion shall be confined only to the first two points.

Justification

What is meant by justification by faith? The word "justification" might be used in our language in three senses. (1) Suppose someone is accused of a crime. He may or may not be guilty. He may or may not suffer punishment for that of which he is accused. But upon proper investigation it is found that he is not guilty of the crime assigned to him. Therefore he is set free. The reason he has been set free is because he is justified in being free. He is not guilty. He has done no wrong.

(2) But suppose one is accused and the deed of which he is accused was actually committed. Suppose one may have killed his neighbor. Under the laws of our land it may at first appear he is deserving of punishment. But upon investigation it is learned that he acted from provocation. He acted in self-defense. Under such a case he is not confined nor punished, and because of the circumstances he is declared justified, even though he actually did the deed. It is deemed he was justified in it.

(3) But suppose one is accused, found to have actually done the evil deed, and there is no excuse for it. Out of malice and premeditation he acted wickedly. He therefore deserves punishment for his deed. But then he is set free anyway by the grace of the judge. He did not deserve it. He could not merit it. Yet, because another stepped forward and took the punishment in his stead, he goes free.

How It Is Used Here

It is in this third way that the term "*justification*" is used in our text. Man sins against God by violating God's law (First John 3:4). He is guilty. There is no way for him to claim innocence because he has sinned. There is no reason or justification for man defying the will of God. It is totally unwarranted for him to do so. He deserves his punishment. Yet, one has come forward and received the penalty on his behalf, and he is declared innocent of guilt and set free. He has been justified of his sins and become the recipient of the benefits of the mercy and grace of God because Christ acted on his behalf.

What Do We Do?

By what means does man take advantage of the justification that is provided him? He has access into the benefits of the grace of God by obedient faith. When Paul writes in Romans of faith he speaks of the faith that obeys (Romans 1:5; 16:26). John 1:12 teaches, "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*" "*Power to become*" means to have the right to become. One does not become a son of God simply by believing, unless you understand that it is an active, obedient faith. But having knowledge and being convinced, believing, enables one to have the power to become what he is not yet; namely, a son of God. It is by faith that one reaches the blessings offered by the grace of God.

Romans 1:17 teaches the "*just shall live by faith.*" Without faith there is no spiritual life. Hebrews 11:6 teaches we cannot please God without faith. Acts 15:9 reveals that Jews and Gentiles are both saved the same way, by faith. "*The gospel is God's power unto salvation to them that*

believe." (Romans 1:16). If one is saved , he must have faith, the right kind of faith, the faith that obeys. James 2:24, "*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*" The kind of works mentioned here are works of obedience, not merit. Faith alone, without obedience, saves nobody. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. It is by works of obedience that faith is made perfect, whole, complete (James 2:22).

Our faith is not in men, creeds, the works of man's merit, plans devised by men, or any such thing. Our faith is in Christ the Son of God. By His power we are healed. We lean and depend on Him and show our faith by our obedience. Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrew 5:9).

Meaning of "*By Faith*"

Hebrews eleven includes the phrase "*by faith*" repeatedly, and give us a clear definition as to the kind of faith that brought those stalwart characters of old into favor with God. In each instance their faith caused them to do what God commanded. Acceptance of Him means acceptance of and compliance to His teaching. "*Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say.*" (Luke 6:46).

Peace With God

Included in the blessings of justification is "*peace with God.*" The very word "peace" is appealing to say and hear. The thoughts produced are pleasant and comforting. How men everywhere long for peace, between nations, individuals, antagonistic factions, races, their fellowman, and peace within themselves. Our age is so beset with turmoil and aggravation. Except for those who are deranged, such things as strife, warfare, conflict, struggle, however necessary at times, are considered unpleasant. None in his right mind would deliberately seek conflict rather than peace.

There are different kinds of peace. What does it mean to have "*peace with God?*" We can be at peace with ourselves, within ourselves, between ourselves, and still not necessarily be at peace with God. The worst warfare that rages is the war man declares against God by

sinning. Sin darkens life with frustration, makes the striving of this world so empty, destroys dignity, wrecks the health of the body and mind as well as the immortal spirit. More than that, sin contaminates man so that he will be condemned to eternal punishment if sin is not removed by forgiveness which is only possible through the blood of Christ. Sin offers no benefit. "*The wages of sin is death.*" (Romans 6:23).

Through Christ

But there can be peace with God. Reconciliation is available. God has made such possible through Christ. Christ is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). We are reconciled by His cross (Ephesians 2:18). The gospel message is one of reconciliation (Second Corinthians 5:18,19). Jesus made reconciliation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17).

Because of these truths we can easily see the necessity of coming to Christ. It is not God that must be reconciled to man, but man to God. God has not sinned nor caused any alienation between Himself and man. It is man that has sinned and man that must be reconciled. Man is the one to be forgiven. He must be changed or converted. Only through Christ can this become a reality for anyone. Peace with God through Christ speaks of the grand and glorious good news that the gospel of Christ declares.

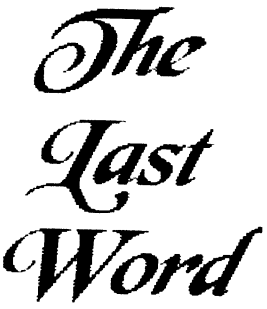
Other lessons on the grace of God and hope of the Christian that are mentioned in our text deserve a place among our lessons, and have been discussed, and shall be again in the future. May God's blessings rest with us as we glorify Him because of the revelation in these verses.

* * * * *

Americans who are truly patriotic might do well to forget such slogans as "Remember the Alamo," or "Remember Pearl Harbor," and think more seriously on the thought, "**Remember Sodom and Gomorrah.**"

We may sing, "**God bless America,**" but seeing how so many in the nation defy God, we might also ask, "**Why should He?**"

Ethics of a Liberal



A liberal openly blasted faithful brethren in the newspaper in Nashville, and I wrote him, asking him to answer relevant questions and substantiate the diabolical, judgmental, negative, and accusatory defamations he had thrown out. He wrote back, continuing the same as before, but no answers to anything. Having openly slandered brethren he wanted to get off in a corner and privately discuss it. IS THERE NOBODY IN THE LIBERAL CAMP WILLING AND ABLE TO DEFEND WHAT THEY CONTEND AS OPENLY AS THEY BLAST BRETHREN? Their tactics are hit and hide, rip and run, smear, slander, and sneak away. I wonder if they are this unethical in everything they do, or only in their religion? At least, this liberal did not break my record of not yet having a liberal to give answer for anything they do. When you ask them, however, properly, you are "inflammatory." They divide the church, teach heresy, promote digression, and slander faithful brethren. JB

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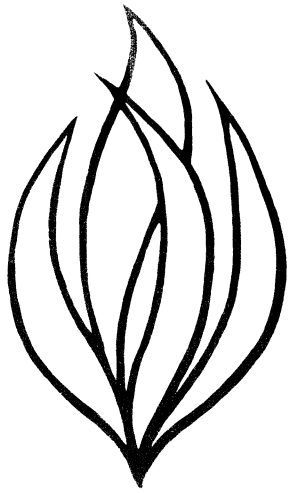

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME XIII James W. Boyd NUMBER 12

Can We Find Such A One As This?

The subject is taken from a question asked by Pharoah in the midst of the Biblically recorded event of Joseph's interpretations of Pharoah's dreams. Pharoah dreamed of seven lean cattle devouring seven fat cattle, but they grew no fatter. Also he saw seven lean ears of grain devour seven full ears of grain, but they grew no fatter. Joseph interpreted these dreams to prophesy the seven years of plenty that would come upon Egypt and that would be followed by seven years of famine.

Following that interpretation, Joseph gave some advice to Pharoah for preserving supplies produced during the plenteous years to be used during the years of scarcity. He suggested the appointment of a man over the entire operation who was wise and discreet that could properly execute the work that had to be done. Upon receiving this advice Pharoah asked, "*Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?*" (Genesis 41:38).

Pharoah then determined that Joseph was just such a man, "*none so discreet and wise as thou art,*" and he appointed him over this matter. Doubtless Pharoah made many appointments and decisions during his rule, but none was more excellent than his selection of Joseph, a man who was ruled and governed by the Word of God as directed by the Spirit, one who had the attitude and disposition to be a subject to Deity. Joseph was a person of exceptional character. Our lesson shall focus on character, not only of Joseph, but character that we would do well to imitate and strive to develop.

Character

Character is both formed and displayed in times of adversity and prosperity. Joseph's life was a swing from one extreme situation to another. But in all circumstances, favorable and unfavorable, he formed and displayed a good character. One moment in life he

was a petted and pampered favorite son. But the next moment he found himself at the bottom of a pit, placed there by his brothers. Once he was in slavery, but later placed over the household of his master, Potiphar. One time he was in prison, but later became the man in charge of the prisoners. In prison he was a forgotten man, but soon rose to the rank of power second only to Pharoah himself. Let us see if we can agree with Pharoah that Joseph was the quality of character Pharoah thought him to be as seen in the events his life.

Obedience to Parents

First, Joseph is an example of obedience to parents. We live in a time when many youths evidently think that disregarding, disrespecting, and disobeying parents is the "in" thing. We might admit that many parents are much to blame for the development of this attitude in their young, but that is another subject and worthy of consideration. God teaches young people to obey and respect their parents. Exodus 20:12, "*Honor thy father and thy mother...*" Paul wrote, Ephesians 6:1, "*Children obey your parents in the Lord...*" In Romans one Paul described the vile condition of Gentiles who had cast off God and he listed some twenty-three sins specifically which characterized them. In verse thirty he mentioned. "*disobedient to parents.*"

Joseph was instructed by his father to inquire of the welfare of his brothers as they tended his possessions. If ever a son might have balked at his father's directions, this could have been the time. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, hated him, and obedience to his father would place Joseph at their mercy and disposal. But he answered his father, "*Here am I,*" (Genesis 37:13), meaning his willingness to go and do whatever his father asked of him.

There were many distressing events that followed in the life of Joseph because of what happened to him while obeying his father. But never do we read of Joseph expressing regret for obeying. Quite the contrary! Upon the death of Jacob Joseph led in paying honor and respect to his parent. Can we find such a one as this among us today?

When Mistreated

Second, Joseph withstood the test of being mistreated by his own kin. What happened to him was cruel, unjust, and inhumane. He was sent from his home where he enjoyed security, love, and physical provision, but was overpowered, disclaimed, and totally rejected by his own flesh and blood. He must have suffered physically, mentally, and emotionally from this severe ordeal over the years. If ever a lad might have cause to be resentful and grow bitter, Joseph in the pit, in slavery, and in prison could be that circumstance.

Sometimes the worst kind of treatment comes from those you least expect it. It is sad when family members are vicious toward each other. What must the Heavenly Father think when there is strife among His children and brethren mistreat each other? People say things, act in bad ways, hold grudges against kin that they would never consider against others. No maltreatment hurts as bad as maltreatment from physical and spiritual kin.

But Joseph had the remarkable quality to not allow evil in others to destroy goodness within himself. Because others did wrong was not justification for him to do likewise. He knew and lived the teaching that Paul wrote in Romans 12:19-21 about overcoming evil with good.

Moral Purity

Third, Joseph handled the challenge against his moral purity. Potiphar gave him charge over his household. Joseph's duties took him into the living quarters of Potiphar. While there he was repeatedly approached by Potiphar's wife to commit fornication with her. But he steadfastly refused by calling such a thing "*this great wickedness and sin against God.*" (Genesis 39:9). He withstood temptation and retained his moral purity.

Joseph learned that one way to escape the ravages of temptation is to put distance between yourself and temptation. He fled from her presence. He looked upon temptation, not so much as an opportunity to sin, but as an opportunity to resist evil and not sin. We need to learn that so that every time we encounter temptation

we can overcome it and grow stronger. This disposition toward temptation equips us to face the next temptation from a stronger position. Can we find such a one as this among us?

Ruined Reputation

Fourth, Joseph knew how to withstand the trial of false accusations that shattered his reputation. Refusing to be immoral with Potiphar's wife did not deter her from later accusing Joseph to Potiphar of attempting to do the very thing he refused to do. The accusation was a vicious lie, unjust, and unfounded, but believed nonetheless. Once a trusted servant, he was now banished from the household and was cast into prison with his reputation destroyed by the wickedness of others.

There is, however, a difference between reputation and character. Reputation is what others may say and think of you. This can be good or bad. Of course, "*A good name is rather to be chosen that great riches...*" (Proverbs 22:1). But sinful people can and often do destroy reputations. One is not likely to have a good reputation if he has an evil character. He just might, undeserving though it be. But character is not what others think of you, but what God knows you to be. While others may destroy your reputation, only you can destroy your character. Joseph did not let the things that happened to him destroy the good character he possessed. Can we find such a one as this among us?

Forgotten

Fifth, Joseph knew what it was to be forgotten. He must have wondered after being sold into Egypt why his father and brothers never came searching for him. We know why Jacob did not. He had been deceived by his other sons to think that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. But Joseph did not know that. Of course, as honest and sincere as Jacob was in this belief, he was obviously wrong. We need to learn from this that just being honest and sincere about what we believe does not mean what we believe is true. This is one of man's most difficult lessons to learn. We see this problem everywhere in matters religious. So many are deceived this way.

Also consider the ingratitude of the butler whose dream Joseph interpreted while both were in prison. Upon the release of the butler back into the service of Pharoah, Joseph specifically asked the butler to remember him before Pharoah. After all, Joseph did not deserve to be where he was. But the Scripture tells us that the butler forgot about him. (Genesis 40:23).

It is one of the burdens of life to think oneself neglected, forgotten, and made to feel unwanted and unnecessary. Sometimes people do weird and tragic things to themselves and others in reaction to such treatment and feelings toward themselves.

But Joseph did not let even this painful experience destroy him. He obviously knew that God cared, and therefore he was never totally alone or forgotten. Who among us has this same confidence and disposition?

In all of the preceding events we have mentioned, Joseph suffered adversity and his character proved sterling and stalwart. He was later elevated to high honor, rank, power, position, prestige and wealth. Having faithfully endured so much abuse, how would he fare in his unexpected prosperity? Many have done well in times of difficulty, hardship, and strife, only to wreck their lives when confronted with the peculiar temptations of good fortune, power, authority, and the ability to have and do as one wishes. Would Joseph indulge himself with extravagance? Would Joseph turn against his former persecutors and reap his revenge upon them? What Joseph did is his crowning glory!

Like Christ

In this last portion of Joseph's life we see a most Christlike quality in him even though he lived nearly twenty centuries before Christ. Some have described Joseph as likely being the most Christlike Old Testament character because of what he did once he gained power. Joseph possessed a forgiving spirit toward his offenders. He was willing to let the evil done against him pass by and be remembered no more. As for his brothers in particular, inasmuch as they gave evidence of genuine penitence and showed their regret for their

evil. Joseph returned evil with good. His brothers feared him at first, especially after the death of their father, Jacob. But Joseph told them, "*Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.*" (Genesis 50:19-21). There was not a grudge in his heart, nor resentment. He had no retaliatory spirit. Rather he was kind, forgiving, and considerate. Can we find such a one as this?

As we consider these noble qualities, let each of us ask of ourselves if we are the type of person "*in whom the Spirit of God is?*" As we partake and follow the teaching of the Spirit, we can be of noble character. This, however, is impossible unless and until we come to Christ, the perfect pattern for nobility of character.

* * * * *

Our Unpossessed Ramoths

NUMBER ONE

First Kings 22:1-3. "*And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel. And it came to pass in the third year that Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, came down to the king of Israel. And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?*"

"*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein.*" (Psalm 24:1). We are not owners in the absolute sense of the word, but temporal stewards. We have use and control over many things but only for a relatively short while. Eventually we must

give an account for the use, or possibly misuse, of that which has been entrusted to our care. First Corinthians 4:1, "*Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.*"

There is a restricted sense in which can say things are ours when making the distinction between that over which we are stewards and that over which others are stewards. Such an idea is expressed in Acts 5:1-4. When Peter was rebuking Ananias and Saphirra for their folly in lying to the Holy Spirit about what they had given, he said, "*While it remained, was it not thine own? and after if was sold was it not in thine own power?*"

Some things are ours, not because we have absolute ownership, but are ours in the sense that they are within our power to control. There are many things over which we have no personal control. The raging of the elements certainly falls into that category. We cannot control tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, etc. There are events of worldwide significance that are beyond the power of most people to shape, instigate, or regulate. But there are those things over which we have control, and we are accountable for using that power of control. First Corinthians 3:21, "*For all things are yours.*" When God created man He said, Genesis 1:28, "*And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*" Collectively, the human family is rich! It has great power to control many things. We as individuals also have certain controls as well. Shall we not recognize our responsibility in using such power?

Unpossessed Possessions

We have possessions that sometimes we do not possess. This may at first sound as if it is a contradiction, but this is the same idea that was expressed in our text. There was this area called Ramoth that rightly belonged to Israel. As the king of Israel said, "*It is ours.*" But the problem was that it had fallen under the occupation and control of the king of Syria. Ramoth was a possession that they did not actually possess.

Obadiah seventeen reads, "*And the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.*" It is rather strange to speak of possessing in the future tense what is already called a possession. The explanation is that they had possessions that they did not possess. Something that should have been under their control was not under their control even though such was intended. Things we should control are not always controlled.

The Lord has given man power that man sometimes refuses to use. One instance of this possibility is found in John 1:12, "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*" To believe is not all that is necessary to become a son of God. To believe gives one "*power to become,*" the right to become a son of God. Sometimes this passage is abused to try to prop up the false doctrine of salvation by faith alone. It teaches just the opposite of that and refutes that doctrine. If one believes, in the sense of mere mental assent of the truth, but does not act in obedience to the command of truth, he fails to use the power that his belief offers him. His faith brings him to the place where he knows he can and ought obey. If he does, he rightly uses that power. If he does not obey, then he fails to use the power he has.

Unused Power

We are often not powerful and it is not because the Lord has failed us, but because we do not use the power offered us. Man has the power to come to Christ, but all will not come. We can become more than conquerors through Christ, but many will never be spiritually victorious and will suffer eternal defeat because they will not utilize the power that is within their grasp.

We all have, from the inspired Word, "*all things that pertain to life and godliness.*" (Second Peter 1:3). But our lives are not always godly. We have freedom from the bondage of sin through the truth (John 8:32), but we are not always free from sin (First John 1:8,10). Man is offered peace with God (Romans 5:1), but we are not all at peace with God. Salvation has been brought to all (Luke 19:10), but not all are saved. Christ is at the door of every heart (Revelation 3:20), but not every heart is

opened to Him. We have our unpossessed possessions, our own Ramoths, blessings that are ours for the taking, but which we have not taken; matters over which we can and should exercise control, but have not used that power and control. Let us speak in two lessons of some such things, considering only one in the first study.

Our Children

Our children are within our power. This may not be true of all, however, because some children have grown to maturity and are now responsible for themselves. There comes that time when parents can no longer be held responsible for the lives of their children. Also, some children are not within the power of their parents because parents have lost control by not exercising their power and authority when they could. But it should be true of children who are still under the guidance and oversight of their parents that the parents have power over them.

Genesis 4:1, Eve said concerning the birth of her son, Cain, "*I have gotten a man from the Lord.*" Possibly many parents have not recognized that our children are from the Lord and entrusted to us. Psalm 127:3, "*...children are an heritage of the Lord, and fruit of the womb is his reward.*" Hannah said of Samuel, First Samuel 1:27,28, "*For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord: as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there*"

Our children are within our power to direct, train, shape, and mold as we choose. Every parent ought to be jealous of this power and right as well as sensitive to this responsibility. We should not allow the state, schools, friends, the devil, nor his agents usurp that authority that we have concerning our children. Neither should we neglect exercising this authority ourselves. Psalm 127:4, our children "*are as arrows in the hand of a mighty man.*" We can determine more than anyone else in the world, other than the children themselves, their direction of life. The old adage says, "As the twig is bent, the tree will grow." It is not easy, sometimes impossible,

to straighten the crook in a full-grown oak that grew in such fashion because of what happened to it when it was but a sapling.

Our children are saying to us as the Gibeonites said to Joshua, Joshua 9:25, "*And now, behold, we are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do.*" The tragedy of the family of Eli was, First Samuel 3:13, "*For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*"

A Parent's Prayer

Before the birth of Samson, his father "*entreated the Lord and said, O Lord, ...teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.*" (Judges 13:8). Should not this be the prayer of every prospective father and mother? What a noble and honorable request! Again, verse twelve, "*And Manoah said, Not let thy word come to pass. How shall we order this child, and how shall we do unto him?*" If only parents would be this concerned about their children that they would seek the will of the Lord regarding the upbringing of their offspring!

The responsibility of a child should bring the parent closer to God because we cannot properly rear our children apart from God. Is it not too obvious that many young people are reaching physical maturity without having God before them? Has your child caused you to seek God's help and be more dependent on Him? Have you asked, as Bible characters asked, "*What shall I do for my son?*" (Second Samuel 10:2). "*How shall I order the child?*" (Judges 13:8). "*Is the young man safe?*" (Second Samuel 18:29). "*Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?*" (Psalm 119:9).

Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" (Ephesians 6:4, "*And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" First Timothy 5:8, "*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than and infidel.*"

Parental Duty

These passages bind upon the parents the duty not only to supply the material provisions, but the spiritual guidance and training of the child. The upbringing and education of the child is the responsibility of the home. Schools are only to assist the homes, not replace the home, nor usurp the home. The heart of education is the education of the heart. Genesis 18:19, it is said of Abraham, "*For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*" Can this be said of us and our handling of our children?

What a charge is given to parents in Deuteronomy 32:46, "*Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law.*"

Are our children safe, spiritually safe in their environment, habits they are forming, language they are hearing and using, values they are making, attention they are getting, training they are receiving? It is unthinkable that our children will listen to verbal advice but ignore the example we set before them in our lives. We cannot lift our children unless we stand on higher ground.

Psalm 78:1-8, a text too lengthy to include here but which you are urged to pause and read, gives emphasis to our theme. The things of God must not be hidden from our children. The generation to come must be shown the praises, works, and testimonies of the Lord. Why? So the generation yet to come might know these things, set their hearts in God, and keep His commandments, that they might live successfully here on this earth, and live eternally with God in the life beyond this one.

Our children are within our power. They are our possession. But do we possess them? Are we controlling them? What kind of stewards are we being regarding them? Shall we be still and allow them to fall into or remain in the hands of Satan? There are many matters

about which we must be diligent. Is there anything that is more sobering and demanding, insistent and urgent, than this of which we have spoken regarding our own children?

* * * * *

Our Unpossessed Ramoths

NUMBER TWO

Our text is First Kings 22:1-3. It may prove useful to the reader to refer to the first lesson and reread the brief comments made that shows the connection of the text to the points we are making. There are those things that, in one sense, are ours, but yet, are not ours because we fail to use the power and control that is granted us. All is God's and in a real and true sense we are but stewards. But still we have power over things, and we shall give an account of the use, or misuse, even the failure to use, that power and ability to control. Too often we be as the king of Israel said concerning a territory called Ramoth that he knew belonged to Israel but had been taken by Syria. "*Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take them not out of the hands of the king of Syria.*"

Our talents, regardless of how tremendous or minimal they are, are within our power. Every person has some talents, usually far more than they realize. None of us are empty-handed in this respect. We are speaking of talents other than the more obvious ones, such as money. We have the talent of energy, time, mental and physical capacity for activity. We do not all have the same capacities and abilities, or even have what we have

to the same degree. It is good that it is that way so that every need might be met.

A false doctrine that is now making its way into the distorted thinking of those of the liberal bent is that we have spiritual gifts today. When the Bible speaks of spiritual gifts it speaks of miraculous power, not just talents and abilities. Spiritual gifts had a purpose and that purpose has been accomplished in the confirmation of the Word (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). To claim spiritual gifts today is false. To call our natural or developed talents spiritual gifts is to fail to speak as the oracles of God. Spiritual gifts were to cease (First Corinthians 13). Why cannot people be content to use Biblical concepts in a Biblical way, rather than redefine words so fit their false doctrines?

When Paul wrote his brethren in Corinth, First Corinthians 12:13-27, he emphasized how each has his or her role, none could discount the usefulness and necessity of the other, but that all working together was what was needful to make the body whole. A pint jar cannot contain what quart jar can, but neither is it expected to do so. But it is expected to hold a pint.

Two bear hunters were hunting. One was a huge strong man. The other was a rather small man, certainly in relation to the first. The small man said, "If I was as big as you, I would find the biggest bear in the woods and drag him in." The larger man responded, "There are some little bears in the woods, too." We too often expect a great amount from others whom we perceive to be multi-talented, but do we always realize what talents we have and how God expects us to use them, producing the best we can with what we have?

Judgment Scene

Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus pictures the judgment scene. In this presentation we see how reward was made according to the relationship of opportunity and effort made. Opportunities are not always the same. But when each did as he could with what he had, and did it to the best of his ability, he was rewarded and the master was pleased. The same words are used to give praise to the

two talent man as the five talent man because they, like it is said of the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus, Mark 14:8, "*She hath done what she could.*"

Why was the one talent man rebuked? Not too very long ago I heard of a sermon preached by one who claims to be a gospel preacher wrest and twist this passage to contend that churches ought to take contributions and invest them and allow them to accumulate, then form "foundations" by which the work of the church would be supported. Does any intelligent person really believe this is what the Lord is teaching? How far astray from truth some "clergymen" go! The Lord is teaching that the one talent man, although he did not double his money as the others, was not condemned because of the failure to invest the talent. He was condemned because he did nothing. He did not do what he could, not even the least thing. He hid his talent for fear. He was one who certainly did not possess his possessions. But Jesus is not teaching the church to make investments in order to provide financial support for the work of the church. That is to be accomplished by liberal, cheerful, free-will giving as determined by how one prospers and plans. Some have more interest in interest than an interest in saving souls.

Excuses

Too many never attempt to do what they actually could do and do very well because they excuse themselves. "I don't do as good as somebody else. Please have me excused." That you may not do as well as some other in some efforts is not the point. You may not be expected by the Lord to do as well and you may not have talents others possess. But you need to possess what talents you have. Whatever you do there will be many others who may very well do better. But what of that? There would be only one preacher of the gospel in the world if all preachers took the attitude that they would not preach because somebody can do a better job than they.

Some complain, "Well, I have never done that before." There was a time when there was nothing you had done before. If you have not done it before, how can you know

you cannot do it? The "right angle" approach to doing anything good is the "try-angle."

"But I may fail!" Right you are! You may do just that. But you may succeed. The only sure failure is to not try. If you try and do not accomplish all which you have set before you, you have a measure of success just because you tried. Second Corinthians 8:12, Paul said, "*For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.*" Someone has said, "If you are not satisfied with your lot in life, why not build a service station on it?" Yes, we should put our lives to use because it is not as important what life has brought to you as it is what you bring to life. Do not fail to possess your possessions!

A Debtor

Romans 1:14-16, "*I am a debtor both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*"

Paul said he was debtor. He once was a persecutor, blasphemer, one who made havoc of the church, lost, but one of good conscience (Acts 23:1; 26:9). But later, in Christ, as one of the saved, blessed of God, and a recipient of the benefits of God's mercy, he felt obligated to let God and others know of his gratitude, and he knew his responsibility to tell others of salvation through Christ whether they be Greek, Barbarian, Jew, wise, or unwise. He was a debtor to others because of the blessing he had received.

Paul said he was ready. How ready was Paul? "*So, as much as in me is...*" He was as ready as his power and ability would permit. Nothing was of greater concern to Paul than preaching the gospel. He allowed no hindrance, obstacle, or enemy, regardless of how painful or powerful, how difficult or taxing upon him, to come between him and doing his spiritual duty to others.

Neither was Paul ashamed. He was not ashamed of the gospel, even though there were many who mocked and

ridiculed what he preached. He was not ashamed of the power of God, even though many did not even believe God existed. He was not ashamed to use what power and possessions he had in working for the Lord. His sense of indebtedness forced him to use his talents for the salvation of others. He learned to possess his possession, and he utilized them to the fullest.

An Equal Talent

One talent we all have in equal amounts is the talent of time. It has been said that time is the stuff of which life is made. Time is opportunity. Twice Paul exhorted us to redeem the time (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5). By this he meant we should make the best use of it, not waste it, but make every minute "sixty seconds worth of distance run," as Kipling wrote in the poem, "If."

So often we are inclined to say, "I just do not have the time." This does not always reflect a lack of ability, desire, interest, or concern. We are surely honest at times in thinking we do not have the time to do what we may have been asked to do or want to do. But do we use this as an excuse to keep from doing what we really could do? It is so often heard when the call goes forth for personal work, visitation, even attending worship services regularly, caring for the less fortunate, etc.

But the fact remains that God gave us these duties, and He gives each of us the same number of minutes and hours in a day. Rather than saying we do not have the time, would it not be more accurate to say that we have not arranged our time to include some things? We do have to establish priorities. But let us have as our priority those things that God would want us to do. There are many things clamoring for our time. But we must seek His kingdom and righteousness first (Matthew 6:33). This is the Lord's command.

Priorities

We can get ourselves so busy with various temporal duties, even matters that are not wicked in themselves, that we leave undone the more serious and sacred duties that God has assigned His children. Does what God want

occupy prime importance with us? Are we inclined to relegate His work into a second or third place in life? Can it be true that we are so overtaken in "busy-ness" that we neglect the Lord's business? If we exhaust our energies, time, abilities, and talents to the point we cannot do the special labors expected of the Christian? Are we possessing our Ramoths? Are we using the power we have? Are we controlling those things given us to control? Time is power. We possess it every day we live. But do we really possess it?

Examples

There are many examples of using talents recorded in the Bible. God asked Moses what he had in his hand. It was a shepherd's staff, just another common rod as shepherds used until Moses was willing to use it as God directed.

The lad who had a small lunch of five loaves and two fishes did not have much. But when he allowed the Master to use it, it was enough to feed the five thousand with some left.

Hannah had a son that she gave to the Lord. Noah could not covert the world, but he did save his own family. Will we do as much? Rahab exercised herself in saving her household even as she saved the lives of the Jewish spies. She possessed her Ramoths. David could not properly use the warrior's armor offered him by Saul when he went to face Goliath, but he used his sling effectively. Paul told Timothy to not neglect the gift in him (First Timothy 4:14).

A closed hand cannot receive a gift or a blessing. Let us open our hands and our eyes and see what God has placed in our possession and so use these possessions , such as our children, our time, all of our talents, to serve the Lord and bring glory to His name.

* * * * *

When and if you change your address, please advise us, or we must discontinue sending you our booklet.

What About the Babies?

Few subjects capture the interest and attention of people more than lessons that involve our babies. We are all concerned about them, physically and spiritually. Our lesson is primarily centered on their spiritual state, welfare, and relationship to God.

The question is often asked, "What about the soul of a baby? If a baby dies, is he lost or saved? When does one become personally responsible to God?" A significant segment of the religious world says a baby is born in sin, and if it dies the baby is damned forever. They contend a baby is born totally depraved. This idea flows from the influence of Augustine and Calvin and their doctrines. It does not come from the Bible. The doctrine of total depravity says in Adam's fall we all sinned and we are all guilty of sin when we are born, totally depraved, helpless and hopeless to do anything about our spiritual condition until there is a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon us. We are supposed to have inherited the guilt of the sins of our forefathers and are condemned because of it.

The natural sequence to such a doctrine is either the baby bound for hell or we must do something for the baby since he obviously cannot do anything for himself. That which was devised to be done for the infant was called infant baptism. Actually, what was done was not a baptism but a sprinkling of water on the child which was erroneously called baptism. Baptism is immersion, not sprinkling. There is not a word in the Bible that authorizes such a practice upon infants.

None Of It Is Biblical

The fact is the Scriptures do not support the practice of infant sprinkling, infant baptism, the doctrine of total depravity at birth, inherited guilt of the original sin of Adam and Eve, or inheritance of the sins of forefathers.

Romans 5:12 is sometimes cited to support these false doctrines, but let us consider it. "*Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men...*" I have deliberately omitted for the moment the last phrase of the verse. The passage teaches that sin entered the world through the sin of our first parents, and the consequence of sin came with it, which is death. It also teaches that death has passed upon all. One consequence of the sin in the Garden of Eden which all must suffer is that all must die. This speaks of physical death.

The portion of the verse omitted is now to be studied. "*For that all have sinned.*" There is physical death and there is spiritual death. Both entered the world because of the sin. Physical death will come to all (Hebrews 9:27). But spiritual death is because "*all have sinned.*" (Romans 3:23), not because of Adam's sin. The wages of sin is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Whether one sins or not, he will die physically. But one must be guilty of sin to die spiritually.

People often suffer various consequences of the sins of others. Wives and children suffer because of a husband and father who is a drunkard. But they are not guilty of his sins.

Individual Guilt

People become guilty of sin when they transgress the law of God. Sin is transgression (First John 3:4). Spiritual death is due to one's own sins. We may influence others and lead them to sin, but we are not guilty of their sins. Others may influence me to sin, provoke me and tempt me to sin, but they are only guilty of provoking and tempting. They are not guilty of the sin which I commit. Sin entered the world through Adam, but nobody except Adam is guilty of Adam's sin.

Romans 5:12, like Romans 3:23, explains why we die spiritually. The principle if forcefully stated in Ezekiel 18:20, "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall*

be upon him." If the doctrine of the inheritance of Adam's sin was true, it could not be said the soul that sins shall die. The soul would already be dead, having been dead from birth.

Paul wrote, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*" (Second Corinthians 5:10). "*And behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*" (Revelation 21:12). These last two passages emphasize personal responsibility and accountability for what each one does, not for what somebody else has done. Sin is a transgression of God's law, and the child has transgressed nothing but the threshold of life.

Not until one is responsible and has personally violated God's law is he guilty of sin. Until then he has no need of being saved because he is not lost, but safe. By his own sins he becomes separated from God, but not until then.

Modern Version Perversion

Another passage that is often misapplied to support the false doctrine of inherited sin is Psalm 51:5. "*I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" What does the passage actually say? It does not say David was conceived sinfully. It does not say he was personally sinful when he was born. It says sin was all around him. Possibly his mother was guilty of sin when he was conceived, not that she was sinful in conceiving. There is no support whatever for the idea that David was born guilty of sin. The one in sin in this passage is not the child, but either the mother or the world into which he as born.

The Living Bible, which is nothing more reliable that a distorted human paraphrase, has rewritten the passage and totally perverted it. The LB reads, "But I was born a sinner, yes, from the moment my mother conceived me." The New International Version teaches this same Calvinistic doctrine, as do many of the so-called modern versions. Let us always remember these books were produced for profit by people who do not consider the

Bible to be God's verbally inspired Word, and they have simply injected their denominational creeds into the text as if they belonged.

The Truth About Children

Let us consider an array of passages and learn what the Bible does say about the spiritual condition of children. "*And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them, and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them and blessed them.*" (Mark 10:13-16). Similar accounts are found in Matthew 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17. The disciples evidently considered Jesus too busy to be bothered with the children. But Jesus used them to teach concerning the nature of those who would make up His kingdom. "*Of such is the kingdom of God.*" Again, "*Except ye be converted and become as little children.*" Unless He meant the kingdom would be composed of those of a childlike nature, He was teaching that nobody but children would be in the kingdom, and that is absurd. People must be **as** children, pure, innocent, trusting, dependent, obedient. If children are in sin, guilty of sin, lost, doomed, damned, and totally depraved, why would Christ want people to be like children? Is the kingdom of God composed of those who are condemned?

God's Fault?

To teach that babies are born in sin because they have inherited the sinful spirit of their parents is a bad reflection on God. Babies inherit physical characteristics from their parents, but not their spirits. We receive our spirits from God. Hebrews 12:9 calls God the "*Father of spirits.*" If the baby's spirit is depraved, it would be because God is depraved. This is blasphemy! We may not be able to prove to the satisfaction of all just when the spirit takes abode in the human body (the Bible teaches it is at conception, and this is why abortion is murder), but we do know from Whom it

comes without any possibility of question. Unless God is depraved and guilty of sin, the spirit of the child is sinless and without guilt of sin.

Infant Baptism

What about infant baptism? First, let us insist that the burden of proof for this practice rests with those who advocate it. But we would answer, since the child is sinless, it is senseless, useless, and an unauthorized religious human exercise. There is not the first word in the Bible that teaches it. To go beyond the authority of God and what is written is forbidden (Colossians 3:17; Second John 9-11; First Corinthians 4:6). Again, we must note that what is practiced is not infant baptism, but infant sprinkling. It remains for those who do it to find it in the Bible.

"But what about Acts ten and sixteen where we read of the household of Cornelius and Lydia being baptized? Surely, there must have been children in those families." To assume children were in those families is nothing more than an unsubstantiated assumption. Even if children were in those families, we shall show they would not have been proper subjects and candidates for baptism. Nobody can even prove children existed, or if they existed that they were present.

Those present heard Peter preach and believed what they heard (Acts 15:9). Infants could not comprehend what was preached nor have the capacity to believe or disbelieve either way. In Acts sixteen, those baptized were the women who had come to the river's side for prayer and heard the teaching of Paul. They "*attended*" to the things spoken, which means they understood what was taught and acted accordingly. The text says women, not women and children. Children would not be capable of doing what those who heard the word did. Furthermore, you would have to assume that the woman, Lydia, was married, and if married she had children, and if she had children they were present, and that if present they were infants, and if infants they were baptized. What a long list of unsupported assumptions from which to concoct as senseless doctrine!

Methodists Changed the Discipline

It is interesting to note that the Methodist Discipline of a few years back contended for the necessity of infant sprinkling (they called is baptism) because children were depraved. But now they contend for it because children belong to God, and need to be dedicated to God. Such is the shift in human doctrines, which only proves such doctrines have no Biblical basis.

If babies are lost there would be something in Scripture telling us that, and informing us what must be done for them since they can do nothing for themselves in this matter. After all, it was the mission of Christ to seek and save the lost. What is to be done about the babies if they are lost? Why did God say nothing about it? The Scriptures furnish us unto every good work Second Timothy 3:16,17), but it furnishes us nothing about the lost condition of babies and what to do about it.

There is no Biblical reason to be concerned about the spiritual welfare of babies. David said when his infant son died, "*But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*" (Second Samuel 12:23). Why should David want to go to him if the infant was doomed and damned? Rather than being concerned about babies if they should die, we should be more concerned if they live!

When Is One Accountable?

When does one become accountable before God, and responsible for his relationship with God? Obviously, there does come such a time because we shall be judged. The Bible gives no specific chronological age or specified birthday celebration. It varies with each individual because it is a matter of capacity to know and understand and respond. We can say that generally such ability comes between the age of eight to fourteen. Some may never reach accountability due to mental incapacity, but that is an exception. To teach that we become accountable at a certain age, like the age of twelve because Jesus went to the temple at twelve, is to confuse Jewish law with reality under the new covenant.

Accountability depends upon one's mental capacity to know right from wrong, and one's ability to understand his relationship with God, and comprehend his duty toward God. To obey God one must do so "*from the heart*" (Romans 6:16-18). That demands a mental grasp of one's spiritual conditions and the relevance of the terms of pardon. To be able to meet the Lord's conditions for salvation one must be able to be taught, able to learn, able to understand, able to believe, repent, confess his faith, and be baptized for the remission of sins. One must be able to make such decisions from the heart and his actions based on convictions. Until then, he is yet incapable to respond to what will eventually become his duty if he lives.

Certainly it behooves each parent and those who are teaching the young to be attentive to each child that they may receive instruction and be led in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, so they might know and understand what the will of the Lord is, and being then capable of doing it - to do it.

* * * * *

The Future of *A Burning Fire*

One never can speak with absolute confidence what will take place in the course of time, even if time continues. But we make plans and have expectations. With this issue we have successfully produced thirteen volumes, twelve issues each, of ***A Burning Fire***.

Present plans call for continued publications for at least four more years. At that milepost, we should just about have exhausted the material presently intended to be included, and shall reconsider things then.

Who knows what the future may hold? Life, health, finances, equipment, time, so many circumstances have a bearing on these things. But right now, things are **GO!**

Faithful For Their Time

The Last Word

A few weeks ago I was invited to speak to brothers and sisters in Christ who are senior citizens. It was a delightful evening with a meal and association. I wondered what would be encouraging to these good people. From their point of view so many things for which they have stood and fought are being buried beneath the rubbish of liberalism, politically, morally, religiously, educationally, and just about every other way. That is discouraging. But those good people are not the cause of this despicable departure from decency and truth. They have been faithful to the Lord and His Word and deserve praise. So praise them I did, and gave them words to inspire them to stay that way.JB

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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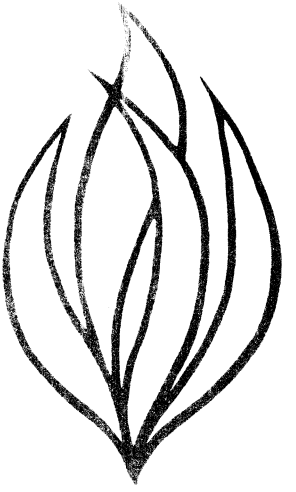

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

Some Questions and Answers

It Remains Unchanged ***BC***

VOLUME XIV James W. Boyd **NUMBER 1**

Questions and Answers

This issue of **A Burning Fire** will be devoted to discussing selected questions and answers on a variety of Biblical subjects. For a period of over twelve years in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Jacksonville, Alabama, and Jackson Tennessee I had the opportunity to serve on a panel on television alongside brethren of those areas where we dealt with questions that were submitted by the viewing audience, and we gave them Biblical answers. You can imagine the wide range of topics that would come before us. But there were certain questions that were submitted time and time and time again. This reflected a special interest that people had on these particular themes, and we would deal with them whenever they arose.

I compiled from the long list of questions that were submitted a number that were among those most often asked over this span of time. Whether or not the questions are those of greatest importance to the soul is not mine to determine. But they are questions for which people most often wanted to hear Bible answers. A study of them is still relevant and useful. We may extend this into a portion of the next edition. JWB

* * * * *

DO YOU THINK YOUR PEOPLE ARE THE ONLY ONES GOING TO HEAVEN?

The very first thing we must determine is what we shall use as our authority. What man thinks is not the authority whether it be me, you, of anybody else that lives or has ever lived, unless you have reference to inspired men. The Word of God is the authority. Once that is clearly settled in our mind we shall be able to get

off this focus on what people think and learn what God teaches.

The way to heaven is straight and narrow (Matthew 7:13,14). Those who obey God will be saved (Hebrews 5:9), and those who don't, won't (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). Nobody can change that. Why try? When the Lord commands and man obeys, man shall be blessed. If man refuses to obey, can we say he shall be blessed anyway?

Some people like to put others in the area they call "judging other people." When you believe what God says and say what God says, you are not judging other people. You are simply relating what God has said, even His judgments. We need to think more seriously about not believing what God says and taking upon ourselves to say something different. If you refuse to believe and teach what God says you are judging God's Word to be wrong and undeserving of being accepted. The only one God says will be saved are those who believe and obey what He says they must believe and obey.

When people have obeyed the conditions of the gospel as the Bible teaches, and continue faithful, they shall be saved. Salvation is not in just any religion, but only in Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Neither do we read of salvation in denominations because the Bible says nothing authorizing denominations. How can we just claim that does not matter? We must accept God's judgments and His Word teaches that those who believe and obey Him will be saved. This is what we have preached all our preaching life.

DOES THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BELIEVE IN TITHING?

It is impossible to generalize and say what all members of the church believe on anything. People are at various stages of growth, and some have much more to learn than others. But like our first question, what members believe is not what determines right and wrong. The church is not to make doctrine, nor alter the doctrine of Christ, but to proclaim it (First Timothy 3:15). Faithful

brethren are not committed to what some erroneously call "Church of Christ doctrine." Such does not exist.

Tithing refers to ten per cent. This was commanded of the Jews under the law of Moses. In fact, they gave more than one tithe. As we study the Biblical subject of giving we get the impression that this was practiced as far back as the time when Abraham gave to Melchizedek.

Just when man began giving a tithe is irrelevant because we live under the law of Christ, not that of Moses or the Patriarchs. There being no specific percentage taught in the new covenant of Christ, we teach no set percentage. There are other qualifications to acceptable giving, however (First Corinthians 16:1,2; Second Corinthians 9:6,7; the principle of Proverbs 3:9, and others).

Giving is an expression of love, not a matter of percentage. The doctrine of Christ neither requires nor restricts giving to any certain percent.

WHY DO YOU NOT HAVE MUSIC IN YOUR CHURCH?

First, we have no church of our own making, but are members of the Lord's church. Second, we do have music; the kind the Bible authorizes which is singing. We are content with the "*oracles of God*" and know man should not add to nor take from what God has said. What we do is by Christ's authority (Colossians 3:17), something nobody that plays instruments in worship can say truthfully. There simply is no authority for them in the will of Jesus Christ. If one thinks so, find the passage.

The refusal to use these instruments in not because we think instruments are sinful in themselves, nor because we cannot afford them, nor because we dislike instrumental music per se. It is not just to be different. It is a matter of sincere determination to abide in the doctrine of Christ (Second John 9).

WHAT IS THE BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT?

There is much controversy over this question, but I shall try to state my convictions as plainly as possible. While some contend this sin is attributing the miracles of Christ to the devil rather than divine power, and we agree this would be blasphemy, speaking against Deity, yet, some of the ones who did this very thing had the gospel preached to them that they might be saved. Why preach to them if they could not be forgiven?

Others say it is the rejection of the gospel until death overtakes them. True, there is no second chance (Second Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27). One who is not forgiven in this life cannot expect forgiveness after death. To reject the gospel is to reject the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13). But this rejection, if it be the sin under consideration, would not be committed until death. But this sin we are considering can be committed in this life, so we do not accept this explanation.

It is my conviction that so long as one stands in rejection of the gospel he cannot be forgiven because the gospel is the only way of salvation. The passage that mentions the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit indicates this sin is committed in this life. Blasphemy literally means to speak against. Surely, one does this when he rejects the gospel.

No sin is unforgiveable if the conditions of forgiveness are met. No sin is forgiveable until the terms of forgiveness are met. So long as one lives in defiance, rebellion, disobedience of the gospel, he cannot be forgiven, and such a one is in danger of damnation. The Holy Spirit has given sufficient evidence for us to accept the gospel. If we do not, but speak by our life and word against His will, we sin in such fashion that seals our doom.

While there is some credibility in each position, it is the last one that I believe has by far the better and more consistent part. I am equally confident that not all will agree with me. However, whether one knows what the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is or not will not determine his salvation. Whether one believes and obeys the gospel will determine salvation. Better we concentrate on the more important, don't you think?

WHEN DID GOD CHANGE THE SABBATH?

Some questions assume things that have never been proven. As for God changing the Sabbath, He never did. He did change the necessity to observe it as taught in the law of Moses.

The Sabbath is and always has been the seventh day of the week, not Sunday. Sunday is not the "Christian Sabbath."

Some say Constantine changed the day of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday. This is false. It is true that Christ observed the Sabbath because He lived subject to the law of Moses as a Jew (Galatians 4:4). But never did He bind this observance on the church. In fact, Christians are warned against binding the Sabbaths (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16,17).

Many times after the church began the apostles entered the synagogues on the Sabbath, but not to engage in Jewish worship, but to teach. The old law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), including the Ten Commandments, which is evident from Romans 7:1-4 where the sin of coveting, the tenth commandment, is specifically mentioned as that from which we are delivered.

The law of Moses was fulfilled by Christ (Matthew 5:17,18), a law given only to Jews (Nehemiah 9:13,14; Deuteronomy 5:1-3). The early Christians assembled on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:1,2). Constantine, instead of making the first day of the week the day of assembly, recognized it as the day the Christians assembled, and in order to favor them assigned it to be a legal holiday.

Actually, we do not observe a day, anyway. We remember Christ in worship on the first day of the week. Even those who contend for Sabbath keeping now do not follow the law regarding it which forbids cooking, travel, demands rest, and other restrictions. These things are ignored by Sabbath observers. We are led by the truth of Christ, not the law of Moses (John 1:17; 8:32; Galatians 3:11).

WHERE DID CAIN GET HIS WIFE?

It has always seemed strange to me that this question is asked over and over. It is usually provoked by skepticism and those who question the truthfulness of Scripture. Their idea is that since Adam and Eve were the first couple, having two sons, there could not have been anybody for Cain to marry. The Scripture does not tell us how long after the creation before Cain married. Furthermore, Scripture tells us (Genesis 5:4) that Adam and Eve begat sons and daughters. It is a mistake to think that Abel and Cain were their only children. Obviously, Cain married his sister.

Some have calculated that it would have been possible for the world's population to have grown to over 400,000 people by the end of the first century. Even if no woman bore children until they were sixty-five years old there could have been nearly 1,200 people who could have been alive. Keep in mind their long lives. There was no scarcity of people as prospects for Cain's wife.

Too often we become very concerned about what is not revealed (Deuteronomy 29:29), and very lax about what is.

WHAT IS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN?

This question is often closely associated with the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, already shown to be the rejection of the gospel as given by and through the Holy Spirit. It is thought by some that is the unpardonable sin.

But there is no sin that the blood of Christ cannot and will not cover provided the conditions of forgiveness are met (Romans 5:20). No sin is pardonable unless the conditions are met. God has provided the way of forgiveness and no sin is unpardonable because of the nature of the sin.

First John 5:15 speaks of a sin unto death and a sin not unto death. We should pray regarding a brother who has sinned a sin not unto death, but it is useless to pray for a

sin unto death because all the prayer in the world by someone else will not remove sin unless the sinner confesses it (First John 1:9). Any sin can be a sin unto death if not confessed, and thus not forgiven. But no sin need be a sin unto death if confessed and hence forgiven.

CAN A CHILD OF GOD SO SIN AS TO BE LOST?

This questions introduces the doctrine of "once saved, always saved." It is sometimes called the doctrine of impossibility to fall from grace.

It is true that once a sin is forgiven by the Lord that sin shall never be the cause of one being lost. Once saved from past sins, those sins are gone forever. By coming to Christ by obeying the gospel man receives forgiveness of past sins. But that does not mean man cannot sin in the future and be lost (First John 1:8,10; Romans 6:23).

First John 3:9 reads, "*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*" Cannot does not always means impossible. Genesis 44:22 says that the lad (Benjamin) cannot leave his father (Jacob). But we know this was not impossible because he actually did leave his father and was taken to Egypt as Joseph had directed. This verse does not mean it is impossible for a child of God to sin, which would contradict what John wrote in the first chapter, but emphasizes the incompatibility of a child of God sinning. He cannot keep on sinning and be faithful to God.

John 3:36 says, "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.* Some argue that one who "*hath*" eternal life already has it and if eternal life it is never-ending, therefore, one cannot fall, having already attained eternal life.

One does have eternal life who believes, but in what sense? Many make the mistake of only taking part of God's teaching on the subject, omitting other teaching, and drawing false conclusions. First John 2:25 makes it clear the believer has eternal life in promise, not in

reality as yet. Hebrews 9:15 speaks of the "*hope of eternal life.*" Eternal is a quality of life as well as the extent of life. As children of God we have a certain quality of life and the expectation of being with God forever.

It is inconsistent and incompatible for a Christian to sin (Romans 6:1,2). But it is not impossible. John 5:24, "*He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation: but is passed from death to life.*" This passage refers to the same person of John 3:36. If "*shall not*" means it is impossible to be lost once you believe, then why would "*shall not*" mean it is impossible to ever be saved if one did not believe at the moment? The final "*enter thou into the joys of the Lord*" comes at the judgment, but not now.

We read of many who were children of God who did so sin as to be lost, such as Adam, Judas, the Israelites in the wilderness, Simon the sorcerer, even some who were disciples of Christ (John 6:66), like Ananias and Saphirra, Demas, some who were members of the churches of Galatia (Galatians 5:4), as well as some in the churches of Asia (Revelation 2:3).

If the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" is true, considerable portions of the New Testament are foolishness because they consist of warnings against falling, against doing the very thing some we cannot do anyway. The book of Hebrews was specifically written to prevent apostasy. Such texts as First Corinthians 10:12, Second Peter 1:9,10; 2:20-22 would have no meaning. These all show it is possible to so sin as to be lost even though one has once come to Christ.

Many miss the real issue. Christ came to do the Father's will (John 6:37-39). It is the will of the Father than none be lost (Second Peter 3:9). But all will not be saved because all will not believe. The believer will be saved. But cannot a believer cease to believe? He can. And if he does, he will not be a believer, and will be lost.

WERE THOSE BAPTIZED BY JOHN'S BAPTISM BAPTIZED AGAIN AFTER THE COMING OF THE CHURCH ON PENTECOST?

John was the forerunner of Christ and he preached the coming of the kingdom, which is the church which began on Pentecost. His baptism was for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4), in water (Matthew 3:11), looking forward to the coming of Christ (Acts 19:4). It was a part of his overall work of preparing the way for the Lord as he was commissioned (Luke 7:30). Surely, what he did was sufficient to do what he was sent to do. To contend one baptized of John had to be baptized again after Pentecost is to contend John's work of preparation was inadequate. Those baptized before Pentecost did not have to be baptized again.

However, Acts 19:4 reveals where Paul did rebaptize some who had been baptized by John's baptism. Evidently they had been baptized of John's baptism after Pentecost and before the baptism of the great commission, first preached on Pentecost, was operative and they had not been baptized for the remission of sins in the name of Christ. Since their baptism was improper, they were rebaptized, the second time in the name of Christ as were those on Pentecost. (I use the terms rebaptize and rebaptized with accommodation, realizing that actually one may be immersed but not properly, and then must be immersed again. If one is baptized properly he is never "rebaptized" properly).

This shows that being baptized, even immersed in water which is baptism, but with the wrong understanding and for the wrong purpose is invalid as far as spiritual blessings are concerned, and the person should be baptized properly, by the right authority, and for the right purpose. Some are baptized to join some denomination, or to prove they are already saved, or possibly some other reason. These are wrong reasons. Such people should be baptized in the name of Christ, immersed in water for the remission of sins.

Regardless of what those baptized of John's baptism were to do, that has no effect on us today. We are to obey the Lord with the baptism He and His apostles taught.

HOW DO YOU KNOW BAPTISM IS A BURIAL?

There are several ways we can know baptism is a burial. The word "baptize" means to immerse, submerge, bury, plunge beneath. Baptism is the "*form of doctrine*" that saves (Romans 6:16-18). The doctrine is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4). Baptism is its "*form*" or pattern, representation. We are "*planted*" with Him in the likeness of the death (Romans 6:5).

Verbal pictures of baptismal scenes show a going into the water, the baptism taking place, a coming up out of the water. Both the one baptized and the one doing the baptizing go into the water. Substitute measures like sprinkling and pouring do not present such a picture, nor do they require such actions.

The Greek words for sprinkling and pouring are different words from the word for baptize or baptism.

Baptism is called a burial in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12.

Secular history also reveals the early church practiced immersion. Whether one contends baptism is a burial or something else depends on the degree or respect one has for God's Scripture.

IS ONE ACCOUNTABLE BEFORE GOD WHO IS MENTALLY DERANGED?

It is difficult to know just what are the powers of comprehension a person has. When should a person be thought mentally inadequate or incapable of obeying the gospel? We do know that God expects only what we are capable of doing (Second Corinthians 8:12). If we are capable of obeying, we must obey (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

To be able to obey the gospel one must be able to hear the Word (including understanding what is heard), believe it,

recognize sin for what it is, repent of sin, confess faith in Christ, and obey from the heart (with sincerity and understanding) the command to be baptized for the remission of sins. If one cannot do these things, he cannot be accountable because he cannot obey.

An infant, a very young child, falls into this category. They are not lost, but safe. The mentally deranged certainly are in this category. However, one can once have the capacity to obey, but delay until such time that capacity is lost due to injury, age, disease, etc. and would be accountable.

HOW OLD SHOULD ONE BE BEFORE BEING BAPTIZED?

This questions deals with some of the same material of the previous question. When to be baptized is not a matter of chronological age, but of capacity to understand and obey. It is not just understanding. Many have the capacity to understand but do not. It is the capacity to understand.

Some have erroneously thought the age of twelve is the time because Jesus was twelve when He went to the temple. This is faulty and forced. There is no connection between that visit, Jewish requirements, and baptism.

There is a time of innocence (Matthew 19:14). There does come a time of accountability (Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10,12). That time varies from individual to individual depending upon one's capacity to meet the conditions of salvation. Ordinarily, but not always, that state will be reached somewhere around eight to twelve years or age, possibly older but not much. Whatever age, one must be taught and know what he or she is doing to properly obey the Lord. Youth should be taught to remember their Creator in their youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

WHAT IS THE MARK OF THE BEAST?

The answer one gives to this question depends on his approach to the book of Revelation. The approach I contend to be the most consistent is to consider what is prophesied in Revelation to now be history, with some exception. That which was prophesied pertained to events concerning the early church, having to do with the various persecutions from Jews and Romans which the church was suffering and would continue to suffer for some time to come. Those events were to "*shortly come to pass*", and were "*at hand*" (Revelation 1:1,3; 22:6). But the book has meaning to the church today.

The theme of Revelation is an encouragement to faithfulness because only by being faithful would there be victory. It is a mistake to consider Revelation as a play-by-play forecast of all the future history of the world, or even the history of the church as if Revelation is tomorrow's newspaper in advance. I sometimes ridicule this view of Revelation by saying some people look at Revelation to find out who will be the next president and who will win the World Series. The view is almost that foolish.

The book is highly symbolic and figurative, and it does not behoove me to be too dogmatic as to the meaning of all of its specifics, although its symbols can be best understood by the way they have been used in the Old Testament, the fulfillment of which was have recorded in the New Testament in many, many instances.

The mark of the beast is mentioned eight times. The beast is the Roman power, the persecutor of the church. It is not to be understood as a literal mark of a literal beast, like a tattoo or a mark by a branding iron. It is significant that those who would yield and bow to the edicts of the Roman emperor would renounce Christ. This was the badge, identification, marking of those who would be condemned. It shows an allegiance and submission to the persecuting power of the Roman empire. It was the mark of those who would rather switch than fight the good fight of faith. This seems to me to be the most logical and consistent understanding, although there are many opinions offered that differ from this. Evidently, all cannot be right. But what we

believe is consistent with the other portions of Revelation and well as actual history of events.

People grope about excessively for solutions to these things, but they certainly are not essential to our salvation. Knowledge of them increases our understanding. But we should never allow such things interfere with more important matters we can know.

DISCUSS THE BIBLICAL REASONS FOR DIVORCE.

Did you notice the way the question is asked? The question assumes something that is not true. It suggests there are reasons (plural) for divorce. There is only one reason God will allow divorce and that is fornication (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). That settles that for those who respect the Word of God.

The word "porneia" means illicit sexual intercourse, which includes fornication, adultery, beastiality, incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, etc. The Lord's design for sexual union is in marriage, one man, one woman, for life, with only one cause that allows divorce. That's it!

Even though marital matters may become complicated with some situations, these overruling factors govern the relationship and cannot be dismissed. First Corinthians 7:15 is not another reason for divorce. Divorce is not under discussion in that chapter. The teaching there is the Christian is not bound to his or her mate if it means forsaking Christ. Such bondage which they are not under is one to which Christians cannot submit. We are bond servants of Christ, not to our mates. Marriage is not a slave/owner relationship. If there is separation, the believer leaves, the alternatives are clear. There must either be reconciliation or remain unmarried. Divorce and remarriage are not acceptable alternatives.

Some have falsely suggested the party guilty of fornication is also free to remarry. This is not true. The last part of Matthew 19:9 teaches the one who marries the person who has been put away because of fornication is in adultery. Obviously, if the one who marries the put

away person is in adultery, so is the put away person. The guilty is not free to remarry.

There are only three classes of people who have God's approval to marry: (1) those who have never married (First Corinthians 7:36); (2) those who have married but their mate died (Romans 7:3); (3) and those who have married and have been divorced because their mate was guilty of fornication (Matthew 19:9). A more lengthy discussion of this theme has been presented in other lessons, tracts, and books.

WHERE DID ALL OF THE RACES COME FROM?

They all came from Adam (Acts 17:26). Efforts to be more specific involves one in extensive speculation and hypothesis. All we can know for absolute certainty is what we read in Genesis and what Paul said in Athens.

WHAT IS MEANT BY THE 1,000 YEAR REIGN IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

Like the mark of the beast, the answer depends on the approach to the book. Some things we know it does not mean, but it is more difficult to determine with dogmatic precision just what is does mean. It does not mean the reign of Christ on earth for one thousand years. Lessons on the errors of premillennialism expose this fallacious view. The reign noted in Revelation twenty is the reign of martyred souls, not an earthly reign by anybody.

In that chapter, there is no mention of the bodily resurrection, but a spiritual resurrection of the cause of Christ which was under persecution, and for which the martyrs had died. The martyred souls were earlier seen crying, "*How long? How Long?*" Later they are seen as on thrones, indicative of ultimate victory, and the victory of the cause for which they died. The number "1,000" is a numerical symbol of completeness, showing the completeness of the victory of those faithful in the church, thus surviving the effects of all enemies to destroy them. The term is used this way also in Deuteronomy 7:9 showing completeness.

Rather than a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth in the literal city of Jerusalem, it is a symbolic expression denoting the ultimate success of the faithful, especially those who gave their lives for Christ.

WHAT DOES BEING BAPTIZED FOR THE DEAD MEAN?

Read First Corinthians 15:19. First, no passage should be understood so as to contradict easily understood passages. Each passage must be studied in its context. This statement of Paul is made in that great chapter where Paul proves the resurrection of Christ. It has nothing to do with a substitutionary baptism by the living on behalf of those who have died without having obeyed, as is practiced by Mormons. If it means what Mormons say it means, since baptism saves (First Peter 3:21), why not be baptized repeatedly so all would be saved? But the Bible is plain enough that each shall give account for himself (Romans 14:12). Obedience to God in baptism is a personal matter and we cannot rely on others to do for us what we must do for ourselves.

The passage is in the midst of Paul's arguments on behalf of the truthfulness of the resurrection. He is saying that there is no use being baptized if this life is all there is to our existence. Why make preparation for a life beyond this if there is no such thing? Baptism is a part of that preparation. Seeing we must die, and there is existence beyond the grave, we should prepare. As verse thirty emphasizes, why be in jeopardy, suffer persecution, or obey such commands as baptism if it is all meaningless? The very fact these things are to be done is evidence that life after this is a reality. This is not substitute baptism for others, but teaches the relationship of baptism to the resurrection and eternity.

HOW DOES ONE BECOME A SAINT?

Paul called brethren saints in nearly every epistle he wrote. The way one becomes as saint is precisely and simultaneously the way one becomes a Christian. One must obey the gospel.

A saint is not some person made so by some Romanist decree. He is not someone who has reached sinless perfection, or even near it. Sainthood is not a "second measure of grace," or the result of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Saints are Christians because they have been sanctified, set apart from sin and into Christ.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE AGAINST EASTER AND CHRISTMAS?

Denominationalists notice that members of the church of Christ do not celebrate these days as religious holy days as they do. It is a shame that many must not read their Bibles but have concocted various religious celebrations of human origin. Easter is said to denote the resurrection of Christ as Christmas is called His birthday. Neither is taught in Scripture.

Once again, it goes back to the matter of authority and respect for authority (Colossians 3:17). There simply is no authority regarding such celebrations. Christians believe Christ was born of the virgin Mary, and that He arose from the dead. The Deity of Christ is stressed in both events. But as for a special holy day celebrating them, there is no authority. To teach as our commandments the doctrines of men is to make our worship vain (Matthew 15:9). Neither of these celebrations is a part of New Testament Christianity.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD THE GOSPEL?

While being concerned for such people, let us also be concerned for ourselves, and our responsibility to take the gospel to the world. But the Bible teaches we cannot be saved without the gospel (Mark 16: 15, 16; Romans 1:16; Hebrews 11:6 alongside Romans 10: 13-17; James 1:21; Acts 11:14). If people can be saved without the gospel, we should leave them alone and not bother them with the duties imposed by the gospel. If ignorance means salvation, let us suppress the good news rather than preach it, and all will be well for everyone. Second Thessalonians 1:7-9 answers the question explicitly.

Such people are and will remain lost. One cannot be saved without believing and obeying the gospel. They cannot do that until they hear it.

WHY IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST NOT A DENOMINATION?

Many have only considered the term "church" in the context of a denomination and have difficulty understanding the use of it Biblically. The Bible never speaks nor authorizes the existence of any denomination that has, does, or shall ever exist.

Yet, the Bible does proclaim the Lord's church. There is no kinship between the church and denominationalism. They are antagonistic toward each other. They follow different authorities, teach different doctrines, practice different things, one having Christ as its head and Savior, the other having no Biblical authority to exist. The church existed before there was any denomination. There is only one church approved of God (Ephesians 4:4) which is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23).

Where do men get the idea of denominationalism from Scripture? It simply is not to be found there.

WILL WE KNOW EACH OTHER IN HEAVEN?

Certainly not, if we do not get there. But answers to such questions are not explicity revealed, but we can determine from various revelations the answer. The evidence is that there will be recognition in heaven.

There are records of those who have died but are recognized (Luke 16; Matthew 17). The body as well as the spirit will be raised (First Cortinthians 15), but it will be the same body as a spiritual body. There may well be some recognition, but we are not able to tell just what and how.

Christ promised His apostles He would be with them and they with Him (John 14). Surely this indicates an eventual recognition that the promise might be fulfilled.

We do know that earthly relationships will not be the same (Matthew 22:30). But whatever be the situation, it will never mar our joy or happiness. The joy of heaven will not be determined by whether we recognize someone or not. It is somewhat comforting to know we shall be together again with faithful loved ones who have gone before us. This is a question from which we would rather pull away because there is not an abundance of evidence, but as we said, enough is given to lead us to the conclusion that there will be recognition in some form or fashion.

WHAT GOOD IS THE OLL TESTAMENT SINCE WE DO NOT GO BY IT, AS YOU SAY?

We have heard it said that we of the churches of Christ do not believe the Old Testament. This is false. All Scripture is inspired of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17), and we believe it all. Things written aforetime are for our learning and our example (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11). From the Old Testament we learn prophecies that were fulfilled in the New. We see the type-antitype relationship of the two testaments. The things of the Old are shadows of the things revealed in the New (Hebrews 10:1).

We are not living subject to the Old because we live under Christ (Hebrews 1: 1,2; John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The Old has been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), and fulfilled (Matthew 5:17). But we see in operation various principles of God's dealings with man, and the gradual unfolding of His scheme of redemption for man through Christ. These principles are still true even though the specifics of the old law are not binding.

The better we understand the Old Testament, the easier we can understand the New Testament. We can learn much of the difference between right and wrong from knowledge of it. There was a purpose in what is recorded in the Old Testament. The failure to recognize the distinction between dispensations and covenants, however, has contributed to much religious error. We must learn to "*rightly divide the word of truth*" (Second Timothy 2:15).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT ONE BORN OF GOD CANNOT SIN (FIRST JOHN 3:9)?

This was answered previously regarding the doctrine "once saved, always saved." Cannot does not always mean impossible, but also means inconsistent, incompatible. One cannot do something and consistently, compatibly, be faithful to God.

Sometimes cannot does mean impossible. John 3:3, "*Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" John 15:4, the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine.

But it does not always mean impossible. Acts 4:16, a notable miracle had been done and they said, "*We cannot deny it.*" But many did deny the miracles, but not consistently. Acts 4:20, Peter said, "*For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*" They could speak other things, but not consistently with their duty to God. Genesis 34:14, when the Israelites were asked by the men of Shechem to allow Dinah to become the wife of one of them, they were told, "*We cannot do this thing.*" It was not impossible, but inconsistent with their law to do so. Genesis 44:22, when Joseph said Benjamin must be brought to Egypt, the brothers said, "*The lad cannot leave his father.*" But he could, and did.

In John 3:9 the meaning is the latter meaning. The same epistle shows the possibility of Christians sinning (First John 1:8, 10), and how to be forgiven of sin (First John 1:9). Romans 6:1,2 shows the inconsistency of sin in the life of a Christian, not the impossibility. Acts 8:22 shows sin did occur with a Christian, and what he had to do to be forgiven.

WHY DO YOU SAY THOSE IN DENOMINATIONS ARE LOST?

We say this, but it is never said in a spirit of self-righteousness or hatred toward those in denominations. But is it not also fair to ask why one should contend those in denominations are saved even though they have not obeyed the gospel as taught in the New Testament, and not even teach the necessity of doing so?

Can one be saved and not obey Christ? (Hebrews 5:9). Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23), and the church is His body (Ephesians 1:22, 23). The church is not a denomination nor the total of denominations because there is nothing in Scripture about denominations. None of them even existed until hundreds of years after the church was established on Pentecost (Acts 2).

The gospel produces only Christian, members of the Lord's church. It does not produce members of denominations that have been started by men.

Actually, the burden of proof regarding salvation of those in bodies other than God's church rests upon those who so contend. We preach the gospel as God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and the necessity of obedience thereto (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). Those who hear, believe, and obey have God's promise of salvation. Those that do not obey do not have this promise regardless of how honest, sincere, moral, or religious they may be. No person has the right to change the truth on this matter in order to accommodate people in denominations.

WHAT DID JESUS MEAN WHEN HE SAID TO LET THE DEAD BURY THE DEAD?

Death means separation. There is physical and spiritual death because there are those who are physically and spiritually dead. Matthew 8:19-22 uses the term in both senses. Jesus taught priorities and putting first things first. He is not teaching disrespect for fathers who have died. He is not saying to ignore such necessities as burying the bodies of the physically dead. But He is calling for His followers to recognize the need of following Him even before attending to such matters as burying the beloved dead. Before putting Christ into a secondary position, let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. He is not prohibiting funerals, nor the proper disposal of the physical remains. Matters of greater importance, however, must take precedence over lesser things. This teaching is similar to that in

Matthew 6:33 where we are taught to put Christ and His kingdom first.

WHY CAN AN ELDER DRINK NO WINE BUT A DEACON CAN DRINK A LITTLE WINE?

The question is founded on a false premise and false position. It is provoked by the phrases of First Timothy 3:3,8. Verse three, the elder is not to be given to wine. Verse eight, the deacon is not to be given to much wine.

First, there is no conclusive evidence in the New Testament that early Christians ever drank fermented wine, or approved of it. There are several instances of drinking wine, but wine does not necessarily mean fermented wine. That which was used for the Lord's Supper is not called wine, but the "*fruit of the vine.*" grape juice, not strong drink.

It has been abundantly documented that there were several methods of preventing fermentation of grape juice even in the first century. What was used at the Passover was without contamination or pollution, as seen in the direction for unleavened bread. Medicinal use of wine was authorized (First Timothy 5:23). If you have what Timothy had, then you have authority to use what Timothy used. Are you confident you know both of these matters?

Jesus made "*good wine,*" (John 2),which is defined by linguists as unfermented. To contend that Jesus made what prophets condemned to be given to others is to put Christ in violation of the inspired teaching of the prophets. Again we state, there is no evidence the early Christians used or approved the use of intoxicating beverages. All the evidence points the opposite way.

Even if they did, one still must prove that the intoxicating beverages of today are what they may have used. This is impossible to equate. What is called social drinking is specifically condemned in First Peter 4:3 by the word "*banqueting,*" which means taking strong drink in small amounts. Peter also refers to the "*excess of riot,*" and the "*excess of wine.*" Can one create a small

riot and be correct? Can he riot in moderation? Or is rioting excessive? The same will apply to wine.

What was forbidden the elders? Obviously, intoxicating wine because the Lord's Supper involved the fruit of the vine, which is wine, meaning the produce of the grape. They were not forbidden the Lord's Supper. Even from the Old Testament those of leadership were prohibited from strong drink.

Whatever was allowed for deacons must be understood in compatibility with other teaching regarding strong drink, and qualities of leadership. The teaching simply calls for moderation even in that which is allowed. There is no such thing as moderation in that which is sinful and prohibited.

My son illustrated the truth this way. He said he recalled when he would go out at night with his friends that I would tell him, "Don't get into a lot of trouble." Never once did he think I was telling him it would be all right to get into a little trouble.

Science has proven that drunkenness is a matter of degree. None who respects Scripture denies drunkenness is sinful. Alcohol is not what is forbidden. There are legitimate uses of it in medicine, preservation of foods, cooking, killing germs, etc. What is forbidden is using it as a beverage, whether one is an elder, deacon, Christian or non-Christian.

We face tremendous drug problems in our land, and the number one drug problem is due to alcoholic beverages. Who could possibly contend in the light of fruits as well as specific Scripture that drinking alcoholic beverages harmonizes with the character and teaching of the perfect Son of God?



WHY DO YOU SAY BAPTISM IS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION WHEN THE BIBLE TEACHES WE ARE SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, NOT BY WATER?

First, the Bible does teach salvation by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). It also teaches we are saved by water in baptism (First Peter 3:21). It teaches we must obey Christ to be saved (Hebrews 5:9). Christ gave baptism as a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16). This is why we teach the same thing.

It is not a question of water **or** blood. Both are involved. We reach the blood of Christ when we are baptized into His death where His blood was shed (Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized unto Christ (Galatians 3:27) where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10). We are saved by His blood when we are baptized into Him and His death. We are baptized into His body (First Corinthians 12:13), which is His church (Ephesians 1:22,23), and which He saves (Ephesians 5:23). His blood is in His body just as our blood is in our body.

When one is baptized he is not depending on the water to save, but the blood of Christ to save. He is merely obeying what the Lord commands by which he reaches the saving blood according to God's plan.

We wonder why some people plot one part of God's plan against another part as if either part is exclusive of the other. We are saved by many factors working together, such as grace, mercy, love, blood, the resurrection of Christ, faith, works of obedience to the law of Christ, good works in life, indeed, a long list of factors revealed in Scripture. This either/or approach to God's plan is a gross error. Cannot we see the need to take the whole counsel of God rather than isolate one factor to the exclusion of everything else God has revealed? The real question is not whether we are saved by the blood of Christ. We are. The question is **WHEN** are we saved by the blood of Christ. It is when we obey the Lord in baptism whereby God teaches we then reach His saving blood. This baptism is a water baptism (Acts 8, 10; First Peter 3:21).

IF BAPTISM IS NECESSARY TO SALVATION, WHY WAS THE THIEF SAVED WITHOUT IT?

Let those who contend baptism is not necessary prove the thief was never baptized. Many in the area of Judea were baptized of John. His baptism was for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). Could the thief have been among them? I do not contend he was. I contend he could have been. Let those who say so confidently he never was baptized prove what they say. But that is not the important issue here.

It is not "if" baptism is necessary, but "since" baptism is necessary. Repentance and remission of sins in the name of Christ (by His authority) was first preached on Pentecost. Those who lived prior to that day were not commanded to be baptized in His name. The thief lived and died before Pentecost. That is why it was not necessary for the thief. But since Pentecost, the message of the gospel calls for baptism for the remission of sins.

The same reasoning tells us why such people as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and many others were not baptized. They were never directed to be. It also explains why every example of conversion in the book of Acts is concluded with baptism. We are so commanded. We live under the will of Christ (Hebrews 9:15-17) which did not become operative until after His death. Again, the thief did not live under that will.

We cannot look to the thief as an example of the way people are saved under the will of Christ anymore than we can look to Rahab or Joshua. This ploy is often used by denominational people to dispose of God's command to be baptized, but they fail to rightly divide the word of truth. Efforts to get around what the Lord has commanded are abominable.

* * * * *

This is all the space we have in this issue to discuss these questions so often asked of us. Lord willing, we shall devote a portion of the next issue to a few others.

* * * * *

It Remains Unchanged



We live in a era when there is much clamor for change, any kind of change, without much regard from what we change and to what we change. This infection has long been found in religion when men think they someway change God's will because they decide they want to do things differently from the way God has authorized. Is there much of anything about the will of Christ that somebody, somewhere, has not tried to change in order to accommodate what people want? But does it change God's revelation to man? Absolutely not! Not in the slightest degree! Man only deceives himself to think the unchangeable truth of God can be tossed around to fit what man wants. JWB

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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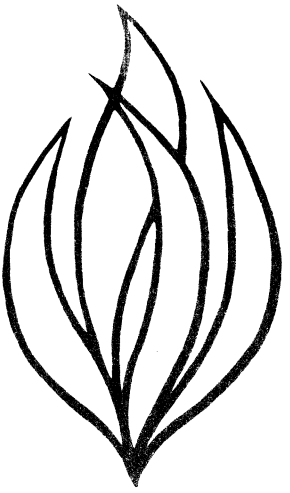

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

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Victory to the Faithful BC

VOLUME XIV James W. Boud **NUMBER 2**

More Questions and Answers

In our last issue we presented a number of questions that had been asked of television panels on which I have appeared, questions that were asked by the viewers, and were asked more often than others. We also presented Biblical answers to those questions.

In this issue we wish to present a few more of the questions that reflect the interest viewers had about Biblical matters, and offer you Biblical answers as best we can. We urge each reader to spend some good study on these things and be ready to give answer to people who may ask you such things.

We cannot always determine the motive behind questions asked of us, but whatever the motive, that is between the questioner and God. Many times Jesus was questioned and those asking the questions had insincere and ulterior motives for doing so. However, we cannot determine that unless it is so obvious their motives are evil, and they betray their motives. But we give answer to questions assuming that those who ask really want to know the truth.

I hope you will continue to enjoy this kind of study.

* * * * *

WHY DO YOU NOT ANOINT THE SICK WITH OIL?

James 5:1-316, *"Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing praise. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."*

Sickness is universal to mankind. It is possible for a child of God to be sick. This does not necessarily mean his sickness is due to his personal sins, however.

The teaching is to call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil. Oil was used in two ways: (1) as medicine, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, (2) and symbolically, as used in anointing one as king, prophet, priest, or showing one has been set apart or designated in some way for some specific purpose.

In our text it is used symbolically, serving as a token of God's power by Whom healing comes, designating the sick as the recipient of such power. We must remember that this was written in the time when miraculous healing was utilized. The reason we do not anoint with oil today is because the day of miraculous healing has passed as have all miracles, inasmuch as they have accomplished their purpose of confirming the Word, and those who were endowed with such power to heal miraculously have long ago died.

When one becomes sick today he calls for the doctor to learn what medicine is useful to produce a cure, and he calls for brethren to pray that God, by His providence, not His miracles, will provide healing the medicine is intended to produce. The oil did not heal even then. The prayer of faith that called for God's power was the means of healing. With or without the oil, God's power, then miraculously and now providentially, heals, and this power is besought in prayer. God still heals, but not miraculously as is implied in this passage. God provides our food also, but not miraculously as when Jesus fed the five and four thousand, but through His natural laws in operation.

It is still proper to pray for the sick that God might raise them up. To anoint with oil would leave the false impression we expected a miraculous cure. Such is not according to God's will. For this reason we do not anoint the sick with oil. Neither do those who practice this produce miraculous cures for those over whom they pray.

ARE THERE DEGREES OF REWARD AND PUNISHMENT?

Some seem to have the idea that if they can just "get their foot in the door of heaven" all will be well with them. We dare not allow this question lead us to develop a "get by" attitude, (just get a small degree of ward), toward serving the Lord which would indicate salvation on our own merit.

There are several passages that suggest degrees of reward and punishment. Luke 12: 47,48 speaks of many stripes and few stripes. Much is required of those to whom much is given. The variation of punishment is according to ability to produce. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25) implies degrees of reward and punishment according to ability. Matthew 10:15 says it will be more tolerable for some than others. Also see Matthew 11:22. Scripture indicates a heavier judgment on those with greater opportunity (James 3:1). These are inescapable indications. Yet there are other verses that would suggest such is not the case.

Second Timothy 4:6-8 says Paul would receive a crown of righteousness which God would give to others also. In the parable about workers entering the vineyard at different hours there are indications of equal reward.

About the most conclusive and certain thing we can say on the subject is that our reward will be enjoyed to the fullest of our capacity to enjoy it. It is possible that capacities vary. Who would suggest we have the capacity to appreciate heaven on an equality with Paul? But we need not be concerned with the subject. If God wanted us to know conclusively about it, or even more about it, He would have revealed it. We cannot see how knowledge of the answer would be of any great benefit to us.

Our duty is clear. God wants us to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1,2). We must constantly do our best in Christ. God is just and righteous and will deal with each one as is proper in His infinite and holy wisdom. Anything less than complete commitment to God endangers the soul. The answer given here may not be as

definite as some would like, but this is as definite as I think the Scriptures will allow.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN WHEN IT SPEAKS OF BEING PREDESTINED AND FOREORDAINED?

There is a doctrine of Calvinism that teaches God has already decided who of us shall be saved and who will be lost, even decided before we were born. Furthermore, the doctrine says there is nothing anybody can do to change that decision one way or the other. A similar view is that "whatever will be, will be" because all things are already programmed and out of our control, but left only to fate, chance, or a predetermined scenario. People speak of death being the time "when your number comes up," as if the date and hour of your death is already set.

Romans 8:28 and Ephesians 1:5,11 speak of this matter of predestination. It is said of Christ, First Peter 1:18-20, that it was foreordained before the foundation of the world the way of salvation would be through Christ. We believe there are those things that have happened and shall happen that God has "set in concrete." The return of Christ, the end of the world, the resurrection and judgment are among such things. The mission of Christ to this earth to provide salvation for mankind was also predetermined by the Lord of heaven. This is evident from the inspired prophecies and their eventual fulfillment in Christ. So it is not a question whether God has predetermined some things, but what things, and to what extent. Has He predetermined our salvation without us having anything to do with it whatsoever?

It is evident that God made man a creature of choice with the power of volition. All things that have happened have not been foreordained to happen, They happened because of man's choices regarding them. It was predetermined that Abraham would have a son by Sarah, that Israel would be a great nation, that Christ would be born of a virgin, that all shall physically die. But when we die, how, where, under what circumstances, and our spiritual state at death is not predetermined. God has predetermined a certain class of people that

shall be saved (those who believe and obey Him), and a certain class of people who shall be lost (those who do not believe and obey). But each one has the right to choose which class he will enter.

If everything is already predetermined, then an invitation to fallen mankind is a hoax. Man would not be responsible for his destiny. If any are lost it will be totally God's fault. The gospel message ought never have been sent forth because whatever one does about it changes nothing.

The fact that there are conditions to salvation shows we have the power of choice and are accountable for ourselves. It is not yet settled where we shall exist in eternity. We will make that decision on the basis of what we do regarding Christ and His church.

IS IT WRONG FOR A BOY OR MAN TO WEAR LONG HAIR?

Paul answer the question plainly enough in First Corinthians 11:14,15. Obviously, the Lord disapproves of hair styles that confuse the sexes. While long and short are relative terms, it is evident that they meant something. It is relative to what men and women commonly wear. Hair styles change somewhat. In the days of our forefathers the hair styles were different and would be considered unacceptable today. The hair styles of women vary considerably. We are involved with custom to some degree in this question. But we are also involved in clear distinctions between male and female, and those distinctions are to be noticeable.

In Paul's day for a woman to go without a veil marked her as a harlot. Such was the custom. It is not so today. The lack of a veil gives no such marking. While remembering that confusion over the sexes was to be avoided in the Old Testament even in clothing worn, the Christian ought to present himself/herself in such fashion as is modest and that will bring no reproach upon the cause he professes.

To wear hair styles that are characteristic and would mark you as a dope peddler, rock-and-roll barbarian, a rebel against authority, an imitator of the lowest and most immoral forms of humanity, certainly is not commendable for a child of God. It is fruitless to deny that such styles often seen today are those advocated by the rioter, disturber, dope head, rebel, godless, immoral, and renegade. They even boast that long hair on the male is a sign and mark of that kind. That is their badge by their own claim. Why should Christians wish to imitate that element and be confused as one of that sort? While some who wear shorter hair styles are also beneath contempt, it is openly boasted that long hair is the sign of being such a person.

Should we not do that which is honorable in the sight of all men (Romans 12:7)? Shall we not abstain from all appearance of evil (First Thessalonians 5:22)? Shall we do that which brings reproach on the way of Christ (Titus 2:5)?

The same word used to describe men wearing long hair (First Corinthians 11:14, shame) is the word used to define homosexuality, vile (Romans 1:26). This ought tell us the answer. Especially when parents teach their young not to wear their hair in this fashion are the young obligated to obey parents. To refuse to do so is rebelling against parents and the will of God. When it is offensive to faithful brethren it ought not be done, and it is offensive because it violates the Scriptures cited.

There is no evidence that Christ and the apostles were in their appearance like long hair hippies. Would inspired men openly, deliberately, continuously go contrary to what another inspired man wrote? Would Jesus appear in a fashion that was contrary to what the Holy Spirit taught?

Some among the Jews took the Nazarite vow which called for not cutting the hair. If wearing long hair was a regular and customary fashion, the sign of the vow would be no sign at all. It is wrong for men to wear their hair in long fashion that would confuse them with women and be like women. Many have violated this New Testament teaching, even many who profess to be

children of God, in order to be counted as "with it," one of the "swinging generation." God will hold such people accountable and guilty lest they repent.

WHILE UNDERSTANDING IT IS WRONG TO USE A MECHANICAL INSTRUMENT OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP IN THE ASSEMBLY, WHAT DOES THE CHRISTIAN DO REGARDING THE USE OF INSTRUMENTS OTHER PLACES, SUCH AS IN THE HOME? MAY ONE SING HYMNS WITH INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC IN THE HOME?

Whether a mechanical instrument of music is used is not the issue with faithful brethren. Whether it is used in worship anywhere is the issue. Regardless of where it is used, it is prohibited in worship for the reason that there is no authority for it, and what we do must be done by His authority (Colossians 3:17).

The instrument is not inherently evil. It can be acceptably used in entertainment, recreation, artistic performances, etc. But this is not worship. Songs of worship ought be used for worship, not recreation, entertainment, or performances. Can one really sing "How Great Thou Art?" with the same intent and attitude as he might sing "O Susanna" or "My Old Kentucky Home?" Certainly not!

Why should one wish to see how close to error he can come anyway? If he has doubts he ought not (Romans 14:23). He could well lead others astray by such practices. There is nothing redeeming in using mechanical instruments with songs of worship at any time, except possibly to learn the melody as the written music defines. There is no redeeming merit for using songs of worship to entertain or perform as often is done. There is a way that is right and cannot be wrong, and we should follow that way.

WAS THERE ANY PLAN OF SALVATION FOR THE NON-JEW DURING THE MOSAIC AGE?

Whatever be the answer to this question it will in no way affect the way we are to be saved. We note that the law of Moses was just for the Israelite nation (Deuteronomy 5; Exodus 20; Hebrews 9). It was never given to the Gentiles and Gentiles were never subject to it. That law had special functions and purposes that were accomplished with the coming of Christ (Matthew 5:17; Galatians 3:19; Romans 7:7). It was not the fulfillment of the promise God gave Abraham to send a Savior, one of his seed, through Whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Galatians 3:18).

We know there were instances and evidences of God's concern for Gentiles during that Mosaic period of some fifteen hundred years duration. He sent Jonah to Nineveh. This fact is made plain also in Romans one because God gave mankind no excuse for not believing in Him. They had evidence of God but they worshipped the creature rather than the Creator. God gave them up to vile affections, gave them over to a reprobate mind, to uncleanness and degeneracy of their own choosing.

It appears that while God was developing the nation of Israel through which Christ would come, He was also proving through the Gentiles that man cannot govern himself without God, and is incapable of devising his own system of religion that will suffice. He used both Jew and Gentile to prepare mankind for the only solution, who is Christ.

Before the law of Moses God spoke to the heads of families in a direct manner, such as to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and others. Some have suggested that once God separated Israel from the rest of nations and gave them the written law from Sinai that God continued to deal with the rest of mankind in a direct fashion as He had done. This may be more speculation than revelation, however.

The Bible was not written to provide us an entire history of mankind or the entire history of God's dealing with mankind. It was written to reveal the system of salvation God designed, developed, and delivered through

His Son, Jesus Christ. For this reason, Biblical focus is on the Jewish nation and Mosaic law leading to Christ.

Some have said the Gentiles could have become Jews by being proselytes. This is true. But Judaism was not an evangelistic system and did not actively pursue converts. It was rather a religion that one followed due to ancestry. Others were often repelled by the Jews.

Surely the most important point to remember is that we now live under the universal and perfect law of liberty of Christ. Salvation is by the gospel and is for all because all need the gospel. Just what and how God dealt with other nations during the Mosaic age is an interesting study, but we have answers only at a fleeting glance at best, and not enough to draw any major and dogmatic conclusion, except that whatever way God dealt with them makes no difference to us now one way or another.

WHAT DID JOHN MEAN IN FIRST JOHN 3: 20,21?

"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn is not, then we have confidence toward God."

We must remember never to assume an obscure passage means something that contradicts a clear passage. We cannot understand this to teach that what we think about a thing is the ultimate standard of right and wrong. We may do something that our heart, or conscience, may condemn us for doing. To violate our personal faith and conviction is sinful (Romans 14:23). What we believe may or may not be right before God, but if we violate what we believe to be right we are not being honest even with ourselves.

This does not mean, however, that if our heart or conscience does not condemn us that our action is necessarily approved of God. Our consciences must be trained and taught by the will of the Lord. When that is the case, when we sin our consciences will offend us and condemn us, and we can know God's will has been violated. We may do this or that and our heart or conscience not offend us. This does not necessarily mean

God approves of it because God is greater than our heart, and the heart just might not be properly taught and trained to be offended when God's will is violated. Many people do things with a good conscience but they are wrong before God because they have been taught incorrectly.

The point of emphasis is that the will of God is the standard of measure, and His will is greater than the measure of our heart or conscience, or how we may feel about a thing. We see from this the necessity of having the heart so taught and trained according to the will of God that it can serve us as a more reliable warning system concerning right and wrong.

PLEASE EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BODY, SOUL, AND SPIRIT?

Sometimes Scripture speaks of man as body and soul, (Matthew 10:28), and other times as body, soul, and spirit (First Thessalonians 5:23). There is no problem discerning the distinction between body and soul, or between body on the one hand and soul and spirit on the other. We are familiar enough with the body to know this physical part of a human being. The body is the place of habitation of the soul and spirit.

Most often the term "soul" includes what is meant by "spirit" when the term "soul" is used by itself. Sometimes "souls" is used to simply designate persons (Acts 2:41). However, "soul" can also refer to the animalistic life of the human (Genesis 2:7), as well as the spirit of man which is created in the image of God. When both terms are used the distinction is that "soul" refers to the animalistic life, such as humans have in common with animals, and "spirit" refers to the spirit of man that is in God's likeness (Hebrews 4:12).

Whether one speaks of man as body and soul, or in his three-fold nature as body, soul, and spirit, it is evident there is more to man than just the materialistic flesh. While there are similarities between man and animals regarding movement and life, there is the great distinction that man is spirit and the only creature of

God that is created in His image. It is this spirit that Christ came to save from the ravages of sin.

WHY DENY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BY DENYING POWER TO SPEAK IN TONGUES?

Bible believers do not deny that there were those who were capable of speaking miraculously in tongues as recorded in the New Testament. But tongues were languages which could be understood, miraculously spoken, even though they were not normal, native, or natural to the speaker.

That such abilities reside among men today is what is denied. This is not a denial of the power of the Holy Spirit, but respect for what the Holy Spirit has revealed in His Word about miracles and the purpose of tongues, who could speak them, and their cessation.

Some people mistakenly think when you teach the day of miracles has passed you are limiting God. This is not so. God has limited Himself, however. We have no right to deny Him the power to do that since that is what He has chosen to do. Because we contend God does not create people now the same way He created Adam and Eve is not a denial of the power of God. Because we contend God does not feed people with manna or ravens as recorded in instances in the Old Testament, or when Jesus fed the thousands from little substance, does not deny the power of God. Then why should anybody think it must be a denial of the power of God to say tongues, as spoken in Scripture, are not among us today?

Tongues were for a sign to unbelievers, used as other miracles to confirm the Word and spread the gospel before the complete revelation from God was given and before the all-sufficient Scriptures were available to man. When "*that which is perfect*" had come, with reference to the full and complete revelation of God, such things ceased. We now have God's all-sufficient and authoritative Word and the need for a practice of miraculously spoken languages has been removed.

CONCLUSION

We have touched on several subjects with the questions in this and the previous issue, but not near so many as arose over the course of years while answering questions over television programs with other brethren. But as I gleaned from the many programs those things which were asked, we have presented these which repeatedly came to the foreground. People do not always ask what is most needful, but what they want to hear discussed. Relatively few people wanted to hear how to be saved, how to worship God acceptably, the meaning of the Lord's Supper, even what God has spoken concerning the many moral issues confronting mankind. But we found the way to teach such things anyway. Often they asked from curiosity, or simply because they had some point they hoped to make. The propriety of the motives behind the questions asked remains between the inquirer and God. Whatever was the motive, we tried to deal with the question in a Biblical way. People may ask questions in order to learn, and we generally assumed this was the case. How many times we were naive is impossible to tell. We knew from Scripture that sometimes questions are asked in order to find fault and ensnare those who answer in contradictions and inconsistencies, attempting to establish preconceived views, or other such reasons.

But these questions doubtless give evidence of the interest, and level of that interest, that many have toward what the Bible teaches. We hope by offering the answers to these several questions that the reader will come to a greater knowledge of the truth, and be motivated to "search the scriptures" more and more, not only to know for oneself what truth is, but that they may be better able to convey that truth to others.

Something that does disturb is the increasing ignorance of the Bible among all people generally, even among members of the church. What is worse, there seems to be a growing attitude that it matters not what the Bible teaches anyway. We take strong exception to such things.

* * * * *

The Bible

NUMBER ONE

We shall be dealing with matters crucial to our faith or religion. We use the term "faith" as it is used in Jude three, "*...that ye should earnestly contend for the faith...,*" meaning the religion, the faith, of which Jesus Christ is author, founder, and finisher. We shall deal with points of concern that are vital to the validity and integrity of New Testament Christianity.

Our faith resides in the One, the Christ, of Whom we read in the Bible. What a person can know of true Christianity and the will of the Christ is to be learned only from the Bible. Our faith, therefore, is no more reliable than the information we have regarding Him, what He did, what He taught, who He is, our obligations to Him, as is found in Scripture.

It is admitted by friend and foe alike that the Bible is a marvelous book. But not all agree that it is the Word of God. Some consider it to be God's plenary, verbally inspired Word just as it claims to be. But others consider it nothing more than an exceptional work at best, but totally of man. Still others look upon it as only ancient literature, even Jewish fable, folklore, and such like. Of course, there are many who have nothing but contempt for the Bible because it contradicts so much of what they say and do, and they are not hesitant to manifest their hatred toward it anyway and anytime they can.

There are several important questions that shall be raised and the truthfulness of the answers is at the heart of "the faith." If the Bible is true there are many who shall suffer because of their opposition to it. There are those who shall be blessed because they believe it. If it is false, many have been deceived and have been wasting their time, their hope is vain, and Christianity is just another human religion, no more, no less, no better, no worse than others. Some would even contend that Christianity is worse than others.

Questions to Ask

What is the Bible? What does it claim to be? How important is it to Christianity? From whence has it come? How did we get it in its present form? Can we have confidence in it and its completeness? Is part of it missing? Does it include anything that does not belong? Are we in possession of reliable texts and versions? What of the alleged contradictions and mistakes skeptics claim are in the Bible? What is the nature of the inspiration of the Bible?

We shall attempt to answer such questions in order to build faith, belief, confidence, and trust in the Bible, and remove those things that would destroy the Bible. Truth is always compatible with truth. We must investigate lest we have a flimsy and unsound basis for our lives, our religion, our hopes, and our destiny.

It Is An Old Writing

For want of a better place to start, let us start by saying the Bible is an ancient book, but by no means the oldest writing. There are earlier writings going back four to five thousand years before Christ. John 5:46,47 reveals that Moses wrote of Christ. For a long time skeptics denied this by saying that writing did not exist in the time of Moses, over thirty-five hundred years ago. But now it is well known that writing existed at least twenty-five centuries prior to Moses. This is one of the many instances where archeology has vindicated the claims of Scripture, at least showing the reasonableness and validity of its claim that Moses wrote of Christ.

Early writings were on stone, clay, wood, leather, papyrus sheets, vellums, parchments, cave walls, and eventually paper. Papyrus sheets are made from papyrus plants and are found in abundance. This was the most important writing material of the ancient world. The New Testament was originally written on such sheets.

As for the Bible, we do not know the specific time and place where the first Scripture was penned. This information is not revealed. But it was done by Moses.

The word "Bible" means books. The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books into a single book.

God's Communications

From the Bible we learn that God's first communication with mankind were verbal or oral. He spoke directly to Adam, Noah, Abraham, and other patriarchs. The first written will of God was at Sinai when Israel was encamped at the foot of the mountain and God gave tablets of stone to Moses. It was likely there and then that much of Moses' work was done, although we cannot know how much. It was here that God told Moses to write down the law God gave him by which Israel was to be led. From that time forward we have numerous writings from God. The Old Testament, from the time of Sinai through the time of Artaxerses, king of Persia at the time of Malachi around 400 B. C., the book was written. The New Testament contains records, histories, biographies, and letters by inspired men written to churches and individuals, revealing Christianity. We are not lacking for abundance of written material in the Bible.

Divisions, Writers, Languages

The Bible is divided into the two testaments, Old and New. Men have classified these books in various ways. The Hebrew Bible was divided into three categories consisting of twenty-two books; law, prophets, psalms and other writings. These twenty-two Hebrew books are the same as our thirty-nine books. The oracles of God were given to the Jews (Romans 3:2). This kind of Jewish division was recognized by Christ (Luke 24:44). There was never any quarrel between Jesus and the Jews of the first century which books belonged or what they said.

The terms "Old" and "New" do not refer to the age of the covenants. The Old was first, but was fulfilled in Christ, lasting approximately fifteen hundred years (Galatians 3:19-28; Matthew 5:17). The New was second, revealing the will of Christ, and has already lasted nearly two thousand years, five hundred years longer than did the Old. Christ, by establishing His new will, made the first old (Hebrews 8:13). He took away the first to establish

the second (Hebrews 10:9). The Old is old because it has been taken away. The New is new because it is the one of which Christ is the mediator (Hebrews 9:15), and which can accomplish what the old could not accomplish (Hebrews 7:9; Romans 8:2,3). It is new because it shall last as God's will for mankind until the return of Christ at which time we shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48). We need to understand why the Old and New Testaments are called old and new.

God used about forty different people to write the Bible, spanning a period over fifteen to sixteen hundred years. Included in the Bible are three dispensations, systems of rule by which God has governed man in the past and how He governs today. These three are, (1) Patriachal, (2) Mosaic, and (3) Christian dispensations (Hebrews 1:1,2).

There are three languages involved in Biblical writing. Two are predominant. There is Hebrew, and almost all of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament were originally written in Hebrew. Some small portions were in a kindred language called Aramaic. This latter tongue was a common language in Palestine starting about five hundred years before Christ. This is likely the language that Jesus often spoke. It is possible that when the New Testament speaks of the Hebrew language, Aramaic is what is meant because Aramaic was the common language of Hebrew people at the time. A few portions of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic, and few portions of the New were also in Aramaic.

The Greek language was used in writing the New Testament for the greater part. It is commonly called Koine Greek, the conversational Greek. At the time of Christ this form of Greek was an almost universal tongue. It is a dead language; no longer commonly used.

How We Got It

How did we get our present Bible? Is it accurately preserved from the ancient writings? These matters are of great importance. We can make determination from two sources called primary and secondary sources. The original writings are not available and have possibly perished. Why God did not see fit to preserve them we

know not. Could it have been that men would have made idols of them, build shrines over them, make their resting place a holy place? We do see people venerate relics of the past of far lesser significance.

Let us consider the primary sources. We are concerned with what are called manuscripts. New Testament manuscripts are in Greek and are copies of the original autographs or writings. Some forty-five hundred manuscripts of varying quantities have been found, far more than any other ancient writing. Some were copied near the date of the originals. Most include only portions of the New Testament.

There are three manuscripts that are considered of great value called the Vaticanus, Sinaiaticus, and Alexandrian texts. While these have the edge regarding age, there is grave doubt concerning the reliability of the accuracy of these texts. But they are of great value in making comparisons and determining the text alongside the many other manuscripts. There are other sources of greater age and reliability than these, especially greater than the first two. There is abundant evidence that the first two are corrupted in many ways, and they are at variance from what can be shown from other sources.

Secondary sources include ancient translations, writings called lectionaries, and the personal writings of early Christians. If something has been translated it obviously existed prior to the translation. The oldest evidence of the contents of the autographs are from ancient versions. Lectionaries are books containing selected and special passages designed for public reading in public worship. Over eighteen hundred such writings have been found. From the letters and commentaries of early Christians, wherein is quoted so much of the Scripture, especially the New Testament, almost all of the Scriptures can be reproduced.

The vast amount of source material allows for comparisons of the texts and detection of possible human errors, such as copying errors, misspelling, and other trivial variations (such as saying "Holy, Holy, " rather than "Holy, Holy, Holy," or citing "Lord Jesus Christ" rather than "Christ Jesus the Lord."). With this

abundance the fullness and completeness as well as the accuracy of the true Biblical text can be ascertained. In less than 1/1,000ths of the New Testament text is there any substantial variation to be found at all. Even there no principle of faith or command is involved. From this vast amount of sources, nearly 20,000 documents altogether, the New Testament can be found intact, surpassing by far anything else of ancient writing. This in itself is significant.

As for the Old Testament, accuracy is no less preserved when we realize several important facts. God committed the oracles to the Jews, as noted. Jesus endorsed the Old Testament Scriptures as the Jews considered them. He usually quoted from the Greek Version of them, the Septuagint, a translation from Hebrew to Greek, compiled about two hundred fifty years before Christ. Accuracy is also verified from other versions, even Samaritan copies.

They Were Careful

When one considers the meticulous care of scribes and copyists to prevent any error, we are made all the more confident. It is some of the most interesting reading to learn of the precise methods used as they went about their work making copies of the Scriptures. From the Dead Sea Scrolls, and more recent discoveries of the oldest copies known of Isaiah and other books, over 1,000 years older than anything preciously discovered, the accuracy of the text as we have it is confirmed. Again, archeology has proven to be the friend of Scripture.

We are not confident of the accuracy and veracity of the Bible because of these findings, but because we know God is the author and preserver of His Word. But these findings are impressive upon any honest mind regarding the Bible. It makes us more assured than ever that God has, does, and will keep His promise, such as First Peter 1:25, " *The grass withereth, and flower thereof falleth away. But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*"

* * * * *

The Bible

NUMBER TWO

We turn our attention to what is called the authority and canonicity of the Bible. Contrary to what some have mistakenly concluded, authority and canonicity are not the same. The canon refers to those books that are accepted and recognized as belonging in the Bible. There are sixty-six such books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. These books are included because they are authoritative. They are not authoritative because they are included. Their inclusion was based on their authority. They would have been authoritative even if men had mistakenly omitted them from the canon. They had authority before they were generally accepted. A Biblical book, since it is inspired of God (and we consider inspiration in other lessons) had authority from the moment it was written. No man gave any book of the Bible its authority. Authority is based on inspiration. Many ancient books have been written, but not all are inspired of God. The canon refers to those books which are recognized as inspired because of the evidence both within and without the Scriptures. No book is in the canon that is not authoritative and no book is authoritative simply because it is in the canon. It is in the canon because God made it authoritative by His inspiration of the writing.

By Jesus' day the canon of the Old Testament was fixed and included twenty-two Hebrew books (which correspond to our thirty-nine books). They included the law, prophets, psalms and other writings, the same material Jesus accepted (Luke 24:44). We accept what Jesus accepted when we accept the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.

As for the New Testament, Paul's writings are called Scripture by the inspired apostle Peter (Second Peter 3:16). First Timothy 5:18 quotes Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7 as Scripture. This covers the vast portion of the New Testament. As for the rest of it, from history we learn that the other writings of the testament were,

looked upon by the early Christians as authoritative from the first time they appeared and were received with that respect, and read in public assemblies where Christians met for worship as the Word of God. It is false to think the church produced the Bible. Rather the Word of God produced the church, and the Bible message is that Word, the seed of the kingdom, from which the church has come and still comes. We must understand what produced what lest we credit man as the source of Scripture rather than God, and that would be the greatest mistake we could make regarding the Bible.

Before the Writing of It

Christians existed before the new covenant was written. But they did not exist before the new covenant. The word preached, believed, and obeyed produced Christians, the church. The church existed before the actual text was written, but not before the Word was revealed. It was eventually written down in its completeness. For a time God's Word was in inspired man, but now is embodied in the inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). "*All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*" So when we speak of the New Testament canon we simply refer to the books that even the early Christians recognized as inspired of God. From versions, lectionaries, secular histories, and personal writings and commentaries, we can know what they considered inspired. Furthermore, there are documents called catalogues that were written by early Christians that list the books accepted as Scripture long before any council met to place their stamp of approval on them.

Internal Evidence

But the strongest and most indisputable evidence is the internal evidence and claims of the books themselves. A study of evidences is itself a most valuable study that space will not permit here except to mention. We stoutly recommend you get a reliable book on Christian evidences and read and know for an irrefutable fact that

the books of the Bible are from God because the evidence is overwhelming.

Some cry, "It is not fair to use the Bible to prove itself." But it is foolish not to include the Bible in proving what it is and from whence it came. If you wished to know the contents of a bottle, would you exclude a study and investigation of the contents? Certainly not! Let us be just as open and fair with an inquiry into the Bible.

Other Books

Why does the Catholic Bible include books that our Bible excludes? Depending on the way the books are counted, there are from seven to fifteen books included in Catholic Versions of the Bible that are not found otherwise. They are called Apocryphal or doubtful books. They are additional books. For the most part these books are historical and do not and will not affect the plan of salvation.

Why are these books rejected by others and accepted by Catholics? All of them are listed with Old Testament books. They never were included in the Jewish canon, even the canon Jesus accepted. Remember it was to the Jews that the oracles were committed (Romans 3:2). The Jewish writers of the first century rejected them also. Lacking the internal evidence of inspiration, they sometimes contradicted those books that are known to be acceptable. Within them we find the foundations of such doctrines as purgatory, praying to dead saints, etc. These objections cannot be waved aside by papal decree. Even Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin and whose version Catholics once called perfect, excludes them. Romanists are terribly inconsistent when it comes to the matter of the Apocryphal books.

There are apocryphal or doubtful books of the New Testament era as well, but none are included in the canon by anyone. The Bible is not the only ancient book that discusses some of the events recorded in the Bible. The thirty-nine books of the Old and the twenty-seven books of the New are inspired as we can surely ascertain when we study the evidence understand.

Our English Bible

We now consider the English Bible. There have been many versions in English down through the years. The first English translation or version was from the Latin by John Wycliffe in the fourteenth century.

William Tyndale in the sixteenth century also produced a version. He wrote the pope and said, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of Scripture than thou dost." His translation was from the Greek and Hebrew.

The best known and most widely used version is the King James Version of 1611. This was a work done by forty-eight choice Greek and Hebrew scholars who worked under threat of death if the text was disturbed. They looked upon the book they translated as the Word of God, not just another ancient document totally from the minds of men as is usually the case with those who produce the many modern "versions" on the market today. Some, in their feeble and frantic efforts to provide credibility for modern versions that teach fatal doctrinal error, have given themselves to trivial nit-picking objections against the KJV, most of which are cruelly and intellectually dishonest and unjust, lacking the scholastic integrity the critics profess to possess. When you read and study the King James Version you have before you a reliable and accurate revelation of the Word of God by which you can surely learn His will, and if obeyed, will take your soul to heaven. There is a place for up-dated versions, provided they translate rather than mistranslate, and provided they are versions rather than perversions. But the recent clamor for the need of a modern speech version has been highly and irrationally overblown. The contention that people cannot understand the KJV is absurd. Having taught the Bible even to six and seventh graders for years day by day in class after class from the KJV, I know there is no validity in this contention that we cannot understand it. We must remember there are those malcontent with God's revelation who prefer things new to things true.

Some consider the American Standard Version the most accurate of all English translation. What the ASV does

translate is probably very accurate. The omission of much of the text from the ASV, as it follows the Westcott-Hort Greek Text, is the prime objectionable feature of it. It is true that some of the strongest objections raised against the ASV is its literalness, which is actually not a fault but an advantage and virtue. Too many "translators" have adopted the policy that it is legitimate to simply paraphrase what they think God may have meant rather than translating what God has said. They admit their works are paraphrases, but some are intent on using them as reliable translation nonetheless. The ASV was produced by one hundred and one of the ripest Greek and Hebrew scholars ever assembled. To a great degree it preserves the beauty and style of the KJV while blending a degree of literalness without as many obsolete and archaic words as found in the KJV. But let us understand about archaic and obsolete words. They are not errors. It is far easier to define a word not currently and commonly used today than it is to explain and explain away the false doctrines included in most modern versions, such as the Revised Standard, New International, New English Bible, Good News for Modern Man, the Living Bible, Easy-to-Read Bible, and many others of similar inadequacies and errors. About the most complimentary thing that can be said of most new versions is that they are commentaries rather than reliable translations, and often some of them are ridiculous commentaries, far removed from anything akin to the message they propose to present. All kinds of denominational doctrines have been injected into the text of many modern versions that simply are not true. It is a tragedy among brethren that so many have opted for the unreliable versions produced by those who do not have respect for the inspiration of the Bible and willingly cast darts at the reliable KJV, hoping thereby to give stature to their new things. Different books will produce different people. We are witnessing such changes among us, partly because of these versions, and this is not complimentary toward brethren who promote and endorse these products called modern versions. They lead people to think these books are God's Word, but they often teach error. With some, that really does not matter, because they have already joined the ranks of those who contend the Bible only contains the Word of

God rather than believing the Bible is the Word of God, existing due to the plenary, verbal inspiration of those God chose to write it. They have decided to join the modernists who contend truth is relative and not absolute, that truth cannot really be known but is something for which we can only search. Not accepting the Bible as the Word of God, without pain of conscience they can tamper with it to suit their own whims, and accommodate the sins of our times, bringing the alleged Word of God into conformity with the way of the devil that so many are determined to follow.

Why the KJV

I generally preach from the KJV, occasionally citing the ASV for some specifics. The KJV is that with which most faithful brethren are familiar, and is translated from the same text as those European versions that produced the break from Romanism in the Protestant Reformation. It is the version most widely used in producing what we sometimes refer to as the Restoration Movement. It is a version that is accessible, accurate, and conveys the truth, only now and then needing some explanation of a few obsolete words which still are found in most complete modern English dictionaries. I strongly recommend to you the KJV and warn you of the modern versions and their doctrinal error. It can be justly added that the New King James Versions does have great merit and benefit. It is not to be classified alongside the vast array of modern products so often being used and promoted.

I suggest with equal persistence that those who promote and endorse these modern versions that have been shown over and over again to teach error do not serve well the cause of Christ by doing so. They lend themselves to the increasing Biblical ignorance, confusion, and digression which is running rampant through the Lord's church at this time, and in a society that is increasingly disrespectful of the Word and will of the Lord. They will not be counted guiltless.

* * * * *

Victory to the Faithful



At the East End congregation where I preach we have been studying the book of Revelation. It is a difficult book and with so many varied ideas floating about concerning the time it was written, the meaning of the symbols, the relevancy to our time, and other points of difference, it really does not behoove one to become very dogmatic about the conclusions he may draw. But there is something that we can rest assured is to be learned from this book even if many other matters remain somewhat obscure and indefinite. The theme of the book emphasizes the spiritual victory that belongs to those who come to Christ and remain faithful to Him. This we know, and we rejoice. JWB

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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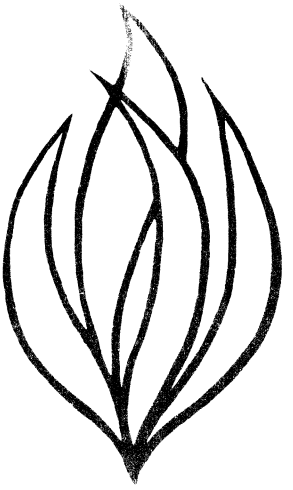

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME XIV **NUMBER 3**

James W. Boud

The Home Church And Her Young

NUMBER ONE

We have heard the many warnings from faithful brethren who are in positions to know that the church is losing thousands of her young people every year. We have no reason to doubt the accuracy of their statements. We rather believe, however, that the home is losing the young and the church is suffering the loss. Be that as it may, we are inclined to believe that the loss of our young is possibly the greatest loss the church has suffered in the twentieth century. Estimates range from fifty to ninety per cent no longer are staying with church, depending upon the area studied. Many of those who nominally remain with the church have drifted into the worldly and liberal digression and erroneous tangents so characteristic of many churches of Christ today. This loss has become so apparent during the very years when the young would ordinarily be of college age, whether they be in college or not.

Some years ago I set out to discover what was happening to the faith of the young during college years and why the loss. More precisely, I wanted to learn what the home church could do to prevent it and recover as many as possible. I visited many campuses, both state schools and so-called "Christian" campuses, as well as other private institutions, interviewing students, preachers, teachers, counsellors, student center directors, dorm supervisors, youth workers, deans, presidents, and whoever would give me the time to discuss this matter. The answer I received from my questions were for the most part thoughtfully given because I asked them to allow me their time before I visited them, requesting they give thought to the area of investigation I was making prior to our discussion. It was usually obvious that some preparation was given to the answers to my questions.

The information I received was tremendous and the volume of it so large that all I can present in this booklet only touches the surface, but sufficiently, I believe, for us to see the nature and magnitude of the problem of losing our young. A lengthy series once appeared in the GOSPEL ADVOCATE reviewing my investigation and campus visits.

My inquiries were along four major lines of thought. (1) What are the deficiencies in attitude and knowledge among incoming freshmen and how do these change during college years? (2) What can the home church do once they are away from home to help them remain faithful? (3) What are the dangers, problems, frustrations, and most destructive influences they encounter in college environments? (4) What are the most effective means and activities for young people, what is really worthwhile, that will stabilize them in the faith? The answers varied somewhat from college to college depending on the nature of the school. But there were so many things in common with them all.

Several observations are in order. I was impressed with the value of the "Christian" schools pertaining to moral environment. I was disturbed with the glaring decline even in these areas, and particularly with the compromising, false, and liberal doctrines being taught and protected on these "Christian" campuses in recent years. It is not unfair to say that for the most part, those who sacrificed so much to bring these schools into existence have been betrayed because the very purposes for which the school was established are being buried beneath a barrage of liberal propaganda.

By noting the relatively better moral climate on "Christian" campuses, we do not demean the work done among some state college students, but the state campus is far more open, compromising, permissive, and outright rebellious toward the will of God. But even the work done among students in state schools was obviously being influenced by the liberal and worldly ways, all the way from near cultism to the "do your own thing" philosophy.

The acceptance of drugs, immorality, alcoholic beverages, co-ed dorms, immodest dress, profane speech, were much in evidence on state campuses more than elsewhere. Such an environment presents special needs for the Christian who attends them.

I was impressed with the urgency of effective work among young people. While not in total despair, I find little reason for realistic optimism, and faithful workers among the young are in near panic as the problems sweep the youth in large numbers. Many of these workers have simply resigned, even promoted the idea, to go along with the trends. Our losses are high and departures are numerous because of digressive influences within and without. Folks back home are too often not even aware of the seriousness and magnitude of the problem, resting comfortably in their naive state that things are now as they were when they went to school.

I am convinced that the young people generally do not lose their faith at college as much as having taken little faith to college with them. We are losing them before they reach college, and it only becomes glaringly evident once they are away from family influence, the home church, parental advice, but fall under the spell of their new freedoms and many are overwhelmed by the parade of self-proclaimed superiority they must endure from their professors.

It was startling to me to hear one tell me that probably less than fifteen per cent attend services regularly once they arrive on his campus. Campus workers often never have a chance to be of assistance because the youths never allow them to even know of their once-professed connection with the church. We are obviously not doing a good job prior to their leaving for college. Liberal churches that abound around campuses take advantage of this attitude, and are often successful in leading the young into religion which is not New Testament Christianity.

I am further convinced that homes and home churches are not meeting the issues, many not even being aware of them, and fewer still having knowledge how to cope with them. We must get busy doing something about that.

Unless great strides are taken among the young to return to the "old paths" the Bible teaches, having Biblical authority for what we say and do, these young will be forever lost to the cause of Christ. They may be religious, but not as the Bible teaches them to be.

Psalm 71:18, "*O God, forsake me not until I have declared thy strength unto the next generation, thy might to every one that is to come.*"

The first area of questioning had to do with the deficiencies of knowledge and attitude among those entering the college years? (These things are specifically concerned with those going to college, but they are also reasonable applicable to all of that age, whether entering college or not.) They have a lack of personal conviction. They have a borrowed faith, not the real sincere acceptance of truth because they have learned it for themselves, but because they have leaned on others. This is partly their own fault, but why have they not been taught better? They have attended Bible classes and worship services, but often due to family pressure and insistence, but have never really learned and been convinced by the evidence of truth. This is either because it has not been properly presented to them, or they have been unwilling to apply it to themselves, which in many instances is the case. Generally speaking, they are Biblically ignorant. Once away from home, lacking conviction, they forsake the church.

Young people need to be asked, "What do you believe, and why?" As one has said, "God has no grandchildren." The sad fact is, parents and local brethren cannot bestow their faith on their young without the young coming to willingly believe it and knowing why. One cannot be sustained on the faith of another. We may have told the young WHAT to believe, but evidently they do not know WHY they should believe it. They remain uninformed until other influences take them away. While they are often touted as the most brilliant generation to ever come upon the scene of human history, we have strong reasons to doubt that when we observe their conduct. They are surely more ignorant of the Bible than most any generation in this century.

Interestingly, the faith among young people who come from the small, rural churches seems far stronger than those who come from the large, rich, worldly metropolitan churches. Those from mission areas have far greater faith than those where the church counts progress in numbers. This is probably because they have come from churches where conviction was taught to be necessary, not mere social acceptance. Faith among the young where there are many churches, large numbers, big money, seems to be less grounded because they are what they are because many others are what they are, but not because they are founded on "thus saith the Lord." This is no argument for small churches against large churches per se, but it is a strong indictment that churches that recognize the need for "thus saith the Lord" produce far stronger faith than the social minded, recreational, entertaining, numerically prominent, financially comfortable churches who have most likely compromised truth to gain their recognition.

We found some alarming attitudes among them. They want less "doctrine," and more social action. This they are getting from liberal churches. They have almost entirely missed the mission of Christ and the church.

They speak much of "love" but show little comprehension of what love is, as taught in Scripture. They consider it mostly an emotion and sentiment to be outwardly expressed by holding hands, closing eyes, swaying bodies, and such as that. They do not seem to recognize that love is seeking the other's highest good as God has determined that good. They act, with some exceptions, as if doctrine and love are in conflict. They fail to note the Biblical teaching that one cannot separate love from obedience to Christ's doctrine. They seem to think love allows "let me go my own way without rebuke, whatever I say, do, or want." This they receive in heavy doses from liberal churches and liberal teachers in pulpits and college classrooms. They consider doctrine as "our" doctrine while others have "their" doctrine, not realizing that the Lord's church is to produce no doctrine, but is to uphold the doctrine of Christ in our world.

They are being taught aggressively that our services are cold and irrelevant, and they are indifferent to services unless they have some kind of "charge" to them to make them feel good. They obviously do not understand the purpose and nature of worship. They are not aware of what the Bible teaches about worship, or the proper attitude toward worship, and seldom can tell you with Biblical authority what ought to be done in worship. They have drifted, with help, with the trend of emotionalism, "getting turned on with Jesus," and "feeling good," expecting something special to come upon them from the Holy Spirit, even if it has to be invented.

Characteristic of the young, they feel they simply must be accepted regardless of what they say, do, how they act, dress, or what influence they exert on others. If you do not accept them, whatever they display, you are bigoted, old-fashioned, uncaring, lacking in compassion, and cannot be trusted. They are not beyond parroting the church-bashing they hear in the schools and liberal churches. They are big on condemning those who condemn anything, denying anybody the right to "judge" anything, except for themselves. They detest any form of condemnation except what they choose to condemn.

Those who are knowledgeable of the Bible know that these views are in error and can be and have been proven fallacious. Not all have bowed the knee to Baal, but we speak generally. Most are inconsistent, and are not even aware of it. But the sad thing is that many of these have been "raised in the church," as is evidenced by their words and phrases. But respect for the Bible is so often near non-existent.

There are other attitudes of note that are more commendable. They care far less about rugs, drapes, buildings, and parking lots. They seem to be more concerned for people than steeples, even though their concern is often misdirected. Many expressed grave disgust at large expenditures for buildings in which to meet, but have more sympathy for large expenditures in which to play. I never quite got one to explain that to me. It should be evident that these large expenditures, whichever direction, have not stopped the youth drain.

The young are really repulsed by what they consider gross hypocrisy among members of the church. This probably has had a far greater impact among the young than among older members. This may be because the hypocrisy they observe is among older members, even though they fail to see the inconsistency and hypocrisy in their own peer group. Coming from youthful idealism into the world of realism shakes them. They find it hard to adjust to the reality that everybody and everything is not as professed to be. Much that they call hypocrisy, however, is actually immaturity, and the need for growth among those they criticize. They find it hard to discern the difference. Some of this will be tempered with their own maturing.

There is no excuse for hypocrisy among the young or the old. But who can deny that adults have placed many stumbling blocks in the path of youth? I heard it repeatedly said, "I'm so sick of the hypocrisy in the church." I could assure them that many others agree with them on that score. I could not get good answers from the young as to why that ought cause them to take out their anger at hypocrites against the Lord by turning away from His church.

They call the work of the church relatively unimportant and push it aside to accommodate their whims, pleasures, sports, dates, and "good times." Their religion, if it remains at all, is often a matter of convenience rather than personal conviction. All of this takes a deadly toll among them. We cannot overstate the power of example, good and bad.

What must be done is for everybody to be taught that two wrongs will not produce the right. Nobody can go to heaven on the basis of the hypocrisy of others. Who can believe we can throw out God and His Word simply because some ignore it, or even profess to follow it but do not?

Many young people are, in their words, "bored to tears" with their Bible classes in the home church. Often this is because they have no interest and concern, but often it is because the classes provided them are not conducted intelligently, by competent people, with informed

teachers, but just whoever happens to be willing to volunteer to take them. Often I had the complaint that they did not believe the elders of their home church knew what was going on in classes, and did not really put much stress on providing them the best possible teachers, and even less concern about materials. While they studied theories, math formulae, complicated data in school, they are subjected to fill-in-the-blank booklets, puzzles, catchy fictitious stories of "problem solving," dull lectures, and ill-prepared presentations. They are taught so little Bible in "Bible class" that they know little about the Bible.

I was impressed that brethren and sisters who teach must learn that the day of Saturday night preparation is over if we are going to retain our young. It never was adequate, and it is now so painfully apparent. Many rightly feel the teachers are not dedicated, are there because nobody else wants to be, therefore, are not motivated to serious thought and Biblical inquiry. Possibly, brethren, we have gone along for so long with publishing houses graduated level materials that we fail to realize how the young need to comprehend the same gospel as their parents and grandparents. Why is not a thoroughly prepared open Bible study far better than what so many are getting?

I would contend that the day of studying only what somebody else says the Bible says, through printed literature, is ineffective. Many young people told me that they wish from the fifth and sixth grade they had been given opportunity to simply study the Bible.

Another weakness in our teaching is that too often we merely relate facts without application to life of those facts. While the Bible is relevant to our age, many are never shown this relevancy, and then it becomes dull.

Unless our teaching efforts are improved, become more Biblically oriented, sharpened and brought up to their capacity of learning, we will not retard the departure of our young from the way of God, nor will we develop them in the personal conviction they must have to sustain them.

It pains me to relate how impressed I was that so many young people have abandoned a strong Biblical stand regarding worldliness. They say preaching they have heard on the subject has been vague, weak, compromising, and abstract. Therefore, they shun to condemn drinking alcoholic beverages, modern dancing, smoking, even though most question the propriety of using drugs. They are frustrated by churches that provide havens for violators of God's will by condoning worldliness. Let one church take a righteous stand and some get disgruntled over it, run away to a more permissive church, and they are received with open arms without repentance. This disgusts them. It disgusts me also.

Many have never seen the dignity of negative preaching, and clamor for only something positive. They have not been taught the whole counsel of God. They have been brainwashed into thinking condemning error is someway a display of an ugly heart. Furthermore, often they hear the denunciation of sin from the pulpit, but see the practice of it without consequence. Elderships have much for which to give answer along this line.

They will hear much criticism of condemnation of sins from both parents and peers. Sin may only be condemned generally, but not specifically. It is like one said concerning the statement in prayer, "Lord, forgive us our sins." He wondered what would happen if somebody said, "Name one you would admit."

The young, taking their cue from the older ones, see the fear of offending the prominent, the more wealthy, and the quest to be socially acceptable in the community. They see cowardice and fear to defend what is proclaimed, and while they do not admire that, they come to think this is the way to face error. Their stand against worldliness is so weak because they have been shown this weakness regarding it from both home and home church.

Where are the young lacking? You name it, and with many, it is lacking. I repeat, they are so Biblically ignorant. What they do know they are not well able to communicate. They know of Abraham and Moses but do

not even know who lived first, or how each fits into God's scheme of things. There is a tremendous need to emphasize the authority of the Bible, and the necessity of having Bible authority for what is taught and done. They cannot even defend the inspiration of the Bible, and this is deadly seeing how in nearly all schools there are those teaching things that would undermine that truth.

How badly they need courses that survey the themes of each book of the Bible, and how the books relate to each other, and to us. The need to know why the church is not a denomination. One administrator of a "Christian" school whose enrollment then consisted mostly from "Christian" homes, said that eighty per cent of the incoming freshmen considered the church just another denomination among denominations. On a questionnaire that asked, "Is the church of Christ a denomination?" eight of ten answered, "Yes."

The home church must turn attention to teaching the home to fulfill its duty toward the young. Rather than trying to take the place of the home with fun and games, the church needs to teach the home what members of the home should be and do. More than the local church, even more than professors, student centers, or anything else, the home must be strong in the Lord because there, more than anywhere else, is where the young are molded. The home church can help the young by helping the home help the young. It is all too evident the church in many places is losing its young because of the home rather than the church, except as the church neglects its duty in teaching, and as the home church may itself become liberal and digressive, bashing the Lord's church in favor of newness and change without regard to revealed Biblical truth.

* * * * *

NUMBER TWO

I asked those with whom I discussed these matters, "What would you wish you could tell the leaders of local churches?" The attitude toward the leadership was often one of guarded respect, but almost as often, and I found

this disturbing, open rebellion and disrespect. Some even said, "Get with it or get out." They wondered why, if the church is supposed to be so important, that the leadership moved like it really was not too significant. They complained of those leaders who do not do the work, and really hinder those who want to work. While some detested what they called "hard preaching," there were others who had heard what some call "hard preaching" and wondered why the leadership was so shy, sometimes cowardly, to support preaching that was "right down the Biblical line." They expressed a concern that the leadership of local churches, generally speaking, did not take their task very seriously, or at least did not show that they did. The correctness of these views may be debated, but this is what existed among them.

As for preachers, they commented on how so many seemed to be so impressed with themselves, and so concerned about their "image," so interested in their job that they will bow and bend to whatever pressures come upon them to retain their jobs, image, and especially when they have good incomes. They said they were tired of joke telling, but the inconsistency of all this is how they will flock like birds when one of these charismatic joke tellers are speaking. It was hard to determine what some of them really were thinking. They expressed disgust toward those who they think rely on verbosity and personality to make up for their lack of study and preparation. But again, they will flock to hear and follow such preachers. These kind of comments were both encouraging, but at times very disturbing because it reflected the kind of preaching they had been hearing.

A second major area of inquiry that I made was what those I consulted believed to be profitable activities. I will be highly selective in this section and abbreviated because it would take too long to mention specific programs that were sometimes suggested. But even the young seemed to be aware that much of what many churches are doing is simply busy-work. They want what they believe to be meaningful, although most of the students found it difficult to define what they considered to be meaningful. Great numbers of them did not consider the things the Bible calls for the church to do to

be very meaningful. It was evident with some that to be meaningful meant what was exciting, fun, sensational, entertaining, and pleasing to their peers both in and out of the church. I found among several state campus works that they try to imitate the denominational student centers, even the fraternities and sororities on campus. They want to get into parades, put up cleverly worded signs in front of our buildings during school "homecoming," have rallies before ball games, etc. They obviously have never separated the work of the church from such mundane, trivial and secular matter. They really did not impress me as understanding what it the function of the Lord's church. Some want the college age people to operate under their own supervision away from the eldership, having their presidents and vice-presidents, having no real connection with the church except for the church to provide facilities, and pay the bills. What was astounding is how many adult workers among these young people go along with that approach.

When you asked them about attendance at Bible classes, worship services, special learning opportunities, they said they usually did that back home. But they are far more lax about this once they are at school. They are restless, but not for coming to a knowledge of the truth.

While there were those who expressed the above attitudes, there were others, although fewer in number, who longed for a church near campus that would provide for them opportunities to work among their fellow students, teach the distinctiveness of the church when they brought their friends to assemblies, and not just try to make everybody feel good as if they were simply "honored guests," and act as if the church was so fearful of offending that their friends could come and go and feel all was well even though they remained lost. They sometimes said they were actually ashamed of the services because leadership would allow the most incompetent song leaders to lead singing, and it sounded terrible. They asked, "Why can't we put our best foot forward for others to see what the church stands for?"

What can the home church do for their young people once they are in the college environment? To be sure, many opportunities have already been missed by that

time. Once they are away, there is less contact and less influence by the home church. But one request repeatedly heard by those who work with the students is that home churches let churches near the schools know their young people are in the area. Students often do not come to the services at all once they come to school, and brethren around these schools never have contact with them because they do not know they exist. They never can find out who they are. Religious preferences are no longer recorded at registration. Word of mouth or chance is the only way to find out who might have some contact with the church unless and until students attend the services, or the home church notifies the church near campus.

We regret that some campus works are not the kind and quality they ought to be, lacking Biblical soundness, and faithful brethren would not even want their young to be connected with the campus work. A major problem the young faithful brethren have today is finding a church reasonably near a campus that still stands forthrightly for the truth of the Bible. So many have drifted with the liberal trends and tides of the world that brethren at home had just as soon their young not be contaminated with what is being served by campus churches.

I made inquiry into what those around all these schools considered to be the greatest frustrations, problems, and most destructive influence the young encounter. Youth is a great age, but it is not easy. Social pressure was mentioned by everyone of them. Faith shaking doctrines promoted by unbelieving professors placed them at a distinct disadvantage because they are often not allowed to respond, do not have equal opportunity to state their convictions, and so often are not even prepared to defend what they say they believe. When most of the class laughs at religion and pokes fun at the church, it is difficult for the timid and shy young Christian to stand. Teachers play a deadly role. When teachers, fellow students are both against you, and you have a compromised message coming from the campus church, everything is made more difficult for our young.

Even in "Christian" schools this sophistication of "expertism" that some professors exhibit is intimidating

to many. Statements are made as if what they say is the last word when the young Christian knows that what he teaches is contrary to what the student has been taught. It is a shame and a disgraceful indictment of the "Christian" schools, in nearly every case, that they do not reenforce Biblical truth the young have learned at home and in their local church, but the teachers seem to think it is their mission in life to change the views of their students to harmonize with the seminary and theological training the teachers have absorbed while obtaining their arbitrarily determined academic degrees. It became how obviously wise it is that parents tell their young as they leave for school, even for "Christian" schools, not to swallow everything they are told. Likely as not, you will encounter false teachers at either place as quickly as one that teaches the truth.

Pressure from their peers is so tremendous it cannot be measured for its magnitude. This is why many youths get caught up in using drugs, engaging in immoralities, drinking alcohol. It is because "everybody else is doing it." Of course, everybody is not doing it, but it seems that way so often.

Intentionally, ideas are often planted in their mind to discount the Bible, question its authority and validity, and relevancy to our modern and scientific age. The fact that those who ridicule and discount the Bible know little to nothing about the Bible does not prevent them from creating problems for those who have been taught to love, respect, and study the Bible. Home churches sorely need lessons that build confidence in what the Bible claims itself to be, the Word of God.

The young are taught that the Bible is not the standard, that there really is no standard, that "if it feels good, do it," then bombarded with the temptations to do evil, and the pressures to "go along" by their peers. You can see why the Christian youth has entered a spiritually savage jungle and needs all the help he can receive.

Some brethren, trying to provide better companionship for Christians who attend the schools, have built dormitories where Christian students can live and maintain Christian standards. Too often the co-ed

dorms at state schools are nothing but state financed brothels. This may sound harsh but from what I was told, I have no reason to disbelieve it. How can they maintain any semblance of decency while living in such environments?

Our young must be assured that for every attack against God and His Word there is an answer. Even though they may not readily have the answer, and even though it may pose a difficult research to learn the answer, there is no objection against God and His Word for which God has not provided an answer that refutes error. Of this our young need to be assured, and therefore, need to not be humiliated nor afraid to stand for what they have been taught by faithful brethren to be the truth. Truth can be defended, and there are those capable of defending it. So often attackers will not allow opportunities for their edicts of error to be questioned or challenged. They make their high-toned pronouncements and demand everybody accept them, even contending that anybody with a brain will readily swallow everything the college professor tells them because he is smart. Our young need to know they have no obligation to accept that sinister attack on truth.

As would be expected, there is the problem of dress and appearance. Some of the worst looking human beings I have ever seen were walking about the campuses of what were supposed to be prestigious institutions of learning. No only are so many so sloppy, reflecting a lack of self respect, but immodesty is the rule rather than the norm in some of the places I visited. One student told me he had known many students, but never had known a boy with long hair or a girl with a mini-skirt who did not seriously lack self respect or a sense of responsibility for their appearance and influence. Another commented, "You can cut the hair and lengthen the skirt, but it takes longer to change the heart that has allowed it." Just why young Christians wish to ape the lowest and most base elements of society is inexplicable. It reflects that they did not learn much of the way of Christ at home or from the home church, and they are not getting much from the church near the campus. How the church needs to teach the young to be models of Christianity, not mockers of it!

Brethren who contend appearances are merely innocent fads, passing quirks, are blind to the realities of atheistic and social revolution in our society and the influence it has had on molding the mind, values, attitudes, and hearts of the young, even in the church. We are fools to shut our eyes to the realities of evil that surround our youth.

There are other problems young people face that threaten and upset their spiritual balance. There is the pressure of time, the establishment of priorities, the shock of the largeness of the schools they enter, the impersonal qualities of campus existence, becoming a number on a card, the loss of individual concern everybody needs.

This emphasizes all the more the need for establishing contact with faithful churches near campuses, if they exist. If that does not occur early, they may soon begin to think it does not matter. They turn to do whatever they wish and get lost in the crowd. Even on campuses of schools operated by Christians they are shocked by things that are wrong. Because of this they are subject to becoming cynical against everything called "Christian."

No campus is perfect. There are problems on all of them. But the campuses where Christian principles are at least verbalized and do not condone such things as drug abuse, immorality, profanity, and other evils so obvious in the world, may prove worth the cost and effort. The present problem in "Christian" schools is their adoption of liberalism and digression. And it is existent in every "Christian" school, and rampant and dominant in most of them.

I found it generally true that concern for the individual student is more apparent on "Christian" campuses than on state campuses. Unless you do something that is illegal, the administrators in state schools generally keep hands off. Only when someone is caught violating civil law do they get involved. All kinds of Satanic movements are found there, and that some of these are found on "Christian" campuses is even more disturbing.

While the picture is generally bleak and discouraging, we must mention other pressures that make life for the college person rather difficult. He and she face such things as military service, who to marry, life's profession, even what will be their major, as well as meeting the financial responsibilities of getting their education. All these things make an impact on their attitudes and lives. Decisions regarding money, jobs, friends, acceptance, convenience, family, the world generally, takes its toll. The young must learn to include God in every choice in life, usually in an environment where God is declared irrelevant.

The impact of coming into an environment where immorality is often so prevalent and accepted is greater than folks back home realize. There is the accumulation of youthful passion, a sense of independence and freedom from parental supervision, escape from preaching against the wickedness of immorality, and the urging to "do your own thing." I got the distinct impression from those I interviewed that on some campuses it was almost a wide open society where anything goes. Placing a youth in that setting who has been taught to have respect for right and wrong can be a very tremendous shock to them.

Often their problems are created, or at least aggravated, by their home., Family conflicts, complaints about money, making the young feel guilty like he is imposing on parents because he is costing so much only adds to his frustration. Cars, money, late hours have proven deadly to many students. Young people are like springs coiled to expand. Hold them down until the moment you must let go and they spring out of control. Let them expand gradually, and under control, and when the time comes to remove your hand, they stand on their own.

I never did discover why another two problems exist and are so demanding, but almost all of the young mentioned them both. There is pressure to (1) conform to the crowd around them, and (2) be sure you become different from people back home. This is neither wise nor reasonable to think either pressure brings good necessarily. Whether one should conform to others must be determined by the truth. Whether to be different from folks back home

should be determined the same way. But they are brain washed into thinking they are not really educated unless they throw away whatever those who love them most have taught them in the past.

Advisors of the young told me there were five very vulnerable types of young people being knocked off track once they get away from home into the college environment. (1) Those who have been overprotected and never given opportunity to exercise the power of choice, how to choose, what to choose, seldom trusted, and given few responsibilities, everything done for them, and escaped discipline. (2) Those who were forced to do this or that, even regarding the church, without ever being benefited with explanations and reasons why. (3) Those very subject to pressure, who lack personal conviction because of lack of knowledge. (4) Those who have been prominent in high school activities and are often disillusioned because they are not so suddenly prominent of college campus. They often pay a terrible price seeking that prominence. (5) These who have been granted too much freedom at home, being either allowed or forced to be an adult before they were capable of dealing with adult situations, physically, intellectually, financially, and spiritually.

Now that we have considered some of these matters, what do we do with all of this? Only a portion of information I learned has been included, but enough for us to draw some conclusions about what we must do in the interest of the young and their relationship to the church.

Is this information merely interesting to us, or do we care enough to want to do something for the young that will really help keep them faithful to Christ? This is an important decision each congregation must make, and this means each individual should be concerned.

I pursued this investigation with the lofty expectation that we all can profit from what is discovered. I would hope that the local church would make better efforts to provide a solid, grounded spiritual foundation for the young under its influence. We desperately need people who will give themselves to the task of devising courses

of study that will prepare the youth for what is before them. We need first rate people to help them be first rate Christians. We must provide qualified teachers for them so they can teach and show the young what Christians are supposed to be.

We need those who will guide, plan, promote activities that are truly effective. This takes time, thought, and money. It cannot be done haphazardly.

We must get an "away-from-home" department for our young. This must be overseen by dedicated and informed people. The home church must keep in touch with them, and the churches near the schools also.

More than anything else, possibly, we must put an emphasis on teaching the home regarding parental responsibility for the young, and teach the young "thus saith the Lord." Our teaching and preaching must be the kind God wants, as Scripture reveals, in message and content. We must expose them to the truth, and warn them of the error, if we expect them to believe and obey truth. How can they take convictions to school with them if we have not shown them the right way?

We must learn to listen to what they tell us. They can inform us of their needs sometimes far better than we can know by mere observation, or trying to recall how it was when we went to school. Today's students face things the older generation never faced, at least not as openly, defiantly, and rebelliously against God as things are today. Our task is before us. Our young are depending on us. We need parents and home churches that really care, and will act aggressively. Can you think of any other way we can keep from losing our most cherished possession, our young people?

* * * * *

It is not an encouraging factor to realize how faithful brethren have been betrayed by so many of the schools upon which brethren once could rely.

Religion With "Kicks"

A vast, almost innumerable host of people are looking for their "kicks" today. They are seeking what they consider pleasurable, however temporary, something exciting, sensational, highly charged emotionally, rousing and radical. They are looking for escape mechanisms from the pressures of life, trying to find some meaning to their existence, looking for the new, exhilarating, daring and stimulating. They are trying fast cars, drugs, sexual orgies, wild "music," rioting, imitation of degenerate movies, weird dress, almost anything one can conceive in order to "add gusto to life."

Life has gone sour, flat, stale, and boring to many people. Many have had too much money, too much leisure, too little understanding of the sacredness and purpose of life. They have no firm foundation on which to build life, and therefore the problems of life overwhelm them as a roaring high tide. For decades people have been bombarded with the idea, and many have accepted it, that matter is the only reality, "man is the most," having things is success, that we are but animals, having no purpose, coming from nowhere by chance, here for nothing, no guidelines by which to live, no way to determine right from wrong, and going nowhere but to the grave. They have lost, or probably never possessed, any true perspective of life and the dignity of the human being. People have, therefore, felt they must pour some meaning into life because "you go around only once," and "you must get all you can from it." So they do weird, wild, reckless, irresponsible things to add some color and depth to an otherwise drab and shallow existence. They suffer from the frustrations that are bound within them that is the result of a life separated from God.

Seek Escapes

In recent years there have been scores who have not turned to drugs and the other sinful "escapes" that dominate the scene, but seek a religious experience of

some sort, some explosion within them. They look for their "kicks" from religion. This has been evident from the pew to the pulpit. They seek a religion that "moves the feet, turns you on, blows your mind." These are the terms that are heard among them. They shout and roll and lose control, as if they have become possessed by some electrical spirit from "out there" somewhere. This has often been attributed to a warm, moving experience where the Holy Spirit "shakes you loose and leaves you limp." In religion many are seeking and inventing the new, untried, fancy, bazaar, strange, even to the lascivious to relate to youth and get the "fire of life." They want that which "makes you feel good and makes you cry at the same time."

While we would agree there is no personal value to what can be called a hand-me-down religion, a borrowed faith that is impersonal and meaningless (many have this kind of religion because they have neither learned what nor why they believe), we would condemn the use of religion as a substitute for other sources of "kicks." This is certainly to miss true Christianity. Getting "kicks" does not solve problems nor save souls. As much as anything else, it only complicates matters, deceiving and deluding people into thinking they have something when all they have is the passing wind of fad and foolishness.

The Wild Way

The wild religion of "kicks" gets so much attention today. A truly pious Christian who goes about life serving God, attending to his duties, imitating Christ in his conduct toward others, seldom is recognized. But let some young blood with hair like a savage paint a cross on the windscreen of his motorcycle, or write "turn on with Jesus" across a dirty T-shirt, the cameras being to whirl, and the writers run to their typewriters providing great notoriety, and presenting such as that as the "benefits" of Christianity. The distortions and misrepresentations of the faith of Christ are blazed in neon lights, pictured in fashion of white buck shoes, half nude bodies, even rock music, drug smoke, and leather jackets. This is profitable "box office" and sells books, magazines, and movies because it is sensational. It attracts the Biblically ignorant, and thrills people

who are seeking something and are willing to accept most anything that relieves their dullness, doldrums, and boredom, turning on emotions. Such is the appeal of the bumper sticker, "Honk, if you love Jesus," and explains the popularity of the song, "Jesus Christ, Superstar," a blasphemous document if ever one existed. All of this creates a new kind of so-called Christianity that kicks, swings, rocks, and wows. It reflects the idea that the Holy Spirit "zaps" people into this conduct. That such has little to no resemblance to New Testament truth is of no consequence to most. Though some of these extremes are not generally practiced, this mania for a theatrical religion has its traces among some brethren who cater to the will of "baby boomers" who want their religion to provide fun and excitement. It conforms to the Jesus freaks, holy rollers, and similar tribes. This circus type of promotion of religion in the character of showmanship and entertainment is artificially created, consists of environments designed to arouse, and exploit even those who may have a zeal, but who are without knowledge.

Jesus' Attitude

Jesus was very impatient with people who wanted a "kicky" religion. Consider Luke 11:19, "*And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall be no sign given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.*" Here were the big crowds, wanting the spectacular, sensational, and dramatic. He had healed, fed the hungry, and other things, and had taught them. They had come to see more signs, to be fed, seeking excitement and to get their "kicks." He looked upon them with pity and rejection.

Jesus' attitude is also revealed in the record of Luke sixteen about the rich man and Lazarus. Remember how the rich man said, "*Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.*" But Abraham told him, "*They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.*" The rich man continued to plead, "*Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead,*

they will repent." Abraham answered, *"If they hear not Moses, and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."* The rich man wanted his brothers to have something special, something different and new. Do you see the lesson? Jesus rejects a "faith" that must constantly have special "kicks" and signs, bypassing the Word that calls for the conversion of the heart. Some wish to replace the Word with a super-duper episode, and scenes of sensationalism.

People who want something spectacular, some highly emotional experience that they think can be traced to the Almighty are in the class as Herod, Luke 23:8, *"And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him, and he hoped to have seen some miracles done by him."* When Jesus refused, they mocked the Lord.

Blasphemous

This so-called opera, "Jesus Christ, Superstar," caught the "kick" idea, having Herod to say, "Prove to me that you're no fool, walk across my swimming pool." To think that some brethren cannot even see fault in such things as this show is a sad commentary on their spirituality. But some still make similar demands of Jesus today. Jesus rejected people who followed Him who were simply looking for the sensational and uncommon.

If you are looking for signs, wonders, and similar things regarding the identity of Jesus and His way, your search is over when you open your Bible. You will find more than enough evidence to create faith and prove the truth about Him. But if you seek more, as some young people were once advised on the campus of Abilene by their speaker, "How about a good old-fashioned sign?" (and his suggestion was greeted with applause), you will be disappointed. In the Bible you see the creation of the universe and all therein. You read of the destruction of evil at the time of the flood. You find the mighty miracles of the prophets of the Old Testament. Moses did them, as did Elijah, Jonah, and others. You read of the miraculous birth of Jesus by the virgin Mary, as well as His resurrection. You see the sign of the prophet Jonah

(Matthew 12:40) that confirms His identity as the Son of God (Romans 1:4). You will know of the confirmation of the gospel by the things done by the apostles and others to whom miraculous powers were given (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:1-4). You want signs? God has given them and tells you about them in His Word (Second Timothy 3:16,17). You want "kicks," drama, sensationalism, emotionalism, fun, excitement, a supercharged thrill that turns you on, you will not find that in Christ and His faith. His religion does not provide such things. That comes from another and opposite source. All this "Let's get excited" approach only proves that some confuse excitement for genuine zeal, and reflects their lack of comprehension of the gospel. He will not turn your water into wine, nor perform some miraculous feat. He has already done that. Jesus warns you that you are moving toward the day of judgment and says, "*Repent... or perish.*" He tells all of us to come to Him for salvation, or be lost forever.

The Right Way

If you believe and obey His Word, follow Him in life. He will forgive your sins, make you a new creature, grant you fellowship and oneness with Deity, and will give you light through His Word for the journey of life that leads into the Eternal City where the redeemed rejoice.

Those who refuse to believe and obey on the testimony of the inspired Word of God, who keep wanting a religion of "kicks," thrills, excitement, and theatrical emotionalism, who thereby show a disregard and contempt for the divinely given record about Christ, will not be satisfied with what they learn from Scripture, nor shall they receive what they pursue. His way is one of joy, but also discipline and self-control. He does not encourage people to "shake loose and let go." His is the way of faith and conviction, not fun, frolic, and confusion. We have no business wanting a religion with "kicks." We should seek the religion of Christ and be converted to Him by faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ, rising from the watery grave to live His way.

* * * * *

He Followed Faulty Counsel



When Rehoboam was approached by tribes led by Jeroboam, they sought not rebellion, but relief from excessive burdens imposed upon them by Rehoboam's father, Solomon. Rehoboam sought the counsel of age, wisdom, and experience who urged him to conform to their reasonable requests. Evidently, he did not like what he heard and sought other advice from his young peers who insisted he move in the opposite direction. Rehoboam, prefering youthful nonsense to the wisdom of age, foolishly followed bad advice to the destruction of the unity of the nation. Though hard for some to grasp, wisdom of age is worth considering.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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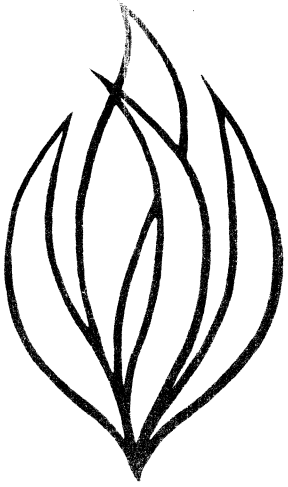

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIV James W. Boyd NUMBER 4

The Christian's Relationship to the World

When two people choose each other as companions in marriage, their relationship to each other changes immediately and permanently. The husband now has new responsibilities and duties as does the wife. Failure by either of them to assume and properly discharge those duties is to bring havoc upon that new relationship. The husband must provide for his wife and the wife is to be subject to her husband "*as the church is subject to Christ.*" Certain privileges as well as duties belong to each them when they consent to the vows of matrimony. This is a part of the relationship. The point we stress is that their relationship to each other has changes when they marry.

Marriage not only changes their relationship to each other, but changes their relationship to everyone else as well, including parents. Their relationship toward all others of the opposite sex also changes. The married person no longer has the right to date others as before. Because one's obligations to one's mate take first place, others are never more than in a secondary relationship.

The figure of marriage is used in Scripture to teach what happens when one becomes a Christian. In baptism we are wedded to Christ and our relationships change (Romans 7:1-4; Ephesians 5:22,23). Our relationship changes with respect to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whereas we were children of the devil because of sin, now being forgiven, we are children of God. Previously being alienated from Christ, we are now added to the body of Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, the Bible.

One essential point we must understand is that Christians are expected to be good, but just being good without changing our relationship to Deity does not bring salvation. Before the spiritual blessings are ours to

enjoy we must be "*in Christ*" where God provides them (Ephesians 1:3).

Not only does one change relationship with Deity when he becomes a Christian, but he also has a change of relationship to the world. He is still one who is in the world in the sense that this is where he exists, but he is not of the world in the sense that his way of life is not worldly (John 15:19; 17:15,16; First John 2:15). Even though he is still surrounded by worldly people, worldly things, worldly activities, his allegiance does not belong to the world, but to the Lord.

The World

What do we mean by the term "world?" There are several meanings of this word in the Bible, and the meaning can be determined as one examines the context in which it is used. The "world" may refer to the earth, or this planet. Acts 17:24, "*God made the world and all things therein.*" Similarly, Mark 16:15, "*Go ye into all the world...*" Becoming a Christian does not change one's relationship to the "world" in this sense. We remain on this planet as before.

"World" may refer to earthly goods. Matthew 16:26, "*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world...*" The Christian has an obligation in this "world" to earn so as to provide for his own (First Timothy 5:8), give to the cause of the Lord, help those less fortunate, and demonstrate proper stewardship. He is to "*labor, working with his hands the thing that is good that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need.*" (Ephesians 4:28). There is nothing inherently evil with material possessions per se. But the Christian must remain the master of his goods lest his goods become his master. We are to use such things to "*lay up treasures in heaven.*" (Matthew 6:19).

"World" may also refer to the human race, the people who live on this planet. John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world...*" means God loved the people of the world, or humanity, and made provision for their salvation.

"World" also means the evil that is so characteristic of this world and many people in it. It refers to that spiritual sphere of evil (First John 2:15), the evil order, that which is opposed to God. John 14:30, Satan is called the "*prince of the world.*" Those whose allegiance is given to that which God declares to be sinful are those in the "world" in this sense. It is this meaning that we have in mind when we speak of the Christian's relationship to the "world" and how it changes upon coming to Christ.

Our Duty

The Christian has the responsibility to separate himself from the world. This does not mean he must leave the planet, or live a monastic life, never using material goods, or denying himself contact with humanity. He must, however, separate himself from rebellion against God, the willful practice of sin, abstaining from practices that are condemned, withdrawing himself from influences tending to draw him from the ways of God. He cannot imitate sinful ways and be faithful to Christ.

This demands that he give heed to Second Corinthians 6:17,18, "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*" James 1:27 admonishes that we be "*unspotted from the world.*" This same idea is presented in First Thessalonians 5:22, "*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*"

In light of such Biblical teaching, how can anyone honestly contend that the Christian can persist in drinking alcoholic beverages, engaging in the modern dances, lying, smoking, using profanity, being dishonest, and "*such like*"? (Galatians 5:19-21). There is no defense for such behavior. Unfortunately, there are those in the church who would argue that these things are innocent and in harmony with living a Christlike life. Such an attitude toward the "world" is a shame of our time.

Not of the World

To help us understand better, think of Jesus. He was human, but He was not of this "world." He was distinct,

different, and separate from sinful practices (Hebrews 4:15). Even when He went where sinners were, it was not to "go along" with them in their sin, but to teach then the way of righteousness. He never compromised God's will to make something evil appear to be acceptable. He also expects those who claim to be His disciples to do as much. We are to be a "*peculiar people*" (Titus 2:14) who deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.

Consider the word "church." We speak of that which Christ built, and that of which He is the head, that which was purchased with His blood. The word means "the called out." Those who compose the church are those who have been called out of sin into fellowship with Deity as the redeemed. We have been delivered out of darkness and translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Even though the church is in the world in one sense, it is not to be like the world in another sense. The more like the world the church becomes the more the church loses its distinctiveness and appeal. It sacrifices its right to exist. Like a boat on a lake, it is one thing for the boat to be in the lake, but quite another for the lake to get into the boat. It is one thing for the church to be in the world, but when the world begins to get into the church we have trouble. Faithful brethren will not stand idly by and allow worldly attitudes and practices to be characteristic of the church without fighting against the evil and contending for righteousness.

As a Marriage

Go back to the marriage illustration that Scripture gives Before marriage the woman could choose any man she wished to be her companion. But once she was married, she is committed to her husband so long as they both shall live. Likewise, before we are saved by the blood of Christ, we may choose whatever works of the flesh and sin we wish, reaping the consequences of doing so. But once one has come to Christ he is not at liberty to follow after such things. Second Corinthians 5:15, "*And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*" First Corinthians 6:19,20, "*Ye are bought with a price... ye are not your own.*"

In addition to being separate from the world, the Christian assumes solemn responsibilities to the world. We have the duty to educate the people of the world of their lost condition and how they can be saved by Christ. We once were lost and are now saved. We have the duty to seek and save the lost as did Christ. Have you ever thought what might be your spiritual condition if nobody had ever cared for your soul enough to educate you regarding the gospel? Are we not obligated to show as much love and concern for someone yet lost as has been shown to us?

A Difference

Specifically, we have the duty to live the way of the Lord, and to live our faith. In this we are like Christ. Acts 1:1, "*The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.*" He is our example and we are live according to the way He taught. There is little doubt that more of us need to be impressed with our duty to live our faith. There are things God expects us to do, such as worship, help the needy, be as we ought to be at home, on the job, in all areas of life's activities, how we rear our children, where we go, what we say, how we treat other people. Matthew 5:16, "*Even so let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" People will size up the way of Christ, so to speak, by the way we who profess to be Christians, live. They need a demonstration before them. We are the first, and possibly the only, epistle that some will ever read.

When others see our indifference, neglect, absenteeism from worship, participation in things of the sinful world that are off limits to Christians, observe our disrespect for the law, our homes broken and shattered by strife and divorce like the world, do you think they are going to be impressed with either us or the way of Christ that we say we have adopted? Will they not think that being a Christian amounts to very little?

As much and more than other places there ought to be the an exemplary life of a Christian demonstrated in the home. There is to be love in the home, genuine concern for each other, duties discharged, cooperation, harmony,

and spiritual interest. Many husbands and wives must not have been married by a preacher or a Justice of the Peace, but rather the Secretary of War. Homes are not supposed to be battlegrounds. Using the words of James, "*My brethren, these things ought no so to be.*" Little wonder many young people grow up confused, unable to have a proper home of their own. They have never seen the home demonstrated the way God wants it. It has been said of the way of Christ, "If you love it, live it."

Preaching the Word

Accompanying our manner of life must be preaching the Word of life. The church is the brotherhood of soul winners. Preaching and teaching should be done with love and a sense of urgency. The doctrine of Christ cannot be pushed aside by promotions of entertainment, recreation, fun and games, politics, human theologies, philosophies, psychology, and the like. Only the gospel will save (Romans 1:16). We cannot win souls with gymnasiums, soup kitchens, prizes, various gimmicks that have captured the emphasis of many. The gospel, the whole counsel of God, book, chapter, verse presentation of truth is what is vital and indispensable. Trying to make people feel better about themselves even still remaining in sin, making life more joyful, getting them excited and emotionally stirred is not what the world must hear from God's people. They must hear the Word so they can believe and give heed to the Word.

Separate and Educate

Separate and educate is the Christian's duty to the world. Being the salt of the earth, the light of the world in the darkness of sin, as a city set on a hill are Biblical descriptions of the noble obligations we have to discharge. Before we can do our duty toward God regarding our duty toward the world we must leave the sinful world. This is accomplished by the power of the blood of Christ. We receive forgiveness of sins and enter into the saved relationship with Deity when we hear, believe, and obey the Word of truth.

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Forgiveness

Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is spiritual death or eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23; Second Thessalonians 1:9). The same truth is taught in James 1:13-15. Man in sin is unacceptable to God, lost, condemned, doomed, damned, helpless, and hopeless, and can never see the glories of heaven as he is. God has warned man of this since Eden. Yet, we all sin (Romans 3:10, 23; 5:12). When man recognizes these facts and desires to be acceptable to God, if he has the right spirit about him, he seeks forgiveness from God for his sins, and forgiveness from his fellowmen when he sins against them.

How could we possibly overemphasize the importance of forgiveness? It cannot be done to the person who wants to be saved. Sin destroys, but "*God... being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not.*" (Psalm 78:38). The benefit of forgiveness is preservation, not destruction.

Matthew eighteen contains the parable of the unmerciful servant who was forgiven, but who would not forgive. Forgiveness means release from a debt we could not pay. Forgiveness covers our sins. Psalm 85:2, "*Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin.*"

Blessing of Forgiveness

We are highly favored when forgiven. Paul quoted Psalm 31:1,2 in Romans 4:7,8. "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*" Forgiveness brings joy. Matthew 9:2, "*So, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.*" You will recall the rejoicing of the man from Ethiopian upon his baptism when his sins were forgiven. Whereas sin brings one spiritual death, forgiveness makes one spiritually alive. Colossians 2:13, "*And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having*

forgiven you all trespasses." Forgiveness of sins, that which separated us from God, means sins are blotted out (Acts 3:19). Psalm 51:9, *"Hide thy face from my sins and blot out all mine iniquities."* To blot out means to erase and make as if never done. Hebrews 10:17 tells us He remembers our sins no more.

Obviously salvation is dependent on the remission of sins. Luke 1:77, speaking of the mission of Christ, teaches that Christ came *"to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins."*

Source of Sin and Forgiveness

Satan is the source of sin, and man is tempted to sin, and does sin. But God is the source of forgiveness of sin. All sin is against God because sin is the transgression of God's law (First John 3:4). Yet, God is willing to forgive, even though He is the offended one. The attitude of God toward the sinner is seen in several verses. Second Peter 3:9 tells us God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent. Jeremiah 33:8, *"And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me."* Psalm 86:5, *"For thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee."* Psalm 103:4, *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases."* Psalm 130:4, *"But there is forgiveness with thee."* Daniel 9:7, *"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him."* Micah 7:18, *"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy."*

When Peter spoke to Ananias and Saphirra he showed God as the source of forgiveness and that their sin, though a lie unto men, was a lie unto the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). The willingness of Christ to forgive is evidenced in His prayer over Jerusalem. Matthew 23:37, *" O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen*

gathereth her chickens under her wing, and ye would not." Ephesians 4:32, *"God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."* The Lord's attitude toward the sinner is significant when we consider our own attitude toward those who sin against us.

A Gift

It is God who has made provision for the forgiveness of sins. Man cannot atone for his own transgressions, but salvation is a gift (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 6:23). The mission of Christ was to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15; Luke 19:10). Christ is the provided atonement (Romans 5:11). First John 2:2, *"And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world."* By His blood we are forgiven (Hebrews 9:12,22; Ephesians 1:7; Matthew 26:28).

Furthermore, forgiveness and salvation from sin is made possible and available only in Christ (Acts 4:12; 13:38; Luke 24:47; First John 2:12; Romans 8:1; Ephesians 1:3; Second Timothy 2:10). This is the gospel message. Forgiveness and Christ cannot be separated. Without Him there is no such thing as forgiveness of sin.

While God is willing to forgive, and has provided the way of forgiveness, even the power of forgiveness, making forgiveness available to all mankind, one may never be forgiven even though it is a gift. It is a gift given and received on certain conditions. There is a giver of the gift, but there must also be a willing receiver of the gift. Acts 26:18 teaches that forgiveness is conditioned upon the opening of the eyes to the truth, turning from darkness to light, away from the power of Satan and to God. The principle is clearly stated in Second Chronicles 7:14, *"If my people, which are called by my name... shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."* Matthew 4:12 states the conditional nature of forgiveness in general terms of seeing and perceiving, hearing and understanding, turning from sin. More specifically, Acts 10:43, *"...whosoever shall believe in him shall receive remission of sins."* Romans 3:25, speaking of Christ, *"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation*

through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." There is also the condition of repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). *"Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."* Obedience to these conditions initiates one into the spiritual realm of spiritual life called repeatedly in Scripture as being *"in Christ"* where salvation is(Second Timothy 2:10).

Once in Christ we are cleansed, sanctified, and our past sins held against us no more (Hebrews 10:8; Second Peter 1:9). When we sin, even though we are Christians, we will not live a life of sin (Romans 6:9), but will be faithful to Christ (Romans 6:1,2). It is not impossible for us to sin, but it is inconsistent and incompatible for us to live a life of sin. In this sense we cannot keep on sinning (First John 3:9). But we dare not contend that as Christians we never sin (First John 1:8,10). There are simply too many revelations in the Bible of Christians sinning to ever deny that possibility and probability.

But when we sin we can be forgiven of sin. But, again, it is conditional. Acts 8:22 teaches one must repent and pray. First John 1:9 teaches we must confess our sins. This is not the way one is forgiven who has never been baptized into Christ, but the way one who has been baptized into Christ is forgiven of sins committed once he is in Christ. John says we must *"walk in the light as he is in the light"*, (First John 1:7), denoting the manner of life we are expected to live as Christians.

Attitude Toward Others Counts

Please note further God's attitude toward sinners with respect to forgiving them. Did not Jesus pray, *"Father, forgive them..."* (Luke 23:34)? He desired forgiveness even of His bitterest enemies. It was not a prayer that they would be forgiven apart from meeting the conditions later proclaimed in the gospel, but that they might have and take advantage of opportunities to meet those conditions. But does not this show us conclusively God's attitude, His willingness toward those who offend through sin?

Matthew 6:12,15, "*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors... For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*" Colossians 2:13, "*Forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*" Ephesians 4:32, "*Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*" Do not these passages teach us what our attitude should be toward those who have trespassed against us? Inasmuch as we look to God for forgiveness, should we not also be willing to be forgiving? I never knew a person who sinned against me who was worth the loss of my soul by my unwillingness to forgive.

We must develop the spirit possessed by Stephen. Acts 7:60, "*And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*" Paul, who was certainly one of those for whom Stephen prayed, having suffered much persecution because of his life of service in Christ, also prayed as he neared the end of his way, "*At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men have forsaken me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.*" We must be as Paul admonished the Corinthians to be toward a brother who had sinned but later repented. Second Corinthians 2:7, "*So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.*"

The one who nurses grudges, unwilling to forgive, destroys the very bridge over which he must cross to enter heaven. Mercy, grace, sympathy, compassion, and genuine Christian love are those good qualities that serve to motivate the child of God to hold and manifest a forgiving spirit. Such a spirit is essential in being forgiven of our own sins.

What Limit?

There should be no limit to our willingness to forgive. Matthew 18:21, "*Then Peter came to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto*

thee, Until seven times, but until seventy times seven." Luke 17:3,4, *"Take heed to yourselves; If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn against to thee saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."*

We are not responsible for one who will not repent, even though we can encourage him to do so. His sin cannot be forgiven unless he does repent. God does not forgive those who will not repent, but is always willing and ready to forgive the penitent. There is no limit placed on how many times He will forgive. Nor should there be a limit with us toward those who truly repent. The one who sins has a duty to see the evil of his way and turn from it. But the one sinned against has the duty to be forgiving when he does turn away from his sins.

May it be, therefore, that we will see our own need of forgiveness from God, seek forgiveness, receive the gift of forgiveness by meeting the conditions of forgiveness, then live a life in an attitude of forgiveness toward others even as the Lord did toward us.

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The Christian and His Country

Those of us who live in the United States live in a land that has been bountifully blessed. We are citizens. What does the Bible teach about our relationship and duty to the nation in which live? While we know the faith of Christ causes us to look toward heaven, it also governs how we live in this life, and deals with matters of life, even our citizenship in an earthly kingdom.

Under the Mosaic system under of Israel lived there was what we would call today the union of church and state. The law of Moses regulated spiritual, civic, and domestic

matters, including religious service, civil duties and privileges, and personal matters. Christ authorized the recognition of the distinction between church and state. Matthew 22:21, "*Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*" We sustain different relationships toward government and toward God. They are separate one from the other, although all things are governed by duty to God. The kingdom of Christ is not an earthly kingdom like those of this world. His is a spiritual kingdom. When Jesus was before Pilate He affirmed, John 18:36, "*My kingdom is not of this world.*" There are two kinds of kingdoms, one earthly, the other spiritual. But they are not the same, not united, but separate.

Ordained of God

Civil government is ordained of God. Romans 13:1-6, "*Let every soul be subject unto the higher power. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same, for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.*" God has not ordained any one particular kind of civil government, but He has ordained that there be regulatory forces over society, without which there could not exist civilized society. Obviously, God is more pleased with a system of government that would be favorable to His spiritual kingdom than one that would suppress it and be antagonistic toward it.

There is another divinely ordained government, however. That is the Lord's church, His spiritual kingdom. It is different from the civil government. Matthew 16:16-19 shows us how the Lord uses the terms "church" and "kingdom" interchangeably. Those in the

church have been "*delivered... from the power of darkness and... translated... into the kingdom of his dear Son.*" (Colossians 1:13). This spiritual government is regulated by spiritual laws of the New Testament. It has a spiritual mission of glorifying God and saving souls from sin, being the pillar and ground of God's spiritual truth, conducting its spiritual warfare against the forces of spiritual wickedness with spiritual weaponry. It spreads its borders and defends itself by the "*sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.*" (Ephesians 6:17). It seeks to convert the heart and mind, and thereby the life of human beings into the service of man's Creator and Judge. Other weaponry consists of truth, righteousness, the gospel faith, salvation (Ephesians 6).

They Operate Differently

Civil government is different in nature, purpose, means of operation, and laws under which it operates from the spiritual kingdom. It is an oft-committed error to take laws that apply to one and impose them on the other. The same can be said regarding the home. These three divinely instituted institutions, the civil government, the home, and the church, are not equated , but each has its distinctive purpose and operation.

The Sermon of the Mount, the law of the spiritual kingdom, cannot be used as the standard and criteria for the conduct of civil government. Civil government has the right to use physical force to enforce its authority, defend itself, and protect its existence (Romans 13:4). But this is not so concerning the church. The civil government has the right to wield the sword, an instrument of death, and carry out what we call capital punishment, but not so in the home or the church. John 18:36 shows not only a different nature of the kingdoms, but the approved right of the civil government to use force. That which civil government is ordained to do is morally right before God. God has never ordained and approved what is immoral. The idea that "all human government is evil" is a false doctrine. Those attending to the proper functions of government are doing what God wills to be done. The state is out of place to invade the spiritual realm and the church is out of place to attempt to regulate the appointments reserved for civil

government. These two divinely appointed kingdoms have their divinely appointed work, purpose, and methods of operation and they are not the same nor should we try to operate them the same. Too often, neither the government nor the church is tending to the business God has appointed them to do.

Citizens of Both

The Christian is a citizen of both kingdoms. Paul was a Christian, but also a Roman. This dual citizenship contains the potential of conflict, but not necessarily so. In many nations the laws of men have made it difficult for Christians. But the Christian has duties to both governments, receiving benefits from both. He is also allowed privileges from both. Regarding civil government there are some things we must do, some things we may do, some things the government may allow or even command that Christians cannot do.

Christians are directed to pay taxes (Romans 13:6,7; Matthew 22:21). They are taught to obey the laws of the land and submit to the authority of those in civil power (Romans 13:1,5; First Peter 2:13,14). The Christian enjoys protection from the lawless because he is a citizen of the earthly kingdom over which civil rulers reign (Romans 13:3,4; First Peter 2:14). This protection is for all citizens, not just for the Christian. The Christian enjoys this benefit, not because he is a Christian, but because he is a citizen of the earthly power. Those enforcing civil law are doing what God requires. This is not an evil and sinful work, and those involved do not sin as they do what God requires.

Christians are to pray for their leaders that we might live quiet and peaceful lives (First Timothy 2:1,2). The prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16). Christians cannot do all that the government may permit because the government will allow many things that God says are sinful, such as drinking alcoholic beverages, divorce for any and no cause, gambling, etc. Just because something is legal does not mean it is approved of God. God never sanctions what is immoral. But the Christian must live within the limitations of legality nonetheless, with one exception.

Which Has Priority of Allegiance?

The Christian cannot do anything required by civil government that requires him to violate and disobey the law of God. Men make civil laws. God made spiritual laws. Our first allegiance is to God (Matthew 6:33). In Acts 5:29 we read where the apostles, though commanded by earthly authorities to cease preaching the gospel, responded that they would obey God rather than men. Here is where conflict between the two kingdoms may arise. For the government to require what God disallows, or forbid what God commands, is to step outside its ordained authority. While we cannot disobey laws that we simply do not like, we must ignore laws, commands, and orders that demand we violate God's law.

There are privileges the civil government may allow that are indifferent as far as being faithful to God is concerned. They are neither spiritually right or wrong. Voting is one such privilege. Christians may vote or they may choose not to vote. Either way no sin is involved. However, the influence of Christian people might make society better and produce leaders of better quality if they would exercise their influence by the use of this privilege. All nations do not allow its citizens such a privilege as we possibly too often take for granted.

We may hold public office. Erastus was a chamberlain, the treasurer of the city (Romans 16:23). Nothing is even suggested that the Ethiopian had to resign his post as a government official upon coming to Christ. Cornelius was a Roman soldier and nothing is suggested of his resignation. There were Christians in Caesar's household, official government people. When John the Baptist, in his work of preparing the way for the kingdom, responded to the inquiries of soldiers what they must do, he responded in such fashion that they could remain soldiers because they they were not to take advantage of others and be content with their wages (Luke 3:14). Those that obeyed his instructions would be prepared for the kingdom of the Lord.

A Real Problem

One of the most controversial areas regarding the Christian and civil government is whether he can serve as a soldier or policemen. While this involves relatively few, it is an important matter. Just what governmental people will we allow, and which ones shall we disallow? What of the teachers, clerks, tax collectors, and many elected or appointed officials who are government workers? May they serve or must they remove themselves from all government service? Can one be a postman, or a fireman?

The Scriptures teach that God has ordained government (Romans 13), and has given government certain necessary functions for orderly society, even the right to use physical force to this end, and they are God's ministers in this. Is it sinful for one to do what God has made necessary? Are only the servants of the devil to serve in government as God's ministers? If so, which servants of the devil? Should he be a Hitler, or should he be a good, moral non-Christian? Where is the authority for your answer? It is a strange doctrine that says only the servants of the devil can do God's work and forbid that work to God's own people.

It is in this area that many make the mistake of taking the laws governing God's spiritual kingdom and try to impose them on the operation of civil government. My oldest son once asked me, when he became aware of the doctrine that only non-Christians can serve in government to enforce the laws of the land, what would happen if we were successful and converted everybody, but a few evil people. Just who would enforce the laws against the evil ones, which is the function of government? This is a question those who contend Christians cannot be policemen and soldiers need to face. Has God ordained something that, of necessity, demands that some must be lost in order to do what He has constructed and made necessary? We do not believe this for a moment. We must remember the difference in the functions of the two kingdoms.

Christian Citizens

The best citizen in any country is the Christian. This is because he will obey the laws, work for morality and

righteousness which exalts a nation. He is a living demonstration of good citizenship. Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*" The Christian helps his country best by being righteous and promoting God's righteousness.

God expects us to be loyal, law-abiding, interested supporters of our nation as our nation does what it is ordained of God to do. This becomes a problem as government more and more assumes what it was never intended to assume. It also is difficult when the laws of the land continually defy the laws of God.

If we are a part of governmental service, we should discharge our duty to the nation to the very best of our ability. But always keep in mind that spiritual salvation and the spiritual kingdom comes first. We must be in the spiritual kingdom to be saved for salvation is in it.

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God's Will and Capital Punishment

All preaching must rely on God's Word as final authority. This is true on the subject of capital punishment. This theme is widely discussed, and Christians must know the will of God regarding it. Ignorance of God's will leads to disregard of its solemn demands, will allow mankind to drift on the sea of sentimentality rather than be firmly anchored in the harbor of truth.

Capital punishment means, as the Latin signifies, punishment which takes the head. It means death to the convicted violator of law. It means the life of the offender is justifiably taken by duly ordained authority, which is civil government, and his life is forfeited as punishment for his crime. It does not refer to taking life illegally or without authority, as individuals taking matters into their own hands for revenge, lynch mobs,

etc. It refers to that which is executed by government according to authorized procedures.

Genesis 9:5,6, "*And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man: at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.*"

After the flood at the time of Noah, before the thunder and lightning that accompanied the giving of the Mosaic Law, God expressed His attitude toward capital punishment, especially when the crime committed was murder. There is nothing in this command that implies, explains, or infers the principle was merely a local, national, or temporary principle. This was not given to any one special nation but to all people. We shall show this principle applies under the guidance of the New Testament.

The Reason Behind It

The reason for capital punishment is because of the dignity and sacredness of human life. "*For in the image of God made he man.*" Those who do not respect the dignity and sacredness of human life and take life forfeit their right to live. Just so long as man is in the image of God will this law of capital punishment be the will of God. Only when the reason for it becomes untrue will the law become invalid. Ironic as it may appear, God grants the right to take life from those who do not respect human life. It is a law designed to protect life by removing from life those who do not have proper respect for human life.

There are those who oppose capital punishment. They have various reasons which, upon close scrutiny, prove to lack validity. History reveals a fluctuating sentiment regarding capital punishment. Presently, it seems to flow against it. For nearly two hundred years our government practiced capital punishment, and still allows it in extreme instances. It was accepted in every responsible mind as legal, civil, moral, and recognized as constitutional. Now, it is questioned and in many

ways human life is disposed without fear of severe recriminations. Divine law has not changed on this point. Even our Constitution has not changed. But man's unwillingness to abide by the law has changed.

In our present world we have conditions of permissiveness and distortion of law even by judicial authorities. Many think it is their duty to overturn whatever has been before their own time. Protection for morality and human dignity has been virtually destroyed, just as it was with Judah and Northern Israel before the fall of those nations. Filth is denied to be filth. Drunkenness is considered a mere disease. Pornography is called art. Profanity runs at high tide. Freedom is interpreted to be license. Marriage and the home are under attack as archaic institutions. We live in a time where the "woes" of God apply. Isaiah 5:20, "*Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*"

Government Often Fails Us

Our courts have become so lenient with the criminal and indifferent to the rights of actual and potential victims. Even the slightest clerical miscues can allow a vicious savage criminal go free after arrogantly and defiantly committing crime after crime against innocent people. Such is the reality of our present nation. Only God knows where this degeneracy in high and low places will take us, and how long He will permit His blessings to flow in spite of our sinfulness. But this we do know. Regardless of man's thinking, God's will remains unchanged. God's standard of morality does not vary with the customs of man nor are they affected by human sentimentality, pseudo-intellectualism, and the misrepresentations of love.

What About "Kill?"

Some argue that the Ten Commandments say, "*Thou shalt not kill.*" This is true. Yet, the same God, to the same people, under the same authority commissioned death for certain crimes. The commandment did not forbid capital punishment. It does not forbid taking

human life in all circumstances. What is forbidden is murder, not merely the taking of human life. All killing of humans is not murder. People die as a result of accidents, self-defense, even in war.

There are seven Hebrew words translated "*kill.*" There are at least that many in Greek. But one word in particular is used when the command not to kill is given and that is the word meaning murder. This does not forbid legal, moral, often commanded executions, whether in the line of law enforcement or national preservation. Punitive killing by proper authorities is not murder. We have no right to close our eyes to this reality and truth if we really want to know what the will of God is. You may oppose capital punishment if you choose, but you will have to find other grounds than ,"*Thou shalt not kill.*"

Some argue that the possibility of an innocent one being executed should remove capital punishment altogether. We must grant that possibly, even with all precautions that can be taken, innocent ones may die. That such has happened we cannot deny. But the abuse and misuse of capital punishment, and the change of human error was just as great as when God gave the law. But He still gave it. The possibility of human error is not sufficient to repeal or dismiss, set aside or ignore divine will. The abuse of a thing does not dispose of the valid use of a thing. God's law allowing capital punishment remains firmly entrenched.

A Secondary Purpose

Some contend it does not deter crime. This may well have some validity. (It is practiced so inconsistently and infrequently, how could one know?) Only proper teaching that changes the hearts of men can really prevent and deter crime, although the fear of punishment does tend to deter crime. Remove all punishments for all crimes and you will soon see that punishment does deter crime. But capital punishment is not primarily a deterrent to crime, but a punishment for crime. Since much crime is committed by repeaters, it would deter them once they were executed. Even the warnings of hell do not keep some people from sinning,

but hell is a deterrent, but more a punishment. The same is true with capital punishment. One reason capital punishment is not more effective as a deterrent is because it is not practiced consistently, persistently, and with reasonable speed. Read Ecclesiastes 8:11. The legal "red tape," weak administration of criminal law, emphasis on the "rights" of criminals rather than the "wrongs" of criminals and the "rights" of victims has destroyed much of the criminal's fear of punishment, especially capital punishment. Our laws and officials allow indefinite appeals from decisions and convictions of guilt. Some crimes have gone unpunished for years on end even though the criminal has been convicted and the penalty specified. This is why capital punishment "does not work." Misnamed mercy has become an excuse for calamitous injustice that tends to encourage and even condone crime. It is even the case quite often that the news media makes martyrs of criminals as they face their just due. What kind of society have we become?

The United States reels and sways under the affect of drug addiction and similar crimes. In some countries, where the death penalty is exacted for drug peddling illicitly, the use of drugs is minimal. Does not this demonstrate the invalidity of the claim that the death penalty does not deter crime? It would be a blessing if our nation adopted the death penalty for a number of crimes. This would cleanse the nation of much dross. Nations where capital punishment is reasonably and speedily executed without the endless wrangles over irrelevant matters, murder is ten times less prevalent per capita than in our "enlightened" and permissive society. But capital punishment is primarily to punish. The deterrent to crime that certainly follows is a beneficial by-product.

It Is Unloving?

Some contend capital punishment is against Christian love. They think it is inhumane, lacking compassion, even racist. But the same God who ordains capital punishment is the author of love. When considering love, why should we not consider love for God, love for truth, love for justice, love for victims, love for the innocent, love for the potential victims. Why is the only

love some consider is their misguided and misdirected, misinformed and malpracticed "love" toward those who have shown no love toward their fellowman? It is not love to give license to evil, encourage it, or condone it. It is not love to remain passive as wickedness runs rampant over the land, subverting male and female, rich and poor, young and old. Love for the criminal is not the all-transcending love. There are others loves that take priority over indulgence of those who decide to criminalize society.

Every passage, without exception, that is used to reject capital punishment, legal coercive force, defensive warfare, self-defense, is in the context of forbidding personal vengeance and retaliation, prohibiting one from taking the law into one's own hands. Or the passage refers to the operation of God's spiritual kingdom, not the operation of God ordained civil government. To apply any passage in this fashion is to misapply it.

Wasn't That Under the Old Law?

But some complain that Genesis 9:5,6 was before Christ. What about under Christ? The New Testament affirms this same position of capital punishment. Note closely. Matthew 26:52-54, after Peter has used his sword, cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest, Jesus told him to put the sword in its place because it was not Peter's prerogative to take the law into his own hands. He did not say there was no place for the sword to be used. In fact, Paul affirms the sword is borne by civil government properly. The sword represented the power to kill. But Christ told Peter to sheath it because he did not have the right to use it. What Peter was trying to do was out of place at that time because Scripture was being fulfilled. The sword was not to be used for personal retaliation, lest those who so use it also perish in the same manner.

Romans 13:1-7 shows government ordained of God can use the sword and does not bear it in vain. This as a specific ordination by God for government to use physical power, such as the sword, an instrument of death, to enforce its laws and preserve its control. God

never gave government the right to do something immoral, but He did ordain capital punishment by the civil authorities. Christians are to support the government in that practice.

Acts twenty-one and twenty-three was an instance where the power of the sword was employed for the protection of Paul. Paul never denounced its use nor intimated the sinfulness of those who used it simply because they used it. Paul was not one to do wrong or allow wrong so good might come.

Acts 25:10,11, while pleading innocent of violations, Paul said he was willing to die if guilty as charged. He did not suggest the government did not have the right to take his life if he was guilty, but showed his willingness to submit to the right government had.

Regarding the persecutors of the church, Revelation 13:10, the principle is again affirmed. Such power is not for personal vengeance, but it is the tool of the vengeance of God, as taught in Romans 12:19.

The Real Question

We have sympathy for those who commit crimes that properly call for their death. But our sympathy, or lack of it, is not the question here. Whatever nations may do regarding capital punishment is one thing. But there is no room for doubt regarding God's will. His will remains as expressed near the beginning of human existence. His law is still in force and will remain so even if men and nations resist it. We only prove ourselves fools to think we know better about such things than the One who gave us all things. Unless and until we properly apply the rules God has decreed, we shall continue to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. We are seeing the tragic results in our own soceity and in our own day of the disavowal of the propriety of capital punishment.

* * * * *

I am aware that some object to points made on the subjects in this edition. But just because some object is no reason to set truth aside.

Listen to the Right One



People seek advice. When they have problems, face challenges, get opportunities, they seek advice. So often people get bad advice because they simply have sought it from the wrong ones. They listen to the wrong people. Why listen to those who show no love for God, morality, the Bible, the church, and expect them to tell you the way you ought to go? God sent His Son into the world for a number of purposes, among them, to be an example for us to follow (1 Pet. 2:21). What's the matter with some of us? Isn't the Christ good enough to guide us anymore? Do we know someone better? Nobody will do better than to listen to God's Word.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is available.

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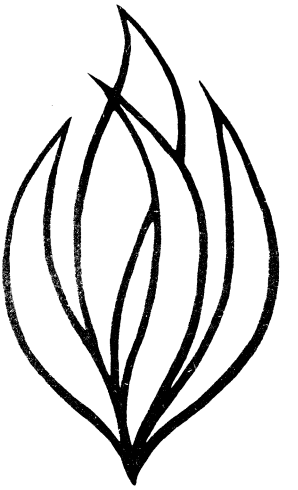

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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Attitude Toward False Doctrines and False Teachers

The Christian can expect to encounter many problems as he tries to live according to the doctrine of Christ. There are few problems that give the Christian more concern or requires more thought than what his attitude and action should be toward those who teach false doctrines, whether in or out of the church.

The problems regarding those outside the body of Christ are more easily understood than when such exists inside the body. Ephesians 5:11, *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* Second Corinthians 6:14-16, *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them,, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Wherefore come ye out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."* But the attitude and action of the Christian toward false doctrines among brethren is where the gravest portions of the problem really lie because the false teachers are in the same spiritual family, the church.

Why the Concern?

Why should we be concerned about this? It is because false doctrines destroy, and that is all they can do. Truth is what saves (John 8:32). Christ warned against false doctrines. Matthew 16:6,11,12, *"Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees*

and of the Saducess. How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Saducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Saducees." Again in Matthew 15:9, *"But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* Paul also warned, Galatians 1:8,9, *"But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."* Scriptures that condemn false doctrines can be multiplied in their reading. There are few, if any, who would contend false doctrines are good, but there are those who think it makes little difference.

First Corinthians 5:6,7, when Paul was dealing with false ways, *"...Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened."* To allow false doctrines to go without opposition is to invite rebellion against the truth. Galatians 5:9, *"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."* Paul's attitude toward those who taught falsely in the church was stated in Galatians 2:5, *"To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."*

False Ways Often Followed

That false ways are often followed is evident from observation of history and present society when these ways are compared with what God has declared to be true and false. That even the church is subject to following false ways is evident from the history of the church, plus the many warnings that are repeatedly given in the New Testament against false doctrines and false teachers.

How is it that the church, the very institution God set to be the pillar and ground of the truth, can become involved in and even overcome by false doctrines? As we analyze the apostasy which Paul prophesied in First Timothy four and First Thessalonians two, we see that God's people were led away from the truth a step at a

time, bit by bit, a little here, little there, steps ever so slight, so slight that they went undetected by inattentive Christians. We know the church did fall away. We are not to think that the Lord's church fell away in a single bound by one big step, or even a few steps. Such was not the case. But we know the difference between the New Testament church and the ecclesiastical system of Romanism that existed in the dark ages. The difference is glaring. But we are not to think what was erroneously called Christianity took that leap from truth in one giant bound. Paul warned how the apostasy would come. First Timothy 4:1, "*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils...*" Notice, not all would depart at once, but it would begin with SOME departing, first a few, then more and more. Acts 20:28-30, Paul speaking to the overseers of the church of Ephesus, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock, also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*" That is how apostasy became a reality. The attitude toward error was one of tolerance as it grew.

In The History of Israel

As one gazes into the pages of the Old Testament and sees God's chosen nation, Israel, we see time and time again they worshipped idols and committed other acts of abomination. We are made to wonder how such a people who had been exposed to God's truth could ever reach such a state! It was because of their **peers, prophets, princes, priests,** and **people** (and if like today, we could add **professors**). They were like peas in the same pod, rebellious against God's authority. Their neighbors influenced them and they failed to adhere closely to what God's Word commanded. They did not jump into such a deplorable state with one leap, but gradually drifted into it. As Jesus said, "*If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*" (Matthew 15:14). This is exactly what happened.

What Must Be Done

When error arises, the first thing to be done is to make an attempt to correct it. This is the right attitude toward it. Error is not corrected by simply denying it exists. It takes more than a simple decree that evil is good for it to be good. It takes Biblical evidence, Biblical teaching, to prove the correctness of any doctrine or practice. Too often the standard used during the gradual digression is simply discovering what most are doing rather than what the Bible teaches. Truth is not determined by counting noses. When evidence and teaching is presented to show a matter to be wrong, that evidence and the force of it ought to be accepted, or the evidence itself discredited by Scripture. We should make efforts to correct what is wrong. But when you are denied that opportunity, and the truth is ignored, and there are such times, do we just go along with it anyway, to keep peace and fellowship? **Absolutely not!**

As we seek the Christlike attitude toward false doctrines and false teachers, especially among brethren, we must consider Second John 9-11. "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine,, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed. For he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds.*" The doctrine or teaching of Christ is possessive phrase, meaning the teaching or doctrine that is of, comes from, belongs to, and by the authority of Christ. We are forbidden to bid Godspeed to those who teach outside that realm or body of truth. We are forbidden to approve of the course such teachers pursue and promote. We have a responsibility in what we encourage and endorse. We become guilty of sin by promoting things that have been proven to lead the church into error. John again warned, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" By what standard do we try, prove, put to the test, what we hear? Can it be anything other than the all-sufficient Scriptures? (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Second Peter 2:1,2, "*But there were false prophets also among the people even as there shall be false teachers among you, who*

privily bring is damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that brought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." It is an unfortunate fact of life that many are led away by false doctrines and false teachers.

Are False Teachers Honest?

This is not to say that all who teach error, nor all who follow error, are deliberately and necessarily dishonest and desire to defy God. Such may well be the case with some, possibly most, but certainly not all. Saul of Tarsus was a demonstration of honesty in error, as was Apollos. Some are simply lacking knowledge of what the Bible teaches, and do not see the trends of events. Too often brethren are like the pig that the farmer easily led to the slaughter by dropping grains of corn just in front of the pig. The pig, never looking up to see where he was going, grabbed each kernel, one at a time, until he was led to his doom. The fact that people can be honest and sincere and still be wrong is well established by Scripture. They are still wrong, and none ought presume such could not be the case with himself. There is a way to know whether you are believing truth or error, and that is by measuring by the Word. That is the only way.

Often brethren are led away by well-meaning friends and lifetime associates. We are influenced by the so-called scholars, by our children, marriages, and by those with charismatic personalities. Some can have error pointed out to them, but because of those who are involved in it, they remain reluctant to oppose it. That is a case of dishonesty. True enough, opposition to false doctrine may well cost friends, even family. You may run aground with those who profess to be "somewhat." Paul warned the Galatians that they were "*bewitched,*" meaning they were deceived. They were not stupid, but they had not opened their eyes and used their knowledge in detecting which direction they were going, and what they were supporting. It was far more deadly than they realized. If they had been more cautious, and remained loyal to the Word that had been proved before them, they would not have found themselves in the absurd position which Paul noted. He called them "*foolish Galatians,*"

not because of hatred for them (which is never the right attitude toward those who hold error), but in his determined attempt to keep them from pursuing a path that would inevitably lead where they did not want to go. They had been subjected to an influence that seemed innocent on the surface, an influence that even contained some truth, but an influence that was taking the church away from the pure and noble standard of truth, an influence that eventually subverted most of the church of the first century, at least the churches of which we read in the New Testament.

Deception

The early and ancient church was deceived into accepting error by being overwhelmed with the magnetism of personalities that mixed large portions of truth with smaller portions of error, enough truth to entice brethren to support and rely upon them, and enough error that it eventually so poisoned the church that it fell away. How relevant this is in the church now!

Who would like to drink a large, cool, refreshing looking drink that had only one trouble with it, that trouble being that it contained a small portion of deadly poison, enough to kill? People can be deceived to think they are doing no harm in what they do, support, and encourage because there is also some good presented alongside it. But it is folly to shut one's eyes to the overall direction and trend many promoters and promotions are taking the Lord's church today. It is not wrong to urge an attitude of caution, and reject that which is not sound according to "*thus saith the Lord.*"

If Acquila and Priscilla had possessed the same attitude toward error some "loving" brethren possess today, they would never have bothered with correcting Apollos and his imperfect message in Acts eighteen. Apollos was still teaching the validity of John's baptism after it was no longer valid. Did that matter? He taught a lot of truth regarding Christ. He was mighty in the Scriptures. But if false portions of his message had not been corrected, it would have subverted the souls of many everywhere it was believed. Fortunately, Apollos accepted the truth when it was presented, which proves his honesty.

Everyone does not accept truth when presented. But what if he just continued to ignore the truth? Would that have mattered? Some today do not seem to think so. Certainly it would have mattered. It would have been improper and unloving for brethren to support him just because he taught some truth alongside his error.

There is no way to misunderstand what the Holy Spirit teaches regarding false teachers who do not turn from their error. Understanding is not the problem regarding Romans 16:17,18 and Second Thessalonians 3:6, and similar instructions. Accepting truth and being honest with what the Word teaches is the problem. Many are just dishonest with the truth.

We Need Paul's Attitude

Paul wrote how he was often in many perils of various sorts, one of which was being in perils of false brethren (Second Corinthians 11:26). Paul warned Timothy, Second Timothy 4:1-5, "*I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.*" One can easily see in our time how those who warn of liberalism, modernism, worldliness, unauthorized activities, are maligned, ridiculed, berated, and disparaged by the very ones who loudly claim a superiority in love and piety. It does not take a church historian or a so-called Biblical scholar to know that the church today is not near so informed in the Bible as in past years. Brethren on the whole are less determined to insist on "*thus saith the Lord*" for what they do, teach, and practice. Many shun doing battle even when necessary in order to preserve faithfulness. Too many are simply willing to compromise, surrender, or go along quietly with error and those who promote it.

That is **not** the right attitude toward false doctrines and false teachers. Thankfully, all are not that way.

When Change is Calamity

Some have claimed the change of attitude in the church toward truth and error is wholesome, maturing, coming of age, and a demonstration of love and tolerance. The change in attitude toward error is none of those things. God's Word says God hates every false way (Psalm 119:104). Shall we do otherwise? Shall we allow ourselves to drift? Many have not come of age, matured, shown love, but only learned to tolerate error.

Let me be specific in one area so we call can understand what I mean. Consider the difference between the Christian Church and the Lord's church. They are glaring and numerous. It was not always as obvious. At first, the difference was serious because it pertained to the matter of authority and respect for it. But there were few manifestations of it. But as time passed, more and more it was evident that people considered the Bible differently. Then we saw the rise of the missionary society, then instrumental music, and from there came women in the places of authority, women preachers, change in local government, observance of "holy days," cooperation and acceptance of denominations, open membership, doing more and more unauthorized things, denial of the necessity of baptism, even denial of verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture. Digression produced another denomination.

It did not start out to do that, nor was that the intent. It began with a compromising attitude toward the mixture of error and truth, a tolerance of false doctrines and false teachers. People failed to commend what Scripture commends and failed to condemn what Scripture condemns. They followed the lead and influence of those who advocated digressive words and ways, leaving the "*thus saith the Lord*" position, which is the only attitude one can acceptably have toward everything. In time, division occurred, a division that could have been avoided if more brethren had "blown the whistle" on digression and false teachers, and more would have respected God's will above their own.

History Is Repeating Itself

We are experiencing similar things in churches of Christ today that disrupt unity, fellowship, and growth. Many have changed their attitude toward authority, the work of the church, worship, worldliness, and decided it best to have peace without truth. There will be souls in hell that could have been saved, because they have spent their energies and talents promoting and condoning what it not according the Scripture. Many others, who might have been saved, will never know the truth because the message they hear is distorted and perverted. As in Paul's day when the "*mystery of iniquity*" was already at work, it is at work in our own day, being led by colleges that uphold false doctrines and false teachers, weak and fearful elderships, the large, monied, worldly, compromising churches with their highly financed clergymen and staffs. The list of false doctrines grows in length with each step they take.

As in yesteryear, those who warn of apostasy are called everything ugly, even by those who claim to have the loving piety that rivals that of Christ. But let us not think false doctrines and false teachers can be ignored. To be friends with God's enemies is treason. Christ did not ignore them, but fought against them. So must we.

Only truth will make us free. God's Word is truth. Addition or subtraction perverts the clear stream of saving truth. While we must work in growing in grace and knowledge, we must remain alert to search the Scriptures to determine what is true, diligently standing for the right, and just as diligently resisting the false doctrines and false teachers who have risen among God's people. Anything less is to fail in loyal service to the Christ who died for us. This is the right attitude that we must posses without fail, and act accordingly.

* * * * *

This lesson is somewhat longer than most that appear in *A Burning Fire*. But few lessons are needed more than the sentiments of this one.

We Can Know Truth

John 8:32, "*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*"

John 17:17, " *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*"

Second Timothy 2:15, "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*"

Hebrews 1:1,2, "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in the these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*"

We have only one primary point to make in this lesson. As surely as God is, as surely as He has spoken, we can know the truth if we will study the Word of God. It is not a matter of guesswork or mere probability, but knowledge of the Bible is knowledge of the truth. The Bible is the source of truth regarding God and man's relationship to Him. We can know what that truth is.

The Bible claims to be God's Word (Second Timothy 3:16,17). If it is not, we have no reason to place confidence in anything else revealed therein. We are aware that the religion of Christ has many deadly enemies. They exist both in and out of the church. Those who would be faithful to Christ have the privilege and duty to present the truth, preach it, and defend it against its enemies. "*Preach the word; be instant, in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*" (Second Timothy 4:2). "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" (Mark 16:15). Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:17). God has given us armor with which to do battle (Ephesians 6), and to "*contend earnestly for the faith*" (Jude 3). Beware of any who would say that the truth needs no defense or that the truth will defend

itself. We are confident that none can crush truth forever. But we have the obligation to defend it.

Against Truth

It has become the wail and cry of liberals and other antagonists against the truth in their efforts to blunt the defenses of the truth to say the truth needs no defense. They do not believe what they are saying because what they are saying is what they believe to be the truth, and they are vigorously prosecuting and defending their views. But they would hope to dampen the enthusiasm of those who are determined to defend God's truth by persuading that truth needs no defense. They would prefer to be set loose and allowed to run free of opposition to their error.

Another plea of the enemies of truth is that we never can really be sure just what the truth is, we cannot really know it for sure, we can only continue to search for it, but never can ascertain whether we have it. They will condescend only to the point that we might be able to come to what is most probable, but never really know. This is nothing less than blatant agnosticism, and it is even being preached by some of the better known names among the ranks of the Lord's church. Pathetically, even though this charge has been repeatedly proven, there are some weak and wobbly members who do not grasp the seriousness of the contention that we cannot know the truth. Unwittingly, many are advancing the cause of Satan by refusing to reject the agnostics in the church.

Enemies of Truth

We inquire, "Who is the greatest enemy of the truth?" Some might say the scientists. Some scientists are surely anti-Christ, anti-God, anti-everything true according to God's book. But true science is no enemy of the truth. Science deals with the physical, weights, observable data. But the religion of Christ is concerned with spirit, soul, heart, mind, matters beyond the reach of science to study and measure. The proven facts of science have proven to be a friend of the Bible. We need not set aside one proven scientific fact to accept the Bible. There are some atheistic theories we cannot

accept, but these theories are really nothing more than the hypotheses of unbelieving people whose claim is only the expression of what they wish was true. Even though the Bible is not a scientific book, there is no truth of science that contradicts it.

Some people have developed philosophies that counter the Bible, such as the anti-God philosophy of Humanism, based on evolution, and that all things are here as the result of some undesigned, unplanned, unexplainable naturalistic accident. The problem Christian people face is that these false philosophies are taught far and wide as if they were true, even though the proponents of them will not place them on the line for fair and honorable investigation. Science and the Bible agree. Philosophies of men and the Bible often differ. Misunderstanding of the Bible and science will differ. But God's works (the world that science studies) and God's Word (the Bible) are harmonious, as we would expect them to be. But these claims of unbelievers are so persistent that many are asking, as did Pilate, "*What is the truth?*

Is It Absolute?

Some would tell us that there is no way to know absolute truth, that there is no absolute truth, there is no right or wrong, but that everything is relative, and truth is only as you have personally experienced it, being determined by how you feel about it. They say we can only search for truth and must accept as fact that we cannot find that for which we search. Some say you cannot prove the truth, but only believe it, and that you must go by your feelings, or, if religious, you must have some kind of "encounter" with Christ. They deny the Bible is God's truth, but only a means of having this "encounter," and you can come to Christ without the Bible, the church, or any such thing. We might as well face reality, and not just brush these contentions aside because they are being taught on every level of education, over television, in religion, even by some misguided professors in colleges operated by brethren who supposedly love the truth. One has even taught that we cannot prove with certainty that Christianity is the true religion of God, but that it is only the most reasonable, and most likely did come

from God. Just why such people are tolerated in Bible departments is without good sense. Why churches support programs that produce such agnosticism and destruction of faith is evidence of the grave apostasy that has swept many so-called "Churches of Christ."

Under the banner of academic freedom, every kind of faith-destroying theory is being sown in the hearts of the young, even by brethren. When the Scripture is cited to refute their error, they cry, "That is just your interpretation." They do not really believe the Bible is the standard by which to prove what is right and wrong. Once such things were heard only from modernists and denominational seminaries, but now, since so many of "our professors" have become scholars from these seminaries, we hear in classrooms and pulpits this same truth-denying philosophy. Why administrators do not stop it can only be explained by recognizing how they are more concerned with the school being accepted by the academic community than they are interested in the truth of God. Why elders allow such people to preach is beyond explanation.

"What It Means to Me"

Attempts are made to make the Bible mean most anything somebody wants it to mean. Ask them where they get such ideas, and time and time again they will cite some professors in whose class they studied. There they heard, "Evidence does not really prove." There they were taught that evidence proves only if and when the mind accepts the truth. What ridiculous anti-God nonsense! Evidence proves and truth is truth whether anybody ever accepts it. This simply destroys confidence in the reliability of the Bible and dims the light for our path. It would mean that we can never be sure about anything and must be embarrassingly apologetic about everything that we have thought was true. It destroys the Bible as the standard of authority. It makes every man his own god and lawgiver.

If these silly but collegiate contentions are true, what are we doing here on earth anyway? Why are we concerned about right and wrong, Christ and the soul? What difference does it make whether one is a Christian or

not? Each one is being told to "do your own thing" as best he can because this is the best he can know anyway.

We Can Know

I shall show you, from the Bible, that you can know the truth. It is not elusive. It is not just whatever one thinks. We can know truth.

Before going to that task, let me explode beyond recovery and repair this philosophy that we cannot know the truth for sure. If we cannot know, then how do we know we cannot know, and why are the philosophers so dogmatic in their contentions that we cannot know? Do they know we cannot know? How do they know it is true that we cannot know what is true? Are they the only ones who can know anything for sure, and all they know for sure is that nobody can know anything for sure? The whole idea is self-contradictory. Let us face reality. What lies behind this whole "cannot know" doctrine is the egotism of the self-appointed superiors of professors who seem to think they have a monopoly on knowledge and wisdom and that they, not God, are really the final judge of all things. And some of our own, who have drunk deeply from the polluted wells of these agnostic and atheistic seminaries, are pouring more and more of this same kind of anti-God rubbish into the minds of young people being sent to these campuses of so-called "Christian schools," where men teach who claim to believe the truth, but who teach this heresy. Why do not those on these campuses call a halt to such things? Where is their faith and honesty? Are teaching jobs, tenure, acceptance, and money that important? But so many that I know, who say they do not believe we cannot know, are as silent as death when it comes to challenging and rebuking their colleagues.

The Bible says we can know the truth, not just guess at it, and not just locate what seems to be the safest. The Scripture has within itself evidence that it is the Word of God. From evidence we can ascertain and know what is true. Faith is a way of knowing from evidence.

Here Are Some Who Knew

Acts 17:11, "*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*" Why would they do that except the Scripture tells the truth and they could learn it? Jesus said, "*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think that ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.*" Why would Jesus say that if truth could not be ascertained?

Colossians 4:16, "*And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that ye, likewise, read the epistle from Laodicea.*" Why should they do that, since they could not know truth anyway, according to the "wise" men of our time?

Colossians 1:9, "*For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.*" Did Paul believe those people could know the truth, and be sure about it? Did he pray for something he knew could never be anyway?

First Thessalonians 5:21, "*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*" How could we ever do that if we cannot know what is true for sure? By what would you prove anything with any certainty? How could you ever know what was and was not good, if truth is unattainable?

First John 4:1, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" If there is something called false, there must be something called truth. If you know one, you must be able to know the other. What a futile exercise, trying the spirits, if truth cannot be determined with certainty!

Some Others Who Could Know

Shall we go on some more? Yes, we shall, because the matter is of utmost seriousness. First Timothy 4:3, "*Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.*"

What's that? Somebody knew the truth? It says that. Shall we follow the "wise" men and deny it?

Ephesians 3:4, "*Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.*" We can know even as Paul knew from what he wrote.

Ephesians 5:17, "*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*" If some of our seminary trained "scholars" had been alongside Paul they would have been able to correct him when he said we could understand God's will. They could have told Paul that the best anybody can do is to probably find what they feel might possibly be the case. Poor God! If only he had studied at the seminaries and become a college professor He would not have had Paul write such foolishness as the teaching that we can know the truth!

First Timothy 3:15, "*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" If people cannot know truth, how could Timothy know how to behave? And just what is the church to support and proclaim if truth cannot be determined for sure? Shall we just teach doubts and maybe-so's?

Jesus said, "*Ye shall know the truth.*" That settles the matter for believers in Christ. If they question that, they question Christ, His Deity, His perfection, His Messiahship, everything about Him. They are agnostics and destroyers of souls. If we cannot know the truth, there is nothing that will set us free from the onslaughts of sin and hell. It is a serious question to ponder!

A description of false teachers, those who lead others into apostasy, in Second Timothy 3:7, is that they are "*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" Some are just exactly like that among us today. And false teachers they are!

Proverbs 23:23, "*Buy the truth, and sell it not.*" How can you, when you cannot tell what it is? How can we worship in truth (John 4:24)? On and on we can cite passage after passage that refutes the agnostic and

Satanic inspired heresy that we cannot know truth for sure.

Some Do Not Love the Truth

Are you willing to face reality and accept what Scripture teaches? The reason people say nobody can be sure is because they do not love the truth, do not want the truth, want to be allowed to "do their own thing," want to teach and say whatever they wish without opposition, and wish everybody would go their way. They are so pumped up on their own egotism and theological degrees that they think they are the only ones who know anything, and they know most everything, even as they deny anybody can know anything for sure. Why follow such servants of the devil? Why allow such people in classes, pulpits, in schools and churches? But they are there!

Salvation depends upon a knowledge of and conformity to the truth. Without truth, knowing it, believing it, obeying it, we shall be damned. The Lord did not come to simply make men religious. They were that way before He came. He came to save them from sin through obedience to the truth (First Peter 1:22). If truth cannot be known, then God has commanded the impossible and will damn us for not knowing and doing it. What sort of God do you think God is, anyway? The doctrine that we cannot know the truth, and know it for sure, is blasphemy against God!

Romans 10:17, "*Faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" Faith is not taking a leap into the dark. Faith is based on evidence (Hebrews 11:1). We can believe because of the evidence God has revealed. Just as surely as God said something, it is sure and certain and we can know it is so. When God tells us Jesus was born of a virgin, the ravings of atheists, agnostics, infidels, modern translators, college professors, etc. cannot change it. So it is with everything else God has revealed. Faith, founded on evidence, is a way of knowing!

We walk by faith, but not a blind, naive, gullible, senseless, stupid, illogical, unintellectual belief. We do not determine truth through the physical senses or

emotional reactions at the moment. We walk by the Word of God and the evidence revealed there.

We do not contend that all truth is easily learned and easily attained. Much truth is relatively simple to learn. Sometimes it is more difficult, even as Peter noted (Second Peter 3:16). So much more the reason for persistent and diligent study! But to say we cannot know for sure is as contradictory to the truth of the Bible as sin is from righteousness. Truth can be known, proven, learned, believed and obeyed.

You and I may not know the truth, may not obey it even if we know it, but it exists because God has revealed it. We can know it and obey it. If we do we shall be saved. If we don't, we won't. Now, if what I have written is not true, how could you ever show it was not true if you contend that truth cannot be known?

* * * * *

Six Men Who Believed In Jesus

There is a tremendous significance in the identification of Jesus made by John the Baptist when he called Him the "*Lamb of God*" (John 1:29). This was not so much a reference to His character and manner, although we recognize the gentleness of Jesus just as we recognize His strength and power that is suggested when He is called the "*Lion of Judah*" (Revelation 5:5). John referred to Jesus as God's offering for the sins of mankind, a sin offering. "*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.*" (Romans 8:3). Jesus was the sacrificial lamb just as was the lamb that was slain and whose blood was sprinkled on the door posts and lintel by the Israelites immediately prior to their deliverance from the bondage from Egypt (Exodus 12). That lamb was called the

Passover Lamb. Jesus Christ shed His blood at the cross of Calvary for the deliverance of mankind from the bondage of his own sins, indeed, for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). Paul called Jesus "*our Passover*" (First Corinthians 5:7). This action of Jesus, as the Son of God, is a basic truth upon which rests the validity of the blessings and spiritual promises of New Testament Christianity.

Our lesson concerns six men who were convinced of this truth regarding Christ. They were convinced because they had investigated the evidence and had accepted the conclusion and responded to the challenge, "*Come and see*" (John 1:46).

John the Baptist

It is obvious that John the Baptist believed in Jesus. "*After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me. And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore, am I come baptizing with water.*" (John 1:30,31). Whereas John once was not acquainted with Jesus, now he identifies him, "*Behold, the Lamb of God*" (John 1:36). John's mission and message in life was to be the herald, the forerunner, the proclaimer of the coming Christ. Such had been prophesied of him, and emphasized at his birth (Malachi 4:5,6; Luke 1:16,17).

Other events had transpired in the life of Jesus before this one that is recorded in John of which we can read in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This record and event occurred after His baptism at the hands of John and the coming of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, plus the verbal confession that He was the Son of God made by the Father Himself (Matthew 3:14-17). All of these things that had already occurred provided divinely given evidence and a sign unto John the Baptist that Jesus was the Christ. "*And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven, like a dove, and it abode upon him, and I knew him not; but that he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.*"

(John 1:32-34). It was on the basis of this evidence that John believed.

Two Others

We shall refer to two other believers together; men who were not always believers but came to accept the affirmations of Christ as being the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. They are John and Andrew. Verse thirty-five refers to these, "*Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*" One is named Andrew, and the other, although unnamed, was probably John. The omission of one's own name in events where the writer is included was characteristic of writing of that day, and the Holy Spirit used John and his style to provide these inspired Scriptures.

Both had heard John the Baptist preach. The success of that preaching is evidenced by the fact that hearers were led to follow Christ. They were not wedded to their teacher, but to the One of whom the teacher spoke. Here is the measure of the success of preaching even yet.

Upon hearing the testimony, they believed and walked with Christ. They called Him "Rabbi," which means an exalted teacher and Master. They spent the day with Jesus. Surely, speaking with Him, being taught by Him, their faith was secured. "*Faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of the Lord.*" (Romans 10:17). When the day was over, they were convinced of these truths concerning the Christ. The Lamb of God and the provision of sacrifice for sinful man was before them.

Peter

The Scriptures relate how one of these two men, Andrew, sought out another for the Lord, our fourth man for this study. His named was Simon, also later named Peter. "*He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus.*" (John 1:41.42). Andrew realized a responsibility that we all have and should recognize; namely, to tell our own

kin, and all people of the world, to come to a knowledge of the Messiah.

We are aware of the great power and influence for truth that Peter became. Peter owed much to his brother Andrew because he had "*brought him to Jesus.*" If Andrew did no more than this, he contributed to the conversion of untold numbers of people through the ages through the efforts of his prominent and aggressive brother. To bring another person to the Lord and to be instrumental in the salvation of a precious soul is one of the greatest accomplishments in life. We may be weak and possess but one talent. But if we use that talent to save a soul, what a bountiful blessing it produces! Proverbs 11:30, "*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.*"

Philip

The fifth believer was Philip. Found by Christ, he became one of the Lord's apostles. This Philip is to be distinguished from another Philip who preached the gospel to the Ethiopian, who was one of the seven selected to care for widows being neglected, and who later is said to have had daughters who prophesied, living in Caesarea. Not much is said of the Philip of whom we now speak. But he was one who took a lad with a small amount of food to Andrew, who in turn took the lad to Jesus. Jesus used the small portion of food to feed five thousand. He is also the one who took some Gentiles to Christ (John 12:20,21).

The importance of Philip was that he was a living result of what we call personal work. Andrew was quite accomplished in this type of work. Christ is our example in such an effort. Jesus went personally to Philip just as Andrew had gone to Peter. While some may not consider teaching just one person a very sizeable thing, especially in our day when some count success only in terms of numbers, much of the great teaching by Christ was originally delivered to one or two persons, or a few in number. We should not despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10). The lesson on the new birth was preached by Jesus to Nicodemus. He taught of Himself as the water of life to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's

well. He sought out Philip. Many want to discharge their duty to teach others only by proxy, by which I mean, paying somebody to do their teaching for them. While it is right to support preachers and teachers, is it not also something we can and ought to do in conversing about Christ and salvation with others? We have the capacity to talk with others about the weather, sports, politics, the affairs of the day and business matters. Is it too much to mention the soul and the need of Christ sometime? Some feel they have done their mission work to tell somebody else about someone who needs the gospel, which is good, but not enough. But then we see Philip in turn finding Nathanael, who is our sixth man who believed in Jesus.

Nathanael

Nathanael seemed to exhibit at first the greatest amount of skepticism concerning Christ. There was great doubt in his mind. We are told why this was the case with him. Even though he is called a good man "*in whom is no guile*" (John 1:47), possibly Nathanael was overly impressed with the sordid reputation of the city of Nazareth from which Jesus had come and which was His boyhood home city. When told by Philip that Jesus was the One of whom the prophet Moses had written, Nathanael questioned, "*Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?*"

The response of Philip to this question of skepticism is noteworthy. There was testimony and evidence available to show that Jesus was the One of whom Moses spoke, as well as the other prophets. But Philip did not attempt to persuade Philip on the basis of what Jesus meant to Philip. Sometimes people try to win souls by giving their "testimony" about what Jesus means to them. We are not instructed to do that. We are told to tell people what Jesus means. But what he means to various ones may differ from person to person, and one could hear all of that and still never know the truth about Jesus Christ. Philip simply wanted Nathanael to "*come and see*" for himself. It is important that each one have a sincere personal faith, not a borrowed faith from someone else. Each person needs to investigate the evidence for himself. It is convincing. The honest and sincere mind,

upon consideration of the evidence, will recognize the truthfulness of the claims concerning Christ. Philip wanted Nathanael to check the information for himself. If only we were able to get people to open their hearts and minds long enough to allow the evidence that produces faith to have a chance! How dreadfully unfortunate that so many will never take a serious look, but reject Christ in ignorance and arrogance without investigation! They thereby reject their only hope of salvation and never give truth the opportunity to bless them. Why will some people refuse to inquire about the most important of all matters, but will exhaust themselves in searching out information about the trivial, mundane, temporary, earthly matters that have no real importance after all?

When Nathanael met Jesus, Jesus made mention of certain facts about Nathanael that nobody could have known except by divine power. "*Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.*" (John 1:47,48).

Nathanael, now having opportunity to see the evidence of Jesus Christ and His Deity, then said, "*Thou art the Son of God; thou art the king of Israel.*" (John 1:49).

Two Significant Points to Consider

There are two primary points that deserve our respect from all of this. One is the identification of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, the Lamb of God, the Rabbi and Master, the Son of God, the King of spiritual Israel, the One of whom the prophets spoke. All of these identifications are found in the passages we studied. The identity of Jesus is the foundation of Christianity.

Two, all of those who were brought from the state of unbelief to belief were brought through the consideration of the evidence. With minds and hearts that were open and willing to be taught, they heard, they saw, they hearkened. The message persuaded them. And so it is

today in winning souls for Christ. The weapon is the "*sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" (Ephesians 6:17). The gospel is still God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). When we can encourage people of like mind to examine the claims and proofs concerning Christ, to "*come and see*" for themselves, not rely upon what other men say but what the Holy Spirit has revealed in the all-sufficient Word (Second Timothy 3:16,17), therein is the power of persuasion for them to believe and obey unto salvation.

We might add, there were those who were so interested in the welfare of others that they busied themselves in getting the evidence presented to other people. We may not, and probably will not, be successful in winning everyone we attempt to win, everyone we want to win, but our task is to be sure that all people everywhere have the exposure to the only way of salvation, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the whole world.

* * * * *

So You Can Know and Understand My Joy in Producing *A BURNING FIRE.*

It may be negligence on my part to not include excerpts from letters that encourage me, but I have been humbled by good words that so many of you have sent my way. I am a realist and know that my work is not as wonderful as some of you have expressed. But it sure does me good to hear it. It is but a small paper relative to others.

There are many good publications being produced by faithful brethren. We have many papers that are standing for the faith. I commend to you **Contending for the Faith, Firm Foundation, Spiritual Sword, First Century Christian, Sowing the Seed, Reason and Revelation,** church bulletins, and any number of others not named. I do not imply by not naming some that they are not worthwhile and influential. These come to mind at the moment. I am grateful for every effort faithful brethren are making to teach the truth of God. ***A BURNING FIRE*** has its limitations and inadequacies. But I do appreciate the encouragement. JB

Good Words Ignored



Baptist Church Manual, page 81, "It may be laid down as a principle of common sense, which commends itself to every candid mind, that *a commission to do a thing authorizes only the doing of the thing specified.* The doing of all other things is virtually forbidden. There is a maxim of law, that *the expression of one thing is the exclusion of another.*" It cites Biblical illustrations. " For example: God commanded Noah to make an ark of *gopher-wood.* He assigns no reason why gopher-wood should be used. The command, however, is positive, and it forbids the use of every other kind of wood. Abraham was commanded to offer his son Isaac for a burnt offering. He was virtually forbidden to offer any other member of his family." These are good words. But it makes one wonder why, since God authorizes singing in Christian worship and not playing mechanical instruments, Baptists do it anyway. They should practice what they preach on this maxim. JWB

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is available.

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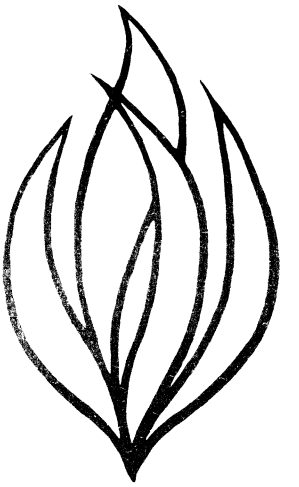

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIV James W. Boyd NUMBER 6

The Christian and the Races

One of the most vile problems of the first century was that of racial tension. Years earlier God had segregated the descendants of Abraham from the rest of humanity. Exodus 19:5,6, "*Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.*"

This special relationship was not based on color of skin, superior mentality, wealth, or power. This came out of the covenant God made with Abraham, "*In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed.*" (Genesis 22:18). When the Lord's kingdom was established, which is the church, this wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was abolished. His blessings in the kingdom are open to all (Mark 16:15; Ephesians 2:14-16; Acts 15:9; Revelation 22:17). "*Whosoever will may come,*" is His will now.

The first few years of the church's existence was almost exclusively composed of converted Jews. They were converted to Christ, but problems arose as the gospel was taken to other races. The reason for the problem was racial in nature as well as religious. The Lord taught Peter by a vision that the gospel is for all (Acts 10:9-16). Peter had preached the universality of the offer of salvation in Christ on Pentecost, but obviously the comprehension of this was not clear (Acts 2:39). Upon arrival at the house of Cornelius, Peter indicated a full grasp of this truth when he said, "*Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.*" In divine confirmation of this truth the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles and they spoke in tongues. The only conclusion that could be drawn from all of this was, "*Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus*

Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

During the ministry of Paul he constantly encountered certain Judaizing teachers, teachers who contended Gentiles must conform to certain tenets of the Mosaic Law in order to be saved. Even Peter exhibited withdrawal from Gentiles in Antioch until Paul rebuked him (Galatians 2). A full discussion of the matter took place in Jerusalem (Acts 15), and the truth was ascertained. But resolution of the prejudices between races was not experienced by all people, even in the church. Racial problems and the matter of the Christian's relationship to those of another race still abide today as it has through the years.

It is a Worldwide Problem

It is elementary to note that the world is in racial crisis. We have Jew versus non-Jew, black versus white, yellow versus red, etc. The evidence of the problem is more pronounced in some portions of the world than others, depending on the extent of mixture of the races in a given locality. But it is prevalent everywhere race touches race. Those of varying racial, religious, economic, educational, and social backgrounds are feeling the forces of prejudice one against the other. None have escaped it. You are doubtless an object of prejudice as well as a possessor of it. The problem in our nation, the United States, is primarily white versus black, black versus Jew, Jew versus Gentile, as well as other tensions between people whose skin pigments differ.

Man's inhumanity to man has been a blighted part of human history. Exploitation, retaliation, lack of consideration has marred the past. It mars the present. It does not oversimplify to say that such tensions exist because many see fit to ignore, even in one's individual life, the teaching of Christ regarding our attitude and treatment of our fellowman.

Many efforts have been made to eradicate the overt actions of prejudice, hatred, and racial bigotry. We should know by now that intolerance of others, racial hatred, suspicion will not be eliminated by legislation, segregation, integration, court decisions, and other such things. Experience shows that such things have often aggravated a bad situation. They have at times prohibited abuses temporarily. But the real problem is a problem of the heart. The Christian's relationship with those of other races is a heart issue.

Same Creator

The Bible teaches that God is the Creator of all men (Acts 17:26). Christ died for all (First John 2:2). Each soul is precious and will be saved or lost. As far as one's relationship to God is concerned, race is immaterial (Galatians 3:28,29).

Many have mistakenly referred to the Old Testament "curse of Ham" as the basis for assigning certain races, particularly the black race, to the role of inferiority. This reflects grave Biblical ignorance. The curse, Genesis 9:25, was upon Canaan, a son of Ham. Nothing indicates the curse had anything to do with skin color, but servitude. People of every race have been in servitude. Nothing indicates all of Ham's descendants were under the curse anyway. Whatever the curse, under Christ such things have no significance any more than the special relationship the Jew had with God .

There may be, and in some instances there are, social justifications and sociological defenses for racial segregation in some respects. But this does not justify unfair racial discrimination. Segregation is not always evil discrimination, even though it often is. Men of every race usually take pride in their own race, and admit to the soundness of judgment that calls for those of basic similarities to remain among those of their own race. Although Biblically one cannot declare racial intermarriages to be sinful, few seriously question the extraordinary problems created in such relationships. The virtues of wisdom and the need of social, religious, economic, educational, and other likenesses urge similar views regarding marriage within one's own race.

Generally, speaking, people of every race with whom I have discussed the matter agree with that.

Racial differences do not justify one being party to oppression and injustice. No one race has the exclusive problem of racial prejudices. It is evident in every race. But Christians will have no part in that. He does not try to deprive another of rights that belong to all humans. He has no right before God to create strife, riot, lawlessness, or create unrest between races. He is neither a rioter, nor does he beat up on other people.

Such wicked extremes are not characteristic of true Christians. Whatever social changes are needed he seeks to expedite through lawful means, Christian conduct, and the spread of the gospel standard. He recognizes that racial differences do not necessarily mean inferiority or superiority, but he is aware of the differences and tries to harmonize them as successfully as he can in his own life and society generally.

Being Different is not Bigotry

The Christian is not insistent on segregation or integration of the races in every association of life. Nobody of any race has ever contended for that among people I have known. There may be exceptions, but generally everybody limits the degree of association for a number of reasons. Certainly there are differences of various sorts between people of different races and cultures, possibly due to heritage, education, training, other elements of environment and inheritance. Who is so foolish to deny that? But these difference do not detract from the fact that we are all human beings, created in the spiritual image of God, souls to be saved or lost, and such differences make no difference regarding spiritual worth or spiritual fellowship between us when we are in Christ.

In the New Testament both masters and slaves were Christian brothers. Both were as likely to be white as of different skin color. But when they became Christians, their social status did not change, but their attitude and actions one toward the other was as Christ would have it. They were brethren in the Lord, helping one another

serve God so they all could reach heaven. While it is physically and mentally impossible to be what some call "totally color blind," because we can see we are of different skin color, the Christian is "color blind" when it comes to the spiritual realm, and doing unto others as he would have others do unto him.

The Christian's Concern

The Christian is not insistent on segregation or integration of the races in every association of life. Some of the most godly Christians I have known in different races agree on that. A person has the right to resist either being imposed upon him as if God has so decreed. Wisdom and expediency play a major role in determining such things, even in the church. But his concern is consideration, Biblical education, spiritual regeneration, and the removal of spiritual barriers between races. The Christian regards each person individually, not as one of a certain generalized class, race, or preconceived category. His standard of conduct toward others is not governed just by tradition, emotion, social pressures, or any such thing, but by the way the Lord would have people treat each other. There is no hatred in his heart toward others, nor contempt for an individual just because one is of a different race, or because of other distinctions over which a person has no control. While there are some who like to shock others and run with disregard of the feelings of others being either intolerant of other races, or being hypocritically inclusive of others, the Christian allows the quiet, natural order of things to characterize his behavior. He does not fly off into racial tangents just to prove himself before a mixed up society.

Let me cite an example where segregation or integration can be determined by good wisdom and judgment. Whether blacks and white wish to belong to the same congregation may be a matter of expediency. They should never be separated because of racial prejudice. It may be thought best, to reach people of either race, that separate congregations exist. But it is wrong and sinful to exclude anybody from the ranks of God's people on the basis of race. People attend congregations that may be more compatible to their personal circumstances.

There is nothing inherently evil about this of itself. Would you condemn a black family for not attending a church made up mostly of white people when they might prefer to attend a church made up mostly of black people? Would you condemn a white Christian for choosing to worship where there are mostly white members? If such a choice were made because of racial prejudice, that s one matter. But cannot one choose to serve God among those with whom he prefers so long as they are faithful brethren? And should not those of a predominantly white membership love and respect those of a predominantly black membership, and vice versa? The answers to these questions are not hard to determine.

We may summarize by saying that the Christian follows what is called the Golden Rule. "*All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them.*" (Matthew 7:12). It is not Christlike to lump everyone of any race together and label all such people to be this way or that way. There are faithful Christians in all races. There are degenerate and obnoxious people in all races. Derogatory names, insults, broad sweeping generalities that seemingly allow foi no individual exceptions are wrong and unfair.

The Christian must keep before him the mission of Christ and continue to serve that cause. Christ came not to relieve all human suffering, change governments, raise or alter all cultural and economic standards, or even primarily to solve all the social inequities that exist in society. He will affect such things only to the extent that mankind will be converted to His truth and live according to His will. He came to save from sin. Other beneficial by-products of this salvation are merely that, by-products. When someone asks, "What are you doing to help solve the racial problems in the world?" the Christian answers, "I am preaching and practicing New Testament Christianity, converting the sinful to Christ."

Oneness

Christians are of one spiritual fold with one Shepherd without regard to racial differences. All are in the one

body of Christ, going to the same heaven, the same way living by the same divine rule. We may worship together at the same place, or we may consider it more expedient to worship in different places, but that separation does not affect our fellowship or brotherly love one for the other any more than it would between two congregations of similar membership. Christians will condemn every form of evil and will truly love his neighbor, which means seeking his neighbor's highest good.

While the world may war, riot, legislate, enforce, exploit, march, bus, loot, burn, curse, restrict, beat, oppress, defame, rebel, or disparage others, seeking revenge and retaliation, promoting unfair exclusions, this will not be the way of those who follow Christ. The racial problems may never be solved in the world, but it is certain that ways most of the world has been going about it do not solve, and often make matters worse. The child of God will respect all men who are respectable, seek peace with all possible, but above all will seek and save the souls of all whether he be of one's same race or not. He will be known for his courtesy and consideration, and will allow the wisdom of God to chart his daily course in this and all other matters of life.

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The Authority of the Bible

NUMBER ONE

If ever there was a time when Christians need to say what we believe and why we believe it, this is the day. I say not with a tone of despair, but with justified and genuine concern, and even more as a challenge, that it is strange that among people who have been a part of efforts to restore the faith revealed in the New Testament, that we need some straight talk about Biblical authority, the necessity for it, and its nature.

Denominations have never accepted the Bible as authority as the Bible demands. At best, they have accepted the Bible alongside their creeds, disciplines, manuals, edicts of councils, conferences, prayer books, feelings, human traditions, later day revelations, etc. But it is increasingly apparent that a renewed emphasis for the need of Biblical authority exists among brethren of the churches of Christ. Too many have adopted too much of the denominational attitude and outlook toward religious authority.

Shall We Put It Aside?

What if I should come before you to preach, but I put the Bible aside? What could I say? Would I even have a place to start or a place to go with any lesson worthy of the identification of a gospel sermon? Would there be any authoritative basis for anything I could preach? But this is what the religious world has done and in the place of the Bible there is a drumbeat of worthless theologies, philosophies, human opinions, politics, social reform, and as often as not, propaganda that is anti-Bible even though it is called preaching the Bible, and coming from the mouths of those egotists who profess themselves to be superior in everything.

While many brethren are unwilling to go that far, just yet, there is too much of what I note among brethren that consists of "how to" pep talks, religious fiction, testimonials, and a page from the emotion-stirring "holy rollers." We have been setting the Bible aside, not all at once, but bit by bit. We have acted, in too many instances, like the Bible is a loose-leaf notebook and we are removing pages one by one.

Some have even declared Genesis one through eleven to be a myth, the flood possibly nothing more than a local flood, even distorting the plan of salvation as if it was grace alone. One of the areas where some brethren are guilty of departing from Biblical authority is in the work of the church. Some years ago some arose to deny work that the Bible does not authorize, but now more and more we see churches involved in activities such as recreation, physical exercise classes, entertainment, social events, ball-games, gymnasiums, secular

education, until one cannot tell the difference between the Lord's church and the denominations with their perverted attitudes toward the church. Many others have for all practical purposes silenced any teaching regarding dancing, social drinking, immodest dress, smoking, etc. because too many of the members are guilty, and preachers and elders prefer to please the people. False doctrines are taught on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, such as is taught in colleges, promoted in workshops, and in written materials. A few continue to rightly condemn the long-hair on males, but most disregard what the Bible teaches and think it acceptable to present themselves as if they are of the drug, rock-and-roll subculture. Who is not aware of the contentions over the direct operation of the Holy Spirit many have adopted? Yes, bit by bit, even some who claim to be New Testament Christians are tearing out verse after verse, page after page, of the Word of God.

I ask where is the real difference between tearing up the Bible bit by bit, and throwing it away abruptly altogether? In fact, the only difference might be, the former is more deceptive and subtle, but both efforts accomplish the same disastrous results. One is blatant, and easily detected. The other is sly, gradual, and goes without notice unless one is very attentive.

Liberalism/Modernism

The most pressing issue facing those who believe the Bible today is the vicious attack of liberalism and modernism. Even now we are hearing some of our "scholars" in Bible departments talking how the threat of liberalism has passed, and now the area of danger is what these liberal professors call "the reactionary right wing." This is to remove attention from their own sordid digression and departure from the truth. We have to make a choice to either respect the Bible as the Word of God and the all-sufficient authority of it, or launch into a "do your own thing" imitation of the failures of denominationalism. Some are already promoting the latter, even as they deny they are doing it. The very nature of the Bible demands you take it all, or nothing. The Bible is not a religious supermarket where you can take what you want and leave out what you do not want.

Unless we are so proud, egotistical, blind, naive, and digressive, we cannot deny the existence of the digressive attitudes and activities that have invaded the Lord's people in recent decades, primarily through the avenue of the Bible departments of the colleges, the sophisticated and know-it-all professors, the compromising administrations, the ecumenical lectureships, the literature of compromise often promoted for the sake of making money but used in Bible classes, and the continued willingness of those who say they are faithful but who keep using, promoting, and endorsing the very people who are leading the church away from the Bible. Toleration of this liberal trend will sweep away much of the Lord's church, if not in our day (and we believe in our day), surely in the generation that follows, because it is designed and intended to "up date, make relevant, change, revise, alter, restructure" the church for modern times.

God's Word

All we know and believe is on the basis of evidence, and that evidence is in Scripture. God has spoken and revealed His will. The Bible is that revelation. When any person gets to the point that "*thus saith the Lord*" is not the standard, and when he thinks there is no necessity for Biblical authority, then nothing is left. When any people become more concerned with reactions, what denominational people may think, how popular and prosperous something may be, then the way of apostasy is already paved and greased. Too many today, in a cowardly and sinister pretense of piety, prefer "peace" at the sacrifice of truth. Many times, and we have seen it, what ought to be the first and dominant consideration in matters pertaining to the church and the truth is neglected altogether in favor of assuring acceptance and favor among certain ones, often among the "big names," the wealthy, socially elite, and worldly minded, numbers-conscious promoters. Time and again, instead of seeking Biblical authority for what is said or done, we hear the statement, "I don't see anything wrong with this or that." Just because somebody may not see any harm in something does not mean that God's authority is supporting it. Our question should be, "What does the

Bible teach?" When we respect the Bible as divine authority, this is what we will be asking.

There are commandments from God that rest entirely upon His authority for which we may not see the reason behind it. It may not be something that appeases our senses of ethics or morality. But it is commanded of us, and because of the sovereignty of God we are accountable to obey. When God speaks, man is to hear and heed. We must have the attitude of Samuel when he said, "*Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth.*" (First Samuel 3:9). We cannot know what God desires unless we hear His Word. When we are not following His directions we are going the wrong way. Man's ways are never superior to His.

He is Authority

Jesus said, "*All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*" (Matthew 28:18). He not only possesses all authority, He is authority. What He taught is that which the Holy Spirit reminded the Lord's apostles (John 14, 15, 16). What they taught was the will of the Lord. What they taught is now embodied in the all-sufficient, authoritative, inerrant, verbally inspired, infallible Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

We want to turn our attention to the nature of the authority of the Bible, which will occupy the rest of this lesson and the second part as well. We approach our study in full realization that the acceptance of the Scriptures is to accept Christ, and to reject the Scriptures is to reject Christ. The authority of Christ is the Bible.

Supreme

His authority is SUPREME authority. Ephesians 1:20-23, where Paul was writing of what God had done, "*Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him*

that filleth all in all." Again, Colossians 1:18, *"And he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."* Our Lord is this authority because He is Deity, and as Deity in the flesh He lived a sinless life. *"For we have a high priest that cannot be touched with feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."* (Hebrews 4:15). *"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."* (First Peter 1:22). His authority is the religious "supreme court." One can appeal no higher. There is no other.

There was a time for Israel when the law that God gave through Moses was the authority. But that law has served its purpose, been fulfilled, and taken out of the way (Matthew 5:17,18; Galatians 3:23-25; Colossians 2:14). No man can set aside God's law except Deity. The Lord Jesus accomplished what that law was designed to introduce. *"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."* (John 1:17).

Jesus said, *"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."* (John 4:34). *"I can of mine own self do nothing; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."* (John 5:30).

There is no council, pope, conference, convention, lectureship, preacher, editor, so-called scholar, school Bible department, perverted Bible, civil government, eldership, social organization, fraternal order, or any such thing that can alter, surpass, overshadow, revise, or in any way change the authority of Jesus Christ.

Sufficient

His authority is SUFFICIENT. It is not partial nor incomplete. None can say, "Here is something we can do in service to God for which we need no divine authority." One of the reasons there have been so many innovation, digressions, and introductions of false ideas into "Christianity" is because some have thought the authority of Christ was lacking in some way and they have supplied what they think the Lord overlooked. How many times have men engaged in something for which

there was no Biblical authority and then cried, "Where does the Bible forbid it?"

That is not the right question. When we do what we do "*in the name of*" Christ, as we are taught to do (Colossians 3:17), we must ask, "Where does the Bible authorize it?" Doing something on the basis that the Bible does not specifically forbid it is to assert the insufficiency of the authority of Christ. On this mistaken notion many brethren have gone into the playground church business, secular education, entertainment, use of mechanical instruments, and any else somebody might want. There is not anything in service to God for which we do not need His authority. Peter said that God has "*given all things that pertain to life and godliness.*" (Second Peter 1:3). I wish all of my brethren believed that. The denominational world never has believed it.

Universal

His authority is UNIVERSAL. His gospel is to be preached to every creature in all the world (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). The faith of Christ is not a family religion as was the Patriarchal system. Nor is it a national religion as was Judaism. Regardless of where people may dwell, those of every nation that fear Him and do His will are acceptable (Acts 10:34,35). What some of our own people need to learn is that the gospel that saves the poor, saves the rich. The gospel that saves the young, saves the old. This concept of making the gospel relevant to the ghetto, or adapting it to the nuclear scientists, or making it fit the singles group, or this divorced group, or this youth group, or this senior citizens group is to miss one of the important characteristics of the authority of Christ. The truth is just as binding on this generation as the past generation, or the next generation. "*The word of the Lord endureth forever.*" (First Peter 1:25). There is no gospel for the north, and a gospel for the south. There is no truth while at home and something different away from home on vacation. There is not one truth for one nation and another truth for a different nation. What the Lord teaches me, He teaches you. Some of our "learned" brethren need to learn that basic fundamental.

While there are passages directed toward women, some toward men, some toward the young, toward parents, preachers, elders, sinners, saints, His authority, His truth, His saving plan does not vary from place to place. It is universal in scope. We shall continue this thinking in the second part.

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The Authority of The Bible

NUMBER TWO

Each of us has the choice to either accept the Bible as the authority in religion, or ignore it and follow whatever we choose. But we must bear the consequences of our choice. While the Bible is discarded by many, it remains the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient, and authoritative Word of God. Therefore, in all matters pertaining to our service to God we must ask, "What does the Bible teach?" We must respect the authority of God as given in His Word.

In our first lesson we learned that the nature of this authority is that it is SUPREME, ALL-SUFFICIENT, and UNIVERSAL in application to all people, everywhere, in every generation. We today lived under the authority of Jesus Christ, God's Son, and His authority shall continue until He comes again.

Same for All

There is UNITY involved in His authority. By this we mean that the same authority is behind everything He ever said or did. There is as much authority behind one command as another. To be sure, there are some things that the Bible teaches that are more crucial than others as far as the immediate consequences are concerned. But disobedience to the will of God, as it applies to us. is

sinful, and it is just as sinful to disobey one command as it is to disobey another. No man, or group of men, have the right to declare anything that God has revealed, directed, commanded, and instructed to be non-essential and unimportant. Man only shows his arrogance and depravity in pride when he attempts to stand in judgment of God's commands and rank them according to importance as to which ought to be obeyed and which can be ignored.

James 2: 10,11, "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, ye if thou kill, thou are become a transgressor of the law.*" James is not saying that a murderer is also an adulterer. He is saying that when either evil deed is done, the law of God is violated and the guilty stands condemned. This is because the authority that forbids one, forbids both.

Many religious people bemoan the decrease of disrespect for the moral teaching of the Lord. They will try to persuade others to do, or not to do, certain things because the Bible so teaches. But what they do not realize is how they have already undermined respect for the Bible by contending that some of God's commands are important, but others can be ignored. There is just as much authority behind the command to be baptized as there is behind the prohibition of adultery. There is the same authority behind repentance as there is not to steal. The teaching on the Lord's Supper is from the same source as the command not to murder. When you have taught and believed, as most of the religious world does, that you do not have to obey God in baptism, repentance, and the Lord's Supper, you can hardly expect people to regard the moral teaching of the Bible to carry much weight. But the same God, same Christ, same Holy Spirit is behind the entire teaching of the Bible. People who respect Deity will respect what Deity has taught, and will cease their "pick and choose" type of religion.

Learn from False Teachers?

I get very aggravated to hear some of my brethren talk about how much we can learn from the denominations.

One of the reasons the church is suffering from digression and apostasy today is because too many have learned too much from the denominations already, and not enough from the Bible. Some have imitated their methods until they now imitate their message. We need to understand that the same methods that might promote error are not necessarily what is successful or acceptable in promoting truth. Some have learned so much from denominations that whenever false doctrines are taught, then exposed, we hear the wail, "That's just your interpretation." That is the denominational dodge of truth that some of my brethren have adopted in recent years. We could set anything aside that we do not want on that basis. One may interpret and another misinterpret. To interpret means to get the meaning God has given. God has not given a confused and divided message. He is not the author of confusion. When two people interpret the Bible they will be together and united. When they are divided it is because one, possibly both, misinterpret. Why should brethren want to follow the denominations when denominations are constantly dodging the truth with one sort of dodge after another?

The Real Problem

Our problem is not so much the problem of interpretation anyway. It is the problem of the will to abide by what God has taught. We ought to be like Daniel when he was commanded to eat certain foods that he could not lawfully eat as a Jew. He knew the law of God. That was not the problem. The question before him was whether he would obey the law of God or not. That is all that he had to decide. This is the way of most of us in the church. We know the truth, but how many prefer to "learn from the denominations" and think someway they can get around God's Word? But the authority of Christ abides through it all, one part as well as all parts.

Timeless

The authority of the Bible is TIMELESS. Christ said He would be with His disciples always (Matthew 28:20). His authority did not end when He ascended into heaven. We shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48). We hear people talk about the need to update, modernize, streamline the

Christian faith so it will be relevant and applicable to today's man. Some denounce the faith of Christ as useful only to the first century. They say the world has now become more mature and needs something more mature, and they clamor for change. If the world has become more mature, then we would be better served to return to infancy again. What people really want is a religion that lets them do their own thing without restriction.

The doctrine of Christ is just what all people need, now and forever. The trouble is that too few are willing to listen and learn. Even some of my twisted brethren have suggested that we are answering questions nobody is asking. We are answering questions that everybody ought to be asking. We shall not change the answers to fit the questions. Men need to change their questions if the truth appears irrelevant to them. What the Lord taught in AD 33 is applicable now and shall it be until He returns. The gospel that saved our parents will save our grandchildren. The gospel does not change according to the whims, trends, fancies, and drifts of men.

People need to learn that running from the truth does not change it. Rebellion against it does not alter it in the least. Substitutions and disobedience does not invalidate one thing. Do you know why so many of the so-called modern speech translations are finding such a market today? It is not because they are superior translations. It is not because they teach truth, or are more easily understood. It is because the "truth" is changed in instance after instance to accommodate what men already believe, or what some modernist or doctor of denominationalism wants the Bible to say. Men have rewritten the Bible to suit themselves and pawned it off as the Scriptures. Some of my own brethren have no more respect for the truth of God that to uphold such things as reliable Bibles. We do not need another Bible. We need to learn and follow the Bible we have. We have no objection to updated translations, provided they are translations. But we are offended and stand opposed to these products of merchandise called Bibles that distort and pervert the Scriptures. The Word of the Lord endures and will do so forever, but not because some of my "scholarly" brethren help it to be that way. They have joined the Devil's service to present a new book, with a

different message, that, when followed, will produce a different people than the people God wants. The Biblical authority is timeless and we should respect it as that.

Final

Biblical authority is FINAL. In light of the previously mentioned characteristics, one would expect this characteristic also. When an authority is supreme, all-sufficient, universal, essential in all of its parts, and timeless, how else could it be anything except final? The Bible revelation settles all questions and all matters, There is nothing higher to which anyone can appeal. This is God's final and complete Word.

As absurd and amazing as it sounds, we have been in the presence of brethren who have declared, "Scholarship is the final test." Rubbish! Human "scholarship" has battered against the Bible through the years as much as any other source of enmity the Scriptures have faced. Paul warned against the philosophers and pseudo-scientists. He warned against following human wisdom. The "wise men" of our time care little to nothing for the revealed truth of God. If we want to know the truth, then we must be as the noble Bereans who Paul commend for searching the Scriptures to see what was so (Acts 17:11). The "scholarly" theologian is one of the last sources in which anybody ought place their confidence in matters religious. Away with the doctrine that we follow the "best minds in the brotherhood," "men of stature" as some pitiable brethren describe them. First, often those called the best minds are nothing but educated egotists who think they know better than God. Second, usually those who contend to follow the "best minds" are those who consider themselves among the "best minds." Third, "men of stature" among whom? Some are so impressed with what they consider superior academic "scholarship," the kinds of "doctors" that don't do anybody any good. Usually they are the seminary trained professors who are in the foreground leading the church into apostasy. We have seen some of these brethren with the "best minds" go so far from respect for God's truth that we have no confidence in them whatsoever. Some no longer even believe in the existence of God.

We cannot emphasize to much the importance of knowledge of the Bible and respect for what it teaches as the divine authority in matters governing the relationship between God and man. Regardless of what one does with it, or what you say about, or what I think about it, the Bible remains exactly what God said it is. Someday, we all shall be brought to that realization anyway. Happy will be that person who has shown His love for the truth and followed the Bible. Woe be to those who had set it aside in any way, whatever their reason!

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Six Witnesses

"*When Jesus came to the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked us disciples saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?*" (Matthew 16:13). "*While the Pharisees were gather together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David.*" (Matthew 22:41,42).

These two questions serve as the texts of our study concerning the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Was Jesus who He claimed to be? If so, what are the implications for us? What evidence is presented to us that we might believe it? It is very evident from the Scriptures that God expects us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, His only begotten Son, the Savior of man, the long looked for Messiah. But God does not expect us to believe with a blind faith, but has provided us evidence and testimony whereby we can know His true identity.

Paul wrote, "*In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.*" (Second Corinthians 13:1). Jesus taught the necessity of having two or more witnesses in establishing the truth when settling disputes between brethren (Matthew 18:16). The old law taught, "*One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth; at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three*

witnesses, shall the matter be stablished." (Deuteronomy 19:15). Therefore, for testimony to be considered competent and reliable there is to be a plurality of witnesses. Then testimony is deserving of acceptance.

The basic truth of the Bible is that Jesus is the Son of God. Everything about New Testament Christianity depends on this being the truth. Otherwise, there is no validity, authority, or divinity regarding it. Jesus stated following Peter's confession of Him as the Son of God, *"Upon this rock I will build my church."* (Matthew 16:18).

Witnessing

Sometimes today we hear people say they are "witnessing for Christ." We should *"speak as the oracles of God"* (First Peter 4:11), rather than take Biblical phrases but convey false ideas by them. A witness in the Bible was one who either was an eye witness or one who was inspired of God and could testify reliably. Simply telling what others have testified is not "witnessing for Christ." Nobody today qualifies as a "witness for Christ" since nobody today is an eye witness of the things written, nor are they inspired of God as were New Testament witnesses. We have heard denominational people claim to be as inspired as were the apostles, but they claim what is not true. Today we can relate what witnesses witnessed, but we are not witnesses. We should not use such terminology lest somebody think we are claiming inspiration, which would be a false claim.

He Cited Six

In John five Jesus cited six witnesses of Himself; six sources of evidence to show that He is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. It is our present intent to consider these six witnesses.

Jesus has just healed a lame man at the pool of Bethesda. He had taught the unity and oneness of Himself and the Father, and how He came to do the will of the Father. He cited how authority belonged unto Him, that the judgment would be executed by Him, and that there was no way for men to honor the Father without honoring the Son. This is a very exclusive claim of

Christ. He taught the coming resurrection of both the good and the evil, and how eternal life was through Him. All of this teaching was founded on the claim of His Deity, that He is the Son of God.

Such teaching caused some to accuse Him of blasphemy. They were offended at Him and sought to slay Him. But Jesus provided sufficient evidence to sustain His claim.

His Own Word

The first witness was His own testimony. "*I can of mine own self do nothing; as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.*" (John 5:30,31). Jesus claimed to have come from God. He had claimed His Deity in John 4:25,26 when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. "*The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.*" Later He said, "*For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*" (John 8:24). It had been prophesied (Isaiah 55:4) that Jesus would bear witness. "*Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.*"

He said His witness was not true, not because what He said was false, but because He was but one witness and that testimony alone was not the plurality of witnesses that was needed. Nonetheless, His testimony cannot be set aside, for even though He is but one, He is one.

John the Baptist

Then He said, "*There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth.*" (John 5:32,33). John the Baptist was sent by the Lord for this very purpose. "*And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.*" Luke 1:76). "*As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the*

way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Mark 1:2,3). *"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light."* (John 1:6-9).

When Jesus came to John, John said of Him, *"Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29). Jesus made it clear in His discussion with the Pharisees that John spoke and acted with authority (Matthew 21:25). The work and words of John the Baptist must be received with the highest credibility and validity. He was the second witness Jesus mentioned.

His Works

But there was even a greater witness than John that proved Jesus to be the Son of God. *"But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."* (John 5:36). What Jesus had done, was doing, and would do show Him to be who He claimed to be. Nicodemus had recognized Him as one from God because of the miracles that He did (John 3:2). Those with whom the apostles had contact considered Him one of the prophets of old because of His works and words. His miracles, His sermons, the way He fulfilled the prophecies of old, the authority by which He taught, all proclaimed the same message, "This is the Christ, the Son of God." No servant of the devil could or would do the good things He did, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, calming the elements, casting out demons, forgiving sins, etc.

When John the Baptist was in prison and soon to die, he sent some of his people to ask Jesus, *"Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another?* Notice the evidence given. *"And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. The Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."* Luke 7:20-22). All of this,

plus the climatic evidence of His resurrection, declared Him to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4).

The Father

Furthermore, the Father Himself had borne witness of Him. *"And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me."* (John 5:37). At His baptism (Matthew 3:17), and on the mount where He was transfigured (Matthew 17:5), the Father had said, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* A different kind of testimony was given as recorded in John 12:28 to glorify Christ. This testimony had been given in the presence of others, such as Peter, James, John, Moses, Elijah. Peter later wrote, *"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."* (Second Peter 1:16-18).

Already more than a sufficient number of witnesses has been produced. But there was additional testimony to be considered.

The Scriptures

Jesus cites the Scriptures as bearing record of Him. *"Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."* (John 5:39). Jesus established early in His work the precedent of proving truth by Scripture. He blunted the temptations of Satan by answering each temptation with, *"It is written..."* and then quoted teaching from God as found in the book of Deuteronomy. Never has there been any question as to the respect Jesus had for the Scriptures. We would that all today had similar respect. There is no more reliable testimony than the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17; Second Peter 1:20,21). To question the Scriptures is to reflect a doubt of God. By the promises, prophesies, the old law, the

Judaistic system, all of which served as a shadow of things to come (Hebrews 10:1), one can almost piece in detail the work and mission of Christ as He fulfilled God's plan for the salvation of mankind.

Jesus said the Scriptures gave them eternal life. Why is that so? It is because the Scriptures tell of Christ. There is no separation of Christ and salvation, or salvation from Scripture. The reason the gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16) is because the gospel reveals Christ, the author of salvation (Hebrews 5:9).

Moses

Closely connected to the fifth witness, is the sixth, which is Moses. "*For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*" (John 5:46,47).

None of the ancient patriarchs were more respected by the Jews than Moses, the great deliverer, law giver, guide, prophet, and writer of inspired Scripture. Jesus taught that understanding the place of Moses in God's great scheme of redemption would lead one to accept Him because Moses testified of Christ. He wrote of Him and foretold concerning Him. It is grossly inconsistent to claim to believe Moses and reject Christ.

Jesus presented six irrefutable witnesses, any one of which we can accept at full validity. By them we can know for a certainty that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of mankind.

We look with disdain and rejection on any man, book, so-called "scholar,' perverted "Bible," modernist, clergyman, whoever and whatever that in any way demeans, minimizes, or removes the God-given evidence of the Deity of Christ. Because He is the Son of God we have the obligation to know Him, believe in Him, obey Him, follow Him, being subject unto Him in everything. So we close by asking, "*What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?*" Our answer will determine our eternity.

* * * * *

Deserving of Honor



I had the honor recently of speaking to the teachers of a nearby congregation at a most delightful event. It was their annual appreciation dinner for their teachers. There were around fifty to sixty people present, and we enjoyed a wonderful meal together, and I thoroughly benefited from being in their midst. What impressed me was the genuine expressions by the elders of that church for those who labored faithfully in the Word. There is a lot of good work being done by brothers and sisters who assume the awesome task of a teacher. I say it is awesome because of the responsibility that goes with the job (James 3:1). Probably few teachers ever receive the kind of respect they really deserve. And certainly those who teach cannot know of the magnitude of spiritual blessing they are to those who are their students. Lives are changed, minds and hearts are molded, God is glorified, souls are saved because of the noble and sacrificial work of being a Bible teacher. JWB

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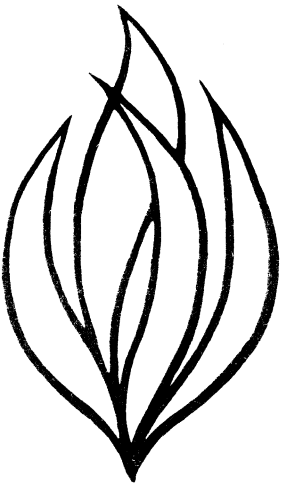

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIV James W. Boud **NUMBER 7**

Contending for the Faith

You should begin this lesson by reading Jude from your own Bible, then return to our comments. It is one short chapter, but your understanding of it is vital to this discussion. It would be profitable to discuss the entire chapter verse by verse. But our focus centers on verse three, "*...and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*" Here we have a description of THE FAITH. Literally the text tells us "*to contend earnestly for the once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith.*" While writing this epistle on salvation, the Holy Spirit led Jude to include these words about contending for THE FAITH. There are reasons for this. There will always be those who will contend against it. The text, chapter one, shows us God's recognition of false teachers, false brethren, false doctrines, and the dangers of such to the souls of men everywhere, even the church of Christ. God knows what will happen to the church when error is left unchecked and exponents of error are allowed to go without challenge to their false doctrines.

False Teachers

False teachers are described in several ways in this one chapter book. There are those who crept in (verse 4), religious creeps. They are ungodly men (verse 4), filthy dreamers, fleshly, despising God's authority (verse 8). Jude calls them brute beasts (verse 10). They are like Cain, going to have their own way; like Balaam, the Old Testament compromiser who led Israel to sin; like Korah, leader of rebellion against Moses, Aaron, and the authority of God (verse 11). They are spots, clouds without water, trees with dead fruit (verse 12). Verse thirteen pictures them as raging waves foaming in shame, and wandering stars in the blackness of darkness. They are murmurers, complainers, and mockers (verse 18). God's attitude toward such people is clear. Verse five says they shall be destroyed as

unbelievers. Everlasting chains under darkness are reserved for them (verse 6). Like Sodom and Gomorrah, they will suffer the vengeance of eternal fire (verse 7).

Knowing the danger of such people, having a love for brethren, Jude was compelled to write with diligence to deal with false brethren, and deal with them he does. There is no hesitation or apology in his words about false teaching and false teachers. He wrote with clarity, definiteness, and decisiveness. There is nothing vague or ambiguous in his words. Notice verse three in detail.

The Faith

There is such a thing as THE FAITH. Paul said in Ephesians 4:4, "*There is one faith.*" How that differs with denominationalism that contends not for THE FAITH but for many faiths, leaving it to man to choose the faith of his choice! THE FAITH is the plain, simple, powerful New Testament gospel revelation, the truth, the doctrine of Christ, the Word of God. When Paul was in Paphos and met Sergius Paulus he encountered Elymas, the sorcerer who sought to "*turn the deputy away from the faith.*" (Acts 13:8). The deputy was a prudent man. Elymas resisted the teaching of Paul and tried to prevent the acceptance of the system of salvation, that body of doctrine of God's plan for saving man.

In Acts 14:22, Paul exhorted brethren to "*continue in the faith.*" From Acts 15:9 we learn the hearts of the Gentiles, like all others, are purified by the faith. The Greek includes the indefinite article "the." Galatians 3:23, "*But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed.*" The faith refers to the gospel system. This is not just belief, but has reference to the religion of which Christ is author and founder. Paul continued to write what we are, namely, children of God. He tells us where we are, namely, in Christ. He tells us how we got there, namely, being baptized into Christ. This is the message of THE FAITH, God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16) for which we are to earnestly contend (Jude 3).

A Delivered Faith

Notice further that the faith is a DELIVERED FAITH. It is not a product of the minds of men, man's genius, invention, or origin. Paul states, Galatians 1:1 that his apostleship was of God. In verses 11,12, "*But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*" What he preached was not a product of his education, former religion, own reasoning, human philosophy, or any such thing. The gospel is affirmed to be heaven's revelation.

Let us compare two passages, both of which reveal the origin of the gospel. First Corinthians 2:9-13, "*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God., For what man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*" The other verses are Ephesians 3:1-5, "*For this cause I Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given unto me to youward, how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*"

Both passages tell us of God. What did God do? He made a revelation. What was revealed? All things of God; the mystery of Christ. By whom was this revelation made? By the holy apostles and prophets. By what means is this revelation given? By words, written and spoken, which the Spirit teacheth, not words originating with men. Here is the source of THE FAITH. We are not dealing with human opinion and experiences. These are not testimonials induced through emotionalism and imagination, but the once-for-all-delivered-faith from God to inspired men through the Holy Spirit. Every word of it is God-breathed. Second Timothy 3:16,17, "*All*

scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." Scriptures teach a verbal, plenary, all-sufficient, infallible, inerrant, authoritative revelation of THE FAITH that is embodied in Scripture as it was given to inspired men.

Once For All

Notice further that the faith was ONCE FOR ALL delivered. The word translated "once" is used of what is of perpetual validity and never in need of repetition. This asserts the timelessness of the Word. This same word "once" is used in Hebrews 9:26,28 regarding the death of Christ. Christ does not have to die a second time. It was all-sufficient the first time. This teaching sinks forever the contention that there is latter day revelation from God. The gospel is the same now as it was in the first century, and will remain the same unto the Lord returns. It is the same in every generation, in every nation, making no allowance for additions, substractions, modern-day visions, cultures, dreams, special leadings, etc. THE FAITH is a faith adequate for all time and all people.

A Delivered Faith

THE FAITH was DELIVERED to the saints, God's people. They are the custodians of THE FAITH. First it was revealed to inspired men, earthen vessels (Second Corinthians 4:7), and now recorded in the inspired book (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Christians are not given the power to make, alter, change, update, or any such thing regarding the Word of God. Christians are the stewards of THE FAITH. As a banker has the responsibility to care for, guard, defend, and properly use that which is placed in his care, so the saints have a similar duty toward the Word. As the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God (Romans 3:2), Christians are entrusted with THE FAITH. Our greatest responsibility and privilege is to love this truth, live it, defend it, preach it, contend for it, and if need be, die for it. If we do not have

the strength, concern, courage, will, and conviction to deal with THE FAITH that way, there is none who will.

Contend For It

The exhortation in Jude is to CONTEND earnestly for THE FAITH. This is an obligation and privilege. The word translated "earnestly" comes from a word meaning to agonize, struggle with difficulty against all dangers and antagonists to the gospel. The word is sometimes translated "strive" (Colossians 1:29; First Timothy 4:10; Luke 13:24), and "fight" in First Timothy 6:12, "*Fight the good fight of faith.*" It is a term of combat and warfare.

Just how does one earnestly contend for the faith? Jude was doing that very thing in this epistle. Recognizing error, false teachers, false doctrines, he was waging war against them. He knew they were not to be ignored and they would not just go away. He had the right, indeed, the duty, to warn brethren about such things until brethren showed an awareness of them. While some ignored the matter, insulted the proclaimers of truth, impugned motives, he still was plain, pointed, powerful, precise in his presentation on matters regarding sin and religious error. He contended for the faith in the very letter in which he urged others to contend.

Paul Contended

Paul was contending for the faith when he treated Elymas the way he did. Notice his straightforward and powerful words, "*Then Saul, (who was also is called Paul), filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?* (Acts 13:9,10). In Galatians two, where Paul recounts his exposure of error in Peter when Peter showed himself inconsistent and compromising, and Paul rebuked him to the face, before them all, because Peter was to be blamed. Paul was contending for the faith. When he commanded the withdrawal from those who walked disorderly (Romans 16:17; Second Thessalonians 3:6; First Corinthians 5:7), he was contending for the faith. When he specified by name those who needed marking, such as Hymaneus,

Alexander, and Philetus (Second Timothy 4:14), and Demas (Second Timothy 4:10), he was contending for the faith. When John, the apostle of love, named Diotrophes as the disturber that he was (Third John 9), John, like Paul, was contending for the faith. Faithful gospel preachers who do the same today are lovers of truth, and do not cringe to contend for the faith.

Peter and Others Contended

When Peter preached the gospel on Pentecost, when Paul stood before the Jewish councils and Roman courts, when uproars were created in various places, the apostles were contending for the faith. When John warned not to believe every spirit, but try them (First John 4:1), when Peter warned of false teachers that would bring in damnable heresies and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of (Second Peter 2:1,2), when Paul urged Timothy that some would depart from the faith, and he was to preach the word in spite of what people said, did, or thought (First Timothy 4:1; Second Timothy 4:1-4), they were contending for the faith.

May I add a further comment to the words of Paul to Timothy. Second Timothy was the last letter the apostles penned. He realized that apostasy was threatening the church. Still he urged, "*Preach the word.*" When? "*In season; out of season,*" which means, when people like it, and when they do not; when they want it, and when they reject it. By reproof, rebuke, and exhortation, with longsuffering and doctrine, he was to contend for the faith. Why? Because the time was coming when even brethren would not want it; when brethren prefer what they wanted to what God said they needed.

Paul contended for the faith when he warned the Ephesians elders for three years with tears about apostasy coming into the church through them. He taught that elders ought convict the gainsayers (Titus 1:9), not coddle up to them and run along with them. Stephen was contending for the faith when he fearlessly preached the truth before the very leaders who had caused Christ to be put on the cross. Plainly he told them the truth, even when they hated it. They considered

him their enemy because he dared tell them the truth. He gave his life (Acts 7) contending for the faith.

Jesus Contended

Jesus set the example in contending for the faith. Those who perceive Jesus as some kind of effeminate, weak, namby-pamby pacifist, a wishy-washy religionist, just do not know the Lord as Scripture reveals Him. He was no shabby revolutionist either. John called Him the Lamb of God (John 1:29) when speaking of Him as the sacrifice for sins. But John also wrote that He was the Lion of Judah when writing of His character (Revelation 5:5). When He confronted error, His zeal ate Him up. He acted decisively. None could doubt where He stood and none could mistake why He stood as He did. When attacks were made on Him personally, He paid little attention to it. "*When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*" (First Peter 2:23). But then the message of truth that He preached was opposed, you find no stronger actions among men than those taken by our Lord. Christlikeness in contending for the faith is sorely needed in the ranks of God's people in our own day. Too many, who claim to be kind and loving, are just cowards and will not contend for the faith.

In contending for the faith, we must uphold every portion of it. We must oppose anything, everything, anybody, everybody, anywhere, everywhere, any time, every time, that efforts are made to minimize or contradict THE FAITH. Especially is this true when the fiery darts of the evil one come crashing against the church from the outside, and the insidious digression bubbles within the church. We are soldiers of Christ and He is the captain of our faith. We are to go forward in this spiritual warfare to liberate souls from the enslavement of sin, and defend the glorious freedom from sin that is in Christ. Some are spectators and not participators in this fight. Instead of being God's gladiators, some are Satan's agitators, undermining like traitors. Faithful men of God must "*contend earnestly for the once-for-all-delivered-to-the- saints faith.*"

* * * * *

Responsibility to the Eldership

There are matters that require straight-forward language and our subject is one of them. The Lord's church was established and organized by Christ. It is revealed to us in the New Testament. Christ is head over all things to the church (Colossians 1:18). It is organized into local congregations that are overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, and every member a part of the body. This is the Biblical pattern.

Those who serve in the work as elders and deacons are men who are to have certain qualifications as outlined in First Timothy three and Titus one. Elders have certain duties before God and the congregation. Various terms are used to designate their work, such as elder, pastor, shepherd, presbyter, overseer, and bishop.

Paul stated to the elders of the church of Ephesus, "*Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*" (Acts 20:28-31).

Their Task

Their work is to feed the church the spiritual food, exercise oversight or superintendence and direction of affairs, guard the church from error, whether it comes from within, without, or even from among themselves, and to see to it that God's will is done, taught, and respected rather than defiled, perverted, and ignored.

Hebrews 13:7,17, "*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*" "*Obey them that have the rule over you and*

submit yourselves for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you." Ruling, watching, being examples, leading are parts of the work.

First Thessalonians 5:12, "*And we beseech you brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you...*" Those who are over others in the Lord are the overseers or elders. Their labor includes service to the church, admonishing and teaching the things that must be proclaimed.

First Peter 5:1-3, "*The elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the suffering of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*" This repeats what has been said plus the prohibition of being "*lords*" and acting like bosses. Elders are not dictators nor tyrants. They neither make nor break God's revealed will, but are to uphold truth, defend truth, not legislate truth nor compromise it.

Their Authority

Elderships do have authority to rule, to carry out their God-given function. If they did not have authority, then the very purposes mentioned in the above texts could not be expedited by them. There is no more awesome responsibility on human beings than on elders. They shall give account for everyone in their charge (Hebrews 13:17). Paul calls it a "*good work.*" (First Timothy 3:1).

Members Have a Duty

The congregation led by elders also has responsibilities to those who lead them. Elders are to held with honor (First Timothy 5:17,18); even double honor, including moral, spiritual, and material support, when they perform their duties well.

First Thessalonians 5:12,13 calls for knowledge of them, which means more than simply knowing who they are

and calling their names. It means to grant to them the respect due because of the work they discharge. The verses also teach us to esteem them highly in love. This love is not some weak and mushy sentimentality or a personal affection. We are to love every brother or sister. But God expects members of the church to help, not hinder, the eldership in its work. This is done by consideration, kindness, respect, aid, and assistance.

First Timothy 5:19 teaches us not to receive accusations against an elder except it be by two or three witnesses. Those who lead are subject to criticism. They are not infallible in their work and lives. They are still human beings and prone to mistakes, individually and collectively, just like others. Sometimes some act as if an elder is to be absolutely sinlessly perfect and have infallible judgment, every time on everything, or he becomes a target. God's plan that calls for a plurality of elders over each congregation helps to prevent mistakes. When errors are proven, First Timothy 5:20 applies. "*Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others may also fear.*" But the Bible teaches it is wrong to receive, accept accusation and criticisms of elders without proper proof. To open a barrage against an elder, openly, publicly, or privately, when there is no support or justification for it, is to sin. Some are very long and loud in talking about and against some elders, but will not talk to and with the elders.

Hebrews 13:7,17, already quoted, teaches us to be mindful of them, considerate, which means literally to have a feeling for. It calls for attentiveness, giving heed, paying attention and conforming. We have a duty to follow their faith, imitate their good lives, obey their decision, submit to their rules. The writer is saying we are not to cause them grief while they do their work, but be a source of joy to them. This does not mean to follow them or any other into doing wrong and sinning against God. The idea is not difficult to understand.

Follow Their Lead

Suffice it to say that leaders cannot lead if followers will not follow. It is strange how some in a congregation will ask a man to serve as an elder and then give him the

hardest time he can in his work. The relationship of elders to the members is that of leaders and followers, brethren together. Since God expects elders to lead, does He not also expect members to follow? Elders are to feed. Members are to partake of the food offered. Elders are to rule. Members are to submit to that rule. When elders are discharging their duty as the Bible teaches them, they have the right to expect the congregation to feel obligated to hold up their hands and give them support and assistance. There are instances when elderships act arbitrarily and even sinfully. Nobody is required to follow such leadership. When they go astray on some matter, we have the duty to point this out to them rather than create rebellion against them.

It is a sinful deed to be a rebel against those who properly rule. We emphasize properly. We sin to defy those we are to obey if they are doing their duties. Those who serve as elders are brethren in the Lord. They should receive the courtesy every brother is to give to every other brother, and even more, because of the special tasks they are expected to perform.

Abuse of Power

Some elders take advantage of their place and act like they are drivers of their personal slaves. We have known men in elderships who have yet to learn the first principles of being considerate toward the congregation, who have the "I am boss" attitude toward their work. But the failure of some misplaced men who by misfortune have been appointed over a congregation does not excuse members from their duties. Very rarely is the case when there is not something deserving in an eldership.

We urge elders to be attentive to their work and discharge it with great efficiency. We also urge members of the church to be aware of the responsibilities we all have toward elderships. God's plan works better than anything man can devise when it is practiced.

* * * * *

The Glorious Resurrection

The Bible refers to several resurrections, physically and literally, figuratively and spiritually. In the Old Testament we read of some who were literally and physically raised from physical death by God's prophets. Similarly were some raised in the New Testament by Christ and the apostles.

A resurrection is mentioned figuratively in Revelation twenty with reference to the rising again of the cause of Christ for which some had been martyred. The conversion of the Jews, if it would occur, was characterized by Paul to be like a resurrection (Romans 11:15).

When one leaves the ways of sin and is forgiven by the Lord this conversion is called a resurrection from spiritual death life (Romans 6:3,4; Ephesians 2:1).

The resurrection at the end of time when Jesus returns will be a literal, bodily resurrection. "*Marvel not a this; for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.*" (John 5:28,29). "*Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*" (John 11:23,24). First Thessalonians 4:13-18 makes clear the final and great resurrection will include all the redeemed, living and dead.

Our topic is the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ following His crucifixion. "*He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.*" (Matthew 28:6). "*For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he arose again the third day according to the scriptures.*" (First Corinthians 15:3,4).

What It Proved

The resurrection of Christ from the dead proved Him to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). This was not the first or last evidence given of this fact concerning Him. But if Jesus had died, and remained in the tomb, He could not have sustained His claim of being the Messiah. Why is this so important to Christianity? It is because His Deity is the foundation upon which all of the religion of Christ rests. On this rests His authority, His credentials, and the salvation He offers. If He was not who He claimed to be, He is a pretender, liar, deceiver, and fraud. Who could place confidence in such a one as that? How could such a one ever save anyone from anything? Our very expectation of heaven is based on this truth. "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe, and believing have life in his name.*" (John 20:30,31). "*For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*" (John 8:24). His Sonship is the foundation of the church (Matthew 16:18). "*For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" (First Corinthians 3:11). This is the reason modernists and liberals are so insistent and vicious in their attacks against the Deity of Christ. They resent every evidence that affirms He is God's Son. They will deny the record, change the record, lie about the record, distort the record, do anything to remove evidence that He is who He is. This is why they deny miracles, because His resurrection is a miracle and they cannot afford to allow the resurrection because that proves His identity and authority.

A Fulfillment

The resurrection was in fulfillment of divinely-given prophecy. Prophecy made and fulfilled shows the hand of God behind it (Deuteronomy 18:22). A major characteristic of the preaching of the apostles was the use of prophetic Scriptures to show how Jesus fulfilled them. Peter did this on Pentecost when he referred to the prophecies of David (Acts 2: 25-28,31). "*He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.*"

Had Jesus not come from the tomb He would have proved Himself to be a false prophet. "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up...But he spake of the temple of his body.*" (John 2:19,21). "*When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them, and they believed the scriptures, and the word which Jesus had said.*" (John 2:22). "*He is not here, but is risen, remember how he spake unto you, when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and third day rise again.*" (Luke 24:6,7). These were prophecies He himself made concerning Himself.

God's Power

The resurrection is a demonstration of divine power (Romans 1:4). Man has no such power in himself. There have been times when God worked through men, but the power was always of God. God is the giver of life (Genesis 2:7), and the best man can do is to temporarily prolong life. The resurrection was a miracle, a direct intervention by Deity, supernatural and beyond human ability. While it is not our theme in this lesson, let me suggest that a study of the evidences of this resurrection is heavily one-sided in its favor. Since this miracle is proved true by the evidence, why is there reason to deny or question any other miracles recorded in the Bible? Once one has accepted the fourth word of the Bible, "*God,*" he has no problem with anything else revealed therein. To deny the resurrection is to deny God's Word and God's power.

God's Wisdom

The resurrection, in God's wisdom, was an essential ingredient in His plan for redeeming sinful man. Just as the Lord's death was a part of that plan, so is His resurrection. We are saved by the gospel (Romans 1:16; First Corinthians 15:2). Part of the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:3,4). Without the resurrection the plan is incomplete.

We are delivered from sin by being obedient to the form of doctrine that Paul preached (Romans 6:16-18). The doctrine is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

The form, or representation, of that doctrine is baptism into Christ (Romans 6:3,4). We die to sin, are buried in water, and are raised to walk in newness of life. We are planted in the likeness of His death and raised in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:5). God's plan for redeeming man includes and depends upon the resurrection of Christ. Baptism saves, but because of the resurrection of Christ (First Peter 3:21). Had He died and stayed dead, wherein could we have hope in Him?

Reason for Hope

The resurrection does provide hope for the faithful Christian. Just as in His death He paid the penalty for our sins, in His resurrection He gives the basis for eternal life. "*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?* (John 11:25,26). How could a dead man ever make such a offer?

After Paul had listed several dire consequences if Christ had not been raised, such as their preaching being vain, faith vain, the apostles being false witnesses, being yet in sin, those who had died had perished, and we are most miserable (First Corinthians 15:14-19), Paul said, "*But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*" (First Corinthians 15:20-22). All those dreadful consequences do not abide. Rather, the glorious promises and good things made possible by His resurrection are ours. Peter tells us God "*hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" (First Peter 1:3).

We can come to the resurrected Lord, be saved from eternal spiritual death, and inherit eternal spiritual life, by obeying and living for the resurrection Christ. Can we not see why it is so appropriate to refer to His resurrection as a glorious resurrection.

* * * * *

The Faith of Hebrews Eleven

There are several major themes in Hebrews. We learn of the supremacy of Christ over man, angels, Moses, everything. We read of warnings, remedies, and preventions of apostasy. There is also the call to faith, especially in the eleventh chapter. This chapter has been properly titled, "The Hall of Faith," because it contains the names of people of great faith in times past. Those people looked beyond what they could see with the physical eye, and even beyond their own experiences. Having the Word of God, they were confident of unseen things as much, probably more, than that which was seen. The evidence God had provided convinced them of unseen realities.

It is foolish to dismiss the unseen simply because it is unseen. We do not actually see life, spirit, love, thought, but we see irrefutable evidences of their existence.

Defined

Faith is defined in Hebrews 1:1, "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*" Faith is not a "shot in the dark." Nor is it a "leap into the unknown." God has never asked man to believe anything without sufficient evidence whereby he can be sure of what he believes. Faith is rational and intelligent, provoking confidence and assurance. We can know by faith because faith is based upon divinely-given testimony. "*Faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" (Romans 10:17). Faith begins and ends with the limits of this testimony. Faith makes the unseen certain because God has declared it so, and given assurance of it. It is vital to our spiritual welfare that we understand Biblical faith.

What Faith Does

Faith saves. Romans 5:1, "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The faith that saves is an active faith that cause

us to do as we ought. It has the unique quality of demanding action. We wish to consider some of these qualities and actions of saving faith as is demonstrated in Hebrews eleven.

Saving faith provokes worship and sacrifice. The church is to offer spiritual sacrifices (First Peter 2:5). Among them is the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15). Abel offered sacrifice to God "*by faith*" (Hebrews 11:4). God had obviously instructed what was to be done because to act "*by faith*" requires the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

Worship has always been expected from man by the Lord. Even now, as Jesus taught, "*God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*" (John 4:24). Matthew 4:10, "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*"

Some want to worship their own way and this explains why there are so many different rituals, ceremonies, new ideas and fads in worship. How to worship has not been left to man to determine. Worship infers respect and honor toward God. We cannot worship acceptably if we show no respect for what God has said regarding how we are to worship. We are to worship by singing, praying, observing the Lord's Supper, giving of our means, and studying His Word. This is that which is revealed in the New Testament as the practice of the early Christians as they were guided by inspired men.

While we realize how wrong it is to worship God according to our own will, is it not just as rebellious to refuse to be present at those times when God is to be worshipped according to His will?

Walking by Faith

Saving faith provides the way in which we are to walk in life. Ephesians 4:1, "*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*" Second Corinthians 5:7, "*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*" Romans 4:12, "*And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had yet*

uncircumcised." First John 1:7, *"But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* Genesis 5:24, *"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not; for God took him."* Hebrews 11:5, *"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had testimony that he pleased God."*

To walk by faith is not to live blindly, guessing, merely hoping and wishing you are going the right direction. It means to walk or live with confidence because you are going in harmony with the will of the Lord. It is nonsense to claim a saving faith, but live life our own way, like the sinful world, separated from God, contradictory to His way. It should be obvious that we cannot walk by faith without a knowledge of the faith. Ignorance of the will of God is at the foundation of the waywardness of the way of live so many pursue.

Faith and Works

Saving faith means works of obedience. There is no conflict between faith and works of obedience. One without the other amounts to nothing. James 2:17, 18, 20, 22, 24, *"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works... But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?...Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?...Ye see then how that by works a man is justified and not by faith only."*

We are not saved by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), or our own works of righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). Nor can we be saved by works of the Mosaic Law (Romans 3:20). But saving faith necessarily demands obedience. Genesis 6:22, *"Thus did Noah according to all that God commanded him, so did he."* Hebrews 11:7, *"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house..."* Noah's obedient faith saved his own family and condemned the wicked world that rejected that faith. The faith that saves is the faith

that obeys. In every example of faith in Hebrews eleven the people acted obediently upon the testimony received.

Saving faith is life giving. Genesis 15:6, *"And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it unto him for righteousness."* This was said of Abraham. Man cannot be saved by his own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). Eternal life is dependent upon the righteousness of God. We are either saved God's way or not at all. The benefits of His righteousness are appropriated by an active and obedient faith (Romans 5:2). Abraham's faith led him to obey (Hebrews 11:3). He looked for a city (Hebrews 11:10). He offered Isaac as sacrifice (Hebrews 11:17). This is evidence of a perfected faith that assured him of a life with God.

Faith in Making Decisions

Saving faith provokes the making of right decisions. Moses often was faced with momentous decisions, even early in life. Reared in Pharoah's court , educated in the ways of the Egyptians, realizing that he was an Israelite and Israel was God's nation, he had to make a decision where he would take his stand. Hebrews 11:24-27, *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible."* By worldly standards Moses made a foolish choice in forsaking power, wealth, prestige, pleasure, and possibly the throne of Egypt. But he chose hardship, suffering, trials, afflictions, being reproached even as was Christ. He did this in order to do God's will, and be with God's people. By faith he chose the way of life, God's way. Going God's way is seldom the easiest way, but it is the best and right way. It is the only way that provides genuine happiness both now and in the hereafter.

Faith's Power

The power of faith is seen in other matters mentioned in Hebrews eleven. Israel was delivered from Egypt, the

walls of Jericho fell, Gideon with few men routed Midian, Barak, Deborah, Samson, Jephthah, and many others did mighty things for God because of a strong faith. Their faith did not allow them to wait and see the end of things. Regardless of how things turned out, they followed God's will. They knew what God said and they had confidence in God, respecting the evidence God gave them. They "*kept the faith,*" come what may!

What of my faith and your faith? Is it like those of Hebrews eleven? Let us not deceive ourselves. If our faith is not like their faith, how can we be saved? Faith is one avenue of knowing. Based on divine testimony, we can be sure and confident of the truth. We do not live life with a maybe-so regarding right and wrong. Faith leave no room for doubt. Away with the false notion that if we accept something by faith that there is room for doubt. To so teach is to promote agnosticism. We can be as sure of truth as we can be sure the Bible is the Word of God. What Scripture reveals is not just the most likely, the most probable, the best of alternatives. The Bible is His inerrant and infallible Word and we can rely upon it.

We are saved by faith and without it we cannot be saved. Our faith must lead us to obey, worship, sacrifice, live each day God's way, making the right decisions and doing all this with confidence.

* * * * *

Things Worthwhile

You have heard the old adage, "All that glitters is not gold." That means that everything that appears desirable is not desirable. Often what seems to be of value is actually striving after the wind. Many things are deceptive, counterfeit, and are more of a waste of time and talent than something that contributes to our welfare and benefit. We have to constantly keep on guard lest we be overtaken by people and things that offer what may seem to be fantastic claims and promises, but fail to produce things worthwhile.

What really matters? What is really worthwhile? Jeremiah tells us, "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.*" (Jeremiah 10:23). Solomon wrote a similar theme, "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" (Proverbs 14:12).

Having the Right Standard

Mankind has accumulated many facts, developed many things, but in spite of his genius in certain realms, and his accomplishments, he is not qualified to establish the standard by which real value is determined. Man left to himself becomes more and more degraded, not uplifted. A person never proves himself more foolish than to try to live life by his own wisdom separated from the One who made him and knows what is best for him. God knows! What God says is right! Anything that varies from the will of God for man is harmful to man and is wrong. The Bible so teaches and experience so proves. It is true that many do not accept the standards of God, but that does not disprove the validity, credibility, infallibility, and benefits of God's standards for man. It ought to be reassuring to us that in spite of the trail of failure that mankind has left behind him in "doing his own thing," we can know of the reality and existence of things that are really worthwhile, and we can know that we can find out what they are and have them for ourselves.

Having a Savior

It is worthwhile to have a loving and caring Savior from sin. Even if we denied it, it would not change the fact that "*all have sinned*" (Romans 3:23). It is sin that separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2), and the wages of sin, the ultimate payment, is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Man is doomed and damned in his sins and he does not have the capacity to save himself by himself. But God has provided mankind a Savior which is Christ the Lord (First Timothy 1:15). He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). How dark and dreary the reality of this world would be if there was no salvation from sin. Mankind's greatest need is salvation from sin. How we

wish the world would come to that realization! What a benefit for all that would be!

Having Peace

It is worthwhile to be at peace with God. More than the riches, power, fame, and fortune that this world can give, and even that comes to a relative few in this world of turbulence and disturbance, there is a real peace "*which passeth all understanding*" (Philippians 4:7).

This peace is "*in Christ.*" Romans 5:1, "*Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Jesus said, "*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33).

So many are disturbed and distraught all around us. They have sought peace from the wrong sources. They have used indulgence and satisfaction of the passions, drugs, escapism, turning to the psychologists who wrestle with disturbed minds hoping they might produce the cure. But so long as we live in sin and refuse God, we war against the very thing we say we want. Only by being faithful in Christ can we have the inner peace that the Almighty has provided. Reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of our sins is the pathway of peace. "*For he is our peace...*" (Ephesians 2:14).

Having Hope

It is worthwhile to live life with the hope of an eternal life in heaven with God and all the redeemed. We know life is brief and of uncertain length, but certain to end. What a cruel hoax, how useless and meaningless, if life ended in the grave! What would you give in exchange for the hope that you have, Christian friend? The faithful are promised eternal life (John 3:16; Titus 1:2; First Peter 1:3-5).

The great "*one hope*" of the followers of Christ is heaven. But we do not speak of mere existence. All shall exist in eternity. Even the wicked shall be raised (John 5:28,29). In spite of the false doctrines taught by some sects that

the evil will cease to exist at death, the Bible teaches all shall be raised, good and evil. The Christian's hope is that beautiful place called heaven.

This hope is found in the same relationship with God as the peace of which we formerly spoke. "*And this is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*" (First John 5:11).

Regardless of whatever else we might attain during our span of years on earth, whatever else we may possess or enjoy, we cannot and will not live even this life to its fullest and best without hope for the life that follows hereafter. This hope is the anchor of the soul (Hebrews 6:19). It is the comforting power in times of distress. It is the motivating power in times of discouragement and weakness. It provides an unshakeable joy within the heart that circumstances and happenings will not destroy if we walk in the footsteps of Him who leads us.

When Death Comes and Eternity Begins

Next, consider two other worthwhile things together. They have do so with the termination of this life, and the life after physical death. James wrote, "*Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*" (James 4:15-15). Death means separation (James 2:26; Ecclesiastes 12:7). All experience death, either as we have observed the death of others who have preceded us, or, if we be alive when He returns, we shall be changed and separation occurs (First Corinthians 15:51,52).

At death, regardless of friend, family, brethren, or foes, we shall bid them "good-bye." Then, as Israel crossed Jordan, we shall enter the chilling waters of death and we leave behind all that we have known in our earthly existence. Shall we attempt that crossing, which cannot be avoided, alone? We shall not be alone if we have taken advantage of God's offer to "*walk through the valley of the shadow of death*" with us (Psalm 23:4). The

Lord Jesus knows what it is to die. He will take those that are His into the safe-keeping of our heavenly Father. Those who walk with Christ in this life will be blessed to have Christ walk with them through death.

One who witnessed the death of Voltaire, an outspoken atheist, said, "God spare me from witnessing the death of another unbeliever." Is it not worthwhile to have the assurance that the Son of God will lead you step by step through the uncharted waters and you will have no fear, but anticipation of the Lord's "*Well done?*" Jesus conquered death, and through Him, we will also know that victory of being "*more than conquerors.*"

In God's plan, at the time He considers appropriate, the Lord Jesus shall return. His words, "*I will come again,*" cannot be stifled even beneath the scoffing and mockery of skeptics and unbelievers. At His coming this earth and all that is therein shall be burned up (First Peter 3:10-12). It will be the day of judgment and the separation of the righteous from the unrighteous forever (Matthew 25). Then what will really matter? Then what will we say is truly worthwhile?

Then shall the Christian be given his reward in heaven (Matthew 5:12). We shall receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10). We shall enter into that eternal existence of bliss. Paul wrote, "*For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give unto me in that day; and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing.*" (Second Timothy 4:6-8). All the gold, silver, fame, fortune, frolics, pleasures that characterize this world which passeth away will be gone forever. The redeemed in Christ will possess for eternity everything that is really worthwhile.

* * * * *

You will benefit from thinking on the thought suggested on the back cover.

Can Homosexuals Be Saved?



There is much talk about this sin in our society. And it is sin. There is no way to deny the Biblical condemnation of homosexuality except to be dishonest. Some have come down so hard that you would think they did not want homosexuals to be saved. Others are so twisted in their thinking that they don't even think it is wrong. But I wonder why this question? Why do people ask this about homosexuals? Why not ask the same question about some other group of sinners and see what answer you get? Can a thief be saved? Can an adulterer be saved? We know they can, but not in their sin. They must repent of it, come out from it, be cleansed by the blood of Christ. So it is with a homosexual. One cannot keep on practicing sin. The way of salvation for the homosexual is exactly the same as for all other sinners. One big problem that exists today regarding this sin is the way that prominent government officials and other degenerate liberals are trying to make this sin acceptable. It is a sin and always will be . JWB

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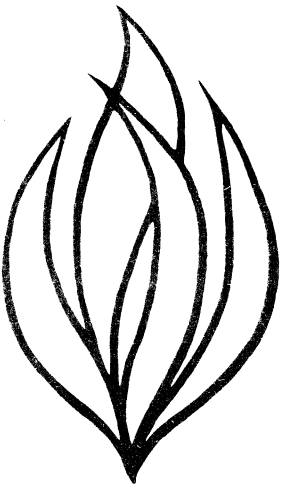

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Treasure and the Pearl

Matthew 13:44-46, "*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*"

A parable has been defined as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a story involving physical things that teaches spiritual meanings. In Matthew thirteen there are seven parables, each depicting, defining, explaining, and illustrating something about the kingdom of heaven. Because of similarity, it is reasonable to study some of the parables together.

Our two parables under consideration, the parable of the treasure and the parable of the pearl, do not merely repeat the same identical lesson. The primary message is repeated, but with a difference. These two parables complement each other. Together they include two broad classes of people who are so fortunate as to come into possession of the kingdom of heaven.

The Kingdom

What is the kingdom of heaven? It is the same as the kingdom of God, God's kingdom, His spiritual kingdom, that which has come from God, the kingdom that had its origin in heaven, the Lord's church, the kingdom of Christ. This kingdom was prophesied to come in the Old Testament prophecies. It is the one of which Christ gave Peter, then all of the apostles, keys that they used in preaching the gospel of the kingdom. It is the kingdom of heaven in the sense that it was designed in heaven, and those who live faithfully therein shall exist with God in heaven for eternity. The kingdom of heaven is composed of a citizenry that is the same as the church (Colossians 1:13). There are few truths that are denied so fiercely in the denominational world as this truth, but

there are few matters that are emphasized more completely in the Scriptures than the identity of the church as the Lord's kingdom. These parables teach the glory, worth, value, greatness, and desirability of being in the kingdom, the Lord's church.

Finders and Seekers

The difference in the parables is the difference between "finders" and "seekers." Sometimes men would bury their treasure. There were no banks and possibly none to whom they would entrust their wealth. Sometimes men died with the secret of the location of their treasure dying with them. There it would remain until someone possibly discovered it through chance. "Found", according Thayer, means to find by chance, like stumbling upon it, unaware of its existence until it was located. The picture is like one plowing in a field and his plow uncovers a box of treasure that he had not anticipated nor even knew existed.

The pearl merchant is somewhat different from that. He did not just "happen" upon the goodly pearl. He perceived that it did exist somewhere, and he was diligently seeking it. He had some pearls but they were blemished, tinged in some way, with defects of some kind. He spent effort to locate the pearl of great price.

There are two kinds of people represented here who come into possession of that which is valuable. One was a "finder" and the other was a "seeker."

The discovery of their prize is not what made the treasure or pearl valuable. The value was there whether they ever discovered them or not. Regardless of what reaction they might have taken once they knew the treasure and pearl existed, the value was inherent in the treasure and pearl. We must stress the value. Their good fortune was twofold: (1) discovering what was already of great value, (2) recognizing the value of what they discovered and having sufficient appreciation for it to make the effort to own it.

The Value to Them

How valuable was the treasure and pearl to them? Something may be of great value, but not to a particular person. Some may not care for what they have and consider something very valuable as almost worthless. But these discoverers sold all they had to secure for themselves what they wanted. No price was too dear to obtain what they considered valuable and available.

What is Pictured?

Such is the earthly story. Let us learn the spiritual meaning and application. The treasure and the pearl represent the kingdom of heaven, the church. Just how valuable is the church? The value of a thing is determined by the price paid for it. However men may consider the church, the Lord considered it of such value as to pay the price of the blood of Christ for it (Acts 20:28). How valuable is the church to you? Some seem to consider it so useless. What a tragic mistake for anyone to so consider the church of Christ. Christ gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25). How valuable is Christ?

There is quite a contrast in God's sense of values and those held by the denominational world regarding the church. How can men say the church is not essential since Jesus died for it? How can men consider the church optional in light of its relationship to God and Christ? Some do not think it is worth working for its welfare. Some who are members of it are not loyal and faithful. But just as Christ is the Savior, the church is the saved, and is the very embodiment of God's plan for saving man. Christ will save the church (Ephesians 5:23). There is no salvation outside the church than there is outside of Christ because the church is His body.

Some go through life oblivious as to how meaningful, beautiful, valuable it is living with God in His kingdom. But by chance they hear the truth, learn it, having never realized the existence of such blessings in this life. They never knew how much they needed Christ, or the joy of being in Christ. But they happened upon the truth.

There are others who have realized that life has purpose, a meaning, that there must be truth in the world, and have searched diligently for it before discovering it.

The way of the Lord for man is valuable whether men ever discover it or not, or whether they respect it once they become aware of it or not. How wonderful it is for all concerned when people do show appreciation for what God offers once they are aware of its existence.

Why the Church is Valuable

The church is of great value, not because of the righteousness of the people in it. They have been washed clean of sin by the blood of Christ, and now live in a relationship where the blood of Christ keeps on cleansing as one walks faithfully (First John 1:7). All the credit for the value of the church belongs to Christ.

Just as the treasure and pearl was so dear to those in the parables, so much so that they gave their all to obtain them, so it is with the Lord's church. One must deny self, and follow Christ. Those who love sin must turn from sin. The lover of money must abandon his covetousness. The indolent man must learn to work. The violator of the law must learn to obey the law. The lover of pleasure must control himself and follow after righteousness. In other words, in order to make the gain, there must first be the sacrifice. It is wonderful to realize that we never have to give up anything that is worthwhile or good for us in order to lay hold on the spiritual wealth of being in the Lord's church. We must be like Paul and count all things but loss for the cause of Christ.

Two Points

These two short parables make two great points that directly bear upon our duty and accountability before God. They teach us the value of the church. They also teach us what the Lord expects of each of us regarding the church. Do we respect what Jesus taught? If so, we shall be in the church, laying hold on the valuable treasure and pearl of great price, the spiritual wealth the Lord has made available to us in His church.

* * * * *

What I Owe the Local Church

Let us first point out some matters with which we surely would agree. Surely, every Christian desires to do what is right in the sight of God. He wants to properly discharge his duties in whatever realm he is involved.

The New Testament speaks of the Lord's church in three ways: (1) the church everywhere, the universal church; (2) the local church, local congregation, and (3) the people of God assembled for worship. The Lord wants us to be concerned about the church in whatever sense we use the term. Our lesson centers on the local church.

In Acts 9:26-28, Paul, after obeying the gospel and being added to the church as obedient believers are (Acts 2:47), came to the city of Jerusalem and wanted to be identified with brethren in that locality. He wanted their fellowship, their association, to give and receive the strength, comfort, and encouragement that comes to members of the local church together.

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

Universally

We have a duty to the church everywhere because it is the body of Christ. But we especially have a duty to the local congregation to which we belong. It is in the local church that we serve. The church universal has no governmental structure other than Christ as the head of the church. Each congregation is independent of the other, self-governing within the teaching of the Bible. Where a local church has members that have a keen

sense of local responsibility you will have a happy, growing, active, strong church of Christ. We want to bring a few of these duties to our attention.

Locally

We all want the local church to radiate a godly influence, Therefore, every member has the duty to live a godly and righteous life. "*Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*" (Titus 2:12). We are to be as a city set on a hill, the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). When we fail in this we do injury to the cause of Christ and to every other brother and sister in the Lord. It is not just our own business what we say, do, or think. When it concerns others, as influence always does, we owe it to others to be what we profess to be; followers and imitators of Christ. What hurts one member hurts the entire body.

Some Desires and Duties

We want the home church to stand for the truth. This is what the church is assigned to do; namely, to be the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15). This demands knowledge by the membership that comes only through study and prayer. Each is obligated to grow (Second Peter 3:19). It is not an optional matter. "*Study...*" is a command of Second Timothy 2:15). Can we afford to deliberately forsake opportunities to learn more of God's will as revealed in the Scriptures?

Members of the church have the duty to hold up the hands of the preachers who come their way when they teach the truth, and to resist and oppose any who do not preach sound doctrine. No church will long remain spiritually strong before God that is not concerned with sound doctrine and purity of the message of truth. Are you doing your part in standing by truth?

We want those who visit in our services, strangers, newcomers, to feel welcome among us. We need to show a genuine interest and concern for them. Hospitality and courtesy is the least we can offer (Hebrews 13:1). We may

know that we are glad they are with us, but are we attentive to our part in making sure that they know it?

Do not wait until somebody else speaks to you. Speak to them first. They may be a visitor just waiting for some warm, sincere, and kind greeting. We owe it to the local church to create that atmosphere of people being wanted. This ought not be an artificial, pretended show of interest but because our interest is genuine.

The Leadership

We want the local church to have good leadership. We all must exercise great caution in the selection of those who serve as leaders in any capacity. But alongside good leadership must be good followship. This we all can help make a reality.

Those who lead are men, just human beings, not infallible. They are subject to making mistakes, doctrinally and in matters of judgment, like other people. Collectively they work at leading as an eldership. But their mistakes are kept at a minimum when they realize that those they lead are behind them, encourage them, appreciate their efforts, and try to cooperate with them as best they can. When a member is assigned a duty, or assumes some responsibility, he owes it to the local church and the leadership to discharge that duty to the very best of his human ability. It is the Lord's work that is involved. Loyalty to leadership is not necessarily an endorsement of every decision they are called upon to make in every matter of human judgment. We should strive for unity in matters of doctrine, and exercise consideration toward any who might differ with us in any matter. Some brethren, sometimes even elders, seem to have forgotten there is a "golden rule."

We must take their leadership seriously (First Timothy 5:19), and not be too eager to hear and pass along some criticism. Leaders sometimes fail. But let it never be because their followers failed them.

Some brethren make leading so difficult. How would you like to lead an army like the one we now describe. Picture a squadron of men called for drill and the

morning roll call. The sergeant calls out, "Smith. Where is Smith?" Somebody explains that Smith has a new boat and has gone to the lake. Then the sergeant calls for Jones. "Where is Jones?" Well, Jones had company and could not make it this time. He said he would see him next roll call. "Where is Brown?" It just so happened that Brown was cleaning his car. Someone said Brown had said this was about the only time he could get it done because he was so busy the rest of the time. "Where is Adams?" Well, it then is brought to light that the sergeant had said something that offended Adams and he just was not going to come back until the sergeant apologized. As for Thompson, he just overslept. But White was there, because he did not have anything else to do that morning.

How would you like to lead an army that had no more loyalty to duty than these soldiers? Yet, that is what many elderships have to lead. Are we like some of these?

Vital Signs

We want the local church to be active, alive, vigorous, and enthusiastic. But, although many brethren do not believe it, without faithful attendance at the worship services, this quality will be lacking. Worship is a privilege as well as a duty. Poor attendance will cause a local church to dry up and die.

When you get sick and go to the doctor, he checks your vital signs like blood pressure, heartbeat rate, temperature, insurance policy, and other things of importance to your health. Attendance is one of the vital signs of a local church. While we are not interested in numbers for the sake of numbers about which to brag, we are concerned for souls. When members of the local church have a habit of being irresponsible in attendance it saps the life out of a church regardless of how fine the preacher, eldership, building, etc. We owe it to the local church to be present at the local assemblies faithfully as often as physically possible.

Our contribution ought be into the local treasury also. While we may visit, and even make many contributions to worthwhile causes, the bulk of our giving should be at

home. This is because the home expenses continue even though we might have to be elsewhere on a given Sunday. Make sure our contribution finds it way home.

The local church should be one that is a winner of souls. "*He that winneth souls is wise.*" (Proverbs 11:30). We have a duty to the local church to make the effort to convert others. Most churches leave that almost entirely to the preacher, possibly one or two others. This is one reason we are not converting more than we are. Are members supposed to care for the lost, or just a select few? The early church was characterized by the membership taking the gospel to the lost wherever they went.

The home church ought to be a church of great warmth. It ought to be a refuge from the storms of life. There should exist consideration, genuine concern, and love throughout the membership. "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" (John 13:35).

Something to Cut Out

There is no place among members of the local church for cutting, harsh, calloused indifference and bitter words, How earthly parents are grieved when children tear at each other. Is God any less displeased? Yet, we have seen and known brethren who seem to delight in creating hard feelings, saying unkind things, provoking all manner of hurt for their brethren, and acting as if they did not even belong to the same spiritual family. We have heard members the church do this to one another, and to preachers, elders, and deacons.

Personality peculiarities, petty problems, varying views in matters of judgment are not to be allowed to cast a frigid chill over the warmth of brotherly love. When this happens, the local church is hurt by it, and the Lord will hold the guilty responsible for creating a bad climate. We need to ask, "What kind of church would this church be, if every member was just like me?"

* * * * *

Doctrines Common in Denominationalism

It is reported that there are over two thousand denominations in America. They differ in many ways, such as different types of government and organization, ways of worship, doctrines taught, creeds followed, and names worn. While most denominationalists say one denomination is as good as another, yet, each promotes his denomination above all the others. The hard truth is that denominationalism is not of God, not taught or authorized from the Scriptures, but exists contrary to what the Bible teaches regarding the church. The Lord's church is not a denomination.

Even though denominations have many differences and are divided in many ways, there are some doctrines many hold in common. Some of the things they teach and believe are true, such as the existence of God, Jesus is God's Son (although many deny the Biblical evidences of His Deity, such as the virgin birth, miracles, His resurrection), that man is accountable to God, and have varying degrees of respect for the Bible. But they also hold some common, basic, fundamental positions that are contrary to the Word of God. Some of these we wish to consider in this lesson. We study this material because we do not ever want to be caught up in denominational errors, which some are inclined to allow to stand simply because so many hold them. We need to know the truth and shun the false ways of men. "*But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" (Matthew 15:9). "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" (First John 4:1).

Salvation by Faith Alone

Many denominations teach that salvation is by faith alone and have that in their creeds and manuals. They say, "Just accept Jesus as the Christ. Just accept Him as your personal Savior. Only believe." Some encourage

people to acknowledge their faith by raising their hands, send in cards, come forward and receive some literature, and other means to indicate their faith. No response of obedience is required other than to indicate, "I believe." Of course, if this is the way of salvation to the exclusion of anything else, as they teach, this means obedience is unnecessary. While some of them say that faith includes obedience, that necessarily involves a contradiction to their "faith only" doctrine. They want it both ways.

Notice some Biblical facts. "*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*" (James 2:24). Is it not strange that the only place "*faith*" and "*only*" come together in Scripture it teaches the very opposite of what denominationalists teach? These works by which one is justified are not works of merit, or of one's own righteousness, but works of obedience.

"*And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*" (Hebrews 5:9). Are we to think that the absence of obedience means Jesus will be the author of our salvation anyway?

"*In flaming fire taking vengeance of them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Second Thessalonians 1:8). This demands something in addition to believing. It teaches obedience in the plan of salvation.

"*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*" (Matthew 7:21). Obviously, those that would cry, "Lord, Lord," believe. According to denominational doctrines that ought suffice for their salvation. But according to Jesus there was more required. That which is required to be saved from past sins includes faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ as the Son of God, and baptism for the remission of sins. This is to be followed by a faithful life.

God's people must militantly oppose and expose such false doctrines that deceive and mislead people into a false security. Such doctrines cause people to close their eyes to the truth. But if we love God, His truth, and the souls of others, we will resist such false doctrines as

salvation by faith alone. It is not what God's Word teaches.

Honesty, Not Doctrine

Many denominationalists, realizing the widespread confusion and division in doctrinal matters among them, have concluded that doctrine is of no significance anyway, and all that matters is that one be honest and sincere in what they believe, whatever it is. It has been said, "One faith is as good as another. Choose the faith of your choice. Doctrinal difference makes no difference." Others have added that God will not condemn an honest man. Is that the truth?

Paul was an honest man before he was converted. Was he saved even as he persecuted and made havoc of the Lord's church? Did God smile upon him anyway? While honesty and sincerity are certainly two qualities that must exist in the heart of one who follows Christ, one can have both of them and still follow the devil. Where is the Biblical basis for contending that is matters not what one believes so long as he is honest and sincere? Do not those who so assert have any obligation to show that to be true from the Word of God? Or are we all supposed to accept it because denominationalists have declared it?

There is "*one faith.*" (Ephesians 4:4). We are to "*earnestly contend for the faith.*" (Jude 3). Paul "*kept the faith.*" (Second Timothy 4:7). Having "a faith" is not necessarily having "*the faith.*"

Discount Baptism

Most denominations degrade and consider baptism unnecessary even though most practice something or another that they call baptism. Some do not baptize (immerse), but sprinkle and/or pour water on their subjects. Others will baptize (immerse) for reasons others than what the Scripture teaches. Some denominations call for something called baptism in order to "join" their denomination, but not to go to heaven. They make it more difficult to get into their man-made religious organization than they do to go to

heaven. If they can go to heaven without a denomination, why ever belong to one? But this denial of the necessity of baptism is a "must" because they teach salvation by faith alone. While the Lord's church is falsely accused of preaching "water salvation," as if the power of salvation is in the water itself, denominationalists want to "dry clean" everybody.

What does the Bible teach? Baptism is immersion (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4), in water (Acts 8:36; 10:47), in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38; 19:5), for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), or to be saved (Mark 16:16), at which time one is also baptized into the body (First Corinthians 12:13), which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), because God adds the baptized ones thereto (Acts 2:47). We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27), and into His death (Romans 6:3,4), where His blood was shed (John 19:34), and by which we are justified (Romans 5:9). Because we reach His blood in baptism, Peter wrote, "*...baptism doth now also save us...*" (First Peter 3:21).

One as Good as Another

Denominationalists often teach that one church is just as good as another church. They do not practice that, but only say that. If that be so, why not join them all and get the good out of all of them? We will agree that one denomination is as good as another, but none or them exist by the authority of God. The Lord's church is not a denomination, has no kinship or fellowship with denominations, oppose the division, confusion, and false doctrines that pour from denominations. Nor is the church the sum total of all the denominations. There is nothing Biblical about denominationalism. If so, take your Bible and show us where!

The church is the house or family of God (First Timothy 3:15), the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13), the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23), the one body (Ephesians 4:4), the saved (Acts 2:47). Nobody is taught from Scripture to "join" the Lord's church, but we are all taught to obey the commands of the gospel and when we do God adds us to the company of the saved, which is the church (Acts 2:47). How can denominationalists read the prayer of Jesus for unity, read Paul's condemnation of division,

and still have the gall to promote a system of religion that propagates, thrives on, and is sustained by division? Why cannot people be content with the church as the Bible reveals it without trying to change it to suit people rather than submit to God?

When we sow the seed of the kingdom, which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11), it will produce the kingdom, or church. One must sow the tares of the doctrines of men to produce denominations.

Nothing in a Name

Denominationalists say there is nothing in a name. The reason they say this is because denominations wear all kinds of names religiously, few being found in Scripture at all. But they do not believe their contention when it comes to their practice, or even in other matters, but only in matters religious. They consider names important in business, on products, in marriage. They do not name their children "Fido," and their dogs after their grandparents. The teaching is false and their practice is hypocritical.

What does the Bible teach? Isaiah 62:22 tells us that God would call His people by a new name, once both Jews and Gentiles were included. Acts 11:26 reports, "*And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,*" the first congregation to include both Jews and Gentiles. Paul gave sanction to this name in Acts 26:28, as did Peter in First Peter 4:16. It is not a name of derision given to disciples of Christ by their enemies, but a name that honors the Son of God and given by God Himself through inspired men. But denominations wear names that honor men, governmental systems, religious rites, names that only divide people one from the other.

Abuse of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is abused by denominationalists because they do not observe it as the New Testament teaches it is to be observed, either in the matter of when, or the meaning of it. In fact, in some denominations, observance of the Lord's Supper is not required at all. Some will make a big show of something called the

Lord's Supper during Easter or Christmas, maybe even at weddings and "infant baptisms." Catholics call is a "mass," which to them means a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, even though the Bible says He was offered once (Hebrews 9:28).

The Lord's Supper does not exist by the authority of the church, but of Christ. He instituted it (Matthew 26:26-28; First Corinthians 11:23-30). We are commanded to observe it as a memorial to Christ, in His memory, commemorating Him, emphasizing His sacrifice, in His kingdom, until He come again. The physical elements of the fruit of the vine and the unleavened bread represent the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

The early church observed the Lord's Supper in their assembly (First Corinthians 11) on the first day of the week (First Corinthians 16:1,2). We have the example of brethren meeting on the first day of the week for this purpose (Acts 20:7). The early church was stedfast in this practice (Acts 2:42). This demands regularity, and how regular. To legislate one first day to the exclusion of other first days is without divine authority.

Even though secular history is not our authority in religion, it is noteworthy that secular historians tell us the early church met each first day of the week to eat the Lord's Supper as a memorial to Christ.

Other Common Errors

There are others denominational doctrines and practices we could name, such as the use of instrumental music in worship, clergy and laity, women preachers, the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, permissiveness toward worldliness, such as dancing, drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking, etc.

The spirit and action of denominationalism runs counter to New Testament teaching and shows great disrespect for the only religious authority we have, the Bible. The Lord's church must respect Biblical teaching and oppose every false way.

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The Legalism of Grace

The Bible says much about the grace of God, but many are not really aware or informed regarding it. It is not surprising to Bible students that much is heard about God's grace. We rely on and are the recipients of the benefits of His grace. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:4,8,9, "*Ye are saved by grace.*" Romans 3:24, "*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" Titus 3:7, "*That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*" That we are saved by grace is indisputable.

Grace

But what is grace? Grace is a favor bestowed that is unmerited, unearned, underserved, but received anyway. God has favored man with the way of salvation. Man did not deserve to be saved. He cannot earn his salvation. But because of what God has done, man can be saved. We are not to think, however, that salvation is by grace alone because there are several components in God's plan for saving man that are built upon the grace of God.

It is unfortunate that some have misused the teaching about the grace of God as to eliminate the absolute necessity of obedience to the commands of God. Some speak of grace versus law, as if the two concepts are antagonistic against each other.

Law

But what is law? Law is a rule that exists by authority. It consists of commandments, ordinances, judgments, statutes, precepts, regulations, prohibitions, instructions. Law implies authority. In the case of God's law, we are dealing with God's authority.

There are several passages that teach we are "*free from the law.*" But we must examine them in context lest we conclude that one does not even have to obey God's law.

John 1:17, "*For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*" God gave Israel a law through Moses. But that law is not the only law in the Bible. Law existed before Moses ever lived. There are other laws. This passage teaches that we are not saved by the law of Moses, but by the grace and truth that came through Christ. But the truth of Christ includes law.

Romans 3:20, "*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh by justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*" This does not negate all law, but that Mosaic law is not the way of salvation from sin. Sin can be defined and known for what it is through Moses' law, but that law did not provide for forgiveness. But this is far from saying that grace and law are incompatible.

Similar teaching is found in Romans 6:14. "*For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*" This means we are under a different system than the Mosaic system, but under the system of Christ. It does not teach there is no law to which we are still accountable.

The same teaching is found in Galatians 2:16, "*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.*" There is a wide difference in saying we are not saved by the law of Moses and saying there is no law to which we must respond.

Galatians 5:4, "*Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.*" Anyone who would expect to be saved by the law of Moses is not relying as he should on the way of salvation by grace through Christ.

Grace and Law

But there is law in the grace of Christ. In other words, there is legalism in the system of grace. Legalism is conforming to law. Legalism, conforming to God's law, is to complement God's grace in bringing man to salvation. Let us see this illustration. When a man makes a will and states certain conditions that must be met before the distribution of his estate, the conditions do not render ineffective the grace of the will maker. The existence of

his will is a demonstration of his grace toward his heirs. He was not obligated to give them anything. But he offers them something from his estate by his grace. But he may well stipulate certain conditions his heirs must meet before they receive what he offers. But the fact that he makes the conditions does not mean the conditions are incompatible, inconsistent, or an infringement upon his graciousness toward them. Rather, the conditions are the means for carrying out his grace. The conditions are laws that must be obeyed. So it is with the grace of God, His laws, and our salvation.

Let us see that there is law in the system of grace. Galatians 6:2, "*Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.*" There is a law of Christ. This cannot be denied. We are obligated to obey His law.

Ephesians 2:8,9, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast.*" Grace refers to what God has done to save man. Faith refers to what man must do to be saved. To further show no incompatibility between grace and works, consider the very next verse. "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*" God expects works of us. How could we conclude that works and grace are antagonistic?

Romans 5:2, "*By whom we also have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand...*" It is by man's conformity in faith to what the Lord has commanded that we enter into the benefits and blessings provided by God's grace.

When Paul was writing of the promise for all men that was given through Abraham, he wrote, "*Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace...*" (Romans 4:16). Both grace (God's part), and faith (man's part), are essential. One without the other avails nothing for mankind.

No Conflict

Nor can we ever conclude conflict between faith and law. Romans 1:17, "*The just shall live by faith.*" Life with God can be mine and yours through a system that demands faith. But in this same letter Paul wrote of the "*law of*

faith" (Romans 3:27). Notice the harmony that exists between grace, faith, and law!

We are not saved by the law of works of our own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5), nor by the works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), nor by the works of the Mosaic Law (Romans 3:20,27), nor can we earn salvation. This does not mean there is no law in the plan of salvation, or that salvation is by grace alone.

As far as the law of Moses is concerned, "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.*" (Romans 10:4). The word "*end*" refers to a target, goal, the reason for existence, the purpose involved. It is used in First Peter 1:9 explaining that salvation is the end of our faith. Such teaching regarding the law of Moses is harmonious with Galatians 3:23-25, "*But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.*"

The law of Moses did not provide forgiveness (Hebrews 7:19; 10:4). But to reach heaven we must conform to the "*perfect law of liberty*" (James 1:25). This is the law of truth, because one is made free by the truth (John 8:32).

Free From What Law?

Some false teachers try to make much of the teaching that we are delivered from the law. But from what law are we delivered? Are we free from the laws of nature, such as gravity, heat, sowing and reaping? Certainly not!

Are we delivered from civil law? No! (Romans 13; First Peter 2). Are we delivered from the law governing morality? The grace of God, and obedience to His law, makes morality a prime obligation upon all mankind. The "do your own thing" doctrine is contrary to the law of Christ, and His grace is not to be used as liberty and licence for lasciviousness (Galatians 5:15; Jude 4). We are not delivered from the "*royal law*" of James 2:8), or the "*law of God*" (Romans 7:22). By the "*law of the Spirit of*

life in Christ Jesus" we are made free from the law of sin and death (Romans 6:2). We are not free from all law.

Romans 8:1-4, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."*

There are three laws mentioned in that text. The law of sin and death is defined in Romans 6:23 and James 1:15. The law of Moses was not capable of delivering us from the law of sin and death because one could not live perfectly under that law. But another law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the law that is a part of the same system of salvation as the grace of God, that law can and does save man from the law of sin and death. It does so because by obedience to that law man partakes of the grace of God.

Perfect Harmony

Where then is grace, if there is law to obey? Grace provided the way of salvation, the blood of Christ, by which we are saved (Romans 5:9). Obedience brings us into that grace. What we obey is the law of Christ.

There is legalism, law keeping, in the system of grace that cannot be dismissed. Grace teaches us (Titus 2:11,12) how and what we must do to be the peculiar people that God wants.

We frustrate the grace of God (Galatians 2:11) when we do not obey the law that fits perfectly within the same system of salvation as the grace of God.

One final thought: if salvation is by grace alone, who made that law? Even then, how do you escape law?

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Curse Ye Meroz

Judges 5:23, "*Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord; curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof...*"

Israel, God's chosen people, even with all the advantages given them, were, in the period of the Judges under consideration, alienated from God because they had forsaken the ways of the Lord. As was so often the case, God determined to chasten them because of their backsliding and bring them to repentance.

God still chastens those He loves. Hebrews 12:6, "*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*" While there are some that consider all chastening to reveal a lack of love, the discipline, rebuking and training that one receives is because of love. Those left simply go their own way and "do their own thing" are not loved as they should be.

God often used the nations around Israel as instruments to chasten His own people. Even though these nations were not righteous, and served heathen gods, they could be used by the Lord for benefit to His own people. In this circumstance in our lesson, God used Jabin, king of Canaan, and his army under the leadership of Sisera, the captain, to humble the disgressive Israelites.

Under the Judges

The history of Israel during the period of the Judges is not a glorious period for Israel. They would repeatedly fluctuate between serving God and serving idols that they had learned to follow from the nations around them. Their loyalty to God was stained with periods of disloyalty. While they were enjoying prosperity, they would turn from the true God of heaven, the source of their prosperity, and serve their selfish interests and gods other than Jehovah. Then God would allow them to be humbled. In their humbled state, whether in bondage or under local captivity, they would repent and return to the Lord. At this, God would raise up a deliverer, a judge, who would lead the people in their time of crisis and throw off the yoke and burden imposed by the

persecuting forces. Once the enemy was subdued, for a time Israel would again show loyalty to God and God would allow them to prosper. But before long, the cycle of apostasy and prosperity would repeat itself.

Our Setting

At this time the leaders of the people were Deborah and Barak. Under their leadership Israel went against Jabin, having repented of their backsliding. God gave them a great victory over Sisera and the armies of Canaan.

But there was a real problem concerning the people of Meroz. They took no part in the conflict. They could have assisted and they should have. They had the opportunity and could have made significant contributions toward the welfare of the entire nation. But they chose to remain aloof from the struggle and refused to help even their own people.

The location of Meroz is not definitely known, although it is thought to have occupied a strategic location where they could have guarded a mountain pass and prevented the escape of the men of Canaan once they were being routed. They could have acted in a manner that would have had a lasting effect for Israel, but they did nothing. The angel of the Lord said they were to be cursed bitterly because of their failure. The last part of our text reads, "*because they came not to the help of Jehovah, to the help of Jehovah against the mighty.*" By failing to help God's people against the enemies of God and His people they were declared deserving of being cursed bitterly.

Let us see the situation clearly. Here was a struggle between truth and error, the true God versus false gods, heathenism against the living God, God's people against the servants of the devil. God was on the side of Israel. Why should not Meroz also be there in the conflict?

Do we not learn from this? When we fail to lend assistance to the people of God, whose people we also profess to be, and there is this battle and struggle of right against wrong, are we not guilty of the same failure as that which brought reproach against Meroz?

When the Lord appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, he asked, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" (Acts 9:24). Saul was actually persecuting the church, binding men and women and putting them in prison, consenting unto their death, because of their faith in Christ. But in so doing, Jesus said he was persecuting Him. Surely, if persecuting the church is to persecute Christ, then to help the Lord's church is to render help to the Christ. It follows that withholding help from the Lord's church is to withhold help from the Lord Himself. We can easily see this is true.

A Constant Warfare

Christians must constantly keep in mind the age-old struggle and battle that is in progress. It is the warfare between truth and error, righteousness and unrighteousness, good against evil, right versus wrong, the forces of Satan as they war against the forces of God. Each side is equipped with an arsenal of weapons with which to fight this spiritual warfare. Nobody can content himself or herself to attempt a neutral stance in this struggle. As Jesus taught, we are either for Him or against Him. An attempt to assume a neutral position is to choose to not be fore Him. There is no middle ground. This is the mistake that the inhabitants of Meroz made when the time for their assistance was presented.

The nature of the gospel, and the person of Jesus Christ necessitates a decision. It is inescapable. A decision not to help the Lord is a decision that deserves curses of damnation. While there are some matters of life in which we can afford to be indifferent and there be no serious consequences, this is not so regarding service to God and allegiance to Christ.

Opposing God's People

It is a serious thing to oppose the people of God as they are involved in doing the Lord's will. It is equally serious to fail to lend assistance when needed in carrying out the work for Christ. Whenever we are able to help and have opportunity to help we have a corresponding obligation to help., If we do not, in what

way are we different from the people of Meroz of long ago that displeased God?

Chapter twenty-five of Matthew pictures the judgment scene. Jesus said in verse forty, "*Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it not unto me.*" This chapter is noteworthy, not only because of the judgment scene, the separation of the sheep from the goats, but the reasons given for the distinctions between them. A close reading of verses thirty-one through forty-six teaches that both were judged according to what they did, or did not do, with respect to something that ought to have been done. The sins of adultery, stealing, lying, murder, etc. are not named against those that were banished into punishment. Condemnation of such things is taught elsewhere in the Scriptures. But those condemned were condemned because of what they did not do; because of their failure to lend assistance as they ought.

James wrote, "*To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" (James 4:17).

We need to consider this principle when there is a gospel meeting, when there is a call for work. when the needy need help., when the bereaved are suffering, when the discouraged need uplifting, when the truth is under attack from within and without, when the church is being degraded, when helping hands are wanted. We dare not think we can behave as did those of Meroz and still be looked upon with favor by the Lord. They were cursed bitterly. Shall we receive a different recompense if we are guilty of the same transgression?

Today, as the church is bashed right and left by liberals and modernists, as the Deity of Christ is attacked, as the Bible is set aside in favor of the "scholarship" of self-appointed experts, we sometimes see and hear brethren that shy away from the fight. They may not join the forces of error directly, but they give Satan assistance by not coming to the side of faithful brethren who are contending for the faith. This is a serious breach on the part of many. Let it not be so insinuated among you.

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The Lord's Church In God's Plan

In a very real sense it can be said that the Lord's plan for the salvation of man IS the church. This we shall explain as we proceed. When we realize what the church is, what it is supposed to be and do, we shall see that this is not an unfair or exaggerated position. In a time such as ours when many degrade the church, declare it non-essential, and even ridicule emphasis on the church, bypassing it in the work and worship of God, we need to consult once again the Bible and learn how the church fits God's plan, indeed, is the plan in evidence and demonstration.

Until members of the church are thoroughly informed regarding the church and its proper place in God's scheme of things, we are not likely to aggressively pursue the work nor be active in fulfilling our purposes.

Not a Substitute or Afterthought

The premillennial theory teaches that the church is only a temporary substitute for the failure or change of God's plan regarding the establishment of His kingdom. It is considered as a secondary provision after the Jews rejected Christ. That Christ was to establish the kingdom is well established in Scripture. It is also true that Jews, as a nation, rejected Him, although not all did because the first church was composed of Jews. It is true that Jesus returned to heaven, and will return. But when He returns, it will not be to establish the kingdom He failed to establish the first time. He succeeded in establishing the kingdom. Next time He will come and deliver the kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). The kingdom is the church and the church is the kingdom. They are not separate institutions.

If Christ failed to establish the kingdom the first time, then all the Old Testament prophecies were wrong, the prophets were false prophets, even though directed by God. Even Jesus would be a false prophet because He declared the kingdom was "*at hand,*" as did John the

Baptist, the twelve apostles, and the seventy that Jesus sent forth. Eighty-four men, guided by Deity, declared the kingdom to be "*at hand*" in that first century. Were they all wrong? Did Christ fail to establish the kingdom, or postpone it, and build the church as a substitute measure until He comes again? ABSOLUTELY NOT! The church is the kingdom. Those who are members of the church are the citizens of the kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). The fact that the Jews rejected Christ did not alter God's plan. Romans 3:3,4, "*For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid; yea, let God be true, but every man a liar, as it is written, That thou mightest overcome when thou art judged.*"

Before the Beginning

The church was in God's plan even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), even according to God's eternal purpose (Ephesians 3:8-12). The establishment of the church was that which had been prophesied, especially by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16). It was on that same day of Pentecost that people who were obedient to the gospel were added to the church (Acts 2:47).

The term "church" is used in several senses in the New Testament. It is significant that it is never used with reference to denominationalism in any form. There is no Biblical authority for the existence of any denomination that has, does, or ever shall exist. The word "church" means "called out." Those in the church have been called out of darkness into light, called out of the world into Christ, called out of sin into salvation, called out of Satan's dominion into the kingdom of God.

This call comes by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14; Romans 1:16). The church is composed of saved people. It is set forth by various figures in the Bible as a body with Christ as the head (Ephesians 1:22,23), as a kingdom with Christ as King (Colossians 1:13), as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5), as a building with Christ as the builder and foundation (Matthew 16:16-18; First Corinthians 3:11), as a family with God as the Father and Christians as His children (First Timothy 3:15; Romans 8:16).

The Saved

The word "church" is used with reference to the saved everywhere, the church universal (Matthew 16:16-18; Colossians 1:18). It is used with reference to local churches or congregations (Romans 16:16; First Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2; Revelation 1,2,3). It is also used with reference to the local church assembled in worship (First Corinthians 11:18).

The local congregations of the New Testament, although beset with frailties, were organized alike, taught alike to believe and walk by the same rule, and were the church of Christ. They shared the "*common salvation*" (Jude 3). It is that church which we are interested in restoring for our own time.

I heard a liberal once ask, "Which church are we going to restore? Shall we restore the Jerusalem church, the church at Rome, the church at Ephesus. etc.?" Inasmuch as the Lord's church is what is revealed in the New Testament, this is that in which we are interested. These churches were united in the matters of faith, even though there were members who were not always walking faithfully. Such remarks often are heard from people who really have no interest in restoring the New Testament church, but prefer to follow their own plan that allows everybody to do whatever they wish.

It is God's intent that we have membership in a local church. A local church is the largest governmental organization of which we read in the New Testament for the church, other than Christ being head of the church. Too many have adopted a "floating" policy where they go hither, there, and yon and never assume responsibility anywhere for anything. Being a bunch of "jumping grasshoppers" never will build up anything. We are not talking about an occasional visit with brethren in other places. But we are concerned about those upon whom you can never depend, will not take any assignment, will not be identified with any congregation, and do not feel any sense of duty anywhere in particular and nowhere in general. When Paul came into Jerusalem he desired to "join" himself to the Christians there. Thanks to Barnabas, after some reluctance by the Jerusalem

brethren to accept him because of his reputation as a persecutor, Paul became one among the saints there.

Governing the Local Church

God has assigned elders to oversee the work and affairs of the local church. Christians are taught, "*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.*" (Hebrews 13:7,17). Elders have the oversight of the flock (First Peter 5:2), but cannot shepherd the flock if the flock scatters of its own will and refuses to be assisted. Those who "jump about" do not take advantage of one of the God-given safeguards against apostasy.

In a day when rebellion against authority is so common, it is not commendable for children of God to refuse to commit themselves under the oversight of the system of rule that God has devised. To remain aloof from the local church and fail to cooperate in that organization is to run roughshod over a part of God's plan for man.

The organization of the church is relatively simple, especially when compared with the systems designed by men. Christ is the King or Head of the church. The headquarters of the church is where the Head is; namely, in heaven. There is no earthly head of the Lord's church, nor any ecclesiastical system larger than a local congregation.

The local church is overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, with every member making up the membership of the body. This is neither complicated nor difficult to understand, but when executed as God has designed it, it is the most effective and efficient system one can consider.

Ephesians 1:22,23, "*And hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*"

As surely as Jesus Christ is adequate and sufficient, so is His church, which is His body.

The Work

What is the church to do? We have already seen what it is to be. It is the saved. The mission of the Lord's church is to be carried out through the autonomous local congregations. While congregations may cooperate with each other in doing various works, no congregation may assume the oversight of another congregation. It takes the combined effort of all the saved to perform the work that the Lord has given the church to do. This does not permit some kind of organizational structure that would overshadow the local church, but it means that each Christian and each congregation must be busy at the task if the work is going to be done.

The work of the church that is primary is to be the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*" (First Timothy 3:15). It is to carry forward the mission of Christ to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). There are duties for the individual and the congregation collectively. Sometimes these duties will even overlap, but even so they are not always identical. The church is to go forward with that great charge that Jesus uttered just prior to His ascension into heaven. "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" (Mark 16:15). The early church understood that and that comprised their basic and fundamental work. We must understand that today.

The church also has a responsibility to relieve the distressed. There are some who contend that the church sins if it gives assistance to anyone except those of God's family. They cannot even assist an orphaned child from the funds given by Christian into the local church treasury. Does anyone really consider such a disposition Christlike in nature? Did Christ confine His benevolence just to those of the house of Israel, God's children during His ministry? Are we not to imitate Christ? Great stress is given by some that helping the needy outsider is strictly and exclusively a duty of individuals. Yet, when questioned, how few of those who so contend provide for orphaned children in any way! How few help the needy children! How few ever help

anybody. They claim they cannot afford it even as they ride about in new cars, watch big-screen televisions, etc. Such hypocrisy is deserving of stout rebuke. Whether an individual or the local church, pure religion involves visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction (James 1:27). Who wants to be in a church that cannot practice pure religion? Paul wrote Galatians 6:10 to churches.

The church can help widows (First Timothy 5:16), but not orphans (James 1:27)? While the church cannot be the home for the homeless, it can provide a home for the homeless. When it does, it is doing a part of the work the Scriptures teach the church to be doing.

The church is to build itself up through edification (First Thessalonians 5:11), and strengthening its members by teaching (Matthew 28:18ff). Once one is baptized, he is as a babe in Christ, and must be afforded the "*sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby.*" (First Peter 2:2).

The church assembles for worship as well as carrying out the work. First and foremost the church is to bring glory to God by living as God would have people to live, serving as God would have them serve, worshipping as God would have them worship, and being busy in saving the lost souls from sin (Ephesians 3:21).

The Church and Salvation

Some have said, "The church does not save you." This is said to mean that it does not matter to which church you belong. But that is all wrong. In a sense the church does save you. Christ is the Savior. But the church has a role in saving people by preaching the gospel to all, without which there is no salvation (Romans 10:13-17). The church is composed of the saved. The church that does not emphasize the mission of preaching and teaching the truth, by which we are set free (John 8:32), is failing. Too many churches today have opted for recreation, entertainment, gymnasiums, parties, festivals, trips, cook-outs, playgrounds, etc., even hiring "ministers" to conduct such affairs. Where is authority for such things? Little wonder churches are not held in respect as they once were! Many have become the poor man's country

club. Others have become so worldly centered and worldly minded that the gospel finds little place in their affairs. They may be big, with lots of money, popular, politically powerful, have impressive buildings, and big salaries for the "staff," but that is not what God teaches and we ought to have more respect for His Word than to promote such things, even when these things themselves may not be sinful. They are not the work of the church nor reflect comprehension by the members of such churches as to what the church is, and what it is to do.

We said at the start that the church IS God's plan for saving man. God's seeks salvation, and the church is at the center of it because the church is the saved. One must be in the church to be counted among the saved. He must be in the church to serve as he ought. One enters the church the same way he is saved from his past sins. He must hear the word, believe in Christ as the Son of God, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized in water for the remission of sins. Then God adds him to the church (Acts 2:47). The existence of the church is the demonstration and exhibition of God's plan for saving man (Ephesians 3:10).

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Influence

We are studying a matter of greater power than most of us realize. Anything that has great power must be used with great care. The power of influence is staggering and actually beyond our ability to measure to its fullest because it is so great and far reaching. Influence is a quality that everyone possesses in varying degrees. This study, therefore, is very applicable to everyone who reads these words. It should be of great concern to every Christian. What we have in mind for this lesson is not to deal with many specifics, but to stress the reality of the existence of influence, and the kinds of influence.

What Is It?

What is influence? Influence is a moral and spiritual force that has the power and capacity to effect other people, conditions, and situations. Jesus presented this moral force in two figures in the Sermon on the Mount. It is as salt. Matthew 5:13, "*Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of men.*"

Again, it is as light. Matthew 5:14-16, "*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither to men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"

Influence is pictured also as leaven. Matthew 13:33, "*Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*" Paul recognized this analogy between leaven and influence when he wrote, "*Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*" (First Corinthians 5:6).

Two Kinds

There are two kinds of influence. Some influence is bad and detrimental to those it touches. It is harmful to those who are affected by it. It leads people away from God rather than toward God. Such was the influence of Solomon's wives upon him and led him into idolatry. (First Kings 11:1-3). The influence of the Pharisees was harmful. Matthew 23:13, "*But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.*" Consider the influence of that which is called Jezebel in Revelation 2:20, "*Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.*" This may refer to a person or an evil influence.

Even the influence of Peter was detrimental on one occasion in Antioch. Paul wrote in Galatians 2:13, "*And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insmuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.*" This was when Peter bowed beneath the pressure of Jewish brethren to disassociate himself from Gentile brethren. Paul warned, "*Evil companions corrupt good morals.*" This is due to the power of influence (First Corinthians 15:33). Solomon wrote, "*Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroyeth much good.*" (Ecclesiastes 9:18). This is due to influence.

But there is also good influence which helps others and goes a long way in leading others toward the right, straight, and good way. It is beneficial in nature. Such was the influence of Mordecai in Esther 4:14. When Esther balked at approaching the king of Persia on behalf of the Jews, Mordecai advised, "*For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place: but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" This was encouragement enough for Esther to act courageously in bringing about deliverance for the Jews from the wicked and sinister plot of Haman.

Dorcas was a good influence. At her death, Peter was called by her friends. When he arrived it is said, "*When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber; and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.*" (Acts 9:9).

Consider the love and consideration shown by brethren toward Paul as he, as a prisoner, was making his way toward Rome. Acts 28:15, "*And from thence, when thy brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appiforum, and the three taverns; whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.*" Their influence was a good influence on Paul. We could name others, such as the influence of Lydia on her own household, like that of Cornelius on his household and the Jews, and the Philippian jailor on his family. The truth of the matter is that every word, deed, attitude, however small it may

seem, is either for good or for evil. Nothing said or done it totally without significance.

We All Have It

There is another fact that cannot be overlooked. Every person has influence either to use or abuse. Romans 14:7, "*For none of us liveth to himself; and no man dieth to himself.*" The teaching is that we all have influence, and there is no substance to the claim, "What I do is nobody's business but my own."

We are born with influence. The very entrance and presence into the world of a child changes almost everything around him. Just consider how it rearranges everything pertaining to the family. Meals, trips, work habits, rest, anything and everything must be adjusted because of the impact of the new person just born. That is powerful influence.

We influence other people and other people influence us. Influence is a two-way street. For this reason we must be careful regarding what we do, with whom we have close association, what we say, as well as what we allow ourselves to hear, what we permit ourselves to see. Such affects our thinking. Our conduct, appearance, speech, actions, attitudes, where we go, everything has a bearing on our influence.

Thankfully, there are many constructive influences in the world coming from many sources. We must seek those good influences and allow ourselves to be affected by them. This is reason enough to seek out Christians.

You might recall that following the crucifixion that Peter said, "*I go a fishing.*" Others said, "*We also go with thee.*" (John 21:3). Peter influenced them. Hosea 4:9, "*And there shall be, like people, like priest.*" This gives recognition of influence. Cannot we see the influence of the ten faithless spies who returned from spying out the land of Canaan and the effect they had on the entire nation of Israel? They "*made the heart of the people melt.*" (Joshua 14:8). Their influence was very detrimental.

Influence Keeps Working

Again, we never do lose our influence. Our influence may change from good to bad, or vice versa. But we always retain our influence to some degree even after we are dead. It is never quite exhausted. Even when redirected, it remains. Like radioactive materials, like the drop of radium on a wood floor, it can be brushed up, washed up, even burned, and traces of the activity will even be found in the ashes, in the water, on the brushes. It cannot be destroyed. Our influence has an eternal effect. What a sobering thought!

They do not bury our influence in the coffin when they bury our body. This can be a cause for rejoicing and a cause for regret, depending upon the kind of influence we have left behind us. Revelation 14:13, "*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.*"

Hebrews 11:4, speaking of Abel, "*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*" Hebrews twelve teaches us that we have a "*great crowd of witness*" who have left their mark on the world, who have left lessons to be learned, which are useful even now long after they have left the scene.

Did not Peter teach that possibly a faithful wife can influence her husband to become a child of God, not through constant preaching as much as by good example (First Peter 3:1-6)? That is a matter of influence. Consider the woman who anointed the head of Jesus in Matthew twenty-six. Jesus said of her, "*Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her.*" Does not her influence live even yet?

The sins of Jeroboam infected the national life of Israel during his lifetime, but also long after he had died. When other kings did wickedly they were compare with the evil of Jeroboam. The iniquities of fathers have affected

generations (Exodus 34:7). Our influence can and will affect people we shall never meet, never know, and who will not even know our influence affects them. But it can, does, and will. Therefore, is it not evident that we must guard, protect, cherish, and properly use and never abuse our influence?

We Shall Answer For It

We shall stand before God in judgment and give account (Second Corinthians 5:10), and among those things for which we shall answer is what we did about influence. *Romans 14:13, "Let us not therefore judge one another any more, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."* First Corinthians 8:9,13, *"But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak... Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."* In both of these passages Paul is concerned with influence on others. Matthew 18:6, *"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."* How important is the use of our influence! We can never have the attitude, "I do not care what others think. What I do is my business alone." That is simply not so, and cannot be allowed in the lives of those who would profess to follow Christ.

One of the finest compliments that could be paid to an individual is that it is easier to be good when he or she is nearby. Thanks be to God for those people who are always sources of encouragement to follow the Lord, who live in such fashion as to make you want to do better.

We close these thought by telling of an instance that occurred in a place where I preached a gospel meeting. A young man, about twenty-three years of age, was baptized and his wife was restored. Because of their example, coupled with teaching, two sisters obeyed the gospel later in the week. Many people have been good examples in leading others to obey the gospel. On the other hand, many have set the wrong example and exerted a negative influence on others by their persistent

refusal to obey the gospel. We do not want nor expect people to obey Christ simply because somebody else does. But neither can we discount the tremendous influence for good that is exerted when one comes forward to obey Christ.

Parents need to think seriously about the influence they have on their children when they refuse to come to Christ and they live their lives before their children. What a glorious influence is used when they obey. The children learned by their influence that the way of Christ is the way to live.

Where is your influence? What kind of influence is it? We shall answer to God regarding it whether we consider it great or small. Make it a good influence and God will bless you.

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Samson's Sins

One of the evidences of the divine inspiration of the Bible is the impartial way the Scripture portrays the lives of characters, even the Biblical heroes. There is a record of the vices as well as the virtues; the successes as well as the failures. A characteristic of uninspired writers is to write with a distinct and noticeable bias either in favor of one they admire, or in disfavor of one they do not like. But the Holy Spirit chose to reveal certain things about people both pleasing and displeasing to God, as when He did He told it like it was.

Samson is considered a Biblical hero. From the days of youth, children who are brought up in homes where God and His Word are respected are taught the story of Samson. He was one of the judges of Israel. The record of some fifteen different judges is given us in the books of Judges and First Samuel, even though the account of some of them is very brief. But Samson filled a difficult role in a difficult time for Israel, and his work was unique among the Judges.

He was a power and strength for Israel, God's people, in a period of history that was noted for its faithlessness and fear. Israel had so many ups and downs during their history, especially during the Judges. The record of the Judges goes through cycles and repetitions of conditions depending upon the way the people at a given time reacted toward God. Samson was a leader during a time when the Philistines were harassing and overpowering the Israelites. We must mention that God allowed the enemies of Israel to persecute them when the Israelites would apostatize from God. This was God's way of bringing them to repentance and into His favor again.

A Hero

Samson was a hero in a number of encounters and conflicts with the disturbers of his people. He is known most for his great physical strength that he used against Israel's enemies. He was literally a one-man army. Whereas other judges had used few men at times, like Gideon and his three hundred man force, and others had used larger armies by which to bring deliverance to Israel, Samson relied on his own free-wheeling style and individual efforts without the aid of others.

But, in spite of his great physical strength, he was guilty of many sins. He became a victim of his own transgressions. Sin proved to be the undoing of this notable character. It is only that theme upon which we wish to concentrate because his sins are like the sins of so many of us living many centuries after Samson.

His Background

Look at Samson's background, home, and family. His parents are mentioned at various times in the record, and there are indications that he had a reasonably good home. The marriage of his parents was one of cooperation in the rearing of their son. Any home ought to be that way. It is unfortunate that such is not the case if every home. One of the gravest problems facing our great nation is that of marital strife and turmoil. The breaking up of marriages and homes and the disastrous influences and results that come from it are immeasurable. The lack of fidelity, the disunity,

instability, and dissolution of what God intended to remain solid is bringing dire consequences upon the land. Everywhere one reads and hears, experts that really do care for the teaching of God are being forced to realize that the failure of homes is one of the major causes of the crime, havoc, mental agony, abuse, and injury in the land. Homes are truly blessed when parents are united and cooperate.

Samson's parents were a prayerful people. They believed in God and knew the value of prayer unto God. Upon learning that they would become parents, they prayed. "*O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.*" We need to get the import and impact of that prayer. How wonderful it would be if every father and mother would pray a similar prayer on behalf of their efforts in rearing their children¡ Parents ought to pray fervently and regularly for their children. We need God's help, and God has provided us guidance. Too many just do not give God much heed. The devil has a hard job of disrupting children whose parents are concerned about bringing that child up in God's fashion.

There is a poem that should cause parents, especially fathers, to closely examine themselves regarding the impressions they make on their children.

"When father prays he doesn't
Use the words the preacher does.
There's different things for different days,
But mostly its for us.

I can't remember all of it,
I'm little yet, you see.
But one thing I cannot forget,
My father prays for me."

Does your child ever hear you pray, and for them? With the popular and worthy cliche around, "Have you hugged your child today," we might think of one that asks, "Have you prayed with and for your child today?"

Manoah and his wife wanted Samson to be reared according to the will of God. Judges 13:12, "*How shall we*

order the child, and how shall we do unto him?" Parents are taught, *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."* (Proverbs 22:6). Paul wrote, *"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."* (Ephesians 6:4). They were not content to simply let Samson grow up. They tried to do right by him.

Was He Respectful?

But Samson broke the hearts of his parents. In spite of their good intentions and efforts, he disappointed them. It is one thing for parents to put forth the right effort on their part, but there is a responsibility that abides with children also to respect and honor their parents, being obedient to them. *"A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother."* (Proverbs 10:1). *"A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him."* (Proverbs 17:25). Some children go astray from their teaching because they bow before other influences that are contrary to their teaching. Samson seemed to have done this and it was his own decision. Proper teaching does not guarantee faithfulness in the child unless the child gives heed to what he is taught. When he does, he will remain faithful, even unto his old age. If he does not, what a tragedy and waste!

Self-Willed

What were the sins of Samson? He was self-willed and rebellious. He demonstrated disrespect for his parents in his choice of a wife. He chose a Philistine. *"Get her for. me for she pleaseth me,"* was his instruction to his parents. They wanted him to be considerate of the law that God had given Israel long ago and take a wife from among his own nation. But he was headstrong, inconsiderate of parents, and God's will, short-sighted as to the result of such a marriage, and had to have his own way. Therefore, he disregarded the counsel, advice, and warnings of his parents.

There is the thought put forth by some that what Samson did with respect to wanting his wife from among the Philistines was God's idea in order to make an opening for him to get among the Philistines. There

may be some truth to this, but personally I think it stretches matters somewhat.

"A wise son heareth his father's instruction; but a scorner heareth not rebuke.". "A fool despiseth his father's instruction; but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.". "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee; and despise not thy mother when she is old.". "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." (Proverbs 13:11; 15:5; 23:22; 30:17).

Like Solomon's son, Rehoboam, Samson gave no heed to the wise counsel he was given by older people. Like Saul, the first Israelite king, he was rebellious and disobedient to God. Samuel told Saul, *"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."* (First Samuel 15:23).

Bad Companions

Samson also chose evil companions. He selected the Philistines and a woman of Timnath, and later a harlot in Gaza, and eventually the deceiver, Delilah. It is a sad day when God's people prefer the association of those who belong to the devil. Something is wrong with such a person. *"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.". "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause, let us swallow them up alive as the grave, and whole as those that go down into the pit; we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil, cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse; My son, walk thou not in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path."* (Proverbs 4:14 1:10-15). Paul wrote, *"Evil companions corrupt good morals."* (First Corinthians 15:33, ASV). We become like those with whom we become involved. In the company of other apostles Peter was ready to die for Christ. In the company of the enemy as he warmed himself by their fire, he was capable of denying Him three times.

Dared the Devil

Samson courted and dared temptation and yielded to it. He dared trouble by giving a riddle to guests at his wedding. He dared trouble with repeated visits among the Philistines. He taunted regarding the source of his strength until he revealed his secret.

We are taught to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation,*" and to "*flee youthful lusts,*" as well as "*resist the devil.*" Yet, many are quite willing to give the devil unnecessary opportunities to mislead them. Then they wonder why they fell. When Joseph was tempted to sin, the Scripture records, "*He hearkened not unto her to lie by or to be with her.*" He immediately put distance between himself and temptation. While some temptation may not be avoided, it is folly to flirt with the possibility of sinning. It is no sin to be tempted, but it is a sin to yield to temptation. And it is contrary to every resolve we ought to have to deliberately dare the devil to make us fall.

Daniel resisted temptation by purposing in his heart he would not defile himself (Daniel 1:8). Vashti, when told to display herself before the eyes of a lustful, drunken company, refused. Many have lost their virtue and forfeited their souls because they were unable to resist temptations, even temptations they could have avoided.

Immoral

Samson was guilty of fornication. If we can believe what we read about our land, and believe what we hear being propagated far and wide, the nation of the United States overflows with fornicators. Samson went in to a harlot and violated a commandment of God. There are so many who are damning their souls, as well as destroying their bodies, self-respect, sense of morality, and the fibre of our country with similar conduct. Paul said that those who do such things "*shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*" (Galatians 5:19). John adds that they "*shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*" (Revelation 21:8).

What About His Word?

Samson was disloyal to his vow, the Nazerite vow, which required that he drink no fruit of the vine, allow

no razor to his head, nor have contact with dead bodies. We have record of two violations, and knowing his character, why should we believe he kept any of his vow? Men who will not keep their word, keep their obligations, not even to God, cannot be expected to be counted as honorable, and can only expect to fall.

Christians have vowed faithfulness to the God of heaven through Christ. Unfaithfulness means our ruin. Are we better than Samson in keeping our vow?

It Was Costly

Consider what Samson's sins cost him. Sin pays, but such wages (Romans 6:23). There may be pleasure in sin for a season (Hebrews 11:15), but death, spiritual death, ultimately is the recompense (James 1:15). He sacrificed his strength, freedom, sight, self-respect, home, honor, life, and worst of all, favor before God. Was it worth it? It would like to hear the many people infected with the disease called Aids tell us if they now think their fornication, homosexuality, degenerate conduct was worth it? *"They are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."* (Psalm 1:5,6).

We have this record so we may learn from it (Romans 15:4). Will we give heed, seek forgiveness of our sins, live loyally to God? Or will the deplorable example and regrettable story of Samson fall on deaf ears?

* * * * *

It may not bother you, and I hope it doesn't. One trying circumstance I have had to face is when other gospel preachers whom I deeply respect and love, who are my friends, and basically stand together doctrinally, fall out with each other. Never able to know all the situation, I find myself pulled apart. Usually the issues are matters of opinion, but not always. But I find myself losing friends from one side or the other, maybe both. Several instances like that have come my way. I wish it never would occur and they would be reconciled. How I wish they all could forgive and forget! JWB

Our Blessings

The word "bless" has several meanings in the Bible. Sometimes it refers to something God does for man's benefit. It can also refer to something that some good man can bestow upon another man. The word can also mean praise. Psalm 103:1, "*Bless the Lord, O my soul.*" It also means giving thanks. Matthew 26:26, "*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body.*" First Corinthians 10:16, "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?*" First Corinthians 11:24, "*And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take eat, this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.*"

Blessedness can refer to a state of happiness created from within. Matthew 5:1-12 gives us the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. Those who are blessed are those who enjoy an inward peace which results from right thinking, right conduct, right relationship to God, and serving God and others.

Care and Concern

One of our greatest blessings is God's care and concern for us. Psalm 37:25, "*I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*" Matthew 6:25-34 is a passage that emphasizes the providence of God for us. In view of this, complaining about life is to reveal the need of a more Christlike spirit. This is said, not to shame us as much as to provoke us to the attitude of gratitude.

The old song says, "When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed, When you are discouraged thinking all is lost, Count your many blessings, name them one by one, And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done."

Afflictions can be a blessing. James 1:2-4, "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh*

patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

One of the surest cures for the "blues" is to see the problems that others have and compare them with your blessings of benefit. Other's problems do not make your problems any less, but it helps us keep things in perspective. So many have a very difficult life with tremendous hardships of various kinds. We will quickly overcome the depression we might experience regarding our own difficulties when we busy ourselves in ministering to the sick, weeping with those that weep, rendering helpful service to those who are less fortunate than we. And there are so many like that.

The Source of Blessings

The object of our praise and thanksgiving for our blessings is God. Psalm 103:1-5, "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.*"

Psalm 107:1,2, "*O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.*"

James 1:17, "*Every good gift and every prefect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*"

Philippians 4:6, "*Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*"

Israel, in times of prosperity, would forget God. The cry of the prophets was that they have forgotten the Lord their God. Only when they were punished for their apostasy would they realize the source of their blessings. The only time some ever address God is when they are

asking for something, but not to offer thanks for blessings received.

Blessings involve both receiving and giving. There is a need to share our blessings with others as well as receive blessings. The judgment scene of Matthew 25:1-46 shows the Lord's pleasure toward those that rendered service to others in need. First John 3:17, "*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*" Matthew 10:8 speaks of the principle of receiving and giving blessings. "*Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received; freely give.*"

Good Examples

One blessing we can bestow upon others is the blessing of a good example and living in such fashion as to be a source of encouragement. One has said, "I had rather see a sermon than hear one." This is somewhat the idea of Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light so shine before men, that others may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"

Barnabas was the kind of person who blessed those around him because he was a good man, a son of consolation and exhortation, a man who gave encouragement to others. We all can do that if we try.

Conditional and Unconditional

There are blessings that we receive that are conditional and others we receive unconditionally. An unconditional blessing is ours regardless of what we do or our attitude toward God. We have life, the laws and benefits of nature, the rain, sunshine, etc. by which we are blessed whether we be good or evil. Matthew 5:45, "*For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*"

Some blessings are conditional. All spiritual blessings, which are in Christ, are conditional (Ephesians 1:3). They can be ours only if we meet the conditions required to be "*in Christ.*" Such are the blessings of forgiveness of

sins, fellowship with God, the right of prayer, the hope of heaven, etc. After citing several Christlike qualities that we are to develop as Christians, Peter wrote, "*For it these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.*" (Second Peter 1:8-10). The blessing is "*in Christ.*"

First Chronicles 4:10, "*And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.*" Notice the kind of blessings for which Jabez asked. He prayed to be kept from evil. Jesus taught us to pray, "*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*" (Matthew 6:13). Our prayers should be akin to the words we read in Proverbs 30:8,9, "*Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*"

Barriers to Blessings

We may not be blessed with as much as we could enjoy because we build barriers to blessings. We pollute our minds with evil and cannot see the good. Being overly critical, fault-finding, selfish, indifferent, having a don't-care attitude can dominate our hearts, and we fail to see and appreciate our blessings.

God has graced our world with wonders and scenes of beauty. There is much good in the world, even though at times there seems to be a scarcity, and the prevalence of evil dominates affairs. But we must not let the scars of sin and human depravity prevent us from seeing, enjoying, and rejoicing in the abundant blessings around us. Psalm 19:1, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork.*" This is

still our Father's world and He will overrule to the benefit of His people.

Spiritual Blessings

Our greatest blessings are spiritual. We are grateful for family, friends, health, provisions, life, light, truth, etc. But Christ, the way of eternal salvation, the hope of glory, is man's greatest benefit. His life is an example for us to follow. His Word is a guide on our journey toward eternity. His atoning blood is provided for the cleansing of our sin-stained souls, and is God's means of our redemption. What a glorious opportunity is ours to be a Christian! Herein we have a purpose for living, a goal to reach, knowing from whence we came, why we are here, how to do while here, and where we are going. His resurrection promises us that there is life after this, and we can be in heaven with God and all the saved.

Our nation has a season called Thanksgiving. I am glad that this is characteristic of our land. Unfortunately, there seem to be fewer and fewer who give God the glory for the blessings we have, but even turn their energies in repudiation of God. But the Christian shows his gratitude the year round. The best way to say "thank you" is by living a righteous life along with our sincere words of thanks. We show gratitude by being a blessing to others. God told Abraham, "*Be thou a blessing.*" We can be a curse or a cure, a hindrance of a help, a problem or a provider of assistance. We prove ourselves by serving. Matthew 23:11, "*But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.*" Our Lord Jesus demonstrated this before us. May we follow in His steps.

* * * * *

If our mailing goes as planned, by the time you receive this booklet the year of 1993 will be drawing toward a close. We will have taken many steps along the pathway of life. Life will have ended for some who are vibrant and active even as this is written. It is a good effort we make when we pause a moment and take inventory of the life we are living. JWB

True Obedience



While we hear false teaches preaching the false doctrine of salvation by grace alone, and that we contribute not one whit to our salvation, I still read in the Word of God of the necessity to obey the gospel. I still read of the authority of the Lord to make commands and the duty of mankind to obey them. Regardless of the clackers who denounce "rule keeping" and who falsely claim we teach we are trying to earn our way to heaven by being obedient to God, the fact remains we must obey. Sorry liberal! It is that way. True obedience means submitting oneself to the will of the Lord from the heart (Romans 6:16-18), willingly, voluntarily, motivated by love, with understanding that we are to what the Lord commands for the reason the Lord states, and in no way looking upon it as meriting anything. We wonder why liberals like to misrepresent teaching they do not accept. Possibly it is easier than facing the truth. Nonetheless Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Try to get the heaven without it! JWB

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is avaliable.

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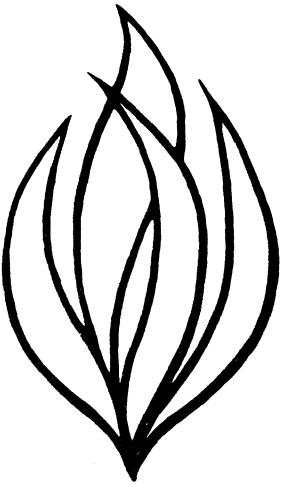

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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The Modern Versions

"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandment of the Lord your God which I command you." (Deuteronomy 4:2). *"Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.* (Proverbs 30:6). *"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."* (Revelation 22:18,19).

These passages present convincing evidence that man is not to tamper with the Word of God. Those that do so place their salvation in danger as well as mislead others. To add to or take away from what God has said, in any way, is to violate these verses.

A Great Danger

In recent years many versions of the Bible have been produced and sold by the millions of copies. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. once said, "It is my firm conviction that the greatest immediate danger confronting the churches of Christ is the general acceptance of the pseudo-versions of the Bible." I share that concern and agree, not because this man or some other has said it, but because the evidence shows it to be true. It reflects a willingness to join forces with those who tamper with the Word of God, and also gives evidence of the willingness to accept false doctrines from books that would be rightly rejected if preached from pulpits. Gradually some of these false doctrines are finding their way into the pulpits, classrooms, etc. This lesson is intended to destroy confidence in the modern versions by giving the reasons why they are unreliable. I want the reader to know my position regarding them from the start, but I also hope the reader will be fair enough to investigate what is said before going ahead and accepting the modern versions.

Why They Are a Danger

First, when you are handling the Bible you are dealing with God's Word, which is religious authority. "*All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*" (Second Timothy 3:16,17). This passage teaches the divine inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, all-sufficiency, and authoritativeness of the Bible. Tampering with authority produces confusion. Rule changes always creates confusion. There was a time in religious discussions that one could usually appeal to the Bible to settle questions and disputes. True, some did not accept the Bible and you would have to prove the Bible to be God's Word. This is more and more necessary, and such evidence is abundant. But now you must prove "which Bible." These new books do not read alike. It is not that they simply are teaching the same thing in different words. They are teaching different doctrines, contradictory to themselves and each other. There are serious doctrinal differences within them, as we shall observe.

It is the work of the church to be the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 1:15). But with these modern versions, one must ask "which truth?" "*Preach the word,*" Paul said, (Second Timothy 4:2). "Which word?"

Again, it is wrongly said that one can prove anything from the Bible. That is not true when one rightly divides the word of truth (Second Timothy 2:15). God does not contradict Himself. But with the multiplicity of new so-called versions that teach various things, that has almost become true.

It is my conviction that the rash of new versions is the result of a Satanic conspiracy to destroy confidence in the Bible by discrediting it in the eyes of people generally. Certainly that has been the fruit produced by the new versions. With the overflow of new versions has come a corresponding loss of respect for the inspiration, accuracy, and truthfulness of the Bible. Those who promote, produce, encourage, endorse the modern versions are guilty of promoting this conspiracy whether

they realize it or intend it or not. Pollute the spring and pollute the stream. This is the result.

We should not oppose a new version per se. But a version ought to translate, not mistranslate. It must not be a perversion, but a version. It cannot have fatal doctrinal errors in it by additions, subtractions, alterations, omissions, and presenting human commentary and paraphrase as if that was the Word of God.

Denominationalists have tried in vain to get their creed from the Bible and have been put to flight repeatedly because they could not. Now there are these new so-called versions called Bibles that include the creedal doctrines in the text. They have put their creed into their Bible. They have rewritten passages to do this. No man has that right and still call what he produces a Bible.

The modern versions render many great Bible aids for study useless. There is already such an appalling lack of knowledge of the Bible. But there will be more with the onrush of new versions. Try using a concordance, dictionary, lexicon, and other aids with these new things. They are useless. To be sure, in time, others will produce books compatible with the new versions.

Just Imagine a Class

Imagine a class coming together to study. They try to determine from the Bible when to eat the Lord's Supper. One book says the first day of the week, Another says Saturday night. Some even call the breaking of bread nothing more than a common meal, so even the Lord's Supper is taken out.

Study the nature of tongue-speaking. One says it refers to languages. Another says it is ecstatic utterances. Another says strange sounds. How can the student ever know?

Was Peter a pope? Some of the new versions call him the rock upon which the church was built.

What is the plan of salvation? Some teach correctly. Others teach salvation by faith only, which contradicts

itself and reliable Bibles. Did Isaiah prophesy a virgin would give birth to a child? Many of the modern versions have taken the word "*virgin*" out, and replaced it with two words, "young woman," or just a "girl." That is quite a difference.

In my early years of preaching I soon realized the detriment to study by the distorted footnotes often found in Catholic Bibles. The errors in those footnotes explained away God's truth. But now the errors are found in the text as if they were a part of God's Word. It is folly to contend such false doctrines are merely matters of human opinion. It is a matter of truth versus error. Those who hold to these new books are guilty of upholding false doctrines when they tell people such things are reliable versions of the Bible.

Attitudes of the Producers

Who is giving the public these books? For the most part, they are products of modernists, liberals, infidels, denominationalists that do not accept the truth regarding the nature of the inspiration of the Bible. One's attitude toward an object will determine how one treats that objects. If I hold a stone in my hand thinking it is merely a piece of gravel, I will not treat it with the same respect I would if I understood it was a precious gem. Those producing these books do not look upon the Bible as the inspired word as taught in the Bible itself. Let us consider some of the attitudes various ones hold. All do not hold all these attitudes, but these things exist among them.

To them Christianity is an evolved, rather than a revealed religion. It has been taken from past religions and gradually developed. The Bible is an ancient document written from previously existing documents. The doctrine of the Deity of Christ gradually evolved. The first four books of the New Testament are merely human interpretations of Christ, and contain exaggerations. Matthew was not accurate. Paul was ever changing his mind. The writers are not even aware they were writing Scripture. Abraham is a myth, as was Jonah. Gideon is a legend. Justification is a religious experience of some kind. Paul only had second-hand

information and was inconsistent. There is no such thing as divine prophecy and fulfillment. We need a new religion for a new day. So it goes with the "translators."

They have translated according to their attitude toward Christ and the Bible. They have translated according to their theology. They have given their interpretation of the Bible and called it the Bible. They tell you what they think the writers probably meant to say, but not what they said.

In view of these attitudes toward the Bible, how could anybody be so naive as to think these new versions are not to be held suspect? It is just as sensible to put a fox in charge of the chickens as to put the Bible in their hands and expect a reliable version from them.

These statements have been general, but can be specifically proven. But space does not allow going into detail. But let us now turn our attention to a few of the more prominent new versions for specific examples of perversion and false doctrine.

Revised Standard Version

The RSV render the term "*virgin*" in Isaiah 7:14 as merely "young woman." The word "almah" does mean a young woman, but much more. It means an unmarried, young, chaste, marriageable young woman, or a virgin. We can know this is what Isaiah meant when he is quoted by another inspired writer, Matthew 1:22,23, who tells us the prophecy refers to the virgin birth of Jesus specifically. Why any person wants to join ranks with modernists to remove divinely given evidence of the Deity of Christ is beyond understanding. The birth Isaiah mentioned was to be a "*sign*," which referred to a miraculous event. There is nothing miraculous about a young woman bearing a child. But there is a miracle when a virgin bears a child, and not just a child, but specifically designated that the child would be a son. This perversion alone is enough to place the RSV suspect. We must remember that the man in charge of the Old Testament translation of the RSV was a militant, anti-Christian, Jewish rabbi who denies Jesus

is the Son of God. Why should we follow his perverted way? It is not scholarship to do so, but heresy.

Every mention of Jesus as the "*only begotten Son of God*" has been taken out of the RSV. Instead, the word "only" by itself is used. But Jesus is not the only Son of God. Adam was called a son of God, as were the people of ancient Israel, and Christians today. The term "*only begotten Son of God*" necessitates Deity of Christ. "Only" does not demand such.

Some have said the word "monogenes" (*only begotten*) ought to be "unique." But that says nothing about the Deity of Christ. We are all unique. But Jesus was unique because He is the divine Son of God.

The translators of the RSV made a deliberate decision to use the pronouns "thee, thou" with reference to Deity, and "you, yours" with reference to mere humanity. And what did they do to pronouns mentioning Jesus? Yes, they used only the human designation. Why? Because they do not believe in Jesus. And yet, some of those who say they do believe in Him adopt the false Bibles.

The RSV is the official Bible of the National Council of Churches, which ought open your eyes. There is no more heretical, anti-Christ, modernist organization in the world than that one. They admit the RSV was produced to further their cause, which is to render Christ nothing more than an exceptional man.

The RSV makes the "*seed*" of Abraham (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16) his posterity, which could mean the nation of Israel. Paul said it referred to Christ specifically. The "*seed*" was "*one.*"

RSV translators deny prophecy-fulfillment elements of the Bible. They leave out such passages as the last twelve verses of Mark sixteen that teach the Great Commission, the plan of salvation, the purpose of tongues. They omit the account of Jesus talking to the woman taken in adultery. They make Luke 1:34 read (as Mary is trying to understand how she could have a child), "How can this be, since I have no husband?" Sadly, many women without husbands have had children., But none have had

children without relations with a man. The passage should read, "*How can this be, seeing I know not a man?*" She had no relations with man, she being yet a virgin.

Why do the so-called "scholars" among us wish to join hands with those who deny the very foundation of Christianity, the Deity of Christ, and tell us that these books that time and time again remove evidences of that Deity are reliable Bibles and we ought uphold them? I have no confidence in the RSV, nor in those who uphold them, regardless who he is or how many arbitrarily determined theological and academic degrees he has. He upholds error, promoting fatal doctrines that cost souls.

The Living Bible

The LB is one of the most perverted books ever produced. It is called a paraphrase, meaning, putting the words of others into your own words. There is nothing wrong with making a paraphrase. But to call a paraphrase as the actual Word of God is a deliberate lie. Commentaries have their places, but no commentary is God's Word. People need to know what God said, not what some "scholar" thinks God might have meant to say if He had given it more thought. The LB is not even a reliable and profitable commentary. Yet, some uphold it and use it almost exclusively in studying the Bible.

The LB teaches premillennialism (Second Timothy 4:1; Isaiah 2:2-4), salvation by faith only (Romans 4:12; John 1:12). It takes out James 2:24 and the phrase "*not by faith only.*" It teaches salvation before baptism (First Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3). It teaches the direct operation of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8), and the false doctrine of inherited guilt of sin (Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:3). In places it has profanity (First Samuel 20:30). The errors of this book are so manifold that it would take more space than we can now afford to specify them all.

The producer of the LB is a Baptist, though many Baptists disclaim him and his book. He has totally removed the phrase "*churches of Christ*" from Romans 16:16, and changed it to read, "All the churches send you their greeting." One woman heard me preach these things and afterward said, "But it is so easy to read."

That may be true. The funny paper is easy to read, but it will not tell you the truth you need to know to go to heaven. Some want everything poured in and nothing to dig out. Easily read books make their danger all the more subtle, especially perverted as the LB is.

Bad News For Any Man

Good News For Modern Man is bad news because of the multiple doctrinal errors in it. It also teaches salvation by faith alone (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:26). It makes Christ and Paul contradict each other regarding the removal of the Mosaic Law (Matthew 5:17,18; Ephesians 2:15), but nearly all the modern versions do the same thing. Christ said He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. These new books have Him saying He did not come to abolish it, but has Paul saying He did that very thing. They both cannot be right. Called the Today's English Version, it removes Galatians 5:4 and the phrase "*ye are fallen from grace,*" because the man who produced it does not believe you can. He changed the first day of the week to Saturday night, and the Lord's Supper to a common meal in Acts 20:7. Fifteen passages that refer to the blood of Christ have been changed to merely read the death of Christ. People can die many ways without shedding blood, but Christ's blood is that by which we are saved. What right does any man have to remove it when God places it there? Bear in mind, many deny the blood atonement. The TEV teaches the old law is still in effect. And there are brethren who would oppose the TEV and LB, but sing the praises of the RSV and others that teach doctrines just as false.

True of Others Also

The things said here are true in many ways and regarding other doctrines in the New English Bible, the New International Version (we presented a full lesson on the NIV previously), New American Standard Version, and many individually produced versions like Goodspeed's, Moffatt's, and on and on, with the possible exception of the New King James Version, far and away the superior among modern speech Bibles. There is not one of the so-called modern versions on the market today that does not pervert God's Word in some

fundamental fashion, and still people buy them, read them, use them, promote them, quote them, as if they were using truth. Even this is true among our brethren.

There is not a senior college or university operated by members of the churches of Christ to my knowledge that does not have one or more of its professors in Bible classes but who uphold one or more of these modern versions, and they do so with the approval of the administration. This is why I am confident that the Bible departments of "our" schools are probably the primary funnel through which modernism, liberalism, doctrinal errors, and digression is flowing into the Lord's church. While some consider this almost heresy to even suggest the schools are anything but reliable, the fact remains they are not. More and more pulpits and classrooms in congregations are ringing out with the new, uncertain, and downright false doctrines taught in the modern versions from which preachers and teachers are studying.

Frankly, I expect denominational heretics to latch on to these books. It suits their error. But brethren are following the way of the nations around them. Some are so liberal and so desire to be considered scholarly and intellectual that they are aping the infidel mouthing of atheists and modernists. Support for modern versions from a child of God is unbecoming and is a violation of the very truth God has given. But we have learned long ago that the "scholars" and most "school brethren" are more determined to go the way of so-called scholarship of those who deny Christ than to stay with truth. These books are poison. If you do not think so, you need to do some study and cease following wherever the professors and big name promoters lead you.

Reliable Bibles

When you read, study, preach, teach the King James Version, you have a reliable Bible, trustworthy, that teaches no doctrinal error, and will lead people to heaven. This is generally true of the American Standard Version, although the text is not on solid ground with Westcott-Hort. As said, the New King James Version is very good.

The criticism against the KJV is grossly exaggerated. It is charged with archaic and there be some. Of the 773,746 words, some 300 are archaic and obsolete, but not wrong. And it is a lot easier to give the meaning of an archaic word than to explain away false doctrines in the new versions. We rightly hold suspect those who want to discredit the book that will probably be the guide of more people entering heaven than any other version that has ever been produced. Shame on them!

Have! Know! Believe! Obey!

It is not enough to just have God's Word. We must know it, believe and obey it if we are to see God in His glory. The Word of Christ shall judge us (John 12:48), and His Word endureth forever (First Peter 1:25).

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The Lord's Day

As Christians assemble on the first day of the week for worship, we are reminded that this day has become just another day off work for many people. It is used for pleasure, recreation, self-indulgence, games, sports, overtime pay, pursuit of hobbies, an extra day for a vacation trip, and such like. Little concern for things pertaining to God crosses the minds of many people.

Psalm 118:22-24, "*The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoiced and be glad in it.*"

This text is concerned with the day the Lord made, a day of praise because of salvation, a day noting the rejection of the Redeemer, but also a day noting His triumph and coronation as the head. Jesus Christ was refused by some but made head of the corner by the Father. The day of this Psalm is a day of rejoicing and gladness because of Christ.

We are familiar with special memorial days like the Fourth of July, a day of national celebration. In the Bible there were special days. In one sense everyday is a day that the Lord has made. But there have been days that were sacred days, and connected with sacred events. Without the event some of these days would have no special significance. But some events make some days distinctive.

The Sabbath Forever

The seventh day of the week was prominent under the old covenant or the Mosaic Law. God blessed and sanctified that day because on that day He ceased His creation. This setting aside of that day was not done at the cessation of creation but later, even after the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:12-15), at Sinai (Nehemiah 9:13,14). If there was an observance of the seventh day as a holy day prior to that the divine record does not declare it. Deuteronomy 5:2,3 tells us this provision was not made with previous generations, but with Israel. Even when the covenant was made, it was for Israel only, not for all nations. Exodus 31:13-17 shows the seventh day a sign between God and Israel.

When one understands the three dispensations revealed in the Bible he can know when the Sabbath was enjoined and for how long. The covenant made with Israel through Moses was said to be forever, everlasting, and perpetual. What does this mean? Does this mean endless and without limit?

It is also said in Scripture that the burning of incense and burnt offerings was to be perpetual. But none would contend that these things are operative under the authority of Christ. Jonah was in the whale "*forever*" (Jonah 2:6). Possibly to Jonah it seemed it would never end, but we know he was there three days and nights. So these words do not necessarily mean endless and without limit. We must determine what they do mean.

There are times when these words mean endless, such as reference to eternal punishment. But they mean "the full time period assigned; full period under consideration." For Jonah, three days was the period under

consideration. As for the Sabbath, it would last and was to be observed "*throughout your generations,*" or just so long as Israel remained God's chosen people, which means until they as a nation fulfilled the purposes for which they were chosen.

Whenever the words forever, eternal, perpetual refer to events in time, the extent is limited to the period assigned. When they refer to events beyond time, outside the scope of time, after time is no more, they mean limitless and endless.

When Forever Ended

When and where did the nation of Israel end? When did Israel's "*forever*" cease? Both the Old and New Testaments tell us.

Amos 8:2, "*And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my people Israel; I will not again pass by them anymore.*" Verse five has the question when this will be. Verse nine tell us, "*And it shall come to pass in that day that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.*" Was not this fulfilled in Matthew 27:45,46? "*Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" The end of Israel is included in the Lord's statement, "*It is finished.*"

Hosea 2:11, "*I will cause her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.*" Hear Paul in Colossians 2:14-16, "*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross, and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days.*"

Amos and Hosea said such things would cease. Matthew and Paul tells us when they ceased.

The observance of the Sabbath is a part of the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments. The entire decalogue belonged to the old covenant. We serve God under a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31). Hebrews 8:7-11 shows the faith of Christ to be the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. The Sabbath law was never a moral law, but a ceremonial one. The other nine commandments all existed before the law of Moses and included in the new covenant of Christ. The Sabbath was peculiar to the Mosaic system.

Delivered From the Law

Romans 7:1-7 teaches that we are delivered from the law that includes, "*Thou shalt not covet,*" the tenth of the Ten Commandments. This shows the Ten Commandments are a part of the old law that has been fulfilled. We are not to covet, but because Christ teaches not to covet, not because of the Ten Commandments given through Moses.

To what day does the text in Psalm 118 refer? May we persuade the reader to turn and read Matthew 21:33-46. For the sake of space we ask the reader to do this now.

The application of the passage is that God let His vineyard in the Old Testament to Israel. They were unfaithful and unfruitful. God sent prophet after prophet unto them and they persecuted and killed them. Eventually, He sent His Son, and they killed Him also. Jesus applied the words of David to Himself (Verse 42). The hearers understood that Jesus spoke of their destruction as well as His death and eventual triumph.

When the Jews killed Christ it was also the death of the nation of Israel. It can never revive as God allowed it to exist in the Old Testament. The present day Israel is not a kingdom as was ancient Israel. With the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, all genealogies, so essential to the old Judaistic system, were destroyed. God took away fleshly Israel and Jesus established His spiritual kingdom, the church. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus ushered in the day of salvation, the day the Lord hath made.

The Significance of the Day

But can we separate the phrase, "*This is the day the Lord hath made,*" from the first day of the week? Because of the significance of events that occurred on the first day of the week, we must recognize there is a definite connection. Christ arose on the first day of the week. Pentecost came on the first day of the week. The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the first day of the week, and the kingdom began that day. The New Testament church assembled on that day (First Corinthians 16:1,2; Acts 20:7). Hence, the glory, significance, importance and specialness of the first day makes it easy to accept it as the Lord's Day. It is a day of praise, worship, rejoicing, gladness, because on that day the people of God commemorate Christ. Actually, we do not observe the day, but on that day we observe the memorial to the Christ.

There should be in the hearts of all brethren in the Lord a special awareness of the first day of the week that makes it distinctive from the other six days because of the reasons mentioned. We would affirm that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day, a day which the Lord hath made, because it is the day of observance of the salvation provided to mankind by and through Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.

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Reverence in Worship

Reverence is defined as awe, respect, recognition of dignity and authority. To hold in reverence is to consider something holy, sacred, honorable, and higher than oneself.

Psalm 111:9, "*He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant forever: holy and reverend is his name.*" This is the only time the word "*reverend*" appears in the Bible and it is not as a title of some denominational clergyman, but a description of God and how He is to be held in reverence.

The reverence that the early Jewish copyists of Scripture had is noteworthy. They were exceedingly careful to treat every word with respect. Especially was this true when they copied the name of God. Reverence is a quality and state of mind that finds expression in word and deed. We are commanded not to take God's name in vain. Nobody will use in a profane way a name he respects. When you hear one misusing the name of God, he is telling you he has no respect for God.

Hebrews 12:29,29, "*Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.*" Our duty is plain and the practice is essential.

What Reverence is Not

Because some have a confused concept of reverence, let us notice some things which are not to be classified as reverence. Flippancy, flightiness, indifference, scorn are certainly irreverent. Taking lightly that which should be considered seriously is not being reverent. Lacking discretion and discernment is not reverence. We live in a day of observable irreverence toward God. It seems the more irreverent the movies, songs, plays, etc. the better the "box-office." Blasphemy, mockery, joking about Deity, nicknames for Deity are all examples of the very opposite of reverence.

Nor are we to think that a long face, a sick look, folded hands, short steps, and put-on piety is reverence for which the Bible calls.

There is to be reverence in worship. John 4:24, "*God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*" To worship in spirit has to do with one's attitude, condition of heart, understanding, and motives. First Corinthians 11:29, "*For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.*" To worship worthily is not to think one is worthy. It has to do with the manner and behavior in worship, the quality of the heart, showing whether we are reverent or irreverent.

There are several causes for irreverence. It may be due to a failure to understand why we have assembled. We are commanded to assemble (Hebrews 10:25). It is not for mere association with others, for fellowship, to be entertained, or to proceed through certain habitual rituals without significance. We are not gathered to soothe the conscience or pay our dues. We have come in obedience to God to worship God. We are present to worship. Each is to worship.

About Worship

What does it mean to worship? Worship consist of acts of adoration. Acts are involved that spring from an attitude of reverence and respect. We are to worship according to the directions of Him whom we worship. We are to sing, give, pray, partake of the communion feast, and proclaim God's Word. These things are to be done with understanding, meaning, fervently, sincerely, from the heart, with the intent to praise.

You may have said or heard someone say, "I did not get much out of church today." It may be because we think too much about "coming to church" rather than coming to worship. It may be we have come just to get rather than to give the honor and glory we are to give. It may be because we were not participators but spectators. Each one must worship. Nobody can worship for somebody else. Participation will dispel a lack of interest, inattentiveness, and will contribute to reverence.

Acts of irreverence are easily noticed. Unnecessary talking during the worship service, passing notes about irrelevant matters, laughter, excessive loud talking upon entering the place of worship! While we do not have to pretend we are in a tomb, neither are we entering a sports arena before the kick-off. Noises with books, distractions! These are generally lessened as one sits toward the front. Children crying, parents choosing the place of worship as the place to administer a spanking! (I was teaching this one Sunday night and later a member told me that he uttered a silent prayer that his boy, usually a bit rowdy, would be good during the rest of that service especially. He was.) The up-and-down, in-and-out processions by both young and old are

distractions and lend themselves to creating irreverence, or disrupting reverence. Playing with the babies and rattling keys are noticed. Such things indicate that some are not keeping their mind on the solemnity of the occasion.

More Irreverence

These are also evidences of irreverence that are not as noticeable as those mentioned above. While we need not "dress fit to kill" each assembly, we can become too casual and even sloppy in our dress for worship. Our clothes do contribute to our state of mind. We are not saying we must wear fine and expensive clothes. But we are not going to a sporting event. We are not getting ready to work in the garden or mow the lawn. Worship is not a playground period. We should dress in keeping with the dignity of the occasion.

The failure to sing may show a disregard for this avenue of worship. To not follow in prayer, or let your mind think of irrelevant matters while considering God's Word are individual matters that only the individual will know and can control. Sleeping too late, staying out too late the evening before the day of worship, contributes to inattentiveness and drowsiness that does not reflect reverence. (There may be unavoidable exceptions that demand late hours.) Filling your mind with the newspapers, TV, funnies, etc. just before worship makes serious thought more difficult. Even our physical posture as we sit may indicate a lack of concern. When one is sloughed over, sleeping, lying back with his eyes closed, squirming, he reflects disinterest. We can add the habit of being late and rushing from the service as fast as possible as if you cannot get away soon enough. This shows a mark of something that ought not be. Some act as if "school is out" and they want no more of it than they feel they must do. Is this an attitude of reverence?

One of the more disgusting and sinful practices among some is rushing outside, even between Bible study and worship periods, for a smoke. Not only is this sinful and offensive to everyone who knows the truth, but it shows

that the smoker does not care about others nor the teaching of God.

And What of the Rest of the Day

Reverence for things holy might be indicated by the kinds of activities you plan for the remainder of the Lord's Day. Some make it simply another day for gain, hilarity, play, and selfish interests. Some, however, use it to visit family, friends, brethren, others who need attention. Some use it for needed rest and study. More subdued activity contributes to a reverent attitude on Lord's Day. With the rise of sports on Sunday, less and less are involved in matters that matter on Sunday. One preacher was heard to ask, "We get excited at ball games; why can't we get excited at church? The answer is simple. The two are not alike. One is a period of worship of the Almighty God in the special presence of Deity. The very purpose for being present is so different, and the activities are so different in meaning and tone. We come to honor God, not have a "blow-out."

Reverence for God extends beyond the worship hour. Whatever one does in life ought reflect respect for God. While everything we do is not properly called worship, everything we do is to be done to the glory of God . Worship is part of our service to God, but we serve God in many other ways also, including the manner of our daily life. Reverence is a living matter and one that occupies us as long as we live.

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Why Reject Premillennialism

What one believes does make a difference. It is important and has an effect in molding his attitude,

outlook on life, his hope, and his service to God and man.

We have been told that seventy per cent of so-called "Christians" believe the doctrine of premillennialism in some form or another. There are many variations to the doctrine and it is difficult to know them all and keep them separate. But there are certain points that are generally and basically acceptable to all premillennial theorists. We contend that any doctrine that is contrary to and derogatory of the truth is deserving of repudiation, and premillennialism is such a doctrine.

The theory makes the assertion that Christ came to establish His kingdom, but upon being rejected by the Jews, He postponed the kingdom, returned to heaven established the church instead as a temporary substitute. The theory continues with Jesus returning again for the saints, silently and suddenly raising the righteous into a "rapture," leaving the wicked here on earth in the "Tribulation" for seven years, then coming again at the end of this seven years with the saints. Then the Jews will be miraculously transported to Israel and converted, the temple will be rebuilt, Christ will then set up His kingdom and reign literally and actually on this earth for one thousand years with Jerusalem as His capital city.

At the end of the one thousand years the forces of good and evil shall engage in a physical warfare called the Battle of Armegeddon at which time the wicked shall be banished into punishment and the righteous taken into heaven.

This theory is alternately called the future-kingdom theory, the one thousand year reign of Christ, and other such terms. I reject this doctrine as false, unbiblical, destructive, and wish to present a number of Biblical reasons why. While some have called the theory "harmless" because it deals with what may yet be, I shall show it is not harmless because it would uproot the truth, making the entire Scripture message suspect.

The Theory and the Kingdom

The theory means the the kingdom does not yet exist. Yet, those in the church at Colosse were in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13), as were those in Ephesus (Ephesians 2:19), as were those to whom John wrote in Revelation (Revelation 1:9). How could people be citizens in a kingdom that did not exist? Yet, they were "*in the kingdom.*"

The theory degrades the church by making it just an after-thought, a substitute, something different from the kingdom. Those in the church were said to be in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). Jesus used the terms interchangeably in Matthew 16:16-18. Jesus would not commune in the Lord's Supper again until in the kingdom (Luke 22:18). If that be true, and it is, the kingdom is not yet future because those in the Corinthian church were observing the Lord's Supper (First Corinthians 11:23ff). Why do premillennialists observe the Lord's Supper since they say the kingdom has not yet come? Matthew 18:3 teaches the converted are in the kingdom.

If the kingdom is not yet, then Paul's designation of Jesus as "*King of kings and Lord of lords*" (First Timothy 6:15) would be false. Acts 2 teaches that God has already raised up Jesus to sit on the throne of David, a spiritual throne. Jesus Christ is King over His kingdom now. He was to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, who was king and priest at the same time. There cannot be any question but Christ is priest now (Hebrews 6:20; 9:24,25). He is both King and priest at the same time as was Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18).

The theory would make the Lord's kingdom an earthly kingdom even though Jesus said it was not of this world (John 18:36). His is a spiritual kingdom. Some looked for His kingdom to be an earthly kingdom when He came the first time. Some are still making the same kind of mistake as to the nature of His kingdom. Even though Paul was charged with treason for preaching another king than Caesar (Acts 17:7), the kind of king Paul preached was a spiritual king, not one that would rule and reign as an earthly king.

More Refutation of Scripture by the Theory

The theory makes the Lord's footstool His throne. Yet, Acts 7:29 teaches, "*Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool.*" The Lord's church or kingdom has no earthly headquarters. Its headquarters is where its Head is, which is in heaven, not Jerusalem.

The theory makes Christ a false prophet for Jesus said the kingdom would come in the lifetime of those to whom He was speaking (Mark 9:1). If it has not yet come, Jesus was wrong.

The theory makes John the Baptist a false prophet for John preached that the kingdom was "*at hand.*" If it has not even come yet, John was wrong. Such would also be true of the twelve apostles and the seventy sent forth to preach the same message.

The theory makes Daniel a false prophet. Daniel two tells of a dream of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon which Daniel interpreted to refer to four kingdom that would come, the first being Babylon. In the days of the fourth kingdom, which corresponds to the Roman empire, God would establish His kingdom (Daniel 2:44). If it did not come then, Daniel missed it and cannot be called a true prophet of God.

Furthermore, in Daniel seven Daniel pictures the Son of man coming to the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom (Verses 13,14). This refers to the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:6-11) and is like the teaching of Jesus in Luke 19:12 when the "*nobleman went... to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.*" The kingdom was received BEFORE the return, not AFTER as the theory demands.

The theory makes more than one return of Christ and more than one resurrection. It asserts that He will come for the righteous and take them into the "rapture." Then He will come yet again for the third time to defeat all enemies and set up His kingdom. But the Bible teaches only one return. "*Martha saith unto him., I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*" (John 11:24). Lazarus was righteous and if the theory were true, would be raised to "rapture," and that before the last day. But Jesus allowed her understanding of the resurrection to stand. "*Marvel not at this; for the hour is*

coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:28,29). Both the good and the evil shall be raised the same hour.

Second Peter three teaches the world shall end when the Lord returns. But the theory has over a thousand years to continue after He comes. The truth of the matter regarding the kingdom is that Jesus is not going to "set up" His kingdom when He comes, but will "*deliver up*" the kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 11:24).

The Theory and Salvation

The theory by-passes the plan of salvation for the Jews. It asserts an instantaneous, miraculous salvation of the Jews, as well as their miraculous transfer to the land of Canaan. This eliminates the need to preach the gospel to the Jews, even though Paul did and thought it necessary. It means they do not have to believe and obey as do the Gentiles. Paul and Peter taught that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35). They taught that both shall be saved the same way (Acts 15:9; Romans 3:20).

The system degrades the power and ability of God to fulfill His promises. Did God really make the promises of the coming of the kingdom and go back on these promises because the Jews rejected Christ? Paul said He did not (Romans 3:3). If He failed to carry out what He had prophesied once, do you suppose He might do it again at the next coming of Christ? Who else might reject Him and cause Him to change His mind? Could we really count on God to keep His Word if the theory be true? The establishment of the kingdom was not predicated on the acceptance of Jesus by Jews anyway.

What About Revelation Twenty?

Much is made by premillennialists of Revelation twenty where there is mention of a thousand years. But the book of Revelation is a highly figurative book, with various colored horses and riders, swords coming out of mouths, names written on the thighs of the Lord, the mark of the beast on foreheads, a key to a bottomless

pit, the binding of Satan, a spiritual creature, with a chain, the smiting of nations with a rod of iron, a dragon whose tail knocks out one third of the stars of heaven (some dragon if actually a dragon, and some tail), and souls, martyred souls, crying out from under an altar who were those who had been beheaded.

In the midst of this kind of symbolic and figurative language is the phrase about one thousand years, and yet, premillennialists insist that while everything else is figurative the one thousand years must be actual and literal. There is no sense whatever to that kind of misinterpretation.

Unfortunately for premillennialists, Revelation twenty omits some basic things necessary for the theory. It does not mention the bodily resurrection of anybody, the return of Christ, anybody's reign on earth, Jerusalem, nor does it even include people today. Rather it is a figurative picture of victory of the martyrs and the cause of Christ in spite of the persecution they endured.

The theory violates Biblical teaching that the Christian Age is the last age, "*the last days.*" (Hebrews 1:1,2). The Bible teaches that Judaism has run its course and its purposes have been accomplished. See Colossians 2:14; Galatians 3:23-25; Ephesians 2:15; Matthew 5:17,18.

The theory makes Jeremiah a false prophet, and there is no way premillennialists can even respond to this next point, let alone reasonably set it aside. Jeremiah 22:30, reads, "*Thus saith the Lord, Write this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah.*" The man under consideration was King Coniah, sometimes called Jehoiachin or Jeconiah. He was the next to the last king of Judah before Judah fell to Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar. The last king was Zedekiah. Coniah had no descendant to reign on the throne in Jerusalem, nor would he ever have a descendant to reign there. Significantly, Zedekiah was not his descendant because Zedekiah was his uncle. Also significantly, Coniah is listed in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:11. How can Jesus reign in Jerusalem and not make the prophecy of Jeremiah

false? Keep in mind, Jeremiah spoke the Word of the Lord. Maybe the prophet and the Lord were wrong and the premillennialists are right! Really!

The theory makes Paul's preaching regarding the way of victory for the Lord's kingdom to be false. Paul wrote, "*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.*" (First Corinthians 10:4). We are in a spiritual warfare and our victory will be won through spiritual weapons and armaments (Ephesians 6) rather than through an actual, physical warfare of extermination of the wicked, as the premillennial theory dictates.

Premillennialism cannot be harmonized with Scripture. It contradicts so much that the Bible teaches clearly, and degrades so much that the Bible exalts. It is a wild, speculative, imaginary, sensational, mysterious theory that attempts to predict the future and turn the earth into heaven itself. It cannot be believed and believe the teaching of the Bible at the same. We must choose which it will be.

There are prominent people, such a Billy Graham, and a wide variety of Pentecostal doctors who loudly proclaim this theory in some fashion or another, and many listen to their invented theories and go off after these false teachers. This is not a minor matter, as some liberals in the church would like to have us think. It is a matter of the Deity of Christ, the accuracy and inspiration of the Scriptures, the integrity of the Word of God, and affects our very salvation. We cannot and will not bow before the ways of men regarding this false doctrine just like we cannot afford to adopt the false doctrines of men on any subject. To do so is to bring upon us God's wrath and our own condemnation.

* * * * *

Listen cautiously to those who clamor for change. What do they want to change? God's Word does not change and we should not try to make it fit the molds of the ever-changing ways of men!

Sara Katherine Boyd



In the first hour of the day of October 27, 1993, a wonderful event occurred. Another darling granddaughter was born. The father is our son Bill, and the mother Lori, daughter of Jean and Clifford Reel. Sara joins a family of a sister, Rose, and two brothers, Cliff and John. We now have three granddaughters, and six grandsons. Our prayers will continue with Sara and her wonderful family who live in Lincoln, Nebraska. God ever bless them all.

* * * * *

A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is avaliable.

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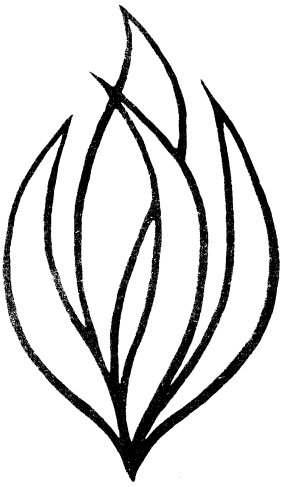

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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VOLUME XIV James W. Boud NUMBER 11

What is Biblical Preaching?

Second Timothy 4:1,2, *"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine."*

This is a subject that preachers must study, and it is essential for all to understand. We must have a Biblical concept of preaching. We need to know what to expect, what to support, how to recognize Biblical preaching, and what to oppose. We want to consider this matter from both a positive and negative point of view. We want to learn what Biblical preaching is, and what it is not.

Attitude Toward the Bible

The foundation of Biblical preaching is in one's attitude toward the Bible. This will determine how he uses the Bible and what he thinks of the authority of the Bible. The Bible is not man's commentary on God's Word. It is not man's subjective and existential interpretation of experience. It is not merely a record of traditionalism and ancient code of ethics. It is not just a philosophy among philosophies.

The Bible claims to be and is the infallible, verbally inspired, inerrant, authoritative, all-sufficient **Word** of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). This can be proven from the evidence available to mankind to investigate. All parts are inspired of God. The Holy Spirit chose the words, without error, from the vocabularies of men chosen for the task of writing the Bible. Nothing more is needed and nothing less will suffice. It is God-breathed, hence, binding and authoritative. If there is any doubt or confusion about this point, there cannot be the Biblical preaching for which the Bible calls. This has become a problem because too many have become convinced that the Bible is no longer to be regarded as our pattern and guide. Such people are in gross error.

To preach means to deliver a sermon. It is a religious discourse to influence thought, will, emotion, and actions in the life of the hearer. The word "sermon" is from a Latin word meaning "stab, thrust." Thus, one is cut to the heart (acts 2:37; 5:33; 7:54) as the result of preaching. To preach is to proclaim with formality, gravity, authority, certainty, and finality. The preacher is a herald of a message that comes from a source higher and greater than himself. His message is from the King of kings. He is not permitted to proclaim a message of his own, but that which is from God.

An Abuse

The pulpit is no place to air personal doubts, but to preach the Word by which comes faith (Romans 10:17). Preaching is not intended to entertain, amuse, just occupy time, or make people "feel good." It is to "*speak as the oracles of God*" (First Peter 4:11). There is a difference between having something to say and having to say something. The preacher has something to say.

To evangelize (be an evangelist) is to emphasize a good message, the message of salvation from sin (Romans 10:15). Evangelism is a combination of the right message from the right man for the right purpose. The declaration of the Lord's Word is designed to save men from sin and produce an abundant life now and in eternity in heaven.

Much that is called preaching is not Biblical preaching. The pulpit is not the place, nor are the worship services the time for the discussion of mundane, earthly matters, current events, passing scenes, and opinions of men except as they relate to spiritual life. Secular speaking is not Biblical preaching. Many are good orators, actors, and entertaining speakers, but that is not Biblical preaching. The reason many people do not know the Bible, and are divided over the Bible, even refuse to conform to the Bible, is because too much of what they hear that is called preaching is not the presentation of the Bible. Often what they hear is a man-designed distortion of it.

"Sermons" that are nothing but book reports of current best sellers, travelogs, an analysis of the latest movies, the study of prominent people in the news, discussions of the arts, sociology, psychology, human philosophy, ecology, etc. are not Biblical sermons. The "sharing" of uninspired opinions rather than teaching inspired revelation is not Biblical preaching. "Sermons" that range from "Should the UN supervise a truce between nations?" to "Why is there a wildcat strike at Ford Motor Company?" have been presented to religious people in services where there should have been Biblical preaching. These subjects may have interest, and have their place, but such subjects are not Biblical. Such speakers are not gospel preachers, but current events commentators, theologians, religionists, possibly even moralists, but not preachers of the gospel of Christ.

Not Uncertain Sounds

Nor is the pulpit the place for expounding the speculative and fanciful theories regarding the future, the work of Deity, the return of Christ as if there were "signs of the times." Often preachers draw large crowds with such subjects, especially as they pretend to predict the future. But what ought be taught is that which has already been revealed in Scripture, and that alone. "*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness; from which withdraw thyself.*" (First Timothy 6:3-5).

More Abuse

The purpose of preaching is not to grind somebody's ax, as it were, and ride some hobby, vent some personal hang-ups, create sensationalism, display showmanship, or give a performance. The preacher ought not be on his personal ego trip, seeking praise for himself from his hearers. Often preachers mark themselves by gaudy dress, funny stories, humor for humor sake, personal bragging, personal testimonials, various oratorical

gymnastics that do not edify. Second Corinthians 5:5, "*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.*"

When a presentation is completed, the question ought be asked, "What truth was stressed?" Often it is difficult to determine. But one can remember that quite a show was given and the preacher was a crowd-pleaser. People left marvelling, not at truth, but at the preacher.

"We Would See Jesus"

We would persuade that Biblical preaching is preaching that fills the need, "*Sirs, we would see Jesus.*" Biblical preaching is preaching that informs the hearer what God teaches.

There is also that which can be labeled as "spiritual sophistry." Closely akin thereto is subtle, deceptive argumentation, the battling against "straw men" and fake issues. There is sometimes preaching where there is more emphasis placed on manner that message content. Some are impressed with verbiage that is nothing more than techniques instead of truth. Many are impressed with the production of responses through emotionalism than genuine conversions through conviction to the truth. While there is a place for persuasion and exhortation, it should not be used as a substitute or even as a competitor to instruction and the creation of understanding.

Scripture Based

Biblical preaching is more than simply using a multitude of Scriptures and quoting passages. There must be explanation, application, presentation in context. It is not proper to get a subject, decide on the points to be made, then seek verses that will support what you have already determined to teach. That is getting the cart before the horse. Even the devil quoted Scripture.

One does not have to present numerous Scriptures to have a sound, solid Biblical message. Often long sermons

are properly preached from just a single verse, or a phrase, even a single word.

One great need of our time, as has been true in every generation, is that there be Biblical preaching. This is the most relevant and necessary kind of preaching. Romans 1:16, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."* James 1:21, *"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."* Too often people today are like those in the days of Amos. Amos 8:11, *"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."* Why should there be a famine of the Word of God? It is because many who call themselves preachers are not preaching the Bible, but their creeds, manuals, disciplines, feelings, catechisms, theologies, philosophies, "think-sos,' and other such trivia of no real importance. What little Bible that is preached is often twisted and wrested out of shape and context until the very message of God is missed completely.

Too many preachers are involved in everything on earth except learning the truth so they can teach the truth to others (Second Timothy 2:2). They get involved in community projects, running errands, trying to be "sparkplugs" for activity, promoting programs, being the church's public relations man, sponsoring bowling games, parties, golf tournaments, and trips to amusement parks. They lack study, lack preparation, lack comprehension of the truth, and are not offering much substance of spiritual nourishment for their congregations to eat and grow.

Resist Pew Pressure

Pew pressure is certainly a factor in the decline and void of Biblical preaching. The hearers do not want it because it cuts across their conduct. They will tolerate it only a short while. If a preacher persists in presenting what is needed rather than what is wanted, pew pressure brings

about his dismissal and replacement with a people-pleaser.

Amos 2:12, "*But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophesy not.*" That means, "Don't preach to us!"

Amos 5:10, "*They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.*" Amos 7:16, "*Now therefore hear thou the word of the Lord. Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac.*" Once a preacher was asked to teach the minor prophets and began with Amos. It was less than three weeks that the uproar against him was tremendous simply because he dared to bring out the attitudes people had against the preaching done by Amos. He never lasted to finish the study of Amos, let alone the minor prophets. People just did not want what was needed, and had no idea that the study of the minor prophets was such a condemnation of the same kind of people they were.

Isaiah 30:9,10, "*That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord, which say to seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits.*" And there be many who will accommodate such stuff as that.

After Paul had admonished Timothy to preach the Word, he added, "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned aside unto fables.*" (Second Timothy 4:3,4).

Resist Economic Pressure

Economic pressure is a favorite weapon of the opponents of Biblical preaching. To elders, evil men will say, "Get rid of that preacher or we will withhold our contribution until you do." That gets the attention of weak elders. To the preacher, they will say, and often the elders are the ringleaders in this, "Either change your message or we will fire you." This is done alongside intimidations,

ignoring the Word preached and the truth presented, battling against it, doing everything except conforming to it. But any preacher worth his salt will resist the Satanic surge of economic pressure, and will never compromise one word of God's truth, regardless of the source of the pressure, the intensity of the opposition, or the personal consequences for standing faithful to the Word. He must respect the teaching, "*But the truth and sell it not.*" (Proverbs 23:23). Truth is not his, nor anyone else's to negotiate or barter away. It is his to preach. There might be more Biblical preaching if there were more preachers and hearers who were more concerned with the truth that is needed rather than the mushy nothings that are wanted. We should be mature enough to want what God says we need. That means we will rejoice in the "*whole counsel of God.*" (Acts 20:27).

It is a privilege to preach and a privilege to hear Biblical preaching. It is an awesome responsibility for both preacher and hearer. Since the Bible is the Word of God, when it is preached we are listening to God, obligated to obey what it teaches, and thereby we can be blessed. To reject it is to reject God and reap the dreadful and eternal fruits of spiritual destruction.

All these things being true, we must demand, support, and appreciate sound Biblical preaching. This we will not fail to do when we live the Bible as the Word of God which it claims to be. This will include our favorable response to what it teaches.

* * * * *

This is not a political statement.

It is all too apparent that some brethren think more of their political party than they the Word of God. We have never known a political party that was perfect. But we have never seen an administration as morally destitute of truth as this present one of Clinton. He entered the fray promoting homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle, making it easier to get baby murders (abortions), appointing to high office the most morally corrupt people one can imagine. Why in the name of all that is right do Christians support such servants of hell?

Jesus Answers the Question: "By What Authority?"

"And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will ask you one thing, which if ye will tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." (Matthew 21:23-27).

There is an art in answering questions, knowing just what to say and how to say it in order to accomplish the most good. Jesus was often asked questions on a great variety of subjects, with different motives behind them, by friends and by foes. When He answered, His words had the ring of finality and authority.

Some resent having questions put to them regarding their convictions and why they believe and do what they believe and do. Christ generally welcomed questions because it most often opened for Him the door of opportunity to teach and emphasize some point of the truth of God. Peter wrote, "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*" (First Peter 3:15). This is not always easy to do. It is very demanding of a person to keep himself prepared to answer questions. Most of us would probably do a better job on these occasions of questions if we had time to ponder the matter a while before we must give an answer. Staying ready is a difficult task.

What Was the Motive?

The question that was asked of Jesus in our text was not asked for information, but was motivated by the desire to trap Jesus in some way. Jesus had not been commissioned by the religious leaders of the Jews to teach. We might say, in the language of false religions today, He had not been "ordained" as minister by any religious order. Because of this there were those who sought to discredit Him and His message before His hearers. They wished to picture Him as a renegade and rebel that was acting outside the law and without authority to speak and act.

But Jesus knew their hearts and motives, and blunted their purposes. Rather than answering their question in the manner that they supposed He might, and in a way that would play into their evil hands, He asked them a question that put the spotlight of truth on them. He asked them about the baptism administered and taught by John the Baptist. Did John say and do according to the will of God or did he act by the direction of men?

They Dodged

The critics of Jesus had to dodge giving an answer. John had not been "ordained" by the religious leaders either, but the people properly recognized him as one sent from God. They knew his message was the message of God. The leaders had rejected both John and His message. Jesus asked them a question, the answer to which would give answer to their own question. Answer to one would be answer to both.

The way Jesus responded to these inquiries and critics reveals such remarkable wisdom. We are not always obligated to answer just any question in the way and manner some might desire. When we are asked we have the right to answer according to the truth and in a way that will advance the truth. We have no duty to give ammunition to the enemies of truth. We are not obligated to cooperate with the evil designs of people who ask questions just for the purpose of finding fault. By asking a question we can sometimes get a person to answer his own question. This is not the way to answer

every question, but sometimes it is the best way. When one is led to answer his own question, he is less inclined to reject the answer.

They Trapped Themselves

The priests and elders got themselves into a dilemma.. They had not thought the matter through before they asked their question. Either way they responded to what Jesus asked would leave them in a bad light. If they admitted the baptism of John was of God, Jesus would ask them why they had refused it. If they said John was of men, they were afraid of the people who considered John a prophet. They wanted to discredit Jesus before the people, not themselves. They feared alienating the very ones they were trying to influence and whose minds they were trying to prejudice against Jesus.

They even dug deeper into trouble when they answered, "*We know not.*" With that response, could they be considered competent judges of who was a true prophet and who was not? They admitted they did not know about John. They disqualified themselves to have even asked the question concerning the authority of Jesus. They had taken a position that was shown to be incompetent and fallacious. Jesus responded to their inquiry in such a way as to expose their error and inconsistency. This is often the more excellent way to give answer to some who ask some things.

Still a Good Tool

There are false doctrines being taught today that can be exposed as false by meeting them with another question. It is true that we may not always think of the best thing to say at the best time, however. Some doctrines are designed to offset God's word, release man from any obligation to God, and allow a person to do whatever he wishes. Let us consider some of these doctrines that can be met and refuted by asking another question.

Some say there is no objective truth. We ask, "Is that true?" If there is no objective truth, how can they know it is true that there is no objective truth? Some follow by saying there is nothing absolute. We ask, "Is that

absolutely true?" How can one be absolutely sure there is nothing absolutely sure? This disposes of that false doctrine by showing how it "shoots itself in the foot," so to speak.

One contends that you really cannot prove anything for sure. We ask, "Can you prove that?" If they can, they have disproven their assertion. If they cannot, they cannot know you cannot prove anything.

It is asserted that there is no absolute moral law, with do's and don't's. Therefore, we all must tolerate each other in our diversified society of morality and moral standards. But if there is no moral law that is superior and to which we must subscribe, why are we obligated to be tolerant of others? Why is tolerance any more authoritative and proper than intolerance, if there is no absolute moral law?

Shall We Dodge?

Some claim that a good teacher should only present a variety of views concerning matters and never take a position, leaving each one to take his own position as he sees fit. This is the way some teachers in the so-called "Christian" schools teach the Bible. They never conclude anything as truth. But we ask, "Is that your position that nobody who teaches ought to take a position?" Then why do they take a position when they denounce taking a position? Jesus took strong positions. Some would condemn Him for being dogmatic no doubt. But the same ones are very dogmatic that nobody ought to be dogmatic. Cannot we see the folly of attempted neutrality in these things and the weakness of doctrines that would destroy the truth?

Some have said that a real scholar cannot be committed to anything lest that prejudice his freedom to discover whatever he might discover. This is often said to scoff at the genuine scholarship of brethren if they hold firmly to certain truths. The idea that is attempted to be implanted is that if one holds strongly to a certain view then he is incapable of being unbiased. But we ask, "Why are you committed to not being committed?" Some like to disallow for others what they insist they be allowed to

have. When a point of view is self-contradictory, is not the fallacy of it obvious to us? Does not asking about such things expose the pseudo-scholars of the Bible? We contend that these errors are exposed by good questions.

Does It Matter?

Many believe that one belief is just as good as another. They declare that what one believes really does not matter very much. But we must ask, "If that is so, why is not our belief that what one believes does matter just as good as your belief that what one believes does not matter?" And why do those who say it does not matter try so hard to change our minds since we believe it does matter? This is a strange position that is held prominently in the denominational world, and in liberal digressives who have divided the Lord's church by their false doctrines. It is much like the doctrine that one church is just as good as another church, unless some church believes that it does matter to which church one belongs. Then another standard of exclusion is used to measure against such a church. Our experience has been that the denominationalists that say one church is as good as another do not believe it because they are jealous and zealous for their particular denomination over and above every other one, even preferring it to the Lord's church.

Can We Understand?

Roman Catholicism teaches that we cannot understand the Bible, but must rely upon the official interpretation by Roman priests to tell us what it means. What is so odd is that they will sometimes even quote the Bible to us, that which are supposed to be unable to understand, in order to convince us that we cannot understand it. Why do that if we cannot understand it? That doctrine is nothing but a transparent attempt to get people to remain ignorant of what God has said so the Roman doctrines will not be refuted.

About the same thing exists with Pentecostals, Calvinists, Mormons, etc. who claim one must have a direct operation of the Holy Spirit before he is spiritual enough to understand the Scriptures. Again, like

Catholics, they will even cite Scriptures that we supposedly cannot understand in order to convince us that we are incapable to understand them. If we had a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, we would not need their teaching anyway, but would have perfect understanding, and without anything they ever would say. We would not even need the Bible.

Why do some argue and debate against arguing and debating? Why do some preach that preaching is now outmoded and does no good? If all that is true, why do they do what they discount and cancel?

What if..."

Sometimes we encounter people who ask, "What happens to a person who dies on the way to being baptized?" We prefer to let such people answer their own question by asking them one. To those who believe that one must come to the mourner's bench to "pray through," we ask what will happen to such a one if he drops dead walking toward the bench? To those who believe in faith only, we would ask what happens to the man who is being taught and is almost convinced but dies before the session of teaching is completed and before he believes?

People will often ask "what if?" questions to attempt to get around what the Lord has commanded. But is it not clear that this "what if" question about baptism does not and will not apply to the person asking the question? He can never claim a right to crawl under that umbrella even if that umbrella existed. It is a transparent attempt to discount a command of Jesus. Why would anyone even want to do that anyway if they really believed in Christ? We can "what if" every command the Lord has ever given, but does that remove the command? By asking a pertinent question we can put to flight the folly of such questions.

His Authority

Back to the question asked of Jesus, "*By what authority doest thou these things?*" While on this occasion He responded in the most suitable manner the situation demanded, in other places of Scripture we have the

record how He answered that question directly and explicitly.

In Matthew 7:29, after His hearers heard Him preach, they knew by what authority He spoke and they recognized the authority of Him. "*For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*" The scribes knew the law by virtue of copying it over and over. But what they copied were the authoritative words of God, not words of authority of their own. But when Jesus spoke, He spoke with authority and was the source of that authority because He was Deity in the flesh.

In Matthew 9:1-8, Jesus forgave the sins of a man sick of the palsy. His enemies complained and accused Him of blasphemy inasmuch as only God could forgive sins. But Jesus proved His Deity by demonstrating His power and causing the man to arise and be whole. This showed conclusively His authority in what He said and did.

Matthew 28:18 Jesus said, "*All power* (or authority) *hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth.*" The Bible leaves no doubt as to the divine authority Jesus Christ had and showed while on earth and certainly still possesses. Yes, Jesus answered the question in a way that taught the greatest truth at the moment, and even by that, implied His divine authority.

* * * * *

The Invitation

"*Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:28-30).

This wonderful statement of invitation was uttered by the Lord Jesus and expresses several inescapable implications that we need to understand concerning the Lord and our relationship with Him. First, let us get

something of the background against which this statement was made.

Earlier in this eleventh chapter John the Baptist had sent messengers to Jesus asking, "*Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*" John was in prison at the time, being placed there by Herod because John dared to preach that God's marriage law was applicable to all people, whether children of God or not. (Many so-called preachers will not dare preach God's truth on this point because it would offend too many people. Their "love" will allow them to let the people go to hell rather than hear the truth. Some love!)

John was doubtless discouraged and he wanted to know more about Jesus. But could it not also have been the motive of John to send these messengers, not that John had doubts, but to enable these disciples, his messengers, to know first hand of the evidence that Jesus is the Christ? How convincing it would be for them!

Jesus sent him word, "*Go and show John again those things which ye see and hear; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" This evidence of His power, authority, and mighty deeds would be convincing of the reality of His Deity.

Hear Jesus on John

Then Jesus discussed John the Baptist. What did the people expect to see in that man? John was not a reed shaken in the wind. He was not just an ordinary prophet. He was not one who lived in the finery of this world. Rather, John was the messenger that was sent before Christ as the prophets had foretold would come. There was none born of woman that was greater than John. John was a part of God's great scheme of redemption in that he was the herald of the Lord's provision for the salvation of man, Jesus, His Son.

Jesus rebuked His hearers, "*But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto the children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We*

have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating and drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of the publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children." (Matthew 11:16-19)

It really did not make any difference who was God's messenger or his manner of working, the people rejected them. John lived in the wilderness and was not a city dweller, and the people criticized him. Jesus walked among them in the cities as well, but they had harsh words of rejection concerning him also. The people were so hardened of heart and closed of mind that it made no difference how they were approached or by whom, they would not receive the truth. This was a stern and strong rebuke of that evil and adulterous generation. It was the message that they disliked, and no messenger of truth could have pleased them. How like those of yesteryear are many today toward the gospel and gospel preachers!

He Warned

He also warned the people of the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum that the day of judgment would be more tolerable for the ancient and wicked cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom than for them. Jesus said the people of those ancient cities would have repented if they had the equal opportunities to turn from their wickedness that Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had. Mightier works had been done in those cities of the time of Jesus and yet, they still persisted in their wicked ways. Better evidence was presented to them, yet they continued in their rebellion and rejection of Jesus.

We have even better evidence now of what God says is right and wrong than did the cities of the time of Jesus or the more ancient ones He mentioned. But is there any evidence that the people of our nation are turning from their national degeneracy? We still ask, "God bless America? Why should He?"

Then Jesus thanked God that His truth had been revealed to those who were not blinded by their own wisdom and conceit, but, as it were, "*unto babes,*" that is, unto those who were humble, teachable, willing to learn, desiring truth, and who would follow the truth. Even today, those who are so wise in their own eyes find no place for the wisdom of Jesus Christ in their lives. The colleges and universities of our land are running over with educated fools who are polluting the minds of their students with their degenerate and depraved rebellion against God and His will.

Against this background, where the stubbornness and sinfulness of the people was so glaringly evident, and their conduct so deserving of rebuke, in spite of all of that, Jesus manifests His love and concern by extending to them this noble and marvelous invitation of Matthew 11:28-30. Let us now turn our attention to at least four inescapable implications of this invitation.

Man Needs to Come to God

One, the very fact that Jesus invites shows that man is apart from God and needs to come to God. This is the reason behind the invitation and what makes it necessary. Man has separated himself from the Lord. What is it that produces this separation. "*Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy that he cannot hear, but your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*" Isaiah 59:1,2). "*And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*" (Ephesians 2:1-3). It is sin that alienates us from God. And this is something for which we are all accountable. "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23).

Jesus said that a man labors under a heavy burden. Sin is a burden that man cannot successfully carry in this life and into the next. Man needs relief and rest from that burden. Apart from God there is no rest to be found. The invitation to man to "*come*" indicates that man is separated from God because of man's own sins and man needs to come to God for the relief that he cannot obtain from any other source.

God Wants Man to Come

Two, God wants man to come to Him. This very thought is marvelous in itself. God would not invite man to come if He did not want man to come and if He did not want fellowship with man. God is certainly not insincere in extending this invitation. The fact that He offers it manifests His love, compassion, interest, and concern for doomed and damned sinful humanity.

Have you ever thought how God must feel when His invitation is rejected, having extended it only to be rebuffed? Surely, it must be offensive to Him. Even we know how disappointed we are when we sincerely offer an invitation to someone and they cannot accept it. But how hurt we are when we extend an invitation and it is deliberately rejected. Do you suppose God is pleased when we do such a thing with His invitation?

The church joins with Christ in extending this invitation. "*And the Spirit and the bride say Come.*" (Revelation 22:17). This church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5). Those in the church are also concerned for the welfare of the souls of others and rejoice when one accepts the invitation of the Lord.

Can anyone seriously doubt or question the Lord's desire for man to come to Him? "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" (John 15:13). Jesus even went a step beyond this, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous men will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Much more then, being*

now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." (Romans 5:6-9).

Man Can Come to God

Third, the invitation shows that man can come to the Lord. It is possible for man to accept this invitation. God would not invite man if man was prohibited from accepting it. Some teach that some are predestined to salvation or condemnation and that there is nothing one can do about it one way or the other. They are locked in a fixed destiny, according to this false doctrine, without any choice on their part. The existence of the invitation of Christ is evidence that such a teaching is false. We are never taught to do something that we cannot do. It would be a cruel and heartless "god" to extend relief to those suffering under heavy burdens, knowing all the while they could not accept relief and because the "god" had already decreed their doom regardless of their need.

We cannot come to God because we deserve the right to come. We do not come because we earn or merit the privilege to come. If it was not for the love, grace, and mercy of God there would be no invitation whatsoever. Man would have to suffer the justice of his own transgressions from which he could not possibly redeem himself by himself. So we know that man can accept the Lord's invitation if he will. He has the power of choice and the ability to respond favorably.

Man is Told the Way

Fourth, God has graciously informed us, through His Word, that there is a way that exists that leads to Him. He has taught us what this way involves, and how we can come to Him in acceptance of His invitation. God draws us unto Him. *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day."* (John 6:44). But we ask, "How does God draw man unto Him?" Does God draw through some miraculous means, or by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, by something better felt than told, or some mysterious experience? Certainly not! The very next verse (45) tells us how man is drawn by the Father. *"It is*

written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Who is it that comes? It is those that are drawn (verse 44). Again, who is it that comes? It is those that are taught, have heard, have learned (verse 45). Therefore, it is clear that God draws man to Him by man being taught and man learning the Word of God.

"For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39). God calls us. How does God call? *"Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Second Thessalonian 2:14).

God provided Christ, His perfect life, His death, burial, and resurrection as the way of salvation (First Corinthians 15:1-4). This was and is God's plan. This is what Deity has done to make it possible for man to remove that barrier of sin that separates him from his Creator and Judge.

When God calls, He expects man to answer. He calls and we must call back to Him. *"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."* (Acts 2:21). The same is taught in Romans 10:13.

How do we call back in response to God's call? It is not just saying, "Lord, Lord ." (Matthew 7:21). It involves the doing of His will. *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven."* Peter told his hearers on Pentecost, *"Save yourselves from this untoward generation."* (Acts 2:40). He did not tell them to save themselves by themselves, for this they could not do. But he was emphasizing that they had a part in their own salvation and they must do whatever was required of them. Obedience is involved. *"Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9).

The Process in Capsule Form

The process of salvation, and it is a process because there are several elements involved, is outlined in

Romans 10:13-17. "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias* (Isaiah) *saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*"

Notice the steps involved. One must preach; the message must be heard; it must be believed; one must call on the name of the Lord; the result is salvation. Please notice that Paul did not contend for salvation at the point of belief, but only after calling on the name of the Lord. Paul placed something between belief and salvation that he specified as calling on the name of the Lord. Those who preach and believe salvation at the point of faith have an insurmountable problem harmonizing their contention with the inspired word of Paul. Since the apostle put something between faith and salvation, who is the man with authority to say that there is nothing between them?

What does is mean to call on the name of the Lord? Paul surely knew, being guided by the Holy Spirit, and since he was commanded to do exactly that. Acts 22:16, "*And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" Here is that which a person does to call on the name of the Lord. He is baptized, just like Ananias told Saul (Paul) to do.

Again, First Peter 3:21, "*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*" God calls. We answer. What is an answer but a response to the call? How do we answer? Baptism is answering the call of God. Having been called by the gospel, hearing the call, believing the call, and answering the call in obedience to the commands of the gospel, the burdens of sin are lifted from us. One assumes a lighter, easier burden, a responsibility and duty, but one which he can

carry, now having had the unbearable burden of sin taken from him. He is given rest from the burden of sin that condemns, and assumes his place alongside people of God with a load they can carry with God's help.

Called by the Gospel

Too many times people are taught that they are to wait for some special kind of call they feel must be a call from God, but a call that never comes except in their own imagination and of their own invention. We have already been called. What we need, what God has provided, what we are to do to answer God's call is revealed in the gospel.

Once when our youngest, Sam, was playing nearby where I was sitting, I called to him to come to me. I could not see him, but could tell how quiet he became as he stopped playing and yet, did not come. I called again, more forcefully, "Sam, come here to me." Still he did not come.The third time, more forceful than before, I called and this time he came running to me, explaining, "I'm sorry, Daddy, I did not hear you the first two times." Many of us are like Sam on that occasion. We have heard the call of God. We just have not answered.

The Master's invitation is the most serious proposition ever placed before the human mind. And let it be known that God has done all that God is going to do to call us. He has provided the Savior. He has provided the way to the Savior. He has taught us what that way involves. He has invited us to come that way. Now it is up to each one to come the way of the Lord's provision, or suffer the consequences of damnation of the lost because of rejection of the invitation.

Let it not be your situation that the invitation is rejected. Come to Christ today, and have your sins lifted from you forever. Such is our prayer that goes with this lesson to everyone who reads it.

But what are we commanded to do? Having heard the word, we are to believe in Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24). We must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). We are to confess our faith in Christ as the Son of God (Romans

10:9,10; Luke 12:8,9), and baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 3:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6: 3,4).

* * * * *

TIME GOES BY EVER SO SWIFTLY:

This is hardly a revelation to any reader. It may have seemed as if time crept along when we were younger, but surely we are not so inclined to think as the years accumulate.

We began this venture of producing ***A BURNING FIRE*** in June 1982 while preaching for the East Main church in Tupelo, Mississippi. Little did we realize just what we were undertaking. We had no idea as to the amount to time, work, and expense this would ultimately demand. It is a good thing we did not because we may have been discouraged.

But I am so glad about what has been done. The next issue will complete fourteen volumes, each volume having twelve issues. We started out to produce one volume per year, but have gone a bit faster. As plans now stand, possibly three, maybe four, volumes remain. Time will tell what we can do.

But a point I want to make is this. Little did we realize when we started this work how rebellious our nation would become against the ways of God. We knew many were crying for the overthrow of everything good, but could we have even imagined how successful the enemies of decency and truth would be over the next decade? We now live in a land when in almost every arena there is the denunciation

of the truth of God. Our governmental leaders are probably the most vicious enemies of God's way that has ever occupied the power of government. The schools and universities are producing another generation of humanistic, heathenish barbarians without moral principles and fear of the Lord. Money, power, fame, and pleasure are the gods of America. The churches are saturated with insipid servants of Satan who dare not teach the truth as revealed in the Bible. They have gone after the ways of sin, accommodating sin, even condoning sin. The entertainment world is dominated by the most degenerate minds imaginable. Just consider what they produce and this cannot be denied. The written materials being splashed about all ring with defiance of God.

Even the Lord's church suffers under the rebellion of heretics, liberals, modernists, who have digressed from the truth to go along with the ways of the world. Colleges established by good men to help homes in educating their children in an environment where truth was respected have been perverted time and again into citadels of heresy.

Who could have imagined the deplorable conditions that now exist when we began this effort just eleven years ago. I did not foresee how depraved matters would become. Did you?

But I knew this, and still know. God's truth is the way, the only way, and no other way can or will save. I intend to be one who will walk that way, and teach that way. I hope you will too.! JB

Avoid the Burden of Regret



We find few people who would deny that there are things in their past that they regret. It may be deeds, words, decisions of various kinds. We realize we cannot always do perfectly like we wish we could, and who does not know how much improved is hindsight over foresight? Some may allow regrets of the past to spoil their present and future. So we need to avoid regret all we can. This does not mean that from this day forward we will always make the best choices, say the best words, do the best deeds. But we can avoid regrets if we will do the best we can at the moment. It may not prove to be the best and things may not turn out the may we would prefer. But if we do the best we can with what we know each time, who can do better than that? If the future proves our efforts were not the best, at least we can be comforted in the knowledge that we did what we thought was best and can, like Paul, "*forget the things which are behind*" and press on toward the prize before us. We may not be pleased every time, but we will avoid regrets. JWB

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is avaliable.

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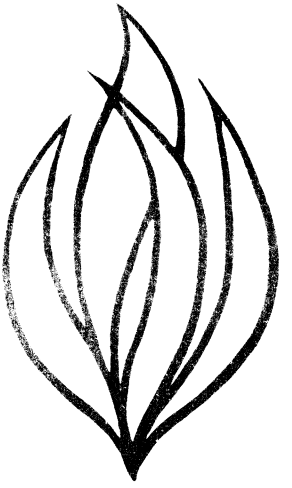

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XIV James W. Boud NUMBER 12

The System of Salvation

There are some very sobering words found in the Bible. "*Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you.*" (Isaiah 59:1,2).

What is sin? John tells us it is the transgression of the law (First John 3:4), meaning the law of God. It is a violation of the law of God under which we live and to which we are accountable and answerable unto Him. Furthermore, Paul writes, "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23). What difference does that make? "*The wages of sin is death...*" (Romans 6:23). This refers to spiritual death, separation from God and His favor.

Somewhat in contrast to these sentiments, and to offset the tragic results of sin, we read, "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...*" (First Timothy 1:15). It is evident that man is in sin and God wants to save him from its wages. It is equally evident that God intends to save man through His Son, Jesus Christ. How does God save through Christ?

Once a Mystery

When reading Ephesians 3:1-7, Paul informs us that "*by revelation he* (God) *made known unto me the mystery, (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby when ye hear, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*" Please take note of the word "*mystery.*" In the New Testament it refers to a battle plan, a scheme, a design by which something is to be accomplished. Here it refers to God's plan for redeeming man, His system of salvation through Jesus Christ. Once it was hidden, in the sense that it was not yet revealed and was unknown.

It was gradually unfolded as God designed it before the foundation of the world. But now it is revealed. Now it is no longer a mystery or unknown. As Colossians 1:26 reads, it "*hath been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.*"

What is involved and included in God's system of salvation? As we begin our investigation, may we be impressed that if we are to be saved we must know and follow God's plan. It is not left to man to devise his own plan of salvation. The plan is God's and we must conform to it. So you can see that we are really concerned with the most important matter your mind can consider, whether we realize it or not.

System of Grace

Salvation is by a system of grace. Romans 3:24, "*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" Ephesians 2:8,9, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.*" Titus 3:4-6, "*But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.*" The Bible leaves no room for doubt but the plan of God for saving man is a plan that involves and includes the grace of God. But there are questions that must be considered, such as, how does God save by His grace, and when does God save by His grace?

First, we must understand what is meant by the grace of God. It has reference to an attitude and action of God on behalf of mankind. God has done something for us that we could never merit, could never earn, nor deserve. Instead of dealing with us in our sins according to justice, God has determined to offer man His mercy. As Psalm 103:110 reads, "*He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*" How thankful we can be for this, because if justice had been the measure, none could be saved because none are righteous (Romans 3:10). Without the grace of God, we

could close the subject of salvation right here. There would be no salvation.

But we are not saved by grace alone. No such statement or insinuation is to be found in Scripture to that conclusion. Just consider a moment. If salvation is by grace alone, and God wants all to be saved (Second Peter 3:9), and since the grace of God hath appeared unto all men, none would be lost. But who can read the Bible and conclude that all shall be saved? Furthermore, if any were lost, it would be God's fault. He would be a respecter of person to save some and not save others, the very thing Paul and Peter said was not the case (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; First Peter 1:17). If salvation is by grace alone and any were lost, would it be because God's grace was insufficient to save? Paul denied the inadequacy of the grace of God to save (Romans 5:20). If salvation was by grace alone, it would remove man's accountability to God and leave the matter entirely up to God.

Salvation is by grace, but not by grace alone, regardless of who says otherwise. There are other components in God's plan for saving man revealed in Scripture.

System of Blood

God's system to save is a system of blood. Christ tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). In the death of Christ where He shed His blood we see the manifestation, the demonstration of the grace of God. Ephesians 1:7, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."* Jesus said He shed His blood *"for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:28). *"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission,"* (Hebrews 9:22). But the blood of animals would not suffice (Hebrews 10:4). It was *"by his own blood"* that He *"obtained eternal redemption for us."* (Hebrews 9:12). *"Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."* (Romans 5:9). In this way God commended His love toward us (Romans 5:8). Our reconciliation to God is accomplished by the death of Christ on the cross (Ephesians 2:16). As surely as salvation is by grace, it is also by blood. How shameful that some today are ashamed of the blood of Christ and are repulsed by the doctrine of salvation by blood. The

blood of Christ is the cleansing agent for our sin-stained souls. But as with all agents of cleansing, it must be applied. We must learn how and when the blood of Christ is applied.

Thus far it ought to be obvious that the love, mercy, and grace of God is such that by the sacrifice of Jesus, divine provision has been made for the salvation of man. The system of salvation is made possible by the unmerited favor of God toward sinful man and demonstrated by the death of Christ on the cross where His blood was shed. This is the role that Deity has done in saving man.

But man has his part to play in God's scheme for redeeming man. Peter preached Christ on Pentecost, informing his hearers of what God had done and what God expected them to do. He urged, "*Save yourselves.*" (Acts 2:40). He did not urge them to save themselves by themselves. That would have been contrary to what he had preached about what God had done. There is no salvation for man by himself. But there is man's part. In that great invitation that Jesus extended in Matthew 11:28-30 He commanded men to come, take, learn. There was that which Christ had done. There was that which man must do. Whatever it is that man must do, he must do it. Unless man does man's part of God's plan, he cannot be saved. Without what God has done there would be no man's part. But since God has provided the way, and designed man's part, man is expected to do what God commands.

System of Faith

Therefore, we see that the system of salvation is a system of faith. Romans 1:16, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*" Note the need to believe. Jesus said as recorded in John 8:24, "*Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*" John 3:16 stressed the essentiality of faith. In fact, without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). As surely as the system of salvation involves grace, love, mercy, and blood, it involves man's faith. We appropriate to ourselves the benefits of God's grace by faith. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith.*"

(Ephesians 2:8). We have access to God's grace by faith (Romans 5:2).

But what kind of faith? The Bible speaks of different kinds of faith. There is weak faith, strong faith, dead faith, and faith that works through love (Galatians 5:6). Jesus taught, "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*" (Matthew 7:21). Can there be any doubt but man has something to do? Hebrews chapter eleven has been called the "Hall of Faith" because many Old Testament characters are held before us as examples of acceptable faith. Notice as you read that in each instance of that chapter the faith was an active, obedient faith. Mere mental assent to certain things was not sufficient faith. There is a faith that saves and a faith that will not save. Never does the Bible teach salvation by faith only. James 2:24 specifically teaches that one is not justified by faith only. We have seen we are justified by grace, love, mercy, and blood, and here were see we are justified by obedient faith, but not by faith only.

John 12:42,43 tells of some who believed on Jesus but would not confess Him. Their faith would not save. It took more than faith like that. Agrippa believed (Acts 26) but as far as the record shows, he was never saved. Faith only would have saved all of them if salvation is by faith only. The Bible makes plain that salvation is by faith. It is equally plain that salvation is not by faith only. There is no more misleading and deceptive doctrine, one that dominates the denominational agenda, than the doctrine that salvation is by faith alone.

System of Works

From James 2:20-24 we learn that we are justified by works. This may at first seem to contradict Ephesians 2:8,9 where we read that we are not saved by works. But inspired men do not contradict each other. Obviously the writers have different works in mind. There are works that will not save. But there are works in God's system of salvation that are essential to being saved. We must discern between the kinds of works.

We are not saved by works of our own righteousness (Titus 3:5). Nor are we saved by works wherein we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9). Nor are we saved by works of the Mosaic Law (Romans 3:20,28; Galatians 2:16). But have we not learned how we are saved by faith? Let us also learn that Jesus called faith a work (John 6:29). It is a work of God. It is God's work in that God calls upon man to believe, but believing is something man does.

System of Obedience

There are works of obedience by which faith is made perfect, whole, complete (James 2:20-24,26). Works of obedience is what made the faith of Abraham an acceptable faith. Without his obedience his faith would have availed nothing. Romans is a book that emphasizes both grace and faith. Yet, at the start of the book (Romans 1:5), and at the close (Romans 16:26), Paul speaks of the obedience of faith. The faith that that saves is the faith that obeys. The works of obedience are the kind of works that makes faith a saving faith, without which we are not saved.

System of Law

What does one obey? One must obey God's law. The system of salvation includes law. Romans 8:2, "*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*" What is the law of sin and death? It is the law says, "You sin; you die." As Romans 6:23 teaches, "*The wages of sin is death.*" But we can be freed from that law, and this is necessary that we be freed because we all sin (Romans 3:23). There is a law by which we are freed. It is the law of God after the inward man (Romans 7:22). It is not a law of meritorious works, but the law of faith (Romans 3:27). James calls it the "*perfect law of liberty.*" (James 1:25). It is the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

Grace is not incompatible nor inconsistent with law. Neither is faith incompatible nor inconsistent with works of obedience. The system God devised and delivered involves all these things. The very fact that there is a system at all proves there is a law by which men can be saved.

In that law are commandments men must obey. Christ is the author of salvation to the obedient (Hebrews 5:9). Can we be friends of Him if we disobey (John 15:14)? Do not we show our love by our obedience (John 14:15)?

Keep in mind, even as man obeys he is not earning his way to heaven, nor attempting to do so. When we obey we are doing nothing more than what we ought to do (Luke 17:10). Salvation is a gift (Romans 6:23). But as with all gifts, there is a giver and a receiver. God gives, and man must receive the gift. We receive the gift by meeting the conditions stipulated in the law that God has given and made possible by His grace.

It is when we obey the law that we are saved by grace. It is when we obey the law that we enjoy the application of the blood. It is when we obey that our faith becomes a saving faith. It is by obedience that we are justified by works of obedience to the law of the gospel.

Summary

God's mystery, His plan, His Scheme, His system to save mankind is one of grace, love, mercy, blood, faith, law, and works of obedience. It is not one apart from the other, but each part with the others. One apart from the other will avail nothing. When man, in faith that comes from hearing the Word (Romans 10:17) obeys the law of Christ, God applies the saving blood to man's sin-stained soul, the merit of that blood of the Son of God having been graciously, mercifully, and lovingly provided, that man is saved from his past sins.

That law includes the command to hear the Word (Romans 10:17), believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3), confess our faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10), and to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).

Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" John 14:6.

* * * * *

The Message of Galatians

Like all Scripture, this epistle originated in the mind of Deity, but was written by the apostle Paul approximately twenty-five years after Pentecost. Like other New Testament books, it dealt with existing and anticipated apostasy due to Judaizing teachers, teachers who were trying to lead both Jewish Christians and Gentiles to first accept certain parts of the law of Moses in order to be saved.

Galatians can be divided topically into three major sections: (1) Paul's defense of his apostleship and message, chapters one and two; (2) the emphasis on the gospel of Christ being of divine origin and how all are accountable to it rather than the law of Moses, chapter three, four and the first part of five; (3) exhortations and admonitions that pertain to daily Christian living, most of chapter five, and six.

The basic theme of the book is the discussion of three significant milestones in the revelation of God's plan for saving man, and their relationship to each other. These milestones are (1) God's promise to Abraham, (2) the law of Moses, (3) and the faith of Christ.

Our approach will be to consider the truths, specifics and principles, of the book as they are just as relevant and true for our time as they were for those to whom this epistles was originally written. Due to limited space specific references will be omitted, alluding to passages rather than providing lengthy quotations which can be read in your own Bible.

Defense of Apostleship

To Paul's amazement, the Galatians churches were defecting from their former faithfulness. He marvelled at their removal. Their drift was due to the influence of a perverted message, (1:6,7). God's curse rests upon any who would teach other than apostolic revelation, (1:8,9).

Paul defended his apostleship and message with several points. He was not an apostle of man, but of Christ. He affirmed that what He preached was not of man, not of human origin, but from the divine revelation, (1:10,11). He cited his earlier life as a persecutor, but also his subsequent call to preach Christ, (Chapters 1,2). He was not guided by notables of Jerusalem, and they added nothing to him, (2:6). In fact, there had been a confrontation between Paul and Peter related to the very issues that troubled the churches in Galatia, (2:11ff). Whereas Peter had withdrawn himself from Gentile brethren, Paul showed the way of justification to be, not the Mosaic law, but the faith of Christ.

The Promise, The Law, The Faith

Turning to the basic theme of the book, Paul noted how God, centuries earlier, had made a covenant with Abraham. In that covenant was the promise, "*In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed.*" (Genesis 22:18). The covenant was confirmed, (3:17). The law of Moses, coming four hundred thirty years later, was not the fulfillment of that promise and did not annul that promise, (3:17).

The law had various purposes, being added because of sins, to bring Israel to the coming of Christ, to serve as a temporary guide for Israel until faith came. It was not against God's promise to Abraham, nor the accomplishment of it. The law defined sin, condemned sin, warned against sin, but did not contain the revelation of the way of forgiveness of sin.

The "*seed*" promise was specifically fulfilled in Christ, who is identified as the "*seed,*" (3:16). Therefore, people are justified before God by the faith of Christ and not by the law of Moses.

Paul showed the end of the law and the folly of returning to it with other explanations. He cited an heir apparent, being a child, is as a servant, but later an heir in reality, (chapter 4). As a child he is kept under restraint and custody until maturity. Such was the case with Israel under the law. But when the fullness of time was come,

they were no longer under the law, but were redeemed and became sons, receiving inheritance.

Paul also appealed to various Old Testament teachings how that those under the law were under a curse (Deuteronomy); that the just shall live by faith (Habbakuk); that redemption was through Christ who became a curse on behalf of all (Deuteronomy).

He cited the historical event regarding Hagar and Ishmael on the one hand and Sarah and Isaac on the other as a type of that faith which was to come. Hagar and Ishmael represented the Mosaic system. Sarah, a freewoman, and Isaac represented the faith of Christ. As Hagar and her son were cast out in deference to Sarah and her son of promise, so the old Mosaic system was cast out in deference to the faith of Christ. That was actually the fulfillment of the promise regarding the seed of Abraham, (4:30). Christians are the children of the freewoman, the faith of Christ, (4:31).

With these, and other personal persuasions, Paul sought to prevent his brethren from further hindrance and apostasy being caused by false teachers, attempting to lead them back to a renewed faithfulness through the restoration of any who had been overtaken.

Living as a Christian

Assuming a restorative reaction and result of his efforts, Paul gave instruction on matters of practical living in a Christ-like fashion. He warned against the works of the flesh, (5:19ff). He emphasized the unimpeachable law of sowing and reaping, (6:7,8). He included encouragements to stedfastness in positive Christian conduct along with a closing that contained a prayful attitude for the spiritual welfare of the brethren in the Galatians churches. Galatians, alongside Romans and Hebrews, shows the way of Christ being superior to and the culmination of all that which had been given and gone before Him.

Saving Faith

Let us now turn our attention to some specific truths and principles. Galatians teaches us the nature of saving faith. The faith that saves is the faith like that of Abraham, (3:6,9). But it is not by faith only, but by a system of faith that includes obedience. Galatians 3:26,27, "*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" Notice, "*ye are...*" because "*ye have been.*" Unless you have been, you are not. One must be baptized to be in Christ. This act of obedience must accompany faith for it to be a saving faith.

Prophecy/Fulfillment

Galatians refutes the modernists in their denial of prophecy and fulfillment. Galatians underscores the unity of the Bible, that is, the unbreakable link and chain that runs from Genesis to Revelation. Miraculous prophecy and its fulfillment stand as irrefutable evidence of divine inspiration of the Scriptures. Repeatedly Paul called out Old Testament reference to support New Testament conclusions, (3:8). One must deny the entire book of Galatians if he denies the miraculous prophecy and fulfillment element of the Bible.

An Essential

Galatians shows the necessity of "*rightly dividing the word.*" We cannot understand the scheme of redemption without knowledge of the relationship between the covenant with Abraham, the law of Moses, and the faith of Christ. It is not an overstatement to say that most of the religious world that calls itself "Christian" either does not understand or just repudiates these relationships, and have mixed and confused them into a combination of Judaistic Christianity that almost defies explanation. This confusion is at the heart of much of the denominational chaos that has caused so much religious division.

Sufficiency of the Faith

From Paul's defense of his apostleship and message we see the affirmations of the inspiration and all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, (1:8,9,11,12), and the

sufficiency of "*the faith,*" (3:25). This epistle destroys the claims of latter-day revelation, invented because so many are simply discontent to accept God's Word, and prefer something different. In view of the teaching in this book, we can see the wisdom and correctness of the motto to "speak where the Bible speaks; and be silent where the Bible is silent." God's condemnation rests upon those who would do otherwise.

Verbal Inspiration

Galatians gives us a clear illustration of how some are tampering with the word of God through so-called modern versions. The Revised Standard Version changed the singular word "*seed*" to the plural word "descendants" in Galatians 22:18. The RSV changed the word "*seed*" in Galatians 3:16 to the ambiguous word "posterity," which might mean one or many. Inasmuch as the prophecy has been changed to include many, they intended "posterity" to refer to many. But Paul was making his inspired argument based on the singular number of the word "*seed.*" He said the "*seed*" meant Christ, not Israel, or many descendants of Abraham. Of course, the "translators" of the RSV, which has been upheld in nearly every one of "our" colleges, do not believe in prophecy and fulfillment, and do not believe Jesus Christ is the promised "*seed*" of Abraham. So they just muddled it up and, if they are right, these passages have lost any significance regarding Christ. If they are right, one wonders why Paul even mentioned it.

The Living Bible and Today's English Version have removed the phrase in Galatians 5:4, "*Ye are fallen from grace.*" Neither of the producers of these new books believe one can fall from grace. Is it so hard to see why they took the liberty to pervert the Word and accommodate their dogma?

It is tragic, inconsistent, inexcusable, and reprehensible that anyone would promote, endorse, and present as reliable Bibles such perversions of the truth of God as is done by such "translations" as the LB, TEV, RSV, NIV, etc. Some have done so ignorantly, because they were simply parroting the "professors." But some have done so knowingly, and either do not care what the truth is,

or are among that number that wants to rearrange and redefine truth according to liberalism and modernism. In either case, it is a sorry situation. Brethren ought know and do better than to follow such people.

The Scriptures are verbally inspired (First Corinthians 2:12-14) and Galatians shows how important a word can be in the revelation of God's will. Let us not be guilty of tampering with it.

Regarding Apostasy

Galatians stands as an insurmountable obstacle to the denominational dogma that one cannot fall and cannot apostatize. The necessity of faithfulness is emphasized throughout the epistle along with warnings against falling. In fact, to prevent apostasy is one of the major themes and purpose of the book.

Universal Offer

Another message of Galatians is that the gospel is for all. There is to be unity in Christ. The blessings of God can belong to anyone who will conform to His will, whether Jew, Gentile, bond, free, male, female. God is no respecter of persons in Galatians as He proved when Peter went to the house of Cornelius , (3:28).

Galatians refutes the modernist claim that Peter preached one gospel and Paul preached another. They preached the same gospel, having received it from the same source, (2:7-9). One worked primarily with Jews while the other went among both Jews and Gentiles, neither to the exclusion of any. The very confrontation between Peter and Paul is evidence they had preached the same truth or else there would be no cause for Paul's rebuke of Peter's inconsistency and error in turning from the Gentiles, (2:18).

General Matters

Galatians deals with such relevant and living issues as worldliness, freedom in Christ, benevolence, responsibility, mutual assistance, individual accounting. All of these matters are treated in this book.

Finally, the action of Paul regarding his confrontation with Peter shows the necessity of putting the teaching of truth before persons, even persons of importance, (2:6,11,14). It seems that some people today have their "untouchables" in which they have a vested interest, whether it is some man, paper, school, project, program, etc. When things go astray from the truth regarding that vested interest, because of that interest, and especially if some men of prominence are involved in that interest and error, the defense of the truth goes lacking, is allowed to be overshadowed by a defense of those involved in error, and the exposure of wrong is left undone. Many times, if anyone attempts to deal with it, that person, not the one in error, becomes the "villain," and the ones in error are protected. Just why that is so often the case among some churches of Christ is bewildering, but it is nonetheless a sad record whenever it is the case. Love for men should never be allowed to provoke a compromise with the truth. In fact, the best way to demonstrate love for brethren is to always put the teaching of truth foremost before everything and everybody. Who is willing to do that? Are you?

The epistle of Paul to the churches of Galatia is an inspired revelation of basic fundamental information necessary to the understanding that the system of salvation is through Christ. In it we see the unfolding of God's eternal purpose and the coming forward of His scheme of redemption. We have the assurance of the correctness of what we read in the Scriptures. We have direction given us by which we can attain our fondest aspiration, an eternal home in heaven. We have God's answer to many problems and issues raised in and out of the church even in our own day. We have a manifestation of God's love and concern for man in that God has provided us His truth that we might walk therein.

* * * * *

A real test of loyalty to the Lord comes when you have to decide between truth on the one hand, friends, family, fame, and fortune on the other.

The Jordan River

Matthew 3:1-6, "*In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his lions; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.*"

Matthew 3:13-17, "*Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade him saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straitway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him; And low a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*"

One of the most famous rivers in the world is the Jordan River in the Palestine area. It is not renown because of its length. It is only about one hundred miles long by air; two hundred miles actually. It does not come close to the measure of many other rivers in length. Jordan was never a river known for its commercial activity. There are fertile lands on either side of it because it overflows its banks and irrigates the land. But one thinks more of the Nile River in Egypt, or others, when that quality is considered. There are no great cities on the Jordan River. It is not worshipped as a god like many rivers in pagan lands.

Its Fame

Then why is the Jordan so famous? Though it has some distinctive characteristics that make it interesting to study, it is famous because of events connected with it. Especially is it special in the minds of believers because of these events.

Other rivers flow their course and proceed with a gradual descent, reach sea level, and come to rest. Jordan begins in the icy springs and melting snows of Mt. Hermon, just a few feet above sea level. It flows through the small waters of Merom which are very shallow. Ten more miles it enters the Sea of Galilee, which is twelve miles long. Many events connected with the life of Christ involved that sea. Now the river comes to about six hundred feet below sea level, coils southward through the Jordan Valley which is bounded by mountains and wilderness. It eventually reaches some thirteen hundred feet below sea level and empties into the Dead Sea and the lowest land on earth. The Dead Sea is the lowest body of water.

Moses and Jordan

The historical events connected with Jordan have given it its fame. Moses brought Israel from Egypt to the deep valley on the eastern side of Jordan just north of the entrance of the river into the Dead Sea, the plain of Moab (Deuteronomy 32:48-52). On Mt. Nebo, the peak of Pisgah, Moses looked over the Jordan into the land of milk and honey, and he could see the Jordan winding through the wilderness. There Moses died and God buried him.

Joshua and the Jordan

Joshua commanded Israel to come to the banks of Jordan (Joshua 1:11). The river was overflowing its banks at the time, with rapid current, steep banks, swollen over the valley (Joshua 3:15). In some places where the ravines were deep the measure has been one hundred feet. The current has been measured at times as much as forty miles per hour. In spite of the obvious hazards involved, Israel obeyed Joshua's command to follow the priests into the water. God cut off the water from the north as it flowed to the south and the people

passed over on dry land. Once across, the river's flow was renewed. Do you believe it? I certainly do. It was a miracle of God, a supernatural event revealed in inspired writing.

If God created the heaven and earth, could bring the flood in the days of Noah, parted the Red Sea, surely He would not stumble at the Jordan River. The purpose of this miracle was four-fold. (1) It gave Israel access into Canaan. (2) It destroyed the spirit of the Canaanites. (3) It established Joshua before the people (Joshua 3:7). (4) It demonstrated the power of God.

The Israelites settled the land and many years passed with the river figuring in the history of Israel during the period of the Judges, the United Kingdom, the Divided Kingdoms, to the time of Ahab, king of Northern Israel, Ahab had led the people into idolatry, with the aid and probably urging of his wife, Jezebel. Baal worship was in vogue. God's prophets were being imprisoned, exiled, or murdered. Then came Elijah upon the scene. Elijah had additional association with the young prophet Elisha.

Elijah and the Jordan

When the mantle was to be passed from Elijah to Elisha these two prophets walked to the Jordan Valley and to the river, at the very area where Moses had viewed the land and where Joshua had cross into Canaan. Elijah took his mantle and smote the waters of Jordan and they opened for Elijah and Elisha to pass. A whirlwind and horses with a chariot of fire took Elijah, and his mantle fell to Elisha. Elisha, upon his return, took that same mantle and again smote the Jordan River and it parted for him to cross and return to his work before the people.

Others and Jordan

There are many other Biblical records of interest pertaining to the Jordan. It had to be crossed by Abraham and Jacob as they made their journeys. Naaman dipped himself into it seven times to be cleansed of his leprosy at God's command. It was once the scene of a near civil war between the tribes of Israel

early in their history. Around it Gideon scored many military victories for Israel. Many of the armies of God's people were familiar with it, its fords, its barriers, etc.

Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, prophesied in Malachi 4:5,6, "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*" The New Testament reveals that this "*Elijah*" was John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). He began his ministry and mighty work as the forerunner of the Messiah on the banks of the Jordan, baptizing in that river that had already seen so many notable events in God's plan and dealing with man.

Jesus and the Jordan

One day another young and unpretentious man came his way. He came to be baptized of John. On that day even heaven broke its silence and we hear God's own confession that Jesus is His Son. On the banks of the same river over which Moses viewed the promised land, that Joshua and Israel had crossed at floodstage, that had been opened before the ancient prophets, there was this scene of preparatory work for the coming of the Savior of man. God, Himself, announced the identity of Jesus as His Son. Surely, this was a moment of crowning glory associated with the Jordan.

The Symbol of Jordan

Jordan's fame also has a certain connection in the mind of the Christian. We sing that great hymn, "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand." In that song the Jordan River symbolizes the death we all face. The grand thought is that of standing at the water's edge of the river of death that separates us from the eternal and heavenly home that God has provided for the redeemed. As Israel had wandered many years, and the promised land had come into view, with Joshua as their leader, they only needed to cross the dark waters of this great river to reach their goal and the promised land.

So it is with the saved in Christ. Having spent our sojourn in this life, marching on with hope and assurance of heaven, with Christ as our leader, we need only to cross the dark waters of death (followed by the resurrection and judgment) to reach that lasting and blessed existence with God.

Great is the fame and significance of the Jordan. Greater still, and comforting to our Spirits, is the hope in Christ as we approach the Jordan of death with Christ. As with Israel, so are we dependent upon God for a successful and victorious crossing. As surely as the touching of the feet of the priests literally opened the pathway for Israel into Canaan, so our feet must touch the chilling waters that separate this life from the next, and the path will be opened unto us for the safe passing and entrance into God's rest.

* * * * *

Second Mile Religion

Have you noticed how difficult it is to define the religion of Jesus Christ in just a few words? There are so many sides to it, like a diamond with many facets of beauty and brilliance. It must be viewed from every direction to see its worth. It is a perfect plan for man's redemption. It is the way God has designed to reconcile man unto Himself. It even contains the teaching whereby man can live at peace with his fellowman. It is a pattern for life as well as a preparatory course for eternity. What else can make one fit for the company of angels and the heavenly hosts other than the religion of Christ?

In view of eternity and the glory of heaven, let us know that the Lord does not thrust one into the eternal state of heaven for which he is not fitted. Probably some, seeing their distaste for the things of God in this life, would be miserable if they were allowed to go to heaven. Jesus teaches that heaven is a prepared place (John 14:1ff), and it is for a prepared people.

In the Sermon on the Mount, which is the gospel of the kingdom, Jesus mentioned characteristics of those who would be citizens. This sermon is a presentation of the advance beyond the imperfect concepts and abilities of Judaism, heathenism, and paganism. It goes beyond just the actions of man. It even regulates his motives that spring from the inward man. It recognizes that man is spirit as well as body.

Matthew 5:38-42, "*Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*"

The Christian Disposition

Three illustrations of a Christian disposition are given, under similar but somewhat different circumstances. (1) Being smitten. (2) Being sued at law. (3) Being compelled to go a mile against our will. Being smitten is to suffer indignity and reproach. Rather than retaliate and seek revenge, it is better to suffer it. To be sued is to to have taken from you your possessions, forcefully, yet legally. But we must be willing to part with such things rather than bring shame and reproach on that for which we stand. Being compelled to go a mile refers to a practice imposed on the Jewish people by the Romans, that they had borrowed from the Persians. It was the conscript of a private citizen into government service. It was a compulsory service. If one of authority forced you into his service to accommodate him for a while, be willing to do more than what was required. We really deserve no commendation for being willing to give only the barest requirements. Luke 17:10, "*So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.*" The distinctive Christian quality is to hold it a vice not to do more than is required. The "get by" attitude, do as little as I can attitude, is not what pleases God.

Application in Worship

We can make some profitable applications of a second-mile religion. Consider the periods of worship.. Some ask, "Do I have to attend Sunday evening worship, or mid-week Bible study?" Why would one who loves the Lord and is hungry for His Word even ask such a thing? I did not know a Christian did not want to worship God. Hebrews 10:25 is perceived backwards by some. We are to assemble for exhortation, not just exhort each other to assemble.

When the matter of finances and monetary support of the cause of Christ is considered, attitude is as important as amount. We are to give cheerfully, with joy, not grudgingly or because we feel that we "have to." Yes, we "have to." But those who love the Lord give because they "get to." The Macedonians gave first themselves. Their attitude was to give the heart (Second Corinthians 8). When that is done, the amount will usually take care of itself. They gave beyond what was expected. They were practicing a second-mile religion.

Application in Conduct

Mankind can sin positively and negatively. We can sin by doing what we ought not do (sins of commission), or by failing to do what we ought to do (sins of omission). We might not find it so difficult to restrain ourselves from doing what we believe will damn us to hell. But what of the good things that ought to be done? James 4:17, "*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" Are we good simply because we are not bad? In that case, even an inanimate object might be classified as good. Some measure their Christianity in terms of the evil things they do not do. They do not kill, lie, cheat, etc. This is part of being a Christian. But this could be said of a stature in the park, Their list of achievements for good are zero. There are the "*thou shalt not*" passages, but there are also the "*thou shalt*" passages. Second-mile religion does not just refrain from evil but does good.

Matthew twenty-five, beginning with verse fourteen, teaches the Lord's condemnation of the one talent man.

He was not condemned because he lost his talent or wasted it. He was not condemned because he did not double it as others had done their talents. He was condemned because he did not do what he could have done. He did not even try.

Matthew 21:18,19, "*Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.*" Why did the Lord do that?

Fig tree first bears fruit, then leaves. The presence of leaves indicates the presence of fruit. This tree, while giving the impression of bearing fruit, only bore leaves. It was not what it should have been. It was not doing as it ought to have done. Some of us may be this way.

Application in Serving

The judgment scene of Matthew 25:31-46 commends some because of the good they had done. Others were condemned, not because of the evil charged against them, but because of the failure to have done good. Though sufficient in one area, they lacked sorely in another. They went one mile, but not the second.

We must add here that we do not earn our reward, nor can we do enough good to deserve God's blessings. Even so, there are those things God teaches us to do, and when we obey God He has promised to give us His blessings.

First Kings 20:39,40, "*And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king, and said, Thy servant went out into the midst of battle; and behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man, if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be fore his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it.*"

A prisoner was taken and a soldier was assigned to guard him with his life. But the prisoner escaped. What

was the excuse? He was busy here and there, maybe even with matters he considered deserving of his attention. But he neglected his charge. He was not attendant to his primary duty. Just so, many are very busy in many matters today, not all of which are necessarily evil in themselves. But at what are we so busy? If we become too busy that we neglect the more vital elements of life, then we have really become too busy. We are too busy if we cannot practice the second-mile religion, doing what we ought, not doing what we ought not, and doing more than what is expected.

The First Mile

Of course, before we can concentrate on the second mile, we must cover the first mile. Before one can go the second mile, he must travel the first mile. Before you can do more than you ought in the service of God, you must do what you ought to enter the service of God. The first thing of priority in doing as you ought is to obey the gospel of Christ. Believe, repent, confess your faith in Christ, and be baptized (immersed) in water, in the name of Christ (by His authority), for (in order to) the remission of sins, into Christ and His body, the church (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; First Corinthians 12:13), at which time and place we reach the saving blood of Christ (Romans 6:3,4). Then, not before then, can you be in a position to practice the second-mile religion.

* * * * *

Possibly there is some significance in the fact that brethren are really getting back to the fundamentals and basics of Christianity. Some never left them. It was my privilege during 1993 to speak on a number of lectureships. What stood out in my mind is how many of the assigned topics dealt with attitudes. Of the some fifteen lessons, at least twelve, possibly another, could be placed in the category of dealing with the development of proper, Christ-like attitudes. This is really getting at the heart is the matter. Once the heart is right, will not conduct follow? JWB

More and More a Sad Truth is Being Realized and Recognized

Like many brethren, I subscribe to and receive free many papers published by good brethren. I also receive some that are promoting the advance of a "restructured" church in the mode of denominations. Among the faithful there is the growing acceptance of the sad fact, a fact about which many of us have been warning for many years, that the church is being divided by false doctrines taught by false teachers and churches that once followed the Lord have decided to "do their own thing."

I see more and more the recognition of the obvious, indeed, the unavoidable, since some are determined to abandon the old paths of truth for the new age, adaptation of doctrine to culture, accommodation of a rebellious element among "baby-boomers," and a desire to be like denominations, etc. The fact is that a new and different fellowship, born of heresy, has arisen among those once loyal to Christ and His church, and it is now being stated openly as never before.

While the fact of apostasy grieves any faithful Christian, we would also contend the recognition of division and the disfellowship of the heretical elements is essential to the continued welfare of the Lord's church. They have gone out from us. They are no longer of us. A new denomination has been created from the ruins of division caused by false doctrines by false teachers. It is done! JWB

Fornication or Consummation



Among the false doctrines being taught regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage, one of the more ludicrous is the idea that a man and woman are not married until there has been sexual intercourse between them. That intercourse is what makes them married, according to this view.

Some are always seeking ways around what God teaches. Some have married and seek divorce on the grounds that the marriage was never consummated in sexual intercourse. What they do not understand is that sexual intercourse is a provilege IN marriage, and not what makes one married.

Just be a bit logical, maybe for the first time. If marriage is not marriage until the sex act, what do you have going on? You have a man and woman going to bed with each other for the sex act who are not even married to each other. Folks, that's fornication, not consummation. They are married when the preacher says, "I pronounce you husband and wife." JB

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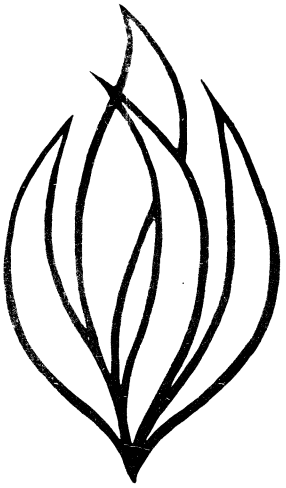
A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Abortion

Those of us in the church often take too much for granted. We assume that everyone, including our children, know the difference between right and wrong on basic and fundamental matters when actually they do not because they have not been taught correctly. We are naive to think that those in the church are immune from the influence and propaganda of those who deny God and bombard our society with immorality and corruption.

Too many in the church have a hesitancy to oppose the moral degeneracy that abounds in our land, thinking, for some unexplained reason, that dealing with such matters is out of bounds for the church in its teaching. The failure of Christian people to militantly speak out and stand up for the way of right in our nation has contributed to the advance of wickedness in the nation. God does not look favorably upon such people! Christians are concerned with the salvation of souls. But they are also the "*light of the world*" and the "*salt of the earth.*" We must involve ourselves in such issues lest there be a complete erosion of civilization, morality, and the concept of the dignity of the human being.

Today, nearly four thousand lives will be deliberately snuffed out. This will not occur in Russia, China, Cuba, or other God-denying and tyrannical nations. This will occur in the United States. Those whose lives shall be terminated are not victims of war, nor are they criminals receiving just punishment for crimes, but innocent babies. Abortion is being used to end unwanted pregnancies of unwed mothers by the thousands. But not only this, as we shall discuss. Abortion has become a major madness of murder in the "land of the freaks, and the home of the knaves."

The Court

The Supreme Court has ruled the legality of abortions. Our government continues to advance the practice of abortion. Christians know that the Bible teaches that

everything that is legal is not necessarily moral. A woman is permitted to abort her child during the first three months of pregnancy simply on the decision of herself and her "doctor." During the second three months she is allowed to abort her child if it is deemed needful to protect her life. Even during the final three months, even when the child is often capable of living and surviving outside the mother's womb, she is allowed to abort her child if it is thought necessary for the woman's mental, physical, or emotional health. This is so broad and can cover so much subjective consideration that it is not a protection of the child whatsoever, but actually is abortion on demand. The present government of the United States (1993) is ruled by a most degenerate band of servants of hell to occupy power in our land, and they now advocate abortion on demand, at any time, for any reason. They even would demand everybody pay for it. How can any nation survive under such godless fools?

In most major cities of the nation there are even advertisements in newspapers and on billboards advising women where they can go and have their babies destroyed. This is the low level of barbarism to which this nation has stooped.

Doctors, who have taken oaths to preserve life, have betrayed their oaths and their calling and have devoted their entire money making careers and practices to the destruction of life rather than its preservation. The abortion clinics are gleaning millions upon millions of dollars killing babies.

A Vile Deed

It will not be our purpose to be descriptive of the inhumane scenes of horror, butchery, savagery, and terror involved in the abortion processes. Those things need to be known, and those of age should even see pictures of such to impress on their minds what a horrible matter we have under consideration. But our lesson is concerned with God's attitude toward it.

While the proponents of abortion object being compared to the perpetrators of the Nazi atrocities against humanity, they are incapable of presenting a case in

their defense as to why they should not be so considered, even worse, than the Nazi murders who killed five to six million Jews over a period of years. But abortion kills from forty to fifty-five million babies every year throughout the world, and America leads the way. What the Nazis did is minor compared to what abortionists are doing all the time.

Questions

To center our thought, let us ask and pointedly answer some relevant and pertinent questions.

(1) Is that which is in the womb alive? Obviously, yes.
(2) When did that which is in the womb become alive? It was when the female egg and male sperm united. If it was not alive it would not grow. But it grows.
(3) Is that which is in the mother's womb merely a part of the mother's body? Absolutely not! We hear advocates of abortion plead for the mother's right of "power over her own body." We hear them cry for choice. But the mother exercised power over her body when she engaged in sexual intercourse. Now that the child is conceived more is involved than just her body. Everything a person will become is included already in that which is in the mother's womb. There is a new body. Even though this new body is dependent upon the mother's body, it is a totally new life. It is not, as abortionists say, like a tumor, an appendix, the tonsils, or some diseased tissue that can be removed upon choice. Once conception has occurred, not only must the mother consider her body, but there must be consideration of the baby.
(4) It that which is in the womb human? Certainly! It is produced by humans, and is neither animal nor vegetable. The indifference toward abortion is some of the fruit of the theory of evolution that considers the human being nothing but a highly evolved animal. This is the reason we affirm that evolutionists are enemies to the dignity of humanity. Taking that theory to its logical conclusion, the disposal of any human being cannot be considered anything more than the disposal of any other animal.
(5) Is the human life in the mother's womb innocent human life? Yes. The child is sinless, having done no evil nor guilty of sin.

(6) Does abortion willfully, deliberately, intentionally, and with premeditation and forethought destroy this innocent and human life? Yes. And this is precisely the definition of murder. This drives right to the heart of the matter. **ABORTION IS MURDER.** LEGALIZED ABORTION IS LEGALIZED MURDER.

Proverbs 6:17, among other things, lists that God hates "*hands that shed innocent blood.*" This makes a difference to civilized and moral people. God hates abortion and abortionists for what they do.

The Word of God

What does the Bible teach on this subject? That murder is prohibited is unquestioned by anyone who knows anything about the Bible. Murder by abortion, like other means of murder, are not necessarily mentioned specifically and explicitly. But conclusion can be confidently drawn with unwavering certainty from the principles of truth as well as specific statements that relate of the matter. Let us turn our attention to a few of these.

Acts 17:25, "*He giveth life to all...*" God gives life Does man, with impunity and without God's authority, have the right to terminate it? Human life is different from all other forms of life because mankind is created in the spiritual image of God (Genesis 1:26,27). For this reason human life is sacred. We are different from animals. This is the basis for human rights and dignity. Without this special characteristic we are nothing more than materialistic beasts. To impress on man the special distinction he has, and the sacredness of human life, God decreed the forfeiture of one's own life if he lacked respect for the sacredness of human life and murdered another (Genesis 9:6).

Abortion is compatible with evolution, humanism, atheism, and other anti-human and anti-God philosophies. The dignity of the human being rests solely on the Biblical teaching that man is in the spiritual image of God.

No Difference

The Bible does not distinguish between the unborn and newborn babe as far as the babe being a human being. Jeremiah 1:5, "*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.*" Did God sanctify just a blob of tissue and ordain a tumor? None can doubt that God considered Jeremiah a person even before Jeremiah was born.

The unborn John the Baptist leaped in his mother's womb when his mother, Elizabeth, and the expectant mother of Jesus met each other. There is no question but John was considered a living person even before birth. We must ask with caution of bordering on irreverence, "Was that which was in the womb of Mary only a blob of tissue?" as abortionists contend? No God-fearing person would ever consent to such blasphemy.

Scripture uses the word "brephos" to refer to both an unborn and newborn child. Luke 1:41,44, it is used to refer to John before his birth. It is used of Jesus after His birth (Luke 2:12). It was used of newborn infants in Acts 7:19. There is no distinction because one is already a person, a distinct human being, both before and after birth, all the degenerate raving to the contrary notwithstanding.

Why Is It Done?

More often than not abortion is used to terminate pregnancies that have resulted from fornication and adultery. Unmarried couples engage in sexual intercourse without regard to morality, with no regard to the power of reproduction, with no concern for the child that might be conceived, with no regard to the spiritual welfare of anybody, and with contempt for the ways of God, with no respect for the sacredness of marriage, and when a child is conceived, to cover their sin, to shed responsibility, to dispose of what they do not want, they resort to the murder of the child. Like David, but in a different way, they resort to murder in their attempt to cover the result of their sin. Those who obey, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery,*" never have to consider abortion to cover their wickedness.

Some married and professional women are having abortions because they are more concerned with their careers, personal ambitions, selfish goals than they are the God-given role of motherhood and the responsibility of parenthood. Being encouraged by degenerate feminists (which is a redundancy because all feminists are degenerate), whose goals are opposed to the ways of God, they resort to murdering their child rather than bearing the child. God condemns those who are "*without natural affection*" (Romans 1:31), which refers to those lacking affection regarding their own children. This is certainly descriptive of those who endorse and practice abortion. It is characteristic of a depraved society.

It is ironic that some who endorse abortion even go to the Bible, which they despise, to try to justify it. Of course, abortionists have no use for God's Word, do not believe the Bible, ridicule the Bible, but think if they could use the Bible to advance their heathenism, they would do it. They contend that Adam was not alive until God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, therefore, the baby is not alive until it breathes, and in the womb it does not breathe.

While it is true that the system whereby the baby gets oxygen is changed at birth, his difference with Adam is that Adam was created mature. Adam was not alive in any sense until God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, but that is not true concerning the conceived child. He is alive from the moment of conception. If that was not true the babe would not and could not grow.

Some cite Exodus 21:22ff to make a distinction between the life of an unborn child and other human life. But that passage is evidence contrary to the arguments of abortionists. "*If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him: and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life.*"

The scene is that of a struggle between two men in which a woman with child is hurt, causing the child to depart from the mother's womb. Abortionists claim. "If the

baby dies, only a fine is to be paid, but if the mother dies, the punishment is death. Therefore, the child is not considered a living person as is the mother." The fallacy of this argument is evident because abortionists read into the passage, not out of the passage.

The passage does not say if the baby dies as a result of the struggle merely a fine is to be paid. A fine is to be paid because the fruit of the womb is departed prematurely. The baby may live, and no mischief other than a premature birth occurs. Even this is to be fined according to the law.

But if "*any mischief*" follow the incident, which would certainly be true in the event of either the death of the mother or the child, then capital punishment was to be exacted. Is the death of the child no mischief? This proves that both mother and child are living persons.

Furthermore, the case under consideration in Exodus is not parallel to the deliberate, planned, premeditated destruction of innocent human life. This case was an accidental matter, not a willful destruction of the child. This passage offers no support whatever for abortion.

Hard Matters

There are some very hard questions related to this matter. This is a great emotional issue and often emotions overrule truth in the minds of some. Some ask, "Can the child be aborted to save the mother's life or if the mother's life is threatened?" The mother's life is always threatened in every birth. Dr. Jerome LeJune, famous geneticist, answered the question, "I would never attack and kill the unborn child." He further explained that if he was faced with an either/or situation, such as cancerous uterus or a tubal pregnancy, he would be forced to remove the cancer or tumor and in doing so he would inadvertently cause the child to die. But the death of the child would not be the cause of the surgery nor its purpose. The purpose was to save life, not destroy it. The motive involved is of paramount concern.

Dr. Lee Cayce, Nashville, Tennessee, who delivered so many children over his many years of medical practice,

and who was attendant at the birth of our firstborn, is reported to have said, "In all my years of practice I have never seen the case where such a choice was necessary." This does not mean such a choice is never necessary, but it is rare. Even when the choice must be made, it is a choice to save life, not to deliberately destroy life. Surely, such rare instances to save life ought not be the basis for the wholesale and indiscriminate murder of millions of babies each year!

"But what if pregnancy results from rape or incest?" We are not insensitive to the victims of such atrocious crimes, nor the emotional complications in such instances. Our hearts bleed for those who have been so mistreated. We are repulsed at the sympathy for the criminal while victims are often forgotten and neglected. If I had my way there would never be the possibility of one convicted of rape or incest ever being able to commit the same crime again, regardless of what it takes. But even in such rare instances where pregnancy might occur under such conditions, this is no basis for allowing wholesale killing of babies such as is now being done. Even under these circumstances, the dignity of human life is the overriding issue.

We have read a report of a ten year study in Minneapolis involving three thousand five hundred rape cases, and not one time did pregnancy result. We are told that the female reproductive system rarely conceives under the trauma of rape. Even when there is a rape, it takes several hours for the sperm to reach the ovum and emergency treatment by medication can prevent conception. Certainly, we are dealing with human tragedy all around in these instances. But are we to set standards according to the rare exceptions?

Other Reasons

We are told that abortion is a method of population and birth control. It certainly is. There is a similar method also, such a killing off all over sixty years of age, all those of deformity, or whoever might not be wanted. Why would not that control population? And as frightening as it is, there are those (like a former governor of Colorado) who do advocate that elderly

people consent to die for the benefit of those who are younger.

What if there is a danger of physical or mental deformity of the unborn child? Again, this is always a possibility in every birth. But do we destroy children who are born with abnormalities and deformities? Would you discontinue the programs of assistance to such people and simply kill them? Is not a deformed child a human being? And who is to decide which deformities warrant being murdered and which should be allowed to live? Shall we let the evolutionists, humanists, atheists, the Hitlers of the world make such judgments? Who do we decide to keep and who do we decide to destroy? Possibly the world would have profited if those who now advocate abortion had been the victims of what they advocate. The fact remains that there is no justification for the murder of unborn children and this is precisely what abortion is. Abortions because of rape and deformity constitute a very small percentage of the abortions being performed, but even these are wrong.

What To Do

Living in a world where this degenerate barbarism exists and grows, what can the Christian do? He must first realize the enormity of this sin and its consequences. He must reaffirm his concept of the sacredness of human life and the dignity thereof. Once society opens its doors to this kind of savagery there is no limit to the low level of conduct to which the human family will descend. The doors are already open in these United States where God is attempted to be mocked. Already some advocate infanticide, euthanasia, genocide, the destruction of unwanted races. The only positive thing that can be said for abortion (and this benefit is already past) is how better the world would be if the parents of the proponents of it had practiced it!

Christians must remember the basis of human dignity and how mankind is created in the spiritual image of God. We must emphasize before the world, actively, militantly, aggressively, before it is beyond the point of return, the Christian standards of morality, individual

responsibility for one's actions, the sanctify of the home and marriage. We must stedfastly resist the moral degenerates, feminists, politicians, and parasites on society whose profane mouths must be stopped before they uproot every semblance of human dignity to accommodate their vile ways. More often than not, these opponents of everything good are led by homosexuals, lesbians, prostitutes, money-hungry doctors, fornicators, adulterers, disgruntled females who are unhappy with their role in life and who are miserable, and who want everybody else to accommodate their sinfulness and share their misery by determining the pattern for all society. Our enemies are anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Bible, anti-church, anti-marriage, anti-morality, dominated by whores and whoremongers whose lives overrun with all forms of moral filth and vile pollution. We need to know our enemy and the nature of these vicious opponents of God and truth. They are people who have become so corrupt that they seek to dignify every vice and denounce every virtue, legalize every perversion and ridicule God's plan for mankind.

They will be found promoting the Equal Rights Amendment, are members of the National Organization of Women, will vote for those who advocate sin, will court the favor of such movements to reach office, advocate the extraction of tax funds to provide for the murder of children for all who want it, who prostitute the ideals of womanhood and motherhood because their minds are so filled with the evil of Satan they cannot and will not see.

We are naive to think we are against a people who listen to reason or are persuaded by truth. This they hold in contempt. We are against the most venomous and cruel tyrants with evil minds our world can consider. While our hearts grieve because of their mental, physical, and spiritual condition, we cannot be so blind as to allow them to force their wickedness down the throats of us all, and for forthcoming generations. We live is a sinful world, and a nation that grows worse and worse each day. God bless America? Why should He?

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Winning Souls Through Christian Unity

First Timothy 1:15, "*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*"

Luke 19:10, "*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*"

Matthew 1:21, "*And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.*"

It was the work and mission of Jesus Christ to save lost souls. It is the work of His body, the church, to continue winning souls. Before Jesus ascended into heaven He charged, Mark 16:15,16, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" Matthew 28:19,20, "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*"

First Timothy 3:15, "*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" It is the work of the church to uphold and proclaim the saving truth of Jesus Christ. Those that hear and heed will be saved. Those that don't, won't.

Romans 1:16, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*" How is this gospel to be spread? First Corinthians 1:21,

"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Whatever promotes the spread of the gospel, provided it is in harmony with the Lord's will, is beneficial. Whatever hinders that spread is detrimental. Our study shall focus attention on unity as something beneficial to the power of the gospel, while division is a hindrance. We shall divide the lesson into two main parts.

The Bible teaches the necessity of conversion to be saved. Acts 3:19, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."* Matthew 18:3, *"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."* There are not many ways of conversion. There is only one way. We either follow the way the Lord has given or we shall remain lost in sin. When those who are in Christ are united they will be aggressive and active in winning the lost to Christ and salvation.

Unity

What is unity? Although that may seem to be a peculiar question, it is obvious that many do not know the unity of which the Bible speaks. Unity means agreement. Amos 3:3, *"Can two walk together except they be agreed?"* Unity is not agreeing to disagree. Unity is not mere union. You can put a dog and a cat in a sack and you have union, but not unity. Unity is not mere togetherness.

John 17:20,21, *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* As the Godhead is united, so God wants His people united. This means they will talk alike. First Corinthians 1:10, *"Now I beseech you, brethren,, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the*

same mind and in the same judgment." Usually, at least in the past, when you heard a preacher on the radio, it would not take long for you to identify him as a brother in Christ by the way he talked. He would speak "*sound words*" and preach "*sound doctrine.*" He would speak as the oracles (First Peter 4:11; Titus 2:1,8; Second Timothy 1:13). To have the same mind demands using the same standard by which to determine what is true or false.

Ephesians 4:4 teaches that there is "*one faith,*" just as there is "*one body,*" which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). Nothing in Scripture allows man to take his choice of faiths, churches, etc.

Philippians 1:27, "*Only let you conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.*" This means brethren are to have the same spiritual goals, the same message, working together hand in hand and heart with heart for the salvation of the lost. One reason the early church grew as it did was the oneness among brethren. Acts 2:42, "*And all that believed were together.*"

This new and false doctrine propagated by liberal digressives who have gone out from the church preaching "unity in diversity" even in matters of doctrine and faith is a vile and venomous heresy that plagues the church and hinders conversion to Christ. God will not consider the proponents of such error guiltless.

Division Generally

The second part of our lesson centers on those areas where division hinders conversion and soul winning. First, we shall consider the religious division in the world generally, and then matters of division in the home and in the church.

The devil works effectively in our world with false doctrines and ideas that divide those who say they love God from those who care nothing about God. There are many honest and sincere people who say they love the

Lord but are following ways that are contrary to the will of the Lord. There are even philosophies and theories that contend there is no right or wrong. To some, everything is beautiful in its own way, and everyone is urged to "do your own thing." Such is the hue and cry of humanism. It ushers in a society of permissiveness, corrupting morality and undermining every fundamental sacred matter. "To each his own" is the wail of those who reject God.

Of course, if such doctrines were true, the entire mission of Christ was useless because everything is all right just as it is, regardless of what it is. Can we really heed such as that? Any doctrine that contradicts itself is unfit for acceptance. Those that would follow a self-contradictory doctrine are as those in Second Timothy 2:25, "*Those that oppose themselves.*"

If there is no right or wrong, how can we know it is right to believe there is no right or wrong? If you cannot determine what is true as distinguished from what is false, how can we know it is true to say we cannot say what is true or false? If each is to "do his own thing," you have as many laws and lawmakers as people. If each is left as his own judge and jury, this is sheer and transparent anarchy and chaos. Such a time existed in Judges 21:25, "*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*" Little doubt that the many voices clamoring, "Lo here, Lo there, follow this, follow that, follow anything, follow nothing" has caused many to turn a deaf ear even to Christ.

Even among the religious there is wholesale division. We have Romanism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Moonies, Mohammedans, on and on. There are literally hundreds of varying denominations, each with its distinctive doctrines and names. There is nothing in the Bible that would authorize or justify such as this.

The Lord's Church is Not a Denomination

Let us remember that the Lord's church is not a denomination, nor a combination of denominations. Once a television panelist was asked, "With all the

different churches, how can you ever tell which one is right?" The answer is simple. Search the Scriptures and learn what the truth is, and accept that, rejecting all else. The point we make here is that division causes many to give up their search in despair.

I once engaged a man from India in conversation and he asked my line of work. I told him I was a gospel preacher. He was of some Oriental faith. But he made one comment that was momentarily disarming. "If your God is as mixed up as the Protestant world, He is more confused than I am. He needs me, but I don't need Him." I tried to explain that I agreed with that, but that I was not promoting the chaotic so-called Christendom, but the faith of Christ as the New Testament teaches. But you can understand the problem he faced.

Havoc of Division

Jesus knew what this division would bring and He prayed for unity that the world might believe. Division, such as characterizes denominationalism cultivates the ground for the seeds of atheism. It produces hopelessness, waste, duplication, confusion, contradiction, and doubt. If all of us who say we believe in God and Jesus Christ His Son would cast aside the man-made doctrines and churches we could rout atheism in record time, putting that influence almost out of business. But when people continue using their creeds, manuals, prayer books, catechisms, disciplines, confessionals, edicts of councils and conferences, how can there be unity? People now are even using so-called Bibles that do not teach alike. Once there was the faith of your choice, the church of your choice, and now, with these modern speech perversions, the Bible of your choice. The early church had problems, but not denominationalism. We need to learn the answer to the question, "Will good people in all churches be saved?" How can they be when churches other than Christ's church are not pleasing to God nor teaching His way?

It is not that people cannot see the Bible alike. They are not even looking at it many times. It is not that we interpret differently. To interpret means to get the meaning of it. God did not give us a book that divides

and condemns division and commands unity at the same time. He is not the author of confusion (First Corinthians 14:33). Let us not blame God for human mistakes.

Division in the Home

Religious division in the home is a tremendous hindrance to winning souls for Christ. One going one way, the other doing differently, what are children to think? They often abandon everything about God. How can a religious parent do right by marrying a non-religious one. We need to ask before marriage, "What kind of influence will this person have on our children, if we have any?" Children love both parents and are confused. One asked, "Why did not God build just one church so we could be together?" The truth is, God did build just one church.

Marrying outside the Lord's church is daring the devil to take your soul and the souls of children that may come into that home. How can a Christian consent to enter into such a relationship where his own Lord and Savior cannot be first?

Division in the Church

But there is also division in the church that hinders winning souls. When church A is at odds with church B, people outside the church seldom understand. They are turned off by both of them. You say, "They ought to investigate," and I agree. But few will. They ought not have to investigate. We ought to hold fast to sound words and be united.

Some talk how outsiders run down the church. This is often true. But nothing runs down the church quicker and more effectively than division among brethren. Some never have a good word about their preacher, the elders, anybody in the church, and wonder why they cannot convert anybody. Some even degrade their brethren before non-Christians. What a shameful manner of behavior!

False teachers split churches, and hobby pushers want their own way. Those who rebel in worldliness against the teaching of Christ and reject the necessity for divine authority hinder soul winning. Six things even seven, God hates (Proverbs 6:16-19), including "*he that soweth discord among brethren.*"

When you love the Lord's church it hurts to see it disrupted and torn asunder. Consider the soldier who threw the spear that ripped the body of Christ while on the cross. How does he differ from one who rends the church asunder? Some are like hard headed Diotrophes (Third John 9), and confuse their stubbornness with stedfastness. They had rather tear up the church than give up their pride, personal ambitions, and their own way. Children, outsiders, everyone see this, and they go away, still lost. We give a false impression of Christ when this occurs.

Christ is the only way of eternal life (John 14:6; Acts 4: 12). Unity can be attained and maintained only when all are content to abide in the doctrine of Christ. Why should it be any other way? We love each other and should work for harmony, unity, based on truth, a "*thus saith the Lord*" in all matters. The world needs the efforts of Christians to spread the saving Word, and their energies ought not be expended having to fight a rear guard action against digressives and apostates. Souls can be reached, and they depend on us to take the gospel to them. Our success depends to a great degree on our unity, or our failure on the lack of it.

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Covetousness

Through the years I have discovered that many people do not mind the condemnation of sin. Irreligious people do not get too upset over it. They do not care. Religious people will often relish it. This usually is the case, until you get specific. Talking about sin in general is not as disturbing as talking about some specific sin. But just

now we need to consider a specific sin, one that many would dismiss as not too important, and certainly one of which they are not guilty, they think. We shall study what God teaches about the sin of covetousness.

To covet means to have a desire, but it is certain type of desire. It means to long for, crave, especially something that belongs to another. It is a denotation of the existence of greed, the love of money, or the things money can buy. It is not to be equated with ambition or a desire to succeed, but it is an over-reaching ambition, even to the extent that one would take advantage of another to reach his goal. It is usually associated with the insatiable desire for material things and money, but not exclusively such things, such a satisfying his lust.

All desire is not evil. When Paul wrote concerning the spiritual gifts (First Corinthians 12), he urged them to covet the best gifts. First Timothy 3:1, '*If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*" But covetousness is an evil, inordinate, unlawful desire.

Biblical References

There are many references in the Bible concerning this sin. "*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.*" (Exodus 20:17). Jesus said, "*Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" (Luke 12:15). "*But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not once be named among you, as becometh saints.*" (Ephesians 5:3). The sinfulness of covetousness is underscored in Scripture. "*Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupicense, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*" (Colossians 3:5). Paul calls coveting idolatry. It dethrones God in one's life and replaces Him with material things. Jesus said, "*No man can love two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" (Matthew 6:24). We have to decide what shall be first in our lives, God or material things. There is not room at the top for both.

The seriousness of this sin is seen in Ephesians 5:5, "*For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*" In other words, covetousness will bar a person from heaven.

Covetousness is a characteristic of those the Lord labels as reprobate (Romans 1:18-32). It is also a mark found among false teachers (Second Peter 2:3,4). There are those that would teach anything or leave out anything in their teaching if it brought them the money they want. This is possibly one of the reasons why the Lord's church has suffered at times with weak, erroneous, watered-down teaching. Some preachers and teachers prefer the large salaries more than they love the truth and if the truth should offend they would lose that money. So they leave out, add to, change up the word of God for money. Paul said covetousness would be a characteristic of those perilous times of apostasy (Second Timothy 3:1,2).

Becoming Covetous

One does not become covetous overnight. It is not a sudden illness that falls upon one. Rather it is an attitude that grows, develops, and is cultivated and nurtured. It gradually entwines itself around a person's heart and life as a vine does a young tree, and just as effectively chokes the life out of it. Covetousness is a spiritual disease of the heart. Jesus said, "*For from within, out of the heart of man proceed... covetousness... All these evil things come from within and defile the man.*" (Mark 7:21-23).

Its Effects

Covetousness affects adversely the lives of people. It causes domestic trouble in the home. Proverbs 15:27, "*He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house.*" It is a problem of the heart that will even cause a person to scoff and deride Christ. When Jesus taught that man could not serve two masters, the Pharisees, who were covetous, derided Him (Luke 16:14). When covetous, our eyes are blinded from the truth. Paul warned, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought*

nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us therewith be content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (First Timothy 6:6-10).

People will become liars, thieves, gamblers, fornicators, forsake their duties, offer and take bribes, even murder people for the sake of money. Even some who profess to be Christians will compromise and sacrifice the truth of God in order to obtain more and more money. There is not a sin people have not committed and would commit again for money. This is the plague of materialism, materialism in the sense of getting, having, holding on to things of a material nature.

Too many people are more concerned about what they might get than they are with what ought to be. Success in our society is so often measured in terms of possessions rather than character and honor. Many focus their attention on what one has rather than what one is. We need to be careful that we not be more concerned about a high standard of living than living by a high standard.

In Israel's History

As one studies the history of Israel we often find them in times of adversity and poverty. But in such times they were humble, penitent, obedient to God. But they would fail the test of prosperity. In their abundance they would turn from God. Covetousness is particularly a danger and a threat when there is abundance because there is created the love for the material wealth and the desire for more and more.

Covetousness disqualifies a person from service to God. A man cannot serve the Lord as an elder or bishop if he is a covetous man or greedy of filthy lucre (First Timothy 3:3,8). Covetousness disqualifies one from fellowship with the Lord's church. *"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators, yet not*

altogether with the fornicators of this world, for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no, not to eat." (First Corinthians 5:9-11).

Not Just the Rich

Covetousness is not a sin found just among the rich. Those who are in poverty and difficult circumstances can also be greedy and lustful of material things and sin in order to obtain them.

In the Bible we read of covetous people. There was Ahab who coveted the vineyard that belonged to Naboth. He and his wife Jezebel committed many transgressions against God and man in order to get it.

Achan stole that which belonged to the Lord's treasury and hid it in his tent. His sin brought hardship upon the entire nation of Israel, and he eventually lost his life because of his greediness.

Gehazi, servant of Elisha, after Naaman had offered Elisha gifts and Elisha had refused them, ran after Naaman and told him lies in order to take advantage of Naaman's generosity. Gehazi was covetous of money and clothes. His sin only brought him rebuke and leprosy.

Did not Judas even betray his Lord for thirty pieces of silver? Was not the rich, young ruler sorrowful when he learned he had to separate himself from his wealth to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:16-22)? He could not bring himself to leave his possessions. Annanias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit about their giving and were struck dead. They wanted to hold on to some of their money even as they wished to make it appear they had given all. Covetousness got hold of all these people, and it brought injury to every one of them.

We are impressed with the family of sins with which God associates the sin of covetousness. The reader is urged to read Romans 1:18-32; First Corinthians 5:9-11; First Corinthians 6:9,10; Colossians 3:5).

The Fruits

Realizing the tragedy that covetousness does bring, we need to understand that covetousness is so useless, productive of nothing good, but only evil. Solomon wrote, "*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase; this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of the laboring man is sweet whether he eat little or much, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail, and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go, and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind? All his days also he eateth in darkness and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.:* (Ecclesiastes 5:10-17).

Paul echoed these sentiments in First Timothy 6:7,17, "*For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out... Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.*"

A Fool

The only person that Jesus specifically called a fool during His personal ministry was a covetous man. In the parable of the man who prospered and increased his wealth and built more barns to hold his wealth, but neglected his soul, the statement is made by the Lord to him, "*Thou fool; this night shall thy soul be required of thee. Then whose shall all these things be, which thou hast provided?*" (Luke 12:20). Again Jesus taught, "*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lost his own soul.*" (Matthew 16:26).

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

Lacking in Faith

To be covetous is to demonstrate a lack of faith in the providence of God. Jesus taught, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*" (Matthew 6:33). David said, "*I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread.*" (Psalm 37:25). "*Let your conversation be without covetousness and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*" (Hebrews 13:5,6).

Rather than being covetous, let us honor God with our substance (Proverbs 3:9). "*Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*" (Ephesians 4:28). Let us be good stewards of that which God has entrusted to our care in this life, using it to His glory. May be pray, in the words of Proverbs 30: 8,9, "*Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal and take the name of my God in vain.*"

First Things First

The teaching against covetousness does not discourage ambition and financial success. But it helps us keep our priorities in order and to labor for that which is lasting. We need to have the right set of values. Striving for the things of the here and now, even to the neglect of what is more important, is a sad mistake.

Parents often have forsaken the needs of their children while giving themselves to making more money. Mothers have left the home for the market place, not because of need, but due to greed for more money. Contributions have been shaved, people go into debt, and even try to beat their debtors, all because they have allowed covetousness to invade their hearts, lives, and pattern of life.

This lesson is needed by the business man, young families just getting started, those in prosperity or poverty, older people who reflect their greed by holding on to money more than they should and not giving as they ought. We are besieged by advertising to buy, get, have more and more, bigger, better. We need rather to "*set your affection on things above and not on things on the earth.*" (Colossians 3:2). Covetousness can destroy the soul. Let is not be characteristic of us.

* * * * *

You probably noticed if you have read this issue that the lessons are considerably longer than we usually produce. The sermons when verbally preached were longer than usual. It was not intended to be that way nor intended not to be that way. We simply felt the subjects under consideration demanded more space than most of the lessons we present. We were more concerned with the subject matter than length. Of course, you understand fully.

You might remember the next time you hear a sermon that it is almost impossible to discuss every subject adequately within the exact same time span. Give your preacher a break if he goes longer sometimes than you think he ought. He cannot always get what should be said into your time frame. Don't be in too big a hurry that you miss truth you need.

Elders Have The Authority



In every association of people who work together for a common cause there must those who have authority to decide, direct, and keep the work on course. The Lord's church is no different in this respect. The government of the Lord's church does not have any organization larger than the local church. The local church is overseen by elders or bishops (Acts 20:28).

Elders, nor anyone else, have authority to change the will of God. This is what batters the church today. There are those who seek to change even the pattern of the church to fit our modern and degenerate culture. But nobody has that right.

But elders do have authority in matters of judgment and opinion to rule for the local congregation. That, along with other duties, is one of the reasons for their existence as an eldership. Without someone to do this chaos and anarachy would exist even in the church.The congregation is taught to " *submit*" to the elders in such matters (Hebrews 13:17). God's way work fine. JWB

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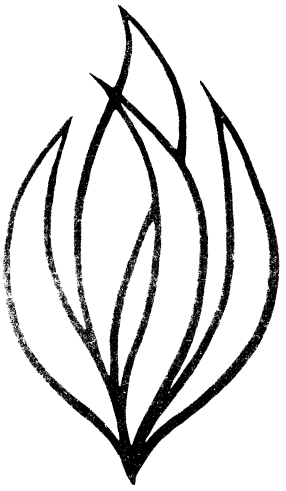

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XV **NUMBER 2**

How Many Does It Take?

A realistic and objective view of our nation reveals a deadly spiritual poverty across the land. As a people we are plunging ourselves into a self-imposed destruction due to sin. Sin is more open, widely acclaimed to be the "in" thing, more accepted, promoted, endorsed, admired, advocated, and imitated than any time in the lifetime of people living today. Society waxes worse and worse, and no thoughtful person can deny it. A survey of the songs, television programs, movies, books, political aspirants, magazines, educational emphasis, dress, language, violence levels, speech, lack of personal responsibility, various forms of entertainment, the deterioration of the family, home, marriage, all point the same direction. America is a wicked nation and getting more so. More and more there is the removal of Biblical restraints, and higher and higher go the levels of degeneracy that has become as American as apple pie. Who in their right mind could defend the trend of American life over the past thirty or more years, since the rebellious age of the sixties especially?

There is a growing number of people who seek to impose a totally different and radical moral standard which amounts to no moral standard at all. The feminists, evolutionists, humanists, drug promoters, and the "get re-elected regardless of how" politicians are having their day to the suppression and destruction of things sacred, honorable, and decent. "Do your own thing" has become the religion, wail, and cry for too long. We suffer in a period of confusion, moral chaos, disorder, and growth of evil. With many people, even some who claim to be religious, sin is just not a valid concept anymore.

Isaiah 5:50, "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*" Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.*" Galatians 6:7,8, "*Be not deceived. God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that*

shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Romans 15:4, *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..."* The history of Northern Israel and Southern Judah, as well as that of heathen nations, serves us well to show the results of the pursuit of evil. It is past time for Americans to wake up to the reality of our conditions if we be spared the wrath of God.

Still Worth Saving

In spite of many undeniable faults, I would persuade us all that America is worth saving for several reasons. I would not say this because of our material abundance, but because of our heritage of freedom and respect for the dignity of mankind. This dignity is founded on the fact that man is in the spiritual image of God. In our land the Lord's church is more populous than any other locality. Historically we have been a bastion for human dignity, freedom, and justice founded on divine principles. Many are saying today that should abandon these principles.

In spite of some years of slavery, a terrible blight and evil period for the nation (the wages of which we still reap today), the governmental framework of the land has been resistant to tyranny. America is our home, and likely the home of our descendants. For their sake, something must be done, and that right early. America is threatened as never before, not only from without, but with a more sinister threat from within. Who will save it? Can it be saved? How many will it take? If any should doubt the desirability of saving America, we suggest a comparison with any other nation on the face of the earth, or in human history.

Our Most Pressing Need

Spiritual salvation is our greatest need. There is but one spiritual Savior, Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12, *"Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved."* The threat of the invading oriental religions, Muslims, cults, human denominations, and shrines to human wisdom called

schools, they all threaten America. "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). Whether we speak of an individual or of a nation composed of individuals, the only One to follow is Christ because only He has the capacity to save America from its doom brought on by transgressions against God.

Our Role

Christian people are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13), and the preservative influence in society. They are the light of the world in the midst of sinful darkness (Matthew 5:14). Christians have the power and privilege of prayer (James 5:16). God has overruled in the affairs of nations (Daniel 4:24; 5:21, 23, 25, 27; John 19:10,11). Could He not do so again? With Christians as the leavening influence for good, righteousness could permeate throughout society again.

We must learn the source, the real source, of our strength. It is not in armies, navies, bombs, rockets, missiles, Wall Street, etc. We do not affirm these are evil to be disposed. But we affirm there must be more than that. Such weaponry has come and gone in other nations now extinct. Such have been built and destroyed over and over again. Our strength is not economic, material wealth and power, even though we be the richest of all the lands of the earth. It is a grievous display of misdirection when our leaders cry, "It's the economy that matters." Sure, it matters. But that it not what matters most.

Nor does our power lie in diplomacy, treaties, negotiations, and assemblies of nations, even though such things have their place. None of them are any more reliable than the people who have made them. What confidence can this nation have in the atheistic, ruthless, murderous governments of the world? Who could trust a humanist, evolutionist, or any such people? They do not even considerable themselves accountable! Our best force is not in science, technology, human wisdom and education, although these can be a positive factor if we use them rightly.

A Continuing Truth

We must underscore Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation.*" The Lord is our strength. We must not turn away from Him. When Judah's enemies were knocking at the gate of Jerusalem, Isaiah encouraged the king and his people to rely, not on their allies, or themselves, but on God. When Jonathan encountered the Philistines, First Samuel 14:6, he said, "*...for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many of by few.*" Our strength is of divine origin, spiritual strength, moral strength, not human and worldly strength and wisdom.

In Other Times

In the days of the Israelite judges, Israel was enslaved by the Midianites. The number of Midianites was as grasshoppers and their camels without number. God called Gideon and Gideon called for volunteers to deliver the land. First, there came thirty-five thousand, but God said that was too many. Twenty-two thousand returned home in fear. But the ten thousand who remained were still too many. The number was reduced to three hundred men who believed in God, and in Gideon, and who followed God's plan precisely (Judges 7). How many righteous people will it take to preserve America?

Did not God preserve the entire human race from total destruction by saving eight souls? The world was once so evil that God repented that He had made it. Yet, all were not destroyed because Noah and his family were upright and were people of faith. Through them God provided a way of preservation. God can save by many or by few.

Nehemiah, with only a handful of fellows, aroused the people of Judah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. In spite of the odds against them, fighting with one hand and building with the other, they removed the reproach from Jerusalem. How many will it take to rebuild the spiritual walls of America?

Our Lord appointed only twelve men to go forward and take the appeal of the gospel into all the world. How many does it take when there is real and sincere dedication to the task?

Genesis 18:20-33 tells of the warning from God to Abraham of His intent to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. If ten righteous souls could have been found the cities would have been spared. Can we doubt that America has already been spared this far because of the righteous souls in the land who believe and serve God through Christ according to the New Testament? The Lord's church is the dike that has been holding back the tides of disaster. The spiritual and moral goodness of people, the honest, sincere Christians and their influence, have been the redeeming quality for this nation. But now there are severe and indisputable evidences that even this dike is cracking before our very eyes with the invasion of liberalism and division, and truth is losing its influence.

Will It Happen Again?

It has been the case in times past, and may well be again, that the righteous have to suffer because of the wrath of God upon a land that is so dominated by evil. But thus far even the wicked have been blessed because of the righteousness of a few.

Whether God will preserve America and its freedom I dare not predict. Frankly, I am not overly optimistic, seeing our people have decided to place in the highest ruling offices of the land the most degenerate, depraved, anti-Christian, immoral reprobates that have ever occupied power in the land in all its history (written in 1993). As abominable as our rulers show themselves to be, executive, judicial, legislative, national, state, local, the saddest reality is that they probably represent the level of morality in the country among the population as a whole. And I know what the Bible teaches. We reap as we sow. I know what sin does to a nation. To a large degree, it depends on America's response to the call to repent. This call going forth will be sent by those who believe the truth. This is where Christians enter the picture again. God expects Christians to rise to the task.

If you had lived at the time of Noah, would you have been invited to enter the ark, or be left outside to drown with the rest of the wicked? Would you have been one of

the three hundred chosen to remain with Gideon as the enemies of God's people were routed?

Regardless of what the future holds for our nation, our duty is clear. We must stand, whether we be few or many. We must be active, aggressive, militant, outspoken, uncompromising, sacrificial, steadfast, and confident in our position. We cannot be cowardly, neutral, compromising, fearful, passive, and assume a pretended piety that only hides abominable traits under a feigned cloak of righteousness. We must demonstrate real conviction. You just do not see a great amount of what is necessary among Americans today. Even many in the church are such disappointments as they give in, give up, and side with sin, culture, error, and depart from truth.

Do you have the attitude of Joshua? Joshua 24:15, "*Choose you this day whom ye will serve, ...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" We are the only ones that can save ourselves, our nation, and our descendants through Christ. We are the only ones who can keep freedom, truth, human dignity, and righteousness alive for generations that may come.

For Evil to Win

All it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. It is not like Christ to wait for the other person to act. We must let the wicked know they shall not pass. What a shame to let the devil capture our nation and its historically good qualities be removed and not even give him a fight!

Our message is a call to resolution, commitment, determination, and Biblical conviction from that number who say they love God and His righteousness. That number can provide the reasons for the preservation of our land and its freedom for the next generations. Do you have this resolve? Are you determined to do what is open to you? Will you stand? What will you be doing? When will you start doing it?

* * * * *

Making Decisions

Over the years I have discovered that one of the most rapidly rejected efforts is the offering of unsolicited advice. People had just as soon not be advised unless they request it, unfortunately. Many who do request it really prefer someone to simply agree with them rather than really advise with them. Nonetheless, sometimes advice is what we need whether we want it or not. Advice on making decisions is one such matter, so here goes.

There are some things over which we have no control and have no power of choice. Some things are set, predetermined, foreordained, and there is nothing we can do about it. They are bound to take place. For instance, we have no power to control the rising and setting of the sun, that we shall die, be raised, judged, and exist in eternity. We cannot set the will of God for that has already been done. Nor can we alter the fact that we have a duty to God and our fellowman. That there exists good and evil in the world is not ours to control, although we have something to say about our little corner and whether we do good or evil.

But there are many matters about which we not only may, but absolutely must, make decisions. God has created man with the power of choice, a spirit, a mind, an intellect by which we can think, reason, determine, and decide. Furthermore, God holds man accountable for his decisions. We will either enjoy or suffer the consequences of our choices (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Unavoidable

There is one decision that we face that is unavoidable. We have to decide what we shall do regarding Christ. The very nature of Christ and His will demands that a decision be made. "*No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" (Matthew 6:24). "*He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*" (Matthew 12:20). Such statements demand the

making of a choice where you will stand. The attempt to be neutral is impossible because that is a decision to not be for Him, which, He says, is to take a position against Him. So any way one goes, he must make a decision about the Christ.

Decisions ought not be made hastily and rashly, especially those that are significant and have such a tremendous bearing on life and eternity. We must be cautious and careful, yet, at the same time, willing to make the decisions that are necessary. But we need to know how to make good decisions. We need to know what to take into account. A decision is a very personal matter and each must make it for himself or herself because nobody else can make it for them. We can advise and help one another, but ultimately the burden comes to rest upon the shoulders of each one alone. We hear people say, "It is my decision to make." By that they mean they have the right to decide, but by it that also show they have the responsibility to decide and cannot shift that responsibility to any other.

Israel and Moses

We read of people facing decisions in the Bible. When Elijah, the great prophet of God, confronted Israel to decide whether they would serve God or Baal, he said, "*How long halt ye between two opinions?* (First Kings 18:21). The time had come when they could no longer straddle the fence, so to speak. Moses had to make a choice what he would do with his life. "*By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had recompense of the reward.*" (Hebrews 11:24-26).

As Moses approached the end of life, he came before the people of Israel and called upon them to make the right decision regarding service to God. "*See I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil, in that I command thee this day to love the Lord, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply, and the*

Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life that both thou and thy seed may live, that thou mayest love the Lord thy God and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him, for he is thy life, and the length of thy days, that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to give them." (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

Joshua's Choice

A similar statement was expressed by Joshua to the people he had led for many years as he was about to relinquish the reigns of leadership. "*Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" (Joshua 24:14,15).

Now let us establish a few guidelines which will help us make wiser decisions. The decisions we make reflect our character, our goals, our priorities and values in life. We must consider the major and important matters seriously because they have such an effect on us. We have to take into account our faith, training, conscience, and others. We will not be content with decisions that violate what we are convinced is the right thing to do.

Consider God

Our decisions must be made according to the answer to such questions as, "From whence did you come?" We come from God. He is the Father of our spirits (Hebrews 12:9). "Why are you here?" Solomon says to fear God and

keep His commandments because this is the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13). "Where are you going?" The Bible teaches but two destinies open to us, heaven or hell (Matthew 25:46). The answer to these questions will determine what you consider yourself to be. Each of us is a soul that shall not only live on earth, but exist in eternity. We are worth more than all the world, according to Christ (Mark 8:36).

Decisions ought to be made only after asking, "What would Christ have me to do?" After all, He is the Lord. I have a duty to Him. What would He want in this matter? How will the way I decide affect my relationship with God, the church, and my service as a Christian? Many people have taken up residence, assumed jobs, married mates, without proper consideration to such things. The result has so often been spiritually disastrous.

Consider Others

We have an influence on those around us just like they have an influence on us. While it cannot be allowed to be the overruling factor in decision making, we must consider others. "*No man liveth to himself...*" (Romans 14:7). Such decisions as your life's work, your marriage mate, your friends and associates, your place of worship, all will have a tremendous bearing on your happiness and success in this world before God, and also on those around you.

Long Range

Too often we make decisions with only a view to the immediate conditions and circumstances and do not consider sufficiently the future and the long range implications that will follow. We cannot make decisions only thinking of the here and now, only considering this life. After this life is over, what then?

There is the story of a man who was speaking with his son about the son's future plans. He asked the boy what he intended to do. The son responded that he hoped to get a college education. This pleased the father, who then asked, "What then?" The son responded he expected to get a job. That was fine, but what then? He hoped he

would marry. This was expected, but what then? Then he planned to rear a family. This was nice, but the father asked again, "What then?" After that the son expected to someday retire. This was customary, but again, "What then?" The son thought for a while and said, "I suppose I will someday die." The father said, "That's right. What then?" The things we decide must be decided with the inclusion of the reality that we shall be in eternity. We must ever ask, "What then?"

Consider Your Family

What effect will the way I decide have on my family and their welfare? Satan will take advantage of every situation in life if we allow it. He will drive wedges between us and those we love unless we consider them in what we decide. By now we ought to see that decisions are crucial turning points in our lives. While we ought not approach them with fear, we do need to realize that even a minor decision can sometimes turn us a certain direction, a direction that may not be apparent for some time later after we have traveled the road much further. We must consider our example before others, our faithfulness to God, our response to duty, our family, and the soul that shall be judged at last.

Consider Wisdom in Others

In making decisions we show ourselves wise to consult with those who have experience, who love us, who truly seek our welfare, who want the best for us, whose lives have been godly, who have demonstrated that they know what does and does not really matter in life. Godly people are the best friends one can have. As we have said, each must make his or her own decision, but godly counsel is such an asset. The counsel of the ungodly will not bless us (Psalm 1). How foolish to seek guidance of those who fail, those whose hearts and minds reflect no real concern for the wishes of God., Why ask a divorcee how to have a good marriage? Why ask parents whose children have left every principle of good and right how to rear children? Why ask a man who has never done anything but fail in every endeavor he has undertaken how to succeed? Why ask the ungodly how to live before God in an acceptable manner? We deprive ourselves of

some of the very best information available when we shut ourselves off from the counsel of the wise and godly people around us.

Prayer

No decision ought be made without prayer. Christians have the right of prayer, the privilege to attract the attention of the One who oversees all things. We believe in the providence of God. We know God cares, and we trust His promises to provide and protect. We ask for failure when we do not ask God for His guidance through His Word and seek His providential means.

Without Regret

But there is another point about decision making that experience tells us is something essential. Once we have considered the matter with the inclusion of the guidelines we have mentioned, with caution, careful, considerate and prayful, deciding with a view to God's Word and eternity, and how it affects others, once we make the decision, live with it without regret. Even if it later develops that it was not the best decision, you have no regret concerning it because you made it according to the best you could do at the time. As one goes through life and looks back at some of the decisions he has made (hindsight is usually almost perfect), he sees where he might have done much better if he had decided a different way than he did. But in addition to profiting from hindsight and seeing mistakes, he can know that he made his decision in the wisest and most righteous manner he knew how at the time, and then he has no trouble living with his decision. Like Paul, sometimes we have to forget those things which are behind (Philippians 3:13,14). Regret is a heavy burden to bear. We can be free of guilt, but regret is often our companion for life. We can avoid a lot of regret by approaching decision making properly, and then having the attitude that you did what you could at the time when you could. Some things we might even be able to undo. There are some things for which we only have one turn and no second chance and cannot be undone. But if we will make decisions with these principles in mind, we can accept whatever might be the results of them.

Matter of Choice

Living right is by choice. It does not just happen. We have to make a conscious, deliberate decision to live right. Salvation is a deliberate decision. Such men a Agrippa, Felix, and others tried to make no decision and thereby decided to remain lost.

Life is something like going through the cafeteria line, taking this and leaving that. Then, eventually, there comes the time to pay for what you have chosen and taken. Let us choose wisely. Cain, Adam, so many others made bad decisions to their ruin. Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, many others, chose God's way. But when one follows the teaching of Christ, he will decide as he ought.

Now, armed with this bit of advice, solicited or not, may it be that we will make better decisions in the future.

* * * * *

The Church: Principles and Plea

When we speak of the church of Christ we use the term in the same sense as Matthew 16:18 when Jesus said, "*Upon this rock I will build my church.*" We refer to His church and only His church with the phrase meaning the church that belongs to Christ. He purchased it (acts 20:28), gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25), is the head of it (Colossians 1:18), since it is His body (Ephesians 1:22,23). Surely, it is proper to refer to it as the church of Christ (Romans 16:16), the way the Holy Spirit did.

The word "church" means the called out. It refers to people who have been called by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14), out of the power of darkness into light (First Peter 2:9). They have been delivered out of the world of sin and into Christ where there is salvation (Second Timothy 2:10; Colossians 1:13). The church is

composed of a peculiar people (Titus 2:14), who belong to the Lord. The church is the saved (Acts 2:47).

The term is used to refer to the saved in a local area or the saved throughout the world. It is never used in Scripture in the sense of a denomination. Denominations are either larger than the saved in a given area, or less than the saved throughout the world. There is no Biblical sense in which the word "church" can be used pertaining to denominationalism. There just is no kinship between the Lord's church and denominations that have come into existence from the minds and actions of men.

Other Terms

There are several descriptive terms in Scripture defining the church. As noted, the church consists of called out people, a peculiar people. It is called a kingdom when referring to its governmental features (Colossians 1:13). It is identified as the house or family of God when emphasizing its family nature (First Timothy 3:15). (The term "family" is never used with reference to simply a local church). It is called the body of Christ when stressing its relationship to Christ and the fellowship of its members (Ephesians 1:22,23; First Corinthians 12:12). Christ is the King of the kingdom. God is the Father of the family, and Christ is the elder brother and joint-heir (Romans 8:17). He is the head of the body.

The church is also revealed as the fold of Christ, who is its spiritual Shepherd, and there is one fold (John 10:16). When its worship is put forward it is called God's temple (First Corinthians 3:16). When called a vineyard, its work and service is featured (Matthew 21:28). The closeness to Christ is emphasized in Ephesians five when the church is called the bride of Christ. All of these identifications (even being an army with soldiers of the cross fighting the good fight of faith) relate different features of the church, but the same people.

What The Church Teaches

What does the church say to the world? What does it advocate before mankind? What are its principles and

plea? First Timothy 4:11, Paul told Timothy, "*These things command and teach.*" What things?

Sometimes we hear people say, "The church teaches this or that." We should be concerned with learning what the Bible teaches, and that is what the church should teach. The church is not the origin of its message, the doctrine it is to uphold (First Timothy 3:15). The Word of God is what brought the church into existence when preached on Pentecost, and that truth is what it is to proclaim. We do not speak disrepectfully but accurately when we say that one might hear most anything being taught depending on the church one has under consideration. But no man has the right to advocate or proclaim anything other than what Scripture teaches. The church has no authority of itself regarding the creation of doctrine. It is to proclaim and follow what the Word of God has authorized.

The Scriptures affirm its own verbal inspiration (Second Timothy 3:16, 17; First Corinthians 2:12,13). Whether the Scripture one is reading is prophetic, apostolic, from the Old or New Testament, the Scripture is the source of doctrine and is to be rightly divided or handled aright (Second Timothy 2:15). God gave us the Bible that we might know what we must know, be convinced, leave the wrong and follow the right. The Word of God is our "*lamp*" and guide in life. We must contend, as Scripture does, that it is the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Word of God.

How Deity Operates on Man

God operates on the heart of those who are in sin through the preaching and hearing of His Word. He lives and dwells with His people by and through the guidance of the Word. Man comes to believe through the Word (John 17:20; 20:31; Romans 10:17).

Ephesians 5:18 commands us to be filled with the Spirit. A parallel passage in Colossians 3:16 tells us how we obey that command. "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.*" Deity influences, leads, and guides man by His Word, not separate nor apart from it. The Word of God is the very sword the Spirit uses (Ephesians

6:17). What the Scripture ascribes to Deity in guiding and leading man is also said of the Word of God. This is because Deity uses the Word as His instrument or means of guiding and leading. We do not read of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of man to save him apart from the preaching of the Word. The Word has been revealed, written, and can be read and understood. When followed, God dwells with us.

Romans 1:16,17 teaches that the gospel is God's power unto salvation. The gospel reveals the facts, commands, and promises regarding salvation through Christ. In the gospel is the '*righteousness of God revealed,*" meaning God's strategy, battle plan, scheme, and system for saving man. It refers to the way God justifies man.

Components of the Gospel

The fundamental facts of the gospel include the eternal nature of Christ, His birth by a virgin, His perfect life, His fulfillment of prophecies, His miracles and teachings, His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. It reveals God's grace, mercy, and love for sinful humanity and what provision Deity has made on the behalf of man's salvation. It also includes His kingship as He now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, plus His promise to return for His own.

The commands of the gospel must be obeyed for one to be saved (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). Inasmuch as man without Christ is lost in sin and Christ is the only Savior, each one must obey what the Lord has commanded. He commands faith, repentance, confession of faith in Him, and baptism into Him in order to be saved. Once among the redeemed we are to live lives after His pattern faithfully and loyally. We must respect and follow whatever He teaches regarding work, worship, and everything else He has revealed by His authority (Colossians 3:17).

The gospel includes many exceeding great and precious promises (Second Peter 1:4). Among them is the promise of forgiveness of sins, fellowship with Deity, and the expectation of heaven when a faithful life as a Christian has come to its conclusion.

It is tragic that the churches of men have rejected the divine command for one to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). This baptism is a baptism in water of penitent believers. Salvation is not determined by how one feels, what one thinks, what others say or do, but by what the Scripture teaches. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; First Peter 3:21, and many others, lead man to the inescapable conclusion that baptism is essential to salvation because the Lord made is a condition of pardon. Who has the right to set it aside? It is never presented as a work of merit by which one earns his salvation. It is rather presented as the act of obedience whereby one reaches the saving blood of Christ (Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). Why those of denominations have warred against what is taught is one of the wonders of the religious world.

God's Church Government

Those in the church not only advocate, preach, and teach the inspiration of the Scriptures, the power of the Word, the need to obey His commands, but it also upholds the Biblically revealed government of the church. Christ is its head (Colossians 1:18). Guided and directed by the inspired Word, the church is organized into local congregations. We never read of an organizational unit larger than a local church. Each church is overseen by elders and served by deacons (Philippians 1:1). Every member is a member of the body (First Corinthians 12). The system of government of His church is relatively simple. Is it not pathetic how men have departed from what is authorized and produced complicated and erroneous systems?

Worship

The church advocates the same worship of God as the Scripture denotes for Christians. Without going into detail in this lesson in this matter, for there are other lessons pertaining to this, we just list the items or avenues of worship the New Testament authorizes. We sing, pray, give of our means, partake of the Lord's Supper, and proclaim His Word of truth. This is that which we read from Scripture and this is that which, when done in the right spirit, is what God wants. Other

actions, regardless of how well-intentioned, are simply outside the authority of Christ and must be abandoned to be right before God.

As the Oracles

The call of those in the Lord's church is to call Bible things by Bible names, using sound speech that cannot be condemned, speaking things which become sound doctrine, speaking as the oracles of God (Titus 2:1,8; First Peter 4:11). His disciples were called Christians (Acts 11:26). Why should anyone wish to wear a religious name other than what God's Word designates? The Ashdodic language being heard in some quarters today simply betrays how those who speak have been drinking too often and too deeply from the fountains of human religions rather than from the source of pure speech.

Inasmuch as the Bible declares the necessity of living a faithful life as a Christian, being what one has professed to have become, the church sends forth the need of adding the "Christian virtues" to our characters and lives (Second Peter 1:5ff). It matters what one believes and how faithful to correct convictions he lives. How we present ourselves before God in daily life is important.

The Plea

The plea of the church today, if it be found contending for the faith once delivered (Jude 3) is to restore the religion of Christ among men, seeking unity based upon acceptance of God's truth. Christianity for our century must be the Christianity of the first century. Truth makes us free (John 8:32). There must be unity for there to be one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God and Father (Ephesians 4:4-6). We urge people everywhere to abandon creeds, disciplines, manuals, and such like for the Word of God.

Salvation is in the body of Christ, His church. The principles and plea of the church today is as it has been since Pentecost. What saith the Word? This is our plea and the foundation of it.

* * * * *

The Future of the Church

It may seem a bit presumptuous to assume one can know what the future holds for the church as if he is a prophet. We can neither claim to be a prophet, nor, like, Amos, the son of a prophet (Amos 7:14). There have been infallible prophecies uttered in the past, however, regarding the future of the church. The Old Testament prophets foretold its coming. John the Baptist said it was "*at hand*" in his day. Jesus predicted it would come in the lifetime of some of those who heard Him speak (Mark 9:1). The apostles warned of an apostasy which history reveals did occur (Second Timothy 4:1).

We can also know that ultimately the future of the church will be eternal victory. Matthew 16:16-18 tells us the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Nothing could prevent its establishment and it shall not be destroyed. The theme of the book of Revelation is the eventual victory of the faithful in the church of the Lord. First Corinthians 15:24 speaks of the kingdom, which is the church, being delivered to the Father. But this glorious and final victory does not and will not prevent apostasy arising from time to time.

Where are the strong congregations of which we read in the New Testament? What happened to them? Have they not ceased to exist? They left the truth and fell away. We can be sure that during their good years they would not have supposed that these congregations would someday cease to exist.

Crisis and Conflict

We can be confident that the future of the church will be one of crisis and conflict. It has been that way since Pentecost. The Lord warned of such spiritual warfare and even persecution that would come from many sources against His disciples. The church is in a struggle against evil, fighting the good fight of faith in a world that loves the darkness of sin. Christ came to bring

peace between God and man, but that will not necessarily produce peace between men. There are those who will follow the Lord and those who will not. There will ever be conflict between those two. While our fight is not a carnal one (Second Corinthians 10:4), it is a warfare nonetheless.

As We Sow

We might be assisted in knowing something of the future of the church when we take notice of the unrepealable law of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7,8). We can learn something of the future by considering the past. The kind of seed that is sown will determine the kind of fruit produced. We know what the early church was by what it taught and what it practiced. We know what the church is today by what is taught and practiced. The church of the future will be according to what will be taught and practiced. For this reason there is a justifiable concern by faithful brethren for the future of the church with many false and denominational concepts being promoted by many in the church.

Just what is being taught? Will the church of the future have the proper respect for the authority of the Word? Is the Word being taught or laid aside for other ideas? The seed of the kingdom, which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11) only produces the Lord's church. We cannot expect to sow and tolerate the sowing of that which is contrary to Scripture and the church be as it ought to be. There must be "*sound speech.*" So much that we hear from many quarters, from literature used, modern speech so-called Bibles, from college classes, publications some produce, is foreign to "*thus saith the Lord.*" While many in the church have knowledge of truth and even warn of the trends that run against the truth, what of the oncoming generations as the truth is more and more set aside and the ways of men adopted? Are we so blind and hardened as to think this will not affect the future of the church, and in an adverse way?

The issue might be presented with a series of questions. Will the teaching done in the church be Bible or human theology and philosophy as taught in colleges? Will we preach the gospel or promote gimmicks? So many in the

church have obviously opted for the flashy dresser, the hurrahs, jive talk in a show of being "relevant," give away prizes, helicopter rides for attendance, trips to resorts and playgrounds, listening to the politicians, etc. Shall we have emphasis on the message or spend our time adopting the methods of those in error?

How Led?

Will the church be led by elders who know and love the Book, or by editors who want to sell papers? Shall we be influenced by gospel preachers or by modernistic professors? Will our guide be Scripture or so-called "scholarship?" Shall we alter our mission from evangelism, edification, and benevolence in favor of secular education, recreation, entertainment, and "feeling good?" Can we retain our distinctiveness or shall we drift into being just another denomination as some advocate? These are fair questions and present the problems facing the church in precise terms that will affect the future of the church.

Will we build churches or buildings? Shall we offer worship and praise or just get "high" with emotionalism, big promotions, headline contributions, and battery charges? Will the church actually progress or digress? They are not the same thing, you know!

Godly elders could and should prevent the church from falling away. But how many had rather keep "peace" with men than seek the way of the Lord?

Conviction or Convenience?

Will our faith be that of conviction of conscience by the Word or compromise and convenience? In many instances the latter seems to be prominent! Shall we convert the world or conform to the present culture? Many are trying to change God to fit the times when our task is to change the world to fit God. Bigness rather than soundness is the watchword of many. Is it not evident that some are more concerned about budget than baptisms, and looking for responses rather than conversions? Such questions need our consideration because they bring us back into the way that helps us see

where we are, and what may be more important, the direction we are going. This will have a tremendous impact on the future.

It makes a difference the direction we are going. This does not minimize the importance of where we are. Suppose you are traveling from one place to another. Where you are is obviously important. If you really wish to reach your destination, does it not matter the direction you are going? Will you reach it if you are going the wrong direction?

The analogy fits our conditions. We are on our way to heaven. At least, that is the desired destination. Where we are matters. Whether we are faithful in Christ or not makes all the difference in the world and in eternity. But what is our direction? Are going toward the goal, or are we drifting away from the path we must travel?

Quite often brethren speak of the pioneers of the Restoration Movement. Certainly, they had the right goal. They taught the right pattern, plan, and blueprint from the Scriptures. (Some deny the Bible is our pattern, but they are apostates and heretics, no longer believing what the Bible teaches about His church). Those of yesteryear demonstrated a noble spirit. But they are not now, nor have ever been, the authority. No faithful gospel preacher ever cites them as authority. They advocated what Peter demanded in First Peter 4:11 about speaking as the oracles of God. They had the Word and had the right attitude toward it as the Word of God. They sought unity based on truth, nor mere union and "unity in diversity." They were not willing to negotiate, compromise, or bend with current events. We need more of that disposition today if the future of the church is to be acceptable to God.

Not All

Not all that is called "churches of Christ" are really what they are called. We have long known that the term "church of God" is a correct term to identify God's people. But it takes more than just the name, even though the right name is important, to be right with God. Too many have become tolerant of sin, without

discipline, winking at theistic evolution, premillennialism, working of miracles today, claiming the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, practicing worldliness, fellowshipping the unbaptized, even offering to forget differences and seeking fellowship in spite of grave and incompatible doctrinal differences. This "love me, but leave me alone to do my thing" attitude of many makes them suspect that they are no longer "churches of Christ" although they may have such a sign in front of their meeting house. Churches can be rich, but not righteous. They may have great size, but also great sin and error. The phrase, "*a glorious church,*" does not properly identify many congregations that choose to wear the Lord's name. They have been overcome by more digression than they admit.

Apostasy is never more than one generation away unless the church is properly taught and its work properly authorized. Many who love the truth and the church as the New Testament teaches have warned that there is emerging from our number a new denomination, using gimmicks and methods of false religions, promoting their erroneous views through modern versions, being led by those who are determined to restructure the church to a fashion more acceptable to the religious world and our sinful culture. Such is the case with the new Jubilee Church springing from Nashville, Tennessee, and those under the influence of the Tulsa Workshop, and the so-called "Christian Colleges" with their know-it-all professors, who know more about the theologies of unbelievers than they do about the Word of God. The false doctrines and concepts are being endorsed and promoted through papers (Wineskins, Image), schools (DLU, ACU, etc.) and other means such as big extravaganzas like Jubilee, etc.

Preach the Word

The only way to assure the future of the church to be acceptable to God is to preach the Word , know the Word, practice the Word, not go beyond the Word, demand authority from the Word. The church of the future will be composed of different people than the church today. Time and death will see to that. Will those people believe and practice what is taught in the Bible? They will not

likely do so if they are not taught the Bible as the Bible is. Trends that take people away from the paths of righteousness develop slowly until they seemingly jump to a fast pace, as is now apparent. Step by step, rather than by gigantic leaps, there is a very noticeable revolution that comes on the scene. There must be a constant measuring of ourselves, not by ourselves, but by the divine standard, with the resolve to adhere to that standard. Otherwise, the future of the church will be bleak and disastrous, and the present congregations will become like the congregations we note in the New Testament that no longer exist as a churches of Christ.

We can know what THE church will be like in the coming century. THE church will be like THE church of the first century. Just what everyone who claims to be a member of the church may be like is impossible to know at this point in time.

The church ultimately shall see God in His glory if those who compose it will remain faithful to the Lord, walk in the light as He is in the light, maintain their fellowship with Deity by obedience to the commands of Deity. If members of the church will live lives as Scripture requires, their future is already promised, and the outlook is wonderful. Then the future of the church will be bright and blessed. This is what we must assure for oncoming geneations by standing firm in the faith, wielding the sword of the Spirit in all matters.

There may well be days of suffering as we do this. Ridicule is already a common reality. Hearing the things the Word calls sacred and holy blasphemed by the renegades of Satan are heard all around. There may even be physical persecution as in days past. But keep in mind the inspired words of Paul in Romans 8:18, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*"

* * * * *

What have you done today to show you love God?

I Am Just A Little Surprised



Among the efforts being made to preach the gospel in the county where I live , several congregations have banded into a radio work where each congregation involved assumes responsibility for the program a regularly designated week each month. East End is one of those involved and I do the preaching when our turn comes around. This provides for us five fifteen minute programs each month for each congregation. It has worked our splendidly and sound doctrine is heard every week.

For two months I kept after denomination clergymen and members to please provide for me the passage that teaches salvation by faith only. I told them I already believed salvation by faith, but wanted that passage that teaches what they teach. I really begged them to prove the false doctrine they uphold.

I was surprised that nobody, NOBODY ever tried to present the verse I requested. Of course, I know why. It is not in the Bible. But why, then, do they teach it? Is that honest? JB

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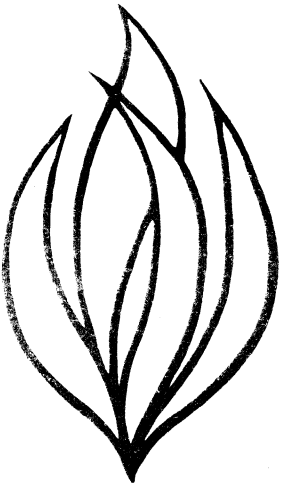

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Why Persecutest Thou Me?

NUMBER ONE

As Saul of Tarsus was on his way toward Damascus to continue making havoc of the church, "*suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven, and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who are thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*" (Acts 9:3-5).

As persecution was being leveled against the church, Christ said that it was against Him. The head of the church, Jesus Christ, was One who was "*despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*" (Isaiah 53:3). His enemies pursued Him, pushed, maligned, persecuted, harassed, seeking constantly to ensnare Him in His words, even seeking to throw Him over a cliff, ever revealing their intense animosity and hatred toward Him.

"*Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him...*" (John 15:8). "*This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.*" (John 8:6). "*Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.*" (Matthew 22:15).

His opponents were not satisfied until He "*yielded up the ghost.*" (Matthew 27:50). He was hated with an unparalleled hatred, and was the subject of vindictive bitterness and cruelty toward Him. Why? Why was the Son of God so despised? As Pilate asked, "*Why, what evil hath he done?*" (Matthew 27:23).

The hatred against Jesus ceased not with His death, but was transferred to His apostles and other disciples. Persecution followed His innocent, humble, unoffensive disciples. The hatred for the Master was turned against His servants. The choice that was often given to Christians was, "Renounce Christ, or be put to death!"

The only crime of which they were accused was being a Christian. Again, we ask, why was this?

His Personal Suffering

In this first part of our three part study we will focus attention on Jesus and the persecution He personally suffered while He lived in Palestine. There were several sects of the Jews, Pharisees, Saducees, Herodians, Libertines, Zealots, Essenes (the last not specifically mentioned in Scripture). They were political, religious, economic factions and parties. They had great rivalry and hatred one against the other. But in Jesus they found a common foe. They were willing to set aside their doctrinal, philosophical, economic, and ambitious disputes and differences to join together in opposing Jesus. As Paul was informed, Acts 28:22, concerning the church some years later, "*we know that every where it is spoken against.*"

Not All Hated Him

The hatred against Jesus was not shared by everyone at first. The general masses of people loved Christ rather than hating Him. They thronged about Him, followed Him everywhere, listening to Him, receiving the blessings He bestowed. They gave God thanks that such a One was among them.

But there was another element that was smaller, but powerful and very influential. They were the priests, rabbis, scribes, the leaders of the people. While they had anticipated the coming of a Messiah and a king, when Jesus came He did not fit their preconceived notions. He was not rich, had no military force, was not intending to drive out the Roman armies, did not wear decorative robes, did not display a public piety and show, did not engage in long prayers, rituals, and traditions. He was not one of them but was in contrast to them. Rather, He rebuked them, severely, sharply, repeatedly because of their sins.

"Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe

and do; but do not after their works, for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men. They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogue, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi." (Matthew 23:1-7). This kind of teaching did not set well with those of prominence and in positions of prestige and power.

Hear Him again. Matthew 23:13-15, "*But woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widow's houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: therefore, ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*" Here we begin to discover why Jesus was persecuted. They did not believe Him because He dared to tell them the truth regarding them and their sorry spiritual state.

The Lord's Answer

At this point please take your New Testament, laying aside the lesson, and read Matthew 23:16-26, noting the sharpness and directness of the words of our Lord against wicked men. There you will find the basis for the hatred against Him. His condemnation of evil caused the guilty to smart and chafe under His perception of them and His indictment of their evil works of darkness and pretense. There were repeated confrontations between Jesus and these people.

Turn once again and read Matthew 23:27-36, and ask yourself, "Is this from the Lord of love?" Yes, Jesus is the Lord of love, and also the Ruler of righteousness. To love the good demands a hatred of the evil. Jesus' teaching insulted the pseudo-dignity and pretended sincerity of these hypocrites. He offended their pride and exposed their iniquities. As a result, He received their

contempt, hatred, bitterness, and became the object and target of their plots, schemes, and designs to harm Him.

Jesus Was Offensive?

He offended not only the rabbis, priests, scribes, etc. but also those of popularity and riches. Mark 12:41-44, "*And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and man that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury. For all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.*"

Jesus did not cater to the rich, extol their wealth, flatter them, as they were accustomed to being treated. Rather He commended the sacrificial poor. When He told the story of Lazarus and the rich man this was offensive to those who were covetous and greedy and who trusted in their wealth.

Jesus taught, "*Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" (Matthew 6:24). "*A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" (Luke 12:15). To the rich man the Lord said, "*Thou fool.*" (Luke 12:20). He taught that there was a vast difference between physical prosperity and success and spiritual prosperity and success. This offended those who measured their worth in terms of physical wealth.

The procedures and manners of Jesus would not be considered wise and diplomatic today. They would even be termed indiscreet if not altogether out of line. People have become accustomed to so much soft-soap and the Dale Carnegie approach to preaching that they actually think that men know more how to present God's truth than Jesus did. So many today play up to the monied and powerful, regardless of what kind of people they are or how contrary to God's will they are in life.

Some Still Received Him

But even though Jesus was offending these "notables," the multitude did not turn away from Him until much later. They still sought Him. When Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of His life before His crucifixion, He was received by the multitudes with great enthusiasm. Matthew 21:8-11, "*And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*" The people rejoiced to see Him.

But soon their attitude completely changed. To be sure, the leaders exerted influence on them, but there was another reason that these who shouted His praises were soon to be heard crying, "*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*" What changed their attitude?

Why They Persecuted Him

It was because Jesus also condemned the sins of the people as much as He did the sins of the prominent. Matthew 21:12,13, "*And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.*"

In Matthew twenty-four He warned of the wickedness of the people of Jerusalem, that city that had a dreary history of persecuting God's prophets that had been sent unto her. He foretold its destruction, and even the destruction of the temple. These words, like the other "*hard saying*" of Jesus caused many to turn away from Him. Once, when some were leaving Him, He asked His disciples, "*Will ye also go away?*" Peter responded, "*To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" (John 6:67,68). The hearts of the masses were offended and became willing pawns in the hands of Jesus' enemies among the leaders, and were used to promote

the unscrupulous designs of those who called for His death when He stood before Pilate.

Their hatred was climaxed when Jesus was condemned, led to Calvary, and crucified, even as people cried "*His blood be on us, and on our children.*" (Matthew 27:25). Paul once asked brethren in Galatia, "*Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*" If Jesus had asked that question the answer would be a resounding, "YES!"

One has written, "John the Baptist's message from the wilderness was not 'Smile, God loves you.' It was, '*O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee the wrath to come?*' Jeremiah was not put into a miry pit for preaching, 'I'm OK, you're OK.' It was for crying out against adultery, idolatry, and other wickedness of his nation. Noah's message from the steps of the ark was not, 'Something good is going to happen to you.' He condemned the world and was a preacher of righteousness. Jesus Christ was not crucified for saying, '*Consider the lilies, how they grow,*' but for saying, '*Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites... child of hell... fools and blind guides... whited sepulchers... generation of vipers*'."

We read a poem that said in part:

Don't be negative, said some to me.

But they were as negative as could be.

Don't be negative, was their constant cry,

But from the cross I heard Jesus sigh:

'Twas not sweet positive truth I taught

That caused my painful death to be wrought.

It was exposure of error, lust and greed,

That prompted my enemies to plot the deed.

Jesus was not persecuted because He healed others, raised the dead, offered hope and salvation. It was

because He dared to condemn sin. John 3:19-21, "*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be proved.*" Matthew 23:37,38, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*" Notice the willingness of Jesus to save, but, "*ye would not.*"

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Why Persecutest Thou Me?

NUMBER TWO

Having considered the persecution of Christ personally, and discovering why He was persecuted, we now turn our attention to the persecution that was suffered by the early church. We want to learn why there was such hatred directed toward the apostles and the early disciples.

The apostles and early Christians were warned by Christ and by each other to expect persecution. John 15:18-20, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world, would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also.*" First John 3:13, "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" First Peter 4:12-16, "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall*

be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed: but let him glorify God on this behalf." Matthew 5:11,12, *"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."* They were forewarned.

How They Did Suffer

And suffer they did! First Corinthians 15:30,31, *"And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily."* The sufferings of Paul are listed in Second Corinthians 11:23-28. The church in Pergamos knew persecution and one of their members, Antipas, was martyred for the cause of Christ. Peter was imprisoned. James was beheaded. Stephen was stoned. The church was known as a sect spoken against everywhere (Acts 28:22). Those who preached the saving gospel were driven from city to city. Men and women were bound because they followed *"that way."* Many made havoc of the church even thinking they were rendering God a service. And we wonder why this happened! What evil had they done?

Expectation and Concern of the Jews

Among the Jews there was an expectation of the coming King and Messiah. These expectations were heightened by the preaching of John the Baptist. The prophets of old had foretold of His coming. Pretenders had arisen from time to time, only to be exposed and often executed. There were those physical rebels against Rome who temporarily attracted a following. Because many had come and passed away, people were suspicious and on guard against any who claimed to be the Messiah. When Jesus appeared, having the prophesied credentials, the people still did not recognize Him for who He was. They

tended to set Jesus alongside all the others that had come, and thought His death would terminate His influence just as had been done concerning others.

But the enemies of Christ did become concerned after His crucifixion and His promise of the resurrection haunted them. They, with Roman permission, took measures to assure nothing could happen that could be considered a resurrection. His tomb was guarded. Yet, He arose.

After His death, burial, and resurrection there came forth a new and powerful element in society. Men began preaching Christ and His resurrection, declaring Him to be both "*Lord and Christ.*" Their preaching was not done in some distant land, nor after a long span of time after the event, but in the same city where Jesus had died, and only fifty days after His crucifixion. They cited how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies; how many had seen the risen Lord; that they were witnesses of His resurrection; that He had ascended into heaven; that He was reigning as King. They stressed how openly these things had been done, and that it was not done '*in a corner,*" and confirmed their message by performing miracles.

Thousands heard the message of truth preached in His name. Three thousand heard, believed, and obeyed on the day of Pentecost, the day of the establishment of the Lord's kingdom, which is the church. Being baptized and added to the church, they banded together as brothers and sisters in Christ, children of God, the saved through Christ, and they were a distinct body. The church of Christ was a reality. They dared to be different and distinctive in their devotion to Christ. Now we begin to see why they were despised by others who rejected Christ, and who had led the way in persecuting Christ.

The Church Grew

But the early church proved to be a formidable and persuasive element. The early church grew from three thousand to five thousand men, not counting men and younger people. Multitudes were recorded as being converted, even many priests and former unbelievers. The new faith threatened the Jewish religion and the religious and political control Jewish leaders held over

the masses. The church could not be brushed aside and ignored. It demanded, and received, attention.

Beginning among the Jews, later the Gentiles were included because the salvation that Christ offered was for those of every nation (Acts 10:34,35). It soon became apparent to all that this was not just another Jewish sect, but a new faith, a new religion, a new way of life with a new King.

First, the Jews

The first persecution against the church came from Jews who felt their system was threatened. But even though Jesus was a Jew, and the first disciples were Jews, this was not a national faith but a universal faith. It challenged everything that existed or had gone before it.

The message and claims of the early church were affirmative, positive, negative, inclusive, exclusive, distinctive, certain, and without compromise. They proclaimed a faith of absolute authority. It was of divine authority (Matthew 28:18). Jesus had taught He was the only way (John 14:6). Peter preached the same truth (Acts 4:12). Jesus had said there would be one fold and one shepherd (John 10:16). He was the "*only Potentate, the King of kings, the Lord of lords.*" (First Timothy 6:15).

They declared that Christ was the "*end of the law*" (Romans 10:4). This meant that He was the goal of the law of Moses, that toward which the law pointed (Galatians 3:24,25). Now that Christ had come the law of Moses was no longer authoritative and operative for anyone, even the Jews to whom it had been exclusively given. It was taken out of the way at the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 10:9). He did not destroy it. If He had destroyed it, He could not have fulfilled it. But He did fulfill it (Matthew 5:17,18), and Paul says He abolished it (Ephesians 2:15).

Furthermore, none could be saved by that law (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:20). This did not mean there was no law at all to which people are accountable. But none are accountable to the law of Moses. Christ brought in a better hope and a better covenant (Hebrews 7:19). There

was a change of priesthood as well as a change of law (Hebrews 7:12).

Their declarations of the gospel were exclusive in the extreme. There was one way and no other. This was not something alongside other systems. This was not something that was just as good as some other way. One would be saved this way or not be saved at all. This exclusiveness offended many who relied on other ways to please God, and they exhibited their animosity toward this teaching by persecuting the teachers of it and those that believed and followed it.

Then, the Gentiles

But the religion of Christ was not only offensive to the Jews. The pagan and false heathen religions took offense as well. Where the gospel was preached and believed, pagan temples became desolate, people burned their books of curious arts, idol makers lost their income (Acts 19). As the message of the one true and living God was spread abroad (First Thessalonians 1:9), people learned of God's wrath toward those that would not obey the gospel (Second Thessalonians 1). They learned that their pagan gods were not gods at all. And those who preached these truths were subjected to vicious, rash, and ruthless persecution at the hands of the Gentile, heathen, and pagan world, from the worshippers of Diana to the worshippers of the Roman emperor.

Furthermore, we see that the early church did not tolerate fraternity and fellowship with the sinful, lascivious, and sensual world. Nor did they extend fellowship to other religions. There is no record of the early disciples inviting Jewish rabbis to hold joint worship services with them, or inviting pagan priests to fellowship with them or take part in their worship. We read of no interfaith brotherhood. Rather we read, Ephesians 5:11, "*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*" Second John 9-11, a passage that many in the church today must think has been lifted from the Bible, "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto*

you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed. For he that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deed." Romans 6:1,2. *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"* Read Second Corinthians 6:14ff and heed divine teaching regarding fellowship with error. This is what the early church heard and lived after being taught. How much our brotherhood needs this message today!

Same For All

Salvation was for all and was extended to all, but on the same terms (Acts 10:34,35; Mark 16:15,16; Matthew 28:18-20). Nor was there any compromising, negotiating, or "dialoging" in order to simply "get together" with those who persisted in their human religions. Rather, the early church taught that people are lost in sin, cannot save themselves, need a Savior, that God has provided a Savior, and the Savior is Jesus Christ, and He is the only Savior, salvation is in Him and His church and cannot be enjoyed otherwise. They taught the terms of entrance into Christ and His body, the church. They taught faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins. They taught the necessity of a life of purity, morality righteousness, work and worship as children of God in Christ. They did not teach there were saved people in human religious organizations. They did not teach salvation for those who had come to Christ but who lived and worshipped in error.

Just as the proclamation of truth caused Jesus to be unpopular, when His disciples went forward with those same truths, it provoked hatred and persecution against them as it had done against Jesus. Sadly, many never even seriously considered the gospel truth. Some, in their sophistication and self-inflated egotism and superiority, cast aside the truth and those that taught it as being unworthy of their consideration.

Paul once asked the brethren of Galatia, *"Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?"* The answer to Paul was, "YES!" The answer to Jesus was, "YES!" The

answer to the early church was another, "YES!" The paths of the early disciples were stained with their blood. But they persisted and upheld the faith by holding firm to the promises of God and His assurance of reward and ultimate victory to those that overcome and remain faithful.

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Why Persecutest Thou Me?

NUMBER THREE

Having now observed in the first two parts the persecution received by Jesus during His earthly ministry, and the persecution of the early church, we now concern ourselves with the church today and persecution. Christianity is still unwanted, unpopular, and the object of great enmity and hostility today. In some areas the opposition is as intense as it was in years of the first century. It seems that nothing is so generally rejected and despised as pure, simple, undenominational, Biblical, true, New Testament Christianity. A person can go forward preaching superstitions, spiritualism, denominationalism, Oriental paganism, cults, modernism, humanism, the "new morality," communism, socialism, free love, almost anything and everything and it will enjoy a following and be allowed to pursue its goals without much opposition. But nothing excites hatred against people as much as the hatred toward those who would contend for "*thus saith the Lord.*" Our nation gloats over bashing Christianity today, 1993.

Even though division exists among the numerous sects and denominational bodies, and they will clash and war one against the other, blasting each other without mercy, they get together and form a common bond in their opposition to the presentation of what the Scriptures teach regarding the religion of Christ. In

some cases, the opposition has become physical and violent.

Tolerant of Whom?

Why is it that some will contend that honesty and sincerity is sufficient regardless of what you believe, but will not apply the same standard toward those of the churches of Christ? Somehow members of the church are not to be included in this "tolerant" spirit. Some will preach that it really does not matter what you believe and practice, but if you believe and practice what churches of Christ believe and practice you are automatically shunned and become something unworthy of being tolerated. Some contend that whatever you want to follow ought to be allowed, unless you want to follow nothing but the Scriptures. The doctrine of salvation by grace alone, or salvation by faith only is applied to anyone except those who are members of churches of Christ. That "comforting" doctrine does not fit them. Why is that? Some say it does not matter to which church you belong, just so long as it is not the church of Christ. This is not an imagined condition nor does it reflect a "martyr complex." It is a reality. In fact, the reality of it has caused many who were once in the church to leave the church and pursue a path to be acceptable, or try to make the church more acceptable to those who reject the church because it stands for Biblical truth. Some even surrender and compromise truth to "get along" with everybody.

Christ and His church, in the past and the present, are objects of opposition because of the inclusive, exclusive, distinctive nature, and character of Christ and His church. The Lord's church is not just another denomination among denominations. The Bible speaks of no denomination nor offers any authority for the existence of a denomination that has, does, or ever shall exist. The faith of Christ is not just **A** system, it is **THE** system. It not just **A** church, but **THE** church. Christ is not simply **A** savior, but the **ONLY** savior. What is upheld is not something just nearest the truth, but what **IS** the truth. There are those who want everything to be fuzzy, gray, and without distinction. But the will of

Christ, which the church is to uphold (1 Timothy 3:15), does not fit in that mold.

This thing of "being nearest the truth" is an absurdity. How can one know what may be "nearest the truth" unless they know what the truth is? And if one knows what the truth is, why be content with something that is simply "nearest the truth?" Why not insist on the truth? Why be satisfied with following something other than the truth? What is wrong with contending for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3)?

Attacks Because of Hypocrisy

Some reject the church because there are members of the church who fail to live up to the doctrine of Christ. This is a criticism that is too often found to be true. But it is a criticism that could probably be leveled at any religious group of people. The cause of Christ is wounded and hindered by those who profess to be Christians who live more after the ways of the world than the way of Christ. But regardless of how inconsistent and/or hypocritical some members of the church may be, (and there is no defense for it), that does not alter the truth of Christ in the slightest. The truth is not determined by what people may or may not do, but according to what the Lord has revealed to be true in His Word, the Bible. It will stand even if all who profess to be Christians fall flat.

Why the Church is Persecuted

The church today that is faithful to the Lord faces opposition and persecution because of its exclusive creed, that which is believed. The faith of the Christian is in the "*only begotten Son of God.*" His will is the standard, and that will is revealed in the inerrant, infallible, inspired, authoritative, and all-sufficient Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It is that will by which we shall be judged (John 12:48), and there is no allowance for diversion from it (Galatians 1:6-9).

This contention is offensive to those who subscribe to disciplines, manuals, prayer books, catechisms, confessionals, councils, popes, conferences, conventions, feelings, etc. This offends those who want to also

embrace the books of Mormonism, the Koran, Watchtower, and other so-called "latter-day-revelations" composed and compiled by uninspired human beings and contain messages contradictory to the Bible. The plea for the Bible as the sole authority offends those who claim a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, who wish to be governed by their subjective and emotional feelings, or other standards of men. There is no love in the hearts of those who want additional authorities for the contention that there is the one authority, the Bible.

The Bible claims to be the Word of God, and forbids anything other than the Word of God. If it is the Word of God, this excludes all other measures and standards men promote. If it is not the Word of God, it propagates lies and is not deserving of being followed at all.

The Plea For Unity

The Lord's church that is faithful to the truth opposes sectarianism, partyism, denominationalism, heathenism, hobbyism, humanism, etc. that is so dominant in the religious world. The Lord's church pleads for unity based on the truth of the Scriptures, upholding one body (Ephesians 4:4,5), preaching there is one fold and one shepherd (John 10:16), which demands we follow the same rule (First Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27).

While the Lord's church preaches that the gospel is for all, it also preaches that all can be saved but only on the same terms. Mankind is not allowed to choose whatever he wishes with equal benefit. Biblical teaching and the demand that mankind observe Biblical authority is too narrow for many, especially those who want to include what God has excluded, and those who defend division, sectarianism, denominationalism, and the new craze, "unity in diversity." Some have falsely preached that there are Christians in all the denominations. How can that be when most denominations do not ever teach God's plan of salvation? It is not sectarian to stand for one church, the one plan of salvation, the sole authority of the Bible, and other distinctive points of truth the church is obligated to uphold. Some, evidently becoming weary of standing for the truth, being desirous of being

more acceptable to the nations round about that do not follow the truth, and have decided to let down the truth and its claims in order to leave the lines that God has drawn in a mushy, fuzzy, unclear haze.

If one is determined to stand for what the Scriptures teach, he becomes the target of the divided, chaotic, confused religious world even those in the church who have compromised and weakened before that persecution. Nothing brings people in religion together like the banding together to defend the ways of men against the way of God. Too many are like the Jewish sects of the first century who had a zeal, but not according to knowledge, intent on their own way in preference to God's way (Romans 10:1-3). How they could battle each other, but get together to battle Christ!

We Must Continue

The church that is faithful to God will continue to uphold the gospel even as it contradicts and violates the theological theories, philosophies, worldly practices, and sinful manners of the twisted religious world and the anti-God people around us. It is a noteworthy comment that was written many years ago by an older gospel preacher named Benjamin Franklin, recorded in the book, The Gospel Preacher, Volume 2, page 291.

"The Church of the living God does not stand on a succession of popes, clergy, ordinances, officers of churches; but on the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of the prophets; the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, above all, through all and in all; one Lord Jesus the Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Deity substantially; the resurrection and the life; Head over all things to the Church, and blessed forever and ever; one Eternal Spirit; the Spirit of all truth and all revelation; one book, the Bible; one gospel, the gospel of Christ and the teaching of Christ and the apostles; in one word, on having everything the first Church had, being everything it was, and hoping for all that was promised to it. If it believes the same the first Church did, practices the same, and hopes for the same, and believes it; has the same commands and obeys them; has the same promises and hope for them, it has the same

faith, and obedience and hope; if it has precisely the same book, and follows it, unquestionably, it is the same Church" (Emphasis, BF).

This is offensive to those who want and seek something other than this. Various measures are used to suppress the efforts to proclaim the everlasting truth. Often, without fair inquiry, but from prejudice and self-will, there is opposition, rejection, dismissal, persecution, and humiliation directed toward one and all who hold these truths to be without Biblical refutation.

Paul once asked his brethren of Galatia, "*Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*" If Jesus asked that question, the answer would be a resounding, YES. If the early church asked that question, the answer would be, YES. If the present faithful in the church asks that question, again, the answer is, YES. Men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19-21). Those who follow the light will suffer because of it. Second Timothy 3:12, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*"

Nonetheless our hope is stayed in Christ. He said, "*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs in the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*" (Matthew 5:10-12). Paul wrote, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" (Romans 8:18).

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Makes you wonder: Why do some, who once were faithful to God but now adopt the new liberalism, act as if they are ashamed of the identification the Holy Spirit gave the Lord's church, "*churches of Christ*?" (Romans 16:16). Why be ashamed of anything Deity has said? JB

Was Peter the First Pope?

Most Bible students already know the right answer to the title question, but all do not know the reasons for the right answer. Whenever there is a death of the reigning Catholic pope the news media will speak repeatedly of the event, and refer to the apostle Peter as the first pope. One commentator said at one death of a pope that the church was without a head until another pope was selected. The Catholic Church was without a head, but not the church of Christ, the church of which we read in the Bible. We stoutly dispute the idea that Peter was a pope at all, or that the Bible teaches anything about such an office. The Lord's church is never without its Head. But one's attitude toward the papacy ultimately depends on the extent of respect one has for the Scriptures.

The office of a pope does not exist by the authority of the Bible. Second Timothy 3:16,17 affirms the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, and it says nothing of such a position. Actually, the papacy exists as a result of the gradual evolution of apostasy beginning specifically with a falling away from the governmental arrangement of the church as taught in the Bible.

After much rivalry for years among those who already digressed from God's pattern and the development of certain "bishops," there emerged the boastful claim by John the Faster of Constantinople that he was universal bishop. Gregory the Great of Rome openly denounced such a claim as presumptuous, arrogant, and going far beyond the realm of acceptance by others. It is somewhat surprising that one who called himself the "bishop of Rome" would rebuke the use of such a title as the Universal Pope, but later his successor, Boniface of Rome, assumed the very title Gregory had denounced as sinful presumption. With military assistance of the Roman Emperor named Phocas, Boniface was able to make his claim stick where John the Faster was forced to back down. The year was 606 A.D., nearly six hundred

years after the Lord's church has been established on Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2). Who believes the church was without a head for six centuries?

Christ is Head

The Bible teaches that Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). The church does not have two heads, one on earth and one in heaven. If anyone ever asks you where the headquarters of the church of Christ is, tell them it is where the head is, and that is heaven. It is not Rome, Boston, London, Salt Lake City, Mecca, Abilene, or Nashville. The death of no man leaves the Lord's church without a head.

The titles that are assumed, not only by the pope but many clergymen of many religions, are in violation of the spirit and letter of the teaching of Christ. Matthew 23:8-10, "*But be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth, for one is your Father which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ.*" It seems that both Protestant and Catholic clergymen have either never read, or just pay no attention to, these explicit words from the Son of God They parade about wearing their specially designed titles to show themselves to be "somewhat."

Peter Disallowed Worship

Peter would not even allow himself to be worshipped, such as the time of his visit to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10: 24-26). What a contrast with that which the popes not only accept but require from their followers! This contrast is too glaring for honest people to ignore.

Foundation is Christ

The church was not built on Peter, as Romanists claim, but on Christ. Matthew 16:16-18 teaches that Christ is not only the builder of the church but the foundation of the church, and that foundation is the truth of the confession made by Peter and recorded in Matthew, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Christ is the Rock upon which the church was built, not Peter.

The word translated "*rock*" that refers to the foundation of the church is the word "petra," feminine gender, and means a mass of stone, a solid ledge of rock. The word translated "*Peter*" is the word "petros," a masculine word, and refers to a mere pebble that can be easily tossed. Rather than calling Peter the rock upon which the church was built, even though the word Peter means stone, Jesus is showing a tremendous contrast between Peter and the foundation of the church so that ought not be any confusion whatsoever as to the foundation of the church. Paul clears up any misconceptions anybody could have when he wrote First Corinthians 3:11, "*For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.*"

We do well to listen to the inspired words of Peter himself, First Peter 2:4-8, "*To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious. Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Christ Jesus. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but unto them which disbelieve, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner. And a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed.*" Peter knew who was the foundation of the church, the rock, upon which all else rests. Why cannot others also understand it as he did except they are wedded to their traditions of men more than the truth of God?

Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22 contain the very same statement to which Peter referred, but even more significantly, Jesus cited the same passage (Matthew 21:42), and made application of it to Himself. Jesus knew He was the Rock of the foundation and said so. Why do men have such trouble with this except they do not accept His word?

Prominence, but Not Primacy

Much is made by some of the prominence of Peter. No Bible student denies the prominence of Peter in the New Testament record and that he was an outstanding apostle. Nobody of right mind would demean that great man. But we dare not confuse his prominence with primacy. Peter called himself "*servant*" (First Peter 1:1), an "*elder*" like others (First Peter 5:1). The power granted unto him (Matthew 16:19) was also granted to all the other apostles (Matthew 18:18). All were given the power to forgive sins in the sense of proclaiming the conditions upon which God would forgive the sins of men. He never claimed the power of forgiveness to himself, but rather taught Simon to "*pray God*" to be forgiven (Acts 8:22). We wonder why Peter, if he served as pope as Catholics claim, he did not simply say, "I absolve thee?" We can illustrate the relationship of Peter and the other apostles to be much like that which abides with senators in the United States Senate (no offense to the apostles intended). Some are more prominent and influential than others. But they sustain equal rank and authority and none has but one vote, and none has the primacy over the others.

Peter Was Married

Peter was not qualified to be a pope according to the qualifications the Romanists have for a pope because Peter was married (First Corinthians 9:5). Matthew 8:14 says he had a mother-in-law. You do not have one unless you are married. Catholics claim Peter left his wife once he became pope, but we wonder what kind of apostle of Christ would he be if he violated God's law concerning marriage, putting asunder what God had joined together.

Can't Get Peter in Rome

The facts are that there is no Biblical evidence that Peter was ever in Rome. He evidently was not there when Paul wrote the letter to the Romans. Even though Paul addressed many brethren, sent greetings to many, is it not strange that he would not even say "hello" to the pope? It was not until the year 354 A.D. that it was styled that Peter was the "bishop of Rome." The entire idea rests on human doctrines and traditions, not history and Bible. Keep in mind that the Biblical form of

government is a plurality of elders or bishops having the oversight of one congregation, not one "bishop" governing many congregations.

Some have speculated that Babylon (First Peter 5:13) refers to Rome. But there is no reason to draw that conclusion except some are so desperate to get Peter to Rome even if they have to change cities.

Nobody Else Thought He Was Pope

The other apostles did not consider Peter to hold a superior rank and authority over them. Paul rebuked him to the face in Galatians 2:11-13. When he wanted to know the truth about circumcision he did not have to go ask Peter. At the meeting where circumcision was discussed in Jerusalem (Acts 15), the one who presided was James, not Peter. The summary and concluding remarks were by James, not Peter. None ever referred to Peter as pope nor indicated any recognition of primacy among them. The Holy Spirit was promised to all of them, not just Peter (John 14,15,16). The fact that his name is often listed first proves nothing because his name is not first in Galatians 2:9. Some say Christ told him, "*Feed my sheep.*" But this was the work of them all. Remember that Peter was the one reported to have denied Him three times. Little wonder he was charged three times with giving needed strength to the church. The same admonition was given to Paul and the elders. Matthew 20:25,26 records a time when two other apostles requested places of primacy and were denied. Jesus said it was not to be so among the apostles. How dare some come along later and say the Lord was wrong about it, and then make Peter top man!

Paul said he was not one whit behind the chiefest apostles (Second Corinthians 11:5; 12:11). That does not harmonize with one of them having primacy over the rest of them.

The Popes Are Unqualified

The qualifications for an apostle make it impossible that there could be successors to them. Apostles were to have been eye witnesses and ear witnesses of Christ

resurrected. They had the power of miracles. They were baptized in the Holy Spirit, even having power to lay hands on others and bestowing upon them the power to perform miracles. They were guided infallibly in the things they taught and revealed. These things are not possessed or possible by anyone living today. Those who claim to succeed apostles or be apostles today simply do not respect what Scripture teaches on the subject. This applies to any church, any man, anywhere, even the apostates in Nashville, Tennessee who claim to be apostles. They do not know the difference between apostles and apostates. They are the later.

What more need to be said to show that Peter was never a pope? The Bible knows nothing of such an office, and that alone is sufficient to disprove it is of God. Even if one could prove the office was authorized of God, he could never prove it was occupied by the apostle Peter. The whole papal system resulted from an apostasy from the truth, not adherence to it.

* * * * *

THE QUESTION GOES UNANSWERED

Now and again I receive an irate letter from those who oppose churches supporting orphan homes. They list a vast amount of irrelevant material and demand that you spend your time and energy answering them on a wide variety of differences. They act like, especially among some of the younger ones, that the subject is brand new and that these issues have never been discussed.

I am willing to accommodate them provided they answer me one thing. This I require they answer first before I waste a lot of time dealing with their objections. I ask them to show me how anybody, individual, church, anybody can provide for a homeless person without an institution other than a church. Of course, it takes a home, and the church is not designed to be a home. A home it absolutely essential.

They are so opposed to a home, or demand a certain kind of home, they never answer me on that. JWB

Why Make Up Lies About the Defenders of the KJV?



Some who attack defenders of the King James Version just lie, lie, lie. A West Tennessee church which has done a backflip sent out an article loaded with misrepresentations of those who defended the KJV. Who ever assumed denominations were caused by the KJV? Who ever said the KJV was never revised? Who ever said the KJV was always respected? Who ever denied false teachers quote the KJV? But you have to twist and wrest it to get false doctrines from it. These new things include error right in the text. If "baptize" is such an evil word, when do the modern guys quit using it? They use it in the same bulletins where they denounce it. Who ever said the whole world uses or should use the KJV? Show the difference in text that alters the doctrine of Christ? Why do these people erect "straw men," make false charges, and lie? Is that the way they do things? Honesty would improve their conduct! But don't expect it! JB

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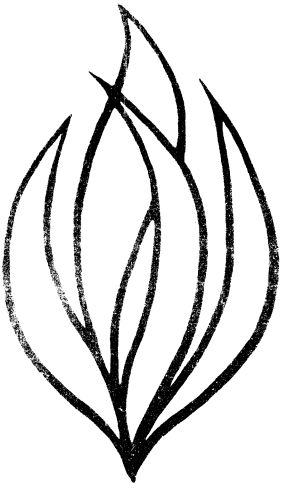

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XV Owen W. Reed NUMBER 4

The Church: Lost and Found

Jeremiah 6:16, "*Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.*"

This response to God's appeal expresses somewhat of a climax to numerous appeals by the prophet of God to the people of Judah who had departed from the ways of the Lord. That nation, like so many before it and many since then, are representative of man's apostasy and self-imposed alienation from his Creator.

Genesis three records the first mutiny and revolt against God. Even as man was expelled from the Garden of Eden we read of the first indication of God's intent to provide the way of redemption for mankind. Genesis 3:15 has properly been recognized as referring to the Christ that would come, the "*seed of woman*" that would bruise Satan, He being bruised Himself by Satan when He died at Calvary.

Genesis six, after the flood in the time of Noah that destroyed all living except the eight in the ark, tells of another of man's apostasies with the erection of the Tower of Babel. That structure, built to get for themselves a name, was to prevent the spread of mankind throughout the world in direct contradiction to the instructions of God. It was something man erected to bring upon himself certain glory. But God frustrated this evil plot with the confusion of their languages that prohibited the completion of their intent. It was another instance where man preferred to govern himself rather than submit to the Almighty.

After God gave the wonderful promises to Abraham and the coming into reality of that special nation called Israel, we read time and again how Israel marred its history by its backsliding from God. The prophets God sent would plead with the priests, princes, false

prophets, and the people, but to no avail. As Hosea wrote, Hosea 11:7, "*And my people are bent to backsliding from me.*" Conditions so deteriorated that God's chosen people were taken into Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. Many efforts were made to produce reforms, but the ones who needed to reform would not have it so.

The text says to stand (stop), ask (listen), and see (look), walk (go). Stop, look, listen, and then go. Seeing what is right, follow what is right. There are many ways to be wrong, but only one way to be right. Finding that way depends on seeking for it.

Man Versus God

The revolts and rebellions of Israel underscore how there is a difference between God and man, God's ways and man's wicked ways. Jeremiah 10:23, Proverbs 14:12, Isaiah 55:8,9 all warn and advise that people follow folly to pursue their own course rather than God's. The same sentiment is stressed in Paul's letter to the Galatians, chapter one, verses six through nine. A perverted gospel in not the gospel at all. One of the more effective ways to pervert the gospel is to add to it. One can contaminate a perfectly good loaf of bread by inserting a small portion of poison into it. Pollution of fresh water can be accomplished by adding foul ingredients. Jeremiah accused the false prophets, "*For ye have perverted the words of the living God.*" (Jeremiah 23:26). People still do this same thing by teaching their creeds, feelings, perverted modern versions of the Bible, catechisms, disciplines, manuals, etc. that men have invented for religious guides. God said in Jeremiah 23:34, "*I will punish that man and his house.*" As then, so today, the perversion of the Word of the Lord has figured prominently in the history of man, even in the history of the church.

Periods of Church History

Church history can be divided into at least five periods, starting from the beginning of it. Actually, more than five periods can be designated if you include the periods when the church existed in the mind of God before it was founded on Pentecost in Jerusalem, and when it existed

in promise, prophecy, and preparation. But our periods in this study will begin with the origin of the church and its perfection.

The church was designed as Deity determined. As God created mankind in perfection, so the church began in perfection. The New Testament reveals the church as God planned it to be, exactly as He wanted it, and came at the time He set for it to come. The church began under the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the apostles and other inspired men. The way the church was at the beginning is why we turn to that stage of its existence to learn what the church ought to be.

Departure

The second period is the period of departure. Just as man degenerated and departed from God's way through submitting to the temptations of the devil, so was it with the church. Gradually, slowly, step by step, men began to show their dissatisfaction with the church as God gave it, and made changes in its government, manner of worship, doctrine, mission, making accommodations and compromises with the ways of the world, imitating paganism, following human traditionalism, altering almost every facet of God's church into a perverted distortion. The very rule of faith, the Word of God, was set aside and other authorities instigated.

Apostasy

This led to the third period, the period of apostasy. The apostles had foretold this very tragic circumstance (First Timothy 4:1,2; Second Timothy 4:3; Second Thessalonians 2:3). As time proceeded there emerged a dominant religious power that came to be called Roman Catholicism. This was not the Lord's church, but an apostate church that had come into being as the result of men leaving God's way for their own. Man was subjected to that period of history known as the Dark Ages.

Reformation

The fourth period of religious history can be called the period of Reformation. It consists of a series of attempts

by many people to reform the existing apostate system from within. It was the effort of people who recognized the gross corruption of religion that was falsely called Christian and took note how far removed from God's plan it was.

Usually those who made these noble attempts were either suppressed or possibly annihilated. Entire groups of people were martyred. Notable names among the leaders of these efforts are Zwingli, Luther, Calvin, Knox, and many others. But their attempts of Reformation were only to produce a different kind of heresy. The dominance and assumed authority of the papacy were replaced by human creeds, disciplines, and divisions into denominations. The original ideas and goals to correct what was in error were proper as far as they were executed. These reformers tried to get back to the Bible, but were sidetracked by the doctrines of men that resulted in the clutter of churches of Protestantism.

Restoration

Eventually there came the period of Restoration. It is fair to say that compared to the periods of apostasy and Reformation the efforts of restoration have had little lasting impact on the religious world generally. Some have even rejected the efforts because they have lacked the "bigness" for which some religionists clamor. The idea of restoring New Testament Christianity is generally repudiated by those caught up in denominationalism. But it is the effort to go behind denominationalism and Roman apostasy, and go to the Bible with greater success than the Reformation. It was and is the determination to see the Lord's church as He intended it before men led it into apostasy. The movement is based on the thought of First Peter 4:11, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*"

Preachers from various religious backgrounds began to preach that men should believe what the first church believed, do as they did, practice what they practiced, organize as they were organized, worship as they worshipped, be as they were, calling themselves by the same name, and following the same standard, the Word of God. Such is the labor that faithful children of God

are undertaking even in our time. We are thankful to be a part of such an effort. It is a continuing process in that every generation must be taught everything.

There is the story of some who were caught up in the 1849 gold rush of California. One party was making its way westward but lacked water. With great hope they came upon a stream, but it was brackish, bitter, and unfit for drinking. One member of the party wandered upstream and found the spring from which the stream flowed. There he found pure and refreshing water before it became contaminated on its way downstream. He brought his companions to this thirst-quenching spring and they drank and were spared destruction. He had found the original source and its goodness as the water existed before the side streams poured in their pollution.

Back to the Original Fountain

This is an illustration of the scene of religion in the world. We need to go back to the fountain from which life flows. We must return to the perfect water of life and drink deeply of the Word of God. We cannot rely on the waters that have become soiled by the ways and doctrines of men. When we, or any people, will do this, we will find the Lord's church as the Lord gave it and revealed it. The intrusions of mankind into those realms reserved only for Deity caused the church to become "lost" in our world, even though the "*seed of the kingdom,*" the Word of God, was never lost. But the consumption of that which God has revealed to us in the Bible will cause the church to be "found" for ourselves and for those who follow after us. Should not such an effort strike a responsive cord in our hearts?

* * * * *

It is with deep regret that now and again we learn than some brethren who once walked with us in the work of restoring New Testament Christianity have decided to leave the cause of Christ and seek the friendship and fellowship of denomination. JB

Ways to Improve the Church

May we have clearly in the mind just what it is in this discussion we are trying to improve. The church has a divine side and a human side. The divine side is from God, of God, perfect in design and every other respect. No man or group of men can improve on anything on the divine side of the church whether we speak of its government, work, worship, message, terms of entrance or any such thing. So much for those who clamor for "change" in the church in these areas.

But the church is composed of human beings. To be sure it is a composition of a very special group of human beings because they are people who have been washed clean of their sins by the blood of Christ and stand acceptable before God as God's spiritual children. But they are still mere people, subject to temptation, with human frailties, weaknesses, shortcomings, and personality peculiarities, different talents, and all with the capacity of producing various kinds of trouble for themselves and others.

So when we speak of improving the church it should be obvious we are talking about improving the human element of which the church is composed. There really ought not be any question in the mind of anyone that there is always room for improvement even in the very best of members. Let us suggest a few ways we can improve ourselves, and bring glory to God.

Start With Self

We should begin with self. This is probably where we will have the greatest influence if we really apply ourselves to the task. Second Corinthians 13:5, "*Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith.*" Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*" Self-examination is an oft repeated admonition in the

Scriptures. As one has said, "A better world begins with me."

Tell yourself, since you are not perfect, that you would not really fit in a perfect church. If you were so fortunate to find that perfect congregation it would cease to be so the moment you became a member of it. This is not a put down, but simply a recognition of our own limitations. It is realism. We are the saved, but we are not sinlessly perfect (First John 1:8,10). We have been born again (John 3:3-5), but we are still growing as we are taught to grow (Second Peter 3:18). We are in Christ, and to be found faithful in Christ is our task (Revelation 2:10). While we accept the fact that we are not perfect, we should never lean on the reality of our imperfections to dismiss the necessity of being rebuked and chastened when we go astray. We cannot dismiss our sins on the basis, "Well, I am only human." While we are only human, this is all the more reason for us to constantly be trying to improve.

Criticism and Prayer

We may be able to improve the church by being more careful about our criticisms. Some never seem to have much good to say about the church, but are loaded with criticisms.

When we are tempted to criticize we should accompany that criticism with prayer. We may not always be able to change others, but if we accompany our discovery of faults in others with prayer we shall improve ourselves. Criticisms are often just and deserving. They are even helpful especially when properly given and properly received. Sometimes they are unjust. They can even become backbiting (Second Corinthians 12:20). It is not hard to find fault in others. We are taught to ever be alert regarding false doctrines that may arise even from among brethren. We should be willing to examine criticism against ourselves regardless of what motive may have prompted it because it just may well be that somebody sees something in us that needs to be corrected and improved that we have not seen in ourselves. But genuine love will provoke prayer even when we must take issue over various matters. We should never be so

blinded as to think all criticism is bad. But let us be sure our motives are pure and our criticisms are helpful.

Find the Best

We can make improvements in the church by emphasizing the best rather than just concentrating on the worldly and worst brethren. This is not to say that we should ignore or pretend that evil does not arise among us. We should ever be ready to deal with it and rid the church of it. But there are many good faithful brethren. We can accent the dedicated brethren, those who are sincere, working, developing a spiritual mind more and more. Hypocrisy is certainly in the church and none who keep aware of reality would deny it. The hypocrite is a servant of the devil and a powerful weapon in his arsenal. He is a pretender and feigns piety. But every sin that is committed by brethren is not because of hypocrisy or due to their intent to deceive and pretend to be what they are not. Probably more often the sins of brethren are due to ignorance, weakness, and not having yet developed the spiritual strength that others may have already developed.

The devil likes to point out the weaker brethren and never calls attention to the strong and faithful Christians. He likes to present the church to the world only in terms of those who are not what they ought to be. This is not an honest presentation of the kind and quality of people that compose the church, however. Paul took note of faithful brethren (Romans 1:8; First Thessalonians 1:3). In the letters from the Lord to the churches of Asia, while he called attention to those who needed to make tremendous corrections, He also took note of the faithful, even the faithful few. Remember, even the Lord had a Judas. But He also had a John, James, Peter, and Paul. We do well to keep such people in the foreground of our thoughts as we consider the Lord's church.

Personal Responsibility

We make improvement when we do not blame others for our own faults. While we have influence on one another,

and often the influence may not be the best, our ultimate faithfulness is not dependent on others.

We read in Scripture how Adam tried to blame Eve for his sin. Eve tried to blame the devil. King Saul tried to blame the people. Aaron said the people were at fault for making the golden calf. Blaming others for our own faults has been characteristic of the human family. But facing our personal accountability and responsibility is a sign of reaching a higher level of maturity. We shall each give answer for ourselves (Second Corinthians 5:10). Others may provoke us, but this is still no excuse for our wrongs. We are not to return evil treatment for evil treatment (Romans 12:17-21). We have our own Christian duties regardless of what others may or may not do (Galatians 6:9; First Corinthians 15:58).

Being Involved

One way to improve the church, as we consider self, is when we consider some worthy work that is being neglected, and instead of asking why somebody does not do something, get busy doing it. Good works are often neglected. But too few ever seriously consider that they have just as much responsibility to see that a good work is done as their neighbor. We should not feel we have to wait until we are asked or assigned some work before we can be busy. Some seem to think everything must be highly organized before they can do anything. Surely, work done in the name of the church ought have the approval of those who have the oversight. But there are so many personal and individual responsibilities we can discharge if we would only set ourselves to the task. We do not have to wait for anybody to get at it. Self-initiative is a wonderful characteristic and many, fortunately, exhibit this trait. While the harvest is great, the laborers are few (Luke 10:2). We should make ourselves be among the laborers. Some of the most productive Christian work that has ever been done has been done quietly and consistently by individual Christians who go about their life as faithful Christians, without notoriety or fanfare, but who accomplish so much good because they engage in it, like the ant, without somebody having to push and shove them into action (Proverbs 6:6-8). We need to be more as was Alvin

York, hero of World War I, when asked why he did what he did. He responded, "I seen my duty and done it." We should look for and see our duty and do it. This would result in improvement of the church.

Attitude and Action Toward Others

We can be considerate and respectful toward others, seeking opportunities to do something beneficial for somebody else, especially those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). Have you really seriously studied that passage we sometimes call the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12)? The faithful practice of this principle would produce a rich, warm, loving, and brotherly fellowship that would be more akin to the heaven for which we long. Colossians 2:12 speaks of brethren being "*knit together in love.*" Romans 12:10, "*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another.*" Ephesians 2:21 says we are to be fitly framed together. We need the good influence of each other and should seek the good companionship from brethren (First Corinthians 15:33). While we must stand for the truth, let us try to keep in mind the feelings of others and be as considerate as we can be, toward the young as well as those who are older. We are, after all, of the same spiritual family, brothers and sisters in the Lord (John 13:35). Who could question the fact that the church would be better, the human side improved, if each Christian was more attentive to the welfare of all of God's children!

Seek Solutions

One additional reminder we mention is to recall that every church has certain problems. This has always been the case and as long as time remains will always be the case because each church is composed of people, imperfect people. Because there are problems is no reflection on the divine side of the church. As stated, that part of the church remains perfect, and is not subject to change. Every age, however, faces challenges. We are no different in that respect. We must learn to distinguish between truth and error, faith and opinion, sins and personality peculiarities. We must resist the pressures from the world and stand together as one

against that which seeks to destroy us all. We can and should uphold each other as each one upholds the truth.

While churches have problems we can try to be a part of the solution and not part of the problem. Problems cannot defeat us if we resist them, but we can defeat ourselves by letting problems get the best of us. With the help of God, and by faithfully following His lead as given in His all-sufficient Word, we can make the spiritual progress and improvement He expects of us. We can stand firm for the truth without wavering, and be loving at the same time. We can meet each day with hope, assurance, expectation, and enter every noble and righteous task with the determination and resolve we have. In so doing, who can doubt but we will be making improvement in the church!

* * * * *

Mormonism

First John 4:1, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*"

Among the religions of the world that must be tried is that called Mormonism, or the Church of Latter Day Saints. We need to know something of them because it is likely that we may encounter them from time to time since they are aggressive and active in winning converts by door-to-door personal work.

We do not impugn the motives, sincerity, nor honesty of all those people. But we do challenge the truthfulness of their claims and doctrines. While there are those who would consider any opposition to anything people do in religion to be a manifestation of hatred, this is not so. Some militantly oppose opposition. We examine Mormonism because the apostle John has directed that this be done. We recognize many good qualities of those called Mormons, such as their zeal, usually high moral

standards, and good works that they, like most religions, are active in performing.

We must consider the Book of Mormon and their attitude toward it. James Tolle has noted some quotations from their writings that tell us their attitude. "We consider the Bible, Book of Mormon, Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, and Sayings of Joseph, the Seer, our guide in faith and doctrine." Again, "In council with the twelve apostles, Joseph Smith said, 'I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book'."

Tolle observed, "It is claimed that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon from the original record on golden tablets through stones called Urim and Thummin, attended by the angel Moroni, and guided by divine power, and that, therefore, it is an infallible translation, free from all error: 'And we know that they (the golden plates) have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; therefore we know of a surety that the work is true. The translation of the characters appeared on the Urim and Thummin, sentence by sentence, and as soon as one was correctly translated the next appeared'."

Tolle wrote, "Orson Pratt, one of the Mormon apostles, has made the following pertinent observation: 'The nature of the Book of Mormon is such that, if true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it'."

Book of Mormon

"In the Book of Mormon, First Nephi 13:23-41, it is claimed that the book contains the covenants of the Lord, the plainness of the gospel as given by the apostles, the record of truth, and the plain and precious truths left out of the Scriptures. It is claimed to be a record in reduced form of a people called Nephites that was originally written 600 years before Christ. The Book of Mormon is claimed to have been written about 1,600 years ago by a man named Mormon and his son Moroni

adding to it and hiding it in 420 A.D. near Palmyra, New York. This would have been near 1,000 years before Columbus discovered the continent. The book was supposed to have been on engraved golden plates and found by Joseph Smith in the 1820's under the guidance of an angel named Moroni, and perfectly translated by Smith from a language he called Reformed Egyptian."

The book is supposed to be the history of those in America from the time of the Tower of Babel (after Noah's flood) until nearly 500 years after Christianity was established. Christ is said to have visited this continent after His ascension recorded in Scripture.

If the Book of Mormon is what is claimed for it there is one glaring and immediate inconsistency. How could there have been any "Christians," as Mormon call Christians, from 420 A.D. until the 1820's and the finding of the book? It was not available during all those years. Yet, it is supposed to be the "keystone of our religion," according to its founder.

Regarding the Bible

Please consider what these claims do to the Bible. While claiming the Bible to be the Word of God (Article 8 of their Articles of Faith), as far as has been correctly translated, they claim it is not correctly translated. But their objections are not simply based on what they call translational errors. James Bales records, "As Pratt put it: 'Indeed so much corruption in the old manuscript copies was calculated to throw a mist of darkness and uncertainty over the whole of them... All, therefore, is uncertainty as to the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Old Testament; they can be proved to be changed, added unto and corrupted in almost every text...'."

From other Mormon writings we read, "It is abundantly proved by various learned writers, that the Greek copies of the New Testament are awfully corrupted in almost every text... What shall we say then, concerning the Bible being a sufficient guide? Can we rely upon it in its present known corrupted state, as being a faithful record of God's Word? We all know that but a few of the inspired writings have descended to our times... What

few have come down to our day have been mutilated, changed, and corrupted in such a shameful manner that no two manuscripts agree... Add all this imperfection to the uncertainty of the translation and who, in his right mind, could for one moment suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide? Who knows that even one verse of the whole Bible has escaped pollution, so as to convey the same sense now that it did in the original? Who knows how many important doctrines and ordinances necessary to salvation may be buried in oblivion in some of the lost books."

It should not take a scholar to see that these statements are in direct contradiction to the Biblical claim of authority and all-sufficiency (Second Timothy 3:16,17), and the promise through Peter that the Word of God would endure (First Peter 1:24,25). As for words being lost that are necessary to salvation, if Mormons are right, then who could ever know the way of salvation? Jesus said, Matthew 24:35, "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*" Who do we believe, Christ or the Mormons?

Ridicule of the Bible

Actually, the Book of Mormon ridicules the Bible. Second Nephi 29:3,6,10, "And because my words shall hiss forth - many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible... Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews?... Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written."

They believe one is a fool who relies on the Bible, seeing it is neither reliable nor accurate, but corrupted and polluted, insufficient and inadequate. Although they use the Bible as a "door opener," they do not believe it is what the Bible claims for itself but will believe what Joseph Smith claims for the Book of Mormon. The Bible claims inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, all-sufficiency, and authority (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We ask what sin does the Bible not condemn? What good

does not the Bible commend? What doctrine has been omitted that is necessary to salvation? Where is there any evidence that the Book of Mormon supplies what the Bible is supposed to have left out? All of this about the Book of Mormon is nothing more than Mormon propaganda and animosity toward the Bible.

Latter Day Revelation

Mormonism is based on the claim of continuous revelation from God. In this they are like Catholics, Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, Nazarenes, Quakers, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Protestants with all their many books. They all claim a direct guidance by the Holy Spirit for their extra-Biblical revelations, and all claim to perform miracles to prove they are right, and they all deny the other is right. Who does one believe? I deny them all their fallacious claims because the Bible teaches otherwise!

They blame religious division on the Bible. If the Bible is of God, this charges God with the cause of the very thing He condemns. God is not the author of confusion (First Corinthians 14:33). Division results from the creeds, manuals, catechisms, disciplines, prayer books, confessionals, and latter day revelations of human origins, including the books of Mormonism. Their Article 9 says of continuous revelation, "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." If that is true, then we really do not have truth, nor shall we ever have it, nor will th Mormons have it. Just remember, when one comes to your door, that you can advise him that what he is teaching you may not really be the truth because there may have been some latter day revelation since he checked with Salt Lake City headquarters that has overturned what he is saying.

Preeminent Prophet

So intent are Mormons for special and added revelation that they have said in the October, 1972 issue of Ensign, a monthly journal of their church in an article by Alma P. Burton, a quotation from Brigham Young stating that

'if the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Book of the Doctrine and Covenants were placed before him together,... those books do not convey the word of God direct to us now as do the words of a Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation."

Wilford Woodruff, a former president of Latter Day Saints, speaking of the same three books, "and they would scarcely be sufficient to guide us twenty-four hours. We have only an outline of our duties written; we are to be guided by the living oracles." Harold Lee, president of that church in 1972, said, "President Grant (president of the Mormon church, not the U.S. president, JWB) used to say to us...'Brethren, keep your eye on the President of this church. If he tells you to do anything and it is wrong and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it. But you don't need to worry, the Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead this people astray.'."

The Latter Day Saints are taught that God continues to speak to them through living prophets, so any contradiction between Mormonism and the Bible is almost automatically accepted as the result of latter revelation, with the correct instruction from the church president to be preferred to the written word, whether the Bible, or their own publications.

Book of Mormon Contradicts the Bible

Such teaching is not in harmony with such passages as Galatians 1:6-9 where Paul condemned anything different from what he had preached, and what the Galatian churches had received. They sure did not receive a message that was hidden until 420 A.D. It contradicts John 14:26, 16:13 where Christ promised the apostles they would be guided into all the truth. Peter was wrong when he claimed to have been given all things that pertain to life and godliness (Second Peter 1:3). Jude 3 teaches error when it teaches the faith has been once delivered to the saints. Paul could not have preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26,27) because all of it had not, and even ye has not, been revealed, according to Mormons. Which do you believe?

The contradictions of the Bible and Mormonism are so numerous we shall mention only a few to illustrate the falsity of Mormonism.

They say Christ came to America after His ascension, but the Bible says he took His throne and reigns in heaven and will until He comes again (Acts 2:33-35; First Corinthians 15:25,26). Mormons teach marriage extends beyond this life, even into heaven, but the Bible shows marriage is terminated at death (Romans 7:2; Matthew 22:30). Mormons teach baptism for the benefit of the dead who died unbaptized, but the Bible teaches each must obey for himself (Second Corinthians 5:10). When Paul asked, "*Why are they then baptized for the dead?*" (First Corinthians 15:29), he was proving the surety of the resurrection by showing how baptism was preparatory for the ultimate resurrection, not a case of one being baptized for another. Their claim of having apostles as successors to the Lord's apostles, as do many other religions, is shown to be impossible by the Bible because the qualifications for an apostles included being an eye witness to the resurrected Christ, taught by direct revelation, chosen by Christ personally, with power to perform miracles, and to give such power to others. None living today can meet such qualifications.

Errors of the Book of Mormon

As for the perfect Book of Mormon and its infallibility, is it not strange that there have been several "official" revisions of the book in later editions?

The Bible says Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. The Book of Mormon says it was Jerusalem. That book also says the Nephites were called members of the church, Christian (Alma 46:13). But this was 600 years before Christ. Acts 11:26 reads, "*And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*" The Book of Mormon claims to be from 2,600 years old, yet many verses in it are exact copies of the King James Version of the Bible, even some of the same grammatical peculiarities of the KJV. Yet the KJV was translated 1,200 years after Moroni was supposed to have buried the golden plates.

The Mormon elders are mere school age boys whereas Biblical elders were older men, with families who were faithful to Christ. But you can cite all of this to Mormons and it does not matter. We hear much of brainwashing in our day. Mormons are classic examples of how effectively people can be saturated with what some want them to believe. If you question what they say they will try to talk you down by spouting their "testimony" about Joseph Smith being a prophet and the Book of Mormon from God. This is the only way they can sustain their views. Some are honest, but there is abundant evidence this is not true of all of them.

The Bible is All-Sufficient

The Scriptures teach there is no continuous revelation. Joseph Smith said all spiritual gifts (tongues, revelations, etc.) would never cease. The Bible says they would (First Corinthians 13:8). How long were they to continue? Verses 8-10 says until "*that which is perfect is come.*" This was not that "who" is perfect will come and not with reference to Christ, but that which is of neuter gender, some thing. The infant church was established, taught, and edified by the preaching of the Word embodied in inspired men, earthen vessels (Second Corinthians 4:7). This is as Christ had promised His apostles (John 14:26; 16:13). Now this saving truth is in the inspired Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). That which is perfect is the full, complete, perfect recorded will of God, "*the perfect law of liberty*" (James 1:25).

This same truth regarding the spiritual gifts is taught in Ephesians 4:11-13 where the special offices and gifts would be granted "*till we all come in the unity of the faith.*" This is not until we all believe alike, but until the full, unified body of truth was revealed and known. That faith has long since come (Jude 3). Therefore, there are no living apostles, no latter day prophets and prophesies, or special revelations since the completion of the New Testament. This Biblical teaching makes all claims of latter day revelation, regardless of the religion, false claims. Just remember to mention to the Mormon "elder" who may visit you that if continuous revelation is true, they cannot even be sure that they are telling you the truth when they come to see you. It may

have changed for all they know. Many doctrines of Mormonism have changed through the years regarding marriage, church government, state of the Negro race, and many other matters we cannot include here.

Mormonism is a false religion, anti-Biblical, not founded on truth, but formed by men perpetuated through zeal, Biblical ignorance and disrespect. It is more of a cult than a church. When we do as John taught (First John 4:1), and try the Mormon faith, we can affirm confidently that there are indeed many false prophets gone out into the world, and Mormons are among them.

* * * * *

Laborers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16, "*For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth hour and ninth hour, and did likewise. Again about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman*

of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen."

This is one of the nearly fifty allegorical, figurative, and parabolic teachings recorded of Jesus. He often taught with parables in order to create understanding among those who desired the truth, but at the same time it would allow those whose minds were closed to remain in darkness.

A Parable

There have been various definitions of a parable. It is a comparison between familiar and physical facts and situations with spiritual truths. It is not a mere fable that is make-believe and essentially of the earth. But a parable looks heavenward. It is not a myth which can be a vehicle of truth, but not the truth itself. A parable speaks of what is realistic, actual, something that either has happened or could happen. It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Usually it contains one, possibly two major lessons. One of the mistakes and dangers regarding parables that we might make is to make more of the parable than what was intended by trying to assign some deep significance to every minute element of it. Inconsistencies and contradictions can be created by doing this. This parable teaches us regarding the kingdom, which is the church, and something about those in the church.

Major Comparisons

The major comparisons might be listed as the householder or Christ, the vineyard or His kingdom or church and the place of service to the Master, the laborers who are Christians called to His work, the marketplace as the world from which laborers are

called, and the reward which represents the blessings given through Christ, even life eternal.

The parable emphasizes the authority of Christ as the householder. He is the One who calls others into service. The vineyard is His and He determines the reward. There is none superior to Him.

The Lord desires workers in His vineyard and seeks people to serve Him. He calls them from the sinful idleness of the world by the message of the gospel and motivates them by offering a reward. The potential reward is one of the motives for serving God, along with the motive of escaping punishment. The highest motive of service is love. Christians serve by reaching the lost, caring for the needy, attending to the sick and aged, rearing their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, living moral lives, learning more and more of His way, and practicing that way in daily life, encouraging one another in love toward faithfulness and loyalty to Christ. Another essential in serving God is worshipping Him. All worship is service, but not all service is worship. There are specific acts of worship that God has revealed in the New Testament that we are to do according to His will.

Reward

There is a reward for the laborers. Matthew 5:11,12 says "*great is your reward in heaven.*" Paul wrote of the "*crown of righteousness*" which he and others would be given (Second Timothy 4:6-8). The "*crown of life*" is the theme of Revelation 2:10. But people must serve in the vineyard in order to receive the reward. The reward is not for those who remain outside. Nor will it be given to those who may have served in many good things but were never in the Lord's vineyard. The spiritual blessings that God gives are to be found "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3). One cannot labor in the devil's vineyard and expect to receive the Lord's reward. This is why our labor "*is not in vain in the Lord*" (First Corinthians 15:58).

Laborers Come at Different Times

Laborers were hired at different hours. This is analogous to people obeying the gospel at different times in life. Some come to Him in the days of youth, some in middle years, others toward the sunset of life. Reward is not necessarily determined according to the number of years spent in service but according to the spirit of service regardless of the years involved. Christ is certainly not teaching nor encouraging delay because one's soul is in danger of hell so long as he remains outside the vineyard. To deliberately delay would betray a wicked and unsubmissive spirit toward His service. As the song admonishes, "There is danger and death in delay." Such would be contrary to the plea that "*now*" is the day of salvation (Second Corinthians 6:2).

Degrees of Reward and Punishment

Nor does this nullify the impressions that there are degrees of reward and punishment as other passages indicate. We are taught how the day of judgment will be "*more tolerable*" for some than others. Some will receive "*many stripes*" and others will receive "*few stripes.*" We shall be rewarded and judged according to our individual works (Second Corinthians 5:10). Our works in life are different.

Neither is Jesus showing that it is proper for brethren to be jealous and envious of the rewards of others who may not have had to serve as long nor as hard. This is taking the parable beyond the lesson that is intended and emphasizing beyond propriety.

Redeem the Time

The parable is teaching that we must take advantage of the opportunity to serve at the earliest hour we can. Whenever that opportunity comes, we are to seize it. So long as there is opportunity it is not too late, even though there obviously comes the hour when there will be no more opportunity. The parable stresses that settlement and reward is at the end of service, not before. The reward is for those who labor, not for those who do not. Therefore, we must enter the service of the Master, enter into His vineyard, as soon as we have opportunity if we expect to receive His blessings.

Question Answered

The message of Jesus is an answer to the question of Matthew 19:27, "*Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?*" In verse sixteen the rich, young ruler had asked, "*Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*" Christ answered him, "*Keep the commandments.*" The ruler later went away sorrowful even though he had done that. He lacked one thing. He evidently put his commitment to his wealth before commitment to service to God. He was not willing to work in the vineyard, sacrificing whatever had to be sacrificed to labor for the Master. It was then that Jesus taught the difficulty of rich men entering the kingdom. It was not that it was impossible, but it was impossible without God. One who trusts in riches is not trusting in God. Anyone can be saved God's way, but none can be saved any other way. Too many who are rich allow their wealth to mean more to them than God's way.

Peter noted that the apostles had put Christ first, having forsaken all and followed Him. Then Peter asked, "*What shall we have therefore?*" The Lord's answer was that those who enter into the labor of the Lord's vineyard shall receive the Lord's reward. This was a comforting, reassuring, hopeful, and motivating promise.

First and Last

Please notice the phrase at the beginning (19:30) and at the close of the parable (20:16) regarding the first and last. This phrase is found three times in the New Testament with three senses. In Luke 13:30 it teaches that Gentiles as well as the Jews would be acceptable to God. Matthew 19:30 teaches that those who the world may consider first, possibly due to wealth and other measures, are not necessarily counted first with God. Matthew 20:16 teaches that those who enter the vineyard last, even late in life, shall be rewarded just as will those who entered His service early in life. But we must learn the main emphasis of the necessity of working in His vineyard and entering therein at the earliest opportunity.

How does one enter the vineyard? How does he answer the invitation to work? He is invited, called, by the gospel. He must respond favorably to that call by obeying the commands of the gospel, including faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism in water into Christ for the remission of sins. Having answered the call, he labors until the end of the day and then he shall receive the Lord's reward. Have you entered the vineyard? Are you laboring faithfully?

* * * * *

ONLY BY EXAMPLE?

There are those who contend that the authority of elders is limited to leading only by example. Some do this because they do not want to submit to the elder's decision to disallow certain modern perversions of the Bible that some of these products of our digressive schools advocate.

First Timothy three teaches the qualifications of men who are to serve as elders or bishops. Among them, "*One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God)?*" Ruling his own house is demonstrative of his ability to take care of the church of God. Are we to think and be so foolish as to declare that fathers in the home can only lead by example? Has he no authority to direct, even command and insist upon certain things?

Indeed, we know the father has authority. In the Old Testament, Genesis 18:19, it is said of Abraham, "*For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him.*" Deuteronomy 32:46 we read how parents were taught to comand their children. Are those who give commands void of authority? Certainly not!

The home is one proving ground for one who may be called upon to take the work of an elder and assume leadership in a congregation. Leadership gives him authority to do the work God has assigned he do. JWB

Love is Not Enough

The Last Word

This idea that love covers all things is a misnomer We insist that even in marriage that is acceptable to God, love by itself is not powerful enough to maintain the relationship God wants.

Love is defined as "seeking the other's highest good." That is certainly a binding and sealing force in any relationship. But marriage commands something extra.

That extra is commitment to one another, to an ideal, a standard as given by God, to a vow and promise before God and man. Regardless of what becomes of one's attitude toward their mate, and there are factors that can mar and damage the love that ought exist, the marriage will be sustained because of the commitment made. By the determination to live up to what has been promised, one will make the home solid and secure. Not until one can commit himself to the divine principles of marriage as well as to another ought marriage be considered. JWB

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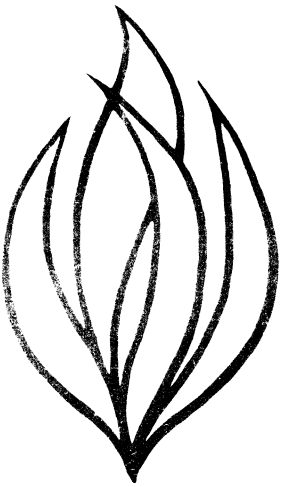

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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The Empty Seat

Hebrews 10:23-27, "*Let us hold the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.*"

Let us also look at another text from the Old Testament, and first consider the background of it. David was already in the service of Saul, the first king of Israel. He was already recognized as a national hero and the people sang his praises. Saul was very jealous of David and had previously tried to slay him.

The time of the new moon approached. It was a significant time for the Jews as it marked the beginning of the month. It was celebrated with a feast, ceremonies, and sacrifices. Saul was to prepare a feast and David and many others were expected to be present. It was David's duty to be there because he was now an official of Saul's kingdom. Because of Saul's enmity toward him, David asked permission of Jonathan, Saul's son and heir apparent, to be dismissed from the feast, and permission was granted. But we read in First Samuel 20:18, Jonathan said, "*Tomorrow is the new moon; and thou shalt be missed because thy seat will be empty.*"

The Problem

We wish to consider the problem of the empty seat with regard to the assembly of brethren. The Lord's church suffers seriously because so many allow their seat to be empty at the worship periods. There are some parallels between the case of some today and that of David.

At the time that David belonged in his seat he planned to be elsewhere. He would be missed. Habitual and

deliberate absenteeism from the assembly is not accidental. It is more often than not because we plan to be absent, either doing other things or allowing them to interfere and permitting them to push aside our sacred duty to worship God. We mistakenly sometimes refer to an absence being due to a providential hindrance. Actually, this is a misnomer. Providence is the operation of God. God does not command something of us and then erect barriers that prevent us from doing what He has commanded. There may be times and circumstances that may arise over which we do not have control that may make attendance impossible, such as illness, caring for the sick, or other unplanned and unexpected interferences. But we ought not lay the blame for our absence on a work of God when it is our own doing. More often it is because we plan to be absent.

Others Notice

There are those who will take note of our absence just as Jonathan told David some would notice that his seat was empty. Those who are enemies of the church will notice when we are absent. Saul was David's enemy and Saul noted his absence (verse 27). People who know that we profess to be Christians and who know the obligation of the Christian to worship God on the first day of the week will see us when we fail to discharge that duty and privilege. While Saul got angry that David was absent, we can be sure that Satan and those who serve him will not be angry to see that we have failed. It gives them the opportunity to say, "See how little his faith really means to him." No wonder so many in the world are not impressed with the Lord's church. So many who claim to make up the church do not discharge their duty to faithfulness in worship. They not only neglect to do what they ought, but they defy a divine command and disobey God.

Christian brethren will miss you. Jonathan missed David because he loved David and wanted him present. When brethren assemble, regardless of the hour, they miss those who have chosen not to attend. They are trying to be faithful, but they are discouraged and disappointed that one of their brethren care so little for them or for God. Seldom is there an assembly when the

absentees are not mentioned in prayer, not self-righteously, but out of concern for the soul of the ones who see fit to ignore their duty.

God misses you when you are absent. God knows not only that you are absent, but He knows the **REAL** reason why. Nothing escapes His awareness (Hebrews 4:13). The excuses that people often use to justify in their own mind why they refused to worship do not carry weight with God. He knows why we stay away and how we could have been present if we had just cared enough to be present. He knows how we make our plans without proper regard for our duty as a child of God. While one might deceive himself, and even some of the brethren, we cannot deceive God when we are absent. Transgression of God's will does not go unnoticed and God holds us accountable.

Why We Meet

When we assemble, it is to worship God. We are not merely "going to church" like we were attending some club meeting. It is without explanation how some professed Christians can take disobedience to a divine command so lightly, as if it were nothing important. We are to meet around the Lord's Table at His call. When an invitation from anybody is refused, common courtesy demands a better response than to simply ignore it. We would not treat dignitaries of this world with the same discourtesy that some evidently have toward the Lord .

Absenteeism deprives us of something vital to spiritual growth and development, which itself is commanded (Second Peter 3:18). We cannot and will not grow without spiritual food, which is the Word of God (First Peter 2:2). We are expected to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise (Hebrew 13:15). Deliberate absenteeism from partaking of the Lord's Supper is tantamount to a refusal to proclaim the Lord's death 'till He comes again (First Corinthians 11:23-29). Love for God will motivate us to always be present whenever physically possible.

Worship is a period of communion and fellowship with God and the brethren. It is the performance of a sacred and divinely commanded duty. It is the proper

stewardship of influence, time, and talents. All of these matters should concern those who really expect to go to heaven after this life ends. Dare we pass off so serious a matter with the trite excuses that generally characterize brethren? Can our love for God and the opportunity to worship be set aside so easily as if the whole operation were superficial, optional, and really does not matter? Is it not obvious that many evidently so consider the periods of worship?

Is Our Seat Really Empty?

When we are absent, in one sense our seat is empty. But in another sense it is really not empty at all. It is full of testimony to the spiritual neglect of which we are guilty. The seat stands before all as a source of discouragement, especially to those who care for our souls and who are trying so hard to do what God directs. Our empty seat is a monument to our spiritual immaturity and/or indifference. Our empty seat is a delight to the enemies of the Lord. How can one be at peace with himself knowing he is giving the forces of evil additional ammunition to war against the forces of God? In view of so much in this world that is stained with spiritual darkness, with the decline of morality, with the desecration of things sacred, with our young growing up in a society where God and His Son are cast aside for the paltry and wicked ways of a degenerate world, how can a Christian be indifferent to such things?

Yes, there is a problem of the empty seat in the Lord's church. Is it my seat that is creating this problem? Is it yours? Are we guilty of habitual, deliberate, frequent absence? Are we planning things that prevent our loyalty to duty? Those who are content with the empty seat in the assembly here and now may have to accept the fact that they will have no seat around the throne of God in heaven. Obedience to God is essential to salvation. Hebrews 10:25 cannot be dismissed and shunted as if it does not matter. Faithfulness in worship will never be considered a light and trivial matter to those who are truly faithful children of God.

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Analysis of Matthew 5: 31,32

If one who attempts to preach and teach takes his work and responsibility seriously, he will be sobered by such Bible teaching as James 3:1 and Matthew 15:14, "*My brethren, be not many masters* (teachers, JWB) *knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation... And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*" It must be the desire of every proclaimer, whether he proclaims verbally or through the printed page, to present truth and refute error. He must have the dual motive of upholding what is right and opposing what is wrong in order that souls might be saved. It requires both positive and negative preaching to preach the whole counsel of God. Such is surely critical on the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

There is so much error being taught on this theme. This tragedy is compounded, and possibly causes to some degree, the widespread practice of divorce in our nation, a nation that leads all others in the dissolution of what God has joined together. Adults and children are suffering inestimable damage because of the general disregard of God's laws on this subject. The moral climate of the nation has stooped to such a low level that immorality is commonplace and now even considered socially acceptable.

Admittedly, the subject is a controversial one. But let us understand something about controversial subjects. This does not mean that there is not an absolute right and wrong regarding it. It may mean that learning the truth may be more difficult than some other subjects. But it simply means there are some who accept God's truth about it and some who refuse to accept it and therefore there is controversy over it. We intend to present three lessons in this issue from three relevant passages that discuss this subject beginning with Matthew 5:31,32, then studying Matthew nineteen, and finally Romans seven and First Corinthians seven. Our appeal can only

be made to those who care about right and wrong. We are painfully aware that all do not care for the truth, and would not conform to it even if they learned it. Efforts to sidestep truth is one of the causes for so much error being taught and practiced regarding it.

The Text

Our text comes from the Sermon on the Mount, the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). It is the section where Christ was contrasting what people had heard with His own will. They had heard the law and many interpretations by the rabbis of the law, along with various perversions of the law. Christ did not make distinction between the Old Testament law and the perversions, not that they were the same, but simply used the formula, "*Ye have heard..., but I say unto.*" From this approach He discussed such subjects as murder, adultery, divorce, perjury, vengeance, benevolence, and other pertinent themes.

Matthew 5:31,31, "*It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*" This teaching is substantially repeated in Matthew nineteen but with a different emphasis. Chapter nineteen focuses on the husband and how he sins when he puts away a chaste wife and remarries. Chapter five focuses on the sin he provokes when he puts away his wife and then she marries again. Not only is the sin of putting away discussed, but also the sin involved when one marries a divorced person when the divorce was not because of fornication. In both instances Christ deals with those who marry, divorce, and remarry. The circumstances and conditions are of vital importance.

"*It has been said...*" refers to Deuteronomy 24:1,2. The rabbis disagreed as to the acceptable grounds for divorce. There were essentially two schools of thought. The Hillel school contended that most anything that displeased the husband was sufficient cause. They would fit well into today's society. This was a very liberal,

permissive, and indulgent view. The Shammai idea was that only unchastity, adultery, allowed putting away. Uncleanness, a matter of moral defilement and nakedness, would seem to eliminate divorce for mere trivial reasons. Such implied shameful and disgraceful behavior that was sexual in nature. The grounds were not that specifically stated, however, with definite limits.

The prophet Malachi (2:15,16) records the Lord's displeasure of divorce and putting away one's mate. Matthew nineteen shows how Jesus taught that divorce was never intended.

What Is Not Taught

This text under study does not teach that divorce was approved, but tolerated because of the hardness of heart (Matthew 19:8). Deuteronomy 24:1,2 does not teach approval of divorce, but is a command for a writing of divorcement in the event of a divorce. It called for a legal document. At no time do we read where God gave pleasurable sanction to divorce. It does not teach that God once approved it but has changed His mind.

"*But I say unto you...*" contrasts Christ's doctrine with the views they had heard from the law of Moses and the rabbis. It was more in substantial agreement with the Shammai school than the Hillel school, however. It allowed divorce in the event of fornication.

The One Cause

The very essence of marriage is "*one flesh,*" and union for life. Fornication is a fundamental breach of contract and vow. Christ does not demand divorce, but allows it under this circumstance. One is not compelled to continue to cohabit with a mate who is unfaithful in his or her vows to keep himself or herself only to the mate. A continued toleration of such sin by the offended mate could imply sanction of it.

But should a man put away his wife for any other cause and she remarries, she commits adultery, and so does the one she takes as her second mate. But the first

husband shares in the responsibility for provoking such a sin. She becomes an adulteress. The one marrying her becomes guilty of adultery. The disregard of the one cause that allows divorce causes all to be guilty of sin in different ways. Fornication is the only cause that we find in Scripture that allows divorce.

What Is Fornication?

What is fornication? How does it differ in meaning from adultery? Fornication is a broader and more inclusive term than adultery. It refers to any unlawful sexual intercourse without respect of one's marital status. It includes extra-marital and pre-marital sexual intercourse, whether it be heterosexual, homosexual, beastial or whatever. Adultery is also sexual sin and occurs when either or both of those involved are married, but not to each other. All adultery is fornication. But it has a more limited meaning than fornication. Adultery may be the most prominent form of fornication. The terms are often used interchangeable, however, with reference to illicit heterosexual behavior. The broader term, fornication, is the ground for divorce. Remarriage after a divorce on other grounds is forbidden and causes one to enter the state of adultery. Such a remarriage is prohibited by Scripture.

Living in Sin

Does a participant in a forbidden marriage "live" in adultery? Some argue that one cannot "live" in adultery because adultery is an act. Adultery is an act, but it is also a state or condition. Romans 6:1,2 teaches we can live in sin and sin is both an act and a state or spiritual condition. Colossians 3:5-7 records how some once lived in fornication. Adultery is one form of fornication. One can "live" in the state or condition of adultery.

It is argued that the second marriage is called a marriage and it is therefore acceptable. Hebrews 13:4 is cited to contend that everything called a marriage is approved of God. But Scripture uses such terms as prophets, apostles, gospel, Christs, as well as marriage, and just because the terms are used there is no implication that every time it refers to that which God approves. There are false

Christs, false prophets, perverted gospels, and false apostles. Nehemiah 13:23 tells how Jews were married to heathens, but this was not acceptable to God even though their relationships were called marriages. Ezra told them to "*put them away*" (Ezra 10:3) because such "marriages" were unacceptable to God.

Does It Apply Now, and To Whom?

Others have said the text is not applicable except to Christians and does not apply to those who may have been married, divorced, and remarried prior to becoming a Christian. But the truth is that God's law on the subject as given through Christ makes all amenable to it. The term "*whosoever*" is universal.

The phrase of Matthew 5:32, "*commit adultery,*" is present tense and means a continuing action or state. One continues in adultery as he remains in such a "marriage."

Some have even gone so far to justify the sins of people regarding marriage that they have defined adultery as the divorce, not a sexual cohabitation or mating. This is absurd. There is no definition of adultery that excludes sexual intercourse unless one speaks of spiritual adultery or unfaithfulness to God. Let a false teacher redefine words and he can teach anything, and does.

We even read of one denominationalist who contended that God has one specific man for one specific woman and if a man and woman marry and later learn that they were not intended for each other their relationship was an adulterous one and they should divorce and keep searching until they find the one God intended for them. There is no end to the ridiculous, blasphemous, and diabolical abuses people have heaped against God's law on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Matthew 5:32 demands that we accept the conclusion that Christ's will is the same as what God intended from the beginning. God disapproves of divorce and always has. There is only one ground for divorce regardless of what society or the civil powers might accept. Divorce is wrong. Divorce for other reasons and then remarriage

means those involved commit adultery. So long as they remain in that relationship they will keep on in the state of adultery. We shall see more in detail when we study Matthew 19:3-9.

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Matthew 19:3-9

The Scriptures teach the will of God concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. We must learn it whether we be old, young, married, unmarried, and especially if we are in a condition that will condemn us. The world generally has abandoned what the Lord teaches even though He is the originator and designer of marriage. Religion has so compromised with the world that it is seldom an effective element in combatting the increasing divorce rate and occurrence of adultery. Even some who profess to be members of the church of Christ have adopted false doctrines in place of the truth, accommodating the sinful condition into which some have placed themselves rather than standing firm and true to the Word of God. Domestic immorality in our nation threatens its very continuation as a blessed and free people. But who is listening?

False Positions

The Pharisees approached Jesus tempting Him with questions regarding marriage and divorce. False ideas had been taught then just as they are taught now. The word of God had been wrested and doctrines concocted to fit the sinful conditions of man rather than changing the conditions to conform to His will. Some of these false doctrines that are so blatantly contradictory to the very essence and tenor of marriage are still propagated today. For instance, some say that if one is in an unscriptural marriage, having divorced for reasons other than fornication and remarried anyway, thereby living in adultery, if one becomes a Christian he can continue in that adulterous relationship. The truth is that even though sins can be forgiven, whether it be

polygamy, homosexuality, adultery, there is the necessity of repentance that demands the cessation of the sinful conduct. One cannot continue in sin and be a faithful Christian (Romans 6:1,2).

There are others who have invented the doctrine that God's law regarding marriage and divorce only applies to Christians. Therefore, the doctrine contends, all marriages entered into before becoming a Christian do not count. They teach that nobody except a child of God is amenable to what Jesus taught even here in Matthew nineteen. They call it by the unscriptural term, a "covenant passage." What they refuse to admit is that God's law applies universally and this we shall document before this lesson is completed. When Christ taught on the subject He restated God's intent for marriage from the beginning and it was and is applicable to all.

Others say that in the event of divorce, even for fornication, the guilty party is as free to remarry as the other. The argument says that marriage broken for one is broken for both. That is true, but that does not answer the problem. All agree that the innocent has the right to remarry (although some might even war against this), but some fail to recognize that not only is the marriage bond broken, the law of God grants the innocent the right of divorce and remarriage, but God's law says nothing that condones the remarriage of the guilty. There simply is no authority to teach the guilty may remarry with God's approval. We strongly deny the right of the guilty to put away his mate and remarry. Such false doctrines often taught by those involved in bad situations, or who have relatives so involved, have caused many people to be deceived and to think their marriage is acceptable to God when in reality they are living in adultery.

Similarity

Matthew nineteen is similar in some respects to Matthew five which was discussed in the previous lesson. We encourage the reader to acquaint himself with the text of Matthew 19:3-9, and then return to our comments.

Verse three tells us that the Pharisees asked Jesus a question. This question reflects the practice of putting away one's mate for any cause, however trivial. It also reflects false doctrines taught then and now. Verses 4-6 is Christ's answer. He cites the original record as God intended. Marriage is for life and what God has joined should not be put asunder by man. God has not joined every union into which people may enter even if it is called a marriage. One must be marriageable before marriage can be approved by the Lord. Not all are marriageable because of previous conduct.

His answer also shows the law to be universally applicable, being given at the beginning of the race before there was Christianity. Notice the broad term, "*whosoever.*" That is all inclusive. God's marriage law is not a church ordinance or a sacrament. It is not just applicable to Christians. Regardless of what anybody has said or done prior to Christ, the will of Christ is that which has been from the beginning.

Second Question; Two Phrases

Verses seven and eight offer a second question. Take note that Deuteronomy 24:1,2, to which the questioners referred, did not command divorce, nor sanction divorce, nor approve divorce, but commanded a writing of divorcement, a document, in the event of divorce. Christ's response to their second question explains why divorces were allowed (not approved). It was the hardness of their hearts, their stubborn will, their rebellious attitude. He repeated that it was never God's intent for divorce to occur.

Verse nine is Christ's teaching, like that in Matthew five, in contrast to what they had heard in times past from whatever source. There are two phrases involved in the verse. (1) "*Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.*" (2) "*And whosoever marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*"

The first phrase is a statement of the general rule regarding divorce and remarriage. It is forbidden. There is one exception to this general rule. It is stated in what

is called an exceptive clause, which means the cause is the only cause for the exception. Only if there has been fornication can there be an allowed divorce.

The second phrase deals with those who marry a person who has been put away. There are two "whosoevers" in this verse. One, the one who puts away his mate on grounds other than fornication and remarries; two, the one who marries the put away one, regardless of the reason for having been put away. The put away one simply has no right to remarry. If they do the one they marry is guilty of adultery and both would be guilty.

Consider the meaning of the phrase "*committeth adultery.*" This meaning cannot be ignored and set aside without doing violence to what is taught. It is present tense, meaning a continuing action. Literally, one who puts away a mate on grounds other than fornication and remarries keeps on committing adultery. It matters not what society or civil law may accept. This is what God's Word teaches.

The passage teaches that all persons who shall put away their mate, except for the reason of fornication of the one being put away, and remarries, keeps on committing adultery. Those who put away a companion who has committed fornication has the right to put away that companion who has committed fornication and to remarry if they choose, provided the one they marry also has the right to marry. Persons guilty of fornication and are put away because of that are not granted the right to remarry and be pleasing to God. The right of putting away and remarrying belongs to the one who is innocent of fornication, not the guilty.

An Objection

But some complain, "If the wife is loosed from the husband, the husband is also loosed from the wife." Agreed! But that is not the question regarding the right of putting away and remarrying. Such is not merely determined by the matter of loosing. Both are still amenable to God's law on marriage. There is more involved than simply a man and woman, husband and

wife. God's law grants the innocent the right to put away and remarry, but no such right is granted the guilty.

Others complain, "That means many couples are living in adultery." This is the sad truth. But their state and relationship does not change the will of the Lord.

Is there no forgiveness for the fornicator? Yes, provided the conditions are met. If a fornicator is not a Christian he must obey the gospel to be forgiven. If one is a Christian but guilty of fornication he must be restored to be forgiven. But forgiveness does not grant permission for remarriage. Baptism will not make adultery a union holy before God. The put away one still has no right to remarry nor remain in an adulterous union.

Three Classes

There are three classes of people who have the right to marry. (1)Those who have never married. (2) Those who have been married but their mates have died. (3) Those who have married but divorced because their mate was guilty of fornication. In all three instances we are assuming that both parties to the marriage have the right of marriage. Both must fit into one of these three categories.

The innocent or offended mate, the one not guilty of fornication, may choose to forgive their fornicating mate and reestablish their relationship. He or she may not choose to exercise the option to divorce. God will forgive when and if conditions are met. Conditions require repentance. Repentance demands cessation from sin and leaving an adulterous union. Genuine repentance produces a reformed life. One cannot keep on stealing, lying, or committing adultery.

Any other approach to marriage nullifies the sanctity of marriage and renders the teaching of Jesus null and void. If the false doctrines being taught today were true, it would have been useless for Christ to have taught anything, but just let people do whatever they will. That is not the way of the Lord.

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Romans 7:1-7 and First Corinthians 7:10-16

The three lessons on the passages relating to marriage, divorce, and remarriage are so necessary, especially in light of the permissiveness in society, the moral laxity, and the lack of proper consideration for the sanctity of marriage that dominates the minds of so many people. God's law on this theme has been the same from the beginning until now. The basic factors of His will remain (1) marriage is for life, (2) divorce is allowed, but only for one cause which is fornication, (3) remarriage is permissible for those whose mates have died, or for those whose mates were put away because the mate was guilty of fornication. Remarriage under other circumstances is adultery (4) Only the one who is innocent of fornication in the event of divorce has the right to remarry. The guilty does not have such a right. (5) Those who enter into a marital union when either party is not marriageable enter unto an adulterous union.

Please read the text of Romans 7:1-7 and return to our comments. This study does not add to what has already been discussed, but will underscore certain points.

The Main Theme

Romans 7:1-7 does not have as its primary purpose the teaching of marriage. The theme of Romans deals in part with the relationship of the law of Moses to the law of Christ. Paul used marriage to illustrate this relationship. Like Ephesians five regarding Christ and the church, marriage is used to define and describe certain truths. Being used, however, enables us to understand certain truths regarding marriage.

Paul was speaking to those who were knowledgeable of God's law and what it allowed and required. Verses two

and three emphasize that marriage is for life. Remarriage is permissible upon the death of one of the mates. This does not negate the exception to the life long rule of marriage taught in Matthew five and nineteen. It simply states the general rule and original intent. Christ did include the one exception.

Marriage is for life. It is dissolved at death (Mark 12:26). Also see First Corinthians 7:29 on this point. Remarriage, however, while one's mate is alive constitutes adultery. There is nothing complicated about the passage. It simply does not include the exception as does the teaching of Jesus in Matthew. The passages do not contradict. One includes information the other does not take into consideration.

The application of Romans seven was that as one is bound to a mate as long as one lives, and is not bound upon death, nobody is now bound to the law of Moses because we are dead (separated) from that law. It has been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14) and taken out of the way (Hebrews 10:9; Matthew 5:17,18) because it has been fulfilled. Such is also the theme of Galatians and Hebrews. Christians are married to Christ and delivered from the old law (verses 6,7) which includes the Ten Commandments, the tenth of which is specifically noted. While it remains true that we are bound by nine of the ten commandments, the fourth being the exception, this is true because these nine are also included in the law of Christ and taught by the authority of Christ, and not because of the authority of Moses and the law that came through him.

The important point to learn here regarding marriage is that it is intended to last "until death do thee part." Remarriage prior to separation by death is adultery. But remember the Lord's one exception to this general rule.

Not Another Reason

First Corinthians 7:10-16 has been misused by some to claim that Paul taught a second reason for divorce in addition to fornication as taught by Christ. The "second reason" is said to be desertion. They call it the "Pauline privilege," contending that the deserted mate can

remarry even though fornication does not exist. But the chapter does not concern itself with divorce and remarriage at all. It does not give a second reason for divorce. It is concerned with the conduct of a Christian who is married to a non-Christian, and who faces a potential or already existing separation.

It should be obvious that it is not necessarily sinful in itself for a Christian to be married to a non-Christian. It is not an encouragement to such a relationship, but if it was sinful to be so married then Paul surely would have commanded the Christian to leave the marriage. This is also a death blow to those who contend God's marriage laws are applicable only to Christians. How could His law be applicable to the Christian and not the non-Christian? They were married in the sight of God and to each other and God recognized the legitimacy of that marriage. If that were not so their children would not be legitimate, but Paul says they were. Furthermore, the Christian is taught not to leave the non-Christian mate, but other passages teach the Christian to try to convert the mate. They are not to put away their mates if their mate is willing to continue to live with them as husband and wife.

But the loyalty of the Christian belongs first to Christ. If the non-Christian mate wishes to leave, the Christian is to let them leave rather than surrender loyalty to Christ. The chapter deals with the choice that is possibly imposed upon the Christian who is married to a non-Christian. Shall I follow Christ or leave Christ and follow my mate? The answer Paul gives is clear and plain. Christ must always be first with every Christian.

What Bondage?

Consider the phrase "*not under bondage,*" that some say means the Christian is no longer under the marriage bond. The word "*bondage*" is from the word "douloo," which means a bondslave, a servile condition. It is used one hundred thirty-four times in the New Testament and, unless this is the single exception, it never refers to the marriage bond. Marriage is not that kind of relationship anyway. The bondage which the Christian is not under is not the marriage bond.

Another word, "deo" is used forty-four times in the New Testament and refers to the marriage bond. It is used twice in this chapter to mean the marriage bond (verses 27,39). "Deo," not "douloo," refers to the marriage bond. Paul made a distinction and we must recognize it. When Paul told the Christian he or she is not under bondage he used the word "douloo." Therefore, he is not teaching that a deserted Christian is free to remarry and is free from the marriage bond. It means the Christian was never bound more to the mate than to Christ.

Is the deserted believer free to remarry? The answer is NO! Divorce and remarriage are not under consideration. These options are not open to the deserted Christian. The options open are to either be reconciled or else remain unmarried (verses 10,11). The Christian may not be able to prevent the separation, but that does not grant the Christian another reason for divorce. This is in protection of the sanctity of the institution of marriage.

Temporary Separation

We might add that inasmuch as God intends marriage to be for life, it should be evident that God does not sanction separation except it be with mutual consent and for a good cause. "*Let him depart*" does not necessarily mean an irreconcilable condition. It is not the same as a divorce. If separated, the Christian must remain unmarried or be reconciled, which would become impossible if remarriage was permitted.

The occasion for separation is not for a petty, trivial difference. While there is wisdom in a temporary separation to "clear the head" under some circumstances, such is not God's intent for marriage. But the major point we wish to stress here is that the passage, although misused at times to contend for error, does not permit divorce and remarriage with desertion as the grounds. There remains the one ground for divorce and that is fornication (Matthew five and nineteen).

The seriousness of these lessons cannot likely be over stressed. Those who live in adultery shall be lost eternally (Galatians 5:19; Colossians 3:5). Those who

would teach people that they can remain in an adulterous relationship should ask themselves if they think they can be saved while teaching people to remain in conditions that will cause the soul to be lost.

The early church disciplined those who were in adultery (First Corinthians 5). They sought to restore them through repentance, urging them to change their minds to the extent that they changed their lives. They were not taught, nor were brethren content to fellowship, those who remained in sin. Such discipline is essential lest the church become known as a haven for adulterers even as they continue in adultery. What influence can the church have toward sustaining the sanctity of the home and marriage if that which is taught undermines the very basic and fundamental elements of marriage as God gave it?

The home is a divine institution and the sexual morality of the nation is vital to its success. This depends upon our knowledge and respect for the law of God. If one contemplates marriage, be sure that both of you have the right attitude toward marriage, and both are marriageable according to "*thus saith the Lord.*" Otherwise, you enter into the dark despair of earthly sorrow and an eternity of hell.

We repeat the classes of those who may marry. (1) Those who have never married. (2) Those who have married but whose mate has died. (3) Those who have married, but have put away their mate because their mate was guilty of fornication. There is the way that is right and cannot be wrong. We would plead for all to respect God's law.

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NOTE: The three articles on marriage, divorce, and remarriage are not presented as the totality of comments that are needed and deserving, but to discuss the verses sufficiently to learn the will of God. Many questions and hypothetical situations can be raised that can be answered but only if we understand the basic principles first. We think these lessons present those principles. JWB

Hebrew Salvation

First Corinthians 10:1-12 is our text and the length of it is too extensive to include here. Please read it from your own Bible. It refers to a momentous Old Testament sequence of events. One major point we need to recognize is that even though Israel had been baptized unto Moses in the cloud and sea and delivered from Egyptian bondage, all of those from twenty years old and upward were not allowed to enter the land of Canaan because they acted wickedly. There were two exception, Joshua and Caleb.

The Message

This is an example to us and teaches us that even after our baptism into Christ and deliverance from our past sins we can fail to reach our goal of heaven if we act as they did. The salvation of Israel from Egypt is specifically said to be an example or ensample. Actually, this refers to the fact that their salvation is a type or symbol and our salvation serves as the antitype. Recalling from other lessons, we remember that a type is something in the past of former ages that shows in outline something in the future or later age. The antitype answers to the image of the type.

God sent Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt. Exodus 4:19,29-31, "*And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return to Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life... And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel, and Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people, and the people believed, and when they heard that the Lord had visited them they bowed their heads and worshipped.*"

By the things that Moses and Aaron did and the things which the people heard from them the people believed that God would deliver them from their bondage. Were they delivered at that point of their faith? The answer is obvious that they were not. Faith alone in what God

through His messengers had revealed was not sufficient to their deliverance. Salvation for the Hebrews was not at the moment they first believed. This becomes very important as we study our own salvation.

The Plagues

Exodus chapters seven through twelve tell us of the plagues that befell Egypt. Were they delivered simply because God's power was greater than that of the Egyptian gods? Were they delivered the moment the final plague was over? Indeed not! Exodus 13_20-22, "*And they took their journey from Succoth and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night; he took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.*" This records how the people had now turned their backs against Egypt, but they were not delivered from Egypt yet. In fact, we next read of how Pharoah pursued them and they were fully aware that they were not yet free. Exodus 14:10-12, "*And when Pharoah drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them, and they were sore afriad, and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt this with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.*" They knew their deliverance was not yet a reality.

The Instructions What to Do

Then Moses gave them the word of direction from God. Exodus 14:13, "*And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show you today, for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more forever.*" Even when this word of encouragement and direction was given them they were still not ye free from the hands of their captors and masters.

Moses and His Rod

Exodus 14:21-31 informs us what happened next. Moses was commanded to lift his rod over the Red Sea, the Lord parted the waters, Israel was commanded to march through the sea on dry land, the pillar of cloud going between them and the Egyptians until Israel was passed over. The Egyptians followed Israel into the gap and the Lord caused the walls of water to collapse and the enemy of Israel was destroyed. Chapter fifteen tells how the people praised God and rejoiced because now they were actually out of bondage. The Lord saved Israel that day (verse 30). What day did the Lord save Israel? It was the day when, as Paul described in First Corinthians ten, they were baptized in the cloud and the sea.

Not There Yet

Now that they were out of bondage and could properly be spoken of as enjoying salvation from their enemy, were they in the promised land that God offered just yet? Certainly not! Most of them would never get there because they acted wickedly as our text reveals. Even though they were saved from their former enslavement, they were not yet in the land that God had promised even in the days of Abraham. Their entrance into that land was dependent upon their making the journey after their baptism unto Moses. Those that were not faithful in that journey, even though delivered from Egypt, were not to receive the inheritance.

Like Our Salvation

Notice the fact of this being a type of our salvation. Israel was in bondage and God sent Moses with the word of deliverance. The people believed what Moses preached to them how God would deliver them. They were not saved yet simply upon their belief. They turned their backs on Egypt. But they were not saved yet and they realized it. They acknowledged God and were baptized in the cloud and sea, their enemy then being destroyed. They were saved that day from that bondage, but they were not in Canaan yet. Entrance into Canaan was dependent upon their faithfulness in journeying through the wilderness. Many fell by the way.

The picture of our salvation is not difficult to comprehend seeing how the salvation of the Hebrews is a type of our salvation. It is not a mere coincidence or accident that the two are alike. This was divinely designed. Paul says these things serve as an example or type to us. Consider the antitype.

The Bondage, Moses, and Christ

Their bondage was physical bondage in Egypt while ours is a spiritual bondage in sin. As God sent Moses to Israel to deliver them from Egypt, God sent His only begotten Son into the world to save man from sin (John 3:16; First Timothy 1:14). Christ brought the gospel (the good news of salvation) to mankind as Moses brought word of deliverance to Israel. The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). This is the reason the gospel must be preached (Mark 16:15,16). Romans 10:13-17 shows the necessity of the gospel. Salvation is the goal. But there is no salvation unless people call on the Lord. One cannot call until there is faith. One cannot believe until he hears. There can be no hearing until there is preaching. There can be no preaching without the preachers being sent. What is to be preached except the gospel? Without the gospel the chain that takes one from the state of being lost in sin to the blessedness of being saved simply does not exist!

Believe and Obey

The message must be heard and believed (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24). But one is not saved the moment he believes any more than the Hebrews were saved the moment they believed the message of Moses that God would save them from Egypt. Man must turn his back on sin in repentance (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30). But man is not saved the moment he turns any more than the Hebrews were delivered the moment they began their march toward the sea with Egypt at their back. Man must acknowledge, or confess, Christ (Romans 10:9,10). But man is not saved yet, just as the Hebrews were not saved at the moment they acknowledged God. Man must obey what the gospel commands him to do which is to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Just as Israel was baptized in the cloud and sea, and that was the day of

their salvation, so when man obeys in baptism, that is his day of salvation from past bondage. Just as Israel then had cause to rejoice once their baptism was accomplished, so man today has cause to rejoice once his baptism is accomplished (Acts 8:39; 16:34).

In Heaven Yet?

Is the baptized believer in heaven yet? Some would have you believe that once you are saved from your past sins that there is no way you can fail to reach heaven. Did all the Israelites reach Canaan? Certainly not! Nor is the baptized believer in heaven yet. Have his past sins been forgiven? Yes, they have. What must he now do, having been freed from his sins, and now looking to the promise to enter heaven? He must make the journey of life faithfully in Christ (Revelation 2:10) as Paul did (Second Timothy 4:6-8). It is most difficult to see how one can miss this simple and plain type-antitype relationship that God has provided us in Scripture.

Every example of conversion of which we read in the New Testament after the beginning of the kingdom, the church, on the first day of Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, follows the same pattern, and the pattern is like that of the Old Testament salvation of the Hebrews from Egypt.

The need of salvation from sin is evident. That God has sent us a Savior is also evident. Jesus Christ, His Son, is that Savior and Deliverer. He provided the way of salvation by being lifted up on the cross, from the tomb, and into heaven. He sends to mankind His invitation to come to Him and be blessed.

Man's part is that man, like Israel, must hear the good news of God's offer of salvation, learn the way of salvation that includes believing in Christ, repenting of sins, confessing faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ. Our plea is that we all will come to a knowledge of the God's plan and be content to go that way. There is no other offered us.

* * * * *

Medium Churches

The Last Word

One of the more pleasurable blessings we have as grandparents is to enjoy our grandchildren coming home with us and spending the night. They look so precious when they are sleeping. And they can come out with some of the most marvelous comments when they are not even aware of it.

Several months ago when three of them spent the night with us, the next morning Tyler was asked how he was feeling. He said, "About medium." When we asked him what that meant he said, "That's in the center between hot and cold." Immediately I thought of the church in Laodicea that the Lord considered "*lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot.*"

The Lord was displeased with such a church. It makes we wonder if He finds any churches today with this same spiritual blight. When He does, do you think He is less displeased? What about the church where you attend? Is it a "medium church?" JWB

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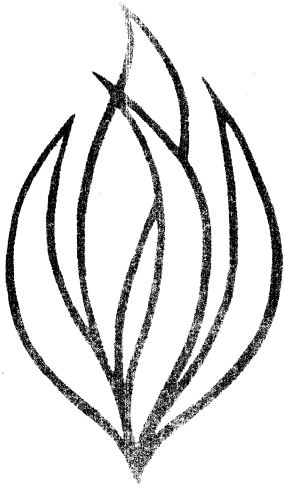

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XV *James W. Boyd* **NUMBER 6**

Faithful and True Sayings

Second Peter 3:18, "*But grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.*"

We shall study five passages of Scripture that will contribute to our spiritual growth in the knowledge of God's truth. These passages touch upon different subjects. Three come from First Timothy, one from Second Timothy, and the third from Titus. All three of these books are epistles from the apostle Paul to evangelists, Timothy or Titus. But the instructions given in these epistles include the teaching or doctrine that these evangelists were to teach to others. He said in First Timothy 4:11, "*These things command and teach.*" Second Timothy 2:14, "*Put them in remembrance...*" First Timothy 6:2, "*These things teach and exhort.*" Second Timothy 2:2, "*And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.*" Titus 2:1, "*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.*"

All five of the passages we shall consider are introduced or described either as a faithful or a true saying. This is not to say that other sayings are not true and faithful, but are so defined to emphasize the importance of them.

What does it mean for a saying to be faithful and true? It means when we hear it or read it we are hearing and reading that which is dependable, reliable, something on which we can count with assurance and confidence. It is stable, objective, permanent, unstained with any error or untruth and defilement. These are things to be assuredly believed. There is no room for doubting their veracity.

First Timothy 1:15

First Timothy 1:15, "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world*

to save sinners; of whom I am chief." This verse has to do with the mission of Christ.

Paul had been discussing his own life before and after entering the service of Christ. Formerly he had been a blasphemer, persecutor, and injurious. Now he was counted by the Lord for His service. The grace of God had been abundantly extended to him. This itself was consistent with the mission of Christ to this earth.

Christ came to save sinners. This is a basic and fundamental truth concerning the religion of Christ. Whatever else may be said of Him, this fact must be kept in the foreground. He came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). Inasmuch as all have sinned and all are under sin, all need salvation. Since man cannot save himself, he needs a Savior. Christ is that Savior. Paul declares that our Savior, Redeemer, Deliverer from sin is Christ, the Son of God. First John 3:5, "*And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him is no sin.*" First John 2:2, "*And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*"

First Timothy 3:1

First Timothy 3:1, "*This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*" This passage brings to mind the governmental arrangement of the Lord's kingdom, the church. Christ is the head, and the church is organized into independent local congregations that are overseen by qualified men called elders, bishops, shepherds, pastors, or presbyters. The church is served by deacons, with preachers and teachers, every member being a member of the body. There is no super ecclesiastical organization larger than the local church authorized in the New Testament.

The office of bishop is a work of delegated and limited, but important authority. It is an office in the sense that it is a distinctive work, and those who serve are charged with distinctive duties that demand the exercise of certain authority. We should emphasize that the work of an elder or eldership is more of a work than an honorary position and office. He, with his fellow

bishops, is to feed the flock the spiritual food they need. That food is the Word of God (Acts 20:28; First Peter 5:2). He must exercise the oversight of the flock, using his own judgment in matters of judgment and human opinion. He is charged with the watchcare of souls (Hebrews 13:15; First Timothy 3:5), convicting the gainsayers (Titus 1:9), and being and example to the flock (First Peter 5:3). This is called a good work, ordained of God, vital to the spiritual welfare of those in the church.

Those who so serve must do so willingly, with a pure motive, the desire to do the good this opportunity of service afford him (First Peter 5). The Scriptures exalt the work of elders. Men who are placed in this awesome work should pay attention to what they are supposed to do, being aggressive in fulfilling that work.

First Timothy 4:8,9

First Timothy 4:8,9, "*For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation.*" This passage is one that instructs us how to set our priorities in life. The body is the temple of God (First Corinthians 6:19,20; 3:16). It is wrong to abuse the body. This is the reason it is sinful to overeat, drink alcoholic beverages, use harmful drugs, smoke nicotine, and other practices that are so evidently destructive to the welfare of the body. We must care for the body (Ephesians 5:29).

In many quarters there is great emphasis today on caring for the body with advice concerning diet, exercise, rest, and many healthful habits. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a corresponding emphasis on the welfare of the spirit. People seem to be more concerned how they physically appear to others than how they spiritually appear before God. Paul is not condemning physical attentiveness and care for the body. But to attend to that and neglect the soul is to put first things second. Bodily exercise has a limited profit and is useful to physical vitality. But such is not nearly so important as godliness. The one may produce temporal benefits and results. But the other produces eternal blessings. This

faithful saying establishes what our priority in life should be. It is similar in that respect to First Peter 3:3,4, "*Whose adoring let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*"

While our society places such emphasis on the material, physical side of life, and constantly bombarding the public with the value of personal attractiveness and physical welfare, Paul is teaching the child of God not to be overly carried away in such things and not lose sight of that which is of greater value. When life ends, and it shall end, which will be of importance to us then?

There need not be an incompatible contest with caring for the body and caring for the soul. As mentioned, the body is the temple of God and caring for it does have spiritual connotations. We are aware that one's outward physical appearance can be a reflection of a heart of godliness (First Timothy 2:9,10). We dare not let lesser matters take priority over the more important ones.

Second Timothy 2:11-13

Second Timothy 2:11-13, "*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.*" Consider a companion thought in Galatians 2:20, "*I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not It, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*" Paul is saying that life is to be lived as Christ would want us to live it. Our lives are to be sacrificed to the service of Christ. We are said to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1,2). If we die with Him, we shall live. We are to give ourselves to Christlike living. This is the avenue to an abundant life here and a spiritual eternity with God.

When we become Christians we become dead to sin, which means we are separated from sin, being washed clean by His blood when we obey His command to be

clean by His blood when we obey His command to be baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4). The way to life is the way of death to sin The way to reigning is the way that may cause suffering. Denying Him means our own denial by Him of us. To fail to believe changes nothing as to who Christ is. But Christ will not deny Himself and join us in denying Himself. He remains faithful to the truth regarding Himself that He is the Son of God, the Savior God has provided for mankind.

Second Timothy 3:12, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" This is a hard saying. None like persecution. But following Christ will bring such upon us because the sinful world is hostile to Christ and those that love Him. But our hope abides in such promises as Romans 8:18, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.*"

While denying Christ produces our own denial, confessing Christ means He will confess us (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10). Even if we are not faithful to Him, He remains faithful to Himself, His Word, His promises, His warnings. Our own personal unfaithfulness and disbelief will only bring our personal condemnation. Faithfulness will be rewarded with the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Titus 3:8

Titus 3:8, "*This is a faithful saying, and these thing I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.*" Being a Christian demands doing good works. The passage is placing emphasis on a sacred Christian duty, that of service and good works. Titus 2:14 tells us that we are to be a kind of people who are zealous of good works. We are to do as Jesus did, and He went about doing good (Acts 10:38). Having become Christians, we are to be what we profess to have become.

Galatians 6:10, "*As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*" This is an admonition applicable to

both individual Christians and to churches inasmuch as it was written to the churches of Galatia. It stresses the importance of doing good to those who are in need.

In Matthew twenty-five when Jesus was picturing the judgment scene, in verses thirty-one through forty-six, He tells who shall be blessed and who shall be sent away. There will be a great separation of the two and their destinies far removed one from the other. But it is somewhat significant that this particular teaching shows that the distinction of the two groups, the ones on the left or right, was not made on the basis of the evil they had done, but on the good they either did or failed to do. This does not mean evil deeds shall not be taken into account. But in this particularly teaching evil deeds are not brought into the matter. Only those deeds of good works or the lack of them are under consideration.

It follows harmoniously with that teaching He gave so often that the greatest in His kingdom are those who serve. This is a teaching in which we can have confidence, and it should serve as a warning as well lest we be negligent of doing good works.

Each of the five passages contributes to our ability to focus on Christ and His will. With this expanded knowledge we should strive to live accordingly. These are divinely given teachings and exhortations necessary to be known and applied in the process of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior.

* * * * *

The Modern Dance and the Christian

There are those, both in and out of the church, that do not consider this to be an important subject. But we insist it is important because the Scriptures make it important. We are sorry that so many professed Christians have adopted the sinful ways of the world to

the extent that sound teaching regarding this subject is no longer welcomed by them and their dancing partners. First Corinthians 10:31 makes it important. "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*" It matters what a person does. It matters whether what he does brings glory to God or not. While we realize that questioning the practice of dancing is not the pathway to popularity in a depraved society, we could care less what is the path to popularity. We care more what is the path that God would have us walk.

Of What Do We Speak?

We are not concerned about dancing of the kind of which we read in Exodus 15:20, done by women alone, in the day of rejoicing over deliverance from bondage. We are not talking about the individual dance of David of Second Samuel 6:12-14 in his day of rejoicing over the ark of the covenant entering the city of Jerusalem. We are talking about dancing that is based on sexual appeal, sexual emotions, men with women, the modern dance of the gyrations of the body in sensual fashion, practiced in the ballrooms, discos, high school proms, television exposures, sensual bodily movements set to music, even exhibited at parties in homes of people, some of whom even call themselves Christians.

The most charitable, lenient, favorable thing that can be said for the modern dance is that it is highly questionable conduct for a Christian. The very fact than many ask, "Is there any harm in it?" is an admission that it is a doubtful practice. Romans 14:23 forbids doing that which cannot be done with good conscience. While there be many who care little what is right and wrong or what God teaches regarding this theme, and there are many others who have their consciences seared by their desires to imitate the world, possibly there are some who can be reached with the truth because they still have some question in their minds regarding its propriety for the child of God, even though some who have these doubts still dance.

This dancing is characteristic of those who are wicked and defiant toward God. Job 21:11-15, "*They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They*

take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore, they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" When we dance we leave this same impression on others about our attitude toward God.

Consider the Crowd

Sometimes a person can discover the way they are going by taking a good look at the crowd with whom they are traveling. Matthew 7:17-20, *"Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit... Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."* What is the fruit of the modern dance? Who will be honest enough and with open mind inquire fairly to answer this question? While likely the social butterflies and the aspirants of worldly acclaim probably will not honestly consider the question, hopefully, someone who reads and teaches the Word of God will bring it to the attention of both young and old.

What It Creates

The modern dance creates evil desires, desires that cannot be satisfied morally and legitimately outside of marriage. It creates lust and impure passions. It condones the unchaste handling of bodies of those of the opposite sex. It often is associated with immodest attire and certainly lascivious movements of the body. It is very often the prelude to overt sexual immorality, fornication, and adultery. It has been described as the initiation course and training for prostitution. It provokes jealousy, marital strife, and leads to divorce. How can anybody who says they are Christians fellowship such evil works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11)?

Worldliness

Worldliness refers to the sinfulness of this world. First Thessalonians 5:22 reads, *"Abstain from all appearance of evil."* First John 2:15 forbids the love of this world. Romans 12:1,2 teaches the Christian not to conform to

the ways of this world. James 1:27 warns against being stained and spotted with the world. Many who say they are Christians need to ask if these passages really have any meaning to them. How can a person who claims to be honest read such divine admonitions and ignore their applications? How can "Christian" young people and their parents read these things, even leaders of the church read them, and go ahead in condoning the modern dance? Have they no sensitivity to truth whatever?

Lasciviousness

Dancing is wrong because it is lascivious. Lasciviousness means that which provokes lewd emotions, actions, impure thoughts, that which has as its basic appeal the sexual impulse illicitly provoked and immorally satisfied. Galatians 5:19ff teaches lasciviousness is serious enough to keep one out of God's kingdom. Second Timothy 2:22 urges, "*Flee youthful lusts...*" How does one justify calling himself or herself a child of God having been taught these truths, but then engaging in the very thing that provokes lust and immorality? Titus 2:11,12 says that the Christian is to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world. Can one read these words from inspired pens and have no concern about doing the very things that defy these teachings? Evidently some can because this is what they do. But are they acceptable to God in it? There is no person alive or dead that can fit the modern dance into the characteristics that are to belong to Christians!

Dancing encourages immodesty in dress and manners. Those who make their living by dancing admit that the greater the modesty of the dancer the poorer the dancer. To be a good partner in the dance one must be as one surrendered to their partner. There must be a personal abandonment of restraint. The movements, positions, steps, entwining of the bodies, even the attire worn, is best when it is sexually suggestive. As one tosses himself or his partner about, the indecent exposure of the body is obvious to every onlooker and dancer. If such is not vulgar, please tell me what sort of movements and positions could be called vulgar! Does vulgar have any

meaning to the modern dancer? Revelling and lasciviousness are sins. Dancing is both of them.

The sex drive is one of the strongest drives in the human body, and strongest in youth, those most given to modern dancing. The sex drive is not evil of itself. God gave the human such desires and rightly understood and rightly used and satisfied they are holy, pure, and proper. God has also provided for the moral satisfaction of these drives in marriage, in the intimate relationship of husband and wife. The arousal and provocation of such emotions when they cannot be morally satisfied is sinful. How can a Christian simply harden his heart and close his eyes to these realities? How can parents and church leaders, even elders and preachers, be complacent in the face of such things in this conflict between the modern dance and the will of Christ? How can husbands and wives ignore this element of the dance and say they follow Christ?

Sin Set To Music

The liberties permitted on the dance floor would not be tolerated elsewhere. A man embracing and twisting around the body of his neighbor's wife would cause real problems, until it is set to music. Then somehow it becomes an acceptable sport. The entwining of the limbs, the bodily contact, the handling of the body but set to music is considered proper by some people. But you remove the music and it will cause a fight. The modern dance is the fine art of covering with music the indelicate, immodest, and indecent attitudes and postures between men and women. If these things did not exist in the dance, the dance would find no appeal.

Flee, Not Flirt, With Sin

Certainly dancing leads one into temptation. It is designed and intended to provoke temptation. Can a Christian sincerely pray not to be led into temptation and then attend the dance where the prime action is for that very purpose? Dancing ruins the Christian's influence as a Christian. It enhances his reputation as a hypocrite. It places a stumblingblock before others.

There is not the first righteous and pure thing that can be said for it.

While those who create and design the dances readily admit the sexual appeal of it, now and then you find some simple minded parent, or worldly minded youth, who denies it. Some offer the most lame excuses trying to make this sin acceptable. They call it recreation. They do not know the difference between recreation and dissipation of the body and spirit. One can find recreation that is not stained with impurities. Those who dance are not primarily interested in it because of recreation. They are lying and deceiving nobody, probably not even themselves.

Such Excuses

Some say it is better for the youth to be on the dance floor than in a parked car. Is this the only choice youths have? Some say it will be all right if chaperoned. How do you chaperone sin and make it righteous? Who chaperones after the dance is over and the emotions already aroused? Can you chaperone the mind of another? Such tripe is unworthy of intelligent people to offer as an excuse for what they want to do regardless of the will of God.

But now and then one hears somebody say that dancing does not affect them sexually. If it does not, then they are not getting from the dance what is intended by the dance. It may be true of the very young whose sexual sensitivities are not mature enough as yet, but who are pushed into the activity by peers or fool parents. With those who are older they are most likely lying, or they are not all male and female. Restrict dancing to all male with male partners or all female with female partners among those who are normal and see how successful is your party! It will be a flop, unless you are entertaining a group of perverts. Furthermore, even if you are not affected, can you be so sure your partner is not? Have we not responsibility toward others? With normal people such is simply not the case and the excuse not to be believed. The truth is that dancing provokes within people the very thing that some would deny, but

who are determined to continue practicing, God's will notwithstanding.

Woe To The Preacher

But let a gospel preacher preach God's truth on the subject, or let some true Christian oppose the modern dance and some wiggling creep will accuse him of being dirty minded. This is an accusation sometimes made by those of dishonest mind, who themselves care not for truth, but only their own appetites. But are we to believe that the most loyal, sacrificial, truly pious, righteous, Biblically informed, dedicated Christians are the only ones who are dirty minded people, while the dancer and his twisting partners are the pure ones, wholesome, and worthy of imitation? Who can believe such nonsense as produced by the defenders of sin, the modern dance?

I have even been told by leaders of the church that the modern dance is all right because there was dancing at the return of the prodigal son. Have such defenders of the dance no shame whatever?

Some Who Don't Defend The Dance

Such excuses on behalf of the dance are never made by professional dancers, nor the choreographers, or dance designers. They readily admit the truth of its basic nature and sexual appeal. They do not deny the charges against it. Many prostitutes readily admit they were led toward their way of life by the dance. They do not deny its appeal. Some rather approve of the charges against it because this shows they are being successful in what they intend to accomplish by the dance. Just listen to the songs, the lyrics, and observe the actions and see if you think this is the kind of conduct that brings glory to God! See if you honestly think this is what Jesus approves!

The worldly church member is the major defender of the dance against the accusation that it is sinful. Many church members are misguided, untaught, spiritually weak, hard headed, stubborn, and ambitious to be accepted by the world at all costs. Their passion for popularity has crowded out their professed loyalty to

Christ. The alien sinner is not fooled by the excuses offered by the "dancing Christians." Neither are faithful Christians fooled by it. Most important of all, God is not fooled either.

Christians Don't Dance

Christians should not participate in the dance, not attend the dance, have nothing to do with the promotion of the dance because dancing is sinful. The dancing foot is not attached to a praying knee. The two activities are incompatible in the same life.

We wonder what has happened to the leadership of the church which has evidently caved to the demands of the sinful members who dance. Where are the preachers, these weak, powder-puff cowards who are more insipid clergymen than gospel preachers? I'll tell you where they are. They are occupying many of the pulpits of churches that once stood for truth, but have become so permissive, liberal, arrogant, and conceited that truth is no longer their major. They prefer being paid their salaries, not for what they preach but for what they won't preach.

We appeal on the basis of the revealed will of God, the Bible, for brethren to once again refrain from such practices, and become the advocates of righteousness by opposing the modern dance, especially among us. Surely, example, influence, thought and action should mean more to the Christian than to allow himself or herself to be carried along by the world. If we really care for the truth, for our souls, and the souls of others, dancing will not be a part of our lives.

* * * * *

P.S.

We might add just this observation regarding preaching with respect to the modern dance. When I began preaching in 1952, I did not know one preacher who would even attempt to defend this evil practice. Now, it hard to find many who still stand for the truth regarding it. It is another indication of the liberal digression that has so diseased the church. JWB

Why Does The Gospel Not Save?

"*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*" (Romans 1:16,17).

At first, our subject may appear to question what Paul has affirmed in this passage just quoted. Paul tells us the gospel saves, and we are asking, "Why does the gospel not save?" But we are certainly not questioning Paul's statement.

Let us begin by looking at the spiritual condition of those in sin. Jesus said, "*Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.*" (John 8:34). Paul wrote in Romans 6:16-18, "*Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness.*" Again, Ephesians 2:1, Paul says that those in sin are "*dead*" in sins, spiritually separated from God. In Second Timothy 2:24-26 he talks about those held captive of the devil.

To understand the condition of the sinner is to see his helplessness, his need for salvation, his inability to save himself, and his need of a Savior. We cannot save ourselves by ourselves. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.*" (Ephesians 2:8,9). We are not saved by our own works of righteousness, but by the mercy of God (Titus 3:3-5). Nothing is more evident than man's need of a Savior.

The Savior

God has provided the Savior. "*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*" (First Timothy 1:15). Salvation is "*in Christ.*" (Second Timothy 2:10). Does God save by some kind of direct operation upon us? Or does God use some means and operate indirectly through that means to save us? This is an all-important question in learning how God saves man. If God uses a direct operation, there is no need for the gospel. If He saves directly without means then all would be saved because God is not willing that any should perish (Second Peter 3:9). But all are not saved nor will be saved. If God saves directly, and any person is lost, it would be God's failure to directly operate upon him.

But God saves through an indirect power and plan that includes the exercise of man's power of choice and volition. That power is the gospel. This plan respects the nature of man as God has created him. Paul tells us the gospel is the power of God to save, a power of evidence, persuasion, and conviction. We are saved by the gospel (First Corinthians 15:1-4).

The Gospel

The power of the gospel is found in what the gospel reveals. Just what does the gospel tell us? It reveals the "*righteousness of God,*" that is, God's plan for making man righteous or justified. "*All thy commandments are righteousness.*" (Psalm 119:172). In the gospel we find God's commandments that men are to obey whereby they come to the salvation God offers to give. The "*righteousness of God*" does not refer to a virtuous attribute of God, but to God's way of making man justified before God.

Theoretically, there are two ways man can be counted righteous. One, and this is an impossibility, man would be righteous if he was sinless. But we can rule that out. "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23). Two, he can be made righteous by the faith of Christ. " *Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference.*" (Romans 3:22). We can be saved by being forgiven of sins. "*Blessed are they*

whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (Romans 4:7,8).

One of the problems the Jews of the first century had, and that many today still have, is expressed in Romans 10:3. *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."* Men were determined to follow their own plan rather than God's plan, a plan of which they were ignorant. It is still the handicap of man now. They want to go to heaven, but they want to go their own way rather than the way God has revealed. But the gospel reveals that way.

Unrighteousness Revealed

The gospel also reveals the unrighteousness of man. Notice again verse eighteen. God's wrath is against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of man. Man's guilt of sin is firmly established. The very death of Christ declares the unrighteousness of man. *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a righteous man some would dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."* (Romans 5:6-9).

The gospel also reveals God's wrath against sin. In this same Roman letter Paul wrote of the *"day of wrath,"* (Romans 2:5), referring to the day of judgment. Romans 6:23 tells us the wages of sin is death, that is, spiritual separation from God.

What Else Is Needed?

Seeing how man sins, and cannot save himself, but needs a savior, and Christ is the only Savior, and the gospel reveals God's way of saving man, why does the gospel not save? There is no magic in merely preaching the gospel. The gospel must be heard, but that is not sufficient. The gospel is sufficient, but the hearing of it is not sufficient. The gospel must be believed. It is the

power of God to save them that believe. It also must be obeyed (Second Thessalonians 1:8). Those who obey not the gospel shall be lost. Failure to believe and obey the gospel neutralizes its power to save a person. Faith can be made void (Romans 4:14). The commandments of God can be made of none effect (Matthew 15:6). Christ can become of none effect (Galatians 5:4). The power of the gospel to save produces benefit only to those who hear, believe, and obey. The blessings are conditional. Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Proof that salvation is conditional is stressed when Peter preached, "*Of a truth, I perceive that God si no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.*" (Acts 10:34,35). One can be accepted, but he must fear God and work God's righteousness, keep His commandments. It is conditional.

Then why do people refuse to obey the gospel? This is the puzzle of the ages. Whatever may be offered as a reason or excuse, it is the influence and work of the devil. "*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*" Second Corinthians 4:3,4). Refusal to obey the gospel is the result of the work of the one who seeks man's destruction. "*Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil walketh about as roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*" (First Peter 5:8). How does the devil do this?

Satan's Devices

There are many avenues that Satan uses to keep man lost. Some are ignorance, pride, worldly wisdom, love of sin, a closed mind, and a hardened heart. Jesus said, and He was quoting from Isaiah, "*By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*" (Matthew 13:14,15). When Jesus was praying over Jerusalem, He said, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that*

killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing, and YE WOULD NOT." (Emphasis, JWB). (Matthew 23:37). Jesus would have saved them, but they just would not be saved.

Other ways that keep people from obeying the gospel are ways of deception through false doctrines, false security, not having a ready mind to receive the truth, modernism, liberalism, denominationalism, creedalism. The cares of this world choke the word among many (Luke 8:14). Some are willing to believe a lie (Second Thessalonians 2:11). But regardless as to the how or what keeps one from believing and obeying the gospel, those who do not are lost, and shall remain lost until they do. People who have been taught to wait for some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or expect some strange event or weird experience, will wait forever. They may have some such thing, but that is not the way God saves.

His Word Does Not Fail To Save

There is a passage in Isaiah 55:10,11 that used to bother me no little. It seemed to contradict Paul's affirmation that the gospel saves. But when we see clearly the full truth about the way of salvation, we see what Paul and Isaiah meant. *"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."*

I would go preach in a gospel meeting the best I could, teach the gospel as clearly as I could do, and I knew that people understood their responsibility to God. Yet, they would not respond to the invitation of Christ to be saved. I would reason that the seed was sown and possibly later it would bring forth converts, and this was true. But the gospel was designed to save and few were saved. But the word would not return void. It would accomplish its purpose. How could this be?

I was made to realize by a wise teacher (H.A.Dixon) that the gospel saves, but it will also condemn. We shall be judged by the words of Jesus (John 12:48) in that last day. The gospel reveals God's righteousness, but it also reveals God's wrath against sin. It contains promises, but it also contains warnings of punishment to the unbeliever and disobedient. It is preached so people can make a choice and a decision what to do about Christ. It will accomplish one or the other result for each one. It will either save, or it will condemn.

Knowing that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation makes the preaching of it an imperative duty. But just preaching it does not mean that all who hear will be saved. It has the power to save **IF** believed and obeyed. *"For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them, but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."* (Hebrews 4:2). That the gospel does not save is no fault of the gospel, but the fault of those who hear but reject it.

God offers us salvation from sin and salvation in heaven through Christ. Salvation in heaven is dependent upon salvation from sin. He calls us by the gospel to be saved (Second Thessalonians 2:14). Our sins are forgiven when we hear, believe, and obey. Medicine will cure a disease only if applied. The patient cannot expect to recover from his illness if he refuses to use the prescribed remedy. Neither can a person expect to be saved if he does not apply God's remedy from sin. God is willing to save (Second Peter 3:9). But each one must be willing to be saved, God's way. Otherwise, the gospel cannot, will not, does not, save.

* * * * *

There is a great need for Christian people to speak out on the moral and religious issues facing our nation. Some are intimidated when accused of meddling in politics if they speak out on abortion, homosexuality, violence, dishonesty in government, and other immoralities. That such sins are political policy does not mean this is politics. Rather is it truth versus error. Speak out! LOUD!

The Word of Angels

Hebrews 2:1-4, "*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?*"

God's mercy is manifested to us in many ways. Among them is the kindly but firm warnings that we read from time to time in Scripture. The way God warns is powerful, clear, precise, penetrating, and leaves no room for doubt. Such is the nature of our text. The passage is a divine message sent from heaven to which we will take heed if we be wise.

The word "*therefore*" that is at the first of the text indicates a conclusion is about to be drawn from what has been said in chapter one. We read there how God had spoken to man through the ages in a variety of ways at various times. Now He speaks His will to man through His Son, Jesus Christ. The writer speaks of the glory of Christ who is heir of all things, having all authority by virtue of His Sonship. He is the One by whom the worlds were made. Verse ten teaches the heavens are the work of His hands and He laid the foundation of the earth. The eternal nature of the Son is presented in verse twelve by the words, "*thy years shall not fail.*" Even though the heaven and earth shall perish, "*thou remainest.*" We also read of the brightness of the glory of God and how the Son is the express image of Deity. He sustains all things, rules and reigns at the right hand of God.

Chapter one also teaches His superiority over the angels (verse 4), being better than the angels, having a more excellent name than they, being called God's Son, begotten of God (verse 5). Even the angels worshipped

Him (verse 6), and are His ministers. God never gave such rank and authority to angels as He has His Son (verse 13). No angel is called God (verse 8).

All of this being true, we should give the more earnest heed (sincere, alert fidelity and attentiveness) to the things which we have heard regarding Christ. Why? Lest we let them slip, fall away from them, apostatize, and experience the disastrous results. The book of Hebrews was written to exalt Christ and to prevent apostasy back into that which had already been proven inferior and less beneficial than Christ. The writer argues that if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, meaning it was true, faithful, reliable, dependable, and fulfilled, how much more so is the word of the One who is superior to angels.

Consider the Words of Angels Past

Just how stedfast were the words spoken by angels?Let us go back and review some of the revelation of the Old Testament and messages that were given to men from the Lord through angels.

In Genesis eighteen we read of the visit by three men to Abraham in the plains of Mamre. They told him that he and Sarah would have a son. Even though Abraham was at that time well stricken in years, as was Sarah, and she had been barren all her childbearing years, the question is raised, "*Is there anything too hard for the Lord?*" Was their word stedfast? In time the promised son, Isaac, was born. Can there be any question about the reliability of the word Abraham received from these three men who were identified as angels?

In Genesis thirty-two we read where Jacob wrestled and conversed with an angel just prior to his reunion with Esau. Jacob had fled his home some years earlier in fear for his life. Of course, some of the problems he had brought upon himself. But now as he returns to his homeland the news that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with many armed men was a very threatening message. Even though he returned quite prosperous, with family and herds, he knew not the mind of Esau.

Jacob prayed and was reassured of God's preservation. It was at that time that God changed his name to Israel (prince of God), and the angel blessed him. Was the angel's word stedfast? The remaining part of Jacob's life gives us answer to that question. His life proves the certainty and reliability of what he learned from the angel.

The angel Gabriel announced to Zacharias the coming birth of a son who was to named John. He was John the Baptist (Luke 1:13). At that time Zacharias and Elizabeth had no children and they also were well stricken in years. Zacharias asked for a sign that such an event would take place. He was made dumb until the child was to be born. Things came to pass precisely as the angel had spoken. The word of angels proved stedfast.

Gabriel also announced to Mary the coming birth of Jesus. Mary was a virgin and yet, without knowledge of man, she would bear a son. Even His name was specified. His mission was noted as that of Savior. While she wondered at such things when she was told them, all things took place and the prophesies were fulfilled just as the word of the angel had spoken.

Angels and the Old Law

In Galatians 3:19 we learn that the law of Moses was ordained by angels., It was called a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It was the temporary authority for Israel until the coming of the will of Christ. The law was fulfilled in Christ (Matthew 5:17,18; Luke 24:44). Again, the word of angels proved stedfast because the law was taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross.

The writer of Hebrews not only used the word of angels as the reason to take heed, but noted also the fact that every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward which proved the word of angels. To receive a just recompense of reward means to receive proper compensation and repayment for what was done. There are many examples especially in the Old Testament of such things. Consider the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). We also read in Second Peter of the flood at the time of

Noah, as well as the evil ways of Balaam. Genesis nineteen records the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Leviticus ten tells us of the death of Nadab and Abihu when they acted without proper authority. Even Moses was denied entrance into the land of Canaan because he took part credit to himself for providing Israel water they needed and struck the rock which God had said to only speak to it (Numbers 20). Then there was Uzzah's transgression in touching the ark, which was forbidden expect to the one authorized to transport it (Second Samuel 6). The fall of Northern Israel and Southern Judah into Assyrian and Babylonian captivities also showed how disobedience received a just recompense of reward. Later the fall of Babylon, the wicked destroyer of Judah, fell beneath the invasion of Persia. Throughout the Scriptures we read of individuals, families, nations that proved repeatedly, "*The way of the transgressor is hard.*" (Proverbs 13:15). Transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward. This long Biblical record shows to us God's wrath against sin and the certain fruits of it.

A Conclusion

What can we conclude from this vast amount of information on such matters? When one realizes the record of God's punishment against evil and the evildoers, this should provoke within us a more earnest heed to what He has declared through His Son. When we realize that even that which was revealed through angels was faithful and true, that their warnings came to pass, and their words fulfilled, and you couple that with the realization that Christ, the Son of God, is superior to the angels, how much more should we give heed and pay attention to what Christ has taught us!

In the Mounts

The same principle of His superiority is taught in the event at the mount where Christ was transfigured before His apostles. Matthew 17:5, "*While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*"

It is also emphasized in Matthew 12:41,42, "*The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.*"

Hebrews 10:26-31, "*For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"

God lovingly warns just as He lovingly invites (Matthew 11:28-30). "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" Shall we take heed and live? Or shall we ignore and be damned? Each one must make his personal choice.

* * * * *

It is hard to fight error and not become bitter and hardened by the conflict. All things are toughened by opposition, and we develop a defensive armor to ward off attacks. Softness may be a mark of the sunshine patriots, but we may expect the veterans of many battles to have a few scars and be of tougher fiber. The old pioneer preachers who fought the battles against sectarianism were no "cream puffs" as to character, but we are persuaded that they continued to live for God and the church in spite of their battles. J.A.McNutt

When Not To Fly Off The Handle



You may have heard this humorous story but it bears repeating. Two men were sitting on a fence by the road and along came a meat truck. Its back door flew open and a great load of balogna fell out. Three crows were flying nearby and saw it and quickly descended upon the balogna. They proceeded to enjoy a long, free feast on the meat. After a while they decided to fly away, but had eaten so much they could not get airborne. They saw a hoe leaning against the fence and decided to climb the handle and launch their flight from there to help them get some altitude. The first climbed up, flew off, but exploded. Then came the second and did likewise. Then the third didas the other two. The two men watched all of this and one finally spoke and suggested the whole episode had a moral in it.The moral he suggested simply is, "Don't fly off the handle when you are full of balogna." Sounds like the man had some real wisdom, doesn't it?

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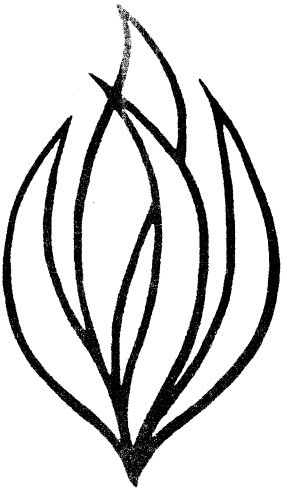

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Shepherd Psalm

A psalm is a sacred composition in the form of a song or a poem. It is an expression of great devotion. Holy thoughts are expressed in sublime and loving language. The Psalms of the Old Testament embrace a wide variety of thoughts. They range from a very positive to a very negative expression. Some of them comfort and encourage while others motivate, even express condemnation. You find some that express frustration and discouragement. The psalm can either be sung or read. The favorite of the Psalms of the Bible for so many is the twenty-third.

My God and I

God is mentioned twelve times. The personal pronouns, I, me, mine, are found seventeen times. This give us a clue to the nature of the psalm. It emphasizes the very personal relationship that the psalmist had with God, and that anyone who is a child of God can also have. It portrays divine care and concern for the individual.

There are fifteen phrases that compose this psalm and each has its own distinction and significance. Each one can be considered as a verse in the hymn with different emphasis, yet collectively, they form a majestic expression of the God-man relationship.

A reading of Psalm twenty-three will be helpful at this point. Having done that, let us turn our attention to each of the phrases with brief observations of each.

1 - Faith in the Shepherd

The psalm is a song of faith. "*The Lord is my shepherd.*" John ten presents Jesus as the Good Shepherd caring for His sheep. This is in itself a glorious thought that the Lord watches over us. He is mine and I am His. We are like sheep in need of the care of another. We have that care in the Person of the Christ. Who could desire to have as our Shepherd more than the Lord's Son?

2 - Providence

It is also a song of providence. "*I shall not want.*" The psalmist was aware that there be many in the world who lack even those things which are necessary to the sustenance of life. But such a lack would not be his to experience because the Lord would provide. Is this not essentially what the Lord Jesus promised in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25-34)? We must not forget, however, that this is conditional. We are to seek His kingdom and righteousness first. We have no reason to expect the providential care of Deity if we neglect the priorities He has established for us in life.

3 - Contentment

The twenty-third Psalm is also a song of contentment. "*He maketh me lie down in green pastures.*" I am told that it is a strange thing about sheep that they will not lie down unless they have a sense of freedom from fear, tension, and friction. If they are subject to predators and pests, or suffer from hunger, they are disturbed, restless, wandering, and nervous. Only when they have the contentment that can be theirs by the work of the shepherd will they be at ease and lie down. Our shepherd finds the fields of green for us and protects us so we can be content, calm, serene, being constantly aware of His abiding presence and oversight of us.

4 - Peace

This psalm is one of peace and tranquility. "*He leadeth me beside the still waters.*" Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. The peace that He brought to this world is peace between man and God. He also teaches us how to have peace with one another. Another form of peace that is vital to a useful life is peace within oneself. When one is in the right relationship with God he does enjoy peace within himself and with justification.

Our shepherd takes us to the quieting, soothing, refreshing waters of life. Again we are told that a peculiarity of sheep is that they are hesitant, if not totally obstinate, to drink from swift and rushing water.

It frightens them. But they find satisfaction and peace where the water runs clean, pure, deep, and still.

5 - Life

Psalm twenty-tree is a song of life. "*He restoreth my soul.*" Who has not been cast down, dejected, suffering from the feelings of rejection, tasting defeat and tempted to bitterness, not having sufficient strength within himself? As sheep are subject to various kinds of attackers and are prey, so are those who live in this world but who follow the Lord. There are times when we need uplifting and encouragement. Here is where we find it. It comes from our Shepherd. He can and does restore that which has fallen.

6 - Leadership

We are reading a song of leadership. "*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*" The invitation of our Lord Jesus is, "*Follow me.*" Where He leads, if we follow, will be to our benefit and His glory. He is our example and as Peter taught, we should follow in His steps (First Peter 2:21). Not all who lead will lead in the right way or the right direction. Christ warned against blind leaders of the blind and how they both fall into the ditch. But we can have utmost confidence in where our Lord leads us. There are paths of unrighteousness that are open to us and we are constantly tempted by the temptations of Satan to go that way. Because our Shepherd cares for us He will never lead us anywhere to our destruction. If we will follow Him we shall be led in the way of truth, the path of righteousness, and will successfully make our journey through this life that eventually leads into eternal glory in heaven.

7 - Confidence

We also have before us a song of confidence in the face of certain dark realities of life and death. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...*" Life is brief, and uncertain. James describes it as but a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away (James 4:14). It is appointed unto man once to die

(Hebrews 9:27). Death is as certain to come as life has existed. None shall escape it. Even so, in this dark hour of unknowns and uncertainties, we can be confident because we know that this life is not all there is to our existence. We rightly considered death as a doorway through which we must pass into something greater. Second Corinthians 5:1,6-8, "*For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens... Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; (For we walk by faith, not by sight). We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*"

8 - Courage

This is a song of courage. "*I will fear no evil.*" Hebrews 13:6 teaches, "*The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*" Even though there be many storms of many kinds that break all around us, we shall not have to be broken by them. We can courageously overcome them. We may not always be able to rid the portion of the world where we live of the evil that is so prevalent. But what we cannot overcome we have the power to endure (First Corinthians 10:13). With the assurance of ultimate victory for eternity that we have been promised by Creator and Judge, we have no cause to fear what may come our way. The greater our faith the less will be the sense of insecurity and fear. We will face each day with courage.

9 - Companionship

One fathomable thought of the psalm is that this is a song of companionship with God. "*For thou art with me...*" This is really a summary and comprehensive phrase that encompasses the major theme of the entire psalm. Psalm twenty-three has been rightly called the "I-Thou" psalm. We have fellowship with Deity, one of man's greatest and most undeserved blessings. Uphill, downhill, in good times, bad times, we are never alone. As the song says, "If Jesus goes with me I'll go anywhere." When we walk in the light as He is in the light we shall maintain this fellowship (First John 1:7).

10 - Comfort

This is a song of comfort. "*Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" The rod and staff are implements and tools of the shepherd that are used in leading the sheep, gently directing them rather than for driving and whipping them. These instruments are often used by the shepherd to retrieve a sheep which may have fallen into danger. It was used to drive away invaders of the flock. It served as his weapon. It was used to discipline the sheep and gently nudge them along as the shepherd would take them from one grazing place to another. He even used it to count the sheep and keep up with each one lest through oversight or wandering some sheep be separated from the flock. Is it not comforting to know that we have One who is so attentive and caring for each of us?

11 - Support

This is a song of favor and blessing. "*Thou anointest my head with oil.*" Anointing one with oil was a manner of appointment, setting one aside and apart, making one special. The shepherd might also anoint his sheep with ointment to help kill pests, flies, bugs, and even assist in curing diseases. It could be used as an antidote for that which would aggravate the sheep and heal its wounds. Our Shepherd has made us special and we are a set apart people.

13 - Gratitude

Psalm twenty-three is an expression of gratitude and joy for the bounty of blessings of the past and present. "*My cup runneth over.*" Recognition is given to the Lord as the giver of every good and perfect gift, the provider of the abundant life. It is an expression of appreciation.

In one sense this phrase carries a special meaning to me personally. In 1963 I was privileged to preach in a gospel meeting at the congregation where I attended as a boy. My Dad was then an elder of that church which had been established by his father and grandfather. The final Sunday of the meeting, which proved to be less than a week and a half before my father suddenly died, upon returning home from the morning service in which I was

privileged to preach and my brother had lead the prayer, my father was so filled with thanksgiving and gratitude that he is reported to have sat on the bed and simply quoted, "*My cup runneth over.*" Nobody will even know how grateful I am that I had a small part in making that a great day in the life of my father. He did not have an abundance of this world's goods although we always had what was adequate and more. But he considered his blessings and counted his cup as running over. Is not this psalm a sincere and heartfelt praise for the blessings God has given which we have the privilege to enjoy even in this life?

14 - For the Future

But it is also a song that contemplates and anticipates blessings in the future as well as the past and present. "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*" The psalmist faced the future with confidence and optimism because he knew the source of his blessings past and present, and he knew that God not only had blessed, and does bless, but will bless. Paul wrote in Romans 11:22, "*Behold the goodness... of God.*" The psalm takes note of what the faithful child of God can expect.

15 - Immortality

Finally, the psalm is a song of immorality. "*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*" The knowledge of life after this, the promise that life will be with God and that it shall never end, is that which belongs to those who are in the Lord's sheepfold. The sheepfold of Christ is His church over which He is Shepherd.

Would that we all would have the Lord as our glorious Shepherd. Christ is the door into the sheepfold. There is one Shepherd and one fold (John 10:10). Make this psalm personal and applicable to you by coming to the Christ., and you can repeat it with the same conviction as the psalmist who was guided by the holy Spirit to write it.

* * * * *

The Value of a Changeless Bible

A prominent characteristic of our day is change. Of course, change has occurred in every age, but who can doubt that there have been so many, tremendous, and rapid changes in recent years, far beyond what most could have imagined? Change is noticeable in almost every area of life whether you consider transportation, agriculture, medicine, methods of waging war, entertainment, or whatever. We are living in the middle of an immeasurable technological revolution of changes. They are rapid, radical, extensive, making what is new today to be obsolete tomorrow.

Many of these changes have meant genuine progress, improvements, and have certainly been beneficial to mankind. Especially is this true in the realm of health, standards of living, the ability to do things. It is a shame that more have not benefited from changes in these areas.

It is also true that sometimes people have provoked change simply for the sake of change without due regard to the detriment of mankind. There is no virtue in making changes that take us backward from what is useful and good. The "art" of tearing down without offering something better is definitely not commendable. We ought not oppose change just for the sake of retaining the status quo any more than we ought to promote change just for the sake of change. What presently exists is not always the most desirable, but we certainly ought to turn to something better before making changes. Furthermore, all changes are neither beneficial nor permissible before God.

Some Changes Are Unwelcome

There have been changes invading areas where there ought not be change. There have been many changes that are nothing less than open rebellion against God and His will. Religions are changing, but the religion of God has

not changed. Who has not taken note of the changes in the denominational world in matters of doctrine, attitude toward Christ and the Bible, moral standards, even questions about the reality of God, and challenges to the Deity of Christ such as has not been seen nor heard previously? There have been changes in the role of women, families, ethics, and matters that affect the way people live one toward another. Romanism used to boast how it has not changed, but there are few systems of religion that have undergone more changes in its history than Romanism. Especially is this true in recent decades. Religious people of all kinds have attempted to change what is proper regarding marriage and divorce. They have sought to remove the stigma of divorce. The sanctity of the home has been attacked. Premarital and extra-marital sexual relationships have become so commonplace that many think this is what ought to be. Even the dignity of human life has been viciously attacked in our own "nation under God" with over twenty million abortions over the past few years. When even the religions are founded on the ever shifting sands of human doctrines and opinions, swaying with the trends of unrighteousness, following the authorities of men, one cannot look with confidence toward religion generally for any true guidance in life, let alone guidance toward heaven.

It has been one of the most depressing facts of my lifetime as a preacher of the gospel to see many changes in the churches of Christ as more and more have opted to imitate the ways of the world rather than remain loyal to the truth of the Bible. The weak, compromising nothingness that is characteristic of so many, even and especially in the pulpits and places of leadership, has been a heart rending reality that faithful Christians cannot ignore.

Christ's Will Does Not Change

But the will of God through Jesus Christ does not and has not changed with the currents and tides of human departures from truth. The truth does not now or ever accommodate man's rebellion and sinfulness. That which man might make and discover he might improve and change. But there is no way that any man or group

of men can improve, nor has the right to change, the counsel of God.

Jude three teaches we are to contend for the faith once delivered. Psalm 19:7 teaches the law of the Lord is perfect. How can that be improved? Romans 11:34, "*For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?*" Does any person really think he can advise God and make alterations and improvements on what He has said and done? James 1:25 tells us of the perfect law of liberty. Isaiah 55:9, "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than you thoughts.*" Man never shows himself more foolish than to challenge the wisdom of God. First Corinthians 1:25, "*Because the foolishness of God is wiser than man; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*" Therefore, people ought not tamper with that which the Almighty has delivered. In fact, God specifically forbids him to do so. Man ought not try to change God's Word, but rather appreciate the value of the changeless Bible.

Sin is Real

The value of a changeless Bible is made evident in the prevalence of sin. There are three words used in Scripture to describe man's spiritual offense against God: (1) sin, (2) transgression, (3) iniquity. Sin means to miss the mark (Romans 3:23). Transgression is to step across the boundary (First John 3:4). Iniquity is to deviate from the standard (Isaiah 59:2). To speak of such things is to speak of a certain reality. Some will attempt to cast a cloak about sin to bring it into respectability and remove the stain and stigma of it. We hear people contend, "Sin is only as you think it is." Some call sin a mere disease, the result of some fault of society. Others define it as simply anti-social behavior. Skeptics call sin a throwback from the dark ages of religious superstition. Every kind of explanation anyone can imagine is called upon to remove man from responsibility to God. Is it not strange how evident the results of sin are everywhere? Yet, some attempt to deny its reality. Sin is as real as the day that Satan deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden, and we are wise if we believed that.

The Bible deals with the problem of sin. It is not a book devoted to science, economics, history, or other themes. But it does stress the reality of sin, wages of sin, man's individual and personal guilt of sin, God's concern for man in sin, and God's provision for the remedy for sin through Christ, as well as what man must do to be saved from the wages of sin. It also gives us direction and guidance how to avoid and prevent sin and its consequences. Nothing anywhere else confronts sin as does the message of God. Since sin has not changed in the history of man, only taking on new forms from time to time, how fortunate we are to have the Word of God that deals with sin and that it does not change!

Gives Purpose to Life

The value of the changeless Bible is also evident in that its message gives purpose and meaning to life. What is the meaning of life? Many obviously have never learned because they are uninformed about life as revealed by the Giver of life. Many cannot successfully cope with life because they have never understood where they came from, why they are here, what they are supposed to be while they are here, or where they are going. The Bible instructs us regarding all of this with clarity and confidence. People are seen and heard to turn to all sorts of weird, distorted, self-destructive behavior seeking to insert some purpose for their existence. They champion all kinds of causes, pursue all kinds of lifestyles, looking and searching, using everything from drugs to degeneracy, crime, and suicide.

The meaninglessness of life stems from the failure to understand the nature of man and his worth. So many have swallowed the false atheistic philosophies from the minds of men, subscribing only to the materialistic explanations for all things, contending man is only an evolved animal that has come into being by chance and accident. Those of this persuasion who seem to have some concern for the human family have adopted a "social gospel" approach, failing to recognize the spiritual side of man.

But man is spirit as well as flesh. There is an inward as well as outward man. Genesis 1:27 teaches we are created

in the image of God, and God is spirit (John 4:24). We have a mind, with the power to reason, understand, decide. We have a goal and purpose in life, and our noble mission is to glorify the Creator. We have the assurance of victory at the end of this life if we serve our Creator. We are not like the beasts of the field. We cannot and do not live by "*bread alone*" (Matthew 4:4). We cannot simply eat, drink, and be merry and then close our eyes in the sleep of death and consider that to the sum of our existence. If this life and the material side of it is all there is to our existence, then we are of all men most miserable. There is no reason for life. It is all a farce and a cruel hoax perpetrated on man.

The whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14). There is an "oughtness" that we must appreciate and to which we must conform. The message of the Bible gives purpose for living and hope for the dying (First Corinthians 15:19, 24-26, 52-57). This is the resurrection chapter that assures us that physical death is not the end but the entrance into an eternity. It is one of the many passages of hope and purpose that does not and will not change. Thanks be to God for this changeless Word!

Dignity of Man

There is a solid Biblical emphasis on the dignity of human life and the emphasis on the concern for every individual. Even though there be billions of people on earth, there is no such thing as an unimportant person. God is not only aware and concerned for the masses, but for each one that makes up the masses. This changeless Bible reveals to us the mind of God and His interest in each one. Matthew 6:26, "*Behold, the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?*" Psalm 119:1-12 is a classic passage on the consideration by the Lord of heaven for each person. Again, Matthew 10:29-31, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*"

The very invitation of the Lord to people to enjoy the blessings He offers stresses the individual. The invitation is to *"whosoever will."* When Peter gave instructions how to be forgiven of sin, he gave the command to *"every one of you."* How glad we can be that this truth revealed in Scripture does not change with the fleeting changes of this world!

Responsibility

But we should also be sobered by the reality that the individual concern that God has for us also calls for individual responsibility toward God and that each shall stand before God in judgment (Second Corinthians 5:10). We all shall be judged. The unchangeable revelation of individual worth is both comforting and sobering. We should be impressed with the extent of personal duty and privilege.

In a world of change, let us not confuse the changing with the changeless. May we lay hold on that which serves as an anchor to the soul. Let us follow that stable standard and guide in life that is sure and stedfast. Let us follow that certain and unwavering path that eventually leads those who take it into heaven. First Peter 1:24,25, *"For all flesh is a grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."*

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P.S. We are living in an age (1994) when change is the word of the day both in and out of the church. We have no confidence in political leaders who call for changes because they are simply advancing their own fame and fortunes, and their words are usually meaningless. But when there are those in the church who call for a change, even changes in the message of God, we have grave concern and must resist such Satanic activity to the utmost of all of our capacity. JWB

Jesus and Bartimaeus

This is a study of the relationship between Jesus and another person whose name was Bartimaeus. There are three records of the meeting of Jesus and Bartimaeus, Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52, and Luke 18:35-43. Because of the length of these passages they are not copied here but the reader is urged to read each of them before continuing this lesson.

These records are not exactly alike in every particular. But there are no contradictions between them. It takes all three of the records to have the full story because one account may include information that another may omit. Taken together we learn everything that God has considered important for us to know and to learn the lessons intended.

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem when he met Bartimaeus. Calvary was but one week away, and the end of His personal ministry here on earth would soon be upon Him. By this time His fame was widespread and the people had responded to Him with varying reactions, some very positive and receptive, and others very negative and hostile.

As Jesus made His way toward the city He knew what awaited Him there. He had already informed His disciples, Mark 10:32-34, "*And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.*"

As Jesus went from place to place it was not unusual that He be followed by large throngs of people. This was because His fame and reputation for doing many miracles and good works preceded Him.

Meet Bartimaeus

On the way Jesus met the man Bartimaeus. Matthew reveals that there were two men. Mark and Luke focus attention only on the one. Bartimaeus was not a ruler, a religious leader, a king, or a rich man. He was a beggar, and blind beggar at that. Begging was about the only means of livelihood that existed for such people at that time. But Bartimaeus heard the noise of the crowd and asked what it meant. He was told that Jesus was coming. He evidently had heard much of Jesus before this time as is evidenced by the events that follow. One point we do not want to overlook is that Jesus, even though in the midst of a throng of people, was mindful of even one. He showed concern for this single individual and demonstrated interest and compassion toward him.

Being told that Jesus was coming along the way Bartimaeus began to cry out to Jesus. The way He addressed Jesus shows that He considered Jesus more than just another man, a prophet, or another miracle worker. He called Him the Son of David. Matthew says he called him, "*Lord.*" The significance of this is in the fact that the prophets of old had foretold that the Messiah that God promised would be of the seed of David. Additionally, the word "Lord" means Master. There can be little doubt that Bartimaeus, even with the information about Jesus that he had, was already convinced that Jesus was the One God promised to send.

His Need and Faith

Bartimaeus recognized he was in need and believed that Jesus had the power to provide what he needed. He also realized that he was helpless to do for himself what was needful. Therefore, he urgently and persistently sought Jesus' help. Mark records how Jesus took note of his cry and called for Bartimaeus to be brought to Him and the meeting of the two was realized.

We, like Bartimaeus, must realize we have a spiritual need that we, by ourselves, cannot meet. We must understand, however, that Jesus has the power to provide. Like Bartimaeus, we must recognize Him to be more than just another exceptional man, not merely a great leader, teacher, and martyr for righteousness, but as His name indicates, He is the Savior, Emmanuel, God with us. We must confess as did Peter, "*Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.*" We must be convinced as was the centurion at His cross, "*Truly, this was the Son of God.*"

We often refer to the people on Pentecost, and for good reason, because that is the day the Lord's church began. The people heard evidence concerning Christ as was preached by Peter and the other apostles. Being convinced, they cried out, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" This reflected their attitude toward what they learned and toward Jesus. It reflected the realization they were in need of that which Jesus provided. This is the same attitude of heart that people must have today if they be benefited by the Christ.

The Lord Was Concerned

Another prime truth we grasp from this account is that even though there are over four billion people in the world, there is not one for whom the Lord does not have concern. We may be inclined to think because there are so many people that God does not care for us as individuals and that His interest is only for the masses. It is true that God is concerned for the human family generally, but He also is concerned for each of us independently and separately. Even amidst the throngs that surrounded Him, He turns to give attention to this one man. He does not exclude the individual. As in Luke fifteen, where Jesus is presented as the Good Shepherd who had one hundred sheep and ninety-nine were safe in the fold, He was concerned for the one that was lost. It is almost beyond our comprehension to understand the extent and measure of the worth of each person, and the Lord's interest in each one.

The Response

We see the blessed reaction of Bartimaeus when Jesus called for him. He immediately came because that was his great desire. How unlike others of whom we read, for instance in Luke 14:16-24, where we read the teaching of Jesus about a man who prepared a great supper and extended invitations to his potential guests. But one by one those who were invited began to make excuses and refused to come. The displeasure of the host, in this case representing the Lord, is seen in the comment, "*For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*" (Luke 14:24). Many today, rather than desiring to come to Christ and taking advantage of the opportunity when called, will make excuses on top of excuses for refusing Him. Why cannot they realize they are sealing their own eternal doom?

Some Discouraged Him

But the study of Jesus and Bartimaeus would not be finished without noting the rebuke the people around Bartimaeus made toward him when he first began to cry out to Jesus. Why did they seek to silence the beggar? We are not specifically told. Could it be that they felt he was only a nuisance? Were they ashamed of him? Possibly they had not shown proper concern for him themselves and were embarrassed at his condition. They may have felt that such a one as he did not deserve the attention of one like Jesus. Regardless of their reasons, we see the sharp contrast between their lack of concern for him and the genuine concern Jesus had for him.

We must learn that anyone who would seek to discourage us from calling to Christ is not our friend. They do not seek our highest good. They do not have the concern for another that all should have toward everyone around them. Regardless of who it might be and for whatever reasons, anyone who would influence you and discourage you from coming to Christ is your deadly foe.

The power of Jesus was demonstrated when He said unto Bartimaeus, "*What will ye that I shall do unto you?*" Upon being asked to grant his sight, Jesus touched his eyes and Bartimaeus received his sight. Certainly, this was a miracle, another manifestation that Jesus was who He claimed to be. But the power of Christ and the

performance of the miracle are not the only important lessons and information that we learn from this event. This account displays certain principles of God's dealing with man that we must notice.

So Must We

Just as Bartimaeus believed the information concerning Jesus and was convinced He was the Messiah, so must we. It is evident that sufficient evidence had been brought to the mind of Bartimaeus and even though we do not know exactly what that evidence was, it was convincing to him. We also have evidence given to us that is designed to convince us of the same truth concerning Christ. John wrote, John 20:30,31, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life in his name.*" Romans 10:17 teaches that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. We have that Word and the inspired record and testimony of the witnesses who were present on such occasion as this.

It is important to notice that this assertion by John followed conversation between Jesus and Thomas, the one who temporarily had doubt that Jesus had come from the tomb. He had said he would not believe until he had seen the nail scars and the wound in His side. Upon being granted opportunity to consider the evidence, he cried out, "*My Lord and my God.*" God expects us to believe in Jesus as the Christ. But God has also provided sufficient evidence for our faith.

Bartimaeus Ignored the Discouragement

Even though Bartimaeus was discouraged from crying out to Jesus, fortunately, Bartimaeus ignored the attempts to silence His quest for the attention of Jesus. Had he succumbed to their rebuke, he would never have been blessed. There may be those close to us, in our associations, who discourage us from following Christ. It may be a relative or one who claims to be a friend. There may be those who would make you feel undeserving of the Lord's blessings. To be sure, none of us deserve the

salvation He offers. But that is all the more reason we need to come to Him. This is why He came to this world. If we deserved what He offers, we would not even need Him.

Some may ridicule you if you suggest following the righteous way of life after Christ. They may point out your sins and weaknesses to convince you that you cannot overcome your transgressions. They fail to realize that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more (Romans 5:20). Some might even persecute you in one form or another and do all they are capable of doing to keep you from the Lord, even persuading you that if you try you still cannot do His will. Some will attempt to convince you that just any way you choose to go will be all right with God. But we must remember that the Lord never invited anyone to do anything they cannot do, and He has invited all men, everywhere, to come to Him and be saved from sin.

Jesus is Concerned About You

Finally, once again let us be impressed that Jesus is concerned not just with the high and mighty of this world, nor just the rich and worldly-wise, but also with the poor and lowly. One of the marks that He is the Messiah is the fact that the poor had the gospel preached to them (Luke 7:22). It is generally the case that those who consider themselves to be "somewhat" in this world are not near so receptive to God's truth as those who are of more humble and modest means (First Corinthians 1:26). This is because some rely too heavily on their wealth, and others have no wealth upon which to rely, and therefore are more willing to hear the gospel.

Even now, our Lord, through the gospel message, is saying to each one that they are welcome to come to Him. So we send forth the same report to you as was given to Bartimaeus, "*Be of good comfort, rise, He calleth for thee.*"

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The Salvation of Noah

The processes used in the printing industry have changed quite dramatically over the past few years. Even though not used now as was in previous years, there was a molding of metallic type that was inked and placed against the paper on printing presses. That metallic type was a certain letter that, when pressed on the paper, would produce its image. The image was called the imprint or the antitype, that which answered to the form of the type. Printing now involves other processes that have proven to be more efficient, expedient, and rapid. Seldom today does one find in the average print shop a letter press in wide use, but presses that use offsetting or other means of production. But our study is not about printing. We cite this to illustrate the distinction between type and antitype, that which was the original form and that which answers to it.

Type and Antitype

There are types and antitypes in the Bible. The dictionary defines an antitype as a person, thing, or idea that is represented by an earlier type or symbol, such as a New Testament event or person, prefigured in the Old Testament. Our study concerns one of the types in the Old Testament and its New Testament antitype. We study the salvation of Noah. Not only shall we be impressed with the inseparable tie between the Old and New Testaments, but shall also see illustrated for us our own salvation.

Our text is First Peter 3:20,21, "*Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*"

The term "*like figure*" means an antitype. The salvation of Noah is a type of our salvation. In some sense we are to regard baptism as saving us. We do not understand that the power of salvation is the physical element of water. Nor do we understand that we are saved by works of our own merit when we are baptized. God alone has the power to save and we are saved by the blood of Christ. The water into which we are commanded to be baptized has no magical ability to wash away our sins. It is not some kind of "holy water" that has special powers any more than the waters of Jordan into which Naaman was commanded to dip seven times in order to be healed of leprosy had special powers (Second Kings 5). We understand baptism is the means used by God as a condition and act of obedience that one must obey in order for God to save. It is most significant that where and whenever baptism and salvation are mentioned in the same text, together, baptism always comes before the blessing.

Not Baptism Alone

The Bible does not teach that one is saved by baptism alone. The reason we even mention this is because some, contend that salvation is by faith alone because in some passages only faith is mentioned when discussing salvation (Romans 5:1; John 3:16). Only baptism is mentioned in the discussion of salvation in our text. It would follow that if the inclusion of faith and the omission of baptism in one passage teaches salvation by faith alone, then this passage would teach salvation by baptism alone without faith. But that is not true.

Neither is there any mention of the blood of Christ, repentance, or any other condition of salvation. The truth is that we must include all God has said on the subject in order to learn what is included. It is not necessary to mention every point in every verse whenever salvation is discussed. That would not be any more reasonable than presenting the entire multiplication table every time you multiplied.

Was Noah saved by water? The answer is yes because the text so affirms. Was he saved by water without faith? The answer is no because Hebrews 11:7, "*By faith, Noah,*

being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house..." Never does the Bible teach we are saved by faith alone, repentance alone, baptism alone, or any other such thing alone.

Not When He Heard

When was Noah saved? The record of Noah preparing the ark is found in Genesis 6:14-22 to which we now call the attention of the reader. It records how God made a revelation to Noah of the coming destruction of the wicked world and Noah believed what God told him. Was Noah saved the moment he heard God's word? No! God told him what to do, how to do it, giving instructions concerning the ark, how to build it, from what material to build it, the window, door, dimensions, number of stories, pitching it with pitch, and all the rest. He even instructed him about the animals to be taken into the ark.

The Scripture then records, *"Thus did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he."* Did his doing what God said earn salvation for Him? No! Did he merit his salvation because he did these things? No! Was it necessary for him to do what God instructed? Yes! Without obedience he would not have been spared. He heard, believed what God said, and obeyed and was saved. We would not be reading about him if he had simply heard and believed what God said but never obeyed. He would have failed to take advantage of the gracious means of salvation that God offered Him.

Let it be stressed also that Noah was not saved the moment he believed the truth of God. Some contend we are saved the moment we believe. Noah was not, and neither are we.

Noah was saved in the ark by water. The water lifted the ark above the destruction of the flood to the saving of Noah and his family (Genesis 7:17). Peter says that baptism is the antitype of Noah's salvation in the ark by water. In *"like figure"* we are saved.

Saved From What?

From what are we saved? We are not saved from persecution (Second Timothy 3:12), nor from disease and physical and physical death (Hebrews 9:27). We are not saved from the pain and sorrow that accompanies man in this life. The early Christians endured all such things. Nor are we saved at the point of baptism into the final and eternal heaven. Peter said "*baptism doth also now save us.*" The salvation at baptism is a present salvation, not heaven. There is a salvation presently enjoyed. Eternal salvation is dependent also upon one's faithfulness (Revelation 2:10). Peter refers to the same salvation as that which he preached on Pentecost (Acts 2:38), the forgiveness of sins. This is the same salvation Jesus mentioned in Mark 16:16, and which He said would begin at Jerusalem with the "*remission of sins*" (Luke 24:46,47). He refers to salvation from old sins, past sins, from which the Christian has been purged (Second Peter 1:9), sins that are past (Romans 3:25). (The Romans passage would also include sins that were committed by those who lived faithfully under the old and former dispensation under Moses' law).

What Baptism is Not!

Peter inserts an explanation that baptism is not the putting away the filth of the flesh. It was not simply taking a bath to remove dirt from the body. Why would he even mention such a thing? The only reason he would have to mention this is because of the possibility that some would confuse the immersion in water (baptism is immersion) with simply bathing. If baptism was just dropping a few drops of water on the head it would never have been necessary for Peter to make the distinction between baptism and bathing. Peter's comment is an illusion to the act of baptism which is immersion, a burial in water.

An Answer and an Appeal

Peter further explains that baptism is an honest, sincere response of the heart to the call of God. God's call comes through the preaching of the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). As would be anticipated, when God calls, He expects an answer. Baptism is man's answer of obedience to the call of the Lord. It is man's appeal unto

God for his salvation. He does this with honest and good conscience, a conscience properly taught and with proper and informed motives. The conscience has been subjected to teaching that has produced faith, a faith that demands the action of obedience, a faith that is perfected or made whole and complete by obedience.

Peter either told a lie or he told the truth. Baptism either saves or it does not save. Peter said baptism saves. We suggest that people pay attention to what Peter said baptism does rather than what men say it does not do. Baptism either saves or Peter was wrong. It saves us by the remission of sins. Peter does not call baptism a symbol of our salvation or a sign that we are already saved prior to being baptized. Baptism is a symbol, but of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3,4). It is a symbol of that truth that saves. By being baptized we come in contact with the saving blood of Christ which was shed in His death (Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized into His death.

The salvation of Noah was a temporal salvation that serves as a type of our spiritual salvation from sin. Noah, upon hearing God's word, believed it, and acted in obedience to what God commanded. God, by means of water, saved Noah and his household.

Hear, Believe, and Obey

Today, people hear the gospel, believe it, and when they obey the commands of it, repenting, confessing faith in Christ, and being baptized for the remission of sins in the name of (by the authority of) Jesus Christ, their sins are forgiven. God, by means of water, saves the obedient.

Again, we emphasize, because some have falsely accused us of teaching what we never have taught, the water itself, of itself, by itself, does not save. God saves by the blood of Christ. We are saved by His grace, mercy, and love. But when does God save us? It is when people have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel commands, including baptism.

I once read an article in a paper called "The Baptist and Reflector," in which the writer was commenting on

Galatians 3:27 that reads, "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" He commented that this tells one way we enter into Christ. I wrote him twice and his editor once and simply asked, "Where do we read any other way of entering into Christ?" I never heard a word in spite of repeated attempts to extract a response. If any reader of this article knows of such a passage, I would appreciate you sending it to me. We all know why I never heard from them. There is no other step that takes one from out of Christ, into Christ. Romans 6:3,4 and Galatians 3:27, the only two passages that tell us how one gets into Christ, both teach the same act of obedience. It would seem that honest and sincere people who claim to love the law of the Lord would struggle to obey as much as they struggle to uphold their denominational dogmas and try to get around what the Lord has commanded. Would it not be far more simple to just obey and be blessed?

The account of the salvation of Noah was given, not just to relate the preservation of the human race at the time of God's destruction of man's wickedness. It was not written to simply talk about Noah. It is an illustration, a symbol, a type of the means God uses to save man, even us, from a worse destruction, the condemnation of the soul. The record is God's forethought of instruction to those of us yet living under Christ. Let us understand that as Noah heard, believed, and obeyed, even so must we. The question before you is, "Have you obeyed the Lord in baptism for the remission of sins?"

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JWB

Two Kinds of Hearers



"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out demons, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell: and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:21-27.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is avaliable.

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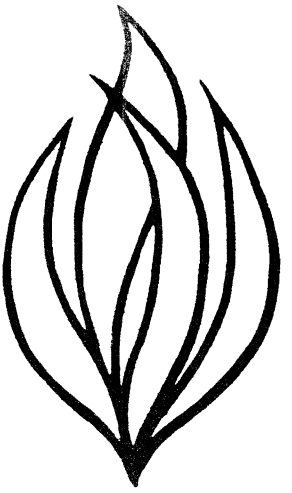

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XV *James W. Boud* **NUMBER 8**

Husband And Wife As A Team

You should read Ephesians 5:23-33 before reading this lesson. That text serves as the text for the subject. Many of us consider ourselves most blessed to have been privileged to have the husband/wife team demonstrated before us by our parents. Many of us enjoy this teamship in our own marriages. For this we are grateful beyond expression. It seems that everybody ought to know that the husband and wife are to function as a team.

But it is also obvious, due to the havoc and breakdown found in many marriages, that a lot of people have not learned this fundamental truth. If more were aware of it, and worked accordingly, there would not be the destruction of homes so rampant in our society today.

We are discussing an attitude, a matter of the heart. We are also focusing attention on a relationship. We can say that we are studying an attitude of heart that should be demonstrated in a specific relationship.

What is a team? The word is not used in the Bible with reference to marriage even though the concept is there, as we shall discover. A team consists of people working together, yoked together, coupled, linked, cooperating for the common good. Webster defines the word and uses marriage to illustrate the meaning.

Different Yokes

The word "yoke" can be understood in terms of a burden or an unbearable load as Paul used it in Second Corinthians 6:14, "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*" Or it can be understood to refer to a beautiful and intimate relationship of favor as Jesus used it in His invitation found in Matthew 11:28-20. "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest*

unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Being yoked in marriage requires agreement. Amos stated the great principle in Amos 3:3, "*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*" Teamwork demands consideration, communication, consultation, cooperation, companionship, and in marriage there must be the inclusion of Christ. Without these essentials the team simply cannot and will not function as its Originator intended.

Originally

It was God's original and present purpose that the husband and wife function as a team, not separately, but as a complement to each other. Genesis 2:18, "*And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*" God did not say that it is wrong to be unmarried. But as it is stated in Proverbs 18:22, "*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord.*" Marriage is a blessing given to mankind by God. If we could summarize marriage with one word, we would choose the word "companionship." This is what God intends in marriage.

Several Biblical Phrases Show Teamship

Let us now read Genesis 2:20-25 where there are several phrases that show the teamwork we are considering. "*And Adam gave names to all cattle, and the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*"

This teaching concerning marriage was repeated by Jesus Christ when He gave His will concerning marriage (Matthew 19:1-9). His will is as God planned and designed it from the beginning. All men everywhere are accountable to God through the teaching of Christ in this matter as in all others (John 12:48).

Composition of the Team

Notice the team is composed of a husband and wife, not merely a man and a woman, nor a man and women, nor a woman and men, nor a man and man, nor woman and woman. Many have perverted this relationship, such as homosexuals, lesbians, adulterers, fornicators, etc. Of such Paul said that God had given them up to dishonor, vile affections, and called them reprobate (Romans 1:24, 26,28). While we have pity and concern for those who pervert themselves in any fashion, nobody can claim to be loyal to the doctrine of Christ and pronounce such things as anything other than sin which damns the soul.

Teamwork of husband and wife is seen in the phrase "*bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.*" Understand the context. All the other creatures God had created had passed before Adam and none of them were suitable to be his companion. Nor was it expected that they would be. So God made a special creation for man that was suitable. The phrase, "*this is now,*" literally means, "this turn." The other creatures had their turn, so to speak, and were found unsuitable. Now it was the woman's turn, the special creation, and she was created suitable as man's companion.

Teamship is seen in the phrase "*one flesh.*" There is a difference in flesh. All flesh is not the same flesh because there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds (First Corinthians 15:39). We might add here that this passage, alongside many others, drives a spike through the heart of any attempt to harmonize the Bible with organic evolution, atheistic, theistic, agnostic, or whatever. But the point as it relates to our theme is that God made man and woman of the same kind. They were two distinct personalities blended into one satisfying unit for the physical and part of the spiritual needs of both.

It is as stated in Proverbs thirty-one, "*He trusts her... He praises her... She will do him good.*" (Verses 11,12,28).

The word "man" is sometimes used in the Bible to refer to the male of the human family. Sometimes it refers to the whole human family, male and female. The man is the male man, and the woman is the female man. They were not Deity, nor animals, but humanity, of the same kind and of one flesh.

The Closest Relationship

This teamship is closer than the tie between parent and child. They were to leave and cleave one to the other. Prime allegiance belongs to each other above even the close tie of parent and child. If parents want to give a great gift to their children that will be of enduring strength for them throughout the life of the child, give them parents who truly love each other before all else this world offers. We are to love our mates first before everything except God. The beautiful truth is that when we love God first we will love our mate above everything else.

Husbands and wives are interdependent on each other. "*For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of man, even so is man also by the woman; but all things of God.*" (First Corinthians 11:8,9,11,12).

Anti-Marriage

We hear much criticism today against the very institution of marriage. Some complain that in marriage you lose your individuality. We can never completely lose our individuality. We shall stand as individuals before God in the judgment (Second Corinthians 5:10). But in any human relationship, including marriage, there is the sacrifice of some individuality. Why just attack marriage and not all other human associations? This is because many want

the physical privileges in marriage without the duties in marriage.

In marriage each is an individual with distinctive roles for which each is especially made to fulfill. We should assist each other in fulfilling these God-given roles in life. Neither is the master of himself or herself, but each seeks the highest good of the unit. This is what "agape" or love embodies and involves.

What It Requires

Teamwork in marriage requires compatibility, companionship, nearness, personal involvement, cooperation, but also Christ. We need to understand that any disposition of marriage that omits God cannot be what marriage is intended to be. There are three involved in marriage, not just a man and a woman. There must be the inclusion of the Designer, Originator, Giver of marriage, who is God. Many problems arise because people fail to understand and accept this. Many problems could be solved, even avoided, if all would respect this fact of truth. False doctrines arise because some have failed to respect both the individual and collective duties each has toward God. Marriage is not merely a social relationship, economic arrangement, or just a legal contract. It is a holy, sacred, God-given relationship. Without God in marriage it is lacking in a basic fundamental ingredient.

This attitude of teamwork must manifest itself in a number of areas. Husbands and wives are like a lock and key, or two blades of scissors. They cannot and do not function properly by themselves.

There is teamwork in the conjugal or sexual relationship. Paul wrote, "*Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*" (First Corinthians 7:2). This "added language" of love, the expression of love, the satisfaction of pure and holy emotions and desires within marriage is reserved for the members of the team. Outside of marriage it is an abominable transgression against God, society, one's mate, self, and family.

There should be teamwork in the rearing of children. Genesis 1:28 tells us that God blessed THEM and said to THEM to be fruitful and replenish the earth. Both have a duty, not only in bringing the child into the world, but also in the upbringing, training, and care of the child. This includes setting goals, priorities, discipline, provision. The child is not "my child" or "your child", but "our child."

There should be oneness in handling the finances of the home. This is a source of problems among many. Some talk about "her money and his money." This is foolish. You may not agree, but you need to consider this point more seriously. Money problems have caused much strife in marriages. An understanding that in marriage it is no longer "me, my, mine," nor "you and yours", but it becomes "we, us, ours" in everything.

Teamwork demands loyalty to one another. This would eliminate many problems. Nobody from outside the marriage can intrude into a marriage where husband and wife are loyal to each other. This includes having and showing respect for each other's feelings, refusing to embarrass and destroy the other.

For Life

Teamwork in marriage means you are together for life, in good times, bad times, sharing joys, sorrows, loads, burdens, in sickness or health, adversity or prosperity, not pulling apart, not pulling against, but pulling with each other. It is a case of "me and you against the world."

The words of Ruth state the idea. "*The Lord do so to me and more also if ought but death part thee and me.*" As Jesus said, "*What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*"

A Basic Point

Teamwork in marriage means being united in THE FAITH. It is not enough to be united in a faith, but THE FAITH. Both ought to be Christians as the Bible teaches. Unless both are in Christ there is no standard by which

to measure, no rule for making decisions, no guide for life, no basis for solutions to differences. Let us teach our young to marry "*in the Lord.*" So many who have ignored this teaching have lived to regret it and more are lost to the cause of Christ than remain faithful in a religiously divided home. The best team is one composed of a Christian husband and a Christian wife. It is difficult enough at times to resist the devil when you are standing together. How much more difficult when you are divided in the most important matter of life, your relationship to God. Like machinery, it is not the revolutions that wear out the machine, it is the friction. When both are Christians you have the oil that will keep down friction.

We need to teach our young, as many of us have been taught, that the primary goal in marriage is to help each other get to heaven. This is a statement of Peter, "*...dwell with them... as heirs together of the grace of life.*" (First Peter 3:7). Recognize that you both are precious souls, precious to each other, and precious to God.

The Leader

Every team must have a leader. In God's plan the husband is the leader of the home. We are sorry this does not please everyone. But it pleases all who love God (Ephesians 5:23).

There are alternatives to teamwork. What are these alternatives? They are frustration, estrangement, heartbreak, betrayal, harsh words, bitterness, regret, agony, broken homes, scarred children, ruined lives, separations, loneliness, hatred, handicapped youth, lost souls. Unless the God-designed team functions as God has designed it, Satan will run in some substitutes that will destroy everyone involved.

Value of Experience

While watching a sporting event and playoff games, I heard one commentator say, "Have you noticed how that most of the time the teams with experience are the ones that make the playoffs." He was simply observing how experience makes the team more effective. This is true in

sports. It is also true in marriage. You learn to think alike, work smoothly, understand each other, grow together, where one stands two stand, and you never walk alone.

We speak of newlyweds and how they seem so well suited for each other. Bless their hearts, they may well be. But they are not near as well suited as they shall become as they go through life together.

God's team consists of a husband and wife, living together, loving God and each other, in the oneness of marriage, and in Christ.

* * * * *

Set Thine House In Order

Second Kings 20:1-6, "*In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order; for thou shalt die and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord saying, I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, before Isaiah was gone out of the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people. Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer; I have seen thy tears; behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go unto the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.*"

There are statements in this record that should motivate us to the noblest goals. Hezekiah was a good king of Judah, and there was a scarcity of good kings. Of all the kings of Northern Israel not one was called good. Of the

twenty kings of Judah only six could properly be called good. Hezekiah was one of the six.

At this time Northern Israel had already been overrun relatively recently by the Assyrian, and Jerusalem and Judah were being threatened also. In addition to this grave concern, Hezekiah was sick and it seemed he would soon die because of his illness.

That Dreaded Word

What is that word that is so seldom associated with self but so often associated with others? What is that event that reduces all men to the same rank? What is sure and certain in the future of each of us? It is death. Hebrews 9:27, "*And it is appointed unto man once to die...*" This should not be considered morbid, but realistic. This reality should, and usually does, sober our thinking. Daniel Webster, being impressed in a sermon that all must die, said, "Frigid and weak as these words might seem, at once they were to me the most impressive and awakening I ever heard." When we read of some condemned prisoner who awaits death because of his crime, to see soldiers marching into battle, knowing that many shall never return, to visit the terminally ill, to observe the inevitable toll of age, we are conscious of the solemnity that hovers about us, deeply moved by the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the continuation of life.

Hezekiah was given a temporary reprieve, a postponement, to this inevitable event. He was given additional opportunity to "*set* (his) *house in order.*" None of us can ever know when a day may be our last. This is all the more reason we should be busy at the task of setting, and keeping, our houses in order. We know not what a day might bring. We sing the song that says, "Get ready for the judgment day."

Houses That Were Not In Order

The Bible tells us of those who died the wrong way, that is, with their houses not in order. Jehoram, one of the wicked kings of Judah, a son of a good king named Jehoshaphat, had every advantage. The prophet Elijah

was one of his advisors and teachers. Yet, "*He departed without being desired.*" Adam Clarke said he was hated while he lived, neglected when he died, visibly cursed of God and necessarily execrated (loathed,JWB) by the people he had corrupted and oppressed. His death was a sad ending to a sorry life. His house was not in order.

Another good king's son, Absalom, died an inglorious death, exhibiting arrogance, pride, deceit, lies, greed, and leaving behind a memory of a wasted life of wrong deeds and dissipated opportunities. He died guilty of betrayal and disloyalty to his father. He is another example of a man who died without his house in order.

In the New Testament, Luke twelve, we read of the only man that Jesus ever specifically called a fool. The reading of verses sixteen through twenty-one reveals how tragic it is to face God in judgment having left this life in such a fashion as did that man. Thinking that he had an abundance of this world's wealth, he failed to establish the correct priorities in life and in death all of the material abundance he had at his disposal was of no value to him. He did not set his house in order.

Time and space forbids that we speak of so many others of similar and pitiable destiny, such as Cain, Lot's wife, King Saul, Judas, etc. But they allowed death to overtake them and their houses were out of the order that God expected and instructed for each of them, and us.

A Step Toward the Crown

In sharp contrast to these we read of those whose death was but the final step in a great accomplishment by the grace of God. But they had set their houses in order. Their lives were successes and death was but a crowning of that success.

King Josiah of Judah, another of the few good kings, met death defending the territorial integrity of his nation, executing his duty as the king of God's people. He had been the initiator of many reforms during his reign and tried to get the people to return to God before the overthrow of Judah became a reality. Second Chronicles 35:24 says of his death, "*And all Judah and Jerusalem*

mourned for Josiah." When good men die those who appreciate what is good will mourn because of their absence from our midst.

Consider the death of Stephen recorded in Acts seven. His death is the first recorded death of one martyred for the cause of Christ. He had stood before the enemies of Christ and boldly proclaimed Him. In his message he showed them the Christ and reproved them for their unbelief. Acts 7:54-60 tells us of the vicious reaction on the part of his hearers. They, being cut to the heart, gnashed on him, with their teeth, cast him out of the city, and stoned him until death brought him relief from this wicked world and wicked people. While we would not cherish the manner in which this nobleman of God died, how sweet would be the fate of us all if we would leave this life as prepared to meet God as did Stephen. He had his house in order.

Acts 9:36-39, "*Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is by interpretation called Dorcas; this woman was full of good works, and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days that she was sick, and died; whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he should not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber; and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.*" Notice the text speaks of those things which Dorcas did "*while she was with them.*" In death she was no longer with them, and because of this they were grieved. She had been a person full of good works, charitable deeds, using the talents that she had for the relief and benefit of others. She had lived in such a fashion that her house was in order when the day of her death came.

Precious to God

As with those whose death marked the end of the tragedy of their lives, there were many others whose death was surely precious in the sight of the Lord, such as Peter,

Paul, David, Abraham, Moses, and scores of others. "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*" (Psalm 116:15). This is because their houses were in order when time came to die.

The following story conveys the message and the benefit of having your house in order. "I stood one day in the sanctifying memory by the side of the sainted dead. Suddenly I was conscious of the presence of a stranger nearby. He seemed to be waiting for me to speak. I said unto him, 'Friend, who art thou? And why dost thou intrude upon my moment of memories and reflections?' He answered, 'Do you not know me? I am the king of terror.' Looking at him more closely, I saw nothing about him at that moment that struck terror in my heart. 'I see nothing terrible about thee,' I responded. Then he said, 'No, for the moment I have no terrors at my command. When people live and die as did this one, my authority has vanished. But where one lives in selfishness, impurity, hatred, strife, greed, against Christ and for this present world, where one has lived without God and without hope, there I raise my throne and dress it with such terrors that are at my command. But here, in the presence of the sainted dead, I have no power. I leave thee in peace.'"

John wrote, Revelation 14:13, "*Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.*" Is this not the scene of spiritual victory? Will such be the case with me and you? When shall that moment come?

It Must Come

Eventually the summons to leave this life will come to each one. We may have more immediate warnings of it. We may not. But glory can be ours if we be so wise as to not only set out houses in order, but having once done that, keep them in order. We do this by coming to Christ for forgiveness of sins, obeying His teaching to believe on Him, repent of sins, confess our faith in Him, and being baptized into Him for the remission of sins. Then we keep our houses in order as we live faithfully as a Christian should, following His footsteps day by day.

What of your house? We trust that these words do not create an undue anxiety within your heart. But we do hope they will provoke a sincere response to the Lord. If such a lesson can do this within any heart and life, the story of Hezekiah will forever be a blessing. Should you be so informed of your death being nigh upon you, what would you do? Have you set your house in order? Are you ready to be judged by the ALMIGHTY GOD of heaven? Possibly there are many physical and earthly matters that might command your attention for a while. This is understandable. But what of your spiritual orderliness? This is that which is most important, isn't it?

* * * * *

Graveclothes

John 11: 38-46, "*Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said unto them, Loose him, and let him go. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees and told them what things Jesus had done.*"

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was a miracle. He had been dead for four days when Jesus called him from the tomb. This miracle was another proof of the identity of Jesus as God's Son and it caused many to believe on

Him. It also demonstrated that our Lord has power over death. He is the giver of life. He was capable of benevolent deeds of compassion toward mankind.

No Longer Appropriate

Lazarus came forth and was bound with the graveclothes appropriate for burial. But upon arising they were not appropriate for the living, and the Lord instructed that they be removed. Notice that Jesus did not remove the stone from the cave, nor the graveclothes from Lazarus. This He left for others to do. He did what they could not but expected them to do what they already had the capacity for doing. God does for people what they cannot do. But He does expect people to cooperate with what Him by doing what they can do. They removed the stone and they assisted in removing the inappropriate garments from Lazarus.

This principle is true respecting the spiritual realm. The saved are spiritually alive, even thou they were spiritually dead. Ephesians 2:1, "*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.*" There are some things that are characteristic of the spiritually dead. First Corinthians 6:9-11, "*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*" It is inappropriate for the spiritually living to be clothed with the graveclothes of the spiritually dead. First Peter 5:5 teaches us to "*be clothed*" with the traits of the righteous. The redeemed are arrayed in robes of white. Revelation 7:13,14, "*And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*"

The Old Testament priests had holy garments to wear. In the New Testament every Christian is a priest. He should not be clothed with the garments of sin but loosed from that which is characteristic of the spiritually dead.

There Are Many Graveclothes

People sometimes wear their graveclothes. There are a number of them. We wear the gravecloth of Biblical ignorance which handicaps and hinders us from being what we ought to be. Second Timothy 2:15 urges study that we might handle aright the word of truth. This lack of knowledge is one of the most serious problems even in the Lord's church today. We cannot mature without knowledge. First Peter 2:2, "*As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby.*" Second Peter 3:18, "*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*"

We can resist temptation with knowledge. Jesus used the Scriptures to defeat the temptations of Satan (Matthew 4). Psalm 119:11, "*Thy word have I laid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee.*" We cannot teach what we do not know. First Timothy 4:13,16, "*Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine... Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.*" We cannot be easily led astray with Biblical knowledge (Ephesians 4:11-15). Biblical ignorance cultivates the ground for apostasy.

Malice and Anger

There are also the graveclothes of character weaknesses such as malice and anger. Ephesians 4:26, "*Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*" First Peter 2:1, "*Wherefore laying aside all malice and all guile...*"

Selfishness

Selfishness is a gravecloth, such as was the character trait of the rich fool of Luke 12:17-19 who was only concerned about himself, centered his attention on himself, even to the neglect of others. Closely akin is

greediness and covetousness. Ephesians 5:3, "*But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you as becometh saints.*" First Timothy 6:9,10 warns of materialistic attitudes and ambitions. "*But they that will be rich fall into temptations and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*"

Other Graveclothes

Other evil character traits would include dishonesty, lying, pride, egotism, jealousy, and envy. Romans 12:17, "*Provide things honest on the sight of all men.*" Colossians 3:9, "*Lie not one to another, seeing you have put off the old man with his deeds.*" Romans 12:3, "*For I say through the grace that is given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*" Titus 3:3, "*For we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.*" Romans 1:29, "*Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers...*" These are Biblical teachings regarding the spiritual graveclothes of character weaknesses which bind us so often.

Bad Habits

Then there are the graveclothes of bad habits. There is the bad habit of profanity, evil speech, gossip. Ephesians 4:29, "*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*" Matthew 12:36,37, "*But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*"

Drinking alcohol, smoking, gambling, and other similar habits can become weight about the soul that will

destroy. Such activities ought not be a part of the lives of those who have laid hold on spiritual life. These are the kind of things that are what can be expected of those who are spiritually dead, not those spiritually alive.

Human Traditions

But people can also be bound by the graveclothes of human traditions. This was certainly a religious problem in Jesus' day. Many were convinced to be observant of the human traditions, such as were demanded by Pharisees, even above the law of God. There have always been those who assume to make laws where God has not made them just as there are those who choose to ignore what God has said, doing what God has not authorized. Men have no right to legislate for God any more than man has the right to set aside what God has legislated. What so many today have adopted as their rule is that we can do just about anything that feels acceptable to us, not realizing the necessity for authority. But religious ideas that are formed, molded, sustained and perpetuated on no higher authority than the fact that such has been done for a long time is to bind ourselves where we ought to be loosed.

Thinking You Are Unworthy

Many are bound with the gravecloth of unworthiness. It is true that we are undeserving of the blessings of God, but at the same time we are not to destroy a sense of self-worth, self-esteem, self-awareness and personal value. Each one is worth more than the whole world (Matthew 16:26). "*For what is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lost his own soul.*" This is true because we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

Matthew 22:39, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,*" implies there must be a certain degree of concern for self. Love of self is a prerequisite to properly loving another. Ephesians 5:28,29, "*So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.*" Self-esteem is vital to a husband treating his wife with respect and honor. A person that is always "down on

himself" is like a handcuffed, tied, restricted person who is unable to function, who has lost motivation for growth and improvement. This gravecloth should be loosed.

Not For The Living

There are other graveclothes that we might mention. But graveclothes are expected only when burial is necessary. They are appropriate for the dead, but not expected among the living. Such spiritual graveclothes ought not be a part of the existence of the spiritually alive. To persist in such things is to bind, limit, and restrict ourselves from operating as a Christian must operate. We must be loosed as surely as Lazarus had to be loosed. This requires a recognition that such things do not belong as a part of the Christian way of life. Once recognizing this, we must turn our attention to developing another kind of character and lifestyle. We are to put on the new man, be renewed, put off the old man, following after the image of the One who created us (Ephesians 4:17-24; Colossians 3:5-11).

* * * * *

The Rending of The Veil

Matthew 27:45-54, "*Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a spunge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the*

bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."

There are several miracles surrounding the death of Christ, the most prominent being the resurrection itself by which He was declared to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). There was the darkness from the sixth hour to the ninth, which corresponds to our noon to three in the afternoon. There was an earthquake with rocks broken apart. Also mentioned are graves being opened, the bodies of saints arising and going into the city and appearing to many. The veil of the temple was rent in twain. Even if some of these events might be explained naturally, (and we are not suggesting that any of them were natural, but strongly believe each was miraculous), the fact that it all took place around the death of Christ was not just coincidental. But much of this miraculous action is overshadowed by His resurrection.

Mt. Everest is the tallest mountain is the world. But there are other peaks near Mt. Everest that are higher than any other mountain in the world except Mt. Everest. Yet, few of us ever recall the name of those peaks because of their proximity to the tallest. This may explain why the miracles surrounding the death of Christ do not receive much attention from many Bible students. The resurrection looms so large that these other things are overlooked.

Let us focus attention on two of these miraculous events, and then concentrate our study on a third.

Darkness

Consider the darkness at an hour when usually the sun is the brightest. Amos 8:9 may have been a prophetic reference to this event. "*And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear*

day." (Amos 8:9). I know of no other event that would fulfill this prophecy except the time of the death of Christ except possibly a reference to the smoke ascending over Jerusalem when it was destroyed. Peter said all the prophets had foretold of this hour and the things that transpired. (Acts 3:24).

If the words of Amos were not a prophecy of this hour, it still helps us to understand the significance of the darkness. The sun being darkened is a symbolic figure of speech recognizing the fall of a great power. With the death of Christ the dominion of Satan suffered a fatal blow. Likewise, the Jewish law and the Mosaic system came to it termination, being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Whatever might be the true significance of this darkness, we cannot doubt that it was a manifestation of God's power overruling the affairs of that day. The death of the Son of God was in many respects a dark day on this earth.

Opened Graves

What about the graves being opened, the dead being raised, walking about? What happened to them? Why was this done? Only Matthew records this event so we have little information concerning it. The fact that only Matthew records it does not lessen the reality of it or its significance. It is thought that these things may have occurred, as Scripture states, "*after the resurrection,*" rather than at the moment of His death. We really do not know much about it and had rather leave off the speculation about it. Possibly the event was to emphasize the reality of a bodily resurrection. Whatever was the purpose, it was a manifestation of divine power to be sure. We read in Deuteronomy 29:29, "*The secret things belong unto God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever...*" So we are content to let the unrevealed remain so.

The Veil

Let us turn attention to the rending of the veil. The veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle, and later the temple. It is described in Exodus 26:31-33. There it is stated that "*the veil shall*

divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy place." It was made according to divine instruction and specifications. The priests officiated in the Holy Place. Only the high priest went into the Most Holy Place where was located the ark of the covenant, the cheribims, and the mercy seat atop the ark, which denoted the special presence of God. The temple was the center of the Jewish system, and the Most Holy Place was the centermost and primary place in the temple. Entrance into this Most Holy Place was only through the veil.

As long as the veil was intact, it preserved the sanctity of this place as well as the entire system of which it was the heart. The veil enforced the law, the priesthood system, the Jewish religion. It was a very significant element of Judaism.

But at the death of Christ this veil was rent from top to bottom. That which was formerly sanctified was no longer so. The system which it denoted lost its significance and distinction. The law, which had been a wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, was broken down at the death of Christ (Ephesians 2:15,16), and the veil that preserved that law was no longer intact.

Not only the high priest, but all the priests had entrance into the presence of God. The Jewish office of high priest ended because Jesus Christ has become our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). We approach God through Him (John 14:6). We are all priests (First Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6). No longer is any geographical place, any building, THE place to worship God. It is as Jesus had said, John 4:21, *"Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."* There is no "sanctified" place.

The End of the Law

The rending of the veil was a physical manifestation of the conclusion of the Mosaic law and the accomplishment of the purpose for which it was given (Galatians 3:24). The old covenant was to be replaced with the new, better, and second will by which we are saved (Hebrews 8:6; 10:9,10). It marked the end of that

which was but a figure of that which was to come (Hebrews 9:24). The rending of the veil marked the bringing in of the "*true.*"

Hebrews 10:20 teaches that the veil is also a representation of the body of Christ. "*By a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.*" The veil was a type of the body of Christ in that, as the veil was torn, so was the body of the Lord.

John 19:31-34, "*The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day (for that sabbath day was a high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs, but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.*"

The fact that the bones of Christ were not broken was in fulfillment of prophetic words in Psalm 34:20, "*He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken.*" The law of Moses (Deuteronomy 21:22,23) required that no body be left hanging.

Through the Veil

Just as the way into the presence of God was through the veil in the tabernacle and temple, so our way to God is through Christ. "*And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies of your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight.*" (Colossians 1:21,22). As His body was torn, so was the veil.

The significance of the rending of the veil might escape us as we behold the glory of the resurrected Christ and the tremendous sacrifice on the cross that preceded it. But this tearing was a momentous demonstration of God regarding the law of Moses, the fulfillment of prophecy, the removal of the former covenant, and a graphic

presentation that we all are now subject to the authority of Jesus Christ.

Authority in religion is a hotly contested matter. But among the other lessons we learn, such as the end of the Mosaic system, and that the way to God is through Christ, we have the answer as to whom we must turn and allow to be the Guide and Master of all things.

* * * * *

TWO BIG BUMPS IN THE ROAD

The road of life has stretches of smooth pavement, but now and again, you hit a bump.

When you consider life you will soon see that there are so many wonderful blessings that God has given us. We would not for a moment suggest we emphasize the negative side of life as we look at bumps in our path. Considering family, friends, brethren, salvation, fellowship with Deity, material provisions, health, on and on, most of us can count our many blessings.

We must always be careful lest we become like the Israelites that were constantly complaining and murmuring about first one thing then another. That is not what we are doing here as we take note of two bumps on the road of life that have given us, and we think others, many hours of concern and grief. They have caused frustration and I am unable to find solutions.

There are brethren we have known through the years who once stood so loyal to God's truth, believed in the same things we do, stood with us in fighting the good fight, but where are they now? We see them in the camp of the

liberals who are destroying the church with a fury. These once good brethren promote the cause of liberalism, attend liberal functions, invite liberals for their meetings, generally show their contempt for where they once stood and those who still stand in the "old paths" of Scripture. These apostates really bring a great deal of sorrow to the heart of anybody who loves truth and the souls of men. I can list a fairly long list of such people I have known, but now, they consider me a radical because I have not accepted their digression.

The other frustrating problem is when brethren who stand for the same things, teach the same doctrine of truth, oppose the same liberal errors, but have a falling out with each other. Bad as that is, it does not stop there. They expect others to "line up" with them in their squabbles. And if you do not choose sides, you are no longer worthy of their friendship either, at least they hold you at a distance. Sometimes brethren fall out over matters about which those not involved could never in a thousand years know with certainty all the sources of their problems. But still some demand you support them or else. If you do not, you can be sure they will let you know in one way or another that they are down on you. If you try to get them together, you often get both sides against you. This is not uncommon. But it does cause the heart to suffer.

In either case, such things ought not ever be. I am not just wanting their acceptance. I can live without that, even though I once enjoyed it. But such things hurt the cause of Christ and will destroy souls in hell. That bothers me.JWB

Nothing Doubting

The Last Word

Acts 11:12, "*And the Spirit bade me to with them, nothing doubting.*" Peter was reporting to brethren his visit to the household of Cornelius during which he took the gospel of Christ for the first time to Gentiles. He restated before them what he had been instructed (Acts 10:20) regarding the messengers Cornelius had sent to Peter and the invitation to come to Caesarea. This was no small matter for Peter to obey. Until this time, even though he had preached the gospel is for all, he did not fully comprehend how universal the gospel message really was. For him to go visit these Gentiles was something quite new for him. But he went, " *nothing doubting.*" Is not this the way we are to follow the instructions of God in our own lives? Even though we may not grasp the importance and significance of everything God expects of us, are we not to show our faith by our unreserved obedience? We appreciate Peter's attitude toward the will of God. May we do as he did! JWB

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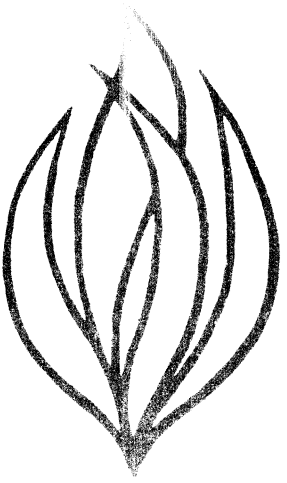

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XV James W. Boyd **NUMBER 9**

The Solution to Our Ills

Hebrews 4:12-14, "*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.*"

This is a marvelous statement about the Word of God and of Christ. These are troublesome times for our nation. I suppose that such could be said to some extent in every generation and in every nation because trouble seems to be the companion of the human family wherever it is found (Job 14:1,2). But it is certainly true of our time. There is sin in high places and low. We suffer from the problems imposed by alcoholic beverages, low morals, disintegration of the family, illegitimate births, abortions, divorce, ever increasing crime rates, pornography, evolution (that teaches us we are only materialistic animals), and many other plagues. While many in the nation profess to be religious, how many are righteous or even see the need of being so? The nation's very fibre that holds us together as a free people is under vicious attack from both within and without, even in places of governmental power. The devil is enjoying prosperity in the "land of the free and home of the brave," now with some justification called the "land of the freaks, and home of the knaves." Possibly such can be said of every nation, and possibly of every previous generation. But what happens elsewhere and in other times is not so much our concern as what happens where we are and when we live.

Proverbs 14:34 is still true. "*Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach of any people.*" Psalm 9:17, "*The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations*

that forget God." Galatians 6:7,8, *"Be not deceived. God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."*

Trying Times for the People of God

These conditions mean that these are trying times for God's people, those who compose the Lord's church. So many things in religion generally are alarming. There are divisions, contradictions, compromises, open rebellion, and surrender to the ways of the devil within the ranks of those who profess to be religious. Many religious leaders are nothing more than charlatans, money grabbers, hypocrites that prey upon the ignorant and superstitious within the blind masses. Much of religion is sensationalism, emotionalism, "feel-good-ism," propagated by false doctrines, offering false hopes, false security, even materialistic appeals. Even in the Lord's church there exists a strong and determined element that wishes to change the church and make it like the denomi(nations) round about rather than the church of which you read in the Scriptures. The partaking of the sins of the world by those who are members of the church is so commonplace that anyone who stands up and speaks out for the truth on these matters is usually branded as some kind of unloving radical. The liberal, digressive, permissive compromises alongside the lethargy, indifference, Biblical ignorance, unfaithfulness, and rebellion under the inexcusable weakness of leaders and teachers is taking a deadly toll among those who say they follow the Bible.

The church as revealed in the Bible is generally unnoticed in the world. This is not a "put down" of the church. It is simply a statement of historical reality. It reflects the degree of contempt and disdain that the world holds toward the Lord's church. Because of this some clamor for changing the church to be more acceptable and popular with the world. But it remains true that most historians write about the church only in terms of denominationalism, evidently revealing their ignorance of the church of the Bible. The church of the Bible, if mentioned at all, demands nothing more than a

passing footnote or a sub-topic. Because men love darkness rather than light, the church of the Bible is often not a very powerful force in our world and is only a slight power in molding national morality. A sad commentary is that too many in the church have mimicked the world and fashionable religion rather than imitating faithfully the Scriptural doctrine. Churches of Christ have in many instances lost the distinctiveness that ought to characterize it because of the adoption of the promotional gimmicks and gadgets, with emphasis on men, human methods, and expansive machinations rather than the inspired message. As one has commented, when one looks like a duck, waddles like a duck, quacks like a duck, has a bill like a duck, it is not surprising that he is taken for just another duck. Such has become a millstone around the neck of the Lord's church over the past few decades of liberal digression.

God Offers the Solution

God places emphasis on the message to cure the ills of mankind. It is the blood and heartbeat of the prosperity of the church. The Word is living, active, sharp, powerful, and never out-dated nor irrelevant as some would have people to believe. The problem with man and the Bible is that the Bible is untaught, unknown, misrepresented, disbelieved, untried, and unwanted. But all of this, as tragic as it is, in no way discounts the fact that the Word of God is the way of salvation and provides the solution for mankind and his problems.

Paul tells us that the world considers the gospel foolishness, but it is still the message of God to man to solve what ails him. Too often the preaching heard is nothing but pretty platitudes, designed to please the hearer, more akin to a humorous after dinner speech, intended to entertain, fill the time, go through the motions, provide a pep talk, with guarded manipulations of people, running over with super promotions and emotions, telling people what they want to hear rather than what God says they need to hear. How many who call themselves preachers are really just psychology counsellors whose counsel is what they learned in some seminary or school, often stained with humanism and

modernism, rather than the Word of God? Much that people hear is long on the personality of the preacher and his ego and short of the message of God. "*By their fruit ye shall know them.*" We see the fruit being produced.

The Gospel

The solution to man's ills and the growth of the church is the gospel preached, heard, believed, obeyed, and lived. The church is composed of the saved. The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The basic problem of man is sin. Just consider what you hear and see on the "news" night after night. There is war, theft, abortion, AIDS, poverty, murder, problem after problem. More often than not, at the root of it is transgression of God's moral teaching. But so few want anything said or done that would really correct or even improve the low morals and degenerate conduct of the populace.

What does the church do in these trying times? As often as not many have tried to find a way for God to accept all of this regardless of His stated hatred of every false way. The church has developed a "clergy class" of professionals, a staff, giving titles and positions just like the decayed and decaying denominations, satisfying the ego of first this one and that one, making each to appear to be "somewhat."

Many look upon preachers a simply "hired help," being paid as much for what they will not say as for what they say. They ought to be as the prophets of God proclaiming His message without fear or favor to anyone and everyone, anywhere and everywhere.

We see people taking off into the field of "church growth," as if they have discovered some special secret that nobody has ever known until they came along. THERE IS NO SECRET AS TO WHAT MAKES THE LORD'S CHURCH GROW. IT IS THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL TO THOSE WHO HEARTS ARE HONEST AND OPEN TO THE TRUTH. What do you say when someone asks you, "How can we make the church grow?" Do not be swept away by the special experts, promotional programs, big boom and bust extravaganzas that appeal to the fleshly lusts of people to be coddled and

entertained. Talk rather about preaching the gospel in its purity and simplicity without compromise, both positively and negatively. That is the way the church grew after it began. The young and restless, wise and scholarly of our day have not, will not, cannot, improve on that regardless of all of their "hot air" that boasts of big crowds.

The Same Old Gospel

That which is taught must be the old gospel of the Bible. We cannot solve problems with a "social gospel" that concentrates only on the physical. The social gospel is insipid and anemic. The ways of Dale Carnegie cannot replace the gospel. Such might woo and win numbers, but it will not convert and change the person into favor with God.

That which denies the Word, the reality of heaven and hell, contends there is no right or wrong, and that there is no eternity, but only the here and now cannot help mankind, but only can contribute to the deepening of man's problems. Social reform without spiritual regeneration is cosmetic. It is like putting a band-aid on cancer. It may make somebody feel good and think they are doing something worthwhile, but it is just show.

Men need to be converted and only the Word of God can do that. How tragic it is that many become malcontent with the gospel and seek something new rather than contending for what is true. How many times are we warned not to tamper with, add to, take from, nor alter in any way what God has said? How often are we assured that what we do must be done with divine authority? But how many really pay serious attention to what the Bible tells us?

The gospel heard must be the simple gospel (First Corinthians 1:26; 2:3,4). There is no room for the demonstrations of alleged personal genius and ego manifestations. So many are impressed with some man, not the message. This may be why some seem overwhelmed with the desire to impress others that they are "wise men," but are not really gospel preachers on the cutting edge in the battle for souls on God's side. The

result of such as this has produced in our time a horrendous digression, compromise of truth, and apostasy.

Blind Leaders

We again send forth the warning concerning the dangerous emphasis on that which is called the "highly schooled and educated clergy." This is not an anti-education or anti-intellectual statement. The so-called "scholar" is probably the one who is most likely to leave the truth and follow the paths of his own "wisdom." We have known of elderships who have restricted their inquiries for gospel preachers only to those who have a Master's Degree from some school. (Lest some think this is "sour grapes," I have mine. So what!) How long does it take what seems to be otherwise intelligent people to realize that theological knowledge does not necessarily mean Biblical knowledge? Some are ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (Second Timothy 3:7). It is because they are ever learning the philosophies and doctrines of men rather than of Christ.

Standards for Preachers

Do you realize that the standards some churches use for preachers would disqualify most of the apostles who were "*unlearned*" men, not having the formal schooling of the day? The apostles were not uninformed nor lacking in intelligence. They just did not fill themselves with what men thought and then declared themselves the experts. Just listen to some preachers stalking about like proud peacocks boasting of degrees, seeking to display their irrelevant learning, using high sounding words to impress the little man in the pew, showing more what they do not know about the Scriptures than what they know.

Three men were listening to one these stuffed shirts and one turned to the other and asked, "What's he talking about?" The second responded, "He doesn't say." The third overheard them and commented, "But he must be smart. I don't understand a thing he is saying."

If brethren would return to the good day when they sought preachers and teachers who knew the Book, loved the Book, lived the Book, taught the Book, and "put the hay down where the calves are," the church would avoid many ills and solve many others.

A Way Versus The Way

The gospel preached must be the certain and sound gospel. We are not to preach "a way," but are to preach "the way." Many are proclaiming doubt, maybe-so's, speculations, some even contending that nobody can really know anything for sure. It is strange how that they are so sure nobody can know anything for sure.

We need people who will speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11), using sound words that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:1,8), with certainty and clarity, "*speaking the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15), without ambiguity, not double-tongued with uncertainties derived from the doctors of philosophy and human misrepresentation. Some say we cannot know anything for certain but that the best we can do is strive for truth. How do they know that? They are so certain about that being true! Any philosophy such as that "shoots itself in the foot," and is not worth following. Those that advocate such nonsense ought be marked and branded for what they are, false teachers, servants of the devil, dividers of brethren, deceivers of men. Truth is revealed, available, and within our ability to know it and live it (John 8:32; First John 2:2; Ephesians 3:3,4).

The Whole Counsel

The gospel that is the solution to the ills of mankind must be the militant gospel of Christ, being taught both positively and negatively, being the whole counsel of God. This does not give license to be ugly or deliberately offensive to anybody. But let us understand that truth offends those who do not want or love it. While we are not to be a contentious people, just out looking for a fight, trying to pick a fight, we must realize that a fight is being waged between truth and error, the Lord and Satan, righteousness and unrighteousness, and it is our task to be soldiers of the cross and fight the good fight.

The timid, passive, soft approach, as if one is ashamed of the gospel, is not what pleases the Lord. We are to contend for the faith as with "fixed bayonets," because we are in an eternal life or eternal death struggle for ourselves, our children, our neighbors, and all those around us.

The solution to man's ills is never to be found in the fields of politics, economics, secular education, military power, nor even religion per se. While each of these may have contributions, they do not contain what man needs. Man's problem is sin and God has provided the only answer there is and that answer is Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Each one needs to be a promoter, defender, and participant in the way of Christ if he truly wishes to make significant contributions to the solution of the ills of mankind.

* * * * *

The Authority of The Eldership

You may not agree with what is taught in this lesson, but if you do not at first agree, let me kindly say to you that you now have an opportunity to learn something you need to learn, and correct your views. There are various threats to the Lord's church at this time, one of which is rebellion against authority.

First Samuel 12:13-15, when Samuel was introducing Saul, the first king, to the nation, "*Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen and whom ye have desired! And, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. If ye will fear the Lord and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of*

the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers."

First Samuel 15:22,23, after Saul's failure to destroy the Amalekites as commanded, "*And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.*" Calling rebellion as witchcraft he assigns rebellion as running roughshod over Deity, claiming to have the rights and powers of Deity, claiming to do that which only belongs to Deity. Rebellion is disrespect and disregard of authority, the defiance of commands, acting contrary to authority and/or without authority. It is the opposite of obedience and submission.

We see rebellion in civil affairs, in the home, against parents, in the schools against teachers and rules. It is quite evident in religion, and even in the church from time to time. There be those who claim to have a "liberty" which they do not have before God. They are the "do-your-own-thing" people. They use various authorities such as a clergy, theologians, feelings, ancestors, creeds, majority rule, status quo, venerable men and other non-authoritative sources when they should conform to the authority of Christ as revealed in the Bible. We shall concern ourselves with but one area of authority and rebellion and that is regarding the government of the Lord's church as it relates to the elderships of congregations.

God's Government

The government of the church is determined by Biblical revelation. "What works" is not the standard. All authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 28:18), and He is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). The apostles were given authority by Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 14,15,16; First Corinthians 2:12,13; Matthew 16:19; 18:18). The will of the Lord that was once embodied in inspired men is now embodied in inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). When one

uses the Word as authority he will speak as the Word speaks (First Peter 4:11). He will learn that there is no organizational form larger than the local church, The local church is overseen by qualified men called elders, bishops, pastors, shepherds, presbyters. Local churches had both elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1). There were elders in every church (Acts 14:23). His way works.

Contrary to what is sometimes heard from the prating of men who seek control, elderships do have authority over the local church. It is disappointing to read from the pens of some who call themselves "brethren" the challenges of this Biblical truth. They say the idea that elderships have authority is alien to the New Testament, worldly, borne of naive Biblical scholarship, and the King James Version. (Time after time, rebels show their utter hatred toward the KJV. Little wonder they hate it! It stands between them and their goals to dominate, subvert, change, and restructure the church. Modern versions advocate the false positions these rebels have taken. In them rebels find more latitude to believe and practice whatever they want.) Some have said elderships have no authority at all. Others have said they have authority only as examples. Such people only betray their contempt for plain and clear Scripture.

They Are Not Perfect

Elders are not always what they ought to be. Is that news? Elderships are sometimes disobeyed by some members. Is that news? But to contend that elderships have no authority, except possibly as examples (something everybody ought to be and have), is grossly and reprehensibly wrong. One liberal "scholar" has written an article where he took one Greek word that means authority and tried to show it was never used with reference to the eldership. But he omitted nearly a dozen other words that affirm the very thing he denied. Even the word he cited demands obedience, the same kind of obedience that is to be given to the eldership. Such is not "scholarship" but dishonest sophistry, unsound doctrine, and digressive heresy. But so it is so often with the self-acclaimed "learned."

If elderships have authority, then it is rebellion to deny it. It is rebellion against the source that grants elderships authority. If elderships have no authority, it is usurpation of authority to claim it for them. Just whose authority is usurped must also be established. Seeing the Lord's attitude toward rebellion, this is a serious matter whichever way one goes. Numbers sixteen tells of Korah, Dothan, and Abiram who challenged the authority of Moses. That challenge was considered a challenge to the authority of God because God had granted authority to Moses. The result was God's wrath against that faction and their ultimate destruction.

His Duties

When one considers the duties assigned to elders he is forced to admit they have authority. Acts 20:28, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers...*" Does not this grant authority for their self-examination? Do they not also have at the same stroke authority over the flock as well as themselves? Is not the authority to discharge a duty inherent in the charge of that duty? Certainly!

Acts 20:31, "*Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears.*" Do not watchmen have duties? What value is there to attentiveness and vigilance when they are powerless to do anything about what is seen? Why warn the watchers if they are helpless and have no right to do anything about what they see?

First Timothy 3:4,5, "*One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?*" To rule literally means to rule with authority. Taking care of the church was equated with the rule of a father over the home. This is not of a worldly source, but Scripture. Are fathers limited in ruling the house to merely being an example? Cannot fathers command their children as did Abraham (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 32:46; Proverbs 22:6)?

First Timothy 5:17, "*Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor*

in the word and doctrine." Again, elders are to rule. This means to take the lead, preside over, oversee, superintend. This means they possess authority.

First Thessalonians 5:12,13, "*And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.*" Those who are "*over*" the brethren are to be esteemed because of the work they do. They are "*over*" the brethren because they have authority. They have the power to direct and command. This is the same word used in Acts twenty-six by Paul when referring to his attitude toward Agrippa, the ruler of the land and one in authority. It means to come before one of authority. Away forever with the false doctrine that elderships have no authority. It is a sinister attempt to seize power to inject whatever somebody wants into the bloodstream of the church without anybody having power to call their hand.

Hebrews 13:7, "*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*" Remember, be mindful, of your leaders. They are those who are over you and who rule over you. This is in a religious context, not in the context of a civil official.

Hebrews 13:17, "*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*" Again, the ones to be remembered are the ones to be obeyed. They watch for the souls of those under their authority, and will be held accountable for each one. Will they be held accountable yet denied the necessary authority to carry out what they are charged to do?

Hebrews 13:24 salutes "*those that have the rule over you.*" This refers to the same men as Titus 1:7, "*For a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God...*" A steward is an overseer, possessing delegated authority. He is an administrator, manger, and superintendent.

What Is Behind This Rebellion?

We have already noted that some want to be "free" to do whatever they want and elderships prevent them from doing that. But we wonder why this outburst of rejection of the authority of elderships? There are several reasons. While we have no desire or intent to judge motives of proponents of this false doctrine, we do judge the fruits and want to discover the source of it.

The "pastor system," preachers ruling things, the doctrine called "evangelistic authority' has captivated some who are more ambitious than informed. Preachers have authority, but their authority is to preach the Word. Titus 2:15, "*Rebuke with all authority.*" The word here means by the way of commandment, giving a charge, backed by the authority of God. A preacher is A leader but he is not THE leader. Paul, when he wished to teach those who had charge of things, did not send for the preachers but for the elders.

Certainly, there is the tragic abuse and misuse of authority. First Peter 5:3 warns of lording over brethren. I had one elder to tell me that when a boss tells the employee to move that box, the employee must move that box. I told him that is fine between bosses and employees and box moving, but he was not boss and his brethren were not his employees, and we were not moving boxes. He had the dictator attitude toward his position and he abused his authority. He must have thought when made an elder he had been crowned king. Diotrophes had this problem of desiring to be "big dog in the kennel," loving preeminence among brethren, doing as he arbitrarily saw fit. We must distinguish between using and abusing authority. The very prohibition of abusing power indicates that the right use of power had been granted. This is one reason for not allowing a novice to become an elder lest his lack of understanding and immaturity allow him to abuse authority.

Too many have simply not studied God's government. They like to imitate what they think "works" as practiced by denominations. Some are even impressed with a democratic form of government in the church. They call it "majority rule," and sometimes it seems more of a mob rule because of the disorderly way some rebellious ones try to take over the church to their own

satisfaction. The "one man - one vote" doctrines is not applicable in the Lord's church. It may be in other organizations, religious and secular. But this is not the way God's church operates. Rebellion, pride, arrogance, rule or ruin attitudes exist. We should never be protective of abuses of authority and power. But we must be protective of the oversight God has given elderships. Such rebellion is often born of the disposition of contempt for "oughtness," and as stated, a wholesale distaste for the King James Version. (They would forbid elderships from forbidding teaching from perverted versions, the kind liberals love and use.)

The Nature of Their Authority

There are various areas of authority that belong to elderships. Their authority is delegated and limited according to God's Word. They never have authority greater than God. God must always be placed before civil government, parents, elderships, or anyone and anything else. We cannot set aside His will to obey men when men would direct us contrary to His revealed will. We cannot make obligations optional, however. We cannot alter the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins, or the restrictions on women being forbidden to preach, or follow practices that would disassemble the assembly rather than assembling brethren, or change when to observe the Lord's Supper, or many other matters where God has spoken. (It is a sorry tale to learn how some contend women may teach mixed classes and preach if the elders approve. Elders cannot approve what God does not.)

Neither can we bind something optional, some custom, some human opinion, as if it was the law of God. Elderships have not this right. Some have tried to redefine Christianity with demands untaught in Scripture, forbidding the church to do certain works that are authorized in Scripture for both individuals and churches.

Elders are to see that the church they oversee fulfills its divinely appointed mission. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. They are to convict the gainsayer, keep the church pure, feed the flock the truth, keeping

peace among brethren, not by compromise or negotiation, but by a firm, kind, inflexible stand for truth. Executing these duties will often call for the exercise of judgment. Here is the realm of their authority and activity. Only one bent on rebellion will scoff at the contention, "Someone must make decisions." Every group of people must have someone in charge to make decisions. It is true with the Lord's church also. The Lord has placed that duty, with authority, on the eldership.

The authority of an eldership is limited to one congregation. While there are to be elders in every church (Acts 14:23), they have the oversight of the "*flock which is among you*" (First Peter 5:3). The doctrine and practice of satellite churches, many small churches operating under one super eldership, is not Biblical. It is apostasy that has already been experienced many times in the religious realm. We must recognize that there simply is no larger organization of the church than the local church, and elders have the oversight of the local church, and their authority is limited thereto.

While elders are not perfect, individually nor collectively, (and I have known but only one or two who ever seemed to think they were), good elderships do not claim to be. But their authority is unmistakable, and the duty of the congregation toward them is unmistakable. To rebel against it to rebel against the God who gave it.

* * * * *

What Shall I Do With Jesus?

Matthew 27:17-23, "*Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream*

because of him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate said unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified."

Our subject is one of the questions Pilate asked. The setting of the inquiry is familiar to Bible students, the climax of the trials of Jesus. The same question asked by Pilate has been ringing through the years as each one hears of Jesus and realizes that they must give answer.

The very nature of Jesus Christ demands that each one give answer what he or she will do with Jesus. His claims, His offer, His word, and work necessitates making an answer. People have answered the question in a variety of ways. But nearly all the ways one can imagine were suggested in the New Testament.

"Crucify Him"

When the Jews at Jesus' trial were asked, they said, "*Let him be crucified.*" To them, disposing of Him was the answer. It is interesting to recall how some years ago the Roman pope forgave all the Jews of crucifying Christ and declared the Jews would not longer be held responsible. Isn't it amazing how false teachers rewrite Biblical revelation in their pursuit of "getting along?"

In possibly less offensive language, many since that day long ago have taken a similar attitude toward Jesus. They would put to death His cause, His name, His teaching, and do so by force if necessary. They would erase from the world the existence of His church. But such a response does not dispose of Christ nor His cause for they are eternal in nature.

Sell Him

Others have given answer similar to the acted answer of Judas. "I'll sell Him." Judas, for thirty pieces of silver,

about the legal price of a slave at that time, betrayed the Lord to His enemies. Instead of allowing himself to be used by Jesus for good, as he had been called, Judas was willing to use Jesus for his own evil and gain. Betrayal by those in whom you ought and feel you can trust is one of life's most painful experiences. Many gospel preachers, as well as husbands and wives, have known first hand just what this is.

Judas was one who once walked with Christ, but turned and sold Him. How many, even who also once walked with Christ, have turned from Him and given their efforts to rend asunder His doctrine? Solomon once said, "*Buy the truth, and sell it not.*" (Proverbs 23:23). The worst deal one could ever make is to sell Christ and His Word. There is nothing this world can offer that could be equal to what is sold.

Forsake Him

Closely related to the attitude of Judas is the attitude many of Jesus' disciples took during His personal ministry. "We'll forsake Him and go with Him no more." Jesus saw this happen even among His apostles at the time He was seized (Matthew 26:56). They all forsook Him and fled. But even during His ministry some considered what Jesus taught to be too hard and refused to follow Him any further (John 6:66).

Jesus often spoke words that pertained to the sins of His hearers. They would be repulsed by them, not realizing that He was telling them the truth and for their own good. They would follow Him as long as He provided "loaves and fishes," doing miracles of compassion and healing. But when He loved them enough to correct them, they reacted by rejecting both Him and His teaching.

It doubtless was fear on the part of the apostles that led them to flee at the time He was seized in the Garden of Gethsemane. Doubtless today it is fear that prevents some from standing up and being counted for Christ. Some have decided it is better to forsake Him. They evidently prefer the praises of men than the consequences of remaining loyal to Christ.

Persecute Him

Some have answered the question, "What shall I do with Jesus?" with the answer, by word and deed, "I shall persecute Him." Persecution was commonplace to those of the early church. Both Jews and Gentiles would persecute Christians. Persecution unto death was a dreadful but frequent experience among the early members of the body of Christ. To persecute God's people is also to persecute Him (Acts 9:3,4). Saul of Tarsus persecuted the church, thinking he was serving the Lord, but in so doing, Jesus told him he was also persecuting Him. As surely as doing good in His name is to do good unto Him (Matthew 25:40), the heaping of difficulties upon His cause and His followers is to persecute Him.

The book of Hebrews speaks of even crucifying Christ afresh when describing just how abominable it is to apostatize. It is consoling to know that the Lord identified Himself with His persecuted people, such as Stephen for example (Acts 7).

Stay Neutral

But others have tried to take a neutral position regarding Jesus the Christ. I say they have tried, but they cannot do so because the very nature of Christ and His religion removes the possibility of being neutral. We must remember how the Lord said, Matthew 12:30, "*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*" Even if some make the attempt to be neutral, their decision not to be FOR Christ is, as Jesus taught, a decision to be AGAINST Him.

Partial Service

Others seem to have the disposition, "I'll serve Him but not exclusively." As unreasonable as it is, this is the attitude of those who claim to be disciples of Christ but who refuse to leave the sins of this world. They seem to think they can have both Christ and something else, even that which is contradictory to Christ.

Matthew 6:24, "*No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold*

to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Nothing brought the wrath of God upon Israel quicker and surer than when they attempted to serve both God and Baal. To be a true disciple of Christ, a clear severance from the sins of this world is as necessary as putting on the new man of righteous living.

Wait A While

Felix, when confronted with the truth, and seeing the necessity to decide regarding Him, decided, "I'll postpone my decision." Did he really postpone a decision, or did he make a decision that refused to acknowledge Christ? We only deceive ourselves when we think we can acceptably postpone deciding for Christ when we already know what we must do, how we must come to Him, and know there is no other way. The decision to postpone is to decide to reject Him. Should one die, not having come to Christ, but having only decided to "wait" until it was more convenient, shall he be saved or shall he be condemned? The answer is certain and easily determined. Only by coming to Christ has one made the soul-saving decision. Postponement is faulty and destructive to the soul.

Almost

"What shall I do with Christ?" is sometimes answered in the same way Agrippa tried to answer. He was almost persuaded. Paul, upon hearing that response, simply noted the great difference between almost and altogether. Acts 26:29, *"And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether, such as I am, except these bonds."* Paul earnestly desired that one and all could know the joy and salvation that he knew in Christ.

Being almost saved simply means to remain lost. Like the attitude of postponement, if one is called upon to face God in judgment having almost come to Christ, he will simply be denied entrance into heaven. Being almost saved, again like postponement, is affording Satan additional opportunities to intervene, harden your heart, persuade you to run away from doing what you know you must do., We have seen so many who were

almost saved, but many of them died altogether lost because they never did what they must to go to heaven.

Come to Christ

In John six when some were abandoning Christ because of His teaching, Christ asked essentially the same question of His disciples that Pilate asked of His enemies. "*Will you also go away?*" The answer that Peter gave should stir our hearts. John 6:68,69, "*Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou has the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*" This must be our response to the question also if we are to be saved.

Upon hearing the gospel of Christ, faith in Christ is the first step in coming to Him, to be followed by repentance of sins, confession of our faith in Christ, and baptism in water into Christ by His authority for remission of sins. Consider the words of Pilate as they are incorporated into one of our songs, "What will you do with Jesus? The question comes to you. And you must give an answer for something you must do. What shall it be?"

* * * * *

Pentecost: The Beginning

In Acts chapter two we read of a most significant event that occurred on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish feast day, the feast of weeks. Because of wheat harvest it is also called the feast of harvest, coming fifty days after the Passover, the most holy of the Jewish celebrations. It was also a great day of beginning regarding the religion of Christ. We focus on the first Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

The apostles were in one place when the Holy Spirit came upon them as Christ had promised (John 14,15,16; Luke 24; Acts 1). They spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance, guided and directed in the message preached.

Peter, along with the eleven, preached the sermon recorded in this second chapter. The events of the day marked the beginning of several important things.

It marked the beginning of the fulfillment of prophecies relating to the kingdom of God, such as were foretold in Isaiah 2, Micah 2, Joel, 2, Daniel 2, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Peter later said that all the prophets foretold of those days (Acts 3:24). Christ and John the Baptist had recently preached that the kingdom was "*at hand.*" It had been prophesied by messengers of God as to the time, place, and circumstances that would be the beginning.

The promised kingdom began that day. That kingdom is also called the church (Colossians 1:13). Those who heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel that day were added to the church, or kingdom. Everything that had transpired prior to that day pointed to the coming of that day, and from this day forward the Scriptures point backward to it.

This also marked the beginning of the new covenant. Jeremiah 31:31-34 was a prophecy of the new covenant. Hebrews, a book that among other things shows the superiority of Christ and His law above that of Moses, chapter eight and verse eight, quotes Jeremiah and shows the new covenant of Christ as the covenant Jeremiah foretold. Christ took away the first covenant in order to establish the second (Hebrews 10:9,10).

Pentecost also marked the beginning of the gospel through which God remits the sins in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus had stated, prior to His ascension, Luke 24:46,47, "*And he said unto them, This it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*" In Peter's sermon he announced the terms of forgiveness that include repentance and baptism in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38). Before Pentecost forgiveness may well have been granted another way. But now that the new covenant had become a reality, remission of sins in the name of, or by the authority of, Christ included these conditions. John had baptized with a baptism of repentance for the

remission of sins (Acts 19:4; Mark 1:4), looking forward to His coming. But from the day of Pentecost until even now remission of sins in the name of Christ follows the same process as announced on that glorious day.

The Church Began

Obviously with Pentecost marking the beginning of the kingdom, it also marked the beginning of the reign of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. Acts 2:30-33 affirms this as the day of His coronation because He was now exalted, having received God's promise, being by the right hand of God, which refers to a place of unequaled rank and authority. When Christ returns as He has promised, He will not set up His kingdom but deliver up His kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). It is then that the last enemy, death, will be destroyed in the resurrection. John 5:28,29, "*Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.*"

Christ now reigns and will reign until then. Daniel 7:13,14 is Daniel's prophecy of the Son of man returning to the Ancient of days, Jesus returning to the Father, and receiving the kingdom. Christ was given His kingdom after His ascension. The day He took the throne and the day the kingdom began was this wonderful day of Pentecost.

The Way to be Saved

Pentecost marked the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins in the name of Christ. Objectors to baptism often cite such people as the thief on the cross as an example how even people today can be saved. Of course, they cannot prove the thief was not baptized just as none can prove he was. Regardless of that, nobody was ever commanded to be baptized for the remission of sins in the name of Christ prior to Pentecost. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the many who lived before Pentecost were never commanded to be baptized in the name of Christ. But from Pentecost forward this is the command the people heard, believed, and obeyed. Every example of

conversion following Pentecost culminates and finalizes with the one who needed salvation being baptized.

The Last Days

This was also the beginning of the last days, the last age. The Bible presents three dispensations, three periods and three systems how God has government mankind. These are called, for want of better terms, Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian ages. The Christian age will end when Christ returns and the earth ceases to be (Second Peter 3:10). When He comes there will be the resurrection of the dead (John 11:24; 5:28,29), and the judgment. There will not be another age after this one. (If there is to be a literal one thousand year reign of Christ on earth in Jerusalem, as some teach, then this is not the last age as Scripture teaches. Were the writers of Scripture wrong when they said this was the last age? They were not! The teachers of the fanciful, speculative theories such as premillennialism are those who are wrong.)

The last days refers to the age of the new covenant, the time of the kingdom, which is now almost two thousand years old. We must not confuse the "*last days*' with the "*last day.*" The last day, or final day, will close the last days. But the last days began with Pentecost.

This exceptional day also marked the beginning of the work of taking the gospel to the world. Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19,20, Luke 24:46,47, and Acts 1:8 are records of the Lord's charge or commission to His disciples to preach the gospel to every creature in the world. It is a marvelous wonder that we read how the gospel was taken to the known world in the immediate period following (Colossians 1:23). Every generation must take the gospel to every creature.

Pentecost marked the beginning of the work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of mankind. John 16:7-14 are words that Jesus spoke to His apostles, the promises of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, and how they would be guided, directed, and have every truth brought to their mind by inspiration. Acts 2:1-4 tells of this taking place. Through the preaching of the Word of God as done by the apostles, the Holy Spirit works in

converting the hearts of people to Christ, leading and guiding them unto salvation and how to live as a saved one. Everyone who is saved is saved by the work of the Holy Spirit. But none are saved by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. None are saved by some miraculous event. All who are saved are saved because the Word, as given by and through the Holy Spirit, is preached. The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16), and the gospel is the instrument used by Deity to convert people to Christ. The Word of God is called the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17).

Greatest Since Creation

Of all the beginnings since the creation recorded in Genesis, the most notable one by far is that which occurred on the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ. (1) Prophecies were fulfilled. (2) The kingdom, or church, became a reality. (3) The reign of Christ began. (4) The work of the Holy Spirit to convert man by and through the means of the Word had its beginning then. (5) The plan of salvation in the name of Christ, including baptism by His authority for the remission of sins, was first proclaimed that day. (6) The new covenant by which we are saved was announced on Pentecost. (7) The last age began.

There is yet another beginning we must consider. It is our own beginning in the new life as a Christian. We speak of the new birth (John 3:1-5). Becoming a Christian is like starting anew, a new creature in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17). If anyone is going to heaven he must make that journey. None can reach the goal without making the start. We start, begin, by obeying the gospel in faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. Unless one has this beginning, the end is certain doom. May we encourage one and all to begin anew in Christ, giving thanks for the many glorious beginnings that took place nearly two thousand years ago on that day that is called Pentecost, the day Peter called "*the beginning* " (Acts 11:15).

* * * * *

I Hope You Understand, But I Have Some Fine Sons!



Mark it off as just parental pride and boasting if you like. I suppose that element is in here. But there is also a thing called giving honor to whom honor is due. And that is really what is meant by this paragraph. I have three sons and one son-in-law that I consider my fourth son. They are of that generation many call "baby-boomers." But these are not your typical baby-boomers because they are strong faithful Christian men if ever four did live. No father could ever be more blessed than I when I consider my boys. Much evil and error pours from those of that generation, but not from my boys. They are men of God. I do not suggest they are perfect by my next comment, but I can say of any one of my boys what the Father said to Jesus, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." Glory to God, and thanks for their mother! JWB

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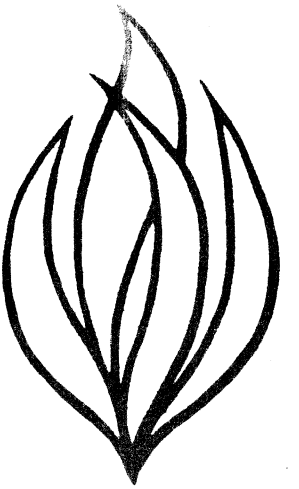

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XV *James W. Boyd* **NUMBER 10**

The Voice of the People

This lesson is a restatement of basic and fundamental convictions. Many of the things shall be general in nature. All in all, we shall consider a wide variety of points.

There is usually a great interest in what is learned from polls. Polls are taken to find out what people think of this or that subject. Even though often unreliable, polls are useful for candidates for public office because they want to know what is the voice of the people, and what people think about the candidates, events, issues, and attitudes. Polls not only measure opinion but they also have the power to influence opinion. People have a tendency to follow what other people do and think. Many things have been produced by concentrating on what the polls reflect. The attitude that "everybody's doing it" has taken many people the direction they decide to go. Attitudes are contagious. People follow people.

We read of prison riots in one state and before long inmates in other prisons even in other states take their cue and riot also. Let a group of disgruntled students go on a binge of destructive havoc and soon students from other schools engage in similar misconduct. What people do and think is important in itself. But its importance is enhanced in its power to influence others.

There is a story that about one hundred years before Christ two brothers revolted against power in the direction of a democratic action. "Vox populi; Vox Dei" became a widely used phrase. Translated it means, "The voice of the people is the voice of God." That provokes an interesting thought. It simply means, in the minds of many, that whatever most people think is what should be considered right. It was the attitude and slogan in the French Revolution, English Revolution, and other actions taken to listen to and heed the "voice of the people." Whatever the majority thinks, says, wants,

rules is to be considered right. The "voice of the people" becomes the standard.

In our own nation this attitude has been prominent. America, while trying to find a happy middle ground with emphasis on the individual and the rights of each person, making attempts to protect minorities, has also promoted the attitude of "the voice of the people." A monarchy is the most efficient form of government because what the king says is law. Our forefathers chose a republic to put power into the hands of the people through representatives rather than a king or monarch. Power has the ability to corrupt those who possess it. Power in the hands of the people is thought to protect against such corruption. But what happens when the people become corrupt? The "voice of the people" rule has its problems as well as other forms of rule.

These weaknesses in political affairs are harmful although understandable. But what is true politically is not always true in the religious realm. It is hard for some to understand that what might be desirable in governing a nation cannot be acceptable in serving God. Right and wrong in matters of morality and religious truth is not determined by "the voice of the people." Too often people have removed themselves from the voice of God and ignored the fact that God is supreme, and His kingdom is just that, a kingdom. Jesus Christ is King and the form of government is that of a monarchy, not a democracy or majority rule. The majority, as far as serving God is concerned, is usually out of step with God.

Before the Flood

Notice a few illustrations. Consider the time prior to the flood of Noah (Genesis 6:5,6). The majority were wicked and deserved destruction, receiving what was deserved. In Numbers 21:5, the majority of the people of Israel murmured against God and spake against Him and Moses. At Sinai, the majority called for the construction of the golden calf and brought God's wrath against Israel (Exodus 32:1,6,9). Later in Israel's history, First Samuel 8:19, the people wanted a form of government like the nations around them rather than allow God to continue

to rule as He had been doing. Should the majority be followed when the majority goes against God?

In the New Testament, Matthew 13:15, it was obvious that the majority was dull of hearing, hardened of heart, closing their eyes to what they should see, and preventing understanding. Over and over we find throughout the Bible examples of the foolishness to listen to "the voice of the people." Remember, the "voice of the people" cried, "*Crucify him, Crucify him.*"

The Religious Division

Many are puzzled by the manifold divisions that exist in the religious world. Much of it is due to the fact that so many people allow themselves to be so heavily influenced by what most do, or what many do. "Can so many be wrong?" is the question asked. "Are all of these people lost?" we hear questioned. But we must keep in mind what Jesus said about the few and the many in Matthew 7:13,14. Certainly most can be wrong. The Bible records time and again that most were wrong. Being in the majority does not prove you are right or wrong. It only shows you are in the majority.

Christians must be alert that they cannot follow the multitude to do evil (Exodus 23:2), and still follow Christ. The young and old are subject to pressures to conform to this world, but we are warned against doing that (Romans 12:1,2). Consider a few issues where this realization is applicable.

Look at the moral permissiveness of our day! Permissiveness has given birth to the erosion of morality. Sensuality is encouraged, even promoted. Sexual perversion is finding social acceptance. Premarital and extramarital sexual relationships are common place, but they are still fornication and adultery regardless of what the majority says or does, thinks or condones. Drinking alcoholic beverages has been approved by the Biblically ignorant and spiritually rebellious nation in which we live. But does this mean the majority is right? CERTAINLY NOT!

Materialism, in its two senses, meets the approval of the masses. In one sense materialism denies God, life after death, heaven, hell, the reality of the soul, man's accountability to God, the coming judgment. Is the "voice of the people" right?

Materialism in another sense is the pursuit and worship of the false god of having material things, money being the supreme god. Even if most say this is the way, does it make it the way? Has not such a pursuit and misuse of life produced unhappiness, contributing to reactions as bizarre as the "hippie movement" to counter materialism? If all served mammon and none served God, shall we join them? We cannot serve both!

No Fear of God

Our society suffers under a lack of respect for God. Rebellions against authority cuts a bitter swath in almost every area of activity. "Do your own thing" is the cry of the day. "We are the Pepsi generation." Profanity, taking God's name in vain, drugs, ridicule of sacred things and those who hold to sacred things is broadcast as entertainment. Just because others run the race toward hell, are we obligated to go along, or even stand idly by and not warn and persuade to a better way? Shall we heed the "voice of the people?"

Marriage, divorce and remarriage has been so distorted by the ungodly and even the religious teachers of our day to accommodate the sins people practice that the sanctity of the home is scarce and its disintegration evident in many quarters. Because so many are already so steeped in sin even many brethren have jumped on the devil's bandwagon and decided God's will does not work, contending there are many causes and acceptable reasons for divorce, remarriage as one desires to be remarried, compromising with the world. Are such things not simply additional evidences of the influence of the "voice of the people?"

In matters pertaining to the church, the way of salvation, manner of worship, who to fellowship and not fellowship, there seems to be a growing number who think we must "go along with others" and listen to the

"voice of the people." It is most disturbing how the evidence is so strong that brethren, many who once were considered pillars of strength, have decided to act according to what is appealing, what most like, what is popular, what enhances their image and pleases the most people. Is this the kind of teaching we find acceptable from Scripture?

How Truth is Determined

Not only do some try to determine what they are going to do by checking "the voice of the people," but are even trying to ascertain what is truth by "the voice of the people." But we must learn and never waver from what we learn, that truth is not determined by what most do and want. Truth is not legislated by the church which is to be the pillar and ground of the truth. The church has no power to make, break, alter, or authorize divine law. The Christian must live, promote, and defend truth as revealed in the authority of truth, the Word of God. The hard fact of Christianity as relating to the "voice of the people" is that the church is not to be operated as a democracy, but with respect to the monarchy of God, Jesus Christ as King, His Word as all-authority. "*The law of the Lord is perfect*" (Psalm 19:7). It is not just A standard, it is THE standard, and THE ONLY standard.

The "voice of the people" should simply echo the voice of God. Those who truly follow God do not determine their ways by polls, nose counts, public opinion, what most like, or even what they think they might want and like, but by the inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-authoritative, all-sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 3:17,17), without addition, subtraction, or alteration. Any other approach is tantamount to rebellion against the voice of God.

Being a Christian is not being a weather vane, pointing whichever way the popular winds might be blowing. He does not drift with the current. He does not check to find out what might "succeed" with others before he decides what to believe and do. The voice of the Christian must be the voice of conviction, not one of convenience. "What would the Lord have me be, do, say, think, and defend?" is his watchword. He can only learn what this involves

from His Word. Christians hear and heed the voice of God through Christ and His inspired Word, not "the voice of the people."

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About the Lord's Supper

In the early centuries of Christianity there was much uninspired writing as well as the inspired Scripture. They are interesting to study even though they are not authoritative. They have historical and informational value. They are called the Ante-Nicene writings because they were written before the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Among them are the writings of Justin Martyr who was born in 114 A. D., not far removed from apostolic days.

In one of his writings he described the weekly worship of the Christians. "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased the president (meaning the one who presides, JWB) verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succor the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it

is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For he was crucified on the day before that of Saturn; and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun having appeared to His apostles and disciples He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for tour consideration." (Ante-Nicean Christian Library, Vol. II; pp.65-66).

An Item of Worship

The Lord's Supper is one of the five New Testament avenues of worship authorized by the Word of God. The others are singing, praying, teaching, and giving. There is no authority for burning incense, using instruments of music, burning candles, or any other act than what is noted in the New Testament. Christians today confine themselves to what the New Testament authorizes as the New Testament teaches (Colossians 3:17).

The early Christians met on the first day of the week to engage in these authorized acts of worship. We do not rely on uninspired writings to know this, but Scripture (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:1,2; Hebrews 10:25; First Corinthians 11). The first day of the week is not the "Christian Sabbath." The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week and is not authorized as the day of assembly for Christians as is the first day.

Many religious people observe the Lord's Supper once per month, or once per quarter, semi-annually, on special "holy days," variously chosen celebrations, etc. But where is the authority to do such a thing? What we do must be as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11) and by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17).

The partaking of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week was once recognized by all, not just churches of Christ. We see from Justin Martyr this was true and it was the practice of the Greek Orthodox Church until the seventh century. Some continued this practice as late as the sixteenth century and John Calvin lamented how the practice was going out of style. But those who are determined to follow the New Testament as authority

accept what Scripture reveals and continue to follow the primitive practice every first day of the week, by divine authority. But more on the Lord's Supper itself.

This supper is described for us in four New Testament books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and First Corinthians). The first three deal with the institution of it. Certain details are found in one record that are not found in another. Together, complementing each other, and without contradictions, we have the full account as Scripture denotes.

Paul to the Corinthians

We want to concentrate on First Corinthians 11:23-20, written by Paul in the middle of the first century, twenty or more years after the church began on Pentecost, with descriptions and instructions being revealed by and through the Holy Spirit. The fact that the passage is written to brethren proves that the Lord's Supper was not something just for the apostles but was to be a personal observance among brethren everywhere.

Verse twenty-three, "*For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he has supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he come.*"

The Lord instituted the Supper the night He was betrayed. He was in an upper room with His disciples observing the last Passover. From some of the ingredients of the Passover Feast Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. He used unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. (Justin Martyr mentioned the use of water which was probably used to dilute any fermentation that might have taken place in the fruit of the vine, JWB). We are not given the liberty to use just any physical ingredient that some might like, but what the Scripture teaches.

Physical Ingredients Represent

The two physical ingredients beautifully symbolize the body and blood of Christ. They are representative. They did not become the actual body and blood of Christ because His body and blood was still intact before them even as this episode took place.

That this Supper is a memorial to Christ is proved by the Lord's own words, "*This do in remembrance of me.*" In partaking of the Lord's Supper we remember Christ and everything concerning Him, with emphasis on His death, burial, and resurrection. The Lord's Supper looks backward to God's provision for the salvation of man at Calvary. It also looks forward to the return of Christ because this Supper is to be observed "*...till he come.*"

Actually, the Lord's Supper is to "*show*" or proclaim Christ. We might look upon it as a proclamation to the world as well as to each other the person, Jesus Christ, and what He has done for mankind. It is also an item of teaching as well as an item of worship. It is an expression of faith in Christ, a belief in that record of the past, and faith in that which is to occur in the future. When we realize the significance of the Lord's Supper we will be impressed with the seriousness of deliberately being absent from the assembly and the observance of it.

The Way We Partake

Our manner of observance is also important. It may be surprising to learn that this Supper which was given and intended to be soul-enriching can actually become soul-destroying if we do not partake of it in the proper manner. Beginning with verse twenty-seven, "*Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*"

Observers of the Supper have a great responsibility to self and others to have the correct attitude and manner

at the time the Lord's Supper is partaken. The word "*unworthily*" refers to manner and attitude. "*Discerning*" concerns understanding. We must understand what we are doing and do what we do with a reverent and worshipful attitude and conduct. The frame of mind and behavior as well as comprehension of the significance of the Supper is of vital concern. This is a blessed privilege provided by the Lord for His people to show adoration and thanksgiving for Christ and recognition to God for what Deity has done on our behalf in salvation of our souls. It is an observance that can only be rightly observed by Christians; those who have heard the Word, believe in Christ, repented of sins, confessed their faith in Christ, and been baptized in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins.

The Lord's Supper is a communion with God and each other. In the Lord's Supper we have fellowship, joint participation, one with another in glorifying Deity. It is never to be taken lightly, flippantly, but soberly thankfully, reverently, and seriously with discernment. Because Christ is holy, that which is a memorial to Him is also holy. There is much more to be said regarding the Lord Supper, but these thoughts suffice for the present.

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God's Charges Against His People

The texts that we shall consider pertained to the time when Israel was God's chosen nation. It is neither anti-semitic nor unbiblical to deny that Israel of today, or Jewish people today, still retain that special relationship. Galatians 3:28, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*" Acts 10:34,35, "*Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.*"

God's Accusations

From Malachi we read of complaints that the Lord had against Israel. "*Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them, or, Where is the God of judgment?*" (2:17). "*Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.*" (3:13-15).

These passages have something in common. These are God's words of complaint against their words against Him, and the feigned innocence of Israel. When God complains against them they act as if they have no idea what God meant. Consider their words against God.

"I Loved You"

Malachi 1:2, "*I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?*" This was God's complaint against their ingratitude, which is a most cruel trait of character. Israel's history was marked with ingratitude. God gave promises to Abraham, their father. He chose Jacob instead of Esau as their forefather. He delivered them from Egypt and gave them a homeland, a glorious kingdom, with physical and spiritual provisions. "*I loved you,*" God said. They answered, "*How have you loved us?*" In other words, "What did you ever do for us?" Are we to suppose that God is any less displeased with people today that have been blessed by Him but who refuse to acknowledge Him and His blessings?

"You Despised Me"

Again, Malachi 1:6, "*A son honoreth his father and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where in mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?*" Sons

honor fathers and servants respect their masters. If Israel claimed God as Father and Master they should honor and respect Him. But they did not. Even the priests are said to despise His name.

The word "*despise*" comes from the word meaning to consider lightly, look upon as unimportant, deliberately ignore. When one disobeys God's Word this is what he does. Sin is far worse than many think. This was even the attitude of Israel's religious leaders.

We cannot fail to see their pretended innocence. "*Wherein have we despised thy name?*" They acted as if they did not know what God meant. They had adopted idolatry, neglected God's commandments, served false gods, abused God's worship, offered blemished sacrifices, and still feigned they could not understand God's displeasure toward them.

"You are Guilty of Pollution"

Malachi, 1:7,8, "*Ye offered polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts.*"

They had placed polluted bread on God's altar, sacrificed to God what was not even acceptable to others. The law called for sacrifices to God to be of the very best with unleavened bread, animals without spot or blemish, the firstfruits of their labors. But they were offering blind animals, lame and sick.

This charge was repeated in chapter one, verses twelve and thirteen. There it is mentioned how their offerings had become wearisome or burdensome to them. They got tired of worshipping God, God's way. They had "*snuffed*" at worshipping God as cattle does fodder that it dislikes.

God said that even their earthly rulers would not accept what they were offering to God. And can we be pleased with giving God what might be called the "leftovers,"

that for which we do not have further use? God says this is to despise His name.

They Got Things Backwards

Israel also exhibited the base form of depravity by calling good evil and evil good (2:17). Isaiah once wrote, "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*" (Isaiah 5:20). Is not this what many are doing today? Does not this demonstrate grave disrespect for God's standard of good and evil and overturn God's judgments? Some cry long and loud that it is wrong to judge, but they are guilty of judging God by declaring good what He has called evil, and declaring evil what He has called good. They really do not mind judging. These people really dislike being told what the judgments of God are and how wrong they are to contradict Him. It is never wrong to condemn what God condemns, nor is it wrong to commend what God commends. Israel questioned whether God would even judge them at all. "*Wherein is the God of judgment?*" Like many living in our own time, they acted like whatever they did, God would not mind, and even if He did He would not do anything about it.

You Are Disobedient

Another charge against their words is found in Malachi 3:7. "*Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?*"

The Lord strikes against their apostasy, pleading with them to return to Him. Their response was that they did not know where or how they should return, They again acted as if they had nothing to leave and there was no reason for saying they should return to God. To them they had been doing everything just right already. They were denying they had ever left God. This is so often the case with those who forsake the Lord today. They like to pretend they never did leave. But those who leave the Lord, His church, His way, need to return to him.

You Robbed Me

Malachi 3:8, "*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.*" Notice their question expressed their pretended innocence. In answer to God's question, we all know that man will rob God. God told Israel how they had robbed Him. They did it by not giving and offering as they should. By withholding their contributions that should have been given they were guilty of robbing God.

I heard a story from an older preacher how we went to a place to preach in a gospel meeting and the brethren approached him with what they considered to be a real problem. It seems one of the brethren was taking money out of the contribution plate as he would pass the plate among the congregation. They considered it as stealing from God. The preacher told them they should not be too concerned about brethren stealing from God because it was going on all over the brotherhood. When they heard this they were "comforted" because they were not the only ones, but they inquired about brethren stealing from God everywhere. The preacher told them how their man was stealing from God what others had given, but many were stealing from God by never giving what they should have been giving from the start. In either case there was the taking from God what should have been in His treasury. Yes, people rob God, not only of money, but time, thought, respect, obedience, and many other ways.

Malachi 3:13-15, a text already quoted at the start of the lesson, seems to describe the climax of Israel's rebellion against God. They considered it to be without profit to serve God. To them it was vain. They obviously wanted what some would call the "good life." They were happy in their pride. The wicked workers were set up and those who would tempt God were delivered. It really was not such a bad thing, some thought, to go their own way and do their own thing.

True Today

Is not this same thing being asserted in our land today? We hear people talking about how they go through life but once and they should get the most "gusto" out of it

that can, meaning they have the right to "live it up" anyway they see fit to live. Those who deny God think they are free to eat, drink, and be merry without consequences. To them it is useless to restrict yourself. They refuse to consider what the end result of their kind of life will bring them.

God declared that their words were stout against Him and He proved it to them. Their feigned innocence did not change the fact of their rebellious guilt. Trying to rationalize and explain away their transgressions did not remove their transgressions. God was not deceived by their words. The result was that Israel was the recipient of God's sharp and certain denunciation of both them and their sins. Malachi 4:1, "*For, behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud,, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.*"

In spite of their sins, God offered them forgiveness provided they would come the way of forgiveness. God loved them, but He did not approve of them. He told them of the coming salvation. The last verses of Malachi prophesied the coming of John the Baptist (Luke 1:17; Matthew 17:10-13(, who was the forerunner of the Son of God who would shed His blood that would save the obedient (Hebrews 5:9).

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THERE IS CAUSE FOR SOME DEGREE OF OPTIMISM when we hear and see more and more brethren speaking out and standing up for the truth against the vicious onslaughts of liberals who feel they are ordained of God to change the church into the likeness of denominations. The lines of demarcation are becoming more and more pronounced that divide those who continue to respect the need for Biblical authority and those who prefer to cater to the culture (often sub-culture) of our times with their digression from truth. While there is cause to rejoice at times, we must never slack in our determination to resist evil and do good. JB

In The Beginning

How and when did this world come into existence? This is a matter of concern that eventually confronts every serious minded person who seeks to understand the elementary matters of the world of which he is a part. When understood, the answer brings peace, joy, strength, purpose, and dignity. When left unresolved, it creates doubt, meaninglessness, unrest, uncertainty, and conduct that is destructive.

Acts 17:24-28, "*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation: that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.*"

We live in a universe of innumerable bodies that involves "natural" laws. We cannot escape acknowledging the existence of the universe. Where, when, and how did it come into existence, including man? Paul said God did it. In our time, many have forsaken this explanation and have turned to science to give us our answers.

Limitations of Science

Science is incapable of discovering origins. Do not minimize the magnitude of contributions from the field of science. But do not think it is without limit. Science is limited to what is can observe and measure. That fact places origins, such as our world, beyond its grasp.

Scientists have developed many theories about it, however. Some have said that matter, that which science

weighs, measures, and observes, is eternal in nature. Some have said the world came into being by accident, by random chance, a spontaneous event that somehow, some way, at some time, just happened, without reason or purpose. From that they have developed various theories about the origin of man, such as organic evolution and that man and all other living things, animal and vegetable, have come from the same accidentally produced cell. That their theories contradict each other, and are even self-contradictory, has not caused many of the "world's wise men" to discard them because they have only one other alternative which is God, and that explanation they have already decided they will not accept. One is naive to think that scientists are always open minded and honest with the evidence. It is interesting how, in the face of the fallacies of their theories, some scientists have simply abandoned the search for the answer and have announced there is no answer. If they do not know it, nobody can, they think.

The origin of this world cannot be seen, weighed, measured, and observed as it happened. There was no man to witness its beginning. Our answers must come from revelation. That is the only alternative. Our information from revelation is that the world was created by God (Genesis 1:1; Exodus 20:11).

Creation

What is the Biblical doctrine of creation? Both the Old and New Testaments contend that God is the Creator and is to be so worshipped. You remove or destroy this record, you destroy the integrity of any and all parts of the Biblical record. If the Scripture is false on this point there is no reason to have confidence in it on anything.

Creation was a free act of God whereby He, according to His sovereign will and for His own glory, in the beginning brought forth the whole visible and invisible universe without the use of pre-existing material. He brought it into being by the sheer power of His Word.

The word "create" means something out of nothing, ex nihilo. It also is the translation of "bara" which is used only where God is the acting one. Fiat creation, creation

as the result of decree, order, and command by authoritative sanction, is what the Bible teaches about creation.

Either God (Spirit) or matter is eternal. If both are eternal, God cannot be assumed to be greater of the two. If the world was made from something already existent, from whence did the already-existing matter come? Who or what, brought it into being? Scientists have already proven by things they can demonstrate that matter is not eternal. To contend that both God and matter are eternal is to dodge an answer and offer a self-contradictory hypothesis. If God made the world from matter that already existed, you still face the problem of origin, the origin of the already-existent matter. Therefore, the argument for the eternal nature of matter fails to answer.

Romans 4:17, "*God... calleth those things which be not as though they were.*" Hebrews 11:3, "*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*" The Bible denies the eternal nature of matter.

God is the Cause

God voluntarily created the world and He exists absolutely independently of and before the existence of this world. He is the Cause of this world's existence. Genesis 1:1 shows God clearly distinguished from the heaven and earth which He created. Psalm 33:6, "*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.*" Second Peter 3:5, "*For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old...*" John 1:1-3, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*" Isaiah 45:18, "*For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it, he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited; I am the Lord, and there is none else.*"

All of the details of "how" God did this, other than He spoke and it was so and it was good, are not revealed. We can add to the many speculations and this would be of no profit. But from nothing God produced this world. Is this reasonable? Is it credible? We answer "yes" to both questions and proceed to show why.

Cause and Effect

The law of cause and effect is accepted by all reasonable people. That the world exists cannot be sensibly denied. The world therefore had a cause. Genesis records God as that First Cause. Science proceeds in all of its investigations on the validity of the law of cause and effect, having proved and demonstrated it over and over. Science relies on its validity. The law is reasonable regarding the origin of the world.

The First Cause was either mind or matter. The universe consists of both mind and matter. Did mind produce matter as the Bible says? Or did matter produce mind? Science itself has shown that matter is not eternal through laws called the laws of thermodynamics, contending that the earth is "running down, wearing out." If it was eternal it would already be gone. Furthermore, things of matters left to themselves go from order to disorder, the very opposite of what evolution and other hypothetical arguments demand.

Mind or Matter?

Additionally, science itself shows that matter does not produce mind. Does the nest create the bird or vice versa? Does the automobile bring into existence the driver? Does the telescope create the astronomer? Life does not originate from dead matter. What if scientists created life in the laboratory, which they have not done? It would only prove the necessity of the action of disciplined and controlled mind to produce it. Once we heard a noted commentator over television declare that scientists had created life in the laboratory. Actually, as the report revealed, they had simply combined some non-living material with living material and the result lived. But that is not startling. This is what happens every time I eat a good biscuit. Production of life in the

laboratory would only affirm what Bible believers have said. It came not into existence by accident but from the operation of mind.

Design

It is futile to deny the design, orderliness, and systems of this world. Design demands a designer, a mind. Hebrews 3:4, "*Every house is building by some man, but he that built all things is God.*" To contend that a house just happened would be cause to consider the contender's sanity as having forsaken him.

Morals

Existence of morality proves mind before matter. Matter has no conscience, no "oughtness," no morals, nor can matter produce such. There is no moral standard by which rocks and trees are to be governed. The existence of a moral code demands the previous existence of mind that produced the code.

The purpose of the Genesis record is to show man that the world which exists does so by the creativity of God, and that God alone is the Creator. God, thereby, reveals His existence to mankind and His eternal nature (Romans 1:20). He reveals to man man's dignity inasmuch as man is created in the spiritual image of God. The Bible is not intended to teach science, even though scientifically it is accurate in those things which it reveals. If the Genesis record is false, the Bible is false, with all of the dire consequences to man, and this would create a total void of any genuine and dependable authority for mankind whatever anywhere.

Six Days

Creation was accomplished in six days (Exodus 20:11; Genesis 1). These days had an evening and morning just as do our days. The word "day" comes from the word "yom" meaning what we call a solar or twenty-four hour day when it is used with a numeral. In the Biblical record it is used with a numeral regarding creation. There is no reason to think otherwise, either from the findings of science or the language of the Bible. The idea

that days might mean long periods of time was born of the desire to accommodate the evolutionary hypothesis. If long periods of time are meant it would make the Genesis record scientifically impossible. The eons of darkness would destroy the very life that was supposed to be evolving. It would place the life of Adam into the millions of years.

Furthermore, the geological conditions of our world do not demand long periods of time. We must remember that there is a difference between actual and apparent age. Even the cosmetic industry will insist on this. Adam was created full grown. So was the world where God placed him. The actual age of the earth is not revealed. But there is no condition or finding that cannot be explained within the framework of the miracle of creation and the flood at the time of Noah. Believers need not compromise one Biblical revelation with the skeptical and blasphemous "scientists" who are more a determined atheistic, evolutionist, and humanistic horde than honest people of science, who would deny everything that gives dignity to man.

Accuracy

Christ and Paul received Genesis and its record as accurate, actual, historical, and literal. If they were wrong, Christ is not Deity and Paul was a liar rather than an inspired revealer of truth. The Bible would be a gross fraudulent hoax. One either accepts Genesis or he rejects the entire Scripture. There is no middle ground.

With the creation God fixed certain laws of procreation and reproduction. Each was to reproduce after its own kind. Scientists have proved repeatedly that this is the way things still are. There is no scientific evidence of organic evolution, Darwinian evolution, atheistic, theistic, or agnostic, Any accommodation with such false teaching is to accommodate that which unbelievers have created in their attempt to replace the wisdom of God with their own. Of course, this has been a smear on the history of man since the Garden of Eden, and it is still a rampant, arrogant, dishonest effort even now through the claims of "superiors" that they know more than God could ever have thought.

Purpose

To deny God and His creation record forces us to ask, "What would then be the meaning of man's existence?" If we came as the result of some materialistic accident, came from nowhere for no reason and going nowhere but to the grave, why life itself? What despair and uselessness the theories of men impose upon mankind! They would destroy every evidence of the dignity of mankind. He is reduced to just another meaningless animal among animals in a no-reason existence. If that were so, and thank God it is not, there would be no reason to behave in any certain way. There would be no morality, no law, no purpose, nothing. Of course, this is what indulgent people really want. But with the growth of this idea in the minds of people we are seeing the corresponding results of accepting just such a philosophy. Without God there is nothing but hopelessness and destruction into nothingness. Wherein would there by any motivation for doing anything good? Indeed, who could say what was and was not good anyway?

Man's problem through the ages has been his attempt to relieve himself from accountability to God. In order to do this, he must deny the existence of God. Therefore, he concocts and propagates explanations for the existence of the world other than the reality of God. People make fools of themselves to pursue this path, but such has been and presently is the theme of what some call "education" (Romans 1:22).

To believe God and the Biblical record, and accept the proven scientific evidence, we see purpose, reason, hope, dignity, happiness, oughtness, morality, and future. Fundamental to the religion of Christ is, "*In the beginning God created the heaven and earth... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.*"

This same God sent His Son to save mankind from sin. Man's very spiritual salvation is inseparably tied to the record of origins as God has reveled it.

* * * * *

REALLY?

I learned a long time ago not to believe everything I heard or read. But some things create more skepticism than others.

Did the story of the incarnation really begin in "sexual scandal"? That is what Andre Resner of Abilene Christian University said in an article published in WINESKINS, a paper produced by Rubel Shelly.

Is the story of the incarnation really a "scandalous story" as Resner said?

Because Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba had a stained morality, does this really imply Mary was of the same sort, as Resner implies?

Was Ruth really an immoral person with Boaz as Resner and the WINESKINS crowd has imagined?

Do you really think Mary was "another sexually questionable woman" as they say?

Was the story of the birth of Christ really "the most embarassing scandal" of all? These great "scholars" suggest it.

Was the Holy Spirit's account through Matthew really just a "covert statement" to set us up for the "predicament" of Joseph and Mary? Where did this man learn that?

Really, was Joseph's dream just "his subconscious" running wild, trying to find some justification for the outlandish excuses

being offered for Mary being with child? It must be so because these "wise men" have declared it. Who would dare question a liberal?

Was Joseph's dream just his "imagination" rather than a message from God through His angel as the Bible teaches? Are we too bold to even question what these heretics have presented?

Did Mary just use Joseph to "cover her shame?" He said so.

Seeing the other immoral episodes that took place in the past, did Christ really "come from a similar situation"? Resner and the WINESKINS element have printed it, and stand behind it, just as the president of ACU does. Harold Hazelip, president of David Lipscomb University ought be proud to have such a one as this publisher to speak for him.

No, I really did not make any of this up. I really did not invent these scandalous, blasphemous, sacrilegious ideas. They were brazenly, arrogantly, defiantly put forth in the literary instrument of apostasy, WINESKINS, by one who "teaches" Bible at ACU. And for all this vicious diatribe against God's truth and His Son, some still see no danger in the Nashville JUBILEE which this Shelly promotes. How base and flagrant against things holy and sacred will this gang of liberals go before some naive and gullible brethren open their eyes to the truth regarding them and what they are doing? JWB

Attend Good Lectureships



I speak not of attending the assemblies of worship just now. We should always be faithful in this privilege and responsibility. I am suggesting you take advantage of the good lectureships that brethren are presenting. Many churches are doing this all over the country. Some of the finest periods of worship, and rich Bible studies you could ever experience are offered to those who are present.

I try to attend as many of these events as my time away from home and distance will allow. In addition to the benefits already named, it is one of the most inspiring and encouraging times to be with faithful brethren, sound people, those of kindred spirit, who are also of the one faith, who are aware of the onslaughts of liberals against God's truth. These brethren love the souls of man far and near, and are spreading God's truth, and standing firm. What a glorious blessing to attend these marvelous lectures where truth is upheld! Do yourself a favor and attend as many as you can. You will know for yourself!

* * * * *

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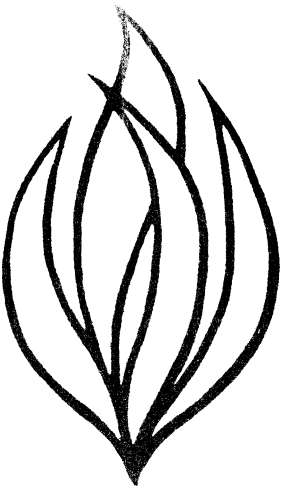

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XV *James W. Boyd* **NUMBER 11**

James Teaches About Prayer

What passages in the Bible teach us the most about prayer? Most every Bible student would include what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, that which has been called the model prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). It contains less than seventy words and is therefore noted for its brevity. It is model in scope, covering a wide range of matters both physical and spiritual. Its simplicity is noticeable and it is easily understood. One is impressed with its directness, the way specific things are stated rather than cloaked in vagueness. It is directed to God the Father as the giver of good gifts and offered for His praise and adoration.

Others might mention the prayer prayed by Jesus recorded in John seventeen. This was the prayer where He prayed for unity, God's providence, and protection, for Himself, and His disciples both then and now.

Other great inspired commentaries on prayer were written by Paul. His comments were very short and precise, but at the same time broadly inclusive, such as First Thessalonians 5:17,18, "*Pray without ceasing... Brethren, pray for us.*"

What James Wrote

But there is also the last chapter of James. James 5:13-18, "*Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*

And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." This passage teaches us several important matters concerning prayer.

The phrase, "*Let him pray,*" suggests individual prayer. "*Let him call for the elders... let them pray,*" suggests collective and united prayer. "*The prayer of faith,*" means a believing prayer. "*Pray for one another,*" teaches intercessory prayer. "*The effectual fervent prayer,*" shows the need that prayer be fervent and sincere. "*And he prayed again,*" denotes the propriety of repetitious and continuing prayer, although not with vain repetitions as to think one is heard simply because of his much speaking (Matthew 6:7). "*Prayed that it might not rain,*" shows the specific nature of prayer, not just a general prayer. Let us focus more closely on verse sixteen for there we learn much more about prayer.

Confess Faults

"*Confess your faults,*" is the way the verse begins. The attitude in prayer is important. One must have a willingness to confess his sins because this shows an attitude of humility, a recognition of need, a dependence on God, and the absence of self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, pride, and arrogance. Prayer itself is bowing before another, a submission to one who is considered greater than the one praying. We recall the teaching of Jesus, Luke 19:9-14, "*And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others; Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*" One man was proud and thought he lacked nothing. The other was humble, confessed his sins, and displayed a genuine attitude of dependence on God.

One Another

We are to confess sins "*one to another.*" We not only humble ourselves before God but before each other in so doing. This confession is not made before some appointed priest of a human religion, nor before some "senior prayer partner" who sits in a superior rank above the one who is confessing. Such is foreign to the truth and the spirit of the teaching as well as the letter. There is no more reason one should confess to another than for the other to confess to the one.

We make a serious mistake to think that only other people commit wrongs and need forgiveness. A willingness to admit fault is a cleansing attitude. We may not be guilty of the same sins but none are sinlessly perfect. We should always be examining ourselves and looking toward self when we come to the matter of confessing sins (Galatians 6:1).

"*Pray for one another,*" is the recognition of equality of saints before God. Each has an access to the Father that can be used on behalf of others. This demonstrates love, concern, spiritual, and physical interest in the welfare of each other. Paul repeatedly asked his brethren to pray for him even as he said he did not cease to remember his brethren in prayer. We all stand in the need of prayer regardless of our rank in this world among men pertaining to the affairs of men.

There is a story about Abraham Lincoln when visitors were going through the White House. He spotted a minister of former acquaintance and took him aside into a private room and asked that he word a prayer on behalf of them both. We appreciate being remembered in prayer when we are sick, or are traveling, or undertaking some task, possibly facing some difficulty. Gospel preachers are often encouraged because they are remembered in the prayers of their brethren. One of the most loving moments of a congregation is when they bow their heads in prayer and pray especially on behalf of certain brethren, whatever might be the reason for the prayer. It is not trivial but genuine love that causes brethren to often name others in their prayers.

Being Specific

Similar to the model prayer of Jesus in Matthew six, James shows prayer is to be specific. He mentioned Elijah who specifically prayed that it might not rain, and then later specifically prayed that it would rain. Notice the specific nature of prayer when James taught brethren to pray for the sick that they might be healed. We must take notice that James taught in the days of miracles. It is implied that the elders who were called had miraculous power to heal, for such power was granted to many by the apostles laying hands upon them and imparting such power. God healed through the apostles. He then healed miraculously. God still heals, Now He heals through the means that He has provided, such as medicines, doctors, nurses, etc.

Anoint With Oil?

The anointing of oil has been the cause of confusion for many. To anoint one with oil could and did have certain medicinal benefits as is evidenced in the actions of the Good Samaritan when he found the victim alongside the Jerusalem to Jericho road, and he poured oil and wine on the victim's wounds. Again, anointing with oil was a symbol of designation to denote the recipient of some benefit or blessing, or a symbol of appointment to some task, such as becoming king or a prophet. Again, this was done in the context of the miraculous age and should not be incorporated as a religious rite among brethren today.

Possibly it is more appropriate that our private prayers be more specific than public prayers because there are personal matters about which we pray that does not include, and even should not be brought to the attention of everyone publicly. But even in our public prayers we can include specific matters that pertain to all those involved in the act of praying. It is not that we suggest forbidding prayers be personal, but that when one prays in leading the thoughts of prayers for many brethren, he should speak of those things pertaining to the entire congregation. He has the power of prayer and his own private prayers would be the better place to include the more private and personal matters.

Sincerity

Sincerity in prayer is essential. A prayer is productive when fervently prayed. Again, attitude is involved. The state of heart and the relationship with God is important. We do not pray to "claim" God's blessings as if God owed us anything and we have come forward to "claim" them. We have heard people pray, especially on television, and word their prayers almost as if they were demanding God to make good on His promises, shouting at God, "We claim this or that because you have promised it." But we pray with request, asking, entreating, appealing. Nothing is more hypocritical than to pray, not believing, not really meaning what we pray.

What of Your Life?

Another condition of heart for acceptable prayer and for prayer to be heard and answered is one's quality of life. This does not mean that we can so live as to deserve to be heard and God owes us in payment for a good life. But Proverbs 28:9 warns, "*He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.*" One cannot disregard God's law, live in whatever way he wishes, and still expect God to hear and answer his prayer. "*The prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" Some folks may live so that they are not on speaking terms with God.

Tennyson wrote, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." This is true concerning the prayers of those who are faithful children of God. God's children have the privilege of calling on their Father. They also have the duty of prayer. There is great power at our disposal and use to attract the attention of Almighty God and be assured that He will hear and respond to our prayers according to His will. Not all who pray have that assurance. Only those in Christ have the promise that God offers in the matter of hearing and answering prayer.

God's Will First

A righteous man will always pray that God's will be done rather than his own. This is in the imitation of

Christ (Matthew 26:29). When we call upon the infinite God the right way, out of the right mind, we have His assurance that blessings will follow. Make this blessing your own by becoming His child.

* * * * *

God's Tool

There are many Christians who are active and working diligently in being what God wants all people to be. They are righteous and busy in doing His will in their lives. There are also others who profess to be Christians but who appear to be sitting idly by, not really participating in the work of the Lord, doing very little if anything to expand the influence and cause of Christ in this world. What makes the difference?

We would like to believe that every Christian would prefer to be useful in the Lord's kingdom. We are sure this is what God would have us to do. Assuming there is the desire to be useful, there must be something other than desire to work that causes some to be at work and others to be relatively inactive. We often pray, "Use us as tools in Thy hand to do Thy will in this life." What kind of Christian can and does God use?

We have examples in both the Old and New Testaments of people who were tools in God's hands. In Acts six we read of the Grecian widows who were had been neglected. This neglect was brought to the attention of the apostles. Acts 6:1-4, "*And in those days, when the number of disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitudes of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*"

They Were Tools

Having received this direction, and the list of qualifications which should belong to those they would choose, men who were of good judgment, wise, spiritually minded, of good reputation, seven were selected and appointed by the apostles. They became tools in God's hands to accomplish a needed work.

We also read of the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Ananias was sent to him to tell him what to do. At first Ananias hesitated to go because of the reputation of Saul as a persecutor of Christians. But he went after he was told that Paul was a "*chosen vessel*" of the Lord (Acts 9:15). Why was Saul chosen? Was it not because he had shown himself to be honest, zealous, dedicated, knowledgeable, aggressive, and a man of conviction that stood out from among his peers? He was one that could be used as a tool in God's hand.

Early in the personal ministry of Christ He chose the twelve apostles. Generally speaking they were active men, workers, men of integrity, capable of assuming and discharging responsibilities, humble, teachable, with certain natural abilities, having developed qualities of life that gave them tremendous potential to accomplish the work the Lord had for them to do. They became tools in the hands of God.

Their Qualifications

From the accounts of Bible people that God could and did use in His service, we can list a number of outstanding qualities. As we proceed to note these qualities we might ask ourselves how we qualify. The Lord uses the talented. A talent is difficult to define. We all have talents in varying ways. But it could refer to natural abilities that have been developed or could be developed. Some are seemingly born with certain potentials that may not be possessed by others. This does not make the talented more precious in the sight of the Lord. It does mean they can do more than some others and are therefore expected to do more than others. But whatever talents one might have he must cultivate them, use them, or they will not produce and will soon be lost.

In the parable of the talents we find application here. In the parable the talent was money but the principle could apply to whatever ability and opportunity one might have. In Matthew twenty-five we read of the five talents one had, two talents of another, and but a single talent of a third. The first two were commended because they went out and used what they had and doubled their substance. The man with one talent was not approved, but severely rebuked. It was not because he did not double what he had. It was because he failed to use what he did have. He was too fearful to act. He buried his talent. What a waste! While we all do not have the same talents, we all have talents and are expected to use what we have. The greater our talents the more God expects (Luke 12:48).

The Usefulness of Training

The Lord uses the trained, those who will equip themselves to do a better job. Again, we refer to Saul of Tarsus. He had studied at the feet of Gamaliel and had knowledge of God's word as well as the world around him. He knew languages and was noted for being a learned man. All of the apostles were trained for their task for over three years at the feet of Jesus. While it is a danger and a mistaken idea that only those who have been professionally trained can do the Lord's work, it is true that God can use those who receive training. Being a Christian is "on the job training." The more we do in His service the better equipped we are to be an effective and efficient servant. Moses spent two thirds of his life getting ready to do the major task that God had for him to do. His final forty years was spent leading Israel from Egypt toward the promised land. He had been trained in Egypt and in the wilderness as a shepherd. At eighty he was ready and served well.

The Young Can Serve

The Lord can use the young. It is not necessary to wait in order to service. To be sure there are works and tasks that are not to be left to the young, but this does not mean there are no works for them to do. Paul saw the quality of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3), and had him go with him to the work. Joseph, Samuel, David, Josiah, Daniel,

John Mark are all good examples of youth at work for the Lord. First Timothy 4:12, "*Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*"

Notice the closing phrase of the previous passage. The Lord uses the pure. It was said of Nathanael, "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.*" (John 1:47). An elder is to be "*without reproach*" (First Timothy 3:2). "*Keep thyself pure,*" (First Timothy 5:22). One who lives in service to the devil in his life cannot be a tool in the hand of God. While evil in one's past can be forgiven, evil in one's present prohibits him from doing the work he should do. One can renounce the sins of the past, repent of them, reform his life. But if one continues to walk in darkness he cannot be in fellowship with the Lord (First John 1:7).

The Lord can use those who are dedicated, steadfast, and will not compromise. He uses people who have the courage, strength, and stamina like John the Baptist.

Not All Can Be Used

The Lord cannot use those who are proud because the proud get themselves in the way of rendering service. He uses the humble. Denying self is a qualification for being a disciple of Christ (Matthew 16:24). The emphasis our Lord placed on greatness was measured in terms of service rendered.

Some may be like Naaman who was wanting only to do what he wanted to do, or "*some great thing.*" Some show signs of seeking their own glory, honor, gain, fame, and prestige. To be honorable one must work without the praises of men. Those who seek men's praise may get that, but that is all they get. Seeking the recognition of the world, even of brethren, is not being a useful servant of the Lord (Matthew 6:1-4).

The Quiet and Unnoticed Servant

Very likely the most profitable service to the cause of Christ may be rendered by one who is seldom noted, but who goes about his or her daily duties without fanfare,

living righteously, earning a livelihood, paying bills, rearing children in the way of the Lord, caring for those in need, speaking kindly and lovingly to others, refraining from partaking of the evil of this world, praying, worshipping, reflecting in a humble and quiet way the spirit of Christ.

We Must Be Willing

But the Lord can only use those who are willing to be used as tools in His hands. Being a Christian is to be a volunteer. One becomes a Christian upon making a deliberate decision to be a Christian and obeying the commands Jesus has given to enter His fold. In John 6:66 some who followed Jesus heard Him and turned and walked with Him no more because they were unwilling to accept His teaching or conform their own lives to His will. When the apostles were called they left all and followed Him. One may have many talents, great training, many other assets that are worthy and notable, but if he or she is unwilling to be of service to the Lord they cannot be used by the Lord.

What of You and Me?

Does God use you and me? Can He use you and me? Are we trying to make ourselves people God can use? It is significant that most qualities necessary for being a useful tool in the hands of God are qualities that we can develop if we set our minds to the development of them. Talent may be natural ability, but it may be latent and must be nurtured. Training, humility, dedication, loyalty, purity, willingness are characteristics we can possess if we are determined to possess them. There is really no excuse for not being useful to Christ.

We may not serve the Lord in the same capacities as others, but that is not that is most important. God expects each one to serve the way He has authorized and in the way we are capable. But He does expect that. As was said of the good woman, "*She hath done what she could.*"

Let each of us take inventory of ourselves and our work as Christians. Let each ask, "What am I doing? Am I

doing what I can and ought?" It may be wonderful to work with others and work with some organized program of work. Such programs are usually offered in most faithful congregations and we are urged and solicited to be participants and cooperate. But we are not confined to only that way of serving. There is labor that each can do and accomplish without having it to be some organized program promoted by church leaders. There is that personal, individual, sacrificial manifestation of love in service that is open to everyone.

It ought to be our prayer, "Lord, use me as a tool in Thy hands. Make me useful and may I diligently strive to make myself as useful as I can be."

* * * * *

Know Thyself

LESSON ONE

Psalm 8, "*O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet; and sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!*

Man, meaning the human race, is here. We exist. We are creatures of reality. But what are we? We wish to present a lesson answering the inquiry of the psalmist, "*What is man?*"

What is Man?

There have been many philosophies put forth through the ages of history to answer this question. Man has been described so many ways, and analogies have been drawn. We are concerned with the Biblical doctrine of man in order that we might have a healthy and correct respect for ourselves and others. This is possible only as we understand the relationship between God and man.

Man is either a product of creation or in some manner has evolved into what he is from something else. Either man began as man or he became a man somewhere along the way. It has to be one way or the other. He either was born a man, originally made a man, or was transformed into a man. Which is it?

The Biblical doctrine on this point is quite clear. Genesis 1:26, "*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... God created man is his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*" Genesis 2:7, "*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*"

Similarly for the woman, Genesis 2:18, "*And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.*" Genesis 2:21-23, "*And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.*" These accounts were endorsed by Jesus (Matthew 19:5), and the inspired apostle Paul (Acts 17:24-28).

An Unsupported Hypothesis

Organic evolution is not supported either by science or Scripture. There is no process or mechanism known to science by which a single cell has developed into the highly complex creature like man with many cells. The

evidence for evolution exists nowhere but in the imaginations of those who stoutly refuse to accept God's word, but trust in the words such unbelievers have put on paper. No branch of science affords evidence that evolution (Darwinian evolution) is a proven fact in spite of the lies put forth by some who seem to think that if they shout a lie long enough that eventually everyone will accept it as the truth. The Biblical doctrine harmonizes with every known and demonstrable fact. Man is a being created by God.

Man's Uniqueness

Man is a rational being. The Bible shows man as having ability to think, reason, perceive, understand, plan, purpose, will, determine, analyze, hope, and remember. These are all qualities of mind. Significantly, God, through His word, speaks to the mind of man. God obligates man to study His word, learn it, live it, teach it, and defend it. There is no other creature of the creation of God upon whom God imposes this responsibility. This is because man is unique and distinctive from all other creatures. Furthermore, only to man does God give the power and privilege of prayer.

God created man as a free moral being, a creature of choice and volition. Genesis three records the entrance of sin into the world. Why did God make man capable of sinning? The answer lies in the question itself. God made a man, not a robot or a machine. Man can choose what he will and will not do. Unless he could do this he would not be man. Man sinned by choice. He is capable of deciding his course. Man is a moral creature with capacity to be concerned about right and wrong. God does not force men to follow Him, nor force men to come to Him for salvation. He does not even force men to love Him against their will. God does not govern man in violation of the quality He placed in man.

A False Doctrine

Calvinism teaches that God predetermined everything about everybody before they were even in existence. If this is true, and it most assuredly is not, it would mean that man is just a programmed machine carrying out

what has already been determined for him. Everything man said or did would actually be meaningless. It would mean that man is not responsible for his behavior or for himself. He could not change what he did even if he thought he wanted to do so. It would mean he could not alter his destiny to be saved or lost. His entire existence would simply be fate, "whatever will be, will be."

Note the following passages that show this doctrine to be false and that man does have deciding power, therefore, accountable. John 7:17, 37, "*If a man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself... In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.*" Matthew 11:28-30, "*Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" Hebrews 5:9, "*And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*" Revelation 22:17, "*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, Come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*" Each of these passages imply a capacity in man to exercise his own will and make choices, which would not be true if man is as the Calvinistic doctrine falsely contends.

The Conscience of Man

The created, rational man who is a free moral being has a conscience. In this he is clearly distinguished from all other forms of life, animal and vegetable. Acts 23:1, "*And Paul earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.*" Roman 9:1, "*I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.*" Second Timothy 1:3, "*I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.*" Consider closely what is affirmed in Romans 2:15. "*Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one*

another." There is the conscience. Man has a conscience. The conscience is a witness bearer. It can commend, excuse, condemn or accuse.

The conscience urges man to do what he judges he ought to do or to refrain from doing what he determines he ought not do. The conscience does not assure him that he has judged and determined correctly. To so think is one of mankind's fundamental errors. Some say, "Let your conscience be your guide," as if whatever your conscience guides you to do is necessarily right before God. That is not so.

Things to Consider

There are a number of factors involved regarding a course of action under consideration. The accuracy of information is all important in the proper working of the conscience. If information is in error, or incomplete, then judgments made on that information may well and likely will prove to be faulty. Conscience only operates on whatever information the heart or mind of man receives. Conscience does not assure the accuracy of information.

Conscience is involved in making judgments, not only on the information received, but also against the background of training a person has received regarding what is right and wrong. Man decides on the basis of what he has been taught. The conscience serves as a prompter to make judgments according to one's training, but it is not an assurance that the training that he has received is correct.

The conscience is involved when man acts. If one acts in harmony with, or possibly contrary to, the judgments made as his conscience dictates, then his conscience will either commend him (when he acts in harmony with his conscience), or condemn him (when he acts contrary to his conscience). His conscience will determine whether he feels good about that he does or badly about what he does. But how he feels does not determine whether he has actually acted according to the will of God or not. His feelings are determined by whether he has acted harmoniously with his conscience and nothing more.

Consciences have to be trained properly before they can be a reliable guide.

Good Conscience, but Evil

It is possible for one to have a good conscience even while doing evil. Saul persecuted Christians but never did he violate his conscience., When one does as he has been taught to be right, whatever he does will not violate his conscience because it is in keeping with his training. It is even possible to have a pained and grieved conscience while doing what is actually right. If one has been taught something is wrong when actually it is right in itself, then his conscience will pain him when he does it even though what he does is not actually wrong in itself. It just depends on the way the conscience has been trained and the correctness of the information received. For these reasons the conscience, while a guide, cannot be considered an infallible guide. For the conscience to be reliable it must be trained in harmony with the word of God. Only God's will is the ultimate and infallible standard and measure.

Continued action in violation of the guidance of the conscience can make one's conscience "*seared.*" It soon loses its sensitivity to its training. It is actually retrained. First Timothy 4:2, Paul speaks of men that speak lies, "*...having their consciences seared with a hot iron.*" They had lied so much and so often that even though it may have been painful to their consciences at the first, they continued lying until their lying no longer offended their consciences.

Listen to Your Conscience

It is sinful to violate the conscience. Romans 14:22,23, "*Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*" The word "*faith*" has the meaning of one's personal conviction in this passage. It refers to what one thinks to be right or wrong about a matter. To eat flesh, the subject of Romans fourteen, thinking it to be wrong, even though Paul makes it clear it is not wrong in itself,

is to run against the guidance of one's conscience and conviction, and Paul says even that is also sin. One cannot be honest and do what he thinks is wrong. Even if he does it doubting that it is right, he does sin.

Conscience is an aid to man if his conscience has been molded to react harmoniously with God's word. When the conscience is ignored it is corrupting to a person. So the old adage to let your conscience be your guide has only limited merit. But the Bible teaches this unique quality of man, that he does have a conscience.

What is man? Thus far we have learned that man is a created being, a rational being, a free moral agent with the power of choice and accountability, a being with a conscience. Other qualities are presented in the next lesson to help us know ourselves, what we are, who we are, and our relationship with God.

* * * * *

Know Thyself

LESSON TWO

Psalm eight includes the question, "*What is man?*" We are reaching for the Biblical doctrine of man. This is an essential point to understand if we are to have a healthy respect for ourselves and others as well as comprehend our relationship to God. What we think of ourselves will affect how we conduct our lives, determine our values, and will contribute to the eternal destiny of the soul. In our first lesson we learned that man is a created, rational, free moral being with conscience that can commend or condemn, depending on its training. We saw the importance of training our conscience in keeping with the Word of God.

We Are Physical

Now we learn that man, in this life on earth, dwells in a physical body. The Biblical doctrine of man makes it

clear that there is a distinction between the real individual and the place where the real individual lives. Second Corinthians 5:1, "*For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*" A tabernacle is a tent, a temporary dwelling. When physical death overtakes a human being he leaves this tent of a physical body for a spirit "*house not made with hands.*" The existence of that house gives us courage, hope, purpose, and meaning to life because it is a house that is not temporary but eternal.

Second Corinthians 5:6-8, "*Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; (For we walk by faith, not by sight). We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*" Our earthly life is lived in this fleshly body, but while we live we are absent from the place where the Lord will dwell with us eternally. When we leave this fleshly tabernacle we go to be with God. The "*house not made with hands*" refers to being in the eternal presence of God.

Second Peter 1:13,14, "*Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me.*" The real Peter is distinguished from the body in which Peter lived. At death, and this is that to which he refers, he would leave this tabernacle, or body.

Acts 9:36-39 tells of the death of Dorcas. When Peter came to her side and was shown the coats and garments she had made, even though her body was in their presence, Dorcas was not. It tells of the things Dorcas had done "*while she was with them.*" It is a comforting thought to know that what we commit into the grave is not actually our loved one but only the body in which they lived before they went to be with the Lord. The real person has already departed for home before the burial.

James 2:26 teaches that death is the separation of the body and spirit. Ecclesiastes 12:7 also shows how the body is to return to the dust from which it was made, but

the spirit into the care of God. So we cannot escape the fact that the Bible teaches man is body and soul. He is flesh, but also spirit.

More Than Physical

While man is mortal as far as the physical body is concerned, the real man lives and does not cease to exist. Matthew 25:46 contains the climax of the teaching of Jesus and the judgment scene He had just presented. After the judgment the wicked enter into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. In both instances, both with the saved as with the lost, man enters a domain that shall never end.

The immortal nature of the spirit of man is emphasized in the following passages. Second Corinthians 5:1, which we have already cited, noting a building from God, a house not made with hands, "*eternal*" in the heavens. Philippians 1:23, "*But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and to be with Christ, for it is very far better.*"

Philippians 3:21, "*Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*" Jesus has the power and will use His power to fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory. First John 3:2, "*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested we shall be like him, for we shall see him even as he is.*" Just what all this passage might include I would be hesitant to say with dogmatism. But one thing for sure it does teach, and that is that man does not cease to exist at physical death, but has a spirit that survives and the spirit of the redeemed shall be glorified even as Christ was glorified.

John 11:25,26, "*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die.*" Note that those of Christ shall "*never*" die. Obviously this does not mean they shall not experience physical death, but that they will not cease to

be existent though overtaken by physical death, but shall live with Him.

Second Timothy 1:10, Paul referred to Jesus, "*...who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*" Until the cross of Christ, death and Satan had dominion over mankind. But that is no longer the case because Christ conquered death and overcame the forces of evil to establish the way of eternal life for man, bringing into certain reality the immortal nature of God's creature, the human being.

First Thessalonians 4:17, when Paul was comforting his brethren concerning those who had died prior to the return of Christ, he told them how when Christ does return, "*... then we that are alive, that are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*" This certainly does not imply a cessation of man's existence, but states his immortality, his never ending existence. The immortal nature of man is unquestionably affirmed by the inspired Scriptures.

We Shall Give Answer

Man is amenable, accountable, and responsible before God and to God. God commands men to repent because, Acts 17:31, "*.... he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*" The command to repent presupposes the reality and existence of sin, the transgression of God's law (First John 3:4), because there is no sin where there is no law (Romans 4:15). The reality of sin means the reality of law, which means the accountability of man to obey God's law. Such is also evident from Second Corinthians 5:10, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*"

A Universal Doctrine

There is one body of doctrine applicable to all mankind today. That is the gospel, the one faith (Ephesians 4:5),

and it is to be preached to every creature (Mark 16:15) because all men need the salvation offered in the gospel, and all men are amenable to God's gospel law. Although man may be unaware that he is to give answer ultimately to God, or man may choose to disregard that fact of the future, that does not change the fact of accountability to God's will that abides with all mankind.

Some of the words in the Old and New Testament give us a picture of the various parts that make up man. Man is flesh. All flesh is not the same flesh (First Corinthians 15:39). Mankind is of the same flesh (Genesis 2:23). This is that part of mankind that shall return to the dust (Ecclesiastes 12:7). This is the mortal side of man; his material nature.

Spirit, Soul, Heart

Man is also spirit, referring to that part of man that does not cease to exist at physical death, that part of man that is made in the spiritual likeness or image of God (Genesis 1:27). This is that part of man that leaves the body, the tabernacle, at physical death (James 2:26). This is the part of man of which God is the Father (Hebrews 12:9) and underscores man's spiritual realm, value, and immortality.

There is also the word "*soul*" as well as the words "*body and spirit.*" "*Soul*" is used in several distinct ways in Scripture, each determined by its context. Sometimes it refers to that which is synonymous with man's "*spirit.*" Sometimes it is that quality called life that is also extant in animals (Genesis 2:7). Scripture sometimes speaks of both "*body and soul*" (Matthew 10:28), and presents man as a dual being. Scripture also uses the word "*soul*" to refer to a person in his or her entirety. such as in Acts two where it is said that three thousand souls were baptized on that day of Pentecost.

But there are also times when Scripture speaks of man as a three-fold being, having body, soul, and spirit, with obvious difference between soul and spirit, such as in First Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12. In such cases the body surely refers to the flesh, the soul refers

to the animalistic life of man, and spirit refers to the inward man, that part of man that is in the likeness of God's spiritual image.

But we also find the word "*heart*" when describing mankind. This has no reference to the physical blood pump within the chest cavity of the body of the person (although there are times when " *heart*" does refers to the bodily organ, determined by context). "*Heart*" means the fountain or seat of thought, passion, emotion, desire, appetite, affection, as well as that part of man that reasons, judges, understands, decides, with the connotation of man's intellect. As already noted, man has a conscience and this is related to this part of man.

In summary we can say that man has many parts. He has been created by God, he is rational, he is a free moral being, he has a conscience, there is body, soul, spirit, inward and outward man, that part of man that is mortal and decays, and that part of man that is immortal and will exist in eternity. Mankind, therefore, is related to two worlds, the physical and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal.

When we consider man as the Bible pictures him, we see the reason for contending for the dignity and glory of the human being above every other creature that exists on earth. We see he does have reason to exist. We learn from whence we have come, why we are here, and where we are going. We see the purpose of this life, and the mission we are to accomplish. We understand why humans are to be considered with respect and honor. It is not because of man's own merit, but because he is a creature of God, made very special by God, one who shall give account to God. "*What is man...?* He is worth more than all this world, even one person. He is so valuable that God sent His Son into the world to save him from that which would destroy his welfare. That in itself should prove to us the greatness and worth of man.

Are not these truths vital to us in order that we might truly know ourselves, and see ourselves as God sees us?

* * * * *

I'll Tell Your Something That Really Does Brighten a Day!

Let a congregation of God's people hear about a need for assistance in some locality where brethren are struggling to have a place to assemble, and let that same congregation put forth a successful effort to raise funds to assist the struggling church, then do we not have cause for rejoicing?

See a brother or sister who has allowed sin to overtake their life, having left the church and turned away from the loving admonitions given them time after time until it seems the fallen one will never be impressed with their guilt and their need for repentance, but one day the sinful brother or sister steps forward to acknowledge their sins and ask God's forgiveness and seeks to return to fellowship with the saints, does not that make a day bright and cheer the heart of every redeemed soul? Surely, it does!

Let a false teacher spew forth his error with all his pomp, pride, and egotism and some good, humble brother who loves the truth stand up and be counted on the side of truth to the discredit of the false teacher, does not this give courage to every faithful soul, and brighten the day? Who could doubt it?

And then to hear of the conversion of souls to Christ where the gospel heretofore had not been preached, is this not an inspiration to know that the gospel is still God's power to save? It brightens even the darkest hour!

When you know of two good brethren who for one reason or another have fallen out with each other, and then with a more rational mind and Christlike spirit resolve their differences and have kindly and brotherly affection toward each other again, it is enough to make the hardest of hearts soft and warm!

And what lifts the soul much more in this day of apostasy and digression to meet people you have known in years gone by, people with whom you have had little contact for a long span of years, and then upon renewal of closer association find out that they are aware of the inroads of error, they are still loyal to the same gospel of Christ for which you once stood together, they have not changed with the currents and tides of departure, but still follow the "old paths!" How reassuring and strengthening it is! What brightness becomes such a time as that!

And when in the midst of sorrow, death, disease, losses of one sort of another, even such as are common to man, and you once again focus your attention on the eternal reward of heaven, plus the assurance that God cares and is with you even as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, the darkness that might try to surround you is displaced by the effulgence of His glory and your soul rejoices in the brilliance and beauty of the knowledge that you are His child. What a lovely and shining day is that!

May God bless each of us as we serve Him.

JWB

Some Brethren Demand Too Much

The Last Word

Yes, sometimes brethren ask of others far too much, more than they really have the right to ask or expect. If fact, they act in a very faulty manner to ask what some must think they have a special privilege to demand.

The scenario goes like this. One gets angry at another, not over doctrine and God's truth, but for some disagreement between them. Then what happens? Possibly one or both get the idea that everybody else should get angry at the same one with whom they have their problems. They cut and tear, not only at their adversary, but demand everybody side with them against their adversary. THEY HAVE NO RIGHT TO MAKE SUCH DEMANDS! They ought to be ashamed to expect it.

What they ought do, rather than making more enemies, is settle their disputes so everybody could be happy.JB

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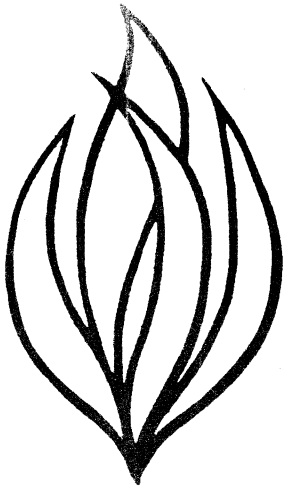

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Two Principles For Achieving Unity

Much thought and many words have been offered on the subject of unity, especially on unity in religion. One drawback to the influence of those who profess to follow Christ is the broad and deep division that characterizes what is called "Christianity" by the world. Of course, all that men call the religion of Christ is by no means of Him. But the desirability and power of unity is not questioned. But how do we attain it? Nearly everyone will ultimately answer that we must have a common standard, even if the standard is to allow division to continue and call it "unity in diversity." Most "Christians" say they have allegiance to the Bible, but this obviously is not true. Therefore, the division, confusion, competition, and chaos persists.

Unity is the Lord's will (First Corinthians 1:10-13; John 17:20,21). While some have foolishly gloried in division, even thanking God that He has given us division in order to allow man a choice how man might wish to serve God, no honest person can read the Scriptures and not be impressed that God wants unity among those who claim to belong to Him.

A Good Procedure

We wish to present two very simple but important principles that, if heard and heeded, would assist in attaining religious unity, even the kind and quality of unity that God approves. Let us deal with one thing at a time and make things as sure as they can be made. Look at that last statement again. (1) Deal with one thing at a time, and (2) make things as sure as they can be made. This procedure is useful in settling all difference and closing ranks. We seek unity and the opportunity to nourish it. We could stand together if we would apply these two principles to the division that exists whether we speak of the general religious division among religious people everywhere, or the division that sometimes is forced into the ranks of the body of Christ.

If only we could deal with one thing at a time. We know that there are many matters that are related. But this should not prevent us from considering each difference by itself long enough to find common ground. If what we have learned has to be altered when we see its relationship to other matters, so be it. But if we try to conquer all problems of division with one swoop, we shall likely fail and the differences will seem insurmountable and defy solution. There are so many doctrines, names, beliefs, practices that we cannot resolve all of them in a swift moment or one swipe of the sword. The process of taking one thing at a time may be slow, even tedious at times. But one of the difficulties people have when discussing religion and encountering differences is jumping about from one matter to another, never coming to any solution on anything. This hop, skip, jump type of religious discussion seldom produces any lasting good. It only underscores the width of divisions. This jumping about is often a tactic used by some when they see their position has faults about it. We have experienced this over and over again when discussing the Bible with various religious people. It sometimes is hard to get people to stay on the subject. When they run into a snag in their beliefs their first line of defense is to hurry along to another subject without resolving anything. This will never cure division.

We are told that computers have two possible reactions on any given point, either a yes or a no, a positive or a negative, a plus or a minus. Operating at speeds beyond comprehension, thousands of answers can be given quickly, producing solutions that often seem so complex. Yet, when one understands the operation of computers (and I do not profess this understanding but accept what others who know have told me) he learns that the many calculations the computer makes are actually made one at a time. It is done with such speed it only seems to be a sweeping conclusion.

An Illustration

Let me illustrate this principle with daily life. The next day's duties may seem ever so involved when we sit down and outline what we expect and need to accomplish. Our tasks seem almost beyond us if we

consider them all together. But we become equal to the task when we tackle one thing at a time. Resulting confusion and frustration is commonplace when too much is attempted at once without completion of anything. This principle is operative in deciding religious issues.

Regarding Baptism

For example of how this works, consider the subject of baptism. What is the form of baptism? This is one question among many questions about baptism but one of the simplest to learn. But there is division about it. Is baptism immersion, sprinkling, or pouring, or all three? What does the Scripture teach? The word "baptize" means to plunge beneath or submerge. Baptism is said to be a burial (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4). Every word picture of baptism in the New Testament shows it to be a burial. Sprinkling and pouring are admittedly introductions and substitutions by men that came many years after the Scriptures were written. The solution is really very simple provided we all accept what the Bible teaches. The problem is not the form of baptism as much as one's willingness to accept what the Bible teaches. Everyone agrees that immersion is baptism. Division arises when some adopt the non-Biblical authorities and follow them. The issue should be put to rest and then turn to another, now standing in unity on this matter. To jump to another point without coming to a knowledge of the truth is fruitless.

Consider another thought pertaining to baptism. What about "infant baptism?" We put "infant baptism" in quotation marks because actually few, if any, baptize (immerse) infants. Those who practice what they call "infant baptism" do not baptize infants but sprinkle or pour water on the infant's head. Such a practice did not find its origin in Scripture. It grew out of the false doctrine that children are born into this world depraved, guilty of the sins of their foreparents. Some who realized baptism was for the remission of sins and believing the children damned hastened to do something for the "depraved" children and started practicing "infant baptism." But such never has been a Biblically authorized practice.

But this matter ought not divide honest people. There is no question what Scripture teaches as to who is a qualified candidate for baptism. Without going into great detail here in this lesson, we can summarize by noting that in the New Testament those who were baptized were those who had been taught, had the capacity to learn and understand, who had faith in Christ, who repented of their sins (implying they were old enough to have transgressed God's law themselves, (First John 3:4), and had the capacity to confess their faith in Christ (obviously having the ability to do this, which infants do not.) They understood they were to be baptized by the authority of Christ for the remission of sins as they were taught. If only we would consent to stay with what the Scripture teaches there would be no division on this matter.

But how often when Scripture is cited, someone who persists in rejecting what the Bible says about baptism suddenly wants to discuss another subject?

We Can Know With Certainty

Our second principle is to make it as sure as you can and this has great merit in producing unity. We can be sure. To say we cannot know and cannot be sure contradicts Christ (John 8:32), and John (First John 2:3). God did not command unity of His people and then prohibit its attainment. We can know the will of God (Ephesians 3:4; 5:17). We can know, for instance, how often to partake of the Lord's Supper because Scripture reveals it was observed every first day of the week. Nobody contends that practice is wrong. We have authority for that. But where is authority for some other day? Which practice is sure and right and one in which we all can have confidence?

Regarding Music in Worship

In the matter of music in Christian worship, none who knows what the New Testament reveals would contend we must have an instrument, even though some of the arguments for it will logically demand it. All agree that singing is acceptable. All agree the early church sang without instruments and were pleasing to God. The

source of division is the addition that some would force upon others. Can we find a way that is sure, that cannot be wrong, where all can stand together and cease the division over the matter? Certainly, we can, if we will simply be willing to abide by the revelation in the Word. Every passage that teaches on the subject teaches the same thing regarding how to make music in worship by the authority of Christ. All teach singing. It is always right to abide in the doctrine of Christ (Second John 9-11). We are not suggesting that people who want the instrument cease using it merely because we can all agree to singing. They should give it up because there is no authority for it. But we can be one in the matter when we are content to accept that of which we can be sure.

Every issue between people may not be so easily resolved as the illustrations used. Even those we have mentioned have not been settled because too many simply reject what Scripture teaches in favor of what they want, what their foreparents did, what their church practices, what their creed call for. It is significant to me that those who stand so adamantly opposed to the churches of Christ will agree that immersion is right, singing is right, etc. but accuse the members of the church of causing division. We stand for the very thing upon which we all can agree is right. How does this cause division? We stand for the revealed truth. It is the innovations of men for which there is no Bible basis that divide, and these things we must oppose if we be faithful to truth, not only because they are wrong and divide, but because they are wrong by lacking authority for them.

His Will First

It would seem that as defeating and destructive as division is, in the light of the Lord's will that there be unity, that men would seek unity on God's terms. It all begins with the attitude toward the authority of the Bible. While some say we should follow the Bible, they also insist that other authorities be given equal billing and be embraced as well. But the Bible forbids other authorities (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Bible is inspired of God, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and all-sufficient. If people would subscribe to the authority of the Bible and take one issue at a time, deal with it,

resolve it, and accept what cannot be wrong, giant strides toward unity would be realized. How many times have we received letters and calls from people about various subjects, but when a Biblical answer is given they bring up a multitude of other things without accepting the truth on anything.

But if Scripture is rejected on one issue there is not much use trying to resolve other issues on Scripture because the rejection of Scripture destroys any common ground upon which agreement can be founded. This false doctrine of "unity in diversity" is simply the doctrine to agree to disagree and just call it unity anyway. "Unity in diversity" is not unity but heresy. Those who promote that doctrine do not seek unity, but seek fellowship in spite of division.

We can make things sure without guesswork and speculation if we will. When all will abide by the Biblical prohibition of adding to and taking from God's Word we can obey what He teaches, speaking as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11).

Following these two principles may not resolve all matters, but I find few, if any, that would not be solved. It just depends on whether those who are divided really love the Word enough to let God have his way.

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Solomon's Temple and the Church

We find many Old Testament pictures of New Testament people, doctrine, events, and other type and anti-type relationships. We can even learn in the Old Testament something about the Lord's church that is revealed in the New Testament more completely. Of course, these things show the inseparable tie that exists between the Old Testament and new Testament. This is important

because modernists deny there is any real connection between them. For them to do that would demand they surrender their preconceived bias they have already declared how there can be no such thing as prophesy and its fulfillment for that demands the miraculous, which demands the existence of God and inspiration, something they abhor to consider.

Tabernacle and Temple

Moses built the tabernacle for the Israelites as God gave him the pattern when Israel was encamped around Sinai. Later, after Israel had taken Canaan, the period of Judges had passed, and Israel had become a kingdom, the tabernacle was replaced by the temple, which was called the "*house of God*" and where God did dwell in a very special and distinctive way. The Lord's church is now God's house (First Timothy 3:14,15), and its members are said to be the temple of God (First Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:16). Ephesians 2:19-22 also presents the church as a "*building fitly framed together... unto a holy temple in the Lord.*"

What had the people in Corinth and Ephesus done that made them the temple of God? Acts 18:8, "*And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians believed, and were baptized.*" Acts 19:1-5 we read where Paul baptized men of Ephesus in the name of Christ. These people had heard the gospel, believed in Christ, and obeyed the commands of the gospel, including being baptized.

God no longer dwells in a physical temple as He did in the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament (Acts 7:48; 17:24). There were three physical temples in Israel's history. The first was built by Solomon some four hundred eighty years after Israel entered Canaan. It took seven years to build and was destroyed when the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. The second temple was the one built under the leadership of Zerubbabel after Judah returned from Babylonian captivity. This temple gradually fell into the state of disrepair. Herod's temple, the largest of the three and the one standing during the life of Jesus on earth,

took forty six years to build. It too was destroyed when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The temple was first proposed by David. But permission was denied him to build the temple because he was a man of war and there was so much conflict around him during his reign (Second Samuel 7:1,2; First Chronicles 28:3). But David was told that his son Solomon would build it and David was permitted to gather many of the materials that would be used in its construction (First Chronicles 28:6). There are a number of parallels between the temple and the church. At this point one should leave our remarks and familiarize himself with the record of First Kings 5:1-11 concerning the building of Solomon's temple.

Solomon's Temple

The first temple was built by Solomon. The church was built by Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:16-18).

Solomon was on the throne as king when the temple was built. Christ had already ascended into heaven to be at the right hand of God at the time the church came into existence on Pentecost (Acts 2: 33,34). This was as Daniel had prophesied when he told of the Son of man going to the Ancient of Days (God, the Father) and being given a kingdom (Daniel 7:13,14).

Adversaries had been defeated before the temple was built. The constant plague of enemies was one element in the denial to David's request to build the temple (First Kings 5:1-5). Christ did not build His church until He had conquered the great adversary, the devil. Hebrews 2:14, "*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*" Christ had said that even the gates of Hades would not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:20). This meant that nothing, not even His own death, would prevent the church from being established. Furthermore, Peter preached, Acts 2: 25:27, "*For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved; therefore did my heart rejoice,*

and my tongue was glad, moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope; because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption."

Material for the temple was brought out of another kingdom. Solomon got cedars from Lebanon (First Kings 5: 8-10) with the cooperation of Hiram, king of Tyre. The material that enters into the temple of God, His church, also comes from another kingdom. There are two spiritual kingdoms, one belonging to God, and the other to the devil. Those in the kingdom of God are those who have been delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into God's kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Every Christian was once in the kingdom of death, but now is a citizen in the kingdom of life.

Prepared Material

Material that went into Solomon's temple was prepared for the temple (First Kings 5:6). The timber was cut and the stones were hewed to precision to the extent that when these materials were put together they fit perfectly and the temple was erected without the sound of the hammer nor axe (First Kings 6:7). Those who enter the Lord's church are also prepared to enter. We are prepared by being taught and converted to Christ, our sins being washed away by His blood, and we are thereby made fit for the new temple of God.

The materials that went into Solomon's temple were paid for before they went into the temple (First Kings 5:11). Solomon gave Hiram the payment before they were placed into the temple. A similar thing has taken place regarding those of us who make up the church, the temple of God. The blood of Christ was the price paid for the church (Acts 20:28). He shed His blood at Calvary while men were yet in their sins (Romans 5:8). If the price had not been paid there could not have been the temple.

The material was brought across the water before it was placed into the temple (First Kings 5:9). After the cedars were cut they were conveyed to Israel by means of water. Similarly, one enter the temple of God, the church, by means of water, being baptized in water by the authority

of Christ for the remission of sins. One is baptized into the body (First Corinthians 12:13) which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23) which is also God's temple (Ephesians 2:19-22). Those who make up the church or temple have been born again, "*born of water and the Spirit*" (John 3:3-5).

The Finished Product

When the temple was completed it was considered beautiful, holy, sacred, being filled with the glory of God. Isaiah said of the temple when bemoaning its destruction that was to come, he called it, "*Our holy and beautiful house*" (Isaiah 64:11). Similarly, Paul said of the church, Ephesians 5:27, "*That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such things; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*"

In the temple the priests of God offered their sacrifices. In the church, every Christian is a priest for we make up a holy priesthood (First Peter 2:5). There is no such thing as a clergy-laity system in the Lord's church like you find in the denominations which are of human rather than divine origin. Service to God is to be done as one is a member of His church. It is in the church that we offer our sacrifices and do the work God has commanded of us.

Solomon's temple was a physical building. But the church, even though it is presented as a building, is not a physical house. Even some brethren must think the church building where we meet for worship is some sanctified and holy place because they disallow eating in the church building because to do so would be a sin against its holiness. Language is often loosely spoken by brethren that tends to reveal a misunderstanding of what the church is. I have a beautiful rolltop desk that I purchased from a good sister who had it in her garage. I thought she was going to sell it to somebody else who could pay more for it than I, but she graciously sold it to me with the explanation that she wanted to keep it in the church. I think I knew what she meant. I told her in jest that I did not know who baptized it, big as it is, but I am glad they did. You have to be baptized to be in the

church. But the church is a spiritual house made up of people who have been spiritually redeemed by the blood of Christ. We are living stones. We are the temple of God.

A Significant Difference

We have noted several similarities between Solomon's temple and the Lord's church. Without doubt the temple was a part of the shadows of things to come, a type of the Lord's church. But we can also note one tremendous difference. Solomon's temple was destroyed. The Lord's church shall never be destroyed but shall last forever (Daniel 2:44). Death could not prevail against its beginning, nor shall anything prevail against its eternal glory. As we often sing, "It shall stand."

When you study the Scriptures you are impressed with the tie between the Old and New Testaments. You soon learn, even about the temple, that it was more than just a holy place of worship and service to God under the old law of Moses, with all of its compartments, courts, furnishings, and tapestries. It was really a type of that which was to come. We see in Scripture the gradual unfolding of God's place for redeeming man which He designed and determined before the foundation of the world. We read the prophecies, promises, and Old Testament pictures of the system of salvation through Christ. These things have been fulfilled in Christ and His church. Now God lives and dwells in and with His temple, the church. As people hear, believe, obey, and continue faithful to follow His Word, so Deity lives within them through that Word. We enter the temple by faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins. The Lord then adds us to His church (Acts 2:47), which means we become a part of His temple. Are you a "*living stone*" in the temple of God?

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With this issue we complete fifteen full volumes of **A Burning Fire.** Our present plans call for two, possibly three, more volumes before our resources are exhausted for this work. JWB

God's Way To Happiness

Happiness is much sought after by all mankind. It has proven to be elusive, difficult to attain, difficult to retain, But God wants people to be genuinely happy. The faith of Jesus Christ is not totally for the next world but also for this one. Following Christ is the way of happiness.

When people are asked what they want out of life, what they want for their children, what is their wish for the world, time and time again the answer is that happiness is the goal. We hear the words of refugees who flee their homelands and come to this country say openly and repeatedly that they have come seeking happiness.

To be happy is accepted and recognized as a desirable end. Therefore, people make great efforts to be happy. Many make terrible mistakes trying to reach happiness and even do things that destroy the possibility of happiness in their search. But we know that God wants people to be happy because He has provided and taught the way of happiness. What we also need to learn is that God's way to happiness is not the way that men devise. As in other things, the way of the Lord is the right way and the way of man is the way of deception and death, and is inferior to the way of the Lord (Proverbs 14:12); Jeremiah 10:23; Isaiah 55:9).

Ways That Fail

In our lesson we want to consider ways that men have tried and failed to be happy. Our study is primarily from the book of Ecclesiastes and the inspired report thought Solomon. We need such a study to set our goals, establish proper priorities, and learn "to keep our head on straight."

Solomon had power, prestige, honor, and prominence in this world (2:9) "*So I was great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem...*" He was evidently

impressed with his own greatness in the eyes of the people of this world. With his power as king he obtained whatever he wished. He had armies, chariots, menservants, maidservants, nations were paying tribute to him, everyone feared and respected him for his worldly greatness, honor, and prestige.

There is such a striving among some people for recognition, seeking popularity, and acceptance. Some are willing to pay almost any price to be ranked among men. They use all means to obtain the limelight, even do weird and bazaar things to get recognition and feel important. What they are doing is feeding their ego and trying to enlarge themselves before their fellowman. Yet, few shall ever approach the extent that Solomon had in all these things. Even so, they did not bring him happiness. "*Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun*" (2:11). Vexation means annoyance, something troublesome, disturbing, even productive of harassment.

How many times have we seen lived before us the misery, insecurity, unhappiness of prominent people who admit they would exchange it all for the peace of the humble man who may have very little of the recognition this world can afford! Prominence, while not sinful in itself, is simply not the way to happiness. But too few people ever really learn that lesson but continue to seek and pursue it.

More Failure

Solomon had wealth. Probably as much or more than any other single element, wealth is mentioned by people as a necessary ingredient to possess in order to be happy. If wealth would ever make one happy it should have brought happiness to Solomon. First Kings 10:23, "*So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.*" He had a throne of ivory, drinking vessels of gold, navies that constantly brought riches to him from abroad. The Queen of Sheba heard of this wealth and wisdom and wanted to see for herself. After

seeing she exclaimed that half was not told her (First Kings 10:7).

It is disappointing to so many in our materialistic age to learn, after spending themselves in seeking and acquiring wealth, that such is not capable of producing what they sought. Ecclesiastes 5:10, "*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase; this is also vanity.*" Verse twelve, "*The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.*" Verses fifteen and sixteen, "*As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go; and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?*"

Jesus said, Luke 12:15, "*Take heed of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" It is not this way because riches are necessarily evil in themselves. They are not. But one may have all such things and yet not be happy. Some of the most miserable people on earth are wealthy. Those who want to be rich often drain their very lives and spirits in quest of wealth, only to find they have reached for the wind, piercing themselves through with many sorrows (First Timothy 6:10).

Additional Failures

Solomon sought and enjoyed the pleasures of this world, satisfying himself in whatever he desired. Some confuse happiness with fun, frolic, having a "big time," letting yourself go, being on an exciting "high," attending parties, entertainments, drunkenness, satisfying the physical lusts and appetites. I once stayed in the home of a man while preaching in a gospel meeting who told me he once had gone the ways of pleasure seeking, living a wicked life in self-indulgence. But he confessed it only brought him disgrace. He learned that the only real happiness is in living God's way rather than trying to fill life with the pleasure of sin (Hebrews 11:25). While all pleasure is not sinful, the grasping to satisfy one's desires with the sinful pleasures has been demonstrated

repeatedly not to be the way of human happiness. Sin pays, but the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Ecclesiastes 1:17; 2:1, "*And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit... I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and behold, this also is vanity.*"

Solomon uniquely possessed the knowledge and wisdom of this world. First Kings 10:24, "*And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.*" Here was an area where Solomon not only had acquisition but in which he excelled. Jesus referred to him as a wise man. But some seem to think that to have knowledge for knowledge's sake will bring them satisfaction for which the soul of man longs. This was one of the misconceptions of the people of Athens before whom Paul preached (Acts 17: 20,21). Some people make themselves professional students, ever learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth.

Knowledge can be very beneficial and we would not for a moment ridicule the desire to know and the blessings knowledge can afford. But it cannot produce the happiness of heart and life that man wants and needs. One can know many things, but unless he knows what really matters his knowledge is ultimately for naught. Some of the most educated and worldly-wise people on earth are classified as the most malcontent. This is because the attainment of worldly knowledge does not produce happiness. Ecclesiastes 1:18, "*For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.*"

An Inescapable Conclusion

The only conclusion we draw at this point in our lesson is that such things for which so many strive so hard simply have not the capacity to provide that which is really sought. But in spite of the abundant evidence of this truth, it is not likely that people will cease pursuing these paths in search of happiness. Should not the vanity these things produce cause us to turn our attentions elsewhere in the pursuit of happiness? While we do not advocate crushing proper ambitions, but would

rather exhort that we take advantage of the good such things could produce, we must insist that we accept the limitations of them. They cannot bring to mankind that "*peace of God, which passeth all understanding.*" (Philippians 4:7). One might find happiness even with these things in his possession, but it will not be because of these things he is happy. One can have happiness without them. Solomon reached the conclusion, Ecclesiastes 12:13,14, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.*"

Why Not Listen to God?

There are hundreds of beatitudes in the Bible, expressions that speak of happiness, as well as other passages that are concerned with earthly happiness and where and how it can be found. From these we learn the source and definition of genuine happiness.

Blessedness is a kind of happiness, but much more than mere happiness. It has been said that happiness depends on what is happening, but blessedness is not affected by what happens. Blessedness is more than being light hearted, free from care, being a "good time Charley." Blessedness is more a state of mind, a spiritual condition of the soul that describes one's relationship with man and God. Blessedness, different from happiness which is determined by environment and circumstances, is an inward quality, a contentment of spirit, that derives its existence because of one's relationship with God. It comes from knowing you are right with God; knowing you have done your best; living with a clean conscience that has been trained according to God's will. It is a contentment that is not to be confused with disinterest or lethargy, but is a deep inward, spiritual stability that is not and cannot be shaken by events that befall us. Having laid hold on what really matters and what counts, having what lasts, what is eternal, knowing you are a child of God with a purpose for living, knowing where you are going and why, this is what brings the blessedness of which we speak. This is the ultimate earthly happiness.

An Array of Scriptures

The best part of any lesson is the Word of God. The following passages present to us a portion of the Scriptural information regarding the way of happiness.

Psalm 1:1,2, "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*"

Psalm 2:12, "*Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*"

Psalm 84:4, "*Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.*" Keep in mind that the New Testament teaches that God's house in His church.

Psalm 106:3, "*Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.*" Happiness is found in right doing.

Job 5:17, "*Happy is the man who God correcteth.*"

Psalm 144:15, "*Happy is that people whose God is the Lord.*"

Psalm 146:5, "*Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his help; whose hope is in the Lord his God.*"

Proverbs 8:32, "*Blessed are they that keep my ways.*"

Proverbs 16:20, "*Whoso trusteth the Lord, happy is he.*"

Proverbs 29:18, "*He that keepeth the law, happy is he.*"

After teaching humility and the greatness in serving, John 13:7, Jesus said, "*If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*" There is a principle stated here that we must grasp, Happiness is produced by doing as well as thinking. Knowing to do right and failing to do right will destroy happiness. Happiness cannot be ours through neglect. James 4:17, "*Therefore to him that*

knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." We cannot be happy in sin.

First Peter 3:14; 4:14, "*But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake happy are ye... If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye.*" Happiness is available even in trying times provided you are doing what is eternally true.

Luke 11:28, "*Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep is.*"

Psalm 40:4, "*Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust.*"

Romans 4:7,8, "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*" Forgiveness of sins, having the Father-child relationship with God is the real source of happiness and blessedness.

Revelation 22:14, "*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*"

Turn and read the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew five. These statements are not just a code of ethics, or a moral code, but much more. They are a part of the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23), presenting qualities that characterize those who would make up His kingdom. They are "Pentecost Pointers," pointing toward that notable day when the kingdom of God, His church, would come into existence. As you read, note the spiritual traits that bring about the blessedness of which Christ spoke.

In summary, we can say of happiness, the kind of happiness that is blessedness, that it is serving God and serving Him faithfully. May it be the lot of each one to know and cherish this happiness.

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The Christian Man as Leader and Provider

Partners in marriage are to function as a team, as we wrote in our most recent issue. The operation of the home requires teamwork. But every team must have a leader. Also, there are certain necessary provisions, material and spiritual, in making a home. Every home, therefore, must have a provider. It is our goal in this lesson to present the Biblical pattern that the Christian husband and father is to be the leader and provider in the marriage and the home.

Let us first consider a few basic and fundamental principles that need restating. Marriage and the home is of divine origin, design, and purpose. God must be considered and His will be the governing element. The home and family were founded with the intent to bless all mankind. Companionship is fundamental to a marriage and home. Each one in the home, husband, wife, and children, has privileges and responsibilities. We cannot leave God out of the operation of the home and marriage and expect them to be what God says they are supposed to be.

Specific Roles

In God's scheme of things the man is the leader in the home. He was created first (Genesis 1,2; First Corinthians 11:3; First Timothy 3:13) and as surely as Christ is over the man the man is designated to be over the woman as decreed by God.

Woman was created for man as a suitable companion. All the animals had passed before Adam and though he probably could appreciate the need for a companion, none were suitable for him. So God made woman from his rib, one of his own kind, of his own flesh and bones. She did not become his slave nor was she less human than he. She also had needs and among them was the need of companionship. But God's revelation tells us of

the rank that God specified. We will have more to say on this matter as the lesson progresses.

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, understood that the law of Moses taught that a wife was to be subject to her husband (First Corinthians 14:34,35). Since she is subject unto him, he necessarily must assume the duties of headship and leadership. Where goes subjection of the woman to the man must go man's responsibility to lead. He cannot neglect this duty anymore than she can neglect being in subjection.

The truth regarding this matter does not suggest inferiority but notes the difference between the husband and the wife and the distinction of roles each is to fill. If we asked which was superior, a tractor or a wristwatch, we would realize that they cannot be compared in all particulars because they serve different roles and functions. So it is with man and woman.

He is the Head

The New Testament teaches that man is the head and must lead the unit (Ephesians 5:22,23; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5). This places responsibility on the man that he cannot shirk nor honorably delegate to another. We are sorry this divine design does not please everyone, but it does please those who love the will of God, both man and woman. Who is not pleased with such a design? It does not please men who wish to shirk their duties. It does not please women who wish to usurp authority and have dominion, or who have a strong distaste for the feminine role. It does not please the distorted misfits who would promote the unisex society, or would confuse the roles of men and women, attempting to promote the ridiculous idea that men and women are alike and equal in all respects. God, who made the human race, knows far better what is best for humanity than innovators who denounce God and prefer to follow their own perversions and confusions. Experience proves His way to be the most beneficial and fitting for society and the human family. The reversal and confusion of role causes strife, jealousy, divorce, homosexuality, lesbianism, and general moral and family decay, such as we are witnessing in American society today. We are seeing the

advance of havoc promoted by those who hate God and His righteousness.

Weak Men

The lack of a strong masculine figure in the home minimizes the stability of boys in their masculine roles. Girls who have weak fathers and domineering mothers are those most prone to seek security in giving themselves in immorality to some man who asserts his masculinity. Boys who grow to maturity without benefit of the male image from some source never grasp the real distinction between male and female and are not likely to fulfill their role they should discharge.

Sometimes the roles of both husband and wife are imposed on a person due to death, illness, or some other intrusion into the general relationship. In this we often see God's providence at work because it seems when such things are forced into people's lives they have a way of combatting the effects because they retain a proper understanding of the role of male and female. But when the roles are deliberately exchanged or forsaken, not because of uncommon tragedy, but because of divorce or other manifestations of selfishness, the problems surmount. In the first instance necessity is offset by other means. But in the second the heart is confused and rebellion leaves its ugly mark on everyone involved.

The Provider

The man and husband has the primary duty and privilege to provide what is needful for the home, both materially and spiritually (First Timothy 5:8; Second Corinthians 12:14; Genesis 3:19). There is far more to being a good provider than simply providing material needs, and this is an area where many husband and fathers have really failed. Some are quite able to provide dollars, but not the guidance, love, and example that is vital. So many "men" leave the spiritual training and example solely to the wife and mother while they shirk one of the most awesome and sacred responsibilities in the home (Ephesians 6:4). Proverbs 17:6, "*Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.*" Unfortunately, some fathers are a

scourge, disgrace, handicap, and millstone about the neck of their children and children's children because they show no real concern for the spiritual welfare of their offspring and descendants.

The father being the provider does not entirely forbid the wife and mother from assisting in this task anymore than it prohibits the father and husband from assisting the wife and mother in her roles. There may arise those times when necessity demands she assist. We make a big mistake to think a wife and mother is not making material and physical provision unless she is employed gainfully outside the home. Many women are employed outside the home and the consequences of this arrangement demands more consideration be given to it. Taking all things into account, such arrangements have not generally proven beneficial to society and mankind because children suffer from it. People need to realize there is a great difference between women working outside the home due to need and working due to greed. Selfishness, lust for things, materialistic attitudes have provoked much of what we see in families today. The primary duty of the wife and mother is to her home and family. She is to guide the house (First Timothy 5:14), bear children (First Timothy 5:13), be keepers (workers) at home (Titus 2:5), and if and when other pursuits interfere or prevent her accomplishing her primary task effectively as a homemaker, mother, and wife, she has confused her role. It is a wrong attitude for men to hold, men who want their wives to work outside the home, just so they can have more of this world's goods, even to the neglect of the care, security, training, health, protection, and general welfare of home and children. Realizing this does not set well with much of modern American today, we stoutly insist that modern society is not the best one to set our standards, but the will of Almighty God.

The Wife and Mother

While we speak of the role of the man primarily in this lesson, we must at the same time consider his mate. Some have emphasized other careers for women than that of wife, mother, homemaker. They have actually belittled and ridiculed this God-given and divinely

assigned role. They sneeringly refer to her as "just a housewife," as if those who are in the factories and offices are the superior ones. That is just so much Satanic ammunition being exploded to the destruction of many marriages, homes, resulting in divorces, and distraught children. The harvest of such distortion will not be reaped in just one generation. Furthermore, this doctrine of the modern antagonists of God that one is a better wife and mother if she forsakes her home and pursues her own goals and career makes about as much sense as one being a better baseball player if he forsakes the game. Young women are urged to "take care of yourself first" even if the family and marriage to which they were supposed to have committed themselves suffers. While there is nothing wrong in taking care of yourself, we ought to teach people not to assume roles they do not intend to fill. One should make up his mind before he commits and once committed realize the duties he or she have and fill them. Doing this may prevent someone from accomplishing some self-serving ambition but there are things more important than simply doing what you want to do. Does anybody really consider doing what they ought to do before just doing what they want? We all should.

Family Under Attack

From every quarter we witness attacks against the family, and the role of the man in the family. This should concern the Christian. The television, comic strips, magazine articles present the father as a blundering and ignorant fool that just cannot seem to get it together. The adoration of women assuming the work and roles of men, that they are superior in every realm, from being the company president to driving a tractor, or being a combat pilot, are designed to turn society into a matriarchal and anti-Biblical society.

We have been shocked (but it has become so propagated that instances have become commonplace) at the swapping the role of man and woman. The wife and mother, being far superior to her husband and father in the family, leaves the home to make the material provisions and the husbands and fathers stay home to be the keepers in the home, the very opposite of the roles

God designed for men and women. This appeals to some men who have been called "real go-getters," that is, they take their wives to work and then "go get her." Surely, there is to be a sharing in the operation of the home. But there is also to be a leader and provider and God says that the man should assume and shoulder that responsibility. We have so many no-good males today that it is often hard to find a man, a real man, who will do as God teaches he should. We sure need to teach our young sons how to be God's man.

With the advance of the so-called "women's liberation" movement there has been a corresponding decrease of respect for womanhood. There is less courtesy, chivalry, and politeness. Many women have just become "one of the boys." They have knocked themselves off the pedestal where God placed them and are attempting to become what they were never intended to be. Where do people get the idea that just because something can be done that it ought to be done, and that if it can be done then it must be right to do it?

There doubtless may be an isolated exception here and there, but what has taken place regarding the role or the man, and confusion of women, has caused more grief and havoc in the home and society than can be corrected in a short span, if ever. People who live so rebelliously against God may well have to experience utter destruction before things get more as they ought to be. Surely, that has been the case in many nations and kingdoms of which we read in history, including the Bible.

While many men are too mixed up to be real men, and many women see his cowardly ways and his unwillingness to assume the male role, this does not impeach the rule and design of the Lord. Regardless of what society does, says, or thinks, or even what you may or may not do, God's way remains the same, and it is the best, and if we be as wise as we like to profess ourselves to be we will listen and give heed to the will of the Lord.

* * * * *

Offending Little Ones



Jesus taught about little ones, children, using them to illustrate what should be the nature and character of those who make up His kingdom (Matthew 9:36-42). In verse forty-two, He said, "*And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe on me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.*" There cannot be any doubt regarding the Lord's displeasure with those who offend His children. Should not this teaching cause us to be more cautious how we deal with each other?

We hear and read so much about "child abuse" in the degenerate society of America as well as other nations. We are shocked and angered over such as that. Such offense has no excuse. The explanation is simply ungoldliness on the part of those who commit such things. But our righteous indignation should extend to those who choose to offend Christians also, including those heretics who divide and bring error among us.

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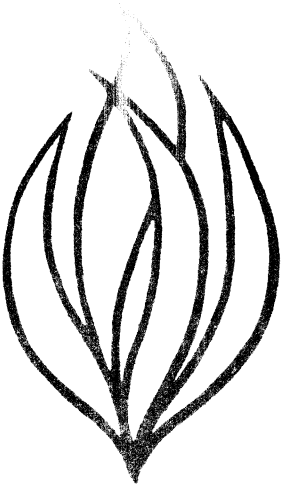

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

The Story of Jesus

PART ONE

Scripture References to the Story of Jesus ***24***

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The Story of Jesus
PART ONE

"Tell me the story of Jesus,
Write on my heart every word.
Tell me the story most precious,
Sweetest that ever was heard."

When the inspired men of the Bible preached their subject was Jesus the Christ. Over and over they told mankind the story of Jesus and all the things that are related to Him. This is what constitutes the preaching of the gospel of Christ.

The first four books of the New Testament reveal the life of Jesus Christ. It is not entirely accurate to speak of the "four gospels" because there is only one gospel. We do have four records of His life on earth. Actually, these records are so brief that they barely qualify to be called biographies. They cover only a small portion of the things concerning Him, the things which He said and did. Other than the final week before His crucifixion, the book of John records events in only twenty-five other days of His life. Of the three and one half years of His ministry on earth only about ten per cent of His days are mentioned/ There are huge gaps in the record of His entire life. As John wrote, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.*" John 20:30,31). He further wrote, "*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.*" (John 21:25).

From these passages we can know we have only a limited supply of information concerning Him, but we can also be confident we have what God has considered adequate to create faith in Jesus as the Christ and to prove His identity as the Son of God and Savior of the world.

These four books are not the only source of information we have concerning Him, however. We have prophetic references about Him in the Old Testament that teach us about Christ. The other books of the New Testament also give us pieces of information that enlarge our understanding of Him. There is a scarcity of uninspired books written during that period of history that tell us very much, if anything, we cannot know and in which we can have confidence, that is not in the Scriptures. Therefore, to learn of the Christ we turn to the Bible. To learn of His ministry on earth we turn primarily to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Limitations in Our Study

Our study will be limited and in summary form. We shall exclude a discussion about His pre-existence with God before His incarnation. We will also have only passing references to the many, many prophetic references concerning Him. We shall begin with the angel's announcement of the coming birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, and continue through His Ascension back into heaven. The lesson is presented with the hope that this abbreviated account of the life of Christ on earth will benefit both young and old as well as those who possibly have never seriously studied Christ. It may prove to be a valuable introduction and motivating force that will encourage a deeper and richer study of the Savior of mankind and His will as presented in all the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. It is essential that we acquaint ourselves with divine revelation concerning the One on whom we must depend for a successful life now and a glorious existence in heaven in eternity.

Please note the small numbers beside the topical headings. This will refer you to a Scripture list at the end where the accounts to which we have references that can be read more fully. We also encourage the reader to secure for himself a reliable harmony of these first four books in his expanded study of the story of Jesus. Such a harmony will take all four books into account and present a complete Biblical record of so much of His life.

1 - John the Baptist to be Born

The story of Christ begins with the story of John. It was the time of the morning sacrifice and the priests would perform their tasks according to their assigned time. Zacharias was one of the priests. His wife was named Elizabeth. They were called righteous, blameless, people who walked in the commandments of the Lord. They were stricken in years and Elizabeth had been barren all her days. Yet, during the time Zacharias was performing his priestly duties he was visited by an angel who told him of the coming birth of a son who was to be named John. As a sign of this event the angel said Zacharias would not be able to speak until the son was born. He was also told of the work John was to do, how that he would go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah, calling people to repentance, announcing the coming of the kingdom, making ready a people prepared for the Lord.

2 - The Announcement to Mary

The Biblical scene shifts from Jerusalem to Galilee and Nazareth. The angle Gabriel appeared to Mary who was betrothed to Joseph. Both of them were descendants of David. He was a carpenter and their means were very modest, possibly even poor. This we determine from the kind of sacrifices they offered, which were the sacrifices of the poor. Even though they were bound to each other they had not yet come together as husband and wife.

She was told of the Son that was to be born unto her, His identity, His name, and how He was the fulfillment of God's promise through the Davidic lineage. He was the "*hope of Israel.*" Having difficulty to accept the announcement because she was a virgin, nonetheless she humbled herself before God and soon it was apparent that she was with child.

She then visited her cousin, Elizabeth, the one who would give birth to John. We read of the great words of praise that she spoke when she was on this visit. Meanwhile, Joseph was much perplexed and disturbed and suspected infidelity. But he was informed by an angel otherwise, and was told that the child of Mary was of God. His mind set as ease, and dismissing his plans to

put her away, being reassured by information from God, he recognized this as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 7:14) concerning the virgin that would bear a son.

In the near time, John was born and circumcised according to the law of Moses. Even though some suggested he be named after his father, his father said he was to be named John, as the angel had instructed. At his birth Zacharias was no longer without ability to speak and many words of praise were offered to God.

3 - The Birth of Christ

A census of the people was commanded by the Roman Emperor, Augustus Caesar. It was for the purpose of taxation and each was to be enrolled in their ancestral home area, which for Joseph and Mary was Bethlehem. This meant they had to make the journey from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the south, a distance of some eighty miles. While the journey must have had its difficulties for Mary, being great with child, they arrived only to find there was no room for them in the inn.

Time came for Mary to be delivered and they found lodging in a stable. She brought forth her firstborn Son, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger.

The announcement of His birth was given to shepherds who were tending their flocks. Angelic hosts appeared, singing, "*Glory to God in the highest.*" These shepherds then visited the stable where the child was, going out thereafter and telling what they had seen and heard.

On the eighth day Jesus was circumcised, He being a Jew. After thirty-one days He was presented in the temple according to the law about the firstborn. There were also the rituals of purification for the mother, sacrifices and offerings being made. The family of three were met at the entrance by one named Simeon who had been promised that he would not see death until he had seen the Messiah. His words of rejoicing are recorded in Luke two. Also we have the record of Christ being seen by Anna, a woman who served the Lord in the temple. It is

recorded how she gave thanks to the Lord as did Simeon and spake of Him to others.

4 - Journey to Egypt and Nazareth

Wise men had seen the star denoting the birth of the Messiah and followed it into Palestine, coming to Jerusalem to pay homage to the Child. They first made inquiry of His whereabouts from Herod. The scribes told Herod of the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Herod asked the wise men to locate the Child, on the deceptive plea that he, also, wished to worship the Child.

The wise men followed the star to where Jesus was. This event probably occurred about two years after the birth of Jesus, this being suggested due to the slaughter of babies by Herod from two years old and younger at a later time. Whatever of that, these wise men brought gifts and having completed their purpose, returned to their own country another way rather than informing Herod where Jesus was, being so instructed by God.

But Herod still sought the life of the Child. This reckless tyrant instigated an indiscriminate slaughter of children around Bethlehem two years old and younger. This was in fulfillment of prophecy that is called the lamentation of Rachel for her children. But the Child Jesus escaped because Joseph, being warned in a dream to flee into Egypt with the Child and His mother, This, too, was to result in another fulfillment of prophecy, "*Out of Egypt have I called my son.*"

The length of stay in Egypt was probably brief, but we have no revelation how long it was. But events soon allowed Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to return to Palestine. They were told to go to the land of Israel, but they prudently avoided Bethlehem and the Jerusalem area, rather returning to their home in Nazareth. This was even yet another fulfillment of prophecy how Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

5 - His Life in Nazareth

We have very little information about the life of Jesus until He reached manhood, therefore, very little about His life in Nazareth where He resided until about thirty years of age. He was doubtless a carpenter by trade as had been Joseph. He was once called a carpenter. Jewish fathers gave their sons a trade by which they could earn their livelihood and usually it was their own trade that they passed to their sons. The most comprehensive statement we have about His life in Nazareth as He was growing toward physical maturity is Luke 2:52, "*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.*" When we realize the limited revelation about His earthly life, and understand that the record is not simply to give us His life but to show His identity, we can more readily comprehend the void of information of those years that were not directly concerned with His divinely appointed mission.

There is one event of significance recorded, however, and that was His visit to the temple when twelve years of age, going to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph. Among the Jews, when one reached that age, they assumed certain religious obligations, such as attendance at feasts. At the time of His visit the land had relative calm. Archelaus had been banished and the territory was governed by Roman governors. It was the time of the Passover. It seems that the family remained in Jerusalem the entire Passover week. When Mary and Joseph started their return from Jerusalem to Nazareth, they assumed that Jesus was among their traveling companions. When they realized He was not with them, they returned to Jerusalem and sought Him three days. When they found Him He was in the temple, which might not have been too surprising, but what He was doing did surprise them. Jesus was discussing the law of Moses with the doctors and lawyers.

When they asked Him why He had not come with them He simply said, "*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" But then He did submissively return with them and remained in Nazareth until near the age of thirty.

6 - The Voice in the Wilderness

For a moment we must turn our attention again to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. John was about six months older than Jesus which means he was also about thirty years old at the period we now consider. In appearance, manner, and ministry we was likened unto the Old Testament prophet Elijah with his leathern girdle, coat of camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey, living in the wilderness, and teaching a message that was precise, direct, and often condemning in nature. John came preaching in the wilderness that the kingdom of heaven was "*at hand,*" meaning nearby and soon to be. He also called the people to repentance, baptizing those who believed in the coming Messiah and for the remission of sins. His message demanded evidence of repentance. This, of course, provoked opposition from some, especially then he preached that one could no longer rely on ancestry to be counted as a child of God. This the Jews had been doing, and properly so, for some fifteen centuries. But under the will of Christ that case would not be true. Those who wished to be children of God would have to alter their sinful lives. The rituals and traditions that were being taught and bound on others by the Pharisees were not what had to be obeyed.

7 - The Baptism of Jesus

John was baptizing in the Jordan River. Jesus came to John and asked to be baptized. His purpose was not for the remission of sins, because He had no sin, but "*to fulfill all righteousness.*" Righteousness refers to the commandments of God (Psalm 119:172.) While we do not have the record where God commanded Jesus to be baptized, by implication we know He was so commanded and Jesus obeyed. John at first objected to His request, stating that Jesus ought baptize him. But Jesus insisted and John complied. When Jesus came from the water a voice from heaven was heard that confessed, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" The Holy Spirit descended upon Him as would a dove. Then Jesus was led into the wilderness for a series of temptations.

8 - Jesus Tempted by the Devil

Temptation is not to be confused as the same thing as sin. It was and is no sin to be tempted. Yielding to temptation to do evil is sin. Christ was tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15), yet He never sinned (First Peter 1:22). We should not consider this series of temptations as the only temptations Satan placed before our Lord. He provoked Him throughout His ministry in various ways.

The temptations were an assault on His authority by the provocation to submit to the Devil. Jesus had fasted for forty days prior to these temptations and Satan tempted Him to command stones to be made bread. Again, He was told to cast Himself off the pinnacle of the temple and no harm would come to Him. He was finally tempted to fall down and worship Satan and Satan would surrender the world to Jesus. In each instance Jesus rebuffed Satan by quoting Scripture, each quotation coming from the book called Deuteronomy. Following the temptations angels came and ministered to Him. In all this He did more than meet and overcome temptation. He showed His power over the avenues of temptation that Satan used (as he had used them against Adam and Eve, and also mentioned in First John 2:15-17). He demonstrated His superiority over Satan. He conquered Satan in his attempts to thwart and subvert the plan of God for the salvation of man even before it was announced. This was a very important encounter between Deity and the Devil.

9 - Back to John

The hour finally came for John to show Jesus as the Messiah. Having already disclaimed that designation for himself, some wondering if John was "*that prophet*" of which Moses had spoken, John made it clear that he was not the prophet foretold. Rather, he called Jesus, "*The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.*" He further taught, "*He must increase, and I must decrease.*"

John was not the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom. John's disciples, when introduced to Jesus, turned from John and followed Christ. We read of such men as Andrew, John, Philip, and Nathanael doing this. They had been taught by John that when Jesus came

upon the scene they said, "*We have found the Messiah.*" The success of the ministry of John was the reaction of people toward Christ. We might add that this is still the measure of successful gospel preaching.

10 - His First Miracle

The scene is a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Here Jesus turned water into wine, which proved to be "*good*" wine, not an intoxicating beverage, but the very best juice of the grape. Because of this miracle many were caused to believe in Him. This was the purpose of His miracles.

11 - Cleansing the Temple

There are three Passovers mentioned during the ministry of Jesus and from these we conclude that His ministry extended over three of more years. On His visit to Jerusalem at one of these Passovers He came to the temple and found money changers in the temple, animals being bought and sold. While this activity was not totally illegitimate, if it had been done fairly, honestly, and in the proper place, it was wrong because of where it was done and the exploitation of travelers that was taking place. Those who lived away from Jerusalem and would travel some distances to the feast could purchase their sacrifices once they were there and exchange the coins they normally used for the Jewish coins that would be acceptable in their gifts. But the premises of the sacred temple was no place for this business and it was being utilized for just such a purpose. This provoked Jesus to action.

He called the temple His Father's house and drove out the animals and overturned the tables, saying they had turned it into a den of robbers. This indicates the exploitation, greed, and unfairness that was being done.

Although many did not like what He did they did not lay hands on Him, but only asked by what authority He did it. "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,*" was His answer. He was not speaking of the physical temple which He had cleansed, but the temple of His

body and the time of His death and resurrection. This was to be a sign of His authority.

12 - Jesus and Nicodemus

Following the incidents at the temple, while still in Jerusalem, Jesus had His conversation with Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling court, which history calls the Sanhedrin. He was also a Pharisee. Whiled most Pharisees were hostile toward Jesus, this was not true of Nicodemus.

The conversation was on the subject of being "*born again,*" the new birth. Jesus told him, "*Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*" Then Jesus patiently explained to Nicodemus the spiritual nature of this birth, the kingdom, what preceded the new birth, and what was involved in being "*born again.*" (If only people would consult what Jesus taught rather than their emotional sensationalism regarding the new birth, much religious error would vanish, at least in the hearts and lives of honest people). Jesus showed the necessity of faith and repentance, and being born of water (baptism). He even included a mild rebuke of Nicodemus, a religious leader, for not more readily understanding spiritual matters.

13 - Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

From Jerusalem which was in southern Judea, Jesus started toward Galilee, the northern province, having to pass through Samaria, the middle province. There was great enmity between the Jew and Samaritan that stemmed from the time of the return of Judah from Babylonian captivity and the Jews' refusal to allow Samaritans to assist in the rebuilding of the temple under Zerrubbabel. The "*Jews have no dealing with Samaritans.*" They consider one another as dogs. So hostile were the Jews and Samaritans toward one another that most Jews when traveling from Judea to Galilee or going the other direction did not go through Samaria but would pass over the Jordan to the east side and travel through Perea rather than Samaria.

The Samaritans had a rival religion that was patterned somewhat after Judaism. They had their own holy mountain, Mount Gerizim, and temple. They also had high expectations for the coming of the Messiah.

While Jesus' disciples went into the city for food, Jesus remained at Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus engaged her in conversation and took advantage of the environment to teach her about Himself as the living water of life, the water of spiritual salvation, not like the physical water which came from the well. He used water figuratively to offer eternal life.

In the course of their conversation the woman was impressed, and informed, and ran into the city to tell everyone there that she had found the Messiah. They came out and heard Jesus preach for themselves and many believed on Him. The entire episode bewildered the disciples, but immediately informs us of a basic truth of the faith of Christ, the gospel is for all.

14 - Healing the Nobleman's Son

Jesus now entered into His first expanded ministry in Galilee, and specifically into Capernaum. More of His mighty works were done in and around Capernaum than most any other place. A nobleman of that city heard of the presence of Jesus. His son was nigh unto death. He came requesting that Jesus come and heal his son. Jesus merely spoke, "*Go thy way; thy son liveth.*" The nobleman returned home and found his son recovered. It was reported to the father that the son recovered at a certain hour which was the same hour Jesus had spoken to him.

15 - From Capernaum to Nazareth

The chronology of the events we are about to consider that took place during the ministry of Christ is not certain and we should not become dogmatic regarding the order of these events. But they all occurred in approximately the same general time frame, the early part of His first major Galilean tour.

The people of Nazareth were anxious to hear Him. They had heard of hoe He turned water into wine at Cana.

News of what all He had done in Jerusalem had gone everywhere, especially His cleansing the temple. They could easily have known about how He healed the nobleman's son who lived in Capernaum which was not far from Nazareth.

Jesus went into the synagogue as was His custom and was given opportunity to read the Scriptures and make application of them. He read from the prophet Isaiah about the Messiah that was to come and then applied the Scripture to Himself, saying, "*Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.*"

The reaction to Jesus at this point was that the people were surprised, not so much that the Scripture could and would be fulfilled, but that this son of Joseph, a carpenter of their own number, would make the claim for Himself. This angered them and they drove Him from the synagogue to the brow of a hill where they would have cast Him down except He made His way among them and lost Himself in the throng, coming back to Capernaum.

16 - Four Disciples Called

Capernaum was near the Sea of Galilee. There Jesus found fisherman who were mending their nets. They had fished all the night before but had caught nothing. Jesus told them to go out and cast their nets. They reluctantly followed His directions and when they did, they made a huge catch, so much that their nets began to break, and they needed assistance to hold what they caught. Peter's reaction typified all of them when he said, "*Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" He simply did not consider himself worthy even to be in the presence of such a One as Jesus. Then Jesus told them (Peter, Andrew, James and John) that they would be fishers of men, and they followed Jesus.

17 - Miracles in Capernaum

We have already noted several miracles of Jesus that occurred in this general geographical area. The people were impressed because His teaching was not like that of the scribes but as One having the authority to teach by

His own name, and well they might so consider Him because He was the Son of God.

In the synagogue (whose ruins have been uncovered in recent times by archaeologists) He cast an unclean spirit from a man. The people were astonished and His fame spread abroad. He also healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. Many were brought to Him with all manner of diseases and He healed them. He used these things to provoke faith in Him as the one He claimed to be. He did it to gain open-minded hearers of His Word.

18 - A Tour Through Galilee

He made this tour in order to preach the gospel of the kingdom, "*for to this end came I forth.*" Wherever He went there were large multitudes of people awaiting Him. They came from Palestine, Syria, north and south, all around. He healed a man of leprosy, then told the man to do the things that the law of Moses required for his ceremonial cleansing and acceptance once again. But the man was told by Jesus not to broadcast this cure, but he published it all the more, insomuch that the opportunities for Jesus to teach what He came to teach were hindered by the throngs seeking to be healed.

In another instance in Capernaum four men let a paralytic man down through the roof to the presence of Jesus. They had found it impossible to get him through the crowds. Jesus commended their faith and healed the man. He first pronounced the man's sins forgiven and this angered the religious leaders who were there. They accused Him of blasphemy, contending that only God could forgive sins. In this contention they were correct, but they failed to realize that Jesus was Deity. In order to prove that fact to them Jesus asked which was easier, to forgive sins or heal the man. Then, in order to prove His power and identity, He ordered the man to take up his bed and walk. The people remarked they had never seen things in such fashion., They had never seen anything like it.

19 - The Call of Matthew

While in Galilee Jesus called Matthew, also called by the name of Levi, a tax collector, a publican, to follow Him. Tax collectors were generally hated because they were Jews who had placed themselves into the services of the hated Roman government. But Jesus obviously saw great potential in Matthew. Matthew obligingly and willingly committed himself to follow Jesus.

20 - At the Pool of Bethesda

This miracle occurred in Judah. Jesus had gone there again for another Passover observance. We can see from the rapidity that we encounter the records of Passover visits that we have only an abbreviated and sparse amount of information given about all He did. But keep in mind that the purpose of the inspired record was not to give a detailed biography, but to reveal evidence to produce faith. This is does abundantly.

It seems as though the waters of the pool at Bethesda had healing power. I do not have an explanation for this. I simply know that this at least was what people believed about the waters there, and this is what the record says about it. But this man was unable to reach the waters when they were troubled and he was prohibited from being healed. He had been afflicted thirty-eight years and there was none to assist him. Jesus came to him and raised him up so he could walk.

The result of this miracle of healing brought trouble against Christ because He had healed him on the Sabbath Day. Some of the Jews complained against the man for carrying his bed on the Sabbath. When they learned he was doing what Jesus had instructed him, their wrath was turned against Jesus.

It was then that Jesus preached a great sermon about six witnesses that proved His identity. Under the old Mosaic law two or three witnesses were sufficient to establish the truth, but Jesus gave six. (1) His own claim; (2) His works; (3) the Father's confession of Him; (4) what John the Baptist had testified and preached concerning Him; (5) the Old Testament Scriptures; (6) and especially the writings of Moses. He added, "*If ye believed Moses, ye would believe me.*" But one can recognize the growing

opposition to Jesus as time passes. The more the evidence mounts that He is the Son of God, the more intense was the opposition against Him.

21 - Opposition Provides Opportunity

Sharp criticism was leveled against Jesus and His disciples because they plucked grain as they passed through the fields on the Sabbath. Jesus took advantage of their criticism to show their inconsistency. They did not criticize David for eating showbread that was reserved only for priests. Furthermore, what He and His disciples had done was within the Mosaic law. Their emphasis on the Sabbath had been distorted by their traditions to the point that they would not even allow the allowable, even the doing of good on the Sabbath. He asserted that He was Lord of the Sabbath, and how man was not made for the Sabbath and He asked them if such healing as He had done was unlawful. They refused to answer, but sought ways to destroy Him. In Galilee He continued to heal man, fulfilling prophecies regarding Himself that proved He was the Messiah that God foretold would come. We also have record of His choice of His twelve apostles.

22 - Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount was a doctrinal presentation of the nature of the kingdom that was soon to come and the characteristics of those who would compose that spiritual kingdom. We shall not here go into detail about the content of that sermon because of its length. (We have an extended series of lesson studying this sermon that are included in other issues of **A Burning Fire.**) Suffice it to say here that the sermon if the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). By beatitudes, analogies, precepts, comparisons, and contrasts with the law of Moses, alongside exposure of hypocrisy, warnings, promises, Jesus revealed the nature of His kingdom that was to come, and which did come on Pentecost after His resurrection. The Sermon on the Mount has been reasonably described as the Constitution of His Kingdom.

The location of the mount where this sermon was preached cannot be ascertained, but that it not important. It is important to recall that it was not simply a presentation of morals and ethics. It is revelation of His kingdom and pointed to Pentecost and the church.

23 - Healing the Centurion's Servant

The life of Jesus continues in Galilee where most of His ministry took place. A centurion sent messengers asking Jesus to come because his servant was ill. The centurion manifested humility, only asking that Jesus speak the words necessary. He was also a man of authority but did not consider himself worthy for Jesus to enter his house. Jesus commended his faith because he showed he knew Jesus could heal even by the power of His Word.

The centurion was a Gentile, which gave Jesus opportunity to teach the universality of God's concern for all mankind. He said people from all direction would sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This aroused the Jews all the more because they reserved such distinction for themselves. Jesus told the messengers, "*Go thy way, as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.*"

24 - In Nain

Upon entering the city of Nain Jesus met a funeral procession. The only son of a widow had died. But Jesus raised him from the dead. The people glorified God and the fame of Jesus spread all the more.

25 - John the Baptist Again

At this time John had been imprisoned because he had preached against the adulterous relationship between Herod and Herodias. Herodias had been married to Herod's brother but Herod took her for himself. John preached, "*It is not lawful for you to have her.*" Such preaching angered Herodias and she had him imprisoned.

Messengers from John came to Jesus and they asked, "*Art thou he that should come; or do we look for*

another?" Probably John, who certainly already knew the identity of Jesus whom he had called the "Lamb of God," but likely was somewhat discouraged and confused due to being imprisoned. He may have been only sparsely informed about what Jesus was doing. Then again the entire event may have been intended to strengthen the faith of the disciples of John in Jesus.

Jesus told John's messengers to tell John what they saw and heard, which included the blind being made to see, the lame to walk, lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, and the dead being raised, the gospel being preached to the poor. All these things would mark who He was.

Then Jesus spoke concerning John, his greatness, strength, and how he was the one prophesied to come announcing the Messiah. He added that there were none born of woman greater than John, but even the least in the kingdom was greater than he. This could only be possible because John was never in the kingdom, being beheaded before the kingdom, the Lord's church, was established on Pentecost. While Jesus was exalting John, He was really exalting the church and the importance of being a citizen in the kingdom.

Jesus also rebuked the inconsistency of His hearers who had rejected John. John preached in the wilderness and was not a social man, They refused to heed his words. But Jesus came into the cities and they accused Him of being a winebibber and a glutton. It really did not make any difference who came to them or in what manner, the message that was being preached is what they hated and they refused to obey. They would not repent.

26 - Jesus Rebukes Galilean Cities

The preaching of Jesus became more and more pointed as His ministry continued. In spite of His many mighty works and evidences in the Galilean cities of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, they disbelieved. Ancient cities that they all knew were disapproved of God, like the Gentiles cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, would have repented and done better than the hearers of Jesus if they had been afforded as great an opportunity to repent as Jesus' hearers had received. Jesus said it

would be more tolerable for those wicked Gentile cities in the judgment than for the cities of Galilee where Jesus had worked and preached.

27 - The Anointing of Jesus

When Jesus was in Galilee He was invited by a Pharisee to eat with him. Many objected that Jesus would eat with such a one, but Jesus reminded them that He came to seek and save those who were lost. As they were about the table, a sinful woman entered, bringing an alabaster box of ointment. She bowed before Jesus, tears falling from her eyes, and she washed His feet with her tears, drying them with her hair. She also kissed His feet in an act of adoration.

Some who were watching raised criticism that if He had known who she was and the kind of person she was He would not have allowed it. If He was who He claimed to be He certainly would have known about her. Christ read the minds and thoughts of these critics and and those of His host, taking advantage of the opportunity to teach on the subject of love and forgiveness with a vivid illustration. He spoke of two debtors, one who owed so much he could never pay, and another who owed little, but both of whom were forgiven. He asked which would love the creditor the most? The answer was that the one who was forgiven the most would love the most. Jesus concurred and taught the principle that when one loves much there is much benefit; when one love little there is little benefit. The host had not honored Him in any particular fashion, but the woman had done these things to honor Him. He then spoke the woman's sins forgiven and said, "*Go in peace.*" Who can fail to see the calmness, compassion, perception, and courage of the Master and profoundness of His Word plus His concern for those who are lost in sin?

28 Jesus Continues His Travels

One of the remarkable things about the Christ is that He spent His time in the little land of Palestine, only once or twice going beyond its borders, but His fame reaches throughout the world. But He did travel extensively in that land. Some have divided His life into the various

tours that He made into both northern and southern Palestine. The events in His life were attracting huge multitudes and were becoming more and more controversial. But His most extensive journeys were throughout Galilee.

29 - A Demon Removed

Jesus met a boy possessed with a demon. The boy was both dumb and blind. When Jesus healed him the multitudes were amazed. More and more even the unbelievers began to wonder whether He might indeed be the promised son of David of whom the prophets had spoken. But His enemies said He cast out demons by the power of the devil. This was a very serious and vicious charge.

Christ showed the inconsistency of their accusation when He said a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. Satan would not was against his own kingdom. But then as now, those who oppose Christ are so often unreal and inconsistent.

It was at this point in His teaching that He taught concerning sinning against the Holy Spirit. This sin, in the context of that event, was attributing to the devil the works of God. It also was the occasion of some of His strongest words of condemnation as He called His enemies "*offsprings of vipers.*" He rebuked the scribes and Pharisee for their constant desire for more and more signs. Many signs had already been given, but they refused to believed. He did, however, cite a sign that was to come which He called the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was in the belly of the fist three days and three nights, so the Son of man (Christ) would be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. (Three days and three nights denote a manner of expressing time which included at least portions of three twenty-four hour days). One readily recognizes that Jesus was actually speaking of His own forthcoming death, burial, and resurrection.

Similar to other rebukes He rebuked the people by pointing to two Old Testament characters, both of whom were Gentiles. He mentioned the people of Nineveh who

repented at the preaching of Jonah. But a greater than Jonah was in their midst and they did not repent. He also named the Queen of the South who came to marvel at the glory of Solomon. But a greater than Solomon was in their midst and they refused to glorify Him. These encounters were among the more tumultuous ones He had with the scribes. Pharisees and others sought to ensnare Him in His words.

30 - Jesus and His Relatives

Jesus seldom failed to use every occasion to plant some truth. His time was short and He used it wisely. While teaching, His fleshly kin came to the scene. He was told of their presence, but answered, "*Who is my mother? Who are my brethren?*" He was in no way showing disrespect but was laying the groundwork for a spiritual lesson. "*For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.*" What He taught was that kinship with Christ that really counted was a spiritual kinship. It even surpasses that of one's own fleshly family. Those who did the Father's will would be considered His kin. The spiritual tie is more to be desired than a physical tie.

31 Using Parables

One of the methods that Jesus used in teaching was the use of parables. Rather than mentioning each parable, or trying to find the chronological order of them, it will suffice for this review of the life of Christ on earth to have a number of general statements regarding His use of parables. It is likely that He taught the same parables in different places and various times, much like gospel preachers might preach the same sermon in different localities. Paul taught the same wherever he went.

A parable is a comparison between something familiar and some spiritual truth. It has been described as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Some parables were almost like proverbs while others were highly figurative statement that might actually say one thing but imply something else (like the parable of turning the other cheek, going the second mile, etc.) In these He was teaching an attitude rather than actually doing the

precise thing mentioned. All parables were designed to illustrate the truth He taught. Many came in response to questions asked of Him, such as, *"Who is my neighbor?"* That brought forth the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The parable of the lost sheep, lost coins, and lost son teach the joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. The parable of the sower shows there are different reactions to the gospel. Several parables were descriptive of the kingdom that was soon to come. Others were illustrations of principles at work in the judgment.

Many sermons are necessary to properly discuss the parables of Jesus. They were intended to reveal truth to those who sought it and keep it hidden from those who only wanted to hear Him in order to ridicule Him. A parable presents a situation we can understand and with which we all accept. The applications of the parable were to teach spiritual truths. We make a mistake, however, to make too much of them, such as, trying to make each item in the parable have some great significance. A parable is usually intended to convey one or two great truths and the rest of the parable is merely supportive material.

Depending upon what all one might include, there are somewhere between forty and fifty parables given by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. He used them throughout His ministry. As mentioned, doubtless they were used over and over. Some were taught to His immediate disciples while some were taught to the multitudes generally, even some to His enemies. It is sufficient here to know that the Master Teachers used parable even as it had been prophesied that He would (Psalm 78:2).

32 Jesus Stills the Tempest

While in Galilee the multitudes pressed upon Him so much that when He was near the Sea of Galilee He commanded His disciples to depart to the other side. There was a need for some seclusion and rest. But while crossing the sea there arose a sudden tempest (which was not uncommon for the Sea of Galilee). The boat was covered with waves, but the Master was asleep,

indicative of His physical weariness. The disciples, fearing for their lives, awoke Him. When He arose He rebuked the wine and the waves and the sea was calmed. His disciples said, "*What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*

33 The Gadarene Demoniac

Once on the other side of the sea Jesus encountered a man possessed by two demons. Another account says the name of the demon was "*Legion*" because many demons had entered into him. The man was fierce and fearful. None would venture into his vicinity. He lived among the caves and tombs. He had great strength, even breaking fetters than some had tried to use to bind him.

When Jesus approached he came crying, "*What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God?*" Whereupon, Jesus commanded the demons to depart from the man and commanded they enter a hear of swine nearby, numbering about two thousand. Once the demons left the man and entered the swine the swine rushed over a cliff into the sea and they were drowned. People came and found the man recovered. But they were so fearful that they asked Jesus to leave their borders. Then Jesus entered the boat and returned to the other side where multitudes awaited Him.

34 Levi's Feast

Back in Capernaum a man named Levi had a great feast for the publicans and sinners. Jesus was also there along with Pharisees, scribes, and others that made the environment one of hostility and criticism of Jesus. Some criticized Him and His disciples for being there. Jesus again explained He was there because they were spiritually sick and needed what He offered. He was not there to condone nor cooperate in their evil.

The disciples of John the Baptist questioned why the disciples of Jesus never fasted. Fasting was a mark of sorrow and for the purpose of creating solemnity of mind. Jesus said their time for sorrow had not yet come because He was yet with them. But the time was soon coming when He would be taken from them and they

would fast. But while He remained it was inappropriate that they fast.

35 The Daughter of Jairus

Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue who had a daughter of twelve years of age, but the daughter was sick and dying. Jairus came to Jesus and asked that He heal her. As He went a woman who had been ill twelve years reached out and touched the hem of His garment and was healed. Jesus recognize that virtue or power had gone out from Him and asked who had touched Him. Inasmuch as multitudes thronged around Him His disciples said it was impossible to know. But the woman came forward and admitted she was the one. Jesus commended her because of her faith. He continued His way to the home of Jairus.

As He came messengers came and said it was too late and the daughter was already dead. But Jesus told them not to feat and moved forward. He arrived and took Peter, James, and John with Him into the room where lay the body of the girl. Also the parents entered with them. Then Jesus commanded the girl to arise. She arose, and Jesus told them to give her something to eat. The people marvelled at this great deed of raising the dead to life again. Jesus again proved power over death.

36 Healing the Blind and Casting Out Demons

The miracles of Jesus continued almost every place He went, except in some places where the people refused to believe. He did not perform miracles simply to gain show for Himself but to prove His identity.

Blind men came asking for mercy and were given their sight. He cast out demons, even though the Pharisees had charged that He did it by the power of the devil. He had already exposed their inconsistencies in that accusation. A detailed reading of these events creates faith.

37 Rejected at Nazareth

The last time Jesus had visited Nazareth the people had tried to cast Him over a cliff because He applied an Old

Testament prophecy regarding the Messiah to Himself. But once again He came to the synagogue to teach the people. They challenged His right to teach and the source of His wisdom. They noted He was but a carpenter and that much of His family still lived among them. Christ did not mighty there because of their unbelief, noting that a prophet is not without honor save in his own country.

Scriptures for Each Section

1- Lk. 1
2- Mt. 1; Lk. 1
3- Mt. 1; Lk. 1
4- Mt. 2; Lk. 2
5- Lk 2
6- Mt. 3; Mk 1; Lk. 3
7- Mt. 3; Mk 1; Lk. 3
8- Mt. 4; Mk 1; Lk. 4
9- Jn. 1,3
10- Jn. 2
11- Jn. 2
12- Jn. 3
13- Mt. 4; Mk. 1; Lk. 4; Jn. 4
14- Jn. 4
15- Mt. 4; Lk. 4
16- Mt. 4; Mk 1; Lk. 5
17- Mt. 8; Mk 1; Lk. 4
18- Mt. 4,9; Mk 1,2; Lk. 5
19- Mt. 9; Mk 2; Lk.5
20- Jn. 5
21- Mt. 10,12; Mk. 2,3; Lk. 6
22- Mt. 5,6,7
23- Mt. 8; Lk. 7
24- Lk. 7
25- Mt. 11; Lk. 7
26- Mt. 11
27- Lk. 7
28- Lk. 8
29- Mt. 12; Mk. 3; Lk. 11
30- Mt. 12; Mk. 3; Lk. 8
31- Mt. 13; Mk. 4; Lk. 8
32- Mt. 8; Mk. 4; Lk. 8,9
33- Mt. 8; Mk. 5; Lk. 8
34- Mt. 9; Mk. 2; Lk. 5
35- Mt. 9; Mk. 5; Lk. 8
36- Mt. 9
37- Mk. 6

The next issue will contain another twenty-nine sections that will complete the story of the life of Jesus while here on earth as recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, with one reference to Acts.

Willingly Ignorant



It is very difficult, if not impossible, to persuade people regarding the truth, whether your subject be mechanics, science, medicine, biology, or God's plan of salvation, if they not only do not know what the truth is, but willingly, wilfully, deliberately intend to remain that way. The same thing is true regarding brethren and the divisive, liberal, digressive doctrines that some are promoting among brethren today. In spite of the bleeding of the body of Christ, the tearing asunder of the church by false doctrines, some are more content to remain uninformed, misinformed, than to exert the necessary effort to become informed. This is true even among preachers and elders of various congregations.

This is all the "change agents" of our day want from them. Indifference and ignorance simply paves the way for those who are taking brethren into apostasy to succeed. They can do what they wish, when they wish, as they wish, without opposition. God does not look with favor on those who are wilfully ignorant.

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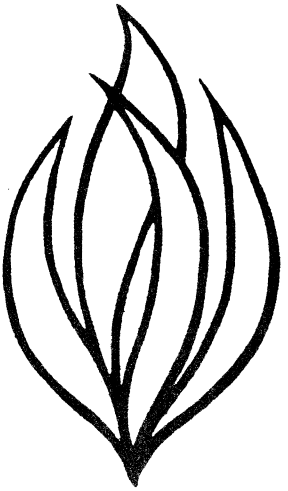

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

The Story of Jesus

PART TWO

Scripture References to the Story of Jesus ***24***

The Whole Story of Jesus ***BC***

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The Story of Jesus
PART TWO

38 - Another Galilean Tour

By this time in His life Jesus had selected His twelve apostles, spending much time with them privately in order to teach them and encourage them in the work for which He had chosen them. His immediate goal was to prepare for the coming of the kingdom and His long range goal was to present the guiding truths that would govern the kingdom, planting them in the hearts and minds of these apostles.

The apostles were sent forth in pairs to cover the land with the message of the coming kingdom. They were given miraculous powers and promised that the message they needed would be provided them. They would meet opposition and He characterized their work as being like sheep among wolves. People would betray them as well as those who would believe them. Those that received them and their message would be blessed. Where they were rejected they were to "*shake off the dust from their feet*" and proceed elsewhere.

News came to Jesus of the death of John the Baptist. As already noted, John had been imprisoned because of his preaching against the adulterous relationship of Herod and Herodias. Now he was beheaded to fulfill a promise Herod had made to Salome, daughter of Herodias, who had pleased Herod and his court with her dancing. The news of John's death greatly disturbed His disciples and they gathered together with Jesus. But the multitudes pressed so heavily upon them that they found no time for leisure or rest, not even so much as to eat their meals.

39 - Feeding the Five Thousand

Jesus and His disciples went into a deserted place, but again were followed by a great multitude. The day passed and there was no food for the crowd. Jesus characterized them as sheep without a shepherd, and had sympathy

and understanding toward them. The disciples suggested that Jesus send them away for food, but Jesus asked what food was available. There were only five loaves and two fishes that a small lad had. But He had the people to sit in orderly groups and miraculously took the limited supply and fed the five thousand with twelve basketsfull being gathered as leftovers. This was one of His miracles of physical supply.

40 - Walks on the Water

He continued to demonstrate His Deity including walking on water, once again showing His power over nature and the elements. He sent His disciples across the Sea of Galilee without Him, going into a nearby mountain to pray.

While the disciples were crossing the sea a storm arose and they were afraid. But they looked to see Jesus coming toward them walking on the water. They were sore troubled, thinking they saw a ghost. It was then that Peter asked Jesus, if He be the Christ, to allow him to come to Him on the water. Peter was allowed to walk on the water toward Jesus. But as he took his eye off of the Christ and focused attention on the boisterous waves around him he was frightened and began to sink. Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him. When they eventually reached the other side of the sea, the disciples worshipped Him, saying, "*Of a truth, thou art the Son of God.*" Once again the function of miracles was realized.

41 - The Bread of Life

The teaching of Jesus was the burden of His ministry even though the fame of His miracles often overshadowed His Word in the minds of the multitudes that crowed around Him. We recall in the lesson He had taught the Samaritan woman that He was the water of life. In Capernaum He taught another sermon of being the bread that gave eternal life. He said He was that bread and people must partake of Him in order to have that life.

This sermon caused problems with some of His followers. They did not understand how they could eat

and drink of Jesus. They, like Nicodemus, were in the rut of physical thought only while Jesus was teaching them figuratively His spiritual truths. Some became so offended at His teaching that they turned and walked with Him no more. This must have been a disappointment to the Lord. The opposition against Him was on the rise and He was now even losing some of His friends. Sometimes this was due to jealousy, and other times due to misunderstanding. Jesus even indicated how some one of His own apostles would betray Him to His enemies. Following these events Jesus did not return to Judea before the time of His crucifixion, but continued His ministry in the province of Galilee.

42 - Condemnation of Traditions and Hypocrisy

The increase in opposition did not deter Jesus from condemning that which was deserving of condemnation. The scribes and Pharisees had raised their human traditions to the level of and above the commandments of God. Jesus showed how they even rejected the commandments of God in favor of their traditions. He called them hypocrites, pretenders, serving God with their lips but not with genuine obedience.

One example of what Jesus meant was how the commandment of God called for them to honor (including care for) their parents. But the Pharisees said one could give his money to the service of God (into a treasury they would often control) and if they so gave they were free from the care of their parents. What they gave was called "*Corban.*" In this way they transgressed the will of God and followed their own customs and laws.

The disciples recognized that the teaching of Jesus offended some of His hearers. But His reaction was not to apologize for His teaching nor to withdraw the truth He had spoken. He said, "*Every plant which my heavenly Father planteth not shall be rooted up.*" He further called the Pharisees and scribes blind guides and said, "*If the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit.*" Do you suppose Jesus would be a welcomed preacher in the congregations of worldliness, softness toward sin,

compromise, and hypocrisy so prevalent in religion today?

43 - A Daughter of a Gentile

One of the few times that Jesus ever crossed the borders of Israel He went into Phoenicea, near Tyre and Sidon. Israel's history had been mixed with these cities, sometimes hostile and sometimes friendly. The ancient cities had been destroyed because of their wickedness but more recent cities had been erected nearby. They were Gentile cities.

Here Jesus met a woman who asked Him to heal her daughter of a demon. At first Jesus refused on the basis that He was to do His deeds among the Jews first. But she persuaded that even the dogs eat crumbs of the master's table. Seeing her faith and humility, He granted her request.

44 - Into Decapolis

Decapolis was on the east bank of the Jordan River. When Jesus went there He performed many miracles and it was said of Him, "*He hath done all things well.*"

Another miracle was done that was similar to one performed near Galilee when he now feeds the four thousand. Once again multitudes had followed Him, and food supply was inadequate. This time He commanded the multitude to be seated and with seven loaves and a few fishes He fed them. This time seven baskets of leftovers were collected.

45 - Into Caesarea Philippi

Turning northward from Decapolis Jesus returned into Galilee, but continued to press even further northward toward Caesarea Philippi, being accompanied by His disciples. He taught them especially warning them against the "*leaven,*" the teaching, of the Pharisees. He performed such miracles as healing the blind, and finally departed from the multitudes to be alone with His disciples.

Once they were alone He asked them who people said He was. Various answers were offered because the people, knowing of Him, still were often confused as to His true identity. Some had said He was Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets who had come back from the dead. But Jesus turned to His disciples and asked them, "*But who say ye that I am?* It was then that Peter confessed, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God..*" With that confession, Jesus taught how He would build His church on that rock of truth and even death (Hades) would not and could not prevail against it. Nothing would prevent Him from doing what He had come to this earth to do.

In His teaching He foretold His coming death, burial, and resurrection. To this the disciples raised objection. Then Jesus urged the coming event of one denying Him, and the necessity of taking up one's cross and following Him.

47 - His Transfiguration

Jesus went into a unnamed mountain, usually thought by commentators to have been Mount Hermon, but still unnamed, near Caesarea Philippi in the north of the land of Canaan. He took with Him Peter, James, and John. It was there in this mountain that the Lord was transfigured, changed, before them. This meant there was a change in His appearance. His face did shine as the sun and His garments became white as the light.

There were also in appearance two majestic Old Testament characters, Moses, the lawgiver, and Elijah, one of God's greatest prophets and defenders of the law. They conversed with Jesus about the things that were before Jesus the Christ.

Peter suggested that honor be paid to all three by erecting a tabernacle, or booth, for each of them. Mark indicates that Peter did not know what else to do at the time. But about them a cloud overshadowed them and voice from heaven was heard that confessed Jesus as God's Son. Importantly, although this confession was similar to the one at the time Jesus was baptized, there was something additional said. The voice from heaven added, "*Hear ye him.*" This is of tremendous significance

because even in the presence of those of former dispensations and givers and defenders of former systems, God showed that Jesus Christ was to be the One of authority and mankind must hear and heed Him.

Just a short while after this event Jesus told His apostles not to tell it until after His resurrection. They kept questioning Him what was meant by His resurrection, not yet comprehending all that would soon befall the Lord.

47 - The Demoniac Boy

While still in Caesarea Philippi there is the record of Jesus delivering another person from a demon. The apostles had been requested to drive out the demon but they had failed for some reason. The lad was brought to Jesus who did cast the demon out. Just why they apostles were not able to do this we do not know precisely. There must have been something very distinctive about this particular demon. But it is said of the disciples that they were not able to do it, while it is said of Jesus, "*All things are possible to him that believeth.*" We must remain uncertain about some questions that we might ask about this particular event in the life of Jesus.

48 - Forecast of Death and the Resurrection

Leaving the territory of Caesarea Philippi and returning to Galilee, Jesus continued to speak more and more of His forthcoming death. He said He would be delivered into the hands of His enemies and His enemies would kill Him. But He also forecast how He would rise again the third day. This prophecy continued to perplex His disciples who did not understand these things until after that had occurred.

49 - Paying the Tax

While in Capernaum Peter was asked if the Master paid the tax. This was a tax imposed by the religious authorities. Jesus taught that actually He was not obligated to pay the tax since He was the Son of God. But lest it create a disturbance and additional criticism against Him if He did not pay it, and lest it cause some

to stumble, He consented to pay the tax nonetheless. He sent Peter fishing with the instruction that he retrieve the tax money from the fish's mouth.

50 - Jesus Teaches Humility

Jesus faced a number of problems as He approached the time of His death on the cross. Not least among them was the conflict that was brewing among His own apostles. They as yet did not understand many things, had insufficient faith, one of them would even betray Him, but they were arguing over who would be the greatest among them once Jesus was gone. In Capernaum Jesus met this strife among His mean. The question was asked, "*Who is the greatest in the kingdom?*" The apostles were even then reaching for rank and position and this ambition had reached even those who were closest to Him. The desire to be chief had always been a problem among people and often the undoing of many. We cannot overestimate the destructiveness of such attitudes in the work the apostles would be charged to do, and even in the work Christians of today are called upon to perform. The selfish ambitions and desire for glory and notoriety has hindered the cause of Christ so many times. The things some will do to be "big dog in the kennel" are almost beyond imagination.

Jesus taught the necessity of humility, even humility like that of a little child. The ambition for personal gain was contrary to being a person of service. He taught that the more one served the greater he would be. Someone has suggested, and rightly so, that each of us could and probably would do much more if we were more indifferent who would get the credit for what is done.

Not only did He teach humility but also forgiveness. How much better to rid oneself of whatever would keep him from heaven than to possess everything or anything but be lost. Also He taught how to correct personal difference and conflicts of those who would compose the church. The offended one must approach the the offender with the goal and purpose of seeking a solution to their differences. If after personal attempts to reason together failed, others were to be included to try together to resolve the problem. If this even failed then the problem

was to be brought before the whole church and hopefully the pressure and persuasion of all the brethren would cause the offender to correct his error. If that still did not solve the problem, the fellowship that had been enjoyed with the offender was to be withdrawn and he was to be excluded.

One of the strongest lessons Jesus ever gave on the need to forgive was preached at Capernaum. It was His parable of the Unmerciful Servant. One servant was forgiven a great debt, but that same servant refused to forgive a much smaller debt that was owed him. The unforgiving one was condemned and punished for his failure to forgive, especially after he had been forgiven. The lesson Christ taught is unmistakably clear. If we seek and expect forgiveness of our transgressions by the Father we must also be ready and willing to forgive those who sin against us. The world had never heard such teaching and the world even yet does not approve of such manner toward offenders and sinners.

51 - Leaving Galilee for Judea

Jesus departed from Galilee for the last time and begins to make His way toward Jerusalem in Judea and the things that awaited Him there. His journey to Judea would once again take Him through the province of Samaria. One will recall an earlier presence there when Jesus met the woman at Jacob's well and preached how He was the water of life. The Passover time was approaching. Jesus sent His disciples into Jerusalem ahead of Him.

There was much disagreement among the people in Jerusalem about Jesus and He had become quite a controversial figure. Many wondered whether or not He would come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast because there was greater hostility against Him there than in other areas. While some acknowledged He was a good man, others said He was leading the people astray.

There is considerable disagreement among Bible students about the chronology of the events during this part of the personal ministry of Christ. We shall not attempt to unravel the various theories that have been

proposed because, in the long run, the chronology is not that important so long as we realize these things occurred and that they occurred relatively close in time to each other. We prefer to concentrate on the events themselves that continue to show Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, which, after all, is the prime purpose of these first four books of the New Testament. Jesus seems to have made several short journeys across the Jordan just north of the Dead Sea, back into Jerusalem and Bethany until the final week of His life before His crucifixion.

We now want to trace His steps through Samaria as He goes southward. Some went before Him to prepare for His passage through Samaria. When He arrived the Samaritans would not receive Him. While this was not a totally uncommon reception in many areas, this time it posed some difficulties. James and John were still with Him. When they noted the rejection of Christ they suggested that Christ command fire to come upon the people to destroy them. Jesus refused to do that, but it was in this environment that Jesus said, "*Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*" No doubt the rejection by so many of the very One who had come to bless them was trying to Jesus. Also these is no doubt that His eventual coming to Jerusalem created an intense excitement among the people, both among friends and foes alike.

52 - A Variety of Events

One must consult all four books to find the inspired record of the event we shall simply and briefly mention with little comment. There was the occasion when an adulterous woman was brought before Jesus. The people were ready to stone her as the law of Moses taught one should treated after proper judicial procedures had taken place and the guilty had been convicted. But she was brought to Jesus and He was asked what He would do. This was to find occasion to criticize whatever position He took regarding her. But Jesus simply wrote on the ground. What He wrote we are not informed. The accusers persisted and Jesus finally lifted Himself and invited those who were without sin to cast the first

stone. At this each accuser slipped away one by one. Jesus then forgave the woman, telling her to sin no more.

It angered the Pharisees all the more when He taught He was the light of the world. When He exposed their sinfulness they sought to stone Him. They claimed they were the sons of Abraham, but Jesus said if they were they should do the good works of Abraham. He said they sought to kill Him because He told them the truth.

Jesus also healed a man born blind. The man was told to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Later, when the man was brought before the Pharisees they questioned him about how he received his sight. He told them what Jesus had done. They were furious at the former blind man and threatened him, calling Jesus a sinner. They even asked his parents about the matter, but they said their son was old enough to answer for himself. Later Christ found him and he believed.

It was about this time that Jesus taught the lesson of the Good Shepherd. He intimated that the shepherd was to lay down his life for the flock, and indicated that His forthcoming death would be of this nature. This only further infuriated His enemies.

It was in this scenario of events that He taught about the Good Samaritan in answer to the lawyer's question what he had to do to inherit eternal life.

He later visited the home of Mary and Martha. While Martha was busy about the duties of the home to the neglect of receiving spiritual teaching, He said Mary had chosen the good part. Does not this insist that the Lord expects each of us to establish a proper set of priorities and seek first things first? This does not allow for the neglect of lesser matters but the more important ones must be given prime attention.

Jesus was also accused of being in league with the devil. He severely denounced the sins of the Pharisees and lawyers. Their intensity of opposition against Him had reached explosive levels. We must remember that the humility, gentleness, kindness, and compassion of

Christ is not what took Him to the cross, but His stern, forthright condemnation of sin. Sinners simply would not listen to His words.

He continued teaching on such subjects as the vanity of earthly riches, worldly anxieties, the necessity to watchfulness, and what wise stewardship entails. Again, He told of His coming death. Because He wanted people to forsake their sins He warned all to repent or perish. He even cited two current events (Pilate killing worshippers in Galilee and the falling of the tower of Siloam that killed many) not being as bad as that which would come upon the impenitent. With the teaching of the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree He showed the necessity of producing good fruit and the condemnation of pretending to be what one is not, the condemnation of hypocrisy. But His strongest denunciations were yet to come when He condemned the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees.

Throughout these days He continued performing miracles of healing which proved His Deity and His message as coming from the Father. Unable to cope with these signs, miracles, and teaching, His enemies increased their plots against Him. The Jews would at times take up stones to stone Him, but He asked for which good works He was about to be stoned. This angered them all the more because it humiliated and exposed them before the multitudes. He was providing the evidence, even for us as we read from the eyewitnesses and inspired pens of these things, that we might believe and have life in His name.

53 - Periods of Withdrawal

There were times during this eventful period that Jesus would withdraw from Jerusalem to Bethany, and to Perea beyond the Jordan River. It was during such times that we read of His prayer for Jerusalem, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how oft would I have gathered they children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!*"

Jesus was even threatened by Herod Antipas with death if He did not leave Jerusalem. When He healed on the

Sabbath day another time He aroused the enemy more and more. He used their criticisms for additional opportunities to teach more of His parables and the crowds followed Him constantly, How this galled the religious leaders!

One of the more notable deeds performed during this period was when He raised Lazarus from the dead. He had been told that Lazarus was sick but He did not rush to his side. When He arrived Lazarus had already died. He was met by Mary and she cried that if only He could have been there possibly her brother would not have died. She obviously believed Jesus had the power to heal him, but not to raise him from the dead.

In this setting Jesus taught concerning the immortality of man and the eventual resurrection of all the last day. Jesus had her take Him to the tomb of Lazarus. When Jesus saw the grief of the people, especially of those so dear to Him, the Bible says, "*Jesus wept.*" He then commanded that the stone be rolled away from the door of the tomb. This suggestion met objection, but was nonetheless obeyed. Then Jesus called for Lazarus to come forth from the tomb, and he did.

This caused many to marvel and believe, but it also angered those whom, in spite of every evidence, were determined to resist Him. How frustrated were His enemies at this point! They did not know what to do concerning Him because it was too obvious that He did miracles. They reasoned that if they left Him alone, however, everyone would believe on Him, and this they could not afford. They would lose their places of rank and importance, as well as the source of their wealth and influence. So as the Passover approached, plans to eliminate Jesus forever were being concocted among those who now sought His life.

Among the last teachings were lessons on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Also we read of His meeting with little children and how He used them to illustrate the nature of those who would be citizens in His kingdom. There were more parables as His time slipped away. More prophecies were being fulfilled and more

prophecies by Him were stated of His death and resurrection.

As we have already noted, we continue to read of that which marred things for Christ and that was the strife and personal ambition by James and John to hold special places in His kingdom. This gave evidence that even they did not yet comprehend the spiritual nature of His kingdom.

Another man, Bartimaus, a blind man, received his sight and glorified God. This was probably the same occasion which some of the accounts give when Jesus healed blind men along the road to Jericho. As Jesus passed through Jericho He met Zacchaeus, a small man, who climbed a tree so that he might see Jesus as He passed that way. When Jesus saw him He told him to come down and He went to his house that day.

Among other things that He said was that He would receive His kingdom when He went away. This is precisely what Daniel had foretold in Daniel 7:13,14. Then He set his face stedfastly toward Jerusalem and headed for the crucial days ahead of Him. Boldly He walked into the city, knowing what awaited Him there, but willing to do what He came to do for the benefit of all mankind.

54 - Jesus Comes to Bethany

Another Passover was approaching. Six days before that feast Jesus came to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany, just a few miles from Jerusalem. Mary took ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus as an act of honor. Judas objected, saying the ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor. He suggested what she had done was a waste. Judas was the keeper of the funds and a thief. Christ said she had done a good work because she had anointed Him for burial. He also said what she had done would be preached wherever the gospel was preached and noted as memorial to her. We still preach it yet. Meanwhile, the priests were taking counsel how they might destroy Jesus. They also sought to destroy Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. His presence stood as a living rebuke to their unbelief of

Jesus. We now embark on the final week before the cross.

55 - Entrance Into Jerusalem

On the first day of the week Jesus entered Jerusalem. We must take note as we observe the events that follow of the swing of the pendulum in the attitudes of people toward Jesus as He persisted toward accomplishing the purpose for which He came to this earth.

Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on the back of the colt of an ass as had been prophesied in Isaiah sixty-two. People placed branches and garments along the way as an expression of honor, denoting Him as conqueror and king. As could be expected, this caused His enemies to be furious with Him because the people were obviously admitting Him and they were losing their grip and control. While the religious leaders were incited to anger, the multitude were crying, "*Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom that cometh; Blessed is the King.*" What may seem a bit strange and to come almost out of place was that Christ took this opportunity to once again forecast the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem because of the wickedness of the people. He said this at what seemed to be the closet to His moment of general acceptance among the people of Judea.

56 - The Barren Fig Tree

While the daylight hours of His final week were spent in Jerusalem, Jesus would travel in the evening back to the nearby village of Bethany. One morning as He approached Jerusalem He saw a fig tree that gave the appearance of being a fruitful tree. But in spite of its appearance it produced no fruit. Jesus pronounced a curse against the tree, condemning it to destruction.The reason for this action was that the tree was a symbol of hypocrisy, appearing to be what it really was not. They sin of hypocrisy was among the more obvious sins of those who were His enemies and this was another condemnation of that sin.

57 - Another Temple Cleansing

In Jerusalem He once again cleansed the temple of those who desecrated it by turning His Father's house into a den of thieves. Those who were the targets of this rebuke were misusing the temple, taking advantage of others in their dealings, and were generally using what should otherwise be a holy place for their own gain. But when Jesus acted as He did toward them, and this is the second time, they were aroused to increased animosity toward Him.

During the days Jesus was occupied with healing and teaching. On this particular day certain Gentiles came seeking Jesus also. They first had approached some of His disciples with their request to see Jesus. When Jesus met them He used the event to teach and tell how He would be raised up and would raw all men unto Him. This caused the Pharisees to be all the more frustrated in how to deal with Jesus because the multitudes hovered around Him. But they were hesitant to openly and physically attack Him lest their evil backfire on them.

58 - His Authority Challenged

About the most severe approach toward Jesus as yet was a challenge of His authority to be doing and saying what He was. He was asked by what authority He did His deeds. Jesus turned the challenge against the challengers, asking them whether John the Baptist was sent from heaven or from men. It was a question they could not and would not answer because however they answered they would condemn themselves. If they said he was from heaven, Jesus would ask why they did not believe him. If they said he was from men, they knew they would anger the multitudes who considered John a prophet of God. So they withheld their answer. Therefore, Jesus refused to answer their inquiry, knowing that their motives for asking were sinister and evil.

59 - His Teaching the Final Week

Someone has said that God had but one Son and He was a preacher. It is significant that Jesus recognize His role as preacher and teacher. To the very last, even when the

clouds of death were gathering around Him, He continued to teach until the last. It was during the early part of this final week that Jesus preached such lesson as that of the wicked husbandman (a parable). An owner sent servants to the husbandman, but the servants were mistreated. Eventually, he sent his own son, who was killed. Then the owner punished the wicked husbandman. Jesus made application of this parable to Himself and what His enemies would do to Him, and what the Father's reaction would be.

He also taught the parable of the marriage of the king's son, again applying the parable to Himself and the calling the guests to Himself and how those who were unprepared would not be allowed into the wedding feast. His enemies could not fail to get the message that their rejection of Him meant their rejection by the heavenly Father.

Various questions were asked of Jesus, often posed to ensnare Him if they could. But Jesus gave them answers with which they could find not fault but which they would not accept anyway. They asked Him if it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar. Jesus said they should render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and render to God what belonged to Him. This was not the kind of answer they expected. They hoped Jesus would either offend the Romans or offend the Jews who hated the Romans. But all He did was to teach the truth and it offended His opponents. They were not able to take hold of His answer and use it against Him. Meanwhile, the multitudes listened and they marvelled at Him.

The Saducees questioned the resurrection with a hypothetical situation about a woman who had seven husbands during her lifetime, each of which died. They asked who would be her husband in the resurrection. They, of course, denied the resurrection and that there was life after this life. They thought they had posed a problem that Jesus could not handle. But Jesus taught that there would be no marrying and giving in marriage in the next life. Marriage is a matter of this life. He accused them, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures..." Is it not likely that this is usually the reason people are in religious error?

Another came to Him asking which was the greatest commandment. His answer was to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. He added that the second was to love one's neighbor as himself. Such teaching was incapable of being rebuked or rebuffed.

Christ also taught that He was the Son of David that was promised to come. In one of the most severely worded discourses on record, Christ condemned the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees with strong terms and definite displeasure.You should read Matthew twenty three. We wonder if such preaching would even be tolerated in the more worldly and sophisticated churches of today. Probably not. People have adopted such "loving ways," based on this misunderstanding of love as taught in the Bible, that they would disapprove of the Lord, His manner, and His message.

Jesus also gave some points about His return, added descriptive scenes of the eventual judgment with such teaching as the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the Parable of the Talents, and the separation of the sheep from the goats. One should take time to study such teaching and learn what the will of the Lord is.

All in all the first part of His final week was a momentous, active, aggressive, and highly tense situation for Jesus to face. It was somewhat a climatic conclusion to His public preaching and teaching that had seen hostility and confrontation almost from the very start.

60 - Conspiracy Against Him

While Jesus was being very active in and around Jerusalem, the chief priests and Judas were making plans for the betrayal of Jesus by Judas for the price of thirty pieces of silver. Being fearful to seize Jesus when multitudes surrounded Him, they conspired for the one opportunity to take Him relatively quietly and privately when there would not be the risk of the multitudes rising to His defense. But in such surroundings where they could take Him privately they wanted to be sure to get the right man and not just one of His disciples. So they

agreed with Judas, one who would readily know Him from the others, and waited until what they deemed to be the proper place and time to lay hold on this One who claimed to be the Son of God.

62 - The Last Passover Supper

On what would be our Thursday evening, the Lord and His apostles returned to a previously determined upper room to observe the last Passover Supper. This would not only be the last time Jesus would observe the feast, but inasmuch as the law of Moses which included the Passover would soon be removed by being nailed to the cross with Jesus, this was the last time that the Jewish Passover was to be observed with the approval and by the authority of God. All so-called observances since that time are erroneous carryovers from an age and system that is no longer operative, nor has been since the cross.

It was during this event that several significant things occurred. Jesus washed His disciples' feet, teaching them service and humility. He dealt with the problem of contention among His apostles as to who would be the greatest after His departure. He pointed Judas out to be the one who would betray Him. He instituted the Lord's Supper that was to be observed when the kingdom came. He taught His disciples additional information with such teachings as the vine and branches, with promises of the coming of the Comforter or Holy Spirit upon them, and more about the events that would soon take place. He told Peter that He would deny Him three times before the cock crowed thrice.

After these things they went to the Mount of Olives and to the specific Garden of Gethsemane. Having told His disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, He prayed for them, for their strength, that they would be united, and that those who would believe because of their work would also be united. He also prayed for the city of Jerusalem that would soon be destroyed. He suffered mental and emotional agony in the garden because He knew what awaited Him very shortly. Then the hour came when a mob, led by Judas, came through the gates of Jerusalem into the mount and to the garden, where

Judas planted an identifying kiss upon Him and His enemies seized Him.

62 - Seizing Jesus

Even though His enemies had come to take Him, at first it seemed they were afraid because they hesitated. It was only after Jesus urged them to do what they had come to do that they went forward with their plans. They took Him into the city and before Annas, a deposed high priest but a very influential leader among the Jews. There they charged Him with blasphemy, physically abused Him, slapping Him about the face, and asking Him about His teaching. The entire proceeding was an illegal one and false witnesses were brought in to speak against Him, distorting His teaching, using what He had said and done as concocted evidence of religious crimes. When daylight came they took Him before the highest Jewish council (Sanhedrin) and went through the formality of sentencing Him to death. But their actions were done while it was still dark. They had to wait until daylight to ratify the earlier actions because it was not lawful to condemn a man to death ion the darkness. One of the notes of interest in the mockery of the trials of Jesus was how meticulous and precise His enemies were in some matters while they condemned the innocent Son of God to death! But the Jews could not execute a prisoner, a power that the Romans had reserved exclusively for themselves. So there was the necessity of having their actions approved by Roman authorities and as soon as possible they took Jesus before Pilate.

63 - Christ Before the Romans

He was taken before Pilate who, upon examination, found no fault with Jesus. Pilate would have set Him free at this point. But when he heard charges, different charges than what had been laid against Him earlier, that Jesus claimed to be a king and this was tantamount to treason against the Caesar. Pilate sought a way out of the trying situation that would be politically expedient for himself and he sent Jesus before Herod, who just happened to be visiting in Jerusalem at the time. Herod was ruler over Galilee and when Pilate learned Jesus was from Galilee he thought he found his way out. But Herod

kept Him only a short while, continuing the heaping of abuses against Jesus, however. Demanding Jesus to perform a miracle, and Jesus refusing, Herod then had Jesus beaten, humiliated, mocked, and ridiculed, and finally sending Him back to Pilate.

Pilate, very disturbed by the whole affair, and having no cause to condemn Jesus, finally submitted to the cries of the multitude who had been aroused by their religious leaders to cry out for His crucifixion. Even Pilate's offer to free either Barabbas or Jesus resulted in their demand that Jesus be the one to die. His wife even urged that he have nothing to do with Jesus because Jesus was just.

But Pilate, washing his hands with waters, acted as if he was through with any responsibility in the whole affair. He turned the Christ into the hands of those who called for His death to be crucified alongside two thieves just outside the city of Jerusalem at a place called Calvary, the place of the skull. Meanwhile, Judas, realizing he had betrayed innocent blood, hanged himself.

64 - Christ on the Cross

Jesus was led through the streets of Jerusalem toward Calvary, the mobs on either side crying for His death. He was bearing His own cross, some spitting upon Him, others reaching out to beat Him. After falling beneath the weight of the wooden cross, a man from Cyrene named Simon was compelled to take the cross the rest of the way. There Jesus was nailed to the cross and it was lifted into place, the Son of God being left to die.

Hanging there between two thieves we hear Him make seven statement. (1) "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*" (2) To the thief He said, "*Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.*" (3) To Mary, "*Woman, behold thy son.*" (4) To John, " *Behold, thy mother.*" (5) "*I thirst.*" (6) "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" (7) "*It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*"

Soldiers cast lots for His garments as foretold. At the moment of His death the sun darkened, the earth did quake, and the darkness reigned for three hours, the veil

of the temple was rent from top to bottom, later tombs were opened. A centurion said, "*Truly, this was the Son of God.*" Soldiers came to hasten the death of those on the crosses at the request of the Jews who did not want bodies on the crosses over the Passover. But when they came to Jesus they found Him already dead and did not break His bones, even as it was prophesied they would not, They did pierce His side with a spear.

Pilate allowed Joseph and Nicodemus to take the body of Jesus and place it in Joseph's new tomb. At the insistence of His enemies, a watch was set to guard the tomb lest anything should happen to the body and the prophecy of His resurrection be proclaimed. They had remembered how Jesus said in three days He would be raised again. They wished to prevent any scheme His disciples might attempt to make the disappearance of His body appear He had come from the tomb.

Ordinarily, this would conclude the life story of another person on earth; with death and burial. But Jesus was not just another man, but the Son of God. Even the disciples did not fully understand what had taken place. They were discouraged, disappointed, deflated, and disillusioned. They gave up hope, some even deciding to return to their former occupations. For a while they remained together to ponder the events they had witnessed and the Person named Jesus.

65 - The Resurrection

But the story of Jesus on earth was not yet over. On the first day of the week, as prophesied, Jesus came forth from the tomb. When women came to anoint the body the stone of the tomb was already removed and they were met by men in white who announced, "*He is risen, as he said.*" They ran and told His disciples who at first disbelieved until they visited the tomb themselves and found it empty and the graveclothes orderly placed.

There are in the Biblical records some twelve or thirteen specific appearances of Jesus mentioned as Jesus appeared before His disciples, women who knew Him, even as many as five hundred at once. He walked with them. He talked with them. He ate with them. They saw

Him. They touched Him. They could hear Him speak, and even see the nail prints and wound in His side. Jesus sent word to His disciples by the women that He would meet them in Galilee.

His enemies concocted the story how His disciples stole His body. Suffice it for this brief review that the alternatives to His resurrection, the "explanations" offered by unbelievers can easily and adequately be answered and dismissed as irrational, unreasonable, impossible, and without evidence. The fact is that Jesus the Christ rose from the dead, and thereby provided another irrefutable evidence that He is the Christ, the Son of God.

66 - His Ascension

We read of Jesus meeting His disciples in Galilee. He returned to Mount Olivet, giving His disciples the Great Comission to go and preach the gospel to every creature, and in the sight of His apostles Jesus ascended into heaven with the assurances that He will come again.

It is fitting to close these remarks on the story of Jesus with this quotation from John 20:30,31; 21:24,25. *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name... This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."*

* * * * *

FOOTNOTE

Possibly one or two words of additional explanation are in order. This is probably because there are so many false theories and doctrines centering around Jesus the Christ.

When we use the word "story," we are speaking of a factual, historical, inspired account of the Person. Sometimes people have used the word "story" referring to some fictitious or imaginary narrative. There are stories that are fiction, and stories that are historically true. The story of Jesus is the latter.

Nor should we ever forget that we have relatively very little about the life of Christ here on earth. Of the some thirty three years He was here, only a very small portion of time is actually covered in the four Biblical records. But when we understand the purpose of the books, we can readily see why this abbreviated record if the case. The books were not given to record a full biography of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather sufficient evidence is presented to prove to all who will openly investigate the evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of men. The proving evidence along this line is overwhelming in nature and amount.

Men have written volumes upon volumes concerning the Christ. There is no way the greatness of Jesus can ever be fully examined or explained, let along comprehended. But what we have reviewed forms to foundation of the faith. Everything about Christianity is ultimately founded on the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. He was either God in the flesh, Deity on earth, or one of the most deceptive pretenders the world has ever known. He cannot be called a good man unless He is recognized and accepted as the Son of God. A good man would never claim such a distinction if it were not so.

The brevity of what it included in these two issues of **A Burning Fire** is presented with hope that it will provoke within each of us a thirst for further study and greater knowledge of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, our Lord, and our Savior.

Scriptures for Each Section

38- Mt. 9,10,14; Mk. 6; Lk. 9
39- Mt. 14; Mk. 6; Lk. 9; Jn. 6
40- Mt. 14; Mk. 6; Jn. 6
41- Jn. 6
42- Mt. 15; Mk. 7
43- Mt. 15; Mk. 7
44- Mt. 15; Mk. 7,8
45- Mt. 16; Mk. 8; Lk. 9
46- Mt. 17; Mk. 9; Lk. 9
47- Mt. 17; Mk. 9; Lk. 9
48- Mt. 17; Mk. 9; Lk. 9
49- Mt. 17; Mk. 9
50- Mt. 18; Mk. 9; Lk. 9
51- Mt. 19; Mk. 10; Lk. 9; Jn. 7
52- Lk. 9; Jn. 7
53- Mt. 19,20; Mk. 10,14; Lk. 10-19; Jn. 9-12
54- Mt. 26; Mk. 14; Jn. 11
55- Mt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk. 19; Jn. 12
56- Mt. 21; Mk. 11
57- Mt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk, 19,21
58- Mt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk. 20
59- Mt. 21-25; Mk. 11-14; Lk. 20-22; Jn. 12
60- Mt. 26; Mk. 14; Lk. 22
61- Mt. 26; Mk. 14; Lk. 22; Jn. 13-18
62- Mt. 26; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 18
63- Mt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 18
64- Mt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 19
65- Mt. 28; Mk. 16; Lk. 24; Jn. 20,21
66- Mk. 16; Lk, 24; Jn. 20,21; Acts 1

The Whole Story of Jesus



This issue of **A BURNING FIRE** as well as the one just previous is on the theme of The Story of Jesus. What has been attempted is to present what the accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have to reveal concerning our Lord, with a minor injection here and there of information from additional Biblical sources.

However, we would not for a moment suggest that the story of Jesus is confined to these four books. It might seem strange to even have to mention this, but because some are talking about a "core gospel" that relegates Acts and the Epistles out of God's pattern for today, we must make this notation. Actually the story of Jesus is from Genesis to Revelation. Certainly the New Testament books other than these four must be considered and together they provide for us the will of Christ. These four books, not four gospels for there is but one gospel, tell us of His personal and earthly ministry, and it has been the goal to present it in this form as a review. JWB

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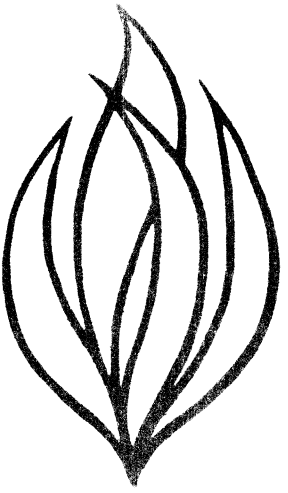

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Evidences for the Existence of God

The Bible begins, "*In the beginning God...*" (Genesis 1:1). The Holy Scriptures open with the affirmation of the existence of God. No place does the Bible set forth a detailed presentation arguing the existence of God. But throughout the Scriptures the existence of God is asserted and insisted. Without God the revelation of the Bible would be without meaning. Indeed, it would be non-existent.

No passage more firmly contends for the existence of God than Romans 1:18-21. "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened.*"

Please take note that the inspired writer said they were "*without excuse.*" They could have known. They should have believed and accepted the reality of God because the evidence was before them.

God has intended that the church be the "*pillar and ground of the truth,*" which includes the truth regarding Him and the reality of His existence. We come to this study in the fullest confidence that there is no argument that the atheist can present that cannot be met and refuted and overthrown. Those who believe in the existence of God have no reason to fear an examination of the evidence of God's reality. We do not condemn any generation that raises questions. We rather commend the activity. We are confident that if more would investigate the evidence for the existence of God then the

atheistic arguments would soon melt away as does the snow with the coming of Spring and Summer.

Faith is Reasonable

Faith in the existence of God is reasonable, logical, and consistent with everything that we can know. It is necessary to explain many things that we do know, there being no other rational explanation. Furthermore, the existence of God is provable, contrary to the idea that some contend that we cannot prove that God exists. Some say it is a matter of faith and therefore we cannot know. The fact is, faith is a way of knowing because faith is based on evidence (Hebrews 1:1). Our faith in the reality of God stands upon sound and solid evidence that allows for no other conclusion than the contention that "God is." God said, "*I am that I am.*" We are not without evidence, evidence to which God's word has pointed that convinces us of His existence. It is not just a matter of the most probable or most likely conclusion. His existence is the only position one can take if he allows the evidence to speak.

The Alternative

Let us consider for a moment the alternative if God does not exist. We have no explanation for our origin that can be demonstrated. We have no purpose for our existence. There is no reason for our being alive because we, along with all the rest of the universe, would be the result of an unplanned, unintended, accidental chance happening. There is no dignity to human life above that of a beast. There is no explanation for the universe. The Bible, with all of its high and holy precepts, is but a pious fraud. There is nothing awaiting us after this life but decay in the grave. There is no hope, only chaos. There is nothingness. There is no right or wrong. Prayer is useless, for there is none to answer. Where we came from, why we are here, how we are to conduct ourselves while here, where we are going, are all matters about which we can know nothing or have any answers. Nothing really matters. The darkness and destructive gloom of atheism would overshadow everything and everybody. Talk about complete despair and uselessness! This entire universe, including me and you, are nothing.

The arguments for the existence of God do not depend upon how we "feel" about it. Rather, we have pointed out to us what we might call the "footprints of God" all about us. There is evidence that we can analyze.

Cause and Effect

We first consider what is usually called the Law of Cause and Effect. This simply means that because something exists it must have a cause that brought it into being. We all agree, both believers and unbelievers alike, that the universe is composed of both mind and matter. The universe does exist. We are here and we see it before us. From whence came all this? It has not always existed because a scientific law that is called the First and Second Law of Thermodynamics informs man that the universe is "running down." It therefore had to have a beginning or it would have already run down. Matter is not eternal. This, too, is scientifically proved.

Furthermore, something cannot and does not come from nothing. Hebrews 3:4, "*For every house is builded by some man, but he that built all things is God.*" The very existence of a house is proof that cannot be refuted that someone was there to build it. You may not know who, maybe never have seen the man, did not see him build it, but it cannot be denied that the house was built because it stands before you. It could not produce itself.

The universe exists. It could not have produced itself. It could not have always been as we have already noted. It had to have a cause and that Cause is God.

Life Produces Life

Another fact is that non-living things cannot and do not produce life. This is repeatedly demonstrated. Some have claimed that scientists have produced life in the laboratory, but this is not true. What they been able to do is combine living substance with non-living substance and the combination lives. But that takes place every time someone eats a meal. Living and non-living substances are combined and the combination lives. This is not creating life. And what if scientists did "create" life? What would that prove? It would not

disprove the existence of God. Rather, it would prove what believers in God have been contending all along, namely, that life is the result of action by living intelligence, a mind, an intellect. That intelligence and mind belongs to God.

Matter did not and cannot produce mind, but mind produced matter. The nest does not produce the bird, but the bird produces the nest. The telescope does not produce the astronomer, but the astronomer produces the telescope. The automobile cannot produce the driver, but a driver can produce an automobile.

It is reasonable, therefore, to accept the existence of God because of the Law of Cause and Effect. There is no other rational explanation.

Design

Just consider for a while the intricate design of our universe. It is beyond comprehension. The universe, from one part to the other, displays a plan, a design, an observable and often measurable orderliness. The precision and exactness of nature and its uniformity defies accidental origin. Take a wristwatch and look at it. Did that just happen? Was there no maker? Could such result from mere chance? Was there an explosion in a printing factory that produced the dictionary?

It is obvious that our universe had an arranger and an intelligent designer. "*The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.*" (Psalm 19:1). "*O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom thou hast made them all, the earth is full of thy riches.*" (Psalm 104:24). When one considers the rotation of the earth, the planets, stars, seasons, day and night, the minute designs of nature, in animals, vegetation, the human body, indeed, in all of nature, can he really think that all these things accidently fell into place by chance? The tilt of the earth could not be other than it is to sustain life. How "lucky!" Otherwise the oceans would flow north and south to the poles with mountains of ice. If the rotation of the earth were faster or slower part of the earth would either freeze or burn up. Life would be impossible. If the distance between the earth and the

moon was different, the tides would overflow dry land. How does one explain the "fortunate" supply of oxygen, nitrogen, etc. in just the right proportions? And what of the many interdependent systems that exist, systems that depend on each other and would have to come into existence simultaneously? Was it just "luck" that the animal and vegetable systems that depend on each other "just happened" along at the exact time the other needed it? Such "reasoning" is nothing short of nonsense.

The story is told about Ben Franklin who had a large globe of the earth in his office. An atheist admired it and asked where he got it. Franklin replied, "From nowhere. It just happened into existence. Nobody made it." The atheist was astonished at such a reply and derided him for it. But Franklin showed how the atheist contended the entire universe came into being that way. The atheist's folly was upon him.

There is Morality

There is the irrefutable moral argument for the existence of God. The very reality of moral concepts, "oughtness," duty, and responsibility insist that God is. Rocks, trees, soil, matter cannot produce morality nor possess it.

People everywhere have a moral law that they follow. Without it human relationships could not exist. There would be no authority, no code of conduct, no workable society. People have conscience and guilt feelings when they violate whatever moral code they have chosen. Men have what they call "right and wrong." If this is not true, how can one say that it is wrong to say there is a right and wrong? Men understand the need for fairness and justice. Moral ideas exist. They could not have come from matter, but only mind. They had to come from a mind capable of moral precepts. That mind is God. This is not to say that all moral codes that men follow are from God. It is to say that morality came from God.

There are some things that cannot properly be learned and applied without moral teaching and moral principles. One cannot teach human relationships without morality. Sex cannot be understood without it being in the framework of morality. No society can rise

higher than its morality. (A cause for concern for our nation.) But if there is no God, there is no moral authority. Every man could do that which was right in his own eyes with total disregard for others, and the result would be total chaos in society. All people in every nation and tribe recognize this as true.

The Nature of Man

The religious nature of man argues for the existence of God. Wherever man is found, he is found to be religious. There is the universal longing in the heart of the human being for God. Paul called this fact to our attention in Acts 17:24-28, "*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being, as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.*"

Men do not always serve the living and true God of heaven. But men have something to which they look as their god. Did man create God? Or did God create man? Where did the idea of God come from? Even though some men mold and make their own gods, men would not have introduced the concept of God because this would have denied men their absolute freedom and placed them under obligation. One of the provocations to atheism is the desire in some men to be totally free and unwilling to submit to authority. Humanism teaches that "man is the most," that there is nothing higher than man. Some men do not want anything above them, nor do they want to be bound to laws not of their own making. Those who deny God do so to a great extent because they want to escape responsibility toward God and man for how they live. So man would not have introduced nor perpetuated the idea of God. The very idea of God could only have come from the reality of His existence.

The Unprovable

Atheists can never prove their case. For one to prove there is no God he would have to assume the very characteristics of the God he denied. He would have to be everywhere at the same time, know every thing, have all power, lest the very place he was not, the very truth he did not know, the very power he lacked would be God.

The Russian cosmonaut circled the earth in orbit and returned to announce he did not see God. Consider what a small portion of space he covered, what did he prove? That he was able to orbit the earth proved there was a design that enabled him to make the trip. After all, God is Spirit and invisible anyway. He is not a material being as are we. One cannot dismiss the reality of God just because he floated in space and saw nobody. We accept the reality of many things even though we cannot see them. Who has seen a radio wave? Nobody. Men accept their reality on the basis of evidence of their existence. We do not see germs, but accept their existence. Just because the blind do not see the sun does not mean the sun does not exist. Just because the deaf hear no sound does not argue that there is no sound. We see evidences of God in His universe, and even more important, we have His revelation of Himself to us in His Word.

While we can know of the existence of the Supreme Being from the world around us, we cannot know the character of God, our duty and relationship to God, without the Word of God. God has communicated to His creatures through His Word, and knowledge of His Word is essential to our proper relationship with Him.

Faith is Essential

Faith in God is mandatory for salvation. *"Without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus said, *"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me."* (John 14:1).

* * * * *

The Christian at Work

One cannot accurately present the faith of Christ separate from work and service to God and his fellowman. The Christian is one who lives life in the imitation of Christ, Christ being the example (First Peter 2:21). John 9:4 reads, "*I must work the work of him that sent me, while it is day; the might cometh when no man can work.*" Just as Jesus was a laborer in the cause of His Father, so must we be. We are as laborers in the vineyard of the Lord. Now, in this life, is the time for work. Rewards come later.

Being a Christian is living a certain manner of life. It is not just some event, nor just an on-again, off-again procedure, with spasmodic endeavors. Jesus said, "*But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.*" (Matthew 23:11). Matthew 4:10, "*...and him only shalt thou serve.*" Galatians 6:10, "*As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*" We are impressed with repetition of the Biblical teaching that being a Christian is being one who works and serves.

The work that we do should be done diligently, not slothful (Romans 12:11). Solomon wrote, Ecclesiastes 9:10, "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*"

Unit Work Program

We should want to assist in every way we can the program of work of the congregation to which we belong. I want to commend to you a program of work called the Unit Work Program, that can involve you in the work for the Lord in ways and to degrees you may never have been involved. Most congregations have various programs that are designed to motivate brethren to work and promote the cause of Christ. The one I am suggesting is not necessarily to replace what some may already be doing, unless that proves expedient, but to enlarge our view and expand what can and should be done. We need

to get away from the idea some have promoted that one program makes all others superfluous. Many have been turned away because some overly zealous brother gets an idea and unless everybody jumps on his bandwagon that they are not really doing anything. We have heard brethren promote radio and television programs (and what wonderful means these are to preach the truth), but they sound like you are sure to go to hell unless you send them your money to have their program. Others have said essentially the same ridiculous things about busing programs, personal work studies, papers, some ever include contributing to schools, and try to place others on a guilt trip unless they do everything just as the promoter says they should. We have no such attitude toward what we are suggesting.

But the Unit Work Program, not original with be but endorsed as I have seen it in operation where I have preached, does provide opportunities for personal involvement for every member in a labor of love. The potential is almost unlimited.

So often that which is called a Christian work is not really considered significant unless it is highly organized, receives great notoriety, is broadcast in neon lights with fanfare, excitement, and a big bang. Often such things only prove to be a boom-and-bust disaster anyway. Working for the Lord is not something that runs on pep rallies and emotional and psychological "highs." Many are too much like Naaman, only willing to do some great thing. But we are persuaded that it is the unheralded, day-to-day persistency of the individual Christian that makes the Christian the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the city set on a hill. The Unit Work Program encourages just such work. Whoever originated it gave it great wisdom and reflected the proper concept of what is involved in living the Christian life. It is an emphasis on the individual Christian and calls for personal daily initiative and motivation. It works with those who take James 4:17 seriously, "*Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" It is a program that encourages brethren to work individually but also to cooperate with other brethren in the local church

because the program is inclusive of everyone who is willing to work and excludes none.

Why Efforts Fail

We have found through the years that some programs fail because they are not very realistic, even though possibly idealistic. Sometimes those who have conceived a certain work have the time to do all that the program requires, not realizing that others have other duties in life that may force them to use other means in their labor. It is wrong to make somebody feel they are an unworthy child of God just because they do not do everything the booster says do. We all can be like Mary of whom it is said, "*She hath done what she could.*" (Mark 14:8). Inasmuch as we do not all have the same talents, opportunities and capabilities, we should realize that to whom much is given, much is expected, but to those to whom less is given, less is expected. Have we not seen many brethren never involving themselves in a program of work because they simply could not perform what the program demanded and therefore just stayed away from it altogether?

This Unit Work Program is also void of pitfalls that would tempt one to seek personal glory or develop an attitude of pride before others. Sometimes some people who work hard seem to relish the praise they might receive from their brethren and soon show an attitude of superiority. The truth may well be that they are not near so faithful as others of whom most never hear nor see. These things that some brethren have adopted in giving prizes, rewards, plagues, etc. to "The Outstanding Christian of the Year" is a nauseating practice. Just who endowed these offerers of gifts of special recognition such wisdom to declare such ostentatious proclamation? So often the whole episode reduces itself to "you praise me this year and I'll toot your horn next year." I do not discourage showing appreciation to good brethren and their labors, but to seek praise of men seems very out of place. Such is not becoming the faith of Christ. That work which is encouraged by the Unit Work Program is done and reported, but the reports are not even signed and nobody necessarily knows who has done what, but

only that work has been done. Those involved work for the kingdom's sake, not their own glory before men.

Its Regularity and Content

But there is a regularity to it and affords each person to quietly, persistently, lovingly, effectively, with conviction, go about doing the Father's business in a systematic, intelligent, and orderly fashion in conjunction with others.

Notice the areas of work and service that are encouraged. (1) Fellowship. This included attendance at the worship and study hours where joint participation is always in the foreground. (2) Social association. This might take on the form of promoting love and mutual concern for others by having guests in the home for meals, outings together, what we sometimes call fellowship meals, and other such things that enrich the development of brotherliness and understanding among brethren of the local church.

(3) There are six areas where brethren are urged to make contact with other people. (a) Absentees, (b) outsiders, (c) visitors who attend the services of the church, (d) the sick, (e) contacts by telephone, (f) contacts by cards and letters. All such things are reaching out to others, hoping to influence them to consider what which we hold near and dear in Christ.

(4) There is benevolent work. All such work need not be done through the treasury of the church. Supplying what is needful to others can be done as we have ability and opportunity, seeing the needy are shown love and care. Supplying food, collecting a good pantry for assisting, whatever may be needed from clothing to sympathy, we do not have to rely solely on what the elders decide, or wait until there is action by the deacons, or a decision in a business meeting. We have the right and privilege to act and we should act.

(5) Food preparation for those who are sick or bereaved. This is an area where I have found the sisters of the Lord's church to usually be very responsive and attentive. This is a good and noble work. (6) We can

support special activities such as a gospel meetings, singings, attending funerals where we can weep with those who weep, visiting funeral homes. I have been associated with some congregations where so few seem to demonstrate they really care that one of their number has suffered great loss in the death of a loved one. Some cry long and loud about love, but we can show love by giving attention to such activities.

(7) Home studies and daily Bible reading. Some could conduct a study class if they would. It requires thought, time, and knowledge, but we can teach what we know. Who cannot find time to read something from the Scriptures every day if they set their mind to do so? The Word is our spiritual food. Can we survive if we starve ourselves? Passing tracts to others on vital subjects, checking the teaching heard in a sermon, listening to a good radio sermon, or tapes. Doing such things that make one Biblically informed are things that each one can do without having to organize, scrutinize, hypnotize, and agonize. We simply need to get to the work.

Keeping Records

Records of such things can be kept on a tally sheet by each individual as he goes through the week, keeping the tally sheet in a place where it is convenient to mark the category of work done. It is helpful to have each member aligned in a group and each group present totals of work done each week. It might even be best not to publicize what each group does but what the entire congregation does collectively. There should not be developed a competitive spirit in this program. That would defeat one of the attitudes behind it. But having groups may be useful for keeping records of what is going on, seeing progress is made, and discovering areas where more work needs to be done.

As you can see, the areas of work involve more than anyone individual can find time to do. One should not feel shame for not doing everything every week. It is an unwarranted attitude to think nothing is being done unless it makes a big splash. With each doing his and her part, doing as they can, keeping track of what is being done, talking of what is done together, each one

will be motivated and encouraged to work more effectively and efficiently in the Lord's service.

It Works

The Unit Work Program is not a cure for everything. It has its weaknesses like other programs people invent. But usually the weakness of this program rests with the members of the church who simply do not cooperate and will not work with the others as they should. It is of immeasurable benefit to everybody.

This is a program that can be led by the eldership, possibly selecting good men for group leaders, someone to serve in keeping records, making the counts, providing the tally sheets, and collecting the data each week. It is but a suggestion, but one that I have seen produce tremendous results in more than one congregation. I am thankful I came in contact with it and think brethren would benefit from its use. Those involved usually develop good habits, good attitudes, a sense of responsibility, and although this is not the goal but a by-product, it does make one feel he is doing something worthwhile because he does what he does for the Lord and for others. Those involved usually develop a loyalty, enthusiasm, and genuine interest in the Lord's church that they had not attained previously, locally and universally. I commend the idea on the Scriptural basis that what we do be done with authority, orderly, and for the cause of Christ. So let us go "to the work!"

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Lift High the Royal Banner

Psalm 60:4, "*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.*"

Periodically we need reminders that call attention to the overall cause of Christ, underlining why we stand as we

do, what we are for, what we are against, why we exist, and a restatement of our purposes, hopes, and goals. We need to keep primary matters in constant focus.

Isaiah 13:3, "*Lift up a banner upon a high mountain... I have called my mighty ones.*" With these words God's prophet was about to embark upon another denunciation of the evils of Babylon, Moab, Syria, and other enemies of the people of God.

The Flag

A banner is a flag that has many uses and purposes. We often sing of our banner that we uphold as Christians. The lifting high of the banner is a call for rallying troops as they go into battle. "Forward into battle, see His banner go." Yes, we have a "royal banner given for display to the soldiers of the King."

A banner is a sign of identification. Song of Solomon 2:4, "*... and his banner over me was love.*" When ships plow through the seas they fly their flags and by these flags one is able to identify the nation from which they come. Even pirates had their crossbones and skull to identify who they were. A flag shows to whom we belong and who we serve. It is an announcement on whose side we stand. It is much the same as the little story about a grandma during the War Between the States when northern troops began to march across her farm. She grabbed a broom and went out to meet them. When told she could do no good with a broom, she responded, "I can at least show them whose side I'm on." Psalm 74:4, "*They set up their ensigns for signs.*" An ensign was their banner or flag.

We have the hymn that says, "To Christ be loyal and be true, His banner be unfurled." We unfurl the banner of Christ before the sinful world. We lift it high to openly call for battle against evil and to acknowledge our allegiance to the Lord. Unless we do unfurl the flag the world will not know of God and His way. We cannot expect the forces of Satan to fly the flag of salvation and redemption for mankind. A banner that remains folded and lowered cannot be of benefit.

Our Banner

What is the banner we uphold before the world? As the song suggests, "His banner over us is love." We proclaim God's love for mankind that has been demonstrated by the giving of His Son for the salvation of mankind (John 3:16). Our banner is the Christ and Him crucified. We preach not ourselves but Christ (Second Corinthians 4:5). Isaiah 11:101,12, "*And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious... And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.*" This was a prophecy dealing with the coming of Christ, the root of Jesse, the father of David, and Christ was the Son or descendant of David. We fight a warfare, a spiritual warfare, the good fight of faith under the banner of Christ and His cross. We are the standard bearers and Christ is the standard.

In any conflict the banner upheld is always the object of the attacks from the opposition. Christ is under attack from infidels, modernists, humanists, skeptics, liberals, pseudo-scholars, denominationalists, the misguided religionists, the uninformed practioners of evil. But by holding Christ we defy the Satanic philosophers, theologians, the wicked of this world because we preach Christ, His vicarious death and His resurrection, the hope of glory He offers to those who follow Him.

A Sign of Victory

The flag is raised as a sign of victory. Many have seen the giant statue in Washington of the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima when the peak of the island was captured. That signaled to all the reaching of the goal. Our banner is a symbol of spiritual conquest. We enjoy deliverance from sin (Colossians 1:13,14). We conquer temptation (First Corinthians 10:13). We can overcome sorrow (Second Corinthians 1:3-5), and even death (First Corinthians 15: 57).

The psalmist wrote, "***Thou*** *hast given a banner.*" Our banner has been given by the Father and is not of

human origin or design. Christ gave Himself (Matthew 20:28; First Timothy 2:6) as a ransom for all people. When our nation was very young Betsy Ross made the first flag and it was honored and respected as the banner of the nation. The national anthem was written with adoration for the flag and how, in spite of bombardment, it was still flying. But how much more is the flag of the children of God to be honored, respected, and how much more stable it is.

The flag is "*given to them that fear him.*" It is the duty of every Christian to lift the banner, the Christ, high before the world. Those who respect Him will do as they are commanded regarding this banner. We cannot look to those outside the church of Christ, or even the betrayers in the church who compromise with the enemy, to defend, protect, and press forward with the Lord's banner. To be friends with the ways of the world is to declare oneself an enemy of God (James 4:4). Such inconsistent, hypocritical, "let's play church" type of people have never taken seriously the fact that the banner has been placed in their hands to be held aloft. Some allow it to fall. God looks to you and me, Christian brothers and sisters. As another song suggests, "Into our hand the gospel is given. Into our hands is given the light."

How Is It Done?

How do we uphold this banner? We do so by word and deed, by what we say and do, by message and manner of life, by saying and serving, by expression and example. Acts 8:4, 35, "*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word... Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus.*" We seldom hesitate to let others know we are loyal to some athletic team, or even a political party, our state and nation, even our home region. Christians cannot leave all the acknowledgments of Christ to the pulpit. It is a sad commentary that with some who call themselves gospel preachers even send forth an unclear sound, uncertain, compromising and without distinction. To uphold the banner we must follow the admonition of Psalm 107:2, "*Let the redeemed say so.*"

Matthew 5:16 teaches us to let our lights shine. Ephesians 4:1 instructs us about how to "*walk*" or live life. First Peter 3:16 reminds the Christian he may be evil spoken of by evil doers, but his manner of life ("*conversation*") is to be good. When the life of a Christian is consistent and harmonious with the doctrine of Christ the world sees Christ living in them. All of us who profess to be Christians need to be reminded that we are the very best Christians somebody knows. What impression of Christ do they get from us?

This banner is in our hands "*that is may be displayed because of the truth.*" An unfurled banner sends the call, rallies the forces, identifies the troops. A banner furled and folded is of little value. Truth is what the world must hear. To display the truth the banner must be taken from its case. A Bible in the bookcase but not in the heart, mind, and life is like a folded flag.

Defend the Flag

We must defend the honor and integrity of the banner. "Lift high His royal banner; it must not suffer loss." We are impressed with the account of a soldier who was severely wounded and fell to the ground. He was the soldier carrying the flag into battle. But even though he fell to the earth he held his arm aloft that held the flag and let it not tumble until another could take it forward. His dying words to the next man were, "Let not the flag fall." The flag represented the cause for which he fought. So must the attitude be in our hearts toward the cause of Christ. Truth makes men free (John 8:32), and it must not be allowed to fall or be trampled underfoot by the enemy lest all mankind be the losers.

If we properly respect the banner we will lift it high and it will bring blessings to all. Let me mention briefly just three blessings. First, an open avowal of our faith is our best security against entangling ourselves again with the sinful world. An open confession of faith commits us to stands for what we believe. We protect ourselves against falling away by letting it be known we are friends of God. We cannot afford timidity in God's soldiers as we invade the camp of the foe lest we be tempted to compromise. Some have criticized an aggressive warfare

and a militant spirit within the hearts of Christians. They have charged there is a lack of love in these hearts who pursue the enemy with determination and an uncompromising stand. They have confusion in their own hearts what real love is. So often they equate love with the willingness to "go along" with error and sin so people will not be offended. We charge that such is not a display of love but as often as not a display of cowardice and a desire to be accepted by men more than God. Was it not when Peter timidly crept into the camp of the foes of Jesus and warmed himself by their fires that he became victim to the temptation to deny him thrice?

A Call to Courage

Second, holding the banner high gives courage to the fainthearted, weak, and discouraged. Philippians 1:12-14, "*But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel, so that my bond in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places. And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*" When there is one who will dare to be strong, the likelihood is that others will also rise. But should there be a void of courage, few will hold the banner aloft.

Message to the World

Third, holding the banner and lifting it high gives the world the one, the only remedy for sin. In view of the darkness of the sinful world, seeing the plight of the lost, can we afford to be overly modest in holding up Christ, the banner, and His truth before all mankind, calling people unto repentance? There is no solution to the ills of men other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To keep the banner folded or placed in a corner, or covered in a case rather than in sight before everyone, is to sin against both God and man.

Let us rally around the flag, unfurl our Lord before the world, lift Him up for all to see that they might be saved. It may well be that these words will someday be read by someone who once took hold of the banner and marched

into the fray on the side of truth, but for whatever reason has
allowed it to slip from his grip. Such need not be the case anymore. Through repentance, confession of sins, and prayer, the negligent soldier of the cross who has not marched faithfully behind our Captain can start again with renewed vigor, courage, and determination. May it be so!

* * * * *

Delay

We have heard about the preacher who planned to preach a lesson about the evils of procrastination but kept putting it off.

We have three passages that serve for out texts in our lesson. Ecclesiastes 9:10, "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.*" The emphasis is on doing vigorously whatever you undertake, and doing it now.

John 9:4, "*I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.*" This is almost the same sentiment as the fist passage. There comes a time when the opportunity for doing what needs to be done is gone.

James 1:22-25, " *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*" James stresses doing. It is not enough to simply hear and believe. There must accompany hearing and faith with obedient action.

Secular writers often encourage people to overcome the tendency of procrastination, putting things off that really need to be done now. The attitude, that you will get to it later, is really an attitude that allows the theft of time. The old adage, "A stitch in time saves nine," is certainly true. We are urged to never put off until tomorrow what we can and should do today. The idea is to seize the opportunity and do what you can because time is fleeting and it is later than you think.

A Problem We Face

Let us focus attention on a problem before us. It is not enough to **know** what is good, right and wise. It is only enough when we **do** what is good, right and wise. We cannot content ourselves on knowing the right way but must realize the necessity of going that way. Furthermore, it is not only important to do the right thing, but to do it at the appropriate time. We must act when opportunity affords and what we do accomplishes the most benefit. Proper action at the proper time should be our goal.

There seems to be a tendency in most of us toward inertia, a tendency to remain in whatever state we find ourselves regardless of what it is. Often we find it easier to wait than to arise and take action that needs to be taken. It is easier to relax, drift and float along than to get up and do. Unpleasant tasks are most likely to be postponed until the very last minute possible. The importance of doing the task is often overshadowed by its unpleasantness. So often we delay tackling the work before us if we suspect it may be difficult or not too enjoyable, regardless of how much it needs to be done.

Anything that involves fear and uncertainty, that creates doubts in our minds, are also among the things we might be inclined to postpone. We may not go to the doctor even though we suspect we should, but we are afraid of what he might find. We avoid making decisions and assuming responsibilities because of fear. We are often hesitant to commit ourselves to a certain direction being afraid of what it might demand of us later. Students have often postponed doing some assignment

they dreaded until the burden becomes almost overwhelming.

Proper Consideration

This is not to argue against giving due consideration to matters that come before us in life. We need to count the cost and know as best we can what we are doing and what we are undertaking. But there comes a time for action and the cessation of continued deliberation. Surely, this is true in doing the work of the Lord inasmuch as lives are being lost, evil is growing and captivating many souls, diseases are getting out of control that destroy souls and lives on earth and ruin happiness. We deceive ourselves many times by thinking that if we postpone, put off, wait, some way, some how, something will cure the situation and we can avoid it, whatever it is that gives us a problem. Usually, however, such delay only gives the problems more time to become more deeply ingrained and the solutions to them become more difficult than ever. Being passive can be fatal. We have read of the accounts of people caught on upper floors of burning buildings who, although urged to jump into the safety nets below, would hesitate and wait until the fires and smoke of death would overtake them.

A Fatal Delay

There is no area where delay can be more destructive than in the realm of obeying God. Nor can action be more beneficial than action in obeying God. Let us consider some Biblical examples.

Abraham was called by God to leave his homeland and go to a land that God would show him. To his eternal credit he arose and went (Hebrews 11:8). He responded in a decisive manner by doing what he should.

In Luke five we read of Jesus and some of His apostles-to-be. Luke 5:1-11 tells us of Christ preaching out of Peter's boat and His miracle that enabled the fishermen, who had toiled all night for nothing, to catch a great draught of fishes, so much that their boats began to sink. What a wonderful evidence these events had presented to them that Jesus was who He claimed to be,

the Son of God!. When he called them to follow Him they forsook their ships and followed Him. A similar story of action is seen in the response of Matthew (Matthew 9:9) when Jesus called him from his tax collections to follow Him. Matthew "*followed him.*"

We read in the book of Acts several accounts of people being converted to Christ. On Pentecost there were three thousand baptized that same day. We also read in Acts eight of the Samaritans and the Ethiopian. The man from Ethiopia did not hesitate to obey once he learned what God expected. He stopped his chariot and was baptized then and there at the first place of sufficient water. Lydia and her household (Acts 16) were baptized the same day they learned the truth. The Philippian jailor (Acts 16) obeyed the "*same hour of the night.*" They were not deceived to postpone what they knew they should do. I like the story about Sgt. Alvin York, and refer to it often, when he was explaining why he acted in the heroic way he did when in battle during World War I. He simply said, "I seen my duty and done it."

Room for Growth

We can be sure that there were many things about the faith in Christ that these people in Acts had yet to learn. Every person who becomes a Christian is as a babe just born into the family of God and there must be growth and development as it true in the physical realm. But they acted on what they knew once they learned how to begin service to God through Christ. Is not this what all should do?

Some Who Delayed

But we also see examples of the opposite kind. Acts 24: 24-27, we read about Felix who had opportunity to come to Christ but who, hoping for a more convenient season, never did what was necessary to save his soul, as far as the inspired record is concerned. How many have perished into the torments of hell because they were waiting for a "better time" to act on their knowledge.

King Agrippa, Acts 26: 27-32, might have been saved if only he had acted when he had the opportunity! Paul

had preached to him and he even believed what the prophets had said that related to Christ. He further admitted he was **almost** persuaded. But he was not **altogether** persuaded. He postponed obedience and closed the door on his salvation.

How can we effectively approach this program of procrastination? I wish I really knew how to move those who are so near the kingdom but for some unexplained reason refuse to obey. How many times have I preached to people and they listen attentively, they even say they agree with what has been taught and know they should obey, they sometimes even state they intend to obey someday, but they thus far are content to put off what they must do. They even know they are lost and will go to hell if they die as they are. I have preached the funerals of some who simply postponed until their last opportunity passed them.

The Cure

Unless people set the proper priorities in life and do what must be done **NOW**, they risk their souls. So often people arrange lesser things in some order so they will attend to them. Why cannot they see that the salvation of their souls is more important than anything else?

We can resist the destruction of procrastination if we ask ourselves if what we are considering is really a good thing to be done. Does it need to be done? Can I, with the help of the Lord, do it? Is there really any overwhelming reason for delaying? We need to learn that when the red light turns yellow and then green, it is time to move.

As has already been stated, there is nothing more important than saving the soul. Patrick Henry, 1775, traveled up and down the colonies calling for revolution. "They tell is, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week or the next year?" With such admonitions and reasoning he was instrumental in helping to bring our great nation of freedom into existence.

When?

I ask you, if you do not come to Christ **NOW**, when will it be a better time? Will you come next week, next month, or next year, if indeed you are still alive then? Will there be any more evidence that Jesus is the Christ and that you need forgiveness of sins than you already have before you? Will the teaching of Christ be any different later than what the teaching is right now? Will the steps you must take to become a Christian be altered in any way with the passing of time, if you have the time to pass? What blessings can be yours later that cannot be yours now if you would obey? People may intend to be saved and know what to do. To those we say in the inspired words of Paul, "*Behold, now is the day of salvation.*" (Second Corinthians 6:2.) In the words of Annanias who was sent to Saul of Tarsus, "*And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" (Acts 22:16). As we often sing, "All things are ready, come to the feast." "Why do you wait, dear brother?" The spiritual light is green. It is time to move!

* * * * *

Words We Need to Hear and Heed

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and forgive their sin, and heal their land."

Second Chronicles 7:14

These words were originally spoken by the Lord to the people of Israel about the time Solomon assumed the throne. The history of that nation is well entrenched in the minds of Bible students and we know how they gave no heed to these great assurances and blessings God offered them. What stands before us today is whether we will pay more attention than did they.

An Observation About Gospel Meetings

The Last Word

I has been my privilege to preach in scores of gospel meetings. I am always honored to be invited by brethren to come to them and preach the gospel. The fact they have sufficient confidence in me to ask me to come places a heavy responsibility on me, but also grants me exceptional opportunities. But some have said gospel meetings have outlived their usefulness and many churches have ceased to have them. How sad!

I have noticed over the years that gospel meetings usually include many fundamental and basic lessons. Churches that have ceased having them show they are often lacking in the knowledge of these basic matters. Their regular preaching does not include them either. Churches that continue to have these special teaching events usually have a membership that is better informed about the gospel. Little wonder! They love to hear, know it, live it, and know how to defend it. Such churches will be difficult for the devil to lead away into digression. JWB

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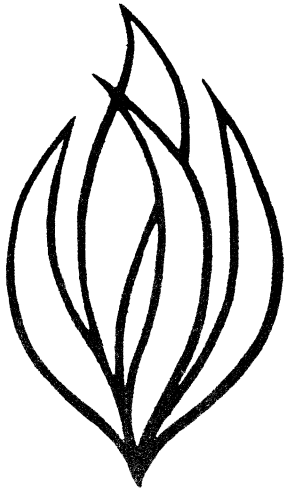

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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"I Sat Where They Sat"

Ezekiel 3:10-15, *"Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart and hear with thine ears, and go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. Then the spirit took me up , and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place. I heard also the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heart of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. Then I came to them of the captivity of Telabib, that dwelt by the river Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days."*

This is a record of the Lord's charge to the prophet Ezekiel to go to a certain people with the message, *"Thus saith the Lord."* His hearers were in bondage, exiles, suffering because of their rebellion against God, displaced persons, sorely in need of instruction and encouragement. What their reaction would be to that which Ezekiel was commissioned to preach was not fully known, although the prospects of acceptance were slim. But he was to preach what God told him to preach whether the hearers would receive it or reject it. Their reaction would have no bearing on the content of the message.

But before attempting the task, Ezekiel was to be prepared. This preparation consisted of (1) receiving the message in his own heart, (2) being led by the Spirit what he was to say, and (3) for seven days to go and sit where his hearers sat. Verses fifteen says, *"I sat where they sat."* Why did he do this? This would give him a better knowledge and understanding of their problems and needs. He could gain insight into their real conditions and become personally involved with them so he could relate to their situation. Being with them he would develop a stronger zeal to help, could become more

concerned for them, familiarize himself with their strengths and weaknesses, and overall this would have an affect on his own attitude toward the work he was given to do. Furthermore, this would grant him time to meditate on the message he was to deliver.

The lesson we can learn at this point is that sitting where the other person sits can assist us as children of God to develop the right attitude toward our tasks and learn better how to conduct ourselves as we strive to live a life in the imitation of Christ. We need the lesson of occupying the other person's seat for a while. There is an old Indian proverb that teaches, "Before you criticize, walk a mile in the other man's moccasins." None of this would change the message. It would not contribute to compromising right with wrong. But it would equip one to better serve and sympathize.

Jesus and Paul

Is not this what Jesus did? Philippians 2:5-8 tells of Christ taking on the form of a servant, becoming as man, leaving His glory with the Father in heaven and living among men as a man, even while remaining Deity. Hebrews 4:15, "*For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, ye without sin.*" The devil attacked Jesus (Matthew 4) through every avenue of approach at the very onset of His ministry on earth. Tempted, He suffered. He became flesh and took His place alongside us to serve as Savior, Advocate, and High Priest. He sat where we must sit.

Is not this in principle what Paul did with the Holy Spirit's approval? First Corinthians 9:19-23, "*For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law. To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law of Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men*

that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."

Paul was not saying it made no difference what people were or did. He was not teaching anything one wants is all right. He did not partake of the wrongs of anyone. He did not strive to be "one of the boys." But he tried to see as they saw, so that he might teach them and lead them to be what they ought to become and show them the path of salvation.

Can't We Try?

Admittedly, this is a difficult thing to do and we do it so imperfectly at best. But should we not try to see things as others see them so we can lead them from where they are to where they can and should be? Let us make a few applications of this idea of becoming all things to all men and see just how workable this principle really is.

What of the sick, those who are lonely, hurting, possibly gazing out the window, just waiting for death! It is hard to put yourself in their place. Can we really understand the grief some suffer when death strikes one of their own? Can we grasp the losses and setbacks that plague the lives of many? Those that care for the sick do a labor of love, but they also have a great responsibility, a heavy work, one that nearly breaks the heart, especially when you watch day-by-day a loved one in agony, confusion, in long sleepless hours of suffering.

There are those confined to prison. Surely, it is because of their own misdeeds and their punishment is meted against them. But can we imagine being locked in a cell, behind bars, cut off from life, disgraced, often even in physical danger from other inmates? Just how do we propose to show care and concern for such unfortunate, though wicked, souls?

But to be more specific, what of situations closer to home. Do not those who are older have the need to put themselves in the places now occupied by the younger? The young should try as best they can to see things from the viewpoint of the older generation also. The older generation has an advantage because they have been

where the younger generation is, while the young have yet to experience what those who are older already know. But try to put yourself in the place of the young parent trying hard to fulfill their role as God wants it filled. Often those who are older seem to have forgotten how often the young are surrounded with the intoxication of near madness that is so characteristic of many in their youth. Temptations, pressures, facing of problems and decisions of tremendous magnitude, and often lacking experience and knowledge to cope and deal with such things that are thrust upon them, cannot we try to see things as they do? Youth needs understanding and sympathy as well as instruction and a good example to follow. They do not need coddling in sin, nor should sin be condoned. They need guidance, discipline, and a demonstration before them of the difference between right and wrong. But they also need to be treated with respect and courtesy for they have feelings. Children are not small adults, but young persons. When considering the young, and standing firm in the path of righteousness, try to put yourself in their place to help and lend assistance. It will probably go further than merely criticizing and rebuking without providing light to show the way.

Look Ahead

The young need to project themselves forward a few years, as best they can. How will it be when they grow older, or when they are parents and grandparents? How do they want their children to respond? What kind of treatment do they expect from their offspring? It is admittedly more difficult for the young to project forward than for the older to remember backward. How do you expect a son or daughter to actually sit where Dad and Mother sit and view things like them? They simply cannot. But the young have a great advantage with time on their side. They will, with the passing of time and coming of experience, learn. They will learn that parents deserve respect and obedience. The young must try to respect the awesome responsibility now resting upon their parents. They must realize their limitations due to lack of experience. They will give answer to God for how they contribute to the molding of their own lives, their souls, the direction they go.

What we are saying is that a proper measure of consideration of the other person's place is always in order. Husbands and wives need to change places, as it were, and seek to understand as best they can. Their roles are different in spite of the foolishness of some that would combine and confuse the two. But to exchange seats for a while will help both. (One man, having done this for a few days, was convinced God did not expect the man to stay home with the children day after day. He said no man was strong enough to do it.) But we can exchange places sufficiently and long enough to appreciate what the other does, what each faces. This will make for better understanding and less criticism and faultfinding. If we could only see through the other's eyes. Husbands would likely be less critical of meals, the condition of the house. He might even be more complimentary. The wife will see why the man needs a haven after a day at the office or on the job somewhere, fighting a hostile world, with irritable people. He does not need the same thing when he comes home. Try to think what it is like for the other. That is the way we truly can be helpful toward each other.

Needful in the Church

In the church this attitude should abide among elders, deacons, preachers, and all the members. It would cut down much of the harsh verbal abuse sometimes heard. Elders have the watchcare for souls. If some who seldom cooperate with them would be in their place with their tasks even for a while, even seriously consider what elders have to do, they might make life easier for elders as they discharge their duties.

Elderships have to make many decisions as stewards of the funds, listening to complaints, maintaining the truth, convicting the gainsayers, answering calls for help of one kind or another, weighing every matter, realizing they must give account to the Chief Shepherd. They have all of these things as well as the normal duties of home and job that everyone else has.

Consider your fellow Christian as they come to worship. Sometimes the stresses of life take their toll. Many brethren have various pressures on them from their

occupation, finances, health concerns, even wiggling babies to handle, the burdens of homemaking. Everyone is not aware of what may be heavy upon the heart of the one next to them. Then the preacher may produce some long, dull, and dry rambling for a sermon. It is beneficial for preachers to sometimes sit in the pews and get a better picture of what others do all the time while they preach.

Regarding Preachers

But cannot preachers be given consideration also? Many do respect preachers because of the truth they preach. But some people treat preachers like "hired help" rather than brethren who strive to preach the Word. They do not have appreciation for the labor and strain that preaching demands. The average sermon is about five thousand words. The average preacher will preach about ninety to a hundred times a year at home, many more counting his meetings, radio sermons, classes several times a week. The average full-length novel is about fifty thousand words., The preacher must produce over nine such novels every years, year after year, using the same basic theme, gleaning from the same source material, to the same people, but people of different ages, varying knowledge, different needs, temperaments, and people who are even different from one service to the next. Little wonder the strain often "gets to him" even to the point that he wonders about his own ability and worth. It would help so much if the rest of the brethren gave more consideration to the challenge he faces time after time after time. He usually does all of this under the most severe insecurity for his livelihood and welfare of his family. Just a handful of gripers can change his life.

I am confident that many brethren will be the fuel for hell because they have such little respect and consideration for preachers. The way some treat preaching brethren is a disgrace before God and man. If other people treated them the way they think they have the right to treat preachers, they would howl to high heaven. I do not say this in a self-serving way, but from observance of what has happened and is presently being done to many preachers even as I write these words. When I hear of preachers being "fired" because of some

dictator in the church, or over disputes of personality clashes, given a week or two to vacate the house, without consideration of his family, children in school, his means of support, and mostly to the satisfaction and glee of some ugly dispositions in the church, it raises great anger within me. It is more than obvious that many brethren have never given much thought to the Golden Rule principle taught in the doctrine of Christ.

I trust you get the idea of the lesson. If each of us knew more, thought more, about the road others have to travel, we would possibly be more what we ought to be toward the other. We would likely think less of self and more of others. We would be better prepared to do the work God has given us to do when and if we would sit where the other sits.

Golden Rule

We mentioned what is called the "golden rule." Actually the lesson tells us that we should not only learn the words of the "golden rule" but practice it. Read it from Matthew 7:12. We should learn to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). It will make us more willing to forgive those who are penitent, less demanding that everybody conform to our own peculiarities and quirks, and learn to esteem the other better than self (Matthew 6:12,14,15; Philippians 2:3). It would cause us to avoid thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Romans 12:3).

Don't you agree that God knew exactly what He was doing when He had Ezekiel spend some time sitting where others sat? God wanted Ezekiel to do his job well. He knew this would provide him in a great measure the equipment he would need. If it would help that great man of God who lived many years ago, it will also help you and me if we would apply the same principle.

* * * * *

Some want to innovate in worship. Has Colossians 3:17 and John 4:24 been repealed?

Honoring Christ

John 5:23, *"That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him."*

There are three major points made in this passage, two explicitly and one implicitly. (1) All men should honor the Son as they honor the Father. Does not this underscore the deity of Jesus Christ? (2) To fail to honor the Son is to fail to honor the Father. This underscores the uniqueness of Christ in that He and He alone is the avenue of access to the Father. Those who would profess to honor the Father apart from honoring the Son cannot do what they profess. (3) To honor the Son is to honor the Father, also.

Therefore, we need to learn how to honor the Son. It is not left to man to determine the way to honor Him but it is left to man to follow the way Scripture teaches to honor Him. John 4:24 and Colossians 3:17 show us that what we do must be by divine authority and according to the truth of God. This would include the five avenues of worship, singing, praying, teaching, the Lord's Supper, and giving, but also other ways of honoring which are not items of worship.

By Confession

We honor Christ by confessing Him as God's Son. God acknowledged Jesus as His Son (Matthew 3:17), at His baptism, and (Matthew 17:5) at the event of transfiguration on an unnamed mountain. Christ was acknowledged as God's Son and the Christ on another occasion also by the high priest (Matthew 14:61,21). He was acknowledged as King (John 18:37) when He stood before Pilate. Peter confessed Him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). John confessed and wrote a book to support the claim of Jesus being the Son of God (John 20:30,31). The Sonship of Christ was the burden of the confession made by the Ethiopian just prior to his baptism (Acts 8:37). Martha made the same

confession when Jesus came to the tomb of Lazarus just before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:27).

To fail to confess Christ is to not only dishonor Him, but also to make it impossible for Christ to confess us before the Father (Luke 12:8,9). Why should anyone resist confessing this truth in view of the abundance of evidence to prove it is true, plus the teaching that not only all should but all would confess Christ eventually (Philippians 2:11; Romans 14:11)? First John 2:23, "*Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*"

By Baptism

We honor Christ when we are baptized into Him. Baptism is important for a number of reasons. Christ submitted to it (Matthew 3:14,15). But what is important to us is that Jesus made it a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16). Men may do all they may to dismiss the importance of being baptized, but who really thinks he has the right to dismiss a condition of salvation that is to plainly taught and stated by the Lord himself?

Baptism is a picture of the primary facts of the gospel, such as the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 6:3,4). Paul told the brethren in Galatia that when we are baptized we are baptized "*into Christ*" (Galatians 3:27). Does anyone who takes the Bible seriously really believe we can be saved out of Christ and apart from Him? Salvation is in Him (Second Timothy 2:10). That being true, what of those who are not in Him, and just how does one propose to get into Christ other than the way the Word of God teaches (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27)?

By Worship

We honor Christ when we assemble with our brethren to eat the Lord's Supper. Luke 22: 19,20, "*And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them saying, This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.*"

After the Lord's church was established on the first Pentecost following His ascension, the church continued stedfastly in "*...breaking of bread...*" (Acts 2:42). The church in Troas continued this observance (Acts 20:7) on the first day of the week. The church in Corinth was taught regarding it (First Corinthians 11:23-29).

The Lord's Supper is a proclamation of Christ, who He is, what He did, what He shall do. By partaking of it worthily, with understanding and appreciation, we show honor to Christ. Brethren must learn that the neglect of the Lord's Supper is to neglect a divinely given duty and privilege of honoring Christ, the Son. This is, like other items of worship, a way of honoring the Son.

The Worthy Name

We honor Christ by wearing His name. We ought not wear other religious names not authorized by His Word. The church belongs to Christ since He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He is its head, Savior, and Redeemer (Ephesians 1:7, 22,23; 5:23). The church is His body and we are members of His body (First Corinthians 12:27). Why should it be thought strange that His disciples wear His name?

The church of the New Testament revelation was composed of the saved (Acts 2:47). They were called Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; First Peter 4:16). James said the name His brethren wore was a worthy name (James 2:7). Since our relationship to Christ is presented as the relationship of the bride to her husband we wear the name of the husband who is Christ. That we wear His name was prophesied many centuries before Jesus even came to earth (Isaiah 62:2), and the name, rather than having been given by enemies of Christians out of derision, is the name that God designated. Seeing who Christ is and what He has done, noting our relationship to Him, how inappropriate, as well as anti-scriptural, for those who profess to belong to Him wear other religious names than His!

By Our Lives

We honor Christ when we pattern our lives according to His will and after His example. Imitation is a high form of showing respect. Christ is our example (First Peter 2:21). He came to do the Father's will (John 4:34), and attend to the Father's business (Luke 2:49). If we be His followers, should we not do likewise?

Christ came to serve (Matthew 20:26). So should we serve. Christ was obedient (Hebrews 5:8,9; Philippians 2:5-8). So should we be obedient. Christ was humble (Philippians 2:5-8). So should we be humble. Christ was prayerful, forgiving, respectful of the Father's Word, and on and on we can mention those qualities of perfection that characterized the Lord Jesus that we should imitate. Paul wrote, First Corinthians 11:1, "*Be ye followers of me, even as I am also of Christ.*" When we "*walk in the light as he is in the light*" (First John 1:7), we show our love, respect, reverence and honor for Him. That being so, what do we show when we do not live after His pattern?

By Following

We honor Christ by coming to Him in exactly the same way He has appointed. His mission to this earth was to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He has revealed through the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the inspired apostles how one comes to Him in order to be saved from sin. It is not that which is too often heard from the preaching of men, the denominations, such as faith only, grace only, just receive Jesus, let Him be your personal Savior, raise your hand, sign a card, pray through, place you hand on the television or radio, come to the mourner's bench, expect a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, claim your gift, just ask Him and thank Him, nor any such thing. Such as all of that is not taught in the Word of God. The plain and simple truth as to how the lost come to Christ is a message that should ring from our pulpits, classes, and personal conversations.

One must hear the gospel of Christ (Romans 10:17). This is why there must be the preaching of the Word (Second Timothy 4:2; Mark 16:15). Those who hear must believe that Jesus is the Christ (Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16; 8:24,

and scores of other passages that teach the essentiality of the conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God). But, as Jesus and His apostles taught, one must also repent of his sins (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 17:30; First Peter 3:9). Having heard, believed, and repented, one must make the confession of his faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10) as we discussed earlier in the lesson. We are not taught in the Bible to confess that we are already forgiven at the point of faith as false teachers of denominations teach. We are not taught to simply confess our sins, which confession is implied by our coming to Christ. But that which is to be confessed is the truth concerning the identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Son of the living God. We must also be baptized for the remission of sins by His authority as was done in every example of conversion revealed to us in the book of Acts (Acts 2, 8, 9, 16, 18, 22, 26), without exception. This is in harmony with what Paul and Peter taught (Galatians 3:27; First Peter 3:21).

Surely, none in his right mind could contend we honor Christ as we ought when we refuse to be saved as He offers. We cannot reject His teaching and His will and still honor the One who gave it. To refuse to obey is to say, if not verbally, by actions, "Your coming, your life, your death, your suffering, your existence, your sacrifice, your example is all for nothing and is of no value to me." We may not intend to convey such a rejection of Christ, but is it not true that we cannot honor Him apart from obedience to Him? Can we truthfully say we are honoring the Son when our actions proclaim that as far as we are concerned He just wasted His time and had just as soon never come? We do honor Him when we follow where He leads, and He leads us toward heaven.

What a wonderful invitation, "*Come unto me...*" (Matthew 11:28). Those who do honor the Son, even as they honor the Father which sent Him, will come to Him.

* * * * *

Probably this issue will be mailed about the middle of 1995. Many gospel meetings have been and shall be in progress. Do you make your plans to support them as Christians ought to do? Surely, you do!

Stephanas, the Addict

First Corinthians 16:15, "*I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints).*"

We hear so much about various kinds of addictions in our world. When we use the term concerning that which is bad we speak of one who has allowed himself to become a slave to a habit, one who has lost self-control and self-discipline. When used with reference to something good it refers to one who is enthusiastically dedicated to what is wholesome and right. This last kind of addict is the kind that the house of Stephanas was.

Did It "Just Happen?"

Let us make a point here that is closely associated with our lesson. Things do not "just happen." Rather, somebody has to make things happen. Whether it be something good or evil, unless it is some kind of natural and uncontrollable disaster, somebody has to act to make things happen. Particularly is this true concerning doing good. The needy do not "just happen" to be visited. Somebody has to do it. The spreading of the gospel throughout the world does not "just happen." Somebody has to spread it. One does not just accidentally become a child of God. It is the result of intention and somebody has to act to bring it into reality. We hear people often say, "Things will work out." Actually we should say that somebody will work things out. If that which is needful is to be accomplished we cannot sit back and wait and just hope something will happen. We should get busy and make things happen. This is no way demeans the providence of God because God helps those who help themselves and uses those who are willing to be used.

The great need of our world is to hear and obey the saving gospel. The faith of Christ needs to be felt in the lives of people. To accomplish this we who profess to be

Christians must (1) see the need, and (2) meet the need. In John 4:35, Jesus said, "*Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*" If the fields are to be harvested, souls saved, there must be action on the part of someone. Matthew 9:37,38, "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.*" If this is to be done, somebody, in fact many, must spring into action. It is evident that the house of Stephanas is an example of just such people who did not sit around waiting for things to "just happen."

In what way or ways did they demonstrate their devotion and addiction? They saw the need and set out to meet the need. They were addicted to the ministry of the saints, which means the work that God expects His people to be doing. Obviously, they were not the kind of people who waited to be asked to do something. They did not wait until somebody else did what was needed. They did not simply ask somebody else to get busy. They did not wait until somebody organized a program of work that might get headlines. They did something themselves. From time to time we meet people who murmur, complain, hesitate, and even spend much time "making plans" while there are others who go out on their own initiative and get things done while the procrastinators stall and postpone.

What Was Behind it?

Why did these good people act this way? Is it not evident that they saw their personal responsibility? The work was no more their work than the work of others. But it was no more the work of others than their work. It was their duty as much as others. They believed in being active and aggressive in going about the Lord's business. They could not and would not be content to sidestep the work or sit idly by while the work languished or while others attended to it. How the Lord's church needs people of this responsible disposition! Whether it be the matter of caring for the needy, proclaiming the gospel to the lost, restoring the fallen, building up the church spiritually or numerically, such is every Christian's duty and the house of Stephanas realized it. Someone

has rightly said, "We have been saved to save." Would that more of us accepted this truth!

These people were truly converted. They had been baptized by Paul and were said to have been the first fruits of Paul's labors in Greece. They had been taught right and realized that being a Christian involved giving sacrificial service on behalf of others. They had received the Word as it was in truth, not the word of men but of God (First Thessalonians 2:13). The Word preached, heard, and believed produced action motivated by love (Galatians 5:6). Galatians 5:13, "*By love serve one another.*" First John 3:18, "*My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*": Of what value is a faith that does not serve and work (James 2:14-18)? To know to do good and not do it is to sin (James 4:17).

Volunteers

God needs more volunteers. He needs people who have so partaken of the divine nature Second Peter 1:4) that they have become addicted people to the ministry of the saints, not content with personal inactivity. A faulty concept some have about serving is that they should serve only when they do something publicly, or in some organized group activity. They feel they are serving if they are asked to lead a public prayer, conduct the song service, preach, or help at the Lord's Table. While these things are important and someone must do them, and we should not minimize any of these divinely appointed activities, they are not near all there is to rendering service. In fact, these are but a small portion of the service open to the child of God.

Isaiah's attitude when God needed a messenger was, "*Here am I; send me.*" (Isaiah 6:8). Nehemiah voluntarily assumed the work of returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the walls of that city. David volunteered to face the giant named Goliath without being asked. The Good Samaritan acted on his own initiative by offering care to the man who had fallen among the robbers and left to die. Acquilla and Priscilla deliberately and voluntarily took Apollos aside and taught him the way of the Lord more perfectly. Barnabas volunteered to

stand by the former persecutor of Christians, and assisted brethren to accept Saul of Tarsus as their new brother in the Lord. Little wonder that Barnabas is identified in Scripture as a man of exhortation and consolation! All of these people took it upon themselves to discharge what they knew was a duty and when the opportunity arose to carry out that duty they considered it a privilege and would not shirk the work.

Always A Need

There is always the need in every congregation for people to fill the vacancies in the many places where the work needs to be done. There is always the work of teaching somebody how to be saved. The sick need the care and encouragement of faithful brethren. The aged need the concern and attention of their younger brothers and sisters in Christ. There are those who have suffered losses of one sort or another that need the comfort and interest of others. The bereaved are often given momentary attention, but soon, when the loneliest of hours come upon them, they find themselves almost as if they had no spiritual family that cared for them. Why should there have to be some organized program of work before Christians engage themselves in seeing these needs are met. Organized programs have their place. But can we not do anything on our own without it being orchestrated into some "big move" before we respond to doing the Lord's business?

The house or family of Stephanas stands before us as an example of people who acted somewhat like Alvin York, American hero during World War I, when he was asked to explain why he did the deeds of bravery that he performed. He simply stated in his Tennessee mountain English, "I seen my duty and done it." This is the attitude that soldiers of Christ should have toward doing the work of the Lord. There has been, is now, and always will be the need in every congregation for people like the family of Stephanas.

Obviously, before we can be involved in serving God by serving others we must ourselves be in Christ. Out of Christ we are yet laboring in the service of Satan, just one lost soul among many other lost souls. Before

becoming addicted to the service as we should we must become a Christian. Let us learn the order of things. First, one becomes a Christian. Then he is to be that which he has become in his daily living. Paul had gone to Corinth to preach the gospel. Acts 18:8 reveals that many heard what he preached, believed what he preached, and were obedient to what he preached when they were baptized. That number who obeyed the gospel must have included Stephanas and his household because they were of the first fruits in that land. This is where they made their start. This is where each of us must make our start. But having started, we are to be as Stephanas, devoted, dedicated, committed, addicted to the ministry of the saints.

* * * * *

Be Not Deceived

Galatians 6:6-10, "*Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*"

This passage discusses matters crucial to Christian character and living in the likeness of Christ. The brethren of Galatia were urged to sow to the Spirit, support their teachers, be helpful to one another, even to all people, and were warned that one reaps as one sows, encouraged to persevere, and not grow weary in well doing.

In verse seven they were admonished, "*Be not deceived.*" It is this admonition to which we turn our attention.

Deception

What does it mean to be deceived? There are several words that define it, such as beguiled, misled, seduced, led astray, taken into error. James 5:19, "*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth...*" The word "*err*" is the concept of being deceived. Matthew 24:4,5, "*Take heed that no man deceive you.*" People can be led to believe things that are not true, even when they are honest and sincere in their deceived conviction.

This warning proves once again the possibility of apostasy. The human being is vulnerable and open to attack. To think otherwise is to take leave of the meaning of words, and one must deny observable history as well as outright repudiation Scripture to think he is beyond deception. This is a warning calling for alertness, caution, and staying on guard.

There are many examples of people being deceived found in the Bible. The serpent deceived Eve (First Timothy 2:14; Second Corinthians 11:3). Jacob deceived Isaac into believing Jacob was Esau, the older brother (Genesis 27:25). Later, Laban deceived Jacob, giving him Leah rather than Rachel for his wife (Genesis 29:25). Joseph's older brothers also deceived Jacob into thinking that Joseph was dead when actually Joseph was very much alive and prospering in the land of Egypt (Genesis 37).

The Worst Deception

A person can be deceived by other persons, and he can deceive himself. Romans 16:17,18, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*" Ephesians 4:14, "*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*" Ephesians 5:6, "*Let no man deceive you*

with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Colossians 2:4, *"And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words."* Second Thessalonians 2:3, *"Let no man deceive you by any means."* First John 1:26, *"These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you."* Second John 7, *"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antiChrist."*

Because we can be deceived by others we must adhere strictly and closely to the divinely revealed rule, taking heed to such warnings as that given in First John 4:1, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* Paul urged, First Thessalonians 5:21, *"Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good."*

We can deceive ourselves. This is a deadly condition. Paul warned, First Corinthians 3:18, *"Let no man deceive himself..."* James 1:22 speaks of a man deceiving himself when he is a hearer of the word but not a doer of the work. We can deceive ourselves by following personal opinions, likes, dislikes, feelings, traditions, creeds, and such like rather than the authority of God in the Bible. Those who are content to be misinformed, uninformed, who close their minds and do not have the proper regard for truth, do not love the truth, are subject to deception. Being honest and sincere does not immunize one from being a potential victim of deception. Let us consider some areas where people, even ourselves, can be deceived.

Shall Not Enter

One is deceived to think the unrighteous shall somehow inherit the kingdom of God anyway. First Corinthians 6:9,10, *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."* Similar teaching is in Galatians 5:19-21. Some seem to think because God is love that God will

not punish the evildoer. They deny the reality of hell. They think some way they can get by with their wickedness without repentance and coming to God for forgiveness and all will be well with them anyway. How deceived one is when he refuses to believe the wrath and justice of God as well as His mercy and love!

Companions Matter

One is deceived to think that associations do not matter. First Corinthians 15:33, "*Evil companions corrupt good morals.*" (ASV). The power of influence can and does run in both directions. Romans 14:7, "*For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.*" Choosing friends, occupational partners, marriage mates, and all other associations have an affect on us. We cannot disregard the power of influence.

You Do Sin

One is deceived who contends there is no sin in his life. All have sinned, Paul teaches (Romans 3:23). Even the Christian sins at times (First John 1:8,10). Becoming a child of God does not impart escape from temptation nor produce sinless perfection in life. This is why remaining in the body of Christ, His church, is so important. It is in His body that we find His blood, and we are cleansed by His blood (First John 1:9). It is unrealistic to close our eyes to our own sins. Hell will be populated by many who were deceived in this life who thought they were outside the outreach of Satan and his wiles. The Christian, by the way, although he sins at times, does not live in the state of sin, but in Christ. He is prohibited by divine law to continue in the state of sin (Romans 6:1,2).

Riches Deceive

We can be deceived by material wealth. Jesus warned, Luke 12:15, "*Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" Matthew 13:22, as Jesus was explaining the Parable of the Sower, He spoke of, "*...the deceitfulness of riches...*" It is possible for one to think his material prosperity means he is necessarily

acceptable before God spiritually. The letter of Christ to the church in Laodicea dispels any such notion, however, because they thought themselves in need of nothing, but in the sight of God they were poor, wretched, naked, blind, and miserable. Seeing how riches can and do deceive, it is a wonder that so many set as their prime priority in life to have, get, accumulate, keep, and grow riches, not realizing that such betrays where their heart is, and that they strive for the wind.

Another Deception

Lust and sin deceive. Ephesians 4:22, "*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.*" Romans 7:11, "*For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.*" Second Thessalonians 2:10, "*And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*" Hebrews 3:13, "*But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*" Sin offers pleasure, reward, and appears attractive. People are misled, not being aware of the ultimate wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Consider the fruit used to deceive Eve. It was appealing through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. John warns of these avenues of approach by Satan to lead us into sin (First John 2:15-17). But that which sin offers will ultimately pass away.

A Frequent Deceiver

Pride can deceive. Galatians 6:3, "*For if a man thinketh himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.*" Romans 12:3, "*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*" An inflated ego, a pompous display of self importance, is a mark of haughtiness and pride. Those who succumb to the idea that they are "*somewhat*" are easy targets for self-deception. So often this becomes evident when people spend their time and energies

consuming the philosophies, doctrines, theologies, and theories concocted in the minds of men. They consider themselves to be "scholars" and "experts" because they have attained certain arbitrarily determined academic levels, looking upon all others as being ignorant, uneducated, uniformed, inferior, unqualified to speak, while considering themselves to be the only ones deserving of being heard. Such has captivated many who mount pulpits after getting their degrees of higher education. Its not higher education per se that is so wrought with folly, but the kind and quality of the education. There are often deceived people who are so overruning with pride that they have to regularly remind their hearers that they are educated, they have their degrees, they love the titles denoting their schooling, and are to be considered the elite. It is nothing but a demonstration, however, that there are many educated fools who have been brainwashed with the doctrines of men and who have little to no respect for the doctrine of Christ. But they are very successful in deceiving themselves and others because of their "stature."

Ignorance

The lack of knowledge of the truth is the avenue of deception. The Saducees posed a tricky question to Jesus concerning the resurrection, but Jesus responded, "*Ye do err...*" Then He told them why they erred. They did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God (Matthew 22:29). Misinformed, uniformed people can be led astray. This is why it is worthwhile to repeatedly admonish brethren that a congregation composed of people who know the Bible will be the least likely to swerve into digression in any direction. But when people do not know the truth, smooth tongues and fair speeches, pleasing personalities and egotistical men can take a church into error. Peter speaks of false teachers, comparing them to Balaam (Second Peter 2:12-15). Balaam was a prophet who was covetous, but unwilling to curse God's people. But he accomplished their downfall through compromise and false doctrines that led Israel into abomination. Peter spoke of those who had "*gone astray.*" This is the same word meaning deceived.

Cannot Deceive God

One is deceived if he thinks he can mock God (Galatians 6:7,8). To mock means to sneer, as to turn up the nose. Some do this toward God as if there will never be a day to reap their harvest. But who doubts that what is sown is reaped? We know this principle is true in every field of human endeavor. Why should we be deceived into thinking it is not true in our relationship toward God? Romans 2:6 teaches that God "*...will render to every man according to his deeds.*" We are self-deceived if we think we can reap God's blessings while sowing the devil's seed. God's truth cannot be successfully disregarded, ignored, or disobeyed.

In contrast to the deception that characterizes false ways and false teachers, those who teach God's truth never use deceit. First Thessalonians 2:13, "*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*" Second Corinthians 4:2, "*But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*" Paul said his preaching was not with "*enticing words of man's wisdom*" (First Corinthians 2:4). God's word, rather than misleading people, guides them aright. "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path*" (Psalm 119:105). "*Righteousness art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful*" (Psalm 119:137. 138). Truth does not perpetuate itself through deceit nor do those who love the truth believe truth must be spread by deceitful manners. Rather then deception, our delight is in the law of the Lord. God's truth is the very opposite of deception. When one hears, believes, and obeys the Word of God he will not be deceived by others, nor by himself.

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It Does Make One Wonder

Last year I preached a series of lessons on my weekly radio program entitled "Which Way?" Four weeks were given to which way the church, five to which way the nation, and four to which way the home. It just so happened that the programs were aired during and immediately after the political campaigns.

Some really got upset over these programs because they considered them to be meddling in politics. For the life of me, this was difficult to understand. There is no place for purely political matters in our pulpits. But are we to shy away from the moral, ethical, and religious issues simply because some want to throw them into the political arena?

I discussed homosexuality and adultery and some thought I was hitting the President. Wonder why? Some considered my emphasis on marital fidelity and personal responsibility to be racist. Do you? Some even thought my teaching on holding criminals responsible for their crimes was being unfair to the poor. It made we wonder where people had misplaced their minds. And when I taught against lying, you would have thought I was advocating the dissolution of Congress. Again, I wonder why?

It is the work of God's people to preach the truth and insist it be applied. "If the shoe fits, wear it." But some, in defense of their political parties and biased attitudes, prefer that we soft-pedal condemnation of sin if it touches their politics. Where is our loyalty to God? JB

Responsibility and Grace



In the current discussion of "free grace" as some consider it, there is also the matter of personal responsibility. One of the grave issues facing our society is that people are not to be considered responsible for their actions. Those who contend that salvation is by grace alone are promoters of this same cancer. Their doctrine necessarily contends that regardless of what one does or does not do, God saves him. He is not accountable and he can go his own way and "do his own thing" and because God loves him God's grace will cover everything, even if he never repents or obeys anything. This hideous contempt for the need to obey the gospel has contributed to the false notion that people are not responsible or accountable for their behavior. We have the right to ask, if salvation is by grace alone, why preach the gospel at all? JWB

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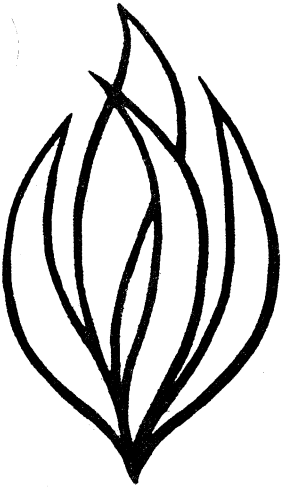

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The New Morality

Romans 13:8-10, "*Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet, and if they be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*"

There is in our world a very popular doctrinal system called the New Morality. It is certainly not an altogether new movement. Ecclesiastes 1:9,10, "*The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, that is new? It hath been of already of old time, which was before us.*"

The New Morality seeks to replace the moral standards and teaching of the New Testament. It is even promoted, not only by the irreligious elements of society, but even religious leaders of liberalism who contend they are promoting the will of God.

Things Are Changing

In an issue of Look magazine there was an article how we are in the jet age, the era of nuclear war, population explosion, fragmented families. The moral conditions are changing so rapidly that the old established guidelines are being yanked out of our hands. Things are changing so extensively, rapidly, and completely that one cannot really depend on anything and there is nothing to which one can tie himself and know it will remain, not even the Bible, the church, or anything. The New Morality system proclaims the Bible is irrelevant for our age and too outmoded for our times. Over a recent television program one young person was asked to comment on what the Bible said about abortion and she commented, "The Bible really doesn't mean anything." So think a lot of people.

It was the Vatican that named the New Morality system, with reference to the philosophy of relativism in moral thinking, no established and absolute norms, with everything depending on the situation and each person left to fulfill himself as he sees fit. The New Morality is announced as the new standard for society where there are no rules.

Some see the New Morality in terms of the Playboy magazine. That publication advocates hedonism, doing whatever brings pleasure without any restrictions. But actually the New Morality and the Playboy doctrine are not quite the same because the New Morality system does not deny all responsibility and some of its proponents say they believe in God. Upon investigation one will soon learn that the New Morality is simply the old immorality in a new dress with some variation.

Everybody Suffers

Society suffers from the New Morality, especially the youth. Unable to cope with the new codes, the void of laws, the license the New Morality would grant, there has developed a veritable avalanche of psychiatric problems, drug damage, mental and physical violence, the destruction of self-esteem, and the lack of personal worth. More and more people are committed to mental care. There has been a rise in crime, suicides, with many being dead even while living. It is because those who have been deceived by this philosophy have nothing on which to depend, thinking they have come from nowhere, are here for no reason, and speedily going no place.

What is the real message of the new moralists? It is not merely a Hugh Hefner and Playboy movement, although closely connected. But it contends we are long removed from the Biblical age which was written in the Bible for ancient times. It contends the Bible does not deal with what we face, our mobility, drugs, automation, germ warfare, computers, and potential global nuclear war. But it does deal with all these things.

Joseph Fletcher, an Episcopal seminary professor of ethics, of all things, teaches there are only three ways

open to man to determine right and wrong, if there is such a thing. There are three systems. (1) Legalism -a law for every case; (2)antinomianism -no law whatever, which is more the Playboy thought; and (3) situation ethics -doing what is considered to be the "loving" thing at the moment without guidelines and rules. It is easy to see that the system is totally subjective and a cousin, if not the twin, of total lawlessness.

The New Rules

There are six proscriptions, six rules (though the advocates of the New Morality cringe when they are called rules). They are attractive but dangerous because they contain sprinklings of truth, but are deadly. (1) The only thing good is love. There are no "oughts and ought not's" except to love. (2) The ruling norm, therefore, must be love. One is permitted even to violate the Ten Commandments if love is the motive. If you need something, you may steal it. You may lie if you think it will produce good. You can commit adultery if you say you are in love. The situation may mean it is your duty to violate God's Biblical laws. (3) Love and justice are the same. Justice is love distributed. (4) Love wills the neighbor's good whether he likes him or not. This is so near the truth and draws attention of people who do seek truth. (5) The end justifies the means and nothing else really matters except the ultimate outcome. (6) Love's decisions are made according to the situation. You can do what you think is "best" at the moment, not according to any rule that has come from any other source or authority. Everybody is his own god.

The New Morality is a reaction against religious traditions of men, the double-standards and hypocrisies of so many. It is appealing because it seems to promote love and grant freedom. It seems to exalt people above rules. In fact, it is a false and immoral philosophy that cannot be harmonized with the Bible, is anti-Christ, and in practice, is detrimental to humanity and is the very opposite expression of genuine love as taught by Christ. Let us consider some of the errors of the New Morality.

Not According to the Bible

The Bible makes it clear that there are certain actions that are never right under any situation. We find in Scripture several catalogs of sins and works of the flesh. These are absolute and under no circumstances can these actions ever be considered acceptable.

The Bible does not define love as just doing what somebody thinks is "loving." Just what can the New Morality and situational ethics say when there is a conflict of interests between two people? Just how do you decide what is "loving" without rules and guidelines? Who has the right to declare the difference between truth and error if everyone has the right to decide everything for himself? From a pragmatic or practical point of view the New Morality doctrine is unworkable in society. It creates utter anarchy and chaos if followed. There would be as many standards as there are people. This was the degenerate condition in Israel as defined in Judges 17:6 when "*every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*" How can people survive harmoniously together when everyone is a law unto himself?

The New Morality displaces God and every person becomes his own god, answerable to nobody but his own opinions and feelings as to what is "loving." It is falsely assumed that someway morals are inherent rather than learned. But there are many people who have demonstrated that they think it is perfectly moral to even dispose of an entire race of people if that race is not to their liking. People have to learn the distinction between right and wrong. It is not inborn. Man is not guaranteed to always know what is right. In fact, Scripture teaches that man cannot direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23), and what may seem right to him may actually be the way of death (Proverbs 14:12). Paul said, Second Corinthians 10:17,18., "*But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.*"

The Distortion of Obedience

The proclaimers of the New Morality grossly distort the teaching of Christ regarding obedience to law. While Jesus made a clear distinction between divine and human doctrine, between revelation from God and

human tradition, He insisted on obedience to God's law. He gave commands which one will either obey (to his salvation) or disobey (to his condemnation). This idea some hold that man is free from all law under Christ is not so. We are never free from divine law and this Jesus Christ emphasized repeatedly. In fact, love is obedience to God's law (First John 5:3; John 14:15).

The New Morality proponents, especially those who show a greater concern for the reality of God than others, contend that God will, in some manner, inform each person what they ought to do under various situations and circumstances. The truth is that God has, by and through His Word, already revealed to man what he must do under all circumstances, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, sometimes very specifically, sometimes generically and in principle. We cannot expect some kind of direct operation from God, some manner of special revelation that "informs us" what God wants us to do under various conditions.

Does Not Work

The New Morality concept does not work in the normal affairs of life. At best it is only a possible alternative in extreme cases, but a devious alternative. The new moralists asks, "May a person kill a child in order to save a large number of persons?" This dismisses the value of trial and suffering. It does not take into consideration all alternative patterns of conduct. It removes motive from the determination of right and wrong. It only offers two choices, both of which are tragic. This is seldom, if ever, the only choices available. But even so, just who thinks himself sufficiently capable to make himself as God to decide which is the "higher good?" Possibly the loss of many would be better than the loss of one. The New Testament teaches that sometimes it is better to suffer for righteousness sake than to do evil (First Peter 4:12). Furthermore, to arrange an extreme situation, which is admittedly an exceptional one, and from that draw a general and universally applicable conclusion for all conduct is absurd. This is the ploy of the advocates of the New Morality that betrays how sinister are their goals.

The New Morality contradicts explicit prohibitions of inspired writ. Whereas it contends that one may do evil that good may come, Paul was offended that some would accuse him of teaching that and denied that was a valid position (Romans 3:8).

The Fruit

The fruit of the New Morality should tell us something. Consider the crime, disease, chaos, anarchy, regret, despair, indecision, contradiction, and fear that it brings into society. It makes human relationships unlivable if all conformed to it. Thus far this system has added to the horrors of mental breakdown, escapism, suicides and hopelessness.

The only conclusion that can be drawn when we compare truth with the New Morality is that the Christian cannot follow it. Servants of the devil have always adored it. The way of Christ is not law versus love, but law and love. Love is the fulfilling of the law (Galatians 6:2). Love is to obey God's law (First John 2:5; 5:2,3; John 14:15). Law must be applied to every situation with proper respect for the limits and boundaries of law, with observation of do's and don't's, oughts and ought not's. While the New Morality establishes every man as his own authority, the Bible teaches there is an authority to which every person is amendable and answerable.

One final observation. We hear among some former brethren who have tired of Biblical authority boastful and glib talk about a so-called New Hermeneutics. They call for a new way to interpret the Bible. Frankly, as one listens to what they say, they have, consciously or unconsciously, been influenced by the same basic philosophy that produces the New Morality. They want everybody to take the Bible and make it mean whatever they want it to mean. They would swell with anger should people treat their words with the same measure they treat the word of God. False teachers are everywhere (First John 4:1).

* * * * *

Only Through the Word

Every false teacher, in order to save his cause, must repudiate the Bible as the guide in religion. He must do this either by contradicting the Word, ignoring it, taking from it, or equating other authorities alongside the Word, as claimed latter-day revelation, emotional experiences which he attributes to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, receiving special communications and revelations from God, warm feelings, small voices, visions, dreams, creeds, manuals, catechisms, confessionals, edicts of councils, conferences, synods, popes, or some other human ecclesiastical body or source. There are all sorts of religious authorities to which men look today rather than, or alongside, the Bible. Without them the false teacher is silenced.

Currently there is an emphasis on the alleged activity of the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word, the Bible, the Scriptures. The doctrine is "the Bible plus." Some have even gone to such extremes as to claim the Holy Spirit leads them regarding where to work, parking their car, which airplane to ride, what clothes to wear, which school to attend, etc. The Holy Spirit makes all of their decisions for them. Still others claim their preaching is directly guided by the Holy Spirit in a special and miraculous way, entering the preacher and speaking through him, illuminating the Word for the reader and hearer by special operation. Such claim has been also the basis for the tongue speakers and other "miracle workers."

Unsound Words

Those of this doctrinal persuasion have developed a distinctive vocabulary among themselves. You can hear them talking about the Holy Spirit laying a burden on their heart, witnessing for Christ, giving personal testimonies, claiming the Lord spoke to them, being illuminated by the Holy Spirit, personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. (Some teach a personal indwelling of the

Holy Spirit but deny any special miraculous power.) Their language is not "*sound speech*" (Titus 2:8, nor do they speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11).

We must realize that claiming activity by the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word has historically given rise to occults, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Romanism, Pentecostalism, the electronic church (PTL Club, 700 Club), teachers like Oral Roberts who saw a giant Jesus, Pat Robinson, Jim Bakker, etc. It is a basic stone in the foundation of Calvinism. Nearly every denomination looks to something other than the Bible, or in addition to the Bible, as their source of religious authority, and claim it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

A very fair and sobering question we ask of those who make such claims and cite such authorities is, "If the Holy Spirit is guide of all such things, why the contradictions, confusion, and division? Is Deity that confused to give different messages and doctrines and all of them of God?"

The Claims Are False

We can know these claims are false, not only because they contradict the Biblical teaching, but because of the fruit being borne. The position of the false teachers is that if you cannot prove something from the Bible, then "prove it" by your feelings, your claims of God speaking directly to you, the extra something to which he is privileged that nobody else ever receives.

God has revealed His mind to man concerning man's duty to God, how man must serve and worship God, the kind of life God expects man to live. God hath spoken to man (Hebrews 1:1,2). There are only two ways for a mind to communicate with another mind. There is either a direct and miraculous communication, or there is the use of means, agents, symbols, words, through which one acts to produce effects in the mind of another, to convey thoughts. On Pentecost, God miraculously guided the minds of the apostles and what they spoke. First Corinthians 2:12,13 teaches miraculous guidance, as does Second Peter 1:20,21. Christ had promised the

apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth. Paul warned against any doctrine other than what he had preached. Peter said they received all things that pertain to life and godliness (John 14,15,16; Galatians 1:6-9; Second Peter 1:3). Unless God still miraculously guides us, He must guide us the only other way; namely, through some medium, means or agency.

Respect of Persons

If God guides some miraculously and not everyone then He is a respecter of persons in spite of Paul's and Peter's denial of that. If God miraculously guides even certain ones, why does He not guide them alike, for they differ tremendously? Why do they not all have the same knowledge and teach the same doctrine? Why is their message at such variance from what the apostles taught in spite of the warnings against teaching such things? Where are the genuine signs, wonders, and miracles to confirm their claim as was done by the apostles, the ones to whom the promise of miraculous guidance was made as they went about revealing the whole counsel of God? Where goes the claim must go the demonstration of that claim. Just to simply "claim" the Holy Spirit proves nothing.

Against Scripture

To claim the direct and miraculous guidance of the Holy Spirit today is to speak disparagingly of the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures even though the Scripture claims that for itself (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We hear those who claim "the Bible plus" contend that the Bible is not adequate and sufficient, that we cannot understand it. The truth is that God either could not give us revelation we could grasp, lacking the power to do so, or He would not provide such revelation we could grasp, but still holds us responsible to obey it. Which horn of the dilemma would you like to take? Either He could not or would not. But we contend that He did reveal His will, sufficiently, within the grasp of man to read and know (Ephesians 3:1-5; 5:17), and allows for no other guide than what He has provided (Second John 9; Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18,19). The claim of Scripture for Scripture is that it is verbally inspired, inerrant,

infallible, authoritative, and all sufficient (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It either is or it is not. If it is, then all else is eliminated. If it is not, then why should we have confidence is anything else that Scripture tells us? Faithful gospel preachers who rely on and preach the Word are sometimes accused of being obsessed with the Bible as the sole authority. Certainly, they are. Indeed, they must be, if they be true to the Lord.

To deny a special and miraculous operation by the Holy Spirit does not make one anti-Holy Spirit, nor negate the power of the Holy Spirit, nor challenge the providence of God, nor deny Deity answers prayer. We confess the reality of the Holy Spirit as one of the Godhead. What all Deity may do we would not profess to know fully. But as for the way Deity has and does communicate the message of salvation through Christ to mankind we can be certain because Deity has revealed in the Word how Deity has done this.

Dwelling of the Holy Spirit

But someone asks, "Does not the Holy Spirit dwell in us?" The answer is, "Yes." There are many passages that so teach, such as Romans 8:11. That is not the question here. It not argued about the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. He does. But understand that Christ dwells in us also (Ephesians 3:17), and so does the Father (First Corinthians 3:16). But none of these passages that teach the Holy Spirit dwelling in us teach that they dwell in us literally, personally, actually, as if our bodies are occupied by any spirit other than our own. Yes, the Lord lives in us, but HOW does He live in us (Galatians 2:20)? The Bible teaches that the Word dwells in us also (Colossians 3:16).

I have had it said to me, and considered it a compliment, by some who knew my father, "I can see your daddy in you." How do they see my father in me? Is it because my father's literal spirit has come to occupy my body? Indeed, not! At this writing my father is physically dead and his spirit is in the hands of God, not in my body. They see my father in me as I partake of the ways, attitudes, and manners of my father. As I follow

him he is seen in me. So it is with Deity dwelling in humanity.

Here is How

John 15:1-10 teaches us how Deity dwells in humanity. Read the lengthy passage and consider these comments. Notice the verses speak of man abiding (living, dwelling) in Christ, Christ abiding in man, God and Christ abiding one with the other. This is accomplished "*if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*" The concept of the "indwelling" of Deity in humanity is nothing more or less than the doctrine of fellowship between Deity and humanity (First John 1:3,7). Deity no more operates and possesses people apart from their will than does Satan. Satan uses the means to influence man such as words, false doctrines, temptations, false teachers, deceptions, and other various Satanic servants. But God also uses means. Man is a free moral agent with the power of choice to decide his own will, whether he will serve God or Satan. To suggest some direct operation of either is to surrender man's power of choice and he becomes but a pawn and robot. What a degrading doctrine!

As far as the Holy Spirit leading, guiding, and influencing us, nothing is taught in the Bible of Him that is not also taught of the Word. The Holy Spirit is not the same as the Word, but the truth is that the Holy Spirit operates by and through the Word. They do not act independently (some use the word conjointly, which is at best confusing) one from another, but the Holy Spirit uses His sword which is the Word (Ephesians 6:17) to accomplish His operation. The Word is the medium of Deity. God's Word once was embodied in inspired men, but now is in the inspired Scriptures.

The Word

We urge each reader to consider such passages as James 1:18,21,22 to learn we are begotten with the Word, saved by the Word. See also First Corinthians 4:15. We must be born again, but we are begotten by the Word (First Peter 1:23). Ephesians 5:26 teaches Christ cleanses by the

Word. The parallel passages Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 show the Spirit dwells in us and the Word dwells in us. The Spirit dwells as the Word dwells. Psalm 119:105, we are led by the Word. Our hearts are enlightened by the Word (Psalm 110:104,130). By the Word we get understanding. We shall be judged by the Word (John 12:48). We are called to God by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). Faith comes by the Word (Romans 10:17). Christ came to give the water of life (John 4:14). But what is the water He gave? He gave the Word. God draws man, but through learning, teaching (John 6:44,45). To resist the preaching of the prophets was to resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51,51). God testified against Israel by the preaching of the Word done by the prophets (Nehemiah 9:30).

Let us hear the conclusion of the matter. Every effect, emotion, and direction the Holy Spirit produces is engineered by the use of the Word. Only through the Word does Deity lead us. If it is not found in God's Word, then it is not God's will. For this reason we should try the spirits whether they be of God (First John 4:1), and the standard of measure is the Word (Acts 17:11; Psalm 19:7,8).

Beware of those who claim something special, some revelation and guidance that nobody else ever receives. Isaiah 8:20, "*To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*"

* * * * *

We are not to even attempt to judge the hearts of men. We can only consider the fruit being borne. We must leave the judgment of the hearts to the One who knows the hearts of men.

But as we have observed through many years of dealing with many people, within and without the church, even religious people, it is apparent that many who are religious do not allow their religion to interfere in the way they live.

Remembering the Words of Christ

What Jesus taught and authorized to be taught in His name (by His authority) settles every question regarding the relationship between God and man, man and man, in matters religious, of morality and doctrine. Let us read together four passages that contain that very emphasis.

John 16:4, "*But these things that I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning because I was with you.*" John 15:20, "*Remember the word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.*" Acts 20:25, "*I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Luke 24:6, "*He is not here, but is risen; remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee.*"

These passages present a two-fold emphasis. (1) There is the emphasis on the words of Christ, and (2) the remembering of His words.

Promise to the Apostles

The Lord gave His apostles a miraculous power of remembrance by promising them the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. John 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13,14 record the giving of this promise. The Holy Spirit would inspire them. Because of their uniqueness in God's scheme of things, the apostles were to be divinely guided in what they taught because they would be teachers forever, not merely during their lifetime. Their words, being by the authority of Christ, having been received of the Holy Spirit, would provide the standard of measure of truth versus error. Therefore, no error could be allowed in what they taught. Their teaching was inerrant, without

mistake. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would attend to that as they did their assigned work.

There was a two-fold office or work of the Holy Spirit we mention here. The Holy Spirit is called in the passages of the promise the Spirit of truth. The Word of God is also called the truth (John 17:17). The purpose of Jesus coming to earth was to "*bear witness of the truth.*" (John 18:37). When the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles was given, Christ was nearing the end of His stay on earth and would soon ascend back to the Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit would reveal to the apostles that truth in its fullness and completeness, reminding them miraculously and without mistake what the Lord had taught them.

The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles in a special and exclusive measure, the baptismal measure of the Spirit, for the special purpose of accomplishing the work the apostles were to do after the return of Christ to heaven. The Holy Spirit's work would be accomplished through that which was done by the apostles.

Consider more closely this two-fold office or work of the Holy Spirit regarding the apostles in reminding and revealing. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was never promised to all, not even all believers, but to the apostles (John 14,15,16; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). This event would provide them with infallible recollection of what Christ taught. People today do not have perfect recall of things. With regard to the teaching of Christ, nobody has perfect recall of all that Jesus said, nor can anyone know what Jesus taught without hours of study of His word. There are some who falsely claim to miraculously be guided by the Holy Spirit in what they teach but they cannot and do not demonstrate such power.

It was to the apostles that Jesus said, John 16:4, "*...when the time shall come...*" In Matthew 10:19,20, we have the words of Jesus promising the apostles they would be provided what was needful when it was needed. The time came for Christ to ascend and the time came for the apostles to preach what Jesus taught them. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon them would provide them perfect

and miraculous knowledge and recall of the doctrine of Christ in every respect.

Inspired Men

The teaching of Deity was then embodied in inspired men. We now have that same teaching in the inspired Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Nobody has the same miraculous remembrance of the things Jesus taught and nobody can claim to be miraculously guided by the Holy Spirit to teach and reveal truth infallibly as did the apostles. Where goes the claim must go the demonstration. Many who claim miraculous guidance cannot even find passages of Scripture in the Bible, let alone know what is taught.

But not only was the Holy Spirit to remind the apostles of what Jesus taught but would also reveal all truth. Whatever truth God wants men to know concerning His relationship to man, it was revealed and taught the apostles who in turn taught it to others. Second Peter 1:3, "*According to his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness...*" Nothing was left out, and they were lacking in no respect. Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26), and this he could not have done if there was to ever be such a thing as what some call latter-day revelation.

Revelation From God

At the time of the ascension of Christ there were some truths not yet revealed because, as Jesus said, they could not bear them yet. Truth was revealed to them progressively, in parts, until all of it, "*that which is perfect,*" meaning the whole and complete, was come (First Corinthians 13:10). This revelation of truth to the apostles accounts for the fact that some truth is not found in the biographies of Christ, but what the apostles taught was by the direction of Christ, by His authority, and carries with it the same weight of authority of Deity. For instance, First Corinthians 7:12, Paul teaches concerning certain matters about marriage, and said, "*But to the rest speak I, not the Lord. If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.*" Paul was giving inspired

revelation. This was not simply his personal judgment or opinion in the midst of inspired testimony (as some modern translations misrepresent it- and to think some brethren even think that it is just a matter of liberty which version you uphold as reliable and faithful in presenting the word of God). What Paul said was by divine authority. He was "*Spirit led*" (7:40). Through Paul the Holy Spirit was revealing truth that had not previously been revealed, or at least not done so by Christ while Christ was still here on earth.

To remind and reveal was the work the Holy Spirit did with the apostles. Such a promise was never given to anyone other than the apostles and we never read of others having this same power as that with which they were endued when the Holy Spirit came upon them on Pentecost. (Paul, being an apostle, obviously also received this power, but the record of his reception of Him is not explicitly stated, but necessarily implied.) The Holy Spirit was one "*whom the world cannot receive.*" The term "*world*" makes the distinction between the apostles and the rest of mankind. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was exclusively to the apostles, fulfilled on Pentecost, with the exception of Paul as noted.

What About Cornelius

Some have considered the events at the house of Cornelius an additional occasion of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Many good brethren have held that view, but without taking into consideration certain matters they need to consider. The Gentiles did receive a "*like gift,*" like in manner, but not measure. Gentiles were never promised such a baptism as were the apostles. If they received what the apostles received on Pentecost there was no need for Peter to preach to them because they would immediately be guided and know as much about truth as did Peter. There would be no reason for Peter's words since they would also be reminded and could reveal the words as well as Peter and the other apostles. We do not accept the events in Caesarea to be the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit, but it was a direct operation of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of proving to Jewish brethren that Gentiles were also to be

included in the gospel. This is what was understood by it even then (Acts 10:45-48; 11:18; 15:8,9).

Everyone receives benefits from the apostles being baptized of the Holy Spirit because of what the apostles were provided, a remembrance and revelation of the doctrine of Christ. Again, these truths are now recorded for us in Scripture. If we learn and remember the words of Christ as recorded in Scripture, and the truths taught by the apostles, we have what settles all matters. As someone has said, "God said it; that settles it." We best believe it! Let us apply this to a few matters.

He Settled These Questions

Concerning creation or evolution, Christ settled it by His words in Matthew 19:1-6, God "*made them at the beginning male and female.*" That allows for no evolution. They were male and female from the start. It is the lie of lies to attempt to harmonize the theory of evolution with the revelation of the words of Jesus.

Regarding miracles, Jesus endorsed the account of the flood (Matthew 24), the record of Jonah (Matthew 12), the story of Lot's wife (Luke 17). To deny the miracles is to deny the Deity of Christ because He endorsed them as historical and used them as such. How could He be the Son of God and convey falsities concerning the miracles?

Consider further the Deity of Christ. Modernists claim He was but a great teacher, moral leader, but not Deity, the Son of God. But He claimed to be God's Son, and accepted the identification as God's Son. He either was God's Son, Deity in the flesh, or He was a pretender and a fraud, a liar, and deceiver. John 1:18 says He was the only begotten of God. He said He "*proceedeth forth from heaven.*" How could He be a great moral leader if He perpetuated blasphemous lies concerning Himself?

As for the right to divorce, Christ settles it (Matthew 19:9). Only in the event of fornication does God allow divorce and remarriage, and only the innocent party has the right of remarriage. That is clear.

Regarding the reality of sin (which some contend is only a concept of antiquated myth of centuries past), Jesus said, Luke 19:10, "*For the Son of man is come to seek and save the lost.*" He came to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). All the psychology in the world can never erase the reality of sin. Denying it does not change it.

The same application is possible regarding the possibility of apostasy, the necessity of baptism, the reality of heaven and hell. Whatever be the issue or question, when we remember the words of Jesus we have the answer. To know His will we must only remember what was revealed. But we must study and learn that will.

Standard of Judgment

We shall be judged by the words Jesus spoke (John 12:48; Matthew 7:24-27). What a tragedy to stand before God in judgment, as we all shall do (Second Corinthians 5:10), never having been familiar with the standard of judgment. Let us then devote ourselves to learning what Jesus said, what the Holy Spirit has revealed, what the apostles were reminded to teach, and believe it, heed it, enjoy it, rather than suffer the results of rejecting it.

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An Explanation May Be In Order

From time to time we receive requests for additional names to be added to our mailing list. I wish it was possible to include everyone that requests it. But let me explain. It is obvious that some think ***A Burning Fire*** is the product of the East End church with me doing the editing. That is not it. East End is graciously allowing me to use its mailing permit because I am the preacher there and this paper is part of my personal efforts to preach and spread the word. I personally furnish about 98% of the cost involved as I have from the beginning in 1982. I am necessarily limited how much of an outreach I can afford. I never advertise, but receive only the personal requests as I can add to it. So please understand if a request is not filled right away. JWB

Salvation

First Timothy 4:8-11, "*For bodily exercise profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe. These things command and teach.*"

There are several wholesome and helpful thoughts in this passage. Paul is writing to the evangelist named Timothy. These were things Timothy was to teach and that people are to believe and practice.

God is called the Savior of men. He is the Savior of all men. He offers to save "*whosoever.*" This does not teach all will be saved. To contend for such as that is to contradict too many other passages of Scripture. He is the Savior of them that believe. He is "*not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance.*" (Second Peter 3:9). But unfortunately all will not repent. He is the Savior of all men in the same sense that Christ tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9; First John 2:2). The opportunity of redemption is open to all, but salvation is conditional. It will become a reality only to those who do His will.

Not Faith Alone

This passage is not teaching salvation by faith alone. No passage teaches that. True enough, belief is the condition mentioned in this passage. But this passage is not all that the Word of God reveals on the conditions of salvation. Those who believe with a saving faith are those who obey. Those that believed (Acts 2:44) were those who had heard the Word, believed what they heard, and obeyed the commands given them (Acts 2:41). In the Bible the believer that is saved is the one with an obedient faith.

Paul speaks of our life here and life hereafter. This is a plain and distinct inspired assertion of life after physical death. While bodily exercise has some profit, and is needful for good physical health, relatively speaking, it is of small value when compared to godliness which is profitable for the spirit of man. Godliness means reverence and respect for things holy and sacred. It pertains to the spiritual part of man, to spiritual life here and which is to come. The emphasis is upon priorities. What matters the most? Is it not strange that many will exert themselves strenuously in physical exercise, which can be good within its limits, but fail to exert any energies in the care of the soul? Have they not confused what really matters? It is not either physical exercise or godliness. There can be attention to both. But let us learn which is most important.

This is a faithful saying. It is worthy of being accepted. It presents a two-fold conclusion. It is something which is reliable and dependable. It is a statement full of faith, doctrine, and pertains to the relationship between God and man. It deserves being taught and heeded. Seeing the emphasis on physical life and placing religious matters in a secondary position, we wonder how many, even some in the church, have really learned this saying and are convinced of it.

Three Realms

There are three realms of man's existence. There is the natural and physical realm. He is born into this world physically. He enjoys the physical blessings God has provided. All people, regardless of their attitude toward God, have access to the temporal blessings, provided they follow the physical laws. The rain falls on the just and unjust alike. This is the reason even the wicked sometimes prosper in this world. Many physical blessings are unconditional.

But man also lives in the spiritual realm. He is spirit as well as body. The favorable spiritual realm is that into which he is spiritually born (John 3:3-5). He enters this realm by a rebirth of the inner man when he renders obedience to the gospel. It is the realm where he is privileged to partake of the benefits of the grace of God.

There he can profit from the spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), such as the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with the redeemed and with Deity, the hope of heaven, the providence of God. The saved are in a spiritual realm of security and salvation that does not belong to the lost. The lost are also in a spiritual realm but one that is dominated by the ways of Satan. Only those who have met the conditions of salvation live in the spiritual realm with God. Mankind is most blessed to live with God even in this life.

Eventually, there is for the redeemed the realm of eternal glory (Romans 8:18). Having entered into God's favor by the spiritual rebirth, having lived in Christ and dying "*in the Lord*" (Revelation 14:13), he is "*born*" (comes forth) from the grave by the resurrection. Christ, the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18) has demonstrated His power over death and the grave. His resurrection presents His rank. It was not like the resurrection of Lazarus and others who were once raised. They were to die again. But Christ is to die no more. The blessings of eternal life with Him belong to those who are His. This is in the life "*which is to come.*"

Great Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-4 speaks of the great salvation. It mentions the Word spoken by the Lord which is confirmed, proved, verified, and certified. How was the Word confirmed? This was done by signs, wonders, and miracles., This was the purpose of such things. This was as promised (Mark 16:20). It is now an accomplished fact. There is no need for such things because the Word is confirmed. This is why we can know there are no miracles being performed today because the need and use of them has already been attained. Like the scaffolding of a building under construction, once the building is erected the scaffolding is removed having properly served its purpose. To claim the need for miracles today is to deny that the Word was successfully and properly confirmed. But Holy Writ contends it is confirmed. As the tug boat is useful in bringing the large vessel in and out of the harbor, having accomplished its work, the tug is removed. So it is with miracles.

Once God's Word was embodied in inspired man. But now, by God's provision and promise, it is in His inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). If something is not shown to be true from Scripture, or lacking authority in Scripture, or refuted by Scripture, then we can have no confidence in the conclusion. It is possible for one to neglect his salvation which the Lord first gave and confirmed in the preaching by inspired men.

Different Salvations

The word "*salvation*" is used in different senses in Scripture. Once it meant the physical deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea. "*Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.*" (Exodus 14:13). Moses was telling them they had to be calm and confident in God, not get ahead of God, wait for God's orders and actions, then do as God commanded, then they would be spared the destruction Pharoah planned for them. This was deliverance from physical danger.

It is also used to refer to the Savior Himself. Psalm 118:19-24 is a passage quoted in the New Testament by Jesus and His apostles and application was made to Christ Himself. "*I will praise thee, for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.*" It was a prophetic statement referring to the very person and work of Christ. A similar thought is in Psalm 118:14, "*The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.*"

When Jesus was but a babe and taken into the temple and was seen by Simeon, Simeon said, Luke 2:28-30, "*For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*" This was directly applied to the person of Jesus.

But salvation is probably most often used in the sense of pardon from sin. Mark 16:16, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...*" Acts 2:28, "*Repent and be baptized... for the remission of sins...*" Acts 22:16, "*Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins...*" The pardoning of sin is an act of God. But God does not act until we meet His conditions. Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God and is not according to how much we want to be forgiven or how we feel. Man can know he is

forgiven only as God declares it. We have confidence in God's Word that He will and does forgive when He says He will forgive, and when terms of forgiveness are given us, and we meet those terms, we can be assured God keeps His Word.

In no sense do we earn or merit salvation when we meet the Lord's terms. We are dependent on God for our forgiveness. We could never merit His gift of salvation. But we shall never enjoy the salvation He offers until we do what He has told us to do to lay hold on that salvation.

As the governor pardons the inmate of his crime, the assurance of forgiveness is not determined by how the inmate feels, but on what the governor declares. It is not determined by what the inmate wants or wishes. It is not determined by some process the inmate devises. Feelings alone tell us nothing more than what one might believe to be true. Many times people have felt something was true when in reality it was not true. But when God declares one to be forgiven, we have certainty that such is done.

The Most Desired Salvation

There is eternal salvation. Hebrews 5:8,9, "*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*" This salvation, as well as salvation in the sense of forgiveness of sins, is possible only through Christ (Acts 4:12). This salvation is salvation in heaven, in the life that is to come. This is the "*great salvation*" of Hebrews two, which is preceded by salvation from sins.

We can neglect salvation, failing to partake of it. If we do, we shall not escape the consequences of our neglect, but shall suffer retribution and recompense. But God is Savior to the obedient believer. How glorious is our opportunity to be saved.

* * * * *

An Unnecessary Roadblock to Progress

We all know what we mean by a roadblock. That is something that stands in the way of getting to where you need to go.

We also recognize there is a difference between progressive and digressive. Some congregations and brethren like to call themselves progressive, but in reality they are merely digressive. But real progress for the Lord's cause can and ought be made, always according to the divine pattern.

What some "conservative" brethren seemingly have forgotten is that it takes finances to do much of the work the church must do. Training preachers, supporting preachers at home and away, providing materials, assisting the needy, conducting the local affairs of a congregation all take funds.

The work is too often curtailed because of a lack of funds, and that is due to the failure of brethren to give as taught in Scripture. Money can be used for the Lord. Too often the Lord gets leftovers after brethren have whatever they want for themselves.

Giving is a touchy subject to some because they do not want to give. The nerve running from the heart to the pocketbook is the most sensitive one some people have.

But those that love the Lord and His will give, liberally, cheerfully, as purposed and as prospered. The roadblock is not their fault. JB

Looking for a Fight?



When our Lord came to this earth He did not come primarily to condemn, but to save. However, in the process of providing the way of salvation there were many things He had to condemn because those things were wrong. But His prime motive was to do the will of the Father.

As we follow in His steps we are called upon the fight the good fight, be good soldiers, and spiritual warfare is our mission. We cannot be a faithful follower of the Lord and avoid all conflict. But conflict is not our prime purpose. We are in a fight, but we are not out just looking to fight with someone.

We seek not to defeat people, put them down, cross them up, but save their souls. Motive in fighting is important. JWB

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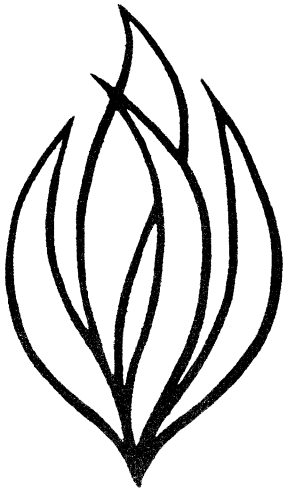

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Blessedness of A Christian Home

Two lengthy passages should be read as the introduction to this lesson: Genesis 2:18-25 and Matthew 19:1-8. Both are specifically emphatic regarding the subject under consideration and provide the Biblical foundation for the conclusions we must accept.

There are so many problems in marriages and homes today. There is so much failure and unhappiness. As one sees the domestic scene being subjected to divorce, delinquency, strife, tensions, one is provoked to ask, "Does it have to be this way? Is this what marriage and the home really is?" The answer is emphatically **NO,** and it was never intended to be that way. There is the alternative if people would pay attention to the Lord.

It Begins

A Christian home begins when two people, a Christian man and a Christian woman, who love the Lord and each other, enter into the sacred covenant relationship before God and society as husband and wife. This home continues as they live life in the imitation of Christ. We are mindful of homes that consist of other relationships, such as a home of brothers and/or sisters living in the same domicile, extended families of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and others where the will of Christ prevails, are also Christian homes. Our prime focus is on homes that involve marriage.

Malachi 2:14 speaks of the wife of thy covenant. There is a covenant made not only between a man and a woman, but it also involves God. While some contend marriage only involves two, how does one remove the originator and governor of marriage from the covenant and expect the marriage to be what it ought to be? The fallacy in the thinking of too many is that they have left out God. Marriage is more than a civil, legal, and social contract.

It is a divine covenant that binds a divinely determined relationship with divinely appointed purposes.

Universal Laws

The law of God concerning marriage applies to everyone whether they are Christians or not. If this is not true then all marriages where Christians are not involved would be meaningless, children would not be born within a legitimate relationship, and such sins as adultery and fornication would not really be sins since no law would be violated. But the law of God governs marriage and has done so long before the religion of Christ was brought into the world. It began in Eden.

Marriage must be entered with the determination that it is a permanent and lifelong relationship (Romans 7:2,3; First Corinthians 7:39). Regardless of health, problems, poverty, abundance, age, or whatever, the vow to stay faithful one to the other "till death do us part" is just exactly what God expects. Once a woman said she wanted to divorce her husband because she did not love him anymore. She was rightly asked, "What does that have to do with the vow and commitment God expects you to keep?" This is the kind of determination one must have upon entrance into marriage. It is for better or worse, richer or poorer, sickness or health, until death.

Divine Origin

God is the giver of marriage as our texts reveal. The first home consisted of Adam and Eve, not John and Joe, or Mary and Sue. God performed, as it were, the first "marriage ceremony" because He brought the two together, which a ceremony does. What God has joined together should not be put asunder (Matthew 19:6). Understanding this teaching is not difficult. Abiding by it gives some people trouble. It is because they are not respectful of the will of the Lord.

A Christian home is where each puts his or her mate before all else, everyone except the Lord. When one does put the Lord first in life he or she will put his or her mate before everyone else, including in-laws, friends, neighbors, children, whoever. The teaching of God is to

"*leave.... and cleave*" (Matthew 19:5). The two become united and compose a team of godly togetherness. They are as the title of a song suggests, Me and You Against the World. It is a case of forsaking all others and keeping oneself to the mate as long as both shall live. Loyalty to one's mate is paramount in the marriage and home as God would have it be.

The Christian marriage and home is where there exists a relationship of trust, loyalty, faithfulness, and confidence. Such relationship produces immeasurable blessings. Proverbs thirty-one speaks how "*the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her*" and "*she will do him good.*" To have a good wife is a favor from God (Proverbs 18:22). "*A prudent wife is from the Lord*" (Proverbs 19:14). There should be kindness, forbearance, cooperation, consideration, and longsuffering. It is no longer "me, my, and mine", but "we, us, and ours" in all things.

Count the Cost

The Christian home is composed of two who have counted the cost, who are willing to pay the price, and who will reap the benefits from God. It is where love not only exists but is expressed. It is where you know you belong, are accepted and loved. The Christian home is where human ties of love and compassion are at their best. This does not mean perfection, but each one seeks the other's highest good. That is what love does.

The relationship of husband and wife is sacred and is used by the Holy Spirit to depict the tie that exists between Christ and His church. He is to love the wife as Christ loved the church and she is to reverence the husband as the church does Christ (Ephesians 5).

What a blessed influence a Christian home has on children born into such a home! It was said of Abraham, Genesis 18:19, "*For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*" Ephesians 6:1-4 and Proverbs 22:6 both place heavy responsibilities on parents to rear their children the way God wants them to be reared. To know why

children are they way they are, whether good or evil, consider the home from which they come. The home is a laboratory where children are molded and formed into adults, either to God's glory or to reproach. The home is where Christianity is seen by the young eyes as they live day by day. In the Christian home they see selflessness, honesty, sacrifice for the right, morality, honor, the dignity of labor, purity of speech, respect for others, entertainment and recreation compatible with living for God. They learn to spend and be spent for the cause of righteousness. They are taught to respect God and His will, authorities and rules. They learn to discern between good and evil and have love for the church.

Precious Memories

Christian homes provide godly memories that serve throughout life. The inhabitants are provided strength, a rich and righteous heritage, something to live by and for, a recognition of mission and purpose in life, goals and aspirations that lead toward heaven. In such a home the child is taught duty, responsibility, and cultivates self-respect as well as respect for others and given the pattern to follow in life. Blessed in that person who has had the privilege of being reared in a Christian home!

The Christian home is concerned for the spiritual salvation of every member of it. We should often consider Noah. He lived in such wicked times, even to the extent that God determined to destroy the world by the flood. But Noah was a righteous man and he was at least able to save his own family. Will we do as much? He found grace in the sight of God (Genesis 6:8). We can do that also if we will walk with God like he did. In the Christian home each person is taught to love God, obey the gospel, serve faithfully in His kingdom. He learns to worship, being a righteous steward of all that comes within his power. He gleans knowledge from the Word that is the light and guide of the home. The primary goal in any marriage and any home that is pleasing to God is to help each other get to heaven.

A Christian home contributes to a good mental, emotional, and physical welfare also. Such homes are free from the undue strife, tension, hate, competition,

and pressures that can and do destroy good health in these areas. A Christian home is composed of people who follow the way of the Lord and learn how to cope with whatever life brings. There is always the source of hope, comfort, assurance of ultimate victory and providence of God. Happy homes produce happy people. The home ought to be a haven in the midst of the storm of life; an isle of refuge. In the home one should expect help, encouragement, advice, and consolation from those who love most. A Christian home is a relationship that is the nearest to heaven this world affords.

Basic Unit

The home is the basic unit of society. From homes come all teachers, government leaders, businessmen, preachers, merchants, everyone. From the home comes the standards of morality of the nation. The stream will not rise higher than its spring, nor shall the land be purer than its source. Society reflects the condition of the home. There are so many social problems on the national level in America. The answer to our problems is Christ and homes produced by the way of Christ.

There are many people in the world who have the distorted idea that unless they can "do some great thing," meaning something that brings attention and public acclaim, that they are not doing much of significance. That is a false view. There is no more productive and far reaching contribution to the good of mankind both in this life and the next than to establish and maintain a Christian home where the Lord reigns supreme and all members of the home lovingly seek His will and the spiritual salvation of each other.

Each of us can have this quality home. It begins with becoming a Christian and continues by being a faithful Christian. It is up to each one to do his or her part, father, mother, child, or whatever other relationship one has toward other members of the family, and to see that they are what they ought to be, and together live in, benefit, from, and perpetuate in the home the will of Christ. May we never be satisfied with anything less.

* * * * *

In the Garden: Evil's Hour

Text: Luke 22:39-53.

In long airplane flights and sea voyages there comes that point called "the point of no return," that point when reached allows for no turning back. For Jesus the events in Gethsemane was a "point of no return." Matthew and Mark both record, "*When they had sung a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives.*" On this mount was the Garden of Gethsemane, one of several gardens on the slope outside the city of Jerusalem. This was a very significant moment in the life of Christ on this earth. The Lord had visited this garden many times.

Generally speaking, what do we observe in the garden? We see the loneliness of Jesus. He had taken Peter, James, and John with Him further into the garden than the rest of the apostles to share with Him His vigil. But they were exhausted and fell asleep. He was left alone.

We also see the mental agony that Jesus suffered. There was the physical side of all that happened to Jesus, but there was also the mental and emotional side. Christ was only thirty-three years of age and there was yet much to do. His supporters were few in number and misunderstood much that He had taught them. Some had proved themselves rather unreliable. From a mere human viewpoint His mission appeared to have been a failure. Rather than received as God's Savior to man, He was for the most part being rejected by nearly everyone.

Another Agony

But we also see in the garden the spiritual agony of Jesus. He knew what awaited Him. He knew that dying on the cross was God's will. Yet, even though His human side dreaded what the next hours would bring, being forsaken, humiliated, abused, and blasphemed, He would suffer the agony of knowing that mankind was defying the Father's desire that they receive Him as His Son.

In all of this we see Jesus accepting the will of the Father that He die for the sins of all men. It was important the way He accepted it. Mark 14:36, "*And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt.*" Much is conveyed by the use of the word, "*Abba.*" It was a term used by a young child to his father. We have no equivalent in translation. It is not an absolute synonym to the word father because it carries the idea of trust, confidence, dependence, and a close warm association. Jesus speaks to God the Father in such terms. It is akin to our word "daddy" but has much greater reverence in it than does "daddy."

The essence and importance of Gethsemane is the feature that Christ said, "*Thy will be done.*" How did He mean it? Was it with abject surrender as might characterize a beaten man who resisted all that he could but no longer? Was it as one who was weary and was just giving up the fight, realizing it was useless to continue the battle? Was it with resentment, bitterness, and uselessness, as if He was saying with resignation, "All right! Have it your way!" We think not. Jesus was neither beaten nor bitter. He was not weary of doing the Father's will, nor was He using sarcasm.

Furthermore, it is important that we recognize it was not stated with rising rebellion and feelings of betrayal. He submitted to the will of God and so expressed His willingness in terms of love, trust, confidence, considering the things taking place as part of God's plan to accomplish for man what man otherwise could never enjoy. This was a giant step in the coming of God's scheme of redemption for man. He was willing to be a part and do His part. For this cause He had come.

He Is Taken

Soon the quietness of the garden was broken by the trampling feet of the mob, the clanking of armor, the shouting of men. They had come to arrest Jesus as if He was a violent criminal. Even the manner of seizure of Christ was designed to humiliate Him.

The drama of the moment begins to unfold. First, there

was the traitor's kiss, an act usually of affection and friendly greeting, but on this occasion a sinister betrayal. Then there was Peter's desperate defensive action, using his sword to cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, which Jesus restored. Then Jesus was arrested and began the walk back into the city of Jerusalem to the series of trials that proved to be mockery of justice.

In the actions of Jesus in the garden certain things are quite clear and we want to be impressed by them. Jesus went to His death voluntarily. He could have called twelve legions of angels to provide for His immediate protection (Matthew 25:53), but He did not. When He asked for whom the mob sought, and being told that they sought Jesus, He had to urge them to do their dirty work and take Him (John 18:4-9). Jesus willingly allowed His enemies to take Him. He willingly laid down His life (Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 5:25; John 10:17,18). He gave Himself, not as a victim as much as a willing servant to Deity. His sacrifice was motivated by love for humanity.

Prophecy Completed

In all of this Jesus saw the fulfillment of prophesy. Even this reflected His respect for the Word of God. Matthew 26:54, "*But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled?*" He desired that the promise of God be accomplished at whatever cost to Himself. It was not that events were out of control. Regardless of how it appeared on the surface, God was very much in control. His plan was being unfolded precisely as He had determined.

The time of the Garden of Gethsemane was a time of great paradox, things seeming to be going in opposite directions. "*This is your hour and the power of darkness,*" said Jesus. These events were leading to the cross. While it was a time when evil seemed to be prevailing, it was also a time when an essential part of God's plan for saving man from evil was being done. At the same time we see displayed the sinfulness of men and the love of God. As Peter preached, Acts 2:23, "*Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.*" All of it was according to God's foreknowledge. But the

actions of evil were a part of it as these people, by lawless hands, took Him in the garden.

Does it now become clear that Jesus would not defend Himself? Seeing this, the disciples forsook Him and fled. But so be it! This was something He had to do alone and He alone could do it. He had reached the point of no return and He was committed to go through with it. This was a major portion of His mission, the end of the road, and He had to go the rest of the way. Nobody else was qualified to be the propitiation for the sins of humanity.

Tragedy

One thing remains. Even when we see the tragedy of the garden presented in its blackest and most bitter context, one abiding impressions remains. Jesus was actually taking a step toward His ultimate victory. He was never out of control of the situation. What seemed to be launching His defeat was but another move toward total defeat of all evil. It had been rightly summarize that what Jesus did and what He endured was not a retreat in defeat, but victory, not only for Himself, but for us all.

The story of the arrest of Jesus as if He was a criminal was not one being unwillingly haled into judgement and death. It is rather the story that tells of a willing sacrifice of One who, of His own free will, laid down His life that men might have forgiveness of sins and hope of heave. This is that which is the true meaning of the sinister hour in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Paul later said, "*We preach Christ and him crucified...*" (First Corinthians 1:23). Galatians 6:14, "*But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...*" This is what this lesson attempts to do also. This is the message concerning Christ and the world must hear it. It is the prelude to the cross, the place where His saving blood was shed, the blood that is reached when we obey the gospel, being baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4), where His blood was shed (John 19:34), and our soul is washed clean by the Lord.

* * * * *

Virtue

The introduction of the lesson is Second Peter 1:1-12. There we find the English word "virtue." It appears seven times in the New Testament, but not always with the same meaning and idea. It is sometimes difficult in translating from one language to another to find an exact equivalent except to use more than one word. The Greek language, the language of the New Testament, has the capacity to present shades of meanings to ideas that are not always easily duplicated in the English. Such is true of the word translated "*virtue.*"

Three times it comes from the Greek word *dunamis* and means power (Mark 5:30; Luke 6:19; 8:46), such as is used with reference to the healing power of Christ. Four times it comes from *arere* and carries two primary meanings. Second Peter 1:3, '*Called us to glory and virtue*" or as the ASV renders it, "*by his own glory and virtue,*" referring to the excellence of God. *Arete* is also found in First Peter 2:9 and translated "*praises.*" "*Show forth praises of him who hath called you.*"

Similarly, it is in Philippians 4:8, "*If there be any virtue...*" and means moral excellence, without imperfection, but goodness and absolute purity.

Twice we find "*virtue*" in our text, Second Peter 1:5. Here it refers to a quality of character to be added in the growth of a Christian. This has reference to a quality of man, not the excellence of God. It is part of the divine nature of which man is capable of partaking. Man does not have moral excellence nor sinless perfection. The term here is more specific and limited. It is listed in the catalog of qualities that are to be nurtured, cultivated, and developed in growth as a child of God. It is as if the Holy Spirit was saying this quality is vital to the ability to develop the other graces listed. It is stated to be necessary to be fruitful in Christ and to prevent apostasy. It is best understood as moral courage.

Just how do we define moral courage? We can use two methods to learn its definition. (1) Cite examples and

demonstrations of it; (2) or express verbal explanations of its nature.

Old Testament Examples

The first example we cite is that of Joseph when he refused the advances of Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:8,9). Joseph knew the risk to his position in Potiphar's household regardless of his decision. Yet, he fled from the presence of temptation and had the courage to reject sin. To be sure, he suffered much because of his decision. He was falsely accused of doing the very thing he refused to do and was sent to prison. But in face of evil he chose to do what was right before God.

Moses refused to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter, resisting the temptation to be rich, powerful, and rejected the pleasures of sin for a season. He defended a fellow Israelite when he was being persecuted by a taskmaster. He determined to count himself among God's people rather than among the Egyptians. His choice was not as easy one, but it was a deliberate one which was motivated by his faith. He acted contrary to what many would consider in the best interest of his worldly existence. But he displayed moral courage such as was necessary for him to qualify for the role God had for him in life. He exercised the power of choice and decided to do right and bear whatever consequences would come upon him for his righteous choice. This was a demonstration of virtue.

Whereas Joseph and Moses showed virtue because of what they refused, others showed virtue by what they did. Consider Joshua and Caleb, two of the spies Moses sent into Canaan, Although the other ten spies resigned to disobey God and encourage Israel not to enter the land, these two stood firm in faith, resisting the pressure of their peers and fellow countrymen, and urged the people forward. Sadly, they were not successful but they had courage that with God's help they could take the land. Consider also other men such as David when he went before Goliath, or Daniel in his training when he purposed in his heart not to defile himself with food set before him that was unlawful for him to eat, or even when he refused to abandon prayer to God in spite of the

king's decree and was cast into the lion's den. Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they faced the fiery furnace rather than bow before idols. Was not Elijah a character of virtue at Mount Carmel and his contest with the false prophets of Baal? What of Esther who risked her life to preserve Israel? She said , "*If I perish, I perish.*" But she was determined to do her duty. It is virtue, moral courage, to do what you must do and ought to do.

Others With Virtue

In the New Testament we read of such men as Peter and John Mark, who at first lacked moral courage at a crucial time in life (Mark 14:68-71; 51,52), one denying Christ and the other fleeing from Him. But later in their lives there is no question that they possessed this great virtue (Acts 4:19,20; Second Timothy 4:11), and demonstrated their willingness to serve the Lord faithfully at all costs. It required moral courage for Paul to bring alms from Gentiles to Jerusalem as he planned in face of prophecies that warned he would be seized by his enemies (Acts 20:22,23; 21:10-13). The expectation of capture was realized and he was arrested, having to be rescued by authorities lest he be killed by the mob. He became the object of an assassination plot, imprisoned, tried, and had to appeal to Caesar for his life.

The Virtue of Christ

But the supreme example of moral courage is Jesus Christ. He endured such suffering in order to do the Father's will. Matthew 26:39, "*If it be thy will, let this cup pass from me... nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt.*" The Bible furnishes us many examples of the very quality we have under consideration.

Courage is not the exact opposite of the presence of fear. Courage often rises in the presence of fear and in spite of fear. All people realize that self-preservation is a powerful motivation of man. We fear what threatens our welfare and will do what we have to do to protect life. Fear can be very discomforting. But it can also serve as a blessing by encouraging us to be cautious, diligent, calling us to action, and is often a prelude to greatness.

Fear can be turned into an asset. Courage is that quality of facing that which may strike fear in our heart but doing what we ought in spite of that fear. People often do brave deeds, not because of the absence of fear, but in spite of fear. They do them anyway because they face fear but overcome it with courage.

Provides Power

Courage or virtue is the quality that enables us to encounter moral challenges to our convictions and not yield or bow to the temptations and onslaughts of Satan against our soul. Virtue will cause us to resist the pressure to conform to evil, and even stand alone, if needs be, for that which is right, and retain Christlike purity and stedfastness in spite of what any and all others may do, or even think about it.

Virtue keeps on a level of spiritual equilibrium and stability. We will not be tossed to and fro by whatever crosses our path. We can face temptations that otherwise would cause frustration except we have the moral stamina to defend ourselves against it. Virtue means to know what God expects and then doing what God expects. To just know but not do as God expects produces guilt, shame, and has even driven people over the precipice of mental and emotional breakdown, even suicide, like Judas. Virtue means "*having done all, to stand*" (Ephesians 6:13). Let us consider some very practical matters regarding virtue.

Practical Applications

Virtue enables the young to say **NO** to youthful lusts. It equips the business man to deal honestly when it may be more materially profitable to deal otherwise. Virtue gives us strength to stand when tempted to worldly conduct such as dancing, drinking of alcoholic beverages, stealing, using drugs illegally, lying, gossiping, being immoral sexually. Virtue prevents one from compromising timidly his convictions and surrendering to the wishes of the crowd around him. It assists the sinner to confess his faith in Christ in a world that is hostile to Christ. Virtue will guide the Christian to walk worthy of his vocation. It will cause

elders, preachers, and teachers to defend and uphold truth against all the invasions of error and digression either to the left or to the right, regardless of personal consequences. Virtue will provoke brethren to seek and hold to the "old paths" in the midst of the storms of innovations, gimmicks, and newness for the sake of newness. It will encourage the parent to resist the temptation to be lenient, permissive, and indulgent when love, discipline, and firmness are in order. Virtue will fortify one to meet the fiery darts of ridicule, rejection, and insult in order to remain faithful to "*thus saith the Lord.*" Virtue is to have the power to do right even when nobody else is watching to either praise or condemn what you do. Virtue is a mark of spiritual maturity.

A Quality of Growth

Brethren can help one another in the battle we all must fight, this war between good and evil. We can bear one another burdens (Galatians 6:2). But ultimately, we each one must grow, mature, cultivate and develop personal virtue, moral courage, for ourselves if we are to make our calling and election sure. The lack of virtue will produce spiritual blindness and weakness, make us to be unfruitful and barren, and will leave us unsure, unsettled, and vulnerable to the wiles of Satan, more subject to falling away into condemnation. We can see the wisdom in the admonition, "*add... virtue.*"

* * * * *

God in Genesis 1:1

"*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*"

Most everyone recognizes this as the opening statement of the Bible. We contend that it is a timely truth, an understanding of which would eliminate vain speculations about the world, mankind, and Deity.

This statement not only gives answer to the question of our origin and from whence came the universe, but it

also reveals certain qualities of the nature of Deity that we wish to observe. In answering the question regarding the source of all things, while realizing the principle of cause and effect to be without repeal, we also recognize that even in the Bible there is no detailed account of just how everything took place. We have to admit that Scripture does not set out first to prove there is the existence of God, but begins on the premise that God is. This is not to say that we cannot find evidence of God and by that evidence know the reality and existence of God. It is simply to say that the Biblical account does not satisfy all the curiosities and questions that people can raise about origins. The brevity of the account does not allow that. The account was not intended to provide a detailed record of every little matter that we might wish to know. It is simply a historical account to tell us from where all thing come. Neither is it to be considered a comprehensive picture of all of the nature and characteristics of God.

We are persuaded that once a person accepts and understands what the Genesis record conveys, such as in Genesis 1:1, he will have no problem whatever with any of the rest of the Biblical revelation. The verse that opens the Scriptures is a crucial, pivotal passage, even from the very start of the divinely given record.

Eternal Nature

This verse declares the eternal nature of Deity. While time concerns itself with specific points, it had a beginning. But before there was the accounting of time, before the beginning of time and the universe, there is God. It is appropriate to mention here, as we shall on several occasions throughout the lesson, that man's inability to fully comprehend the nature of Deity should not cause us to despair, but we should accept and expect a lack of comprehension because Deity is infinite and mankind is limited. Due to our own nature we cannot fully grasp the nature of God.

God identifies Himself in Scripture, "*I am that I am.*" This means He is the self-existing One. While man can be understood in terms of time, space, matter, stops and starts as well as spirit, such things are of no

consequence concerning God except God is spirit. This is one of the reasons Deity shall forever be beyond the full grasp of man's knowledge.

About "Created"

There is significance in the word *"created"* which is translated from the Hebrew term *bara*. Concerning the origin of this universe this term is never used with reference to the actions of men but only with regard to what Deity has done. It conveys the idea of bringing something into existence from nothing. In other words, the universe was not created from existing matter. Before God created there was no matter. It is interesting to remember that science studies matter that already exists. It contributes invaluable information concerning the laws that govern the operation of matter. Nonetheless, there was a cause for its existence and that Cause is God, not previously existing material. By laws called the laws of thermodynamics scientists have proved that matter is not eternal in nature. Matter did not always exist. But Scripture tells us the origin of existing matter and that God brought things into being from no previously existing matter. Mind existed because God existed, but not matter.

His Power

From this creation account we can determine two very important attributes of God: (1) the power of God; and (2) the wisdom of God. By the power of His Word this universe was brought into existence. He spoke and it came into being according to His will. Such power is beyond man's comprehension. We are told by scientists that energy only changes form but is not being continually created. So all the energy that has ever been expended, or shall be, was wrapped in the creative power of God at the beginning. The Scripture says that *"God said... and it was so."*

As we read verses three through thirty-one of Genesis one we have as detailed account as is available to us about the creation of this world in which we live. Some criticize this record by saying it is not scientific. If by that they means that the record was not written to

provide a scientific account of the origin, that is correct. We have already noted that. But if by this criticism they mean that what is revealed is against the findings of science, we forcefully deny that is true. Those acquainted with both science and the Bible readily affirm that only Biblical ignorance or prejudice would lead to such a comment. Many critics simply do not do their homework and refuse to make fair and honest investigations. The fact is that there is nothing in the Genesis record, or any other portion of Scripture, that contradicts what can be proved and demonstrated by science. Quite the contrary is true. The Genesis record not only harmonizes with everything men have been able to prove, verify, and demonstrate, but it offers the only consistent and scientifically plausible explanation for much of the phenomenon that scientists have observed about the world.

His Wisdom

The Genesis account also reveals the wisdom of God. When one considers the design, complexity, harmony, precision, immensity of this universe and observes the many, many interdependent systems that must have come into existence simultaneously for any of them to exist, he can see why the psalmist declared that this universe declares the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). He is forced to acknowledge the evidence of mind, a designer, a planner, and an overseer in bringing the world into being. What knowledge it took to fashion such a world as ours! Seeing how intricate and systematic our world is, one must simply defy and deny irrefutable evidence to contend that it all came into being by chance, by accident, as a result of totally naturalistic events. Such a conclusion is irrational. No person in his right mind would even contend that the inventions of men "just happened." How much less sensible is it to contend that the entire immeasurable universe came into existence that way! It only shows to what nonsensical persuasions many will go in their attempt to remove themselves from an accountability to God. Not wanting to be held responsible for their actions, wishing to escape being amenable to anything or anybody, they seek to deny even the existence of God, seeking to explain the

existence of the universe in manners beyond all good sense and evidence.

Plural

The noun "*God*" and the verb "*created*" tells us something of Deity. God (Elohim) is a plural noun while created (bara) is singular. Ordinarily in grammar, the noun that is the subject of a sentence must agree in number with the verb that is the predicate. But not so here, and as we continue our study of the Bible we can see why. Even at the beginning of the Bible we have the strong suggestion of a truth of which we learn more fully in later passages, namely, the plurality of persons in the Godhead. Admittedly, the nature of the Godhead (Deity) is not easily grasped, explained, or set in totally proper perspective. Again, this is due to our own limitations. But the fact of there being three persons in the one Godhead is so repeatedly affirmed that can deny it only if he denies Biblical revelation. All three, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, exist as one Deity, one God, one Godhead (Godhood). Each played a role and was included in the creation of the heaven and earth. They worked in total unity, oneness, and cooperation.

Defeats Atheism

The contentions of skeptics and unbelievers are silenced in the very first verse of the Bible. They are not silenced in the sense that they will cease their attack and skepticism. But their their ammunition is taken from them from the start. They are silenced in the sense that no man, standing upon the evidence, can overcome what Genesis 1:1 declares.

This verse defeats the doctrine of polytheism, the idea that there are many gods. While there are three persons in the one Godhead, there is one Godhead, one God, one Deity. The doctrine of polytheism is rendered null and void in light of the unity and cooperation of the Godhead in purpose, nature, and action.

This verse is a crushing blow to materialism that contends that matter is eternal and that somehow, someway, at some time, everything that is just happened

by chance to come into existence, by accident and good fortune through natural processes and organic evolution. Genesis 1:1 teaches that matter had a beginning and that God is eternal; that what exists does so by design, intent, and has meaning and purpose. Genesis 1:1 gives life meaning and purpose while a denial of this passage deprives mankind of any hope, reason to be, mission, destiny, or anything else that would lift him above just another hunk of material. Without Genesis 1:1 there is no dignity of human life.

This verse defeats the doctrine of pantheism, which contends that everything that exists is God. Pantheists say there is no personal living God who cares, loves, knows, saves. They say all the world is God. Many of today's "wacko" environmentalists are pantheists. That God created everything is true. That the creation is a manifestation of God is also true. Pantheists contend that everything is to be worshipped as God. This is the basis for the idolatries of mankind making the creature rather than the Creator the object of worship.

"Un-get-over-able"

Skeptics can never get over Genesis 1:1. It stands as an insurmountable obstacle to their unbelief. Neither by reasoning, philosophies, theories, or imaginations can they set Genesis 1:1 aside. On the other hand, as we have said, once one accepts this verse, things take on a new and radiant meaning. We can see the power, wisdom, and love of God and He can easily be believed and reverenced. His revelation of Himself has been accomplished through the coming of Jesus Christ to this world. He came to establish fellowship with sinful mankind, providing forgiveness of sins that only sets up a barrier between man and his Creator. The revelation of God, which begins at Genesis 1:1 declares His love, grace, mercy, justice, wrath, and plan of redemption for man. For man to benefit from this revelation He must come to God through the Christ in love, faith, and obedience.

* * * * *

A Godly Life

A reading of the entire second chapter of Titus is the preparation needed for this lesson. It is within these passages that we find the apostolic admonition and teaching that Christians should live godly lives. So much of the New Testament is written to people who have already become Christians. Many passages are intended to inform Christians how to be what they have become, how to live in this life in a fashion and after a manner that God expects and that will bring them blessedness. An emphasis upon proper living now in no way detracts from the theme of life after death and an eternity in heaven. The two worlds are inseparately tied together. This life is the time to prepare for the next. The New Testament enjoins and encourages as well as describes and defines godly living. Titus chapter two is just such a chapter.

Paul wrote to Titus, one who had been converted by Paul, and had been Paul's helper. Titus had been left in Crete as Paul continued on his journeys. While there Titus was to strengthen the church, get it organized according to God's pattern, and also teach brethren sound doctrine, including doctrine relating to living godly lives. Part of sound doctrine emphasizes godly living.

Sound

For doctrine to be sound means it is pure, healthy, wholesome, and accurate. Doctrine means teaching. Sound doctrine is the teaching of God's Word on any subject that is taught the way God has revealed it. Among the things Titus was told was, "*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*" Such teaching is a part of the system of grace and the way of salvation. The message was to be taught with authority (verse 15), the authority of God, not of man.

The instructions were to different people in different periods of life and different positions in life. This would

include aged men, aged women, younger women, younger men, and servants. Other passages of Scripture are directed toward parents, children, masters, elders, teachers, and preachers. People are not always just alike, nor do they live in exactly the same circumstances. The sound doctrine of Christ, however, is directed toward each one to conform to godly living.

Godly

What does it mean to be godly? The dictionary defines it as obeying, living, fearing God, devout, religious, pious. When used as an adverb it refers to a godly manner. It is not exactly being like God, although one does imitate God when he is godly, but it is more exact in that a godly person sees and discharges his duty, respects his obligations to God and man, and does as he ought, tries to be as he ought, has a healthy reverence for that which is sacred, realizing there is "oughtness" in life. It is this quality that makes the Christian "*peculiar*" or distinctive in this world. The Christian's difference is because of the righteous life that he determines to live.

As surely as godliness is expected, it also produces blessings. At times it may bring hardship, especially at the hands of the ungodly. Second Timothy 3:10-12, "*But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea,and all that will godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*"

But First Timothy 4: 6-11, "*If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation. For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.*"

First Timothy 6:6, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*" Psalm 4:3, "*But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call unto him.*" Second Peter 2:9," *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.*"

Aged, Younger, Men, Women

The text of Titus chapter two is not just one subject. To the aged men, verse two, he says they are to be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, and in patience. Let us make two observations. Soundness is required, not only in doctrine taught, but in the activities of life. Godly living involves attitude and actions. Sound doctrine alongside unsound living is not acceptable before God.

To aged women he said, "*Likewise,*" which includes what has already been said plus behavior that becomes holiness, meaning a demeanor that is reverent, having respect for things noble, holy, sacred, and right. Holy, sanctified, set apart are synonyms. Those who are holy, or sanctified, are those who are set apart from the world of sin into the service of God. First Peter three speaks of the manner of holy women. Godly living embraces speech, habits, dress, and general conduct. Godly women will not be false accusers, making false accusations against others. Nor will they consume strong drink. Rather they are to be teachers of the good, noble, and praiseworthy things, having lived and learned what is good, informing others, especially younger women, what they have learned. The lives of godly aged women will allow others to benefit from their godly experiences in life. There is so much profit to the young who heed the counsel of the older who are godly.

To the younger women Paul taught them to be sober, love their husbands and children, be discreet, chaste, keepers (workers) at home, good, obedient to their husbands. Notice how much Paul said that relates to the domestic responsibilities in conducting the affairs of the home.

Those who study the matter and who are not dishonest and prejudiced readily recognize that the breakdown in the home and the failure of women to provide for the home first in their lives is at the tap root of much of our ills in society. While this may sound what some call chauvinistic, it is sound doctrine, and needs to be heeded. More and more of this world is recognizing this truth, thankfully. While the world would have the women who care for their home, husband, and children to be considered second class citizens and left out of the real world, God says this is part of godly living. It is something righteous, noble, and exalting. When one washes the dishes, does the housework, cares for children, maintains the home, she is serving God by serving her family and is guilty of putting first things first. We regret that even many women in the church have no respect for the teaching of God along these lines. They prefer the glamorous and popular, even when it calls them away from their primary labor of love for the Lord and family.

To the younger men Paul advised them to be soberminded (same as discreet). Why is no more said to younger men? It would be redundant to repeat the qualities of godly living to them because of the things he has already said to the former groups. What belongs to those previously taught also applied to them in their particular circumstances.

Being soberminded involves being attentive to every duty one has, whether to one's wife, children, job, earning a livelihood, paying bills, obeying laws, whatever. Many men have so glaringly failed to be godly in their family relationships, especially in the training of children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Other Matters Included

There is a false idea that prevails that godly living include religious showiness, paraded piety that is akin to Phariseeism. Godly living involves prayer, worship, Bible study, working in the vineyard, but more than these things. It includes the daily discharge of duty, even in mundane matters, relationships with others, manner

of treating other people, and whether the "golden rule" is found in one's life.

Whether words are directed to young, old, men, women, servants, masters, boys, girls, parents, children, whoever, godly living involves all of life. It is not simply a Sunday matter. Whatever one does he is always to remember he is a Christian and what he does he does before God and as a child of God. He never takes off the "Christian hat," so to speak, even though he may wear many other hats in life as well. He is first and last, always a Christian and his life should show that. Godly living involves a very personal and individual relationship between the Christian and God. It is impossible to regulate and control except by oneself. While the church must teach godly living, and discipline ungodly living, ultimately whether or not one will live a godly life depends upon his or her daily decisions and manner in each moment and in each situation.

May we, by these few remarks, be encouraged to godly living. Why? First, that the word of God be not blasphemed (verse 5). So the adversary has no evil to say of us (verse 8). But also that we may adorn (decorate) the doctrine of God our Savior (verse 10). It is not that we can improve the doctrine, but we may act so as to bring honor and provoke respect for it. We should live godly lives because of the blessed hope and eventual appearing of Christ (verse 15). Seeing how He gave Himself for us, is it not befitting that our lives should be lived for Him? Romans 12:1,2, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*"

Let us be said of us, Colossians 3:3, "*...your life is hid with Christ.*"

* * * * *

They Understood It



When I hear some preachers today talk about people not needing to know why they are being baptized, that any reason is acceptable, I ask, "What did those taught by Paul understand?" The first verses in Roman six tells something they understood and we must also.

They knew continuing in sin was incompatible with being a Christian.They knew they were baptized " *into Christ,*" as also taught in Galatians 3:27. They knew those " *in Christ*" were not condemned (Romans 8:1), that salvation was " *in Christ,*" and "*in Christ*" is where all spiritual blessings are found (Ephesians 1:4). They knew the connection beteen baptism and the death of Christ because they were baptized into His death. They were baptized to be saved. They knew " *newness of life*" began then.

Some are so anxious to fellowship human denominations that they will accept denominational baptisms that are not related to what the Bible teaches is the purpose of baptism.

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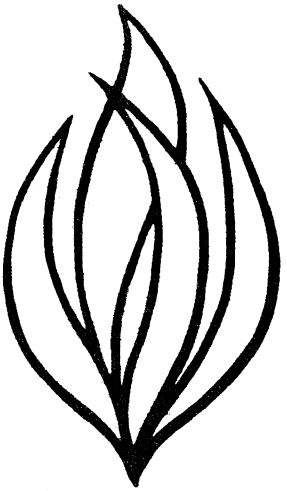

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVI *James W. Boud* **NUMBER 7**

The Unchanging Christ

Hebrews 13:8, "*Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.*"

It is vital that we understand our subject. We are discussing a person, a very unique person. We are talking about the second person of the Godhead, but in a very distinctive role and relationship. We are not only concerned with a person but with an office, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah.

Jesus is one of the Godhead, composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. But the second person of the Godhead has not always had the same role in the divine scheme of things. He has not always been Jesus. He has not always been the Christ. He has not always been Emmanuel, God in the flesh (Matthew 1:23).

When we discuss Jesus the Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever, we are discussing the second person of the Godhead in that role when He was born in Bethlehem, lived in Palestine, died at Calvary, and was raised from the tomb to ascend into heaven. We have in mind what some have called "the historic Jesus." We are not talking about some mythical figure, some imagined being, some subjective concept of a man. We are talking about a real, actual, historical character that walked among men, whose name was Jesus, and whose office was and is the Christ. In the words of Peter on Pentecost when he was identifying Him, "*that same Jesus,*" is the same yesterday, today, and forever, starting with the time of His fleshly birth by the virgin Mary. It is not that the second person of the Godhead had His beginning with that birth, but that the entrance of the second person of the Godhead into this world as Jesus the Christ began with the miraculous conception and birth by a virgin. This is the Jesus of whom we speak as being the unchanging Christ.

Context

The context of this phrase is important to our understanding of its significance. This statement is an explosive passage of praise discussing certain things that had changed, such the law, a change in the priesthood, a change in the covenant, and change of authority.

The book of Hebrews is a book that encourages Christians to faithfulness and stedfastness. It gives a warning against apostasy and falling away. Christians were being subjected to teaching by Judaistic teachers who were imposing the old law of Moses upon people, refusing to accept the fact that the old law had been nailed to the cross, taken out of the way, having been fulfilled (Colossians 2:14; Matthew 5:17; Ephesians 2:15). Hebrews offers several irrefutable reasons why one should not turn back to that which no longer is God's will for anyone, not even the Jews to whom that law was exclusively given. In view of all that had changed, Christians should look to One who has not changed.

The statement concerning Jesus is a source of comfort that can be derived from the unchangeable in the midst of what is constantly changing. It identifies Him as that which cannot be moved, a vantage point of guidance, a "Star" by which we can locate ourselves and our relationship with God much in the same way a sailor can locate his position with a sextant, an instrument used to determine the longitude and latitude by the stars.

Contrast

This affirmation about Jesus the Christ is in contrast to the changing law, the old law having ceased and passed away. It is a contrast between Jesus the Christ and the fickleness and instability of mankind. It is a statement that tells us, "Here is One on whom you can depend." This is the foundation and reason for our faithfulness. It is the motivation for our "keeping on, keeping on," for we can depend upon Him, so should we be dependable, faithful, loyal, stedfast, unmoveable, unchangeable in our service to God through the unchanging Christ.

Let us consider the alternative to an unchanging Christ. What if He was an ever-shifting, altering, wavering, vacillating Christ? Could we have confidence in Him? Could we know in what to have confidence? Would His Word be reliable? How could we know what pleased and displeased Him from one moment to the next? If He was unstable, here today and gone tomorrow, would not His will be nothing more than a "maybe so"? Would it not make the honorable effort of the restoration of the New Testament faith both a futile and useless effort, as well as an impossible task? Restore what? Shall we restore Him yesterday, today, or as He might be later? What a confused dilemma for those who would be His disciples if He was anything other than the unchanging Christ! On what basis could Peter affirm *"that the word of the Lord endureth forever"* (First Peter 1:25) except He is the unchanging Christ.

His Deity

Hebrews 13:8 declares and affirms the Deity of Jesus. Immutability, an unchanging nature, belongs to Deity. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of light, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* (James 1:17). *"For I am the Lord, I change not."* (Malachi 3:6).

Paul wrote concerning Christ, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"* (Colossians 2:9). Dispensations come and go, Patriarchal, Mosaic, and now the Christian age, *"the last days."* Generations come and go. Preachers come and go. Rulers come and go. Even while on the scene people are constantly changing. But Christ remains without alteration. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, *"which is, and which was, and which is come"* (Revelation 1:4).

Hebrews 13:8 dictates the sufficiency, adequacy, and completeness of Jesus the Christ. He *"filleth all in all"* Ephesians 1:23). *"For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell"* (Colossians 1:19). The verse affirms His perfection. Any change, however slight, would be to mar and blemish the Perfect One. There is nothing lacking, nothing needed, no addition or subtraction to be made concerning Jesus the Christ.

Hebrews 13:8 shows the relevancy of Christ for our day. He was not just a first century character and teacher. The way of Christ is not irrelevant for our times. Unfortunately, His way is too often untried and not followed. But He remains as the model for man since Pentecost, for the present, and for all time that may remain. He is our example (First Peter 2:21). His rules, His standards, His commands, His doctrine, all apply to every generation. What a marvel!

The Christ that lived, and arose from the dead, lives even now. Our hope is not in a dead martyr. A Christian and a Mohammedan were comparing their faiths. "We have a shrine, a tomb, of our founder, where we can worship," said the Mohammedan. "We have no shrine or tomb of our Lord, retorted the Christian, "because He is not dead. "*But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept*" (First Corinthians 15:20). "*Knowing that the Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him*" (Romans 6:9).

The second person of the Godhead, taking on the form of flesh, assumed a role, station, and relationship of distinction. He became man's only Savior, and will always be the only Savior (Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

Priest and Advocate

He is a priest, yea, our High Priest and Advocate (Hebrews 3:1; First John 2:1). He is the one mediator between God and man (First Timothy 2:5). He intercedes for us (Romans 8:34), and even now lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

This same Jesus is the Christ and Lord (Acts 2:36), and shall ever be. He is the standard of judgment (Acts 17:31; Second Timothy 4:1; John 12:48). Hence, His authority is the eternal authority, and all are accountable unto God through Him. He reigns as King, and of His kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:32,33), but it shall be delivered to the Father when He returns (First Corinthians 15:24).

The unchanging Christ has the same attitude toward the lost, seeking to save (Luke 19:10). He hates every false way as does His Father because false ways destroy those He loves. He considers those who do His Father's will to be His family (Matthew 12:48). That has not changed and will not. He praises the good and condemns the evil. There is no variableness in this with Him.

We must note His unchanging character. While on earth He had a reputation among some as an evil doer, blasphemer, even a glutton and winebibber. But this mistaken reputation did not affect His real character. While on earth He showed us the Father (John 14:1-6). He was humble, loving, angry at evil, compassionate toward the unfortunate, diligent in work, with unparalleled respect for the Word of God, sympathetic to the bereaved, forgiving to the penitent, obedient to the Father's will, and uncompromising in nature. Such He was. Such He is. Such He will ever be.

Some Change

The unchanging Christ of Hebrews 13:8 does not mean there has been no change in His method of operation. He was once in the flesh, but He no longer walks in that fashion among men. Once He worked miracles to convince others of His identity. Now He works through the inspired testimony to that fact (John 20: 30,31; Romans 10:17). Once He revealed His will through men that were inspired of the Holy Spirit to speak as His ambassadors, as He promised the apostles (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15). Now His will is embodied in the inspired Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

The unchangeableness of Christ is a fundamental plank in the foundation of our hope for eternal life with God. Our hope cannot be dashed away because He neither alters nor wavers in His will. Our hope is the "*anchor of the soul*" (Hebrews 6:19). Of what value is an anchor that is constantly moving about, changing positions, flowing with the current? Our anchor of hope can be no more stable than the One in whom we place our confidence.

Our protection is assured, for He has said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*" (Hebrews 13:5). By His own

word He has assured us of His providence (Matthew 6:33). We have a Lord who is trustworthy, dependable, and faithful (First Corinthians 10:13). We can count on Him to be where He said He would be, do what He said He would do, be what He said He would be.

We today have no reason to be envious of those of the first century who walked and talked with Him in the flesh. Jesus the Christ is as much our companion in life, our benefactor, our source of blessings, as He was to those of yesteryear. And He will be the same to those of days that may yet come if they will follow Him in truth.

What we know Him to be comes from inspired revelation. This is that which He shall ever be. "*This same Jesus*" that was crucified and was declared to be God's Son, both Lord and Christ, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Thanks to God that it is so!

* * * * *

A Dedicated People

For the text, the reader is asked to first read the entire fourth chapter of the book of Acts. It is from the information in this chapter and the report about various people here that we take our lesson on dedicated people.

Having read the Scriptures, let us ask, "What is the meaning of dedication?" To dedicate means to give yourself to some purpose, or some person without reservation. It means to be set aside for a purpose or a cause. It is to be consecrated. We read of people being dedicated in the Old Testament to certain purposes. "*Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the Lord; come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the Lord*" (Second Chronicles 29:31). These were people who had been set aside for specific duties and services before God.

The idea of dedication is closely related to sanctification, being set apart through cleansing. Paul carried the idea further when he spoke of the people of God being a "*peculiar people*" (Titus 2:14). Those who are of Christ are peculiar in that they are distinctive, people who have committed themselves to the service of the Lord.

Again, is not this the general concept of the church? The word that is translated "*church*" is from the Greek word "ekklesia," which means "the called out." The church is composed of people, but a very special people. They are the saved. They are those who have heard the call of God from His Word and responded to that call, being set apart from their sins and the evil ways of the world and into the service of God under the authority and merit of Christ. They are dedicated to the cause of Christ and for the purpose for which He lived and died.

To be dedicated refers to an attitude of heart that expresses itself in deeds. The dedication may well have some outward form of notation, such as when one is dedicated to a task, but the dedication begins in the heart. It conveys itself aloud through deeds of love, obedience, service, and loyalty.

The purpose of our lesson is to highlight the loyalty and dedication of the early disciples of Christ as is recorded in this fourth chapter of Acts. These people serve as an example for us. They not only had a dedicated heart, but they demonstrated their dedicated heart by what they did and did not do.

Peter and John

In this chapter we read of Peter and John. They were busy preaching the gospel of Christ. Their preaching got them into much difficulty, however. They were persecuted, intimidated, threatened, physically abused, yet they remained courageous and obedient to the commission given them. "*But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*" (Acts 4:19,20).

Being let go by their captors, they rejoined the other apostles (verses 23-31). They were neither haughty, vindictive, fearful, nor cringing and complaining of their situation and problems. These early Christians were united, thankful, trusting, and full of praise to God in spite of the harassment and persecution they suffered. Their dedication is seen in their determination not to be turned aside from their righteous mission. "*And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.*" (Acts 4:29).

We see in this account not only the dedication of Peter and John, but the whole company. "*And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.*" (Acts 4:32-35).

The dedication of these disciples was in part due to the dedication of the apostles. Surely they were affected by the hardships being suffered by the apostles, but they were also influenced by their own dedication to Christ. It was not safe, let alone popular, to be a Christian. But this did not cause them to draw back from the truth. They only expanded their concern for each other and the lost. Look again at verse thirty-four and thirty-five and see how they were dedicated to the cause of Christ and to each other. If the apostles had shriveled at this time, we wonder what might have been the history of the early church. But all stayed together and helped each other. Nobody lacked anything that was needful. Those that had sufficiency shared with those that lacked.

Christianity Is Not Communism

This generosity has been misunderstood by some as communism. But when one studies what is actually

revealed, he is not amazed because of it being communism, which it is not, but because of the love in the hearts of these dedicated people. This was not a compulsory action, but a voluntary one, as is made evident when we read Acts 5:4. The land and possessions belonged to each one and each one had the power of its use and distribution. It was not a selling off of everything and then providing an equal distribution, but each received as he had need. This is a far cry from being a parallel to a civil government enforcing the taking from the "have's" and giving to the "have not's." There was still the respect for the right of ownership. But there was also a recognition of the duty of stewardship and fellowship. They were motivated by unity and love for each other (verse 32). They were not content to live in word only, but also in deed. "*But whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*" (First John 3:17,18). James wrote, "*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works and I will show thee my faith by my works.*" (James 2:14-18). Their actions reflected their dedication to Christ and to others who belonged to Christ.

In the judgment scene presented in Matthew twenty-five, who was it that received the rewards and heard the words, "*Well done,*" except those who had fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, provided for the prisoner and stranger, given water to the thirsty? This all is a manifestation of genuine dedication to the cause of Christ.

Barnabas

Let us also focus attention on the dedication of one

named Barnabas. For some reason this man is singled out in this account. We can only speculate why that might be and this would likely be unprofitable. But he was called the son of consolation or exhortation, which indicates concern and a compassion he had for those who were in need of assistance, materially and spiritually. He sold what he had for the benefit of others.

But the dedication of Barnabas is also evidenced by other events of which we read in Scripture concerning him outside of this chapter. After the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, when no other would extend fellowship to him, Barnabas did. Others were afraid of him and feared him because of his reputation as a persecutor. They could not believe such as one as Saul would actually now be one of their brethren. But Barnabas was convinced of the genuineness of his conversion, brought him to the apostles, convinced them of his sincerity and validity as a brother. "*But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had boldly preached at Damascus in the name of Jesus.*" (Acts 9:27). That was a good day's work to the credit of the dedicated Barnabas.

When the church in Jerusalem heard the gospel had been taken to the Gentiles in Antioch of Syria, the brethren sent Barnabas to assist those new brethren (Acts 11: 22-24). As their work progressed, Barnabas left for Tarsus to secure Saul (Paul) for further work together. They worked as a team in Antioch. "*And when he found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*" (Acts 11:26).

The joint labors of Barnabas and Saul extended to taking collections from Antioch to Jerusalem in the time of famine in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). That he was chosen for such a work indicates the confidence others had in him and how they recognized his integrity, his devotion to the cause of Christ, his love for brethren, and his concern for the needy.

Barnabas is one of those doubly outstanding characters of which we read in the New Testament in the days of the early church. Probably we all would have to improve considerably to measure up to his great stature as a Christian.

Barnabas and Paul

The work of Barnabas and Paul included the first missionary journey that included at first John Mark, who became the source of contention between Barnabas and Paul later (Acts 13:2,3). They were together in success as well as the hazards of that journey. They endured opposition from the sorcerer, Elymas, persecution to the point that Paul was stoned and left for dead, and even a misdirected praise of them as if they were gods.

When Judaizing teachers from Jerusalem came to Antioch and created confusion and division by insisting that Gentiles had to conform to certain Jewish laws and traditions before they could be counted a Christians, demanding circumcision, Paul and Barnabas withstood them. We must wonder what might have been done to the truth if they had not stood as they did. Finally, it was decided to put a stop to that kind of heresy by going to the source from which such false teaching sprang. It was decided by the church at Antioch to send brethren to Jerusalem and clarify the matter so that false teaching could be terminated. Barnabas was selected to go with Paul. He took a leading part in the discussions that transpired. Obviously, he was a man known for his knowledge of the truth, his determination to stand for it, and fight for it, his soundness in the faith, his overall dedication to the faith of Jesus Christ.

Later when he and Paul disagreed over taking John Mark on a second missionary journey, his dedication was evident. He saw in Mark what potential was there and would not surrender to Paul's wishes concerning him. He persisted in his work of preaching the gospel, taking Mark and going again to Cyprus. Personality disagreements did not affect his dedication to the truth or his duty. It is ironic that he, rather than Paul, proved

to be right about the usefulness and worthiness of Mark. Even Paul later was convinced of it.

Little wonder that the cause of Christ grew and was defended and the gospel preached everywhere with such dedication as these early disciples demonstrated. It takes dedication to be a faithful Christian. It is an essential element in establishing and maintaining the cause of truth, in facing opposition, temptation, discouragement. digressions, perils from within and without. The dedication we all should have is expressed in Paul's writing of First Corinthians 15:58, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*"

A more noble cause never existed than New Testament Christianity, saving the lost, bringing praise and glory to God. As we reflect on the dedication of these people of chapter four of Acts, let us also resolve that we shall strive to be equally dedicated, supportive, active, aggressive, determined, and faithful.

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Sin and Its Consequences

The history of people, even the writings of men, plus the Bible speaks so often of sin. What man might think of sin is of some concern, but our interest must be what God's Word says on the subject.

The very first sermon I tried to preach was entitled as this sermon. There were eight people present and I was "ready" and even now have before me the outline that I used. At this writing that was nearly forty-three years ago, back in June, 1952. What is interesting to me is that not one point of truth has had to be "updated" since that first sermon, although I hope the manner of delivery

may have changed somewhat for the better. J. Roy Vaughan helped me prepare this lesson and with the encouragement of others I embarked upon a lifetime of preaching . My thanks to brother Vaughan.

Definition

What is sin? Many define sin as nothing more than a mistake that is not of very great consequence, or possibly poor judgment in some matter. Some even contend that sin is just a relic from ancient times and superstitions, not much worse than bad manners. But God's Word gives us at least four specific definitions of sin, and compiling them we have what God says about it.

First John 3:4 teaches that sin is lawlessness, a transgression of the law, having reference to God's law. To transgress means to cut across limits, lacking respect for the authority of rules. First John 5:17 defines sin as unrighteousness. "*All unrighteousness is sin.*" There are many thoughts and deeds which people are capable of committing that are the very antagonistic of right doing according to the commandment of God, which is a definition of righteousness (Psalm 119:172). Doing evil, committing that which is forbidden, is unrighteousness and sin.

Paul adds another definition in Romans 14:23 when he says that whatever is not of faith is sin. In this passage the word "*faith*" refers to one's personal conviction or belief. It is wrong to do what you believe to be wrong. To do so is to be dishonest with yourself. It does not mean just because you think something is right that it is right. You could even be wrong to think something is wrong. What man thinks is not the standard for determining right and wrong. God's Word is the standard. But to do what you believe is wrong is to violate your own conscience, your own integrity, and Paul says that is sin. We ought never do what we think is wrong whether that thing is actually wrong or not. We must be honest with our convictions. A person who is not true to his own convictions will not be true to God. A person who will do what he thinks is wrong, even if it is not wrong, will do what is actually wrong if he chooses. Finally, James

defines sin as the neglect of doing good that you know you ought to do (James 4:17).

Like most other matters, sin can be classified. But sin is not classified as some would have us believe. Some talk about "mortal sins" and "venial sins," but the Bible never classifies them as such. Some speak of "big sins" and "little sins," but the Bible knows no such distinction. To be sure, some sins cause more immediate and harmful consequences than others, but sin is sin. Neither is sin to be classified according to what provokes sins. We suggest the Bible teaches there are three major classifications of sin.

Ignorance

There are sins of ignorance. People are often without knowledge that they are sinning because they are not informed of the will of God. We see this illustrated by a man driving his car through a thirty mile per hour speed zone, but he is doing sixty. He may not have been aware that he was violating the law. This, however, does not excuse him, even though it may explain why he did it.

Under the law of Moses one was guilty even though he sinned ignorantly. Leviticus 5:17,18, "*And if a soul sin and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he wist* (know,JWB) *it not, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity; and he shall bring a lamb without blemish out of the flock with thy estimation for a trespass offering unto the priest, and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred and wist it not, and it shall be forgiven him.*"

Paul said he persecuted the church ignorantly. First Timothy 1:13, "*...though I was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious, howbeit, I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief...*" But it was the same man that spoke by inspiration, "*The times of this ignorance therefore God overlooked but now commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent.*" It is said in the Scriptures that Christ was slain by men who did it ignorantly. Acts 3:17, "*And now brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it, as did your rulers,*" Peter's words to

his Jewish hearers. Even though they did what they did in ignorance they were still held accountable and guilty for their sins.

Weakness

Sometimes we sin due to weakness. Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*" We are all subject to temptation. Even Paul warned of this and said he was still vulnerable (Second Corinthians 9:27). One of the biggest mistakes a person can ever make is to think that he has reached a level of spiritual maturity that he cannot be tempted, or that he is so strong that he would never fall. That very attitude is a manifestation of weakness. First Peter 5:8 warns how the devil "*walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.*" Peter wrote this to his Christian brethren. We are to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation*" (Matthew 6:13).

We have so many records of even stalwart people of God falling beneath their weakness when tempted. Consider Peter who denied His Lord three times, emphasizing his denials with cursing and swearing, and doing this just a short while after he had vowed he would die before he would forsake Christ. We may say, "I didn't intend to sin," and this may be true. But our weakness will allow Satan to find a way to destroy our resolve if we are not ever alert, ever growing, making ourselves stronger.

Rebellion

But the Bible teaches how some have sinned due to outright rebellion against God. Hebrews 10:26-31 (a passage you do well to read), warns that people can sin willfully, deliberately, intentionally. Christ died because people sinned willfully. There were some who deliberately testified against Him falsely. They knew what they were doing. Consider Cain, Saul, the first king of Israel, and Judas. They held God's will in contempt and despised His law. We are warned that we are due a much sorer punishment when we refuse to accept Christ as our Savior and on His terms.

Love of the World

Why do people sin? One reason is because of the love of this world, that is, the evil things of this world. First John 2:15, "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*"

Love of Material Things

People love the material things of this world more than God. First Timothy 6:6-10, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction, and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*"

Love of Pleasure

People sin because of their love for pleasure, being lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (Second Timothy 3:4; James 5:15). Hebrews 11:25 tells how Moses did not choose the pleasures of sin. Unrighteousness does sometimes, temporarily, bring worldly pleasure (First Timothy 5:6), and that is all some people consider.

Lack of Love for God

People sometimes sin because of what they lack. They lack love for God and His will. When one loves God he will keep His commandments (John 14:15,21,23,24; First John 5:3). People who lack fear and respect for God, as Paul described the Jews and Gentiles in Romans 3:10-18 have no concern about sinning. When Solomon was closing the book of Ecclesiastes he noted, Ecclesiastes 12:13, "*Let us there the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*" Lack of this fear or respect will allow one to violate God's will with indifference.

Won't Get Caught

Possibly some sin thinking they will get away with it because sin is not immediately punished every time. Sin was often immediately punished in Bible times (Acts 5, Ananias and Saphirra, for example). When we violate natural law we are usually speedily punished, such as falling from a ladder and violating the law of gravity, or placing our hand on a hot stove. Ecclesiastes 8:11, "*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*" When evil is not punished quickly, crimes will persist all the more. This explains some of the continued havoc in our society. One of the grave faults of our so-called "justice system" today is that people can do the worse sort of things and great lapses of time pass by before anything is really done about, if at all. People begin to think they can get away with doing evil, and therefore, many continue to commit evil.

Wages: Now and Later

While there may well be hardship that befalls the transgressor even in this life (Proverbs 13:15), the full "*wages of sin*" may not be meted out until after the judgment. Moses told some of his Israelite brethren, if they did not do as they vowed they would, "*...be sure your sins will find you out*" (Numbers 32:23). Instead of thinking we are getting away with anything because we are not immediately punished, let us rightly consider this as a time of opportunity to repent and be spared.

What are the consequences of sin? Proverbs 14:34 teaches, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*" Even the nation of Israel, when they turned from God, was carried into captivity and eventually liquidated as a nation because of their own sins. The same was true of Babylon, Edom, Philistia, Phonecia, and others. Why cannot we in our age learn from what happened to those nations that defied God?

Adam and Eve sinned and brought sin into the world. They brought suffering and death. They were driven from the Garden of Eden and Paradise. The enormity of their sin vibrates through the world even yet.

Saul, the first king of Israel, disobeyed God by not following His commandments concerning the Amalekites, and he lost his kingdom, and died being hated by his nation, a suicide with his own sword.

Yes, sin pays. But what does it pay? "*The wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). This has reference to spiritual death, a separation from God eternally. As we read such passages as Luke 13:28 and the description of punishment, and Matthew 25:41 and the judgment scene, the words of Revelation 20:11-15 and 21:8 of the destiny of those who have sinned but never came to Christ for forgiveness, and Second Thessalonians 1:6-9 of the eternal punishment of those who know not God and obey not the gospel, can we escape being impressed of the terrible consequences of sin?

Salvation From Sin

Thanks be to God there is salvation from sin. This salvation is "*in Christ*" (Second Timothy 2:10). We can become God's children by faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ, at which time God washes away our past sins by the blood of the Savior (Romans 6:3,4). If we will come to Christ and live faithfully in Christ we have the assurance that sin will not be our spiritual destruction. Being faithful involves working for the Master, living like the Master, worshipping according to the authority of the Master, keeping ourselves unspotted from the world, and doing that which we ought while abstaining and opposing whatever the Lord has revealed He hates. In this way, and the only way, can we avoid sin and its consequences. Being saved is not a complicated matter, But it is something that must be done by conviction, deliberately by choice, and done while there is time and opportunity. Otherwise, the wages of sin are still there and if we do not believe it now, we most assuredly will be convinced later, but alas, too late.

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A book every Christian ought read closely is about the Change Agents in the church, by William Woodson, available from Paul Sain, Pulaski, Tenn.

What Does My Religion Cost?

There is a fictitious story about a beggar who sat at a rich man's gate, being dependent for his living on what the rich man gave him. Once the rich man asked him to run an errand, to which the beggar responded, "I solicit alms. I do not run errands." This ungrateful and reprehensible attitude is the kind of attitude many people may hold regarding their relationship with God. They want His benefits, but do not wish to assume any duty or responsibility to do anything for God. We have seen this attitude in action many times with many who come by the church building looking for handouts. They would use the church for themselves, but have no interest or concern about God or anything pertaining to Him.

Many people approach religion with the question, "What is in it for me?" Much of the religious appeal being made to people today is based on the expectation of material gain. People are led to believe that coming to God will get them a better house, newer car, larger salary, finer clothes. Some respond to these appeals seeking only their personal and material advantage without any concern for reciprocating for what God does. While there are definite advantages in serving God, (but these are not primarily material in nature), there are responsibilities also that we must assume and we must do our duty.

David's Attitude

Second Samuel 24:18-25, "*And Gad came that day to David and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Aranuah, the Jebusite. And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded. And Aranuah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him; and Aranuah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground. And Aranuah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshingfloor of thee, to build an altar unto the Lord,*

that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Aranuah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him; behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of oxen for wood. All these things did Aranuah, as a king, give unto the king. And Aranuah said unto the king, The Lord thy God accept thee. And the king said unto Aranuah, Nay, but I will surely buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burnt offering unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel."

David had sinned in making a census of the people, relying upon himself and the might of the land rather than on the Lord. For punishment David was given three options: (1) seven years of famine, (2) three months of fleeing before his enemies, or (3) three days pestilence. David placed himself at the mercy of God and God sent a pestilence upon Israel.

Now David was commanded to offer sacrifices to remove it. Aranuah offered to give David what he needed for the sacrifices but David refused to accept it. He would buy it. He contended, in essence, "I'll pay for what I use. I do not want to give God that which is no sacrifice to me. I do not have a religion that costs me nothing."

There Is A Cost

Anything worthwhile involves costs in terms of money, energy, time, patience, understanding, selflessness, and other costs. We readily understand this principle in life. To secure a secular education is very costly in terms of money, self-discipline, study, classroom attendance, preparation of assignments, time, midnight oil, stickability.

Marriage has costs if it is to be successful. One must be cooperative, considerate, forbearing, forgiving, serving, ready to meet and discharge responsibilities.

To be a successful athlete one must pay the price in training, desire, diet, discipline, determination. There may to some degree be the element of natural ability, but mostly, it takes practice, practice, practice.

This is certainly true to become an accomplished musician. There are dedicated hours of study and work, rehearsal and repetition. The same principle is true in succeeding in business. One must discharge diligence, effort, work, extra work, long hours, many energies expended for which he may receive no pay.

Success is also costly in the religious realm. Acceptable service to God is demanding. Luke 9:23, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" Romans 12:1, "*I beseech you therefore.brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*" Luke 14:33, "*So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*" It costs to become a Christian and it costs to be faithful in what you have become.

It Costs Money, Also

What does your religion cost you? What does it cost in money? Second Corinthians 8:7, "*Therefore, as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.*" Second Corinthians 9:6,7, "*But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver.*" The Lord wants us to give willingly, cheerfully, liberally as we have purposed and proposed. Acceptable giving demands planning.

Mark 12:41ff records Jesus observing the giving of gifts into the treasury and noted the gift of the poor widow who gave all her living. He commented that she had given more than all those of more bountiful means who gave of their surplus. There may be members of the church who will spend more on a vacation, sports, or

hobby each year than they will give to support the work of the church. Does not this reflect a mar in what is our prime interest? It is not wrong to spend funds on many things, but what could the church do if everyone had the attitude of the widow? Would our missionaries have to travel to and fro begging brethren to supply even their minimal needs so they can make personal sacrifices and expend their efforts to preach the Word?

It Costs Time

What does your religion cost you in time? Is it really sufficient to spend an hour or so in worship each week and let that be the total of time spent? How must time is spent with the Bible? How much is spent doing good to others? How much is spent trying to teach others, even our own children if we have them? Many people will spend far more time in front of the television watching things that they probably ought not be watching than they spend trying to grow spiritually, seeking the salvation of others, and doing good to the less fortunate and needy. There is no need to complain we do not have the time to do such things. Everyone has the same amount of time. It may require some changes in our schedules and priorities, but is our religion worth enough to us to give it the time it needs? Is it not possible that a person can get himself or herself so busy in many matters that ultimately it will prove the person did not have time to go to heaven?

It Takes Your Talents

What does your religion cost in terms of the use of your talents and abilities, other than money? We have abilities to do the work of the Lord and we are accountable unto Him. It may at times call for inconveniences to use our capacities to do what must be done, but is it not worth it when given into the service of God?

We do want to be careful that we do not our works to be seen of men. What we do that is not in the public eye will receive no commendation from other people, will produce no earthly reward, but will contribute to treasures in heaven. We have talents sufficient to earn a

living for self and dependents, to hold jobs, to run machines, to operate businesses. Do we not use these things also to further the cause of Christianity? Are our talents to be used only for the advancement of our own personal and temporal ambitions?

It Costs Your Life

What does your religion cost you regarding the manner of daily living? Does your religion affect your habits, attitudes, words, influence, where you go, your goals, priorities, what you say, the selection of your friends and social life? Is it not a sad thing that so-called Christians will do things so unbecoming to one who professes to follow Christ? In the movie, Gone With the Wind, a Negro maid had the line when speaking of certain behavior of some of the characters, "It jist ain't fittin." There are many things that "jist ain't fittin" for the Christian. Some things ought not be named among us (Ephesians 5:3). We should lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, conforming not to this world, but putting off the old man with his doing (Hebrews 12:1; Romans 12:1; Ephesians 4:22). Christians are not free do "do their own thing" regardless of what that thing might be. They are to walk in the imitation of Christ (First Corinthians 11:1).

Could it be that some of us are properly labeled "Bryl Cream" Christians? Like the ad for that hair ointment says, "A little dab will do you." Dabbling in the faith of Christ will not suffice. Such is disrespect of its Founder. People should not feel slighted because they are not blessed of God when they are not willing to pay the price of being His child.

Malachi wrote the question, "*Will a man rob God*" (Malachi 3:8)? Surely he will, has done it, and probably will continue to do so in many instances. It was made evident to Israel that men will rob God. God proceeded through Malachi to tell Israel how they had robbed Him? They had withheld their tithes, offered polluted and blemished sacrifices, tried to serve God in a manner that cost them nothing, or at best very little or from their leftovers. The result was, Malachi 1:10, "*I have no*

pleasure in you, saith the Lord, neither will I accept an offering at your hand."

No Cost? No Worth!

Religion without costs in not beneficial as a faith by which to live and it will prove disastrous by which to die. The person whose religion costs him will be amply rewarded provided it is the religion of Jesus Christ. Even a "*cup of water*" will not go unrewarded (Matthew 10:42).

We cannot outgive God. The bounty of His blessings will always overshadow what we can do in return. When we pay the costs we are not earning our blessings because we could never do enough to do that.

Even though God calls on us to sacrifice, He makes it difficult to sacrifice, by which I mean, He blesses us so bountifully when we serve Him it makes our sacrifices and costs we offer pale into relative insignificance so that we do not consider our sacrifices to be sacrifices, but opportunities. We consider them pleasure to render into the service of Him. What we do in the labor for the Lord is never in vain (First Corinthians 15:58). Older and faithful Christians are among the first to speak of such things.

Service to God through Christ is the only endeavor in which a human being can be involved where there is a guarantee of success. Success if not sure in athletics, business, nor any other activity. But it is true regarding being a faithful Christian. The religion of Christ was costly to Christ (Second Corinthians 8:9). He was rich but became poor for our sake. Should it not cost me and you to receive the blessings He provides?

The bottom line is simply this: Are we willing to pay the price of being a faithful child of God? Will we pay that price? Or are we the kind of person that says, "I solicit alms. I do not run errands."

* * * * *

Be Ye Ready



When the Lord Jesus said, "*Therefore be ye also ready*" (Matthew 24:44), I know he was speaking with regard to the coming of Christ and the need that we be ready. I doubt He would have had any reference to what I am about to tell you.

East End has had a radio program many years and I get to preach on it. One day for some reason the taped message I gave to the station was accidentally erased by someone before it was played. It was not noticed until almost time for the program. They called me and told me, and you talk about having to hurry and get a program quickly! Preachers with programs can relate to this, I'm sure. But was I ready? Well, how things went I leave to the mercy of God. But having to be ready sometimes means to stay ready.

Actually, I think staying ready is what the Lord is teaching us with His words of warning. So let is stay ready; not necessarily for earthly emergencies, but ready for the judgment day. It can come upon us so suddenly, and sadly otherwise.

* * * * *

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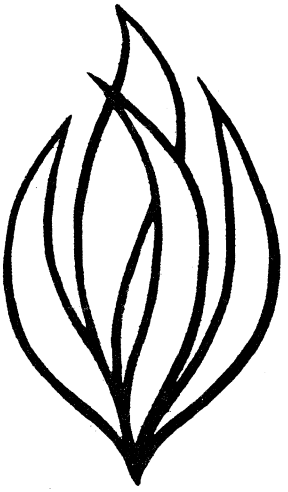

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Responsibility of the Elders to the Congregation

In another lesson in this issue we shall study the responsibility of the congregation to those who serve as its elders, both individual responsibilities and collective. But the elders have responsibilities to the members of the congregation also, as fellow members, as a part of the eldership toward each member individually, toward one another, and toward the congregation as a whole. This lesson deals with some of these duties as revealed in Scripture.

Our Two Primary Texts

Let us first read two passages. First Peter 5:1-4, "*The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lord's over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*"

Acts 20:28-32, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For this I know, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears. And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*"

Willingly and With Proper Motive

Those who serve as elders are to serve willingly, not by constraint. They should desire to work for the good that can be done (First Timothy 3:1). None ought assume that duty if he is not willing to perform the work required. Few things are worse than having the wrong man in the right place. A man in leadership, and elders must be men, who is reluctant to discharge the duties of that leadership, who seeks the position of an elder for other motives, will become a hindrance rather than a help to the cause of Christ. How difficult it is for brethren to do the work God has assigned to His church when those in the lead, who have the task, will not perform.

An elder must have a noble, pure, and godly motive for being one. He should not seek it for filthy lucre, personal gain materially. This implies that there were "paid elders," better termed, elders who were materially supported by the church in the days of the early church. We learn in First Timothy 5:17,18 of duties of the congregation to elders. We support those who preach. If it is deemed expedient and needful, we can support those who oversee the flock. We might wonder why preachers are sometimes erroneously called and considered to be "pastors" of the congregation. Probably this is due in part because few think anyone but a preacher should be supported in order that God's work be done. While some have gone off the deep end with a clerical staff not unlike the foolishness of denominational clergymen, there is Biblical authority to support elders who do the work. A good case could be argued that it might be better to support elders so elders' work can be done if it requires supporting them than to provide support for preachers. We do not have to choose between them, but we should know both are authorized. Even so, the motive for being an elder ought not be such support anymore than money ought be the reason preachers preach.

Neither ought the motive for being an elder be to acquire some honor or glory to oneself. This seems to be a shortcoming of too many who become elders. It should not be in order to discharge power or possess control. You might be surprised how many times this proves to be the case. Let the congregation begin seeking men to

serve as elders, or to be added to the existing eldership, and some begin campaigning for the place as if they were running for some kind of political office or seeking some honorary degree. The motive for being an elder is to serve, love, help promote the cause of Christ, assist every member of the congregation to get to heaven regardless of personal cost or sacrifice that work demands from him.

Not Lords

Elders are prohibited from being lords over God's heritage. While they have authority, it is a delegated and limited authority. They do not become the executive officers of a business firm. They should not act like spiritual directors expecting everyone to jump whenever they shout, "Frog." They are not bosses over their personal employees. They ought not be like Diotrophes who loved to have the preeminence among brethren (Third John 9). They are not taskmasters with the members as their servants. How many times we have seen men who are called elders act in just such fashion. I once served under a man who called himself an elder who expressed his concept of an elder toward the preacher this way, "When the boss tell the employee to, 'Move that box,' the employee must move that box." Possibly this is true in an employee-employer relationship. But I left no doubt in his mind that I was not his employee and he was not my boss. We were brethren in the Lord serving in different capacities with the eldership having the oversight of the church. I was not his peon to be "bossed." What an attitude! He did not know the difference between the use of authority and the abuse of authority. Elders do not have the power nor right to dictate, command, and lord if over others in the church. Just who some of them seem to think they are, we wonder? Do they think they have been elected some kind of mini-god?

Some elders treat the people in the church, and the physical properties of the church, as if it was their personal asset. They save money like they would their own rather than using it for the work intended. They seek to "lay by in store" for what might someday happen in some far distant time. After many years of being in

debt for a building, and the final payment was in sight, suggestions were being made how the money being used for the payment might later be used. One elder suggested we provide a savings account, build up a reserve. When asked why, he said you cannot tell what might happen. He recalled the depression of the 1930's and fifty years later still had a depression mentality. He was asked why we should accumulate a savings account since we did not even have one during the years of indebtedness. Souls are dying for lack of the gospel and he, like too many others, thought it best to prepare for "retirement" and save all that could be saved. What a mistake! Elders need to learn that the church does not retire when they do. The church is ongoing and growing. Some would allow generations to come and go before they would turn loose of funds to do the work of the Lord just because they had hard times a half century ago. This is lording it over God's heritage when that is allowed.

Lead Versus Drive

Shepherds do not drive their flock but lead it. Elders are shepherds. Shepherds are considerate of every sheep, seeking what is best for each sheep and the entire flock as a whole. Just here is it worth reminding us that, as sure as the congregation ought practice the "golden rule" toward elders, the elders should have the same attitude toward the flock and every member of it. We have witnessed some elders treat members with such discourtesy as if it did not matter what was said and done to the member. We have seen, and even experienced, from some elders treatment toward preachers that they would be aghast if they received similar treatment from anybody. Real love for one another will not allow mistreatment of anybody. We should try to put ourselves in the place of the other and work for his or her good. Good sisters have been brushed aside, and needy brethren have been denied and humiliated by elders who just lack understanding. But how they want others to hold them in esteem! Elders must want to go to heaven, and want the families under their oversight to go to heaven, and work to that end at all times. While all of us may not totally agree on matters of opinion as to how to reach the assigned goals, we most assuredly should treat one another with brotherliness.

On Guard

Elders are commanded to "*take heed.*" Here the elder is pictured as a watchman, on guard, being alert to the needs and dangers. He is to be attentive, informed, aware, up-to-date, with eyes and ears open, and able to detect what endangers the souls of his flock so he can protect them. Detect in order to protect!

This watchfulness begins with himself. He can never allow himself to become the tool of a faction that seeks to "take over the church" and run the other elders out. There are brethren, some preachers, who cast about the eldership seeking whom they may deceive, in order to use that elder to advance their own aims regardless of others of the eldership or congregation. Elders must ever be alert to such people and not fall prey to them.

He must take heed to himself. He cannot lead where he will not go. He cannot teach what he does not know. He cannot help others to be what he himself is not trying diligently and sincerely to be. Elders must give attention to their own lives as much, possibly more, than others because of their place of authority, guidance, and influence. He must give attention to his own study and knowledge. He must be very mindful of his family. He cannot allow them to do just as they please. One of his duties is to be an example. But what kind of example will he be if he does not rule his own family well? He must take heed to his speech, temper, habits, attitudes, motives, and faithfulness toward God. It is no little matter that he assumes when he becomes an elder.

He must also take heed over the flock, his charge. He must know his members, their needs, their families. He must be willing to spend and be spent on their behalf. He must be on guard against false teachers and false doctrines, evil practices, inroads of digression that some attempt to promote. He has a duty to warn, protect, chastise, and enforce. Sometimes elderships will let bad situations just "rock along" and they "go along to get along" until the bad gets the upper hand over the entire church. They have the care for each soul and shall give an account for each soul. Knowing this they should be very aware and attentive to each one and what goes on,

both in the local church and the brotherhood generally. What an awesome responsibility he has before God and the brethren he loves and leads!

A Prime Duty

The elders have the duty to "*feed the flock.*" As already noted, we can see this means more than simply providing a preacher, while this is included. They have to be careful who they present before the church. They must be careful what they endorse, who they endorse, and even what they appear to endorse. They are derelict of duty to the congregation if they do not know the people they put before the flock to teach and preach. They should investigate and examine, question and measure before they present anyone before the church. Some elders never seem to accept their duty to know their man and for what he stands. They accept somebody's suggestion and in comes someone that could cause the church headaches for years to come. We have heard of elders who learned that some preacher they invited was unsound, but because they had already invited him, or because it was "too late" to make other arrangements, they let him come, and the flock gets the idea that the elders approve of him and accept him and his influence. This is totally unjustified neglect of duty.

They must not only drink deeply of the water of life themselves, but they must see that the pure truth of God is taught, either doing the teaching themselves, or through others. They are ultimately responsible for what is done and taught. There should be no allowance for unsound people, unsound materials, unsound practices in their congregation. Their charge to "*watch*" means they must know the Word, be able to convict the gainsayer, refute error, defend truth, and not give place to false doctrines for an hour. When truth is taught they should stand with the ones who teach it because they stand for the truth.

Watchful

Continuing this theme, if all elders had been more vigilant, the human legalism of yesteryear would never have found a home in many churches. Premillennialism

would never have divided brethren nor been given the opportunity. The error on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the wave of Pentecostalism, liberalism. modernism, and the modern perverted so-called translations would never have been given a place to destroy. It takes courage to withstand a false teacher. especially when he is a relative of some member, or a friend. But elders owe it to the church they serve to be informed, keep informed, know what is going on in the world, in the church, in colleges that influence the church, in papers. We have seen in our time elders who do not know, do not want to know, and are jealous of anybody else who does know. They have adopted the position that it is their sole task to "keep the peace" at any price rather than "keep the faith." Many have sacrificed truth in order to keep peace. Such neglect of duty has taken many congregations into digression. Some elders had rather find some compromise, keep the members who promote error, collect their contributions, have their numbers, and be personally accepted by others than stand for the truth of God at all costs!

"The buck stops here!"

Most of us may be familiar with this classic expression by former President Harry Truman when expressing his responsibility to rightly use his authority. It is a good phrase. Elders have the duty and owe it to the church to take the oversight of matters pertaining to the local church. There is a difference between overseeing and overlooking. Many things are overlooked because elders are not attentive, not willing to work, uncaring, and not informed. But everything the congregation does is their responsibility. The lives their members live are their responsibility and they shall give account. They have the authority to discharge their duties but with that authority also goes responsibility. While they may solicit help from others, they cannot be content to remain in indecision on matters that they must decide. Have not we seen matters drag on and on, month after month, even year after year, because elders will not "fish or cut bait?" They refuse to assume the duty they have.

Ofttimes the choices that must be made are not easy, but they are the ones that must make them. They cannot

neglect them. This is part of providing for the flock. We once encountered a neighboring congregation where their preacher stated some outright lies about another preacher from his pulpit. The offended preacher called his hand once he learned of it, and later also consulted the offending preacher's elders in the matter. Amazingly, not only would the offending preacher not apologize or prove his accusations, but his eldership would not require correction be made, stood behind the lying preacher, contending that, even though their preacher was in error, they were not responsible for what is said in the pulpit. Is it any wonder that church later suffered strife and division over the liberalism the lying preacher promoted?

Decisions have to be made. The local church is not to be operated like a democracy. The system of God calls for those who oversee the church to oversee it. Elders must be courageous enough to provide the oversight and if they are not, they should step aside and let some others do the work.

Example

Something has already be mentioned about example. We are to imitate Christ. Those who lead should show what this entails. Just how elders who drink alcoholic beverages, smoke, dance, gamble, curse, etc. expect to properly lead anybody is beyond us! They will lead, but will lead members to hell if followed. If one is not willing to live a righteous life he should never be in the eldership. If already there, he should be removed.

The work of an elder requires time, energy, thought, prayer, sacrifice, good judgment, knowledge of the truth, as well as a "thick skin" when meeting criticism. Criticism comes, so many times unjustified. If one will not prorate his time to give to the work he ought not assume the responsibility for it. All he will do is retard the work. The cause of Christ will languish under him because he does not give time to attend to it. Thank God for the good elders who have made their work the major activity of their lives! And there are many such men and it has been my good fortune to have been associated with just such elders time and again.

They Have Authority

We return to this point to emphasize how every institution must have those in authority. There is a difference between having authority and being authoritarian. Elders must rule but not obnoxiously as if they were so superior to others. They must rule and exercise the power they have with an open and considerate heart toward others. How many times has power and authority ruined otherwise good men and crushed churches because elders failed to see, use, and control their authority! And how many times have we been privileged to see the Lord's cause move forward and win souls because men in leadership respected, appreciated, and rightly used their authority!

God's system of government for the church works and works efficiently when God's pattern and plan is followed. When something goes awry in a congregation it is because somebody, in some way, has left God's way of doing things. His way is perfect.

Reward

There is a rich reward awaiting faithful elders. Many souls will be in heaven because of such men that otherwise would miss it. Peter said, "*When the chief Shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*" A "*well done*" awaits them!

As stated, it has been my privilege to work under the oversight of several elders and elderships. With but few exceptions, they have been good men, trying to do what they ought and can to lead the church, and have been my guides and counsellors to my benefit. We have at times encountered some of the other sort, but thankfully, there have not been many. Some members and preachers have suffered under bad elders. Many of us have been blessed with fine elders. Most of us, especially those who have moved from one location to another, have seen both kinds. But we can confidently say that good elders and elderships are blessings to everyone with whom they come in contact. May their kind be numerous!

* * * * *

The Responsibility of the Congregation to the Elders

The church was established and organized by Christ. All information we have about the way the church is supposed to be is found in the New Testament. Christ is the head of the church and has preeminence in all things to the church (Colossians 1:18). The system of government is relatively simple and efficient when men follow the Lord's plan. We read of there being elders in every church (Acts 14:23), as was true in Philippi (Philippians 1:1). The congregations were overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, and every Christian a part of the church, being members of the body (First Corinthians 12:27). This is the New Testament pattern for the government of the local congregation under the headship of Christ and the authority granted by Him to the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, their teaching being now embodied in the inspired, authoritative, all-sufficient, infallible, and inerrant Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Those who serve in the capacity of elders and deacons are to be men of certain specified qualifications which are revealed in First Timothy chapter three and Titus chapter one.

Elders have duties both to God and to the congregation they oversee. There are various terms in the New Testament that denote them and their work, such as pastor, shepherd, elder, bishop, presbyter, and overseer. Their duties we have discussed in the previous lesson of this issue. The congregation also has responsibilities to those who serve as elders. Serving as an elder and being a part of the eldership (the plurality of men who jointly oversee the congregation) is one of the most awesome and sobering duties that a human being can undertake. We must respect the magnitude of this work. We could only wish that all who are elders realized its significance, and many do. We could wish that all members considered it as they ought. The Bible teaches

that the elders shall give an account (Hebrews 13:17). The work of an elder is a work to be done and Scripture calls it a good work (First Timothy 3:1). But just as elders are to assume and discharge this work, the congregation is also to meet responsibilities to them because each Christian shall give account of himself regarding these duties as well as all of life (Romans 14:12; First Corinthians 5:10).

Double Honor

First Timothy 5:17,18, "*Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, A laborer is worthy of his reward.*" Elders are to be held with honor, even double honor. They not only should receive moral and spiritual support and esteem, but also supplied with physical and material support if needed as they do their work. If they are so provided, even as an ox is not to be denied the fruit of its labor, then elders would be allowed more time to devote their energies for the performance of their duties, especially the duty of attending to matters of doctrine and the word. We sometimes forget that those who are elders usually have all of the individual and family duties that others have plus the duties of being an elder. They must provide a livelihood for themselves and their families as do others but also expend much time and work in caring for the congregation in all the ways they are obligated. While they deserve the respect and moral support when they serve well, they ought not be forced to neglect any of this work because they have to expend themselves in lesser duties. Whatever they need to discharge their work as elders ought to be provided by the congregation.

First Thessalonians 5:12,13, "*And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.*" To know them that labor means more than just knowing their names to identify them. I have found that many members of the local church to not even know who the men are who serve as elders of the congregation. This is a fault of members

that can be easily erased. It may be that some elders are so inactive that nobody takes notice of them and the fault lies with them. But knowing them means to have knowledge that they occupy such a place and understand their work, and then give recognition that they are serving in this most serious duty, respecting the duty they perform. It means giving recognition that they serve the church, and then give recognition of the service rendered. It means they are accepted by the members of the congregation they oversee. The very work they do demands special recognition to be given them. It is wrong to ask a person to assume this work and appoint him to the work and then withhold from him what he needs, or not work with them cooperatively in carrying out the work.

Esteem in Love

This same passage says to esteem them highly in love. This love is not favoritism, nor simply a sentimental feeling toward them. This does not have reference to a personal affection, although that might be included. Many members really have an affection for the good men that lead them in spiritual pathways. It is rather a love that seeks the elder's highest good, a love of him and for him and his wife because of the sacred work he is performing for the whole congregation, done on behalf of others, and by the authority of Christ. This love must express itself in deeds as well as words. It calls for being helpful, responsive, cooperative, respectful, ready to carry out assignments, helping them carry out their duties. God expects members to help, not hinder. When the eldership is not running smoothly, it possibly is due to friction among them, but it is also often due to the lack of cooperation by members. We have heard brethren speak of how they love their elders, but they do not lift their hand to assist them in expediting the work the congregation undertakes. Love for the eldership stems from love for the work overall, and respect for the work for God that elders do.

Slow to Accuse

First Timothy 5:19, "*Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.*" It is

generally open season on preachers and elders, or anyone who tackles a task. Some people seem to think that have some God-given right to take potshots at whoever serves publicly , whenever they want to shoot, and never feel obligated to know much about what they are attacking. I read a little statement recently that said some folks leave "no turn unstoned". You read it correctly. Regardless of the turn made, some will stone it. Such is often the burden of serving as an elder. Many good men have been hurt and their lives made painful because some careless member or members assume the right to dig and jab at them because they are elders.

Those who go the front lines and into the foreground of the work as leaders must do are often targets of criticism. Often this criticism is done in love and done constructively. But too often it is done with malice by those who much prefer to talk against rather than walk and work with the ones they criticize. They prefer to use cutting words rather than engage in constructive work. They undermine with their talking. They do not seem to consider how they undercut authority even in the minds of the young, and those outside the church. I have heard members severely berate preachers and elders in the presence of young people and non-Christians. When such is done, should we be surprised that the young and non-Christians have no respect for the church?

Elders are not perfect in all they do. But are we? Elders are subject to making mistakes, and their mistakes are more serious. They are subject to temptations as others. Yes, they should be better able to handle it because they are to be selected from the strong. But they are still just human beings and suffer from pressures as do others. This is one reason we believe God authorized a plurality of elders to form the eldership that oversees the congregation rather than having a one man rule. It is not likely, although possible, that all the eldership will "go bananas" at the same time. Brethren ought not be too quick to assume elders are at fault unless there is verified testimony to that fact by witnesses. Criticisms are often made from evil motives and are not just. When they are just and proven, Paul says, First Timothy 5:20, "*Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may fear.*"

This would apply to elders as well as everyone else. But this is something that must be done cautiously.

Failure to treat an elder or the eldership properly and justly and accepting whatever somebody says against them is to do wrong. When differences arise with elders, they should be the first to know of it. Why tell everyone else? Preachers often make this mistake and stir up rebellion against elders before they confront the elders with their differences. It is not unknown for elders to be viciously criticized and no effort made to either prove or correct the mistakes that are alleged. Preachers have certainly been treated this way also. Such has been the cause of many disturbances in the church. For shame!

Golden Rule

How is the member to treat the elder? Let us begin with Matthew 7:12, called the "golden rule." Sometimes we wonder whatever happened to the "golden rule" among some brethren, seeing how they fight, claw, and rip each other. It should be applied in every relationship including treatment toward elders. Would you like your sincere efforts to be belittled, ridiculed, your motives harshly judged and impugned, your earnest desire to serve and do right to be scoffed and mocked? Would you want your family to be berated and accused unjustly as the topic of talk, talk, talk? Do you not realize that being in the spotlight, as all leaders are, is difficult enough without someone hiding in the darkness trying to shoot you down? Many problems in the home and church would never have the air to survive if brethren believed and obeyed Matthew 7:12. We could possibly emphasize this passage in application of treatment toward elders to the extent that would conclude that this covers just about everything about the duty of the congregation toward elders.

Submission and Obedience

Hebrews 13:1,17, "*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they*

that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you." We are to be mindful and thoughtful of the elders, especially regarding our deeds and attitudes toward them and the manner of life we live. We owe it to them to make their labor as painless and successful as we can make it. Consideration for their feelings is proper. We must be attentive to them, giving heed to their lead. We have the duty to imitate their faith, like Paul called upon brethren to imitate him as he imitated Christ (First Corinthians 11:1).

To obey is to submit to their rule. They make decisions of judgment on behalf of the local body. This is part of their work. We should cooperate as best we can with those decisions. We should not cause the faithful elder grief as he does his work, but be a source of joy to him. Otherwise, it is unprofitable for us. We have known some brethren who have been constant burdens to the eldership throughout their lives. They are always a source of problems and antagonisms by the way they complain, obstruct, or the lives they live.

Leaders cannot lead if followers will not follow. Since God expects leaders to lead, isn't it true that He expects followers to follow? Elders rule and the congregation should obey and follow. Elders are to feed the church and the congregation should be willing to be fed and cultivate an appetite for the sincere milk of the word. The food is the meat of the truth, the milk of the gospel. Members should take advantage of the opportunities the elders provide to be fed.

Elderships have authority, a delegated authority, to discharge their duties. They have a limited authority, having no power to make, alter, legislate, or compromise truth. They do have the authority to see to it that the word of truth is taught, defended, upheld, and enforced with the work of the church, the pillar and ground of the truth, being expedited. Members should cooperate with them in seeing all of this is accomplished.

Hold Up Their Hands

Members are expected to be as Aaron and Hur when the Amalekites attacked Israel in the wilderness. They held up the hands of Moses so the battle led by Joshua could be brought to a successful conclusion. As Moses held up the rod of God, Israel prevailed. When he became weary and the rod was lowered, Israel suffered setbacks. So Aaron and Hur held up his hands and the victory belonged to all the people of God.

We realize surely, if the elders go contrary to truth, we shall not follow men, but God. As in all matters of authority, in the home, parental, in civil government, husbands, etc. "...*we must obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29). But in the matters of opinion and human judgment that affect the local church, elders have the duty to lead and members have the duty to follow. To refuse to do so is to challenge God's government for the church. It is to dishonor the very ones we are commanded to honor. In the many years I have been preaching (nearly forty-three at this writing) I have never knowingly taken problems with elders (and I have had them) before the congregation to do battle without first facing them, even in matters of doctrine as well as opinion. In matters of opinion wherein we differed I just let it pass, and sometimes it cost me dearly because some elders would not be as considerate. In matters of doctrine I still showed respect for them first. I find this is generally the case with most preachers and members who take their faith and work seriously. Only in matters of "*thus saith the Lord*" is one justified in contending openly and then because God's truth is challenged.

We can summarize the responsibility of the members to the elders by saying it is to love, support, imitate, obey, submit, honor, cooperate, and treat according to the "golden rule," living so as to add no burden but bring joy to them. Peace, progress, and faithfulness of a congregation depends on members doing their duty to the elders as well as elders doing their duty to the church. After all, we are brothers and sisters in Christ who serve in different capacities, but each doing whatever he can to see that others one get to heaven.

* * * * *

Modesty in Our Dress

Lady Godiva, in the eleventh century in England, is said to have gone through the streets of her city on horseback without clothes in an effort to persuade her husband to spare the people who were overly taxed. From appearances, there must be many women, sometimes men, who seem to be working to lower taxes the same way. There is a take-off (no pun intended) on the nursery rhyme about Ole Mother Hubbard. She went to the cupboard and her cupboard was bare. Today, too often, many are imitating her cupboard .

Ole Mother Hubbard went to the closet
To get her poor daughter a dress,
But when she got there, her closet was bare,
And so was her daughter, I guess.

There is the need for Christians to appraise the quality of attitudes and actions regarding what we wear, especially in mixed company and in public. This appraisal involves reflection on Biblical revelation. Too many have given up convictions under the pressure of public opinion, fashions, fads, and the lowering of moral standards and conform to the lead of those who know not God nor care for His truth. As we discuss this subject we are fully aware, and willingly run the risk, that many simply will not give an impartial hearing to what is written because they are determined to go their own way and do their own thing, even though the will of God contradicts them. It is a shame that some of us are that way, even in the church, on this and other matters. But honest and sincere brothers and sisters in Christ want to be Biblical. We trust our remarks will be just that, as well as plain, but not earthy; clear, but discreet.

We contend that it is morally wrong, sinful, to dress immodestly. This includes the wearing of such attire as shorts, bathing suits in mixed company, skimpy clothing, clothing that is too sheer, tight, open, short, slit, and designed to reveal what ought be covered when bodily movements are made. Immediately we can see how the cheerleader is in trouble. We are talking about

immodesty in our dress. We cannot be modest and wear immodest clothing in public and mixed company.

Matthew 5:27,28 is a divine command. It is a prohibition. It condemns not only adultery, but also lust. Since lust is sinful, it should be obvious that provoking lust is also sinful. Who could contend it is right before God to provoke sin? Men may well be guilty of lust and this we do not justify (Luke 17:1,2; Romans 14:21). But are not women who parade their bodies in an immodest fashion guilty of provoking sin? Can the teaching that condemns causing one to stumble be ignored? Shall we disagree with Christ regarding those who encourage offenses?

Second Peter 2:14 speaks of some men who may "*have eyes full of adultery.*" Some may well lust regardless of how modestly a woman may dress. In such cases, that is his guilt altogether. But that is not what we are considering here. A modest woman does not contribute to sinning.

There Is Such A Thing

There is such a thing as immodest apparel (First Timothy 2:9,10). If there is modest apparel there also must be immodest apparel. Some try to escape the force of this teaching on modesty by saying modesty is a relative matter. "What is modest now was immodest fifty years ago. Therefore, we cannot draw the line to say what is or is not modest." If that argument had validity then the teaching that calls for modest apparel would be nonsense. If nonsense, why did the Holy Spirit speak of modest apparel? If one cannot determine what is or is not modest, why mention it? The very fact that women are taught to dress modestly implies we can determine modesty from immodesty even though there may well be relativity involved. There is also a limit involved.

It is immodest to wear clothing which calls attention to those parts of the body which arouse erotic impulses, such as those that create lust. Clothing that does not do that is modest. That which is designed to provoke sexual stimulation is immodest. Who denies that this is the purpose of the slits up the skirts to reveal the thighs?

If brief swimsuits are modest, how could one ever be immodest? What else could be removed before immodesty was present? The only thing left is total nudity. If short shorts are modest, what must one remove before they would be immodest? If it is modest to uncover the body and emphasize the body to increase sexual stimulation, how could one ever be immodest?

The sad fact is that some just remove the teaching of God regarding this subject. They want to be immodest and try hard to get around what God has said.

Right and Wrong

Some things are right or wrong simply because God spoke them to be right or wrong. Some things are neither right nor wrong of themselves, but can be wrong under certain conditions, circumstances, and company. This is not the same as situation ethics, a philosophy that denies any absolutes about right and wrong, and contends that everything depends on conditions, situations, and circumstances. Immodest clothing is wrong for both reasons. God has condemned it, and some conditions make what is by its nature neither necessarily right or wrong to be wrong. For instance, wearing a small amount of clothing may be acceptable in the privacy of the home or with one's mate. But on the streets this would certainly not be proper attire. Who can refute this intelligently?

Sexual desire is powerful, but not evil of itself. This appetite has been placed in the body by our God. But the same God who made us also demands modesty and condemns lust, fornication, adultery, and all unlawful sexual attractions. He has provided for the satisfaction of this desire in marriage. Do you suppose God remembers how He made people, or did He forget about that when He condemned immodesty, lust, fornication, etc.? God intended that mates be attracted to each other, but not drawn to just whatever might sashay down the street. What God has given to be used has to been abused.

A Moral Purpose

Covering the body with clothes has a moral purpose as

well as the purpose of protection, prevention of sin, and ornamentation. Garments are immodest when they do not respect this moral purpose. Clothes can reflect the character and quality of one's heart. It tells what kind of person one really is. Immodest clothing is a display of insecurity, inferiority, rebellion, lack of confidence, and defiance of God's law. One must think they have to expose themselves to get anybody's attention. A woman's security level is often measured by the length of her skirt. The secure, loved, accepted, and appreciated woman does not have to attract attention of everyone nor does she dress provocatively. She reflects her values of herself, her self-respect, and the sanctity she has for her own body by the way she dresses (First Corinthians 6:12,20). The woman who dresses immodestly reveals a flaw in her morals and character just as an emotionally immature male equates manhood with profanity, obscenity, adultery, muscle shows, and drinking alcoholic beverages. Both show maturity when they show moral respect for themselves and those of the opposite sex. If women want the respect of godly men they must act and dress modestly, as women professing godliness. Otherwise, they can be prepared to be considered cheap, easy, usable, disposable, and undesirable. They can expect to be the targets of uncomplimentary remarks (sometimes called sexual harassment today), even if they do not hear them. Have you not heard single women complain about not finding a suitable marriage partner? But consider where they look for them. At bars, taverns, mixed athletic clubs, beaches where their clothes are almost gone. What kind of people do they expect to find there?

An Excuse

Some excuse immodesty in women by saying women do not realize the moral destruction they promote in the way they dress. To which we say, "That is so much poppycock!" Mature people are not unaware of the reactions to their dress and behavior. This excuse is most likely dishonest and at best naive. Many dress to be chased, not chaste. If one doubts the destructive power of immodest dress just listen to the comments and see the reactions to their clothing. Women are not fools in the sense of being ignorant. Many are fools in what they

allow themselves to wear. They know what they do when they parade themselves immodestly. This excuse might possibly apply to those very young and immature who have not yet matured physically. While it may be true that what stimulates the male may not stumulate the female, the female knows what stimulates the male.

Men can be provoked to lewd thought and lust. Godly men must guard the heart even in the presence of ungodly women. One of the more glaring events I can recall was the time when some brethren, intent on keeping their hearts and minds proper, refused to serve the Lord's Supper up and down the aisles because of the mini-skirted women in attendance. How God must have been proud of those women! Some were wearing clothing that was so short they could not sit down without being immodest, even at worship. Again, what must God think of such assemblies and such hypocrites?

Some say they wear brief attire to keep cool, exercise, etc. But if that were altogether true, why wear shorts even in weather when they wear jackets at the same time? Do not be fooled! Such attire is to be attractive via exposure! One can just as vigorously exercise without sacrificing modesty. Even those who live in hot climates and dry and arid areas do not abandon their modesty to keep cool. These are excuses offered by the worldly minded hypocrite who wants to do whatever he or she wants to do, God's will notwithstanding.

Like modern dancing, excuses are seldom heard from the people of the world. They know the thinking behind dancing and immodest clothing. The excuses come from some hypocritical church members who conforms to the ways of the world rather than of Christ.

To complain that others do it, even those who condemn it, does not justify it whatsoever. Inconsistency on the part of one does not give license to another.

There is no objection to swimming, playing ball, keeping cool, exercising, or even leading cheers per se. We have seen all these thing done in modest apparel. But what is condemned is using such activities as excuses to violate the teaching of God and do what is immodest.

Universal Application

The rule of modesty is applicable in Canada and in Key West, at a ball game or on the street. Can you imagine how an elder of the church can justify giving support and attending a beauty pageant where the contestants parade before the audience in a tight, skimpy swimsuits? This preacher has had to deal with such hypocrisy and compromise in his tenure as a gospel preacher. I was even told that people in that particular area did not have the same reactions to immodesty as others. I guess those people were more weird than I first detected. How sickening and disgusting, yet we wonder, even with this mind and attitude, why the church is not influencing people to be saved! If you think sex and lust is not involved on the beach, at the pools, even at football games today, separate the male from the female, put clothing on the cheerleaders, swim separately, and see what happens. You would see the entire operation fold and close. The prime interest would be removed.

Include the Men

But what about men, as if it is all right for women to dress immodestly if it can be shown that men also dress immodestly. We admit readily that all fault does not lie with women. We do not believe God has a double standard. God requires modesty from both. Neither ought to wear that which is designed to create lust or hope it will. But what impresses the male does not generally impress the female. They are stimulated somewhat differently. Men are highly stimulated by the sense of sight, which more directly relates to clothing worn by women and only to a lesser degree does it relate to clothing worn by men. As for scantily clad men, most women are not near so affected as men are. We admit there are some who like to see the male body immodestly attired, however. For this reason men should adhere to God's standard as well as women.

Women need not be ashamed for being women. As one properly suggested, let the woman dress so others will know she is a woman, but also so they will know she is a lady.

How Some React to Truth

Often the reaction to such teaching as this is, "What I wear is none of your business. Just clean up your own dirty mind." It is not just a matter of having a dirty mind, and what one wears in the presence of others is their business. Furthermore, immodesty provokes rape, even though all rapists are not motivated to sexual lust but sadistic behavior. But there are many evidences to prove immodesty provokes lust. There are twenty per cent more rapes during the season when the sun comes out and the clothes come off. No competent authority denies the influence. To deny it is to deny that exposure even attracts. While a woman may not be a rape victim, she may well be the one who provokes the rapist who rapes someone else. This is why such matters are everybody's business. When the Santa Maria was commandeered at sea, a luxury and recreational liner, the women were told to refrain from swimming, wearing their party and provocative dresses, shorts, etc. lest it provoke sexual intrusions by the hijackers. Nobody who is honest is going to deny that skimpy clothing has this effect.

Too many mothers, who ought and probably do know better, are contributing to immodesty, and also teaching their daughters and sons to ignore the godly standards. Fathers, who know what provokes lust, allow their wives and daughters to be the objects of lust by refusing to demand their womenfolk wear modest apparel. The home is the most influential source of teaching and moral influence. The home, even more than the church, will determine the moral behavior of those in the home. The church must ever teach and contend for the moral standard that the New Testament demands.

Be A Christian

Just why a person who says he or she sincerely wants to be a Christian would entertain the desire to be like the sinful world is inconsistent with faithfulness.

Christians are to "*abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*" (First Peter 2:11). Galatians 5:19 condemns lasciviousness, that which provokes lewd

emotions as immodest apparel does and is designed to do. Those who ignore God's teaching invite God's wrath upon themselves, but they bring harm to others as well. You may ignore and even deny this truth, but neither your ignorance or denial changes it whatsoever. But you have a serious spiritual problem and need to correct it immediately.

There is a story of a father who took his little daughter into a pretty meadow for a picnic. Soon the father fell asleep. When he awoke he missed his little girl, so he called and searched. Finally, remembering a nearby cliff, he ran to the edge of the cliff and, looking down, he saw her mangled body where she had fallen while he was asleep.

Today, many fathers, mothers, even elders and preachers, need to wake up. The church and home needs to wake up. Everyone needs to wake up. We have seen hearts break and tears flow over immoralities committed. Many times those involved have had permissive training regarding their clothing. Immodesty runs rampant, even among some who profess to be in the kingdom.

Does it matter to do? Does it matter regarding your children? Even if it does not matter to you now, it matters to God, His people, and someday it will matter even to you.

* * * * *

The lessons is this issue are somewhat longer than what we generally produce.

But some lessons seem to take more space because of the many things that should be said. Every lesson can hardly be just alike in length.

This is not an apology, but an explanation.

They comes to you with the hope they may be spiritually beneficial to you.

Subject to Higher Powers



In Romans seven, the Christian is presented with a double motive for being subject and obedient to the higher powers. One, it is for wrath's sake. That means he should obey in order to escape punishment from the civil power. Two, it is for conscience's sake. This means the Christian's conscience is trained according to the will of the Lord, and that will teaches him to obey the laws of the land. This dual motive also directs him to pay tribute, custom, taxes, and have respect for the authority of the government, look upon the function of government as honorable, and give honor to those who hold governmental positions, if not for sake of the person, then for the sake of the position itself and authority of it. Christians are to render to all what is deserving, and the civil government is deserving of obedience and respect. The support by the citizenry of the government is proper when the government is attending continually to the work the Lord has given it. JWB

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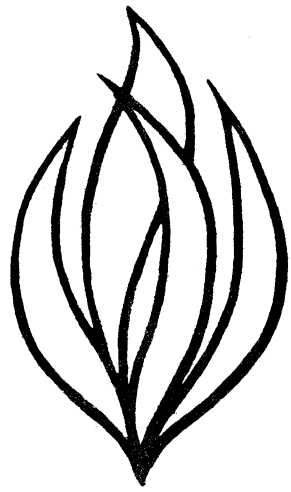

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Which Way? The Church

There are matters that every congregation should consider about the future of the church. Those who are concerned about the welfare, faithfulness, and influence of the church will not take the matters that relate to the future of the church lightly. We approach these remarks making no claim of special insight. We, like Amos, do not profess to be a prophet or the son of a prophet (Amos 7:14), although he became an inspired prophet which none today shall ever be. We know that it is far easier to know what has been, what ought to be, and even what is, than it is to know the future. This is because the future is conditional. It is not locked in. The conditions that will affect the future are partly in our hands, but also partly in the hands of those who will live in the future and compose the church of the future. There are factors which will govern the future over which those of the church today will have no control.

As we consider this subject there are some things of which we can be sure. The church of the future, if God permits time to continue, will be composed of another group of people, another generation, possibly to include some living now but who will be older, of course. We may be faithful and the next generation unfaithful. We may depart from the truth and the next generation follow the truth. But we can learn from the past (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11), but will we? Someone has said that about all we seem to learn from the past is that we will not learn much at all.

We must consider the unimpeachable law of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7,8). This truth gives us misgivings and grave concerns, but at the same time, it gives hope.

Direction Matters

Where the church is today is important. But the direction it is going is also important. Whether the church today is faithful or unfaithful, strong or weak,

really matters. But where are we headed? We can illustrate the importance of direction by considering two men, both sick. But one is getting better while the other is getting worse. Direction matters. Is the church a faithful church that is growing stronger, or is it drifting toward digression? Again we say, it matters!

Consider the History of the Church

We also must consider the history of the church as we think of its future. There have been periods of growth, prosperity, and faithfulness. But there have also been times of apostasy, departure, and digression. I know the church can be faithful because God expects it and He does not expect nor command what cannot be. Second Peter 1:10, "*...if you do these things, ye shall never fall.*" We need not fall. The early church did fall as prophesied (First Timothy 4:1; Second Timothy 4:3). Will the future of the church be one of faithfulness or digression?

The Lord's church is an ongoing institution, a living body. It shall stand forever (Daniel 2:44; Luke 1:33). It will be moving through the pages of history, But which way will it be moving? Will it go to the left, or to the right, backward or forward? Or will it pursue the path of God, moving more toward Him rather than away from Him? Again we say, it matters!

Inevitable Conflict

We can be sure that the future of the church, like its past, will be one of conflict and crisis. There has never been a time when the church was not at war in the spiritual warfare between good and evil. We are the Lord's soldiers (Second Corinthians 10:3,4), and Christ is the captain of our faith (Hebrews 2:10). We have a spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:10-18). We make a mistake to expect peace in this life. While we have peace with God through Christ (Romans 5:1), we will not be at peace with the sinful world. We have an adversary, the devil (First Peter 5:8), and this very fact causes some to faint and grow weary (Galatians 6:9). Conflict is not what most of us prefer. While we would like all to be in agreement and there be harmony, and for this we labor (Romans 12:11), all

people simply are not going to submit to the will of the Lord and permit us to have peace now.

Authority

The direction of the church now and the welfare of the church of the future depends on respect for the right authority. Because this is true, and as we see so much disrespect for God's authority, this gives us concern for the church. There is a chain of authority. Ultimately all authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 17:5; 28:18; Hebrews 1:1,2; Colossians 1:18; 3:17). Christ has delegated authority to the apostles (John 14,15,16). His will, once embodied in inspired men, is now embodied in inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Failure to respect authority, to stand within authority, will inevitably produce apostasy. It always has and always will. Other gospels are condemned (Galatians 1:6-9), and sound doctrine is commanded (Titus 2:1,8; First 4:11).

The apostles predicted an apostasy that in time resulted in the formation of Romanism. It was caused by disrespect for proper authority. Men turned to councils, popes, traditions, superstitions, etc. The same kind of disrespect, although in other directions, produced Protestantism with the creeds, disciplines, manuals, prayer books, confessionals, feelings, etc. It was only by respect for authority that which is called the Restoration Movement could have validity, with emphasis on returning to the oracles of God without addition or subtraction. It was and is disrespect for authority that created and perpetuates what is called the Christian Church denomination. But there are strong evidences of similar disrespect among many brethren in the church even as I write these words.

Present Influence

The church of today can and will influence the church of tomorrow. The church of today is faced with making some tremendous decisions. While the church has many problems and confrontations from without, the worst problems, and the most deadly ones, come from within.

The church must decide whether to follow pseudo-scholarship or plain Scripture. Will our concern be for colleges or shall we have compassion for the church? Will the emphasis be on methods or the message? Shall we be ruled by editors or overseen by elders? Will we listen to professors and presidents or to godly pastors? Will the preaching be Pentecostal or the preaching of Pentecost? Shall we subscribe to the nickels, numbers, noise, food, fun, and frolic fellowship with gymnasiums and gimmicks, or "*preach the word*"?

We see bulletins almost entirely devoted to Opryland and Six Flags over Georgia, ball teams, flashy dressed preachers, jive talk, helicopter rides, free bicycles, hurrahs, and handclaps. Shall we pursue social outings or sacrificial offerings? Will our assemblies be genuine worship in spirit and truth or hyped emotionalism? We see all around the acceptance of perverted Bibles which have been promoted and defended more by the colleges and their Bible departments than most any other source of acceptance. But so have book stores and the "up-to-date" preachers. The church must decide whether it be versions or perversions!

Shall we instigate programs with entertainment, public relations so everybody in the community will accept us, have our cheerleaders, promotional boosters that make us feel good, or shall we be guilty of preaching the only message of salvation there is? To whom do we turn? Shall it be the charismatic clergyman type, or to teachers of truth? Which shall it be, the money makers with promotions or the soul savers with gospel preaching? Will we adopt a religion of convenience and compromise, or one of conviction and conscience? Shall we convert the world or conform to the world?

Some seem more concerned about rugs in the aisle than repentance in the heart. They seek responses rather than sincere conversions. I once preached a gospel meeting at a church that claimed in a campaign the previous year that they had baptized ninety-six people. Yet, less than one full year later, only one of the ninety-six was meeting with them. Many they dunked in water never assembled with the saints one time because they thought they could still remain in their denominations. They

were never taught about the kingdom. That event got headlines in some brotherhood papers, but most were merely wetted, not wedded to the Lord. They are now thoroughly confident of salvation even though they are apart from the body of Christ.

Modernism and Liberalism

We must decide what to do about modernism, liberalism, and the seminary trained professors. What we ought to do is clear. Crossroad cultism, playground evangelism, family life centers (for which we have no authority) dominate some programs. Shall we continue to wink at the doctrine of evolution in colleges, even colleges and universities conducted by those who claim to be Christians?

To my mind these issues are critical. But what may be more deadly is the "go along" attitude so many have concerning error. We find too few who will stand up and be counted for truth. They determine fellowship on the basis of friendship, fame, finances, fun, family, and foolishness rather than "the faith." They ignore the prohibition to fellowship works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11). They plead for whatever is not specifically forbidden even though Scriptures teach we must have authority for what is said and done (Colossians 3:17; First Peter 4:11). Some even fellowship the denominations in their holy days, ministerial associations, joint services, etc. This disrespect for God's authority breeds certain apostasy in large measures, feeding upon Biblical ignorance, a misconception of love, a lack of study, and a catering to feelings. Some contend there are Christians in all denominations, that baptism is acceptable even if one does not know it is to be saved or for the remission of sins. They uphold and participate in the so-called unity meetings that advance unity-in-diversity, which is nothing more or less than to agree to disagree. Unity-in-diversity is not unity, but heresy. The vicious cycle must be broken if the future of the church is to be beneficial to man and a glory to God.

Shall We Learn

Are we really learning from the past as we ought? Are we

even listening enough to be on guard? This remains to be seen. But we are sure there are many sources from which digression is pouring. Probably as much or more than any other single source is the influence of the colleges. A close second is the larger, financially secure, metropolitan, socially interested churches which emphasize big operations that are not even Scriptural. These churches are often guided by elders who prefer peace to truth and do not wish to disturb the devil if it would disturb their treasury.

This was the path that was trod that produced digression and the Christian Church just a few years back. Some preachers seem to be more of a professional clergy. In fact, many have been taught and trained with such a concept of preaching. Many are nothing more than overpaid ear scratchers and entertainers who have sacrificed soundness for statistics, faithfulness for filthy lucre, gain for gospel. They lust for community acceptance and prominence. Can you imagine any place where the apostle Paul might have been chosen "The Young Man of the Year"?

It Took a Break of Shackles

The pioneers of the Restoration Movement broke from the shackles of denominations and moved away from error toward truth. This "movement" was simply to return to the original pattern. While not authority, nor perfect, these men made the Biblical plea that called for unity founded on truth. They preached rejection of all except what was of God. Their direction was right. Today, we perceive the drift is away from truth toward apostasy in many churches. Men call for union, teaching that doctrinal differences make no difference, creating union through compromise, negotiation, friendships, and summits rather than unity through obedience to the truth revealed in Scripture. For shame!

Calling a rabbit an elephant does not make it so. Calling a church the "church of God" or "church of Christ" does not make it so. While it is right and proper to identify the church with Scriptural terms (Romans 16:16), today, some churches use the term "churches of Christ" that never have been "churches of Christ," and some continue

to use that designation that are no longer deserving of it because they have left the faith.

Apostasy is never more than one generation away. This is because the religion of Christ is a taught religion (John 6:44,45). What if a generation is not taught correctly, or refuses to abide with the teaching? Does honesty, sincerity, activity, enthusiasm, or numerical growth assure faithfulness? It never has and never will. With many, apostasy does not have to wait until the next generation. They have already produced it.

Progress or Digress?

Whether the church in the future will progress or digress is largely the responsibility of today's elderships. Over the years I have been blessed to work with many wonderful men who were elders. I respect the work of the eldership, and I respect their authority. There can be no question among those who keep up with what goes on that too many elderships have abdicated their duties and through their ignorance and indifference the churches have languished toward digression. Some elders are so negative about keeping alert and knowing what is taking place that I wonder if they know Roosevelt is no longer President. Thank God for those who take their duties seriously! There are too many of the other kind!

Preachers have a prominent role in determining the future of the church also. While some seek headlines, popularity, acceptance by everybody, money, power, notoriety, security, they wander into being pious playboys, emotional entertainers, preaching whatever suits the people rather than what God has authorized. They dare not cross friends, power structures, papers, schools, lest it retard their "advancement in the brotherhood." Their messages are all positive and no negative, making others feel good as they gain glory for themselves. They shall have their reward!

You may think this is harsh and it is. But the sad part of it, it is so often true. I have not just started taking notice yesterday of what is going on. These things are now more outstanding, but I have been warning of them long before most of the brotherhood even considered it

possible. How many times have I been scraped and raked because I warned of such things, things that are now so dominant that nobody in their right mind can deny it!

While I make no claim of knowing everything, I do know something. I have not worked among brethren for over four decades with my eyes shut!

A Brighter View

Some may complain, "You paint a dark picture." No, I paint no picture at all. I am looking at the picture already painted and additional paint being added daily. The current drift may not end until it ends tragically as it did a century ago in total division, apostasy, and the creation of another denomination from the ruins of an apostate brotherhood brought on by those who have gone out from the truth. I am neither pessimistic nor optimistic as much as realistic. Many in the church must either repent of sin (a decision sinful digressives must make), or there must be the separation from the sinners (the divine formula that will be followed by the faithful).

The fact is, all is not well, the law of sowing and reaping is very much alive. We are lacking in teaching in areas that are urgent.

But we would not have one think all is dark. There are now and again encouraging straws in the wind. It could be that after decades of digressive drift we may be turning a corner. The church entered this period of departure with growing numbers and may well go out with ranks depleted or greatly reduced. Error extracts a deadly toll.

But smaller churches are not always aping the larger liberal ones, but some are standing up and speaking out. We see many preachers who are not intimidated by the elite, the collegiate, the big names, big money, big splashes, big numbers, nor who are seeking their own before they seek the cause of Christ. Churches are conducting preacher training schools where sound doctrine is the essential ingredient. Many brethren, in and out of leadership, are more and more aware how the

devil has infiltrated to destroy, change, and divide the church and lead captive fallen brethren. More and more false brethren are being marked and identified as they promote their digressive ways and doctrines. Elderships have taken more seriously the necessity of preserving a remnant and the remnant is becoming more and more identifiable and solidified.

But no faithful congregation can or will be led astray when its membership loves and knows the Book. They must know it, believe it, love it, teach it, apply it, live it, and defend it. The seed of the kingdom is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). The Word will endure forever (Second Peter 1:25). Ignorance and lack of love for the truth is at the tap root of digression. We can influence the future of the church by faithfully conforming to the Word.

Ultimate Future

We can know the ultimate future of those who are faithful in the church. We shall be delivered to God (First Corinthians 15:24). Christ saves the church (Ephesians 5:23). The devil could not prevail against its beginning, nor shall he prevail against its existence and ultimate victory. The individual question we each face is whether we will be among the faithful! We shall not be judged as a group, brotherhood, congregation, family, but as individuals before God. Therefore, the future of the church depends on the direction you take, and that I take. We know what has been, and we can learn from it. We can know from Scripture what ought to be, and we ought to conform to it. We can know through observation what now is, and there is both good and bad to be seen. But what the church will be in the days to come depends on whether we, and those that come after us, are determined to obey the commandments of God and respect His authority or go the way of destruction, the only alternative. We know that salvation is in the body, the church, in Christ.

* * * * *

Our next two lessons shall deal similarly with the nation and the home.

Which Way?
The Nation

Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*" This proverb is the basis of our thoughts.

We love and appreciate the blessing of being an American, living in a land of freedom, a freedom that has been provided, protected, defended at great cost to many, many people over nearly two centuries. There have been those periods in our history that are very regrettable, such as when the institution of slavery was existent, the abuses in our factories of people of all ages, the forced war for Southern independence, the various scandals, international wars and other tragedies. We see poverty in various pockets, and all manner of social problems among the populace. Yet, all the world looks to this nation as one to be desired. Our national heritage has reflected our moral standards and religious values that have their roots in the Bible. The Biblical standards are often incorporated into our laws. We do not have to build walls or string barbed wire to keep our people in this land as others do their land. Our sentries are not to prevent escape, but to protect. Many are so eager to come to our nation that they do so illegally. While our land has not always been good, it remains the best so far.

We Have Been Blessed

America has been abundantly blessed materially, with freedom, opportunity, and benefitting from the advancements in medicine, technology, food production, etc. Generally speaking, the nation has been compassionate toward those who are not so fortunate. America continues to provide assistance to the underprivileged nations more than any other nation in the world. It is somewhat amazing, in view of that fact, that so many who receive our gifts have hatred for us.

Where is America now? Which way are we going? The reason for our greatness has been our moral and

spiritual values. Psalm 33:12, "*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.*" We cannot claim to be a "Christian" nation in the Biblical sense of the Word. But true New Testament faith has had the opportunity to flourish in the land of religious freedom, under the protection, rather than the suppression, of civil government. Spiritual strength and respect for the divine has been our mark.

Most nations and empires rot from within before they succumb to the pressures from without. What happens to America matters to me because it is my earthly home, the home of my foreparents and my descendants. After the fall of the Roman empire there was the era called the Dark Ages. It was years upon years before the enlightenment of the Renaissance broke through. I do not want my descendants to have to pass through two or three centuries of atheistic, modernistic, communistic, humanistic, materialistic barbarism and depravity before the sun rises again. Do you?

It is significant how God made promises and warnings to the kings of Israel, Saul, David, Solomon, even such kings as Jeroboam. In essence He told them if they would serve Him they would be blessed. If they defied Him they would suffer their fall. That principle operated down through the history of nations. America is great because America has been good. When America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

Destruction at Work

Consider ancient Israel. These principles worked just as God gave them. Under the judges, kings, whatever period of history one considers, when the nation was not righteous, even though religious, they suffered. When they forsook God and served something else it led to their captivity and destruction as a nation. Do we have reason to think these principles shall somehow be rendered null and void for our own land?

Edward Gibbon cited several factors that contributed to the fall of the Roman empire in his account called The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. (1)A rapid increase in the divorce rare. (2) Higher and higher

taxation. (3) The craze for pleasure, sports, and violence. (4) Huge military preparations for conquests. (5) Decay of religious influence. Should it cause us concern? Yes!

Immorality

America reels under the vicious impact of the sexual revolution, which is a disregard of God's moral standards. Such has produced an assault on the society, home, marriage, family, health, and youth that has not seen its equal in our history. There is a disregard for marital vows, morality, chastity, and moral responsibility. Diseases due to immorality run rampant. We hear from the "experts" all kinds of proposed solutions except teaching people how and why to be moral. There are unwanted children, many of whom are murdered by abortion. There is a rocketing rise in child abuse. The nation labors under increasing tax burdens to support the illegitimate, diseased, and depraved. People have suffered shame and loss of self respect. Over fifty per cent of black people being born are born to unwed parents. The rate of illegitimacy among whites has doubled in the past five years. The physical, mental, emotional damage is creating an unstable and maniacal society. "Crazies" are crawling out of the woodwork and terrorizing society. Crime continues to increase and criminals coddled. Pornography is a big industry. Drugs, alcohol, flow like water down the Mississippi. One cannot fathom the depth and seriousness of the self-imposed and destructive elements in our land today.

What Education?

America reels under the impact of what is called "progressive education." Illiteracy is not being overcome. Even those who go to school emerge unable to cope with the bare necessities. Educators have grave concern, and well they should, because they have adopted this foolery of progressive education. Industries suffer and America lags. While many jobs are being lost due to foreign competition, many jobs are available that cannot be filled because of the lack of qualification. Some who leave high school cannot fill out job applications. While the "experts" meddle with attitudes and personal adjustments, students do not even learn facts and figure

essential to earning a living. The dominant influence of the humanist, John Dewey, has turned the educational system into a humanistic brain-corrupting project. America continues to fall behind.

Secular Humanism

Secular humanism is promoted by the state through the educational institutions. Humanists desire to make our society a totally secular one, removing all traces of faith in God, the very factor that has made America great, injecting organic evolution as fact (which is a lie), saying there is no right and wrong, but everyone can "do their own thing." With a program called "Values Clarification" humanists in education undermine and destroy Biblical values. The media, one of the worst enemies of freedom in America today because of their promotion of the lies of humanism and evolution, are contributing to depravity, especially in the sexual programming and total disregard of things godly and right. We are told that atheism is the fastest growing religion in America. Just why the "smart" people and the "experts" cannot see what their fruit is producing for American is difficult to understand.

America's Entertainment

We get an indication of the mentality of the nation when we see the quality of entertainment. Real talent is minimized in favor of gyrating, savage stupidity. Weld metal bedposts together with some wagon wheels, and some call it art and sculpture. It is nothing but junk. There has been such a worship of "self-expression" that it has become nonsense. Splash paint on a canvass and slide over it with your feet and some fool will put it in a gallery. The "artist" gets his picture on some national magazine. The loudest, most vulgar, depraved looking, dope headed, bellowing degenerates are called musicians and their noise is called music. It is trash. People thrill over the shootings, fast cars, adultery, getting drunk, violence, blood, profanity, and call it entertainment. It is sewage from the minds of degenerates who produce it.

Lawlessness

When people rebel against divine law, it is but a small thing to violate human laws. Do you want an explanation for the increase of crime? It is due to the fact that Americans have taught two or three generations that they have come from animals and they are now conducting themselves often with less discipline than animals. Top that with a heavy dose of the influence of lawmakers who wish to remove every vestige of morality and justice, blocking the punishment of the guilty and failing to protect the victim, they make crime profitable. "Sick" judges, under the guise of civil liberty, have flooded the streets with criminals. Parole boards are dominated by uncaring fools. Even when criminals are jailed, there are not enough jails to keep them. Nor are they really punished, but entertained, fed, never made to work, because some "nut" from the ACLU says that is slavery. There is no respect by authorities for the dignity of the human being. Laws are neither properly legislated nor enforced that deal with such things. Remember the judges and lawyers probably learned the same garbage they dispense in the same schools alongside the criminals who dropped out.

Values

America has been guilty of setting aside values that provide for social stability, such as honesty, truthfulness, justice, personal responsibility, work. Rather it has promoted free food, public doles, permissive manners toward crooks, and produced occupational cripples. The loss of respect for human dignity is never more prevalent than in the murder of millions of unborn human beings every year, and often at the expense of the taxpayer. Thousands are slaughtered on the highways due to alcohol, but nothing of substance is done to curb its growth. In our own state (Tennessee) people vote for one to occupy the highest political office in the state (Governor) who made his fortune promoting alcoholic beverages. It would not be as bad if only the drinkers killed and maimed each other. But innocent people suffer from it. Even "Christians" give their support to such promoters of the most destructive drug problem in America, alcohol.

And listen to the liberals wail and cry and march and demonstrate when one vicious, brutal, incorrigible murder is executed. But where are their cries for those he killed, or for others he would kill, or for hard working decent people who have to pay thousands each years to care for the servants of hell who have murdered and thereby lost their right to live?

Will Religion Help?

Again we see and hear the liberal clergymen join the ranks of the decadent elements of society and say there is no such thing as sin. Isaiah 5:20, "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light; and put light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet; and sweet for bitter!*" Sensual living destroys self-discipline which destroys freedom. Freedom is not license and cannot be sustained without self-discipline. Without self-discipline there simply cannot be enough laws or enforcers to regulate the nation. We are killing the blessing of freedom by listening to and siding with the liberal and immoral propagandists among us, even religious leaders. What was once an occasional blight and blemish on the scene in America has become the dominant plague. Some may consider this idle talk but in so doing they only show themselves unwilling to consider the evidence. Their unwillingness contributes to paving a smooth way for things to get worse.

We do not wish to overdraw the conditions. But anyone who denies there has been a decline in the moral and spiritual values of the people of this land are simply ignorant or dishonest. We have no major concern as a gospel preacher with matters that are purely political. But when leaders of our land make decisions based on their horoscopes, turn to the psychics, use the premillennial theory to regulate foreign policy, act as if whatever makes money and gets votes is right, the nation is in deep trouble. And we are in deep trouble! People lie to get into office; lie while in office; lie to stay in office. Do I fear Russia? Yes! Do I fear economic disaster for the nation? Yes! Do I fear nuclear war? Yes! But for America I fear most the law of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7,8; Hosea 8:7). Do you realize that even members of the Lord's church, being more

concerned with their political affiliation than God's truth, even lend their support to admitted humanists to lead our nation? They constantly berate high officials that suggest respect for God. They vote for the most immoral. When so-called "Christian" people act like that, what direction do you think the nation is going? Will America be the first nation to repeal the law of sowing and reaping? I do not think so and this disturbs me because of those who follow after in the coming generations. While many propose all manner of efforts to make things better, they stoutly refuse to consider the real problem which is moral and religious, giving aid and comfort to those who want to root out all moral and religious influence from education, and in all areas of national and personal life..

Many Voices Rise, Thankfully

A few years ago such words as you have been reading fell only from the lips of preachers who cared enough to tell the truth. Some are critical of telling the truth. But now and again we hear some of these things come from others, a few stable educators, some lawyers and judges, even a president now and then. While the Ten Commandments are still named in many state constitutions, who cares? While our coins hypocritically read "In God We Trust," most trust the coin. Religious leaders provide no guidance or solution. They are part of the problem, having adopted the modernistic, liberalistic, agnostic approach to most everything the Bible teaches. Let is be proposed that our young be taught the moral heritage of our land and the wail and cry of the ACLU (all crooks love us), and other similar groups of hell shout loud. In America we either repent or perish, and signs of repentance are scarce.

God said through Samuel to Saul, First Samuel 15:23, "*Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath rejected thee from being king.*" Second Chronicles 7:14, "*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*" Daniel Webster wrote, "If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering. But if we and our

posterity neglect its instructions and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury us and our glory in profound obscurity." Abraham Lincoln said, "Let the people know the truth and this country is safe." He did not always provide the truth, however. But we need to know God's truth.

The goal if our enemies is to bury us by eliminating our laws that restrict obscenity by calling them censorship. They wish to break down morality and stability of the home by the media propagating the sexual perversity with which the media is so replete already. They wish to promote homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. They seek to discredit the Bible, the family, encouraging easy divorce, eliminate all religious expression from schools and state functions. Are they making headway? Yes!

Regardless of how the people of this nation consider themselves, it is becoming more and more apparent that our enemies consider us much like Sodom and Gomorrah, ripe for destruction, and with justification. They know that morality and religious truth is the only prevention to our fall. That is why they work so hard to remove the barrier. God said He would have saved Sodom with ten righteous men. If Abraham had found nine, needing one more, and you were the only one left to consider, would the city have been spared?

Servants of hell seek America's fall because in the freedom of America truth can still be proclaimed and distributed to the world. But enemies have taken giant steps in bringing destruction on a nation that seems bent to go the way of the devil rather than listen to the way of God. God has blessed America. Will he continue to do so? We ask, if we persist the way of recent past, why should He?

The most preservative and patriotic thing a person can do in this nation, or any other, is to be a Christian. Christians are the best citizens because they uphold the only hope, Jesus Christ, condemning sin and exalting righteousness. Shall we pay attention to Proverbs 14:34?

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Which Way? The Home

The home is the basic unit of society, the source from which everything else comes. Homes will supply the factories, schools, businesses, churches, government officials, leaders, teachers, doctors, accountants, engineers, preachers, and the rest. The home is the spring of civilization. Society cannot rise higher than the spring from which it comes. The home molds the values, priorities, morals, human relationships, and just about everything else in society. It is a true saying, "The hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world."

We are aware that these lessons that ask, "Which Way?" regarding the church, nation, and home are somewhat discouraging. We wish it was not that way. They are depressing to prepare, deliver, and read. But do we think things will be as they ought to be if we just bury our heads in the sand, as it were, and pretend all is well when all is not well?

The only ones who can be pleased with the direction of the family and homes in America are those who are either naive, blind, ignorant, morally degenerate, do not care, or who seek the downfall of good things. This is not to contend that everything in every home is bad, but the direction generally is bad. While marriages increase seven or eight per cent, divorces have increased sixty-five to seventy per cent. Unmarried couples just living together has grown between one hundred fifty and two hundred per cent. At the same time, children living with both parents is down eighteen to twenty-five per cent. Those living with one parent is up over forty per cent, and most of the loss of one parent has been because of divorce.

Children Neglected in Teaching

Sixty to seventy per cent of children under five years of age spend part of the day in some care facility, without spiritual and moral training, while over half of the

mothers in America have left their homes to earn money outside the home. We even hear of two-year marriage contracts, suits of "palimony", (where one fornicator sues another fornicator after they have been committing fornication for a time, just living together).

The so-called "Women's Liberation Movement" and such organizations as the National Organization of Women, along with their push for the so-called Equal Rights Amendment, has been a major contributing factor to the disruption of society and the disintegration of the home. With over half of the black births in America being illegitimate, and the illegitimate birth rate among whites doubling in the past five years, it is not an unfair question to ask if a nation can survive while it makes such vicious attacks on the home and family, its basic structure. The evidence of disregard for what God says on such things is heavy.

The home is a divine institution like the church. It is designed by God and began in Eden. It has divinely given purposes, goals, responsibilities, and privileges. Good homes begin with good marriages of one man, one woman, until death separates them. It involves God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, the knowledge of duties and privileges as declared in God's Word. The prime goal of marriage and the home is to help one another get to heaven. When God is left out of these arrangements the home cannot be expected to be as it ought to be. When God is included and followed the home is one of God's greatest blessings to mankind.

Sowing and Reaping

As with the church and nation, the law of sowing and reaping is relevant and because it cannot be repealed it gives us cause for real concern (Galatians 6:7,8). Downgrading the home and family is the result of sin and false doctrines designed to protect sinners. One gigantic factor on the increase is women leaving their domestic duties and the home and family for other pursuits. There has been a corresponding increase in adultery, lawlessness, and all manner of crimes, disregard for God and His church, and general decay and corruption of morality. While this contention is not

popular in our present society, it is still the truth and to shut our eyes to the truth is to sentence ourselves to a blindness that will destroy us. For the love of money, fame, pleasure, things, people have sold their families and homes, and not just their properties. Each woman who pursues employment outside the home at the neglect of her home should ask whether she does so from need or from greed.

We hear now and again someone say that the church is losing her young people. This is not entirely accurate. The losses of the young to the church are the result of homes losing the young. The church is unable, except in rare instances, to overcome what the home is doing to the young. The home is the training ground (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). We need parents like Abraham, Genesis 18:19, "*For I know him that he will command his children and his household and they shall keep the way of the Lord.*" Many parents are leaving the training of their children mostly to others, and the result is the children receive little spiritual training. Their houses are not much more than filling stations occupied by strangers. Ability to communicate has been ruined by a worship at the altar of television. Priorities are being set by the godless even in the homes of those who profess Christ. Values are perverted because of what people are hearing and seeing.

Alcohol

Special mention is necessary on this theme because alcohol is probably the worst plague in our land. Did you know that drinking alcoholic beverages is producing more and more alcoholics, and is America's number one drug problem? Did you also know that most young people learn that it is proper to drink from what they hear and see in the home, more than any other influence? What fools parents are who drink! While the homes are beleaguered with runaway children, child abuse, abortions, incest, suicides, murders of children, still parents neglect the spiritual and moral training that is their God-assigned duty to provide their children.

So many children are allowed to reach physical maturity never having been taught self-discipline, but

tolerated in self-indulgence. The most frustrated people on earth are those who have to meet life but have never learned the difference between right and wrong, and do not know how to make the decisions they have to make. Many children learn disrespect for authority by being allowed to display disrespect for parental authority first. Proverbs 29:15, "*The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.*" Parental pursuit of selfish ambitions is at the root of many problems that are burying many youths. Far too many parents do not provide the time, energy, patience, knowledge, and guidance enough to rear their own children. They are too busy chasing, sometimes money, sometimes other people.

The sin attributed to Eli was that he did not restrain his children. Just how can a parent do a good job when he is too busy with lesser things to attend to children?

Divorce

Divorce is even occurring in the church at alarming rates. While it is still far less than in society generally (one of two in society), we find more and more professed "Christians" who show they really do not respect God's laws governing marriage and the home. Even less do they respect His teaching regarding divorce and remarriage. To accommodate this growing sin in the church we are being bombarded with doctrines that rather appease those in sin than causing sinners to repent and correct. So many in the church have partaken of the sinful ways of the world that many preachers, teachers, and elders have decided that we must "love them" and teach them something different from what God has said, or at least try to present some plausible dodge around what he has said so we can just go ahead and accept the adulterous unions among us.

Schools Often Hinder

Our schools have contributed to undermining the teaching done in godly homes, and even the erosion of the home itself. False doctrines about marriage, divorce, and remarriage among brethren have had a big push in recent years from professors in "our" schools. Even

those in schools who know better and do not believe these errors being taught are not strong and courageous enough to openly oppose their colleagues. Jobs mean more than truth to so many.

Just what does one think the teaching of evolution does to the reliability of the Bible? Yet, evolution is taught as fact, even in schools supposedly operated by brethren. There are required texts that compromise with evolution. This is glaringly apparent in public schools, which in many matters have become one of the most poisonous enemies of the Lord's church in our day. They teach values and doctrines that are opposite to what God has revealed. Even homosexuality is presented as an acceptable lifestyle to small children. Humanism has become the loudest theme in public education.

Evidence Tells the Sad Story

The evidence of the decline of the home is staggering and it is obvious that the home has been going the wrong direction for several decades. While this is not pleasant to realize, we might as well realize the truth about it. Sadly, too many really do not care.

Everything about every home is not bad. We should not conclude that all in America's homes has fallen victim to the devil. There are godly homes, governed by godly parents, rearing godly children. But this discussion has to do with the present trend and downward spiral of the home, and the conclusions are too pronounced. But all homes do not produce divorce and delinquent children. It is because these homes respect God and His Word. This is why the task of taking the truth of God to the world is so pressing with respect to the quality and spiritual welfare of the occupants and inhabitants of our homes.

What Must Be Done?

It is one thing to recognize a trend but quite another to do something constructive about it, and, in this case, turn it around to what ought to be. There are efforts that should be made. Parents need to show their young what a godly home is. Often divorce breeds divorce. But stability breeds stability. Many youths never know a

good home, marry without that knowledge, and when their home breaks down and out they consider that about normal. They expect failure because that is what they have experienced in their upbringing.

There should be more preparation for marriage by more teaching on God's will for the home and family. It is easier to prevent than to correct problems. Preparation for marriage is a great preventive.

Married people must sever all ties with whatever puts a strain on the stability of the marriage and home, whether it be associates, jobs, recreations, locations, etc. We should police the television. What comes over it, most often, in the name of entertainment, is nothing but spiritual and moral garbage of hell, with every sort of sin paraded as an acceptable bit of conduct including fornication, drunkenness, homosexuality, violence, hate, divorce, murder, etc. On an average day on the "soaps", viewers see and hear nearly seven instances of something sexually perverse. Great entertainment for people who want to please God!

Cannot we strengthen the homes and ties of marriage and the family by family worship, personal prayer, righteous activities together, attendance at worship, family reunions that stress godly heritage, learning and practicing the "Golden Rule"? The greatest gift a parent can give his child are principles and specifics that show the sanctity and uniqueness of a godly home where Christ reigns supreme.

Sometimes the question is asked of a parent whose children are noted for being what they ought to be, "What did you do that your sons or daughters are as they are?" It is generally conceded that providing a one, two, three catalogued list is almost impossible. Good children are formed by living before them good lives. It is not so much one big thing as it is the daily little things combined. But we can say with confidence that teaching them a respect for the Bible is absolutely essential. Whatever advice could ever be given parents regarding their children is that human wisdom cannot displace or replace divine wisdom. As Edgar A. Guest once wrote, "It takes a heap o' living in a house to make it a home."

Good homes produce good people and good churches. Good homes exist where each family member strives to live faithfully before God. Our homes can be what God approves if we will only listen and apply what He says.

Lost Children: A Terrible Tragedy

We often feel terribly helpless as we hear and read of the deterioration of homes, seeing children going astray, and watching the nation dig its own grave by ignoring the family and home. While none of us as individuals may ever make much impact on the world, even the nation, maybe even the community where we live, we can start now to make our homes more in keeping with the divine pattern.

Consider Noah, who saved his children from a world that was so degenerate God destroyed it. Consider Hannah's, Samuel's mother, who gave her child into the service of God. She did this even as the nation generally was going away from God.

Once a person asked me why anybody would want to bring children into this dismal and sinful world where things seemingly are going from bad to worse. I could only respond that we needed our children so we might train them God's way, and work and pray that they will keep the light of truth burning brightly in this darkened world in their own generation. We can provide for God tools for His service through our children if we will. May God help us, and them, in the midst of a present onslaught against His divine will to do what we must to make the salvation of ourselves, our children, and our children's children the eternal reality.

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These three lessons are mere summaries of major themes that deserve our consideration regarding the direction of the church, our nation, and the home. Please read them carefully. You can make a difference. JWB

We Must Keep Saying So



In many of the articles that we write, not only for this booklet, but in our church bulletin, and articles for various papers, we keep stressing the necessity of brethren who stand for the truth against the ravages of liberal digression to stand firm for the truth, but to also stand congenially with each other. How unbecoming it is for brethren who love the Lord to have a falling out with each other over matters of judgment and opinion. We have been grieved to watch and even experience brethren alienating themselves from each other because somebody is always trying to dominate and regulate the other fellow. One of the most glaring symtoms of this is when somebody gets angry at sombody else and then feels the right to demand everybody get angry at the same one. Whatever happened to the attitude, "*For we be brethren*"? Sound brethren may have personal differences at times, but such things ought be resolved and never allowed to disrupt others. JWB

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is avaliable.

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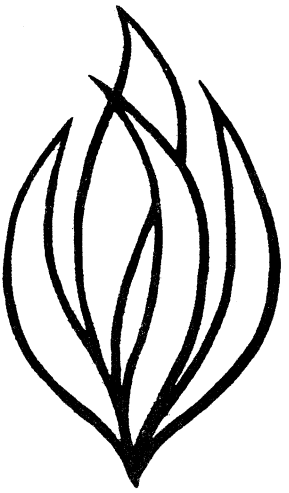

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVI *James W. Boyd* NUMBER 10

The Need For A Standard and Authority

Imagine a football game, but without referees. Suppose one team said it took a ten yard gain for a first down, but the other team said it took twelve. One team said a touchdown counted six points, but the other said nine. One team allowed only eleven players per team on the field, but the other allowed fourteen. There were to be no penalties because the only violations would be those that each team admitted voluntarily. The time limits for the game would be decided as they went along. So start the game! Who would think that there could even be a game under such circumstances? Is there no need for a standard by which to measure everything, and an authority to enforce the rules?

Imagine afternoon traffic without absolute rules. There was no rule in which lane one must drive at any time, or which direction. The lights and signs could mean whatever each driver decided for himself. There were no speed limits and no officers. Want to take a drive?

Imagine a society where there would be no right and wrong, no ought and ought not. Nothing would be really evil except as one considered it for himself. There would be no absolute standard and nobody was accountable to anybody else for anything because it was thought to be a violation of freedom and unloving to judge anybody. Do you want to live in such a society? Is there no demand for standards and authorities?

About Humanism

The philosophy called Humanism makes no more sense than the scenes imagined above because Humanism, which is advocated on nearly every campus, by the media, and even in religion, claiming to be for man's benefit and freedom (not to be confused with

humanitarianism or being humane), contends for the abolition of absolute rules, standards, and authorities.

Just what kind of world would we have if Humanism were adopted all around? Nothing could be called right or wrong. "Everything is beautiful in its own way." Humanism is seen in the phrase, "I'm OK, you're OK." It is the doctrine to "do your own thing; to each his own; I did it my way." As one song says, "It can't be wrong because it feels so right." Some cry, "If it feels good, do it. Nothing is wrong if you feel good afterward." This is Humanism, a fast growing philosophy which is nothing other than an infectious cancer on humanity.

Away With God

Such a doctrine removes God from His throne and replaces Him with each man becoming his own god. It is a philosophy that is totally subjective, nothing absolute and objective, but each is left to say, do, and think as each prefers about everything. Students today are being taught to "express yourself" because nobody has the right to say you are wrong. People are being told that the purpose of life is to fulfill their personality, whatever that means. It is insisted that nobody can know "truth" because truth is relative, and nobody can know for sure, but the best anyone can do is to search for truth, if it even does exist. But nobody can really ever find it, like looking for a black cat in a dark room that is not there.

Humanism contends that the only thing anybody can really know is what they personally experience. "If you haven't tried it, don't knock it."

Can such a philosophy really operate? Is it reasonable, rational, and practical to follow it in life, or in religion? Does it have validity? Is it really an advance of freedom, or a retardation to freedom? Or is it actually a form of servitude, slavery, and bondage to self?

We Cannot Know?

Look at the claim that all you can know is what you experience? Are you going to think that jumping off a ten story building will do you no harm? Do you think

you might be hurt? Why do you think so? Have you tried it? Until you try it, can you know it is harmful? But who has done such things? According to Humanists you cannot know it will be bad for you until you have experienced it. This is how drug users argue. Want to follow Humanism and jump?

Is truth only relative and subjective, only as each may see it? If so, how does anyone know this position is really true? How can they be so absolutely sure when their very doctrine says there is nothing absolute. We contend that any doctrine that shoots itself in the head cannot be a very reasonable doctrine. If it is right, it is wrong. If it is wrong, then it cannot be right.

Is This Man's Purpose?

Is the purpose of man to fulfill his own personality? Just what does this mean anyway? By whose standards shall we determine fulfillment? Shall we allow the policy of the Nazis to be the standard? Can they fulfill themselves, even as they murder six million Jews? Whose fulfillment do you have in mind? Maybe you prefer Ayatollah Komeni who held innocent people captive for over four hundred days. Shall we let the criminal be fulfilled? Are you really ready for a society that says, "Everybody is free to do what they wish and 'fulfill' themselves?" Think about that the next time you read and hear of, or suffer from, a robber. He was simply fulfilling himself! Humanism says he was simply doing his purpose and following his "thing". Without things being right and wrong, who can say he was wrong or that you were right to not want him to rob you?

It really should not take you very long to see that the fastest growing philosophy among us today is so fallacious that you wonder how and why any intelligent person could ever give it a second thought?

What is Normal?

It does no good to cry, "The standard should be what is normal," because who is to say which norm? Who has that authority? Who is there to enforce the norm? To

say there should be any standard at all, even "normal," is to contradict Humanism which calls for no standard.

As for who shall live or die, how can you decide? Shall we eliminate the deformed, sick elderly, injured, unwanted, and just keep the healthy, happy, "wise," and wealthy? Who has the right to say which is which? Humanism denies the validity of all absolutes, ought and ought not's. Just who has the right to say we shall destroy this unborn child, but keep this one alive? Why is genocide wrong? Who says so? Some people believe in it. Whoever says it is wrong runs against Humanism. Madalyn O'Hare, renegade atheist, said she wanted to live where there are no rules and she could be totally free. What if somebody felt they were free to beat her up? How could she say total freedom was right?

Why Man and Not Trees?

Just ask why should man be the most? The humanist claims he is just an evolved animal like others, just more developed and complex. Why should not a dog be the most? Why discriminate against trees? (Al Gore might argue for trees). Who has the right and authority to say that man should be the most? If a man is just elements and physical material, like everything else, not a spirit, the result of naturalistic accidents without purpose or destiny, why make him the most? The fact is, of all creatures on this earth, man is the most, because he is a creature created in the spiritual image of God, a spirit as well as body, and given supremacy over all by the Creator. Without this man is nothing but just another, not the most. Cannot you see how Humanism robs man of his dignity and distinction? Evolution of man is not only a colossal lie, being promoted as proven fact, but it makes man just a beast, and destroys all reasons for him to behave himself other than in a beastly fashion. To talk about "theistic evolution" or "atheistic evolution" is stupid. Man is not the result of naturalistic evolution. That people who claim to believe in God and His Word even suggest such a contradiction to truth only demonstrates how ridiculous some people are willing to be to be accepted by the self-appointed "experts" and sophisticated elite who deny God and curse humanity by their doctrines and philosophies.

The problem humanists face is that they do not want any authority over them so they can do as they please, even though they will not allow others to do as they please, and to do this they must somehow, someway, remove and disallow the reality of God.

Majority Rule?

Some say let the majority determine morality? Why talk about morality if we are just animals? Why let the majority decide? Who made that rule? Who has the authority to enforce that rule or any other? Cannot you see the impossibility of society without a standard and authority? Which majority do you solicit to rule? Will it be the majority in Russia, or the South Sea islands, or among the tribes of Africa or Australia? Will you choose the majority among homosexual ghettos in the large cities? Has following the majority always benefited mankind? Is the minority never best? But even so, to allow the majority to rule contradicts Humanism, because it clamors for no authority or standard!

Have we not proven the point? There must be a standard and an authority. We just have to determine what it will be. Shall we enthrone man? If so, which man? Or shall we recognize God and His Word?

Humanism is the doctrine that says, "Down with God and up with man." Actually, it really says, "Down with God and up with me." Humanists, denying God as they do, do so because admitting the reality of God admits they are not their own superior standard and judge, but are actually accountable to One higher than themselves. This they simply cannot do. The humanists has to admit he has come from nowhere, here for no reason, no guidelines by which to live, and going nowhere, amounting to nothing more than a skunk. Really, the poor skunk is not a deadly foe to humankind as the humanist. His doctrine will destroy civilization and turn the human family into total barbaric chaos.

God is Authority

The truth is that God is over man, having created man, and man is accountable to His Creator. Life does have a

meaning. There are rules that all must obey to please God. The rules are revealed in the Bible, His Word. Each will answer for himself. We are spirit, here for a mission and purpose, and have an eternal destiny awaiting. We urge one and all to "*buy the truth and sell it not*" (Proverbs 23:23).

Jeremiah 10:23, Proverbs 14:12, Matthew 28:18ff, Second Timothy 3:16,17, all relate to this matter. Man's way is not the way, but only God's way is the way. His way is right and anything contradictory and different thereto is wrong. Christ has all authority. Deity's will is embodied in inspired Scripture. "*Fear God and keep His commandments*"(Ecclesiastes 12:13).

* * * * *

The Design and End of Miracles

The place to begin this study is with a clear definition of a miracle. So many things are called a miracle that do not fit the true definition. A miracle is not something that is simply marvelous, wonderful, amazing, and unexplainable. Certainly a miracle is wondrous and marvelous, but many things fit that description that are not miracles. A preacher was speaking on miracles one sermon and asked if anybody knew what was a miracle. He had the habit of eating Sunday meals with the same family every time he visited the congregation. The little boy of that home spoke up loud and clear that everyone could hear and said, "Mother said it would be a miracle if you ate dinner somewhere else today." It may not always be too wise to ask for definitions from your hearers. But people are prone to attach the label of miracle upon many things that are startling and great but are not really the result of the miraculous.

A miracle is supernatural, a direct and observable intervention of God, over, above, and beyond, and even contrary to the known laws of nature. It would include

what the Bible calls signs and wonders. But the word that must be stressed is supernatural.

"Do you believe in miracles?

In order for our answer to the above question to be correct, it must be qualified whether you answer yes or no. Yes, we believe in the miracles recorded in the Bible. They are historical fact and presented so. We do not question the truthfulness of miracles as recorded in the slightest. But, no, we do not believe that miracles are being performed today. Strange as it may sound at first, we believe these two things about miracles for the very same reason. Both answers are based on the Biblical testimony and evidence regarding miracles, and we accept what the Bible teaches about it.

In the Bible the miracles were performed in every dispensation, Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian. The world began by a miracle. God spoke and it was so. It was a direct intervention of God. It was supernatural. It brought nature into reality. There are numerous records of miracles throughout the Old and New Testaments. God's Word is God-breathed (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Therefore we have no doubt about the accuracy of what God has said. In fact, the validity of Christianity is dependent upon the reality of miracles that are recorded. The virgin birth was a miracle. His atoning blood is miraculous. The evidences of Christ's Deity are miraculous in the signs and wonders that He performed. The resurrection and ascension of Christ were miracles. The event of Pentecost included the miraculous. Miracles were performed by the apostles. To deny the miraculous is to deny the Bible and that is to deny Christianity as being from God.

Modernists begin their consideration of the Biblical record with the repudiation of the supernatural. That is the basis upon which they approach Bible study. Little wonder they dismiss what the Bible teaches on anything.

Purpose of Miracles

Miracles had certain purposes. There were goals to be achieved by the use of the miraculous. Miracles were not

done for sensationalism or showmanship and entertainment. Jesus refused to perform miracles when He was before Herod because that was his motive to see them. Nor were miracles primarily for the purpose of showing the compassion of Christ, although the miracles often did that. But there were other goals than these. While the plan of salvation came into being via miraculous events, the process of saving a soul from spiritual death is not miraculous, but the operation of God's spiritual law. There were records of conversion which included miracles, but the miracles were incidental to the way God saves man and were not a part of the converting and saving process itself. Conversion was always, and still is, effected by the Word, belief in the Lord of whom the Word speaks, and obedience to the law of Christ. There is nothing miraculous about the plan of salvation itself except its origin and revelation.

Miracles were for the purpose of proving, authenticating, confirming the messenger and his message as being from God. Moses stood before Pharoah and performed the signs as evidence he spoke in the name of Jehovah. The prophet sent from Judah to Bethel worked miracles that convinced Jeroboam the prophet was a true prophet of God. Naaman was convinced that there is no God in all the earth except the God of Israel, being convinced by the miraculous cure he enjoyed. The Israelites were convinced to serve God because of the miracle performed on Mt. Carmel in the contest between Elijah and the false prophets of Baal. The widow of Zaraphath said, "*Now by this I know that thou art a man of God and that the word of the Lord is in thy mouth is truth*" (First Kings 17:24), referring to the miracle of the prophet raising her son to life. Her statement is similar to Nicodemus regarding Christ, "*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him*" (John 3:2).

Mark 16:20 teaches that the working of these signs and wonders by the apostles would serve to confirm the word they taught. The written record of the signs of Jesus were to be convincing evidence that He is the Son of God (John 20:30,31). Acts 2:32, "*Ye men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by*

him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." The Word is now confirmed and was confirmed by the working of these things (Hebrews 2:3,4).

Tongue Speaking

Miracles were to demonstrate the glory of God (John 3:2; 11:40). They showed the power of God (Mark 2:10,11; Acts 3:12,13). We make the observation especially with respect to the sign of tongues or languages unknown (First Corinthians 14:22). Foreign tongues were a sign to Israel of their alienation from God (Deuteronomy 28:45-49). The tongues on Pentecost certainly demonstrated the inspiration of the Word spoken by the apostles and provided the way for preaching the gospel to people of many languages. Speaking in tongues at the house of Cornelius was a sign of the end of the special relationship the Jews had with God as God's chosen people because now the purpose of their choice was accomplished in Christ. The tongues were a sign that the gospel is for all, on the same terms, Jews and Gentiles. That men of every nation can be acceptable to God is made evident from Acts ten, eleven, and fifteen. It was convincing to Jewish Christians that repentance unto life was granted to Gentiles.

Miracles and Prayer

Does not God perform miracles in answer to prayer? There are Biblical records that show God has answered prayer with the use of miracles. Many can be cited, such as the prayer of Hezekiah, the prayer of Elijah at Carmel concerning the altar, etc. But the question must be, "Does God answer prayer today by miracles?" Whether God answers prayer is not the question. James 5:16 affirms that *"effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* Yes, God answers prayer. But how? That same passage in James gives us the answer. James recalled the prayer of Elijah regarding the end of the drought. We turn back to First Kings 17:1; 18:41-45 and see how God answered that prayer. Elijah prayed and clouds appeared that produced the rain that ended the drought. Was that a miracle? It was an answer to prayer by the working of what we would call the law of nature, namely, rain coming from clouds.

When God has determined how He will operate, we must accept what He declares and not read "miracle" into something that is not supernatural. God can answer prayer through providence as well as the miraculous. To say He cannot and does not would be a limitation on the power of God and disrespect for His self-imposed limitation He has declared about miracles.

Miracles Today?

This leads to the next vital point. The days of miracles have ceased because God has limited Himself. We have three evidences from Scripture that this is true. The first is the purpose of miracles has already been accomplished. The Word has been confirmed (Hebrews 2:3,4), "*For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect to great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?*" The claim for the need of miracles is a false claim inasmuch as the all-sufficient Word has been delivered and confirmed.

Again, the ones to whom miraculous powers were given have long since been dead. The apostles were granted that ability (Matthew 10:8). Also others were given this unique power by the laying on of apostolic hands (Acts 8:17; 19:6; Romans 1:11). This was an ability that belonged exclusively to the apostles (Acts 8:19-21), that of imparting miraculous gifts to others. The apostles are dead and the ones on whom they laid hands are dead. There are no living miracle workers.

True enough, there are those who claim such power. But they do not and cannot perform what is recorded in Scripture. Where goes the claim must go the demonstration. Biblical miracles were not psycho-somatic problems being corrected under super-emotionalism conditions. Such things are not miracles. Parents "kiss away the hurt" from their children all the time. Preachers, elders, counsellors, and others engage in this type of "healing" and it is not miraculous.

Again, the cessation of miracles is revealed to us by explicit New Testament teaching. First consider Ephesians 4:11-13. Read the text and note that Christ gave gifts to men for the purpose of perfecting the saints and making the church mature and stedfast. How long was this to be done? "*Till we all come in the unity of the faith.*" The Scripture does not read like perverted "Bibles" like the Living Bible and New International Version. These gifts were not to continue until everybody believes alike, or until all are unified. But they were to last until the fullness, oneness, wholeness, completeness of "*the faith*" was accomplished and confirmed. As already noted, this has been done (Jude 3; Hebrews 2:3,4).

Let us remark here in passing that it is one of the bewildering characteristics of the some in the brotherhood who continue to use and endorse such perverted books as these versions that distort and misrepresent the will of God so grossly and deliberately. The brotherhood faces a real problem as to how long it will support preachers, schools, papers, etc. that will not face and conform to the truth regarding these things. Repeatedly we have solicited from the promoters and endorsers of these volumes what justification they offer for promoting what teaches such error. If you ever get an answer, which is seldom, it reduces down to this, "We are going to do whatever we like."

First Corinthians 13:8-10 is also relevant to the cessation of miracles. The text affirms that these miracles would cease, vanish away, fail. When? "*When that which is perfect is come.*" It is not when HE who is perfect comes, but that which. It refers to the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25) which our passage affirms was given in parts or portions. When all the parts were revealed then the confirming process, the miraculous, would cease. Again, as noted, that has been done.

Limiting God

But one might complain that denying the miraculous today limits the power of God. Not so! Certainly God CAN do whatever God wills to do. The question is what has God willed to do, not what power does God have. He created the first human by a miracle, but He does not do

that now. Does this limit His power? He has fed an entire nation in the wilderness miraculously, but does He do that now? Does that limit His power? We thank God for our food, life, etc., but such is not given to us miraculously and apart from His will.

Salvation and Miracles

One final word, and this regarding the plan of salvation. The plan of salvation exists because of the miraculous. But it is error to teach that salvation itself is a miracle. One was heard to preach that "we are to preach and God works the miracle." This is error to the core. One is saved through conformity to God's spiritual law and not the result of some miraculous operation, even though God operates (Colossians 2:12). He operates according to His law. The law is revealed in the Word. God does not work a miracle to save, but saves through the Word.

Many have been deceived by charlatans who claim miracle power. Many have exploited the Biblically ignorant, gullible, naive, misinformed, desperate people who are in panic for some solution to problems and seek relief. The confusion regarding miracles is not totally outside the church, thanks to false teachers among us. We have in our possession books, sermons, claims, by those who profess to be our brethren, members of the churches of Christ, college professors, and one who was a head of a Bible department who claimed miracles are still being worked today. The undermining of the integrity of the Bible is at work in such claims.

Thank God for the miracles done. But they have ceased until the return of the Lord, the resurrection of all, and the end.

* * * * *

If things go as we have planned them, (but even the best plans go astray), this issue should come to you near the beginning of 1996. We intend to produce and mail *A Burning Fire* at least one more year, then possibly produce a single hardback volume of several lectures and sermons to conclude this effort. We shall advise you hoping you will be interested.

"Ye Have Heard That It Hath Been Said..."

Lesson One

Our title is a phrase that was used by Jesus at least six times in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21; 27; 31; 33; 38; 43). He was discussing such subjects as murder, hate, adultery, lust, divorce, oaths, revenge, and love. He was preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23), contrasting certain tenets of the Mosaic law and Jewish traditions with His gospel, showing a distinction between what was soon to be set aside and what was the Lord's will until the end of time.

We use the phrase in our lesson to introduce other contrasts between things often heard today and the truth of Christ. Our next two lessons are discussions of six themes. We intend to show truth as well as the folly of error. We shall bring a number of Scriptures to bear and would only counsel, "If the shoe fits, wear it."

Do I Have To?

You have heard it said, "We do not have to attend service on Wednesday evening." Just why anybody who loves the Lord and hungers for greater knowledge of truth would ever say anything that detracts from taking advantage of such opportunities as the Wednesday evening services is hard to understand. It possibly reflects a lack of love and appetite for truth, as well as a "get by" attitude.

What did the Holy Spirit lay alongside love and good works (Hebrews 10:24)? "*Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.*" (Hebrews 10:25). How did the Holy Spirit illustrate willful sin (Hebrews 10:26,27)? Was it not in the context of forsaking assemblies? While Hebrews 10:25 certainly would include the assembly on Lord's Day as observed, where is the evidence that such is the exclusive application?

Are we not obligated to obey and follow those who have the rule over us (Hebrews 13:17)? Leadership must have followship. Elders are the shepherds over the flock and are to feed the flock (First Peter 5:2). Can we conclude the eldership has this duty but the sheep have no responsibility to eat when food is provided? Some sheep get spiritually sick, weak, even starve and die, laying the blame on the shepherds, when they simply would not cooperate.

Matthew 5:6 pronounces blessings on those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Such people never say, "We don't have to attend." If physically able, they are present, not only to feed and learn for themselves, but because of their influence on weaker brethren, outsiders, and their love to promote His cause. We are made to wonder why some seem to be so hardened against Bible study periods. We conclude that God is pleased when there are those who love His Word enough to gather together to learn more of it, and worship Him?

Preacher-itus

You have heard it said, "I'm not going if brother So-and-so is going to preach and teach." We wonder why some people come to the assemblies. We should not come to please ourselves, to be seen, to be entertained, or made to feel good, or exalt whoever may be preaching and teaching. We should come to worship God. Some today, like in Corinth (First Corinthians 1:10-13), have a bad case of "preacher-itus".

Not everyone has the same talent and ability to preach. But it takes everyone doing what he or she can to make the body whole (First Corinthians 12:14-17). Those who conduct the public worship and take the lead in it usually do the best they can. They are not all equally efficient and effective. But they try. We should always do our best. But what an attitude to say you will worship God only if someone you like is going to take the lead!

There is no clergy-laity in the Lord's church. There should not be any "Big I's; little U's" in the church. We all should be helping each other get to heaven. We need brethren who will encourage others, not discourage

anybody. We need brethren who hold up the hands of each other, "*in honor preferring one another*" (Romans 12:10). There is no justification to disobey God, create strife, hurt another's feelings, and promote discouragement just because we may have preferences regarding who does what. But some will grunt, gripe, groan, pout, and murmur unless the one who preaches happens to be to their personal liking.

Too Busy

You have heard it said, "I don't have time to do church work." Some just do not seem to have time to be a Christian and go to heaven. Many have a distorted idea what it means to be a Christian. Being a Christian means being a follower of Christ, imitating Him in daily living, making decisions in life harmonious to His will, following His standard of conduct in all areas of life. It includes rearing a family in God's nurture, caring for your children, earning a living, making provisions for those in your care, assisting the sick, aged, bereaved with sympathy and help, giving material and physical assistance when necessary. It involves presenting the gospel to the lost, recovering those who have fallen by the wayside, constantly asking oneself, "What would Jesus have me do?"

Some have responsibilities in life that others do not have. But there are those works that fall upon no person particularly but on everyone generally, such as visitation, financial assistance, teaching, even doing menial tasks. We all have the same amount of time. Some schedule their time better than others. Some have duties that others do not have that takes time not needed by others. Some have learned to "*redeem the time*" (Ephesians 5:16). Is it not true that if you want something done you usually have to call upon those who are already busy? They will work. Others, who have time hanging heavily on their hands, usually have it that way because they do not want to work anyway. People who really get busy and work for the cause of Christ are those who have set their priorities in proper order. Someone has said that everyone in the church is "willing." About ten per cent are willing to work, and the other ninety are willing to let them. Surely, it must not be this bad!

We should be grateful for the labor of others because we also enjoy and benefit from their work. But we need to ask, "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?" While the Lord does not expect anything of us we cannot do, He does expect us to do what we can. Mark 14:8 commends the woman who had "*done what she could.*"

When Nehemiah was leading the Jewish people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem after their return from captivity, the Scripture says, "*So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month of Elul, in fifty and two days*" (Nehemiah 6:15). How was it that this great work was done, and in so short a time? It was because, when Nehemiah asked for their cooperation, they responded, "*Let us rise up and build*" (Nehemiah 2:18). They all considered the work THEIR responsibility and therefore said, "*Let US...*" (Emphasis, JWB).

It was also due to the fact expressed in Nehemiah 4:6. "*So we built the wall, and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof, for the people had a mind to work.*" Their success was because of their fine attitude, willingness to cooperate, and energetic work.

What We Hear Is Not Always Good

These statements that are sometimes heard reflect attitudes that are not commendable in a child of God. We cannot be content to just "get by." There should be no lack of cooperation and consideration for each other. There should be a willingness to pull together. We need those who pull, not just hold back or just ride.

Matthew 11:15, after Jesus had taught the people, He impressed upon His hearers their duty to give heed to what they had been taught when He said, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*" So let us give heed to what we have learned.

* * * * *

One fellow, having trouble arising in the morning said, "It's that getting up that gets me down."

Lesson Two

Using the phrase of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which He used six times to contrast the Mosaic law and Jewish traditions with the gospel of the kingdom, we are presenting a two-part lesson dealing with things heard today and contrasting them with the truth. We invite your attention to the previous lesson and ask that you consider three more matters.

Mixed Swimming

You have heard it said, "There is nothing wrong with mixed swimming." This refers to males and females going swimming together in their abbreviated attire. While we have no objection to swimming, nor to male and females swimming together, even some swimming together in brief clothing depending on the relationship, we must be opposed to the wearing of immodest attire such as is usually worn on the swimming scenes and in mixed company. The wearing of such clothing violates the New Testament teaching on modesty (First Timothy 2:9,10). It matters not what some do, have done, or what is usually done by the majority. When the Bible teaches something, that takes precedence over everything else. If the modern swim suit is modest, just how much more of the body can be exposed to the sight of any and all before there is immodesty? Nobody is deceiving anybody in this matter. Some are just defiant against the truth. The swimming scene capitalizes on wearing brief clothes, almost none at all, that provokes and exploits sexual provocation and desire. It cultivates and promotes immoral thoughts and actions. No honest person will deny it. Will you?

Lasciviousness

It is lasciviousness, a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:19). It is provocative of lewdness, lust, immoral and unchaste thought and deed which destroys self-respect and modesty. Some might complain, "There is just as much immodesty on the streets." While we have never seen on the streets the almost nothing some people wear openly on the beach, whatever is worn immodestly elsewhere does not condone immodesty anywhere.

The need for respect for God's teaching on modesty does not have geographical boundaries nor is governed by climate. We have heard some try to excuse immodest bathing suits this way, "Nobody thinks anything about it here." That is a lie! As our children grow toward maturity and gain the awareness of the bodies of those of the opposite sex, we must teach them to respect the body, not exploit it, teaching them purity and dignity, and to know the proper functions of the body, and that sexual relationship is to be enjoyed only within the bounds of marriage. It is therefore improper to parade before them near nude bodies lest they be encouraged to lust that can and will lead to their spiritual and physical ruin. You can never teach a boy or girl to be modest in the modern bathing suits. Wearing them and being seen in them removes all natural restraints and a sense of modesty. While swimming might be enjoyed without objectionable immodesty that is usually involved in mixed swimming, it usually is not. If we cannot find places and conditions to swim without being near nude before one and all, then it is better to stay dry than spiritually die.

"Not the Only One"

You have heard it said, "I may be wrong, but so is he or she." This is frequently heard when someone has been criticized for improper behavior. Some try to minimize and even justify their wrongs because somebody else has done just as bad or worse. So what? Why do we even mention what others do? Nobody will be declared acceptable to God because somebody else was not acceptable. Two wrongs never have made a right. We have even heard people try to make something wrong out of something permissible just so they could excuse themselves for something they did wrong.

Other people and what they do is not the standard anyway. Christ is our example (First Peter 1:21). We are not to measure ourselves by ourselves or by others (Second Corinthians 10:12).

The Lord's people should apply discipline, reproof, and rebuke in order to save. It should be done scripturally and with an even hand. But regardless of the mistakes of

others, or the mishandling of situations in the past when correcting others, we can never excuse ourselves by pointing an accusing finger at somebody else. What if Peter, after denying Christ thrice, said, "Well, what about Judas?" and just gone his way?

We also read of the time when Peter was overly concerned about what would happen to John. Jesus dealt with that (John 21:18-23). Peter may have had real concern for John, but whatever his motive, it did not matter what would happen to John as far as what Peter should do. "*What is that to thee?*"

So Say It Anyway?

You have heard is said, "You might as well say something if you think it." There are people who seemingly pride themselves on blabbing everything that comes to their mind. They will say, "Well, I always say what I think." Many times it is obvious that they should have thought before they said. If they had they might not have said it. While it is good not to be deceptive, nor lie, but be honest, it is not always good to empty your brain through your mouth. Proverbs 29:11, "*A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in til afterward.*" There are times when we might think something but it simply ought not be spoken. Silence can be golden.

If it is just as well to say as to think it, it would render some passages nonsense and meaningless. We are to bridle the tongue (James 1:26), letting our speech be seasoned with grace and salt (Colossians 4:6). It is not a mark of wisdom to tell everything you think. Some thoughts are evil and should be suppressed. Thoughts can be sinful and also lead to other sins (Matthew 12:36; 15:19). Evil deeds that follow evil thoughts means two evils have been committed, the thought and the deed. Better, if there be an evil thought, that it not also be allowed to provoke an evil deed., even the deed of speaking what ought never have been said.

Matthew 5:27,28 condemns both lust and adultery. If one does lust, he sins. But is it not worse if he lusts that he also commits adultery or fornication? Such "reasoning" would be nonsense, ill-conceived, and ill-considered.

Such verbiage ought not come forth. It just might be that somebody really wants to say something, knowing it should not be said, but tries to justify saying it on the basis that one just as well say whatever he thinks, thinking this is the "honest" thing to do. Blessed is that person who learns to discipline his mind and control his thoughts. But if his thoughts go astray, he is better to suppress them rather than vent them and send them forth in words he can never retrieve.

The six points that we have discussed in these two lessons are frequently heard but reflect attitudes that need correction, even repentance. They have no place in the heart or life of the persons who wish to follow the Lord. Let us be reminded of the words of Jesus, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*" (Matthew 11:15).

* * * * *

How Long the Day?

The word "day" (Hebrew, YOM) has different meanings. There is day as opposite night, light opposed to darkness. A day is a division of time, like a working day, a day's journey, or a day of the month. Scripture speaks of the "*day of the Lord*," His coming. It can even mean age, as one advanced in days, or an age, like a dispensation. Day can even mean indefinite eons of time. It is used describing periods of time as the day of steam engines. We usually think of day in terms of the twenty-four hour "solar day," the time the earth goes around the sun. Which is it in Genesis, chapter one?

Why Bother With This?

Why ask? Why is it important? It has to do with the truthfulness of the Bible. Is the creation account a fantasy, myth, fable, poetry, only a figurative record, or an actual, historical, literal inspired revelation?

The traditional understanding has been that the day of Genesis one means a twenty-four hour day. But some

challenge that. Some say "day" is just poetry, etc. They contend that Genesis one simply tells us God created the universe, not how or how long it took. Of course, if that was all it does, that could have been said in less than ten words, not two or more chapters in Genesis and elsewhere.

The hard fact is that there is nothing in the context of Genesis one to make "day" mean long periods of time. Long days is the wish of skeptics, not the result of linguistic or scientific evidence.

Something Skeptics Cannot Allow

Contending for "day" to mean a twenty-four hour day would demand the miraculous. Be reminded, some approach the Bible already having denied anything miraculous. Is it any wonder they want to give "day" a different meaning than twenty-four hours? They have to redefine the word to fit their theories.

What Twenty-Four Hours Demands

A twenty-four hour day would affirm the reality of God. Some prefer atheism, no authority, no accountability. And some, desiring to be thought "scholarly," are willing to compromise with the unbelievers.

A twenty-four hour day gives the Bible credibility, and that is the last thing the "wise men" of our day would ever allow.

A twenty-four hour day contradicts the false hypothesis of Darwinian evolution because that demands long, indefinite eons of time. (We state emphatically that the doctrine of organic evolution as propagated by skeptics is a lie, not only anti-Biblical, but unscientific, and philosophically and logically inconsistent and self-contradictory. Why any "believer" would compromise truth to embrace or allow it is without justification.) We are well aware that evolution is taught as proven fact, but this is a case of a lie being taught as fact. It contradicts facts and demonstrable, observable, empirical evidence. It is anti-God, and the prime platform for the most hideous and anti-human doctrine

among men, Humanism. Therefore, how long the "day" of Genesis one is of importance. Confusion arises over it, not because we cannot know and we cannot understand, but because truth is rejected and false doctrine is taught instead.

Some wish to compromise and try to harmonize evolution with Scripture. This effort is called theistic evolution and takes several forms, but all the forms end up in the trash heap of error. Some attempt to have God and evolution both. Compromise is impossible. If Genesis is correct, evolution is false. If evolution is true, the Bible is false and without credibility in anything. Atheistic evolutionists do not care about the Bible, nor the day. They deny it all. Theistic evolutionists are the confused compromisers who cloud the meaning of "day."

Why We Can Be Confident

We have irrefutable evidences for believing the "day" to be the literal and historical twenty-four hour day. (1) If God had wanted to tell us the creation took six literal days, what would He have said differently from the Genesis record? (2) Each day had an evening and morning, light and darkness, just like our days. (3) If "days" mean long periods of time, we have botany problems because vegetation could not have survived long periods of darkness. (4) Exodus 20:8-11; 31:14-17 explicitly tell us it took six days, and the Sabbath, a literal twenty-four hour day, symbolized the seventh day. (5) YOM, when used with a numeral, means a twenty-four hour day. (6) Days, plural, refers to twenty-four hour days over and over again. (7) Skeptics used to laugh at the long life of early man. Take a look a the length of life they must accept if "day" means other than twenty-four hours. If days mean eons, and ages, what do years mean? Adam was created the sixth day, lived the seventh day, could not have been driven from the Garden of Eden until the eighth day (quite some time there), and his life extended over three ages and beyond, therefore he lived thousands upon thousands of years. Will they accept what their contention demands? (8) When the "day" ended, God saw what He had done was "*good.*" If eras are included in the day, they would have to include death, decay, calamity, earthquakes, volcanoes, storms,

floods, etc. How could chaos be called "good?" Those things came after the creation was completed, not during the creation period. (9) Jesus and the writers of the Old and New Testaments considered the Genesis account to be historical and spoke of them in just that fashion. Are we to think our modern day experts know more about it than they? Would you rather trust Christ or the "whiz kids" who flip-flop from one day to the next?

Why Did God Mislead Us?

Furthermore, if it took God billions of years to create the world, why did He say He did it in six days? The whole idea that "day" means anything except a twenty-four hour day repudiates the Bible.

Some Measure the Wrong Way

Some always want the Bible to bow before the theories of unbelieving men, theories that are ever-changing and repeatedly proven to be fallacious. Wonder why they never consider making the theories of men bow before the unimpeachable revelation of God which has been substantiated time and time again? Do you suppose skeptics and compromisers have a bias they protect? Do you really think they seek the truth above all else?

There is No Acceptable Compromise

It is useless to compromise the Word of God with an unproven, unprovable, unscientific, anti-scientific hypothesis that runs contrary to evidence, and is nothing but a philosophical doctrine intended to discount God, the Bible, morality, law, man's spirit, heaven, hell, the Deity of Christ, and everything else the Scriptures teach man.

There is No Reason to Compromise

There is no reason the Christian must assume a theistic evolutionist position as the way things came into being. No scientific fact, a proven and demonstrable truth, has to be denied to accept the historical, literal, inspired, and accurate revelation of Genesis regarding the creation.

The language of the text is simple and clear. Honest exegetes cannot read anything else out of these verses than a day of twenty-four hours and a week of seven days. There is not the slightest indication that this record is to be regarded as poetry, an allegory, or anything of such nature, or that it is not to be believed just as written. The language is that of normal human speech, inspired of God, and to be taken at face value. The unbiased reader will understand it as it reads. There is no rhyme or reason to take it any other way.

It Is "Either"; "Or"

Either the Biblical record is true, or the Bible is folly. Are you ready to set aside Scripture and replace it with the "wisdom" of self-professed "scholars" of a degenerate and immoral age? NOT ME!

The "long day" is faith destroying. God will take due recompense on those who promote doctrines that, if true, would negate His revelation. We urge one and all to simply take God at His Word on this and every other theme we find from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21.

* * * * *

A Hearty Recommendation

We take this space to strongly recommend material on the subject of the creation, evolution, and the implications of each, published by the APOLOGETIC PRESS, INC., 230 Landmark Drive, Montgomery, Alabama, 36117.

They produce sound teaching for adults, students of every level, even for the young children. Parents, preachers, and elders should acquaint themselves with truth on these matters so our people will not be led astray by the doctrines of false teachers, even some liberals who run around among us.

Other Things We Hear



In this issue are two lessons entitled "Ye Have Heard That It Hath Been Said..." There is an almost unlimited number of things we hear we could discuss under this title, such as one church is as good as another, baptism has no connection with salvation, sinners can pray for salvation, salvation is by faith alone, or grace alone, on and on. Having preached on radio nearly all my preaching life, I have found that discussing these ideas and comparing them with Scripture probably provokes more response, sometimes, "heat," than most any other subjects. People are sensitive and committed to their doctrines. But I simply ask, "Where do you get that view?" That is a real roadblock to them. Asking for Biblical documentation for what is believed will stop those who hold error in their tracks. For the same reason they become befuddled, we also must provide "thus saith the Lord" for what we preach, believe, and practice. Otherwise, our message is no better.

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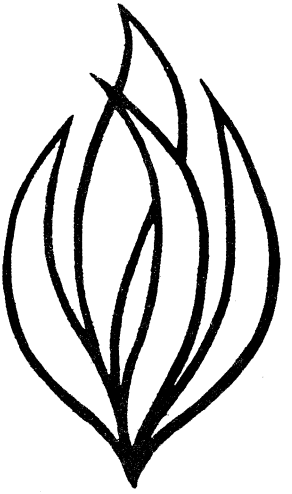

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVI *James W. Boud* **NUMBER 11**

Father's Duty to the Family

We begin with a definition of terms. Duty refers to an obligation, something that not only ought to be done, but is not optional. It is something bound upon a person. A family in this discussion is one that includes the basic unit of father, mother, child or children. Families may be different from this with extended families, one parent families, and various arrangements that are morally acceptable. Some families are without a father or mother due to death or divorce. Some families do not include children. Arrangements of kin in the same house are also prominent. Many of us have known two aunts living together, a father and daughter at the same house, etc. We always speak of moral associations.

Even with a father there may be exceptional families because the father is ill, or unable to discharge his duties for other reasons. But we generally consider the father as the man of the house, with the role of husband and parent of the children. His work may well be shared in some respects by other members of the family, but there are certain responsibilities that are his that cannot be shifted to someone else. This is that upon which we shall focus our attention.

Responsibility to God

The father must accept his personal duty to God (Romans 14:12; Ecclesiastes 12:13). This will determine his duties to others and how he is to meet other obligations. He cannot fulfill his duty if he leaves God out because God is the originator and designer of the home, having brought it into existence with purpose.

Duty to God means he has a duty to family because God requires that of him. It seems that many do not understand they have a duty to family at all. Many families have no father figure for the children. Either through abandonment, neglect, abuse, failure to support, or just shirking of duty, many fathers have been sorely

lacking. First Timothy 5:8, *"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."*

God's Word teaches the father has a duty, what that duty is, and how serious a matter it is. The Bible is the best handbook on fatherhood that has been written.

Responsibility Begins Early

A man's responsibility to his family begins before he even has a family. How we need to teach our young men this vital truth. He is to keep himself morally pure, develop his character, learn to work, and to never be abusive toward members of his family whether they are younger, older, or whatever the relationship. He must not abuse his body with drugs lest the consequences be a detriment to his yet unborn children. He needs to learn what true love is. In other words, he must learn what his duties are before he undertakes the discharge of them.

He does this best when he makes himself a man of faith, integrity, conviction, and honor rather than simply seeking wealth, power, fame, and pleasure. Being a father is not a boy's job. It takes a real man. Too many males in our land are not real men when it comes to facing responsibilities.

Duty Assumed With Marriage

The family originally consists of two people. He is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). This is God's order, so we ought not complain against it. Being the head means he must develop and demonstrate love, sacrifice, loyalty, and faithfulness. It is impossible to discharge his duty to his family if he is unfaithful to his wife He cannot and will not be a good father if the vows of marriage are violated.

His role is that of leadership which demands acceptance of responsibility. In other words, "the buck stops here" with him. This is not a matter of superiority or inferiority. A John Deere tractor does one work and a Timex watch does another. These items serve different roles. So it is with husband and wife. Every efficient

unit must have a leader and the wisdom of God is that the husband is the leader. We are sorry this does not satisfy the God-hating feminist movement in our twisted society. Much of the world rejects this order, but it is still right because it pleases God, and it pleases those who love God. And please take a candid look at what the displacement of roles has done to our children and society generally! What sane person can defend it?

Provision

First Timothy 5:8 has already been quoted. The provision the father is to provide includes food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and protection. He must see that the home gives every occupant security, that the home is a haven and a harbor of refuge. He does this by hard work. Circumstances such as illness, losses, emergencies, etc. may require assistance at times, possibly on a permanent basis. But these are exceptions. The greatest provision a father can give his children is their mother's time. Mothers ought be quick to give that time.

The father has the prime duty to provide spiritual training (Ephesians 4:6; Proverbs 22:6). Possibly in this realm is most of the dereliction of duty seen among fathers. But fathers are to provide guidance, instruction, advice, counsel, discipline, and example in habits, speech, industry, self-control, attitudes, treatment of others in and out of the family. He is to exercise authority, set priorities, determine values, rules, and standards by which the family is to be regulated. The wife and children are necessarily involved, but he is the one God expects to see that the right things are provided.

This does not mean he can rule as a tyrant. He must not have the I-am-the-boss attitude. He is no dictator. He encourages input from the family, is unselfish, sacrificial, behaves with consideration and cooperation with the others. He must be both tender and firm, kind but determined, considerate and strong. He is the captain of the ship and God looks to him for the welfare of the family. Every member of the family ought to help him in every way to fulfill his God-given assignment. They must avoid mutiny and usurpation of authority. They are to lovingly give obedience, respect, and cooperation.

Consequences of Failure

The study of Eli, Samuel, Lot, and David in connection with Absalom are graphic demonstrations of fathers who did not assume and discharge the proper role toward their children. The pain, grief, sorrow, and even death that these families suffered can be traced directly to parental failure to serve as proper fathers.

Let it be said of us as was said of Abraham, Genesis 18:19, "*For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*"

Practical Applications

Let us now discover some practical matters that define the duty of fathers physically and spiritually. How long has it been since:
(1) You led the family in prayer, even giving thanks to God as mealtime?
(2) When did you last pray for each member of the family, and that you might fulfill your duty to them?
(3) When did you last study your Bible, told your children some Bible story, provided them with evidence of God, His character, both His goodness and severity?
(4) Have you given up your "free time" for them lately? Great opportunities arise to guide while walking, swinging, playing in the sand box or playground, or taking special interest in activities special to them.
(5) How long since you took the entire family on some outing like a picnic, games, building memories, creating a sense of belonging and emotional security? Such outings need not be expensive nor elaborate, but should always be pleasant to recall and discuss.
(6) Do you show concern for their education, books, teachers, grades, and what is being implanted in their minds by others?
(7) Compliments support achievement, build genuine self-esteem and self-respect. Do you help build ambition and show their efforts are appreciated?
(8) Have you recently shown appreciation by word, gift, reward, or treat?

(9) Do you teach respect for parents by showing respect for your parents? They will learn to honor father and mother by what they see.
(10) Do you ask for their input into decisions that affect the family, such as vacations, recreations, purchases, schedules, even their rooms? Yes, it may test your metal at times, but it pays dividends in the long run.
(11) Does your family attend worship together, and all the services?
(12) When did you say "no" to them because it was for their welfare? Some activities, clothes, appearances, recreations, movies, programs, associations are not best for them. It is your job to discern.
(13) Have you tried using the world events to show the difference between right and wrong, shown the sinfulness of abortion, but respect for life? Do they know the rules on sexual purity, respect for property, the dignity of work, the demand for justice, concern for the needy, and the seriousness of morality generally?
(14) When you make decisions, do you try to explain your decisions and actions to them, being considerate of their feelings? Let them know you have the duty to be in charge, but they need to know how and why you have decided as you have? This is great teaching. Our young must make decisions, and make them for themselves. But it is the parent's duty to give them the basis on which to make decisions. Do you provide that?
(15) How long has it been since you gave them assurance of your love, protection, and confidence, both by word and deed?
(16) Have you taught them how to select friends, to treat others, to set values and priorities? Do your older children receive instruction on how to select a mate?
(17) You should show concern for school lessons. But what of Bible lessons and church related activities?
(18) Are you concerned about what they are doing, their interests, where they are going, what they like and dislike, what they read, see, watch, with whom they associate?
(19) How long has it been since your children saw you take special interest in the place where you live, and your attentiveness to home duties such as the yard, car, windows, dishes, even vacuum cleaners?

(20) Do you show courtesy to your wife, their mother? Let them know you love their mother. This is one of the greatest gifts a father can give his children.
(21) Do you exercise proper discipline when called for? Or is this left to someone else?
(22) Have you considered their future, in education, vocation, profession, and faith?
(23) Do you make special effort to teach them respect for the church? We live in a day of "church bashing." Shall your children be taught otherwise?
(24) Most important of all, are you teaching them respect for all things pertaining to the authority of God, including His reality, their accountability to Him, and the blessing of fellowship with Him?

There Could Be More Said

We could possibly ask more such questions, but we are persuaded, "It takes a heap o' living to make a home," as stated by Edgar A. Guest. It surely takes a heap of work and prayer to be the right kind of father.

You cannot lead where you will not go. You cannot teach what you do not know. You, father, are the leader and teacher. Your goal is to do all you can so that every member of your family, without the loss of one, will reach heaven. Help them to serve God and man, and keep the torch of truth burning brightly after your time has ended. The next generation needs children such as your family can produce.

In time, you will reap as you have sown. There will be good fruits when you have done your job. You can say, "*My cup runneth over.*"

It is like this, the husband is the master of the house under Christ, the one who manages, oversees, has that special relationship that calls for meeting special obligations. He is the father, founder, producer, the one in charge, with responsibility as the nourisher, upholder, and protector of his family. His first need in doing this is to be a faithful Christian himself.

* * * * *

False Doctrines Among Us and the Sources From Which They Come

There have been few lessons that I have preached has aroused more response, positive and negative, than this one. Liberals go "bananas" when exposed, and faithful brethren support it fully. It really calls for taking sides.

I take my responsibility as a preacher very seriously as do many other preachers. The warnings from Paul in Acts 20:26-31 ring in our ears. My duty is to God, the truth, myself, and to those who hear me. I am compelled by love and duty to sometimes bring to light what is not always pleasant. Nobody should just "go along anyway."

The truth, and the Lord's church, is under vicious attack from within as well as from without. There are those who are truly no longer of us, but who stay among us in order to take others their way (Acts 20:29,30). It is not unfair to say that they do much of this by misrepresentations, lies, ridicule, and false doctrines they make no effort to defend but proclaim nonetheless.

They cannot destroy the church, but they cause much havoc, division, and many souls will be lost because of what they are doing. What they do is not done in a corner, but by public publications, speeches before thousands, through colleges, and other means. It would be impossible to refute all their attacks in this one lesson, but fortunately, more and more material is being produced to convict the gainsayers.

False Doctrines Galore

It is wrong to contend that there are knowledgeable, sincere, devout Christians in all denominations. Some would make the church just another denomination

acceptable to denominations. How can one claim to be a Christian when he has not even obeyed the gospel? How can one claim to be a knowledgeable Christian while serving in some human denomination? This goes unexplained, but proclaimed anyway.

Is instrumental music just a matter of opinion? Is the doctrine of premillenialism just a matter of opinion, even though it refutes prophecy, denies the kingdom, and makes Christ a false prophet? That doctrine invalidates Scripture. Does that matter to you?

Doctrines regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage are abundant. Some teach regardless of the moral state that God's grace will cover it even though those involved never repent or leave their sinful state. They call this compassion for the divorced. The family is in crisis in our land, but doctrines that accommodate sin do not help. Appeal to emotion rather than truth is replete.

Some teach you do not even have to know the purpose of baptism to be properly baptized. Just do it to obey God. Strange how Paul found some in Acts nineteen who had been wrongly baptized and had done so intending to obey God. Did he tell them all was well anyway, or baptize them properly? Read the Scripture. Baptism must be connected with remission of sins, salvation, or some equivalent concept. Not just anything is all right.

So now say the church is not the kingdom, and was begun in the days of John the Baptist. Some claim many are in the kingdom but not in the church. Some say the kingdom has not yet come but will come when Jesus returns, so pray it will. To them the kingdom was not established on Pentecost, and the church is called a big, sick, denomination, as preached from the pulpit of the church that conducts the Herald of Truth. (Really, that church has ceased the oversight and the program is now under a business corporation).

How do you like this suggestion? Let the preacher or some elder arise before the Lord's Supper an absolve the congregation of sins before partaking. Absolve means to declare free from sin and its consequences. What man has such power? Do these false teachers?

Have you heard that ninety-five per cent of our gospel preachers are guilty of incest, and conservative churches foster incest.? This is charged because the Lord's people still teach the truth regarding the husband being the head of the house, which aggravates the liberals who have adopted the God-hating feminist doctrines.

Who would make such a charge? Gayle Napier did on the David Lipscomb University lectureship and was widely reported in the nation's newspaper. (Some see him as an expert on family matters.) For months he denied saying it, but finally admitted it. Later, in Texas, he said if you denied it you are probably guilty of it. What a great lover of the Lord's people! He forgot to give his evidence!

And where were the DLU leaders, except condoning, continually using, and otherwise bashing those who resented his reprehensible comments? These people are not to be questioned for what they say. If they say, that's all that is necessary for everybody to simply accept it.

Over and over we hear former brethren, still claiming to be of the church, teaching salvation by grace alone. You do not contribute one whit to your salvation, they say. Out goes the need for obedience. Just leave it to God.

Now we hear the New Testament is not a pattern, but just a love letter from God to His people. It is not intended to be a guide. To claim otherwise is "pattern theology." With what do we replace the Bible except these "experts?"

I never heard before that faith, repentance, confession, and baptism is just playing a "silly game." I learn from Scripture that is what we must do to be forgiven of sins. Such sacrilege and ridicule of things holy! Do you condone that, support those who do, or fellowship them?

One who preached the "old paths" for years has asked, "Old Paths? What's that?" When does the matter of intellectual honesty ever come into play! He preached it once, has since renounced it, and now acts like he never heard of it?

These false teachers tell us they are not interested in the Restoration Movement. They once were. They still are

because they are always talking about the various "branches" of the movement, including the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Independent Christian Churches (some so-called Churches of Christ). They readily fellowship both of these denominations and other denominations. The churches of Christ interested in following the New Testament pattern is the least desirable "branch". To them, one is as good as another. I am not interested in the Restoration Movement as a new movement, but only because this effort is to restore New Testament Christianity, which is proper.

But what they mean is that they are not concerned with the church of the New Testament, but the "changed" church which is "relevant for today." They charge the churches of Christ were born with this Restoration Movement. That is Biblically and historically false. The churches of Christ had beginning on Pentecost and that is the church in which we are interested and to which we belong. They are not interested in that. They do not want to produce the church of the first century. We wonder, why not? It was built by Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit through the apostles, and was right. Yes, there were members who got out of line, but that does not impugn the Lord and His church. If not concerned with the New Testament church, which church interests them? It seems the only church they want is one they can direct, leaving everything flexible enough to include whatever anybody might want.

You will hear of them at their "summit meetings" and "scholarship seminars." These are nothing but compromising sessions of the self-pronounced elite.

Did Matthew only write his book from what he remembered? Is it true we cannot understand the Bible alike? They say so.

A mark on them is their love for modern versions which teach all kinds of doctrine. They hate the KJV especially because it does not allow what they teach and do. Their "bibles" teach miracles today, faith only, inherited depravity, but are nothing more than commentaries following the "thought inspiration" fallacy. The NIV is particularly their book.

They contend this generation must restructure the church for the "baby boomers," with fun, excitement, clapping, jivy music, and turn worship into a "holy wow!" (Shelly's own words). Away with the dull, stuffy worship we now offer to God, and the need of authority.

Promoted heavily are such things as choirs, voice bands that sound like instruments (Acapella), special music, instrumental music in joint services with denominations, entertainment, solos, quartets, and some contend there is no authority for congregational singing. Do whatever makes you feel good!

Naturally, being on the liberal wave length, they approve of women in leadership roles in spite of First Timothy 2:12-14, a passage they dismiss as "cultural," not for today, and dismissed as irrelevant.

Using proof texts is ridiculed as "scissors and paste" theology. Citing book, chapter, verse is to them legalism.

They claim the church has never existed except in the mind of God. There are no identifying marks of the church! They are not concerned about the church, but a "relationship with Jesus," and "where the Holy Spirit leads me." You can now separate Christ from the church.

Success is measured by finances, numbers, acceptance by the religious world, and influence they have. Truth and soundness is no reliable measure, even if you can find it.

Elders have no authority, some contend. Men of the past who preached "thus saith the Lord" are ridiculed because they were not "scholars."

Prominently taught and given sympathy are the false doctrines of evolution (there are several). We must develop a "new hermeneutic," a way of interpreting the Bible, excluding commands, examples, implications, inferences, explicit and implicit statements. Their approach to Scripture is entirely subjective. Make it mean what you want it to mean for yourself.

Get off of Acts and plug in to the real power, Jesus, in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Do you believe this?

False doctrines being taught could be listed on and on, but this will suffice. Who, once among us, would be doing this kind of heretical teaching? Changes are coming, we are told, and there is nothing we can do about it. The truth is, apostasy is coming, and has already come in many places. Will those who follow the Scriptures be "left in the dust" as liberals hope?

If I was preaching and told my hearers there was a rattle snake in the parking lot and I knew exactly where he was, but said they must find out for themselves (lest I offend the snake and his fellows), you would consider me very inconsiderate. Why should not those who spew this religious venom on the church be identified? Christ and the apostles identified false people. Were they wrong?

Who Are Some of These People?

Not all of the people cited teach all of the false doctrines mentioned, but all of them teach one or more of them, and they all fellowship together and run in the same circles, endorsing each other. Read Second John 9-11 and see what that does to the whole lot of them.

From their lectures, sermons, publications, tapes, papers, books, bulletins, letters, conversations, articles, etc. their positions are documented. These things have not be taught in a corner, and many brethren know of them, in fact, are far better informed on them than I.

The Jubilee of Nashville is a leading force in this heresy. Specific names are Rubel Shelly (Woodmont Hills), Steve Flatt (Madison), Walt Leaver (Antioch), Randall Harris (Donelson), John Clayton (South Bend), Gayle Napier (Harpeth Hills), Max Lucado, several writers on the Abilene Christian University staff, Harold Hazelip (David Lipscomb University President), Calvin Warpula, promoters of the Herald of Truth (once a good program), Upreach magazine, Image magazine, Wineskins magazine, Marvin Phillips and the Tulsa Workshop, Jim Woodruff (author of the Church in Transition), various faculty members at Harding University, the Christian Chronicle, like Jimmy Allen. These are but a few of the leaders in this "change the church" movement. But such people are everywhere and in force, backed strongly by

monied people, and determined to make havoc of the Lord's church, to change it to their pattern rather than the New Testament. They are liberals and right out of modernism, although some deny it. There are many imitators of these outspoken leaders of digression, trained through "our" schools, which schools are probably the worst enemies of the church in our day. I hoped I did not offend any liberal by omitting his name.

If you do not agree with them, "play dead", and not allow them to have their way, you are a legalist, neo-Nazi, a member of the religious Mafia, vultures, hit-men, knuckleheads, unloving, unscholarly, right-wingers, traditionalists, and even a spiritual dinosaur. Oh, to be "loved" by a liberal! They are so sweet, kind, and irenic!

Should you write one of them, you probably will get no answer, or get one that tells you how you are unqualified to question them. "Where did you get your Ph.D.?"

Yes, they have been challenged by competent, knowledgeable people over and over again. But somehow, "the cat got their tongue" every time.

They have divided the church, stolen facilities, created a new denomination, led many into apostasy, and cast their spear into the side of the church, the Lord's body.

They will do it where you attend also unless brethren become aware and on guard. Their tentacles reach out through relatives, young people who have been brainwashed by them at the schools, many "youth directors," the "intellectually elite", and others sympathetic with such errors who are well versed in denominational errors.

"I didn't know," wail some brethren. You wonder where they have been. Tell them Franklin Roosevelt is no longer president. They fail to keep up and alert. This is no new thing, but the fruits of it are glaringly disruptive today. Some elders would not identify a wolf if he was howling at the front door. Why? Brethren in many places do know, have known, all can know, but is there even a will to know? How many prefer to remain ignorant? Peace and acceptance rather than truth?

Ephesians 5:11 forbids fellowship with such. Does that permit having them in to teach, going to their programs, winking at their intrusions? Romans 16:17 says to mark and avoid them. Second John 9-11 prohibits bidding them "Godspeed." Who will obey the Lord?

When Jeremiah saw the miserable state of Jerusalem, it is written, "*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?*" (Lamentations 1:12). Does the liberal digression fostered on the church by these heretics mean nothing to you?

The Only Solution

Whether this generation will be spared or not, who can tell? Many have already left their first love. But we must "*preach the word,*" and not be content with ignorance. As we warn, let us work to win souls to the salvation through Christ. "*Let us rise up and build.*" We have no room for doctrines of men and their theologies, making people feel good in their sins, pseudo-scholarship and psychology of leftists. We must resist their influence and stand fast at all costs, resisting any and all who give quarter to error, whether friend, family, foe, fame, fortune, finances or whatever. "*Stand in the gap.*"

"*Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" (Esther 4:14). Be glad you live in the midst of this struggle so that you can give your all to the preservation of the remnant, and keep the flame of truth burning bright in the midst of the storms of heresy.

As Joshua challenged, "*Choose you this day whom ye will serve*" (Joshua 24:15). Then he added what must be our position. "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*"

"*And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*" (Acts 20:32).

* * * * *

Is the Wisdom of God Evident in the New Translations?

This specific topic was assigned to me at the Phillips Street church lectures in Dyersburg, Tennessee in 1984.

The conflict over modern versions continues to rage. Who is winning or losing? It does matter because of what these versions teach. But whether one wins or loses, doing and standing for the right is what matters.

Many faithful brethren have heard about these things because they have been taught. Many do not know, some will not know because they just "go along" and do not care. They prefer to accept them rather than investigate. They eat whatever is placed before them.

Contrary to the contention of some, this is not simply a matter of opinion. It may be a matter of opinion which reliable version you defend, but not all are reliable. It is not simply a matter of the updating of words, removing archaic words. None contend there no truth even in the worst of them. Nobody I know has ever said you are going to hell to even read them. The issue rather is truth versus error, commentary and paraphrase versus "*thus saith the Lord.*" Is the Bible verbally inspired or is "thought inspiration just as good?

I have never known an advocate of modern versions who seemed to understand and acknowledge the real issue. They do not deal with it, preferring something new. So the question of our title is very appropriate and right on target in defining the real issue.

God's Wisdom Is Evident in His Word

Second Timothy 3:16,17, Second Peter 1:20,21, First Corinthians 2:13, and other passages, contend the Scriptures are God-breathed, verbally inspired,

authoritative, all-sufficient, infallible, and inerrant, and the wisdom of God is revealed therein.

We must understand the importance of words. A word is a sign of a thought. By itself, spoken, it may be just a sound. By itself, written, it may be only a mark. But it relates, conveys, communicates what is in the mind of one and given to another. Words define, specify, and refer to precise thoughts. Words have meaning, and we are not permitted to give words just any meaning we wish. God has chosen words to reveal His will and which words to accomplish that.

God's Wisdom Revealed to Men

Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4, quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3), teach, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of the God..*" (The NIV omits "*but by every word of God*"). Acts 11:14 shows instruction to be given to Cornelius by the use of words. Acts 2:40, Deity spoke through the apostles using words. First Corinthians 2:7, Paul said the apostles spoke the wisdom of God as they spoke words. This being true, men are not permitted to tamper with the Word of God (2 John 9; Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18,19, and other passages in both Old and New Testaments).

The question is not whether the Bible reveals the wisdom of God. It does. But do the modern versions reveal His wisdom? Shall we just set aside pertinent matters regarding them that provoke our concern?

Investigate Them

The "translators" express intentions to give the thought of the word as they think it. Shall we rely on men's thoughts about God's Word rather than have God's Word for ourselves?

Many compilers of these "versions" are modernists, denominationalists, even atheists, who deny the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. We have to be concerned about their attitude toward the Bible not being the real Word of God as claimed. There is constant revision necessary from edition to edition, ever-changing words

that vitally affect the thought. Such demands the questioning of modern versions as you read them.

Unbelievers could produce a reliable version if they would accurately translate without the injection of their bias. But have they done so? Do they respect the Word as the Word claims for itself? Just what have they done?

Promoted as the Word of God

Rubel Shelly said when you read the KJV, ASV, RSV, and NIV you are reading "the very words of God." How could that be since they do not say the same thing, do not teach the same thing even in equivalent words, do not teach the same doctrines in places. Such a comment is unwarranted from a self-professed "scholar." It would be refreshing and a display of concern for the truth when proponents of modern versions cease making impossible statements.

Some denominationalists have shown more concern for defending the integrity of the Bible than many of "our" parroting preachers, scholarly professors, college presidents, big-time promoters, and "go-alongers."

Consider Some Modern Versions

GOOD NEWS FOR MODERN MAN- The Today's English Version. Romans 1:17 teaches faith only. Galatians 5:4 removes *"fallen from grace"* and replaces it with "outside God's grace." We may be outside the benefits of His grace. Is this what God really said in the TEV?

THE LIVING BIBLE. Isaiah 2:2-4 is a gross mutilation of the passage. Genesis 6:4 has sexual relations between women and evil spirits. First Peter 3:21 has salvation before baptism. This answers the question of our topic.

THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE. Luke 23:45 changes a miracle into a natural phenomenon and coincidence. Matthew 16:18 makes Peter the foundation rock of the church. Luke 1:27 removes *"virgin"* to a mere "girl." Is this a reliable presentation of the wisdom of God? Do you know the difference between Saturday and the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)?

EASY-TO-READ VERSION (Produced by digressive and liberal former members of the church who still claim to be.) Matthew 5:18 mishandled to contradict Ephesians 2:15. (Nearly all modern versions do the same thing.) Matthew 19:18 consoles premillennialism, and Matthew 17:15 equates epilepsy with demon possession. It changes the Lord's words, "*Until seventy times seven,*" to "seventy-seven time." (Since this lesson was first given, Goebel Music has written a masterful exposure of this heretical publication.)

THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION. One of our prominent brothers wrote that we ought to accept it or time "would make fools of us." Well, time has made fools of some, especially those who defended the RSV. On what basis does one change "*virgin*" to merely "young woman," (Isaiah 7:14), or remove "*begotten*" from "*only begotten?*" Such passages were composed by a militant, anti-Christian Jewish rabbi. RSV deliberately uses pronouns of "Thee and Thou" to denote Deity, but uses "You and Yours" to denote Christ. The list on the RSV, like the others is so extensive, but these will suffice.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, the favorite of most liberal digressives who have gone out from us. Psalms 51:5 teaches total depravity and born guilty of sin. Ephesians 4:13 has "unity in the faith" rather than "*the unity of the faith.*" Romans 1:17 teaches faith only. Ephesians adds "make music." Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 changes "*fornication*" to "marital infidelity." There are many ways to be unfaithful in marriage without fornication. But fornication is the only reason God allows divorce. Second Peter 3:10 changes "*burned up*" to merely "*laid bare.*"

How many times must a version be shown to be a twisted perversion before honest minds accept the inescapable conclusion it is an unreliable version?

A Danger to the Church

Even though some scoff, tampering with the Word of God is sinful. Modern versions mislead souls, equating commentaries and paraphrases as inspired Scripture. They come from the "thought inspiration" fallacy,

contain contradictions within themselves and with truth, teach false doctrines! Does that matter? It does to those who love the truth. Modern versions lead the way to many of our present digressions.

Sinister Methods of Promotion

As bad as modern versions are, the methods promoters use to advance them is vicious. They will misrepresent the older, reliable versions, slander and ridicule those who defend them, snobbishly ignore the problems, appear to be neutral while promoting the perversions, create straw-men of their own inventions that they readily destroy! They take the insidious "low road" of combat.

When you do not stand for the truth, this approach seems to be the expedient method to advocate what you want. Those who are endorsing the modern versions play down the proven dangers, do not serve well the cause of Christ, nor give credibility or faithfulness to the integrity of the Word of God. But they "love."

There should not knowingly be endorsement or "go alongism" with men, women, schools, professors,, editors, preachers, elderships, churches, lectureships that place their approval on the destruction of truth now being accomplished through such modern versions.

This may "put you in the small company of churches of Christ," as one said. But who counts noses to determine truth? Truth is not determined by college and seminary trained clergymen who are more concerned with academic standing and social acceptance than truth. I do not doubt the opponents of modern versions are in a minority, although I do not know for sure. But what of that? More and more are becoming aware and many books and lectures are dealing with this matter, now many years old. Many have finally joined the fight.

With continued awareness and honest investigation, possibly this plague of distortion of God's Word can be minimized and even neutralized among brethren.

* * * * *

The Art of Acceptable Worship

From Genesis to Revelation, from Cain and Abel to the angelic admonition to "*worship God,*" the Bible repeatedly speaks of worship. God has desired worship in every age or dispensation. Christians past, present, and future are to worship Him. First Peter 2:5, *"to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."* Hebrews 13:15, *"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."* Matthew 4:10, "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve."* John 4:23,24, "*But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

Proper Object

One essential to acceptable worship is the right object of worship. We are to "*worship God.*" (Revelation 19:10). God has always condemned idolatry (Exodus 20:3-5). While there is more to being a Christian than just "going to church," as some state it, you cannot be a faithful Christian and fail to faithfully worship God.

The early Christians worshipped in jails, house to house, in homes, assemblies of the church, and understood the necessity of worship. So must we.

Why has God made worship such a vital part of being a Christian? There seems to be at least two purposes of worship. (1) Obviously, it is to honor, praise, and magnify God. (2) But it is also for our own edification and strength. The worship that God has designed and delivered to us accomplishes both of these purposes. For this reason we should not tamper with the avenues or items of worship God has authorized. How can we improve on what God has given?

Worship Influences Us

Worship should influence us, even though our feelings and benefits are not the primary purposes of worship. But who doubts that worship enlarges our respect for Deity, things holy, and from above (Colossians 3: 1,2)?

Seeing that we study and meditate upon His Word, our knowledge of truth is increased . We are to grow in grace and knowledge (First Peter 3:18). We do this in worship. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 shows we are admonished and taught by worship in singing. "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (Second Timothy 2:15). This is accomplished in worship.

Worship helps us to develop a correct kind of character. We become like what we worship and admire. This is one reason to be cautious about the people we consider our role models. When we worship God we will come to appreciate what God appreciates, and gradually through growth acquire characteristics of the kind and quality of God, although never to His perfection. Such traits are forgiveness, tenderness, justice, purity, generosity, kindness, endurance, and learn to express the traits the way He would approve.

We will be stimulated to do good works as we are taught to do (Titus 2:12-14) by our worship. Work and worship are not the same even though work and worship are both service to God. Worshipping God calls us to righteous living. We will be fervent in prayer, missionary minded, develop proper attitudes, intentions, and goals in life. Studying the Scriptures will persuade us to be stedfast, patient, loving, and active.

Worship that is designed by God will help to accomplish these things for those who worship as He has directed (in truth) and with the mind He expects (in spirit).

This being true, there is no wonder that He commands us not to forsake assemblying in which we worship God (Hebrews 10:25). Sometimes it appears that too many do not really realize the blessings derived from faithfulness in worship.

Acceptable Worship

We do not worship acceptably simply because we are in the building of worship, or because others around us are worshipping. Acceptable worship is not just going through the motions, although worship involves actions. But possibly we all recognize this.

Acceptable worship involves attitude and actions. "*In spirit*" means with reverence, attentiveness, having the proper motive of honoring God, and with understanding what we do. "*In truth*" means to worship as the Word authorizes (John 17:17). Acceptable worship does not embrace just anything somebody might like or want.

If the heart is not right the worship is not right. If the action is not right the worship is not right. With the heart right and action wrong we are worshipping according to our own will. If the action is right but the heart amiss we are practicing mere ritualism.

Essentials For Acceptable Worship That Many Often Overlook

To worship as God wants there must be a life lived close to God. We must be "*in Christ*" because our worship is "*by him*" (Hebrews 13:15), "*by Jesus Christ*" (First Peter 2:5). He is the only access to the Father (John 14:6).

Proverbs 28:9, "*He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.*" First Peter 3:7 teaches husbands to treat their wives properly "*that your prayers be not hindered.*" Matthew 15:8,9 shows that teaching the doctrines of men makes our worship vain, useless, and empty. Hosea 6:6, "*For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*" Even though the rituals were performed, without the righteous life to accompany them they were rendered null and void. Luke 6:46, "*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" Isaiah 1:11-17 pictures an unacceptable people, religious, but not righteous. Acceptable worship is not made so by just what is done in the assembly on Lord's Day, even though what is done must be as He has taught us. It takes a godly life for our worship to be pleasing to God.

Preparation

We are not always in the state of mind to worship. Other matters intrude into life, even matters that are right and necessary. But we should take the time and expend the effort to ready our hearts, emotions, and control our thoughts for our periods of worship. Our minds are not like light switches that can be switched on and off at a moment. We are to understand what we do, and understanding is a matter of the mind or heart.

Paul warned against partaking of the Lord's Supper without discernment or understanding (First Corinthians 11:29). This is the same reason the Lord taught His disciples how to pray. This is the reason for teaching on giving and purposing in the heart. Worship stems from the heart. We are to sing with understanding, studying the sentiments of the song, not just calling words. To do this the heart must be made ready. It calls for an attentive and alert mind.

This can hardly be accomplished when asleep, joking, speaking of irrelevant matters. It will not likely be accomplished after a late night of games, television, and other activities which are commonplace to many on Saturday night. There should be preparation and concentration for worship. Watching television and reading the newspaper Sunday morning is not recommended as preparation for worship. Good hearing requires a mind cultivated to receive what is taught.

Therefore, we must establish the proper mental attitude and disposition, avoiding upsetting experiences if possible, and not rushing, hurrying, leaving home late, arriving late, all of which usually reflect a lack of planning. By prayer, meditation, study, thinking of songs, reading Scripture, or even speaking to others about what you are going to do in worship is helpful.

Participation

All of the above accomplishes almost nothing if one does not participate in the worship activities. Nobody can worship for you. We dare not develop a spectator complex because God is the spectator.

While we study to avoid letting our minds wander, and we do this by listening, meditating, and guarding our thought, when it is time to sing, then sing. When we pray, pray, even if another is leading the prayer. Think of the points made in the Biblical lesson presented. If possible, take notes. This helps retain concentration and attain learning. We need only mention the Lord's Supper and Bible students know where the concentration of thought is to be.

It is always possible, and with young children even probable, that there be distractions. But they should be kept to a minimum. We do not worship unless we get involved in what is being done in communion with the other worshippers and before God.

What Worship Is Not Designed To Do

Worship is not just to make somebody feel good, or get "charged" for the week. It is not just an occasion for association, or even to relieve burdens per se. It is a period of praise, adoration, displaying love for God, offering thanks, giving of gifts, making requests, feeding on His will, proclaiming Christ, which is the function of the Lord's Supper.

While we come to "give" our praises to God, obviously there is a blessing derived from the spiritual benefit we "get." But if more emphasis were placed on worship as the Bible teaches, and less on the lesser matters, our inclinations to be absent from worship periods would doubtless be lessened measurably.

* * * * *

Three preachers were fishing, and began to confess their "besetting sins." One confessed a love for strong drink. Another said the sisters in the church were his problem. The third remained quiet for some time until the others urged him to confess his main fault. He finally admitted, "Gossip is my worst fault, and I can hardly wait until I get away from here and get home to talk."

He now fishes alone.

Whatever Comes On



It is another instance where I take "cute" words of one of my grandchildren and make what I consider to be a reasonable application. Daniel, age five, was being told goodnight by his mother, told to sleep well, and have good dreams.

Regarding his dreams, Daniel said "I just watch whatever comes on."

Many brethren are like that when it comes to what they follow, accept, condone, and even support. Without much discretion, and almost void of investigation, they just support whatever comes on. It seems it does not matter to some how rank and false a teacher may be, how divisive and heretical a program or school may be, how contrary to Scripture a book might be, they just "go along" and read, watch, amen, and support whatever comes on.

Of course, that is the stuff from which apostasy is made. Little Daniel cannot help what he has to watch in his dreams. But we can do better regarding what we support and endorse. JB

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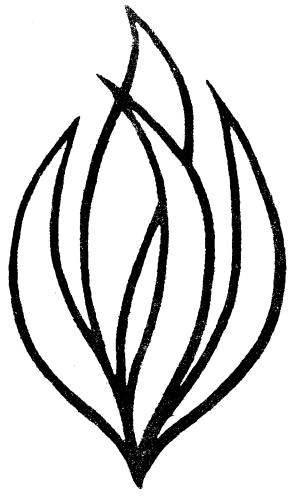

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVI James W. Boyd NUMBER 12

Blessed Is The Peacemaker

Matthew 5:9, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.*"

The Reward Makes the Role Worthwhile

Biblical peace is often misunderstood. This passage is often misapplied and limited in its use. So many have as their first thought of a peacemaker the making of international peace, peace between nations, even the absence of war, getting along with others, the lessening of tensions and strife between two opponents. The Nobel Peace prize is awarded to first one then another on this basis. However, those who negotiate peace between conflicting parties are not necessarily the children of God.

These concepts abide in the term "peace," but this is not the full of it, nor even the major emphasis of the peace which is of primary concern in the Bible.

There are different kinds of peace. Peace may exist between nations, neighbors, among members of the family, co-workers, and in the community. We may get along harmoniously with people around us.

There is peace within ourselves. Most people long for this contentment, being at ease with one's own conscience, enjoying personal satisfaction.

There is peace with God. We alienate ourselves from God by our sins (Isaiah 59:1,2). Peace is restored by and through Jesus Christ. This is the peace of the Bible. This is the most important peace because it has to do with man's relationship with God, determines his present as well as his future destiny.

We can have peace with others, and not be at peace with God. We can have peace within ourselves, and still not be at peace with God. Peace with God may contribute toward

the possession of peace with others and with self, but not necessarily so.

Part of the Sermon on the Mount

The beatitude of our text is in the opening portion of the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon may be thought of as the preamble of the new covenant of Christ. Matthew 4:23 says that Jesus was preaching "*the gospel of the kingdom.*" Matthew 7:28 calls it the "*doctrine of Christ.*" The beatitudes are not simply a code of ethics or a formula how to get along with other people and be happy. Rather, they present characteristics of those who would be citizens in the Lord's kingdom that was to soon come into existence, and did on Pentecost. They have been correctly termed, "Pentecost Pointers." As we study them we see they involve both attitude and action.

What It Means to be a Peacemaker

The benefit and blessing for being a peacemaker is explicitly stated. Being a peacemaker is obviously a desirable role. A peacemaker is one who serves to reconcile what was estranged, and resolves conflicts. Our role as peacemaker is limited somewhat.

Jesus Christ was called in prophecy, "*the Prince of Peace,*" (Isaiah 9:6). The angels sang at His birth, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men.*" This peace was peace between sinful man and Almighty God, a spiritual peace (Romans 5:1).

The gospel of called the "*gospel of peace*" (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15), part of the Christian armor. Ephesians 2:11-17 tells us what Jesus did and how He did it. Those who were alienated from God were made nigh to God by being reconciled to God by the blood of Christ that was shed on the cross of Christ.

Peace, Yet, Conflict

Matthew 10:34-39 teaches, "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*" Then He defined some of the areas of conflict

that would result because of Him. How could Jesus be both "*the Prince of peace*" and yet bring conflict?

There has always been a conflict between good versus evil, God versus Satan, children of God versus children of Satan. Jesus said, John 15:18, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*" First John 3:13, "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" The world has, does, and always will hate the followers of Christ. That is not peace. That is war. Even from one's own family can arise those who will be his enemies. When a person determines to follow Christ, it is not surprising that there is disruption from the former unity with those who reject the Lord.

Unfortunately, some people have accepted the doctrine that the ultimate goal of serving God is to have unity and peace with others. While this is a desirable condition, that is not the foremost goal of Christianity. While no right thinking person prefers strife to harmony, we need to remember that we can have peace and unity with others and still be lost in hell. We shall "*seek peace, and ensure it*" (First Peter 3:11). But unity and peace must be founded on truth and agreement.

Amos 3:3, "*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*" First Corinthians 1:10, "*Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*" Philippians 1:27, "*Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*" Ephesians 4:4-6, "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all, and in you all.*" When this unity and oneness is observed there will be peace with God and with all those who follow God.

Yes, conflict followed Christ and the apostles. Conflict with opponents was a characteristic of the early church. We should not be disheartened when conflict follows us.

Peacemakers are called the children of God. We are God's people who seek to bring Christ's reconciliation between God and man by teaching them and encouraging them to obey the gospel and receive the remission of their sins, thereby establishing fellowship and peace with God. It is in this that we are peacemakers.

As far are getting along with others is concerned, while not a primary mission, as Romans 12:18 teaches us, "*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*" From this we know that it is commendable to work for peace on any and every level. But peace with God is the peace of which Jesus speaks when He pronounces blessings upon the peacemakers.

Abraham Was a Peacemaker

Genesis 13:7-12 relates a problem that arose in the life of Abraham and Lot because of their prosperity. Their flocks and herds grew so large they could no longer live in the same area. Their keepers were involved in strife between them, and Abraham knew this could extend to strife between him and Lot. This he neither wanted nor would allow because, "*for we be brethren.*" Therefore, he offered a proposition to Lot, permitting him to choose whatever land he desired and Abraham would take what was left. Seldom is there seen this magnanimous and generous selflessness. He went the extra mile, retaining God's promises.

Lot's choice took him toward Sodom. His selfish and short-sighted concept of gain for the present did not include consideration of the effect on himself and his family that brought tragedy when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. He took advantage of his uncle for temporary gain, reaping sorrow and loss.

Texts on Peace

Romans 14:19, "*Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith we may edify one another.*" First Peter 3:11, "*Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.*" Isaiah 48:22, "*There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.*" Jeremiah 6:14, "*They have healed also the hurt of the*

daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."

We have already mentioned the different kinds of peace that we can have. There is a way to peace of each kind. We have to first decide which peace is most important to us. Which is of primary concern, having significance in this life as well as the next? How do we have real peace?

Some seek peace through power, suppression of others, control in their hands. Some seek peace through escape, compromise, surrender, and even suicide. Some have resorted to psychiatry to find that for which they long. Some have things backwards in their thinking. Isaiah 5:20, "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*" They have it just as wrong as the person who seeks peace by denying wrong is wrong, and forgetting right is right.

Others turn to many sins, such as immorality, drunkenness, drugs, greed, etc. They want the sin but do not want the consequences of sin. Ultimately they learn, "*The way of the transgressor is hard*" (Proverbs 13:15).

Peace ought to be found in the home. Proverbs 11:29, "*He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind...*" Our homes should be havens, not hells. There should exist love, not strife nor bitterness. The young learn peace, or its opposite, first in the home. By example, words, demonstration, entertainment, standards, values, priorities as exhibited in the home, the way of peace can be acquired or distorted.

The home will be a source of peace when Christ rules supreme in the home. When God abides in the hearts of the family members, there will be peace. It is accomplished by all being faithful Christians.

Peace in the Lord

First Thessalonians 5:13, "*And be at peace among yourselves.*" Peace in the church is peace based on truth, not negotiation, compromise, or surrender. Standing for the will of the Lord does not always produce peace, and

may well produce strife with some. It could and often does bring division and separation.

But if we ever have "*the peace that passeth understanding*" (Philippians 4:7), spiritual peace with God, we must obey and live according to the gospel.

Once being at peace with God, we have the lifetime mission of being peacemakers which means, we work to save the lost by sending the gospel. We have been saved to save. We are at peace to bring peace for which our Lord died. And what a wonderful way to live life, glorying in the knowledge that in the sight of God we are His children as we pursue peace for ourselves and others.

* * * * *

Melchizedek

In the Bible we read of a man named Melchizedek. To many he is a very mysterious creature. But he has a place of significance in God's scheme of things. What does Scripture reveal about him, and why is he important? Hebrews 7:4 in reference to him says, *"Now consider how great this man was."*

Melchizedek is mentioned nine times from five chapters from three Biblical books (Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:1,10,11,15,17,21).

Our Introduction to Melchizedek

We first read of him in Genesis upon the occasion when Abraham was returning from having rescued Lot and the defeat of five kings by Abraham's private army alongside other allies. Abraham met Melchizedek and was blessed by him. Melchizedek received tithes of the spoils Abraham had taken from the victory he had won.

Evidently Melchizedek is greater than Abraham and of higher spiritual rank because of what took place. This

gives additional stature to Melchizedek because Abraham was called the "*friend of God*" (James 2:23).

Hebrews 7:7 takes on significance in this study. "*And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.*" Abraham, the less, was blessed by Melchizedek, the better. This ranking is of importance.

Melchizedek is called the king of Salem, king of righteousness (peace, which is the meaning of Salem), and a priest of God. Salem was probably the territory in and around Jerusalem. Psalm 76:2, "*In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion.*" Zion is another name for Jerusalem. But the location of Salem is not of paramount importance.

From his association with Abraham we know he lived in the days of the patriarchs. This was an age when the fathers of the families served as the priests before God, making intercession, offering sacrifices, and generally being responsible for the family before God. Melchizedek, however, must have been somewhat special in that he was designated a priest of God, which indicates something other and more than the father-priest role, more than the ordinary patriarchal priest.

Withou Father, Mother, Descent

Hebrews 7:3 informs us of something rather strange about Melchizedek. What is said of him is not to be understood literally, but denotes a special quality about him. He was not a miraculously produced person, that is, without parents. The idea conveyed is in light of the geneaology that was required for one to be a priest under the Mosaic system. Melchizedek did not have a genealogical record like the Levitical priests.

This statement is made in the context of the contrast between Melchizedek and the Levitical priests. The Levitical priesthood was based on inheritance. But it was not so regarding Melchizedek. He had been especially called of God and was of a special order. Nor did he have a successor in his priesthood. The significance of this characteristic is seen when the comparison between Melchizedek and Christ is made.

Psalm 110:4, "*The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*" This verse is in a prophetic psalm concerning the coming Messiah. It is quoted at least eleven times in the New Testament with reference to Christ. It is said of Christ, "*Thou art a priest after the order of Melchizedek*" (Hebrews 7:17), a direct quotation of Psalm 110:4. This prophecy was a denotation of the nature of the priesthood of the Messiah.

Melchizedek in Hebrews

The purpose of the Hebrew epistle was to counter the false teaching of Judaizing teachers. Some Jews who had become Christians were being tempted and led to either forsake Christ and return to the old law that was already nailed to the cross and taken out of the way, or to mix the two religions in some manner, retaining certain distinctive Jewish rituals, such as circumcision. The false teachers had been too successful. This letter was penned to prevent further erosion from the faith by showing the superiority of Christ and His priesthood.

This was done by comparing the priesthood of Christ with Melchizedek, and Melchizedek with the Aaronic priesthood. Melchizedek was superior to the priests that came from Aaron. Christ was a preist after Melchizedek's order, hence, superior to the priests of the old order under the law of Moses.

Hebrews show how the Old Testament, the old law, even the old priesthood under the law, pointed toward Christ. This inspired book was not a mere record of the past, or preview of things to come, although it was both. But it was to show Melchizedek as a type, a pre-picture of the Christ.

The priesthood of Christ was new, unique, and distinct from that under Moses and the Levites. Jesus was not born of the priestly tribe, Levi (Hebrews 7:14). For Him to be a priest there had to be a change of the law (Hebrews 7:12,15). Because of that change, we are not under that law, and Christ is priest.

Christ is superior to the Levitical priests just as Melchizedek was superior to the priesthood that was to come under Moses. This is proven in the fact that the Levites came from Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob. Inasmuch as Melchizedek took tithes of Abraham, so in him did the Levitical priesthood give tithes to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:9,10). As noted earlier, the lesser pays to the greater (Hebrews 7:7). Christ is after the order of the greater, therefore superior.

This argument should persuade any Jew contemplating a return from Christ back to the old law to not leave the greater for the lesser.

The priesthood of Christ is greater, also, because it is unchangeable (Hebrews 7:23,24). Only one sacrifice was sufficient (Hebrews 7:27). He is the perfect priest (Hebrews 7:28). He is eternal (Hebrews 7:28), and His priesthood will continue, whereas under the old system there were many priests, one succeeding the other.

The system of Christ is characterized as a better convenent, better testament, better hope, better promises, because of the better sacrifice, which was Christ Himself.

The Role of Melchizedek

It becomes now apparent that his role in life was to serve as a type of the Christ that was promised to come. He was king and priest at the same time, even as Jesus Christ serves as King and Priest at the same time, as prophecied (Zechariah 6:13). Christ is priest now (First John 2:1; First Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25). His kingdom, the church, exists now. He is Priest and King, NOW, being superior to all that came before Him or shall ever come after Him.

(This truth regarding the priesthood and kingship of Christ is one of the many Scriptural positions that strikes down premillennialism.)

(Some make something of the fact that Melchizedek brought to Abrham bread and wine, and contend this is

a type of the Lord's Supper. Personally, I think that is a stretch to far to accept.)

In Some Ways, Still a Mystery

We can ask other questions about this notable man of the Old Testament for which we have no answers. One area of speculation is to try to identify him as some man about whom we already have some knowledge. It is said he might have been Shem, or Ham, or some survivor of the flood. Others said he was an special angel. Some have even suggested he was the Second Person of the Godhead who later became flesh, or even the Holy Spirit. Suffice it to say that these are vain speculations for which there is no evidence. We do better to consider him as the distinct individual he was with the distinct purpose and mission he is assigned by Scripture, and leave it there.

Deuteronomy 29:29 and Second Timothy 2:23 are applicable on these matters.

True enough, what we have is not a complete biography. But we have those things that matter for our eternity, that matter concerning the revelation of Christ, His nature, and His priesthood, that matter in God's plan for our salvation. We have sufficiency to provide evidence for our faith, knowing God's hand is in it all.

Of Melchizedek, he breaks forth suddenly, appears momentarily, then retires without a trace except in the comparison to the Christ. He is cited as the type of the Messiah, serves to explain Christ as priest, king, and His superiority. We are content with that.

* * * * *

What I am about to write is not written in a spirit of being offensive personally to other people. But I have some awareness of what is around us. I am very opposed to the inroads of liberal digression that wreaks havoc against the Lord's church. **I do not find liberals to even be honest,** let alone truthful. We are naive to think they pursue their agenda with intergrity. They do not! Why credit them with honesty? They are not! JWB

"My Father's Business"

"*Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" (Luke 2:49). The word "*wist*" simply means "*know.*" This is an important question because Jesus is the One who asked it. Therefore, we consider it reverently.

Luke 2:41-52 tells of the time when Jesus, at the age of twelve, was discussing matters in the temple with the prominent teachers of His day. He had come there with Joseph and Mary for the Passover. That having passed, Mary and Joseph started home. Supposing Jesus to be in the traveling company, they left Him behind, and for three days searched for Him, finally locating Him back in Jerusalem in the temple.

They inquired of Jesus, "*Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?* They had been very concerned about Him. Intending in no way to slight His earthly parents or be disrespectful, Jesus responded with the question of verse firty-nine. It seems it was asked almost as if He intended to say, "Of all people, you should have known who I am and why I am doing what I am." But they did not fully understand. Nonetheless, "*his mother kept all these sayings in her heart*" (Luke 2:51).

What Did Jesus Understand?

How much did Jesus at this age understand about His mission? We can not be sure, but some things are evident. He knew who His real Father was. He knew what His Father's business was, and He knew He was to be about that business. He evidently knew His role and work in that business. It is safe to conclude that He understood why He was here and what He had to do. After all, although in the flesh, He was Deity.

The implication of the question is that the Father had sent Him on His business. Hebrews 10:9, "*Then he said, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.*" We best understand His mission and His comprehension of it as we observe what

He said, what He did, and what He accomplished. His question to Mary and Joseph is almost the same question as, "Why did Jesus come to earth?" Is it not clear that He came to do what the Father intended?

By considering His question we have an opportunity to magnify and glorify our Lord and His mission, giving credit where credit is due. It belongs to Deity.

To Taste of Death For Every Man

Hebrews 2:9, "*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.*"

Jesus died for us all. His death was a vicarious death, meaning, it was in stead of others. Romans 3:25 teaches He was "*set forth to be a propitiation.*" First John 2:2 teaches "*he is the propitiation for our sins.*" Hebrews 9:12 echoes the same sentiment in different words. "*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*" A "*propitiation*" is an atonement, the satisfactory payment for the sins of man as determined by the Father. Man sinned, and justice demands that somebody had to pay. God provided the payment in the person of His only begotten Son.

Not only is He the propitiation for our sins, "*but also for the sins of the whole world*" (First John 2:2). He provided for the remission of sins for people who lived both before and after the cross (Hebrews 9:15,22). While under the law of Moses there were many sacrifices, the one sacrifice of Himself was sufficient (Hebrews 9:26,28).

His death is the expression of God's love and grace toward sinful man (Romans 5:8; John 3:16; First John 4:10). This last reference reads, "*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*" This is why He is called "*the author of eternal salvation*" (Hebrews 5:9). When He died on the cross He was busy doing the Father's business. We further learn what this includes.

To Bring Many to Glory

"*For it became him... in bringing many sons to glory*" (Hebrews 2:10). His death was to save mankind, and by so doing, rather than the fires of eternal punishment, mankind has access to eternal glory. Many have and will respond to His offer and be glorified. This is the glory of salvation (First Peter 5:10; Romans 8:18). We are "*called... unto his eternal glory.*"

What Jesus did makes it possible for sinful people to become the sons and daughters of God (Second Corinthians 6:18). As God's children we become His heirs and the beneficiaries of His inheritance. First Peter 1:4, "*...and inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.*" Bringing people to glory was doing the Father's business.

To Provide Relationship With Deity

Hebrews 2:11-13 reveals He is the One who sanctifies (the Sanctifier), and the redeemed are the sanctified. A sanctified person is one who has been "set apart" from his sins, "set apart" from this world, "set apart" into the service of God through Christ. The Sanctifier and the sanctified are "*all of one.*" The sanctified are counted as "*brethren*" and "*children of God.*" There is unity and fellowship between them.

Such are those who are "*in Christ.*" The importance of being "*in Christ*" is evidenced by Second Timothy 2:10, "*salvation is in Christ*"; Ephesians 1:3, "*all spiritual blessings... are in Christ*"; Romans 8:1, "*no condemnation in Christ*"; Revelation 14:13, " *blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.*" We are "*in Christ*" and He is in us (Galatians 2:20). Producing this fellowship, oneness, and relationship with Deity was doing the Father's business.

To Destroy the Power of the Devil

Hebrews 2:14, "... *that through death he might destroy the power of him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*" He died and conquered death by His own resurrection. The angels at the tomb declared it, "*He is not; he is risen, as he said.*" He had shown power over

death by raising the dead. As prophesied, He was not left in Hades (the unseen state of the dead) (Acts 2:31). At the return of our Lord the last day, death, the last enemy, will be destroyed when all shall be raised, both good and evil (John 5:28,29; First Corinthians 15:26).

It was a part of His mission to spoil principalities and powers, "*he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it*" (Colossians 2:15), leading "*captivity captive,*" that is, those once in captivity to sin and Satan were delivered from that captivity, being captured by the Lord (Ephesians 4:8). This was accomplished by condemning sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3).

Victorious are His people, for when He comes again all who belong to Him shall be caught up together to meet Him and be forever with Him (Second Thessalonians 4:13-18). This, too, was doing the Father's business.

To Be a Deliverer

It is plain by now that doing the Father's business was being a deliverer from the bondage of sin. Romans 6:16-18 shows we are servants of that which we obey. We obey sin, we are servants of sin. We obey righteousness, we are servants of God. Once there was no deliverance from sin until Christ came to be that Deliverer. As a result of Him doing the Father's business, mankind need not fear death nor the wages of sin (Romans 6:23).

Job once asked, "*If a man die, shall he live again?*" (Job 14:14). Christ is the answer. John 11:25,26, "*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?*" Paul affirmed that victory over death is through Christ (First Corinthians 15:55-57).

This deliverance is possible because He delivers us from the guilt of sin. John the Baptist announced as He pointed to Jesus, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). It is by His truth that we can be made free (John 8:32). Because of Him we can have life abundantly (John 10:10). This deliverance

from sin, and from death to life, was doing the Father's business.

To Serve as Priest and Make Reconciliation

All Christians are priests (First Peter 2:5,9), a royal and holy priesthood; even a kingdom of priests (revelation 1:6). We have a High Priest, which is Jesus (Hebrews 3:1). His priesthood is special, as noted in an earlier lesson, after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20), and not after the Levitical order. Even now He "*ever liveth to make intercession*" for us (Hebrews 7:25).

Christ is the one mediator between God and man (First Timothy 2:5). He is the one mediator as well as an intercessor on our behalf. He accomplished the reconcilation we needed, being our peace (Ephesians 2:14), and He did this by shedding His blood on the cross (Ephesians 2:16). This peace is enjoyed in the one body (Ephesians 2:16), which is His church (Ephesians 1:22,23). We are no longer alienated from God and without hope. Salvation, reconciliation with God, is ours but only through Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

When we ask why Jesus came to this earth, and learn it was to do the will of the Father, is it not evident that providing for our reconciliation with God whom we offend when we sin was part of His role, and in so doing, He was doing His Father's business?

To Succor Those That Are Tempted

To "*succor*" means to supply, provide for. He was tempted even as we are (Hebrews 4:15), but without sin. Because He was tempted He knows how to provide for us when we are tempted (Hebrews 2:18). Having taken on the form of a servant in the likeness of men, (Philippians 2:7), He can and does understand. He qualified to sympathize, know, care, and provide.

The three avenues of temptation were used against Him (First John 2:16; Matthew 4:1-11), but He overcame temptation. He knows how it can be done because He did it. It is not a sin to be tempted, even though we are not to seek out temptations but pray, "*Lead us not into*

temptation." But we shall be tempted in this world. When we come to Christ we are not immunized against being tempted. We are still frail and weak at times. Paul recognized this when he said he had to keep himself under control (First Corinthians 9:27). But adequate provision is made for us (First Corinthians 10:13).

Deity did not become flesh in order to understand man. Deity has always understood man. But He became flesh so that man could know that Deity understands man. Deity knew and understood even if Deity never came in the form of flesh. But nobody can ever say to our Lord when he is tried and tempted, "But you just don't know how it is." He does know and we can know He knows.

Therefore, He provides us strength through His Word and His providence. He guides, comforts, and sympathizes with us. He is a "*present help in time of trouble*" (Psalm 46:1; Hebrews 13:6). Doing this is doing the Father's business.

And What More Can We Say?

He was doing the Father's business when He gave us an example to imitate (First Peter 2:21). We should walk in His steps.

He showed God to mankind (John 14:8-10). To see Christ is to see the Father. Not that they are the same Person, but the nature of each is the same.

He came that God might be just, because justice demands sin be punished, but also to be the justifier of those guilty of wrongs (Romans 3:26). Justice and mercy met at the cross of Christ. God does not look upon evil and good alike. But He made provision to exact justice, but at the same time, offer mercy.

His mission was to become King of kings (John 18:37; First Timothy 6:15). His kingdom came on Pentecost.

Often Scripture says of the events pertaining to Him, "*that it might be fulfilled,*" speaking of the prophecies that had been made concerning Him. His work included

fulfilling these prophecies that showed Him to be the Messiah God had promised.

He came to reveal truth (John 1:17; 14:6). "*The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*"

His work embraced seeking and saving the lost, ministering to others, saving to the uttermost (Luke 19:10; Matthew 20:28; Hebrews 7:25).

There are so many expressions in the New Testament that described Jesus doing the Father's business.

He Finished His Work

What He came to do, He did. John 4:34, "*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*" John 5:36, "*For the works which the Father hath given me to finish...*" John 17:4, "*I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*"

When He died, among His last words He said, "*It is finished.*" A number of things were finished. His life on earth was finished because He was about to die. The law of Moses was finished, being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). The plan of salvation was finished except for His inevitable resurrection. Indeed, the Father's business He came to do was finished.

We can be saved. We know to whom the credit belongs. God saves by His love, grace, mercy, evidenced in the blood of Christ on the cross. But to be saved we must meet the conditions of His will to come to Him and receive these blessings.

We have a part in doing the Father's business, also. We must love and obey. We are to believe, repent, confess, be baptized, and live faithfully before Him.

Jesus asked, "*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" Let us ask, "Do we not know we, too, must be about His business?

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The Folly of Neutrality

We may talk about neutrality, but actually it is impossible to remain neutral concerning Christ. The very nature of Christ, His gospel, His kingdom, and the truth demands that we make a commitment. Nations may assume positions of neutrality in international affairs, people may take a neutral stand regarding the mundane issues of life, and we may even be neutral about athletic contests without taking sides. But one cannot be neutral concerning Christ.

Matthew 6:24, "*No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" Matthew 6:33, "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*" Matthew 12:30, "*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*" These statements of Jesus make a position of neutrality impossible.

Neutrality usually displays certain characteristics in attitude and action. It reflects no preference because of a lack of conviction and an assumed stance of non-involvement. It poses an aloofness as if the issues do not really matter. A neutral is unwilling to be identified one way or the other for whatever reason. Often the attempt at neutrality is actually the result of moral cowardice, a lack of backbone, and an overdose of fear. It is akin to the spiritual disease of "go-along-ism."

People often have friends on both sides of a matter and they wish to stand with their friends. Too often what a person says and does is determined by friends rather than by facts. We should never be guilty of deciding where we stand on the basis of who stands where rather than what is the truth. Many cannot decide until they know where the "important people stand," what is the popular thing to do, and which way is the trend. Like an old preacher once said, "Some folks take on the color of

whatever bush in which they happen to be hiding at the moment." There was a song a few years ago that adequately describes many people. It had a verse that said, "When I'm not near the one I love, I love the one I'm near." It is like the report on a politician when coming before a group and upon being asked about a certain issue, "He came down strong on neither side." This is characteristic of an attempted neutrality.

Ever Learning

Often we hear about those who never can make up their minds on an issue but are constantly "studying the issue." We should study all issues before making any conclusions and taking a stand. But there comes a time to quit studying and stand. While we mull the matter over and over and over again, error advances without opposition. Paul warned of those in his day who were "*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (Second Timothy 3:7). "Studying" is often the excuse, but an attempt to remain neutral is the reason.

Neutrality provides equal opportunity for truth and error without any decisiveness and without any refutation of error. This is seen in many publications, lectureships, and other forums. Some are equally critical of those who stand for truth as they are toward those who stand for error. They are willing to have it either way just so long as they do not have to settle on one way. They had rather straddle the fence and keep everything in a fuzzy gray, but never a clear black or white. Some ever try to be neutral in matters that are diametrically opposed to each other.

Neutrality is also evidenced in what is not said that ought to be said. This is one of the problems of preaching in our time. Much preaching does not contain error itself, but neither does it contain what needs to be heard. The fault is in what is omitted. Herein is the inherent weakness of having nothing but "positive" preaching. Neutrality omits the needed "negative" preaching, and that violates such scriptural teaching as "*reprove, rebuke, and exhort*" (Second Timothy 4:2), as well as the failure to "*declare... all the counsel of God*" (Acts 20:26), plus Ephesians 5:11, "*have no fellowship with*

the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Reproving error is something many avoid with premeditation.

It Cannot Be Done

The folly of neutrality is seen in that Jesus said it cannot be accomplished regarding Him and His will. To illustrate the danger of neutrality, we are reminded of a story of a man during the War for Southern Independence who wished to take neither side. One day a battle was waged on his farm, and to show his neutrality he put on a Confederate coat and the pants of the Union uniform. Was he safe? No, because both sides shot him.

The Scriptures tell of various attempts at neutrality. First Kings 18, Elijah was at Mt. Carmel and proposed a contest with the prophets of Baal. He said to the people, "*How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Ball, then follow him.*" Nothing could be a fairer proposition. But notice the reaction of the people. "*And the people answered not a word*" (First Kings 18:21). They did not have enough conviction either way to decide who to serve, or even respond. They wanted to remain neutral. The contest that followed drove them from their neutrality, however.

In Judges five we read where Deborah and Barak led Israel against the nation of Canaan, Jabin, the king, and Sisera, their captain. Many Israelites joined in the battle of deliverance. But verse twenty-three contains harsh words for the people of Meroz. "*Curse ye, Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.*" This is the same reaction of many today when error and false teachers are running wildly through the brotherhood and some are trying to withstand them, but others will not even lend assistance. They want to be neutral.

In Judges eight we read of the people of two places, Succoth and Penuel, who refused to help Gideon. God called Gideon to lead Israel against the Midianites. With three hundred men he put them to flight. As he followed the victory in driving out the enemy, he asked for help.,

"Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmuna, kings of Midian. And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmuna in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?" They did not want to give Gideon aid unless they were sure they would be on the winning side. Whoever won was not as important to them as being with the winner. They preferred to win rather than to be right. Penuel was the same way. All of those kind of people have not vanished from the earth. But when Gideon returned after the victory, he punished those cites as they deserved.

Two-faced

Notice the two-faced attempt at neutrality among the enemies of Israel as recorded in Second Kings 17:41, *"So these nations fear the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day."*

In Acts 5:29-39 we read of the advice Gamaliel gave the Jewish leaders as to how to deal with the apostles. He said to leave them alone. If what they were saying was false, it would die of itself. If what they were saying was true, nobody could stop it. Gamaliel did not wish to commit himself. He offered the ridiculous notion that error will vanish if it is left alone. But error advances when it is left alone. Neither will truth prosper if not defended and promoted. Yet, there be some today who still advise that brethren deal with matters as Gamaliel.

Not And Honorable Stand

An attempt at neutrality contradicts taking an honorable stand for truth and the necessity of choosing good rather than evil. Who does not recall the noble words of Joshua 24:14,15, *"Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which you fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the*

Amorites in whose land ye dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." He was not a neutral man.

Hebrews 11:24-27 records the choice of Moses. *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."* If some today had been approached by God to deliver Israel, they would have suggested, "God, can't I work out this deliverance while operating out of Pharoah's palace?" Moses made his choice, took his stand, and did his job.

What About Christ?

Does anybody really think Christ was neutral? Even though He is the mediator between God and man, there has never been any doubt that He would do the will of the Father. Will we be like Him, or shall we be like Judas who negotiated on both sides on the street?

Attempted neutrality violates such passages as First Corinthians 16:13, *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."* A neutral cannot obey this. First Timothy 6:12, *"Fight the good fight of faith,"* but not first on one side, then the other. Second Timothy 2:3, *"Thou therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."* This is not qualified to fight as long as it is easy or popular to do so. Titus 1:9, *"Holding fast the faith word."* Second John 9-11, *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, he hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is a partaker of his evil deeds."* Jude three demands we *"contend earnestly for the faith."* Attempts at neutrality make this impossible.

It Makes You Sick

One of the more nauseous forms of neutrality is the attempt to compromise truth with false philosophies. To

meet halfway, as some would try, is to blend and harmonize truth and error, which only results in contaminating the truth with error. The result is less than truth and a victory for Satan.

Theistic evolution, the gap theory, are examples of such compromise. The dual-fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy is nothing but a sop to those who deny the prophecy-fulfillment element of the Bible and who contend the Old Testament prophecies related only to the time of the prophets, not the age of Christ. Some confuse the types and anti-types and call for dual-fulfillment. Once a thing is full is cannot contain anything else. Until it is fulfilled, the prophecy is not fulfilled.

Compromise is at the heart of the controversy over whether we be "Christian only" or "the only Christians." Some want to include the denominations even though God does not even authorize their existence. They may consider themselves broad-minded and tolerant, loving and kind, but their efforts are more toward a restructure of the church the Bible reveals.

The "local flood" heresy is another effort to compromise the Scriptures with the hypothesis of organic evolution of Darwinian nature. One has written in his commentary that the local flood is a "viable alternative" to the universal flood the Scripture demands. This is a frontal attack on the inspiration and infallibility of the Scripture whether the "scholars" realize it or not. They so seldom realize many plain matters. There is no way to harmonize the "local flood" doctrine with Scripture. Why should Christians seek to harmonize truth with the doctrines of men who do not believe in God's miracles and deny the Bible to be God's Word?

Others cry, "We cannot know truth for sure." This is not preaching faith, but agnosticism. If we cannot know truth for sure how can they be so sure we cannot know truth for sure? Any philosophy that shoots itself is not reliable and those who advocate it are not reliable. Some do not want certainty so they can always remain in a state of flexibility if the situation makes it expedient. They seek neutrality and are too fearful to take a stand even though the evidence is conclusive.

The "No-judgers"

The "no-judgers" are those who cry, "Don't try to play God and judge others." I have never met or read after a "no-judger" who was not quick to severely condemn those who did not agree with his "no-judge" contention. I have yet to find one who will not set aside God's revealed judgments lest they demand too much of a dogmatic and certain position. They will even tell us that maybe God just might possibly in some way do something or another differently than what He has said. They cry, "Don't judge," but they judge God and judge those who follow God. They are insipid neutralists.

Picture Peter for a moment in a sad hour of his life as he warms himself by the fires of the enemy after Jesus was seized. He wanted to remain close to Jesus to see what would happen to Him, but he was neither close enough to Jesus to help Him, nor to receive any strength from Him. He wanted to remain nearby but not be identified with Him. He did not want anybody to really know with whom he stood at that moment. He was attempting the folly of neutrality, and even cursed, swore, and denied Christ three times rather than declare his allegiance.

Did his attempt succeed? Certainly not! He later realized his sin and wept bitterly. His repentance is obvious by his conduct thereafter. There was no neutrality in Peter on Pentecost, or at Cornelius' house, or before the Jewish council, or other times.

Let us close with the word of admonition that each one of us stand up for the truth, every day, every way, regardless of the cost for doing so. Either stand up, or sit down and quit pretending. Attempts to please God and man have always failed and you cannot succeed either. You show yourself to be a fraud, not a friend of Jesus. First Thessalonians 3:8, "*For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*" Notice the big IF, and resolve to stand fast, and avoid the corruption of neutrality.

* * * * *

This completes sixteen volumes of *A BURNING FIRE.*

Test of Faith



The wire was strung between the towers. The high-wire artist shouted to the crowd, "Who believes I can walk across this wire?" All agreed he could do it, and so he did. Then he asked, "Who believes I can push a wheelbarrow across this wire?" Again, everyone raised his hand, and so he did. Then he asked, "Who believes I can push this wheelbarrow across this wire with a person in it?" And sure enough, everyone was confident that he could do it. Then he asked the crowd, "Who will volunteer to be that person?" Not a hand was raised. Somehow, the situation had changed.

It is sometimes this way with God's promises. In a class our teacher asked, "What scripture do you find hard by which to live?" He cited several. All had to do with God's promise to provide and care for us. We say we believe it, and probably do. But do we show we believe it. Consider First Corinthians 10:13 and ask, "Do I really believe it?" It is true, but easier to say than live by.

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is avaliable.

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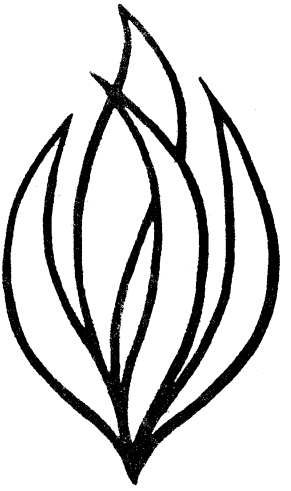

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVII *James W. Boud* NUMBER 1

What God Has Taught About Homosexuality

Christians acknowledge, accept, and agree with what God teaches on any subject. If you love God, you will obey His will. First John 5:3, "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.*" Philippians 2:5 teaches us to have the mind of Christ. If we be honest, whether we agree with God or not, we will acknowledge what He says. Most of the world rejects so much of God's will. Many will even refuse to agree that God has taught on certain themes, therefore they will ignore, deny, and defy His will. Preferring to accommodate sin, rather than avoid sin or seek forgiveness of sin, many try to prove that sin is not sinful.

The information our subject suggests is so clear that we need not belabor the point to learn the correct conclusion. Even though it is a "hot topic" in society, which is evidence of man's rebellion against God, there is no doubt what God has taught on homosexuality.

At the Creation

God created male and female. The marriage was composed of a man and a woman. He created Adam and Eve, not Ellen and Ann, or Phil and Will. From the beginning we know what is God's intention and plan.

Sodom and Gomorrah

From Genesis thirteen, can there be any doubt about God's anger toward this sin? After the separation of Abraham from Lot, Lot chose to pitch his tent toward Sodom. This was before the Lord decided to destroy the place. When the Lord proposed the destruction, Abraham bargained and negotiated with the Lord to preserve the city for Lot's sake. Beginning with fifty, Abraham finally asked if he could find ten righteous men in the

city, would God spare it. God said He would. But evidently there were not even that many righteous men in Sodom.

Lot was warned by angels of what was coming. The angels were set upon by the homosexual mob, and the angels smote the mob with blindness. Great town!

The sin of sodomy (sexual relations between men) gets its name from this wicked and abominable city. And God destroyed those people. Homosexuality is one form of fornication. Can there be any question in the mind of any honest person of God's displeasure toward those who commit such things?

Under the Law of Moses

We can only appeal to the honest. Leviticus 18:22, "*Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.*" Deuteronomy 23:17, "*There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.*" Judges 19:22, in that period of Israel's history when every man did that which was right in his own eyes, "*Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the household round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.*" How would you like to have lived there?

While it is not "politically correct," and not fitting with the "thinking" of our present government (April, 1995), can there be any doubt as to the mind of Deity regarding this sinful conduct?

The New Testament

Be opened minded enough to open the Bible and read Romans 1:20-25. See what those of whom this chapter speaks did! See how they acted! Notice what they thought! Do not omit observing what happened to them! They refused to have God, hated God, and were damned in judgment. We are not making sinful judgments when we condemn homosexuality. It is not self-righteousness that proclaims the homosexual to be abominable. One

who sets his judgment above what God has declared to be sinful is so far out of line that we wonder if there is any hope for him anywhere. Certainly not as he is. Only those who accept what God has taught can be right.

Is God to be Blamed?

Some contend that they cannot help being homosexual, and that this circumstance is natural with them. They claim it results from their genes and they are not responsible. Keep in mind, God condemned it. Are we to say that God is wrong in condemning this act? Does not God know what sin is? Is God or nature to blame? Indeed not, nor is there valid evidence to suggest it is a natural thing. People learn to be homosexual, just like they learn to be alcoholics. It is not a disease like cancer or pneumonia. Everything is called a disease today and nobody is accountable for their misbehavior. Diseases result from sinful behavior sometimes, but the sinful behavior is not just another physical disease.

Let us grant for a moment that being homosexual is beyond one's ability to help himself, (a circumstance that we deny forcefully), God still prohibits the practice. A person may feel inclined to be a whoremonger, but God still condemns the whoremonger. There is no excuse the "modern experts" can raise to justify what God has said is sinful. If only men did not think they were smarter than God we would not have so many so confused.

These perverts are not "born that way." This problem is acquired, and there are many contributing factors.

Not Lack of Compassion

Whenever sin is condemned the permissive like to accuse others of lacking compassion. Jesus condemned sin. Did He lack compassion? The condemnation of that which is destructive to a person is an act of love and concern. Look at the havoc this abomination has already wrought against society. How often are those who are suffering from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases asked, "Was it worth it? Do you recommend it to others in view of the consequences?"

The term "gay" is such a misnomer. If there are any people on earth who are not gay, as in happy, it is the homosexual and lesbian. They compose the scum of the earth in humanity. It is so sad for them and others.

Can They Be Saved?

Can the homosexual or lesbian be saved? They cannot while remaining in their sin. But they, like every other sinner, can be saved and their sin forgiven if they conform to the will of the Savior. There is no sin too hideous that God will not forgive provided His terms are met. But one cannot continue in sin (Romans 6:1,2) and expect to be saved. A thief cannot continue stealing, and adulterer must cease his adultery, the liar must stop lying, etc. And the sexual pervert must leave that sin.

Many have done this very thing, which is additional evidence that being a homosexual is not something one "cannot help." There were some in Corinth that stopped this sort of thing (First Corinthians 6:11). Notice what they ***"were."*** But they did not remain that way.

The way of forgiveness for the homosexual is the same way every other sinner must come. He must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, place His faith and trust in Him, repent of his sins, confess his faith, and be washed clean by the blood of Christ in baptism. He can be made white as snow and become a new creature. He is to live a faithful life as a Christian thereafter.

It Matters Not What Others Say

It really does not matter what anybody else says once God has spoken. While many try to excuse this sin, and lessen the ugliness of it, it does not matter what they say. They may say it is just a different lifestyle. It is that, all right. But IT IS WRONG. Churches may even accept them as they are without a change in behavior, but IT IS WRONG. Psychologists may try to excuse it and place the blame elsewhere, but IT IS WRONG. Politicians may clamor for their votes and lower the moral levels of the nation for their own gain, but IT IS WRONG. Entertainers may do it, athletes may "come out of the closet," but IT IS WRONG. Scientists may explain it

away, but IT IS WRONG. Feminists may condone it and masses and mobs may display their corruption and defiance of things moral and decent in rallies and parades, but IT IS WRONG. There may be advocates of this evil in the halls of government, but IT IS WRONG. Laws may be passed that will allow it, but IT IS WRONG.

There is no way to make evil into righteousness. Evil must be ceased and forgiven. The will of the Lord is without any question. Even though many do not accept His will regarding homosexuality, IT IS WRONG. **AND IT WILL ALWAYS BE WRONG!.**

That being true, there is no doubt where we must stand regarding it regardless of who may be condemned because of it. The Lord's people love what God loves and hate what God hates, and He hates every false way. Read your Bibles and you will agree that God's will about this matter is clear, concise, unmistakable, and will never change. We must be sure we stand with God, even if our nation becomes a continent of cities like Sodom.

* * * * *

Jesus as a Servant

As you study the Bible you meet many great and wonderful servants of God. Consider the likes of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Daniel, and the list could be extended from the Old Testament and into the New Testament. Our lesson will be concerned with the greatest of all the many servants of God, Jesus Christ.

Consider the life of Christ as recorded in the first four New Testament books. Even though the number of days of His life that are mentioned are relatively few, probably around fifty days, we have the information God intended to give us to provide sufficient evidence that Jesus is the only begotten Son (John 3:16), Deity in the flesh (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-12). We shall consider the examples of service our Lord rendered, and attempt

to understand how He placed such a premium on serving to achieve true greatness.

Luke 22:24-26, Jesus taught His apostles about being chief and about service. *"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."* Matthew 23:1-11 contains the teaching of Christ about serving in contrast with seeking the praises of men. Jesus both taught and demonstrated service and is, therefore, rightly called a servant.

Look at Him at the observance of the last Passover with His apostles as He washed their feet, acting as the servant. Consider His response to James and John in Mark 10:41-45, words similar to those we read in Luke. He also designated Himself as one who came to serve rather than to be served (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28).

How Do You Think of a Servant?

What thoughts come to mind when you hear the word "servant?" Some see slavery, men in chains, owned as property. Such were servants, and we are bondservants of the Lord, belonging to another. But we are servants voluntarily, willingly, and because of individual choice, not because service is forced upon us.

A servant is one who does the master's will. Jesus did this. He said, *"Lo, I come to do thy will, O God"* (Hebrews 10:9). In John He repeatedly stated He came to do His Father's will. As He was about to be crucified His attitude was, *"Thy will be done."*

A servant is subject to higher authority, is a laborer, a worker, and must be submissive and obedient. Jesus was all of that while on earth providing for the salvation of mankind (Philippians 2:5-8). Being a servant, while not dismissing self-esteem, is the opposite of being selfish. One is to be desired but the other avoided. Being a servant is not having a poor self-image and is not to be confused with humility. Again, one is desirable and the other to be avoided.

We Are Always Servants

Romans 6:16-18 teaches we are always servants. It depends on who, what, and how we serve. We are servants of what we obey, "*whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness...*" The Romans Christians had been servants of sin, but when they obeyed the gospel they became servants of righteousness. But the point is, they were always servants, and so it is with us.

Jesus Was Deity

Philippians 2:5-8 shows Jesus as Deity, taking on the form of humanity. He did not come as a conquering war hero, or an earthly king over an earthly empire. He came as a humble and obedient servant. He did what He came to do according to the Father's will, and He finished the work He was sent to accomplish (John 17:4). The work He accomplished was to provide the way to eternal glory for even the vilest sinner who will come to Him for salvation. What He did for man could not have been done by a lesser one than Deity in the form of humanity. But He did His work as a servant of God and for man.

Jesus Was Firstborn

Romans 8:29, "*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*" The term "*firstborn*" does not merely refer to the fact that Jesus was Mary's first child, but has greater reference to His rank and position among brethren. God's purpose for our lives is that we conform to the image of Christ, being living sacrifices (Romans 12:1,12), follow His example (First Peter 2:21), as Paul imitated Him (First Corinthians 11:1).

This is a done by a process of spiritual growth. But we are to be servants for He was a servant

He Came to Serve

While on earth, He went about doing good (Acts 10:38). He was born to die that men might live, and have an abundant life (John 10:10).

It was not His primary purpose to bring physical provisions to the human family, but often He did provide physical things in the course of presenting the spiritual instruction and guidance He came to teach. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:16,17), cured a nobleman's son (John 4:46-54), and a servant of a Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13). Peter's mother-in-law was healed of a fever (Matthew 8:14,15), and the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). These were acts of service to those in distress.

He fed thousands, once five thousand and again, four thousand, using but few loaves and fishes.

He raised the dead, such as the daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9:18-26), the son of a widow from Nain (Luke 7:11-17), Lazarus (John 11), and someday everyone (John 5:28,29).

We cannot do all that He did, but we can obey Galatians 6:10, "*As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*" Never is the physical need to be emphasized to the neglect of the spiritual need. Provision of physical needs is only a means and a tool to reaching the end, the provision of spiritual needs.

Jesus Served the Spiritual Needs

All have sinned (Romans 3:23). The wages of sin is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Christ came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). That was His mission (First Timothy 1:15). There is no other way to be saved except through Him (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). All spiritual blessings are "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3). Salvation is "*in Christ*" (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation "*in Christ*" (Romans 8:1). We are redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7). By the gospel, including His death, burial, and resurrection we are saved (First Corinthians 15:1-4). By His blood we have remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22; 10:4; 9:12). This was His service.

His cross is the drawing power (John 3:14-16; 6:44,45; 12:32). He is the bread of life (John 6:35), and the water of life (John 4:14). It is as Peter once asked when some were turning from Him, and He asked if His disciples would also turn away, Peter said, "*To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life*" (John 6:68). No one does, can, or will provide for the spiritual needs of man as the Son of God has and continues to do.

As He Was, So We Must Be

Being a servant is not an optional matter for those who would follow Jesus. Serving is expected of those who put on the mind of Christ. While there are different ways to serve, and we have different talents. When Jesus said we must follow Him, this included humbling ourselves and becoming servants of God and our fellowman. In the judgment scene of Matthew twenty-five, those who were commended were those who had done service. Those who were rejected were those who have failed to serve. We must seek out ways to serve so we can walk in the steps of our Lord, not to be seen of men, but to walk as He walked. His steps lead to the portals of eternal glory.

* * * * *

Christ, the Propitiation

This lesson deals with the very heart of the mission of Jesus to this earth, and God's provision for our salvation. Three times is Jesus called our "*propitiation*" (Romans 3:25; First John 2:2; 4:10). The concept of "*propitiation*" is to appease, render favorable that which has become unfavorable, conciliate, make adequate satisfaction for wrongs done. Sin exacts a price and God does not treat sin and righteousness just alike. Justice demands that sin be punished and a propitiation satisfies the demands of divine justice. We are concerned with what satisfies the demands of God as payment for

sins. Only God has the right to make that determination because He is the one offended by sin.

Propitiation has a kinship with redemption, atonement, sacrifice, reconciliation, forgiveness, washing, cleansing, and similar thoughts. Let us see what will NOT propitiate for our sins, and then learn what WILL.

What Will Not Pay For Sins

Animal blood will not forgive sins (Hebrews 10:1-4). While there is no remission without the shedding of blood, animal blood will not suffice.

The cessesion of sin is the product of genuine repentance, but just ceasing to sin will not remove sins already committed. Prayer for a person who will not repent is not going to get the desired job done. It may help lead one to repentance, but prayer alone does not provide for the satisfactory payment for sin.

The doctrines of being saved from sin by faith alone, or grace alone, are never taught in Scripture. Just why people persist in teaching such things is amazing.

Never can we earn or merit salvation since we are not saved by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), or works of our own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). Nor can we be forgiven through the law of Moses (Romans 3:20).

Pretending that we have not sinned, denying our guilt, thinking some sin is "not that bad" does not remove it.

Nor can we be saved by proxy, like someone being baptized for us after we are dead, as Mormons teach.

One of the most blasphemous things I have heard is where some youth minister had young people write their sins on a stick, throw the stick into a fire, and say the sins are burned away. Sins are not burned away, but washed away by the blood of Christ.

Some have tried to free themselves of the guilt of sin by just blaming others, like Adam, Eve, Saul, Aaron. It will not work.

Proverbs 28:13, "*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*" There are wrong ways to try to cover sins. Romans 4:7,8, "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*" There is a right way for sins to be covered.

What Will Propitiate For Our Sins?

Hebrews 9:22 teaches it takes blood, not animal blood, but the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:12). All of the Old Testament sacrifices were types of the sufficient sacrifice of Christ. They were "*figures of the true*" (Hebrews 9:24). Their inadequacy is evidenced in that they were sacrificed every year (Hebrews 9:25). Only the blood shed at Calvary will save (Ephesians 1:7), the precious blood of the Lamb (First Peter 1:19), the Lamb being the Christ (John 1:29). His blood has the power to appease the wrath of God against sin, satisfying God. As we sing, "There is power in the blood."

His blood was shed but once (Hebrews 9:28). That blood flowed both ways from the cross (Hebrews 9:15), sufficient to cover the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2), not just OUR sins, but MY sins. His blood is the cleansing power (Acts 22:16; First John 1:7).

Revelation 1:5, He "*washed us from our sins in his own blood.*" Revelation 7:13 says our robes are washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Covenants Sealed

In the Old Testament, God's covenant with man was sealed and ratified by blood (Hebrews 9:18-21). Likewise, the new and better covenant is sealed and ratified by blood, the blood of Christ. Such is the message of the book of Hebrews. Matthew 26:28 teaches that Christ shed His blood for the remission of sins.

The Lifting Up of Christ

John 12:32,33, "*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death*

he should die." Christ was lifted up on the cross, from the tomb, and into heaven. This passage has primary reference, however, to His death. His love and His sacrifice is what attracts people to Him.

It is by the blood of Christ that we can overcome the devil. Revelation 12:11, *"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."*

Trampling the Blood

Man can trample the blood of Christ. When we fall away, this is exactly what we are doing. Hebrews 10:26-29 teaches when we willfully sin, there is nothing else that can forgive us except the very blood that we are trampling underfoot.

Have you ever been ashamed of being washed by His blood? There are those critics who detest Christianity and contend it is a bloody religion. It does involve blood. That was God's plan. We are bought with a price and, therefore, are not our own (First Corinthians 6:20). For this reason we are not allowed to live just anyway that we might choose, but live according to the will of the One who died for us. We have that obligation.

Christ purchased the church by His blood (Acts 20:26). There is a story of two young boys who were playing on a railroad track. They did not notice a train coming toward them, but their mother saw the situation, ran with haste to the boys, threw first one, and then the other out of the path of the train, but she herself was caught beneath the wheels and was cut to pices, being dragged down the track, her blood being spilled along the way. Do you think those two boys would ever be ashamed of the blood of their mother who gave her life that they might live?

How inconceivable it is to think that anyone who has been washed clean by the blood of the Son of God would be so rebellious and uncaring as to wilfully sin and crucify the Son of God afresh. How could anyone ever be ashamed of the blood of the One who died that they might escape hell, and enjoy heaven. Yet, there are those

who have done and continue to do that. Nothing shows greater contempt for things holy and sacred than to once come to the blood of Christ, but then turn from Him.

Modernists trod underfoot His blood by denying the efficacy of the blood, denying its power. Following the doctrines of men and making the word and grace of God of none effect is abominable (Mark 7:13).

But have you considered how the refusal to obey the Lord in baptism, where we reach His blood, is saying to Christ that He just as soon not have died as far as you are concerned? How ungrateful that is.

What Can Wash Away My Sin?

We sing this question, and the answer comes ringing back, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus." It is God's way of executing justice for sins, but extending mercy to the sinner. It is not a question, "Does the blood save?" It is, "When does the blood save?" It is when we are obedient to the Lord in baptism, when we are baptized into Christ, baptized into His death, and then raised as new creatures in Christ to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3,4; Second Corinthians 5:17).

You may ask, "Why did God devise such a plan that called for the death of His only begotten Son?" This we cannot answer, except to say, surely we recognize how His plan displays the greatest measure of love for the sinner one could imagine.

Dear reader, do not fail to take advantage of the propitiation provided. And urge others to so do as well.

* * * * *

Shut the Door on the Devil

We are cautioned, "*Awake thou that sleepeth*" (Ephesians 5:14). We read such warnings as "*Take heed..., be watchful..., be diligent...*" We are urged to keep alert and on guard. There is a reason for that. First Peter 5:8, "*Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*" We read so many admonitions to self-examination. This is among them.

We should be familiar with the corrective power of the gospel. First Timothy 1:15, "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*" But there is also a preventive power of the gospel. Psalm 119:11, "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*" Second Peter 1:12, "*Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.*" Peter wanted his brethren to grow and mature (Second Peter 3:18) and to do this they must learn how to avoid problems as well as correct those they did not avoid. Is it not better to prevent problems than to solve them?

It is profitable to take stock, look at ourselves, check our spiritual inventory, individually and collectively as a congregation. What is the condition of the congregation with whom you are associated? Which direction is it going? Where do we want it to go? More importantly, is it going the way God would have it go? While numerical growth is important because each number is a precious soul, that is not the most important matter. Physical facilities may assist in the work and worship of the church, but there are matters that surpass these in significance. Financial capacity must be considered. But spiritual growth and spiritual strength, one of the more difficulty qualities to measure, far exceeds others in importance.

The Present State of Things

The congregation where I am privileged to preach (East End of McMinnville) has enjoyed great success during its history. We all are thankful for that. This congregation has a rich heritage, founded on the Christ, established by faithful brethren, nurtured and taught through the years by loyal gospel preachers, and elders. There is no way to adequately measure what we who are members today owe to those who have gone before us. We stand on what they built. This in no wise minimizes the present membership and their labors of love being done, but is only to express gratitude to God and others for the blessings we presently enjoy to which others who have gone on have made such significant contributions.

We presently experience peace within and unity of mind and heart, standing together on "*thus saith the Lord,*" the only basis for unity. The manifestations of the attitude and love toward one another is observable. We are blessed with addtional people being added to the family of God. Doctrinally we are determined to remain sound in the faith. We have good relations with faithful churches around us. We have every reason to believe the influence of the church is positive and respected by those in the church, and sometimes even by those not yet Christians. In fact, much good is being done, not with great fanfare, but each Christian laboring in the vineyard. There is evidence the church is alive, with exceptional strength in truth in the leadership. The congregation has earned reasons for people to have confidence in it.

We are the kind of congregation the devil would love to disrupt.

Why would the devil ever want to disrupt a dead church? He would not bother a church that was in turmoil and strife. He looks for cracks in good churches into which he would drive his destructive wedge. It is up to the membership, one and all, to prevent the cracks, seal them up whenever they appear, strengthen ourselves, always striving to be better and do better. How do we do this? This is the major burden of this lesson, applicable to East End, but also to any other congregation.

We Have to Shut the Door on the Devil

When we keep our mission, purpose, and goal ever before us, we shall reach our goals. We must know who we are, God's children. We must know why we are what we are, knowing what we are for, and what we are against, and why we are for and against those things.

We must seek to glorify God. Ephesians 3:21, "*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*"

The prime mission is to glorify God, and we do this by the proclamtion of His will to sinful mankind. First Timothy 3:15 teaches the church is the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*"

Our labor is to seek the lost, restore the fallen, edify the saved, live daily lives in the imitation of our divine example, Jesus Christ. How can the devil smear a church where people live godly lives? As we reach for heaven by the grace of God, we are helping each other get to heaven. That is how we shut the door on the devil.

Our Guide and Authority

Never is the devil more excluded than when brethren will keep Christ as the head of the church, our King and authority for all we say, do, and think in service to Him (Colossians 3:17). Recognizing we shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48), we dare not go beyond His doctrine (Second John 9-11), abiding in the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*" (Second Peter 4:11), never going beyond what is written (First Corinthians 4:6). We must not forget what Jesus said in Luke 6:46, "*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" It is not those who say who please the Father, but those who do the Father's will (Matthew 7:21). Love is being obedient (John 14:15). To remember such teaching will help us shut the door on the devil every time and any time he comes among us. Standing with the Lord means a closed door to the devil.

We Must Preserve the Unity

There is only one slight change in the arrangement of letters that distinguishes between UNITED and UNTIED. It is when the "I" gets out of place. That changes everything.

Division destroys because a divided kingdom cannot stand, but is brought to desolation (Matthew 12:25; Luke 11:17). There is power in unity (John 17). To illustrate, try tearing a single sheet of paper and notice how easily it is done. Then put a hundred sheets together and try to tear them.

We will have unity when we all follow the same rule (First Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27). We can be united and still be lost unless the unity is founded on truth. But our unity is dependent upon each being considerate of the other as well as considerate of the revealed will. It sometimes seems some have either forgotten or never heard of the "Golden Rule" (Matthew 7:12). Nothing binds together like a loving attitude. We sing, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." We are to "*love the brotherhood*" with an "*unfeigned love*" (First Peter 1:22; 2:17).

As we keep and nurture unity, we must guard the tongue. So much good can be done by the tongue, but also much harm is possible (James 3). Why cannot we overlook petty differences in personalities and in matters of opinion and indifference while we stand firm and united in the matters of faith, those matters of divine revelation? We must always seek to avoid strife, soothe strife, not allow dangerous matters of division to drift into explosive issues when the truth is not at stake! This shuts the door on the devil and his opportunity to cause division in the ranks of God's army.

Positive Efforts

On the positive side of shutting the door on the devil, let us continue to cooperate, encourage, and support our good works together. We can do this in attendance at worship, involving ourselves in the songs, being generous in our giving, being sacrificial for His cause.

After all, souls are at stake, including our own, and much depends on our faithfulness.

Do we sing a lie when we sing, "I want to be a worker for the Lord"? Nehemiah and the people of Judah were able to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem because "*the people had a mind to work,*" and they said, "*Let us rise up and build*" (Nehemiah 2:18; 4:6). When each assumes and discharges his personal responsibility, the devil has a very difficult time causing trouble within the church. When members build and promote, it shuts the door on the devil.

Other Things That Help

Prayer will shut the door on the devil. The private study of God's Word is possibly the best study one can do because he learns and grows, knows whereof he stands, and practices what he learns. When you love the Lord and His people, prayer and private study, alongside public prayer and Bible classes, are ways of laying up treasures in heaven, and the devil cannot intrude.

We are grateful to be part of the Lord's body, His church. We are not now nor shall ever be a perfect people. God does not demand perfection, but He does demand faithfulness, that is, "*patient continuance in well doing*" (Romans 2:7). He deserves our very best, and we show appreciation to God by doing our best. Let us stay the course, take personal inventory, strengthen our dedication, with daily fresh resolve. We are the ones that make our congregation what it ought to be. When we work toward that goal with brethren, God is pleased. As the saying goes, "A better church begins with me."

There are those who delight in "bashing the church," finding fault with everything and almost everybody. Every congregation will face conditions in an evil world that are not compatible with our faith. We live in an evil world and a society which does not seem to care much for the precious truths of God's Word. Therefore, we will encourage one another to be faithful, keep the church pure, see to the work God wants done, and shut the door on the devil, disallowing him entrance into our midst.

* * * * *

Lamentations

Lamentations is a book of the Old testament, five chapters in length. It is properly identified as the Lamentations of Jeremiah. Probably many have not spent much time studying this book. To lament means to cry the cry of sorrow. Lamentations is a book of mourning, wailing, and grief.

It is rather unique for several reasons, not the least of which is its literary structure. It is written in the form of an acrostic, that is, each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There are twenty-two letters in that alphabet. Chapters one, two four, and five each have twenty-two verses. The first verse begins with the first letter of the alphabet, the second verse begins with the second letter, and so on, in alphabetical order, with the exception of chapter five which has twenty-two verses and uses all twenty-two letters but not in alphabetical order.

Chapter three has sixty-six verses. The first three verses begin with the first letter, the next three verses begin with the second letter, and so on. In this form it is akin to the arrangement of Psalm 119 which is divided into twenty-two sections.

It was written by Jeremiah as the Holy Spirit guided him to write. He was God's prophet, the suffering and weeping prophet. Lamentations tells us why Jeremiah suffered so much and wept so bitterly. The theme is the sorrow for the sins and destruction of Judah.

Historical Background

After Saul, David, and Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided into two nations, Northern Israel and Southern Judah. By the time of this book, Northern Israel had already been taken into captivity by the Assyrians, a captivity from which they never returned as a nation. Southern Judah had continued, but eventually was captured and taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

The beloved city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jewish religion and holy places had been desecrated and defiled. Jeremiah, God's prophet, had foretold of these things, warned the people where their sins were taking them, and now he saw it come to pass. Even though he was proven right before the people, he was grieved at the suffering of the nation of God. He took no delight in the fall of the people. He, along with all the others, suffered humiliation and sorrow. He was an eye witness to the devastation of things considered holy and sacred.

He had patiently borne with this rebellious people, pleading with them to repent. He had done his best to save the city of Jerusalem, but he was ignored, persecuted, and accused of treason because he told the people God's message.

The book of Lamentations is an inspired expression of his grief over the failure of the people to return to God's way, "*the old paths.*" In a sense, this book is a funeral hymn.

Chapter One

Some ideas run throughout each chapter but in different words. In chapter one Jeremiah is stunned, amazed, weeps, is heart-broken over the plight of Jerusalem.

Verse one, "*How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!*"

Verse three, "*Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude; she dwelleth among the heathen; she findeth no rest; all her persecutors overtook her between the straits.*"

Verse five, "*Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions; her children are gone into captivity before the enemy.*"

Verse eight, "*Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed; all that honored her despise here, because*

they have seen her nakedness. Yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward."

Verse twelve, "*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."*

Verse eighteen, including himself as one of the people, "*The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment. Hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow; my virgins, and my young men are gone into captivity."*

The people brought the catastrophe upon themselves by rebellion against God. Hardships may be self-imposed. Proverbs 13:15, "*The way of the transgressor is hard."*

Chapter Two

The destruction of the nation is attributed to the anger of the Lord. Verse one through three, "*How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger. The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought them down to the ground; he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof. He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel; he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about."*

Verse eight, "*The Lord hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion; he hath stretched out a line, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying; therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together."*

Verse fifteen, "*All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?*

Verse twenty-two, "*Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the Lord's\ anger none escaped nor remained; those that I have swaddled and brought up hath mine enemy consumed.*"

Chapter Three

Verse seventeen expressed the depth of Jeremiah's grief. "*And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgat prosperity.*"

Verse thirty-nine shows he had no right to complain because God was just. In verse forty-four he realized God did not heed his prayers, yet he kept contending for the remedy (verse forty). That remedy was to return to God.

In this chapter we find the only flicker of optimism and words of hope found in the book. Verse twenty-six, "*It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.*" Verse thirty-one, "*For the Lord will not cast off for ever.*"

In verses sixty through sixty two and verse sixty-four, Jeremiah pleads for God to deal with his persecutors. As this noble prophet did the Lord's work, the people attacked him viciously. Their actions against him only demonstrated the level of contempt the people had toward God.

Chapter Four

This chapter depicts the suffering and horror of the siege of Jerusalem by Babylon. There was slaughter and starvation (verse nine). The people sunk to the lowest levels of depravity as described in verse ten. It is almost unbelievable what they did and what happened to them (verse twelve).

Verse thirteen tells why it happened. "*For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her.*" They were called worse than Sodom (verse six). The ones who led to their destruction were their prophets, priests, princes, as well as the people.

Chapter Five

This chapter continues to bemoan their plight in verses two, five, seven, ten, eleven, twelve, sixteen and twenty-two. These words provide somewhat of a summary of the tone of the message of the book of Lamentations.

What Do We Learn?

First, neither nations nor individuals can sin with impunity and escape the consequences. We have a personal and a national responsibility. What individuals do, the nation becomes. History cries out the fatal consequences of an immoral nation.

Second, momentary prosperity and deferred punishment does no mean sin is forgotten. Judah prospered when Jeremiah prophesied. But they gave no heed. They had a false sense of security, making themselves all the more vulnerable to calamity.

Third, while it may be more pleasant and agreeable to listen to groundless optimism of false prophets than the words of the dire consequences of sin, best we give heed while we have opportunity to turn around. Jeremiah's words angered the people, and made them feel uncomfortable. But his words were right, but they would not repent.

The true prophet was discredited before their eyes. He set before them their sins and the consequences thereof, the punishment to come, but also the way to recovery and salvation. As in Jeremiah 6:16, that way was "*the old paths.*" But they would not hear, dismissed and ridiculed his warnings, and cast him into a dungeon.

Fourth, the nation forgot God. Babylon threatened. They leaned on Egypt rather than God to protect them. Had not God provided for them through the days of Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, Hezekiah, and others? Their trust was misplaced toward wealth, power, allies, human wisdom and self. What futility!

Fifth, they had sown the wind and reaped the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). They reaped as they had sown (Galatians

6:7,8). Some blamed God rather than their own sin. But they were made to remember how they listened to false prophets rather than God's Word. Jeremiah told them, in essence, "I told you so!"

Sixth, the enormity of sin was more than they imagined. In Babylon they were forced to acknowledge God's way, experiencing remorse. They got caught, but it produced repentance, as genuine remorse will do (Second Corinthians 7:10). In Babylon they saw their folly. Their captivity was God's instrument to punish and purge them of their iniquities.

Restoration

There was the eventual restoration after seventy years of captivity as Ezekiel and Jeremiah had prophesied. Isaiah had identified the man who would permit them to return home as Cyrus of Persia. God's promises to the forefathers were intact. The Messiah would come, and as we read these things, the Messiah has already come.

The principles of God's dealings with Judah are still in operation today. Romans 15:4 teaches how we can learn from these things if we only would. Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteh a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*" Why will we not hear? Why should we blindly and defiantly bring upon us our own ruin and the ruin of our descendants? Who can defy God and expect to win? How shall our nation persist in rebellion toward God and survive? I contend it cannot and will not. This is not said as a pretended or inspired prophet, but lessons learned from the revelations of the history of Israel and Judah of the past

There was a remnant spared. They suffered but survived to carry the banner of truth forward for the oncoming generations. Seeing how such came to pass, a major question before us is this, "Will you and I be among that remnant?" May we resolve to be!

* * * * *

God Works Through Scripture



"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5,6)

Paul had stated in the verses immediately prior to these that patience (stedfastness) contributes to our hope, and the comfort derived from Scripture also gives us hope. He now acknowledges that in reality God is the source of patience, comfort, and hope. In this way Paul certainly shows that Scripture is from God. What is attributed to Scripture is followed by attributing the same thing to God. It is not difficult to see how God operates on mankind to the accomplishment of man's hope through the use of Scripture.

Of we want to hear from God, read His Word.

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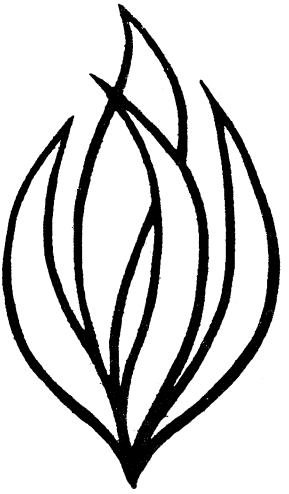

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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How to Keep Our Children Faithful

The Holy Spirit guided John the apostle to write the short epistle of Third John to Gaius about whom reports had come to John of how Gaius walked in truth. Then John added, "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*" (verse 4). John was speaking of those he had taught and brought to Christ. But who is not concerned about their own beloved and dear children? What people on earth would we be more interested in being faithful to God and on their way to heaven than our blessed children?

Our lesson on how to keep our children faithful is not to present a checklist where you do one thing, then the second, then the third, etc., like the directions you might follow in putting a piece of equipment together. There are many elements that are involved in rearing children properly, but you do not do one thing, set that aside, and then do the next. These many elements have to be done in concert, brought along together as a combination, in proper balance, with a mixing and blending of all pieces. Like growth, everything grows at the same time.

We have our children but a few precious years at the longest. We soon learn that the years go swiftly by, and soon, before we realize it, our children reach maturity and are gone from our daily guidance. We have but one opportunity to provide for them what is our duty to provide. If we miss that window of opportunity, it does not return.

We Begin Before They Do

God intends children to be born of parents who are married to each other. God also wants children to be reared in homes where Christ reigns supreme. You should consider the possibility of your children in the selection of the one you marry. So that your home can be one where the will of the Lord is the guiding force, marry a Christian. How can the Lord rule when either

the husband or wife, father or mother, is not a child of God. A divided home in the matters of greatest importance presents a serious handicap to children.

We Really Cannot Do It

It may seem strange in a lesson that teaches how to keep your children faithful to have to admit at the very start that we cannot do it. Even God does not keep His children faithful, that is, without the cooperation of the children. So it is with us and our children. We cannot obey the gospel for them, nor, once they have obeyed, can we be faithful for them. They must keep themselves faithful. We can help or we may hinder. Some are faithful in spite of their parents, and some are unfaithful in spite of godly parents. Some have been blessed to have had parents that assisted them to be faithful. But the bottom line is that each child is answerable to God for himself or herself.

Proverbs 22:6

"*Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" This passage places emphasis on parental responsibility in the upbringing of children, but it is also frequently misunderstood to imply the entire matter rests with the parent. That is not so. The passage presents three stages in the life of the child, two explicitly, and one implicitly.

There is the youthful stage when the parent must train. There are the older years when the child has matured to old age and holds firm to his convictions. But there are also the middle years, years in which the child must walk the way he has been trained. Whether they do that or not is their responsibility.

This being true, to keep our children faithful we must teach our children they are responsible before God. Standing before the judgment seat of Christ (Second Corinthians 5:10) includes them. Giving an account (Romans 14:12) includes them. They will answer for their own words, deeds, and know the consequences.

Therefore, they must make their own decisions about living God's way. We would not want them to have a borrowed faith, that is, believing just because we believed. We want them to have their own deep-seated convictions that will guide them after we are gone. Otherwise, they will never be strong and stable.

Having their own faith does not mean having a faith that differs from our faith. When the parent follows the truth, and the child follows the truth, they will follow the same thing. But each is following the Lord for himself. It is the parent's duty to give them the basis for making their decisions.

Emphasizing how we must teach them to bear their own responsibility does not lessen or minimize parental duty. Ephesians 6:4, "*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" This underscores an essential truth that both parent and child must accept.

Children must learn that the parent is doing what God expects the parent to do when the parent teaches, guides, disciplines, instructs the child. The child must learn his parent is doing what is done in the best interest of the child and the child must submit to that arrangement as God's will. Parents must launch the children on to the sea of life as fully prepared as they can make them.

Rearing children is somewhat like a coiled spring. When the child is born the spring is pressed beneath the hand of the parent and under the control. In time, the hand necessarily must be removed from the suppressed spring. Will it be removed at one bound and quickly, only to see the spring lunge in most any direction? Or will the hand be lifted slowly, and when removed, to see the spring stand just where it is supposed to stand? The time is coming when our hand will be lifted, our training time will be over, and the child will stand or fall. Consider what we must do that they may stand.

We have mentioned two matters of importance already. (1) Select a Christian for a mate; (2) teach them personal responsibility to God.

Teach Them of God

In the course of the child's life his faith in God will be challenged. It is the duty of father and mother to teach the child of the existence of God and the evidences of His existence. He has left His footprints in nature (Romans 1:20). God is the Creator, Provider, Sustainer, Judge, and Authority. The child must learn that God is powerful, a God of love, grace, mercy, but also a God of justice, wrath, and holiness.

We sing, "There's an all-seeing eye watching you." God should not be presented as one who watches in order to catch someone in a fault. To be sure, He is aware of all sin. But, thankfully, God watches over us as a mother watches over the child; not to find fault, to punish, to scold, but to protect, provide, supply the needs. Psalm 33:18, "*Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy.*"

God hates every false way (Psalm 119:104). He provides for the godly (Psalm 37:25). Our children need to know of the terror of the Lord (Second Corinthians 5:11), the goodness and severity of God (Romans 11:22). How else will they come to respect God unless they have a knowledge of His nature. If your child learns about God, it is up to you to see to it.

Must Know God's Will

The Jews were commanded to keep their law before their children. Our children must know of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, concerning Christ, the plan of salvation, the way to worship, what godly living involves, about the church or kingdom. How else will they come to know right from wrong unless taught? How else will they know what God expects, approves, and disapproves unless you teach them? That is the parental duty. We are concerned, rightly so, about the education of our children, but education in what? Will they be educated in what matters most? Will they know the great Biblical accounts of the servants of God, the events that have framed the scheme of redemption, the revelation of things holy and sacred? Not unless parents teach them.

Give Them Self-Esteem

Children need to appreciate their worth, not by some "hyped up pep talk." When I was young and played sports, my father was always supportive and encouraging to me. But he never told me I was the best one on the field. I already knew better than that, and he would have lost credibility to have said that to me. But he urged me to always do the best that I could do.

The child is taught self-esteem when they are taught they are created in the spiritual image of God. Herein lies the dignity of human being and the value of the individual. Here is the basis for the sacredness of life and personal worth. Therefore, they, being distinctive from all else that God created, know they matter, this life is not all there is to their existence, they matter to God, and they matter to you, because they count. Each child is worth more than all the world because each is a precious soul (Matthew 16:26). This cannot be accomplished by degrading them, humiliating them, constantly finding fault with them, yelling at them. They have a quality like God. He is Spirit (John 4:24), and they are spirits as well as physical bodies.

Don't Let This Disappoint You

A hard fact of life is that you will not be the first perfect parent. Furthermore, you will not have perfect children. (That does not come until grandchildren!). So ease up on yourself just a bit and try to relax. The "wise experts" on child-rearing in our day would have you believe that every single little matter that comes along is necessarily momentous and a life-determining situation. That is not so. There will be times when you will make mistakes, say the wrong things, react the wrong way. But much of that will be covered when your child knows you love him, you seek to provide for him, and care for him.

Do not refuse to apologize even to a child when you have done wrong or mishandled a situation. Children are not little adults, and should not be expected to act like adults. (Neither should adults act like children!). Remember, children have feelings, too. They are not to be badgered about with harsh words, cutting remarks,

jerked about. You can hear some of the most awful things come from parents yelling at their children at little league games. How uncalled for!

The little fellows must be trained, corrected, disciplined, but they must also be treated with respect. It is hard for them to grow from a life of idealism into the world of realism where they learn everyone is not good, where every policeman is not honest, where every Christian is not pure, where every teacher is not fair, where you are not perfect as they seem to think when they are small. Don't make it harder on them and destroy your communication with them by being overbearing, dictatorial, and abusive.

From You They Learn to Respect Authority

Respect for authority, or the lack of respect, is learned in the home more than anywhere else. Parents are not just another friend to their children, they are parents, the authority of the home, and deserve respect and to be obeyed (Ephesians 6:1). You can be a friend and a parent at the same time, but never to the disposal of your parental position.

One day I was in my truck with one of my grandsons. James had had a little run-in with some playmate, and evidently retaliated somewhat, which is unlike his character. But I told him that he was to return good for evil. He looked up at me and said with skepticism, "Who made that rule?" I told him that was God's rule. Then he said, "Well, that makes a difference!" He was showing signs of having learned to respect authority.

Example, Word and Deed

Deeds speak louder than words (James 2:18). Our words are drowned out by our deeds unless they are consistent with each other. One of the greatest memories a parent can give a child is a parent who was trying to live faithful to his words, being fair, truthful, honest, loving, dedicated to what was right. We only create confusion in their developing minds when they hear us say one thing but see us doing the opposite.

Referring again to James on that same day, a car passed us and James asked, "Paw Paw, did you see that man in that car?" I noticed him but not much. I asked what caught his eye. He said, "He was smoking. My daddy says it is wrong to smoke." I told him his daddy was absolutely correct. Then he said, "And my daddy doesn't smoke either." Now what good would it have done for that child to be told it was wrong to smoke but see his daddy smoke?

Another grandson was riding home from pre-school with a friend and the friend's grandfather was driving, and smoking. Daniel said, "Your car stinks. When are you going to quit smoking?" Not bad for five years old, is it?

We must set the right example regarding the church. Take them, don't send them to Bible school. One little boy asked his father, "How old must I be before I can stay home from Sunday school like you?" What an example! Is it right to expect them to be what you do not even try to be? Do you know why some children have bad manners, are rude, use bad speech, show bad attitudes? Look at their parents. Do you know why some children have good manners, good speech and attitudes? Look at their parents. You cannot lead where you will not go! Dad once told me I could do what I saw him do. Quite a responsibility he took on himself, but that is the responsibility of a good parent.

First Things First

Matthew 6:33, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...*" We, as parents, must set the right priorities before our young so they will know what matters most. Unfortunately, not every child learns the proper priorities from home. The church must come before self, the world, pleasure, sports, friends. Family must come before peers, morality before lust, honesty before gain, worship before trips, visits, vacations, etc. School lessons are important but not as important as Bible lessons. Conviction surpasses convenience. What do you expect of them when they have been taught at home, shown time and again, that the things God wants for them is of less concern than other things? They may

get mixed signals. For instance, one child asked her mother, "Why do they always cancel church when we have company?"

Children glory to see their own parents participating in worship services, teaching classes, helping in the overall work. Without a word, they learn what matters to their parents and then it matters to them. I can never forget my mother preparing the Lord's Table, making the bread, and being involved in the work and worship of the church.

I recall as a small boy when the little church where we attended replaced the hand-fed coal stove in the basement with an automatic stoker feed. But one cold Saturday the thing went out. I went with my dad and brother Bullington, the janitor, to fix it for Sunday. I was a big help because I held the flashlight. But I also learned what was of interest and concern to my dad, and brother Bullington. It was the church and its welfare. That stays with you.

What Are You Teaching About Worship?

You know the hours of worship, and they soon know them. Do they also know that their family will always respect them? You should not have to decide each time whether you are going to worship. That ought already be decided. You don't decide each day whether school matters, or work matters. Why should it ever be questioned whether worship matters enough to attend?

Good habits can be learned just like bad habits. It may be difficult, especially for young parents, to gather up their children, get them ready, wrestle with them during services, but it pays dividends in the long run. They learn to respect things holy, and pick up far more than we ever imagine.

Some have been heard to complain, "My parents made me go when I was young, now I don't go." Their parents probably made them wash the face, brush the teeth, eat their food, etc., but they still do it. Along with "making them go," teach them it is not a mere duty and obligation, but a privilege to show God appreciation for

His goodness toward them. Develop within them a loving attitude for serving God, making it more than a demand, even though He does demand it. It is a blessing! We become like that which we worship. Teach them to want to become more and more like God in their ways. That will help keep them faithful.

Do You Know Who Their Friends Are?

One area of concern to every responsible parent is the company their children keep. "*Evil companions corrupt good morals*" (First Corinthians 15:33, ASV). Teach them to "make friends of God's children." Sometimes we are disappointed even with children they meet at church. Let us learn, what our children do and where they go is not just our business. When it influences other children, it becomes other's business as well, and vice versa. Every parent ought keep his children so they will be a good influence on other children, and assist other children of Christian families to keep right. Peer pressure is important. How sad when young people "from church" are found saying and doing things contrary to Christianity, and thereby, being a bad influence on other Christian young people! It is the parents' work to make sure that does not happen.

Send them to good Christian camps in the summer, provide for Christian association with activities centered around the church, make your home a place where their friends are welcome. Watch out for their schools events, their books, teachers, subjects studied, their progress. Supervise their entertainment about television. Why invite profanity, immorality, vulgarity, and degeneracy into your living room? Don't you care what you children absorb?

I once received a call from a person who had moved into the community who asked if we had a youth director to direct trips to Six Flags, play games, have parties, etc. I told him we had about a hundred such directors, but we called them parents. This is not the work of the church, but the work of the home, and parents must be about the Father's business of attending to their home work. So many times today the children are being guided by

people other than their own parents. You cannot shift that duty to other people even though others may help.

Be Careful How You Criticize the Church

We want our children to love the church. This is a part of staying faithful. But some never find anything right with the church. There is the divine side of the church that never needs improvement because God's part of it is perfect. There will always be shortfalls in the behavior of members because we are not a perfect people, but we keep trying. Some complain, grumble, find fault, criticize most everything and everybody about the church, and then wonder why their children have so little respect for it. The elders don't handle this right, the preacher is dry and dull, the song leader gets the songs to high, too low, he is too loud, too soft, makes poor selections, the members are a bunch of hypocrites, the most unfriendly people in town, pick, pick, pick, pick. One Sunday a family had the preacher for dinner and the little boy told the preacher he knew what they were having for dinner. He said they would have buzzard because he heard his mother say they had to have that old buzzard for dinner today. Just how will that child see the church as he grows up? As one boy said to his dad, "Why don't you ask to preach next Sunday since you know how it ought to be done?"

It is fashionable among some, not only to find fault with members which can always be found, but now find fault with God's design of the church, the worship services (they are called dull and boring even though they are according to God's pattern). Bashing the church is the ministry of some. As my mother used to say, "Little bears have big ears," and children hear such things and form attitudes accordingly. Then we ask why they are not favorably impressed with the church!

Troubles between members sometimes arise. That is not totally new. If such be the case with you, be extremely careful what you say about another member. Harsh words, cutting statements, accusations might mar the mind of your child if you display your anger and vengeance. It has been known for children to see members point their fingers and shout in the face of

others venting their anger when differences arise. I have seen and heard this as a child and it puzzled me then.

We Must Not Compromise the Truth

Everyone knew where my dad stood and why, and they knew he would stand. We learned that early. The truth is what counts. To sacrifice truth for unity and peace is treason. How unwarranted it is for the home to undercut the church or the church to undercut the home. But this too often happens, especially in such matters as drinking alcoholic beverages, the modern dance, immodest clothing, teaching about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The home and church should present a united front in these matters. It creates a conflict for the child and divides his loyalty if unity in not the case.

When error raises its head, we must stand for the truth, kindly, but firmly. We must be found on the Lord's side without compromise, fear, or favor. We must defend the gospel. Only in this way will our children learn that truth is not negotiable. Unity must be founded on truth, otherwise, we lose our reason to exist. "*Stand fast in the faith*" must be one of our watchwords. We cannot choose what may be the easy or most popular way, but the way that is right. When you do that, at least in this matter, you have done your part.

Be Ready To Give Answer

Children can ask more questions, but by them they learn. It is the work of parents to provide correct answers. If you do not know the answer, do not try to pretend you do because they will eventually see through you. When you do not know, say so, but do not leave it there. Tell them you will find the answer together. Do not leave them to others to provide the answers to questions they ask. You may not know what might be planted in their minds. It's your job first. Do it. They have the right to ask, and you have the task to answer.

Some questions are really puzzling, such as when one of our children asked his mother, "Why did God make poison ivy?" Try to handle that one.

You might have to postpone the answer to some questions, such as a six year old asking if he can be baptized. You may have heard of the father who told his boy that he wanted to talk to him about where babies came from. The boy answered, "All right, dad. What do you want to know?"

To be able to answer their questions about the soul, God, church, truth, you must study. Study for your own sake, but for their sake as well. Provide for them sound literature to read and encourage them to study. Have good source material in the home available to them.

The Value of a Strong Home

We cannot overestimate the value of a strong heritage, where home is a haven, a place of security and love. Home is where it is always safe. Regardless of what befalls them at school, church, in the world, on the field, they know home is the place to go.

One of the greatest gifts that parents can give children is that their children know their parents love each other, are faithful to each other, and that the prime goal of marriage and the home is that every member goes to heaven.

Some children do not know how a home ought to be, never having been in one that operates as God would have it. Children deserve their mother's time. Even though society draws mothers from the home and from their children, nothing and nobody provides the strength, security, and care for children like a godly mother. Sometimes necessity calls the mother from the home, but make sure it is because of need, not greed. Faithful children, a good parent-child relationship, is worth more than the material gain this world affords.

It May Not Always Work

Sadly, not all children respond to even this serious approach to their rearing. But usually such children will never turn against their parents or what their parents stood for, but they will uphold the same eternal and fundamental principles they have learned at home. It is

sometimes said the church is losing so many of her young people. It is true that many young people forsake the church. But the loss is not because of the church but because of the failure in the home. As goes the home, so goes everything else, including the church. The church does suffer loss, however.

Prayer

We shall not succeed without the cooperation of our children. Nor shall we succeed if we try to do our part without God. If we be in Christ we have the privilege of the avenue of prayer. We need God's help, and He is a help. We are assured of God's providence. We should pray for our children.

Never a day passes that I do not take the name of every one of my children and grandchildren before the throne of Almighty God, beseeching Him to watch over them, protect them by His providence, asking that they might always be faithful. This is one of the most important things I can do on their behalf. Prayer is our way to communicate with God, and God hears, and will answer according to that which is best for us. Even our prayers must be according to His will, and our expectation of answers cannot be contrary to His will.

When we do these things, and other efforts could be mentioned, but doing them persistently, patiently, consistently, faithfully, we will know the reward of faithful children. Then we will have possibly the greatest blessing we can have in this life, and be able to say along with John, "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*"

* * * * *

When Children Go Wrong

Most anything regarding our children tugs at our hearts. Some things written here may be disturbing to some, but they are not said to condemn, but to encourage those who still have opportunity to rear their children properly. What is said may also be a source of consolation and comfort to those whose children have disappointed them. We do not want to add to the hurt, but to offer help. We may not, but we want to try. We shall approach this mostly from the parents vantage point, what they might do, with some words to others.

It is not uncommon anymore to hear about a son who has become involved with drugs, a daughter who gets pregnant out of wedlock, young people who have quit the church, run away from home, or ruined their marriage. It seems all the efforts parents have made to rear their children have been wasted and the children have turned against them and their training. These things are all too real and frequent. First Peter 5:8, "*Be sober, be diligent, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*"

Many people are severely hurting because of such things, and are carrying great burdens in the heart. They are very disappointed in their children. While they may take pride in them in some matters, such is not true in the most important matter, their loyalty to God. They tried, but are now hurt deeply, with much joy being drained from life. If this be your lot, you are not alone. That brings no comfort, but it is a fact.

Parents Burdened With Guilt

Parents burden themselves with guilt, asking, "Where did I go wrong?" Many times they did go wrong, but not always. But they have regret and do not understand why things are as they are. Proverbs 22:6 places great responsibility on the parent, as does Ephesians 6:4, and

some are sure they failed somewhere. Possibly so! But the parent may not have been totally at fault every time a child goes wrong. The child must go the way he is trained.

Doing your parental duty does not deprive the child of his power of personal choice, or personal responsibility. If one could not behave contrary to his rearing it would be impossible to convert a person who was reared in sin and bring him to righteousness. While this does not minimize parental duty, it does say loudly that it is not the parent ALONE who is at fault, and possibly the parent is not at fault at all. Much depends on the child, and also, other influences that come in the life of a child over which the parent may have no control.

Who is at Fault?

Assigning blame may seem inappropriate, but it is well that we notice parental duties in their own behavior, examples, teaching, etc. But even God does not keep His children faithful unless the child cooperates with God. If God cannot do it, how do we expect to do it?

There are no perfect parents just as they are no perfect children. But when a parent has been at fault, he or she needs to repent and seek God's forgiveness. It may be too late to change the direction of the child, but the parent's soul can still be saved. The consequences may always be suffered by both parent and child for parental failure, just like suffering will be caused by children's lack of cooperation with their training. But whoever is at fault and whatever the fault may be, it can be forgiven when God's terms are met in humble obedience.

Now What?

Assigning blame may not helpful at this point. Wrong has been done somewhere when anybody goes wrong. But where do we go from here? We cannot undo what has been done. Will things be better? Can they be better? We must start now from where we are. Let us make a few suggestions that we are sure are practical and workable. These suggestions are not to be viewed as solutions,

however. Only repentance and the return of the child to the fold of God solves the problem.

Some Don't's

Don't "burn all bridges." Try to maintain some contact. How can you be an influence for good if there is a total void of communication? Harsh words, barriers, bitterness will only aggravate the situation.

This does not mean to leave the impression you condone their unfaithfulness. You should never do that. It may not be easy, seeing the keen disappointment, to keep from constantly reminding your child of his neglect. When you know so clearly right from wrong, and know your child knows right from wrong but does not live accordingly, that is not easy. The entire situation is not one that loans itself to ease. But anger, arguments, and cutting words will not be productive or helpful for an eventual restoration, which is the goal.

If you as a parent have missed your opportunity by your own fault and neglect, ask God to forgive you. If you have been guilty of making matters worse since your child went astray, ask both the Lord and your child to forgive you. It is never wrong to admit our own errors.

Don't give up on your child. There may times when you feel you are losing the battle. But you cannot afford to give up, for then you have truly met defeat. To not give up may be very trying because the child may seem to have totally ruined his life and there seems to be no reconciliation between you and your child, or between your child and God. Many parents have just about lost hope that one or more of their children will ever come to Christ. Still the parent must hope, not only for his own welfare but for that of the child.

Keep in mind, your child may not act like he is disappointed in himself, but very likely he is and all spark of desire to do right is not extinguished. You may not live to see the day when your child comes to Christ, or is restored. Many people are not converted until later in life after faithful parents have gone to their reward, and their hearts grieved because their children were not

saved. But if you will persist and never give up, possibly this will in time so influence your child that he will favorably respond to the Lord's call. Possibly he will not, but many have and your child may also. You cannot afford of ever give up. Your hope may be the only avenue and source of hope for the child right now.

Giving Up Some Things May Be Required

I recall a circumstance where a faithful preacher's daughter became an atheist. You can imagine the heartbreak of the preacher and his wife. (This daughter eventually was restored, however). You may have to swallow your pride for surely you are embarrassed when your child goes wrong. You wonder what others will think of the child and you. It hurts so much. What will the neighbors say? What will brethren think? It matters to you. But parents must put that aside as best they can, and keep going. Again, like the other suggestions, this one is not easily done. Your pride may be offended.

We have to learn to give our children the control of their lives. Having been their watchman for so long, this is not a trifle task. But they must know that you are no longer responsible for their soul. It is up to them whether they go to heaven or hell.

You might have to consider cancelling financial help if such you are providing. You, as a child of God, cannot afford to finance the works of the devil, even if they are being done by your own flesh and blood. But constantly shaming them will likely repel them. Once they know of your strong disapproval of their waywardness, then you have to let it be as it is, whatever that may be.

Protect Yourself

It is most difficult to accept, but it may well be that in dealing with your wayward child you are dealing with one who is very insensitive to your feelings, or your convictions. While you care so much for them, they may not care in return as they ought. It is not selfish under those conditions to protect yourself from having your feelings walked on. Your child may play on your emotions and even promise many things in order to get

from you whatever he wants, whether it be money, approval, commendation, acceptance, whatever. Then, before you know it, your emotions are crushed once again. Don't let it happen. Don't allow yourself to be his doormat and be used by him, keeping you ever upset, and imposing his ways, which your deplore, upon you.

You do not have the obligation to provide him a place to sin, whether it be for drinking, adultery, or any other sin. Let him know sinful behavior will not be permitted at your house, and he either conforms to that or must find another residence. The Lord's will must come first with you before the whims of a rebellious child. You are concerned about them, but they should not be permitted to crush your every waking moment and times of joy because of his conduct and attitude. You have to pull away enough to let him fall into the hands of God's providence whichever way he goes.

Continue in Prayer

You should never cease to pray for a wayward child. Don't you know the father of the prodigal was ever looking down the road, longing for that day when the son would return home? But you are God's child and have the right to pray. The fruition of your prayer may not come in your lifetime, however.

Love Your Child

This is probably a superfluous reminder, because your concern is evidence of your continuing love. But love the child in the sense of always seeking his highest good. You will not seek his good if you ever compromise with his sinfulness. But always be ready to meet him more than halfway if ever he decides to come back. Let him know that is your attitude, but the decision rests with him because you cannot do it for him.

Be ready to receive him back if he comes back. If he repents and returns, let the past die. It was so hard to see him go away because you knew he going the wrong direction,but leave the door ajar and let him know it awaits his return. Again, it's his move.

Keep God First

Above all else, keep God first in your own life or else both you and your child shall suffer condemnation. God is the source of our strength, our hope, the anchor of our souls. We dare not let anyone, even those so close as children, come between us and God. Our loyalty is to God before our loyalty to our children

The Attitude of Others Toward Parents of Children Who Have Gone Wrong

Let me address those who have seen the wayward ways of children of other people. Surely, if we be of the Christlike spirit we grieve for them as well as the child. This may not be our own burden in life, and it may not be because we have been so much better parents. Conditions and circumstances may have been so different. Under like conditions, we may not have done as well. But be thankful if your home has not been victimized by children who have gone wrong. But be sympathetic and kind toward those who have been hurt .

Don't avoid them. Be friends. Usually we are so afraid we will say or do something that will be wrong and make matters worse. It is that way when you speak with orphaned children, a widow, someone terminally ill, or a divorcee. You may not do just exactly the best in every instance. But being aloof as if you no longer care can be far worse than a thoughtless or ignorant blunder. We can correct those things. They need our presence. Be ready to listen if they ever wish to discuss it, but let them introduce the subject lest you reintroduce more pain. It is already so painful for them. Show your interest in their welfare.

When a child goes wrong it is not the time to offer unsolicited advice, or to give rebukes. Have respect for their privacy. Do not pry for details. If they speak with you in confidence, respect that confidence to the utmost. Do not talk about the situation to others unless it is a proper effort to give genuine assistance. The less said under conditions of departure from God may be the better course to follow. Look for opportune times to assist in recovering the fallen. Remember the

admonition, Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*"

Help the suffering parents to know their own worth. Having experienced this tragedy in life, they may now be equipped to help others more than ever before who are also beset with such things. Help them see their usefulness. They are not total failures. Their loved ones have hurt them, so do not hurt them further.

Suggestions, Not Solutions

As stated earlier, these are suggestions, but not the real solution. The solution is for a child who has gone wrong to repent and return to God and be received again. It will try the limits of your patience, no doubt. It may take some time, maybe longer than your life. Be aware that it may never happen. But what has passed, has passed, and you have to do your best from this point forward. You have to forget, to some extent, the past, and press on, or else your own soul may be lost. What else can you do?

To Children

Let me say a closing word addressed to children. Be careful what you do, what you say, where you go, how you treat your parents. If you put God first in life you will deal with your parents properly. That is a part of being a Christian. Like the loyalty of your parent must be toward God before you, your loyalty must be toward God before them. But avoid causing pain and grief.

I wish there was something more constructive I could pass to you who have suffered with children who have gone wrong. I only pray that God will bless you as you deal with it. May it be that all will be well with your soul. Above all, stay with God!

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Care and Share

In the midst of a chapter devoted to the theme of Christian living we read, Romans 12:8, *... that showeth mercy with cheerfulness."* Mark 5:7, *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."* This passage shows the recognition of a need, and a willingness to supply the need. The principle of sowing and reaping is seen in this last passage also, because one who sows mercy shall reap mercy. When we see others in various conditions that are unfortunate and hard for them, rememeber the old saying, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Problems in Our World

There are languishing souls all around us. People are suffering from illness, grief, losses of many kinds, driven to despair, without hope, and without goals, lacking understanding for the purposes of life. The human family in general is to be looked upon with pity.

We all have burdens of some kind. They are not the same, nor of the same degree of severity. But who does not have problems in this life? Some have far more of them. Some are stronger than others and deal with them more easily. This is one reason the strong should help the weaker (Romans 14). Some situations are beyond our ability to control or relieve because we have limitations. Some illnesses, for instance, are terminal and nothing more can be done about them. There is the inevitable problem of the aged if we live long enough. People have various infirmities and handicaps from which they shall never be able to recover. But all need to know that somebody cares what happens to them.

Like God

Caring is being like Christ and the Father. First Peter 5:7, *"Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you."* Those who are lost in sin whom we try to reach with the gospel do not care how much we know until they are sufficiently impressed with how much we care.

How much does God care for me and you? I have that answer because of what He has done on my behalf. He sent His only begotten Son into this world, the Son died on the cross for our sins, was raised from the dead to offer eternal life unto us. He gave His life that we might live. That shows how much God cares about us.

Psalm 142:1-4

"*I cried unto the Lord with my voice: with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I showed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me;* ***no man cared for my soul.***" (Emphasis, JWB). When the psalmist was beseiged, with his enemies all around, troubles galore, the way was dark and dreary, and he was ever so lonely, more than all that, he felt than nobody cared whether he lived or died. ***"No man cared for my soul."*** That is one of the most pathetic phrases we find in God's book.

But God cared. Verses 5-7, "*I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.*"

To not care about others is cold , calloused, and cruel. In our world some show themselves more concerned about animals and the environment than people and their welfare. Many are more concerned for the material than the spiritual matters of life. Why do not more people value the soul? (Matthew 16:26). Is it because they really do not care? They are not like Paul who considered himself obligated to others (Romans 1:14). We have been saved to save. Someone loved us enough to teach us the way of salvation. Shall not we do as much for another? It is a mark of ingratitude to not care. People who are all for self and none for others are not appreciative of the blessings they have been given.

In fact, it is a sin not to care. The Great Commission, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,*" is a product of divine concern for man. Recovering the fallen (James 5:19,20) reflects a caring attitude. The mission of Christ (Luke 19:10) was the result of caring. We sing, "Must I go and empty-handed?" Shall not we care enough to reach out to others?

Like Christ

We have already mentioned that caring is Christlike, but let us explore this thought a bit more. Look at His life and how He regarded the sick, sorrowful, weak, poor, even the children, His disciples, and the lost. That He cared is so obvious. And we are to follow in His steps (First Peter 2:21).

In Order to be Faithful

Jesus taught that serving is the mark of greatness. Caring provides for serving. If one cares, he will serve. To care for others is to show you care for Christ (Matthew 10:42; 25). Our lives will be misspent if they are centered on only ourselves. The needs in our world are so many and the opportunities are never lacking to render benefit for those less fortunate. People who care are those who lend assistance in time of need.

To Care and to Share

When we care we will share what we have (First John 3:17). Christians have the correct attitude toward possessions. We recognize that nothing we have is our own, but we are stewards of that which belongs to God, and as stewards we shall give an account of what we do with what is entrusted to us.

We might think of the good we would do if we had a million dollars. But what are we doing with what we do have? Two friends walked along and one said, "If you had two dollars, would you give me one?" The answer was, "Certainly. You are my friend." "If you had two suits, would you give me one?" Again, the answer was, "Certainly, you are my friend." Then the question, "If you had two pigs, would you give me one?" The response,

"Man, you know I got two pigs." Is our sharing more talk than reality?

Selfishness

We work for personal and elaborate comforts, and nothing is necessarily sinful in that. But do we study His Word ? How can brethren build playgrounds when the world goes without the gospel, and missionaries go begging? The early church was caring and sharing. Consider the following passages as you study this truth. (Acts 11:29,30; First Corinthians 16:1,2; Second Corinthians 9:1,2). See how the Gentiles aided the Jews (Second Corinthians 8:2-5) To care and share is the mark of genuine love (First John 3:17,18). Did not the widow care in giving her mite? (Matthew 12:42).

The Judgment Scene in Matthew 25

Those who failed to care, failed to share. Those who cared, shared. Is there not a danger in our world where there is so much need and many calls for assistance that we become numb to the needs of others? Possibly so! The frequency of hearing about it, seeing it, knowing of the distressful conditions, and being bombarded with a veritable avalanche of calls for help, we develope a sense of helplessness and resort to doing nothing.

That plight is coupled with the schemers and dishonest solicitations that often come our way, and those who make it their profession to solicit gifts and not work, we can become cynical and skeptical of the motives and the way gifts are dispursed.

But we dare not let such distractions blind us, or cause us to take our eye off the goal of caring and sharing. While we cannot do everything, we must do something, doing what we can do. Some criticize what is done, but as the saying goes, "I like the way I am doing it, better than the way you are not doing it."

* * * * *

Not of Faith

The Last Word

"*And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin*" (Romans 14:23).

Paul discusses matters of indifference. Do you have faith, a personal conviction about something that is important to you? Then have that personal conviction, and live by it before God. To fail to live according to one's own conscience is the worst sort of inconsistency and hypocrisy. If you have doubts about something, leave it alone. A person who will not be true to what he believes will not be true to God. Even if a man thinks a right action is wrong, but does it anyway, he will do a wrong action just as quickly and willingly. Possibly this explains why some people lie awake at nights. They are not true to themselves or to God and they know it. How can one rest easy when he is in such a spiritual state of deliberate contradiction of convictions?

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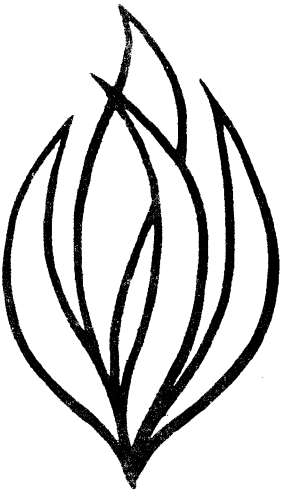

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Be Ye Thankful

Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" One way we let our light shine is to have the disposition of gratitude and show that gratitude by our actions.

A recurring theme in the inspired writings by Paul was that of thanksgiving. First Thessalonians 5:18, "*In everything giving thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*" This admonition is to provoke us to count our blessings, physical and spiritual, recognize their source, and demonstrate our sincere gratitude for our blessings. How do we do that?

The opposite of being thankful is the sin of ingratitude. This can be illustrated by the son whose mother labored long and hard, who sacrificed and did without, in order to provide for his education, but on the day of his graduation he was ashamed of the poor clothing his mother wore and would not introduce her to his fellow graduates. What an ingrate!

Ingratitude hurts, offends, humiliates, and disappoints. How must God feel toward our nation to which He has given so much. God has blessed this nation more than any that history records, yet we see depravity in abundance in crime, violence, immorality, religiously, politically. We might sing, "God Bless America," but we really wonder why He should considering the defiant and disobedient manners of what seems to be the majority in the nation.

Gratitude is a Command

Colossians 3:15, "*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which ye are also called in one body;* ***and be ye thankful.***" (Emphasis, JWB). Philippians 4:6, "*Be careful for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let you requests be made known unto God.*"

There was an event in the life of Jesus that showed gratitude. In Luke 17:11-19, Jesus met some men diseased with leprosy. Their cry for mercy was heard and the Lord recognized their need. His compassion responded, telling them to go and show themselves to the priest that they might be declared clean as the law of Moses required. On their way to the priest they realized their leprosy was gone. Can you imagine their joy? It was what one did that stands out so nobly from the rest. He turned back to Jesus and gave thanks for what Jesus had done for him. He glorified God and gave credit where it was due. We wonder, as did Jesus, "*Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?*" Before we condemn the nine, ask ourselves if we would have been with them or with the one who gave thanks?

Benefits in Thanksgiving

Being thankful enables us to bring glory to God and fulfill our mission in life. Failure to be grateful led the Gentiles to reject God (Romans 1:21). It led them into idolatry and condemnation because of the depravity into which they allowed themselves to go. Should they have recognized the source of their blessings they would have praised God rather than reject Him.

We are reminded of the truth of James 1:17, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights...*" Everything good, even life itself, is from God. His natural laws, the law of sowing and reaping, the physical provisions, so many of which are unconditionally given (Matthew 5:45), are from God.

Every spiritual blessing is given by the Lord. These spiritual blessings are only found, however, "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3), and are, therefore, conditional.

Being grateful helps us keep problems in perspective. They will not loom over us overly large. We will know that the promise of God to His people in First Corinthians 10:13 will enable us to overcome, and what we cannot overcome, we can endure. Psalm 46:1, "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*"

Most of us focus heavily on our problems. Maybe it is because "the squeaky wheel gets the grease." But if we only focus on problems and not our blessings we get a distorted view of reality. We may get like Peter when he was allowed to walk on water. While he focused his attention on the Lord, he was able to walk. When he looked only on the boisterous sea, he began to sink.

We take courage and hope in God's promise, "*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*" (Hebrews 13:5). As we pray to God regarding our problems, let us not forget to pray in thanksgiving as well.

Being grateful not only brings glory to God, reminds us of the source of our blessings, helps keep problems in perspective, but also serves as a deterrent to sin. Sin is put in contrast to giving thanks. Ephesians 5:3,4, "*But fornication, and all uncleaness, or covetousness, let it not be named once among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks.*"

If we are ungrateful, we are biting the hand that feeds us. We will offend the Source of our blessings, but expressing our gratitude makes us pleasing to God.

Gratitude will contribute toward our peace of mind and we can enjoy the satisfaction of doing right (Philippians 4:6,7). It will lessen the causes and provocations for anxiety, and cause for worry, knowing that God is always true to His promises and His providence is real. We must remember, however, that only promises our need, not our greed. There is a difference between our wants and our needs.

Seeing This Virtue...

Seeing the virtue of gratitude and the nobility of this attitude as it expresses itself in our actions, we want to know how to develop this trait and character quality. It begins as a matter of the heart. It is not to be measured according to the abundance that God might give. For a moment, try thinking what it would be to live life without His blessings. Other people in other lands do not enjoy the blessings that we in our country possibly take

too much for granted. Compare your troubles with those of others. Consider how dependent we are on God's providence and the proper operation of His laws.

Count Your Many Blessings

One of the best songs we sing in worship to God is that which admonishes us to count our blessings and see what God has done. Look at the physical portions in life.

While we are blessed in these matters in varying degrees, we have food, shelter, clothing, life, health. We can see, hear, have jobs, transportation. We are blessed with family, friends, and beloved brethren who care for us. What of our freedoms, and the many conveniences and luxuries that are ours! We have access to doctors, hospitals, medicine, schools, books, educational opportunities, teachers.

Generations who have experienced and suffered because of war know the blessing of peace. We have stores, provisions are available, firemen, emergency squads. Besides all this there is the sun, rain, seasons, and the produce of the earth. Could we name them all?

But the greatest blessings are those which are spiritual in nature including forgiveness of sin, salvation, fellowship with Deity and the redeemed, hope, confidence, the privilege of prayer. We are guided by God's Word, blessed with His providence, enjoy His protection for the soul. We have the opportunity for worship, prayer, to be in the church, know God's grace, which we could never deserve, but which we receive when we are obedient to Him. These blessings have to do with our relationship with God, and are eternal in nature.

How to Show Gratitude

We do this by word and be deed, being obedient, and serving others. Do not be a part of the "me" generation, with greed, stinginess, selfishness, "I deserve what the world owes me" attitude. Rather, when you see your blessings, ask, "Why me, Lord?" and be thankful.

* * * * *

Responsibility In Forgiveness

Our subject goes right to the heart of living as a New Testament Christian. Forgiveness is a key concept of the way of Christ, both in forgiveness we receive, and forgiveness we must give. Our duty as a Christian is determined by Christ who is our example and to whom belongs all authority (First Peter 2:21; Matthew 28:18). We are taught to have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), and surely this would include having His mind regarding forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a matter of the mind or heart. Matthew 18:35, "*So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*" What was the mind of Christ? What did He teach? What did He do? What does He expect?

What is Forgiveness

Forgiveness is defined as remission, throwing away, passing over, erasing, pardoning, canceling, releasing, not counting, blotting out, wiping away, **letting it go.**

Forgiveness was the mission of Christ to earth. Luke 24:47, "*And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*" Acts 13:38, "*Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.*" Ephesians 4:32, "*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*" Colossians 2:13, "*And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you.*" He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), by removing that barrier between God and man, which is sin (Isaiah 59:1,2).

It was announced before His birth that He would come to forgive sins (Luke 1:77). Acts 5:31, "*Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give*

repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Jesus forgave and He teaches man to forgive.

Blessedness of Forgiveness

Romans 4:7,8, "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."* It is a blessing to hide our sins properly (James 5:1). The only way to properly hide sins is for them to be forgiven. We cannot work them off. When you obey God you are not working off your sins. You cannot do enough good to offset them, or put God in our debt that He owes you anything. You cannot escape sin by blaming others for it.

Christ is our redeemer and He it is that buys us back. We sell our souls to Satan by sinning, but He buys us back. The relationship between forgiveness and redemption is that our forgiveness is purchased by the blood ransom of Christ (Acts 20:26; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Matthew 20:28). We are forgiven (justified) by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). Forgiveness does not come cheap.

Christ is the sin offering (Romans 8:3; Second Corinthians 5:21). He is the ONLY offering (Hebrews 9:22; 10:4; 9:12). He is the adequate offering (Hebrews 9:28;10:18), having been offered but once. There is no need for repeated sacrifices. He died not for His own sins but our sins, indeed, the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). We cannot separate the blood of Christ from the way of forgiveness of sins.

Interesting Series

The Bible records a very significant series of events regarding forgiveness involving Christ, Stephen, and Paul. When Christ died He prayed, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). Later, Stephen, in the imitation of Christ, prayed as he was being stoned, "*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*" (Acts 7:60). Among those included in that prayer was Saul of Tarsus, later called Paul. As Paul neared the end of his journey he prayed, "*At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge*" (Second Timothy 4:16).

Forgiveness is Conditional

We are forgiven IF we obey His commands. While forgiveness is not earned and forgiveness is a gift, we must accept the gift that is offered. This we do by obeying the conditions of the gospel. In every example of conversion to Christ we find the people, having heard the truth, believing and obeying it.

What if we do not obey? Shall we be forgiven anyway? The answer to that is easily determined when we understand where forgiveness takes place. Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God. Matthew 9:6, "*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" God is the One who forgives. Forgiveness if not determined by how we feel, or the intensity of our desire to be forgiven. It is not determined by following our own will or the will of any man. We do not dictate the terms, but must submit, consent, and obey the terms. This is our responsibility in receiving forgiveness.

Forgiveness follows faith, repentance, confession of our faith, and baptism for the remission of sins (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Romans 10:10; Acts 2:38). Having become a child of God, we are not perfect but will sin. The way of forgiveness is repentance, confession of sin, and prayer (Acts 8:22; First John 1:9).

Forgiving and Forgetting

Sometimes we hear the phrase, "When God forgives, He forgets." This is true. Hebrews 8:12, "*For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*" This is as prophesied (Jeremiah 31:34).

Can we forget when we forgive? If so, to what extent? We may not be able to blank from our memory the event of sin. It may at times be jarred back into the mind. We often forget what we don't want to forget. But as for sins committed against us, when we forgive, we can forget them as far as counting the person guilty of sin anymore, or holding the matter against them.

We must learn concerning sins against us, **LET IT GO!**

Offenses come in the course of life. What if we forgive? What if we do not forgive? We are dealing now with a real problem with many even in the church regarding our responsibility toward others before God as a child of God. Others may sin against us, or we may sin against others. But if we forgive, we will **LET IT GO!**

Sometimes were are offended and it is not because someone has sinned against us. We may have just been overly sensitive, got our feelings hurt, felt slighted, then carry a chip on the shoulder, making a mountain of a mole hill, thinking others should apologize when actually we are being rather immature and pouting.

We are taught to pray, "*And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors... For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses*" (Matthew 6:12,14,15). "*And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses*" (Mark 11:25,26). We must forgive to be forgiven (Luke 6:37).

There is an alternative to forgiving, that is holding a grudge, seeking revenge, retaliation, seeking harm, getting even, "*Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift*" (Matthew 5:23,24).

To withhold forgiveness and hold a grudge, we are stepping out of our bounds. Romans 12:19, "*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*" When we do not forgive, we are burning the very bridge over which must cross if we expect to enter heaven. How foolish such would be because we would be the one who would suffer because of our disposition to not forgive. We really do not hurt our offender, but ourselves. We make ourselves unfit to receive God's forgiveness of our sins.

How Often?

Luke 17:34 and Matthew 18:21 teaches we are not to have limits as to how often we forgive. We should be glad that God does not get tired of forgiving us. Nor should we get tired of forgiving others.

To help us develop a willingness to forgive, we should pray, "Father, forgive me even as I forgive (then name the one who has sinned against us)." I believe that will hurry us into a forgiving attitude.

Can We Forgive Those Who Do Not Want Forgiveness?

God expects us to forgive the penitent. God does not forgive those who are not penitent. Nor can we. God is always of the disposition and willingness to forgive, and so should we be. We should never be the cause of continuing offense between ourselves and others due to our unwillingness to forgive.

Paul urged the church in Corinth to forgive a penitent man (Second Corinthians 2:6,7). As Christ has forgiven, so must we (Colossians 3:13). As God has forgiven, so must we (Ephesians 4:32). Forgiveness restores fellowship. If God will forgive a sinner, why should we not be willing to do so? Romans 8:33, "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.*" There are times and circumstances when everything may not be worked out to everyone's satisfaction. But forgiveness means to **LET IT GO!** It is not worth it, and we should not lose our souls over it.

Consider the forgiveness of the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15). Consider the blemished character of the elder brother who would not forgive and turn loose.

It is not a question what the will of God is, or knowing what it is, and our responsibility regarding it. The question is, will we do the will of God to receive the forgiveness we need, and in forgiving others?

* * * * *

Stewards of God

A steward is a servant, or someone to whom a trust is committed. This implies there is a superior to whom the steward must give an account. He has a duty managing and dispersing goods that are owned by another for the benefit of the owner. A steward is a caretaker of the master's interest. He is expected to be trustworthy, reliable, honest, truthful, and faithful. First Corinthians 4:2, "*Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*"

A steward has a lord, which means a master. Luke 12:42, "*And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?*" Joseph was such a man for Potiphar.

Christians are presented in Scripture as stewards. First Peter 4:10, "*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*" Christians are stewards of God and accountable to God. Romans 14:12, "*So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*" A bishop of the church is a steward of God (Titus 1:7), in the service of God, just as the steward of Abraham (Eliezer) was in the service of Abraham, receiving instructions from Abraham, and giving answer to Abraham (Genesis 15:2). Such is the role of a steward.

To Whom Do All Things Belong?

Crucial to our discussion is to learn who is the Master, the owner, the one whose stewards we are? We must recognize this truth about ownership. Some seem to think that what they have and earn belongs to them. This is not so. First Corinthians 4:7, "*What hast thou that thou didst not receive?*"

Our possessions are not really ours. We do not even belong to ourselves, having been bought with a price (First Corinthians 6:19,20). Certainly, our material possessions are not really our possessions. Positive

proof of that can be seen when we ask at one's death, "How much did he leave?" The answer is, "He left it all."

People Forget God

Deuteronomy 8:11-14,18, "*Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in keeping his commandments, and his judgment, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein, and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage... But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.*"

First Timothy 6:7, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.*"

Ecclesiastes 5:13-16, "*There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil; that in all points as he came, so shall he go: what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?*"

Job said, Job 1:21, "*Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;; blessed be the name of the Lord.*"

Can there be any doubt in our minds that we really possess nothing, but only have temporary use of the blessings God bestows upon us? I heard a man commenting on the Arab-Israel strife of today that Israel was given the land of Canaan forever. The Arab said it was never God's to give. It is true that God gave Israel that land at one time, but Israel turned from God

and lost the land. But to think that God could not give it because it was never His to give is ridiculous

Passages That Show His Ownership

Genesis 1:1, "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" All was His. Exodus 19:5, "*For all the earth is mine.*" Deuteronomy 10:14, "*Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is.*" Psalm 24:1, "*The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.*" Psalm 50:1,10-12, "*The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof... For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.*"

The prophets affirmed, "*Behold all souls are mine*" (Ezekiel 19:4). Haggai 2:8, "*The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.*"

In the New Testament, Romans 14:8, "*For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.*" First Corinthians 10:26, "*For the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.*"

When Abraham gained spoils from his victories over the kings in Genesis fourteen, he knew the spoils did not belong to him, but to "*God, the possessor of heaven and earth*" (Verse 22). At Jericho, the spoils belonged to the treasury of God. Achan was the man who violated that trust and took of things for himself that were God's (Joshua 7:11,14,15).

How Our Stewardship Is Established

It is established by knowing to whom we shall give account (Matthew 25:31-33; Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12). A tenant gives account to the landowner. We are as tenants, and God is as the landowner.

Even as we give we show stewardship. First Chronicles 29:12,14, "*Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all, and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength...But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.*"

The Rich Food

Luke 12:16-21 tells of a man who failed to understand his role as a steward. He might have been considered a master by some, but he was a steward nonetheless. He prospered, and that was not a fault. But he considered what he had to be his. He spoke thirteen times of "*I... my... mine...*" as if what he had was his. The Lord called him a "*fool.*" He was but a temporary steward, as was made powerfully evident at his death.

To Whom Thanks is Given

We give thanks to the owner. (See the lesson on Being Thankful in this issue). James 1:17, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights...*" Ephesians 5:20, "*Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

What God Hath Given

We are stewards of God's grace (First Peter 4:10), and of God's mysteries (First Corinthians 4:1). God has given us our lives (Genesis 2:7; Psalm 36:9; Acts 17:25,28). When we are determining what to do with our lives, dare we withhold from God what belongs to Him? Good stewardship of life means a faithful use of life, as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1,2).

Reward or Punishment is From God

Paul expected to be rewarded (Second Timothy 4:6-8) by the Lord. The one talent man was rebuked by his master because he did not do what he could have done (Matthew 25:26,27). Except for the truth that God is possessor, how could He assume such authority?

Ownership, Stewardship, Relationship

These terms imply a relationship exists between the real owner and his steward. That relationship can be broken to the steward's destruction. The unrighteous steward, (Luke sixteen), was dismissed, and showed his disloyalty both before being called to account, and after being called to account because he looked after his own interests rather than the interests of the lord. Having already wasted his master's goods, he later manipulated affairs to achieve what he wanted rather than what was best for the master. Though he was commended for his shrewdness in considering his own interests, he had not discharged his stewardship properly, and was removed from his place. Unfaithfulness severed the relationship. Luke 16:1,2, *"There was a certain rich man, which had a steward: and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."*

Not Just Money

Stewardship includes the handling of money, but much more besides. It involves our contribution, but more is included. What of our time (Colossians 4:5), and talents, energies, thought, influence, even life itself? It was asked, Malachi 3:8, *"Will a man rob God?"* Men have too often attempted to rob God, either taking for themselves what belonged to God, or withholding from God what was rightfully His, and what God had the right to expect.

To be an acceptable steward everything we do must be done in harmony with the will of our Master. We cannot imagine one being classified as a good steward who went against the will of His master. Good stewardship means, *"Thy will be done."*

How do you dispense with your money, time, energy, abilities, etc.? We should do so as if the Lord physically walked by our side. Spiritually he is with us.

* * * * *

Meeting and Overcoming Temptation

Mark 14:38, "*Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit is ready, but the flesh is weak.*"

One day when I was a very young preacher and a young father I was riding along with an elder of the church and we saw a number of signs along the way that advertised alcoholic beverages. I asked how we keep such things away from our children. He responded, "You cannot keep them from seeing these things, but you have to teach them to know the difference between right and wrong." In other words, temptation will stalk us around every corner, but we must learn how to handle such things.

This is such an important subject and deals with living the Christian life. All have sinned (Romans 3:23). It is sin that separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). What leads us to sin? Before we sin we face temptation. James 1:12-15, "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*"

The first step toward sin is lust or unlawful desire and temptation. Temptation is unlawful desire plus opportunity. One may lust but does not commit an outward act of sin unless there is opportunity to fulfil that lust. (There is an exception to this since Jesus taught that lusting is itself sinful, being a sin of the heart, Matthew 5:28). It is the yielding to temptation that is sinful. Sin brings spiritual death. We must learn to "nip it in the bud" and not let the scenario play itself

out, cutting it away before we sin. That means stopping its progression from lust, to temptation, to sin, to death. The first place to attack sin is overcoming temptation by attacking lust and opportunity.

Be on Guard Against the Devil

The devil walks about as a roaring lion (First Peter 5:8). His prime target is the Christian. Christians can and do sin (First John 1:8,10). This can be very discouraging to a Christian, but the very fact that sin discourages is an indication that the Christian really is trying not to sin. Nobody is so righteous that they cannot be tempted. Paul warned, "*Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*" (First Corinthians 10:12). Even so stalwart a Christian as Paul realized that he could also be tempted to sin. He said, "*But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*" (First Corinthians 9:27).

Even Jesus, being human as well as divine, was tempted (Hebrews 4:15), yet without sin (First Peter 2:21-23). Matthew 4:1-10 reveals the series of temptations the devil placed before our Lord at the very beginning of His personal ministry. It is not a sin to be tempted. The sin is yielding to temptation. All are tempted, but not tempted in the same areas of life.

This is such a serious matter because of the Lord's demand that we be found faithful (Revelation 2:10). We cannot be faithful if, having come to Him, we continue in sin (Romans 6:1,2). When John wrote that we "*cannot sin,*" (First John 3:9), he was not teaching the impossibility of sinning but the incompatibility of being a Christian and continuing in sin.

Satan's Avenues of Temptation

First John 2:15,16 tells us how the devil approaches us to lead us to sin. These are the very avenues he successfully used against Eve, and unsuccessfully used against Christ: (1) the lust of the flesh, (2) the lust of the eye, (3) the pride or vainglory of life. Temptation makes sin attractive, offering reward (however temporary,

Hebrews 11:25). The devil tells us, "Sin pays," and it does. But we must learn what all it pays. It may bring temporary fame, wealth, pleasure, acceptance, a short cut to success, etc., but eventually spiritual death. Satan baits his hook with compromises with evil. Television programs containing vulgarity immorality, profanity, indecency, and produced by the most degenerate minds in our society, is one of his hooks. We watch and absorb and become desensitized to the havoc of sin.

Good News

We can overcome temptation. It is possible to keep from falling (Second Peter 2:10). The Lord knows how to deliver us from temptation (Second Peter 2:9). While we will be tempted, we will not be tempted above what we can handle if we stay with the Lord (First Corinthians 10:13). We can overcome it!

Make Sin Less Attractive

We can make sin less attractive and less appealing. We do this by learning to love the good and hate the evil (Proverbs 8:13). It is like putting a heavy layer of salt on chocolate pie. Knowing the salt is there will make the pie less appealing. When we set our affections on things above (Colossians 3:1,2), and crucify lust (Galatians 5:24) we attack temptation. There are good things upon which to center our minds (Philippians 4:8). We are what we think (Proverbs 23:7; 4:23). It is a matter of guarding your mind. You may not prevent a bird from landing on your head, but you can prevent it from building a nest there. Evil thoughts may intrude at times, but you can drive them away with pure thoughts. Considering the ultimate wages of sin, and not just the here and now, we attack temptation. A beautiful apple is not so appealing if you know it is full of worms inside.

Avoid Opportunities to Sin

We should pray, "*Lead us not into temptation...*" (Matthew 6:13). "*A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident*" (Proverbs 14:16). You will not sin if you cannot sin. Evil in the heart is one sin. An evil deed is another sin. You need not commit

evil deeds. Learn to flee from evil (First Timothy 6:11; Second Timothy 2:22). It is not always cowardly to run. Consider Joseph when tempted how he fled the scene (Genesis 39:12). "*Flee fornication*" (First Corinthians 6:18). "*Flee idolatry*" (First Corinthians 10:14). Why do we see how close to the edge we can come before falling?

We avoid opportunity to sin by selecting good companions (First Corinthians 15:33, ASV), and this includes mates in marriage. We should "make friends of God's children." "*Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them*" (Proverbs 24:1). Avoid people and places where you ought not be.

Make Use of the Word

When Jesus was tempted He unsheathed His sword, the Word of God, quoted it to Satan, and sent him in flight. He repeatedly responded to temptation, "*It is written...*" (Matthew 4:4,7,10). Psalm 119:11, "*Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.*" It is better to avoid sin that even be forgiven of it. Sin always leaves a scar even though it heals in forgiveness. Possibly some consequences of sin and regret will abide with us the rest of life. We can escape sin by following the Word. That is our weapon (Ephesians 6:17). The Word possesses both corrective and preventive power.

We have many examples revealed to follow and others to avoid. Most everybody can learn from their own experiences. A wise person will also learn from the experiences of others. God has revealed specifics and principles of right and wrong. We can know what He approves and disapproves. Learn the Word to defeat temptation. (Isn't it strange we have to urge people to study their Bible?)

Worship Defeats Temptation

To assemble for worship is a command (Hebrews 10:25). But it is also a privilege. Worship helps us keep life in perspective, and our priorities centered. It provides us instruction and guidance. It lifts our aspirations to imitate God. It gives us good associations. It reminds us of what really matters. We think on things eternal,

rather than merely physical and temporary. We recognize our dependence on God. We grow more like what we admire. Have you ever known one to completely abandon God who has been faithful in worship?

Watch the Weak Moments

We have to develop a strong spiritual resolve to combat evil. We must learn, as did Daniel (Daniel 1:8), to "just say no." Daniel refused to defile himself, and that was the result of deliberate choice. His determination was as that of Christ, "*Thy will be done.*" He was concerned, "What would the Lord have me to do?"

There's an all seeing eye watching you, knowing when you sin, when you are tempted, but also knowing when you resist some temptation strong (First Peter 5:7). "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee far from you*" (James 4:7). Then couple your efforts with prayer (Matthew 26:41).

When We Do Yield

When the Christian sins he blemishes the cause of Christ and stains his own soul. Peter told Simon to repent and pray (Acts 8:22). John says we must confess our sins (First John 1:7-10). We have an Advocate before God (First John 2:1,2). While we cannot be perfect, we can be faithful. The Lord never asks of us what we cannot do. Falling does not necessarily mean failing because we can be restored. Abraham fell, as did Jonah, Mark, Peter, Simon, David, but arose. Cain, Judas, Demas fell and remained down.

We might put this in the form of a mathematical equation. Desire + opportunity = temptation. Temptation + yielding = sin. Sin - forgiveness = death. Sin + forgiveness = salvation.

To stop sin, remember, desire + opportunity + yielding = sin. To stop sin, attack desire, opportunity, and yielding. Each time you do you will grow stronger.

* * * * *

Christ, Our Advocate

Our text is First John 2:1,2. " *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*" In a previous issue (Volume XVII, Number 1) we discussed the subject of Christ as the propitiation. In this lesson we want to consider Him as our advocate.

The word translated "*advocate*" means one called alongside to help. It is also used with respect to the Holy Spirit and when it is so used the Holy Spirit is called the Comforter. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon defines the term with reference to Christ to convey the concept of one who pleads another's cause before a judge, a pleader, a counsel for defense, a legal assistant. This is the work of a lawyer. Jesus Christ serves as our lawyer as we stand before God. What qualities would one want in a lawyer to make his defense?

Committed to the Law of God

Some disdain all law, but that is probably because they prefer to do whatever they want to do without restriction. Jesus, from His earliest years, respected the law of God. In Luke 2:49 He said, even as a youth when discussing the law in the temple, "*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" John 4:34, "*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*" John 6:38, "*For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.*" John 9:4, "*I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work.*" The will of God is His law. In choosing a lawyer, we want one who respects the law. Jesus always respected God's law.

Kept It Perfectly

Jesus also has the unique distinction of having kept God's law to perfection. He was born under (subject to) the law of God as given through Moses (Galatians 4:4).

When Jesus was on the cross one thief said, "*This man hath done nothing amiss*" (Luke 23:41). When the mob cried for His death, Pilate said, "*Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him...*" (Luke 23:22). Hebrews 4:15, though tempted in all points as we are, He was "*yet without sin.*" Hebrews 9:14, He "*offered himself without spot to God.*" Second Corinthians 5:21, "*For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin...*" First Peter 2:22, "*Who did no sin...*"

He Chose Us As Clients

Usually the client chooses the lawyer unless assigned by the court. In our case, Jesus can be thought of as having been assigned to us by the court of God, or how He chose us rather than us choosing Him. This is because He does for us what we could never do for ourselves. When He came to earth His very mission was to save that which was lost (Matthew 18:11; Luke 9:56). He was identified as the "*Lamb of God*" (John 1:29). Jesus knew our hopeless plight and volunteered, gave Himself, for our service.

In Spite of the Evidence

Jesus was willing to serve as our advocate before God in spite of the certainty of our guilt. There never has been any doubt about man's guilt of sin. Romans 3:10, "*There is none righteous, no not one.*" Romans 3:23, "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" Romans 5:12, "*...for that all have sinned.*" First John 1:8,10, "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*"

In our judicial system we have arrangements made for the guilty to still be represented with counsel before the judge and the court. But lawyers to not relish the task of having to defend one they know to be guilty and one that everyone knows the evidence condemns. They prefer to take other cases. But Jesus took our case, and He did so knowing He could never make the plea of innocence for us. We are as Isaiah said of the people of Israel, "*I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.*"

That which has separated us from God is of our own making. Isaiah 59:1,2, "*Behold, the Lord's hand is not shorted, that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that he cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear.*"

In Spite of the Cost

Jesus chose to represent us and plead our case before God in spite of the cost. Good lawyers come high. We are not able to pay what Jesus is worth to us. Not only do we not have enough to pay Him, we are not even asked to pay Him. We could never in a million lifetimes pay Him for the service He renders.

Furthermore, He has paid the penalty for our condemnation and guilt. Being convicted and condemned because of our sins, we deserve God's wrath and punishment because God, being a God of justice, does not look upon righteousness and unrighteousness just alike. Righteousness will be rewarded, but unrighteousness deserves retribution. Jesus pleads our cause and pays our penalty in our stead. What lawyer does such as that?

God has determined what will satisfy His justice and He determined it was the death of His perfect and only begotten Son. First John 3:16, "*He laid down his life for us.*" Revelation 1:5, He "*washed us from our sins in his own blood.*" First Peter 2:24, "*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes we are healed.*" It was by His own blood that we obtained eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12). Hebrews 7:27, "*...he offered up himself.*" As far as the cost for our defense, and the penalty for our transgressions, it is as the song suggests, "Jesus paid it all."

He Continues To Plead

Having accomplished the work that the Father sent Him to do, that is, make provision for the salvation of mankind, Jesus ascended back to heaven. He went there to prepare a place for those who belong to Him (John 14:1-4), but in the meanwhile, Hebrews 7:25, "*Wherefore*

he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Jesus is even now before the throne of God on our behalf.

Paul wrote Timothy that we have a mediator, but only one mediator. First Timothy 2:5, *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus."* A mediator is the go-between, the one who makes peace between two parties that are estranged from each other. Man has created the alienation by his sins, but Christ is our peace, reconciling us to God (Ephesians 2:13-18), this being done by His cross.

In addition to being our only mediator, He also serves as an intercessor, one who pleads for another. We often intercede before God for each other in our prayers. The Holy Spirit is also an intercessor for us when we are unable to pray to God as we ought because of our infirmities (Romans 8:26). Christ is now an active intercessor for His people before the throne of God. This is why we pray through Him. We recognize that we have access to the Father only by way of Jesus Christ. John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* Others, including the Holy Spirit, who make intercession still go through the one mediator.

It is because Jesus intercedes for us that we can come before the throne of God and offer our petitions to Him. Hebrews 4:16, *"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need."* To come before God *"boldly"* means to approach Him with confidence, not that we are deserving of being in His presence or soliciting His help, but because of His love and mercy toward us. He has provided us this avenue of approach to Him and we can be confident that He will answer according to what is in our best interest as He has promised.

Our Lawyer Is Our Judge

This is quite different from our court systems. Lawyers and attorneys make their cases before the judge. No prosecuting or defense lawyer can also serve as the judge.

But in the situation with us and Jesus, He is not only the one who makes our plea before the court of the Almighty, it is by and through Him that judgment is declared. Certainly this places us in a most advantageous position. How wonderful it is to know that our lawyer is the Son of the Judge, and the Judge will judge according to the Son.

Second Timothy 4:1, "*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom...*" Acts 17:30,31, "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*"

John 12:48, Jesus said, "*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.*" It is the will of God, as revealed through the word of Jesus Christ, that is the standard by which judgment will be exacted upon each one of us.

Conclusion

Our lawyer and advocate, Jesus the Christ, has never and will never lose a case for those who have surrendered themselves unto Him. If you choose another attorney than the One God has appointed for sinful man, you cannot expect deliverance. The loss of our case means the loss of our soul into the bowels of a fiery hell for eternity. But when the Lord Jesus is our Advocate, we shall be ushered through the portals of glory to live with God and all of the redeemed of every age in a glorious heaven that has no end .

Will you come to Christ, accept His offer to save you by rendering obedience to the conditions of salvation that He has specified in His gospel? Faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ was, is, and will ever be the way.

* * * * *

Goodness and Severity

The Last Word

"Behold, the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise, thou shalt also be cut off" (Romans 11:22).

Two very contrasting characteristics of God are mentioned. They are in contrast, but not contradictory. Paul mentions the goodness of God, and also His severity. This first trait we like to consider because we like to believe we are the beneficiaries and recipients of blessings because of this quality of God. It is certainly true we are blessed because God is good, and good toward us. The other trait causes us to have fear and trembling because it means if we rebel and disobey we shall be recipients of the wrath of a just God. His wrath has already been made very evident toward sin, and it was because of this wrath of God that the penalty for sin had to be paid by the death of Christ on the cross.

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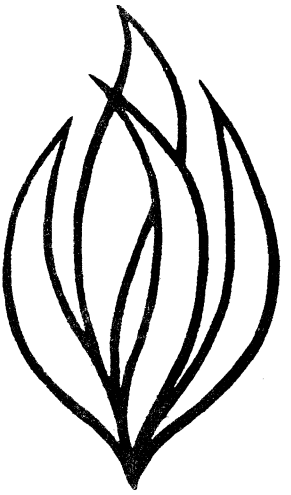

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Commentary Reprinted **BC**

VOLUME XVII NUMBER

Christ's Attitude: Toward the Church

When Jesus came into the world the church was not yet in existence. It had existed in the mind of God from the beginning (Ephesians 1:4; 3:9), but did not become a reality until the first Pentecost following the ascension of Christ back to heaven (Acts 1,2). The church, which is the Lord's kingdom (Colossians 1:13), had been planned, promised, prophesied, down through the ages by God's spokesmen and there were many signs that would indicate its arrival. John the Baptist preached that the kingdom was "*at hand*" in his day, as did Jesus (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). One of the very first proclamations of our Lord, the Sermon on the Mount, is characterized as the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23), and He said it would come in the lifetime of those to whom He spoke (Mark 9:1). But the signs and prophecies denoting the kingdom is not the burden of this lesson. We wish to consider what revelation teaches us about His attitude toward the church, and the priority He placed upon it.

In His Temptation

His attitude toward the church is evident at the time Satan tempted Him in the wilderness following His baptism. Satan offered Him the kingdoms of the world if only Jesus would leap from the pinnacle of the temple (Matthew 4:8-10). But for Jesus to have accepted the offer would have aborted His mission even at the outset of it. He came to establish His kingdom, and to save the lost. The church would be composed of the saved (Acts 2:47). How could He save if He sold out to the devil? No, He valued the church enough to resist Satan's offer.

His Remarks About John the Baptist

In Matthew 11:7-11 Jesus complimented John by saying, "*Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.*" Then He went on to say, "*Notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*" How could this be? It is

because John was never in the kingdom, which is the church. He lived, served, and died before the church became a reality on Pentecost. As great as John certainly was, the value placed upon even the least in the church was considered greater than John. Can we possibly escape the thrust of the value Jesus places on His church with such words? How blessed are those in the church!

Setting the Groundwork

In His teaching that preceded the church He exalted the church that was to come. His disciples were taught to pray for its coming (Matthew 6:10). He taught that He, God's only begotten Son, would be the builder and that it would be built on the foundation of His Deity (Matthew 6:16-18). There would be no other foundation (First Corinthians 3:11). He placed great emphasis on whose church it was. When He cleansed the temple He called it "*my Father's house.*" It was God's house. So it is with the church. It is His church, and the "*house of God*" (First Timothy 3:15). All that had been involved in bringing the church into existence demonstrated the attitude of Christ favorably toward the church.

In the Selection of the Apostles

Jesus commissioned His apostles to go and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15,16), baptizing those who believed. Baptism is the Lord's designated way to enter Christ and His church (First Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:47; Galatians 3:27). He promised the apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them (John 14,15,16), and they would be guided into all the truth (John 16:13), which is the Word of God (John 17:17). The Word is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11), which is the church, and the Holy Spirit was the assurance that what they preached was right before God. We dare not miss the relationship between the Word and the church. Without the Word there would be no church, no saved, because we are saved by the Word (Romans 1:16; James 1:21).

Not only was the Word preached to establish the church (Acts 2), the Lord provided for the spread of the church by providing for the spread of the gospel, and the

continuation of the church by offering the milk and meat of His Word whereby Christian spiritual grow and learn to serve acceptably before God (Acts 20:32). The Word of God produces the church. The tares of the doctrines of men produce human denominations and churches about which no word is found in Scripture.

As Its Head

The attitude of Jesus toward the church is evident in the fact that He is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23), and as head he has all authority (Matthew 28:18). Therefore, everything done regarding the church must have His stamp of authorization (Colossians 3:17). The church is His spiritual body (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23). The mere notice of this truth demands we recognize His attitude toward the church. Being the head of the church is another way of denoting Him as King over His kingdom (First Timothy 6:15). All matters pertaining to the church have to do with Him. We would therefore expect His attitude toward the church to be that of reverent consideration.

He Died For The Church

Possibly nothing depicts His blessed attitude toward the church more forcefully than the truth that He considered it worthy of His own suffering and death. He died for the church (Ephesians 5:25), giving Himself for it. He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). For this reason those in the church can rightly understand that we do not belong to ourselves but unto Him who died for us (First Corinthians 6:20).

The value of a thing is most generally determined by the price paid for it. In essence Jesus is saying to the world, "Look at the value I place on the church. Look what I did to bring it into being and allow you to be members of it." From this I know without question what Deity thinks of the church. Even prior to His death by crucifixion, take note of His suffering, humiliation, how He endured blasphemies, betrayals, denials, and ridicule. And for what? It was for the church. It makes you wonder how any person could ever have a demeaning attitude toward

the church when the Lord has so clearly demonstrated His glorious evaluation of it.

At Gethsemane

Do we not learn of His attitude toward the church as we read His prayer that He prayed on that fateful night He was betrayed and seized by His enemies? Not only does that prayer, recorded in John 17 and which is in reality the Lord's Prayer rather than what He taught regarding prayer in Matthew six, include petitions on His own behalf in view of what He was facing, but words of prayer on behalf of His apostles whose task would be to reveal and proclaim God's will by which the church would be planted, but that prayer included divine requests on behalf of all those who would believe on Him, all the church, and for all ages of the church. Furthermore, His concern for the church would never cease. How Jesus gloried in the church!

His Relationship With the Church

Please take long consideration about the relationship He has declared that He sustains with those who make up the church. We are a brotherhood in fellowship with each other and with Him (First John 1:3-7). Our relationship is more than that of physical kin, but spiritual kinship (Matthew 12:46-50). Christ loves the church as His bride (Ephesians 5). He is the chief Shepherd and Intercessor for the church (First Peter 5:4; Hebrews 7:25). He saves the church (Ephesians 5:23), and will deliver it to the Father when He comes again (First Corinthians 7:24). Because of this relationship we can confidently affirm that salvation is in the church. Reconciliation with God is in the church (Ephesians 2:16). He is the One Mediator for the church (First Timothy 2:5). What a marvel that sinful man can be so cleansed by His blood that we are given such a relationship with Deity!

Attitudes He Did Not Have

It is worth our consideration to notice some attitudes Jesus did **NOT** have toward the church. The reason for

these notations is because some have adopted such attitudes as we shall mention.

He never looked upon the church with contempt, but love. He never ridiculed the church nor sneered at it, or advised that it be ignored with an air of indifference. He never thought it to be irrelevant for man regardless of what age in man's history since Pentecost is considered. He did not think there were many churches, one just as good as another. He never considered His church to be a conglomerate of human denominations and sectarian bodies. He never advised people to choose the church of their choice. He always considered there is one church. He did not present entrance into heaven by optional paths outside the church. He never suggested such an inconsistent and hypocritical doctrine as "unity in diversity," nor in the light of the heresies presenting the church as the second incarnation. He never allowed the church to be changed according to culture, and the doctrines it supports to be altered to accommodate the sins of any generation. He did not consider the church in terms of the temporal as much as He did in terms of the eternal kingdom of which there would be no end.

His Attitude; Our Attitude

We can know what is the attitude of Jesus Christ regarding the church. That is unmistakable and firmly established from Scripture, even as we have done in this lesson.

The real question of concern for us should be whether we have the same disposition of reverence and respect for the church that Jesus had, and is expected of those who would be His disciples. We should sing, "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord," and be sincere and earnest in that sentiment, showing our love by obeying the gospel whereby the Lord adds us to His church, and remain faithful in His body, worshipping Him, living each day walking in His steps, and working in the task that Deity has assigned the church to perform. Indeed, "I love thy church, O God!"

* * * * *

Christ's Attitude: Toward Worldliness

We sing the hymn, "More and more like Jesus, I would ever be." If that be the case, we will develop the same attitudes as the Lord personified. Philippians 2:5, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*" Paul continued to show the disposition of Christ regarding humility and obedience. But should we not have His attitude toward all things? We learn of His attitude from the one source God has provided, the Scriptures.

The first passage that comes to my mind is John 1:29 which tells us that Jesus is "*the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.*" His mission was not primarily to condemn, although there is condemnation to those who reject Him. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; John 3:17). Paul wrote, Galatians 1:4, that He came to deliver us from this present evil world. Obviously, our Lord's attitude toward the world was that from which man must be delivered. God sent His only begotten Son to give us life. First John 4:9, "*In this was the love of God manifested toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.*"

Just here let us draw upon an illustration to clarify. Consider our relationship with Christ as that of a marriage. For two to become married there must be the change of relationship to each other, with parents, and all others. When we become Christians we are wedded to Christ (Ephesians 5; Romans 7). Our relationship changes toward Deity, the church, and the world around us. Christ taught the Christian to have a specific relationship toward the world and this denotes His attitude toward the world.

Different Worlds

The word "world" does not always have the same meaning in Scripture. Sometimes it refers to our planet earth (Acts 17:24), "*God made the world and all things*

therein." It may have reference to the material things of the world. Matthew 16:26, "*What doeth it profit a man if he gain the whole world...*" There is nothing inherently evil about material things, however. Sometimes "world" means the people on earth. "*God so loved the world...*" (John 3:16). But worldliness has reference to the sinful characteristics of this world. Satan is the "*prince of the world*" (John 14:30). It is the sphere of evil and rebellion against God. It is what causes one to be lost, separated from God. It refers to the sinful actions, influences, and manners of sin and spiritual corruption so prominent in the world. It is this last area where we consider the Lord's attitude toward worldliness.

Separate

We are to be separate from the world (Second Corinthians 6:14-18). This does not mean we leave this planet, nor cease the use of material things, denying all contact with the people of the world. It means we are to separate ourselves from all rebellion against God, vice, the ways of Satan, immoralities, impurities of life, and the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). "*Love not the world...*" (First John 2:15,16), is the apostolic admonition. We are to keep ourselves unsoiled and unspotted from the evil of the world (James 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 5:22).

It is here that Christianity jars so hard against much of society. We are to separate and insulate ourselves from the lying, fornication, drinking, dancing, smoking, profanity, dishonesty, immodesty, lust, revelry, and abuse so evident in the world. People can and do sin in such vicious, violent, defiant ways, killing the unborn, homosexuality, pornography, adulterous marriages, etc. Such is the worldliness that Our Lord deplores.

What It Means To Be In The Church

The church consists of the "called out," those called out of darkness and translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). We are to be people of the day, not the darkness of sin, a peculiar, distinctive people (Titus 2:12), and not conformed to this world (Romans 12:1). The love of the world will choke the Word out of our lives (Matthew

13:22). Poor Demas forsook Paul and his noble work because he loved this present world (Second Timothy 4:10). John writes, (First John 5:19), "*We know that we are of God and the while world lieth in wickedness.*" Such is not a statement of self-righteousness but one that shows our relationship to God.

So What?

Regarding sin, some attempt to excuse themselves by crying, "Everybody's doing it?" First, that is not so. Only those who go their own way rather than God's way are committing sin. It may seem most are doing it, but so what? That makes nothing right just because most do it. Exodus 23:2, "*Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*" There are two ways open to us, the broad way that leads to destruction, and the strait and narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:13,14). We must make the choice regardless of what anyone else may or may not do.

Many of us want the blessings of God rather than the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). For this reason we must be careful what we sow because that is what we shall reap (Galatians 6:7,8).

Why Be God's Enemy?

"*The friendship of the world is enmity with God,*" (James 4:4). The Christian lives with restraint, not indulgence. He is self-controlled, being submissive to the will of the Lord. He will deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12), rather than permitting uncontrolled satisfaction of every desire (Colossians 3:5-10). He is a new creature by virtue of being in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17). Therefore, he sets his affections on things above (Colossians 3:2; Philippians 4:8).

The Lord's attitude toward worldliness is that we separate, prevent, and insulate ourselves, resisting the devil so he will flee from us (James 4:7).

Educate

Not only are we to separate and insulate, but also educate the world. The "world" here refers to the people

of this planet world, so they will separate from the evil world. Jesus came to be the light of the world so steeped in the darkness of sin (John 8:12). Matthew 5:14 teaches that we are to be a light in the world. We do this as we reflect the brilliance and beauty of the purity and perfectness of Christ, realizing we can never do so with perfection. We were once lost, but now we are saved in Christ where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10). We are to be like Jesus, doing as He did and taught (Acts 1:1; 10:38). We are to walk in His steps (First Peter 2:21).

One has coined the good phrase, "We have been saved to save." This presents to us our primary mission regarding the world. We reach out to those who are yet lost in their sins and teach them the Lord's way of forgiveness and redemption. Their hearts and minds must be instructed and educated in the doctrine of Christ so that they also may have God (Second John 9). Our warfare is that between good versus evil, righteousness versus unrighteousness. It is our duty before God to condemn the sinfulness of this world, arouse the lost to an understanding of their condemned spiritual condition, and show them the way of salvation.

This involves the teaching of the will of the Lord regarding speech, manners, habits, conduct, the operation of the home, church, worship, determining where to go, what to do, what to endorse and support, what to oppose and resist. Only through a knowledge of and faith in the Word of God can this education be accomplished. But the seriousness of the matter is evident when we realize there is no other way that is pleasing to our Lord.

It is not inaccurate to think of the church in terms of being a soul-winning fraternity. We are brothers and sisters in the family of God with the holy mission to bring the lost to Christ, keep the saved faithful, and recover those that may fall by the wayside. Because the evil of the world is a deadly foe to the child of God we recognize the deadliness of being overcome by the world.

But because of Jesus Christ we can overcome the world. We must separate ourselves from the evil of the world, insulate ourselves as best we can from the fiery darts of

the evil one, and educate those around us to the joy and victory of living and dying in Christ.

Jesus overcame the world. He said, John 16:33, "*...be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*" Through Him we can also overcome. First John 5:4 reads, "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*"

It has been rightly announced that Christian people are in the world, but not of the world. We are people of the world, but separated from the world. We are living on the earth, but are not partakers of the evil that characterizes the sinful world. We are among those whom the Lord loves, but are not aligned nor will allow ourselves to be molded by the world.

Our victory is so complete that we are "*more than conquerors*" (Romans 8:37. There is nothing that we cannot handle if we remain loyal to God (First Corinthians 10:13). We can do all things through Christ (Philippians 4:13). For this reason we are admonished to not be weary in well doing. Indeed, we shall reap the eternal harvest if we do not faint (Galatians 6:9).

Deliverance and Forgiveness

There is no deliverance from the world until we are forgiven of our sins. This forgiveness is possible by the blood of Christ, which we reach by our obedience to the gospel of Christ. When we are baptized we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was shed (John 19:34). We are then justified by His blood (Romans 5:9). We enlist in His army to fight the good fight, and do so with the assurance that our ultimate goal of heaven is before us, and to all them that love His appearing (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

* * * * *

The three lessons dealing with the attitude of Christ, toward the church, toward worldliness, and toward the Word, were first delivered in Craig, Colorado in 1993.

Christ's Attitude: Toward the Word

What we know of Christ we learn from the inspired record, the Bible, from the teaching of Christ and what He authorized to be taught in His name. The question is asked in Scripture, "*What think ye of Christ?*" (Matthew 22:42). Our answer is found in Scripture.

Philippians 2:5, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*" With that Paul showed how Jesus was humble and obedient, submissive and serving, and we are to imitate Him.

Generally speaking, His attitude was respect for the Word as coming from God. It was to be loved, respected, obeyed, never blasphemed nor changed, but considered with deepest awe and reverence. When we pick up the Bible, it is a different book from all others. It is the Word of God. Our attitude must be as that of Jesus.

Attitude Toward Himself

In his pre-incarnate state, before He took on the form of flesh, He is identified as the LOGOS, the Word (John 1:1-3,14). Logos refers to both the message and the messenger. We often use the word in this fashion when we say, "Have you heard the latest word on something?" This has reference to a message. Or possibly we might say, "He is the last word on that subject," referring to the messenger. Jesus came to earth as both the message and messenger of the revelation of God to man. He contended that to see Him was to see the Father (John 14:1-11). They are not the same divine person but of the same divine nature. There is no way to separate Deity from the Word.

The Word Personified

Jesus is the very personification of the Word. As noted, He was so identified before He was born of the virgin Mary. While here He said, "*I am the way, the truth, and*

the life" (John 14:6). He remarked, "*Thy word is truth"* (John 17:17). This Word became flesh (John 1:14), the only begotten of God. Jesus could no more deny the Word than He could deny Himself. He lived truth, demonstrated truth, revealed truth, taught truth. As one learns the person (Christ), he learns the Word. As one learns of Christ, he learns the very essentials of the Word. As one studies the Word, the person is made known to Him. Christ and the Word as inseparable.

At Twelve

Jesus showed His respect for the Word at the age of twelve when He discussed the matters of God's law with the religious teachers in the temple. Having been inadvertently left behind by Mary and Joseph after attending the Passover, and after three days of their searching for Him, He was found in conversation about the law of God. He said, "*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"* (Luke 2:49). Jesus connected the Father's business with the Word of the Lord.

His Temptation and the Word

Christ used the Word to defeat Satan when Satan attacked Him in the wilderness through a series of temptations. Without discussing all the ramifications of each temptation just here, suffice it for our study to note that in each instance Jesus rebuffed the onslaught directed against Him by the proper use of the Word. In each response He said, "*It is written..."* and proceeded to quote passages from the book of Deuteronomy that exposed and opposed the devious ways of the devil.

I personally think there may be some significance in the fact that the first book that modernists, who deny the Bible as the Word of God, made their original attacks against the Bible by attacking the book of Deuteronomy. Without question, modernists are servants of the devil, and what better service could they render to their spiritual father than to attack the very portion of the Spirit's sword that was used to deflate his wicked intents? Notice also in this exchange between Christ and Satan how Jesus disallowed the devil's misuse of Scripture. The ability to quote Scripture in no way

assures that one is "*rightly dividing the word of truth.*" Even the devil can quote Scripture. But the main point pertinent to our present investigation is that the Word was sufficient to ward off the blows of Satan.

The Centerpiece

The Word of God is the centerpiece of the teaching of Jesus. Our Lord used words to convey the mind of Deity to the mind of humanity. First Corinthians 2:12,13 affirms the verbal inspiration of what the apostles taught. Those words, though from the vocabularies of men, were words chosen by Deity. By the use of words God has revealed His will to man, what God has done for man, and what God expects of man in return.

God requires that man obey His Word (First John 5:3), and His commandments are not grievous. By His Word we are informed of His doctrine, the examples we are to imitate, about Himself. By His Word He teaches principles through the parables. By His Word He reasoned, implied truth, answered questions, refuted error. It is not by feelings and special, direct revelation that God teaches people, but by and through His Word. How else would man ever know the mind of God except Deity's use of His Word as the means of communication?

The Word Fulfilled

The respect Jesus had for God's Word is seen in His insistence that the Word be fulfilled. If God said it, it was true. Matthew 5:17,18 shows His intent that the Word would be fulfilled. Part of His mission was to accomplish that very thing. He was determined to uphold God's Word regardless of the cost to Himself. At His baptism (Mark 3:15), He announced that it was to "*fulfill all righteousness.*" Psalm 119:172 teaches the commandments of God are righteousness. Jesus was baptized in order to obey a commandment of the Father.

His entire earthly ministry was committed to doing the Father's will (John 4:34). "*Thy will be done*" was a watchword of His life.

He spoke in parables so that the previously revealed Word might be fulfilled (Matthew 13:13,14). Often in His teaching He would remark, "*This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears.*" He traveled about Palestine in fulfillment of God's prophetic Word (Matthew 4:14). Never did He spare Himself that the Word might be fulfilled (Matthew 26:56). He made frequent reference, "*That the scripture might be fulfilled,*" and once declared, "*The scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:35). Who can miss the respectful attitude of Jesus toward the Word?

Historically Correct

While the book of God is not designed to primarily be a history book, when it speaks of historical matters it speaks without error. Jesus so considered it historically correct regarding such things as the creation, Jonah, Sodom, the serpent in the wilderness. These things are not myths, fables, or fiction. Jesus considered the miracles recorded in Scripture as historical accuracy. We cannot accept Christ without accepting what He thought of the reported miracles in the Word.

He Taught The Word Is To Be Known

Jesus said of the Word, "*They testify of me*" (John 5:39). To know Christ one must know the Word. Matthew 22:29, "*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God.*" Obviously Jesus advocated a person to have knowledge of the Word, lest he fall into error. He asked, "*What is written in the law? How readest thou?*" (Luke 10:26). Jesus expected knowledge of the Word of God..

He so exalted the Word that He taught it is the source of life (Matthew 4:4; John 6:63; 20:21).

Obedience of the Word

He was obedient to God's Word (Philippians 2:8). He taught man must obey (Matthew 7:21). The genuineness of one's professed love is contingent on obedience (John 14:15). Disobedience made the commandments of God of none effect (Matthew 15:3,6). The baptism of John, being rejected by some, was a divine commandment and should have been obeyed (Matthew 21:25). Everything we

do in service to God must be by His authority (Colossians 3:17). Obedience is not optional if we are to be pleasing to God. We cannot have it just any way or either way we choose. How different is the attitude of Jesus toward the Word from that of most people today, even blind religious teachers and their blind followers.

Judgement Standard

That we all shall be judged is affirmed repeatedly (Romans 14:12; Second Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 22:12). But what will be the measure by which all shall be judged? It is the Word that Jesus taught (John 12:48). Having presently before us the very standard by which our destiny in eternity will be determined, why do we not spend more time and effort in coming to a knowledge of it so that we might conform our lives to it, that we might stand with confidence and hope when our time to be judged eventually comes?

Endurance

First Peter 1:24,25, "*For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*" Matthew 24:35, Jesus said, "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*" This is His attitude toward the Word.

Man's Problem: Lack of Respect

The grave problem of people is their disrespect for God's Word. Unlike Jesus, some hold it in contempt, remain ignorant of it, wrest it, twist it, abuse it, defy it in their militant suppression and rebellion against it. We know the attitude of Jesus toward the Word. What is our attitude? When Paul preached to those in Thessalonica they received what he preached with the attitude of Jesus. First Thessalonians 2:13, "*...When ye received the word of God which ye received of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*"

* * * * *

Is the Church of Christ a Big, Sick Denomination?

Romans 16:16, "*The churches of Christ salute you.*" The phrase "church of Christ" denotes to whom the church belongs and is a Biblical phrase denoting ownership. Faithful brethren use the term Biblically with reference to the church of which you read in the New Testament.

I do not know how the question title of this lesson strikes you, but it is demeaning to the church and repulsive to me. I had just as soon one ask, "Is Jesus an imposter, liar, pretender, deceiver and fraud?" Whatever else might be said, if a church is a church of Christ, it is not a denomination. If it is a denomination, it is not the church of Christ.

This question was raised by Lynn Anderson at Highland church in Abilene some years ago. Later came many confusing explanations as to what he meant. It was made in the context that salvation is outside the church, an admission that he had been preaching what he did not believe, his concern with what the community may think of the church, and teaching young people generally to be disrespectful toward the church. He equated upholding the church with support of corruption and reinforcement of distortion. There was no suggestion that he had only a few of the members of the church in mind, but with a wide brush painted this grotesque presentation of the churches of Christ. Let us consider this statement word by word.

Big

Big is a relative term. Big compared to what? Some congregations are very large. The membership universally is thought to be in the millions. We are not among the most populous, but among the smaller religious groups. But right and wrong is not determined

by counting noses. Success is not measured merely by size, but soundness. Let God keep score. Let us keep the faith. Too many have opted for the "nickels, numbers, and noise" religion.

Denomination

A denomination is a class or society of individuals called by the same name, a sect, a fraction or part of the whole. We are called by the same name, "Christians." The enemies of the church called it a sect (Acts 28:22). If we be a sect, it is not one of human origin. The church is composed of the saved, not a fraction or part of the saved. None are saved outside the church, the body of Christ. No denomination that ever has, does, or shall exist shall do so by the authority of the Word of God.

There are major contrasts between the Lord's church and human denominations even though there be some similarities. What the Bible says of the church cannot be said of any or all of the denominations. The church came from the mind of God (Ephesians 3:11) while denominations have come from men. The church was purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). Where is there any evidence God approves of any denomination? The church was prophesied to come by inspired men of God like Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, and Christ. Not a word of prophecy anywhere in the Bible about denominations. The church is the kingdom of God (Matthew 16:16-18; Colossians 1:13). Denominations are not God's kingdom.

The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23), not just a part of His body. There is only one body (Ephesians 4:4). Denominationalism is characterized by many bodies. The church began on the first Pentecost after the Lord's ascension (Acts 2). Denominations have come into existence since that time. The church is the house or family of God (First Timothy 3:15). God has no children outside His family. No denominations even claims to include all of God's children, but the church includes them all. Members of the church wear the name God gave them (Isaiah 62:1,2; Acts 11:26; Romans 16:16). The monument to denominationalism is a variety of divisive names of human origin.

Nearly every denomination looks to something other than or in addition to the Bible as religious authority. Consider the many creeds, manuals, catechisms, disciplines, confessionals, edicts of councils, popes, conferences, clergymen, etc. Christ is the authority, and what He authorized to be taught by inspired men, now contained in the all-sufficient Scripture.

The government of the church is according to God's pattern of the New Testament. Denominations have all sorts of governmental arrangements. The terms of entrance into the Lord's church differ from what one must do to enter a denomination. What one does to become a member of God's church is what one must to do be saved. The church and denominations worship differently, the church according to authority, the denominations as men see fit.

Christ built the church but never established any denomination. The church existed hundreds of years before denominationalism raised its divisive head. It is impossible to parallel the Lord's church with denominations. We should not demean the church as a being a denomination.

The question before us is not whether a church can digress and become a denomination. The church where this derogatory statement was made is an example of just that. But the question is whether churches of Christ generally have become denominations, and if so, where is the evidence? That some have is evident, and they are the very ones who subscribe to such church-bashing as Anderson and other liberal digressives propagate.

Sick

By sick, is it meant that sin is sometimes found among members of the church? If so, yes, the church is sick. Is the church composed of perfect people? The answer is no. Is there room for improvement, Yes. Are false doctrines sometimes taught? Yes. Are they condoned and tolerated? By some, yes. Are there weak members? Certainly so. Do some have denominational attitudes and practices? Some do. If such errors are tolerated, allowed to go unchecked, it will certainly lead to

apostasy and drift into denominationalism. If you do not have respect for the Biblical teaching and warning, denominationalism is not far behind. Let Anderson speak for himself and those who cater to his digression. But to paint the whole brotherhood with his wide brush of slander is vicious.

If by sick you mean to show your contempt for the church, it is not the church that is sick. If by that you reveal your desire to restructure the church, changing its message, work, worship, etc., again it is not the church that is sick but the change agents. If you desire to reduce the church to be acceptable to the unsaved community, contending that salvation can be outside the church, one as good as another, then it is you who are sick, not the church? If you mean the church is no better or no worse than others, but only possibly closer to the New Testament, the church is not sick. It is the New Testament church.

The church to which I belong is the church of Christ, not a denomination, having no kinship with denominationalism, never condoning it or having fellowship with such. Denominations have no Biblical right to exist. If so, produce the Biblical proof! As best I know how I will defend the New Testament revelation regarding the church of Christ, and in spite of human imperfections among those of us who compose the church, I contend it still is the church of Christ when we follow the New Testament pattern. When seed is sown (the Word of God), it will only produce God's kingdom, His church, never a denomination. Does Anderson suggest the church cannot exist until there is perfection in all its members? How absurd!

Danger of Becoming a Denomination

The church is always in danger of apostasy and becoming a denomination. As we have said, those who talk like Anderson are living proof. Many are ripe to be led astray. Those who want food, fun, frolic, to feel good, to be accepted regardless of the compromise necessary, and desire to follow men rather than Christ, are always subject to being led away. While some are attracted to others because of what they consider to be good morals

and repulsed by the worldliness of some members, that does not degrade the Lord's side of His church.

Sadly, the influence of schools, false teachers on faculties, academic freedom to teach whatever, has contributed to the current apostasy of many. Entertaining such teachers on lectureships, meetings, programs, etc. has advanced their apostate influence. Error disguised as scholarship has deceived many. The constant changing of positions has caused some to think nobody can be right.

Please Consider the Following Closely

Romans 16:17, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them.*" This passage has to do with religious fellowship. It has to do with those who are teaching and practising false doctrines and who are thereby driving a wedge between themselves and those who are determined to remain loyal to the revealed will of God. This passage demands so much of us that many find it difficult to muster the courage to obey it. There are consequences that follow to the hurt of the obedient. There are awful consequences to fall upon the disciplined, but sadly, some heap great affliction upon the obedient. Rather than false teachers and practitioners of error being restored by proper administration of discipline by faithful brethren, the faithful are subjected to all manner of abuses.

While it is hard to sever fellowship with those you love, former co-workers, family, whosoever goes astray and will not repent, it must be done lest the church be in danger of being a denomination of "smooth sayings."

There cannot be fellowship with those who promote premillennialism, who use instrument music in worship, agnosticism, tongue-speaking, who claim miracles today, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, evolution, fellowship with denominations, salvation by grace alone, or faith alone, forms of Calvinism, adulterous relationships, and many other false ways that are being accepted by some. We should have no

desire to violate God's Word by condoning such doctrines and brethren who subscribe to them.

I realize that severs us from a growing number of people, but what of that? It alienates me from congregations with whom I once had good relations. The brotherhood in many places has increasingly drifted from the truth we once held together when I began preaching. In spite of personal affection for brethren, we dare not "get in line" with digression and innovations of men. Such would not be love, as some contend. It is contempt for truth.

The toleration and support of those who persistently teach falsely and will not repent is unacceptable to God, whether those people be in schools, publish papers, preach in pulpits, oversee churches, or whomsoever. We cannot look to big churches and charismatic people to turn the tide. THEY ARE THE TIDE.

It Will Ever Be With Us

Human frailty and weakness shall ever be among members. Hypocrisy exists, and renegades arise. Greedy charlatans are not just in denominations. Religious politicians can be found. Such people always cause hurt and harm. Not every sin is due to hypocrisy, however, but sometimes weakness and lack of growth. But while such can be expected and has stained the history of the church since Pentecost, such ought be corrected, opposed, removed, never compromised and tolerated. If it is, a denominational status is sure to follow.

Because some "Churches of Christ" have become denominations in no way means the church of Christ is a denomination. We will not surrender the Biblical designation of the church because some have defamed it and brought reproach upon it by their denominational stance.

One Source Some Overlook

One source of the inroads of error into the ranks of the church that some simply refuse to see is the acceptance of the perverted so-called versions of the Bible. The false and fatal doctrines contained therein were once said to

be minor and could be explained away. Many, following the lead of the "scholars," have seen fit to disparage reliable versions which produced the restoration of the church in favor of "easily read" distortions called Bibles that teach explicitly and without shame the false doctrines of denominationalism. Brethren were constantly warned that different books would make us a different people, but the "wise" refused to heed. Now we hear from pulpits the very false doctrines of denominations now found in false Bibles. Those who have blindly promoted these new things have done grave disservice to God and His people. They shall not be held guiltless before God for contributing to the apostasy that has beset the churches in recent years.

An Absurd Notion

Recently I heard a man comment that liberalism was not really such a danger to the church. But he evidently has closed his eyes to reality and to what has transpired. Some years ago brethren were very aggressive in continuing to promote the concept of sowing the seed and producing the crop, sowing the Word of God and producing the church. The efforts to restore New Testament Christianity in our time enjoyed great success until these efforts became sidetracked by the necessity of fighting the rearguard betrayal by liberals and modernists who rose among us. Weak leaders and popularity seekers decided it was more "expedient" to go along to get along. The effort to turn the church into another denomination may well prosper, but it can never completely succeed because whenever a congregation becomes a denomination it ceases to be the Lord's church. With a draining away of resistance against the inroads of apostasy, brethren who grow weary of well doing, or who cease to care, will pave the way for more and more congregations to no longer, with justification, be identified as a church of Christ.

Restoration Work

We are familiar with the caption, Restoration Movement. The concept is a noble one because the goal is to restore the church as the New Testament demands it to be, and to do so by the only method that can

accomplish the task, preaching the Word without addition and subtraction. When men of honest and good hearts of yesteryear gave themselves to such a task the Lord's church bloomed again even amidst denominationalism. Though hated and despised by the religious clerics and those wedded to human doctrines and traditions, the effort saw great success. Much of what was gained has now been lost due to the attitudes and actions by such people as Anderson and others of similar stripe of betrayal and abandonment of God's truth. It may well be that the remnant must begin again, even from a less advantageous position than before, to bring the word of salvation to the world, having suffered great losses due to the worldly professors, liberals, modernists, position seekers, salary gainers, double talkers, project promoters, and unbelieving scholars.

Is the church of Christ a big, sick denomination? Quite the opposite. And the glory of our God is in the church of Christ.

Our Challenge

The task before the faithful is clear. Even if we be a small minority (although many have not bowed the knee to Baal), even if we have to stand alone, we prefer doing that than running, walking, or sitting with the church bashers who are serving the devil by erecting another denomination from the ruins of division in the churches of Christ, a division they have caused by their departure from the truth and their adoption of the false ways and erroneous doctrines of denominationalism.

When you preach the Word, you have satisfaction of knowing you are not contributing to the crowd who wishes to change the church to accommodate men, but you are working for the Lord to the salvation of all those who will believe and obey, thereby taking advantage of God's grace and mercy as provided through the blood of His Son.

Shame upon those who would castigate the Lord's church, whatever be their motives for doing so!

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Commentary Reprinted

Several years ago I published a commentary on the book of Romans entitled, **System of Salvation.** Possibly some of you are aware of this, and may even have secured a copy for yourself. It was in hardback form. My supply was soon exhausted and I wanted to reprint it, but at the time the cost seemed prohibitive. However, after receiving a number of requests for copies, I investigated reprinting it in paperback, and finally I have them available.

To my mind, the book of Romans is a great doctrinal treatise on the way God saves man, and provides us with as complete a revelation of the system of salvation as any other one book, mentioning nearly every component of what God has done to save us, and what we must do to partake of what He has provided, the relation between grace and law, love and obedience, the Mosaic law and the faith of Christ, God's mercy, Christ's blood, baptism, and on and on for 266 pages, a verse by verse discussion of all of it.

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What Do They Have In Common?



There is a tremendous difference, but what do they have in common, such as eating in the church building, located preachers, orphan homes, instrumental music in worship, and fellowship with denominations? All such things have caused division at one time or another among brethren. In this there is something in common. But are there no major distinctions in these issues? Certainly, there is! The first three are merely matters of opinion, but the last two are matters of doctrine and faith. They cannot be considered alike. Liberals and "antis" put every divisive issue in the same pot. But they are mistaken to attempt this. JWB

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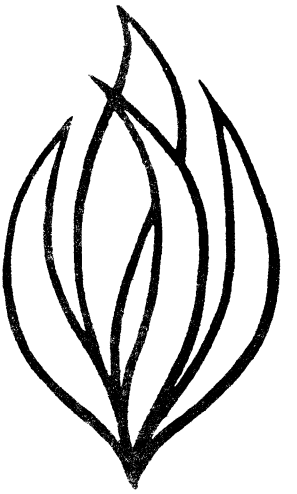
A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Why We Do Not See The Bible Alike

The very first point I want to make in this discussion is that our title is somewhat misleading. It assumes and asserts something that is not altogether accurate. It seems to imply that people can actually see the Bible differently, and it appears to contend that nobody sees it alike. Neither position is expressive of reality. There are people who do see the Bible alike, so I gather we can. In fact, early in our discussion we want to make the contention that if and when people see the Bible at all they will see it alike. To say that people cannot see the Bible alike is an indictment against God which is untenable. We shall discuss this matter further. But suffice it to say here that God has communicated with man through the words of His choosing from the vocabularies of men. He is not the author of confusion (First Corinthians 14:33). To suggest that we cannot see the Bible alike is to suggest that God has given us a communication which calls for us to be united, but at the same time a communication that prevents us from being united. What kind of charge is that to make against God? Is this not to shift the blame from men to God for the confusion, division, and chaos that exists in the religious world? We should be more thoughtful before we jump to such irrational conclusions.

Another indictment against God with such a position suggests that God either could not, or would not, give us His Word in such fashion that we could comply with what it demands of us. Who could have respect for such a God if that were really the case? Was God unable to reveal His mind to man? Even as we read of the power of God, was He too inadequate to be able to tell us what He wants us to know and do? Again, we should be more careful than suggest such things against God.

We hear some "wise" mean today telling us that we cannot really understand what God has told us because God had to tell us what He wanted through what they call "man talk," meaning man's language. It is

contended that man's language is not adequate to convey the spiritual thoughts of God, therefore God did the best He could with what He had, but we cannot really be sure He actually told us what He wanted to tell us because He had to use "man talk." They further suggest that if God could have communicated to us like the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit communicate with each other, with "God talk," then we could be more confident in our Bibles than we presently can be. Just where these "wise" men learned all about this "man talk, God talk" doctrine has yet to be revealed. It seems these "men of wisdom" think they can adequately communicate their thoughts from mind to mind with "man talk," but somehow God just was not able to do as well as they can do. All of that is nothing more than a transparent attempt to justify division, promote what is called "unity in diversity," and place responsibility for it all on the shoulders of God because His communication to man just can't cut it, and destroy confidence in the reliability and credibility of the Bible. Let us see it for what it really is. It is nothing less than a denial of the inspiration, a dismissal that Paul spoke "*not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*" (First Corinthians 1:13). It denies the infallibility, inerrancy, all-sufficiency, and authority of the Word of God, Second Timothy 3:16,17 notwithstanding.

We need to have the respect for the Word of God that the Bible, as it is, is relevant, applicable, and essential to man just as he is. Unless we have this conviction about revealed truth, there is nothing whatever on which we can depend in matters of religion. If the Bible is not an adequate communication from God, why was it ever given? Since it claims to be adequate, and if it is not, where else are we misled by it? Can we have confidence in anything in it?

We Can Know

There has risen even in the ranks of brethren this agnostic doctrine that we just cannot know the truth for sure. They are some years behind time because denominational false teachers have been wailing that pitiable moan years on end. Of course, those who so contend are very sure that what they say about this is

true. It seems that some must have adopted the concept that they can be sure we cannot be sure, but nobody else can be sure about anything. Why we ought to listen to such people has not yet been explained to me. I may not know who they think they are, but I know what they are.

The Lord teaches we can know the truth. I shall only cite to you a few passages that you may consider in your investigation (John 8:32; Ephesians 3:1-7; First John 2:3; First Thessalonians 5:21; First John 4:1). How many passages does one need before he can see the fallacy of the idea that we cannot know what truth is?

Not only can we know the truth, we can be united. Agreeing to disagree is not unity, but heresy. You can get that kind of foolishness among Unitarians. I really do not see why some of our "enlightened, liberal, scholarly" brethren are not more consistent and just join the Unitarians rather than continue to create havoc among brethren. Some want to erect new buildings within a stone's throw of Unitarians. That is unnecessary to duplicate the same insidious philosophy at such expense. It must be they have other motives, such as Paul mentions in Romans 16:17,18. Again, consider such passages as John 17:20,21; Philippians 1:27; First Corinthians 1:10. Any position that says unity cannot be attained is a defiant rejection of plain Bible teaching.

As we go further into our study let us set aside the false doctrines that we cannot see the Bible alike, that God was unable to communicate adequately with the mind of man, that division ois God's fault, or that we have an irrelevant document in the Bible that demands, and yet prohibits what it demands at the same time. We readily acknowledge that many read the words written on the pages of the Bible and then announce different conclusions. There must be a reason or reasons for such as that. We think certainly there are, and shall now explore some of them. Before that, however, there are a few basic fundamentals that we must recognize.

Four Fundamental Facts

First, there is one faith (Ephesians 4:5). Some say we just interpret the Bible differently. This is to confuse the

meaning of the word "interpret." When we interpret something we get the meaning of it. We GET the meaning, not GIVE it a meaning. To say that we can take God's Word and get different meanings is to say that God is the instigator of our division. Again, this blames God.

Second, His Word has not changed. Jude 3, Second Timothy 3:16,17; First Peter 1:25 and other passages show the Word will endure and is not subject to change. We hear some today clamoring to change everything, speaking their lies that they only want to change from "traditions," but when you listen to them very long it is obvious they want everybody to change their attitude toward the Bible, change the divine side of the church, change the plan of salvation, change the way of worship, change the distinction between right and wrong, in other words, change everything to suit man, accommodate sin, appeal to the "baby boomers," and drag God and His people into the next century as it should be, according to the "new lights" among us. But God's Word needs no updating, revising, editing, or any such thing. Not only is it not needed, but it is forbidden explicitly.

Third, man is the same. He has the same needs, especially spiritual needs, and God still offers the same solutions. The Word as it is, is what man needs as he is.

Fourth, the cause for people reading the Word of God and then adopting different conclusions is not because they "interpret" differently; it is because some interpret and others misinterpret, or possibly all misinterpret differently. But when you interpret the Bible, and I interpret the Bible (get the meaning), we will be alike.

Ignorance is a Basic Cause

Jesus once said to some who were accusing inconsistency in His teaching, "*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God*" (Matthew 22:29). As Paul said, "*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God*" (Romans 10:2). That people believed and acted from ignorance is an oft-repeated theme in Scripture (Acts 3:17; 13:27; First Corinthians 2:8; First Timothy

1:12,13). I must rely on the reader to be sufficiently interested in the subject to look up these passages and study them, Ephesians 4:17-19 summarizes the present point. *"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart, who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."*

Just here is a good place to warn us that in some of our "Bible classes" and young people's seminars where they come together to share experiences, conduct sessions on problem solving, God does not get a word in anywhere. You get a lot of "I think, I feel, I believe," and then some advice from some psychology "expert" that does not even believe in God. What they are really sharing is ignorance, a major cause for concluding different ideas.

Two Classes of Ignorance

Some are ignorant because they have never studied. When we speak of such ignorance we have no reference to intelligence. All of us are ignorant of so many things, not because we could not know and understand, but because we have never studied in that field. This is by far the largest number of people who "do not see the Bible alike." We wonder how people who are ignorant of the Biblical message could expect to see it in agreement.

But some have studied and still are divided. One group has accepted a misunderstanding and is content with what they have concluded, unwilling to investigate their position, somewhat like the adage that says, "My mind is made up; don't confuse me with the facts." Such folks are not very teachable because their eyes they have closed, their ears are stopped, and their heart is hard. Still others have studied and do not understand but are still very teachable. They are not hard ground on which seed falls, but are of good and honest heart, willing to consider what they have not yet considered, wanting to grow and come to a knowledge of truth. Much of the honest confusion comes from the failure to *"rightly divide the word of truth,"* or handle it aright with respect

to the dispensations, the three ages revealed in Scripture: Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian. Many matters of division dissolve once this is understood.

Failure to Reason Correctly

Possibly we cannot assign one reason more dominant than others, but surely one reason people come to the Bible and leave in different directions is because of the failure to reason correctly. While there are some who speak disparagingly of reasoning and the use of logic, they use it when attempting to sustain their contempt for it. This is another case where some "shoot themselves in the foot" due to their gross inconsistency. We shall not go into the process of reasoning with any depth here, but only mention this to be considered.

Faulty "reasoning," using invalid arguments, having a mistaken concept of faith (as a leap in the dark rather than conviction based on evidence), accepting contradictions as if both are true, refusing to consider the context, unable to infer conclusions that are implied by explicit statements, assigning anything you don't like or want to change to some cultural basis exclusively, teaching that it is all a "mystery," as if we can never really uncover it (like looking for a black cat in the dark room that never was in there). All such things prohibit people from "seeing the Bible alike." Let's face it, many are irrational, having no reference to being mentally deranged, but the refusal to use logical approaches to the interpretation of Scripture. Even though it is absolutely necessary to use logic in understanding anything, for some reason some set that aside regarding the Bible.

Alongside that is the obvious disdain some have toward authority, especially divine authority. Even though we are taught to have divine authority for what we believe and do (Colossians 3:17), some cry for what they call "freedom in Christ," as if the freedom in Christ is the liberty to "do your own thing."

Deception is a Major Cause

Returning to consider people who have studied, misunderstand, and have accepted a misunderstanding,

we wonder how can this be. Is it not because of the success of the devil's manipulations to deceive? When one is deceived he may think something is true when in reality it is not true. It is not that he is a renegade or dishonest. It is not that he does not care, or feels he is not responsible to know. He is deceived. Let us never forget that deception is one of the weapons in the devil's arsenal. He used it with great accomplishment against Eve (First Timothy 2:14). People are led into wickedness by deception (Second Timothy 3:13). Paul warned the Galatians that they had been "*bewitched,*" which means deceived (Galatians 3:1; 6:7). Just because we think something is so does not make it so (Matthew 5:17; 6:7; 10:34). We do ourselves a grave injustice and place a serious handicap over our hearts if we ever think we are incapable of being deceived. To so think is itself deception. But at the same time, while realizing we can be deceived, let us not forget that we can also understand. God expects us to understand so I know we can. God never asks of us that which is beyond what we can do. This is not to say we shall grasp fully everything written to us (Deuteronomy 29:29). There are very difficult passages throughout the Bible (Second Peter 3:16). But what we need to please God is not a mystery beyond our comprehension.

Some are deceived because they have accepted as true that they cannot understand the Bible, and that must be left to some special "clergy class," some "priesthood," some self-appointed expert, some "vicar of Christ," some super Christian that they can never hope to be. It never occurs to some that God gave His Word to everybody, not a special few to the exclusion of the rest of us. Paul wrote for all to read and know and understand. Why would he do that if nobody could without some "ordained interpreter"? What is usually the case, this "infallible interpreter" has to have somebody to "interpret his interpretation." It never ceases, but goes on an on.

Some are misled and deceived to think that they cannot understand the Scriptures until there is some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon them, some miraculous or unexplained enlightenment from God, something that will bring life to the pages of the Bible, or otherwise it is a dead letter. This is the way they

speak of the Bible. You can quickly see who is at fault for your confusion if this be true. It would again be God's fault, more specifically, the Holy Spirit's fault because He has not "zapped" you with ability to comprehend. Until He does, you are destined to remain in the dark. I have had some who hold this false view to even try to read Scripture to me to prove they were right. I simply told them to hold up on the Scripture because, according to their view, I could not understand it until I was "zapped" anyway. I wonder why they so inconsistently cited Scripture? Is it another case of "shooting oneself"? Sounds that way to me.

People are deceived when they somehow become convinced that it really does not matter that much after all. Some contribute to that position by deriding matters of faith as it they were just matters of opinion, and that we make mountains out of mole hills. That such is possible we do not deny. But that such is in reality the case must be studied on a point by point basis. Such things as instrumental music, premillennialism, women's role in the church, the purpose of baptism, and many other such points needlessly in dispute today are not man's "mole hills," but God's mountains. Before we relegate something upon the trash heap of being of no significance we better have a good grasp of what the Scriptures say of such things.

Some tell us now that the epistles were not intended to teach doctrine or a pattern or that they are particularly relevant to us today because those writings were just "love letters." When you once have dismissed the authority of the New Testament epistles as having any authority over you, or have concluded you are not amenable to them, little wonder you have no motive to really learn what they teach! It is another maneuver to misdirect the minds of men away from, rather than toward, understanding.

Let me urge the reader to study how John warned against deception (First John 1:8). Paul lovingly warned of it (First Corinthians 3:18). So did James (James 1:22,26). Proverbs 14:12, "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*"

Ignorance and Deception

There are two reasons for "seeing" the Bible differently that have distinct relationship between them; namely, ignorance and deception. The more ignorant one is, the easier it is to be deceived. You hold a colorful stone before me and ask me to tell you whether it is a diamond of just glass, being ignorant as I am on that matter, I could not probably tell. (For that reason and others I don't buy diamonds.) You offer a child a shiny penny or a crumpled dollar bill, he will likely take the penny because he just does not know any better. (I can handle that one.). False doctrines have fertile and prepared fields into which bad tares can be sown when the mind is uninformed and ignorant. It is a wonder, this being so glaringly true, that strenuous efforts still have to be made to get people to study the Bible. Even brethren know more about the "soaps" than Scriptures.

False Standards

Not a few are misled because they have accepted a false standard by which to measure. While we are commanded to "*prove all things,*" (First Thessalonians 5:21), and "*try the spirits,*" (First John 4:1), this necessitates a standard by which to measure. This explains why people of equal intelligence, education, sincerity, and respectability go different ways in religion. By the Scriptures we are "*throughly furnished unto all good works*" (Second Timothy 3:17). Nothing is lacking, nothing is missing, nothing needs man's additions, nor will God tolerate man's subtractions, alterations, or tamperings. But if you use your human creed, and I use my discipline, and another uses his manual, and others use their catechism, and on and on it goes, little wonder we don't come out in unity! How could we? This is so elementary and easily grasped we shall not belabor it further except to say this is why people who say they cannot see the Bible alike read a passage, then screen it through their human rule books, and then divide and separate. If only we would agree, "*To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*" (Isaiah 8:20). We shall never see anything alike until we are looking at the same thing. Too many

are not looking at the Bible at all wondering why we do not "see" it alike. Foolishness!

What are some of these false standards people use? We have mentioned the human creeds, manuals, disciplines, etc. But also there is the ancestral positions, what father and mother said or did. There is what Doctor This and Professor That has decreed. Even brethren have fallen victims to citing those they define as Restoration Movement leaders as if they spoke with authority. While we can respect the learning of anybody, we must never look upon them as our authority. Christ is the authority, and His Word is the last, only, and perfect Word. "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*" (First Peter 4:11). We must be as the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11). How foolish it is to take a false measure (Second Corinthians 10:12). Regardless of majorities, minorities, etc. our priorities must be determined by the Bible.

Now to One Other Sinister Reason

We do not stand in judgment of the hearts of others to make this next point, but rather recognize something Scripture has said that has direct application to our discussion., We have noted that people can see the Bible alike, many do see the Bible alike, God expects us to see the Bible alike, He has given us a Bible that we can see alike, that it is not God's fault that we are divided religiously. We have seen that some are not even looking at the Bible, some are ignorant of its message, have not studied it, accept what somebody says it might mean. Many do not come to the Bible intending to apply logic and good reasoning to determine its message. We have noted also that some are deceived, misunderstand and/or accept a misunderstanding. We have seen several reasons why many are so willing to remain deceived, including false standards of measure.

It is a matter of pride that causes much of the trouble. Is not this one of the avenues by which Satan tempts us (First John 2:16)? It is a human failing for people to think too highly of themselves (Romans 12:3). Was not this one of the causes of the insidious Gentile degeneracy recorded in Romans 1:22,23? What about that person who thinks he knows when he really does not know

(First Corinthians 8:2)? Too many think they are what they are not (Galatians 6:3). It becomes a vicious round and round with ignorance paving the way for deception, deceit being perpetuated by pride, and pride preventing honest inquiry to drive out ignorance. It all is nurtured and fed by prejudices of many sorts, coupled with conceit that nobody can tell us anything, what we do not know has not happened yet, and will not likely happen until we say so, desiring to be considered "*somewhat*" by discovering some new thing, not realizing that what we discover is so old it just seems new. Many are like a man that could "strut sitting down." When we come to the point that we are so schooled, consider ourselves so instructed that we cannot be further instructed, and our pride in ourselves and our abilities becomes so strained that we, unlike Paul, think we have already "*apprehended*," (Philippians 3:13), it is very unlikely that we shall be capable of crashing through the vicious cycle that keeps us from seeing the Bible and its revelation. We should never be so filled with pride that we cannot admit we have been wrong. Some act as it is it beyond consideration that there is a possibility that they could ever be wrong, therefore they refuse to check anything that might challenge their present positions, choosing to remain as they are, often in some unrealistic ivory tower of self-erected superiority.

This is not to say that we can never be confident of what we believe. We most certainly can because we are admonished to "*hold fast to the form of sound words*" (Second Timothy 1:13). But even in our confidence we can be open minded. Holding firmly to convictions is not synonymous with being closed of mind. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus into Paul the apostles is a Biblical demonstration of this truth. Neither is being open minded to be equated with vacillation, instability, such as being "*tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine*" (Ephesians 4:14), "*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (Second Timothy 3:7).

There is a difference between confidence and sinful pride and conceit that blinds us to our own weaknesses and shortcomings. One of the troubles with the church in Laodicea was their pride that prevented them from

seeing themselves as they really were (Revelation 3:17). To learn we first must have a humble spirit, and a "*love for the truth*" (Second Thessalonians 2:10). We must learn to deny self (Matthew 16:24), and have the attitude like Jesus, "*not my will, but thine be done*" (Luke 22:42). We are promised, "*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled*" (Matthew 5:6). We need to check on our appetite.

How many reasons have we suggested as to "why we do not see the Bible alike?" We noted ignorance, deception, false standards, faulty reasoning, attitude, pride, and conceit. Let me suggest one more.

What A Shame if This is the Reason

To see the Bible is to see it alike. To "not see it alike" is because somebody is not seeing it. Could it be that seeing the Bible alike takes study, and study demands too much effort on our part and therefore we just do not do it? In other words, is part of the reason because we are just really too lazy to go to heaven? Is it possible that some of us prefer to have something poured in rather than have to dig it out? We live in a world of the "quick fix," short cuts, push a button with immediate results. But learning God's Word does not come that way. One man told a brother who was very informed about the Bible that he would give his life to know that much about it. He was told, "That is what it takes."

Maybe, just maybe, we would be more inclined to put forth the effort if we had a greater appreciation for the blessings awaiting those who learn and do the Father's will as given by the authority of His Son. We need not list the physical and spiritual blessings here, but surely if we would count the blessings we would want to do whatever is necessary. Then we could turn with humble and loving spirits to those around us and teach, encourage, warn, and lead precious souls to the salvation that is open for all through the word of God. Considering the alternative, we must give it our best.

* * * * *

Does Matthew 18:15-17 Apply?

Matthew 18:15-17, "*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*"

That the passage applies is a foregone conclusion. It is a part of the doctrine of Christ to which all men everywhere are amenable. How it applies is what we must learn, and then conform ourselves to it.

That brethren sin is certain (First John 1:8,10). All sin is against God (Acts 5; Second Samuel 12:13). We often sin against one another (Matthew 18:15). But God desires there to exist peace and fellowship among His children (Psalm 133:1). "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*"

People react in various ways when offended. Some may seek revenge and retaliate. Others may just pretend it never happened, leave the sin intact, the sinner is unforgiven, and those involved are tempted to hold a grudge one against another. Still others will seek a resolution to the problem and do what is necessary to restore genuine peace and fellowship. Our passage tells us how to do the latter, which is what God wants of us.

A Personal Trespass

We must not overlook the obvious in the first of the passage that this deals with settling a personal sin one against another. The sin committed is not a sin that involves the whole church or the world. It is a private dispute. Failure to recognize this has caused many to misapply the passage to any and all differences.

In the instance of a personal offence the offended one must go to the offender with a motive to resolve, a willingness to forgive, seeking the salvation of the wrongdoer. The offended must initiate the process because sometimes the offender may not even be aware of the offence. Brethren of good faith, love, and honest heart will generally settle all personal disputes at this level and that will be the end of the matter, good relationship is restored, and all is well. **This works.**

However, the offender may not be persuaded of his wrong, so the offended is to take others with him to discuss the problem, and others serve as witnesses of the discussion. Sometimes the offender will not even discuss it and that forces a by-pass of this step in the process. The combined wisdom of all should surely ascertain the truth and find the solution. This ought to resolve even the most serious problems among brethren who really want resolution. Seldom do matters have to go further.

If the offender will not hear the group, and the issue is of such nature to perpetuate hostility and friction, the influence of the whole church is to be enlisted to persuade the sinful brother to repent. Sometimes both parties involved have something for which to repent. (This teaching was given prior to the existence of the church and in anticipation of the coming of the church). It takes a person of strong self-will and hardened heart to withstand all his brethren who seek his recovery.

If the offending sinful brother will not hear or heed this approach brought to him, he is to be disciplined by being considered as one deserving of withdrawal of fellowship. He must be avoided and left to himself with the rest going on their way, remaining ready to forgive if ever the sinner repents. This is the teaching of the text.

When It Does Not Apply

This divinely ordained procedure does not apply to situations where brethren have sinned publicly, taught false doctrine publicly, where his sin is not a personal offense but one that from the start involves more than just one offended brother. There are those who would like to demand the right to preach and teach whatever

they wish in any way they wish, by word, on the page, whatever, and nobody has the right to expose and oppose him until they come to him first. This is an abuse of the passage. The passage is not a cover for those who would be false teachers and protect them from correction as openly as they have propagated their error. This "love me, but leave me alone to do whatever I want" is not a part of the doctrine of Christ. Liberals have cried this false application all over the country as they try to shield themselves from exposure and rebuke.

It is right to oppose error anywhere and everywhere. Ephesians 5:11, "*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*" Jude 3, "*...earnestly contend for the faith.*" Second Timothy 4:2, "*...reprove, rebuke, exhort...*" Philippians 1:17, "*...I am set for the defence of the gospel.*" Titus 1:9-14, "*...exhort and convince the gainsayer...Wherefore rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith...*" First Timothy 1:3, "*...teach no other doctrine...*" Titus 3:10,11, "*A man that is a heretick after the first and second admonition reject...*" (I had a liberal who had lied publicly about me to refuse to meet with me about it and he cited this passage. I had to ask when was his first and second admonition seeing I could never get him to talk about it to me at all. Liberals have their own way which is foreign to the way of Christ. That man is no longer with faithful brethren but has started his own community digression.) Titus 2:15, "*...rebuke with all authority...*"

What About Other Congregations?

What if another congregation openly advocates error by word or deed? Does their local autonomy prohibit others opposing and exposing that error? The passage was never intended to protect error, but to prevent the spread of error. Acts 15 is a classic example of congregations settling doctrinal disputes between them. We are to preach the gospel everywhere to everybody. Truth is our business, anytime, anywhere, with anybody. No, congregations cannot do wrong and hide behind the cover of local autonomy.

Is it ever right to identify by name the false teachers? Absolutely, yes! Paul withstood Peter to the face. He

named Hymanaeus, Alexander, Phygellus, Hermogenes, Jannes, Jambres, Demas, and John named Diotrophes. Now and again we hear of some brethren who demand the preacher never to name the enemies of truth. Are they sincere in their profession for truth? Whose side are they on? Are they wiser than the Holy Spirit ?

It is right to oppose error, by person, congregation, paper, or any source of it, and by name.

Is It Not Best to Approach Them Privately Anyway?

The answer is, NO! False teachers will lie. You go to a false teacher and confront him with his error and see what happens nearly every time. Determined to hold his error and shame those who oppose him, without witnesses to the conversation, they will later make attacks against the one who approached them trying to direct the focus from his false doctrines to the alleged abuse he will charge against his opponent. Once that has happened, the matter becomes more cloudy than ever and will likely degenerate into a personal conflict rather than a settlement of truth. God knows what is the best way to handle a false teacher. When someone assumes the stance to proclaim false doctrine openly, he must be opposed just that way. We are to have a greater concern for those he may mislead than for him.

It may be well to eventually talk with him personally and privately, but not until the false doctrine is exposed lest some think it stands. Johnny may make a mistake on his paper at his desk adding 2 plus 2 and making it 7. That can be handled with just Johnny. But if he goes to the chalkboard and does that, that must be handled for all to see what the error is and what the truth is.

Fair Questions Deserve Answers

If one hundred people hear error publicly taught must all one hundred be privately approach the teacher before it can be rebuked? Certainly not! What if a brother in a distant place teaches error openly and publicly, possibly by his paper. Must people everywhere, all of them, first go to him before they can resist that error? Certainly not! What sort of abuse of our text does one wish to make

in order to shield the false teacher? **The text deals with personal offenses, not public sins or the teaching of false doctrines!** Opposing it does not make it public. It is exposed publicly because it was made public by being taught publicly. This removes the necessity of a personal approach. It has already passed the private situation and is not a personal conflict but a doctrinal dispute. If it had been only mentioned privately there would have been no public issue.

Examples

Paul rebuked Peter to the face, "*before them all*" (Galatians 2:14). Paul cited a fornicator in a letter to Corinth without a prior personal approach to the sinner. John condemned Diotrophes openly, promising to take care of him further when he came. Christ rebuked Peter, James and John before others. We are in good company to publicly rebuke error publicly taught, even identifying the false teachers. The text does not apply in such cases.

Who Would Want It Otherwise?

Some have an aversion to opposing error., They more strongly resist the exposure than they do the error itself. With their "irenic" spirit, they only oppose those who oppose error. I had one "preacher" to rebuke me openly for opposing his publicly taught error without first coming to him. I asked him why he exposed my "error" publicly without first coming to me if that was the way it worked. (Later, for the good of the church, he quit preaching). Once the eldership of a church publicly attacked me for publicly attacking their false doctrines without coming to them first. But they never came to me. Surely, the legs of the lame are unequal. Let's face it! Many prefer to do their thing with nobody having a right to put it to the test. They are more concerned about being exposed than they are the error they teach. When they cannot defend their error, their tactic is to smear those who expose their error. Such "love" they have.

Why Would Anybody Want it Otherwise

Let us allow motives to remain between God and the individual unless and until they are openly revealed and

the fruit betrays them. Some may not want to go to the person who has offended them. Why not? It is never proper to engage in vicious slandering, name-calling (there is a difference between calling names and name-calling), judging motives, slinging mud, with derogatory labels as "witch hunter, watchdog, legalist, Pharisee, knucklehead, spiritual dinosaur, etc." (Liberal's terms!)

Brethren, when you become the object of "liberal love" you are in danger of receiving the most venomous kind of treatment. But that never justifies you reciprocating in like fashion. But do not be intimidated!

Who would not want to deal in truth? Why adopt the hit, run, and hide strategy? It does not reflect a desire for unity or peace. Error causes division, not defeating it with truth. Remember Ahab who accused Elijah as being the troublemaker when in reality he was the troublemaker (First Kings 18:17,18)? It is very possible that some who condemn exposure of error really hold that error but are too cowardly to admit it. There are those who will try to make you the "bad guy" if you resist what they do. It has always been the way of those who promote error, when unable to withstand the message, to turn against the messenger.

It is a sinister, insidious service to Satan to attempt to build a wall of protection around false doctrines and false teachers by the misuse and abuse of Matthew 18:15-17. The text applies in the event one has sinned against another and the two of them who are involved have the duty before God to do what the Lord teaches in bringing about a reconciliation. They ought to be able to do that between themselves without disturbing others. Some are even willing to allow their problems divide the entire brotherhood before they consider resolution.

But sometimes it takes help. God has provided that help. We ought never have to separate from each other over disputes of personal offenses. Settle them! God's way! But do not be handcuffed by misapplications.

* * * * *

This lesson was preached at the 1986 Mississippi Lectures.

Elder, Feed the Flock

Peter wrote to fellow elders, First Peter 5:1-4, "*The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind: neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*" Paul spoke to the elders of Ephesus, Acts 20:28, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*"

While some hold grave misconceptions regarding the eldership, let us focus our attention on their primary work. They are not just decision makers like a board of directors or business executives, nor bosses holding some honorary position where duties are discharged at regular meetings. Their position is not a political one. To become an elder is to assume a work more than a position. What work?

Their work involves many matters as seen in the charges Peter gave to elders, his instructions, warnings, as well as the qualifications in First Timothy and Titus. We shall focus on one, "*Feed the flock.*"

Feed

Feed means to pasture, tend, direct, superintend, rule, govern, protect, provide, including spiritual watchcare. These duties imply a certain authority in order to discharge them. God has not assigned them work then tied their hands from doing it. Our text mentions oversight. Therefore, "feed" centers attention of seeing to it that the church is properly nourished, fed, taught. The church is not to be fed just anything. It matters what is the spiritual diet of the ones they oversee and for whom they exercise care.

Some General Matters

Let us mention a few points with which all can easily agree. The qualifications for an elder include "*apt to teach*" (First Timothy 3:2). There must be a readiness, willingness to this work that demands knowledge, wisdom, and ability. He must be able to teach publicly and privately, by precept and example. He must demonstrate as well as explain. What does he teach?

He is to hold fast the faithful word, exhorting in sound doctrine, convicting the gainsayer (Titus 1:9). He cannot do this without extensive knowledge of the Word. He must speak the Word of God (Hebrews 13:7). The Word is the diet for the church. Those over the church must admonish the church (First Thessalonians 5:12). This does not demand that they exclusively do this work personally, even though they should have the capability to do it. If they only were to so function that would eliminate other teachers and preachers. Inasmuch as they have the oversight, all the teaching is under their direction and supervision. They are responsible for it and those who preach and teach under them are accountable to them as well as to God. (I did once meet an "elder" who contended elders were not responsible for what came from the pulpit. I told him he was either responsible or irresponsible).

Provide Hope

Elders must give reason for hope (First Peter 3:15). One cannot lead where he will not go; he cannot teach what he does not know. As all teaching and preaching, it must include exhorting, reproving, rebuking (Second Timothy 4:1-4). Of all people, leaders must "*earnestly contend for the faith*" (Jude 3), set for its defense (Philippians1:17). If that is not the case, weakness reigns at the head.

Give Answer

Elders must be able to give answer to issues that arise. Congregations have the right and need to expect them to keep abreast with issues confronting the church, inform members, and teach the truth regarding them. Some decry "issues" because they do not want to deal with

them, and the flock suffers as a result. The early church faced many issues, Judaism, the resurrection, the second coming, apostasy, the Lord's Supper, marriage, divorce and remarriage, the Deity of Christ. Elders must know the answers to the questions of the flock in their care.

Exposure to Truth

Elders have a foremost duty to see that their flock hears the truth. Life is filled with making decisions. Brethren must have the basis of truth upon which to make life's decisions. Elders cannot make the personal decisions for members, but are to teach them the standards of God.

Members must be aware of their duties, knowing right from wrong, and able to distinguish sheep from wolves. Elders must provide this information. The best preventive to digression and apostasy is a membership, not just the eldership, that can discern between truth and error because they have been taught the truth and error has been exposed and opposed. The most frustrated people on earth are those who are not taught. When the congregation knows the Word, the devil and his servants cannot breach the walls.

Obviously, therefore, elders must know what is being taught , who is doing the teaching, and how it is being done. Some teaching is trite, shallow, and wrong. There is no place for literature that teaches unsound, uncertain doctrine. In many instances the one who stands against false teachers is the preacher while some elders sit idly on the side. This is never the way it is supposed to be in a congregation. Elders have no right to allow false doctrines and sinful behavior to go unchecked and uncorrected. They have no right to forbid the teaching of any truth. It is in their interest, as well as others, that all truth be taught.

Part of the noble work of elders is to protect their flock from the poisonous food of the doctrines of men. They should not allow those who serve such food into their midst to teach. They are rather to lead by the still waters and green pastures of truth. This is primary in performing their God-given work as an elder of the church.

The Right Food

First Peter 2:2 speaks of the "*sincere milk of the word.*" We are to "*grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (Second Peter 3:18). One cannot grow without proper nourishment.

It has been the unfortunate occurrence that some who have assumed the task of an elder have allowed the sheep to be led into the noxious weeds of religious error, preferring to have what they call "peace" rather than standing upright for the truth. That such causes the sheep to be weak, sickly, malnourished, even destroyed does not seem to cause them concern so long as nobody gets his feelings hurt and nobody ever gets upset. They will allow those who profess to be "angels of light" but who teach error to conduct their services, preach in their pulpits, teach their classes, and generally exercise an unrestricted influence in the congregation. Unless elders stay aware of what is going on in their flock and round about them, unless they take a kind but firm stand for truth on every matter, unless they prevent some from presenting the liberal and digressive "junk food," they will deprive their flock of the rich and strength-giving nourishment God wants the flock to have, and the people will be led astray and tossed to and fro by most anything that comes down the track. I am persuaded, and would persuade every reader if I could, that strong and faithful elderships could have prevented the divisions that occurred over the anti-cooperation and anti-orphan issues, and could have prevented the liberal apostasy that presently (1995) grips the Lord's church. They have the authority to make and keep things right. Too many do not know what is right, will not stand for the right, fear those who are wrong, and generally abandon the flock to the wolves.

Some Are Not Hungry

Something that complicates the work of elders is when the flock has no appetite for what the elders must serve them. Whether the flock is hungry or not, elders cannot change the menu. Only the Word of God provides the spiritual nourishment for growth, recovery and stedfastness.

A Balanced Diet

Elders must see to it that the flock receives a balanced diet. They must keep in check any preacher or teacher who "rides a hobby," giving emphasis to only the negative or the positive side of truth to the neglect of the other. From milk to meat is the goal (Hebrews 5:12-14). The "*whole counsel of God*" is what is necessary. This includes first principles and the plan of salvation. It includes manner of life as a Christian. It demands teaching regarding work and worship, human relationships such as in the home and marketplace. There must be shown the proper relationship that exists between grace, law, mercy, blood, works, obedience, and all the other components of the doctrine of Christ. It means teaching about Christ and the teaching that is His. There is no place for substituting gospel sermons with pep talks, entertainment, making people feel good, and emphasis on style rather than substance. Mothers who care for their family serve balanced meals, giving them what is needed, possibly not always just what they want. It that were so, some families would have nothing but pizza to eat.

When we hear it said that the church has grown Biblically ignorant, we know the blame lies with preachers and teachers, but also with elderships who have not demanded "*thus saith the Lord*" preaching. No diet is balanced that does not include respect for divine authority for what is believed and practiced. One need not give fifty reasons why something is wrong when there is no authority for it to begin with.

What Too Many Are Wanting

Too many members want something soothing, popular, and attractive to the world. Elders cannot be sidetracked with such as that. It is absurd to think elderships cannot control what is taught. They have the power and right to choose preachers, teachers, literature, and versions. Nothing is more ridiculous than for elders to invite false teachers into their midst. They may inadvertently and accidentally invite one, but once it is known, they should remove him immediately. One elder told me about a man they invited to a gospel meeting and they

later learned he was unsound regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. But they let him come contending that he was already invited and it was too late to do anything about it. RUBBISH! Men of responsibility would have stopped him if they had not known of his false ways until he was walking up to the pulpit. TELL HIM TO SIT BACK DOWN! That is the duty of elders!

One elder asked me how you can find out what preachers believe. I suggested he ask them. They may not tell you the truth every time, but it is irresponsible to make no effort to know. Send a questionnaire to him before he comes. He may be insulted that he is questioned, but let him be. Elders must provide only good food.

It Is Such An Awesome Work

Being a good elder is not child's play. I know of no human duty that demands more of a man than overseeing the spiritual welfare of a group of Christians. Good elders deserve our support and encouragement especially as they attend to this primary duty of seeing that the flock is properly fed.

It calls from them experience, knowledge, wisdom, skill, patience, kindness, firmness, love, stedfastness. You name the noble quality and they must have it to greater degree than most. They must operate without being led by the nose by preachers, college presidents, editors, "big name" brethren, finances, numbers, or popularity.

Do Not Silence the Truth

Elders are limited in attempts to suppress the truth or forbid the truth being taught. They cannot change, tamper with, alter, substitute what God has said is true. But good elders never have such a desire anyway. They know the gospel must be preached in season, out of season, and want it so. Elders will either assume and properly discharge this task to feed the flock or they shall give answer to God for their neglect. God help them as they serve faithfully before God and their brethren.

* * * * *

Never Has Been, and Never Will Be the Solution

While we all probably share legitimate interests in the affairs of civil government, we will make a big mistake to ever think government, with huge expenditures, programs, etc. can ever provide the solutions to the ills of the nation. This is because the problems facing our land are religious and moral in nature, and physical solutions do not touch the causes nor provide the solutions. Consider most any problem we have, unless a natural disaster as floods, tornadoes, etc. Even many accidents and diseases have a moral cause. Until and unless our people repent of sin and have a change of mind there will be no change of manners. The doctrine of Christ provides what we need.This is why our work as Christians is most important. JB

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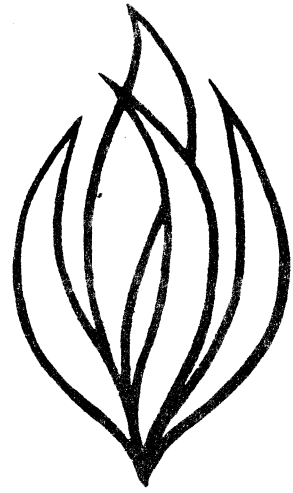

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Looking Unto Jesus For Obedience

Hebrews 12:1,2, "*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith: who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*"

Following the chapter sometimes called the Hall of Faith because there are listed so many who were commended for their faith, we are urged to put aside whatever might hinder us and put our eye of Jesus Christ with undivided attention, and focus on Him.

And why Him? It is because He is the author and finisher of our faith. He is our leader, captain, prince, and the one in charge. He is the highest example of faith.

How did He do this? He did it by enduring the cross and being elevated the the right hand of God. Peter wrote a similar statement, First Peter 2:21, "*For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.*" As with all other things, Jesus is our example regarding obedience. He spoke on the subject and demonstrated what true obedience is. He "*became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Philippians 2:8).

Define Obedience

To obey is to do as one is told to do, to submit to the controlling power, submit to authority. It means following the orders of one superior, acting in accordance and compliance, and yielding to the will of another. Obedience implies willingness to carry out orders from someone whose authority or control is acknowledged. It involves attitude and action, disposition and deed.

There is no way to properly discuss the relationship of God and man without discussing obedience for it is used in the highest significance in man's duty toward God, and is an oft repeated Biblical theme.

Obedience is the ultimate test of faith. James 2:18, "*Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.*" Romans 1:5 and 16:26 speaks of the "*obedience of faith.*" Romans 10:16 teaches there is no separation of faith and obedience. "*But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report.*"

The meaning of obedience is seen in Matthew 8:23-27 when we read how the wind and sea obeyed the Master's voice. Mark 1:27, when the unclean spirit obeyed Him, there was submission to authority and to the Lord's will.

Jesus Explicitly Taught Obedience

Luke 6:46, "*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" Matthew 7:21, "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter unto the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*" The manifestation of love is obedience. John 14:15, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" First John 5:3, "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*" Obedience is the sign of friendship. James 2:23 tells of Abraham and how he believed and obeyed and "*was called the Friend of God.*" John 15:14, "*Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*"

Jesus Taught Obedience by Demonstration

His death was a supreme act of obedience, as already noted from Philippians 2:5-8. Romans 5:19, "*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*" He learned obedience by His suffering (Hebrews 5:8). He was obedient to Joseph and Mary during His youthful years in Nazareth (Luke 2:51).

His baptism was an act of obedience (Matthew 3:15). It was to fulfill all righteousness, and the commandments of God are righteousness (Psalm 119:172). His worship habits were obedience. Luke 4:16, "*And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.*" He was born under the law that required that (Galatians 4:4; Exodus 20:8).

He showed His obedience by His recognition of His mission to do the Father's will There is a medley of passages that teach this. (John 4:34; 5:19,20; 6:38; 8:29; 10:18; 12:49; 14:31; Matthew 26:42; Hebrews 5:9). We rightly conclude that the entire earthly life of Jesus was one of perfect obedience, an example of obedience, a demonstration in attitude and action what obedience is. He fully understood His mission, understood obedience, and without sin performed obediently in every respect.

Obedience Involves Spirit

The spirit of man is involved in obedience as well as actual performance. People may physically force actions upon a person against their will. Matthew 27:32 speaks of some being pressed into service, or forced. Simon of Cyrene was "*compelled*" to bear the cross of Christ (Matthew 27:32). A father may tell his son, "Mow the lawn," and the son may do it, but unwillingly. An officer may command a recruit to perform some task, and he does it, but unwillingly. We may call that obedience, but that is not the obedience the Lord expects. We must do what God says, the way God says do it, for the reason God says do it, because He says so, and do it voluntarily, willingly, from a motive of love, with sincerity, and submissively.

In First Samuel 15, Saul did part of what God told him to do, but Samuel said he was rebellious rather than obedient as Saul contended. In Acts 19:1-5 some had been baptized by John's baptism, obviously after John's baptism was no longer valid. They had not yet obeyed the command of baptism they had to obey. So Paul baptized them again, this time for the right purpose and in the name of Christ. Just having been baptized, and even to obey God, was not sufficient, evidently. When the

reason for baptism was unknown and misunderstood they could not obey as they must. You cannot be taught wrong and obey right. There is a danger in the church today of accepting into fellowship some who have been immersed but not according to the New Testament purpose for baptism. They really have not obeyed the gospel until they know and do as God has commanded.

Other Teaching on Obedience

Thus far we have mostly confined our study to the words, deeds, and spirit of Jesus Christ personally regarding obedience. But there are additional points we must understand that Jesus authorized to be taught by His apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit (John 14,15,16).

It is necessary to obey the gospel to be saved (Second Thessalonians 1:8). Our souls are purified by obedience to the truth (First Peter 1:22). Children are to obey parents (Ephesians 6:1), servants are obey masters (Ephesians 6:5), and we all are subject to civil authority (Romans 13:1).

When there might arise a conflict, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:19). We are to obey those who watch for our souls (Hebrews 13:17). When Paul was describing our spiritual warfare he said it consisted of "*casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*" Therefore, our entire career, if we may call it that, consists of being obedient.

A Way To Show Respect

Obedience shows respect for authority. Matthew 21:23, "*And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?*" The refusal to obey John's baptism was disrespect for authority (Matthew 21:24,25). We must respect the authority of Christ in all we do in our service and life before God. Colossians 3:17, "*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed,*

do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him." "*In the name of*" means by His authority. Since we show respect to authority by obedience to that authority, what does disobedience show except disrespect? Can we expect to go to heaven with disrespect for the Savior?

Contrast of Teaching

We cannot miss the difference in the teaching done by some today and the teaching of Jesus on the subject of obedience.. Some play down its importance, try to give it a bad name by suggesting the obedient are trying to earn and merit salvation by their works of righteousness. Such is not the case and it is a hideous false doctrine to even suggest that. False teachers who teach salvation by grace only or faith only erect straw men to demolish in their attempts to speak disparagingly of the necessity to obey the Lord. Those who obey are not trying to earn salvation. Luke 17:10, "*So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*"

Some scoff at obedience by suggesting it is an attempt to be saved by "rule keeping." Well, there are rules to keep. Some ask, "Why so much preaching on obedience? We need to hear of the grace and love of God." We do need to hear of the grace and love of God, but we do not have to persuade God to be gracious and loving. We do need to persuade people to obey. God's commands are not optional. You do not glorify God by minimizing His commands.

One false teacher (Rubel Shelly) said we do not contribute one whit to our salvation. Let him or any other try to be saved and ignore the duty to obey. Can we disobey and still be saved? If so, prove that from Scripture.

Our choice is to obey or disobey, and reap the results of our choice. God's commandments are not mere suggestions that we can take or leave with equal consequence.

Contrast the Lord's commands to obey with the doctrine to just be honest and sincere. And why should brethren ever be guilty and negligent in using such false teachers of such false doctrines, fellowshipping them, bringing them in to youth meetings, copying them? Does truth matter? It does to those who obey God.

Notice Who the Lord Saves

Hebrews 12:2 says He is the author and finisher of our faith. Hebrews 5:9, "*And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.*" NOTICE: **TO THEM THAT OBEY HIM.** Are we to think we are just as well off to not obey in light of such clear and precise teaching? Who will be saved? Will you be saved? You will if you obey, and if you don't, you won't.

This is not standing in judgment of anybody against the will of God regarding judging. This is merely to emphasize what the Lord has taught us. If you disagree, you stand in judgment of God because you are saying what the Lord taught is wrong. Are you sure you are qualified to do that? This is but to accept the Word of the Christ. That is looking to Jesus. To disobey is to look away from Jesus.

Summary

Now we see Jesus told us about obedience, has shown us what obedience is, commands obedience, expects obedience, and has given the commands that are to be obeyed, and has conditioned salvation on obedience to those commands. In light of this, what shall be the end of them that obey not the truth (First Peter 4:7). And what are the blessings that belong to those who obey?

"TRUST and OBEY, for there's no other way; to be happy in Jesus, let us TRUST and OBEY."

* * * * *

The Unchanging Kingdom and Its Unity

This study is especially useful in the midst of the efforts of some to change the church. When somebody suggests a change, we need to ask, "From what, to what? Why" And by whose authority?" Change is sometimes beneficial, and sometimes deadly. Our study is one of a fundamental point of God's truth, and we must never let that truth slip away from us.

Oneness, unity is such a popular subject! But it should not be confused with mere togetherness. The ecumenical movement was given a great push by one of the Vatican Councils, urged along by Protestant mergers, religious groups adopting new rules, changing beliefs and doctrines, securing new and different names, negotiating, compromising, drawing up new contracts, and thereby changing the face of the groups involved. There are those who would change God's unchangeable kingdom to fit the mold of the denominations. Such has been one of the hidden and not to subtle goals of some of these so-called "summit meetings" liberals conduct.

This is a switch from a few years ago when denominational clergymen were thanking God for the many churches so that man might have his choice as to how to serve Him. The pendulum swings, it seems, from choice to oneness, and now the cry is "unity in diversity," which means the division continues but it does not matter. Separatism is politically incorrect. People had rather get together than be converted to the one faith. There is, therefore, an indifference toward what is believed. "I'm O.K., you're O.K., everything is beautiful in its own way, do your own thing, just be sincere and love." Those who so contend do not understand what Christian love and unity involves.

Amos 3:3, "*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*" God does not want union, but unity. To agree to disagree

is heresy, not unity. Those who clamor for "unity in diversity" really want fellowship in spite of division.

Rome Would Like Unity

The papacy wants unity, but all under the authority of the pope. Many Protestant churches have liberalized their doctrines to promote togetherness. Generally speaking, the so-called unity being achieved is not the unity of the Bible just as everything that is called Christian is certainly not Christian. Some are so liberal they are willing to accept most anything and have fellowship in joint worship services with those who deny Christ. Some years ago I heard a rabbi speak on the Dead Sea scrolls in a meeting that was begun by a prayer by a Methodist clergyman who announced he would not pray in the name of Christ out of respect for the speaker.

The Digression Among Brethren

Some misguided and disgressive brethren also work for such a "unity" with the Christian Church and other denominations, using about the same approach, sacrificing truth, compromising, surrendering the authority of Scripture. The way to unite is relatively simple: namely, follow the Biblical pattern. But some prefer "friendship" with the world, summits, joint worship services, exchange of teachers rather than truth. Faithful brethren will never accept that. To be united we must resolve our differences according to what the Word of God teaches. Otherwise, our unity will undo us.

We can have union without unity, and even have unity without God. We can all be united in error. But His kingdom is united, stands for true unity on the right basis, following "*thus saith the Lord.*"

Neither Catholic, Protestant, or Jew

Religions used to be classified according to the above three designations. With multi-culturalism growing these three are too limited. But the Lord's kingdom never fits that classification. The kingdom is the same as the Lord's church. (We will not belabor this oft-proved truth just here). Unity is the plea of New Testament Christians

(Psalm 133:1). Jesus taught unity (John 10:16), prayed for unity (John 17:20,21), and His apostles taught unity (First Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:4,5).

Is All Division Sinful?

All division like that of which we speak results from sin. Division among brethren is because somebody departs from truth. We are taught to separate ourselves from the world. But it may become necessary to divide from some because they must be disciplined, they teach error and will not repent (Matthew 10:34-39; First Corinthians 5; Second Thessalonians 3:6; Romans 16: 17,18; Ephesians 5:11; Galatians 2:4,5). To adhere to the truth may call for no fellowship and division because some will not follow truth. The basis for unity is the gospel. We read of the seven ones in Ephesians four: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. The one body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), or kingdom (Colossians 1:13). We have the one King who reigns on the one throne in heaven (Acts 7:29). We serve God under the one royal law which is the law of Christ (James 2:8). There is but one Shepherd over the one flock (John 10:16), and we are to walk by the same rule Philippians 1:27; 3:16), be of the same mind and same judgment (First Corinthians 1:10). The church is founded by the one founder, which is Jesus Christ, on the one foundation which is Christ (Matthew 16:16-18).. While there are many members, there is but the one body (First Corinthians 12:12,27). **This will never, ever, change!**

Some may leave, ridicule it, ignore it, berate it, scoff at it, deny it, but they cannot and will not change it.

Consider the following passages as you learn of the unity the Bible demands. Galatians 1:8,9 which forbids other "gospels." Read Philippians 1:27 and 2:1,2 and notice the oneness emphasized. Division is condemned in First Corinthians 1:10. We are to follow His authority (Colossians 3:17). Bidding "Godspeed" to those who do not follow His doctrine means we become partakers of evil (Second John 9-11). Our standard must be the "*oracles of God*" (First Peter 4:11). Unity demands agreement by acceptance of the Word, and conformity to

sound doctrine (Titus 2:1,8), and faithful practice. Unity permits no addition or subtraction from the divine rule, and allows no variance concerning those matters where God has spoken. There is a difference between matters of doctrine and faith and matters that are of human opinion. To fail to properly and correctly rightly divide the Word of truth will cause division over matters that ought never divide, and cause us to relegate God's Word to the realm of human opinion. "Speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent" is a good guide. Unity in doctrine and charity in opinion is also right. Only in this way do we show respect for the Word.

Abuses of Romans 14,15

Teaching regarding weak brethren in these chapters is sometimes misused by liberals to contend for toleration of false doctrine. But what is considered in these chapters are matters of indifference, human opinion, not faith and doctrinal differences. To take these verses and apply them to doctrinal differences is to abuse God's Word in the vain attempt to accommodate false teaching.

Some wail that adherence to truth is legalism, dogmatism, unloving, partyism, self-righteousness, intolerance, and judgmental. Tell it to the Lord! He is the One who has commanded it! But what is more loving that advocating truth above the ways of men? What is more judgmental than condemning those who love truth? What is more divisive than false doctrines? What is more legalistic than making man's will superior to God's revealed will? Are we permitted to tolerate what God says He will not? Have we no obligation to recognize and criticize that which is contrary to the revealed will of God? The trouble with some who profess "love" is that they love their own way rather than God's way. **They would dethrone God and enthrone themselves!**

The Evil of Division

How would you ever calculate the immense destruction caused by division? It provokes alienation of brethren, creates confusion and unbelief, divides homes. One story is very illustrative of the havoc of division. One little boy one Sunday, seeing mother go one way and father

another, commented that he wished God had made only one church so they could go together. The fact is, God did make only one church, but men have created many others and the division that results. Consider the waste and duplicity of resources and manpower in the operation of the many churches. Division cultivates the soil for atheism and disbelief in Christ (John 17: 21). Division erodes religious and moral influences without which no society can be what it ought to be. God will not hold those who promote this division guiltless.

The Spirit of Christ

Why should we think, as some would have us think, that holding firmly to the truth is not the spirit of Christ? Did not our Lord stand without change regarding the establishment of His kingdom? Even though some rejected Him, did He give up His plan and return to heaven a failure? Was not His mission an unchanging one to save the lost? Does His plan of salvation for man change from time to time, and place to place? Where do His promises change, or His warnings? What is it that He expects of us that He has changed? He has that unchanging desire for unity based upon the one foundation of His truth, a true brotherhood of obedient believers who stand together in Christ.

Paul taught that the work of the church was "*speaking the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15). It is not love to soft-pedal God's truth. It is not love to tell people how to feel good in spite of remaining in their sins. It is not love to withhold truth from the lost. It is not love to allow those in error to continue in error without their error being brought to their attention that they may correct it. It is not love to ignore sin and false doctrine. It is not love to compromise God's truth in order to "get along" with others. When you truly love you will seek the other person's highest good, and there is no way anybody can do that without seeking unity based on truth. It is not love to be a party with the "change agents" who seek to turn the Lord's church into just another denomination that is acceptable with the religious world. God does not allow men to change His kingdom to accommodate themselves, and dismiss His doctrine as being nothing

more than the result of ancient culture. We should not be willing to stand alongside anybody that seeks such.

The Church Has Problems

The church has had problems since its beginning on the first Pentecost following the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Shortly after the church began, disturbances began to arise over first one thing then another. The early church was beset with false doctrines from Judaism, about the Lord's Supper, the resurrection, settling disputes, morality, and conduct toward one another. The imperfections of man have always created problems. It is no different in our day as we seek to be and proclaim the same church approved of God of which we read in the New Testament. Nor should we expect the church to ever be totally free of problems.

But this is our watch and our time for service. As was said to Esther by her cousin Mordecai, "*Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" (Esther 4: 14). While liberals and human legalists would divide and change the church and trouble the unchanging kingdom with their extremes and departures from truth, we must stand always ready to fight the good fight, defend the faith, remain stedfast without wavering, and never submit to man's attempts to change what God has determined shall not change with His approval.

Division is a powerful weapon in the arsenal of Satan, often placed in his hands by the very ones who war against him. We should strive never to be a part of creating unjustified division within, about, or concerning the kingdom.

Some day, this united kingdom of Christ will be delivered to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24), and those in the kingdom shall live with God forever.

* * * * *

How to Treat Children and Parents

Family relationships are so important to right thinking people. The family and home is the basic unit of society. Usually, when things are not right at home, they are not right anywhere. We witness two extremes people have toward kinfolks. There is either great partiality (the "blood thicker than water" attitude), and the other quite the opposite. With some, they treat their family worse than they would anybody else on earth. But who is dearer to us than our children and our parents? We can add to this the love we have for faithful brethren.

Jesus taught that our spiritual relationship to Him is far more precious than even family relationships. Matthew 12:46-50, "*While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*" Christ before family and spiritual kinship before physical kinship is also taught in Matthew 10:34-39. But without question, the family has a special place in the heart.

About Your Children

Are you not impressed how much and how strongly the Scripture teaches about love for children? The relationship between God and the redeemed is pictured as a father-child relationship. God always has admonished care for widows and children, and forbade that they ever be oppressed. Jesus even compared those in the kingdom to be as children. There are strong words underscoring parental responsibility in rearing children in both the Old and New Testaments. God has a special concern for children.

Treat as Children

Children should be treated as children, not simply small adults. First Corinthians 13:11 shows there is a difference between a child and an adult. We know that, but we do not always show that we know that. Children, by reason of immaturity, lack knowledge, wisdom, and experience. They have limited abilities, in skills, vocabularies because they are in the early stages of learning. Some seem to expect children to act like adults. Some adults keep acting like children, but it is unfair and unreal to expect children to behave in a mature fashion even as they are being taught to do so.

We must treat them with tender compassion. Psalm 103:13, "*Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.*" Children are to be considered as gifts from God. Consider the attitude of Samson's parents toward the child that would born unto them (Judges 13:8,12). Psalm 127:3-5, "*Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord: and fruit of the womb is his reward.*" Eve considered her child as a manchild from God.

Children can be the source of one of life's greatest joys. Third John 4, "*I have no greater joy than to hear than my children walk in truth.*" There are several matters involved in producing this joy. Much depends on how we treat our children, and how children treat parents.

Respect for the Children

We should have respect for our children. They have feelings, too. Some parents scream at their children, yelling, snatching, jerking, physically slapping and knocking at the slightest provocation. Who has not seen little fellows crushed at heart because of the insensitive way some parent treated them? Often this is seen at the ball fields, the grocery stores, etc. We should never abuse them verbally or physically. That's wrong!

Each One an Individual

We must recognize that each child is a unique person and nobody can fill or take his or her place. It is dangerous to make too much comparison between

children because they vary in talents and dispositions. Some are quicker than others to learn. They possess different talents. But each is distinctive and worthy. One mother was trying to find out why one child turned out well but another did not. She said, "I treated them just alike." That may have been the major cause. They were not alike and should be considered individually.

Without Partiality

Even though they are different, we cannot be partial. Some may be easier to rear than others because dispositions differ. There is the real need for the exercise of the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12). You cannot treat a teenager like a pre-schooler, or vice versa. Jacob's mistake regarding his sons was partiality toward Joseph and it caused hatred from Joseph's brothers. We must always seek what is best for each child.

Not to Provoke, but to Love

Ephesians 6:4 teaches us not to provoke our children to wrath. Parents can make their children unnecessarily angry. Sometimes we may simply be trying to show them who is boss and we become overbearing. Children who feel crushed and overpowered by arbitrary power learn rebellion and resentment. Provoking the worst from our children is an abuse, not use, of our authority.

Seeking their highest good is to show true love. You will not be the perfect parent nor have perfect children, but love covers many mistakes. Women are taught to love their children (Titus 2:4). You do not neglect nor mistreat those you love. A trait of the wicked was being without natural affection (Romans 1:31), which means the failure to love even your own flesh and blood. Some "mothers" today have murdered their children, beat them, aborted them, etc. God will not overlook that!

Training

It is the primary duty of parents to train their children. Ephesians 6:4 says to "*bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child*

in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." The training is the parent's job.

This includes discipline, but that is not just punishment. Discipline means showing the way to go as well as deterring the way not to go. Genesis 18:19, "*For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment...*" You, the parent, are authority. You are more than just another friend. By word and example you have to show and teach them right from wrong, truth from error, righteousness from evil. If we spare the rod (a euphemism for discipline and training), we will spoil the child (Proverb 13:24; 23:13,14; 29:15). Never does the Word of God allow abusing the child.

Eli's failure, although he was mostly a good man himself, was that he failed to rightly discipline his children (First Samuel 2:12; 29). The most frustrated youth alive is the one not trained to know the difference between right and wrong, and are not taught individual responsibility for what they do.

Providing Guidance and Counsel

Children do not always heed good advice and direction. But they have to learn to make decisions and in time will make all of their own decisions. We want it to be that way. But it is the task of parents to provide them standards and a sound basis upon which to stand in making decisions. When they have to decide, without you, will they know how? Will they know why? That is part of the parent's job of ruling the house. Parents should make it as easy as possible for their children to come to them and receive good counsel and advice.

Encouragement

Life is sometimes overflowing with discouraging things. Our children meet with disappointments also. They must be shown how to deal with them. We should not be the source of discouragement. I have heard parents say to their children, "You never do anything right. Won't you ever learn anything?" I ate supper at one home and was told by the little boy of four or five, "Daddy says I am a

bad boy." I told him he was not bad. Children may do things that are bad at times, but that does not make them bad children. They soon develop the sense that this is expected of them so they do as expected. Parents should help them succeed, build self-esteem and self-respect, show them their worth, because they are souls and are loved by their parents and by God.

Provide, Protect, Teach to Stand

First Timothy 5:8 and Second Corinthians 12:14 shows we are to provide for our young, spiritually as well as physically. How can children get along well if nobody protects them from harm? Moses' mother cared for him and protected him. Joseph and Mary protected Jesus by taking Him to Egypt. They cannot stand alone. But they must be taught to stand alone. The time will come when you will not be there to prop them up, and them must learn to stand, where to stand, why to stand, and how to stand. The time comes when we must turn them loose, and that is not easy to do, but must be done.

There are other elements we could justifiably mention, but now turn attention the other direction.

Treating Our Parents

How we treat our parents depends in which stage of our relationship we are. We have different duties as minors than we do when we reach maturity, or when they become dependent upon us as we have been dependent upon them. As minors, we are to love and obey. The child in the home has the duty to conform to the will of the parents. As mature men and women we are to care for and provide for them, especially when they need us.

Honoring parents means to give respect and special consideration (Ephesians 6:2). Children can bring joy and gladness to their parents, or they can bring reproach, sorrow, and despair. How can people so live as to hurt their parents who cared for them when they were small? Parents sometimes make bad mistakes, but shall we always be unforgiving and "make them pay" as if their feelings do not matter to us? Third John 4 is something we should provide for our parents to say. We

owe them that. Proverbs 23:24,25, "*The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice; and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.*"

Included in showing respect is to speak kindly of them, doing things that show our love and appreciation. "*Disobedient to parents*" was a mark of the wicked Gentile world (Romans 1:30; 2 Timothy 3:2).

As minors we are to obey (Ephesians 6:1), as Jesus was subject to Mary and Joseph while living in Nazareth (Luke 2:511). We must pay attention to their instructions (Proverb 1:8; 4:1; 23:22).

Showing Gratitude

Parents have to sacrifice so much for their children. They do it from love, but it is sacrifice nonetheless. Be thankful if you had good parents and let them know you are thankful for them. And be sure your children have good parents so they can be thankful for you someday.

The time eventually comes, if all goes normally and as usual, that your parents become aged, if they live. They may be relatively helpless, in need of physical care and assistance. Children should provide. "*Requite their parents*" (First Timothy 5:4) means to provide for them. Jesus rebuked some who gave gifts to their faith but neglected caring for their parents (Mark 7:11-13), abiding by their own traditions and making the law of God of none effect.

What you sow, you shall reap (Galatians 6:7,8). This ought to sober children. You need to show your children how to treat parents by the way you treat their grandparents. And when the time comes when you must bid them good-bye, and you stand by their coffin and grave, there is great comfort in the knowledge that you treated them properly.

God help us treat our children and parents as God would have us treat them.

* * * * *

How to Treat a Weak Brother, a Brother in Error, and a Disciplined Brother

Quite a long title but this was a subject assigned to me in a lectureship. Being a disciple of Christ determines how we ought to treat other people, including the ones mentioned in the lesson topic. Treating other people as God would have us treat them is a part of Christian living. We have our vertical relationship with God, but we also have a horizontal relationship with other people, including brethren in various situations.

Consider the three classes of brethren of our title. All three are brothers in the Lord. All three reflect problems, and are problem people. However, all three are not necessarily more wicked and evil than many others, although those in error and those who have been disciplined have serious problems not relevant to the weak brother. It is not hard to have good relationships with faithful brethren who are knowledgeable of the truth and when everybody behaves properly. They make association and fellowship easy. But problem people put us to the test.

The Weak Brother

There are such brethren. They are not hypocrites to be shunned and look upon with scorn. They are not bad, but just have not yet grown, possibly because of lack of time and opportunity. It is inexcusable for one to stay weak forever, however. We need not be too sure that we are always so much stronger than others. We all have weaknesses, and our weaknesses may not be of the same sort. We must get the mote out of our own eye. First Corinthians 10:12, "*Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall.*" Romans 12:3, "*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is*

among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." We all are in various stages of growth and levels of maturity. The level of growth may depend on time, opportunity, background, ability, and circumstances in life. Some know more, know better, but the weak are not rebellious nor to be equated as such.

The Golden Rule

We must treat the weak brother as we must everyone else, and that is according to Matthew 7:12, *"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."* We should want to be treated the way we ought to be treated in order to help us get to heaven. Therefore, we must treat weak brethren so as to help them get there.

Romans 14:1, *"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations."* We should receive them, not create confusion for them. We are not to stand in judgment over them (verse 3), and condemn them (verse 10). Romans 15:1,2 teaches us to bear with them and not put a stumblingblock in their way. We should try to please the other, not ourselves, bearing with the weak as he grows. Paul illustrated how to treat a weak and immature brother with the subject of eating meats. Whether one ate meat or not was of no spiritual consequence, except he was not to violate his conscience. Such is a matter of opinion and indifference, not a matter of right and wrong. The passage does not teach we are to overlook and tolerate sin and false doctrines. But it teaches patience and longsuffering with those who are learning, and tolerance in matters of opinion.

First Corinthians 8:7-13 is another passage dealing with eating meat offered to idols. Again, there was nothing wrong with the meat nor the eating of it. But for the stronger to eat before the weaker could present a stumblingblock to those who were not mature and informed enough yet to discern the matter. Insisting on one's right to eat the meat regardless of the influence on the weak is to make your rights a way of wrongs.

First Corinthians 9:22, "*To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*" Paul teaches us to put ourselves in the other person's place for a moment, and show a brother's love and help, leading them into strength. Help them gain that strength through knowledge and maturity. Exhort and admonish, teach and instruct. It is wrong for the weak to be satisfied to remain weak. Just as you would treat a child, First Corinthians 13:11, kindly, honestly, sincerely, patiently, considerately, see that he is going in the right direction.

In principle, we must be like the Good Samaritan toward the weak. The man in the parable had physical problems, but the weak have spiritual problems. What did the Samaritan do? Not like the priest and Levite. The Samaritan helped him gain strength by caring for him. So must we treat those who are weak in the faith.

The Brother in Error

He is a difficult problem, and not the same as a weak brother who is growing and going the right way. All in error are not dishonest, however, but some are. Time always seems to tell. Some errors are worse than others because of the immediate consequences. If one thinks Abraham died at two hundred seventy-five years rather than one hundred seventy-five years, while he is in error, that is not near so serious as one who thinks salvation is by grace alone. Some errors are more serious for the individual and the church. It is not love to ignore error. Galatians 5:9 teaches a little leaven can leaven the whole lump. Dealing with error is not sinfully judging, but is exercising righteous judgment (John 7:24; First Thessalonians 5:21; First John 4:1).

Some are honestly mistaken. We all have been at times, haven't we? Some are strident in false doctrines and practices even though they have been taught the truth.

Remember, God hates wickedness (Psalm 45:7), and so must we. If one is contentious, stubborn, and an agitator and disturber of the church for his own way and will, sowing discord by teaching and following error, he

cannot be ignored. Psalm 119:104, "*I hate every false way.*" But we must hate the wrong even as we love the wrongdoer. This is what the Lord did, and we must follow in His steps.

The brother in error must be treated with meekness and with the motive and desire to recover him from his error (Galatians 6:1). Matthew 18:15-17 teaches how to deal with personal offenses, but notice the goal is recovery and reconciliation. This passage has been abused, however, by liberals that even though one openly and publicly teach error that we must go to him personally before we can contradict his error. Not so! All offenses are not personal and private.

James 5:19,20, "*Brethren if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins.*" Again, our goal is recovery. Bring the one who is in error to correction and repentance. First Timothy 5:20, "*Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.*" Paul dealt with Peter's error in Galatians two as openly as it was committed. Likewise was his dealing with sin in Corinth. Aquila and Priscilla dealt with Apollos to correct his false teaching and in a manner where she could have a part.

We read of the exposure of error as practiced by Diotrophes, Hymanneus, Alexander (First Timothy 1:20; Second Timothy 4:14; Third John 9). When such conditions as those arise among brethren they must be handled with love and care, but they must be handled. Again, it is not love to let it stand as if it did not matter.

Sometimes the very best efforts do not turn the person from his wrong doctrine and evil practice. Then another set of conditions exist. We cannot fellowship those who persist in false ways (Second Thessalonians 3:6; Romans 16:17,18; Second John 9-11; Revelation 2:21; Second Corinthians 6:14-16). Nothing is clearer than this teaching that brethren should be given "*space*" or time to repent, but if they will not, shall we just pretend that all is well when it is not well? That would be an injustice to

God, the church, and to the one who has placed his soul in danger by his false ways.

One of the grave errors being committed by many brethren today is to continue to use and support those who are known to be false teachers. What they are doing is advancing the influence of such brethren and giving the impression that false doctrines are tolerable among the saints.

The Brother Who Has Been Disciplined

The disciplinary measures which we have in mind are those that ultimately result in withdrawing fellowship from a brother because of his false words and ways. Regardless of why fellowship was withdrawn, whether because he was immoral and would not repent, a false teacher and would not repent, living disorderly and would not repent, efforts to recover have failed, he is to be treated, not as an enemy, but a fallen brother (Second Thessalonians 3:15). None should seek to destroy him, but his false ways must be held to the light of truth lest everyone think error is of no consequence. The verses which we have cited that tell us what to do about such brethren also tell us what it means. Second Thessalonians 3:6 means to abstain from familiar association, withdrawing from him, avoiding him, shunning him. Hopefully this will provoke shame in his heart for his wrongdoing and lead him to repent.

Romans 16:17,18 teaches we are to mark and identify such brethren, taking note of them, and avoiding them.

First Corinthians 5:2 teaches he is to taken away from among us.

First Corinthians 5:11 teaches we are not to eat with them socially nor leave the impression that we condone his conduct by continuing association as previously done.

Ephesians 5:11 teaches we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them, regardless of who is involved.

This is not an exercise of self-righteousness nor sinfully judging, but an act of obedience to God and for the benefit of the wrongdoer as well as the church generally.

When we study how to treat the kind of brethren our title suggests, we must always be cautious about our motives, and try our best to act in concert as a congregation so the weighty impact of the treatment can have the most desirable effect. We must never look with contempt and hatred toward anyone, especially toward a brother with problems. We must be careful lest we become guilty of mistreating others. There must be action, but it must be motivated in the spirit of compassion, conviction, and courage.

Churches who deal with problem members will grow stronger as a result. Churches that ignore such problem people will soon lose their zest for truth and their vitality to stand faithful in the faith as well as see their brother remain lost.

Let us commend the will of God regarding these people because, after all, we are interested in saving souls, including theirs and our own.

* * * * *

We Are Working Hard...

to produce the sermons and lectures that we have yet to publish. Just what form this will take is not determined as yet, but probably there will be a book of several hundred pages that will include scores of lessons rather than a monthly publication such as we have been producing the last several years.

If ever we produce such a book, we hope mightily that the readers of **A BURNING FIRE** will be interested and will wish to secure a copy. JWB

Lost Opportunities



We must stay alert to opportunities because as we have opportunity to do good, we should. Fear is one reason people fail to grasp their opportunities. Some hesitate to obey the gospel, some too long, because they are fearful they will not be faithful. Some hesitate in financial opportunities until they are gone. Some postpone schooling or marriage until they think everything is just right, but when things get "just right" the opportunities are no longer there. Caution and fear are not the same. "Redeem the time" (Col. 4:5).

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A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is avaliable.

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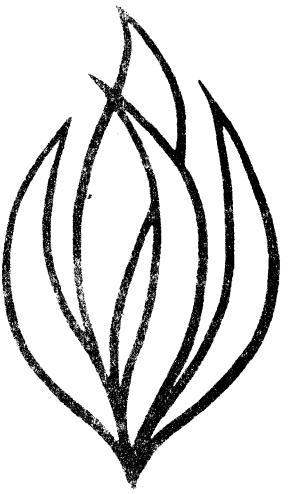

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Nature of Worship

Man is a worshipping creature. This is a universal trait. There are no people anywhere who do not have their gods and religion of some sort. Even humanists and atheists have that which they worship whether they call it worship or not, and as often as not they worship themselves or something else. Worship is not a characteristic of animals or the mindless and materialistic elements of creation.

Worship implies there is a belief in God or some god. God is that which man considers superior to himself. Therefore, man involves himself in spiritual and religious activities regardless of his god or gods, whatever the physical activities may be, and they vary from religion to religion.

Our lesson is not to consider the items of worship of the true and living God, nor the mechanics and forms of true worship, although the acts of true worship to the true God are distinctive. We are focusing on the nature of worship, especially true worship, which involves its purpose, what worship is for, what it produces, why worship, what it is all about, the essential qualities and character of worship. Some of these things are basically the same regardless of what is worshipped or the form of worship.

An Attitude and Action

Worship involves an attitude and action. Something is thought and something is done. Mind and manner are involved. Deed and disposition are included. Worship is an act of reverence paid to some object of worship.

Worship is associated with words like love, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, reverence, honor, obedience, veneration, awe, respect, and bowing down. True worship is commanded, therefore, a duty. God seeks worshippers

(John 4:23,24). But worship is also a privilege because of the blessings derived from it.

A False Notion

Let us dispel a false notion some have suggested. Everything we do is not worship. Nobody would have ever suggested that if they had stayed with Scripture, but some have so longed to have instrumental music in worship that they have said everything we do, at home, at work, at play, at church services, everything, is worship. It is true that we should glorify God in all that we do, but worship is but one way to do that. All worship is service, but all service is not worship. Abraham went to the mountain to worship. He was not always at worship. The Ethiopian, and Paul, went to Jerusalem to worship. All was not worship. Activity of worship is distinctive and recognizable from everything else.

Other Things True Worship Is Not

It is not the nature of worship to just follow some custom or culture. While some worship may be the result of that, true worship is directed by the authority of God and is not culturally based nor of human origin. True worship is true because it according to the will of God.

True worship is not a form of entertainment, amusement, or a spectator sport. Each worshipper is expected to be involved and a participant.

True worship is not a spontaneous convulsion, a "holy wow" of dancing, shouting, clapping, gyrating, etc. Nor is it an explosion of emotion, often a near riotous event. Some "worship services" can hardly be distinguished from rock and roll concerts. Rather true worship is orderly, reverent, decent as all things should be (First Corinthians 15:26). Some have cast disdain against an orderly and arranged worship and judged it to be a mere ritual and insincere form. (Who made them God to know such motives?) But not so! Prior arrangement by which to worship is a demonstration of thoughtfulness, and the seriousness of the activity, plus consideration of all worshippers involved. One liberal said, "We get excited at ball games. Why not get excited at church?" Anybody

that cannot see the difference between a ball game and coming before the throne of God to praise him has more problems than a misunderstanding of worship.

Worship is not intended to simply arouse emotions and call it spirituality. It is to express spirituality, a reverence for Deity. It is not to please people, make them feel good, give a psychological lift, just do what somebody likes and wants, or a pep rally. Worship is to show reverence to God and please God. It is shameful to know that there are some who were once of us but who have gone out from us have adopted the sensual and silly fashions of misguided enthusiasts and who now clamor for such things. It is a shame we even have to mention that these wild parties are not worship.

True worship is not designed to appeal to the five fleshly senses of man, touching, smelling, hearing, seeing, and tasting. Many use artificial stimuli to create emotions, such as low lights, incense, touching each other, rousing music. Emotion is involved because the heart is the seat of emotions, such as love, awe, cheer, and admiration. But worship is not a gesture of passion, working off enthusiasm, or arousing it to get people excited.

John 4:24

Jesus said, "*God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*" God is the object.

In spirit means with sincerity, from the heart, with the right attitude, intelligently, with understanding and reverence. Worship in proper form without proper spirit is vain worship.

In truth means in proper form, according to the Word which is truth (John 17:17). What is done must be by the Lord's authority (Colossians 3:17), and we learn of this in His Word. Proper form without proper heart is vain.

What Worship Is and Does

Worship proclaims faith, implies conviction, loyalty, allegiance, commitment, with humility. Worship announces to the world to whom your heart and life

belong. It proclaims the Christ. Worship supplies and relieves the yearning of the soul of man to reach toward the One upon whom he depends. "*As the hart* (deer, JWB) *panteth, so panteth my soul after thee, O God*" (Psalm 42:1). The fact that men everywhere worship proves the longing man has to commit himself and his subjection to one greater than himself.

Worship shows the unity of the worshippers. It is a communion one with another, but also with Deity. There is fellowship. The Lord's Supper is called the communion (First Corinthians 10:16). Worship reflects conviction and an understanding that God cares. Once a mighty king was meeting with his advisors and his young son walked into the council room. The king did not ignore him because he was his child, but asked, "What is it, my son?" So God takes note of us, His children, when we worship.

The worshipper becomes more like the One he adores. Compare the lives of those who worship God with the lives of those who do not (Romans 1). Worship pulls man upward, and, beholding the face of God as it were, we become like Him. These are reasons for worship.

The Object of Worship

God is the object of true worship (John 4:24). While men have many gods, Jehovah God of heaven is the One to be worshipped (Matthew 4:10; Exodus 20:4). Idolatry is folly (Psalm 115). Worshipping men is wrong (Acts 10:25,26; 14:11-18). Animals, nature, trees, stars, mountains, rivers, etc. are not to be worshipped (Romans 1:25). Not even angels are to be worshipped (Revelation 22:8,9).

Men are not qualified to decide the acts of worship, but this is determined by the One who is worshipped, the One to be pleased. The very nature of worship demands conformity to the desires of the One worshipped. Our attitude is not to be, "Here, God, take what I give you, but "What would Thou have me to do?"

Various Kinds of Worship

The Scriptures speak of vain worship (Matthew 15:9),

will worship (Colossians 2:23), ignorant worship (Acts 17:23), and true worship (John 4:24). True worship is authorized by the Lord and is to be done His way. God has not left it to man to decide what to do to worship Him. God has always given laws governing worship, a pattern to follow. Only when we worship according to His pattern is worship acceptable. **When we do something as an act of worship for which we have no authority other than the whims, wants, likes, and doctrines of men, we are engaged in worship that God will not accept. Such is the nature of true worship.**

The order by which the authorized acts are done has not been prescribed by the Lord. Some ridicule two songs, a prayer, another song, sermon, etc. But whatever procedure one adopts, it is opinion, but the acts done are matters of faith and must be according to pattern.

A Deliberate Decision of Conviction

God seeks willing worshippers and never forces any to worship Him. Worship is the result of a decision motivated by conviction. Each must decide for himself whether to worship God or not, whether collectively or privately.

Worship is not so much to get, but to GIVE. We do receive blessings, but we are to GIVE reverence to God. Some complain, "I didn't get much out of worship." We do not worship primarily to get, but GIVE praise to God. We do not "come to church to get for ourselves." We "go to worship to give honor to God."

We shall not embark on a discussion of the items of true worship, but suffice it here to say, worship is something man does that is directed from God, God's way, with specific purposes, motivations, blessings, and is an obligation and privilege. We must learn what God has taught in His Word and worship accordingly, being faithful in it.

* * * * *

Preaching: Devotional or Doctrinal?

The first thing we must do is define our terms, presenting the correct definitions and also negating erroneous but popular definitions.

Preaching refers to the public proclamation of the gospel. It should be obvious that preaching, like teaching, should include doctrine, which means a teaching. Doctrinal preaching informs, instructs, and makes an appeal to the mind and intellect of man, designed to create understanding so that he might make a correct decision regarding the information presented. Devotional is meant to include that part of preaching that persuades, appealing to the heart, motivating one to action, urging the making of a commitment.

I do not know from whence came the idea that preaching would ever be exclusively doctrinal or devotional because most sermons include deliberate use of both qualities.

It is sad that some have confused devotional preaching with simply making people feel good, and leaving out doctrine that might disturb or convict. When one preaches he should have in mind the proclamation of the Word of God (Second Timothy 4:2). Whether preaching is considered doctrinal or devotional will depend on attitudes and goals.

Devotion refers to that which is devoted, dedicated, consecrated, and usually pious, sincere, emphasizing compelling motives, designed to appeal to man to obey God. Doctrine is the teaching of Christ, that body of truth which God expects men to believe and obey. It is a mistake to think that a sermon should exclude either quality and make the sermon either one way or the other. The correct manner and message of a gospel sermon will be both doctrinal and devotional.

Why One or the Other?

This matter arises because some present the truth in a cold, harsh, insensitive manner while others omit doctrine and simply try to make people feel good, or be aroused and stirred. Who would want preaching that does not teach and instruct? Who wants preaching that is not devoted, dedicated, and leads to commitment? One may have that which stirs the emotions through sad stories and scare tactics, but never come to a knowledge of the truth. One can know a lot of truth but never be moved to act upon it. The sad fact of the matter is that some do not want sound doctrine (Second Timothy 4:3), and prefer to be entertained and emotionally lifted. Others may wish to know facts but have no heart to comply. We must want preaching that saves (First Corinthians 1:21). The distinction often made between doctrinal preaching and devotional preaching is rather arbitrary and not of Biblical origin but a humanly devised separation of qualities that should be combined in proper balance when the gospel is presented.

What is Balanced Preaching?

We hear people talking about "balanced preaching" and it is clear many know not of what they speak. For preaching to be balanced it must include the whole counsel of God, with effective manner and substantive theme. Let us now consider some areas where preaching must be balanced.

Some preaching must be directed to those not yet Christians and some to Christians. The Scriptures instruct how to become a Christian and why, but also how to be what one has become.

Sermons should deal with meeting the immediate needs in life, but also the eternal needs of man. Man needs God's guidance in this life (Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; Matthew 4:4). But only by the Word can we know the way to heaven (James 1:21; John 6:63).

There must be motivating instruction regarding our relationship with God as well as our daily relationships with other people. Matthew twenty-five stresses we have

our duty to God (vertical), but also an obligation toward others (horizontal).

The gospel includes the Lord's promises, but also the Lord's warnings. God keeps His promises (Second Peter 3:9), but He is equally sure about His warnings (Hebrews 2:1-4). There is the positive side of the gospel and the negative. There are the "thou shalt" commands, but also the "thou shalt not" commands. There is the quality of God that is kind, gentle, patient, longsuffering, but also qualities of wrath, anger, justice, and holiness. It is a mistake to preach the one and omit the other. While some will only tolerate what they call "positive" preaching, a survey of what God says is to be preached shows that God demands some things and prohibits others. The negative is as much His truth as the positive. We should want whatever He has provided. There are blessings to be enjoyed, but there are curses that will come to the disobedient.

There are those things that God commends, but what of those things He condemns? Shall not we present both to our hearers? When the Lord sent the epistles to the seven churches of Asia they included both commendations and condemnations. That brings things into balance. Paul epistles contained both. To hear some of the "wise men" of our day talk about what should be preached, you get the idea that God would have done a better job if He could have had them as His advisors and counsel. After all, they have been to the seminary and have their theological degrees from the "divinity schools" of human wisdom. If you think this is sarcasm and ridicule, you have rightly understood the words.

Preaching should present the facts but encourage man to comply with the facts by moving him to obedience by considering the consequences of his choices and his personal responsibility to God. This means a sermon will include doctrinal substance and devotional substance in varying proportions.

Consider the Preaching God Wants

God wants preaching that is true to the Word (First Peter 4:11; Titus 2:1,8). Preaching must exalt Christ (First

Corinthians 1:23; 2:2). There must be the proclamation of the system of salvation (Acts 2,16). Preaching should answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" How could one claim to preach the gospel, God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and exclude grace, mercy, love, blood, works of obedience, faith, law, all the components of God's plan for saving men in their proper sequence and relationships?

Preaching must distinquish between righteousness and unrighteousness, right and wrong, (First Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21).

Preaching that God wants exalts the church, its identifying marks. While some today deny one can identify the Lord's church, the divinely given marks of identification are still in the Scriptures. There are the prophecies regarding it, its establishment, when, where, how, by Whom, the manner of worship, its government, the terms of entrance, name to be worn, and other such matters that mark the church from all other institutions.

Preaching should comfort the troubled, but at times trouble those who are comfortable in sin (First Thessalonians 4:18; Second Thessalonians 1:6-9), that convicts the sinners, strengthens the saved, and recovers the fallen (Acts 2:37; First Peter 1:22; James 5:19). It does not create guilt but recognizes it, and provides the cure of it. These are the goals of gospel meetings and all other sermons. This is what adherence to the revealed Word of God will accomplish in people's lives.

Did not Paul urge Timothy to "*reprove, rebuke, exhort*" (Second Timothy 4:2)? Should we not persuade (Second Corinthians 5:11)? Preaching that God wants keeps the church pure in life and doctrine (First Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 5:27) so that it will be His glorious church.

Mankind must learn there is blessedness "*in Christ,*" how to get into Christ and live faithfully in Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4; Ephesians 1:3; Second Timothy 2:10). Learning to live according to the Lord, in the Lord, for the Lord, and even to die in the Lord is what God wants man to know (Revelation 14:13).

Preaching teaches and lovingly persuades all to come to Christ and be Christians, "*walking worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called*" (Ephesians 4:1). The only way to have balanced preaching is to know the Word, and that comes through study, study, study, and more study.

What Sermons Are Not?

Sermons are not psychiatric sessions to make people feel good. There are not the pseudo-counselling that is sometimes confused with preaching. In no place is a preacher called a marriage counsellor even though he may teach what the will of God is regarding marriage and its challenges. There is no place to pacify man in his sins and make him feel good by accommodating him in his rebellion against God's truth. It is not unfair to charge that too many discourses provide this sordid result and therefore people continue in sin.

Preaching should not be deceptive to slip up on people by leading them to accept something because they have been "charged up" emotionally and temporarily. Our worship is not a "holy wow." We are expected to be reverent before God, but not with a pretended piety. Sermons are not pep talks and worship is not a pep rally. Preachers are not cheerleaders. Often what is called "devotional" consists of sad tales, provoking emotions, down by the lake at night, holding hands, lights out, arousing people to some kind of "high," for the moment, and calling it spiritual. Preaching that is designed to entertain, present a comedy routine, draw attention to the speaker, and just arouse emotions is not the kind of preaching you find in the Scriptures. We might add that sessions that concentrate on bashing the church and belitttling the Bible, which has become a trademark of many "devotional" preachers, is not Biblical preaching.

If You Want Devotional Preaching...

What is more moving and thrilling than THE FAITH (Jude 3)? What motivates more than a sense of duty and love toward God in the realization of personal responsibility and accountability (Second Corinthians 5:11; Ecclesiastes 12:13)? Study the lives of the noble souls who gave their all to living and proclaiming

doctrinal truth. There you will find devotion and your own motivation (Romans 15:4). What stirs the heart more than to realize one is lost, but can be saved? What a marvel! None of this is possible, however, without the doctrinal side of preaching.

If You Want Doctrinal Preaching...

Preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Teach love, kindness, forgiveness, grace, mercy, the blood of Christ, faith, repentance, confession, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the condemnation of sin, the marks of the church, the hope of eternal salvation, fellowship with God, God's part in God's plan for man, and man's part in God's plan for man. What part of the doctrine or teaching of Christ are we qualified to declare unnecessary and without value to be preached? Second John 9:11, "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him Godspeed is a partaker of his evil deeds.*"

To think of preaching as devotional **OR** doctrinal is wrong headiness. Such is an abitrary and artificial distinction when you consider preaching as was done in the New Testament under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It must be both because the two concepts are inseparable rather than mutually exclusive. How can we please God and have our preaching be other than the way He has revealed the preaching He wants?

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Boldness

Proverbs 28:1, "*The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.*" Ephesians 6:19, "*And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.*" Philippians 1:20, "*According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.*"

In each of these passages the characteristic of boldness is presented as something commendable. This is a trait that characterized the early Christians as well as people of God in all ages. After Paul's conversion he boldly preached in the name of Christ at Damascus (Acts 9:27). Paul and Barnabas waxed bold in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:46). Because of Paul enduring persecutions, others were made bold (Philipians 1:14). We can even be bold at the judgment (First John 4:17).

What Does Boldness Mean?

To be bold means to be confident, daring, free to speak, to use free utterance, strength, good courage, without fear, hopeful, of good cheer, without concealment, without ambiguity, but a daring spirit, with assured confidence, conviction, in faith, nothing wavering, without doubting, clear, and distinct.

It is possible to know truth, believe truth, and yet allow truth to suffer and be swept away because of the lack of boldness. The reason some churches fall away is because they are fearful, afraid to stand up and be counted on the side of truth, afraid of being rejected, trembling lest they be "put on the spot," unwilling to sacrifice themselves for the Lord's sake. Many have adopted the foolish and false position that peace is the most important of all things. But it most often is not because of love for peace as it is fear to stand and fight the good fight of faith, lacking boldness. Many love the acceptance of men and praise of their peers more than they love the truth of

God. Some speak and act blasphemously against God's way, openly, without shame, yet without rebuke, challenge, correction, or condemnation of their sin. This the lack of the boldness that God's people must have.

Let Truth Ring Loud and Clear

Our voices should ring in the proclamation of truth and the denunciation of all evil and error. We should declare for all to know the dignity of man, the creation by God, His absolute moral standard, the Deity of Christ, the one church, His plan of salvation, the coming resurrection and judgment, man's accountability, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the way of righteous living.

Alongside that we should shout the condemnation of abortion, homosexuality, drunkenness, lasciviousness, adultery, sin in high places, the do-your-own-thing attitude, divorce, false doctrines of liberalism, modernism, denominationalism and the false religions of the world that are not of God.

Become a Target

Being bold is a sure way to become a target of abuse. There has been, is now, and will ever be those who ridicule, slander, misrepresent, lie against, falsely accuse those who are bold enough to stand by God's Word. Accusations of bigotry, prejudice, hate, self-righteousness, etc. are all designed to intimidate. When the forces of hell cannot meet the truth, and they never can, they resort to the way of persecution. It has always been Satan's tactic and one learned by his servants that when you cannot dismiss the message, demean the messenger. Such was done to Christ, the apostles, faithful brethren through the years, and certainly today. In Acts four when those who did not wish to accept the message of the apostles, wanting to deny the miracle performed before them, the only thing they could do was to threaten, beat, harass, but the brethren were faithful to the truth and bold in their response. The efforts to intimidate can never succeed unless we allow them to succeed. The early church endured and overcame such persecution because they were bold. This must

characterize our lives also. We wish to note five specific areas when Christians must be bold.

Bold When Facing Ridicule and Scorn

Learn it well and soon. The sinful world hates Christ and His people. First John 3:13, "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" Jesus said, John 15:18, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*" First Peter 4:12, "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*" Often those who cry tolerance are the least tolerant toward God's people. Those who claim superiority spiritually, almost as if they have a monopoly on love and goodness, are usually the most unloving and meanest people on earth. Multi-culturalism is willing to include everything except true New Testament Christianity. Liberals attack the Bible with cheap shots of elitism, self-proclaimed superiority in scholarship. Question them and their response is, "Where did you get your PhD?" They denounce God, and offer nothing but their own will. When men cannot answer truth, this is what they do. We do not use the gospel to defend ourselves, but we defend the truth. They detest quoting the Bible and call those who do "Bible thumpers." The devil has many children of this sort and they try to crush the boldness of the righteous.

We must not allow ourselves to become the victims of their blustery mouthings. We must look to the noblemen of God like Moses, Joshua, Elijah, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, Christ, and other early Christians. They possessed boldness.

Bold When We Face Temptation

It is so necessary to be bold when we are tempted. James 1:12, "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*"

Too often the cause of Christ has suffered reproach brought on by those who claim to be Christ's disciples. Their hypocrisy is one of the devil's most potent weapons in waging war against the souls of the lost.

We can resist the devil and he will flee from us (James 4:7). Too many do not resist him, but flirt with sin and dare the devil, arraying themselves against the tried and proven ways to oppose temptation, but yet some expect God's blessings anyway. Second Timothy 2:22, Paul told Timothy to flee some things, not flirt with them.

We must utilize the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6: 13-19), and when we do we can overcome temptation (First Corinthians 10:13). A Christian who is wise does not see how close he can come before sinning, but how far away from sin he can keep himself. As with Joseph when tempted to sin by Potiphar's wife, he put distance between him and temptation (Genesis 39:12). We are to abstain from the appearance of evil (First Thessalonians 5:22). Did not Peter succumb to the temptation to deny Christ when he warmed himself by the enemies' fire, attempting a posture of neutrality (Matthew 26:58; Luke 22:56)? Weakness may explain why some fall before temptation, but weakness is no justification for falling.

Bold In Prayer

Prayer is a privilege God grants His faithful children.. Hebrews 4:16, "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*" When we approach the throne of God we must do so with utmost reverence, awe, respect of His holiness and Deity. What some have called "boldness" may be nothing other than sheer disrespect and a lack of reverence. "*There is no fear of God before their eyes,*" (Romans 3:18). It is no little matter to come before the Lord. We are unworthy to approach Him and undeserving to ask of Him. Therefore, it is never to be with arrogance that we approach God, "claiming His blessings and demanding He bless us," as I have heard some preachers verbalize. Some have shouted at God, saying, "You promised. Do it!" Have they no shame to address God is such fashion? We can approach God only because He allows us to approach Him.

Prayer is a manifestation of faith, confidence, assurance, recognition of His power, integrity of His Word, trust in His promises, and our dependence upon Him. We pray in faith, nothing wavering (James 1:6),

without wrath and doubting (First Timothy 2:8), but humbly beseeching His blessings. But we can be confident, bold, when we approach Him in prayer.

Bold In Proclaiming the Gospel Truth

We must have confidence in the message that we declare to others. If you have doubts, they will eventually show through. Some may be like the preacher who wrote on the margin of one of his sermon note sheets, "Yell loudly here! Not quite sure of this point!"

We must have conviction based on the evidence of the Word (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 11:1). Some are masters at "beating around the bush" in their remarks, and you can never be quite sure where they stand. Their position reflects double-mindedness because of their double-talk. Two men heard a preacher preach and asked, "Whose side is he on? What is he talking about? Is he for or against?" Ambiguity is not being bold.

When one preaches the theologies, philosophies, and doctrines of men he has good reason to be timid and hesitant. He has no business preaching such stuff. But when he preaches truth, he is bold, confident and sure.

Sometimes those who say we cannot be sure about anything are very sure nobody can be sure about anything. They say we cannot know, and they know nobody can know. It is usually because they do no know that they talk this way. We can know, should know, can know we know, and be bold about it. Some are not bold in proclaiming the truth because they fear criticism, and being labeled dogmatic, unloving, hateful, and fear of losing their jobs and salaries. They do not mind offending those who love the truth but are scared to death of opposing those who have no love for the truth. Hearers should know what the will of the Lord is through preaching, the use of sound speech, doctrine,and words, "*thus saith the Lord,*" as God's oracles.

Bold When Opposing Error

Paul is a great example of boldness in confronting false teachers. Consider the time when he had to confront

Peter and others when Peter was to be blamed, creating division and confusion regarding the observance of the Mosaic law (Galatians 2). Look at Christ as He faced the Pharisees, charging them with their hypocrisies and binding their traditions even above the law of God (Matthew 23). Remember what John wrote about Diotrophes in Third John 9. Observe Peter and John when they were before the Jewish counsel which commanded them to cease preaching the gospel, and how they said they had to obey God rather than men (Acts 4).

I recall a time when former preachers were invited back to a congregation, and I was among them. The man who spoke before me (who had preceded me at this place), commented how there never seemed to have been any trouble where he had preached. It was easy to see why.. He never tackled anything controversial, and never opposed error lest somebody get their feelings hurt, and the church had suffered because of it. I guess he knew better how to handle error than the apostles, the prophets, John the Baptist, or even Christ. When you never condemn anything, and are willing to "go along to get along" you may never have trouble, but you do not do your work faithfully before God either. Why was Christ and the early church persecuted? It was not for the good they did, nor their kind, gentle manners, for healing the sick, feeding the hungry, or agreeing with people. It was because they confronted error as they were instructed to do. Little wonder churches under such weak preaching and cowardly behavior drift into false ways, and eventually apostatize! Better to lose friends but save souls. Better to seek God's approval than man's praise!

What Boldness is Not

Boldness is not to be equated with being harsh, slanderous, rude, crude, loud, caustic, deliberately offensive, bombastic, pompous, pretentiousness, and just picking a fight. Ephesians 4:15 teaches us to speak the truth in love. But truth sometimes offends those who run counter to it. We are allowed no compromise, negotiation, nor dare we be content to be tossed to and fro, but must submit to the Lord's authority and conduct ourselves accordingly, come what may!

Can we be faithful without being bold? I fail to see how we can because boldness is not an optional quality to develop. We must be bold in the home, the church, society generally. Boldness demands we go the Lord's way, and it requires knowledge of that way, love for the truth, open minds, and a willingness to pay whatever price is necessary. It demands honesty, even to admitting we are wrong when proven wrong. It means "*having done all, to stand*" (Ephesians 6:13).

Some Find It Easier Than Others

Some are more bold than others, and find it easier to be bold than others. This is an acquired trait. Boldness may not be as evident in some as others. Boldness is identified when under trial. It is no problem to be bold when everyone around you agrees with you and approves of you and that for which you stand. It is when opposition arises that boldness is tested.

Be mindful that among those who shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone are the "*fearful*" (Revelation 21:8), those so cowardly they give way to persecution and deprivation, choosing rather to abandon truth. Have you ever thought what real persecution might do to the church today? What would it do to me and you?

It takes boldness to become a Christian and to remain a Christian. In our world where every decency, morality, and Scripturally ordained doctrine and practice is being vilified, under vicious attack from heathens, unbelievers, evolutionists, politicians, educators, the profane, degenerate, depraved, materialists, religious leaders, including false teachers among brethren, the call of the Lord comes forth loud and clear, and unmistakable. Be strong! Stand fast in the Lord! Be unmovable! Speak the truth with boldness! Put on the whole armor! Be not ashamed! Fight the good fight of faith! "*Hold fast your confidence* (boldness) *and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end*" (Hebrews 3:6).

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The Gospel Is Good News

We will "*stir up your pure mind by way of remembrance*" (Second Peter 3:7), reminding you of something needed now that includes the past, and about which there will never be a change. Our study will consist of a series of questions with Bible quotations to provide the answers.

Romans 1:16,17, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*"

What separates man from God?

Ironically, the good news begins with the bad news that man is lost in sin and stands condemned (Ephesians 2:12, "*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*" Isaiah 59:1,2, "*The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear?*"

How does Scripture define sin?

First John 3:4, "*for sin is the transgression of the law,*" having reference to God's law. First John 5:17, "*All unrighteousness is sin.*" James 4:17, "*To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" Romans 14:23, "*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*" This is in the context of man's conscience. To violate your conscience is sinful. It does not mean that nothing is sinful until your conscience is violated, but it means that violation of your personal convictions, whether they be right or wrong, constitutes sin.

What are the wages of sin?

Romans 6:23, "*The wages of sin is death.*" Death means separation and this refers to spiritual separation from God. James 1:15, "*...and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*"

How many are guilty of sin?

Romans 3:10, "*There is none righteous, no, not one.*" Verse 23, "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" Romans 5:12, "*...for that all have sinned.*"

Is one guilty of the sins of his foreparents?

Ezekiel 18:20, "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.*" Each shall be accountable for the "*things done in his body*" (Second Corinthians 5:10).

It should be obvious, therefore, that if we to be saved this barrier of sin that we have erected between ourselves and God must be removed. The good news is that sins can be removed. This is the gospel.

How are sins removed?

Romans 4:7,8, "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*" For sins to be removed and covered and the barrier between man and God destroyed, sin must be forgiven. The forgiveness of sin is the only way to remove sin.

What is necessary for sins to be forgiven?

Hebrews 9:22, "*And almost all things are by the law purged with blood: and without shedding of blood is no remission.*" God has determined salvation is by blood.

What blood forgives sins? Will animal blood do it?

Hebrews 10:4, "*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.*"

Whose blood will forgive sins?

Hebrews 9:12, "*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption.*" Forgiveness is accomplished because of the blood of Jesus Christ. God provides nothing else by which our souls are cleansed.

Where did Christ shed His blood?

John 19:18,34, "*Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side, and Jesus in the midst... But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.*" As all are aware, Christ shed His blood on the cross of Calvary. The death of Christ is not good news, but an essential part of the good news that salvation is offered to man. What His death provides is the good news.

Why did Jesus come to earth?

First Timothy 1:15, "*This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*" Luke 19:10, "*For the Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost.*"

What caused God to send Jesus to this world?

John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Romans 5:8, "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" Saved by the love of God!

Are we not saved by the grace of God?

Ephesians 2:8,9, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*" Although we are saved by the grace of God, never, ever, does Scripture teach in any manner that we saved by God's grace alone.

Are we saved by God's mercy?

Titus 3:3-5, "*For we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God, our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*" Grace is God's unmerited favor. Mercy is God's withholding punishment although justified.

What did Christ purchase with His Blood?

Acts 20:28, "*...the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.*" This is why Christians acknowledge the truth Paul wrote in First Corinthians 6:19,20, "*What" know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's.*" The church belongs to Christ (Matthew 16:1-18) because He built it, it is founded on Him, He is the Savior of it, and He bought it with His blood. Christ purchased the company of the saved, the church, to which the saved are added (Acts 2:47).

What was the price of man's redemption?

Ephesians 1:7, "*In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, to the riches of his grace*" First John 2:2, "*And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but for the sins of the whole world.*" A propitiation is the satisfaction of justice. God determined that His justice and holiness would be satisfied with the payment for sin by the shedding of the blood of the perfect Son. His blood is the ransom price (Matthew 20:28), and by His blood has the way of salvation been provided.

What must man do?

John 3:3-5, "*Ye must be born again.*" Matthew 7:21, "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of the Father which is in heaven.*" Hebrews 5:9, "*Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey him.*" Those who come to God

must be drawn to God (John 6:44). We are drawn as we are taught, as we hear, as we learn. Man must have faith (Hebrews 11:6), and faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Therefore, salvation is by the word of the gospel (James 1:21).

What Must Man Believe?

He must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. John 8:24, "*Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*" As the Ethiopian confessed, "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*" (Acts 8:37). The times are numerous that teach us that we are saved by faith. Nobody true to the doctrine of Christ would ever suggest any contradiction of the Biblical teaching of salvation by faith. What is contested in the false doctrine that we are saved by faith alone. There does not live a person on earth who can produce the passage that teaches that we are saved by faith only, or faith alone. Why men teach it is for them to answer to God. James 2:24 explicitly contradicts such a false doctrine.

What else must we obey?

We are to repent (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38;17:30; First Peter 3:9); confess our faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:10; Luke 12:8,9), and be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). It is then, upon our obedience, that we are made servants of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). It is then, upon being baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where He shed His blood (John 19:34) that we are allowed to rise and walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4), as new creatures in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17). Jesus directed, (Mark 16:15,16), "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned.*" Baptism saves (First Peter 3:21), because that is when and where we reach the Savior's saving blood (Romans 6:3,4).

It never has been a question whether we are saved by the blood of Christ, but when are we saved by His blood. It is when we obey the truth that we are redeemed by His precious blood (First Peter 1:18,19).

When we are baptized we are also baptized into the one body (First Corinthians 12:13), which is the church (Colossians 1:18), and there is only one body (Ephesians 4:4,5). In Christ there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1, but salvation (Second Timothy 2:10), and every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). Just as there is one body there is one baptism and the baptism being preached and practiced when the Holy Spirit had Paul to write that there is but one was baptism in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins and into Christ.

After baptism what are we to do?

Revelation 2:10, "*Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life.*" Faithfulness is essential. We can fall away (First Corinthians 10:12; Second Peter 2:20-22). Faithfulness means "*patient continuance in well doing*" (Romans 2:7). We are not to grow weary in well doing (Galatians 6:9). First Corinthians 15:58, "*Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" Paul knew the crown of righteousness awaited him because he had kept the faith (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

Must one obey the gospel to be saved?

The gospel is the message of salvation. It cannot be ignored. First Thessalonians 1:7-9 shows the necessity of obeying the gospel. Acts 4:12 teaches salvation is in none other than Christ. Jesus taught (John 14:6), "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" Certainly one must obey the gospel to be saved, and nobody has the right to hold out hope for the souls of those who do not obey. It cannot be done by the revealed authority of God.

The gospel is God's good news to man than reveals the way of salvation. It is that the lost may be found and the doomed can be saved. Thanks be to God for the good news, the gospel of Christ.

* * * * *

Vengeance and Justice



We are taught that God is a God of justice and that vengeance belongs to Him (Romans 12:19). God does not consider righteousness and unrighteousness just alike, the righteous rewarded, and the unrighteousness punished. What of crimes committed, not necessarily against us? Shall we seek revenge? Should criminals receive justice? We should not seek the harm of any just to get even. But crimes must be punished lest crimes be thought acceptable. Otherwise justice is perverted. Our nation must return to justice.

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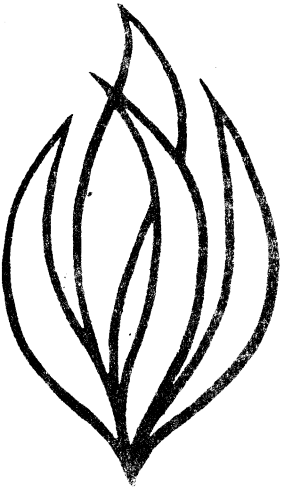

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVII *James W. Boud* NUMBER 8

Does the Gospel Include Gimmicks, Gadgets, Playboys, and Clowns?

It is a shame that such a subject must be discussed among churches of Christ that have claimed need for Biblical authority for what is taught and done. Yet, circumstances in the brotherhood make such a study necessary, and we do not shy from it. It is not, however, the kind of question men in the New Testament asked.

Let us begin with the Biblical observation of the gospel, which means good news and glad tidings. Man is lost in sin and God has provided the way of salvation (Romans 1:16). That way is Christ (John 14:6). The gospel is the revelation of all that pertains to that way, including facts, commands, and promises. This is the reason for preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26). The gospel is the truth, the doctrine, the faith, the word of Christ. Everything authorized by Christ is included in the gospel, God's way of making man righteous, justifying man before God, including examples to follow, the doctrine by which to live, our work, worship, relationship to man and God, the regulation of life, and the goal of heaven.

The gospel is to be preached to saint and sinner because all the world is amendable thereto. "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel...*" (Mark 16:15). Paul told Roman Christians he was coming to preach the gospel to them (Romans 1:15). The gospel is God's plan for man to save him from his sins, and keep him saved by showing how to be faithful.

The gospel is spread by men "*preaching the gospel*" (First Corinthians 1:21; Acts 8), "*preaching Jesus.*" Christ is preached publicly, privately, personally and according to "*thus saith the Lord*" (First Peter 4:11;Titus 2:1,8).

Not by Trickery

Knute Rockne once explained his reason for championship teams. Seldom did he win by trick plays, but by execution of basics. The same is true regarding the spread of the gospel. Congregations are built by feeding people the Word, Bible study, daily Christlike living, taking the message of truth to hearts and lives.

Some have resorted to gimmicks to make the church grow and be relevant. Basically, a gimmick is a deceptive device, a secret, subtle means of reaching an unrevealed goal by capturing attention by deception. Some have the idea that whatever works is good. But we must ask, what work is to be accomplished? We must have respect for the work of the church as the Bible reveals.

Our goal is not mere numbers, responses, nickels, numbers, and noise. What kind of growth is sought? It is not the work of the church to simply make people feel good, be happy, or provide a temporary uplift or escape. It is not to the pursuit of secular education, recreation, entertainment, body building, etc. Some call all this just methods, but false doctrines have come in under the disguise of methodology, perverting the work of the church. Some think the end justifies the means.

What Gimmicks Really Do

Gimmicks degrade and trivialize the gospel, reducing it to triteness. Why should people be surprised the work of the church is limited? Do we go to the filling station to get a tooth filled? Do we go to the hospital for groceries? Each has its function and so does His church. First Timothy 3:15 teaches the church is the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*" Its work is evangelism, edification, benevolence, and to provide worship to God. Where is the church taught to entertain, provide recreation, etc.? The church is not authorized nor intended to conduct all the affairs of life even though all affairs of life are governed under the gospel umbrella. God has provided the home, government, and the church. The church is not to be and do everything. Nor do we have authority to use just any means to do what the church is authorized to do. We must accept God's limitations on the work.

An Often Repeated Problem

Some decide to do something they like, then seek justification for it. Some have even accused Jesus of using gimmicks by performing miracles. This is blasphemy. His miracles confirmed His identity, and were never used to deceive or trick. He rebuked multitudes who were attracted to Him for the wrong reason. Even compassion was not the prime goal. He never sought to just entertain, refusing to perform miracles when they rejected Him in Nazereth and before Herod. Does feeding the five thousand justify building gymnasiums? We dare not accuse Jesus of bribery.

Some defend gimmicks on the grounds it will draw people to us. But that is not our mission. "Partied in" must continue to be "partied" to remain. Each gimmick must top the last one. The real mission is forgiveness of sins. You cannot out Hollywood Hollywood, nor out denomination the denominations. You give a milk shake, and they'll add French fries. You add the fries, and they'll add a dessert. Some people sell their souls to the highest bidder. Such may set attendance records, but only to gain the glory of men.

Some get so determined to reach their numerical goals they can rationalize the acceptance of any means to reach them. Some have invited non-Christian politicians, athletic heroes, beauty queens, after dinner speakers, providing hot dogs, joke tellers, musicians, slap stick routines following devotionals to get numbers. Preachers are expected to be "good mixers" and a director of fun and games. Such is not related to the mission of God's church.

Where the Difference Is

There is a distinction between the use of expedients to carry out the mission of the church and the use of gimmicks not even related to the mission. Sunday school classes are not gimmicks but teaching efforts. Buildings in which to teach and worship may be used for other purposes at times, but that does not give authority to build gymnasiums, game rooms, jogging tracks, swimming pools, weight lifting rooms, hot baths, etc.

Using a boat for a pulpit does not authorize furnishing members with fishing boats, or a recreational flotilla.

There is also a difference between spiritual progress and a religious hurrah, but some seem not to know it. When a church gets caught up with religious hurrahs, sponsoring youth camps, banquets, ball games, and side shows, it is good to recall Paul's statement, "*the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*" (Romans 14:17).

There is no wrong for the individual Christian to be involved in such activities and using his money for them. But dare we fall victim to the fallacy that whatever the individual can do the church together can do? College presidents have promoted this false idea to get into church budgets for secular education. But we dare not leave the essential principle of requiring Biblical authority for what the church does. Such gimmickry is shot down with one question, "Where is Bible authority for it?" We will not be deterred from legitimate work authorized by Scripture, but neither shall we endorse that which lacks that authority.

Ernest Underwood noted he had converted people while golfing and fishing with them. But he rightly denied this authority for the church to build golf courses and run fishing camps. He mocked, "I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of carpentry, masonry, and slam dunking that is in thee. And these things which thou hast learned from denominations, commit to foolish men who will be able to build like structures, and do like athletic things. For bodily exercise in now the IN thing to do. Give diligence to come before May 3rd, ground breaking time. The overshoes, and especially the blueprints for the gymnasium, bring when thou comest" (II Heresy 4:11-17).

Not Just Anything Goes

You cannot "sell" the gospel like cars, refrigerators, football tickets, etc. A Ford or Chevy will both get you there, but truth and error will not lead to the same place. We are not to expect the gospel to produce the same "excitement" as a football game. It is not our mission to

merely excite, arouse, turn on. Do not confuse commitment to Christ with being carried away with something. There is a difference between doing the Lord's business and just a lot of artificial "busyness" with programs, promotions, shows, parades, and temporary emotional "highs." Coffee and confetti conversion will only multiply confusion, spiritual dwarfism, and neurotic members. Too many already confuse spirituality with feelings, and measure progress only in terms of numbers and acceptance by the community. But genuine success is measure in changed lives through sound doctrine, faithfulness in the Word and manner of life like Christ, whether many or few.

Look What We See Today

Consider the rash of gimmicks being used in religion, some by our digressive brethren as well. We have mentioned the advertisement of politicians, movie stars, athletes, beauty queens, lolly pops, free balloons, hamburgers, Indian headdress, carnations, throwing pie in the face of preachers, preaching from the roof of the building, jumping Toyotas with motorcycles, fifty dollar lucky seats, kissing pigs, comedy skits, exercise classes, health spas (one church featured their Minister of Body Health, the director of their spa), gymnastics performances (even on the PTL Club), art centers, family life centers, slim-a-rama classes, ball teams, martial art classes, free bicycles, helicopter rides, free tickets to Opryland. But you get the picture.

Christians do not stoop to gimmicks and make mockery of the gospel, but trust the light of Christ to draw men unto Him. It will draw those of good and honest heart. The good-time-Charleys may not be impressed. He will not degrade the serious and sacred message of saving truth by gimmickry. Faithful preachers will expose such practices to be wrong. Faithful elders will never allow it. Faithful churches will never pursue it. When brethren are more concerned with reverence for things holy they will not even consider using such shameful tactics as if in the name of the Lord.

* * * * *

Seventh Day Adventist Doctrine of Man

What is man? Who is he? Why does he exist? From whence has he come? Where is he going? All this is important to determine the nature of man, proper conduct, duty, responsibility, morality, man's place in the world, his level of dignity, his present and future, and his accountability, if he has any. The Bible informs man of his nature, origin, purpose, how he should live, and his destiny. Men have concocted many theories and doctrines which, if true, would alter what the Bible teaches about man in all these matters.

Our study centers on the nature of man, the soul, immortality, and future punishment (or lack of it) as taught by Seventh Day Adventists. It is not unfair to say that what they teach today may be changed tomorrow because they contend for latter day revelation. If that be so, doctrines could be changed in a moment. But we shall try very hard not to misrepresent what they teach presently. We shall use SDA to abbreviate for Seventh Day Adventists.

No Existence Apart From The Body

SDA teach the soul has no existence apart from the body, that man is wholly mortal, with no entity capable of surviving physical death. Man is a complete unit, not with components. Upon decay of the body, man has no existence whatsoever. There is no inherent immortality. However, they believe immortality will be given to the righteous conditionally because of Christ.

The cornerstone of SDA doctrine is that immortality refers only to God, including Christ (First Timothy 1:17; 6:16). But it is a mistake to take one passage to the exclusion of others on the same subject and build a doctrinal system thereon. The Bible does teach the immortality of God and He is the only source of it. But

man is also immortal because God made him so. God is the Father of spirits (Hebrew 12:9). If immortality is exclusive to Deity, then so is invisibility, which all know is not so. Part of man is mortal; his body. But there is more to man than just his body, as shall be proven. For this there is more evidence that space allows to present.

SDA doctrines contends the soul, spirit, in Old and New Testaments, do not remotely imply conscious entity able to survive physical death. But Daniel 7:15 shows there was more than body to Daniel. His spirit was in the midst of his body. They were not the same. Ecclesiastes 12:7 certainly shows both body and spirit of man. One returns to God and the other goes to the grave. Matthew 10:28 shows the soul can survive the body. First Thessalonians 5:23 shows there is more to man than body, but body, soul, and spirit. This is sufficient.

The Bible Must be Wrong

If SDA doctrine is true, there are certain Biblical affirmations that are reduced to the ridiculous. It teaches the soul is merely breath. But did Jesus simply blow His breath on God (Luke 23:46)? When Jesus was "*troubled in spirit*" did He only have breath trouble (John 13:21)? Are Christians to simply cleanse themselves from offensive breath when taught to cleanse themselves from the filthiness of spirit (First Corinthians 7:1)? Did Peter teach people to just not breath loudly when he taught them to have "*a quiet spirit*" (First Peter 3:4). Do you lose your soul when you get your breath knocked out of you? Certainly, soul/spirit is more than breath.

Death is THE END

SDA doctrine contends death is not only the complete cessation of life, but annihilation. But James 2:26 teaches death is the separation of the body from the spirit. SDA doctrine runs into problems here. They say death is annihilation, and contend there is no immortality in man, but the righteous will be given immorality when Jesus comes. How can this be? The righteous die, and therefore are annihilated. To whom can the Lord give anything? Must man be re-created? Or

is man resurrected as the Bible teaches? If annihilated, there is nothing to resurrect. SDA doctrine actually teaches the annihilation of both the good and bad, but evidently a re-creation of the good. But Hebrews 9:27 teaches after death there is the judgment. If annihilated, what is there to judge. The truth is, death means separation, and never annihilation.

And What About Adam?

They deny Adam died in any sense except physically. Genesis 2:17 warned Adam he would die the day he disobeyed God. But his physical death did not occur until hundreds of years later. Did God miss it? Obviously, there are two kinds of death, physical and spiritual. The soul dies in the sense that by sin it is separated from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). How could those who have been annihilated bury others who no longer exist (Matthew 8:22)? The conversion of James 5:19,20 does not eliminate physical death, but spiritual death. First Timothy 5:6 show all death is not physical because "*she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.*" Once the false doctrine is shot down, it is shot down.

Soul Sleeping

SDA doctrine teaches death brings total unconsciousness, otherwise called "soul sleeping." We have to ask, if death brings annihilation, what is there to sleep? They cite Ecclesiates 9:5,6 and how "*the dead know not anything.*" But they quit reading too soon. The very next verse says, "*neither have they anymore reward.*" If SDA doctrine is true about verse five teaching soul sleeping, that would eliminate reward and immorality for anyone. The truth includes the phrase, "*under the sun,*" having reference to this life. The dead know not anymore of this life because they have departed from this life.

Matthew seventeen defeats this doctrine because we have Moses and Elijah with Christ on the mount when Jesus was transfigured. They were aware, alive, and existing. The martyrs were crying out in Revelation 6:9,10, and they were not unconscious or soul sleeping.

SDA, Hell, Sheol, and Hades

SDA doctrine says these terms all refer to the grave. To them punishment is inconsistent with mercy and love, and punishment is eternal only in the sense of being final. They contend the wicked go to the grave and that is the end of them, there being nothing more. The wicked lose nothing, gain nothing. This may be some comfort to a wicked person to think this way, but it contradicts Biblical teaching.

The doctrine of no punishment for the wicked is inconsistent with the justice of God and the warnings of His wrath. It removes accountability for the wicked, yet Paul says all shall give account (First Corinthians 5:10). It denies the universal resurrection which Jesus taught (John 5:28,29). Luke 12:4,5 shows there is something to fear after death. Luke 12:47,47 teaches about few and many stripes. SDA doctrine says no stripes whatsoever. Matthew ten teaches how the judgment will be more tolerable for some than others. SDA doctrine says there is nothing for the wicked to tolerate anyway. What about Sodom, Gommorrah, Tyre, Sidon, Bethsaida, and Capernaum? Had they nothing to fear in spite of Jesus' warning them?

While SDA doctrine says no punishment, Hebrews 10:28,29 warns of sorer punishment. While SDA doctrine says death ends all for the wicked, Matthew 25:46 uses the same word, *aionion*,to qualify both life and punishment. Matthew twenty-five speaks of the separation of the sheep from the goats. SDA doctrine re-creates the sheep and there are no goats from which to separate them because they are annihilated at death.

David Lipscomb said, "I fail to see why any good man desires to convince people that wickedness would not meet a terrible punishment." (Gospel Advocate, 1901).

There is More

We have all this and have not even discussed Lazarus and the rich man, which destroys SDA doctrine by itself. I know SDA strongly object to the use of Luke sixteen, and well they might. They call it "just a parable." It is

not called a parable, except by them. There are evidences that it is not just a parable which we do not undertake to discuss here. But so what? Does the parable teach a lie or the truth? They claim it only teaches the uncertainty of riches, responsibility for wealth, that this life is the time to prepare, and selfishness of wrong. All of this is true. But it also teaches existence and life after death, consciousness, accountability, the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and punishment for the wicked as surely as reward for the righteous. And is it not strange they say it teaches the sufficiency of the Scriptures when latter day revelation denies that?

Man is body, but also soul, spirit, heart.The heart of man thinks, reasons, purposes, believes, loves, sorrows, desires, understands, fears, and despises. Are these qualities of the body?

Ellen G. White, founder of SDA, claimed Jesus only used the misconceptions of people at that time to convey more important truths, and He simply never bothered to correct their erroneous doctrines and opinions This is blasphemy. Jesus never taught error, nor built truth upon error. He did not convey truth in the vessels of error, leaving error in tact.

Some Conclusions

SDA doctrine destroys the dignity of human life, reducing him to nothing more than an animal. It is rank materialism. It removes personal responsibility and accountability, which are deterrents to sin. It removes the wages of sin and the rewards of salvation. It sets aside Scripture after Scripture regarding the nature of man, the resurrection, judgment, and eternity. It denies man is created in God's image, God being spirit (John 4:24), the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9), and man is His likeness in that regard.

Acts 17:31; 24:25 teach the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. We better believe it and prepare for it.

* * * * *

Causes and Cures of Apostasy

Apostasy is defined as defection, abandonment of what once was held, falling away, leaving, desertion, forsaking principles and positions once professed. Our discussion centers on the causes and cure of apostasy. We are not discussing the possibility of it, the reality of it, the extent of it, or the results of it. There is so much in the Bible on the subject we cannot even mention all that pertains to the causes and cures in one lesson.

We shall learn the causes from two sources: (1) a study of those who did fall away and see what they did, and (2) a study of the warnings against it. From two sources we shall see the cure: (1) what God and His people did in the midst of apostasy, and (2) the admonitions given designed to prevent and correct it.

Deception

The first portion will deal with causes, and there are many. Adam and Eve fell because of deception (First Timothy 2:14). They believed a lie and ate the forbidden fruit. They were driven from the garden once they fell beneath the subtile temptations placed before them that appealed to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (First John 2:15ff).

Idolatry

Israel experienced many apostasies. One cause was idolatry, a change of primary allegiance. Idolatry began in Israel with the golden calf at Sinai. It continued with service to heathen gods and the adoption of heathen worship. Nehemiah 13:24 tells us how the integration of heathen idolatry into their own religion resulted in "*the language of Ashdod,*" which was a confusion of speech because of the mixture of idolatry and truth. They, like many today, so imitated that which was around them that they began to act like them, talk like them, and fell from the ways God ordained for Israel.

Like Other Nations

This desire to be "*like the nations round about*" has been a cause of apostasy through the ages. Malcontent with God's ways, Israel wanted a king to rule over them. People today are subjected to peer pressure, pressure from others to the way of others. Congregations as well as individuals are urged to go along with whatever others are doing. Elderships have surrendered the autonomy of the local church by bowing to the pressure of project and program promoters as much as if they joined some ecclesiatical diocese form of government. Actions, decisions, positions are determined, not by what the Bible teaches and authorizes, but what others are doing. This imitation of sister congregations regardless of what is being done has resulted in gradual but certain digression. It amounts to measuring ourselves by ourselves which Paul declares is not wise (Second Corinthians 10:12). With so many doing so much that is not authorized, every church must stand on its own rather than be swayed by pressures from others.

Stubbornness

Stubbornness, a disease of the heart, has always been a contributing factor to apostasy. This was a problem with Saul when he was told to utterly destroy Amalek. His so-called "partial obedience" resulted from stubbornness (First Samuel 15:23). He did things his way rather than God's way, and contended stoutly in spite of contrary evidence that he was obedient. Israel during the time of the judges were often just outright stubborn. They "*ceased not from their own doings*" (Judges 2:19). They failed to drive out the enemies God told them to destroy. They would serve God for a while and then stubbornly return to their digressive patterns. Paul spoke of those of "*seared consciences*" (First Timothy 4:2). Jesus spoke of "*hardened hearts*" (Matthew 6:52). He prayed, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not*" (Matthew 23:37). So many have the "play on Miss Bertha" attitude. This refers to a time of a meeting when brethren came for worship and some intended using the

instrument. A father urged his sons not to use it. But the sons, like the generation following Joshua who knew not the Lord, turned to the pianist and said, "Play on, Miss Bertha." The father, true to the truth, arose and left. The stubborn will to have their own way by the sons brought division and apostasy.

Love of Money and the World

Apostasy is caused by the love of money and the love of the sinful world. Paul told Timothy that "*Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world*" (Second Timothy 4:10). We are warned not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world (First John 2:15ff). The church is in the world, but not to be of the world. It is good that the church is in the world, but it is tragic when the world is in the church. But when brethren love their sins, and seek to accommodate sin rather than be cleansed from sin, apostasy is sure to follow. "*For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*" (First Timothy 6:10). Jesus taught the folly of trying to serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). "*No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot served God and mammon.*"

Compromise For Peace

Ranking high on the list of causes for apostasy is the spirit of compromise. That spirit is so prevalent in the world. It has a legitimate place in many affairs of this world, and some have adopted it in the realm of religion. Compromise signals a gradual erosion from the truth, not an abrupt and violent disruption and separation from it. Giving a little here, a little there, secures digression as surely as a sudden break. In a way, it is more effective because it is more difficult to detect by the unwatchful and naive. Compromise results from a failure to recognize that truth is absolute and is not negotiable or relative. Many have a fear of being labeled dogmatic or radical and will bow before intimidating epithets heaped upon those who will not compromise. Some had rather condescend to agnosticism, a message

of doubt and uncertainty that contends we cannot know for sure about anything, that we may be wrong, rather than take a stand for the absolute revealed truth and be unmoved. Some say truth us unattainable, and we can only search for it. Under this Satanic spell, they adopt a "go along to get along" policy and attitude. "Peace at any price," is the child of compromise. "Don't rock the boat," is the wail of wavering. Like some of old (John 12:42,42), the desire for the praises of men causes many to leave the faith and go in a spirit of compromise. But we do not have the right to surrender one point of truth for anything, anybody, anywhere, or anytime.

This spirit of compromise is evident in the attempts to harmonize atheistic evolution with the Bible. Theistic evolution or evolutionary creationism is a case in point. Some prefer to be accepted and considered "scholarly" by the academic community more than accepting the revealed word of God, the acceptance of which requires the rejection of no scientific fact. Premillennalism is a compromising theory between Scripture and the imaginative and fanciful speculations of men regarding the Lord's return. The fact that the theory blatantly contradicts the Bible seems not be of concern to many who wish to get along and have fellowship regardless of the truth. Paul warned against being spoiled by the philosophies of men (Colossians 2:8), and so-called science (First Timothy 6:20). Attempts to harmonize truth and error gives stature to error and pollutes truth.

Only Positive Preaching

In our day, a major contributing factor to digression and apostasy is the cry for what is called positive preaching and the abandonment of what is called negative preaching. Faithful brethren everywhere have been under severe attack to cease negative preaching altogether and engage only in positive preaching. Some are apologetic for the exposure of error. They fail to recognize, just as did Ahab, who is the real troubler of Israel. The prophet of God, Elijah, was not the cause of trouble in Israel as he exposed the sins of the king and the people. It was the king and the people in their sins. Those who oppose error are not the troublers, but those who promote it. Too many so-called preachers today are

mere hirelings holding on to a job, seeking to be popular, preferring to be the "man of the year," rather than God's messenger, afraid of offending evildoers, and unwilling to cross wickedness in high and low places.

Weak Elders

There are too many so-called elders who are weak, ignorant, who will not be warned, who will not keep alert and informed, who refuse to refute the gainsayer, but prefer to attack those who do, who are led about by the liberal and worldly members as puppets on a string, seeking to keep the peace while kicking the principles of truth to do so. They are moral cowards and make themselves unfit for their duties. Elders of the church could stop the digression of the brotherhood overnight if they were not so much a part of it. But far too many lack the spiritual backbone to do anything except wage war on those faithful brethren who are determined that error shall not pass. Paul warned, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.*" This has been the sad record of the history of the church that such has occurred so often. Some will not try to stop the departure from the faith, and resent those who try to stop it.

Pseudo-love

Another cause of apostasy is the distorted concept of love. Love is a basic and fundamental Christian attribute and quality. But some have concluded that all opposition to sin stems from hatred of other people. To them, love means a limitless indulgence and toleration of sin, a longsuffering attitude toward the destruction of the truth. They consider discipline an act of hatred, not realizing that a "*little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (First Corinthians 5:6). Paul said to purge out what needed purging, but he was not an apostle of hate.

We sometimes hear the pitiable wail, "We all sin, therefore, we must be loving and patient." It is true we all sin, but to use this truth to stifle rebuke, reproof, and disciple is wrong. Many have the attitude, "Love me an leave me alone to do as I see fit regardless of who or what is hurts and adversely affects." Some act as if their evil is nobody's business but their own. But how they talk love. It has been my experience that those who talk love so piously and sweetly are often the meanest, most vicious, undermining, backbiting, and back-stabbling people on earth. What they call love is nothing but a cover for their digression and apostasy.

No Authority

Apostasy is caused by leaving the principle that demands authority for what we say and do. Colossians 3:17, *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ..."* The instrument of music used in the worship came into the church and divided it because some left the necessity for authority for what we do. The missionary society that split the restoration movement resulted from this same fault. The work of the church today is being confused and misled on the same basis. Error is coming into the church under the disguise of methodology. Methods have to be used, but only to accomplish what is authorized to be done. It is not the work of the church to engage in entertainment, recreation, build gymnasiums, etc. For too many brethren, numbers is the name of the game and whatever produces numbers is the way to go. They cry, just like those of the Christian Church, "The Bible does not say not to." This is the way some are pushing the colleges into the budgets of churches. They contend that it is not specifically condemned, then it is all right. "What's wrong with it," they ask. That which is wrong with it is the lack of Biblical authority for it. Once we leave the necessity for authority, we have adopted the very position that allows anything people want; anything Catholicism or denominationalism wishes so long as we do not have a "thou shalt not." The same principle is true regarding innovations in worship such as humming, dancing, clapping, choirs, choruses, solos, quartets, as well as instruments.

Marrying Non-Christians

Marrying those who are not Christians has taken a deadly toll in the church. Foreign wives destroyed Solomon (First Kings 14:11). His wives turned his heart after other gods. What was true with Solomon and Israel remains true today. Those who have studied the impact of mixed marriages on the church have said that seven of ten who marry outside the church will leave the church. Only one of six convert their mate. Where the mate is converted is the exception, not the rule. This is in part due to the weakness of the Christian who reflects that weakness by marrying outside the church. Such marriage situations provoke compromising attitudes toward denominational error. The affection for persons often means a defection from principles. To the unmarried, may I urge you to marry "*in the Lord.*" To those in this dilemma, keep trying to convert your mate. But you cannot convert your mate if he or she sees that you are not faithful, and evidently the faith of Christ is not so meaningful to you after all.

Politics and Favoritism

Jude wrote, when writing of false teachers and apostasy, of some, "*having men's person in admiration because of advantage*" (Jude 16). How much has the influence toward apostasy been propagated by following men. People follow families, children, big names, schools, papers, professors, favorite preachers, monied brethren, before they will the Lord. They oppose error until someone they admire adopts it. They go along with the powers that be in the brotherhood for the sake of getting and holding jobs. False teachers are used on lectureships, in gospel meetings, on workshops, as if they were as acceptable as anybody else. This is allegiance to men rather than truth. Have we forgotten second John 9-11? Does not First John 4:1 have meaning anymore? Are we to be like Israel who followed faithless spies, who followed evil kings, who let the blind lead the blind (Matthew 15:14)? Have we become so paranoid over academic degrees that we have placed soundness and wisdom in the background? Our Lord must be the One who is pleased with what we believe and do.

Wetted, Not Wedded

Apostasy in our time is resulting from the "join now, learn later," kind of conversion, if it can be called conversion at all. Many unconverted have been brought into the accepted ranks of the church and their influence has been to water down the truth and lead precious souls astray. To be sure, when one comes to Christ there is much room for growth. But there is also the need to count the cost first, to know what is involved in being a Christian. We are filling the church with wood, hay, and stubble when we think we can preach Christ and not the church, preach the man and not the plan. These efforts to slip up on people through psychology, how-to-feel-good programs, "friendship evangelism," is contrary to the truth of God as sin itself. Too many in the church consider the church nothing but another denomination. They have simply been wetted, not wedded to the Lord and His body. I conducted a gospel meeting in a city that the year previous had put on one of these great "campaigns." Over ninety were baptized, but only one was in evidence one year later. Those people were misled, mistaught, deceived into a false security, and likely are now beyond reach because of this "join now, learn later," approach, a quick shot effort.

Lack of Growth

Closely akin to the above, we must grow as Christians. The failure to add Christlike qualities invites apostasy. When Peter listed the "Christian virtues" of Second Peter 1:5-7, he concluded by saying, "*For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things ye shall never fall.*" (Second Peter 1:8-10). But what if one does not do these things? The answer is, apostasy. Are we to expect the blessings of God whether we abide by His will or not? Did not Jesus warn of apostasy in the parable of the sower? Like the seed that fell on hard and stony ground, it takes no root and perishes.

Weariness

But those who fight the good fight of faith are also tempted to fall away by becoming weary in well doing. Discouragement, like that which Elijah experienced, can wear you down. This is why Paul wrote, *"Be not weary in well doing, for is due season we shall reap, if we faint not"* (Galatians 6:9). *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"* (First Corinthians 15:58). Persecution, intimidation, criticism, efforts to ostracize you, rejection, are all provocations to defection and surrender. We dare not let it happen.

Perverted "Bibles"

It is my firm conviction that the attitude that has allowed the intrusion of the perverted Bibles into our midst as if they were reliable Bibles is at the root of the present apostasy. It reflects a disrespect for the purity of the word, the willingness to harbor error, the desire to get along in the sinful world with the sinful, rather than adhere to the revealed word. Once the word, the authority, is changed or tampered with, and still accepted, we have no basis upon which to stand for anything.

Home Failure

The failure of the home has led to apostasy. The home has not always set the example. Rather than creating respect for God's authority, through neglect, the home has failed to create respect for authority. When parents have the attitude, "I don't care what brethren think, I will do it anyway," like some hold regarding dancing, drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking, wearing immodest apparel, missing worship, and many other matters, young people are being taught at home to reject the church. The truth upheld by faithful preachers is cast out at home. When parents are critical of the church, defensive of those who rebel against truth, the youth are taught to ignore what is right, have no respect, and eventually leave the church. This is apostasy and its cause in many cases. While some like to blame the

church for such losses, more than likely the problem is right back at home.

Lack of Love for the Truth

The causes of apostasy might be summed up by saying there is a lack of love for the truth, like some lacked in Paul's day (Second Thessalonians 2:10). Frankly, I am not surprised that all do not love the truth. Loving themselves, their own way, and their sins so much makes it incompatible to love the truth. Paul warned of those who would not endure sound doctrine, but would turn to fables (Second Timothy 4:2). There are those who are destitute of the truth, who suppose the way of godliness is a way of gain (First Timothy 6:5). The fellowship of false teachers is tolerated even though Christ warned against them as ravening wolves (Matthew 7:15). Brethren use denominational teachers, films, literature, methods, language, and when they do, why should we wonder where apostasy comes from?

Ignorance

Apostasy results from an ignorance of the word. "*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God*" (Matthew 22:29). "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*" (Hosea 4:6). Apostasy comes when people give heed to seducing spirits, doctrines of demons (First Timothy 4:1), listening to those who speak great swelling words that deceive the hearts of the simple (Romans 16:18; Jude 16). Apostasy results when people, like those in the day of Isaiah and Amos, say, "*Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits*" (Isaiah 30:10). "*Prophesy not,*" is the preference of many (Amos 2:12). When people start calling good evil and evil good (Isaiah 5:20), the woes of apostasy are upon them. How many are led astray by flattering words, oratory, being beguiled with enticing words (Colossians 2:14)? With such things comes such doctrines as unity in diversity, agreeing to disagree, "I'm O.K. and you're O.K., everything is beautiful in its own way."

These are some of the more notable influences, not all, that lead to apostasy, and they are plentiful, and very apparent in the brotherhood even as I write.

The Cure

We now turn our attention to the cure of apostasy. Some years back when I was a much younger preacher and beginning to encounter some of the doctrinal problems that plague the church, an older preacher (H.A.Dixon) offered me the admonition for combatting such things in the apostolic words, "*Preach the word.*" Actually this is the only cure. We must continue to declare sound doctrine (Titus 2:1), sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:8). We must continue holding the pattern of sound words (Second Timothy 1:3), and speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). As the noble Bereans of old, we must search the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). God told Isaiah, "*Cry cloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression and the house of Jacob their sins*" (Isaiah 58:1). In the time of apostasy God told Ezekiel to be a watchman and sound the warning (Ezekiel 33:1-9). Some will scoff and call you a "brotherhood watchdog," but such people would have scoffed at Paul had they lived then. "*Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one might and day with tears*" (Acts 20:31). Paul preached Christ, "*warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom*" (Colossians 1:28). We must warn of the judgment to come upon those who fall away. "*For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace*" (Hebrews 10:26-29).

Stand Fast

Facing probable apostasy, Paul urged brethren, "*Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as your labor is not in vain in the Lord*" (First Corinthians 15:58). "*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit*

you like men, be strong" (First Corinthians 16:13). *"Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand"* (Ephesians 6:13). Apostasy can reach such proportions that the only thing you can do is to make sure you are not swept away by it by standing firm. We fight apostasy by refusing to give place to those in error for an hour as Paul refused (Galatians 2:5,6) even against those who may appear to be somewhat, but it makes no matter who they are.

Prove the Spirits

Rather than following whoever and whatever comes down the road, prove the spirits whether they be of God (First John 4:1). Despise not prophesying (First Thessalonians 5:20), which we read in Scripture, but prove all things, holding fast to that which is good (First Thessalonians 5:21).

When the Hebrews were threatened with apostasy Paul prescribed a cure, *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation...?"* (Hebrews 2:1-3). Christ admonished the Ephesians as they showed signs of apostasy, *"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent, and do the first works"* (Revelation 2:5). Like the prodigal, the cure and correction of apostasy is to come to ourselves and realize the fallen state and repent, return to the Father for forgiveness, and be restored. Repentance, forgiveness, restoration is the cure. Cover-up efforts and pretending that nothing was ever wrong is no cure, but only a perpetuation of the corruption.

Restore the Fallen

The fallen must be restored. *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"* (Galatians 6:1). *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him. let him know*

that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19,20). This recovery is accomplished by repentance, confession of sins, and receiving forgiveness through prayer (Acts 8:22; First John 1:8-10). Repentance, confession, and prayer is God's "second law of pardon," the law of restoration for those who have apostatized.

Withdrawing Fellowship

Should those efforts at recovery fail, apostasy must be combatted by the withdrawal of fellowship from those who persist in their apostasy. One preacher (G.K.Wallace), commenting on what to do about the rebellious and impenitent members of the church, said, "I know what to do. I got my letter from Paul telling me to withdraw from them. Didn't you get your letter?" Evidently some must think the letter did not mean and include them because they shy away from any disciplinary efforts. Often when proper measures are taken, if they are taken at all, they are taken so long after the apostasy that no real effect of recovery was very probable. Paul wrote, *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us"* (Second Thessalonians 3:6). That instruction is not difficult to understand. We are to have no company with such (First Corinthians 5:9); are to avoid them (Romans 16:17); not even to eat with them (First Corinthians 5:11), let alone invite them to our platforms, bring them on our campuses, grant them space in our papers, and generally endorse them in one way or another as is the case so much in the church today.

While we are not to draw lines, we are to recognize and respect the lines that God has already drawn, and do what He commands regarding it. We are to *"have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them"* (Ephesians 5:11). Not only refuse to go along with the apostasy, but fight against it. Apostasy is of the devil, but we are not helpless in our spiritual warfare pertaining to it.

Drifting or Rowing

Is it not evident, that today, as in yesteryear, some have departed from the faith? Some are drifting. But some are deliberately rowing the ship of faith toward the rocks of apostasy. It is our duty to see to it that they are not permitted to remain in the boat to the destruction of all.

If we are not willing to recognize these causes of apostasy, and take the divinely instructed measures to combat it, correct it, prevent, and cure it, then there is no profit in continuing to bemoan the reality of it. But those who love God, love the church, love the faith, love the lost, love the fallen brethren, will fight the good fight of faith until death overtakes them.

* * * * *

Coming Lessons

There is an attitude among many religious people that God has not provided what man needs. Evidently they are convinced they know more what man needs than does God. They add and subtract from the will of God, contending that what God has given is not sufficient or relevant for our time. Should we make some improvements to put things more in the order man thinks they should be?

Such is a most arrogant and disrespectful way of considering Christ. In view of this fallacy of thought, we shall have lessons next month on the following subjects:

The All-Sufficiency of Christ in Forgiveness

The All-Sufficiency of Christ in Saving Grace

The All-Sufficient Church

The Day of Gospel Meetings



There are those who would have us believe that the effectiveness of gospel meetings has passed us. They prefer something that "draws a crowd" regardless of how degrading to the gospel their procedures might be. But is it really true that gospel meetings are things of the past? I contend strongly that such is simply not the case. Even as I write this we are involved in a most successful soul-winning gospel meeting at East End. It is just Wednesday morning and eight precious souls have been reached by sound and certain gospel preaching. Churches that have given up on gospel meetings need to rethink their decision. They are missing a great opportunity. JWB

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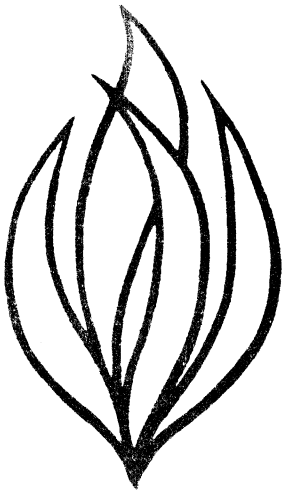

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The All-Sufficient Church

Is there really such a thing as the all-sufficient church, or are we just wandering in fairy land, make believe, fantasy, and wishful thinking to even consider such a thing? Is it really possible for there to be an all-sufficient church?

We read in the Bible about the Lord's church. He promised to build it, called it His, purchased it with His own blood, is the head and Savior of it. Scripture presents that church to us as the family of God, the Lord's kingdom, His body, a building, His army, a vineyard for labor, and other analogies. Is the church He established fully adequate, or does it lack something? If the Lord's church is not all-sufficient, do you suppose man can improve upon it and create one?

Meaning of All-Sufficient

To be all-sufficient means nothing is lacking. It needs no updating, restructuring, but is always fully relevant. If there is an all-sufficient church, that would puncture the goal of liberals among us who clamor for change, implying something is missing that ought be there. All-sufficient means full, and there is no need for improvement, does not allow for change lest it immediately become insufficient. All-sufficiency precludes the acceptability of any other church.

We must consider two elements pertaining to the church. There is the human side and the divine side. The Lord's church is composed of people, a redeemed people. But these people are not sinlessly perfect, but are subject to temptation and sin, in the process of growth, but with weaknesses. The divine side of the church includes the nature, design, government, work, law, mission, terms of entrance, place in the scheme of salvation, identification, worship, and all else Deity has decreed in Scripture pertaining to the Lord's mind concerning the church. None would contend the human side of the

church is all-sufficient. Neither should any suggest inadequacy of the divine side lest that cast a reflection on God.

It is not uncommon for critics of the church to find fault with the human side and use that as justification for making changes in the divine side. But because there are some bad elders, does that mean we should change the governmental structure of the church? Because some preachers are immoral, should we change the message preached? Does failure to do all the good we ought justify tampering with the terms of entrance? Does poor singing warrant introducing choirs, clapping, solos, instruments, and other innovations people want? NO!

Let's face it brethren. Some are lying to the church about the church needing change. They "say" they only want to be more mature and Christlike, but they are altering what God has specified and legislated. We are never so naive as to think false teachers and "change agents" are honest in what they proclaim?

Ephesians 1:22,23

"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

The church is the fullness of Christ. How sufficient is Christ? We are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10). In Christ we receive the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19; Colossians 2:9). The fullness of God is in Christ; the fullness of Christ is in the church. This teaches the church, the divine side, is as all-sufficient as Deity. This strikes a death blow to the contention the church is optional, irrelevant, or needs updating. It shows the all-sufficiency of the church.

Inasmuch as all spiritual blessings are "*in Christ,*" all spiritual blessings are in the church, His body. There are no spiritual blessings outside of Christ, therefore, none outside the church. Now how sufficient is the church?

Not Sufficient For Everything

The church is not and never was intended to be sufficient for all we need to know and have. It is not sufficient as a home. If it was, God would not have ordained both the home and the church. It is not sufficient to serve as the civil government. Again, God saw fit to provide both. The functions of the home, church, and civil government are different even though they overlap in places. The church is not sufficient to provide food for the whole world nor is it intended to do so. It is not sufficient to provide employment, housing, economic wealth, armies and navies, recreation, fun, games, excitement, secular education, parties, etc. **But the church is sufficient to accomplish everything God intended it to accomplish.** Can you name any work of the church for which the church is not adequate? Remember, the church can provide a home for the homeless, but it cannot be a home. We neither need, nor are we allowed, to displace and substitute anything for the church of Jesus Christ.

W. T. Hamilton wrote, "God's purpose for the church is for it to fully express Christ to the world" (Glory in the Church, page 44). The church is the extension of the work of Christ. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; First Timothy 1:15).

Some say, "The church doesn't save you." This is said in the futile effort to make the church non-essential for salvation. Yes, Christ is the Savior. But in a sense the church saves because the work of the church (First Timothy 1:15) proclaims the message of Christ.

Christ came to reveal God to man. The church makes God known to man. Ephesians 3:10, "*To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known the manifold wisdom of God.*" The church not only proclaims the wisdom of God in saving man, but the church is a living demonstration of that wisdom since the church is composed of the saved. The angels, and other faithful men of the past, stedfastly looked for the unfolding of God's plan. When that plan was revealed, there was the church, the finished product. The mystery was no more a mystery. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. said, "The church is the plan of salvation," by which he meant that all that went into providing God's way for

man is embodied in the existence of the Lord's church. The church shows God's love, mercy, and grace, as well as Christ's sacrifice and justice. What a different, relevant, respectful concept of the church this is from the indifferent, take your pick, optional concept some have about the church! What a difference from the Jubilee church bashers and liberals who seek to change the Lord's church into another denomination!

Ephesians 3:21

"Unto him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without without end. Amen."

The ultimate goal and purpose of the church is to glorify Christ, not just for ages past, but throughout all ages, world without end. How dare any frail, weak, egotisical man rave against the church as if it is irrelevant, out-of-date, in need of changing, its worship dull, stuffy, and must change and go with the times or become extinct! The Lord's church as the Lord built it is all-sufficient to bring glory to Him.

Includes All the Saved

The Lord's church is sufficient to include all the saved. The saved were added to the church (Acts 2:47). If any had been left out, God would have been a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35). All the saved are in the church, and none outside the church are saved.

Inasmuch as the church is not a denomination, nor composed of denominations, there being no authority for any denomination, and the Bible never speaks of denominations. how does anyone say there are sincere, knowledgable Christians in all denominations, except their mind is perverted from the truth? That would be heresy, propagated by those who "*serve their own bellies,*" (Romans 16:17), seeking their own fame)Titus 1:11), doing what they do to draw disciples away after them (Acts 20:30).

Sufficient to Edify Itself

The church can build itself up (Ephesians 4:16; Second Peter 3:18). This is done by the church feeding on the milk and meat of the gospel (First Peter 2:2), not by adhering to philosophies, theologies of men, psychiatries, self-proclaimed "scholars," counsellors, and other trained in the doctrines of men. For instance, we are advised we must not create guilt feelings lest we drive people away. Did you read Peter's sermon on Pentecost? When I hear such stuff, it makes me feel guilty because I preach like Peter. We are told we must remove guilt feelings, and this we do, by removing guilt, with souls being washed pure by the blood of Christ. There must be repentance, which is produced by godly sorrow (guilt feelings). People in the church will never grow feeding upon the wisdom of the world.

Sufficient For Preaching

There is no room for institutions to displace the church in seeing that the gospel is preached to the world. The work of individuals and churches often overlap because both are involved in this realm. Some, in their interest and zeal, are not content with God's government to do the work of the church and they establish organizations that displace the church, the church becoming nothing more than a source of funds for their organization. The home must teach the truth, every Christian must do so, the body of Christ must do so. This body has all the organizational structure needed to do the job God gave it without losing local autonomy and local oversight.

Brethren must also be ever mindful of what is being taught, even when the work is done by the church.

Sufficient to Fulfill Prophecy

Have you not heard false teachers teach that the church and the kingdom are not the same? Even the Jubilee masters are guilty of such false teaching. Some like to call themselves the Pilgrim Church. We are pilgrims, but that is not what God called the church. On Pentecost, the day the church began, the prophcies concerning the coming of the kingdom were fulfilled. While some say the church has never existed except in the mind of God, we read of people being in the church in the New

Testament. The Biblical evidence that the church and the kingdom are one and the same is abundant and irrevocable. This smacks of the false premillennail theory as denominations try to separate Christ from His church. They also try to separate the church from His kingdom.

The church was established in Jerusalem on Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection, in Jerusalem, in the last days, with the message of remission of sins in the name of Christ, with power, that power being the Holy Spirit, and in the days of the fourth empire as prophesied in Daniel two. Those in the church were said to be in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). The Lord's Supper, not to be observed until the kingdom, was observed in the church (First Corinthians 11). The kingdom came in the lifetime of those to whom Jesus preached, as promised (Mark 9:1). What came in their lifetime was the church.

Instead of making wild claims, let them tell us what was prophesied about the coming of the kingdom that was not fully come on Pentecost, the day the church began!

Conclusion

Please do not misunderstand. There is always room for improvement in the human side of the church. This truth faithful brethren have ever preached. But that is not what some would change. There will never be room to change anything about the divine side. It is sufficient in every way. It was sufficient to withstand efforts of Satan to prevent its establishment. It has always been sufficient to prevent the devil and his servants from destroying it. It is sufficient to endure, persist, continue, even through eternity in the realm of glory with Christ, the ultimate resting place for those of the all-sufficient church of Christ.

* * * * *

Would you really expect something that Jesus built to be anything other than sufficient?

The All-Sufficiency of Christ in Saving Grace

The subject is familiar to many, yet unknown by most. Confusion exists about it because of much false teaching pertaining to it. For many, all that I can do is "*...put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them...*" (Second Peter 1:12), and "*stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance*" (Second Peter 3:1).

Grace is defined as unmerited favor, denoting the attitude and action of God on behalf of man that man could never earn nor deserve. God has done something for man that man could never do for himself or for any other man. Mankind is the recipient of what is beyond his ability to produce by himself. He has blessings and benefits in both the physical and spiritual realm that come from God.

The grace under consideration is God's grace that saves man from the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). The need for this grace is evident inasmuch as man sins, and sin destroys. Man cannot save himself by himself, therefore, man must have a savior. God has provided the Savior, and the One provided is His only begotten Son, Jesus. It is in the Scriptures that we learn of this Savior and the way to be saved. That we are saved by grace is an emphatic truth of the New Testament (Ephesians 2:5, 8,9; Romans 3:24). Without the grace of God, we could end the discussion of man's salvation right here. How we rejoice in the declaration, "*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*"

Sin Versus Grace

There is an antagonism between grace and sin, with grace being the superior. Romans 5:12 teaches how sin came into the world through Adam. "*And by one man sin entered into the world.*" All the briers, thistles, thorns,

sickness, pain, sorrow, death, jealousy, hatred, etc. are due to sin. None have escaped the guilt of sin (Romans 3:23), except the Christ (Hebrews 4:15). Sin is that barrier that we erect between ourselves and God (Isaiah 59:1,2). Yet, God's grace, extended through Christ, is superior to sin, cover sins, removes sin, and the guilt of it. Romans 5:20, *"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."*

Through sin we lost access to the tree of life; through Christ the gates of the eternal city wherein is the tree of life are opened to us. Through sin we die spiritually; through Christ we live spiritually. Through sin we lost our physical bodies; through Christ we receive our incorruptible spiritual bodies. Through sin we are spiritually lost; through Christ we are saved. There is no sin that the grace of God through Christ cannot cover and blot out forever. There is no "unpardonable sin" when the conditions of forgiveness are met.

Not by Grace Alone

How sad that some so teach as to pervert the grace of God by contending we are saved by grace alone. Such teachers are challenged even here to present the passage that so declares. It is never taught in Scripture. Words like "only" and "alone" have been added to God's Word by man to saving faith as well as God's grace. It is a deadly thing to tamper with the revealed and inspired Word.

If salvation was by grace alone, all would be saved, because the grace of God has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). By God's grace Christ tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). If anyone was lost, it would be God's fault, not man's. If salvation was by grace alone, man would not be responsible for his spiritual destiny. And if any were saved, God would be a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:11; First Peter 1:17). The judgment would be a farce, since man could not do anything about his condition anyway. If salvation was by grace alone, and some are lost, would not this say that God's grace would not be sufficient to save, even though we have already learned how grace covers all sin, when correctly received?

All-sufficiency

It means lacking nothing, adequate, fully supplied, enough to meet the needs of the situation, that which does all it is intended to accomplish. There are some things grace is not intended to accomplish. It will not cover sins without repentance. No sin is forgiven without obedience. Some trash obedience as they falsely teach salvation by grace alone. This is one of the jarring errors of the liberal elements that have divided the church in our time.

When we speak of the all-sufficiency of the grace of God, we are not saying grace is the only element included in God's system of grace. Grace is all-sufficient in the sense that it will accomplish what God designed it to accomplish. "*My grace is sufficient for thee,*" the Lord told Paul when Paul prayed for his thorn in the flesh to be removed (Second Corinthians 12:9). Paul was promised the adequacy of God's provisions for him, enough for him to be strong and overcome his adversaries, and have ability to do his work. God's grace is sufficient to cover all our sins, when appropriated correctly.

The Element of Grace

Grace is a major element in God's plan of salvation. I resent the charge some heretics are making against faithful preachers of the past and present that we have not preached God's grace. Why do some feel they have to lie and misrepresent in order to promote their agenda? Is it not evident that they do this because their agenda is error? God has manifested His grace through Christ, by what Christ did, by what He taught, by what He accomplished, by what He offers. We cannot separate Christ from the grace of God (Romans 5:21). Without Christ there is no system of salvation (John 1:17; 14:6; Acts 4:12). Therefore, we conclude the all-sufficiency of Christ in saving grace.

God's Part

We are aware that some scoff at the notion of "God's part" in our salvation, but scoff they may, it changes nothing. The system of salvation includes God sending

His Son, the Son dying on the cross. This is the work of Deity. The system includes the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. This is the work of Deity. The system includes God's mercy and love for man. This is God's part in His provision for our salvation. But there is more to being saved than what Deity has provided.

Man's Part

"*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heave, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 7:21). "*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46). When Peter told those on Pentecost to save themselves, he did not mean they could save themselves by themselves, but that they had to do their part. There is the necessity of man's faith (Romans 1:16; 5:1; John 3:16; 8:24; Hebrews 11:6). There are works of obedience (Ephesians 2:8,9; James 2:20,24,26; Romans 1:5; 16:26; Hebrews 5:9). Works of obedience are not works of merit (Titus 3:3-5), nor works of which man can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), nor the works of the Mosaic law (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16). But some seem to have the attitude that God must save them by His grace regardless of what they do or fail to do. This is not so!

It Includes Law

God's system of grace includes law, the law God has provided. There is no conflict between law and grace. There is the law of God, the law of faith, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the perfect law of liberty, the law of Christ (Romans 3:27; 7:22; 8:2; James 1:25; Galatians 6:2). This law demands obedience (Hebrews 5:9; Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). Shall we assume we can dismiss the necessity of obedience and be saved?

We are delivered from the law of Moses, but not all law. We are delivered from the law of sin and death, but not all law. There are different kinds of faith, different kinds of works, different kinds of law. But, remember, one element of God's system separated from the others will not produce salvation by itself. God has drawn His pattern to perfection, and we take it all, not any part to the exclusion of another.

Grace Can Be Rejected

Galatians 2:21 tells how we can frustrate the grace of God. Some Galatians were doing that by returning to and relying upon the Mosaic law. We can fail of the grace of God and not enjoy the benefits of that which God intends (Hebrews 12:15). We can even make the grace of Christ of none effect (Galatians 5:4; First Corinthians 1:17), by falling from grace.

Salvation is God's gift to man (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 6:23). "*But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" Because salvation is by grace, it is a gift, not earned, merited, nor deserved. But every gift has a Giver, and every gift has a receiver. Man receives God's gift by meeting God's condition. We in no way earn our gift when we are obedient, and no faithful brother has ever so taught, as some digressive apostates have charged (Luke 17:10). Man rejects the grace of God by not meeting God's conditions. Like the city of Jericho, which was a gift to Israel when they obeyed His plan, salvation is our gift when we obey His plan. For this reason none have occasion to boast (Romans 3:27).

A Glorious Thought

What a glorious thought! We can be saved! How glorious is the truth that God's grace is universally offered, and extends to all. Salvation, therefore, is open to "*whoso ever will.*" We are all in need of salvation; Christ tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9); He forgives the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2); all will be saved the same way (Acts 15:9; Romans 3:29). This is why the gospel must be preached to every creature (Mark 16:15), so all can hear, and obey by believing in Christ, repenting of sin, confessing their faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ.

When you seriously consider man in his lost condition, and the glory and majesty of God, it is a wonder that God offers to have fellowship with us. But by His grace through Jesus Christ, this bounty we can enjoy.

* * * * *

The All-Sufficiency of Christ in Forgiveness

We are dealing with a key issue of New Testament Christianity. Forgiveness is at the heart of the faith of Jesus Christ. In this study we will consider forgiveness from two points of view: (1) as a benefit and blessing we receive for ourselves, the forgiveness we receive from God, and (2) our duty and privilege of forgiving each other. Man's greatest need is to be forgiven of sins by the heavenly Father because our sins alienate from God. This need is supplied through Christ. The forgiving spirit we are to have toward others has been determined by Christ. He is our Master, Teacher, and Example.

Forgiveness is a matter of the mind or heart (Matthew 18:35). "*So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye* ***from your hearts*** (emphasis, JWB), *forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*" Living a Christlike life involves having the same mind or attitude toward things as Jesus. "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*" (Philippians 2:5). This was stated in the context of having humility and the spirit of obedience. But who would question that the mind of Christ is to be our standard in all things?

Being a forgiving person is a matter of being obedient whether we are considering our forgiveness from God, or our being forgiving toward others. We must know what Christ has done in this matter, what He taught on the subject, and what He expects from us in both areas.

What Does It Mean To Forgive?

Various definitions are found in the dictionaries as well as descriptions of instances of forgiveness. It means to throw away guilt, pass over, erase, pardon, cancel, release, not count, blot out, remit, wipe away. As one has defined, "It"s over and done." I prefer the definition,

"**Let it go.**" Something is said or done that ought not have, but God let's it go as if it never occurred. Someone offends another, but the offended one **let's it go**.

The Mission of Christ

When our Lord Jesus came to this earth, a major part of His mission was to provide the way of forgiveness. Luke 24:47, "*And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*" Acts 5:30,31, "*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*" Acts 13:38, "*Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.*" Ephesians 4:32, "*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*" Colossians 2:13, "*And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.*" It was announced to Mary before His birth, Luke 1:77, "*To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.*" There is no separation of forgiveness and Christ. First Timothy 1:15, "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*" Jesus provided for our forgiveness, and taught us to forgive those who sin against us. Scripture reveals **HOW** He fulfilled His mission. Forgiveness is important to us because we all sin (Romans 3:23). We sell our souls to Satan by sinning.

What He Did Is Sufficient

A person is most blessed when he is forgiven. Romans 4:7,8, "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*" So often men try to cover their sins the wrong way. Proverbs 28:13, "*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*" We cannot cover sins by working them off. When one obeys the gospel he is in no way attempting to work his way to heaven by his own merit. You cannot do enough good to remove the guilt of sin.

You cannot cover your sins by shifting the blame to another as was attempted by Adam, Eve, Aaron, Saul, and others. You certainly cannot remove the guilt of sin by denying you have sinned, calling evil good and good evil. Isaiah 5:20, "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*" **The only way to cover sins is for sins to be forgiven.**

The Role of Christ

How did Christ provide for our forgiveness? His is the role of a Redeemer who purchased us with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Ephesians 1:7, "*In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*" He stated that He came to "*give his life a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28), and that His blood would be "*shed for many for the remission of sin*" (Matthew 26:28). We noted that we sell our souls to Satan by sinning, but now we can add that He bought us back by His blood. For this reason we are not our own, having been bought with a price (First Corinthians 3:23). "*Ye are Christ's.*" First Corinthians 6:19,20, "... *ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods*".

We are redeemed (justified) by His blood (Romans 5:9). The value of something is determined by the price paid for it. We know the value the Lord places on the soul of man, and His church, because of the price paid. Salvation for man did not come cheaply. Our Lord came to be the sin offering for us (Romans 8:3; Second Corinthians 5:21).

John presented Jesus as the "*Lamb of God*"which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29,36).

Only the blood of Christ would suffice (Hebrews 9:22; 10:4; 9:12). After His sacrifice "*there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins*" (Hebrews 10:26). The sufficiency of Christ in forgiveness is noted in the fact that He was offered only once (Hebrews 9:28; 10:18). There is no need for repeated sacrifices as was done under the Mosaic system. The sufficiency of Christ in forgiveness is seen

also in that He covers the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2), by being the propitiation for our sins.

Where Forgiveness Takes Place

Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God. Luke 5:21, "*Who can forgive sins but God?*" Jesus said, "*The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins*" (Matthew 9:6). It is God who forgives. Forgiveness is not determined by how we feel, nor according to man's terms (Romans 10:2). We are not forgiven because of our sincerity or the intensity of our recognition of our need and desire to be forgiven. God is the One offended when we sin, and God determines how we are to be forgiven. We must consent and conform to His way in order to be forgiven. It is His way or not at all.

Our Part

This brings us to our part in obtaining forgiveness. When is a person forgiven by the Lord? Forgiveness is conditional. We must believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of our sins (Luke 13:3), confess our faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). What right does anyone have to claim forgiveness until he has done what the Lord requires?

Since we are saved by the blood of Christ, we must come in contact with God's cleansing agent. When we are baptized we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was shed (John 19:34). The Christian who sins may be forgiven by meeting the conditions specified for him: repentance, confession of sins, and prayer (Acts 8:20; First John 1:7-9).

We are not forgiven until we have done the will of the Lord.

Forgive and Forget

It is said that when God forgives, He forgets. This is true. Hebrews 8:12, "*For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*" When we forgive, can we forgive so completely? Can we really forget what has occurred?

We may mentally recall the incident as having happened. Even the Lord recalled the occasions when Israel sinned when He was reviewing their history and relationship with Him. We cannot expect to blank everything from our mental memory. But, as God, we can count the forgiven one as without guilt. We can, as we have defined forgiveness, **let it go.** When God forgives us we are first not acceptable to God, but He accepts us once more. We were alienated, but now we are reconciled and restored to peace with God. This is forgiveness.

Forgiving Others

This brings us to a duty we have toward one another. We have opportunity to demonstrate the mind of Christ in us. When Christ was dying on the cross, He prayed that others might be forgiven. Luke 23:34, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" Stephen prayed for the forgiveness of his persecutors. Acts 7:60, "*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*" Paul prayed for those who had sinned against him. Second Timothy 4:15, "*May it not be laid to their charge.*" Stephen and Paul showed the mind of Christ living in them.

Offenses come. The important matter is how we deal with them. Let us insert here that every offense is not necessarily a sin against us. Some of us are overly sensitive, wearing our feelings on our sleeve, just looking for something about which to feel slighted. We have no right to be offended by the trivial and petty things, differences of opinion, or accidents. So many times people get at odds with each other over things that really do not matter. **Let it go.**

We are taught to pray, "*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*" (Matthew 6:12). "*And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your heavenly Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses*" (Mark 11:25,26). We must forgive to be forgiven (Luke 6:37). "*Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*"

The alternative to forgiveness is to be unforgiving, seek retaliation and vengeance, nurse a grudge, even the

score, and retain the barrier, as well as not be forgiven ourselves. Is such misery worth it? Vengeance belongs to God anyway (Romans 12:19). Grudge holding only hurts the one who holds the grudge. Cannot we easily comprehend the Lord's attitude toward those who will not forgive. Pause from this study and read Matthew 18: 23-25 and discover the mind of Christ in this matter.

If you have trouble forgiving somebody, pray like this. "Lord, forgive me as I forgive (name the person.)" I think we will find it easy to forgive others. When we refuse to forgive, and do not have a willingness to forgive, we burn the very bridge of deliverance over which we must cross to enter heaven. Why allow what somebody else has said or done keep us out of heaven? **LET IT GO!** This is a willful deliberate action on our part that we must take, and it is what God expects of us.

How Often Shall I Forgive?

Jesus answered this question in Luke 17:4 and Matthew 18:21,22. There is no limit. Are not we glad God has not limited His forgiveness of us? Should not our attitude be that of the father in the parable of the prodigal son? We can only hope the elder brother changed his mind.

Consider the benefits to all in matters of forgiveness. He forgives us, we are reconciled to God, saved, accepted again, no longer counted as guilty, and enjoy fellowship with Deity. When we forgive others we are united, and destroy the work of the devil. We live and love in peace rather than hostility and hatred. What tremendous harm is done the cause of Christ when brethren will not forgive each other. What a tragedy when brethren, who stand for the same saving gospel, are hostile toward each other. How tragic to face God in judgment with an unforgiving spirit, and unforgiven.

It is not a question of the Lord's will, nor our understanding of it, nor our responsibility regarding it, nor His expectancy of us. But will we do the Father's will and be forgiven and forgive others? That is the question.

* * * * *

The Cross in Time and Eternity

What is the "hub" of the Bible? Where would you mark the center point of its message? This will depend largely on the matter you have under consideration because there are so many "peaks" in the gospel message. Many say it is Pentecost, that glorious day the kingdom, the church, came into existence. Others might designate the birth of Christ, even the coming of John the Baptist, and many will look to the resurrection of Christ. Actually, all these things are so interlocked, inseparable, interdependent, that they cannot be separated. But without doubt, one must place the cross of Christ in this company of "peaks" in God's mountain range of events that unfolded God's scheme for man's redemption.

We must emphasize that the sending of Christ to this world, His life, death, burial, and resurrection are all manifestations of God's love for sinful and undeserving humanity (John 3:16). Particularly is the cross a demonstration of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7), and mercy (Titus 3:3-5). How does one distinguish between grace and mercy since they are so closely related? One might consider punishment deserved but not received as mercy, while favor received but undeserved as grace. Be that as it may, there can be no question that the cross reveals God's provision for man's salvation, the atonement offered, the ransom paid, the demands of justice met.

Prophecies

To study the cross in time and eternity we must consider the prophecies pointing toward the cross of Christ. It is first suggested, though not detailed, in Genesis 3:15, "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" These were God's words to Satan.

The idea of one being bruised for our iniquities was again mentioned in Isaiah 53:1-10, which is a specific reference to the cross of Christ and events surrounding

it. "*Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did not esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for the transgression of my people was he stricken, and he made his grace with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.*"

The forerunner of Christ, John, announced Jesus as God's sacrifice, when he said of Him, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). These are a few of the prophetic references from the past, pointing toward the cross.

Types of Christ

The animal sacrifices, from the beginning and especially under the system given through Moses, were typical of Christ, each pointing as an arrow of direction toward the great sacrifice of the Son of God. Hebrews 9:22, "*And without shedding of blood is no remission.*" For what purpose were these animal sacrifices if not typical of that one of the cross? Remission of sins is not accomplished by the blood of animals. Those sacrifices were repeated over and over (Hebrews 10:1-3). Animal

sacrifice either fully accomplished the remission of sins or pointed toward that which would. It is the latter. They made nothing perfect. There were many sacrifices for different purposes, but none erased sin, but were types of the sacrifice that did erase sin.

Hebrews 9:12, "*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*" Christ was offered only once. The blood of Christ flowed both ways from the cross, both backward and forward, both to cover sins before the cross and after the cross. Hebrews 9:15, "*And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*" The Israelites had dim conceptions of the Messiah and the plan of salvation, but the daily "shadows" that passed before them pointed to the coming Redeemer and His death on the cross.

Additional evidence that animal sacrifices prior to the cross were typical of the cross is seen in the fact that the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ is sufficient, and terminated the offering of the continual animal sacrifices that had preceded him.

Better

The book of Hebrews teaches that Christ was BETTER than angels, BETTER than Moses, had a BETTER priesthood, offered a BETTER covenant, with BETTER promises, which lead to a BETTER country, because it was all dedicated and consecrated by BETTER sacrifices. Hebrews 9:23, "*It was therefore necessary that the pattern of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.*" This had reference to the one sacrifice of Christ.

Hebrews 10:11,12, "*And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.*" Jesus Christ, after His death on the cross and the sacrifice of Himself, returned into heaven

to take His place at God's right hand, a reference to His ascension to the throne as King.

Covenants

A study of the cross in time and eternity also teaches us the relationship of the cross and the new covenant with the law God gave Israel through Moses at Sinai. Christ came to fulfill that law, accomplish the very purposes for which it was given (Matthew 5:17,18; Galatians 3:23-27). He did not come to destroy the old law because if He destroyed it He could not have fulfilled it. He did abolish it (Ephesians 2:15), taking it out of the way (Colossians 2:14), and this He did by His death on the cross. The old law was disannulled by His death (Hebrews 7:18).

Hebrews 10:9 adds to this thought. "*Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.*" The same truth is evident with the rending of the veil of the temple at the time of His death (Matthew 27:51). As long as that veil was intact, the system to which it belonged was intact. When that veil was rent from top to bottom, which in itself indicates an action of God, the sanctuary that had been sacred through the years of Moses' law was no longer so. This marked the termination of that system, its purpose fulfilled.

The death of Christ on the cross was an event that occurred at a point in time in the past. It is a historical event, recorded in both secular and sacred history. The Bible teaches that the whole world, knowingly or unknowingly, noticed His death. Matthew 27:45, "*Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*" The cross in the spectrum of time did happen nearly two thousand years ago.

His Deity Proclaimed

The cross provided yet another opportunity for mankind to observe the display of the Deity of Christ and the quality of His character. We see His patience in suffering, His forgiving spirit, His love for His own, His praise of the Father, His submission to the will of the Father. We also recognize the reality of life after

physical death in the confident statement of Jesus regarding His spirit going to the hands of the Father.

All gospel preaching, which began on Pentecost, points back to the cross. On that notable day Peter declared, "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2:36). The crucifixion, the death on the cross, was a central theme of the very first gospel sermon.

When Paul was recalling what he had preached to the Corinthians in First Corinthians 15, he said, "*How that Christ died for our sins...*" (verse 3). First Corinthians 1:23; 2:2,. "*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness... For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*"

Galatians 6:14, "*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" As John explained His mission and God's way of saving man, he wrote, "*And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world*" (First John 2:2).

The Gospel

Except for the cross there would be no good news, no gospel, no forgiveness, no salvation, no hope, no heaven. Romans 5:6-10, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*"

Effects

The cross in time and eternity must include the immediate and long range effects of the cross. The immediate effect was that God's plan for man's

salvation had taken another giant step toward completion. The stage was now set for the greatest of all evidences that Jesus is the Son of God, His resurrection by the power of God (Romans 1:4). Opportunity for the remission of man's sins was nearer. The means of reconciliation between God and man had been offered. The door was opened for man's resurrection from spiritual death to spiritual life. Justification, sanctification, redemption were no longer prophetic matters, but realities (First Peter 1:19). Those formerly afar off could come nigh (Ephesians 2:13). Man once stained in sin could be cleansed by the cleansing agent, the blood of Christ, that God provided. Man could enter into the body of Christ, the church, where His blood flows freely, and where man can keep on being cleansed by the blood of Christ as he is faithful in that body, if he walks in the light as He is in the light (First John 1:7).

The eternal effects of the cross can be appreciated as we consider the following questions: What is the value of the soul? How much is forgiveness worth? How precious is it to belong to God -- forever? Without the cross there would be no removal of the barrier of sin that can keep us from eternal life. But because of the cross we can live eternally with God. He died that we might live.

How to Take Advantage of the Cross

How do we take advantage of the cross and receive the benefits of what Jesus suffered? We come to the cross and reach His saving blood when we obey the gospel, believing that Jesus is the Son of God and placing our trust in Him, repenting of sins, confessing our faith in Him, and being baptized in water for the remission of sins in the name of Christ, at which time we are baptized into His death where His saving blood was shed (Romans 6:3,4).

I

How does one measure what God has done?

To what can His deeds be compared?

What now can we say

Of that most awesome day

When Father and Son showed they cared?

II

Gaze toward the future; look to the past,

Cover the whole span of time,

Was ever a deed

More amazing to read

Than the death of His Son sublime?

III

And yet we can know by His death long ago

By His suffering on Calvary's tree,

Of life with God here

Each day, month, and year,

And throughout eternity.

IV

No wonder we raise our voices in praise

When we bring the cross into view.

The blood shed that day

Has opened the way

Into heaven for both me and you.

We commend to you, to the world, to all who ever pass on the face of God's creation, the cross of Christ in time and eternity!

* * * * *

In View of the Present Distress



There is a need to challenge the faithful Christians of today to meet the threats against the church that have arisen from a digressive and liberal element who have become malcontent with the Scriptures for a guide. Therefore, we shall have from one to two lessons each issue for a while dealing with false teachers, false doctrines, conflicts in the church, defending the truth, the attitudes and actions we must take. Alongside these lessons we shall continue to present the positive side of the New Testament faith. We wish combatting false doctrines was not necessary, but, lo, the servants of Satan abound both in and out of the church. We shall not be negligent to concern ourselves. JWB

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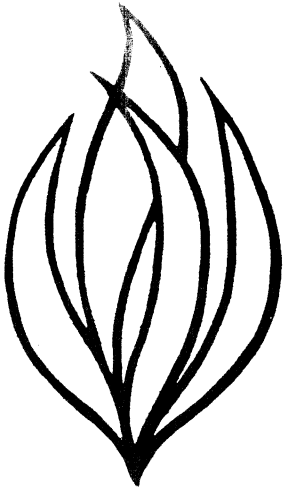

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVII *James W. Boyd* NUMBER 10

How To Defend the Faith by Speaking the Word of God

Long titles almost preach the entire lesson. The way to defend the faith is by speaking the Word of God. The title presumes that the faith needs defending. Some say that the truth defends itself. It is certainly true that the truth is defensible and provides what is necessary for its defense, but it is also true that those faithful to the truth must use the truth in the defense of the truth. There are those that set aside the truth, wrest the truth, twist it, pervert, abuse, and misuse the truth, handling it deceitfully and wrongly dividing it. Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:17), so we conclude that there is validity in defending the truth. Jude urged that we earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3). To do this will include using the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17), defensively and offensively, in the spiritual warfare on God's side.

The title suggests that the way to defend the faith is by speaking the Word of God rather than speaking something else. Defense of the faith is not accomplished by mere oratory, pseudo-intellectualism, mouthing the philosophies of men, using deception, trickery, gimmicks. The faith is not defended by dodging the issues, being "Mr. Personality," compromising with error to get along, relying upon "scholars," nor quoting the crumbs that fall from the tables of the skeptics.

Good Advice

When I was in my first located work in South Bend, Indiana, brother H. A. Dixon preached in a gospel meeting there. I was encountering ideas in religion that I had never heard before, let alone understood and knew how to combat. There were hobbies in the brotherhood of which I had never been aware. It was frustrating and confusing. I asked brother Dixon how one deals with

these things. His answer consisted of three words, "*Preach the word.*" He reminded me also that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), and that was what I must be doing. He advised the persistent use of the sword of the Spirit, the sharp two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12), for both offense and defense. Following his learned advice has proven to be the correct way to defend the faith.

Early Opposition

The faith was under attack in its earliest days of existence. It was defended in the New Testament record by those who spoke the Word. We shall consider several examples of the early Christians defending the faith by speaking the Word of God, and learn the ingredients of defending the faith. We shall also observed some things they did not do in its defense.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the Galilean apostles as Christ had promised and they spoke in tongues, languages, whereby every man could understand their message. "*And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?*" (Acts 2:7,8). It was obvious that what was taking place was the work of God.

But some ridiculed. "*And they were all amazed and in doubt, saying one to another, What meanest this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine?*" (Acts 2:12,13). How did Peter defend the faith at its very beginning against this criticism? "*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words. For these are not drunken as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel...*" (Acts 2:14-16). Then he proceeded to quote Joel 2:17-21, identifying the events of Pentecost as the fulfillment of the prophet's words. He showed the connection between prophecy and fulfillment.

Again, Peter cited David. "*For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on*

my right hand that he should not be moved. Therefore did my heart rejoice and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope, because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life. Thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance" (Acts 2:25-28). He then followed this quotation from David with application to Christ, showing from the prophets how Christ fulfilled the prophecies regarding the Messiah. Like Apollos in Acts 18:28, "*For he mightily convinced the Jews. and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.*" Peter and Apollos defended the faith with the unbreakable tie between prophecy and its fulfillment. How tragic that even some among us today would remove the prophetic evidences of the Deity of Christ and deny they have reference to Him.

Peter also went straight to the issue at hand, which was the real identify of Jesus of Narareth. "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2:36). He was not hesitant to let his hearers know he was bringing Christ and His will to their attention. He shied not away from mentioning Him and His Deity.

When asked a question, Peter defended the faith by giving clear, precise, understandable answers. When asked, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" Peter answered forthrightly, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38). Nobody would fail to know what Peter instructed. His answer was not one of multiple choice. It was not an optional matter. His answer did not leave it to each one to suit himself. It was a clear and definite formula of command in order to be saved from sin. Taking the Word of God, its prophecies and fulfillments, dealing with the issues, answering with clarity and firmness, Peter defended the faith, and many souls were saved.

How Christ Did It

When Christ was tempted by Satan (Matthew 4), He was approached by the three avenues of temptation, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. This

temptation was a challenge to the identify, integrity, and faithfulness to His mission. It was Satan's effort to destroy the faith before it had an opportunity to become real. But Satan was put to flight and the captain of the faith was victorious through speaking the Word of God. In each instance of temptation, Jesus quoted Scripture in answering Satan. "*It is written...*" was His opening remark. It is interesting to note that all three of His answers came from the book of Deuteronomy, the first Old Testament book that modernists attacked in their effort to destroy the Bible. Surely modernism is a Satanic conspiracy to destroy the Word of God. J. W. McGarvey defended the authorship and inspiration of Deuteronomy in his book and his arguments, though they have more often been ignored, have never been answered by the enemies of God's truth.

But Jesus was not the only one to quote Scripture on that occasion. Satan used Scripture improperly and misapplied it in his attempt to subvert the Lord. But Jesus did not let him get away with it. Jesus defended the faith by properly speaking the Word of God, defending its proper use, and exposing the misuse of it. By the Word of God Jesus defended the faith.

Paul, in his defense before Agrippa (Acts 26), defended the faith by the Word of God. He was there because of charges made against him by the Jews. Being taken into Roman custody, he underwent numerous trials and had to appeal to Caesar in order that he might not be killed by the Jews. His defense was more of a sermon about Christ than a personal defense. The attack upon Paul was in reality an attack on the faith that he proclaimed. So often, when men cannot successfully knock down the truth, they attempt to knock down the one who teaches it. But Paul, like Peter, emphasized that he was merely preaching the truths which the prophets had said would come to pass, and showed how Jesus fulfilled them.

Paul did not claim he had been misunderstood. He did not suggest that all that was needed was a better dialogue with the Jews. The issues between them were clear. He never intimated that they ought get together and maybe they could work something out with which they all could live. He preached Jesus, His death, burial, and

resurrection, the very truths his accusers denied. "*Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other thing than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles*" (Acts 26:22,23).

Paul used the same defense of the faith before Agrippa that he had used before Felix. "*Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself... But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets... And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee*" (Acts 24:10,14,25).

More on Paul and Others

This was essentially the same defense of the faith Paul had used before the Jews when they wanted to kill him. "*Men and brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now unto you... And it came to pass that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest... And he said unto me, Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles*" (Acts 22:1,608,21). When the faith was under attack, Paul preached the gospel, the plan of salvation, with disregard to his personal fortunes at the present or for the future.

When Stephen stood before the Jewish council (Acts 7), because he had been accused of blasphemy (6:11), and false witnesses had been brought against him (6:13), and because he had been disputing them (6:9) with arguments they could not answer nor resist (6:110), what was his

defense? He went to the Scriptures and reviewed God's historical use of Israel. He defended the faith by showing the gradual unfolding of God's plan, showing the dispensations, the unity of the Biblical revelation from start to finish, explaining the relationship that exists between the Abrahamic promise, the law of Moses, and the new covenant of Jesus Christ. He preached the Word as his defense of the faith for which he was being wrongfully persecuted.

He also concluded his remarks by making direct, specific, and personal charges against those in error. "*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit, as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers*" (Acts 7:51,52). He did not allow his hearers to leave his presence thinking all was well with their souls while they remained in their sins. Yes, he lost his life, but he defended the faith, and received God's approval for doing so.

Consider Peter and John in Acts 4, imprisoned because they taught the resurrection of Christ. They were commanded to cease their preaching. They had to decide, "Shall we quit?" Listen to him, "*And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them. Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby ye must be saved*" (Acts 4:1-12). Peter could never preach like that over some of the radio and television programs of some of "our" people today. He would never be allowed in many pulpits, even among us, with such clarity and definiteness concerning salvation and Savior. He showed the superiority of Christ above

all else, the exclusiveness of the Savior, the facts of the gospel, the application of prophecy, and spelled out the guilt of his hearers for rejecting Him. Though he was again charged to be quiet about it all, he said, "*Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:19,20). He defended the faith by preaching it.

When Paul was in the city of Athens, among the scholars and intellectuals of his day, the worldly-wise (Acts 17), he was not intimidated by their much learning (vs. 21), nor their ridicule and mockery (vs. 32). He defended the faith by asserting God as the Creator (vs. 24), the sinfulness of idolatry (vs. 25,29), the necessity of repentance (vs. 30), the preaching of the judgment to come (vs. 31), and the resurrection of Christ (vs. 31).

A Modern Blunder

Some years ago, a leading proponent at Abilene of the program called HEARTBEAT, Clois Fowler, received criticism that the name of Christ was never used on the program. He attempted to defend this error by contending that Paul never mentioned Christ on Mars Hill. I cited to him the recorded fact that it was Paul's preaching of the resurrection of Christ that got him to Mars Hill in the first place. "*Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said,, What will this babbler say? Other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection*" (Acts 17:17,18). The very idea of the church promoting programs to make people "feel good" and omit the use of the name of Christ lest it create prejudice. Paul did not defend the faith through deception, trickery, psychology, health and wealth salvation, fun and games, compromise, or cowardice, slipping up on people. And those who attempt to do so today are betrayers of the faith, not defenders of it. Of course, those who promote HEARTBEAT have long ago left the "old paths" for the new liberal digression.

When Paul was questioned by his hearers for preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, brethren met in Jerusalem to learn the will of God (Acts 15). There was an awesome dispute. They did not come together for a seminar to share their views of their past, as was a meeting once advertised in the once reliable Gospel Advocate, which now advertises almost anything and everything anybody produces, whether false teachers or not. They did not come together in Jerusalem to negotiate.

Peter recounted his visit to the house of Cornelius. Barnabas and Paul told of their work among the Gentiles. But James put the lid on the matter with Scripture, quoting Amos 9:11,12, showing that the taking of the gospel to the Gentiles was the fulfillment of the inspired prophecies in Amos (Acts 15:15-19). Letters were sent out so that truth and the faith being for all was defended. By the use of Scripture the matter was settled, even though many did not accept it.

What Was Not Done

It is significant what the early Christians did not do in defending the faith. They never apologized for it, or tried to entertain people into Christ by having the best playground in town, the largest hamburgers, the most exciting games, the loudest musical shows, the finest kindergartens, or the best equipped gymnasiums called "family life centers." They did not use false teachers as authorities, nor turn to the theologians and denominational clergymen and their schemes. They did not continue to promote apostate and unreliable brethren. They were not afflicted with the disease of "go-along-to-get-along" that is so prevalent among some so-called "Churches of Christ" today. They did not discuss politics, jokes, national foreign policy, social reforms without spiritual regeneration, weight loss, nor even what do to about self-esteem. They were not project pushers, program promoters, con-artists, nor did they confine their preaching to "positive" preaching.

They did not leave everybody else alone. I am sure Elymas wished that Paul had been transferred to the twentieth century and left him alone (Acts 13). I am sure the idol makers of Ephesus preferred Paul to leave them

alone. The early church did not dodge the issues with verbosity, loudness, rudeness, ignoring others, displaying a self-professed intellectual superiority which manifested snobbery, heaping personal insults, and answering questions by telling how many schools they have attended and degrees they have. They did not tell inquirers, "You are not qualified to question me." False and irrelevant accusations were not in their arsenal of defense of the faith.

They did even subscribe to putting the "doctors of philosophy" who were false teachers in Bible departments in order to meet arbitrary standards for their schools as DLU did a few years back, and which school even now has on its faculty one who has left the church and "ministers" to a Community Church. They did not compromise nor saddle up to teachers guilty of leading the church into digression because the teachers had a 'big name" and a big following. They did not seek "peace at any price."

Looking in review as to how the early Christians defended the truth, the faith, the gospel, we see they used Scripture, rightly divided and applied. They spoke sound words, with a certain and distinctive sound, not going beyond what was written and inspired, nor adding to nor taking from, but proving all things by the divine standard, trying every spirit, never considering men above what God said, whether the men were friend or foe.

Today, we cannot defend the faith with unreliable Bibles, nor can we depend upon the Bible departments, papers, diplomacy, and community goodwill. We must '*Preach the Word.*" That and that alone will do the job, and that will be enough. It may well be ignored, but only until the day of judgment. Satan cannot answer truth. That is our weapon of defense for the truth.

* * * * *

This was a sermon requested by the Phillips Street brethren in Dyersburg, Tennessee for their lectureship, and preached by me, 1982.

Combatting Resentment

This attitude of heart called resentment is very commonplace in our world. There is so much evidence of it. Resentment is not only common, but deadly, and none seem to be totally immune from it. If everyone would confess, probably everyone has experienced it at one time or another. Surely, we are all tempted to it.

We can contend with justification that being resentful is a detriment to us, and danger to our spiritual welfare, and can damn the soul. The person who holds to resentment lives in the country of chaos, in the state of unhappiness, in the town of bitterness, on the street of misery. Hebrews 12:15, "*Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.*" Ephesians 4:31, "*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.*"

When we consider the pain of stored up hostility, ill feelings, grudges, envy, jealousy, and bitterness toward others, events that have happened, and conditions, is it really worth what is costs to be bitter?

The Bitterness of Haman

Haman is an example of resentment, and it led to his destruction. He was prominent before Ahasuerus, king of Persia. But because Mordecai would not bow before him, Haman was enraged, and plotted against Mordecai. His plot included the destruction of all the Jews. He even built a special gallows upon which he intended to hang Mordecai. But his plot was discovered and thwarted by Esther. Rather than Mordecai being hanged on the special gallows, Haman was the victim. We never hurt those we resent as much as we hurt ourselves. Who would contend that Haman made the wise decision in allowing his bitterness to take him where it did?

Joseph Was Without Bitterness

Quite different from Haman was Joseph. He was surely hurt, sinned against, falsely accused, abandoned, forgotten, and mistreated in miserable conditions. He had every reason to harbor resentment toward those who dealt with him that way. But Joseph was of a forgiving spirit. He had the attitude of Christ. Someone has said he was the most Christlike character of the Old Testament. He was triumphant over what could have ruined him. Resentment grows out of self-pity, wounded pride, sense of inferiority, hurt feelings, envy, jealousy, nurtured by a vengeful spirit. Selfishness causes us sometimes to cling to the bad things that come our way.

Those We Resent

Let us consider more closely those against whom resentment is often held. Sometimes it is a person who has been more successful than we have been. We think of them as not being so deserving as to enjoy success while we have worked hard and have not seen such success as they seem to have. Romans 12:15 teaches us to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice. We may do a much better job weeping with those who weep than we do rejoicing with those who rejoice. We look at someone and see that they are healthier, wealthier, wiser, happier than we are, and we cannot be glad for them because we do not have the same benefits. So we hold a spirit of resentment toward them. Is that proper?

We are inclined to be resentful toward those who may have offended us in some way. People do take advantage of one another at times, and those who hold the "short end of the stick" grow bitter toward the one who has outdone him. We have to admit that people can deliberately take advantage of others. It is not always accidental. They say or do something we find very distasteful and dislike, and do not find it in our heart to forgive and "let it go." When that happens, we are the victims rather than the ones we resent.

We are tempted to grow bitter toward those who disagree with us, especially when someone has successfully shown us that we are wrong in some matter. Nobody

likes to be shown to be wrong. But did you know that if you are wrong, the person who shows you are wrong is really a friend, even though they may not intend to be? Now you can get things right. We differ in decisions, convictions, values, and resent those who differ because they do not think as we deem they should, and as we want them to think. They do not follow our advice.

What Resentment Does

It does have its effects. It can ruin physical health, create stress, cause depression. It can also mess up mental health, cause a troubled mind, and anxiety. It fosters bitterness, cynicism,, making us suspicious of everything and everybody. We get a sour outlook on life, brightest links of life are broken, and we become touchy, overly sensitive, malcontent. We self-destruct.

But the worse effect is that we separate ourselves from God. Can we hold resentment toward others and be what God wants us to be? Surely, none would contend so!

Matthew 5:23, in the teaching of Jesus about making peace with others, we learn that resentment can nullify our worship. What a dreadful thought! If we have aught against another, we better be working on that before another worship period. Likewise, we can alienate members of our family, friends, and beloved brethren. We create the worst kind of unpleasant memories. We get to the point we see nothing good in anything, only the bad in others. And what a deplorable example we set before our children, and the world, to present ourselves as Christians and hold resentment. Resentment is a real "downer" on a good life, unless you let your conscience become so seared that nothing really matters anymore.

How to Handle Resentment

Some people just bottle it up, keep it inside and to themselves, bury it deep in the heart, try to ignore it, but it is still there and grows worse. Like a deep infection, you ignore it, it continues to work, gets worse, until finally it erupts in some form (sickness, grief, unhappiness, alienations, etc). Resentment can be nurtured so long until it becomes almost hopeless to

overcome, and we go to the grave with regrets, with a bitter and broken heart. Ephesians 4:26, "*Let not the sun go down on your wrath.*"

Resentment causes some to seek revenge, pull others down, get even, insult them, inflict them some harm, cause heartache for our enemy, and gouge back. Such as this never settles problems, but only aggravates them. It will bring guilt to the sensitive soul of conscience, and make us uneasy always. We cannot ever be proud of ourselves. I have never seen a vengeful person that seemed happy. They may get even, but on what a low level? All of this behavior breeds hatred, which is the opposite of the love Christians are to have. God tells us vengeance is His (Romans 12:19). We really get out of our territory when we allow ourselves to hold resentment and seek revenge.

The way to defeat resentment is through forgiveness. The best definition of forgiveness is, **LET IT GO!** Have you ever known a forgiving person who was sorry or regretted having the forgiving attitude? It is a Christian obligation to forgive, seek reconciliation, seek peace and pursue it (Romans 14:19; First Peter 3:11). We may have to forgive more than once. Thank God He is willing to forgive more than once!

We may run into a problem when we try to make peace with somebody with whom we have had strains. It takes two to make peace, but we must make sure we are one who works for it, exhausting what we can do to produce it. If the other fellow will not seek reconciliation, repent, that's their problem, not mine or yours. But it is our problem if we are the barrier to reconciliation.

To overcome resentment we must stop reliving the bad things of the past. It only blurs our visions of the present, and places a veil over the future. Why should we let the things of yesterday destroy the glory of today and the hope of tomorrow? What benefit is that to us?

Cannot we pray for those who despitefully use us as Jesus taught us (Matthew 5:44)? He did, and He is our example, and we are to follow His steps (First Peter 2:21). We should bless, not curse. Overcome evil with good

(Romans 12:21). If we are ever going to rid ourselves of resentment and the accompanying evils it produces, we must forgive. The alternative is a life of misery and deprivation of God's forgiveness of us. Is it worth that?

Jesus Could Have Been Resentful

In this life, as far as this world is concerned, others were wealthier than our Lord, although He was King of all. Others had more followers than He, even though He came to save the world. Others inflicted humiliation, hurt, harm, pain, harsh words, false accusations, distorted His words, and finally the cruel death of Calvary. Nobody else could offer to mankind what our Lord Jesus brought to offer us. Yet, the mobs chose the release of Barabbas before they let the innocent Son of God go free. But what was His attitude. You already know well the words of the Savior as He died on the cross. "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

What Will We Do With These Truths?

We will be so much better and happier if we take them to heart and life. When the storms of life overtake us, and temptations come with disappointments, offenses, conflicts, will we follow our Lord? Can the words, deeds, circumstances of others mean more to us than being right with God? Count your blessings. That redeems.

Have we suggested anything in this lesson that is not true? Cannot we accept what will redound to our salvation? These are thoughts each one must consider in his or her own mind and life. We are dealing with that for which we all shall give answer before God. There is no question but our disposition toward resentment will effect this life. And it can adversely affect our eternal destiny unless we get on top of it, defeat it, put it behind us, and press on toward the prize of the high calling of God.

Would it not be tragic that any of us had to exist in hell because we would not turn loose of enmity and hostility?

* * * * *

What Will You Leave Your Children?

"*A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children..*": (Proverbs 13:22).

If you are so blessed as to have children, there will come the day , providing the normal and expected process of life applies to you, when you will leave your children. You will have lived, worked, provided, given, guided, loved, but finished your association with them. Will you leave them money, property, a business, farms, etc.? A parent has not done nearly enough if all he leaves his children are material things.

We should concern ourselves about leaving them something that will endure when all the treasures of earth will have perished, as they must. "*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (Matthew 6:19-21). We must leave them something to help them in life, and prepare them to die and meet God in judgment, which we all must do.

We need to leave them that which will outlive us, and even them, and can be passed on to your children's children. You see, it is not a question whether we will leave our children. We will. And we will leave everything. As a man asked upon the death of a very wealthy man, "How much did he leave?" The answer is, he left it all. The question is what shall we leave them. We provide for them in this life, as is our duty, but does it stop with our death? First Timothy 5:8, "*But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*" Much more needs to be provided than the material and physical needs of life.

A Faith to Live By

Hebrews 11:6, "*But without faith it is impossible to please him...*" Faith provides hope, guidance, forgiveness, security, purpose in life, dignity. To neglect providing opportunity for your children to believe is the worst sort of neglect and is to sin against the child. There is only one faith (Ephesians 4:5), THE faith, the faith of Christ. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Leave your children a faith founded on God's Word.

A Deep Love For The Word

Closely akin to providing a faith, help them develop a deep and sincere love and commitment to the word of God. This, as noted, is the source of our faith (Romans 10:17). Ephesians 6:4, "*...but bring them up in the nuture and admonition of the Lord.*" Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*" Psalm 199:97, "*O, how love I thy law...*" Biblical illiteracy is rampant in our world, even among members of the church. Much fault lies in homes where efforts to teach the children the message of the Bible are not being made. We see parents urging them to learn and develop in so many things, lesser things, that have their place. But what of the most important knowledge of all?

Priorities, Values, Morals, Standards, Goals, Duty

The virtues of the title of this section do not just happen to come into one's possession. We are not born with the proper virtues and attitudes. We have to learn them. Whose responsibility is it to see that your children learn what is right in these areas? You know it is your duty toward them.

"Ecclesiastes 12:13,14, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*"

Matthew 6:33, "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...*"

They must learn personal responsibility and accountability before God. They have obligations that only they can discharge. Should we allow them to think life is solely for selfish gain, or for service to God and others? While they must mature to make their own decisions, we must provide them the basis upon which wise decisions can be made. They must respect the value of their soul. Matthew 16:20, "*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall he give in exchange for his soul?*" From parents children must learn what is the true measure of success. Will you leave that correct measure with them?

A Good Example

Paul wrote, First Corinthians 11:1, "*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*" Christ is our ultimate example (First Peter 2:21). We cannot train them only with words, but deeds. We must demonstrate truth, morality, honesty, industry, worship, love, all the Christlike virtues. They will remember more your example than your words. What you really were will stay with them more than what you have said, even though your words are also important.

The problem many young people have is that they cannot get over the bad example set before them by parents. Therefore, there results confusion, frustration, and disappointment, created when they hear one thing from parents, but see something in their lives quite contrary to it. You will not be the perfect parent, but you can be a good example and show the right path by deeds. We say children need role models, and well they do. Parents should be the number one role models. You cannot lead where you will not go.

A Good Name

Proverbs 22:1, "*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold.*" What will be your reputation? Will you have so lived as to smear the family name with stains and shame that they will have to bear all their lives? Or will they be provided something for which to live, something to admire, something for which to strive themselves?

Will they have something to live up to, or something to live down? What we do affects us, but far more than ourselves for the present. It affects oncoming generations. The difference between character and reputation is well known. Nobody can mar our character but ourselves. But we can also mar our reputations. We should strive to live so that when we leave our children we have not blemished either one.

Good Memories of Home

We should make our home an environment of kindness, comfort, a haven of encouragment, where everyone is challenged to do their best and be their best. Especially is this essential in the formative years of our children. We must think about what we shall leave our children long before the time approaches that we must leave. We must start early.

Our homes must manifest love, security, fidelity, discipline, correction which reflects care. One of greatest gifts a father and mother can provide for their children is their love for each other. Homes must be places where acceptance is evident, even as improvement is needed. Let there be joy in the home.

Some homes are battlegrounds where there is abuse, loud and hostile words, ridicule, and anger. We have heard it often, "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." It need not be a mansion, but it is a relationship of each family member to the other where the will of the Lord rules and reigns, and everyone is committed to Him.

Home is where everybody counts, everybody is respected, where forgiveness is offered, and where, "I'm sorry," may often be heard because it is needful. The primary duty of parents is to provide such things for their children. Guidance, advice, counsel, even rebuke are all vital elements in considering what we shall leave them.

Are You A Faithful Christian?

Many children have never known a Christian father or mother. They do not know the blessings of a home where Christ is King. They are deprived of knowing by

experience what God intends every child to know and have. Children need to left the knowledge that you respected the authority of God, loved the Lord, obeyed His will, worshiped Him, lived like Christ, valued His church, knew the soul is precious and is to be saved from sin. There is more to life than the here and now. There is a hell to shun, and a heaven to gain. Your children need to have the assurance of comfort that comes from hope that can be their own when they belong to the Christ, like you belong to Christ.

The Final Time

There will be the hour, the final hour, when your children shall view your physical body for the last time. Then, possibly more than ever before, will the importance of heritage have meaning for them. You will have transmitted something to them, and they will have acquired from you a legacy. What kind of legacy will you have provided your loved ones? I think of this often, and more often as the years pass by. It is important. I know how important it has been to me regarding my own parents. Doubtless, many readers of these words know first hand of that which I write.

Many people are concerned about how much money their children may get from them as heirs. That may be all right, but dare we neglect the greater matters?

The inheritance of my children depends on what I am doing now. When they pass before my coffin, look upon my face, think about me and my time with them, will they know I have considered these things, thought of each of them, and included them in my daily prayers as the cherished persons they are? Will thay take my body to the grave and be able to thank God that I left them what matters?

God has provided for His children an "*inheritance incorruptible, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven...*" Let us leave our children the hope of that inheritance.

* * * * *

Fighting Christians Are Loving Subjects

The subject of the lesson is an affirmation, a declaration, an assertion of a proposed truth. But is it really true? The subject suggests the New Testament teaching that being a Christian as somewhat like being at war. Paul told Timothy to "*fight the good fight of faith...*" (First Timothy 6:12). He also said, "*War a good warfare...*" (First Timothy 1:18), and "*endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*" (Second Timothy 2:3). As for himself, he said, "*I have fought a good fight...*" (Second Timothy 4:7). Christ is mentioned as the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). These and other military terminologies are used in the Scriptures to describe what it is to follow Christ. We also often find such words as "*contend*" and "*strive.*" John 18:36 pictures the disciples of Christ as servants who are willing to fight. Actually, the servant is a bondservant, owned by another, subject to his Master, bought with a price. As Paul told brethren, "*Ye are not your own.*"

To be subject means to be accountable, submissive, obedient, loyal, answerable to the one over you. As citizens of the kingdom of Christ we are subject to our King. There is no question, therefore, but the Scriptures present Christians as servants, those who are subject to Christ, and involved in fighting. But are such servants or subjects actually loving as they fight?

Our Warfare

We have to understand the nature of the warfare in which we are involved. Second Corinthians 10:3-6, "*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.*" We have an adversary, the

devil (First Peter 5:8). Our weaponry is depicted in Ephesians 6:13-18 as spiritual weaponry. We are in a war of the flesh versus the spirit, good versus evil, right versus wrong, truth versus error, the cause of God versus the cause of Satan. At stake are the minds, souls, lives, and eternal destinies of human beings. This warfare includes both offensive and defensive actions, losses and gains, many confrontations and conflicts. There are hardships and persecutions to be borne, often intense suffering of the body and heart, having allies and enemies, support and opposition. It includes the preaching and doing to the will of the Lord, exposing and opposing everything contrary to it.

It is not always a pleasant undertaking, but it is always the right fight. We wage war for truth, salvation, souls, spiritual peace, fellowship with God, forgiveness and heaven. We wage war against sin, immorality, ignorance, prejudice, unfaithfulness, apostasy, error and division. Unless we understand we are soldiers at war, and understand the nature of our warfare, we cannot be the proper subjects and servants we are expected to be.

Paul, a Fighter

Is it fair to classify Paul as a fighter? Those who know Biblical revelation answer, "Yes." Paul said, "*I have fought a good fight...*" Observe him as you study his life, travels, words, deeds, attitudes, the stand he took and the battles he waged. For what did he fight? He fought for truth, God, Christ, the church, souls of saints and sinners. Against what did he fight? Suffice it to say that he fought every false way.

Did this bring him into conflict with other people? It did, constantly. Recall his encounter with Elymas, and how Paul struck him blind. Consider the Judaizers with whom he always had to deal. He fought with the pagan Athenian philosophers, Roman and Jewish authorities, false brethren, publicly, privately, openly, face to face before all. Paul was always in the thick of battle.

Seeing he was a fighter, could he also be described as loving? Some consider fighting and loving to be opposites. What was Paul's motive for fighting? What did

he seek? What was his attitude toward Christ, truth, and other people? Did he care about others? All we have to do is read what he wrote and know the answer. Philippians 1:24, "*Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*" Philippians 3:7,8, "*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I might win Christ.*" Romans 10:1, "*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.*" Romans 9:3, "*For I could wish myself were acursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*" Did not the Holy Spirit cause him to write First Corinthians 13? Do you think Paul understood the meaning of love and what love is?

A Loyal Subject

Was Paul a loyal subject? Colossians 3:17, "*Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*" Paul was totally committed to Christ. Ephesians 5:24, "*Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be subject to their own husbands in every thing.*" Who can doubt his loyalty and subjection?

Was He Loving?

Did Paul's fighting make him less loving or unloving? Who would dare make such a charge against him? Then why do some today impugn the love in the hearts of those who fight God's warfare as Paul did? Why have some concluded that fighting and loving are necessarily at conflict against each other? Cannot they conceive of hating sin and loving the sinner even as did our Master?

Consider the evidence of Paul's love in addition to his words. Consider what he sacrificed to be a follower of Christ. Consider what he suffered to be a proclaimer of His truth. Consider the extensive efforts, risks, dangers he underwent to take the gospel to the lost. Read his words of affection, compassion, self-sacrifice, brotherly kindness, and heartfelt concern. Listen to his admonitions, his stern warnings, his stout rebukes, the

way he labeled false teachers, his exhortations, his disciplinary correcting. Were they not all motivated by love, seeking the highest good of the other?

On one occasion I received a note from a brother who obviously held a grossly distorted view of love. Following a relatively strong sermon against and exposure of the doctrine of "unity in diversity," this person, who harbored more compromise than he would admit, asked for book, chapter, and verse for manifesting a spirit of disgust and dislike in public for error, and writing that used a long series of synonyms of disgust. He had judged the use of such to be a lack of love and a display of a spirit lacking compassion and consideration. I simply responded to him, "*Have ye never read...?* He did err, not knowing the Scriptures. Had he never considered the words of Jesus Christ publicly spoken in rebuke against the hypocrisy of the Pharisee (Matthew 23)? Did he not have acquaintance with the strong words and actions of Paul toward Elymas (Acts 13:9,10), or in Philippians 3:18,19 as he described enemies of the cross? What would possess a person to find fault with strong condemnation of error and try to conceal his dislike for the exposure of error with the charge that such lacks love? Was Paul disgusted with those who were false? The answer is, "Yes." Did he not love them nonetheless even as he rebuked them? Again, the answer is, "Yes." This fallacious concept of love would rid the church of ever confronting error anywhere. Some would like that, I am convinced.

Only Condemn Condemnation

It is a faulty position and an unwarranted and erroneous judgment of another's heart to denounce the denunciation of sin as if doing so was contrary to love. Such condemnation of the condemnation of wrong has always characterized those who compromise truth. But the condemnation of sin and error is characteristic of God's servants now as has always been true of the faithful.

Such attitudes that only oppose opposing error would, in some cases, have silenced the voices of Christ and the apostles against sin. It charges lack of love, but

misrepresents love. We wonder what extra-sensory power those who condemn the condemnation of wrong makes them capable to judge the hearts of others and damn them for lacking love? Those who condemn error love the Word, the lost, and the saved far more for they teach the truth. Those who oppose opposing sin and error know not what they do. They may seem pious, claim compassion, but are compromising, willing to fellowship the evil works of darkness. Some of the meanest people I have ever had the misfortune of knowing are some who are prolific in mouthing, "love, love, love." They have not the slightest concept of Christian love, what it is, what it demands, or how it is manifested.

True Through the Ages

I have cited only Paul and few references to Christ. We could look into the Old Testament prophets and see the same thing. As for the New Testament, was John the Baptist a man of hate as he exposed the evildoers of his day (Matthew 3:7-9)? What of Peter and John when they were before the Jewish council? Were they fighters? Were they loyal subjects? Were they loving? Yes, Yes, Yes.

Back to Paul. First Corinthians 11:1, "*Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.*" Paul was a fighting Christian who was a loving subject. He imitated Christ. Who are we to imitate? We cannot be Christians today without doing as Christ and His apostles did? We must be fighting and loving subjects. The two activities of word and deed go hand in hand. Who would take away the sword, shield, spear, and armor of the soldier of the cross under the deceptive guise that the use of them is a lack of love? God's favor does not rest on those who would to that. We admonish, be a fighting Christian and a loving subject, speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

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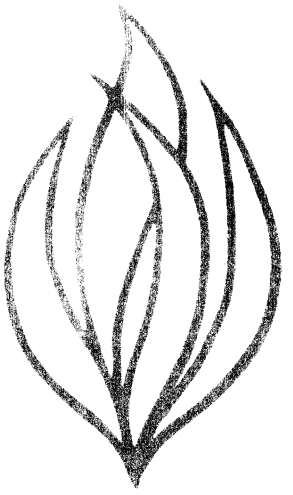

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Current Liberalism

First John 2:19, "*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be manifest that they were not all of us.*"

This passage described those of the anti-Christ element with which John was dealing. It is also descriptive of the liberal and digressive element that has arisen in the church over the past few decades. There are those who were once with us, but have gone out from us. When they went out, they showed they were no longer of us. Because they were not of us, they left. The fact that they left shows they are not of us.

In times past, when digressive movements erupted in the church, those promoting the innovations and divisions at least had the honesty to leave the church. But today, liberals have no integrity whatsoever. They remain within the ranks of brethren in order to sow their seeds of apostasy, taking over properties, deceiving the ignorant and naive, and presenting themselves to be loyal brethren. But they lie and do not the truth.

It is not a new thing for heretics to arise. Apostasy has been a historical fact of church life. The brotherhood has often suffered defections, sometimes of great magnitude, because some became malcontent with the Word and decide they are wiser than God. But there is a major difference in today's group of disgruntled troublers. As noted, they do not go out from us. Today they seek to maintain fellowship, and are allowed to do so by others who are compromisers and cowards, who prefer fellowship more than truth. These heretics have their plans, purposes, methods, and goals to restructure the church into another denomination acceptable to denominations. They could not be successful in their wicked destruction if they went their way, so they stay.

Just why people who say they love the Lord will "go along" with these church dividers and disturbers, we cannot tell, except they too love men more than truth.

Some will even say they do not agree with the liberal elements, but continue to invite them into their pulpits, lectureships, classrooms, workshops, quote their material, send their youths to absorb their heresies, support their functions, attend their rallies, and "go along" as if they were faithful to God. They willingly ignore and disobey Second John 9-11 which forbids extending "*Godspeed*" to such people. They act as if Romans 16:17 that commands these false teachers be marked was never written. "*Come ye out from among them*" never crosses their mind. The prohibition of fellowshipping the evil works of darkness has no application for them. They march in step with those who are destroying the church in our time. To have peace, they gladly sacrifice truth. They often join these apostates in denouncing those who oppose their error.

We shall consider WHAT they do, WHY they want to do it, citing their own words, and HOW they intend to take the church into the religious pits of denominationalism.

Attitudes and Actions Among Modern Liberals

There are things that brethren have done that they refuse to do anymore. They refuse, not because what we have done is wrong, but they want something new, regardless of the lack of authority behind it. They call whatever has been done previously, traditionalism.

A tradition is something that has been handed down. But they fail to discern between human traditions, which are not God's law (Mark 7:8,9), and apostolic tradition (Second Thessalonians 3:6), which we are to follow. They ridicule what those before them have done and obviously think their new ways are superior.

Let them name the tradition of men which we bind as if it was the law of God! Either do it, or have the decency to hush! I predict they will do neither!

They scoff at two songs, a prayer, song, sermon, and invitation. What is so offensive about that? What tradition that they would establish would they substitute for what they deride? They blaspheme the Lord's Supper as "taking juice and crackers." God forbid such talk!

They agree to do and say some things, although it is difficult to get them to speak plainly and with a certain sound. They speak "mush," that can be taken most any way, and when objection is raised, they whine, "I was misunderstood." They speak with "forked-tongue" in order to please men, win support, subvert churches, and get crowds. Again, they lie. They are trying to see how much change they can bring in without somebody objecting. They even admit to pushing, backing off, pushing some more. The only thing of which they speak plainly is their contempt for those who do not agree with them and follow their lead. They are not the kind, loving, non-judgmental, tolerant people they claim to be. They are very negative toward anything negative, condemning those who condemn anything, even sin, except when they want to condemn it. Especially do they condemn those who oppose their digressive ways.

Obey or Disobey

When was the last time you heard a liberal emphasize the necessity to obey God? They call that legalism. They say we must develop human potential and make people feel good. To talk too much of obeying is too restrictive and demanding. They no longer "*contend for the faith*" because they contend we cannot really know what the truth is anyway. They think we can just search for truth, but it is too allusive to ever say what it is. But how certain they are that what they say is absolutely it. They accept just about anything, oppose nothing, criticize only those who contend for the "old paths," and the only ones who are really wrong are those who say we must be right. They deny the church of the New Testament has been, can be, or even should be restored.

They want fellowship with denominations and are actively engaged in it. They especially intend to bring a union between the churches of Christ with the Christian Church. They say they want unity, but what they really want is fellowship in spite of division. Amos 3:3, "*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*" They want us to be like our religious neighbors. Shades of Israel wanting to be like the nations round about! While we are taught to be of the same mind, same judgment, follow the same rule, this is not what they want. To have the

union they crave they would accept instruments of music in worship, theistic evolution, clapping, humming, choirs, special music with solos, baby dedications, Easter, Christmas as religious holy days, false doctrines on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, premillennialism, women preachers, making worship a "holy wow," the church is not the kingdom, Jesus failed, and a host of other false doctrines and practices contrary to Scripture. They have forsaken the Bible as their guide.

The New Hermeneutics

What a farce! Hermeneutics simply refers to principles for interpreting (getting the meaning of) the Bible. We do not "interpret" differently. When we get God's meaning we will stand together. If we stand separated, somebody, maybe both, are misinterpreting. We must "*rightly divide the word of truth.*" But they reject what they sneeringly refer to as "pattern theology." Have they no mind nor ability to read God's Word? Cannot they know as well as any other that following God's pattern for doing things is inherent in following God? But they would allow each one to "interpret" as he sees fit, to each his own, with as many meanings as people. But how they howl if somebody did their writings like that! But they assume the right for people to do God's writings like that! They would not like for people to give what they say whatever meaning suits them, but they would allow everybody to do that to God's Word.

This "new hermeneutic" thing is nothing more than what men have done since the Garden of Eden. It is the same old "you go your way, I'll go mine," everything is beautiful in its own way, do your own thing, nobody is right, nobody is wrong, whatever cuts your butter, spread it, I'm O.K., you're O.K. What happened to good sense?

The Same Old Denominational Line

Liberals today detest being different from the denominational world. They not only extend fellowship to denominations, as we have already noted, but hold joint services with them, at which time they will usually bring laughter from the audience when they ridicule the churches of Christ. They contend there are "faithful

Christians" in all denominations. Just how that can be, since we learn about Christians in the Bible, and read nothing of denominations anywhere, seems not to bother them. They seek the approval of their neighbors, not the Lord. They no longer believe in the exclusive nature of the gospel, that there is one body, or that there is a distinctive gospel plea. They condemn as judging anybody who would say somebody might be lost, and will not go to heaven. That God demands making judgments has no influence on them. They want to be accepted by the religious world.

They are turned away from the conviction of the all-sufficiency of Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). They rely heavily in a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, special leadings, feelings, suggestively reached conclusions. How they ridicule "book, chapter, verse preaching." Those who do that are "Bible thumpers." This betrays the level of "love" they have for the Bible and for those who uphold it. "*O, how love I thy law.*"

Listen to Them as They Speak

"If the Church of Christ were to continue to be what it was when I was growing up, I would not want my children to be a member of it." Then why does this apostate not leave the church, and leave it alone, since he detests it so?

The same heretic said, "I will no longer be concerned about what the Bible says; I will be concerned only about where the Holy Spirit leads me." Well, the spirit leading him will lead him to hell.

One contended that if Mrs. Noah wanted a master bedroom to be paneled with pecan timber there would have been nothing wrong with it. Of course, God said use "*gopher wood,*" but this wiser-than-God "scholar" says it's O.K., so it must be O.K. Who is God to cross him? Those who would teach Noah had to use "*gopher wood*" are ridiculed as "gopher wood preachers." See how they respect the need to be obedient?

They ridicule the need for authority, Colossians 3:17 notwithstanding. They have no respect for the silence of

the Scriptures, assuming they can add whatever they wish provided there is no specific and explicit "thou shalt not."

Another said, "Unless the church of Christ changes their attitude toward instrumental music, social drinking, and the denominations, they are doomed." This man was for many years the president of one of "our" schools. How liberals are willing to accommodate the world! Schools have been a leading and driving force in the current liberal digression. Personally, I have known only one college president that gave evidence to me that he loved the church more than what advanced his school, and that was H.A.Dixon. If there have been others, I never knew them. Teachers, administrators, "go along" and even endorse false teachers to secure their faculties. Many "Bible" teachers have secured their degrees from schools of error, have come back to "our" schools, and brainwashed and contaminated many unlearned and unsuspecting youths. They present themselves as the only minds alive. This has had a devastating impact on the Lord's church.

"If I were in a congregation where the will of that congregation, the decision of the elders, was that the instrument was going to be used next week, I wouldn't mount the pulpit and condemn them and divide the church." That heretic evidently cares nothing for the will of God above the will of digressives. How can a person claim to be a gospel preacher and make such blasphemous statements? Has he no self-respect or honor left in him? O, but he is the "big man" in Jubilee!

Leroy Garrett wrote in the Restoration Review, 1985, "It is a risky business, in the light of the Scripture, to make immersion absolutely necessary to becoming a Christian." Well, friend, the inspired writers of the New Testament were not afraid of that "risky business."

On and on such comments of similar nature, all leading to the same goal of reducing the church to just another religious and human denomination, in order to be accepted by the world. Historically, it is the larger, city, monied, worldly churches that swallow this garbage the liberals pour forth.

But How Smooth They Operate

Many of them are merely aping what they have heard from the self-proclaimed "experts." But some are so charismatic, personable, academically trained that they could, as my Dad once said of a person, "sell an Arab a barrel of oil for double price, and the oil belong to the Arab." (No disrespect for Arabs intended.)

They stress the "love of God," although it is evident they know not what the Bible teaches about love, because they disdain obedience. "Really, God is going to save you regardless of what His law says," wrote one liberal. They have no concept of Biblical grace whatsoever. Obedience is "salvation by works" to them. But there is no conflict between grace and law, obedience and love. "Christians are not ruled by codes, rules, 'Church laws.' Christians are ruled by principles... led by the Spirit, by the nature of Christ, by Christian character, by heavenly wisdom! There ain't no such thing as 'Church laws,' rules, regulations." **Says who?** And who made that rule and regulation this liberal was espousing?

The doctrines of liberals completely destroy respect for Biblical authority. When they are not completely contradicting God's Word, they are sowing seeds of doubt and confusion regarding what it teaches. They even question whether we have God's Word, and contend we cannot know anything for sure, except that THEY are certain they are right on everything.

Some say liberals are sincere, only misled, just do not know, and have not seriously considered the evidence. There may be some like that who have blindly followed the blind. But the leaders give evidence of being dishonest, not caring what truth is, deceitful, and classic servants of the devil. They promote their distorted "versions" of the Bible, deny verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, scoff at inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible, removing its authority and divine origin. They love their feelings and claims of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on THEM.

They hate using logic to reach conclusions. This is because their conclusions are so illogical. They deny

Scripture infers anything, or that implications are authoritative. They say we are governed only by what is explicitly stated, but then they are not governed by what is explicitly stated. We are explicitly told not to add to nor take from His Word. But that does not mean THEM. Even so, where is the doctrine that specifically and explicitly says we are only bound by what is explicitly mentioned? It is their doctrine. Where did they get it, except from their own desire to do whatever they want?

They use the printed page, college classrooms, pulpits of liberal churches, mammoth programs, and circus-type events to attract the naive and propagate their heresies among the gullible, ignorant, and naive, laying emotionalism on thick and heavy, preaching hatred toward those who are determined to stay with God's Word. What a sordid lot of evil people liberals are! Their words and works condemn them! Beware of them!

Our Task Is Critical

We cannot, and shall not, surrender to their erroneous contentions. We will continue to "*speak as the oracles of God*" (First Peter 4:11). We will continue to require authority for what we say and do in service to God (Colossians 3:17). We will "*contend for the faith*" (Jude 3). We will stand for the Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

Who will be God? Shall it be me, or you, some "scholar," some preacher, some editor, the world, some theologian, some seminary, some program, some prominent liberal? Or shall we be content to "*let God be true and every man a liar?*" (Romans 3:4).

It demands that each one decide. I encourage us to be like Joshua. "*As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.*" Now, you can do whatever you wish. But if you want to go to heaven, you better make the only decision that can take you there. Liberalism will damn your soul!

* * * * *

Will the Church of Christ Ever Be Without Controversy?

Why, no! But let us discuss this subject. Let us ascertain that about which we are concerned. We are talking about the Lord's church, the one revealed in the Bible. We are not talking about denominationalism, or any one among the denominations. We have in mind the church Christ established, over which He serves as head, the one He purchased, and has promised to save. We discuss that church. Will that church ever be without controversy?

Let us understand a point or two about controversy. It simply means that there is disagreement about something, sometimes a very serious disagreement. There are varying positions. This results in struggles and conflicts in attempting to uphold these variant positions. We are not to understand a controversial matter as something that can be taken either way with equal validity. It is not something where it cannot be determined what is right and wrong. It is not that we cannot know the truth. It is not a "take your choice, you can't lose" proposition. It is a matter where there is difference, controversy, and both cannot be right. There is right and wrong, truth and error.

Would Be Nice

Would it not be nice to think there would be a time of no controversy? Who would not desire it? Just think how wonderful it would be to be at peace with everybody and everything. It would be a Utopia, a near heaven on earth. How nice to have no controversy with those of the religions like the Jews, Mohammedans, the Oriental religions, etc. But serious differences exist. It would be nice to have peace with all the denominations. How fine if we could consider them all as brothers in Christ, worship with them, go along with whatever they say and do and not be at variance with them. I would settle to

have no controversy with my brethren. "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*" (Psalm 133:1). Who would not want it so? Pardon the possibly harsh comment, but I suggest a person must be a fool who wants controversy when there is no good reason to be involved in it. Who wants controversy for the sake of being at odds with others?

Did not Christ come to bring peace? Is He not called the "*Prince of peace,*" in Isaiah 9:6? Is this not one of His names, alongside Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace? At the birth of Jesus the heavenly hosts sang of peace on earth and good will toward men (Luke 2:14). But there are different kinds of peace. There is peace within oneself, peace with others around you, and peace with God. You can have peace with yourself and not be at peace with others. You can have peace with others and not have peace with God. You can have peace with God and be at odds with your fellowman. Paul's message, "*Be ye reconciled to God,*" stressed peace with God. Reconciliation to God is by and through the cross of Christ (Ephesians 2:16). Christ came to the world to bring man the opportunity for peace with God. "*Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Romans 5:1).

Conditional

Enjoying this peace with God is conditional. One must hear, believe, and obey the gospel to be at peace with God. Many blessings belong to those who are at peace with God, but Christ did not promise a cessation of controversy because one comes to Him. The opposite is true. "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it:* (Matthew 10:34-39). Following Christ may well bring controversy even with those who are nearest

and dearest on earth to you. Following Christ will always produce controversy between those who follow and those who do not.

Paul realized that discipleship and followship of Christ meant controversy. When he and Barnabas went to Paphos, he encountered Elymas when Elymas was hindering Sergius Paulus from hearing the truth. Paul said, "*O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?* (Acts 13:10). Does not this sound like there was controversy? In Galatians 2:11, Paul had to withstand to the face Peter and others who were to be blamed in causing dissension in the church because of racial discriminations between Jews and Gentiles. There was controversy. Paul told Timothy to "*fight the good fight of faith*" (First Timothy 6:12), and "*endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ*" (Second Timothy 2:22). There was controversy ahead of him in serving Christ. Christians are admonished to "*put on the whole armor of God*" because there is a warfare to fight (Ephesians 6:11). Jude taught us to "*earnestly contend for the faith,*" (Jude 3), which would demand there would be controversy.

Did They Ever Ask?

I wonder if the early Christians ever asked the question, "Will the church of Christ ever be without controversy?" I wonder if Paul asked it when he was being lowered down the wall at Damascus (Acts 9) to keep from being murdered, or being escorted to Caesarea to escape a Jewish plot against his life (Acts 23). Did he ask it when he preached the gospel in Lystra and the opposition was so intense that he was taken out of the city and stoned and left for dead (Acts 14)? When he went to Thessalonica and preached, the unbelieving Jews stirred up such a ruckus that he had to flee the city. He went to Berea, and was having success, but the Jews of Thessalonica followed him there and caused trouble against him and the message he preached (Acts 17). Did he wonder, "Will there ever be a time when there will be no controversy?" There was quite an uproar in Ephesus over his preaching that was closing down the idol makers. What a controversy ensued! When brethren

faced death, and false teachers, beaten, in prison, did they ask, "Will the church ever be without controversy?"

I wonder also about men and women over a century and a half ago who marched against the citadels of denominationalism, challenging and being challenged ever step of the way. When they suffered harassment, misrepresentation, conflict, ridicule, humiliation, having to fight the majority at every turn, did they wonder about the end of controversy?

I have often thought of the man, David Lipscomb, who was pictured as an old woman with a broom trying to sweep back the tide. Did he do this because he wanted controversy, or was it inescapable as he stood for the truth against the digressive errors, errors that are even rising again among those who profess to be New Testament Christians?

Peter and John stood before the Jewish council when they were commanded to discontinue their preaching. They were beaten when they accused their hearers of killing to Son of God, as they had done. Did they ask, "Will the church ever be without controversy?"

What of Christ Himself? His life span on earth was but thirty-three and one half years. Yet, it was a struggle from birth to death. Especially were the three and one half years of His personal ministry a constant controversy. Has there ever been a time when serving God was without controversy for those who served Him? Ask Elijah as he comes down from Mt. Carmel from his contest with the false prophets of Baal. Ask Daniel when he is in the lion's den. Ask Jeremiah, Micaiah, Amos, if serving God produced controversy. What of John the Baptist who was beheaded because he contended that God's marriage laws applied to those who were not God's children? Ask Stephen as stones bounced off his body. Who? When? Where has there been no controversy for those who faithfully served the God of heaven?

Inevitable

The very nature of Christianity makes controversy inevitable and inescapable. For this reason, some, being

cowards, shun it. The way of Christ is narrow and strait. There is no room for deviation. To depart from His way is to bring Biblical condemnation. Did not Paul condemn those who preached differently from what had been preached (Galatians 1:6-9)? What of the passage, "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed, for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds*" (Second John 9-11). For this reason, not just any teaching and every teacher is acceptable with those who are determined to be faithful for Christ. This is the reason some preachers and teachers do not belong in classrooms, pulpits, on lectures, on pages of journals professing to uphold truth. The very narrowness of the claims of Christ makes controversy inevitable.

The possibility of apostasy shows controversy will occur. We are either for Him or against Him (Matthew 12:30). We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). We have an enemy that Peter identifies as the devil (First Peter 5:8). An adversary means an enemy, and an enemy means controversy.

The existence of false teachers will mean controversy. Paul warned of those who would "*enter in among you, not sparing the flock*" (Acts 20:29). He warned of those who would speak perverse things and draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:30). John urged that we try the spirits whether they be of God (First John 4:1), and told us why,"..,*because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" When we "*prove all things and hold fast to that which is good,*" (First Thessalonians 5:21), we will have controversy from those who seek error and evil. Peter spoke of false prophets bringing in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them (Second Peter 2:1,2). Shall these be allowed to "do their thing" without being opposed? Will not their very digression from truth produce controversy with those who love souls enough to withstand false teaching?

From the letters Christ sent to the churches of Galatia, there were the Nicolaitans, Balaamites, Jezebels, and the

lukewarm. As long as there are mouths of vain talkers to be stopped, gainsayers to convict, deceivers, subverters, scoffers, deniers of Christ, there will be controversy. Jude called them clouds without water, ungodly creeps, filthy dreamers, and trees without fruit. Was he not involved in controversy? Let me add that as long as "scholars" wish to rewrite the Bible according to modernism, denominational dogmas, and produce so-called versions that pervert the Word of God, those who want God's truth will be involved in controversy with them. It is a tragic shame that many of our brethren have decided that they will not uphold the truth but have opted for new books called Bibles that distort the truth of God. They ought to be ashamed of themselves, and they have no right to claim to be faithful preachers of the gospel. They contribute to the cause of the devil more than the cause of Christ.

Still True Today

The church today faces many controversies, within and without. From without there is Romanism, Humanism, Atheism, scientism, materialism Pentecostalism, immorality, situation ethics, modernism, liberalism cultism, the battle for the integrity, inspiration, sufficiency, and inerrancy of the Bible, and on and on.

From within one can name many controversies, such as worldliness, premillennialism, errors about salvation by grace, false doctrines on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, tongues, the work of the church, the work of the Holy Spirit, orphan homes, congregational cooperation, instrumental music, choruses, humming, solos, special music, the Christian and government, the authority of elders, crossroadism, fellowship, unity in diversity, modern versions, located preachers, Bible classes, the woman's role in the church, various forms of Calvinism, theistic evolution, the encroachments of Bible departments, wearing titles, the food, fun, and frolic entertainment binge, children's church, and this "go-along-to-get-along-ism" that has captivated so many churches of Christ in recent years.

These are not all, but some of the controversies among members of the church. They are so numerous that I am

almost overwhelmed to list those that I have. The Philistines are numerous, The majority seems to have gone the way of digression in our present day. We lean heavily on the optimism of Jonathan when he said, "*For there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few*" (First Samuel 14:6). David Lipscomb once said, "Nothing has given me more pain in heart than the separation from those I have heretofore worked with and loved. The majority seem to be going away and leaving those who stand firm for the old ways. I love to be with the majority, and would certainly go with them, if I were not afraid of offending God in so doing" (Gospel Advocate, 1899, page 104).

The Answer is Clear

The answer to our question is seen in the volume of teaching in the New Testament as to how we must face opposition and persecution. "*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward which is in heaven. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*" (Matthew 5:10-12). "*Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles*" (Matthew 10:16-18). Paul told Timothy, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution*" (Second Timothy 3:12). "*If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf*" (First Peter 4:14-16). Such persecution and opposition would not have to exist except for the fact that those who serve the Lord will endure controversy. The answer to our question is clear. The answer is, "NO!" The church will never be without

controversy so long as there be faithful Christians in a sinful world. Until we all bow our knees to Baal, or reach the eternal peace, there will be controversy.

This being true, we need to realize the futility of expecting peace. To "*seek peace and pursue it*" is the thing to do when the peace you seek is peace with God. This is attainable. But why say, "*Peace, peace, when there is no peace,*" and can be no peace? We are warned, "*Beware when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets*" (Luke 6:26). Some are paying an awesome price to have peace with those around them. Seeking peace with men at the price of compromising and sacrificing God's truth is a greater price than faithful brethren are willing to pay. To have peace at that price is to further the cause of the devil, not the cause of Christ, and will cost the soul in hell.

It is going to be a way of controversy as long as the enemy exists. The work of the church, upholding truth, demands a never-ending struggle, a fight, conflict, and controversy. Possibly we may have limited peace at moments with some faithful brethren, but even that can be fragile and short-lived. In moves some lying liberal, who goes to work among the weak and disgruntled, who begins to clamor for changes in message and direction, and weak elderships grow faint and cowardly, appeasing and compromising, and the lovely peace is broken for those who follow truth. And because they stay with the truth and do not "go-along-to-get-along" they are branded as the ones who disturb the peace.

A Happier Thought

But let me end on a happier note. "*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them*" (Revelation 14:13). In Second Thessalonians 1:6-9, Paul writes of the troublers and the troubled. God's recompense upon the troublers is tribulation, but to those who are troubled, "*rest.*" "*But I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18). Some day faithful soldiers of the cross will lay down their sword and shield. When we, like

Paul, have finished our course, if we have kept the faith, we shall have the crown of life (Second Timothy 4:-6-9).

The writer of Hebrews wrote, "*Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it... For we which have believed do enter into rest... And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest*" (Hebrews 4:1,3,5). The rest to which the writer refers was not the rest that Israel enjoyed when led by Joshua into Canaan, but the eternal rest through Christ. "*There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief*" (Hebrews 4:1-11).

We came to Christ, enlisted in His army to fight and struggle in the controversy for righteousness until death relieves us. There is no escape from controversy here, but eventually, we will exist where controversies end. "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord*" (First Corinthians 15:58(. "*Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not*" (Galatians 6:9).

* * * * *

Is The Church Troubled by Soft Preaching?

People have different views as to how preaching is to be done and what it should include. There is soft preaching and hard, kind and harsh, positive and negative, practical and theoretical, strict and permissive, militant and passive, definite and vague, demanding and optional, label after label is placed upon preaching. We have no aversion to labels that are accurate.

But we can brush all these labels aside with one swoop. The kind of preaching God wants and that we should support must be Biblical. We should like preaching which is recorded for us in the Bible, having God's approval. Biblical preaching, content and manner, is what is acceptable because such is right regardless of what labels people place upon it.

Evaluation of preaching reflects a person's attitude toward the Bible. Preaching may be Biblical but not wanted, therefore, labeled as hard, harsh, negative, narrow, or other terms that are intended to discredit it. Preaching may be Biblical but not accepted by some because they prefer to see somebody skinned, whipped, humiliated, "got told," otherwise, it is too soft, weak, etc.

We request you read John 6:53-61,65-68. Here we have preaching done by Christ. Some considered His preaching too hard, demanding, militant, and refused to follow Him anymore. Shall we consider them right or did He know what and how preaching ought be done? Herod and Herodias considered John's preaching that condemned their adulterous relationship too narrow. Were not the prophets of the Old Testament rejected because the people loved their sins rather than the Word of God? Fault so often lies not with the preaching, the preacher, or that which is preached, but the attitude of the hearer toward the Word of God. They prefer the smooth sayings.

Isaiah 30:8-11, "*Now go, write it before them in a table and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever, that this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord, which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits; get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.*" Rebellious people much prefer soft preaching.

Amos 2:10-12, "*Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even this, O ye children of Israel? saith the Lord. But*

ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets saying, Prophesy not." Some today are like this.

The Ahab Attitude

Too many have shown the Ahab attitude, First Kings 22:5-8, *"And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord beside, that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inqure of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so."* All the Ahab's are not dead!

I Looked, but...

...I did not find many examples of soft preaching in the Bible. In those places where I did find it, it was done by false teachers, and was condemned by God. False prophets came with the message that was essentially, "Do your own thing; go the way you like, and everything will be fine." This was what they wanted and got.

Jeremiah 6:13,14, *"From the least of them even unto the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."* Romans 16:17,18, Paul talks about marking those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine, *"for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly: and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."* Second Timothy 4:1-4, Paul said, *"Preach the word,"* not that which scratches the ears of men. Someone asked what is the worst kind of tickle. It is the tickle in the ear that only a false teacher can scratch. Colossians 2:4 says some can be beguiled with enticing words, appealing to what men want with little regard for what men need.

First Timothy 3:15 says that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. To be anything less or more, to support anything less or more, means trouble for the church, and failure to fulfill a divinely appointed obligation. John 8:32 teaches that truth makes one free. Anything more or less endangers and enslaves the soul.

My Personal Observation

What are some examples of such preaching? Failure to have a Biblical basis for the message, never citing the passages as authority, is soft preaching. One has said he will not clutter his sermons with Scripture references. While one may not wish to cite every reference, he should so preach that people can tell the difference between the Bible and his commentary. With pep talks, emotional appeals, psychology, seminary theology, politics, the wisdom of men, doctrines of men, and book reviews of clergymen that replaces Scripture, we are fast becoming less and less Biblically informed. Christ said, "*It is written...*" Do you suppose He knew how to preach? The apostles constantly referred to the Scriptures. They commended those who would "*search the scriptures*" to learn what was true (Acts 17:11). Whose will are we to preach anyway? Why is "thus saith the Lord" out of style, except some do not want what God says? We should "*preach the word,*" and "*not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ.*" God cannot get a word into some sermons.

Some want all positive and no negative preaching. There have been some very vicious negative remarks made about being negative by liberal people. Some are very critical of all criticism, except what they criticize. Eight of the Ten Commandments are negative. Did God realize that? Should He have done differently to suit the more "loving" approach? Reference after reference can be found that says to be negative. Jeremiah was to root up, tear down, pull down, and destroy, as well as build and plant. Timothy was told to prove and rebuke, as well as exhort. Biblical preaching includes both doing and not doing. It was a balanced revelation and it is wrong to exclude one or discredit the other. Warnings and condemnations are by nature negative. The Bible is full of them. If you do not want negative preaching, you do

not want Biblical preaching, but must prefer soft preaching that omits much of what God has revealed.

Fact or Fiction

Some preaching is not much more than emotion stirring and fictional stories separated from the doctrine of Christ. They are designed to arouse feelings, draw tears, and get responses with a flair for the dramatic and sensational. But preaching is to instruct in the way of the Lord. Denominational people have eliminated emphasis on doctrine because they claim it is too divisive. It does divide, just like there will be the division between sheep from goats. Too many so-called preachers have borrowed from denominations in manner and message. Some have even bragged that have not extended the steps of conversion in an invitation for weeks on end. Some ridicule Biblical preaching and chastise others for preaching entire sermons on baptism. People simply do not know the difference between truth and error because it is not properly taught. Some conduct seminars on how to feel good about yourself, money management, how to grow old gracefully, and lose weight, and leave people thinking all is well with their souls when they are lost in sin.

We hear unsound, uncertain, ambiguous, indefinite, non-distinctive talking called preaching, but it is weak and soft. The apostles gave definite answers to questions. We have some people, like those who operate the Herald of Truth, who will not even answer Biblical questions for those who inquire with Biblical answers. They have developed a "slip up on them" approach. Titus 2:1,8 calls for sound doctrine, sound speech that cannot be condemned. First Corinthians 14:7 demands there be a certain sound, one with distinction. We are to speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). Many have bought the language of Ashdod (Nehemiah 13:24), half in the speech of idolatry and not the Jews' language.

Could Have Been Any Number of Preachers

Two men were listening to a preacher when one turned to the other and asked, "What is he talking about?" The other said, "He doesn't say." Some preach like that. But

when objections are made they whine, "You misunderstood me." Why is it some of our "brilliant scholars" are constantly having to explain what they could have said clearly and plainly the first time if they knew about what they were saying? One preacher preached on dancing and one elder remarked that when he got through he could not tell whether he was really against it or thought it to be harmless. He offered "advantages and disadvantages" to dancing. What advantage does lasciviousness have, anytime?

This nebulous approach is a favorite with some college Bible professors. They simply present all sides to a question and leave things dangling, letting the immature student decide for himself without the benefit of being shown the difference between truth and error. One taught on the subject of instrumental music in worship, presenting both sides, and never showed the fallacy of using it, or showed we must have authority. This is soft preaching. Second Corinthians 3:12, "*Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech.*" Possibly his hearers did not approve of everything he said, but they knew what he was saying. Some try to be so subtle, so diplomatic, they almost apologize for the truth, and their hearers do not really learn what the truth is. It is not unfair to say that some colleges are teaching men to be that kind of preacher. They are plush on polish, and dwarfed on doctrine.

The Sin of Omission

One of the crimes of many of today's preachers in the church is not what they preach that is wrong as much as what they omit that ought be preached. They avoid what might be considered "controversial," which means, what some of their people might not like. Some do not teach outright error, but never teach their people the whole truth. Their sermons sound all right as far as they go, but never go far enough. Unfortunately, they are considered sound, but do not really do their job. They do not and will not say what needs to be said if they think somebody might object. They leave out, omit, dodge, skip, because it was not "timely," or something like that. heresies pouring over the brotherhood that are coming from there. They get their salaries, not for what they

preach, but for what they consent not to preach. Yes, they will preach on love, but never condemn an adulterous marriage, immodesty, social drinking, Calvinism, and other sins that are prominent among them. They will preach good works, but not giving, faithfulness to worship, or against smoking. They will discuss the greatness of God, but never a word against modernism, human legalism, the Crossroads philosophy, cultism, or denominationalism. For this reason many people do not know why many things are wrong. But Paul preached the whole counsel of God, including reproving and rebuking. Ephesians 5:11 teaches we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but some can see liberal brethren worshipping with denominations and never say a word about it. They leave that out. Little wonder churches are digressing! The "sermons" they hear are equally suitable for the Rotary Club, the Methodist Church, or the PTA.

A Despicable Way of Doing Things

Closely akin to the above is the staying away from subjects where "big name brethren," schools, papers, editors, the rich and influential might not approve. Politicians have become plenteous, padding their own pad, wanting to be on the "in" with those they consider "somewhat!" Some brethren will invite men to come among them who have promoted recreation as the work of the church, but scorn those who have resisted them in it. They will not cut their ties with the schools that advocate and promote perverted Bibles among us. They are diseased with "go-along-ism." Their fellowship is determined by friends, family, fortunes, fame, finances, rather the THE FAITH. They show themselves more concerned for self, salary, position, and prestige than their obligation to truth. They will avoid exposing what some prominent preacher has promoted that is wrong. Let some prominent family in the church hold some view and regardless of how erroneous it is, the "preacher" will never touch it. Some want the crowds, the brotherhood awards and headlines, the numbers, with the attitude that says, "Don't drive anybody away," even if you have to compromise the truth. They dare not offend anybody except faithful brethren and the Lord. They want to "keep the peace" when they are not at peace

with God themselves. They go "bananas" if somebody calls names and identifies the enemies of the cross. But if sin is condemned and contrasts are made between sin and righteousness, it has to be done in an impersonal, veiled manner so nobody will think it applies to them. When Peter preached on Pentecost, he accused his hearers of having killed the Son of God, and said, "*which you have slain.*" "*Woe unto you,*" is a Biblical warning. Some have dulled the sword and been lulled by soft preaching so much that when they hear the truth presented in Biblical fashion they get angry.

Preaching Unauthorized Trivia

Soft preaching takes the form of preaching that lacks authority, practicing things that lack authority. We hear of presentations advocating colleges in church budgets, building gymnasiums, playgrounds, fun and frolic fellowship, children's church, humming, special music, quartets, entertainment, women teaching and preaching. In some churches, according to their booster bulletins, more time is spent promoting trips to Opryland than on missions. If the Bible does not authorize something, it is not of God, has no right to be done, must be exposed and opposed. But soft preaching never will do it. The Bible does not have to specifically forbid something for it to be outside God's approval. Some prefer to preach on Ann Landers' comments, or Dr. Dobson, and current events than Christ and Him crucified (First Corinthians 1:23).

God Does Not Want Soft Preaching

These things illustrate the kind of preaching God does not want. It is soft and weak. It will not save souls. It will not glory Christ. It is not true to the Book. While there is no excuse for being crude, slanderous, insulting, or just getting somebody told, neither is there an excuse for a preacher to deviate from Biblical preaching. Preachers ought not do it; elders ought not permit it; members ought not support it. The world must hear the whole truth, and so must the church. Soft and weak preaching produces soft and weak churches, digression, apostasy, atheism, and ultimately eternal damnation.

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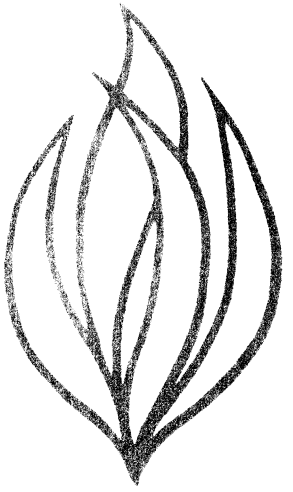
A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James W. Boyd

The Cost of Discipleship

Even though the text is lengthy, it is essential that we get it before us. Luke 14:25-33, "*And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*"

With these words, our Lord projects into our thoughts the cost of being His disciple. Obviously, there are expectations and priorities to be respected. Counting the cost is illustrated in two ways: (1) building a tower, and (2) going into battle.

The great cost of discipleship is also presented in Matthew 10:34-37, "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*"

It is our goal in this lesson to discover what it means to be a disciple of Christ, how that relationship is entered

and accomplished, how it is sustained, and at what cost? What is involved in being a disciple of Christ?

A Disciple

A disciple is a follower, a learner, one who follows a discipline established by another of authority. Discipleship is not automatic, but conditional. It is the result of a willful and deliberate choice on the part of man taking advantage of what Christ offers. He must hear the gospel, believe it, obey its commands of repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ, and keeping on obeying in life. One becomes a disciple by being taught (Matthew 28:19). The apostles were told to "*teach all nations,*" or "*make disciples.*" The same concept is presented in John 6:44,45 where Jesus said those who come to Him must be drawn of the Father. But then He adds, those who come to Him must hear, learn, be taught. The emphasis is on the Word.

Some are willing to start a life with the Lord, but are unwilling to continue. This is a sad reality that has marred the history of mankind and the church. In John 6:59-69 we read of those who followed Jesus, but became resentful when they heard what they considered to be a "*hard saying.*" They turned and walked with him no more. Seeing this possibility, Paul urged, "*Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not*" (Galatians 6:9). First Corinthians 10:12, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" This describes those who are unwilling to pay the cost of discipleship. To be a disciple requires coming to Christ, taking His yoke, learning of Him (Matthew 11:28-30).

We can never earn, merit, nor deserve the salvation Christ offers. A faithful disciple will be saved. But the church, the community of the saved, is not just a storm cellar for the storms of life without expectations from us, and obligations to meet. We dare not be like the beggar who was begging on a street corner, and a potential benefactor approached him, promising to give him alms if he would run an errand for him. The beggar replied, "I solicit alms. I do not run errands." Many may

be like this: wanting the blessings at no cost to themselves.

Christ Paid the Cost

"*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich*" (Second Corinthians 8:9). Christ "*died for the ungodly*" (Romans 5:9); purchasing the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28); tasting of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9); and being the propitiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). This is why Paul tells Christians they are bought with a price and do not belong to themselves (First Corinthians 6:20). Without Christ on the cross we could dismiss the subject of salvation completely.

But His cost is not the emphasis of our lesson, but our cost. The Ephesians who were converted paid a price of their books of error because they burned them (Acts 19:19), counting the cost some fifty thousand pieces of silver. When David came to sacrifice unto God (Second Samuel 24:25), he was offered as a gift everything that would be needed. But he declined the offer, and he answered, "*Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of what which cost me nothing.*"

Some Specific Costs

John 8:31, "*If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.*" Recognizing it is good to begin, but not enough to just begin, we must continue. We must become a disciple, but continue to be what we profess to have become.

John 15:7, "*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*" Originally spoken to His apostles, the teaching is clear and applicable in continuing with Christ. To abide means to live, dwell, stay in. There is a life to be lived if we be His disciples. That life is determined by His Word. Christians were told that "*the word of God abideth in you*" (First John 2:14). How does that Word abide in us? Luke 6:46, "*Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the*

things which I say?" Is it not obvious that the Word abides in us as we are obedient to it?

People are identified religiously by the doctrine they follow. This is how you identify a Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, Mormon, etc. Christians are identified because they learn and follow the Word of Christ. First John 2:3-6, "*And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him, He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk, even as he walked.*" We must abide in His doctrine or we do not have God (Second John 9).

Living as Christ Lived

First John 1:7, "*But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*" This means doing, thinking, and speaking as Jesus would. He is our example and we follow His steps (First Peter 2:21). We are to have the mind, attitude, disposition of Christ (Philippians 2:5), not only in humility and obedience which are underscored in the Philippian context, but in all things. We are to be found "*...bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*" (Second Corinthians 10:5). Does not this demand we have Bible knowledge in order to know what He would do?

Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23

"*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*" Luke adds, "*...take up his cross daily...*" The disciple of Christ has the attitude, "*Not my will but thine be done.*" Bearing the cross is not simply enduring the commonplace hardships and burdens of life that are characteristic of nearly everyone in life. It refers to the trials that come due to being a disciple. It is deliberately undertaking to face and endure whatever is necessary to remain loyal to the Savior. Did not our Lord teach us that hardship may well be out lot, and how to meet and defeat it? (Matthew 5:10,11; First Peter 4:16; Philippians 1:12; Second Timothy 3:12). Do

not ever overlook the precious promise of Romans 8:18, and First Corinthians, chapter fifteen. Read them.

Being a disciple of Christ means bringing our whole being into conformity with the will of God as given through Christ. We are to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:2). We must demonstrate a loyalty born of conviction, in good times, bad times, all times. Being a disciple of Christ is never even suggested to be a "bed of roses" in this life, although there are great joys and blessings. "God has not promised skies always blue." Man must make a choice. Will it be gold or God, Caesar or Christ, men or money, sensual pleasure or spiritual purity? "*Choose ye this day whom ye will serve...*"

There are two ways to live; two roads we can travel (Matthew 7:13,14). One is strait and narrow that leads to life, and the other is broad and wide that leads to death. We must establish our priorities to be His disciple. "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33). Paul counted everything but loss for the knowledge of Christ (Philippians 3:8). Will a man rob God of his talents, time, and influence? These must be given to God.

Even before anything, everything, or anyone else regardless of how near and dear to us, Christ must be first. This is what it means to "*hate*" father and mother. It is the idea of loving less.

A Disciple Follows His Moral Standard

We must give up the sinful things of this world (First John 2:15; Romans 6:1,2). We cannot be like Demas who loved this present world and forsook Paul and all they had stood for together (Second Timothy 4:10). Moses made the great choice to serve God with the people of God, even if it brought reproach, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Some today balk at giving up the lascivious dance, drinking alcoholic beverages, using profane speech. Christians are careful where they go, what they do, what they think. They are watchful for temptations of Satan

that would lead them astray, resisting the devil so he will flee from them (James 4:7).

Being His disciple means keeping oneself under control (First Thessalonians 4:1-5; First Timothy 6:11,12). Self-control (temperance) is one of the virtues Peter teaches we are to add to our lives in order that we never fall (Second Peter 1:5,6). We must be in such control of ourselves that we not become subject to any, or under the power of any (First Corinthians 6:12). We immediately understand the great danger involved when a powerful automobile or airplane is out of control. How much worse when a person is out of control!

A disciple of Christ is a new creature (Second Corinthians 5:17), and must "*abstain from every appearance of evil*" (First Thessalonians 5:22). The church in Thessalonica had "*turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God*" (First Thessalonians 1:9).

Other Matters Discipleship Involves

It necessitates worship (John 4:24). If your faith will not take you to worship, why do you think it will take you to heaven? Someone might whine, "It's more to being a Christian than going to church." We do not "go to church." We are the church, and the church goes to worship. Surely, there is more to being a Christian than worship. Have we not already made that clear. But worship is a part of it, and nobody can dismiss it!

We must grow, adding qualities to our lives and characteristics that reflect Christ (Second Peter 3:18; Second Timothy 2:15). This we cannot do without knowledge of the Word. There is a price to be paid for knowledge. Too many want something poured in rather than something dug out. Ignorance is no excuse (Romans 1:20; Acts 17:30). We cannot experience growth as a Christian without proper food. Shall we grow strong on a starvation diet? We must partake of the "*sincere milk of the word,*" and "*the meat*" (First Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:14).

Certainly one of the most practical and observable evidences of being a disciple of Christ is loving and forgiving. We cannot be forgiven if we are unforgiving

(Matthew 6:14,15). The badge of discipleship that Jesus mentions in John 13:35 is important. "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" Do we love as we must? Do we seek the others' highest good, even at personal sacrifice if necessary?

As for forgiveness, the story is told of Andrew Jackson who was about to be baptized. The preacher asked him if he forgave his enemies. Jackson asked, "Do I have to?" Whether he did or not is not our concern. But that we must forgive is our concern. Forgiveness means **LET IT GO!** It's over, done, passed, and **LET IT GO!** There is more to forgiving than just to quit fighting.

By What We Do and Do Not Do

There are so many things we, as Christians, are not to do. There are the "thou shalt not's" that must be respected. But being a disciple of Christ is far more than just NOT doing wrong. We are people of good works, DOING what we ought. James 4:17, "*To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" Titus 2:14 teaches we are to be a people "*zealous of good works.*" A tree is known by its fruits (Matthew 12:33). What kind of fruit do we bear? Is it the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23)? John taught his hearers to "*Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*" (Matthew 3:8). This speaks of words and deeds of righteousness. Those who were received of the Lord in Matthew 25 were those who had done good things.

First Corinthians 15:58, Paul teaches us to be "*abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" There is work to be done. There are different kinds of works. Some are works of merit, works of the Mosaic law, works of which we can boast. But these do not contribute to our salvation. There are works of obedience without which there is no salvation (James 2:14-26; Hebrews 5:9). Galatians 5:6 admonishes "...*faith which worketh by love.*" Doing good is laying up treasures in heaven, an investment that cannot fail (Matthew 6:19-20). Doing is surely doing as Christ did, of whom Peter said, "*Who went about doing good...*" (Acts 10:38).

Summary

The cost of discipleship includes other matters of which we will not presently speak. But it includes a two-fold mission. It is coming to Christ, and continuing in Christ. The second is impossible without the first, and the first is insufficient without the second. Revelation 2:10, "*Be thou faithful unto death...*" Romans 2:7 we read, "*...patient continuance in well doing.*" The early church "*continued stedfastly*" (Acts 2:42), and so must we.

It does cost a lot to be a disciple of Christ, to be a faithful Christian. Jesus taught us to count the cost, not to decide whether we will be His disciple, but what He expects of us as His disciple. While it costs much to be His disciple, consider the cost of not being His disciple.

Will you not start today with faith in your heart that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, into Christ, and into His body, the church? Then be His disciple faithfully in life. That will assure you of His fellowship here in this life, and a home in heaven in the next.

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(This was one of two lectures I was invited to compose and present at the lectureship in Christianburg, Virginia, 1995.)

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A Word About the Next Lesson

Several times I have been invited to speak to preachers on matters pertaining to being a preacher that, when observed, would make us better servants in our task. It is so easy to blunder in such fashion that would detract from the glory of our message. We must guard against that. I offer some following observations that, in my opinion, need to be respected by those of us who preach lest we bring reproach on the gospel of Christ. JB

Some Practical Observations on Being a Preacher

There are matters of faith, those things where God has spoken, and from which man is allowed no variance. There are matters that involve human judgment and opinion. People can differ in these things without a breach of fellowship. Everyone has a right to their opinion in matters of opinion. Nobody has the right to their opinion in matters of faith when God has spoken.

What I am about to present falls in the category of opinion, my opinion, regarding several matters that I am convinced we who preach should consider. We do not want to bring reproach upon the glorious gospel of Christ by our own failures to conduct ourselves in respectable fashion. But I am sure many of us have done that, not intentionally, but carelessly and thoughtlessly. Often we make hideous blunders trying to be funny, attempting to be considered "normal" like others, to be included as a "regular guy." But we must be careful.

Uncouth Language

I do not have in mind rank profanity here, which, of course, is wrong for any Christian. I speak of words that are crude, without good taste, vulgar, and ill-mannered. I have heard some terrible things come from the mouths of preachers, even from pulpits. If putting the next few comments in bold letters would emphasize them enough, I would do so. But think of them carefully.

There is absolutely no place whatever for bathroom jokes, especially from the pulpit. Is this where we want the minds of our hearers to dwell? Is this compatible with the message of God saving man? Shall we speak of people belching, having bad breath, smelly feet, in the name of being funny? Why talk about the body functions, body odor, using deodorants in preaching?

I am somewhat embarrassed to even mention these things as I try to illustrate what I am trying to say because it is so uncomely. I heard one preacher speak of being as put down as when a dog used his leg for a fire hydrant. What on earth does he mean using such language? Some giggle when they talk about walking cautiously through a cow pasture. Why sink to such low levels? People do not appreciate that uncouth rubble!

Some of us can get so explicit in condemning pornography and describing what we are condemning that it gets pornographic what we are saying. One of the glories of inspired writ is the way it discusses the most sensitive and intimate matters in language that is discreet and decent. Why do we not try to do the same and by-pass the opportunity to play the crude comedian? Why speak of the length of your underarm hair, picking lint from your navel, picking your nose, or sneezing on somebody? It is vulgar, possibly, to even illustrate what I am opposing. But you get the message by now. Using such poor judgment and words is degrading to the dignity and majesty of the divinely given message.

Keep Records

As a practical matter, I suggest you keep records of what you have preached and where. This is not so you will not preach the same thing again at the same place, although that may be good to avoid sometimes. You might be able to preach the same lesson the next Sunday and few recognize it. But I have found that people do listen, and sometime later might inquire about some point, some passage you used in some sermon somewhere, and they want a copy of it. You can provide them what they want if you have a good record. Just a practical suggestion!

Use Good English

We do not have to be specialized grammarians, thankfully. But we ought not "butcher" the language. Thar ain't no excuse for sich as that! One of the more often heard errors is the misuse of "at." Where is he at?" I don't know where we are "at." Leave off the "at." Sentences are not to end with a preposition. It is easier to avoid in writing than in speaking, however.

A story is told about Winston Churchill, a master of the English language, who received a message from a subordinate that ended with a preposition. He wrote back, "This is something up with which I will not put." We should try to learn proper grammar. It helps.

Leave Your Children at Home

I know everybody will not agree with this, but it is my opinion, and you can be wrong if you wish without me getting disjointed. We have four children, and love them dearly. When they were small we had a difficult time caring for them when we would go places where children really did not belong. There are such places. It may be a special gathering for adults, a visitation dinner, or a retreat for adults. You do not have to take them everywhere you go. Not everybody wants your children in their home. Children can tear up things, spill things, make noise, generally disrupt whatever is happening.

My wife had a good way of answering this situation when we would be invited to dinner or to some place. She would say she would return the call as soon as she was sure she could locate a sitter. This put the "ball back in their court." If the person said, "O, bring your children," then whatever got broken was their responsibility. If they said, "Call as soon as you can," you get the message. When someone invites you and your wife somewhere, do not just assume that includes your entire family. Often it does not. You may not go as much as you otherwise might if you neglect this suggestion.

Criticism

You will not be preaching long before you will receive criticism. Sometimes it is done constructively, and sometimes with an evil intent. I recall brother Charles Hoggatt, an elder in South Bend, Indiana making a critical comment to me once (and I knew he did it for my good, because he was that way). He said, "Jim, you put an "r" on words where they don't belong, and take them off where they do belong." I was from the South where we know how to talk. He was a Yankee. What did he know? I asked him what he meant. He said, "You say, 'shugah,

for sugar, and 'Jehovar' for Jehovah." He was right. I have tried to be more careful since then.

How do you react to criticism? We probably are defensive at first. But we are wise to listen. They may not even mean well, but listen. They may see something in us that is a real flaw and we now have opportunity to make some improvement. It may prove that their criticism is unwarranted, then you can dismiss it. But listen to it!

I was advising this once and a man in the audience asked, "How long did it take you to develop that attitude?" I answered, "I'm working on it."

Cut the Gluttony Talk

"Good thing he isn't preaching on gluttony." "Good thing you aren't preaching tonight." Such as often heard after a good meal regarding preachers. How degrading! Preachers may eat much, and some may be gluttons, but not every big eater is a sinful glutton. Some take more coal for their stoker than others. It does not enhance the influence of a preacher to speak of him as a hypocritical sinner just before he tries to persuade some lost soul to obey the gospel. Clamp down on that stuff! It is not in good taste and usually is only done trying to be funny. It isn't funny. It's more of a "put down" than factual.

Learn Some Manners

I do not subscribe to all of the etiquette rules we hear. But some are so obviously good. Can't you learn how to properly hold your fork? You are not shoveling coal. Why push with your thumb when there is bread or a utensil, and then lick it? Don't *s-l-u-r-p* your coffee, except at home. Use your napkin, not your hand or sleeve. A little polish may be in order. You can win the ill-mannered if you are mannered, but you will negatively impress those with some culture if you are uncouth. This is not a trifling matter. Preachers have hurt their influence because they act so crudely.

Something That is Not Just Opinion

Most of what I am suggesting is just my opinion, and you can dismiss it if you like. But not so with this next matter. It is improper to speak of holy and sacred things in trite terms. Reverence and respect for that which is divine and of divine order is mandatory lest we sin by being sacrilegious and blasphemous.

It makes my blood nearly boil to hear these smart-eleck liberals castigate what they call "traditionalism" in such flippant terms. One described our worship to God as two sons, prayer, another song, "juice and crackers." That man only proved that all fools aren't dead. The very idea of speaking of the divinely-ordained memorial to the sacrifice of the Son of God as "juice and crackers." You can see the level of his respect for God and His will!

Why describe fellowship with Jesus in terms used to picture someone on a dope experience, a "Jesus trip"? Shades of the devil at work! Jesus is not a "superstar," like he is the quarterback of religion, or some basketball hoopster of faith. I heard a raving maniac on television tell his audience that they had come together to talk about the Big Man and His Boy. Really! God forgive me for even mentioning this to tell you what I mean.

Heathens may speak disparagingly of sacred matters, but not gospel preachers, in or out of the pulpit.

Who is on the Other End?

Some people sound alike on the telephone. Be sure you know with whom you are speaking. It may be somebody that ought not hear some thing. It may be somebody who is suffering a loss, in pain, or just heard some good news. Do not just assume you know. It can prevent a world of potential trouble for you.

I shall not soon forget one Monday morning about seven when the telephone rang. My wife answered, and turned to me and said, "Betty is on the phone."

Well, I have a sister in Florida named Betty and we joke with each other. So I took the phone and said in a rather indignant voice, "What in the world are you doing

calling me at such an ungodly hour on Monday morning?" Well, it wasn't my sister. It was our soft spoken and gracious church secretary also named Betty. She simply said, "Brother Boyd, I don't have an article for this week's bulletin." I nearly died, and you never heard such explaining that I did. Know with whom you are speaking before you create some real problems.

Are You a "Holy Joe"

Preachers do not mind being considered special people of God because of their work. We should be. We want to be a "regular person," but some bend over the other way and present themselves as so righteous, pious, and good. One brother would come to funerals, having no part whatever, but carrying the biggest Bible around for all to see. He probably meant well. After all, the Word is our comfort and hope at such times. But some criticized him as if he was like the Pharisees broadening their phylacteries. We heard of a person who went to the home of a prosperous brother, and looked at the elegant furnishings, and with folded hand, said, "This too shall pass away." Well, wow for them! Does only one know that? Just too good to be true!

Weddings

This exercise falls into the realm where we are called to assist at times. Save yourself some grief. Be consistent. Never permit the use of songs of worship to be rendered with an instrument. Regardless of your attitude toward instruments in weddings, you can stir up useless trouble this way. We know the difference between a wedding and worship, and we know the difference between a church building and the church. Opinions vary, and elderships decide differently in these matters. So be it! But you do not have to push your "rights" to the point that they create "wrongs." Advise the wedding party of this requirement from you at the start. It usually works out to the satisfaction of most folks.

Watch Your Posture

Don't sit slouchily. If you sit on the platform before your turn to speak, keep both feet on the floor. Nobody cares

what color your socks are, or how hairy are your legs. It is not dignified nor in keeping with what you are about to present. One preacher slumped forward with legs extended during a prayer. He appeared so irreverent, God be judge of this. But he looked that way. There's an all-seeing eye watching you, and it may be some impressionable child who will conclude the seriousness of the activity by how you conduct yourself.

Sports and Politics

I like sports, particularly football. When I lived in Alabama they discussed football three hundred seventy five days a year, usually Alabama and Auburn. I live among some rabid Tennessee fans. One friend and brother had a big Tennessee sticker on the back of his van, and I told him jokingly that if he put one in his front window they would let him park in the handicapped zone. But some are touchy on such things.

People get touchy about politics. I do not hesitate to denounce sin promoted by politicians regardless of who they are. If they are for abortion, homosexuality, sex education from the humanist viewpoint, etc. I preach on that and name them. Politics, tax policies, foreign policies, government programs, have no place in pulpits and the preacher must be careful how he speaks of these things anytime lest he needlessly offend and drive a wedge between his message and some lost soul. Sports and politics are not so important as to overshadow the saving gospel. Just a suggestion! But a wise one!

Start Early

I advise preachers to get an early start on their sermons. Waiting to the last minute can be dangerous because who knows what might come up and disrupt your plans. One friend I know waits until Saturday to decide his Sunday morning sermon, and uses Sunday afternoon to prepare for Sunday night. I warned him about that. Sure enough, one week it happened! Funerals, hospitals, problems! Sunday night he went to worship and still did not know what he was going to do. He told me later he felt so bad when a brother prayed that he have a ready recollection for what he had prepared. He said, "I thought God would

have to do better than that for me tonight." His own fault. Keep a few lessons warmed up. Even if you do not preach regularly, you never know when the local preacher may get sick, be called away, and you be asked to fill the pulpit somewhere. An early start means more thought to what you are doing. It is important!

How to Take a Compliment

Compliments are appreciated but they always embarrass me. Often I responded by saying I messed up on part of it, got the wrong reference, spoke too loudly, one degrading thing after another, just after they expressed their delight in my work. That is the wrong way to receive a compliment. I have finally learned how to handle a compliment if it comes my way . Say, "Thank you," and shut up.

Do You Get Nervous

I have never known the time I can recall not being nervous before speaking. But this is not all bad. It is uncomfortable for a while, but it may be just the edge you need to get into your lesson with enthusiasm and vigor. It soon passes usually. The preacher probably knows more about his topic at that moment than anybody else present because he has just studied it. To be sure, the presence of some is intimidating.

There is the story of one young preacher who was about to take the pulpit, and in walks a veteran who was a real scholar and orator. He asked that older brother to preach for them, who declined. Then he said, "Well, will you leave so I can preach?" He was that nervous. But this may betray too much the feeling, "How am I doing?" Try to not concentrate on that as much as on the message.

"How Are You Today?"

That can result in a lengthy report of medical history. Better to say, "Glad to see you." I really do not know how to handle the situation after worship when people are going by you at the door, and expecting you to shake their hand and greet them, and some good soul gets right in your face and begins a long story or explanation or

question about something and you are caught. When you get that worked out, write me your solution.

I recall a good brother, now dead, who had missed several Sundays due to pneumonia, but who came back one Sunday. I approached him and said, "Brother Turner, you are looking good." He responded, "There never was anything wrong with my looks. I had pneumonia." It would help if we could learn how to ask people how they are getting along. But it is not easy!

Take a Joke on Yourself

Do not take yourself so seriously that you cannot laugh at yourself with others. Preachers are often the target of jokes. I recall a gospel meeting at the home congregation when the attendance was exceptionally good. I commented on it to one of my deacon friends, (the Tennessee fan), and he said, "I have been telling you if we had some decent preaching we would get the people." That same man got me good one day. I was discussing the keys of the kingdom, the key representing authority. I took my Ford truck key from my pocket (and I am proud of my truck), and said, "To what does this give me authority?" This man, an advocate of Chevrolet, I think, said, "Not much!" But good fun is healthy, and you must learn to not be offended by good humor on yourself. You do not have to be the "life of the party," but try not to be "stuck in the mud" with long face and sour disposition.

In Closing

Some of us talk too loudly, laugh too loudly, dress too loudly. But try to be yourself. Do not just imitate somebody, but be yourself. Of course, always try to improve yourself to be as respectable as possible. But be yourself. You will be a better preacher.

Finally, Ephesians 4:15, "...*speaking the truth in love.*" "*Preach the word.*" This is our task. Try never to hinder what you are doing by your own shortsightedness. And when you blunder, get up, improve, keeping going, and do your best. God will be glorified! Now get to it!

* * * * *

Jesus and False Teachers in the Book of Luke

From the inspired writing we learn of Jesus, His Word, His manner and methods, and what He expects of us as we imitate Him. In this study we shall confine ourselves to information found in the book of Luke. At times there may be a parallel account of some event we shall notice, but we shall not undertake a discussion of additional information except what is in Luke. Our subject is not as broad as a discussion of Jesus and His enemies, but concerns false teachers and false teaching, false impressions, and false insinuations, to see how Jesus handled these things, hear His words, see Him as He uses His tools, watch His actions, and observe the display of His attitudes. We shall limit ourselves to a few instances.

Luke 3:21-23, "*Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my Son; in thee I am well pleased. And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph...*"

Jesus Used Scripture

In Luke four is Luke's record of the temptation of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness. This event is probably most often studied from the account of it in Matthew four. The devil is the father of lies and false doctrines. False teachers are servants of the devil. Verses 3, 5-7, and 9-11 give us the three approaches Satan made against Jesus. Notice that the devil can quote Scripture, but he abuses and misuses it. Some are heard to say that one can prove anything from the Bible. This is not so, unless you misuse the Bible as did the devil. The Lord used the Scripture to combat the devil and the misuse of Scripture.

Jesus responded to these temptations in each instance, "*It is written...*" All quotations He used come from Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:13,16. The first words of His ministry after His baptism are appeals to Scripture. Our Lord never strayed from respect for the Word of God, what God said, and what God meant. Scripture was enough to put Satan in retreat, at least "*for a season,*" until a more favorable time.

We also must respect Scripture. Whatever is contrary to Scripture or is not authorized by Scripture, that either adds to or subtracts from it is false doctrine. The Scriptures are verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient, and authoritative (Second Timothy 3:16,17; Colossians 3:17). To realize what we teach and believe must be by the Lord's authority forever disposes of the insipid argument that something is permissible if the Bible does not specifically condemn it. We are to "*speak as the oracles of God*" (Second Peter 4:11), not an idea of the denominational "unity in diversity" heresy.

Jesus Was Logical

Jesus was in continual and on-going conflict with the Pharisees, as in Luke 5:17-26. The Pharisees denied His right to forgive sins, denied His Deity, accused Him of blasphemy. What could be more false than these contentions? But Jesus was not intimidated by them. It was not blasphemy for Jesus to claim Deity. Verse twenty-two, Jesus asked them, "*What reason in your hearts?*" Their reasoning was flawed. Jesus proceeded to prove His identity and authority by the power of a miracle they could not deny (verse 24). His method was to appeal to a sensible and logical argument. If "A" is true, and "B" is harmonious with "A", then "B" is true. Since Jesus had power to heal the palsied man, He had divine power and could forgive sin because He was Deity.

We can use the same method in meeting the false teachers that deny Jesus is the Messiah. The prophets said the Messiah was to die, and rise again. Other prophets foretold many things concerning the Messiah. Jesus did come. He did die, and was raised again. He did fulfill the prophecies spoken concerning the Messiah. This proves He is the Messiah. We need not be

intimidated from using sensible, logical reasoning to defend the truth and defeat error.

Jesus Used Questions

In Luke 6:1-11 we read of an occasion when Jesus was against the Pharisees. He had been accused of violating the Sabbath law by plucking grain. He showed their inconsistency and asked a hard question. "*Have ye not read so much as this, what David did when himself was hungered, and they that were with him; how he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the showbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?*" He did not deny that David violated the Law (Deuteronomy 23:25). The Law did not prohibit all activity. The law even granted certain exceptions, including the doing of good. In verse five Jesus asserted His Lordship and authority, "*that the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.*" He, as Deity, had made the Law, knew its requirements and prohibitions. They had misinterpreted it. His questions shifted the burden of proof to them. It was a hard question, not because they did not know the answer, but the answer would expose their inconsistency and misinterpretation. They did not condemn David who was wrong, but did condemn Christ and His disciples who were not wrong.

Sometimes people cry, "We interpret the Bible differently." Actually, this cannot be done. To interpret is to get its meaning. Unless what God has given is ambiguity and is the author of confusion, which Paul denies (First Corinthians 14:33), one interprets only when he gets God's meaning. All other conclusions are misinterpretations. People often misinterpret differently, but when two people interpret, they will understand and stand alike.

Notice how Jesus made them prove their position. Sometimes those who advance error are heard to say, "What's wrong with it?" They only make accusations of another's position and never assume to prove their own position. Jesus' opponents were left gawking when called upon them to prove where they stood to be true. We must demand the same of those who advocate false doctrines, and not simply assume the defensive.

The Devil is Not Against the Devil

In Luke 11:14-20, Jesus is accused of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub (sovereign of evil spirits). He blunted their false charges, however, by contending that the devil is not against himself (verse 18). Their position was self-defeating. If their sons were casting out devils, was it by the same power? Why would the devil seek to defeat those who worked on his behalf?

From this we see that when something is grossly inconsistent, it defeats itself and is not worthy of being accepted. It is disconcerting to know that one college president contended openly that being consistent was the mark of little people and not necessary. This is probably because he had become so grossly inconsistent in the position he took regarding the distorted modern versions. He quoted, "A foolish inconsistency is the hobgoblin of little minds... Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today... Ah, so you shall be misunderstood? To be great is to be misunderstood." He was quoting from Emerson and endorsing a fallacious viewpoint, but the fact remains at some point he is dead wrong. Maybe this is the way false teachers pursue greatness, being inconsistent and misunderstood. But they are not really misunderstood. They are understood, inconsistent, and wrong. One may not understand the full operation of an engine, but when there is a foreign noise coming from it, he can know something is inconsistent and wrong even though he cannot immediately tell what it is. Jesus demanded consistency from His opponents and this they could not produce.

For example, take the doctrine that one cannot know anything for sure. If that is true, it is false. It defeats itself. How can one know for sure that one cannot know anything for sure if you cannot know anything for sure? Such glaring lack of harmony labels the doctrine as false and self-destructive. Do you not find it strange that some are so blinded by their own determination to go their own way that they ignore their inconsistencies? They have clear warning, but pay no attention.

Again, He Asked Them

In Luke 20:1-8, Jesus is asked about His authority. He responded by asking a question of His opponents. He asked that they first tell Him whether the baptism of John was from man or heaven. Either way they answered, they were cornered. If from God, they had refused to heed John's teaching. But if they said John taught from men, they would anger the many who had heard and obeyed John. The enemies of Christ often asked certain questions of Him, not in order to learn, but to ensnare and find fault. Jesus, knowing their motives, turned the tables on them.

From this we learn that we are not obligated to answer whatever question someone may ask, especially when it is evident they only seek to find fault rather than to learn. Proverbs 26:4,5 reads, "*Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceits.*" We do not have to answer foolish questions nor should we give foolish answers.

There are those who always want you to prove your position but shy away from ever proving their position. Jesus made them accept the responsibility for what they taught and made them sustain it. If they would not, He felt no responsibility toward them.

He Charted His Own Course

Often the enemies of Christ would set traps, like the Saducees and their questions concerning the resurrection. Jesus avoided their traps and refused to follow their lead. He kept control of His own direction. As they denied the resurrection, proposing a case where a woman had seven husbands, and they asked whose would she be in the resurrection (Luke 20:27-39), Jesus showed they did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God. They would have to be against what Moses said about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob if they denied the reality of life after physical death. We see Jesus meeting false teachers by keeping control of His direction rather than feeling obligated to be trapped and have to travel down whatever path they had determined for Him. He

was not confined to their limited knowledge of Scripture.

He Used Strong Words

Some might never suspect it, but Jesus faced false teachers with strong words, condemnations, labels, and name calling. Read Luke 11:393-54, Matthew 23, and John 8. In Luke 13:31,31, He called Herod a fox, indicating Herod was crafty, cunning, sly, and deceitful as well as deadly. Perhaps the way He described Herod was likely the most stinging and contemptuous name ever given by the Master to any of the sons of men. Is it ever right to call names, or condemn by names? The Lord thought so. Some sweet and overly pious preachers today, who talk so much about "love," might not think so., But they do not understand what love is or how it is demonstrated. But Jesus used strong words of condemnation to those in error. Who will condemn Him for doing it? I suppose liberals would!

He Met Things Head-On

Luke 22:24-27 is where Jesus met false concepts that the apostles held concerning what is true greatness. He met it head-on. They were arguing about who would become the greatest once Jesus was gone. He rebuked them and their error by contrasting His will with the error. Verse 25, "*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.*" When He set truth side by side to error one could see the distinction.

Just Plain and Clear Teaching

Luke fifteen tells us about false teachers who misunderstood His mission. Jesus taught the work of saving the lost by three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost boy (the prodigal son). Some were condemning Him for His association with sinners. But what was the nature of His association? It was not to condone, but to correct and save. Jesus never was one to "go along" with wrong. Correcting a false view is a very

positive action. Teaching truth plainly, simply, and in a manner understandable was the way He handled that association with those who needed the salvation he brought.

In summary, how did Jesus deal with false teachers and their wares? We have cited at least ten ways, none to the exclusion of the others, but He used first one then the other. (1) He used Scripture. (2) He reasoned, that if this is true, then that is true. (3) He exposed inconsistency. (4) He exposed misinterpretations and misuse of Scripture. (5) He called names, using strong words of condemnation. (6) He asked questions that put the burden of proof on His opponents. (7) He showed error was self-defeating and self-destructive. (8) He contrasted truth and error, setting them side by side for easy comparison. (9) He refused to follow the lead of the false teachers who simply set traps and deceptions, and did not desire the truth. (10) He presented truth in a plain, clear, positive manner, as in parables.

When one asked Jesus, "*Who is my neighbor?*" Jesus taught the story of the Good Samaritan, concluding, "*Go thou and do likewise.*" Let us appropriate that phrase in the context of our lesson as to how Jesus met and handled false teachers and false teaching, and let us go and do likewise.

* * * * *

This lesson was first delivered at the lectureship at the Bellview Church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida, 1985.

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This issue of *A BURNING FIRE* completes seventeen complete volumes of twelve issues each.

Plans for the future are explained on the back cover.

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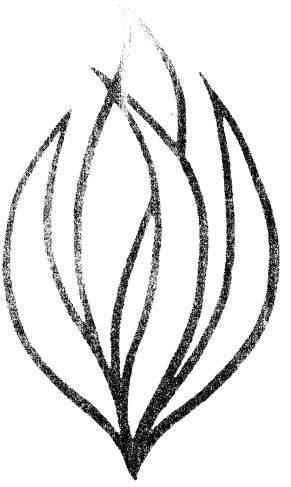

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVIII James W. Boyd NUMBER 1

Am I My Brother's Keeper?

Genesis 4:8-11, "*And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.*"

The question, our subject, followed a previously asked question from God to Cain. "*Where is Abel thy brother?*" This was not asked for information, for surely the God of heaven, being omniscient, knew what had happened to Abel. Rather, it was a way of approaching the subject God wished to discuss with Cain. It was a cross-examination of him. This is the second record of cross-examination of which we read from God to man. The first was to Adam and Eve when God inquired regarding their transgression in the Garden of Eden. Their reaction was one of shame, very evasive, filled with excuses, and they tried to hide from God. Cain's reaction was less commendable in that he was arrogant, lied to God, and pretended not to know. He felt no responsibility toward his brother. This is why he asked, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*"

Of course, Cain knew about his brother. He was the one who killed him. But this was of little concern to him. He feigned ignorance, and pretended innocence. He told God, "*I know not.*" He lied. In essence, he is telling God that it was not his duty to keep up with his brother, to know about him, to be concerned for him.

In the New Testament we read of some people who held this same contemptuous attitude toward others as Cain. I refer to the priest and Levite in the parable of the Good

Samaritan. They could see a fellowman in dire condition and pass by on the other side. For whatever reason or excuse, they perceived no personal responsibility toward him.

First John 3:11,12, "*For this is the message that we heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*" Cain added to his transgressions because he was a wicked man. Abel suffered because he was righteous. Out of envy, Cain killed Abel. How far removed from the duty to love!

Envy

Envy is defined as a resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another coupled with the desire to possess the same advantage. Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God while Cain's was not. But this was the fault of Cain, God had instructed them concerning the sacrifice. We know this because Abel did what he did by faith (Hebrews 11:4), and faith comes by hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17). God would not have rejected Cain arbitrarily. Envy is sometimes equated with jealousy. But there can be a good jealousy, but never a good envy. God is jealous of His people because He loves them and does not wish harm to come to them. Our God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5). Paul was jealous over the Corinthians. Second Corinthians 11:2, "*For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy.*" Envy produces nothing good, but brings upon the envious person a spirit of malice, infamy, bitterness, and baseness. Proverbs 14:30, "*A sound heart is the life of the flesh, but envy the rottenness of the bones.*" Envy causes the envious to decay and rot from within, destroying the health of the soul. See what it did to Cain!

Selfishness and Separation

Being only concerned about himself, Cain lost interest in others. His attitude and actions renounced two basic Biblical concepts regarding God and man. He forgot the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. God is not the spiritual Father of all, but He is the Creator and from His works we all have come. We are of one blood

(Acts 17:26). Does not God teach us, therefore, because of this relationship, that we are family, the human family, and we must count with each other? Would not acceptance of this truth remove the hatred, abuse, violence, evil that people do to each other? Family makes a difference in the thinking of God. What difference does it make with you?

As members of the same family we have duties to each other. "*Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?*" (Malachi 2:10). Abraham realized there should be no family strife. When he initiated the way of peace between himself and Lot, he gave the reason for it, "*For we be brethren*" (Genesis 13:8).

To God the family is special. The church is called "*the house of God*" (First Timothy 3:15). He pictured the relationship He and Christ have for the saved as His household, He as Father, we are His sons and daughters (Second Corinthians 6:18). Brotherhood demands us to be our brother's keeper. This is the link that hold us together. Consider the following truths in this light.

We are to love our neighbor as our selves (Matthew 22:39). If our brother falls, we are to restore him (Galatians 6:2). We are to bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2). As we do good to all men, we are to be especially mindful of those of the same spiritual family, the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). We have duties to care for those of our family (First Timothy 3:5; 5:4). One of the sins of the people Jesus encountered was their willingness to be unconcerned for their parents (Mark 7:10-13). We are to give to those who are in need (Ephesians 4:28). The brotherhood of man requires we treat each other as we would be treated (Matthew 7:12). We wonder what ever happened to this Goldern Rule in the lives of so many, even among kinfolks?

The answer to Cain's question is clear and precise. "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" Most certainly he was, and so are we. This is written for our learning (Romans 15:4). But violation of this principle is too often seen among us.

Another Question

"*What hast thou done?*" God knew all about what Cain had done, but he wanted Cain to see the enormity of his crime. He was guilty of hatred, envy, lying, irresponsibility, and murder. It is significant that the first murder was the result of a religious dispute (Genesis 4:3,5). Religious disputes have been the provocation of many conflicts over the history of man. It is not because God makes it so, but because many will not follow the way of God, seeking their own way.

Followers of Christ endured much pain and persecution in the first century, as they do this day. Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7). Antipas was martyred (Revelation 2:13). We read of Catholics killing Protestants, and vice versa. The history of the Reformation Movement is stained with blood. Wars came between the Crusaders and Mohammedans. Are not many of the bloodiest strifes in our world today of religious origin? Such has caused some people to consider all religion to be evil. It has been said that there is no hatred as hateful, no malice so malicious, no bloodthirstiness so bloodthirsty, no madness so mad, as that of a theologian who has no Scripture to prove his doctrine. Christians who adhere to "*thus saith the Lord*" have no cause for anger in the midst of conflict, because they are confident and their faith is founded on the Rock. They may be disappointed at times, but are not of the sort to inflict harm to vent their frustrations.

"*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,*" (First John 3:15). God teaches brotherly love, family affection, not hatred, the seed of murder.

The Consequences of His Evil

They proved to be worse than Cain ever thought. His evil deed, by the blood of Abel, cried out against him. "*The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground,*" said the Lord (Genesis 4:10). What did it say? It said Cain was evil, Cain was a murderer, Cain sinned, Cain deserved punishment, Cain was a destroyer, Cain was vile and wicked. As Isaiah wrote, "*Our sins testify against us*" (Isaiah 59:12). As Moses warned, "*Be sure*

your sin will find you out," (Numbers 32:23). We cannot ignore our duty to our brother and escape the consequences. The blood of Abel yet speaketh, saying, we are our brother's keeper.

What a person does talks either for him or against him. We are accountable to God and shall give answer (Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12; Revelation 20:12; 22:12). It matters what we do. How we treat our family matters before God. How we look upon our fellow man matters to God. Cain's deeds spoke against him. Paul's former life as a persecutor of Christians spoke against him until brethren finally realize he was a converted man. Abraham's works led the angel to say of him as he was about to offer Isaac, "*Thou fearest God*" (Genesis 22:12). Saul's disobedience spoke against him (First Samuel 15:13,14). Abel's obedience yet speaketh on his behalf (Hebrews 11:4). Our works will speak after we are gone (Revelation 14:13) to our good, if we live and die in the Lord. The miracles of Jesus spoke for Him. "*No man can do the miracles that thou doest except God be with him*" (John 3:2). Our deeds will bless us or curse us at the day of judgment.

Our faith shows itself by our works (James 2:18). Love manifests itself in obedience (John 14:15). Words reveal the heart (Matthew 12:34). The inward man is reflected in the conduct of the outward man (Proverbs 4:23).

God Cursed Cain

A word of caution when we speak of God cursing, like when Jesus cursed the fig tree. Young children are taught not to curse, meaning the use of vulgarity and profanity. It is worthwhile to explain how God never does that evil, but His cursing is the pronouncement of punishment against the evildoer. This distinction is profitably made in our preaching and teaching.

God had previously cursed the serpent, and the ground (Genesis 3:14,17). He had warned of death to Adam and Eve. But God cursed Cain because God will not condone sin. He will not look lightly upon those who disgrace the dignity of human life, as in murder, even in the form of abortion.

What man sows, he reaps (Galatians 6:7,8). Cain sowed sin and evil, and he reaped God's wrath and his own sorrow. (Genesis 4:13).

We have a duty, therefore, to all men, to those who are our blood kin, and to those of the household of faith, God's spiritual family. "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" We better know that we are, and conduct our lives accordingly. This is not only a duty to man, but a duty to God, because God is the One who has commanded our duty to others.

* * * * *

Proper credit belongs to Leroy Brownlow for the above lesson, taken from his good book, The Greatest Questions of the Ages.

* * * * *

The Right Church

We cite two passages in which there is a similarity. Luke 24:46,47, "*Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*" Acts 11:15, "*And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.*" Both passages have reference to a "*beginning.*" The first was spoken by Christ looking forward to the "*beginning.*" The second was by Peter as he explained events at that had transpired at the house of Cornelius, and looked backward to the "*beginning.*" Between the times of these statements there had been a "*beginning.*" The "*beginning*" referred to the events on Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, when Peter preached repentance and remission of sins in the name of the Christ.

Pentecost was a momentous day, a day of anticipation, excitement, and suspense. "*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). Jews gathered to find out what was going on. Some were confounded, amazed, marvelled, in doubt, even mocking and making false accusations.

It was then that Peter quoted Joel 2 (Acts 2:16), saying, "*It shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Acts 2:21). With that text, Peter began the first gospel sermon, preaching the resurrection of Christ, founded on three major points of evidence. (1) The prophets had foretold the event; (2) the apostles were eye-witnesses of these things, and (3) and this explained the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He concluded, "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36).

Obviously being convinced of the truth Peter preached, they cried out, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37). Peter answered, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 2:38). The response was that three thousand obeyed, and they were added to the church (Acts 2:41,47). **This was the beginning of the church, the beginning to which Christ and Peter referred.**

What Happened to it?

Our question is, "What happened to the church that began that day?" Today, there are many churches. We hear people teaching, "Go to the church of your choice; one is as good as another." People say that, but they do not really believe that. They obviously consider one better than another because they have chosen one rather than others. "What happened to the church?" that began on Pentecost is a proper and legitimate question. But is it the right question? We would insist that the question ought not to be "Which church is better?" but "Which church is right?"

Some are offended at this question. But all churches are not right. Often they are at odds and opposites to each other. Revelation 3:9 warned of a church becoming the "*synagogue of Satan.*" How could such a church be right?

Ephesians 4:4,5 teaches there is one body, and Ephesians 1:22,23 teaches the body is the church. Therefore, we can know with certainty, there is one church, a singular church, just as Jesus promised to build (Matthew 16:16-18). This leads to the main point of the lesson. **The church of which you read in the New Testament was and is the RIGHT CHURCH.** While some declare they no longer have an interest in the church of the New Testament, or to restore it in our time, that church is the right church. Rubel Shelly, of the infamous Jubilee, the "change agent" and editor of Wineskins, has stated, "I no longer have as my goal the restoring of the first century church." Well, I do, and so should everyone else. Those that respect Scripture will always be concerned with the **RIGHT CHURCH**.

The Apostasy

The New Testament warned the church would fall away (Second Thessalonians 2:3). Paul warned the elders of Ephesus, when visiting with them at Miletus, of such a tragedy (Acts 20:30,31). The apostasy was already taking place (Second Thessalonians 2:7). In Revelation 2:5, the church in Ephesus had begun to fall away and was told to repent, or else the candlestick would be removed.

History shows the church apostatized. It apostatized because it compromised, with Judaism, Romanism, heathenism, worldliness, and doctrines of men. This is a matter of historical record.

Even as apostasy occurred, men arose attempting to prevent it. After it became apparent, others arose to attempt to reform the apostate church. This effort is called the Reformation Movement, or the Protestant Movement. That movement was intended to bring people back to the Bible, protesting the errors of Roman Catholicism. It was so successful that many began to say that the religion of the Bible was the religion of Protestants. But that was NOT SO!

The great malfunction of the Reformation Movement, though it brought the Bible back before the people, was that Protestants followed the teachings of the reformers rather than the Bible. They did not teach alike. Their followers went in different directions and groups, which resulted in the formation of many churches, and what is now recognized as denominationalism.

Old Philadelphia

The church at Rocky Springs, Alabama is the oldest church of Christ in that state. But there is more behind that story. Around 1803 there came settlers from North Carolina into Warren County, Tennessee, establishing a community called Philadelphia. They were of varying religious backgrounds (English Episcopal, Scottish Presbyterian, etc.). But they shared many beliefs in common, and wished to worship together. Being removed from everybody else, how would they be able to do this? They determined to set aside their denominational distinctions, and for the sake of unity, give up their creeds and follow the Bible. Soon they gave up sprinkling for baptism, baptizing in nearby Big Hickory Creek. (That creek runs by my house, JWB). They began observing the Lord's Supper each first day of the week. They called themselves simply the church of Christ. Their efforts prospered and grew. Please take note, there was no contact with Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, or any other great teacher who worked for the restoration of the New Testament church.

Eventually, some left the settlement and moved to Rocky Springs, taking the gospel with them, and started the church there about 1811.

These humble, sincere, people accepted the simply idea, "Take the Bible, teach what it teaches, believe what the early Christians believed, do what they did, and be what they were." What were they? They were Christians! Where else does one learn about being a Christian except from the Bible? They did not worry about tracing their history back through many churches to Jerusalem. They took the Biblical concept of Luke 8:11, that the seed of the kingdom is the Word of God. That seed was sown in

the hearts that were honest and good and it produced the same fruit as in the first century: CHRISTIANS.

Even though resisted and opposed by the defenders of unbiblical denominationalism, they were not ashamed to declare, "The church of which I am a member is the one of which you read in the New Testament, and is the **RIGHT CHURCH.**"

What About That Message Today?

Today when brethren preach like that some call them arrogant, bigoted, narrow, sectarian, "knucklehead," unloving, right-winger, traditionalist, legalist, throw-back, spiritual dinosaur, Bible thumper, and so it goes. Often preaching today is on "felt needs" rather than the doctrine of Christ. It is people-oriented rather than Bible oriented. Some say, "Don't say we are the New Testament church. It may turn some away. We should embrace the idea of 'Christians in all denominations.'"

Well, I cannot and will not do that because I do not read in the Bible of any denomination that ever has, does, or shall exist. I will not be intimidated by being victimized by "liberal love" which has no kinship with the love Christ taught. If we love Christ we will obey Him (John 14:15). I am not ashamed to affirm that the church of which I am a member is the church of which you read in the New Testament and is the **RIGHT CHURCH.** This is not said in arrogance, bigotry, evil judgmentalism, nor self-righteousness. It is not a matter of mere history, but of identity.

Finding the Church Today

If you moved into a city or visited there, how would you find the New Testament church today? Suppose Paul came into our town, how could he identify it? Would he look for the church the majority like? Would he expect it to be the one that attracts the largest crowds, or has the most money, the most fun and excitement? Is there any way that he could identify the same church he preached in his day? For what would he look to find the right church?

The Right Name

Having the right name would not necessarily make it the right church, but the name is important. The only ones who say the name of the church is unimportant are those who have the wrong name. Christ called it "*my church*" (Matthew 16:18). It is His, called after Him. Romans 16:16 refers to "*churches of Christ.*" Liberals complain, "You can't use that!" Why not? If Paul had said Methodist Churches, they would use it. If he had said Pentecostal Churches, or Baptist Churches, they would use it. But he did not say that. He said "*churches of Christ,*" so we can use it. We ought never be ashamed to identify the Lord's church the way the Holy Spirit identified it. There are other designations also, like "*church of God,*" but we must be cautious not to confuse the church with denominations that use the right name.

(This sermon is taken from a sermon designed and delivered by Bill Boyd, my eldest son.)

How Do You Worship?

Paul would want to know how we worship. We would tell him we assemble on the first day of every week, as he did, break bread (Lord's Supper), sing, pray, give, study God's Word, just as the first church did. (First Corinthians, Acts 20:7; Ephesians 5:19). We would also note we do not use mechanical instrument of music either, for the same reason we do not count beads, clap hands, burn incense, dance, hum, beat drums, etc. There is no authority for such things (Colossians 3:17). Paul would recognize and respect that because he taught that.

He Would Listen to the Preaching

The message preached tells one the kind of church it is. Methodist Churches preach the Methodist Discipline, Baptist Churches the Baptist Manual, Catholic Churches the Catholic Catechism, etc. Any time a man stands in the pulpit he is obligated before God and man to preach in such a manner and with the message that Paul would recognize as the doctrine he preached. Paul understood the Old Testament, and wrote most of the New Testament. If one preached out of the Bible, Paul would

recognize it as the gospel preached by the right church, and not the theologies, philosophies, opinions, creeds, speculations, and doctrines that have come from the minds of men. Today there are too many people-pleasers, world-pleasers, who talk real nice, act real nice, look real nice, but as gospel preachers, they are a sorry lot. Search the Scriptures! (Second Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 2:1,8; Mark 16:15; First Peter 4:11, etc.)

How We Are Organized?

Organization matters if we are to be the **RIGHT CHURCH.** The New Testament church has Christ as the Head (Colossians 1:18), there being no ecclesiastical hierarchy over the local congregations, which are autonomous, independent, overseen by elders, served by deacons, alongside the members composing the local church (Philippians 1:1; Romans 12:4,5).

These churches are tied together, not by an organizational government, but a common faith and salvation in Christ. They cooperate without losing autonomy or taking over one another. The headquarters of the church of Christ is where the Head is, which is heaven (Acts 7:49). This is according to the New Testament pattern.

How Does a Person Become a Member?

Nothing is required to become a member of the **RIGHT CHURCH** except what is required to become a Christian. What is the church except people who have been saved by being redeemed by the blood of Christ? When you become a Christian, you also become a member of the church. There is no experience to tell, no vote to pass, only the gospel to obey (Acts 2:41,47).

The Plan of Salvation

Paul would want to know what plan of salvation is required. Men today teach salvation by grace alone, faith alone, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, raise your hand, send in a card, touch the television, pray through, give a testimony, relate an experience, just claim it. Paul would not recognize such a that.

We would tell Paul we teach what he taught. One must believe in Christ as the Son of God (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24; Romans 1:16,17), repent of sins (Acts 17:30); confess faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4), then walk in newness of life as a new creature in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17).

In the New Testament record, this is what the apostles taught. They were led in what they taught by the Holy Spirit (John 14,15,16; First Corinthians 2:12,13; Galatians 1:10-12). Those who heard and believed were translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). They taught there was no other way (Acts 4:12; Ephesians 4:4,5), just as did the Christ (John 14:6). Were they arrogant, sectarian, bigoted, irrelevant, legalistic, or the other "loving terms" liberals use to disparage faithful brethren, or were they **RIGHT?** They were right, and when we teach the same things, we are **RIGHT.** We have no right to teach otherwise, nor does anyone else, and still claim to be acceptable before God.

Conclusion

When a church has the wrong name, worships the wrong way, teaches the wrong doctrine, is organized wrong, has the wrong terms of membership, the wrong plan of salvation, it cannot be the right church. When a church has the right name, worships the right way, teaches the right doctrine, is organized by the right pattern, has the right terms of membership, requires the right plan of salvation, it cannot be the wrong church, but is **THE RIGHT CHURCH.**

Those in the church are not perfect, sinless people, even as the first Christians. They have problems as did those of long ago. But they are God's people, having done what God says to do, and striving to be faithful in Him. They are bound for the promised land, and invite all, in the words of Moses, "*We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you.. Come thou with us and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel*" (Numbers 10:29).

* * * * *

Christ on David's Throne

First Timothy 6:15 speaks of Christ as the "*blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.*" Jesus is not just a king, but a king on a specific throne, the throne of David. As David, the second king of Israel, is an ancestor and type of Christ, his kingdom is a type of the kingdom of Christ. David's kingdom was an earthly kingdom, and he had many successors until Judah was taken into captivity. Our lesson considers the role and significance of the kingdom of David in God's scheme, and its relationship to the Christ and His kingdom.

Prophesied

The kingdom of Christ was prophesied to come. When Jacob blessed his sons, he said to Judah, "*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be*" (Genesis 49:10). Christ was of the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). Isaiah 2:2-4 speaks of the mountain (government) of the Lord's house, also called the house of the God of Jacob. Daniel 2:44 tells when the kingdom would come, "*in the days of these kings,*" the kings of a fourth empire, Babylon being the first, then Persia, Greece, then Rome. Daniel 7:13,14 says the Son of man would go to the Ancient of days and be given a kingdom. This was the prophecy of the ascension of Jesus to the Father to receive His kingdom. Zechariah 6:12,13 tells of the King on His throne and being priest in His temple. Hebrews likens Christ to Melchizedek who was king and priest at the same time. Isaiah 9:6,7 shows the government would be on the shoulders of the child to be born, the identity being only Jesus the Christ.

It was foretold to Mary concerning Jesus that He would be a King and the throne was specified to be David's throne (Luke 1:31-33). Peter declared Him to be on David's throne (Acts 2:29-36). Jesus said He would come to His kingdom in the lifetime of some of those with

whom He spoke (Matthew 16:27,28). Furthermore, His kingdom would not be an earthly kingdom (John 18:37).

What Others Said

His role as king is repeatedly acknowledged in Scripture by others. Even though they probably did not understand the full nature of His kingdom, they knew Him to serve in that capacity. Nathanuel said, "*Thou art the king of Israel*" (John 1:49). The mother of James and John asked special favors of Him for her sons when He came into His kingdom (Matthew 20:21). As He entered triumphantly into Jerusalem the people hailed Him, saying, "*Behold, the king cometh*" (Matthew 21:5). The thief asked to be remembered by Christ when He came to His kingdom (Luke 23:39). Then there was the inscription over His cross, "*This is Jesus, the King of the Jews*" (Matthew 27:37). Paul preached "*another king, King Jesus*" (Acts 17:7).

About the Throne of David

Second Samuel 3:9,10 tells of the kingdom taken from Saul and given to David. Second Samuel 7:12-16 reveals a promise to David that when his days were fulfilled and he slept with his fathers, God would set a his seed after him, and that one would reign forever. This could not refer to Solomon because his reign ended. Also Solomon had already been made king before David died. The promised King would come after David died. Obviously, this promised King would be before the universal resurrection. David went to the tomb to await the Lord's return and the resurrection. The reign would come prior to the resurrection.

Significantly, David's throne is also called the throne of Israel (First Kings 2:11), and also the throne of the Lord (First Chronicles 29:23). The throne of God is called the throne of Christ (Acts 8:30). Peter on Pentecost showed the prophecies regarding the throne and David had reference to Jesus Christ. With the prophecies fulfilled, the kingdom did come.

No Biblical truth is any more pronounced with certainty than the existence of the kingdom of Christ now!

The Nature of His Kingdom

David's earthly kingdom was an type of that which was to come. The nature of the kingdom of Christ was misunderstood when He was on earth, and it is misunderstood by many even yet. His is not an earthly kingdom, nor bound by the geographical borders that denote the boundaries of earthly kingdoms. Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). It is in the world but not of the world. It is spiritual in nature (Luke 17:20,21), "*within you.*" His kingdom reigns in the heart and mind. His is a spiritual house, and a holy nation (First Peter 2:5,9). Its citizens offer up spiritual sacrifices (First Peter 2:5; Romans 12:1). His throne is in heaven (Acts 7:49), as Stephen quoted Psalm 11:4.

It Came as Prophesied

The kingdom of Christ came in the city of Jerusalem as Isaiah foretold. The apostles had been told to return there and wait for power to come (Luke 24:47). The kingdom would come with power (Mark 9:1), and in the lifetime of people then living. The power would be the Holy Spirit upon them (Acts 1:8). It would come after His ascension, in the days of the Roman empire (Daniel 2,7). These conditions existed with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on Pentecost.

Jesus did not fail in His mission to establish the kingdom even though He was rejected (Romans 3:3). At the last Passover observance, Jesus said He would not commune with His disciples again until the kingdom (Matthew 26:29). The communion was a reality in the life of those in the church in Corinth (First Corinthians 11). Those in the church in Colosse were said to have been delivered out of the power of darkness and "*translated into the kingdom of His dear Son*" (Colossians 1:13). John said he was in the kingdom as well as those to whom Revelation was originally sent (Revelation 1:9).

This means Christ reigns NOW. The kingdom exists NOW. He has been raised to the right hand of God (Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13), denoting His rank and authority. This is as prophesied (Psalm 110:1). He has been raised into heaven to sit on the right hand of God, angels and

authorities subject to Him (First Peter 3:22). All authority is His (Matthew 28:18). But He has also been raised to sit on the throne (Acts 2:30). Therefore, to sit on the right hand of God, and to sit on the throne means the same thing.

He serves as High Priest NOW (Hebrews 3:1; 4:15; 7:25). If priest NOW, He is King NOW, as foretold by Zechariah 6:12,13, after the order of Melchizedek. He has the "key," symbol of authority, of David (Revelation 3:7). There is no question that the kingdom now exists, Christ is on His throne, and His kingdom is a spiritual one, the antitype of David's earthly kingdom.

There Will Be No Other

Nor will Christ set up an earthly kingdom as the false doctrine of premillennialism contends. It is an impossibility if the Scriptures are true. Jeremiah 22:30 tells of the next to the last king of earthly Judah. The last five kings of Judah were Josiah, his son Jehoahaz, another son Jehoiakim, a grandson Coniah (also called Jeconiah or Jehoiachin), and finally a third son of Josiah named Zedekiah. Of Coniah it was written, "*Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days, for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah*" (Jeremiah 22:30). This is significant since Jesus is a fleshly descendant of Coniah (Matthew 1:11).

No fleshly descendant of Coniah would reign in Judah, the province which includes Jerusalem, the very city premillennialists claim Jesus will set up an earthly kingdom when He returns, and rule a thousand years. Unless God's prophecy is false, no such thing will happen. When Jesus comes again it will not be to set up His kingdom, but to deliver up His kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). This future-kingdom theory is false. But it is not without consequence because it contradicts Scripture. How anyone who claims to be faithful to the Word of the Lord and contends the premillennial theory is innocuous contends for an absurdity. This doctrine is degrading to Christ, and removes Him from His throne.

Who Are the Citizens?

How does one become a citizen of the Lord's kingdom? It is the same way he becomes a member of the church since the church is the kingdom. Christ said He would build the church, and gave the keys to the kingdom. The churches in Asia were in the kingdom. Members of the church are fellow-citizens with the saints (Ephesians 2:19). The Colossians were in the kingdom.

When people heard the gospel, believed it, and obeyed it in repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ, they were translated, changed, born again, and entered the kingdom as new creatures (John 3:3-5). Those who are in the kingdom are those who do the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21).

In Summary

We have shown that Scripture teaches how Christ was prophesied to be King. He came to be King. His kingdom was foretold. His kingdom, a spiritual kingdom, is the throne of David. He is King NOW!

It is important to us to be in the kingdom because those in the kingdom are heaven bound. Those in the kingdom will be delivered to God when King Jesus comes again, the dead are raised, the judgment takes place, and eternity is entered.

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With this issue I begin what is planned to be the final volume of *A Burning Fire.*

There shall follow eight additional issues, and the equivalent number of pages usually used for the last three issues will be used for additional material that will be placed in the sixteen bound volumes I have prepared for my children and grandchildren.

The total number of volumes of *A Burning Fire* will be eighteen.

Attitudes and Positions Toward Error

Actually this sermon was originally titled, What Does God Teach Should be Our Attitude and Position Toward False Doctrines and Those Who Teach and/or Condone and Promote Them? That seems a bit much, so I have abbreviated it. There have been similar lessons on this general theme in ***A Burning Fire*** several times.

False doctrines are taught and false teachers abound, both in and out of the church. This is not new. This problem has existed since the beginning of the church, even since the beginning of man. How some deal with it sometimes may be new and even destructive to the cause of Christ. Some will condone error, just go along with it peacefully, support and use false teachers, invite "fence straddlers" to preach for them, people who SAY they do not agree with error, but who take part in efforts that are designed to promote it. Some people cannot decide whether to stand for the truth or stand quietly alongside error. They act as if it is a matter of indifference.

Over the years we have been surprised, amazed, and greatly disappointed in men and women, churches and schools, once thought to uphold sound words, but now are not known for their faithfulness, but rather for their waywardness and support and coddling of digression. It is difficult to get them to explain why. I have asked so many of them, only to be brushed aside and ignored.

Things Being Taught That Are Wrong

In addition to major denominational attitudes, we hear major denominational doctrines. Some teach salvation by grace alone. Others teach salvation by faith alone. Instrumental music in worship is nothing to some who once stood for the truth. Some deny there is a pattern in the Bible for our service to God. Even the inspiration of

Scripture is challenged. Did you know some who were once faithful gospel preachers now teach there are knowledgeable Christians in all denominations, even though the Bible never even speaks of a denomination? We hear that the church is not the kingdom, and that the kingdom has not come even yet. The church is called another denomination. Divorces are accepted regardless of the cause. Remarriage is all right regardless of the divorce. You can take the Lord's Supper any time, and restricting it to the first day of the weak is just traditionalism. Some openly express disinterest in restoring the New Testament church, contending it is irrelevant to us today. We do not even have to know the truth regarding the purpose of baptism for it to be acceptable before God. On and on go the false doctrines being taught by false teachers, many former brethren.

Used to be No Question

These matters are settled by the Word of God. There used to be no controversy about such things in churches of Christ when brethren generally believed and followed the Bible. What God taught was believed and respected. There was no question what preachers would preach on these subjects, or what elders would uphold. But now?

Shall we consider false teachers to be our friends when they have made themselves enemies of the cross? Shall we overlook the error that condemns the souls of people because some family member adopts it? Do not we have any respect for what God has taught? There is no doubt what attitude we are to have toward such things.

Romans 16:17,18

"*Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*"

Does that sound like we should help them, include them, condone them, promote their programs, etc.?

Second Thessalonians 3:6

"Now we command you brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us."

There is to be no fellowship with such people who reject apostolic tradition. We must withdraw from them.

Second John 9-11

This is the verse many would like to remove from the Bible because it upsets their association with false teachers, false doctrines, and events that promote such. *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."*

Complicity with them, go along with them, include them, support them, you become as guilty as they are in violating God's will. Plain enough!

Ephesians 5:11

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

Some continue to fellowship such people, and never ever consider opposing them. Can you miss what God says?

Galatians 1:6-9

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

There is no doubt what must be our attitude and position toward those who teach false doctrines or condone them that do.

Why?

Paul tells us why error must be resisted. First Corinthians 5:6, "*Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*" Second Corinthians 6:14-18 teaches that truth and error do not and will not mix.

This explains why faithful brethren do not support some events, schools, lectureships, similar affairs. This is why some "gospel meetings" are not announced. The preacher is not sound, but often throw their influence in favor of the false brethren among us.

Some may not say anything wrong themselves on a given night in a given sermon. But we are foolish to determine one's soundness on one sermon when he has a tract record of supporting error. We need to ask where these preachers stand? Which direction is their influence? What do they support and allow? What have they been teaching elsewhere by spoken words and pen? Whose hands are they upholding? Do they provide platforms for false teachers? Do they stand alongside them in a quiet fashion? If so, they are in complicity with them.

It is right to ask questions about brethren who talk with uncertain sound. We have the right and obligation to know what they teach before we align with them. People change. Do not take it for granted, just because one was sound ten years ago, that he is necessarily sound today. Watch out for the "change agents," the modern Jeroboams. Would you approve of those who approved of Jeroboam?

Doesn't This Divide the Church?

Absolutely! False doctrine can only divide the church. Opposing false doctrine is not the cause of division. When brethren stand for the truth together there is peace and harmony, unity and progress. It is when some become malcontent with what the Bible teaches and

authorizes that division pokes its ugly head into our midst. Always remember! It is the one who upholds error who causes division, not the one who calls attention to it and stands for the truth, even at the expense of having to terminate fellowship with false teachers.

Ahab tried to blame Elijah as a troublemaker, but Ahab was the troublemaker because he did evil. Elijah only pointed out his evil and condemned it, rightfully so.

Those who teach error or condone it throw a spear into the body of Christ as much as was done when Jesus was on the cross. We cannot halt between two positions. We must decide either for God, or against God. When you press a false teacher to give answer for what he does, you will likely be ignored, rebuked, brushed off, scorned, ridiculed, rejected, or other manners of "loving liberals" who are determined to go their own way even to the harm of the church. They only betray their lack of commitment to the truth.

The Right Attitude and Position is Clear

Go back and look at the few verses we cited at the early portion of this lesson. Take your own Bible and underline them and study them. See if you really think it is a difficult task to determine what our attitude and position must be.

Paul told the brethren in Corinth, "*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all things be done with charity*" (First Corinthians 16:13,14).

Be like Joshua who told his people to chose the one they would serve. Everybody must make that choice for himself or herself. But Joshua knew what choice to make, and he chose to serve Jehovah, and his house with him. He never had any doubt where he stood.

Obey God regarding false doctrines and false teachers. "*And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap it we faint not*" (Galatians 6:9).

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In Future Issues

You can expect to read the following lessons in issues yet to come. Just exactly when each one will appear we cannot tell now. But they are in the works and on the way, plus others.

Be Ready to Defend the Truth

The Silence of the Scriptures

The Relationship of the Qualifications and Work of Elders

Revelation 20

Islam

Regarding the Blood of Christ

Heaven

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

The Eternal Kingdom and Its Mission

Authority in Religion

The Crisis of a Qualified Leadership

Things Believed That Are Under Attack

Is There a Pattern for Worship?

Critics of Criticism

Doctrinal Problems in Evangelism

East End CHURCH OF CHRIST
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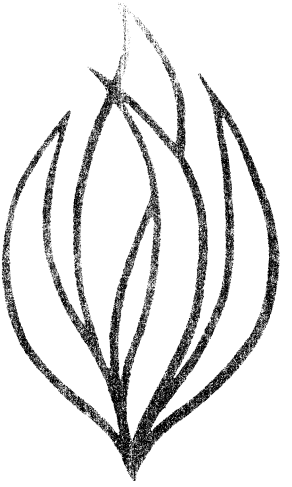
A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVIII James W. Boyd NUMBER 2

The Silence of the Scriptures

There has always been a struggle in the religious world over the matter of authority in religion. What is to be the measure, the standard, the guide and final rule by which things are determined? There are many authorities existing now, such as the Book of Mormon, Watchtower Magazine, disciplines, manuals, prayer books, confessionals, councils, conference, popes, ancestors, clergymen, theologians, the majority, even a person's individual feelings, alongside schools, scholars, and prominent persons, often preachers. These things may be all right for many churches, but such will never be proper for members of the church which Christ established on Pentecost, and for which He shed His blood.

This matter of authority has also been a point of contest within what is called the Restoration Movement, a religious effort that challenged all "authorities" except the Bible. Reading from Hebrews 1:1,2, we learn that God speaks to man through His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ promised His apostles that they would be guided in all truth by the Holy Spirit (John 14,15,16). The Scripture claims to be authoritative and all-sufficient (Second Timothy 3:16,17). There is a "chain of authority" that begins with the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and continues through the apostles and inspired writers, now incorporated in the Scriptures.

A Dispute Rages

But there has been dispute among those who claim the Bible is the sole authority in religion over matters of which the Bible does not specifically mention. These areas are called areas where the Bible is silent. There are different views toward the silence of the Scriptures. Some contend that silence gives consent, that is, we are permitted to do whatever the Scriptures do not specifically prohibit. Another view is that we must act with authority and have Biblical authority for what we

teach, believe, and practice, being prohibited from going beyond the Scriptures, adding to or taking from them.

The basic and bedrock difference between the Lord's church and the Christian Church and other denominations is this approach to the silence of the Scriptures. Denominations contend for the first view, silence giving consent. Therefore, we have an explanation why there is such variance, division, confusion, and permissiveness in the denominational world. The members of the Lord's church insist there must be divine authority for matters religious. While denominationalists say things are permitted "because the Bible does not say not to," members of the Lord's church contend we must be guided by what the Scripture does say and "*speak as the oracles of God,*" also contending that the Bible prohibits explicitly and implicitly. If a matter is not authorized it is outside the doctrine of Christ and therefore forbidden. In other words, the argument is that when God speaks, this includes what He wants and excludes whatever is not included.

Nothing New Here

This is not a new problem in religion. Both the Old Testament and New Testament address this matter frequently. This was a major problem in the historic Reformation Movement. Martin Luther held the view that silence gives consent while Ulrich Swingli insisted we must have authority for what we do, although he obviously did not live accordingly.

Thomas Campbell once wrote, "Speak where the Bible speaks; be silent where the Bible is silent." When he made that point someone complained that if that were followed we must give up infant baptism because there is nothing in Scripture about it. At least, the person complaining understood the position and was absolutely correct in saying there is no Biblical authority for infant baptism.

Our approach in this lesson will be to first present the true principle from Scripture, and then offer illustrations of the principle from secular and Biblical

evidences, making applications of the principles to various issues.

There is a foundational matter we must first consider. Hebrews 1:1,2, Matthew 28:19, Colossians 3:17, Acts 4:10, and other passages inform us of the chain of authority we have already mentioned. Beginning with the Father through Christ, through inspired men and Scripture, we have God's revelation to man by which all matters are to be determined in man's service and accountability to God. The Bible is the sole authority for therein is revealed God's righteousness and teaching. Whatever one does must be according to that authority.

Determining Authority

How does the Bible authorize? Obviously, whatever God commands is His authority. Also when we read of an approved example, such as the partaking of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), we have what God has authorized. The Scriptures also authorize by inference, sometimes called necessary inference. An illustration of this is how the command to assemble (Hebrews 10:25) necessarily infers the necessity of a place to assemble, therefore the place is obtained by His authority. The kind and location of the place is not taught, but is nonetheless made necessary by the command. Man must exercise his own judgment to locate the place, and what he determines is an expediency, that which is to expedite what is authorized. Expediencies must be lawful (First Corinthians 6:12; 10:23), therefore they are authorized. We must always remember, however, that there is no way to expedite what is not authorized. Substitutions, additions, omission, subtractions are not expediences. Those things which are coordinate of things or that are commanded or approved are not expediences but displacements. Man is permitted to determine how to do what God authorizes in such instances where God has authorized what is to be done but has not said how it is to be done.

Generic and Specific Authority

Another approach to Biblical authority involves considering the distinction between generic and specific

authority. The building of the ark provides an illustration for us. God told Noah to build the ark. He was specific regarding how long, wide, how big, the design, etc. He also told him to build it from gopher wood, very specific. If God had simply said make a vessel, and from any material Noah chose, these would have been generic commands and Noah would have been at liberty to build whatever he chose from whatever he chose. But God was specific. Therefore, when God told him what to do this necessarily excluded all else that could be done in obedience to God. Noah could not obey God and build a flatboat from cedar. He could not even build the ark from cedar. To have displaced what God had specified would have been disobedient.

Explicit and Implicit

Sometimes God's directions are explicit and at other times implicit. By explicit we mean the matter is spelled out in detail, like building the tabernacle and the pattern to be followed. Implicit authority means the directions are not distinctly stated, but are implied. For instance, God commanded the gospel be preached to all the world and believers to be baptized. Nowhere do I read that James W. Boyd must be baptized by explicit statement. But His command implies I have this duty. We must examine the Scriptures and learn what is and is not authorized and confine ourselves to that, doing what we do by His authority, or in His name (Colossians 3:17). To go beyond His doctrine is to not have God (Second John 9).

Demonstrations of This Principle

This principle has been clearly demonstrated, understood and operative down through the ages of God's dealings with man. In Numbers 22 and 23 we read where Balaam was asked to curse Israel, but he would not. He later did lead Israel to sin, but his response to the request to curse Israel was, (22:18), "*If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God to do less or more.*" He knew there must be authority for him to operate.

Deuteronomy 4:2 and 18:20 teach us the test of a prophet whether he is true or false. Additions to God's Word are prohibited. One who presumes to speak in the name of the Lord that which the Lord has not commanded was to be put to death. He had to have God's authority and he was not left to do whatever God had not specifically forbidden. He was forbidden by virtue that God included what He wanted and all else was excluded.

Proverbs 30:6, "*Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.*" One cannot teach and practice whatever he chooses just so long as that thing is not specifically forbidden. To do that would be to add to what God had commanded.

Acts 15:7-9, 24, refers to Peter's comments at the Jerusalem gathering where the relationship of the Mosaic law was under consideration. There had been trouble caused by some from Jerusalem who would have bound the Jewish law even after it had been nailed to the cross and taken away. Did they have authority from the Jerusalem brethren to go and teach such things? No, they did not. Acts 15:24, "*Forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with word, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment...*" We wonder just how far the wail, "But you didn't say not to," would have gone as justification for teaching what these false teachers were teaching?

First Corinthians 4:6, we are taught not to think of men above what is written (KJV); not to go beyond what is written (ASV). Colossians 3:17, Second John 9, Galatians 1:6-9, First Peter 4:11 all emphasize a similar theme of the limitations of doctrine beyond which none have the right to go. We wonder, in light to Hebrews 1:13, "*But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool,*" if some angel had presumed to take such a rank and position, he could have justified it on the basis, "But He didn't say not to!"

Hebrews 7:13,14 teaches on the subject of a change in priesthood. Christ was not of the tribe of Levi, but Judah. Nothing is said from the law of Moses of one

from Judah having authority to be a Jewish priest. Was one from tribes other than Levi forbidden to be a Jewish priest? He was! Why? He had no authority to be a priest. Could he become a priest anyway on the basis, "But he was not specifically forbidden to be a priest?" No, because he was forbidden because he was not authorized to be a priest. He was excluded when the direction of inclusion was given. Nothing specifically prohibiting him was necessary. Similar teaching is found in Revelation 22:18,19 prohibiting adding to and taking from the Word of God.

There is no lack of Biblical evidence in presenting the principle that we must have authority for what we say and do, and we cannot go beyond what God has said. Silence does not give consent.

Easily Understood Elsewhere

We understand this principle readily in other matters also. Should you place an order from some store for a certain object, are they at liberty to send you that object and whatever else they may choose? Certainly not! What if they sent several items, and a bill, and when you complained they said, "But you didn't say not to?" Would that make it all right?

Send your child to the store with a list, and even if he gets what is on the list but adds many other items he wants, by whose authority does he get the additional items? If he said, "But silence gives consent," you would readily understand the principle of inclusion and exclusion.

If a man asked an investor to buy certain stocks and bonds, and the investor did that, but also purchased many other stocks and bonds, would that be permissible on the basis, "But you didn't say not to?" Can a cook place whatever ingredients he wishes into a dish regardless of what the recipe demands and still claim to have followed the recipe? Can the druggist put whatever drugs in a medicine he wants rather than follow what the doctor orders on the grounds, "He did not specifically forbid these other drugs?" The matter is not difficult to grasp, except when it comes to serving God somehow.

But now we turn our attention to some Biblical illustrations of this principle that nobody can deny.

Biblical Illustrations

Noah could not change at liberty God's directions regarding the ark and it still be said, Genesis 6:22, "*Thus did Noah according to all that God commanded him, so did he.*" Naaman could not dip himself seven times in a Syrian river and claim to have obeyed God, saying, "God didn't say not to dip there." God told him what to do, where to do it, and that excluded everything else. Nobody had to say, "Don't do this or that." Having been given His authority, that was it, all of it, nothing else allowed.

Ask Nadab and Abihu if presuming to do what is not commanded is all right with God (Leviticus 10:1,2), They perished because they did that which the Lord commanded not. Ask David if transporting the ark of the covenant on a cart is all right (First Chronicles 15:13-15). God never told him not to transport it that way. But He did tell him how to transport it and anything else than what God said was an addition, substitution, innovation, that was prohibited because it was not authorized.

Can we have as ingredients of the Lord's Supper hamburgers and Coca-Cola, even if we also included unleaven bread and the fruit of the vine? None in their right mind would accept that. But where is it specifically forbidden, except in the teaching not to act without authority? The same thing is true regarding partaking of the Lord's Supper on Thursday night or some other day other than the first day of the week, for which we have authority. Nobody has to find a direct prohibition. Those who advocate other days are obligated to find authority for it and there is none. The principle is well established in matters of secular life and Scripture. We should simply abide by it.

Some Applications

Let us apply this teaching to various issues. Concerning the use of a mechanical instrument of music in worship, where is the authority for it? To say, "The Bible does not

say not to," is insufficient. It does not say to do it, nor anywhere allows it, and is therefore without divine authority, hence, forbidden. The same is true regarding choirs, whistling, humming, clapping, quartets, etc. Those who partake of the Lord's Supper at weddings are asked, "Where is your authority?" Those who turn the work of the church to recreation, secular education, gymnasiums, volleyball courts, chemical laboratories, raising money through cake sales, bazaars, car washes, and gimmicks such as "Western Day" where everybody dresses in western motif (former Madison church of Christ), where is your authority for perverting the work and worship of the church? Those who permit "children's church," divided assemblies, washing feet as an act of worship, burning incense, burning candles, counting beads, praying through Mary, praying through for salvation, sprinkling infants,we ask, "Where is your authority?"

Some complain, "You are just against everything." That is not so. We have to be against what is without authority to obey God, however. We are strongly for having authority for what we say, do, and uphold.

The Consequence of Silence Giving Consent

If silence gives consent there is no limit to the innovations, diversities, departures, and divisions that could and would follow. Man's will, not God's will, would be the governing rule. We cannot be of the same mind, judgment, and speak the same things adopting a "unity in diversity" position. Such a position is not unity, but heresy. It only produces apostasy.

The Lord's church is not a segment of the Restoration Movement. Some other churches may say that of themselves, like the Christian Church and what is called the Independent Churches of Christ. They are departures from the basic principle that determines authority. We cannot be united and cannot be acceptable to God unless we respect what God has said and respect the silence of the Scriptures, insisting on "*thus saith the Lord.*"

In a discussion I had with a preacher of the Christian Church, he insisted that I cease my opposition to the use

of mechanical instruments on the grounds of the silence of the Scriptures. I responded to him that our entire discussion would never have been necessary if he had respected the silence of the Scriptures. The subject of mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship would never even come up since Scripture says nothing about it, but does say we are to sing. If we ever adopt this "do your own thing" attitude, we just as well quit serving God because we would have dismissed Him as authority.

We must obtain, retain, and sustain the spirit of Isaiah 8:20, "*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*" This divine principle of truth will not be compromised by faithful people of God to get along with anybody. To do so would be to cease to get along with God.

* * * * *

Be Ready to Defend the Truth

The title of this lesson is in the form of an imperative, a command, an admonition, and a charge to keep. People are told to do many different things and they ought not do them all. But this is something every Christian ought to do. We should inquire into the validity and propriety of every directive we receive. What is the authority behind it? We propose to establish the authority, propriety, and validity of being ready to defend truth.

Four passages come to mind. First Peter 3:15, "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*" Philippians 1:3-7, "*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this*

very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, even as it is meet for me to think of this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." Philippians 1:15-17, *"Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will; the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds; but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel."* Romans 1:15, *"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also."*

The Meaning of Ready

What does it mean to be ready to do God's work? When I first left my earlier occupation to preach the gospel and moved to South Bend, Indiana, I thought I was ready. I soon learned through the years just how much there is to really being ready. But to be ready implies having a strong desire and willingness to preach. One must also be equipped. As Daniel Boone is reported to have once said, he kept his powder dry, his musket loaded, and knew how to use it. Readiness means preparation.

Readiness also demands recognition of a sacred duty. There is more to being ready than just wanting to be ready and thinking you are. Peter, in Luke 22:33, said, *"Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death."* He was honest about that, but he proved he was not yet ready as he thought. He later denied Christ thrice. He was as yet untried and untested. Paul said, Acts 21:13, *"What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."* When he said that he had already proven himself many times. There is more to preparedness than willingness, desire, and a sense of duty.

What We Defend

We must get clearly in mind what we are to defend. We are not called upon to defend men, even the big names, restoration leaders, nor favorite personalities. We do not defend papers, colleges, parasite projects and programs,

many of which were once good works but now gone bad. We do not defend the pocketbooks and make decisions based on money. Nor do we defend the status quo or the past per se. We must learn the difference between what is new and what is true. We cannot defend denominations or the religious world generally with its theories, opinions, speculations, philosophies, and false doctrines. While we are responsible for ourselves, we are not even to be set to simply defend ourselves because when we are proven wrong we should change rather than defend ourselves. We are to defend the truth (John 17:17), God's Word, "*thus saith the Lord,*" and the inescapable applications of truth and its implications.

Does Truth Need Defending?

Does the truth need defending? Some say truth will defend itself. It is true that truth provides sufficient ammunition for its defense. But the inspired apostle Paul thought the truth needed defending, and he was set for it and did it. Jude thought the truth needed defense (Jude 3), and urged we contend earnestly for it. Stephen acted as if truth needed defense (Acts 7). If your family is attacked, would you defend them? If truth is attacked, would you defend it?

But some complain that we ought not defend it against brethren. We ought not have to defend it against brethren, of course, but often it is necessary. Why should we not defend the truth against brethren who teach error? "*A man's foes shall be they of his own household.*" Shall we not contend with the foes of truth when they raise attack against it, regardless of who they are?

Why Do It?

Why must the truth be defended? It is because truth has enemies. There are false teachers gone out into the world (First John 4:1). Acts 13:10 says there are those who pervert the right ways of the Lord. Philippians 3:18 speaks of the enemies of the cross. Everybody does not love God's truth. Relatively few do. We have an adversary, the devil (First Peter 5:8), and he has his agents at work against the truth both in and out of the church.

Some pervert the truth (Galatians 1:7). Others will not endure truth (Second Timothy 4:3). Error will not save, but only the truth. The gospel will save (Romans 1:16; John 8:32). Some will lead others astray (Acts 20:30; Second Peter 2:1,2). We cannot prevent apostasy and digression without defending the truth, keeping out error, such as premillennialism, missionary societies, instrumental music, various forms of liberalism, Calvinism, ungodly living, etc. How do you suppose such things are kept out of the ranks of the body of Christ? It is not by just "going along" with it, but resisting it and defending the truth. Legalism, theistic evolution, modernism, the perverted "Bibles," Crossroadism (cultism), sectarianism, humanism, denominationalism, worldliness are deterred by defending the truth. Many have perverted the work of the church and some have decided it is best to cease to blow the trumpet of warning on this point because prominent people are involved, or because somebody of the denominations might not think well of us (as if they ever have). The church has become infected with project promoters, being led about by colleges, camps, even business ventures and recreation. With many, the concept is, "You invent it, get a booster, get some doing it, and put it in the budget of churches. Start it and let brethren carry it, authorized or not." I had rather be driven from every pulpit among churches of Christ than to go along with such errors that are gradually but surely subverting the church in error.

What It Takes

What does it take to defend the truth? It takes knowledge of the Word, a commitment to it, and experience, talent, alongside desire and willingness, and a sense of duty. It takes knowledge of the error to know its vulnerability. There is so much error it is nigh impossible to keep up with all of it. Experience is not always measured in years and age. We do wonder why many churches prefer as "pulpit minister" some cheerleader, enticing entertainer, and personal playboy with his flashy and fancy manners, a game general with jangling gibberish of jokes and babblings of egotistical blowhards rather than sound, seasoned, and sensible proclaimers and defenders of the truth. So many churches are simply not fed sound doctrine. Shame on elderships that allow it!

Defense requires some talent and this is where so many of us are lacking. Talent must be developed. Not all can use adequately the same weapons. While we all have the sword of the Spirit, some are more capable in using it than others. Some can speak, other can write, few can debate, reason, expose publicly and privately. All can assist others. Very few are effective in all these areas. We are grateful for the talents every faithful brother has to defend the truth and must resolve to use what limited talents we have the best we can.

We must be willing and able to take the consequences of defending the truth. Someone has said, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." Not everybody can take the heat, and this is not said to accuse or just be critical, but simply note this reality. Even the strongest swimmers can be swept away by the tide and engulfed beneath the deadly flow if not aware of his personal limitations and capacities. Defenders of truth will face insecurity of livelihood, loss of respect from some, abandonment by some who were once friends, cancellations of appointment, victimized by slander, lies, ridicule, and will suffer many times a genuinely broken heart. Not everyone is of the same disposition and some can take it better than others. But there are consequences to bear defending the truth.

Defending the truth demands time, study, energy, and a willingness to spend and be spent. One may well be labeled a "brotherhood watchdog," faultfinder, and other unflattering terms by those who mouth "love." He will be accused of being unloving. He will be persecuted, threatened, repudiated, even by some who profess morality, certainly by the denominational world. He may well become a victim of religious and brotherhood politics if he seeks to please God rather than men, and if he refuses to "line up" with some power brokers. He can even become estranged from closest friends and family. This burden at times becomes more than some can bear, and more than some families can endure. It is costly. It was costly to Paul, Stephen, Peter, John, and others.

Defense of the truth takes the proper spirit and attitude, purity of motive which God knows. One does not seek victory for himself. To seek this will blind him from

seeing the truth. It fosters pride. But he cannot be passive toward error, nor commit the sin of attempted neutrality in matters of faith, compromise, being friends with God's enemies, which is tantamount to treason. He must vindicate the truth without being vindictive. He cannot have an attitude that error will die if left alone. If that were so, we would all be in Utopia by now.

Why Some Do Not Defend the Truth

Some are just too "sweet spirited" and irenic in nature to defend truth. They are not really faithful soldiers of the cross, but possess a misguided piety, covering cowardice with self-righteousness, a strong egotism, and a self-declared spiritual superiority. They seek to live "above it all." A defender of truth is not a self-seeker, nor seeks the notoriety, fame, popularity, prestige, acceptance by men, a larger salary, or even the continuation of one. His work demands the backbone of a prophet that cannot be done by clerics, opportunists, personally ambitious professionals, and negotiators. I have never understood those who profess to serve God attacking those who defend God's truth. But often the defenders of truth will have attackers from among those who claim to be servants of the Most High. Such is usually determined by what you defend as well as by what you attack.

Back to Paul

Paul said his task was to defend and confirm the gospel. The truth has been confirmed, verified (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). We are now committed to the proclamation of a confirmed truth. We must be on the offensive as well as the defensive. It is not a question whether we shall preach positively or negatively. We must preach both ways. It is not a case of either/or. It requires both. If critics of defenders of the truth would do more defending of the truth and cease creating false doctrines that demand the defense of truth, we could save more souls. So much time and energy in recent years has had to be expended in fighting a rear guard action against liberal subversives, the worldly, compromising apostates, that it has retarded the offensive thrust of reaching those who have not yet

heard and obeyed. But if we do not defend the truth, the foundations are destroyed, and we shall have nothing to defend and present to the lost except additional religion of men.

Believing these things to be true, we would contend for the validity, authority, and propriety of the imperative, "Be ready to defend the truth." Let us be up and onward to the fray in the army of the Lord!

* * * * *

Why is Gospel Preaching Not Accepted Today?

The Bible reveals some very bad news. Sin entered the world through Adam (Romans 5:12), and all have partaken of sin for themselves (Romans 3:23). Sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is called death, with reference to a spiritual separation from God (Romans 6:23). Therefore, man in sin is alienated from God, but cannot save himself from the wages of it (Ephesians 2:8,9,12). He stands in need of a Savior, otherwise, he is eternally doomed and damned, hopeless and helpless. He shall be judged (Second Corinthians 5:10), and there is nothing to which he can look forward but the reaping of what he has sown.

The Bible also reveals some very good news. God loved the people of the world in their sinful state and sent Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, into the world to offer salvation to mankind (John 3:16). Jesus is the only Savior for mankind (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). If man is to be saved it will be through Christ or not at all. Jesus died for our sins (First John 2:2), and we are saved by His blood (Romans 5:9). But the blood of Christ will save only those who come to Christ. This is why our Lord sends the good news, the gospel, along with the

invitation that man accept His offer (Matthew 11:28-30). By the preaching of the gospel the Lord calls us to Him (Second Thessalonians 2:14). The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16), for therein we have revealed to us God's scheme of redemption. We must hear, heed, and live by the gospel of Christ in obedience in order to receive the spiritual blessings God provides through Christ (Second Thessalonians 1:8).

Then, Why?

All of this being affirmed with certainty in the Scriptures, why do not people accept the preaching of this good news? It would seem that the very mention of salvation would provoke us all to hasten without delay and rush to the Lord and be saved. But that is not the case, is it? More often than not the gospel message is rejected than accepted.

Romans 10:13-17, "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh of hearing , and hearing by the word of God.*"

Down through the history of the church those who preach the message of God have known the discouragement, heartbreak, and disappointment of going, preaching, people listening to the gospel, but no favorable response to it. It is not true of all, of course, but it is true of so many, even most. Why is that?

We do not profess to know all the reasons, excuses, hindrances, and barriers that people erect between themselves and salvation. We do know some of them, and we do our best to remove as many as we can and overcome the influence of whatever prevents obedience to the gospel. But it still remains a difficult truth that we fail to reach so many, all of whom need, desparately, what the gospel offers.

Our Duty

We have a clear duty to preach. Mark 16:15, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" Hearers have a clear duty to "*take heed how you hear...*" (Luke 18:8). All are accountable and answerable to God and shall be judged by the words of Christ (Second Corinthians 5:10; John 12:48). It is some consolation to the weary preacher to know that we have done what we could, that we have tried. It helps some to realize that even Christ, His apostles, the very best preachers of our day and days gone by met with the same reaction so often. Many still turn away and not one turns away but it means another precious, immortal soul is damned. Romans 10:16, quoting Isaiah 53:1, expressed the sad commentary, "*But they have not all obeyed the gospel.*" If we knew why, possibly we may be better equipped to do our work more effectively.

Not the Fault of the Lord

Isaiah 55:11, "*So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.*"

For a long while this passage was a great mystery to me after preaching the gospel of salvation, but few were saved. How was it accomplishing its purposes? The word "*void*" means to produce no effect. But the Word of God does produce effect. It will save (James 1:21), but it will also condemn (John 12:48; Hebrews 2:1ff; Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). It does one or the other. God intended that it would do one or the other. But why is His Word being rejected by those who need salvation?

Not Heard

Often it is simply not being heard. One cannot believe what one never hears (Romans 10:14). Faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). Jesus said, "*No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they all shall be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father,*

cometh unto me" (John 6:44,45). Without hearing and learning there will be no coming. But the gospel is not being sent to many, and they cannot be saved. This is a failure of the saved. We so often spend our energies plowing the same ground, keeping house, playing church, and do not take the Word to the lost.

What is being heard is often a perverted gospel. Nobody can obey right when they are taught wrong. John 8:32, *"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* Error will not deliver the soul. This is why Paul condemned a perverted "gospel" (Galatians 1:6-9). Too often the truth is watered down to accommodate men rather than save them (Acts 20:26; Matthew 4:4). Much preaching that is not wrong in what is said is sorely lacking because it never includes what must be said. What is left out can mislead just like misinformation that is included.

Error Won't Do It

Error that is presented as truth cannot convert one to Christ. It might convert one to something, but not to Christ. Acts 20:29,30, *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock, also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw disciples after them."* Error does not convert nor does it keep the saved saved. The Galatians were being deceived (Galatians 3:1), because a perverted message was being declared. Preaching that is uncertain and unsound destroys. *"And even things without life, giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?* (First Corinthians 14:7). *"But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine... sound speech, that cannot be condemned"* (Titus 2:1,8).

Many preachers, and many of our brethren, have their M.A. degree, which could mean "Master of Ambiguity." They are ever having to explain what they have taught, and explain their explanations, seldom being sure, frequently fuzzy, everything "gray," and nothing too clear. It reminds you of the story of two men listening to a preacher and one asked the other, "What is he talking about?" The second responded, "He doesn't say."

When you have such preaching, alongside little study, unlike the Bereans of nobility (Acts 17:11), how can you expect people to be saved? If hearers investigated and were honest, a lot of preachers, who are more akin to denominational clergymen than gospel preachers, would be off their lucrative payrolls and be forced to make an honest living.

People Are Often Misled

Colossians 2:8, "*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*" Such teaching not only takes the saved into apostasy, but it prevents the conversion of those who have never come to Christ. Preaching that says there is no right or wrong, no absolute truth, and we cannot know for sure even if truth exists, everything relative, subjective, like situational ethics, alongside denominational dogmas of "do-your-own thing," little wonder the gospel is rejected. Those who preach "everything is beautiful in its own way" do not recognize the hideousness of sin. This doctrine that says. "I'm O.K.; you're O.K.," deceives rather than relieves. Some are teaching it does not matter what you believe so long as you are honest and sincere. Some are even teaching it makes no difference why you alledgedly "obey" just so long as you have some reason in mind. All of this goes harmoniously with the preaching that says we cannot know anything for sure, that man is an evolved animal, that there is no hereafter, judgment, or accountability. While some do not go all the way into outright and complete denial of every truth, they are not really any different in the basic platform on which they stand with those who totally reject the gospel. What can be expected under this kind of preaching except rejection of the gospel? All it does is to blind eyes, stop ears, harden hearts, raise prejudices, provoke scoffing, ridicule, and mockery of truth. It cultivates the listener "*so they will not hear.*"

The servants of the devil, many in pulpits where once the truth was preached, have evangelized the world to the point that multitudes will never even consider the will of God at all. This is why many do not accept the gospel.

The Light Is Covered

Another reason for gospel rejection is that the light of the gospel is often covered by the bushel of hypocrisy. Matthew 5:14-16, "*Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"

What can turn people away from the truth more effectively than hypocrisy on the part of those who profess it? The Lord might say of us what He said about Pharisees, "*All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do ye not after their works; for they say, and do not*" (Matthew 23:3). James 1:22, "*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*" This "doing" includes purity, compassion, love, work, service, worship, sacrifice, putting first things first, matters to which many pay lip service and little more. People cannot hear what we say because of what we do.

Hypocrisy on the part of the Christian does not excuse the lost, because the hypocrite is neither man's judge nor his standard to follow. But the hypocrite hinders the work of salvation and that cannot be debated. It is the sad truth of the Lord's church in our time that worldliness, digression, liberalism, human legalism, and other abominable behavior has been so tolerated in our fellowship that many look on the church as being full of hypocrites. While it is certainly not full of them, because there are many faithful and godly brethren, it does seem many are content to retain the hypocrite even though it is costing souls in doing so.

A worldly member of the church has much for which to give account. James 4:4, "*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*" What a difference from Abraham who was called, "*the Friend of God*" (James 1:23). First John 2:15, "*Love not the world, neither things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is*

not in him." Drunkenness, lasciviousness, which includes dancing, immodesty, smoking, materialism, emphasis on the sinful pleasures of this life are examples of loving the world, and this is condemned. Some in the church act more converted to the "soaps" than the Sermon on the Mount. They know more about the "soaps" than they do the Sermon on the Mount.

Some in the church neglect doing the work and worship, and how many have prayed a lie when the prayer is lifted that we all return at the next hour of worship? With too many there is no intention to be present. Talk about blatant hypocrisy!

We sing hypocritically when we sing, "Take the world, but give me Jesus." It is not honorable to pretend to be what you will not be. It is not honorable for elderships to allow it to continue without corrective discipline, and allow the church to suffer the reproach of hypocrisy. Why do so many think it expedient to cater to the worldly member and soothe him in his sin than to hold fast to the Word of God? No wonder many churches are losing ground, and many churches of Christ are losing ground. Who wants to belong to a bunch of people who do not seem to know what to believe, or even if they can be sure of it, and then not live according to it anyway?

We realize that sermons and words like this are thought by some as being "too hard and unloving." They are neither. They are true and motivated by love. We have traveled the route of "the soft approach" until the church has become a laughingstock before the religious and irreligious alike. This is why many are not obeying the gospel.

The Love of Sin

Some will never accept gospel preaching because they love sin. This is why some object to such a sermon as this. John 3:19,20, "*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*" It is not news that some prefer sin to righteousness, "*lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*" (Second Timothy 3:4). Acceptance of the gospel demands repentance, a change

of mind that results in a change of conduct. "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*" (Romans 6:1,2). Some do not want to change and they continue as they wish. Even the warning of hell and the offer of heaven does not attract them. Psalm 1:6, "*For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*" Isaiah 5:20, "*Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*" Regarding sin, many will continue therein because "*my people love to have it so*" (Jeremiah 5:31). This is why many reject gospel preaching.

The Curse of Division

There are others who are confused by the division around them. John 17:20,21, "*Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*" Division, such as is produced by denominational churches and the ever-present innovators in the church, costs the souls of people. What are they going to say in the judgment? They are always wanting something new, different, changed, that divides and confuses! Division gives substance to the false claim that we cannot know what truth is. It makes it sound reasonable and accurate.

Confused Over the Value of Life, the Need of Salvation, and the Cost of Being a Christian

Some are confused over what is valuable in life. Luke 12:15, "*...for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" Mark 8:36, "*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lost his own soul?*" Ecclesiastes 12:13, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.*"

Others are confused over the need of salvation. They have accepted the concept of "sin" to be an old-fashioned fairy tale. The Bible makes plain the reality and terrible

results of sin. If one will be honest and just look around him he could not deny either sin's existence or even its havoc in this life, in addition to eternal hell. Have you ever said, done, or thought anything contrary to the will of God? That is sin (First John 3:4).

Are some confused over the cost of being a Christian? There is a cost. Romans 12:1,2, "*I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.*" Luke 9:23, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" How many are willing to pay the price?

What To Do To Be Saved

Doubtless, many are confused over what to do to be saved because different messages are being sent forth on this most important matter, Some are told to wait for some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or that salvation is by grace alone, or faith alone. Some preach that you just raise your hand and thank God, sign a card, get saved, pray the "sinner's prayer," just claim salvation, accept Jesus (without ever teaching what the Bible teaches about accepting Jesus). Even some of our liberal apostates are now preaching error that one does not really need to know why he is baptized for it to be acceptable. They say it is all right if it is done just to obey God. Where does the Bible leave that impression? Certainly, being baptized is to obey God, but in Acts nineteen, Paul encountered some who have been baptized thinking they were obeying God, but their baptism was not for the right reason. Paul baptized them again, in the name of Christ. When one is baptized he does obey the Lord because the Lord made it essential to salvation. But some are baptized to obey the Lord, thinking they are already saved before baptism, or to join some denomination, of which the Bible says nothing. Such is not the "*one baptism*" Paul preached and practiced. False doctrines flow freely about how God saves man, and this creates confusion and causes many to not accept the faithful preaching of the gospel.

The Bible still teaches the necessity of faith in Christ as the Son of God, repentance from sins, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins, into Christ and His church. There ought not be any confusion over this matter.

Regardless of why one rejects the gospel, the sad truth is that he remains damned. The extent of this tragedy escapes our ability to express adequately. Only when gospel preaching is accepted, including obedience and faithfulness, is there the promise of salvation in heaven. How we pray that more would accept it.

* * * * *

"Must Be Doing Something Right"

It was reported to me on the very day I wrote this notation that an elder of a congregation stated this in defense of a false teacher. The false teacher is Steve Flatt of the church in Madison, Tennessee, which is numerically large. Brethren, does size determine what is right? If so, Billy Graham and Promise Keepers must be right in spite of the false doctrines they teach because they attract crowds. Such trash we have heard before!

One way Flatt gets crowds is through gimmicks. Madison, one of the Nashville Jubilee heretical churches, had a big Country/Western Day on Sunday, April 28, 1996, featuring a Bar-B-Q chuckwagon, Kids Rodeo, special keepsakes for each one present, a concert with a country singer who stars in a performance about Hank Williams, Sr., a degenerate reprobate of years gone by, and everyone urged to dress in western motif. They said the highlight of the day would be their worship.

Worship is the highlight of every Lord's Day with faithful churches without the gimmicks and entertainment that draws crowds. How pathetically repulsive that an elder of the church can be impressed with a false teacher simply because he gets crowds. No wonder churches are digressing from the truth with such insipid and pitiable leadership as that. As Wayne Coats has said, it is a shame that stupidity is not painful. JWB

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A Burning Fire



"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVIII James W. Boyd NUMBER 3

How God Speaks to Man

(In 1996, the church in Christianburg, Virginia had as the theme for their lectureship sermons preached by N. B. Hardeman during the Tabernacle Sermons in Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee. One of my lessons was this one, preached by brother Hardeman in 1938).

Hebrews 1:1,2, "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.*"

The primary emphasis is that God spoke in times past, and God speaks today in this last dispensation. He used various ways in times past, such as dreams, small voices, directly, through a burning bush, visions, etc. But now He speak through His Son. When you stop and consider it, it is not at all surprising that God would communicate with those whom He created in His own image. What the passage is teaching us is how God has determined the authority by which we are to be governed in our relationship with Him now in contrast to how He governed man in ages prior to ours.

Hardeman observed how the book of Hebrews was an exaltation of Christ and His superiority over all that came before Him, or would follow after Him. This is one of the themes of Hebrews. Christ is presented as the heir of all things, the One by whom the worlds are made, the brightness of His glory, and the express image of the Father. All such designations underscore the deity of Christ.

He is also the One who purged our sins, and is our Savior, now at the right hand of God, the place of supreme authority and rank. The One God has chosen through whom to speak to us is the One of highest authority.

The Background of the Assertion

Man was created and placed in the Garden of Eden, only to prove himself unfaithful to God. Therefore, God drove him from the Garden in order to uphold the dignity of His own sovereignty. How could God be God and allow man to defy Him as he willed? God had to show His supreme power and excellence, and man was deprived of his home. Yet, God still loved man, although He obviously disapproved of him. We must learn the distinction between God's love for man and God's approval of man. He never ceases to love us.

Man was given a system of religion suited to him, with God speaking to and by the fathers (patriarchs), the revelation of God being gradually given with the fathers serving as priests of their families. During this age there was no written law, but there were commands, instructions, sacrifices of worship, and blessings and promises given, alongside warnings lest man depart from God's way. Man seemed determined to do just that.

Revelation continued until the time of Noah when God spoke to Noah with the warnings of the coming flood because of the wickedness of mankind. But God told Noah how to be saved from the flood along with his family, and Noah obeyed God.

Later God spoke to Abraham the great promises that he would be the father of a great nation, his descendants as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars of heaven, that his people would have a land of their own that God promised them, those that blessed him would be blessed and those that cursed him would be cursed. The greatest promise was that through his seed all the families and nations of the earth would be blessed. That seed is specifically identified by Paul in Galatians 3:16 as the Christ. Significantly, all the remainder of God's revelation to man is the inspired record of God keeping and fulfilling the promises that He made to Abraham.

God continued to speak to the patriarchs Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Jacob who became the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel, until the time of Moses and Mount Sinai.

The Law of Moses

God governed Israel for fifteen to sixteen centuries by the law that God delivered to that nation through Moses when Moses went into Mount Sinai after Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Everything about this religious system was according to the pattern that God gave, including the tabernacle, the plan of worship, regarding the priesthood, the daily conduct of Israel, even garments and specific feast days and sacrifices. It was, in contrast to the family religion of the earlier age, being rather a national religion, given exclusively to the Israelite people. No other people have been accountable to God under the law of Moses, and even Israel is no longer answerable to God by that law, seeing it has fulfilled it purposes, being nailed to the cross, and taken out of the way. This law was never, nor intended to be, the fulfillment of the promises God gave Abraham, nor the way of salvation designed by God before the foundation of the world. There were certain purposes for this law, and the law of Moses served the purposes for which God gave it.

The fact that the law of Moses was only given to Israel does not mean God has no interest in other people. But inasmuch as the inspired record is that of God's plan for redeeming man, accounts of contact with others are minimal.

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

One of the more serious problems many have today regarding the Bible is to rightly divide, or handle aright, the word of truth (Second Timothy 2:15). Many know the division of the Old Testament from the New Testament, even able to determine books of law, history, poetry, prophecy, the abbreviated record of the life of Christ, the history of the early churches, and epistles written to early Christians. But they fail to make the distinctions between dispensations or systems by which God has governed man (Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian). Therefore, we often see a mixture of the systems, which ought no so to be. Our text shows such a mixture has no authority from God seeing He now speaks through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The law of Moses was nailed to the cross (Colossians. 2:14), and blotted out. We now live under a new covenant as was prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31), and shown to be that of Christ (Hebrews 8). The first law was faulty in that it defined sin, condemned sin, provided sacrifices to roll sins forward year by year, but not the forgiveness of sins which could only be accomplished by the blood of Christ. The first covenant waxed old, not simply because it came first, nor that it lasted longer (the new covenant has already lasted two thousand years while Moses' law lasted only sixteen hundred years), but because the old law was replaced by the universal system God provides to save us from sin.

Christ Came

When the fullness of time was come, (Galatians 4:4), God sent Christ to break down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, making the twain one new man, bringing reconciliation, by the cross, and in the one body, which is the church (Ephesians 2:15). We are all saved the same way (Acts 15:9; Romans 10:12).

Hardeman correctly attacked the false doctrine of premillennialism that contends the prophecies have not yet been fulfilled, which is tantamount to an attack on the mission of Christ and His church. Such a doctrine destroys the inspiration of the Scriptures, makes Christ a failure to His mission to earth, degrades that for which He shed His blood, and argues for the unfaithfulness of God. The truth is we are all now under a "world wide, heaven born, blood bought institution" through the wisdom of God, a universal faith for all men everywhere.

God Speaks to Us Through Christ

Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18). He is now on David's throne (Acts 2). He is God's Son and God says we are to hear Him (Matthew 17:5). It is by His words we shall be judged (John 12:48). During His personal ministry He went to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but now He goes to all the world, and has commissioned His apostles and those who are His people to take His gospel to all the world. All the world needs the forgiveness of sin that God offers to all who come to

Christ. As Hardeman declared, "That's where we are tonight."

That system under Christ calls for our faith in Christ, repentance of sin, confession of our faith, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins, enabling us by the power of His blood to be raised to walk in newness of life, and added by the Lord to His church.

This system of salvation given through Christ is what is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16), the Word of God, the Bible. We have a solemn responsibility to hear and heed that gospel, and to let its message ring to all the world, encouraging one and all to obey.

Man need not expect some small voice, strange experience, special revelation, emotional outburst as if it was caused by the Holy Spirit, or any such thing. If and when a person wants to know what God says to him or her today, they must turn to the Scriptures and learn the will of Christ, for by and through Him God speaks now.

* * * * *

The Unity of the Bible

We must understand what is meant by the unity of the Bible, its significance and relevance to our salvation. We confidently contend that the Bible is the Word of God and it claims such for itself (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It is infallible, inerrant, with verbal and plenary inspiration, all-sufficient, and authoritative, authored by Deity and written by men.

God expects us to believe and accept the Bible as His Word. But He does not fail to provide for us evidence of this truth that we must believe. Even though the Scriptures were written by over forty different men, with the use of three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and small portions of Aramaic), men from a variety of backgrounds and degrees of learning and formal

education, they never claimed to have written of themselves, but always contended that what they wrote was from God.

Throughout the Bible there is one major theme (God's way of saving man), one central personality (Jesus Christ), one goal (that man might be saved from sin and have the proper relationship with God now and eternally), with no contradictions (even though some have been alleged but none without answer), and in perfect harmony from Genesis through Revelation.

The New Testament teaches that the Old Testament was written for our learning (Romans 15:4). In the Old Testament are examples for us that we might know what God approves and disapproves (First Corinthians 10:13). The better we understand the Old Testament the clearer and sooner we come to understand the New. The relationship of the two Testaments is seen in the type and antitype comparisons, with the Old presenting pre-pictures of that which comes in the New. Throughout the Bible in the record of God's dealings with man we see the principles of justice, grace, obedience, law, providence, the wages of sin in operation. There are over three hundred twelve quotations from the Old Testament recorded in the New Testament. With such a vast array of evidence, none can honestly question the strong tie between them.

A False Accusation

It has been said by some that those of us of the churches of Christ do not believe the Old Testament or that it is inspired of God. Such is as false as anything could possibly be. We believe what the record contends that all Scripture is inspired of God. But we also believe the Scripture when it teaches us we are now subject to God under the authority of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). We must study the Word in order to rightly divide the Word (Second Timothy 2:15). God speaks to us today through Christ (Hebrews 1:1,2). Therefore, we do not turn to the Old Testament to learn of our responsibilities and duties in serving God. This is a far cry from denying what the Old Testament writing has revealed. But we must see and comprehend the unity of the Bible.

Genesis

While we will not discuss at length every one of the sixty six books, we must consider the general composition and revelation of the books. Genesis presents to us the origin of all things, how man was tempted and sinned. In Genesis we find man worshipping God (not always as God instructed), the offering of sacrifices, and the descendants of the first pair both good and evil as is evidenced in the lineages of Seth and Cain.

As the world grew worse and worse, God repented of having made man and determined to purge the world by the flood at the time of Noah. Noah was spared, however. Then we read of the Tower of Babel, and come to the time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, with emphasis upon the great promises that God gave to Abraham.

In Genesis we read the relationship of Abraham and Lot, about Sodom and Gomorrah, the twelve sons of Jacob and Joseph being sold into Egypt, his hardships and rise to power. The book closes with the family of Jacob going into Egypt where they grew into a mighty nation within a nation. It was through this nation that God worked.

The Rest of the Pentateuch

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy records the enslavement of Israel, the birth of Moses, and the deliverance of Israel from that bondage. Much space is given to the ordinances of the law God gave Israel through Moses, and Israel's wandering in the wilderness for forty years before coming to the borders of the promised land of Canaan.

It is always noteworthy to be reminded that the law of Moses was exclusively to Israel, the people chosen of God through whom He would provide the universal Messiah. At the end of the forty years, the leadership changed from Moses to Joshua.

Israel's History

The book of Joshua is the inspired record of Israel taking the land God gave them. Judges is the account of periods of faithfulness and apostasy in the history of Israel which extended over three to four hundred years. We read of what can be called the cycle of Judges (a lesson which shall appear in **ABF** later), beginning with loyalty to God and prosperity, only to see the people turn from God into sin, being punished by occupation by enemy nations until they repented, whereupon God would raise up a deliverer, a judge, who would lead in driving out the enemy and a return to faithfulness and prosperity, only to see the cycle repeated time and time again. The period of the Judges finally decayed to such an extent that every man did that which was right in his own eyes rather than following the way of the Lord. As much as any period of Israel's history, that nation proved the Proverb, "Righteousness exalteth a nation and sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

In the period of judges we read of such outstanding characters as Gideon, Deborah, Jephthah, Samson, and last but not least, Samuel, the man of God who led them in the transition into a kingdom. The episode of Ruth also occurred during the period of the Judges.

The United, Divided, and Captive Kingdoms

First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles report to us the history of Israel, first as a united kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon, and later as two nations, Southern Judah and Northern Israel, until the time that each was eventually taken into captivity because of their defiance and rebellion against God, and their loss of the land that God said could have been theirs if they had remained faithful. But they did not.

There is much overlap in the books of the Kings and Chronicles because Kings presents the history of all the tribes, while Chronicles emphasizes Southern Judah. Naturally, there would be much overlapping in the records.

It was during this period, particularly during the Divided Kingdom era, that the prophets did their work. Isaiah,

Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets came to preach the Word of God to the people, condemn them for their sins, and plead with them to return to the "old paths" of righteousness. They would also prophesy concerning events of the future, particularly the coming of the Christ and the establishment of His kingdom, which is the church.

The Old Testament closes with prophecy concerning one who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah, with reference to John the Baptist.

From Malachi until the record resumes with Matthew, there is a span of some four hundred years with no record of revelation from God. We make a mistake, however, to think the Scripture says nothing of those years. Prophetically, especially in Daniel, we read of events that would transpire in the world, the kingdoms that would rise and fall (Babylon, Persia, Grecian, and Roman), until eventually God would establish His spiritual kingdom. The time was coming for the time of Christ.

The One Story Continues

In the fullness of time God sent His Son (Galatians 4:4). We first read in the New Testament of the work of John the Baptist who was sent to prepare the way for His coming. In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John we have what some call the "biographies" of Christ. I rather think they are much too abbreviated in scope to be called biographies. The theme of these first four New Testament books is the evidence that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, so that we might believe and have life in His name. Included in these books is the record of His pre-existence before coming to earth, His birth by the virgin Mary, His works and miracles, words and teachings, how He fulfilled prophecies of old, and the animosity many developed against Him until He was seized, arrested, crucified, and buried.

But, as prophecies had declared and as He Himself had noted, on the third day **He arose from the dead**, this being the climatic evidence of His Deity.

By His death and resurrection the Old law of Moses was fulfilled and terminated, having accomplished its purpose to "*bring us unto Christ.*" Some forty days later He ascended into heaven to the right hand of God, assuming His place on the spiritual throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords, to await the establishment of His kingdom on Pentecost as He had promised His apostles.

The History of the Early Church

The book of Acts not only records the beginning of the kingdom or church, but its early growth, how it spread, but was persecuted wherever the truth was proclaimed. In Acts we find the revelation of conversions, what people heard, what they believed, what they did, what they became as a result of their obedience, which was Christians and members of the body of Christ, the saved. Acts tells us of the gospel being preached, including its facts, commands, and promises, as well as warnings.

The early church enjoyed great success for a long while, until seeds of apostasy began to be observed and reported. Also opposition against the will of God through Christ began to expand.

The Epistles

Letters were written by Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude to Christians, sometimes to individuals and sometimes to congregations and Christians of large areas. In these epistles is where we learn much of what it means to be a Christian, the manner of life that is to be followed by Christians, and about the church, its work, worship, organization, and meeting false doctrines that would arise from time to time. Here we find what God considers right and wrong, the divine guidance He expects us to heed, the warnings of hell and the offering of heaven, our relationship to other people, duties, opportunities, and the promised return of the Lord, the resurrection of all, the judgment, and eternity.

Revelation

The final book of the New Testament is unique because of its inclusion of vast amounts of figurative and symbolic speech. Much dispute and confusion has arisen among men regarding Revelation, primarily because men will not pay attention to the time frame that the book declares to be under consideration. Revelation is not tomorrow's newspaper, nor the future history of the world, or even the future history of the church in every detail. It is the assurance unto the early church, then under bombardment of persecution, that faithfulness would produce ultimate victory for the followers of Christ. This is the message that is so important and relevant to us even yet. Through symbols, many of which can be deciphered from Old Testament usage, we learn that Christ will conquer all, and those who belong to Him shall live eternally in glory.

Because the book is so highly figurative in nature, it does not behoove us to be overly dogmatic regarding everything that is recorded therein. But there is no reason to miss the major theme of victory. It contains principles that have been, are now, and will ever be true.

Summary

This is the one story of the Bible, We have presented but a sketchy review, but we trust sufficiently adequate to establish the point of the unity of the Bible.

And how else could such a book have come into existence, covering the vast spans of times, with men of various backgrounds and diversities, except there was the divine oversight in its production?

The Bible is not a geography book, nor mere history, or science text, or great literature. But where it speaks of such things, it speaks with accuracy and precision. It tells us what God has done, and what we must do in order to be saved from our self-imposed destruction by sin. It is an exaltation of Christ, our hope, comfort, guide, glory, and victory. **And by it we shall be judged.**

* * * * *

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

This lesson is not only to inform people what to do to be saved, but assist them in telling others. Things familiar are sometimes taken for granted as if everyone knows. But many are ignorant of what God teaches on this theme, and many substitute plans are being offered that shall not succeed. It is so important seeing that a man's soul is worth more than this world (Mark 8:36).

Whether a person realizes it or not, this question is the most important one the mind can ever consider. This is true because the answer will determine life here and in the hereafter. It is of temporal as well as eternal consequence. It is because of what the question implies. None ask the question except they first realize they are spiritually lost and have a sincere desire to be saved. They have become aware of the wages of sin, that they are separated from God, and it reduces itself to a matter of heaven or hell. The question is essentially asked three times in the book of Acts (2:37; 9:6; 16:30).

Salvation

Consider the goal and desired result. It is salvation of the soul. Salvation is presented with different meanings in Scripture. There was the salvation of Noah from the flood which was a physical salvation (Hebrews 11:7). Paul was physically saved from shipwreck (Acts 27:31), and he warned that except all abide in the ship they could not be saved.

But the salvation under consideration is not a physical salvation, nor a salvation of the social gospel. Christ did not die on the cross in order for man to have a larger house, better car, more lucrative job, richer food, or be free from physical stress and disease.

The salvation involved in this question is spiritual salvation of the soul of man from the wages of sin. It is the salvation of that part of man that is created in God's

image and that survives the life of the physical body. But even spiritual salvation is presented in different senses.

Spiritual Salvation: Future, Present, Past

We read of the ultimate goal of salvation in heaven. First Peter 1:9 teaches that this salvation is the end (end result) of our faith. This is a salvation of the future for which we hope (Titus 1:2). It is the salvation from the wrath of God (Romans 5:9), and His judgment against evil. First Peter 1:4 calls it an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fades not away, reserved in heaven.

There is also the sense of salvation in our present relationship with God. We are now a saved people. That is what the church is (Acts 2:47). First Corinthians 1:18 Paul speaks of himself and the brethren in Corinth as saved people. They were not in heaven, yet, but they enjoyed salvation. First Corinthians 15:2 speaks of the gospel by which ye are saved. This saved relationship is sustained by walking in the light (First John 1:7-9), and being faithful (Revelation 2:10). It is conditioned on our faithfulness in Christ (Philippians 2:12). Paul teaches us to work out our own salvation, but not work out our own plan of salvation. We are to work God's plan now.

But salvation is also mentioned as being saved or delivered from the guilt of past sins. Even though we can be saved from guilt, many times we still must suffer other consequences. Second Peter 1:9 reminds us how we were purged from past sins. This means we have been forgiven of sins previously committed. It is when we are saved from past sins that we are added to the church and are counted as one of the redeemed. In this lesson, it is salvation in this sense which we have in mind.

But we need to understand the relationship of salvation in all of these senses. We cannot be saved in heaven without first enjoying the saved relationship with God in this life, which we cannot enter without being forgiven of the guilt of past sins. There are conditions to be met in order to come to know this salvation.

So we turn our attention to what we must do to enter this relationship by being saved from past sins.

What?

Asking "what" implies some thing, some act, or attitude. Not just anything will suffice. There is that specific thing or things we must do. Salvation does not "happen" accidentally, without the intent and choice on our part. Salvation is not universally and unconditionally given. Therefore, whatever is involved we want to know what that is, seeing the alternative is condemnation. We must have knowledge of what is necessary to be saved.

Done

Whatever is involved is to be done. It calls for action, which means obedience (Hebrews 5:9; Matthew 7:21). When we understand God's plan for saving man, we soon realize much has already been done by God Himself to make salvation possible. God has done His part, and now we must do what He says is our part.

Must

Whatever the "what" is, and is to be done, must be done. It is not something optional. We cannot be indifferent toward it. The only choice we have is to obey or disobey. We encounter a necessity, something that is required to attain our goal of salvation. There is the necessity of God's law and His command that places upon us a duty and obligation. This necessity is established by divine decree. We are not considering directions from the minds of men because they can be dismissed without consequence. But we cannot dismiss what God requires. Most of the world has never learned this basic truth.

Like John 3:3-7, as Jesus taught Nicodemus regarding the new birth, this is something that must be done.

Me

What must be done must be done by me. What must **I** do? The very question shows I am involved, not passive. It proves salvation is not by God's grace alone. If salvation is by grace alone, our very question is foolish. The question need not then be answered but repudiated. Without me doing my part, God's grace will not save me.

What I must do is not just something for me to think, believe, feel, or want, but to do!

There are acts that I must do. While I must do these things, this in no way suggests I am working my way to heaven, or that I am attempting to earn salvation, nor that I merit and deserve salvation (Ephesians 2:8,9). Spiritual salvation in any sense is a gift of God (Romans 6:23). God has been gracious to provide the way of salvation, and inform us of that way, even inviting us to come that way. But we must do our part and nobody can do it for us. Salvation cannot be ours by proxy.

What We Learn and Must Do

We learn through explicit statements and commands, and observing examples of people being saved. We must have faith (Hebrews 11:6), without which we cannot please Him. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). If we do not believe in Christ, we shall die in our sins (John 8:24).

We also must repent, turn from, our sins, which is motivated by godly sorrow and a recognition of the goodness of God (Luke 13:3; Second Corinthians 2:7; Romans 2:4). Repentance is not just being sorry, but a sorrw that provokes the determination to turn from sin, and produces a reformed life.

One must confess his faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10; Luke 12:8,9), as did the Ethiopian (Acts 8:37).

In all of the examples of conversion of which we read in the book of Acts (Jews on Pentecost, Samaritans, Ethiopian, Saul of Tarsus, Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailor, or the Corinthians), conversion was completed when they were baptized into Christ. Baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:3), to wash away sins (Acts 22:16), to be born again (John 3:3-5), to get into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4), and to be added to the body, the church (Acts 2:47; First Corinthians 12:13). Taking the whole counsel of God regarding what was done, there is faith, repentance, confession of faith and baptism into Christ.

An Ever-abiding Principle and Law

Consider the law of sowing and reaping. Who can doubt that what we sow, we shall reap (Galatians 6:7,8)? The seed of the kingdom is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). When that seed was sown into honest and good hearts in New Testament times, that which was produced was Christians, only Christians, and Christians only. When we hear the same message of salvation they heard, believe what they believed, and obey what they obeyed, we shall be what they were. They were saved from their past sins, and entered into a saved relationship with God. Their past sins were forgiven, and they rightly possessed the hope of eternal salvation in their hearts which would be theirs upon their faithfulness to the Lord unto death (Revelation 2:10; Galatians 6:9).

What must I do to be saved? I must hear the Word, believe it, repent of my sins, confess faith in Christ, be baptized the right way and for the right reasons, and live a faithful life before God in Christ, and I shall have salvation in all the senses which the Bible presents it.

What Men Say

Men tell other men they can be saved by faith only, or grace alone, just raise your hands, sign a card, come to the altar, pray the "sinner's prayer," telephone us, expect some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, "receive Jesus," even by proxy according to Mormon doctrine. And on and on it goes. But the only reliable answer is what we learn from "*thus saith the Lord.*"

There cannot be any doubt as to the blessing of salvation. Learning <u>WHAT</u> is involved is not that difficult. That something is to be <u>DONE</u> is clear. The imperative nature is equally clear in that it *MUST* be done. The personal involvement is indisputable because <u>"I"</u> must do it. Learning, believing, and doing is the whole matter.

Shall we be saved? It is now left to us to determine. I have declared to you the counsel of God.

* * * * *

The Cycle of Judges

The word "Judges" is used with at least three distinct meanings in the Old Testament. Most Bibles will entitle the seventh book of the Old Testament as the Book of Judges which contains twenty-one chapters, covering Israel's history from the death of Joshua to Eli.

We also speak of the period of the Judges which extends from the death of Joshua through most of the life of Samuel, a historical span of three to four hundred years.

Then, judges refers to the men, and a woman, who served as rulers in Israel during this historical period. We ought to remember that the events recorded in the Book of Ruth also transpired during the period of the Judges.

Probably more than any other single Biblical book, the record of Judges is a demonstration of the Proverb, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people*" (Proverbs 14:34). Throughout the period of the judges, history seems to repeat itself. We all have seen how some people withstand the hardships of ill health, death in the family, financial ruin, despair and losses of various kinds, depressions, poverty, afflictions, and persecutions, only to fall victim beneath the temptations and trials that come in times of prosperity. Israel did this over and over again.

Did you ever wish you were wealthy? Probably most have given that some thought at one time or another. In truth, most of us are far wealthier than we realize. But what if a great abundance of money suddenly came your way. Could you handle the problems that come with it? Don't be too sure. Many have endured many things, but collapsed beneath the burdens imposed by wealth. Covetousnss, greed, selfishness, the desire for more and more, the striving for mammon, has caused much sorrow and grief in the world (First Timothy 6:6-10).

We all would fare better if we had the attitude of Proverbs 30:8,9, "*Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food*

convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." The people of Israel did such as this in the time of the judges.

A Book of History

Judges is a record of historical events concerning a certain period of Israel's existence. But it is far more than that. Judges is for the instruction of all those who will hear and heed. The entire period was one of restlessness, instability, disunity, false security, rebellion, repentance, and restoration. It was so turbulent that it helped give rise to the call for a centralized government under a king like others nations around them.

Judges contains rebukes and punishments against Israel that had not been necessary under the godly leadership of Joshua and those immediately after him. However, once that generation died away, there came a new generation on the scene which failed to heed the warnings God gave their forefathers. More than once Israel was deceived by the deceitfulness of riches, of which Christ warned in Matthew 13:22. They confused their physical welfare as spiritual welfare. Like the rich man in the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16), they often fared sumptuously, but it led to their spiritual digression and disfavor before God. Like the rich man the Lord called a fool (Luke 12), they centered their thoughts on themselves and their prosperity and forgot God time and again.

Judges is also a demonstration of First Corinthians 10:12, *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."* Also we see Proverbs 16:18 at work in this period, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."* If ever a book proved the possibility of apostasy, Judges is such a book. It seems that throughout the history of man, man has not remained faithful to God for long periods of time, but would serve God, only to see themselves overcome by their own waywardness and sinfulness.

Let us consider as a text, Judges 2:10-22. Please read it.

Judges in a Capsule

This text is almost a summary of the book in capsule form, abbreviated and reduced to a few select phrases and concepts. What we find in this text is a seven step cycle that characterized Israel over and over during this period of their history. They would be (1) in prosperity, serving God and enjoying His blessings. But as is so often the case, in prosperity they forgot the source of their blessings and ceased to serve God faithfully, (2) turning and adopting the ways of idolatry. Of all the transgressions of which we read in the Old Testament, idolatry is one that God simply would not tolerate. The nation of Israel has been instructed from its beginning not to serve other gods. Because of their sin, God would allow them to be punished, being taken into (3) captivity, sometimes taken outside their borders, and as often as not, being overrun within their own homeland. Hardship and suffering would soon follow. Crops were burned, houses destroyed, people forced into slavery, and in time the people began to realize their folly in turning from God and (5) repent of their misdeeds and cry unto the Lord for relief from their oppressors. It was then that (6) God would hear their cry and raise up a judge, a deliverer, who would rally their forces and manage to drive out the enemy. The people would once again (7) serve God and enjoy prosperity. But the cycle would only be repeated. Alienation to faithfulness, apostasy to recovery, such is the description of the record of Judges.

We need to note that when Israel forsook God, there was not a spiritual vacuum in the land. Rather they set God aside and sought other gods. They were religious throughout the time, but they were not righteous. We must never make the mistake to conclude that being religious necessarily means being righteous. Even today there are many in our own land who are exceedingly religious, but the trait of righteousness according to the will of God is not to be found among them.

A Lesson Too Often Ignored

From the cycle of the Judges we learn something that our current generation seems to ignore. We see the conse-

quences of the actions of one generation upon the next. The apostasy of one generation brings hardship upon the one that follows. Also the return to God by one generation brought prosperity to the next one. It is a sin of the worst kind and neglect for one age to fail to consider the impact and effect their conduct will have on their children and greandchildren. What we do affects them, and so often the adverse effects outweigh the benefits we try to leave them.

How many suffer today from the ravages of disease, the effects of drugs, the burdens of life, imposed on them by what their parents have done? Can we even tally the high price many are paying for the folly of our times?

A Judge

How would you define a judge? A judge was one who directed the affairs of the nation especially in periods of crisis. The judge would be the one God would raise up to bring the people back into a more normal and pleasant existence by delivering them from their enemies.

One did not become a judge by inheritance. Following Gideon's success, some wanted to set up such a succession, but Gideon would not permit it, contending that God would rule them rather than a system more akin to a king. This eventually changed.

Judges were not chosen by the people in a democratic manner. With some exception, they were temporary in their assignments until the time of crisis and recovery was expedited. They were raised to meet certain conditions and they varied greatly from the manner of rule of Samson to the more noble manners of Samuel.

Some have suggested, since it seems the judges recorded in the book did not necessarily follow one after the other in a straight line secession, that there were judges on both sides of the Jordan River to meet the needs as they arose. Whatever of this, as the inspired narrative unfolds, they may well have come in somewhat the sequence as presented.

Sometimes these judges brought deliverance by arousing the entire nation, raising an army, attacking the foe, and rebelling against the enemies that held power over the nation. At other times, the work seemed to be done almost single handedly, as did Samson against the Philistines. Just here we might be impressed with a statement made years later by Jonathan, son of King Saul, First Samuel 14:6, "*...there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.*"

Leadership

In this book we find many examples of outstanding leadership. What would Israel have done without the encouragement Deborah gave to Barak when he wavered in his duties? Who cannot appreciate the leadership quality of Jethphah, even as it was recognized by his fellow countrymen? Gideon displayed leadership when he was given the small force of three hundred men to attack the hordes of Midianites that controlled the land. First he was given a small task to perform (tearing down altars to false gods and building altars to the true God). Then greater duties were assigned him. With his relatively minute army, with organization and precision, he routed the enemy. He instructed his people what to do and when to do it, and commanded, "*Look on me and do likewise... as I do, so shall ye do.*" That, my dear reader, is real leadership (Judges 7:17,18).

Even the wicked ursurper, Ahimelech, was a good example of leadership. Ahimelech was a son of Gideon who attempted to seize power after Gideon's death. Some do not count him as a judge because he took control for himself rather than being called of God. But he gave a great example of leadership as recorded in Judges 9:48, "*What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done.*"

Certainly, there is the need for leadership in times of crisis. Today many who are in positions of authority are fickle, weak, vasicillating, hesitant to stand, even as attacks against truth abound. We live in times of crisis with God's people under attack. When the need for leadership is the greatest, many have cowardly withdrawn from the truth and gone along with the foe.

The Sources of Israel's Troubles

Israel's troubles began when they failed to drive out the inhabitants of the land as God has instructed them to do upon entrance into Canaan. They tolerated what God said to destroy. Does it not seem that many today are willing to make the same mistake regarding evil?

But also contributing to their troubles was their own stubbornness and determination to go their own way, doing their own thing, rather than submitting to the directions from God. Often we read in this book, "*And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord,*" then read again how they "*did evil again.*" They refused to learn lessons taught them from their past.

Judges Teaches Something Else

In Judges we see that sin brings punishment (Romans 6:23). Moses and Joshua had warned Israel many times of such things. They were responsibile for what they did and failed to do. Taken captive over and over, there were no shortage of captors and persecutors: the Philistines, Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Sidonians, Amorites, Perezites, Jebusites, Midianites, men of Mesopotamia, Moabites, and Ammonites. When Israel did not drive out these heathen people, God used these evil people to prove, test, and punish Israel. Often God used the wicked to punish the less wicked.

Judges explains why God wanted Israel to separate themselves from the heathen nations. The power of influence an be destructive. Familiarity of evil can breed toleration of evil. The desire for peace, and to please others, leads to compromise. Even now, the Lord teaches His people to come out from those who would lead them astray (Second Corinthians 6:14-18). "*Evil companions corrupt good morals*" (First Corinthians 15:33 ASV). We are not to fellowship unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11). Some just will not learn this.

When Scripture says God brought evil to Israel, it was not moral evil or temptation to sin, but is an expression of the punishment God dealt them from the demands of justice. Israel brought the evil upon themselves.

The Ruin of "Do Your Own Thing"

I am sickened by this phrase that is heard so often in our society. People somehow think they have the right to do whatever they wish without bearing responsibility and consequences for it. Israel was a land when everyone did that which was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25). Everyone was his own law maker and judge. Jeremiah taught, "*It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.*" "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death*" (Proverbs 14:12). Even now some talk about a "new hermeneutics," a new way to "understand and interpret" God's Word. It is nothing other than their design to "do their own thing" regardless of what God says. There is nothing new about it. It is the same old soul damning doctrine demonstrated in Judges when some contended there was no pattern they must follow. What do we see as the result? The closing chapters of Judges recounts the most hideous and reprehensible conditions and conduct one could imagine. This is always the result when people decide to forsake God and "do their own thing."

Some Things Judges Proves

Judges proves the link between man's sins and God's anger and wrath against evil and evildoers. It proves the link between disobedience of God with God's displeasure and punishment of the disobedient. It proves the link between ingratitude and pride; self-will and destruction. It proves the link between obedience and God's blessings. Indeed, "*Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...*" (Romans 15:4).

There were some fifteen different judges recorded over this period of history, depending on the way they are counted. Some do not count Ahimelech, as we have noted. Others will count Deborah and Barak as two. But as I count them, and most others usually count them this way but it is no great issue anyway, I find thirteen judges reported in the book of Judges and the last two reported in First Samuel. They are Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak (counted together), Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson as the major ones. Minor judges,

those about whom little is reported, include Shamgar, Ahimelech, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. The final two, reported in First Samuel, are Eli and Samuel. Of them all, Samuel was doubtless the most noble statesman and godly leader among them. It was Samuel who led the people in the gigantic transition from a rule of judges to a kingdom under Saul.

Judges teaches what Galatians 6:7,8 expresses. "*Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*"

Spiritual victory belongs to God and those who follow Him and His leaders. This book teaches what Jesus taught, John 15:5, "*Without me ye can do nothing.*"

We must give heed to the admonition "*Let those who have ears, let him hear what the Spirit saith...*" even through the book of Judges. We can learn and profit from the events and people of the past, or we can dismiss them, only to repeat and experience in our own lives the same failures and tragedies.

Anyone should profit from his own experiences. But is not a person a wiser one who can profit from the experiences of others? Too often it seems too many of us must learn the hard way, if we learn at all. But that which is revealed in God's Word is for our benefit and we can gain immeasurable good from the knowledge and application of the principles and truth therein. May we open our eyes and hearts and be wise and saved.

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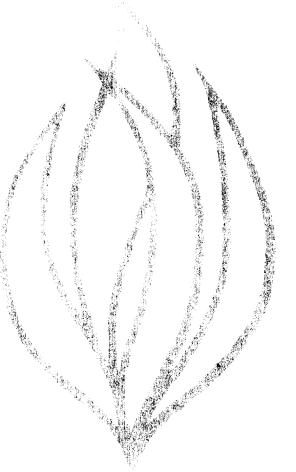

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVIII Owner W. Boyd NUMBER 1

The Eternal Kingdom: Its Mission

Our lesson will instruct us and help us stay the course in the kingdom of which we profess to be citizens. This material is often presented under various titles, and questions, such as, "What are churches for?" or the work of the church. Anything that exists ought to have good reason for existing, and this is true concerning the church. Are we doing what God expects those in the kingdom to be doing?

The church is important because it is of God, existing in His mind before the foundation of the world, founded by and built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, He being the head and Savior of it, and the church presented as His body, God's family, God's kingdom, and being composed of the saved, the redeemed, who are in Christ.

It is also noteworthy to be reminded that the New Testament speaks of only one church, even though there were many congregations. Never, ever, does the Bible present God's church in terms of a denomination. When we speak of the church we are speaking of the kingdom of God, for which conviction there is abundant evidence.

We shall consider our theme with several appropriate questions before us. Did God give His church a work to do? If so, what is that work? Why did He give the church the work He did? How is the church to do its work? Is the church sufficient to do its work as God has designed it? What if the church fails to do its work? Are there things the church ought not be doing?

It goes without much elaboration that many, both in and out of the church, are confused and misled regarding the purpose of the church and the work God gave the church to do. We shall mention a number of things that are generally being done today that are not really the work of the church at all. It is unfortunate that many consider being busy as the same thing as doing the Lord's business. But they are not necessarily the same.

What we do in our service to God must first have God's authority, as is required by Colossians 3:17.

Things the Church is Not To Do

It is not God's intention that the church direct the affairs of civil government. While we have legitimate interest and concern about civil affairs as citizens of our country, we should not involve the church in these matters that are purely political, economic, and government policies regarding trade, foreign affairs, police work, elections, road building, etc. But in matters of morality, ethics, truth, though often thrown by some into the political arena, the church should and must be involved because that involves the business of righteousness. For example, the issues of abortion, alcoholic beverages, gambling, same sex marriages the teaching of evolution, intrusions against the moral standards of God, these are the concern of the church.

The church is not intended to provide the social life of its members, furnishing entertainments, sports, gymnasiums, playgrounds, camps, recreational facilities, etc. To those who think so, we simply ask for the Scripture that authorizes such things. The craze to have the church to entertain has, in some digressive churches, turned the worship services into near revelry, shows, "a holy wow," and a religious Hee Haw.

While places for assembly and facilities to do the work are necessary, it is not the work of the church to simply build buildings, temples, sanctuaries, etc. For too long many have depended upon glamorous buildings to be the attraction of the church. Disproportionate amounts of money have been spent building and maintaining elaborate buildings. But the church grew more rapidly, physically and spiritually, when our buildings were more "on the other side of the tracks."

The church is not in the money making or money saving business. Some churches hold huge savings accounts, drawing interest, hoarding funds, while people all over the world are dying, lost, without the gospel. Good stewardship of funds is one thing. Greedy and grasping brethren who just hold on to money while the work

languishes is something else. I would fear to be an elder of a church presiding over large savings while the gospel is not being preached.

It is not the work of the church to provide secular education. Secular schools are businesses and do not belong in the church budget. For many years school people have dug into the treasuries of churches for their school work. Christ did not die to provide chemistry labs, tennis courts, computers, or make "scholars." Schools can be helpful or harmful to the cause of Christ. At present, 1996, most of the colleges established by brethren, have become enemies of the cause of Christ rather than friends because they have led the way into digression and apostasy. Brethren have for too long bought the false teaching that whatever an individual can do, the church can do.

The church is not simply to make people feel good, draw crowds, build self esteem, get numbers and funds, be accepted by the community, etc. The church should seek to please God, not men. You will never please all men anyhow. It's like the man and boy and the donkey. They started out with the man riding the donkey and the boy walking. Some criticized, thinking the man should let the boy ride. So they changed places. Then some criticized because the boy should have had more respect for the man than to ride while the man walked. So both got atop the donkey. Again, some criticized because they thought both of them on the donkey was too heavy for the donkey. So they both walked. Then they were accused of being fools for having a beast of burden but not using him. You cannot please everybody. Why try?

Some have befuddled the work of the church by seeking to do something without authority, but then asking, "What's wrong with it?" If it is without authority, it is wrong. We must have authority for the work of the church as we must have it for the worship, the plan of salvation, organization, terms of entrance, and so on.

The church is not intended to displace the civil government nor the home and school. Let us now consider what the work of the church is.

It's Prime Function

The church is to glorify God. Ephesians 3:21, "*Unto him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end. Amen/*" We are to let our light shine that others may glorify the Father (Matthew 5:16). This includes assembling for worship (Hebrews 10:25) where God is praised. It means the church is to be the pillar and ground of God's truth (First Timothy 3:15). Now let us consider further what this involves.

The Work of Teaching and Doing Good Works

Christianity is a taught religion (John 6:44,45). Jesus sent His apostles out to preach and teach (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). The early church, as it was scattered abroad, went everywhere preaching the gospel (Acts 8:4). Peter, Paul, Philip, many others, taught the people. They were set for the defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:17), and were instructed to "preach the word" (Second Timothy 4:2). The salvation of people is dependent upon the Word (Romans 10:13-17; James 1:18,21). There is no salvation without the Word being taught, believed, and obeyed. Salvation of souls is the goal of the church as it glorifies God. Therefore, the church must give itself to the spreading of the gospel, God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

Also, we are to be imitators of Christ in doing good works, as did Barnabas, Dorcas, and churches who helped other churches. We are to be a people zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). Good works involve what Jesus mentioned in Matthew 25. But even the doing of good is more a means to the end of preaching the gospel than the end in itself. Benevolent work, as it is often called, is the way into the heart so the seed, the Word of God, can be planted. The church was never designed to be the world's bread basket, provider of all physical needs, and promoter of a mere social gospel.

What is to be Taught?

Paul preached the gospel (Galatians 1:6-9) without addition or subtraction. He taught Timothy to do the same thing, who was to also teach others (Second

Timothy 2:2; 4:2). Peter taught words whereby the lost could be saved (Acts 10:6,32,33; 11:14; 15:7). Paul said he preached Christ (First Corinthians 1:21), sound words and sounds speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:1,8). Peter said we are to speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). Paul did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26).

Many effective methods may be used to teach, but we should not become top heavy with methods to the neglect of the sound message. Not every method of teaching is effective in teaching the gospel. Some methods reduce the gospel to something trivial and trite. Some contend we can learn how to teach from the denominations. The only thing we shall learn from denominations is how to have no respect for the authority of the Word. You do not necessarily teach error and truth the same way. We are to encourage people to believe and obey the gospel (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:9), not merely respond to some message. We are in the business of saving souls by the Word.

Who is to be Taught?

"*Whosoever will may come.*" The gospel is for all. All need it. All should hear it. All men and women, boys and girls, capable of properly responding obediently to the requirements of the gospel must be taught to do so. Every nation, tribe, and color must be taught (Acts 10:34,35). All will be saved the same way (Romans 10:12; Acts 15:9). The same message must go throughout the world. Teaching God's truth is the only way to save the lost, recover the fallen, and retain the saved. Teaching truth is the primary work of the church.

More on Doing Good

The church is commissioned and authorized to follow in the steps of Christ and give assistance to the less fortunate and needy. Galatians 6:10 authorizes doing good unto all men, especially brethren. James 1:27 defines pure religion as visiting (providing for) widows and orphans. It is wrong to neglect doing good (James 4:17). There is benevolence for which the church is responsible (First Timothy 5:16).

Some have created unwarranted and sinful division and disturbance in the church by making laws about benevolence where God has not made them. Especially have some become irate at the church giving money to orphan homes. That the church is to help the homeless can hardly be denied (James 1:27; Galatians 6:10). While some explode over the church giving funds to another institution to do its work, (and I oppose that also), an orphan home is doing the work of the home. It is another institution but it does what the church is not intended to do, that is, be a home. I would like to have some of these rabid disturbers of churches show how the church can possibly care for any homeless, members or otherwise, without another institution other than the church. The church is not, and cannot be, a home, but the church can provide a home, When it does, it does its work, supports another institution, authorized to exist.

Churches can also assist each other in doing work of mutual specific interest. Churches in the New Testament cooperated with each, and never lost their congregational autonomy in doing so. There is no authority for a superstructure of the church.

The church is sufficient to do whatever God has authorized the church to do, and it is not sufficient to do what God has never authorized the church to be or do. It is not sufficient to be a home. But it is sufficient without a missionary society. Today, many have decided to establish corporations, broadcasting companies, "Jubilee" extravaganzas, separate and apart from the governmental organization of the church as given in the New Testament, calling on churches to merely pay the bills. This is going beyond the Word.

What If The Church Does Not Do Its Work?

Then, who will? Will the servants of the devil do it? God looks to His children to do the work of the church. If they do not do it, it will not get done. Then how will God be glorified and souls saved and assisted? We are workers in His vineyard, and we must answer His call and enter into His labors, His way.

* * * * *

Regarding the Blood of Christ

There are four major points intended to be made in this lesson with several minor ones. We begin by asserting all need to be saved from sin because all have sinned and separated themselves from God by sin (Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Inasmuch as we all must die (Hebrew 9:27), and shall be raised from the dead (John 5:28,29), we must realize we are answerable and accountable to God and shall be judged by Him through Christ (Romans 14:12; Second Corinthians 5:11). These truths are established, undeniable, cannot and will not be altered.

We must also understand, even though man needs to be saved, he cannot save himself by himself. Without the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8,9), God's love (John 3:16), and mercy (Titus 3:3-5), we could not be saved. We cannot be saved by the works of the Mosaic law (Romans 3:20).

Even so, all are permitted to be saved and salvation is offered to everyone. Christ came to save us from our sins (Luke 19:10; First Timothy 1:15; Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17). Salvation is a universal offer. All who are saved are saved the same way (Acts 15:9-11; Romans 1:16; 3:22;10:12). Regardless of race, sex, nationality, color of skin, or other distinctions that exist among the people of the world, since the day of Pentecost all are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:28; Romans 5:8,9; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 10:4; 9:22;12; First Peter 1:18,19; First John 1:7; Revelation 1:5; 7:14).

The Primary Point of the Lesson

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST IS THE CLEANSING AGENT OF THE SOUL OF MAN. God, the offended One, not only has the authority to determine how we may be saved, but has determined we shall be saved by the blood of His only begotten Son.

His Death is the Propitiation

Propitiation means that which satisfies the justice of God. God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, even the sins of the whole world (Romans 3:25; First John 2:2; 4:10). God does not look upon righteousness and unrighteousness just the same. His holiness demands that sin be punished as surely as righteousness is rewarded. The Father accepted the blood of Christ in lieu of man suffering the penalty himself. This is why we refer to the death of Christ as a vicarious death, His death being instead of another.

Those alienated from God because of sin are made nigh and reconciled to God by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:12,13). Peace between God and man, a peace broken by man's transgressions, is possible through the blood of His Son shed on the cross (Colossians 1:20). At the cross the offer of mercy was made possible because the penalty for sins was paid (Romans 3:25). Justice and mercy met at the cross (Romans 3:26).

This is the reason we speak of the efficacy (power to produce) of His blood. The blood of Christ is sufficiently powerful to save everyone who is cleansed thereby.

A Second Major Point

Every person who is saved is saved by the Lord's blood. Apart from His blood we have no approach to God, no relationship with God, no acceptance by God, and no salvation from God. It is God's plan that called for Christ to die for the sins of man, Christ becoming a sin offering (Romans 8:3). His death is proof beyond refutation of the sinfulness of man, his need of a Savior, and his inability to save himself. The shed blood of Christ at Calvary demonstrates the love, grace, and mercy of God toward sinful mankind, showing He is not willing that any should perish (First Peter 3:9).

Then Why Are Not All Saved?

Even though all need to be saved, and God wants all to be saved, and has provided the way for all to be saved, all will not be saved, because, in addition to what God has

done for man's salvation, salvation is conditional upon man doing what God instructs him to do. God demands obedience to His will (Hebrews 5:9; Matthew 7:21). Man must make the choice to either accept or reject God's offer of salvation. God does not and will not force man in either direction. Therefore, we know salvation is not by grace alone. The false system of Calvinism teaches grace only, but such would remove any and all responsibility of man in the matter, and place man's salvation entirely the responsibility of God.

The saved are called God's "elect," or chosen ones. God has chosen some to be saved and some to be lost, but not as Calvinists teach. We are chosen as we obediently respond to His commands. We are made "elect" by His blood (First Peter 1:2). As in the Old Testament there had to be the proper sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice, so there must be the proper application of the blood of Christ. Jesus is called the Lamb of God (John 1:29), our Passover (First Corinthians 5:7), as He shed His blood on the cross (John 19:33,34). God has predetermined that those who are washed by His blood will be saved, and those who are not so washed will be lost. Each of us must and are permitted to decide which it will be for ourselves.

It is not a question whether we are saved by His blood or not. <u>We are.</u> The question is WHEN are we saved by His blood? Is it before we sin, after we sin, when Jesus died even before we were born or had sinned, or when the conditions of reaching His blood are met?

The Third Major Point

We sing the hymn, "What can wash away my sins?" The answer comes ringing back, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Our sins are washed away by His blood when the application of His blood is made. As with any cleansing agent, the agent must be applied. We are washed clean when we obey from the heart that form of doctrine delivered (Romans 6:16-18). The doctrine is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4). The form of that doctrine is when we die to sin, are buried in baptism, and are raised to walk in newness

of life (Romans 6:3,4). This, too, is a part of God's plan for saving man.

Baptism, the Blood, and the Body

The blood of Christ is in His body. We must enter the body of Christ, which is His church (Colossians 1:18). His blood is reached by "faith in his blood" (Romans 3:25). First Peter 1:2 shows the connection between obedience and the blood. It is when we obey that there is the "*sprinkling*" or proper application made of His blood. In baptism we reach His blood because we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was shed (John 19:33,34). This is why Annanias told Saul of Tarsus to be baptized and wash away his sins (Acts 22:16).

Entrance into the "*holiest*" (heaven) is by blood (Hebrews 10:19). When we are baptized "*into Christ*" (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4), we enter that relationship with Christ wherein is salvation (Second Timothy 2:10), and all spiritual blessings are found (Ephesians 1:3), and there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1), but blessedness (Revelation 14:13).

It is when we are baptized that we enter the body, the church (First Corinthians 12:13). There is but one baptism operative now in the Lord's scheme of redeeming man (Ephesians 4:5), and that is baptism in water, for the remission of sins, into Christ and His body the church, by His authority.

Never are we to think, "Are we saved by baptism or the blood of Christ." The water itself saves nothing. The power is in the blood. We are saved by His blood WHEN we are baptized. And we must remain faithful in His body for His cleansing blood to keep on cleansing us from sin (First John 1:7).

Other Points of Interest

When the blood of Christ was shed, the old law ended (Colossians 2:14). His blood flowed both ways from the cross (Hebrews 9:15) to forgive sins committed under the old law. The blood sacrifices of the Old Testament were

types of the sacrifice of Christ. His blood, once shed, is sufficient for all (Hebrews 9:26,28; 10:10,14). Never again need our Lord die for our sins.

We are sanctified, set part, by His blood (Hebrews 13:12), set apart from the sinful world and set into the saved relationship with God. Hebrews 13:20 called His blood the blood of the new covenant or testament (Matthew 26:28). We, if we be among the saved, have been bought with a price (First Corinthians 6:20), and the price was His blood (Acts 20:28). Therefore, we are obligated to live for the One who died for us (Second Corinthians 5:14,15). His blood is holy, and there awaits condemnation to those who count it otherwise (Hebrews 10:29).

God has provided us a memorial to Christ and the remembrance of His blood in the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:27,28; First Corinthians 11:25-27).

The Fourth and Final Main Point

The blood of Christ will never save those who reject it. It will save all those who are washed clean by it.

What if His blood was never shed? Where would be our hope, our forgiveness, our fellowship with God, our entrance into heavenly glory?

Will we be saved without the blood? The answer is NO. So our last point is simply this, will you be washed in the blood of Christ? This is a personal decision you must make.

The blood is the power to save. All need to be saved and can be saved the same way. To reach His blood we must meet the conditions, which are faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of our faith, and baptism into Christ. Will you be saved?

The credit, glory, honor, and praise for our salvation belongs to the One who devised the plan, made the sacrifice, revealed the plan, and offers the plan. We can benefit if we obey.

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The Relationship of the Qualifications of Elders and the Work of Elders

We have had many lessons over the years regarding those who serve in the most awesome work of being an elder in the Lord's church. But this lesson approaches the matter a bit differently than we have ever presented it. There are a reasons for and relationships between the qualifications God directs and the work He expects.

God's government for His church is relatively simple. Christ is the head of the church. Christians are organized into local congregations, overseen by a plurality of elders, served by deacons, and all the members making up the body, including those who preach and teach. There is no authority for a super-ecclesiastical organization, but each congregation possesses local autonomy with all congregations tied together by the common bond of the faith.

Elders are also identified as pastors, bishops, shepherds, and presbyters. These words imply and describe the nature of their work. Simply stated, without the qualifications, they cannot effectively do the work.

It Is A Work

First Timothy 3:1, *"If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work."* The position of elder is not merely to bestow some honor, a place of power and authority. While that may be included, that is not the purpose of the "office." An elder is not and should not be selected because of popularity like one might be chosen for a political office. Some possibly look upon elders somewhat like a board of directors, with the preacher being the chief executive officer. This is a mistaken notion.

Being an elder is the most serious responsibility one can assume because of the nature of the work involved and its far reaching consequences, which are both temporal and eternal. Elders deal with souls, lives, destines, truth, matters that are sacred before God. They will either bring glory to God or reproach upon Christ. The failure to do the work properly is no fault of the pattern of government God has designed, but the failure of men to expedite the work correctly. This failure is usually due to the lack of qualifications.

His Work

We now shall consider the work of elders, not necessarily in order of importance, because all of his work is important. He is to serve as an example to follow. First Peter 5:3, "*...being ensamples to the flock.*" Like Paul, he must live an exemplary life (First Corinthians 11:1). He says by word and deed, "This is the way you are suppose to serve God as a Christian."

Being an example does not nullify his authority, that shall be discussed later. His authority is not limited and confined to simply being an example. But because he is to be a proper example, you can see the necessity for him to "*take heed unto thyself*" (Acts 20:28). To be the right example demands vigilance, self examination, caution, and constant introspection of himself. He must never allow himself to become a stumblingblock or hindrance to others, guarding his words, habits, values, and priorities. "You cannot lead where you will not go," and he says to the church, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

"Tend the Flock"

First Peter 5:2 (ASV), "*...tend the flock of God which is among you.*" The word "*tend*" is rendered "*feed*" in the KJV. Tend is a more inclusive term which including feeding, but a lot more. Feeding is one of the specifics in tending. With these words Peter uses the analogy of a shepherd and his sheep. Like Christ, the chief Shepherd, the elder is not a hireling, but one who seeks the welfare of the sheep, even before himself. He provides, protects from wolves, leads, guides, comforts, cures, supplies, and seeks their highest good at all times, even when it

demands great personal effort and sacrifice. This is the idea presented in Psalm 23. He bestows benefits upon those in his charge.

Feed the Flock

More specifically, he must feed the flock (Acts 20:26; First Peter 5:2). As stated, this is part of tending. This means it is his responsibility to provide spiritual nourishment which is the Word of God. God has provided food for His people to nourish the soul. Elders are to serve that food, and the flock is expected to partake of it.

It is the work of elders to be certain that the right food is served the right way (Ephesians 4:15). They must screen what is served, monitoring what is taught as well as teaching themselves, providing good materials and a balanced diet. They are responsible for who teaches and what is taught, whether in a classroom or the pulpit. (I once had an "elder" tell me he was not responsible for what the preacher taught from the pulpit and that was totally the preacher's responsibility. He was wrong, wrong, wrong. I told him he was either responsible or irresponsible.) If elders were knowledgeable and attentive to what is taught, liberals, digressives, apostates, and "change agents," would have no place to inject their venom into the church.

Elders must provide that which builds character, equips one for life and duty, how to face trial and temptation, and to meet threats and problems. They must guide people in success and failure, enduring hardships of life, serving and worshipping God faithfully, rearing families, giving Biblical answers that brethren might grow spiritually and become Christlike. While many are becoming obsessed with "counsellors," elders are our counsellors. They must also lead in matters of discipline of the rebellious.

All this demands a knowledge of the Word, and knowledge of those he leads. Some need milk while others need meat. The flock must know what saves from sin and it is the duty of elders to see that the flock has opportunity to learn and respond to what the Lord requires in this matter.

Take the Oversight

First Peter 5:2, "*...taking the oversight thereof.*" They are "*overseers*" (Acts 20:28). This concept is embraced in the meaning of the word "bishop." They are to superintend, exercise authority, rule, lead (not drive), govern, decide for the church. They have the authority to expedite the duties assigned them.

They are warned not to abuse that authority (First Peter 5:2), by being "*lords over God's heritage.*" They are to USE, not ABUSE, their authority.

It is their task to see that the work of the church is expedited (First Timothy 3:15). This requires of them judgment, consideration of the flock, and willingness to accept responsibility. As President Truman once said of his office, "The buck stops here." So it is with elders and the affairs of the church.

Their authority is limited and delegated. They do not decide the doctrine, but they decide the way the doctrine is to be proclaimed and upheld. They cannot alter the revelation of God's will in any particular (as regarding baptism, the work of women, the Lord's Supper, assembling, marriage), but they have the duty to see that God's truth is taught and followed.

They Are to be Watchmen

Hebrews 13:17, "*Obey them which have the rule over you and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you.*"

This tells us something of the depth and seriousness of their work and responsibility. They must watch for the welfare of souls and shall give answer to God for those souls. They have to care what happens to people. With some, the question, "Where are they?" is a fearful thought. The parable of the lost sheep, with ninety-nine safe in the fold, shows the shepherd leaving the ninety-nine and seeking the one lost sheep. Such is their work.

This demands of them vigilance, warning of the enemy,

providing measures of defense, being alert, rebuking, disciplining, being ready to action and seeking recovery.

The Qualifications Make one Fit for the Task

Some of the qualifications of elders are absolute while others are obviously matters of degree, which allows room for continued growth, but recognizable already before appointment. Some are more qualified than others. All qualifications are designed to enabled him to accomplish the work he undertakes. They are related, both positive and negative in nature. But he MUST possess them lest he cannot function as he must.

A man may be a good man, moral, accomplished, successful in business, mentally keen, intellectually competent, popular, and have leadership abilities in other fields, and yet not be qualified to be an elder in the Lord's church. It is no disgrace to never be asked to be an elder, but one should be qualified before he is asked, and before he accepts.

The qualifications for elders are given by the Holy Spirit in First Timothy 3 and Titus one. In our discussion we shall combine the lists since some overlap. Most of them have to do with character, inward quality, spiritual qualities that are manifested in his life and observable in his behavior, conduct, and manners. They deal with what governs his life. How can one be a spiritual leader without proper spiritual qualifications? These qualifications are in the imitation of Christ, and should be (for the most part) characteristic of all Christians, but especially elders.

No Striker, Brawler, nor Contentious

We find these listed in First Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7. They are closely related. He is not to be the type of person who is ready with a blow, pugnacious, quarrelsome, with unruly temper, belligerent, argumentative, and disposed to physical combat.

This does not mean he does not stand strong for the truth, but his manner in doing so must not be as the world. He must understand the nature of our warfare

(Second Corinthians 10:14), otherwise he will bring reproach on the church, the eldership, the truth, and do harm. How can you lead in peace if you are warlike?

Not Soon Angry

Closely related to the above, he must not be soon angered, but a person of self control (Titus 1:7). He cannot have a "low boiling point, be a hothead, or have a short fuse." An elder must not allow himself to be easily provoked, touchy, or thin-skinned. He must guard his words, actions, impressions given, and be a self disciplined individual. Some men may have good qualities that enable them to preach, deal with false teachers, promote the gospel, but not be qualified as an elder for lack of these very characteristics.

Temperate, Vigilant, and Sober Minded

First Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 calls for these traits. He must be a person of even disposition, calm, thoughtful, and opposite of rash, frivolous, impulsive, and extreme. These qualities have to be developed over the years prior to becoming an elder, being watchful for his habits, emotions, always in moderation. In his work he cannot afford explosive reactions, but must meditate, be rational, enter the depths of consideration and seriousness. He cannot just "pop off" without giving due thought. He must be watchful for and anticipate consequences for what he says and does. It is more to being an elder than just being one of good intentions.

All these qualities will make him just, holy, fair, righteous, impartial, and respectful of what is sacred, with the highest and purest motives. He is to be a man of unblemished integrity.

Attitudes

The above mentioned qualities are behavioral qualities. Now we consider some qualities of heart that will manifest themselves outwardly. While we are limited in our knowledge of the heart of another, God knows, and we can judge by the fruits that are borne.

An elder must not be self willed, having to have all things his way, as was Diotrophes (Third John 9), who loved to have preeminence among brethren. He must be gentle, patient, kindly toward others (not permissive of sin), not harsh, bitter, vindictive, vengeful, complaining, or discourteous. He must not have a dictator complex, or think his rule means he is a "boss."

How can one lead the church effectively if he ignores his treatment of other people? How can he win their trust and confidence that he must have to lead?

He must be given to hospitality, showing a welcome attitude toward others, friendly, gracious, concerned for the needs of others, kindly disposed, an encourager of men, reaching out for the benefit of his people.

Also, he must have the right attitude toward being an elder, desiring the work with a pure motive, not in order to advance himself or bring self glory, but to serve and help people get to heaven. His concern is souls, the lost and the saved, for Christ and His church. Such things matter to him more than life itself.

Knowledge, Ability, Experience, and Wisdom

Elders must know sound doctrine, even being able to convict the gainsayer, "*holding fast the faithful word*" (Titus 1:9). How can he feed without knowing what to feed? He may serve, or allow to be served, that which will poison the soul if he is without knowledge of truth. Elders must be apt, able, to teach, not that they personally do all the teaching for there are teachers and preachers in the church also, but he must be able to communicate God's will. After all, the mission of the eternal kingdom is to be the pillar and ground of the truth. How can he expedite that work if he is ignorant of the truth the church is to support?

He cannot be simply a novice, a newcomer, a recent convert, but one who is well grounded. He has been down the road at home, in life, in the church, and knows the pitfalls. If ever the "blind leading the blind" takes on meaning, it does regarding elders leading the church. He must have the wisdom of age.

God has not turned the leadership of the church into the hands of youth. So much digression and apostasy has resulted because men, too young and inexperienced, have taken control. A novice does not even know that for which to look and beware. Experience is necessary to keep the church on course.

His Personal Habits

He must not be given to wine, but be orderly, of good behavior, modest, the opposite of being uncouth and earthy. He has, as the saying goes, "got it together." How can he be a good example if his own habits are deranged? His appearance, manner of speech, faithfulness in worship, is always that of a gentleman. How do you teach the evil of drinking strong drink if you drink? How do you uphold modesty if those of his home are immodest? How can you urge worship if you ignore the assemblies?

His Domestic life

This has always been an important matter, but probably more so in our time due to the havoc being wreaked concerning marriage and the home. How can he guide the young and teach how homes ought to be if his home is in disarray? He is to be the husband of one wife (one at a time, always respecting God's marriage laws), and to have proven his capacity to lead in the paths of righteousness in his own home and demonstrated the ability to rear his children in the Lord. How can he rule the house of God if he cannot rule his own house?

It is unfortunate that the conduct of a man's family can reflect badly upon him. His wife can make him unfit for the eldership. His children can bring reproach upon him. Where there are problems in his home, they can be handicaps for him in this work.

Reputation, Values and Priorities

While the world does not set our standards, an elder must have a good report from those without. Otherwise, a man might bring reproach on the church if he is known to be an adulterer, liar, hypocrite, cheat, boozer,

profane, etc. He must be without reproach, blameless (not sinless perfection), but honest, upright, decent, known for goodness. How can you expect those who need to be converted to respect a church who puts people in leadership whose moral lives are worse than their own? This is also a problem with many members, also.

He is not be covetous and a lover of money. His emphasis is spiritual, not physical, gain. He knows the value of the soul, the body, time, eternity. How can he lead people to seek first things first and have their affections on things above if he does not have the proper priorities in life? He must love good men rather than evil. He shows what he appreciates and considers to really matter in life by the kind of person he is.

Can We Find Such a One as This?

This was the question Pharoah asked when Joseph gave him advice how to select a man to lead and prepare for the coming years of plenty and famine. Yes, the qualifications are tremendous, but attainable or God would not have required them.

There is probably nothing worse than having the wrong man in the right place. This is true in civil government, true in the history of Israel, even recognized in more trivial matters of business positions, coaching duties, etc. Never is it more important to have the right people in leadership than in the Lord's church. God knows what He wants done. He knows what it takes to get it done. He has designed the qualifications men are to possess who undertake the work to be done. We dare not dismiss them, any of them. None are optional and disposable. As stated, some are absolute, and some are matters of degree, but all must be present in that man who is asked to give his life in this service and work. We must respect them all.

Therefore, we should encourage younger men to give themselves to the development of these qualities so when opportunity is given them to assume leadership they will be ready, willing, qualified , and do well.

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Comments On Modesty

The elders of the church at East End asked me to bring a matter to the attention of the congregation that had evidently provoked from some harsh criticism of the church. The criticism, to my mind, was not absolutely fair, but as is often the case, everybody was "thrown into the same bucket." What was criticized was certainly not applicable to all, not even to most. But it ought not be applicable to any. I had preached on the subject many times before, and probably will do so again because it seems to be needed from time to time. But you have to appreciate elders who have concerns about such things and who want the church to be properly taught God's will. Whether I was able to fulfill what they desired is not mine to say, but I received from them their support for the lesson that was brought.

I searched for some time for what might be a reasonable and considerate way to bring up this subject and finally decided to simply ask a few questions and accompany them with a few remarks, and that did not take very long to make the major point.

Does Truth Matter?

I began by asking the congregation if truth really mattered to them. Some might be offended at being asked this, but we dare not be naive and think that truth matters to everybody, even everybody in church pews. It was not asked to be arrogant or for a put down, but to arouse the thought of personal responsibility for reactions to truth.

Romans 12:2

What does this passage teach? *"And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."* This means we, as Christians, are not to be molded into the fashion of the world, not to follow and

imitate the sinful things of the world. We are to be different because of the way we live. We are to be a peculiar people (Titus 2:14), which means distinctive. Just because others do something, that is not our way.

The Way of the Devil

How does the devil entice us to sin? James 1:14,15 teaches we are enticed by our own lusts. The devil uses the avenues of temptation (lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and the pride of life, First John 2:16), just as he tempted Eve, and Christ, and everyone else.

Immodest Clothing

Is there such a thing as immodest clothing? While Scripture makes is certain that there is (First Timothy 2:9), we raise the question because some ask, "What is modest apparel?" as if one could never tell what was and was not immodest. Paul evidently thought there is a difference and that people could determine that difference. What more authoritative instruction do we need? It is obvious that the over exposure of the body creates lust, provokes evil thoughts, lewd comments, and often leads to fornication. Wearing immodest clothing is sinful. That is plain enough for all to understand.

What Is Modest and Immodest?

Words have meaning, whether Greek or English. Modest means decent, unpretentious, discreet, shy, chaste, that which does not provoke lust, but purity of thought and action, which prevents shameful acts, is free from what is lewd, sexually obscene, salacious, and appealing to sexual desire and imagination.

Immodest is the disregard of the above restraints. Paul says we are to wear modest clothing. Now that will be significant to those who care what God thinks.

Do People Realize the Effect?

Certainly, they do. I do not buy this foolishness that people do not realize the influence and impact of their clothing. This may be true of the very young, but even in

early years people become impressed and obsessed by what they and others wear. Clothes are deliberately designed, bought, and worn because of the effect on others, both modest and immodest. This is why some take great pains to dress modestly and appropriately, and others imitate the sinful ways of the world.

How Much More?

If the abbreviated swim suits are modest, pray tell me how much more can one take off before they become immodest? There is not much left and the end is in sight. Skirts way up the thigh are shy and chaste? When a woman cannot sit without the indiscreet exposure of her body, that is modest? Some know what they wear, know what they expose, and deliberately do this because of the sexual effect. You see some tugging and tugging but there is nothing there to tug. It's like the time a little boy got lost in the grocery store, and once reunited with his mother, was advised to hold on to his mother's skirt. He said, "I can't because I can't reach it."

Dirty-Minded

Some show themselves fools by denouncing the necessity of modest clothing by accusing those who uphold modesty as being dirty-mind. The preacher is a dirty-minded old man. I really resent that stupidity. "It is a shame that stupidity is not painful." But suppose everybody that teaches and calls for modesty is a filthy minded, degenerate, depraved, sexually deranged maniac. How does that change what Paul wrote? One should be careful who is accused of being dirty minded. Was Paul dirty minded? Was the Holy Spirit who caused Paul to so teach dirty minded?

I do get tired of older women complaining to me about the immodesty of some younger women. They often are right, but let them tell the younger women themselves. It is far more appropriate that they do so than me or any other man. Are not older women supposed to teach younger women to be chaste? If you think I am going to tell some woman, young old, pretty or ugly, that her skirt is too short or her blouse too tight, you are a half

degree off being totally crazy. Tell them. Tell their mothers.

And where are the mothers and fathers in this matter? Have they become brain dead? Where are the husbands and fathers who are supposed to rule their homes? Have they just surrendered their responsibility?

Applicable to All

The principles of modesty apply to young, older, male, female, the world, and especially the child of God. It is good advice to dress to show yourself a man or a woman, but also that you are a Christian gentleman or a lady.

Will such teaching do any good? Yes, and no. It will do no good for the children of the devil who do not care, and probably not much for the worldly minded church member. But it will help the faithful Christian, and strengthen and encourage those who really love truth and want to do the will of the Lord in their lives.

Something of Which You Can Be Sure

When you dress immodestly, you can know that you provoke lust and violate Scripture. You sin. You cheapen yourself and are shameful. You advertise yourself that you lack self respect, are craving for attention even if means being cheap. You should be ashamed!

You may provoke lust in the weak and ungodly, but you also provoke pity and disgust in those who strive to live righteously. You are not glamorous, and your sin is not appreciated.

I have never understood why a Christian would want to dress more akin to the Hollywood type whores and whoremongers, the street walking people and basest elements of society, than people professing godliness!

* * * * *

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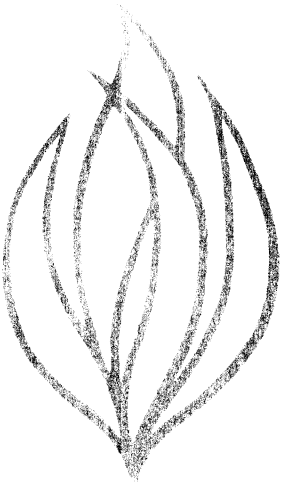

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVIII *James W. Boud* **NUMBER 5**

Things Believed, But Under Attack

Luke began the Book of Luke announcing that he was setting forth a declaration of "*things which are most surely believed among us*" (Luke 1:1). In other words, there are matters we believe, that can be known with certainty, that have been delivered by and through God's eye witnesses and ministers of the Word.

It matters what one believes. Truth and error are not of equal benefit (John 8:32). The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, not error (First Timothy 3:15). Faithfulness to Christ, which is essential (Revelation 2:10), demands faithfulness to His Word (Luke 6:46; Colossians 3:17; First Peter 4:11).

We shall mention several points in the doctrine of Christ which the church has, does, and must uphold. It has done so properly, historically, and scripturally, even though these matters have been and are now under attack from without and within the church. The doctrine is not "Church of Christ doctrine" because there is no such thing. The church is not the origin of doctrine, but is the supporter, proclaimer, defender, and follower of the doctrine of Christ.

Singing in Worship

Every mention of music in worship by the authority of Christ is singing. The Scriptures authorize congregational singing (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). It is noteworthy that there is no authority for the use of mechanical instruments of music, humming, whistling, hand clapping, or the imitation of instruments of music, choirs, quartets, solos, and other innovations that the "wise" of the world have seen fit to impose. While this is different from most of the religious world, and varies from the admonition of compromising liberals within the church, it is right, and cannot be wrong. It will never change among those who are faithful to the Lord.

One Church

Ephesians 1:22,23 teaches the church is the body, and Ephesians 4:4 teaches there is one body. **That settles that for those who accept God at His Word.** But all do not accept what the Word declares, do they?

The church is not a denomination and there is no authority for the existence of any denomination that has, does, or shall exist. All the saved are in the one church (Acts 2:47). One must obey the gospel to be added to the church. We do not do one thing to be saved and something different to "join" some church. Those outside the church are yet lost. All of God's children are in His family, which is the church, His household (First Timothy 1:15). While faithful brethren are sorely criticized for taking this position, we cannot speak as the oracles of God and take any other. We also want unity, but unity based on truth (First Corinthians 1:10).

The Inspiration of the Bible

Scripture teaches the Word to be inspired of God (God breathed) (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Scriptures demand verbal inspiration (First Corinthians 2:13,14; Second Peter 1:20,21). The concept of mere "thought" inspiration is error. This attitude toward the Bible is probably the major difference between brethren and the denominational world because it affects one's attitude toward authority. But this "most surely believed" point will never be compromised to get along with anybody.

More on Worship

Jesus taught we are to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). God is the object of our worship (Matthew 4:10), and Jesus is the only avenue we have to God (John 14:6). To worship in spirit involves the heart, attitude, motive, reverence, manner, and the condition of the inward man. To worship in truth means to do what we do according to what truth teaches. It must be as directed by the Word since "*Thy word is truth*" (John 17:17).

Scripture teaches we are to sing, pray, partake of the Lord's Supper, give of our means, and study His Word. In

doing so, we give honor and praise to God. Why does anybody think they can improve on what God has given? Evidently, some prefer entertainment, shows, performances, emotional "highs," and self-praise to worshipping God because of the innovations men have introduced and called it worship. Unless it is as God has taught, God does not accept it.

Baptism

Baptism is a burial (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:4), in water (Acts 8:36; 10:47), into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3), and into the one body (First Corinthians 12:13). It is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), to be saved (Mark 16:16), and administered by the authority of, "*in the name of,*" the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is one baptism that is operative and binding today (Ephesians 4:4).

A proper candidate for baptism is one who has been taught, believes in Christ, has repented of sins, confessed faith in Christ, knowing why and what he is doing.

Church and Kingdom

The church is the kingdom of Christ, and it has already come, having been established on the first Pentecost after our Lord's ascension into heaven. Any doctrine contrary to this is false doctrine. Christ said He would build His church, which He identified as His kingdom (Matthew 16:16-18). The church in Colosse was said to be in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13), even as John said he and the churches of Asia were in the kingdom (Revelation 1:9). Christ said the kingdom would come in the lifetime of those to whom He spoke, and with power (Mark 9:1), and identified the power to be the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The abundance of prophecies pertaining to the establishment of the kingdom were fulfilled in the establishment of the church regarding where, when, by Whom, and characteristics of its beginning.

Few doctrines so mutilate the inspired Scriptures as the false doctrine of premillinnealism, contending for a literal earthly kingdom with Jerusalem as capital, and

Christ reigning for a literal one thousand years. It is not true, deserves to be opposed and exposed for truths' sake.

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

God's will is that marriage consist of one man, one woman, for life. Remarriage is permissible when one mate dies, or when there is a divorce on certain grounds. That grounds is fornication and only fornication, upon which the fornicator is forbidden to remarry, and the innocent party may remarry. This is the will of Christ (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) and is as God designed marriage from the beginning (Genesis 1,2). Those who enter a "second marriage" after a divorce when fornication has not been the cause enter the state of adultery, from which they must exit in order to no longer live in sin. The Biblical evidence of these truths has been abundantly presented time and again. There is no room for rejection of these truths, and those who do so sin.

While marriage is not an obligation, those who may marry are those who have never been married, or whose mate has died, or has been divorced because their mate was guilty of fornication, and the one they are marrying also meets these requirements.

In our society where divorce has become a rampant plague, many even in the church wish to compromise this truth to accommodate the world. It cannot be!

No Fellowship

There can be no fellowship with evil, or with false churches of human origin (denominations) because of Ephesians 5:11, Second John 9-11, and Romans 16:17. This teaching becomes more pertinent as we hear and see brethren having fellowship with denominational churches and groups, teaching their doctrines, compromising with their worship, and generally reducing the Lord's church to the same status as the human organizations they choose to fellowship.

Role of Women

Women may not teach men nor usurp authority over them (First Timothy 2:11,12). Men, not women, are to lead, serve as elders, deacons, song leaders, preachers, and teachers of mixed groups. The modern and heretical feminist movement has converted liberals into their camp and some wish to degrade the Lord's will to accommodate what is politically correct in our degenerate and anti-Christian society. Women may and should teach children and other women, but nobody has the right to grant them the right to do what God forbids and what is not authorized for them. This, too, is an unpopular position in our day, but whatever of that, these things are believed because they are right, and they are right because Scripture teaches them. Those who are tired of the Scriptures have their problems with God.

There are other matters that could be listed, but we have chosen these few to mostly indicate how things believed are under attack. But we must teach sound doctrine that is certain and cannot be condemned (Titus 2:1,8). Even though some depart from the faith, we must preach the word (First Timothy 6:3-5). It is encouraging to see more and more brethren awakening from the slumber that overwhelmed so many for so long as the "change agents," their own name that identifies these heretics that attack the things most surely believed. Doubtless many will fall victim to their service to the devil before the tide is turned.

From Whence They Come

Every point of the doctrine of Christ that I have mentioned has been contradicted in recent times by members of some apostate Churches of Christ in the Nashville, Tennessee area at events or by those who sponsor and are connected with the Jubilee, David Lipscomb University, ads, letters, sermons, news articles, bulletins, etc. Apostasy is led by Steve Flatt of Madison, Walt Leaver of Antioch, Rubel Shelly of Woodmont Hills, Harold Hazelip of DLU, and other churches like West End, Donelson, Harpeth Hills, and a number of others. They include "preachers," teachers, professors, elders, board members, etc.

These errors have been either individually or collectively endorsed, such as the use of instrumental music in worship, calling it a matter of opinion, having no objection to choirs and choruses in worship, clap hands, entertain with "Acapella" (a group that imitates something never authorized to begin with, instruments in worship), and generally degrade and denounce the church as it is determined to hold to the things most surely believed. They are heretics, apostates, digressives, liberals, and servants of the devil. They divide churches, and lead brethren into perdition with their egotistical and self proclaimed superiority over everything and everybody. They ridicule the church before others.

In addresses at Jubilee, and/or by their speakers, has been heard calls for unity in diversity, that doctrinal differences make no real difference, that the church is a denomination, we should seek unity with the Christian Church and other denominations, just love, Christians in all denominations, etc.

It has been contended that the Bible is composed of notes men took when Jesus spoke, taken from documents, no reference to the verbal inspiration the Bible teaches, just thought inspiration, using modern perversions, contending that worship should be a "holy wow," and everything you do is worship, from eating the Lord's Supper, washing the car, or talking on the telephone. They endorse substitute assemblies for the local church on Lord's Day, confuse worship and service, and the list of their false ways grows daily.

Some contend you can accept denominational baptism, question whether it is necessary for salvation, and that baptism is acceptable if you intend to "obey Jesus," whether you know what obedience involves or not.

They deny the church and the kingdom are the same, denounce those who oppose premillinnealism, calling the doctrine simply in the "gray area," teaching error on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the role of women, almost anything else, except, "love me and leave me alone to do my own thing."

At Jubilee women have taught men, led prayers, led singing, been asked to give the main address. Those who object are called quaint, legalistic, unloving, old fashioned, divisive. One said they had done it so much it did not matter. Women who have violated the teaching on teaching men have received special honors from their elders. Saving the whales has been declared as necessary to salvation as baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In a geographical area once known for its spiritual strength and soundness, Nashville, Tennessee has become one of the worst spiritual cesspools for digression, liberalism, modernism, and heresy that exists in the world. Evidently few are the "preachers" of the area who have the backbone to oppose it.

What Does This Have to do With Us?

Are we so naive to think that such heresy will be confined to that area? Does it not exist throughout the world? I am sorry such exists among us anywhere, but it spreads like the plague because it allows people to do whatever they wish, believe whatever they wish, just so long as it is different from what has been.

Truth is our business everywhere and anywhere, especially when people are misrepresenting the Lord's church in their tomfoolery. We are taught to be "*set for the defense of the gospel*" and "*stand fast in the faith.*" Our loyalty to Christ will not allow a passive attitude toward such things.

We are seeing a replay of disaster of a century and a half ago, and over some of the same issues. Brethren in and around Nashville have relatives and members who go to Nashville, visit, do business, are employed there, attend schools there, in hospitals there, and even worship there. We do not and will not bid Godspeed to such error and those who promote it. An elder at Woodmont Hills is on the faculty at DLU. Many teachers of DLU are members of that apostate church. False teachers in and around Nashville are on the faculty. Board members are heretics. Where to worship with faithful brethren in Nashville becomes more and more a problem, although some faithful churches remain.

Many who do not openly condone and endorse such heresy are evidently fearful to expose it. How some "preachers" love their pay, and are willing to let the devil progress in order to keep their positions. It reflects the extent to which Satan has eroded the brotherhood. Why some churches who say they are faithful will use these heretics is beyond justification.

We are not overstating the case when we say the church is in a battle for the continuation of faithfulness to the Word. The doctrine of Christ, things most surely believed, is being undermined by liberal brethren. No preacher, teacher, elder, deacon, or faithful Christian will condone such things, nor refuse to refute them.

If you came home and found your wife and family beaten, assaulted, insulted, and abused, would you consider it lightly? Would you try to see some "positive" good in it? Would you refuse to oppose it on the basis that "they mean well?" Would you back away lest somebody think you are negative?

The church is the bride of Christ, the family of God, and it is being mangled, changed, restructured, destroyed, misrepresented, and abused by false "brethren" and their doctrines. Does it matter to you? Do we consider it lightly?

I do not think we do, nor that we should. We will not close our eyes and pretend, and sleep. I'm not ashamed of what I believe because I can prove what I believe from the Scriptures, and it is what the Scriptures teach that I believe. I shall resist and expose any and all who contend against it.

Everyone must keep informed, read good material by sound brethren, stay with the BOOK, and be as Joshua regarding where you and your house shall serve. We must be loyal and true to Christ regardless of personal costs. And so shall we be!

* * * * *

(Preached at the East End church, September 9, 1989)

Critics of Criticism
Shall We Be Silenced?

A lecture assigned and delivered in Paris, Tennessee, August 2, 1992.

Let me speak of some hard realities. Second Timothy 4:3,4, "*For the time will come when they shall not endure sound doctrine; but atfer their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*" Acts 20:29,30, "*For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*" First John 4:1, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*"

To contend that there are false teachers that have arisen among us is an understatement. We hear the false doctrines of grace only, instrumental music, premillinnealism, denial of the identity of the church and kingdom, Christians in all denominations, perversions of the teaching of baptism, theistic evolution, women preachers, a "new hermeneutics," there is no pattern to follow, and so on. We are told that these changes are coming and there is nothing we can do about it. So confident and arrogant are the heretics.

But why should they be among us? They are not of us. They usually go out from us, but today they seek to stay with us and do their dirty work of destruction. God has provided the way to send them out by discipline. Why allow them to remain? Why use them? Why make it appear they do no harm? It is a lack of love for truth that they are permitted to remain among us. False teachers are not guiltless, and neither are those who fellowship them. Many act as if Scripture was never written that forbids fellowship with them (Ephesians 5L11), forbids bidding them Godspeed (Second John 9-11), calls for marking them and avoiding them (Romans 16:17), withdrawing from them (Second Thessalonians

3:6), and accepting the anathema Paul pronounced against such as they are (Galatians 1:6-9).

For these false teachers to make headway they must silence the voices of those who contend for the faith and, therefore, criticize their error. They use many methods to do this, which will be the burden of my remarks. The easiest and surest way to silence us would be to show from the Scripture that what they are teaching is true, and the criticisms we make are false. But they will not do that. They cannot, but run in fear from having what they teach and practice examined in the light of what the Bible teaches. It is not overly critical, nor an overstatement to say, that truth no longer means anything to them. They are usually obsessed with the world's "scholarship," denominations, subjective feelings, and their own self-appointed superiority.

But they are gaining much ground through such extravaganzas as Jubilee, the Tulsa Workship, similar events in various places, youth rallies, books, papers, the schools (the Bible departments), and general subversion of churches where they can gain control.

The Cry For Love

They make their appeal through what they call "love," calling for "unity," as if they were the first angels of light to consider the words. We have no objections but support love and unity. But not the perverted "love and unity" for which they clamor. What do they love? Where is love for truth? Where is love for those who love and defend truth? Their love is for error and self.

Unity? What do they call unity? And at what price? Shall we compromise truth and agree to disagree and call that the unity for which Christ prayed? They do not seek unity, but they want fellowship in spite of division. They call it "unity in diversity." Unity must be founded on truth and agreement with the truth (Amos 3:3; First Corinthians 1:10). They lie when they say they do not want to change doctrine, but only attitudes. Their arrogant attitudes remain the same. It is the doctrine they are changing to accommodate the sinful world, perverting the gospel of Christ, making fair speeches,

subverting whole houses, practicing deception and dishonesty, and being abusive beyond imagination of those who do not bow to their ways. They march to the drumbeat of human wisdom, denominational error, their emotions and feelings, with a "do your own thing" religion of their own making.

Intimidation Attempted

This is a persistent weapon in their arsenal.They affirm a superior intellect. They have their scholars' seminars, having learned their heresy at the feet of unbelievers. (That is the way to become a real scholar.) They deny Biblical teaching and adopt human philosophies and theories. No faithful brother of the past is considered a real "scholar." They parade their arbitrarily determined degrees as if that made them somewhat. We wonder where was wisdom and knowledge before their day?

They answer critics, "You are not qualified to question me." Or, "Where did you get your PhD?" Some people could strut sitting down.

While they profess a greater "spirituality" than the lowly faithful Christian, they claim discerning between right and wrong is to judge. But they do it! They say we are not in the line drawing business. But shall we not respect the lines God has drawn? When we do, we are not sinfully judging but judging righteous judgment (John 7:24). How loudly they criticize criticism if the criticsm is directed toward their false doctrines.

They Say Come Personally and Privately First

They would silence their opposition by contending their opponents must first come to them personally before any criticism can be made. It matters not to them that they are propagating their heresy openly, loudly, publicly, but if you object, you must go into their corner to speak with them before refuting it. That is a false doctrine. They pervert and misuse Matthew 18:15-17 for such a stand. That passage deals with personal matters. When one teaches publicly false doctrine, that is not a personal matter. That is a matter of truth versus error, and that is the business of brethren everywhere.

I have dealt with many liberals personally and privately, but they lie. They will say one thing privately, and then publicly continue their false doctrines. But they do not practice their own doctrine. They will openly castigate their opponents without ever contacting them first about it. They, being liberals, permit themselves a double standard. They make their tirades against the church and faithful brethren openly and publicly. Indeed, the legs of the lame are unequal. They are a double minded people, and dishonest to the core.

Do you criticize Catholic doctrine? Have you first gone to the pope? Do you oppose Mormon doctrines? When are you going to Salt Lake City? Such trash they speak!

Blame the Division on the Faithful

Division exists, and is growing. But the cause is error and those who teach it. We were united and prospering until liberals became malcontent with truth and began their vicious devouring against faithful brethren who contend for the faith once delivered. But, like Ahab did Elijah, they blame God's people for the strife. They whine, "You are going to drive people away." This is like the complaint made against Jesus in John six. But He did not change His doctrine to suit the whiners. False doctrine is what causes division, not standing for the truth as revealed in Scripture. They do not recognize who the real troublers of Israel are.

Straw Men

By "straw men" we mean fake and pretended issues and positions that never really existed, and then the "courageous" destruction of those "men." For instance liberals will accuse the church of driving people to incest, as was done on the DLU lectureship by Gayle Napier. Shelly accuses the church of teaching people they can and do work their way to heaven. The church is accused of making women second class citizens because the church teaches God's Word on the role of women in the church. They love to parade what they consider to be the shortcomings and failings of some brethren and with a wide brush paint everybody that same color. But the truth is, they lie, and do so knowingly. Their

conscience is so seared they have no respect for right and wrong unless it advances their agenda. What they really want is to displace God's will for their own.

Because some elders fail and are even bad, they propose to invalidate the governmental organization of the church. Because some preachers are immoral, they conclude all are that way. Because everybody does not do everything they ought to do, they conclude everybody is a hypocrite. Because some have tired of the Lord's pattern for worship, they inject a religious Hee Haw instead. What they cannot understand is that human failures and weaknesses does not justify changing God's law. Because some do not sing well, let some "professional" chorus do the singing and everybody listen, then applaud.

Ridicule and Name Calling

With their claims of super love, you would think they would never do such a thing, but nobody is as mean and vicious as a liberal in ridiculing faithful brethren and calling them derogatory names. Unless you saddle up with them you are unloving, unscholarly, a hate monger, neo-Nazi, right-winger, spiritual dinosaur, gopher wood preacher, Bible thumper, five-stepper, legalist, traditionalist, knucklehead, power addict, victims of Southern theology, ignorant, dull, stuffy, racist, and a religious KKK. This from the mouths and pens of "loving liberals."

They attempt to discredit faithful preachers of the past, especially the pioneer preachers, unless they can use them to their advantage. They cannot distinguish between human tradition and apostolic tradition. Contending that we are under NO law, but all grace, everybody that does not accept this is a bigoted legalist. Faithful brethren are used to being called Campbellites by the ignorant of the denominational world, and water dogs, and being the butt of jokes that disparage and impugn good motives. But the "loving liberals," not able to meet the issues nor prove their positions, resort to the low level of slander, misrepresentation and lies. Whoever suggested that lying is a necessary quality to be a "good" liberal had it just right. Nobody is more evil than a liberal who undermines the church.

Nothing Binding Except...

They teach nothing is binding except what is explicitly stated. We ask, "Just where is that law explicitly stated?" They consider their law binding. They deny establishing authority by command and direct statement, approved examples, necessary inference and implication. The truth is, they have no way to ascertain authority because their philosophy is, "I'm O.K., you're O.K., everything is beautiful in its own way, do your own thing."

Reject the Necessity for Authority

Colossians 3:17 is discarded by them. For instance, trying to inject instruments of music into the worship, they have claimed there is no authority for congregational singing, but admit there does not need to be. We are "free" under Christ, evidently to do whatever we like and want. They whine, "It doesn't say not to," like that gives authority for something they want. Well, let's have pork and beans on the Lord's table. We can on their basis.

Create Doubt

Doubt is the prelude to denial, and liberals know that. So they plant doubt regarding what the Bible teaches as much as they can. To hear them talk, there is nothing we can know for sure, except that we cannot know anything for sure. They are absolutely sure about that. This allows for the possibility that anything might be all right, and that is what they want to establish.

No Law; All Grace

Grace and law, however, are not mutually exclusive. Grace does not deny law, nor vice versa. Grace is not permissiveness, as if there is no right and wrong. Law is a rule established by duly ordained authority. God has His law even now. Who made the law that we are not under law? The liberals made it, even as they denounce all law. We are not under the law of Moses, but we are subject to the law of Christ. Law infringes on their "freedom" to do as they want. They distort obedience

No Pattern

Without a pattern, anything goes. That is their agenda. The Bible, to them, is just God's love letter to His people rather than a light unto our feet and a guide to our path. Everbody is free to "interpret" the Bible any way they wish and everybody is right whatever they conclude. They do not even know what it means to interpret. It means to get the meaning. God gave His Word and it means something. When we get that meaning, we interpret. Until we get that meaning, we misinterpret.

This fallacy is the backbone of what they call the "new hermeneutics." Facts, logic, truth, are not important to them because they say we cannot understand the Bible alike anyway. Anybody would be insulted if others took their words and made them mean whatever the hearer wanted them to mean without regard to what the speaker said and meant. But liberals take that liberty with God's Word, and castigate as wicked judges anybody that would deny them the right to do that.

They deny there is any pattern for worship, church government, plan of salvation, anything. Nobody can say what we ought and ought not do. This reminds us of the days in Judges when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes," but God was displeased. How they ridicule the "old paths." Shelly asked, after having preached on the old paths for many years, "Where did we ever come up with that idea?" He knows where it came from, and the legitimacy of it, but when you have left the old paths, and cannot prove them wrong, you have to do something, and this is what liberals do. As Coffman said, you have to wonder about the honesty of such people.

Jeremiah described liberals, "*For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters; and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water*" (Jeremiah 2:13).

The Sympathizers

Not only are the militant and arrogant liberals enemies of the cross, but so are the band of sympathizers of

liberal digression who are constantly critical of those who contend for the revealed faith, but seldom, if ever, raise their voices against the error being promoted by false teachers. Sympathizers will fellowship with them, attend their hurrahs, speak of them in glowing terms, appear on their programs, march in cadence with their doctrines, display a pseudo-love for everyone except those who love truth more than money and fame, criticize the manner of opposition against liberalism, but never seem to find a way to oppose liberalism themselves.

They seemed not to be grieved that liberals are tearing apart the family of God with their heresy. But when you defend the church and the truth it is ordained to uphold, these cowardly sympathizers claim you are showing our "dirty linen" to the world. No, the dirty linen is the trash of liberals, and we try to clean it up before it contaminates any more than it already has.

Some are heard to say of liberals, "I don't agree with them but..." Can anybody really believe that? They just as soon agree. They possibly have deceived themselves into thinking their cowardice is justified, but when error is running rampant and you cannot bring yourself to stand against it, you are no good for the cause of Christ. Probably, they have hardened their hearts, compromised their convictions, seared their consciences, sought their fame and fortune, until they are willing to let the will of God be trampled. As one has written, "The greatest mistake any Christian can make is to assume that teachers of error are sincere."

A New Denomination

Liberals are creating a new denomination from the ruins of churches of Christ they have led into apostacy. Whether you call it the Worldly Church, Pilgrim Church, Family Church, Community Church, Jubilee Church, or Church of Heresy, it all comes out the same way. They are undeserving of being identified as churches of Christ. They hold to that name so they can deceive people and take property.

What we are witnessing is like the days when the Christian Church was created from division caused by liberals. They are guilty of piercing the body of Christ with their swords of error. They crucify Him afresh by their antics and doctrines (Hebrews 6:6). They are not guiltless before God or man, nor are those who condone, endorse, fellowship, and run along with them bidding them Godspeed, or act as if it does not matter.

We Shall Not Be Silenced

But faithful brethren, whether few or many, will not be silenced by their wicked wiles and manipulations, sinister plots and lying manners. We shall persist in teaching what the Word teaches, opposing whatever is contrary to it, admonishing all men everywhere to the way and will of God through Christ. How could anybody seriously claim to be a follower of Christ and do otherwise?

* * * * *

When Jesus Says, "Thou Art..."

There are six phrases in the letters to the seven churches of Asia as recorded in Revelation that begin with the words, "*Thou art...*" The words are "you are" or "you have" in the New King James Version. The difference does not in any way alter the message. The passages are written for us below with ***"thou art"*** in bold.

To the church in Ephesus, (2:5), "*Remember therefore from whence* ***thou art*** *fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."*

To the church in Smyrna, (2:9), *"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but* ***thou art*** *rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."*

To the church in Sardis, (3:1), *"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis, write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that* ***thou*** *hast a name that thou livest, and* ***art*** *dead."*

To the church in Laodicea, (3:15-17), *"I know thy works, that* ***thou art*** *neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because* ***thou art*** *lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that* ***thou art*** *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."*

Five times the phrase is used to rebuke and condemn wrong the Lord saw in those churches. One time there are words of commendation and encouragement.

Some General Observations

All of these comments are made by the Lord concerning what He noted about the churches involved. They are words directed from the Lord to His people. Inasmuch as we profess to be His people, these words have relevance and significance to us. Four of the seven churches in Asia are involved. Three of the *"thou art"* passages are direct toward the church in Laodicea.

We are impressed that these words are specific and personal. **YOU** are. He was not discussing somebody else, but addressed them with the definite **YOU.**

Also note He said, "You **ARE."** It is not that you may be, could be, or were, but you are, right then, as the Lord described. The Lord, being Deity, has the ability to know with infallible precision. He sees motives and actions, heart and deed. Psalm 44:21, *"Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart. Nothing can be hid from the Lord.".* Hebrews 4:13, *"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."* Psalm 33:13,14, *"The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth."*

We observe that these words, coming from Deity, are authoritative, coming from the highest authority. Romans 3:4, "*Let God be true, but every man a liar.*" Paul makes this comment by inspiration denoting the absolute perfection, truthfulness, and reliability in whatever the Lord says. So it is with what God says.

All six statements are judgmental. As noted, five accuse and condemn, while one commends and shows divine acceptance. They express His attitude and evaluation of what He observed in these churches. The Lord has the right to so judge, "*The Lord shall judge his people.*" (Hebrews 10:30).

He Does Not Only Condemn

In the five instances where He has words of condemnation, He also includes the solution and instruction for correction. He diagnoses the problem and prescribes the medicine. The way of correction is repentance (2:5; 3:3; 3:19). Repentance demands a change of heart that produces a change of action and manner. In other words, although there was distress and sin among these churches, that situation did not have to remain that way.

Repentance is not simply being sorry, although godly sorrow works repentance (Second Corinthians 7:10). But genuine, soul saving repentance produces results that are manifest in reform. To Ephesus is would mean returning to their first works (2:5). To Sardis is meant being watchful and strengthened (3:2), To Laodicea it meant making the effort to supply what was lacking (3:18). The Lord always shows the more excellent way.

His Motive in Every Case

Whether the Lord is chastening and condemning, or encouraging and commending, His motive is the same. All these words come under the umbrella of divine love for the children of God. He wanted Ephesus to prevent having their candlestick (their identification as a church of Christ) from being removed (2:5). He wanted them to overcome and eat of the tree of life (2:7). He wanted Sardis to revive what was not yet dead, but dying

(3:2)). There remained a "faithful few" even yet upon which recovery could be established. He wanted to prevent their name being blotted out of the book of life (3:5). He loved the church in Laodicea (3:19). He certainly did not approve of them as they were, but His love never wavered. Summarily speaking, He wanted them to remain faithful (2:10). It was their soul salvation which was His interest. He knew that when people err, they can make the necessary corrections. Whether they do or not is a choice man must make. But ignorance is always a hindrance to improvement and correction of wrongs. The Lord was providing them opportunity and motivation to do what must be done to once again be acceptable before God.

The six "*thou art*" passages do not embrace all the good or evil that the Lord could have observed among these churches. But these few notations were specified.

"Thou Art Fallen"

The history of the church in Ephesus is marked by many notable conditions. They had heard the apostle Paul preach, experienced growth, faced obstacles from their opponents, which included the instigation of riots and threats. They also had received an epistle from Paul which included warnings as well as promises. But now the Lord says they had done what some people today say nobody can do, and that is, they had fallen.

The church at Ephesus started out well, but digressed from their acceptable state. We are not told specifically how they had fallen or in what way the Lord considered them to have fallen. But the sad reality is they had fallen. When we read this, as well as the teaching in Galatians, Romans, Hebrews, and in almost every one of the New Testament epistles about the possibility and warnings of falling, we are amazed that some can stand directly in opposition to this Biblical truth and declare, "Once saved, always saved." Such a doctrine is false.

Their problem was not a matter of knowledge. They could remember their earlier and acceptable state. By these words the Lord informs them that they could not continue as they were and be pleasing to God. It is as if

the Lord is saying to them, "We both know what you were, and that you were acceptable. Now we both know what you are, and you are unacceptable." They could not deceive the Lord regarding their true spiritual condition.

The solution for them was repentance, that change of heart that would cause them to turn again to their former state and their first love. This was not an optional matter if they wished to please the Lord. No command of God is optional. We decide to either obey or disobey, but we are not a liberty to do whatever we see fit and expect God's approval. Failure to repent would mean they would lose their identity as a church of Christ. Could they become a Community Church? To obey His direction would be to their glory.

"Thou Art Rich"

It was said of the church in Smyrna that they were in tribulation and poverty. How could they be in that condition, suffering blasphemy and persecution, and still be called rich? Evidently this church, for whom the Lord had no rebuke in this letter, had "*true riches*" (Luke 16:11). The churches in Macedonia were in poverty but were rich in liberality (Second Corinthians 8:2). Luke 12:21 speaks of those who are not rich toward God. Real wealth is not to be measured materially. This church evidently laid up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19). Was the rich, young ruler truly rich, or the man who fared sumptuously every day (Luke 16:1)? One is rich when he is rich in good works (First Timothy 6:18).

Paul had made many rich by his message and manner in teaching the gospel (Second Corinthians 6:10). Material riches can deceive and cost us our soul (Matthew 13:22). Those who are rich are those who hear and heed the call of God (Romans 10:12). They are the ones who have laid hold on what really counts. They have the wealth of forgiveness, fellowship with Deity, the privilege of prayer, the promise of God's providence, comfort, hope, guidance, and purpose in this life and the anticipation of an eternal life in heaven. These are the spiritual blessings found only in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). This "*thou art*" is one of commendation and encouragement to Christians in need of it.

"Thou ... Art Dead"

This is not complimentary. The church in Sardis had a name of being alive. Their reputation, however, did not describe their true character. Reputation is what others may think of you. Character is what God knows you are. Why this church had a good reputation we are not told. Doubtless it was because in their history there had been many good things. It may have been because once they were faithful, doing good works, following the "*old paths*" of the faith of Christ. Many churches today have a good reputation for these reasons.

It might be that they were considered somewhat because of trivial measures, such as numerical strength, financial ability, multiple programs, community popularity, elaborate buildings, etc. Many churches today have these things and some are so light headed as to consider that necessarily a mark of being spiritually alive. Churches may have great "busyness," but not really be doing the Lord's business.

Their reputation had possibly come from their past, and they were relying on the good things done in the past. Whatever might be the source of their reputation, their reputation was misleading. The Lord said, "*Thou art dead.*" There were the "faithful few" there, and in them was the hope of their recovery. But the basis of their recovery depended on their repentance, a return to the works they were allowing to die, and to be alert and strong, qualities they were lacking. If they did not correct matters, the Lord would come upon them as a thief in the night, a definite warning of judgment.

The Three "*Thou Art*" Phrases to Laodicea

This church was unacceptable to God as they existed. So displeased was God with them that He threatened to spew them out of His mouth. The connotation is that they made Him sick. It was because they were neither cold nor hot. This is another way of saying they were lukewarm, a reference to their lack of conviction, their indifference, absence of zeal and devotion.

This church lacked aggressiveness in their religious life. They went about their Christianity in a lax, haphazard, half hearted manner. They were prone to compromises. They wanted to be saved, but did not want to pay the cost the Lord requires. They wanted the blessings but were unwilling to bear the burden.

Such a disposition in a church will inevitably lead to apostasy, especially in times of crisis and temptation. They were deceived into thinking all was well between them and God because they were materially prosperous. They are not the last to be so deceived. They thought they were in need of nothing, increasing in goods, and their real condition was just the opposite.

The Lord told them they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and unclothed as far as having the garments of faithfulness.

Again, the solution was repentance. Whenever there are faults, problems, sins, etc. the solution demands first of all, repentance. Not only were they told to change their hearts, but were told that for which they should seek. There are few words of stronger rebuke than the evaluation of the Lord about the church in Laodicea.

Relevant to Us

What would Christ say to us today should we receive a specific letter from Him as did these churches? The truth which He calls on us to respect and obey would not change in the least. Our individual circumstances may vary from congregation to congregation even as they did then among these churches. But the word of the Lord endures forever (First Peter 1:25), and therefore, we can know that the truth He taught them is applicable to one and all who profess to follow Christ regardless of the age in which we live. How wise we will be if we heed the admonition He gave them, "*He that hath a ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*"

* * * * *

The Time Draws Nearer and Nearer

The time draws near when the publication of our booklet, ***A Burning Fire,*** will cease. Just about everything that was intended at the start, some sixteen years ago, has been accomplished. At that time it was projected to put into print most, lacking very few, of the sermons I have preached over the years. They have now been included in the two hundred nine issues (this is the 209th). We shall produce only two or three more.

In addition to my lessons printed in ***A Burning Fire*** there are many manuscripts of lessons in lectureship books that have not been reprinted in the booklet.

In the next booklet, possibly two, I want to include some material that I consider vitally important in our knowledge and service to God. Admittedly, it is not the kind of material that will appeal to light study, but because of its very nature, is deep and beyond being easily grasped. And I do not suggest what I shall include will be all that adequate. But it is a study that I have enjoyed preparing, presenting, and consider so needful.

The Nature and Characteristics of God

This will be the theme and shall occupy as much space as I consider will be needed. We cannot fathom all there is about Deity, even all that is revealed. But we do not have to know everything to know something. I hope we can learn something.

The material will be presented in such fashion that will enable those who wish to pursue the matter further to have a beginning point, with citations of multiple passages, concerning a matter about which we must acknowledge our inability to fully understand.

Look for it! I hope it will do us some good! JWB

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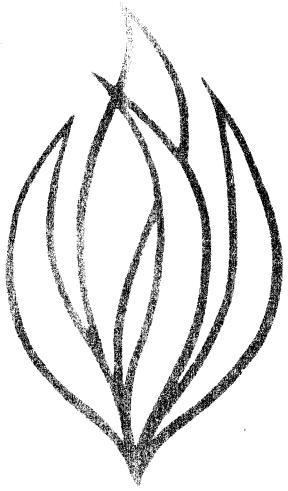

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

The Nature and Attributes of God

PART ONE

Paving The Way For Apostasy **22**

VOLUME XVIII James W. Boyd NUMBER 6

The Nature and Attributes of God

PART ONE

Tell me about your God. We sing the hymn, "Our God, He Is Alive," and "How Great Thou Art." We must admit at the very start that we undertake a task that is beyond our ability to fully comprehend because of our finiteness. But we shall profit from considering what we can know and what is revealed about the nature of God.

We will for this study presume we accept the reality of God. By using the word presume, I do not suggest that God's existence is simply in the realm of probability, but certainty, but presume the reader believes He is. God said "*I am that I am,*" (Exodus 3:14), which conveys the thought of the self-existing One. It is not in the purview of this study to present the evidences for His existence. That is a profitable study in the field of Christian Evidences. The Scripture begins with the existence of God . If God does not exist, there is no need to study His nature and attributes.

God has been defined erroneously so many ways. Some use God for whatever they cannot explain, like He is the creation of man to explain what man does not know. Others say He is merely a force, a spiritual power, impersonal (not a person), but aloof from the world. Many contend for many gods, while some say God is merely man's conscience, nature or the cause of nature, a being with all rights but no duties. Energy is defined as God, as is beauty, love, morality, emotion. Some have said God is an absolute spirit without consciousness until God becomes conscious in the mind of man, which actually denies His existence. An eternal mind, the first ground of all being, a universal substance, a cause but not the only cause of all things, thought in the abstract, and many other complicated and generally unperceptive definitions have been offered by men to define God. Would it not be better, indeed, far more rational and intelligent, to see what the Bible actually teaches concerning God apart from man's theories?

Definition of "God"

God's nature prohibits a complete definition of God which defies full description. We can take note of His essence, that which makes God, God, and can enumerate His attributes within limitations. We can say God is a Being and then indicate the nature of His Being and how He differs from other beings. But God is Deity in contrast to humanity and all else. The Westminister Shorter Confession makes a good statement, "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." Another has written, "God is an eternal personal Being of absolute knowledge, power, and goodness." Another, "God is a Spirit, absolute, personal, and holy, infinite and eternal in his being and attributes, the ground and cause of the universe." Once more, "God is the infinite and perfect Spirit in whom all things have their source, support, and end." These expressions have their merit and limitations but define God in terms of His nature, being inadequate because many of His attributes are not included in these otherwise commendable statements.

So we accept our limitations and inabilities to fully comprehend God. We can be correct as far as we can know and what is revealed, but we cannot know all. We cannot search and find out God to perfection (Job 11:7-9). We can know some but not fully understand (Job 26:14; Isaiah 40:28). His ways and thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8,9). His judgements are unsearchable and His ways past finding out (Romans 11:33-36). Great is the mystery of godliness (First Timothy 3:16), having reference to God's plan and His thoughts.

We can know only to the extent that the finite can know the infinite (Deuteronomy 29:29). One does not have to know everything to know something, and for certain.

The Revelation is Sufficient

God has revealed Himself sufficiently (Second Timothy 3:16,17; Matthew 11:27-30). Man needs this revelation to know God, to know himself, to know how he ought to live, and what he can expect and how to please God. Our

knowledge of God must not be merely intellectual, knowing about God. I do not imply something outside our intellect, however. There are two kinds of "knowing God." We can know about God, but we can also know God having a relationship and fellowship with God. We can have this saving knowledge (First John 2:3; 5:13). This involves obedience to God. Second Thessalonians 1:7-10 teaches we must know God. Hosea 4:6 shows the people lacked knowledge, but they knew about God, but not having an obedient, saving, acceptable knowledge.

God Has Revealed Himself Several Ways

There is a sense in which God is revealed in nature. He is not merely nature, but nature reveals God (Romans 1:19-21; Psalm 19:1). We would not know that nature reveals God if Scripture did not inform us. Nature reveals that God is, the reality of His existence. We must look elsewhere to learn who He is. We cannot rely upon nature to know the attributes of God or how we can have a saving knowledge of God.

God is partially revealed in the existence of man. Again, we would not know this except Scripture says so. Man is said to be "*in the image of God*" (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, there is something about man that is likened unto God, a spirit being (John 4:24). We must look elsewhere to learn in what ways man is in God's image than simply looking at man.

God is revealed in Christ (John 14:7-9; Colossians 1:15; 2:9), Christ being "*the image of the invisible God,*" and "*for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*" Hebrews 1:3, He is the "*express image of his person.*"

God is revealed in history. The Scripture reveals this. Spurgeon has quoted another on Psalm 75:6,7, "The rise and fall of nations and empires are in this Psalm ascribed to God. He exalts one and puts down another at his pleasure. In this He continually uses instrumentality, but that instrumentality is always rendered effectual by his own agency. When nations or individuals are prosperous, and glorious, and powerful, they usually ascribe all to themselves or to fortune. But it is God who has raised them to eminence. When they

boast he can humble them. In these verses God is considered as the governor of the world, punishing the wicked, pouring out judgments on his enemies. The calamities of war, pestilence, and famine, are all ministers of providence to execute wrath."

Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth and nation, but sin is a reproach to any people,*" shows God dealing with nations. John 19:11, Jesus told Pilate, *"Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."* Daniel 2:21, *"...he removeth kings and setteth up kings."* Similarly, Daniel 4:17 teaches.

God is revealed in special revelation, which is the Bible, the Word of God. We could not even be sure of the other "revelations" actually revealing God except the Scripture so taught. It is here that we learn His essence and attributes. We cannot know God by mere intellect, or have a saving knowledge of God without His revelation , the Bible, and our obedience thereto. None of the other "revelations" inform us like the Bible does. No one writer has fully revealed and described God, but we glean our information from all the writers and compile it.

The Essence and Attributes of God

We now really begin to analyze, put into categories, and organize our information. By the essence of God we mean the substance, that which underlies all the outward manifestations, the source and cause of the qualities His possesses, His basic make-up, and what makes Him God. God is not the mere personification of an idea, but a real Being. We consider the Godhead, Godhood, in contract to manhood, or the animal world.

The attributes of God are qualities that belong to Him, that describe His essence, not subjective but real and objective qualities that denote the way Deity operates and exists, and manifestations of His essence. God has non-moral attributes (that which does not involve moral qualities), and moral attributes (that which does involve moral qualities).

Man is in some ways like God, and in other ways can become more like God, (Second Corinthians 3:16,17), but

can never become God or equal with God. Man is like God in that man is spirit as God is spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7; John 4:24; Hebrews 12:9). To a limited extent, man can become like God, approaching the likeness of God, in His moral attributes (First Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1), being imitators and followers of God. Man is not and cannot be like God in ALL the essence of God. Man cannot be like God in His non-moral attributes, such as God's omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, immutability, etc.).

We are not to think that we can dissect the nature of God and break Him into pieces. His very nature prohibits this. His essence and attributes are so interwoven and related to each, so superimposed one over the other, so overlapping and supplemental to each other, that one cannot be totally considered in the absence of the others. This adds to our difficulty in comprehending what is revealed. But we can consider each quality as distinct only for the purpose of analysis, realizing that each quality is affected by the others. We must avoid getting a "one sided" impression of God. These qualities are not complementary to each other (one making the other complete). Each is complete and perfect in its own right. But they supplement each other (add to each other; add to the sum total of God).

This is So Important

As we study the nature of God, we must keep the most reverent attitude inasmuch as our minds are considering the Highest of the High (Ecclesiastes 12:13). We are not merely considering another commodity or personality. We are considering the Being unsurpassed, and knowledgeable only to a limited degree. The very limitation of our comprehension, even at best, and the very limitation of terms used to denote His nature (none of which can be considered fully adequate) should provoke within us the realization of the magnitude of His greatness and the necessity of our reverence. Our world shows such irreverence toward God. As Paul wrote, *"There is no fear of God before their eyes"* (Romans 3:18).

God is Spirit
(John 4:24; Second Corinthians 3:17,18)

God is not physical. A spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). He is not like physical things (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:23).

Then how do we explain expressions that present God as having body parts, such as arms, hands, eyes, feet, ears, etc.? These are anthropomorphic (to represent something by assigning human attributes), and symbolic representations of God to bring the Infinite into the realm of our finite ability to understand. We read of the hand of God, the eyes of God, the face of God, the ear of God. But we also use such expression in our day to day conversations when we speak of the long arm of the law, the footsteps of time, the eyes of Texas, and the walls having ears. These show what God possess in His perfection that man possesses in man's imperfection.

A farmer once tried to describe a big city to his children who had never been off the farm. He likened a subway to a mole, and a skyscraper to a silo. How inadequate! But it was the best they could understand. If we are to know God's ways at all, they must be expressed to us in terms we can grasp, clothed in language of human attributes. Even though anthropomorphic terms are sorely inadequate, we cannot understand a mere abstract, metaphysical proposition. Heaven and hell are described to us in much the same process.

God is Invisible
(Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15; First Timothy 1:17)

No man has or can see God (John 1:18; First Timothy 6:16). God is in heaven (Matthew 6:9; First John 3:2). No man can see God and live (Exodus 33:20). (This explains Manoah's concern in Judges 13:22).

Then how do we explain the Scriptures that say men saw God? (Exodus 33:11,23). Again, this is to speak figuratively. Can a man see his own face? No! But we speak of one seeing himself, when he looks into a mirror, which manifests his face. God is Spirit and spirit is invisible. Man can see manifestations of God

when that manifestation is embodied in some physical form, such as angels as men, or in Christ. Man can see God in the sense of seeing the works of God, like the burning bush. We cannot be sure just what was seen in the various instances mentioned where it is implied men saw God, except to know some kind of manifestation of God came before them. God was manifested at Sinai to Israel in the lightning and thunder. Exodus 20:4 shows we ought to avoid physical or mental images of an invisible, spirit, Deity. Unfortunately, some have pictured God as old, whiskered, grim, gruff, heavy eyebrows, etc.

Being spirit and not physical, God is not subject to limitations, aging, weakness, ailments, and other such things characteristic of physical beings. This essence of God is essential to the reality of the rest of His essence and attributes, such as personality, omnipresence, being eternal, living, etc. Being a Spirit is a basic point in the nature of God. Christ (God in the flesh) helps us overcome the mystery of God being invisible and spirit.

God is a Person

God is mentioned in the Bible as one would speak of a person. God is not an "it," or mere force, consciousness, cause, explanation, or non-personal idea. Man has personality with a body. God has personality without a body. God has characteristics of personality.

Persons have self-consciousness. This is more than mere awareness of which even a brute beast may possess. Persons can think, and think they think. Persons can relate their awareness of themselves. Self-consciousness gives self-determination. God is self-aware. "*I am that I am,*" (Exodus 3:14; First Corinthians 2:10).

God has personality traits. He has intellect. God knows (Genesis 18:19, "*Now I know...,*" Exodus 3:7, "*For I know their sorrow,*" Acts 15:18, "*...known unto the Lord are all his saints.*"

God has sensibility. He is grieved (Genesis 6:6); loves (John 3:16); and Psalm 103:8-13 mentions several others. He has the power of decision (Genesis 3:15).

Psalm 115:3, "*He hath done whatever he pleased.*" John 6:38, "*I came down to do the will of him that sent me...*" Romans 9:15, "*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.*"

God speaks. Genesis 1:3, "*And God said...*" He sees. Genesis 11:5, "*The Lord came down to see the city and the tower.*" He hears. Psalm 94:9, "*He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?* Also Isaiah 59:1,2.

God repents (Genesis 6:6; Jonah 3:10; Exodus 32:14). Notice when God repents. It is when men repent.

God is angry (Deuteronomy 1:37). Often we read of the anger and wrath of God. He is jealous , demanding first place and rightfully so (Exodus 20:5). God is compassionate (Psalm 111:4), "*The Lord is gracious and full of compassion.*" Isaiah 40:28, "*He faints not, neither is weary.*" He works continually. John 5:17, "*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*" These are qualities of persons, not things. Some of these traits will be mentioned under other headings later.

God Lives

He is the living God (First Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 16:16; 22:32). He is, therefore, animate (active), rather than inanimate, not a material substance or mere influence. Life implies power and activity. This places God in sharp contrast with idols and physical images that know and do nothing (Isaiah 40:18; 46:5-9).

God in Three Persons; Yet, One God

This may be one of the more difficult attributes of God for us to grasp, yet it is essential that we understand this. When we speak of Deity we speak of the Godhead or Godhood. The study of the Godhead (traditionally referred to as the Trinity), is a major undertaking of itself. We cannot present a large discussion of the Godhead or the doctrine of the Trinity in this presentation except to take note of it. Trinity is not a Biblical term but a Biblical concept. The Godhead is mentioned here as a subheading in our general discussion of the nature of God. It deserves a separate

and lengthy discussion itself. But a few statements are required to present the unity of God in three persons.

By the unity of God we mean there is but one Deity, that one divine nature in contrast to human nature. H. Leo Boles made commendable comments on this subject in his book, The Holy Spirit. The terms Godhead and Godhood "express the state, dignity, condition and quality of Jehovah. As manhood is used to express that which makes a man a man, and childhood that which makes a child a child, so Godhead is that which makes God God." It denotes Deity. There is one Deity and nature of Deity. (Deuteronomy 4:35,39; 6:4; John 17:3; First Corinthians 8:4-6; First Timothy 2:5; James 2:19). There is oneness of that which is called Deity.

Yet, there are three distinctions in this one essence of Deity, three persons, known as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; Second Corinthians 13:14). There is unity of essence or substance, purpose, endeavor, even in the inner relationships that exist in the Godhead (John 17:21-23; 14:1ff). What One does the Others do even though One may be the actual active agent. The Trinity is not to teach a threefold nature of God. There is but one nature. But it teaches three persons, each being of the essence of Deity and together making up the one Godhead.

For a comprehensive and adequate illustration of this particular nature of God we are at a loss. Some have suggested the oneness of husband and wife, yet the two remain individuals. But this is not altogether comparable. Could we illustrate this with three drops of water, each distinct, but all of the same substance? Our inability to explain this fully does not invalidate the reality of this truth. It only goes to emphasize the gulf between humanity and Deity, giving all the more reason for man having genuine reverence before Deity.

Each of the three persons is called God; the Father (John 20:17); the Son (Hebrews 1:8); and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3,4). There are several Biblical records where all three persons are in evidence, yet each is distinct from the other (Matthew 3:16,17; 28:20; Second Corinthians 13:14).

The plural use of nouns and pronouns in reference to Deity also gives evidence of the Godhead (Genesis 1:1), and "*let us make man,*"(Genesis 1:26).

Godhead Used Three Times

The word "Godhead" occurs only three times, each time from different but closely related words.

To Theion, Acts 17:29, means Deity, more than just divine, which may refer to anything heaven sent, or supremely admirable, like John the Baptist or prophets. Christ was divine, but more than merely heaven sent. He was Deity in the flesh.

Theiotes, Romans 1:20, "*His everlasting power and Godhead,*" (KJV), or "*His everlasting power and divinity,*" (ASV). Deity is "*perceived through the things that are made.*" Deity is in contrast with corruptible man and lower creatures generally.

Theotes, Colossians 2:9, refers to the totality of all that enters into the concept of the Godhead. Herein lies the distinctiveness of Jesus Christ. Here the incarnation is stated in the strongest terms. It refers to the very essence of the Godhead from which all attributes are determined, the fullest connotation of Deity and Supremacy.

God is Self-Existent

"*I am that I am,*" was God's declaration of Himself. This quality of God renders the subject of His origin irrelevant. People sometimes ask, "Where did God come from?" History does not reveal a time when men did not have such an idea as an all-powerful, all-wise, ever present, self-existing Being. Jehovah means the always existing one, the uncaused cause.

What this means to us is that God is not dependent for His existence upon anything outside Himself. He is not His own cause because He always existed. God has always been and always will be. If God could cause Himself to be, He could cause Himself to cease to be. His immutability prevents this possibility. His existence is grounded, not in His will to exist, but in His very nature.

Man cannot, therefore, ever eliminate God, nor ever be unconcerned about God.

God is Eternal

Closely related to that previously mentioned. God is eternal (Genesis 21:33; Psalm 90:2; 102:27; Isaiah 57:15; First Timothy 6:16 when speaking of Christ as God). He is infinite in relation to time. We cannot think back before God nor forward beyond God. For finite minds, this is an incomprehensible essence.

Eternity for God is as NOW, past, present, or future. They are all as present. Time is of no essence with God (Second Peter 3:8). As Creator of all, He is the very cause of time. Time and eternity are not of the same nature. He is aware of all the sequence of events in time both as a sequence and as now. Eternal means more than duration, but means without beginning or ending (Hebrews 7:3). Who can really grasp this? Not I.

The Immensity and Vastness of God (Jeremiah 23:24; Second Chronicles 2:6; First Kings 8:27)

This is also beyond our comprehension. God is infinite in relation to space as He is in relation to time. He is not limited or circumscribed to space. This harmonizes with His "spirit" nature as opposed to a physical nature. This essence of God is demonstrated by the attribute of omnipresence, which will be discussed later. The emphasis here is on the great extent in every way of God, and how immeasurable is His nature.

Having now briefly considered the substance and qualities, let us turn our attention to the characteristics that manifest these qualities, the demonstration of these qualities. We first observe the non-moral qualities of God that man cannot imitate.

God is Omnipresent

God is omnipresent, meaning He is in every place all the time in the same sense or with reference to the same end

or purpose. The presence of God is mentioned in Scripture in at least six senses.

(1) He is with all people, good and bad (Luke 12:2; Hebrews 4:13; Proverbs 15:3). There is no hiding from God

(2) He is with His people (Christians) in a more intimate fellowship (Matthew 28:20; Psalm 140:13; First John 1:3). God dwells with humanity as humanity follows God.

(3) He is present in an additional sense in our worship of God (Psalm 100:2; First Corinthians 10:16). This is a communion with God. Where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is there (Matthew 18:20).

(4) So complete is His presence that we do not escape Him at death (Psalm 23:4; 139:7-12). This is a comforting thought to those who love and obey the God of heaven.

(5) All shall stand before God in judgment and be in His presence then (Matthew 25:31-31; Second Corinthians 5:10). This includes both the righteous and wicked.

(6) The redeemed shall be in His eternal presence in heaven (First Thessalonians 4:16,16). The lost will be deprived of His presence (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

The omnipresence of God is a source of comfort to those who love and serve Him. We are never alone. He is always aware of us, our trials, efforts, successes. It is also a source of warning to those who do not love and serve Him. There is no way one can escape God, hide from God, or deceive God.

How does one explain such statements where God goes from one place to another, coming to His people, taking abode with them, if He is omnipresent (Genesis 11:5; Habakkuk 3:3; Exodus 19:9; Psalm 50:3; John 16:13; 14:23)? This is the accommodation of language that takes notice of the several sense in which the presence of God is presented. God can determine, limit, or expand the degree and nature of His presence as He wills.

God is Omnipotent

Genesis 17:1, "*I am the Almighty God.*" This means God is able to do whatever He wills, possessing both the physical and spiritual power to accomplish His will and intent. Genesis 18:14, "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*" This was stated in the context of the coming birth of Isaac. Jeremiah 32:17, "*...there is nothing too hard for Thee.*" "*Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power.*" Revelation 19:6, "*The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*" Matthew 19:26, "*...with God all things are possible.*"

Power relates to what CAN be done. Some things cannot be done at all because they are self-cancelling. For instance, God cannot make a four-sided triangle. God's power relates to what is possible to do according to His will, not limited to what man can do. God WILL do only what harmonizes with His divine will and nature.

Psalm 115:3, "*...He hath done whatsoever He pleased.*" God cannot save those who disobey Him because He has willed that the obedient will be saved. Regarding miracles, it is no question of God's power to do miracles, even today. But His will reveals He does not operate in such fashion now. To teach the cessation of miracles and the termination of their purpose, as Scripture does, in no way impugns the power of God.

Ephesians 1:11, "*...who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*" Job 42:2, "*I know that thou canst do all things and that no purpose of thine can be restrained.*" All these passages affirm His omnipotence.

His power is seen in the creation, nature's laws and nature's orderliness. John 1:3, "*All things were made by him...*" Revelation 4:11, "*...for thou hast created all things.*" Genesis 1, "*Let there be..., and it was so.*" Hebrews 11:3, "*...the worlds were framed by the word of God.*" Acts 14:15, when Paul and Barnabas were worshipped as gods in Derbe, and Acts 17:24 when Paul was in Athens, and in Colossians 1:16, we are taught the power of God. Romans 1:20, "*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being*

understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

His power was demonstrated in the miraculous. The miraculous is the supernatural. It is direct and observable divine intervention. A miracle is not just something that is marvelous and wonderful. It is not just something that we may not be able to explain, or simply the unusual. It is supernatural, not according to the laws of nature, and at times, even contradictory to the laws of nature. People misuse the word "miracle" to define whatever startling thing may happen to occur. God has shown His miraculous power over the elements in calming the sea, separating the Red Sea, and the Jordan River. He demonstrated His power in providing food, manna for Israel, feeding thousand from a small supply. He demonstrated His power over disease, demons, and death. There is no way to sufficiently measure the power of God.

God's power is also seen in the sustenance of the world. Hebrews 1:3, "*...upholding all things by the word of His power."* God feeds the birds, but does not put the food in their mouths. But the truth that He provides is irrefutable.

This leads us to consider the providence of God . That God provides is clearly taught, being the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount how God provides for those who seek His righteousness and kingdom first (Matthew 5:33). Example after example in both Old and New Testaments pictures the providence of God. Just how God makes provision we are not readily aware. It does not take a miracle, however, for God to provide. God provides through the oversight of and operation through the laws of nature that He put in motion. Such was the case when God provided rain at the prayer of Elijah.

The fact that God answers prayer is another manifestation of His power. James taught concerning the prayer of a righteous man availing much, and at the same time showed that God answered prayer through natural means. We are assured, "*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to*

his will, he heareth us: and we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (First John 5:14,15).

God has shown He has the power to destroy. Did He not do this at the flood at the time of Noah (Genesis 6-9)? What of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19)? What did Christ do to the fig tree (Matthew 21)? Many times the enemies of Israel were routed and destroyed by the operation of God, such as the destruction of the Amalekites (First Samuel 15). God sent the plagues upon Egypt (Exodus 7-12), and Pharoah was impressed with the power of God. Paul struck Elymas blind (Acts 13).

Some have mistakenly considered the destructive power of God to be evil. But this is not so. It is something positive and good when that which is deserving of destruction is destroyed. To rid the world of what is evil is to better the world. God always has used and does use His power for the good of mankind. When men decide to rebel against God, they bring upon themselves the wrath of God and self-impose their own destruction.

God's power is seen through the operation of governments and nations, as we have already noted (Daniel 2:21; John 19:11). Did not God use nations, both good and evil, to accomplish His purposes?

But we must be aware of God's power to save, and how glorious is that power and what benefit to a lost race. Hebrews 7:25, "*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.*" Romans 1:16,17 tells us the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It should be obvious, however, that not all will be saved. God has the power to save the most wicked wretch even without conversion if He so chose. But He has revealed His will as to how He will save. He will not force salvation upon any. But salvation is open to all of every race, tongue, nation, and color. But those that will be saved must obey His will. God is not willing that any should perish (First Peter 3:9), but most will (Matthew 7:13,14), but it will be because they do not conform to His will. The condemnation of men is no detraction from the power of God. He has the power to save the obedient, and punish the rebellious.

An Important Observation Regarding His Power

God does not exercise His power contrary to His will. He will not violate His own will and nature. Therefore, there are some things that God, although omnipotent cannot and will not do. It is the result of His choice.

God cannot tolerate iniquity (Habakkuk 1:13). He cannot deny Himself (Second Timothy 2:13). He cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). He cannot sin (James 1:13). He cannot do the absurd or self-contradictory things, such as make a rock too heavy for Him to lift, make two mountains without a valley, etc. His omnipotence is determined by His will. He can do as He wills to do.

Therefore, He does not exercise His power to the fullest. God, and only God, can limit God, but He can limit Himself. There is never any question as to God's power to do something. He has the power. CAN does not mean WILL. He CAN. Whether He WILL is another matter. This is very pertinent when considering God working miracles today. According to His revealed will, He does not.

Why Does Not God Destroy All Evil?

This is such a perplexing problem to many people, we are tempted to restate the sermon, Why Does God Allow Suffering, that was published in Volume XI of **A Burning Fire.** It was a lesson of nearly nine pages that is too long to completely include here. Suffice it to say, in order to provide an answer to our question, for God to destroy all evil He must remove the source and cause of evil. That cause is sin.

To remove sin, God would have to remove man's ability to sin. This would necessitate the removal of man having the power of choice. Man would no longer be a free moral agent, but only a robot going through pre-programmed motions. Man would no longer be a man. He would no longer be a responsible creature, nor could he bring glory to God by his obedience to God, which is his primary reason for exiting.

God has provided for man the way to be forgiven of sin. Even so, man may well have much to suffer as a consequence of his sins, even though he can be forgiven of the guilt of sin and relieved of the eternal consequences of sin. But there would be no glory to God or for man if man could only do good, and not evil. God allows evil, but does not impose it upon any. Sin is in the world, and the wages of sin are real. Righteousness and unrighteousness are not considered alike.

It is not a question of God's power to destroy all evil and suffering. But for Him to do so would mean a complete rearrangement of the entire universe, a different creation than man, a change in man's purpose for living, and a total variation of the will of God.

The omnipotence of God, about which we have spent much comment and consideration in this lesson, is, like the omnipresence of God, both a source of comfort to those who love and serve God, and at the same time, a source of warning to those who choose to go their own way and ignore the way God teaches is right.

God is Omniscient

Psalm 147:5, "*Great is our God, and of great power, his understanding is infinite.*" There is nothing that God cannot know. He can know whatever He chooses to know. Whether God exercises His ability to know all things is a matter of dispute. Some contend if God knows the future, or chooses to know the future, then that is the way things are going to be, regardless of what man does; therefore, they contend God withholds His own knowledge from some things in order for man to make his own choices. We have to accept the possibility that God may not exercise His full power of knowledge just as He does not fully exercise His physical and spiritual power at all times. But this in no way impugns the contention of the infinite omniscience of God. We repeat, if His knowledge is limited at all, like His other attributes, it is limited by Him, His will, and His nature. We have to admit that we cannot know to what extent God may choose to know and not know.

Because of the omniscience of God, man is unable to deceive God. Galatians 6:7,8, "*...God is not mocked.*" Man cannot hide from God, nor can he hide is deeds, whether good or evil. "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*" (Proverbs 15:3). He sees in darkness and light (Daniel 2:22). He sees in every place (Psalm 139:7-12). The thoughts of a man's heart are known to Him (First Corinthians 4:5; Proverbs 15:11). Nothing is covered from Him (Job 26:6; Hebrews 4:13; Jeremiah 23:23-25). Even the hairs of your head are numbered (Matthew 10:30). Therefore, we can concur with Moses, "*Be sure your sins will find you out*" (Numbers 32:23).

Time is of no consequence to God. He knows the past and the future (Isaiah 46:10). God's knowledge of the future is foreknowledge. He foreknew many things, prophesied them, planned them, promised them. Does God's foreknowledge predetermine? This is a matter of great dispute. Some contend that prescience, foreknowledge, is not causative. But this is not really the point. If His knowledge is perfect, causative or not, (and His prescience may not be the CAUSE), if His knowledge is perfect regarding what He chooses to know, things must be as God knows they will be. It is a foregone conclusion that things will be just as He knows they will be. But this raises other questions.

Does God choose to determine everything about the future that He could know? This may remain unanswered. Did God know that man would sin, or know that man could sin and made preparation for it? Who can dogmatically tell? We must contend that man cannot know (nor does he need to know) all that God may know about the future. Certainly, God knew man's ability to sin, therefore, He could know of the possibility, even the probability, if not the reality that man would sin. Such is His knowledge of the future in anything. Because of what God knew about the future of man, He made provision for man's redemption even before the foundation of the world before man existed (Ephesians 1:3-6). This is a manifestation of God's love as well as His omniscience.

But cannot God choose not to know something about the future? He can make that choice, just as He can choose not to always use His power the same way. God knows the possible, probable, and the actual, if He chooses.

Does God know who will be saved or lost? We know He has already declared which class of people will be saved or lost. Those that do His will will be saved. Those that don't won't. As for individuals, whether God knows that or not, I cannot tell, because whether I will do His will or not is my decision. It does seem reasonable to think if God knows I will be saved, or lost, it will be that way regardless of what I now do. That smacks too much of Calvinism predestination, and the removal of man being responsible for his own destiny for me to accept. But we must admit the omniscience of God in whatever matter He chooses to know and to whatever extent He chooses.

As with God's omnipresence and omnipotence, the omniscience of God is a comfort to those who love and serve Him, but a warning to those who do not.

Can Never Prove God Does Not Exist

Because of the omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience of God, man can never prove that God does not exist. Man would have to be omnipresent lest God be at the very place man was not. Man would have to be omnipotent lest the one power man lacked might be the power of God. Man would have to be omniscient lest the one thing man did not know is the existence of God. Man would have to become the very God that he was trying to deny existence. This truth is a fatal blow to all claims of atheism, and should awaken even the agnostic.

God is Immutable; Unchangeable

The Scriptures teach no variableness, neither shadow or turning regarding God (James 1:17). "*I am the Lord, I change not*" (Malachi 3:6). This is said with regard to His power (Romans 4:20,21), His plans and purposes (Romans 11:29; Isaiah 46:10). "*My counsel shall stand.*" This includes His promises (Second Corinthians 1:20; First Kings 8:56). "*There hast not failed one word of all his good promise.*" It is said of His justice (Genesis 18:25).

"*Shall not the judge of the world do right?*" It is also true of His love and mercy (Psalm 1-3:17; 118; 136). His mercy is everlasting and endureth forever. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is not changeable like man (Numbers 23:19). If God changed His nature, He would not be God. Any change in His nature would invalidate the rest of His nature. He cannot change for the worse, lest He become imperfect. He cannot change for the better, for He is perfect. He cannot be more or less than what He is. His nature allows for no development, self-evolution, or improvement. Of necessity, His is the same in the Old Testament as is the New Testament.

This being true, how do we understand God repenting, changing His mind, changing covenants. There are things that the changeless God changes. Immutability does not mean God never changes His mind or His covenants. Some commands of God are conditional, and the consequences of disobedience are stated. But when there is obedience, His changeless nature is that He will change His mind about the consequences.

God is unlike stone, and more like mercury, which changes according to the variations in the character and conduct of men. The events about Jonah and Nineveh serve as classic demonstrations of God changing His mind. But His ability to change His mind is a part of His changeless nature.

God gave Israel a covenant, but now speaks to man through Christ and His new covenant. This was always God's plan. He did not change regarding this intent. To have not changed covenants would have been contrary to His changeless nature. It was God's unchangeable plan that the covenants would change.

God is unchanging in that He changes with prescribed and unchangeable limits and according to conditions He has determined. A change of attitude toward a person occurs when a sinner repents and comes to God through Christ. Moses changed the mind of God about destroying Israel (Exodus 32:10-14; Numbers 14:11-20). But such was possible because of the changeless nature of God.

God changes His operations only on the basis of unchangeable principles. This is why we learn so much from God's dealings with Old Testament men and events. If God was not changeless, we would not learn anything.

Like His other non-moral attributes we have discussed, what and how He changes things is always according to His changeless will.

Immutability means God is unchangeable in purpose to hear and answer prayer properly directed toward Him. Prayer changes things, one has written. This is true. It is because God has determined that prayer changes things. God is faithful (First Corinthians 10:13), dependable, reliable, trustworthy. Man can count on God. God will fully perform all that He says He will perform (Romans 4:21). "*What he had promised, he was able also to perform.*"

This attribute of immutability is a source of confidence, courage, and comfort to those who love and serve God. But it also serves as a warning to any who do not.

At this point, we shall leave our study of the nature of God, returning in the next issue with a discussion of the moral attributes of God, qualities that man, to the extent that man follows God, can imitate God and be like Him. The non-moral qualities we have mentioned are not possible for man to attain. They are unique to Deity. But the moral qualities are presented to us so that we might become sons that are likened to the Father.

Toward the end of this material I wish to list a number of things that Jesus said about God. After all, part of the mission of Christ was to reveal God to man.

* * * * *

The article that begins on the next page is far more serious and important than many realize. Hopefully it may contribute to opening the eyes of some who seem determine that they will not see. JWB

Paving the Way For Apostasy

Sometimes it seems that things so obvious are deliberately denied and ignored. That the Lord's church in our day is continuing to suffer under a tremendous erosion from the faith revealed in Scripture should be apparent to anyone who stays alert and attentive regarding what has been going on in the brotherhood. Yet, some write, speak, and act as if nothing has gone awry. How can a person keep from knowing the invasion of heresy and liberal digression into the body of Christ over the past few decades unless they have determined they do not want to know? Even when those who are producing the apostasy admit and boast of their determination to change the church into the likeness of denominations, some remain gullible, naive, or for other motives that are not commendable, look the other way as if all is well. It is a pathetic thing to see.

False teachers have arisen from among us, and have gone out from us, with the avowed determination to either change us or destroy us. They contend that the church as we have known it cannot exist in this new and modern society and culture, therefore, the church must change to accommodate what is new.

No, the changes they propose are not mere changes of attitude and methods, but of the doctrine the church is to uphold, if they have any respect for doctrine at all. But their attitude has changed. Their attitude toward the Bible as final authority has changed. They no longer subscribe to Scripture as guide.

These heretics have produced large gatherings to promote their agenda, such as the Tulsa Workshop and Jubilee in Nashville. They have captured the schools and Bible departments which have now been for some years one of the major sources of digressive thought and teaching. They are not honest enough to go out from us, but remain among us to prey upon the naive and blind leaders who tolerate their heresy, take over church buildings they did not build, take over schools they did not build, take over memberships they did not create, but somehow are able to deceive into following them. How is it they have such success?

There are several reasons they succeed, such as Biblical ignorance, rebellion against the Bible, desire for numbers and money, feeding their own bellies, seeking acceptance from the world. But there is another factor, often overlooked, that has paved the way for these workers of iniquity to succeed. That is the weak, cowardly elders and preachers who are content to remain ignorant, who will not only refuse to mark and avoid false teachers as Scripture commands, but who involve themselves as accomplices with them in their evil deeds, bidding them Godspeed, providing for them pulpits to advance their influence, and going along in order to get along.

There are preachers who have taught truth, part of the truth, the positive side of truth, but who never do the whole work God expects. They never oppose error, or if they do, never can bring themselves to identify who is propagating error even though that error is dividing the brotherhood. They evidently

prefer their places, positions, salaries, and acceptance more than they love the truth of God that is being stomped under foot. They never have criticism for anybody except those who criticize false doctrine and teachers of it.

I doubt the reliability, even the credibility, of any preacher or eldership that has this digression swirling all about them but play they don't know about it. I doubt the courage of men who will not defend the faith and expose error and false teachers. They may have "big names" and be "somewhat," but they are poor servants of Christ. They will enter complicity with those who are tearing the church apart and leading it into liberal digression, and confuse their complicity with being loving and tolerant. In truth, they appear to be more interested in seeking for themselves, appear to be afraid to stand, and crawl into the darkness of pretended piety and love when they are deliberately refusing to see, and continuing to parade the very enemies of the cross as worthy of support.

No, some do not personally and openly accept the false doctrines being taught. But they violate truth (Ephesians 5:11; Second John 9-11; Romans 16:17,18), by their fellowship with such as Jubilee speakers, and the like.

Possibly, as Jesus said of His murderers, "*They know now what they do.*" But the sad truth is, some do know, don't care, seek their own, and if they don't know it is because they won't know. They do not seek to know. They like their bread buttered and know who butters their bread. But what of the truth? JWB

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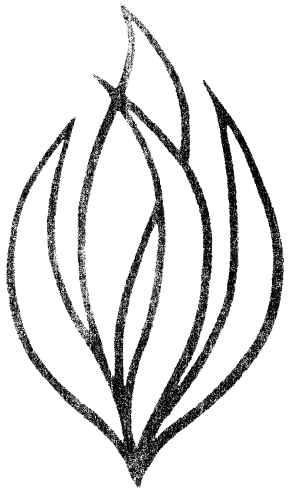

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Nature and Attributes of God

PART TWO

This study is a continuation of that which was begun in the previous issue of ***A Burning Fire.*** We have studied the essence of Deity, the nature and non-moral attributes of God, and now turn attention to the moral attributes of God as Scripture reveals them. Man is like God in that man is spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7; John 4:24; Hebrews 12:9). Man cannot be like God in ALL the essence of God. He cannot be like God in God's non-moral attributes (omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, immutability, etc.). Man can never become Deity. But to a limited extent, man can become like God in God's moral attributes. We are to be imitators of God (First Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1; First Thessalonians 1:6). We are to be followers of the example of Christ (First Peter 2:21). But that which makes Deity Deity is not for man to possess. Man will remain humanity in contrast to Deity.

We would remind ourselves that we cannot dissect Deity and His nature, breaking Him into parts. His very nature prohibits this. His essence and attributes are so interwoven and related to each other, so superimposed one over the other, so overlapping and supplemental to each other, that no quality of God can actually be considered in the absence of all others qualities.

But for the purpose of study and analysis, we must consider each quality as distinct, realizing that each quality is affected by all other qualities. When we keep this in mind we shall avoid developing a one-sided and perverted impression of God.

God is Holy

What praise is given to God when we sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!" God is holy (Isaiah 5:15; Psalm 99:9; Revelation 4:8). This means that God is separate from and exalted above all creatures. He is

sanctified. This is because of His goodness and purity to perfection (Matthew 5:48; 19:17).

God is separate from all moral evil, wrong, and sin (James 1:13; First John 1:5). This attribute of holiness is not so much as one attribute among many others as it is a coextensive overriding quality under which all other moral attributes can be placed. It is His umbrella of holiness that covers His moral nature. This is why is it blasphemous to refer to any human being as "His Holiness," as Romanists do the pope.

God's will is the expression of His holiness. His holiness ranks above all other qualities, being fundamental to His character, and in a sense measures, governs, determines, regulates, modifies, and necessitates the other attributes. God is the Holy One of Israel.

This quality demands a distinctiveness that pertains to God in an ethical sense. Man can, in his own life, reflect in a limited way, the holiness of God as he follows the way of God. We are instructed to be holy. "*Be ye holy for I am holy,* "(Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2). We are "*...partakers of the divine nature...*" (First Peter 1:4), partakers of His holiness (Hebrews 12:10). Such is possible only when man separates himself from the sins of the world (John 17:16; Second Corinthians 6:16-7:1; First John 2:15-17; Romans 12:2). God's holiness is the perfect standard (First Peter 1:15; Leviticus 11:44).

God's holiness exhibits itself in justice, truth, jealousy, authority, and purity. These qualities will become more in evidence when these traits are discussed specifically. Suffice it here to comment that holiness means God is unapproachable by sinful man except through a mediator. The one mediator is Christ (First Timothy 2:5; John 14:6; Hebrews 12:24).

God's holiness means that God takes great delight in what is right, and hates every false way (Jeremiah 9:24; Psalm 37:23;119:104; Proverbs 6:16-19). Holiness inspires us to reverence, praise, worship, and adoration (Psalm 22:3; Hebrews 12:28,29), To delight in the good necessitates hatred for the evil. God renders reward and punishment, not considering good and evil with

indifference, nor to be treated just alike. God will recompense against evil, such as He has done with the flood at the time of Noah, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of the Canaanite nations, and all other evil eventually (Jeremiah 9:25,26; Second Thessalonians 1...6ff).

It is because of God's association with and designation of certain people, vessels, houses, mountains, laws, lands, garments, ointments, days, gifts, crowns, oil, Scriptures, that these things are also called holy. They are set apart for His glory and to His service. They are not holy in a sense of moral purity for such things are non-moral. They are holy because they are God's possessions and God is holy.

The holiness of God makes demands on man, and with justification. His will, which is holy, must be obeyed. Whatever His holiness demands of me, His love provides and makes possible.

God's Goodness

Inseparable from His holiness is God's goodness. God is good (Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:18. Jesus said there is none good but the Father, giving affirmation that God (Deity) is the very source of all that is good.

God loves and His very nature is love (First John 2:8). His love has been manifested in so many ways, not the least but the greatest of which in through Christ (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8). His love demands that we love Him in return (First John 4:19). "*We love him because he first loved us.*" Returning that love cannot be separated from obedience to God. If we love Him, we will obey Him (John 15:14; 14:15; First John 5:3). Some years ago someone had a bumper sticker that said, "Honk, if you love Jesus." Any goose can honk. But as one brother commented, "I don't think you show you love Jesus the same way you get a dog out of the road." The way man shows he returns God's love is by man's obedience to the holy will of God.

Fortunately for man, God's love will always continue (Romans 8:35-39). Let us not confuse His love with

approval. While He will always love us, that does not mean He always approves of us. But let us understand that the love of God is not an abstract principle, but manifests itself in the benefits, blessings, gifts, grace, mercies, provisions, forgiveness of sins, fellowship, hope, purpose of life, all the spiritual blessings that we find in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3).

We can better understand the meaning of love when we look at the love God has for man. God always seeks our highest good. That is what love (agape) is. Just as God love sinners, He hates sin. His love would allow Him to do nothing other than that. God hates what harms those He loves.

God is Merciful

James 5:11; Psalm 103:8; 136, "*His mercy endureth forever.*" Mercy is not an arbitrary, optional goodness extended to those in distress. Mercy is a not a matter of paying a debt. It is akin to grace, unmerited favor. Grace is God giving benefits we do not deserve. Mercy is withholding punishment that we do deserve. Both come out at the same place- our salvation. Mercy is made possible from a God of justice and wrath because the demands of justice have been otherwise met by Christ Jesus (Romans 5:25,26). There are so many passages that glowingly speak of the mercy of God.

God is Gracious (Psalm 86:15; 103:8)

Like mercy, grace is not born of God's indebtedness to man. Grace is His goodness extended to the undeserving. It is favor given although unmerited. It is offered to all (Titus 2:11). Grace teaches us the gospel. Faith gives us access into the benefits of His grace (Romans 5:2). Christ is the manifestation of God's grace. He is the living demonstration of God's grace. The grace of God is the avenue of salvation (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 11:6). Grace provides for man what is impossible for man to provide for himself. How many are the Scriptures that speak of the grace of God! In nothing is the grace of God so evident as in the forgiveness of man's sins by the blood of the perfect Son of God. While grace and mercy are often mentioned interchangeably, there is a

distinction between them, and both magnify the glory of God.

Other Qualities Defined By Action

God is our help, provider, protector, strength, comfort and peace. The Scriptures repeatedly speak of God as man's benefactor, and how He blesses man. God is our help, strength, and refuge (Psalm 46:1). He is presented as our Father and Shepherd (Matthew 6:9; Psalm 23). These are terms showing an intimate relationship between God and His people. All these qualities are manifestations of God's goodness toward man.

"Jehovah-Jireh" means "God will provide" (Genesis 22:14). God cares for us (Matthew 6:25-30; 7:9-11; First Peter 5:7). Truly, as the song suggests when we praise God, "O Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

(Let me remind you that there are many passages cited for the reader's personal study, rather than trying to give the quotations in this written piece.)

Second Corinthians 1:3,4; 7:5-7 teaches that our God is the God of all comfort. His providence has been manifested miraculously and naturally many times in former days, and now through natural law. That natural providence is a reality is also affirmed (James 5:17,18). Regarding the providence of God, we may not be able to specify at what point something is a work of God's providence, but inasmuch as His providence for His people is affirmed in Scripture, and believing the Scripture to be God's Word, we are confident of the reality that God is the God of providence.

Matthew 7:11, "*How much more shall your Father who is in heaven give you good things to them that ask him?*" The parallel passage in Luke shows the good things refer to the blessings through the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:15).

"*Jehovah-Shalom*" means Jehovah of peace (Judges 6:24). God is the God of peace (Hebrews 13:20). He offers the peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). God gives spiritual peace between God and man. This is the peace that Christ brought into the world. Christ makes

reconciliation between God and man. He is our peace (Ephesians 2:13-16). A by-product of the spiritual peace man can have with God is peace among men. As two men both follow Christ and each have peace with God, so they will have peace one with another. Jesus was called the Prince of Peace in prophecy (Isaiah 9:6).

Matthew 10:34 has caused some problems for some, seeing Christ brings peace, but at the same time brings a sword and produces variance between people. But he sends a sword in the sense that there will be those who will accept Him while others will not. There will be no peace between believers and unbelievers. Those who walk with the Lord can expect hostility and opposition from those who choose to set the Lord aside.

God Is True

John 17:3 teaches He is the only true God. First Thessalonians 1:9 refers to Him as the living and true God. Romans 3:4 urges, "*Let God be true...*" First John 5:20 says we "*may know him that is true.*" God's knowledge, declarations, representations eternally conform to truth and reality. When Christ was on earth He was truth personified, the full essence of truth (John 14:6). Revelation 3:14 and 19:11 speak of Christ as the "*faithful and true witness,*" and "*faithful and true.*" His Word is truth (John 17:17).

God's truth is absolute and without iniquity. His truth is the apex of veracity and reliability. God's faithfulness necessitates His truthfulness, and vice versa. It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18). Those who oppose or differ with God are liars (First John 1:8,10; 2:4,22; 4:20; 5:10; Romans 3:4). "*Let God be true but every man a liar.*"

There being no greater by which God could assure the truth to be the truth, God swore by Himself and His own promise (Hebrews 6:13,16-18).

How is the veracity of God to be reconciled with the non-performance of some of God's threats? If God's threats are unconditional and absolute, God is not slack concerning His promise (Second Peter 3:9). However,

many times God has threatened on condition. If certain things are done or not done, then God would do this, that, or the other. If God did not omit punishment when conditions are met, God would not be true.

Jehovah-Tzideenu: Jehovah, My Righteousness

God is just and righteous (Deuteronomy 32:4; Isaiah 30:18; 45:21; Second Chronicles 12:6; Ezra 9:15; Nehemiah 9:33; Psalm 89:14; Daniel 9:14; Zechariah 3:5; John 17:25; Second Timothy 4:8; Revelations 16:5)

This attribute of God has been called "the other side of God." This is because some are prone to exclusively emphasize the gentler qualities of God to the neglect of this one. His justice is a phase of His holiness, and His holiness demands justice, goodness, perfection, moral and ethical righteousness. The wrath of God against evil, and His anger being hot at sinfulness, is as much an attribute of God as God is love.

Justice demands reward and punishment. One could not be just without both qualities. Reward is remunerative justice. Punishment is retributive or punitive justice. God would not be morally perfect if sin went unpunished and righteousness unrewarded. To tolerate sin as if it is no worse than righteousness would be unjust. To dismiss righteousness as if it was no better than sin would be unjust.

Justice is evidenced in reward. Moses, Hebrews 11:26, knew the "*recompense of reward.*" Matthew 5:11,12 shows there is reward to the persecuted for righteousness sake. Hebrews 10:35, "*Cast not away therefore your confidence which hath great recompense of reward.*" There will be rest for some (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). There is the promise of a heaven to gain and the warning of a hell to be shunned. Such is the case of justice. God is just.

Likewise, justice is evidenced in punishment and there is punishment for some (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). There has been the casting down of angels, the removal from Eden, the curses upon all humanity and the serpent, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of

Egypt, the captivity of Israel and Judah, the fall of heathen nations, the death of Ananias and Sapphira, the warnings of hell.

Vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19; Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). His vengeance is not vindictive. He does not seek to retaliate nor have the desire to get even. He is vindicative, desiring to vindicate, maintain, and support what is true, and to justify and defend what is right against the wrong. "*Behold the goodness and the severity of the Lord*" (Romans 11:22). While God is a God of love, is He not also a God of wrath (Romans 1:18)? Ephesians 5:6 speaks of God's wrath on children of disobedience, also Second Chronicles 28:11. Paul wrote, Second Corinthians 5:11, "*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*" Hebrews 10:31, "*It is a fearful things to fall into the hands of the living God.*" Jeremiah 51:56, "*The Lord God of recompense* (pay back, JWB) *will surely requite* (avenge, JWB)."

God's ultimate justice will be meted out at the Judgment Day. John 5:29, both the righteous and unrighteous shall be raised, the righteous to life and the unrighteous to damnation. Matthew 25:55, there will be the separation of the sheep from the goats. Matthew 3:12; 13:37-43, the separation of the wheat from the chaff, the good grain from the tares. We now live in the day of mercy with God extending His mercy to us and calling us to come to Him through Christ and receive His mercy. The day of Judgment will not be the day of mercy, but of justice. This, along with many other matters, is what makes that day something we should ponder long and deep.

Furthermore, God's justice is evidenced in impartiality. Is God a respecter of persons? It may sound strange at first, but the answer can be either yes or no, depending on what you are discussing. Acts 10:34,35 makes it clear that God is no respecter of persons as far as offering salvation to anyone regardless of race, national origin, color, etc. Anyone who fears God and works righteousness is accepted with Him. Titus 2:11 teaches that the grace of God has appeared to all men. Revelation 22:17 offers His invitation to "*whosoever will.*" The same truth is taught in Romans 1:16,17; 2:11,12. Galatians 3:28 shows that race or sex is no barrier to being offered

salvation. Regardless of race, sex, nationality, social status, wealth, occupation, education, all such things that often divide people into various classes are of not significance when it comes to God being willing to save them. All are invited to come, observe His teaching, attend worship, love the Lord, cleave to Him, abstain from evil, and all other things God has directed of man.

But God does respect character. Many physical and all spiritual blessings are conditional. God does have respect for those who meet His will and will bless them with blessing that others do not receive, indeed, cannot receive until they obey His will. While God has invited *"whosoever will,"* there will be those who will not (Matthew 23:37). Each one will be judged according to his own deeds (Romans 2:6; Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12; Revelation 20:13). In the Judgment, every person will be judged according to his or her works. Actually, what could be more impartial than that?

It is necessary to underscore this next point because some have confused the attributes of God as being contradictory. Others have been only willing to emphasize what traits they prefer to the neglect of others. There is no contradiction between God's love, mercy, and grace, and God's justice and wrath. God has provided for both through the sacrifice of Christ (Romans 3:25,26). The justice and mercy of God come together at the cross. Christ became the propitiation for sins, the satisfaction of God's wrath against sin, by paying the penalty God determined. His was a vicarious death, His death meeting the demands of justice on behalf of others. Justice being met, therefore, God offers mercy. We live in the time of mercy. His mercy is offered and extended to us now. Since God is love, He could not refuse to possess wrath toward that which destroys those He loves.

The Judgment will be by God through Christ (Acts 17:21; Romans 2:16). We shall be judged according to the words spoken by Christ (John 12:48). Justice and mercy, both, are by and through Christ. The gospel, given by God through the Holy Spirit, reveals the will of Christ, the potential Savior of all, but actually the Savior of those who come to Him and obey His will.

God is Sovereign

Jeremiah declares Him to be "*an everlasting King.*" God is supreme above all else, anything else, everything else. He is the MOST HIGH GOD (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1). None is like our Lord and God (Exodus 8:10; 9:14; Deuteronomy 33:26; Isaiah 46:9; Second Samuel 7:22). Deity has all power and authority (Matthew 28:18). This allows no equal rank with any. God gave Christ the pre-eminence over all things to the church (Colossians 1:18). He is above all (Ephesians 1:21; 4:6; Philippians 2:9-11).

By virtue of this supremacy, God has the right to command and man has the obligation to respond obediently. We are His creatures. Is the creature more than the Creator? (Romans 1:25; Acts 17:24,25).

The sovereignty of God insists that our loyalty and allegiance be directed toward God. "*Jehovah-Nissi*" means Jehovah is my banner (Exodus 17:15). Consider the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37,38), that of loving and serving God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Exodus 20:3, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" Exodus 20:5, "*I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.*" He will not take second place or share first place. "*Seek ye first...*" is the teaching of Matthew 6:33. None is to be before God (Matthew 10:37). We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). God calls with the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14), and we must answer His call by loving and submissive obedience (Matthew 7:21; Acts 22:16; First Peter 3:21).

We often sing the hymn of praise, "How Great Thou Art." What a fitting tribute to God. Second Samuel 7:22, "*Wherefore, thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.*" Job 36:26, "*God is great.*" Psalm 48:1, "*Great is the Lord.*" Revelation 19:17 speaks of the supper of the "*great God.*"

The last portion of this study on the nature and attributes of God shall focus our attention on what Jesus said about God during His personal ministry on earth.. Inasmuch as a portion of the mission of Christ to earth was to reveal God to man (John 14:9), we shall learn

something of God by listening to what was said when God was in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught that there is one God and He and the Father are one (John 10:30; Mark 12:29). He taught the Fatherhood of God (John 10:30). God is perfect (Matthew 5:48) and gives good things, things of the Holy Spirit, to them that ask Him (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13).

Our Lord spoke of the power of God (Matthew 5:45; 6:26) and providence of God (Matthew 6:10; 10:29). Also He included the goodness of God (Matthew 10:18).

He did not fail to inform us of the justice of God, including the rewards of obedience (Matthew 6:1; 7:22; 16:27; 25; John 16:18), and also how the unfruitful are cut off (Matthew 25; John 15:2). He mentioned His holiness (John 17:11), and righteousness (John 17:25).

A great portion of the information Jesus gave about Deity concerns the graciousness of God and His forgiveness of sins (Matthew 6:14). This is because God loves (John 14:21; 15:10).

Whereas men have all manner of dead gods of their own making, in contrast to that, Jesus taught that our God is a living God (Matthew 16:16).

He presented a veritable listing of Deity's qualities that were not always stated in just so many words, but sometimes implied in the plan of salvation and other statements. All things are possible with God (Mark 10:27). Deity, Jesus, has all authority (Matthew 28:18. He knows the hearts of men (Luke 16:15). While no man knows when Christ will return, Deity does know (Matthew 24:30,36). He is Lord of heaven and earth (Matthew 11:250; knows all our needs (Matthew 6:8,32), and answers prayer (Matthew 7:7).

Do not these comments emphasize the infinity, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of God? These are included in the revelation Jesus made concerning Deity.

He recognized and spoke of what is called the Trinity (Matthew 28:19). God is eternal in nature (Matthew 28:20; John 8:58). He taught about worshipping God and how God is Spirit (John 4:24). Even His impartiality is revealed (Matthew 8:11; Revelation 3:20).

While most of the things that Jesus taught about God are also taught in other places in the Bible, and by the inspired Old and New Testament writers, we must accept what Jesus said about God in order to accept Jesus. How inconsistent it is, on this and any other matter which our Lord has addressed, to make a claim of believing in Christ, but at the same time rejecting anything He taught us. This we cannot do, and be acceptable to the Savior.

A Limited Discussion

We confess to presenting a limited and cursory account of the nature and attributes of God. While there is much revealed that we can know, and much more can justifiably be written on this theme, these comments will suffice for the material I wished to present. It just seemed to me that somewhere in the vast material I have published in ***A Burning Fire*** that I needed to concentrate on this theme in one place, even in a limited and obviously abbreviated way.

To God be the glory!

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A Disturbing Observation

Those who are awake and aware know and recognize that the Lord's church has suffered a sore digression over the past few decades. This is beyond question when one honestly considers the evidence how liberalism has invaded the church far and wide with a viciousness that makes the legalism of a few years previous pale into relative insignificance. As tragic as it is to note the rise of false teachers, equally tragic, and possibly more so, are those who will not warn, mark, oppose, and reject the false doctrines being taught, nor cease fellowship with the false teachers. Are not such people also guilty of advancing this digression? We contend they are!

Revelation Twenty

There are chapters in the Bible that are very outstanding because of what they reveal. We would never suggest that any chapter was insignificant, but some are more significant than others. Among the great and oft-studied chapters is the twentieth chapter of Revelation. In order to understand any of the chapters in Revelation we need to have an overview knowledge of the entire book, its style, nature, and purpose, which are determined by a repeated study of the book.

Revelation was written primarily to those of the early church, and who were suffering persecution from both Jews and Romans. The events pictured in the book were to soon occur. This is a crucial point in understanding the book. Some people read Revelation as if it is tomorrow's newspaper, predicting specific events of our future, as if it were a [play by play presentations of all things future. Not so! Some have contended they found Henry Kissinger, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Frankling Roosevelt, in the book. In chapter one, verse three, also chapter twenty-two, verse ten, we are told that the things discussed were "*at hand.*" Chapter twenty-two, verse six, says they were "*shortly be done.*" The book is about events in which the early Christians would be involved.

Revelation is a very highly symbolic book, literally filled with figurative terminology. We read of a key, a chain, a dragon with a tail that could pluck out stars from heaven (some dragon and some tail if literal). There is a bottomless pit, a thousand years, marks on foreheads, certain beats, seals, serpents, and many other things which are obviously symbols, representing something, and not always easily determined just what. One has said Revelation was written in "code" language, so the early Christians could understand, but if the book fell into enemy hands, the enemy would not understand. Many early Christians knew and understood the Old Testament imagery often found in the book, but non-Christians would neither know nor care. The book was to warn, promise, teach, encourage beleaguered and battered Christians to faithfulness, prevent apostasy,

and show the way of enduring persecution. Herein is the value and application for us today. One of the purposes of persecution is to cause Christians to become discouraged and fall away, give up, return to their sins, and be spiritually lost again.

Revelation Abused and Misused

This book has been wrested and twisted to produce much false doctrines and speculations of men, most notably the doctrine of premillennialism. Those that teach that doctrine rely heavily on Revelation 20:1-10. This doctrine is not a dead issue as some contend. It is not a problem among faithful churches, but it is prominent among denominations, and there is compromise with it among liberal and apostate groups. We must never interpret an obscure, figurative, symbolic passage in such a way to contradict a plain, clear teaching. We must study to get the meaning, not give it some meaning that we have invented.

While premillennialism is not our theme, we should look at some of the major tenets of that doctrine since proponents of it often cite Revelation twenty to support it. It contends that even though Christ came to establish His kingdom, His plans were changed because the Jews rejected Him, and He returned to heaven with the intention of coming again sometime to do what he came to do the first time (establish His kingdom), and established the church as a temporary substitute until that time.

Such is refuted when we realize Christ did what He came to do, did not fail, was not surprised by the Jewish rejection (it had been prophesied), and did establish His kingdom on Pentecost. The church is the kingdom, not a temporary substitute, and had been in the mind of God before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). When Christ returns, it will not be to SET UP His kingdom, but DELIVER UP His kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24).

The doctrine contends Christ will come quietly, invisibly, following noticeable signs (we have studied the alleged signs in another lesson on Matthew twenty-four).

But Scripture tells us His coming will be visible, audible to all, there being no immediate signs, but He will come as a thief in the night, life proceeding as usual, and we know not when

The doctrine says when Jesus comes the saints shall be taken up in THE RAPTURE (for seven years), while the wicked shall remain in THE TRIBULATION on earth.. The word RAPTURE means to be taken up. Sometimes you see a sign on a bumper that says in the event of the rapture this care will be vacated. Saints will be taken up when Jesus comes (First Thessalonians 4), but not in THE RAPTURE of which premillennialism speaks. There is tribulation on earth, and even saints suffer it, but not THE TRIBULATION of a seven year span. There is nothing in Scripture that teaches such a thing.

The false doctrine teaches that the Jews will be miraculously converted and transported to Palestine, Judaism restored, and the physical temple rebuilt. But why would Christ restore a system He has already declared faulty and imperfect and displace the "*perfect law of liberty*"? Scripture teaches all shall be saved the same way. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. The law of Moses has been fulfilled and taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross.

The doctrine says when Jesus returns He will reestablish David's kingdom, ruling from Jerusalem for one thousand years. But David's throne was a type of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, which is not of this world, a physical kingdom. None of the descendants of Coniah would ever reign in Judah, and Christ was one of his descendants. Just why the advocates of this speculative and false doctrine consider the one thousand years to be literal when every other term is so obviously figurative just shows the inconsistency of those who teach it. It's false. This earth shall be destroyed when Jesus returns.

Things Never Mentioned

Essential things that must be included in Revelation twenty to support premillenialism are simply not included in the text. The passage does not mention the second coming of Christ, a bodily resurrection, an

earthly reign of anybody. It does mention the reign of martyred souls who lost their lives for the cause of Christ. It does not mention Christians today at all, or anybody reigning in Jerusalem, nor David's throne and kingdom, nor the revival of Judaism, the conversion and transportation of Jews to Palestine, THE RAPTURE, or THE TRIBULATION. It does not mention the premilleinnial doctrine.

But to say, and with confidence, what it does not say and mean, does not yet say what it does mean. This we now shall address. It is necessary that you take your Bible and read Revelation 20:1-10 slowly and thoroughly!

The text teaches one comes as an angel, a messenger from heaven, with authority to bind, restrict, and limit the power of Satan for what is called one thousand years (a symbol of complete success of His work), with deliverance for those who are set free from subjection to and from the grasp of Satan.

Christ did come from heaven, resisted the temptations of the devil, cast of demons, conquered death and the grave, provided the way of salvation for man from his sins by forgiveness of sins, and from the hold of Satan, and Satan no longer could hold power over man except by man's willingness for the devil to control him. Christ has restricted the power of Satan over man. Man need no longer be in bondage to sin and Satan because of what Christ has accomplished on man's behalf. Man is made free by the truth of Christ, His Word, the gospel. There is spiritual deliverance for those who do not follow the way of the devil, but go the way of the Lord.

This is a symbolic picture of spiritual victory of the cause of Christ and those who are of Christ, a cause for which many were martyred. It is similar to the symbolism of the restoration of Judah found in Ezekiel and his vision of the valley of dry bones being raised again. This in Revelation symbolizes the resurrection of a cause, the cause of Christ, and those who had fallen in what seemed to be defeat, but actually would redound to their eternal victory. The martyred were on thrones as judges, living and reigning beyond physical death. They did not suffer defeat.

In chapter six these martyred ones were beneath the altar crying, "*How long?*" Here they enjoy apparent vindication, a resurrection of that for which they died. This is the theme of the book, namely, ultimate victory to the faithful. As Revelation 2:10 reads, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.*" That verse is in capsule form the theme of the book, the key to understanding it.

How are you going to take a literal chain and bind a spirit? Cannot we see this is a figurative and symbolic presentation? That includes the one thousand year reign, which is so important to the premillennial speculation and false doctrine.

This shows the Lord Jesus restricting the power of Satan, and ultimate victory of those who come to Christ, especially those who had died because they had lost their lives for being a Christian. After this restriction was placed on Satan, there was the loosing of Satan. Whereas binding Satan was sure with the gospel, we know that the entire power of Satan is not bound. It is limited, but not totally removed. This is evident to us in a very disastrous way as we see the world in sinful darkness. But the devil has no power over me, or you, or anybody else, against our will. He cannot force himself upon us to the extent that it will force us into eternal damnation, unless we cooperate and go along with him. He is limited. But the continuation of his destruction is seen in the loosing to some extent.

This has been illustrated as tying a vicious dog on a chain. Within the extent of the chain, one is in danger. But the dog is limited and cannot harm anyone outside the bounds of his limitations. Christ has limited the power of Satan by the way of salvation revealed in the gospel. But if we come within the rule of the devil he can devour us. He will continue to do his evil work through deception, temptation, even using our blessings, if we allow it, to lead us astray.

The passage speaks of God and Magod which were historical enemies of Israel who sought to ensnare and trap them. They were enemies of the people of God. So it is with Satan. Even as we study now, the devil seeks to

ensnare us, and will, if we permit it. But he cannot do so against our will.

Word of Caution

Cannot we see how this would be an encouragement to Christians who were being subjected to persecution? But we must again be warned not to become overly dogmatic about what each symbol may mean? About the only thing about which we ought be dogmatic about Revelation is that we should not be too dogmatic. In the Old Testament we read of symbols and prophecies and the answer to them may be found in the New Testament. We find words like, "*This is that which was spoken...*" But we have no additional book beyond Revelation to tell us precisely what each symbol represents, and we do well to leave what cannot be known unanswered. But we can be confident of the major and primary theme of ultimate victory for the faithful that Revelation teaches.

We can, by having knowledge from secular history what did happen regarding Christians, know with a reasonable degree of confidence to what the passages probably referred. But a word of caution is appropriate.

But there is nothing here that supports the doctrine of premillennialism that contradicts so much plain teaching that we can know and understand without question.

The Last Five Verses

Again, read carefully from your Bible these verses now. We have here one of the Biblical presentations of the Judgment scene. The judgment is not a time of deciding who will be saved or lost in heaven or hell, but the recognition of them, the sentencing of them, and the separation of them. One fearful and certain truth is. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*" (Second Corinthians 5:10). There will be the acquittal of the righteous, and the conviction of the wicked. This will involve the use of books.

Our text mentions the opening of books. One book is called the "*book of life.*" Revelation 21:27 speaks of the "*Lamb's book of life.*" Paul mentioned in Philippians 4:3 of his fellow laborers whose names were written in the "*book of life.*" These would be those who have "*washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*" (Revelation 7:14).

There is cause for rejoicing when your name are written in heaven (Luke 10:20). Christ warned some who stood subject to having their names blotted from the "*book of life*" (Revelation 3:5). We often sing the song that asks, "Is my name written there?"

Another book will be the book of the standard of measurement, the Word of God. John 12:48, "*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.*" Not only do we learn that the judgment will be the last day, but the standard of measure will be the word of the Christ, His doctrine. John 15:3, "*Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*" Psalm 119:105, "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*" In light to these truths, is it any wonder that faithful gospel preachers continue to insist that the foundation of their messages be the Word of God? It matters not what men may choose to offer and for which they contend because what men say will not be the standard by which judgment is made.

Sir Walter Scott, a man with a library of many, many books, when lying on his death bed, requested, "Bring me the Book." Can you imagine how startled one would be to receive such a request from a man who had so many books? Scott was asked, "Which one?" He responded, "There is but one Book to a dying man. He had reference to the only book that really matters when it comes to living life and facing the end of it. That book if the Bible, the Word of God. All other books pale into relative insignificance when compared to the Bible.

A third book is the book that records our words, deeds, and motives. We shall be judged according to our works, the things we have done in this body.

Have you never heard, and even sung, "There's an all-seeing eye watching you." The idea expressed is that God knows everything about us, and nothing escapes His awareness. What He sees and knows of us is recorded. All our evil deeds, words, and thoughts are recorded unless they have been blotted out and washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ.

These books will be in evidence at the judgment, and from them will be the revelation of the destiny of the wicked as well as the righteous and faithful in Christ. One destiny will be eternal spiritual death, or hell. The other will be an entrance into the eternal glories of God, or heaven.

That Which Means Sure Success

The message of Revelation chapter twenty is not really all that difficult to understand when we center our attention on its context and figurative nature. It is a part of that assurance that our effort in serving the Lord through Christ is the only effort we can ever make and be confident of success. Those who come to Christ and live faithfully before Him have God's own promise of ultimate spiritual victory. There is no other effort in which we can engage that guarantees success as does becoming and being a faithful Christian. You may go into business, but you may become bankrupt. You may enter a marriage, but see it disintergrate. You may begin a journey, but never reach your destination. But if you will come to Christ and "*be thou faithful unto death,*" you are certain of the outcome.

There will be times when the way seems very difficult. Such has always been the case with the child of God who must live in a world of sinful darkness. But as Paul wrote, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18).

When we consider the book of life, our major concern should be, as expressed in the song, "Is my name written there, on the page white and fair; in the book of thy kingdom, is my name written there?"

if at present it is not, it can be! This is the offer of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. If you will hear His Word, believe it, obey it, being washed clean by His blood as you are baptized into Him, and raised to walk in a newness of life, being faithful unto death, your name will be written there, will remain written there, will not be blotted out, and when the judgment is yours to face, all will be well with your soul.

This is the essential and primary theme of not only Revelation twenty, but the entire book. May God bless us that we may come to Him through His Son.

* * * *

Growing and Changing

(NOTE: It has been my policy in producing ***A Burning Fire*** to only include sermons and articles of my own. This is not because I believed them superior to others, nor do I believe what others write is not deserving of being produced. It has simply been because what appears in ***A Burning Fire*** is intended to be my own work. Only on one or two occasions over the past seventeen completed volumes, and into the eighteeneth, have I departed from that. But what follows was of such nature, and with which I agree so heartily, that I wish to include it. It was written by Frank G. Starling, appearing in the ***Bible Light,*** July-August, 1996, of which he is editor. Frank is a good personal friend, but more significant to you, a faithful preacher of the gospel. I commend to you his remarks. JWB)

Someone has said, "To grow is to change, and to have changed often is to have grown much." Not necessarily. All change in an organization or in an individual is not in and of itself productive of good. As with all things, the coin of change is two-sided and has a negative and a positive. The standard for change must be right or the harvest resulting will have a bitter taste and be exceedingly difficult to swallow.

The very brief quote with which this article began was the lead in an article of a few years back, written by one of our brethren of the liberal persuasion, the design of it being to further the agenda of the reconstructionist change agents among us. These destructive devotees of change have sought diligently the last few years to rework and retool the gospel along with the organization and mission of the Lord's church. Doused thoroughly in an irenic spirit of compassion and cooperation they have little of such for those who would hold to the rudiments of the faith as found in holy writ. Those who seek to carry out the appointed work of benevolence following the guidelines of the New Testament run head on into the fast-moving eighteen wheeler of the change agents, the "social" gospel. The old fashioned Jerusalem gospel, they tell us, is not getting the job done and they call loudly for change. "We're not meeting the feel good needs of the people we are trying to reach and there must be a change," they scream from pulpits all across the brotherhood. Shame on them. If they don't change their plea, it is certain Heaven will one day change it for them! (See Revelation 10:11-15; 21:8).

Further changes are sought in the role of women in the work of the church and many see no problem with the Christian woman in the pulpit, serving at the Lord's table, or moving zeal-first into various and sundry areas of service in the church. Reading the signs of the times these architects of change have new schemes, new designs for the church's transition into the New Age.

"*Boost not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*" (Proverbs 27:1; cf.; Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32). It would be a mark of wisdom on the part of these change agents to give notice to these words of David, "*Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent of the great transgression,*" (Psalm 19:13). The godly women in the church recognize God's limitations (I Corinthians 14:34; I Timothy 2:9-11). Change agents, your attention - God's way is the only lawful way.

Voices that once rang out with the clarion call of the primtive gospel (II Thessalonians 2:14), now urge a "new hermeneutic" upon us, a necessary change, they say. No, friends - what is really needed is faithful adherence to Heaven's pattern (and there truly is one) set forth in the New Testament (II Timothy 3:16,17). Follow the Father's will as Jesus did (John 5:30; 8:29) and the old hermeneutic will work just fine, thank you.

That which is advocated by the change agents is a reproach to Almighty God (Galatians 1:6-12; I Peter 4:11; Revelation 22:18,19). It surely does not produce growth or change that is positive and edufying for either the individual or the congregation. Here's an excellent place for change (if they're serious); change your attitude, drop the mask of arrogance and your presuming ways (again, recall Psalm 19:13), and humble yourself before God and do it His way! Some change is necessarily a part of our daily life and common sense confirms it. However, in the view of this scribe God did a good job and invites no help from lowly men, whatever the intellectual punch they bring to the matter of growth and change. The beginning of the Lord's church saw amazing change in lives and stimulating numbers in the ranks of those who wanted to faithfully serve God (read Acts, chapters 1 through 28). In modern times the church of the 1950's was acknowledged to be the fastest growing of hundreds considered. In both instances the changes came in the lives of men and women and <u>not</u> in the revealed will of God! If God has not licensed it, surely we agree, no group of men posing as self-appointed surrogates for God can issue a license for the changes being advocated (I Peter 4:11).

The gospel effects changes that is like nothing else, producing happiness that reaches from earth on into eternity. Our ever changing world needs the changeless gospel of the changeless Christ (Hebrews 13:8)

* * * * *

To which I must add; "Thank you, Frank!"
JWB

Two Kinds: Both Harmful

As the regular readers of ***A Burning Fire*** are fully aware, and those who have heard me preach, I am a solid supporter of those who will, in addition to preaching the positive truth of the gospel, also obey God and oppose and expose false teachers and their doctrines. Even though such people are sneeringly called "watchdogs, knuckleheads, spiritual dinosaurs, traditionalists," and other "loving terms" concocted by digressive and liberal people, I appreciate their work.

At the same time, we must also be mindful of some who would assume the role of brotherhood dictator and become brotherhood agitator against everybody and everything that does not conform to their opinions. I am not speaking of doctrine. The Lord has determined that. I speak of how brethren may oppose false ways. Some seem to think if you do not act on matters the way they do, and when they think it ought be done, that you are somehow compromising truth. Some try to dictate to congregations other than their own how to fight error. But if one is fighting error, whether they do it just like me or not, I am pleased with them. I may wish they would be more aggressive, but at least they are acting.

If someone calls names, as I do, well and good. If he chooses not to do so, but opposes error, I can go with him. But when he begins to go along with and defend the use of false teachers, we take parting roads.

But some will brand as "liberal, false,, etc." on such flimsy subjective judgmental differences just because somebody does not do everything like they want it done. Some give others a right to act as others think best. Some do not! This last kind of person can do damage to the Lord's cause as well as apostates of the liberal bent. We should give place to neither the liberal, the compromiser, nor the self-appointed dictator who demands everybody jump when he says "frog." Such behavior has alienated brethren, even when both preach sound doctrine. Such a thing ought not so to be, brethren! Nor will I consider such with indifference! JB

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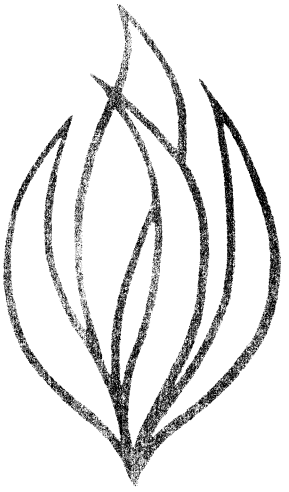

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME XVIII *James W. Boyd* **NUMBER 8**

Something About Yourself

Let me tell your something about yourself. Psalm 8:4, "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?*" The inquiry is repeated in Hebrews 2:6.

There are so many false doctrines and ideas floating about concerning man, his nature, what he really is, and many of them are actually plagues and destructive notions that adversely affect our daily lives. What we think of ourselves will affect what we say, what we think, what we do, how we behave and conduct ourselves regarding others, our daily manner of life, our values, our outlook on things of the past, present, and future.

This discussion is designed to inform and remind us concerning certain things about ourselves as revealed in the Word of God, the Bible. We are operating on certain assumptions. When we say assumptions we are not speaking of things that are unproven, but things that have repeatedly been proven true, and we assume that they are already accepted by our readers. While we realize many do not accept what we assume our readers have accepted, we are confident that each assumption is based on irrefutable evidence and can be accepted with confidence. We make at six assumptions. (1) God exists; (2) God is Creator; (3) God has revealed Himself in part through the natural order; (4) God has revealed Himself through Christ and the Biblical revelation; (5) The Bible is the Word of God; and (6) Jesus Christ is Deity.

Man According to Scripture

We read in Genesis 1:26,27 that man, meaning mankind, has been created in the image of God. Since God does not have a physical body, but is Spirit (John 4:24), man also is a spirit being. Hebrews 12:9 tells us that God is the Father of spirits. (This is one reason we know that people are not born into this world with depraved, sinful spirits. The very contention is a blasphemous reflection on God). When God created mankind He created them

male and female (Matthew 19:4,5). In truth we are as Paul declared, Acts 17:28, *"For we are also his offspring."*

Man: A Triune Being

To speak of man as a triune being simply asserts that man is a three-part creature. There is a spirit in man (Job 32:8). Daniel was grieved in his spirit in the midst of his body (Daniel 7:15). This not only alerts us that we are spirit, but the spirit lives in the body. Zechariah 12:1 teaches God forms the spirit in man. Our life is in the spirit because the body without the spirit is dead (James 2:26). At physical death there is a great separation of body and spirit. The spirit returns to God at death (Ecclesiastes 12:7), and man does not cease to exist at death as some have falsely taught. Death in the Bible is never presented a annihilation or complete cessation of existence. The spirit, even though is has not always existed and, therefore, is not eternal, it does not cease to exist at death and, therefore, is immortal.

But man is also characterized as a soul. This is generic term and the word "soul" is used in different senses, determined by the context of the passage. In Acts 2:41 soul is used to refer to the whole person, as three thousand souls were baptized. A similar usage is found in Acts 7:14 when we read of seventy-five souls of the house of Jacob going into Egypt.

Soul is also used with reference to the biological and animalistic life. While man is alive, active, a sensual and moving body of activity, he is not an evolved descendant of lower forms of animal life. This false doctrine has been more destructive to human welfare than can be measured. Genesis 1:26,27 speaks of God breathing into man's nostrils the breath of life, or soul. Man became a living and conscious being. The word is often used interchangeably with spirit, as in Acts 2:27 when it is reported that God would leave the soul of Jesus in hell or hades, the unseen state of the dead.

What is most obvious is that man is a physical and material body. We are composed of the elements of the dust of the ground from whence we have been made, and to which the body, at death, will return (Genesis 3:19).

"Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal,
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul."
---Longfellow

Other Biblical Terms Describing Man

In Second Corinthians 4:16 Paul spoke of the inward man and the outward man. "*For which cause we faint not; but though out outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day.*" Ephesians 3:16, "*That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.*" The outward man refers to the body while the inner or inward man refers to the soul or spirit in the body.

"*For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*" (Second Corinthians 5:1). The spirit of man is the person who lives in the body, called a tabernacle or tent, a temporary dwelling place. We shall someday have a resurrected body, a "*house not made with hands.*" While we live for a few years in this body, "*...at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord,*" eventually we shall be "*absent from the body*" and be "*present with the Lord*" (Second Corinthians 5:6-8). It is the spirit of man that is the inner man, the immortal part of man that survives physical death, but now lives in the body. As already mentioned, death is the separation of body and spirit (James 2:26).

Man's Heart

Scripture speaks of the heart of man, not with reference to the muscle organ that pumps the blood through our physical system, but "*the hidden man of the heart*" (First Peter 3:4). It refers to man's mind, the seat of his thoughts and power to think, his passions, appetites, affections. It is with his heart that he purposes and plans, hopes, understands, determines, decides, hates, loves, believes, wills, remembers. Because of the heart of man he has the ability to do what other creatures have not been given the power to do.

God appeals to man through his heart because man is a rational and intelligent, emotional and intellectual being. God uses His Word to appeal to man's heart. "*Come let us reason together*" (Isaiah 1:18). This is the way that God communicates with man. He has given us His Word that we can know and understand, thereby having the evidence upon which to make decisions. We can take information and draw conclusions.

A Free Moral Agent

A most unique feature in the nature of man is his capacity and ability to exercise choice. Man has the power to act upon his knowledge and understanding in whatever way he sees fit. This does not mean he will always act as he ought, but he can choose his own course. He has the ability to come to God or reject God. God does not force Himself on man to do His will if man chooses otherwise. Man can either obey God or rebel against Him. Man can, must, and will decide and choose.

To be sure, man will be held accountable for his choices and will either benefit or suffer the consequences of his choices (Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12).

The Conscience of Man

Man has a conscience. This nature of man is sorely misunderstood by many. Some have falsely concluded that man instinctively knows right and wrong because he has a conscience. But this is not so. The function of the conscience is to commend man when he lives harmoniously to his beliefs and standards, and condemns man when he acts contrary to his beliefs and standards. It does not say that his beliefs and standards are either right or wrong. The conscience must be taught the correct standard so man can believe what is true. He must receive correct information regarding what he ought and ought not do, say, think, and believe.

One can do wrong and his conscience never be violated. Such was the case with Saul of Tarsus, later the apostle Paul (Acts 23:1). But he persecuted the very Christ. Therefore, the conscience by itself is not a safe guide. Even so, we are not to violate the conscience (Romans

14:23). If one will willfully violate his conscience he cannot claim to be honest with himself or God. And the conscience can become seared and hardened to the point that evil will have no offense to him (First Timothy 4:2). Animals and the vegetable and plant kingdom do not have consciences, and are not held accountable as is man. This is a most unique trait of yourself.

These qualities mentioned overlap one another, indeed, are superimposed one over the other and operate together. Basically, you are body, soul, and spirit with all the attendant capacities of these qualities. There is the inner or inward man and the outward man. Man has a conscience to help him govern his manner of life. He is a creature with the power of choice, and this carries with it an accountability for the choices he makes.

When the physical body dies the animalistic nature of man comes to an end and that part of life ceases. But the spirit (often also called the soul) does not die in the sense of ceasing to exist. It survives the body. It is the soul or spirit of man that Christ came to save. This is the spiritual image of God in which man has been created. and is considered by the Lord to be more valuable and precious than all the world (Mark 8:36).

We are, therefore, creatures of two worlds, the spiritual and material. "*What is man?*" We can declare with certainty that man is a glorious creature, and this is what makes each person matter. This is the basis for and reason to have respect for self and others, considering the soul (spirit) above all else. This is the basis for human dignity and sacredness of human life.

Home of the Soul

The ultimate home of the soul (spirit) of man, male or female, can and will be with God for those who exercise their minds, make their choices, and decide to come to Him, following Christ, training his conscience according to His will and Word, and living harmoniously with it. You see, you are a special and glorious being!

* * * * *

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is the name of an Old Testament book, and a book that is all too often dismissed in our Bible studies. Yet, its themes are age lasting, its principles unchanging, in fact, unchangeable. Although written so many years ago, it speaks to our day, is applicable to our lives, and is as true now as when originally penned by the inspired writer.

The theme of Ecclesiastes is, "*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*" This may sound most pessimistic and cynical, but it is not. It is not only realistic but calls us to focus attention of things that really matter most. Vanity means insubstantial, fleeting in value. Eclessiastes 1:2, "*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.*" Ecclesiastes 12:8, "*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity.*" This is repeated in various forms nearly thirty times through this book. It is not saying there is no value to anything, but there is that which is most valueable which commands our attention.

The design of the writer is to affirm and demonstrate the futility of all earthly efforts, worldly pursuits, and temporal pleasures as the means to supply mankind with the enduring happiness and blessedness before God for which people of every age has yearned, and for which those of our own time expend so much time, talent, and energy to attain, usually in futile ways. The writer makes his point that man needs God. To prove this, by inspiration, he uses his experiences, and those of others. But he does not simply expose the false sources of happiness, but also directs his readers to the unfailing fount of good.

The writer is called the "*son of David, king of Jerusalem.*" Who else could this be but Solomon? He comes toward the close of his very eventful career after he has drunk freely of worldly things. If happiness could be obtained that way, he would surely possess it. But he shows such pursuits have failed him.

He identifies himself as "*the Preacher,*" the meaning of the word Ecclesiastes. He makes clear his aim is to teach

knowledge, and many proverbs, with the theme, "*I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of man, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life*" (Ecclesiastes 3:2). He tells us what he learned.

Is Wisdom the Way to Happiness?

Solomon experimented to discover happiness in the exercise of wisdom and much knowledge. "*And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt*" (First Kings 4:29,30). "*I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.*" (Ecclesiastes 1:16). His knowledge embraced facts and details of his day, plus he knew people, their hopes, longings, fears, anxieties, and commanded an unusual perception of life. Solomon sometimes used his exceptional abilities to the glory of God. Too often, it was to find happiness apart from the true source of wisdom and knowledge. Some today contend "education" is the answer to all problems. But education in what? Education that advances the causes of unhappiness makes happiness less likely.

Knowledge is valuable only as a means to an end. It can be a blessing or a curse, depending on what knowledge you have and how it is used. To seek knowledge for the sake of knowing, as did Athenians (Acts 17), produces no good. Many well-informed people are unhappy. Ecclesiastes 1:18, "*For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.*"

Riches, Wealth, and Regal Living

Solomon turned his heart toward material possessions of extreme extravagance and abundance. He had ample opportunity to test wealth as a source of happiness. He possessed great works, vineyards, gardens, orchads, baths, servants, cattle, silver, gold, entertainers, and all

the trappings of luxury and riches. Did it supply his needs? "*Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun*" (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

So many have never learned, Luke 12:15, "*Take heed, and beware of covetoueness; for a man's life consiseth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth.*" Covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5), and many dissipate their lives in quest of happiness through earthly gain. While the Lord knows we have material needs, He warns against putting such things first (Matthew 6:33). We cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). Some of the happiest and most contented people have relatively little, and some of the most miserable live with abundance. Ecclesiastes 5:10, "*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.*" The church in Laodicea confused their wealth with acceptance before God (Revelation 3:17).

How About Prominence, Power, and Prestige

Solomon sought and acquired prominence, power, prestige, noteriety among men. He had fame, popularity, position, and acceptance from others. Jesus said, "*Woe unto you when all men speak well of you*" (Luke 6:26). How pitable is the person who makes such things his goal in life! Some turned from Jesus because they loved the praises of men (John 12:42,43). These things are born of pride, egotism, a craving for the limelight, getting attention, and receiving the plaudits of others.

The fame of Solomon spread throughout the world. When visited by the Queen of Sheba she remarked that the half was not told. But are the famous necessarily happy? All this proved to be bitter gall to Solomon, and he was laboring for the wind with no profit.

Jesus taught, Luke 14:11, "*For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*" While many seek to grow in fame and be popular, actually the way up begins by going down. Fame and popularity are so fleeting, and seeking such is as

striving after the wind. So many who claim celebrity status are miserable. Solomon proved such is vanity.

Does Sin Bring Happiness?

There was no desire, folly, immorality, or fleshly indulgence that Solomon did not give himself. He sought happiness through forbidden and sinful pleasures. Did it bring him what he needed and wanted?

Many today are deceived to think gratification of the flesh and selfish indulgence brings happiness. They use illicit sexual conduct, drugs, gambling, drunkennes, thrills of one sort or the other, but never does the pleasure of sin bring happiness. Moses made the wise choice, Hebrews 11:24-26, choosing rather to suffer affliction than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Sin only produces sorrows, ruined lives, immeasurable because of the magnitude of grief that ultimately is produced by sinful living. The final wages of sin is separation from God (Romans 6:23). Are we wise to seek happiness with temporary pleasures that brings us to hell? Such has not been, is not now, and never will be the avenue to happiness.

What Solomon is Not Saying

Solomon is not teaching that all knowledge and wisdom is evil. He was not anti-intellectual. Nor does he teach that all wealth, fame, and pleasure is sinful, even though the desire for and acquisition of such things often brings sin into the lives of those who seek such things.

But his lesson is that such things do not produce the sustained happiness for which we yearn. They do not fulfill life's purposes. They cannot bring blessedness before God, or satisfy the longings and needs of the soul. "*All is vanity*" in that respect.

Since these things do not bring what is truly of value, because they don't, won't, and can't, what does? We now turn our attention to what may well be the most profitable lessons we can learn from this book that exposes the folly of seeking happiness through faulty means.

The Major Lesson

Ecclesiastes 12:13,14, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*"

A holy and reverent respect for God alongside an unquestioning obedience to His will, in view of the inevitable judgment before God, is what really matters. Life without God is meaningless. Physical death terminates worldly pursuits. But God provides forgiveness, guidance, purpose, and all His commandments are for our good. Blessed is that person who has partaken of divine knowledge and wisdom, whose wealth is spiritual wealth, who seeks favor with God above men, and who finds his pleasure in living and serving God according to God's infallible directions. Truly, that is the happy and contended person.

We each must face life, and physical death cannot be avoided. We must consider these things fairly and squarely. To fulfill our purpose and enjoy the greatest joy in life, we must realize what our mission is. Our purpose is not to just have knowledge, wisdom, wealth, fame, acceptance by men, and the rest. We are here to glorify God by being His kind of person.

Once learning our mission from God's Word, it is also from His Word we learn how to accomplish that mission. Ecclesiastes teaches that lasting joy is with God. This necessarily points us to the Christ because it is by Him, and Him alone, that we come to the Father (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

If you would find happiness here and eternally, follow the path of righteousness that God has provided, and you shall have everything that matters, now and forever.

* * * * *

The next issue will be the final issue of
***A BURNING FIRE*.**

Is There A Pattern For Worship?

Why do we even have to ask this question? Bible believers have always considered the Bible as the pattern to follow. But some, like Rubel Shelly, Max Lacado, and others of the same heretical bent, deny the Bible furnishes a pattern. This error is propagated at the Tulsa Workshop, David Lipscomb University, Abilene Christian University, Image magazine, the infamous Jubilee, by the so-called Community Churches, and others, all of which sneer at what they call "pattern authority," calling it traditionalism and other terms they consider uncomplimentary. There are many names, quotations, verbal and written comments to prove the allegation. They say it is impossible to restore the New Testament church, and even boast of not being interested in doing so. They want what they call relevant to our present culture, as if New Testament Christianity is not, and contend the church must be flexible to change with the culture and be acceptable or else it shall die. They shout that the Bible is no blueprint or guide, but only God's love letter to those of the first century culture.

Such as this is a blatant and blasphemous attack on God and His Word. Read again Second Timothy 3:16,16. Their doctrine, as old as rebellion itself, allows for all kinds of doctrines, practices, and anything goes. Man's will, not God's will, is the standard. What they call "freedom in Christ" is self-imposed bondage to self and sin. They want a "do-your-own-thing" religion. It is not a new contention, but one that has been revived in our time. If there is no pattern even for how we worship, we can do anything we wish. There is no right and wrong. Whatever suits you must suit God, and everybody can worship God according to whatever dictates he may perceive in his own heart and passion.

Old and New Testaments Reflect Patterns

The Scripture provide us guidance, blueprints, forms, examples, type and anti-types, shadows and images. Not just anything is all right before God. God has had

patterns in every generation and dispensation, not only in worship, but other areas as well. Consider the pattern for Noah's ark. How could Enoch "*walk with God*" if he could do whatever he wished? Could Abraham leave Ur and go just anywhere? Is there no pattern for the government of the church? The plan of salvation is the same conversion after conversion recorded in Acts. Ask David or Uzzah, who touched the ark of the covenant, if there was pattern regarding the transportation of the ark. How could Christ be our example if there is no pattern? Why would Paul say imitate him as he imitated Christ without a pattern? Exercising judgment implies the existence of a standard, rule, pattern, and law.

God Has Always Had a Pattern in Worship

In every age God has expected worship from man, and according to His directions. Worship is showing deep respect, paying homage, do obeisance, and is composed of specific acts, specified and authorized acts that are done with reverence, awe, drawing near to God and having communion with Him. John 4:24 teaches us the right object of worship, which is God; the right attitude, in spirit; and the right actions, in truth. This implies there is a pattern for such things. We cannot worship just anybody or anything anyway we see fit and please God. Inherent in the nature of worship is that the worshipper does the will of the One who is worshipped. God has never left it to man to determine how to worship Him. We must have the attitude, "I give you as You direct," not, "You take whatever I give." We need to remember who is in charge. Is it man or God?

Not Everything We Do Is Worship

It is absurd to contend everything we do is worship. Some have gleaned this from following modern-day speech perversions of Scripture. I am not worshipping when I wash the car, plow my garden, cook a meal, or change oil in the lawn mower. If that was worship, obviously there is no pattern, and everybody can and does worship differently. This would allow whatever innovation you wish. If we play "White Christmas" on the piano at home and that is worship, then we would be

justified in playing the piano in the assembly. (This is what some are trying to establish.)

Abraham went to the mountain with Isaac to worship (Genesis 22:5). What he was doing prior to that was not worship. Elkanah went to Shiloh to worship (First Samuel 1:3). Why go there is everything he did was worship? The Ethiopian had been to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8:27). Riding in his chariot was not an act of worship. Paul came to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 24:11). Riding horseback was not worship. Wise men came to worship, and Herod sought Him to worship Him (Matthew 2:2,8). Obviously, everything they did was not worship. Worship involves a time, place, deeds, acts, in the right attitude of heart that are recognizable as distinctive from everything else one does. All that you do is not worship, the "change agents" not withstanding. They confuse worship and service. All worship is service, but all service is not worship.

Old and New Testament Worship Patterns

Cain and Abel worshipped. Abel worshipped by faith. One did right, and the other wrong. Was the worship of the golden calf wrong? Surely it was. But why was it not all right if they had no pattern? Idolatry violated the pattern. The design of the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the garments of the priests, the priesthood itself was according to God's revealed pattern. Ask Nadab and Abihu if there was a pattern for worship in their day? Jeroboam, an ancient change agent, changed the time, place, and personnel in worship that violated God's pattern. If there was no pattern for worship, how could the Corinthians abuse the Lord's Supper? The very fact there is designated the object of worship, God, demonstrates there is a pattern to follow.

Why Has This Issue Risen?

Some have a disdain for the law of God, and are repulsed by the need to obey. They have a passion for the new over the true. They are obsessed with change in order to accommodate what people want, and draw crowds. They also desire to do-their-own-thing, be like others, receive approval of men. They have no love for the truth, but

disrespect verbal inspiration. Following the "wisdom" of men they inject their innovations, criticizing our worship as dull, boring, unattractive, and without appeal to the modern culture. They seek entertainment, lights, drama, fun, celebration, excitement, a "holy wow," shouting clapping, dancing, emotionalism, swaying, solos, choirs, instruments, concerts, and other performances to which applause if given. Some like beads, incense, animal blood, signs, symbols, candles, and an appeal to feelings. "We get excited at ball games. Why not get excited at church?" is the wail of ignorant, blasphemous, and digressive people. But worship was never intended to be a "religious Hee-Haw."

In music some clamor for solos, choirs, "special music," instruments. In giving they invent many ways to simply "raise funds." Regarding the Lord's Supper they want it anytime, anyway, with an artificial environment and drama to arouse emotions. They use divided assemblies, substitute assemblies, enter inter-denominational worship periods. They have never learned to give to God at worship (not just a reference to finances), but seek to get and satisfy self, and leave the period "feeling good."

With Authority

Colossians 3:17, "*Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...*" We have authority to sing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week with the proper ingredients and understanding as a memorial to Christ (Matthew 26, First Corinthians 11; Acts 20). We are to pray (First Thessalonians 5:17; Matthew 6), and give of our means (First Corinthians 16; Proverbs 3:9). Our attitude is involved in the Scriptural pattern for worship. These things the Lord's church did when directly guided by the Holy Spirit in the first century. Were they wrong? Who can be the Lord's counsellor today and advise Him of things better to do? The change agents evidently think they have been elevated by some special dispensation to that level and seek to redirect the way and manner that worship to God is to be offered in our time. Who can believe them? They show no respect for the necessity for God's authority, nor respect for His Word whatsoever except where it pleases them to do so.

Pattern is Implied and Unavoidable

That there is a pattern in serving God, including worship, is implied in the following passages, and there is no way anybody that is honest can or will want to avoid it.

Second John 9-11, "*Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your houses, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*" Those who "go along" with the promoters of the present heresies need to take note!

Galatians 1:6-9, *"I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say we now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you, that than ye have received, let him be accursed."*

First Peter 4:11, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..."*

Second Timothy 4:2, *"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."*

The "bottom line" in this issue of a pattern in worship is simply, "Shall we serve God or man, or self?" Shall we follow human wants or the divine will? Shall we be the Lord's church or a man's denomination? Shall we be Christians or just religious after our own fashions and ever-changing cultural habits?

Joshua gave the answer. "*Choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,*" according to His pattern, including worship.

* * * * *

Islam

Second Timothy 4:7, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."* Jude 3, *"...contend earnestly for the faith..."* Ephesians 4:4,5, *"There is... one faith..."* (Underlined for emphasis, JWB). Paul was never a Moslem but was an advocate for the the faith of Jesus Christ, the religion of God revealed in the New Testament.

Islam was founded by a man named Mohammed who was born about 570 A.D. in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. He died in 632 A. D. and there is a shrine to him in Medina, Saudi Arabia.

Islam means to submit to the will of a god called Allah. It is a religion, but more than a religion. It is a political system, a culture, controlling all of life, faith, and like Romanism, is a union of the political and religious. A Moslem (sometimes Muslim) is a name of one who submits to the way of Islam. There are many Muslims who are not Arabs, but nearly all Arabs subscribe to this system.

The Koran and Mohammed

The utterances of Mohammed are supposedly contained in what is called the Koran (their Bible). To them this Koran is the absolute and ultimate revelation from God. It supersedes all previous revelations, like the Old and New Testaments. (In this the Koran is like the Book of Mormon as considered by Mormons.) To Moslems, Allah's will is fully expressed in the Koran. While they allegedly respect the Biblical prophets (Abraham to Christ), Mohammed is the last, greatest and supreme authority of them all. While claiming to respect Christ, they deny the basic and fundamental claim of Christ that He is Deity. What a gross inconsistency!

Mohammed was born in a dominant tribe in Mecca, a city of pagan worship by Arab tribes. It has numerous shrines, the most revered being called Kaaba (Cube) which contains various idols. This Kaaba (Cube) they

say streaked from heaven at night in the forgotten past. Mohammed developed a strong distaste for the idolatry of the Bedouins (nomads) of his upbringing.

Allegedly he was called by Gabriel in a vision and told to "Recite." He was not told to write because he could not write. At first he did not believe he was a prophet, but was later persuaded that he was by his wealthy and once-widowed wife, fifteen years his senior. Thereafter came many more visions, articulating what the Koran contains. The Koran was written by Mohammed's followers after his death. It contains much that is similar to the Old and New Testaments. Like so many false religions, it is founded on man and his unsubstantiated claim to have received some special and latter-day revelation from God since the all-sufficient Scripture of the Bible.

Mohammed, because of opposition, fled from Mecca in 622 A. D. to Yathrib (Medina) which is two hundred miles north near the Red Sea on the western side of Saudi Arabia. Moslems date their calendar from the time of his flight. He was accepted in Medina and became their governor, warred against Mecca and captured it, destroying its idols, punishing his former opponents, but preserving the Black Stone (Kaaba).

Some Characteristics of Islam

Islam has a long and bloody history of warfare. At the death of Mohammed his followers embarked on warfare, spreading their religion unto Syria, other portions of lands closely related to Palestine, Irag, Iran, Egypt, India, Spain, Portugal, France, and the Indonesian Islands. They were finally halted by Germanic tribes in what is now modern France in 732 A.D. Those they conquered were forced to adopt their faith, pay tribute, or die. They retained their control by similar means.

Islam is strongly monotheistic, one god, that being Allah. Because they misunderstand the Biblical teaching of the Godhead they reject the concept of the Godhead composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, erroneously concluding, as do some others, that this advocates three gods. But such is not so. Paul wrote,

"*There is... one God and Father,*" (Ephesians 4:6), and that is Jehovah God, the true and living God of heaven. Allah is considered to be the sole creator and judge. Islam emphasizes heaven and hell, forbids eating pork, gambling, usury, and alcohol. The Koran gives many penalties for various crimes, laws on marriage, divorce, and allows polygamy (up to four wives).

The five pillars of Islam are: (1) The unity of their god, Allah, "There is no god but Allah; Mohammed is the Messenger of Allah." (2) Prayer, offered five times daily facing Mecca. (Originally they faced Jerusalem until the Jews in Medina opposed him). They pray in their mosques (houses of prayer) Fridays, led by an Imam. But they have no clergy or priesthood. (3) Almsgiving as an act of piety toward Allah. (4) The Fast of Ramadan. (5) The pilgrimage to Mecca.

Jihad is the name of holy war to defend and promote Islam. Mohammedans have been victimized in the past by the Crusades of Catholicism, and have waged war to recover the "holy places."

The role of women has been subservient, being distinctive in dress, veils (accept when wearing battle uniforms). This is changing among modern Moslems although studiously followed by the more radical elements of Islamic fundamentalism. They practice circumcision of male babies. To be uncircumcised is to be an unbeliever.

At graves it is whispered into the ear of the dead, "Who is thy God? Allah! What is thy religion? Islam! Who is its prophet? Mohammed!" This to remind the dead to make proper responses when angels interrogate him in the grave lest he suffer torment until the Judgment Day.

Islam is very racist, claiming to be the religion of blacks and others of dark skin, and Christianity the religion of whites. But the religion of Christ is for all (Acts 10:34,35). Take note of many blacks in this country adopting Islamic names. Islam is a vicious but tremendous power in Africa.

Islam today is divided into several divisions, two being primary. They are Sunnites (the majority), and the Shiites (those in Iran, Irag, the more militant and radical elements). Shiites will even slash themselves with knives, pull out their hair, like the worshippers of Baal in the days of Ahab and Elijah. They are mystic, using animated dances, infusion of voodoo magic, and the clattering of their tongues in shrieking noises.

Their Holy Places and Days

They have three holy cities. One is Mecca, where is their most sacred shrine (the black stone), and the birthplace of Mohammed; two, Medina, where Mohammed fled and where is the place of his burial and shrine; three, Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock built on the cite of Solomon's temple. According to Moslems, the rock was visited by angels before the creation of Adam, is the place where Abraham offered Isaac, a place of prayer for all the prophets from Elijah to Mohammed, the place from which Mohammed ascended on his journey to receive revelations, and where the angel will blow his trumpet at judgment. Inside the Dome are supposed to be two hairs from the head of the prophet Mohammed.

Mecca, with the black stone, must be visited at least once by every Moslem sometime in life. They have three main rituals. One, marching around the black stone seven times; two, a lesser pilgrimage running seven times between two small hills across Mecca as a reenactment of Hagar searching for water for Ishmael, from whom they claim to have descended; three, a greater pilgrimage to the Mount of Mercy in the Plain of Arafat to "stand before Allah" from noon to sunset. This is a climatic ceremony.

Only in more recent years has Islam become evangelistic by teaching. Heretofore they expanded by military conquest, forced conversion, or death. While claiming to be tolerant of other faiths, they demand tribute of those they conquer and persecute those of other faiths, especially Christians. They advocate doing missionary work by precept, not war, except when they think it necessary to Islam. They universally hate Western culture, considering it decadent (and in this they have a

point), and a culture of Christianity (which it is not, but a culture that has perverted Christianity). They also hate atheistic communism. There are millions of Moslems in the former Soviet Union nations.

The Fast of Ramadan is in their ninth month. It was then that Mohammed was supposed to have received his first revelation on the twenty-seventh of the month. Ramadan is a fast to commemorate the coming of the Koran and is a most scrupulously observed religious duty. They fast from dawn to dusk, taking no food or drink until darkness, abstain from sexual activity, and it is not until the sound of the cannon at sunset that normal life and its duties and privileges resume. This fast lasts for a month. Someway, it is justified to set it aside during war, as was done during the recent Gulf War, in which several Islamic states were involved, even in opposition to each other.

We should have concern about this false religion because it has invaded our own shores and is taking a deadly toll among the irreligious elements of our society because they do not care. It is winning converts among blacks and others of color against whites and Christianity. It is extracting money from the national treasuries to support its aims and goals. Mosques are being built across the nation. Their peculiar and immoral habits are threatening the Christian teaching regarding the home, marriage, the role of women, etc. They find fertile soil among those Americans who see the evils of alcoholic beverages and immodest dress, which have become trademarks of our society. Contrast the "Christian clergy" advocating drinking, homosexuality, gambling and just about whatever anybody wants with people who serve a false god and follow a false prophet, but at least can see the havoc such things cause everybody.

Salvation, however, is only in Christ, not Islam (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We necessarily must be alert to this invasion of error, and stand firm in "*the faith.*"

* * * * *

The Name Christian

When asked what I am religiously, I respond I am a Christian. When asked which denomination I respond, none. I am simply a Christian, a member of the Lord's church revealed in the New Testament. This is difficult for some to grasp, having learned nothing but error. The Lord's church began on Pentecost, the gospel being heard throughout the world by Colossians 1:23, its growth rapid and extensive (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14), from a small beginning to something greater than any earthly empire. Its growth alarmed both Jews and Romans who persecuted that way, but found the suppression of its growth impossible. Many factors contributed to its growth, primarily the preaching of the Word, the work of Paul and other apostles, but also the name Christian.

Before Paul (Saul of Tarsus) was converted he contributed unintentionally to the growth of the church as a persecutor (Galatians 1:13; Acts 26:9-11) which caused Christians to scatter, taking the gospel wherever they went (Acts 8:1,3,4). Saul persecuted the church, however, in good conscience (Acts 23:1), but was actually persecuting Christ (Acts 9:4). He did much more after his conversion, of course, God using him to carry the gospel to both Jew and Gentile. He suffered greatly for the cause he once persecuted (Second Corinthians 23-28). The last half of the book of Acts records his missionary labors.

The Name Contributes to Growth

The name CHRISTIAN appears three times in the New Testament; by Agrippa to Paul when he said, "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*" (Acts 26:28); Peter, when writing to Christians under persecution, urging them not to be ashamed of being a Christian but rather glorifying God in this name, or on this behalf (First Peter 4:16). It was first used to identify disciples in Antioch, "*The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch*" (Acts 11:26). James does mention "*the worthy name by which you are called*" (James 2:7). From what source came this name of identification for those of Christ?

The Origin of the Name

This was not a name assumed by Christians for themselves. They generally referred to themselves as disciples, saints, believers, followers, learners, brethren, generic terms that could be used by any group. But they were CALLED Christians by someone else.

It was not the Jews. The name Christian includes Christ, and Christ means Messiah. The Jews denied that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and would not call His followers by such a name. They considered Christians a sect (Acts 25:5). They never considered Christians to be children of Abraham, even though they actually are spiritually (Galatians 3:29).

There is no evidence that the name is a nickname given in derision by enemies of Christ. This name received apostolic approval, was not to be worn in shame, but a name by which to glorify God, a worthy name. No derogatory nickname would be so approved.

Isaiah 62:2 and 65:15 foretells how God would give His people a new name when both Jews and Gentiles would be included. By Acts eleven the gospel had been taught to both Jew and Gentile and the church in Antioch was composed of both. Furthmore, the word translated "called" is only used to denote an action of Deity. It refers to those being named, identified, a very specific appellation, and it came from God, not any man.

Named After Christ

Like the Herodians, Marxists, Lutherans, Calvinists, Christians are named after their leader, Christ, which means the Anointed One or Messiah, titles of Jesus. The name brings honor to Christ. It denotes one as a follower of Christ. It shows party loyalty to His church, unity and fellowship with those of the common bond, showing they are of the same people. No matter what nationality, gender, color, culture, social status, or other such barriers noted in the world, Christian is the name of identification to one who adheres and conforms to the doctrine of Christ (Galatians 3:28).

What About Other Religious Names?

Why would anybody who says he believes the Scriptures want to wear any name that does not have God's approval and authority for wearing it? It seems so inconsistent and irrational to do so. The many names people wear, the denominational names, are divisive and cultish, and in contradiction to the teaching of Paul in First Corinthians 1:12,13. Some say the various names do not matter and are of no consequence. Evidently, the Holy Spirit did not think so, or Paul would not have written as he did. Who says they do not matter? The only ones who say that names do not matter are those who have the wrong names, names which have no authority from the Bible to be worn. Why are not those who profess to be followers of Christ content to wear the name Christian without all the other divisive human appendages men have attached to themselves?

Who Is A Christian?

Not all that this world calls Christian is Christian according to the New Testament. One is not a Christian simply because he believes that Jesus is the Son of God. There were people who believed in Jesus, even as devils do, but who turned from Him. Who would dare call them Christians? Truly, the term is used so loosely today that great reproach has been brought on the name Christian by the antics of many who say they are Christians. It is used in an anti-scriptural way. We should speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). Every kind of church, doctrine, practice, idea, position, and tradition imaginable has been labeled Christian. We have no right to call something or someone Christian that does not conform to the doctrine of Christ.

Men can be saved by no other name (Acts 4:12). This truth brought Christians into early conflict with the Jews and Romans of the first century. It brings Christians into conflict with other religions, including denominational religions, today. Being a Christian demands obedience to Him. It begins with the Word being preached, heard, believed and obeyed in repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ.

Upon being added to the church upon that obedience, Christians are to live that special kind of life that imitates the Christ.

Christians Are Made By The Word

Christians are the citizens in the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13). The Word of God is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11). No seed, no kingdom, no Christians. The Word (seed) must be planted (by teaching) into the honest and good heart and it produces a Christian, the same as it did when planted in the first century. It takes something other than the Word (seed) to produce followers of other religions and denominations. When that which is sown are the tares of human doctrines, creeds, and such like, it produces something other than Christians of the New Testament order.

We are urged to receive the Word, by which we are saved (James 1:21). We are purified by obedience to the truth, which is the Word of God (First Peter 1:22,23). It is significant that there is recorded in the New Testament no conversion to Christ separate and apart from the Word of God. In every instance, without exception, the gospel was preached, believed, and obeyed.

Therefore, we must conclude that there is no separation from the Word and being a Christian.

Let us return to our opening comments about what one is religiously and to which denomination does one belong. You ought to be simply a Christian. Not this kind of Christian, that kind of Christian, but simply a Christian. This is what is right. You ought not belong to any denomination because they do not exist by the authority of God, and are contrary to the doctrine of Christ. You should belong to the Lord's church, the church of Christ. All can be simply Christians and be in His one church. After all, it is to Christians to whom the promises of heaven are extended after a life of faithful service unto God through Him. What a glorious blessing to be called a Christian, and to be one.

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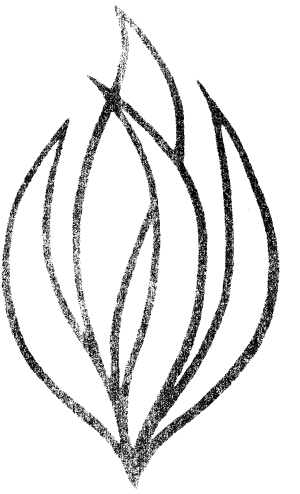

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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FINAL ISSUE

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VOLUME XVIII *James W. Boyd* **NUMBER 9**

Heaven

When I began the publication of A BURNING FIRE fifteen years and eighteen volumes ago, the first lesson was on the subject of heaven. After all, heaven is the goal, holding priority for us in everything we do in this life. This is our one hope. So it seemed appropriate to me to begin this final issue with another lesson on heaven, even though it will not simply be a repetition of the first, naturally having some overlapping teaching.

Heaven is mentioned over siX hundred times in the Bible. To be sure, it does not always refer to the same thing or same place. For instance, in Luke 15:21 when the prodigal son was making his confession of wrongdoing, and Matthew 21:25, when Jesus asked regarding the baptism of John, heaven is used to refer to God and His authority.

In Deuteronomy 1:28 and 9:1 heaven refers to something of great height, "*cities walled to heaven,*" or "*fenced up to heaven.*"

Repeatedly heaven refers to the abode of the Father. "*Our Father which art in heaven,*" (Matthew 6:9), as one example.

In Matthew 5:12 Jesus said, "*Great is your reward in heaven,*" meaning the place of reward and the abode of the blessed. Like many other matters, the meaning is determined by the context.

Heaven as Seen by the Jews

In the Jewish mind there were three heavens, possibly four (a disputed but unimportant matter). Genesis 1:7,8 speaks of the air, where birds fly, storms rage, clouds form. Genesis 1:17, heaven refers to space, the place of the sun, moon, stars, and planets. As mentioned, it often refers to the dwelling place of God. Then we have the location of heaven in Paul's vision, recorded in Second Corinthians 12:1-4. Paul called it the "*third heaven,*" meaning the Hadean realm and Paradise. He was caught up "*into paradise.*" Paradise was where Jesus wnet when

He died, but that was not the abode of the Father for He had not yet ascended to the Father even after His resurrection (John 20:17).

From the earliest Biblical history men knew something better was over there (Enos, Enoch). Revelation from God guarantees a life beyond, but where? Our hope is not limited to this life (First Corinthians 15:19). Heavenly reward is still future (Hebrews 13:14). *"Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come."* The heaven for which we hope is part of the good news. We can lay up treasures in heaven that perish not (Matthew 16:19-21).

What Will Heaven Be Like?

While this is not our major concern in this lesson, let me answer by saying it will be like nothing that we can adequately describe because of its granduer. Literal language is simply too tame and commonplace to be adequate. But we can be sure that however heaven will be, it will be to our liking.

There are many questions regarding heaven for which specific answers are not given us. They only provoke speculation, which may be interesting but uncertain, and we can not become dogmatic about unlearn, untaught questions.

Do we go immediately to heaven upon physical death. On this we can be reasonably certain, and the answer is that we (our spirit) go to the unseen state of the dead, the intermediate state between death and the resurrection, called Hades, which is composed of Paradise (Abraham's bosom), and also a place of torments, where the rich man went at his death (Luke 16).

Who will and will not go there? This is determined by our individual response to the call of Christ. We must be born again (John 3:3-5). Those who obey shall be saved (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9), and those who don't, won't. No thieves will go there (Luke 12:33), or such as those listed in First Corinthians 6:10), nor unclean persons (Revelation 21:27), spiritually unclean, unwashed by the blood of the Lamb. Revelations 21:8

and Galatians 6:19ff mentions others who will not go there.

Sometimes brethren are criticized with such words, "Do you think you are the only ones going to heaven?" We can confidently say that nobody is promised to go there that rejects the gospel and refuses to obey it. It is open to "whosoever will." The trouble is, the whosoever that won't contend they will go there anyway.

Will we recognize each other in heaven? We can only say that even though the Holy Spirit does not directly address this question, recognition is strongly implied. Future life implies memory that connects with the former life. Inhabitants of the realm beyond the grave are reported as conscious of their whereabouts. They were conversing with each other in recognition regarding the past. The thief requested, "*Lord, remember me...*" (Luke 23:42). The rich man knew Lazarus and Abraham, and Abraham knew them both. Moses and Elijah were identified at the transfiguration of Christ long after they had died.

I would not suggest we shall recognize one another by physical features, heaven being a spiritual realm, we having a spiritual body (First Corinthians 15:44). But how does one spirit recognize another? I confess this goes beyond my ability to comprehend.

Paul said he would be present with the Lord and his Corinthian brethren, which implies roecognition (Second Corinthians 4:14). The Thessalonians were taught the redeemed would be raised together, implying recognition (First Thessalonians 4:13-18). David said he could go to his sons (Second Samuel 12:23), implying he would know that event. Beyond this, I risk no more.

Some have complained that if we do recognize others, then we would be miserable if someone we loved was not there. First, I want to be sure they are there and must do all I can to help them get there. And I want to get there myself. But had you rather not be able to miss those absent than ignore those who are there? Take God's Word for it. Heaven will be plesant, regardless of what we may or may not know or recognize.

Will There Be Degrees of Reward and Punishment?

Again, indications are in the affirmative. Luke 12:42-48 speaks of few stripes and many stripes. Matthew 11:21-24 mentions the judgment being more tolerable for some than others. The parable of the talents indicates different rewards (Matthew 25:14-31). We shall be judged according to our works, and they differ (Revelation 20:13). We shall enjoy the joy according to our spiritual maturity and capacity. Paul says it will be very far better (Philippians 1:23), so let us leave it there.

Heaven Is A Real Place

Heaven is not simply a state of mind (John 14:1-4). It is a "*place,*" a spiritual place. It is called a holy city (Revelation 22:19). It is where Christ went to prepare (John 14), to which He ascended (Acts 1), and called the Father's house (John 14).

A spiritual place may be only expressed in material terms, like twelve foundations, gates, gems, twelve thousand furlongs, etc. These terms are figurative, like the street of gold, the perfect cube. But the important thing to remember is that God is there (Revelation 21:3). "*Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and he their God.*"

(The relationship of these words with church is a subject we will not enter here, but has application.)

More About Heaven and What It Will Be

Heaven is presented as a place of worship, beauty, perfect happiness, security, and with God. It is a new place, free of sin, no pain, no death, no sorrow, no tears, no night (Revelation 21:4). Second Peter three specifies the end of the present heaven and earth, and a new habitation, a place fit for the abode of the redeemed. It will be joyful, eternal, blissful, and an existence that is good and pure. There will be the location of the tree of life, the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7). It was from this tree than man was barred when he sinned in Eden (Genesis 3:23). It is not a literal tree, but a figure and symbol of life.

Heaven is described as a place of reward, "*crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10, "*crown of righteousness*" (Second Timothy 4:6-8), where the soul never dies.

Heaven is in the presence of God, therefore, the fulness of joy. "*In thy presence is fulness of joy*" (Psalm 16:11). Jesus is there (Hebrews 9:24). He has entered into heaven itself.

Heaven is called a "*better country*" (Hebrews 11:16), a place of security (Matthew 20), that shall last forever (Matthew 25:46). There is no curse there (Revelation 22:1-3), and those who are there are identified with God.

Paul in Romans 2:7 shows heaven to be a place of glory, honor, immorality, peace, and eternal life. God will be on the throne (Revelation 22:3). It is that Sabbath rest, spoken of in Hebrews 4:9, "*There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.*" Revelation 14:13, those there will be blessed. Revelation 7:15,16, "*Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.*"

The mention of the temple implies heaven will be a place of worship. Who was worshipping in Revelation 7:14, but those whose robes had been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.

Heaven Is A Gift; An Inheritance

God forbid that we ever think that we can earn, merit, or deserve heaven. Heaven is an inheritance to God's children (First Peter 1:4) and given to us (Matthew 25:34). To be sure, there are conditions we must meet first. We are invited to go there (Revelation 22:17: Acts 10:34,35) and we can go there provided we do as God commands us. Even when we obey, we earn nothing. We are given access into His grace.

We need to ask, will a religion that won't even take you to worship in this life, take you to heaven?

* * * * *

Must obey the gospel
F, R, C, B, LF

Lessons From Some Prominent Men Connected With the Cross of Christ

When this lesson speaks of "prominent" men, we do not infer that they were necessarily men of nobility, but only were leaders or prominent among others. Hitler was a pominent person in World War II, but not noble. The men we shall discuss (Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, several soldiers) were not noble, with one obvious exception. But they were associated with the cross of Christ, or events leading up His death. We want to observe their words and conduct and draw lessons from them than can be useful to us in our service to God.

We shall not simply consider the historical record, but spiritual matters implied. These were real people in a real circumstance. Let us take them in the order of Jesus' appearances before them.

Caiapahas

He was high priest that year, the year of the Lord's death. The high priest was supposed to be of the family of Aaron. But by the time of Christ it had become a political appointment by Roman powers. There was a rapid turnover of occupants in the office.

Christ was first taken to Annas (John 1) after being seized in the Garden of Gethesemane. Annas was called high priest because he had held the office previously, only to be forced to relinguish it. But obviously he was a man of great influence and power among the Jews. The enemies of Jesus first secured his endorsement of what was to take place. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, to whom Jesus was sent to be indicted.

Caiaphas used his office to advance the destruction of Jesus. Jesus had gained a great following among the

people and the leaders of the Jews considered Him a threat to their power. The alternatives before Caiaphas concerning Jesus were (1) let Him alone and allow the people to follow Him, which might bring down upon him the wrath of Rome, which would cause the loss of power and position for the Jewish leaders, or (2) simply put Jesus to death. There was a third alternative, accept Jesus as God's Son, but that was unthinkable for him.

Caiaphas was the man who reminded the people of the death of one man for the nation (John 11:49,50; 18:14). He reasoned that it was better for one to die than the nation be scorned by Rome and risk his own power. His reminder was a prophecy of the death of Christ. From that time forward ways to bring about the death of Jesus were sought. For Caiaphas, the only solution to his problem was the death of Jesus. His decision was determined even before testimony was heard.

Jesus endured both Jewish and Roman trials. He went before Annas first, then Caiaphas twice, then before Pilate, to Herod, and back to Pilate.

The first condemnation of Jesus before Caiaphas was done in darkness with charges of blasphemy against Him, Jesus being subjected to vicious persecution, and condemned to death. But the sentence of death could only be given legally in the daylight, not at night. His second appearance before Caiaphas was simply to ratify the decision of the illegal procedure the previous night.

Caiaphas was a man of self-interest rather than justice and truth. He was a biased judge who considered the end to justify the means. In his case, both the end and the means to reach that end were wicked. How hypocritical to seek to legally condemn an innocent man. Caiaphas exemplifies the low level to which some men will go to achieve their self interest. The Lord cannot use such people in His cause, but the devil can and does. A basic element in serving the Lord is to deny self.

Pilate

He was the procurator of Judea at the time, there in Jerusalem to oversee and promote Roman interests,

collect taxes, and keep control. Pilate had agitated the Jews earlier by moving Roman army headquarters from Caesarea to Jerusalem with all the idolatrous images that came with it. He later removed the images under the protests of Jewish mobs, showing himself to be subject to mob pressure, which became apparent in the trial of Jesus. He ruled with terror, slaying Galileans at their sacrifices, forcing hardships in daily life upon the Jews. He had no love for the Jews or their religion, but he desired peace which was for political expediency.

Jesus was brought to him. The Jews had condemned Him to death, but execution of prisoners had to be carried out by Romans. Rome forbade the Jews that authority.

Charges against Jesus before Pilate were tailored to fit the occasion. When He was charged before the Jews the charges were religious, that of blasphemy. There were false witnesses. Before Pilate the charges were insurrection, treason, refusal to pay taxes, that Jesus was a threat to Caesar because He made Himself king. Enemies of the Lord have no problem (then or now) in misrepresenting others to advance their agenda.

Pilate knew that the Jews had brought Jesus out of envy, yet, he wanted peace with the Jews. He feared offending them. This man was void of moral cahracter. He was not the last political leader of that sort.

He questioned Jesus and found no fault in Him. That should have ended the matter with Jesus being set free. But he compromised, having Jesus scourged even though innocent. That deed only whetted the appetite of the Jews for greater punishment. They kept crying out that He be killed until they got what they wanted. Pilate teaches us that we should never compromise truth with error. It is the first step toward denial of truth.

Pilate was the man that liberals must love. He asked the question, "What is truth?' as if nobody could ever know. Liberal are skeptics, agnostics, questioning if truth really exists, and even if it does, whether anybody can really know what it is. Even with irrefutable evidence before him, he simply denied it. Later he was warned by

his wife to have nothing to do with Jesus, "a "*just man.*" But he gave no heed.

Pilate pleaded, unsuccessfully, that he was innocent of whatever took place, and performed the dastardly deed of ceremoniously washing his hands as if that would allow him to escape responsibility. He even attempted to escape responsibility by sending Jesus to Herod, who was visiting in Jerusalem at the time. He was a man who tried to "work both sides of the street." He was so weak.

He later gave the body of Jesus to Joseph for burial, but allowed the Jews a special guard to prevent the disciples from stealing away the body and then claiming a resurrection. He allowed the sign over the cross that read Jesus was King of the Jews (even in three languages), but the Jews also knew he could be bought, and protection was offered the guards if they would lie. The Jews and Pilate would cover them if problems arose from it.

Pilate shall ever be known as a man of compromise, self interest, lack of conviction, duplicity, feigned innocence, a worldly, wealthy, corrupt politician in the worst sense. Unmoved by truth, justice, mercy, principle or character, he was disgraceful and despicable. How can such men gain such power? It is often the case, then and now. Pilate was not the last ruler of this degenerate nature.

Herod

Pilate sent Jesus to Herod to shift responsibility because Jesus was a Galilean and Herod was the ruler of Galilee. But crimes were to be prosecuted in the area where they were commited, which would have been Judea in the case of Jesus, if He had done anything wrong. This Herod was the son of Herod the Great, who was an Idumean, a descendant of Esau. The Herods were Jews by faith, nominally, but the conversion of Herod the Great was by force by the Maccabees, a conversion of convenience, political aspirations, and not of conviction.

Herod the Great sought an independent kingdom, and made Judaism subservient to his rule. He built a temple for the Jews to pacify them. He began his rule under the

protection of Rome, but few men have lived who were more cruel, depraved, and a man of despotism.

Our Herod was Herod Antipas, with a stained family heritage. He had beheaded John the Baptist because John taught him the truth regarding marriage. If Herod could have lived now he could find some preacher around that would have sanctioned his sinful relationship. But at the instigation of Salome (Scripture does not cite her name but secular history does) and her mother, Herodias, the adulterous companion of Herod, John was executed.

He once considered Jesus to be John come back to life. When Jesus was before him Jesus answered him not a word. Herod wanted to see Jesus perform some miracle. He allowed the worst kind of abuse to be perpetrated against Jesus, placing a crown of thorns on His head, a reed given Him for a sceptre, and a robe, with mockery, spitting, hitting. Herod was an unscrupulous, cruel, sensual maniac. Jesus once called him a fox, denoting his deceptive ways.

He and Pilate used Jesus as a common foe to make peace between themselves. It was Pilate and Herod against Jesus, like it had been Pharisees and Saducess against Jesus, like it is Catholics and Protestants against the church, and denominations and liberal apostates against the church.

Jesus was at the mercy of the worst people both Jews and Gentiles. Nobody can expect justice or mercy from such depraved, immoral, degenerate, defiant, wicked people. When leaders are of this sort, the nation is sure to suffer. We wish our own nation could learn this lesson before the blessings and freedoms we have known are destroyed and our descendants never know them.

Jesus was returned from Herod back to Pilate.

Four, Possibly Five, Soldiers

There were at least four soldiers at the cross of Christ because they gambled for His seamless garment (John 19:23) as had been prophesied (Psalm 22:18). They had respect for its worth.They were the ones who actually

crucified Him. They were carrying out their orders and worldly duties, not aware of the significance of what they were doing, and evidently without regard for the more important matters of that event. They were indifferent to the fact that the garment belonged to the Son of God. They obviously did not believe Him. They are like many today who go through life, failing to take note of what really matters, not weighing the evidence nor conforming their lives accordingly.

There was possibly another soldier, a centurion, (but he could have at first been one of the four), maybe the man in charge of the execution team. At the death of Jesus there was an earthquake, darkness, and the veil of the temple was rent in twain (although the centurion could not yet have known of the veil). With this evidence that he could see, he declared, "*Truly, this was the Son of God.*" His faith was based on the evidence, just as is our faith. Faith is knowledge founded on evidence, seen and unseen. This man was not unlike Thomas when Thomas met Jesus after the resurrection. When Thomas saw the evidence, he believed. Jesus pronounced blessings on those who did not see, like Thomas, but who believe nonetheless. They would believe because of the inspired revealed evidence of the Scriptures. Our faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

How Would We Have Fared?

All of these men were prominent surrounding the cross, but they were so different in many ways, and alike in others. But what if we had lived at that time, and it had been our lot to be closely associated with the events of the cross? We doubtless would not want to be like the Jews, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, or the four soldiers. We would prefer to be like the faithful women, John, Joseph, the apostles later on, and this centurion. We can learn from each of them.

Our attitude toward Jesus and His cross determines not only our present manner of life, but our eternal destiny.

* * * * *

The Work of the Church Is To Edify

Self edification is one of the works the church is to perform in service to God. The plan of our lesson is to first cite Scriptures that calls for edification. We shall observe that it is commanded. Then we shall learn what it means to edify, its purpose, why do it, and how it is to be done. We must emphasis the importance and necessity of edification, considering some things that help and some that hinder the success of this work.

Scriptures

First Corinthians 14:12, "*...seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.*"

First Corinthians 14:16, "*Let all things be done unto edifying.*"

Romans 14:19, "*Let us therefore follow after... things wherewith one may edify another.*"

Ephesians 4:11,12, "*And he gave some, apostles, and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some pastors, and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*"

First Thessalonians 5:11, "*Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*"

Acts 9:31, when persecution eased, the church was edified. There are numerous passages calling for the edification of the church, mostly, but not exclusively, from the epistles.

What Does It Mean To Edify?

There are several related definitions. Basically it means to build up (Acts 20:32), to build on a foundation laid by others, carrying on instruction begun by others, going on after beginning, rebuilding, restoring, repairing,

recovering. To edify is to promote Christian wisdom in others, helping each other to live lives acceptable before God, with grace, affection, piety, respect, obedience, holiness and virtue. It is to strengthen, better equip, make ready, comfort, encourage, to help others improve spiritually, gain spiritual growth, increase faith. It includes warning, correcting, rebuking, preventing evil, advising, instructing, teaching, admonishing, establishing (not in the sense of bringing into existence, but stabilizing, settling, making firm, grounding). Edifying means training, explaining, exhorting, motivating, urging progress in pursuit of a certain course, stimulating, putting knowledge into the mind by communicating. It involves bringing things to remembrance already learned (Acts 14:22; 15:32; 18:23). It means keeping the face toward a certain way and direction, rendering constant, and placing firmly.

What The Work Implies

We enter into the family of God as babes, having been born again. As in the physical realm, so we must grow spiritually (Hebrews 5:14; Second Peter 3:18). The work of edification implies the necessity of growth. We cannot enter and lay down. We must move forward, always within the boundaries and authority of the doctrine of Christ, but ever growing.

Babes must grow, the weak must be strengthened, the wayward recovered, and all be prepared, learning to overcome whatever might subvert us. Baptism is the beginning of our walk with God in Christ. Then there is a life to be lived in the imitation of Christ. Having become a Christian, we must go on toward perfection, maturity, wholeness, and completeness. Edification implies there is a work involved. It is accomplishing this growth. Edification is providing for that growth.

In What Are We To Grow?

We are to grow in the grace of Christ (Second Peter 3:18). We are to grow in Christlikeness, with the mind or attitude of Christ (Philippians 2:5; Ephesians 4:15) We must grow in love and discernment (Philippians 1:9; Hebrews 5:14). The greater the growth of a Christian the

better equipped is he to know the difference between right and wrong, and to make righteous decisions in his life. We are to grow in Christian character (Second Peter 1:5-11). We must grow in faith and love (Second Thessalonians 1:3). Growth is needed to resist temptation (James 4:7), to serve and sacrifice (Romans 12:1,2). The whole matter of edification is a process of being more and more what we have professed.

Edification may well be a work that many have neglected, at least there is evidence to suggest as much. Consider the loss of many who are baptized, the loss among our own young. Consider the evident lack of Bible knowledge among members of the church. Most any adult Bible class is indicative of this sad truth. Possibly too many have emphasized such things as better buildings than better members. While we spend much time and effort to convert the child of the devil to the Lord, and this we must do, too little effort is given to making the convert a strong child of God. Could we have been seeking quantity at the expense of quality?

The work of edification is a work of elders, but not elders exclusively. Are we not our brother's keeper? Should not all of us have a personal concern for souls, especially for those of the household of faith?

Edification is mutal action toward each other. But to edify we must have knowledge. We must prepare ourselves to teach others. Unless we busy ourselves to do this work, the work will continue to lag and be neglected and the result will be even more and more who fall.

Why It Is So Important?

Already we have touched in why edifying is so important. But more should be said. To measure the importance of edifying, let us ask how important is it for you and me to grow, mature, stand, prevent sin, overcome temptation! How important is it that we be Christlike, faithful, and prevent ourselves from being tossed to and fro (Ephesians 4:14)?

Seeing it in this light, we see edification to be essential in ultimately reaching our goal of heaven.

Some Things That Hinder This Work

Good fruit is borne when edification is conducted faithfully and properly. But wickedness among the members of the church will tear down faster than others can build up. A hardened heart, one who is dull of hearing, rebellious and defiant, determined to go their own way the truth notwithstanding, this hinders the work. As all can readily understand, sin in the church is detrimental because sin is deceitful.

Foolish and unlearned questions can cause strife (Second Timothy 2:23), and so can the love of money (First Timothy 6:10). Ignorance, failure to search the Scriptures, pet theories, opinions, hobbies, and a love for this world , these uproot the profit of edification.

Things That Help

Edification is assisted when we have real concern for each other, realizing the worth of every soul. Diligent watchfulness by elderships, preachers who preach sound doctrine, with certain sound, members with a clean and pure heart (Matthew 12:34; Proverbs 23:7), keeping peace among brethren that is founded on truth (Romans 14:19), such things help. Nobody likes needless disturbance. Nothing is so offensive to the world than wrangling Christians and hypocrites. But knowledge of the book, with personal responsibility, faithfulness of example, all these things advance the work of edification.

How Is It Done?

One might present an overriding principle of which we read in Ephesians 4:15, "*...speaking the truth in love.*" We edify correctly by relying on the written Word (Second Peter 3:1,2), preaching the gospel as the gospel is revealed (Romans 1:16). Naturally, with the increase of our love one for the other (First Thessalonians 3:12,13), the world will know that we are the Lord's disciples (John13:35).

It should be the goal and ambition of every Christian to be a good role model for those around him. This is not to say that we should present ourselves in a self-righteous

manner. But our deeds and our words should be harmonized. Good examples carry tremendous influence. We should so live that we can say to others, "Do as you see me do." None would ever contend that we shall be the perfect role model. But as we imitate Christ, we are showing to those near us what it is to be a real Christian. This is a part of the work of edifying.

Summary

Seeing that edifying is a divinely given command to Christians, and that it is something that involves our fellowship and relationship to each other, now knowing somewhat better what it is, what it accomplishes, observing its fruits, and being impressed with the essential nature of it, let us be about the task. We know what hinders the work and what promotes the work. We know how it is to be done.

So where do we go from this point? Certainly, among other things as children of God, we should edify one another. Even this lesson is doing that work.

* * * * *

A Closing Personal Note

As I write these final words of this last edition of **A BURNING FIRE**, I soon will mark my forty-fifth year trying to preach the gospel. At present, I am the regular preacher for the East End church in McMinnville, Tennessee, as I have been for the past nearly eight years. I hope to continue this work for a while if all continues well. Alongside that, if I can be of assistance to brethren in gospel meetings, vacation Bible schools, lectureships, or similar efforts, please contact me.

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History of A BURNING FIRE

A BURNING FIRE! A booklet of sermons that I have preached through the years, in complete manuscript form, and published at a rate slightly over one issue per month over a period of some fifteen years, each issue consisting of twenty-four pages and cover, now compiled in eighteen volumes containing twelve issues each, and having been sent free of charge upon request to all who asked for it, mostly at my personal expense, with a few contributions along the way.

It was in the Spring of 1982 and I was preaching at the East Main church in Tupelo, Mississippi. For reasons I did not really plan, I had kept all my outlines of my sermons since I began to preach. I always felt the material there was worth keeping, and the sermons worth preaching, and preaching again. I make very full outlines. I have over twenty-one notebooks of over one thousand outlines.

As I sat in my office and my eye fell upon those notebooks, I asked myself, "What value will these be after I am dead?" These notebooks contained and represented a tremendous amount of study and work. Probably, as is true with most preacher's outlines, somebody might get some use from them sometimes. But mine just might be lost as far as being of benefit to anybody else, since they were not too usuable to others.. So I decided to write them out in manuscript form.

That really was not a difficult task except for the physical labor of typing a thousand or more sermons. As I said, I make such full outlines that I can preach from them almost verbatim the same sermon one year and then again ten years later. That work of typing them out extended over several months and years, doing much of it while I was away in gospel meetings. My wife said of my typing that words were bouncing out of my fingers. It took several years to get them all done. In fact, I was already publishing them long before I had them all in

manuscript. I actually finished the manuscripts just a few weeks prior to publishing this last issue.

Meanwhile, I asked myself again, "What good will these manuscripts do unless I get them out to others?" So I hit upon the idea of publishing them in a booklet and sending them out. This is how the idea of ***A BURNING FIRE*** got started. If I had known then the amount of work and expense I was undertaking I probably would not have started. But I am so glad I did. It may be shameless to say, but I am sure proud of the eighteen volumes of sermons I have produced.

The name of the booklet was found by Rosalyn, my wife. We were looking through the Bible searching for something appropriate when she came across the verse in Jeremiah 20:9, *"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay."* She said the name of the work should be ***A BURNING FIRE***. After all, it was His Word I wanted so much to get to others. So it was. And this verse was always printed on the front cover of every issue.

But how was I going to publish them? About that time my Aunt Nell died and left me a little money. She, my Dad, Aunt Bessie, my grandparents, had all been faithful Christians. The inheritance came from the sale of their old homeplace. What better way to use it than to spread the same gospel we all cherished. I had enough to buy a table model printing press, a plate maker, and a few other necessities that were determined by brother Calvin Barber, a faithful brother and preacher and in the printing business. So I got what I needed and went to it, doing the work myself. Calvin showed me what to do. I could not afford having it done. My inheritance got me started and covered about the first year of publishing.

A funny thing happened when I bought my table model press. I got it from a Baptist preacher in Corinth, Mississippi. Even though it was small, it was heavy, and it took both of us to carry it out to my car. I was walking backwards and he was walking forward as we carried it. I stopped once and told him that was the first time I had

backed up to a Baptist preacher in my life. He laughed, but I meant it. After that he wanted cash, no check.

I have never advertised the booklet because I was solely responsible for the expense and knew if it got very big I could never handle it. For years I have sent over 750 to 800 copies each time. This has been about the normal distribution, after a slower start, of course. If I had advertised it, I think I would have had many more requests. My brethren like things free. News of it spread by word of mouth, and I let it go only that way. I always cringed when I went away to a gospel meeting, and the preacher there would get up and announce my free booklet to everybody, and said just sign up. Sometimes it got heavy on me, believe me! But I never turned anybody away, especially those who wrote me asking for it. But mostly it has been sent to those who requested it personally, seldom on request from someone else.

I will try to relate the more significant milestones of its production as I see it.

My equipment was adequate for a while, but a better looking paper I wanted. I first began typing it with a new typewriter I purchased. But I got wind of an old type setting machine that a printing company in Greenville, Mississippi was going to sell, so I bought it, only to later discover I had paid too much for it. But it did make it look "more professional." I used it until it got so old that parts for it could not be acquired. Eventually, I got a computer and learned to do the type setting with the word processor. I am writing this with it now.

As for this computer, if it had not been for brother Tony Lawrence, preacher at Bybee Branch church here in McMinnville, I would have lost my mind. He set up my programs, showed me what to do, corrected my bungling and the things I messed up, and generally kept me going.

I have so many to thank for their help through the years of production. Calvin, who helped me get started, also helped me get a cutter. For a time the church at Tupelo let me use their folder. Eventually I bought me a folder. I invented a way to stitch it, and used it until Hassel

Hood, good friend and brother in Chattanooga, bought me a foot pedal stitcher which I used the rest of the way.

I have had several presses. I bought a larger floor model, had one given to me by Jim Green, then of Pennsylvania, and when that one gave out a got another one from a church here in McMinnville. I never was a good pressman, but I did the best I could. The church in Pensacola was going to get a new camera, and Max Miller knew I wanted one, and got the old one for me, which I used for such a long time. I made my own films, plates, everything from start to finish. It was work, as those who do this know well.

Getting the addresses on the booklets was a real problem until the computer method came along. I tried several ways, none too satisfactory, but always managed to get them out.

Several churches, East Main, Arlington in McMinnville, East End in McMinnville allowed me to mail on their permit, but I paid the postage. This was such a help.

Toward the last, Paul Sain and I worked out some arrangements that proved beneficial to both of us concerning equipment and printing, and he produced the booklet for the last few volumes. I still did the stitching, labeling, and mailing, but the quality of printing went up greatly.

I have always kept back sixteen copies of each issue, and at the completion of twelve issues, a full volume, I had them hard bound. This was for my children and grandchildren to keep and use in the future. I had the first few volumes bound, but the cost was terrific. So I invented a way to sew and bind the books myself. Rosalyn did the sewing and I did the binding. After a few years, however, this got old. I had help from a good friend, Edwin Ray of Rock Island, who had a work shop where we could bore the holes to make the sewing easier. Eventually, I got extravagant and had the last few volumes bound profesionally. They do not look all that much better than mine, but it was a lot easier to pay for it than do it myself. I have all the volumes across the

top of my roll top desk, and I look at them with pride. You may not understand that. Possibly you can.

I had good fortune in securing the hard back covers. Charley Nichols, of the Nicholstone Bindery in Nashville, Tennessee, gave me these covers. I had known Charley when he was getting started, and I was working at Williams Printing Company in the early 1950's. He would call on us, actually me mostly, to arrange for bindery work. He went on to make a million dollars, and I went into preaching. But when I went to him and asked him to make me the covers, stamp them with name and volume numbers, he not only did it, but when I went to pick them up, he insisted he give them to me. Now that was a "biggy" in getting it done. At that time I already had several volumes bound, and I was going to bind them myself, but lacked covers, and needed some twelve more volumes. What a favor he did me, and I appreciated it, putting him on the mailing list because he was a devout Catholic. I think they look real nice. I did not reach him with the gospel, however.

The great joy I had in producing my sermons cannot be expressed. But when I received letters from appreciative readers, that really made it worthwhile. People would phone me, thanking me for some lesson. Others would write asking for copies. I did not produce extra copies much above what I needed each time because of the expense, but I could take them to a copy machine and send them specific lessons they requested. I appreciated them appreciating the lessons.

One preacher called one day to ask permission to use something in an issue. I told him if the man I got it from did not mind, I sure did not. I really cannot determine where every sermon idea came from. But the sermons are mine, in that I believe them, and arranged them, and preached them. I also told him I produced it to be spread abroad, and nothing was copyrighted. The only thing about a copyright to me is "when you copy it, copy it right."

I have had so many preachers tell me what a help the booklet has been in their radio work. Sunday school teachers have told me they used it as the source for their

Sunday school lessons. Many of the sermons have been preached by others. I am so glad I could have a small part in helping them in their work, and getting the message of truth out where they labored.

It has been sent overseas to several countries, and possibly the greatest words of thanks have come from those people. Reading material is precious to them. Each volume, after all twelve issues were done, if there were many "leftovers," I usually have sent them to a church that sends them overseas. But I never did have a big lot leftover. Some would write asking for back issues which I simply could not provide them.

I included notices (usually on the back covers) of the births of my grandchildren, at least all until now. Somebody said the real reason I was producing the booklet was to boast of my grandchildren. Well, that might have been a good enough reason. But it was my booklet, and my grandchildren, and I was paying for it, and I would tell everybody about them if I wanted to do it. Every grandparent will go along with me in that.

It was a headache keeping the mailing list accurate because some would never let you know when they would move, and back it would come, with extra postage expense. The postage rate really grew from the time I began in June, 1982 until I finished in 1997. In fact, paper, and everything else has gone so high, it would be prohibitive for me to start such a project now. I am glad I did not know what I was getting started.

Souls have been reached with the gospel because of ***A BURNING FIRE.*** Some have told me of baptisms of people who learned the truth from it. Others have been reported restored because of a lesson here and there in it. Does not that make all the work and expense worthwhile?

It has been an ongoing point of frustration and laughter how we overlook typographical errors, often finding them only when the sheets come off the press, or as you take them to the Post Office. It would seem that eventually one would learn the difference between prophesy and prophecy, and learn how to spell occurred,

or is it occured as I often misspelled it? Rosalyn would proof-read after me and catch most mistakes, but they were too numerous for her to get them all. I proofread until now I can hardly read an article and get the message for looking for misspelled words and punctuation errors.

With issue number nine of the eighteenth volume, I ceased its publication, having published nearly all of my prepared sermons. (This history is included in this ninth issue.) I have made some additional ones and expect to make more, of course, but I will just preach them, not write them for distribution from now on. Alphabetical and topical indexes for the hand bound volumes, and this history, will occupy the pages that would ordinarily be allotted for the last three issues of Volume Eighteen.

This is when, why, and how ***A BURNING FIRE*** was born, grew, worked, and ended. But the message of saving truth contained in these sermons and these volumes will endure forever, because they are true to the Word of God.

The Lord blessed me with health, help, sufficient funds, and opportunity to preach and write what I preached. I do not expect anybody to ever appreciate these things as I do. That would not be expected. Every man has his own labor. I hope and pray mine will not be wood, hay, and stubble, but gold, silver, and precious stones (First Corinthians 3:12). But whatever of that, I believe "*every man's work shall be made manifest,*" (First Corinthians 3:13), and ***A BURNING FIRE*** has been part of my work.

James W. Boyd

* * * * *

The hymn that you find on the last page was composed entirely, music and words, by one of my sons, Bill. It seemed a most appropriate expression with which to conclude this work.

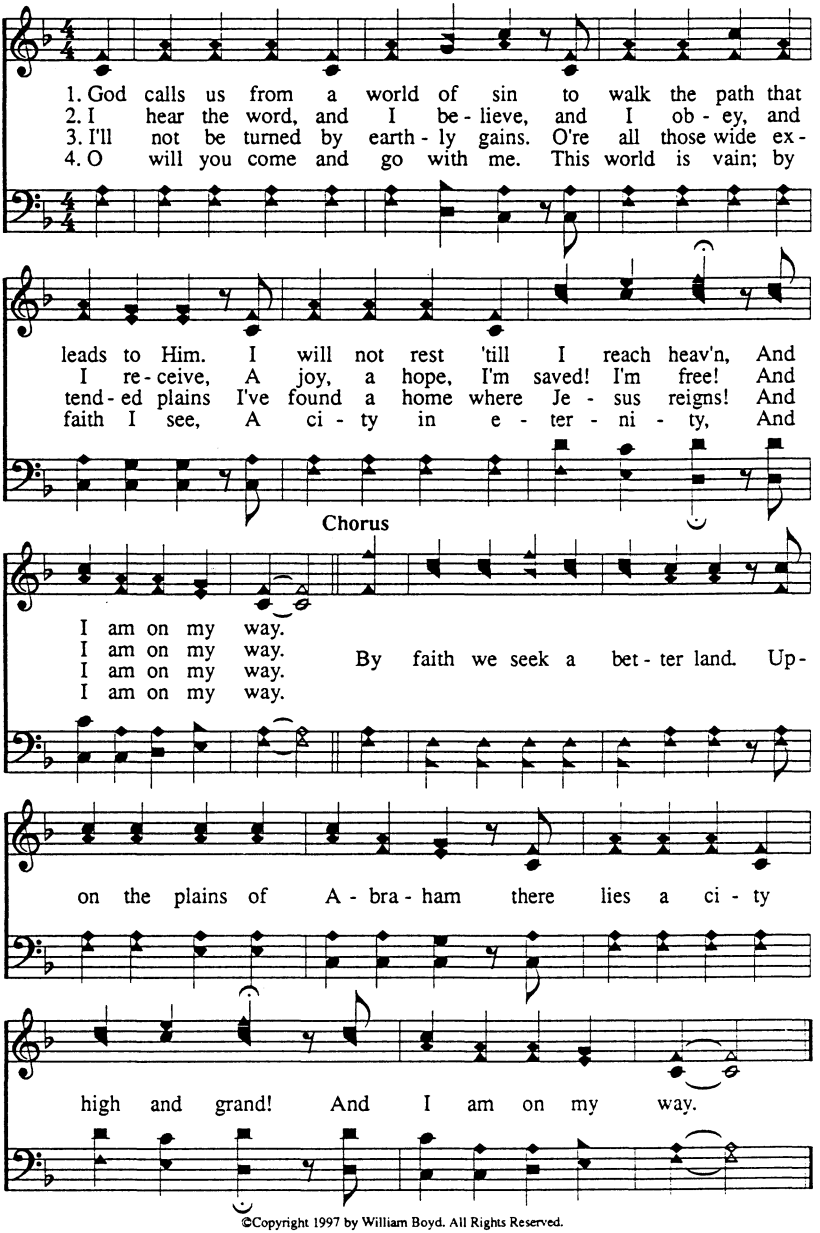
"I Am On My Way"

I Am On My Way

Hebrews 11:8-16

F-4-DO
William Boyd

William Boyd



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ALPHABETICAL

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Anger, Wrath, Heady

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 3:31). "Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies" (Galatians 5:20). "Traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4). All the works of the flesh are not listed in Galatians five. The words anger and wrath are often used interchangeably as synonyms.

Wrath has a deeper more permanent sentiment, especially when considering the wrath and anger of God as a manifestation of His judgment against evil. Anger is more turbulent but usually temporary. It can be illustrated like the anger at the moment by an athlete, road rage or a sudden abusive behavior. The anger and wrath of God is always justified. It is righteous indignation. Such is not always so regarding human wrath and anger.

Anger is an emotion of instant displeasure on account of something that presents itself to our view. It is provocative and aggravating. But all anger is not necessarily evil. "Be ye angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26). Christ was angry (Mark 3:5).We read of God being angry many times because of His displeasure with sin and sinners. These things are sinful when excessive, unwarranted, without cause and beyond control. They have become traits that we are to put off (Colossians 3:8). We are dealing with matters that affect our relationship to God as His child.

Examples of Anger in Scripture

There is the anger man toward man and disagreeable circumstances that is often displayed in hostile actions. Such was the case with Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:5, 6). Esau was angry with Jacob (Genesis 27:45).
Simeon and Levi grew angry regarding mistreatment of their sister, Dinah (Genesis 34:25-29; 49L5-7). What of the anger of Pharaoh with Moses that he said Moses should see his face no more (Exodus 10:11, 28)). Saul and Jonathan became angry at each other over David (1 Samuel 20:30-34). Ahab was angry with Naboth because Naboth refused to sell him his vineyard (1 King 21:4). Ahasuerus was angry with Vashti, with Haman (Esther 1:12; 7:7). Nebuchadnezzar was very angry with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that he heated the furnace seven times hotter than usual (Daniel 3:13, 19). Jonah got angry that his gourd was cut down and Nineveh was not destroyed (Jonah 4). Did not Herod get angry with the wise men who did not return to him? (Matthew 2:16). The Jews were certainly angry at Stephen when they gnashed on him with their teeth (Acts 7:54-58). Even Christ was threatened by the Nazarenes who wanted to cast Him down a hill (Luke 4:28).

Uncontrolled and Misdirected Anger

Human wrath is always suspect and can become the characteristic of a fool. Christians are to be self-disciplined and under control, maintaining a calmness, composure even in provocative circumstances. We do not suggest this is always easily accomplished. But an uncontrolled state of mind can trigger great evil. Fathers are not to provoke their children to wrath (Ephesians 6:4). Proverbs 21:19, “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman.” Proverbs 29:22, “An angry man

stirreth up strife and a furious man aboundeth in transgression." We should strive to rid our hearts and lives of this kind of anger.

Anger is so often connected with many sinful attitudes and deeds. Pride, cruelty, strife, contentions, murder, grievous words, evil speaking go along with anger. Who can doubt it is a bad influence? Proverbs 22:24, "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go." Rather, "A wrathful man stirreth up strife; but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife" (Proverbs 15:18). "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Proverbs 16:32). Elders are to be slow to be angry (Titus 1:7). Leadership cannot afford a man with a "short fuse" and a "low boiling point." James admonishes us to be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath (James 1:19).

Once two men be were arguing heatedly until one suggested they might soon fight. But another said, "The one who strikes the first blow admits he has run out of arguments." Anger can cause your defeat.

Justified Anger

The Lord was angry (Mark 3:5). He had healed a man on the Sabbath Day but was grieved at the hardness of the hearts of His critics and looked on them with anger. He condemned the Pharisees with strong words that might be called harsh (Matthew 23). Jacob was angry at Laban for pursuing him (Genesis 31:36). It was justified. How often was Moses angry? He was justified to be angry before Pharoah, when he came down from Mt. Sinai to see the golden café worship. He was wroth at Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16:15) and even got angry at the entire nation and struck the rock rather than speaking to it (Numbers

20:11). Nehemiah was angry with some who were taking advantage of those who were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 5:6). Consider Paul and how he dealt with Elymas (Acts 13). It is not a virtue to look at evil passively as if it was nothing serious. It is not a sin to display strong displeasure at evil and evil doers. Righteous indignation is justified. It would be inappropriate to be otherwise if kept under control. We should not consider evil good naturedly.

The Wrath of God

The wrath of God is the divine response to human sin and injustice. There are scores of references to the anger and wrath of God in Scripture. Israel complained when "the anger of the Lord was greatly kindled" (Numbers 11:10). Their idolatry provoked Him to anger (Psalm 78, 58). His displeasure produced punishment to the evil doer. Is He not angry with those who do not follow His will like the time Israel would not enter into Canaan (Deuteronomy 1:37). God judges the righteous and is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11). Joshua 7:1 reveals His angry at Achan's sin and He will vex the heathen in his sore displeasure (Psalm 2:5).

Scripture refers to God's anger and wrath as His judgment of condemnation. There is the "day of wrath," "righteous judgment" (Romans 2:5). Isaiah 13:9, "The day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger." He did not spare the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The message of Jesus was to "repent or perish." The wrath of God abideth on the unbeliever (John 3:36). Revelation warns of the lake of fire and brimstone. Nineveh was spared from God's wrath by repentance

(Jonah 3:10). Jeremiah urged Judah, “Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.”

As an Object of Anger

We can become the object of another person’s anger and may not always be able to either prevent or control it. We ought not deliberately provoke others to anger. But Christians are often the targets of anger. How do we handle it?

Proverbs 15:1, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” We can practice the “Golden Rule,” being kind but resolute, and not retaliate in kind. Romans 12:19-21, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves; but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger; feed him; if he thirst, give him, drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.” Talk about a big order! But it is God’s will that we behave in just such a manner. We must be like David before Goliath; Daniel and his three friends before Nebuchadnezzar. They retained their resolve to serve God with calmness and composure. When we learn to do this we have gained a tremendous victory and moved toward maturity.

Heady means rash, headstrong, explosive, without caution and deliberation but acting without forethought in undue haste, irrationality and momentary loss of control. Proverbs 14:29b, “…but he that is hasty in spirit exalteth folly.”

The story is told how two men sitting on a fence saw a meat truck pass by, hit a bump, and out came several containers of baloney. Then they saw crows diving on the baloney. They ate until they could not fly. Seeking assistance by climbed up a hoe handle leaning nearby. One flew off and exploded. Then a second did the same. Likewise a third. One man remarked to another, "This proves you ought not fly off the handle when you are full of baloney."

There are times when anger is wrong. There are times when it is justified. God's wrath and anger is always justified. There is never a time when it should not be controlled. That may not be the case with us, however. We can avoid the wrath of God by doing His will

* * * * *

Idols That Affect Man's Service to God

An idol is anything that we set before, alongside, or instead of the true and living God of heaven. Idolatry is giving allegiance to anything before God. Idolatry is repeatedly and severely condemned in the Bible. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3) is a theme throughout Scripture. Possibly many think of idols only in terms of images, and that is included. But that is not the whole story. Pagan religions, Romanism and others have physical and mental images.

Making images differs from making images as religious symbols. One may have an image of baby feet to express opposition to abortion. That is not like some "relic" of a "saint." Kissing the toe of Peter's stature, St. Christopher on the dashboard, using the brazen serpent as an idol is not like having lions at the entrance of the driveway or a horse at the barn. The image of Buddha is not like a family

snapshot. A totem pole is not the equivalent to grandpa's picture. Scripture condemns making any image an object of worship. Likewise, worship of the sun, moon or stars is idolatry. To bow down, kiss, or show adoration and homage to such things is idolatry as ancient as history. But still some people let their lives be governed by such things.

That which can be made an idol is not necessarily evil in itself. Paul teaches idols are nothing (1 Cor. 8:4). For this reason eating meat offered to idols is not necessarily sinful. The brazen serpent that became an idol was not sinful in its first use. Many have self as an idol. That does not make being a person is evil. But it is sad when anybody adopts the attitude, "Not Thy will but mine be done." To make what a person wants, likes, and pleases him first in life is wrong. If I become my own standard maker, my own authority, I become my own god. When I am self-willed I put self first before God and others (2 Pet. 2:10). Paul speaks of those who are lovers of self more than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:4). This is the "do-your-own-thing" crowd (Judges 17:6). Scripture leaves no doubt that self is man's number one idol.

Modernism, humanism, relative subjectivism and liberalism are nothing other than replacing God. "Man is the most" is the cry of these idolaters. They contend there is no right or wrong, truth or error, just be honest, unity in diversity, no law, no absolutes. But who decides what is honest under such a system?

They deny Christianity, the pre-existence of Christ before Bethlehem, His Deity, the virgin birth, the immortality of the soul, even the existence of the soul, the inspiration of the Bible, judgment, heaven, hell, sin and salvation. Instead, They worship human wisdom, "scholarship," degrees, so-called science and the elite. Their vocabulary is deceitful because they use words like God, Deity,

inspiration, truth, love, salvation, etc. but not as the Bible presents them. Baptism, moral purity, sacredness of human life, the law regarding marriage is set aside. Then you get the sinner's prayer, situation ethics, the worship of trees and animals as being equal or superior to man.

Origin of Such Doctrines

These ideas are coming from theologians, professors, schools, clergymen, the "experts." They simply reject what they do not want, with the wave of their superior hand they dismiss God's will as irrelevant, unconvincing and illogical. Without evidence they dismiss truth, logic, consistency, but assert they know best. There is no way to set God aside more certainly than to set aside His Word. Things that interfere with what God says are important such as worship, good stewardship, family responsibilities, morality are idols. Idolatry confuses priorities.

Mammon

One rather obvious god is mammon, money, material things. Paul warns against the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10). This love causes people to lie, steal, cheat, murder, sell the body and soul, create war. This is so evident in our world. Money is not evil in itself. It depends on one's attitude toward it, manner of acquisition and distribution. Many have adopted the false premise that having money means success. The "dog-eat-dog" operation goes forward. The Golden Rule is buried. Get all you can and can all you get.

Matthew 6:24, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will

hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." We are taught to mortify covetousness (Col. 3:5). Some think, "What's yours is mine if I can take it." But our profession is being a Christian. Even our jobs are to pay the bills as we serve Christ.

Fame and Indulgence

To be in the limelight is the ambition of so many. Jesus said the greatest would be servant of all. Some loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42, 43). Ego, pride, the desire to be recognized and applauded is the goal of many. Diotrophes had that disposition (3 John 9). "My name in lights," is so important to celebrities. Some are so proud they can strut sitting down. They will compromise truth to get fame. They lack self-esteem, self-worth and have a serious sense of inferiority.

Alongside that goes the desire to satisfy the flesh with every indulgence, seeking pleasure (Heb. 11:25), obsessed with physical appearance, lustful, living riotously in revelry, having a "good" time in drunkenness. This is the prime mission in life according to some.

We must also realize that innocent things can become idols when they come between us and God. Sports, hobbies, jobs, vacations fall into this category. While not evil in themselves they become evil because they are first.

Do We Make Men Our Idols

Peter would not let Cornelius even appear to worship him (Acts 10:26). Herod met tragedy when he allowed himself to be presented as a god (Acts 12:21-23). Paul and Barnabas were mistaken as gods (Acts 14:8-18). Popes, ancestors, family, religious leaders, Elvis are gods to many.

But the bottom line is that God has not (does not or will not) surrender His throne nor share first place with any. We must always be as Paul taught the Thessalonians to turn from idols to serve the living and true God.

* * * * *

The Problem of Immorality In the Modern World

The faith of Christ calls upon man for many things such as the obligations of worship, good works and preparing for the judgment and eternity. But there are also matters pertaining to the present that involve other people. Our manner of life, often called lifestyle, is an important part of being a faithful Christian. We live in a world that is often hostile to the things Christians are supposed to say, do and think. Christians face problems caused by immorality.

Our lesson deals with our manner of life and morality. "Be thou faithful unto death…" (Rev. 2:10), is as much a part of obeying the gospel plan of salvation as faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism. It includes and involves moral living. Morals relate to principles of right and wrong in behavior. Morality is a doctrine or system of moral conduct, conformity to ideals of right human conduct. Therefore, immorality is in conflict with moral principles and is in active opposition to what is moral. Immorality is discordant with the ethical and moral principles with the refusal to acknowledge moral boundaries. God has given is a moral system.

The influences around us can he a help or hinder. Immoral influences on us and others are threats to our spiritual welfare as we run the race set before us.

Not a New Problem

Immorality is nothing new to the human experience. Such has been in evidence since the Garden of Eden when the first pair decided to do their own way rather than obey God. Especially did immorality reach tremendous proportions in the days of Noah. It is said, Gen. 6:5, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Consider the history of the nation of Israel during the period of the judges until their captivities. Our text (Romans 1:18-32) depicts the moral degeneracy of the Gentile world before Christ, and Romans two shows the Jews were doing the same things.

Immorality is certainly characteristic of our day. We shall not deal with statistics that show the low moral level to which our nation has sunk because the numbers are so staggering that most do not really comprehend the extent of immorality by seeing numbers. We shall be more concerned with right versus wrong, the causes and consequences of immorality, now and eternally.

Immorality Results from Several Factors

Jesus noted that men love the darkness of evil rather than the light of truth (John 3:19). Moses made a deliberate choice to forsake the "pleasures of sin" which still cause many to partake of sin (Heb. 11:25). Evidently, many never consider the ultimate wages of sin, which is spiritual death

(Rom. 6:23). All they see and feel is the immediate satisfaction they derive from sinning.

At the root of all immorality is the lack of fear ad respect for God (Rom. 3:18). Without God there is no deterrent or need to correct sin. Since many mistakenly conclude there is no God, no accountability, no judgment, no heaven, no hell, no right or wrong, no absolute and objective truth, no soul, they find nothing to compel them be restricted from anything they feel like doing. They are, therefore, guided by subjectivity and their feelings and fleshly appetites.

Immorality is the natural fruit of atheism. Each person becomes his own god, lawgiver and judge. His god is his belly (Phil 3:19). His works are called the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19ff.) in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit.

But one is foolish to contend as some do that if you are not going to be a Christian you should just do whatever you wish. It is true you will not escape hell, but for the sake of society generally, for safety and personal security, for a reasonable degree of orderliness in society, everybody ought to live morally. There can be nothing but chaos without moral guidelines. Additionally, living an immoral life hardens the conscience (Rom. 1:21) until you are reprobate. Most had rather have neighbors who are moral non-Christians than immoral non-Christians. Most had rather live next door to moral non-Christians than the hypocritical immoral so-called "Christian." Morality benefits everyone and immorality produces hardship on all.

The Cost of Immorality

Can we even fully calculate the most of immorality in the realm of health? Note the loss of production due to absenteeism from work, the shortening of life, handicaps and inabilities, the pain and suffering, the financial burdens

imposed not only on the immoral and their families but the entire population. And we cannot dismiss the effect of immorality on the coming generations due to financial costs and diseases that were passed to them by an immoral generation. How much of our expenditure on better health would be eliminated if people lived moral lives?

Consider the cost in lives lost. The many deaths caused by diseases that were brought on by immoral living are beyond calculation. Lives are lost due to promiscuity, homosexuality, drunkenness, illegal drugs, etc.

Do we not know how immorality contributes to the destruction of the foundation of society, the home? Much of the divorce, physical abuse, neglect and financial ruin are brought against homes because one or more members of the home choose to live an immoral life.

We are not naïve to suggest that nobody "profits" from immorality, at least financially. Manufacturers and distributors of alcoholic beverages mass huge fortunes with their products. Drug and pornography dealers are among the wealthiest. How the television and movie industry accumulates vast fortunes by promoting immorality and appealing to the worst in mankind with their evil products! Even "comedians" make a career out of being smutty and creating laughter over immorality. Casino owners, including state lotteries, advance the cause of immorality, making people parasites on society, being controlled by the criminal elements. These degenerate people do not care for decency but dollars; not wanting God but gain.

The greatest cost is spiritual because immorality will cause the soul to be eternally lost in hell unless they repent and are forgiven. One soul is worth more than the world (Mark 8:36). To gain the world but lose the soul is a loser. Galatians 5:21 read, that "they which do such things shall

not inherit the kingdom of God.: Immoral people dishonor God, those around them, and even themselves (Rom. 1:24).

Being Specific

Immorality has invaded every realm of human activity. We know that television, magazines, newspapers and movies are overflowing with it. You need only watch for a short time the programs wicked producers and writers of television programs, talk show hosts, and similar human scum pushers produce before you hear some profanity, vulgarity, sexual innuendo, adulterous conduct implied, consumption of alcohol, violence, rape, murder, etc. You name the vice and these people parade it in an acceptable light with titillating and exciting scenes of wickedness. You wonder if these people ever had a decent thought? You cannot tell by what they produce. Much today is being made of ratings and a computer chip called the V-clip. Such may help some and warn of the low level of content, but that will never solve the problem.

Look at the magazines readily available in grocery stores and street corners. See the themes of degenerate behavior.

In business, politics, government, education, we see the havoc of immorality which is directly connected with the humanistic philosophy that occupies the space in the head where people's minds are supposed to be. Christians are to be lights in the world which demands opposing such immoral trash. But people are warned, "Don't cause trouble and keep quiet." The advance of immorality deserves trouble of the greatest magnitude before the entire nation and world are completely engulfed in it. It is still true. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people (Pro. 14:34). Are we so blind and ignorant as to think we shall be the first people to repeal or veto the law

of sowing and reaping? “Ne not deceived. God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7, 8).

Fornication and adultery are immoral acts. They produce diseases, divorces, delinquents, disgrace, disrespect and damnation. We hear much of unwanted pregnancy which usually is the result of immoral behavior. Most abortions (murder) are performed to remove responsibility for a child conceived in an immoral relationship. The “wise men” of our time propose every solution to these problems you can imagine except the only solution and that is teaching and conforming to God’s standard of sexual morality, the sanctity of the home and marriage, and personal responsibility for one’s actions.

Drunkenness has become so commonplace that many even make jokes about it. The use of mind changing and behavior altering drugs that are sold on the streets is characteristic of national life. What havoc this has caused the homes of drug users and drunkards! Poverty, crime in support of addiction, deranged minds, the loss of property, limb and life are all results of this kind of immorality.

But in our “superior and sophisticated age,” crimes committed under such influence are too often dismissed or treated lightly, even excused. The financial costs created by these things are immeasurable for magnitude. It is bad enough that the immoral suffer, but consider the suffering of the victims of these people, and the potential victims who are innocent of such wickedness!

More Specifics

Can one find an honest person? It is reported that Diogenes went through the streets of his city in broad daylight with a lantern saying he was looking for an honest man. Have they become that scarce in our own time?

Is lying considered bad? Evidently not by many people, even national leaders. In the March 1996 issue of the *Firm Foundation* we read where a judge in Florida threw out a city ordinance that made it illegal for politicians to lie on the basis that the law was a violation of free speech. Is cheating dishonest? It is not according to many students in our universities. Is perjury a crime? I guess not if you do not get caught and happen to be a President. People are willing to distort and pervert truth, misrepresent and deceive. Can you have confidence in a person or nation whose leaders are obviously and perpetually dishonest?

Even some philosophers are becoming alarmed at the violence and murder that is taking place. But such conduct is paraded before the public as the way to solve conflicts. Like those of Romans one, people are unmerciful toward their fellowman. While using television and advertising to effectively sell products, some of these same people deny that the constant menu of violence has any effect on the morality of the nation. If their bankbook depends on your blood, so be it, as far as they are concerned. We are not safe in our streets, stores, homes or schools. When society does not have enough morality to discipline itself you cannot provide enough policemen to control it.

Immorality in the Heart

Greed is a heart problem just as prejudice. Greed is born of materialism and concentration on this world to the neglect of the next. Luke 12:15, “A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

But try to tell that to most people and hear them laugh that truth to scorn. Solomon taught that wealth, even in abundance, was vanity. It cannot satisfy the longings and needs of the soul. Stealing is born of greed, not willing to work, and disrespect for the rights of others. Thieves invade homes, cars, stores, burglarizing, looting, pilfering. This is immorality and causes many problems for the modern world. Immorality is why we have locks, jails, security systems, night lights, 911, neighborhood watches.

Another Immorality Made Legal

Gambling is big business even though usually dominated by the criminal element. The immoral heart that wants something for nothing commits immoral deeds, trampling the dignity of man, creating poverty, scoffing at the sacredness of the work ethic. Winners have bought their ruin by winners just as losers have destroyed themselves.

What shall we say more? Cannot we name disobedience to parents, being without natural affection, worshipping idols, envy, backbiting as also listed in Romans one? The list of immoralities is long and always deadly. They have existed in every age with different appearance.

Is This Not a Problem?

Who cannot see that such things are a problem for our modern world? Christians are influenced by it because, even though we are not of the world, we are still in the world. We have to go against the grain and swim upstream against the current. Evil companions that corrupt good morals are to be shunned and can be found everywhere.

Immorality creates problems in selecting a marriage partner, choosing a job, selecting a place of residence.

Immorality causes godly parents heartaches and headaches because their task in rearing their children is made manifold more difficult.

The only solution is correction by purification of the heart. This does not mean that laws and their enforcement are of no value. The lawless would run rampant over everyone without laws for the protection of the innocent and potential victims. But what can you expect when the laws are enacted by people whose minds have been penetrated with humanism, whose hearts are anti-God, and when courts are manned by those who see no evil in so much God calls immoral?

While all this has a telling and calamitous effect on the Christian, we must be reminded of Noah who lived in an evil time but retained his faith and saved his family. We can expect frustrations of insecurity and injustice and see our resources dissipated and wasted by a world that seems determined to be immoral. We have a problem but we can defeat it in Christ.

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(Lesson also found in the Garfield Heights Lectures, 1996)

The Way of the Wicked

The lesson is a very simple one and applicable to all. There are several words used in lexicons and dictionaries to define the word wicked, such as evil, morally bad, harmful, injurious, reproachful, one who causes trouble, disposed to mischief, diseased, malignant, wretched, condemned, ungodly, unjust, one who does wrong, opposite of righteousness, depravity, evil plots and schemes to do harm to others, etc. It is not hard to get the picture, is it?

There is so much in the Bible on the subject in hundreds of verses with warnings, examples and judgments. This lesson will be confined to Proverbs 15.

Proverbs 15:9

"The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord."

There is such a thing as being wicked. Not everybody is a good person. In fact, we all have sinned (Rom. 3:23; 5:12).There are those who work iniquity (Matt. 7:23) and will not do the will of the Lord (Matt. 7:21). Even a member of the church is called wicked in 1 Cor. 5:13.

What about the way of the wicked? It is an abomination to the Lord. That means it is disgusting, abhorrent, loathed and offensive. It is looked upon with intense hatred as a detestable deed. It brings God's wrath and anger upon the wicked person because it violates His holiness, justice and intolerance of sin. This is not a trivial matter. Proverbs 6:16-19, "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, feet that be swift to running mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."

The outward appearance of a wicked person may seem a desirable pathway. Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Psalm 73:3, "…I saw the prosperity of the wicked." This is why some think it desirable. But it matters not what seems to man or man's evaluation. How does it appear before the Lord? It is an abomination.

Proverbs 15:8

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord."

Sacrifice is a performance of worship. The wicked may attempt to worship God. Would not this seem to be something admirable? Many sacrifices are commanded. But God does not accept just any worship that may be offered from just anybody who offers it. We have the examples of Cain, Nadab, Abihu and the Israelites whose worship was often rejected. It is unfortunate that some think God must and will be pleased with whatever worship is given to Him.

There is such a thing as vain worship (Matt. 7:7, 8). Samuel told Saul, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). Worship that is not accompanied with a righteous life is unacceptable. Proverbs 28:9, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." We cannot cover our sins by a pretense of worship. We do nobody a favor to leave the impression all worship is suitable.

Proverbs 15:20

"The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord"

God knows the hearts, minds and thoughts of man. In this matter we are limited, but not God. We may deceive others and ourselves but never deceive God. Moses warned, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23). Hebrews 4:13, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifested in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 23:7, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." Matthew 15:18, 19, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart

proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Genesis 6 tells us the thoughts of the hearts of those people were evil continually. Peter told Simon, Acts 8:"for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." God knows the evil heart and disapproves.

Proverbs 15:29

"The Lord is far from the wicked."

This is the tragedy of the matter. Fellowship with God is destroyed. It is when we walk in the light that we have fellowship with Deity (1 John 1:6, 7). "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Peter 3:12)."Salvation is far from the wicked, for they seek not thy statutes" (Psalm 119:155). Paul described the Ephesians before they became Christians as being "without Christ, aliens from the common wealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world...afar off" (Eph. 2:12, 13).

The Bible is very certain about the eternal destiny of those who go the way of the wicked.

Psalm 1:6, "…but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Psalm 37:38, "…the end of the wicked shall be cut off."

Psalm 73"19, ""How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors."

Psalm 145:20, "…but all the wicked he will destroy."

2 Thessalonians 1:9, "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

Matthew 25:46, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment…"

Sobering words to be sure!

More is Said

We have read only a portion of each of the verses from Proverbs 15. There is more that presents another side.

Proverbs 15:9 reads, "The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord; but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness."

Proverbs 15:9 reads, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight."

Proverbs 15:26 reads, "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, but words of the pure are pleasant words."

Proverbs 15:29, "The Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the prayer of the righteous."

The point is that the same verses where we are warned of the dreadful, deadly way of the wicked we have words of encouragement and promise to the followers of God.

There is no doubt which way God expects us to go. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: But strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

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The Church Has the Right Name

The church to which this lesson has reference is the church revealed in the New Testament. We are not concerned with **A** church but with **THE** church. The name of the church has become complicated because of religious

error. The world is flooded with churches with names that differ from the one in the New Testament. This makes it difficult to identify the church because of the division and confusion the many names have caused.

Often the question is asked, "To what church do you belong?" Such a question was never heard in New Testament times. It would have been without meaning because there was only one. Even though there were many congregations, there was one church. Because there are many substitute and human originated churches it becomes necessary for some terms of identification for **THE** church. Why not the terms of the New Testament (1 Pet. 4:11)?

There is no formal or exclusive title for the church. If there was only one brand of automobile in the world you would not need the many other names. For the same reason there is no need for human originated names. More often that not, the church was simply referred to as the church (Matt.16:16-18; Acts 2:47; Eph. 3:21; 5:25, etc.) Until this truth is accepted, the name of the church will be a problem.

Geographical Areas

It is true that we read of many churches in the New Testament but because of the various places they existed like the churches of Asia, the church at Antioch or the church in Babylon. These were not denominational bodies but were churches of the same kind. There are several terms used in the New Testament to identify the church.

Some of the Terms

The church is often referred to as the kingdom, showing it to be a spiritual government and a monarchy. Those in the church are said to be citizens and in the kingdom (Eph.

2:19; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9; Matt. 16:16-18). We find the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:10; Mark 9:1); the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 3:2; 4:17); Christ's kingdom (John 8:36; Heb. 12:28). These terms show to possession.

Also the church is the family (household) of God (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:1). This presents our relationship to God, to Christ, and to our Christian brothers and sisters (Rom.8:14-17; 1 Tim. 4:6). Galatians 6:10 calls the church the household of faith. Again, these terms show possession.

Churches of Christ (Romans 16:16)

Brethren today are most often known by this term. It is correct but not an exclusive term. Some have become ashamed of it because they no longer believe what the Scripture teaches about the church of the New Testament. One preacher offered to surrender the term for the sake of unity. Why surrender anything the Holy Spirit provides in order to unite with those in error? This term reminds us that Christ is the foundation, the founder, the head, the King, the savior, the deliverer and the judge of the church. It gives honor to Him. It is not narrow, bigoted, sectarian or self-righteous to refer to the church the way Scripture does.

Additional Terms

We read of the church of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Tim. 3:5), and the church of the Lord (Acts 20:28-ASV). Because some denominations not patterned after the New Testament church wrongfully appropriate this name does not mean it is wrong. Admittedly, it creates confusion, but the term is a Biblical one for the Lord's church.

The church is presented as the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 2:19-22). It is called God's building (1

Cor. 3:19) fitly framed together. Christians are living stones in this building (1 Pet. 2:5); a spiritual house. The church is not a literal physical building, but a spiritual one.

God's husbandry (1 Cor. 3:9) is another proper term for the church, as well as His vineyard (Matt. 20:1-6). Christ is the vine and we (the members) are the branches (John 15:1-10). The branches are not denominations. None even existed in New Testament times. We can consider the church as the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18). There is one fold as certainly as there is one shepherd (John 10:16). Elders are shepherds over the flock (Acts 20:28-30) and are to prevent wolves from entering therein.

Just a Few More

The church is like the Lord's army, equipped with the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-17, with Christ as our captain (Heb. 2:10). We are to fight the good fight of faith (2 Tim. 4:6-8), a spiritual warfare (1 Cor. 10:4) as good soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3, 4). Jude uses a military term for the activity of the church when he admonished us to "contend" for the faith (Jude 3).

Most know the church is called the body of Christ (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22, 23). There is one body (Eph. 4:4). Christians are members of that one body (1 Cor. 12:12-31).

Ephesians five presents the church as the bride of Christ. Hebrews 12:23 uses the phrase church of the firstborn and general assembly. Those in the church have their names in the Lamb's book of life (Luke 10:20). There may be others.

What Most of These Terms Do

As has been previously noted, most of the terms used in the New Testament to identify the church (we call them names) are to show to whom the church belongs. It is not MY church or YOUR church but the church of Christ. All churches do not belong to Him, did not come from God nor have His approval according to His Word. We should speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11) and be satisfied to identify the church as Scripture does. You will not find the denominational names in the Bible. Why use them? The Bible does not know anything about hyphenated Christianity; Baptist-Christians, Methodist-Christians, Presbyterian-Christians, Catholic-Christians, on and on. The church is not the Christian Church even though composed of Christians. It is not the "All-Saints" church even though members are saints. It is not the "Family of God Church" or "Community Church." Why go outside the Bible when you want to identify the church of the Bible?

Other Special Terms

Those who compose the church are called Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:15, 16), members of the body (1 Cor. 12:12-31; saints (1 Cor. 1:2), disciples (Acts 11:26), citizens of the kingdom (Eph. 2:19), children of God or sons and daughters of God (Rom. 4:16, 17) and brethren (1 Tim. 4:6).

Some say there is nothing in a name. But that is because they have the wrong name. Names are important in every realm. God has always so considered it. The right church will have the right name. It takes more than the name to be the right church but it takes the right name nonetheless.

* * * * *

The Church: It's Identity

Matthew 16:18, “And I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” This is the Lord’s direct statement to Peter after his confession that Jesus was the Son of God. It is obvious Christ would build the church and it would be His. Ephesians 5:25, 26, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.: Paul was not referring to just a church, but THE church. If one is interested in finding A church that is easy. But what about finding THE church? How can that church be identified?

The church is called the church of God, the pillar and ground of the truth, God’s building, His temple, the household of faith, the house of God, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, and when referring to several congregations, the church of Christ. (See the lesson on The Church Has the Right Name just prior to this lesson.)

The answer is, YES.” Even if it does not, it can exist. We are not seeking something resembling the church, very much like the church, or something more than the church. We want the church of the Bible. How can it be identified?

It Existed in Apostolic Days

We know the apostles preached the church. People became members of the church. They were added to the church. Churches were established, visited and existed. The Lord’s church came into existence on the first Pentecost after the Lord’s ascension, in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 2). Any religious institution whose history is exhausted before you go back to the days of the apostles, the day of Pentecost, cannot be THE church of Christ. The Mormon

Church began in 1830 by Joseph Smith. The Methodist began in 1729 by John and Charles Wesley. The Baptist Church started in 1608 in Holland and 1639 in America by Roger Williams. Baptists once tried to trace a line of succession back to the apostolic days but most have abandoned such an effort because it is impossible. The Presbyterian Church began in 1535 by John Calvin. The Episcopal Church began in 1534 by Henry the 8th. The Catholic Church had its first pope in 606 and no council until 325 with a vast array of doctrine unknown in THE church of the apostolic days.

As you go back past the confusion of Protestantism, the apostasy of Romanism and to the record of the New Testament, you find THE church Christ built.

Its Beginning and Early History

It was established in AD 33, in Jerusalem, on Pentecost as prophets had foretold. Any religious body established at any other time or place cannot be THE church, and we have no reason to find or defend any other. THE church is governed by the Word of God, the New Testament. There are no manuals, disciplines, council edicts, catechisms, synods, popes, prayer books, confessionals, general assemblies, etc. Such were unknown in the New Testament. THE church is governed exclusively by the Bible.

We have the same seed (the Word of God) and can produce the same product, the same church. The church did not originate in the days of what is called the American Restoration Movement. That movement was to RESTORE, not start something new.

Matters to Be Restored

We can take the Scriptures and show how prophecy was fulfilled when the church was established on Pentecost. We can see the teaching for unity, oneness and singularity of the church; not many denominations. We can learn what is the authorized work of the church; the worship offered by the church; terms of entrance into the church; the names of the church; and every element about the church for the Bible teaches us these things. We must abide by that.

Other lessons have been presented on almost every phase, element and composition of THE church in the sermons in A BURNING FIRE. This brief study is designed simply to assert with complete confidence that the church does exist, it has identifying marks, and these marks can be detected so that people can recognize the church of Christ. Let us resolve to study these things and learn them.

* * * * *

Christian Growth and Adding Christian Graces

There are numerous ways to accomplish church growth which we usually consider as numerical, financial, physical or other ways of expansion. Such things may reflect growth but not always. There is a vital area of growth without which all other apparent growth is insignificant. That is spiritual growth.

Growth is not optional (2 Peter 3:18). But it must be attained God's way rather than through gimmicks, gadgets, schemes and programs of man's authority. It will entail expediencies and human judgment in certain areas. Hebrews 5:12-14 gives emphasis to the need for growth and the rebuke for immaturity. It takes the Word to have

spiritual growth. “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

Growth necessitates change. We go from what we are toward what we can and ought to be. God saw us a sinful people but knew what man could become and provided the way for growth through His word. No word; no growth.

Christian Graces

In 2 Peter 1:4-9 Peter writes of what are usually called Christian graces; at least some of them. It is addressed to those who had “obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” He is saying, “You have been born again; now grow.”

Add to your faith. One must have faith before adding anything to it. Nor would anybody need to add anything if salvation was by faith alone. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). There is no record of anyone having saving faith apart from hearing the word of God. Nor is there growth apart from the word of God.

To add is to place alongside our faith these qualities that show themselves by deeds. We cannot continue to partake of the way of sin (Rom. 6:2) must but give ourselves to becoming more and more like Jesus, growing in His likeness day by day. This is spiritual and church growth.

What Are These Graces?

Christian graces are qualities of character to be added to our character. They are not independent of each other but are blended in life together, simultaneously and in proper balance. They are spiritual in nature and reflect the nature of His kingdom like the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. They are what make Christians a “peculiar” people

because of the kind and quality of life they live. To develop kindness, good will and favor toward others is likened unto the grace God has shown mankind.

These qualities make us fit for the Master's service. One of the purposes of a church is to help one another get to heaven. Adding these traits of character will strengthen and encourage brethren as well as have a good impact on those not yet converted. A good and faithful Christian is one of the drawing powers toward Christ. Christians are saying to others, "This is the way." A prospective Christian can be turned off by the ungodly life of one who says he is a Christian. Then there is the loss of two souls. We must make sure we do not make possible the deceitful ways of Satan to discourage people from the truth by wicked lives.

Adding Takes Work

Peter introduces these graces with "giving all diligence" which means growth does not just happen. It results from deliberate decisions to live faithfully. It takes strenuous and persistent effort. It does not mean we earn salvation by works of merit any more than any other act of obedience. It is part of man's part in being saved in heaven. It is that which can keep us from falling away.

Add Virtue

We think of virtue as moral purity. But it is more. It demands moral courage and manliness. "Quit you like men," (1 Cor. 16:13) governs one's behavior to be mature, as courageous manhood. Christians must have a high level of courage to be a good soldier of the cross. He will do right because it is right regardless of what others say, do or

think. He chooses to stand for the truth without regard to personal consequences; even standing alone if necessary.

Remaining faithful may require separation from others. If so, so be it. He cannot and will not surrender nor compromise God's truth to accommodate anybody.

Revelation 21:8 catalogs abominations before God and the first listed is being "fearful." The Christian will not give way to persecution and become guilty of apostasy. It is not always easy to stand but it is always right. The lack of virtue will mean the loss of victory.

Add Knowledge

Peter does not write about secular knowledge but knowledge of the word of God. One must possess some knowledge to become a Christian but that is not sufficient knowledge to enable one to be a faithful Christian. He does not have to know everything to start but he must grow in order to be faithful and bear fruit to God's glory.

We must learn how to work, worship, treat others, teach, select priorities, things to do and not do in Christianity. You cannot teach what you do not know and teaching is a part of our labor. This knowledge comes from private study, meditation and practice of lessons learned in sermons, classes, papers, books and other methods.

Add Temperance

Temperance in the King James Version is the doctrine of self-control. The Christian learns to control himself; self-discipline. There are limits and boundaries beyond which he will not go. He governs his ambitions, appetites, goals and desires of life in harmony with God's will. He controls his tongue, temper, consumption of food, becomes the

slave to no habit, being the master of self. He will abstain from everything wrong and keep in moderation that which is right. He is no extremist. He keeps his life in proper balance rather than letting others control him. Christ is his Master. The Lord is his Shepherd.

We must not just control our deeds but also the source of our deeds; the heart (Proverbs 4:23). Our thoughts are to be those things that are true, honest, pure, lovely and of good report (Phil. 4:8); our affections on things above (Col. 3:2).

Add Patience

Many misunderstand patience to simply mean being content to calmly wait around needlessly. It means being steadfast and faithful even under trial and temptation. It is enduring hardship. Persecution is designed to provoke us to renounce our loyalty to Christ and give up. The faithful Christian will bear up and never deny the Lord. He will be like Job (James 5:11). He will keep on keeping on.

We are encouraged to do this with such promises as 1 Cor. 10:13. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” It means there is nothing that shall happen that you and God TOGETHER cannot handle.

Add Godliness

Godliness means reverence for that which is sacred. It is the opposite of being blasphemous and derogatory toward the things of God and His will. Ungodliness is to mock God, ridicule the sacred things Christians believe and practice. Some who think themselves to be “scholarly” are

given to ungodliness, desiring to be accepted as "somewhat" by everybody, like denominations, like the world, even calling the worship a "holy wow." Dancing, clapping, screaming, swaying, laughing, shouting, falling, climbing, crawling, prancing and other uncontrolled manifestations of emotion gone wild is ungodliness. In the presence of God in worship we should be reverent rather than carrying on with hilarity, entertainment and other artificial means of creating excitement.

The world does not respect things holy because "there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18)

Add Brotherly Kindness

Christians will treat one another properly with kindness, courtesy, guarding our speech and honoring the church. Some seem to delight in bashing the church and criticizing faithful brethren who stand for the truth. While there is a place for correction of error, there is no place for cutting personal insults toward others. But they are often heard.

Forgiveness is a mark of brotherly kindness. When one falls we should help toward their restoration (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19). Brotherly kindness partakes of our family relationship we enjoy as brothers and sisters in the Lord. How distressed the Father must be when His children hold grudges or behave unseemly toward each other. Love for the brotherhood is to be genuine and sincere (1 Pet. 1:22).

Finally, Add Love or Charity

Charity is the better translation. Love is an emotion but more than an emotion. It demonstrates itself. To say "love" but be without the action of love (as charity suggests) is to have an empty love. Charity implies helpfulness and

seeking the other's highest good. Without love we "become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1).

Conclusion

Adding these Christian graces is to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). We become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter. 1:4). It is the path of being fruitful as well as the prevention of falling away, making our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). We can look forward to an entrance into glory with God in heaven (2 Peter 1:11). What a significant contribution to a better world and the spiritual growth of the church as well as a tool to reaching the lost when we grow by the Christian graces.

(An extended rendition of this lesson can be found in the 2000 Memphis School of Preaching Lectures.)

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Success and Failure of Churches

Things are not always what they seem. What appears to be true on the surface may not be the true case. Experience and Scripture (Prov. 14:12) shows man can be deceived. We must not judge by appearance (John 7:24). A patient in the hospital may feel well, look well, have no pain but die. We have to look deeper than the apparent surface.

There are unfaithful churches. Churches of human origin are among them. Churches once faithful that have fallen away are also among them. Churches that do not follow the New Testament pattern are unfaithful churches.

There are faithful churches. Although not perfect they are following the New Testament pattern and keep on keeping on, walking in the light, taking "thus saith the Lord" seriously in name, work, worship, terms of entrance, doctrine, organization and all other identifications.

An Oft Asked Question

Repeatedly in Scripture we find it being asked, "Why do those in the wrong seem to prosper?" (Psalm 73:1-2; 94:3-7; Jer. 12:1; Hab. 1:1-4). "The wicked walk on every side when the vilest men are exalted" (Psalm 12:8). In many ways they do prosper. We cannot forget how righteous Job suffered. Why the righteous suffer and fail is often asked. What's wrong with God that He allows that? It seems so unjust to us at first. Unfaithful churches grow and faithful ones decline. Shall we despair and "curse God and die?"

Defining Success and Failure

We may be confusing what these terms really mean. We have to consider the real work and purpose of the church before we can determine whether it succeeds or fails. To do the work is success. To not do it is to fail. The standard must be the word of God.

The prime purpose of the church is to glorify God (Eph. 3:21). The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). It must preach the word, do benevolent work and edify the saints. In other words, help one another get to heaven. To do this is success; spiritual success.

What some consider success is not necessarily what God considers success. Great building, large contributions, big numbers in attendance may be success but not always. Some see huge crowds and say, "They must be something

right." It may be they use gimmicks, entertainment, fun and games to draw crowds. They may compromise truth, refuse to preach what is needed and seek to please men rather than God. That is not success. To be accepted by the community, have influential people as members and get headlines is the goal some have. The church in Sardis had a reputation of life but the Lord said they were dead (Rev. 3).

Isaiah 5:20, 21, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe into them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" Things that men applaud may not be what God approves. Some love the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:43).

Who was the most successful: The rich man or Lazarus. (Luke 16); wealthy contributors or the widow (Matt. 12:41); Laodicea (Rev. 3) or the Macedonian churches (2 Cor. 8; 2, 3); Herod or John the Baptist (Matt. 14); Gideon or the Midianites (Judge 5); Noah or the rest of the world (Gen. 6); Lot or the people of Sodom (Gen. 19); Paul or the Jews who sought his life; Christ or those who crucified Him? Were not those who did the will of God successful while those who disobeyed Him failed?

Take the Long View

We make a serious mistake to consider just the present. Christians take a longer view and see the ultimate results. Psalm 73:12, 16, 17,19 "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches…When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end…How they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors." Psalm 1:6, "For

the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Two farmers lived on adjoining farms. One was a Christian and the other an atheist. One year the harvest of the atheist surpassed that of the Christian and he boasted of it. The Christian replied, "God doesn't settle all accounts in August." It is in the judgment where all shall know success or failure.

We may have a tendency to become discouraged, feel intimidated, ineffective and insignificant. We see large crowds flocking after false teachers. Human originated churches have their parking lots full. But remember what real success is. Eccl. 12:13, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

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Isaiah and Restoration

The messages of the prophets in the Old Testament were designed to produce restoration, call people away from apostasy and persuade them to return to the original pattern of religious life that God had given them. It was to lead the people back to the way things should be,

We are determined to "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent," producing again the church of the Lord as revealed in the New Testament. We have no desire to originate anything new, reform some man-made religious organization, but to restore that which began on Pentecost. Restoration was the work of the prophets and our work also.

Isaiah was a man of courage, faith, conviction and determination. He was one of the more prominent and outstanding prophets due to the times and conditions that existed when he lived but also due to his character.

Isaiah 30:8-10, "Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: that this is a rebellious people, a lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord; which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits." Isaiah noted that what he taught was not his own message nor originated with him but he spoke by divine authority the message God wanted these people to hear. "Thus saith the Lord" was his theme.

The Times and Conditions

Isaiah was God's prophet during the days of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah over a period of fifty to sixty years. While his words were primarily directed to Judah, he also warned Northern Israel as well as countries surrounding them as Egypt and Assyria. It was not an easy time to be a faithful servant of God. There was difficulty in bringing the nations back in line when the leaders of the nations were nearly always pulling the other way.

Isaiah was not the only prophet of his time. We read of Amos, Hosea and Micah. They were all restorers. God's people made the mistake of turning to one of the more powerful nations to assist them in their deliverance from problems rather than relying upon the Lord.

Both Judah and Northern Israel prospered materially. Their wealth proved to be a contributing factor to their undoing. The mark of ingratitude and the attitude of self-

sufficiency has been the ruin not only of nations but many individuals. God warns us of this danger to the soul. The very condition of abundance and pride made the work of the prophets exceedingly difficult because the people were not soon ready to hear words of rebuke and reproof from one they did not respect. They were religious but not righteous

Isaiah's Message

We shall focus our attention on what Isaiah taught in the first chapter of his book. In verse two he said the people had rebelled against God by rebelling against His word. There is no surer way to rebel against God than this. Isaiah illustrated how unreasonable they were. "The ox knoweth his master, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." You would expect even animals to have respect for the one who fed them. But these people chose to turn their backs on their Master. They were called a sinful nation because "they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward."

Progression versus Digression

Some talk today about making progress and identify themselves as progressive. But what they are actually doing is digressive and going backward. The unreasonableness of their continued rebellion is expressed with the question, "Why should ye be stricken any more?" They should have learned that their course of error would only produce their hurt. "The whole head is sick and whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it."

The Certainty of His Prophecies

Often we read from the prophets of events yet future as if they already existed. This is called “prophetic perfect” and emphasizes the assurance and certainty of what was to come. While the nations were prospering, in time the country would be desolate, their cities burned and their land overrun by strangers. They would as a besieged city. Such conditions eventually did overtake Judah and Jerusalem but not in the days of Isaiah. Furthermore, there would be a remnant to survive. The need for restoration was so obvious they are likened to Sodom and Gommarah.

His message was positive and negative. He did not only condemn their wickedness but pointed them in the right direction. He urged them to “hear the word of the Lord.” As stated in Isaiah 8:20, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” This is the way their restoration could be accomplished. It would not come through their sacrifices, offerings and observing days and seasons. Even their prayers were not acceptable. They needed a daily righteous life in sincerity.

Isaiah told Judah how to make correction. He taught them the ways of restoration. He said, “Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doing before mine eyes; cease to do evil.” Leaving what was wrong and pursuing what was right was the way to go. The restoration was open to them and it was their decision.

Oh, Jerusalem

We wonder how a once “faithful city: could become a harlot and unfaithful to God. How is it that some once

faithful in the Lord, enjoying the spiritual blessings in Christ, having hope for the world to come can turn from God and reenter the sinful world to their own spiritual death? We read in the New Testament of some who did that very thing and needed to be restored. Some were.

A Clear Message

Isaiah would call the people of Israel to repentance, specify their sins and tell them the will of the Lord. God sent messenger after messenger unto them to persuade them to be restored before either nation fell; Northern Israel before Assyria and Judah before Babylon. Northern Israel fell first but Judah's doom was postponed for over a hundred years. It was not because the message of recovery and restoration was not delivered. It was because the people did not want to conform to the will of God and chose their own destruction of which they were warned.

The Lessons for Us Are Unlimited

We know today that everything that is labeled "Christian" is not Christian according to the New Testament. We hear the wail that one church is as good as another church; salvation by faith only; there is no law; there is no pattern. God has given us a pattern to serve Him and when we obey we are pleasing to God and can know we are pleasing to God. Disobedience brings death.

In the latter seventeen hundreds there arose efforts to do a similar work to the prophets to call people back to the New Testament church and restore God's order. Men seek to be united, but we can never be united standing on the doctrines of men. We can unite only on the divine teaching and confine ourselves to what Deity has revealed.

The plan to restore New Testament Christianity in our time is a valid and correct one. It is the only one that can bring man to a saved relationship with God through Christ and His church. The nations of old did not need something new but to go BACK in order to go FORWARD. We also must go back to Jerusalem where the Lord's church was established, see that church and pattern ourselves accordingly. There is no fault that can be found with this restoration plea. We are not devoted to some kind of religious "movement" per se. We are determined to learn God's will from God's word and follow it. The work is right and those doing it are right to be doing it.

Did Isaiah Fail?

Isaiah set about the task at God's direction to restore Judah and Israel to God's favor. History shows the people of those nations continued to follow the ways of error and suffered destruction. Did Isaiah fail in his mission?

He certainly did not accomplish all he wanted to accomplish. But did he fail? How could anyone ever conclude that Isaiah, and the other prophets, failed when they did the work God told them to do? How can people today be called failures if they do as they did? Success awaits the faithful. Let us be sure to be among them.

(An extended presentation of this lesson can be found in the 2004 Garfield Heights Lectureship book.)

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Laodicea and Restoration

Our Lord wrote seven letters to seven churches in Asia recorded in Revelation. There are similarities to the letters but each has its own unique distinction. We shall focus on the letter sent to Laodecia and how it relates to the theme of restoration. In it we have additional identifications of Christ, words of condemnation, warnings and promises. The letter to Laodecia does not have any words of commendation. It was different from the others churches in that is was said to be lukewarm, possibly like some today.

Christ identified Himself a number of ways in these letters. "And unto the angel of the church of Laodecia write, These things saith the Amen, faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). His words to the "angel" (messenger) may be addressed to one who preached there. In all these identifications of Christ His Deity is magnified. As "the faithful and true witness" means whatever He says ought to be heeded and we can rely on it. He is worthy of our complete confidence. As "the beginning of the creation of God" underscores His Deity seeing all things were made by Him (Heb. 1:2).

The Real Condition

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:15-17). They thought material prosperity meant real prosperity. Also they were guilty of thinking too highly of themselves (Rom. 12:3; Gal. 6:3). They were like the "rich fool" of Luke 16 who trusted in his wealth. This same cloud of deception had overtaken the people of Judah

and Northern Israel in the days of Isaiah, Amos, Micah Jeremiah and others. The Laodecians thought they were in need of nothing but they had drifted and turned back into the same spiritual slavery from which they were delivered.

Their real condition was they were failures. They were lukewarm. The Lord preferred they be either cold or hot but as they were made Him sick and He would spue them out of His mouth.

What is a Lukewarm Church?

That is a church where the members are not as dedicated to doing the will of God as they must be. It is a church where there is inactivity, lethargy, self-satisfaction and laziness, having forms of godliness but without sincerity. A church may be very active, showy and prominent and still be lukewarm in things that matter. Such is true when members are half-hearted and indifferent toward their responsibilities. They may be "playing church" or "keeping house for the Lord" but not exhibiting a decisive, militant, aggressive, committed evangelistic fervor. Thankfully, there are many churches that are not lukewarm. But some lack zeal, are unwilling to sacrifice and with little courage to stand for the truth in a world of evil. Until there is a restoration they will lack the enthusiasm and devotion they once possessed when they entered Christ.

One brother asked another, "Do you know the two most serious problems facing the church? The brother responded, "I don't know and I don't care." The first man said, "You named them both."

Let Each Examine

Each one needs to ask whether he is a help or hindrance to the cause of Christ. Those outside the church can seldom hurt the church like a lukewarm member can. To be a professed follower of Christ and leave a false impression or a distorted picture of a Christian hurts every other Christian as well as the Lord. They cause the church to be smeared, ridiculed, scorned and ignored. Hypocrites, and that is what a lukewarm members are, can cause a lost person to remain lost because he is repulsed by the lukewarm member.

Lukewarm members only deceive themselves. Others see them for what they are and certainly God does. Some may think large numbers, huge buildings, a "scholar" as preacher with a string of degrees after his name or big contributions make an acceptable church. A church may have these qualities and be acceptable but it may have them and still be lukewarm because they excel in matters that do not matter. Some will spend millions for playgrounds and gymnasiums while their brethren in other places have a difficult time to have an adequate place to assemble. Some turn the church into little more than a social club with religious overtones where people seek entertainment, acceptance by the denominational world and satisfaction of worldly and sensual appetites. Some even try to change the worship into periods of what they call a "holy wow."

A church may have wealth, friends, power, prestige, popularity and prosperity if many sorts and be lukewarm in the purposes of the church.

Restoration Was Possible

We see the Lord believed restoration was possible. A precious soul restored is a soul saved from spiritual death and a multitude of sins are covered (James 5:19, 20). Hebrews 12:6, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,

and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." The Lord never condemns just for the sake of condemning. It is always as an avenue for recovery.

Their need was great but the solution was sure. They needed to come to Christ and secure the true wealth. His medicine would cure their ills. None are so blind, however, as those who refuse to see.

The first step toward restoration was a change of heart and mind. They needed to repent. Their conversion had to be genuine and from the heart.

The Lord tells us, as He told them, how we go astray. He also shows us the road back to Him. Never has anybody been converted to Christ, or been restored from apostasy, without first being disturbed and shaken that all was not well with his soul. Some decry disturbing people. Without such disturbance none will ever be motivated to respond obediently. The mission of Christ was not to simply make people feel good but allow them to feel good because they could know of their favorable fellowship with Deity. To pacify the sinner in his sins is to sin against him. The gospel disturbs the comfortable and comforts the disturbed.

The Kindness of Christ

As He closed this letter He wrote, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh I will grant to sit with me in my throne even as I overcame, and am set down with the Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:20, 21). The Lord will not crash in our door for our salvation. He will not save without our willingness to be saved by obeying His will. He does seek our restoration and has provided the way to

eternal joy. Let us take heed lest we drift away as did Laodecia. Do you need to be restored? Does the congregation where you attend need a restoration? If so, such can be a reality if members will repent.

(An extended presentation of this lesson can be found in the 2004 Garfield Heights Lectureship book.)

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The "Pastor System"

What is called the "pastor system" is not a problem everywhere but does exist in places. This lesson is really one of respect for authority and the government of the Lord's church. Christ is the head of the church. There are autonomous (self-governing) local congregations overseen by elders (pastors, shepherd, presbyters, bishops), served by deacons, with the preachers and teachers and all other members making up the church. Those who oversee must first meet specific qualifications and be appointed. Their work consists of the care of souls, being good examples, making decisions for the congregation and respecting God's word by requiring authority for what is done. They were ordained in every city (Titus 1:5); in every church (Acts 14:23). The church in Philippi was so organized (Phil. 1:1). Each church should target this organization.

The "pastor system" involves the preacher, as we shall observe. The work of a preacher is to preach. God had but one Son and He was a preacher. H. A. Dixon once told me the work of the preacher was to study, study, preach, study, study and preach. HE IS NOT A PASTOR by virtue of being a preacher. He may serve both as a pastor and a

preacher but these are two separate roles. He should not be called a pastor simply because he preaches (1 Pet. 4:11).

The "pastor system" is connected with the dispute over what some call "evangelistic authority." This means giving authority to the preacher. Some object to a preacher being located at a place for a period of time because that makes him a pastor. Evangelists, they say, travel about. Have they not considered a preacher traveling about or an evangelist remaining in a certain place? The preacher is an evangelist whether at one place or traveling about. There are two kinds of preachers; located and dislocated. How long a preacher is to stay at a given place; how to support him; how much to support him are matters of judgment to be determined by mutual consent. Actually, the complaint about a "pastor system" is a smear at located preachers because they assume a located preacher takes charge and control of the church. NOT SO! Elders have that responsibility. Preachers have authority to preach (Titus 2:15) because of the authority of the word they preach. Some located preachers may attempt to be THE pastor but that is an abuse of something otherwise acceptable. The preacher should not attempt to assume such authority and the elders should not abdicate their authority to him. The preacher is under their authority like all the other members.

Problems That Arise

The preacher does not have the right to take charge of the congregation. There is not to be a one-man rule. He should not be "the man to see." He is not to have superiority over the eldership. He should not be asked to do the work of an elder even though in some work there will be overlapping. "Let the preacher do it" is the wrong way.

Sometimes he sees the work of elders that needs to be done but is neglected and he barges in to do it. He should not. This may explain why he appears to be THE pastor but does not justify this intrusion.

Sometimes the preacher wants power but not the heat that goes with it. He may be a Diotrophes wanting preeminence, attempts to control and manipulate elders and others to do his will. Some even try to remove and replace elders that do not give him this power. He becomes a CEO for the congregation with a "rubber stamp" eldership. They become mere figureheads. Denominations operate like that but it is wrong. It not wrong simply because denominations operate like that. It is wrong because that is not the right way in the Lord's church.

Signs of a Possible "Pastor System"

It is probable when the preacher makes all or most of the decisions, when he is in charge of the meetings, he is "master of ceremonies" at gatherings, he chooses the teachers for Bible study and VBS, he selects and approves materials used, he decides who will conduct the services, he chooses the gospel meeting preacher, he determines the mission work, he may even do the contact work for paving the parking lot, he settles the disputes, decides on most activities, makes most of the announcements. He is totally in charge. "Ask the preacher," is the answer to what the congregation does.

Preachers can drift into this undesirable position. Often it is because others will not and do not assume the work they should be doing and he does it because nobody else will. I once was sweeping the leaf-covered door mat at the entrance and was asked what I was doing. I said, "The

work of an evangelist," meaning, something nobody else ever seems it is their job to do.

It is true that some preachers are not beyond going around and over the eldership to get their way. They develop a following that pressures the elders to do things his way. He becomes a good mixer and director. He gets and keeps his power and control. This is WRONG.

Don't Shut Him Out

Preachers should not be shut out from affairs of the congregation anymore than others. Elders are wise to consult him and keep him, and the congregation, informed. His advice can be useful but this does not put him in charge. It can prevent conflicts, problems and misunderstandings to keep him well advised.

Good advice for preachers that would defeat the "pastor system" is for him to know his place, fill his place and keep his place. The same goes for elders.

God's system works and works best. Everyone suffers when His wisdom is supplanted by man's "better" ideas.

* * * * *

Is the Restoration Complete?

There are those who recognize the efforts made to restore New Testament Christianity but delight in degrading what has been done and produced. There are

some who do not even care to restore the New Testament church but prefer what they call a church relevant for our century. Just what that entails we are not informed. Therefore, they contend that efforts to restore the church that began on Pentecost are useless, not desirable or incomplete. This is to assert that the original church has no place in our day. Has the church been restored?

Concerning the Church

The church is the kingdom (Col. 1:13) that God promised, prophesied to come, planned, designed and delivered the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ (Acts 2). It is composed of the saved (Acts 2:47). Its existence is a manifestation of God's wisdom (Eph. 3:10).

As prophesied, history shows the church fell away from the truth into apostasy, Romanism, Protestantism resulting from the Reformation Movement. In the late 1700"s serious efforts began to be made to return to the New Testament. Down through the years of dark apostasy there were probably some faithful Christians who made efforts to remain true, oppose the apostasy, reform the digressive movements and follow the Scriptures. There is no way to trace such a lineage, however. Such efforts were subject to persecution, suppression and those involved often physically exterminated. The history of those dark ages is a trail of blood, wars, atrocities and shame. There were many who displayed courage and were willing to sacrifice for the purity of the gospel.

We show a vicious arrogance to not have gratitude in our hearts for those who have gone before us who have fought for the faith. However misguided many of them were, they displayed a spirit of commitment that would be refreshing to see today. They achieved a great deal and brought the

Scriptures to the foreground. We stand upon their shoulders and constantly benefit because of their efforts. Is it not disgraceful how some seem to think and act like the world did not exist until they came on the scene? Did God create the world on their birthday? The way some speak of those noblemen of the past you would think that everything that ever happened was unimportant until they arrived.

We acknowledge that so many who went before us did not succeed in reproducing the New Testament church. They fell into the chasms of human doctrines, falling short of the truth of the Bible. While we appreciate what was done in yesteryear we do not for a moment look to those uninspired people as our authority in religion. No uninspired man is authority regardless of how sincere and truly scholarly he was. We look to God for authority.

The Chain of Authority

Christ is all authority. Those who revealed truth in His name, the apostles, are authority regarding what they taught as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. The truth was embodied in inspired men until fully revealed. Truth is now in the all-sufficient, authoritative, inspired, infallible and inerrant Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). It is to the word of God that we look in restoring New Testament Christianity.

As stated, we benefit from the work and study done by those who lived before us, breaking from Romanism and Protestantism. We should bury our pride, egotism, self-acclaimed superiority and conceit but not follow blindly any man. Some delight in casting off those of the past with the pontifical wave of the hand, snobbery, with ridicule, belittling what they did, even denouncing them so they can assert the church has not yet been restored. It is observable, however, how some who mistreat the past teachers often

will refer to them when they think they can appropriate their influence and some of their words for some cause they currently profess. Such hypocrisy is deplorable.

Our Plea

Our plea is like that stated in Isaiah 8:20. “To the law and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.” We seek not to start anything new, reform anything already existing, but restore what came into reality on Pentecost and is described and defined for us in the Bible.

Some who made serious efforts to accomplish this bore names like Stone, Scott, Smith, Jones, Campbell and a host of others. None of these are authority for anybody nor did they pretend to be. They were often still lacking seeing the difficulty to break from the ranks of human churches. But they progressed until the church once again was present.

While some claim we can never know the truth but only pursue it, they contradict Scripture that we can know the truth and be set free by it (John 8:32). We can understand God’s message (Eph. 3). To contend the church cannot be restored is to contend the original never existed. To contend the original church is irrelevant us is an insult to the blood of Christ; its purchase price (Acts 20:28). The Bible reveals the marks of the church. We have God’s pattern. We can follow and imitate it.

Imperfections

Some contend the church has not been restored because there are imperfections among the members. But were there not imperfections among the members of the original church? Those imperfections did not negate its existence.

We shall never have perfect people to compose the church. Perfection of members has never been the criteria for a restored church. There will always be room for growth and improvement. Such was the case in the past and is so now.

Contrary to the wail of liberals the New Testament does provide us God's pattern. Since the original existed so can the restoration by following the pattern. IT HAS BEEN RESTORED. If not, let those who object tell us what is lacking, missing, omitted or should be changed. Let them do this with Biblical authority; not their likes and wants.

Faithful brethren are accused of going through the Bible eclectically (at random selection), picking and choosing only what they want. Such can be done. This has been the "cafeteria style" of denominations. What is done that is not authorized? What must be added or altered? It is one thing to make such an accusation but more difficult to prove it.

A Continuing Restoration

In one sense the restoration effort is a never ending effort. Every generation must be taught everything, to follow truth and not traditionalism. As stated, there must be a constant effort to improve our lives. But the doctrine is evident. The marks of identification such as the name, worship, work, terms of entrance, government, etc. has been restored.

Restoration preaching is simply preaching the same gospel of the first century, calling people back to God's way, God's plan of salvation and God's church. It is our duty to learn, believe and obey; then live accordingly and propagate the faith to the world.

* * * * *

The Validity of the Restoration Movement

Christian people are willing to investigate, question and prove all things by searching the Scriptures as did those in Berea (Acts 17:11). Truth has nothing to fear. When one wants the truth above all else he wants to have things put to the test. 1 John 4:1 urges, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." We will probe our efforts, faith and hope to see if they are worthwhile and eternally beneficial; right before God. Is the effort to restore New Testament Christianity valid?

What Does "Valid" Mean?

When applied to what is called the Restoration Movement it means to have authority, be justifiable and appropriate to the desired goal. It means conformed to accepted principles and satisfies requirements. For something to be valid, whether a deed, document, action or argument, means it is based on sound reasoning, relevance and incapable of being overthrown. That which is valid is deserving of being supported because it is well grounded, sound, binding and sensible. Does the Restoration Movement meet these criteria? The answer depends on what the plea is and what does plea produce when accepted and applied?

What is the Plea?

To restore means to bring back as the original. People may restore a house, car or furniture. It produces what was. In religion it takes us back to the Bible as the standard of faith and practice. It is based on the Bible as the word of

God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Bible either is or is not God's word. Restore means to return to God's way as the measure and standard. Is the Lord's way right? Is His way valid? Is it correct? Certainly, it is. The original was right.

The Lord built one church and has one plan of salvation and that has not changed. The plea is not to originate or reform but to duplicate the New Testament church in name, work, worship, government, doctrine, etc.

This plea is unique and rejected by denominations. They exist without Biblical authority. We are told we need a 21st century religion but they fail to tell us what that is. They whine that the Bible plan is outgrown, legalistic, traditional and irrelevant. But how they would improve things is not revealed. The restoration work is without human creeds, catechisms, manuals, prayer books, disciplines and confessionals as denominations follow. This plea would put denominations out of business. So it should be. We must follow the Bible without addition, subtraction, alteration or substitution. We must preach what those of the original preached, believe what they believed, practice what they practiced and be what they were; simply Christians. They were the saved who spoke as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). They relied on the Lord's name or authority (Col. 3:17). They learned not to go beyond what was written (1 Cor. 4:6). Since the original was valid, the duplication of it must logically and necessarily be valid.

Because man needs salvation, and the church was established but fell away, men must be called back to God's way. We give heed to warnings found in Matt. 15:9, 13; 2 John 9; Jeremiah 23:10; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 John 4:1.

What Does This Plea Produce?

Salvation is the fruit of it. The one church results from it. Unity comes through it. It is similar to the time when God's Law was found in the temple in days of Josiah, king of Judah. Once read and believed the people returned to the Lord. The restoration plea is produced by sowing the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11) which is the word of God.

A Loud Objection to the Plea

Opponents of the restoration cry that the plea is irrelevant and restoration does not matter. Is sin still in the world? Do people partake of it (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 3: 4)? What is the result of sin (Isaiah 59:1, 2)? Does man need a Savior? Can he save himself by himself? Does God recognize this need of men? What has He provided? What motivated God to make provision? Who is the Savior? What has the Savior done? What must man do? What must one do to be saved? What could be more relevant than this?

Has the church been restored? If not, what is lacking? If it has not been, is it possible to do so? Is there another way to heaven than Christ's way (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Eph. 4)?

We can be thankful for the original, Christ, the apostles and the revelation of God's will. We can be grateful for those before us as well as those presently with us who make the restoration plea. We should want to be in that number for our sake, the sake of others and God's sake.

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The Church's One Foundation

Every Christian is aware that singing is a significant part of his worship of God. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16

both tell us that we by our singing teach and admonish one another as well as praise God. One hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation,” is an old song and frequently used in worship and for good reason. The writer of the verses believed the Bible is the infallible word of God and the sole authority in religion.

“The church’s one foundations is Jesus Christ her Lord”

The overall emphasis of the hymn is that the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. He announced He would build His church and that He as the Son of God would be its foundation as Peter confessed in Matthew 16:16-18. On this fundamental truth rests the entirety of the validity of Christianity. Paul says there is no other foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). He is the tried and precious stone that was to come (Isaiah 18:6) as Peter stated (2 Peter 2:6-9). Ephesians 2:20 speaks of the apostles as the foundation but only in the sense that the Christ they preached was actually the foundation.

This song also contends that Jesus is Lord of the church, the Master, the guide, the instructor and authority. No regulations of human origin supplant His will.

“She is His new creation by water and the word”

The church did not exist before the coming and ministry of Christ except in the mind of Deity (Eph. 1:4; 3:11). It came when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the first Pentecost after the Lord’s ascension (Acts 2). Jesus did not provide a postscript to the Law of Moses but something new. The church is His new creation.

Those that compose the church have become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17) by putting on the new man (Eph.

4:24, 25) having been born again (John 3:3-5) by being baptized (Rom. 6:3, 4) to walk in newness of life as taught in the word. Sins are washed away in baptism (Acts 22:16). We are born again by incorruptible seed, the word of God (1 Peter 2:23). We are begotten by the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). The seed of the kingdom is the word (Luke 8:11). Without the word and without baptism there is no church.

"From heaven he came"

Christ came to this earth from heaven to do the will of Him that sent Him (John 6:38). His specific mission was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Those once lost but are now saved make up the church.

"And sought her to be His holy bride"

The relationship of Christ and the church is like that of husband and wife (Eph. 5:22- 32). This passage, dealing with the marital relationship actually is about Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.

Another passage showing this relationship is Rom. 7:1-4. We are married to Christ when we are members of His church. He is presented as the bridegroom in Mark 2:19, 20. The analogy of Christ and the church as husband and wife ties the two together with a bond that should not be broken. It will not be broken unless the church leaves the bridegroom. Those who would advise to preach Christ and not the church ignore the bond this comparison demands.

"With His own blood He bought her
and for her life He died"

An awesome price was paid for the church. It was the blood of the Son of God (acts 20:28).He purchased it. It belongs to Him. Those in the church do not belong to themselves but to the One who bought them (1 Cor. 6:20). We are justified by the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9). We are redeemed and enjoy forgiveness of sins because of the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).

The value of something is determined by the price paid for it. I know how valuable the church is to Deity. How different from some people who think the church is optional and other churches are of equal value. We are reconciled to God and to each other by the blood of Christ in the body which is the church (Eph. 2:14-16).

"Elect from every nation yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth,
One holy name she blesses; partake of one holy food
And to one hope she presses with every grace endured."

The elect refers to those who God has chosen to save. This choice is not as Calvinists teach but God has predetermined who shall be saved. Those that believe and obey will be saved and those that don't won't. We decide whether to obey or not. The elect make up the church, the saved. Peter said, "that God is no respecter of persons but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is acceptable with him" (Acts 10:34, 35). From all over the earth, people have heard, believed and obeyed. The need for salvation is universal. So is the offer of salvation. Such was the intention of God from the moment He gave His great promises to Abraham.

The unity of the church is a theme of this hymn. We often study the seven "ones" listed in Ephesians four. Division is condemned and unity is that for which the Lord

prayed. How different from the chaotic conditions the multitude of churches presents to the world.

It is in the church, in Christ, where we receive all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Every grace is there. Do we fully appreciate the bounty that is ours in the church?

"Tho' with a scornful wonder we see her sore oppressed"

From the beginning the Lord's church has had its enemies and opponents. We need not be too surprised because the darkness of sin and those that love sin has consistently been in opposition to the Light of truth of the glorious Lord (John 3:19-21). Wicked people are against Christ. Jesus said His disciples would be hated because He was hated. Truth exposes the evil in the hearts and lives of people and they resent the truth.

The apostles were imprisoned and commanded to cease preaching. James was beheaded. Stephen stoned. The church was scattered by persecution. Saul made havoc of the church. The history of Christianity has been stained by the blood of martyrs. So it is today that there be those who detest and despise the way of the Lord. The church is misrepresented, lied against and fought. It will be that way as long as the world continues.

"Her doctrine rent asunder by names and creeds distressed"

The church neither makes nor has the authority to alter doctrine but has the charge to uphold and proclaim the doctrine of Christ (1 Tim. 3:15; 2 John 9-11). Denominations have doctrines that are peculiar to them and distinguish them one from another. There is no such thing as "church of Christ doctrine" except in the sense that the church believes, follows and teaches the doctrine of Christ.

It is so evident that the doctrine of the Lord has been wrested, twisted perverted, distorted and misused by religionists in order to accommodate themselves in religions of their own making. It often seems that those who pursue this abuse of the doctrine of Christ are the self-proclaimed superior "scholars" who are skeptics. Down through the years there have been those who have torn asunder the doctrine of Christ in spite of the Biblical teaching that we neither add to or take from what the Lord has said (Rev. 22:18, 19).

"Yet saints their watch are keeping. They cry 'how long, how long.' And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song."

In face of this persecution the way grows weary and long at times. Those who were martyred for the cause of Christ cried, "How long?" before they and the cause for which they died would be avenged. We have encouraging words throughout the New Testament to not faint and we shall reap. Our mourning shall be turned into eternal joy, peace and blessedness. Paul had great confidence in his eternal destiny. There is coming a day when the night of weeping shall be the morn of song." Things will not only be better but good. A glorious future awaits the faithful in Christ.

What the Hymn Teaches Us

It reminds us of the church's foundation, the relationship of the church with Christ, its divine origin, that it is blood-bought and loved by the Lord. Composed of the redeemed from every nation, yet it is one body, united in the truth it proclaims, enjoying the spiritual blessings God has provided and promised.

In spite of those who would oppose it, even seek its destruction, victory belongs to the faithful in the church. The ways and teachings of men are hindrances, but they shall be overcome. A sure reward is over there in the morning of joy for the church of Christ. We have good reason to use this hymn in our worship.

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Acquila and Priscilla

Acqualia and Priscilla were two persons mentioned in the New Testament and are the subjects of this study. Their names appear in a number of passages that the reader is urged to find and read. (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Romans 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19 and 2 Tim. 4:19). Each of these gives us an insight into their lives and characters. What we learn in Scripture about Acquila and Priscilla is what we ought to be. Their lives were commendable.

The first reference to them is in the book of Acts in connection with the inspired history of the travels of the apostle Paul; the occasion when he came to Corinth on his second missionary journey. He had just come from Athens where he encountered stiff apathy toward God and almost a total rejection of the gospel by the people there. Naturally, he was somewhat depressed. His simple preaching of the gospel had made little impact for Christianity in that citadel of ancient wisdom and philosophy. Most of the reaction was indifference. But what else can one expect from those who consider themselves the wisest in the world?

Paul became acquainted with Priscilla and Acqualia because of several matters they had in common. They were Jews and had a common religious background in the Law of Moses. All Jews anticipated the coming Messiah. They

were in a Gentile environment away from the Jewish homeland and they had a common occupation as tentmakers. It cannot be dogmatically determined whether they were already Christians when they met Paul. It is possible because they were from Pontus and there were some from Pontus present at Pentecost when the church began. Those present could have taken the gospel back with them. Inasmuch there was no church in Corinth, it is most likely they were converted by Paul as they worked together, After all, Paul would preach every Sabbath in the synagogue. Luke, the writer of Acts, calls Acquila a "certain Jew" rather than a brother in Christ. It matters little if anything as to when they became Christians.

Respect for Marriage

This couple was married and to their credit they obviously respected that divinely given institution. Their names always appear together. Sometimes Acquila is named first then Priscilla but other times the other way. There must have been a mutual strength, love and respect between them. They worked together in their trade and faith. There is no suggestion, however, that Priscilla ever violated the inspired teaching of Paul regarding the role of women toward her husband, the home or the church. If she had done otherwise she would not have been commended so highly by the apostle. It seems that she went about her life in a forceful manner, proving she was a valuable assistant (help meet) to Acquila.

Their names were of Roman origin which has given rise to the speculation Acquila was once a slave to a Roman. But Scripture says nothing of this. They had been deported from Rome by Claudius Caesar as were all the Jews at that time. Just why this was done we are not informed.

They Were in Ephesus

They were with Paul in Corinth until he left and went to Ephesus and they went with him (Acts 18:18-19). While in Ephesus they were assistants of Paul and had opportunity to meet Apollos. When they learned Apollos was teaching the already invalid baptism of John the Baptist they took him aside and taught him the way of the Lord more perfectly. What could they have done to help Apollos if they had not known the truth? What good this well-versed and eloquent preacher did from that time forward (Acts 18:28 tells how he "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ") was largely due to the help given him by Aquila and Priscilla.

When Paul wrote Timothy (First Timothy) Timothy was in Ephesus. It is difficult to trace the travels of this couple but it seems they were deported from Rome, went to Corinth, went to Ephesus with Paul and returned eventually to Rome and even later back to Ephesus. Their travels have relevance only because we read of the church meeting at their house several times in different locations.

Priscilla and Acquila might have been present during the harrowing experiences of Paul because there were many enemies of the truth in that city. Paul said they risked their lives for him (Romans 16:3-5). It is possible that this would refer to situations that developed there. Of this we can not be absolutely sure. But they did risk all to help the apostle. Of that we can be sure.

Church People

There are so many attacks against religious people today and some refer to them, sneeringly, as "church people." If

only there were more of them the world would be a better place. Acquila and Priscilla were not ashamed to be identified as church people. As noted, the church often met in their house in Ephesus and Rome.

Helpers

They may be best remembered as helpers. They had a wonderful grasp of the Lord's teaching as to whom greatness belongs. As the Lord had taught, those that serve are the greatest. Specifically they helped Paul. Even to be recognized for their assistance by one as great as Paul is noteworthy.

Matter of Dispute

It may not be a matter that deserves any discussion but now and again some speculate regarding Acquila and Paul. Some have suggested that the vow usually thought to have taken by Paul (Acts 18:18) was actually taken by Acquila rather than Paul. While the wording is not conclusive, it seems more likely the vow was taken by Paul seeing what all he did in connection with it rather than something Acquila did. But it is of no real consequence. We should be aware of this idea, however.

Lesser Lights

My father-in-law, H. Clyde Hale who preached for over fifty years, often spoke of "lesser lights," those considered to be minor in comparison with some of the more notable people. He always considered himself among the "lesser lights" as we all should. There are those in every age who are more prominent than others. This is not unusual. Some

are not considered "somewhat." Priscilla and Acquila might be named among the "lesser lights" when compared with Paul, Timothy or Luke. But what does that matter? They were like the woman who anointed Jesus before His death. Jesus said of her, "She hath done what she could" (Mark 14:8). That is a commendable goal in life for us all?

To study about people like Priscilla and Acquila is an encouragement. It is a boost to hear and know of good people doing good things and God receiving the glory.

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(See Garfield Heights Lectures, 1991, for a long study.)

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Alcohol and Tobacco Use

Thousands are killed on the highways every year and half are caused by somebody drinking alcoholic beverages. This fact alone is enough for Christians to oppose alcoholic beverages. How can a Christian defend a practice that is so deadly against so many?

It may be boring to recite statistics of the problem because they change each year. Statistics are not what cause the Christian concern.

Many people have a virtual apathy toward the consumption of alcoholic beverages. They assume they will be consumed. So what? Therefore, they will condone it. Yet, millions of alcoholics, addicts suffer physical, mental, social, financial, emotional and spiritual havoc. It is self-imposed.

There are costs to the national economy. The tax collected does not come close to what it costs. Can you measure the crime against innocent people due to the beverage? Yet, it is advertised, condoned and defended. Religious teachers have failed to teach the truth regarding it

because so many of their followers use it. Courts do not seem to really care because we witness violators of the law under its influence are treated too lightly. Legislatures that make laws regarding it are usually filled with consumers. It is destructive of the home, creates abuse and brings divorce. There is nothing good that be said about it.

Social Drinking

Some contend "social drinking" is not wrong. The social drinker is one of the most dangerous drinkers. He usually considers himself under control when he is not. There is no doubt that drunkenness is condemned and drunkenness is a matter of degree. All manner of anti-social behavior takes place when a person gets his supply of social drinks. There is no such things as taking alcoholic beverages moderately because you cannot do wrong moderately and it be right.

Biblical Wine

The word "wine" does not always mean strong drink or fermented. This kind of wine is forbidden and its consumption condemned. Even juice in grapes in a cluster is called wine (Isaiah 65:8). That is certainly not strong drink. When some see the word "wine" they mistakenly immediately conclude it is strong drink of the intoxicating sort. That is not so. Furthermore, the wine of the Bible is not the brandied wine on the market today anyway.

There were ways even in ancient times of preventing grape juice from becoming an intoxicating beverage. BIBLE WINES, by William Patton gives a number of ways such was done. The Lord's Supper does not use intoxicating wines. That which is specified is "fruit of the

vine." There is no argument that justifies using strong drink on the Lord's Table.

What Jesus Made

You cannot discuss this subject for very long with one who wants his booze without the subject what Jesus made at the wedding feast becoming the focus of attention. We cannot give a lengthy discussion here about this but enough to show conclusively He did not provide strong drink. Habakkuk 2:15 and Proverbs 23:31, 32 would prohibit giving another strong drink. Jesus did not violate God's law. He did no sin (Heb. 4:15). How dare anyone accuse Christ of violating God's law in his attempt to justify his drinking alcoholic beverage!

Consider the state of what He made (good wine) which is unfermented. The guests show they could discern the taste of what they drank and were not in a drunken state even though they exhausted the wine supply. Before you falsely accuse Jesus one should first be sure he knows exactly what Jesus made.

Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake. This was a medicinal use of alcohol; not being drunk as a beverage. Alcohol can be profitably used to preserve foods without an intoxicating influence. Alcohol can be used to get rid of germs. Alcohol is not what is condemned. The mind-altering, intoxicating body-changing use of it in what is called drunkenness is condemned. It is the number one drug problem in America. Every drink contributes to the destruction of brain cells even when used as a medicine. Why use it when other means and methods are available?

Some drink alcoholic beverages with their regular meals. So what? That does not make it right. Some condone polygamy, prostitution, abortion and slavery but that does

not make it right. God's will is what matters; not what some do. Some do not care about their influence on children, society or even themselves. Most young people learn to drink from the alcohol allowed in the home. They even engage in binges which result in immoralities, death and disease. How any disciple of Christ would attempt to defend such blight on humanity is beyond justification. We have not even addressed the injury and destruction of the body organs caused by consuming of alcoholic beverages.

What about the Use of Tobacco?

Why do people refuse to accept undeniable evidence? They are like the stubborn Israelites of old. The Christian's body belongs to the Lord. It is not to be desecrated and abused but dedicated to the service of the Lord. We are not to be addicted to anything and nicotine is an addicting drug. It is also a poison often used as dog repellent, defence from sharks and can kill in eight seconds. The effects of tobacco on the human body are totally negative. There are twenty noxious vapors that arise from a cigarette. Carbon dioxide is cancer causing. How many have lost their lives after excruciating suffering because of lung cancer caused by smoking? It is slow suicide. It has a destructive impact on the heart, lungs, liver, blood vessels and every other organ of the body. It is known to have damaging effects on an unborn child, with weight loss, less lung development and blood pressure. A child is less likely to survive when its mother is a smoker during pregnancy. It provokes premature births. Respiratory diseases are its gift to man. Have you ever seen a lung that has been removed from a cancer patient that was caused by smoking? What of cancer of the mouth and throat for chewing tobacco? Using tobacco is just plain stupid as well as filthy and sinful.

The Power of Influence

On one occasion I was driving along with a grandchild when a car passed us. James asked me if I saw the driver. I assumed there was one but took no notice. He said the driver was smoking. Then he added, "My daddy says it is wrong to smoke." I told him his daddy was absolutely right. Then he said, "And my daddy doesn't smoke either." Young people learn to smoke seeing their parents smoke. What impression would James' daddy have on him if he saw his daddy doing what he said was wrong?

O yes! It is no more wrong than overeating. Some try to excuse their smoking because others overeat. Two wrongs don't make a right. You cannot do either one without sin.

About the most ridiculous excuse for not using tobacco I have ever heard was that disuse would hurt farmers. The real trouble is that farmers are hurting others with their product. But farmers do not make anybody smoke. The use of tobacco has led many into using marijuana, cocaine and other such things that are even more harmful and wrong. There is not one justifiable excuse for using alcoholic beverages and tobacco. It is disgraceful to do so. But it is also disgraceful, possibly more so, to hear "Christians" trying to justify their use. That is beyond all sense.

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There is a Place for All

There is a place for everyone in the church of the Lord. We can know this because the need of salvation is universal (Rom. 3:10, 23; 5:12) and the offer of salvation is universal (Mark 16:15" "Whosoever will may come."

Christ died for all (Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2). Salvation is intended for Jew and Gentile, male and female (Gal. 3:28). The Lord wants all to be saved rather than perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Those who are saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47). Therefore, this proves there is a place in the church for all who will come to Christ.

The church is one body composed of many members (1Cor. 12:12, 20; Rom. 12:4, 5). We are not all alike because we have different talents, abilities, capacities and opportunities. But we are like those given five, two and one talent. The five and two talent men doubled their assets. The one talent man was severely rebuked and lost what he had. Why? It was not because he did not do as much as the others but because he did not do what he could. He did nothing. He did not try.

What is Expected of Us?

We are only expected to do what we can. Some say, "If only I could preach, teach, lead singing, do something prominent." But that is not the issue. We should be like the woman who anointed Him before His death and was said to have wrought a good work because she did what she could (Mark. 14:6, 7). The widow who gave her two mites gave more than those who were wealthy because she did what she could (Mark 14:42). It is true that to whom much is given, much shall be required (Luke 12:48), but Paul teaches it is accepted according to what a man hath and not as he hath not (2 Cor. 8:12). We are to give as we are prospered but not all are equally prospered (1 Cor. 16:2). The Lord does not expect us to do exactly as others do but

He does expect us to do what we can, find our place and fill it to the best of our ability. Doesn't that make sense?

We all have a mission in life. This does not suggest that all has been predetermined what we shall do, but we have a mission that we are to fulfill. Esther was like that. Mordecai realized that and told Esther, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). She had the opportunity to save her people and she saw her duty and performed it the best she could. Robert E. Lee said the noblest word in our language is the word "duty." It is said of Alvin York, World War I hero from Tennessee, when asked to explain how he was able to do the heroic deeds in battle, that he did simply said, "I seen my duty and done it." That, in principle, is what God expects of us.

Others Who Did What They Could

Hur was not as prominent as Moses, Aaron or Joshua when the Amalekites attacked Israel in the wilderness. But he helped to hold up the hands of Moses while the battle raged which gave Israel the victory. He was not Israel's leader or Moses' prophet. He was not captain of the army like Joshua. But he did what he could.

Eliezer was the servant of Abraham was sent on the mission to find a wife for Isaac among Abraham's kin. He assumed that task with great humility and relied upon God for direction and did what he could. He found Rebecca. He had his role and he fulfilled it.

What of the Israelite maid who told Naaman's wife of a prophet in Israel that could provide a cure for her Syrian master, Naaman? (2 Kings 5). His leprosy was really not her concern but she did what she could. The servant who persuaded Naaman to simply obey the prophet's

instructions after Naaman first angrily balked at doing them did what he could and was most successful for himself and Naaman. They both did what they could.

When Paul was in prison forty men took a vow to kill Paul and plotted the way they could get it done. Paul's nephew learned of this, reported it and Paul's life was spared and he was sent out of Jerusalem to safety. Though not even named, this lad did what he could. None of these persons could be said to be unimportant. They were among the fortunate ones who found their place and filled it.

The Work of Nehemiah

The Bible student knows of Nehemiah when as a cupbearer for the Persian king he learned of the deplorable conditions of his people in Jerusalem after their return from captivity. He could have said it was not his business and he could do nothing about it. But that was not his path. He was grieved, wept but did more than that. We recall all his foresight, actions, labors and eventual success in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He was willing to get involved and do what he could.

"The field is white, the call if clear
Not all will answer Thee;
Thy will be done; I am but one
But you can count on me."

Tools in the Hands of God

There many in the Bible who were used by God as tools in His hands to accomplish His will. Consider the seven men selected to relieve the distress of the Grecian widows shortly after the church began. We can recall Ananias who was sent to tell the way of salvation to Saul, of Tarsus. We

read how young men were used like Joseph, Daniel, Timothy and John Mark. In each instance they did what they could do.

Some God Cannot Use

God cannot use the proud, worldly, unfaithful, lukewarm and lazy. (Some folk's favorite part of the Bible is where they loafs and fishes.) Our service must be voluntary, deliberate, decisive, willing yet with conviction and humbly given. There is honor in working without praise, recognition and fanfare. The Lord condemned those who did what they did in order to receive praise of men.

In the Vineyard of the Lord (Matt. 20:1-16)

The kingdom (the church) is pictured as a vineyard, a place of labor, where His servants serve. The marketplace is the place from which the workers are called. Christ is the giver of the reward and blessing. The workers were called at different hours but they each did as they had opportunity and did what they could and received the blessing.

It necessary we labor in the Master's vineyard. We cannot labor in the Devil's vineyard and expect the Lord's reward. It is important we be in His church to do our work.

Something Specific

We now turn to some activities specifically that we can do. Before we considered them there is an attitude that we must develop before was can accomplish the goal. When Nehemiah led the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, we read of the attitude of the workers as they under took the task. "The people had a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6). This

attitude we must have to succeed in doing what we can. "What is that in thine hand?" God asked Moses Then He instructed him to use it as he could do. There is no such thing as a Christian who can do nothing.

Can You Do These Things?

We can seize opportunities to have fellowship with brethren in cooperation with the work of the church. We can contact absentees lest they drift away. See the non-members and others who visit our services. Contact the bereaved. Attend funerals. Prepare food for the needy, bereaved and newcomers. Send letters, cards, make phone calls and invitations. Provide transportation for those who lack, not just to the worship services but to the doctors, grocery stores, etc. Remember the gospel meetings, lectureships, singings and special classes as well as make room for home Bible studies. This will keep you busy. A prime target is that we live each day in a righteous manner and never do that which would bring reproach on Christ and His church.

You must fulfill your duty to the local church by your faithful attendance. Attendance at worship is an indicator of the life of the congregation. Show hospitality to strangers; support the leadership; give properly because the financial integrity of the congregation depends on its members; be a winner of souls, especially among your own family. Make the assembly a place of refuge, love, warmth, care and helping others get to heaven. Somebody is always in your pew. It is either you or the devil. The preacher sees your pew whether you are present or not. More importantly, God sees your pew. Do you fill your place?

The reason some things get done and others are neglected or defeated is often a case of "too many chiefs

and not enough Indians." Be a good Indian. Rom. 2:6 says that God will render to every man according to his deeds.

Have you ever asked, "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?" Isaiah 6:8, "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, who shall I send and who shall go for us? Then I said, here am I, send me." There is a place for everyone. Let us do as Jesus said when He was but a lad of twelve years of age, "Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business? (Luke 2:49).

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The Church and Our Culture

It may seem strange to some that we discuss such a subject but there are those who contend the church must conform to our culture or soon disappear. What is the attitude of our culture toward the church and what is our response to this attitude? Generally speaking, there are exceptions, the attitude of the culture toward the church is negative, even hostile. Especially is this true when the church revealed in the New Testament is under consideration. There may have been a time in American history when conditions were more favorable but the present situations are not comforting to the Lord's church. This stems from the attitude that the church is irrelevant and out-of-date, has no value for our time, optional at best, no real benefit, only a crutch for the weak and a plaything for the superstitious. Some contend the church is given to showmanship, pageantry, covetous for money, self-righteous, power hungry and an anti-religion attitude is justified. Observe how religious people are pictured in the movies and television. They are wimps, silly, uneducated,

biased, bigoted and intolerant. This is the way those who produce such programs consider religion generally.

Listen to sewer rat celebrities and see their immoral conduct. Hear the profanity, see their T-shirts, read their bumper stickers. You will see we do not exaggerate. Read the laws being passed, the ACLU, remarks by "professors," rulings by many judges, planks of political parties and it cannot be denied that the church is under vicious attack.

While many Americans may be religious they are not righteous because many churches have abandoned any respect for the word of God in favor of conforming to the desires of the culture. The Lord's church is particularly looked upon with contempt, disdain, ridicule, resentment and hated because of where it stands. This is the result of years of heavy doses of humanism, materialism, atheism, Catholicism, Protestantism, divisions, factions and the false doctrine of Darwinian evolution. Some look upon religion in terms of robes, ceremonies, fake miracles and "holy water" and such does not pertain to the church of the Lord.

It cannot be doubted that much criticism of religion has been brought on by such characters as Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swygart, Oral Roberts, Pat Robinson, Benny Hin and other television personalities that present religion in fashions that would disgust anybody. Hypocritical religious people, who say one thing and do another, who condemn sin and partake of it, have caused many to be repelled.

The Lord knew it would be this way and warned against it. Today the church suffers from the philosophy called "unity in diversity" which simply means "do-your-own-thing" and God will be pleased regardless of what it is because nothing really matters.

Our Culture is Ignorant of the Church

Like most people in the world, and in spite of the Bible being the most widely purchased book in the world, most do not know very much about the church revealed therein. Human churches do not teach it. People do not study it. Most do not even know very much about the church to which they belong, let alone the church of the Lord. Ask people who built the church, when, why, where, how to become a member, what is its worship and work, what is the authority, God's plan of salvation, the destiny of the church and they don't have a clue. Probably they will never know because they have swallowed the anti-church propaganda to the extent they will not even investigate and know more about most anything than they do the church.

This negative attitude toward religion is also borne by the church of the Lord because it teaches accountability and that is shunned. It teaches restrictions on behavior and many don't want any. It upholds the difference between right and wrong and many deny there is a right a wrong but they think they are right to think so and you are wrong to not agree with them. The church swims against the current of our culture and is a distinct minority people. This world is not our home. We are just passing through.

Reactions to the Attitude of Culture

Nobody likes to be rejected. Therefore, some seek acceptance at the cost of selling the truth. "Buy the truth and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23). Our Lord was rejected. Why should we think His disciples will not be (Matthew 5:10-12; John 15:18, 20; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 John 3:13)? Some are just not willing to be rejected and seek approval of others and will compromise God's way for the ways of the culture. Seeking larger numbers they will appeal to the

majority and deny the Lord. Is this the kind of reaction God expects from His people? We think not.

We hear some contend the church must change or die; that we should allow the culture to mold the church so it would be relevant. The truth is the other way around. The culture has adversely affected the church but faithfulness to God will not allow that. We dare not decide to join them if we cannot win them.

As previously noted, these conditions have always existed and the church has always had to face them. But we are not saved to accommodate the culture. We must show what the Bible reveals, God's attitude toward the church, how valuable He considers it, that it is a divine institution, teach all the identifying marks of the church, contrast it with denominations and false "isms," and remind the lost that salvation is in the church, the body of Christ. By our manner of life, our words, our attitudes we must have loyalty to God regardless of the culture.

What Attitude Shows

Our attitude toward the church reflects our attitude toward God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, ourselves, our fellowman, our life here and our eternal destiny. Without God everything is nothing, without meaning and nothing matters. Our response to the hostile, vicious and negative attitude that culture generally has toward His church is that we carry out the Great Commission and preach the gospel to every creature. Love, reprove, rebuke, teach, exhort and stand fast. We are in war for the souls of men and cannot and will not allow ourselves to be directed by the whims of culture, human wisdom or any such thing. We may not take the world for Christ but we can take Christ to the world. We will ever teach men that they are

lost in sin, they cannot save themselves by themselves, God has provided a Savior and that only savior is Christ, His only begotten Son. We will teach men what they must do to come to the Savior by faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. When this is done God adds one to His church.

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Priorities of Our Culture

A priority is what comes first, superior, that which is more important, takes precedence and receives preferential treatment. Our culture is our society, human behavior, values, thought, speech, actions, social forms and beliefs. It refers to the conduct characteristic of our society. In contrast to the will of God, priorities and culture are very subject to change. Culture is not the standard for Christians. I do not profess to know or understand all of our culture but only a part of it by experience and more of it from reading, observations and reports. What appears to take priority in our culture is very diverse. Culture is determined by what people say alongside what people do. Saying and doing are often at variance.

Our present culture shares many characteristics of other cultures past and present. This is to be expected. But there are wide differences also. Generally, our present culture is very much at odds with the faith delivered by Jesus Christ. The traits of our culture we shall mention are not necessarily in order of importance. All are important.

Money

Many are like the rich fool of Luke 12. This is evidenced by the greed, grasping, selfishness, covetousness,

materialism and desire for things. The "Almighty Dollar" is the god of many. They seek gain, not God; money, not morals. There is little people will not do if it brings them money. They will sell their own soul and the souls of those around them for money. Some will fight, cheat, steal, kill, gamble, neglect health, family, soul and duty to get money.

Money is not evil, per se. It is the love of money that defiles (1 Tim. 6:10). Solomon proved that money will not bring happiness. We may accumulate it but cannot take it with us when we depart this life. Luke 12:15, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Can there be any doubt that money is a priority of our culture?

Pleasure

Pleasure is not evil. However, many will sin in order to have pleasure. Sin can bring pleasure (Heb. 11:23). Man can satisfy lust, have what he calls a "good time" (no time is a good time that God disapproves) and call his experience pleasure even though the aftereffects are often dreadful for him. Many amusements and entertainments are not wrong. But they can be carried to the excess, become dominant of time and money and posses the person's life. People seek pleasure in recreation, sports (even Lord's Day has become subjected to a day of sports more than worship). People will regularly spend more money on a weekend for pleasure than they contribute to the welfare of others and the promotion of Christianity in an entire year. Is this our mission in life? Is this not a trait of our society?

Fame

Seeking fame, notoriety, with a "see me" syndrome, getting one's face and name before others, clamoring for praise and applause, wanting to be a celebrity and telling people how important one is has captivated the lives of so many. They live to be recognized on the street, being popular, with a name everybody knows. Even in the church some seek position as if that is something that matters. Does it really matter how famous you are? Does that really make you something acceptable before God? Is not this of prime importance to much of our culture? Headline hunters abound all around. Why? It is pride and egotism gone to seed. We are warned not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). We are warned if all men speak well of us (Luke 6:26). Some of the most famous people in the world are among the most degenerate and evil examples of the human race. Fame is deceitful.

Physical Appearance

Huge industries are built around making people "look good." There is much time, money, study and energy spent in making the physical appearance comply with some "experts" say it ought to be. Diets, pills, make up, image changing to appear younger than you are abound. Is this what is so important in life? The way some behave you would think so.

We should take care of the body, our health and desire to appear respectable Is not there reason to question the emphasis placed on style, fashion, weight, hairdo, hair color and other appearance matters? How much of the advertising we see is parading this priority on appearance? It cannot be doubted that this issue is primary with many in our society. Is this what the Christian has his emphasis? It is not according to 1 Peter 3:3.

It is rather disgusting how some have no shame in appearing like those that are of the subculture, the addicts, the bums, the long-haired pot smokers with their ear rings, shabby clothes, unkempt look and smudginess. That is as unacceptable as being overly done the other way. But some who are not like that think it "cool" to appear in such fashion. They have their head on crooked.

Power

Without a doubt the craving for power is the dominant driving force of many lives. Control over others is the goal. To dominate all affairs, events, be in charge, "the man to see," desire to control, manipulate, manage and dictate is how some want to live and is their reason for living. We see it in politics, businesses, schools, homes, everywhere. Even the church now and then has a Diotrophes that wishes to have preeminence (3 John 9) and "lord" over the flock.

Usually those who have power have sought power and were willing to do whatever it took to get that power. That is the priority of their existence. Herod was like that and allowed himself to declared as a god (Acts 12:21, 22).

What those who are so hungry for power do not seem to realize is that they cannot hold power for long at best. They will release it in favor of some other and all their life's emphasis will have vanished into nothingness. They will have sought the fleeting deception of power. (It is not unheard of that some preachers seek power and work diligently in "church politics" to get it.)

Education

We run the risk of being accused of being anti-education. This is not so. We have no objection to proper education,

even getting many degrees, becoming a genuine scholar and expert. It is not wrong to ask about the kind of education one has the ambition to possess. Intellectual attainment can be a good thing, rightly acquired and rightly used. It can also lead a person and others to think someone is something when he is nothing actually before God (Galatians 6:3). Man's wisdom is not always wisdom. Following man's wisdom can lead him to destruction because he places so much trust in man's wisdom he turns away from the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:21). A man may be well versed in many areas but unless he has a knowledge of God he has missed the mark. No person is truly educated who does not know the will of God. He may think so, and others may hold him up as a "scholar" but God's will is a real education. The wisdom of men is foolishness with God (Rom. 1:22; Psalm 14:1).

It is rather pathetic to see people strive so strenuously for titles, degrees, position among those they consider elite and then show their folly by being against God.

Freedom

Freedom has been a glorious concept in our country since before its beginning as a nation. Wars have been fought to obtain and sustain our freedom. Opponents of freedom from within and without have been repulsed, at least thus far. Freedom has certainly been a priority for us.

But some confuse freedom with license. They think freedom means you can do whatever you want without restriction or responsibility and accountability. Some do not want any boundaries on what they say and do. They have no taste for any authority and law. They want to do as they please. That is not freedom that is beneficial but creates chaos and anarchy.

We have freedom in Christ. We are free from sin and spiritual death if we remain faithful to Him. We are free to serve God God's way. We are free to go to heaven. We are not free from all opposition, persecution and hardships common in life. We are not free to live just any way we choose. We do not even belong to ourselves. We belong to Christ. We are not to use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh (Galatians 5:13). Therefore, freedom has a different connation for the Christian than for many of our culture.

Some of our priorities are in the realm of the temporal versus the eternal; the material versus the spirit; the sensual versus the pure. Christ taught, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

Doubtless the reader can list additional priorities some hold in our culture. But the Christian always asks, "What would God have me to say, do and think?" That is what is primary with him. In every area of life the will of God is respected and obeyed.

I recall one good elder with whom I was privileged to serve as preacher would always include in his prayer, "Lord, may we keep our priorities in order." That means God's order.

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Elijah and Others

In First Kings 19-22 and Second Chronicles 18-21:1 we read of a number of people whose names are given and also others who are not named. Information in these passages sometimes overlap but we find information in one that is not found in the other. Let us consider a portion of the information given regarding these people mentioned. We

have to assume that the reader has some knowledge of the history of Northern Israel and Judah in this period when the kingdom was divided into two nations. We shall focus first on four prophets of God that are named; Elijah, Micaiah, Jehu and Eliezer.

Elijah

The career of Elijah was well underway by the time of his great victory in the contest at Mount Carmel. It is surprising to see him in great discouragement following that victory. But we shall not be too hasty to rebuke Elijah because he was threatened by Ahab and Jezebel and forced to flee into Arabia. He was no coward but understandably discouraged because he thought he was the only one in the nation that served the Lord. He had proven the truth and yet the truth was rejected shortly after the proof. God told him he was not the only one and seven thousand had not bowed their knee to Baal. With this word of encouragement he returned to his work as prophet, selecting Elisha as his successor and anointing Jehu (not the prophet) and Hazael to be kings over Northern Israel and Syria.

There is a mark of brilliance in the way that Elijah dealt with Ahab concerning Ahab's abuse of Naboth and seizing Naboth's vineyard. There are few episodes of the abuse of power, greed, wickedness, conspiracy and dereliction of duty than that which was done in that seizure. Ahab and Jezebel showed what degenerate characters they were.

God sent Elijah to meet Ahab after he took possession of the vineyard. When Ahab saw him he addressed him thusly, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (1 Kings 21:20). It was then that Elijah told of the doom that faced Ahab because of his sins. Later Ahab called Elijah the troublemaker of Israel. But Elijah told him he, Ahab, was

the troublemaker because he rejected the word of the Lord. Elijah showed enough love for God, Israel and Ahab to tell him the truth even though it was not what Ahab wanted to hear. Elijah told Ahab that he had "sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord" (1 Kings 21:20). Ahab could look forward to a gruesome death.

Ahab, like many in the first century and today, had no love for the truth (2 Thess. 2:10) It is naïve to think that everyone desires the truth. If Elijah was an enemy and troublemaker the world needs more like him today.

Micaiah

He is another stalwart prophet of God. Ahab hated him because from Micaiah he heard the truth that he did not want (1 Kings 22:8). There was an unholy alliance between Ahab and Jehoshaphat of Judah in a project to retake Ramoth-Gilead from the Syrians. Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to help him and Jehoshaphat agreed to do so without consulting the Lord. When he called for a prophet of God Micaiah was selected. He told the kings they would be defeated. Ahab then put him in prison on a diet of bread and the water of affliction until they returned. Micaiah told Ahab he would not return but would die.

There was one who urged Micaiah told go easy on Ahab and to repeat what the false prophets had told Ahab. Micaiah was urged to be a "people pleaser" rather than deliver the message of God. It took courage but Micaiah told the kings what God had said rather than the preferred message. Things turned out just as Micaiah had foretold.

Jehu

Jehu confronted Jehoshaphat after the defeat by Syria and questioned him, “”Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord” (2 Chron. 19:2). Jehoshaphat is a “mixed bag” when it comes to his life before God. There were some commendable things about him but he also proved to be double-minded and a compromiser. The words of Jehu are like those of Paul in Ephesians 5:11, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” It is treason to be an ally with the enemies of God. Jehoshaphat had done that very thing.

Eliezer

A fourth prophet in these chapters is another man who rebuked Jehoshaphat. In spite of the misfortune he suffered because of his alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat also made alliance with Ahaziah of Northern Israel who succeeded Ahab. They built a navy together. Eliezer warned him against such an arrangement but as is often stated, “You just can’t warn some people.” But it makes a difference who we have companionship. This navy was ultimately destroyed (2 Chron. 20:37). We see so many instances of sin in high places in that period even as we do today.

Our own government condones abortion, homosexuality, immorality, distortion of truth, greed and corruption among those in control of government. This is not a political statement but recognition of true conditions. So many in leadership are arrogant, defiant, blatantly selfish with an “in your face” attitude toward the people of the nation as well as God and His will. These prophets spoke against such as that. Will we do as much?

Ahab and Jezebel

Ahab was a king dominated by his wicked wife. He was weak and derelict of duty, a worshipper of idols, fearful of truth and a pouter. There two commendable flashes of action by Ahab. One, when he was threatened by Benhadad of Syria he responded, “Let not that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off” (1 Kings 20:11). These were good words in the face of danger. Before that conflict ended Benhadad was asking for mercy.

The other was when Elijah rebuked him for his evil deed against Naboth and Ahab repented. Because of this God postponed the fall of his house until after his death. But what a legacy to leave to his children! We all are aware of the reputation and character of Jezebel, one of the wickedest women to have ever lived. Her very name is a by-word of evil unto this day.

Zedekiah

Zedekiah was a false and lying prophet who always told Ahab what he desired to hear. He abused the true prophet Micaiah and mocked him. Other characters of these chapters that are named are Jezebel, Benhadad, Naboth, Hazael and Elisha.

The Unnamed

Of course, there were many soldiers in the battles whose names are not mentioned. Of particular interest is the soldier who shot his arrow at random that found its way into the body of Ahab and killed him. This man probably never knew how much good he did that day killing Ahab.

There were the evil conspirators with Jezebel in bringing Naboth to his death. What of the sneaking, sniveling

compromiser who urged Micaiah to prophesy falsely to please the kings? Then there are the seven thousand who had not bowed their knee to Baal. Could they but know the strength and courage they gave Elijah and Christians today as they motivate us to faithfulness against heavy odds.

Few have their names written in the book of life. Israel's history was not written just for the sake of recording history. It is for our sake and the lessons we can learn from those of the past (Romans 15:4). It was to record the history of the people through whom God brought salvation to the world.

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The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31 gives us the account of the rich man and Lazarus. Some call this a parable but it does not measure as a parable. Usually when Jesus taught with parables it is stated that they were parables. Not so in this case. Names were not used in parables but we have the names of Lazarus, Moses and Abraham in this account. This is most likely a historical record. Even if "just a parable," as some describe it to minimize it, it teaches the truth and Jesus would not use deception to convey His message.

We are introduced to two very different characters not only in their physical conditions but their spiritual state. Having possessions is not what made the rich man evil. Poverty is not why Lazarus was blessed spiritually. Possibly the rich man showed too little concern for his needy neighbor but his riches did not condemn him. The fleshly condition of Lazarus was a human tragedy. He ate the leftovers from the rich man's table and dogs were his companions. Even after

death their existence was quite different from each other and different from their condition on earth.

Where They Went

The fleshly state of a person does not indicate his spiritual condition. Where these two went after death was not the eternal destiny of the soul. Before one enters that state there must be the return of Christ, the resurrection, the judgment and sentencing. Where they went was a temporary place of the soul prior to those events. For Lazarus it is called Abraham's bosom, a place of comfort, safety, deliverance from misery, protection and provision. For the rich man it is called hell, a place of torment and suffering, so intense a drop of water would bring respite.

Consider the Word "Hell"

Some who have tried to push modern versions ridicule the King James Version for rendering this word "hell" in this account. It is a translation of the Greek word *hades.* There are two Greek words in the New Testament translated by the one English word "hell. The other is *gehenna. Gehenna* means the place of eternal punishment. *Hades* means the temporary unseen state of the dead. The word here is *hades.* To render it "hell" is not incorrect because the English dictionary gives both meanings to the word "hell." The American Standard Version does make it clearer by making a distinction in the translation. There no KJV "error" as some charge.

Hades is in two parts. One part is called Abraham's bosom or Paradise (where Jesus went at His death). The other is a place of torment where the rich man went, called

Tartarus. Lazarus was with the father of the faithful and the rich man banished into an existence to be avoided.

A Request

The rich man makes a request of Abraham that he would allow Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue. The request was denied because there is a great gulf between the two that cannot be crossed. While this is a comfort to those in Abraham's bosom it is fatal to those like the rich man because there is no change of their condition once they die from the state in which they died. There is no passing from one the other.

A Second Request

The rich man then asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to his brothers and warn them of the place where he was so they would not come there. It is commendable that he would want to warn his brothers but it was too late. He could not go back. Furthermore, the brothers had the Law of Moses as their guide and they had what they needed at that time. Nothing special would be done on their behalf. "They have Moses and the prophets," he was told. Nothing could be added by Lazarus returning to them. The rich man was like some today who are not content with what God has revealed in His word and want God to do something special for them. This will not happen. We have the word. If the brothers would not hear what God provided they would not listen to this beggar if he returned.

Lessons to Learn

(1) Whatever Jesus teaches is true whether a parable or a record of a historical event.
(2) "It is appointed unto man once to die" (Heb. 9:27) regardless of their condition in this life.
(3) There is a wide variance between people and their circumstances in this life.
(4) We dare not rely on material prosperity as a sign that all is well with the soul.
(5) We see the necessity of preparing for eternity in this life. There is no second chance to be offered.
(6) Jesus not only taught there is a life after this one but in that life there is consciousness and awareness, even memory. "Son, remember…"
(7) Since both men were children of Abraham (therefore children of God; of Israel) and now one is saved and one is lost, how can one claim that once one is a child of God he cannot be lost?
(8) Does not this insist that we must have knowledge of what God has revealed and be content with that?
(9) There is awaiting mankind both reward and punishment depending on their life while on the earth.

How much would the rich man give, if he had it, to have one more day to make preparation for eternity! Would he not gladly sacrifice anything to escape his destiny?

Those in the Hadean world of Abraham's bosom shall be called into heaven. Those in the place of the rich man will be in torment eternally.

* * * * *

Elijah Under the Juniper Tree

This study focuses on the text of First Kings 19:4-10. There is a legend that one day the devil decided to sell his

tools except one; DISCOURAGEMENT. He said, “I can tool into the heart and open the way to destruction as easily by this tool as any that I possess.” Discouragement is a dangerous state of mind because it leaves a person open to assault by the enemies of the soul.

Elijah, God’s prophet, was down and almost out. Why was this? It is not what you would expect at this point in his life because in the previous chapter we have the record of the great contest that took place on Mount Carmel where Elijah had just led all Israel to a great victory for the Lord. He had asked the people, “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him And the people answered him not a word.” Many were worshippers of the false god called Baal.

After the evidence was conclusive that Baal was a false god and Jehovah of heaven was the true God the people cried, “The Lord, he is the God. The Lord, he is the God.” Yet, Elijah was very discouraged in spite of this victory.

Upon this victory Jezebel, a worshipper of idols, sought his life and vowed to kill him as the false prophets had been killed. He was not a coward but he was forced to flee into the wilderness of Arabia to spare his life. He was now sitting under a juniper tree.

Have you ever been there? Are you there now? Do you know someone who is there? If you have never been there it is likely you will be some day.

Why People Get Discouraged

What causes people to become discouraged? Why do some lose all interest in life, want to give up, quit and even seek to take their own life? Why do people lose the zest for living and only see gloom and doom, dragging through life,

dreading each day and fearing each night? There are many who are in that miserable condition.

Hardships in life can cause discouragement. Bad health, financial loss, death of loved ones, defeats, betrayals and disappointments call cause it if we allow it. We make honest efforts to do what is right but at times it seems it does not pay.

Why Elijah Was Discouraged

As noted, he was a fugitive and fleeing from the evil hand of Jezebel. He was physically weary, broken and tired. We hear much about the influence of the mind over the body. Elijah suffered from that reality. He had just made a hard journey from Jezreel to Beersheba, doubtless in haste, fear and danger. He had not had proper food and drink but loss of sleep.

The first thing the Lord did to bring Elijah out of his discouragement was to allow him physical restoration. When depressed we need sleep, rest and nourishment. God allowed Elijah to rest. If you find yourself under the juniper tree do not forget the care of the body, its necessities and the healing effects of a robust physical state. Even as our Lord went about Palestine doing His work He took time now and again to rest.

Elijah Was Lonely

You might think that a man of the disposition and character of Elijah would be above the pain of loneliness and not in need of companionship and sympathy. Is there really such a person? We are not like that. God created man to be a social creature. He said it was not good for man to be alone. Elijah was a man of like passions and emotions as

we. He needed friends who agreed with him and understood him to help him just as we have that need. We treasure our friends, family and fellowship of brethren and are more dependent on what they do for us than we think.

Elijah thought he was the only one in Israel who served the Lord faithfully. When God found him under the juniper tree Elijah explained, “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; am they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:10).

The Lord told him he was not alone because there were yet seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). There were others who held with him common convictions, suffered common problems and fought common battles. Others were concerned for the same things as was Elijah.

Elijah Was Disappointed

Disappointments can breed discouragements. He felt he was a fugitive in his homeland among the very people he sought to help. There was a price on his head. He felt he was a failure even though the Mount Carmel event had gone his way. He thought surely all Israel would follow the Lord. But that was not the case. Had not he done as he ought and just as God instructed? Was not God glorified by his work? Had he not stood for the truth? But he did not see the good fruit of his efforts.

So often the best part of a person’s labors are unseen by that person. In fact, what he does may not bear fruit until later, even after he has left this life. They may not always produce as much as you would desire. But if you have done as you ought, that is a measure of success already. The

Lord has a different measure of success than what men think. God's verdict regarding Elijah was not the same that he thought about himself.

Back to Work

Having taken care of the body and having shown Elijah he was not alone but more successful than he imagined and his labor was not in vain, God put Elijah back to work. Nothing dispels discouragement like getting back to the work that needs to be done. He had done well but there was more he was to do. He was to anoint Jehu (not the prophet) to be the next king of Northern Israel, anoint Hazael to be king of Syrua, and select Elisha to be his own successor.

Few things invigorate the body and mind like knowing there will be others after you who will carry on your good work. What you do will last and continue with others. Especially is this true of those who serve the Lord because their work does not only affect this life but life beyond the grave. There is someone who will take your place and keep the things you gave your life to alive. Elijah found Elisha and gave him his mantle. This was a great source of encouragement to Elijah as is also to Christians today. So when you get discouraged find something to do that is beneficial to others. Not only will that help them but will help lift you ought of the gloom and darkness of discouragement, help you see your own worth and direct your paths to joy and spiritual prosperity.

The Deepest Discouragement

Probably the deepest discouragement comes in the knowledge of our own sins, moral failures, shortcomings and transgressions. Most of us realize that we are

inadequate in so many ways. Because of these things we suffer regret. Regret can provoke discouragement. We may think what we do does not matter anymore and nobody cares, that we have fallen too far and cannot get up. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is no pit into which we can fall from which we cannot be lifted; no sin that cannot be forgiven. The lord does not consider sin the last thing. There is forgiveness.

This is not said to minimize the deadliness of sin but that we might be reminded how God forgives when we meet the conditions he has given. “Tho your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). When God forgives the sins are gone. Romans 4:7, 8, “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impure sin.” The way of forgiveness is to come to Christ who came to forgive us. We should think our moment of discouragement is the final chapter of life.

It Is Like This

There was a young lawyer who became so discouraged. He had few clients and lost most cases. He walked with his head down, face drawn, sad, forlorn, his back was stooped and he had a furrowed brow. In the same rooming house where he stayed was a young painter of portraits who asked the lawyer if he would allow him to paint his picture. He agreed. But when the portrait was finished, instead of having painted him as he saw him he had painted him walking erect, head high, with a great stride and a smile on his face. When the lawyer saw it he remarked, “If you see me like that then I can be like that; and I will be like that.” The painter saw him as God sees us; not only as we were, and as we are, but as we can be.

A man fussed at a little boy that the boy was worthless and no good. The little boy responded, “God isn’t through with me yet.” Is that not the same way with us?

So be aware that discouragement is a tool of the devil to seek our destruction. Recognize it for what it is and the source of it. Get up from your juniper tree and use the Lord’s prescription for returning to a life of service. The devil cannot defeat us when we walk with the Lord. So let us be up and about our Father’s business.

The Christian has more reason to be optimistic than anyone on earth. We have forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God and His children, the privilege of prayer, His providence, His guidance, hope for this life and eternity and a real purpose for living. This world will pass and with it common trifles. Let us walk with the Lord. Be not dismayed whate’er betide; God will take care of you.

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Eli and Samuel as Leaders

Eli and Samuel were two outstanding Old Testament people in the history of ancient Israel. We read of them and their careers in First Samuel. They had several things in common. Not only did they have association with each other during Samuel’s youth, but they both were outstanding leaders of the people. Both served as a judge in Israel; the last two judges, even though neither had their record in the book of Judges. Eli was a priest and Samuel was a seer. They both had some very commendable qualities but they had a common weakness that was bad. Their lives overlapped.

Samuel is considered the most honorable of all the fifteen judges of whom we read and with justification for that opinion. He is listed alongside Moses, Gideon, Joshua and others in Hebrews eleven as being one of the examples of faith. Their association began when Hannah, Samuel's mother, brought Samuel to the tabernacle for training by Eli. Samuel lived near the candlestick in the tabernacle.

Eli

He was judge immediately prior to Samuel. He was also high priest and judged Israel forty years. The first notice of him is not complimentary because he accused Hannah, as she was praying for a child with no sound and only her lips moving, that she was a wicked woman and drunk. Such hasty judgment was certainly not becoming a high priest. The son for whom she prayed was Samuel who later took the place of Eli.

His greatest failure was in the upbringing of his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. He lacked leadership in his home. His sons were also priests but were immoral and involved in evil dealings. All the blame did not rest with Eli but he could have done more to restrict them. Scripture says, "He restraineth them not." He had the power and authority to terminate their wickedness but did not do so. He was accused of honoring his sons above the Lord. His own conduct brought upon him God's dispeasure. We cannot put even our families before God. When Eli was told that the punishment would be that his house would be cut off from the priesthood and none of his descendants would live to old age, Eli simply surrendered and said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."

Is it not true that too many church leaders, preachers and others lose their own children as they busy themselves in

trying to save others? Our first “mission field” should be our own home, children and family.

Eli and Samuel

Eli showed great understanding, kindness and wisdom when helping Samuel. God called Samuel in the night and Samuel thought the voice was that of Eli. He went into Eli several times inquiring what Eli wanted, but was informed Eli had not called him. Eli perceived it was the Lord calling Samuel and advised Samuel to answer, “Speak, Lord, for they servant heareth.” This reflects the disposition of Eli and is also a commentary on the entire life of Samuel.

Eli and the Ark of the Covenant

That which brought on the death of Eli was the result of the capture of the ark by the Philistines. The ark had been wrongfully taken to the battle field by the sons of Eli. The report of the battle to Eli revealed that Israel had been defeated, his sons had been killed and the ark captured and taken into enemy country. Hearing this last report Eli, at the age of 98, fell backwards, broke his neck and died. That the ark was captured was more than the old man could take. Now that Eli was dead, Samuel became Israel’s leader and the last judge before a kingdom was adopted.

Samuel

Samuel led Israel during some very crucial times. He led the transition from the judges to the kings. Being a son of godly parents, Hannah and Elkanah, and trained by Eli, he was prepared for his role. His name means “asked of God.” He served as judge, prophet, advisor to Saul and spiritual

guide to David. He was not a warrior like so many of the judges before him. He was respected by the people from the time of his call. “And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord” (First Samuel 3:19, 20). His most notable record was in his last years.

Samuel at Mizpeh

Shortly after taking the leading role he called Israel together to Mizpeh for sacrifices. The Philistines learned of that gathering and launched an attack and Israel was smitten. But the tables were turned on them. The Lord thundered a great thunder upon the Philistines and discomfited them. It was that Samuel raised a stone and called it “Ebenezer,” meaning, stone of help. We sing of this event when we sing, “Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I’ve come.” This was the only major military effort during the rule of Samuel because the Philistines attacked them no more during his life. There awaited him a great disappointment for the people grew weary of a government led by the Lord and wanted a change.

Samuel and Saul

The people wanted a king and told Samuel he was growing old, his sons were wicked (both charges were true) but that was not the real reason they wanted a different government. They wanted to be like the nations around them. Samuel was grieved but God told him the rejection was of Him, not Samuel. This was something Gideon, many years before, would not accept. God allowed but did

not approve of their wishes. Samuel anointed Saul to be the first king.

Saul was a disappointment to Samuel. Saul took it upon himself to offer sacrifices without Samuel which he should not have done. Saul failed to destroy the Amalekites as instructed but saved Agag, the king, and many animals Saul said were to be used for sacrifice and Samuel told him, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22).

As Saul became more powerful Samuel slipped into the background until called upon to anoint David to be the next king. During his last years he went about the land with calmness, dignified, with a reverent and obedient manner, praying for the people and teaching them God's will. As Samuel had anointed the first king for Israel, he also anointed the second, only to see before his own death how these two were very much at enmity against each other, primarily because of Saul's jealousy and mean spirit. During these tense years of struggle between David and Saul, Samuel was a counselor to David and a guide. Samuel died with the first king seeking the life of the one to be the second king.

The farewell address of Samuel to the nation is something to behold. He challenged anyone to lay charges against him and said he would correct whatever fault any found in him. None brought forth anything against Samuel. Seldom do we read of men relinquishing power to another with such wisdom and refinement.

Samuel established schools for the prophets; the first educational institutions for religious instructions of which we read in Scripture.

The dark spot in Saul's life was how he failed, like Eli, to rear his sons to be righteous. They perverted judgment, took bribes, turned aside after lucre and walked not in the

ways of Samuel. They provided one of the excuses the people used for clamoring for a king.

Samuel and Witch of Endor

This particular event involving Samuel is one that is a puzzle to me. Saul was distressed as he faced the Philistines in battle. He wanted to talk with Samuel who had died. Saul had outlawed such people as this witch but he sought her out nonetheless. How it was that she brought up Samuel, I do not profess to know. I rather think she was as surprised as any that Samuel came forth to advise Saul.

What Samuel told Saul was not to Saul's liking. Israel would be defeated and Saul and his sons killed. It came to pass just that way.

At the death of Samuel all Israel mourned for he had been a worthy leader for the people for such a long time, faithfully carrying out his responsibilities to both Israel and to God. Little wonder he is listed in Hebrews eleven because he is a teacher of men even yet by the record of his good and righteous life.

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Jeroboam

A name can call up and provoke thoughts of good or evil. This name, like the name of Judas, Jezebel and Pilate, reminds one of sin and rebellion against God. Some wrongly claim there is nothing in a name but nobody would

ever name their child Jeroboam because of the two men of the Bible who wore that name because they were evil. Both of these men were kings of Northern Israel. They are usually distinguished be calling the first one Jeroboam 1 and the second Jeroboam 2, although the Bible does not use this distinction Jeroboam 1 was the first king of Northern Israel and Jeroboam 2 was the thirteenth. Jeroboam 1 is thought to be the worst of the two. To describe his wicked son Nadab it was stated, “He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 15:26).

The one we shall study in this lesson is Jeroboam 1 of the tribe of Ephraim and the son of a widow. We read of him in First Kings and Second Chronicles. There had always been a jealousy and tension between the tribes of Ephraim and Judah and it comes to the forefront with this man who was first in the service of Solomon of Judah. He is described as a mighty man of valor, young and industrious with leadership ability to whom was given charge of the house of Joseph, which was the tribe of Ephraim. There was trouble for Solomon toward the end of his reign and Jeroboam was part of that trouble.

Jeroboam and Ahijah

Ahijah was a prophet of God who was sent to Jeroboam. When they met Ahijah took a garment, tore it into twelve pieces, gave ten of them to Jeroboam and told him this meant that the nation of Israel would be divided and ten of the tribes would be given to him to rule as king. With this forecast conditional promises were made to Jeroboam how he could have a successful reign for himself and his descendants. “And I shall take thee and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shall be king

over Israel. And it shall be if thou wilt hearken to all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statues and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee" (1 Kings 11:37, 38). He did not meet those conditions, however. The reason the ten tribes would be taken from the house of David was because Solomon had not walked in the way of the Lord. Two tribes remained under Solomon and his descendants.

In some way this meeting of Jeroboam and Ahijah became known to Solomon and Solomon sought the life of Jeroboam so that he fled to Egypt until Solomon died. Then he returned to his homeland.

Jeroboam and Rehoboam

Rehoboam followed Solomon as king. The people approached him to lessen the burdens Solomon had imposed upon them. Rehoboam consulted advisors young and old but took the advice of the younger ones to make their burdens even greater, whereupon the people rebelled against him. They gathered together and selected Jeroboam to be their king. Rehoboam was prepared to wage war against these rebels to reunite his kingdom but God forbade him to do so. Jeroboam assumed power over the ten tribes.

Jeroboam Swings into Action

The first thing Jeroboam did was to fortify his land against potential enemies, especially Judah. He showed himself insecure and disobedient because he became a major "change agent." He changed the way the people were to worship. Rather than allowing them to go to Jerusalem

as was their manner, he build altars and golden calves for them to worship in the southern part of Northern Israel in Bethel and in Dan in the northern part of the nation. He said, “It is too much” for them to have to go to Jerusalem. Actually, he was afraid if his people went to Jerusalem, which was in Judah, they might return their allegiance to the house of David and overthrow him.

Not only did he change the object of worship (from God to idols) and the place but also installed vain fellows to the priesthood that did not belong. They were not even of the tribe of Levi from which all priests were to come. He changed the time of the feasts and observances to his way. In disregard to the promises God offered him he wasted his opportunity and talents to his ruin. We wonder why there was not resistance to his changes from the people.

Jeroboam Rebuked

There was an unnamed prophet of God from Judah who went to Jeroboam and denounced his idols (1 Kings 13). The altar was rent and ashes poured from it. This prophet even called the name of the man who would destroy it all. It was Josiah about 350 years later. When the prophet condemned Jeroboam the king commanded the prophet be seized. But his hand withered and his arm paralyzed. He cried to the prophet for relief and it was given him. Jeroboam then invited the prophet to return with him to his palace and eat with him. The prophet refused. The prophet had been instructed to go and do his work, return to Judah and not eat nor drink in Northern Israel. So he started home. On his way he was met by another prophet who told him God had directed him to tell the first prophet to return with the second prophet and eat. It was a lie, but it was believed. The result was that the first prophet that had been

faithful in his work and had refused Jeroboam brought his own ruin by believing a lie, was met by a lion on his way home and killed.

In spite of all this evidence of going against God's will Jeroboam persisted in idolatry and evil. He reigned twenty-two years. His son, Nadab, reigned only two years before Baasha destroyed the entire family and took the throne.

Repeatedly there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, and later between Jeroboam and Abijam (the son of Rehoboam) until Jeroboam died. In these wars Jeroboam was usually the loser.

A Son of Jeroboam Dies

A warning was given to Jeroboam by Ahijah the prophet who had become old and blind. A son of Jeroboam named Abijah fell sick (1 Kings 14). (Take note of the similarity of names during this period of history.) Jeroboam sent his wife to see the prophet regarding his son. She disguised herself. But when she came to the door of the prophet he addressed her immediately as the wife of Jeroboam blowing her "cover."

The prophet told her the son would die when she reached home. He also rebuked Jeroboam for his unfaithfulness to God and said that his seed would soon be cut off, his family would cease to exist, he would die in the city and dogs would eat his flesh. Northern Israel would be smitten and scattered because they would follow his evil ways. All of this eventually came to pass as Northern Israel was taken into Assyrian captivity from which they as a nation never returned. What a legacy this man left for his people!

His Character

What can we say of the character of Jeroboam 1? He was a person with exceptional capacities, but his personal ambition and disloyalty to Solomon and God proved his undoing. He misused his talents and wasted his opportunities, set aside God's promises and went his own way to destruction of himself and all those around him. He created strife and shame because of his arrogance and defiance. He was too self-willed to be called good.

We learn from Romans 15:4 these things were written for our learning. We can see that the Jeroboam's are not all dead. We want to be careful lest we become so much like him that we bring about our own downfall.

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Barnabas

There are what we call major characters of the Bible, like Paul, Peter, James and John, and lesser ones, like Timothy, Luke, Silas and Mark. The lesser ones are often overshadowed to the extent that we do not gain profitable information regarding them and their good qualities as we can do if we would focus more attention on them. One of the lesser characters neglected is a man named Joses, or Joseph, better known as Barnabas who name means "son of prophecy." He is also identified as a "son of consolation" or "son of exhortation." These terms are significant because they reveal to us that this man was a preacher with the ability to exhort, strengthen, build up, comfort, lift up and admonish. There is always a great need for just such people. We are here to help one another get to heaven and Barnabas realized that and worked hard to do that. We also note how he was one of warm emotion and deep feeling for others, tender of heart, considerate of others, perceptive of

the value and abilities of others that could be incorporated into the cause of Christ.

He was a Jew of the tribe of Levi but no indication that he was a priest. His home country was Cyprus, the country into which he and Paul first went when they embarked on what is called Paul's first missionary journey and where he and John Mark returned after Barnabas and Paul parted company. He was a kinsman of John Mark (cousin or uncle) which may partially explain his reluctance to do as Paul insisted and leave John Mark from traveling with them on the second journey. Rather he took Mark with him to Cyprus where they continued the preaching of the gospel.

A high compliment is given him in Acts 11:24, "For he was a good man; full of the Holy Ghost and of faith."

Good Things about Barnabas

The notations we make are not taken in chronological order but they show the kind of man Barnabas was. In the early days of the church Acts 4 reveals that Barnabas was a man of means and owner of property that he sold and laid proceeds at the apostles' feet as did others. (Ananias and Saphirra got in trouble for the way they handle things.) Why he was singled out to report his gift we can only speculate. It may be because he is mentioned quite often after this event in spreading the gospel. This shows his generosity, compassion and willingness to share what was committed to his trust to the cause of Christ and the relief of those in need. He used what he had to the glory of God. Who cannot commend him for this? He knew that we are to "honor God with our substance" (Proverbs 3:9), that we serve God by serving others, and he understood it.

When news came to Jerusalem that the gospel had been preached and received in Antioch the brethren in Jerusalem

thought is best to send some of their number to see those in Antioch. Barnabas was among those chosen to go. He is called an apostle but not one of the twelve apostles of Christ. The word apostle means "one sent" and he was one that was sent by the church to Antioch where he stayed an entire year. It is evident that Barnabas enjoyed the confidence of his brethren to work and be sound in the faith. He was a leader in the church in Jerusalem.

We find later another time when he could rightly be called an apostle of the church when he and Paul were sent by the church in Antioch on the first missionary journey.

He was with Paul when brethren in Antioch decided to send assistance to the churches in Judah.

Barnabas Stood by Paul

Paul was converted in Damascus. It was some years later before he visited Jerusalem. When he did come he was not at first well received by all the brethren because they were fearful of this man who had once been a rapid persecutor of the church. It was Barnabas that had confidence in Paul and took him to the others and convinced them of his genuine conversion. Because of the dangers to his life Paul later escaped to Tarsus, his original home. What might have been the career of Paul if Barnabas had not accepted him? Knowing the apostle's conviction, he probably would not have done much differently than he did. But isn't it true that sometimes people might have done more and done better if they had been encouraged rather than discouraged? Barnabas was a man who encouraged others.

It was while Barnabas was in Antioch (where there was this church composed of both Jews and Gentiles and where the disciples were first called Christians) that he went to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him back with him. This was

the beginning of a powerful two-man team in the cause of Christ. Scriptures show there was a tremendous teaching corps in that church. While there the church determined to send Paul and Barnabas, along with John Mark, on the first missionary journey. It was to Antioch that they returned and rehearsed all that God had done by them on that tour.

Barnabas and Problems

The early church had problems regarding Judaizing teachers who attempted to bind the Mosaic Law (at least portions of it) on Christians, even saying one must be circumcised to be saved. This was a disturbance to the church almost everywhere Paul went. A dispute arose over this question while Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch. It had not been a problem for Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel to Gentiles while on their journey. It was not a problem for them now. But it arose in the church and needed to be settled.

Paul and Barnabas were among those sent to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles there to discuss this issue. The apostles stood in the same conviction as these two but others were contentious. The discussion that took place is sometimes called the Jerusalem Conference. It was not a conference of brethren to legislate doctrine. The truth had already been settled by revelation from the Holy Spirit that the gospel is for all on the same terms. The meeting was for brethren to decide to obey the Holy Spirit.

Peter spoke about taking the gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile. Paul spoke of his preaching to Gentiles, as did Barnabas. James quoted Old Testament prophecy that showed everyone was to be taught the gospel and saved on the same terms. Acts 15:12, “Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring

what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them". The issue should have ceased to be an issue but it was not. It followed Paul wherever he went. The epistles of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews were all addressed to this problem. They all worked to bring unity and understanding to all the church everywhere.

Inasmuch as Peter and Barnabas had been major factors in this conference, it is all the more surprising that a notable dispute took place in Antioch when Peter withdrew himself from Gentile brethren under the pressure of some from Jerusalem who would not readily receive Gentiles. Even Barnabas was carried away in the wrong direction. How could these men, knowing the truth they had upheld, be so wrong? Paul contended with them for truth's sake. Barnabas may not have at first how serious was the infraction being imposed against Gentile Christians.

Barnabas, Paul and John Mark

We know there was dispute regarding the taking of Mark with them on the second journey. Paul was dead set against it. Mark had started with them on the first but returned home for reasons not revealed. Whatever were the reasons Paul did not consider them justified. Barnabas may not have excused Mark but he did not want to cast him aside. He was a kinsman. But Barnabas had the ability to see the potential in a person, even as he had Paul when he brought him from Tarsus, and would not forsake Mark. He took Mark with him and Paul took Silas and they both continued preaching the gospel. They never became hostile toward each other. In fact, later Paul commended Mark as a profitable servant of the Lord. One has suggested that Paul was probably right about Mark at the time of separation, but Barnabas was right about Mark in the long run. It was

an instance when two good brethren differed on a matter of judgment but retained their fellowship.

On the Journeys

On one occasion Paul and Barnabas were considered to be gods, Jupiter and Mercury. Paul dispelled that notion, however. Barnabas risked his life as well as Paul when there was such opposition to their preaching. He suffered the same hazards of travel as did Paul. He was with Paul when the men of Lystra took Paul outside the city and stoned him until thought he was dead. There cannot be any doubt that Barnabas was a soul-winner and sacrificed himself for the salvation of others. He was an evangelist of high proportions.

Did He Have a Weakness?

Is there anyone who does not? His weakness may have been evident when he joined Peter in pulling away from Gentiles for a while. He may have been too insistent regarding John Mark but that worked out successfully. He may have had a disposition for brethren to work in unity to the extent he would not cross the false teachers that disturbed the church. But to accuse him of that would not be based on confident information.

The church needs more people like Barnabas with his kind, compassionate disposition toward others, giving help to the downtrodden, encouraging brethren in times of stress. Is it not more correct to consider Barnabas the way the Holy Spirit identified him as we noted earlier, Acts 11:24, “For he was a good man.”

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Words of Thomas

In Matthew 10:3 we have the name of Thomas as an apostle of Christ. He is also listed among the apostles present when Jesus ascended into heaven and they returned to the upper room in Jerusalem where they were told to wait until they received power from on high, which was the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Thomas was a twin also called Didymus. There is not as much revealed about Thomas as James, Peter, John and Paul, but more about him than many of the others. He is best known for his words which are recorded in the book of John.

John 11

Here we have the record of the friend of Jesus, Lazarus, being sick. His sisters sent for Jesus but Jesus delayed going to his side. He and his apostles were beyond the Jordan where they had been driven by His enemies. He remained there for two days before departing for Judea. He waited until Lazarus was dead.

He finally said, “Let us go into Judea gain.” To go would mean danger because the hostility against Jesus was growing among those that hated Him. Most of the disciples objected to this suggestion reminding Him how some sought to stone Him. But Jesus insisted they go.

It was then that Thomas spoke. “Let us go also, that we may die with him” (11:16). Is it not obvious that Thomas wanted to do whatever Jesus wanted to do? He encouraged the others to do likewise. He was willing to face whatever danger faced Christ, even unto death. His devotion and loyalty cannot be questioned.

The little band of disciples and Jesus made the journey, came to where Lazarus was, and Jesus raised him from the dead. It was a marvelous experience for these disciples, including Thomas, to see Lazarus come forth from the tomb and witness this demonstration of Jesus being a conqueror of death. This miracle gave additional evidence that He was who He claimed to be; the Son of God.

John 14

This chapter records the events that transpired in the upper room at the Last Passover Supper. Jesus had been teaching His disciples, washed their feet, Judas was soon to betray Him. He had told them He was going away but would come again. He comforted them, promising the coming of the Holy Spirit to them and reminding them of the mission they were to perform. He taught them He was the way, the truth and the life. This is the time that Thomas said, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” Even after three and one half years of intensive instruction it is evident that Thomas and the others still lacked understanding what was to take place. Jesus said they should have known by this time. To know Him was to know the Father because they are one in nature, essence and purpose. Christ dwelt with the Father and the Father with Him. This particular assembly was fraught with misgivings and misunderstandings. The time was swiftly approaching for Jesus to die on the cross. His disciples were confused by His words and their understanding was lacking. Little wonder they fled when He was seized.

John 20

In this chapter there are two quotations of words from the mouth of Thomas. The first is in verse 25. It was after the resurrection of Christ. Christ appeared before His disciples and they could see and know He was alive again. For some unrevealed reason Thomas was not present at that particular gathering. When the other disciples later told Him they had seen the risen Lord, his response was, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." It is because of these words that Thomas is often referred to a "doubting Thomas."

Did Thomas doubt that Jesus was the Christ? Had he not seen sufficient evidence to know Jesus was the Messiah? Was it not that his doubt was whether Christ had risen from the dead? He had witnessed the crucifixion and knew if Jesus had come from the grave the evidence of His crucifixion would be apparent. This is what he wanted to see for himself. He was not such a "doubting Thomas" as he was a "cautious Thomas." He wanted to know, not on the word of the others, but for himself. Well might he want that because later it is shown to have been a requirement to be His apostle; having seen the risen Lord (Acts 1:22). It is not that he thought the other disciples were not telling the truth. But he wanted this knowledge first hand.

Lessons have been drawn from the absence of Thomas on this occasion to emphasize how important it is to be present at every assembly. You can never know what important event may occur or what great truth you need to know may be presented at the very meeting you miss.

The next week when the disciples were together again Thomas was with them. Jesus came to them through closed doors and said, “Peace be unto you.” He then used the very words Thomas had spoken about seeing the nail prints and the side of Jesus to invite Thomas to do what he said would be necessary for him to believe. Whether Thomas actually touched the Lord we cannot be certain. But he saw the marks on his body and was convinced. It is then that he declared, “My Lord and my God.” If ever there had been any doubt in His mind about anything regarding Christ, it was removed completely. Jesus told him, “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” This statement is applicable to all living today. It includes me and you, dear reader. We have not literally seen the risen Lord as did they, and later like Paul on the Damascus road, but we believe because of the testimony of those eye witnesses that saw Him. To provide this evidence is one of the reasons that John wrote this book (John 20:30, 31).

Additional Mention of Thomas

Two other times we read of this apostle. One was when Jesus meet with a few of them at the Sea of Galilee after the resurrection and provided fishes for them and an abundant catch of fish (John 21:2). The second was at the ascension as we mentioned previously when the eleven returned from witnessing His departure (Acts 1:9-13). The reports regarding Thomas provide additional evidence for us to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

* * * * *

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

There is probably no woman in secular or scared history that is more familiar, more respected and more admired than Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is certainly one of the best known characters of the Bible. There are six women named Mary in Scripture with ten specific references to our subject and other implications of her presence.

Mary was a Jewess of the tribe of Judah and the family of David. When the angel came to Mary to inform her she would bear a child even though she had never had carnal relations with man, it is said, "And the angel came in to her and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28). Again when Mary visited Elizabeth she was greeted by Elizabeth, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (Luke 1:42). Even before giving birth to Jesus she was highly favored by the Lord which speaks volumes of good about her character and life.

Humble Circumstances

Mary lived in Nazareth. Just why one of the tribe of Judah had moved to the north to make her home we have no knowledge. But Nazareth was a place that was not prominent, even not very well respected. Nathanael said of that small city, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Mary was an obscure Jewess girl in a lowly city. She probably never wore fine clothes nor had occasion to exalt herself as many do.

We know that she and Joseph were of modest material means because when they went to make proper offerings after the birth of Jesus they offered the sacrifices that were acceptable from the poor.

Her travels consisted of going to Bethlehem where she gave birth to Jesus in a stable, the flight into Egypt to escape the search of Herod who sought to destroy the child, her return from Egypt to Nazareth where the family lived until the time Jesus began His ministry and the trip again to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve. She had possibly made that journey many times.

Her Suffering

After the birth of Jesus and He was taken to the temple, they met Simeon, a just and devout man. He had been told that he would not see death until he saw the Lord's Christ. When he saw Jesus he took him in his arms and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people" (Luke 2:29-31). Simeon also said to Mary, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34, 35). We are not to think that Mary was literally pierced with a sword but her heart was cut and offended at the suffering of her Son, especially at the events surrounding the cross.

The Subject of the Miracle

It had been prophesied (Isaiah 7:14) that a virgin would conceive and bear a son that would be the Lord's Messiah. The angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her she was to be that mother (Luke 1:27-35). Matthew 1:18-21 confirms that the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy. Only the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy.

She was submissive to the call of the Lord even though this would bring hardship, danger, shame and possible death to her. Many would never believe and understand why she was expecting a child being a virgin. The birth of Christ was not a miraculous birth but He was miraculously conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit. This entire episode was of great concern to Joseph to whom she was espoused. To be espoused was as binding as marriage but as yet she and Joseph had not come together as husband and wife.

What her age was at this time is not known. The attitude of Joseph at first was to put her away "privily" or quietly rather than drag her before public disgrace and possible death. But he was informed of the circumstances about Mary by the angel of the Lord and graciously accepted her to be his wife. They did not live together as married until after the birth of Jesus.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Mary and Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist) were related. While Elizabeth was expecting her child Mary visited her. When they met the child, John, leaped in the womb of Elizabeth at the sound of Mary's voice. It was on this occasion that Mary composed one of the marvelous praises of God by a woman which we read in Scripture. (There were three other such praise themes: one by Miriam after Israel crossed the red Sea; a second by Deborah after the great victory over the Canaanites; and a third by Hannah at the coming birth of Samuel).

Bethlehem

The prophets had foretold the place of the birth of the Savior to be Bethlehem. A taxation imposed by the Roman

government caused Mary and Joseph to go to the land of their ancestry to pay the tax. That land was Judea. The journey must have been difficult for this woman. Mary soon gave birth to Jesus there. Jesus was born in a stable because there was no room in the inn for them. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and soon was visited by shepherds who came to worship the child.

It was from Bethlehem that she, Joseph and Jesus had to flee from Herod. But now the Word had become flesh and Deity had taken the fashion as a man (Phil. 2:8). As a child Jesus was subject to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:51). Leaving Egypt after the death of Herod this family returned to make their home in Nazareth.

After the birth of Jesus Mary and Joseph had other children some of which are named and others not named. The doctrine that she was a perpetual virgin is contrary to Scripture. Once Mary and her other children came to see Jesus (Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 3:35) and Jesus used the occasion to teach how spiritual kinship with Him was more important than fleshly kinship.

At the Temple

When Jesus was twelve years of age the family went to Jerusalem to worship. When time came to return home Jesus became separated from his earthly parents since they thought He was with some of the other travelers. After spending three days searching for Him they found Him in the temple discussing matters with the doctors there. When they inquired about this Jesus said, “Know ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). Mary did not fully understand all this about Jesus, such as the visit by the shepherds and later the wise men, but Scripture tell us she “kept all these things in her heart.”

Mary at the Wedding Feast in Cana

This was the time when she and Jesus were attending a wedding feast and the supply of wine was depleted (John 2). She told Jesus and Jesus made wine from water. (That Jesus made an intoxicating drink is absurd and the evidence is abundant that such was not the case but is too extensive to include in this lesson.) At first Jesus was reluctant to perform this miracle but relented. What He produced was better than what had been served previously. Doubtless Mary took note of all that.

At the Cross

While all the apostles except John fled at the seizure of Jesus by His enemies, Mary and others were with Him to the end. As she stood by the cross, surely with heavy and grieving heart at the suffering of her Son who had come to help the very ones who were persecuting Him, and to hear the taunts and insults hurled at Him, was the most excruciating moment of her life. But Jesus remembered His mother and commissioned John to care for her in His absence. His respect for Mary is a lesson for all regarding the honor we are to give to our parents. That which Simeon had foretold her in the temple after His birth had become a gruesome reality.

Later Appearances of Mary

She was among the women who came to His tomb but found the body gone. She was of the one hundred twenty who assembled together after His resurrection (Acts 1:14). She was a witness of the risen Lord. After His resurrection

we read no more of this great and noble woman whose life was given to the service of God.

False Doctrines Regarding Mary

It is so unjust for men to have invented doctrines regarding this righteous woman that defame her and her Son. The doctrine that she should be worshipped would be abhorrent to her. The doctrine called the Immaculate Conception was a necessary invention growing out of another false doctrine. The belief that we inherit the guilt of the sins of our ancestors, especially Adam, posed a problem regarding Mary. Was she not a child of humans and should she not also be thought guilty of sins from them? To get around that and make her guiltless they posed a special way for her to escape that guilt by saying she was an exception to the rule of inherited sin. Oh, the folly of men!

The doctrine of her alleged perpetual virginity is contrary to the revelation of other children of Mary, even with names, who were half-brothers and sisters of Jesus.

One of the more blasphemous doctrines invented about her is how she is a co-mediator with Christ. It is affirmed that one can get the attention and response from God quicker and more easily by praying through Mary than through Jesus. Never are we taught to pray through Mary or anyone else other than the Christ.

Another false doctrine is that Mary did not see the corruption of her fleshly body as others (which is the result of sin) but has been bodily taken into heaven. Nobody knew this until 1950. This violates the teaching that flesh and blood cannot inherit heaven.

On it goes with those whose religion is to make Mary their goddess rather than Christ as the Messiah.

This good woman is noted for her humility, submissive obedience, worship of God, faith, endurance, patience, courage and a gigantic contributor to the completion of God's plan for saving man by giving birth to Jesus as Deity became flesh. We can understand why she is so admired.

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Reaching for the Lost And God's Word

It is usually the case that a title either makes an assertion, an affirmation or at least an assumption. Such is certainly the case with our title. There is repeated reference made in God's word, the Bible, concerning the lost and saving the lost. There are many people who are lost. We must learn who is supposed to reach them, and how. Is there anything the lost themselves must do in order to leave the condition of being lost? What are the consequences to the lost and to those who are supposed to reach the lost if this effort to save the lost is not made?

We read in Matthew 10:6 that Jesus sent His disciples to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." Second Corinthians 4:3 Paul said, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." Jesus came to this earth to "seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

There are many Scriptures that speak of the saved. The saved were added to the church (Acts 2:47). Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). All are placed into one of two classes; saved or lost.

The Lost

To be lost refers to a spiritual condition. One who is lost is in spiritual bondage, a servant of sin (Romans 16:16, 17). It is because of sin and iniquity that a person is lost (Isaiah 59:1, 2). The lost are alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

Sin entered the world with the transgression at the Garden of Eden. Paul wrote, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Man Needs a Savior

To say that man cannot save himself is not to say that man has nothing whatever to do with his own salvation. When Peter preached on Pentecost and was urging his hearers to obey the gospel he said, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40). He did not say, "Save by yourselves." That cannot be done. There is man's part in God's plan for saving man, but no person has the power of self-redemption without God and what God has provided. We cannot be saved by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9). We cannot be saved by works of our own righteousness and merit (Titus 3:3-5). We cannot be saved by the works of the Law of Moses (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16). This means that man, if he is saved, must have a Savior.

God has provided the Savior and the Savior is His only begotten Son (John 3:16). He came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). He is God's way to bring spiritual peace between man and God (Ephesians 2:18). Man may have peace with himself and with his neighbors, but unless he is at peace with God he is lost. That can only be obtained through Christ. There is no other. Peter asked,

“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

God’s Part in God’s Plan

Before the foundation of the world God devised the scheme of man’s redemption (Ephesians 1:4; 3:11). For ages His plan was unrevealed but it is now revealed through the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5) and we can understand it. The glad tiding of salvation is in the gospel (Romans 1:16). In the gospel is reported what God has done on behalf of man that he could not accomplish for himself as well as what God expects man to do to receive the saving benefit that God has provided.

As we consider reaching the lost we must place paramount emphasis of what God has done without which there would is no salvation for man at all.

The system of salvation is a system of God’s grace, mercy and love toward man (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:3-5). He sent Jesus to pay the penalty for man’s sin.

Christ graciously went to the cross voluntarily and shed His blood. The way of salvation is the way of the cross. We are redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7). He shed His blood for the remission of our sins (Matthew 26:28). We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:8, 9).

Man’s Part

Man is saved by grace but not by grace alone. Salvation, eternal life, is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). Nothing is clearer in Scripture than the fact that man must be receptive of the gift God offers. There is a giver: God. There is a receiver: man. God has commanded man to do certain

things in order to receive His gift. Unless and until man obeys His commands the gift will never be his.

Man is saved by faith. This is taught repeatedly in Scripture. But he is not saved by faith alone any more than he is saved by grace alone. Neither doctrine is taught. There are different kinds of faith. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Otherwise, it is a dead faith (James 2:24).

Man is saved by works. What kind of works? Not works of merit or his own goodness but works of obedience. Those that say salvation is by faith without works ignore the teaching that faith is a work (John 6:29). It is a work of God inasmuch as God has commanded it but man is the one who must believe. Some think that whatever they do if done sincerely and honestly that this is enough. Not so! We must do what God has commanded. God has done his part and man must be taught to do his.

Five Steps

Even though some ridicule the idea of five steps, and laugh at what they call "five steppers" it is not difficult to count what must be done. A person must hear the gospel, believe it, repent of their sins, confess their faith in Christ and be baptized in water for the remission of sins. To contend a person can be saved and not do what God has commanded is to displace God from His throne and attempt to put oneself in His stead.

Salvation and the Word of God

There is no salvation apart from the word of God. What we call the Great Commission directs, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Why preach the gospel? The message of salvation

must first be heard. James 1:18 states, “Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls.” Paul told the Corinthians they had been begotten by the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). Peter said we are born again by the word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

God saves by the preaching of what some think is foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18-21). But without that message none can be saved. It is the work of the church to be the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Paul told Timothy to “preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:2).

Unfortunately some seem to seek crowds and acceptance by the use of tricks, deceptions, gimmick, gadgets, worldly attractions, thinking popcorn and peanuts will convert the soul. But the apostles preached Christ and His kingdom and urged people to obey the Lord.

Methods Are Needed

Necessarily there must be methods used to get the gospel message into the hearts and minds of the lost. We use public proclamation, private home studies, public media, written materials, personal contacts and a variety of approaches to teach the truth. The lost must become informed and it is the task of Christians to see they are informed. Those that win souls are wise (Proverbs 11:30). We must declare the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). As Paul planted, Apollos watered and God gave the increase (1 Cor. 3:6, 7) so it is today that we must plant and water the seed of the kingdom which is the word of God (Luke 8:11). We are to plead, persuade, teach and hold out God’s promises to the lost we will fail in our duty. What the lost do with it is their responsibility. If the lost do not lay hold of the blessings God offers, then they will remain lost.

Remember that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15:7, 10).

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The Savior's Invitation

Seventy miles north of the Dead Sea is the Sea of Galilee. There were three prominent cites on its shores where Jesus did much of His earthly ministry; Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum. It was in this area where Jesus spoke what is recorded in Matthew 11:20-30 in which He included His great invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto you souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Even though the people of these cities rejected Him He invited them to come to Him and be blessed. This is a great invitation for several reasons.

Because of its Origin

Does it seem egotistical that Jesus would say, "Come unto me?" No mere man has the right to extend such a call. But Jesus had already been acknowledged as the Son of God by the Father at the baptism of Jesus. He had already met and defeated the arch enemy, Satan, by overcoming the temptations against Him. He was conscious of His identity and ability to perform what He promised. The invitation given by Him was different from all others.

Because of who is Included

"All ye that labor…" shows it is extended to everyone who is mentally capable of responding. This would exclude babies and any who are so mentally handicapped that they cannot understand. It was given to the weary, heavy laden and burdened with sin. It was for those in need of rest from those things. This would include all since all have sinned.

This invitation implies there are those who are away, aloof, separated and apart from the Lord. They need to come to Him. They were not born alienated from God or totally depraved as the false doctrine of Calvinism teaches. They were not guilty of the sins of their ancestors; Adam or anyone else. Such is not taught in Scripture.

Just here it is noteworthy how the New International Version distorts Psalm 51:5 to make it read that David was born guilty of sin, "sinful at birth; from the time my mother conceived me." Some have suggested the absurdity that the NIV and KJV teach the same. That is not so. The passage in the KJV teaches that either David's mother was in sin or that David was born into a sinful world, the latter being the most likely. But it does not teach David was born guilty of sin either his own or anybody's.

The reason people are away from God is because of sin (Isaiah 59:1, 2). Since man is the one who departed from God, man is the one who must return to God. It is useless to plead with the Holy Spirit to come and save a person who will not come to Christ. The sinner must make the decision. God is willing to save; Christ is ready to save; the Holy Spirit beckons one to be saved. But if man is saved he must come to Christ. This is the reason Paul persuaded men (2 Cor. 5:11). We do not have to persuade God to save us. Because man must come Jesus invited him to come.

The Condition of the Sinner

Paul gives us the gloomy picture of one who is in sin as being strangers from the promise, alienated from God, hopeless and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). Men cannot be saved by their own intellect, wealth, prominence, power, prestige, political preference, ancestry or the doctrines of men. We must accept the invitation of the Savior. The call comes by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Cor. 4:15; Romans 1:16). We are begotten (born) by the gospel (1 Peter 1:23). We either come to Christ or we shall live our lives and die in sin (John 8:24).

Another Implication

The very fact that Jesus extends the invitation implies that we have the power, liberty and ability to accept it. The Lord is not so cruel as to extend the invitation to salvation and then deprive man of the ability to accept it. We are not helpless to respond. We are not totally dead and depraved. We have the power of choice and decision. God created us in that fashion. We do not have to wait until the Lord decides to save us by some direct operation on us from the Holy Spirit. God has already acted on our behalf when He gave His Son. If one is lost it will be because he rejected the invitation.

Jesus prayed over Jerusalem how He desired to save them. “I would… but ye would not” (Matthew 23:37). This invitation emphasizes man’s responsibility and accountability. There is a yoke to be assumed that is light and easy compared to the unbearable yoke and bondage of sin. Salvation is not by grace alone (altogether the act of God without anything on the part of man).

Great Because of its Offer

To what are sinners invited? He can receive relief from the burden of sin that condemns him. He leaves a life of hopelessness to a life of purpose. He can gain heaven. He can know that when he comes he will not be cast away and will stay in good favor with God so long as he lives faithfully. Christ will lift the load that man cannot successfully carry by himself. He will be freed from the woes of this present world and the threats in the world to come. His benefit is for this life and eternity. In both instances he will enjoy the abundant life (John 10:10).

Like an old mariner who has experienced many storms, he will be comforted to see the other shore where there is safety. He is filled with joy that others may not understand.

The one who comes to Christ may be compared to the soldier who comes home after the armistice is signed, lays his armor and uniform down and enters into rest.

Hardeman's Encouragement

N. B. Hardeman was a great gospel preacher in years gone by. He composed the following paragraph. "When our forms shall have bended low, when our cheeks have been furrowed by the finger of time, when hoary hairs bedeck our brows, when we shuffle off all that is mortal and the Captain of our salvation bids us to stand on the quiet plains of a never-ending eternity, we shall enter into that rest that passeth understanding and appreciate in all its fullness what the Savior meant when he said, 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden'."

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We Would See Jesus in Perfection

In John 12:20, 21 we read of some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus. Hebrews 12:1 urges us to run our race with patience looking unto Jesus. It is important to see Jesus because He is the Son of God and our Savior. In this lesson we seek to see Jesus in Perfection.

Perfect means whole, complete, mature, flawless, without blemish, that which cannot be improved, without fault, lacking nothing and excellent in every respect. We shall mention a few areas where He is perfect and doubtless many others could be added to the list.

Sinless

This is the first mark of perfection that comes to mind. He came into a sinful world, encountered sinful people, condemned sinful conditions and behavior, provided for forgiveness of sin but never partook of anything sinful. Sin is a transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4) and Jesus never violated in any way the law of God. Though He was tempted in all points like as we are He remained without sin (Heb. 4:15). 1 Peter 2:22, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." He was accused, tempted, tried and false witnesses raised against Him. He never stumbled.

He is the only one to have ever lived without sin and perfectly. We all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) but not Jesus. When He was being accused, tried and condemned to death Pilate's wife called Him a just man. Pilate, when his offer to release Jesus was rejected, asked, "Why? What evil hath he done?" While on the cross one of thieves remarked that He had done nothing amiss. Jesus asked the high priest why He was smitten? Judas, after he realized the treacherous deed he had committed, cried out, "I have betrayed innocent blood." Never could the charge of sin be truthfully laid upon Him. He was perfect.

A Perfect Sacrifice

Because He was sinless He was the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sins of men. This was God's plan (1 John 2:2). When Israel left Egypt a lamb was sacrificed and one was to be sacrificed as the Passover lamb each year. That lamb was to be without blemish (Exodus 12:5). The Jewish Passover lamb was a type of Christ. Jesus was called by John to be the "lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). We are redeemed by the precious blood of the lamb and that is Christ (1 Peter 1: 18, 19).

So complete was His sacrifice that there was no need for sacrifices of blood anymore. Under the Law of Moses the priests would offer blood sacrifices regularly and repeatedly. Even then they could not make one perfect (Heb. 9:9). Christ was offered once (Heb. 7:26, 27) for sins committed under both the old and new covenants (Heb. 9:15) and that was adequate and sufficient. As the hymn declares, "He had no tears for his own guilt, but sweat drops of blood for mine."

The Perfect Mediator

Hebrews 9:15 presents Christ as the mediator of the new covenant. The old covenant was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). Because man sinned he needed reconciliation with God. Christ is the One who made possible the peace between man and God.

A mediator is a go-between. Not just anyone can qualify to be a mediator. He must be related to both parties but not a party to the dispute, knowing all the circumstances,

desiring reconciliation, not through compromise and negotiation but the execution of God's plan.

Jesus became man as well as Deity. Sin created the problem but He did no sin. He came, not so He could understand man, but so man could know that He understood. He is our peace (Ephesians 2:14) and it is through Him that we have access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18; John 14:6). He is God's provision for us. Paul told Timothy thee is one mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).

The Perfect Example

"For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Jesus called His apostles by saying, "Follow me." He tells all men, "Take up your cross and follow me." It is rather presumptuous for any man to tell his fellows to follow him unless it is on the basis as did Paul when he urged brethren in Corinth, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). We often speak of "role models," with reference to those who are worthy to follow. Jesus Christ is the perfect role model in every respect.

In life we observe measures, standards, ideals and goals. Christ was perfect in all these. We are to always ask, "What would Jesus do? What would he have me to do?"

We should follow Jesus in courage as when He set His face to go to Jerusalem knowing what awaited Him there and the evil conspiracies of His enemies.

We follow Him in patience such as He showed the apostles in their slowness of understanding. "Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me?"

He is the example in humility, taking on the fashion of man (Phil. 2:5ff).

He is the example in obedience, even to the death on the cross (Phil. 2:8).

He is our example in forgiveness. While on the cross He forgave His executioners. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

In love, compassion, speech, facing temptation, in every matter with which He was involved, He is our example. We never go wrong following the footsteps of Christ.

The Perfect Giver of Life

It goes without saying that not everyone can give life. Deity is the Creator of life. We all die physically (Heb. 9:27) and we all shall be raised (John 5:28, 29) because Christ rose from the dead. By His resurrection He demonstrated power over death. A dead Savior could not offer eternal life. It was His mission to bring eternal life to man (John 20:30, 31; John 10:10; John 3:16). When some were forsaking Him Peter remarked, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Who else but one who had conquered death could offer us life? He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). This is why He is called our hope of glory (1 Tim. 1:1; Col. 1:27).

The Perfect Teacher

John 3:2, He is called Rabbi, exalted teacher, by Nicodemus. Acts 1:1 tells us He went about teaching and doing good. God had but one Son and He was a preacher and teacher. He is the very personification of truth (John 14:6) and there is no error in anything He ever taught. He had perfect knowledge of all things because He existed before the world was created. He had a role in that creation.

When some went out to take Him they came back to their leaders with the remark, “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46). He taught as one having authority (Matt. 7:29). Therefore He is the perfect guide to instruct man the way he should live and to show him the way to heaven.

Consider the subjects He taught. He revealed God’s plan of salvation, His church, the Golden Rule, what should be our priorities in life, how to worship, who is the greatest being servant of all, and the great lessons on the water of life and bread of life. On and on we discover divine truth from the teaching of Jesus.

Sometimes He taught an individual; sometimes multitudes, sometimes just the apostles and other disciples. Would you not have cherished the opportunity to have heard Jesus as He explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus the prophets regarding Himself ? (Luke 24:27)?

The Perfect Friend

We sing, “Jesus is all the world to me, I want no better friend.” He once said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you,” (John 15:13, 14). Christ even laid down His life for His enemies (Romans 5:8) while we were yet sinners.

Our Lord will not forsake us or leave us. He will never leave us (Romans 8:38, 39). This does not mean we cannot leave Him but He will not abandon us. In good times, bad times, He is the One of Whom we can depend to be with us and supporting us. No “fair weather friend” is He.

The Perfect Judge

There is a great day coming when we all shall stand before the judgment of Christ to receive the things done in the body whether they be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). God has appointed a day of judgment. It will not be a day of decision as to who will be saved or lost. That decision we make. It will be the day of sentencing according to what we have done about Christ.

We shall be judged according the His word (John 12:48). Often there is injustice administered in our courts, but that will not be the case on that day. His judgment will be fair, just and infallible. There will be no mistakes, and perfect outcome with no appeals. Only Jesus, the Son of God, could qualify to be the perfect judge.

Inasmuch as He will be our judge, and today offers to be our Savior, should we not hasten to come to Him for salvation and know that all will be well with the soul when that final and awesome day comes?

* * * * *

Jesus Teaches Repentance

It is correct to say everything taught in the New Testament regarding repentance was taught by Christ. He is the author of all teaching and those that taught by His authority wrote as the Holy Spirit guided them. This lesson is not on everything taught by Jesus and His apostles but we shall give consideration to some of those things.

Peter

On Pentecost after Peter had preached Christ to his hearers they asked, “What shall we do?” The first thing Peter told them was to repent (Acts 2:38). In his sermon

after healing the lame man and preaching Christ again Peter told his hearers to repent (Acts 3:19). Acts 8:22 Peter told Simon, “Repent of this thy wickedness.” He closed his two epistles teaching that God would have all men “come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Paul

Paul told his hearers in Athens, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). He also made the distinction between godly sorrow which worketh repentance and worldly sorrow which does not (2 Cor. 7:110). He wrote in Romans 2:4 “that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”

In Hebrews

The inspired writer said God would not repent (change His mind) regarding the priesthood of Christ (Heb. 7:21). Hebrews 6:1 teaches we must repent from dead works. We can reach a point beyond which we cannot repent because of the hardness of heart (Heb. 6:6). Hebrews 12:17 mentions the refusal of Isaac to repent from blessing Jacob rather than Esau as Esau requested.

John, the Apostle

The church to whom the Lord sent letters (recorded in Revelation 2 and 3) were told to repent and those that would not would come to destruction. There is no shortage of teaching and preaching by those sent forth by the Lord on the subject of repentance.

John, the Baptist

The message of John as he prepared the way for the coming of the Lord was that the people must repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2). His work was to turn the hearts and minds people to God and urge them to believe the gospel that was coming.

His baptism was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). He sternly rebuked some who came to hear him preach that needed to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, indicative that their repentance was genuine (Matthew 3:8). But let us now focus on teaching on repentance done by Jesus personally.

Christ

Jesus taught that John the Baptist came with the way of righteousness but the priests and elders did not believe him. The harlots and publicans did. They repented.

Jesus taught repentance with the story of two sons who were given instructions by their father to work in the vineyard. One said he would go and went not. The other said he would not go but repented and went. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of behavior.

Repentance does involve sorrow and remorse but much more. Judas, after betraying Christ, displayed sorrow and remorse to the extent he hanged himself. That was not repentance. Repentance calls for putting off the old man of sin and putting on the new man (Ephesians 2:22, 24). Repentance will result in a different manner of life. Let those who teach that one can divorce and remarry when the grounds for divorce is not fornication take note when they say such a person can remain in that adulterous relation.

Who Should Repent?

It should be obvious that all should repent since all have sinned. Jesus said, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). He did not imply anyone was sufficiently righteous to be without the need to repent, but that sinners (including all) should repent.

The Necessity of Repentance

Luke 13:1-3 reveals how Jesus used certain then current events to illustrate repentance. Physical disaster had struck some but it was not because they were more unrighteous than others. But He said, “Except you repent you shall all likewise perish.” Repentance is not an optional matter. Our salvation depends on our repentance among other things.

We must also repent in order to be forgiven by our fellowman when we have sinned against them (Luke 17:4).

Joy

Luke 15:7, “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine persons which need no repentance.” This rejoicing is in the presence of the angels of God (Luke 15:10). The account of the “prodigal son” shows repentance in its working form. This young man left home and wasted his substance. He found himself in a deplorable condition. But he resolved to return home and sought his father’s forgiveness. That displayed repentance at work. He changed his mind and acted upon that change.

Repentance is not sorrow. Sorrow produces repentance. Repentance is not a reformed life but produces a reformed life. Repentance is a matter of the heart being changed.

Ample Evidence

The people of Nineveh, being warned by the preaching of Jonah that God would destroy that city in forty days because of their wickedness, repented. God then repented of what He intended to do. They changed then He changed.

Jesus recalled the wickedness of the cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. But He said if those people had the same opportunity to repent as the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (where Jesus did so much of His teaching) they would have repented.

We can see the folly of all those cities for not repenting. What of us who have greater opportunity to repent than did any of them?

When to Repent

Jesus taught the time and opportunity to repent is now. In His teaching about the rich man and Lazarus He showed how the rich man ignored his opportunity to repent in his lifetime. Now that he was dead it was too late. Even though he wanted his brothers to avoid where he was it is evident that their time and opportunity to repent was in their lifetime on earth. There would be no special favor given them because they the Law of Moses that taught them the way they should live. Why should we expect God to do something special for us when He has already provided the Savior and the message of salvation that we can obey?

Must Be Preached

Before Jesus ascended into heaven He commissioned that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in His name beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). To preach the whole counsel of God is to preach repentance.

Behind repentance is the awareness of the guilt of sin and a desire to be forgiven. There is sorrow for having offended God by transgressing His will. That sorrow will lead to repentance and repentance will lead to a reformed and better manner of life.

Would you ignite rejoicing in heaven and repent?

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Jesus Teaches Us How to Pray

"Lord, teach us to pray," was the request of His disciples (Luke 11:1). Everything taught in the gospel regarding prayer is what Jesus taught either personally or by those who taught by His authority as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. This study shall be confined mostly to what Jesus personally taught. There are at least sixteen specific instances of Jesus engaging in prayer which we read in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Refutes "Jesus Only"

The very fact that Jesus prayed destroys the "Jesus only" doctrine (that there not the Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but there is only one person of Deity and that is Jesus). If that doctrine is true we ask to whom was the prayers of Jesus directed; to himself? Did He address himself in heaven even as He was on the earth? Did He ask himself to glorify himself or escape the painful death on the cross? This evidence confirms that Jesus is what is called

the Second Person of the Godhead praying to the First Person of the Godhead, the Father, in harmony with the Third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus usually sought a place for prayer so He would not be distracted (Luke 11:1). Neither the place nor posture in prayer is of prime importance. One man was once heard to say that the most fervent prayer he had ever prayed he was running the hardest he could run from a bear. But there is value in seeking an environment for prayer that is conducive to reverence, quietness and communion with God. Jesus prayed in the wilderness, the Garden of Gethsemane, in the mountains, at the tomb of Lazarus and even on the cross.

With Others

There were instances when Jesus prayed being alone. Other times He was in the company of His disciples. Also there were times when probably many stood about. There is a great blessing in the fellowship of prayer with other brethren such as when we participate together in our worship services. We should never dispense with personal and private prayer.

Approach to the Father

Prayer is resorting to God. It is approaching the throne of God. Such an activity must be considered in the utmost sense of reverence, awe and recognition of our blessing to call for the attention of Almighty God. Jesus taught His disciples to address their prayer to the Father. Prayer is an avenue of communication with God that is given to His children when we can express our praise, thanksgiving and make petitions to Him, acknowledging that He is the giver

of every good and perfect gift. Prayer is not to inform God of our needs because He already knows them. It is to show we recognize our limitations and that we know our needs are provided by Him. In this we glorify the Father.

Just how one who is not a spiritual child of God could address the Father in prayer is difficult to understand. Certainly God is aware of every activity of everybody, sinner and saint, and He knows when sinners attempt to pray. But He has not promised those outside His family that He will answer their prayers as He has promised His children.

In Faith

It smacks of hypocrisy to pray to God and have doubts that He hears and answers. We are to pray, believing (Matt. 21:22). God may not always respond to our prayers the way we have prayed, but will answer them the way He sees best for us. He may refuse to give us what we ask, postpone what we ask, or even substitute for what we ask. It is comforting to know that He will always hear us and answer according to His infinite wisdom what is best for us. This is similar to the way earthly parents respond to the requests of their physical children.

Thy Will Be Done

We recall the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced the crucifixion. He prayed if it was possible that "this cup" would pass from Him but "thy will be done." Such should be our attitude in prayer. We should never prayer for God to do something that would be against His will. Of course, He would not do that but we should never ask that. For instance, we may pray for the

salvation of some lost soul but not that that person be saved contrary to the will of God that necessitates obedience.

We pray according to how we visualize conditions and needs but we do not always know best. Therefore we pray that God will overrule and answer as He thinks best and always in harmony with His will.

He Taught By Parables

One parable Jesus used to teach the need of persistence in prayer is the parable found in Luke eleven of the man who approached his friend in the darkness of night. He kept on with his request until he received what he needed.

There was a widow who would not cease soliciting a judge for relief until she received what she needed (Luke 18:2ff). Christ warned against vain repetitions (thinking we shall be heard simply because of much speaking). But He did not condemn repetition. He also repeated His prayer in Gethsemane at least three times. Vain repetition is in evidence with the mindless counting of beads or speaking so many "Hail Mary's" thinking that gets God's attention. That is not the manner of prayer Jesus condones.

Humility

By the use of the parable of the comparison of prayers of a Pharisee and a publican (Luke 18) Jesus taught the necessity of humility in prayer. It is almost beyond our ability to comprehend that Deity would afford weak and frail humanity to even approach Him. While the Pharisee was arrogant and explained to God how good he was, the publican would not so much as lift his head toward heaven but asked for mercy upon himself as a sinner.

It is startling to hear some, especially on television, shout to God and demand He do this or that and keep His promise. Who are we to make demands of God? We are the dependent ones. Shall we not approach Him with that disposition?

An Abuse

Prayer can be abused and misused. Praying on street corners and standing in the synagogues to be seen of men is to use what God has given for personal praise. Such prayers never reach heaven. They are answered only to the extent that the one who prays receives his praise from others.

When brethren are asked to lead a prayer on behalf of the congregation he is faced with the obstacle of praying as if he must sound best to other people. Of course, he should be mindful he is doing something in a public way, try to be heard and not just mumble his words inaudibly and make his prayer fitting for all that all may say "Amen." But such is not a time to display himself before his brethren in a pompous manner. Prayer is not "show time" for the one who leads.

Intercessory Prayer

An intercessory prayer is a prayer of behalf of another. Christ is the only mediator (1Timothy 2:5) and He prayed for others. No other can serve as mediator but we all have the privilege of praying for others. John seventeen records the prayer of Jesus (this is truly the Lord's Prayer rather than what is recorded in Matthew six where He was teaching His disciples to pray). He prayed for Himself but also for His apostles and those who would believe on Him through the word of the apostles. We pray for the sick, the

lost, those less fortunate, our families, brethren, rulers. All such prayers are intercessory prayers and, done properly, are acceptable.

For What to Pray

Other portions of teaching regarding prayer probably give us more information on the substance of prayer and for what to pray than the personal words of Jesus. We do learn to pray as He did for even our enemies and those who seek our harm. We pray for forgiveness, our daily bread, His providence in life, every physical and spiritual blessing, that we can avoid temptation and endure the temptations we cannot avoid, for spiritual strength to remain faithful. There is no limit to what we can include in prayer. If we cannot prayer over it we should leave it alone.

In His Name

Christ is the avenue of our access to the Father (John 14:6). Merely saying such words as "in Jesus' name" may not necessarily make it so. Nor would we contend that no prayer is acceptable unless these words are audibly verbalized. We agree it is expedient to use such a phrase in prayer because it emphasizes the need to pray by His authority and recognize He is the approach to God.

In prayer we praise His name. "Hallowed be thy name." There is the sense of reverence before the throne of God in prayer that we will respect.

Thanksgiving

Much prayer in the New Testament is given to thanking God for His blessings. Some only pray when they have need of something but fail to pray to show gratitude for what they receive. As our song suggests we should "count our many blessings; name them one by one" and see what God has done.

The Ultimate Goal of Prayer

Is it not correct to say that the ultimate goal of prayer is not for self or others but rather to the glory and praise of God? Jesus once prayed that the Father would glorify Him, but why? "I have glorified thee on earth" (John 17:4, 5, 24). His was not a selfish request. As it should be in all that we do (Matt. 5:16), we should do it to the glory of God. So it must be in prayer.

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Christ is the WORD

This lesson is intended to help us see the Deity of Christ more clearly and fully. We observe some ramifications of His Deity also. We shall focus on John 20:30, 31, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing ye might have life through his name." We encourage the reader to read John 1:1-18 where Christ is named as the WORD.

Consider the term WORD. The ordinary meaning of the word "word" according to the dictionary is that it is a medium of conveying thought, making the unseen thought

objective, a sign of an idea, a method of revelation and a means of communication. John uses the term WORD more than thirty times; six times in a personal sense (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Revelation 19:13). It is used as a name of One sent from God. This is the title of the Messiah before and after His incarnation (becoming flesh).

Logos means WORD

Logos means more than the ordinary understanding of WORD. It is not synonymous with the term in a grammatical sense, or as a spoken word or a written word. It depicts Deity. The Logos "was with God… was God." It expresses eternal and timeless existence with an intimate and everlasting presence with Deity; hence Deity himself. The Logos is not only speech to convey a thought but the thought itself. It not only means a messenger (means of communication) but also the message communicated. Logos expresses the nature, substance and mode of God's revelation to man. Christ is Logos. Christ is the WORD.

This would be expected inasmuch as in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9) To put in another way, Christ is the vessel to convey God's idea and He is the idea God conveyed. Christ provided the mechanism for man to know God. He is the efficient instrument of divine action. WORD is used in this way when speaking of the message of God and His message which is Christ. To have seen Christ, therefore, is to have seen Deity for He is the WORD.

Logos as a Person

Logos is not an inanimate tool as the term "word" usually suggests but speaks of the nature and mission of a

person. Personal pronouns are used to speak of the Logos. He is the Son of God; the only begotten of the Father (John 1:14). The WORD had a pre-incarnate existence; before becoming flesh. The uncreated Logos was on equality with God (Phil. 2:6). Actually Logos is God and not merely an instrument of God. He is a distinct and separate personality from the other two persons of the Godhead. Admittedly, this presentation of Deity is difficult to grasp.

Logos as Creator

"All things were made by him." This truth is also explicitly stated in Hebrews 1:1-3. He is the beginning of creation, existent before the world began, existent when time was not yet, and involved as the very Creator of what was brought into existence. John 1:10, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."

More about the Logos

In John one we learn that without Logos there is no light or truth; hence, no salvation. His teaching is light to the mind as natural light is to the eye. Light is in conflict with darkness; which describes sin. Logos enlightens by giving the light of truth which makes men free (John 8:32).

"In him was life," (John 10:10). He is called the Word of Life (1 John 1:1). Note the testimony of John the Baptist who bore witness of the Light. Grace and truth came by Him. It is not that there was no truth until the Logos came, but verses fifteen through seventeen states the contrast to the Law of Moses which preceded Him. The WORD revealed the thoughts of God in saving man and salvation was by the One who communicated that message.

The Logos is the Light, the Life and also the Love of God for sinful man and the blessings of God are given through Him.

Logos Was Made Flesh

What a marvel of the wisdom of God! He voluntarily "took upon himself the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). "He gave himself as a ransom for all," (First Timothy 2:6). "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father," (John 10:17, 18). He was born of woman (Galatians 4:4) and was made a little lower than the angels (Hebrews 2:9). This emphasizes His pre-incarnate state and that He became flesh. He was sent by the Father, born of a virgin, the only begotten Son of God. The WORD is the atonement, propitiation, and He tasted of death for every man (Heb. 2:9). He came to defeat the works of Satan and make possible spiritual deliverance for man. He came to keep the prophecies and promises of God and to provide the merit for man's pardon; a merit man could never have produced himself.

Logos in the flesh is the personification of God's message to man. He became the highest thought of God in a fleshly and personal form. In becoming flesh He did not lose His Deity. He was Deity in the flesh, Emmanuel (God with us), wholly human and wholly divine. By His incarnation His Deity was with a different manner but not different in essence. Becoming flesh He did not cease to be what He was before He became flesh. Logos was God among men.

Logos Demands Deity

Christ as the WORD (Logos) means Christ is not just "a god" but THE God. "Thy throne, O God," (Hebrews 2:8). He came first unto his own which was Israel and then to all mankind. Israel rejected Him for the most part. To those who believe He "gave power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). Salvation is by faith in the Logos, the WORD. To be saved one must not only believe but obey the commands of the WORD, Logos. Why? Logos is Deity.

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Your Place in Life "in Christ"

The phrase "in Christ" is found many times in the New Testament. What does it mean? What is its significance? What does it require? What does being "in Christ" provide? How does one get "into Christ?"

The phrase denotes a spiritual relationship with God. God sent His Son into the world to save sinners. To be "in Christ" means to be saved, redeemed, sanctified (set apart). Those in Christ have been called out of the sinful world into a saved state. It means he enjoys fellowship with Deity and the other saved. He is a Christian in the body of Christ, which is the church. His name is written in the Lamb's book of life.

Daily

Being a Christian, "in Christ," is a daily matter which has a daily impact and significance on life. Christianity is not just a Sunday affair but an every day religion. It not simply an avocation and subordinate occupation but a

profession to which one's entire life is devoted. Everything a Christian does is regulated by the doctrine of Christ; not just a portion of life. It superintends every day. Although the Christian is involved in many matters in life, he is first and foremost always a Christian.

Christianity involves daily prayer. Psalm 55:17, "Evening and morning and at noon, I will pray and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice." Psalm 88:9, "I have called daily upon thee."

We, like the Bereans of old, search the Scriptures daily.

Like Jesus, we seek souls daily. "I sat daily with you teaching in the temple," (Matt. 26:55). We are to exhort one another daily (Heb. 10:25).

We take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23).

"In Christ" determines the way we conduct life.

From Darkness to Light

Christian people have been called out of the darkness of sin into His marvelous light of truth. We live in the world but are not of the sinful world. We are a peculiar, distinctive and different people, not merely for the purpose of being different, but for Christ's sake. We are a dedicated people without reservation with an attitude that manifests itself in all actions of life. In spite of persecutions, hardships, opposition, perils and disappointments we voluntarily and willingly are motivated by the love of God through Christ. We are a people united in the common goal of glorifying God; helping each other get to heaven by believing and obeying the Word of God.

Walk the Way

The Christian way of life is presented as a walk pleasing to God. We walk WITH God (companionship, fellowship, side by side, step by step). We walk BEFORE God (in His presence, inspected by God, which is both a sobering and comforting thought). We walk AFTER God (as sojourners, pilgrims, walking the path that pleases God, following His guidance.) "Ye shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him, and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him and cleave to him," (Deut. 13:4)

Sometimes the way we are to go is called "the way of holiness." We do not follow the multitude to do evil but follow Christ as our example and guide in life.

The New Way

Being "in Christ" means going the new and living way as a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). It is somewhat like electricity in that it is best known by what is DOES. The Patriarchs lived under a system distinctive to their time and under God's authority. The Israelites lived under the Law of Moses. Our way is not that of former dispensations but a new way; the way delivered to mankind by Christ.

This way was prophesied in former ages that it would come. It was announced by John the Baptist. It came upon the scene on Pentecost after His ascension. It is not a postscript to former systems but a new way appealing universally to all. It will never be superseded by another way. It is founded on Jesus as the Son of God.

A "Doing" Religion

James 1:22; 4:17, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only…Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Matthew 7:21, "Not

everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." It is often charged to be irrelevant. This is not so. It is often unknown, untried and discarded, but it fills the greatest needs of humanity. His greatest need is salvation from sin.

Christianity not only provides for life after this, but also for this life. It offers the solutions to the crises that arise in the home, in marriage, the parent-child relationship, relationship with neighbors, even peace between nations. It has the key to racial strife, crime, the tidal wave of lawlessness. A change of heart, not laws, brings out the best in man. Christianity makes man a MAN, not just an evolved, meaningless, accidental brute beast without goal or purpose for existence.

To be "in Christ" means to be the kind of person God wants. He is a self-examiner, one who is busy, who cooperates with others in righteousness, loves what God loves and hates what God hates. He is humble and obeys.

"In Christ" Has Its Cost

Discipleship is conditional. The way was purchased by the blood of the Son of God (Acts 20:28). This was the greatest cost; His provision of salvation by the way of the cross. It demands sacrifice, faithfulness, having the mind of Christ and seeking first things first. This calls for the denial of self, a willingness to suffer trials and hardship for the sake of righteousness, the proper use of talents, the endurance of persecution and following the moral standards of Christ. Being "in Christ" is a daily spiritual growth including work, worship and forgiving others. "In Christ" is as Paul said, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all

things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

"In Christ" Provides God's Blessings

There is no condemnation "in Christ" (Rom. 8:1). There is forgiveness of sin "in Christ" (Eph. 1:7). All spiritual blessings are "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). We have fellowship with God and the redeemed (1 John 1:3); enjoy the providence of God (Matt. 6:33); have peace and reconciliation with God (Eph. 2:15; 2 Cor. 5:19) and hope (1 Tim. 1:1). "In Christ" is stability (1 Cor. 1:21); comfort and consolation (Phil. 2:1); and the expectation of the resurrection (John 11:25) and ultimate victory (1 Cor. 15:57). "In Christ" we have the abundant life both now and eternally (John 10:10). As Christians, "in Christ," we have so much going for us.

What is your place in life? What is life "in Christ?" It is a life of service, following Him, with costs and sacrifices. It is a life of faith and obedience but a life with purpose. It is different life from life in sin in a sinful world. It is the best and happiest way to live; the only road to heaven; a way of work and worship, spiritual warfare and strife, but with eternal consequences. It calls for a life of purity, spiritual growth that produces blessings beyond measure, joy, peace and the rewards God has for His people.

How Does One Get "In Christ"

When we hear the gospel, believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of our sins and are baptized in water for the remission of sins we are then counted as one who is "in Christ." It is in baptism that we reach the saving blood of Christ (Rom. 6:3, 4). Paul says we are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27); not because there is power in water but the power is in the blood that we reach when baptized in water. Then, as we walk in the light as He is in the light, we shall continue in fellowship with Deity and His blood will keep on cleansing us until that day when we shall hear the words, "Well done." Are you "in Christ?"

* * * * *

Man Needs to Know How God Keeps Him Saved

In the New Testament we have many assurances of the providence of God. First Peter 3:12, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are opened unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." Philippians 4:19, "But my God shall supply all your need according to the riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Not only will He supply what we need but "exceeding abundantly" (Ephesians 3:20).

Even though God provides, man must partake of His provision. Medicine may be of value but only if properly taken. Food will nourish but only if eaten. God does not force His goodness on anyone. Just as God cannot and will not save without our cooperation, He will keep us saved without our cooperation.

We do have the spiritual need of keeping saved; a life long operation. We must dismiss the folly of the false doctrine, once-saved-always-saved. To be saved requires

knowledge, faith and obedience. The same is true in keeping saved. God will not save against our will, however.

We are obligated to become a Christian. We are also obligated to be what we profess to have become. God has provided the way to keep us saved.

Three Senses of Salvation

(1) Obedience to the gospel saves us from past sins (Acts 2:38). (2) Christians do sin and can be forgiven of their sins by what is sometimes called "the second law of pardon." It is not really a second law but a part of the law of Christ that applies to the sins of a Christian rather than the sins of an alien. Repentance, confession of sins and prayer is the way of this forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

(3) A third sense of salvation is heaven, the crown of life, the eternal life reward, a crown that fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:4). One must live a faithful Christian life in order to enjoy this salvation. God's supply to us to keep us faithful is our concern in this lesson. God has not left us adrift with the need of keeping saved without His provision to accomplish it.

Birth, Then Growth

Once "born again" we must grow as is true in physical life (2 Peter 3:18). We must learn to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:14). Many do not seem to know this difference. "Man shall not lie by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). The word is God's supply for man's need. It is the standard by which all is measured. We ask, "What would God have me to do?" This we cannot know without knowledge of His word, the Bible.

God Supplies through Worship

One sign of drifting is forsaking the assembly of worship (Heb. 10:25). Worship, or the neglect of it, reflects our attitudes, priorities and degree of love and respect we have for Almighty God. A person who walks with God will worship God, God's way.

By worship we demonstrate our love and seize an opportunity to be admonished, taught, edified and thereby strengthened. We admire the object of our worship and seek to imitate the object. God is the object of our worship and by faithfulness in worship we seek to be like God.

A distinguishing characteristic of the early church was the faithfulness and regularity in worship (Acts 2:42). The hymns we sing contribute to our faithfulness. Consider the sentiments of such songs as "I Am Resolved," or "Anywhere with Jesus I Can Safely Go," or Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus," or "I'll Never Forsake My Lord."

Reverently partaking of the Lord's Supper recalls His death, burial and resurrection and we set our sights on that marvelous day of His return and our ultimate entrance through the portals of glory.

"To "pray without ceasing," another act of worship, gives recognition of our dependence on God and that He supplies our needs. These help keep us saved.

A Life Long Work of Developing a Christian Character

We sing, "I want to be more like Jesus." This is the ambition of every Christian. He left us the example that we might follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). Second Peter 1:5-11 lists a number of virtues we should add, simultaneously,

to our character. We are not likely to abandon what we admire and imitate as good. Rather we shall suffer whatever we must to defend Him and His cause, proclaim it and live according to it. It is important that we imitate the character of Christ. But how can we if know not what it is? Where else can we learn of it except the Word of God?

Saved by Hope

Romans 8:24, 25, "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."

Among the themes of Hebrews is how the way of Christ is better: a better sacrifice, a better covenant, a better promise, a better country, a better resurrection and a better hope. Hope keeps us striving forward and pressing toward the prize, keeping faithful. Take away that hope and you destroy the motivation for remaining faithful. Someday this hope shall become a reality and we shall fully appreciate how we are saved by hope because hope kept us going.

The precious promises give us reason for hope. We have the assurance we can endure whatever comes upon us and thereby God keeps us saved (1 Cor. 10:13).

Trials Can Help Keep Us Saved

Trials, persecutions and hardships are usually considered hindrances and are intended so by the devil. But these stumbling blocks can be turned into stepping stones. We can use them for our benefit to keep us saved. After all, there is nothing that shall happen this day that God and the Christian cannot successfully handle (1 Cor. 10:13). God is

faithful and we can rely on God under all conditions. He keeps His promises to His people.

We can expect the world to be against us as it was against Christ. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you,” (John 15:18). “Marvel not if the world hate you,” (1 John 3:13). These tribulations can help us grow as we either overcome them or endure them. James tells us to count it joy to face such things because such trial of faith works patience (faithfulness), (James 1:2-4). We are blessed when we suffer for righteousness’ sake (Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Peter 4:14).

Paul considered suffering differently from most. He said, “But I would that ye should understand, brethren, that the things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Phil. 1:12). Romans 8:18, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.”

Whether trials, etc. will be opportunities or obstacles depends largely on how we perceive them and treat them. “Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

Watch Your Associates

Romans 14:7, “For none of us liveth to himself; and no man dieth to himself.” This simply means we all have influence to some degree. Influence flow both ways with us and other people. We need to be careful about the influence we allow to be pressed upon us by making proper choices of friends and associates. “Evil companions corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33 ASV).Good people around us helps keep us faithful and keeps us saved.

This includes good elders who have the watch for our souls (Heb. 13:17). God has provided for our keeping saved by the very government He arranged for the church. When brethren fulfill their duty to one another they will not allow anybody to "fall through the cracks" and be lost without making strenuous effort to recover the fallen (Gal. 6:1).

When in the company of evildoers, come out from among them (2 Cor. 8:17). Remember Peter was strong and determined when in the company of his fellow apostles. But when he warmed himself by the fire of the enemy he weakened and denied the Lord.

One decision many make regarding their associates that proves to be deadly is when they marry. They choose someone who does not share with them their faith in Christ. Marry a Christian who will help you get to heaven; not the other way around. How many have been pulled away because they followed their mate into denominationalism or other departures and lost their faith in the things true?

Keep Saved by Not Loving the World

The "world" here refers to the sinful world. We should set our affections on things holy and sacred and not love the world (1 John 2:15). Much in this world is attractive. If we are not alert we can be drawn away by a love for the world even by things not evil in themselves.

Three Negatives in Being Faithful

(1) "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Does it seem that some almost flirt with sin and dare the devil to defeat them? They see how far they can go before they commit what they consider to be wrong!

(2) There comes a time when running is the wise way. Paul taught, “Flee idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). “Flee fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18). “Flee youth lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22). After listing a number of dangers, he said, “Flee these things” (1 Tim. 6:11). Recall the way Joseph dealt with temptation by Potiphar’s wife. He put distance between him and the way of sin. We pray, “Lead us not into temptation” (Matt. 6:13). As Christians we cannot continue in sin (Romans 6:1, 2). Keeping ourselves unspotted from the world will keep us faithful (James 1:27).

(3) Learn from Daniel how he made up his mind he would not defile himself (Daniel 1:8). When pressed and pushed we can rely on our own determination NOT to do evil if we will. We can have a strong resolution like Daniel. In this way he was able to stay faithful.

Three Positives to Keep Saved

(1) Do what is good. When your life is filled with doing good there is no room for doing evil. James 4:17, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin.”

(2) Don’t grow weary in well doing. Galatians 6:9, “And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.”

(3) First Corinthians 15:18, “Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” Keep on keeping on is the message.

We may be sure of success if we remain faithful. We may not accomplish all we ought or wish. Even the constant effort to remain true to the Lord is a measure of eternal success. We never fail if we keep trying.

Study the Word

It should be evident by now that knowledge of God's word is essential in keeping saved. God has provided. We must partake. Knowledge requires study, effort, patience and endurance. It is a daily activity we dare not dismiss. We must be about the Father's business as was our Lord (Luke 2:49). In a very positive way that is how God keeps us saved.

Now we know how to become one of the saved and how to keep saved. What will be our decision in the matter?

* * * * *

Man Needs Guidance

Our title is surely an understatement. A look at our world confirms the need of man for guidance. This need, like all others, has been provided by God.

Man needs spiritual guidance and how to live life. We cannot make a successful journey into the next world without the guidance God provides. We all should learn from our own experiences, although many times we do not seem to learn. A wise person will also learn from the experiences of others, not having to experience everything himself to know the way he ought to go. We must not neglect to see what God has said about our attitude toward guidance, the source of guidance and our own inability to provide adequate guidance. Even though God provides guidance it is of little value to man if he will pay no heed to it. God has guided man in various ways since Eden and it has always been efficient, adequate and reliable. We never go wrong going the way of the Lord.

There are those who do not think God has provided sufficient guidance and they are always clamoring for something more, something sensational and something especially for them. Just why they expect this we know not. Of course, there are always those who think they know better than God and they will discard what God provides for their own way. This is so apparent in our time.

Jesus warned, "And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the pit" (Matt. 15:14). Something may look good, feel good, seem good and strike us as pleasant but not be the way we should go. From whom we receive guidance makes a difference. God's way is always right.

Two Explicit Statements

"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). That man needs guidance could not be expressed more clearly.

We shall not be successful if we simply allow our own experiences, wisdom and "think so's" direct us.

Different Roads We May Travel

Man has been created a creature with the power of choice. We can make our own decisions where we go, who to follow and what to seek. Jesus taught, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13, 14). Notice He said "many" will go the way to

destruction. “Few” go the way to life. The majority of people simply refuse to heed the guidance God provides. But the choice is mine and yours to make. Our decision will determine our existence in eternity.

Nobody but a fool would deliberately go the way that he believed to be wrong. People always take the road they believe is the correct one. Believing a way is the way to life does not make it so. While we must have confidence in the guidance we receive, we cannot just assume it is right. There is a way to know if it is right. We shall discover it.

First let us consider some who followed the wrong guidance.

Nadab and Abihu

These two men were priests of God who had the sacred responsibility of placing fire in the sacrifices over which they had administration. Doubtless they had executed that task many times. For some reason they decided to handle things differently than what is prescribed by the law. Not just any fire would be acceptable. Scriptures says they offered “strange fire before the Lord which he commanded not” (Lev. 10:1). The result was that fire came from the altar and devoured them. God had told them what to do and they took another route.

“But he didn’t say not to.” This is often heard from those who wish to alter, substitute or change God’s way for their own. They presume whatever they concoct will be all right. There was no need for God to tell them not to use the “strange fire” they used because He told them what to do. That ended the matter. That same principle applies when it comes to the kind of music God authorizes in worship today. He has said sing. He does not have to say not to use instruments for it to be outside His authority (Col. 3:17).

King Saul

This man is one of the more pathetic men of the Bible. God allowed Israel to choose for themselves a king and Saul was the first. He began his reign under most favorable circumstances with Samuel as his mentor, only to waste his opportunities and produce massive failure.

He acted as priest when he should not. He ignored God's directions concerning the Amalekites. He was warned. He was taught. God, through Samuel, attempted to direct his path. But He would not listen to God. He died a disgrace and brought reproach upon the people of Israel. We wonder if Saul had life to live over if he would do better next time. We do better to ask if we will do better in our own time.

Jonah

When God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn them of impending destruction because of their wickedness Jonah went the opposite direction. He had to learn the hard way that it is better to heed God's guidance than take matters into his own hands. When called the second time he had learned his lesson and went as God directed.

Gentiles

We do well to read Romans chapter one and the description of the Gentile world without God. So much reported about them parallels our own degenerate generation. The letter to the Romans shows that salvation is needed by both Jew and Gentile and can be obtained on the same terms; through Christ. The Gentiles were not God's chosen people as were the Jews. They decided to follow

their own way. God “gave them up” to do as they pleased and they committed abominable practices to their disgrace. As God proved through the Jews that man cannot save himself even with a law from God, He also proved through the Gentiles that man cannot devise a plan of salvation for himself but he will only bring ruin and disaster upon his head. “They did not like to retain God in their knowledge” and tragedy after tragedy befell them.

The Period of the Judges

This span of Israelite history has been called the “dark ages” of Israel. Time after time, because of the waywardness of the nation, God would allow their enemies to persecute and destroy them as punishment. God would also raise up a deliverer, a judge, who would cast out the oppressor and restore their independence. They demonstrated how that even God’s people would not remain faithful to Him for long periods of time. They chose to “do-their-own-thing” rather than heed God’s guidance.

Two verses stand out in the book that describe their condition (Judges 17:6 and 21:2 5). They are almost identical. “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” This simply means that everybody did as they pleased and took no guidance even from God. They proved the truthfulness of the passages in Jeremiah and Proverbs previously quoted.

Hezekiah Listened to God

When the Assyrians overran Northern Israel they threatened Judah and Jerusalem. Hezekiah, Judah’s king, sought guidance from God through the prophet Isaiah. To

his credit, once guidance was given, he followed it, his life was extended and the nation was preserved for many years.

Moses Needed Guidance

Who could think that Moses would have been successful in leading Israel out of Egyptian bondage by relying only upon himself and his own wisdom and power? He was called to his task at the burning bush and followed the directions of God from that day forward until he brought Israel to the banks of the Jordan. There were times when the obstacles seemed insurmountable. But God provided the solutions and directions and gave Moses the guidance he needed. He will do as much for us on our journey through life toward heaven.

There are others we could mention as Nathan's advice to David after his sin with Bathsheba; God's direction for transporting the ark after the mishap with Uzzah; Joshua as he faced Jericho; or the words Isaiah as explained by Philip to the Ethiopian. They needed God's guidance.

It Takes More than Good Guidance

Just because correct guidance is given does not mean reaching the desired destination. One may ask for directions to a given locality but if those directions are not correct and are not followed the goal will not be reached. We can always be confident God's guidance is correct. But will we follow it? Do we think we know better?

Possibly we have the problem that Paul mentioned in Romans 12:3 of those who "think more highly of themselves than they ought to think." "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs

16:18. There must be some reason people will ignore God in favor of their own way.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). The “poor in spirit” refers to the humble and those who are wise enough to recognize they need guidance rather than considering themselves to be all-sufficient and in need of nothing.

Isaiah 35:8-10 refers to the “wayfaring man.” He is the man that some may call a fool but realizes he is unwise of the path he must travel and is willing to be guided. There seems to be an element that thinks they have no dependence on God whatsoever. Their mistake will become so evident the day of judgment.

What Jeremiah Faced

What a thankless task God assigned to Jeremiah. He was sent to warn Judah of their fall if they did not repent. But those to whom he preached would have none of his message. “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, we will not walk therein” (Jeremiah 6:16). They were not of the disposition to heed God’s guidance.

Solomon wrote, “Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words” (Proverbs 23:9). Jeremiah faced that very situation for nearly fifty years.

How Does God Guide Us?

If you wish to see how relevant the word of God is to the life and welfare of man read Psalm 119 where His word is mentioned in all but three of the 176 verses of the psalm. God has supplied every need of man by His word and His providential care.

Jesus told His apostles the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 14, 15, 16). Their teaching is recorded in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative all-sufficient word of God, the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Both for the prevention of sin, forgiveness of sin and overcoming the effects of sin are revealed in Scripture.

Where We Need Guidance

"The Lord is my shepherd." From Him we can know human relationships in the home, church, marketplace, toward friends and foes, even the civil government. God has given us His pattern for the church, for work, for worship, for daily living and growth. Where else can we learn the standards of morality God approves, the priorities of life, the specifics and principles of right and wrong, how to face problems of life and make the decision imposed on us? Last but not least are the directions for reaching heaven. The areas of guidance from God are limitless.

But Some Want More

There are those who not only do not want what God has provided but want something more and different. Such was what the rich man requested regarding his brothers still on earth (Luke 16). Some seek a "direct operation of the Holy Spirit" which God has never promised. They want miracles. They have ceased because the people and purpose of them are accomplished. They want one to come from the dead and tell them mysteries. One has already come from the dead and they refuse to give attention to Him.

Conclusion

"Guide me O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak but thou art mighty; hold me with Thy powerful hand." "Jesus, Savior, pilot me over life's tempestuous sea."

* * * * *

The Lord Tries the Heart

Proverbs 17:3, "The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts." The idea is that there is an analogy of refining metals and Deity trying the hearts of men. The fining pot is used in the process to free the metals from any imperfections and the furnace as the source of heat to purge whatever must be removed to produce the improvements needed. The process of purifying and improving the heart of man is by trial, affliction and various hardships.

Definition of the Heart

It is by the heart that we understand, believe, reason, make decisions and think. The heart is the seat of our emotions, love, hate, motivations and intentions. It is the same as the spirit of man, the inward man, that part of man that survives physical death and that shall be judged the last day. It is the soul; the mind; the spiritual likeness we have with God (Gen. 1:27). It makes man unique from everything else that God created.

Purified by Obedience

The value of a purified heart is immeasurable. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose

his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36). This is why we must be careful of our thoughts. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he…" (Proverbs 23:7). We are not what we think we are but we are what we think. First Peter 1:22, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obedience to the truth…" The heart must be kept pure. David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 41:10). "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of the heart are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Jesus taught, "…for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). "Blessed are the pure in heart…" (Matt. 5:8). We often sing the prayer, "Purer in heart, O God, help me to be." From this array of Scriptures we can see the magnitude of our subject.

God Knows the Heart of Man

To know the heart is a power of God that man does not possess. Only God is qualified to try the hearts of men. "I the Lord search the heart. I try the reins, even to give every man according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:10). The Psalmist asked, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me, try my reins and my heart" (Psalm 26:2). "For thou, O God, hast proved us; thou hast tried us, as silver is tried" (Psalm 66:10). Concerning man God is said to "refine them as silver is refined" and "try them as gold is tried" (Zech. 13:9). "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10). Men may attempt to discover the heart of others, but God only knows and He does know.

The Process of Refining

Malachi presents God as the refiner in the context of the coming of John the Baptist. What does a refiner do? He holds a piece of silver over the middle of the flame and allows it get hot to burn away all impurities. He sits in front of the fire with his eyes on the silver lest the silver be destroyed. He knows the silver is refined when he can see his image in it.

This is like the way God deals with us with trials and afflictions, hardships and persecutions, even things that are common to man but especially because we are Christians. We are refined when God can see His image in us. While we shall never equate God, of course, we can become more like Him. Paul wrote, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

First Peter 1:7

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Peter was writing to Christians who were suffering persecutions and in heaviness of temptations because of their faith. Christ said we can rejoice in persecution because "great is your reward which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:10-12). We may expect persecutions because the world hated Christ, our Lord (John 15:18; 1 John 3:13). But God has a purpose in these sufferings that we may overlook unless we are attentive.

How often do we ask, "Why?" when hardships come our way over which we have no control. Why did this or that happen? What did I do to cause this? Just what does God have in mind?

God's children live under the marvelous umbrella of His providence. But who is so bold as to think he understands all the working of Deity in providence for us? I do not have to understand it to know it because He has promised it. What comes upon is may be God's way of opening doors of opportunity for service and growth. I can also know that whatever happens I can handle with Him (1 Cor. 10:13).

Peter says our faith is more precious than gold. That is because it is spiritual rather than material; it has to do with the eternal and not just the temporal. Salvation is the end (result) of our faith (1 Peter 1:9). Romans 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." We dare not "curse God and die" when sore trials come upon us.

Athletes know they train best when they are lifting weights, pushing with their muscles, facing opposition and thereby growing better prepared for the race. God tries us so we can growth and develop and detect our weaknesses and improve.

More on the Analogy

When we compare the heart of man with gold and silver we observe that both the heart and the precious metals have worth by their very nature. Gold and silver is recognized universally to be the most valuable of all metals. There can be no adequate value placed on the soul because of its exceeding worth.

As metals must be purified so must the soul of man be purified. We transgress God's law (that is sin, 1 John 3:4). Sin contaminates the souls. That can be removed by the blood of Christ and kept pure by the trials that we meet. We can know the quality of the heart in this way. Such exposes

our convictions and steadfastness. It helps us develop patience (James 1:3). We demonstrate faithful living.

Evil and Good

God tries the hearts of both the evil and the good. What He sees in the righteous brings Him joy. An evil heart is displeasing to God.

We are not able to try our own hearts lest we deceive ourselves. God, the "goldsmith," uses the heavy weights we carry to enable us to grow stronger and overcome.

Challenges are laid in our path. Heartbreak and disappointment become unwelcome companions that must be borne. But they can be blessings in disguise. They can be turned to our good, making us humble, patient, longsuffering, sympathetic and determined. It is in this way that we become partakers of the suffering of Christ.

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Prayer for Rulers

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of truth" (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Civil government exists in various forms throughout the world. Without them there would be chaos and anarchy. Experience demands there is civil government. Furthermore, civil government is ordained of God (Romans 13:1 2; Daniel 2:21; Proverbs 8:15, 16). Christians are citizens of two kingdoms; the earthly nation where he lives

and the kingdom of God. Jesus recognized dual-citizenship and said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” Some contend that civil government is of the devil and Christians must have no part in it. This is outrageously foolish. We are taught to pray for those in civil government. Would God have us pray for that which is of the devil? Civil government is a “minister of God” for special purposes God has appointed (Romans 13:4). Even if every person was a Christian there is need for civil government in such mundane matters as tax collection, traffic control, inheritance laws and making contracts legitimate, etc.

This passage is not optional; is not a suggestion; not a mere encouragement to brethren, but a command. We are to pray for those in authority.

Our study will not be one of an overall relationship we have with government but confined to the propriety and necessity of praying for the rulers of the nation at all levels of government.

“First of All”

This is not to say that prayer for rulers is to be the first thought in prayer or that this is the primary matter in prayer, but it is something of importance. Paul uses four terms which relate to prayer: (1) supplications; petition addressed to God; (2) prayer, praises, respect; (3) intercessions, on behalf of another; (4) thanksgiving, gratitude.

Those for whom we pray include kings, all who have rank and authority in society by civil decree or popular choice.

Many governments are cruel, ruthless and unjust. We are not to think that all governments are approved by the Lord.

God has not appointed any one form of civil government but obviously, some are more compatible with the will of God than others. So many rulers abuse their power over others. Many are proven enemies of Christ. A bad government may be better than no government seeing the consequences of chaos. It is difficult to imagine a society where there were no laws, no security, without a standard of tolerable conduct or protection from harm.

We pray for our rulers because so much depends on them, their character and their work being done. Life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness and protection of property would have no defender without someone in authority. Rulers affect the daily lives of all under their jurisdiction by their policies, morals, example and ability to impose their will and influence on others. None would contend all rulers are deserving of honor and respect but they represent the authority of civil government. We can and must respect the power even if we deplore the conduct of the person in charge, which is probably the case more times than not. When and if rulers call for us to violate the law of God we will respect the law of God rather than civil rulers and their arrogant defiance of God (Acts 4:9, 10; 5:29).

For What Should We Pray and Why?

Christians do not seek personal harm for anyone. Sometimes those in power deserve punishment for the way they do things, however. We should pray for the personal welfare of rulers. This does not equate an endorsement of the person, his conduct or positions he adopts. In fact, it is often proper to pray their manners will be defeated because they promote evil. They become our enemies. David prayed his enemies would meet their downfall.

We should pray for their conversion to Christ and their salvation. We do this for all men.

We should pray they will be just in their dealings. One of the grievous evils in ancient Israel was unjust judges, priests and rulers. We should pray they would enact righteous laws and be obedient to them themselves, which so often is not the case. We should pray they would respect Deity and the Christian's right to worship God God's way. We should pray they would honestly and properly discharge their duties.

The purpose for these prayers is that we may live a quiet and peaceable life. Governments can be so destructive that they even destroy millions of lives as rulers seek power, money and fame. Paul lived in a time when civil rulers were viciously wicked, such as Nero. Muslim nations have governments that are barbaric. Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Catholics will impose restrictions on those who do not conform to their religion. Some are more loyal to their political and governmental parties than to the Lord. There is no way a faithful Christians can support a person or party that promotes abortion, same-sex "marriage," alcoholic beverages, divorce for any cause and such like. It has been my experience to encounter some who rather support their party than go to heaven.

We pray for our rulers so they will produce a society where we can teach and practice the pure doctrine of Christ without interference and that the proclamation of His will shall have free course in society.

"Not My Will, But…"

It is not wrong to pray for some potential rulers to assume power and for some others to lose it or never possess it. Some people are not compatible with

Christianity. Christians can pray they do not obtain authority. Would it not be wonderful if rulers could be found like Samuel, who, after many years in the public eye as a ruler among his people he could invite criticism of his work and receive none? Fortunate are the citizens who have good persons to rule. Those caught beneath the power of self-seeking, greedy, degenerate and unreliable power-hungry tyrants are burdened almost to extinction. Authority is to be respected. Those in authority should try to be respectable.

Civil government will not likely be pleasing to us at all times; maybe most of the time. But we always will pray that the will of God will overrule and govern and in His providence we can enjoy a quiet and peaceable life.

* * * * *

Prayer for Unity

Some refer to the teaching by Jesus how to pray as the "Lord's prayer" (Matthew 6:9-12). Actually John seventeen records His prayer in which He prayed for unity.

The first part of His prayer was regarding Himself and focused on God the Father and Christ the Son being glorified. Their oneness is the foundation of His observations.

Next He prayed on behalf of His apostles and said they had kept His word with the exception of Judas. He would soon give them what is called the Great Commission and He knew the difficulty of the task they would undertake. He promised them the coming of the Holy Spirit who would guide them. He knew they would be hated and persecuted but He did not pray they would be taken out of the world but that they would be sanctified (set apart) by

the truth which is the Word of God. He would send them forth as the Father had sent Him.

The last part of His prayer was for "them also which shall believe on me through their word." This part of the prayer would include those of us living today who believe in Christ because of the word of truth preached by the apostles and now recorded in Scripture. Faith would be produced by that word (Romans 10:17). But there would be those who would hear the word and yet disbelieve. He knew how essential it was for those who believe in Him to be united. He prayed that they all may be one even as He and the Father are one. They are one in nature, essence and purpose. They are Deity; members of the Godhead. The reason He prayed for unity is that the world may believe in Him also. Division among His professed followers would build a barrier between hearers and believers. Division is probably one of the most effective weapons the devil can use to discourage people from becoming Christians. Division misrepresents the Lord and His church,

Division Does Prevail

The so-called "Christian" world is hopelessly divided. There are many reasons for this. It is not because unity is impossible. Many are united and believe alike. It is not because we cannot see the Bible alike. Many <u>give</u> the Bible a meaning rather than <u>get</u> the Bible meaning intended. God is the author of the Bible and He did not call for unity and give us that which would necessitate division. Men try to blame division on God.

Division is not because we interpret the Bible differently. Interpret means to get the meaning. When you interpret (get the meaning) and I interpret (get the meaning) we will be together. When either misinterprets we cause division.

The doctrines of men have been accepted by many rather than "thus saith the Lord" and these doctrines cause division among those who say they are followers of Christ.

False "Unity"

The religious world has invented a "unity" which is not unity according to the Bible. Just believing that Jesus is the Son of God is well and good but there is more to being united than this. Denominational "unity" rests only on this point and not always on that. They entertain a "unity in diversity" doctrine that allows people to believe whatever they wish so long as they say they believe in Christ. For this reason denominational churches have their own peculiar doctrines and practices that distinguish them from others. There exists Baptist doctrine, Methodist doctrine, Episcopalian doctrine, etc. etc. We should be following the doctrine of Christ. Unity in diversity is much like calling for a white blackbird. It does not exist. Division still prevails. There is no real desire for unity because they believe one church is as good as another, one doctrine as acceptable as another (except the church of the Bible and the doctrine of Christ). They seek fellowship in spite of division. This is not Christianity. True unity means conformity to God's absolute standard of truth.

Ephesians four lists seven "ones" which define the unity for which Jesus prayed. When you read this and couple that with Paul's condemnation of division in First Corinthians it is amazing how some can contend for denominational division just the same. Division in the church is also wrong.

Unity That Pleases God

Can you imagine the Father and Son holding to different doctrines, different plans of salvation and different ways of worship? Are they divided over the destiny of the righteous and unrighteous? Do they endorse many churches when the Lord built only one? Is there division between them as to the purpose and necessity of baptism?

Historically there have been those who have pled with men in what has come to be known as the Restoration Movement. This effort is to bring all people back to the Scriptures and let God's Word be the final authority. That is the only path to unity that will please God.

More than Unity

While the Lord pleads and prays for unity we must not think unity is the ultimate goal. People can be united in error and they are a powerful force when united. Christ wants us to be united in truth. Truth is more important than unity. Truth makes us free. But we can be united and go to hell together if we do not follow the truth.

Jesus warned that enemies could and would arise even from their own kin. Division would result when some accepted the gospel and others refused to obey. That kind of division is sad but is expected and made necessary by the disobedience some choose.

Is it not blatant hypocrisy to cry for unity and at the same time do those things that create division like false doctrines, man-made churches, different authorities? Some say we should be tolerant of all beliefs but they refuse to be tolerant of those who want to follow only the Bible. Pages could be filled with instances of those who say they want unity but insist everybody accept whatever they say and want even though it is not according to God's revelation.

Some division exists because of personal hated and jealousy between people. Some who even believe alike cannot work together because they have no love for their brother. They create a "mafia" type element and are "party" boys, demanding all join their party. Being stung because they did not get their way about something or are not the most prominent they divide those who try to serve God. This desire to be "big chief" has divided many. Church politics, seeking your favorites above others, hurts the church. Some self-proclaimed "scholar" will ring out some false doctrine and lead some blindly into a clique and divide brethren. In over fifty years of preaching and observations I find that much of the division that arises is over minor, petty, personal and senseless things as often as doctrinal disputes; maybe more so.

The Power of Unity

We have heard many times the illustration of the strength and power of unity. It is an easy task to break one twig standing alone, but combine several twigs together it becomes almost impossible with normal strength. Weakness is inevitable when forces divide. We have heard the phase, "divide and conquer." This has been the strategy of warfare for many fighting units that faced heavy odds. Satan has won many battles because those on God's side cannot stand together. Since the Lord wants unity should we not do all in our power to obtain and maintain it?

* * * * *

Courage

Ephesians 6:19, 20 Paul urged brethren to pray for him "that utterance may be given unto me, that I may speak

boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am ambassador in bonds: that there I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." Paul couples boldness with doing what he ought to do. An overriding principle in courage is duty and doing that duty; doing what God expects of us. Courage is defined in terms of what it does. It is a trait of character that enables a person to meet a situation that may seem beyond his ability, but he meets it just the same. Regardless of what must be done he undertakes the effort even without assurance that he will victoriously accomplish what he seeks or prefers. Courage is needed in difficult times more than when all is easy. Against overwhelming odds courage goes forward seeking victory nonetheless.

The Source of Courage

Hebrews 13:6, "So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Christians look to God from whom we draw our strength and courage to do His will. As we learn and follow His directions revealed in His word we have every reason to face whatever we encounter with confidence.

Bible Examples of Courage

There are so many instances of courage displayed in the Bible that we must limit our lesson to a few. First, Hezekiah was courageous when the Assyrians were defeating Northern Israel and threatening Southern Judah where he reigned. He said to his people, "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid or dismayed because of the king of Assyria, not for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more for us than with him" (2 Chronicles 32:7).

He and Judah trusted God and overcame what threatened them. That took courage.

Joshua is an example of courage more than once. He and Caleb were courageous to stand against the ten faithless spies after the return from spying the land of Canaan. Everyone fell away in fear to do what God commanded them. But these two, although unsuccessful, contended they were able to take the land because God was with them.

Also consider Joshua and the gigantic task he undertook as leader of Israel following Moses. He was at that time a yet untried leader but he led Israel across the swollen Jordan and to victory in taking the land of Canaan. God had encouraged him to be of good courage.

Place yourself in the sandals of the young shepherd as he approached the giant Goliath. To be sure he had already developed courage by defending his flock and killing a lion and a bear. But this was a most challenging event since none in Israel would undertake it. David went forward with words of confidence and won the day because of courage

Were not the three friends of Daniel courageous when they refused to bow before the idol of Nebuchadnezzar? They had announced that God could deliver them but they had not been told He would. Nonetheless, they would not give way to this evil command even though they faced the fiery furnace as a result. They never flinched.

Consider the courage of Moses as he heard the commission given him at the burning bush. He was at first reluctant but was persuaded to undertake an almost impossible task of leading a nation of slaves from under the control of the most powerful nation on earth at that time.

Look at him again as he repeatedly climbed Mount Sinai to go into the presence of God to receive God's law for the people of Israel. The event was so frightening that the people could not even approach the mountain.

See Moses again standing at the Red Sea with the rod of Aaron calling upon the people, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord which he will show to you to day” (Exodus 14:13). Did not that take courage? His courage was made evident by what he did.

There are More Examples

How can we omit so many others? In the New Testament we hear the apostles being demanded to cease filling Jerusalem with their message. But their response was, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Even though they faced death they did not cease to preach the gospel as the Lord had commanded them. Vicious opposition was hurled their way time and again but they persisted in doing what they ought to do. That is courage.

One of the most courageous men of the Bible is the prophet Jeremiah. God called this man to preach against the sins of Judah and to warn the people of impending self-imposed destruction. Even as he was sent forth God told him the people would pay no attention to him but would persecute him. He still did as he commanded. He did not lessen his strong message in the least. He would not compromise with false prophets or evil kings. Even though there were times when he would have liked to do something other than what he was told to do, he did not quit. “”Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay” (Jeremiah 20:9) (From this verse the name of our booklets, A BURNING FIRE, was taken.)

Jeremiah is often called “the weeping prophet” because he grieved having to condemn the people he loved and see

them stubbornly follow their path to their havoc. But in spite of his personal grief, he did his duty. That is courage.

So many others can be found and the reader likely can add several from his own study of the Scriptures. These will suffice to illustrate by action what the Bible means when it calls for courage.

Courage is Needed Today

Christians live in a world that is hostile to the things they hold dearest of all. They refuse to be partakers of the sin that characterizes this world. Though tempted to "join the crowd" they do not follow the multitude to do evil. They live their lives as a small member of a small minority. It is not easy to live a Christian life, even to have to turn sometimes from people you love in order to be faithful to Christ. Christians suffer scorn and ridicule and seldom given credit for being honest and sincere in their convictions. They are accused of being narrow-minded bigots simply because they have decided to follow Jesus.

Jesus warned such opposition was to be expected. After all, the world hated Christ. The world would also hate His disciples (John 15:18; 1 John 3:13)? Paul wrote, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:2). It takes courage to become a Christian and strive to remain a faithful Christian when so much around you is pulling the opposite direction. But the true Christian will not turn away nor depart from the way of the Lord. It takes courage to keep on keeping on.

Courage to Encourage

Not only must we be courageous for our own sake but for the sake of others. Paul wrote, "And many of the

brethren in the Lord, waxing confident in my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Phil. 1:14). As he approached Rome after his torturous journey by sea from Palestine as a prisoner though innocent, he was met by some of the brethren at Appiforum and three taverns. When Paul saw them he thanked God and took courage (Acts 28:15). Giving courage to others was one of the outstanding talents of Barnabas. We need one another as we help one another get to heaven.

Second Peter 1:5

"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge." The word "virtue" means courage. Those to whom Peter was writing were Christians who were being maligned, misrepresented, persecuted, imprisoned, beaten, misunderstood and falsely accused. How could they survive such maltreatment against them? It would take virtue in their character.

Has there ever been a time in the history of the Lord's church that Satan has not arrayed his weaponry against those who compose the Lord's people? So it is today.

We can meet and overcome these things if we will develop and exercise courage as the Lord teaches. We can be like Gideon as he faced the multitudes of Midianites who oppressed God's people. We can be like Micaiah who would not compromise his message before false prophets and kings Ahab and Jehoshaphat. We can be like Paul as he climbed the steps to Mars Hill to preach the true and living God, the resurrection and the judgment to skeptics and sophisticated "wise" men of that day. How could Paul return to the city of Lystra to preach the gospel; the very place he had been taken outside the city and stoned and left for dead? It took courage. Did not Noah show courage to

build the ark in full view of an evil generation because he believed God? Did he not save himself and his family?

One has said, "Courage is to fight with the handle even after the blade of the sword has been broken." Nathan Beford Forrest was once asked what command he would give his troops if surrounded. He said, "Charge in all directions." That is courage. Napoleon was facing defeat and ordered his drummer to beat "retreat." The drummer said he had never learned that beat but could beat attack. This he did and turned the battle to victory. Courage!

Not Courage

Courage is not simply taking a risk, being reckless and inviting needless danger. Firefighters and policemen often take risks but to help someone in need, not just to be risky and seek personal fame. They show courage, not because they never experience fear, but they do as they ought in spite of their fear. Bravery is not equated with absence of fear but is stronger than fear when the situation calls for it.

Elders need courage to lead their flock soundly. Preachers need courage to preach the whole counsel of God. Parents need courage to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It takes courage to stand FOR truth and AGAINST error. It takes courage to "just way NO" to temptation. If we do not develop courage we are subject to being swept away with the tide of digression and apostasy.

See the Lord Jesus as He set His face to go to Jerusalem! See Him standing before Pilate, the mob, Herod as His enemies cried for His crucifixion! See Him on the cross! He never flinched in His mission and duty. He did not seek to escape once the suffering began. He had the courage to

do what He came to do under the most trying and difficult circumstances. Let us be courageous!

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The Church in Heaven

This is intended to be a message of hope, comfort optimism, encouragement, a promise of personal and eternal success. We speak of God's people, the church, and the ultimate victory of the saved that compose the church. Salvation is presented in two senses: (1) salvation from sin; and (2) salvation in heaven. The church exists presently and will eternally.

Members of the church are citizens of the kingdom of heaven (Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9; Mark 9:1). This world is not our home. We are pilgrims, strangers and sojourners who are just passing through on our way to another destination. Man's spirit does not cease to exist when this physical body is overtaken in death (Eccl. 12:7). Even though it is appointed unto man once to die (Heb. 9:27) that is the death of this tabernacle of clay which houses the spirit. There is life beyond this one. We have reason to believe that because of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. God is not the God of the dead but the living, including Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 22:32), long physically dead. The Christian sings, "Heaven hold all to me."

Regarding the Kingdom

We cannot separate the kingdom from the church in heaven. The kingdom was prophesied to come in the days of the fourth empire (Roman) in Daniel 2:44. It would come when the Son of man went to the Ancient of days (Jesus going back into heaven) Daniel 7:14. It would come

in the lifetime of some to whom Jesus spoke (Mark 9:1). There is the earthly phase of the kingdom and the eternal phase. The earthly phase will end when the Lord Jesus comes again and delivers it to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Then shall be the resurrection and the judgment (John 5:28; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12). Entrance into the eternal phase of the kingdom is yet future (2 Peter 1:11; 1 John 2:25).

Why call the church the kingdom of heaven? It is because it came from heaven, was designed in heaven delivered from heaven, the throne is in heaven, Christ rules in heaven and faithful members of the church shall live eternally in heaven with Deity and the redeemed. A heavenly kingdom is in contrast with an earthly one. Jesus said His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

Christians shall inherit the kingdom (Matt. 25:34) as a prepared place for prepared people (John 14:1-4). "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2 Cor. 5:1, 2). We inherit an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and fadeth not away (1 Peter 1:4).

Sadly, some will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:20, 21). There are two places for eternity: (1) for the devil and his angels; and (2) the place prepared for the saints of God' members of the church.

Promised to Whom?

It has already been noted that heaven is promised. John teaches it is promised to Christians. Christ is the Savior of the body which is the church (Eph. 5:25; 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18). The promise is to them who obey Him (Heb. 5:9; Matt. 7:21). Heaven is a conditional promise. Unless we

meet the conditions (being in the church) the promise does not apply to us. This is why being in the church matters.

How is the Ultimate Destiny Presented?

God has used several comparisons to describe to us the glory of heaven. None of them or all of them combined, can do justice to the glory of heaven.

Heaven is a place of reward (Matt. 5:11, 12). "For great is your reward in heaven." This reward cannot be earned but is given to us when we meet certain conditions. It is the prize we seek that is given to spiritual victors (Phil. 3:14).

Heaven is an inheritance that belongs to God's children (1 Pet. 4; Heb. 9:15). It is a crown of life to the faithful (Rev. 2:10); a crown of righteousness for which Paul looked, expected and reminded was for all who love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8). It is eternal life (Matt. 25:46).

Heaven is a place of rest (Matt. 11:28-30; Heb. 4:9; 2 Thess. 1:6-9). As God rested on the seventh day (ceased His creative work), as the Jews were to rest on the Sabbath Day, as Israel found rest after Joshua led them into Canaan, there remains a rest for the faithful of God in heaven. Meanwhile, we work for the night is coming.

Heaven is described as a better country, a better city (Heb. 11:8-10, 16). We sing, "To Canaan's land I'm on my way where the soul never dies." My son composed a hymn that includes the phrase, "By faith we seek a better land. Upon the planes of Abraham where lies a city high and grand! And I am on my way." Is not this aim of life?

Heaven, then, is the end result of following THE faith of Christ. "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:9).

In the Kingdom Now and Later

Life in the kingdom, the church, now prepares us for life in the kingdom in heaven.

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The Attitude of Worshippers

For worship to be acceptable to God it must include the right acts and the right attitude. The very nature of worship necessitates some attitudes and forbids others. This is a serious matter because without the proper attitude the worship is vain and is rejected by God. Jesus said our worship is to be in spirit and truth (John 4:24). "In spirit" refers to attitude, disposition and understanding of the heart. We can do the proper actions but if with the wrong attitude it will be rejected. 1 Corinthians 11:27 teaches the Lord's Supper to be eaten "worthily," and that has to do with attitude. "Worthily" is an adverb of manner denoting the quality of worship. Attempted worship with the wrong disposition, intention and misunderstanding is useless. Worship with the right attitude answers the question, "Why are we here?" It has nothing to do whether one is "worthy" of anything.

Humility

Acceptable worship calls for the attitude of humility, denial of self and the exaltation of God. The lesser worships the greater (Heb. 7:7). Worship is not to entertain or please oneself or other people. It is not to relieve burdens or make one feel good, although when one worships acceptably he will feel good. It is to bow before

the great "I AM." "Lord, we come before Thee now, at Thy feet we humbly bow." The Pharisee certainly did not approach God with this attitude (Luke 18).

Sincerity

Our worship must be from the heart and not a mere ritual formality. It is to be done voluntarily, deliberately, decisively, intentionally and with conviction born of faith that is born of the word. We must truly mean what we say and do, considering the songs, prayers and the entire effort. It is not a time for pretense, vain repetitions, personal display or "show time" for anyone. Those who lead in worship must guard against any semblance of such a thing. We worship not to please wife, husband, friend, or anyone but God. It is not right to be done with a false piety (Matt. 6:1-7) or a pretended loyalty (Matt. 23:5-10). Even our prayers must be fervent (James 5:16) which means solemn and earnest.

Respect

The nature of worship calls for respect for the One worshipped. We dare not worship "our way" but His way. We must respect the majesty of God, His authority and will. Colossians 3:17, "And whatsoever ye do in word of deed, to all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." It is folly to pretend to worship God but reject His counsel. This is closely connected with the next point we want to make.

Spirit of Obedience

God rejected the sacrifices of Israel when their lives were wicked. Saul told Samuel the people had preserved the animals of Amalek to be used for sacrifices but they had been instructed to utterly destroy everything. Samuel told Saul, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 16:22). Proverbs 28:9, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination to him." "Sunday Christianity" is not Christianity. His will must be obeyed.

Please note the inconsistency to come before God with the attitude, "God, we have come to worship you, our way." The One being worshipped determines what is acceptable; not the worshipper.

Consider the mistakes of Cain, Nadab and Abihu, and Aaron's golden calf which was made in conjunction with a feast to the Lord. They worshipped their way. We know the outcome is their deeds. Obedience recognizes duty but also knows that worship is a privilege. We become more and more like that we admire and exalt. Our attitude must be, "What would God have me to do?"

Reverence

This is a quality that many seem to dismiss in our time. Reverence means with solemnity, self-control, standing before the throne of heaven and in the presence of Almighty God. It is not a trifling matter. Worship is not a "holy wow." To suggest such a thing betrays a blasphemous attitude. "Holy and reverend is his name" (Psalm 111:9). Heb. 12:28, "…we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

One was once heard to say, "We get excited at ball games. Why don't we get excited at church." He meant getting excited at worship. Poor thing! If one does not

know the different situation between a ball game and worship there is more wrong with him than mistaken ideas about worship. Worship is not a time to "let go and let God." It is not for clapping, yelling, screaming, jumping, dancing, shouting, rolling, spasms and convulsions. Worship demands self-discipline and self-control. It is not a religious "Hee-Haw." It is not designed to release emotions, jump to rock-and-roll beat, gyrations and fainting. This is more akin to what occurred with the false prophets at Carmel when competing with Elijah.

Flippancy, inattentiveness and irreverence reflects an attitude of triviality of wandering thoughts, slovenly manners and unkempt dress. Some can't sing because of too much gum in the mouth.

Giving

We are aware that giving is an act of worship and "we honor God with our substance" (Proverbs 3:9. But what we have in mind is that the worship service is not for us to GET. It is our opportunity to GIVE honor, praise and glory to God. It is a sacrifice of praise (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15). We come to GIVE; not GET. A benefit to the worshipper is that he does derive a blessing in worship. But that comes as a by-product of worship; not the prime purpose. Worship fulfills the desire to honor, exalt, praise and glorify God; to express thanksgiving and offer petitions. We show love for God and our brethren. We are influenced for good.

Worship with the right attitude gives recognition to values and priorities in life. We seek the spiritual, eternal and sacred above the material, temporary and profane. It shows the value we place on ourselves, our spirits, our duties and accountability to God.

Pharisee and Publican

In Luke 18:9-14 we have recorded the prayers of two men. They had some things in common but other matters in sharp contrast. Both worshipped. Both believed in God. Both were religious. Neither was ashamed of being religious. Both prayed. By casual observation it may seem they were doing the same thing. The difference was their heart. The Pharisee was proud, arrogant, self righteous and sought to praise himself. The publican was humble, penitent, confessing his sins and seeking mercy. He came to please God and sought God. Who cannot see the difference in attitude of these worshippers?

How We View the Worship Service

We may sometimes think and feel the worship service did not measure up to our expectations or what we hoped it would be and do for us. Some contend they "didn't get much" out of it. Again, we are not there to GET for us but to GIVE to God.

Surely there are times when the service seems superior to other times. Possibly the song leader was inadequate, the preacher boring, the lesson more applicable to us than others, the prayers not well-worded or even spoken loud enough to be heard. Services are conducted by frail men who usually do their best. If we do the right acts (singing, praying, partaking of the Lord's Supper, giving and studying His word) the service is proper in that respect. Our problem may be our own attitude because we want something new, exciting and to be like the nations round about. We would do well to engage is some serious self-examination (1 Cor. 11:28). After all, worship is a very personal matter. We want to come before God with clean

hands and a pure heart. Psalm 24:3, 4, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." Then when the hour for worship comes we shall state with David, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." We will have the same attitude toward worship as Peter did at the Mount of Transfiguration, "…it is good for us to be here."

* * * * *

Holy Days

This lesson is not presented as a sermon but simply a collection of information regarding days some have declared to be "holy days" which magnify the false doctrines that are in the world. These days are of Catholic origin and many times imitated by Protestants. Christians observe the Lord's Supper every first day of the week as the New Testament teaches. They do not observe these "holy days" that have come from the minds of men.

Galatians 4:9-11, "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain."

Paul was teaching that we are not under the Mosaic Law which called for observances of days, etc. but under Christ. Some were turning back to the ways of Judaism and observing unauthorized "holy days." Paul was showing them that such was to turn away from the truth. Since it

was improper for the early Christians to turn to observing such days, why is it not improper for those who profess to serve Christ today to do similar things? It is wrong. We must avoid it.

Below we shall list a number of these "holy says" that some observe without much comment about them but only remind us that such as not found in Scripture.

MARDI GRAS- the last day of feasting, revelry, nudity, drunkenness and rioting before LENT

ASH WEDNESDAY- when ashes are placed on the forehead the first day of LENT to indicate penitence

LENT- a period of 40 days of sacrifice, denying self things that are usually commonplace otherwise

HOLY WEEK- the last week of LENT

LAZARUS SUNDAY- commemoration of the raising of Lazarus

PALM SUNDAY- commemoration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem

MAUNDY THURSDAY- the day of the Last Supper

GOOD FRIDAY, HOLY FRIDAY, BL:ACK FRIDAY- the day of the crucifixion of Christ

EASTER- the day of His resurrection

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY- the Sunday after Easter when the pope forgives sins that have been confessed and the

removal of temporal punishment for those sins, accompanied by reception of communion

“But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). There are other celebrations.

ANNUNCIATION DAY- the day Gabriel announced to Mary of the coming birth of Jesus

ADVENT- leading up to Christmas; the visit by the wise men, etc

CHRISTMAS- the birthday of Jesus

ALL SAINTS DAY- celebration of martyrs

A DAY TO CELEBRATE THE TRANSFIGURATION

HOLY CROSS DAY- Remembering the masons who erect a cross on church buildings

TRINITY SUNDAY- to celebrate the Trinity

EPHIPHANY- celebrate the baptism of Jesus

There are others but this must suffice. None of these days have Biblical authority. They have resulted from the doctrines of men. Christians realize and recognize them as relics of apostasy. Many “Protestant” churches have borrowed such things from the Catholics. Their religions are overrunning with rituals, ceremonies, pious displays and showmanship of human religions.

But I suppose it is all right for those who do not have respect for the Word of God anyway.

* * * * *

Overcoming Anxiety

The subject suggests anxiety is something that needs to be overcome, hence, something undesirable. But this is a problem common among nearly everyone at one time or another. Anxiety is a sin. Luke 12:22, ("Take no thought for your life…") means not be anxious. Philippians 4:6, 7, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ."

We often say, "I just can't keep from worrying." This is not true because God never asks anything of us we cannot do if we rely upon Him.

Worry and anxiety are uneasiness of the mind, distress of the heart and fretfulness of disposition. It involves expenditure of mental, emotional, physical and spiritual energies that should be spent differently. Anxiety comes from a Middle English word that means to strangle, mangle, harass, snap, bite and shake. Disturbing!

Over What Do We Worry?

We worry over what has happened, is happening, will happen, may happen, could happen, even things that likely will not happen. There are two things about which should not worry: (1) things we cannot help because we can do nothing about it; (2) things we can help and ought to be busy doing something about it. When we see so much evil

around us we may even worry if right will prevail over evil. We do not think it will in this world. There is the world to come. Then we shall know that right prevailed.

Undesirable Results

Worry always produces a negative result. Matthew 5:25-30 is inspired teaching from Jesus about the providence of God. Knowing what Jesus said and conforming to what He said are two different matters.

There is a difference between worry and a proper and legitimate concern. They are not the same. “Be not anxious” does not mean to be flippant, irresponsible, unconcerned, not caring or living an ill-planned life. The Lord does not condemn giving proper thought to the needs and duties of life that demand attention. Distinction exists between “forethought” and “fear thought.” Solomon cited the ant as an example to follow and the ant gave proper consideration for preparation for the future.

Consider Second Corinthians 11:28 as Paul recounted things he had endured, “Besides those things which are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” The church faced trouble everywhere from many sources; persecutions andd the threat of apostasy. He was properly concerned about this because souls were at stake. It mattered to him what happened to his brethren. Worry means frustration while concern is a matter of protecting and preserving what deserves protection and preservation. The difference between caring and being troubled with cares is a real distinction we may confuse.

What Worry Produces

Worry will impair health mentally and physically. Good health demands a good frame of mind which worry destroys. Worry steals joy and brings a dark cloud over life. It borrows trouble that often never comes. It weakens our defenses to cope with problems. It actually manifests a weak faith. It is a spiritual malady.

Furthermore, it is useless and futile because it never produces any good. It is not neutral in effect. Can you name one beneficial contribution worry ever makes?

We borrow trouble. We may be like the man who ran toward the dock to take a ferry thinking he was late and might miss the boat. As he approached the end of the dock he saw the boat was a few feet away. With a mighty leap he jumped on board. One bystander asked him why he did that since the ferry was just coming in to the dock; not leaving. He had borrowed trouble.

One of the more deadly results of worry, "…the care of this world," is its power to choke the word out of our life (Matthew 13:22).

Millions of dollars are spent pursing remedies for worry with suggestions of every sort except the one that works. The right relationship with God and trust in His promises is the real cure to this distressing situation.

How Do We Overcome Worry

My Mother once said most of the things about which she worried never happened so she worried over them so they would not. I don't think that is what the Lord had in mind.

Regarding worry about the past, Paul advised to forget it (Phil. 3:13). Shakespeare said, "Let us not burden our remembrance with a heaviness that is gone." Fitzgerald captured the Biblical concept when he wrote, "The Moving Finger writes, and having writ moves on; nor all our pity

nor wit can lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all our tears wash out a word of it."

Worry about the future can be dispelled when we meditate on such passages as Psalm 46:1-3, "God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

Why worry over the present? We must learn to be content as we are (Phil. 4:11-13). "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34). We can only handle one day at a time. We are overburdened when we try to carry the loads of yesterday, today and tomorrow all at once.

Worry Over Physical Death

The mission of Christ removes this worry if we follow Him. Paul was ready to die because he had made proper preparation for death having fought a good fight, finished his course and kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:6-8). His reward awaited him. We can do as much because Paul said, "…and not to me only but to all them also that love his appearing."

Prayer Defeats Worry

We are so dependent on God. Why should we try to deal with all the matters of life and death without Him? Does He not promise that we can handle whatever comes together with Him (1 Cor. 10:13)? Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). God will hear and answer the prayer of His people.

The more we trust God the less we shall worry. We must put our emphasis in life on the spiritual (Mark 8:36) rather

than the material which perishes (1 Tim. 6:6-9). Hebrews 13:5, 6," Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). He is able to do above what we are able to ask or think (Eph. 3:20). We can learn to accept what we cannot change and work to change what we cannot accept.

Sometimes we may be like the man, in the dark of night, who stepped over a precipice and as he was falling grabbed desperately for something to hold him. He caught a limb protruding from the bank and held tightly until his strength gave way. He finally turned loose and fell, six inches, to solid ground.

"Said the robin to the sparrow
I should really like to know
Why these restless human beings
Rush about and worry so!

Said the sparrow to the robin
I know not, unless it be
That they know not the heavenly Father,
Such as cares for you and me."

Remember the law of sowing and reaping. Sow to the Spirit and all will be well (Gal.6:7, 8). Do not grow weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9) because we shall reap if we faint not. After all, problems can have a positive effect to keep us humble, develop patience, offer opportunities to grow and defeat weakness. The Lord may be using such things to chasten us because He loves us (Heb. 12:6). We can count our blessings and see our worry is in vain.

The solution to worry, and it is so much easier to say than to follow, is to take God at His Word. Our faith will put worry to flight. This will allow less room for worry.

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Whosoever Shall Lose His Life

The reading of Luke 9:1-27 is necessary to get the proposed lesson. The length of the reading makes it inexpedient to include here because the Scripture is readily available.

The Lord selected His apostles and granted unto them power to accomplish their work. He gave them miraculous abilities that would confirm their preaching, show the power of righteousness over the devil and his servants and display the Lord's concern for both the spiritual and physical welfare of mankind. This is sometimes called the Limited Commission in contrast to the Great Commission given later. The first was to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" while the latter was for all men. The first was a message of the coming of the kingdom and the latter that the message of the kingdom had come. The Old Testament prophets had foretold the coming of the kingdom. John the Baptist had preached it was "at hand." Jesus and those He sent forward preached the same message. Emphasis was on the nearness of the kingdom. It would come in the lifetime of some to whom Jesus spoke.

No special material preparations would be necessary since the Lord promised adequate provisions would be given along the way. Undertaking their task under these conditions called for great faith and loyalty on their part.

If they preached as instructed they would discharge their responsibility even if there were some who rejected it.

They were told to simply shake the dust off their feet against such people and go onward. This was a symbolic statement to show the responsibility of rejection rested with those who refused to give heed to their preaching.

So the apostles went to their work with their message of the coming kingdom, the good news of salvation and their merciful work of healing the sick to verify their message.

Herod

The text speaks of Herod who thought Jesus might be John the Baptist returned from the dead. The Herod family was antagonistic to the Lord. Herod the Great sought the life of Jesus at his birth. Herod Antipas had put John the Baptist to death. Later Jesus had to stand before him and be mocked and persecuted. The Herods were hostile to justice, decency and human dignity. Herod was fearful.

It was about then that the identity of Jesus became a dominant subject. Upon the return of his apostles from preaching Jesus inquired who the people thought He was. It is strange that none suggested He was the Christ but one of the stalwart men of God of ages past returned to life. Jesus was most concerned who His disciples considered Him to be. If they were to be His ambassadors their own faith must be sound and secure. It was then Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16).

Feeding the Five Thousand

All this produced the occasion when multitudes followed Him to a deserted area but became hungry. Rather than sending the people away Jesus seized the opportunity to teach and He solved the problem of hunger with five loaves and two fishes. This demonstration of divine power gave

evidence of the source of blessings. Many followed Him but not all with the best motives. Some wanted to make Him an earthly king that would deliver them from Roman occupation. Others hated Him because of the righteousness He preached. Some followed out of the desire for "loaves and fishes." Doubtless, some were simply curious. But we must believe many wanted to hear the truth that He taught.

The Bewildered Disciples

When Jesus told His apostles of His forthcoming death they were confused at the prospect of such evil coming to their Master. Jesus then taught that those that followed Him must deny self, take up their cross and follow Him

To deny self simply means that the will of the Lord must rule life rather than our own will. To take up the cross was to endure whatever hardship following Christ might bring. It does not simply refer to difficulties that arise in life such as are common to man. But those things that bring harm because of faith constitute the cross to be carried. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Since He was hated it should not seem strange to us that His disciples would be hated as well. The Lord would be ashamed of any who should be ashamed of Him or His Word. To lose one's life for His sake is to conform to "thy will be done" as the measure. Priorities must be established and first things must be first. The richest, most blessed and useful life one can live is to follow the Lord daily. There may be times of hardship in doing this but this is what it means to lose your life for His sake.

Misguided Pursuits

Some want fame, fortune, the praise and glory of men and pleasure. To seek these things is to seek folly. What can this world offer with its paltry offerings that compares to the abundant life in Christ? Shall we cast Him away and our hope of heaven for such things? Salvation of the soul is the most important matter the human mind can consider whether we realize it or not.

We need not wear a badge that declares we do not follow Him, or paint a sign that we oppose Him, or tear pages from the Bible to show our hatred. Certainly such shows we are ashamed of Christ. But we shall be judged by His words (John 12:48). Shall we have contempt for the standard by which our eternal destiny is determined?

The fact that the kingdom would come in the lifetime of some to whom Jesus spoke is one of many fatal blows to the false theory of pre-millennialism. If the kingdom is yet to come, Jesus was a false prophet. Shall we look to a false prophet for our salvation?

Another false doctrine exploded by the events in connection with this passage is that John established the church. John was beheaded before the church was established. Jesus promised to build it in the future (Matthew 16) and John died in Matthew 14. John built no church whatsoever. He prepared the way for the Christ.

* * * * *

Aggressive. Fighting, Defending

The Holy Spirit has used several analogies and illustrations to describe to us the life, duty and privileges of being a Christian. It is like a walk or journey, a race to be run, as labor in the vineyard and, the one we consider now, as a soldier in battle. Probably this illustration stresses

more than others the great demand for responsibility, sacrifice, performance, character and obedience.

Jude three teaches we are to "contend earnestly" for the faith. "Contend" means to strenuously strive on behalf of something. In this case it is the faith of Christ, His religion. We are to do this "earnestly."

Ezekiel was a watchman for the Lord. He was to be on guard for the nation against dangers that would arise. He had to be aware and attentive to everything around him. He could not slack from constant vigilance.

Most people would prefer peace without conflict. Those who prefer conflict have a distorted view of life. Seeking peace is a noble goal, but to seek peace at any price is betrayal. Some think that peace and unity is the ultimate goal of Christianity. That is wrong. We can have peace with each other and be united and be lost because we walk not after the truth. Truth is the primary thing.

Being a disciple of Christ will bring conflict because there are those who will not respect the way of the Lord. Jesus said, "Think not that I came to bring peace on earth, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). It is ironic that seeking peace often means we must engage in conflict.

This is why the gospel causes much controversy. Because of man's love for sin, his rejection of divine authority, his disposition to "do his own thing" and have his own way runs counter to the teaching of the Lord. The hatred that servants of the devil have for God makes conflict, as objectionable as it is, inevitable.

Our Warfare

Our warfare is a special kind. It is not a carnal warfare but a spiritual one (1 Cor. 10:3-5). We battle for the hearts, minds and souls of men. We seek no earthly territories. It has been a stain on religion that there have been those

systems that have used carnal warfare to promote and defend their religion, such a Romanism, Protestantism, Islam, etc. Christianity is neither advanced nor defended by such actions as carnal war.

Our Enemy

First Peter 5:8 makes it plain that our enemy is Satan. Satan often uses people to advance his evil way. But it is the devil who is the accuser and deceiver (1 John 3:8; Rev. 12:9). He works his wiles, subtilty and snares (2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 6:11). We must be ever mindful that Satan is the real enemy, not other people. We seek to deliver others from his captivity. Therefore, our efforts are against him even though there are times when we must identify by name those who are in Satan's army. Opposing error is not the same as making a personal attack on someone. Opposing error is essential in the contest for the souls of men just as much as the presentation of the gospel.

Some make a mistake to condemn all judging. We must make judgments if we serve the Lord. When we condemn or approve what God has revealed, we are not being "judges" but only showing respect for the judgments God has made and revealed. It is strange how some criticize criticism except their criticism of those who stand for the truth against error. They are not hesitant to judge those who teach the truth but condemn the idea of judging when error is exposed and opposed. How is opposing error unloving? Is it loving for the lost to remain so without effort to save?

Aggressive

The message we proclaim is the gospel. How do we go about doing that? Christians are not a people looking for a fight, just finding fault, seeking arguments over which to

fuss and be quarrelsome. We can be aggressive without being obnoxious, rude, loud and spewing fiery and provocative rhetoric. To be aggressive means to be energetic, active and zealous for what we believe and teach. We do what we do with all the heart, soul, mind and strength (Luke 10:27). We speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). We love God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, the church, the saved, the lost, those who have fallen away. Some have wrongly concluded that opposition to error is a lack of love. Just the opposite is true. To make such a false charge is to indict the prophets, Christ, His apostles and all who preach the whole counsel of God.

Paul said he had fought a good fight (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Would it have possible for Paul to have done the things he did without being aggressive? What of the apostles who would not cease to preach even though they had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine? Are we to please men or God (Gal. 1:10)? Paul faced conflict when he opposed Peter in Antioch (Gal. 2). Actually, the conflict was caused by Peter's errors; not because Paul had to corrected them.

The makers of idols felt the effect of an aggressive manner. Paul dealt with Elymas aggressively (Acts 13). Look at the work of Jeremiah, Isaiah and all the prophets Jer. 1:10). It is always the case that trouble is caused by error; not because error is opposed. It is important we oppose error in the proper manner and spirit.

Other Aggressive Servants of God

Jonathan was aggressive when he and his servant went against the Philistines. David was aggressive when he was both offensive and defensive facing Goliath. What shall we say of Gideon as he battled the Midianites? Is not John the

Baptist an example of an aggressive warrior in spiritual battle, calling for repentance, preparing for Christ?

Nathan Bedford Forrest had the reputation of dividing his forces when he attacked the enemy, especially when outnumbered, in order to deploy them efficiently. He was taking a page from the work of Gideon.

A Positive and Negative Warfare

The Christian armor as described in Ephesians six shows we fight an offensive and defensive battle. We take the sword to go forward and the shield to defend. It is a sad commentary that some "soldiers" who have become so negative against being negative. This is a part of our fighting.

It is arrogant and presumptive to think we have the right to tamper with "thus saith the Lord" in any way. Being negative is necessary lest people follow that which destroys rather than saves. The Lord has not commissioned us to go into the world and negotiate with the servants of the devil but to preach the gospel and condemn error so that they might hear, believe, repent, confess their faith in Christ and be baptized in water for the remission of sins. The aggressive soldier will do this very thing. There are matters we are FOR and matters we are AGAINST.

Being Defensive

How ridiculous for some to contend that the gospel needs no defense when Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). Truth needs defending against the false doctrines and philosophies of men. To do this we must have knowledge and courage. "Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword" (Numbers

20:18). These were the words Edom spoke to Israel when Israel wanted to pass through their country. The point we make with this phrase is that Christians must say to world, "Thou shalt not pass." Our attitude must be as was that of Paul, "But I would that ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel" (Phil. 1:12).

Some Fighting is Unnecessary

Some matters do not warrant our attention and fighting, such as genealogies, contentions, strivings about the law, fables, foolish and unlearned questions (Titus 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:23). Fighting over personality clashes never produces benefit. Even in matters of indifference and expediencies we should be charitable and tolerant. These kinds of battles are not the kind God wants.

Inside and Outside

Promoters of false doctrines can arise from within and without the church. Those things from without are harmful but not near so much as errors promoted from within. These are more deceptive and readily accepted.

We must be alert to traitors. Christ had Judas. Paul had Demas. John knew Diotrophes. Today, we have the self-appointed and self-identified "change agents" who think they have God's ordination to revise God's will. They are like those of the "Fifth Column" traitors during war in Spain who were from within giving aid and comfort to the enemy. There are religious "Quislings," a name taken from a man who conspired in Norway during World War II with Germany. Enemies without are dangerous but enemies within are deadly. The church has to fight a rearguard

action against such people. We must mark them, avoid them, exclude them, reject them and get on with the war to save souls. This is the war the Lord expects of us.

Be Not Entangled

A soldier who goes to battle must not be entangled with other affairs. Paul wrote, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4). Christian soldiers cannot be wrapped up in the sinful world, partaking of the ways of the devil and still fight successfully for the Lord. Everything he does he does under the umbrella of being a Christian.

We must have battle plans and methods for doing our work. That demands "handling aright the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). But we cannot become so obsessed with "methods" that we forget the "message" is primary. Some want to adopt the methods of denominations to spread the gospel. But methods that may spread error are not always the same that are useful in spreading the truth. "Preach the word" is the way to fight the good fight. Some say we can learn from denominations. I contend that what we learn from denominations is disrespect for the word.

We may at times suffer a temporary defeat and setback. But ultimate victory belongs to the faithful. Consider the deadly consequences of not going to war. It will affect your eternal destiny. If we do not do battle for Christ, who will? So let us go onward into battle under the leadership of the Captain of our faith (Heb. 2:10).

* * * * *

Christians Make Good Employees

"Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11). "Slothful" means sluggish and backward; the opposite of earnestness and diligence. Paul admonished his brethren then and now to be earnest in accomplishing, promoting or striving after anything.

Romans twelve is one of the most outstanding chapters of the Bible dealing with the theme of Christian living. Verse eleven exhorts the Christian in two ways toward the same goal. (1) The Christian is to be energetic and active as far as he is capable. He is to be diligent as he goes about his tasks that are honorable and beneficial. (2) He is not to be a person who is lazy and irresponsible, but one who serves the Lord and his fellowman with a zest that marks him as a child of God. Whatever task he undertakes, he does it with all his might, believing in what he is doing, and doing it like he knows the worth of it.

This has a direct relevancy to the mandatory matter of earning a living, performing services by which provisions in life can be obtained, maintained and sustained. The nature of a Christian is reflected in his character. He is distinctive from those of the world. He is one of the "peculiar" people; traceable to his relationship with Christ.

Man is supposed to work, assuming he has the mental and physical ability to do so. Work is not a part of God's curse because of sin. It was a divinely given assignment before sin entered the world. Man was to dress and keep the garden. It was after sin entered the world that God said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen. 3:19). The result of sin was that man's work would be more difficult. Paul told Christians, "Working with his hands the thing which is good" (Eph. 4:28).

Jacob rebuked his sons in time of need and asked, "Why do you look one upon another?" Gen. 42:1, 2). Instead of making an effort to get grain they were just standing around doing nothing. Work was what Jacob expected.

Jesus asked some in the marketplace, "Why stand ye here all the day idle (Matt. 20:3, 6)? Paul warned against giving assistance to those who "learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (1 Tim. 5:13). One of the problems Ezekiel faced with Judah was "an abundance of idleness" (Ezek. 16:49). They ought to have been at work.

Paul worked with his hands when necessary. "And labor, working with our own hands…" (1 Cor. 4:12). He, along with Priscilla and Acquila, were tentmakers.

The Work Ethic

The Christian has respect for the need of work. "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). This speaks not of those who cannot work, or when there is no work available, but of those who could work if they would but will not. Most people, when they get hungry enough, will be willing to work. The Christian is fully aware of the nobility of work.

We Work for Others

Most of us hold occupations in the employ of somebody else. Many are self-employed but that is not the case with most of us. What Paul teaches is applicable to every Christian whether he works for another or himself. One who is employed by another is subject to his employer.

“Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed” (1 Tim. 6:1). The kingdom of heaven is compared to a vineyard in which workers work (Matt. 20:1). In New Testament times there were masters and slaves. But the principle remains similar regarding our relationship between employee and employer. Slavery is an institution that runs against the teaching of Christ and we rejoice that such does not exist legally in our nation anymore. But the principles regarding master/slave relationship given nearly two thousand years ago are still applicable in the employee/employer relationship. “The servant is not greater than his lord” (John 13:16).

In our lesson we are assuming the work under consideration is honorable. The Christian, then, understands that his real employer is the Lord. “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters, according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ, not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as servants of God, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not to men” (Ephesians 6:5-7). In other words, the Christian seeks to please Christ by being obedient to his employer.

Being obedient means he is free from pretence; not just appearing to be a good worker when being watched, but one who knows and appreciates the fact that he always is in view of the Judge of all. “Eyeservice” is not his ambition. He does not seek to just look busy. Fortunate is the employer who has such a man as this working for him.

Good Stewards

A good employee is a good steward. A steward is one who is given charge of that which belongs to another. He

uses it in the interest of the owner. The one talent man in Matthew 25 was rebuked, not because he did not double his funds as did the others, but because he was a poor steward and did nothing at all. In another parable Jesus told of a servant who took his master's goods and used them for his own gain (Luke 16:1). Joseph was given oversight over the house of Potiphar because he was a good steward. Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, was so trustworthy that he was charged to getting a wife for Abraham's son, Issac. We are all temporary stewards in this life and should serve well.

Courtesy and a Good Name

A good employee can bring good will to his employer by being a courteous worker, accommodating to others, not acting rudely or impatiently, but treating people with respect and following the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12). An employee of the opposite disposition can soon ruin a business. The Christian does this because it is right as Christ taught. He does things efficiently and congenially not only for himself, his employer, but for the Lord's sake.

He Will and Will Not

It is reported that there are millions of dollars stolen by employees from employers every year, The gospel teaches, "Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may to have to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28).Christians will not steal from anybody.

Christians will also tell the truth. You can rely upon his word. "Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9). Truth in the business world is not always the norm.

With All His Might

Romans 12:11 teaches us to be energetic and diligent in the discharge of our assignments. The Christian will give himself to his task with enthusiasm and vigor. He may not always like what he does but he does it properly. Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Colossians 3:23, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men." Christians work for the Lord primarily.

Morality

Thousands of hour of work are lost to employers because employees are absent from work due to immoral behavior. The moral values of the Christian are such that he will keep himself fit for labor. He will not be absent due to sickness caused by evil living, such as drunkenness, illicit use of drugs, fighting, arrest, jail time, accidents due to deranged minds by mind-altering drugs and such as that. He will not be one who causes disruption in the work place.

One of the more evil results of women leaving the home and going into the work market has been the increase of adultery, divorce, unfaithfulness of one sort or another, neglect of children, jealousy and envy; all for the sake of money. Many have shifted their affections while on the job. Such is not true with faithful Christians.

The Christian is not selfish but is concerned not only for his own job record, his reputation, what people think of him but his influence as a Christian, not bringing reproach on the name of His Savior. He guards his tongue from dirty stories, profanity and gossip. He keeps his speech pure. He learns to express himself correctly without dipping into the

gutter to do so. Matthew 12:34, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” So he guards his heart, thoughts, motives and intentions. When a Christian is on the job you have no worry about him offending anyone with low level talk that is offensive. Refined people do not have to use profanity. Only the ignorant and base do that.

He Is Not Violent

Disputes arise from time to time between employees and employers. It is not uncommon for union thugs to destroy property and injure people seeking their goals. Companies have hired thugs to harm employees who do not conform to their will. Can a Christian ever be a part of such a thing? To ask is to answer. While some people are beaten, shot, even killed in labor disputes, property burned and cars stoned the Christian’s loyalty to Christ prohibits him from participating in such activity.

There are wicked servants. Jesus mentioned one in Luke 19:22, “Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, Thou wicked servant.” Some will lie, cheat, steal, short-change, cut corners, do inferior work, dishonest deeds in order that they might gain more. But do they gain or lose? In God’s eyes they are losers. They corrupt themselves and make themselves unfit for the service of God.

Would it not be wonderful if a Christina who seeks employment could simply submit a resume to a prospective employer that he is a Christian and the world would immediately know that here is a person who will make a worker to be admired. When the employee follows Christ this will be the case.

The Christian employee teaches by both word and deed to the world, his children and his brethren what a worker ought to be. He does this because he is committed to Christ.

* * * * *

Building a Christian Character and Reputation

Let us first get a clear definition of our subject material. Character is what a person really is. It is what God knows him to be. It does not refer to something physical but one's moral nature. The measure of character is what one would do if he knew nobody would ever know; what he would do if nobody was watching. Good character can be built and only the person himself can destroy it.

Reputation is what others perceive a person to be. It is not always the same as one's character and can undergo tremendous change as one lives life. Reputations can easily be destroyed by others even when character is good.

One may have a bad character and a bad reputation like Doeg who killed God's priests, or King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. One may have a good character and a bad reputation like Joseph in Egypt when falsely charged with evil, or like Jeremiah who was accused of treason because he spoke God's warnings, or like Jesus Christ. One may have a bad character and a good reputation like Absalom as he stole the hearts of the people from David, or like Judas, or the church in Sardis who had a reputation of being alive but was dead on the Lord's view (Rev. 3:1). We should seek both a good character ands a good reputation.

We speak of a certain kind of character; the Christian character which is necessary to salvation. While God is no

respecter of persons (Acts 10:34, 35) He does respect good character.

Character is taken with us when we die. That is the only thing a person truly possesses. That will not be left behind.

The importance of character is evidenced in its lasting power for evil or for good. Consider the character of Abraham, David, Moses, Daniel, Paul and others. Consider adversely the character of Ahab, Jezebel, Diotrophes and similar people.

Character is important to a nation. The character of a nation is the total of the character of its citizens. "Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). An orderly society is dependent on the character of the citizens. There cannot be enough policemen to enforce good behavior by law unless there is good character among the people.

Character and Science

Scientific advancement must be governed by character, not just by what man may be capable of doing. Genetic manipulations, surrogate parentage and similar scientific possibilities exist. Science is powerful. But where did we get the idea that if something can be done it ought to be done? A gun pointed at the right object and in the right hands can be useful and beneficial. But a gun pointed the wrong way by the wrong person is harmful. Scientific knowledge can be destructive as well as constructive. Not everything that can be done ought to be done. It depends on the character of those who have and use science whether it is beneficial or harmful.

The Builder of Character

Each one is the builder of his own character although we are assisted by others. Good character is not received but achieved. It results from development and spiritual growth. It begins to be formed in the home, worship services, Bible classes, schools and experiences of life. This process continues throughout life. It is within our power to possess the kind of character God approves.

Having a good character requires a good teacher and a good example to imitate because it is learned. We have perfection in Jesus Christ to follow. A good environment can help but is not absolutely necessary to have a good character. Some of the world's best people have risen from bad environments. Some with environmental advantages have proven to be disgraceful. We must have righteous ideals, goals and priorities. It is the result of training of the conscience. The word of God provides what we need to develop a good character.

Some contend that a better education is the solution to the many ills confronting society. This may be true but not necessarily. What kind of education do you mean? We have some highly "educated fools" in society. We could wish the "experts" who recommend almost every "cure" to the ills of society except the only one that works would be educated in the ways of God rather than their inflated ego.

Others Factors of Character

Habit can be an aid in developing a good character. Constant practice of good things will make us more what we ought to be.

A penitent spirit when we do wrong makes for good character. It is one of man's most difficult tasks to admit, "I was wrong. I have sinned." Unforgiven sin will enslave

more and more. Sin without repentance decreases one's appetite for things good, high, holy and righteous.

Character is also determined by where you place trust. Trust in yourself and you are doomed to disappointment. Trust in your friends and they will die and leave you. Trust in your money, and you may have it taken from you. Trust in reputation and a slanderous tongue will blast it. But trust in God and you are never to be confounded in time or eternity.

Obstacles to Overcome

A lack of Bible knowledge hinders developing a good character. Holding false standards, the wrong priorities, yielding to temptation, allowing pride to dominate, choosing evil companions, seeking one's own way will just about ruin any chance of a good character.

Reputation

While it is not necessary to have a good reputation to get to heaven (evil people may think ill of you), it is important. Luke 6:26, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." It is not bad to have some people against you. Reputations can be sorely misleading. But they do count. One is barred from leadership in the church without a good reputation (1 Tim. 3:17). This is because of influence upon others.

Did you ever hear someone say, "I don't care what people think of me." That may be so, but we should care. Probably we do care more than we will admit. For the sake of our influence we ought to care. We cannot care what

others think to the extent that we would compromise truth for their approval. But remember, "A good name is better than precious ointment…" (Eccl. 7:1, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches…" (Prov. 22:1). Shakespeare once wrote, "Who steals my purse steals trash, 'tis something, nothing; 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands. But he that filches from me my good name, robs me of that which not enriches him, and makes me poor indeed."

A counterfeit coin may pass a few hands without being discovered. But eventually it will be found out. As Moses said, "Be sure your sin will find you out…" (Num. 32:23).

One is best known by what one does and says more than by what someone says or thinks about him. Jesus is the best example of this truth. Jesus said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). James says let a man show by his manner of life wisdom and knowledge.

When Character is put to Test

Character is tested and developed by both prosperity and adversity; when things go smoothly and when things are rough; in victory and defeat. It is made and displayed by the way we meet life and its challenges. Christians can expect their characters to be tested in this evil world that is hostile to their convictions. One of the most severe trials of character is when you are viciously, unjustly and falsely maligned. But we can be consoled, strengthened and encouraged in the knowledge that Jesus knows. That is what matters.

* * * * *

Confess Your Faults

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth must" (James 5:16).

These words were written to spiritual Israel, applicable to Christians in the first century and also to Christians anywhere and anytime. There is a life to be lived as a Christian according to the way God has directed. James is a portion of that guidance given by God. There are things required and things forbidden; promises and warnings.

These words were given when miraculous healing was evident but such healing has ceased (1 Cor. 1:10). The matter of confessing sins and prayer neither was nor is miraculous in nature.

Christians Do Sin

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). "If we say that we have not sinned we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). The fact that we have become Christians does not mean we never sin. We need forgiveness of sins committed since becoming Christians. God has provided the way for that forgiveness by His blood. It includes confession of sins. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Others Have Confessed Sins

We confess our faith in Christ before baptism and that implies we understand we are guilty of sin. David confessed his sins surrounding his sin with Bathsheba (1 Sam. 1:13). Achan confessed he had sinned (Josh. 7:20).

Simon admitted his sin (Acts 8:22-24). The publican confessed he was a sinner (Luke 18:13).

A little boy heard his self-righteous uncle pray for God to forgive his sins. He then said to his uncle, "Name one." We may find it easy to ask for forgiveness generally but what of specific sins?

What It Means to Confess

It is to make something known. The one confessing makes known his penitent spirit regarding his transgression. He recognizes the sinfulness of his word or deed and speaks to another concerning that guilt and makes it known he is turning from it.

"Confess" in the Greek is present imperative which means we must always be willing to confess, keep on confessing, when the need arises.

Confession is not simply an expression of a desire to do better. Everyone should have that desire always. It is not "if I have sinned." It is mockery of confession unless one is convinced he has sinned. It is not feeling we have not done enough. Who has? We all could respond all day on that. It is not the same as asking brethren for prayer when facing some crisis or challenge. Such is certainly acceptable.

To Whom Do We Confess?

All sin is against God (Acts 5:4). When Joseph refused Potiphar's wife he said "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God" (Gen. 40:9)? Ananias and Sapphira sinned against God (Acts 5:4. Even though others would have been involved, God would be offended always in sin. Ezra 11:10, Daniel 9:4, 5 shows we are to confess to God. Only God can forgive sins. While we are to

forgive each other, we may do that and still not be forgiven by God. We are to forgive each other on God's terms. Our text is concerned with person to person confession with confession to God always implied.

Some "change agents" have suggested we raise the windows and let in a bit of freshness and before the Lord's Supper let an elder or the preacher "absolve" the congregation of all sin. Where do we read of such a thing? "Absolve" means to set free, release from guilt and penalty. Just let some super brother wipe them away. Where do they get the idea that we partake of the Lord's Supper in perfection? We partake "worthily," not because we are worthy. This is a juvenile imitation of Romanism which grants such power to Roman priests. Wayne Coats remarked, "I know only two people who could possibly set one free from sin. They both reside in Nashville. One is an apostle and the other raises windows." He spoke of Don Finto and Rubel Shelly. Fresh is not to be foul.

A. T. Robertson commented, "Confession of sin to God is already assumed. But public confession of certain sins to one another is the meetings is greatly helpful in many ways. This is not confessing to one man like a priest in place of the public confession. One may confess to the pastor (his word, JWB) without confessing to God, or to the church, with little benefit to anybody."

Another Heresy

In the Boston and Crossroads Movements they have the senior-junior prayer partner arrangement where the junior confesses to the senior but not the other way around. This one-way confessional sets up a special class of brethren to hear confessions. It is nothing but a mind-control of others.

The Extent of the Confession

This is determined by who is involved in the offense. Surely the sin should be confessed as widely as the parties involved. Confession to God to the exclusion of those offended would be folly. The offended one must be included (Matt. 5:23, 24). Some sins need not be publicly confessed (Matt. 18:15) because they are not publicly known. Personal sins should be personally confessed to God. Personal offenses should be resolved by those involved. All offenses need not be made publicly known or publicly confessed because no benefit would be derived. It seems obvious that many knew of Simon's sin and he confessed to all. He asked his brethren to pray for him. Private sins can become public knowledge and all are affected and infected. Unless publicly confessed how else could we know to forgive? There is a difference between forgiving and being willing to forgive. Can we forgive if the offender persists in his sin? God does not even do that. Why should one who is guilty of some private wrong want to broadcast that to everyone? All are not involved. That becomes a matter between him and the Lord. There are times when offenses must be told to the church (Matt. 18:17). Nobody should ever have the attitude that what he does is nobody's business but his own if others are affected and they are when sin is committed openly and known.

For example, one may utter profanity and only he knows it. He should confess his sin to God. But when a man has taken his father's wife (as in Corinth, 1 Cor. 5) that needs to be publicly confessed and corrected. The entire church was not only aware but had become "puffed up" over it. To have tried to cover that in a corner would not be sufficient. If the church does not know, what benefit can come from a public confession? Some things are best left unsaid. If

nobody but God knows, take it before God alone. Confess your sins as widely as they are known.

Are there not sins in the heart that only God knows? Shall we confess those to others? What is gained? Actually, harm could result rather than benefit.

How to Confess

There is no set pattern how confession is to be offered. Some come down the aisle at services, although that is not required. Others may confess their sins to elders and have it announced to the congregation. Others may make their own statement of confession. (This last can lead to error if women begin to speak before the assembly.) There is no set procedure in Scripture. Whatever procedure is used it should consider the purposes of the confession for all.

Behind the Confession

Confession results from obedience from the heart, by choice, not by over persuasion or an appeal to emotion. It is done with humility, a display of accountability, motivated by a penitent spirit. Prayer is to be made after confessions (James 5:16; Acts 8:22). If sin is not confessed it does no good to pray for the sinner to be forgiven.

Confession if sin is not a sign of weakness as much as a determination of strength and a sign of spiritual wisdom. It requires courage and conviction with a love for righteousness. One must deny self and embrace truth. He must be convinced of the way of right and abhor evil. It contributes to continued fellowship and communion with brethren. It clears the conscience. To ignore the need to confess our sins will harden the heart and dare the devil.

Who cannot rejoice over one sinner that repenteth? To recover a fallen brother is our aim (Gal. 6:1; James 5:20).

Not the Way for the Alien

The teaching of James is not the way an alien sinner, one who has never come to Christ, is forgiven of sin. That person must obey the gospel by hearing the word, believing it, repenting of sin, confessing faith in Christ and being baptized in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). The words of James are to Christians who have sinned. It is sometimes called the "second law of pardon" although there is but one law of pardon but directed to two different classes of people; non-Christians and Christians.

Possibly pride is the greatest barrier to confessing sins. What a tragedy that we remain in sin due to our own pride! How blessed we are that we have an Advocate before God (Heb. 3:1; 1 John 2:1) who stands in our behalf. Let us not disappoint Him and fail to "confess our sins."

* * * * *

Patient in Tribulation

"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer… Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not" (Romans 12:12, 14).

It may be easy for someone to tell you to "take it easy" in times of trouble, but Paul was one who had experienced much trouble and knew how to respond to it. His admonition is the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"Tribulation" refers to anguish, burden, including persecution, trouble and affliction. It is a pressing upon

one, oppression, distress, calamity, misery and a burden of heart. It is physical, emotional and spiritual.

It is true that often trouble is self-imposed, even though unintentionally. Others can also cause us trouble. But trouble is a part of man's existence. Paul speaks of such things that are "common to man" (1 Cor. 10:13). Did not Job say that a man's life is "full of trouble" (Job 14:17)? When trouble comes we are not to think we are unique in that respect. Accidents, disease, physical and mental handicaps, injuries when we violate the laws of nature, infirmities of old age, inevitable conflicts, losses, death, on and on the list grows of trouble in life. Some may even result from malice and hatred in our hearts toward others and in their hearts toward us. Life may not always seem fair but who says it is supposed to be fair?

Jesus warned of persecutions that would come upon His people because of their faith and convictions as they live in a world that is hostile to His way (Matt. 5:11; John 16:2). Peter comforted his brethren who were in the midst of persecution (1 Peter 4:16). Paul's statement is familiar, "Yea, and all that will godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). First Thessalonians 3:4, "That no man should be moved by afflictions; for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto." There are so many similar passages.

Is God the Cause?

Many quickly blame God when trouble strikes. "Why does God do this to me?" But is God the cause of our distress or the provider of comfort in distress? The problems of life are the result of sin in the world, ours and others. God allows transgressions because we are creatures of choice. Even the righteous suffer. There simply are some

things we cannot change but must learn to either overcome or endure. Don't blame God for man's failings.

God is the source of relief from such things. While Job's friends were mistaken to think that Job's problems stemmed from his own sinfulness, he was not personally at fault nor was God. Pilate had slain some who sacrificed and others died when a tower fell upon them, but it was not because they were more evil than others (Luke 13:1-5).

Some think trouble is just "bad luck." But life is not luck. Denial of any personal responsibility is a trait of our generation. We ask, "Why me? Why this? Why that? Why now? Why so much? Why so long?" Such questions only prove we do not always have the reason for things that happen. Jesus said, "In this world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33).

Examples of Suffering

Christ is our example before all others how to cope with tribulation. When He was reviled, He did not revile again (1 Peter 1:23). Isaiah 53:7 foretold His suffering and how He would handle it (Isaiah 53). Was not Christ tolerant and patient toward His disciples who would hear but not understand? Was He not disappointed in Judas yet did not rail against him? Paul was troubled on every side (2 Cor. 4:8) but did not retaliate. "I am filled with comfort; I am exceeding joyful in tribulation" (2 Cor. 7:4). The apostles thanked God they were counted worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ (Acts 4:5). Paul said he counted himself happy even when in chains before Agrippa (Acts 26:2). These are examples how to combat trouble.

James 5:11 tells us Job is an example in suffering. He never did "curse God and die." He said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 15:13).

Look at the marvelous life of Joseph as a classic demonstration of overcoming and enduring hardship (Gen. 37-41). Even so, he sought no revenge.

Benefits of Tribulation

Does it seem strange to you that there are benefits in tribulation? Peter tells us we are "tried with fire" (1 Peter 1:7) by which our faith is purified and refined. James teaches our troubles help us to develop patience (James 1:3). We gain wisdom, experience and hope under fire (Romans 5:4). Just as the athlete presses weights to grow stronger for the race, so we face hardships that can be our training efforts. Enduring distress makes us more compassionate and sympathetic toward others. We develop perseverance and humility when we encounter roadblocks. We do not always have to understand the why and wherefore of everything. It is not a question how to escape tribulation but how to face it.

Our prime point of this lesson is tribulation met successfully requires and develops patience, steadfastness, growth and maturity; the core of faithfulness.

Definition of Patience

Ecclesiastes 7:8, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better that the proud in spirit." The best definition of patience is faithfulness, keep on keeping on. Paul urges, (Rom. 2:7), "…patient in well doing." It is a continuing operation, staying under, abiding, remaining, undergoing, bearing up and persevering. It is being lenient rather than rash; steadfast rather than vacillating; unswerving in loyalty. It is not to be equated with self-pity under trying circumstances

without complaining and murmuring. It may not be totally void of complaint. It is not indifference toward problems.

Romans 8:35-39 speaks how nothing can deprive us of the love God has for us even though He may not always approve of us. Patience is that trait of character which enables the Christian to overcome and endure whatever may come in his life. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). Hebrews 12:1, “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” We cannot quit regardless of how weary we may become. Self-control, self-discipline leads us to victory. Especially is patience necessary when wrongs are committed against us. It reflects composure, tranquility, confidence, fortitude, submission, forbearance and calmness. When life seems to “ruffle your feathers” patience comes into play. When all goes well and is pleasing it is not difficult to maintain a good disposition. “For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God” (1 Peter 2:20).

Fountain of Patience

What produces patience? Our motivation to live with God in heaven keeps us pressing toward the mark. We will endure whatever it takes to reach our ultimate goal of heaven. We have reason to maintain our faith. Why would we sacrifice eternal glory because of hardships that this life may bring on our heads? Faith produces patience and faith comes via God’s word (Rom. 10:17). We live with a justified hope; not just wishful thinking and guessing. We have full confidence in our Savior and for this reason we go forward in life day by day loyal to our King.

The book of Revelation is an encouragement to patience among the first century Christians who were undergoing persecutions. Revelation 13:10, “Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.” Again, Revelation 14:12, “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”

When the spiritual conflict is over, when we have fought the last battle of life and physical death has taken us away, when we are eventually resurrected from the dead and stand before God in judgment as all must (Heb. 9:27; John 5:28, 29; 2 Cor. 5:10), then we shall know the victory because we have determined to be among those who patiently kept the commandments of God. Romans 8:18, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present world are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.” We can know we have a home in heaven if we will be that faithful and patient servant.

A Precious Promise

A precious promise that will help us continue in patience is 1 Cor. 10:13, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

With such an assurance we shall be patient in tribulation.

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Christian Living Under Attack

Christianity is not only God’s way of saving man from sin but it also a way of life. It makes a difference to God how we live each day. We are to imitate Christ and not

conform to this world (Rom. 12:1, 2). Because there is coming a day of judgment our manner of life is to be holy (2 Pet. 1:11). Our conversation (manner of life) is to be becoming the gospel (Phil. 1:27). We are to be holy because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). We are to live righteous lives (Titus 2:12).

Many have chosen to live contrary to the way of Christ and are living their own way. They are not content to do just that but attack the way of the Lord, try to dissuade others from living His way, using their influence in the opposite direction with criticism of the Lord. This has become dominant in our society and the result is moral decline, degeneracy, depravity and rebellion against Christianity.

How is This Being Accomplished?

There are determined efforts being made to destroy respect for the Bible, Christ, the church, divine authority and even the reality of right and wrong. There is the desire to lower standards to accommodate what God calls sinful. Humanism has captured the minds of so many that their attitude toward things sacred and spiritual is that it does not matter and nobody cares. The worst sort of behavior is paraded as if it should be acceptable and imitated.

What are the Sources of These Attacks?

It is shocking to learn of some of them. We expect that pressure from the hellish dens of iniquity, but not from places where goodness ought to be respected. The home, not all but too many, leads the attack. Behavior is first learned at home. Homes are suffering from divorce, disregard for the sanctity of marriage, neglected and abused

children, sexual unfaithfulness, verbal and physical abuse and the emotional disaster that always follows. There exist many unnecessary single parent homes, mothers working outside the home and the home neglected. This last is partly due to high taxation and the craving for money. “A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Proverbs 29:15). How many millions of children are now called “latch-key” children because they have a key to the house because when they come home none are there to guide them? This has been promoted by the devilish so-called “feminist movement.”

There is a lack of spiritual training of children and they grow up physically and do not even know the difference between right and wrong. Parents set a poor example before their children by smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, using profanity and drugs, committing fornication. The home is the source of all national life. Look at the homes of America and you will discover why our problems are almost insurmountable.

The Educational System

That which is supposed to help produce good lives contributes to the destruction of good lives. The educational system, not every system but many, especially the public schools and schools of “higher” education, degrade moral living, promoting temptations, condoning immorality, rejecting God’s moral principles. Why? It is because the “wise” men of our time do not want restrictions on behavior; not even self-imposed ones. They want a society where “anything goes,” except morality. The National Education Association is one of God’s worst enemies in this country. Dominated by communist thinking and humanistic philosophy, it is incapable of producing a

good society. Anti-god theories reign supreme in spite of irrefutable evidences that they are false, such as Darwinian evolution. Nothing is more foolish than what is called the "big bang theory" of origins.

"Scholars" think they can debunk the Bible. What they do is wave their hand to dismiss it because they cannot handle it. They think it is their duty to destroy faith in the hearts and lives of their students. Why should a person live a godly life for no reason? They seek to destroy the reason and just look at the lives produced!

School activities promote lasciviousness, atheism, homosexuality, laughing at God. One student wished to take a Bible into class and he was prohibited. He was told it was not allowed in the school. God told him not to feel to badly because He was not allowed there either.

The Media and Entertainment World

It is not exaggeration to say that these sources are down right vulgar. Those who produce much that can be seen on television have money as their god; not morals. They seek dollars; not decency. They want gain; not godliness. They love sin; not sense. Programs, even newscasts, reek with profanity, violence, cruelty, abuse, bloodshed, murder, rape, torture just for the sake of showing it. The producers are human scum. They influence the public for evil. They glorify immoral celebrities, excuse drunkenness, and look like "street walkers." Talk shows, day and night, dip to the lowest levels of human misbehavior and moral filth.

Where would one go to find a decent movie? They say they have ratings? Who does the rating but people of sewage-type minds? Can anything coming out of Hollywood be trusted to be true and decent? They merchandise vulgarity. People see, applaud, and imitate

such stuff in their lives. They claim they are only reflecting society. Some parts of society do not deserve being reflected. But they are also influencing society even though they push their lies that they are not.

Most in the news media and the entertainment world are secularists, liberals, atheists, racist bigots and hypocrites. Religion is presented by them in a despicable fashion as weak and hateful. Even much music glorifies the abominable. What is lower than these rock-and-rock sewer rats in their shows and personal conduct? Why would any decent person want to imitate this sub-culture's dress and manners except they have that same contempt for decency?

You would possibly think athletes, who are supposed to be trained and self-disciplined, would be better role models. Many are good. But there are so many pieces of human rubbish that get the headlines because that is what the media wants.

In addition there are the tabloids, magazines, novels, books that are nothing but unrighteous attacks against God.

Government

To find a decent role model among those in government is a rare find. The purpose of government is to protect the good and punish the evil (Rom. 13:3; 1 Pet. 2:14). Is that the way it is? Does not government too often protect the violator and demean the victim?

America's number one drug problem is alcohol which is promoted, licensed, endorsed, used, taxed and encouraged by those in government by their behavior and the laws they pass. They pay no attention to the hell and havoc drinking causes on lives, minds, bodies, health, home and economy. There has yet to be presented one societal benefit to the manufacture, distribution and consumption of alcoholic

beverages; the darling of government and greedy scum. It has been suggested that the government in Washington is ruled by three parties: Democrat, Republican and the cocktail party.

The permissive and tolerant attitude toward drunkenness promotes evil. People can even kill while drunk and the judicial system gives them the proverbial "slap on the wrist" when they deserve execution. Drive your car and destroy and kill while drunk and punishment is minimal and only then if you don't buy your way out. Why should there by repeated DUI's? You cannot drive when you are in jail or the grave. Many government rulings are designed and intended to intimidate religious people into silence.

Government makes a mockery of justice to drag out trials, appeals, etc. for literally years after the crime. Eccl. 8:11, "Because sentence against an evil doer is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." But our "wise" men think God does not know what He is saying. They know better.

Why should parolees commit crimes? Why are there such things as parolees? Why support murdering the unborn as our degenerate government does? Most abortions are to cover fornication of unwed mothers and the desire to get rid of responsibility.

Consider the character of those who lead in government. Some of the most degenerate conduct is their way. And most get away with it depending if their party is in power. What do they care? They think they have been chosen to be god. "Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Most ignore this, especially the ACLU and Acorn. When a nation has no more respect for God than we presently see, it may be mockery to even ask for God to bless America. It is getting harder and harder to pledge allegiance to such a nation.

One Unexpected Source

Would you believe that religion is an enemy of Christ? Sure, you would. Those steeped in religion were enemies of Christ while He was on earth. Why would not some of them be enemies now? Many who profess a religion are soaked in hypocrisy. Now and again you read of religious leaders in their immoralities, adultery, homosexuality, drunkenness and most any other transgression of decency. How they parade their wailing of sorrow on television and stupid people just think they are wonderful!

Religions that follow creeds, disciplines, catechisms, prayer books, conferences, confessions of faith, etc. are not followers of Christ. They reject the doctrine of Christ. They attack those who subscribe to "thus saith the Lord" and brand them as self-righteous judges. To some the only real sin is to believe the way of Christ is right. They want whatever anybody does to be acceptable. God's moral code does not exist among them anymore.

Then you have weak charlatans, money-grabbing cowards who seek the praise of men more than God. They will preach any doctrine money will buy. They know who butters their bread and they like their bread buttered. They will not stand for the truth and ridicule those that do.

What has been written here is not a pretty picture. It was not intended to be. It was to take a look at the attacks against Christian living that persist all around us. When we see the evil world we do not expect it to shine brightly in righteousness. The bright side is that some will still go the way of the Lord, even though a distinct minority. We must make sure we are among them because they are the ones who will inhabit heaven.

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Responsibility to Live as a Christian

The subject is so broad because of the massive amount of the New Testament writing regarding the theme. To learn the lesson intended it will be necessary for the reader to have his Scriptures nearby because it is inexpedient to write out all the verses to be cited. The subject is almost as wide as man's relationship to God.

The title implies a distinctiveness, uniqueness and observable difference in the way Christians live and the way others live. We have a duty to God and man to live as Christians. Such a life is a privilege and blessing but also a duty and obligation. We are in the world but not of the sinful world. There are marks and manners that are distinctly Christian in nature. This is illustrated by a number of comparisons and examples. This is not an optional matter but a duty before God (Revelation 2:10).

A Walk

Ephesians 4:1 pictures the Christian life as a walk. Christians are pilgrims and sojourners (1 Pet. 2:11). This world is not our home. We're just passing through on our way to another destination like Israel as they marched through the wilderness toward Canaan. Our walk is a "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," like First Thessalonians 2:12, "That ye walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." This means to live in a worthy manner, that which is befitting to the Lord, harmonious and consistent. Not just anything is acceptable. There are things to do and things to avoid doing. It is a life of "thy will be done"; denying self (Luke 9:23). Once becoming a Christian we are to live as a Christian (1 Thess.

1:9). This requires more than just a ritual, ceremony and outward performance, although this is included. Our lives must be genuine, unfeigned, not pretended or hypocritical but according to the truth. We are to live in the same attitude of obedience that brought us to Christ. This "newness of life" (Romans 6:3, 4) means we are born again, new creatures, not the same as before (John 3:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:17; Tit. 3:3-5).

Before and After

Ephesians 2:1-6 shows how we were dead in sin but things are different because of God. The Corinthians Christians were to assume their responsibility to live differently from their previous way of life (1 Cor. 6:9-11). We who are Christians were servants of sin but now servants of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). We cannot live in sin and be faithful to the Lord (Romans 6:1, 2). Colossians 3 teaches were must not only mortify (put to death) evil, but seek the things which are above and set our affections thereon. Christians are not to follow the ways of the sinful world (1 John 5:15-17). The Christian has a different love, interests, priorities, goals, values and loyalties (Titus 2:11-15).

He Must Grow

Coming from the water of baptism he is just beginning his new life, having put off the old man of sin and putting on the new man (Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:8-10) and will abstain from the appearance of evil (1 Th. 5:22). He must grow spiritually (1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:12-14).

Growth demands proper food and exercise. We grow by partaking of the sincere milk of the word and exercising

ourselves in righteous living. That calls for study of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15); showing love toward others (John 13:34, 35); considering others better than oneself (Phil. 2:3, 4; Rom. 12:3). Like the Good Samaritan he seeks to help others. He practices the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12). What a contrast to the attitude of the "ME" generation!

New Responsibilities

The Christian feels obligated to care for his physical body (1 Cor. 6:12, 19, 20) even as he cares for the needy (Jas. 1:27) and his family (1 Tim. 5:8). His life will imitate Christ in that he will be doing good (1 Pet. 2:21; Acts 10:18; Jas. 4:17; Gal. 6:10).

The Christian has the duty to worship (John 4:24; Heb. 10:25). He must tell the story of Jesus to others (Mark. 16:15; 2 Tim. 2:2) as did Priscilla, Acquila and Paul. He will "prove all things and hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21), being mindful that there are false teachers in the world (1 John 4:1; Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:6) He cannot fellowship those who live contrary to the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). He will be busy exposing error and keeping the peace and unity of brethren based on truth.

The list grows long on the broad subject of the obligations of a Christian. He must especially guard what he thinks (Phil. 4:8) because that will govern his actions. He is careful as to what he says, where he goes, what he thinks and with whom he associates as his friends, how he dresses, his speech, the way he treats others, his self-control and reverence for things holy and sacred. The Christian will use his influence for things that are pleasant and acceptable in the sight of God; not to please men.

Reproach on Christ

Some who profess to be servants of the Lord actually bring reproach on His holy name because of the inconsistent way they live; inconsistent with the way of Christ. Paul accused the Jews of having done such as this in their rebellion against God in ages past (Romans 2:24). Being a Christian only in name and not in life will misrepresent what it is to be a Christian. There are sins that are not to be named among us (Eph. 5:3). Sadly, some will ignore this teaching and give occasion for the enemy to speak reproachfully of Christ (1 Tim. 5:14). But there is no justification for such living and it is to betray the very Lord who bought us to live in such a wicked fashion.

Professing to be a disciple of Christ is not a trivial claim. One must assume what is required by the Lord to wear His name (Acts 11:26). Unless one is willing to do that he makes mockery of God's Son by saying He follows the Lord. While we shall never be without sin we can be faithful. That is our responsibility as Christians (Rev. 2:10).

* * * * *

When Does a Christian Possess Eternal Life?

Eternal life is offered by God to mankind through Jesus Christ (John 3:14-17). Eternal life is a gift from God (Rom. 6:23) and is provided by the grace of God (Rom. 5:21) of which Christ was commanded to speak (John 12:50). There the inseparable tie between Christ and eternal life.

False doctrines have arisen over when the Christian possesses eternal life. Does he possess it when he becomes a Christian? Is it a life that gradually gained? Is it a blessing in the life beyond this one? Is it present or future? There are Scriptures if taken alone that present answers to

these questions both ways. God does not contradict Himself. We must see the whole counsel of God to learn the correct answer. His will harmonizes in every point.

What is Eternal Life?

Some think eternal life is simply an unending life. It is that but much more. It is not likely we shall be able to fully grasp the meaning of eternal life because we are finite creatures and when we speak of things eternal, everlasting, forever we are speaking of that which belongs to God (Deut. 33:27). Can we expect to fully comprehend God?

"Ainios," the Greek word, is used with reference to the great spiritual blessings of being a Christian which come through Christ. His covenant is called an eternal covenant (Heb. 13:20). It defines the ultimate destiny of the soul (Luke 16:9). When referring to life it means being saved in heaven. While it has the idea of unending, that definition is not sufficient. We must include the quality of life as well as the duration.

Eternal life is to know God and Christ (John 17:3). It is life with God, offered by God, promised by God and given by God through Christ. The word "eternal" is also used regarding punishment. It means more than immortality. It is not the same as eternal existence. It is far more.

Eternal life is a reward on which Christians are to "lay hold" (Matt. 5:12; 1 Tim. 6:12). The righteous shall receive the opposite of that to which the wicked are subjected (Rom. 2:6, 7).

Regarding "Forever"

In defining "eternal" there is another term we must consider and that is "forever." It means the lifetime or remaining lifetime of a given period. It does not always

mean unending. The Passover is said to be “forever” (Exo. 12:14, 17). Aaron and his sons were to be priests “forever” (1 Chron. 23:13). Canaan was to be an everlasting possession but that was conditioned on Israel’s faithfulness (Jeremiah 18:7-10). Therefore, when we read of something being eternal, everlasting or forever we must take context into consideration and even the limitations and conditions that may be involved. It may mean unending but there may be an indefinite but limited period.

One glorious thought regarding eternal life is that is reassures us that there is life beyond this one. We have a mortal body but an immortal soul.

Eternal life is not the same as remission of sins or becoming a new creature in Christ although the ideas cannot be separated. One leads to the other. Eternal life is linked with the hope of the gospel (Col. 1:22, 23).

Doctrines of Men

Scripture warns us of false teachers (1John 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1). Some contend for the idea of “once-saved-always-saved” based on the belief that we have eternal life now and it is unending. If a Christian sins (and some deny we do) the grace of God will unconditionally cover it. Therefore, once saved we cannot lose it. This is a plank in the Calvinist platform. It is that point in the TULIP acronym of Calvinism called P. The doctrine contends once one is of the “elect” (which God arbitrarily determines without man having anything to do with it whatsoever) he cannot miss heaven. He has eternal life now. He has it already. “They can by no sort of wickedness break away and escape heaven.’

It cannot be denied this is a comforting doctrine if it were true. Lying, drunkenness, adultery, theft, murder,

denial of Christ, nothing condemns you if you have been chosen by God. Does eternal provide this kind of security?

Calvinists claim if ever one does fall away it because he was never really saved anyway. This the way they dismiss the record of those who are reported to have fallen away. They cite “hath eternal life” as in the present tense and if a Christian sins it is only the body that sins and not the soul.

This doctrine was promoted by Augustine in Catholicism and John Calvin in Protestantism. It was first preached by Satan in the Garden of Eden when Satan told Eve , contrary to what God had warned, she would not die even if she violated the command of God. The day Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit they died spiritually (separated from God) and also brought physical death into the world.

Answers to Error

We ask, “If eternal life is possessed now and cannot be lost regardless of what is done because it is eternal, why the many warnings from God against doing that very thing?” The “non-elect” certainly cannot fall because they are already lost. The warnings could only apply to the saved. Every New Testament book includes warnings against falling away and being lost even though one has once come to Christ. You cannot fall off a ladder you never climb. You cannot fall out of bed if you never got in bed. You cannot fall away unless you were once saved.

Second Peter one presents virtues we are to add to our faith. “IF” we do these things we shall never fall. What “IF” we do not do them? Why the admonition if one cannot fall anyway? The entire context of Peter’s words has to do with the entrance into the everlasting kingdom that “shall be” (future) administered to brethren in the future. Brethren

are in the kingdom on earth now, the earthly phase of the kingdom, but are not in heaven yet, the eternal phase.

Some Who Were Saved but Fell Away

As stated, Calvinists claim those who fall away were never saved. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark. 16:16). Simon did that very thing (Acts 8:13). Was Jesus wrong about him? Was Simon the exception? Later we find him "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:23). Is that salvation? Why did he have to repent and pray that God would forgive him if only the body had sinned and the soul was still saved? What of Demas who labored with Paul but loved this present world and forsook Paul (2 Tim. 4:10; Jas. 4:4)? What of Judas who had part in the apostolic ministry but betrayed Christ? Eternal did not mean they were secure spiritually regardless of their lives thereafter.

Jesus said, "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that was sent, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). This means a person keeps on hearing and keeps on believing. He could quit. The same is said in John 3:16, "hath everlasting life," and 1 John 5:11, 12. "Shall" and "shall not" are conditional not absolute. Jonah said Nineveh "shall be overthrown" in forty days because of their wickedness but it was not destroyed because the people met the condition of repentance. "Shall" was not absolute. Ezekiel 18:20, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Did that mean even if they repented they would still die? "Shall not come into condemnation" implies a conditional and continuing situation; not impossibility. The phrase "shall not see life" (John 3:36) does not mean impossibility to be saved.

"Shall not see life" is as binding as "shall not come into condemnation." One cannot be saved in unbelief but can the unbeliever become a believer and be saved? Certainly! Can a believer become an unbeliever and be lost?" Certainly! Are we to conclude that one who does not believe can never believe? Certainly not! There was a time when Paul did not believe but he became a believer. "Shall" or "shall not" does not mean all is settled. One can change. There is a sense in which the Christian presently possesses eternal life ("hath") which we shall discuss later.

What about "Cannot?"

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). Does "cannot" mean it is impossible? If it does, we have a genuine contradiction in the Bible, right here in this one epistle because 1 John 1:8, 10 affirms we do sin. "Cannot" does not mean impossible but incompatible, inconsistent, unbecoming to a Christian. Joseph told his brothers to bring Benjamin with them the next time they came to Egypt but they said, "The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die" (Gen. 44:22). But Benjamin did leave his father and Jacob did not die. Did "cannot" mean impossible? No, not then nor in First John.

John is contending as did Paul in Romans 6:1, 2, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?"

We use "cannot" in the same way in daily conversation. One may invite you to dinner but you say, "I cannot come." It is not because it is impossible but you already have obligations and meeting obligations means you cannot

come. One “cannot” keep on living in sin if he is to be given eternal life in heaven.

The apostles told the Jewish counsel, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19, 20). Was it impossible for them to quit preaching or to preach some other message?

God told Moses the people “cannot” approach Mount Sinai while God was there. Why the warning if it was impossible? To even suggest “cannot” means impossible admits the weakness of the Calvinistic doctrine.

Other Arguments for Error

Calvinists say that it is only the body that sins, not the soul. Ezekiel warned about the soul sinning. Peter warned of sins that “war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). James warns against envy (James 4:5). That is a matter of the heart or soul of man. Jesus said, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies, these are the things which defile the man” (Matt. 15:19, 20). These become sins of the body because they are first sins of the soul. The wages of sin means death (spiritual separation from God) (Romans 6:23). Do sins of the flesh affect the soul? Consider Galatians 5:19ff and the works of the flesh. It has never made sense to contend a regenerated person can never sin so as to be lost then hear how he is admonished to ask God to forgive him. Why?

There are other ideas presented to sustain this false and contradictory doctrine but this is sufficient to show it false. Names in the book of life (Phil. 4:3) can be blotted out (Rev. 3:1-5). Punishment is said to be eternal (everlasting; same Greek word) in Matthew 25:46 just like life. If eternal

means one can never be lost does that also mean one can never be saved? Sheep that follow Him hear His voice (John 10:27, 28). That means they keep on hearing His voice. Can they cease to listen? So it is with every support put forward. The doctrine falls even as Christian can fall.

The Affect of This Doctrine

Who could possibly affirm that such a doctrine would ever motivate a person to live a righteous life? Why do so? It would make no difference what kind of life he lived once he "came to Christ." He could satisfy every passion, goal or ambition, right or wrong, and he would still be acceptable. Godly people are repulsed by such a concept.

Possibility of Apostasy

The following verses teach the possibility of apostasy. First Corinthians 1:27; John 15:1-10; Hebrews 6:4-6; Hebrews 2:1-3; Matthew 13 in the parable of the sowing seed; Galatians 5:4; First Corinthians 10:12; Acts 26:26-31; Galatians 5:19-21; First Corinthians 11:26; James 5:19, 20; Galatians 6:1; Matthew 25:24-30; 36-42. There are others. How much evidence does it take to show this "once-saved-always-saved-doctrine" is false?

Why are we taught to be faithful (Revelation 2:10) if it is impossible to do otherwise? It is necessary that we continue in well doing (Galatians 6:9; Romans 2:6, 7), being steadfast and immovable (First Corinthians 15:58).

Eternal Life is Future

We have eternal life now "in promise," but not actually. Eternal life begins at the completion of the judgment

(Matthew 25:46) which will not occur until Christ comes again and all are resurrected. A child of God is an heir of God (1 Pet. 1:4, 5). An inheritance is not something one already possesses except in promise and hope (Heb. 6:12; 1 John 2:25; Titus 3:7; Romans 8:2). Jude addressed his book to Christians who were "looking for eternal life" (Jude 2).

What This False Doctrine Does

It cancels out man being amenable to the law of Christ because he already has all he desires. It makes the invitation to the fallen meaningless. The warnings are senseless. The commands to Christians are optional. There is no reason to live a righteous life once you come to Christ. It gives forgiveness of sins even before they are committed. It destroys the hope of the Christian because he already realizes that for which he hopes. He is no longer accountable for what he does? It is deadly to the doctrine of Christ and declares the word of God to be null and void.

The Christian is blessed with the doctrine of eternal life, having it now in promise and will enjoy it in heaven.

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Gains and Losses

Our text is Philippians 3:4-11 which you are urged to consult in your Bible. The Holy Spirit uses Paul's life's experiences to ask and answer questions as we press toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14). What is of greatest value? What should be our priorities in life? What really matters? Is being a Christian worthwhile? What are the costs to being a Christian? What

are the gains? How are we to consider all other things compared to serving God?

The Significance of "First"

Christ taught "first things first." We are to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first (Matt. 6:33). One who wished to follow the Lord wanted to bury his father first but Jesus showed there is something more important (Matt. 8:22). We are to love the Lord even before father and mother (Matt. 10:37). The Macedonians first gave of themselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5). This explained why they gave so liberally. Before one is appointed as deacon he must first be proved (1 Tim. 3:10). What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his soul (Mark 8:36)? Salvation comes first. After a life of indulgence Solomon teaches what really counts. "Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). "First things first" takes center stage in serving the Lord.

We Consider Many Matters

Many matters have relative importance in life such as health, human relationships, physical needs, property, education, livelihood, etc. We do not minimize these things completely. The Lord knows we have need of such things. But the spiritual and eternal subjects are more important. It is hard for some of us to learn this. Our love is not for the things of this world, sinful or otherwise (1 John 2:15-17).

The Lord taught in the parable of the treasure found in the field that we seek what is of most value (Matt. 13:44). The same lesson is repeated in the parable of the pearl merchant and how he sought the goodly pearl (Matt. 13:45,

46). The things of this life are material and will pass away while the things of eternity are spiritual and shall last.

How Paul Evaluated

In our text Paul weighed his gains and losses to be with Christ. He drew a contrast. He considered what he had, what he lost, what he gained. He presented a BEFORE and AFTER of himself. Ephesians 2:1-6 shows what they were and what they became. First Corinthians 6:6-11 shows their past in contrast with their present in Christ.

Paul was told he would suffer for Christ's sake (Acts 9:16) and suffer he did (2 Cor. 11:23-28). That was part of his cost. He was hated by former friends, called a traitor, blasphemer and the target of plots against his life. Even as he wrote Philippians he was in prison. There have always been those who hate, ridicule and persecute Christians. Paul paid a tremendous price to be a Christian. Was not this what Paul said would ever be? "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

What "Things" Were counted Loss?

When he was converted he profited above those of his own age (Gal. 1:14). He had been taught in Jerusalem by Gamaliel, the most renowned teacher among the Jews (Acts 22:3) and he enjoyed that prestige. He was of true Hebrew bloodline; of the tribe of Benjamin (from which came the first Israelite king); a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee (the strictest of the Jewish parties); without reproach among his fellows (Phil. 3:3-6) and blameless. He was not just a rising start among the Jews. He had already risen. He gave up his religion (the religion of his ancestors), his religious party, his prosperity past and present. Whatever

else he might need to give up he was ready to do so (Phil. 3:13). He was not only willing to be bound but even to die for Christ (Acts 20:22-24; 21:13). He sacrificed and denied self for Christ (Luke 9:23). He had taken up his "cross." The "cross" was not the common problems of life but the burdens assumed in order to follow Christ. Friends, family, fortune, fame were all left behind.

What Was His Attitude Toward Giving Up These Things?

He did it willingly and considered such things as trash. He did it voluntarily, deliberately, decisively; not as a penalty but a privilege. He did it after a logical, rational sensible conclusion. It was not a "knee-jerk" reaction on his part. It was not wishful thinking. He makes these comments in Philippians after a life of service, devotion, success and suffering. There is no element of uncertainty in his words but absolute confidence. He had this conviction when he was baptized and the turbulent events and years had not dimmed that commitment. He had only grown stronger and his decision proved to be right and true. He was courageously undaunted by the stress and had not been intimidated. He knew to whom he belonged. He knew to whom the credit belonged; not the old law nor his own righteousness, but through THE faith of Christ (Phil. 3:9).

He Summarizes His Gains

He was "found in Christ." There is no condemnation "in Christ" (Rom. 8:1). Salvation is "in Christ" (2 Tim. 2:10). All spiritual blessings are "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). "In Christ" is forgiveness (Eph. 1:7); fellowship with Deity and the redeemed (1 John 1:3); providence (Matt. 6:33); peace with God (Eph. 2:15); reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19); hope (1

Tim. 1:1); stability (1 Cor. 1:21); comfort and consolation (Phil. 2:1; a new life (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:3, 4); mercy, prayer, wisdom, purpose in life, the resurrection to glory. Greatest of all is eternal victory (1 Cor. 15:57) and triumph (2 Cor. 2:4). All the benefits and blessings of God that are offered by the cross of Christ were his.

Paul was a highly educated man. He knew the value of knowledge. He now had the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:8). This was not just knowledge ABOUT Christ but an intimate, personal saving knowledge. He knew Christ as His Savior, Redeemer, Companion, Protector, Mediator, Intercessor, Teacher, Guide, Lord and Master and the way to God in heaven. He had all these gains and the promise of heaven as well.

Does It Pay to be a Christian?

Is not the answer evident not only for this life but for the life beyond this one? The toils of the road will seem nothing when we get to the end of the way. The burdens assumed by coming to Christ are light compared to the burden of sin which Christ lifts from us (Matt. 11:28-30).

Ask the noble servants of God of old times if it pays to serve Him? Ask Job, the prophets, the faithful down through the ages. "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Psalm 1:6). The end of the wicked is destruction (Psalm 3:19). After confusion over what seemed to be the prosperity of the wicked, the psalmist saw the end of the matter (Psalm 73:11-19) and how the righteous are those who prosper and wicked are brought into desolation.

Romans 8:31, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" 1 Pet. 3:13, "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" Hebrews 13:6, "The Lord

is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Psalm 37:25, "I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." Can we doubt the value of serving God?

Death awaits everyone. But the Christian will have the guidance and company of the Lord when he enters the valley of the shadow of death. He will not have to cross Jordan alone. In his life he is drinking out of the saucer. His cup runs over. This world cannot offer nor provide what one has when he is "found in Christ." He may not have fame, fortune, power, wealth applause and acceptance from others. Most likely he will not. What of that?

What of our own balance sheet of gains and losses? What do we consider of greatest value? On that last day will be found in Him?

* * * * *

Godliness

"And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity" (2 Peter 1:6, 7). Peter lists traits of character that Christians are to add to their character. Godliness is included.

"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness" (Titus 1:1). In this way Paul begins the letter to Titus in which he speaks of godliness.

"But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto ungodliness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Paul warns against something that produces the opposite of godliness.

In this lesson we intend to find the Biblical definition of godliness and learn God's truth on this subject. We are expected to live lives that reflect, demonstrate and exemplify godliness. ""Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12). The opposite of godliness does not pay pleasant wages. "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Psalm 1:6; 2 Pet. 3:7).

Confused With Being God-like

While there is a relationship, godliness is not equated with God-likeness. This is true of many qualities of the Christian. Godliness is more specific than God-likeness. It means reverence, piety toward God, standing in awe, veneration, reverent wonder, admiration, worship and exaltation. Piety refers to loyal devotion, being dutiful. A godly person sees and does his duty to God. He realizes there is an "oughtness" in life and he has responsibility and accountability. To be pious implies zeal in the acts of worship and respect for what is sacred.

That which is sacred is that which is worthy; deserving of commendation; set apart in honor, holy, and not to be profaned.

To be profane is the opposite of being pious just as godliness and ungodliness are opposite. Ungodliness is to treat that which is sacred with irreverence; to desecrate and blaspheme.

The "mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16) reveals the Deity of Christ, His person and His doctrine, His pre-

existence before becoming flesh, His incarnation, how He was tempted and attended by angels, His superiority over angels, His perfect life, His vicarious death, His resurrection, ascension and coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords. He is such a One who deserves adoration. A godly man will worship Him.

Eccl. 12:13, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." Fear means respect; to stand in awe and reverence; to honor.

The ungodly are described by Paul in Romans 3:18, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Godliness recognizes the greatness of God and all doubt of Deity is removed. There is consciousness of the duty to do His will.

The English word "godliness" appears fifteen times in the New Testament, once as holiness or reverence. Surely we have the concept of godliness with this array of Biblical evidence.

Godliness is an Acquired Trait

We learn to be godly. We must pursue it. It does not just happen. We must exercise ourselves unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). It takes effort on our part. It is not a characteristic that is ours by some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon us. It is not inherited. We are taught to be godly. After listing various things to flee, Paul urged Timothy to follow after certain things, including godliness (1 Tim. 6:11).

Godliness is profitable to us (1 Tim. 4:8) more than bodily exercise. Why? It is because godliness is connected with our promises both now and in the life to come. That which is spiritually profitable is eternally profitable. Part of the message from Paul to Timothy was that he put such things to the remembrance of brethren (1 Tim. 4:6).

Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6). We serve God with reverence and godliness (Heb. 12:28).

Godliness and Sincerity

A godly man does not just go through forms without meaning (2 Tim. 3:1-5). While there are forms and rituals by His authority, there is no room for insincerity and hypocrisy as characterized the Pharisees. They feigned a love toward God and did what they did to be noticed of men and ignored God's word. It was for show.

Sincerity is a quality of the heart. Godliness displays itself in actions, like faith and love. Godliness will affect and determine our words, attitudes, goals, ambitions, behavior, priorities, judgments, decisions and way of life. It is reflected as we worship. We will be reverent in worship in both attitude and action if we are godly.

Occasionally we see what appears to be irreverence in religious exercises. Performances are often promoted and admonished. Hilarity and entertainment has become commonplace among some. We see hand-clapping, screaming, fainting, swaying, falling, climbing, yelling, crawling, almost a "holy wow" and a religious "Hee-Haw." There is an abandonment of self-control. It becomes revelry like you see at rock concerts. Much is done for appearance sake. It is akin to the conduct of the prophets of Baal in their contest with Elijah at Mount Carmel.

Another Form of Ungodliness

Have you ever heard anybody come to lead the congregation in prayer and refer to God, the Father, as "Dad?" To them it may sound cute and cool but it is disrespectful of God. "God is greatly to be feared in the

assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him" (Psalm 89:7). The Lord is more than just another "good friend and good buddy" in life.

Some have called the Lord's Supper "juice and crackers." It is hard to even write this it is so despicable. I do so to illustrate what ungodliness is. Some are flippant about His holy name. Some provoke laughter and ridicule of the church. Some call brethren "five steppers and church-of-Christers." This is as vile as calling Christians Campbellites. Some "brethren" are ungodly.

How would you like to stand before God in judgment having been guilty of such ungodliness toward His sacred name, His Son, His word, His church (Jude 15)?

See the terms Other Places

To better understand the use of the word "godly" and "ungodly," see them in other contexts. 3 John 6 speaks of a godly manner of supporting those who labored for Christ. 2 Cor. 7:9-11 mentions godly sorrow, made sorry after a godly manner, sorrowing after a godly sort. Godly sorrow leads to repentance and seeks to please God, not just with tears and hugs and a refusal to obey.

2 Cor. 11:2 tells of Paul's jealousy for his brethren and it was a godly jealousy; a genuine concern for the honor and purity of the church. 1 Tim. 1:4 is edification that calls for reverence, respect and obedience to God. Psalm 12:1 bemoans the shortage and decrease of godly men among the people.

Paul wrote that the godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Not everybody will respect the Savior upon whom we depend. Such has been the case since Pentecost. Some brethren are shunned, ridiculed, ostracized, ignored, harassed and even physically abused by those who are

intoxicated with their ungodly egotism. Our world is dominated by ungodliness that is hostile to Deity. Those who choose to be godly are targets of the enemies of God. Jesus told His disciples, "The world will hate you because it hated me."

Godliness and Blessings

When we understand what it is to be godly and are willing to pay the price that is required to be godly, we shall see that being godly is not just toil and hardship but the provision of abundant blessings is the result.

Only by respect and reverence for God and the things connected with Him is there salvation. Only the godly have the privilege of prayer. Only the godly enjoy the providence of God. Only the godly fulfill man's purpose for existence. Only the godly have fellowship with Deity and the redeemed.

It is the duty of the church to be the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). That truth defines godliness, describes godliness, produces godliness and presents the standard of godliness. Godliness, then, is one of the qualities found in the growing and maturing Christian.

"In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge" (Proverbs 14:26).

* * * * *

Keeping the Eye on the Goal

We are in a race. The race to which we refer is the one mentioned in Hebrews 12:1. "…and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." As Christians we must be faithful. Our life is pictured as a race. In a race you run to reach the goal and win the prize. To be a winner

demands patience, steadfastness, faithfulness and laying aside all hindrances. Galatians 6:9, "…and let us not be weary in well doing, for is due season we shall reap if we faint not."

What is our goal? Why is that our goal? How do we reach that goal? One essential in reaching the goal involves maintaining a constant focus on the goal and remembering the way to reach it. Being a Christian is somewhat like running a marathon with one important exception. In a marathon there is one winner. In the Christian race all who complete the course are victors.

Our Goal

What is the ultimate goal of the Christian life? We understand that there are many blessings, spiritual and material, that are ours to enjoy from the bountiful hand of God. But the climatic goal and target is heaven; the eternal spiritual home of the redeemed soul.

It is recorded with reference to Abraham, "For he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God… But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:10, 16).

Moses made the choice in life "esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of reward" (Hebrews 11:26). He chose the affliction with the people of God than the pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25).

Paul wrote, "For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give

unto me in that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Pail said he had a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better (Phil. 1:23). This is why he pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God (Phil. 3:13). We strive for a crown that is incorruptible (1 Cor. 9:24).

Scripture teaches there is life after this one (2 Cor. 5:11). Because of our hope in Christ we do not sorrow at death as do others who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). Jesus spoke of our goal. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. And I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself: that where I am ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Why is Heaven Our Goal?

There is the location of the tree of life. There is comfort, rest, reward, companionship with the saved of all the ages. There is the escape from hell, no more pain, sorrow, suffering, tears, sickness and dying. Heaven is eternal and will never end. There we will be with Deity.

In this life we are but straying pilgrims (1 Pet. 2:11). We are sojourners passing through on a journey we never before traveled. Our salvation is the end (result) of our faith (1 Pet. 1:9).

How Do We Reach That Goal?

There are many essentials we must believe and do to reach heaven. Our obedience to the gospel is our initial step. Being a faithful child of God in work and worship is

the continuing part. Keeping our eye on the goal keeps us focused on what and why we live as we do.

We realize that regardless of what we believe and do salvation in heaven would never be possible if it were first for the grace, love and mercy of God in sending His Son to shed His blood for the remission of our sins. It is by our obedience that we take advantage of what God has done.

In life we must have the same determination, dedication, resolution and conviction as did Jesus when he "set his face toward Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). He was intent on doing the Father's will. So must we be. If we do not keep our eye on the goal we are in danger of slipping and drifting into the course of condemnation (Hebrews 2:1).

Hebrews 2:2 tells us how to keep focused on our goal, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." By and through Christ we keep our eye on our goal. While we do not literally see heaven or the Christ, we walk by faith and see it afar. Are we moving closer to the goal or going away from it? Are we aware of the roadblocks, detours and distractions provided by the devil to cause us to miss our goal?

Some years ago a football team was invited to a bowl game they were supposed to win. They lost. The coach explained that the players got too involved in the entertainment, news media and other distractions. They did not keep their mind on why they were there. They took their eye off the goal.

We hear from many quarters that there are alternative routes and easier paths that will take us to our desired destination. But we dare not and cannot look to any man, our own feelings or anything other than the Christ. He is the way to reach the goal of heaven. He is the only way.

Why Look to Jesus?

As just noted, there is no other way (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). We can place our trust in Him with confidence. He was tempted in all points as we are but without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He is the Perfect One. He is our example and we must follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). God sent Him into the world for this very purpose that we might reach heaven. We hear Him say, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). Therefore we ask as did Peter, "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

He is the One through whom the Father now speaks to man (Hebrews 1:1, 2). At the mount of transfiguration after confessing that Jesus was His Son, God said, "Hear ye him" (Matt. 7:5). He is the author and finisher of our faith. All is accomplished through Him. He came into the world, lived a perfect life, proved Himself to be the Son of God, suffered and died, but was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven and took His place on His throne by the right hand of God. He was exalted because He conquered that which destroys man. By Him we can complete the course. We will be spiritual winners. Therefore, we keep our eye on Christ. We dare not look away.

How Do We Come to Know Christ?

We have the noble example of the Bereans who "searched the Scriptures daily" to learn what was so (acts 17:11). Keeping the eye on the Christ and the goal before us means learning and conforming to the will of the Father as given by the authority of Christ in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Word (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Bible is the only reliable source of information we have because it came from God. While

some scoff at the Bible, as do Mormons whose book says in ridicule, “Bible, a Bible,” the Bible tells us where we came from, why we are here, how to live while here and where we are going. We live life keeping our eye on Him.

An Illustration

Picture in your mind a sailing vessel as it plows through the uncharted waters in darkness of night. A young sailor is at the helm. He has not gone this way before nor knows the way to go. On board is the experienced captain of the ship who knows navigation and has knowledge what to do and how to do it. The young sailor asks, “How can I keep on course during the night?” The captain responded by pointing toward a certain star, and said, “Keep that star before you. Never let your eye wander from it. Keep it in sight and you will stay on course and all will be well.”

We are like that young sailor in need of guidance. Christ is the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10), but more than that. He is the “bright and morning star (Revelation 22:16) on which we keep our spiritual eye. If we follow Him all will be well with our souls and we shall reach our heavenly goal.

Years ago Moses was leading Israel toward the land of Canaan. He was visited by an in-law. Moses knew where he was going and desired his in-law to go with them. “We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come thou with us and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel” (Numbers 10:29). We invite the world to journey with us.

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Living for the Master
Walking in the Light

Our service to God is presented by several analogies; sometimes as a race, work in a vineyard, warfare. It is also pictured as a walk, a sojourn, taking a journey. "Furthermore, then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more" (1 Thess. 4:1). "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. 4:1). "But if ye walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Pet. 1:17).

We must walk to please God, not men (Gal. 1:10); walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing (which means all we do must be pleasing to Him) (Col. 1:10). We do not serve "with eyeservice as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (Eph. 6:6, 7). "That ye walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12). As the apostles told those in power who commanded them to cease their preaching of Christ, "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

What It Means to Walk in the Light

It means to follow the will if Jesus Christ. Christ said, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Sin is represented by darkness. Righteousness is

represented by light. Christ came to be "a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:26). John the Baptist preached Jesus as the Light, the true Light (John 1:4-9). To reject Jesus is to walk in the darkness of sin (3:19- 21). Christ is the Light that cannot be extinguished. Sinful darkness cannot overcome Him. Satan attempted this by tempting Him shortly after His baptism (Matthew 4), but failed.

To walk in the light means to believe and do whatever He teaches. What He has taught is revealed in the word of God, the Bible (Psalm 119:1-5). The answers to all questions are determined by what the Bible teaches.

Walking Used Different Ways

We are taught to walk WITH God; walk BEFORE God; and walk AFTER God. Each has a distinct and singular meaning. Together they reflect our relationship with God and the meaning of walking in the light. Let us briefly consider each of these.

WITH God

Genesis 5:22, "Enoch walked with God." This idea is that of companionship, fellowship, going side-by-side, hand in hand and heart in heart. It is like the time when Jesus walked WITH the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:15).

Enoch walked with God three hundred years after the birth of Methuselah. Methuselah never knew a day in his life that his father did not walk with God. Can your children say as much?

There are times when men get ahead of God. It seems Moses did that when he slew the Egyptian taskmaster

thinking it was time for him to deliver Israel from bondage. But he was much premature, went too far, too fast. There are times when men are not with God but get behind God; too far behind to receive benefit from Him or be of assistance in His cause. Such was the case with Peter when after Jesus was seized he followed "afar off." He was too far behind.

We must be in agreement with God in order to walk with God. Amos said, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 4:13). The apostles walked with Jesus and because they did it was recognized (Acts 4:13). Can others see in us that we walk with God?

BEFORE God

Genesis 17:1, Abraham was told to walk before God. To walk before God means to live in His presence as a soldiers who walk single file in inspection before their commander. Samuel walked before Israel from the days of his childhood (1 Sam. 12:2) He had been visible to all. Jacob said Abraham and Isaac walked before God (Gen. 48:15). Hezekiah mentioned how he walked before God (Isaiah 38:3).

We go to the clothing store and buy our clothes and walk before the mirror for inspection. Factories have inspectors along the assembly line to keep check on the product that it is meeting the quality standards. God inspects us.

In 1 Peter 3 Peter quotes Proverbs 15:3, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good." We sing the song that says there's an all-seeing Eye watching us. This is both sobering and comforting.

One elderly preacher told the story of his youth when he and his father would go to the barn to feed the animals. In the daylight he would allow his father to go ahead and he

would follow, sometimes a distance behind. He was not afraid. At night when they returned in darkness he would walk just in front of his father to be watched and protected as well as guided along the path. So it is with us and God.

AFTER God

Deuteronomy 13:4, "Ye shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him and cleave unto him." This conveys the idea of following God where He leads. He is our leaders and we are His followers. To walk in the old paths, to walk in the law of the Lord, we walk uprightly, in truth, in the way of good men (Psalm 1:1).

Israel was not to walk in the ways of Jeroboam who led Israel to sin. He changed the way of worship by changing the object of worship (substituting an idol for God); the place of worship (Jerusalem for Dan and Bethel); the priests (using those who were not even of the tribe of Levi); the time (changing the times for the celebrations). He was one of the first "change agents." To follow his evil is condemned throughout Israel's history.

There is grave and deadly danger in following the wrong leader. "And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:14). Once a man was driving in a snowstorm and all he could see were two red taillights on the truck in front of him. Suddenly the lights were gone. The truck had plunged over a precipice. The driver almost followed to his death also.

Moses warned, "Follow not the multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2). Solomon's downfall was because he followed the ways of his idolatrous foreign wives and their gods. Israel went to destruction because they followed the nations around them rather than being faithful to God.

Jesus said many shall go the way of destruction and few shall go the way of life (Matt. 7:13, 14). When people follow their own lusts, consciences, ambitions, ancestors, the doctrines of men and their feelings, they shall not succeed. We must follow the way of the Lord and walk after Christ (1 Pet. 2:21; 1 Cor. 11:1).

To walk or live acceptably and receive His care and His blessings we must walk WITH God, BEFORE God and AFTER God

How Do We Begin Our Journey?

The way begins with obedience to the gospel. For one who has never come to Christ, he must believe in Christ as the Son of God, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ as God's Son, and be baptized in water for the remission of sins where he is washed clean of sin by the blood of Christ.

For those who once came to Christ but fell away they must repent of their sins, confess them, and pray to God for forgiveness. This way they will be restored and back again in the good favor of the Father.

What will be the end of the journey? There awaits the glory of heaven for eternity to those who walk in the light as He is in the light.

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Living for the Master
Putting on the Christian Armor

The Christian life is presented to us by the analogy of fighting a war and we, as Christians, are soldiers. Paul wrote, "The charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy,

according to the prophecies which went before thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18). Timothy was taught to be a good soldier (2 Tim. 2:2, 4).

Paul was very familiar with the armor and weaponry of a Roman soldier since he often was a prisoner. He also knew about fighting (1 Cor. 9:7). He speaks of his work as going to war. He was able to make comparisons between the Roman equipment and the weaponry of the Christian. We must learn about our Christian armor and how we enlist in His army as well as the nature of our fight.

The Nature of Our Fight

Christians do not advance nor defend the Christian faith by an actual carnal warfare as is done and has been done by many religions. The kingdom of Christ is not an earthly kingdom. Paul fought the good fight of faith (2 Tim. 4:6-8). We war not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers of evil (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Our weapons are spiritual weapons (Eph. 6:12). We seek the capture of souls for Christ and salvation; not for earthly territory. Christ is the captain (Heb. 2:10) and the devil is the adversary (1 Pet. 5:8). We are under His command and are to be obedient to His direction (2 Tim. 2:3, 4).

Enlistment

We enlist in his army voluntarily. We are not drafted into service against our will. We enlist by obeying the gospel. Everyone in His army is there because they have chosen to be there. There is no such thing as neutrality in this war (Matt. 12:30). We cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24).

The duration of enlistment is the remainder of life (Rev. 2:10; Luke 9:62). We are to serve with diligence (Jer. 48:10

and contend earnestly for the faith (Jude).We do not wage our war without weapons and the ones God provides are offensive and defensive.

The Girdle

It is compared in Paul's writing to that of a Roman soldier (Eph. 6:10-18). We must notice that every piece of armor is directly related to the word of God. We are girded about with truth. Jesus said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). A girdle is about the midsection of the body to hold the rest of the armor in place. Apart from the truth the warfare cannot be successfully waged.

Breastplate

We have a breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate protects the vital organs of the body, such a heart, lungs, etc. Wounds in the chest are serious and usually fatal. Righteousness means being right with God because His commandments teach us how to be right with Him (Psalm 119:172). We do not do just what seems right to us, but God's will. There may be a way that seems right to us but if not His will we go not that way (Prov. 14:12; Jer. 10:23). "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise" (Proverbs 12:15). To put on the breastplate of righteousness means to hear and heed the counsel of God.

Our Feet

Our feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Notice that peace is the goal and how every piece of armor relates to the word. The gospel is the gospel of good

news. It also reveals some bad news. The bad news is that we sin and sin separates us from God. To live and die in that spiritual condition is to be lost eternally. But even though we are doomed and damned by sin the good news is that we can be forgiven and released from that bondage. That was the mission of Christ (1 Tim. 1:15). He brings peace between man and God (Eph. 2:14). His kingdom is called the kingdom of peace (Rom. 14:17). Children of God are messengers of peace (Isaiah 52:7; Rom. 10:15).

Our Shield

A defensive weapon is the shield of faith. With a shield we can ward off blows from the enemy and stop the fiery darts that are meant to destroy. By our faith we have trust, confidence, belief and commitment to the way of the Lord. Given wholly to Him we can battle the attacks of the enemy. The word enables us to defeat temptation even as Jesus used the word to defeat the temptations of the devil (Matt. 4). Repeatedly He sent Satan into retreat by saying, "It is written…"

The Helmet

We wear the helmet of salvation. The helmet, of course, protects the head, the place of the brain, that must be protected more than any other part of the body. A wound to be head may not kill but will incapacitate a soldier that he cannot fight. Our salvation is to be learned from the Bible, the word (James 1:18). We do not read of anybody being saved without first hearing the word. We can take courage as we face the enemy, temptations and hardship and even rejoice when times are difficult because we have a hope of

eternal life promised to the faithful that comes by our protection (1 Thess. 5:8).

The Sword

We go into battle to advance forward by using the sword of the Spirit which is defined as the word of God. A sword is used to attack the enemy as well as fight off his intended blows. We use the sword offensively and defensively. We go against the evil of the world to save the souls of the lost. We must have a strong weapon that can conquer; an instrument of aggression.

Paul entered places where the gospel had never been heard; where idolatry was deep and rampant; and he used the sword of the Spirit to gain spiritual ground and win souls. Being a two-edged sword it cuts both ways. It is the ultimate weapon. It is on the sword that rely the most. It even penetrates to the conversion of the heart (Heb. 4:12). It not only promotes the truth but is the truth. It also exposes error by which no man can be saved.

The Privilege of Prayer

As the soldiers of Christ we have the blessing and privilege of prayer. We recognize how dependent we are on Him and we seek His assistance as He sees best for us. We know we are insufficient standing alone. We rely on His providence, making petition, expressing thanks, maintaining our relationship with our Captain.

Absolutely Necessary

Putting on the armor of Christ is not an optional matter if we are to enter this spiritual warfare. Without it we are

totally helpless and cannot succeed. It is not a matter of indifference. It is an issue of priority for the Christian. God has provided and we must train so we can be proficient in its use and use it effectively.

The Reward

Our reward for being a good soldier is in First Corinthians 15:17, "But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." When the last battle is fought and we lay our armor down, we can say with Paul that there is a crown of righteousness awaiting us.

* * * * *

The Greatness of the Humble Heart

Like so many other of these lessons, they should be read with an open Bible because so many of the Scriptures are not written out in their fullness but they can and should be read from your Bible. Our text is Luke 9:46-48 where Jesus took a child and taught a lesson on humility. The "greatness" of "humility" may seem to be at cross purposes but we will discover that humility is a quality of greatness.

There was a discussion among His apostles who would be the greatest after Jesus left. Why this was important except they mistakenly perceived the kingdom would be an earthly kingdom and they sought rank in that kingdom? While Christ was with them they knew He was the greatest. Do they not betray a personal ambition that provoked strife and jealousy among them? This had been a problem with James and John earlier when their mother sought chief places for them in the kingdom (Matthew 20:20, 21, 24).

(Since they were discussing chief places, this would have been a perfect time to announce the office of pope for Peter, if ever there was such a thing. But He did not.)

The Lord's Answer

The answer they heard from Christ was not what they expected. He perceived their thoughts and did not have to openly ask what they were discussing. He taught being great was a matter of the heart and spirit, the "inner man." It required rendering service. To be great one must be humble (Matt. 20:25-28). Honor follows humility. God does not really determine one's greatness. Each one does that for himself/herself whether they are humble or not.

Jesus took a child and illustrated humility. A child is without pride and selfish ambition, but is sincere, dependent, innocent, subject to authority, can be governed, does not hold grudges. Such is the nature of those in the kingdom (Matt. 18:1).

He taught humility when He washed the feet of His disciples just prior to His crucifixion when others would not, at least did not, assume the task (John 13).

There is a difference between being childish and being like a child. One reflects immaturity while the other reflects humility. We are to avoid the one and imitate the other.

The Best Example

Philippians 2:5-8 shows us the best example of humility and why. It is Christ and what He has done to save man from his sins. He left heaven, came to this earth, lowered Himself to take on the form of man and was humiliated beyond description. We must notice that His humility

preceded His obedience to do the will of the Father. Humility goesbefore obedience. The proud do not obey.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke of the "poor in spirit." He was thinking of the humble. The humble person knows his limitations, that he is not self-sufficient, does not seek prominence over others, but is dependent on God. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God: (2 Cor. 3:5).

Obsessed to be Preeminent

The way we see some people fight and scratch to get and hold to high places and be the most prominent betrays their obsession with to be seen of others and have power. Diotrophes (3 John 9) was overcome with this spiritual malady. Christ rebuked the Pharisees because of their ambition for the chief seats, notoriety, titles, praise of men (John 12:43), doing things to be noticed, presenting themselves as superior (Matthew 23). The Lord does not demean ambition but not at the expense and lack of consideration of others. Some are tempted to climb over one another to reach what they consider to be the top. They seek primacy among men even if others are harmed in the process. We all aim high to be Christians, but at what do we aim? Being a Christian is the highest calling. In whose eyes do we seek greatness? It was said of John the Baptist before his birth, "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15). That is the only greatness that really matters.

One Master; Many Brethren

Matthew 23:8, "Be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." How the Pharisees sought the titles and recognition of others! Such a

spirit is incompatible with the spirit of being a Christian. Some may be more outstanding than others but let it be because of work's sake; not artificial praise and the pursuit of glory. We do good works, not to our glory, but to the glory of God (Matt. 5:16).

We are all priests of God and Christ is our High Priest. We are stars that shine with varying brightness. It is not our goal in life to seek to be the brightest star by restless and aspiring ambition for self. We do the best we can at what we are called to do and let honor and glory find its place.

James 4:6, 10; Luke 14:11

"Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble… Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." Someone suggested that the way to go up is first to come down. Luke 14:11, "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." We cannot miss the profound conclusion these verses demand.

Why Be Humble

The first reason is because God commanded it. That ends all questions about its necessity. It is not optional be a requirement to be pleasing to God. :Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your care upon him; for be careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:6, 7). The proud shall be punished. "Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

Christ pronounced "woes" upon the proud Pharisees. Consider some in the Bible who displayed pride to their own hurt. There was Naaman (who at first rejected his healing because "he thought" it should be done some other

way). Nebuchadnezzar had to be humbled for several years as an animal because of his pride (Daniel 4). Herod brought on his own ruin by his pride (Acts 12:22). Was not pride the cause of the fall of Judah and Israel (Micah 6:8)? Pride is the avenue of temptation (1 John 2:16). It was to pride that the devil turned to mislead Eve in the Garden of Eden.

There are Blessings for the Humble

The kingdom of God shall be theirs (Matt. 5:3). Learn the lesson intended in the parable of the prayers of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee was so proud and exalted himself and was rejected. But the publican humbled himself before God and went to his house justified (Luke 18:9-14). Paul warned us against thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). :Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3). Proverbs 15:33, "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor is humility." Proverbs 22:4, "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life." Proverbs 29:23, "A man's pride shall bring him low, but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit." Isaiah 57:15, "I will dwell in the high and holy place with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and revive the hearts of the contrite ones." The contrite grieve over sin.

The Need of Humility

When we compare ourselves with the Creator of all, it is easy to be humble. "Nay but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed way to him that formed it why hast thou made me thus" (Rom. 9:20)?

After Job was so bewildered by what happened to him, the Lord approached him and impressed upon him his smallness compared to the greatness of God.

When one is humble he will stand in awe and reverence before the One with whom we have to do. Such should be our attitude of heart when we assemble for worship.

Two Examples of Humility

Most are familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan. Of the three who came upon the man who had been robbed and beaten, which was humble? It was not the priest and Levite, although being religious leaders you would think they would have given assistance. It was the lowly Samaritan who used what he had to provide for this unfortunate person.

In Matthew 25 and judgment scene, who was it that heard the words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father…?" Was it not those who had served others? Were they not great because of that? No evil was charged those who were rejected. It was their failure to have done what they should have done that brought their ruin.

"Of you are too big to do small things, you are too small to do big things." This teaches humility? Better that it be said judgment day, "Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower" (Proverbs 25:7).

What Humility is Not

It is not spinelessness or being without a vigorous spirit. It is not timidity or a lack of aggressiveness. It is not void of conviction. Peter was humble but aggressive. Christ overturned the tables of those who defiled the temple. Humility does not make one small and insignificant except

in his own eyes. It does make him grateful to be a part of something bigger than himself and that which shall endure after he leaves this life. It will call him to recognize his imperfections and seek to improve. At the same time it will provide for him power to face adversity or prosperity with stability and not be knocked off track by either.

Not all will follow the way of humility. Not all who do will be praised by others. What of that? There is no question but the path of humility leads to greatness and service to others. The big question we face is whether we will choose that way.

* * * * *

Things That Aid Christian Living

Christian living is essential to go to heaven (Gal. 6:9; Rev. 2:10). Faithfulness cannot be ignored. It is not easy to live as a Christian in this world of sin. It was not designed to be easy, but to be right. Christians face opposition, hardship, persecution and many other obstacles that are almost unimaginable seeing the goodness of Christianity. The Christian is provoked by tribulation (Matt. 5:12; 1 Pet. 4:16; 2 Tim. 3:12) to quit and give it up. This is what difficulties are intended to do. But we can overcome them.

At the same time there are things that help us along the way. This lesson shall mention five of those aids to Christian living and certainly is not an exhaustive list. But these things have a tremendous and positive influence on us to stay faithful and live properly.

The bottom line, however, is that Christian living is the result of a personal decision and choice. Let us look briefly

at some of these aids. As is true of most lessons, it will be necessary for you to have your Bible by your side. Writing out all the Scriptures to which we refer is inexpedient.

Jesus

Our Lord is our role model. In essence Jesus is saying to us, "Watch me and do as I have done." He is perfect in every respect; the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9). Without Him we are nothing (John 15:5). He is the only way (John 14:6). We seek to imitate Him (1 Pet. 2:21) because He is our example and pattern. Being tempted in all points as we are, yet sinless (Heb. 4:15) He can guide is successfully to the desired eternal destination. We keep looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:2). Our affections are set on what He approves (Col. 3:1, 2). Paul said to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). So we must. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

We are toward Jesus as one little boy was toward his big brother. "I want to be like him." We sing, "I want to be more like Jesus, and follow him day by day." Also we sing, "More and more like Jesus I would ever be." As we learn of Him and turn our lives in His likeness we constantly ask, "What would Jesus do? What would He have me to do?" We can learn about this role model only from the Scriptures that reveal this Savior unto us.

Visiting Calvary

Each week Christians turn their minds especially in remembrance of what the Lord has done that we might be saved. We look again at the cross of Christ in the memorial called the Lord's Supper. Such was observed by the early

church (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-29). “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

By the Lord’s Supper we not only remember His sacrifice but proclaim Him to the world. We remain faithful because we dare not turn our back on Him lest we be rightfully accused of crucifying Him afresh (Heb. 6:6). “Shall I crucify my Savior?” As we survey the wondrous cross we learn He demands my soul, my life, my all and we are motivated the live the kind of life He prescribes for us.

Fellowship

There are enemies of the cross that would do us harm. But there are friends of Christ and His disciples also. There are those of like precious faith to support one another (2 Pet. 1:2). How can you measure the spiritual value of a Christian home, Christian parents, a Christian mate in marriage, Christian children and brethren in the Lord? We are members of a congregation of people who have as one of their purposes in life to help one another get to heaven. We have friends, preachers, elders who watch for our souls. We are loved and should we falter there are those who will “be on our case” to see that we do not stray from the fold of safety. None should ever be allowed to “fall through the cracks” to their spiritual ruin, “for we be brethren.”

The Continuing Grace of God

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble” (Psalm 46:1). We are His children because of His love, grace and mercy toward us. As His child we continue to be blessed by these things. When Paul was suffering and he prayed for relief the Lord told him, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9). When John was

in probable exile on the Isle of Patmos, the Lord told him, "Fear not; I am the first and the last" (Rev. 1:17). What an abundant promise is 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Hebrews 13:6! Cannot we be victorious in light of these words?

While it is true that God may not always approve of us, He will never withdraw His love from us (Rom. 8:31, 35-39). That does mean we shall be saved regardless of what we do. It means God seeks our highest good at all times. He supplies our every need (Heb. 2:15). For this reason we can come before His throne with confidence to obtain mercy and find grace in the time of need (Heb. 4:15).

We have our stones of Ebenezer. When God delivered Israel from the attacks of the Philistines, Samuel raised a stone and called it "Ebenezer," which means "stone of help" (1 Sam. 7:10, 12). The song tells us of this. "Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by thy help I've come." This help is intended to help us live the Christian life.

Hope

In Christ we have hope in this life and for the life to come. The hope of the Christian provides for him the confidence, optimism and assurance he needs to fight the good fight of faith successfully and faithfully. Farmers plow in hope. Merchants trade in hope. Christians live in hope of heaven; eternal life with God. Titus 1:2, "in hope of eternal life."

We are saved by hope (Rom. 8:24). How is this possible? Our hope motivates us to "keep on keeping on" in faithfulness in Christian living, knowing we shall be with God eventually. We keep doing our best. Christianity is a faith of hope (Co. 1:15). God is the God of hope (Rom.

15:13). Christ is our hope (1 Tim. 1:1). Away from God there is no hope (Eph. 2:12).

Hope expresses not only our desire but our expectancy. We desire to live in heaven and because of Christ we expect to do that very thing.

First Corinthians 15:57, 58

"But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

When the days grow long and weary betimes in trying to live the Christian life, the destiny of the faithful is assured. Psalm 27:13, "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

Jesus spoke the words of incredible assurance and hope before He ascended into heaven (John 14:1-6). Paul tells us of our future in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff. You do well to pause and read these words. They will lift you up in His service and life as a Christian. His promises will not fail (2 Pet. 3:9).

The Christian can join with the psalmist and say, "My cup runneth over" (Psalm 23:5). No people on earth are more blessed than those who strive to live the Christian manner of life. We have every spiritual blessing "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3) and the promise of God's providence.

Therefore, we shall put forth every effort in sincerity to live a life pleasing to God in spite of dungeon, fire and sword because these things will help us along the way.

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The Bible

Let us be reminded of Jeremiah's words, ""O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). Hear the psalmist, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). We shall have occasion to investigate the assertion of Paul in First Timothy 3:16, 17.

All we know of heaven, hell, the Holy Spirit, Christ, angels, eternity, etc. is what we learn directly or indirectly from the Bible. The Bible was the foundation upon which our country was founded. That respect, faith and confidence in the Bible has been destroyed by God-haters and the nation no longer looks to God for anything. We have reason to believe that the blessing of freedom that America has enjoyed and defended will soon be a relic of history because it has turned so violently against the Bible.

The Bible is among the oldest books in the world revealing events from the Creation into the first century. Its record is older than the pyramids, the Greek poets, philosophers, Athenian libraries, Socrates, Plato and all the rest. Yet, its message is relevant to day as when first given.

Facts about the Bible

The Bible is a book of sixty-six books, written by around forty writers, over a period of about 1,600 years. It was written, not by a people with literary advantages and facilities, but a nation that spent hundreds of years in bondage, as wanderers and a persecuted people. They were unlearned, untutored, without a literary background nor schooled in the educational schemes of their day with few exceptions. They wrote about events primarily within a very small geographical area, but with a single theme

(God's relationship with man), without contradictions or discrepancies.

Other than the Bible there is no outstanding Jewish writing except the uninspired history by Josephus. It was written by a people whose very name has become a by-word of reproach, yet a book found in every civilized nation in the world, Jew and Gentile.

The Bible is not a science book nor intended to be. Yet, when it speaks of scientific matters it is accurate according to what can be proven to be true. There is no contradiction between proven science and the word of God. There is not one single scientific demonstrable fact that must be set aside to accept the truthfulness of the Bible. There is much in pseudo-science that must be set aside, however, because it contradicts both science and the Bible.

The Bible never becomes obsolete as does the findings of science, mathematics, medicine, agriculture, navigation, architecture, history, man's religious doctrines, etc. etc. These are constantly undergoing change and "updating." Nothing of the sort is needful for the Bible to be relevant and applicable to man.

The Bible, contrary to the high-handed assertions of skeptics, is not irrelevant but is unknown, unstudied, untried, untaught and brushed away with the wave of the hand by those who think they are superior to God. Nothing ever needs to be added or taken from the Bible. It can be translated into different languages and when correctly done loses none of its power.

A Hated Book

In spite of the immeasurable good of the Bible there has never been a book more hated. It survives regardless of the many vicious efforts to destroy it. Even in Bible times such

efforts were made by king Jehoiakim and his messenger, Jehudi. It was cut with a pen-knife and burned thinking that would get rid of its message, yet the words were rewritten and more given. Roman Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, Islamists, those of the many human religions and political ideologies have shown their contempt for the Bible and sought to drive it from the earth. It was thought that the Bible, like Christ, would cease to have power if only it could be destroyed. But, like Christ, it has not been destroyed and cannot be destroyed.

Concerted efforts now exist worldwide by such organizations as the ACLU to dispose of the Bible. Feminists hate the Bible. More and more liberal politicians align themselves with those who hatre the Bible. The so-called self-appointed "wise men" of our times use the institutions of learning to destroy confidence in the Bible because they consider themselves to be god.

Why Such Vile and Irrational Hatred?

Men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19). The Bible exposes the sinfulness of man and men are too proud to admit it. It offends them as they seek to do whatever they wish. His sins are condemned. He smarts under the rebuke.

Genesis 6:5 tells of the depth of wickedness to which men sunk before the flood at the time of Noah. Romans 1:19-31 tells of the evil ways of Gentiles before Christ. Their ways are very much in prominence today.

The Bible shows how dependent man is on God and men like to think of themselves as self-sufficient and in need of nothing from anybody. In his arrogance and human wisdom (which he contends is superior to divine wisdom) he has sought to deny even the existence of God and His revelation to man. He does not realize that his wisdom is

not even equal to God's "foolishness." He would rather go to hell than conform to the will of his Creator. He will get his wish.

He detests the authority of God over him. He wants to have all-authority. He wants to do-his-own-thing without restriction or limitation and demands it be accepted by all. How he cries and wails under the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" commands of the Bible. How dare God think He can tell them what to do! They have their degrees and wallow in their theological mud! God's will is contrary to man's hellish schemes, ambitions, lusts and intentions.

Recent Efforts to Destroy the Bible

During the period of World War I Germany attempted to stamp out the Bible. Their government decreed, "We will train a generation of boys and girls, not under the influence of God of the Bible, but under the influence of the god of war."

Communist Russia and China attempt to do the same thing. Such is the work of humanists, atheists, evolutionists and the "elite" of "education". Physical force has been used. Brain-washing is a prominent technique. Confiscation of property is a norm. By the media, entertainment, even religions, men have sought to dispose of the Bible. They have been all too successful with many. They have taken the Bible from the schools, trying to remove it from every corner, even in homes. They are the slimy enemies of God and we must be aware of their kind.

Cannot Destroy It

Even though many efforts have come and gone, and will continue, the Bible will not be destroyed. Taking a word

from the poem, "The Village Blacksmith," the Bible is pictured as the anvil and the attacks as hammers. The anvil wears out the hammers. Not the other way around.

Voltaire predicted the demise of the Bible. Yet his very shop has been used as a distributing point for the Bible.

Thomas Paine in "The Age of Reason" said the Bible would soon be found only in museums. But today it remains the best selling book in the world year by year. Hurrah for "smart guys!"

The challenge is ever before the enemies of the Bible to see if they can produce something that improves on it. They have had twenty centuries to attempt it. His word has never and can never be equaled by mere man. It is for all men, everywhere, in all ages since Pentecost. That is because it is a living, powerful, sharp two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). The opponents cannot deal with it. They can only scoff and turn up their egotistical noses.

The Bible has always been beneficial to man (something that atheism has NEVER been in any way). It is as fresh today as ever.

The existence of the Bible is itself a miracle of the age despite the attacks against it from pagans, philosophers, pseudo-scientists, clerics, "scholars," etc. It surpasses the proud of the past and shall remain the rule for life. It is the mariner's North Star. It is the Christian's compass, a lamp unto our feet and light to our path.

Paul

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

(This lesson is based on a sermon preached by N.B.Hardeman at the Ryman Auditorium meeting in 1922 and was reviewed by me at the lectureship at Christianburg, VA in May, 2000).

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All-Sufficiency of the Bible

We shall focus attention on Second Timothy 3:16, 17 but not exclusively. This passage affirms the divine inspiration of the Bible. It is therefore inerrant and infallible as well as authoritative and all-sufficient. To say that it is "all-sufficient" is rather redundant because being sufficient means it is fully capable to meet the needs. The main point is that the book is God-breathed, which is the meaning of being divinely inspired. To be pleasing to God we must take it all and it is all that is takes.

There are those who deny this. Therefore, man has heaped upon himself many additions, subtractions, substitutions, alterations and changes to suit what he wants. We now have the Islamic Koran, the Tripitake of Buddism, Veda of Hinduism, the Book of Mormon, the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, various disciplines, manuals, prayer books, creeds, catechisms, rules of conventions, councils, conferences, traditions, feelings, faith of ancestors, on and on an endless stream of religious authorities.

You cannot really believe the Bible and deny its sufficiency because that is what the Bible claims for itself. It you do not believe that you have no reason to believe any of it. If something is more than the Bible it is too much. If it is less than the Bible it is too little. If it is like the Bible it is not needed because we have the Bible. There may be

study helps we can use but none are the authority like the Bible. The Bible allows no room for the so-called "latter day revelations" or direct operations from the Holy Spirit. What can any other source provide that God wants that is not already taught in the Bible?

Attitude Matters

Our attitude toward the Bible will determine our disposition of it. If you possess two coins, one a dime and another a fifty dollar gold piece, you will handle them differently. There is abundant evidence that the Bible came from God (which is not our prime theme here). Since it came from God, is it all that we need? Does God send us something more? It does matter.

Every false teacher and false doctrine, human religion, including denominations, contends for something more or less than the Bible. They all deny the sufficiency of the Bible. Many religious problems stem not from what the Bible says but that man will not accept what it says, being unwilling to discard their additions and subtractions. Man never shows himself more foolish than to tamper with God's word or when he thinks he can improve on what God has provided and revealed.

Second Timothy 3:16, 17

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

ALL SCRIPTURE means the Old and New Testaments. This demands plenary inspiration.

ALL GOOD WORKS refers to what God calls good.

THROUGHLY FURNISHED means it lacks nothing.

PROFITABLE means helpful, useful, necessary.

We must be impressed with the completeness and sufficiency that is affirmed by these verses.

Other Verses

Jesus said, “Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). Why search the Scriptures if they are inadequate and lacking? The implication is demanding of their sufficiency.

In John 14, 15, 16 Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to the apostles who would teach them all things, bring to their remembrance what He taught them, and guide them in all truth. Did He keep His promise? He certainly did beginning with Pentecost. Since they taught all truth, what did they leave out and where is there room for additional revelation? The Scriptures now teach what they were guided to teach. Nothing is lacking in Scripture.

The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily to see what was true. Why the Scriptures if they were not what they needed? Why did they not consult some other source?

Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). What did he omit? Did he not pronounce the curse of “anathema,” (cut off from God), upon those who taught a perverted gospel different from what he taught? Anyone who teaches what the apostles did not teach proclaim a perverted gospel (Galatians 1:6-9). The Scriptures are what he taught.

What the apostles spoke was later written in words chosen by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12-16). We are taught not to go beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6).Why would that be the rule if what is written is inadequate?

Peter said the word of the Lord endureth forever (1 Pet. 1:25). Why do we need or want something other than that?

The apostles were provided all things that pertain to life and godliness (1 Pet. 1:3). If they had it all how much is yet to come and from what source?

Jude 3 teaches the faith has been once delivered (once for all time and completely) to the saints. Therefore, anything that comes thereafter or differs from it is not of the faith of Christ. The Scriptures reveal that faith.

There are three passages that explicitly forbid additions and subtractions to the Scriptures (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18, 19). As Isaiah wrote, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). This could only be said if the word was sufficient. We must have the Lord's authority (Col. 3:17).

Sufficient in What

The Bible is not sufficient in mathematics, science, mechanics, navigation, medicine, on and on. It was never intended to be. It does now and then mention these subjects and is always correct what it teaches. But that was not why God gave us the Bible.

"So shall me word be that goeth forth out of my mouth, it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). The Bible is intended to supply that which pertains to life and godliness, the relationship of God and man, man's salvation and God's plan. It is sufficient in these matters.

The Bible is not insufficient by just having a copy in the house without knowledge of it, without study, without application, without faith, obedience and practice. The

gospel is God's power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) but only to those who have obedient faith. It is able to save the soul but only the one who receives it (James 1:21). It benefits those who hear and do (Matt. 7:24-27).

Notice the Four Areas

Doctrine or teaching: Do you want to know what is the doctrine of Christ, what to teach and what to believe? We are to teach sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10; Titus 2:1). We are not to condone doctrine that is not the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). We are to mark those who cause division by false doctrines (Rom. 16:17). Some will not endure sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3). Some are turned by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). The doctrine of Christ is the standard and measure. The Scriptures furnish that to us. If it is not in the Bible it is not God's word.

Reproof: There are things and people who must be rebuked. Sin stands in opposition to that which God approves. Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2). It cannot be allowed to go unchecked lest the whole lump be destroyed. (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). We cannot have fellowship with sin (Eph. 5:11). There must be chastening betimes (Job 5:17; Prov. 13:24). To chasten is a mark of love (Heb. 12:6-10). "For as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. 3:19). Reproving is a part of showing the difference between right and wrong, truth and error, good and evil. That way we learn that difference. We learn how and what God reproves in Scripture.

Correction: We must not only reprove what is contrary to God's will but correct it and make it right. "My son despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction; for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (Prov. 3:11, 12).

The only way to make things right is to be forgiven (Rom. 4:7, 8). The Bible way of correction is revealed showing what we need to do and why. When we fall we need to recover, be restored, reinstituted and reconciled. This necessitates obedience to the gospel taught in Scripture.

Instruction in Righteousness: The righteousness of God does not refer to an attribute of God but the way God makes man righteous. It is right doing. It is the commandments of God (Psalm 119:172). Showing the way of righteousness is the positive of God's revelation. It is fatal to turn from the way of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

What We Learn

From what reliable source do we learn of our spiritual condition, our spiritual needs, God's provisions for us, the identity of Jesus, what Deity has done to save us, what Deity expects from us to take advantage of what He has done, how to live, how to treat others, how to worship, where we came from, why we are here, how to live while here and where we are going? All these important matters are taught us in the sufficient Scriptures. There is nothing lacking that can be or needs to be found elsewhere.

The all-sufficient Scriptures will be the standard of judgment in the last day (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12, 13).

Therefore, in the Bible we have all we need. We need all that is in the Bible. We do not need more and cannot afford less. As started previously, we take it all and it is all that it takes; inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient.

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The Gospel of Christ in Acts

Sometimes you may hear someone speak of "the four gospels" with reference to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We may as well get it right. There are not four gospels. There is one gospel. There are four accounts of events that tell us of the ministry of Jesus and the evidence that while on earth He was the Son of God.

The gospel is a specific message; a revelation from God; the good news of salvation for man. It is THE gospel, not a gospel or something perverted or twisted to accommodate the minds of men (Galatians 1:6-9). It is based on the bad news that man sins and in his sin he is doomed and damned. He cannot save himself. But God so loved him that He has provided a way of salvation and that way is His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The gospel tells of God's love, grace and mercy and the coming of Jesus to this earth in the fashion as a man, to live His perfect life, provide evidence of His identity, be humiliated, suffer, die on the cross for the sins of all the world, be buried but raised from the dead the third day and then ascend into heaven to return to the Father where He reigns on His throne by the right hand of God until He returns to deliver up His kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24) and the redeemed ones enter heaven for eternity. That is the good news.

We learn of this not only from the first four books of the New Testament but the entire New Testament reveals the gospel that was prophesied back in the Old Testament. We also learn of the gospel in the book of Acts (a book that tells of some of the acts of some of the apostles) after they received the Great Commission to take the gospel to the world. That work began on the first Pentecost after His ascension. The gospel spread beginning from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and throughout the known world.

The Message by Chapters

Without touching every chapter, let us observe the gospel in Acts. Chapter one tells of the ascension, the disciples being together and the selection of a replacement for Judas.

It is chapter two where we read of the establishment of the kingdom, which is the church, and the message of salvation through Christ was preached for the first time. Peter convinced his hearers of the identity of Christ and they asked what to do to be saved. They were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That gift was not a personal indwelling of the Spirit nor miraculous powers but the accomplishment of the promise that was given to Abraham that in his seed all the families and nations of the earth would be blessed. Three thousand heard, believe and obeyed and were added to the church. The gospel had begun to save the lost.

Chapter three through seven teaches us how to be saved (the same way as taught in chapter two), that Christ is the only Savior, the preaching of the words of life which include the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, early problems in the church, persecution of the church, but the expansion of the church as the persecuted were spread abroad but took the gospel with them and taught it.

Examples of Conversion

In addition to the example of conversion on Pentecost beginning with chapter eight we read of the conversion of Samaritans, and the Ethiopian eunuch. In chapter nine, Saul, a persecutor of Christians, is converted. In chapter ten the first Gentile is converted at the house of Cornelius. We see the gospel in action as it is preached, heard, believed

and obeyed. Of course, many rejected the gospel also and there were enemies of the truth abounding everywhere.

Chapter eleven, along with chapter fifteen, reveals the solution of the problem about Gentiles, whether the gospel was for them. Peter had taken the gospel to them, but there were some among the Jewish brethren who attempted to bind the old law of the Jews upon the Gentiles in order to be saved. With discussions among the leaders, Peter, Paul and Barnabas, and James with all the church they recognized the message of the Holy Spirit that the gospel is for all and intended that way from the time of Abraham.

Chapter twelve tells us of the martyrdom of James, the apostle, and the imprisonment and release of Peter. How strenuously the Jewish leaders sought to suppress the preaching of the gospel of Christ!

The Preaching of Paul

Beginning with chapter thirteen the theme of Acts is the labor of Paul in the vineyard of the Lord. Having seen the Lord on the road to Damascus, he was taught and baptized into Christ and began preaching the One he formerly persecuted. He began what we call his missionary journeys, of which there were three plus his voyage to Rome.

He taught people that salvation was by the grace of God, by obedient faith, to abstain from idols, immorality, that they lived under the will of Christ and not the Law of Moses. The offer of salvation was universal because the need of salvation was universal. He taught there are no gods but the true God of heaven. His theme was always the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and how man must believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ and be buried in water for the remission of sins where the blood of Christ is applied to his sin-stained soul

and he is raised to a new life as a new creature in Christ. He assumes the privileges and duties to live faithfully before God until death takes him from this world. He awaits the return of the Lord to take His people to heaven eternally.

We read of the conversion of Lydia, the jailor of Philippi and some Corinthians. We know what they heard, what they believed, and what they did to come to Christ. We see the gospel doing what the Lord sent it to do.

The Promises Proclaimed

As we study the sermons preached by God's messengers, we learn of the promises God offers and extends to the obedient. Because of these promises we have hope for this life and the life to come that was prophesied.

The book closes with Paul in prison in Rome but continuing to preach and teach the gospel as afforded opportunity, no man forbidding him (acts 28:30, 31).

Revealed and Confirmed

Christ promised the Holy Spirit to come upon the apostles. Before He ascended He told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for power from on high (Luke 24:47). That power was the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). With the revelation underway, there was the need to confirm, prove, verify and authenticate the message. This was done as Jesus said it would be by miracles (Mark. 16:20; Heb. 2:3, 4). We read how the apostles healed the lame man (3:11, 12) and the effect was that it was undeniable that the miracle was done by the apostles (4:16). Stephen worked miracles (6:8), as did Philip (8:6) and Peter raised Dorcas (9:40). These things were done to confirm the message.

Spread by Preaching

The gospel was spread by preaching. Paul went on his missionary journeys preaching the word. The gospel was taken to Samaria and to the Gentiles by preaching the word. This is the way the church grew. They filled Jerusalem with their gospel (4:28).

Many believed and obeyed. Beginning with 3,000 on Pentecost it soon grew to 5,000 men (4:4). Even many of the priests obeyed (6:7). "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (19:20).

The Effect

The gospel changed lives and behavior, attitudes and convictions (2:42-47; 4:34-37). Brethren prayed together, for each other, comforted each other. Some burned their books of curious arts (19:19). Idols were forsaken (ch. 19), the idol Diana was threatened (ch. 19), and people turned to the true God from their idols (1 Thess. 1:9). First Corinthians 6:19-21 shows how their behavior changed.

Yes, the gospel was rejected by many. Christians were persecuted, imprisoned, beheaded and beaten. Their enemies stirred up riots stoned them, ran them out of the cities, plotted against their lives, commanded them not to teach and preach and others offered excuses that it was not convenient and they were almost persuaded; not altogether.

In the gospel according to Acts we find souls that were lost but were saved. How? What was the pattern? What was the power? The gospel was how, the pattern and the power (Rom. 1:16). In this book we see the Great Commission executed. God's promise to Abraham was being fulfilled. It is in Acts that we see the progress of the early church; the church built by Christ and the one He saves (Eph. 5:23).

Without question we read of the gospel in Acts.

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Can We See the Bible Alike?

There is division, confusion and disagreement in the religious world. Not only is there separation between religions (Christian, Jew, Moslem, etc.) but within religions (denominationalism). There is division among those who profess to use the Bible as their only authority. We seek to understand why and wonder if there can ever be unity.

The Bible is God's communication with man; a revelation of the mind of God to man (1 Cor. 2:12ff). It has come from Deity (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). This will be a major overriding fact in seeking the answer to our question. Why did God give man the Bible? What does it include? Jesus said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The Word is the means God has used to speak to man and it calls for unity.

A Prominent Denial

There are those who deny the existence of truth. Others deny it is attainable; that we can only search for truth but never expect to find it. They explain the division over the Bible this way.

Some contend there are no absolutes of which we can be sure and they are absolutely sure of it. We wonder how they can be sure it is true there is no truth. This position destroys itself and is not worthy of acceptance.

What Does "See" Mean?

It means to understand. Can we understand the Bible alike? Can we come to a united conclusion? We would contend if we understand it we do understand it alike just as is true in any other subject. When two people differ it means that one (possibly both) misunderstand. This is either true or God, the giver of the Bible, is the author of confusion even though such is denied in Scripture (1 Cor. 14:33). If we cannot understand the Bible alike why did God provide it? The very existence of His message implies God expects man to know and understand it. It would be senseless to give man a message and make it such that man would be prohibited from understanding it. We would not even send a message to others so they would be confused but informed. God wants man to be informed of His will.

Judged by His Word

We shall be judged by the word of Christ (John 12:48). Christ is just (Acts 3:14). What justice could exist if we could not understand the standard of measure to be applied to us? Does God hold us accountable for what we can never know even if we wanted to know? Does He shield us from what is vital to us? The fact that the Word is the standard of judgment means we can know it.

Commanded to Teach It

How could we teach His Word if we do not and cannot know it? Knowledge of what is to be taught is required for a teacher. The command to teach means we can know it. Closely allied with this thought is that we are to study it. Why study it if it is impossible to understand? Without study we cannot be pleasing to God (2 Tim. 3:15). If correct conclusions are beyond our ability, study is useless.

The Bible Calls for Unity

There are those things of which there is but one (Eph. 4:4, 5). Unity (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27; John 17:20) requires we "see" things alike. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Does God require unity but give us His message that prohibits unity because we cannot understand it the same way? To make such a statement is an insult to God. Unity demands understanding.

Consider These Scriptures

Ephesians 3:3-5: Paul was given revelation from God. Paul knew what was for a long time a "mystery," (Something unknown but not unknowable). God's will is no longer a mystery because it has been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets (divinely inspired men). We can also know the mystery even as Paul knew it. We can come to this knowledge by reading. We can "see" it alike and "see" it as Paul saw it.

John 5:39: Jesus admonishes the searching of Scripture. What use would it be to search the Scripture if they were beyond our ability to understand and understand alike? Jesus implies by searching the Scriptures we can "see" it alike.

Acts 17:11: The Bereans searched the Scriptures to ascertain the truth. They understood they could understand it. What use would it be to search the Scriptures if they could not understand them?

Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony." Why? "We cannot understand it alike anyway," some may wail. Is that what God is telling them?

1 Peter. 4:11: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." How can we know when one speaks as the oracles of God if we cannot understand the oracles of God? How could anyone really know what the oracles of God are? The very admonition shows we can "see" it alike.

It is rather amusing, if it were not so serious, that some tell us we cannot understand the Scriptures and then quote passages to us to "prove" we cannot understand it.

Enlightened by the Holy Spirit

Some contend we cannot understand the Bible until the Holy Spirit "enlightens" us in some miraculous, direct, mysterious way. To them the Bible is a dead letter in spite of the Bible teaching is it living (Heb. 4:12). Liberals have prayed for the Spirit's "enlightenment" on the dead, dark pages of the Bible so we can understand.

The Holy Spirit has already provided the Scriptures. Was He unable to provide them so we could understand them? Did He deliberately refuse to make it understandable? Why preach to sinners who do not have this "enlightenment?" They cannot understand, they say. Why cite to them passages they must obey when they cannot understand it until the Holy Spirit "zaps" them with "enlightenment."

Did God give multi-meanings to His Word that cause confusion? Why do those who claim this special gift of "enlightenment" not preach the same message? Does the Holy Spirit guide some one direction but guide others in a different, even, opposite, direction? Some try to put the responsibility of division, confusion and disagreement on God. To be sure, some parts of Scripture are hard to understand (1 Pet. 3:16). Who is so bold to claim he understands everything? You do not have to understand everything to understand something. His Word is such that

a “wayfaring” man can grasp it. The essentials to be saved are not difficult to understand. The fact is, many do understand alike and this proves it can be done.

Then Why Do Men Not “See” It Alike?

It is not God’s fault. Some are not even looking at it; like the farmer who denied there were rats in his corn crib but would not look to see. Reading creeds, manuals, disciplines, catechisms, etc. becloud the mind. Following conventions, councils, clergymen and conferences will never lead to the truth. Feelings, traditions, trends, “experts,” and self-proclaimed “scholars” do not ascertain authority. Ignorance of the Bible, which is no reflection on one’s intelligence necessarily, causes division. There are many “educated fools” who are misinformed, uninformed, lacking information and only partially informed. This does not justify the situation but does help to explain it.

Such was true in New Testament times. It was a problem among the Jews (Rom. 10:3); for those who called for His crucifixion (Luke 23:34); and the enemies of Christ (Acts 13:27). It was the problem for those who denied the resurrection (Matt. 22:29). It was the problem for those who walked after the way of Gentiles (Ephesians 4:17-19). The Athenians had this problem (Acts 17:23).

There are at least two kinds of ignorant people: those who have never studied, and those who have studied but have accepted something that is not true. Some are content in ignorance. It is possible for one to be deceived, taught incorrectly and misled. The ignorant are those most easily misguided. Counterfeit is the most deceptive because it appears close to what is valid. Some accept ideas simply because somebody else does. But you cannot deceive a

person who knows. Knowledge dispels deception. To prevent apostasy we must know the truth.

Some will never "see" things alike because of pride, self-will and prejudice. We must have an honest and good heart. Our motives for study must be pure; not just to prove somebody wrong or yourself superior and win an argument. We must sincerely desire to know the truth.

We can "see" what to do to be saved if we will study and stay with the Bible. May we do that!

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How We Got Our Bible

This is more of a study ABOUT the Bible than OF the Bible. It is useful for appreciation of the inspiration of the Bible. We have the Bible. How did we get it?

The Bible is an ancient book but not the oldest. Moses, who wrote the first five books, lived some 1,500 years before Christ. Writing can be dated as far back as around 4,500 years before Christ.

The Bible claims to have come from God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Paul said what he preached originated with God (1 Cor. 2:4; 10-13). Peter tells us how the Holy Spirit guided men to speak (2 Pet. 1:20, 21). Jesus promised the apostles divine guidance by the Holy Spirit in their teaching (John 14, 15, 16). God used about forty men to write it over a period of over 1,500 years. The writers never claimed their words came from them, but from God. Over 3,800 times they used such phrase as "God said," "thus saith the Lord."

The writings were not only from God but were not simply dictation without the personal style of the writers. God used the vocabularies of the writers to express His own thoughts. This accounts for the different styles of

writing in the Bible. What they wrote was not their "interpretation" of what God said, but what God said. The origin and inspiration of the Bible is a major portion of the subject of Christian Evidences.

Three languages were used in its composition: (1) Hebrew (most of the Old Testament), (2) Koine Greek (most of the New Testament); (3) Aramaic (small portions in both Old and New Testaments). The originals were written on materials that have not survived passage of time.

Important Words and Definitions

There are several words the meaning of which is necessary to understand how we got the Bible.

AUTOGRAPHS: This refers to the original writing. Why they were not preserved we know not. It may be prevent the abuse of them as Israel did the brass serpent.

MANUSCRIPTS: These are copies of the autographs. The Dead Sea scrolls have confirmed the reliability of our Old Testament in the Masoretic Text. The copyists were meticulously cautious in their work, even counting the number of characters they copied to assure accuracy. Some go back to the second century.

There are two kinds of Greek manuscripts: (1) Unical (the oldest and in "capital" letters); (2) Cursive, of which there are hundreds. There are over 4,500 such manuscripts with portions of Scripture and some with the entire New Testament.

LECTIONARIES: These were a collection of selected writings that were used in public worship with portions of Scripture being included. Together they reveal much of it. There have been found over 1,800 lectionaries.

VERSIONS: There are many translations of the Bible, some even older than manuscripts, that have been

discovered. A translation implies the existence of that which was translated and was older. This is the way the Bible went from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, English or other languages. When there is correct translation the Word is unchanged regarding its meaning and revelation.

WRITINGS OF THE "FATHERS": The "Fathers" refer to ancient commentators of the Scripture. In their work they included lengthy portions of Scripture. It has been estimated that the entire Bible could be gathered from their writing since quotations are so numerous.

From these and other sources the text of the Scriptures has been determined and formulated. We have more information regarding the text of the Bible than any ancient writing known to men.

CANON: These are the books that belong in the Bible. They are divinely inspired of God and were from the moment they were written. To the Jews were committed the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2) The Jews divided the Old Testament into divisions different from the division we use but the material is the same as in our thirty-nine books. Jesus recognized their division in Luke 24:44 as the Law of Moses, the prophets and psalms. The writings of Paul are called Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15, 16). There is abundant internal and external evidence for the divine inspiration of the sixty-six books of our Bible. This is the CANON.

CATALOGS: These are ancient listings of the book that have been recognized to be inspired. Many catalogs are available that have been collected through the ages.

What about the "Errors?"

What some call "errors" are not justifiably called errors. There are variations to be sure. Is it really an error if a copyist wrote "Jesus, Jesus" rather than just "Jesus?" Is it

an “error” to find “Christ Jesus” rather than “Jesus Christ?” Such is the nature of many of the so-called “errors.” There are some variations in spelling, particularly in names and places. There is variance from one manuscript to another in syntax, the way in which words are put together to form phases, clauses and sentences. But there is no change in meaning.

Our English Bible

The Bible was translated into Latin. That version is called the Vulgate Version. John Wycliffe (1330-1384 AD) translated the Bible from Latin to English. Years later the Catholic Church had his bones dug up, burned and cast into a river to show their disapproval of what he had done.

William Tyndale is called the Father of the English Bible because he translated it in the 1500’s from the Greek text compiled by a Greek scholar named Erasmus. It was printed in Germany because of the opposition to an English Bible in England by the ruling Catholic powers and prevented the work being done in England. Copies were transported into England, however. Many of them were seized and burned. Such was the attitude toward the Bible.

Tyndale was kidnapped, imprisoned, strangled and his body burned at the stake, 10/16/1536. Many have suffered and died to present the Bible to us in our tongue. Some ninety-per vent of the King James Version is almost identical to the Tyndale version.

King James Version

Guy Woods once commented that he believed more people will be in heaven as a result of the KJV than all the other versions combined. King James of England gathered

fifty-four (later reduced to forty-eight) of the ripest scholars and commissioned them produce an accurate version of the Bible. They began their work in 1604 and completed it in 1611. “A translation which endures can represent no single viewpoint, and that the King James Version has lasted for three and a half centuries is a tribute to its deliberate impartiality” (How We Got the Bible, Lightfoot, page 102).

Since 1611 there have been language changes, spelling changes, word meaning changes, misprints, alteration of word order that have provoked many to produce more translation. There is no objection to new translations provided they are translations and not commentaries or rewritten books such as is characteristic of so many of the so-called modern-speech versions like the RSV, NIV, TEV, NEB, Easy-to-Read Version, etc.

In 1885 there was produced the English Revised Version which is not an updating of the KJV because it was translated from a different text; the Westcott-Hort Text. It is interesting to note that in disputed passages so many times the ERV departed from the W-H to read like the Received Text and the KJV. The American Standard Version came out in 1901 and is considered one of the most literal translations, at least in what it produced. The several omissions and deletions of the ASV hampers it from being the most reliable, however.

Some, evidently thinking if they could degrade the KJV (which gives them a fit) it would make the “modern” versions acceptable, have criticized the KJV for archaic language, obsolete words, etc. An archaic word may not be in use but it is not an error.

Some complain about “Easter” being in Acts 12:4 and say it authorizes the observance of “Easter.” It is an error and it should read Passover. It does not authorize the celebration of Easter any more than it authorizes the

Christian to celebrate the Passover. Furthermore, "Easter" denotes a season as well as a celebration. What is recorded took place in a season that later came to be known as "Easter." One liberal anti-KJV, modern version advocate raised this criticism but he and his congregation join the denominations in celebrating Easter. Indeed, the legs of the lame are not only unequal but must not exist at all.

The translation of "hades" as "hell" is not an error. Hades is the unseen temporary state of the dead. Hell is the place of eternal punishment. English dictionaries give both meanings to the word "hell." It may be confusing but it is not wrong. The ASV did make it clearer by translating "gehenna" as "hell" and transliterating "hades," (giving it an English sound and spelling.

When you read the KJV you can have confidence you are reading the Word of God. One liberal digressive said when you read the KJV, RSV, NIV, etc. you are reading the very Word of God. How could that be when they not only do not read alike but even teach different and contradictory doctrines?

Humorous Translations

People do make mistakes. For instance there is what is called the Wicked Bible where the command "Thou shalt not commit adultery," is rendered without the "not."

There is the Murderer's Bible that reads, "Let the children first be killed," rather than "filled."

One reads, "The dogs liked his blood" instead of "licked" his blood.

One says, "Printers persecuted me without a cause" where it should read "Princes."

One presents the parable of the "vinegar", not the "vineyard."

We Have God's Word

It has been estimated that substantial variations are less than one per cent of the Scripture, and none of that pertains to any doctrinal matter.

Peter wrote, "For all flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1Pet. 1:24, 25). Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pas away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). His words shall judge us in the last day (John 12:48). We have the Bible, God's Word. Let us learn it, believe it and obey it.

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Warnings and Promises

What is a promise? It is a declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified. Men make promises but their promises are no more reliable than their word and ability to keep the promise. Sometimes men "bite off more than they can chew," which means they cannot keep a promise they have made. Sometimes promises are broken unintentionally, but may be broken intentionally.

There are divinely given promises; promises that God has made. God keeps His promises (2 Pet. 3:9).

A promise is usually in the context of something good and the fulfillment of it is anticipated with joy. Such promises are forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38); eternal life (John 3:16); the providence of God (Matt. 6:33) and many similar promises God has given to man. How grateful we

are for the "exceeding great and precious promises" of God (2 Pet. 1:4) that can be ours through Christ.

There is another kind of promise, if we can call it that, that is just as sure and certain that is better identified as a warning. There are threats with negative results if ignored. There are things of which we can be sure, a sure as the precious promises; things we would wish would not occur. A promise has positive consequences while a warning has negative consequences. This is the distinction we make.

The Credibility of God

What we are discussing has to do with credibility of God. Will God keep His word in both warnings and promises? "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them; he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face" (Deut. 7:9, 10). Peter quoted a portion of this passage (2 Pet. 3:9). "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised" (Heb. 10:23). We can be sure what God says is the way it will be.

Some rejoice in the good that God will do unto them, being kind, gentle, etc. We dare not minimize but praise God for His living kindness. But do not misunderstand the nature of God. He will also keep His threats and warnings to punish the evildoer. Some might say, "God would never do that." Some talk like they would be more compassionate, just and kind than is God. They ignore the "harder" side of God, His justice and holiness. But such a view invalidates the credibility of His word to us.

We have but one major point in this lesson and that is how God has made promises that are positive and warnings that are negative. God keeps His word in both instances. We shall cite several examples of this truth.

Adam and Eve

"God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Gen. 3:3). What is it about the phrase, "Thou shalt not" that seems so hard for many of us to understand? God warned them. They ate of the forbidden fruit anyway. They were expelled from the Garden of Eden. They died spiritually that day (separated from God) and brought physical death upon all their descendants (Rom. 5:12). Cannot we understand that God kept His word?

Noah and His Generation

Genesis 6:5, 6 tells us of the evil spiritual condition of mankind prior to the flood. God gave His word, "And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man and beast and creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them" (Gen. 6:7). Did He do it? When we read of the flood that followed can we doubt He kept His word?

The Biblical evidence for a universal flood continues to mount in spite of the skeptics who do not wish to credit Genesis as being historical but only a myth or fable. Christ cited the flood as an historical event (Luke 17:32).

Sodom and Gomorrah

God warned He would destroy these two cities because of their abominable behavior (Gen. 18:20). He gave Lot

and His family opportunity to escape and some did. Genesis 19:24, 25, "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and all that which grew upon the ground." Sounds like He kept His word.

Promises through His Servants

Korah and others led a rebellion against Moses and it was tantamount to a rebellion against God since Moses was God's chosen leader (Numbers 16). They said to Moses, "You take too much upon yourself…" The matter was put to a test as to whom leadership belonged. The events that followed showed conclusively that Korah and others were the ones who had taken too much upon themselves and they perished. God kept His word when He warned them.

Similar Events Teach the Same Truth

God told Israel to gather manna each day, but not more than necessary except to cover the Sabbath day. That which was gathered in excess would spoil. Some didn't believe that, gathered, and it spoiled. (Exo. 16:26-28).

God was strict regarding violations of the Sabbath (Exo. 31:14, 15; Num. 32-36). One gathered sticks on the Sabbath and was stoned. Looks like He meant His law.

Israel would prolong their days in Canaan if they were obedient. Otherwise, they would lose the land. They were not obedient and lost the land (Deut. 11). Palestine does not belong to the Jews today by God's promises. They may take and hold it but not because God said it would be theirs.

The New Testament warnings given to the seven churches of Asia were not just idle words. God meant what He said. Where are those churches today?

When God "Broke" His Promise

God has never gone back on His word. He changed His mind about Nineveh when He warned they would be destroyed in forty days because of their wickedness. That was obviously an optional warning. They repented, and when they repented, He repented (changed His mind). If God did not change His mind when He makes a conditional promise or warning (explicitly or implicitly) He would be untrue to His word. He is never untrue to His word. Does this fact make any difference to us? It should.

Warnings before Us

God has warned us today of certain things as well as promised us great blessings. He has warned, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). It that just a "maybe so" as some must consider it?

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous unto eternal life" (Matt. 25:46. Did He mean it? Will He be unfaithful to His word?

Luke 13:3-5 demands we repent or perish. How many shall refuse to repent and then expect not to perish?

Revelation 21:8 lists a number of sinful people who will have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. Do you think He just said that to scare people or did God warn with certainty?

Paul mentioned a host of wicked people who shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9, 10). He spoke as the Holy Spirit guided him. Are these idle words?

Psalm one tells the destiny of the blessed and the ungodly. Proverbs 14:34 warns a nation of its conduct. Galatians 6:7, 8 presents the law of sowing and reaping that shall not be repealed. Will God keep His word?

Take His Word Seriously

Some teach baptism is not necessary for salvation, but God does. Some have said, "Maybe God will find a way to save them anyway. We dare not limit God." It is not a question of limiting God. It is a question of believing God when He tells us there is one way and that way is Christ. God can do whatever God sees fit. To suggest He will do differently than what He has revealed is to challenge His credibility and integrity. Who has the right to do that?

When God draws the line it is man's duty to respect that line and not try to move it, change it, define it some other way than what God says. We should be sobered by both the positive promises and negative warnings of God He will forbid entrance into heaven of those who are disobedient and unfaithful. He will usher the obedient and faithful into glory. His terms of salvation are to hear the word, believe it, repent of sins, confess our faith in Christ, and be baptized in water for the remission of sin where we reach His shed blood and rise to walk in a newness of life. Who has the right to say otherwise? We can rest assured that the following is true. Those who believe and obey shall be saved. Those who don't, won't. That is because God is faithful to His word.

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Defense of the Gospel

Jude 3 teaches we are to contend earnestly for the faith. Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). The faith is the same as the gospel. Other terms of which we read with reference to the same thing are the Word, doctrine, truth; all referring to God's plan for saving man. Paul told Timothy to preach the word (2 Tim. 4:2). Paul preached the gospel (Rom. 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:1). At Salamis he preached the Word (Acts 13:5). Elymas sought to turn Sergius Paulus from the faith (Acts 13:8). When he said he was set for the defense of the gospel he was contending for the faith.

Evidently, Paul thought the gospel needed to be defended. It needs defending against false doctrines, false teachers, those who would pervert it and wrest it. It must be done and done the way God wants it done. Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit as he defended the gospel. We do well to learn how he handled this matter and do like him.

He not only was set for the defense of the gospel, he actually did defend it. It mattered to him what people believed about Christ and His message of salvation. He would not allow it to be distorted without defense of it. Some do not approve of the way others defend the gospel. There are better ways to do it than what some of us do. But as one good brother once remarked, "I like the way I am doing it better than the way you are not doing it."

Paul in Action

After Paul's conversion he immediately began to preach the very Christ he once persecuted. He disputed with the Grecians with questions and answers in informal debate.

He did not just “argue religion” as some express it. He set out to prove his message was true and ward off why it was rejected. He often disputed in the marketplace. His dispute was reasoning with others about the truth (Acts 17:17).

His actions at Paphos on his first missionary journey were dramatic. He preached and even Sergius Paulus was impressed. Elymas tried to hinder the gospel but Paul struck him blind for a season. He did not lose his temper. Being filled with the Holy Spirit he was aggressive, decisive and stopped the opponent of truth with vigor.

Did he not defend the gospel in Antioch (Galatians 2) when the actions of Peter were causing division in the church? Peter had pulled back from his Gentile brethren and was to be blamed (2:11). Paul withstood him to the face and did not give place to those that were in error for an hour. It was urgent that the church not be influenced by these Judaizing teachers who sought to bind the Law o Moses on Gentile brethren.

If some living today had been present you probably would have heard it said, “Now brother Paul, you are going to cause trouble.” Paul did not cause trouble. Peter caused the trouble. Those in error are always the ones who cause the trouble; not those who correct it. Some offer the advice of Gamaliel which is essentially, “Just leave it alone and it will die out” (Acts 5:35ff). If that would work, all error would have died out long ago. Paul warned that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6). Error could not be ignored lest the whole church become corrupted.

The abuse of Matthew 18 on how to handle personal offenses is sometimes cited in handling publicly taught error. That pattern is not teaching how to handle publicly taught error. Paul showed how to handle error done in public when he confronted Peter. I recall one man rebuking me for opposing a false teaching he was making because I

had not gone to him privately and personally first. He "wrote me up" in his bulletin about it. I was under no obligation to go to him privately and personally first. But while he was rebuking me for opposing him publicly he was rebuking me publicly without ever having come to me first. Some folks have their head on crooked.

Calling Names

Why do some object to calling the names of the sources of error? Paul did it (Demas, Alexander, Hymenaus, Philetus, Jannes, Jambres, Hermogenes, Phygellus). These were not personal attacks but defense of the gospel by warning from where error came. If you knew there was a rattlesnake in the room, would you not expect those who knew where it was to tell you? The Holy Spirit approved of this, still does, and so do we.

Motives Matters

The heart is important in this business of defending the gospel. Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence…" Proverbs 23:7, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he…" Paul knew the gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1, 2). He did what he did for the spiritual benefit of others (1 Cor. 4:14). False teachers creep in (2 Tim. 3:6). One brother called them "religious creeps." Elders must be able to stop the mouths of gainsayers (Titus 1:9, 11). Paul knew the damage false ways would do to the church. Love for the church, the souls of men and dedication to his duty would not allow him any other path but to defend the gospel. He did not engage in personal conflict for the sake of conflict, personal gain or victory; not just to prove somebody else wrong or that he

was superior to win. He, like Christ, rebuked, condemned and corrected because of love for others.

His Manner of Action

Here is where some of us go astray. We go about the noble task in a bad way. Paul knew what the situation demanded. He told the Corinthian brethren he could come to them with a rod, or in love and in the spirit of meekness (1 Cor. 4:21). He was never rude or mean-spirited. But with tears in his eyes and heart, he said beseechingly of those who perverted the gospel, "anathema," which means to let them be accursed (Gal. 1). His motives were righteous.

Consider What He Did

He was both positive and negative. He shows what to do and not to do. He was balanced in preaching the whole counsel of God. He did not condemn error without teaching truth. He sought to remove hindrances to salvation by creating understanding and conviction even as he warned of what would destroy.

In the dispute about the old law in Jerusalem when some argued for binding the old law on Gentiles, he explained what God had wrought among the Gentiles on his missionary tour (Acts 15). He preached the superiority of Christ, the new covenant, the purpose of the old law (Galatians, Romans, Hebrews) and how it had been taken away (Col. 2:14). He showed how God used Israel and the old law temporarily to usher in the new covenant. It was wrong to continue to bind what had been loosed. God now speaks to man through His Son (Heb. 1:1, 2); not Moses.

There was the problem of division in Corinth. The division was over men and Paul condemned the division (1

Cor. 1). Negatively he said, “Let there be no divisions among you.” Positively he said they should speak the same things, be of the same mind and judgment. He exposed what was wrong and presented what is right.

There were doctrinal problems in Colosse; probably from Gnostics who denied the Deity of Jesus. Paul exposed their mysticisms and philosophies that impugned the dual nature of Christ; human and divine.

Regarding those who denied the resurrection in Corinth he gave eye-witness testimony of the resurrected Christ and listed the fatal consequences if Christ had not been raised (1 Cor. 15). He removed error; he established truth.

The same manner and procedure was true concerning the abuse of the Lord’s Supper, the misunderstanding about spiritual gifts. Always in a logical, rational, systematic explanation he defended the gospel.

See how the exposed the idolatrous errors in Athens at Mars Hill. Idols were wrong. They should turn to the true and living God.

Paul made prolific use of Scripture to document his message about Christ as did Peter. He cited the prophets and promises recorded in the Old Testament. He knew the Scripture was inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). He relied upon it for defend the gospel. He taught we are not to think of men above what is written (1 Cor. 4:6).

Defense by Discipline

Some will persist in error, subvert churches, and will not be brought to repentance. Brethren can teach, rebuke, shame, correct, plead and expose but nothing turns them from error. In such sorrowful situations fellowship must be withdrawn. They must be removed from being considered as one of us. They must be marked as enemies of the cross

There were those in Corinth that Paul said to give up and turn them over to Satan. There are times when we must shake the dust from off our feet against the unruly (Matt. 10:4). We cannot fellowship the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). We cannot bid "Godspeed" to those who tech error (2 John 9-11). Discipline is not an unloving act but an act of love after all other measures have failed.

The Word Will Endure

Some say the gospel needs no defense; that it will defend itself. But Paul shows it does need defense and he defended it. The gospel teaches us how to do that. Defending the gospel is not an easy undertaking and often is an unpleasant experience because the enemies of truth are not congenial and usually not honest.

The Word will be the standard of measure at the Judgment. We will have served well if we will have contended for the faith and defended the gospel. Our happy eternity depends on doing that very thing.

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Evidences of Inspiration

The Bible is here. How did it come into existence? From what source did men get it? Is it completely of men? Men would not have produced it if they could because it condemns too many things men approve and commends too many things men condemn. The writers would have condemned themselves if they had authored it. They claim it came from God.

Is it completely from God? If so, in what sense is it from God? What does the Bible claim for itself?

The Bible claims it is a product of work from both God and man. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21).

Is It Inspired of God?

2 Timothy 3:16 affirms the Scripture is “God-breathed.” That is what the word “inspired” means. Therefore, it is accurate, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient.

There are several false theories of inspiration. Some say it is inspired in the same sense as other pieces of literature. The writers were moved to write what they did from emotion, experience, sorrow, etc. If this is all there is to Biblical inspiration then the writers of the Bible lied. Samuel said he said what God told him what to say (2 Sam. 23:2). David said the Holy Spirit spoke by his mouth (Acts 1:16). Such is affirmed repeatedly by Bible writers. If the Bible is wholly of men, why have they not produced something superior to it all these years?

Others contend only the “thoughts” of the Bible are divinely inspired and that men wrote what they “thought” God meant. This theory is refuted in 2 Pet. 1:20, 21 which denies the Scripture is man’s interpretation of what God said. If that is so, all we have is what men think; not what God said.

There is the “mechanical dictation” theory. God simply dictated the words much as an executive might dictate to a secretary. That would not explain why there are different styles, vocabularies and distinctions in the writings. They certainly exist and there must be an accounting for that.

Verbal, Plenary Divine Inspiration

This is the correct view. The words were chosen by the Holy Spirit from the vocabularies of the writers to express the mind of God. The writers were guided by the Holy Spirit in the words used. “All scripture” is included (plenary). This did not suppress human faculties but used them. This explains the different styles and vocabularies of the books. It does not mean that everything recorded is the truth because false doctrines are often mentioned. Even words from Satan are included. But everything that is recorded is recorded truthfully. It did not immunize the writers from sin, disease, persecution, suffering, etc. It did not reveal unto them all information on every subject. It did reveal God’s way of saving man and His relationship with man. It revealed what God wishes to teach man.

The Claim

As already mentioned, it is “God-breathed.” We would not contend for a book to have come from God unless it claimed to have come from God. The writers denied they were the source of it and claimed it came from God.

Exodus 4:12, God to Moses, “Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say.”

We have already noted what Samuel and David said.

Luke 24:44, Jesus endorsed the Old Testament as the Jews had it; the law, prophecies and psalms. What was included is what we have in the thirty-nine books.

Jesus accepted as historical the record of the flood of Noah, (Matt. 24:37), Jonah (Matt. 12:40), the Creation (Matt. 19). He used the Scriptures to defeat Satan (Matt. 4). He promised the apostles the Holy Spirit would come and guide them into all the truth (John 14, 15, 16). The apostles spoke on Pentecost as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2). What Paul preached was not of man but God ((Gal.

1:11). What the Thessalonians received was of God (1 Thess. 2:13). Paul spoke, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Spirit teacheth (1 Cor. 12:13). This demands verbal, word, inspiration. Jesus told the churches of Asia to "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

One may not believe what the Scriptures say about it. But it is unquestionable that the Bible claims to have come from the mind of God and written by men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Some object to examining the Bible to prove it came from God. How irrational! If you wanted to know the composition of a metal object, what would you examine? Would you accept what some "scholar" thought about it without examining the object?

Consider Some of the Evidences

The unity of the Bible proves it is from God. Even though there are sixty-six books, written by around forty writers, over a period of 1,500 years or more, in three different languages, in different countries, under different circumstances, by shepherds, fishermen, tax collectors, physicians, kings, warriors, etc. when compiled there is one theme (salvation for man and his relationship with God), one central personality (Jesus Christ), without contradiction but one single book.

This may be illustrated with a great painting or mosaic. Suppose a painting was made by many different painters with similar diversions as characterized the writers of the Bible, yet when the various parts were brought together they formed a perfect portrait. Would you not know there had to have been a single over-seeing mind behind it?

Consider also the historical and geographical accuracy. Consider even topographical perfection in it. There are

lands, peoples, nations which are correctly recorded. Some such things mentioned in the Bible were the subject of scorn until more and more findings of archeology proved the Bible to be true. Nothing has been found that disproves anything the Bible affirms. One man, Dr. Ramsey, set out to disprove Luke, who wrote Acts, was in error, came away from his investigation convinced it was accurate. Luke mentioned thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, nine Mediterranean islands, and ninety-five persons accurately.

Information was written by Moses that nobody at his time could have possibly known. The Bible has been shown to be true by archeology and secular historians like Josephus, Pliny and Tacticus. What men say is not why we believe the Bible to be from God but their findings do corroborate that claim.

Scientific Foreknowledge

The Bible is not a science book. But when it speaks of scientific matters is speaks correctly. There are five fundamentals of science: time, force, action, space and matter. Moses included all five in the first verse, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." How could he know this except God revealed it unto him?

Job 38:16 speaks of the springs of the sea and the recesses of the oceans which scientists have proven to exist. The writers of the Bible never discovered those things. Chapter 38-41 include fifty questions of which man can only answer about five or six. Men thought seas were totally fed by rains and run-off. Now they know it includes springs. The recesses are hidden in the depths of the sea, uncharted. But in 1873 was discovered a trench five and one half miles deep. Another was found in 1960 to be seven miles deep. How did Job know that?

There is not one proven scientific fact that one must discard to believe the Bible message. Some theories conflict with Scripture but not proven truth. One of the greatest lies perpetrated by enemies of God is that science has proven the Bible false. It is their theories that conflict, not only with the Bible, but their own discoveries.

Medicine

Medical advances stagger the mind. But Moses wrote of medical truth long before men discovered it, such as life in the blood (Lev. 17:11-14). Genesis 17:12 called for circumcision on day eight. Why that day? On that day the blood of a newborn coagulates and clots the best. How did Moses know that was a good day for that rite? He taught quarantine of certain diseases and germs. These things were not discovered by men until relatively recent ages.

Other scientific fields prove the same thing. In physics, astronomy, biology men have discovered facts that the Bible writers mentioned long before the age of scientific discovery. There is no contradiction between the Bible and true science. We do not expect there would be. God is the Creator of the world which scientists study, and God is the author of the Bible. He does not contradict Himself.

Prophecy and Fulfillment

One of the many strong evidences of divine guidance and inspiration of the Bible is prophecy and fulfillment. This required certain things to be done at the proper time, the proper way, in exact detail, not just probability or based on experiences but outside the ability of the prophet to produce. Isaiah said Assyria would be God's rod of anger

but would itself be overthrown (Isa. 10:1, 24, 25). It happened just that way (2 Kings 17:24; 18:13).

Judah would fall to Babylon and be in captivity seventy years; then released by Persia (Jer. 25:9-11; Hab. 1:5). It happened (2 Kings 25:25; 2 Chron. 36:21). Babylon would be destroyed by the Medes and Persians. It happened (Daniel 5).

Sennecherib (Assyrian) would take Northern Israel but not Judah (2 Kings 18:13). It happened. He would return home and be killed. (2 Kings 19:7). It happened. He was killed by his own sons (Isa. 37:37, 38).

Josiah was prophesied (by name) to destroy the altars of Jeroboam three hundred years before he was born. (1 Kings 13:2; 2 Kings 23:15, 16). Cyrus (by name) was to deliver Israel and this was foretold one and half centuries before he was born (Isa. 44, 45; Ezek. 1:11). Who could imagine "guesswork" could have produced such forecasts?

Regarding Christ

His lineage was prophesied (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:4). He would be the seed of woman, born of woman, the seed of Abraham and David (Gen. 22:18; Luke 3:34; 2 Sam. 7:12; Luke 1:32). He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22), of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Heb. 7:14). The time of His arrival was foretold (Dan. 2:44; Luke 2:1). Judah had its king, but He would be king (Gen. 49:10; Matt. 2:22). He would be brayed by one of His own for thirty pieces of silver (Ps. 4:19; Luke 24:39; Zech. 11:12; Matt. 26:15). Enemies would spit upon Him and beat Him (Isa. 50:16; Matt. 27:30). His hands and feet would be pierced (Ps. 22:16; Luke 24:39; Isa. 53). His body would not be corrupted (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:22). There are over three hundred Messianic prophecies and their fulfillments

in the record of Scripture. Is this not evidence that the record is of God?

Add to this the brevity, influence, indestructibility of the Bible. It does not appeal to the curiosity of man as do human writings. There is impartiality. Even some of the "heroes" have their sins exposed. The evidence is overwhelming that the Bible is a unique and God-given.

Inspiration and Translation

Is inspiration lost in translation? We know that translators are not inspired as were the original writers the Holy Spirit used. Christ and others in the New Testament quoted from the Septuagint Version as divine Scripture. That was a translation from Hebrew into Greek. I know a correct translation does not remove inspiration.

There is less than one percent of the Bible that has not been ascertained beyond dispute by manuscripts, versions, copies, lectionaries, writings of early commentators, etc. Even that one percent has nothing to do with doctrine of man's duty to God. So-called "errors" are cited in different ways of spelling proper names of place and people, syntax (word order), etc. These are not "errors;" only variations of no significance. His Word will endure forever (1 Pet. 2:25; Matt. 24:35) in spite of enemies and efforts to destroy it. It is divinely inspired of God and will be the standard at the Judgment (John 12:49; Revelation 20:12).

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The Message of Galatians

Most of the epistles were written with one or two primary themes, often correcting misunderstandings. Such

is true of Galatians. The basic issue of Galatians is to affirm the divine origin of the gospel of Christ as was preached by Paul. The churches of Galatia had been subjected to teaching that made the gospel of Christ secondary to the Law of Moses and that to become a child of God one must conform to the former law, especially circumcision. The gospel was attacked by attacking the apostleship of Paul and by questioning the source and authority of what he preached.

The book was written to correct and prevent Christians from falling away from the sufficiency and superiority of the gospel of Christ. Moses' law was inadequate and had been abolished because it had served its purpose for existence. Paul explains the relationship that exists with the promise God gave to Abraham, the Law of Moses and the faith of Christ. The universal offer of salvation promised through the "seed" of Abraham did not come with the Law of Moses but with Christ. The law was not the fulfillment of that promise but neither was it against the promise.

Paul asserted his preaching was divinely directed and was not after man (1:10. 11). It was a revelation authored by the Holy Spirit. Tragically, some had fallen victim to the false doctrines and had "fallen from grace" (5:4).

Chapters One and Two

The first two chapters were designed to defend the apostleship of Paul. To discredit the message efforts were made to discredit the messenger. Paul said those that preached a different gospel than what he preached and what they had received were preaching a perverted gospel which was not gospel at all. He pronounced curses against them; "anathema," which means to be cut off from God (1:8, 9).

Paul rehearsed his manner of life before he became a Christian when he persecuted Christ by persecuting the church. Now he preached the same Christ he once persecuted. He did not learn his message from men; not even from other apostles. They "imparted nothing to me." He became an apostle by the same authority as Peter and the others. He recalled the unpleasant but necessary confrontation with Peter in Antioch when Peter, and even Barnabas, pulled away from Gentile brethren to pacify Jewish brethren who were contending for the Law of Moses to be bound on Gentiles. He said "they walked not uprightly" (2:14). They all knew that man is not justified by works of the law but through the faith of Christ. (2:16). Salvation by the old law would "make void the grace of God" (2:21). In this way he makes a slashing defense of his apostleship and the message he preached.

The Promise, the Law, the Faith

As already mentioned, Paul shoes these three great documents related to each other. With explicit explanation in chapters three and four he shows how Abraham was made acceptable before God according to the same plan, in principle, by which men are made acceptable today. It was by a system of obedient faith. It was not by the Law of Moses which came much later. The law did not fulfill the promise God made to Abraham. The law was given because of transgression (3:19); (2) as a "tutor" to bring us to Christ (3:24). It served as a guide for Israel until THE FAITH came (3:25). Paul used Old Testament references to establish the relationship of all three.

An Allegory

He even cited the experiences of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael to show the gospel of Christ is the way we are to follow. As Hagar and Ishmael were cast out, so it is with the old law.

Chapters Five and Six

Having shown we are to follow Christ, he turns to present a number of essentials to faithfully following Christ. It is not a matter of salvation by works or by grace. It is by both, if we understand there are works of the old law, by which we are not saved, but also works of obedience that are conditions we must meet. It is not grace OR law; it is grace AND law.

We learn the nature of saving faith. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. "Faith alone" will not suffice. Man is saved by faith when he is baptized "into Christ" (3:27). Those who were baptized were children of God (3:27).

Points of Truth in Galatians

Galatians is a refutation of the denial of prophecy-fulfillment element of Scripture. To claim Paul took Old Testament passages and incorrectly used them to accommodate his doctrine and further his own cause when prophecy-fulfillment was not true is to charge Paul with the indignity of hypocrisy, dishonesty and misuse of God's Scripture. This charge has no validity.

Galatians teaches us to "rightly divide the word of truth" by observing the different dispensations.

It teaches the sufficiency of God's Word, condemning adding to or taking from what Paul preached. If Paul did not preach something, we should not preach it. To tamper with the Word is sinful. Modern-speech translations do this

frequently. For instance, some new versions change the word "seed" (referring to Christ) to "seeds" to mean Abraham's posterity, the nation of Israel. Scripture is forthright that the "seed" promise to Abraham spoke of Christ. Paul used a singular word and this shows verbal inspiration. It makes a difference. The TEV omits the phrase in Galatians 5:4, "ye are fallen from grace" because the authors of the TEV contend once-saved-always saved. It is inexcusable to mistreat God's Word in any way.

Galatians teaches unity in Christ. The distinctions that exist among people (male, female, bond free, Jew, Gentile) do not abide in Christ (3:28). One may belong to the Lord regardless of race, gender, or social position if the gospel has been obeyed. There is the sameness of the way of salvation for all. All need to be saved and all may be saved but the same way.

As already noted, the allegory of Sarah and Hagar affirm the end of the application of the old law and how we now live subject to Christ and His will.

Skeptics like to find fault with Scripture and accuse Peter and Paul teaching different gospels. They talk about the "Petrine Gospel" and the "Pauline Gospel." Nothing of the sort even exists except in the minds to self-made gods who think they know better than God. Peter and Paul had a dispute in Antioch, but the gospel they taught was the same. Read Peter's sermon on Pentecost and compare it with Paul's sermon in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13). They even used the same Old Testament passages with reference to Christ. Their difference was only in the ones to whom they preached; not what they preached.

Worldliness is condemned in Galatians. Paul lists the works of the flesh and those that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (5:19-21). Our world needs this same warning because these sins are commonplace.

Apostasy is possible according to Galatians (3:1; 4:9, 11; 5:4; 7, 9). Galatians stresses the necessity of faithfulness. We must "faint not" 6:9). We shall reap in due season.

The law of sowing and reaping in taught (5:6:7, 8). This is a law that we cannot repeal. What folly people perpetuate to think that some way they shall be able to avoid the consequences of the kind of seed they sow. Moses once said, "Be sure your sins will find you out." But when we sow to the Spirit we reap life everlasting.

Some were confused about our liberty in Christ. We are free from sin and free from the Law of Moses but we are not free to do what ever we wish. Some were using their freedom for an occasion to the flesh (5:14).

Principle is more important than people. Paul realized this when he "resisted" Peter and others in Antioch. What a serious blow to truth it would have been had Paul been willing to avoid conflict and dismiss the grievous error because of the prominence of Peter. Nobody is bigger than the truth.

We learn from Galatians there is no compromise or reconciliation between the flesh and the Spirit. Evil and righteousness will not mix. Such are "contrary the one to the other" (5:17). Persecution has always been and will always be the lot of those who become a disciple of Christ. Some will take a false way in order to avoid persecution (5:11). The true Christian will not do that but his glory is "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6"14).

Summary

Galatians reveals to us some basic information pertaining to the system by which God saves man. In it we see the gradual unfolding of the plan of God from before the

foundation of the world and His eternal purpose. Christians commend the book of Galatians.

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God's Foolishness and Man's Wisdom

"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25). These words were addressed to the church in Corinth; a city, like Athens, that prided itself in wisdom, knowledge and philosophy. They thought if they did not know or understand it was not worth knowing and understanding. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it please God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). That which men considered foolishness is wiser than all the wisdom of men. The weakness of God is stronger than the strength of men. "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty: and base things of the world and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Cor. 1:27, 28). Then he tells why. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (verse 31). "Therefore let no man glory in men…" (1 Cor. 3:21).God's ways are far superior to man's ways.

The Wisdom of the Plan of Salvation

The gospel plan of salvation is not based on logical premises laid down by men. The plan does not appeal to what men call wisdom. There is no logical connection between the things done and that for which it is done. It has

been that way in several of God's dealings with humanity. Sprinkling of blood on their doors at the time of their departure from Egypt would not appeal to man's wisdom.

He gave promises to Abraham and commanded him to slay his son, Isaac. Man could not see God's wisdom in such a thing. But man never shows himself more foolish than when he put his worldly and fleshly wisdom against the wisdom of God.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8, 9). Man does not think as God thinks.

The Scheme of redemption is a matter of obedient faith based on evidence. It is not a program of logical conclusions or a matter of sight. We cannot work out a system by which we can save ourselves without God (Phil. 2:2). We have to obey God and follow His system.

Other Illustrations

The things written aforetime were written for our learning (Rom. 15:4). We learn from Naaman and how he was healed of leprosy. Never was there heard of dipping in a river to be healed of leprosy. His disease is typical of our sin. He had no remedy by his own design. What do men think of God's remedy? In the eyes of man it would be called foolish.

What men would call foolishness manifested the wisdom of God. It took only seven dips in the river and took all seven. Did the waters heal Naaman? Absolutely not! No credit was given to the river. Was credit to be given to the prophet? To whom did Naaman credit for his recovery? It was not to the prophet, only God.

Joshua and Jericho

Have you considered the way Joshua took Jericho? How could marching around the formidable walls, shouting and blowing trumpets bring down the walls of the city? They could not. But that was the condition God gave Israel to be victorious. Jericho was a gift from God. Being a gift did not preclude the necessity of obedience. But what would man think of such a procedure? There was no logical sense to it. It seemed weak, trifling, foolish and even silly. There was no logical connection between what Israel was to do and the walls coming down. Suppose Joshua had stopped sort of doing what God said do? Would the walls have fallen anyway? Certainly not!

Man's folly is seen in the power and wisdom of God by contrast. What men consider foolish is the power of God. Why do men think they are so much wiser than God? Just because God does not do things the way they think they call it foolishness.

Israel in the Wilderness

One of the faults of Israel as they marched toward Canaan was their murmuring and complaining. Once God sent fiery serpents into their midst until they asked for relief. God told Moses to place a brass serpent on a pole and when bitten if they would behold the pole they would not die. Have you ever heard of such a cure to a snake bite? What man would have ever devised such a plan? Only if God's way was obeyed could one be spared regardless of how foolish some may have considered it.

There was no virtue or power in the brass serpent. The power was God. But God's power became beneficial only when they obeyed His directions.

The Man Born Blind

Jesus healed a man born blind. Jesus made clay and applied it to his eyes. He was told to wash the clay Jesus had made. He did and came seeing. What eye doctor would prescribe such a remedy today? This is another instance of what man might consider foolishness but is God's wisdom.

Conclusion

The principle in these accounts is the same for our salvation. A suffering, dying Savior was God's plan for the provision of our forgiveness. Preaching the cross may seem foolish to some but it is God's way of saving man (1 Cor. 1:18, 21).

The same is true regarding baptism. Men dismiss it because they see no logical connection between being buried in water and being forgiven of sins. It is not up to man to decide how such things are to be. That's God's prerogative. Man only shows his arrogance to deny what God has said is necessary. Baptism saves; not because of power in the water itself, or even because we obey. The power is the blood of Christ but that blood is applied when we obey the Lord's command to be baptized. Why is that so difficult for some to understand? Is it because their "wisdom" is considered wiser than God's?

Naaman was healed when he obeyed. Joshua took Jericho when he obeyed. Israel was spared when they obeyed. The blind man could see when he obeyed. We are saved when we obey. Such is the demonstration of the difference between man's so-called wisdom and what man calls foolishness which is the wisdom of God.

When one learns of his lost condition due to sin, his inability to save himself by himself, that God has provided a Savior and Christ is that Savior, he will want to come to Christ. He will believe, repent, confess his faith and be baptized regardless of what some "wise" men of the world may think of it. It may seem foolish to some. But it is God's Word and His wisdom to those who believe and are saved. It is foolish to think you can be saved any other way.

* * * * *

God's Word and Spiritual Gifts

We do not profess to know everything we would like to know on this subject because we are dealing with the miraculous. In this study we cannot rely on our personal experiences or the experiences of anyone we know but totally on the revelation of Scripture. We admit our limitations. But we do not have to know everything to know something for sure.

We shall not delve into the miracles of the Old Testament of which there were many. Our study is confined to what is called "spiritual gifts."

What are Spiritual Gifts?

God's Word speaks of spiritual gifts. Why are they so identified? Such gifts were specific miraculous abilities that God, through the Holy Spirit, granted unto some to use for certain purposes and to accomplish certain aims. They are not called "spiritual" because it made those who possessed them "super Christians." They were just natural talents and abilities. They were not capacities that could be learned and developed. These gifts were miraculously granted abilities

used in the service of Christ. They were signs that signified something beyond the user of the gift. They were for the purpose of confirming and verifying the credentials of the messenger of a message because the message was the revelation of was truth. They were not for the purpose of creating sensationalism or entertainment with the spectacular. They even went beyond showing compassion, although this was displayed. We do not read that they were the means of saving souls separate and apart from hearing, believing and obeying the Word of God. They were not, therefore, a special means of saving. There are no instances recorded of conversion in which the miraculous was an essential part, but only incidental, to the way of salvation.

Mark 16:20 teaches these signs were to be used to confirm the gospel. That was accomplished (Heb. 2:3, 4). The record of the signs is for the purpose of proving the inspired testimony is true (John 20:30, 31). Jesus was proved to be the Son of God by the signs, wonders and miracles He performed (Acts 2:22). They demonstrated the glory of God (John 3:2; 11:40) and His power (Acts 3:12, 13). They did not necessarily reflect a godly heart of the one with the gift nor did it mean one was acceptable to God (Matt. 7:22). Caiaphas was able to prophesy (John 11:49).

The Gifts

First Corinthians twelve provides a list of nine spiritual gifts. Others are listed elsewhere, as in Ephesians four. We do not well to be dogmatic what these gifts included.

The gift of wisdom was to gain wisdom miraculously to apply the revelation of the will of God. This gift would be useful in determining whether one taught truth or error and how to use what was known.

The gift of knowledge was possessing knowledge not normally learned.

The gift of faith is not the faith that comes by hearing the Word (Rom. 10:17) but something more, possibly like faith to remove mountains or obstacles.

The gift of healing seems easier to understand. Healing the sick, lame, blind and even raising the dead was a specific area of miraculous work.

The gift of miracles escapes me what it included. All these are miraculous in nature. Surely the first century Christians knew what it was even if we do not.

The gift of prophecy was not only the ability to forecast the future but to teach infallibly the inspired Word.

The gift to discern spirits would enable one to distinguish true teachers from false teachers (1 John 4:1). It was a supernatural power to judge the message delivered and the messenger that delivered it.

The gift of tongues is terribly misunderstood. This enabled one to speak in understandable languages that were not normal, native and natural to the speaker; languages he had never learned. It was not babble, incoherent vowel grunts and sounds, explosions of ecstasy or any such thing. They were to be used as a sign to unbelievers.

The interpretation of tongues was the ability to translate from one language to another. In fact, tongue speaking was prohibited without one who could interpret. This is further evidence that tongues were intelligent and understandable languages.

In the KJV we read of “unknown” tongues. The word “unknown” is a supplied word to indicate they were not normally learned by the speaker. It does not mean nobody could ever understand them.

Even though there was diversities of gifts they all came by and through the same Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11). They

were all closely connected with the spreading of the Word of God to convince hearers that they were hearing God's Word. For ages God's revelation had been a mystery (unrevealed) but now was revealed to the apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5). For a time His holy message was embodied in inspired men and is now embodied in the inspired Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Word has been proved and verified the way God said it would be.

Ephesians 4 teaches additional gifts belonged to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

Who Had These Gifts?

Christ gave miraculous ability to His apostles when they went out to preach what is called the "Limited Commission" which was to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." They used these signs to confirm the message of the coming kingdom.

They were baptized with Holy Spirit baptism on Pentecost and were able to do signs, wonders and miracles which all could behold.

They were able to give this power to others by laying hands on them as the apostles did in Samaria (8:17) and as Paul did to some in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6).

This was the power Simon wished to buy (Acts 8:19). Those upon whom apostolic hands were laid were not able to impart these gifts to others. The spread of the power to grant the gifts stopped with the apostles. This is made evident when Philip, who could work miracles in Samaria, could not grant such power but the apostles who later came to Samaria could and did. Paul wished to visit Rome to "impart unto you some spiritual gifts" (Rom. 1:11). He was an apostle and had that power. Paul granted such power to some in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6).

Since the apostles are dead, and all upon whom they laid hands are dead, we know the age of miraculous has passed. Furthermore, the purpose of miracles has passed since the Word is confirmed (Heb. 2:3, 4). Those who claim miracles today do not do what was done in New Testament times. Is it not strange that those who claim miraculous powers by which the Word was to be verified do not teach the same things? Does the Holy Spirit confirm contradictory doctrines? Remember, where there is the claim must go the demonstration and today's "miracle workers" can only claim but cannot do as was done when there were miracles.

Regulations and Restrictions

First Corinthians fourteen contains when and how these gifts could and should not be used. Among the restrictions is that women were to keep silence in the assemblies as tongues were spoken (1 Cor. 14:34, 35). How different from modern-day "tongue-speaking" sessions in which most of those participating are women.

The tongue-speakers were not to speak at the same time which showed they had the control over when to speak. They were not forced into some kind of explosion beyond their power to control like some claim today.

Not everyone had a miraculous gift and not everyone had more than one gift. Paul had gifts more than them all.

It is very important that we understand these gifts have ceased and we can know when they ceased.

Duration of the Gifts

As already mentioned, all who performed miracles have died. They were to last until "that which is perfect is come." It was not until that WHO (Christ) is perfect comes

again. The revelation of God's will was given in parts or portions. When that which is perfect, whole, complete, nothing lacking is fully revealed the gifts would cease. That came in the days of the apostles. Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Peter said they had received all things that pertain to life and godliness (1 Pet. 1:3). Jude says the faith has been once (for all time) delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). Christ promised the apostles the Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth (John 14, 15, 16). What part did He leave out? Ephesians said they would continue "until we all come in the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:11-13). This does not say until we all believe alike as some perverted modern-speech so-called translations. They were to last until the full truth was revealed. James speaks of the "perfect (complete) law of liberty" (James 1:25).

This Does Not Deny the Power of God

Some, frantically reaching for some excuse to pretend to work miracles, tell us to contend miracles have ceased is to limit the power of God. God is the One who has told us of their cessation (1 Cor. 13). The power of God is not the issue. What does God say? He once created humans from dust. Does He still do that? To say He does not limit the power of God? He once fed Israel with manna from heaven. Does He still feed people that way? To say He does not limit the power of God?

Should you ever be asked, "Do you believe in miracles?" your answer is YES and NO. We believe every miracle recorded in the Bible. We do not believe miracles are being done today. Both answers stem from the same source: the Bible.

God's Plan of Salvation

The plan of salvation does exist because of the miraculous; the coming to earth of the Christ, His virgin birth, His perfect life, His miracles, His resurrection and ascension, and His promise to return. Miracles are not essential elements in this plan. The miracles served incidental purposes, such as getting the one who had the message of truth into the presence of the one who needed to hear the truth (Acts 8, 9, 10), but were not a part of the plan to save people then or now. Salvation results when we obey the commandments of the Lord. Spiritual gifts were confined to the days of the early church.

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Preserving the Bible in the Home

The home is of divine origin, instituted by God in the Garden of Eden. God has given the regulations and design for the home as it ought to be. We expect a divine institution to be governed by divine will.

The home is the basic unity of society. As goes the home, so goes everything. Everything comes from the home. We cannot place too much emphasis on the home as God would have it.

The Bible is not found in every home. Many homes with a copy just as soon not have one. The Bible is used for decoration, at funerals, weddings, to hold family records, or to show when the preacher is expected. Respect for the Bible is sorely lacking. Just as it is true that a man who will not read is as handicapped as the man who cannot read, the home without a Bible is as well off as a home where it is not respected.

The Scripture has much to reveal about the home. God's laws about marriage, divorce, remarriage, husband and wife relationship, parent and child relationship, duties, expectations, privileges, rights are taught in the Bible. The dignity and sanctity of the home is seen as the Lord compares His relationship with the church as a marriage and the church as the family of God.

Depends on Parents

Whether the Bible will be preserved in the home depends upon parents; adults. The Jews were taught to keep God's Word before their young (Deut. 6:7). Parents today have the same obligation (Eph. 6:4; Prov. 22:6). The primary place of learning is the home. Bible study classes at assemblies, Vacation Bible Schools, sermons, all can be of assistance. But it is the duty of parents to see that children know and respect the Bible. This way the Bible will be preserved in the home.

Unless parents have respect for it and knowledge of it the children will not likely develop the proper attitude toward it either. Parents need to remember, "You cannot lead where you will not go. You cannot teach what you do not know." Children that come from homes where the Bible is respected and taught and lived are very noticeable.

The proper place of the Bible in the home makes possible the accomplishment of the primary goal of the home; the salvation of every family member. Salvation is impossible without the Word (Jas. 1:21; Rom. 1:16).

What to be Learned

The origin of the Bible must be taught. It is of divine inspiration. We must know how we got it; God's plan of

salvation (what God has done and what man must do); the identity of Jesus Christ and the evidence He is the Son of God. We must know it is divine authority and the standard of measure of man. We learn regarding the church, its nature, work, worship and destiny.

We must learn personal responsibility, the existence and nature of God, about the home. From the Bible we learn how to treat other people, relationships in the church and family, our duty to civil government, our priorities and goals. We must learn the value of every soul. In the Bible we find God's answers to the greatest questions. There we find revelation about heaven and hell, how to meet error and temptation, how to avoid sin and receive forgiveness. It is the parent's duty to see that every member of the family learns these things.

Other Necessary Things to Preserve the Bible in the Home

Every member should have his own copy of the Bible. Each one must learn to treat it with respect. Children need to have it read to them and learn how to read it. They must hear about the Bible stories, heroes and memorize certain passages. There is an appalling lack of knowledge of the Bible even among "church people." Family discussions of spiritual and Biblical topics help keep the Bible preserved in the home.

To be Applied

The Bible is "lost" in the home if the members of the home are not striving to live according to its teaching in daily life. One may have a disease and the medicine to cure it. But until the medicine is applied it is of no benefit. Man is "diseased" with sin. We have the remedy in the Bible.

Unless the Bible is properly applied it will not benefit. Just having and owning a copy of it means little. There must be conformity to what it teaches in morality, speech, attitudes, actions, every phase of life. Our faith is demonstrated by our works (Jas. 2:18). Of what value is a map showing how to reach a desired destination if no attention is given to it?

From One Generation to Another

Every generation must be taught everything. Traditions are handed down. There are traditions of men that should never be allowed to take precedence over divine tradition (1 Pet. 1:18; Col. 2:8). There is apostolic tradition (2 Thess. 2:15). This is the tradition that must be handed down.

We cannot be saved with a "borrowed faith;" a faith that is "second hand." Each must have a personal conviction based on evidence; not something accepted simply because others before him accepted it. Having a personal faith does not necessarily mean one will believe differently from those before him. If both hold to the truth they will believe alike. But we cannot allow ourselves to be intimidated and drawn from the truth simply because we may have to leave the religion of ancestors. Every conversion in the New Testament was of a person who changed religions.

The Bible is preserved in the home by study; personal regular study. There are many aids to study; books, tracts, commentaries, papers, material on a great variety of subjects. But our focus must always be first and foremost on the Bible. Study is not optional but essential. The home must be the primary place to preserve the Word of God.

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Have You Ever Lost Your Bible?

People are constantly losing things. We lose our keys, coins, glasses, etc. There have even been times I have had to look for my Bible, not remembering where I left it.

There once was a time in Judah when the Bible was lost. Josiah had become king after the long and mostly evil reign of his father, Manasseh. But in a peculiar way it was found. Josiah had commanded the temple to be restored after years of neglect. During the reconstruction the law was found. This certainly indicates how meager the interest was in God's Word prior to this because the Bible was lost in the temple itself. It is quite obvious the people had not taken God's Word seriously. As a result they had turned aside to false religions and idolatry. They had stopped studying the Law. Disobedience, injustice and evil living naturally followed.

When the Law was read, and finally before the king, Josiah rent his clothes in penitence recognizing how far from the way of the Lord they had drifted. The Lord warned of impending destruction that would come. Once the Word was known Josiah instigated a religious revival the likes of which had not been seen since the days of David and Solomon.

Lost Among Denominations

It seems apparent to me that the Bible is certainly lost among the denominations. Their messages focus on the experiences of their clergymen, what they read in their manuals and disciplines, how they cater to entertain rather than teach God's will. The way they invent their own churches with their own doctrines surely shows little respect for "thus saith the Lord." They claim some kind of direct guidance from God but leave out His book. There

may be exceptions to this conduct but this is the general rule among the denominations. Human creeds dominate.

Lost in the Nation

This nation was built on Biblical principles. Today the leaders of the nation reject the Bible, suppress it, ignore it and even war against it. Its influence in national life is being reduced year by year by the atheistic forces that have come to prominence. The Bible is hidden in government, education, entertainment, almost every quarter. A teacher can read most any kind of immoral trash to students but cannot read the Bible. Humanism has captured so much of national life. Even monuments to depict the historical connection of the Bible to our nation are destroyed.

Lost in the Church

What can keep the Bible from being lost in the church? That is not an impossible thought. Just recall the "dark ages" of history and you know such has occurred before. To keep the Bible from being lost we must study it and apply it in daily living. Psalm 119, a chapter of 176 verses, mentions the Word of God in various forms in 172 of those verses. There we learn the need and relevance of God's Word. The Bible is not irrelevant to our day. It is unknown, untried, untaught and cast aside with the pride of man in his determination to go his own way. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 reveals to us the Scriptures as inspired of God, therefore infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient. But what of it when people do not know what it teaches?

Bible Preaching

We must demand Biblical preaching. Funny stories, entertaining speeches, politics, personal "testimonies," and "feel good" messages do not convert the soul to the Lord. We must demand the "old paths" from our pulpits; not this new fangled "change" that digressives advocate.

When did it cease to be correct to call Bible things by Bible names? We are to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). Why do men love to be called religiously by names never found in the Bible? Why do people dismiss the commands of Christ and the apostles? Why replace what God has said with some kind of clerical vocabulary of theologians and self-proclaimed "scholars" that really has no meaning? You never read from the Bible about people "getting saved," "receiving Christ as your personal Savior," (then defining that as some "faith only" twist). Never can we find anything about "the sinner's prayer" to be saved. That will never be heard among those who take the Bible seriously. That has no place in our pulpits and classes. Find the passage that admonishes, "Join the church of your choice," or "one is as good as another." This is what you get from people who have lost their Bible.

There is Authority in Religion

Christ has all authority (Matt. 28:18). What we do must be done "in his name" (Col. 3:17). Probably the single most characteristic of those who have lost the Bible is the disrespect for the authority of God that is revealed in the Bible. When it is read the attitude is that it is optional or unnecessary. Why would people study something they were convinced did not matter anyway? Because it came from God is reason enough for us to respect it.

We must be bold in our speech when we see things amiss in the Lord's body. Bold does not allow being rude or

contentious. But it demands doing what we do earnestly (Jude 3). We cannot just drift along, go along, take the easy flow of the majority and expect God to be pleased with us. A kinder, gentler brotherhood means we stand for the truth of the Bible and confront every evil way. There can be no indefinite tolerance of that which conflicts with the truth.

Bible people, people of the book, will insist that the Bible not be lost. Where it has become lost it can become our guide once again if we will repent and turn again to the way of the Lord that is taught in the Bible. A lost Bible means lost souls. Nothing is more destructive and tragic than a soul that is lost. Only by the Word can people know how to be saved. If the Bible gets lost, we remain lost.

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The Sword of the Spirit

The Christian life is pictured as warfare, a conflict, a battle between good and evil, following God versus following the devil. It is not a carnal, fleshly warfare but spiritual in nature (2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:12). The Lord provides weapons with which to fight successfully. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:13). "Put on the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:11).

We mention one weapon identified as the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Eph. 6:17), His wisdom (1 Cor. 2:8ff) in contrast to that of men, philosophies, creeds, speculations, doctrines and wisdom of men (1 Cor. 2:8-13).

Every weapon mentioned relates to the Word. Truth is the Word of God (John 8:32). The gospel of peace is the Word of God. Righteousness is the commandments of God (Psalm 119:172). Salvation is dependent on the Word.

The Sword of the Spirit

Significantly, the Word is called the sword of the Spirit. The Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead. The sword belongs to Him. He provided it and uses it in the conduct of the spiritual warfare. It is provided for man through inspired men and now in the inspired Scriptures. When man uses the Word, the Bible, he is using that which Deity has given.

Like any sword it is used both offensively and defensively; to advance as well as to protect; to destroy and to defend; to slay and to ward off the enemy who is the devil. It is a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12).

Revelation 19:15 is a description of Christ and "out of his mouth goeth a sharp two-edged sword, that with it he should smite the nations." Revelation 2:12, words were to be heard which came from the One who had a sharp sword with two-edges.

Examine the Sword

The sword is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16, 17); revealing God's mind (1 Cor. 2:8-13), His communication to man.

As noted, it is sharp and living (Heb. 4:12). Contrary to the protests of liberals, it is not a dead letter that must be given special enlightenment and life by some special visit by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

Man must live by the Word (Matt. 4:4). All life, both physical and spiritual, came into existence by the Word of God. It is the Living Word because it came from the Living God. It is disrespectful of God to speak of His Word as being a "dead letter" or "a mere word." No other word can give spiritual life except the Living Word. Psalm 119:50,

"For thy word quickened me." Instead of being "dead" and in need of life, the Word gives life. Repeatedly we read, "…quicken me according to thy word" (Psalm 119:25, 107, 149, l54, 156).

The sword is penetrating, convicting and moves the heart and mind. Those who heard it were pricked in their hearts (Acts 2:37). The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). It lays bare the corrupt heart and exposes the hypocritical conscience. At the same time it provides salve to the spiritually wounded and comfort for the broken heart. It is gentle and soothing, yet is as a hammer and fire. It is powerful because it comes from the Almighty God.

What It Accomplishes

It makes man clean. John 15:3, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you."

It purifies the heart. 1 Peter 1:22, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth..."

It converts the soul. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul…" (Psalm 19:7).

The Word prevents sin. Psalm 119:11, "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." The entire 119th chapter speaks constantly of things accomplished by the Word that God has given. Nothing is more relevant.

The Word sanctifies; sets apart. John 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth…"

We are sanctified by His will (Heb. 10:10, "By the which will we are sanctified…"

John 12:48, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

James urges, (1:21), "Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls."

Psalm 119:24, “Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counselors.” Psalm 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

The word produces faith (Rom. 10:17), is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11), is incorruptible and will endure forever (1 Pet. 1:23, 25).

Man can understand it (Eph. 3:3-5). To do this he must study (2 Tim. 2:15). This is the Word that we are to preach (2 Tim. 2:22; Acts 8:4; 1 Pet. 1:25).

The Spirit and the Word

It is by the Word that the Spirit operates, leads, guides and gives divine influence on the heart of man. There is no direct operation of the Holy Spirit on man separate and apart from the Word. It is noteworthy: that which the Holy Spirit does in guiding man is also said to be done by the Word of God. It is not as if two influences were operating on man; in conjunction with. It is because the Spirit’s tool is the Word. The Word and the Spirit are not the same but the Spirit uses the Word to do the work.

A man may be said to fell a tree. Actually, he used an ax to do the work and it can be said the ax cut down the tree. The truth is, the man, by use of the ax, cut down the tree. So it is with the Holy Spirit operating on man. The Spirit dwells in us as we permit the Word to dwell in us. Therein is the fellowship we have with Deity.

The Word is Essential

We cannot and will not successfully engage the forces of error and evil without the Word of God. Rationalizations, logical arguments, theories, speculations, doctrines of men, creeds, feelings, discoveries, sciences, philosophies are not

capable of providing what the Word provides; what ONLY the Word provides. It is the sword of the Spirit with which we go to war under the banner of Christ, our Captain.

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Thy Word Have I Hid in My Heart

Psalm 119:11, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

The psalmist affirms a fact, a spiritual attitude, an action and a spiritual truth. In this longest chapter of the Bible (176 verses) we have the theme of the Word of God, referred to as the law, judgments, commandments, testimonies, statutes, precepts, ordinances and the way. God's Word is mentioned in 172 of these verses.

These verses reveal the will and mind of God and what God expects of man. Here we discover the characteristics of the Word. It is right, righteous, hopeful, bread, a lamp and light, wonderful, upright, faithful, pure, true, enduring, settled, needful, life giving, cleansing, joyful, bringing liberty, merciful, comforting and rebuking. The emphasis is on the power of His Word and what it does. Blessings are associated with His Word. Therefore, we see the relevance and benefits that God provides through His Word.

Personal Application

What we find is relevant to daily life. It requires of us personal effort. He says, "I" have hid in "MY heart." This is a deliberate, voluntary, willful personal decision. It is like Psalm 1:1, 2, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly; nor standeth in the way of

sinners; nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and might."

Does not this imply His Word does exist? Does not it also imply it is understandable, believable and useful?

Each one must learn for himself how to apply the Word to his life. It requires knowledge which comes from reading, study and meditation. It requires a love and respect for the truth and a submissive spirit of humility. The Word without application will not benefit us. We must be sure it is God's Word that we hide in the heart.

Some Questions Answered

What is the Bible? It is God's revelation to man. It is from God to man. It is replete with expressions such as, "God said… "thus saith the Lord…," etc. Paul said what he preached came from God (Gal. 1:11; 1 Cor. 2:13).

Where is the Word to be hidden? To hide the Word means to place it deep within the heart. What is the heart of man? Some people talk about "heartfelt" religion, "give your heart to God," and "let Jesus live in your heart." What does that mean? Misunderstanding of the Bible heart has caused some to adopt false doctrines, a false sense of security because they depend on feelings and emotional reactions rather than revelation. Some are heard to say, "I know I am saved because I feel it in my heart." They actually are referring to some kind of physical reaction to their emotions. Feelings are not evidence by which truth is determined. Our feelings are determined by what we think. But we do not always think correctly.

Two Kinds of Hearts

We have a physical heart; the blood pump in the chest. We have the spiritual heart; the inward man. The first heart pumps blood through the body and is the center of the circulatory system. There are involuntary actions that are subject to emotions. It sometimes "skips a beat," beats faster or slower, grows stronger or weaker caused by the emotions we experience. All emotions affect the bodily systems; nervous, respiratory, digestive, etc. Some religious exercises are deliberately designed to stir the emotions and then attribute the physical reactions as an operation of the Holy Spirit. This is a false concept.

Emotions are created as a result of what we believe to be true. They do not determine the truthfulness of what we believe. If we believe something is good, we feel good. If we believe something is bad, we feel bad. Emotions are not reliable as evidence of our spiritual condition. Feelings are never cited in Scripture as proof of being saved. If we are saved we will feel good, but we can feel good, thinking we are saved, and not be saved.

The unreliability of emotions is evident in Scripture. Jacob felt sorrowful because he thought Joseph was dead. But he was not dead (Gen. 37:33-35). Saul of Tarsus felt no pain of conscience as he persecuted Christians because he believed that was the right thing to do (Acts 23:1; 26:9; Gal. 1:13). Pagan mothers throw their children to crocodiles and feel good about pacifying their gods. Who could think they were correct in their actions?

Hide the Word in the Spiritual Heart

The spiritual heart is the mind of man; his intellect. The heart thinks (Prov. 23:7; (Gen. 6:5; Matt. 9:4). "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts."

The heart reasons (Luke 3:15). "Muse" means reason. "Why reason these things in your heart?" (Mark 2:6).

The heart understands (Matt. 13:15; Isa. 32:4).

The heart is man's will; his power of determination of actions, decisions. He has volition and can make choices that motivate and guide his conduct. Acts 11:23, "With purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord." Also consider 2 Cor. 9:7 and Daniel 1:8. For a person to be converted he must make the right decisions and choices so he will go the right direction. This involves his heart.

The spiritual heart is the seat of emotions. It is not the same as the physical reactions to emotions or emotional experiences. The heart fears (Jer. 32:40); both in the sense of fright and respect.

The heart despises (2 Sam. 6:16), as Michal despised David in her heart.

The heart loves (1 Tim. 1:5; Matt. 22:37). We are to love the Lord with all he heart.

The heart sorrows. The king, seeing Nehemiah downtrodden, said, "This is nothing else but sorrow of heart" (Neh. 2:22). The Bible also speaks of gladness of the heart and joy in the heart.

The heart desires (Rom. 10:1). The desires can be good but they can also be evil.

The heart is the seat of convictions. We believe with the heart (Rom. 10:10). We are taught to obey from the heart (Rom. 6:16-18). The heart can doubt or believe (Mark 11:23).

What does all this tell us about the spiritual heart of man? The spiritual heart is the inward man, the soul, that which is in the likeness of God.

The Word must be Hid There

Hid means stored, preserved, protected, nurtured, treasured, held in awe and reverenced. Conviction requires understanding, love and desire for truth. Conviction comes from evidence in the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). The seed of the kingdom, the word (Luke 8:11) must be planted into honest and good hearts to bring forth good fruit. The heart of man is the soil into which the Word is sown. The heart is kept by the Word because the Word is kept in the heart.

Who Has Hid the Word in His Heart?

Why do that? We do that so we will not offend God by sin. Sin is transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). All unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17). Failure to do good is sin (James 4:17). Violation of one's personal conviction (even though it may be wrong) is sin (Rom. 14:23). All sin is against God. Joseph understood that (Gen. 39:9). He refused Potiphar's wife saying,"How then can do this great wickedness and sin against God." David said he sinned against God (Psalm 51:4). Ananias and Sapphirra sinned against God (Acts 5:4).

We keep the Word in the heart to prevent sin; avoid sin. Knowing what sin is we can keep from it. Better to prevent sin than to have to overcome it or even be forgiven of it. The Word gives knowledge of right and wrong. By the Word we can combat temptation as Jesus did (Matt. 4).

Furthermore, the Word is corrective of sin once committed. There is no hiding or covering of sin without the Word. It cannot be covered by denial, blaming others, feigned innocence, the passing of time, or any other way except by forgiveness (Rom. 4:7, 8).The Word reveals how our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ. The Word teaches us how we reach that saving blood.

Our text speaks of the best thing (the Word), the best action (hid or stored), the best place (the heart), for the best reason (not to offend God with sin).

* * * * *

The Way

In the third Tabernacle Meeting in 1928 when N. B. Hardeman preached at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee, the general theme was the church, its establishment, apostasy and restoration. Included was a sermon entitled "The Way." In Christianburg, Virginia for several lectureships his sermons were reviewed. This lesson is a review of the sermon from Isaiah chapter 35:8).

In that chapter Isaiah spoke of "the way of holiness." The beauty, simplicity and power of the language of the prophet are striking characteristics of prophecy. In prophecy is evidence of the Savior. The "way of holiness" is the way of salvation; the road that leads from here to eternal joy in heaven with God.

Hardeman illustrated the journey by a trip to Memphis, Tennessee. He said several assumptions are made and questions asked and answered consciously or unconsciously with the intent of such a trip. Does Memphis exist? The trip assumes it does. Is there a road to reach Memphis? Where is it? Where can I learn about it? How can I reach that road? Are there any hindrances to entering into it? How can I keep in it once I am on it? Are there signs and guides along the way that, if I observe them, I may be sure to reach my destination?

After suggesting such questions he applied the illustration to traveling the road, the way, to heaven.

There is a City

Heaven is real. There is the city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). Do we want to reach that city? Certainly we do and this is why we persuade one and all to go with us on the journey. Is there a way? Yes, there is a way. If there is no way to get there our study ends abruptly and immediately. But the prophet says there is the way. He used the term in the singular. There may be different ways to reach Memphis, but to reach heaven there is one way.

Isaiah pictures Christ coming and His time on earth (Isa. 35:5, 6). Eight hundred years later He did come. He taught there were two ways men could go (Matt. 7:13, 14). One was the broad way that leads to destruction. The other is the strait and narrow way that leads to life eternal. There is a way from this life into the next that means heaven.

The Road

Where is that road? Actually, the road is a WHO. Jesus is the way (John 14:6). Christ is not just some way, a way among other ways. He is **the one way**, the only way (Acts 4:12). We go His way or not arrive at the desired place.

Where do I get information about **the way**? Jesus said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). The ME in this passage is God's only begotten Son.

How do I Approach Christ, the Way?

We must be drawn of God (John 6:44). This means to hear, learn, be taught (John 6:45). We are drawn by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). Paul told the Corinthians they were begotten by the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). James says we are

saved by the Word (James 1:21). Peter says we are born again by the Word (1 Pet. 1:23). Little wonder, then, that Christ commanded the gospel be preached to the world (Mark 16:15). Without the Word there is no direction about **the way** to heaven.

In John 6:45 Jesus said, "…cometh unto me." What does it mean to come to Christ? Words have meaning. They are wrappers in which God's thoughts are conveyed to man. "Unto" means "to, toward, in the direction of, approaching." For instance, coming to a building you have to take a number of steps. Most of them are 'unto" the building, coming in the direction of, toward the building. There is a final step that takes you from outside the building to inside the building. That step is made "into" the building. This same principle is true in coming to Christ.

Romans 10:10 we believe "unto" righteousness We never read of believing "into" Christ. We have faith IN Christ. We cannot believe "into" lodge membership. More is involved and necessary.

Acts 11:18, repentance is "unto" life. We do not repent "into" life. We come toward Christ by repentance.

Romans 10:10, confession is made "unto" salvation; not "into" salvation. It is a necessary step toward salvation.

There is that step that takes one from outside to inside. It is the step "into." That step is baptism "into" Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3, 4). These two verses are the only two verses in the Bible that tells us explicitly the final step to get "into Christ" where there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1); where are all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3); where there is salvation (2 Tim. 2:10). There is one baptism (Eph. 4:5). The baptism the apostles were preaching and practicing when Paul made wrote that statement was baptism in water in the name of Christ for the remission of

sins. That same baptism means one is added to the church (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:47), the company of the saved.

WHO is the WAY?

We have learned how to get into Christ because HE is the way; the only way. By faith, repentance and confession "unto" Christ we are then baptized "into" Christ. This is the way we enter the way of holiness.

There is no conflict between God's grace and man's obedience. It is by obedient faith that we take advantage of God's grace. Obedience does not earn salvation. It is not a work of merit. Those who are properly baptized have no concept they are working their way to heaven by their own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). Those who charge that are making false charges out of ignorance and prejudice.

If you are sick and send for the doctor and he prescribes medicine, you should do what he says. Jesus said, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). There is no surer way to repudiate Christ than to disobey His Word.

Once in the Way

Having entered the way toward heaven we must faithfully travel the road. That involves praying without ceasing; working works of righteousness; worshipping God God's way and not forsaking the assembly with brethren, practicing pure religion by being helpful and considerate of those less fortunate; letting your light of goodness shine in an evil world and being faithful even if it costs physical life. It is more than just "going to church."

What awaits us at the end of the journey on THE WAY? The verses of the song express it very well.

"When I've gone the last mile of the way;
I will rest at the close of the day;
And I know there are joys that await me;
When I've gone the last mile of the way."

* * * * *

God Is Gracious

""But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Psalm 86:15).

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Psalm 103:8).

"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy" (Psalm 145:8).

Many are the passages that assert God is gracious. This is an indisputable teaching of the Bible. It means that God has the capacity of grace, the power, capacity, ability and disposition to dispense favor, goodness, benevolence, mercy love and compassion.

Grace is defined as unmerited favor, pure kindness and independent of the merit of the receiver of that kindness. It is an attribute that God possesses to favor man.

The Goodness of God

There is no separation of the graciousness of God from His goodness. In Matthew 19:16 one came to Jesus and called Him "Good Master." Jesus asked him why he called Him good. He was not denying He is good but knowing that Deity is good, He was questioning the inquirer if he believed Jesus was Deity. The man did not answer. Jesus said God only is good; that is, He is the source of goodness.

Many make a mistake to think God is indulgent toward sin or so loving he will overlook transgressions. God will forgive sin when the conditions are met. Meeting the conditions does not earn forgiveness. But sin deserves punishment. God does not consider righteousness and unrighteousness the same way. There is no inconsistency in God's wrath toward evil and evildoers and His graciousness. He does not approve of injustice and sin. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:22).

The Mercy of God

"For we ourselves were also sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:3-7).

Paul equates God's goodness, mercy and grace. There may well be a fine line distinction between mercy and grace. Mercy means withholding deserved punishment. Grace means bestowing unmerited blessings. The result is the same; namely, the salvation of man. We cannot consider the graciousness of God without His mercy.

Other Compatible Traits of God

God is our helper (Heb. 13:6), provider (Heb. 11:40), and source of comfort (2 Cor. 1:3, 4). He is our refuge in the time of storm (Psalm 46:1). God cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). "Count your many blessings… **see what God has done."**

"Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

One of the purposes for the Second Person of the Godhead taking on the form of flesh was to save sinners, pay the price of redemption, be a propitiation (atonement) for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2) and reveal the Father that we could understanding and know Him better.

Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). In Jesus they saw the character of God. When He spoke His words were gracious (Luke 4:22). There are more than words that show He is gracious. Consider what God has done for man. We cannot innumerate everything He has done or promises to do yet.

His Deeds of Grace

Acts 17:24, 25, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." God has given us life itself. That is why we owe our lives to Him. The very fact that we live is testifies of the grace of God. Even those who deny Him are evidence of His existence.

God's Grace in the Old Testament

God gave Adam a wife. “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord” (Prov. 18:22). Before the flood God saw that “every imagination of the thoughts of men was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). Therefore, he “prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Heb. 11:7). He laid hold on the benefits of the grace of God by obeying the instructions God gave him. Do we deny the graciousness of God toward Israel throughout their history?

God’s Promises to Abraham

Genesis 12 and 22 spell out the promises God gave to Abraham. (1) He would be the father of a many nations; (2) his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea; (3) God would bless those that blessed Abraham and curse those that curse him; (4) his people would have a land of their own; (5) through Abraham’s seed all the families and nations would be blessed. This last promise refers to Christ (Gal. 3:16). All of God’s dealing with Israel, their deliverance, His provision, His protection, the law for their guidance were manifestations of God’s grace toward a rebellious people. He watched over them graciously until Christ came.

The Great Demonstration of Grace

The provision for man’s salvation from sin through Jesus Christ is without doubt the greatest display of grace one can imagine. Consider what God and Christ have done on man’s behalf and that which no man could ever have done for himself. Hear His promises and His invitation.

Some have distorted John 1:17, "For the law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," as if it means there was no grace or truth until Christ and there is no law since Christ has come. Grace and law are not mutually exclusive. Grace was often given to man before Christ. Those under Christ live under His law. It is a false doctrine that contends man has nothing to do to be saved. All can easily agree salvation is by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8, 9). But never does the Bible teach salvation by grace alone. Nor does it teach salvation by faith alone. If salvation was by grace alone then, since God would have to be saved, everyone, regardless of what they say and do will go to heaven. No conclusion is more foolish than that. Such would remove man's responsibility and accountability. We are saved by grace, but WHEN are we saved by grace?

Man is saved by grace when he obeys the gospel. If one refuses to obey he makes God's grace of none effect as far as he is concerned. Is his damnation God's fault? Is it because God's grace is impotent? His grace can cover every sin (Romans 5:20).

God looked upon man in sin and made a way for him to be saved (Romans 5:6-9). By doing this He showed grace.

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God is Spirit

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). This is a simple and plain statement of fact from the highest authority, Jesus Christ, regarding the nature of Deity.

"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). Again, we have the affirmation that God is Spirit.

These passages discuss the nature of God; what makes God, God. We realize we shall not fully comprehend or understand the nature of Deity for we are frail and weak humanity. We are finite while God is infinite. To fully comprehend Deity we would have to become Deity. Regardless of our lack of understanding, the fact remains that God is Spirit.

Definition of Spirit

The word "Spirit" is sometimes capitalized to denote Deity. Other times it denotes something else. The word "Spirit" in this verse refers to God. The small "spirit" has to do with man's spirit that shall be mentioned later. God is not flesh and bones like man (Luke 24:39). He is not physical or material as Paul explained in Athens (Acts 17:29). One of the errors made by the Gentile world was to change the glory of God into images of physical creatures (Rom. 1:23). God cannot be weighed and measured. We see God by faith, but our faith is founded on evidence for faith is a way to know (Heb. 11:1).

He is not altogether like man but there is a likeness with man. Psalm 50:21, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." Isaiah 40:18, "To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" Isaiah 46:5-9, "To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? …for I am God and there is none else; I am God and there is none like me"

God is not subject to the limitations of the material, physical realm. There are limits to our capacities and understanding; subject to restrictions that cannot apply to God. He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

God Existed Before the Universe

The universe consists of mind and matter. This is seldom disputed. We may not fully understand everything of the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics. But we know they prove the world is running down. Therefore, it must have had a beginning. Either matter created mind or mind created matter. Did the nest make the bird or the bird make the nest? Did the automobile make the driver or the driver make the automobile? Just so, mind created matter; not the other way around. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1), and that settles the dispute regarding origins. God spoke and it was good.

Anthropomorphism

This big word simply means describing that which is not human in terms of human and personal characteristics. God is described like this to help us understand Him. He presents Himself in terms that we grasp and are familiar. We commonly do this in our day-to-day speech. We might say, "The eyes of Texas are upon you," knowing full well Texas has no eyes. "The walls have ears," meaning what is said will be heard. But we know walls have no ears. There is the "long arm of the law," meaning you will get caught eventually when you violate the law. But the law has no literal arms. We give those things human characteristics to describe them. So it is with God.

We read of the eyes, ears and face of God. (Psalm 34:15, 16), "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from

the earth." How can this be since God is not material? It is explained by anthropomorphism. This is figurative.

God is Invisible

Being Spirit, He is invisible. We cannot see spirits. Rom. 1:20; "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." Colossians 1:15 and 1 Timothy 1:17 show God is invisible. We see Him by faith, not literally. No man can see God and live (Exo. 33:20). This is why Manoah was so concerned when he saw some manifestation of God. He thought he had seen God and would die (Judges 13:22).

Then how do we explain the passages that say men have seen God (Exo. 33:11, 23)? This, again, is to speak figuratively. Men have seen some manifestations of God but not God actually. Can a man literally see his own face? He can only see a reflection. Men have seen manifestations of God many times. But God is Spirit and invisible. Man is prohibited from making physical images of an invisible Spirit. Some picture God as an old man with long whiskers, a gruff face and heavy eyebrows. This is a serious mistake.

Without Limit

God will not fall beneath sickness, old age, weakness, ailments, rust, handicaps or decay that befalls physical creatures. Being Spirit He is here and there and everywhere.

The presence of God is presented to us in six senses. (1) God is with all people (Luke 12:2; Heb. 4:13; Prov. 15:3). (2) He is with His people (Matt. 28:20; Psalm 140:13; 1

John 1:2). (3) He is with His people in a special way in worship (Psalm 100:2; 1 Cor. 10:16). (4) He is with us at death (Psalm 23:4; 139:7-12). (5) We will be before Him at the Judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). (6) The redeemed will be with Him for eternity (1 Thess. 4:18). All this is possible because God is Spirit.

"But men could see Jesus"

Jesus was God on earth, Emmanuel, "God in the flesh," fashioned as a man (Phil. 2:8). He is the exceptional case. He was in existence as the Second Person of the Godhead but He did not begin with His physical birth by the virgin. He is God and has always existed (John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:1-3).

He is a Living Person

God is not a glorified IT, or just a CAUSE or FORCE of an impersonal nature. He has characteristics of a Person who loves, hates, with intellect, awareness, wrath, compassion, thought, choice, etc. Such things are only true of persons.

He who gives life and is the source of life must be living (1 Thess. 1:9). Man is in the likeness of God in that God is Spirit and man is a spirit as well as a body (Gen. 1:27). God is the "father of spirits" (Heb. 12:9). Man's spirit is the inward man (2 Cor. 4:16). His worship to God involves his inward spirit, his mind, disposition and attitude. It must be that of reverence and respect in worship of God.

That man is created in the spiritual image of God is the basis for the dignity of human life. This spirit is the part of man that Jesus came to save from sin. At death man's spirit shall return to the disposition of God who gave it (Eccl.

12:7). What a sharp contrast between the true and living God of heaven and idols.

Therefore, we can conclude as Jesus declared; God is Spirit. The significance and implications of this fact reach beyond our ability to fully calculate. But is it for this reason we stand in awe of God.

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Things Necessary for God to Dwell in Man's Midst

We have a long title and a profound thought. Ezekiel 43:9, "Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcases of their kings, far from me; and I will dwell in the midst of them forever." Our text introduces the thought of God dwelling with men, being in fellowship with man, man being able to live in the presence of God. Psalm 6:11, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Being in the presence of God is both comforting and challenging. The presence of God can be considered in several senses.

First: God and man are always in each other's presence. Regardless of whether one is righteous or evil, because God is omnipresent, we are always in His presence. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). The constant presence of God is also taught in Luke 12:2. (As always, the reader should have an open Bible as he studies these lessons.)

Second: There is a very special and unique sense in which God is with those who are His spiritual children. Jesus said He would ever be with His disciples (Matt. 28:20). "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Psalm 140:13, "The upright shall dwell in thy presence."

Third: An additional sense of God with His children is when in worship assembly. A little lad asked his father why they were going to worship since so few would be present. The father answered, "Because God will be there." Worship is directed toward God. "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands, Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing" (Psalm 100:1, 2). Christ said He would be present where two or three are gathered in His name (Matt. 18:20). We have communion with Deity (1 Cor. 10:16).

Fourth: We do not escape God even at death. Psalm 139:7-12 pictures the ever-presence of God in all circumstances. The twenty-third Psalm gives comfort that He will be with us as we cross the valley of death.

Fifth: Hebrews 9:27, "And it is appointed unto man once to die but after this the judgment." None shall escape being in His presence at the Judgment (John 5:28, 29; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12). Matthew 25 shows the judgment scene and all nations, every one of every nation, shall be judged.

Sixth: Some will be privileged to be in the presence of God for eternity. Jesus will come again and take His people to be with Him forever (1 Thess. 4:13-18). "…so shall we ever be with the Lord."

The first and third senses of the presence of God are unavoidable regardless of our relationship with God. The others are the result of our choice.

Ezekiel's Temple

Ezekiel was taken in a vision to the east gate of Jerusalem (he lived in captivity in Babylon), the same gate from which the glory of the Lord departed (Ezek. 10:19) when Jerusalem fell before the Babylonians, and the same gate through which Jesus entered into Jerusalem in what has been called His Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21). Ezekiel had foretold the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. It had occurred. This temple is presented in the context of chapters of hope, comfort and restoration of the people in captivity. There would be a new temple. The land would be reclaimed but distributed differently. God once left the physical temple; His special place of habitation among them. But He would return. There was a temple to be built by Zerubbabel upon Judah's return from captivity. The book of Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the completion of that temple. Was this the temple Ezekiel saw? We think not and shall tell why we so conclude.

These chapters are dealing with a future restoration of Israel and Judah. But did they look no further than the end of the seventy years of captivity in Babylon? Some have jumped to a false conclusion that Ezekiel had a "millennium" in mind. This is to impose on this revelation an error which was never suggested in it.

Conditional

Suffice it to say at this point that whatever temple is intended God would dwell therein on condition. There had to be the removal of defilements from among the people; the very things that had caused the captivity and had separated them from God. Their whoredom, physical and spiritual, must cease. The defilement by dead bodies must

be corrected. The temple grounds were to be sacred; not a burying place even for kings. God would not dwell in the midst of this people so long as they were in transgression against Him. His presence was conditioned on their submission and obedience.

Back to the Temple

Chapters thirty-eight through forty discuss the new temple and a new age. What Ezekiel saw was symbolic, a typical vision of the future kingdom of God, His temple, the Lord's church. We have here an Old Testament outline of a New Testament picture. It looked beyond Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and Ezra. It projects the church which is called the temple of God (Ephesians 2:21, 22). 1 Cor. 3:16 and 6:19 shows members of the church composing the temple.

Take note of the precise, intricate and detailed pattern of this new temple. This is significant in light of the false doctrines being presently perpetrated that God has not given us a pattern for the church.

No physical temple was intended and no such temple was ever built. The details of this temple as a literal and physical temple, and the reinstitution of the worship therein, are impossible because of its size, the topography of its place, its features and sacrifices. It was more a production of something that would be in the likeness and imitation of Solomon's temple and the one the returning exiles built, but presented in symbolic terms.

The new temple was not to be defiled. The physical temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel and Herod were defiled. Jesus said some had turned the temple into a den of robbers (Matt. 21:13). Actually, man cannot defile the Lord's church. He can bring reproach upon it by an ungodly life, but he only defiles himself.

Ezekiel shows the temple he describes to be more than a physical temple by the exaggeration of the size of the temple he saw. His temple prefigured the church with descriptions found in the New Testament in 1 Peter 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people…"

Consider the Church

We can now focus our attention on the church and God dwelling with His people in the church. 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 should be read in this connection. It speaks of God and His relationship with the church, His temple. The conditional nature of God's presence is emphasized. Christians must separate themselves from that which defiles before we can expect to be in God's favorable presence. To be holy is to be sanctified or set apart from the sinful defilements of the world. Why do some seem to think they can live whatever style of life they choose and still expect God to dwell with them favorably?

God Dwelling with Us

The Scriptures teach that God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit all dwell with us as Christians (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 3:17; Rom. 8:11). Scripture also teaches the Word dwells in us (Col. 3:16). This helps us to understand HOW Deity dwells with humanity. No passage teaches that Deity dwells with humanity with a personal, literal indwelling. This idea is the foundation of a denominational error that contends that man receives something mysterious, warm, a cozy feeling and a special guidance resulting from God indwelling us. Some contend for an inactive indwelling but such is not taught either.

In John fifteen Jesus taught regarding the vine and the branches and how they must abide one with the other. To abide means to dwell or live. Deity dwells, abides, lives in us as we dwell, live and abide in His Word. "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you…" (John 15:7). Jesus illustrated this with the relationship He and the Father have. The Father loved Him and He loved His disciples. How were they to do that? Christians are to continue to abide, dwell, live in the love of God as they keep His commandments (John 15:10) as He kept the Father's commandments. Deity dwells with humanity as humanity follows the Word. "Indwelling" is another expression of the fellowship that can exist between man and Deity; one of the spiritual blessings "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

God dwells in hearts, not physical temples (Acts 17:24). Stephen made that same point (Acts 7:48). The Spirit is in our heart (2 Cor. 1:22), exactly where the Word dwells (Col. 3:16).

Must be His Children

Let us focus on other conditions. In order for God to dwell with us we first must become children of God. This means we must obey the gospel. Ephesians 4:8 shows Christ as a mighty conqueror that has led those once captive of Satan into another kind of captivity, His captives, "that the Lord God might dwell among them" (Psalm 68:18). We cannot enjoy God in our midst until we are captives of Christ, which is another expression of being a Christian.

Live Our Profession

Another condition for the "indwelling of God" is that we must be what we have professed to have become, walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:6, 7). We cannot partake of the sinful ways of the world and expect God to remain with us. We are not to love the world (1 John 2:15) nor be friends of the sinful world (James 4:4). Psalm 15:1, 2, "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly; and worketh righteousness; and speaketh the truth in his heart."

A Penitent Spirit

Ezekiel 43:7 implies before there can be the presence of God dwelling with them there had to be a turning from sin. This is provoked by genuine repentance, change of heart and mind. When we come to Christ there must be a putting off of some things and the putting on of some things (Eph. 4:20-24). The old man of sin is put off but the new man of righteousness is put on. After cataloging a number of sinful matters that have no place in the life of a Christian, he lists several characteristics that must be developed and practiced. Romans eight is a chapter that deals with Deity dwelling with man. Verse fifteen requires no longer living after the flesh. We are to "mortify the deeds of the body" (verse thirteen); "mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth," meaning sinful behavior (Col 3:5).

The Lord is Our Shepherd

For the Lord to dwell with us we must consent to and allow the Lord to be our shepherd (Psalm 23). We must be of His sheepfold (John 10:16). We must submit to His guidance to show us the way.

Other Conditions

Isaiah 57:15 says God will dwell with those with a humble and contrite spirit. The contrite person does not have sinful pride, but is sorrowful and penitent when he has transgressed the will of the Lord. The proud hearts of the Israelites caused them to murmur and complain against God and pay no attention to His warnings. Philippians 2:5 teaches we must have the mind of Christ which includes humility and obedience.

We must be sound in doctrine. 2 John 9-11 forbids even bidding "Godspeed" to those who teach differently from the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of Christ is His doctrine, not just doctrine about Christ, which, of course, is included. It makes a difference what we believe and teach. The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). We need not expect God to dwell with us if we teach doctrine that is contrary to His will. Has not God warned against false doctrines and false teachers?

1 John 4:15, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath toward us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." Love is not all that is necessary for God to dwell with us, but it one essential element. The blessings of fellowship are dependent on our confession of Christ and love for one another (John 13:34, 35).

Possibly there are other conditions that could be mentioned for God to dwell with us. Let us note what a blessing it is to dwell with God. "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house" (Psalm 84:4). As certain as God offered to be in the midst of those recorded in the Old Testament who met His conditions and served Him faithfully, so will He dwell with us if we will obey His will and be faithful.

* * * * *

Where is God When I Hurt?

Probably all have asked this question in one form or another? It was essentially asked by Habakkuk, David, Job and others. People in trouble of various kinds ask it, especially when it is thought things should be well and pleasant. We speak not of just physical pain that comes because of disease, accidents, bruises, broken bones, cuts, etc. We include pain of the heart in times of emotional distress, mental agony, disappointments, betrayals, loss of friends, children going astray, being the target of biting and vicious words or death of loved ones. People suffer these and many other such things. Where is God during all of this? There are some things of which we can be assured.

God's Presence

As we learn in other lessons, regardless of what is happening, God is aware and God does care. Psalm 139:7-12 shows the attentiveness of God in all circumstances. "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous…" (1 Pet. 3:12). "He careth for you…" (1 Pet. 5:7). Even though there are many people, He is interested in each one. We are never alone.

Paraclete

This refers to the Holy Spirit. Jesus used the term with reference to the Holy Spirit in His promise of the Spirit's coming to the apostles after the departure of Christ (John 14, 15, 16). The Holy Spirit would be their Comforter, guide and teacher. We all benefit from that relationship inasmuch as the apostles brought to us the revelation of God's will as they received it from the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26, 27 the Holy Spirit is our intercessor (not mediator) when we know not how to pray as we ought. This is a promise to all Christians.

1 John 2:1, with reference to Christ, He is our Advocate, counselor, advisor, lawyer and attorney before the court of God on our behalf. The Father has committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22; Acts 17:31). He is not only our lawyer but our judge. You can't have it any better than that.

Christ is also our High Priest (Heb. 4:14, 15). Tempted in all points as are we, He was without sin. He knows and understands. He gives help in time of need. He knows what it is to face hardship and pain. Such things are not strangers to the Christ.

Providence

While the word "providence" is not in the Bible the concept runs throughout. Matthew 6:33 is a promise of God's providence in material needs. Abraham, when taking Isaac to the mount for sacrifice, answered Isaac's question regarding the sacrifice said, "God will provide" (Gen. 22:8). He called the place Jehovah-jireh, which means Jehovah will provide. Hebrews eleven tells us that Abraham's faith was so strong that God would keep His promises that he thought God would bring Isaac back to life again.

We see the providence of God working through Esther for the preservation of the people of God from enemies that sought their destruction.

Joseph recognized the things that happened unto him as the providence of God for preserving his people. Even though deprived of his home, sold as a slave, mistreated at Potiphar's house, cast into prison, forgotten by those he befriended, his attitude was, "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not; for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." Romans 8:28 includes the assurance that God can make good come from things evil. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). Rom. 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." Paul consider his suffering to have been for the progress of the gospel (Phil. 1:12-14).

We have the assurance of God's overall purpose. His providence works in harmony with His will. God is not here to serve us, but we are to serve God. Some of our disappointments may be God's appointments for our good. Paul wanted to go to Bithynia but the Holy Spirit directed him another direction; into Macedonia to the spread the gospel there. Burdens can be blessings in disguise. Pain can be useful in developing character, such a patience, faith, humility and draw us closer to God. Hardship can come from the temptations of the devil or self-imposed hardship due to our sin or the sin of others. But the source of hardship is not the most important thing. What we do with it matters most. Shall we curse God and die?

Help from His People

When Lazarus died, who did Mary and Martha have nearby? Did not they have their friends to comfort them? Paul tells us of the comfort God gave him (2 Cor. 1:3, 4). He found no rest until Titus came to him (2 Cor. 2:13) who comforted him (2 Cor. 7:13). Paul took courage when brethren from Rome met him as he approached the city (Acts 28:5). We have God's people around us when we hurt. This is where God is when we hurt. God uses them to bring solace, peace and relief.

God's Precepts

We have the comfort from scripture (Rom. 15:4). Is not 1 Thess. 4:13-18 a passage of comfort regarding those who died in the Lord as well as comfort and hope for us? Who can find greater comfort than the words of the twenty-third Psalm? All problems are not caused by personal sins (Job, John 9, Luke 13). Also consider Jacob, Trophimus, Epaphroditus, Stephen. They suffered but not because of their personal sins. Much of our dealing with hurt depends on the extent of our faith in the Word of God.

We are assured of the promises of God. He keeps His promises (2 Pet. 3:9). "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). That simply means there is nothing that will happen this day that God and I together cannot handle. The same assurance is in the words of Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthenth me" (Phil. 4:13). Matt. 5:10-12 contains God's promises for those who suffer for His sake.

Prayer

When we hurt we have the avenue of prayer to the throne of God. We can attract the attention of Him in this way. James tells us prayer can be effective (James 5:16). Psalm 34:15, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears open unto their cry." Read Psalm 73:1-3 and 12-17 to learn the answer to where God is when we hurt. We can know the end result for the wicked (Psalm 1:6).

What of those times when we receive a negative answer to prayer? When Lazarus died the Lord delayed His coming. The answer to Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane was not a deliverance from what He faced. God may answer, yes, no, or possibly wait. He may answer with an alternative we have not considered. He answers prayers of His children in the way He sees best for His children. Is not this the better way? We pray "Thy will be done."

Here He Is

Where is God when I hurt? Where was He when His Son was dying on the cross? Was He not seeking our highest good, which is the definition of love? Did He not care? He is with us. He has sent His "paraclete." He provides with power, purpose through His people, precepts and prayer.

We have the assurance of being eventually in God's place. Jesus promised this in John 14:1-4. Revelation 21:4, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Where was God when Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego were in the fiery furnace? Where was He when Daniel was in the lion's den? Where was He when Stephen

was being stoned and Paul being beaten and imprisoned? Where was He when Christ died? He was right there every step of the way. He will be with us when we cross the Jordan of death. He has made provision for every care and need that we face. He will never forsake us nor turn away from us if we be faithful to Him. Believest thou this?

* * * * *

Against Such There is No Law

“”But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22, 23).

This is not a discussion of the fruit named in this passage but a focus on the phrase, “against such there is no law” and how it relates to the fruit of the Spirit.

It is obvious that Paul gives recognition and acceptance to the reality that law exists. It is implied there are some things that are against the law. This refutes the false doctrines that contend there is no law since we are under grace. There is such a thing as law which is a body of ordinances, possibly a single ordinance, It is a rule that has been established by duly appointed and proper authority and is binding, to which we are accountable and are not to transgress. Why should this be thought a novel idea?

Law exists in every realm of human activity; business, sports, games, traffic, government, etc. It also exists in religion and in man’s relationship with God. Every religion has laws governing it. God has always dealt with man

according to His law. He gave law to Adam and Eve, the patriarchs Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He gave Israel a law through Moses. He gave a law to Saul concerning the Amalekites, which he disobeyed. Contrary to the error of some, God governs man today through law.

Authority and Law

Not just anyone has the power to make, establish and enforce laws. The church does not make laws. It is to proclaim God's law because it is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). A monarch makes laws for his kingdom because he has authority. Christ has authority over His kingdom (Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:18). The apostles were given authority to speak in His name.

Men have taken upon themselves to make laws in religion without authority. Such presumption always creates strife and problems. The church has been misrepresented, divided and harmed because of religious laws brought into existence by men without authority. Denominationalism exists as a result of such a thing. Liberalism and human legalism is the fruit of such presumption.

Is it not strange how some contend grace and law are in conflict? Both are mentioned in Galatians five. Grace was extended in the patriarchal age (Gen. 6"8). The Psalms repeatedly refer to the grace of God under the Law of Moses. Some misapply John 1:17 as if grace and law oppose each other. The Law of Moses was God's law given through Moses. The grace of God for our salvation is not in that law but in Christ. Neither concept suggests there is no law where there is grace, or that there is no grace where there is law. They both exist together.

One insisted to me, “We are saved by grace without law.” I asked him who made that law. He had just proclaimed a law, a rule, by which he expected to negate all law. His position is so self-contradictory that it is not deserving of serious consideration by an honest mind.

A “Grace-oriented” Church

Has there ever been any other kind that pleases God? The Lord’s church has always proclaimed the grace of God. But never has it proclaimed salvation by grace alone. God has a law against that kind of church. Some cry, “NO LAW,” but expect everybody to follow their law on that.

The Scriptures speak of being delivered from law. Romans 7:1-4 teaches were are delivered from the Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments (Rom. 7:7).

We are delivered from the law of sin and death (a law that says you sin; you die) (Rom. 8:1-4). We are delivered from that law by another law called the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

We are delivered from the laws and doctrines of men (Matt. 15:9).

The Law of Moses had to cease and God changed the law by which He governed man. It was an imperfect law that could not save. Christ could not be our high priest under that law because He was of the tribe of Judah, not Levi (Heb. 7:14). The Law of Moses served its purpose, was fulfilled, and taken away being nailed to the cross (Matt. 5:17; Col. 2:14; Gal. 3:23-25).

Nobody thinks changing the speed limit from 55 mph to 70 mph means we are not under law. We are under a different law but still under law. Paul’s statement “…against such there is no law” shows he accepted the reality of law.

Romans 8:2, we are under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Rom. 7:22, we are under the law of God after the inward man. Rom. 3:27, we are under the law of faith. Gal. 6:2, we are under the law of Christ. James 1:25, we are under the perfect law of liberty. It is by law that the grace of God has been revealed to us.

Sin and Law

Sin is a transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4). Where there is no law there is no sin (Rom. 5:13) If we are not under law we cannot sin. Some argue for instrumental music on the basis there is no law against it. That is false. The law of God forbids adding to His will (2 John 9-11). Adding instruments of music to the worship is adding to what is authorized. We are restricted to what is authorized (Col. 3:17).

The works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19, 20) are violations of God's law and therefore sin. The works of the Spirit are part of God's law. There are things against the law and things required and authorized by law. We have no trouble knowing what is against the law when we know the law. We violate God's law by commission, omission, tampering with His law, altering it, adding to it, taking from it.

No Law against the Fruit of the Spirit

Why is there no law against the fruit of the Spirit? It is because the fruit of the Spirit is a part of God's law, in total harmony with God's law, the positive side of God's law, like Christ in nature and produces what God says is good.

Galatians 5:22 begins with "But," which denotes a contrast with the works of the flesh. We are expected to produce the fruit of the Spirit and abstain from the works of

the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit is binding as God's law. There is law against the works of the flesh but not against the fruit of the Spirit.

As citizens of the kingdom we are expected to obey the law of the King. We must even obey the law of the land as the law of God teaches. The only exception is when the law of the land demands we disobey the law of God (Acts 5:29).

Obedience to the law of God reflects our faith and love. We never go wrong by going right and it is never right to go wrong. The way of salvation is the way of obedience to the law of God. We ought not hear the contention we are not under law. But we must know what law and why.

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Parents: The Bible View

There are many beautiful expressions written by men about parenthood. Many of them are very consistent with the Biblical teaching on the subject. We shall not turn to those, however, but investigate some of the Scriptures that teach us about parents and how to be parents that God approves. There is more to being a good parent than fathers and mothers realize before the child is born.

Begat

This word means to procreate as the father does in becoming a parent. Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob, Jacob begat twelve sons, etc. This is parenthood.

Genealogies, which meant so much to the Jewish system regarding priests and kings, concern parenthood. People today talk a great amount about their "roots." This involves parenthood. What is God's standard for parents and their discharge of duty?

God intends that children be born to parents who are married to each other. Some refer to an "illegitimate" child. Actually, the child may be born to parents who are not married to each other but the child is as pure and innocent as any child. The parents are guilty of sin. Some become parents by the process of adoption, which is a legal and honorable way of becoming a parent. Parenthood involves quite a lot more than physical and legal kinship.

What are the Biblically assigned duties, privileges, blessings, authority, challenges, sacrifices and disappointments of parents? To define being a parent is somewhat like defining electricity. Electricity is usually defined in terms of what is does.

Two Major Texts

"Train up a child in the way that he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

""And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

We might add to that the comment made by the father of Samson when he learned the child would be born, ""How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him" (Judges 13:12)?

We have two kinds of parents in First Samuel; Eli and Hannah. Eli was a good man but he did not control his children as he had the authority and need to do. Hannah was the mother of Samuel. There was not a more righteous

and successful ruler in Israel's history than Samuel who learned from a pious mother how he should be; who prayed to God for a child to give to the service of the Lord.

Parents set the tone in the home. They govern the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual climate of the home. They have the influence to ascertain values and priorities. They determine the standards of home. The quality of the home is set by parents and it is their duty to do just that. They are authority in the home.

They have the duty to demonstrate before their children how God would have the home to be. You may not have had such a home, but will your children have one like that? Some children never experience a home as God would have it. They grow up in a dysfunctional home and think that is normal. They see abuse, anger, divorce, neglect, selfishness and such like and they produce the same kind of home.

Commands to Jewish Parents

"And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates…And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is this day, And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us" (Deut. 6:6-9; 24, 25). Take note how emphatic God was that they teach His commandments to their children.

The church can assist the home in teaching children God's way. But it is first and foremost the duty of parents to see that their children know and practice the truth.

Duty to Each Other

Parents have a duty to each other (Eph. 5:24, 25). Fortunate is the child whose parents love one another and do their duty toward one another. Parents who tear up the home, usually for selfish reasons, sin against the child and the child bears the scars all the days of life.

One of the greatest gifts a parent can give to his/her child is to love their mate as God would have it. The child learns love, consideration, compassion and gains security. It is a crime to rob a child of that which is deserved.

Authority

You may not be able to detect it in every home, but the parents are supposed to be the authority in the home; not the children. Regarding Abraham, God said, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord; to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19).

Children are to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1). This implies parental authority. Parents fail in duty if they do not teach their children respect for authority. That is first learned in the home. If it is not learned the child will encounter problems in school, society, with civil law, on the job, every thing he does. Children who respect their parents usually respect all authority in a proper manner.

Caretaker

The role of a parent might be defined as a caretaker. Parents care for the child's mental and material welfare. That is not the whole story, however. Many children receive that but are denied what is most important. They need security, the opportunity to develop, guidance, discipline, leadership (you cannot lead where you will not go). More than anything else, they need spiritual and moral training according to the will of the Lord. They can have everything this world can afford them, but if they miss that they miss what matters most.

Home should be a haven of happiness. When everything else may go awry, school, the world, friends, even the church, home should be an environment of comfort and encouragement. It is the duty of parents to see that this is characteristic of their home. How deprived and neglected is the child who is not taught right from wrong and is not shown that by word and deed from father and mother.

Not an Easy Task

I sometimes tell young parents that the first twenty-five years are the hardest. After that you begin to see the fruit of your labor. Whoever suggested being a good parent is supposed to be easy. It is joyful and exciting. It is something for which to look forward. But it takes work, longsuffering, patience and stability to be a good parent. Sacrifice is a natural experience. There are many challenges to face and there is no guarantee of success because, even if the parent does his/her job properly, the child is still a free moral person that can choose what he will do. Proverbs 22:6 teaches the parent to train. But the child must go the way he is trained. If he does, he will stay with his training and be blessed. But other influences can

come into his life and destroy what parents have tried to do. Some parents suffer many disappointments in themselves as well as their children. No parent is perfect and no child is perfect. (That does not come until grand-children).

Major challenges come as the child matures. He meets influences in school that are not always compatible with the godly training the parents are doing. Peer pressure has always presented a problem for parents because the child thinks he needs to be included and accepted by them. They are influenced by movies, television, books, magazines and the condition of the world generally. These things present a large threat to godly parents. We live in a world that is hostile to our convictions and that we want for our children. We want to bring them to maturity where they can stand alone and stand for what is true in God's eyes. We want them to have their heads in the clouds but their feet on the ground.

We think of Noah and what a difficult task it must have been rearing children so God would preserve them when the whole world was drowned in their wickedness because of the flood. How did he manage do be so successful with his family? He preached to that generation and converted none from their evil. But he saved his own family. Would to God we all could do as much!

The Rewards of Parenthood

They are too numerous to name them. They are too wonderful to grasp them. When parents have obeyed God and provided for their children they have hope. They will receive honor, respect, love and glory. They will understand the passage that says, "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his

reward" (Proverbs 127:3). They can take the words of John and be thankful. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). There can be no greater blessing this side of heaven that this.

It is with hope motivating these words that each one who reads will be more devoted to the task of being the kind of father or mother God approves.

Someday you shall die and your body shall lie in the casket. Your children will walk by and gaze upon a face so familiar to them. Will they be grateful that God gave them you for a parent and give God thanks?

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Man's Love for God

The phrase, Love of God, has two meanings. It could refer to God's love for man or man's love for God. This lesson discusses the second meaning.

As is the case with so many of these lessons, we ask that you read the comments with an open Bible so long quotations can be read but not copied.

Matthew 22:35-40 teaches we are to love God all the heart, soul, mind and Luke 10:27 adds, strength. This involves the total inward man. Some do not love God. "But I know you, that you have not the love of God in you" (John 5:42).

Matthew 4:8-10 implies how worship includes love. Worship and love are inseparable. Love will not allow us to worship idols. An idol is anything we might put before God, material or spiritual. Love demands that God be first before self (2 Tim. 3:1-5), pleasure, money or anything. We cannot hold to two loyalties at the same time (Matt. 12:30; 6:24; 10:37).

Love for God is not physical because God is Spirit (John 4:24). Our love must be sincere. “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). Love demands action. It is a demonstration of a conviction and emotion. First Corinthians 13 translated the word “agape” (love) as charity. Love is not just an emotion and attitude but displays itself in deeds as charity toward those in need.

What does it mean to love God with the heart, soul, mind and strength?

Heart, Soul, Mind, Strength

The heart is the seat of feelings, attitudes, emotions the instrument of thought, faith and hope. It is from the heart that love springs.

Soul is the word sometimes used to refer to one’s life, the full measure of our life, a life governed by the Lord, that part of man that is in the likeness of God.

Mind is man’s intellect, the seat of understanding, the ability to reason and decide.

Strength is man’s ability and power.

Together they compose the whole spiritual man. We are not to love God with only part of us, but with a Biblically defined total commitment.

1 John 4:10, 19

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Again, “We love him, because he first loved us.”

God is the source of love. John says “God is love” (1 John 4:8). “Love is of God” (1 John 4:7). Our love for God is our response to God’s love for us. He loved first. He is

the source of love. We are to return that love. Nothing is more disappointing that an unanswered, unrequited love. That is painful even among people. With too many people the love between God and man will flow one direction when God intends for it to flow both directions.

Once we learn why God loved us and how He has demonstrated His love toward us we see that God has used love to motivate our love for Him. His love provokes our love. God seeks our highest good, which is the meaning of "agape." God wants man to abstain from evil and do what is good for man's benefit. He warns us of the harm of evil and the consequences. He has threatened punishment to drive us from evil. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. He offers blessings and reward because of His love for us.

But the fear of punishment and the desire for reward will not completely deter man from evil although it does help. The one who can be trusted to shun evil is the one who loves God because he knows evil is offensive to God. Love is the highest and most noble motive for serving God.

Love is a Duty

Like worship and love, duty and love go together. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). It is the performance of duty to love. In fact, it is our first priority. We cannot do our duty to God without love.

How do We Know We Love God?

Just ask yourself a few questions. When you love someone you want to please them. You will want to be in their presence (as in worship). You will want to talk with

them (as in prayer). You will want them to talk to you (as in Bible study). You will want to eat with them (as with the Lord's Supper). You will love those He loves (as loving the brethren). You will want to give gifts (as in giving to prove the sincerity of our love: 2 Cor. 8:8). The reason people do these things is because they love God. The reason some do not do these things is because of a lack of love for God.

Love and Obedience

Love is best demonstrated by obedience (John 14:15; 15:14; 14:21, 23, 24; 1 John 2:5; 4:2, 3). How can one honestly claim to love the Lord but refuse to obey His commandments? You may have seen a bumper ticker that says, "If you love Jesus, HONK." Any goose can honk. How popular would a bumper sticker be that said, "If you love Jesus, OBEY."

Love, like faith, demonstrates itself by deeds. Where there is no obedience there is no real love. His commands are tests of our love. Obedience means doing what God say, the way God says do it, for the reason God says. You do it, or refrain from doing it if evil, because you love God.

Hating What God Hates

Those who love God will also hate what God hates. One who is capable of love is also capable of hate. We are not to love the sinful world (1 John 2:15). Friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4). Proverbs 6:16-19 lists a number of wicked qualities that God hates. We must learn to hate those as well. Psalm 97:10, "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." We are not to hate persons but we are to hate the wickedness that people do.

Blessings and Love

We cannot count the blessings we receive when we love God for their abundance and greatness. God has promised a reward to those who love Him (Matthew 5:12; 19:29).

Romans 8:28 assures us that the things that God has worked are for our good to produce the benefits we need. Those who love the Lord will take advantage of what God offers.

Psalm 18:1, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength."

Psalm 5:1, "But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice; let them ever shout for joy; let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee."

Psalm 31:23, "O love the Lord, all ye his saints."

1 Cor. 8:3, "If any man love God, the same is known of him."

The greatest blessing for loving God while we are on earth is fellowship with Deity. The greatest blessing of all is the eternal reward in heaven.

* * * * *

The Gospel: Facts, Promises, Commands

Jesus told His apostles, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). What does one preach when he preaches the gospel? What is the gospel? The word "gospel" means good news, glad tidings. It begins with bad news about man in sin that resulted in his separation from God (Isa. 59:1, 2). In sin he is hopeless, helpless, doomed, damned, without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). This is relevant to all for all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). The gospel also reveals that man, needing to be saved from sin, does not have the power or ability to save

himself by himself, but needs a Savior. God so loves man, by His grace and mercy He has provided a Savior and the Savior is Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. His Son came to this earth, took on the fashion as a man and died on the cross to provide for the remission of man's sins, was buried but rose from the dead to offer man eternal life. That is basically the message of the gospel. That is good news for man. But there is much more to be said in addition to that broad and sweeping description of the gospel.

The Importance of the Gospel

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). We are called to the Lord by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). Paul told the brethren in Corinth they were begotten through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). We are taught to believe the gospel (Mark 16:15). We have our hope in the gospel (Col. 1:23). We are taught we must obey the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17).

It has been said that the gospel is simple and plain. While we would not oversimplify the gospel, it is within the understanding of all. But we must study and learn what is included in the gospel if we expect to be blessed by it. The gospel is not complicated or mysterious. There are many things in Scripture that are hard to understand, but the message of salvation, the message of the gospel, is one of the most easily understood messages from God man has ever received.

There are three major parts of the gospel. There are facts to be believed, promises to be enjoyed and commands to be obeyed.

Facts

1 Cor. 15:104 teaches we are saved by the gospel and reveals to us the basic fundamental facts upon which the gospel has its validity. First, Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised from the dead. These facts we must believe.

God does not expect us to believe these facts without giving us adequate evidence they are true and we can be confident and convinced of them. Eye-witnesses testify unto us, whose testimony is in Scripture, of each of these facts. We do not hope for facts. Hope looks to the future but these things have already occurred. We cannot obey a fact. But we can believe a fact.

Believing these three facts implies the belief in other things about Christ. We believe He existed with God before being born of Mary when she was yet a virgin. He believe the record of His perfect life, the way He fulfilled the prophecies regarding the Messiah, His miracles that proved His identity as the Son of God, what He taught, His good works, and how He was betrayed, tried , condemned and crucified. But the story of Christ does not end with His death. On the third day He came forth from the tomb (that was shut, sealed and guarded) as conqueror over death, hell and the grave qualifying Him to offer eternal life to sinful man. A dead Savior could not offer life. But He lives.

The evidence of His resurrection is overwhelming. He came forth by the power of God and was declared thereby to be His Son (Rom. 1:4). Our victory over death can be accomplished when we come to Him who has conquered. He rose from the dead to ascend back into heaven to assume His place on the throne of His kingdom which is by the right hand of God.

Remove these facts and you have removed Christianity. That Jesus is the Son of God is the foundation of

everything pertaining to Christianity (Matt. 16:16-18). Without faith we cannot be pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6).

Promises

Our hope rests on the promises that God has made to those who come to Him through Christ. You cannot believe a promise like you can a fact. You can believe with hope in a promise, depending on the one who makes the promise. We can have every confidence in the promises God makes (2 Pet. 3:9). You cannot obey a promise but enjoy a promise.

What are the promises God has made? He has promised remission of sins to those that obey the gospel (Acts 2:38). He has promised His providence for His children (Matt. 6:33); that He will hear and answer our prayers (1 Pet. 3:12); that we can have fellowship with Deity and the redeemed (1 John 1:6, 7); that we can enjoy inner peace (Phil. 4:4-7); and peace with God (Rom. 5:1); rest from our labors (Matt. 11:29; Rev. 14:13); and eventually an eternal place in heaven (John 14:1-4). This is a partial list, but who can place a value upon them that would be adequate?

A comforting and reassuring thought as we consider the promises God has extended to man is that He keeps His word and is faithful (Heb. 10:23).

Commands

The promises are extended to us on condition that we obey the commands of the gospel. These things shall belong to each one who does the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21). Would there be any justice whatever if someone chose to disobey and still could expect to be blessed? God blesses mankind in many ways unconditionally. But all

spiritual blessings are “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Shall we expect His blessings “out” of Christ when He tells us they are “in Christ” and how to get into Christ? What are these commands; the third part of the gospel?

As already noted, we must believe the facts of the gospel and all the truth they imply (John 8:24). We must obey Him when He tells us, “Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3-5). This same Lord said we are to confess our faith in Him (Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:8, 9; Rom. 10:9, 10). To receive remission of sins, to get “into Christ,” we must be baptized in water (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3, 4). There are only two verses that tell us the final step to be taken to get into Christ and both say that step is baptism. Baptism saves (1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is a part of the gospel (Mark 16:16) that the apostles were to preach and did preach and practice.

Following baptism and our rise to a new life in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) we are to live a faithful life (Rev. 2:10). This includes work, worship, growth, service, doing good to all men, taking the gospel message to the sinful world that others might be saved.

The Parts Are Before Us

When one peaches the gospel he will preach these things we have mentioned plus all else that is revealed in Scripture that these things imply. There are facts to be believed; promises to be enjoyed; commands to be obeyed. The question facing each one is whether we respect the gospel enough to believe it and obey it in order to receive the blessings of it! It is God’s message man’s for salvation.

* * * * *

Paul's Dealing with False Teachers

Paul wrote thirteen of the New Testament books (possibly Hebrews also), one hundred chapters. He dealt with false teachers in those books in addition to the record of events in Acts pertaining to Elymas, the Jerusalem Conference, in jail at Philippi, false teachers in Rome, Corinth, Antioch, Lystra, Ephesus, Athens, Thessalonica, just about everywhere he went. False teachers dogged his every step with trickery, traps, to ensnare, plots against his life, "thorns in the flesh." In those encounters he was guided by the Holy Spirit.

But he dealt with them. He did not adopt the foolish notion proposed by Gamaliel that if you just leave something alone and it is false it will fall of its our weight (Acts 5:34ff). Paul did not ignore them and just hope they would go away. He knew a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6). He was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). He considered it a duty stop the mouths of gainsayers and rebuked sharply those who taught error.

When something was done publicly Paul did not feel disposed to handle the matter privately before exposing the fallacy lest others be misled. He always attacked error on the basis of WHAT was being taught; not WHO taught it. If we properly confront false teachers we must learn from Paul, his actions, motives and attitudes. He did rebuke Peter to his face and called the names of some who were false teachers to expose them before brethren.

Some False Doctrines He Faced

In Corinth fornication was being tolerated without discipline. Errors were taught regarding marriage, divorce

and remarriage. Some denied the resurrection and misused spiritual gifts. In Thessalonica questions were raised about the resurrection, the Judgment and the coming of the Lord.

While Corinth faced error regarding the Lord's Supper, some were teaching Gnosticism elsewhere, even denying the existence of God and the Deity of Christ.

Judaizing teachers were everywhere teaching the necessity to keep the old law, practice circumcision to be saved, challenging Paul's apostolic authority, the sufficiency of Scripture, even the authority of Christ. Worldliness was characteristic of so much behavior. There were other errors he had to fight.

We probably do not face any false doctrines in principle that Paul did not have to set down. They may come in a different dress but they are not trivial and are not new.

Why He Confronted False Teachers

Paul always did what he did from the motive of spiritual profit for others (1 Cor. 7:35). He sought salvation for the lost and to keep the saved faithful. He did not seek just to warn and shame. He was not a pugnacious person seeking personal triumph over others. He did not seek to put people down and show superiority or "get somebody told." He knew the damage error does to the church. It mattered to those living and future generations. He had a love for the truth because truth saves; error enslaves. He got no joy from conflict, often grieved over it, writing letters to "beseech" (beg kindly) brethren to stand for the truth.

His personal manner was gentle and soft; yet firm and uncompromising. He was fierce in calling deniers of God, fools (Rom. 1:22). He was strong in his rebuke of those who perverted the gospel (Galatians 1), pronouncing

"anathema" (cut off from God) on them. He was bold without being rash, ill-tempered, mean-spirited or rude.

As he reproved and rebuked, he also persuaded and pleaded. He appealed through love, past loyalties and present persecutions. "Ye did run well…" but were being hindered. He made sure his readers understood what he meant. He was not like the time two men heard a preacher preach, one turning to the other and asking, "What is he talking about?" The answer was, "He don't say!"

How Paul Characterized False Teachers

It is good to "know thyself" but it is also good to know the enemy. He called them perverters, troublers, lovers of this world (Demas), willing to do evil against those who preached the truth (Hymaneus, Philetus, Alexander), being like Egyptian magicians (Jannes, Jambres), and dishonest with evidence. They were ever learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth. They would "check the wind" and "go with the flow," lacking conviction and willing to compromise. Like Satan, they would appear as angels of light but were messengers of darkness; ashamed of those who stood for truth. False teachers are sneaky, deceptive, vain talkers, doing evil privily with enticing words and a show of the flesh, a pretended humility, wolves in sheep's clothing, arrogant, egotistical, ambitious for self and self-superior to all others. He had no good word for them.

Tactics of False Teachers

False teachers will object, obstruct and hinder the truth all they can. They are fearful of people learning the truth on the wages of sin, liberalism, evolution, human legalism,

pre-millennialism, the denominational doctrines from creed books, catechisms, manuals, etc. How they run in horror from the truth on music in worship and churchgovernment.

Paul did not leave error unexposed even though he was subjected to lies, physical abuse and misrepresentations by those who did not love the truth. He uncovered the deceivers (like some today who pretend to be conservative but all the while promote liberalism).

Some false teachers are mild mannered, well-spoken, charismatic and personally pleasant in order to win the hearts of the gullible and misinformed. But they are quick to call faithful brethren stupid, ignorant, without education and stubborn. They refuse to preach the whole counsel of God and expose error lest they lose their jobs, salaries and prestige. They are hirelings seeking to please people by finding out what they want and presenting it to them. They can adapt to most any situation and "fit in" because they lack conviction and will compromise. They can run with conservative brethren as if they were faithful and have fellowship with the denominational world at the same time.

Methods Paul Used

He constantly and powerfully presented the truth. This is the only way to remove ignorance (this no reflection on one's intelligence but lack of knowledge). All must know the truth; not just leaders. He presented truth that cannot be refuted; sound doctrine. He preached the Word, correcting, exposing, warning of the consequences of error, but showing what was right and true.

He not only condemned but provided the cure to error. Like Jeremiah, he rooted out, pulled down, threw down and destroyed, but also built and planted (Jeremiah 1:10). He would reprove, rebuke, but also exhort (2 Tim. 4:2). He

reasoned logically, historically and consistently (see Romans 10:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:12020), He saw error only in terms of loss, danger and an attack to snatch victory from the faithful.

Paul would ask rhetorical questions (Is Christ divided? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? What saith the law?) The answer to such questions made the truth emphatically clear.

While some are heard to say, "I don't see why this or that! I don't understand!" That does not change the truth one whit. We must accept God's truth on the basis of His authority whether we grasp it all or not. We believe certain things are true simply because God has revealed it. Paul used the argument, "Let God be true and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). His teaching on the system of salvation is plain, easily understood and intelligently arranged. He spoke by divine authority. We must observe that same authority.

He was considerate and thoughtful in his explanations, patient with those in error "up to a point." But he would not compromise any truth to get along with anybody. He used the Scriptures prolifically as did Christ when tempted by Satan (Matt. 4). He even resorted to sarcasm as did Elijah (1 Kings 18) by boasting in order to show the absurdity of error. His sarcasm was not mean-spirited as critics often use. He was never irreverent toward things holy as we see and hear among some today who laugh at "two songs and a prayer" and eating juice and crackers. Paul never wallowed in the gutter as false teachers do.

When Nothing Stops a False Teacher

Truth and error will not mix. Exposure, pleading, appealing, use of authority, sarcasm, Scripture, questions,

truth all together will not stop some false teachers. False teachers are not honest. We should not be naïve to think they are. They say evidence does not prove. What works is all that matters to them. The end justifies the means.

We cannot have fellowship with false teachers whether in or out of the church (1 Corinthians 5; Eph. 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:14ff; Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:6; Titus 3:10, 11; 2 John 9-11). Need we say more? We dare not support their functions nor look upon them as innocent. We cannot give them opportunity to spread their venom in meetings, lectures, literature, "summits", youth meetings, etc. Some even say of a false teacher, "He may be in error but he will hold you a good meeting." How ridiculous is this attitude! The false teacher will seize the opportunity to sow tares in the field and devour the flock.

To combat false teachers we must take a stand, set our feet on high ground, stand fast with proper motives and hold in contempt that which is wrong. We must keep our eye on the goal and Him who leads (Heb. 12). We must be willing to be the targets of the fiery darts of the evil. Our battle is not easy and our victory will not be in this world. Paul paid a heavy personal price to be a faithful servant of the Lord. Shall we expect anything less?

God's people have always had to stand against the majority. Learn the life of Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Elijah, John the Baptist, Paul, Christ. But they gave no ground to false doctrines. Let all be done in love and make sure we are well-grounded in "thus saith the Lord." Accept the fact that there have always been false teachers and such will ever be. But fight the good fight of faith. The strife will not be long. This day is the noise of battle, the next the victor's song. Learn from Paul in dealing with false teachers.

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Seditions and Heresies

Seditions and heresies are both called works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). We need good definitions of these terms.

Sedition is defined as rebellion against lawful and duly appointed authority. It includes dissension, insurrection, with the attitude "not thy will but mine be done." It has the disposition of Diotrophes who wanted preeminence. It reflects an attitude that will not submit to authority and seeks the overthrow of authority.

Heresy is defined, and closely associated with sedition, as not being in line, the opposite of orthodoxy, separate from the mainstream, a self-chosen doctrine, putting one's own desires and designs above fellowship with God and the church. Heresy has to do with attitude and action. More specifically it is public and persistent denial of some of the fundamental points in the doctrine of Christ, doctrines that may be entertained by a professed member of the church that are contrary to the fundamental and distinguishing tenets of the church as set forth by Christ and the apostles. The Greek word from which it is translated refers to an opinion varying from the true exposition of the faith of Christ.

Sedition and heresy go together, are closely related and one provokes the other.

Biblical References to Sedition

The Jews had a history of sedition and insurrection against all those who warred against them. The Persians were reminded of this. Ezra 4:15, ""That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers; so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city

(Jerusalem, JWB) is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed." This was a warning from the enemies of Judah about the Jews who returned from captivity and were restoring the city. Israel had rebelled against Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon and Persia was warned. This was done in an effort to cause the cessation of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. But documentation was cited that gave permission for this work and the Jews were not guilty at this time. They had been guilty of it many times earlier in their history.

Barabbas was imprisoned for edition and murder (Luke 23:19). There are no details of his actions but we know he was charged with murder (Mark 15:7) and being against Roman authority. Nonetheless his release was allowed because the Jews hated Christ more than Barabbas and Pilate feared the Jews more than he feared Barabbas.

Paul was wrongfully accused of sedition by Tertullus before Felix (Acts 24:5). He was called a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. This accusation was made because Paul taught the end of the Mosaic Law had come. Paul's teaching was not unlawful, however. He was just accused.

Koran, Dathan and Abiram lead an insurrection against Moses and his authority (Numbers 16). "You take too much upon yourself," they said to Moses. They wanted to share in that authority. The authority of Moses was of God.

In the church authority belongs to Christ (Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23; Heb. 1:1, 2; Matt. 5:17). Authority was delegated by Christ to the apostles (Gal. 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:3; 1 Thess. 2:10) as they were guided by the Holy Spirit as promised (John 14, 15, 16). The authority is now revealed in Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 1 Cor. 2:12, 13; Jude 3). Whatever is contrary to the authority and doctrine

of Christ is heresy, false doctrine, ungodliness. It foments strife, rebellion and division.

Sedition can also be found in the home, school, government, church, work place, etc. The result of sedition is opposite that of unity. There is condemnation of the guilty (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27). Peace is disrupted; division occurs. Some say in essence, "Move over Lord. I'm taking charge. Don't get in my way." This is the tone of modern-day "change agents" who want to revise the church to accommodate today's rebellious generation. Such will seal the doom of those guilty (Gal. 5:21).

Biblical References to Heresy

The word translated "heresy" is sometimes translated "sect" as in Acts 5:17; 15:5; 26:5, The Sadducees were called a sect. So were the Pharisees. The church was called that also. It has reference to a party that is separate from the rest. It is used nine times: six times as sect, heresy once, faction once and parties once. It is never used in a favorable light. The church was first considered a sect of the Jews rather than the new religion of Christ. It is used in a derogatory sense referring to followers of Christ (Acts 24:5, 14; 28:22). The church was spoken everywhere against because of hatred against Jews and Christians.

Heresy is used to refer to some in Corinth who were abusing the Lord's Supper, creating strife and division in the church 1 Cor. 11:19).

It is used referring to false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1). Heretics brought in damnable doctrines, moving in secretly, privily, without detection at first. What was to be done about heretics? "A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition, reject" (Titus 3:10). Why do some prefer to "run along" with heretics when they know they only harm?

In the Old Testament people were taught not to hearken to the words of false prophets (Deut. 13:3). In the New Testament some false teachers went from Jerusalem to Antioch and created division over the old law (Acts 15:24). Some preached a perverted gospel (Gal. 1:7). There are warnings throughout the New Testament of teachers of error. They come as angels of light (2 Cor. 7:11). They draw disciples away after them (Acts 20:30). They deny the resurrection (1 Cor. 15). They make worship vain by teaching the doctrines of men (Matt. 15:9). They transgress beyond the restrictions and boundaries of the doctrine Christ (2 John 9-11). They contend for the old law, at least portions of it that fit their religion.

Falsely Accused

Paul and Silas were accused wrongfully of heresy (Acts 16:20, 21; 18:13). They were accused of teaching men to worship contrary to the Law of Moses. What they did was to teach what the law and prophets taught; the things which were written. Paul denied the accusation was ever true (Acts 24:13-16) and it could not be proved.

Such things as sedition and heresy against the way of Christ are not acceptable to God. It will bring certain damnation to those who are guilty of it. It will also mean the condemnation of those who allow themselves to be misled and influenced by seditionists and heretics.

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Traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees

We shall consider two Jewish parties of prominence in Palestine in the days of Jesus, some of their beliefs and

practices, both good and bad. We will note the relationship between them and certain contrasts of them. We want to briefly consider the historical background of their origin and how they came to be as they were in the time of Christ. We want to note the relationship of these two parties to the faith of Christ.

A tradition is something taught and handed down from one generation to the next. A tradition is neither good nor bad just because it is a tradition. Some have personal traditions such as having a cup of coffee the first thing each morning, winding their clocks each Saturday morning, family reunions on the Fourth of July. These are neither good nor bad in the sight of God and are of human origin and authority.

Some traditions are purely secular and national, such as the celebration of the Fourth of July, a day for voting, Valentine's Day of something of that nature.

Some traditions are of a religious nature such as observing the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, immersing in water for baptism. These exist by divine authority (Col. 3:17, 18; 2 Thess. 3:6). Some have a tradition of meeting at ten o'clock on Sunday morning and others possibly at nine. This is authorized but falls in the realm of a necessary decision of human judgment to meet a divinely authorized appointment. Some traditions are binding because God has bound them such as the Lord's Supper, baptism for the remission of sins, worship on the first day of the week at some optional hour.

We are warned against religious traditions by human authority (Col. 2:8; Matt. 15:9). Some traditions are contrary to the Word of God such as the rosary, the papacy, denominationalism, making laws that God never made and loosing laws He has made. Problems arise when the traditions of men or optional matters are bound or when

those that are of divine authority are made optional or ignored. Elevating human traditions to the rank or level of a divine tradition creates strife. Forbidding all traditions is wrong because some are judgmental but necessary. Reducing a divine tradition to the level of a human tradition is to reduce God's law to man's law.

This brings us to the traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees; some of which were neither right nor wrong, but just Jewish. The Jews had racial and national traditions as do other people. Some were offensive and sinful before God. Some were contradictory to divine law and others were in harmony with it.

Today some are quick to label others as being "Pharisees" because they judge them to be like the Pharisees in action and attitude in Jesus' day.

We shall focus our attention on religious traditions of these groups, primarily on those revealed in the New Testament with mention of some of which we read from other sources like the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, the Talmud, the books of the Maccabean period.

Who Were These People?

They were Jewish religious and political parties. Their origins go back many years before Christ when they were known by other names. They became significant during the days of the Maccabees fighting for Jewish independence.

The Pharisees were very patriotic, more orthodox, frugal and without luxury. They violently opposed Roman occupation of their land, wanted independence for the Jews, looked with contempt upon every nation except their own, aloof from the ways of the world and had hedged themselves apart from the heathen world and other Jews who did not agree with them.

One would become a Pharisees upon an oath of fidelity, striving against Grecian influence of idolatry and immoral behavior. They were generally considered by the people as godly, saintly, the most righteous, respectable and responsible. This was not always the evaluation the Lord shared, however.

The name "Pharisee" means separation, Separatists, no mingling with others of foreign persuasions. There were two schools of thought among them: Hillel (a more liberal element) and Shammai (the stricter group). Gamaliel, the most prominent teacher among them at this time, was of the Hillel school. Both schools looked on Jesus with contempt. When asked concerning marriage the teaching of Jesus was more akin to that of Shammai but He did not cite either school, or Moses, as the authority for marriage but as God created it in Eden.

They were the more numerous party and looked for the physical restoration of Israel when the Messiah came. They were the ones with whom Paul had most of his conflicts over the Law of Moses being bound on Gentiles. They were the more religious of the two parties but gradually became more political. They had a strong, but not dominant, voice in the Sanhedrin.

The Sadducees were aristocratic, liberal, free-thinkers, wealthy, modernists and controlled the priesthood. They accepted only the Pentateuch while the Pharisees took the entire Old Testament plus their own traditions as authority. The Sadducees were more secular, worldly, concerned with material riches and political favor of Rome. They compromised Jewish ways with Grecian influence (called Hellenism) and Roman power.

Jesus warned His disciples of them both (Matt. 16:6, 11) and condemned their ways (Matt. 15:9; 23:1-39). His teaching was often antagonistic to both of them, but not

always. There were commendable things said of them. This is often overlooked today when some hastily brand others as Pharisees because they use the term in a derogatory way. Both were very critical of Jesus and watched His every word and way in order to find fault. They were viciously opposed to His claim to be the Son of God and smarted under His rebuke of their self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

Not all of them were hostile toward Christ (Joseph, Nicodemus), followed Him, ate with Him and many of the priests were converted after Pentecost.

There was close affinity between the scribes and the Pharisees more than the scribes and Sadducees. Not all Pharisees were scribes. Most scribes were Pharisees. This gave the Pharisees a big edge over the Sadducees in the knowledge of the law.

There were tensions, even wars, between the two parties that stemmed back into the Maccabean era. Conflict between Jesus and the Sadducees became more intense toward the later part of His ministry, especially when He cleansed the temple the second time, while the Pharisees were His opponents from the beginning. In Jesus these two parties had a common foe. Both were aggressive against the apostles after Jesus ascended to heaven.

A Major Difference

The Pharisees contended for the written Law and an oral law. The written Law was considered a summary of principles. They contended that some oral law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Pentateuch had 613 laws (248 commands and 365 prohibitions). The Pharisees justified more law than what was written.

The Law contained much about sacrifices, ceremonies, offerings and morals. They claimed some oral laws came

through the prophets and were interpretations of the written law. They did not contend all of the traditions they advocated had come from Jehovah but they bound them and insisted they be obeyed anyway.

Allowance of unwritten oral law opened the floodgates of interpretations and opinions that went further and were more detailed than the written law. They were often subjective in nature. Once a decree was passed it became binding and irreversible. Oral law provided "refinements" of the written law. They allowed great latitude to meaning, creativity and flexibility. The first portion of the Talmud is oral law committed to writing. These laws were often considered even more binding than divinely written law (Mark 7:1-13).

The Pharisaic slavishness to oral law made them bigots, formalists, human traditionalists in the worst sense (Matt. 23:4). The Sadducees denied oral law.

Good and Bad

More often than not the bad out weighed the good. In the New Testament the Pharisees are presented in a bad light, as they are today. In many ways they were as Christians are supposed to be but in other ways they were very contrary to the will of Christ. They were given to external expression of religion to the neglect of the spirit. Christianity has external rituals and actions also but not to the neglect of the heart of man. Consider the act of immersion. That is an outward act but the motive and understanding of the act is important. Outwardly something may appear correct but inwardly not acceptable to God. The external was all that mattered to the Pharisees. They laid great emphasis on fasting and appearing to fast, public prayer, conspicuous garments, forms and rituals, ceremony. Many times they

did what they did in good faith and sincerity but were ignorant of what they were doing.

The Pharisees believed that many things that happened were according to fate over which they had no control. They did not accept the idea that many things happened due to man's choice. The Sadducees believed everything that happened was due to man's choice. Fate was identified by the Pharisees as the work of God, not always understood, like the providence of God.

Some Commendable Beliefs

The Pharisees had respect for the aged. They did not always show it properly, however, (Mark 7:9-13). They believed man had a soul and spirit, angels, resurrection from the dead, life after this one, the Judgment to come, reward and punishment. They were at great odds with the Sadducees over such matters who denied nearly all of these beliefs. Paul once used his belief in the resurrection to divide the Sanhedrin as they were debating what to do about Paul (Acts 23:6).

Pharisees were eager to make proselytes and labored to propagate their faith. Their success was not beneficial (Matt. 23:15). They were mission minded as Christians should be. They wished to embrace all Jews through education to their ways. Christianity is also a taught religion that is spread through education. The Pharisees had great respect for learning and operated schools.

The Pharisees had great respect for the dead and keeping of the tombs (Matt. 23:29. They would build tombs for the prophets and garnished the sepulchers. But they did this for outward appearance.

They would pray at widows' houses for appearance sake. It was pretense (Matt. 23:14).

They were "rule keepers," keeping the Law. Many were upright, moral, given to holiness. Some today ridicule "rule keeping" because they consider obedience optional. Being obedient to the law of God is not Pharisaic in a bad sense. But the Pharisees considered their obedience as earning God's blessings. On this they vary widely from Christian obedience.

They were well organized. So is the church. They include men and women as does Christ (Gal. 3:28). Their religion included alms giving and they expected the Messiah. Christianity includes giving and benevolence.

Their Major Fault

It was not as much what they said as what they hypocritically did. They were not submissive to God but self-centered and self-righteous. As a class they were condemned although there were exceptions. Their showiness in religion was for the praises of men. They were guilty of straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel (Matt. 23:24). They made the word of God of none effect by their traditions (Matt. 15:3-6). They treated men like children with minute, precise ceremonies. For instance, they must repeat certain passages twice a day (Deut. 6:4-6). They had endless washings of cups, hands, clothes, vessels. They had laws what to eat, governing what they deemed clean and unclean more than the written law. Anything slaughtered by a heathen was unclean. There were precise regulations regarding tithing. They tithed everything they grew, bought or sold. They paid their tithes only to priests that favored them. They even tithed mint, anise and cumin. They had laws on what kind of wick and oil could be used in their candles on the Sabbath. They could not eat fowl or an egg laid days around a festival. They could not pay a

heathen their debt three days before a heathen feast. The Jewish midwife was prohibited from assisting a heathen woman give birth. They were extreme on venerating the Sabbath day. They actually practiced what we call situation ethics about the Sabbath. While they could not work their animal they could ride him. They could not carry a stick to urge a beast on the Sabbath. They even objected to healing on the Sabbath. They could give to a beggar if the beggar extended his hand but they could not extend their hand to him. You could exceed the Sabbath day's journey if you felt it necessary.

They believed plowing was wrong on the Sabbath; even dragging a chair if its legs left ruts in the dirt. They could walk on crutches or wooden legs, but not stilts. They could not wear false teeth or unnecessary garments. A tailor could not carry his needle on the Sabbath. They could not eat with a man, even another Jews, whose wife was a heathen. They practiced guilt by association to the extreme. They drew a sharp distinction between Jews and Samaritans. This explains much of the tension with Jesus since Jesus used Samaritans to illustrate His teaching in a favorable light. They were religiously elite and superior like some who think they are today and who like to brand others as Pharisees. While they attempted to tell others what they could and could not do, they did not follow their own guidelines. They blew horns to get attention when they prayed or gave alms. They wore titles and special garments to show their piety. Mark Twain described them as good men in the worst sense. Like liberals and legalists today, they assumed the right to bind whatever they wished.

What is not Like Pharisees

It is not Pharisaic to oppose missionary societies, instrumental music, women preachers, choruses, quartet, clapping, etc. (Eph. 3:21; 5:19; 1 Tim. 3:11-15). Contending for law and obedience is not being Pharisaic (James 1:10; Heb. 5:9). Proving all things, holding to what is good, forbidding what is not authorized, insisting that we build on the rock of truth, calling for morality and reverence, doing things Biblically taught is not Pharisaic. Nor is defending the gospel (Phil. 1:17), marking those who teach false doctrines (Rom. 16:17), having "two songs and a prayer" being a Pharisee. Withdrawing fellowship from the disorderly, standing against the works of the flesh is like Christ. Not many of the things liberals like to brand as Pharisaic fit the bill. Calling someone a Pharisee may reveal how the caller holds truth in contempt.

The Jewish sects have long ago been absorbed with the passing of time. Many of their attitudes and actions, good and bad, still exist. We should not imitate them in any respect because Christ is our authority and Captain.

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Liberty in Christ

The thoughts of liberty and freedom are very precious to mankind, especially in our nation the USA. Our freedoms have been obtained at an awesome price of blood and sacrifice. But they are very much under attack today even from within our nation as they have been from foreign powers historically.

Our Constitution is supposed to guarantee freedom of religion in the First Amendment. It is forbidden for the government to establish a national religion for everyone or demand everybody support some religion. We are free to believe and practice whatever religion we choose without

interference from government or other citizens. Freedom of religion was never intended to demand freedom from religion or the myth of "separation of church and state" as if nothing religious could ever be include by the state. This was what made America different from the European nations from which early immigrants came. This freedom is being eroded by elements that seek to destroy all religion from the country such as the infamous ACLU, etc.

The idea of religious freedom legally is that we are free to choose as long as our choice does not infringe on the freedom of others. Herein is the conflict with Islam that does not allow freedom of religion but demands everyone bow to Islam under the threat of punishment, even death, if conformity is refused. This vicious decree has been practiced in times past by Catholics and Protestants. We are thankful for our freedom.

We are mistaken, however, to think whatever we choose is acceptable before God. It may be legally allowed and protected but that does not mean God approves. This idea of one religion being as good as another is legally permissible but not before God. Some cry, "This is America and I can do whatever I want." That is not so. You do not have the freedom to deny freedom to others. You do not have the right before God to do whatever you want and still expect God to bless you.

What Our Lesson Proposes

What we wish to do now is present Scriptures that teach on the subject of freedom we have in Christ, with possibly a brief comment following each one. The reader must have his Bible as we consider these passages, few of which will be written out fully.

2 Corinthians 3:17: "Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

1 Corinthians 7:22: "For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman; likewise he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant." Christ's servants are said to be free.

Romans 8:21: Christians are delivered from bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Galatians 5:1: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free…"

John 8:32, 35: Without truth there is no freedom. The truth of Christ makes us free when believed and obeyed.

James 1:25: The law under which we live is called "the perfect law of liberty." The existence of law is restrictive, however. Duties of things to do and not to do, limits to observe, are given in the law. We are not free to do just anything we wish and still please God. We must not confuse liberty with license. We shall be judged by the law of liberty (James 2:12).

1 Peter 2:16: We are not to use (misuse) our freedom as a cloak of unrighteousness but as servants of God. Freedom and liberty can be abused. Christian liberty is not "do-your-own-thing."

Galatians 5:13: We are called to liberty but are not to use that liberty for an occasion to the flesh, as if there are no restrictions, but to serve one another.

Jeremiah 7:10: Here is a problem of ancient Judah. They thought they were free to do whatever they wished. "We are delivered to do all these abominations." They were wrong about that. Jeremiah condemned such an attitude.

Romans 6:1, 2: Since Christians are dead to sin (separated from sin) we are not at liberty to live any longer therein.

1 Corinthians 8:9: The restrictive nature of Christian liberty is seen in that we are not to do even things we might have a right to do if it will cause a brother to stumble and lose his soul. Our "rights" can become "wrongs."

Romans 7:1-3, 6: We are freed and delivered from the Law of Moses, even the Ten Commandments as authority. We live under Christ. His law also includes much of the Ten Commandments with additional points of duty.

Romans 6:18; 8:1, 2: We are free from the bondage of sin. We are no longer servants of sin but servants of righteousness. Please note that we are always servants; either of sin or righteousness; never completely free. We are free from the law of sin and death which says, you sin; you die. Another law delivers us from that law and that is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

We cannot go to heaven just any way we choose. We will go God's way or not at all. (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). **We cannot teach whatever we choose.** (Galatians 5:6-9; 2 John 9-11). Some in the academic community have mistakenly taken the idea of "academic freedom" to mean they can teach anything they wish and God approves and nobody should object. Such snobbery is deplorable among those who consider themselves educators.

Religion that is acceptable to God must be according to the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17). Even our worship is restricted by the truth (John 4:24).

The primary freedom we have in Christ is freedom to serve God, God's way; freedom from the Law of Moses; freedom from the wages of sin. It is not freedom from disease, poverty, joblessness, poor housing, hardships or those elements of the "social gospel." We have the freedom to come to Christ, live in Christ, die in the Lord and live with God in heaven.

Freedom of religion according to the teaching of God has been defined as follows: "We are free to go to hell any way we choose. But only the way of the Lord will lead you to heaven."

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Fatalism

There are doctrines and philosophies that contend neither we nor God can or will do anything to affect what happens. This idea is so absurd, contrary to history, contrary to reality, but most important it is contrary to the Bible, it is difficult to know where to begin our discussion. You deserve no credit for whatever you do because you could help yourself. You just had to do it because it is fate that forced you. It was already set beforehand. God had nothing to do with it either because the philosophy of fatalism denies the existence of God. Without God there obviously is no providence of God which the Bible teaches.

Fatalism is a doctrine that all events occur according to a fixed and inevitable destiny which individuals neither control nor affect. The future, therefore, is fixed

irrespective of our attempts to affect it. Preceding events have no connection with events that follow. All happens according to natural law. Nothing is conditional. No God is involved anywhere at anytime. So is the Fatalism doctrine.

Closely related is the philosophy of Determinism; a belief that all physical events and human actions are determined or settled by external forces before they happen. The external forces are the stars, planets, elements of earth, sun, moon, etc. This doctrine may or may not include the existence of God but He is inactive. Everything is in accordance with some mysterious decree issues by some mysterious power perhaps ages ago. It denies there has been or can be anything miraculous.

Another similar doctrine is Predestination. This belief in fate or unchangeable destiny, inescapable, but is determined by God, even the salvation or condemnation of each individual. “He that is born to be hanged shall never drown.” That’s the idea. In religion it is one point in Calvinism that says God determines which individual will be saved or lost before he/she is born and man has no power whatsoever to change what God has determined.

Expressions That Reflect This Idea

People may say they do not believe these doctrines but they speak phrases that promote them. “His time has come.” “This was meant to be; or not to be.” If the Lord wills,” as if God forces something according to a fixed determination. “Whatever will be, will be,” as if everything is already set and we are just waiting for it to happen. “Your days are numbered,” as if it is already decided how many days you will live even before you begin. The Horoscope is based on some external forces on human

activity. We just need to accept whatever it tells us because that's it. It is so much silliness.

Then why discuss it? It is against the Word of God. We shall show how it denies the providence of God and contradicts several Biblical points, including God's providence. It denies the nature of man and his power of choice or volition. That means man is not responsible for what he says, does or thinks and therefore not accountable. (This is what the advocates of Fatalism really want.)

The Golden Bullet of Death to Fatalism

Before we consider the Scriptures consider one very logical, sensible point. Advocates of these philosophies busy themselves in teaching others about them and trying to persuade others to accept them. Why do they do that? They have already proclaimed we cannot decide! They have said nothing we do or do not do effects anything! How can anybody choose to believe in Fatalism when you have no power of choice? It is already settled. You can't change it. What do they expect to change by teaching? Any philosophy that contains within itself its own destruction is not deserving of acceptance.

Fatalism or the Gospel

You cannot believe both. The gospel appeals to man to make a willful decision to come to Christ for forgiveness of his sins. He can determine his own destiny by what he decides to do regarding Christ.

God's Predestination

Some things have been predestined and some things still are. Elements of truth in false doctrines are how they gain attention. The scheme of redemption is according to God's eternal purpose (Eph. 1:3; 3:11). The Biblical doctrine regarding salvation is that God has already determined who will be saved and lost; not according to individuals but according to classes of people. Those who believe and obey will be saved; those who don't, won't. Man has the right to decide in which group or class he will be.

Some have been heard to suggest that maybe God will not condemn anybody after all. Where do they get such tripe? They obviously do not believe "thus saith the Lord." In some unexplained manner they have become wiser than God regarding what He "might" do even though it is contrary to what He has said He will do.

The Bible is replete with prophecy and fulfillment. Sometimes the prophecies are conditional and sometimes unconditional. Those that are conditional are not settled until the conditions are either met or discarded. There is validity in cause and effect (Gal. 6:7, 8).

The providence of God has been predetermined (Matt. 6:33). But this is conditional, isn't it? People are taught to obey the gospel. How can they if they have no power of decision that affects things?

It is predetermined all shall be resurrected and judged. Nothing man can do will alter that. Physical death is inevitable (Heb. 9:27). The day of the Lord will come will come (2 Pet. 3:1). That will be.

Peter says the end of our faith is salvation of our souls. What if one has no faith? Will he be saved anyway?

Fatalism is Idolatry

Idolatry denies the true and living God and substitutes something else like the sun, moon, stars, mountains,

animals, rivers, weather, etc. These things are in control according to Fatalism. Fatalists have goddesses that determine the course of human life and have special names for such things.

Fatalism violates the power of human choice, as we have mentioned. Yet, Moses made a choice (Heb. 11:24-26). Moses urged Israel to make a choice (Deut. 30:19). Elijah called for a choice (1 Kings 18) at Carmel. Joshua said, "Choose ye this day whom ye shall serve" (Josh. 24:15). But he was not as "schooled" as fatalists today and didn't know that was impossible. Agrippa had a choice after hearing Paul preach (Acts 26). We have to make a choice whether to believe the Bible or some fatalist who has made the choice to accept Fatalism.

Why Fatalism is Dangerous

Fatalism denies man is responsible for what he does. That leaves the door wide open for him to do whatever he wants because, "I couldn't help it. It was already determined." Man does not want to be accountable to God or anybody else. He wants "freedom" to do whatever he wants to do; answering to nobody. It is the same reason people are atheists. But doesn't the Bible teach there will be the Judgment (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12;Rev. 20:12)? We cannot believe Fatalism and the Bible at the same time.

Therefore, this doctrine denies anything is immoral, religiously wrong or ethically corrupted. How could it be? It is already set. Morality involves choice, standards and conditions. Excuses must be condoned that say, "I can't help it." Yet, Scripture teaches a difference between right and wrong, righteousness and unrighteousness.

More deadly, Fatalism denies the providence and power of prayer. What good would prayer do if nothing we or

God can do to change whatever has already been decided? We may not know all we would like about the providence of God and how He operates in every case. But He has said He does and that prayer is effective (James 5:16-18) and teaches us how to pray.

Summary

If Fatalism is true, nothing matters. We are just robots programmed to carry out what some power has determined. Nothing is intentional, accidental, coincidental or by choice. It is useless to preach the gospel and the invitation from Christ is a farce. The cross was for no purpose; mercy is invalidated; grace is foolishness; obedience of no value; promises are null and void; blessings are ruled out; life has no meaning, purpose or goals; there are no standards to follow and we are without hope. What a glorious situation!

Furthermore, Fatalism offers us nothing in return for all we have lost in burying Christianity. It is totally negative and destroys everything Christians consider worthwhile. All we can do is just "live it out."

The Folly of Fatalism Illustrated

What would be the use of playing a game if the winner is already determined? We are like watching a re-run of a game already played and the winner has already won.

The truth is God's Word and God's Word is truth. Fatalism is of the devil and cannot be believed. Maybe it has been fatalistically determined I stop at this point.

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Decision Making in Leadership

The elders of a local congregation have a critical responsibility to see that the work of the church (glorifying God in its purpose, belief, teaching, worship, growth) is carried out successfully. To accomplish this work there must be Biblical guidance, plans and decisions. This lesson is about making decisions in the affairs of the local church. This work may be one of the most significant elements in the work of elders other than setting a righteous example. How they decide matters will affect everything else.

Planning demands a course of action that will set and reach the desired goals. This cannot be done in a haphazard manner. One reason some congregations do not grow is due to a lack of planning, just jumping from problem to problem, "keeping house" for the Lord, maintaining the "status quo" and not reaching out. Most bottlenecks are at the top. Plans don't work. People have to work plans. Plans show you the way to get the work done. If you do not know where you are going most any road will do. That is not the way to conduct the Lord's business.

Attributes to Maintain

Every congregation needs to be growing spiritually, edifying the members, caring for the needy, reaching the lost, recovering the fallen, developing a moral and spiritual influence in the world, and helping one another get to heaven. This is a tall order and the elders are to see that this is accomplished.

Elderships have the authority to attend to the work. They are entrusted with the power that responsibility brings. They have to have the vision to see what must be done and use their authority to get it done. This is why they must be men who meet the qualifications. Elders of necessity are decision makers.

What are the goals? Once this is decided, choice among alternative but scriptural ways to attain them must be set. Means and expediencies must be used. No "expediency" should be used that is not within divine authority. Motives must always be kept in check.

Their choices are not usually between what is good or bad. Those decisions are not so difficult. There are decisions between what is good, better and best, which are harder to make. It calls for the exercise of mature human judgment. Short-range and long-range goals must be considered. Capacities and costs have to be measured. Equipment and support from the congregation has to be weighed. The congregation may have to be motivated and sold on an operation. That falls within the work of the eldership and good leadership. They will need feed-back. A wise eldership works to have an informed membership. Some elders seem to display an attitude that what they decide is nobody's business but theirs. What a mistake! They must understand their personnel available to do the work, delegate duties, train workers. Time must always be studied.

A decision that is of momentous influence on the congregation is the selection of the man to be in the pulpit and classes. Preachers are under the authority of the eldership as any other member. They have the right to choose and dismiss those who will preach. Knowledge of the man and his convictions are an absolute necessity if they do this work well.

Hindrances to Decision Making

This work of decision making is not always easily accomplished. There are roadblocks that arise. Fear of making a faulty decision often causes elders to make no

decision in areas that require action. There are always risks involved while wondering what might go wrong. Alternatives plans are usually good to have in mind.

When one or more elders are determined to have their own way you have problems. The work of the eldership is teamwork. Not all decisions receive unanimous agreement, but these are matters of opinion and human judgment and patience is necessary. The most likely time for conflict to arise among elders and the church is in the period of making a decision. The bigger issues call for greater input from members, information, understanding and cooperation. There may need to be corrections made once a plan is determined and they can be made. It is better to run the risk of making a mistake than making the mistake of failure to take action when it is needed. There never has been a hindrance that could not be overcome among brethren of good will who love one aanother and the congregation.

Paramount in every decision is the upholding of the truth, the promotion of unity, brotherly love, resisting error and helping each other get to heaven.

Nehemiah Was a Good leader

A detailed study of the work of Nehemiah in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem will show how good leaders operate. This lesson will not go into those details because thee are other lessons on this subject. But alongside his good leadership the disposition of the people was so important. They had a mind to work. When a program of work was placed before them their response was, “Let us rise up and build.” When you have people like that and a man like Nehemiah at the helm great things can be done for the cause of Christ.

Worthwhile Goals

Let us hastily suggest some goals that benefit a congregation. Better knowledge of the Bible is always a priority effort. This can be accomplished by promoting Bible classes, private study courses at home, using class rolls, keeping up with students, encouraging daily Bible reading, studying tracts and sound materials. Many members would delight to take a correspondence course if an enthusiastic plan was offered.

Reaching the lost is our work. Personal contacts, visitation programs, home studies, tract distribution, welcoming visitors and newcomers to services are good.

How do you recover the fallen? Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19, 20 give insight into this effort. We first must watch ourselves then turn attention to the fallen brother. We cannot quit trying to recover them until they tell us to quit trying. Some may eventually do that. Special mail to them is a good contact. Let them know of genuine love for them.

Programs are needful that train youth and teach brethren how to be useful in worship services. Disciplining the disorderly is a particular work that demands the leadership of the eldership. They must decide the means and methods to be used. This is possibly one of the heaviest decisions they have to make.

Some years ago some "scholar" tried to put down the idea that elderships are to make decisions. He contended that their work consisted of being a good example; not ruling the church. He could not have been more wrong. They must be good examples. But decision making is a necessity for the congregation and it is the duty of elders who have the oversight to undertake that work. Then is the duty of the congregation to work together in peace and unity.

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The Crisis of Qualified Leadership

We need to define our subject. By crisis we mean something crucial, a decisive moment, a crossroad situation where you go one way or the other, maybe a turning point of significance. A crisis is important. Many things, good and bad, can provoke a crisis.

By qualified we mean qualified as God determines; not as man sees. That is not always the same.

Leadership refers to those who lead in the church. Qualified leadership is needed in government, the home, schools, everywhere. But we are concerned with qualified leadership in the church, including elders, deacons, preachers and teachers.

There is no disposition to embark on a bashing of those who lead. My experience has been most fortunate to have been privileged to work with many first class leaders. A few bad apples do not ruin the entire barrel.

Who Do Men Consider Qualified?

Some think a qualified leader should be a good mixer, enthusiastic, energetic, self-confident, charismatic, and these are beneficial qualities. But one could have all this and not be qualified for leadership in the church.

Some prefer those who have been financially successful, highly educated and articulate. It is fine to have these qualities, but much more is needed to be a church leader.

Some leaders have been appointed because of social position in the community or politics, family connections, and as often as not these traits prove to be handicaps rather than assets because they blind men to what matters most.

Having all these qualities can actually be dangerous to the church because even false teachers sometimes posses these things.

Who Does God Consider Qualified?

In His Word God has revealed the qualities necessary for leadership (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1). We shall not discuss these qualities here but take note that without these qualities a man is not ready for leadership in the church. These characteristics must be recognizable, demonstrated spiritual qualities. All Christians should possess most of them. They are traits of character that are developed and grown. WHAT a man is will be more important than WHO he is.

Is This Really a Problem? Is It Crucial?

Anything that has the potential of disrupting the church is a potential problem. Qualified leadership will prevent many problems whereas men not qualified in leadership invites them. Leadership is not a major problem everywhere. Some places seem to have the problem constantly; or at least most of the time. Most places have had the problem sometimes in the congregational history.

Some Moments of Crisis

Crisis exists when selections or additions are made to the leadership. The wrong man in the right place spells trouble.

There can be a crisis when decisions are impending about what to do regarding situations facing the church.

Sometimes a crisis arises when opportunities come before the church to do good work and differences regarding it become points of division.

Sin in the church is a crisis. Consider the crisis brought against Joshua and Israel when Achan sinned. Look at the problems disturbing the church in Corinth over sin. Sin cannot be tolerated, minimized, ignored or it will be like taking a serpent into the bosom.

A Study in Contrasts of Leadership

These are real life examples. The church was receiving a religious publication but it began to include uncertain messages and false doctrines. The elders wrote a courteous cancellation explaining why the paper was no longer welcome. That is good leadership.

A deliberate willful entrance into an adulterous marriage by one of the members led to withdrawal from her. That is good leadership.

The church received a sizeable contribution from an estate but did not allow the funds to remain idle for interest. They choose the most pressing need and opportunity and soon a bus was bringing many people to services that otherwise could not come. Good leadership was at work.

On the other hand, a gospel preacher warned from the pulpit of a false doctrine being openly propagated by liberals. He told who, where, when and why it was false. This upset the elders because it involved some family members at a school they supported and where their children attended. While they claimed they opposed the false doctrine they said the “timing” of the exposure was not best. Asked when would be a good time, no answer was forthcoming. That is sorry leadership hurting the church.

An eldership was advised that their preacher was preaching error regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. But one elder said the elders were not responsible for what came from the pulpit. As unimaginable as that sounds, it actually happened.

Why is This So Important?

The church cannot prosper and fulfill its duty with poor leadership. A congregation is seldom stronger than its leadership. Some, instead of being "pillars" in the church are "pillows," sound asleep on their job. Poor leadership not only affects the church today but generations to come. It also provokes rebellion, revolt and division from people who read the Bible; not content with following error.

When Apostasy Threatens

This is always a danger to the church. We live in a day when apostasy has already taken a deadly toll from legalists and liberals. Why cannot something be done to stop the bleeding? Something can be done. But it will take qualified leaders to do it.

Good leaders can often prevent apostasy if they just would. They have the authority do to so. Many times leaders lead the digression.

Leaders must be informed regarding error, know the truth, keep up with who is saying what and not let apostasy become a live problem. Truth can be known but it takes study. Knowledge of the brotherhood which affects the local church can be known without prying into other's business. How can you know what a preacher believes? ASK HIM! What is so hard about that? Some refuse to tell you what they believe because he is hiding his real stand. Send him a questionnaire. If he objects; drop him.

Elders must insist truth be taught from the pulpit and in classes. It is not right to leave it up to members to "tackle the preacher" when elders won't do it. Leaders should monitor all materials being used and not allow any

discordant ideas creep in. Elders are not obligated to let just anybody do anything they want.

Elders are to convict the gainsayers and mark false teachers as well as commend sound brethren. Some "fire" their preacher, but recommend him to others. This funny story was told to illustrate this point. The preacher was just lazy and would attend to his duties. Efforts were made to get him going but to no avail. Finally, he was dismissed. When the preacher applied at another congregation that congregation wrote back asking about him. The elders sent this note: "You will be very fortunate if you can get this man to work with you." That hardly told the truth about it.

There is no place for preachers that participate in such undermining digressive movements as Jubilee, the Tulsa Workshop, summit meetings with denominations, acting more like college promoting politicians than preachers of the gospel. Elders must take note of such things. Some churches will advertise whatever activity comes to their attention. That is worse than SORRY.

Those Who Fall Create a Crisis

It is a solemn and sacred duty to watch for the welfare of souls. Elders have that duty (Heb. 13:7). It hurts them deeply for one of the flock to stray. They try to keep up with brethren so none "fall through the cracks." It is made more difficult by those who are seldom active.

One couple who only attended worship now and then went away for over a month or so on vacation. When they returned they announced, "We're back." Somebody remarked, "Have you been gone?" We need to know where brothers and sisters are when absent from the assembly lest they drift away without proper attention.

The Prime Cause of Leadership Crisis

It has already been mentioned; the wrong man in the right place; one in leadership that is not qualified according to God's rule. The failure of leaders to use their authority to do their work brings crisis. They are also challenged with the temptation to be "boss" and lord it over the flock. How tragic this always is! They must lead; not drive. They have a work; not a position of glory. They must use caution; but not procrastinate. They must care; but not with needless delay. They must execute (carry out) the work; not execute it (kill it).To lead (pronounced leed) one must remove the lead (pronounced led).

A Long-term Crisis

This is a crisis that may last a generation. It is when a leader (elder, preacher, deacon or teacher) publicly sins. It ruins the reputation of the church throughout the community for years. There is no double-standard for behavior but there is a difference in influence and perspective. Let a church leader commit fornication, steal publicly, lie, divorce or use profanity in public and this harms the church beyond measure. Nobody will be perfectly sinless. But leaders must be above reproach. The world will scorn our Lord if leaders misbehave in such fashion. Any member that lives an ungodly life hurts the church. But when it occurs among leaders it is worse.

Inviting a Crisis

Training men to be leaders should be a priority in every congregation. Once asked when a person should start to prepare for leadership, one elder answered, "With his

grandmother." You cannot start too soon. Young men need to be taught to order their lives so they can be qualified leaders in maturity. They must be taught to respect the work and learn what it involves. Leaders should not be a novice. They must have a thorough knowledge of the Word. They must understand the principles of overseeing. This is not for self-advancement but for qualified leaders. They need to learn how to make good decisions. There is so much they need to know. Starting early is beneficial.

Good and Bad Examples of Leadership

Take your Bible and read about Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Nehemiah, the apostles and Christ. There you will find good leadership.

Now consider Aaron, Eli, Saul, the sons of Eli and Samuel, Jeroboam, Ahab and others like them and you will see bad leadership

In summary we can say that proper leadership is necessary to have a proper church. It takes good brethren to follow good leaders also. But good leadership is the place to start to make the congregation what God wants it to be. It is critical to the success of the church.

* * * * *

Satan, Our Enemy

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

This is a warning to Christians in the context of encouraging words to strengthen. There are certain implications in this warning we cannot escape.

Satan is real, living, active and evil. He is not just an influence, imaginative, in a red suit with horns and a forked tail. He speaks, communicates, deceives, slanders (Satan means slanderer), has knowledge, spoken of with personal pronouns and attributes of a person with intellect. The Bible presents him to be subtle (Gen. 3), a deceiver (1 Tim. 2), a liar (John 8:44), a tempter, (Matt. 4), a disputer (Jude), a destroyer (1 Pet. 5), our adversary and enemy. There is no question how the Bible presents the devil to be a real evil spiritual being.

The Bible tells us of his nature, purposes, his weapons and how he can be defeated. He is our enemy in our spiritual warfare (1 Cor. 10:4).

An Oft Asked Question

People ask about Satan, "Where did he come from; his origin." There are several views and I do not think we should be dogmatic about it. He is not divine but a created being. Some say he is a fallen angel (Luke 10:18); others say he is Lucifer (Isa. 14:12). I do not know his origin. But I do not have to know his origin to know his reality.

What the Devil Seeks to Accomplish

There are three goals the devil has. (1) If you are not in the church he wants to keep you out of it. The church is composed of the saved (Acts 2:47) and he does not want you to be saved. There are two spiritual kingdoms; his and the Lord's. He wants you to stay in his. (2) If you are in the church he wants you to leave it, quit, turn away and become apostate. Some deny that can happen but the Bible is replete with teaching that says it can and does happen (2 Pet. 2:20-22; 1 Cor. 10:12; 1 Cor. 9:27; Gal. 6:9). (3) If you

are determined not to completely fall away he wants you to be as useless in the church as you can be; even a hindrance and obstacle. Some will never work, don't cooperate, complain about everything, find fault with everybody, irregular at worship, objecting to the doctrine of Christ, living a worldly life with their name on the roll but not much else.

How Does He Do His Work?

He mixes truth with error; enough truth to make the error seem to be truth. There is not a direct operation on the heart, but through teaching and persuasion the professed angels of light will use lies, deceptions, excuses, misrepresentations and temptations to mislead. Some excuse their sins by saying, "I'm not the only one," as if somebody else's weakness will make their sin acceptable. Another will say, "How can you expect to learn what is true seeing all the division in religion?" Division does blind the eyes of many but truth can be known (John 8:32). "You cannot afford to offend others with your convictions." Some had rather offend God than a friend, or the memory of some departed loved one. "But the standards are too high." They are high. But God never asked of us what we cannot do. "I can't hold out." But God says you can and has provided what you need to hold out faithfully. The devil cannot defeat you against your will.

Tomorrow

If the devil can persuade us to postpone and put off doing what we ought to do he will have made a real advance against us. Read the following poem by Edgar A. Guest which explains it clearly enough.

He was going to be all that a mortal should be-
TOMORROW
No one should be kinder or braver than he-
TOMORROW
A friend who was troubled and weary he knew
Who'd be glad of a lift and he needed it, too
On him he would call and see what he could do-
TOMORROW.

Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write
TOMORROW
And thought of the folks he would fill with delight-
TOMORROW
It was too bad indeed he was busy today
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way
More time he would have to give others, he'd say-
TOMORROW.

The greatest of workers this man would have been
TOMORROW
The world would have known him had he ever seen
TOMORROW
But the fact is he died and faded from view
And all that he left here when living was through
Was a mountain of things he intended to do-
TOMORROW.

Three Angels on a Mission

This fable tells the story. God was to choose from three angels one who would persuade men not to prepare for the next life. The first said he would tell man there is no heaven. But God knew that would not work. The second

said he would tell them there was no hell. But God knew that was also futile. The third said he would tell them they must prepare but there is no hurry. He got the job.

How vulnerable people are to this deception! Young and old alike seem to think they have plenty of time to do what God shows is an emergency. The brevity of life and certainty of death should sober us. (Jas. 4:14; Eph. 5:6; 2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:12, 13, 15). Hosea wrote, "…it is time to seek the Lord…" (Hosea 10:12). Psalm 119:60, "I made haste and delayed not to keep the commandments of the Lord." Those who obeyed the gospel in New Testament records did so immediately, straitway, the same hour of the night. Ananias asked Paul, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

He Uses Compromise

A compromise is doing less than what God wants. The early church apostatized because it compromised. That is what "change agents" are trying to persuade brethren to do today. Compromise is not usually a giant leap into apostasy but a little taken at a time, step by step, a little here, and little there.

See how Pharaoh attempted to use compromise to frustrate the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. God said, "Let my people go." Pharaoh they could worship God in the same land. Moses said NO. Pharaoh relented slightly and said they could go but a short distance. Moses said NO. Pharaoh said just the men could go, but not the families. Moses said NO. Pharaoh said to leave their possessions behind. Moses said NO. Nothing would suffice but to do what God said was to be done.

A Most Powerful Weapon of Satan

What could possibly be his most powerful weapon is one that is given to him but those he seeks to destroy. If you are in the church you are the devil's mission field. He already holds others captive. Every soul is important to him just as it is with Christ. Satan is no fool. He believes in God, knows how to use his weapons and is skilled. Deception is a powerful weapon as is false doctrine, lies and lusts. He can even use our blessings if we permit it, like family, business, games, pleasure. Certainly sorrow, hardship, sadness, trails and failures are his tools. But nothing gives him more power than HYPOCRISY. Nothing misrepresents the Lord more than this. The most damaging blows can come from within more than from without.

We cannot deny hypocrisy exists. It is not being what you profess to be. Satan will tell people, "You don't need to be saved. You are just as good as those in the church." Sometimes it seems to be true. Some "Christians" are just as worldly, indulgent, lascivious, profane, greedy and dishonest as others. They may gossip, dance, drink alcohol, smoke the same brands or divorce for any cause just like the world. That does not justify anybody disobeying the Lord but it does discourage people from obeying Him. That only means the devil has two he holds captive.

The devil could point to the loyal and faithful disciples in the church. But he prefers to cite the two-faced hypocrite because that smears the Lord's people. Can he point to me? The church is not perfect but we are God's people and should live like that. "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?"

What Can We Do About the Devil?

How can we overcome Satan? James 4:7 says to resist the devil and he will flee from you. Matthew 4 shows Jesus to used the Word to ward off temptation. Eph. 4:25 says not to give place to the devil. 1 Pet. 2:2 teaches us to grow and learn to discern (Heb. 5:14) by feeding on the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2). God has provided the sufficient weaponry for us (Eph. 6). We must keep our eye on the Lord (Heb. 12:2) and fight the good fight of faith. Christ conquered Satan and when we are faithful in Christ we shall be victorious also (1 Cor. 15:58).

* * * * *

Come Ye Out From Among Them

It is assumed that it is correct that there be a separation from unfaithful brethren who digress from the truth by conduct or doctrine. This lesson shall deal with why this must be done and how to do it. Those who apostatize are still our brethren, like those in a physical family who may depart, but the relationship is changed.

God has provided a way to prevent and correct apostasy. We have the whole armor of God (Eph. 6). We have the all-sufficient Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The proper use of the Word equips us to wage a righteous warfare against all spiritual foes in and out of the church. Too often we fail to use what God has provided to defend and protect the cause.

Early in my years of preaching I was confronted with problems in the area where I was because of both legalism (anti-ism) and liberalism. There were those who were under the influence of “anti-preachers” and others wanting to unite with the Christian Church. I asked H. A. Dixon how

to handle the problem and he advised, “Preach the word,” positively, negatively, reprove, rebuke and exhort. Refute error but replace it with truth. Preach truth and defend it from attack. I have found this to be sound advice and the only way.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Please read this passage from your Bible. This is an apostolic instruction regarding what to do and how to do it with the blessings that follow. There are those with whom fellowship is unacceptable. There cannot be agreement with the way of Christ and evil. Light and darkness cannot mix. It is wrong to continue with those who apostatize as if it does not matter. Some act as if they do not believe this and will not obey what Paul teaches.

There must be proper discipline motivated by the proper motives. We are not judges drawing lines or “kicking anybody out of the church.” It is wrong not to use righteous judgment (John 7:24) or fail to respect the lines God has already drawn. This discipline must be obeyed by individuals and the church. To ignore it is to ignore a divine instruction how to keep the church as God wants it.

Preventive and Corrective Discipline

Preventive discipline is simply training correctly. Corrective discipline may be punitive. If either is dismissed the result will be “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” For the benefit of the church and the evildoer we must exercise proper discipline.

Some say withdrawal is not necessary because the apostate has already withdrawn from us. But this command is to the faithful. We cannot allow error to seem to be

acceptable and condoned. It may be easier to just "let it ride" because they have already left but that does not obey this teaching. Regardless of what we or they do this teaching remains the same.

It is not sufficient simply to refuse fellowship with the unfruitful works or darkness. We must also reprove them (Eph. 5:11). It is not hard to see that such people should never be allowed in the pulpit, teaching classes, leading youth groups or such like. We should not attend their activities that promote apostasy. One elder was heard to say why a false teacher was allowed to come hold a meeting, "It was too late to cancel it." It is never too late even if he is on his way to the platform. Some hear a false teacher and come away saying, "I didn't hear anything wrong" and determine his loyalty to Christ on one sermon. False teachers know how, when and where to plant tares and possibly on a given occasion no error may be taught. But where is his loyalty? What is his history of endorsement? What does he promote and condone?

Some would not recognize error if it slapped them in the face. They are so afraid of offending someone (usually a friend or member of the family) that they observe the "Passover" regarding their errors. Some refuse to find out where preachers stand. Send them a questionnaire and have them answer. If he will not; drop him. No eldership is obligated to turn anyone loose without knowing where he stands. Elders have an obligation to the congregation not to let just anybody get before them. Elders can stop apostasy easier and quicker than preachers if they only would. They have the authority and responsibility to do it.

The doctrine of this passage is the doctrine of Christ, His doctrine, not just doctrine about Christ although that would be included. Faithful Christians will not promote or go along with false doctrine. They will not bid "Godspeed" to those who do. If they do they become as guilty as the false teacher. Some boast, "I can preach the gospel anywhere." That may be too broad. We should not preach it where we know it will only be ridiculed, wrested, twisted, held up for scorn and maligned. There is such a thing as casting pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6). We are not to do anything that appears to condone or accept false doctrine.

1 Cor. 14:38 Paul gives advice regarding those who refuse truth. "But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." This means if one is determined to reject God's will let him alone. Let him stay as he is. Jesus taught, "But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:13, 14). Titus 3:10, "A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition reject." To appear to be "one of them" is to do service for the devil. It is treason against Christ.

After reading the following inspired words, learn what the Lord would have us do regarding those who forsake the truth. (2 Thess. 3:6, 14, 15; 2 John 9-11; Tit. 1:1-13; 3:10, 11; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; Romans 16:17). Why do some think they know better how to deal with those who persist in digression that God knows? Do these passages suggest God wants us to "go along" with such people or do they say, "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate?" Shall we not heed Paul's warning in Acts 20:29- 31. Read it and learn. Paul called names, places, marked, exposed and gave specific identification of doctrines and their sources that were contrary to the revealed will of Christ.

"But I don't like fighting over issues." Nobody likes conflict. But our Lord did not bring peace with everybody. Some would fight against Him. Nearly every epistle of the New Testament was written to deal with issues that had arisen in the church. Nothing makes a congregation more vulnerable to apostasy than a smug attitude that does not know what is taking place around them and take heed. "We don't have that problem here," some might say. Rejoice that you don't, but you can be sure if you are not prepared you will have the problem and it will overwhelm you.

The Real Purpose and Motive

Discipline, preventive, positive, corrective, punitive, negative, has the goal of protecting the church; a right thing to do. It is for restoring the fallen; a right thing to do. It is for defending the faith; a right thing to do. Gal 6:1 and James 5:19, 20 teach us how to approach the fallen in order to recover them. There is no hatred toward such people. It is love for their souls and hatred of the evil that enslaves them that calls us to take action. Can we be a friend and see one captured by the devil and do nothing about it? The sooner we recognize those in apostasy the better for the souls of all concerned. "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). When it becomes the last resort, "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate" saith the Lord.

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Departures from the Faith

The lesson should begin with reading the following passages from your Bible. (1 Tim. 4:1, 2; 2 Tim. 4:3, 4; 2

Pet. 2:20-22; Gal. 5:4; Acts 20:30, 31; 1 Tim. 6:10; Heb. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 10:12; 1 Cor. 9:27; John 5:19, 20; Matt. 10:22; Luke 17:32).

These passages affirm two pronounced points: (1) the possibility of departing from the faith, and (2) the reality of departing from the faith. Consider several Biblical persons that did depart from the faith.

Judas Iscariot

Some falsely claim Judas was never in the right relationship with Christ. But that defies revelation. He was an apostle (the one who kept the bag). He was sent to preach the coming of the kingdom under what is called the Limited Commission; just to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He was equipped with miraculous powers. He was privileged to hear Christ preach His doctrine about the Old Testament prophecies, His parables, the fundamentals of the new covenant. He could testify of miracles. He had close association with other apostles. He was with them in the upper room.

Sadly, he covenanted with Jewish leaders to betray Christ for thirty pieces of silver; the price of a slave. He sold his soul to the devil.

Later he grieved over what he had done and admitted he had betrayed innocent blood. He was sorry how things turned out but not sorry enough to make amends. He hanged himself. Today his name lives in infamy. It would have better if he had never been born (Matt. 26:24).

Demas

Demas is mentioned three times in Scripture but we can piece together his life. Philemon 24 he is listed alongside

the most stalwart companions Paul had in proclaiming the gospel with special commendation. Colossians 4:14 his name is mentioned along with others and every name received commendation except Demas. Was he slipping? 2 Tim. 4:10 we learn what happened to him. He departed from the faith, forsook Paul and their labors together, turn to the love of the world and left Christ. We cannot love the world and the Lord at the same time (1 John 2:15; Jas. 4:4). His focus was on the here and now to the neglect of spiritual matters and the life to come.

Several Named by Paul

Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14) did much evil against Paul and had not remained loyal to the faith.

Hymennaus (1 Tim. 1:20) was delivered unto Satan with Alexander because he rejected the resurrection and contended it had already happened. (That sounds much like some today and theories on AD 70).

Philetus is named alongside the first two (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17). Both were describe as a “canker.”

Phygellus and Hermogenes (1 Tim. 1:15) had turned away from Paul much like Demas.

Please note that Paul did not hesitate to name names. These men were apostates and could influence others the wrong direction. The reason people depart from the faith may vary but there is never a justification for it even though we may have an explanation of it.

Unnamed Departures

We know there were those of whom Paul warned whose names are not listed but who walked disorderly (2 Thess.

3:6); not according to the tradition handed of the apostles. Faithful brethren were to have no fellowship with them.

Romans 16:17 calls for marking (identifying and branding) those who cause division by teaching false doctrines. Their names are not listed but those who first received the epistle would know them. The same action must be taken today.

Acts 20:27 Paul warned of some elders who would draw away disciples after them and were called wolves in sheep's clothing. What could be more dangerous to sheep than a wolf among them that looked like he was one of them?

Peter warned of unnamed false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1) who would bring in damnable heresies.

2 John 9-11 spoke of those who transgressed the doctrine of Christ with a different doctrine. Such did not have God. Faithful brethren were not to bid them "Godspeed" lest they also be counted guilty of spreading false doctrines.

There is the unnamed brother in Corinth who was living immorally and who had to be disciplined. That discipline effort was successful and we learn he was restored. To have allowed that to go uncorrected would have cost many souls to be lost. That departure from the faith was very costly.

Judaizing Teachers

Who were they? They were the ones who were teaching that the Gentiles had to keep the Law of Moses, especially circumcision, to be saved. Paul said they taught a perverted gospel (Gal.1:7; 5:4). This was a challenge to the authority of Christ. Some were leading brethren away from Christ back into Judaism that cannot save.

The Churches in Asia

Christ sent seven letters to seven churches in Asia, most of them correcting some faulty teaching or behavior that had been adopted. They were not completely departed from the faith but were on the way there. The letters were efforts to prevent that from occurring. The letters prove the possibility of apostasy. Ephesus would have their "candlestick" removed. Philadelphia was called a synagogue of Satan. Thyatira permitted "Jezebel" to conduct her evil work. Laodicea was lukewarm and contemptible. These situations show apostasy is possible.

Present-Day Departures from the Faith

There are almost endless examples of departures. Many who were once faithful have decided to join those who wish to "update" the church and make it more acceptable to our age. They scoff at the faith they once proclaimed. They have cast their lot with the denominational world in joint services and fellowship. Their attitudes toward worship are more in sympathy with entertainment than reverence.. They teach false doctrines regarding salvation, worship, marriage-divorce-remarriage to accommodate the present society. They even adopt so-called "Bibles" that distort the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. They deny the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Some have openly boasted they no longer have an interest in restoring the New Testament church because it is irrelevant for our time. They preach "unity in diversity," which is not unity. Those who preach it do not desire unity but fellowship in spite of division. Who can doubt for a moment the possibility and reality of apostasy from this abundance of evidence?

Conclusion

Men may depart. Who thinks that changes the will of God? This is not a pleasant theme but a notation of a dark and growing cloud over the brethren. To depart from what Jesus taught is to depart from His purpose for coming the first time. Departure can happen. Even Paul realized it could happen to him. "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). We are responsible and we shall give an account (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Let us not depart from the faith. Let us sing sincerely, "I'll never forsake my Lord."

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Idols That Affect Man's Service to God

Any idol will affect man's service to God and adversely. Idolatry is strongly condemned in Scripture. God commands there are no other gods before Him. We shall consider just a few prominent idols mankind has. Having these gods makes our service to the true and living vain.

Most probably associate idolatry in terms of images; and that is included but is not the whole story. We can have idols that are invisible. Idols are prominent in pagan and heathen religions. Romanism has an abundance of idols. Men seem to want something, tangible, visible, material they can call their gods.

To make images for religious reasons for worship, or to represent that which is worshipped, is not the same as to make images that are symbolisms of non-religious things. For instance, there is a big difference between a little pin of a pair of infant feet that is a sign of anti-abortion and the relics of one called a "saint." A brazen serpent is not the

same as an image of Mary before which one bows. Two images of lions at the driveway entrance are not like a statue of Peter whose big toe is kissed away in adoration. A concrete bull in front of a meat packing warehouse or a horse in front of a barn is not like a statue of Buddha. A photograph is not sinful; nor are pictures representing Biblical physical characters to tell their story. The commands against image making do not forbid all sculpture, paintings and other art forms of symbolism.

They do forbid images that become the objects of worship as if they were sacred gods and become a substitute and replacement for God as the object of worship. To consider the sun, moon, stars, rivers, mountains as gods having divine power is idolatry. Some people bow down to such things, pray to them, kiss them and carry them about as objects of deity.

The brazen serpent, once commanded to be built by God for a specific purpose, was later turned into an idol and destroyed (Num. 21:9; 2 Kings 18:4).

What some do not realize is that it is idolatry to use images to represent deity even if the object itself is not what is worshipped. Aaron fashioned a golden calf to represent the God who led Israel out of Egypt. Paul called that idolatry (1 Cor. 10:7). This is why the dashboard statue of "Saint Christopher is a form of idolatry. (That statue is supposed to protect the car and its occupants from injury. The first one I ever saw was in a junk yard.)

Some of Man's Idols

Some things used for idols are not necessarily evil of themselves. Idols are nothing (1 Cor. 8:4). To eat meat offered to idols without intending to pay homage to it as a god is not sinful. What makes some idols wrong is by the way they are considered.

Man's Number One Idol

An idol is anything that comes between us and God, anything considered greater than God, anything to which we give allegiance before God. God must have first place. Men often put themselves before God and thereby make themselves an idol. It is the attitude, "Not thy will but mine be done." It is when men decide to do what they want and like rather than God's wishes that we commit idolatry. Man sometimes makes himself his own standard maker and judge. That displaces God. Consider the following Scriptures from your Bible and then return to these comments. (Rom. 12:3; 2 Pet. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:2; Luke 14:11; Gal. 2:6; Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12). These verses warn against making self more than we are. When men adopt theories and philosophies than challenge the wisdom of God they are attempting to make themselves their own god.

Modernism, humanism, skepticism, relativism, subjectivism, liberalism are the results of man becoming his own god. He becomes his own idol.

The idea that truth does not exist, we cannot know it, there is no right and wrong, a denial of the historicity of Christianity, a denial of the Deity of Christ, the creation, the Biblical miracles, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the Judgment to come, heaven, hell are the fruits of man becoming god in the place of the true and living God. Instead of divine wisdom men subscribe to human wisdom, "scholarship," and an elite superior view of themselves.

Self-made gods invent a new vocabulary. They may even use Biblical words but do not carry Biblical meaning. This is deceptive and deliberately so. They will talk about inspiration, truth, love, salvation, the virgin birth, the Son of God, etc. but they do not mean nor accept what the Bible

means and teaches with these words. That is blatantly dishonest but self-made gods are that way. They may refer to baptism, marriage, morality but have no relationship to how God uses thee words.

Paul said, "Let God be true and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). This concept of man being his own god comes from theologians, professors, schools, clergymen who exalt themselves. To reject whatever you do not want even if it comes from God is to remove God from His throne and you take His place. That is idolatry. There is no surer way to dethrone God than to disobey His word.

Mammon is a God

Mammon refers to material things, including money. The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Money causes people to do all kinds of evil deeds as lying, cheating, stealing, killing, selling the body, wars, etc. Money itself is not evil. But we must be careful how we acquire it, think of it, and dispose of it. It can be our undoing.

Monetary gain is the goal in life for some. It is not wrong to have business ambitions and seek a profit from your labor. But some people have the attitude to make all you can and can all you make. They enter the "dog-eat-dog" arena and run roughshod over anything or anybody that hinders them from getting money.

But Solomon warns us that money will not satisfy (Eccl. 5:10). Jesus said a man's life does not consist of what he possesses (Luke 12:15). The quest for money reveals greed, avarice, miserliness and desire for wealth above all else. "Keeping up with the Joneses" is all some want. They have the attitude of the thieves who fell upon the man on the

Jericho-Jerusalem road (Luke 10). They thought, "What's yours is mine if I can take it."

Our attitude toward our jobs and making a livelihood was wonderfully expressed by an elder I once knew when asked what he did for a living. He said being a Christian was his profession. He worked at the U. S. Rubber Company to make money to pay the bills.

Fame

It is glaringly apparent that being famous, having headlines, people recognizing you on the street is the height of ambition with many people. Some will do the most bizarre things to get the attention of the public and receive praises of men. Jesus warned, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 7:26). Getting one's name on a marquee, having it placed before other names, being in the spotlight is all the life some people seek.

Diotrophes was a bit like that; wanting to have the pre-imminence over others. People are so vulnerable to peer pressure and they seek the acceptance of others at a painful price, sometimes to their ruin.

The god of fame has caused the destruction of many.

Satisfaction of the Flesh

Lustful appetites, seeking pleasure even by sinful means, is a part of life for many. Moses could have had that but chose a higher level to live (Heb. 11:25). Some are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:4). Some have their belly as their god (Phil. 1:19). One was said to be dead while she lived in pleasure (1 Tim. 5:6).

That satisfaction of the flesh is a god is seen in how obsessed some people are with their physical appearance, the lusts they crave to satisfy, their riotous living. Even innocent pleasures can become gods when put in first place before God. Bodily exercise can fall into that realm (1 Tim. 4:7, 8). Sports, games, entertainment, hobbies, travel, all can become hindrances to our worship of God and seeking His kingdom first. These things do not have to be evil. They just have to be first, even before duty to God.

Men Make Gods of Other Men

Some actually worship the pope. Some worship Elvis. Some worship celebrities, sports stars, entertainers. They will cite men as authority and defend their conduct against the doctrine of Christ. Family is often moved into first place before God (Matt. 10:37). How many refuse to obey the gospel of Christ because some of their family, living or dead, would not approve?

But let us not be confused. God does not and will not surrender or share first place with anything, anybody at anytime. We perceive our allegiance that way or we will be condemned for idolatry. Listen to the inspired apostle when he writes, "Flee idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14).

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Vine and Branches

This lesson is a discussion of a parable of Jesus recorded in John 15:1-8. It is not a total study of that parable but some of the points made from it by N. B. Hardeman in the fourth series of Tabernacle Sermons, 1938, at the Ryman Auditorium on Nashville, Tennessee with a slight addition

ort two. The lectureship at Christianburg, Virginia was given to discussing his sermons in several of those series.

Teaching by parables was an oft used method by Christ. A parable is a comparison of some simple narrative about something with which people were generally familiar with some spiritual truth laid alongside of it to compare. In this way people could learn from the illustration the spiritual truth they needed. The narrative pertained to something that either had happened or could happen; a reality.

Why did Christ teach in parables? It is to clarify truth to those with an honest heart and make the truth obscure to those who love not the truth. Truth is more easily remembered when illustrated than if just presented in abstract terms. In this way Jesus could gain the attention and assent with His hearers before truth was revealed.

The Vine and Husbandman

Christ is presented as the vine. "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman." Obviously this is figurative language. The Father is presented as the husbandman; the one who prunes, nourishes and looks after the vine and branches and the fruit that is borne.

Christ is in the parable as is the Father and Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit was a prime implication in Hardeman's lesson. He pictured the Holy Spirit as the sap which flows, circulating beneath the bark, the life-giving current of the vine's circulatory system that produces the fruit. It refers to the feeding system. Fruit never grows on the vine itself but on the branches. But it never grows without the life-giving flow in the vine and branches. Sap does its work through the main vine and out to the branches that bear the fruit. That is the simple natural situation Jesus uses to make a spiritual comparison. The Holy Spirit does

His work through the vine (Christ) and out to the branches; not separate and apart from the vine. There is no fruit without the operation of the Holy Spirit. But how does the Holy Spirit operate?

There are two ways the Holy Spirit has operated: (1) directly, and (2) through the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Hardeman commented, "If you believe that the sap in the natural realm ignores all means and goes direct to the fruit out on the branches and begins to do its work, then you are prepared to accept the unreasonable, the unscriptural, and the wholly foreign idea of a direct and immediate operation of the Holy Spirit. If, on the other hand, you get the idea that the sap, in the natural world, comes through the trunk and branches, then you are prepared to accept the truth that the Holy Spirit operates upon the heart of the sinner through a medium, and that medium is the book of God."

We can dispense with the concept of the Holy Spirit working directly or "in conjunction with" the Word. He works by and through the Word to affect the heart of man.

"In me"

"Every branch in me," (verse two). All the branches are connected to the vine. That connection is "in Christ," not out of Christ. The branch under consideration was "in Christ" but not bearing fruit. Some branches did; some did not. The husbandman takes away the branch that bears no fruit. This refutes the doctrine once-saved-always-saved.

The branches that produce fruit are pruned, helped, purged so they will bear more fruit. Branches without fruit were cut away. The branches that bore fruit were kept.

Jesus said, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” The word was spoken, heard, believed obeyed and continued therein.

“Abide in me and I in you.” To abide means to dwell, live, continue. Emphasis is on the continued fellowship, joint participation, between the vine and branches. The branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine. There is no hope whatsoever for a branch cut off to bear fruit apart from the vine. There is more hope for a weak branch that remains attached to the vine than for that branch that has been cut away and is separate from the vine.

Apart from Christ there is no hope of producing spiritual fruit (verse five). One may be moral, a fine father, a good husband, and splendid neighbor, public-spirited, charitable and religious, but he cannot be saved by his own good works apart from the vine who is Christ. Many do not understand this and think just “being good” is all that is necessary to go to heaven. “Being good” is essential but not sufficient. One must be “in Christ.”

Does not this behoove us to learn how to get into Christ? Salvation is “in Christ” (2 Tim. 2:10). In fact, all spiritual blessings are “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). To get into Christ one must believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ and be baptized in water for the remission of sins to be saved. Our redemption is “in Christ” (Eph. 1:7).

What Does the Branch Represent?

Jesus said, “If a man abide not in me…” (verse 6). The branch is a person, not a denomination. Sometimes people speak of what they call the “branches of the church.” The church has no branches. What they want to convey is that each denomination is just a branch. But no denominations

existed for several hundred years after Christ. The record specifically says a man. If a man does not abide, continue, live connected with the vine he is cut off, withers, dies and is burned. We dare not pass over these words lightly.

Just as a branch can be cut off, die, wither and be burned, so with man who was "in Christ" but departed. His heart can become so seared and his conscience so deadened that even the truth makes no favorable impression on him. Branches once in the vine but fruitless are cast off, withered, gathered and burned.

Apostasy is possible but faithfulness is possible. Branches can bear fruit, and abide in the vine and continue.

How to Abide

This is one of the more important points of this parable. It is established that the branch and vine must be connected. Branches that do not bear fruit are cut off. Branches that bear fruit are pruned and nurtured.

The way to abide is to let "my words abide in you (verse seven). This is the same way we are made clean. Bearing fruit is to bring glory to God (verse either). There is no surer way to become separated from the vine than to not abide, continue and live faithfully in His word. How can one reject Christ more certainly than denying His word?

The Same Fruit

Every branch bears the same fruit. You do not have one branch bearing apples, one bearing oranges, and another tomatoes. Nor do you have branches that are "in Christ" bearing Mormons, Baptists, Methodists, etc. etc. Why should we not be content to be Christians without the

human appendages we see in our world? Such divisive names are of human origin and divide.

Hardeman quoted Charles Spurgeon, Baptist preacher, who said, "I look forward with pleasure to the day when there not be a Baptist living. I hope they will soon be gone. I hope the Baptist name will soon perish; but let Christ's name endure forever." He was speaking of the denominational division called Baptist. Martin Luther said, "I pray you leave my name alone, and call not yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for anyone." These men recognized the error of denominational names. Those working for the restoration of New Testament Christianity do not condone the use of human names.

Hardeman quoted others who spoke the same sentiment. We wonder why they did not put what they said into practice.

Hardeman said he had never seen the day he wanted to be distinguished from any faithful Christian by some unbiblical name. The very idea is wrong. We should wear the name of the One who died for us (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). That name is "Christian." Christ is the bridegroom and the church is His bride. The church should wear His name. He is the foundation, founder, head and Savior of the church. The branches are persons that belong to Him and are of the same vine.

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Love for the Truth

Second Thessalonians 2:10, "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they

might be saved." This is descriptive of the lost who, because of unrighteousness, do not love the truth and therefore will not be saved; at least in that condition.

We need a clear understanding what we are to love. There is truth in many areas such as medicine, geography, history, etc. We want truth in every area, but especially truth regarding the soul. We are admonished to love a certain truth. Notice the list: the truth of God (Rom. 1:25); the truth of Christ (2 Cor. 11:10); the word of God (John 17:17); the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:5); that truth that Jesus personified (John 14:6); all the commandments of God (Psalm 119:151).

The Necessity of Knowledge

Can we love truth unless we know what the truth is? We can want the truth but we cannot love what we have never heard just as we cannot believe having never heard. We need knowledge of the truth before we can love it. Some contend nobody can know the truth and they know that such a contention is the truth! Can you imagine that? Some even say there is no such thing as truth and even if there is we cannot ever know what it is. They say truth trying to discover the truth is like looking for a black cat in a dark room that is not even there anyway. How do they know that is true? Where did they learn that?

But we can know the truth (John 8:32). There were those in New Testament times who knew the truth (2 John 1). Some were walking in truth (3 John 4). How could this be said if nobody could know about truth?

The things God created are to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:3). Heb. 10:26 mentions those who willfully sinned even after knowing the truth. Not only can we know the

truth but we can understand it (Eph. 3:1-5). A mystery is something that may not be known but can be known. The truth here is called the "mystery of Christ," meaning, that the truth of Christ was once unknown because it was unrevealed but now it can be known because it has been revealed. It is no longer a mystery.

Just how much Biblical evidence does one need to refute this foolishness what we cannot know the truth? But the big question is: will we know it? When we do, will we love it? Many learn it and come to know it but never love it.

Motive

What is our motive for knowing the truth? The truth can set us free from the Law of Moses (Rom. 7). It set us free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8). It grants to us liberty in Christ (John 8:32). Are not these reasons enough for us to love the truth?

In addition, it is by the truth that the heart is purified (1 Pet. 1:22). We are sanctified, set apart, made holy, by the truth (John 17:17). We are saved by the word of truth (James 1:21. Peter went to the house of Cornelius to preach the gospel to them. Cornelius had been told they would be saved by the word Peter spoke (Acts 11:14). Peter's preaching enabled them to hear the word of the gospel, believe, obey and be saved (Acts 15:7).

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). We want to be saved from sin, but there is no salvation apart from hearing, believing and obeying the truth (Acts 18:8). There is no "new birth" without being begotten and we are begotten by the word (1 Pet. 1:3). How much more motivation does a person need or expect to have a love for the truth?

Everyone, however, does not love the truth as is evident from our opening text and as we can observe in daily living. Preaching the truth can even make enemies (Gal. 4:16). Some turn their ears away from the truth (2 Tim. 4:4). James 3:14 says that some do what is unthinkable but do it anyway; that is, lie against the truth. Some in Galatia to whom Paul wrote were not walking uprightly according to the truth (Gal. 2:14).

Love in Attitude and Action

Love is an emotion and an attitude that demonstrates itself by word and deed. How do we know we love the truth? This is something that considers the heart of man. If we love the truth we will believe and obey it. We will never exchange the truth for a lie. Proverbs 23:23, "Buy the truth and sell it not." We will strive to live harmoniously with the truth. Loving the truth is the result of a deliberate choice. Living the truth is also a choice. Those of our opening text neither loved nor lived the truth.

When we love the truth we will search for it where it can be found; in the word of God. Like the noble Bereans, we will search the Scriptures daily. We will consider truth the most valuable commodity to possess. We will receive the truth as did those on Pentecost. Paul told the brethren in Thessalonica, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through the sanctification and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). We will be of the disposition, once truth is established, to accept it and hold to it.

Like the early Christians, we will be willing to suffer for the truth. Many of them gave their lives for the truth. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute,

and say all manner of evil against you, for my sake" (Matt. 5:11). Suffering for the truth has been the history of Christians. We can expect persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

Along with that we will have a strong desire to proclaim the truth to others that they also might be saved. Concern for the souls of others is a characteristic of Christians. We will never be ashamed of truth even as we live in a skeptical and wicked world that is hostile to the truth. We will speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

Finally, but not the Least

When we love the truth we will defend the truth. There have always been those who attack the truth. Such exist now and will exist until the Lord comes again. Jude 3 urges that we contend earnestly for the faith. Paul was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). Some will wrest, twist, malign and misrepresent the truth. Error cannot be tolerated because "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (`1 Cor. 5:6). Error will take away the church, salvation, heaven, not only for us but for those loved ones who follow after us. We have different abilities and capacities for defending the truth and there are different weapons. Not everyone is skillful with every weapon. But we must resign ourselves to fight for the truth because that is the will of God. The psalmist wrote, "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

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Love Your Enemies

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor. 13:13). The word

translated charity is often translated love. I like charity better and shall explain later. Love has definitions, boundaries, limits and expectations. Scripture presents to us examples of love and instructions regarding the subject. It is so broad that it cannot be fully discussed in one lesson. This lesson will focus on one point regarding love and that is love for enemies.

We may not like to think so but it probably true that everyone has some enemies. An enemy seeks your harm and destruction, even your death. Criminals are our enemies. Those who subscribe to the religion of Islam are our enemies because they would deny us religious freedom under threat of punishment or death. Enemies seek to humiliate, exploit, defame, take advantage and assassinate character to take you down. People have enemies because of race, religion, business, politics and other things where there is competition with envy and jealousy. It is possible our treatment of others contributes to them being our enemy. One old gentleman was ninety-eight years old and not an enemy in the world. Asked how that was possible, he said, "I have outlived the dirty rascals."

Christians Have Enemies

The forerunner of Christ had enemies. The early Christians had enemies. There have those who have sought to destroy Christianity down through the ages. Christians have accepted that challenge as a fact of life. Christ implied there would be enemies in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:43-48). It may not seem fair but the righteous suffer (Matt. 5:10-12). The devil is our adversary who seeks to destroy (1 Pet. 5:8). Peter encouraged brethren who were under persecution (1 Pet. 4:12-16).

Our enemies can come from unexpected sources like the family (Matt. 10:17-22, 34-36). Paul was once an enemy of Christians and later suffered as a Christian. Some counted him an enemy because he told them the truth Gal. 3:16). It has always been that way (2 Tim. 3:12). In a world that for the most part is hostile to what we believe, is it any wonder that we have enemies? Our concern is not that we have enemies because of our faith, but how to treat those who choose to be our enemies. What does it mean?

The Meaning of Love

The word "agape" which means love means to seek the other's highest good as God has determined what is good. It means putting the interests of the other before self. Loving is the result of a deliberate and sacrificial choice.

There are priorities of love. We are to love many things but not all just alike. Our first love is to God. We love the brethren, family, friends and even people we do not know. The hardest kind to love is love for our enemies. We have a responsibility to put love for some before love of others. A man should love his wife more than a friend; his children more than a neighbor; his brethren more than an enemy. There are things we are to hate, also. We are not to hate people but we are to hate the evil people do. It is often most difficult to separate the two.

Best Interest

What is the best interest of our enemies? We strive to live at peace with all men as far as possible (Rom. 12:18) short of surrendering or compromising God's truth. We have no right to tamper with truth.

We have a duty to teach, persuade and seek the salvation of those who hate us. We are to resist the devil so he will flee from us. We are oppose his actions, seek our enemies' salvation in a spiritual warfare; not a carnal warfare. This requires us to oppose him and his ways. We are not to encourage the enemy to add to his hatred against us. In spite of all we can do, sometimes some are not content except to be our enemy. The enemy may not understand his own best interest. It is true of everyone that being right with God is the most important interest we have.

Fight Fire with Fire

"A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). That may be an effective way to deal with enemies. We are not to do as was done to us. Under the Mosaic Law it was "eye for eye; tooth for tooth." That violates the Golden Rule (Matt. 5:12). We seek no vengeance against an enemy and do not retaliate as he has done to us. It has been suggested, "Don't get mad; get even." That is not the Christian response. We do retaliate in kind or "even the score;" do not take the law into our own hands and execute judgment reserved for proper authorities (Rom. 13:1-4). It is hard to see injustice done but human judges commit that travesty all the time. When authorities do not handle a situation properly is when we are really put to the test. We know that God will take proper vengeance and will pay back as justice demands unless it covered by the grace and love of Christ in forgiveness. "For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, the Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:30, 31).The wicked shall not escape what is due (Gal. 6:7, 8). We should not have the attitude "one day

you will get what you deserve and I'll be glad." Christians would never be glad for one to die unprepared to meet God. But we have the knowledge and assurance that God will in His time and His way balance the scales (Deut. 32:4). With that assurance we can endure hatred from our enemies. We do not need to concern ourselves with "getting even."

Romans 12:18-21

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

One of my very small grandson's was telling me about a problem he was having with a fellow student in kindergarten who was bothering him. I told him when people do us wrong we are to do them good. He looked up at me with an air disgust and said, "Who made that rule?" When I told him God made that rule, he bowed his little head and said, "Well, that makes a difference." It does make a difference.

When we do good for the one who is our enemy it will, in figurative language, heap coals of fire on his head. It will embarrass him, make him see the evil of his ways, and hopefully change his behavior. We will continue to oppose evil, warn them and others of the evil, try to prevent him from doing harm (physically or spiritually), and with a spirit of willingness to forgive. After all, that is for our benefit as well as his (Matt. 6:14, 15). It may not help him but it is essential to us.

There may come a time that the only recourse we have will be to shake the dust from off our feet (Matt. 10:4; Acts

13:51), quit casting pearls before swine (Matt. 10:4) and "let them alone" (Matt. 15:13, 14).

The Highest Level

Loving our enemy is the highest level of love (Matt. 5:46, 47). It is to be like God. Jesus loved in spite of being hated (Rom. 5:8, 9). We can expect enemies because He had them (1 John 3:13; John 15:18, 20). This matter is very serious because we shall be judged how we handle this. Some we love because it is so natural and easy to love them. Some we love out of a deliberate choice. It is a hard choice regarding enemies.

Love is an emotion that is demonstrated by action. This is why I prefer the translation charity (action) to love.

* * * * *

New "Bibles"

Conflict over what are called "new modern speech versions" has been raging for some time and will not likely end. Faithful brethren have heard much on the subject but those who promote the new "Bibles" seldom consider it. Most of the advocates of them prefer not to discuss them and brush aside any objections to them with the wave of a superior elite hand, not understanding the issue.

Not the Issue

It is not simply a matter of a new version updating archaic words, nearly all of which are still included in most dictionaries and can easily be defined. It is much easier to define an archaic word which is not an error than it is to explain away a false doctrine that has been inserted into the

text. It is not just a matter of opinion which "version" one advocates. New version advocates often quote brethren of yesterday who contended that it is just an opinion which version you use but they were talking about the KJV and the ASV; not these new slang speech distortions so abundant today. Nobody would endorse the Cotton Patch version. Even modern speech advocates dismiss that one. Which reliable version is upheld may well be just a matter of opinion but not all that have hit the market of late are reliable translations as shall be demonstrated.

Nobody is opposed to everything you find in a modern speech version. Nobody opposes private reading of a modern speech version. Nobody contends there are inspired translators. These ideas are often put forward by advocates of modern versions as the reason they are opposed, but that simply is not true- AND THEY KNOW IT.

A correct translation is inspired. Jesus and the apostles often quoted from the Septuagint Version and called it the word of God. A correct translation can be called the word of God, but not a mistranslation or something set forth as a version which is nothing better than a human commentary with rewritten wording that does even teach the same thing.

The Issue

The issue of the modern speech "Bibles" is the inspiration of the Bible. This is the battle of our day. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, the Scriptures are inspired of God (God-breathed), therefore inerrant, infallible, authoritative and all-sufficient. It is a divine, verbal and plenary inspiration (1 Cor. 2:12, 13). 2 Pet. 1:20, 21 rejects the idea of just "thought" inspiration; meaning God spoke to man and man wrote down in his own words what he thought God meant. What we have is not just some man's "interpretation" of God's

word, but we have God's word. We should attempt to GET the meaning of what God has said and not GIVE a meaning to it to suit man's agenda. God did not tell men something and then they put their "spin" on it.

If all we have is what the writers "thought" God meant, and then have translators who wrote down what they "thought" the writers meant, then we have two steps away from the word of God and two "interpretations" of man. It is significant that the composers of such books as the NASV, TEV, NEB, LB, RSV and NIV subscribe to "thought" inspiration. But this is not what the Bible says. There is a difference between a commentary and paraphrase on one hand and a true and accurate translation.

The translators of the KJV, ASV and NKJV believed in the divine, verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture. They handled it as the word of God; not man's "interpretation" of the word of God. Why should we accept as a Bible a "version" founded on a false "inspiration?"

Observe the Words

Words have meaning. They are a means of communicating thought from one mind to another. Otherwise, they are no more than sounds or marks on a page. God chose words to reveal His mind to man.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). A similar reading is found in Luke 4:4). (Many modern speech versions omit the phrase "but by every word…") It is a quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3.

Isaiah 7:14 is a prophecy regarding "almah," (a virgin according to Matthew 1:21). Some modern "Bibles have "almah" as no more than a young woman.

Acts 11:13, 14 God used words for Peter to tell the house of Cornelius what to do to be saved.

Peter preached Christ on Pentecost, answered their question what they were to do, and with many other words taught them what they needed to know (Acts 2:40).

1 Cor. 2:7, Paul spoke the wisdom of God, "not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth…"

Man has no right to tamper with God's word, change it, substitute, rewrite, add to or take from what God has said.

An Incredible Statement

On more than one occasion I heard a "scholarly" apostate who admits he no longer subscribes to the idea of restoring New Testament Christianity say when you read the RSV, KJV, ASV and NIV you are reading the very words of God. That is incredible since they do not read alike; not simply with synonyms, updated words and the like. They teach different doctrines in many places; even some that contradict other passages. They contain doctrines that were once not welcome among faithful brethren but now are heard far and wide, such as faith alone, inherited sin, miracles today, salvation without baptism, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, etc. Does this matter to you? These perverted versions are the source of many false doctrines being taught among us and they are being promoted by the "scholars" in the schools and tolerated.

Specific Examples

Let us look at some of the items that should give us concern. Regarding questions about the RSV one "scholar" said that when it is accepted by the religious world "time

will make fools of us." Some are so concerned about what those of the religious world think. Why not be concerned about what is true? Objectors were ridiculed by "scholars' who have since been proven to be the "fools" as more and more brethren realize the RSV is faulty. Why adopt as our Bible a book that demeans the Deity of Christ by removing "virgin" from the text, as advanced by the anti-Christian Jewish rabbi who was in charge of the Old Testament work? The RSV says it uses the term "you" with reference to humanity but "thee, thine" with reference to Deity, then uses the term "you" with reference to Christ. Does that not open our eyes to the agenda of the RSV that is supposed to accommodate the World Council of Churches?

The NIV contains denominational dogma like Calvinism, having man born in sin, with a sinful nature, faith only, miracles today, pre-millennialism, direct operation of the Holy Spirit on man. 2 Pet. 3:10 with reference to the Lord's return has the earth "laid bare" rather than "burned up." Of course, if it is "burned up" there won't be a place for the Lord to establish the kingdom He failed to establish on His first trip. I once told some brethren in Texas that some of the area I had driven through to reach them looked like the Lord had already come according to the NIV. It was surely "laid bare."

One "scholar" on television said there is no difference between the KJV and NIV on Psalm 51:5. How can he say that? The NIV reads, "Surely I have been a sinner, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." The KJV reads, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." The NIV has man born guilty of sin; the KJV has man born into a world of sin. Quite a difference!

Eph. 4:13 teaches the continuation of miracles that were to be used to confirm the word being revealed "til we all come in the unity of the faith." It does not say until we are

united or all believe alike. It was until the full, complete, oneness of the faith of Christ was revealed (1 Cor. 13:10).

Eph. 5:19 in the NIV says "make music." You can make music several ways, including playing instruments. God specified how to make music acceptable to Him in worship. He said, "Sing." Why cannot man accept what God says? When did man become wiser than God?

Rom. 1:17 teaches our salvation is "by faith from first to last." That advances the doctrine of faith only which is contradicted in many passages. It is not faith from first to last even though faith is included.

The so-called Living Bible takes the prophecy regarding the coming of the kingdom, the house of God, in Jerusalem to mean Jerusalem will become the world's greatest attraction (Isa. 2:2-4). Gen. 6:4 has evil spirits sexually involved with human women to produce giants. In Luke 1:27 "virgin" is changed to mean a mere girl. That is blatant dishonesty.

The NEB says the reason for the darkness at the cross of Christ was only an eclipse, a natural phenomenon, for three hours. The text shows it was timed and directed as an act of God and was a miraculous manifestation declaring Christ.

In Matthew 16:18 the NEB has too many rocks. In the NIV Christ calls Peter, the rock, and upon this rock He would build His church. Peter- rock, another reference to a rock; and then the rock as the foundation of the church! There are not three words meaning "rock" in the passage but only two. Catholics claim Peter is the rock on which the church is built but the rock of the church is the truth confessed by Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The NKJV is probably the most reliable of the modern speech Bibles because it adheres closely to the text. It updates some words but is essentially what the KJV

teaches. There is a bad blunder in Matt. 19:9 where Jesus said "fornication" was the grounds for divorce and the NKJV has it "sexual immorality." Fornication is sexual immorality but one can be sexually immoral in more ways than fornication. Fornication is the only cause allowed for divorce. Even this is better than the NIV which reads "marital unfaithfulness." There are many ways one can be unfaithful in marriage without committing fornication. Why not leave the passage alone?

Contemporary English Version is not widely known. Like others it perverts "almah" and "parthenos" to not always mean virgin; but they do. Some schools were promoting this false distortion even as the administration denied it was being done. I had copies of their material that showed it was being done. Wow! Did that ever set off an explosion- against me; not the error.

The Easy-to-Read Version must be for the "scholars." It has Matthew 5:18 contradicting Eph. 2:15 regarding destroy and abolish. When this error was cited to an advocate of this version he brushed it aside with, "I have heard that before," as if it did not make any difference anymore. He will keep on hearing it as long as he promotes a book with this tremendous error. Remember, some of these "scholars" deny the old law has been set aside for Christ. Now they have a so-called Bible that helps them.

It is not correct to equate demon possession with being epilepsy. Why change the times of forgiveness from seventy times seven to read seventy seven? Some just have to have change at any price.

A Big Mistake

But someone whines, "I like the way the NIV says…" Who cares what you like? What does God say? That is all

that matters. “But Doctor So-and-so said…” Who cares what he said. He is not God. “Some believe…” So what? That does not set the standard of truth.

Attacks are made against the KJV assuming that will validate the new things. If you prove the KJV is wrong from first to last you have not proved the new things true. What would the advocates of modern speech perversion do without Easter in the KJV? That is an incorrect translation. The word should be Passover. But if the use of Easter “authorizes” the observance of that day as a holy day for Christians, (as critics of the KJV affirm) then the word Passover “authorizes the Christian to observe the Passover. Neither is true. (Isn’t it strange that some who say they object to the word Easter in the KJV observe Easter with denominations as a holy day?)The word Easter does refer to a man-made holy day. But it also refers to a season of the year. The crucifixion of Christ and His resurrection did occur in the portion of the time now called the Easter season. This does not justify the faulty translation but explains why the term is used.

Advocates of modern perversion deny that elders have the right to decide which versions will be used publicly in worship as if they no longer have the oversight of the congregation. “Let the ‘scholars’ decide,” and let elders bow at their altar. “See their degrees!”

The issue is truth versus error regarding modern speech “versions.” We do not want a faulty standard. The restoration of New Testament Christianity was accomplished by the use of the KJV. Why not use it?

Winners and Losers

Sometimes one will ask pertaining to this conflict, “Are we winning or losing?” What does that matter? We are

probably losing if we stand for the truth regarding these new things? People want what they want and like what they like and the will of the Lord does not take first place. Nearly every college condones them. Liberal teachers exalt them. Some big liberal churches spread them around. Some want something "new" more than something "true." Truth is not determined by counting noses, especially the noses of "change agents."

We are thankful for the many places that are concerned about the integrity of what is called the word of God and are standing firm for the truth regarding it.

* * * * *

Current Causes of Apostasy

Notice the title closely. The word "causes" is plural because there are many things causing apostasy. We want to notice several of them, how they can and should be prevented so we can learn from the past and stop further erosion. This will lead to constructive rebuilding.

Apostasy is the abandonment of previous loyalty, like Judas and Demas. It is defection, desertion, renunciation of that once held. It is described as "they went out from us" (1 John 2:19) and are no longer of us though they once were.

Current refers to that which is causing apostasy now in contrast to causes of apostasy in the past. There was apostasy in the Old and New Testaments. Romanism and Protestantism are evidences of apostasy. The efforts to restore New Testament Christianity have been hit by apostate movements with legalism and liberalism, various doctrinal "isms" that were once threatening. We are now concerned with doctrines that generate a massive onslaught

against Christ, the church, the Bible and faithful brethren. The devil has too often been very successful.

In principle, today's apostasy is like that of the past but varies in subject matter, geography and people involved. It is often the result a gradual drift with brethren not being alert. It also is promoted intentionally by "change agents." Apostasy certainly refutes the false doctrine of "can't fall."

The Overriding Cause

Rejection of the authority of God is what causes apostasy. This rejection is the result of man exalting himself, following the foolishness of human wisdom rather than divine revelation, egotism and seeking to be a "big name." One rather obvious cause is ignorance. This is no reflection on intelligence but refers to being misinformed, uninformed and untaught. Some years ago a NBC reporter was talking about a dictionary that had a drawing of the Ark of the Covenant beside the word "ark." He sneeringly said some people believe Noah and his family lived in that box for over a year to escape a flood. He was supposed to wise? Jesus told the Sadducees why they were so wrong. "Ye do err not knowing the scriptures…" (Matt. 22:29). Some say they did not hear any error from a false teacher but that could be because they do not know enough truth to recognize error if it slapped them in the face.

Some try to use "local autonomy" as a cover for false doctrines being taught. Each congregation is self-governing but that was never meant to be a place to hide error. Peter accused those who crucified Christ to have done it ignorantly (Acts 3:17). Jesus said while on the cross, "They know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Paul said the Jews they were acting not according to knowledge (Rom. 10:1, 2). Little wonder we hear how some withhold extending the

Lord's invitation, show Andy Griffith films at services, use fun, games, gimmicks and gadgets to create emotion to win "converts." One man told me he left one congregation when after three weeks of "sermons" not one, NOT ONE, Scripture was even cited, let alone read. Why cannot brethren who are otherwise sensible see the need for Biblical preaching? Not only do elders and preachers need to know the truth but every member. Nobody can lead astray a congregation where the membership is thoroughly informed regarding "thus saith the Lord."

Compromise

The early church apostatized. That is because it compromised. How presumptuous man is to think he has the right to compromise what is not his; namely, God's truth. We have a choice regarding truth: accept it or reject it. We do not have the option to change it, alter it, mix it with denominationalism, modernism, liberalism or any such thing. Our goal is not to make everybody happy and feel good. We must please the Lord even if some are disturbed. "Some measure success by how many they exclude," critics of truth will say. That is a lie. But some do measure success by how many they can include regardless of the truth. "Just maybe they will be accepted by God anyway," some contend. What right does a man have to say that about those who obey not the gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-9)? If there is another way of salvation than Christ, what is it?

Unity in Diversity

Is there such a thing as a white blackbird, or a swift turtle? Those who cry "unity in diversity" do not seek unity but fellowship in spite of division which is contrary to

truth. The Bible gives the basis for unity to be the truth accepted. We can be united in error and all go to hell together. Unity is not the ultimate goal; certainly not union.

Some cite Mark 9:39, 40 as justification for unity in diversity. The passage is not talking about denominations or those who teach error. It refers to those who did what they did in the name of, by the authority of, Christ. They were not of the apostles but were on the same side.

Some say we can learn a lot from denominations. What we learn from denominations is to follow men and reject the Bible. Why accept "denomination baptism" even though it is not the baptism taught in the Scriptures? Some marry outside the church and are led into apostasy by their mate. Some absorb denominational material because it is so "sweet and kind" without regard to truth. Some do not really convert before adding people to their role. "Join now and learn later," is the cry. There is much to learn once we are born again. But some have not learned enough to begin. I held a meeting in a city where the year before there had been a big campaign which reported ninety-six baptisms and received much publicity. Of that number only one year later only one, **ONE**, attended worship services with the brethren. Some of the number never attended once. Many had been pushed beneath the water but had not been converted. No wonder there is apostasy!

The Desire to be Accepted

"Go along to get along" is the manner of some. They want others to like them. Who doesn't? At what price? Some castigate "name calling." One prominent brother said those who call names are "religious nuts." (I feel sure Paul would be flattered.) Israel wanted to be like the nations around them and soon left the way of the Lord. Some will

not condemn error but they have strong words of condemnation for those do condemn error. One good brother said there are two places he has no friends (the pulpit and the golf course.) Critics of criticism are odd!

New or True

"Change agents" have persuaded some that anything old must be discarded and only something new is worthwhile. They sneeringly brand anything old as "traditionalism." It may be, but there are two kinds of traditions (something handed down): human tradition and apostolic tradition). Truth is not determined by age but source. Error is also old (remember Eden?)

Some liberals were once rabid "antis." They switched. The inactivity of some brethren has provoked some of this. I heard a young fellow say in a "business meeting, "Let's do something even if it's wrong." That is not the answer to lethargy and dullness.

Holding the old just because it is old is not wise. Taking the new simply because it is new is not wise either. "Buy the truth and sell it not," (Proverbs 23:23), is the standard.

An Obsession

Some have gone overboard for what they consider to be "scholarly." They think having some arbitrarily determined academic degree from some school is to be "scholarly." Even some preachers and elders have bought into that. Some elders will not have a preacher who has no "degree." How some advertise their degrees! I was once introduced as having a good education (maybe) and degrees but the man added, "But you can't tell it." What did he mean?.

Schools have been on the front lines taking the church into apostasy because so many "professors" have drunk so deeply from the cisterns of error as they obtained their degrees and now they spew that stuff before students and churches as if it warranted acceptance.

A Craving

Some brethren have a craving for big numbers, large contributions, notoriety, headlines, prestige and fame. They will not peach the "whole counsel of God" because it may offend some of their number and they want the numbers. It may adversely affect the contributions and they want the contributions. It may make them unpopular and they want to be popular. They are like those described by Paul, "…whose God is their belly…" (Phil. 3:19). But when they finish their message everybody feels good.

Positive and Negative

Listen to liberals denounce negative preaching. They are so negative about being negative. But their inconsistency is acceptable because they are above others. If God could have had their advice when He gave Moses the Ten Commandments the words would have been ten suggestions that were optional. The "thou shalt not" commands would never have appeared.

Some, in their desire to never offend anybody, offend God, They want to be politically correct and disturb nobody. Can you read in the New Testament anybody coming to Christ that was not first disturbed? The gospel is not how to win friends and influence people but to save souls from spiritual death. How they distort true love and show hatred for those who show love as Christ did! The

early church was taught not to have complicity with those who destroy (2 John 9-11; Eph. 5:11). Some boast about the good friendships they have with false teachers! They are not my friends. I don't deliberately make friends of the enemies of Christ. Being friends with God's enemies is treason. Better we try the spirits (1 John 4:1).

There are other causes we shall not mention here, such as the so-called new Bibles (false modern-speech translations), adopting and condoning worldliness, such as drinking alcohol, dancing, lascivious conduct and immodest dress, divorce, materialism and the accommodation of the status quo. Some are trying to convert God to us rather than the other way around. But it all leads to the same thing- APOSTASY.

Almost Universally Ignored

One method of combating apostasy that God has directed is the exercise of discipline, even withdrawal if necessary. It does not appear to be used very often. Discipline is not "kicking somebody out of the church" as some smear. It is a loving effort to recover lost souls who have fallen away from the truth. It is to keep the church pure and the gospel defended. Why do some always feel they have the power of God to condemn the motives of those who are striving to obey God? Those who are habitually, defiantly determined to walk in the ways of error cannot be tolerated. At least, that is what Scripture teaches whether we like it or not.

Some have the "play on Miss Bertha" attitude. It is reported about the time when some were insisting instruments of music to be used but others pleaded not to do it. The one in charge turned to the pianist and said, "Play on Miss Bertha." It mattered not about the truth.

Some want what they want and will have it regardless. They are to be disciplined.

The home is where the correction of apostasy must begin. It is said the church is losing its young people. That is only partially accurate. The home is losing the young people and the church is suffering the consequences. The home is the first line of Christian training of the young.

A Dark Picture

Once when teaching as this lesson does, one came to me afterward and said, "Brother Boyd, you paint a dark picture." No, friend, I am not painting any picture. I am taking note of a picture already painted. It is hideous and dark. Loss of souls, departure from the truth, division in the church, crucifying the Son of God afresh (Heb. 6:6) is not a bright and glorious scene. If we will read 2 Peter 2:20-22 we will see why apostasy is such a dark and gloomy picture. Then we pray we may be more willing to attack its causes and seek remedy.

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Endeavoring to Keep the Unity

"Ephesians 4:3, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Paul was giving to Christians instructions how to "walk" as Christians. It is similar to Peter's admonition presenting brethren as pilgrims and sojourners (1 Pet. 2:11). There is a prescribed manner in which we are to make that pilgrimage.

Phil. 1:27, "Only let you conversation by as it becometh the gospel of Christ…" Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called (Eph. 4:1).There are manners of

life, attitudes and actions that are incompatible with being a Christian. We bring reproach and disgrace on the cause of Christ by bad living. There is a manner of conduct that is proper and fitting that is respectful of Christ and brings glory and honor to the Lord.

Unity and Peace

The subject demands we first submit to divine authority. There is to be no schism, division or dissension among God's people (1 Cor. 12:25). Unity and peace are worthy "for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33). Unfortunately, many do not understand the peace Christ brought.

The early disciples were united and at peace with each other (1 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14-16). The Lord prayed His disciples would be united (John 17:21). None doubt that division has provoked skepticism and atheism. Jesus said it would. Division has retarded the progress of the gospel. Many have been guilty of biting and devouring one another (Gal. 5:15). Many have sought something other than unity and peace but sought various hobbies, false doctrines, liberal and legalistic positions that divide.

There is strength and power in unity. In-fighting diverts power from the spiritual warfare against Satan to turns it against one another.

Another Kind of Division

The gospel produces a division of another sort. The Prince of Peace said, "Think not that I come to bring peace on earth: I came not to bring peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). There is no contradiction here when we understand the kind of peace He brought. There has always been

contention between right and wrong, truth and error, righteousness and unrighteousness. There will always be division between those who accept Christ and those who reject Him. There can be no communion of light with darkness, God and Belial, believers and unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14-16). The gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15) separates the sheep from the goats and the wheat from the chaff (Matt. 25). It proves all division is not evil, but some necessary.

Unity and peace go together (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27). Christ taught, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matt. 12:25).

Unity is not the same as union. Union can exist without unity. The Roman Empire was a powerful union of competing and sometimes warring provinces. A dog and cat in the same sack is union but not unity. Unity in diversity is not unity but heresy. There must be unity where God has spoken and toleration in human judgment and opinion. Those who cry for unity in diversity do not seek unity but fellowship in spite of division.

Unity involves the sameness of character, harmony, and agreement. "Can two walk together except they be agreed" (Amos 3:3). It is not unity to agree to disagree. Unity demands conformity to the same rule, speaking the same things, using the same measure, following the same guide and standing together because of a common conviction and faith. There is one body (Eph. 4:4) and that body is the church (Eph. 1:22, 23). Denominationalism is the very opposite of the unity for which our Lord prayed.

People can be united and at peace with each other and still not be at peace with God. Man-made churches can be united and at peace with each other. But they are not of the Lord. Paul speaks of a special kind of unity and peace.

Unity of the Spirit

The phrase "unity of the Spirit" denotes the unity the Spirit produces, gives, provides and which belongs to Him. While there is one Spirit (Eph. 4:4), the Holy Spirit produces the unity and peace that God wants among us by the Word of God which has been revealed by the Holy Spirit. When men follow the same rule given by the Holy Spirit they will be of the same mind, speak the same things, be of one mind and one judgment. They enjoy the unity of the spirit which Paul urged we endeavor to keep. It does not come through compromise, negotiation or tolerance of error but obedience to "thus saith the Lord." It is ultimately founded on God's eternal truth and man's acceptance of it. Truth produces unity and peace.

Endeavoring

The word conveys the idea of putting forth great and energetic effort, diligence, attentiveness and alertness. Unity and peace do not just happen. Where they exist is evidence somebody is at work. It demands self-sacrifice, self-denial, putting brethren before self. This demands humility (Phil. 2:23). Some want to be the "big dog in the kennel." Was not this the problem with Diotrophes (3 John 9)? Churches have divided over men as well as opinions and doctrines. Selflessness is surely one of the efforts that make for unity and peace while selfishness and pride in the hearts of brethren will provide the devil a weapon of destruction.

While truth makes for unity and peace, false doctrines produce that which is contrary. Rom. 16:17, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause division and offense contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and

avoid them." Examples can be multiplied to illustrate how error causes division and conflict. Truth produces unity. Standing for truth against error is not the cause of division.

Paul warned of grievous wolves that would enter the flock to draw disciples after them. Wolves do not care for the welfare of the sheep. Ridicule of truth and faithful brethren dominate the history of wolves. Division may be caused again if some advance their hobbies, theories, philosophies and speculations. Binding what God has loosed causes division. Loosing what God has bound causes division. Both disrupt unity and peace. Striving just to be different for the sake of being different will cause division. Change for the sake of change will cause division. Trying to be like denominations or other churches will cause division. We should only try to be like the church revealed in the New Testament.

Attitude

We must stand for the truth in the right attitude. Harsh, bitter, vicious words will not contribute to unity and peace. Strong words are much in order. We are to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). All do not love the truth (2 Thess. 2:10). We must love the brotherhood even if some do not (1 Pet. 2:17). There is no conflict between love and taking a strong, uncompromising stand for truth. We stand for truth with sound speech that cannot be condemned (Tit. 2:8).

Forgiveness

When brethren sin regardless of how we should be willing to forgive the penitent. This is for his and our good (Matt. 6:14, 15). Brethren should be allowed "space to repent" (Rev. 2:21). When one could possibly be restored,

should we not make the effort to bring him to restoration (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19, 20)? The attitude of forgiveness must prevail toward those who repent. Unity and peace call for control of the tongue, temper and tone of voice. The goal will likely be missed unless we observe this control.

Keep the Unity

To "keep" implies guarding and protecting something we dare not place in danger and something already possessed. But it must be maintained after being obtained. We hold to something that should continue to exist. The guidance of the Spirit brings and keeps the desired unity and peace.

A Word about Peace

Peace is not just going along to get along. The peace that passes understanding is peace with God. That is the peace Christ brought. We must be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Paul's message was the message of reconciliation. We can have peace within ourselves and peace with our neighbors and still not have peace with God. Some feel so satisfied and will say, "I have peace right here," thumping their chest as if that is where the Bible heart is. What if that is so? Many have that peace but know not God.

There is a bond of peace among brethren. We sing, "Bless be the tie the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." To bond is to hold together, enabling to function harmoniously in that which is supposed to be done.

A Serious Theme

Could we ever over-emphasize the need of brotherly love founded on truth, charity, seeking the other's highest good,

unity and peace? We should not seek those things the wrong way, and not minimize the importance of these qualities. Do not let it be justly said that we are guilty of creating division, dissension, strife, confusion, apostasy, digression, schism, error within the Lord's church.

* * * * *

Standard by Which All Shall be Judged

Heb. 9:27, "And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment."

There will be a day of judgment (Acts 17:31). There will be a judge (John 5:22). The judgment has been committed to His Son. All will be judged (2 Cor. 5:11). The extent of the judgment will be universal (Rom. 14:11). There is life beyond this one or else why the judgment (Matt. 25)? There is a standard of judgment (John 12:48).

David Crockett is reported to have said, "Be sure you are right, then go ahead." How does one determine what is right? How do you determine the length of a board, or the weight of a sack of sand? There is a standard by which to measure. The same thing is true in spiritual matters. Ezekiel had a measuring reed. Jeremiah had a measuring line.

There are two sides to the divine measure; doctrine and practice. It makes a difference what a person believes and does. He cannot be slack in either realm. Some are like the Pharisees who would say and do not (Matt. 23:3). Some teach the doctrines of men that makes their worship vain (Matt. 15:9). Shall we, like Belshazzar, be weighed in the balances and found wanting (Dan. 5:27)?

This lesson concentrates on the accountability of all since Pentecost. Each shall be judged according to the law under which they lived (Rom. 2:12). Those who lived under the Law of Moss will be judged by that law. Since Pentecost all shall be judged by the law of Christ (Heb. 1:1, 2; Matt. 5:17). We live under law. Without law there could be no sin for sin is a transgression of the law (Rom. 5:13; 1 John 3:4). Inasmuch as Christ is the judge, His word is the standard (John 12:48).

His judgment shall be just (Psalm 119:75). It will also be impartial (Acts 10:34) since all must be saved the same way (Acts 15:9). Now is the day of mercy. That day will be the day of justice. If one is "in Christ," justice will demand his salvation, not because of his own righteousness but because of the righteousness of Christ. If one is not "in Christ" he will be condemned (Rom. 8:1). It will not be a day of decision but of sentencing and separation (Matt. 25) of the sheep from the goats; the wheat from the chaff.

God would not permit a distorted and perverted judgment of material things among the Israelites. There will not be a distorted judgment the last day. Human judges often make mistakes and there are appeals to the sentences they render. There will be no appeal to God's sentence because a perfect God will execute perfect judgment.

Many may be deceived by thinking someway, somehow God will set aside His will at the judgment, make exceptions, and those who have ignored His commands, failed to respect the conditions of His promises, gave no heed to His warnings, will enter heaven anyway. It is criminal to extend hope to the disobedient. Some may think they shall be judged by what they think, creeds, disciplines, catechisms, beliefs of churches and various religions, feelings, what ancestors did, consciences, good works, etc.

These will not be the standard of judgment. Man's "think so's" are not as good as God's "say so's."

Some Specific Matters of the Standard

Did we obey the gospel plan of salvation? Faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism in water for the remission of sins is the plan. Will it matter if we have disobeyed (Luke 6:46; 2 Thess. 1:6-9)? "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14). Will the disobedient enter in anyway?

How do we judge other people? Matt. 7:2 does not forbid judgments but demands making proper judgments (John 7:24). We must not make judgments on the basis of friendship, judgments of one's heart, judgment by our own standards, double-standard judgments, without proper evidence. We make many judgments; who to marry, of elders, preachers, who shall be our friends. To not judge is to judge what God has told us to do. How we judge others will be the way we shall be judged.

We shall be judged by our deeds (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12). We shall be justified by our works (Jas. 2:24; Matt. 25:31-40). There are evil deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5) and works of the Spirit. We shall reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7).

We shall be judged by what we have left undone (Jas. 4:17). Consider again the judgment scene of Matt. 25. Those that were condemned were condemned because of what they did not do that they should have done. Being doctrinally sound and abstaining from evil deeds is essential but not sufficient.

What we did will be measured alongside what we could have done. We shall be judged according to the talents

given us. Where there is ability and opportunity goes responsibility. Is not that the lesson of the parable of the talents? James warns those who would be masters or teachers because they have a greater opportunity and more is expected of them (James 3:1). God expects us to give as a man hath, not as he hath not (2 Cor. 8:12). Jesus said to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48).

Our hearts shall be judged. This is why we must guard our motives. God knows the heart. Man can only see the outward appearance (1 Sam. 16:7). David wanted to build a temple for the Lord but he was denied the privilege. But his motive was good. "Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart" (1 Kings 8:18). Good motives are necessary but not sufficient. Good deeds must follow. Good deeds are necessary, but they must be provoked by good motives. It takes both heart and action to be pleasing to God.

Even the secret matters shall be laid open before the Lord (Eccl. 12:14; Rom. 2:16). "For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." We may hide some things from others; and even deceive ourselves. But we cannot and shall not hide anything from God.

Only one Way

There is only one way to cover our sins and that is for them to be forgiven. Rom. 4:7, 8, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." The Lord does not count sin when it is covered. He does not count sin when it has been forgiven and washed away by the blood of His Son. It is a futile effort to attempt to cover sins any other way.

Watch Your Tongue

"For by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37). James wrote an entire chapter about governing the tongue. "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:10).

The Ultimate Measure

Not that what we have mentioned as standards are unimportant, but it is reduced to this. What will we do with Jesus? Our eternity is determined by this. Pilate asked, "What shall I do with Jesus, which is called Christ?" The mob cried, "Crucify him." We know what they did with Him. We know what others have done regarding Him. Some have accepted Him and others have rejected Him. That will decide eternity for them. What of me and you? What others do or do not do does not determine what we do. We must be "in Christ" and be faithful "in Christ" (Rev. 2:10; 14:13). There is no surer way to reject the Lord than to reject His words (John 14:15).

The primary goal of the Lord's mission was to save. But as He saved He necessarily condemned (John 12:44-48).

Revelation 21:12, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." Three books are in this passage. One is the book of life (Phil. 4:3). This is a list of the saved. (Names can be blotted out of that book once there, Rev. 3:5). There is the book of our life and our works. Then there is the standard of judgment (John 12:48).

Those whose names are in the book of life will enter heaven (Rev. 21:27).

Is my name written there? If not, it can be. If it is, I must be faithful so it will remain until I am judged by Christ.

* * * * *

Finding My Place in Worship

There are some things nobody can do for another. Each must believe, repent, confess Christ, be baptized, live righteously, guard thoughts, etc. This is also true in worship. Nobody can worship for you.

Man is a worshipping creature. It is a universal trait. Everywhere man has been found he worships something, some gods of some sort.

The very concept of worship implies some kind of god. The true and living God is revealed to us in the Bible. Idols, mountains, rivers, sun, moon, stars, images, statues, etc. constitute some of the gods men erect. Man has always considered there is something or someone superior to him on which he looks as his god and on which he leans.

Worship of the True God

The worship of the true and living God in Scriptures has certain purposes and produces certain results. We shall consider some of these momentarily. When we assemble it is for the reasons the Bible teaches.

We need to learn the quality and nature of worship in general. Worship is defined as homage paid, acts of adoration, acts that pay honor. Worship involves activity. There is more involved than just activity but it does include

and necessitate some activity. Worship is reverence paid to some object regardless of what that object is.

Worship implies faith, loyalty, love, allegiance, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, reverence, honor, obedience, veneration, awe, respect and bowing down before. It is a mistaken notion that some have suggested that everything we do is worship. All worship is service but not all service is worship. Worship involves certain specified actions. We honor and glorify God in all we do, but all we do is not worship. The Ethiopian went to Jerusalem to worship. He was not worshipping all the time. Abraham went to the mount with Isaac to worship. He was not worshipping on his way there. We do not worship as we mow the lawn, drive the car, take a bath etc. This should be easily understood and not become an issue.

What Worship is Not

It may help us to understand worship by learning what worship does not include; at least in Biblical worship that God accepts. Worship is not simply following some human custom or something of culture, subject to man's whims and changes, additions and subtractions. Worship is not entertainment even though some try to make it that way. It is not a sporting event or an amusement. It is not for the purpose of making people feel good even though one does feel good when he worships properly. It is not simply reaching some emotional or spiritual "high" like getting "high" on drugs. Some create situations in worship to simply arouse emotions. It is not for relieving burdens or having association with others. It is not to GET but to GIVE glory and praise to God. Some may say they did not get much out of worship. It is not designed that we get something, but give something to God; not just money.

The Worshipper

As a worshipper we are to be participants, not mere spectators. Our place in worship is as a participant. To turn worship into an entertainment exercise has given rise to making a worship service a big sensational production. To entertain is to satisfy men, not God. We do not just "watch," but must be involved in the worship. We do what we do out of conviction, a deliberate choice, not an emotional convulsion. There is to be an attitude and action of reverence and awe for God in worship because we are before the throne of God. We do not have to be one who leads in worship to be involved. Proper worship is so designed that everyone can and should be involved.

It is not reverent to have our minds elsewhere on other things. We do not do what we do for showmanship or with hilarity. We do not worship flippantly, scornfully or jokingly. It is not reverent to put on a long face, look sick, pretend piety and righteousness. Reverence is godliness, showing respect for that which is sacred and holy; in this case, Deity. It is not reverent if we fail to participate in the acts of worship. Worship that God approves involves worshipping "worthily," that is, in the proper manner; not that we are worthy, but God is worthy. It is our place in worship to worship toward God, not toward self.

Kinds of Worship

There are different kinds of worship but only one kind that God approves. There is vain worship (Matt. 15:9); will worship (worship according to our will) (Col. 2:23); ignorant worship (Acts 17:23); true worship (John 4:24) which is to worship in spirit and in truth; doing what God

says for the reason He says it. Worship involves the heart as well as the action.

Regulated by the Lord

True worship is toward the right object; God, not Baal, the pope, Mary, Buddha, trees, stars, etc. There must be the right actions (in truth; according to the directions of the word). It must be in spirit (disposition, attitude of heart, sincere and genuine). One must be in the right relationship with God, which is "in Christ." Not just whatever man may do, any way it is done, for just any reason, by just anybody would not constitute acceptable worship.

It requires more than just being honest and sincere although both qualities are essential. It is more than doing deeds and performing rituals. In every dispensation God has had a pattern for men to follow for acceptable worship. Our place in worship is to learn and follow His pattern. Man does not tell God what is acceptable; God tells man. The very concept of worship demands the will of the One worshipped prevails, is respected and obeyed.

There was worship by the patriarchs. Cain's worship was not acceptable because it was not according to God's pattern. Abel did what God said do.

The Jews worshipped according to the Law of Moses with priests, sacrifices, holy days, etc. Nadab and Abihu did that which had not been commanded and they were destroyed as a result (Lev. 10). Do you remember the golden calf at Sinai fashioned by Aaron while Moses was in the mount receiving the law? That was not acceptable worship but an abomination.

Some today claim the Bible is not a book of instructions to be followed but merely a "love letter" from God to His children. They say this in order to get away from the

pattern of worship God has directed so they can do their own thing and everybody is obligated to approve of it. If we do not accept it we are bigoted, intolerant, self-righteous, judgmental, narrow-minded and a host of other lovely terms. But worship is not, "God, you accept whatever I do." He is in charge of this matter; not us.

Authorized Acts of Worship

As stated, we are not at liberty to choose how to worship God. He has not left that to us to decide. What we do must by authorized by Him (Col. 3:17).

Singing is a specific kind of music we use in worship. Ten times God mentions music in Christian worship and every time it is singing; congregational singing. There is no place for choruses, choirs, bands, pianos, drums, clapping, swaying, swinging and swaying, hollering and hooting. We have no objection to a choir provided everybody is in it. Worship is not a "holy wow" as some have blasphemously described it. There are not spontaneous outbursts of uncontrolled emotions as if that was a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. It is not a religious "Hee-Haw, more akin to the manners of the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. We do not get excited at worship like at a ball game.

We pray, not to inform God who already knows our needs, but to give praise, thanks, and show recognition that we realize He is the giver of every good gift.

We partake of the Lord's Supper to honor Christ and the sacrifice He made on our behalf. We proclaim Christ with our brethren, together, in communion with one another and with God. This is done every first day of the week as was done in New Testament times.

We honor God by proclaiming His word, preaching and teaching. Such was done by the early church.

We give of our material means to “honor God” with our substance (Prov. 3:9). We show love by giving (2 Cor. 8:9).

We do not count beads, burn incense, play instruments, light candles, give signs and symbols and the many other things men have devised for their worship.

Our Relationship with God

How can our worship be acceptable if we are not God’s children? We cannot even correctly address Him as our Father. We must be “in Christ.” John 5:23, “That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which that sent him.” 1 John 2:23, “Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.” No man can approach God except through Christ (John 14:6). A sinful life will prevent our worship from being acceptable (Luke 6:46; Prov. 28:9; 1 Pet. 3:7).

The Woman’s Place in Worship

Some contend that one does not worship unless they take a leading role in the worship service. That is so false we wonder how anybody ever conceived of it. Can women worship? Yes, she must worship to please God. She must not violate the restrictions God has placed on her (1 Tim. 2:12). We all worship with every act of worship. Only men are to lead in worship. Men and women have different roles in service to God and this must be respected. How do you conclude we can worship God acceptably while violating God’s will in worship?

The Blessings of Worship

We have already noted that we worship, not to GET but to GIVE. Nonetheless, there are blessings for us when we worship properly. We strive to become like that which we worship. Worship strengths our faith. We learn in worship. We together with brethren proclaim our allegiance to God. Worship creates and sustains unity among brethren. It provides fellowship and communion one with another and with Deity. Worship pulls us upward, motivating us to godliness, seeking the things which are above. It fulfills a duty and privilege of glorifying God.

Each Christian has his or her place in worship. It is a personal matter between the Christian and God. It is something that nobody can do for another. We must be diligent to assume our proper place in worship.

When we are deliberately absent from the assemblies for worship we damage our souls. We ignore the teaching of His Son (Matt. 4:10), "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

* * * * *

Parable of the Talents

The lessons we learn in this parable are lessons we do well to learn as early in life as possible. Matthew 10:8, "…freely ye have received, freely give." Jesus said this to His apostles but the principle is true to us all. Luke 12:48, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

We cannot miss the thrust of these passages that God expects us to produce according to the ability and opportunity that we have. Where there is ability and opportunity goes responsibility and accountability.

Sometimes we might think, “What good I would do if only I had a lot of money, greater abilities, etc.” It is not what we would do if we had more. It is what we are doing with what we have. Second Corinthians 8:12, “For if there first be a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.”

We Are Not the Same

We are not alike in every respect. We have different abilities, limitations and talents and are not expected to do exactly alike. We are expected to do what we can. For instance, we can all worship even though we all cannot lead in worship.

Jesus commended the woman in Mark 14:8 who anointed Him before His death and burial. Some objected to what she did, but Jesus said, “She hath done what she could.”

We may get the idea that what we do does not count very much unless it is something big, everybody notices and it gets recognition, even headlines. Zechariah taught, “For who hath despised the day of small things?” (Zech. 4:10). Too many may be like Naaman who would be ready to do some great thing but balked at the simple things he was commanded to do (2 Kings 5). After all, big things are composed of many little things. That was true even with “spiritual gifts” in New Testament times (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

Matthew 25:14-30

A reading of the passage from your Bible will introduce our study. The overall context is that we must be ready for the second coming of Christ, the day of resurrection and

judgment. Christ presents a series of parables teaching things we need to know and do.

He taught the parable of the wicked servant (Matt. 24:45-51) who took advantage of his master's absence. The parable of the ten virgins shows the necessity of adequate preparation (Matt. 25:1-13). We have the parable of the talents; the subject of this lesson. The parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27) is similar but there are a number of differences with the parable of the talents. The location of teaching was different; the timing was different (the parable of the pounds just before His entry into Jerusalem); the hearers were different (the pounds was to the multitude and the talents to His disciples); the amount given in the pounds differed from the talents; the duration of the absence of the householder is different. These are two separate teaching occasions. One parable stresses constant alertness while the other faithfulness. We shall confine our study to the parable of the talents.

The Kingdom of Heaven

Verses fourteen and fifteen speak of the kingdom of heaven. This is the church, sometimes called the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ. There were many prophecies concerning the coming of this kingdom that were fulfilled with the coming of the church on Pentecost. The church in Colosse was said to be in the kingdom (Col. 1:13). John was in the kingdom (Rev. 1:9). Jesus used the terms kingdom and church interchangeably in Matt. 16:16-18. We no longer pray "thy kingdom come" because it has already come.

There are those who teach otherwise even among some college "professors" and pre-millennial teachers. The consequence of their doctrine makes the prophets false

prophets and denies Scripture. The kingdom will not be set up when the Lord comes again as that theory teaches, but delivered up to the Father (1 Cor. 11:24).

This man who had servants delivered his goods into the stewardship of his servants. This master is Christ and his servants are His disciples. His departure is His ascension and his return is His return.

The servants were given different amounts according to their ability which differed. Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Stewards, as we are, must realize everything belongs to God. It is not "my money," or the "Lord's money." It all belongs to God. We have charge of it for a while and must return it to Him with a full accounting. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive" (1 Cor. 4:7)? 1 Chron. 29:14, "…for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."

As stewards we shall give account. It is required that a steward be found faithful (2 Cor. 4:2). The servants we given different amounts but all were given something.

We all are given opportunities, abilities, skills, money, time, example, influence, different roles. But all are given something. Some have "natural" talents and others have to develop what they have. These gifts are not miraculous and are not "spiritual gifts" that were used in the first century to confirm the word.

What They Did

The man to whom was given five talents got five talents more. The man who received two talents got two talents more. The man who was given one talent hid his talent and did nothing.

The Master Returns

When the master of the servants returned he called for an accounting. The results were reported to him. The five and two talent men were rewarded. Each one had double the amount given into his care. The one talent man was rebuked and condemned. His one talent was taken from him. Notice the five and two talent men were given the same words of commendation. They did what they could with what they had. It could be expected that the five talent man would produce more than the two talent man because he had more with which to work.

Why was the one talent man condemned? It was not because he did not double his talent as the others had done. It was because he did not try. He didn't do anything. He offered his excuses. How did they sound to the master? Did he accept them? In the parable of the pounds we read, "And they all began to make excuse" (Luke 14:18). That is the life story of too many people. Does God accept excuses from man for not doing what he is commanded to do? Did He accept the excuses of Adam and Eve, Moses, Aaron, Saul? Some of them tried to blame somebody else for their failure. Did that work? Was not the one talent man fearful and what do we read of those who are fearful (Rev. 21:8)? It is wrong to do something wrong, but it is wrong to not try to do something. This man, unlike the woman of Mark 14, did not do what he could. To fail to do good that you should do is sin (James 4:17).

You really do not fail if you try. You may not succeed in all you hope and want but trying is a measure of success.

The Judgment Scene of Matthew 25

Listen as the Lord commends some and condemns others. Those condemned were not accused of committing some grievous act. They simply did not do the good they

should have done. Those commended did seize their opportunities and did good things. Some were like the priest and Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan. They did not harm the man who needed help. But they did not help the man who needed help. The Samaritan did what he could as long as he could in every way that he could. That is what made the difference.

A People of Good Works

Christians are a people of good works (Tit. 2:14; Eph. 2:8-10; James 2). Even as we work we are not trying to work our way to heaven or earn salvation. This we could never do. We make no such attempt. We can never deserve the gift of God (Rom. 6:23). We must work the works of Him that saves us. We must be about our Father's business.

The talents given by the master to the servants were given by the grace of the master. The servants did not deserve them nor merit them but they were placed in their custody. Once received, their duty was do the best they could with them for the sake of the master.

Someday we shall stand before God and give account (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12; Rev. 20:12). God will be concerned with what we have done with what we have. Is not this a strong motivating factor for us to do what we can?

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Luke 5:1-11
The Draught of Fish

The word "draught" is pronounced like the word "draft." It means a large haul (verses 6 and 9). There is another similar event recorded in John 21. Some contend these are two accounts of the same event but there are differences.

There were more present in John than in Luke. One was at the beginning of His ministry and the other toward the end. In one the net broke but not the other. Our study is in Luke.

This record is so we might take notice of the miracles and signs of Jesus and with this testimony believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30, 31).

The scene is Gennesaret, the Sea of Tiberias, best known as the Sea of Galilee, known as Chinnereth in the Old Testament. People pressed upon Him to hear the word of God. Others followed Him with lesser motives. Some hoped to find fault in His words; some listened out of curiosity; some wanted "loaves and fishes," some would entrap Him if they could.

There were two idle boats and Jesus entered one that was owned by Simon. He used this boat as His pulpit where He could be seen and heard. He sat down to teach like He sat when He taught the Sermon on the Mount. We do not know how long He taught or the specific points He made. But we know what He preached. "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of diseases among the people" (Matt. 4:23).

He gave instructions to "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught" (verse 4). He predicted a great catch awaited them. Peter did not agree with the decision. He called Him "Master" which implies a previous association and contact. Peter had fished all night and caught no fishes. He saw no wisdom or reason for doing as Jesus suggested. But he was willing to do as Jesus said. Soon he was blessed with a great catch, just as the Lord had said. He called for assistance from his partners, who were James and John (verse ten). Mark 1:16 tells us Peter and his brother, Andrew, were fishermen. James and John were their partners.

The catch was so great that their nets began to break. They filled the boat to capacity and more that it began to sink. There was such abundance! Peter, astonished, fell before the Lord and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (verse 8). Peter felt unworthy to be in the presence of such a One as Jesus. He was obviously humble and made a confession and recognition of the greatness of Jesus.

Jesus used the occasion to impart another great message in addition to His own greatness. He called for them to be "fishes of men" (Mark 1:17). As the event closes they came to land, they left all, and followed Jesus. This relates to us what happened. What lesson can we learn from it?

Lesson to Learn

(1) We have evidence of His identity by the miracle He performed.

(2) We have evidence of His power over nature. It is not too surprising He had power over nature inasmuch as He created all things (Heb. 1:1ff). He stilled the tempest; walked on water; feed thousands with very little; healed the sick. What happened was not a coincidence because He had knowledge of what would happen. We should have respect for Him, His power as Deity. This is a record from reliable witnesses.

(3) Men are more important than fish. Does it shock you that there are those who deny this? Some think animal-life is as important as human life. They equate humans with animals, even claiming we are nothing more than an animal which evolved from lower forms. Some will protect the eggs of an eagle but have no hesitation to kill an unborn

human child. The welfare of humans was cast aside in favor of a snail darter. We catch fish so they may die and be eaten. We catch men so they might live and never die.

(4) We learn to set our priorities and what really counts; what is first. When called to follow Christ they had to make a choice. The Lord must come first (Matt. 6:33) and we cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). These men, like Mary, choose the better part, left all this and followed Him. One of life's big problems is to know how to set priorities.

(5) We learn that previous failure does not mean permanent failure. Peter had failed to catch any fish all night. But this day was a "turn around" for him. Things improved when he did what the Lord directed. We study the lives of Peter, John Mark, Saul of Tarsus and they were not always what they were capable of becoming. People can and do grow. In this case we see the need, if you wish to catch fish, to go where the fish are. So it is in catching men. We must go to them and not say, "Here it is; come and get it."

(6) We see a contrast between divine wisdom and human wisdom. Peter did not think it sensible to launch out but the Lord did. Men think the wisdom of God is foolishness, but the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 1:21-25). God says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9).
(7) We enjoy greater success when we cooperate with each other. Peter did better when he called in James and John. Unity brings strength and division means weakness.

Working together much good can be done, especially when none cares who gets the credit.

(8) Peter allowed the Lord to use his boat. In this he was like the lad who gave his lunch to Jesus to feed thousands; or Moses' rod when used the way God said use it, asking, "What is that in thine hand?" It seemed just a rod but it was more when used as God told him.

This is for us a great faith building event in the life of Christ. He proved who He was; the Son of God. Like Nicodemus, we can say, "No man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him" (John 3:2).

The Other Catch

After His resurrection was His second appearance to His apostles and we read of a similar event. Peter had said, "I go fishing," indicating he was returning to his former occupation. He had seen Him but evidently was not sure about Him. His dream of an earthly kingdom had disappeared. He had been wrong about the nature of the Lord's kingdom all along. He went fishing and others went with him.

As before, they had caught no fish when Jesus appeared. Jesus told them, "Cast your net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find" (John 21:6). The result was they had more fish than they could bring it. But the nets did not break. Others came to help take the catch. This was not used to call them to be fishers of men. That had already been done. All knew who he was by now, but were concerned.

This was the occasion for Jesus to ask Peter regarding Peter's love for Him. He asked him three times, "Lovest

thou me?" Why He did it three times we are not told but some have speculated it was because Peter had denied Him three times. Jesus used different words for "love." He used "agape" twice" and "phileo" once. Agape is the stronger term of deeper devotion and phileo grows out of kinship. Regardless of why He asked three times and used different words Peter was aggravated that He asked him three times. Possibly he was embarrassed. Notice the question. "Lovest thou me more than these?" These what? More than these other men do? More than your work as a fisherman? Peter could not have known how much the other men loved Jesus so it seems to me He was asking if Peter thought following Christ was more important than his fishing occupation. This was a reasonable question seeing how Peter had returned to fishing. Whatever He meant Peter wanted the Lord to be sure of his love for Him.

The Lord told Peter about his future. There would come a time when he would be dependent on another and would be led about. This probably referred to his old age experiences. When Peter was told this he asked what would happen to another disciple, probably John, the writer. The Lord told him essentially, that was none of his business what would happen to John. If John should live and not die until Jesus came again, so what to Peter? As often happens, a mistaken report got out that Jesus said John would live until Jesus returned. But that was not what He said.

The Most Magnificent Thing

It seems to me a notice should be taken of the willingness of the disciples to heed, "Follow Me."

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Matthew 5:9, 10

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

These are some of the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. We know not the mountain where this sermon was preached. We know it was preached in the context and in the light of the preparatory work of John the Baptist for the coming of the kingdom (Matt. 3:2). We know it was in light of His own preaching of the same message (Matt. 4:17). We know it was the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23). We know it was called His doctrine (Matt. 7:28, 29).

The Sermon on the Mount reveals the nature of His kingdom, the characteristics of those who would make up the spiritual kingdom. It was not simply a recipe to happiness or a panacea for social reforms and how to get along with everybody. It was not a "quick fix" to make life easy. Such things may be by-products but they are not the prime message. Foy Wallace called these words "Pentecost Pointers" because they pointed to the kingdom that was established on Pentecost. They are an insight as to the kind of people God expects Christians to be.

Beatitudes

They begin with the word "blessed." Some translations use the word "happy," but "blessed" is far better. Happy is inadequate. These words teach us far more than how to be happy. Happiness depends on what is happening. Blessedness is an inward quality and spiritual state that comes when a person is in the right relationship with God regardless of what is happening. Paul was not always

happy, but he was always rejoicing. He was among the blessed. Blessedness is not dependent on what is happening, but often time exists in spite of what is happening.

What Peace?

What is the peace of this passage? Those that make peace are blessed. There are different kinds of peace. We have peace within self (feel good); peace with others (getting along); and peace with God (a spiritual condition). We can have the first two without the third. We can have the third without the first two. Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2) but we can have peace with God. We can be reconciled. We cannot secure this peace by ourselves (Eph. 2:8, 8; Titus 3:3-5) but only by the grace and mercy of God. God is the one offended when we sin and He determines the terms of peace. He has that authority. Some seem to think they can negotiate with God. "If God will do this, then I will do that." That is wrong. God speaks. Man either accepts or rejects His word.

The Prince of Peace

Christ is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). He brings reconciliation between God and man (Eph. 2:16). Col. 1:20, "And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself, by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. 1:20). At His birth the angels sang, "Peace on earth; good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). Peace is provided through Christ (Rom. 5:1). He is our peace (Eph. 2:14) He is the ultimate peacemaker. He is the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2"5). He preached peace (Eph. 2:17).

Harmonize Two Statements

How do we harmonize His words (Matt. 10:34-36) where He said He did not come to bring peace but a sword with the title of being Prince of Peace? Paul said we are at war (2 Cor. 10:4). We have weapons (Eph. 6). We are to fight to good fight of faith and be a good soldier (2 Tim. 2:2). Obviously, the peace He brought is not "getting along with everybody." We live at peace with others as far as possible (Rom. 12:18). Some will accept Him and others will not. There will always be conflict between the two. Those of the world are at enmity with God (James 4:4) and love the darkness (John 3:19). We read of those who are "enemies of the cross" (Phil. 3:18). How can we have peace with such people as that? We cannot, unless they are converted. It is not always desirable that all men speak well of you (Luke 6:26).

The Gospel of Peace

Rom. 10:13-17 calls the gospel glad tidings and the gospel of peace. When Peter preached to Cornelius (Acts 10:36) he was "preaching peace by Jesus Christ." To proclaim the message of the peace that Christ brought is to be a peacemaker. As you tell the story of salvation, the glad tidings of what God has done and what man must do, we are working for peace between man and God. We are peacemakers. The only place where there is peace is in the kingdom of peace, the church. As one works to make this peace a reality he is a child of God and heir of God.

We do not discount the efforts people make to help people get along, mediating disputes, stopping strife of various kinds, even wars between nations. But that is not

the peace of this passage. Peace with God in the kingdom is what it means.

Certainly not Peace with Men

Verse ten shows the peace is not peace with all men. Christians are persecuted for righteousness' sake. We have opponents who war against us. Paul wrote, "Yes, and all that will live godly shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). That goes with being a Christian. It not something desired or sought but comes with the territory. Persecution can be expected. It will test our loyalty whether we will "cave" under fire. The world hated Christ and it will hate His disciples (1 John 3:13; John 15:18).

The world loves its own (1 John 4:4-6; John 3:19-21). There is no virtue in suffering for your own sins (1 Pet. 2:20). But if you suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye (1 Pet. 3:14). People today may suffer by being rejected, excluded, slandered, misrepresented, undercut, abused, hated, ignored, ridiculed, threatened, loss of job or promotion. Many ways the enemies of God have found to make life hard for God's people. But we are not ashamed to suffer for Him because in this way we can not only prove our loyalty, develop good qualities, but bring glory to His name.

If you are in the kingdom there is a reward to be given you (Matt. 5:12). In the kingdom you shall be delivered to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Then the toils of the road will seem nothing when you get to the end of the way.

Rom. 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

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Second Thessalonians 1:3

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith growth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth."

There were conditions in the church in Thessalonica that needed correction. It was not a perfect church. Has there ever been a perfect church in the sense that every member was exactly what they were supposed to be? We can have the perfect divine side of the church if we follow His pattern. A perfect membership is not possible. There was confusion regarding the resurrection. Some were mistaken about the time for the return of the Lord. Some were even disorderly and had quit working. Paul gave the church instructions how to deal with the disorderly. The brethren there had concern for the faithful who had died. These were major questions for which the brethren needed answers.

The problems of the church were not pushed to the front, however, and other matters were given great emphasis. Much of the epistle was written to encourage and strengthen these brethren because they, like the church nearly everywhere, were facing persecution. Persecution is designed to discourage brethren to the point that they abandon the faith. Someone has said, "To be a true Christian in a time of peace is a great matter; but to be a true Christian in the season of persecution is greater."

The spiritual condition of the brethren generally was such that Paul was thankful. He had many words of commendation for them. Such words are always a benefit for brethren. Good people rejoice over other good people

and good things. The church in Thessalonica caused Paul to have joy and gratitude. Have you ever thought seriously what Paul might say if he wrote letter specifically to your congregation?

Some of the Good Things

What were some of the commendable things about this church? Paul had mentioned some of them in First Thessalonians. In verse three he simply tells how things were there. This was not flattery or wishful thinking. They were this way. Their reputation had gone far beyond their borders. By commending them he give us a standard for every church to reach; a goal for which to strive. We should also want to be approved in such fashion. The passage tells us what God approves and expects.

To God

Notice the one to whom thanksgiving was offered. Paul believed in prayer and his prayer included giving thanks to God. He knew where the credit belonged when people were as they should be. In this he is like James 1:17 who noted that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights. The brethren deserved credit also. His prayer was not a momentary action, but he prayed like this always; constantly. When he said, “as it is meet,” he meant that it was befitting, proper, deserving, worthy and suitable to make such a prayer. Should not we learn to thank God and commend worthy brethren?

A Growing Faith

There are many ways a church can grow. It can increase the number of members; the contribution can get larger;

even physical facilities can be expanded; more and more work can be undertaken. Spiritual growth is a most necessary way to grow. These people had come a long way (1 Thess. 1:9).They had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. Their faith had come by hearing the word (Rom. 10:17). That evidence produced conviction. Paul had reasoned with them out of the Scriptures (Act 17:2). Faith springs from the planting of the seed of the kingdom which is the word of God (Luke 8:11). It takes a certain amount of information to have faith that leads to obedience in order to become a Christian. It takes a lot more faith to remain a Christian. Therefore, the faith that brought them to Christ needed to grow and it had grown. They had been as babes who desired the sincere milk of the word by which they could grow (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). In fact, their growth had been so great that Paul expressed that it had grown "exceedingly."

It is obvious that these brethren had done what was necessary to experience a growth in faith. It was by nourishment, exercise, and increased knowledge of truth. It takes effort to grow, such as study, meditation, diligent searching of the Scriptures. It also takes putting in practice in daily life what is learned. Some do not grow but not because they cannot grow. They just do not do the things necessary to grow. These brethren had done that. We never reach a point where there is no more room for growth.

Examples of Growth

The Bible furnishes us many examples of people growing in faith and practice. Consider Gideon who was at first complaining and wondering why God had abandoned Israel. There was John Mark who turned back on the first missionary journey of Paul and was unwanted by Paul to

go with them on the second trip. He later received commendations from Paul and Paul desired to have him with him. Look how Peter grew from one who denied the Lord to preaching the first gospel sermon on Pentecost and to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. The Holy Spirit used him to pen two of the epistles to Christians teaching them how to live as Christians even though persecuted. Growth is going from where we were to where we are on our way to where we want to be; going from what we have been to what we are presently toward what we can be.

Faith and Charity

Growth in faith is logically followed by growth in charity. The KJV uses the word "charity" rather than "love" and for good reason. Love is an emotion that may or may not express itself in action. If it is the kind of love God wants it will be the motivation for action. Charity implies action motivated by emotion and conviction. It is doing benevolence toward those in need. It conveys both attitude and action with liberality. It is the result of a deliberate decision to seek the other person's highest good.

The Greatest Commandment

When asked what was the greatest commandment Jesus responded with teaching on loving God and then loving one's "neighbor," which meant his fellowman (Matt. 22:34-40). John said we show love for God by showing love for our fellowman (1 John 4:20, 21) and by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:3). Jesus said we show our love for God by how we treat others (Matt. 22:40). Love will help each other get to heaven which is one of the prime functions of a local church.

Sometimes we could be more of a hindrance than a help, a stumbling block rather than an assistant, in getting people to heaven. Sharp words, unjust and petty criticisms, hostility, accusations, judging motives do not help.

The world is very confused about the meaning of love. If it is not sensual in nature it is thought of in terms of something touchy, gushy, gooey, fluffy, accept me as I am regardless of what I do kind of attitude. Some must think saying, "I love you," is all that it takes. This can be good if it is sincere and shows itself other ways. Some must think it means never to cross anybody regardless of how wrong they might be, even if their soul is in danger. "Love ma and leave me alone to do as I wish," some must want. But that would not be the loving thing to do. The Lord always loves but the Lord doesn't always approve.

The Good Samaritan is a good example of love. He shared what he had for the benefit of someone who needed it. He was not selfish but looked after the other's need.

There can be no great demonstration of love than what God has done for man by sending His only begotten Son into the world die on the cross and provide the ways and means for our salvation.

We show love when, as we have opportunity, we do what is good to all men, especially those of the household of faith, the church. (Galatians 6:10).

The love, charity, of these brethren is said to abound. It was in super-abundance and of superior quality and quantity. It was a mutual and reciprocal love, which means they had love toward each other. "Everyone" was included in this commendation. What a wonderful church! Their love was more than good wishes but considerate actions.

These are the kind of things for which every congregation should strive. If we would we would improve

and grow in the way that matters. How much like the church in Thessalonica are we?

Yes, they had problems. Who does not have them? They entertained misunderstanding about some important issues. But with the disposition of heart they had shown they would be willing to learn about those matters also.

We can be like that.

* * * * *

Third John 1-4

After reading the text from your Bible, consider the comments. Although this one chapter book is one verse longer, it contains the fewest words of any book in the New Testament; 219 words. We shall study the first four.

Who is the author? It is the same One who gave us the rest of the Bible; the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit used about forty writers to pen what He directed them to write. It is presumed that the writer of this short epistle is John, the apostle, the brother of James, the son of Zebedee, the same man used to write First John and Second John, the book of John and Revelation. This is determined by the subject material, vocabulary, similar phrases and the structure of the epistle. If John is not the writer then whoever wrote this short book is the same man who wrote the other books just mentioned. The important thing for us to remember is that we are reading an inspired (God-breathed) message.

The Elder

The writer identifies himself as “the elder.” The term is used to denote one of advanced age but also one who oversees the congregation; bishop, presbyter, pastor. The term is not used as a title but a description. There is no

indication that the writer had jurisdiction over the congregation where the recipient lived. He speaks of matters larger than local interest. Most likely he was one who was advanced in years, a long time companion of the receiver of the letter and one who was well known to him.

The Recipient

The one to whom the letter is sent is named Gaius, a name that means master, ruler and lord. He must have been a prominent person. But this is a common name and several people in the New Testament are so named. We cannot connect this Gaius with any of the others. He seems to be one who was very close to the writer, possibly like Timothy was to Paul as a "son in the gospel."

Second John was written to a faithful Christian woman. Third John was written to a faithful Christian man. It is designed to commend and encourage a good man for being the kind of person he was. These matters mentioned are of some interest to us, but the important thing is: what is the message? This is what we must learn.

The writer refers to Gaius as the "beloved." Four times in this short book, twice in the first two verses, he calls Gaius "beloved." This is a term of endearment, a special personal affection above what is usually given to brethren, a heartfelt tenderness. The implied idea is that the writer is older than the reader. The reason Gaius was loved so much is because of truth's sake. Gaius was a man of truth. He led a good life and was faithful in his teaching, good manners, kindliness toward brethren; good qualities all. While John has words of rebuke for another person named later in the book, he shows his approval of Gaius. Who would not want to be approved by an apostle of Christ?

Why the Epistle?

John had received a report regarding Gaius. The implication is that he had heard this report at other times also. Good things were a constant, not a singular, situation with him. He was a person of truth, sincerity, devotion, a man of charity, liberality, doing good things for his brethren and showing hospitality to strangers.

Is it not to their credit that those who brought this report also must have appreciated Gaius and what he was doing? Good brethren are happy to report good things about others. What a contrast with the other man named Diotrophes.

John's Desire for Gaius

John hoped Gaius would prosper. That word means to be led along a good road, to succeed and get along well, advance profitably both materially and spiritually. We are to "weep with those who weep" but also "rejoice with those who rejoice." We have an interest in the welfare of our brethren physically and spiritually.

It is not wrong to prosper materially. We desire that for ourselves and others. Our concern is for both body and soul. "Bodily exercise profiteth little" compared to spiritual well being. But it is important. We must always remember which of the two realms is the most important. It is so sad that some become dwarfs spiritually while seeking to be giants materially. That's getting things backwards. Some have been rich but not rich toward God (Laodicea, the rich man from whose table Lazarus ate crumbs, the rich young ruler). We must be careful where we lay up treasures (Matt. 6:19, 20). That is where our heart will be.

When is the Soul in Good Health?

A soul that has been regenerated, born again, forgiven of sins is in good health. One in a saved relationship with God enjoys good health. Being constantly concerned for the inward man, growing in spiritual qualities and faithfulness indicates good health for the soul. Deeds of good works reflect a healthy soul. Life that magnifies the Christ, treats other properly, works and worships so others can see Christ in us indicates a healthy soul.

At this time the soul of Gaius was prospering and is, therefore, a pattern for us to imitate. He was a demonstration of the "new commandment. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 15:34. 35).

Joy for John

As John remembered Gaius his heart was filled with joy. He said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (verse four). We like to think of this thought in terms of our own physical children. There is no greater blessing to be enjoyed in this world than to hear that your children walk in truth. When that is the case then all the work, sacrifice and duty discharged will seem as nothing. It is then we see the result of teaching, providence, prayer and toil. Would that all brethren could have that joy!

What We Learn

Obviously this letter is intended to assist us along the way of life teaching us of righteous goals. Gailus, John,

others were real people as are we. They were Christians as are we. Their life is of interest to us. We serve the same Master, follow the same standard, hope for the same heaven. We glory in brotherly love and good brethren who are beacons of light in an evil world of sinful darkness. There is truth and we can know it, support it, and live in it.

Material prosperity is not evil and can be a blessing. Spiritual prosperity is the most important. Let us not confuse the two. We can have an abundant measure of joy because others walk in truth. The passage contributes light on our path as we journey toward heaven.

* * * * *

Additions to the Family

For many years ***A BURNING FIRE*** was published with regularity and whenever a grandchild was born, or something very notable took place with our family, I would write a brief note of it. Since ceasing regular publication several years ago, we have had additions to our family (births, marriages) which, of course, have not been included in ABF. I shall make brief notice of them now.

EVELYN CLAIRE BOYD, first daughter of Sam and Lori, born January 1, 2002. She is such a delight and great little granddaughter. She can come up with some of the most amazing statements, as can her sister. She is such a polite, well-manned little girl and is one of most pleasant people to be around you ever saw. How we love our "Evie," as she is called. Now in school she is growing so fast.

KATHERINE MARIE BOYD, Evie's sister, born October 31, 2003, second daughter for Sam and Lori. One day I was at the computer trying to bring up something she wanted

and I could not. She turned to me so sweetly and looking up at me said, “PawPaw, you’re getting old.” She sure told the truth. She was only about four but could work that computer expertly. We have such joy with two little girls. She is known as “Kate.”

BRIGGS PATRICK BOYD, Sam and Lori’s little boy was born September 12, 2006. He is wound up tight and still cannot walk: “He runs everywhere he goes.” Both of his names are family names from way back. Briggs has two special guardians watching for him in his sisters. He has just made that little family a completely marvelous group. He is grandchild Number Twelve.

WILLIAM DUNCAN BOYD, our first great-grandchild, both to John and Jessica (John is Bill’s second son and third child). He is also the first grandchild on both sides of his family so he rates something special. He is the fourth generation consecutively named William. Born March 1, 2010, a few days later he made the trip to see RoRo and PawPaw. It is really something extra to hold your great-grandchild.

There will likely be many more to come that we may never see; certainly not get to see them reach maturity. That goes with life. But let me say right here that whoever they are, and whenever they get here they will come into a family that already loves them as much as we love those already here. If they ever read these words they will know that.

As I have said many times, the most wonderful blessing parents can have on earth are children faithful to God. We can say, as did John, (3 John 4), “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”

(I won’t put an ending on this. I suspect it will keep going.)

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